

The Abomination of Desolation (2)

We continue this month our answer to the question: “I’ve been told that the phrase, “abomination of desolation” in Matthew 24:15 refers to the Antichrist. Is this true, and if it is, what proof is there in Scripture? Also, if the phrase refers to the Antichrist, why is this name used for him in Matthew 24?”

Matthew 24:15, 16 reads: “When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) then let them which be in Judea flee unto the mountains....”

Last month we spoke of the fact that for most prophecies there is an *ongoing* fulfilment. If prophecy concerns only past or future events it is of no relevance to us today, but only a matter of curiosity. That is true of this prophecy also. If it refers only to events that took place in 165 B.C. or in A.D. 70, as some believe, then the prophecy has nothing to say to us today.

In Scripture the word “abomination” always refers to idolatry. That this abomination is the abomination of *desolation* means that it makes desolate God’s holy place and causes the worship of God to cease. We learn this from Daniel 11:31 and 12:11. In the Old Testament that holy place would have been the temple. In the New Testament it is the church. In the Old Testament the worship of God centered in the sacrifices to which Daniel refers in these two references. In the New Testament that worship is the spiritual worship which centers in the public gatherings of the church.

Without going into a detailed study of the book of Daniel, to which Jesus refers, we believe that the abomination of desolation refers first of all to the desecration of the temple by the Syrian king, Antiochus IV Epiphanes (literally, Antiochus the Revealed God) in approximately 165 B.C. In his attempts to root out the worship of Jehovah he tried to force the Jews to worship heathen gods, and erected a heathen altar on the altar of burnt offering in the temple, upon which swine’s flesh was offered.

This was the first abomination of desolation. In those closing days of the Old Testament it was the idolatrous worship promoted by Antiochus which made desolate the temple or sanctuary of God and caused the true worship of God, the daily sacrifice, to cease. We, however, believe that prophecy has an on-going fulfilment and therefore do not limit the fulfilment of Daniel’s prophecy to the history of Antiochus and his persecution of the Jews during the 400 years between Malachi and Christ.

But Jesus makes it clear that the inhabitants of Judea would also see a fulfilment of this prophecy and that it would also bring persecution and suffering upon God’s people: “When ye therefore shall see ... then let *them which be in Judea* flee unto the mountains....” Those who lived in His days would see another fulfilment of Daniel’s prophecy.

So it was. In A.D. 70 after a long siege of the city of Jerusalem, the Roman general, Titus entered the city and before destroying it, planting the standard of the Roman legions, an object of worship among the Romans, in the most holy place of the temple. In that way, an object of idolatrous worship once again made desolate the holy place and caused the daily sacrifice to cease.

Even that, however, was not the final fulfilment of Daniel prophecy. When Antichrist finally sets up the worship of himself, the worship of a man, in the place of the worship of God, and persecutes those who do not worship him (Rev. 13:14-17), then the holy place, not now the OT sanctuary, the temple, but the church of God, will be left desolate and the daily sacrifice, not the OT offering of beasts, but the spiritual worship of God, will cease.

Why do we make this connection between the abomination of desolation and the Antichrist? In the first place there are a number of hints in the book of Daniel that the man who is behind all the troubles of which Daniel prophesies is really and finally no else but Antichrist. For one thing, Daniel speaks in chapter 12 of the resurrection of the dead and of the final glory of God’s people, and of the end in connection with the coming of the abomination of desolation (cf. Dan. 12:2-4).

In the second place, the man of whom Daniel speaks is described in the book of Daniel in terms that identify as the “man of sin” of whom Paul speaks in II Thessalonians 2 (compare Dan. 11: 36 and II Thess. 2:3, 4). This fits, too, with Revelation 13 and what it says about Antichrist setting up the worship of himself in place of the worship of the one true God.

But even that does not exhaust the fulfilment of Daniel’s and Jesus’ prophecies! There is another fulfilment of the abomination of desolation that very much concerns us and for which we must be prepared. That we will look at in the next article.

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