

## Jason Upchurch - Mark 13:14-23 - The Good News that the Temple Will Be Destroyed - Part 5

Well, this is the moment you've all been waiting for. The abomination of desolation.

This paragraph and the next paragraph are the hardest ones in this section to grapple with. And they're hard no matter what theological background you come from because everyone has difficulty figuring out which verses are talking about what event.

To be really honest, I think the view that I hold to is the most consistent, logically coherent and simple of all the views and it makes the most sense of the context and the language that the biblical authors use throughout the Bible.

And if you're like me, you've been taught in a dispensational church that this abomination of desolation is an end times figure that appears during the great tribulation.

John MacArthur: "...**let the reader understand** ...indicates that Jesus was not issuing these warnings to the disciples or to others of their generation, [because] they would not experience the event, but to believers in the end time."

And as much as I love Johnny Mac and my other dispensational pastor friends, I believe they are just wrong at this point.

Have you ever seen those videos of little babies or toddlers who can't see and then they get specialized glasses for the first time and they can see mom clearly? Or they've never heard before and they get hearing aids and can hear mom? And it's like their whole life just changes in a moment. And everyone's crying cause they can perceive clearly?

That's how I feel about this passage. It's almost as though if you just wipe away the crazy end times scenarios that were popularized by the Late Great Planet Earth and Left Behind and rapture mania, and just simply read the passage look up a couple cross references it's pretty simple. It might not be what we're used to, but it's very simple.

So I have 2 main points this morning. The first you already know: that the Abomination of Desolation is the Roman Army coming to take Jerusalem. It's not some end times event, it's exactly what happened in 70AD.

Here's the second point. Buckle up because it'll be a hard one to swallow: the Great Tribulation that Jesus refers to here is not a future event. It's already happened.

I'll just let that simmer for a little bit but those two points are what our section is talking about this morning.

When people see the Romans coming they are to run like no one else away from the city. That's the abomination of desolation.

But why do they run? Because when the Roman army comes there will be tribulation like none other. The abomination of desolation brings great tribulation.

**Matt. 24:21:** Says "then there will be great tribulation such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, and no never will be."

Or to put it plainly: The Roman army coming brings a judgement on Jerusalem that is unparalleled. There will likely be great persecution of unbelieving Jews in the future but we don't have any promise of a judgment like we have a promise of this judgment that happens in this generation.

### 1. What is the abomination of desolation? **Read 14**

The phrase abomination of desolation is a mysterious one. The actual words just mean the detestable thing that makes everyone run away, or makes a place empty out. An abomination is something that is detestable to

God, it's something God hates. Often in the OT it was used to describe sinful practices or idols. These things were disgusting to God.

Rome was an abomination to God in the same way Egypt and Assyria and Babylon were. And God used all these abominable countries to judge his people. God often uses sinful, wicked rulers to judge his people. Rome was an idolatrous abomination.

And desolation simply means something is empty. The root word is related to wilderness. When something is desolate it is cleared out. When it's 2pm here at the church on a Sunday the place is desolate - there's nobody here.

So whatever is coming is an abomination to God and will make Jerusalem completely desolate. There won't be anyone there once they're done. Who is that? And quite simply it's the Roman army. We'll turn to **Luke** in a moment, but notice that Mark says "let the reader understand). Understand what? Understand what he's referring to. The abomination of desolation is not some big secret. It's not a mysterious end time figure that turns out to be the last person anyone expected like some fictional character in the Left Behind series.

No, Jesus says this and Mark simply assumes all his readers will actually get what he's talking about. This was common enough in Jesus's day that they knew exactly what he was saying.

But why use this language? We'll see in a few minutes that Jesus is using the language of the OT to help his disciples understand what's going to happen to the city. He's using very dark and foreboding language to set up what they are to expect.

But **turn to Luke 21:20**. This is a parallel passage and you're going to see that this almost exactly the same thing. But I think Luke does a little interpretation for us because his audience is mostly Gentile. They wouldn't have been as familiar with the OT language as Mark and Matthew's readers would have been. **Read 20-24**

So the abomination is, very clearly, armies. Mark says they are standing where they ought not be. Luke defines that for us. Where is it? Jerusalem. When that happens, know that the desolation has come near. When armies come to Jerusalem know that the place is about to be emptied out. It will be made into a wasteland. Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by Gentiles until the time of the Gentiles is over. Can I tell you something? Jerusalem - to this day - is trampled by Gentiles. Who controls the Temple Mount? Muslims. Jews are legally forbidden from even going onto the Temple Mount area.

Now, I mentioned Jesus is calling on the OT to help his disciples understand what is about to happen. **Turn to Daniel 8**. Daniel mentions an abomination that causes desolation 4 times. And in each time it seems as though what he is talking about is a Gentile ruler who lays siege to Jerusalem and destroys the sacrificial system.

Now, if you've read through Daniel recently you know that the first half are all the fun stories of the fiery furnace and the lions den. And the second half are all the crazy visions that Daniel gets. I'm not going to unpack all these visions. If you have an ESV Study Bible I think the notes are a helpful walk through of what he sees.

I just want you see some of this. Now, understand the language of these visions is very similar to the language of Jesus in the Olivet Discourse. Things are to happen in the not too distant future and Jerusalem is destroyed.

Here in **Dan. 8** this is Daniel's vision of the Ram and the Goat. A Ram charges west from basically Babylon and a Goat charges east from Rome. The ram is Cyrus of the Media-Persian empire, the Goat is Alexander the Great who conquers then dies and his Kingdom is divided up. This actually happened. In verses **8-14** we have the aftermath of Alexander's kingdom after he died.

Now, the language apocalyptic and wild but what I want you to see is the connection between a ruler who is sinful coming in and making Jerusalem desolate and sacrifices being ended. That's all I want you to see for connections. **Read 8:9-14**

What does that all mean? Most people recognize this as the Seleucid dynasty. And this little horn as being Antiochus IV Epiphanes. He was an infamous ruler who eventually began persecuting the Jewish people around 168BC. He ended up killing 40,000 Jewish people and absolutely ransacked the Temple. He's the one who infamously sacrificed a pig on the altar of God and put up an image of Zeus above the altar (Storms, Sam. Kingdom Come). The abomination that caused desolation - this event - was fresh in the minds of the disciples. Daniel calls it the rebellion that causes desolation. Rebellion or the rebellious one is another term for an abomination.

The disciples would have grown up hearing about Judas Maccabaeus and the Maccabean revolt to overthrow the Seleucids and Antiochus and take their land back. It was just 6 years later - 2,300 days - when Judas Maccabaeus led a revolt, took the Temple back and cleansed it from Antiochus's defiling of it.

But when people heard about the abomination that caused desolation they would have thought Antiochus and his armies slaughtering all the Jews.

So when the disciples hear that phrase, they envision Antiochus Epiphanes Part 2 happening. **Turn to Daniel 9.** Again, this isn't a study on Daniel, so I don't want to spend a lot of time here. I just want you to see what's being said so you get a feel for the imagery that Jesus is calling on. He's connecting sacrifices being ended, city being overrun and the abomination of desolation. **Read 24-27**

Okay, what is he talking about? If you ask 4 scholars you'll get 6 opinions. You can read through the ESV Study Bible notes if you want all the options.

I think Daniel is pointing to Jesus who atones for wickedness and brings in everlasting righteousness. He's actually the anointed one who is cut off. And in the aftermath of his death - and resurrection of course - wars will be decreed and in the middle of this 70th week sacrifices will be cut off. That's the destruction of the Temple.

Now, not everyone agrees with that and that's fine. But what we do see is a connection between all these terms: abomination, desolation, destroying of the Temple and Sanctuary, end to sacrifice, destruction of the city. That's all connected. So when Jesus is using these terms he's just using Daniel's language to explain what's about to happen to Jerusalem.

Now there are two other passages that talk about abominations and desolations: **Daniel 11:31** and **12:11**. And just to be perfectly honest, I don't know which event those are talking about - it could be Antiochus Epiphanes or 70AD. And scholars are divided. But what I do know is that Jesus is making this connection that the city will be destroyed and the Roman armies will do it.

So let's look back at **Mark 13** and unpack the rest here. I know that doesn't satisfy some of the questions you might have about Daniel, but I really do want to stay focused on what Jesus is saying.

So the abomination that causes desolation is the Roman armies. Luke makes that clear and Jesus uses that term to show pattern of a sinful person destroying the holy city.

2. Why the command to run? Because it will be a Great Tribulation. **Read 14-19**

So I've made the case over the last few weeks that all the other things we saw in **Vss. 1-13** were non-signs. The disciples wanted to know what the sign - singular - would be when Jerusalem and the Temple was about to be destroyed. Jesus has been telling them about what not to worry about. None of the things before should be cause for alarm or concern. These would be normal occurrences. But when the armies come it's over. Run because the destruction will be instant.

You know what it's reminiscent of? When God destroyed Sodom and said don't even look back or you'll be swept up in the destruction. God is going to do to Jerusalem basically what he did to Sodom and Gomorrah because they've become that bad.

Now, Jesus says to do what no person in their right mind would ever do: run away from the city. In ancient times when a city or the surrounding region was threatened the people all went into the city. That was the source of protection and safety. Jerusalem had huge fortifications, they had their own internal water source, and the city is situated on a hill that makes it very awkward to attack. Why would anyone ever run into the hills? Jesus says because the city will be destroyed. The only hope of survival will be immediate evacuation.

The suddenness of the army is hard to miss. Don't even go down into your house, don't grab a jacket. If you're a farmer and your family is in the city do not go back in there to save them. Why? Because they will die and so will you if you try to rescue them.

This is lightning fast. Pregnant women will slow things down - it's hard to walk quickly when you're pregnant. Having little ones will slow you down. If it's in winter the roads are all muddy and hard to walk on. If it's a Sabbath your conscience might not allow you to leave.

All of this points to a local attack in Jerusalem. This is not an end times world wide event. All of these things were true only for first century Jerusalem and the surrounding area.

How bad will it be? **Read 19**

It's really hard for us to imagine just how bad it was when Rome came and raided Jerusalem. I keep referring to 70AD but really the invasion into Israel began in 66AD. The total assault on the area was 3 and a half years, although the actual siege of Jerusalem was less than that.

What had happened was that Israel had become something of a hotbed of radicals and zealots that opposed Rome. And one thing Rome would never allow was for people to attack them without revenge. And Rome was brutal in revenge.

In one episode leading up to the main battle the Jews revolted and Rome came in and killed 12,000 people and left their dead bodies in the streets. Now, I want you to think about that. Jerusalem in ancient times was impressive, but small by modern standards. And 12,000 people dead is more than twice the population of Deer Park.

Jospehus says that the fighting was non stop and you could hear it non stop. You could also hear the people wailing as their loved ones were dragged out and tortured and then killed and thrown over the wall where there would be piles of bodies. This is was just the warm up for Rome.

Within the city people warred against each other. There were factions who disagreed what they should do as Rome closed in around the city.

Now, here's what's interesting. During one Passover the hostilities actually stopped. The Roman army retreated for a short time. And during that time people come or go into the city if they wanted. And here's the tragic reality - Jerusalem's population exploded. Everyone who could crammed into the city. And that's tragic because when Rome began the siege again even more people were killed. When the walls were breached, the death toll was unbelievable.

You know who left the city? Christians. **Read 20-22**

The days were cut short for a brief time and then the battle resumed. Let me read you some of the description.

Jospehus records in Jewish Wars (5.446ff) that Rome had cut off all food from the city. And there was a famine inside the city. People were starving to death. So Titus decided to retreat his troops into the hills and allow some of the people to come out of the city to get something to eat. But he hid horseman to trap the people.

“the severity of the famine made them bold in thus going out; so nothing remained but that, when they were concealed from the robbers, they should be taken by the enemy; and when they were going to be taken, they were forced to defend themselves, for fear of being punished; as, after they had fought, they thought it too late

to make any supplications for mercy; so they were first whipped, and then tormented with all sorts of tortures before they died, and were then crucified before the wall of the city.

Titus pulled his troops back a ways, waited until families came out with their women and children to try to find something to eat. And then he sends in riders on horses to capture them and crucify them. And the amount of people dying by crucifixion was enormous. There was a circle of crosses around the city with people dying on them in plain sight of those who were still in the city.

Josephus: "So the soldiers out of the wrath and hatred they bore for the Jews, nailed those they caught, one after one way, one after another to the crosses by way of jest - they made fun of the men, women and children as they nailed them to the crosses..."their multitude was so great that room was wanting for the crosses and crosses wanting for the bodies."

Translation: there were so many crosses with people dying on them they were running out of room. And even with that many people dying on crosses they didn't have enough crosses to crucify all the people.

But it kept happening because the famine inside of the city was so great people would rather be caught and crucified and die of starvation inside the city.

"This sight kept many of those within the city who were eager to desert, til the truth was known; yet did some run away immediately as unto certain punishment, esteeming death from the enemies to be a quiet departure, if compared with that by famine. So Titus commanded that the hands of many of those that were caught to be cut off, that they might not be thought deserters.

So the famine was so bad that the people would literally look over the walls of Jerusalem and see the hundreds of people dying on crosses and all the people waiting to die by crucifixion and they'd think "man, that's the better way to go." So they'd run out to get caught and Rome was so brutal that they wouldn't even kill them. They'd just cut off their hands.

Now in the midst of all of this Titus - the general singing Jerusalem - was starting to get frustrated that the siege was taking so long. Rome was usually lightning quick and could overwhelm a city fast. Titus was taking a long time and that basically made him look bad.

"He also owned, that he was afraid that the length of time thus spent would diminish the glory of his success; for though it be true, that the length of time will perfect every thing, yet, that to do what we do in little time, is still necessary to the gaining of reputation. (499)"

So what they did was build a wall around the outer wall of Jerusalem so that no one could possibly escape. And they unleashed even more horrors on the people. At the end of the day, Josephus estimates over 1,100,000 Jews were killed and 97,000 went into captivity.

Now, Matthew and Mark both say that this is the worst thing that will ever happen. **Read 19**

This is why it is often said that this is referring to an end times event. Because whatever this is is the worst. But two things I want to mention. First, the context here is the destruction of Jerusalem. This is the worst Jerusalem has ever faced. And by all accounts - even the biblical accounts of Jerusalem's demise in the OT - this was the worst.

Second, this phrase "has not been from the beginning of creation that God created until now, and never will be" is an OT phrase that basically means it was really bad. It's the Bible's way of saying "this thing is just the worst" even though there might be other things that are technically worse. It's just a saying. Here's 3 that talk about God judging Egypt:

"There shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there has never been, nor ever will be again." (Exod. 11:6)

“Behold, about this time tomorrow I will cause very heavy hail to fall, such as never has been in Egypt from the day it was founded until now.” (Exod. 9:18)

“The locusts came up over all the land of Egypt and settled on the whole country of Egypt, such a dense swarm of locusts as had never been before, nor ever will be again.” (Exod. 10:14; cf. Joel 1:1-4)

Here’s 3 that talk about Jerusalem being destroyed by Babylon:

“a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness! Like blackness there is spread upon the mountains a great and powerful people; their like has never been before, nor will be again after them through the years of all generations.” (Joel 2:2)

“And because of all your abominations I will do with you what I have never yet done, and the like of which I will never do again.” (a reference to the impending Babylonian captivity; Ezek. 5:9; cf. Matt. 24:21)

“He has confirmed his words which he spoke against us and against our rulers who ruled us, by bringing upon us a great calamity. For under the whole heaven there has not been done anything like what has been done against Jerusalem.” (Dan. 9:12)

One talking probably about the first century destruction of Jerusalem:

“At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time.” (Dan. 12:1)

The Bible also uses this kind of language when giving praise to kings:

“[Hezekiah] trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel; so that there was none like him among all the kings of Judah after him, nor among those who were before him.” (2 Kings 18:5)

Hezekiah was the best. But listen to this about Josiah just 5 chapters later:

“Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses, nor did any like him arise after him.” (2 Kings 23:25)

Wait a minute. How can you have 2 kings that are the best and no one is better? Does the Bible contradict itself? No. This is just the way the Bible expresses the severity of something, or even the goodness of something.

So what’s the point? The point is that this was horrific. It was the most horrific assault on Jerusalem in her long storied history. The disciples are to understand it will be unbelievable.

And even then there will be a specific temptation to Christians to retreat into the city. **Read 21-23**

We’ve already read that there will be false Christ’s in the intervening years. Those would come Jesus said and they wouldn’t be a sign of anything. But after the Roman army arrived there would be a new temptation for believers. For Christians who knew this prophecy and knew this was God’s judgement.

It seems as though at that time even Christians might be caught up in the reality of the judgement and believe that Jesus was physically returning. That somehow this was his second coming and go back into the city or follow some rumor that Jesus had returned somewhere.

Jesus says don’t you believe it. Be on your guard. The destruction of Jerusalem is not the second coming. It is a judgement of God, and I think a judgment of Jesus, but it’s not the second coming.

I want to give one piece of application here. And that is we follow the commands of Jesus even when they don't make sense. See, Christians often want to use our own logic and "common sense" to subvert the plain commands of God. We want to justify it because simply obeying his commands are often difficult and maybe seem unusual or unpopular.

Jesus addresses that here. Don't go into the city, and be on your guard against false people who say Christ is over here or over there. Completely contrary to everything that would be happening in their heart and mind.

Jesus says obey his commands and they will live. This is what the gospel calls us to. We believe Jesus and we therefore follow him no matter how unusual the commands seem or how non-sensical they might be. The Christians in the first century did. The Christians in every century should.

**Pray**