

THE “TIME OF THE END” BEGINS WITH THE “ABOMINATION” (A MATTHEW 24–25 SERIES)

PART 4

With the message still resonating that the **end** comes when the gospel penetrates the whole world (Matthew 24:14), Matthew suddenly moved into another apocalyptic arena. Some **abomination** is going to enter the precincts of the Christian church as a pivotal warning to the saints. When its influence rises with controlling force, God’s people are advised to flee, to escape from its coercive supremacy. Jesus invites us to clearly identify **what** that **evil** is!

This “**abomination**” is not labeled as a “sign,” but it is perhaps the most dramatic focused issue in end-time prophecy. When it legally arrives (a Danielic report), timing periods are introduced and dramatic events begin that continue during its terrible tenure. Christ’s portrayal of Jerusalem’s literal fall choreographs what Babylon’s fall (apostate Christianity) will be like at the end. This evil’s eschatological implications will threaten the very foundation of the church, which God details in great depth! Jesus then invites us to confer with Daniel, where a vast amount of information unfolds regarding this abominable “transgression” or sin.

Many scholars (e.g., Turner, p. 576, Keener, pp. 573-575) correctly associate the abomination with the terminal antichrist. He is actually characterized in several ways in Daniel’s prophecies. Jesus envisions a future desecration of His church through that tainted leadership. His apostasy is profound and is central to most apocalyptic discourses! “This is what everyone must grasp.” He noted: “*Whoso readeth, let him understand*” (Matthew 24:15).

“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)” (Matthew 24:15).

“When ye therefore shall see” (vs 15)

This is an interesting phrase. There is no preceding narrative that even hints as to what the abomination might be. In the previous verse an “end” (*telos*) was “featured,” unrelated to this verse.

“Therefore” (*oun* – G), in this setting, must “indicate a transition to **something new**.”¹

In our vernacular: “Moving on to another thought, whenever you see ...”

To “see” means that one can literally observe, experience or witness that this abomination is occurring!² It is a materializing **event** at a **point of time** that transitions prophetic history!

What are we to “see?”

¹ *Gingrich Lexicon* (cf. John 1:22, Acts 25:1).

² *Bible Works, Frieberg Lexicon*.

“The abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet” (vs 15)

In the next phrase, this “abomination” will be personified by standing in the Holy Place. Referencing similar statements in Daniel now becomes crucial to our interpretation. “This expression comes directly from the LXX, in the exact words of Daniel in 12:11; without definite articles in 11:31; and with the plural ... of desolations in 9:27.”³ The “desolation” sin is first mentioned in 8:13. Those are the reference areas Jesus invites us to go to, to understand.

Intriguingly, in Daniel 11 and 12, where the “abomination” is elucidated, a “daily” is concomitantly **taken away**.

1. The “vile person” (Daniel 11:21) has a cadre of supporters (described in military terms) who pollute the sanctuary and take away the **“daily”** (*hatamiyd*) (Daniel 11:31) (see Appendix I).
 - a. **Then** the abomination is “placed,” which God warned would lead to desolation.
 - b. “Placed” (*nathan* – H) in this setting is best translated “set up” (NET, NIV, NRSV, NAB). It has become a **legal mandate – a law**.
2. Recapitulating, at the **“time of the end”** (Daniel 12:4, 9), the **daily** will be taken away and the **abomination** “set up” (Daniel 12:11).
 - a. “Set up,” again, has the earmark of a new law, a legal standard that has just been put into place. Christ’s calling it an **“abomination”** means that **God hates it!**
 - b. Combining chapters 11 and 12, the antichrist, initially called the “vile person” (11:21), and later “king of the north” (11:40), is identified as the force behind this spiritual travesty.

The “sin” or “behavior” that God calls abominable is described in Daniel 8:12-13 (“the transgression of desolation”):

1. Because of a **transgression** (*be pasha* – H), truth is cast to the ground (vs 12). This is what God later calls an “abomination.”
2. This **transgression** is what leads to **desolation**.
3. Verse 11 notes that when the “daily” is taken away, the “place” or role God has in His plans for His church (sanctuary) is cast down.
4. Gabriel later observes that this sin (*bepesha*) causes God’s church (sanctuary) to be “trodden underfoot” or persecuted (Daniel 8:13; cf. Revelation 11:2).

This is identified as the **one key rebellion** that God detests, calls it an abomination and He decrees that it will lead to annihilation (desolation) of its perpetrators. What does this sin or “the transgression” (*bepesha*) allude to?

A resumé of this word was presented by Gleason J. Archer, Jr., in the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, pp. 741-742. It is rebellion against God’s law, authority and covenant. This is pointedly summarized in the Sabbath commandment of the Decalogue.

³ Hagner, Donald A.; *Word Biblical Commentary* (Nelson Reference and Electronic), 33B, p. 699.

- Authority – He is the Creator (Exodus 20:11).
- Law – The Sabbath, within the Ten Commandments, asks us to “Remember,” “to keep” it (Exodus 20:11). Within that “holy keeping” is God’s set-aside time to recall the great meaning of “deliverance” (Deuteronomy 5:15) – physical and spiritual – to His people.
- Covenant – This sacred day is a perpetual covenant sign that total restoration of man will occur (Exodus 31:16-17).

“And arms shall stand on his part, and they shall pollute the sanctuary of strength, and shall take away the daily [sacrifice], and they shall place the abomination that maketh desolate. And such as do wickedly against the covenant shall he corrupt by flatteries: but the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits” (Daniel 11:31-32, 12:11).

The “imperative” by Jesus to study these issues in Daniel reveals, **for the first time**, a prophecy that clearly states the Sabbath will be an end-time issue, associated with an antichrist! Briefly, summarizing this in Daniel:

1. “Abomination”
 - a. Will be used as a controlling power by the antichrist and his followers
 - b. Will be associated with the time of the end and consummation
 - c. Is a false Sabbath that will be enforced by laws
 - d. Will cover a period of 1290 literal days
2. “Daily”
 - a. Will be removed – this represents the true Sabbath
 - b. This will be one of the “acts” by this antichrist and his followers
3. Sanctuary – Temple – Church
 - a. Defiled by casting truth to the ground
 - b. The coercive arena of this apostasy infiltrates the Christian world.
 - c. God’s true church will, therefore, be wiped under the feet of the rebellious.⁴

This “movement” will be so strong that the antichrist is depicted as controlling God’s church:

*“Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that **man of sin** be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; **so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God**, showing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?” (II Thessalonians 2:3-4).*

The Tarnishing Infiltration

The next phrase in Matthew 24:15 bears further review.

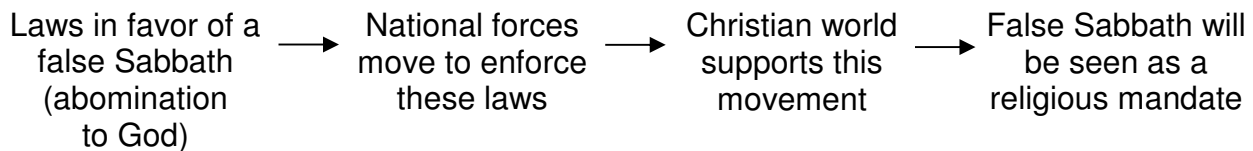
The abomination will ***“stand in the holy place.”***

⁴ Fowler Jr., Franklin S.; *End-Time Secrets of Daniel 8–12* (Christian Heritage Foundation; Lucerne Valley, CA; 2005).

We conclude from Daniel’s prophetic narrative that the antichrist’s rebellion against the Sabbath penetrates the inner precincts of the Christian church. And that would be true. But there is more to this issue. Note this fascinating sequence:

1. When you see Jerusalem (God’s people – the Christian Community) surrounded with armies (forces opposing the Sabbath) (Luke 21:20)
2. When you see the abomination “**standing** where it ought not” (Mark 13:14)
3. When you see the abomination “**stand in** the holy place” (Matthew 24:15)
4. Finally, it takes a ruling seat in the “temple of God” (II Thessalonians 2:4)
 - “sitting” in prophecy means ruling over.⁵

This is a progressive narrative of how an alternative sabbath issue will move into the Christian precincts right at the end. Collectively and ever so briefly, coalescing these three gospel writers to Daniel:



The antichrist becomes the “leader,” the “head” of the Christian Church. Billy Graham noted: “Since his election, Pope John Paul II has emerged as the greatest religious leader of the modern world, and one of the greatest moral and spiritual leaders of this century ... The Pope came [to America] as a statesman and a pastor.... Pope John Paul II [is] indeed a bridge builder, and that is something our divided world desperately needs.”⁶ This is alarming, since John Paul II and Benedict XVI have both written and spoken about laws to re-establish Sunday as a mandated worship day. Pope Francis said on July 5, 2014: “Keeping stores open on Sunday is not beneficial to society.”⁷

It is good that we briefly pause at this point to address an issue that controls the thinking of much of the Christian world. The desecration of the temple is interpreted by the Christian majority as referring to the Seleucid king, Antiochus IV Epiphanes (ruling 175-164 B.C). In 167 B.C. he attacked Jerusalem and did desecrate the Jewish temple. But that was ancient history! Jesus is giving us prophecies and a narrative that are associated to the future of His prophetic discourse associated with the Second Coming.

Though the physical temple is to be destroyed, Jesus looks further into the future and deals with the “spiritual temple” – the body of believers. The horrors of rebellion against truth will take over its precincts. God directed Jeremiah and John to call such apostasy “Babylon.” That study, in itself, holds amazing keys to grasp end-time prophecy in Revelation.

There are **historic** illustrations of what occurs when God’s sanctuary or temple is desecrated (Psalms 74:3-7, 7; Isaiah 63:18). Israel suffered repeated judgments and religious humiliation

⁵ Aune, David E.; *52C World Biblical Commentary; Revelation 17–22* (World Books; Publisher, Dallas, Texas – 1997), p. 930.

⁶ Graham, Billy; *The Saturday Evening Post*, January–February 1980.

⁷ *Associated Press*, July 6, 2014.

(cf. 1 Macc. 3:45; 3 Macc. 1:29, 2:14; 2 Bar. 5:1). God often scattered His people (Deuteronomy 4:26-31; Jeremiah 29:12-14, 31:9).⁸ But at the end, eternal “desolation” will occur.

Instructive is the Jewish history, where historians considered the secular Roman ensign of an **eagle** on a pole as the premier abomination or curse (Philo Leg. Gai. pp. 209-210; Jos. Ant. 18:55-59; War 2, 169-174; 3 Macc. 1:29).⁹ It was that abomination that Jesus referred to in Jerusalem’s anticipated military fall in 70 A.D. But the desecration of the Sabbath will be a spiritual abomination or sign at the eschatological end! Thus, that “sacrilege will usher in the end of the age.”¹⁰ This is why Jesus made the Danelic study an end-time imperative.

“Truth” will be cast to the ground by the abomination or transgression (Daniel 8:12). It becomes so pervasive that Mark notes it stands where it should not. It has entered the church. The issues and powers in Revelation also show a progressive story of how the papacy surrounds, enters and finally controls Christianity. There, abominable issues and blasphemous powers are depicted as a harlot and personified through a beast – all referring to the same anti-Christian, dragon-led, apocalyptic antichrist.

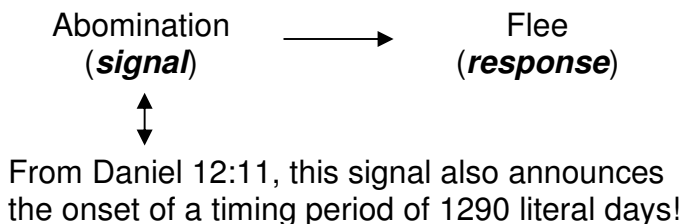
Jesus finishes this verse: **“whoso readeth, let him understand”** (vs 15).

Most expositors conclude that this counsel includes a thorough analysis of Daniel. Daniel chose to write these areas which discuss the **abomination** and **desolation** (chapters 8–12) in Hebrew (most other chapters were in Aramaic). This suggests that they are of immense value to God’s people! In the Apocalypse, the unsealed little book in Revelation 10 is this area from Daniel. We are to “eat it” – fully grasp it.

Matthew continues:

“Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains: Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes” (Matthew 24:16-18).

When the Roman eagle “standard” enters the precincts of Jerusalem or, at the end when the Sabbath day is attacked and a false worship day introduced as a legal mandate, “flee to the mountains.” When this **sin**, defined by heaven as an abomination, is “set up” or “put in place,” “flee.”



⁸ Keener, Craig S.; *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Grand Rapids, MI), p. 575.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Nolland, John; *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Grand Rapids, MI), p. 970.

When the ensign or standard of Rome approached Jerusalem (two furlongs out was considered sacred), the Christians were to flee. A metaphor for the defiled Christian church at the end is “Babylon that great city” (Revelation 14:8). When this abomination has infiltrated the body of Christ (God labels it as in apostasy) – “flee.” Provocative is the note that the eagle Roman ensign was also the same banner for historic Babylon.¹¹

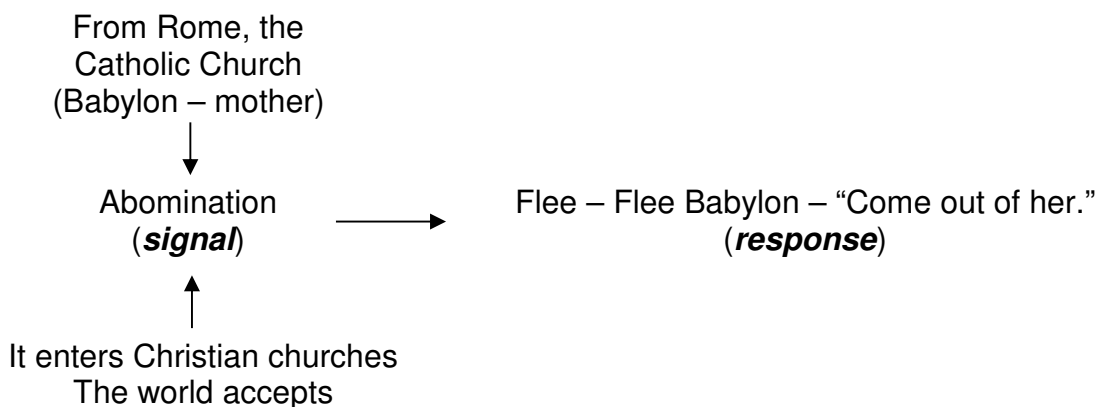
Focusing more deeply on these symbols is the end-time warning to all the world:

“And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen ... And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues” (Revelation 18:2a, 4).

The cry to “come out” is to those still in end-time Babylon – that arena of rebellion. The imperative to those within Judea, housetops or the fields – wherever they are, whatever they are doing – escape quickly. “Get out – flee!” God’s people will embellish that urgent appeal: “Come out of her!”

Babylon is depicted as a “harlot” (Revelation 17), a church giving to the world the wine of her fornication (false doctrines). In her hands is a golden cup – full of those abominations (Revelation 17:4-5; cf. Hosea 4:10-19, Jeremiah 3:2-3). Riveting is the narrative in Revelation. This harlot is “sitting on seven hills,” which alludes to Rome, the “city of seven hills.”

Embellishing the previous graph:



Why the counsel to flee? There shall then be a “great tribulation” (Matthew 24:21), a great time of hatred against God’s people – but even more terrifying:

“And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration” (Revelation 17:6).

“In the last great conflict of the controversy with Satan those who are loyal to God will see every earthly support cut off. Because they refuse to break His law in obedience to earthly powers, they will be forbidden to buy or sell. It will finally be decreed that they shall be put to death. See Revelation 13:11-17. But to the obedient is given the promise, ‘He shall dwell on high: his place of defense shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters shall be

¹¹ http://www.boston-catholic-journal.com/a-primer-to-catholic-symbolism.htm#The_Eagle_

sure.’ Isaiah 33:16. By this promise the children of God will live. When the earth shall be wasted with famine, they shall be fed. ‘They shall not be ashamed in the evil time: and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied.’ Psalm 37:19. To that time of distress the prophet Habakkuk looked forward, and his words express the faith of the church: ‘Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.’ Habakkuk 3:17, 18.”¹²

What did Christ mean by “flee to the mountains?”

Historically, when the Roman armies first approached Jerusalem with their ensign (likely with the lead cavalry horse), Christians saw that as a signal to literally flee. Eusebius (H.E. iii, 5, 3) says that they did escape to Pella, 17 miles southeast of the Sea of Galilee (east of the Jordan River). Remains of that settlement exist today.

The literal escape of Christians to Pella and the fall of Jerusalem create word pictures and metaphors for us to see more clearly the meaning of Babylon and its “ensign” at the end – at which time God’s true people will leave that “great city” (apostate Christianity) and escape to a place of safety.

For those Jewish Christians, the hills of Pella became a refuge. What might be the spiritual refuge or “mountains” that Christ is alluding to just before the Second Coming (*parousia*)?

In the Old Testament, mountains (hills) did have wonderful symbolic meaning.

- They represented God’s power (Psalm 121:1-2), where God dwells (Mt. Zion) (Psalm 2:6, 135:21; Isaiah 8:18; Joel 3:21), where God’s people will go for security and worship (Genesis 19:30, Isaiah 2:2-4, Ezekiel 7:16, Revelation 14:1).
- Additionally, Zion or Mount Zion represented a Scripturally unique place for protection, a stronghold (II Samuel 5:7). It is where the “Lord our God” resides (Jeremiah 31:6). Zion is a mount that cannot be moved (Psalm 125:1). It is seen by Isaiah as a place of refuge (Isaiah 14:32), where God has located salvation (Isaiah 46:13)!

In this end-time period, escaping to the mountains means to **flee from Babylon** (apostate Christianity) to a place of **spiritual safety**. Go where God resides – a stronghold of God.

Expositor White **initially** made a literal application to “flee:”

“The time is not far distant when, like the early disciples, we shall be forced to seek a refuge in desolate and solitary places. As the siege of Jerusalem by the Roman armies was the signal for flight to the Judean Christians, so the assumption of power on the part of our nation, in the decree enforcing the papal sabbath, will be a warning to us. It will then be time to leave the large cities, preparatory to leaving the smaller ones for retired homes in secluded places among the mountains.—5T 464.”¹³

¹² White, Ellen G.; *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 121-122.

¹³ White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 465 (1885).

Symbolically, flee to the “mount of God” means a “stronghold of the Lord.” Escape to a spiritual haven, where the coercive influence of the abomination is not apparent! Eventually, it will be necessary to literally hide as did the Jewish Christians.

“The assumption of power on the part of our nation [the United States] in the decree enforcing the papal sabbath will be a warning to us.”¹⁴ Escaping to secluded places in the mountains will not occur until close to the end of that final three-and-a-half-year period that Daniel so carefully describes in chapter 12.

The urgency is again depicted by the escape language from a *literal point of origin* before fleeing:

1. Judea – “open country” (likely depicting “any country” you may be in)¹⁵
2. Housetop – relaxing at home (I Samuel 9:25-26, II Samuel 11:2, Acts 10:9) – Don’t delay!
3. Fields – area remote from a house (Genesis 4:8) – “Don’t even go back to your home!”

Don’t delay – that terrible abomination, with its legal force, is about to come and inflict “punishment.” Get out of Babylon – escape for your physical and spiritual lives. Find a refuge away from this influence.

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¹⁴ White, Ellen G.; *Maranatha*, p. 180.

¹⁵ Marshall, I. Howard; *The Gospel of Luke* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; Grand Rapids, MI – 1978), p. 772.