

## Mark 13 v 14 – 23

### Intro.

One of the really good things about doing a sermon series on one book of the Bible, taking it paragraph by paragraph, is that you have to tackle the bits you would naturally want to skim over. Not everyone wants to skip the teaching about the difficulties of the last Days and some people really enjoy studying these passages and a few get rather obsessed with them. I am not one of them. I tend to adopt the ostrich stance which isn't good, either, as Jesus wants us to be alert and watchful. We are not to become obsessed with the appearance on the world stage of the antichrist, but to be looking for the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ in His Glory.

As we consider these few verses, we need to be aware of the nature of the disciples' question and the complexity of Jesus' answer.

As Linda pointed out last week, the disciples seemed to think they were asking one question about a series of events that would happen hard on the heels of each other: the destruction of the Temple, Jesus' return and the end of the age.

Jesus' answer contains parallel prophecies spanning from the lifetime of the disciples' generation to the very end of time.

It is worth remembering that Jesus is speaking to four of His disciples, not to a big mixed crowd. He is giving a warning to His committed followers.

### The Abomination of Desolation

What does this mean?

From Daniel's prophecy (which the writer expects us to look into) we learn that:

- One who makes desolate will follow on from abominations – things that cause disgust.
- Foreign forces will come, profane the Temple and set up the 'Abomination that makes desolate', in the Holy Place. Only priests were allowed into this holy room where there was the lampstand, the table of the bread of the Presence and the altar of incense. It was the final room before the Holy of Holies, where only the High Priest could go once a year with the sacrificial blood of Atonement. Something, or someone would be set up in this holy room which was an abomination i.e. a thing that causes disgust or hatred. It's effect is to cause desolation i.e. a state of complete emptiness or destruction. We can hardly imagine the horror felt by the Jews at this idolatry in the Holy Place.
- He will seduce with flattery those who violate the covenant with God. But those who know their God will stand firm, even through great trials.
- There will be a period of time between the prohibition of burnt offerings in the Temple and the setting up of the Abomination of Desolation.

From 2 Thess. 2 v 4 we learn:

- There will be rebellion which links with Daniel's prophecy about people breaking the covenant with God.
- Then the 'Man of Lawlessness' will be revealed. He is also called 'the son of destruction' who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god, proclaiming himself to be God.

In a sense the Anti-Christ, the Son of Lawlessness, the Abomination of Desolation, is always present in all that opposes Christ and sets itself up as God. The rebellion of humankind against the rule of God opens the door for this agent of Satan to operate. There will come a time when he will be manifested overtly.

The disciples would have known of one fulfilment of Daniel's prophecy in 167 BC in the time of the Maccabees, when there were idolatrous burnt offerings in the Temple.

Then, within the disciples' generation, the Romans destroyed the Temple in AD70 – a second fulfilment.

### **Practical action**

The first thing that strikes me about v.14 is that Jesus says, 'When you see this abomination set up in the Holy Place, run for the hills. Don't go into the house to grab your belongings – just escape as fast as you can.'

Jesus' words are so practical and stark: 'Don't hang about hoping for the best – run for it.'

There is an old story about a farmer in a remote area which flooded. He was a God-fearing man and trusted in the Lord to save him. As the waters rose, he moved upstairs and looked out of his bedroom window to see a neighbouring farmer in a boat. 'Come on, get in the boat.' 'No, it's OK,' said the farmer, 'The Lord will save me.' The neighbour was unable to convince him and rowed away. The water rose and the farmer went up into his attic. Through the window, he saw the firemen arrive in an inflatable dinghy. 'Come on, get into the boat.' 'No, thanks. The Lord will save me.' The water rose and he climbed onto his roof. The Coastguard helicopter flew overhead and lowered a man to the roof. 'Come on, get in this harness, we'll winch you up.' 'No thanks, the Lord will save me. The water rose and he drowned. When he got to Heaven, he said to the Lord, 'I trusted that You would save me. Why did you let me drown?' and the Lord replied, 'I sent a neighbour, the Fire service and the Coastguard. What more did you want?'

It's a silly story with a really good point which ties in with what Jesus said. When danger threatens, don't just sit there take sensible action to save yourself wherever possible.

Those who took Jesus' advice in AD 70 escaped to Pella in Galilee. Of those who didn't run, a thousand were killed and many thousands were taken into slavery to such an extent that there was a glut in the slave markets of the Roman empire.

### **Parallel fulfilments.**

As Jesus answers His disciples' question, He slides from talking about this immanent fulfilment into the end-times fulfilment. But, before we move on to that, there are a couple more points from v.18:

*Pray that it may not happen in winter.*

And in Matthew's record of this conversation:

*Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath.*

There is no point in praying that these things will not happen. They will. God says so. However, we can pray for mitigation – that it won't happen at a time which makes flight difficult. We can pray 'Deliver us from evil.' And we can pray, like Habakkuk: 'In the midst of the years (of judgement) remember mercy.'

v. 19, 20 Jesus is obviously now talking about a greater catastrophe than the destruction of the Temple in AD70.

So, will this terrible tribulation be preceded by another appearance of an Abomination of Desolation standing in the Holy Place? It seems likely.

Some people think that, as there is no longer a Temple in Jerusalem, and a mosque stands on its site, this must refer to the people of God, rather than a building. However, archaeologists now believe that the Holy Place stood to the north of the mosque and there are groups in Israel today working towards rebuilding the Temple.

Israel is the only nation in the world to recognise and observe the Sabbath, so the injunction to pray that the need to flee won't happen on the Sabbath would suggest an event happening in the literal Jerusalem.

When the 'Man of Lawlessness' / the 'Son of Destruction' / the Antichrist is revealed and comes into power, exalting himself against every god and proclaiming himself to be God, who do you think he will target first? God's people. There have always been persecutions against Jews and Christians, but this will be the biggie. Interestingly it seems that no one would escape this terrible destruction unless God intervened. Satan wishes to destroy all who carry God's creative image.

#### **What to do?**

- Be alert. These things will happen. Many end-time prophecies have already been fulfilled or are being fulfilled.
- Look, expectant for the Lord's return.
- Do not believe everything you see or read – especially on the internet, even on Christian TV.
- Know what God says in His word, so you can weigh everything.
- Remember Jesus' warning that there will be false Christs and false prophets. Matt. 24 v 23 – 24 tells us that they will do amazing signs, even calling fire from heaven, and they will deceive many.

#### **His Coming**

So, now Jesus comes to the good news – for us, but there are still astonishing signs to come:

After the Great Tribulation, sun and moon will be darkened and stars will fall from the sky. The E.S.V. translation adds that 'the powers in the heavens will be shaken'. I wonder if these are the Satanic principalities and powers mentioned in Ephesians 6 so that this is the beginning of Satan's dominion crumbling.

Jesus is actually quoting here from Isaiah 13 v 10 which is in a passage about the Day of the Lord when God will come and 'punish the world for its evil, the wicked for their sins.' It is clear that this will be a terrible time. If we have problems with the Judgement of God and the punishment of sinners, it is because we haven't grasped the awe-ful holiness of God and the absolute abomination of sin against Him.

The Day of the Lord will be a terrible time for all sinners unless we have repented of our sins, accepted Jesus as Saviour and Lord and been sealed with the Holy Spirit.

On that Day, all mankind will see the Lord Jesus in His power and glory – all that was hidden while He was on earth, apart from a glimpse at the transfiguration. I guess we all have an image of Jesus, the

man – long white robe, beard, smile. When He comes, we will see Him in all His God-ness. No wonder those who have resisted and rejected Him will be terrified.

But those of us who belong to Him will be gathered up to be with Him.

So, in the light of all that Jesus has said about the coming events, what should we do?

v.24 – 26

- We can pray for help and that we will have grace to stand firm in the face of persecution and tribulation. Remember, God gives grace and help when it's needed, not before.
- We can prepare ourselves by knowing what His word says.
- We can make sure we know His voice so well that we are not deceived by imposters.
- We must pray for those who don't know Him and tell them about Him when we have opportunities.

### **Finally**

In 'Prophetic Guide to the End Time', which I found very helpful in preparing this, Derek Prince gives three basic principles for a right attitude to the future, with which I'll close:

- **We are waiting for the Christ, not the Antichrist.**
- **Christ already reigns and will continue to reign.**
- **Christ exercises His authority through us always and everywhere.**

When we grasp these facts, we are going to face the future with strong confidence because our hearts are ready.

### **Luke 21 v 28 (ESV)**

**Now, when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads because your redemption is drawing near.**