

Set Up an Abomination that Causes Desolation

Desolation

We have already learned that the word “desolation” also can be translated to “wilderness,” or “desert” (Newsletter #8). This is true both in Hebrew and Greek. “Wilderness” and “desert” can be used when “desolation” refers to land, cities, buildings, etc. When God on the other hand speaks about “desolate” nations, people, groups, and individuals the words “forsaken,” “unmarried,” or “divorced” are more fitting and biblical.

Abomination

Before we study what it means to “set up an abomination” we will look at the word “abomination” separately. Let us see how the word is used in Isaiah 66:17:

*“Those who consecrate and purify themselves to go into the gardens, following the one in the midst of those who **eat the flesh of pigs and rats and other abominable things** – they will meet their end together,’ declares the LORD.”*

And in Jeremiah 32:34:

*“They set up their **abominable idols in the house that bears my Name and defiled it.**”*

Abominable things can be anything from unclean animals to idols. As a matter of fact, the Bible calls anything that defiles something holy an abomination. The text from Jeremiah uses the word abominable in connection with God’s temple. Idols in the House of the Lord would certainly be abominable to Him. Another word that many Bible versions use is “detestable.” However, it appears safe to say that the words “unholy” or “unclean” are good explanations for the word “abominable.”

Rebellion

Furthermore, we have learned that the words “rebellion” and “transgression” often are used synonymously. From a biblical perspective it seems that “rebellion” refers to long lasting and persistent transgression. Below are a few Bible texts that highlight this, In Psalm 107:11 we read:

*For they **rebelled** against the words of God and despised the **counsel of the Most High.** (NIV)*

In the next quotation Daniel describes what rebellion means, Daniel 9:4-6:

*I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed: “O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with all who love him and obey his commands, **we have sinned and done wrong.** We have **been wicked and have rebelled;** we have turned away from your commands and laws. We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.” (NIV)*

In both passages the word rebellion is used in conjunction with God’s Old Covenant People. There are many texts in the Old Testament with a similar message.

Set Up an Abomination that Causes Desolation

Now we have come to the moment when we are ready to put these words together. The phrase, “set up an abomination that causes desolation,” occurs three times and is found in Daniel chapters 9, 11 and 12. There seems to be an uncertainty regarding how it should be translated as well as how to interpret it. Most Bible

translators believe that it refers to the desecration of the Temple in Jerusalem so expressions are used to support that particular view.

Bible commentators tell us that the construction of this phrase makes two translations possible. Either the abomination causes the desolation or the desolation causes abomination to be set up.

In the first example something unholy desecrated the Temple and led to its destruction. In the second example it is the desolation that causes the abomination to be set up. Most commentators and translators put the words together as in the example below, Daniel 9:27:

*In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing [of the temple] he will **set up an abomination that causes desolation**. (NIV)*

The grammatical construction of this phrase is unclear, so where do we go? If we cannot get a clear understanding of this phrase in Daniel 9:27, 11:31 or 12:11, what do we do? Here we face a dilemma. What caused what? What came first – the hen or the egg? Therefore, we need to search for a text with a simple grammatical construction that is easy to translate. Here it is! The answer is found in Daniel 8 and 9. Let's start with Daniel 8:13:

*Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to him, "How long will it take for the vision to be fulfilled – the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, **the rebellion that causes desolation**, and the surrender of the sanctuary and of the host that will be trampled underfoot?" (NIV)*

Here is a straight forward statement – clear and simple. It is the “rebellion that causes desolation!” This implies; it is *not* the “abomination” that causes desolation! God chose the Old Testament Israelites to be His own. His plan was to bless, protect, and save them. He truly wanted the best for His children. We have read how God longed to gather them under His wings – but they were not willing. Daniel 8:13 above explains that it was their persistent “transgression” or “rebellion” that eventually caused “desolation” to come. In Daniel 9 the same concept is brought forth. When you read please remember that the word “transgression” also can be translated to “rebellion,” Daniel 9:24:

*"Seventy 'sevens' are decreed **for your people** and your holy city **to finish transgression**, to put an **end to sin**, to **atone for wickedness**, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy. (NIV)*

In His mercy God gave them 490 years to finish their rebellion, put an end to their sin and to atone for their wickedness. What an awesome God – but in vain. They did not repent! As a consequence desolation became a fact. The result, desolation on the land, cities, etc. took place in 70 A.D. when Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed. But what was the effect on the people and when did it occur?

Daniel 12

To understand this let us first go to Daniel 12:11. This is a verse that has initiated a lot of speculations. The interpretations are many but if you have read the previous newsletters carefully, you will immediately pick up the common thread, Daniel 12:11:

*And **from** the time that the **daily sacrifice** is taken away, and **the abomination of desolation is set up**, there shall be one thousand two hundred and ninety days. (NKJV)*

So, when was the daily sacrifice taken away? A few years ago I asked around in a couple of Sabbath School classes saying: “I am not asking for a full prophetic understanding of Daniel 12 – only tell me when the daily sacrifice was taken away?” I asked 30 people and EVERYONE answered: “At the cross!” That is the correct response as we already have concluded in previous newsletters.

Now we need to start counting days. The starting point is “from the time” when the daily sacrifice was taken away, i.e. from the time of the cross. So, if we count 1,290 literal days, beginning at the cross, we end up in 34 A.D. (More details on this in a future newsletter). What happened 1,290 days or about 3 ½ years after the crucifixion?

Consider again the question in this newsletter: Was it the ‘abomination that caused the desolation’ or ‘the desolation that caused the abomination to be set up?’ Well, we already read in Daniel 8:13 that it was the rebellion that caused desolation. We have concluded that at the cross the divorce from God became a fact. The leaders of the nation Israel stated: “We have no king but Caesar” (John 19:15). With this statement they rejected not only Jesus Christ as their Messiah but also God the Father.

Set up Abomination

Because of this we conclude that it was “desolation [that] caused the abomination to be set up.” I.e. something “abominable” was set up 1,290 days after the cross! So – was there something “unholy” or “unclean” that was “set up” in 34 A.D.? Certainly! That was the time when the 490-year prophecy in Daniel 9 came to an end and that was when the “time of the Gentiles” began. Let us take a quick look at what the Bible says happened at that time.

- The same day Stephen was stoned, a great persecution broke out and “all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.” The word was preached everywhere they went (Acts 8:1-4).
- The Samaritans accepted the Gospel and received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-17).
- The Ethiopian eunuch was baptized and brought the Gospel to Africa (Acts 8:26-40).
- Saul was converted and became the greatest apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:1-31).
- Peter had a vision where he was told to eat “unclean” animals. (Acts 10:1-48).

All these passages speak of how the Gospel was taken to the Gentiles. Maybe the most fascinating one is Peter’s vision. He saw the sheet with unclean animals and was encouraged to slaughter and eat them. This was abominable to Peter. He had never eaten anything unclean and was not willing to do it now. You all know the story very well. Eventually he got the message and ended up preaching in Cornelius’ house. To his surprise the Holy Spirit fell on the Gentiles. We will read his conclusion in Acts 10:28:

*He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a **Gentile** or visit him. But God has shown me that I should **not call any man impure or unclean.**"*
(NIV)

That is a very fitting statement! Peter quoted a well-known tradition saying that a Jew was not allowed to “associate with” or “visit” a Gentile. The reason for this was very clear. The Gentiles were considered “unclean” and “unholy.” That is why a Gentile could not enter the holy Temple. Soon after Peter’s vision we find a consensus-statement from the Christian leaders in Jerusalem, Acts 11:18:

*When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, "So then, God has granted **even the Gentiles** repentance unto life." (NIV)*

All these events recorded in Acts 8-11 happened in a very short time period and directly after the stoning of Stephen. With the consensus from Acts 11:18, it became obvious that the GENTILES WERE ACCEPTED! Prior to 34 A.D. the Gentiles were *not* accepted and considered "unholy" and "unclean." But now they were welcomed into the Kingdom of God! This is what it means to "set up the abomination!" This is the biblical significance of this phrase! God told Daniel in a prophecy more than 500 years in advance that the Gentiles one day would be fully accepted and included in His Kingdom. Let's paraphrase Daniel 12:11:

*And **from** the time that the **daily sacrifice** is taken away, and **the abomination is set up because of desolation**, there shall be one thousand two hundred and ninety days.*

The Gospel could not have come to the Gentiles, if the "wall" between the Jews and the Gentiles had not been broken down (Ephesians 2:11-22). It took many of God's miracles to change their predetermined hearts – a true paradigm shift was necessary.

Romans 11 emphasizes what we have been talking about in this newsletter. This chapter says that what at first appeared to be a negative event, the desolation of the Old Covenant People, turned into a most positive event for *both Jews and Gentiles*. After the cross, both Jews and Gentiles are accepted into God's Family by grace through Jesus Christ. Let's summarize to see what all this means for God's people and not focus on the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. as most commentators do.

Summary

- It was rebellion that caused the desolation to take place.
- It was at the cross that the desolation became a fact, as the Old Covenant People divorced themselves from God and His Covenant with them.
- Because of this, the "unholy" Gentiles were accepted or "set up," i.e. included into the Family of God (Romans 11). All this could happen because of God's grace (Ephesians 2:11-22).
- The Jews are since then also adopted by grace into the same Family of God.
- It was very difficult for the first Christian Jews to accept this paradigm shift and many resisted.

The next newsletters will focus on Daniel 9.

Toby Joretteg MD, PhD
www.TobyJoretteg.com