

What Does Yeshua Say About the End Times - Part 4

In my last post, we looked at more warnings of the **END TIMES**. In this post, we will begin to learn what we should do as Believers when the signs come to fruition.

Recall that Matthew 24 and 25 are known as the Olivet Discourse since Yeshua was sharing with His talmidim on the Mount of Olives. We may interpret the Olivet Discourse, as with most Tanakh prophecies, as having a double fulfillment. Yeshua was predicting the destruction of Yerushalayim **and** the **END TIMES**. The references are interwoven so that themes from both the fall of Yerushalayim and the Second Coming occur as one expression of God's judgment on unbelievers and deliverance for Believers. However, in the first part of the prophecy, the destruction of Yerushalayim is more prominent; in the second part, the last days before Yeshua's return are more prominent.

The Abomination of Desolation

"So when you see the abomination that causes desolation spoken about through the prophet Dani'el standing in the Holy Place" (let the reader understand the allusion), that will be the time for those in Y'hudah to escape to the hills. If someone is on the roof, he must not go down to gather his belongings from his house; if someone is in the field, he must not turn back to get his coat. What a terrible time it will be for pregnant women and nursing mothers! Pray that you will not have to escape in winter or on Shabbat." ~ Matthew 24:15-20

Daniel 9:27 tells of the ***abomination that causes desolation***. ***"And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator."*** ~ Daniel 9:27 (ESV)

Several times in Jewish history it was thought that Dani'el's prophecy was being fulfilled - most notably during the days of the Maccabees when Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the Seleucid king, ordered that an altar to the Greek god Zeus be constructed in the Temple (167 BCE). He also decreed that swine and other unclean animals were to be sacrificed there, that the Sabbath was to be profaned, and that circumcision was to be abolished. The cleansing of the restored Temple led to the celebration we now know as Hanukkah. Interestingly, that celebration is not contained in the canon of the Tanakh, but is mentioned in John 10:22-23 while Yeshua was in Yerushalayim.

In this passage from Matthew, Yeshua clarifies that the complete fulfillment of Dani'el's prophecy will be found in (1) the Roman destruction of the Temple in 70 CE and (2) the image of the Antichrist being set up in the last days.

"He will oppose himself to everything that people call a god or make an object of worship; he will put himself above them all, so that he will sit in the Temple of God and proclaim that he himself is God." ~ 2 Thessalonians 2:4

"It deceives the people living on earth by the miracles it is allowed to perform in the presence of the beast, and it tells them to make an image honoring the beast that was struck by the sword but came alive again." ~ Revelation 13:14

Yeshua warned against seeking signs, but as a final part of His answer to the talmidim's second question ***"what will be the sign that ... that the 'olam hazeh is ending?"*** (24:3), He gave them the ultimate event that would signal coming destruction. The ***abomination that causes desolation*** refers to the desecration of the Temple by God's enemies.

The phrase *let the reader understand* was a sort of code. A more precise explanation may have been dangerous for the Believers if the letter were to fall into the wrong hands, so Mattityahu urged his readers to understand Yeshua's words in light of the prophecy from the prophet Daniel (see Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11).

Matthew's Jewish audience, under Roman oppression for many years, understood the sacrilege that would occur. The Roman army was notorious for its disregard for the religious life and freedom of the peoples it conquered. Based on verse 21 (which we'll look at in my next post), the third fulfillment is yet to come. Yeshua's words look forward to the end times and to the Anti-Messiah. In the end times, the Anti-Messiah will commit the ultimate sacrilege by setting up an image of himself in the Temple and ordering everyone to worship it as we learned in 2 Thessalonians 2:4 and Revelation 13:14-15.

Many of Yeshua's followers would live during the time of the destruction of Yerushalayim and the Temple in 70 CE. Yeshua warned His followers to get out of Yerushalayim and Judea and to *escape to the hills* across the Yarden River when they saw the Temple being profaned. The Jewish historian Josephus wrote that from 66 CE, Jewish Zealots clashed with the Romans. Many people realized that rebellion would bring the wrath of the Empire, so they fled to Pella, a town located in the mountains across the Yarden River. As Yeshua had said, this proved to be their protection, for when the Roman army swept in, the nation and its capital city were destroyed.

There is undoubtedly a dual reference both to the historical present and to the distant future. First, this passage prophesied the profaning of the Temple by the Roman armies. The Jewish historian Josephus witnessed these very events and wrote about them in great detail in his *Antiquities* (13.140). Josephus believed that it fulfilled a prophecy regarding the desecration of the Temple by Jews (Daniel 9:27). Just before the Roman victory in 70 CE, the army of Jewish Zealots, driven back into Yerushalayim, took over the Temple and desecrated it with their presence and their actions. The flight with haste, then, may focus on going to the mountains. The problem with fleeing *in winter* was the swollen rivers that would make passage difficult across the usually small streams, as well as across the Yarden River, as Jews made their way out of Judea.

The reference to *the housetop* points to the construction of homes where a flat roof would be used like a family room. People would sit on their housetops and work or converse; in the evening, they would enjoy the cooler air on the roof. Yeshua told them to get away immediately (using the outside staircase), not worrying about their possessions. The destruction of the Temple would also be a sign pointing to the final desecration that precedes the second coming of Messiah (2 Thessalonians 2:4).

They could be fleeing the judgment of God that would fall upon the land of Judea, or fleeing from the Anti-Messiah. During this terrible event, the people were to leave immediately, not taking time to pack bags or even to return to the city to get a coat. They should leave everything behind when they flee from the coming crisis. Yeshua expressed sympathy and concern for those who would have difficulty fleeing because they were pregnant or had small children. Yeshua told the talmidim to pray that the crisis would not break in winter because that would make it difficult for everyone to get away. Matthew added *or on a Shabbat* for his Jewish audience. The Rabbinical Sabbath law stated that a person could not go more than two thousand cubits (1,050 yards). They should pray for nothing to hinder their flight. These people literally would be running for their lives.

In my next post, we will conclude looking at this issue of the Abomination of Desolation.