



Christ Reformed Community Church

161 Hampton Point Dr. Suite 2 | St. Augustine, Florida | 32092 | christreformedcc.com

November 6, 2022

Dr. Andrew Smith

“The Olivet Discourse, Part 3” Mark 13:14–23

This morning I want you to take your Bibles and turn with me again to Mark chapter 13, the Gospel of Mark, chapter 13. We are in the middle of a study of what is commonly referred to as “The Olivet Discourse.” This is a teaching that Jesus gives to the disciples on what we refer to as the Mount of Olives, and so we call it “The Olivet Discourse.” We’re in the middle of this study, but this morning I want to pick up in verse 14 and read through verse 23. When you find your place there, please stand in honor of the reading of God’s Word. I’ll read these verses, we’ll review what we have discussed up to this point, and then we’ll look at verses 14 through 23 in some detail. Picking up in verse 14, Jesus says:

But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not to be (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let the one who is on the housetop not go down, nor enter his house, to take anything out, and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! Pray that it may not happen in winter. For in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, and never will be. And if the Lord had not cut short the days, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he shortened the days. And then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘Look, there he is!’ do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But be on guard; I have told you all things beforehand.

You may be seated, and may God bless the reading of His Word. Let’s ask Him for His grace to help us understand these verses this morning.

Our Father, we come again to this Olivet Discourse, and this is a complex portion of Scripture that has been confused even more by those who have misinterpreted it. We pray that You would help us to have insight by the power of Your Holy Spirit, to understand the seriousness of the subject, and also, Lord, to have clarity of mind regarding exactly what Jesus is speaking about, in particular this so-called abomination of desolation. Open our ears, eyes, and hearts to receive Your truth for Your glory. We pray these things in Jesus’ name. Amen.

As I said, Jesus is on the Mount of Olives giving this sermon, or we could say teaching discourse to the twelve apostles, what we refer to as the twelve apostles, who really were the nucleus of the New Testament church. Jesus would refer to them as being central to the proclamation of the gospel. The apostle Paul would refer to them as the foundation of the church. We are studying,

really, the last week of our Lord’s life on earth. On Sunday of the last week of His life, Jesus came into Jerusalem, hailed as He was upon a colt, *“Hosanna! The Son of David.”* He went into the temple on that Sunday and looked around and went back to spend the night outside of the city. The next morning, He woke up on Monday. That was the day that He cursed the fig tree. It was also the day in which He walked into the temple and cleansed it, now for a second time in His ministry. He did it at the beginning of His ministry, and now He’s doing it at the end of His ministry. The cursing of the fig tree was representative of God’s judgment on Israel as the tree of God, the nation of God. Jesus cursed it and said, *“From you no fruit will ever come again.”* He goes into the temple. He chases out the moneychangers, who were conducting business practices, corrupting the worship of God in their hypocrisy, led by the priests.

So, Jesus has been doing things on this last week of His life that was filled with symbolism, the matter of cursing Israel, God’s judgment on Israel. It is now Tuesday, and Jesus has been in the temple complex the whole day. He has been teaching the apostles, but He has also had wave after wave after wave of committees sent by the Sanhedrin to question Him, to try to trap Him into saying something that would incriminate Him and make Him look bad in the eyes of the people. They fail at doing that, but in the midst of all of these debates, Jesus again speaks with words of judgment to the religious establishment. It is now late Tuesday afternoon. Jesus has walked out of the temple. He is headed with the apostles across the Kidron Valley, up the Mount of Olives, which was some three hundred feet above Jerusalem. They are overlooking Jerusalem, as Jesus gives this teaching discourse. Jesus speaks with strong words about events that are going to occur in the lives of the apostles that will be events history will record as what He says are really the worst events that have ever happened. Jesus in this discourse is predicting, as I said, judgment on Israel. That is the covenant people of God and the cataclysmic event of the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem in AD 70 that reveals His judgment on ethnic Israel as His covenant people. And in so doing, God is marking the ending of that covenant but the beginning of a new covenant, the beginning of a new epoch, the beginning of the church age, we could say, the beginning of the new covenant that would be sealed with the blood of Christ upon which Jesus would be resurrected and He would be enthroned at the right hand of the Father as the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

Now, many people have misunderstood the Olivet Discourse also recorded in Matthew 24 and Luke 21. The briefest of this is given by Mark here in Mark 13. So, we’re really beginning at the point of understanding that what Jesus is saying are things that are going to take place in the lives of the apostles, the first century, the first generation of Christians, alive during the apostolic era. There’s a lot that Jesus says. There’s a lot of apocalyptic language that Jesus uses, but essentially, we have summarized Jesus’ teaching here as communicating there’s going to be a judgment on ethnic Israel. There’s going to be a new epoch, a new era, a new covenant, and Jesus’ words can be summarized in seven sweeping statements. First of all, we saw in verses 1 and 2 what we refer to as the supernatural prediction. Not to go into detail, but as Jesus and the disciples are leaving the temple, they tell Him to look at what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings make up the temple complex in verse 1; and Jesus says something like, *“Yeah, that’s nice, but you see these great buildings, there’s not going to be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”* This is a supernatural prediction of an event that will occur in the future, some forty years after the prediction that Jesus makes of the total destruction of the temple in Jerusalem and the abandonment of that temple that would take place by the hands of the Roman army.

That’s what begins the Olivet Discourse is the supernatural prediction, which then leads, number two, to this fearful anticipation where in verse 5 Jesus makes another statement. The apostles are scared to death, verse 4 for example, “*When will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?*” And Jesus began to say to them, “*See that no one leads you astray.*” The second statement Jesus makes has to do with respect to the confusion that will ensue concerning these events and the importance of the disciples being alarmed to the fact that there will be many deceivers and many teachers and many false prophets that will lead astray many people concerning these events. A good word for us to heed today.

They are fearful. Jesus responds to that by saying, “*See that no one leads you astray,*” and that took us to the third sweeping statement. We called it a critical explanation. We moved from the supernatural prediction, verses 1 and 2; the fearful anticipation, verses 3 through 5; to the critical explanation, verses 6 through 8 where Jesus continues to say that many are going to try to lead you astray in verse 6:

You [are going to] hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains.”

In other words, Jesus says, “I’m telling you ahead of time there are some signs that are going to occur before the temple is destroyed.” You’re going to see “*nation rise against nation, kingdom against kingdom...wars and rumors of wars.*” Jesus is saying this to the apostles. Now, many commentators will thrust these verses into some future event that is yet beyond us, but that’s not what Jesus is speaking about. Critical to His explanation is the fact that these geopolitical elements of turmoil and these earthquakes and famines that will occur in the natural realm are all a result of God’s judgment, God’s judgment upon ethnic Israel. And so, Jesus says, “Don’t be alarmed when these things happen. This is going to be a confirmation of my prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem.” And so, that supernatural prediction, fearful anticipation, critical explanation then led us, number four, to the inevitable persecution in verses 9 through 13 that Jesus speaks about. In verses 9 through 11, He speaks about governmental persecution. He tells them to “*be on guard*” because they’re going to be delivered “*over to councils.*” They’re going to be “*beaten in synagogues.*”

This is the Jewish court system going all the way up to the Sanhedrin that the apostles would suffer under, decisions that that leadership would make to persecute the apostles because the Jewish religious leaders rejected the Messiah, and the apostles are preaching that He was the true Messiah, Jesus was, and that He was raised from the dead. That would lead them to “*stand before governors*” as verse 9 says, “*and kings for my [name] sake*” to be a witness. And Jesus says in verse 10: “*And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations. And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit.*” In other words, Jesus is telling the apostles that the gospel is going to spread around the known world to all the nations in the Roman empire. They are going to proclaim this gospel. They’re going to be persecuted for it, and that is exactly what happened in the first century. The apostles suffered martyrdom. Early Christians who followed the apostles suffered martyrdom, being fed by the Romans to the lions in

the arena in the Colosseum, being lit on fire, their heads being chopped off. All sorts of elements of torture and persecution occurred in the first century of the church.

The Book of Acts tells us that the Christians literally turned the world upside down. The secular authorities didn't like that—the Romans. The Jewish authorities didn't like that. It threatened their religion because they rejected Jesus as the Messiah. So, you have this onslaught of persecution that occurred in the first century; Jesus predicts that. In verses 12 and 13, He predicts familial persecution: *“And brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death. And you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.”* Jesus is saying, “It is inevitable that you're going to be persecuted, and this persecution is a sign of the end. It is a sign of the end of national ethnic Israel. It is a sign of the destruction of the temple. When these things occur, know that My judgment is getting ready to come upon Israel because of their rejection of Me as their Messiah, and they're trying to put you to death because they hate Me. That's why they hate you, and God is going to judge them for this.”

So, that then leads us to a fifth very important sweeping statement that Jesus makes in this Olivet Discourse. We move from the supernatural prediction, verses 1 and 2; the fearful anticipation, verses 3 through 5; the critical explanation, 6 through 8; the inevitable persecution, 9 through 13; now, number five, to the pivotal preparation in verses 14 through 23. The apostles are faced with the promise of persecution. Just think about that for a moment. They are faced with the promise of persecution by the lips of our Lord and the responsibility of the Spirit-empowered task of taking the gospel to the nations. This is a lot. Jesus wants the disciples to be prepared for all of these events, and so He speaks in verses 14 through 23 about the pivotal preparation that must mark them. Now, let me say at the onset, I believe these events in verses 14 through 23 have to do with events that occurred in the first century. These are not events that occur in some future point beyond us. Unfortunately, many have associated the dreaded abomination of desolation which is spoken about in verse 14 with a world-ruling antichrist in the future, and if you pull down virtually any commentary, that's what they will tell you these verses refer to, and I just want you to know up front I think they are wrong. Jesus is talking about something future for the disciples but something in our past. Remember verse 31: *“Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.”* The generation of the apostles. A generation is forty years. They're in the early AD 30s. The destruction of the temple is in AD 70, almost exactly forty years, a generation after Jesus' prediction. So, Jesus is not preparing some future saints that are awaiting the rapture. Jesus is trying to prepare the disciples of the first century for this great destruction that's going to take place.

And so, He tells them it's pivotable that their lives are marked, first of all, by practical preparation. Practical preparation, verses 14 through 17. Notice verse 14. Jesus says, *“But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not to be (let the reader understand),”* Mark says, *“then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.”* In other words, when the apostles witness what He calls here the abomination of desolation, the disciples are to be practically prepared. He even says there in verse 14, *“Let those who are in Judea,”* that's the province of Judea where Jerusalem is located, *“Let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.”* Not exactly conventional wisdom because in the first century, if an army was coming, you wouldn't flee to the mountains; you'd flee to the walled city. That was the safe haven. That was the place of refuge,

but Jesus has already warned that the city is going to be destroyed. So, He’s telling the disciples “Don’t go there.” *“Flee to the mountains.”* And we read in history that when the Roman army invaded Jerusalem and they placed it under siege, all of the nonbelieving Jews who rejected the Messiah did flee to the city, over a million of them, and they were slaughtered by the Romans. But the Christians heeded Jesus’ warning. They fled to the mountains. And notice verse 15, Jesus says, *“Let the one who is on the housetop not go down, nor enter his house, to take anything out.”* Verse 16: *“And let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak.”* This is a similar point that God had made to Moses during the time of Egyptian deliverance when God would deliver them from Egypt. The point was, “You aren’t to delay. Whatever you are doing, you are to do fast. You are to make hast. Get out of Egypt. You’re going to be delivered.” That’s exactly what Jesus is telling the disciples. “Get out of Judea. My judgment is coming.” And He uses—listen to this—first century examples of the practical sort of things they might face. For example, in verse 15, if you found yourself on the common first century flat roof of your house, Jesus says, “Descend down that outer ladder and don’t even go in your house to get anything. head to the hills. Don’t enter your house to take anything. Leave.” Or verse 16, if you’re working in the field—this was an agrarian culture in the first century. If you’re a Jew working in the field, and you begin to see the abomination of desolation, you begin to see the destruction of the temple is coming, you aren’t to go back to your home to get your clothes, verse 16. “Don’t go back and get a cloak. Don’t delay.” That could mean you’re going to be captured or put to death.

You see, these are practical points of preparation for the first century apostles, and even verse 17 mentions more. Notice your Bibles. *“And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days!”* Jesus sighs and says, *“Alas.”* That there’s going to be women pregnant. There’s going to be nursing infants. Jesus is saying to His apostles, “Your families are going to suffer. Some of your wives are going to be pregnant with children. Some of you are going to have nursing babies. These threats are real. Don’t fool around. Don’t delay. Make hast. It is pivotal that you be practically prepared.” Now, this has nothing to do with what doomsday preppers say. Jesus is speaking to the first century apostles, and He’s saying, “Get out of Dodge quick because I’m warning you the judgment is coming.” In fact, skipping ahead just briefly to verse 18, Jesus says, *“Pray that it may not happen in winter.”* I mean, you even have a note here of Jesus saying, “Watch and pray.” These signs are coming, and when they come, when you begin to see this abomination of desolation, verse 14, be practically prepared.” But He also tells them in these verses they need to be mentally prepared.

So, we move from practical preparation to mental preparation. We already mentioned verse 18: *“Pray that it may not happen in winter.”* That’s obvious. You don’t want to have to flee in winter with your young family and risk them to the elements of weather. Verse 19: *“For in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, and never will be. And if the Lord had not cut short the days, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he shortened the days.”* Now, these verses are where we get the phrase “the great tribulation” which many in the last 150 years of the church have said is a seven-year period, a literal seven-year period, that’s going to occur in our future. But as I said in the context, Jesus is telling the saved; that is, the elect, those chosen, the remnant of Jews who believed in the Messiah—that would be beginning with the apostles, right? Those people in the first century, Jesus says, would be spared so the gospel could spread, as Jesus said in verse 10, *“be proclaimed to all [the] nations.”* So, Jesus says here that even in verse 20 the Lord

has *“cut short the days so that no human being would be saved except for the sake of the elect whom he chose.”*

So, He wants the apostles to be mentally prepared. “You’re going to suffer. This is going to be difficult but remember My words. I’m doing this, ironically, for you. I’m judging Israel, your people, for you. You have believed in Me. You’ve got to be mentally tough. You’ve got to be mentally prepared. I have My elect people that I’m preserving. You are the foundation of the church. You are the seed of the church from which the church is going to blossom as you proclaim the gospel, so you must be mentally tough. Prepare your wives. Prepare your children. Prepare the church. Prepare My followers. This is going to happen. When it does, it’s not the end of the world. It’s the end of national ethnic Israel. It’s the end of the temple, so be practically prepared. When you see this abomination of desolation be mentally prepared.”

Number three, there needs to be a theological preparation, verses 21 through 23. We’re going to come back to some of these verses later, but notice in verse 21 Jesus says, *“And then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘Look, there he is!’ do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders, to lead astray,”* He says, *“if possible, the elect. But be on guard; I have told you all things beforehand.”* We read in history that there was, as verse 21 says, a multiplication of false christs and false apostles, verse 22, just prior to the destruction of the temple. Josephus, a first century historian, writes about this in his collected works on the Jewish wars, particularly book number 6, but Scripture itself also identifies some of these false prophets. You might be surprised about this, but I want you to turn with me to Acts chapter 21 because I think there is a mentioning of one of these false prophets. Here in Acts chapter 21, the apostle Paul is arrested in the temple. And verse 37 says:

As Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the tribune, “May I say something to you?” And he said, “Do you know Greek? Are you not the Egyptian, then, who recently stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?” Paul replied, [verse 39] “I am a Jew, from Tarsus.”

“I’m not that guy. I’m not that Egyptian.” Who was this Egyptian? Well, history actually speaks about him. He was a false prophet who led some thirty thousand men to the Mount of Olives, the very place that Jesus is giving this discourse, and he told these thirty thousand men that if they overlooked Jerusalem, they would be able to see its destruction. He was a date setter that led this large caravan, a false prophet. He claimed he knew the day, and he led these thirty thousand men to the Mount of Olives to witness the destruction of Jerusalem. He was a false prophet, a false Messiah. Felix actually destroyed his followers, killing them, but somehow this Egyptian—and he was a Jewish Egyptian; we don’t know his name, or at least I don’t know his name—escaped. And here in Acts 21, they misidentified Paul as being this guy because everything Paul did in preaching the gospel caused a stir, and the Jews didn’t like it. And here we read, *“Are you not the Egyptian, then, who recently stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?”* Apparently, this Egyptian had four thousand men that he led into the wilderness.

If you turn back with me to the account in Matthew’s Gospel, Matthew chapter 24 of the Olivet Discourse, there could be a veiled reference to this. Verse 24: *“For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.”*

And Matthew says in verse 25: *“See, I have told you beforehand. So, if they say to you, ‘Look, he is in the wilderness,’ do not go out.”* So apparently this Egyptian had led four thousand men into the wilderness. They were part of the Assassins. That would have been the zealots, the Jewish militia that actually led to a revolt against Rome, which led to Rome destroying the temple. So, you’re piecing all of these events together. Jesus is talking about things that occur in the first century, but notice verse 23 back in Mark 13 again. Verse 23, Jesus says, *“But be on guard; I have told you all things beforehand.”* In other words, you need to be prepared. It is pivotal that you’re prepared practically, mentally, theologically. All of the above. *“Don’t be deceived about when these events take place. Don’t be deceived by false prophets, false Messiahs. Be prepared practically. Have your family ready. Make haste. Be prepared mentally. You’ve got to be tough. You’ve got to understand I promised this was going to happen for your good, to save the elect. You’ve got to be theologically prepared to understand this.”*

Now, I want to return back to verse 14 and that phrase abomination of desolation because really our understanding of verses 14 through 23 hinges upon our understanding of this phrase, abomination of desolation. Jesus says, *“But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not to be (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.”* Remember, there are many people that associate this tribulation period with a period that occurs at the end of the world with a world-ruling sort of antichrist at the end of time. That’s what a lot of commentators will say the abomination of desolation is a reference to because the word *abomination* means “disgusting or repulsive or abhorrent.” It’s used in the Bible to speak of idolatry. Particularly its Hebrew correspondent, the word is used to describe religious rites associated with pagan practices, and so the abomination of desolation has the idea of the abomination, which makes or results in a desolation or an abandonment. And so, it’s become popular to see the abomination of desolation to be associated with the future antichrist referred to as the *“man of lawlessness”* they say, 2 Thessalonians 2:3–4, who in the future period will lead a confederation of ten European nations corresponding roughly to the territory of ancient Rome, pretending to be a deliverer of Israel, but in the end proving to be Israel’s greatest enemy who occupies Israel and the newly rebuilt temple and commits this abomination of desolation. But verse 14 says, *“Let the reader understand.”* Did you notice that? Those are not the words of Jesus. Those are the words of Mark. It’s a parenthetical. Mark is telling the people who originally read this, *“Understand this.”* He’s highlighting the fact that this is going to happen in your lifetime. That’s why Jesus says, *“Truly, I say to you,”* verse 31, *“this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.”*

So, this abomination of desolation is something that occurred in the first century. That phrase, abdominal of desolation, if you go back to Daniel 9 or Daniel chapter 11, that is where Daniel first mentioned this sort of instance. For example, Daniel 9:27: *“And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.”* Or Daniel 11:31: *“Forces from him shall appear and profane the temple and fortress, and shall take away the regular burnt offering. And they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate.”* The abomination, that which is repulsive, that which is sacrilegious, that makes desolate, that abandons the temple, Daniels spoke about. In Matthew’s version of the Olivet Discourse, he says in chapter 24 of verse 15: *“So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel.”* So, he tells us that Jesus actually mentions the prophet Daniel to indicate the fact that Jesus is speaking about something Daniel was speaking about, some abomination, something sacrilegious,

something that led to the desolation or the devastation, the ruinment, the laying of waste, the abandonment of the temple.

Now, conclusions on when this occur or when this occurred differ regarding which scholar you read, but all scholars agree that it's a reference to some sort of pagan vandalism to the temple. That's the best way that I can describe it, and there are four primary views. The first view says that Daniel's prophesy to which Jesus speaks about here from Daniel 9 and Daniel 11 is a prophesy that was fulfilled in the second century BC. You need to understand your dates. Second century BC would have been two hundred years before the birth of Christ, roughly. The year was actually 168 when the Syrian King, Antiochus Epiphanes IV conquered Jerusalem. This was an attempt to Hellenize the Jewish people, and he forbid the Jewish people from practicing circumcision. He forbid the Jewish people from offering Levitical sacrifices. His name, Epiphanes, literally means “manifest God,” but his enemies referred to him as “Epimanes” which means “madman,” and that's exactly what he was. He overtook the temple for a time period. A pagan altar was erected in the temple in the Holy of Holies to honor the Greek god Zeus situated over the altar of burnt offering wherein pigs were sacrificed. It sounds very similar to something Daniel predicted, as I read those verses. And not only that, there was a brothel in the temple chambers, which led many of the Jews to abandon the temple temporarily until they could formulate forces to lead a revolt. We read about this in the noncanonical books of 1 and 2 Maccabees.

Although this sounds like something that Daniel maybe predicted, I don't think this is the event Jesus refers to, first of all, because of the language in Mark 13:14 when He says, “*When you see the abomination of desolation.*” Who is He speaking to? He's speaking to the apostles: “*When you see*” it. It's something future; not in the second century BC, not something they were already aware of. This isn't a reference to Antiochus Epiphanes, the madman who did create a pagan altar in the temple. This is something the apostles would see with their own eyes in their future. Not to mention the fact that the temple was only periodically evacuated. What Jesus is speaking about is a permanent abandonment of cataclysmic proportions of the temple so that it's not rebuilt again. So, it can't be that. So, others think that Daniel's prophecy mentioned here by Jesus, the abomination of desolation, was fulfilled in AD 40. This would have been roughly ten years, a little under ten years, from when Jesus made this prophecy. In AD 40, a crazy emperor by the name of Caligula planned to erect a statue of himself in the temple. He thought that he was a god. But it's important to understand this couldn't be what Jesus is referring to because he only planned to do this. It never actually happened. There was no statue that was erected, and furthermore, the temple wasn't abandoned in AD 40 by the Jews.

So, that leads to a third view. Some think that this reference, “*abomination of desolation,*” quite ironically actually refers to the Jews themselves; namely, the Zealots, the assassins, the militia, who when they were defending Jerusalem when it was under siege by the Romans, actually took up their quarters in the temple complex. You can imagine this, right? If you've ever seen those old World War II movies where forces overtake a church in a war torn city, and they use it as their army headquarters and their sleeping headquarters, and if you get a group of a bunch of men in the time of war doing that, a lot of bad things are going to happen, and a lot of bad things did occur in the Holy of Holies. It was desecrated in the sense that there were murders that happened in the Holy of Holies. All sorts of immorality occurred, and even Josephus says that during this time, the Zealots as they were defending the city of Jerusalem, appointed a high priest that Josephus refers

to as a “clown” because he didn’t even understand what the priesthood was about. I think this option is closest to perhaps what Jesus is speaking about, and yet at the end of the day, I would say that’s not what He’s referring to either, even though that did occur. That’s not the abomination of desolation Jesus has in mind. As I said, the fourth view was the one I mentioned first, which is that Jesus is speaking about the abomination of desolation that’s going to occur in a future rebuilt temple during the period of the so-called antichrist, a period yet beyond us. I don’t believe that any of these views have anything to do with what Jesus speaks about in verse 14. Note again the parenthetical, *“Let the reader understand.”* This is the original readers who need to understand and apply what Jesus is saying.

Now, what has He been speaking about? He’s been speaking about the total destruction of Jerusalem. Turn back with me to Matthew’s account in Matthew chapter 23 because he gives us a little window into the heart of our Lord. In Matthew 23:37, Jesus says, *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!”* Notice verse 38: *“See, your house is left to you,”* what’s the word? *“desolate,”* abandoned. In other words, *“You’ve rejected Me, so now I’m going to do the unthinkable. I’m going to desolate your house, your temple.”* David’s wonderful house. Verse 39: *“For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’”* And what happens in chapter 24 and verse 1? *“Jesus left the temple and was going away.”* The disciples came to Him, pointing out the buildings of the temple, and Jesus said, *“You see all these... Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”* The abomination of desolation was not Antiochus Epiphanes two hundred years before. It’s not the soldiers desecrating the temple. This has to do with God allowing a sort of sacrilegious ceremony within the temple complex that would mock Judaism because of their rejection of the Messiah. Remember again verse 30. I’m going to keep repeating it: *“Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.”* This is not some future temple Jesus is speaking about. They have left Herod’s temple. They’re heading to the Mount of Olives. They can see Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, some say even being able to see down into the Holy of Holies. They’re looking at that temple. Jesus is pointing His finger at that temple and saying, *“Not one stone is going to be left of that temple.”*

So, a straightforward reading of the text means that the abomination of desolation is a reference to the desecration of the temple complex when the Roman general Titus surrounded Jerusalem and utterly destroyed the temple, and I can prove it to you. Turn with me to Luke’s account, Luke chapter 21 of the Olivet Discourse. He describes it very, very clearly in one verse. If this were the only verse we had, you’d have to adopt this position. Verse 20, Luke 21:20: *“But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies,”* Jesus says, *“then know that its”* what? *“desolation has come near.”* Wow. Jesus predicts the future, but He doesn’t predict a future beyond us. He predicts a future beyond the apostles some forty years when Jerusalem was surrounded by Roman armies. Jesus says, according to Luke, this is when the abomination takes place, when Jerusalem is surrounded by the Roman armies with the express purpose of desecrating the temple. That’s what they wanted to get to, and they killed everyone in their way until they got there. Remember, the Roman armies carried flags of pagan symbols. They’re surrounding Jerusalem, surrounding the temple grounds, and in fact, if you’re still in Luke 21, verse 22 says, *“For these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written.”* Remember what Jesus said: *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem.”*

“Because you have rejected Me, your house is going to be left desolate.” That is what is going to be fulfilled. That is the vengeance of God. That is the judgment of God. And what do we read in secular history? Well, we read that that the city of Jerusalem was, in fact, encircled by Roman armies two times; first by Vespasian who had an initial siege on the city. He then backed off of that, and Titus then encircled the city again, which really makes sense of Luke 21:20, that: *“When you see [the city of] Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near.”* It makes sense of Mark 13:14–23 and all of this preparation—practical, mental and theological. It’s because these apostles are literally going to see the armies of Rome with their pagan flags surrounding Jerusalem at which point, they need to get out. Josephus writes about this. I’ve mentioned him. He says and I quote: “And now the war having gone through all the mountainous country and all the plain country also, those that were at Jerusalem were deprived of the liberty of leaving the city.” In other words, a siege was laid. “For as to such as had a mind to desert [or leave,] they were watched by the Zealots.” So, the Roman army wouldn’t allow anyone to leave the city. “And as to such as were not yet on the side of the Romans, their army kept them in, by encompassing the city round about on all sides.”

Josephus later records the encircling of the city by the Roman general, Titus. So, piecing all of this together—it’s really not that difficult—after the first surrounding of Jerusalem, the Christians led by the apostles remembered the revelation that Jesus gave in Mark 13 and they said, “Ah, they’re the Roman armies. We need to leave. Jesus said to leave,” and so, they left. You say, “How did they leave if the city was encircled?” Well, providentially, when Vespasian first encircled the city of Jerusalem, Nero died. And out of respect for Nero and out of grief for his death, Vespasian pulled back the siege, allowing the Christians to escape before the next siege came under Titus. In fact, early church father Eusebius writes about it. Listen to this. He says and I quote: “But the people of the church in Jerusalem...” That would have been those lead by the apostles, the Christians. “...had been commanded by a revelation...” I wonder what revelation that would be? The one we’re studying. “...vouchsafed to approved men.” So, this revelation was passed down orally. It was vouchsafed to approved men—that would be the apostles and their proteges. “...before the war.” So, the apostles heeded Jesus’ words. They warned the church what was going to happen, and Eusebius tells us they left Judea. They went to another province by the name of Perea, to a town called Pella, and there they were safe. And Eusebius says, “And when those that believed in Christ had come thither from Jerusalem, then, as if the royal city of the Jews and the whole land of Judea were entirely destitute of holy men.”

In other words, Eusebius says there were no Christians left in Jerusalem. Once that was the case, “The judgment of God,” the destruction of the temple, “at length overtook those who had committed such outrages against Christ,” those who had killed Him, those who had rejected Him, those who persecuted the apostles, “and his apostles, and [God] totally destroyed,” Eusebius says, “that generation of impious men.” That generation. And what happened? Well, Eusebius tells us. A sacrilegious ceremony occurred with the Roman army where they bowed to a pagan deity, offering incense to Caesar in the temple. Listen to this: “And now the Romans...upon the burning of the holy house itself, and of all the buildings round about it, brought their ensigns,” that is, their military standards or flags, “to the temple, and set them over-against its eastern gate. And there did they offer sacrifices to them: and there did they make Titus the supreme ruler with the greatest acclamations of joy.” That, my friends, is the abomination of desolation that Jesus speaks about in

Mark 13. This is not something that occurs in the future. This is something that occurred in the lives of the apostles. Even history outside of Scripture reveals this to us.

But I want you to turn back to Mark 13 for a moment because there’s a phrase that’s used in verses 17 through 20 that I think might be helpful. Josephus tells us that the Christians left the city as swimmers deserting a sinking ship, obeying the command of God. What does verse 19 say in Mark 13? *“For in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, and never will be. And if the Lord had not cut short the days, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he shortened the days.”* He allowed the Christians to escape by warning them of this abomination of desolation by the Roman armies. As He says there, *“For in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, and never will be.”* Commentators have written about what happened to those inside the city. “The roofs,” they tell us “were thronged with famished women with babies in their arms, the alleys filled with corpses of the elderly, corpses of children. Other young children swollen from starvation roamed the streets like fantoms through the marketplaces, and then they collapsed wherever their doom overtook them. But there was no lamenting or wailing.” There was no crying, “because famine had strangled their emotions.” They lost a sense of emotion in seeing children starving. It was so bad. “Jerusalem could not bury all the bodies,” so what did they do with them? “They flung them over the wall. The silence was only broken by the laughter of robbers who stripped the bodies.” You see, Jesus has to be speaking about that because in Matthew 24:28, Jesus says, *“Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.”* The Olivet Discourse, speaking about what will happen during this abomination of desolation.

But you see, a lot of people will say this can’t be what Jesus is speaking about, something that occurred in the first century, because verse 19 says, *“For in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, and never will be.”* Matthew 24:21, that version, calls it the “great tribulation.” And so, many people say there’s a greater tribulation to which this tribulation only pointed forward to, something that occurs in the future, and so you have people that say Jesus’ statement taken at face value can’t mean what He says. He can’t mean that this is the worst tribulation that ever has occurred and ever will occur. Were the events of AD 70 the worst calamity the world has ever seen? And you say to yourself, “Well, I don’t know. What about the atrocities of World War I and World War II, specifically the Holocaust? Or what about some future great tribulation that people speak about?” Remember, go back to verse 30. Jesus says, *“Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.”* *Tauta panta* in the Greek, “all these things,” all the things that Jesus has spoken about, He says *“This generation will not pass away until all these things take place.”*

This was in my estimation, dramatic apocalyptic, hyperbolic language to emphasize the total devastation of Israel. There was going to be nothing like it, and to the people of that time, there was nothing like it. Who would have ever imagined one of the wonders of the ancient world would be toppled, that God would allow pagan armies to do that? This is language for dramatic effect. That’s what it is. Jesus, remember, oftentimes quoted the Old Testament prophets, right? He was a preacher. He was a preacher of the new covenant that was building off the theology of the Old Testament. He quotes the prophets. He stands in the line of the prophets. What did the prophets

do? Let me give you an example, and you don't have to turn there. When God sent the tenth plague to Egypt, listen to the words: *“There shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there has never been, nor ever will be again.”* Hyperbolic, dramatic language. You say, “Well, there's a contradiction in Scripture.” No there's not. You have to understand Old Testament prophecy. You have to understand these prophets were warning of danger. Moses has to tell the people this. Jesus, the great prophet and preacher, must warn this generation: “You've never seen anything like it.” Or even more interesting for our purposes is in the book of Ezekiel, the prophet Ezekiel. Listen to what he says. This was at the destruction of the temple by the Babylonians, another destruction of the temple. Ezekiel says, *“And because of all your abominations.”* That word sound familiar? *“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.”* That's what God says to the people.

Now, wait a second. He destroyed the temple using the Babylonians, and He says, “I'm going to do something I've never done and never will do again,” but yet He did it again in AD 70. Well, what is this? This isn't God being dishonest. This isn't God contradicting Himself. This is God, through the voice of the prophet, telling the generation that listens to this to heed the warning. “You've never seen something so bad.” Hyperbolic, dramatic, apocalyptic, poetic language. Jesus was a person of His culture. He understood the Jewish literature, and He understood a way to speak to the apostles in a manner that they would get it. “Get out of Judea because this is the worst thing you have ever seen and ever will see again.” By the way, let me ask you a question. Who invented language? God did, right? God invented language, and God has the right to use language the way He wants to use it. And as His image bearers, we do this all the time. When you are famished and you eat a meal, you may say something like “That's the best meal I've ever had and probably ever will have.” You don't literally mean that, usually. You're just saying it because it met the need of the moment. Or when someone asks you “How was your day?” and you respond in one of two ways: “Well, it couldn't have gone better,” or “It couldn't have gone worse.” Well, I can think of a lot of ways it could be worse and a lot of ways it could be better. You don't literally mean that. It's a figurative expression to convey in that moment the strength of your feelings. That's all Jesus is doing here. He's saying in verse 19, “There's not going to be anything like this. There's not going to be anything like this destruction that the world has ever seen and ever will see again.” You say, “Well, what about Noah's flood?” Well, it's interesting that you would bring that up because in Matthew's version of the Olivet Discourse—just turn back there for a moment, Matthew chapter 24—Jesus actually compares this to Noah's flood. Verse 36 of Matthew 24:

But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.

Same discourse, longer version, Matthew's version, and Matthew informs us that Jesus compares the devastation of Jerusalem and the temple to the flood. In other words, “You've never seen anything like this. This is another judgment on another entire people group. What was the flood? It was a judgment on the entire world, right? That's what the Bible says in 2 Peter 2:5: *“He brought*

a flood upon the world of the ungodly.” Well, in Jesus’ day, you want to know who belonged to the world of the ungodly? It was the Jews. They rejected their Messiah. Can you think of anything more ungodly than that, rejecting the very one sent to redeem you? So, what does God do? He mocks His own people by allowing the Roman armies to take their flags with pagan deities and pagan incense burnt in the name of Caesar as if to say, “I am done with this covenant. You are cursed.” And of course, there would be child pains for the apostles. They’re the foundation of the church. They continue the people of God, right? They are the foundation of the church. You see, the seed of the church existed in the Old Testament. The apostles were the remnant of believing Jews from which more branches were grafted in, right?

As a matter of fact, we’ll just sneak ahead for a moment to the sixth sweeping statement, which I call the actual interpretation. Notice your Bibles. *“But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light.”* Remember, Jesus is using apocalyptic language.

The stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven. [Verse 28] From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates.

Luke’s version says, *“The kingdom of God is near”* when you see these things happening. Language of new branches being grafted in, language of the kingdom of God being near. What happened after Jesus was crucified? Well, you say He was resurrected, and then where did He go after that? He ascended to the right hand of God. His kingdom was established in the first century not long before these events occurred, the abomination of desolation. Luke says this: *“For there will be great distress upon the earth and wrath against this people,”* referring to the abomination of desolation, his Olivet Discourse version. *“They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations,”* speaking about the Jews, *“and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles.”* They were, literally, by a Roman army. *“Until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.”* The times of the gentiles. What did the apostles ask, Matthew 24:3? *“Is this the coming of the end of the age?”* “Is this this the end of a time? Is this the end of an epoch? Is this the end of an age? Is this the end of a covenant?” And Jesus is basically saying to them in the Olivet Discourse, “Yes, it is, and they’ll know it’s the end of the covenant, they’ll know it’s the end of an age and the beginning of a new age, the beginning of My kingdom, as I am ruling and reigning over all things because I’m going to completely and totally destroy the temple, which is a symbol of sacrilegious idolatry,” because at its heart, Israel was guilty of idolatry.

They worshiped themselves, beginning with the religious leaders who believed in works salvation. They loved the seats in the synagogues. They loved their long robes and their long prayers. This was a religion of idolatry. It had corrupted to such a point that by the time the Messiah came, they were blind to the fact that He was the Messiah. So, God unleashed His judgment upon national ethnic Israel as a demonstration of His wrath to say, “I’ve saved a remnant of Jewish apostles from which My people will spring.” The kingdom of Christ has dawned in the coming of the new

covenant under Christ. So, we see the actual interpretation of this whole passage in verses 24 through 31, and we’ll look at it in more detail next week, but Jesus is speaking to that generation. What do we learn from verses 14 through 23? Well, I think this passage causes us to reflect on our own generation. Let me be clear, verses 14 through 23 are meant to be applied to that generation of apostles, but God’s Word is timeless, right? There are timeless principles embedded in verses 14 through 23, and I’m going to give you just three of them.

Number one, we learn from this that we need to listen to what Jesus says, not what date-setters say, not what other people say about prophecy. If you are confused about how to interpret the book of Revelation, let me give you a simple way to resolve that; what did Jesus say about end-times in the Olivet Discourse? What is the most natural reading of what Jesus says? And whatever Jesus says, that’s what I’m going to go with because there may be other complicated texts of Scripture, but to me the Olivet Discourse is clear. Jesus says in these verses *“Be on your guard,”* right? *“Don’t let anyone lead you astray.”* We need to take that with us. Take Jesus’ words at face value. Listen to what He says. Number two, we learn from these verses that the kingdom comes, according to Christ, the kingdom grows through much suffering, child pains, Jesus calls them. There are many people today who speak as if the second return of Christ is imminent, as if we’re at the end of the world, as if the world is so old, things are so bad, Christ has got to return soon. But what if we are in the infancy of the church? I mean, you think about all that the Reformers fought for. There was the perversion of the gospel where the gospel wasn’t even clear during the whole period of the Middle Ages. To me, that sounds like the infancy of the church, trying to get the gospel right. You come into our day and there are all sorts of questions that people are asking, particularly about eschatology, and you have kind of a new wave movement where people are seeing that postmillennialism as beginning to answer some questions that premillennialism hasn’t answered. What is this?

Maybe we are in the infancy of the church still, and if that is true, what sort of suffering and birth pains has God called our generation to? Whatever they are, we need to embrace them. We need to be prepared for them. We need to fight for the truth, but we fight for the truth with hope. The apostles are an example to us from the first generation, are they not? But first, we need to listen to what Jesus said. Second, we need to understand the kingdom grows with much suffering. Third, we shouldn’t invite suffering. You know, one of the practical things we learn from this is that Jesus was very clear, *“Flee to the hills,”* because the purpose of the apostles was not for them to be martyred apart from their proclamation of the gospel. They were not masochists. It was predicted and ordained that they would be martyrs, but Jesus tells them to escape and to flee for their lives to give themselves an opportunity to proclaim the gospel. I think that applies in our own day. What is our view of Christian nationalism? What is our view of religious liberty? What is our view of the Christian’s role in the public square? I hope your view of that is not stupid. In other words, I hope your view of that is not just focused on this generation. I hope you have enough common sense to understand the Lord might not return for another five or six generations, so you ought to want to fight for religious liberty and pray for religious liberty for the sake of your children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, and all of that. We aren’t to live this life as if this world’s going to be thrown away. Jesus might not return for a very long time. So, we need to be wise. We need to be discerning. We need to take seriously the words of our Lord in understanding that many of the events that we have spoken about all occurred in the first century, and yet there are timeless principles we take with us.

We’re still waiting the second return of the Lord. We’re still part of His kingdom. The growth of the kingdom comes with much pain, much persecution, much tribulation, much travail. We are to trust the words of Jesus, not to fail in our faith, knowing that He preserves our faith, right? Just as He says here, *“The one who endures to the end will be saved.”* We trust Him for that. We believe Him for that. That’s why we take the Lord’s Supper. We observe the Lord’s Table because it is a reminder to us of the second return of the Lord when He will make all things new. We long for that day. Well, next week, Lord willing, we’ll finish up our discussion of the Olivet Discourse. Let us go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Lord, we come before You this morning with heavy hearts, Lord, understanding the seriousness of which You warned the apostles of these things that would soon take place, this abomination of desolation, the standing of the Roman armies in the temple, offering incense to Caesar who they claim was God, already having been fulfilled. A reminder to us that Your kingdom is here, a reminder to us that You expect the growth and the expansion of Your kingdom. You expect us to participate in that with great hope and joy even in the midst of tribulation and sorrow and great travail. As a testament to our faith in You, we come now to the Lord’s Table to partake of these elements. We ask that You would be with us. Help us to have sober hearts, but also joyful hearts, hopeful hearts, recognizing that these emblems represent our Savior and our Lord, the one and only true King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Meet with us at this time as You have already done during the course of this worship thus far. May You bless us with a special presence of Your Holy Spirit, as we observe the Lord’s Table. We pray and ask all of this in Jesus’ name.