

THE BIBLE'S MOST MYSTERIOUS PROPHECY

Just imagine when the Savior was here he put his finger on one passage of Scripture and said, "Whatever you do, make sure you understand this one." Wouldn't you expect that in the Christian church there would be millions of books on that? There isn't one. Oh yes, recently there was one. I hunted for two years in the libraries of America, England and elsewhere. There was not one book on the subject of which the Lord said, make sure you understand it. So I wrote one.

There it is, what a title, THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION in BIBLICAL ESCHATOLOGY. On with your thinking caps because we are going to look at the most difficult passage in the whole Bible. I invite you to turn to Mark 13. You will notice that in verse 14 it says, "When you see the abomination of desolation set up where it ought not to be, he that readeth, let him understand." Now many have thought that that was just a notation of the Gospel writer..."He that readeth, let him understand." But the Gospel writers are not in the habit of putting in the mouth of Jesus these additions and a closer scrutiny revealed that what our Lord has done is to take a keynote of the book of Daniel as he quotes from Daniel. You see in Daniel 24 times it speaks about understanding...the wise shall understand. Daniel and his fellows had understanding in visions and dreams. "The time of the end, knowledge shall be increased and the wise shall understand." And so, our Lord was really quoting from Daniel not only when he spoke about the abomination of desolation which comes from Daniel's prophecies, but when

he said, "whoever readeth, make sure you understand," that is strange and you won't find books on that, not anywhere. It is amazing and perhaps it should not amaze us. You know there is only one of those 10 Commandments that our Lord himself spoke that had the word 'remember' prefaced and that is the only one that has been forgotten. Even though our Lord finished his work of re-creation on the same 6th day and again rested on the 7th, still Christendom has ignored it. So it is not strange.

Well, let us look at the prophecy. William Barclay says, "No one knows what the abomination of desolation is," that great Glasgow scholar. Vincent Taylor, another great British scholar said, "Let's confess, we just don't have an inkling about this secret." Well, let's see whether that is true. Would you observe the introduction to the chapter, chapter 13. It says in verse 3 that "As he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, 'tell us when will this be and what will be the sign when these things are all to be accomplished?' Did Jesus answer the question? The question was for a specific sign as to the end of the world. Well, I want you to observe with me, the Lord gives them a series of things and says, "These are not the sign, these will happen but they are not the sign." So in verse 5, "Take heed that no one lead you astray, many will come in my name saying I am He; they will lead many astray. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, don't be alarmed, that is not THE sign." This, in effect, is what he is saying. This must take place but the end is not yet; nation will rise against nation, kingdom against kingdom, yes, there will be

earthquakes, there will be famines, but that is not THE sign. All these are but the beginning and then he talks about persecution and in verse 10 he says, "The Gospel must first be preached to all nations and when they bring you to trial and deliver you up, don't be anxious," and it is after that reference to the Gospel going to all the world that he brings in an anti-Gospel. Verse 14, "But when you see the abomination of desolation set up where it ought not to be, then--then--that's the sign." Now that is what our Lord is saying. This is what the Germans call the 'hohepunkt' the high point, the crescendo. This is the peak of our Lord's warnings as he goes on to give the great second advent sermon. He says, look, you will be beseiged by frauds and rogues, deceivers, you will hear of wars and rumors or wars, don't be let astray. There will be famines and earthquakes, don't panic. Even when persecution begins, don't panic, BUT when you see the abomination of desolation standing where it ought not to be THEN, THEN, THEN--and so the words have urgency. They are piercing. What does it mean? When you see the abomination of desolation, Matthew's version adds, "spoken of by Daniel, the prophet." And in order to understand it I want you to come back to Daniel in the first chapter. You know, the Jews had another title for the book of Daniel and the title was, 'The Abomination of Desolation,' because this is the book not only of the promised Christ, but of his rival, the anti-christ. That is Daniel and I want you to notice how it begins because the key lies at the door. If you want to understand the Bible book make sure you understand the opening

verses. That will give you the key. So we are reading the very opening of Daniel, "In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, King of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem and besieged it and the Lord gave Jehoiakim, king of Judah, into his hands," etc. What is the picture? Well, you will notice the reign, the kingdom, this is the book that uses the word king and kingdom more times than all the other prophets of the Bible put together. This is book of the kingdom of God and when Jesus came and said, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand," he said what was foretold in Daniel has come. I, the messiah, who is to usher in the kingdom of grace and glory, I have come! So right in the very first verse we read about the kingdom but we read about two kingdoms, we read about Babylon and Jerusalem in the first verse for the Bible is a tale of two cities. You remember that great book, "It was the worst of times and it was the best of times," that is a quotation from the first paragraph of the TALE OF TWO CITIES by Charles Dickens. The Bible is the tale of two cities. In the first book of the Bible and in the last book of Bible you read about Babel and Salem, Babylon and Jerusalem. In the last book of the Bible you read about Babylon, "Come out of her, my people," and Jerusalem, "I, John, saw the new Jerusalem coming from God out of Heaven, adorned as a bride for her husband."

So, in Daniel, between Genesis and Revelation, again, we have the tale of two cities and the first verse in this book tells us of a conflict between Babylon and Jerusalem with Babylon the

king of the North attacking the city of peace. That is what Jerusalem means, it means the city of peace whereas Babylon means the city of confusion. So here is the king of the North from the city of confusion coming down against the city of peace and beseiging it because there was the temple, there was the emblem of the kingdom of God, there was the Law of God, there were the symbols of his grace and his mercy and forgiveness and his compassion, all there and Satan hated that. So the king of North comes down. That is the key to the book. Whether it is the stories or whether it is the prophecies, that is what Daniel is about, the conflict between Satan's kingdom and God's kingdom, the conflict between powers to the North that were emblematic of that one who said, "I want to dwell in the sides of the North," remember, Isaiah 14--Lucifer--the real king of Babylon. What he could not do in Heaven he tried to do on earth so he set up a kingdom in the North, Babylon, and there he made war on Jerusalem. And so whether it is the stories or the prophecies, this whole book is about this theme of the conflict between the kingdom of Satan and the kingdom of God and the symbol of the kingdom of God is always the sanctuary, always the temple because there was the thickest concentration of the emblems of the kingdom, of the kingdom of grace, the cross, and the kingdom of glory. We spoke earlier about how the tabernacle was the symbol of Christ when he first came down among men. He was a stranger and wandered, no place to lay his head. The old rough tabernacle was emblematic of that first coming. The temple of Solomon with its glory was emblematic of the second coming. Solomon meant king of peace. That great temple

represented the temple of glory which ultimately it will be when Christ comes the second time. So Satan has always made war on these.

Can I refresh your memory very quickly about Daniel before we go on to exegete Matthew and I might as well confess this is not something cooked up this week but this is something on which I thought about 18 hours a day for every day of 2 years straight while I was in England at the beginning of the 70s, 16 hours a day every day for about 2 years. And within 3 months we had exhausted everything in English on the subject, then we moved into German, French and Dutch. Jill was much better in translating minutia of those languages than I could ever be. For two years we worked at it. So what I will give you is not the product of a day's meditation.

Just to remind you of the essence of the book of Daniel. It contains stories and it contains prophecies and the stories illustrate the prophecies. The prophecies all center around the anti-christ, a king who will make war on the people of God, war on the sanctuary, make war on the law of God, think to change the times and the law, etc. That is the prophecies but the stories are the same. Every story, whether it is Nebuchadnezzar saying, "You bow down before this image or else I will cremate you," or whether it is Darius saying, "Daniel, if you go down in that pit the lions will swallow you." In other chapters you will find it a scene of Babylon in its boasting glory and suddenly the king becomes as a beast. They are all telling the same story. All the stories illustrate the prophecies. The key characters of the stories are symbols of anti-christ. They sin by their pride, by their persecution, their

blasphemy. These are the emblems of anti-christ. He is proud because Satan is the real anti-christ. You know, Luther said, "Pope self is the pope I am most afraid of," because the heart of sin is pride and that is our main problem. That is why we are so nervous about being criticized. That is why we view the future with concern because the precious "I" might be hurt--pride, the symbol of anti-christ. And with it came profanity, blasphemy, self-exaltation and persecution. The spirit of the devil is always wanting to apply pressure to coerce someone to think as you think. It is only the Spirit of Christ that can say, let these go their way, let them think for themselves. We will offer them the bread of life but we will not coerce them. "How often would I have gathered you," not how often I have compelled you. God never compels. He is a lover of liberty.

So, in the stories of Daniel, time after time, we have the saints of God menaced and then you get the key word, 'deliver' whether it is chapter 3 or 6 or 12 you will find the same saying, "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us." Darius comes to the pit and says, Daniel won't your God deliver you? My God has sent his angel and shut the lions' mouth. He has delivered me deliver, deliver, deliver all the way through the stories. And when you come to the end of the book of Daniel, the last of the prophecies, the king of North comes down like a wolf on the fold and surrounds the glorious holy mountain, emblem of the church. The church of God is now the Jerusalem of God and it comes to its end and none shall help but Michael stands up, the great prince who stands on guard over the children of thy people and thy people shall be delivered. The stories point forth to the great deliverance at the end of time

which is spelled out more fully in the book of Revelation where, again, we see a death onslaught against the church. Don't think that is just a relic of your denominational sectarian past. That is agreed upon by all scholars who have done work in apocalyptic. The book of Revelation foretells a final conflict against the people of God and endeavors to wipe them out. It says so, "Whoever will not worship the beast should be killed."

When you come to Daniel chapter 7 it is interesting that here is the largest sketch of anti-christ to date and it talks about the terrible things that anti-christ does. It sums them up in the 25th verse, "He will speak words against the Most High and wear out the saints of the Most High and think to change the times and the laws; and they will be given into his hand until a time, two times and a half a time," but then it says that the court will sit in judgment and his dominion will be taken away. Verse 27 says, "That kingdom will be given to the people of the saints of the Most High and their kingdom is an everlasting kingdom." Now, the symbol of that kingdom is found back in verse 13, "I saw in the night visions and behold with the clouds of heaven there came one like the Son of Man. He came to the ancient of days and it was given him dominion and glory and a kingdom." So Daniel 7 pictures the saints of God oppressed by this nasty little horn who is a man who wanted to be God and then the contrasting symbol is a God who becomes man. See the contrast. The essence of the spirit of Babylon is always man wanting to be God. Man does not want God's character but wants God's power. People have always preferred the gifts to the fruit but the

New Testament emphasis is the opposite, "Though I speak with tongues of men and of angels, though I have the gift of tongues, though I can work miracles, though I have all faith, though I have all knowledge, it is nothing without the fruit which is love." The fruit of the Spirit is love. But the spirit of anti-christ is to covet the power of God rather than the character of God.

So in Daniel 7 you have a little horn, a man who wants to be God and in contrast you have God who becomes man, "I saw one like the Son of Man," a symbol of Jesus who had come down and took our nature.

Then if you turn to the next chapter and look at verse 9, maybe we should go back even earlier, you will notice verse 8 of chapter 8. You have this he goat that is said to be Greece who magnified himself and the great horn was broken, and we are told that great horn was the first king, Alexander, the Great, then four generals came up, the four generals of Alexander and in verse 9, out of one those horns, the northern one came forth a little horn, another symbol of anti-christ. Verse 10, "It grows great, even to the host of Heaven, casts down the stars," (Hosea 14) and in verse 11 it magnifies itself against the prince and in verse 13 it asks the question, how long does the nasty horn do its damage to the sanctuary? Then it gives the answer, "Unto 2300 days and the sanctuary shall be restored." If you have an apocrypha which some versions in the New English Bible have, you will find that it quotes from this in the first book of the Macabees and I am reading to you from verse 7 on in this chapter 1,

Alexander had reigned 12 years when he died, remember, the great horn is broken off. His generals took over. There are the four minor ones and out of one of them came forth that wicked man, Antiochus Epiphanes. And what does he do? Well, there was great apostasy among the Jews at that time and Antiochus made a covenant with them which enabled the gentiles of Syria to take over Palestine. When they took it over they poured swine's broth over the temple vessels. They compelled the people not to read the Torah, not to keep the Sabbath, not to practice circumcision, not to have the feasts and they had to wear an ivy branch as one reads not only in I Maccabees but in II Maccabees. I will read you just an allusion to that, II Maccabees chapter 6: "They were forced to wear ivy wreaths." That is the basis of the mark of the beast symbolism in Revelation, chapter 13, where it pictures the final conflict. It draws from what happened when this little horn who came out of the king of the north, Syria, who is one of the four divisions of Alexander's empire. He defiled the sanctuary and set up an image to Jupiter, set up an idolatrous image, then he compelled the people to wear the ivy leaf which was a symbol of false worship. They were not allowed to keep the Sabbath. That is what Revelation 13 is drawing on when it pictures the last great conflict in earth's history. And so, that is the background and I could spend a lot of time on that but we must come back please to Mark 13, "When you see the abomination of desolation set up where it ought not to be," our Lord knew that the terrible crisis under Antiochus Epiphanes had happened a century and a half before. It nearly wiped out Judaism. Had Antiochus succeeded we would not be here. Your presence today and mine is because Antiochus failed. Antiochus

tried to wipe out every Jew. Had he succeeded, Jesus could never have come. It was the greatest crisis since what happened under Pharaoh, must worse than the Babylonian captivity. It is alluded to in John's Gospel where it speaks about the feast of dedication. That feast of dedication was in memory of the cleansing of the sanctuary about 2300 days, about 7 years/began his conflict on the ancient church in the endeavor to wipe them all out. I could read you from Maccabees how Judas Maccabaeus and the others came and cleansed the sanctuary and restored it. This is an image of how one day Christ would come the second time and undo the defiling work of Satan, the great anti-christ and establish a new heavens and new earth, perfectly clean, perfectly pure. The cleansing of the sanctuary was a symbol of the earth restored, holiness prevailing despite all that anti-christ could do. And that had been symbolized in chapter 7 by the coming of the Son of Man and to him being given the kingdom.

Back to Mark 13 and would you notice that having presented this anti-christ's power who, according to our Lord, would launch a tribulation such as had never been (verse 19), then he pictures the climax at the end of that. Verse 24: "In those days after that tribulation the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light, the stars will be falling from heaven, the powers in the heavens will be shaken and then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of Heaven with great power and glory." As in Daniel 7, the anti-christ is succeeded by the Son of Man coming in glory, the same here in Mark 13. Satan does his worst to take over the world--we haven't yet said what it means but

the nemesis will be the coming of God, the Son.

Now, II Thessalonians please. When Dean Farrow (?) wrote about this chapter he said, "That vast limbo of exploded exegesis, that dreary waste." You know, it has been said that commentators each difficult passage shun and hold their tiny candle to the sun. In other words that is saying whenever you read a commentary it is usually very luminous on what is clear and very obscure on what is difficult. "Commentators each difficult passage shun but hold their luminous candle to the sun." Well, Dean Farrow said that vast limbo of exploded exegesis, look at it. Why are we looking in Thessalonians II? Because the seed of this mystical prophecy, the most mysterious in the Bible, the seed is in Daniel. When we come to the Gospels, that seed has sprung up. Now we get to the blade. When we come to Thessalonians we have the ear; when we get to the book of Revelation we have the full corn in the ear. You remember our Lord's imagery? First the seed, then the blade, then the ear, and then the full corn in the ear. Well, that is the way it is with this great prophecy. To understand the abomination of desolation you have to understand all of biblical apocalyptic. The seed is in Daniel, the blade is in the Gospels, the ear is here in II Thessalonians 2 and the full corn is in Revelation. Thessalonians 2 is really a comment on the Olivet Sermon, "Now concerning the coming of our Lord, Jesus Christ," (verse 2), "don't be shaken, don't be excited, don't be deceived," he is going over the same ground. Verse 3, "Let no one deceive you in any way. That day will not come unless rebellion comes first. The man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition

and there is the abomination of desolation who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god, takes his seat in the temple of God. Remember what Mark said? The abomination of desolation standing where he ought not. So here is the man of sin, son of perdition. That word 'perdition,' the synonym for 'desolation,' the one who brings desolation and who himself will be desolated taking his seat in the temple of God and proclaiming himself to be god. Then it goes on to verse 6, you know what is restraining him that he may be revealed in his time. The mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is taken out of the way, then the lawless one will be revealed. The Lord Jesus will slay him with the breath of his mouth, destroy him by his appearing and his coming.

In this passage the work of anti-christ is made parallel and a parody of the work of Christ. If you look at verse 9: "The coming of the lawless one by the activity of Satan will be with all power with pretended signs and wonders." Here anti-christ has the parousia, he is unveiled, he does signs and wonders, there is a set time for him. He is a parody of Christ. I have to be very concise because we are not going to keep you here for a long session such as our topic deserves but let me try and sum up the main points. If we were to turn to Revelation 13, again, we would find a lawless power seeking to be worshiped, trying to take over God's position, setting up an image. Remember the image to the beast? That's the same thing because, you see, the word 'abomination' and here is our key, here's the key to the

prophecy. Only those who know the Old Testament well can understand our Lord. The word abomination is an Old Testament term for an image. If you read I Kings 11, if you read II Kings 23 you will find again and again that word abomination is the word for idolatrous worship. So when our Lord talks about the abomination of desolation what he is saying is, in the last days there will be an idolatrous system of worship that will link with earthly government in order to persecute the people of God. That is the essence, the paraphrase of the prophecy. When you compare the expansion of the definition of abomination of desolation in Revelation 13 where the beast that seeks worship, that sets up an image, an idol, an abomination, condemns to death those who will not receive his mark, there you have the expansion and the prediction that in the last days of earth's history when the world has tried education, science, technology and politics and failed at all of them, it will turn to religion.

Please note what I say, you will see more and more evidence of it in the days to come. The world, having tried science, education, technology, politics and failed in all of them will, in its last days, turn to religion but it will turn to a humanistic religion, a man-centered religion not a religion that is based on the pure word of Scripture and that false religion uniting the state will say, we will only get peace by wiping out the non-conformist. That is how we will have world peace. So false religion is to lead the way in the final political climax of the world in the endeavor to bring peace to a world that has shrunk

like an orange and is threatened on so many sides, having tried everything else, they try religion but they get the wrong brand. Those who want to live by the right brand will be found as non-conformists and condemned to death. That will be the greatest tribulation the world has ever seen. And many will lose their lives according to Revelation chapter 20.

The thing I want you to think of is that the most important part of our study is this, the preview of all this took place at time of the passion. You know, it is interesting when you read Mark chapter 13 and Matt. 24 that the key words, 'watch' which you find about 19 times in Mark 13; 'betray,' then shall many betray one another; 'hour,' no one knows the day or the hour. There are the words you find in the passion story of the chapters that immediately follow. Immediately following this prophecy you have the story of the sufferings of Christ with the key words of the second advent sermon occurring again and again and again. The very men who asked him the question on Olivet are with him in Gethsemane. What does he say to them? "Watch." Just as in that sermon to those men he says again and again he says 'watch.' You find about 19 admonitions through that second advent sermon. In the passion story he says, "He is at hand that will betray me...the hour has come," these key words of the Olivet sermon, the sermon about the abomination are the words of the passion. Our Lord is saying, do you want to know what the end of the world will be like? Watch what now takes place. That which happens to the head of the church will happen

to the body. Christ is the head, his church is the body. So Christ is saying, you want to know what is going to happen to you? See what happens to me. For everything that happens to the head will happen to the body. What did happen? Church and state united. The apostate Jews, remember I read to you in the days of Antiochus, many of the Jews apostatized and joined the king of the north, Antiochus, to make war on their own brethren. Antiochus came down and had his own way for seven years, a terrible persecution, wiped out 40,000 Jews. The time of our Lord's passion the apostate Jewish church stretched out its hand to Rome and said we will deliver him to you. That is what is going to happen at the end of the world. Popular religion will turn against Biblical religion and betray those that hold to it to the stake.

How does this happen? Well, the personification of apostate Jewish religion was Judas. You remember, the record says that after our Lord washed his feet, Satan entered into Judas and he went out and it was night. Probation closed for him. Jesus made his last attempt to win his heart with love and he rejected it so it says, "Satan entered into him." How does the world commit the unpardonable sin? When they reject the last offer of the Gospel. That's why verse 10 of Mark 13 about the preaching of the Gospel precedes the prophecy about anti-christ. The world commits the unpardonable sin when it rejects the last proclamation of the Gospel. As Judas rejected Christ's last offer of love as He washed his feet--and the record says he went out and it was

night and Satan entered into him, that is the preview of what will happen at the end of the world. The Gospel will go to the world. The majority will reject it, Satan will enter into them and probation is shut. They make war on the people that offered them love. That's a preview of the end.

You know, when Judas came with the soldiers, church and state united. The temple guard, the soldiers of Rome came to take Christ in the garden. Judas said, "The one that I kiss..." When you come to Revelation 13 anti-christ professes a system of worship. The Greek word 'worship' means to kiss the hand to God. That's the meaning of the Greek word for worship. So Judas says, "The one that I kiss, hold him fast." So in the last days the world will say, we love God, they offer Him a kiss of worship but it is not based on what the Bible says about worship. It is not based on the Scriptures. It is not based on the Gospel by faith alone. It is not based on the living outward emblems of that Gospel. And so the world will kiss the body of Christ to death as they did with its Master and Lord.

Now, in conclusion, I must say this, when you look at the tragedy of Judaism and when you look at the tragedy of Judas who personified it, their problem was not lack of knowledge. Some of those Jews knew the Old Testament from Genesis 1:1 to Malachi 4:6. They knew how many words were in the book, which was the middle word, and which was the middle letter. There was knowledge. The Bible says the heart and not the head to the highest doth attain.

The Bible says the pure in heart shall see. That is very important. Unless my heart is right with God, I will never understand. The world by wisdom knows not God. Unless the heart is softened by the love of God it cannot see. That person is blind whose heart has not been broken by the story of the cross. If we are not possessed by Christ, as Satan entered into Judas, the human tabernacle cannot remain empty, we will be possessed by the devil himself. Only the Gospel can save us from being a part of the last great apostasy which will endeavor to reenact Calvary all around the world.