

THE CHRISTIAN AND THE CHURCH TODAY (7 QUESTIONS)

Q1: What is the “abomination of desolation”?

A: “...God knoweth your hearts...that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God” (Luke 16:15). The above statement of Christ is actually far more incriminating than it may seem. The Greek actually reads, “...that which is **high in** men is abomination...” The verse also provides the identity of this “high” thing – men’s corrupt “hearts.” In other words, it is men’s hearts, haughty and exalted against the absolute sovereignty of God, which is abominable to God.

Actually, the hearts of unregenerate men, so full of pride, identifies exactly with that entity who dared to challenge God long ago. We read in I Timothy 3:6 that the “condemnation of the devil” was “being lifted up with pride.” The “devil” is none other than Satan himself (cf. Rev. 12:9). Satan is the master deceiver who comes mimicking the Lord Jesus, transforming himself “into an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14). The Bible shows him at work as he came to beguile Eve (Gen. 3:1-13). This was to be a prophetic historical event intended to find fulfillment with the NT church (2 Cor. 11:3).

Satan was typified in the Old Testament by Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon. It was this Gentile king who was used of God in judging God’s apostate people, Judah (2 Kings 24). Through language God uses in describing this king, a real insight into Satan’s underlying desire is given: “I will **ascend** into heaven, I will **exalt** my throne above the stars of God: I will **sit** also upon the mount of the congregation...I will **ascend** above the heights of the clouds; I will be **like the most High**” (Is. 14:13, 14). The Gospel of Matthew clearly prophesies that a day will come when this Satan’s wish is granted: “When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, **stand in the holy place...**” (Mt. 24:15). The Bible is clear that the “holy place” is that which identifies with God (Acts 7:33) - the temple in the OT (Acts 21:28), the churches and congregations in the NT (1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Tim. 2:20).

We are living in the day when indeed the abomination of desolation “sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God” (2 Thess. 2:4). Judgment indeed has begun at the “house of God” (1 Pet. 4:17; cf. Jer. 25:29).

Q2: How can God judge the church if she is the Bride of Christ?

A: “...Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense,

saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people” (Heb. 10:30). Israel, both ancient and modern, has always looked to the glorious “promises” of God for her national identity as well as future guarantee. God’s covenants with Abraham and David are named as being chief representatives of such. However, God’s deliberate choice of words - *everlasting* “covenant,” “possession,” “kingdom” and “throne” (Gen. 17:7, 8; 2 Sam. 7:13, 16) - directly warns against the understanding that the physical people of Israel, the physical land of Canaan and the earthly monarchy of David’s lineage are in view. Irrefutably, Isaiah 9:6, 7 shows that the above promises find their actual fulfillment in the Lord Jesus, and His *eternal* kingdom:

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder...Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever.... Isaiah 9:6a, 7
Indeed, the “children of the flesh [physical descendants of Abraham]...are **not** the children of God” (Rom. 9:8; cf. Jn. 8:39).

The New Testament church has also fallen into the same snare of claiming that which only applies to the *eternal* people of God as her own. To the congregations, the usage of the terms “Christian” and “church” are interchangeable with actually being God’s child and the Bride of Christ. There is no attention given to the fact that national Israel, clearly judged of God, and no longer the entity used of God to bring the Gospel after the cross, is most certainly called “the church” (Acts 7:38), “bought” and “made” of God (Deut. 32:6), even the “people” of God (Is. 1:3, 5:25).

Then what really is the identity of the Bride of Christ? She is the “church” for whom Christ “gave himself” (Eph. 5:25). The Bible is clear that Christ’s giving of Himself was **only** for the elect of God (Gal. 2:20; Tit. 2:14), those who are of the “body” of which He is the **actual Savior** (Eph. 5:23). This church, “Jerusalem above” (Gal. 4:26), is truly forever, and is “without blemish” (Eph. 5:27), rather than being full of “tares” (cf. Mt. 13:37-43) and “grievous wolves” (Acts 20:29). In no way could Christ’s Bride be the “Mother of Harlots” (Rev. 17:5), the now judged New Testament earthly church.

Q3: If God has given the church over to Satan, where is the Holy Spirit?

A: “*yea, woe also to them when I depart from them!*” (Hosea 9:12b). God of course is omnipresent – i.e., He is *everywhere, all the time*. The Bible describes Him as the “One that inhabiteth eternity” (Is. 57:15), Whom even “the heaven of heavens cannot contain” (1 Kings 8:27). Indeed, His presence is known both in “heaven” and “hell” (Ps. 139:8).

However, when referring to those with whom He has an openly established relationship, such as Israel of the Old Testament, the New Testament church, or the child of God, God’s presence usually refers to His active, *positive* operation. With Israel, God’s presence meant that

the people were guided by the pillars of cloud and fire, instructed by His Spirit, nourished by manna, and given water for thirst. Even their clothing did not fray, nor feet swell (cf. Neh. 9:19-21). Similarly for the NT church, God promised that He would be “in the midst” (Mt. 18:20) of those gathered in His name. This was demonstrated at Pentecost of 33 AD when about three thousand were saved (Acts 2:41), having been spiritually “baptized with the Holy Ghost” (Acts 11:16). So too, God promises that once He saves an individual, He will make His “abode with him” (Jn. 14:23), *working* in His child “both to will and to do” (Phil. 2:13) according to God’s will.

Thus, God’s withdrawal implies the absence of His positive operation – it is a sure condition of judgment. As He once withdrew from Israel (Deut. 31:17, 18; Eze. 8:6) and even the Lord Jesus (Mk. 15:34), He has absented Himself from the churches of our day (2 Thess. 2:3-7). As an evil spirit was allowed to replace God’s Spirit in the case of Saul (1 Sam. 16:14), the place the Holy Spirit once occupied in the church has now been given over to Satan, the “spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2; comp. Mt. 24:15).

Q4: If God the Holy Spirit has withdrawn from the churches in judgment, what does this mean for me?

A: “*The tongue of the sucking child cleaveth to the roof of his mouth for thirst: the young children ask bread, and no man breaketh it unto them*” (Lam. 4:4; cf. Amos 8:11-13). We have previously seen that the Bible’s description of God’s complete departure from the congregations in our day indicated the cessation of God’s positive operation therein. Indeed, God likens His “forsaking” of Israel with the hiding of His face from them (Deut. 31:17), and the pouring out of His Spirit (as on Pentecost) with the exact opposite – that of not hiding His face (Eze. 39:27).

One may thus wonder if a time of great famine (e.g., Jer. 14) is an aspect of this absence of God’s positive operation. Generally, the lack of bread and water is understood to refer to the overall dwindling of doctrinally sound preaching:

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD:

Amos 8:11

However, in directly comparing the Spirit to “bread,” “fish” and “egg” (Lk. 11:11-13) by which His children are fed, the Bible is clear that through those accounts that describe a state of famine, God is referring to the fact that the Holy Spirit, the “living water” (Jn. 7:38), is absent, not being applied to “cool” the “tongue” (Lk. 16:24).

David’s inspired words reveal that the Spirit indwelt this child of God (Ps. 51:11). The Lord Jesus describes the singular operation of the Spirit (“wind”) in a man’s birth from above (Jn. 3:8), his “washing of regeneration” (Tit. 3:5). It is the Spirit, Who, as the “incorruptible” seed, purifies the souls of the elect (1 Pt. 1:22, 23). Thus, if the Holy Spirit is no longer positively operating in the congregations, this absolutely means that **no one can**

become saved there. God's immutable plan of judgment, that which begins with the churches, has begun, and there is no recourse:

...I will bring evil upon them, which they shall not be able to escape; and though they shall cry unto me, I will not hearken unto them. Jer. 11:11

Q5: What is the significance of Jesus' teaching on the destruction of the temple Matthew 24:2? (I)

A: a. "...ye are God's building" (1 Cor. 3:9). b. "...so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God" (2 Thess. 2:4). Many today attempt to understand the foretold destruction of the temple by finding the prophecy's fulfillment in the events related to the physical destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70 AD by the Roman Titus. This view allows many, if not all, of the not-so-comfortable prophecies of the Bible, such as the apostasy of the church, to be conveniently swept under the rug of 70 AD – leaving only a glorious, optimistic future for Christ's "kingdom" on earth. This understanding reflects a serious misreading of the word of God, and adhering to this position is a definite departure from a core doctrine of the Bible itself, *sola scriptura* – i.e., by the Scriptures alone. God never allows for the interpretation of His Holy Word by history books penned by uninspired, often biased men.

The disciples' question preceding the Lord's answer focuses on the sign and timing of Jesus' return ("coming"), and the "end of the world [age]" (Mt. 24:3). 70 AD most certainly did not see the Lord Jesus "coming in the clouds of glory" (Mt. 24:30), and the decisive end of the Old Testament age was most clearly indicated when the "veil of the temple was rent in twain" (Mt. 27:51), already in 33 AD.

This means that Jesus' words regarding the decimation of the temple must refer to events near His Second Coming.:

...Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. Mt. 24:2

Q6: What is the significance of Jesus' teaching on the destruction of the temple in Matthew 24:2? (II)

A: a. "ye are the temple of God" (1 Cor. 3:16). b. "...so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God" (2 Thess. 2:4). As we saw in our previous study, the catastrophes of Mt. 24 (the utter destruction of the temple and the great tribulation) could only be pointing to events just before the "coming" of the Lord Jesus (vv. 3, 30), rather than those that took place in 70 AD. Therefore, the question remained – to which temple is the Lord referring?

Here we list 5 possibilities, and the reason(s) why each could or could not be the Temple in view in Mt. 24. 1) *The Temple that Solomon built* (967 - 960 BC): this could not be in view, for this edifice was already a destroyed entity in Mt. 24. 2) *The Jewish nation*: this could not be in view, as they were already first judged in 709 BC, 587 BC, and finally, their age came to an end in 33 AD. 3) *The Temple contemporary to the account of*

Mt. 24: as already discussed, this edifice could not be that which is to be so completely leveled, since the destruction in view in the passage is to be just prior to the Second Coming of the Lord. 4) *The Spiritual, Heavenly Temple composed only of the true children of God*: this body, the "heavenly Jerusalem" (Heb. 12:22) could not be in view as her destruction, her refining was accomplished and fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Who suffered the wrath of God on behalf of His people in 33 AD (cf. Rom. 6:3-8; 1 Pt. 3:18). 5) *The New Testament churches and congregations*: this is the only choice left on our list, and is indeed the entity that Christ has in view in Mt. 24 – the Temple that would be in existence right near the end of the world, that would serve as the stage for the Great Tribulation.

Q7: What is the significance of Jesus' teaching on the destruction of the temple in Matthew 24:2? (III)

A: a. "...I [Lucifer] will sit also upon the mount of the congregation...I will be like the most High" (Is. 14:13, 14). b. "...so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God" (2 Thess. 2:4). Thus far we have learned that the temple of Mt. 24, every last stone of which will be "thrown down" just prior to the return of the Lord, could only be referring to the earthly New Testament church.

As the "buildings of the temple" were in view in Mt. 24:1, the Corinthian congregation is called a "building" (1 Cor. 3:9). As the temple (Gk., *hieron*) is also called a "house" (Mk. 11:16, 17), a New Testament congregation is an entity in which God *houses* ("dwelleth," 1 Cor. 3:16) Himself. Thus we read, "...where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst [mesos] of them" (Mt. 18:20).

In fact, Israel, the "church in the wilderness" (Acts 7:38), also enjoyed this nearness (Lev. 26:12; Deut. 4:7), this indwelling of God in their "midst" (Num. 5:3). However, God had warned that when they rebelled, He would "forsake them," and would not be "among [them]" (Deut. 31:17; cf. Eze. 8:6; Hos. 9:12). In 709 BC for Israel and 587 BC for Judah, God carried out His warnings and forsook His people. Worse, He allowed the heathen to come into the temple and utterly defile it (2 Chr. 36:17-20; Ps. 79:1).

In our day, God has also departed from the "midst" ("way," 2 Thess. 2:7) of the NT church, marking the commencing of the Great Tribulation. Satan, the "abomination of desolation," the "man of sin," now stands "in the holy place," i.e., "in the temple of God" (Mt. 24:15; 2 Thess. 2:3, 4). The NT temple has been laid "even with the ground," and the "stones of the sanctuary are poured out" (Lk. 19:44; Lam. 4:1). Satan reigns where God once was. Clearly, believers must now "depart out" (Lk. 21:21) - must now "**Come out of her**" (Rev. 18:4).

Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. 2 Cor. 13:5a

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