

DANIEL

Daniel's Training in Babylon

1 In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and be-

drink. ¹³Then compare with that of the young royal food, and treat you dance with what you

Mark 13:14–19

14 ‘When you see “the abomination that causes desolation” standing where it does not belong – let the reader understand – then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. 15 Let no one on the housetop go down or enter the house to take anything out. 16 Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak. 17 How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nurs-

ing mothers! 18 Pray that this will not take place in winter, 19 because those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now – and never to be equalled again.

Reflection

What on earth is going on here? ‘Let the reader understand’? It’s almost like those words are mocking us. Understand? Small chance of that you might be thinking. But as always when we read the Bible, context is our friend. And so let’s try and pull this passage apart so that we as the reader do understand both its meaning in context and its meaning for our lives.

Yesterday’s passage ended with,

the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.

Jesus has been speaking about the events in the lead-up to this 'end' that will come and as we've seen he's talking about the fall of Jerusalem that did come in 70AD. In verses 4–13 Jesus has described the lead-up to 70AD. And in today's verses he predicts, in frightening, apocalyptic language what the event itself will be like.

It may help us at this point to turn to history. The Jews revolted against the Romans in 66AD and managed to hold Jerusalem until 70AD as the Romans were distracted elsewhere. But during this period the Jews turned on themselves in a violent civil war, with different Jewish parties

battling for control. Even the temple itself was not spared in which there was open fighting and bloodshed. The inner courts were controlled by the Zealots under Eleazar and the outer court by John of Gishchala. Imagine Jew murdering Jew in the temple. But of course things would only get worse when Rome finally turned their attention back on this rebellion. In 69AD the Romans resumed the attack led by future emperor Titus. Judea was quickly retaken and Jerusalem subjected to a terrible siege for five months, Titus even built a wall to starve them out more effectively. Finally, after five terrible months, Jewish blood ran in the streets and the temple was burned to the ground. Still to this day Jewish people hold an annual day of mourning for the destruction of the temple.

Against this historical light, let's read our verses again,

14 'When you see "the abomination that causes desolation" standing where it does not belong – let the reader understand – then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. 15 Let no one on the housetop go down or enter the house to take anything out. 16 Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak. 17 How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! 18 Pray that this will not take place in winter, 19 because those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now –

and never to be equalled again.

Jesus is predicting the future. He's sitting on the Mount of Olives where one of the four Roman legions that attacked Jerusalem would be camped. What's more, the Romans attacked a few days before the Passover. It's a few days before the Passover as Jesus looks sadly into the future and describes the horror of the events that will befall Jerusalem. The events of thirty-seven years into the future are running past his eyes as he stands in the exact place, at the same time of the year as the Romans would when they unleash this horror on Jerusalem. Not future emperor Titus planning Jerusalem's destruction, but the King of Kings and Lord of Lords mourning his beloved Jerusalem who've brought this down on their own heads.

Jesus words from moments before as recorded in Matthew's gospel,

37 "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. 38 Look, your house is left to you desolate.

Desolate. So flee, run to the hills, flee to the mountains, don't even pause to take your possessions, leave immediately, don't even go back to take your cloak. What will be the sign?

when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes

desolation,'

Jesus is referring to Daniel 9:27. It's apocalyptic language which means it's not meant to be precise, just foreboding. Those familiar with the prophecy in Daniel would have had the strong sensation that Jesus was talking about some abomination, some unspeakable act happening in the temple in Jerusalem. Something so defiling, so sickening in the sight of God, so unspeakable, unclean and vile – something like Jew murdering Jew in the house of God, Jewish blood and Jewish dead bodies littering the temple courts. 'When that happens, run,' says Jesus. Because the atrocity that's about to happen will be unique in the history of the world.

Think & Pray

And so as we think back over this passage and history that I've described we're left with horrifying images of the fall of the temple, the house of God divided with itself, brother killing brother, Jewish blood staining the temple courts until finally the whole temple is burnt to the ground, not one stone left upon each other. And the human toll, pregnant women, nursing mothers, starvation, merciless Romans, unequalled distress and horror, in this dark, dark period in the history of God's people.

We want to put the Bible down and turn our minds away. And yet events like these are playing themselves out throughout the world even as our minds turn to what we might have for breakfast and the small

problems that most of us are going out to face today. Before you do, spend some time now praying for them. Pray for the pregnant women and nursing mothers leaving everything behind as they flee some war torn part of our fallen world. Pray against the evil that is pursuing them. Pray for the millions of refugees in our world. Pray for justice for them. And pray over with God ways that you can extend his mercy to them. What can you do to make a difference today for people whose daily reality aligns exactly with the horror in the verses that you've just read? How can you share the hope of the gospel of Jesus Christ with them? The promise of a better country, a heavenly one, where God is preparing a city for them, an eternal home in a house with many rooms. A place where there will be no more death or mourning

or crying or pain. How can you help him wipe every tear from their eyes today with a vision of justice done and a world made new?

Pray for them today. Start today. One world. One church. A powerful gospel. The blessings of a Western world. And you. What can you start today?