

“Let the Reader Understand”

In the book of Matthew (24:15), Jesus makes reference to the “abomination of desolation” spoken about in the Book of Daniel. And whether it was Jesus directly, or Matthew’s editorial commentary, I’ve always considered these words rather foreboding: “Let the reader understand”. Clearly, in Daniel’s description was an idea important enough to be spiritually underscored— some concept crucial to comprehend.

I’ve recently come to believe that these passages say something critically important about the relationship between the public and the private.

One of the key differences between the kingdoms of Israel and Judah pivots on a similar issue. Did both Judah and Israel suffer from perverse forms of worship? Yes. Were both kingdoms led, at times, by scoundrels and scallywags? Yes. But only the northern kingdom of Israel had publicly entrenched the abomination of idolatry. Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, for reasons of political fear, willfully contrived his own state-cult, complete with golden idols, as a means of subverting Temple worship in Jerusalem. He created a form of “public” civic religion through political manipulation.

So, while the Kingdom of Judah eventually sank so low as to allow vessels for Baal and Asherah poles— complete with male cult prostitutes— inside the structure of the Jerusalem Temple (II Kings 23:4-8), Israel actually began with that foundation. Quite arguably, therefore, Judah never quite suffers the public apostasy that became *de rigeur* in the northern Kingdom— at least until the days of Antiochus Epiphanes when (for the first time) an image set up by this Gentile King would later help our understanding of the “abomination that makes desolate” (Daniel 11:31; 12:11).

To be sure, there was plenty of evidence of private apostasy in Judah, but it was in Israel where it began as **public policy**, and simply **perpetuated**. Judah would have its Hezekiah, and its Josiah reforms. But Israel would actually **never recover from the public apostasy** of Jeroboam. And, in a sense, his wilful abomination did produce its own desolation, insofar as the 10 northern tribes have disappeared into history.

Something foreboding happens when legitimate government falls into illegitimate religion, especially in a nation that ought to know better. This, I think, is a foreshadowing pattern with respect to Daniel’s abomination of desolation. Should a Temple ever be rebuilt in Jerusalem, watch closely if it ever suffers the indignity of being publicly rededicated to someone other than the God of Israel. That kind of abomination would surely provoke God to defend His legacy.

The Temple’s reconstruction in Jerusalem, might, by itself, be a recipe for Divine provocation, depending on the finality of the Holy Spirit’s presence in the New Testament believer. But a false construct inside any such structure would surely be a provocation at heaven, in its own right. It would be a recipe for Divine wrath, and a quick fleeing to the hills...