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Andrew M. Davis

Sermon Notes

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The Abomination of Desolation

Matthew 24:15

Wailing Wall: Every single day, Jews from around the world assemble in Jerusalem to stand in front of the Wailing Wall and weep and pray because of the destruction of the Temple and the fact that Gentile military power prevents them from having autonomy in their own land and in the city of Jerusalem

Many of them pray the words of Psalm 79:1

Psalm 79:1 O God, the nations have invaded your inheritance; they have defiled your holy temple, they have reduced Jerusalem to rubble.

Many of them also pray for the day the Temple will be rebuilt

They pray this way despite the fact that one of Islam's holiest sites, the Dome of the Rock, stands supposedly exactly where the Holy of Holies was in the Temple

Our passage today looks back to the prediction of Christ concerning the destruction of the Temple in AD 70, and it also looks ahead to a stunning future event as well—the rebuilding of a temple of desolation and the desecration of that temple by the Antichrist

I. Key Principle: “As it was... so it will be”

A. The Days of Noah Repeated

Matthew 24:37 As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.

Stripped down... the concept is this:

AS IT WAS, SO IT WILL BE

B. History Repeats Itself... Again and Again

1. Events that have occurred in the past will be somewhat reenacted in the future
2. Elements of past history hold the key to the future

3. Already seen this in the first coming of Christ
 - a. Old Testament prophecy has “types”
 - b. Types are things acted out in ancient history that showed elements of Christ’s first coming
 - c. The near sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham foretells certain aspects of the final sacrifice of Christ

Genesis 22:2 Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."

- d. The rescue of Israel out of bondage from Egypt is a picture of our deliverance from slavery to sin
 - e. The Passover lamb is a picture of the sacrifice of Christ
4. So... history repeats itself when it comes to the Redemptive Plan of God

C. Similarity Concerning the Temple and its Desolation

1. Christ’s statement was about the destruction of Herod’s temple
2. Implication: what Daniel foretold, fulfilled in the past (at Christ’s time) holds the key to some future fulfillment

Matthew 24:15 "So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel-- let the reader understand--"

3. Jesus is saying “As it was, so it will be...” Daniel’s prophecy still had some more fulfillment in the first century A.D., though it had already been fulfilled in the 3rd century BC
4. I’m saying that the statement still has some yet future fulfillment!!!

II. What is “The Abomination of Desolation”?

A. Christ’s Use of the Phrase Here

1. The declaration of DESOLATION

Matthew 23:37-39 "O 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, but you were not willing. ³⁸ Look, your house is left to you desolate. 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.'"

The desolation of Israel's HOUSE is directly connected with their rejection of Christ, and His sad rejection of them

Their house was left to them DESOLATE specifically because they would not see HIM again

2. Jesus' shocking statement about Herod's temple

Matthew 24:1-2 Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. ² "Do you see all these things?" he asked. "I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."

3. The disciples' question on the Mount of Olives

Matthew 24:3 As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"

4. Here he (in part) answers the first question

"When will THIS happen" = "When will the stones of the temple be thrown down so that not one of them is left on another..."

a. Parallel in Luke helps us understand

Luke 21:20-24 "When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. ²¹ Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. ²² For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written. ²³ How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. ²⁴ They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

b. So Jesus is talking about the circumstances surrounding the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70

c. He calls it the "times of the Gentiles"

d. The physical "desolation" of Jerusalem comes after Christ has left it spiritually desolate

e. It will come as a result of MILITARY CONQUEST by Gentiles... specifically by the Roman legions, the most powerful military nation in history

5. So... Matthew 24:15 is AT LEAST about the destruction of the city of Jerusalem in A.D. 70
6. BUT I also believe that it will be an issue right before His coming and the end of the world as well!!

B. "Let the reader understand": The Phrase in Daniel

1. Jesus points his disciples (and us) to read Daniel carefully
 - a. "Let the reader understand" = let the reader of DANIEL'S complex and intricate prophecy understand its details
 - b. Daniel himself was often bewildered by the prophecies the angels had come to give him
 - c. He would ask for insight, and sometimes it would be given him; but other times Daniel was told to seal up the vision for a future generation

Daniel 12:4 But you, Daniel, close up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end.

- d. The implication is that there are portions of Daniel's prophecy that will only be fully intelligible to the generation that actually has to go through it
2. Daniel's repeated statements about the desolation of Israel
 - a. Daniel was a prophet who lived in exile in Babylon after the Babylonians had conquered the Jews and destroyed Solomon's magnificent temple
 - b. In Daniel 8, Daniel is shown the vision of Alexander the Great's conquest of the Persian Empire, including the Promised Land; one of Alexander's successors will viciously persecute the Jewish nation, becoming extremely arrogant, making claims that reach even to heaven; Daniel was told that a huge number of his own people would be given over to this man because of their transgressions... at one point an angel speaks up saying

Daniel 8:13 "For how long is the vision concerning the regular burnt offering, the transgression that makes desolate, and the giving over of the sanctuary and host to be trampled underfoot?"

So the first time "desolation" is mentioned in Daniel, it has to do with a powerful Gentile ruler who dominates the sanctuary, ends sacrifice, and makes the nation desolate because of their transgressions

- c. In Daniel 9, the phrase is mentioned many times

- i) Daniel is praying to God about the desolation of the temple because the Babylonians

Daniel 9:2 I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years.

Daniel 9:17-18 Now therefore, O our God, listen to the prayer of your servant and to his pleas for mercy, and for your own sake, O Lord, make your face to shine upon your sanctuary, which is desolate. ¹⁸ O my God, incline your ear and hear. Open your eyes and see our desolations, and the city that is called by your name.

- ii) The Lord dispatches another angel to tell Daniel with amazing clarity about 70 “weeks”... a timetable about the coming of the Messiah, His death, and the desolations that would follow; he says that after the 69th week

Daniel 9:26 an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed.

- iii) This is a clear prediction of the destruction of “the city” (Jerusalem) and the sanctuary (the temple)... and the desolations that would follow that

- iv) Daniel 9:27 speaks of the famous final “week”... the last stretch of seven years that many commentators believe refers to the final seven years of human history... again the concept of “desolation” figures prominently

Daniel 9:27 And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator."

- v) The concept is that a powerful and evil ruler will make a seven-year covenant concerning the sacrifices of the temple... and that in the middle of that period of seven years, he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering in the temple... and he shall in some striking way abominate the temple... but the end decreed by God shall be poured out on this evil person
- vi) In Daniel 11, the Lord reveals to Daniel the specific history of Israel under the dominion of the Greek rulers that would follow Alexander the Great; one of them, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, would be a particularly wicked ruler who would do special desecrations on the temple... again the language of “abomination of desolation” is used

Daniel 11:31 "His armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice. Then they will set up the abomination that causes desolation.

vii) Finally, in Daniel 12, the concept is mentioned again; but this time, it seems to be in connection with the end of the world and the eternal state of glory the saints will enjoy; Daniel 12:1 mentions a great tribulation greater than any Israel had ever endured; it also predicts the rising up of Michael, the great prince (angel) who protects Israel; the chapter goes on to unfold the deliverance of Israel, the resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked—some to everlasting glory, others to everlasting shame; at the end of the chapter, the angel counts days for Daniel

Daniel 12:8-12 I heard, but I did not understand. Then I said, "O my lord, what shall be the outcome of these things?"⁹ He said, "Go your way, Daniel, for the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end.¹⁰ Many shall purify themselves and make themselves white and be refined, but the wicked shall act wickedly. And none of the wicked shall understand, but those who are wise shall understand.¹¹ And from the time that the regular burnt offering is taken away and the abomination that makes desolate is set up, there shall be 1,290 days.¹² Blessed is he who waits and arrives at the 1,335 days.

Notice: Daniel 12:11 speaks of an abomination that makes desolate being SET UP... this isn't merely the destruction of the temple, but it is the establishment of some specific abomination in the temple... something being set up or erected

3. Summary: What is the "Abomination"?

- a. It is some kind of idolatrous desecration of the temple by Gentile forces
- b. The Hebrew word implies some kind of detestable idol

4. What is the "Desolation"?

- a. It is the spiritual emptiness of Israel... the fact that God has abandoned the nation of Israel
- b. It results in the physical desolation of Israel

C. Basic Concept

Because of their sins, God abandons His people to the power of marauding Gentile armies, resulting in a shocking trampling of His holy place. He does this to show that He is holy, that He dwells in a high and holy place, and not in any man-made shrine, and that what God really wants is to dwell in the midst of a holy people. So, God abandons His people, resulting in their desolation. Because of the desolation, the demonic forces flood in, in the form of Gentile armies, and create a horror show of pagan worship and destruction.

D. God Foretold What He Would Do

1. Song of Moses: Deuteronomy 32
 - a. Moses told Israel its future before any of it came to pass
 - b. God told Israel that they would rebel against him and make him jealous by following Gentile nations in their worship of false gods
 - c. SO God as a just punishment said He would make Israel jealous by giving them over to Gentile nations militarily

Deuteronomy 32:21 They made me jealous by what is no god and angered me with their worthless idols. I will make them envious by those who are not a people; I will make them angry by a nation that has no understanding.

III. Dress Rehearsals for the Final Act: The “Abomination of Desolation” Across History

Again and again in their history, God allowed His holy place to be trampled and desecrated by Gentiles as a punishment for Israel’s sins

A. Phase I: The Philistines at Shiloh in the Days of Eli (1 Samuel 2)

1. The days of the Judges, Eli the Judge... his sons wicked, the nation unbelieving
2. God brought the Philistines to fight against Israel
3. Israel brought forward the Ark of the Covenant from Shiloh as a good luck talisman; they thought God would never let the Ark be defeated, and that as long as they had the Ark, they would win every battle

1 Samuel 4:3 Let us bring the ark of the LORD's covenant from Shiloh, so that it may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies."

4. God allowed the Philistines to defeat sinful Israel and capture the Ark of the Covenant
5. Psalm 78 describes this tragedy... it was not accident

Psalm 78:58-61 They angered him with their high places; they aroused his jealousy with their idols. ⁵⁹ When God heard them, he was very angry; he rejected Israel completely. ⁶⁰ He abandoned the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent he had set up among men. ⁶¹ He sent the ark of his might into captivity, his splendor into the hands of the enemy.

B. Phase II: The Babylonians at Jerusalem in the Days of Jeremiah

1. Later, in the days of Jeremiah, when the people of Israel were trusting in the beautiful temple of Solomon as a good luck talisman, Jeremiah referred back to the events of Shiloh and said He was going to do it again

Jeremiah 7:1-4 This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ² "Stand at the gate of the LORD's house and there proclaim this message: "Hear the word of the LORD, all you people of Judah who come through these gates to worship the LORD. ³ This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place. ⁴ Do not trust in deceptive words and say, "This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!"

Jeremiah 7:8-12 But look, you are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless. ⁹ "Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, ¹⁰ and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, "We are safe"-- safe to do all these detestable things? ¹¹ Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching! declares the LORD. ¹² "Go now to the place in Shiloh where I first made a dwelling for my Name, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of my people Israel.

2. Jeremiah warned them very plainly not to trust in simply having the temple... it was not enough to have the temple
3. BUT they didn't listen!!! In that same chapter, Jeremiah 7, the prophet revealed that the people were stubborn in refusing to listen to the prophets... the end result would be the desolation of the land

Jeremiah 7:34 I will bring an end to the sounds of joy and gladness and to the voices of bride and bridegroom in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem, for the land will become desolate.

4. This desolation was the focus of the sad book of Lamentations

Lamentations 1:1 How deserted lies the city, once so full of people!

C. Phase III: The Greeks at Jerusalem in the Days of the Maccabees

1. This is the very thing Daniel 8 predicted... and also Daniel 11
2. A Greek king would come named Antiochus IV—ruling from 175-164 BC... he called himself Epiphanes: “The Manifest One”... he believed he was the incarnation of a god
3. The prediction of the Abomination of Desolation was made in Daniel as we've seen

Daniel 11:31 "His armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice. Then they will set up the abomination that causes desolation."

4. The book of 1 Maccabees tells us that he desecrated the temple in Jerusalem by building an altar to Zeus and offering pigs and other unclean animals on the altar
5. He did it specifically to enrage the Jews and to taunt the God of the Jews
6. This is the spirit of antichrist... embodied in this ruler two centuries before Christ
7. Christ was saying "As it was in the days of Antiochus, so it will be again..."

D. Phase IV: The Romans at Jerusalem in the Days of Titus

1. The historian Josephus tells us the clearest accounts of the story of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans
2. A.D. 70: the Jewish Zealots and revolutionaries had pushed the Roman occupiers much too far
3. The Emperor Titus had had enough... he dispatched the Legions and they destroyed the city of Jerusalem
4. The temple in particular, covered as it was with gold and precious materials, was a special focus of the marauding Romans
5. They established the standards of Caesar—whom they worshiped as a god—in the holy of holies... the Abomination of Desolation
 - a. The sanctuary trampled by Gentiles
 - b. The establishment of a horrible abominable idol in the sanctuary
 - c. The slaughter of hundreds of thousands of Jews
6. This is what Jesus is speaking of concerning the destruction of the Temple

IV. Key Question: Will the Temple Be Rebuilt?

A. Jesus' Phrase: The "Holy Place"

Matthew 24:15 "So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,'

The most common understanding of this phrase is the Temple

B. The Temple Sacrifices Fulfilled

Matthew 5:17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."

John 19:30 Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Matthew 27:51 At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

C. The Temple Sacrifices Obsolete... Forever

- All the animal sacrifices done in the temple were merely PICTURES of the final sacrifice of Christ
- They had no efficacy to remove our sins

Hebrews 10:4 because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

- When Jesus died, the time for animal sacrifice ended forever
- According to Hebrews, this meant that the Old Covenant sacrificial system was obsolete and would soon disappear

Hebrews 8:13 By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.

- That disappearance occurred when the Romans destroyed the Temple in A.D. 70... they have never been done since that day

D. The Jewish Desolation: Clinging to the Old Covenant

1. When the curtain was torn in two, God SPOKE... "The way into the Holy of Holies...into my very presence is now OPEN! My Son has died! Sinners can be counted righteous! The Old Covenant is OVER! Animal sacrifice is FINISHED! Come near to me, my people, and I will welcome you!"
2. That's what God was saying by tearing the curtain in two
3. BUT standing there watching that miracle were some unbelieving Jewish priests... they undoubtedly ran and told the High Priest, Caiaphas... the great unbeliever who had murdered Jesus
4. That wicked priest, together with other wicked priests, undoubtedly SEWED THAT CURTAIN BACK TOGETHER... blocking the way to God

Matthew 23:13 "Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to."

5. That signaled the unbelief of the Jewish nation that Jesus' death ENDED the Old Covenant and its animal sacrifices forever; it also signaled their commitment to continuing the animal sacrifices
6. When the Romans destroyed the Temple in A.D. 70, God spoke more forcefully: "The Old Covenant is FINISHED!"
7. But the same spirit of unbelief that drove them to sew up the curtain drives them today to stand at the wailing wall and pray for the Temple to be rebuilt
8. That spirit of unbelief, plus their zeal for the Law will continue to drive them to get the Temple rebuilt

For the longest time as a Christian I heard that the temple was going to be rebuilt someday... once I read the strong message of Hebrews that animal sacrifice that was pleasing to God ENDED FOREVER when Christ died, I felt that the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem was an affront to God

Therefore, I concluded, the Temple would NEVER be rebuilt

It never occurred to me until recently that a temple COULD BE REBUILT that was DISPLEASING TO GOD, and that God Himself would predict that act of rebellion by the Jews

E. A Key Verse: 2 Thessalonians 2:4

1. Paul is talking about the Second Coming of Christ; some false teachers in Thessalonika were teaching that the Second Coming had already passed and that they had missed it
2. Paul says, No... the Second Coming cannot occur until the "man of lawlessness" appears... the Beast of Revelation 13, the "Antichrist" of 1 John 2
3. Listen to how Paul describes him

2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. ⁴ He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.

V. Final Phase: The Abomination of Desolation in the Days of the Antichrist

This almost exactly parallels the description of the evil ruler of Daniel 11:

Daniel 11:36 "The king will do as he pleases. He will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will say unheard-of things against the God of gods. He will be successful until the time of wrath is completed, for what has been determined must take place.

This is the very one mentioned just a few verses before:

Daniel 11:31 "His armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice. Then they will set up the abomination that causes desolation.

In other words, Paul is saying that Daniel 11 will be fulfilled RIGHT BEFORE THE SECOND COMING OF Christ

Notice also that this evil figure of 2 Thessalonians

- 1) Opposes every god or everything called God
- 2) He exalts himself over every god and over the true God
- 3) He sets himself up in GOD'S TEMPLE
- 4) He proclaims himself to be God

Notice that he is in "God's Temple"

This phrase bothered me... and I know there are many interpretations for it

But here's mine: He will permit the Jews to rebuild the temple and resume animal sacrifices at long last

These sacrifices will be consistent with their trust in the Law of Moses, but their rejection of the finished work of Christ

Therefore the Temple itself will be an abomination of desolation... and so will their sacrifices... but they will happen

They will call it "God's Temple"... and the Antichrist will accept that title... until he takes over the place, stops animal sacrifice and desecrates the temple by worshiping himself

A. Let the Reader Understand

1. The prophecies of Daniel are very hard to understand fully
2. Daniel himself didn't understand them!
3. He asked for insight... Daniel was told
4. Jesus is here urging us to a more careful study of Daniel
5. BUT at the end of the world, Jesus will simply GIVE the understanding to the final generation who will live through it

Genesis 1:3 And God said "Let there be light" and there was light

Matthew 24:15 Jesus said "Let the reader of Daniel understand" and they understood!

B. RUN FOR YOUR LIVES!!! Next Week!!

Notice that I only gave you one verse today, and it's not even a full thought or a full sentence:

Matthew 24:15 "So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel-- let the reader understand—

The rest of the sentence is simple: RUN FOR YOUR LIVES!!!

VI. Application

A. Come to Christ NOW While There is Time

1. The animal sacrifices were to point to Christ's substitution on the cross for us
2. Christ is the true sacrifice of God, once for all time, to bring sinners to God
3. We are all hopeless apart from Christ... lost... unrighteous
4. God made Christ who had no sin to be sin for us so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God

B. No Permanent Dwelling Place on Earth

1. Christ had no home on earth while He ministered
2. The Tabernacle, that God commanded Moses to make, was a moveable tent... it moved from place to place

3. The Temple was supposedly a permanent structure... David wanted to build it for God
4. God wants us to know that He does not TRULY DWELL in any place made by men
5. Christ had no permanent tomb, but was buried in a borrowed cave
6. The true dwelling place of God and man will be in heaven
7. While we are on earth, and sin still dominates this world, God repeatedly allowed His symbolic dwelling place to be desecrated to teach us this

Isaiah 57:15 this is what the high and lofty One says-- he who lives forever, whose name is holy: "I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit

8. In this world God alone is our dwelling place... Christ is the place where we meet God

C. Desolation

1. The word refers to emptiness... being desolate of God
2. God desires to FILL you, to fill your heart with His presence, to FILL your mind with Christ... to FILL your life with Christ... to cause you to overflow like a fountain... to live a rich, full, abundant, spiritually luxurious life filled with fruit
3. Desolation is being empty of God... isolated from Him... far from Him
4. DON'T BE DESOLATE... come close to Christ

D. Abomination:

1. The word refers to the horrors of idolatry
2. It was because of idolatry that God judged His people
3. Either we will be FILLED with Christ or we will fill ourselves with idols
4. In your heart there can be abominations of desolation: living for and loving created things more than the creator
 - a. Money... possessions... houses... vacations... hobbies... DVDs... Blackberrys... retirement accounts... Lake Houses.... Boats.... Pleasures... careers.... Children... spouses... sightseeing
 - b. Any of these things can be idols

c. The greatest idol is simply SELF... selfishness... fattening yourselves for the day of slaughter by living self-indulgent lives

5. Ask Christ to cleanse the temple of your hearts... to get the whip and take down the abomination of desolation

E. Marvel and What God will Do to Have a Pure People

1. He will allow Gentiles to trample His sanctuary again and again to teach them this lesson

2. He wants purity and holiness more than sacrifices and religion

3. So He brought the Philistines to the Ark in Shiloh... the Babylonians, Greeks, and Romans to the Temple in Jerusalem

4. In the end, He will allow the Jews to rebuild their sinful temple and to allow the Antichrist to set himself up as God in that temple

5. All of that to teach us that God wants us FREE FROM IDOLS... loving and serving Him... turning away from self-worship

6. If that is so, fear His discipline... when you start to venture into idolatry, God will take the whip to your lives and cleanse you because He loves you

F. Marvel at the Intricacies of Redemptive History

1. This was not an easy story to tell today... the five examples of the trampling of the sanctuary is COMPLEX

2. Be amazed at the complexity and symbolism and depth of the work of God in history

3. Fall down in wonder

G. Don't Trust in any Man-Made Sanctuary

1. FBC can be made physically beautiful and still be spiritually desolate

H. Watch Out for Pride

1. The antichrist set up himself as an idol to be worshiped

2. Humble yourself... deny yourself