

Many Deceptions and The Lie

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When the disciples asked Jesus what the sign would be of the end of the age and of His return, Jesus said, “Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the anointed one,’ and will deceive many.” (Mt. 24:3-5) Paul also wrote of the end times that “The time will come when [men] will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.” (2 Tim. 4:3-4) This widespread deception, characterized by false teachers dispensing falsehoods, is the primary feature of the end of the age and the time just before Christ’s return. (also see 2 Ths. 2:3)

Yet Paul, in another place where he describes the end times, writes, “And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe *the lie*...” (2 Ths. 2:11) Paul goes on to say that *all* who believe this lie will be condemned because they “did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” (2 Ths. 2:12) What is this one lie? And how do we reconcile the difference between the first usage that speaks of a plurality, even a multiplicity, of deception with Paul’s reference to a single lie that carries severe, eternal consequences for those who come under its power?

Defining Terms

As is true of all of the New Testament’s prophetic insights, we must pay attention to small clues that pass by very quickly as we read over them. That is, the New Testament, when speaking prophetically, often puts a lot of information about very large pictures into a very few words, a tactic that serves both to conceal and reveal the truth being prophesied. These few words can cover over the truth especially for those who already have some inaccurate “theological” definition that distorts what is actually said and the true interpretation may come to light, sometimes just before (however imperfectly understood) but sometimes only *after* the prophesied event occurs.

It is also true that the only persons who are able to accurately and completely interpret any given prophecy will be those to whom the Spirit of God gives the interpretation. Though there are many prophecy prognosticators today, so-called “prophecy experts” who are quite certain they have the whole end-times scenario all figured out and who are quite convincing in their lectures with their charts and timelines, understanding prophecy is really a matter of seeking the Lord and being content with whatever portion of the whole picture He opens up to us.

Let us lay the ground work for this discussion by reviewing the basic terms already laid before us:

- **Many.** These prophecies are not speaking of the characteristics of some isolated sub-group. This is the condition of many. *Many* teachers are heaped up. A few would never match this description, an important concept to bear in mind when contemplating the fulfillment of these prophecies.
- **Truth.** In contrast to this age of relativistic thinking (a mindset the Bible calls “lawlessness” – Greek, *anomia* [458]), there is truth, truth that we must submit to the Spirit of God to be led into. (Jn. 16:13)

- Sound doctrine. This is not soteriology (salvation), eschatology (end times), ekklesiology (“church” structure) or any other kind of “-ology,” not even “theology”! It is not hermeneutics (interpreting), homiletics (sermonizing) or any of the other skills of rhetoric – which are not found anywhere in the New Testament (except where Paul rejected their use – 1 Cor. 2:1, etc.) but which come from the pagan Greek practice of oration and sophistry. Sound doctrine is simply the practical ways in which we, the followers of Christ, are to express obedience to Christ’s command to “love one another as I have loved you.” (Jn. 13:34, also see Tit. 2:1-10)

- Deception. This is the natural condition of every person whose minds and lives have not been renewed and rejuvenated by Christ and God. We were born into this condition and, until Christ’s light illuminates our hearts, we will never know just how much darkness we really live in. The darkness is especially true in circles where the name of Christ is used to justify and preserve men’s darkness.

- Itching ears. The picture is that of being simultaneously stroked and soothed, a scratching of the ears that addicts one to having the itch scratched. Fables – falsehoods, the “native language” of the devil and the demonic (Jn. 8:44) – are the “ointment” used to achieve this symbiotic relationship.

I Am the Anointed One

Let us return to Jesus’ words and hear again His answer to the disciples’ request to know the sign of the end of the age and of His return. Jesus said to them:

“Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the anointed one,’ and will deceive many...” (Mt. 24:4-5)

We need to recognize the scale of the duplicity that Satan has orchestrated against the people of Christ. And rarely do we see his deceptive finesse more clearly exposed than it is here – but we have to know what questions to ask and we have to know the history of the people of Christ since the time of the apostles to the present day to accurately analyze the answers we come up with.

Most English versions interpret Jesus’ words as being “many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ...’” (Mt. 24:5) Yet when we look at church history we find only a *tiny few* Messianic claimants. Throughout the centuries since Christ, there have been only a handful of men claiming to be “the Christ” – currently, even in this season of religious insanity, there are only a *few* hundred such deluded souls claiming to be “the Christ.” But this does not constitute *many* and there are not *many* who follow after these misguided men. In the face of church history, we must either conclude that the usual English rendering of this prophecy is in error or that Jesus Christ is only a deluded false prophet. These are the only two options before us. Thankfully, diligent research leads us to the former conclusion.

In contrast to the lack of fulfillment of the English mis-rendered prophecy, there is indeed a group of people who fit every facet of the New Testament’s descriptions perfectly. These men

(and women) boldly step behind a pulpit and (whether overtly spoken or subliminally projected) exude the message that “I have the special sacred anointing to proclaim to you what God is all about.” These “pastors,” “teachers,” “prophets,” “evangelists,” “apostles,” whatever title these pulpiteers take to themselves, derive their role, function and authority over the people who claim to follow Christ from the example and tradition laid down by the second and third century “bishops.”

Paul, speaking to a group of men whom he recognized as both elders (Greek, *presbuteros* [4245]) **and** overseers (traditionally, “bishops,” Greek, *episkopos* [1985] – see Acts 20:17, 28), prophesied, “From among yourselves men will rise up, speaking corrupted things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.” (Acts 20:30) This is precisely what happened. The exaltation and installation into office of the bishop in the second and third centuries enabled men to rise up and draw followers after themselves. Church history is little more than the petty bickering of these men, the most prominent tares among the wheat, as they jockeyed for preeminence, power and influence – all interspersed with genuine flashes of light and truth as the Spirit of God manifested the eternal and perpetual call for men to repent and walk humbly, soberly, righteously and godly in the midst of a dark generation and age. (Tit. 2:12, etc.)

To be certain, this was not a conscious, willful departure from the way of following Christ and God. “While men *slept*,” Jesus said, “an enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat.” (Mt. 13:25) Jesus said to the ekklesia of Ephesus (representative of the first century believers), “...you have left your first love.” (Rev. 2:4) In the first century, the followers of Christ were already leaving behind their initial love for Christ and were replacing their pure love for Him with various religious and philosophical traditions that corrupted their life with Him. The first “church manuals” come from the second and third centuries. Men were sleeping and the devil was doing his work. “But,” Jesus went on to say to the first century believers, “this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.” (Rev. 2:6) Jesus would then go on to say to the ekklesia of Pergamos (representative of certain portions of the believers of the third century) that they had in their midst “those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans.” (Rev. 2:15) What had been first century actions – bishops rising from the ranks of the eldership over various assemblies and drawing followers after themselves – in the third century became accepted “doctrines” (teachings – Ignatius of Antioch’s letters proclaiming the bishop as standing in the place of Christ over the assembly of saints stand as the first historically recorded Nicolaitan teachings – see especially “To the Magnesians,” c. 6, “To the Ephesians,” c. 6) Though the New Testament nowhere explains or interprets the name “Nicolaitan,” the meaning is both revealed and concealed (in typical New Testament fashion) by a literal interpretation: “to rule over or conquer the people.” [3531].

Many (but certainly not all) of the men who stepped into the Nicolaitan role of bishop in the first through third centuries were men who honestly and earnestly sought after God and never realized the error they were perpetuating. Men were sleeping and the devil was doing his work. God Himself, in a foreshadowing of the more sinister “strong delusion” He will send (2 Ths. 2:11), allowed this to happen so that the tares and the wheat could mature simultaneously. (see Mt. 13:29-30) As these two “plants” approach maturity, it will become more apparent which is which. The responsibility is upon each individual follower of Christ to come out from all forms of “Christian” idolatry, recognize any contaminations he or she has received or accumulated from the tares and purify him or herself from *all* filthiness of the flesh and spirit so that he or she can truly be God’s son or daughter, a genuine wheat bearing genuine crops for the Master, Christ Jesus. (2 Cor. 6:17-7:1)

The Great Falling Away

Wherever a speaker claims to have “the anointing” and special privileges by which he is “untouchable” (Psa. 105:15 is perhaps the most misused verse in this context) – this usually means that he is safely ensconced behind a wall of sycophants (yes men), well beyond correction and perceived as being somehow above the common (stupid) herd this “great man of God” routinely speaks down to, instructing them from his vastly superior storehouse of spiritual insight and information – he is only fulfilling Christ’s precise prophecy that “many will come in My name, claiming to have God’s special anointing.” (Mt. 24:5) The New Testament clearly says that we *all* have God’s anointing and that we aren’t supposed to need constant teaching and perpetual supervision, especially at “childcare” levels! (1 Jn. 2:20, 27, Heb. 5:12, etc.)

Wherever we can find *many* such speakers (and they are all over the world now – just turn on the radio, television, or internet or visit any local “church” that utilizes the pulpit paradigm), we are simply finding the fulfillment of the New Testament’s prophecies about the many who will fall away from the faith during the end times. Paul wrote, “...they will turn their ears *away from* the truth and be turned aside to fables.” (2 Tim. 4:4)

Peter confirms this and adds yet another piece of the picture when he writes, “But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will stealthily bring in dangerous divisions; even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And *many* will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.” (2 Pet. 2:1-2) Here we have another passage that has suffered under English translation. “Damnable heresies” was used in the 1611 King James and although one can find the idea of “dangerous divisions” in the alternative definitions of the English words, the primary and first thought of most English speakers who hear or read “damnable heresies” is that of gross errors that deserve eternal hellfire. But the real intent behind the Greek word *hairesis* [139] is simply that of divisions grouped around ideas or men. The notion of gross error deserving of hellfire comes more from the “church” that used (and sometimes still uses) “heretic” as a convenient label to dispose of those who ask too many questions or speak too many truths. Today we commonly call these dangerous divisions “denominations” (even the “non-denominational” ones!) and see little or nothing wrong in their existence or place of power over the lives of people who claim to follow Christ.

These men (and women) in these titled places of authority over their brothers and sisters in Christ (whether overtly formalized and institutionalized or assumed and presumed according to unspoken, ill-defined acceptance of the man in his assumed role) stand in a place the Lord did not design. It is a position that can only be rightly called Nicolaitan overlord. Even though it is a sin Jesus hates (Rev. 2:6), it is a widespread and rampant practice nonetheless.

The Lie

This is the scale of the deceptions which Satan has orchestrated against the people of Christ. Using poorly-translated and poorly understood (spiritually speaking) passages, Satan has been able to conceal his sons, the tares, not only among the wheat but, very often, up in front, center stage, behind the pulpit from which they speak “great swelling words of emptiness” that “allure [draw in after the speaker] through the lusts of the flesh” (rather than mature the spirit through the death of self at the cross of Christ), promising “liberty” while they themselves are “slaves of corruption” (especially but certainly not limited to the Nicolaitan and sectarian

corruptions that Satan has infiltrated into the teachings of Christ regarding the practice of “church” – 2 Pet. 2:18-19)

The deception, as was prophesied throughout the New Testament, is global, widespread and pervasive. Paul wrote, “The coming of the lawless one [who comes into view concurrently with the falling away from the faith of the many] is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.” (2 Ths. 2:9-10) The stage is already fully set. Whether “the lawless one” is a single man who, being filled with Satan, sits as king over all the earth or is a description of the average man of the age (neither interpretation completely dismisses the other and both may indeed be in view here), the backdrop of deception is already fully in place.

Paul then goes on to say, “And for this reason [because men prefer Satan’s deceptions] God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe *the lie*, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” (2 Ths. 2:11-12)

To answer the question of what is the singular lie that Paul speaks of here, we need to understand Satan’s purpose in all this. Paul wrote, “Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day [of Christ] will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.” (2 Ths. 2:3-4) As was true from the beginning of Satan’s rebellion, his purpose has been to be like the Most High God. (Isa. 14:14) Satan, unlike Christ, has always considered deity something to be grasped or stolen. (Phlp. 2:6)

The prophecies in Daniel (if the prognosticators have gotten anything right!) would certainly seem to make it clear that the world ruler of the end times (a man often identified as “the antichrist” or Paul’s “man of lawlessness”) will make a covenant that allows the Jews to resume regular sacrifices in some temple in Jerusalem and then abolishes the practice. (Dan. 12:11, etc.) The “man of lawlessness” may indeed sit in a physical temple in Jerusalem and receive worship as the embodiment of the Jewish God Yahweh. But it is surely in the heart of Satan to also sit as lord over the “Christian” assembly, the temple of God that we the people of Christ are. (1 Cor. 3:17) To do so requires the backdrop of deception the New Testament prophecies say will be the primary feature of the end of the age.

What will be *the lie* that even God Himself will enable those who prefer unrighteousness to believe? The answer to this question has two layers. The first layer, the aspect that *qualifies* a person to be eligible to receive the strong delusion that God will send, is simply *any lie* that the person prefers over God’s truth. In this category and in the context of “Christianity” (there will certainly be similar deceptions available for other religious contexts) is “church” and “grace” and tolerance of sin and “spiritual fathering” and all the various deceptions that are preached and propagated under the name of Christ and “Christianity.”

The second layer, the aspect that is the *result* of receiving the strong delusion that God sends, is the lie that the spiritual being that one comes into contact with by practicing all those “Christian” religious deceptions and lies really is God. Already whole congregations who routinely and openly practice blatant abominable sins claim to experience the tangible presence and blessings of God. Already “pastors” and ex-“pastors” write of guiding spirits who take them into “deeper” spiritual experiences and “enlightenments” that have nothing to do with Christ and which have many elements that flatly contradict the written word of God, the Bible.

The lie that many will believe is simply that *Satan is God*. The one who would truly follow after Christ must forsake all notions that Satan is only an ineffective, harmless buffoon or a toothless old tiger, a favorite fable taught at many a “church,” even home “churches.” Anyone who would believe this lie is just as eligible for strong delusion from God, as is the Nicolaitan overlord who stands between God and the people, as is the “average layman” who believes he needs some man to spoon feed him “the milk of the word,” as is the “church”-ite who snubs, mocks or even persecutes those whose lifestyle more resembles Christ than does their own. Each of these lies that *many* prefer over the simple truths of God cause God to send strong delusion upon them so that they can be firmly convinced that they really do pray to God and follow and obey and experience Him. This is powerful deception indeed!

Let he who has ears hear.

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