

BOOKLET SERMON No.1

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PROMINENT DECEPTIONS

(MANY DECEPTIONS EXISTED IN THE PAST, MANY ARE HERE TODAY AND MANY WILL BE ABROAD IN THE
FUTURE)

- In answering the disciples' questions in Matthew 24.3 Jesus mentions seven prominent deceptions which we need to be aware of in the time leading up to His return.
- The thoughts and opinions expressed in this booklet will be most easily understood if you read chapters 24 and 25 of the gospel of Matthew before reading the booklet.
- Unless otherwise noted all quotations from Scripture are from the New King James Version.
- All my comments and opinions are given from my viewpoint as a Christian that the text of the Holy Bible, as originally given, is the Word of God. My opinions are based on my understanding of God's opinion as expressed in the Bible and I offer them with good intention without any will to cause offense to anyone holding a different opinion. They are offered in the hope of shedding light and providing help to anyone open to receive it.

THE MASTER DECEIVER

When Jesus spoke about "THE DEVIL" He said "He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it" (John 8.44). The purpose of lies is to deceive and as "the father" of lies Satan is the master deceiver.

The opening chapters of Genesis have barely told the story of creation when Satan enters with his lies, aimed at bringing our first parents to a disastrous fall. It is interesting to note that Adam was not deceived. Paul tells Timothy, "Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived fell into transgression" (1 Timothy 2.14). Cunning as he is Satan knew how to deceive, whom to deceive, and how to cause maximum damage. Some of his basic strategies are revealed in Genesis 3 where it is recorded that he cast doubt on the Word of God (v.1), caused Eve to distort the Word of God by adding to it (v.3), blatantly denied the Word of God (v.4), attributed wrong motives to God (v.5) and appealed to human fleshly desires (v.6).

It is little wonder that deceptions abound in a world where Satan has such influence and it is not surprising that, "evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived." (2 Timothy 2 13).

Jesus disciples were justifiably impressed by the buildings of the temple in Jerusalem. It had taken 46 years to bring them to their then current condition (John 2.20), but Jesus told them the buildings would be completely destroyed. It prompted them to ask the question, "**Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?**" As Jesus answered He warned about ***SEVEN PARTICULAR DECEPTIONS*** that would mark the years leading up to His return.

SEVEN DECEPTIONS THAT WILL MARK THE END TIMES

As an opening statement Jesus said, "Take heed that no one deceives you". This set the tone for His detailed answer to their question. Even as sincere followers of Jesus Christ we are liable to be deceived. We need to be on our guard to avoid being deceived.

We need to be careful that we do not let Christian relationships cause us to fall into line with any who have been deceived. Adam was not deceived, yet the record states that Eve "gave to her husband with her, and he ate" (Genesis 3.6). In so doing Adam's sin was worse than Eve's for he knowingly disobeyed God. Satan had cleverly placed Adam in a position where he was influenced by his relationship with Eve. Paul reminds us that we are not ignorant of Satan's "devices" 2 (2 Corinthians 2.11).

Jesus unfolds to His disciples the main events that will occur in the time leading up to His return and in doing so gives identifies seven specific areas of deception to be avoided. They are as follows (the chapter and verse references are to Matthew chapters 24 and 25):

- False Christs (24.5)
- False Timescales (24.6)
- False Prophets (24.11)
- False Prospects (24.26-27)
- False Dates (24.36)
- False Professors (25.1-13)
- False Servants (25. 14-30)

Much could be said about each of these areas of deception but in this booklet I intend to merely comment briefly on each of them and then consider, in more detail, what I think to be the two most serious areas.

Brief Comments

1. FALSE CHRISTS (24.5)

I classify this as THE MOST PUZZLING area of deception. It puzzles me how anyone, with common sense and even a basic knowledge of the Word of God could ever mistake any sinful man as being Jesus Christ.

However, Jesus confirmed that “many” people would fall prey to this deception. The internet has information on an amazing number of people (both Jews and Gentiles) who have claimed to be Jesus Christ and attracted followers. Even today some make that claim, and in a day to come an individual, named in Revelation 13.4 as “the beast”, will come to extreme prominence claiming that he is God. More people will follow him than followed any other false Christ, for Revelation 13.8 says “all who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.”

I am not the least bit puzzled as to how “the beast” will achieve such a following. He will come “according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs and lying wonders,” (2 Thessalonians 2.9) and God Himself “will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie,” (2 Thessalonians 2.11). No one can stand against such an onslaught. It will be the fate of those who missed their opportunity of salvation when they “did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” (2 Thessalonians 2.12).

2. FALSE TIMESCALES (24.6)

I classify this as THE MOST UNDERSTANDABLE area of deception. When Jesus spoke to His disciples about His departure and return He said, "In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there you may be also." It was excusable for them to assume that because He was going away soon He would also come back soon.

In the early days of the New Testament Church this assumption may have been widespread. Jesus had said to Peter, concerning John, "If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me." (John 21.22). That could have caused some to think Jesus would be back soon. After all, Jesus said, "Surely I am coming **quickly**." (Revelation 22.20).

Paul had written to the believers in Thessalonica, "For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then **we who are alive and remain** shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air." (1 Thessalonians 4.16-17). Those words "we who are alive and remain" could have made them think Jesus would be back during their lifetime. Some people reading those same words today could also think they will live until the Lord returns (and, of-course, for some generation that will be true).

However, Paul writes to dispel the Thessalonians' mistaken belief. He well knew that he would die before the Lord's return, for he said to the elders of Ephesus, "after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock." (Acts 20.29) He wrote to the Thessalonians, "Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition," (2 Thessalonians 2.3). He uses two of the other titles for "the beast", and goes on to say that the Lord will not be back until He comes to bring an end to the reign of the beast. At His return Jesus will "destroy" the beast (2 Thessalonians 2.8).

This is the message that comes across clearly as Jesus answers the disciples' question of Matthew 24.3. Jesus will not come back until "all" the predicted signs have been fulfilled (Matthew 24.33). Toward the end of His answer Jesus indicates the timescale for His return as he tells the parable of the "man travelling to a far country" (Matthew 25.14-30). **After "a long time" he returns (v.19)** so it was always going to be "a long time" between Jesus' ascension into heaven and His return to set up the Millennial Kingdom.

3. FALSE PROPHETS (24.11)

I classify this as THE MOST PROLIFIC area of deception. There were to be "many" false prophets and they would deceive "many". I think it refers to the entire area of false religions. Christianity has been plagued with false DOCTRINES (some based on a misunderstanding of Scripture, some contrived by twisting Scripture and some having no foundation in Scripture whatsoever) but false prophets have invented religions based on all sorts of falsehoods, be they false gods, false hopes, false fears, false science, false promises or any other departure from God and truth.

Some of them, like the false Christs, have been aided by Satan to perform “great signs and wonders” (24.24). Some have had willing followers, but some keep and increase their followers by coercion, fear and even threat of death, while some gain and keep their followers by satisfying the lusts of the flesh.

In all cases those who follow them are in captivity, for only the truth can “make you free”. (John 8.31-32). Eternity will reveal the truth of the Scripture that says of Jesus “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4.12)

Regardless of the form the religions emanating from false prophets come in, they must be opposed. Paul is clear when he says that the gospel of Christ is the only true gospel and that, “even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel....let him be accursed.” (Galatians 1.8)

4. FALSE PROSPECTS (24.26-27)

I classify this as THE MOST POPULAR area of deception. The false prospect spoken of here is a secret return of Jesus Christ. In modern parlance it is called “The Secret Rapture” and as the doctrine has been embellished over the years it involves two returns of Jesus (one “to the air” to take all true believers to heaven before the “Great Tribulation” and later “to the earth” to deal with the beast and his followers and set up the Millennial Kingdom). It is popular because it introduces the prospect of all latter day believers escaping the troubles of the great tribulation period.

Its popularity is witnessed by the number of books and films that have been produced to propagate the teaching, the number of evangelical churches that have written it in to their statements of belief and the prominence of preaching of a secret rapture in conferences and general church meetings.

Despite the popularity of this belief Scripture clearly says that Jesus will return only ONCE. It is His SECOND advent (not a second and third) as it says, “And as it is appointed for men to die ONCE, but after this the judgement, so Christ was offered ONCE to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear A SECOND TIME, apart from sin, for salvation.” (Hebrews 9.27-28).

Paul makes it clear that the RETURN of Jesus and the RAPTURE of the saints will both occur at the same time (at the end of the great tribulation when Jesus destroys the beast) as he writes “Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him” (both events taking place together)...“that Day will not come” (both events on the same “Day”) “unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed”..... “whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.” (I am quoting only the relevant portions of 2 Thessalonians 2.1-8 to keep to the point being made).

The return “to the air” (1 Thessalonians 4.17) and “to the earth” (Zechariah 14.4, Revelation 20.4 and 2 Thessalonians 1.7-10) are one and the same event. Jesus makes that clear in the detailed answer He gave to the disciples’ question of Matthew 24.3 when He says, “as the lightening comes from the east

and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be" (Matthew 24.27) (the "coming to the earth" for the judgement) and "And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matthew 24.31) (the "coming to the air" for the gathering of the saints)(the Rapture).

The Lord clearly says that He will return "Immediately after the tribulation" (Matthew 24.29)

These are but a few of the Scriptures that show the secret rapture theory to be unscriptural.

5. FALSE DATES (24.36)

I have classified this as THE MOST FOOLISH area of deception. I am inclined toward this opinion because the Lord said concerning His return, in the verse entered above, "But of that day and that hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only" (Matthew 24.36). With the Lord making such a clear statement on the matter you would think people would avoid speculation, much less actually predicting a date.

However, people have set dates and invariably the dates have come and gone to the embarrassment and loss of reputation of the parties involved. Some have even had a second attempt when the first attempt failed.

There SHALL come a time when the beast appears, and makes his covenant with Israel, that believers SHALL know that the Lord's return is some seven years away (Daniel 9.27). Three and a half years later, when he breaks the covenant, it shall be known that it is some three and a half years away, but no one shall ever know "the DAY nor the HOUR" the Father has set. He HAS set the time (for He has "appointed a day" Acts 17.31) but He has not revealed it. There will always be an element of surprise, for Jesus said, "Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an HOUR you do not expect." (Matthew 24.44)

6. FALSE PROFESSORS (25.1-13)

I have classified this THE MOST TRAGIC area of deception.

This involves the salvation or damnation of individual souls. To be on the wrong side of this deception is to end up suffering "eternal punishment" (Matthew 25.46) in the company of the "evil servant" (of 24.48-51), the "unprofitable servant" (of 25.30) and "the devil and his angels" (of 25.41).

What could be more tragic? It makes me think of the warning the Lord gave when He said, "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16.26)

Jesus said, “If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched – where ‘Their worm does not die And the fire is not quenched’” (Mark 9.43-44). He made three applications of the latter quotation to emphasize the importance of what He was saying.

This is one of the deceptions I will deal with in more detail, so I will say no more about it at this point.

7. FALSE SERVANTS (25.14-30)

I have classified this THE MOST DISAPPOINTING area of deception. This parable, about the man travelling to a far country, begins by referring to the servants as “his own servants”. The parable is about “the kingdom of heaven” and the “man” is depicting Jesus, leaving His servants in charge, then returning “after a long time” to judge their efforts. The servants, who are given “talents”, depict the people He has gifted to attend to his business (evangelism, teaching and pastoring). An alternative word for servant is MINISTER. These are Christ’s ministers, and one in three is “wicked and lazy” (v.26). How disappointing is that?

It is easy to make the connection with what Jesus said earlier in His answer to the disciples’ question, “But if that evil servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming’, and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Again, this is one of the two deceptions I will deal with in more detail, so I will say no more about it at this point.

THE TWO MOST SERIOUS AREAS

Jesus concluded His answer with two parables, before ending with a brief description of the Judgement. These parables deal with the most serious areas of deception (the areas relating to SALVATION and SERVICE). We will now give closer attention to the facts the Lord sets before us.

DECEPTION No.6: THE FALSE PROFESSORS (25.1-13)

Jesus did not waste words. It is said of Him that He was (and is) “full of grace and TRUTH” (John 1.14). He describes Himself as “the way, the TRUTH, and the life” (John 14.6). As He debated with the Pharisees He said, “I tell the TRUTH” (John 8.45).

In His straightforward statements and in His explanatory parables He revealed THE TRUTH. In this disturbing parable He reveals some amazing and deeply concerning TRUTHS.

The parable is about an upcoming wedding with ten virgins awaiting the arrival of the bridegroom. It represents the professing church waiting for the return of Jesus Christ (the sum total of people who take the name of Christian, waiting expectantly for the return of Jesus Christ). They are “virgins” (indicating moral purity) and they had “lamps” (they were shedding light, for Jesus said that Christians are “the light of the world” (Matthew 5.14)). BUT FIVE OF THEM WERE NOT “READY” TO MEET THE LORD! The implications are tragic. Half (50%) of those who think they are Christians are not ready to meet the Lord. They may have been deceived by a false gospel (as was the danger in Galatia (read Galatians 1.6-8) or they may have heard the true gospel but “deceived themselves” that they have conformed to it (read James 1.22).

As the story unfolds the bridegroom arrives. There is a degree of unpreparedness with all ten, for they “all slumbered and slept” (v.5), but the five “foolish” virgins are in deep trouble. They had “no oil”. Typically, in Scripture “oil” speaks of “God The Spirit” (read Zechariah 4.1-6). To be a true Christian you must be “born again” (read John 3.3), “born of The Spirit” (read John 3.6-8). Some ardent church attenders, who sincerely assume that they are Christians (ready to meet the Lord) have never even heard this. For years, before I became a Christian, I attended a church where the message was that church attendance, church membership, going through the church rituals and generally just doing ‘the best you can’ is what makes you a Christian. This is a false gospel, but it is what many people believe and are depending on.

God has made the truth clear and plain. “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold all things have become new.” (2 Corinthians 5.17). Nothing else will do.

The beauty of the true gospel is that salvation is a “GIFT” (read Ephesians 2.8-10). All you need to do is recognize that you need it, and then accept it (read John 1.11-13). Everyone needs it (read Romans 3.23) and forgiveness of sin is available for all who will genuinely ask for it (read 1 John 1.9). Leave no stone unturned until you are sure of your salvation (read Ps.32). If you need help ask for it. This is too important to be unsure about!

The “foolish virgins” tried to make things right, but they were too late (v.10). They pleaded for admission, but they were refused entry (v.11). They learned too late the truth of what Jesus said as He concluded the sermon on the mount, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.” (Matthew 7.21)

How tragic it would be, on the day of judgement, to hear the words from Jesus that the foolish virgins heard, “I do not know you.” (v.12)

DECEPTION No.7: THE FALSE SERVANTS (25.14-30)

This, the last, and THE MOST DISAPPOINTING area of deception, pinpoints one of the major problems in the professing church, namely ministers in churches who are not true believers. They are responsible for misleading souls by preaching a false gospel.

The startling implication is that they could represent one in three of the leaders in the professing church. That is a deeply concerning statistic!

If you think this is an unrealistic interpretation just read some of the passages in the Old and New Testaments that address the issue of the professing people of God being misled by their leaders (short passages like Isaiah 56.10-12 and Acts 20.29-30, or longer passages like Ezekiel 13 and Matthew 23).

The ministers are gifted servants (v.15), and the majority use their gifts well and will be rewarded appropriately (vs.16-23). However, the one in three represented by the servant with “one talent” (vs.24-30) is labelled a “wicked and lazy” servant and ends up condemned. This is tragic for the servant, but in terms of such a pastor or teacher in a church, the consequences for those under his ministry are disastrous. This “servant” had an unbalanced view of God (v.24) and a wrong attitude to his work (v.25).

I referred earlier to how Jesus concluded the sermon on the mount. He spoke about the judgement to come and, in doing so, He said, “Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name? And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” So there will be “MANY” in this category! It will include PREACHERS! There will be people in the number who HAD SUPERNATURAL POWERS! But there will be no true Christians among them!

We live in a day when a gospel is preached, in many churches, that has a heaven, but no hell, forgiveness without repentance and conversion with no change of lifestyle. It suits a generation that has “a form of godliness but denying its power” (2 Timothy 3.5).

The “wicked and lazy” servant did not please God. In pastoring a church there is a tension between pleasing the congregation and pleasing God. In being faithful to the gospel of Christ Paul chose to please God, not men, (Galatians 1.6-10). In these days, as we approach the return of Jesus Christ, there is no shortage of preachers, but there is a tendency by many to turn “from the truth”, to tell people what they want to hear (2 Timothy 4.3-4).

CONCLUSIONS

There are many thoughts we may have, and conclusions we can come to, as we reflect on the Scriptures brought before us in this study. Let me, in closing, suggest just a few:

- The only valid and useful conclusions we can come to are those based on the Word of God
- There are many deceivers and deceptions abroad today
- Many of the deceivers may be likable, moral people, but it will not change their fate
- We need to have a good working knowledge of God's Word to avoid being deceived
- There is a great need for faithful preaching of the one and only true gospel
- There is nothing more important for each individual than to be truly saved
- Evangelists, pastors and teachers carry heavy responsibilities
- We live in times when people do not wish to hear the truth
- Some people will take action against you when you preach the truth

And so we could go on!

May we each one respond appropriately to the amazing love of God that led Him to give His only begotten Son as a sacrifice for our sins. May we honour His Son, Jesus Christ, Who willingly died as our substitute, by accepting Him as our personal Saviour and Lord.

If anyone reading this booklet does not have a personal relationship with God may you accept God's free gift of eternal life by acknowledging your need, confessing your sins and receiving rebirth by God the Spirit, thus finding peace in the matchless grace of God.

In that grace and peace may we serve God faithfully all the days of our life here on earth, then, when time is ended, spend eternity with God!

Amen