

Satan's Final Deceptions

It was one of those gorgeous September mornings in Chicago. As the sun rose over Lake Michigan and commuters battled traffic jams on the Kennedy and Eisenhower expressways, and children made their way to school, a chilling story began to emerge that struck fear into the hearts of Chicagoans. People were becoming tragically sick, and some were dying just a few hours after taking Tylenol capsules. On testing, each of the capsules proved to be laced with potassium cyanide, a deadly poison. A deranged individual had tampered with the medication. To this day, we don't know who did this.

As we have seen, Revelation warns us that the "inhabitants of the earth" will drink a deadly potion called the "wine of Babylon." There are false doctrines and teachings that, in the end, will lead only to death. However, the world is not left without the antidote, the protection, against this spiritual poison: the three angels' messages.

In this week's lesson, we will continue looking, not only at Babylon's deceptions but at Jesus' plan to save us from them and the death that they would otherwise bring.

The Way That Seems Right in a Man's Eyes

In the context of the last days, Jesus uttered a powerful warning, "For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect" (Mark 13:22). Who are the "elect"? He later says, "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" (Matt. 24:31). A little scary, isn't it, when the deception in the last days will be so great that even the faithful ones will be in danger of being deceived?

Read Revelation 12:9. Who is deceived by Satan? How do we understand these words?

Obviously, God is going to have some faithful people in the last days, as He has had all through the ages. However, the wording here shows just how widespread Satan's deception really is.

Read Proverbs 14:12. What powerful warning is presented here?

People are often told to follow their own conscience in order to determine for themselves what is right or wrong, good or evil, and then live accordingly. But the Scripture says that we are all sinners, all corrupted (Jer. 17:9, Rom. 3:9-18), and so to trust our own sentiments is almost a guaranteed way to, sooner or later, get it wrong and even to do wrong. A lot of evil has been perpetrated through the ages by people utterly convinced of the rightness of their cause. That is, they followed the "way that seems right" to them.

Instead, we must immerse ourselves in the Word of God, and from His Word, as we surrender to the Holy Spirit, learn truth from error, right from wrong, good from evil. Left to our own devices, or even to our own senses, we can become easy prey to Satan's deceptions.

Think through examples of people, who had acted based on what they themselves believed was right, or even what they believed was God's will, but had done evil things. What can we learn from these tragic events?

The Old Lie of Immortality

Read Revelation 16:13, 14 and Revelation 18:2, 23. What allusions to spiritualism do you find in these verses?

Such expressions as the “dwelling place of demons” or the “spirits of demons” and “sorcery” all indicate demonic activity. No wonder we have been warned that of the two great deceptions in the last days, one will be “the immortality of the soul” (see Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 588).

Of course, that’s so easy to see today. Even in the Christian world, the idea of the soul being immortal is all but staple Christian doctrine. Many Christians believe that, at death, the saved go soaring off to heaven, and the lost descend into hell. How often, for instance, after the great evangelist Billy Graham died, did we hear that “Billy Graham is safe now in heaven, in the loving arms of Jesus,” or the like? This kind of thing is taught all the time from pulpits, in classrooms, and, especially, at funerals.

Read Ecclesiastes 9:5; Job 19:25-27; 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17; and Revelation 14:13. What clear instruction did God give His people about life after death, and where do we find our hope?

One of the pillars of Babylonian deception is a false understanding of death, which, centered on the idea of the immortality of the soul, prepares the way for the deceptive influence of spiritualism. If you believe that the dead, in some form, live on and might even be able to communicate with us, then what protection do you have from any of the myriad deceptions that Satan has? If someone whom you thought were your dead mother or child, or someone else beloved, were suddenly to appear and talk to you, how easy would it be to be fooled by your senses? This has happened in the past, happens now, and, certainly, as we near the very final days, will happen again. Our only protection is to stand firmly rooted in what the Bible teaches and to cling to the biblical teaching about death as a sleep until the second coming of Jesus.

What examples of modern spiritualism exist in your culture today? Why is firm adherence to the Word of God our only protection?

Babylon: The Center of Sun Worship

Sun worship was prominent in Egypt, Assyria, Persia, and certainly Babylon. In his book *The Worship of Nature*, James G. Frazer makes this observation, “In ancient Babylonia the sun was worshipped from immemorial antiquity.” — (London: Macmillan and Co., 1926), vol. 1, p. 529. It may seem surprising, but at times Babylonian sun worship influenced the worship of God’s people in the Old Testament.

Read Ezekiel 8:16 and 2 Kings 23:5, 11. What did the prophets write about the influence of sun worship in Israel and Judah? (See also Rom. 1:25.)

The prophet Ezekiel, a contemporary of Daniel, pictured some of God’s people with their backs toward the temple of God worshiping the sun toward the east. Instead of worshiping the Creator of the sun, they worshiped the sun instead.

In Revelation 17, John describes a time when the principles of Babylon, including sun worship, would enter the Christian church during an age of compromise. The casual conversion of Constantine, in the early part of the fourth century, caused great joy in the Roman Empire. Constantine had a strong affinity for sun worship. Edward Gibbon, the

renowned historian, writes, “The Sun was universally celebrated as the invincible guide and protector of Constantine.” — The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (London: J. O. Robinson & Co, Ltd., 1830), p. 12. In A.D. 321, Constantine also passed the first “Sunday law.” This edict stated, “On the venerable day of the Sun let the Magistrates and the people residing in the cities rest, and let all workshops be closed.” — Edict of Constantine, A.D. 321. This was not a law enforcing Sunday observance for all of Constantine’s subjects, but it did strengthen the observance of Sunday in the minds of the Roman population.

It was in succeeding decades that emperors and popes continued through state decrees and church councils to establish Sunday as the singular day of worship, which it remains today, as well, for the majority of Christians. What a powerful example of the hard truth that just because the majority of people believe in something, or practice it, doesn’t make it right.

Look around at how prevalent Sunday worship is in Christian churches. What should this fact teach us about how pervasive Satan’s deceptions are? Again, as with the state of the dead, what is our only safeguard?

A Call to Faithfulness

The message of the second angel in Revelation 14 is “Babylon is fallen, is fallen.” In Revelation 17, the woman identified as spiritual Babylon, dressed in purple and scarlet, rides upon a scarlet-colored beast, passes around her wine cup, and gets the world drunk with error. Church and state unite. Falsehood prevails. Demons work their miracles to deceive. The world catapults into its final conflict.

At the same time, the people of God are maligned, ridiculed, oppressed, and persecuted, but in Christ and through the power of His Holy Spirit, they are steadfast in their commitment. All the powers of hell and the forces of evil cannot break their loyalty to Christ. They are secure in Him. He is their “refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Ps. 46:1).

God is calling an end-time people back to faithfulness to His Word. Jesus prayed, “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your Word is truth” (John 17:17, NKJV). The truth of God’s Word, not human opinion or tradition, is the North Star to guide us in this critical hour of earth’s history.

Here is a remarkable statement by Dr. Edward T. Hiscox, the author of the Standard Manual for Baptist Churches. In 1893, he addressed a group of hundreds of Baptist ministers and shocked them as he explained how Sunday came into the Christian church.

“What a pity that it [Sunday] comes branded with the mark of paganism, and christened with the name of the sun god, then adopted and sanctioned by the papal apostasy, and bequeathed as a sacred legacy to Protestantism!” — Edward Hiscox, before a New York ministers’ conference, Nov. 13, 1893.

Read Ezekiel 20:1-20. What is the gist of Ezekiel’s message here, and how does the Sabbath fit in with this call to faithfulness?

Ezekiel 20 is an earnest appeal for Israel to forsake pagan practices and to worship the Creator instead of their false gods, in this case the “idols of Egypt.” In the message of the three angels, God is making a similar appeal to “worship the Creator,” for “Babylon is

fallen.” And, too, as we know, the Sabbath, and faithfulness to it, will play a big role in final events.

What lessons can we take away for ourselves from what has been written in Ezekiel 20:1-20? (See also 1 Cor. 10:11.)

Grace for Obedience

The woman in scarlet and purple, riding on the scarlet covered beast, has passed around her wine cup, and the world is drunk with Babylon’s false doctrines. Speaking of the “wine of Babylon,” Ellen G. White makes this clear comment: “What is that wine? Her false doctrines. She has given to the world a false Sabbath instead of the Sabbath of the fourth commandment, and has repeated the falsehood that Satan first told to Eve in Eden, — the natural immortality of the soul.” — Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, Dec. 6, 1892. These erroneous teachings have deceived millions. As a result, God is giving His people, still entrenched in error, a final last-day appeal.

Read Revelation 18:4, 5. What is God’s appeal to multitudes still in fallen religious organizations?

As we already have seen (but worth repeating), many of God’s people are in religious organizations that have compromised biblical teachings. They do not understand the truths of Scripture. God’s loving appeal is straightforward: “Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues” (Rev. 18:4, NKJV).

Read 1 John 3:4 and compare it to Romans 14:23. How does the Bible define sin? How do these Bible passages harmonize?

Sin is the transgression or the breaking of God’s law. The only way anybody can obey the law is through faith in the power of the living Christ. We are weak, frail, faltering, sinful human beings. By faith when we accept Christ, His grace atones for our past and empowers our present. He gives us “grace and apostleship for obedience” (Rom. 1:5, NKJV). Heaven’s appeal to His people in churches that do not respect and obey the law of God is to step out by faith. His appeal to Adventists in Sabbath keeping congregations is to forsake all self-centered, human attempts at obedience and live godly lives by faith in the grace of Christ, which delivers us from sin’s condemnation and sin’s domination. And just as Israel’s faithfulness to the law (Deut. 4:6) would have been a powerful witness to the world, our faithfulness, too, can be a powerful witness and help guide people out of Babylon.

Further Thought:

“‘Babylon the great’ in the book of Revelation designates in a special sense, the united apostate religions at the close of time. ... ‘Babylon the great’ is the name by which Inspiration refers to the great threefold religious union of the papacy, apostate Protestantism, and spiritism. ... The term ‘Babylon’ refers to the organizations themselves and to their leaders, not so much to the members as such. The latter are referred to as ‘many waters.’ (Rev. 17:1, 15).” — The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 7, pp. 851, 852.

“Through the two great errors, the immortality of the soul and Sunday sacredness, Satan will bring the people under his deceptions. While the former lays the foundation of spiritualism, the latter creates a bond of sympathy with Rome.” — Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 588.

In the Old Testament, the spirits of the dead played a major part in Babylonian religion. The Babylonians had a strong belief in the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. They believed at death the soul entered the spirit world. The concept of the immortal soul is foreign to the teachings of Scripture. The Jewish Encyclopedia clearly identifies the origin of the false idea of the immortality of the soul. "The belief that the soul continues its existence after the dissolution of the body is ... nowhere expressly taught in Holy Scripture. ... The belief in the immortality of the soul came to the Jews from contact with Greek thought and chiefly through the philosophy of Plato, its principal exponent, who was led to it through Orphic and Eleusinian mysteries in which Babylonian and Egyptian views were strangely blended." — Kaufmann Kohler, The Jewish Encyclopedia, "Immortality of the Soul," (1906).