

A Prophetic Deception

Lesson 1

Israel and Christ's Return

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SATAN, the master deceiver, is especially adept at leading human beings to misapply Scripture. He used this technique at Christ's first advent. Old Testament prophecy was misapplied, many of God's people were deceived, and the Son of God was rejected by the majority. How did this occur? Many were expecting the appearance of the Messiah. However, "they interpreted prophecy in accordance with their selfish desires" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 30). They expected Him to set up a worldly kingdom and deliver them from their enemies. Jesus of Nazareth did not follow their pattern, so they rejected Him as the Messiah. Satan is perfectly capable of following a similar plan today.

Many Christians are now looking for the soon return of Christ, but as in the days of the first advent many of them are expecting Him to come in the wrong way. Thus the way is being prepared for them to accept a false coming.

Faulty Application of Scripture

Satan is not only bringing about a false spiritual awakening (described in *The Great Controversy*, p. 464), he is also employing a system of false prophetic interpretation, just as he did 2,000 years ago. This false system in interpretation, called Futurism, undermines the three angels' messages. It was developed by the Jesuit Ribera in 1591 in order to counteract the Reformation teaching that the beast and antichrist powers are the Papacy. (See L. E. Froom, *Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, vol. 2, p. 484.) Today a large proportion of the Protestant world has "wondered after the beast" (Rev. 13:3) by following this false system of interpretation.

The first angel's message includes the teaching that probation for the Jewish nation as God's covenant people expired in A.D. 34, at the close of the seventy prophetic weeks of Daniel 9. From that date forward the Christian church (spiritual Israel) became heirs of the Old Testament promises given to Israel (see Gal. 3:29).

Futurism denies this, teaching that the Old Testament prophecies will be fulfilled to the literal Jewish nation at the end of time. The Scofield Reference Bible (notes on Revelation 7, page 1337) says: [The great tribulation] involves the people of God [meaning literal Jews] who will have returned to Palestine in unbelief. Its duration is three and a half years, or the last half of the seventieth week of Daniel (Dan. 9:24-27, note; Rev. 11:2, 3). The elements of the tribulation are: (1) The cruel reign of the "beast out of the sea" (Rev. 13:1), who, at the beginning of the three and a half years, will break his covenant with the Jews (by virtue of which they will have re-established the temple worship, Dan. 9:27), and show himself in the temple, demanding that he be worshipped as God (Mt. 24:15; 2 Thes. 2:4).

The Establishment of the State of Israel

During the past few decades this deception has come to the front. On May 14, 1948, Israel was re-established as a nation in Palestine. This may have been an important step in the last great deception, which will culminate in the appearance of Satan impersonating Christ. In 1669, Increase Mather wrote a book entitled, *The Mystery of Israel's Salvation*. In this book he developed many of the Old Testament prophecies, applying them to the restoration of the Jews in Palestine.

Today the popular book, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, by Hal Lindsey, continues to advance the deception. "To be specific about Israel's great significance as a sign of the time, there are three things that were to happen. First, the Jewish nation would be reborn in the land of Palestine. Secondly, the Jews would repossess old Jerusalem and the sacred sites. Thirdly, they would rebuild their ancient temple of worship upon its historic site".—Pages 50, 51.

Notice that two of the three events listed have happened! On pages 53, 54, after quoting the parable of the fig tree (Matt. 24:32, 33), the author continues:

"But the most important sign in Matthew has to be the restoration of the Jews to the land in the rebirth of Israel. . . . When the Jewish people, after nearly 2,000 years of exile, under relentless persecution, became a nation on 14 May 1948 the 'fig tree' put forth its first leaves.

"Jesus said that this would indicate that He was 'at the door,' ready to return. Then He said, 'Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place' (Matt. 24:34, N.A.S.B.).

"What generation? Obviously, in con text, the generation that would see the signs—chief among them the rebirth of Israel. A generation in the Bible is something like forty years. If this is a correct deduction, then within forty years or so of 1948, all these things could take place. Many scholars who have studied Bible prophecy all their lives believe that this is so."

Lindsey goes on to misapply Zechariah 12-14 to the time of the second coming of Christ. He points to Zechariah 12:10 as applying to "the personal revelation of Jesus Christ as Messiah to a remnant of Jews in Jerusalem" (page 54). He then states:

"There remains but one more event to completely set the stage for Israel's part in the last great act of her historical drama. This is to rebuild the ancient Temple of worship upon its old site".—Pages 55, 56.

A Masterful Deception

What if the Temple were to be rebuilt? What a masterful misapplication of Scripture is here evident! By blinding Christianity to the fact that Old Testament prophecies no longer apply to the literal Jews, which is clearly pointed out in the first angel's message (especially as spelled out in Dan. 9:24-27), Satan has prepared the way to make his appearance as Christ. And what better place to make his initial appearance than in Jerusalem, where many Christians are looking for Him to come? Notice what the servant of the Lord has said:

As the crowning act in the great drama of deception, Satan himself will personate Christ. The church has long professed to look to the Saviour's advent as the con summation of her hopes. Now the great deceiver will make it appear that Christ has come. In different parts of the earth, Satan will manifest himself among men as a majestic being of dazzling brightness, resembling the description of the Son of God given by John in the Revelation. . . . This is the strong, almost overmastering delusion. — *The Great Controversy*, p. 624.

The times we live in demand our special attention. Are our people prepared to withstand this masterful deception?

Only those who have been diligent students of the scriptures and who have received the love of the truth will be shielded from the powerful delusion that takes the world captive. . . . Are the people of God now so firmly established upon His word that they would not yield to the evidence of their senses? —*Ibid.*, p. 625.

We must not only prepare our people but we must warn the world of this great deception by clearly heralding the truth of the second coming of Jesus. We must proclaim the three angels' messages loud and clear.