



August 18, 2023

Have You Ever Been Deceived by Someone?

Warm hellos once again friends, brethren, fellow laborers, spiritual family, and scattered children of God from here on the Gulf Coast. My wife and I pray and hope this finds you doing well, and that again your week has been blessed.

Reflecting back to 2018, my wife and I were in Colombia to oversee a church youth camp. When arriving in San Gil at the bus station, we had once again the experience of haggling for a cab to take us to the hotel/monastery. I don't mind "bargaining" but for some reason it was just never easy in San Gil. We loaded up our bags, and the three of us into the taxi, and then we asked "what is the price again?" The driver elevated the price and said, basically "it's one half again as much as the regulated fair". We had a few words back and forth, and then I said, "Let us out, we'll take another cab - we don't trust you". I felt he had an attitude from the very beginning, and so we found another driver. The new driver said, "oh no, that other driver was trying to deceive you and charge you more! I'm sorry, it is only the original amount - here is the fee sheet we must all use!" We tipped this driver well upon arrival at the monastery, and learned from the experience once again.

Have you ever been deceived by someone? I would guess we have all been victims of deception to one degree or another.

Have you ever received an e-mail claiming you have won some huge amount of money in a lottery or from someone claiming you are able to receive a large sum of money from a wealthy person who was deceased?

They want you to provide some personal ID or maybe bank account numbers. Of course it is a scam trying to steal your Social Security number or other information to use in taking advantage of you, fleecing you, and perhaps even stealing your identity.

We are all very familiar with or have likely heard the term "fake news." It is sadly a reality today. What passes for news is all too often spin and selective reporting in promoting a particular ideology or putting a particular person in a negative or positive light. I have heard news casters claiming to quote certain individuals where snippets of what was said are lifted or stitched together to create a completely wrong impression or even falsehood compared to what was really said and intended. It takes quite a bit of effort to try to get the real story and the true facts about various issues, events, and statements.

I myself unfortunately have been on the receiving end of deception over the years, and might I add it's never fun.

When it comes to Biblical or religious knowledge, there is also much deception.

Some of it is deliberate and some of it is unintentional. This knowledge is more consequential than what a particular leader or politician did or didn't say or do!

The amazing thing is that most "religious" people have been deceived about who God is and what He is doing in interacting with humanity. We know the message in the famous Olivet Prophecies, but it is still amazing to read and comprehend. The greatest prophet of all time stated, *"Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many."* (Matt 24:4-5).

The many, not the few, will come in Christ's name and claim to represent Him, but they bring a deceptive message. In turn they deceive the many, not just a few. True disciples are called out of this deception into the truth. Then Jesus goes on to comment about the events that accompany wars, persecution and tribulation. *"Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many."* (Matt 24:11).

Is it any wonder that we see so much deception in the reporting of so-called news!

During times of calamity, turmoil, or unrest, emotions run high. People can be vulnerable to sensational claims and events and happenings. Jesus went on to

warn, *"For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect."* (Matt 24:24)

The apostle Paul warned about the deception that would accompany the appearance of a charismatic individual that would take place in the time leading to *"the day of Christ"* and His *"coming,"* (2 Thess. 2:1-2) *"The coming of the lawless one 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 Thess. 2:9-10).

The miracle working power he possesses will be used to deceive and influence the masses. We must resist emotionalism, sensational claims, and assertions, and search and know God's word to rebut deceptive claims.

The appearance of miracles and amazing appearances are very influential. The awesome brilliant *Leonid Meteor Shower* that took place on Nov. 12-13, 1833 was believed by many to presage the imminent return of Christ.

This and other events were later accompanied by erroneous predictions by William Miller who claimed that Christ would return in 1843 and then revised to 1844. Many followers sold their possessions and waited for the "end of the world." When this turned out to be wrong, many of Miller's followers were bitterly disillusioned. This was termed "the Great Disappointment." Others have set dates since then and have shown to be in error.

Even today some supposedly "true ministers of Christ" set specific dates, and they have their following. Some seem to claim to have a specialty or gift of understanding prophecy, preaching it, and they too have a large following.

Christ Himself said, *"But of that day and hour no one knows, no, not the angels of Heaven, but only My Father."* (Matt. 24:36) Also, *"Therefore you also be ready, for in that hour you think not, the Son of man comes."* (Matt. 24:44).

He also informed His disciples, *"So you, likewise, when you see all these things, shall know that it is near, at the doors."* (Matt. 24:33)

There is a package of events that must take place *before* Christ returns. We have to be careful not to jump the gun or be deceived by date-setters or prophecy buffs or preachers. We must know what Christ predicted and vet stories, claims, and assertions, and then compare them with what God's Word actually says. We must have our priorities properly determined and in place.

We are to seek first the kingdom of God. That involves our focus, how we live, and our relationship with Him and others. Let us all be aware of deception, and truly be seeking the truth in our daily lives.

Arms up friends! Our sincere prayers and thoughts are with you daily. Thanks in advance for your heartfelt prayers for us.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Hoefker', with a stylized flourish at the end.

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