

LIFE FAITH FUSION DEVOTIONAL

Antichrist and Deception

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SCRIPTURE STUDY


Matthew 24:3-5
 Genesis 3:1-6
 Matthew 25:24
 James 1:13-15
 Romans 1:18-32
 1 Samuel 15:20-23
 2 John 7
 1 John 1:20-23
 Jude 20-25

DIGGING DEEPER

In Leviticus 19:11, Moses gave us the commandment to not lie or deceive one another. *kachash*, the Hebrew verb means to be untrue, in word (to lie, feign, disown) or deed (to disappoint, fail, cringe). We must not just speak truly, we must live truly.

PRAYER FOCUS

Dear Jesus,
 "Help me to live and speak the truth, and identify deception when Satan tries to steer me off course. Help me to abide in Your Word." Amen



know your
enemy

IT ALL BEGAN WITH A GARDEN SNAKE

Jesus sternly warned his disciples in Matthew 24 (often called the Olivet Discourse) that one of the prominent signs of the last days on the earth will be the rise of the "deceiver," the antichrist. Jesus also warns that there will be many antichrists near the end of the age who will lead gullible followers astray: (Matthew 24:5). He warns that these false messiahs will actually come in His name. The reason deceivers are so insidious is that they appear so innocent, even spiritual, at first glance.

"As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. Matthew 24:3-5 NIV

Deception of mankind will not simply occur at some future date in time. Satan has been about the work of misleading mankind since the dawn of history: He did not need an elaborate plan to plunge mankind into darkness-one little white lie would do:

"Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your

eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it.” Genesis 3:1-6 NIV

Deception began when Eve listened to a voice other than God’s. Satan began by questioning God’s command: “Did God say?” Eve quoted the Lord’s command but added her own slant to God’s words. God never told Eve she couldn’t touch the tree. Her perception of God was that He was a hard taskmaster who wanted to deny her the pleasure of the forbidden fruit. Jesus reiterated this harsh view of God in his parable of the talents in Matthew 25. The one talent man called the master a “hard man” in Matthew 25:24. Satan often ensnares the believer by distorting his or her view of God. Jehovah was no longer seen by Eve as a beneficent Father who longed to commune with her in the cool of the evening. God, according to the wily snake, did not have her best interests at heart. He was, instead, a demanding oppressor who denied her wishes. Satan further exploited Eve’s disenchantment with her Creator by reinventing the truth. He promised there would be no repercussions for her disobedience. In fact, she would become godlike by acting on her own volition and grasping for intellectual superiority and self-sufficiency.

Eve was further enticed as she gazed upon the forbidden fruit. In verse six, Eve saw that the fruit was pleasing to look at, good for food, and desirable for gaining wisdom. James, in his New Testament letter, describes this devolution into delusion:

“When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.” James 1:13-15 NIV

God is not our adversary. He is our advocate. We are our own worst enemy when we choose to grasp for forbidden fruit—no matter what form it takes.

- Was there ever a time in your life when you thought you were following God’s plan, but you seemed to have taken a wrong turn? What were the circumstances? Did you have any input from wise counselors or concerned friends? What was the result? What would you have done differently with hindsight?
- How do you view God as your father? Do you see Him as inspecting, distant or disappointed? Read Psalm 139. What do you learn about God’s love for you? What do you learn about His desire to be involved in your life?
- Have you ever felt pressure to compromise your values? From where did the pressure come? How did you navigate that experience?

WHY ARE WE SO GULLIBLE?

Paralogizomai—to beguile, to delude, to misreckon—all are synonyms for the Greek word that is used in this passage in the book of James. This work of trickery implies that disobedience can be attractive, and that false conclusions are easily drawn. The masterful author, C.S. Lewis, penned a clever little book entitled *The Screwtape Letters* in which an experienced demon named Screwtape coached Wormwood, his protégé, on how to deceive witless men:

“My dear Wormwood, I wonder you should ask me whether it is essential to keep the patient (Christian) in ignorance of your own existence. That question, at least for the present phase of the struggle, has been answered for us by the High Command (Satan). Our policy, for the moment, is to *conceal ourselves*.” P.32

If deception were obvious, it would not be deception. Paul, in the first chapter of his letter to the Romans, teaches us that we become deceived when we reject the light (truth) that God gives us and choose to disobey. We soon rationalize our sinful behavior, and our consciences become “seared.” Sin muddies up our ability to see God and to hear His truth. Such rebellion begins a devolution into human depravity.

“The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be *wise*, they became *fools* and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God **gave them over** in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They **exchanged the truth of God for a lie**, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised.” Romans 1:18-26 NIV

The next seven verses describe the **descent** to depravity:

“Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them. Romans 1:28-32 NIV

The portrait of God-rejecters in the first chapter of Romans is almost exactly repeated in the book of Jude as the writer describes the rebellious world-citizens in the last days.

Deception often begins with a single step away from God’s plan. King Saul could not wait for the prophet Samuel to offer a sacrifice before his troops went into battle. In his impatience, the king usurped the role of the priest and offered his own sacrifice to insure Israel’s victory. In 1 Samuel 15:22-23, Samuel reveals one of the contributing factors to deception. He compares rebellion to witchcraft, and stubbornness to idolatry. What was so wrong with Saul’s sacrifice? The king knowingly disobeyed Samuel’s command. When we choose to sin, we become vulnerable to Satan’s schemes (witchcraft). When we stubbornly refuse God’s Word, we become idolaters and substitute our own knowledge for God’s. Saul lost his kingdom over his impatient sacrifice. Rebellion takes us out of God’s umbrella of protection and into the uncharted waters of delusion and oppression.

- Do you find that you stay “on track” with your life if you make decisions quietly and patiently? What are some of the most memorable times God has spoken to you?
- Have you ever experienced the Holy Spirit’s warning in your spirit that something was not quite right? Were your impressions correct? Why do you suppose you felt that caution?
- How has your Bible study helped you to avoid some of Satan’s pitfalls? List three examples.

HOW WILL THE ANTI-CHRIST DECEIVE?

The antichrist will promise the same things Christ does: peace and salvation. He will appear on the scene when the world is teetering on the verge of destruction with a plan for peace and protection. In 2 John verse 7, John writes:

“Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist.” 2 John 7 NIV

John warns us in his gospel, his letters, and his apocalyptic vision in Revelation that one of the key identifiers of an anti-christ is his view of Jesus. If he teaches that Jesus is anything other than 100% God and 100% man, that He came to earth to atone for man’s sin, that He rose from the dead, and that He reigns in heaven, his character is suspect.

In 1 John 1:20-23, John reassures us that the Holy Spirit will protect us from his wiles.

“But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth. Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist—he denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.” NIV

When we recognize that Eve, even in her sinless state, could be deceived, we might fear that we could not escape such insidious schemes of Satan. But we have the indwelling Holy Spirit who guides us into all truth. Christ, in us, can spot a counterfeit a mile away. God has given us His Word to make us aware of His grand design, so we do not have to remain ignorant and fearful. We can face the future with confidence! Jude painted a bleak picture of the last days, but ended his book with wise counsel and a glorious, triumphant prayer:

“But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in God’s love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life. Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh. To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen. Jude 20-25 NIV

- Can you think of any false religion that denies Christ’s deity and humanity? Who are some of the self-proclaimed messiahs that have lived in our century? What did they promise?
- What are some tangible ways you have seen the Holy Spirit guide you? Do you feel confident that God will faithfully direct your steps? Why or why not?
- Jude, in his letter, listed six things that we are to do in the endtimes. These are essentials for victorious Christian faith. What does he exhort us to do? What would that look like in your life?

APPLYING THE SCRIPTURES

Read the following and record your observations on the back of this sheet:

Matthew 24:3-5; Genesis 3:1-6; Matthew 25:24; James 1:13-15; Romans 1:18-32; 1 Samuel 15:20-23; 2 John 7; 1 John 1:20-23; Jude 20-25