

**THE MYSTERY OF GOD
SHALL BE FINISHED**

**THE
LAODICEA
CHURCH AGE**

END TIME DECEPTION

All deceivableness of unrighteousness

A STUDY IN THE RESTORATION OF THE CHURCH

END-TIME DECEPTION

All Deceivableness of Unrighteousness

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PREFACE

One of the greatest needs of Christians in our day is the discerning of spirits (1 Cor 12.10), especially in its immediate context, that of discerning the inspiration spirit of supernatural manifestations.

We live in a day of climaxes and superlatives. As we approach the end of the age, many forces and spirits at work throughout history will reach their fullest expression. For example, there will be:

- **affliction** such as was not from the beginning of the creation (Mk 13.19).
- a great **earthquake** such as was not since men were upon the earth (Rev 16.18).

But my concern in this booklet is with another realm: end time **delusion**.

The devil was a liar from the beginning: "*When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it*" (Jn 8.44). Yet the quantity and quality of his deceit are not identical in every period of history.

At the end time it will be more powerful than at any time before or after, both in depth and in effect. All the deceivableness that unrighteousness is capable of will be unleashed (2 Th 2.10).

But most worrying of all is **who** is affected.

It will affect more people than ever before (Rev 13.14). It is no surprise that this will include "*them that perish*", and those "*who believed not the Truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness*" (2 Th 2.10, 12). But it **is** a surprise that the Bible also says it will include a sobering proportion of the professing Church.

But it should not be such a surprise if we compare the spiritual condition of the professing Church before the **Second** Coming with that of Israel, the professing people of God at the time of the **first** coming:

- Just as the Bible foretold that before the first coming **Israel** would be blinded (Jn 12.37-40), it also says that before the Second Coming the end-time Laodicean **Church** would be blind (Rev 3.17).
- Just as only a remnant of **Israel** after the flesh perceived and received the Word at the end of the Jewish dispensation, so at the end of the Church/Gentile age shall it be with the professing **Church**. Only a remnant will receive the Word in their day. The rest shall be taken in by the end-time deception.

No wonder then that the counsel of Christ to Laodicea, the prophetic preview of the last Church age, is to, "*anoint thine eyes with eyesalve that thou mayest see*" (Rev 3.18). We do well to pay solemn heed to the divine counsel.

Let us now see how the Bible foretells the depth and effects of delusion at the end of this age. May this equip the true believer to tear the mask from the falseness of much that comes in Christ's Name in our day, but is in fact antichrist.

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1. DECEPTION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT: FALSE PROPHETS & LYING WONDERS

The original purpose of the father of lies

One of the keys to a proper understanding of any matter in the Bible is to go back to the beginning, to the time it is first found. Using this key, we find that from the very beginning the evil one was a liar, and also the beginner of lies.

the devil ... from the beginning ... abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it (Jn 8.44).

His very first recorded words confirm this. And they also reveal his strategy, the main focus of his lies, the Word of God.

- **He first questioned what God had said:** *the serpent ... said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden (Gen 3.1)?*
- **He then denied what God had said:** *the woman said ... of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said ... Ye shall not surely die (Gen 3.2-4).*

What was the effect of his words? Deception. Eve did not just *heed* his words. Unlike Adam, she *was deceived* by them.

- *the serpent **beguiled** Eve through his subtlety (2 Cor 11.3).*
- *Adam was not deceived, but the woman **being deceived** was in the transgression (1 Tim 2.14).*

And so it has been ever since, both in the Old Testament, the New, and throughout Church history.

But the deception will be especially strong at the time of the end.

We have seen the overall strategy of the father of lies, to get people to disbelieve, disregard or disobey the Word. Let us now look at the tactics.

He is a master of deception. One way he does this is by false prophecy and lying wonders, imitating the real thing. There are two tactics.

- **Direct opposition**, i.e. prophesying openly **in the name of a false god**, under an evil spiritual inspiration, sometimes accompanied by real wonders professedly vindicating the words spoken.
- **Imitation**, i.e. professing to speak **in the name of the Lord**, claiming to bring His word, whether or not accompanied by signs and wonders.

So, as a background to our own day, let us look at examples of such words and works in earlier times. This will provide a better understanding of, and assist discernment of, the great end time deception. This will sum up all earlier manifestations of false prophecy and lying wonders in the greatest deception of all history.

The time of Moses

God has spoken by His holy prophets since the world began (Lk 1.70; Acts 3.21). But the devil always imitates what God does.

There were false prophets in Moses' day. Some spoke in the name of other gods, some in the name of the Lord.

*But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word **in my name**, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak **in the name of other gods**, even that prophet shall die (Dt 18.20).*

How were prophecies to be tested?

In some cases by whether or not they came to pass:

*when a prophet speaketh **in the name of the LORD**, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him (Dt 18.22).*

The test: Wonders or the Word?

Others could only be tested by their content. Even if accompanied by a sign or wonder that actually happened, apparently confirming their authenticity, false utterances were to be ignored.

*If there arise among you a prophet ... and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, **and the sign or wonder come to pass**, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods ... Thou shalt not hearken... (Dt 13.1-3).*

How is it possible for false prophets to work real wonders? Because it is a divine test. Will we follow wonders or the Word?

for the Lord your God proveth you to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul (Dt 13.1-3).

The devil and his agents can work real wonders. In the earliest times, for example, he brought down fire from heaven, burning up Job's sheep and servants (Job 1.16). This was no natural fire. The extensive damage shows it was far more than just lightning. It was real fire imitating a divine power later manifested by Elijah (1 K 18.36-38; 2 K 1.10, 12). (Compare the acts of the end time false prophet (Rev 13.13).)

Being real does not mean being right.

The Egyptian magicians

An astounding example of the reality of such lying wonders is the Egyptian magicians. This incident is important for these men foreshadow the manner in which the true teaching of the Word will be resisted in the last times (2 Tim 3.8-9).

They performed real, supernatural miracles, turning real rods into real snakes, real water into real blood and bringing up real frogs. These were no fairground sleight-of-hand tricks! They were astonishing.

- *the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments. For they cast down every man his rod, and they became serpents (Ex 7.11-12).*
- *he lifted up the rod, and smote the waters ... and all the waters that were in the*

river were turned to blood ... And the magicians of Egypt did so with their enchantments (Ex 7.20-22).

- *Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt; and the frogs came up, and covered the land of Egypt. And the magicians did so with their enchantments, and brought up frogs upon the land of Egypt (Ex 8.6-7).*

This is what we may expect in our day. The wonderful works of those who resist the Truth will be real. But, as with the magicians (Ex 7.12; 8.18-19; 9.11), their folly will be made manifest (2 Tim 3.9).

Balaam

Balaam was another false prophet met by Moses. As with the magicians, the importance of an understanding of this man is also clear from the New Testament references (2 P 2.15; Ju 11; Rev 2.14).

To get the full benefit of this incident, it is necessary to look at all references both to Balaam and to Baalpeor, but the basic story is found in Numbers 22 to 25.

Israel was on the final stage of her march to the Promised Land, camped on the east bank of the Jordan opposite Jericho.

Moab and Midian, fearing a fate similar to that of the Amorite tribes if they opposed Israel militarily, devised a more “spiritual” strategy. They sought to hire the services of a famed prophet, Balaam, to curse Israel through divination and enchantment.

Balaam was a total hypocrite. He went through all the fundamentally correct motions.

- Before accepting the invitation, he piously claimed he would first seek ***the Lord*** (NB not a false god), for he could only do what He said (Nu 22.8, 18).
- After accepting, on arrival, he professed to the Moabite king, Balak, that he could only speak what ***the Lord*** gave him (Nu 22.38; 23.3, 12, 26; 24.13-14).
- Before going to seek a word ***from the Lord***, Balaam instructed that 7 altars be built and 7 bullocks and 7 rams be offered (Nu 23.1, 14, 29).

He clearly knew the correct way to approach the Lord. This was how burnt offerings were to be offered by Job (Job 42.8) and on the 7 days of the Passover feast in the temple of Ezekiel (Ezk 4.23). It was also how they were offered at the bringing of the Ark to Jerusalem (1 Chr 15.21) and at Hezekiah's rededication of the temple (2 Chr 29.21).

Despite his hypocritical piety, the Lord overruled and frustrated his every attempt to curse by turning them into blessings.

Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel (Nu 23.23).

But the heart of Balaam, like that of so many false prophets, was not on the Lord or His Word. It was set on money. He coveted *the wages of unrighteousness* (2 P 2.15) (Cp Ju 11), the reward he would gain if he cursed Israel. So he devised another plan, the same one used many years later to ensnare the church of Pergamos.

*thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to **cast a stumblingblock** before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication (Rev 2.14).*

The word “stumblingblock” originally described the stick in a trap on which the bait is placed, and which springs up and shuts the trap when touched. Then it came to mean any entanglement, obstacle or snare to trap or make fall. Hence one translator says Balaam “taught Balak to *set a trap* for the children of Israel”.

The similar reference to a trap is found in another reference to Balaam.

*these (i.e. false prophets) ... **beguiling** unstable souls.... have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray following the way of Balaam (2 P 2.12-15).*

“Beguiling” means literally, “to place a bait for, to set a trap for, entice, lure”. A full frontal assault would be too obvious. But those not firmly grounded in the Word would more easily be led astray and ensnared by a different approach.

What approach? What was the doctrine of Balaam? What was the nature of the trap?

In his unwilling blessings, Balaam had described Israel as dwelling alone, not reckoned among the nations (Nu 23.9). She was not to mix with them but to keep separate from their abominations. But although **he** could not curse whom God had blessed, he counselled Balak to get Israel to defile their separation so that **God** would curse them.

The new tactic bore all the hallmarks of the subtle serpent of the Garden of Eden. Instead of hostility, it was the wily charm of a deceitful smile. After all, were Israel, Moab and Midian all related? Was not Midian a descendant of Abraham just like Israel (Genesis 25.1-2)? Was not Moab, the son of Lot, Abraham’s nephew?

On Balaam’s advice, the Midianite women seduced the Israelite men (Nu 25.1; 32.15-16). Even one of the Israelite princes was implicated (Nu 25.14-15). Having been lured into fornication, they were then invited to a sacred meal at the festival of one of their gods, Baal-Peor, taking part in its licentious rites and bowing down to their idols.

*they vex you with their **wiles** wherewith they have **beguiled** you in the matter of Peor (Nu 25.18).*

Israel had fallen into the trap. The serpent’s plan to curse her had succeeded. The fierce anger of the Lord did indeed come upon her.

they provoked Him to anger with their inventions: and the plague brake in on them (Ps 106.29).

Thank God there was a Phinehas, who was totally devoted to the Word, and not deceived by the seducing spirit of a false prophet (Nu 25.7-11). His devotion quenched the fury of the plague.

(See [f81e1b_83adc6d3164a47e39457ae6d65c34d58.pdf](https://www.endtimerestoration.com/files/f81e1b_83adc6d3164a47e39457ae6d65c34d58.pdf) for a fuller exposition of the doctrine of Balaam on my website www.endtimerestoration.com on Articles & Books/
The 7 Church Ages/Pergamos Church Age, pp 4-8.)

The time of the Kings

False prophets are frequently referred to in the contemporary prophetic books during the time of the kings of Israel and Judah.

Such prophets were anything but holy. They had certainly taken no Nazirite vow

of separation. They were deceived drunkards motivated by greed.

- *the priest **and the prophet** have **erred through strong drink**, they are **swallowed up of wine**, they are **out of the way through strong drink**; **they err in vision**, they stumble in judgment (Isa 28.7).*
- *Thus saith the LORD concerning the **prophets that make my people err**, that bite with their teeth, and cry, Peace; and **he that putteth not into their mouths, they even prepare war against him ... the prophets thereof divine for money**: yet will they lean upon the LORD, and say, Is not the LORD among us? none evil can come upon us (Mi 3.5-7, 11).*

These false prophets were not just carnally defiled. They were spiritually defiled. False prophecy is not just mere fleshly imagination. There is a living, spiritual inspiration at work. It is a lying spirit.

If a man walking in the spirit and falsehood do lie, saying, I will prophesy unto thee of wine and of strong drink; he shall even be the prophet of this people (Mi 2.11).

And that lying, deceiving spirit ensnares and it defiles those it touches.

the prophet is a snare of a fowler in all his ways (Ho 9.8).

The old prophet

An unusual incident during this period is found in 1 Kings 13. It is a solemn lesson to heed the original word spoken by the Lord, irrespective of who says otherwise.

After the death of Solomon, the northern tribes broke away from Judah. Fearing divided loyalties if the people continued going to Jerusalem to worship, Jeroboam built an alternative altar in Bethel, in direct contradiction of the Law of Moses.

As he was inaugurating his new altar, a young prophet boldly cried out a remarkably precise word from the Lord.

O altar, altar, thus saith the Lord; Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee ... And he gave a sign ... saying ... Behold the altar shall be rent, and the ashes that are upon it shall be poured out (1 K 13.2-3).

When the angry king stretched out his hand for him to be arrested, it withered, and the altar split and the ashes poured out. The shaken king asked the prophet to intercede, and his hand was restored.

The young prophet now faced a test as to whether he would stay strictly with the original word he received from the Lord. The humbled king asked him to come back for refreshments and a financial reward. Unlike Balaam, or many modern religious figures, the young man's heart was on the original word, not the reward. He was a true prophet.

If thou wilt give me half thine house, I will not go with thee ... For so it was charged me by the word of the Lord, Eat no bread, nor drink water ... (1 K 13.8-9).

He had passed his first test.

But there was a second test. This was far more deceptive. Sadly, this time he failed. Whilst the financial allurements failed to divert him from his commitment to

his original guidance, the seductive wooing of a false prophet succeeded.

There was an old prophet in Bethel who, when he heard what had happened, rode after the young prophet, and invited him back for refreshments. The young man repeated what he said to the king, but the old prophet replied,

*I am a prophet also as thou art; and an angel spake unto me by the word of the LORD, saying, Bring him back with thee into thine house, that he may eat bread and drink water. **But he lied unto him** (1 K 13.11, 18).*

The combination of an older (and presumably more experienced) man, a professed prophetic gift, and a reference to an angelic visitation, confused the young man. He yielded. It had been better to heed the wisdom of Paul.

*Though we, **or an angel from heaven**, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed (Gal 1.8).*

The consequences were dire.

as they sat at the table ... **the word of the LORD came unto the prophet that brought him back**: and he cried unto the man of God ... Thus saith the Lord, Forasmuch as thou has disobeyed the mouth of the Lord ... thy carcase shall not come unto the sepulchre of thy fathers (1 K 13.20-23).

How very odd! The incident provokes many questions. Was he always a false prophet, but used on this occasion to speak truth, like Balaam (Nu 23.5) or Caiaphas (Jn 11.49-51)? Or was he once a true prophet who went astray?

But the young prophet did not need to know all the answers. All he had to do was obey his original instructions, irrespective of old prophets claiming divine revelations and angelic visitations.

The outcome was sombre. A lion slew him on the road home. As the old prophet said on hearing the news,

the man ... was disobedient unto the word of the LORD: therefore the LORD hath delivered him unto the lion, which hath torn him, and slain him, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake unto him (1 K 13.26).

The old prophet brought the carcase back to the city to mourn and to bury him. He also gave instructions that he himself should be buried with him, for the prophecy against the altar would surely come to pass (1 K 13.29-32). How very, very odd!

Stay with the original!

Micaiah & the 400 prophets of the Lord

Why are false prophets permitted? There is a divine purpose. We saw in Deuteronomy 13.3 how the Lord permits lying wonders to test whether people will stay true to His Word. But sometimes they wilfully refuse to heed it.

Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits (Isa 30.10).

If they refuse, the Lord Himself blinds false prophets so as to blind the rebellious.

An excellent illustration of such judicial blinding is Ahab and his 400 so called prophets of the Lord (1 K 22; 2 Chr 18).

Ahab, king of Israel, wanted to recover from Syria his lost territory, Ramoth in Gilead. He sought to persuade the king of Judah, Jehoshaphat, to join him.

It was a totally unnatural union. Ahab "*did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all... before him*" (1 K 16.33), whereas Jehoshaphat was the most godly king since David (2 Chr 17.3).

Yet Jehoshaphat had a strange weakness in his dealings with Ahab. He had re-established peaceful relations with Israel (1 K 22.44), and very unwisely married his son to the evil daughter of Ahab and his wicked wife, Jezebel (2 Chr 18.1).

Foolishly Jehoshaphat was persuaded to consider joining Ahab, the enemy of the Lord. How? Why? He was doubtless bewitched (cp Gal 3.1) by Ahab's spirit, the same seducing spirit by which Ahab's witch (2 K 9.22) wife stirred him up. (The Hebrew word translated "stirred" in 1 K 21.25 is the same as "persuaded" in 2 Chr 18.2.)

In seeking to allure the godly Jehoshaphat, Ahab no doubt used the same deceptively "spiritual" approach as his father the devil later when tempting Jesus. Since Jesus' defence was to quote the Word, the devil quoted the Word (Mt 4.6). Doubtless Ahab reminded Jehoshaphat, a man of the Word, that Ramoth in Gilead was a divinely-given part of the heritage of Israel. In other words, Ahab was asking for help to take possession of Israel's God-given heritage. How spiritual!

Now Jehoshaphat was a genuinely godly man. Despite Ahab's seducing spirit, he still had discernment. Before finalising his decision, Jehoshaphat wanted prophetic confirmation from the Lord. So, Ahab

*gathered the prophets together, about four hundred men, and said unto them, Shall I go against Ramothgilead to battle, or shall I forbear? And they said, Go up; for **the Lord** shall deliver it into the hand of the king* (1 K 22.6).

What a crooked brood of serpents these must have been! Jezebel had slain the prophets of the Lord, apart from those hidden by the godly Obadiah (1 K 18.13). So, why were these 400 spared, when they prophesied in the name of the Lord, not her god, Baal? Either they adjusted their utterances for financial reward, or they had been seduced like those who heeded the allurements of a later Jezebel:

thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols (Rev 2.20).

No wonder a lying spirit so easily found expression through their lips!

Ahab was taken in by the words of his 400 prophets. But Jehoshaphat was of another spirit. His discernment was protecting him. Something did not witness within. Despite the great number of prophets, and though they spoke in the name of the Lord, he was still not settled. He asked,

Is there not here a prophet of the LORD besides, that we might inquire of him (1 K 22.7)?

While waiting for Micaiah, the flood of false prophecy continued. And they were certainly convinced of their own words, despite knowing they would soon be tested. Truly, they were both deceiving and deceived.

all the prophets prophesied ... And Zedekiah ... made him horns of iron:

and he said, Thus saith the Lord, With these thou shalt thou push the Syrians, until thou have consumed them. And all the prophets prophesied so, saying, Go up to Ramothgilead, and prosper: for the LORD shall deliver it into the king's hand (1 K 22.10-12).

But Micaiah was a true prophet. Like Balaam, he said he would only say what God said. But, unlike Balaam, he meant it. Ignoring Ahab's lying professions of piety, he boldly told the Lord's plan to deceive and lead Ahab to his death.

And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the Lord, and said, I will persuade him. And the LORD said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also: go forth, and do so. Now therefore, behold, the LORD hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets (1 K 22.21-22).

The prophets spoke in the name of the Lord, not of a false god. They had royal favour and vastly outnumbered the one true voice of God. But they were liars. They were both deceiving and deceived, just as in the last times (2 Tim 3.13).

Now Jehoshaphat was being tested in this incident. He had done well in not being steamrollered into agreeing to Ahab's proposal. He revealed his true heart in first seeking the mind of the Lord, and embarrassingly asking for yet further confirmation despite the united voice of hundreds all prophesying in the name of the Lord.

But here is a strange and solemn thing. Jehoshaphat discerned there was something not right about the 400, and heard the prophetic word that the battle would be lost. Yet he still would not break his unwholesome links with Ahab and agreed to go forth to battle with him, even agreeing to Ahab's disguising himself, while he himself kept on his royal robes (1 K 22.30), thus drawing enemy attention to himself.

But Ahab's attempt to frustrate the word of the Lord failed. A bow drawn "at a venture" (1 K 22.34) slew him. The battle was lost. As for Jehoshaphat, he barely escaped with his life. Only by crying to the Lord was he saved (2 Chr 18.31). He had failed the test.

It may be that the godly benefit from divine discernment when a deceiving spirit is at work. But to avoid unnecessary suffering they must act on it. It is very unwise to disregard divine direction. The Lord once sought to slay even Moses for failing to fully keep the covenant, even though, in obedience to a divine command, he was on his way to deliver Israel (Ex 4.24-26).

Act on your discernment.

After the exile

At the end of the Jewish kingdom, there appeared a veritable flood of false prophets just as there will be at the end of the Church age. (A detailed exposition is found in Appendix 1, The Flood of False Prophets at the End of the Kingdom of Judah.)

But false prophecy did not cease with the fall of Jerusalem. Whilst Haggai and Zechariah, true prophets of the Lord, were amongst the initial returnees from the exile, the same unclean, seducing, deceiving spirit that had inspired false prophecy from the beginning was still at work.

*For the idols have spoken vanity, and **the diviners have seen a lie, and have told false dreams**; they comfort in vain (Zech 10.2).*

Such lying false prophets even went so far as to wear, *a rough garment to deceive* (Zech 13.5). (Such simple garments were worn by true prophets as a sign of their total commitment to the Lord and lack of materialistic aspirations, e.g. Elijah (2 K 1.8) and John the Baptist (Mt 11.8).)

Overcoming deception by the Spirit & the Word

Around 70 years after the first return, Nehemiah arrived with royal authority to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

Nehemiah was a man of the Word. Far more than a mere government official, he was totally devoted to bringing all things among the returned exiles into line with the Word.

- Before arriving, when at the royal palace, he wept, mourned and fasted that Israel had not kept the Word given to Moses (Neh 1.4, 7).
- On arriving, he fully supported Ezra the priest, whose proclamation of the Word was so effective that the people covenanted to walk in all the law of the LORD, so that everything was, *as it is written in the Law*.
- In accordance with the Word, Nehemiah ensured provision was made to enable the ministries of the house of God to be fulfilled (Neh 12.44-47).
- Later, on discovering this provision being neglected, he immediately rectified the situation, also taking firm measures to bring other matters into line with the Word, such as putting a stop to profaning of the sabbath and intermarriage with non-Jews (Neh 13.10-14; 15-22; 23-29).

He was also a man of the Spirit.

Although false prophets were active, these can only operate where there is a belief in and experience of true prophecy. Nehemiah's belief in prophetic ministry was alluded to by the enemies of the Jews in a letter illustrating their continual efforts to hinder his rebuilding of the wall.

And thou hast also appointed prophets to preach of thee at Jerusalem, saying, There is a king in Judah: and now shall it be reported to the king according to these words (Neh 6.7).

A very instructive example of Nehemiah's faith in and ability to discern the prophetic is found in Nehemiah 6.10-14. An attempt was made to deceive him through his faith in the prophetic ministry. A hired false prophet warned of an attempt on his life at night, inviting Nehemiah to meet with him behind the closed doors of the temple.

But Nehemiah overcame because he was a man of the Word as well as of the Spirit.

Lo, I perceived that God had not sent him, but that he pronounced this prophecy against me ... (Neh 6.12).

How did he perceive? By the Word.

A true prophecy comes from the Spirit, and the Spirit cannot contradict the Word. The Spirit and the Word are one (Jn 6.63). The Law only permitted priests to enter the temple. Nehemiah knew the Word. He was not a priest. For him to enter would be against the Word. He refused to do that even to save his life. It was a trick and a trap to discredit his testimony.

Other attempts were made by false prophets to weaken Nehemiah and his workers.

My God, think thou ... on the prophetess Noadiah, and the rest of the

prophets, that would have put me in fear (Neh 6.14).

But, they did not succeed. Nehemiah overcame false prophets and the spirit of error. He stayed true to the Word. He fulfilled his ministry and finished the work he was given to do (Neh 6.15).

So, from earliest times to the end of the Old Testament the battle against deception raged as the father of lies sought to draw the people away from the true Word of God. And, as we shall see, that battle continued in the early Church and throughout her history, and will reach its terrible climax at the time of the end. But finally it will come to an end.

*it shall come to pass in that day, saith the LORD of hosts, that ... I will cause **the prophets and the unclean spirit** to pass out of the land* (Zech 13.2, 4).

But until that day the true believer can still overcome.

How? By the Spirit and the Word.

2. DECEPTION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

So far we have looked at,

- How the serpent sought to deceive and turn people from the Word in the Old Testament by false prophets and lying wonders;
- The different ways in which the Old Testament believer was tested; and
- How Nehemiah overcame deception by the Spirit and the Word.

Let us now look at deception in the New Testament. We shall then look at,

- Deception in Church history; and
- The climax of deception at the end time.

The invasion of demonic deception

From the very beginning of the Church, the evil one stirred up great opposition.

Opposition from without

One tactic was full frontal confrontation.

The New Testament Church suffered often bitter persecution at the hands of both religious and political leaders. Although the ultimate instigator was, of course, the evil one (e.g. 1 Th 2.18; Rev 2.10), the human instigator was usually the Jews, i.e. those professing allegiance to the divinely revealed Word of God (e.g. 1 Th 2.14-16). They did this either directly by exercising their own authority where they had jurisdiction, or indirectly by stirring up the Roman political authorities elsewhere.

But the New Testament Church was founded amidst extraordinary signs and wonders (cp Acts 19.11-12). As Paul said, *my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God* (1 Cor 2.4-5). Such persecution, whether by threats, imprisonment or death, did not halt its advance. Full of the Holy Ghost, and rejoicing to be counted worthy to suffer for His Name, the early believers went everywhere speaking the Word.

The evil one needed another tactic.

Opposition from within

His second tactic was far more dangerous, and in keeping with his essential nature. Deception.

Not now a full frontal assault from without, but an infiltration from within by those who looked like the true and grew alongside the true. But they were not the true. They were of another seed.

The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: but ... his enemy ... sowed tares among the wheat ... The tares are the children of the wicked one; the enemy that sowed them is the devil (Mt 13.24-25, 38-39).

The aim was not so much to destroy the true from without, but a takeover from within. The ministers of satan transformed themselves into ministers of righteousness. All the

features of the true were counterfeited, creating a satanic alternative church. This would hate and seek to destroy the true, claiming to be herself the only true Church.

A veritable flood of demonic deception was unleashed. The spirit of error came against the Spirit of Truth and the spirit of antichrist against the Spirit of Christ.

There are many references to this invasion in the epistles. Although some speak of the future, others explicitly state that the deception was already at work.

The manner of the invasion: False brethren privily brought in

How did the invaders get in? After all, the light of the early Church was still so great that the false would often withdraw from the true, especially if these were led by godly men still walking in the traditions taught by the apostles (1 Jn 2.19).

Initially the spirit of error often had to work in secret, insidiously worming its way in by the side door, as it were. Heresies were sneaked in stealthily.

- *false brethren **unawares** (Greek = slip in on the sly, sneakily, illegally) brought in who **came in privily** (Gk = secretly, by the side door) **to spy out** (i.e. treacherously reconnoitre) our liberty (Gal 2.4).*
- *there shall be false teachers among you who **privily** shall bring in damnable heresies (2 P 2.1).*
- *there are certain men **crept in unawares** (Ju 4).*
- *of this sort are they which **creep** (Gk = stealthily slip) into houses (2 Tim 3.6).*

The nature of the invasion

Most of the Biblical terms describing the invaders come to seduce the early Church are listed below. They do not make pleasant reading!

- Children of the wicked one (Mt 13.38)
- The spirit of error (1 Jn 4.6)
- The spirit of antichrist (1 Jn 4.3)
- Antichrists (1 Jn 2.18)
- Seducing spirits (1 Tim 4.1)
- Evil men and seducers (2 Tim 3.13)
- Teachers of doctrines of devils (1 Tim 4.1)
- Liars (1 Tim 4.2; Rev 2.2)
- Deceitful workers (2 Cor 11.13)
- Evil workers (Phil 3.2)
- Of the world (1 Jn 4.5)
- Grievous wolves (Acts 20.29)
- Ravening wolves (Mt 7.15)
- Men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith and destitute of the truth (1 Tim 6.5; 2 Tim 3.8)
- Ministers of satan (2 Cor 11.15)
- False apostles (2 Cor 11.13)
- False prophets (1 Jn 4.1)
- False teachers (2 P 2.1)
- False brethren (Gal 2.4)

The following verses give an idea of the kind of people we are dealing with who, by smooth words and flattering speech, deceive the simple (Ro 16.18).

- 2 Cor 11.13,15 **deceitful** (meaning literally to allure, catch by bait) *workers ... transformed as the ministers of righteousness*
- Eph 4.14 *That we be no more ... carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait* (i.e. use wiles, cunning, trickery) **to deceive**
- 2 Tim 3.13 *evil men and seducers* (i.e. imposters) ... *deceiving and being deceived*

No wonder Jude, at the end of the New Testament, cried out to contend earnestly for the faith once and for all delivered unto the saints (Ju 3).

Let us look in more detail at some of the above terms.

Liars

The battle for Truth in the Church is not fought according to the Queensberry rules. We are not dealing with gentlemen who are sincerely wrong in their ideas and beliefs.

They are of their father the devil (Jn 8.44), blatant liars anointed by a lying, seducing spirit. Their consciences are seared, devoid of scruples and inner pangs.

- 1 Tim 4.2 **speaking lies in hypocrisy** (i.e. playacting, pretending to be what they are not), having their conscience seared with a hot iron
- Rev 2.2 *which are evil ... which say they are apostles, and are not ... liars*

Such people did not sincerely misunderstand, mistakenly believing and teaching doctrines contrary to the Truth. They were outright blatant liars and wilful deceivers.

To illustrate, in 2 Thessalonians 2.1-2, Paul refers to forged letters professing to be from him. How could this be among professed Christians? This was not an honest disagreement. Someone consciously sat down and knowingly wrote those letters. It seems impossible, yet happen it did. They were motivated by a lying spirit.

The same blatant lying spirit was also found among Jews professing faith in God.

- **Mt 28.11-14**, where their elders gave a considerable sum of money to the soldiers to lie about the disciples taking the body of Jesus.
- **Acts 6.9-11**, where they bribed men to lie about Stephen's words.

Grievous wolves & false prophets

As well as by false teaching, another way liars, seducers and deceitful workers sought to deceive the early Church was by false prophecy.

In his last meeting with the Ephesian elders, Paul warned that,

after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock (Acts 20.29).

Who were these savage, cruel wolves? The answer is found in the other New Testament reference to wolves among the flock.

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves (Mt 7.15).

So, they are false prophets. But such prophets are very deceptive. They are not obvious enemies of the Truth like the sorcerer and false prophet, Barjesus, who

openly withstood Paul (Acts 13.6-8). No, they come in sheep's clothing. They look like true believers. Their prophecies are in His name (Mt 7.22).

By the end of the New Testament many such false prophets had gone forth (1Jn 4.1).

Ravening wolves

Now, as well as ***grievous***, such false prophets are also called ***ravening*** wolves. Why? The answer is in the second meaning of the word. In addition to describing a rapacious wild animal, it also describes a rapacious human being, i.e. an extortioner or robber, one greedy for gain.

How apt! Similar terms were used to describe Old Testament false prophets.

- *Israel, thy prophets are **like the foxes in the deserts** (i.e. ravenously hungry due to scarcity of food) (Ezk 13.4).*
- *There is a conspiracy of her prophets ... like a roaring lion **ravening the prey**; they have devoured souls; they have **taken the treasure and precious things** (Ezk 22.25).*

Like Balaam, who coveted *the wages of unrighteousness* (2 P 2.15) (Cp Ju 11), the hearts of such Old Testament false prophets were on using their gift to make money.

- *Thus saith the LORD concerning the prophets that ... bite with their teeth, and cry, Peace; and **he that putteth not into their mouths, they even prepare war against him** ... (they) **divine for money** (Mi 3.5-7, 11).*
- *For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them **every one is given to covetousness** (Jer 6.13) (cp Jer 8.10).*
- *will ye pollute me among my people **for handfuls of barley and for pieces of bread**, to slay the souls that should not die, and to save the souls alive that should not live, by your lying to my people that hear your lies (Ezk 13.19)?*

And in the New Testament as well as the Old, one of the fruits of those who are false is covetousness.

- *there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies ... And **through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you** (2 P 2.1-3).*
- *the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, **they have erred from the faith**, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows (1 Tim 6.10).*

Many antichrists

One of the terms describing the invading deceivers was "antichrists". John spoke of many antichrists and of the spirit of antichrist (1 Jn 2.18; 4.3).

What exactly is an antichrist? There are two meanings, an obvious one and a less well known but far more dangerous one.

- ***Firstly***, an ***enemy or opponent of Christ***.
- ***Secondly***, someone who ***puts himself in the place of Christ***. In Greek, "anti" means, "instead of, in exchange for, as a substitute for".

This is not an either/or but a both/and situation. The spirit of antichrist ***both*** opposes and aims to do away with the true ***and*** seeks to replace it.

Whilst claiming to be part of the true Church and working to advance Christ's kingdom, the invading spirit of antichrist sought to replace the very essence of true Christianity, Jesus, the Spirit and Word. But although the terminology was the same, it was, "**another Jesus ... another spirit ... another gospel**" (2 Cor 11.4).

Using the same terminology as the true Church, a full-blown satanic alternative religious system was being created, a mirror image of the true, a fully-fledged counterfeit church in imitation of the original and claiming itself to be the true Church.

The aim was not simply to remove but to take over and replace the true with an antichrist alternative professing to be the true.

Instead of fighting against the true Church from without, the antichrists joined it, seeking to take it over from within. And they not only impersonated the "ordinary" believers in the pews (cp "*false brethren*", 2 Cor 11.26; Gal 2.4). They replicated the highest levels.

- false apostles (2 Cor 11.13)
- false prophets (1 Jn 4.1)
- false teachers (2 P 2.1)

But though having the same external trappings and terminology as the real, it was not the real. It was a perverted counterfeit. A hybrid.

In a word, it was antichrist.

The spiritual effect of the invasion

What was the effect of this invading army of liars, seducers, deceivers, wolves, false prophets and antichrists? To bewitch.

The key to understanding the effect is to recognise that this invasion is essentially spiritual. Men are simply the front. Behind them are powerful demonic forces.

- Demons (1 Tim 4.1)
- Spirits (1 Th 2.2; 1 Jn 4.1)
- Seducing spirits (1 Tim 4.1)
- The spirit of error (1 Jn 4.6)
- The spirit of antichrist (1 Jn 4.3)

The words of liars anointed with seducing spirits can be very beguiling and persuasive.

It is no coincidence that the word "seducers" in 2 Timothy 3.13 originally referred to a wizard, sorcerer or enchanter, i.e. someone who chants spells. The implication is that a seducing, lying spirit has an enchanting, spell-binding, bewitching effect.

That was certainly the case with the Galatians. Even Paul was shocked at how quickly and suddenly they had been affected (cp Gal 1.6).

- *O, foolish Galatians, who hath **bewitched** (i.e. charmed, cast a spell or evil eye upon) you, that ye should not obey the truth (Gal 3.1)?*

How were they bewitched? By enticing, persuasive words.

- *This **persuasion** cometh not of him that calleth you (Gal 5.8).*

This was no intellectual persuasion. It was spiritual. (Interestingly, the Greek word can

have the sense of tranquillising.) It was effected by the same persuasive seduction upon the wicked Ahab when persuading (2 Chr 18.2) the godly Jehoshaphat to join him in battle, despite inner reservations and the word of a true prophet. Significantly, the Hebrew word translated “persuaded” is translated “stirred” in I Kings 21.25 to describe the effect on Ahab of his wife, Jezebel. And what was she? A practitioner of witchcraft, i.e. an enchantress, someone who utters incantations or spells (2 K 9.22).

This same beguiling, persuasive spirit was at work throughout the early Church, seeking to bring others under the same spell as the Galatians.

- I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent **beguiled** Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ (2 Cor 11.3).
- *And this I say lest any man should **beguile** you **with enticing** (i.e. persuasive) **words** (Col 2.4).*
- *Let no man **beguile** you of your reward (Col 2.18).*

Let us now see how to overcome the father of lies and his agents in the New Testament.

Overcoming deception by the Spirit & the Word

As we have seen from the Old Testament, deception is used by the Lord to test total commitment to Himself and to His written and prophetic Word. The overcomer must,

- Stay faithful to the Lord, even if a false prophecy is confirmed by a true sign or wonder (Dt 13.1-3).
- Stay with the original revealed will of God, even in the face of a prophet claiming divine revelations and angelic visitations (1 K 13).
- Act on his discernment and the word of a true prophet, regardless of who or how many seek to persuade him otherwise (1 K 22).

How did the Old Testament stalwart Nehemiah overcome? By openness to the voice of the Spirit, by commitment to the Word and by heeding his discernment.

What about New Testament believers? How did they overcome the father of lies and the deception that flooded into the early Church?

Jesus said He had overcome the world and, by implication, so could His disciples.

In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world (Jn 16.33).

And overcome they did, just like Nehemiah, by the Spirit and the Word.

Although the enemy deployed a whole army of deceivers equipped with powerful weapons, the weapons of the believers were more powerful.

- *the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds (2 Cor 10.4).*
- *take ... the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (Eph 6.17).*

And it was by those very same weapons that Jesus overcame the father of lies.

How did Jesus overcome?

Firstly, in the battles with His critics, Jesus repeatedly wielded the two-edged sword of the Spirit, the Word.

- (When criticised for attending the feast of Matthew the publican) **go ye and learn what that** (i.e. Ho 6.6) **meaneth**, *I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance* (Mt 9.13).
- (When the disciples were criticised for gathering ears of corn on the sabbath) **Have ye not read** (i.e. 1 S 21.3-6) *what David did, when he was an hungred, and they that were with him ... Or have ye not read in the law* (e.g. Nu 28.9-10) *how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless? But if ye had known what this meaneth* (i.e. Ho 6.6), *I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless* (Mt 12.3, 5, 7).
- (When tempted by a lawyer about how to inherit eternal life) **What is written in the law? how readest thou?** (Lk 10.26)
- (When they took up stones to stone Him for saying He was the Son of God) **Is it not written in your law** (i.e. Ps 82.1, 6), *I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken ...* (Jn 10.34-36).
- (When questioned about divorce) **Have ye not read** (i.e. Gen 1.27; 2.24), *that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female ... and that they twain shall be one flesh* (Mt 19.4-5)?
- (When the chief priests and scribes criticised the reaction of the children on His triumphal entry into Jerusalem) **have ye never read** (i.e. Ps 8.2), *Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise* (Mt 21.16)?
- (After the parable of the wicked tenant farmers who rejected and killed the owner's son) **Did ye never read in the scriptures** (i.e. Ps 118.22-23), *The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner* (Mt 21.42)?
- (When questioned by the Sadducees about the resurrection) **Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of God? ... as touching the dead, that they rise: have ye not read in the book of Moses** (i.e. Ex 3.6), *how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living: ye therefore do greatly err* (Mk 12.24, 26-27).

Secondly, Jesus overcame the instigator of the critics, the father of lies himself, in the same way, by the Word, even when faced with lying wonders.

During the temptation in the wilderness, the evil one not only tried to outsmart Jesus verbally. He sought to overcome Him by the miraculous.

- At the first temptation, He challenged Jesus to do a miracle, *If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread* (Mt 4.3). But He declined.
- He then displayed his own miraculous power. Jesus was taken to the holy city and set on a pinnacle of the temple (v 5). How? By climbing? Or by supernatural translation like Elijah or Philip?
- Finally Jesus was taken up into a very high mountain and shown all the kingdoms of the world and their glory (v 8). How did they ascend? Did they walk, or were they translated? How could the evil one show Jesus all the kingdoms of the world? Even from a very high mountain that would be impossible in the natural. Did he give a supernatural vision?

Notice, at the first temptation, ignoring the challenge, Jesus did not use supernatural power. Instead He used the self-same weapon by which He overcame His critics, the most powerful weapon in the universe. The sword of the Spirit, the Word of God.

But he answered and said, It is written (i.e. Dt 8.3), *Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God* (v 4).

On the second occasion, as well as displaying his power, the evil one tried a more subtle approach. As with Eve, he quoted the Word of God. But, it was not in context nor in the Spirit in which it was originally given. But Jesus was not thrown. He again wielded the two-edged sword of the Word.

If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone (i.e. Ps 91.11-12). **Jesus said unto him, It is written again** (i.e. Dt 6.16), *Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God* (v 6-7).

In his final attempt, the devil tried a similar approach to that in the garden. He offered Eve something that was God's ultimate purpose for man (to be like God) but by a different means than He intended (Gen 3.5). Likewise, in the wilderness he offered Jesus the kingdoms of the world without the need to shed His redemptive blood. But despite a further supernatural display, Jesus again wielded the Word, after which the enemy withdrew.

(The devil) *saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written* (i.e. Dt 10.20), *Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve* (v 9-10).

As well as the Word, Jesus had a second mighty weapon, the Spirit. He entered the wilderness full of and led by the power of the Spirit. He returned in the power of the Spirit.

- *Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness* (Lk 4.1).
- *Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee* (Lk 4.14).

And even His words were in the Spirit (Jn 6.63) (Cp Acts 6.10; 1 Cor 2.4, 13).

So, how did Jesus overcome His critics and the father of lies? By the Spirit and the Word. And by those same weapons the early Church as a whole could overcome.

How did the early Church overcome?

John listed the demonic invaders faced by the Church of his day.

- Seducers (1 Jn 2.26).
- The wicked one (1 Jn 2.14), i.e. the father of lies (Jn 8.44).
- False prophets, the spirit of antichrist and the spirit of error (1 Jn 4.1-6).
- Deceivers and antichrists (2 Jn 7).

Yet they overcame. How? Just like Jesus, by the Spirit and by the Word.

They overcame the wicked one by the Word.

- *I have written unto you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and you have overcome the wicked one* (1 Jn 2.14).

They overcame the spirits, the many false prophets, the spirit of antichrist and the spirit of error by the Spirit.

- *Ye ... have overcome them because greater is **he that is in you**, than he that is in the world (1 Jn 4.4).*

Who is "*he that is in you*"? The Anointing, the Spirit.

*These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you. But **the anointing** ... **abideth in you**, and ... teacheth you of all things (1 Jn 2.27-28).*

In a nutshell, how did the early Church overcome?

For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world (1 Jn 5.4).

And how are we born of God? By the Spirit (Jn 3.5) and by the Word (1 P 1.23).

(To see how one specific well known early Church figure, Timothy, was exhorted to overcome demonic invasion, see Appendix 2.)

So, like Nehemiah and Jesus, **the early Church** overcame the demonic invasion by the Spirit and by the Word.

And it is by the Spirit and the Word that **the last day Church** shall overcome the climactic end time deception.

Truly, the weapons of our warfare are mighty through God - the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. They are the most powerful in the universe. In fact, they created the universe.

And they two are one.

Whether the spoken Word,

- *the **words** that I speak unto you, they are **spirit** (Jn 6.63).*
- ***the Spirit** entered into me **when he spake** unto me (Ezk 2.2).*
- *By **the word** of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by **the breath** of his mouth (Ps 33.6).*

Or the written Word,

*All **scripture** is given by **inspiration** (i.e. the breath/Spirit) of God (2 Tim 3.16).*

The battle may be hard, but nothing can stand before a Holy Ghost anointed man with the Word in his heart and mouth! Press the battle! Cleave to the Word. Preach the Word.

If only you knew what lay at the end of the road.

*many deceivers are entered into the world ... Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.
(2 Jn 7-8)*

3. DECEPTION IN CHURCH HISTORY

This section is not a history lesson but a Bible study. Its aim is to throw light on the progress of deception in Church history.

Thou hast tried them and found them liars

When the flood of deception first invaded the early Church, progress was not always smooth. There was still much light in the Church and widespread spiritual discernment in operation. Too many had experienced the real thing. As a result, a full frontal assault was not possible. The spirit of error often had to sneak in by the side door.

The situation progressively deteriorated, however. All the later epistles (particularly 2 Peter, 2 Timothy, 1, 2 & 3 John and Jude) are filled with strong warnings of false teaching and apostasy.

Great damage was prophesied through evil men inspired by seducing spirits. Although not all effects would be immediate, a time would come when not only would this spirit be able to enter by the front instead of the side door, it would be invited in with open arms.

A case study: the church of Ephesus

Developments in the church at Ephesus are typical of the early Church as a whole. Whilst overcoming overt opposition from without (Acts 19.23-41), Ephesus would be progressively undermined from within by the invasion of seducing spirits.

Speaking to the Ephesian elders for the last time, Paul prophetically warned that the flock would be scattered and false teachers arise from their own ranks.

*Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock ... **For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them** (Acts 20.28-30).*

His words were soon vindicated. He had to leave Timothy at Ephesus because some were teaching another doctrine.

- *I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus ... that thou mightest **charge some that they teach no other doctrine** (1 Tim 1.3).*
- ***Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck** (1 Tim 1.19).*

1 Timothy is full of references to the ongoing battle to ensure that Ephesus remained true to the original.

Echoing his final words to the Ephesian elders, Paul told Timothy that the Spirit had expressly warned him of an invasion of demonic deception. And this invasion would not be without effect. Some would listen and turn from the original faith.

*the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times **some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy** (1 Tim 4.1-2a).*

In his letter to the Ephesians, he gave details of these slippery deceivers.

*That we henceforth be no more ... carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the **sleight** of men, and **cunning craftiness**, whereby they **lie in wait** (i.e. using wiles, cunning, trickery) **to deceive** (Eph 4.14).*

Later, by the time of Paul's last letter, 2 Timothy, the false teachers had so greatly grown in influence that there was now strong opposition to Paul and his divinely-given doctrine (e.g. 2 Tim 4.14-15; 1 Tim 1.20). In fact, *All they which are in Asia be turned away from me* (2 Tim 1.15). (Ephesus was the capital of the province of Asia.)

Later still, John, who was probably based in Ephesus in his later years, also referred to the extensive inroads of the spirit of error.

- *even now are there **many** antichrists* (1 Jn 2.18).
- ***many** false prophets are gone out into the world* (1 Jn 4.1).

In fact, that spirit had even gained control of some churches.

I wrote unto the church: but Diotrophes, who loveth to have the pre-eminence among them, receiveth us not (3 Jn 9).

Yet the deceivers in Ephesus did not have everything their own way. There were still good churches where the light was too strong for the invaders.

they went out from us...that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us (1 Jn 2.19).

There were still those who tested all things by the Spirit and the Word.

*thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, **and hast found them liars*** (Rev 2.2).

The seduction of the early Church virgin bride

But, despite her continuing ability to test the false, the grip of the early Church on the Word was loosening.

I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love (Rev 2.4).

What *is* the first love? The Word.

- This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments (1 Jn 5.3).
- If ye love me, keep my commandments ... If a man love me, he will keep my words (Jn 14.15, 23).

The consequences of the waning of the ardour of the first love were dire.

Paul feared that as the serpent seduced the first bride, Eve, in the garden at the beginning, he would do the same with the pure early Church virgin bride. She would be enticed and drawn away from a total commitment to the Word of her Lord.

Being a prophet, Paul sensed that he would succeed.

I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ (2 Cor 11.3).

In fact, the serpent's aim was a complete alternative religious system mirroring the true and counterfeiting the very essence of true Christianity, Jesus, the Spirit and the Word.

But it was, “*another Jesus ... another spirit ... another gospel*” (2 Cor 11.4).

Since the early Church had too much light to fall for a full frontal denial of Truth, the seduction took place in stages. But although, like Jehoshaphat, she still experienced the inner anointing warning her of false teaching (1 Jn 2.26-27), her ear was inclining dangerously towards the persuasive and enticing words of the serpent and his ministers disguised in sheep’s clothing.

The day would come when her perilous flirtations would lead to her being overcome. No longer would the pure virgin bride of Christ put out those who walked not in the doctrine of Christ. Instead, those few who would **not** yield would themselves be put out by an adulterous church, which claimed it was she who was upholding the true faith of her betrayed Master.

Throughout Church history, in its unclean lust for respectability and legitimacy, this adulterous church would hate the true and continually seek to destroy her, claiming to be itself the only true Church.

But just as those born of the seed of God overcame in the early Church, so did they in every period of Church history. And so shall it be also at the end.

Seducers shall wax worse and worse

The invasion of deception continued throughout Church history. But its level did not remain constant. Its quantity, quality and effect was not uniform. There would be a progressive increase in,

- the quantity and quality of **the deceivers**
- the quantity and quality of **the deception**
- the quantity of **those deceived**

This was just as the Bible foretold.

Paul prophesied of it in 2 Timothy 3. Even in his own day there were already those with an outward appearance of godliness (v 5), but who opposed the Truth (v 8). But he warned things would go from bad to worse (v 13). Their deceivableness would become greater and greater.

evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived (2 Tim 3.13).

An increasing quantity of those deceived was foretold.

- Initially, Paul said **some** would be led astray by the false teachers (1 Tim 4.1).
- Later, Peter said **many** would follow their pernicious ways (2 P 2.1-2).

In fact, this turning from the original faith would reach such a point that professing believers generally would not tolerate sound doctrine.

*the time will come when **they will not endure sound doctrine**; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And **they shall turn away their ears from the truth**, and shall be turned unto fables* (2 Tim 4.3-4).

It would culminate before the day of Christ in a great rebellion against the Word.

that day shall not come, except there come a falling away (Gk = apostasy, mutiny, rebellion) *first, and that man of sin be revealed* (2 Th 2.3).

That rebellion would be so great that Jesus questioned whether He would find the original, unadulterated faith on His return.

when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith (Gk = the faith) ***on the earth?*** (Lk 18.8)

But a fuller development of this must be left for the next chapter.

An overview: The wheat and the tares

The nature and progress of deception in the Church is illustrated graphically by the parable of the wheat and the tares. It highlights how the false grows alongside the true all through the ages.

The true & the false grow together throughout Church history

The parable and its interpretation is found in Matthew 13.24-30; 36-43. It covers the period from New Testament times right up to the end since Jesus said the time of harvest was the end of the age (13.39-40).

- Good seed was sown in the field (the world) by the Son of man.
- During the night His enemy, the devil, sowed tares among the wheat.
- The good seed are the children of the kingdom, and the tares the children of the wicked one.
- When the good seed sprouted, the tares also appeared.
- When the servants saw the tares they wanted to uproot them, but were stopped lest they uproot the wheat also. Both were to grow together until the harvest.
- The harvest was the end of the age.
- At the harvest, the reapers (the angels) first gather and bundle the tares for burning in a fiery furnace. The wheat is gathered into the barn.

Why did the Master said not to uproot the tares? Because as it grows, the root of the tares so intertwines with that of the wheat that you cannot pluck up the one without pulling up the other.

So, all through Church history, the tares have grown alongside the wheat, inseparably intertwined.

What are tares?

Natural tares are commonly considered to be darnel, which abounds in the region around Israel, infesting and usually growing in wheat fields.

The key to the spiritual meaning of this parable is to fully understand what tares are.

- ***Firstly***, they partly share the same life as wheat
- ***Secondly***, they very closely resemble it in both appearance and development.

A tare is not wholly distinct from wheat. It is a mixture of pure wheat life and weed life. A hybrid. In his "Parables", Trench calls tares "degenerate wheat". That does not mean they are pure wheat that has degenerated into a sort of wild wheat through lack of cultivation, being left untended. They are hybrid from the beginning.

There must have been some recognisable differences between tares and wheat for the servants to have been aware of their existence. Although very similar, however, tares so closely resemble wheat at each stage of growth, developing at the same pace and to the same height, that they are sometimes called "false wheat". It is only at harvest time that the difference between the two becomes clearly visible.

When the ear first appears, the mature grains are even then similar in shape and size to the wheat. It is their fruits that reveal the difference. The golden wheat hangs down under the weight of the full grain, finally turning whitish (Jn 4.35). The tares are black when ripe, and remain erect, unbent, as their ears are thin and usually fruitless.

How perfectly the natural illustrates the spiritual! From the very beginning a hybrid was growing alongside the true within the Church having many similarities and passing through the same stages. Only at the time of harvest, at the end of the age, when the two come to full maturity, are they readily distinguishable.

- ***The tares are sown at the same time as and among the real thing.*** From the beginning they grew alongside the true, the spirit of error and the spirit of antichrist alongside the Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of Christ.
- ***They develop at the same pace as the real thing.***
- ***They thoroughly intertwine with the real thing.***
- ***They mature at the same time, initially resembling the real thing.***

But however much the tares looked like the real thing, and, however thoroughly entwined with the true they were, they were **not** the real thing!

The effect of tares

To better understand the effect of spiritual tares, hybrid religion, let us look at the effect of partaking of natural tares.

Why did the servants want to uproot the tares? Since they are harmful.

Tares are the only harmful grain among the grasses. They contain a poisonous narcotic and are often infected by a poisonous fungus, both dangerous to grazing animals.

Although the Mosaic laws have a natural application, there is also a spiritual significance (cp 1 Cor 9.9-10). This is certainly true of Deuteronomy 22.10, "*Thou shalt not plough with an ox and ass together.*" Why not?

- ***Firstly***, their different stature would make for an unequal yoke, making it very painful to work together. (The spiritual implication is even clearer when we recall that the ox is a clean animal and the ass unclean.)
- ***Secondly***, because of their different eating habits. The ass happily consumes coarse and poisonous weeds, including tares. As a result, he emits a fetid breath which an ox yokefellow seeks to avoid, not only as unpleasant but as poisonous. It produces leanness, or even, if long continued, death. So, it holds its head away from the ass, pulling with only one shoulder.

And tares are not only dangerous to animals. Even though they appear nourishing, they are a health hazard for humans also. They must be separated from the pure wheat before consumption. If eaten mixed with wheat flour, tares are bitter, poisonous and very dangerous.

In what way is it dangerous? One of its most noted effects is drunkenness.

- Its Latin scientific name, "*lolium temulentum*", means drunken ryegrass.
- The French for darnel is "*ivraie*", from "*ivre*" (drunk), highlighting its ability to intoxicate, and even cause death.
- Faussett's Bible Dictionary says, "when mixed with wheat flour [it] causes dizziness, intoxication and paralysis".
- The site "Botanical.com" says, "It is recorded to have produced all the symptoms of drunkenness: a general trembling, inability to walk, hindered speech and vomiting."

In addition to drunkenness, other possible natural effects include:

- Dizziness i.e. causing disorientation, confusion and lack of clarity
- Paralysis i.e. inability to walk, act or speak
- Convulsions i.e. trembling, inability to control actions
- Death i.e. the extinction of life

What does this teach about the effect of partaking of spiritual tares, i.e. of hybrid religion, a religion where another spirit/life is mingled with the pure life of the original unadulterated wheat?

The spiritual effects are pernicious.

- It robs sobriety and an alert, watchful mind.
- It takes away clarity, bringing confusion and spiritual disorientation.
- It paralyzes the normal functioning of the believer and of the body of Christ.
- It injects poison into the system, damaging any organism which absorbs it.
- It can even totally extinguish life.

So, tares are a very dangerous spiritual contaminant. Whether partaking of the Bread of Life for ourselves or offering it to others, it is essential that it be made with pure wheat flour unmingled with tares. Hybrid religion will not feed or save. It will poison.

How different is the effect of the good seed, the children of the kingdom. Their fruit is pure and nutritious, bringing health and life. The breath they carry imparts the Spirit, not poison and death. They are the harvest that the Lord of the harvest has waited for through the ages with long patience (Jas 5.7).

Who are the tares?

Who are the hybrid tares?

To answer this, we must first ask who the good seed are.

- Jesus said the spiritual wheat are true believers, "*children of the kingdom*" (v38).
- So, if natural tares are hybrid wheat, then spiritual tares must be hybrid believers (i.e. not atheists or followers of other gods), people with characteristics of the true intermingled with features of its second life source.

Exactly who are these hybrid believers?

Jesus called the tares "*the children of the wicked one*" (v 38). To find out who such people are, let us look at the other places where this expression, or something similar (e.g. "*children of the devil*"), is found in the Bible.

With the exception of Elymas the sorcerer (Acts 13.10), such terms are always applied not to atheists but to followers, and even leaders, of the religion of the true God.

- **Speaking of professed believers:** *In this ... are manifest, and **the children of the devil**: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother (1 Jn 3.10).*
- **Speaking of Cain** (who built an altar to the true God): *Cain ... was **of that wicked one**, and slew his brother (1 Jn 3.12).*
- **Addressed to Jews** (a term used by John to describe the religious leaders of the day): *ye do that which ye have seen with your father ... ye do the deeds of your father ... ye are **of your father the devil**... (Jn 8.37-44).*

Another name for the devil or the wicked one is the serpent. Very solemnly, both John the Baptist and Jesus described the leaders of the different Jewish religious groups of the day as the offspring (i.e. progeny, children) of serpents.

- Mt 3.7-9 (to many Pharisees and Sadducees) *O generation of vipers*
- Mt 12.34 (to Pharisees) *O generation of vipers*
- Mt 23.33 (to scribes & Pharisees) *ye serpents, ye generation of vipers*

How can this be? Surely the Pharisees in particular were diligent followers of the Lord.

- **Fundamentalists** They meticulously studied and observed every jot and tittle of the oracles of God. Unlike the modernist Sadducees, they professed belief in the supernatural, such as angels and the resurrection.
- **Evangelistic** They travelled extensively to win non-Jews to the faith. Yet Jesus said, *Woe to you...for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves (Mt 23.15).*
- **Charismatic** Some even had a supernatural ministry: *if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges (Mt 12.27).*

How solemn that zealous, seemingly legitimate representatives of the true religion of the day should be called by the very terms used to describe the tares (Mt 13.38): serpents, offspring of serpents and of their father the devil.

How shocking to find tares among even the scribes and the denominational leaders of the Sadducees, and even the fundamentalist, evangelistic, charismatic Pharisees.

But, just as with natural tares, even though hybrid religion may look like the real thing, it is not the real thing. Despite outward appearances, many in Jesus' day were not pure, unadulterated wheat. They were hybrids, the product of another life source mixed with the true.

Furthermore, such hybrids were not limited to the days of Jesus. They grow alongside the wheat all through Church history, until the final harvest at the end of the age.

And, as we have seen, hybrid wheat is poisonous.

Despite the increasing deception through the ages, and the ever present intertwining tares, nonetheless, there were those in every age who overcame through the life within them and who will one day inherit all things.

4. END TIME CLIMAX OF DECEPTION

The end time climax

The end time will see,

- The two age-old master plans come to final maturity.
- The climax of the aim of the invading demonic forces.
- The wheat and the tares come to the final end time harvest.

The two mysteries come to maturity

All history has been a titanic struggle between two forces, both striving to realise their grand master plans, the one an imitation and counterfeit of the other.

- the spirit of error vs the Spirit of Truth
- the spirit of antichrist vs the Spirit of Christ
- the mystery of iniquity vs the mystery of godliness

At the end of the Church age, the two plans come to maturity.

- The fulfilment of the mystery of God will be the manifestation of God in the flesh of His Church. She comes to a perfect man, a man whose stature is measured against nothing less than the fulness of Christ Himself (Eph 4.13), fully manifesting her Bridegroom in flesh.
- Likewise, the mystery of iniquity shall come to its culmination, the revelation of the man of sin, the embodiment of sin in flesh.

The deception of evil men and seducers comes to a climax

At that time all the evil work of the spirit of error/deception will come to its climax.

Paul prophesied that evil men and deceivers would get worse and worse (2 Tim 3.13). That process climaxes at the end with the unleashing of all the deceivableness that unrighteousness is capable of. The deception will be such that, if it were possible (which it is not), even the very elect would be deceived.

At that time the deceiving forces at work from the inception of the Church will attain their awful goal.

- ***From the beginning*** the mystery of iniquity was already at work (2 Th 2.7). ***Before the day of Christ*** its evil aim shall be consummated in the revelation of the wicked one, the man of sin (v 3), the fulness of evil manifest in flesh.
- ***From the beginning*** the spirit of antichrist was already present (1 Jn 4.3) and many antichrists had gone forth (1 Jn 2.18). ***At the end*** their ultimate aim will be realised when ***the*** Antichrist appears, the fulness of all earlier antichrists.
- ***From the beginning*** many false prophets had gone out (1 Jn 4.1). ***At the end*** the crowning masterpiece, ***the*** false prophet (Rev 13.13; 19.20), will appear, summing up in himself the fulness of all earlier false prophets.

The wheat and the tares come to harvest

The two seeds, the children of the kingdom and the children of the wicked one, planted together at the beginning and growing together through the ages, come together to full

maturity and their end time harvest.

At that time the difference between the two is finally clearly manifest. The wheat hangs down under the weight of the grain, a beautiful golden colour. The tare is black, and remains erect, unbent, as its ear is thin and usually fruitless.

Then they are harvested.

- First the tares are gathered together, ready to be burned in the fire.
- Then the wheat is collected together by the angels and taken to the barn.

At last the Lord of the harvest will have what He has waited for with long patience (Jas 5.7). What is that harvest?

- **Firstly**, it is the self-same seed/life that went into the ground at the beginning, but multiplied, capable of producing the same works and bringing forth the same fruit.
- **Secondly**, it is the children of the kingdom, His Church. She is His husbandry (1 Cor 3.9). She is herself the firstfruits of His harvest (Jas 1.18). She is herself the manifestation and incarnation of the same life first sown by the Son of man.

Let us now look in more detail at the end time climax of deception.

- The end time rebellion
- The consequences of the end time rebellion: The greatest deception in history
- The nature of the deception: False prophets & lying wonders

We shall conclude by looking at the end time overcomers and their reward.

The end time rebellion

Even though things were already starting to slip, in the early days evil men still had to tread carefully. The spirit of error still had to fight to gain a foothold in the Church.

- The Presence of God was so real, none dared join himself to them (Acts 5.13).
- The false had to sneak in stealthily (Ju 4).
- Even when they did get in, those not of the Truth could feel so uncomfortable they had to leave: *“they went out from us, but they were not of us”* (1 Jn 2.19).
- False apostles were put to the test and found out (Rev 2.2).

Unfortunately, however, the situation progressively deteriorated. False teachers and seducers no longer had to slip in quietly by the side door. It reached such a point that often it was the true who were compelled to leave in order to uphold the Truth.

2 Thessalonians 2.1-3

The nadir would be reached before the day of Christ.

that day shall not come except there come a falling away first (2 Th 2.3).

Now the Bible speaks of a loss of spiritual ardour among professing believers at the end of the age in 2 Timothy 3.1-5 and other passages. The rebuke to Laodicea, the final Church age, is particularly sharp.

thou art neither cold nor hot ... So then because thou art lukewarm, and

neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth (Rev 3.15-16).

But, this is not what the term, the “*falling away*” refers to. It does not mean a loss of interest in or neglect of holy things, as is sometimes thought.

Literally, it means a rebellion, revolt, mutiny or apostasy.

- ***In a military context***, this means to refuse the orders of the commander, yet to remain in the army. It is not desertion. A deserter leaves. A rebel remains.
- ***In a religious context***, it means to turn from the orders of our Commander, Jesus, who is the Word. But, as in the natural, such rebels do not leave the Church. They remain, yet refuse the authority of the Head of the Church.

So, before Jesus returns, the Church will rebel against her Commander and His Word. The crucial point is that it is not the ***world*** that rebels or mutinies. It is the ***Church***.

Does this seem strange? Let us confirm it from other passages.

2 Timothy 3.1-4.5

This is Paul’s prophetic warning of the perilous state of the Church in the last days.

How do we know Paul is speaking of professed believers and not of the world? Because of how he describes them (v 4-5). For example,

- ***Traitors***. The world cannot betray the Truth. You can only betray someone or something you profess to believe in. So, this speaks of people who profess to follow Jesus, like Judas (Mk 14.10-11; Acts 1.17, *he was numbered with us*). The Jewish religious leaders are said to have betrayed Jesus. Whilst claiming to uphold the Word, they rejected He who came to fulfil that Word (Acts 7.52).
- ***Highminded***. The only other places using this term are warnings to professing believers (Ro 11.20; 12.16; 1 Tim 6.17)
- ***Lovers of pleasures more (not rather) than lovers of God***. So, they profess a love for God, but love pleasure more. Unbelievers do not profess to love God.
- ***Having a form of godliness***. Unbelievers do not claim a veneer of godliness.

What, then, were the perils of which Paul warned in the last days?

- Not the wars, famines, diseases, earthquakes and persecution that Jesus foretold before His return.
- It was the condition of those who professed to be believers.

What was that condition? Worldly. They would be lovers of their own selves, lovers of money and lovers of pleasure; unholy; and not merely not be good themselves but despise those who are.

But far more serious, they would be wilfully rebellious and mutinous.

- They would not simply passively or indifferently ignore the Truth but actively ***resist*** and ***withstand*** it (2 Tim 3.8; 4.14-15).
- Their opposition would be ***fierce*** (v 3), like the Jewish religious leaders in their opposition to Jesus (Lk 23.5).
- Professing believers, remaining in the churches, would ***blaspheme*** (v 2). (In modern usage, this is commonly understood to mean to use the name of God as a swear word. But the literal Biblical meaning is to speak against, in particular against the Truth (e.g. Acts 13.45; 18.6; 1 Tim 1.13, 20; 2 Tim 2.16-18). The Pharisees did this. Whilst professing to be the upholders of the Word,

- they vehemently spoke against He who was the Word (Mt 12.22-32).)
- They would not only have a mere external **form** of godliness without its reality. They would also actively deny the **power** of godliness (v 5), that blessed power which makes a man a partaker of the divine nature (2 P 1.2-4).

Things would come to a very serious ending.

*the time will come when **they will not endure sound doctrine**; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and **they shall turn away their ears from the truth** ... (2 Tim 4.3-4).*

Notice,

- They would not tolerate sound doctrine, i.e. wholesome teaching, teaching without any harmful mixture of error or corruption.
- They would turn their ears away from the Truth, turning their back on it. And what is the Truth? The Word (Jn 17.17). Mutiny! Rebellion!
- But they do not leave the church. In fact they take it over. Having itching ears (i.e. desiring to hear pleasant things), they fill the pulpit with many teachers preaching what they want to hear. As in the days of Ahab, even though the true had been murdered, he still found 400 false prophets of the Lord who would say what he wanted to hear.

There is an even more serious reference to an end time falling away among professed believers.

Revelation 3.14-22

In addition to addressing the situation of those churches at the time, the letters to the seven churches of Asia are also prophetic of the unfolding ages of Church history. The last, Laodicea, relates to the final period before the return of the Lord.

The rebellion in the Church that Paul warned of in 2 Thessalonians 2 and 2 Timothy 3 & 4 is reflected in the sobering words addressed to the church of Laodicea.

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me (Rev 3.20).

I repeat, these words are not addressed to the unsaved, to non church-going unbelievers, as sometimes said. They are to a church (Rev 3.14).

Why is Jesus knocking at the door? To gain admission. So, Christ is outside His own Church trying to get back in. Why? It is the awful result of the great end time falling away. Jesus, the Word, has been put outside His own church. The troops have not deserted and abandoned the Church. They remain in the Church, but have mutinied and put their Commander outside, refusing His orders.

So, the condition of the Church at the end of the Church/Gentile age at the 2nd Coming will be identical to that of Israel at the end of the Jewish age at the 1st Coming. Rebellious.

He came unto his own and his own received him not (Jn 1.11).

No wonder Jesus asked if He would find faith on earth when He returned (Lk 18.8).

- He did not mean faith in general, but (as the literal Greek says) **the** faith.
- What faith? That described in Jude 3, *the faith once for all delivered unto the*

saints. In other words, would He find the original Word at the end?

The consequences of the great rebellion: The greatest deception of all time

The spirit of rebellion in the end time Church has terrible consequences. It opens the door wide to the greatest deception in all history. At the end time the increasing deceivableness of deception foretold in 2 Timothy 3.13 comes to a climax.

The end time is a time of superlatives. Just as it will see affliction such as was not from the beginning of the creation (Mk 13.19), and a great earthquake such as was not since men were upon the earth (Rev 16.18), so also it will see the greatest deception ever.

What did Jesus say about this end time deception?

If it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect

When asked about the signs of His coming, the very first sign He gave was deception.

*Tell us ... what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world? And Jesus answered and said unto them, **Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many** (Mt 24.3-5).*

Whilst listing other signs such as wars, natural disasters and persecution, Jesus came back to His first sign a second and (with an extremely solemn warning) a third time.

- **many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many** (Mt 24.11).
- **if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect** (Mt 24.24).

Notice the terrible depth of the predicted deception and its far-reaching effect.

- **Many** deceivers.
- **Many** deceived.
- If possible (which it is not) **even the elect** would be **deceived**.

Let us now see how this unprecedented deception is a direct consequence of the great end time rebellion of professing believers against the Word.

All deceivableness of unrighteousness

How could there be deception so great as to almost deceive the very elect? The answer is in Paul's description of the unparalleled delusion before the day of Christ.

*(The man of sin, the wicked one) whose coming is after the working of Satan **with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie** (2 Th 2.9-11).*

This is truly the climax of deception.

- **All power:** All the power of satan will be in operation. Even if he were to reveal this **same** power later, he could never manifest **more**. To put it colloquially, he will give it all he's got.
- **All deceivableness:** Every possible delusion that unrighteousness is capable

of will come. Beyond this there is nothing new. It will be without equal. If the devil ever deceives again (cp Rev 20.8), he will have no new tricks. It will have all been seen before. No greater deception is possible.

- **Strong delusion:** In the New Testament, this word “strong” always describes supernatural power. This delusion is beyond all natural capability.

Not only the world but the professing Church will be deceived. Even if there is no explicit reference to professed believers being among, “*them that perish*,” who, “*received not the love of the truth*,” they are part of the contemporaneous falling away (2 Th 2.3) and thus unquestionably at risk of the deception of v 9-11.

In fact, the falling away, the rebellion, is the very reason for the deception.

- Because **they** refuse to take a hold of and to love **the Truth** (and to love and keep the Truth, the Word, is to love God (Jn 14.15; 1 Jn 5.3));
- Therefore **God** sends a strong delusion upon them deliberately designed to lead them to believe **the lie**.

Why does the Lord cause people to be deceived?

It is not to draw true people from the Word. It is a just judgement on those who have already turned from the Word. Those who reject His voice are judicially given over by Him to their own ways, whether rank unbelievers (e.g. Ro 1.28) or professing believers (e.g. I K 22; Ps 81.11-12). This then leaves them wide open to all manner of deception.

- *if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the Lord have deceived that prophet (Ezk 14.9).*
- *they have chosen their own ways...I will also choose their delusions (Isa 66.3-4).*

Turned unto fables

We find the same thing in 2 Timothy 3.1–4.5. Professing believers in the last days turn from the Word, yet remain in the Church, taking it over and choosing who preaches and what they teach.

*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine (i.e. the Word); but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers having itching ears; and they shall **turn away their ears from the Truth**, and shall **be turned unto fables** (2 Tim 4.3-4).*

Once again, note the sequence. Those who turn from the Truth are judicially turned to falsehoods, fictions and inventions.

- **Firstly**, professed believers **wilfully turn** their ears from the Truth, heaping up teachers to tickle their ears, teaching what they want to hear.
- **As a result**, they shall **be turned** unto fables. By whom? By the Lord.

And knowest not that thou art blind

These verses are addressed prophetically to the Church at the end of the Gentile age.

As seen earlier, Laodicea rebelled and put Christ outside. The consequences are solemn. She is totally blind and blinded to her true spiritual condition. It is dire indeed.

and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked (Rev 3.17).

There are solemn implications to the end time Gentile Church before the 2nd Coming

being blind but not knowing it.

- **Firstly**, she is in the same position as the Jew at the 1st Coming, both blind and blinded (Mt 15.14; Lk 6.39; Jn 9.39-41). And what happened to the Jews?!
- **Secondly**, she is in the same position as Sodom before her destruction. Jesus said the day the Son of man is revealed would be as the days of Lot (Lk 17.28-30). One of the signs of that day was that the Sodomites were struck blind, **and did not know it** (Gen 19.11). How could they not know? Because they were only blind to the door of Lot's house; otherwise they could see normally.

Furthermore, as well as being totally unaware of her blindness, she is also so deluded she thinks she is abundantly endued.

thou sayest I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing
(Rev 3.17).

(How unlike the early Church and the church of Smyrna (Acts 3.6; 20.33; 2 Cor 6.10; 8.2, 9; Jas 2.5; Rev 2.9).

She is totally blind to her lack of the true riches.

- What are those riches? Gold tried in the fire (Rev 3.18).
- What exactly is that gold? A true faith that can stand the test and be found unto praise, honour and glory at the appearing of the Lord (1 P 1.7).
- What then is the awful implication of her poverty? That rebellious, deceived Laodicea does not have a faith that can stand the test, the faith once for all delivered to the saints (Ju 3). She fulfils Jesus' solemn question (Lk 18.8).

Lastly, Laodicea is like the emperor with his non-existent new clothes. She is so utterly deluded she does not even know she is naked.

What does this spiritual nakedness mean? There are several implications, all dire.

Firstly, she **has no garment of salvation**. This is essential to cover the shame of our nakedness. If not covered, the implication is solemn.

- When do we first read of nakedness? After Adam and Eve sinned in the garden. What did it mean? They had lost their original garments of glory.
- How could they hide the shame of their nakedness? Only with a garment requiring the shedding of blood (Gen 3.7, 10-11, 21).
- So, if naked, the sin of Laodicea is not covered by the Blood.
- Even worse, at least Adam and Eve **knew** they were naked. But Laodicea **knows it not**.

Secondly, she **has no wedding garment**. Again the implications are solemn.

- The man in the parable of the wedding feast at the 1st Coming had no wedding garment. Apparently **unaware** of his condition, he was shocked when it was brought to his attention (Mt 22.12). The consequences were serious.
- Likewise, the professing end time Gentile Church before the 2nd Coming does not have the white wedding garment of the bride (Rev 3.18; 19.8). But the only ones who go into the wedding are those who have been granted a wedding garment and are ready (Mt 25.10; Rev 19.8).

Thirdly, she **does not have the Spirit**.

- The Bible speaks of being clothed with the Spirit. (For example, in Ju 6.34, "*came upon*" means literally, clothed; and in Lk 24.49, "*endued*" means to be wrapped around, clothed.) When Elisha put on the mantle of Elijah, it symbolised the Spirit of Elijah.

- Samson is a perfect illustration of Laodicea. He had once been clothed with the Spirit, but through carnality he lost his mantle of the Spirit. **But he knew it not** (Ju 16.20-21).

Truly, Laodicea is deluded, wretched and miserable! The price of rebellion is high indeed.

The nature of the end time deception: False christs, false prophets & lying wonders

We have seen that deception will come to a climax at the end time and that both deceivers and the deceived are deceived by the Lord.

Let us now look at **how** He deceives at the end time, with particular emphasis on false christs, false prophets and lying wonders.

(Apart from the early Church, the supernatural has only become widely accepted in historic Protestant and evangelical as well as Pentecostal/charismatic churches, since 1900 and especially since the 1950s. It is therefore unsurprising that this final Church age should experience a flood of both deceitful **words** and deceitful **works**. Such things could only flourish when prophecy, exorcism and wonders were generally acceptable, otherwise no one would pay any attention. No one counterfeits £25 notes. There are no real ones.)

Jesus' warning of great deception before His coming

The Olivet discourse (Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21) has a compound application.

- In part it refers to the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in AD 70.
- But it also refers to the signs of the end and of the 2nd Coming (Mt 24.3).

Concerning end time signs, the very first one Jesus gave warned of coming deception.

what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world? ... Take heed that no man deceive you (Mt 24.3-4).

He then gave details of the nature of that deception.

- **many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many** (Mt 24.5).
- **many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many** (Mt 24.11).
- **there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect** (Mt 24.24).

This is serious. Note the great extent of the deception.

- **Many** will come **in His name**.
- Who will come? **False christs** and **false prophets**.
- What will be the effect? **Many** will be deceived.
- How will they deceive? By **great signs and wonders so great that, if it were possible, they would deceive the very elect**.

Let us look more closely at some of the details of the coming deception.

In thy name

One of the most dangerous things about end time deceivers is that they are not atheists nor do they come in the name of other gods. They profess their **words** and **works** are done in the name of the Lord.

Now in the Old Testament we read of many false prophets. Although some spoke in the name of other gods, others claimed to speak in the name of the Lord, such as,

- The presumptuous prophets Moses spoke of (Dt 18.20).
- Ahab's 400 so-called prophets (1 K 22.11).
- The many false prophets at the end of the Jewish kingdom in the days of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. (For fuller details, see Appendix 1.)

In the case of lying wonders, however, in the only two Old Testament examples (Deuteronomy 13.1-3 and the Egyptian magicians), the allegiance of the perpetrators was clearly to another god.

But in the New Testament, Jesus spoke of many who would not only speak false **words**, but also perform supernatural **works** in His name.

Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then I will profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity (Mt 7.22-23).

And also, unlike in the Old Testament, their deeds would not be few.

- Those doing the works would be **many**, not just a few.
- Their works would be **many**, not rare or exceptional.
- Those works would also be **mighty**.

Although not specifically relating to the end time, this passage gives an idea of the kind of great lying signs and wonders done in His name to be expected at that time.

(Incidentally, Matthew 7.22-23 illustrates perfectly 2 Timothy 3.13, which says that seducers not only deceive, but are also themselves deceived. Although those Jesus spoke of do their works in His name and call upon His name, they are stunned to be told He never knew them, and for them to depart from Him. They thought they knew Him. They expected to be with Him.)

False christs & false prophets

As mentioned earlier, the end of the Gentile/Church age, just before the return of the Lord, will see a veritable flood of false prophets.

(It was the same in the days of Jeremiah and Ezekiel at the end of the Jewish kingdom (see Appendix 1), and, as detailed by Josephus, at the end of the Jewish dispensation at the siege of Jerusalem.)

But there is something highly significant and very serious about this flood. ***They will minister under a true anointing.***

How can false people minister under a true anointing?

Look again at Jesus' prophetic reference to the great deception at the end of the age.

*there shall arise **false Christs**, and **false prophets** (Mt 24.24).*

Who are these “false Christs”? They are not false Jesuses, but false christs. What does this mean?

- The basic sense of the word “christ” is “anointed”.
- The word has a specific application to Christ Himself. He was pre-eminently the Anointed One (Lk 4.18), having the fullness of the Spirit (Jn 3.34).
- But its application is not limited to Christ. In its wider, more general meaning, its cognates apply to an anointing with ointment or oil, either literal (e.g. Jas 5.14), or with the Oil of the Spirit (e.g. 2 Cor 1.21; 1 Jn 2.27).
- For this reason Young’s Analytical Concordance gives a double meaning of “lying Christs **or anointed ones**” to the AV “false Christs” in Matthew 24.24.

In fact, these “false Christs” have a true anointing of the Holy Spirit, yet are themselves false, not lining up with the Word. Although anointed, they are false prophets.

How can the Holy Ghost anoint a false teacher? How is it possible be anointed with the genuine thing, the Holy Spirit, and yet be a false prophet or false teacher, not lining up with the Word? Consider the following.

- **Balaam** was anointed with the same Spirit as Moses, and prophesied truth concerning Israel. But his doctrine was in error (Nu 31.16; Rev 2.14). He taught the people to mingle instead of keeping separate unto the prophetic word sent to lead them into the land.
- **Caiaphas** gave a true prophecy concerning Christ (Jn 11.49-51). Yet he was the leader of those who denied and betrayed the Christ, the voice of God for their day.

Even stranger, Jesus said that the end time false christs would not only speak **words** of error. Their false prophecy and false doctrine would also be accompanied by **works**, like those Christ did, by the anointing of the same Spirit.

*there shall arise **false Christs**, and **false prophets**, and shall show **great signs and wonders**; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall **deceive the very elect** (Mt 24.24).*

Before looking in more detail at end time lying wonders, let us illustrate how the false can do true signs and wonders by the genuine Holy Spirit.

Jesus spoke of a very illuminating claim made by false prophets.

*Lord, Lord, have we not ... in thy name **cast out devils**?* (Mt 7.22)

By what power are devils cast out? The Bible is clear that the evil one and his agents can certainly perform real signs and wonders. But this is not how devils are cast out. This can only be done by the Holy Spirit. Jesus said so. He explicitly said that the devil does not cast out devils.

But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils. And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand? (Mt 12.24-26)

So, even though Jesus said He never knew them, these false prophets must have cast out devils by the Holy Ghost.

As Balaam was anointed with the same Spirit as Moses to prophesy, so these show the same signs and wonders as the elect. The same Spirit anoints both, empowering them to perform signs and wonders. But although these false christs can do signs and wonders under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, they do not line up with the Word.

No wonder, if it were possible, they would deceive even the very elect.

Let us now look more fully at lying wonders in the name of the Lord at the end time.

Lying wonders

Miracles, signs and wonders are not an automatic proof that God is at work, ***even if real and not fraudulent***. Both the evil one and his agents can perform such wonders.

In the case of the devil,

- He brought fire from heaven upon Job's sheep and servants (Job 1.16).
- In the temptation, he translated Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple, and then to a very high mountain (Mt 4.5, 8). He could also give visionary experiences. (It had to be a vision to show Jesus all the kingdoms of the world "*in a moment of time*" (Lk 4.5)).
- He is able to transform himself into an angel of light (2 Cor 11.14).

As for his agents, although there are only two examples of real signs and wonders in the Old Testament, there are far more in the New Testament.

When will these New Testament lying wonders take place?

- In Matthew 7 Jesus referred to an abundance of signs and wonders accompanying false prophets but without giving any specific time frame.
- In Matthew 24, however, Jesus spoke specifically of many prophets and false christs with ***great*** signs and wonders before His coming, at the end of the age.
- Remarkable supernatural manifestations and unsurpassed delusion at the end time are also referred to by Paul in two key passages.

2 Thessalonians 2.9-11

Speaking of the revealing of the man of sin, the wicked one, before the day of Christ, Paul describes the terrible extent of the end time deception.

*whose coming is after the working of Satan **with all power and signs and lying wonders** (2 Th 2.9).*

(NB The term "lying wonders" does not mean the wonders are fraudulent. Doubtless there are many fraudulent signs and wonders, but the literal meaning is "wonders of a lie". The sense is not that such wonders are false but that they are designed to advance a lie, to lead men to accept false teaching.)

At this time ***all*** the power of Satan will be in operation. There will be not just signs and wonders, but ***great*** signs and wonders, and the unleashing of all the power of the evil one.

What do we know about the nature of these great end time signs and wonders that are real yet wrong?

We have already seen some examples in Matthew 7.22-23. Let us further illustrate from a second passage of Paul's.

2 Timothy 3.8

Describing the perilous times in the last days, he tells **by whom** and **how** the truth of the Word will be resisted.

Firstly, **who** will oppose?

*as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do **these** also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith (2 Tim 3.8).*

Who are “these”?

Jannes and Jambres were certainly not of the household of faith. They were not believers in the God of Moses. They did not do their deeds in His name. They were unmistakably in the enemy camp.

But those Paul warns of are not outsiders, unmistakably in the enemy camp and openly hostile to the Truth. They are in the Church, claiming to be true believers. The context, the previous seven verses, makes it clear that “these” is speaking of professed believers in the last days. They profess to be of the Truth whilst in fact opposing it. It would be far less confusing if they were open heathen like the magicians or Elymas the sorcerer (Acts 13.6-8).

But how can they profess to be believers? After all, Paul says they are “*of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith*” (i.e. the original faith (Lk 18.8; Ju 3), the faith that the end time Elijah is sent to restore and turn the people back to (Mt 17.11; Mal 4.5-6)).

Yet similar terms are used elsewhere by Paul to describe professed believers.

- *Perverse disputings of **men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself** (1 Tim 6.5).*
- *They profess that they know God, but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work **reprobate** (Ti 1.16).*

In fact, tellingly, Jesus uses the very word describing the minds of these men to describe the many wonderful works done in His name by false prophets.

*every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a **corrupt** tree bringeth forth evil fruit (Mt 7.17).*

Secondly, **in what way** do these professed believers resist the Truth?

Just like Paul said, “**as Jannes and Jambres**”. How was that? By **real** signs and wonders. And by **great** signs and wonders.

The magicians copied the initial signs and wonders performed by the true man of God. They turned real rods into real snakes (Ex 7.11-12), real water into real blood (7.20-22) and produced real frogs (8.6-8). These were no fairground sleight-of-hand tricks! They were real and they were remarkable.

So shall it be in the last days. **True** signs and wonders by preachers of the Truth will be replicated (at least in part) by those claiming their alternative **false** teaching is confirmed and vindicated by the **real, true** signs and wonders they perform. And like the Egyptian magicians’, they will be remarkable, not some sleight of hand.

In the light of the great end time rebellion and consequent unprecedented deception, little wonder that Jesus questioned whether He would find faith on earth when He returned (Lk 18:8).

- He did not mean faith in general, but **the** faith.
- What faith? *the faith once delivered unto the saints* (Ju 3), i.e. at the beginning. The original Word.

Unsurprisingly, His reception at the end of the Church age at the 2nd Coming will be exactly as when the Bridegroom came to Israel at the end of the Jewish age at His 1st Coming.

He came unto his own and his own received him not (Jn 1.11).

When the delusion is so powerful and far-reaching, it is no wonder that, if it were possible, even the very elect would be deceived.

- Great wonders.
- Done by professed believers.
- In Jesus' name.

Strangest of all, these wonders will be done by the power of the Spirit.

But fear not. The end time falling away and resultant deception is only one side of the story of the end time Laodicean Church.

There will be they who overcome.

The elect will not be deceived. Why not? Because they **are** the Word. They can't hear anything else. They don't know anything else.

5. END TIME OVERCOMERS

As mentioned before, the letters to the 7 churches in Asia are not only addressed to literal churches of that day, but are also prophetic of the 7 periods of Church history from its inception to the return of the Lord. Laodicea describes the final period.

At first sight there seems no sign of any true faith.

- Her lukewarmness makes the Lord sick so He spits her out of His mouth.
- She is wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked.
- She is so rebellious, she puts Christ outside the church.
- In fact, it is the only church with nothing good said about her.

But a closer investigation gives grounds for hope. There will be those who overcome in the terrible Laodicean age (Rev 3.21). How? They heed,

- **His counsel**, and buy gold tried in the fire, white raiment and eyesalve (3.18).
- **His rebuke**, and repent (3.19).
- **His knock**, and open the door, gladly receiving Him (3.20).
- **The voice of the Spirit** (3.22).

They are put to the test and emerge victorious. They look first to the Word, not prophecy or signs and wonders. They listen to their inner discernment. They stay true to the original to the very end.

It may be that they who remain faithful to the original faith are but few, but there is great blessing for them. Their future is glorious indeed.

How do they overcome?

How do these few overcome in such dire times? In the same way as all overcomers from the very beginning. By the Word and by the Spirit.

By the Word.

- They buy the gold tried in the fire, the true riches, i.e. a genuine faith that will stand the test and be found unto praise, honour and glory at the appearing of the Lord (1 P 1.7).
- What faith is that? The faith once and for all delivered unto the saints (Ju 3), **the original Word**, the revelation given at the beginning (cp 1 Jn 2.24; 2 Jn 6).

By the Spirit.

- They are **endued, clothed, arrayed with the Spirit** (Ju 6.34; Lk 24.49). They buy white raiment to cover the shame of their nakedness. As explained earlier, this speaks not only of the garment of salvation and the wedding garment, but also of being clothed with the Spirit.
- They have also **anointed their eyes with the eyesalve of the Spirit**. This will flood their eyes with light to see the hope of our calling, the riches of His inheritance in the saints and the exceeding greatness of His power by which He raised Christ from the dead and seated Him in heavenly places, and us who were dead in sins together with Him (Eph 1.17-2.5).
- They **heed** His counsel and **the voice of the Spirit** (3.22) and zealously repent.

What does it mean to repent? To change their mind, to think differently, to turn.

- Turn **from** what? From their earlier thoughts and ways, the religion of Laodicea.
- Turn **to** what? Back to the original Word and the Spirit.

They heed the ministry of the end time Elijah sent to turn the listeners back, back to the original, back to the beginning.

- **Just as at the 1st Coming** John was anointed with the Spirit of Elijah to turn the hearts of the fathers to the new generation, the children (Lk 1.17; Mal 4.5-6);
- **So at the 2nd Coming** the same Spirit of Elijah is sent to restore all things, turning the hearts of the children back to the beginning, to the early Church fathers (1 K 18.37; Mal 4.5-6; Mt 17.11).

So, in a day of unprecedented deception, by walking in the Word and the Spirit they overcome,

- The wicked one (1 Jn 2.14).
- Many false prophets, spirits, the spirit of antichrist, the spirit of error (1 Jn 4.1-6).
- The world (1Jn 5.4).

Like those who come out of the great tribulation with white robes and palm branches (Rev 7.10, 14), the Laodicean overcomers also wave their palm branches, symbolising victory over everything thrown against them, standing triumphantly erect and bearing abundant fruit through it all.

The reward of the overcomer

Finally, it will all be over. The last battle will have been fought. The time will come,

that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great (Rev 11.18).

When the Bridegroom comes, the true believer will be presented,

- To the Bridegroom (Eph 5.27).
- Before the Presence of His glory (Ju 24).
- At the Judgement Seat of Christ (Ro 14.10; 2 Cor 5.10).

At the judgement seat all shall,

- **Give account** (Ro 14.12).
- **Receive** for the things done in the body, whether good or bad (2 Co 5.10).

By what standard shall they be judged? How shall they be rewarded?

Judged by the Word

They shall be judged by the Word.

- All judgement is committed to Christ (Jn 5.22, 27; Acts 10.42).
- We are presented before the judgement seat **of Christ**.
- Christ is the Word (Rev 19.13; Jn 1.1, 14).
- So, the standard against which all things will be measured, is the Word.

Rewarded by the Word

They shall be rewarded in the same way they are judged. By the Word.

- They will receive their rewards/prizes (1 Cor 3.13-15; Phil 3.14).
- Who will present them? Christ, the Word (Rev 22.12).

What a time of joy this will be for those who have overcome all things & been faithful to their Groom, the Word, to the end.

Rewarded with the Word

What is the most beautiful reward/prize of all?

The Bible says, “*of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance*” (Col 3.24). But Christ not only **gives** the reward of the inheritance. He Himself, the Word, **is**,

- Both the reward (Gen 15.1);
- And also the inheritance (Ps 16.5).

To illustrate, what are the rewards of the overcomers of the first six churches of Asia? The Bridegroom, Jesus.

- **Ephesus:** the tree of life (2.7). Who is life? Jesus (Jn 14.6; 2 Tim 1.1).
- **Smyrna:** the crown of life (2.10). Who is our crown? The Lord (Isa 28.5).
- **Pergamos:** the hidden manna (2.17). Who is the manna? Jesus (Jn 6.31-33).
- **Thyatira:** the morning star (2.28). Who is the morning star? Jesus (Rev 22.16).
- **Sardis:** white raiment (3.5). What is that? The Lord Jesus Christ (Ro 13.14).
- **Philadelphia:** a new name (3.12). What is that name? His (3.12).

The rewards of the Laodicean overcomer

And what is the reward to the overcomer in this final Laodicea Age, to he who hears the last voice of the Spirit to the churches, repents and opens the door to Him?

Ultimately, he will inherit the rewards of the overcomers in all the Church ages, not just those specific to Laodicea.

he that overcometh shall inherit all things (Rev 21.7).

But, as with the other churches, the rewards specific to the Laodicean overcomer are very relevant to that age. They highlight the soon coming wedding day. Once again Jesus Himself, the Bridegroom, and being with Him, is the essence of the reward.

To sup with Him

Firstly,

I will ... sup with him and he with me (3.20).

What supper is this? There are two aspects to this promise.

- **His supping with us.** When? In this life. The supper is the main meal at the end of the day and symbolises fellowship together (cp Acts 10.41).
- **Our supping with Him.** When? Where? In a general sense, at His table in His kingdom (Lk 22.30; cp Mt 8.11), but pre-eminently, at the wedding feast, the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev 19.9).

This wedding supper has been long anticipated by both Bridegroom & bride.

- **The Bridegroom** said He would not drink of the fruit of the vine until in the coming kingdom (Mt 26.29).

- **The bride** anticipates that kingdom whenever she breaks bread at the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11.26).

To sit with Him

Secondly,

- he will not just sit **at His table**.
- *he will sit with me in my throne* (3.21).

Who sits in the throne with a king? The queen, his bride (Neh 2.6). (Cp *if so be that we suffer with him ... we shall also reign with him* (Ro 8.17; 2 Tim 2.12).)

And not just sit **with** Him.

and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Eph 2.6).

Look to yourselves that we receive a full reward

So then, with such a glorious hope before us, let us give all diligence to make our calling and election sure (2 P 1.10). Beware of what happened to Israel.

- **Most who left Egypt did not enter the land of promise.** *Let us fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it* (Heb 4.1). For, *with most of them God was not well pleased* (1 Cor 10.5).
- **Of those first invited to the great supper at the 1st Coming, none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper** (Lk 14.24).

So, let us be ever watchful of our,

- **Garment** (Rev 3.4; 16.15). We need it to go to the wedding (Mt 22.11-14).
- **Reward** (1 Cor 3.13-15; Col 2.18; 2 Jn 8).
- **Crown** (Rev 3.11).

Like Jesus, let us run with patience the race set before us, with our eyes fixed on the final goal and the joy set before us (Heb 12.1-2).

- **The reception, an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ** (2 P 1.11).
- **To hear the blessed words from He who flatters no man, Well done, good and faithful servant ... enter thou into the joy of thy Lord** (Mt 25.21, 23).
- **The exceeding great reward, the ultimate prize, Jesus Himself** (Phil 3.8, 14).

Let us make it our unshakeable aim to finish our course/race and to fulfil our ministry and our calling.

- Just as did:
 - **David** (Acts 13.22, 36).
 - **John the Baptist** (Acts 13.25).
 - **Jesus** (Jn 4.34; 17.4).
 - **Paul** (Acts 20.24; 2 Tim 4.7-8).
- And as were exhorted to do:
 - **Archippus** (Col 4.17).
 - **Timothy** (2 Tim 4.1, 5).

At the end of our days, may we echo Paul's final words (2 Tim 4.7-8).

- ***I have finished my course*** (Phil 3.13-14; 1 Cor 9.24-27).
- ***I have fought the good fight***, i.e. the fight for the original faith (1 Tim 6.12).
- ***I have kept the faith***, i.e. the faith once and for all delivered to the saints (Ju 3).
- ***there is laid up for me a crown ... which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day***, i.e. a crown of glory (Ps 8.5; Isa 62.3), the Lord Himself (Isa 28.5).

In the meantime, remember the Spirit-given words to a prophet sent to prepare the way for the 2nd Coming at a time when he was under growing opposition and pressure.

- *There is that before thee that thou hast no comprehension of. Therefore prepare ... live according to the Word.*
- *Press the battle. It will be worth it all. ... Press the battle. Keep going. Keep going. ... Just keep pressing. **If you only knew what was at the end of the road.** ... Keep pressing on.*
- *Thou hast chosen the better path.*
- *Because thou hast chosen the narrow path, the harder way ... Because of this momentous decision, a huge portion of heaven awaits thee. What a glorious decision thou hast made.*

Keep pressing on.

- ***Be diligent*** to present yourself approved to God (2 Tim 2.15).
- ***abide in him*** ... that, when he shall appear, we may ... not be ashamed before him at his coming (1 Jn 2.28).
- ***Hold fast the form of sound words***, which thou hast heard ... that good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost (2 Tim 1.13-14).
- ***Preach the word***; be instant in season, out of season (2 Tim 4.2).
- ***Neglect not the gift*** that is in thee (1 Tim 4.14).
- ***Stir up the gift*** of God which is in thee (2 Tim 1.6).

In a word, ***let us go on unto perfection*** (Heb 6.1), Jesus Himself.

Take courage.

- *be strong, let not your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded* (2 Chr 15.7) (Cp Jer 31.16).
- *Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me* (Rev 22.12).

Remember, all heaven is watching.

- *seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses ... let us run with patience the race that is set before us* (Heb 12.1).
- *we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men* (1 Cor 4.9).

***Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them:
because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.
(1 Jn 4.4)***

6. SUMMARY & CONCLUSION: WONDERS OR THE WORD?

Let us sum up and conclude.

From the very beginning, the spirit of error and the spirit of antichrist sent forth their agents to infiltrate the Church. There was an invasion of seducing spirits, antichrists, false prophets, teachers of doctrines of demons and workers of lying wonders.

Furthermore, as Paul said, these evil men and seducers went from bad to worse, a process that comes to a climax at the end time, the day in which we live.

Very extensive false supernatural manifestations, in both word and deed, are foretold.

- Many false prophets.
- Many signs and wonders.
- Great and very powerful wonders.
- Many will be deceived.
- False prophecies and lying wonders done in Jesus's name.

In fact, it will be the greatest deception in all history, so great that if it were possible even the very elect would be deceived.

This veritable flood of supernatural deception will oppose the true preaching of the Word in this day by signs and wonders in the same way that the Egyptian magicians withstood Moses, the man with the Word for his day.

But there will be one very important difference.

In the days of Moses those opposing were not believers in the true God. But at the end of the age, the opposers will work signs and wonders in the name of Jesus, professing to be His followers.

But, God be thanked, they will only be able to go so far. As with the Egyptian magicians, in the end their folly also will be openly exposed. They will be shown up just as the magicians and Ahab's 400 false so-called prophets of the Lord.

But why does the Lord allow such things? Why does He permit false prophets and false miracles in His name, deceiving so many? Surely people cannot be blamed if they are deceived by such remarkable supernatural manifestations?

The answer to this question is absolutely fundamental. Such things are deliberately permitted to test professed believers. What comes first? Wonders or the Word?

*If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, **And the sign or the wonder come to pass**, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods ... and let us serve them; Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for **the LORD your God proveth you**, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul (Dt 13.1-3).*

This principle is fundamental. What did Abraham say when asked by the rich man to send back Lazarus the beggar from the grave to alert his five brothers about the

torments of the afterlife?

They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, ***If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead*** (Lk 16.29-31).

When replying to the enquiry of the messengers of John the Baptist, Jesus showed the proper way to view to miracles and wonders: as a confirmation of the Word:

Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them (Mt 11.3-5).

How did Jesus' reply answer their question as to whether He was the one sent to announce the coming Kingdom? Why did He refer them to the signs accompanying His ministry? Because those were the very works which the Word associated with the coming of the Kingdom (e.g. Isa 29.18; 35.4-6). His works were signposts. He answered their question by pointing them to the Word.

This is the failure of the end time professing church. Their attitude to the Word is the reason they will be deceived by the end time signs and wonders. Because of their rebelliousness and refusal to hear the Truth (i.e. the Word, Jn 17.17), God Himself shall send strong delusion and turn them to believe fictions and falsehoods.

- (the man of sin), whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; ***because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie*** (2 Th 2.9-11).
- ***they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables*** (2 Tim 4.3-4).

How can the true believer overcome such a flood of remarkable manifestations?

When tempted by the evil one in the wilderness, Jesus overcame his words and his wonders by the Word: *it is written, it is written, it is written.*

And that is how we also overcome. Despite many adversaries (the spirit of error, the spirit of antichrist, many false prophets, many antichrists) John could triumphantly say:

*young men ... ye are strong, and **the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one*** (1 Jn 2.14).

We are at the end. Be alert. Even true believer must be fully alert and vigilant against the end time deception. *If it were possible, even the very elect would be deceived.*

No matter how great the manifestations and wonders, stay with the original Word and the revelation vindicated by divine power. Learn well the lesson of the old prophet.

though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed (Gal 1.8).

APPENDIX 1

The Flood of False Prophets at the End of the Kingdom of Judah

At the end of the Jewish kingdom, there appeared a veritable flood of false prophets just as prophesied to be at the end of the Church age.

In the Name of the Lord

Some prophesied openly in the name and under the inspiration of another god (e.g. Jer 2.8; 23.13).

But others, and they were not a few, in their utter folly did not fear to presume to speak in the name of the Lord, even though their words were not from the Lord.

- *Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! behold, the prophets say unto them, Ye shall not see the sword, neither shall ye have famine; but I will give you assured peace in this place. Then the LORD said unto me, The prophets prophesy lies **in my name**: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them ... thus saith the LORD concerning the prophets that prophesy **in my name**, and I sent them not, yet they say, Sword and famine shall not be in this land; By sword and famine shall those prophets be consumed (Jer 14.13-15).*
- *I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied ... I have heard what the prophets said, that prophesy lies **in my name** ... behold, I am against the prophets, saith the LORD, that steal my words every one from his neighbour ... that use their tongues, **and say, He saith.** (Jer 23.21, 25, 30-31)*
- *hearken not unto the words of the prophets that speak unto you, saying, Ye shall not serve the king of Babylon: for they prophesy a lie unto you. For I have not sent them, saith the LORD, yet they prophesy a lie **in my name**; that I might drive you out, and that ye might perish ... (Jer 27.14-15).*
- *They have seen vanity and lying divination, **saying, The LORD saith:** and the LORD hath not sent them: and they have made others to hope that they would confirm the word. Have ye not seen a vain vision, and have ye not spoken a lying divination, whereas **ye say, The LORD saith it;** albeit I have not spoken? (Ezk 13.6-7).*
- *her prophets have daubed them with untempered mortar, seeing vanity, and divining lies unto them, **saying, Thus saith the Lord GOD,** when the LORD hath not spoken (Ezk 22.28).*

Liars

At the end of the Jewish kingdom there were lying prophecies, lying divination, lying burdens, lying visions. Such prophets are not simply honestly mistaken. They are liars. They are of their father the devil, who is a liar, and the father of it (Jn 8.44).

(We meet such liars again in the early Church. They continue through Church history, with such lies coming to a climax at the end of the Church/Gentile age when they will be more numerous and powerful than ever before. At that time the man of sin will come with all power, signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness (2 Th 2.9-10).)

- *The prophets prophesy lies **in my name** (Jer 14.14).*
- *the prophets ... that **prophesy lies** (Jer 23.25).*
- *Thus saith the LORD; Hearken not to the words of your prophets that prophesy unto you, saying, Behold, the vessels of the LORD'S house shall*

now shortly be brought again from Babylon: for **they prophesy a lie** unto you (Jer 27.16).

- *they prophesy falsely* (Heb = in a lie) *unto you in my name* (Jer 29.9).
- *her prophets have daubed them with untempered mortar ... **divining lies** unto them* (Ezk 22.28).
- **They have seen vanity and lying divination ... have ye not spoken a lying divination ...?** (Ezk 13.6-7).
- *Thy prophets ... have **seen** for thee **false burdens** and causes of banishment* (Lam 2.14).
- *Because ye have ... **seen lies**, therefore, behold, I am against you ... mine hand shall be upon the prophets that ... **divine lies*** (Ezk 13.8-9).
- *And will ye ... slay the souls that should not die, and to save the souls alive that should not live, by your **lying** to my people that hear **your lies*** (Ezk 13.19)?

False dreams, false visions, false burdens

A true prophet is a seer (1 S 9.9). He often **sees** his prophecies by dream or vision, not just **hears** them. Likewise with false prophets. These also claim not only to be given divine words, but to receive many of them by dreams and visions.

- *they prophesy unto you **a false vision and divination*** (Jer 14.14).
- *Hearken not unto the words of the prophets ... they speak **a vision of their own heart**, and not out of the mouth of the LORD* (Jer 23.16).
- *the prophets ... that prophesy lies ... saying, **I have dreamed, I have dreamed** ... that prophesy false dreams* (Jer 23.25, 32).
- *Thy prophets have **seen vain and foolish things** for thee: and they have not discovered thine iniquity, to turn away thy captivity; but have **seen** for thee **false burdens** and causes of banishment* (Lam 2.14).
- *there shall be no more any **vain vision** nor flattering divination within the house of Israel* (Ezk 12.24).
- *Have ye not **seen a vain vision** ...? Because ye have ... **seen lies**, therefore, behold, I am against you ... mine hand shall be upon the prophets that ... **divine lies*** (Ezk 13.7-9).
- *the prophets of Israel which prophesy concerning Jerusalem, and which **see visions** of peace for her, and there is no peace* (Ezk 13.16).

Deceiving & Deceived

How did these men receive such false utterances and revelations? Because they were deceived.

- ***they prophesy** unto you ... **the deceit of their heart*** (Jer 14.14).
- *they are **prophets of the deceit of their own heart*** (Jer 23.26).
- ***they speak a vision of their own heart*** (Jer 23.16).
- *say thou unto them that **prophesy out of their own hearts** ...* (Ezk 13.2-3).

True prophets speak by the Holy Spirit like (2 P 1.21). But these speak by their own deceiving and deceived spirits.

- *Hear ye the word of the LORD; Thus saith the Lord GOD; Woe unto the foolish prophets, that **follow their own spirit**, and have seen nothing!* (Ezk 13.2-3)

But their revelations were not simply the product of their own hearts and spirits. There was something else at work. Another spirit (2 Cor 11.4), a seducing (1 Tim 4.1), deceiving, lying spirit.

How did these men come to be so deceived? After all, they really believed their own false words (e.g. Jer 28.1-11, where an easily verifiable time limit for the fulfilling of the prophecy was given).

The reason is both enlightening and solemn. The Lord Himself blinded both the prophets and the people.

- *Ah, Lord God! Surely **thou hast greatly deceived this people** and Jerusalem, saying (i.e. by the false prophets), *Ye shall have peace; whereas the sword reacheth to the soul* (Jer 4.10).*
- *if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, **I the LORD have deceived that prophet*** (Ezk 14.9).

(Obviously, the deceived ones prophesying of peace are the false prophets, not the true (cp Jer 6.14; Ezk 13.10; Mi 3.5).)

It is the story of Micaiah and the 400 professed prophets of the Lord all over again. We shall meet the same thing again, in an even more powerful form, in our own day, at the end of the present age.

Trying the Spirits

With such an array of prophets, all claiming supernatural revelations and to speak in the name of the Lord, how can the true believer discern who has the true word of the Lord?

Faced with great deception, we must be wary of disillusionment and throwing out the baby with the bathwater. The Bible says,

- *Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings. **Prove all things**; hold fast that which is good (1 Th 5.19-21).*
- *Beloved, believe not every spirit, but **try the spirits** whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world (1 Jn 4.1).*

How may we prove all things and try the spirits? Jesus gave two tests of prophets.

- By their popularity
- By their fruits

By their Popularity

Jesus said,

- *Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets. But woe unto you ... when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets. (Lk 6.22-26)*

How were the false prophets received?

- *The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; **and my people love to have it so*** (Jer 5.31).

How different from Jeremiah's reception! Although the few true believers received his ministry, for the professing people of God as a whole he was certainly not flavour of

the month. He was opposed not only by the people and their rulers, but also by those who should have known better, the priests (of whom he himself was one), and those claiming to be prophets of the Lord. In their folly they were not afraid not only to ignore but also to attack, imprison and even seek to murder a true prophet of God.

- *the men of Anathoth (i.e. his home and a priestly city) ... seek thy life, saying, Prophecy not in the name of the Lord, that thou die not by our hand (Jer 11.21).*
- *Then said they, Come, and let us devise devices against Jeremiah; for the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet. Come, and let us smite him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words ... Lord, thou knowest all their counsel against me to slay me (Jer 18.18, 23).*
- *Now it came to pass, when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking all that the LORD had commanded him ... the priests and the prophets and all the people took him, saying, Thou shalt surely die. ... Then spake the priests and the prophets unto the princes and to all the people, saying, This man is worthy to die; for he hath prophesied against this city (Jer 26.8, 11).*
- *Hananiah the son of Azur the prophet (and also a priest) ... spake unto me ... Then ... Jeremiah said unto ... Hananiah in the presence of the priests, and in the presence of all the people ... Amen: the LORD do so: the LORD perform thy words which thou hast prophesied, to bring again the vessels of the LORD'S house, and all that is carried away captive, from Babylon into this place ... Then Hananiah the prophet took the yoke from off the prophet Jeremiah's neck, and brake it. And Hananiah spake in the presence of all the people, saying, Thus saith the LORD; Even so will I break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon from the neck of all nations within the space of two full years. And the prophet Jeremiah went his way. Then the word of the LORD came unto Jeremiah ... saying, ... Then said the prophet Jeremiah unto Hananiah the prophet, Hear now, Hananiah; The LORD hath not sent thee; but thou makest this people to trust in a lie. Therefore, thus saith the Lord ... this year thou shalt die ... So Hananiah the prophet died the same year in the seventh month (Jer 28.1, 5-6, 10-12, 15-17).*

But even such evident vindication did not lead to repentance. The arrogance and defiance was such that even those carried into exile in Babylon in direct fulfilment of the prophetic word of Jeremiah still opposed the true prophet of God.

- *Now these are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem unto the residue of the elders which were carried away captives, and to the priests, and to the prophets, and to all the people ... thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Let not your prophets and your diviners ... deceive you, neither hearken to your dreams which ye cause to be dreamed. ... ye have said, The LORD hath raised us up prophets in Babylon ... they have not hearkened to my words, saith the LORD, which I sent unto them by my servants the prophets ... they have ... spoken lying words in my name, which I have not commanded them ... Thus shalt thou also speak to Shemaiah the Nehelamite, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, saying, Because thou hast sent letters in thy name unto all the people that are at Jerusalem ... and to all the priests, saying, The LORD hath made thee priest in the stead of Jehoiada the priest, that ye should be officers in the house of the LORD, for (i.e. over) every man that is mad, and maketh himself a prophet, that thou shouldest put him in prison, and in the stocks. Now therefore why hast thou not reprov'd Jeremiah of Anathoth, which maketh himself a prophet to you? (Jer 29.1, 8, 15, 19, 23, 24-27)*

The book of Jeremiah gives many other examples of the persecution suffered by

Jeremiah at the hands of the princes, the people and his fellow priests, even unto prison. He was certainly not well received!

Ezekiel likewise.

- *Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that hath rebelled against me: they and their fathers have transgressed against me, even unto this very day. For they are impudent children and stiffhearted. I do send thee unto them; and thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD. And they, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, (for they are a rebellious house,) yet shall know that there hath been a prophet among them. And thou, son of man, be not afraid of them, neither be afraid of their words, though briars and thorns be with thee, and thou dost dwell among scorpions: be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house. And thou shalt speak my words unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear: for they are most rebellious. (Ezk 2.3-7)*

On one occasion, the Lord told him what people were saying about his ministry.

- *thy people still are talking against thee by the walls and in the doors of the houses, and speak one to another ... saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the LORD. And they come ... and they sit before thee ... and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not. (Ezk 33.30-32)*

By their Fruits

A second test of a prophet Jesus gave is, *by their fruits ye shall know them* (Mt 7.20).

The fruits of the false prophets of Jeremiah's day were certainly not good.

Sinful, even to the shedding of blood

- *For the sins of her prophets ... that have shed the blood of the just in the midst of her ... (Lam 4.13).*

Covetous & deceitful

- *For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely (Jer 6.13) (cp Jer 8.10).*
- *will ye pollute me among my people for handfuls of barley and for pieces of bread, to slay the souls that should not die, and to save the souls alive that should not live, by your lying to my people that hear your lies (Ezk 13.19)?*
- *There is a conspiracy of her prophets ... like a roaring lion ravening the prey; they have devoured souls; they have taken the treasure and precious things (Ezk 22.25).*
- *Israel, thy prophets are like the foxes in the deserts (Ezk 13.4).*

Thieves

- *As the thief is ashamed when he is found, so is the house of Israel ashamed; they, their kings, their princes, and their priests, and their prophets (Jer 2.26).*

Profane, wicked, lying & adulterous

- *Mine heart within me is broken because of the prophets ... For both prophet and priest are profane; yea, in my house have I found their wickedness, saith*

the LORD. ... And I have seen folly in the prophets of Samaria; they prophesied in Baal, and caused my people Israel to err. I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem an horrible thing: **they commit adultery, and walk in lies**: they **strengthen also the hands of evildoers**, that none doth return from his wickedness: they are all of them unto me as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah ... for **from the prophets of Jerusalem is profaneness gone forth into all the land** (Jer 23.9, 11, 14-15).

- **they have committed villany in Israel, and have committed adultery with their neighbours' wives, and have spoken lying words in my name, which I have not commanded them ...** (Jer 29.23).

APPENDIX 2

How was Timothy exhorted to overcome?

Paul solemnly charged Timothy to guard well the original divine revelation first entrusted to himself.

- ***Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed unto thee keep*** (2 Tim 1.13-14).
- ***This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy*** (1 Tim 1.18).
- ***Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust*** (1 Tim 6.20).

But how could Timothy fulfil so weighty a charge in the light of the flood of deception invading the early Church? How could he live up to so high a calling? This was war! The days were perilous and evil. How could he overcome?

In the same way that Jesus overcame. By the Spirit and the Word.

By the Spirit

Although the forces arrayed against Timothy were powerful, so too were his weapons.

Firstly, ***the indwelling Spirit***, the Spirit of power.

- ***Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me ... That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us*** (2 Tim 1.13-14).
- ***stir up the gift of God, which is in thee ... God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love ... be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God*** (2 Tim 1.6-8).

Secondly, ***the voice of the Spirit***, equipping him for battle.

- ***This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare; Holding faith*** (1 Tim 1.18-19a).

Lastly (but certainly not least), ***the sword of the Spirit***, the Word of God.

By the Word

Timothy had received a good grounding in the Word in his early years.

- ***From childhood in the OT, from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures*** (2 Tim 3.15).
- ***Later, from Paul, thou hast fully known*** (Gk = closely/carefully followed) ***my doctrine*** (2 Tim 3.10).

But how could Timothy overcome the flood of seducing spirits and doctrines of demons which so soon entered, seeking to seduce, entice and deceive the Church, drawing her away from that revelation?

By ensuring that the word he heard from the beginning remained in him (1 Jn 2.24).

Paul exhorted Timothy to continue in his doctrine, resisting those who brought another doctrine (1 Tim 1.3) and staying true to the original.

- **continue thou in the things which thou hast learned** and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them (2 Tim 3.14).
- **Take heed** unto thyself, and **unto the doctrine; continue in them:** for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee (1 Tim 4.16).
- If thou **put the brethren in remembrance of these things**, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, **nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine**, whereunto thou hast attained (1 Tim 4.6).

He was not to give up the fight, continuing to proclaim that original Word, whether the going was easy or hard.

- **Fight the good fight of faith ... keep this commandment** without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Tim 6.12, 14).
- I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ ... **Preach the word;** be instant in season, out of season; **reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine ... watch thou in all things, endure afflictions ... make full proof of thy ministry** (2 Tim 4.1-5).

If he did not give up the fight but continued in the original Word and fulfilled his ministry, he would be able to echo the triumphant final words of Paul.

- **I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith** (2 Tim 4.7).

What fight? The good fight of the faith (1 Tim 6.12). What faith? The faith once and for all delivered to the saints (Ju 3). Like Paul, he would have stayed true to the original to the very end.

He would have overcome.