

Satan's consummate deception

Can we really expect a Sunday law to be the final test of loyalty to God in a non-Christian nation?

We believe that prior to the second coming of Christ the controversy about allegiance to God will divide the world into two camps: those who keep Saturday, the true Sabbath, and those who observe Sunday, the false Sabbath. But if this is so, how will the billions who live in lands where Sunday has no religious significance be drawn into the controversy? While it is not difficult to envision a national Sunday law in the United States or other Western nations, what about Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist countries, where Sunday is about as holy to the people as the Aztec god Quetzalcoatl is to High-Church Anglicans in Canterbury? How will the flagburning fanatics in Iran who march their children across mine fields for the glory of Allah, or the Orthodox Jews in Jerusalem who stone cars that drive through their districts on the *Shabbat*, or billions of other non-Christians ever be persuaded to keep Sunday holy?

We don't know. Though the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy teach that these issues will be worldwide and that each individual will understand the issues clearly enough to make a rational choice between allegiance to God's law and allegiance to man's, how all nations will be caught up in the final events has not been revealed. All this article can do, then, is show one *possible* way that all those on the earth might be deceived.

In the last days of Jesus' earthly ministry He warned about false Christs. "Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (Matt. 24:23, 24).

Ellen White, in *The Great Controversy*, describes how Satan himself will come as one of these false Christs. "As the crowning act in the great drama of deception, Satan himself will personate Christ.... In different parts of the earth, Satan will manifest himself among men as a majestic being of dazzling brightness, resembling the description of the Son of God given by John in the Revelation (Rev. 1:13-15). The glory that surrounds him is unsurpassed by anything that mortal eyes have yet beheld" (p. 624).

Though this deception could dupe Christians, what about the Muslims in the Sahara Desert, the Jews in Galilee, or the Buddhists in the Himalayas? How could Satan's "crowning act" affect them?

The answer lies in the eschatology of these other faiths. Christians are not the only ones expecting the Saviour. The Jews are still awaiting the Messiah's first appearing. Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims also anticipate the arrival of a super natural personage. "In all three religions [Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism]," writes Jack Gratus in his book *The False Messiahs*, "there are variations on the belief in a future saviour who will arise after a period of universal upheaval to bring peace and happiness to the world." And it is this universal hope of an end-time divine deliverer that could open the rest of the world to Satan's consummate deception.

MESSIANIC WOES

"All the prophets prophesied," says the Talmud, "only for messianic times." The great Jewish philosopher Moses ben Maimonides (1135-1204) taught that the coming of the Messiah was basic to Judaism. In the twelfth of his 13 Articles of Faith, he stated: "I firmly believe in the coming of the Messiah; and although He may tarry, I daily hope for His coming." Despite great confusion about the Messiah's advent, many believed, and still do, that He would appear during a time of great trouble, called the "Messianic Woes," when He would rescue His people and usher in a millennium of peace. "Only the cataclysmic intervention of a divinely endowed being," wrote Abba Hillel Silver in his classic *History of Messianic Speculation in Israel*, "at the moment of the nation's deepest degradation, could destroy the wicked powers which oppressed it, restore the people, cleansed by suffering, to its ancient glory, and rebuild the broken harmonies of the world."

This Advent hope, coupled with the jumbled theories concerning it, opened the Jews to a stream of messianic shams. Simeon Bar Kokba declared, "I am the Messiah!" and led a revolt against the Romans in A.D. 231 that left hundreds of thousands of Jews dead. In the fifth century, pseudomessiah Moses of Crete promised to lead the Jews dry-shod across the sea to Jerusalem. On the Day of Redemption many of the Jews, expecting the water to part, jumped into the sea and drowned.

Serene of Syria, Obayah Abu-Isa ben Ishak, David Alroy, Solomon Molcho, Abraham Abulafia, Isaac Luria, Shabbetai Zebi, Jacob Frank, and others all made messianic declarations and through the centuries thousands of Jews have believed them, often with disastrous results.

Even today a feverish messianism pulses among some Orthodox Jews. A few years ago zealots in Israel tried to blow up the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. Their motive, according to the *New Republic*, was to so enrage the Arabs that they would wage such a vicious jihad against Israel that "the Messiah would come to save his people from destruction."

THE MUSLIM MAHDI

Not only do Muslims believe in a divine "Restorer of the Faith," but many associate him with the returned Jesus. The Koran makes reference to the Christ's second coming (IV, 159). Known in Islamic tradition as the Mahdi, the twelfth in a line of Imams, the "Rightly Guided One" will usher in a thousand years of peace and justice after ending the reign of "antichrist." According to one Islamic tradition, the antichrist will devastate the whole world, leaving only Mecca and Medina in security, as these holy cities will be guarded by angelic legions. Christ at last will descend to earth and in a great battle will destroy the "man-devil."

Though all orthodox Muslims believe in the return of a divine "Restorer," they disagree on the exact nature of the return, a situation that has bred a procession of bogus Mahdis. Among them was Muhammad Ahmad, the Mahdi of Sudan, who revolted against the Egyptian administration in 1881 and after several spectacular victories established a theocratic state that lasted until 1898, when the British conquered it. Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, claiming to be the Mahdi, gained a following in the 1800s. Ali Mohammed of Shiraz declared: "I am, I am the promised one.... I am the one whose name you have for a thousand years invoked, at whose mention you have risen, whose advent you have longed to witness." He was shot by a firing squad. His sect exists today, known as the Baha'i.

HINDU AND BUDDHIST EXPECTATIONS

According to Hindu belief, the god Vishnu incarnates himself whenever evil prevails. The most important incarnation, however, will be in the form of Kalki, who will appear in the clouds with a flaming sword in his hand, riding on a white steed. He will destroy all evildoers in an apocalyptic battle that will initiate a thousand-year reign of peace on the earth.

"So similar is this expectation to the Christian messianic hope," wrote Wilson Wallis in *Messiahs: Christian and Pagan*, "that some years ago the Reverend John Newton of Lahore took advantage of this prediction and wrote a tract showing that the true deliverer and king of righteousness had already come in the person of Jesus Christ. So striking seemed the fulfillment from a Hindu standpoint, that some hundreds in the city of Rampore were led to a faith in Christ as an avatar [incarnation] of Vishnu."

In the 1830s one shaman claimed that he was the incarnation of a Hindu god and led a rebellion against the British, who shot him dead. In northern India a Hindu beggar claimed that he was Kalki come to liberate the masses and initiate a thousand years of peace. After he was jailed his movement fizzled, as have dozens of other Hindu messianic movements.

According to some Buddhist sects, a long procession of bodhisattvas as incarnations of Buddha has appeared on the earth to bestow knowledge upon mankind. In some sects a future savior, the last Buddha, called Maitreya, "Son of Love," is expected to appear from heaven and bring great spiritual blessings. Though there is little incentive in Buddhism for any would-be messiahs, in Japan in 1910 a journalist appeared on the streets of Tokyo and claimed to be the Messiah-Buddha, asserting that he was the "consummation of all the prophecies since the beginning of the world." He and his small movement eventually faded away.

THIS SAME JESUS

Ever since Jesus said, "Behold, I come quickly," Christians have been anticipating His return. Though the Bible, especially the New Testament, teems with Advent texts, Christians disagree on when He will come, where He will come, how He will come, and what He will do when He does come.

This Advent hope--coupled with the confusion over the particulars--has nurtured countless false christs. In 1534 radical Anabaptist John of Leiden declared himself a messianic king and took over the city of Munster in Westphalia. James Nayler, a seventeenth-century Quaker leader in England, had a large following who believed he was the messiah. In Russia messianic movements started under several false messiahs, including the notorious Skoptsy sect of the 1700s, whose leader demanded that his male followers be castrated. In China a self-proclaimed messiah, Hung Hsiu-Ch'ian, initiated a rebellion that took 20 million lives between 1850 and 1864. In America William E. Riker claimed he was the Holy Spirit and in the 1940s founded Holy City, California--his New Jerusalem.

Even today, false christs abound. Sun Myung Moon's messianic claims have received much publicity. Jesus Christ Lightning Amen, a middle-aged recluse reported to be living somewhere in an Arizona desert, gets less publicity but nonetheless believes he is the messiah.

THE CONSUMMATE DECEPTION

The world's great religions have at least two important similarities that could become factors in Satan's grand deception: all expect a divine personage to usher in an era of peace, and all have discord within their own faith about the nature of his coming.

In *The Great Controversy* Ellen White describes the chaos prior to the Second Coming. She quotes Revelation 12:12: "Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time." She places this verse in the last days: "Fearful are the scenes," she writes, "which call forth this exclamation from the heavenly voice. The wrath of Satan increases as his time grows short, and his work of deceit and destruction will reach its culmination in the time of trouble" (p. 623).

Historically, messianic fervor among the different faiths climaxed during crisis times because the people saw a divine deliverer as their only hope. Imagine, then, the messianic expectation of Hindus, Jews, Muslims, and Christians as they face "a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time" (Dan. 12:1), especially since most expect the messiah to come during a time of trouble.

Then, in the midst of this great turmoil, Satan will appear in different parts of the earth in unsurpassed glory. He comes--a majestic being of dazzling brightness--to the Islamic world in the way the Mahdi is expected, and Muslims bow down on their prayer carpets before the "Rightly Guided One," who will usher in the thousand years of peace. In glory unsurpassed by anything that mortal eyes have yet beheld, he arrives among the Hindus, who see him as Kalki, the final and climactic incarnation of Vishnu. The Jews rejoice; their long-awaited *Mashiach* has finally arrived, not as a humble servant, but as they have been expecting, a powerful king who will end the "Messianic Woes." The Buddhists see Maitreya, come to bestow blessing upon mankind. Meanwhile, Christians shout, "Christ has come! Christ has come!" All these groups--already confused about the nature of the Advent--have been duped in the past by charlatans with much less deceptive power than the devil. If people today believe that a Sun Myung Moon is the returned Christ, what will happen when Satan himself in unsurpassed glory makes the claim?

Also, if a divine personage--a false Jesus, Kalki, or Maitreya, it doesn't matter which--appeared on the earth, it wouldn't take long for millions of Communists to realize just how unreal "socialist realism" is.

Satan, impersonating Christ, speaks deep truths, heals the sick, and performs other miracles. In the Hindu world he quotes from the Vedas, before Muslims he quotes from the Koran, and before Christians "he presents some of the same gracious, heavenly truths which the Saviour uttered" (*ibid.*, p. 624). Then, because the world is suffering in a terrible time of trouble, he tells the non-Christians that to help end the woes they all should have a common day, Sunday, to worship God. In this "strong, almost overmastering delusion" he makes the same appeal to the Christian world, claiming "to have changed the Sabbath to Sunday" (*ibid.*).

And the billions of the world--desperate for the wars, the earthquakes, the famines, the pestilence, and the violence to stop obey the words of their long-awaited savior and pay homage to the false Sabbath, thus receiving the mark of the beast.

PEACE

Perhaps it is no coincidence that the world's great religions all expect a divine personage to usher in an era of peace. Satan will orchestrate his paramount subterfuge by fulfilling mankind's expectations. He is preparing the world for it now. A few years ago the New Age movement spent hundreds of thousands of dollars advertising in the world's foremost newspapers that the Messiah of the Jews, the Mahdi of the Muslims, the Christ of Christians, the Maitreya of Buddhists, and the Krishna of the Hindus were all names for one individual and that he would bring peace to the world. In October of 1986 the pope brought together 150 religious leaders from a dozen faiths--everyone from the Archbishop of Canterbury to the Dalai Lama--to pray for world peace.

Yet peace hasn't come, and won't. As the earth descends into the time of trouble, billions will plead for Maitreya, Kalki, the Messiah, the Mahdi, or Jesus to come. And as Satan executes his grandest lie, he just might appear to each religion as the peace bringer for whom they have long been waiting.