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## Deception. Matthew 24:4-5

By Elder Keith Ellis

"And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you."  
Matthew 24:4

This is the first thing our Lord says in answer to the questions asked in the previous verse. Of course it is no surprise our Lord would warn the disciples against the deceitfulness of man.

There was good reason for warning that particular generation of disciples. It seems the period of time under examination turns out to be a very momentous one in the history of the world.

God was manifested in the flesh. He ministered to His sheep, was crucified, buried and resurrected. Not only for the blood of Jesus, but also for the blood of all the righteous prophets would the city and its inhabitants suffer the wrath of God. There would be no greater period in all the history of the world. The law of sacrifices would be ended in a dramatic fashion. The New Testament church was to be established with its supporting signs and wonders. One of the most wonderful religious buildings ever designed would be destroyed. And those unbelieving Jews who remained alive would be scattered to the four winds of the earth. There would be wars, famine, and pestilence. There would be a great tribulation period. Yet there would also be great deliverance for the believing Jews. All of which would take place before AD 70. These were the days of vengeance prophesied in the Old Testament. (Deuteronomy 28:20-69; Isaiah 6:9-12; Daniel 9:25-27)

Jesus warns the disciples in one place to "take heed what ye hear." So they had to be careful of what they believed. It is certain there were plenty of gainsayers available to mislead the people. And of course there were still plenty of unbelieving Jews to raise doubts in the minds of the new Christians.

It is interesting to note that all but one instance of Jesus' warnings concerning deceit are speaking of the very subject we are now engaged in. The only other time Jesus even uses the word is in a parable concerning the deceitfulness of riches.

It was vital for them to remember the words of Jesus and stand fast in them. Thomas, who is commonly referred to as *doubting Thomas*, was one who questioned the truth of what the others had said about seeing Christ after His resurrection. He said to them;

"...Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe."

John 20:25

Could it be that Thomas was doing what Christ had earlier instructed the disciples to do?

"Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there, believe it not."  
Matthew 24:23

And even earlier in His Olivet discourse Jesus states;

"For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many."  
Matthew 24:5

Many fell into this category. This was the first sign, of which the disciples inquired, which would take place before the termination of the age. There would be persons who would assume the name of Christ, and pretend to be the one whom the nation of Israel was awaiting.

The Jews expected Messiah to deliver them from the oppression of the Roman government. Theudas was one who was a self-proclaimed prophet and thought to deliver the people from under the yoke of Rome. He is mentioned in Acts five chapter thirty six. It is said he drew away or deceived about four hundred men. Another one mentioned in Acts five was Judas of Galilee, and he drew away much people after him. (Verse 37) Acts thirteen verse six tells us about Bar-jesus, a false prophet. Acts chapter eight verses nine through eleven speaks of Simon, a sorcerer and says of him;

"But there was certain man, called Simon, which before time in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out himself was some great one; To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God."

Acts 8:9-10

Of course these verses need no comment. They show conclusively the existence of false prophets who claimed exactly what Jesus said they would. The above text and others show there were many instances found in the scripture which fulfill the warnings given by Jesus stating there would be many come in His name saying they were Christ. In the writings of John we see where he states the anti-Christ was already active during his day. (1 John 4:1-3) And these instances were recorded as having taken place before AD 70 and saw their fulfillment during that generation of disciples.

"Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled."

Matthew 24:34

Though those instances saw their fulfillment before AD 70 we can see evidence all around us today some things never change. People like David Koresh and others are still claiming to be Christ. Men are still active in the work of deception. Many have fallen prey to the seduction of men. Any man who purposely removes Matthew twenty-four from its true time context and preaches it as future may unwittingly find himself in the role of deceiver.

History does repeat itself. Hopefully God will give us grace in order to discern the errors of our brethren of days gone by. We should seek to learn History's lessons so we do not repeat its mistakes.