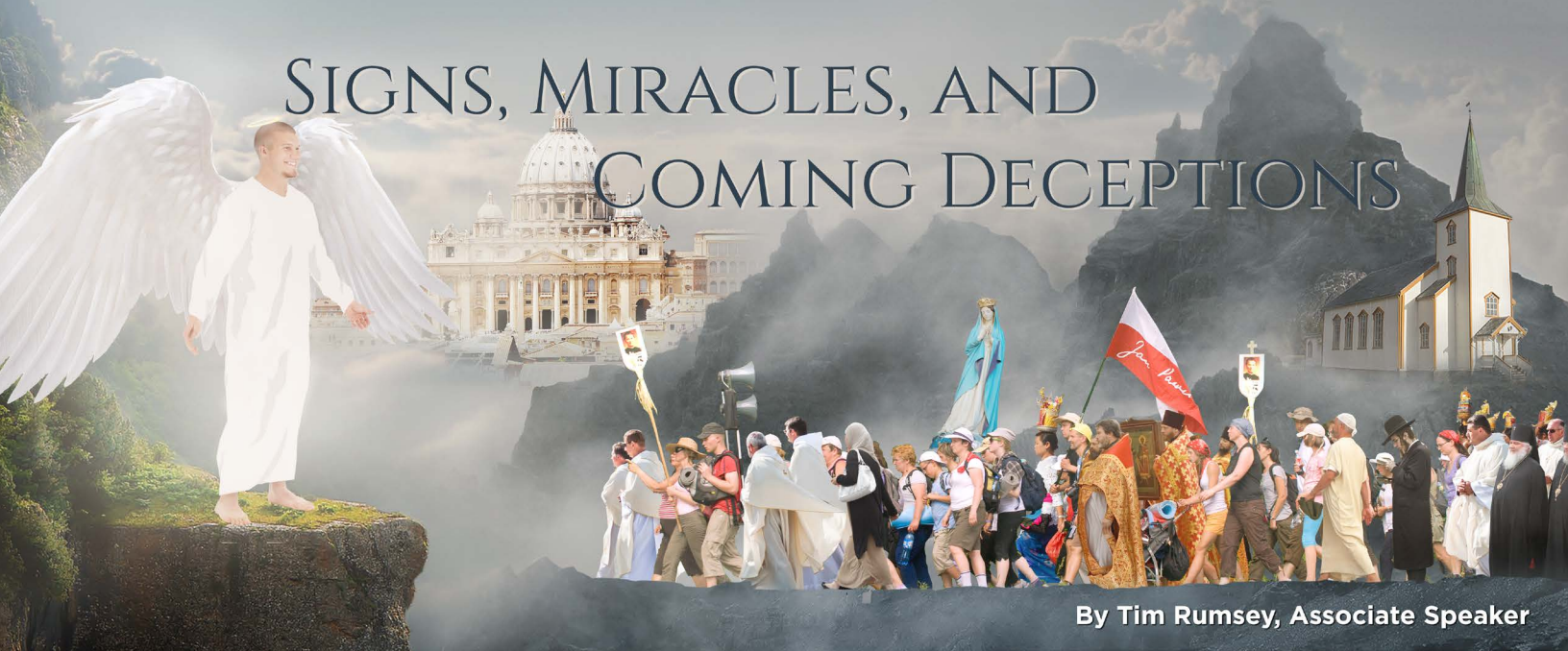


SIGNS, MIRACLES, AND COMING DECEPTIONS



By Tim Rumsey, Associate Speaker

Nina De Santo was closing her New Jersey hair salon late one Saturday night when a customer named Michael appeared outside the shop's glass front door. Michael had been going through a difficult time in his life following a divorce and child custody battle, and De Santo had talked with him more than once as he struggled to get back on his feet. Michael smiled and said, "Nina, I can't stay long. I just want to stop by and say thank you for everything." After a brief chat, Michael left and Nina went home. The next morning she received a phone call from one of her employees. Michael's body had been found the previous morning, nearly ten hours before she talked to him in front of her shop. He had committed suicide. **Michael was dead—so who, or what, had Nina been talking to?**¹

Miracles are happening all around us today. Many involve appearances or communications from deceased persons. In others people have near-death, or out-of-body experiences. **And then there are highly public phenomena, like the miracle that Pope Francis purportedly performed during a trip to Naples, Ita-**

ly, in 2015. As the pope prayed over a vial of dried blood, the blood began to liquefy. Crescenzo Sepe, the Archbishop of Naples, was standing next to Pope Francis and declared, "The blood has half liquefied, which shows that Saint Januarius [the saint whose blood was in the vial] loves our pope and Naples."²

Are these supernatural experiences and phenomena real? Many people shrug their shoulders and dismiss them as either hoaxes or the product of people's imagination. But the Bible states that miracles really do happen. When Jesus lived on earth, He performed many miracles, healing people of sickness, disease, and spirit-possession. John 2:23 says that "many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did." Jesus even raised the dead back to life! One example of Christ's power over death was the raising of Lazarus, a friend of Jesus who had fallen ill, died, and laid in the grave for four days before Jesus called him back to life. "And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Loose him, and let him go'" (John 11:44).

Jesus also gave His disciples power to work miracles. The Bible says that "when He had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease." (Matthew 10:1). In the book of Acts, Peter, Paul, and other early Christians healed people and even raised the

dead to life. Clearly, miracles do happen. But what is their purpose? Hebrews 2:4 says that God confirms His word through "signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit." God performs miracles to confirm our faith in Him and in the Bible, His word. This is also why Jesus gave His disciples power to work miracles. Mark 16:20 says, "And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs." The miracles and signs were given to confirm the word of God!

So are all miracles sent from God? Hardly. Jesus warned that just before His second coming, there would be many deceptions and false miracles. "For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect" (Matthew 24:24). These false miracles will be so powerful and convincing that even those who love God and want to do what's right could be fooled.

According to 2 Thessalonians 2:9, "the coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders." In the Christian classic, *The Great Controversy*, the writer warns us about the reality and danger of satanic miracles. "Fearful sights of a supernatural character will soon be revealed in the heavens, in token of the power of miracle-working demons... [R]ulers and subjects will be alike deceived. Persons will arise pretending to be Christ Himself, and claiming the title

and worship which belong to the world's Redeemer. They will perform wonderful miracles of healing and will profess to have revelations from heaven contradicting the testimony of the Scriptures.”³



The Bible identifies at least three general types of signs and miracles that Satan will use at the end of time to deceive people, and ultimately lead them to accept the mark of the beast. Counterfeit “gifts of the spirit” are one type of false miracle, and include the gift of prophecy, casting out devils, and healing. Jesus warned that at the end of time people would exercise false gifts of the spirit. He said,

“Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name? And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me,

you who practice lawlessness!’ ”
(Matthew 7:22-23).

Don’t miss what Jesus is saying! Even though someone appears to work miracles and be a prophet, the real test is whether they practice lawlessness. The Bible warns in 2 Thessalonians 2:9 that “the coming of the *lawless* one is according to the working of Satan.” What does the Bible mean by “lawlessness?” We don’t have to guess. 1 John 3:4 gives a clear answer: “Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.” The King James Version phrases it this way: “Sin is the transgression of the law.” In other words, the most important thing to consider when discerning between true and false miracles is whether the person performing the miracle—or the person making the prophecy—lives according to the law of God and teaches others what it means to obey God’s law.

The second type of false miracle at the end of time will be false unity. Revelation 16:14 predicts that the “spirits of demons, performing signs,” will “go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, *to gather them* to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.” Unity among religions and unity in worship does not guarantee that such a movement is from God. In John 17:20-23, Jesus did pray for unity among all His believers, but *first* He prayed that His believers would be separated from the world by their faith in Him and obedience to God’s word.

“I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world...Sanctify them by Your truth.

Your word is truth” (John 17:14,17).”

It was more important to Jesus that His disciples are faithful to the teachings of God’s word, than that they have visible unity. When we are obedient to God’s word, we will have true unity. But any unity that is built on ignoring or breaking the law of God will be false, and ultimately destructive.

The third type of false miracle that the Bible predicts at the end of time involves supposed communication with the dead. The Bible teaches that when we die our thoughts perish (Psalm 146:4 and Ecclesiastes 9:5), we have no remembrance of God (Psalm 6:4,5), and we cannot praise God (Psalm 115:17). Jesus compared death to an unconscious sleep (John 11:11), and the Bible teaches that it is impossible for the dead to return to their house and visit those who are still living (Job 7:9-10). God told Adam and Eve that when they died they would not go directly to heaven, but return to the dust of the ground (Genesis 3:19).

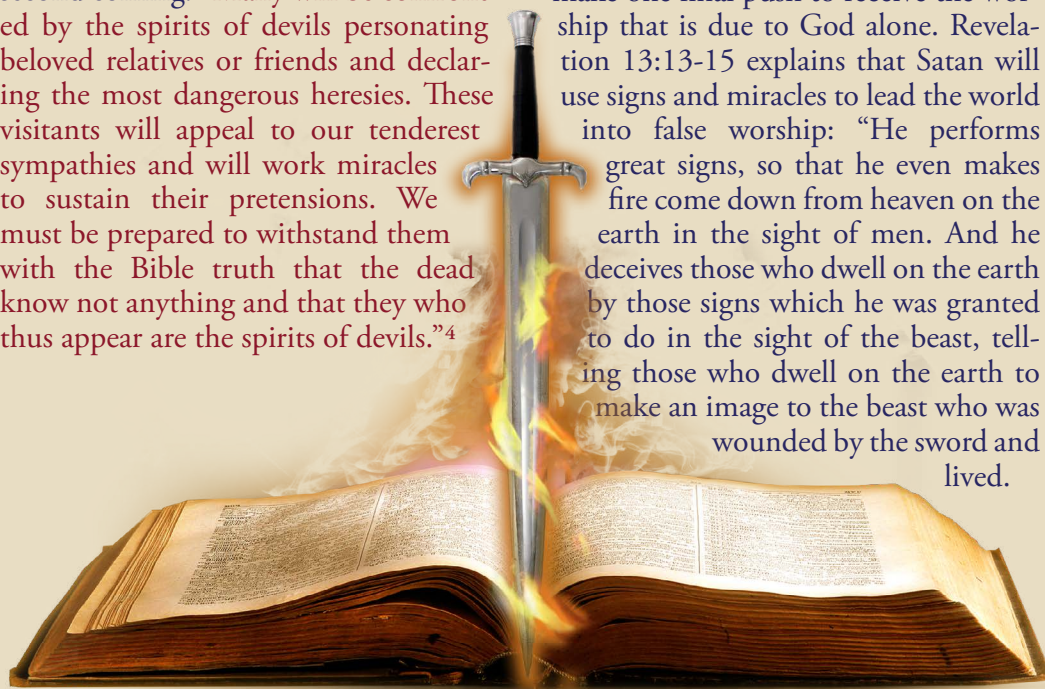
The Bible warns explicitly against attempting to communicate with the dead.

“There shall not be found among you anyone who...practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead”
(Deuteronomy 18:10-11).

Satan can make himself look like an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14),



and he can also appear in the form of a dead person. Deceptions involving communication with the dead will become widespread shortly before Jesus Christ's second coming: "Many will be confronted by the spirits of devils personating beloved relatives or friends and declaring the most dangerous heresies. These visitants will appeal to our tenderest sympathies and will work miracles to sustain their pretensions. We must be prepared to withstand them with the Bible truth that the dead know not anything and that they who thus appear are the spirits of devils."⁴



God's inspired word warns that trying to communicate with the dead is not only impossible, but is extremely dangerous because Satan is able to imitate the form and voice of those that have died. Isaiah 8:19-20 says, "And when they say to you, 'Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter,' should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."

A true miracle sent from God will affirm both the word and law of God. Hebrew 10:16 explains that the work of the Holy Spirit is to write God's law on our mind and heart: "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them." God will not perform a miracle, and the Holy Spirit will not give a spiritual gift, that leads people away from faith in Jesus or obedience to God's law. Instead, God's true spiritual gifts and miracles will enable people to be faithful to God's law in every way, in every part of their lives, all the time.

The final crisis on earth before Jesus returns will be over the law of God. Satan has always wanted worship (Isaiah 14:12-14), and at the end of time he will make one final push to receive the worship that is due to God alone. Revelation 13:13-15 explains that Satan will use signs and miracles to lead the world into false worship: "He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived.

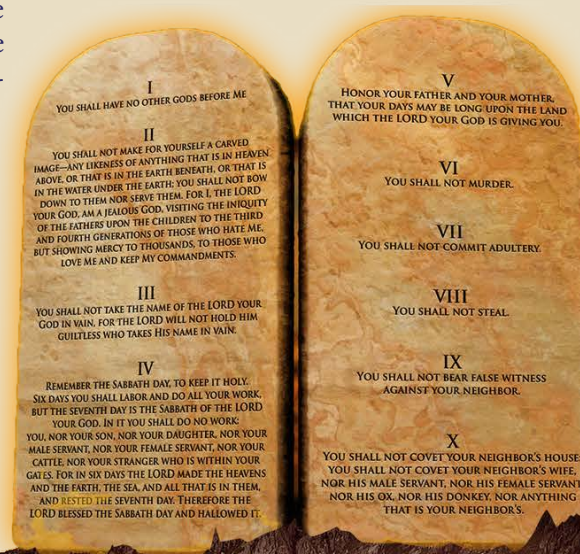
He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed."

Those that participate in the false worship will receive the mark of the beast and face God's judgment (Revelation 14:9-10), while those that choose to remain loyal to God will be faced with the threat of death (Revelation 13:15). Revelation 14:12 describes those that remain loyal to God in this coming time of crisis: "Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus." How can you be on God's side and not receive the mark of the beast? It's very simple! Have faith in Jesus Christ to save you, and choose to obey God's law—all of it.

There is one commandment that even most Christians have forgotten, and that is the fourth commandment to keep the seventh day holy. "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but *the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God*" (Exodus 20:8-10). Many Christians assume that the actual day has either been changed or doesn't matter to God, but this commandment has never been changed in the Bible, and James points out that

"whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10).

In Revelation 15:2, God's faithful people are pictured standing on a sea of glass, and they have been victorious over four things—the beast, his image, the number of his name, and the mark of the beast. These four things correspond to Satan's attack against the first four commandments. The first commandment says to worship God alone (Exodus 20:3), but at the end of time the beast wants to have your worship (Revelation 13:4). Those who are faithful to God will keep the first commandment, and worship only God.



The second commandment says not to worship any graven image (Exodus 20:4), but at the end of time all of the world's inhabitants will be told to worship the image of the beast (Revelation 13:15). Those who are faithful to God will keep the second commandment, and refuse to worship the image of the beast.

The third commandment says not to take God's name in vain (Exodus 20:7), but at the end of time the beast power wants people to honor and reverence its name, which is the number of man or 666 (Revelation 13:18). Those who are faithful to God will keep the third commandment, and remember that the name of God in heaven is the only name that should be worshipped.

The first three things that God's people have victory over in Revelation 15:2 correspond to Satan's attacks against the first three commandments, and the final things they have victory over—the mark of the beast—points to Satan's attack against God's fourth commandment.

The fourth commandment reminds us to keep holy the seventh day of every week (Exodus 20:8-11), but at the end of time the mark of the beast will compel worship on another day—Sunday, the first day of the week. Many Christians are unaware that Sunday worship gradu-

ally crept into the church in the first few centuries after Christ, a result of man's authority and traditions rather than any command in Scripture. In 321 AD the Roman emperor Constantine issued a Sunday worship law which set apart the first day of the week as sacred. Several decades later the Council of Laodicea prohibited worship on the seventh-day Sabbath and mandated that Christians work on the seventh day of the week.

Prophecy indicates that the same thing will happen at the end of time. Enforced Sunday worship will be the visible sign of a false unity that sweeps the world, but those who are faithful to God will keep the fourth commandment and worship Him on the seventh day, even when miracles, signs, and wonders seem to indicate that Sunday now has God's special blessing.

“As the crowning act in the great drama of deception, Satan himself will personate Christ...The glory that surrounds him is unsurpassed by anything that mortal eyes have yet beheld...His voice is soft and subdued, yet full of melody. In gentle, compassionate tones he presents some of the same gracious, heavenly truths which the Saviour uttered; he heals the diseases of the people, and then, in his assumed character of Christ, he claims to

have changed the Sabbath to Sunday, and commands all to hallow the day which he has blessed. He declares that those who persist in keeping holy the seventh day are blaspheming his name by refusing to listen to his angels sent to them with light and truth. This is the strong, almost overmastering delusion.”⁵

Friend, God wants you to make a decision *today* to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior, to keep all of God's holy law, and to worship Him on the seventh-day Sabbath. God wants you to build a daily relationship with Him through prayer and reading His word. Head knowledge of spiritual things is not enough—we must know Jesus personally and surrender our lives to Him each day. Jesus says, “If you love Me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). Do you love Jesus? Will you decide today to surrender your life to Jesus, trust in His power to save you, and to serve Him by keeping all of His commandments? If you do, no false sign or miracle will be able to separate you from your Savior.

¹ <http://www.cnn.com/2011/09/23/living/crisis-apparitions/index.html>

² <http://www.cnn.com/2011/09/23/living/crisis-apparitions/index.html>

³ E.G. White: *The Great Controversy* p. 624.

⁴ E.G. White: *The Great Controversy* p. 506.

⁵ E.G. White: *The Great Controversy* p. 624.

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