

COUNTERFEITS IN THE LAST DAYS By J. HUDSON BALLARD

In speaking of the characteristics of these last days, it would seem that the people of God are to be attacked along three lines—skeptical, heretical, and fanatical lines. The skeptic will work most havoc among the worldly-minded Christians, who never experienced a supernatural touch; the heretic will capture the inquisitive-minded ones, who live most of their religion in their heads; but the fanatic will swell his ranks with the conscientious souls who tremble lest they miss God's will. Is it not heart-sickening to think of the thousands who will be ensnared by these hell-inspired agencies in the days that are now upon us? Have we a proper sense of our own imminent danger?

In these three lines of attack there are three leading characteristics, true of each of them: Great power, great deception, and great success.

1. Great Power (2 Tim. iii. 8 ; Matt. xxiv. 24 ; Matt. vii. 22, 23 ; 2 Thess. ii. 9). As the Lord Jesus co-operated with His faithful witnesses, we are not surprised that Satan plans to do the same for his. In fact, I often think that many of the children of the pit enjoy greater power from their master than the children of heaven will take from theirs. Satan will surely work mightily with his emissaries in these days; he will quicken their minds, oil their tongues, charge them with a Satanic magnetism; he will give them power over the minds and bodies of men and over nature, so that the best of them will become truly superhuman. We have already seen some things that might well startle us, but we shall see more than this.

2. Great Deception (Rev. xiii. 14 ; 2 Thess. ii. 10; Matt, xxiv. 24 ; cf. Deut. xiii. 1-3). We will not discuss the question as to whether or not it will be possible for the elect really to be deceived; that may depend somewhat on who the elect are. Suffice it to learn that the deception of these days will go to the very limits of possibility. This is an alarming statement. Satan is a prince of deceivers; we can almost say that the chief thing in which he excels is deceiving. These days will be his greatest opportunity, and we may be sure he will call forth all the depths of treacherous cunning that are within him. It will become very difficult to recognize him. He will counterfeit, as far as possible, the very teachings and experiences of the Bible, and especially will he attempt to duplicate the apostolic days, with their wonderful experiences, gifts of tongues, signs and wonders. He will abound in pious prayer. He will be humble and gentle and endearing. Oh, the days are coming when the emissaries of Satan will seem to be models of loving, spiritual-minded men and women. Those who are not deceived may be few indeed.

3. Great Success. This will naturally follow from the power and great deception (Matt. xxiv. n ; 2 Thess. ii.3; I Tim. iv.1; 2 Tim. iii. 13 ; 2 Peter ii. 1, 2). We often hear it said that if these things are not of God, they will soon fail and come to nothing. But while this sounds well, it is not the word of the Lord, but the worldly-wise remark of a Pharisee named Gamaliel. On the other hand, the Scripture repeatedly tells us that in the last days these things that are not of God will have the greatest prosperity of all. They will enjoy unprecedented success. We fear that many of the followers of these things will be from the more worldly churches, but not-all. It seems quite certain that some of the choicest companies of the saints will be thinned by deserters. Prominent church leaders will be deceived, Bible students will be deceived, conscientious sanctified Christians will be deceived. So successful will be Satan's operations in these days that he will succeed in making thousands believe that his delusions are God's greatest work, and they will enthusiastically follow, thinking they are following the Lord. It makes us feel like crying, "Oh, Lord, who will abide?"

But what is more important, these movements will become an unseen influence in the air around us; an atmosphere of godlessness, peopled with evil spirits, and heavy with the depression of hell. These evil spirits will do their utmost to injure, mislead, confuse, and depress the children of the Lord. Our bodies will be affected; it will press in on our minds and becloud our souls. All kinds of strange feelings and new and peculiar trials will come to us. A surprising lack of desire and energy Godward, a spiritual deadness, a mental heaviness, lethargy of soul, an alarming desire for forbidden things, and a peculiar delight and fascination in any of the world's pleasures we dare taste. It will be difficult to preach the Word in liberty and power, it will be difficult to give attention to the Word as it is preached, it will be very difficult to get down to real, earnest and continued prayer. Such as this is the atmosphere we must battle against as the days darken around us.

Oh for a people in these days who walk with God, who enjoy the rich blessing and the abundant power that such a walk always brings, that they might be as a beacon-light in the darkness, revealing the treacherous traps of the deceiver, and beckoning the perplexed souls to the real fountain of healing, holiness and happiness ! Oh that we might be such a people, that in our midst the hungry souls—and there are many of them—might find the true religion of the Bible in all its fulness, and the fragrant presence of Jehovah! We owe it to the age. We owe it to the bewildered souls within our reach, not knowing what to believe or whom to follow?

We need to walk with God that we may be able to discern between the true and the false. We may understand doctrine and know intellectually the letter of the Word; but there are those coming who will astonish us and delight us with their unfolding of what they will call the deeper things; who will teach us, seemingly from this very Bible, what we will eagerly receive as new and precious truth. Satan has known this book much longer than we have, and he has the power and the skill to make many of us believe he is teaching us something wonderful out of it. In such times none but those will stand who know God's Word, as the result of their close and continued fellowship with God Himself.

We must remember that such power from below will be given to some men in these days as Satan has never before granted to mortals. If we have no close fellowship with God, such a show of power will deceive us. For instance, some men will, not only have power over the sick bodies of the people, but over their minds as well, and will thus be able to fill altars with men and women seeking some spiritual experience. This is terrible; but a moment's thought will convince us that it is easier to influence a person's mind than permanently to affect his body. Therefore, let us not be deceived when the prophets of the last days will support their claim to Divine authority by crowding altars with crying souls. This has been done occasionally in the past, but it will become more frequent and much more successful in the near future.

If we do not walk with God, we shall be swept off our feet. The time is coming when the usual methods of detecting error and hypocrisy will fail; all our rules and tests will be inadequate. There is only one hope: we must know God in connection with the completeness of His Word. Otherwise, we shall prove an easy prey to these movements that promise great things, impart emotional experiences, and show great power with men. What other safety can we have?

It will be necessary to walk with God that we may have power to resist the influences of these days. Satan will not stop with trying to deceive us; he will attempt to compel us. In attempting this he will bring a mysterious power to bear on our minds, which will make it exceedingly difficult to walk with God, and very easy to live in the flesh. We will be, amazed at the power he can use against us. It will become hard to serve God faithfully and to pray earnestly. It will seem as if everything without us, and almost everything within us, has conspired to keep us from following Jesus all the way, and to induce us to compromise. We will be surrounded by a worldly atmosphere that will draw us away from God, that will render prayer half-hearted, and that will deaden our spiritual senses to the reality of heavenly things and the wonderful presence of the Lord. It will become so easy to slip out of communion with God, and harder than ever to keep the communication open between our souls and heaven. If we do not walk very, very close to our heavenly Companion, this awful unseen influence will overcome us; it will sidetrack us, it will cripple us spiritually, it will lull us to sleep and cause us to miss God's best. Oh, we are in danger! The brethren are in danger, the sisters are in danger, the young people are in danger. I say to my soul, "Oh, soul, hide deep in God, thou art in danger!" I tremble for those who do not walk with God; I tremble for myself, lest I shall not know Him well enough.

And now this is the picture, and it is a dark one. Some may think it too dark. If so, we all must acknowledge that it is better to be ready for worse than comes, than to suddenly be taken by something we are not prepared to meet. But we cannot think this picture is overdrawn. Yea, we fear we have scarcely begun to tell of the horrible darkness, the hellish influences and the sad apostasy of the last days. But there is a brighter side: we can live above it all, we need not go down with the current. Praise God! But it will take such a life of walking with God as we probably have never known in the past. These are exceptional days, and we may find it necessary to enter into a degree of separation, sacrifice, and death to self that we have never before been called upon to make. We dare not live out of God's highest will; we dare not suffer our communion to be broken. Our Lord will stand with us in these days and carry us through in blessed victory, if we will but let Him. Oh, at any cost let us keep our souls free from the touch of sin, and follow hard after heavenly things. Let us see to it that our souls hide deep in God.