

Illusions

As a young boy, I was intrigued with the sleight of hand skills of illusionists, whom we also refer to as “magicians”. Admittedly, in a literal sense, the word magic refers to something which can only be achieved by those who consort with evil spirits. But, in modern vernacular, magic typically refers, not to the practice of spiritual witchcraft, but rather, to illusionists, who amaze young and old by proving the old adage, “The hand is quicker than the eye”, as they fool our senses into believing that they have achieved the impossible.

Why are we so amazed by this form of entertainment? Simply stated, we find it hard to believe that someone can actually trick us into believing that what we see is actually real.

You see, illusions don’t change the facts. They only change how we perceive the facts.

In other words, when the “magician” makes the elephant disappear, the elephant didn’t actually disappear. It’s still there. But, he made you “believe” that the elephant disappeared, by creating an illusion.

So, if illusions don’t change the facts – reality, then why should we be concerned with them?

Here’s why: Our decisions are not always based on fact, but they are ALWAYS based on our PERCEPTION of the facts.

Think about it. We’ve all found it to be true that “hind sight is 20/20”. Why? Because, after all the facts are revealed, we can actually see what was real, and what was only perceived as real.

We’ve all made wrong decisions. And why do we make those wrong choices, which can often be very costly? Is it because we knowingly chose what would bring us pain or loss?

No, we thought we were making the right choice, based on what we believed to be the facts. But after the disappointment set in, we could look back and see where we had been deceived by something which appeared to be real, when it was actually an illusion.

This is exemplified by the story of Gideon’s army’s victorious conquest against the army of the Midianites. We find it in Judges Chapter 7. The story actually begins in Judges 6, when the Lord appeared to an Israelite named Gideon, directing him to lead the people of Israel into battle against the enormous army of Midian.

We’ve all heard the story of how Gideon started with 32,000 men. Then, through the course of two “tests”, ordered by God, that group of 32,000 was distilled down into a select group of only 300, less than one percent of the original group.

And, at another time, I'd love to delve further into the dynamics of this process, by which God led Gideon to eliminate 31,700 volunteers, who simply didn't make the cut. But today, let's skip that, and jump to the part of this story that applies to our topic of "Illusions".

Bible historians estimate that there were probably more than 200,000 soldiers in the army of Midian. So, it seems unthinkable that God would tell Gideon that, rather than 32,000 men, against an army of this enormity, He would prefer to have only 300.

Let's take a look at the "anatomy of an illusion" as it applies to this story.

The reason I believe that Gideon's military victory qualifies as one of the greatest illusions of all time, is because a group of 300 men, carrying nothing but ram's horns, pottery and lamps, effectively convinced an army of more than 200,000 to SELF-DESTRUCT.

The first, critical ingredient necessary in any illusion is the element of surprise. Why is this so important? Simply put, since illusions don't change the facts, and only change our perception of the facts, without the element of surprise, you'd find yourself hard pressed to successfully convince someone that things are "not as they seem".

My guess is that the scouts from the Army of Midian had told their commanders of Gideon's "Pro-Israel Rally" attended by 32,000, most of whom had retreated after hearing Gideon's question, "Are you afraid?" So, it stands to reason that, after hearing that 2/3 of Gideon's crowd had disbanded at the mention of fear, the Midianites would have felt a sense of military superiority. And, with no apparent hint of danger, I think they would have slept very soundly that night.

Under the dark cloak of the night sky, Gideon's band of 300 approached their enemy. Strategic timing afforded them the advantage of literally catching them "off guard". They approached at the changing of the sentries, who stood watch throughout the night.

With precise synchronization, the 300, who stood on three sides of the Midianite camp, blew into the ram's horns, which were likely the same as were used by the Midianite sentries, to alert their army of approaching danger. Then, they broke the clay jars, revealing the brightness of the torches, or lamps, within the jars.

As the Midianites awoke, hearing the familiar sound which signaled danger, but many times louder than normal, the illusion had begun to take shape. They exited their tents with swords in hand, anticipating immediate danger as they stepped into the night. Looking quickly from side to side, trying to get a "fix" as to what was happening, they were blinded by much more light than expected, in the middle of the night.

The combination of extremely bright light and extremely loud noise, created the "element of surprise" necessary to prevent them from having a true grasp of reality, changing their

“perception of the facts”. And, since our decisions are ALWAYS based on PERCEPTION, they made WRONG CHOICES, and began to kill each other.

That’s right, the Midianites began killing each other, in a state of total confusion and chaos. And what did Gideon’s army do? These 300 men need only stand and watch, from their “ringside seats”, as the effectiveness of this illusion played out before them.

Now, ask yourself, if the Midianites had only paused for 5 minutes – not an hour, or even a half hour, but five minutes. If they had taken those few minutes to assess the situation BEFORE taking any action, what would have happened?

Quite simply, this story would have had a much different ending.

History records this as one of the most embarrassing defeats of any military force throughout all time. An army of thousands – hundreds of thousands, was defeated by 300 men with ram’s horns, pottery and lamps, none of whom had so much as a pocket knife for a weapon.

That’s better than a MacGyver episode! It’s better than James Bond, or Inspector Gadget!

Now you see why I consider this to be one of the GREATEST ILLUSIONS OF ALL TIME!

Satan was there that day. He saw this embarrassing defeat. Of course he did. This was his army! And they looked SILLY!

But, like any military leader, he learned from history, how to be victorious in the future.

What was the principle that he learned?

WHEN YOU ARE OUTNUMBERED, CREATE AN ILLUSION WHICH MAKES YOUR ENEMY THINK THAT THEY ARE OUTNUMBERED, AND THEY WILL SELF-DESTRUCT.

How does he use this to his advantage? Think about it. Satan is always outnumbered. When he was evicted from God’s heaven, he took 1/3 of God’s angels, which means that God still kept 2/3, which gives God twice as many as the devil. So, that means that satan is ALWAYS OUTNUMBERED.

So, he creates illusions to make you and me think that we are outnumbered, so we will self-destruct. And all too often, it works!

Right now, there are Christians who are in such a panic because of the price of gas, they are defeating themselves, with their negative thinking, and the devil doesn’t have to lift a finger.

All he had to do was to make us think that we are outnumbered. And he has done a pretty good job of sending fear through the ranks. There is so much financial fear, from the mortgage crisis, fuel costs, inflation, terrorists, war, and the like, that many Christians have made the “jump” from faith to fear.

But, if we would just take five minutes – just pause for a moment and analyze the situation, we’d see that this is an illusion.

Remember what I told you in a recent e-mail teaching? There’s the same amount of wealth in the world today, as there was yesterday. The only difference is that it’s in different hands.

And, not only is our God greater than satan, but He is greater than any of satan’s devices. God is superior to any trickery or any illusion that satan can bring.

But, if we don’t stop to analyze the situation – to find out what’s REALLY happening, we WILL be defeated. And, the sad part is that, often, we are not defeated by satan, but instead, we’re often defeated by ourselves.

We self destruct. Why? Because we panic.

What is panic? It’s fear in “turbo mode”. Why? Because panic is a combination of fear and a sense of urgency – an urgency which appears to require immediate action.

But what does God’s word tell us? It says, “They that WAIT upon the Lord shall renew their strength.” Isaiah 40:31

In fact, in Psalm 37:9 says, “...those that wait upon the LORD , they shall inherit the earth.”

And, in Philippians 4:6, he tells us, “..be anxious for nothing.”

I’m not telling you to ignore what’s happening around you. I’m just saying that what we often think of as reality, is actually an illusion. It’s satan’s attempt to deceive us into believing that we are outnumbered. But when it seems that absolutely everything is falling apart, take a moment – pause – watch – listen. You’ll find that it’s just an illusion – smoke and mirrors.

I know that things may look scary around us, but remember that when God wrote the promises in His word, He did so with perfect knowledge. And that’s not just knowledge of the past – of history. But also, He is omniscient. He knows the future. So, when He wrote the promises in His word, he wrote them with full knowledge of what would be happening around you and me right now – today.

So, get your hopes up. Have faith. Remember that God is greater than ANYTHING you or I will ever face. And He is NEVER OUTNUMBERED.

So, if you're His child, and it looks like you're outnumbered, it's just an illusion. Take a moment to ask Him to enable you to see through His eyes, and you'll see that what seems to be overwhelming, is actually just an illusion.