

The Greatest Hoax of All Time

Jerry A. Stevens Sermon, May 31, 2014

Have you ever been victimized by an Internet hoax? Worse still, have you confidently passed untrue information along to others, thinking you were doing them service? Just what is a hoax? The dictionary defines *hoax* as an act intended to trick or dupe; an imposture. Let's have a look at some famous hoaxes that have tricked people into believing or accepting as genuine something false and often preposterous. Some of them amount to a great deal more than amusing April Fool's Day pranks.

Some All-Time Great Hoaxes

- Who?
- What?
- Where?
- When?
- Why?

Cardiff Giant



The Cardiff Giant (1869)

One of the earliest hoaxes of modern times, in 1869 workers digging a well near Cardiff, New York, unearthed a massive 10'4 ½" human form that many believed at the time was a completely intact petrified man and therefore persuasive evidence that the Biblical passage, "There were giants in the Earth in those days" (Gen. 6:4), was true.

The "petrified man," however, turned out to be the brainchild of one George Hull, an atheist and tobacco dealer from New York City who was intent on getting the better of a Christian fundamentalist with whom he had argued over that Biblical passage in Genesis.

Hiring a stonemason to carve the image of a man out of a massive piece of gypsum (that's the mineral used in making plaster of paris) and burying it on the farm of his cousin, William Newell, it was "discovered" there a year later and became a source of income for Mr. Newell—who charged people 25¢ to see it—for the next few years. The atheist Hull actually came out ahead in the affair by selling his interest in the statue to a syndicate of five men headed up by Cousin Newell for \$23,000: ten times the amount he had spent on the hoax.

But in the end, the scammers themselves got scammed when none other than the famous showman P. T. Barnum made his own copy of the Cardiff Giant and declared Newell's a fake. The case ended up in court, with Hull admitting to the fake and *both* statues declared by the court to be hoaxes. But what does this tell us about people's susceptibility of believing a lie? Hmm.

Pitdown Man



The Pitdown Man (1912)

The never-ending quest to locate the famous “missing link” that’s supposed to conclusively tie man to the ape bit science in the rump back in 1912, when fragments of a skull and a jawbone were discovered in a gravel pit near Pitdown, England. Claimed to be the missing link by many otherwise quite knowledgeable scientists, in 1953 it was determined to be a cleverly aged human skull that had been attached to the jaw of an orangutan and embedded with the teeth of a chimpanzee.

Who produced the forgery and why remains a mystery to this day, but that someone managed to keep scientists on the run for over 40 years has to be considered one of the great deceptive feats of the 20th century . . . and possibly the reason scientists don’t talk too much about finding missing links nowadays. It strikes me as wonderful that many evolutionists are susceptible

to believing such lies because they have predetermined to delete a Creator God from their picture of the emergence of the human race.

Loch Ness Monster



The Loch Ness Monster "Surgeon's Photo" (1934)

It's not so difficult to accept that the most famous Loch Ness Monster photo ever taken turned out to be a fake. What's hard to understand is how it took 60 years to figure that out. Supposedly taken in 1934 by a London surgeon named Robert Wilson—a man known as something of a practical joker himself, it turns out—the photo was the clever scheme of a fellow named Marmaduke Wetherell as a payback for being humiliated years earlier when the supposed monster's footprints that he discovered were nothing but the dried footprints of a hippopotamus.

In collusion with Wilson and an apprentice named Christian Spurling (who was to confess the hoax on his deathbed in 1994, thus solving the mystery), photographer Wetherell attached a head and neck shape to a toy submarine and set it adrift, capturing the famous—if fuzzy—photo of Nessie forevermore. The admission that the photo was a hoax didn't hurt the beastie's reputation, however, which remains as popular as ever, and just as

elusive. The imagination of sinful men is eminently capable of concocting Loch Ness Monsters, Sasquatch (bigfoot)/yeti (abominable snowman), and UFOs. Might some common enemy be behind all these distractions, especially if gullible minds are actually deceived in the process and hindered from exercising faith in Jesus, Who though invisible, can truly be found and experienced?

Orson Welles, “The War of the Worlds” Broadcast



The Orson Welles 1938 “War of the Worlds” Broadcast

Orson Welles (no relation to the famous sci-fi author H. G. Wells) was a virtual unknown 23-year-old radio producer working out of New York, when he directed the radio adaptation of H. G. Wells’s popular novel *The War of the Worlds* on Hallowe’*en* eve in 1938—40 years after the book was published and whose author was still living in London.

Unfortunately, and despite the fact that Orson Welles inserted two disclaimers that the broadcast was fictional, thousands missed the announcements and believed the radio account that a Martian invasion was real.

While some reports of the extent of the ensuing panic have been traditionally overstated, what can't be exaggerated is that it made the young man an overnight celebrity and skyrocketed him to fame. He was to become an acclaimed producer, director, and actor until his death in 1985; but in all that time he never aired the broadcast again (although the recordings of it have been rebroadcast many times since).

What's different about this hoax when compared to others is that Orson Welles unintentionally perpetrated it, making it the most successful inadvertent hoax of all time. Jesus says that Christians should be "wise as serpents, and harmless as doves," and why? Because we are "sent forth as sheep in the midst of wolves" (Mt. 10:16). Just one example of how we can do that is to avoid perpetuating unverified stories we get from well-meaning friends via the Internet or social media. If it sounds too good to be true, chances are that it's phony, or mostly phony. Check it out by going to Snopes.com or TruthOrFiction.com. You'll be surprised how many of these blockbuster stories have been rehashed for years.

Fox Sisters



*The “Hoax” That Wasn’t a Hoax (1848)*¹

Years before any of the hoaxes mentioned thus far, one spooky story needs to be told. On March 31, 1848, Maggie and Kate Fox, teenaged daughters of John and Margaret Fox, began communicating with what they believed was the spirit of a deceased man by means of rapping or knocking sounds at their home in Hydesville, not far from Rochester, New York.

The Fox sisters became an overnight sensation, gaining a significant following among those who were convinced by their public demonstrations of rapping. These people came to be known as spiritualists. They believed that the spirits of the dead existed on a higher plane than the world of human beings, that communication with the spirits was possible through mediums, and that such communication yielded important moral, ethical, and spiritual information. But remember what the prophet Isaiah said about questionable things? “When they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead? To the law and to the testimony: if they [that is, friends, ministers, or churches] speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isaiah 8:19, 20).

One Internet article makes the assertion that the Fox sisters faked paranormal activity, which had the effect of jump-starting the Spiritualism movement of the 19th century. We beg to differ. The doctrine of the immortality of the soul held by most Christians has paved the way for modern Spiritualism. It’s startling to observe how successfully this movement continues Satan’s original lie to Adam and Eve, “Ye shall not surely die” (Gen. 3:4).

One excellent Christian author records a stern warning about this phenomenon: “Some poor souls who have been fascinated with the eloquent words of the teachers of Spiritualism, and have yielded to its influence, afterward find out its deadly character, and would renounce and flee from it, but cannot. Satan holds them by his power, and is not willing to let them go free” (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 343).

The Ultimate Hoax

It remains to mention something about the greatest hoax of all time, which hasn’t happened yet but looms on the near horizon, and one that we had

¹ Much of the material in this sermon has been taken or adapted from <http://www.ourcuriousworld.com/PDFs/Top%20Ten%20Greatest%20Hoaxes.pdf>.

better be alert to detect. Here is the scenario, as the same Christian writer describes it.

As the second appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ draws near, satanic agencies are moved from beneath. Satan will not only appear as a human being, but he will personate Jesus Christ; and the world that has rejected the truth will receive him as the Lord of lords and King of kings. He will exercise his power, and work upon the human imagination.

. . .

The form Satan assumed in Eden when leading our first parents to transgress, was of a character to bewilder and confuse the mind. He will work in as subtle a manner as we near the end of Earth's history. (White, "Christ or Barabbas?" *Review and Herald*, Jan. 30, 1900)

In a very thrilling book, our author friend adds some hair-raising details:

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. Fearful sights of a supernatural character will soon be revealed in the heavens, in token of the power of miracle-working demons. The spirits of devils will go forth to the kings of the Earth and to the whole world, to fasten them in deception, and urge them on to unite with Satan in his last struggle against the government of Heaven. By these agencies, rulers 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.

As the crowning act in the great drama of deception, Satan himself will personate Christ. The church has long professed to look to the Saviour's advent as the consummation of her hopes. Now the great deceiver will make it appear that Christ has come. 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. Revelation 1:13–15. [Stop right there. Let's read that together.] The glory that surrounds him is unsurpassed by anything that mortal eyes have yet beheld. The shout of triumph rings out upon the air: "Christ has come! Christ has come!" The people prostrate themselves in adoration before him, while he lifts up his hands and pronounces a blessing upon them, as Christ blessed His disciples when He was upon the Earth. 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. Like the Samaritans who were deceived by Simon Magus, the multitudes, from the least to the greatest, give heed to these sorceries, saying: This is “the great power of God.” Acts 8:10.

But the people of God will not be misled. The teachings of this false christ are not in accordance with the Scriptures. His blessing is pronounced upon the worshippers of the Beast and his image, the very class upon whom the Bible declares that God’s unmingled wrath shall be poured out.

And, furthermore, Satan is not permitted to counterfeit the manner of Christ’s advent. The Saviour has warned His people against deception upon this point, and has clearly foretold the manner of His Second Coming. “There shall arise false christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. . . . Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, He is in the secret chambers; believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be.” Matthew 24:24–27, 31; 25:31; Revelation 1:7; 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17. This coming there is no possibility of counterfeiting. It will be universally known—witnessed by the whole world.

Only those who have been diligent students of the Scriptures and who have received a love of the truth will be shielded from the powerful delusion that takes the world captive. By the Bible testimony these will detect the deceiver in his disguise. (White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 623–625)

Friends, how else will we know that Satan’s almost overmastering (dominant) delusion is nothing but a hoax? Please turn to Acts 1:11, 12, where we read regarding Christ’s ascension at the Mount of Olives that two angels (in the form of men—DA 831) not only assured the apostles that “this *same* Jesus” would return but also promised that He would “come in like

manner” as they had “seen Him go into Heaven.” Never forget that upon Jesus’ return “every eye shall see Him” (Rev. 1:7). Furthermore, when the Lord returns from Heaven, “the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:16, 17).

So it’s in the clouds above this Earth that Christ appears! Once His feet lost contact with the ground at His ascension some 2,000 years ago, those nail-scarred, blessed feet do not physically touch the Earth again until His third coming, and when they do, *all* the holy angels will attend Jesus. About this the Bible prophet writes: “The Lord my God shall come, and *all* the saints with Thee [these saints are *angels*, as in Jude 14: “Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints”].” “And His feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south” (Zech. 14:5, 4).

False Second Coming



Let's briefly review what we have just read. Did it answer the 5 questions of Who, What Where, When, and Why?

Who?—Satan

What?—False Second Coming

Where?—Different parts of the Earth

When?—The time of trouble

Why?—Satan desiring the worship that belongs solely to Christ

Jesus solemnly warned His disciples and just as surely warns us today, with these words: "Take heed that ye be not deceived: for many shall come in My name, saying, I am Christ; and the time draweth near: go ye not therefore after them" (Lk. 21:8).

We've just spent some time describing the greatest hoax of all time.

Fortunately, our description of the false also sheds light on the genuine Second Coming.

Behold, He Cometh With Clouds!



Take a good long look at one artist's portrayal of this glorious event. As we diligently study Scripture, we need to let sanctified imaginations picture the

true manner of Christ's return, and if anything doesn't measure up, we need to say *confidently*, as Jesus did, "Get thee behind Me, Satan" (Mt. 16:23).

Friends, this is no time to let ourselves become drowsy and fall asleep at our posts; instead, the end times call for us to be more vigilant than ever. Shall we not promise Jesus—and ourselves—to do just that? Whether we do or not is bound to have eternal consequences.

Benediction

Now unto Him That is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen. (Jude 24, 25)