

A Strong Delusion

In 1877, Percival Lowell heard that an Italian astronomer had seen straight lines crisscrossing the surface of the planet Mars. Lowell spent the rest of his years squinting into the eyepiece of his giant telescope in Arizona, mapping the channels and canals he saw. He was convinced the canals were proof of intelligent life on Mars, possibly an older but wiser race than humanity. About the turn of the century, Lowell's theories had gained wide acceptance.

Now, of course, the situation is different. Space probes have orbited Mars and landed on its surface. The entire planet has been mapped, and no one has seen a channel or canal of any kind. How could Lowell have "seen" so much that was not there? There are two possibilities: he wanted to see canals so badly that he deceived himself into thinking they existed, or we know now that he suffered from a rare eye disease that made him see the blood vessels in his own eyes. The Martian "canals" he saw were nothing more than the bulging veins of his eyeballs. Today, the malady is known as "Lowell's Syndrome."

The apostle Paul wrote, "... they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12). These facts about Mr. Lowell well illustrate how a "strong delusion" can similarly come to those who do not love the truth. This delusion is as real as a hand in front of their face, but it is false. Has this happened to you?

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