

False Prophets Endanger God's children

Chicken Little popularized it. You know the famous story of Chicken Little (Henny Penny), the chicken who warned everyone at school that the sky was falling in. In the end, nothing serious happened to Chicken Little nor any other of the animals.

More often than not, warnings of severe trouble fail to come to fruition. One only looks at the weather forecasters for an obvious example.

Our daughter Julie coined a weather law: “The severity of the storm is directly opposite to the hype that it receives.”

But even her law fails at times. The storm does occur as predicted and sometimes even worse.

In Biblical times, God’s warnings through His prophets always occurred just as prophesied. The Old Testament records the many times that God alerted His people to coming judgments. The people whom God warned neglected them at their own peril.

It equally chronicles every time that God fulfilled His warnings. Those who heeded them withstood the judgments. Those who neglected the warnings suffered dire consequences.

In the New Testament, God continued to give warnings to His children regarding dangers ahead. In fact, every New Testament book includes these warnings, except Philemon. Even Christ delivered warnings of false prophets and false messiahs that would come to test His followers.

Christ’s Warnings Of False Prophets

Matthew 24 follows chapters 21-23. Sounds like simple math, but the setting of chapter 24 bears explanation. In Matthew 21, Jesus entered Jerusalem as the heralded King complete with crowds waving palm branches. Matthew 22 describes Christ's cleansing of the Temple followed by His teaching in the Temple in Matthew 22-23.

As Jesus and His disciples exited the Temple, He continued teaching the disciples on the Mount of Olives. That teaching on the Mount of Olives concluded the overall emphasis of Jesus on the coming judgment to Israel, which importance He began in chapter 21.

At the start of His teaching in Matthew 24, Jesus began with a warning of coming false prophets and messiahs. Although Bible scholars differ on the timing of these false messengers, these warning in Matthew 24 bear study because the writers of the New Testament repeat this warning in every book, except Philemon.

“Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.” (Matthew 24.4-5)

Christ’s warning of false prophets: a precaution

When Jesus warned His followers of false prophets, He used the phrase, “Take heed.” This phrase gives the warning, “Beware, look out for...” It also means “Discern.” His caution to His disciples took both forms: the usual warning to beware as well as counsel to discern the appearance of false prophets.

Christ's warning of false prophets: their presence

Jesus did not say that they *might* come. He said they “...*shall come*.” He described their coming as a certainty. Jesus reiterated their sure coming in Matthew 24.11 and 23-25.

He warned that false christs, i.e., false prophets, would arise and test the disciples.

Christ's warning of false prophets: their prevalence

Someone might have imagined that these imposters would appear occasionally – a few “kooks” and “nuts” with emotional instabilities. In that case, they might just dismiss them easily.

However, Christ warned that many would come.

Christ's warning of false prophets: their presumptions

Christ cautioned His disciples against those who would come *“in His name.”*

“Many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ.” (Matthew 24.5)

Some imposters will state that they come as the *messenger* of Jesus, claiming validity for their messages through the use of His name. They would say, “I come to you in the name of Jesus...”

Others would claim that they were the Christ, the promised messiah.

Christ's warning of false prophets: their persuasiveness

With their impressive manners, they would sway multitudes. Jesus warned His disciples that these false christis would deceive crowds that will clamor after them. Their deceits will prove so effective and winsome that they will mislead many.

“Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.” (Matthew 24.4-5)

Christ's warning of false prophets: their power

Jesus continued His warning to His disciples in Matthew 24.23-25.

“Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before.” (Matthew 24.23-25)

The imposters of which Christ warned would display great powers to confirm their presumptions and lend persuasiveness to their false messages.

What does Jesus mean by this description?

The word “great” holds two meanings. One of them describes quality, like a great meal, tasteful as well as healthful. It also means quantity, abundance. Thus, a great meal can include the quality of the food as well as the amount of the food.

In like manner, false prophets will provide signs and wonders of high quality and in abundance. They will not produce a trick or sleight of hand, but many, high quality demonstrations of power.

What does the word “signs” mean?

It describes some unusual occurrence that transcends the common course of nature. These false prophets will do magnificent things, beyond the ordinary. They will use those displays as evidence of their calling and authority.

Jesus warned that not only will they have attesting signs but wonders, too. “Wonders” speak of the miraculous. Moses described this very thing in Deuteronomy, thirteen centuries before Jesus’ birth, long before this dreadful error arose.

Moses issued this warning:

“If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee saying, Let us go after other gods and let us serve them, thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams...” (Deuteronomy 13.1-3)

Moses’ warning combined with Christ's caution would help the disciples know how to discern between the false and the true, the true messenger of God and the false prophet of God. Moses instructed God's people to examine the message(s) the prophet declared.

Christ's warning of false prophets: their prominence

These false prophets will enjoy great popularity. In fact, Jesus warned His disciples that even true Children of God will almost fall for their deceptions. It would seem like the whole world would follow these imposters of

whom Christ spoke.

Christ's Purpose In His Warning

Christ proved to His disciples His deity and messiahship during His earthly ministry. They saw it first-hand, and they believed Him. But Jesus also knew that His followers would face grave temptations after He ascended into heaven.

He promised them the Holy Spirit, Who would reside in them and guide them into the truth. But He wanted them prepared for the coming onslaught of imposters. His warning would ring in their minds as they faced the doubts and fears of the future.

Correlation

How does this warning of Christ to His disciples correlate to you and me?

Christ's warning of false prophets: a precaution

Biblical and Church history confirm Christ's warning to His disciples. God's people have always faced false leaders, centuries before Christ and after Him as well. They still exist today.

Jesus loved His disciples, and He gave to them a warning, which Christian's must heed today, too.

“Take heed that nobody deceive you. For many shall come to you with my name saying, ‘I am Christ.’”
(Matthew 24.4-5)

Christ's warning of false prophets: their presence

Like in the days following Christ's warning to His disciples, false prophets, pastors, and teachers abound today. They influence multitudes with their deceits and apparent confirmations from God. The evil one uses them to divide and destroy the Church.

Christ's warning of false prophets: their prevalence

The condition of today's Church not only verifies their presence but their prevalence. Many false teachers and leaders confuse believers and try to lead them astray. For example, I compiled a list of men and women false prophets in our day. That list, incomplete as it is, includes 60 people and organizations who proclaim heresy as Biblical truth.

Christ's warning of false prophets: their presumptions

You can see how they will sway many people to follow them. No wonder many will conclude:

“This Christian leader coming in the name of Jesus is so good, so clever. The messages we hear are often about Jesus. We see wonderful miracles that could only be of God. This person must assuredly be a prophet of God whom we can admire and follow.”

Other false prophets come who claim to be Christ. Throughout history, many have made this claim. They take the name of Jesus for themselves, yet reject, deny, and denounce the Jesus presented to us in Scripture.

The Bible describes the characteristics of the promised Savior and Messiah that only one person fulfilled, Jesus Christ as revealed in the Bible and in history. No one else has fulfilled all of the signs, prophecies, and predictions given to us in the Bible regarding the Messiah except the Jesus described for us in Scripture.

Further, historians recorded His life and described Him exactly as the Bible described Him. Scriptures confirm that Jesus satisfies all criteria. Anyone can assume the title of the King of Kings, but none fulfills the criteria except Jesus. Jesus as described for us in Scripture is the true Messiah.

Everywhere that men and women have proclaimed the gospel of Christ, it has produced the same response in believers' lives, without regard to color, nationality, social standing, education, or wealth.

People throughout history, who have called upon Jesus as described in Scripture, have experienced the exact same life change, without variation, always, always, always. He alone is our Deliverer, the Savior of sinners like you and me.

Christ's warning of false prophets: their persuasiveness

Note the point that Moses made. When someone comes in the name of Jesus and instructs you to follow his/her teachings, examine not only the supernatural demonstrations, but also the actual teachings of this person.

- Do the teachings lead you to Christ?
- Does (s)he develop the doctrinal truths of Scripture and point out to you what the Bible says?
- Does (s)he give another gospel, something not presented in Scripture?

Isaiah the prophet counseled God's people on this issue. He said,

“And 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.” (Isaiah 8.19-20)

When Isaiah mentioned the “law and the testimony,” he meant the Scriptures, referred to as the law and the testimony in that day. In essence, Isaiah instructed the people of God to go to the Scriptures.

“If they (the false prophets) speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.” (Isaiah 8.20)

The Word of God becomes the final authority. Take the messages proclaimed by the attractive false prophets and evaluate whether they agree with Scripture.

What do they say about the gospel? Their interpretation of the gospel identifies the first point of error with the following deviations:

- they reject the cross;
- they reject salvation through Christ alone;
- they reject salvation through His blood; and
- they reject the payment of the blood of Jesus for the penalty of sin for people like you and me.

Many offer a “salvation” outside the authority of Scripture. Jesus warned against the deceits of powerful false prophets who would deceive many. Their presentation of the “gospel” provides the first clue to their deceptions.

Christ's warning of false prophets: their power

A false Church leader may have the ability to perform apparent miraculous and supernatural things. Some false prophets will exhibit astounding manifestations and claim a special anointing of God upon them.

Especially in our day, false prophets and teachers use this mantra to cause danger to the helpless and gullible. For centuries, they have fooled multitudes to follow their errors. No one can calculate the damage false prophets have inflicted upon not just Christians but also nonchristians.

Christ's warning of false prophets: their prominence

I have seen the reality of this in my lifetime. I have watched men and women practice their deceitfulness to huge crowds. In city after city, multitudes swarm their meetings with enthusiastic responses, following them like sheep to the slaughter.

Their books climb the bestseller lists. Some have even formed international denominations. Without

question, the warning of Christ applies to our day as well. We must heed it.

Implications

False prophets come in the name of Jesus saying,

“I am the messenger of Christ. I am His prophet, His apostle, and His teacher. Observe what I can do and see that I am an anointed messenger of God. Follow me.”

We live in such a day. These imposters abound and deceive many, maybe even you. The Bible records their presence and popularity even though it provides ample warnings against them.

In our texts from Matthew 24, Jesus issued prominent warnings about false prophets. With increasing faith in the Word of God, the followers of Christ must regard His warnings.

We need to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit to discern the false prophets from the true, so that we may again experience God’s glorious manifest presence in our lives.

Questions For Reflection And Application

01. Do you believe false prophets are active on our present Christian landscape?
02. Do you think they know their own deceitfulness or are they merely misled or mentally unstable?
03. List some of the features by which you can identify them.
04. Where do false prophets get the power to perform signs and wonders?
05. What particular risks do false prophets bring to the Church?
06. Do Christ-followers have one final authority on which to stand? What is it?

Thank You, Lord Jesus, for giving us this lesson and preserving for us these instructions that You gave to Your disciples hundreds of years ago. They still apply to us today, and they serve to warn us that we might discern that which is false from that which is truth.

Open our eyes, Holy Spirit, to see the true and the living Christ as revealed to us in the Scriptures. We ask You, Spirit of God, to bring that forth into our lives for I pray these things in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God.

Amen.