

Everest

Mountains can be dangerous places: in particular, Mount Everest in Nepal is life-threatening. The group of climbers had trained for months before tackling this, the highest mountain in the world. They had paid a large fee to their guides and with them had practised climbing from base camp to enable their bodies to acclimatise to the harsh conditions. Their guides reassured them, “It is our job to get you up and down again alive. You must do as we say.”

Finally, the day came, and with a break in the storm, they tackled the final ascent. They were desperate to reach the top, even when the weather changed and the guides told them to turn back. The guides listened to their pleas and pressed on, so they did indeed reach the summit, with great elation.

But on the way down conditions rapidly deteriorated: it got colder, visibility was reduced to zero, they got lost and they ran out of oxygen. The guides and walkers could not get down safely and their dead bodies were left on the mountain.

Fatal Mistakes

When climbing a dangerous mountain, all of our good intentions, preparation, strenuous effort, and trust become useless if our guide makes a fatal mistake. It is exactly the same with religious faith. Good intentions, commitment and zeal are not enough. The Bible states quite clearly that God has told us how to please Him, and that it is futile to try any other way or compromise His instruction. The Jews were

told not to tamper with the Law God gave them:

You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you (Deuteronomy 4:2).

The warning is repeated in Deuteronomy 12:32, and again in the last book of the Bible – Revelation 22:18. In the Law, the people were commanded not to take notice of false prophets who wanted to lead them away from God, who taught things contrary to the Law. This was to apply even if the prophet was able to do miracles or foretell the future (look at Deuteronomy 13:1–3).

Yet throughout history, people have preferred to believe lies or follow their own ways. The first example is in Genesis chapter 3, where Eve did not believe what God had told her about the consequences of eating fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Instead she listened to the lies of the serpent, which brought death.

Deluded Guides

The books of Kings and Chronicles tell a sad history of Jewish kings, most of whom led the nation astray by corrupting the true religion. They compromised their worship by combining it with that of the surrounding nations, which the people probably enjoyed! However, God hated it.

I hate, I despise your feast days, and I do not savour your sacred assemblies. Though you offer me burnt offerings

and your grain offerings, I will not accept them, nor will I regard your fattened peace offerings. Take away from me the noise of your songs, for I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments (Amos 5:21–23).

There were even Jewish false prophets who flatly contradicted the true word of God, preaching what the people wanted to hear as opposed to the truth spoken by His true prophets (Jeremiah 14:14). Jesus himself warned about false prophets (Matthew 7:15), and this warning was repeated by his apostles (2 Peter 2:1, 1 John 4:1).

It seems natural to think that we instinctively know best and can discern right from wrong. Guides can help, but only if they are right. Our teachers and leaders have a great responsibility (James 3:1), but we all bear the consequences of our own decisions and actions. We cannot blame those who we follow. Jesus said this of a very zealous but misguided group of religious leaders:

They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch (Matthew 15:14).



The guides in our story perished with their clients. If we follow false spiritual guides we shall join them permanently in the grave, just as blind followers join blind guides in the ditch.

Make the Bible Your Guide

It is vital that we all read the Bible for ourselves to find out what God has actually said, and what He asks of us. The prophet Micah explains that God has laid out His wishes and instructions very clearly.

He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8).

When Jesus was on trial Pilate asked “*What is truth?*” (John 18:38). Decades ago people believed in absolute truth as revealed in the Bible. Nowadays many consider this old-fashioned and naïve, believing that many things are ‘relative’, that ‘we are all going to the same place’, that there is ‘truth in every religion’, and essentially that it does not really matter what we believe or do as long as we have good motives.

The guides on Everest had positive motives and gave attractive, but fatal, advice. A life without the God of the Bible is as perilous as being on Everest without warm clothes or oxygen. The Bible claims to be the only source of truth that can save us from destruction. Following anything or anyone else is simply suicidal.

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