

Wells Without Water

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Between December of 1811 and February of 1812, four of the largest earthquakes to ever hit our country happened in the boot heel of Missouri along the New Madrid fault next to the Mississippi River. Records from this period in history were not always complete, but there were reports of damage as far away as Cincinnati, Ohio. People were awakened in the night by the shaking in New York City, Washington, D.C., and Charleston, South Carolina. Church bells reportedly rang from this shaking along the East Coast. When all was said and done, these quakes were the largest our country has ever seen east of the Rocky Mountains. To give you an idea of the magnitude of this earthquake, the New Madrid quake shook an area ten times larger than the area shaken by the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake.

Years later, in the fall of 1990, a prominent scientist predicted another catastrophic earthquake would hit the New Madrid Fault Zone. He was able to convince quite a few others as well. As the day approached, some schools closed and people braced themselves for the event, but nothing happened. The appointed day came and went and the ground didn't shake. Even though his warnings appeared to be well-intentioned, he's not necessarily remembered for his life's work as a scientist. He's remembered for his failed prediction — the earthquake that was promised, and never came.

In regards to spiritual matters, the Bible is full of warnings about those who profess to have special knowledge, who act either well intentioned or deliberate, and will wind up misleading others. One such place is in 2 Peter 2 as well as similar verses in the book of Jude. The two writers compare the characteristics of false teaching to relatable events, the first one being wells without water. Visualize if you will a traditional well with a rope, pulley and bucket. Someone standing next to it at ground level would no doubt make certain assumptions as to what was below the surface. And as the bucket was slowly being raised back up to the surface, there would no doubt be a certain level of anticipation about the water that would soon arrive. And then the disappointment as the person pulls the bucket up that is only full of dust, with not even a hint of moisture. Peter says that's what false prophets are like: they promise you water, they give you every indication that they are brimming with water, and when the time comes to deliver, you realize they have nothing to give.

Another analogy used by Peter are clouds carried by the tempest. Jude uses the phrase clouds without water. The idea is very similar to the well. Storm clouds carry the promise of rain, but if they pass right over, or just dissipate before they arrive, they haven't lived up to what you thought they might give you. Jude also speaks of wandering stars. The idea seems to be how stars move in predictable patterns. Their topology — the way that they are arranged in relation to other stars — can tell you many different things: the time of year it is, where you are, and what direction is north. But then there are objects in the sky that don't conform to these rules, that don't seem to move in harmony with every thing else in the night sky. And when we see these objects, the implication might be that this is something we can use to help find our way. But stars that wander in the night sky may give the promise of navigation, but in the end will lead you off course.

In 1 John 4:1, John reminds us to not believe everything that we hear. Every time that we are presented with information that is guaranteed to match up with what God wants, we need to verify it. We need to check it out. Don't wait until you have a dry bucket in your hand. Test each and every claim to see if it truly DOES match up to God's word. That's the only way to make sure that what we are promised will come true.