

Must We Apply The Bible's Tests For a True Prophet to Paul?

Deuteronomy
12:32 says:
"Whatever thing I command you, shall you observe to do: thou shall not add to it, nor diminish from it."

Test for Valid Prophets

The Bible prohibits adding to it. (Deut. 4:2; 13:2). Only a true prophet from God could add text to the Bible. (Deut. 18:15.) The Bible itself lays out the tests for such authorized additions to the Bible. These tests are spelled out in Deuteronomy chs. 12, 13 & 18. They instruct us on how to tell true prophets from false prophets.

Christians rarely if ever apply the Bible's tests for false prophets to any writing in our New Testament. This is especially true when Paul's teachings are in question. Of course, this is partly because other than for Paul, there is no need to do so. The apostles John and Peter along with bishops Jude and James never say anything remotely contradictory of Jesus. Yet, when the issue of Paul is mentioned, it is assumed these writings of Paul are above examination.

Yet, where is the proof that Paul is to be treated as an inspired prophet. Where is the case Paul has ever been tested and proven true by the rigorous demands of Deuteronomy chs. 12, 13 & 18? No one wants to go there but the *Bible commands it!*

“The flock is supposed to be on the lookout for wolves in *sheep's clothing*.”

John F. MacArthur, Jr.
The Gospel According to Jesus
(1994) at 135.

If these tests are to be ignored as to Paul in particular, then ***why do you think Jesus emphasized repeatedly that false prophets were to come?*** (Matt. 7:15, 24:11, 24.) Why do you think Jesus warned these false prophets would come with true signs and wonders? (Mark 13:22-23)? So we would abandon the Biblical test of what is a true versus a false prophet? That we would blindly accept someone like Paul who came with signs and wonders (*i.e.*, healings, jails opening in earthquakes, etc.)? Of course not. Jesus made no exception for Paul.

The Bereans in Acts 17:10-15 knew this. They tested Paul's sermons against Scripture. Yet, they had little available to them in comparison to what we are privileged to examine. They did not have Paul's letters. They only had a single sermon whose contents are unknown. But if Luke presents the Bereans as doing something appropriate, then why would we think we don't have to test Paul in the same manner? We cannot just trust the Bereans' one-time test resolved the issue for all time. Paul could become a Balaam: an evil man converted into a true prophet who later apostasizes. (For further discussion on the Balaam issue, see page 61 below.)

We thus have an inescapable command from God to test Paul.

Moreover, we shall see Jesus reiterated these tests almost verbatim from Deuteronomy. He intended us specifically to use them on any anyone whom the community wanted to add as inspired canon.

The first test of a valid prophet is they must make a specific prophecy using the name of the Lord. (Deut. 18:20-22.) If the speaker will not say God told them this secret of the future, it is insufficient. The reason for such strictness is the test has both a positive and negative side. On the positive, we treat such a speaker's words as from God. Thus, the speaker's words must squarely come within God's *definition* of valid prophecy. On the negative, we must impose the death penalty if the speaker used God's name for a prophecy if it does not come true. If the speaker was not brave enough to use God's name as the source, *e.g.*, he ascribes an angel as his source, we cannot impose the death penalty on the speaker for false prophecy. We must follow Scripture strictly. The speaker did nothing worthy of death.

Thus, unless the would-be prophet says *thus sayeth the Lord* in conjunction with his prediction, he cannot be a prophet in the Biblical sense if his prediction *just so happens* to come true. For the same reason, if what he said proves false, we cannot kill him. He did not dare make the prophecy in the Lord's name. No risk, no gain.

Likewise, if the event is easily predictable, such as the sun will come up or a plane will safely weather a storm, there is nothing highly improbable in such an outcome. The predicted outcome, while not guaranteed, is predictable. It has a significant probability it would have happened anyway. Such predictions are also not *prophetic*. Jeremiah ch. 28 tells us that predictable events are no basis to true prophecy.¹

Thus, *divine prophecy* implies necessarily that the prediction must be something specific and highly improbable that only God would know. If it does not happen, the false prophet is to be killed. Of course, to repeat, he had to first use the words *thus sayeth the Lord*. The speaker must clearly claim divine inspiration for a prediction. Otherwise, imposing a death penalty would be unjust. (Deuteronomy 18:20-22.) However, once exposed as false, God says: "Thou shalt not be afraid of him." (Deut. 18:22.) *The necessity to follow this testing of their words* comes from the command *to not add to canon* (Deut. 4:2) *unless it passes the Bible's test for valid prophecy*.

*"A terrible thing is come to pass in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so; and what will you do in the end thereof."
Jeremiah 5:30-31*

Balaam: True Prophecy and Signs Later Turns into a False Prophet

The Bible then has a second level test. Jesus clearly alludes to this test. (Matt. 7:15, 24:11, 24.) It is set forth in Deuteronomy 13:1-5. Under it, a false prophet can include someone who makes an other-

1. See, Jer. 28:8-9. As Knudd Jepperson (D.D., University Lecturer) points out on this verse: "The prophet who in the name of the Lord foretold misery and misfortune, however, would sooner or later be right. If the time had not yet come, one could rest assured that eventually there would be so much evil, that misery necessarily had to come." (Jepperson, *On False And True Prophets in the Old Testament*, available online at <http://www.theonet.dk/spirituality/spirit95-6/prophesy.html>.)

wise qualifying true prophecy. In addition, they may come with true “signs and wonders.” Yet, the Bible says they are still a false prophet if they simultaneously try to “**seduce you from the way in which the Lord your God commanded you to walk.**” (Deut. 13:5.) God tells us this is a false prophet despite them having true prophecy and real signs and wonders.

Balaam is an example of this type of prophet. At one point he provides true prophecy that indeed came from God. He even was filled by the Holy Spirit during those times. (Numbers 24:1-2.) However, later he teaches people it is permissible to do acts which the Law flatly prohibits. Thus, he is a false prophet under the Deuteronomy 13:1-5 test. Despite this kind of prophet being inspired for a time, you must ignore everything he said. You must brand him a false prophet once he ever tries to “seduce you from the way in which the Lord your God commanded you to walk.” (Deut. 13:5.) (For a full discussion on Balaam, see page 129 *et seq.*)

Thus, Balaam went from a true prophet to a false prophet solely by the *content of his teachings*.

God explains *why* he allows such men to speak prophetically and have signs and wonders “that come true” but whom you must reject them *in toto* when their teachings violate the Law. God allows them as a *test of your Love for God*. The Lord says in Deuteronomy 12:32-13:5:

Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to nor take away from it. If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and **gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes true**, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for **the Lord your God is testing you to find out if you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul**. You shall follow the Lord your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His

voice, serve Him, and cling to Him. But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has counseled rebellion against the Lord your God who brought you from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery, **to seduce you from the way in which the Lord your God commanded you to walk**. So you shall purge the evil from among you. (ASV.)

If some would-be prophet seeks to “seduce” us “from the way in which the Lord your God commanded you to walk,” you must reject him. This is true even if he comes with signs and wonders. God tells us to ignore such a prophet’s words or otherwise we are joining his rebellion. Isaiah instructs us to apply a similar *content*-oriented test to determine a true prophet.

[Compare teachers] To the Law and the Testimony [and], if they **speak not according to *this Word***, it is because there is no light in them. (Isaiah 8:20).

Norman Geisler, a conservative Christian scholar and President of the Southern Evangelical Seminary in Charlotte, concurs on the essential meaning of Deuteronomy. He agrees that if Paul contradicts the previous Scripture, he must be rejected:

[A]ny teaching about God contrary to what the people already knew to be true was to be rejected....If the teaching of the apostle [Paul] did not accord with the teaching of the Old Testament, it could not be of God. (Norman Geisler, “The Canonicity of the Bible, Part One,” *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Baker Book House: 1999).)

Thus, if any New Testament writer tries to seduce us from the way in which God commanded us to walk, the Bible *brands* him a false prophet. Geisler, a conservative defender of Scripture, agrees that Paul must be measured by whether he *contradicts* the Original Testament.

Jesus says so likewise in Matt. 7:15-23 and 24:11,24. So does Deut. 13:5.

As to Paul, the Bereans were on the right path. They compared Paul to Scripture. (Acts 17:11). The Bereans simply did not have the later words of Paul. They did not have access to Paul's letters that we do. Paul's later words must be tested by Scripture that God delivered by the prophets before him. Paul's words must also be tested by the words of Jesus who is both Prophet and Lord.

Let's examine this Deuteronomy test in detail.

Is This A Biblical Standard To Determine Canon?

“Internal evidence relates to the nature of the material itself. Does it claim to be from God? Does it harmonize with other documents that are *perceived* to be inspired? Is it characterized by a lofty tone, *i.e.*, that essence which one expects in a narrative that claims inspiration?”

“The Canon of Sacred Scripture,” *Christian Courier* (Feb. 4, 2004)

Does Paul Get A Free Pass Because of His Fiery Spirit, Zeal, and Long Acceptance?

When it comes to the question why was the canon put together to include Paul, Paulinists typically give unbiblical justifications. They retreat to a justification of inclusion based on our *feelings*, *our perception of a good purpose*, and long *tradition*. These grounds are set forth as a completely independent test that is valid apart from the proper Biblical test.

For example, Josh McDowell in his famous *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* says the criteria for New Testament canon are: “Is it authoritative.... prophetic.... authentic.... dynamic? Was it received, collected, read and used...?”²

However, the only proper test in the Bible is whether:

- It was a predictive prophecy of an unpredictable event;
- It was made *in the name of the Lord*;
- It came true; and
- The would-be prophet's teachings at all subsequent times are 100% consistent with prior *tested* and *tried* Scripture.

2. Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (San Bernardino: Here's Life, 1979) Vol. 2 at 29.

The Origin of McDowell's Test

Where did the Josh McDowell test come from? Such a criteria to assess canon clearly first appears in a work called the *Shepherd of Hermas*. This work was written near 125 A.D. The *Shepherd* was part of Christian canon for about two hundred years thereafter. In the Codex Sinaiticus, it was printed right after the book of Revelation. Numerous church leaders said it was "divinely inspired."

However, then in the late 300s, the *Shepherd* began to be dropped from canon productions. It was removed apparently because it said adultery could be forgiven. Tertullian had in the 200s insisted the book should be removed from canon for this reason. He said its position on adultery was impious. The *Shepherd* then disappears from Christian canons beginning in the 300s. It never returns.

This adultery-principle may seem an odd criteria to determine canon. However, it is the very same reason why pious Christians in the 300s also tampered with Jesus' words in John 7:53-8:11. This is the passage where Jesus pardons the woman accused of adultery. Most versions of John's Gospel in the era of the 300s removed this passage. Augustine in 430 A.D. skewers them for deleting the text based on their wrongly thinking Jesus could not forgive the woman charged with adultery.³ As a result of this deletion, we have all read the NIV's note which says the most "reliable" manuscripts of that era omit the passage. While the manuscripts that delete this are generally reliable, this particular deletion is not itself reliable. What this demonstrates is the removal of the adultery passage in John coincides with the departure of the *Shepherd* from canon. The reasoning behind both changes are identical. A false Christian piety grew up in the 300s which threw out not only the *Shepherd*, but also deleted words of our Lord.

This history is important on the issue of canon formation. While the *Shepherd* properly was excluded from canon in the 300s, it was removed for the *wrong reason*. The right reason is that it was not prophetic. It lacked a predictive prophecy to validate it. Also, it contradicted Deuteronomy on how to define and recognize a prophetic

statement. It was a false prophetic work. Yet, the *Shepherd* was rejected on the wrong-headed notion that adultery was an unpardonable sin. The same silliness caused Jesus' words to be cast into the trash in the 300s.

As a result, when the *Shepherd* was ejected, it already had spread its wrong-headed notion about what is prophetic. During those two-hundred early years (125-325 A.D.), the *Shepherd* was accepted as a *divinely inspired message*. Then when the *Shepherd* was ejected, it unfortunately did not cause anyone to re-evaluate the notion of how to define *prophecy* that the *Shepherd* had injected into mainstream Christian thinking.

The *Shepherd* hung on for so long apparently because it defined a new test of what constitutes admissible canon. It omitted the validated-inspiration test of Deuteronomy. The *Shepherd's* own words were presupposed to be 'canon.' Thus, its redefinition of what

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3. The NIV footnote reads: "The earliest and most reliable manuscripts and other ancient witnesses do not have John 7:53-8:11." This makes it appear this is a forgery. However, the NIV comment is misleading by lacking context. It is also patently false as to the claim "ancient witnesses" do not have the passage. First, the passage is in numerous uncials, including Codex D (Bazae Cantabrigiensis), G, H, K, M, U, and G. It also is in early translations such as the Bohairic Coptic version, the Syriac Palestinian version and the Ethiopic version, all of which date from the second to the sixth centuries. It is also in the Latin Vulgate (404 A.D.) by Jerome. Further, the passage is cited by a number of the patristic writers. Among them are *Didascalia* (third century), Ambrosiaster (fourth century), and Ambrose (fourth century). It is also in *Apostolic Constitutions*, which is a collection of writings from Antioch Syria that is dated between 220 A.D. and 380 AD. Saint Augustine (430 AD) reveals that the reason some were deleting this passage was because its message that adultery could be forgiven. Augustine writes: "This proceeding, however, shocks the minds of some weak believers, or rather unbelievers and enemies of the Christian faith: inasmuch that, after (I suppose) of its giving their wives impunity of sinning, **they struck out from their copies of the Gospel this that our Lord did in pardoning the woman taken in adultery**: as if He granted leave of sinning, Who said, Go and sin no more!" (Saint Augustine, *De Conjug. Adult.*, II:6.). Thus, one can see in Augustine's day, there was a sentiment that Jesus' pardoning this woman of adultery was a wrong teaching. Augustine says this is why it was edited out of various copies of John's gospel.

was prophetic and hence ‘inspired’ replaced the test in Deuteronomy. By changing the rules on canon, it was accepted into canon. Unfortunately, when it was removed, it had nothing to do with making sure the Deuteronomy test would be used to test *from then on* what is approved canon. It was removed apparently for spurious and incorrect notions that adultery was an unpardonable sin. However, as a result of *The Shepherd’s* long acceptance as ‘prophetic’ for over 200 of the earliest years of Christianity, its new test of what can be added to canon became the *de facto* rule.

The clearest proof of the effect of the *Shepherd* on the earliest canon lists is the presence of Barnabas’ letter to the Hebrews.⁴ What explains its presence in the canon of that era to the present? There is no prophecy in *Hebrews*. There is not even apostolic authority involved. The only test that justifies its inclusion comes from the *Shepherd’s* loose canon test. The Epistle to the Hebrews is inspiring, lofty, and can change its hearers. Otherwise, it has nothing going for it to justify any kind of inclusion in canon. It passes the *Shepherd’s* test of prophetic. However, nothing from the word of God endorses the inclusion of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

The Shepherd of Hermas Test Destroys The Deuteronomy Test

As quoted above, Josh McDowell resorts to a test of what can be added to Scripture that is extremely watered down. He would allow something into canon that merely is *dynamic* and *collected, read and used*. By that criteria, if I was moved by the *dynamism* of the book *Shepherd of Hermas*, it should be added back into canon. It was collected, read and used as Scripture by the early Christian

4. Tertullian points out that Barnabas is the author. Origen twenty years later claimed that the author is unknown. See the index “Hebrews, Epistle of” for further discussion.

church. By such loose criteria, then *Shepherd of Hermas* unquestionably should be restored to canon today. It was by such a loose canon test that Barnabas' letter to the Hebrews was included.

From where did McDowell's loose standard of what is canonical come? It actually comes from the *Shepherd of Hermas*. This book claimed an angelic vision gave the Shepherd these revelations. Yet, this book itself was lacking any validating prophecy.

Excerpts of *Shepherd of Hermas*' Loose Standards on Who Is A Prophet

The *Shepherd of Hermas* set forth a test of what was a true prophet that is consistent with McDowell. However, it clearly violates Deuteronomy's test by *diminishing* the proper standard. It is a somewhat lengthy quote, but it is too important to shorten. It sets forth in what it calls the *Eleventh Commandment* the following test:

How will a man know **a true prophet**? You can try the true and the false prophet according to this:

- a) Try the man who has the Divine Spirit by his life.
- b) First, he who has the Divine Spirit proceeding from above is **meek, peaceable, humble**, refrains from all lawlessness, and the vain desires of this world.
- c) He is content to have fewer wants than that of other men.
- d) When inquired of, he makes no reply, nor does he speak privately. When a man wishes the spirit to speak, the Holy Spirit does not speak. It only speaks when God wishes it to speak.

When, a man having the Divine Spirit comes into an assembly of righteous men who have faith in the Divine Spirit, and this assembly of men offers up

prayer to God, the angel of the prophetic Spirit, who is destined for him, fills the man; and the man being filled with the Holy Spirit, speaks to the multitude as the Lord wishes. Thus, then, will the Spirit of Divinity be **apparent**. Whatever power comes from the Spirit of Divinity, belongs to the Lord.

How will a man know **a false prophet**?

In respect to the spirit which is earthly, empty, powerless, and foolish, the following is true:

a) The man who pretends to have the Spirit will **exalt himself**. He wishes to have the first seat.

b) He is bold, disrespectful, talkative, and lives in the midst of many luxuries and many other delusions.

c) He takes rewards [*i.e.*, payment] for his prophecy. If he does not receive a reward, he does not prophesy.

Can, then, the Divine Spirit take rewards and prophesy? No. It is not possible that a true prophet of God should do this. Prophets of this sort are possessed by an earthly spirit.

d) The earthly spirit of a false prophet never approaches an assembly of righteous men, but **shuns them**. It associates with doubters and the vain. It prophesies to them in secret, deceiving them by speaking mere empty words according to their desires. They are empty to whom it gives its answers. An empty vessel, when placed along side another empty one, is not crushed, because they relate to each other.

When, therefore, a false prophet comes into an assembly of righteous men who have a Spirit of Divinity, and they offer up prayer, that **man with the earthly spirit**

is made empty, because the earthly spirit flees from him through fear. This man is made dumb, and is entirely crushed, being unable to speak. This is because of this: if a storehouse is closely packed with wine or oil, and an empty jar is put in the midst of the vessels of wine or oil, if you should come to clear out the storehouse later on, you will find that jar just as empty as when you placed it there.⁵

So is it respecting empty prophets. When they come to the spirits of the righteous, **when they leave, they are the same as they were when they came**. This, then, is the mode of life of both prophets. The man, who says that he is inspired, is tried by his deeds and his life.

What *Shepherd of Hermas* says, when dissected, is that a true prophet is someone who goes to good people and a false prophet goes to bad people. (To whom did Jesus go?) A true prophet does not take money and a false prophet does. A true prophet necessarily changes the lives of his hearers because of the movement of the Holy Spirit. A false prophet will leave his hearer as empty as before. (Did everyone convert who listened to Jesus?) I have to wonder if Jesus would pass this test. The important thing is *Shepherd of Hermas* passed into canon for two hundred years *under its own test*.

Thus, Christians accepted as authoritative a work that purports to change the Deuteronomical test of what is inspired canon. But for the *Shepherd's* change on how to define what is canon, *Shepherd* would be excluded. Thus, to accept it into canon, one has to accept its test as inspired. This is a classic fallacious way of thinking. You have to assume the inspiration of something in order to deter-

5. This excerpt is in all standard versions of the *Shepherd*. This is from <http://www.montanaset.net/rickv/T%20&%20F%20prophecy.html> You can find it under the Eleventh Commandment at <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/shepherd.html>.

mine it is inspired. Under such a bootstrap fallacy, the *Shepherd* cannot help but be inspired. It has redefined the test of what is inspired to suit its own inclusion.

More important, the *Shepherd's* test removed the qualification for a true prophet that he have a predictive prophecy come true. It removed the second test of comparing the words spoken to prior Scripture itself. Instead, the *Shepherd* focused on the power and character of the speaker as well as of the character of the audience. He clearly was inviting you to use your own estimate of the *appeal* of the message rather than Scriptural guidance as your test.

Yet, when the *Shepherd* was rejected after 350 A.D., it was for other reasons unrelated to the *Shepherd's* lack of predictive and fulfilled prophecy. Because the church never disavowed the *Shepherd's* false teaching on what is *inspired or canonical*, the church never recovered from the corruption of how to decide on true canon. This is self-evident in the presence of the Epistle to the Hebrews in canon since the second century. It is self-evident in how Josh McDowell is still repeating almost two millennia later the test put forth in the *Shepherd of Hermas*.

How The Loose Test of the *Shepherd* Is Being Used to Undermine Christianity Today

This early corruption on the meaning of *prophet* from the *Shepherd* is now rising to haunt the church in fundamental ways. The *Shepherd's* teaching is now beginning to unravel the very meaning of Scripture itself. This comes from both sides against the middle: the Liberals on one side and the charismatics on the other.

Liberal theologians are suggesting precisely that under our loose canon-test we need to add some more books. They want Gnostic writings added to New Testament canon. They want the Gospel of Thomas in particular added. Because the *Shepherd-McDowell* test does not come from Scripture, it opens the door to rationalize even

more criteria to change canon if one is willing to rely solely upon *dynamic writings*. There are no true limits once you abandon Deuteronomy chs. 12, 13 and 18 as your boundary markers.

Yet, it is not merely liberal 'Christians' who are using this elasticity of canon-standards to destroy the meaning of Scripture. It comes from the other side too. It comes from our most charismatic side. Citing Paul, the charismatics claim you can have a prophet who makes no predictive prophecy. It sounds extraordinary but it is defended from "Scripture" in the New Testament (*i.e.*, Paul, not Jesus' words). David Boshart is typical:

People sometimes think that 'prophecy' means to predict (foretell) what will happen in the future. Actually, the simple gift of prophecy is essentially forthtelling; ***it is a ministry to make people better and more useful Christians now***. Prophecy in the New Testament church carries ***no prediction with it whatsoever***, for "he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort" (I Corinthians 14:3). Notice that there is no mention of the word *prediction* here.⁶

Once you abandon Deuteronomy's test in allowing Paul in, how can you reject what Boshart says? You cannot argue with him. Paul is treated as a prophet today *even though he made no predictive prophecy in the name of the Lord that came true*. (See discussion below at page 57.)

Thus, now we can see the standard for treating Paul as inspired canon depends on a standard that is weak. If not corrected to re-establish the Deuteronomical test, the very meaning of Scripture is lost.

6. David Boshart, *Prophecy* (reprinted online at <http://www.christcentered-mall.com/teachings/gifts/prophecy.htm>)

Thus, there is more at stake here than just Paul. We need to close the gates using Deuteronomy. We are flooded with Ellen G. Whites, Joseph Smiths, and a host of other self-proclaimed prophets. We need to go back to the Bible's test. Yet, we need to be consistent. We need to apply it as much to Paul as anyone else.

Does Paul's Proselytism Validate Him?

What about the fact that Paul was a zealous proselytizer in the name of Jesus?⁷ The Pharisees were renown for evangelism in Jesus day. Jesus even refers to them as "compass[ing] sea and land to make one proselyte..." (Matt. 23:15.) Yet, that did not validate their teaching.

Did Paul Have A Predictive Prophecy in The Lord's Name Come True?

This leads us back to our main point. Under Deuteronomy, there is no case to add anyone to canon but Jesus. He alone made a significant prophecy that came true, *i.e.*, the fall of the Temple at Jerusalem and His own resurrection.

Paul, by contrast, has merely one arguable prophecy that came true. However, the claim for it is weak. In the middle of a terrible storm, Paul claimed an angel, not God, told him that no one would lose their life in a ship crash. However, he predicted the ship would be lost. (Acts 27:22-25.) Paulinists never cite this as an example of Paul's predictive prowess. This is because in the same context, Paul's lack of *constant inspiration* is also exposed. Why? Because when Paul brought the warning initially, he said the opposite.

7. We hear often that the most successful evangelist in his day was Paul. However, this is exaggerated when one compares him to the far greater success recorded in Acts of James' church, especially Peter's evangelism. See Appendix D: *Paul or James' Church: Who Was The Most Successful Evangelist?*

See Table 2 below.

TABLE 2. Paul's Words Are Not Always Prescient

<i>Paul Warns Loss of Life</i>	<i>Paul Predicts No Loss of Life</i>
Acts 27:10 [A]nd said unto them, Sirs, I perceive (<i>theo-</i> <i>oreo</i> , perceive with the eyes, discern) that the voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the lading and the ship, but also of our lives .	Acts 27:22-24 (22) And now I exhort you to be of good cheer; for there shall be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. (23) For there stood by me this night an angel of the God whose I am, whom also I serve, (24) saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must stand before Caesar: and lo, God hath granted thee all them that sail with thee.

More important, Paul claims the source of this prediction is an *angel* who relays God's decision to save all on board. This takes away from it any claim that it is a *prophecy* at all. To be a prophecy that *can* be valid, *it must take a risk of being a prophecy that is invalid*. To be a prophecy of such kind, it had to be *In the Name of God (Yahweh or 'I am')*.⁸ We read in Deuteronomy 18:20-22:

(20) But the prophet, that shall speak a word presumptuously **in my name**, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.

8. God actually identifies Himself by *two names* and variations on the name. The first is *Yahweh* (and variants) and the second is "I am." See, Exodus 3:14 ("And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.") Jesus used this name for Himself. In John 8:58: "Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was born, I am." Thus, everything Jesus predicts *is in the name of the Lord* since He was claiming to be I Am.

(21) And if thou say in thy heart, How shall we know the word which Jehovah hath not spoken?

(22) when a prophet speaketh ***in the name of Jehovah***, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which Jehovah hath not spoken: the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously, thou shalt not be afraid of him.

Thus, had Paul's prediction been false, Paul could not fall under the false prophecy penalty of death in the Original Testament. This is because the prophet must claim *the prophecy is going to come true in God's name*: "Thus speaketh Yahweh...."⁹ If it is attributed directly to an angel, it does not qualify. By claiming instead it will come true and you use God's name, the prophet-claimant thereby takes the risk that if his words do not come true, then he can be regarded as a false prophet.

This requirement arises from practical reasons. If the 'prophecy' had not come true, Paul would have been able to say 'some darker angel' must have given me the 'message' that proved untrue. The angel deceived me. There is wiggle room to avoid the death penalty if your prediction proves untrue. Thus, to make a valid prophecy, one *must by definition not only have a prophecy that comes true, but one must in advance say the message is directly from God*. You cannot receive the reward of recognition as God's prophet unless one is willing to use His name initially in giving the prophecy. "No pain, no gain" embodies the principle. Thus, if one claims an angel gave it, and you do not claim it came direct from God, it cannot be treated as a valid prophecy *ab initio* even if it later happens to come true.

9. An example of a false prophecy in Scripture is Hananiah in Jeremiah 28:2, battling Jeremiah, the true prophet. In Jeremiah 28:2, Hananiah begins, "***Thus speaketh Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel***, saying, I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon." Thus, by invoking God's name as the direct source of the prophecy, Hananiah was taking the risk of being found a false prophet if he was wrong. Without taking such risk, Hananiah could not be taken seriously if a prophecy happened to come true.

This brings up a second problem with this as prophecy. Angels in the Original Testament make birth announcements and explain visions with God present. They are heralds of a very limited nature. They do not seem to ever have a prophetic role. They speak God's words only when God is described as present.¹⁰ Paul's attribution of *predictive* words to an angel is most peculiar.

In sum, the prediction Paul makes in Acts 27 suffers from several defects:

- It is not of an event so highly unusual that it has low probability.
- It is not in the name of Yahweh. It is attributed to an angel instead.
- It attributes to an angel a predictive statement that angels did not make in the Original Testament outside of birth announcements.

Yet, even if we grant this one prophecy as validating Paul as a prophet, he could still become like Balaam who prophesied with the Holy Spirit but later apostasized. Thus, one cannot rest Paul's validity solely upon the claim this 'angel-vision' mentioned in Acts ch. 27 is prophecy.

10. When an angel appears to Gideon, God is right there talking; the angel makes no prediction. (Judges 6:21-23.) An angel tells Manoah and his wife about their son Samson to be born. (Judges 13:9-21.) In Daniel, he sees the "son of man" who receives kingdoms, and then a "man's voice" tells Gabriel to "make this man understand the vision." (Dan. 8:15-16.) The angel then explains the vision. In Matthew 1:20 *et seq.*, an angel tells Joseph after Mary is pregnant that the child was conceived by the Holy Spirit.

Paul Could Still Be A Balaam Who Has True Prophecy.

To be a true prophet, Paul must prove also not to offer teachings that are inconsistent with what came before. (Deut. 13:1-5.)

Jesus was completely consistent with what came before. Jesus upheld every jot and letter of the Law. (Matt. 5:18.)

Consequently, Jesus' words qualify as both (a) prophetic (predictive and confirmed) and (b) valid (consistent with what preceded).

By contrast, Paul's predictive statements are certainly not represented as prophecies in the name of *Yahweh*. Alternatively, if true prophecy, there is a substantial question whether Paul's words were also valid, *i.e.*, consistent with what preceded. Paul must be examined with whether he started true, turned false and apostasized later. The example from history that proves this is the manner to test Paul is the story of Balaam. Despite Balaam prophesying with the Holy Spirit (Numbers 24:1-2) and believing in the Coming Messiah to rule the world (Numbers 24:17), Balaam later apostasized and was lost!

Balaam's Star Prophecy of Messiah (1290 B.C.)

Most Christian commentators acknowledge Balaam did give true Messianic prophecy in the Star Prophecy. (See *Treasury of Scriptural Knowledge*, Wesley, Henry, JFB, and Gil.) This is why Matthew identifies the Magi following the star to Bethlehem. (Matt. 2:1.)

Let's see how amazing is Balaam's prophecy of Numbers 24:17 to realize how Balaam was a true prophet of Christ *at one time*. Numbers 24:17 reads, Balaam speaking:

I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not nigh;
there shall ***step forth a star out of Jacob***, and a ***scepter*** shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite through the corners of Moab, and break down all the sons of tumult. (ASV).

Friedman, in the modern Jewish translation, renders the first key part “a star has *stepped from* Jacob....” (*Commentary on the Torah, supra*, at 511.) The Septuagint reads “a star *shall arise* from Jacob....”

The last part on someone ruling the “sons of tumult” was interpreted by ancient Jews as meaning “rule the world.” As a result, the Dead Sea Scrolls from 200 B.C. called this prophecy the “*World Ruler Prophecy*.”¹¹ In the *Shiloh* document among the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS), they “interpreted it [*i.e.*, the Star Prophecy] in terms of a singular ‘Messiah of Righteousness, the Branch of David.’”¹²

As to the portion that reads “rise up out of Israel,” Jerome in the 4th Century had a significant variant. In Jerome’s Latin Vulgate translation, he has next “et consurget [future tense] virga de Israel.” This means “he will stand up from the virgin/maiden of Israel.” The Septuagint of 400 B.C. reads similarly but differently: “a man will arise from Israel.”

The reference to a “scepter” has ancient validity. The Dead Sea Scroll texts from 200 B.C. says “scepter.” (See *Footnote 12 on page 62*.) So too the Masoretic text from the 800 A.D. period.

The *Targum of Onkelos* from circa 150 A.D.—the Aramaic interpretation of the Law—restates this passage to have a Messianic application: “a king shall arise from the house of Jacob, and be annointed the Messiah out of Israel.” (See, *Treasury of Scriptural Knowledge*.)

11. Robert Eisenman, *James: The Brother of Jesus, supra*, at 253.

12. Eisenman, *James: The Brother of Jesus, supra*, note 94 at 1002. While the War Scroll has a unified figure in view, some claim they see *two* Messiahs envisioned in the *Damascus Document* from the DSS at 7.18-21. It says “And the star is the seeker of the Law who came to Damascus, because it was written ‘A star has came forth out of Jacob and a scepter has risen out of Israel. The scepter stands for the prince of the congregation. At his coming he shall break down all the sons of Sheth....’” Some claim the *prince of the congregation* is distinct from the star who came to Damascus. This is too vague to read *two* distinct Messiahs. Instead, the star could very well be a *star* of nature.

It is clear from not only this *Targum*, but also from the Dead Sea Scrolls of 200 B.C. that Numbers 24:17 was deemed a Messianic prophecy by Jews long before Jesus.¹³

How did the Magi in Matthew 2:1 know of this Star Prophecy? The Prophet Daniel was appointed head of the Magi of Babylon (Dan. 2:48) in 604 B.C. Daniel likewise made a prophecy of the precise time period the Messiah would come and die.¹⁴ Thus, several Magi in 3 B.C. were hunting for the Star rising over Israel that same year. (Matt. 2:1.) Through Daniel's Magi, the message of the Star Prophecy had become the most *internationally*-recognized Messianic prophecy in Jesus' day. Suetonius, a Roman historian, wrote in his *Lives of the Twelve Emperors* about this belief circulating in Christ's day. Suetonius did not call it the Star Prophecy, but you can readily see its outlines in his discussion:

13. The oracle of Balaam is quoted four times in the Dead Sea scrolls in conjunction with Messianic prophecies. It appears in the War Scroll (1QM 11.6-17), the Damascus document (CD 7.19-21), the Messianic Testimonia (4Q175 1:9-13), and the Priestly Blessings for the Last Days (1QSb 5:27). (See Wise, Abegg, & Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation*.)

14. Daniel prophesied in 604 B.C. that "Messiah" would come and be "cut off" (*karath*) after 69 weeks from the time the order would go forth to rebuild the temple. (Dan. 9:25-26.) It is typical to call a seven year period a *week* due to the Sabbath-cycle of resting the land every seven years. Thus, 69 weeks of years equals 483 years. When did the order go forth to rebuild the temple? The *Jewish Encyclopedia* says 444 B.C. (See "Nehemiah," *The Jewish Encyclopedia of Judaism* (1989) at 520 (Nehemiah "arrived in Jerusalem in 444 BCE with an appointment as governor of Judah . . . [and his] first action was to rebuild . . . Jerusalem.") What is 483 years after 444 B.C.? "The Jewish Calendar is based on a lunar year of 12 months, each month of 29 or 30 days," *i.e.*, 360 days. (*Encyclopedia of Judaism, supra*, at 145) Using this 360-day lunar calendar, 483 lunar years after 444 B.C. is A.D. 33 (*i.e.*, 173,880 days or 476 solar years equals 33 A.D.) This is the very time in which Jesus Christ lived and was crucified in Jerusalem. Thus, the Magi could deduce that anywhere within a generation (40 years) prior to 33 A.D. would be the Star rising over Judea to signify the birth of the new king. Perhaps they were on the watch as early as 7 B.C.

There had spread over all the *Orient an old and established belief* that it was fated at that time for *a man coming from Judaea to rule the world*. This prediction, referring to the emperor of Rome, as it turned out, the Jews took to themselves, and they revolted accordingly [in 66 A.D.]. (Suetonius, *Vespasian* 4.5.)

Balaam Was Not Saved Despite Believing in Messiah To Come

The fact Balaam uttered a Messianic prophecy has important meaning in salvation doctrine. It answers the question whether believing in a Messianic prophecy and knowing about Christ, as did Balaam, saves you. Balaam's destruction at Moses' request proves such belief alone did not save Balaam. Yet, indisputably, he was the first *under inspiration of the Holy Spirit* to believe in and prophesy specifically about the *Messiah*. He saw Christ and believed in Him. Yet, Balaam later apostasized by teaching Jews they could eat meat sacrificed to idols and fornicate. (Num. 31:8, 16; Rev. 2:14.) (See also page 131 for detailed discussion.)

Why Do Paulinists Ignore Balaam's Prophecy?

Why would Paulinists not want to focus upon this amazing prophecy in Numbers 24:17? You rarely hear any discussion of it in Paulinist-oriented congregations. It actually is necessary to know this story to make sense of why the Magi arrived at Bethlehem and why they were following a star. There is no excuse to not help people understand the Star of Bethlehem and its key role in the nativity.

This prophecy is ignored for two reasons. First, it shows how one of the most amazing *inspired* prophecies of Messiah came from a man who *later apostasizes* and is certainly *lost*.

Second, it shows that people steeped in error and pagan practices, like the Magi, could still hold onto one true Messianic prophecy of the Bible. Yet, believing in Messianic prophecy did not make them Christians. It likewise does not make someone a Christian who thinks they can believe *the intellectual side of a prophecy* with no change in

the heart. The Magi's doctrines (Zoroastrianism) taught that they were saved if they used the right verbal formula for belief, known as a *mantra*. They also believed they could pray to those in the afterlife. (See page 424.) Their teachings violated the Law of Moses, which preached salvation by repentance from sin, atonement, and keeping the covenant. Their teachings about talking to the dead also violated the Law of Moses. (See page 426.)

The Magi (from Babylon) in Matthew 2:1 also make us uncomfortable. Their presence proves how Jesus intended the symbolism of Babylon in the Book of Revelation. The Magi of Babylon came from a culture steeped in a *certain type* of doctrinal error. They correctly worshipped the God of Daniel once Nebuchadnezzar decreed this. This Jewish component of Babylonian religion did not evaporate. Instead, this religion continued onward as Zoroastrianism as a monotheistic religion. It placed Daniel's God in the position of *the one true God*. So what does Babylon represent? A pagan religion? No! Babylon represents a faith with the right emphasis on the *true God Yahweh* but adulteration by adding legal principles at odds with God's Law. It is a nation whose faith is like that of Balaam: it knew the true God but it taught its people to violate God's commands. It was a nation built on *legal* apostasy.

Consequently, the lessons of Balaam for us are many. We must examine whether we are Magi, mixing truth with error. We have to examine whether we can be saved by believing in prophecies about Jesus and knowing who He was yet teach doctrines contradictory of God's Law given to Moses? We have to examine whether we can say the right words of faith, and be sincere, and want to know Christ, like the Magi. However, when it comes to giving up our teachings that violate Jesus' words and God's commands, will we?

Conclusion

Balaam is the one prophet who was tried under Deuteronomy 13:1-5 in the Hebrew Scriptures. He had the Holy Spirit when he blessed Israel and gave the Star Prophecy of Messiah. Moses *explicitly says so*. Balaam's prediction about the star pointing to the birth of a King who will rule the world has come true. Yet, Balaam is an apostate and lost. The Bible, through Moses, tells us this too. Balaam's error was telling Israel they could eat meat sacrificed to idols and commit fornication. (Rev. 2:14.)

The story of Balaam is proof that we cannot just assume that if someone like Paul gave a true prophecy one time that he has passed every test. We cannot assume it is impossible that he never can apostasize later. There is much more to a valid prophet than a one-time prophecy, as the story of Balaam proves.