

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

Test for Valid Prophets

Only a true prophet from God can 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. 4, 12, 13 & 18. A key test is that no

prophet could be legitimate who tried to “diminish” (subtract) any command previously given. (Deut. 4:2; 12:32 (quoted in inset).) This was true even if they had “sign and wonders that came to pass.” (Deut. 13:1-5.) This is reiterated in Isaiah 8:20.

However, no Christian council or scholar has ever systematically applied 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 be concerned about canonicity. The apostles John and Peter along with bishops Jude and James never say anything remotely contradictory of Jesus. Yet, Paul is in a different category. Paul makes statements at apparent odds with Jesus. For example, Paul says the law is abolished while Jesus says this will not happen until heaven and earth pass away. Matt. 5:18.

If the issue of a conflict between Paul and Jesus is raised, one frequently hears a knee-jerk response. There is consternation that anyone would want to test the canonicity of Paul's writings. ‘How can we even consider throwing out

Deuteronomy

12:32 says:

“Whatsoever thing I command you, shall you observe to do: thou shall not add to it, nor diminish from it.”

half the New Testament!' There are murmurs of shocked dismay. Yet, such a response presupposes an affirmative answer to the very question posed: does Paul belong in the New Testament?

My answer to such a response is simple: if Paul truly belongs, then *prove it!* Simply use the Bible's test for adding to Scripture and show everyone that Paul passes its tests. Is this asking too much?

The Bible insists that a Christian demand an answer. We are duty bound to ask our Christian brothers: 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 a true spokesperson of God by the rigorous demands of Deuteronomy chapters 12, 13 & 18? No one wants to go there but the *Bible commands it!*

If these tests are to be ignored as to Paul in particular, then ***why do you think a decade prior to Paul's entry into Christian circles that Jesus emphasized repeatedly that false prophets were to come?*** (Matt. 7:15, 24:11, 24.) Why do you think Jesus warned us these false prophets would come with true signs and wonders? So we would lower our guard and never apply Biblical tests for false prophets? Why would Jesus warn us these false prophets would come *in His name?* (Mark 13:22-23). Wasn't Jesus trying to encourage distrust of *Christians* who claimed to have a prophetic office? How could we obey Jesus by refusing to apply the Biblical tests of a true versus a false prophet to Paul? Did Jesus provide us tests of orthodoxy so 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 flock is supposed to be on the lookout for wolves in sheep's clothing."

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

The Bereans in Acts 17:10-15 knew this. They tested a sermon by Paul against Scripture. Yet, they had little written material available to them. By comparison, today we are privileged to examine all of Paul's letters. The Bereans 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 52 below.) Just because Balaam passed the test for a true prophet initially does not guarantee he remained forever a true prophet. Balaam apostasized later and became a false prophet. Accordingly, the Bereans' conclusion about Paul proves nothing. Rather, we need to follow their example of testing Paul to see whether he seduces us from following the commands from prior Scripture and known Prophets (including Jesus).

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 to test the writings of anyone which 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 about the future, the alleged prophetic statement is insufficient to validate the speaker as a true prophet even if it came true. The reason for such strictness is the test has both a positive and negative side. On the positive, if valid, 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 side, we must impose the death penalty if the speaker used God's name for a prophecy and it did not come true.

Therefore, if the speaker attributed as his source someone other than God, *e.g.*, an angel *alone* was his source, we cannot impose the death penalty on the speaker for false prophecy. We must follow Scripture strictly. In this example, the speaker did nothing worthy of death because he claimed his prophecy came from an angel alone, without God's voice confirming it. Thus, unless the would-be prophet says *thus sayeth the Lord* at some meaningful point as his source 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 and he did not ascribe his source to God personally, we cannot kill him. Because he did not dare make the prophecy in the Lord's name, he suffers no penalty. No risk, no gain. No risk, no loss.

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. The Bible says such predictions are not *prophetic* material. Jeremiah chapter 28 tells us that predictable events are no basis to regard their prediction as true prophecy.¹

In summary, *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, the would-be prophet had to first use the words *thus sayeth the Lord* or an equivalent, *e.g.*, Jesus claimed to speak as I AM Himself

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*, at <http://www.theonet.dk/spirituality/spirit95-6/prophesy.html> (last visited 2005.)

(John 8:58). The speaker must clearly claim divine inspiration from *God Himself* for a highly specific and unlikely prediction. Otherwise, imposing a death penalty would be unjust. (Deuteronomy 18:20-22.) However, once exposed as false prophecy, 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.

Second Level Test: False Despite True Prophecy and Signs

The Bible then has a second level test. Jesus clearly repeats this test. (Matt. 7:15, 24:11, 24.) It is set forth in Deuteronomy 4:2 and 13:1-5. A false prophet can include someone who tries to “diminish” the words of a prior validated prophet. (Deut. 4:2.) While a valid prophet can add to Scripture (Deut. 18:15), he is invalid if he “diminishes” from prior Scripture. (Deut. 4:2.) Thus, the Bible warns that even if someone comes with what otherwise appears to be valid true prophecy, they are invalid if they “diminish” the words of a prior valid prophet. Deuteronomy 13:1-5 teaches if they come with true “signs and wonders” which “come to pass,” they are still a false prophet if they thereafter try to “**seduce you from the way in which the Lord your God commanded you to walk.**” (Deut. 13:5.) This is reiterated in Isaiah 8:20, which states: “To the Law [of Moses] and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.” (KJV). Thus, God tells us one who teaches contrary to the commands in the Law is a false prophet despite his having true prophecy and real signs and wonders. As Barnes comments on Isaiah 8:20: “By this standard all doctrines are still to be tried.”

Balaam is an example of this type of prophet. At one point he provides true prophecy that indeed came from God. He was filled by the Holy Spirit during those times. (Numbers 24:1-2.) However, later he teaches people it is permissi-

ble to do acts which the Law flatly prohibits. He tells them they can eat meat sacrificed to idols and they can commit fornication. (Numbers 31:16; Rev. 2:14.) Thus, he is a false prophet under the Deuteronomy 4:2 and 13:1-5 test. Despite this kind of prophet being inspired for a time, you must ignore everything he thereafter 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 133 *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.” God allows them to come to seduce you as a *test of your Love for God*. The Lord explains this precisely 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.)²

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. His *god* cannot be the true God. His *god* must be an idol even if he calls on *Yahweh*. 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] [t]o 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 seduces us from following what God already commanded in 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 Gei-

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2. In context, Deuteronomy 13:1-5 does speak of the false prophet trying to lead them to ‘other gods.’ Some assert this passage could never invalidate a person who uses *Yahweh*’s name and teaches against the Law’s validity. This view argues that using *Yahweh*’s name for Lawless teaching somehow insulates the person from being viewed as a false prophet. This is erroneous. A seduction to disobey God’s commands and to listen to the signs-and-wonder prophet is the same as trying to lead you to other gods—the prophet himself. He becomes a demi-god. His *god*, even if called *Yahweh*, cannot be the true *Yahweh*. In accord, Isaiah 8:20 demonstrates that the alleged prophet’s validity turns on consistency with prior valid Scripture, starting with the Law of Moses and moving forward.

sler, "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 in the Hebrew Scriptures, the Bible *brands* him a false prophet. Geisler, a conservative defender of Scripture, agrees that Paul must be measured by whether his words *accord* with what God commanded in the original Hebrew Scripture.

Jesus says so likewise in Matthew 7:15-23 and 24:11, 24. So does Deuteronomy 4:2 and 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.

Before we examine this Deuteronomy test, let's see what test is commonly used instead.

*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 an independent test which can validate something as canon despite the writing not otherwise satisfying 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...?"³

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

- Was a predictive prophecy of an unlikely event;
- Was made *in the name of the Lord*;
- Came true; and
- The would-be prophet's teachings at all subsequent times are 100% consistent with prior *tested* and *tried* Scripture, and do not negate any commands in such Scripture.

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 from the late 300 A.D. period, the *Shepherd* was printed right after the book of Revelation. Numerous church leaders said it was "divinely inspired."

The *Shepherd* taught in what it calls the *Eleventh Commandment* that "a true prophet" is someone who changes their hearers for the better, whose message is lofty, and who is meek and peaceable himself. By contrast, the false prophet will "shun" teaching the righteous. His listeners will be as empty as before they heard their message.⁴ Under this loose test of the prophetic, the *Shepherd* itself was allowed to pass into the NT canon for two hundred years of early Christianity.

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

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

4. See the *Eleventh Commandment* at <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/shepherd.html> (last accessed 2005).

had in the 200s insisted the book should be removed from canon for this reason. He said its position on adultery being a pardonable sin was impious. The *Shepherd* then disappears from Christian canons beginning in the 300s. It never returns.

This adultery-as-unpardonable principle may seem an odd criteria to determine canon. However, it is the very same reason why pious Christians in the 300s 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. Augustine mentions his contemporaries wrongly thought Jesus could not forgive the woman charged with adultery.⁵ As a result of this deletion, most of us have read the NIV's note which says the most "reliable" manuscripts of that era omit the passage.

5. 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 *Didascalica* (third century), Ambrosiaster (fourth century), and Ambrose (fourth century). It is also in *Apostolic Constitutions*, which is a collections of writings from Antioch Syria that is dated between 220 A.D. and 380 AD. Augustine (430 AD) reveals that the reason some were deleting this passage in later manuscripts was because of 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.

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 not only threw out 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. The *Shepherd* was a false prophetic work. Yet, the *Shepherd* was rejected on the wrong-headed notion that adultery was an unpardonable sin. The same wrong-headed thinking caused Jesus' words in John 7:53-8:11 to be cast off in the 300s by sincere well-meaning but misdirected Christians.

As a result, when the *Shepherd* was ejected, it already had spread its erroneous notion about what is prophetic. During those two-hundred early years (125-325 A.D.), the *Shepherd* was accepted as a *divinely inspired message*. It redefined the test of what is prophetic canon. Then when the *Shepherd* was ejected, it unfortunately did not cause anyone to re-evaluate the notion of how to define valid prophetic canon.

The *Shepherd's* test of canon is the same as Josh McDowell's test quoted above. Under this test, we use our subjective impression of how authoritative it *feels* to us. We look to see if it has a positive *effect*, as we subjectively evaluate it.

If presence in canon implied early-on that a book was 'inspired', then the clearest proof of the effect of the *Shepherd* on early canon lists is the presence of the Epistle to the Hebrews. It actually was written by Barnabas.⁶ Then what

6. Tertullian in about 207 A.D. points out that Barnabas is the author. Origen twenty years later claimed that the author is unknown.

explains its presence in the NT canon of that era even down to the present time? 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 to justify any kind of inclusion in the NT 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 in our NT canon.

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

This leads us back to our main point. Under Deuteronomy, if we examine what belongs in the New Testament, there is no case to add anyone to canon except 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, *without God simultaneously present in the vision*, 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.

Historical Note: Early Adherents of Faith Alone
—‘Faith Despite Disobedience Saves’—

Marcion, *Antitheses* (144 A.D.) said:

18...our Christ was commissioned by the good God [of the NT] to liberate all mankind.

19...the Creator [of the OT] promises salvation only to those who are obedient. The Good [God of the NT] redeems those who believe in him, but he does not judge those who are disobedient to him.

See Table 1 below.

TABLE 1. Paul's Words Are Not Always Prescient

Paul Predicts Loss of Life

Acts 27:10

[A]nd said unto them, Sirs, I perceive (*theoreo*, 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.**

Paul Predicts No Loss of Life

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 second contradictory 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 (Yah-*

*weh or 'I am')*⁷ Somewhere, there must be a claim God was present giving confirmation of the angel's words. 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.

(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 Mosaic Testament. This is because the prophet must claim *the prophecy is going to come true in God's name*: "Thus speaketh Yahweh...." or some equivalent.⁸ If it is attributed directly to an angel without God simultaneously present in the encounter, it does not qualify. By claiming instead it will come true and you

7. 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.

8. 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. Otherwise, Hananiah could not be taken seriously if a prophecy happened to come true.

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 and be put to death. That's obviously why the old prophet in 1 Kings 13 carefully attributed his false prophecy to an angel alone. It spared his life.

This requirement of using God's name arises from practical reasons. If the 'prophecy' had *not* come true, Paul would have been able to say 'some darker angel' must have given him the message that proved untrue. 'The angel deceived me.' There is wiggle room to avoid the death penalty if his prediction had proven 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 with God's direct presence, it cannot be treated as a valid prophecy *ab initio* even if it later happens to come true.

This brings up a second problem with Paul's prediction about the storm as prophecy. Angels in the Hebrew Scripture make birth announcements and explain visions of the future with God present. They are heralds of a very limited nature. For example, in Daniel, they show and explain visions of the future with the "Son of Man" (Jesus) present. They speak God's words only when God is described as simultaneously present.⁹ Paul's attribution of *predictive* words to an angel without God present in the vision is therefore most peculiar.

9. When an angel appears to Gideon, God is present 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, the prophet 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 of the future.

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

- It does not predict an outcome that is so highly unlikely that absent God's foresight it would be unimaginable.
- It is not in the name of Yahweh or an equivalent expression. It is attributed to an angel without God present.
- It attributes to an angel a predictive statement that angels did not make in the Hebrew Scripture outside of birth announcements or in vision presentations with God simultaneously present.

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 chapter 27 is prophecy.

Paul Could Still Be A Balaam Who Initially Has True Prophecy

To be a true prophet, Paul must prove also not to offer teachings that negate what came before. (Deut. 4:2; 13:1-5.)

Jesus was completely consistent with what came before. Jesus upheld every jot and letter of the Law, and insisted upon an ongoing necessity to teach and follow the Law. (Matt. 5:18.)

Consequently, Jesus' words qualify as (a) prophetic (*i.e.*, predictive and confirmed); (b) valid (*i.e.*, consistent with and never negating what preceded); and (c) in the name of *I am* because Jesus claimed to be *I am*. (John 8:58.)

By contrast, Paul's predictive statement is certainly not invoking *Yahweh's* name. Instead, Paul relied upon an angel alone. Even if Paul had a prophecy in God's name, there is a substantial question whether Paul's words were also valid, *i.e.*, consistent with and not negating what preceded. Paul must be examined to determine if he started true, turned false and apostasized later. The example from history that proves this is a

correct test of Paul is the story of Balaam. Despite Balaam prophesying with the Holy Spirit (Numbers 24:1-2) and believing in the Coming Messiah (Christ) 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 the false prophet Balaam did originally give true Messianic prophecy in the Star Prophecy. (See *Treasury of Scriptural Knowledge*, Wesley, Henry, JFB, and Gill.) This is why Matthew identifies the Magi following the star to Bethlehem. (Matt. 2:1, *magos*.)

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* but who later turned false. In Numbers 24:17, we read Balaam's words:

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 "scepter" implied this star would identify a new king. The last part on someone ruling the "sons of tumult" was interpreted by ancient Jews as meaning "rule the world." 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 anointed the Messiah out of Israel." Clearly, Numbers 24:17 was deemed a Messianic prophecy by Jews long before Jesus appeared.¹⁰

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

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, Balaam was one of 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 that they could eat meat sacrificed to idols and they could fornicate. (Num. 31:8, 16; Rev. 2:14.) (See also page 135 for detailed discussion.) Balaam clearly became lost. (Rev. 2:14.)

Why Do Paulinists Ignore Balaam's Prophecy?

Why would Paulinists not want to focus upon this amazing Messianic prophecy in Numbers 24:17? You rarely hear any discussion of it in Paulinist-oriented congregations. It actually is necessary to know about 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 three 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*. Such a possibility is denied by eternal security advocates, relying principally on Paul for their teaching. Thus, any mention of Balaam's prophecy causes embarrassment to proponents of eternal security.

Second, the background on the Star Prophecy shows that people steeped in error and pagan practices, like the Magi, could still hold onto true Messianic prophecy of the Bible. Yet, believing in Messianic prophecy did not make them saved 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 them 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. (Lucian, *Mennipus* 6-9.) Their teachings about mantras thereby violated the Law given to Moses, which preached salvation by repentance from sin, atonement, and faithfulness. Moreover, the Magi's teachings about talking to the dead also violated the Law given to Moses. (Deut. 18:11; *cf.* Isaiah 8:19; 19:3.) Thus, for those steeped in eternal security, it is difficult to mention the Magi were unsaved people who believed in Messianic Prophecies.

Lastly, the Magi (from Babylon) in Matthew 2:1 make us uncomfortable for another reason. Their presence proves how Jesus wanted us to understand 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 must have ***correctly worshipped*** the God of Daniel. First, Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged Yahweh. Lastly, King Darius also later specifically decreed that “the God of Daniel” was the true God and that his entire vast empire had to acknowledge this. (Dan. 4:34-37; 6:26). Thereafter, Daniel obviously had ample opportunity as the chief officer over the Magi to inculcate faith in the true God among the Magi. (Dan. 6:1-2.) Based on Matthew 2:1's mention of the *magos* (Greek for *magi*), there is every reason to believe this Jewish component of Babylonian religion continued. Babylonian religion must have absorbed this as part of Zoroastrianism—a monotheistic religion. In it, Daniel's God must have continued to be *their one true God* for some significant period.

So what does Babylon represent? A pagan religion? No! Babylon represents a faith with the right emphasis on the *true God* and the *true Christ* but ***adulteration*** by adding salvation and legal principles at odds with God's Law.

How do we know the Magi had the right emphasis on the true Christ? That they were waiting for Messiah's birth?

Because Babylon's spiritual & political leaders (the Magi) were clearly aware of Daniel's prophecy of Messiah's date for being cut-off (*i.e.*, killed). (Dan. 9:25-26.) Daniel was the **chief of the Magi**, by appointment of the king (Dan. 6:1-2). Thus, Daniel's prophecy would be well-known by the Magi. This prophecy, uttered in 604 B.C., said the Messiah shall come and be cut-off after sixty-nine "periods of sevens" (*viz.*, a sabbath cycle of seven years)¹¹— 483 years — from the "order to restore and to build Jerusalem." (Dan. 9:25-26.)

The *Jewish Encyclopedia* says this order went forth in 444 B.C. Nehemiah "arrived in Jerusalem in 444 BCE with an appointment as governor of Judah... [and his] first action was to rebuild... Jerusalem [including the temple]." ("Nehemiah," *The Jewish Encyclopedia of Judaism* (1989) at 520.)

What year could the Magi deduce Messiah's being cut-off?

The year **33 A.D.** The Jewish calendar year is a lunar-based year. There are only 360 days in the "year" of which Daniel is prophesying. Daniel's prophecy of 483 *lunar* years thus represents 173,880 days (483 x 360). This equates to 476 solar years in our calendar. If you subtract 476 years from 444 B.C., you hit square on **33 A.D.** How amazing!

Thus, from Daniel's prophecy, the Magi would know the date of the Messiah's being cut-off is 33 A.D. The Magi then could piece this together with the Star Prophecy of Balaam to determine his approximate time of birth.

How did the Magi know of the Star Prophecy?

Again, the Magi no doubt were also trained by Daniel in the Messianic Star Prophecy from Numbers 24:16-19. Daniel mentions his continued use of the Law of Moses while living in Babylon. (Dan. 9:11-13.) Daniel would then have shared this Star Prophecy in the Law of Moses with his Magi.

11. This is often mistranslated as *weeks*. The word is *shebu'im*. In the feminine form, it means a "period of seven days." However, in the masculine, as is present here, it means simply "a time period of seven units" (*e.g.*, month, year, sabbath cycle of seven years). See, *Theological Workbook of the Old Testament* (G.L. Archer, R.L. Harris, & B.K. Waltke, eds.) (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992) (2 Vols.) at 2:899; G.L. Archer, "Daniel," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Gabalein, Ed.)(Grand Rapids) Vol. 7 at 112.

Why would this Star Prophecy tell the Magi that a star's rising would mark the *birth* of the Messiah? After all, the word *birth* is not mentioned in Numbers 24:16-19?

For two reasons. First, a star rising (which for ancients included planetary conjunctions) was ordinarily claimed by the ancients to mark the birth of important future rulers. This is why the Romans understood the Star Prophecy in the First Century A.D. to signal such a birth. For example, Suetonius tried claiming a star in that period augured the birth of one of their own emperors who would rule the world in fulfillment of the Star Prophecy from the East.¹²

Second, history proves the Magi understood the Star Prophecy as a birth augur. Christian historians have traced the prophecy of Balaam after 600 B.C. within the Babylonian religion. Abulfaragius (1226-1286) in his *Historia Dynastiarum*¹³ says that Zoroaster¹⁴ was a student of Daniel, and that Zoroaster taught the Magi that a new star would one day signal the *birth* of a mysterious child whom they were to adore.¹⁵

Thus, the Magi would understand the Star Prophecy to be talking of the *birth* of the same person who is *cut-off* in 33 A.D. in Daniel's Prophecy. Therefore, the Magi of Babylon would be naturally looking backwards one adult life-time (40 years approximately) prior to 33 A.D. This would identify the birth-time for this Messiah to be approximately 7 B.C. Thus, the Magi were on the look-out for this star precisely at about the time Jesus was born in about 3 B.C.

12. Suetonius in *Lives of the Twelve Emperors* says: "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.)

13. This is recorded by Oxford Professor, Thomas Hyde, in his masterpiece of 1700 A.D. entitled *Historia religionis veterum Persarum*.

14. Zoroaster, according to traditional and conservative modern practitioners of Zoroastrianism, lived around 580 B.C. He founded the Magi.

15. George Stanley Faber (1773-1854) (Anglican theologian), *The Origin of Pagan Idolatry Ascertained from Historical Testimony and Circumstantial Evidence* ([London] F & C. Rivingtons, 1816) Vol. 2 at 92.

The Magi of Matthew 2:1 are thus following Balaam's Star Prophecy and Daniel's Messianic Prophecy to the letter. This is what squarely allows them to arrive at the right time in Bethlehem to give presents to the infant Jesus.

Yet, throughout Revelation, Babylon is synonymous with the harlot. What does this mean? God is telling us that Babylon, led by its *Magi* rulers, was a nation whose faith is like that of Balaam: ***it knew the true God and His Christ but it taught its people to violate God's commands***. It taught salvation by mere mantras (*i.e.*, verbal formulas). Furthermore, it was a nation built on *legal* apostasy. In other words, Babylon had the correct faith in the true God and ***waited for the true Messiah and even rejoiced at finding Him***. Otherwise, it had the wrong salvation principles and all its behaviors were contrary to God's Law. Babylon is thus depicted in Revelation as a *harlot*—prostituting itself to base desires.

Consequently, the lessons of Balaam for us are many. We need to examine how important it is that we can alone say the right mantra of faith, and be sincere, and want to know Christ, like the Magi did. But what happens if we trust a mantra (like the Magi did) to save us despite our rejection of the Law which "I Am" (Jesus) gave Moses?

Conclusion

Balaam was a true prophet who was later convicted as a false prophet under Deuteronomy 4:2 and 13:1-5. Balaam truly had the Holy Spirit when he blessed Israel and gave the Star Prophecy of Messiah. Moses *expressly says so*. Yet, Balaam is an apostate and lost. The Bible, through Moses and Jesus, tells us this too. Balaam's error was later telling Israel they could eat meat sacrificed to idols and they could commit fornication. (Rev. 2:14.) He ***diminished*** the Law. (Deut. 4:2.)

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 or that he can never apostatize later.