

## DEUTERONOMY 18:9-22 – IS IT ABOUT A PARTICULAR PROPHET?<sup>1</sup>

### I. INTRODUCTION

The collection of so-called “proof texts” in the portfolio of Christian missionaries includes two verses from the 18<sup>th</sup> Chapter in the Book of Deuteronomy, verses 15&18, which are cited as evidence to support the common claim that the advent of Jesus is foretold in the Hebrew Bible. However, a careful reading and analysis of the entire passage, Deuteronomy 18:9-22, establishes the proper context of these two verses, and demonstrates the absurdity of such a claim.

Muslims, who lately started to target Jews for conversion to Islam, use these two verses as evidence that the arrival of Muhammad, Islam’s “prophet”, is foretold in the Hebrew Bible. Although the analysis presented herein is geared to refute the Christian claim, a similar case is easily made to refute the Islamic claim.

### II. COMPARING CHRISTIAN AND JEWISH ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS

The Hebrew text and side-by-side English renditions of Deuteronomy 18:15&18 are displayed in Table II-1. The King James Version (KJV) translation is shown with pointers to cross-referenced passages in the New Testament. These references are taken from the New American Standard Bible (NASB). However, the corresponding passages below the table are quoted from the KJV for consistency.

**Table II-1 – Deuteronomy 18:15&18**

Deut	King James Version Translation	Jewish Translation from the Hebrew	Hebrew Text	דברים
18:15	The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee <b>a Prophet</b> from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, <b>like unto me</b> ; unto him ye shall hearken; <sup>(i)</sup>	<b>A prophet</b> from among you, from your brothers, <b>like me</b> , the Lord your God will set up for you; you shall listen to him.	נָבִיא מִקִּרְבְּךָ מֵאַחֶיךָ כְּמִנִּי יָקִים לְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֵלָיו תִּשְׁמָעוּן :	יח, טו

<sup>1</sup> Transliterations of Hebrew terminology into the Latin alphabet will follow these guidelines:

- Transliterated terminology is shown in **bold italicized** font
- The accented syllable in transliterated terminology is shown in **SMALL CAPS** font
- Latin vowel-sounds, A – E – I – O – U, are used (not the English versions thereof!)
- Distinct Hebrew letter that have ambiguous Latin letter sounds are transliterated according to the following rules:
  - A vocalized letter א is transliterated as the equivalent Latin vowel
  - A vocalized letter א is transliterated as the equivalent Latin vowel with an added underscore
  - The letter ח is transliterated as “h”
  - The letter ח is transliterated as “ch”
  - The letter כ is transliterated as “k”
  - The letter ק is transliterated as “q”
  - A vocalized **SHVA** (שְׁוָא) is transliterated as a superscripted “e” following the consonant
  - There is no “doubling” of letters in the transliterations to reflect the **dagesh** (emphasis)

18:18	I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.	A prophet I will set up for them from among their brothers like you; and I will put My words into his mouth, and he will speak to them all that I shall command him.	נְבִיא אֲקִים לָהֶם מִקְרֹב אַחֵיהֶם כְּמוֹדִי וְנִתְּנִי דְבָרִי בְּפִיו וְדִבֵּר אֵלֵיהֶם אֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר אֶצְוֶנוּ :	יח, יח
(i) <u>Acts 3:22(KJV)</u> - For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. <u>Acts 7:37(KJV)</u> - This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear. <u>John 1:21(KJV)</u> - And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No.				

The two translations of Deuteronomy 18:15&18 are reasonably similar, except that the noun נְבִיא (*navi*), which is properly rendered as **a prophet** in the Jewish translation, is partially capitalized as **a Prophet** in the KJV translation. This issue, which reflects a subtle attempt by the KJV translators to impute Christology into the text, is addressed in the analysis of these two passages along with the other highlighted terms in them.

### III. OVERVIEW OF CHRISTIAN AND JEWISH INTERPRETATIONS

#### A. Overview of the Christian Perspective

According to the New Testament, Jesus fulfilled a prophetic promise by Moses that is found in Deuteronomy 18:15&18 – two passages that are considered by Christians as messianic prophecies that foretell the advent of a great prophet who will arise from among the people.

While the Christian commentators admit the plausibility of the application of these passages to the succession of true prophets whom God commissioned to instruct, direct, and warn His people, the prevalent view is that the prophet spoken of and promised in this passage is pre-eminently Jesus. This view is supported by the claims that Jesus alone was like Moses in his character as a mediator, in the excellence of his ministry, in the number, variety, and magnitude of his miracles, in his close and familiar communion with God (“the Father”), and in his being the author of a new dispensation of religion (see the Jamieson, Fausset, & Brown commentary).

The Christian view is that this prediction was fulfilled some 1,500 years after the words were spoken by Moses, and was expressly applied to Jesus by Peter (Acts 3:22-23) and by Stephen (Acts 7:37). Moreover, according to the Gospels, Jesus thought of himself as a prophet (e.g., Matthew 13:57; Mark 6:4; Luke 4:24; John 4:44), a view that was shared by his followers (e.g., Matthew 21:11,46; Luke 7:16, 13:32-33, 24:19; John 6:14, 7:40).

Although it is not part of the detailed analysis presented herein, verse 19 has some relevance to this discussion:

**Deuteronomy 18:19 – And it will be, that whoever does not hearken to My words that he [the prophet] speaks in My name, I will exact [it] of him.**

**Deuteronomy 18:19(KJV) – And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him.**

Many Christians perceive this passage as foretelling the dire consequences of unbelief in Jesus and the disregard of his mission, and Christian missionaries often allege that the Jewish people have suffered these consequences during the nearly 20 centuries that followed his ministry for rejecting Jesus.

Detailed Christian interpretations are available in standard Christian sources, such as commentaries by Matthew Henry and Jamieson, Fausset, & Brown.

## **B. Overview of the Jewish Perspective**

According to the traditional Jewish perspective, Deuteronomy 18:9-22 is a passage through which the Torah strengthens the authority of the prophet by affirming him or her as the successor of Moses and the only legitimate channel for (two-way) communication with God. This is in complete contrast to what the Torah states of the king, whose power is limited. In this respect, a true prophet of Israel was more powerful than a king, whose power is limited according to the Torah (see Deuteronomy 17:14-20). Consequently, prophets were among the leaders of the Jewish society, along with priests, elders and, in monarchic times, with kings and royal officials. Some prophets also were influential members of the royal court.

God promises to show enduring concern for Israel by sending them prophets. According to the Hebrew Bible, a prophet is not someone whose main function is to tell the future, stealing knowledge from God and sharing it with the people (see, in contrast, the definition of a Gentile prophet in Deuteronomy 18:10-11). A prophet is someone who tells the truth; someone who does not tell us what we want to know, but rather tells us what God wants us to know, diligently reminding us of our covenantal obligations.

The passage Deuteronomy 18:9-22 teaches the Israelites about prophets and their role, since the people may naturally desire to know the future or to learn the Divine mind; and they will be living among nations who hold that the will of the gods was best learned through augury and sorcery. Within this passage, the description of the place of the prophet is preceded by a stern warning against dealing with soothsayers and diviners. It is a rephrasing of the severe injunctions commanded earlier in the Torah:

**Leviticus 19:26,31 – (26) You shall not eat over blood; **you shall not indulge in sorcery, and you shall not believe in lucky times.****

**(31) You shall not turn to the mediums, nor shall you seek after the wizards, [and thereby] be defiled by them; I am the Lord your God.**

While, on the surface, Deuteronomy 18:9-22 might appear to be speaking about “a prophet”, in reality it concerns the establishment of the **Office of the Prophet** via the expression “... all that I shall command him.” (Deuteronomy 18:18), a position filled by 50 Jewish prophets after Moses.

If, for the sake of argument, one were to *assume* that the prophet being described here is to be only one special future prophet, then it follows that all prophets who came after Moses, except for Moses and this particular prophet, were false prophets. Moreover, one must not ignore the warning found in Deuteronomy 18:20 concerning the fate of a false prophet. This is, of course, absurd – a false conclusion that would result from a false assumption.

The correct context of Deuteronomy 18:15&18 is that God will send His prophets, a [significant] prophet in each generation, to Israel; a prophet not of the same rank and caliber as Moses (Deuteronomy 34:10), but of the line of prophets of which Moses is the “titular father”. The **Office of the Prophet** is thus conceived, and the mission of each of its occupants, who are also endowed with the gift of prophecy, is not so much to foretell the future as it is, in spiritual succession to Moses, to be the teacher and religious guide of his, or her, age.

#### IV. A CLOSER LOOK AT THE PASSAGE

##### A. Deriving the Proper Context

When selected verses from an entire passage are “quoted” by persons who do not know the Hebrew language and its idioms, the correct overall context is likely to be lost in favor of some biased interpretation. This precisely is the case with Deuteronomy 18:15&18, which Christian missionaries lift out of the passage Deuteronomy 18:9-22, a passage that deals with divination and prophecy.

As was noted earlier, the KJV translators made a *subtle* attempt to impute Christological significance to the two verses by rendering the translation of the Hebrew noun נָבִיָּא, **a prophet**, as **a Prophet** in both cases. It is worthwhile to point out at this point that, unlike most other languages that employ an alphabetical system, in the Hebrew language there is no upper-case/lower-case letter distinctions. Therefore, it is rather telling why the KJV translators decided to capitalize the term in these passages. A study of the application of the term “prophet” in both the KJV “Old Testament” and KJV New Testament is helpful in determining whether this particular treatment by the KJV is justified. The information is presented in Table IV.A-1.

**Table IV.A-1 – Application of the term "prophet" in the KJV Bible**

Generic Term	KJV Bible Portion	Application	#	Reference	Remarks
prophet	"Old Testament"	prophet	294	N/A	Common use
		[a] Prophet	2	<b>Deuteronomy 18:15,18</b>	According to the NASB, <b>Deuteronomy 18:15</b> points to <b>John 1:21</b>
			1	1Samuel 9:9	Used here as a title, thus capitalized
	New Testament	prophet	156	N/A	Common use
		[the] Prophet	1	<b>John 7:40</b>	According to the NASB, <b>John 7:40</b> points to <b>John 1:21</b> , which points to <b>Deuteronomy 18:15&amp;18</b>
<p><u>John 1:21(KJV)</u> - And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No.</p> <p><u>John 7:40(KJV)</u> - Many of the people therefore, when they heard this saying, said, Of a truth this is the Prophet.</p>					

It appears that the use of “the Prophet” at John 7:40, where it is a direct reference to Jesus, was designed ostensibly to establish a link, albeit a subtle one, between Jesus and the use of “a Prophet” in Deuteronomy 18:15&18.

*What is the correct context of these two passages?* In Deuteronomy 18:15, Moses speaks to the Israelites and tells them about God's promise. To paraphrase [Moses saying to the Israelites]:

**God told ME that He would bring forth for YOU a prophet from YOUR midst ..., LIKE ME, ...**

In Deuteronomy 18:18, Moses speaks to the Israelites and quotes God's promise as it was told to him. To paraphrase [Moses quoting what God said to him]:

**This is what God said to me: “I will bring forth a prophet for THEM from among THEM ..., LIKE YOU, ...”.**

So, in effect, the two verses convey the same message – the former being a paraphrase of God's promise, and the latter being a quotation of God's promise.

The noun **נָבִיא**, which is the first highlighted word in the Hebrew text of the two verses shown in Table II-1, is in common use throughout the Hebrew Bible, where it appears, in all forms (singular, plural, male, female, with and without prepositions, in various inflections, etc.), on 315 occasions. Generally, whenever this term is applied with the definite article (and, occasionally, with an additional preposition or conjunction), such as, **הַנָּבִיא** (*ha'navi*), **the prophet**, **הַנָּבִיא** (*v<sup>e</sup>ha'navi*), **and the prophet**, **לְנָבִיא** (*la'navi*), **to the prophet**, etc., it always refers to a specific individual. In contrast, whenever the term is applied without a definite article (and, occasionally, with an additional preposition or conjunction), such as, **נָבִיא**, **a prophet**, **נָבִיא** (*v<sup>e</sup>navi*), **and a prophet**, **לְנָבִיא** (*f<sup>e</sup>navi*), **to a prophet**, etc., unless connected explicitly with a name or someone identified elsewhere in the nearby text, it is used in a generic sense. Shown below are the only two such exceptions to the generic case that are found in the Hebrew Bible,

where a specific person is either explicitly identified or implicitly identifiable (in all other cases, אָבִיָּא, אֲבִיָּא, אֲבִיָּא, etc., are generic references):

**Genesis 20:7** - And now, return the man's wife [Sarah], because he [Abraham] is a prophet [אֲבִיָּא], and he will pray for you [Avimelech] and [you will] live; but if you do not return [her], know that you will surely die, you and all that is yours.

**1Kings 13:18** – And he [the old prophet from Beth El] said to him [God's prophet from Judah], "I, too, am a prophet [אֲבִיָּא] like you [אֲבִיָּא] (*kamocha*), and an angel spoke to me with the word of the Lord, saying, 'Bring him back with you to your house, and he shall eat bread and drink water';" he lied to him.

Consequently, the way that the singular or individual reference is to be understood in context, in the (idiomatic) Hebrew, is as being a general term, such as would be applicable to describe the *Office of the Prophet*, rather than to identify a specific individual who occupies, or will occupy, it. This is also the case concerning false prophets in Deuteronomy 13:2, where the individual term אֲבִיָּא, is used, but does not to point to any one specific individual.

Deuteronomy 18:18 contains the following description:

“...and I will put My words in his mouth; and he shall speak to them all that I shall command him.”

A prophet, i.e., any one of the true prophets of Israel, has the ability to speak only that which the Creator commands him, or her, and puts in his, or her, mouth; he himself, or she herself, may not speak or say anything on his or her own authority. The Hebrew Bible contains actual examples of this scenario:

**Isaiah 59:21** – "As for Me, this is My covenant with them," says the Lord; "My spirit that is upon you, and My words which I have placed in your mouth; shall not depart from your mouth and from the mouth of your seed and from the mouth of your seed's seed," said the Lord, "from now and to eternity."

**Jeremiah 1:9** - And the Lord reached His hand, and He touched my mouth; and the Lord said to me, "Behold, I have put My words in your mouth."

According to the Hebrew Bible, a prophet's primary role was to be God's messenger and spokesperson, communicating God's will in all matters. He or she was, in essence, the envoy through whom God, the divine King, governs Israel, as Deuteronomy 18:19 states:

“...whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will call him to account [for it].”,

This declaration establishes the prophet as the highest authority in the land, higher even than the king, about whose commands no similar declaration is ever made in the Hebrew Bible. As such, prophets played a major role in the religious, domestic, and political life of the nation, as was already noted earlier.

It is important to understand that these passages describe a prophet and not a god, a fact that is evident from the use of the terms **like me** [אֲבִיָּא] (*kamoni*) and

**like you** [כָּמוֹכָה (*kamocho*)] in Deuteronomy 18:15&18, respectively. These two terms, כָּמוֹנִי and כָּמוֹכָה, are the respective 1<sup>st</sup>-person singular masculine (or feminine) gender, and 2<sup>nd</sup>-person singular masculine gender inflections of the term כָּמוֹ (k<sup>e</sup>mo), **like, as**, and are used in cases where a comparison is made. Thus, it should be understood that God is telling Moses something like this:

"... just as you [Moses] are a prophet and not a god, so will he [the generic prophet] be a prophet and not a god; just as you were born of earthly parents, so will he be born of earthly parents."

Although the prophets are the inspired declarers of the divine will, their abilities are not without limitations. They are bound by Torah – they may not add to it nor may they subtract from it, except as a **special dispensation** or a **temporary measure** of extreme urgency [called in Hebrew הוֹרָאֵת שְׁעָה (*hora'at sha'ah*)].<sup>2</sup> Prophets may also not venture, solely by virtue of the prophetic gifts with which they were endowed, to give a ruling in matters of Torah Law. In this respect, they must yield to the judge, who is the learned authority empowered to interpret and apply the sanctions of the Law according to the accepted norms of Biblical interpretation (see Deuteronomy 17:8-13).

**Sidebar Note Concerning False Prophets:** Since the notion of true and false prophets is central to Deuteronomy 18:9-22, it is worthwhile to comment on this issue as part of the overall analysis.

The danger of having false prophets has always been present for Israel, in Biblical days as well as throughout the rest of Israel's history, all the way to the present time. Because the people were to rely on the instruction of prophets for important matters, some criteria were needed for identifying oracles that are not truly from God.

How are the people of Israel to identify a false prophet? The Hebrew Bible provides the "litmus test", and this test is valid even after a given prophet passes on – the prophetic horizon, though not unlimited, is definitely not limited by the prophet's own lifetime. Explicit clues for identifying false prophets are provided in the following passage:

**Deuteronomy 13:2-6 – (2) If there arise in the midst of you a prophet, or a dreamer of a dream; and he gives you a sign or a wonder, (3) and the sign or the wonder whereof he spoke unto you occurs, [and he] says, "Let us go after other gods which you have not known, and let us worship them"; (4) you shall not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or unto that dreamer of a dream; for the Lord, your God, is testing you, to know whether you truly love the Lord, your God, with all your heart and with all your soul. (5) You shall follow the Lord, your God, and Him you shall fear, and His commandments you shall keep, and unto His voice you shall hearken, and Him you shall worship, and unto Him you shall cleave. (6) And that prophet or that dreamer of a dream shall be put to death, because he spoke falsehood about the Lord, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and who redeemed you from the house of bondage, to lead you astray from the way in**

<sup>2</sup> A biblical example of this is found at Hosea 3:4-5&14:2-3, where the prophet foretells of times when there will be no Temple standing in Jerusalem, for which he instructs Israel to offer their prayers instead of sacrifices. A post-biblical example is that the biblical requirement to perform a *Brit Milah* (ritual circumcision) on the 8<sup>th</sup> day after the birth of a male child may be postponed when such a procedure could endanger the infant's life. Many other examples are cited in the Talmud and in other sources.

**which the Lord, your God, commanded you to go; and so you shall remove the evil from your midst.**

Thus, even an acknowledged prophet is automatically proven false if he or she claims to have been sent by God to advocate any form of idolatry, or if he or she proclaims any precept of the Torah to be abrogated permanently.

The test of the false prophet, which was the non-fulfillment of the particular prediction he or she announced as the credentials of his or her divine call, is spelled out in Deuteronomy 18:22. However, one must keep in mind that signs and miracles performed by someone who claims to be a prophet are not necessarily the proof of his or her truth (see Deuteronomy 13:2&6).

The prophet Jeremiah offers his own formula to distinguish between true and false prophets:

**Jeremiah 28:8-9 – (8) [There] were the prophets of old before me and before you; and [they] prophesied to many countries, and unto great kingdoms, for war, and for evil, and for pestilence. (9) [As for] the prophet who will prophesy for peace; when the word of that prophet shall come to be, then will the prophet whom the Lord truly sent be known.**

If the message is painful for the prophet to utter and painful for the people to bear, it is likely an authentic message from God. On the other hand, if prophetic words are popularly received then there is reason to doubt them, and the prophet himself, or prophetess herself, would have reason to doubt the authenticity of the message as well.

False prophecy is punishable by death, according to Torah:

**Deuteronomy 18:20 - But the prophet who intentionally speaks a word in My name, which I did not command him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.**

Two types of false prophecy punishable by execution are described here:

- ➔ **Presuming to speak in God's name oracles that He did not command**
- ➔ **Speaking in the name of other gods**

The Hebrew Bible records cases in which proceedings were initiated against persons claiming to be prophets (e.g., 1Kings 22, Jeremiah 26, 2Chronicles 18). These individuals were accused of falsely attributing their prophecies to God. Some were exonerated, others were put to death.

The overall context of Deuteronomy 18:9-22 should now be clear. In preparing the Israelites to enter the Promised Land, Moses, by speaking of prophets and prophecy, true and false, and how to distinguish between them, is teaching the people what they will find there that could divert them from their spiritual path. The underlying message of this passage is that Israel need not fear the efforts of sorcerers and other such characters, because Israel's destiny is far beyond the ability of anyone to inflict harm unto them.

## **B. The Fallacy of the Christian Missionary Claim**

As noted earlier, the New Testament asserts that Jesus is the manifestation of this allegedly special prophet of which Deuteronomy 18:15&18 speak. Some of the many flaws in this popular Christian missionary claim are identified below:

### **Problem #1 – Jesus vis-à-vis the Prophets of Israel**

Like the prophets of Israel, Jesus chastised the people for not doing God's will, for turning from God's laws, but that is where the similarity ends. The prophets of Israel justified their pronouncements on God's Torah. They never acted on their own authority, always acknowledging God's supremacy, and His Law's (the Torah's) immutability. On the other hand, by proclaiming his justification on his own authority, Jesus did not follow the path of the true prophets of Israel.

### **Problem #2 – Jesus vis-à-vis Moses**

God promised Israel a (generic) prophet, one who would be **like** [לְמֹשֶׁה], not greater than, Moses. According to the New Testament and Christian theology, however, Jesus is much greater than Moses was, because Moses was a prophet born of earthly parents, while Jesus is for Christians the divine "Son of God", and for Trinitarians, he is one component of the triune godhead.

### **Problem #3 – Jesus vis-à-vis God**

Combining the above two issues, and in view of the fact that (Trinitarian) Christians view the three components of the triune godhead as co-equals, one must wonder what kind of a god Jesus is if he can only say whatever God tells him to say (v. 18).

### **Problem #4 – Jesus vis-à-vis the People of the Land**

Deuteronomy 18:16 ends with the phrase in which Moses quotes the Israelites saying at Mount Sinai [Horeb]:

**"... Let me not continue to hear the voice of the Lord my God, and let me not see this great fire any more, so that I will not die."**

The people were afraid that they would see God and die since, as the Hebrew Bible teaches, no person can see God and live (Exodus 33:20). According to the New Testament, Jesus, as God manifest in the flesh, came to live among the people, and he interacted with them all the time; he saw them and they saw him, he spoke to them and they spoke to him. How, then, could Jesus also be this prophet? After all, the people among whom he lived did not die when they saw him.

### **Problem #5 – Jesus vis-à-vis the People of the World**

The New Testament, in which it is claimed that Jesus is the manifestation of the prophet that is foretold in Deuteronomy 18:15&18, includes the following warning:

**"... every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people." (Acts 3:23[KJV])**

Has this actually happened in the world? Most of the world's population is not Christian and does not listen to Jesus, let alone know of him, yet they have not been destroyed.

When Christian missionaries claim that Acts 3:23 concerns only the Jewish people, the question they should be asked is: "*Has this really happened to the Jewish people?*" After all, the Jewish people are alive and well today, and are more successful now than ever before.

#### **Problem #6 – Jesus vis-à-vis the “Litmus Test” for True & False Prophets**

As was noted earlier, a prophet who presumes to speak in God's name words that he was not commanded and/or speaks in the name of other gods, is a false prophet who is to be put to death.

According to the New Testament, Jesus “prophesied” the following:

**Matthew 16:28(KJV) - Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.**

- ⊖ **This "prophecy" was not fulfilled!** The generation that Jesus addressed died 20 centuries ago!

Jesus makes a "prophecy" concerning the time he will spend in the tomb (the “Sign of Jonah”):

**Matthew 12:38-40(KJV) – (38) Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee. (39) But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: (40) For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.**

- ⊖ **The "prophecy" of the "Sign of Jonah" [3 days & 3 nights in the tomb] was not fulfilled!** Jesus was “in the heart of the earth” not more than 36 hours.

According to the Gospel of Luke, he died on Friday afternoon and “rose” on Sunday before dawn – a total of some 36 hours. When the women reached his tomb, he was already gone (Luke 23:54--24:3). According to the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus remained in the tomb from Friday afternoon until Saturday evening at nightfall - a total of some 26 hours (Matthew 28:1)!

**Conclusion: If Jesus was a prophet at all, he was a false prophet!**

Finally, it is interesting to note that, while Christian missionaries often quote Deuteronomy 18:15&18, they avoid the rest of the passage, and Deuteronomy 18:20 in particular, which specifies death by execution for a false prophet.

When a person, such as a false prophet, is sentenced to die by execution, the Torah requires the following procedure with the body:

**Deuteronomy 21:22-23 – (22) And if be that a man commits a sin deserving death, and he is put to death, and you shall hang him on a tree [wooden pole]; (23) His body shall not remain all night upon the tree [wooden pole], for you shall surely bury him on that**

**[same] day, for he who is hanged is accursed by God; and you shall not defile your land, which the Lord, your God, is giving you as an inheritance.**

This passage describes a scenario that can easily be applied to the crucifixion of Jesus, and it can be combined with Deuteronomy 18:20 to argue that he was a false prophet, a sin for which the death penalty is prescribed in the Torah (recall that the Hebrew Bible was the scripture in force at that time!).

The issues that plague the Christian perspective on Deuteronomy 18:9-22, as described above, provide a powerful dose of food for thought with which to challenge those who promote their false claims about this passage.

## V. SUMMARY

Deuteronomy 18:9-22 does not speak of any one prophet in particular who will emerge from among the Jewish people. As has been demonstrated, any claims that the passage points to Jesus are self-defeating and create additional problems for those who promote such claims. Rather, this passage contains a generic reference to the line of prophets of which Moses is the "progenitor", and it formally establishes the **Office of the Prophet** for Israel, the requisite tests for distinguishing between true and false prophets, and the penalty for false prophecy.

Within traditional Judaism, it is held that true prophecy was removed from the world following the destruction of the First Temple (King Solomon's) in the year 586 B.C.E. Those prophets who were alive at that time, such as Ezekiel, Haggai, Jeremiah, Malachi, and Zechariah, continued their respective missions as true prophets, and their works are included in the Hebrew Bible. The historical record and the Hebrew Bible confirm that:

☆ **Prophecy ceased several centuries before the advent of Jesus:**

**Psalms 74:9 - Our signs we have not seen, there is no longer a prophet; and there is none among us who knows for how long.**

☆ **Prophecy will return one day in the future (in the messianic era):**

**Joel 3:1 - And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your elders shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions;**

**Malachi 3:23[4:5 in Christian Bibles] - Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord;**

Just as the Davidic dynasty was established forever (2Samuel 7:12-16), regardless of whether the throne is occupied by a king at all times, so has the **Office of the Prophet** been established for eternity, even at times in history when there are no prophets in Israel.