'Among the apocalypses, we acknowledge those by John and Peter. However, as far as the latter is concerned, some of us do not want to allow its public reading in the church.' This comment in the Canon Muratori shows that the Apocalypse of Peter (ApPt) was almost included in the New Testament canon. In the following, we shall deal with a part of the Greek version (the so-called Akhmim marked A) that brings up a temporal-historical theme: the appearance of and havoc brought about by false prophets in the church. These verses are translated as follows:

1. Many of them shall be false prophets and shall teach ways and diverse doctrines of perdition. 2. And they shall become sons of perdition. 3. And then God will come to my faithful ones who hunger and thirst and are afflicted and prove their souls in this life, and shall judge the sons of iniquity.

In order to understand the theme, we shall first attempt to place the text within the framework of the history of the Biblical motif of 'false prophets'. This will provide information for the analysis of the text itself. Second, we shall venture to propose a hypothesis as to whom the expression 'false prophet' was meant to refer to by the author of the writing and to what extent this is reflected in the extant text.

FALSE PROPHETS

Review of the History of the Motif

The figure of the false prophet (ψευδής προφήτης) is known in the OT, in fact, already in the Torah. In Deut 13.2-6, Moses commands the people that if a prophet were to entice them to turn away from the Law, he would have to be put to death even though, or all the more so because, he gives signs and wonders. Deut 18.20-22 demands death upon the prophet who speaks in the name of other gods or speaks words in the name of the Lord that he has not commanded him to say to the people. In Num 22-25, we encounter the ambivalent figure and role of the prophet Balaam. According to Num 31.8 and 16, it was upon the counsel of Balaam that the pagan women tempted the sons of Israel to apostatise and, therefore, the prophet had to die. This is reported in Josh 13.22. The LXX text refers to the enticement by the Greek verb πλανάω (stray, in the passive: be strayed) and to the apostasy by the noun ἀπόστασις. Both words will be a constant element in the characterisation of false prophets. Finally, we mention two examples from Jeremiah. According to verse 14.14, fraudulent prophets deceiving people with illusions of a peaceful future do not follow the call of the Lord. And 23.13 mentions prophets who have misled the people (ἐπλάνησαν). To summarise, the legitimacy of the prophet lies in that he remains faithful to Mosaic Law and that he does not lead his people astray from the ways of the Lord neither by his teaching and prophetic words, nor by his wondrous deeds.

The NT uses the expression 'false prophet' eleven times, among them Matthew and Revelation three times each, and 2 Peter once (2.1). A false prophet is someone who considers himself a prophet but is not one, or who proclaims lies, delivers false teachings, and thus misleads the congregation. Mt 7.15-20 characterises them as coming disguised as sheep, but underneath being ravenous wolves; that is, they are destructive to the congregation. These prophets can be known by their fruits, that is their deeds and their consequences. In verses 21-23 of the very same chapter, Jesus mentions people who would address him by the liturgical confession 'Lord, Lord' (κύριε, κύριε) and boast of having worked many miracles in his name; nonetheless, he would not accept them because they lived their life
without obeying him. According to Ulrich Luz\textsuperscript{2}, Matthew speaks up against fanatic-enthusiastic prophecy here and contrasts it with obedience to Jesus’ law. Since prophecy and apocalypse went hand in hand in the ancient Church\textsuperscript{3}, we encounter the figures of false prophets in the apocalyptic-eschatological sermons of Jesus (Mk 13.22 and Mt 24.11,24).

Scholars have traditionally emphasised the relation between the ApPt and 2 Pt\textsuperscript{4}. There are, indeed, many affinities between 2 Pt 2.1-2 and ApPt 1.1-3 (A). An important parallel is the emergence of false prophets as an apocalyptic theme. The expressions common to both writings in connection to false prophets are as follows: ‘way, destruction, to teach, blasphemy, righteousness’ (6805, ἀπόλεια, διδάσκω, βλασφήμια, άλήθεια). The vocabulary suggests that false prophecy in the congregation appears as false and misleading teaching, relying on signs and miracles worked by false prophets. False prophesy can cause part of the congregation to go astray, relinquish the true teaching and way of life, and contempt, or even blaspheme righteousness.

The parallels in Revelation bring us closest to our subject, the eschatological role of false prophets in ApPt 1.1-3 (A). The designation ψευδοπροφήτης appears in Rev 16.13, 19.20, and 20.10. Rev 13.11-17 should also be listed here. In the preceding verses we read about the dragon-Satan, and the emergence of the beast-Antichrist from the sea. Then the ‘second beast’ rises from the ground, showing unmistakable traits of the false prophets. He ‘was like the Lamb but spoke like the dragon’ and his aim was to make all the people of the earth worship the beast-Antichrist. His description contains the concepts ‘working miracles’ and ‘leading astray’, which we have previously identified in the biblical passages about false prophets. However, most characteristic of Revelation is that in it the persons of the false Christ, or Antichrist (the first beast), and the false prophet, or

\textsuperscript{2} U. Luz, Das Evangelium nach Matthäus I (Ziirich and Neukirchen, 1989), 405-7.
\textsuperscript{3} E. Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher, Neutestamentliche Apokryphen II (Tübingen, 1971\textsuperscript{4}) 181.
\textsuperscript{4} W. Grundmann, Der Brief des Judas und der zweite Brief des Petrus (Berlin, 1974) 87ff.
false teacher - (the second beast), appear together. According to Ellul, the first beast personifies Power, while the second beast, symbolising the false prophet, personifies Propaganda. The false prophet has the appearance of the Lamb because he imitates non-violence; his words, however, are those of the dragon, whom he glorifies, and whose worship he supports by way of ideological arguments. His role is diabolic since the first beast, whose propagator he is, is the double of the dragon-diabolos. False prophet and false messiah thus belong together.

Textual Analysis

After studying the historical background of some motifs, especially the false-prophet motif in 1.1-3 A, analysing and understanding the text should now prove easier. It should first of all be noted that we are dealing with a fragment. The phrase 'many of them shall be false prophets' implies a longer text, which would clarify those from whom the author thinks false prophets would arise. Albrecht Dieterich formulated an interesting theory on why this text has come down to us in a fragment. He suggested that in the original text, which was longer, the eschatological focus appeared in this passage. Due to this feature, the text was copied from this point when it was used as a magic formula, buried with the corpse of a monk in the Akhmim grave. This, however, implies that our text contains the end of a longer work. This conforms, for example, with the Didache, in which eschatological themes provide the closure. The end (20.34) of the surviving Akhmim text discusses those who have (in the end) 'forsaken the way of the Lord'. This idea also occurs in the Ethiopic version, beginning from chapter 10: 'these have forsaken the law of God and are haunted by... demons'. Thus the idea of apostasy imbues the extant and missing parts of the text and connects the Ethiopic and Greek versions.


6 A. Dieterich, Nekyia. Beiträge zur Erklärung der neuentdeckten Petrusapokalypse (Leipzig, 1913) 16.
False prophets – as we have seen in canonical and extracanonical texts – bring havoc to the congregations by their teaching. They teach various things. 'The way' (ἡ δοξά) is equivalent to the Jewish Halakha and concerns the way of life as well as 'diverse doctrines' (δόγματα ποικίλα) that – according to the context – are related to beliefs and convictions about eschatological events. The text characteristically places 'the way' ahead of the doctrines, witnessing to a Jewish-Christian background. In Matthew, too, the way (of life) is more important than doctrine (5.19; 7.15-23). Both the Ethiopic and the Greek versions refer to the fact that the false prophets and their followers have not only deviated from the true way but have also slandered it. 'They were the ones who blasphemed the way of righteousness … they spoke ill of it … they forsook the way of the Lord' (7 E = 22, 28, 34 A). The terminology of 'the way' appears in other works belonging to the Petrine tradition (Acts of Peter 6, 7, 12) and was characteristic of the Palestinian and Syrian Jewish Christians. For them 'the true way' meant the true religion and belonging to the true religious trend. The common denominator of 'the way' and 'diverse doctrines' is ἀπώλεια (corruption, destruction, perdition). They will thus bring destruction upon themselves, 'they shall become the sons of perdition' (2 A); they will die, bringing damnation on themselves and others.

It is at this point that divine intervention is to occur: 'And then God will come' (3 A). The use of the noun 'God' in this context is wholly unusual. Most often 'the Lord' is used, known from OT eschatology and used by Christians as an honorific title for Christ. Why does a different word appear in this passage? One may argue that in this passage Jesus is speaking to Peter and he does not call himself 'the Lord' in his eschatological sermons. This is very well, but why does he not call Him that shall come 'my Father', as he did in the eschatological parts of the NT, or why does he not refer to himself as 'the son of man'?

7 W. Bauer, Wörterbuch, s.v. δοξά.
8 R. Bauckham, 'The Apocalypse of Peter: An Account of Research', in ANRW II.25.6 (Berlin, 1988) 4712-50 at 4737.
This question has not yet been adequately answered by previous scholarship. It is certain that by 'Him that shall come' Jesus did not mean himself; in the subsequent phrase, however, he does refer to himself. The phrase is meant to answer the question whom God is to come to: 'to my faithful ones' (ἐπὶ τούς πιστοὺς μου) – that is, to the members of the Church who are faithful to the true way of life and teaching, not falling to the lures of false prophets. Of them, the text says: 'they thirst and hunger' (cf. the beatitude in Mt 5.6) – that is, the truth the false prophets adumbrated, but the faithful ones still desire. Nonetheless, their faithfulness is rewarded by affliction: Jesus calls them the 'afflicted' (θλιβόμενοι). They probably remained a minority within the congregation or they were persecuted by the authorities on account of their behaviour. Finally, the revelation to Peter states that the faithful ones 'proved their souls in this life' (Ἐν τῷ τῷ βίῳ τὰς ψυχὰς ἑαυτῶν δοκιμάζοντας). The verb δοκιμάζω may mean 'try' or 'tempt'. The activities of the false teachers meant both a trial and a temptation for the faithful. Faith and faithfulness tried is more valuable than that which is untried (Jas 1.2,12). The reward of the faithful will not fail to be given when God comes in judgment. But the punishment of the unfaithful will also not be delayed. The text calls them 'the sons of iniquity' (οἱ υἱοὶ τῆς ἁνομίας), that is, those who have transgressed against the Law. 'Law' may refer this time to the procedure against false prophets, or the opposition to them (Deut 13.2-6; 18.20-22). It is what the 'sons of iniquity' have failed to fulfil. God will therefore pass judgement upon them. The author speaks in the name of those who consider themselves faithful and think of their fellows as fallen to the lure of false teachers.

**Historical Events and Personalities Behind the Text**

Recent scholarship has maintained that the ψευδόχριστοι and ψευδόχριστος (false Christ) mentioned in c. 1 E stand for Simon Hen Koseha⁹, the leader of the Jewish uprising against Rome in AD

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⁹ R. Bauckham, 'The Two Fig Tree Parables in the Apocalypse of Peter', *JBL* 104 (1985) 269-87; 'The Apocalypse of Peter', 4712.
132-135, who was given the Messianic name 'Bar Kochba' (the Son of the Star) on the basis of the prophecy in Num 24.17 by the famous Rabbi Akiba, who at that time was well in his eighties. He was called Bar Koziba (the Son of Falsehood, Υιος του ψευδους) by Christians, including Jewish Christians whom he persecuted. He is relatively well known from the coins he minted, rabbinical as well as Christian literature, and Roman records. The inscription of his coins reads 'Simon Nasi' (Simon the Prince), which can be understood to refer to the Messianic prince. He was ruthless with his opponents, even if they were Jews; there is evidence that he had the town of Tekoa burned down because it refused to obey his conscription orders.

He was fundamentally opposed to Jewish Christians because they refused to acknowledge him as the Messiah and renounce Jesus' Messiahship. Justin Martyr complained of this a few decades later: 'in the Jewish war of not long ago, Barchochebas, the leader of the Jewish uprising, commanded the ruthless punishment of Christians until they deny and blaspheme Jesus Christ' (I Apology 31.6). According to Roman history (Vita Hadriani 14.2) Bar Kochba's uprising broke out in response to the prohibition on circumcision and, after its suppression, 580,000 men perished as a result of the ensuing executions, famine, disease, and fires, which sounds rather unbelievable.

Let us briefly review the evidence that Bauckham quotes in support of his identification of the false messiah in c. 1 E as Bar Kochba.

(a) It is characteristic of all eschatological literature to call one who persecutes Christians a false messiah (Christ). This is true enough in respect of Bar Kochba. In addition to Justin Martyr, this is found in Eusebius, Hist. eccl. 4.8.4 and Hieronymus, ad Rufinum 3.31. Apart from Bar Kochba, there was no other Jewish personage who made messianic claims and persecuted Christians between AD 80 and 160. 'The redaction can be seem to be controlled by a Sitz am Leben of persecution under the Antichrist figure, specifically the situation of Jewish Christians during the Bar Kochba revolt'.

(b) The description

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11 Schafer, Geschichte, 168.
12 Bauckham, 'Apocalypse of Peter', 4724.
tion in cc. 1-2 E could only have been valid for the period of the Bar Kochba revolt. The author's word makes it clear that he still hopes for the conversion of a significant portion of the Jews to Christianity. He calls them 'the sprouted buds and fruit of the fig tree'. However, their conversion is hindered by the activity of the Antichrist who tries to sway Christianised Jews into renouncing Jesus' Messiahship. Faithful Jewish Christian congregations did not comply, and thus began a period of martyrdom for them. (c) The text of cc. 1-2 E recaptulates everything from former Christian tradition that has to do with pseudo-messiahs, especially Jesus' eschatological sermons (Mt 24.4-5; 11.25-36). The passage calls on Christians to resist such deception. All of a sudden, however, it modifies the plural to singular and merely talks of one pseudo-messiah (Antichrist). According to Bauckham, the author of ApPt must refer to Bar Kochba: 'That this false messiah is Bar Kochba now seems a necessary conclusion'\textsuperscript{13} and 'The false messiah of E 2 is best identified with Bar Kochba'\textsuperscript{14}. From the fact that after a series of false messiahs only one is mentioned, we may conclude that from the series of false prophets one single false prophet emerges. One may compare the process of a collective literature emerging from the activities of the rabbis\textsuperscript{15}.

Based on Bauckham's conclusions, we will demonstrate or at least make plausible our hypothesis that if the false messiah in ApPt was Bar Kochha, then the false prophet mentioned in A 1-3 must be Rabbi Akiha hen Josef. We adduce the following arguments in support of our hypothesis:

(a) According to NT apocalyptic tradition, especially Revelation (13.11-17; 16.13; 19.20; 20.10), where there is a false messiah there must also be a false prophet, who disseminates propaganda on behalf of the false messiah among the believers and promotes misleading ideology to persuade the believers to follow and worship him. This is precisely what Rabbi Akiba did when, referring to Num 24.17, he named Bar Koseba Bar Kochba, that is, a legal messiah from the house of Jacob according to the messianic prophecy. 'Upon seeing

\textsuperscript{13} Bauckham, 'Fig Tree Parables', 275-79, 286-87.
\textsuperscript{14} Bauckham, 'Apocalypse of Peter', 4733.
Bar Koseba, Rabbi Akiba said: "This is the messiah king!" (j. Taan 4,7 and 68d)\(^{16}\). Three independent rabbinical sources have statements concerning this.

(b) A false prophet should have considerable authority in the eyes of believers to grant credit to his deceptive words. Rabbi Akiba could perfectly fulfil this requirement: he was one of the leading figures of the rabbinical reform movement in Jabne, the main author of the Midrashim explicating the Pentateuch, the best-known exponent of the Mishnah tradition and Taanaitic theology. He was a charismatic personality, and believed to be a seer\(^{17}\).

(c) Apart from Akiba's straightforward declaration that Bar Koseba was the messiah, several of his indirect comments refer to the fact that he saw his own eschatological-messianic hopes realised in Bar Koseba. Schafer summarises this as follows: 'It appears from the few messianic statements which Akiba made, apart from the so-called messiah proclamations, that he held national-earthly as well as politically coloured views concerning the events of the near future. Though our sources have no direct reference to the Bar Kochba uprising, these messianic statements seem to prove that Akiba saw the realisation of his messianic hopes in the Bar Kochba revolt (at least temporarily)'\(^{18}\). Furthermore, we can be certain of his opposition to Rome, for he identified it with Esau and Edom, the ancient enemies of Israel. In explicating Gen 27.22 ('the voice is Jacob's voice but the arms are the arms of Esau'), he deliberated on what the 'arms' of Rome had done to his people\(^{19}\).

(d) Rabbi Akiba was known as an enthusiast and mystic, and wondrous signs were attributed to him. Such characters are easily infused with the qualities of unique personages, and are prone to dedicate themselves to the service of crediting their messages and aims. 'On the basis of what we know about Akiba's being an ecstatic, we

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\(^{17}\) J. Neusner, art. 'Akiba ben Josef', in *TRE* 2 (Berlin, 1978) 146-74; C.H. Hunzinger, art. 'Akiba', in *RGG*\(^3\) 1 (Tübingen, 1957) 209.

\(^{18}\) Schafer, 'R. Aqiva', 120.

may well assume that his realisation about $\text{Num} 24.17$ [i.e. the recognition of Bar Koseba as Bar Kochba] must have seemed to him a pneumatic inspiration$^{20}$. Tradition handled his enthusiasm with a certain irony. It is reported that after Akiba's declaring Bar Koseba the messiah his companion and colleague Jochanan ben Torta said to him: 'Akiba, you will have grass growing on your jaws but the son of David still will not have come!' Concerning his mystical nature and miraculous powers, tradition has it that when he studied the Torah he seemed to have fire above him as at the giving of the Law on Mt Sinai. The one who was seen to have such fires above him must also have seen fires glowing above Bar Koseba whom he claimed as the messiah. Characteristic of his mysticism was his relish for the Song of Songs. Not only did he attempt everything to support its canonisation, but also used the colours, lights and odours describing the beauty of the bridegroom in Song 5.10-14 to depict the messiah king bringing salvation – the same features that appear in the description of the redeemed in the $\text{ApPt}$ (15-16 E, 7-11 A). The end result, however, did not justity Akiba's enthusiasm: the revolt was brutally suppressed. 'From then on, the Jewry refrained from all prophetic enthusiasm'$^{21}$.

(c) It might also have been Akiba's eschatological and political optimism that led him to identify Bar Koseba, who had at first achieved military success, with the messiah king. Concerning his optimism, it was recorded that during a visit to Jerusalem he and his companion saw a fox jumping out of the ruins of the Temple. His companion began to cry, whereas Akiba began to laugh. He explained that he laughed because if the prophecy of $\text{Jer} 26.18$ about the Temple becoming a wooded height is fulfilled, so will be $\text{Zech}$ 8.4-5, where God promises that aged people and children shall live in Jerusalem again, thereby foretelling peace and welfare$^{22}$.

(f) The accounts of Akiba's imprisonment and execution after the suppression of the uprising are regarded as authentic. True

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$^{20}$ R. Meyer, art. $\nu\epsilonυ\deltaο\piρωφήτης$, in $\text{ThWNT} 6$ (Stuttgart, 1959) at 824ff and 835ff.

$^{21}$ Hunzinger, 'Akiba', 209.

$^{22}$ Schafer, 'R. Aqiva', 92-3.
enough, the accounts do not connect this to his relation with Bar
Kochba but rather to the fact that he continued to teach the Law even
during Hadrian's persecutions when it was banned. It is, however,
certain that the measures against Jewish religious practice were taken
as retaliation for the revolt; by refusing to obey, Akiba expressed his
solidarity with the uprising. To Pappas ben Judah who urged him to
desist from studying and teaching the Tora, he answered with the
parable of the fox which urged a fish to come upon dry land to es-
cape the fisherman's net. The fish answered: "If we are afraid in the
element in which we live, how much more should we be afraid when
we are out of that element. We should then surely die." So it is with
us with regard to the study of the Tora, which is "thy life and the
length of thy days" (Ber 61b).

In view of the above, we can also better understand cc. 1-3 A. The
Jewish Christians who are addressed here suffered much during the
few years of Bar Kochba's revolt, who tried to force them to re-
nounce Jesus, for people cannot believe in two messiahs at the same
time. The uprising was still being fought when the redactor of the
ApPt combined the visions of heaven and hell, belonging to an earlier
tradition, with cc. 1-2 E and 1-3 A, which provide the framework to
the visions and refer to historical events of the period. Whereas cc. 1-
2 E sought to unmask the false messiah and urges readers to remain
faithful to Jesus, cc. 1-3 A likely did the same with respect to the
false prophet. We have several reasons to identify the false prophets
of the text with Rabbi Akiba and (possibly) his disciples. Jewish
Christian readers may well have seen the punishment of false proph-
ets, the ḥāmām of the text, fulfilled in the execution of Rabbi
Akiba.