

Buzz King
buzz@BuzzKing.com
BuzzKing.com
303 437 7419

Deuteronomy 18:14–15, New International Version

¹⁴ The nations you will dispossess listen to those who practice sorcery or divination. But as for you, the LORD your God has not permitted you to do so. ¹⁵ The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him.

Acts 3:11–22, New International Version, abridged

¹¹ While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon’s Colonnade. ¹² When Peter saw this, he said to them: “Fellow Israelites, why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? ¹³ The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate. ¹⁵ You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. ¹⁶ By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus’ name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him.

¹⁹ Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out. ²¹ Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets. ²² For Moses said, ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you.

Matthew 17:1–5, New International Version

***17** After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. ² There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. ³ Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.*

⁴ Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.”

⁵ While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"

Listen to him.

I went to Catholic schools, all the way through 12th grade, and as I have said before, I have very positive memories of the sisters who taught me. They cared about us academically, but also spiritually and physically. They served breakfast before school for any kid who showed up; they provided free lunches to any family that couldn't afford to pay for lunches, and they collected uniforms from kids who had outgrown them, cleaned and patched the clothing, and gave these uniforms to other children. The sisters did the hard work in the parish, while the priests, to be honest, seemed to be spoiled and a bit lazy. One day, I was in class, and as I often did, I was daydreaming. I'm sure that when the sister who was teaching us looked into my eyes, she could see that I was looking through her, focused on something a thousand light-years away. It was history class, and we were studying the impact of the Spanish missions in California, of which there were twenty or so. The sister droned on, and I pleasantly thought about other things. My mind drifted, but then suddenly, her voice stopped, her eyes locked onto mine, and she shouted, "Listen to me, Buzzy!" My heart pounding in my throat, I sat up straight, pulled my vision from the edges of the cosmos and looked directly at her. I will get back to this.

Our first quote today comes from the Book of Deuteronomy, the fifth book in the Pentateuch or the Torah. In Deuteronomy, the Law of Moses is reiterated to a new generation of Israelites – those largely born in the desert during forty years of wandering – who are about to enter Canaan, the Promised Land, which will be called Israel. This was to fulfill one of the promises made by God as part of the Old Covenant: progeny, God’s blessing, and land. Moses himself will die and will not enter Canaan. The Israelites are encamped in Moab. They are waiting to cross the Jordan River and conquer the land of Canaan. This is Moses’ last chance to set his people on the right spiritual path before he releases them to their destiny. He summarizes what has happened to the Israelites since they left Egypt. He overviews the Ten Commandments. He then tells them how they should live in the Promised Land in a way that is consistent with God’s wishes. Our passage is from this last section; specifically, Moses is telling his people how to interpret prophecy and how to properly seek it out. In our passage, Moses first tells his people that they are not to adopt the pagan, multi-god practices of the people of Canaan. Then he predicts a prophet who will be like him, like Moses. Importantly, Moses is the first in a long series of prophets, and Christians see Jesus as the last of the prophets. This is what Moses says: *The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him.* Historical evidence suggests

that the brutal massacre of the Canaanites did not happen, and that the story of the bloody conquest of Canaan is in truth a faith story about how God does indeed provide for the people of God by giving them land, and there is very little historical evidence that Moses existed as an actual historical person. If Moses did live, he lived several hundred years before the Book of Deuteronomy was written. The story of Moses might be based on oral traditions that were passed down over this long period of time. But either way, this notion of prophets provided by God, people who represented God, who spoke for God, and who so powerfully influenced the history of Judaism and Christianity, appears as a prophesy attributed to Moses.

The New Testament is filled with references to the Old Testament, the Hebrew Bible. This is particularly true with the Gospel of Matthew, which was written largely for Jews who were followers of Jesus Christ. It was important for the New Testament writers to emphasize the legitimacy of Jesus by portraying him as fulfilling Old Testament prophecies. We see Old Testament references in other Gospels, in the letters of Paul, and in the Book of Acts. In Acts, chapter 3, Jesus has been crucified and resurrected. He has spoken to the Apostles and ascended into Heaven. Now, the Apostles must carry on his work; they must spread the faith. The Apostles are performing miracles and converting people

who for the most part are Jews. Peter heals a man with some sort of disability that prevents him from being mobile. We see one of countless metaphors in the Bible. It is the Holy Spirit within them that allows them to perform miracles. The idea is that the power of the Holy Spirit, while it is visualized physically, is actually working spiritually, within people to heal them internally, to bring them closer to God. Here is what Peter says to the astonished people who have witnessed this miracle; I have compressed it: *“Fellow Israelites, why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? ¹³ The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. ¹⁶ By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus’ name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him. ¹⁹ Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out. ²¹ Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets. ²² For Moses said, ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. We see that Peter refers to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus, all in the same sentence, making it clear that Jesus is not just some regular guy who thinks he’s God. Peter uses the Old Testament as a way of legitimizing Jesus. He finishes by deliberately quoting Moses by saying: *For Moses**

said, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you." People hearing this were Jews and they would be very aware of these words from Deuteronomy: The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him.

Our third quote is from the Book of Matthew. It is part of the scene depicting the transfiguration of Jesus, which occurs just after his eventual crucifixion has been predicted. Jesus is transitioning from preaching in the Galilee to dying in Jerusalem. The word transfiguration refers to a change in the appearance of someone that shows a deep, otherworldly truth being displayed. On a mountain, Jesus appears in magnificent glory to some of his disciples: Peter, James, and John. They are probably on Mount Hermon, although the Bible does not explicitly state this. The disciples suddenly see Jesus' face shining like the sun. Moses and Elijah, two prophets from the Old Testament, appear. The Old Testament is being used heavily here. Then Moses is quoted again, just as he was quoted in Acts: ⁵ *While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"*

There is a reason to listen to Jesus. He is the only true do-only-good person who has ever lived. That is the essence of Jesus Christ, of the story of the person to whom we are to listen. The Ten Commandments were the core of Israelite and Jewish theology. They tell us to have no other God than God, to have no idols on this earth, to not take God's name in vain, to keep the Sabbath a holy day, to honor our parents, to not murder or commit adultery or steal or lie or covet what another person has. But it was Jesus who came along and focused on the upside of obeying God. Jesus taught us to love and forgive, to have empathy, to treat all people equally, to always seek peace, and most of all, to feel the joy of walking every day in the Kingdom of God. We should indeed listen to Jesus if we want to truly enjoy the gift of faith.

So, what about the sister who caught me daydreaming in class and suddenly shouted at me to listen to her? I was never that good at sports, except for running; you should have seen me get near drowned in water polo in high school. I also failed handwriting and art in 6th grade. But I did have an extremely good short-term memory. In my moment of panic, I realized that I knew precisely what she had just said, despite the fact that I certainly had not been listening to her. I blurted out: *"The California missions were founded in the late 17-hundreds to the early 18-hundreds. They stretch from San Francisco to San Diego. They*

were established under the order of the Spanish King in 1769. They were dedicated to the education and Christian instruction of the Native Americans.”

The sister froze, her mouth open. The class was silent. As soon as I parroted those words, I forgot them. But I of course, coolly acted like it was no big deal. A dedicated student like me has no problem retaining everything that the sister says. Of course, I was listening to the sister!

But while it was the best thing for my education to pay attention in class, and while it certainly was the respectful thing to do, there is no human of whom it is more important to listen to than Jesus. We are told in both the Old and the New Testaments to listen to him. People speak to us in two ways, by what they say with their mouths and what they say with their actions. And Jesus spoke very clearly, with words and deeds. He told us about the power of praying. He taught us that people can be good, that we are not condemned to be brutal and selfish, mean spirited and hateful. Jesus told us to love other people, no matter what, and in general, to be righteous in our lives. Jesus taught us that the Kingdom of God begins right here on earth, that it does not exist only when we pass away. Jesus taught us to forgive, to repent, to be regenerated. He taught us to be charitable and to value the things of God’s world, not the things of the world of people. Jesus told us to find joy in life by finding joy in our faith.

Our third quote has God declaring from a cloud, during Jesus' transfiguration: *"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"* Matthew, Mark, and Luke all contain this scene. The Gospel of John does not. The title "transfiguration" stems from the old King James Version, where the Greek word "metamorpho" was translated as transfiguration. It would have been equally accurate to say transformed or changed. But the translators who created the King James from the original Greek texts were influenced by the old Latin Translation, called the Latin Vulgate, where the Latin word "tranfiguratus" was the literal and proper translation. Leading up to the transfiguration of Christ Jesus divulges that he is indeed the Messiah, and he predicts his death and resurrection. He also warns us to never be ashamed of having faith, of following him – of listening to him. This is at a time when Jesus knows that after he leaves Earth, there will be heavy pressure by society to deny him, for people to disassociate themselves from him. He uses the transfiguration as an opportunity to put a dramatic exclamation point on that lesson that we do indeed need to listen to him, no matter what society says. That's what we face today. Please pray very briefly with me.

God, let us listen to your son. Let us never be ashamed of being believers. Never let us be ashamed of following Jesus. May we always listen to him. Amen.