

## **CHAPTER TWENTY THREE: “You must listen to him”**

Who has the authority to tell humankind how to live? What differences in human behaviour would appear depending on which figure was given authority and which figure people followed?

These questions are not merely hypothetical. Reports of violence in many parts of the world fill the daily news media. In some of these reports, terrorists justify their violence by claiming God commands it. Even though not all adherents of a faith will follow the teaching and example of their leader, those that do can have a significant impact on the ways people treat each other, whether in the direction of violence or in the direction of peace (e.g. Jesus’ “Sermon on the Mount”).

This chapter examines a prophecy with, in biblical terms, major implications for human behavior. According to the Torah, the voice of God commanded obedience to a certain figure to come: “You must listen to him.” God said that if anyone did not obey the words of this figure, God himself would “call him to account.” Whom did God have in mind? The New Testament provides an answer.

### **1. The prophecy of Deuteronomy 18**

- Moses prophesied, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him” (Deuteronomy 18:15). The Canaanites listened to practitioners of sorcery, divination, and witchcraft (18:9-14) but the people of Israel were to listen to the prophet God promised to raise up for them (18:15-22). So the identity of the true prophet is no small matter.

### **2. Strength of Deuteronomy manuscripts**

- The text of Deuteronomy is very well attested in early manuscript discoveries like the Dead Sea Scrolls. Scholars have found no clear case of falsification in the text of Deuteronomy 18.

### **3. “Listen to him”**

- The Gospel provides a number of plausible reasons why particular Old Testament prophecies, like Deuteronomy 18, are fulfilled in Jesus. People saw and heard what Jesus said and concluded he was “the Prophet” (John 6:15) and “the one Moses wrote about” (John 1:45; Acts 3:22-26). Jesus echoed Deuteronomy 18:18 repeatedly (John 14:24; cf. 14:10; 7:16; 8:28; 12:49), as did the voice of God at Jesus’ “transfiguration,” (Matthew 17:5) in the presence of the prophets Moses and Elijah.

### **4. The authority of the Son of Man**

- In the Gospel accounts, Jesus’ authority is often associated with another of Jesus’ names, the “Son of Man.” Some who want to deny Jesus’ deity point out that he frequently referred to himself as the Son of Man. However, when Jesus called himself this he was clearly thinking of someone more than a mere human. He had in mind the “Son of Man” described in Daniel 7:13-14 (e.g. Mark 13:26; Matthew 19:28; John 1:51; 5:27; Matthew 16:27; Mark 2:10).

### **5. Jesus’ command to love**

- In many parts of the Gospel accounts Jesus commanded his listeners to behave in a particular way. However, the most striking is the command Jesus gave to love: to love God with our whole being (Deuteronomy 6:5; Matthew 22:37), and to “Love your neighbour as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:39). Jesus also gave the command to “love your enemies” (Matthew 5:43-48) and to “love one another” (John 13:34). The Qur’an contains no command to love either God or people.

### **6. Sharp sword of persecution**

- Some Muslim polemicists try to contradict the Messiah’s commands to love others and live in peace by quoting Matthew 10:34. But the “sword” that Jesus has in mind in this verse is deadly persecution against his followers. Islamic law prescribes death for any Muslim who leaves Islam to follow Jesus.

### **7. Rival claim for authority**

- The New Testament evidence gives good reasons to believe Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophecy in Deuteronomy 18:15 and 18. A number of Muslim writers have claimed it is not Jesus but the messenger of Islam who fulfills the prophecy of Deuteronomy 18:15 and 18. One must ask whether the teaching and example of that messenger match the Torah prophecy, and express God’s will.

### **8. Jesus invites people to follow him**

- Jesus does not compel people to obey him by force, but invites them to follow him and then gives freedom to accept or reject him. Jesus offers us a loving relationship, not a set of rules & regulations.