

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN OUTLINES

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Section 42

TRANSFIGURED ON HIGH MOUNTAIN JESUS SHOWS HIS GLORY TO PETER, JAMES AND JOHN

(Parallels: Mark 9:2-13; Luke 9:28-36)

TEXT: 17:1-13

1 And after six days Jesus taketh with him Peter, and James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart: 2 and he was transfigured before them; and his face did shine as the sun, and his garments became white as the light. 3 And behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elijah talking with him. 4 And

Peter answered, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, I will make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah. 5 While he was yet speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold, a voice out of the cloud saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him. 6 And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. 7 And Jesus came and touched them and said, Arise, and be not afraid. 8 And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one, save Jesus only.

9 And as they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen from the dead. 10 And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elijah must first come? 11 And he answered and said, Elijah indeed cometh, and shall restore all things: 12 but I say unto you, that Elijah is come already, and they knew him not, but did unto him whatsoever they would. Even so shall the Son of man also suffer of them. 13 Then understood the disciples that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why would Jesus single out just three Apostles to witness the Transfiguration? Did not the others need to behold Jesus' glory? If so, why leave them out?
- b. Even though a week intervened after Peter's confession and Jesus' first plain prediction of His death and the conversation and teaching occasioned by this prophecy, is there a psychological connection between these events and the glorious vision of the Transfiguration? If so, what is that connection? If not, why do you deny such a link?
- c. How do you think Jesus was transfigured? What other NT texts would bear on the question?
- d. Do you think that the total Transfiguration-event was intended in any way for Jesus' benefit? If so, how could it strengthen Him?
- e. Of what special benefit would this benefit be to those Apostles who witnessed it? What would it teach them about Jesus' nature and mission? (Cf. Lk. 9:31)
- f. What do you think was the motive for selecting only Moses and Elijah, of all the OT characters, to appear with Jesus here?
- g. What does the appearance of these two OT worthies have to say, if anything, on the subject of resurrection, or on life beyond this life.

- h. Is their presence in this vision only part of the scenery, a phenomenon without any objective reality? How would you go about defending the factual, historic character of their appearance with Jesus during the Transfiguration? There are "scholars" who doubt it, you know.
- i. Do you think that the apostolic trio had fallen asleep and suddenly awoke to see the vision already in progress, or were merely oppressed by sleep while they were trying to stay awake? In other words, did they miss some of the vision by being asleep? What is important about this detail in relation to the general verification of the historical character of this narrative?
- j. What is so significant about the grim topic of conversation discussed with Jesus by Moses and Elijah? Was this important for Jesus alone, or the Apostles only, or both? Why?
- k. What was so wrong-headed about Peter's enthusiastic suggestion?
- l. Why did Peter propose to make three tents (booths or "tabernacles")? What purpose must he have had in mind for constructing these peculiar dwellings?
- m. Do you think God just made good use of the normal phenomenon that regularly appears on mountain peaks, when He spoke out of "a bright cloud"? If so, what?
- n. What is the significance of God's message from the bright cloud (1) for Jesus? (2) for Peter and the others? (3) for us?
- o. Why would Jesus tell the Apostles here to keep silent about the glorious vision and the heavenly Voice? Would it have helped anything to promote His mission had they proclaimed it abroad?
- p. Besides the fact that Jesus Himself had mentioned the resurrection as the terminus after which they could publicize the Transfiguration, why should the Apostles desire to dwell on the meaning of the "rising from the dead"? (Mk. 9:10)
- q. In answering their question about the proper interpretation of "the coming of Elijah," why should Jesus interweave the Old Testament's mention of the Messiah's sufferings? What good does that fact do toward helping them to understand about the promised "Elijah"? (Cf. Mk. 9:12f)
- r. From what clue could the Apostles arrive at the correct deduction that Jesus had been referring to John the Baptist?
- s. How did the Apostles recognize Moses and Elijah who had disappeared from the earth centuries before, probably leaving behind no reliable photographic likeness whereby these Apostles could have recognized them? What clues would have assured them that

the two men were really Moses and Elijah?

- t. Was the revelation of the lordship of Jesus on the mount of transfiguration more exalted than the revelation of the lordship of Jesus as He died on the cross? Why do you answer as you do?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

About a week after Peter's confession and Jesus' first plain prediction of His death, Jesus selected Peter, James and his brother, John, to accompany Him up into a high mountain where they could be by themselves for prayer. While He was praying, His entire appearance was changed, right in their presence. The appearance of His face was so altered that it shone like the sun. His clothing turned a glistening, intensely dazzling white—white as the light—so white, in fact, that no earthly bleaching agent could possibly make it any whiter.

Suddenly, there appeared two men conversing with Jesus. These were Moses and Elijah, seen in heavenly splendor. They were discussing His Exodus, i.e. His liberation of the New Israel of God, which He was soon to bring about in Jerusalem.

Meanwhile, Peter and the other two had been fighting sleep. They managed to stay awake, so they saw Jesus' heavenly splendor as well as the two men who stood with Him. It was just as these latter were leaving Jesus that Peter blurted out, "Master, it's wonderful for us to be here! If you wish, let's put up three festival booths right here: one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah!" However he did not know how to react nor did he realize what he was suggesting. In fact, they were terrified.

While he was still saying this, a bright cloud overshadowed them, causing them to be gripped with fear as it enveloped them. A voice from the cloud declared, "This is my own dear Son, my Chosen One: I am well pleased with Him, so listen to HIM!" When the disciples heard this voice they fell on their faces in terror. Then Jesus walked over to them and touched them, saying as He did so, "Stand up and do not be afraid." All at once, when they raised their eyes and looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them, just Jesus Himself.

As they were descending from the mountain next day, Jesus ordered them, "Never mention to anyone the vision you have seen, until the Messiah be raised from the dead." So they kept quiet about it, and during that period told no one anything of what they had witnessed.

However, although they kept the matter to themselves, they began discussing with one another what this expression "rising from the dead" could mean.

Then the disciples put this question to Him: "Why, then, do the scholars claim that Elijah must appear on earth before the Messiah comes?"

This was His answer: "That's right, 'Elijah' is supposed to make his appearance first and bring about a spiritual restoration of men's hearts to God. And how does the Scripture describe the Messiah? It teaches that He is destined to endure great suffering and be treated with contempt. However, I can assure you that your 'Elijah' has already made his appearance and people failed to recognize him. They treated him just as they pleased, just like the Bible speaks of him. They will do the same thing to their Messiah too."

Then the disciples realized that He had been referring to John the Baptist.

SUMMARY

Jesus took His "inner circle" of disciples with Him to give them a glimpse of His glory. As God identifies His Son as His final, authoritative Prophet, the Law and the Prophets fade into proper perspective. To preclude misconceptions, Jesus enjoins the men to keep the vision to themselves until after the resurrection. They question Jesus about popular theological views about the "Elijah." Jesus affirms that the famous "Elijah" was none other than John the Baptist, whose rejection was symbolic of His own fate.

NOTES

I. REVELATION OF DIVINE MAJESTY

A. THE PASSIVE PARTICIPANTS

17:1 **After six days.** Because Luke affirms that there were "eight days," some would charge him or the other two Evangelists with contradiction. However, Luke affirms that it was "about eight" and there really are six days between his eight, so there is no contradiction. He merely counted the first and last days, whereas Matthew and

Mark counted only the ones intervening.

This event occurred during the final year of Jesus' ministry. The last date mentioned before this was the Passover at which He fed the 5000. (Jn. 6:4) Although exact computation of the time elapsed since that date is impossible, an examination of Jesus' ministry at Capernaum, in Phoenicia and in the Decapolis (Mt. 15, 16) and the nearness of the Feast of Tabernacles (Jn. 7:2) would lead us to conclude that the Transfiguration occurred at the end of the summer or in the early fall.

To grasp the significance of the Transfiguration, we must remember what had preceded it. Luke draws a tight connection between this event and the Good Confession and the subsequent Sermon on the Nature of True Discipleship. (Cf. Lk. 9:28: "Now about eight days after these sayings . . ." recorded in Mt. 16:13-28; Mk. 8:31—9:1; Lk. 9:22-27) This means that Jesus gave the disciples about a week's time to ponder deeply the shocking prediction of His tragic rejection and death, and especially the unexpected lecture they received when Peter tried to redirect Him. That must have been a sleepless week of furious, secretive arguments among the Apostles, a week of disappointment and discouragement, confusion and turmoil, a week of soul-wrenching torment. Now He would remove their despondency by balancing His earthly humiliation with His heavenly glory.

Jesus took with him Peter and James and John. Why He chose only three Apostles, and only these three, becomes clearer only as the larger picture is seen. His reasons may have been some, or all, of the following:

1. To guarantee the necessary privacy, He chose three and no more. Any larger group would render silence more difficult to maintain. (17:9)
2. To guarantee that the Transfiguration would accomplish its purpose. Whereas it was desirable for all the Apostles to behold His glory, it was imperative that at least some have unquestionable proof of His triumphant glory. But such a vision could not be of value unless enough of them could testify to having seen it. Thus, the choice of three men is to provide witnesses sufficient in number to establish the reality of the fact in any court. (Cf. Dt. 19:15; Mt. 18:16; Jn. 8:17; Cf. Ac. 10:41)
3. To have men who could best interpret and make best use of the Transfiguration's impression on themselves. Jesus apparently

judged the rest of the group not to be qualified to witness it nor to hear of it afterwards. The three chosen were not necessarily elected because better loved by the Lord, but because qualified, in that they were more open, more ready to accept and obey Him.

4. These men, together with Andrew, Peter's brother, had been the earliest disciples of Jesus. (Cf. Jn. 1:35-51) Only they were allowed into the room with the parents to behold the raising of Jairus' daughter from the dead. (Mk. 5:37; Lk. 8:51) Only they were invited to share the Lord's sufferings in Gethsemane. (Mt. 26:37; Mk. 14:33) They had been nearest longest and were most intimately linked to Jesus in heart and thought. In the Master's plan each was to become a pillar supporting the truth:
 - a. Peter was to swing wide the gates of the Kingdom of Christ to Jew (Ac. 2) and Gentile alike (Ac. 10) and record his eye-witness testimony to this pre-passion revelation of Jesus' glory before he too suffered martyrdom. (2 Pet. 1:16-18)
 - b. James would be the first Apostle to lay down his life rather than deny Jesus' resurrection. (Ac. 12:2)
 - c. John, also a pillar of the Jerusalem Church (Gal. 2:9), would probably be the last Apostle to die, having bridged the gap from the personal ministry of Christ on earth until the Church was well-established throughout the world. To him would be granted the privilege of relating the Messiah's triumphant glory seen in the visions of the Revelation. (Rev. 1:9)
5. Indirectly to bless the other Apostles who were not privileged to be present. The others would feel the changed attitude of these three, and because of their positive influence, the others would hold firmer to Jesus in their turmoil, even if they could not identify the source of what blessed them.

Whether these are the reasons Jesus chose them or not, is not clear. To choose these and no others was Jesus' right and was done in His wisdom.

For the Hebrew reader of Matthew's Gospel, the imagery of the event itself would far outweigh any problems connected with His choice. In fact, the imagery would lead the thoughtful Jewish reader to see allusions to events in Hebrew history, beginning with the ascent upon the high mountain, symbol of Sinai (Horeb) on which Moses and Elijah received revelations from God. (See on 17:3.)

And led them to a high mountain apart. The mountain intended must be *high* and within about a week's travel from the area of

Caesarea Philippi, scene of the confession of Peter. (Mt. 16:13-28) Since the next recorded event begins after a secret return through Galilee to Capernaum, the mountain cannot be located in that area. (Cf. Mk. 9:30, 33; Mt. 17:22, 24) None of the tall hills in Galilee or Gilead would qualify and none of the more populous areas of Galilee would permit Him the privacy. Mount Hermon, located just 25 km. (15 mi.) north of Caesarea Philippi and rising over 2814 m. (9232 ft.) and visible from much of Palestine, easily qualifies as the peak in question. Further, if we have rightly identified the time of the Transfiguration as sometime in late August or early September, the snow on Mt. Hermon would all be gone, making it possible for the Lord and His men to scale clear to the top. McGarvey enjoyed 22°C (71°F) weather at the peak, even with masses of unmelted snow in June. (*Lands of the Bible*, 548) W. Ewing (*ISBE*, 3006) opts for *Jebel Jermuk*, the loftiest mountain in Galilee, rising to 1208 m. (3834 ft.), reasoning as follows:

1. It is located in Palestine proper, whereas Mt. Hermon is located in heathen territory and the sacred associations with Hermon are pagan, not Jewish.
2. Jesus was met, upon His descent from the mountain, by a plainly Jewish crowd with "scribes" in evidence. (Mk. 9:14) Therefore, the mountain must have been in a district with a Jewish population.
3. *Jebel Jermuk*, located in Galilee, would be close enough to Caesarea Philippi to be reached within the week after Peter's confession. The distance is just 40 km. (25 mi.). Further, Matthew (17:22: "As they abode in Galilee") seems to imply that the healing of the demoniac boy at the foot of the mountain occurred in Galilee. Mark's "They went on from there and passed through Galilee," accordingly, need not mean that they were outside Galilee, but merely left the area of the mountain and traversed what remained of Galilee between them and their destination at Capernaum. (Mk. 9:30; Mt. 17:24)

But Ewing's arguments are not conclusive for the following reasons:

1. Nothing is affirmed about the particularly Jewish sacredness of the mountain in question. Peter just called it "the holy mountain" in connection with the Transfiguration. (2 Pt. 1:18)

Grollenberg (*Shorter Atlas*, 10) affirmed that majestic

Hermon's name is derived from *hrm*, a root meaning "sacred, unassailable," a fact noticed also by Davidson (*Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, 275). Gesenius-Tregelles (*Lexicon*, 306) agrees that the stem means "devoted, sacred." Davis (*Dictionary of the Bible*, 301) interprets the name as "mountain peak or sacred mountain."

- Now, the Christian Apostle Peter, who would be less likely to sanctify certain places as peculiarly "holy," not even the mount of Transfiguration, nevertheless referred to this site as "the holy mountain." (2 Pt. 1:18) Could it be that the Apostle translated the Hebrew-Aramaic expression *Har-Hermon* into Greek as *τὸ ἅγιό ὄρει* ("the holy mountain"), and thus precisely located the Transfiguration as having occurred on Mt. Hermon? This hypothesis would eliminate the one place in the NT where an Apostle seemed to regard the site of some Christian event as especially "holy," as opposed to the whole earth which is holy.
2. The presence of Jews around Jesus' disciples, even in heathen territory, is not strange, nor is His dwelling in a house in pagan country. (Cf. Mt. 15:21-29; esp. Mk. 7:24!) Besides, the identification of the "house" into which Jesus entered upon rejoicing the main group of disciples after the Transfiguration, is impossible. (Mk. 9:28; see on 17:19) The feeding of the 4000 occurred in the Decapolis. (Mt. 15:29-39; Mk. 7:31—8:10) Excited people had followed Jesus into isolated areas before. (Cf. Mt. 5:1; Lk. 6:12, 17ff; Mk. 4:36; Mt. 14:13; 15:29f; Mk. 8:34)
 3. Matthew's affirmation is textually not "as they abode in Galilee," but "as they were gathering in Galilee." (17:22 on which see notes) This may not be parallel with Mark's expression (Mk. 9:30). Therefore, Mt. 17:22 has nothing to do with Jesus' movements, and Mark's expression may well mean that they entered Galilee from the area around Mt. Hermon.
 4. As to the assertion that there is no hint that He had crossed the border of Palestine, is it absolutely certain that Mt. Hermon would have been considered OUTSIDE the borders of Israel, in the same way Tyre and Sidon are? (Cf. Dt. 3:8, 9; 4:48; Josh. 11:16f; 12:1, 5; 13:2-6, 11; 1 Chron. 5:23; Psa. 42:6)
 5. The argument based on the presence of the "scribes" completely underestimates the dogged determination of those theologians to pounce on even the slightest appearance of weakness in Jesus'

message, manners, mission or men, even to the extent of tracking Him and His understudies to great lengths. (Cf. Lk. 5:17 in context and Mt. 15:1)

6. Retreat to a quiet, semi-Gentile area would be especially appropriate for the private teaching needed during this period of Jesus' self-revelation. (Cf. Mk. 9:30f) Thus, Mt. Hermon in the neighborhood of Caesarea Philippi, while not absolutely certain, is most likely.

B. THE PRIVATE PAGEANT AT THE PEAK

Jesus' stated purpose for ascending the mountain with His inner circle of trusting friends was "to pray." (Luke) The object of His prayers is not expressed, but, if we may judge from what occurred there, this would not be difficult to imagine:

- I. He needed to be with the Father after the disciples' jarring rejection of His clear revelation of His death. It cost Him to tell them the unwelcome truth, but He must remain true to His mission, so He took refuge in the Father's presence. But what need had He to be transfigured for His own personal benefit? Jesus was not an angel, but a MAN! (Heb. 2:9, 14-18) He needed whatever encouragement the Father could give. (Cf. Jn. 12:27f in context.) He may have prayed that God would help Him to succeed in making His own glory more evident to His Apostles, and so defeat the discouragement He could not help but feel because of their obtuseness. The Transfiguration, whether desired or sought by Jesus or not, would serve to brace His courage to face the bitterness ahead in two ways:
 - a. The foretaste of the glory which would follow His suffering (Heb. 12:2) would be like being back home for just an instant, making His voluntary obedience even unto death (Phil. 2:5-11) to be seen, by comparison, as something to be despised.
 - b. The Father's loving voice, even speaking directly to the Apostles, would reaffirm His pleasure in His Son, warm His heart and encourage Him in His lonely mission among unsympathetic men. It is like the encouragement felt by an expert pilot flying through a storm-tossed night with no visible landmarks, when suddenly a voice comes over the radio, saying, "We've picked you up on radar, friend, and you're right on course!"

Peter testifies that "he received honor and glory from God the

Father." (2 Pt. 1:17)

2. His disciples needed further evidence of His true glory: could He not request the Father to grant them this, even in words similar to those in Jn. 17:1, 5? These men who believed the Good Confession which God had revealed to Peter (Mt. 16:17) did not accept the Messiah's mission to suffer (Mt. 16:22), although He had guaranteed them His vindication in glory (16:27). So they needed the direct teaching that a brief, but convincing, revelation of His divine majesty and a word from God would convey. The immediate and imperative significance of this Transfiguration before His status-seeking, materialistic Apostles is to give them a glimpse of a majesty they had never dreamed, a glory that would make all earthly grandeur and magnificence to fade away into insignificance. In perspective, the Transfiguration would confirm the program of Jesus in a moment when, according to every human prediction, He was headed for failure. (Cuminetti, *Matteo*, 233) Peter, interpreting this golden memory in his life, offered it as a supreme illustration and convincing proof of the deity of Christ, as well as the solid kind of evidence upon which we base our faith. (2 Pt. 1:16-19) The understanding of their discipleship depended upon their concept of His Lordship.

17:2 He was transfigured before them. The three Evangelists grasp for adequate terminology to communicate the grandeur of this transformation. They emphasize the splendor of the dazzling white light radiating from His entire being. Although His features retained their recognizably human form, everything else about Him took on a blinding light, blazing with sun-like glory. This is the incident which so marvelously encapsules what the Apostles meant when they said: "We have beheld His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father" (Jn. 1:14), and "We were eyewitnesses of His majesty" (2 Pt. 1:16ff). This is something of that majestic dignity for which Jesus longed: ". . . the glory which I had with thee before the world was made." (Jn. 17:5) It is that unbearable, blinding splendor which shone above the brightness of the noonday sun on the Damascus road that convicted Saul of Tarsus that he lay prostrate in the presence of "Jesus of Nazareth, the Lord of glory" (Ac. 9:3; 22:6, 9, 11; 26:13; 1 Co. 2:8) This is a foretaste of that radiant beauty recognized by the elder Apostle when Jesus dictated the Revelation to him. (Rev. 1:9-19)

He was transfigured means that when people saw Jesus, they normally saw nothing different from a normal Galilean, like a

thousand others they could name. But for this brief, splendid moment the three disciples beheld "the glory of God in the face of Jesus" (2 Co. 4:6) **He was transfigured** (*metemorfóthe*) means that the "form of God" (*morfè theou*) shone through the "form of a servant," (*morfè doulou*) (See Phil. 2:6, 7; Edersheim, *Life*, II, 96.)

The effects on the reader would be at least two:

1. The common reader would see that here in the glory of Jesus is a suggestion of the awe-inspiring glory with which He would be surrounded as He began to reign at the right hand of the Father and in which He will return. (Mt. 16:27; Lk. 9:26) Is this a foretaste of the glory that one day we too shall share? (Cf. Phi. 3:20, 21; Col. 3:4; 1 Co. 15:35-58; 1 Jn. 3:2, 3)
2. If the Transfiguration reminded the Hebrew reader of the shining face of Moses after his conversations with God on Mt. Sinai (Ex. 34:29ff), it would be a comparison by contrast. The luminousness of Moses' face was relatively so feeble that a veil easily concealed it. (Ex. 34:33-35; 2 Co. 3:12-18) Contrarily, the brilliance of the person of our Lord was such that every part of His entire being was radiant. A greater than Moses is here.

C. THE PART PLAYED BY THE PROPHETIC PAIR FROM PARADISE

17:3 **And behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elijah talking with him.** This is the second encouragement of Jesus. At last He is able to converse with men who really understand and share His aims. Just why, of all the illustrious giants of OT history, *Moses and Elijah* should have been distinguished for this appearance is not easily ascertained. Certain instructive factors stand out, however, to suggest a motive for their selection:

1. Their lives and ministry paralleled that of Jesus at precisely this point:

<p>a. Moses was discouraged by the faithlessness and perversity of the people of God (Nu. 20:1-13).</p>	<p>a. Elijah was discouraged by the faithlessness and perversity of the people of God. (1 Kg. 19:1-10).</p>	<p>a. Jesus was discouraged by the faithlessness and perversity of the people of God. (Mt. 16:22ff; 17:17).</p>
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JESUS SHOWS HIS GLORY TO PETER, JAMES AND JOHN 17:2, 3

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| b. Moses talked with God on Mount Sinai (Ex. 19:16-19). | b. Elijah talked with God on Mount Sinai (Horeb) (1 Kg. 19:9-12). | b. Jesus talked with God on this mountain (Lk. 9:28; Mt. 17:5). |
| c. Moses was glorified. (Ex. 34:29-35) | c. Elijah was glorified. (2 Kg. 2:11ff) | c. Jesus was transfigured. (Mt. 17:2; 2 Pt. 1:17) |
| d. Moses led the Exodus from Egyptian bondage, mediated the Law and the Old Covenant. | d. Elijah turned Israel back to Javéh and restored true religion in Israel. (1 Kg. 18) | d. Jesus was to lead His Exodus from sin's bondage, mediate the New Covenant and God's new Law. (Lk. 9:31; Heb. 8:6) |

2. Their departure from the world contrasted with His.

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| a. The death of Moses was immediate and painless while he enjoyed undiminished vigor of health and God buried him. (Dt. 34:5-7) | b. Elijah was exempted from death by a triumphant departure in a chariot of fire directly to heaven. (2 Kg. 2:11) | c. Jesus would endure a painful, ignominious death. (Mt. 16:21; Mk. 9:12) Only by suffering a bitter death would He enter into His glory. (Heb. 2:9; 12:2) |
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3. Both men who had seemed too great to die had been victorious over death, and so would He.

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| a. Moses had indeed died and was buried by God Himself, but now stood "in glory," evidence of his victory over death. (Lk. 9:31) | b. Elijah had not died, but thereby proved that death could be defeated by God's power. (Lk. 9:31) | c. Jesus, though He must truly suffer death, would defeat it by God's power. (Ac. 2:32; 3:15; 4:10; etc.) |
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4. Another lesson from the appearance of the heavenly pair is that death, or removal from the earth, is not the final end of one's place in God's plan. Moses and Elijah, although separated in time by many centuries, are suddenly united and ushered into Jesus' presence for this specific mission. The dismayed disciples, horrified

at the thought of Jesus' abandoning them by voluntary death, are suddenly reminded that death does not bring man to an end, nor does it terminate his mission and service to God. Quite unexpectedly for these defeatist disciples, there appeared UNTO THEM Moses and Elijah and "in glory" too! (Lk. 9:31)

Does this latter expression mean that they too were transfigured, appearing in all their moral, heavenly glory that one day we too shall share, or does "in glory" refer to the sphere in which they were seen, i.e. they were surrounded with heavenly brightness? Luke seems to imply the latter: "they saw His glory and the two men who stood with Him," i.e. Jesus was gloriously transfigured, but not necessarily those who "appeared in glory" with Him. (Lk. 9:32) The difference in terminology may be occasioned by the distinctions in glory: His was the essential glory of Deity, whereas theirs was that of righteous men made perfect. (Cf. Heb. 12:23) Their specific character or appearance should cause us no more difficulty than for that of angels.

As *Moses and Elijah* stood bodily before the Apostles in this vision, they were evidence that God can cause them to appear whenever and wherever needed, and that all who have departed this life really exist in God's presence and He can easily glorify them and again be served by them, even though they were once in the grave, especially His own Son.

Talking with him. They discussed His "departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem." (Lk. 9:31) This is the entire point of this personal appearance of the chief representatives of the Law and the Prophets. Whereas the Apostles refused Jesus' predictions of His death as an idea contradictory to the basic concepts of the Old Testament, here *Moses and Elijah* unhesitatingly discuss His death as perfectly in harmony with all they taught. Were they talking about His victory from their own point of view? After all, they too would have been redeemed by His suffering, and now that their Redeemer was nearing his final goal, His accomplishment of their salvation would undoubtedly have been on their minds and cause for their gratitude.

The "departure" (*éxodos*) was no unavoidable accident, but something He Himself was shortly to "fulfil," i.e. carry out of His own free choice. (Remember "must" [*dei*] of Mt. 16:21) But what, exactly, is this "departure" or *éxodos*?

1. *Exodos* can be a military term, referring to an expedition, a march, a sally or a sortie, a sudden issuing of troops from a defensive position to attack the enemy. (Rocci, 670) Does Luke mean Jesus was conferring with Moses and Elijah about the "breakthrough" which He would accomplish at Jerusalem? The plan of God, while holding Satan's forces at bay for millennia, had moved steadily forward in a defensive posture. Even God's Son had preached positively, limiting Himself merely to skirmishes with Satan. But at the battle of Jerusalem, Jesus would launch an all-out attack that would permanently destroy Satan's capacity to win. (Gen. 3:15; Isa. 42:1-4) Since our Lord intended to win this battle in the only way it could be won, i.e. by giving His own innocent life for the life of the world, "the Just for the unjust that He might bring us to God," the breakthrough must necessarily take place at the cross and the open tomb. (See also on 17:22.) This meaning of *éxodos* comes out at the same place as the one following:
2. Barclay (*Matthew*, II, 176f, emphasis his) elaborates the picture thus:

Exodos is exactly the same word as the English word *exodus*. It is the word which is always used of the departure of the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt, into the unknown way of the desert, which in the end was going to lead them to the Promised Land. The word *exodus* is the word which describes what we might well call the most adventurous journey in human history, a journey in which a whole people in utter trust in God went out into the unknown. *That is precisely what Jesus was going to do.* In utter trust in God He was going to set out on the tremendous adventure of that journey to Jerusalem, a journey beset with perils, a journey involving a cross, but a journey issuing in glory . . . It is as if the greatest figures of Israel's history came to Jesus, as He was setting out on the last and greatest adventure into the unknown, and told Him to go on . . . witnessed to Jesus that He was on the right way, and bade Him go out on His adventurous *exodus* to Jerusalem and to Calvary.

This way, Jesus stands at approximately the same place Moses stood on Mount Horeb reflecting upon his *exodus* which he would accomplish in Egypt. (Ex. 3, 4) The Son of God must go to His Egypt too, Jerusalem (Rev. 11:8). There He would become the new Deliverer to lead the new Israel of God (Gal. 6:16) out of their

bondage to sin. Thus, all that Jesus accomplished at Jerusalem, His death as the perfect Pascal Lamb of God, His burial, His resurrection and ascension to glory, was but the accomplishment of the actual departure. This is His praiseworthy victory, not over a defeated Pharaoh (Ex. 15:1-18), but over Satan himself. (Cf. Rev. 7:1-17; 14:1-5; 15:2-4) Then, the Mediator of a New Covenant would lead His people past Mount Zion, the new Sinai, where His new Law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus (Ro. 8:2) would be "once and for all delivered to the saints" (Heb. 13:18-24; Jude 3), and then on through the wilderness trek (Heb. 13:14), and right on into our Promised Land, the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. The departure of Israel from Egypt was an exodus in triumph by the power of God, and so is "His exodus which He was to accomplish at Jerusalem!"

In short, the Apostles needed to return to their Bible and re-evaluate their own concepts, bringing them into harmony with what Moses in the Law and the prophets really believed and taught. What we have learned as a common characteristic of Matthew's Gospel, and not uncommon in the others, was a real revelation to these disciples: "EVERYTHING written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms MUST BE FULFILLED" (Lk. 24:44; see also Mt. 26:54, 56) If the prophets are not shaken at the thought of a crucified Messiah, why should the disciples? In fact, Peter later admitted: "The prophets prophesied . . . predicting the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glory." (1 Pt. 1:10f)

D. PETER'S PRESUMPTUOUS PERPETUATION OF A PERNICIOUS PANTHEON

17:4 Until this moment the disciples had been passive participants in the pageant. Now, however, Moses and Elijah began to take their departure. (Lk. 9:33) Peter suddenly came alive to try to capture the rapture of that precious moment. The fisherman's ecstatic outburst is marred by the following facts:

1. It is paralyzing: **Lord, it is good for us to be here.** Peter, the man of action, suggests a move that would stop all action, without even realizing the contradiction. Never one to be still for long and much preferring to be busy doing something, he, ironically, desires to prolong this exquisite moment of closeness to God and glory,

forgetting that the action of God is to take place, not merely on this mountain of golden splendor, but down in the valley of daily ministry and on redemption's cross. Does Peter's "good to be HERE" have as its anithesis: "bad to be down THERE among unbelieving, conniving Pharisees and other miserable wretches, enduring sinners' hostility and battling the myriads of evils that plague the earth"? Even ONE booth would be too many, if it meant to stay forever on the mount and ignore world need. Does Peter, in his thrill to keep the Feast with Moses and Elijah, forget the other Apostles, the waiting crowd and needy humanity? How long did he hope to prolong it all? Surely he did not intend to desert the world's needs. However, from this viewpoint, if God's Feast of Tabernacles has come, there would not be any needy humanity to worry about, for all would be supplied, all the world's ills healed.

2. It is perplexed. While both Mark and Luke affirm that Peter "did not know what to say," nor did he really "know what he said," nevertheless he apparently felt he must say something, and blurted out the first instinctive suggestion that came to mind. The very departure of these heavenly visitors may have triggered him to act to try to detain them. But it was unnecessary for him to react, since the entire Transfiguration was even then taking place to correct his own mistaken Christology. He was talking when he should have been listening and learning! **And Peter answered**, does not mean he was answering something addressed to him, but rather that he was responding to the marvelous experience in general and probably to detain the great OT worthies.
3. It perpetuates what must of necessity be temporary.
 - a. It is presumptuous to suggest to the Lord of glory what is right and proper! True, he begins humbly: **If you wish**. Nevertheless, he did not realize the audacity and absurdity of his suggestion. The absurdity of his idea lies not so much in his providing material shelters from the mountain cold for the glorified Jesus and His heavenly guests, as in believing that God's great Feast of Tabernacles had come. (Cf. Lev. 23:33-36, 39-43; Zech. 14:16-19; Dt. 16:13-15; see also Edersheim, *Life*, II, 148-165 for descriptions of rabbinical views of this feast and its typical significance, as also of Jewish traditional observances.) If in the Messianic Kingdom the remnant of the nations would participate with Israel at the great Tabernacle Feast, symbol of God's bringing them out of this life's wanderings into the blessing of eternal peace, perhaps that moment has come! If so, Peter

would make **here three tabernacles**, forgetting that the Feast of Tabernacles lay in the near future (Jn. 7:2f, 10; Mt. 19:1; Mk. 10:1; Lk. 9:51), the proposal of Peter to construct the little huts of branches from trees or shrubs may have been prompted by the realization that they were even then approaching the season for it. The actual materials would have been near at hand on the mountain down at the timberline. Peter's natural, human desire to eternalize this breakthrough of glorious reality is understandable, but it reveals just one more time the fact that he did not comprehend the meaning of the event. This was not, as the Apostles were wishing, the beginning of the final and definitive, but merely a prophetic and fleeting anticipation of it. God's final day of rest had not yet arrived, nor could it until after His day of judgment. And there had been no day of mercy before the day of wrath! Peter presumptuously wanted to dispense with the cross of Christ and freeze history right at that moment, not dreaming that, were he to have his way, he would have been swept out of God's presence forever along with the rest of us!

- b. Not only does he desire to prolong the mountain-top experience, but in the very act of providing **THREE** temporary lodges and placing them at the same level with Jesus, he perpetuates the authority of spokesmen whose messages served their day well, but from this day forward must rightly fade into the background behind the more glorious final revelation of Jesus Christ. How can Peter, who had but recently confessed Jesus to be God's Son and Messiah, now consistently consider even such great and holy men as Moses and Elijah to be at the same level of importance with Him? Is Jesus, after all, really just "one of the prophets"?! (Cf. Mt. 16:14) What is this, but the creation of a pernicious pantheon of personages, in which the definitive revelation of Him who is the final word from the Father is relegated to the status of lesser prophets.

His thinking is still contaminated by his worldly Christology and by his lack of comprehension about how the Messianic mission must be carried out.

E. THE PATERNAL PRONOUNCEMENT OF THE PEERLESS PREMINENCE OF CHRIST

17:5 The correction of Peter's nonsense was instantaneous, even **while he was yet speaking. A bright cloud overshadowed them**, apparently enveloping them, because Luke mentions the disciples' fear "as they entered the cloud." (Lk. 9:34) Although sunny-bright clouds naturally form around a mountaintop like that of Hermon, the special characteristics of this one mark it as supernaturally produced: its brightness, the disciples' extraordinary fear, the Father's voice out of it, its sudden appearance and disappearance at the right moments, and, finally, its possible theological significance. This *cloud* radiated the characteristically celestial brilliance with which Jesus was invested. Like other symbols in this unworldly vision, this *cloud* was part of Israel's unique history. The radiant cloud was the classic symbol of God's presence among His people to lead and bless them. (Ex. 24:16f; 34:5; 40:34-38; Lev. 9:6, 23f; Dt. 5:22-24; 1 Kg. 8:10f; 2 Chron. 5:11-14; 7:1-3; cf. Isa. 2:10, 19, 21; 4:5, 6; Ezek. 3:12; 8:4; 10:4, 18f; 11:22f; 43:2ff) However, more significantly for our context, God appeared to Israel in the luminous cloud to vindicate the mission and authority of His servants. (Ex. 16:10; Nu. 12:5, 10; 16:19, 42; 20:6) In exactly this same way God had appeared to Israel before to say, "This is my trusted servant, Moses: listen to him!" If the Almighty could not tolerate for an instant the neglect of His servants the prophets, how much less can the Father overlook even the well-meaning abasement of His Son! God's Good Confession, although directed to the disciples, would prove a third encouragement to Jesus.

Three distinct, meaningful messages were given, which, Peter affirms, conferred honor and glory from God the Father when the voice was borne to Him by the Majestic Glory: (2 Pt. 1:17)

1. **THE FATHER HERE IDENTIFIES JESUS AS HIS OWN SON: This is my beloved Son.** By contrast, Moses and Elijah, highest exponents of the prophetic office in the economy of God, are but "servants in His house." (Cf. Heb. 3:1-5) Jesus, too, stands last and highest in the long line of God's prophets (Cf. Heb. 1:1ff; Mt. 21:11, 46; Mk. 6:15a; Lk. 7:16, 39; 13:33; 24:19; Jn. 4:19; 6:14; 7:40, 52; 9:17). Nevertheless, He is not to be classified as merely "one of the prophets" (Mt. 16:14), however honorable and holy they had been. He is the very fulfilment of the Law and the prophets. (Mt. 5:17; Lk. 24:44f) He is not just "God's Prophet"; He is God's SON, a

word expressing a relationship so exalted and intimate that no mere prophet ever reached this pinnacle of greatness.

In effect, this word from God says that Jesus is right on course existentially. Just as there is a father at the foot of this mountain pleading for his only begotten son (Lk. 9:38), so here at the summit the Father intercedes on behalf of His only Son, also suffering, not from disease, but from ignorance and misunderstanding on the part of His followers! He affirms that Jesus is really what He claims to be. Peter had earlier confessed Jesus to be God's Son, on the basis of God's revelations made through the words and works of His Son (See notes on 16:17.) Now the Father Himself confirms that conclusion by revealing it directly from heaven.

2. THE FATHER HERE IDENTIFIES THE PURPOSES AND PROGRAM OF JESUS AS HIS OWN: **in whom I am well pleased.** This divine verdict announces that Jesus is right on course morally and tactically. The mission of Jesus, however unworldly, impractical and seemingly unreasonable, however contradictory of human plans and aims, is well-pleasing to God! Jesus' manifestly waning popularity, approaching suffering and shameful death are not objective indicators of the ultimate failure of His mission. "He will continue to refuse to be a political Messiah of the Jews, He will stride into certain death by the hand of wicked men, He will be rejected and despised by the people, but **I am well pleased** with Him!" At Jesus' baptism the Father had expressed His approval of the Son's determination "to fulfill all righteousness" (Mt. 3:15, 17). Here, He repeats His expression of approval, now of the Son's determination to give Himself to death as humanity's Redeemer (Mt. 16:21-28)
3. NOW THE FATHER IDENTIFIES THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS AS HIS OWN: **Hear ye Him!** God announces that Jesus is right on course theologically. This makes Jesus' "prophetic word more sure" too (cf. 2 Pt. 1:19), because God has identified Him as "the Prophet like Moses" to whom men must listen or be damned. (Dt. 18:15ff LXX where the verb form is almost identical: future indicative for present imperative) This order to listen to Jesus intends to be a deliberate and solemn endorsement of all that Jesus had taught, especially concerning His own humiliation and obedience unto death as well as the glory thereafter, and concerning the follower's obligation to bear his own cross. (Mt. 16:21-28) God means that everything Jesus says on this and any other subject is totally true and in harmony with God's eternal purpose. This command

represents the whole point of the Transfiguration. To miss it is to fail to comprehend the entire scene.

How badly the disciples needed to hear this voice! Foster (*Standard Lesson Commentary* 1955, 420) describes these men:

They had been anxious to hear more of what Moses and Elijah had to say; they were commanded to concentrate their attention on Jesus and to yield implicit obedience to Him. The apostles must have been sore tempted in recent months to listen to the bewildering cross-currents of the conflicting desires and plans of the national leaders and the multitudes; they were now ordered to listen to Jesus and obey Him.

The exalted preeminence thus bestowed on Jesus and the transformation of His appearance to harmonize with dignity of His position, and the manner in which His divine majesty was displayed never before nor since witnessed on the earth,—all this would be needed as a steadying influence against the rapidly mounting opposition and conflicts with the hierarchy and political heads of the nation.

It is as if God were saying for all the world to hear: "Listen to Jesus, not Moses and Elijah nor the Law and the prophets as final, not the suggestions of Peter, not the pretensions of popery, not the spiritualistic experiences of mystics nor the rationalistic propositions of skeptics, but the voice of Jesus of Nazareth!" He is the final voice of God, so the fundamental attitude of the disciples is not creative theology, but listening and obedience! Man must give up trying to be the measure of truth and become the disciple and obedient servant of Him who is the Truth. Although every disciple, as a human being, has a right to his own personal opinion and free choice, the "Listen to Him!" urges each to deny himself in order to let Jesus lead and decide. Jesus is our only THEOLOGY AND THEOLOGIAN.

F. THE PROSTRATE, PERPLEXED APOSTLES PERSUADED TO PROMOTE THEIR PRESENT PRINCE

17:6 Although the disciples had been exceedingly afraid before (Mk. 9:6), especially as the cloud enveloped them (Lk. 9:34), they had been more or less passive spectators listening to a discussion that did not require their direct participation. But Peter's wrong-headed reaction brought them immediately into the picture, so God reacted instantly by addressing them directly. **And when the disciples**

heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. The voice of the Almighty so overawed them that their instinctive reaction, typically oriental, is to hurl themselves on their knees with their forehead touching the ground. God dwells in unapproachable light (1 Ti. 6:16), so, when He approaches man, His presence is unbearably terrifying. (Cf. Israel's reaction to the voice of God at Sinai. Ex. 20:18-20; Dt. 5:22-27) Sinful mortals have reason to tremble in the presence of the unmitigated brightness of the glorious holiness of the living God and in that of His messengers. (Cf. Gn. 3:10; Ex. 3:6; Dt. 9:19 = Heb. 12:21; Isa. 6:5; Dan. 8:17; 10:9-11; Ezek. 1:28; 3:23; 44:4; Rev. 1:17)

17:7 And Jesus came and touched them and said, Arise and be not afraid. The touch of Jesus brought them back, not to reality, but back to the events of time and earth. (They testify to the vividness of the reality of all they had witnessed.) They had just seen a glimpse of the world of eternity and Paradise, and the program is now over. They must return to the equally real world of time and tribulation, the world into which Jesus Himself had come. He loved them, so He walked over to them, stooped to their level and tenderly laid His hands on their shoulders to encourage them to rise and have no fear. (Cf. Dan. 10:2-19; Rev. 1:17)

17:8 And lifting up their eyes means that they had remained in the prostrate position from the moment God spoke from heaven. This is the first time they dare raise their heads. Because Jesus had gently encouraged them, they did so. **They saw no one**, because they actually started "looking around" (Mk. 9:8) to see what had happened to Moses and Elijah. The result of this fruitless search is the more impressive because they had desired that Moses and Elijah remain forever present, and because God had ordered: "Listen to Jesus!" Now, literally in this symbolic vision, and later in theological reality, Moses and the prophets faded away as the final arbiters of human destiny, leaving *Jesus only*. The brusqueness with which the vision of Moses and Elijah faded serves to underline the fact that God has given to the disciples (hence to the Church) no other, no higher final authority than **Jesus only**. This is the final reality that must guide the life of the believers. The NT itself reflects this truth. In fact, from one end of the NT to the other, it is always about Him who is the Author and Perfecter of our faith, the Prophet, Priest and King of the new era of God's grace. If men miss this, they miss everything, for this is the one point of this entire event, that is more important than anything else of significance.

G. PROHIBITION OF PREMATURE PUBLICATION BECAUSE OF PREDOMINANT PRECONCEPTIONS AND PREJUDICE

17:9 **And as they were coming down from the mountain.** When they made their descent is not told, so we have no inkling about whether the Transfiguration occurred by day or night. Nor is it clear how soon after that event they started down. Not even Luke's note, "On the next day when they came down . . ." (Lk. 9:37), helps, because, before starting their descent, they may have camped on the mountain one more night after a daytime Transfiguration. The fatigue of the Apostles, evident during the event itself (Lk. 9:32), is no indication of night-time either, since they could have been worn out by the ascent up into the rarified air of the peak.

Jesus commanded them. This very order tests their readiness to "Hear ye Him!" Can they begin obeying instantly? How the other Apostles would have pumped them with questions, cajoling them to furnish information about that wonderful something which must have taken place on the mountain, which was visible in the changed attitude of the three Apostles upon their descent. The Three obeyed the Lord faithfully and "kept the saying to themselves." (Mk. 9:10; Lk. 9:36) By so doing, they proved their discipleship to be true, at least in this point. Others, ordered to silence, almost invariably disobeyed Jesus. (Mk. 1:44f) They probably justified themselves: "He just cannot really mean what He says!" These Apostles trusted Him to know best, and so obeyed. His order contains three elements:

1. The prohibitive limitation: **Tell . . . to no man.** While this is another case of Messianic reserve (cfr. 8:4; 12:16) whereby Jesus wisely restrained popular Messianic excitement by simply prohibiting its divulging, why should the inner circle of disciples not share information so essential to reinforce the faith in Him, for example, of a Judas Iscariot? Why *tell absolutely no man?* Luke's expression (9:36) implies that the Three understood Jesus to mean they were to maintain absolute silence. Jesus knew His men and He had granted the vision of His glory only to those three, among all His disciples, with whom He could trust the information. He well knew what the others would have done with this kind of information, so He simply withheld it by instructing the Three not to disclose it. In fact, the others proved only too clearly their unfitness by their faithlessness and failure at the mountain's base. (See on 17:14ff.) Further, as is likely, even the Three themselves

had not yet digested the full significance of this event and needed time to ponder it in the context of later teaching and events.

2. The content: *the vision*. With this convenient summarizing word Jesus intends to include every part of the disciples' mountaintop experience. But does this word tell us anything about the nature of the experience?
 - a. Hendriksen (*Matthew*, 669) fears that to call a "vision" everything that the Apostles saw, would somehow render unhistorical the transfigured appearance of Jesus, except in the mind of the three Apostles. He urges that *tò hórama*, here rendered "the vision," be translated "what has been seen" or "what you have seen," finding confirmation in the verb forms of Mark (9:9) and Luke (9:36). He feels that the distinction between subjective and objective appearance would really make a significant difference for the history. We agree that the objectiveness of Jesus' personal transformation is a fact: "He was transfigured before them" (Mt. 17:2; Mk. 9:2), "the appearance of his countenance was altered" (Lk. 9:29a), His garments became a glistening white. (Mt. 17:2; Mk. 9:3; Lk. 9:29) If this is so, then, by what criteria may we distinguish one part of the narrative as a "vision" from another part, calling it objective reality?
 - b. But the distinction between the subjective and the objective nature of *the vision* would not make a difference for the HISTORY; it would only make a difference for some of the HISTORIANS. After all, the eyewitnesses of this event are sufficient in number and their other well-known qualifications as inspired Apostles are sufficient and convincing that they can render impartial testimony. The real problem is not "visions" versus "real and historical," but a problem of prejudice in the reader who would deny the reality and importance of WHATEVER occurred during this event. Must we conclude that the "visions" given to Ananias (Ac. 9:10) or to Saul (Ac. 9:12) or to Cornelius (10:3) or to Peter (Ac. 10:17, 19; 11:5) or to Paul (Ac. 16:9, 10; 18:9), or Peter's impression (Ac. 12:9) were any less historical, because they were subjective rather than objective? Just because God projects a "vision" on the subjective consciousness of the viewer does not mean that He is not objectively revealing what they really see in this subjective way. We are dealing with historical fact either way.
 - c. To say that a vision cannot be collective, i.e. given to more than one person at a time (because such would smack of mass

hallucination), or to say that it would be seen by only one person, misses the point. In fact, when God gives visions He can render them visible to one or a thousand as He deems it necessary. Besides, our experience with the world of the spirit and visions is so limited as to disarm any dogmatism about whether any true experience of that world is "subjectively" or "objectively" experienced.

- d. "Vision" does not necessarily mean something unreal or artificially imagined and which became the subject of myth. The word *vision* here is a summary of what happened and is itself clarified by the narration of the event itself, and for this reason must not be used as a definition for that for which it is only a summary, especially where it is flexible enough to refer to "what they saw" (objective) as well as a subjective experience ("vision"). Peter, himself an eyewitness, forever distinguishes this event from even the slightest suspicion of fraud or invention: "We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God . . . we heard this voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain." (2 Pt. 1:16-19)
3. The terminus: **until the Son of man be risen from the dead.** The basic reason for this particular time limitation lies in its appropriateness:
 - a. It would have accomplished no immediate good to have publicized the event:
 - (1) If people believed it true, it would only have ignited misguided zeal and unfounded hopes, hindering the progress of understanding the true, spiritual aims of the King and His Kingdom.
 - (2) If they disbelieved it, they would have to doubt the truthfulness of the fishermen who told it, and the time is not yet come for their powerful, unique, independent witnessing. Later, He would empower them with their own supernatural deeds to serve as credentials to convince men to believe their testimony.
 - b. To keep it a secret would have pushed the eyewitnesses to meditate on its meaning, i.e. what is there about such a glorious event which occurred at such a time that, while crying to be told, must be kept confidential? Time is required to unlearn what is so deeply ingrained, so they must be silent in order to learn.

- c. The death, burial, resurrection and ascension of Jesus to glory would explain the meaning of the Transfiguration. These evidences of Jesus' divine Lordship would be completed by His sending the Holy Spirit. (Ac. 2:33) His crucifixion was required to dash their misguided hopes and His resurrection would unveil His true glory. Despite all His explanations given prior to the actual occurrence of these facts, they still did not make the proper connections, because even now they are "questioning what the rising from the dead meant!" (Mk. 9:10) They understood resurrection as such, but could not mentally connect it in any rational way with the Son of man. Again, understanding is far easier after some unexpected event has taken place and is explained, than with all the explanations given prior to its taking place. The disciples' misconceptions are psychologically understandable, however, on the basis of their emotional rejection of any concept of His death. Resurrection, as a solution to death, would not interest anyone so completely convinced that his Master shall not die. Even now, when the Master alluded to His resurrection, it was as if He had introduced an absolutely foreign subject. Surely this Master of superb figurative language must mean "resurrection" in the metaphorical sense!
- d. Silence would also tend to keep them from boasting about the privileged intimacy with glory to which they had been admitted, lest they be too elated by the abundance of revelations. (Cf. 2 Co. 12:7) A man finds difficulty in bragging about something he cannot even talk about! Pride would be as serious a problem for these disciples as for the others. (Cf. Mk. 9:34 and notes on 18:1 and 20:20-28)

H. THE PONDERING OVER A PIVOTAL PERSONALITY

17:10 Having just heard the living voice of Elijah in glory, the disciples think they see a connection between that and another concept popular in Israel: **And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elijah must first come?** To the unaware, this question would appear to be a gross non sequitur, especially the word "then" which logically links this question with His prohibition to proclaim the Transfiguration until after His resurrection. But the connection is there, so intimate and so obvious to a Jewish reader that Matthew did not even need to express it. The disciples' perplexity

is composed of the following elements:

1. "What the rising from the dead meant" in reference to the Son of man. (Mk. 9:10; Mt. 17:9)
2. "Elijah must first come," or chronological order in God's timing.
3. Whether Messianic prophecy is fulfilled in the brief appearance of Elijah or not.
4. The inexplicable injunction to silence, if Elijah has truly come.
5. They ignored an alternative sequence, an "Elijah" already come who fulfilled the prophecy without being Elijah the Tishbite.

So, if the implications of the disciples' question had been inked in, their meaning would read something like this: "You just affirmed that you, the Son of man and our true Messiah, must rise from the dead, implying that you must die. This implies a time when death is possible. But the scholars teach that Elijah must come BEFORE the Messiah, in order to reform the world with its evil and death. Since we know you are God's Messiah ALREADY come, and since we just saw Elijah appear with you in glory AFTER your own appearance on earth, (1) on what basis do the scribes affirm that Elijah must come FIRST? (2) Does what we saw have anything to do with the fulfillment of the prophecy of Elijah's coming? (3) If so, why did he not remain to do the work expected of him, instead of disappearing almost immediately? (4) But if he must yet morally reform the world, eliminating man's rebellion against God, would this not eliminate any need, yes, even the possibility for you to die? What possible purpose could the death of the Messiah serve in a restored society? If it is restored, a Messianic death would be meaningless, since all murderous opposition to Him would have already ceased. (5) Last, why not speak openly about Elijah's appearance? After all, our testimony to having seen him is evidence that he has come and that you are, therefore, the Christ!"

The Apostles are not unaware of the Malachian prophecy (Mal. 4:5, 6), so their question does not mean: "Where did the scribes get their idea?" (See on 17:11, 12)

Just how widespread the knowledge of the "Elijah-prophecy" really was is illustrated by the fact that even courtiers of Herod Antipas knew of it! (Mk. 6:15) Priests and Levites from Jerusalem had interrogated John the Baptist himself whether he were Elijah or not. (Jn. 1:21)

Rather, they mean, "With what propriety do the scribes take such a

position on Malachi's prophecy?" **Elijah must first come** may have been the scribes' rebuttal to the disciples as the former argued that Jesus could not be the Messiah since the promised Elijah had not yet appeared.

17:11 **Elijah indeed cometh, and shall restore all things.** Note the unsectarian fairness of Jesus: when the scribes represent truth correctly, as here, He is glad to recognize it. (Cf. Mt. 23:2, 3) He loves truth above party. (Cf. 1 Co. 13:6) They were correct in their analysis at these points:

1. The absolute certainty of Elijah's coming was based on God's ordering: **Elijah must come** (*Elan dei elthein*).
2. The sequence of the comings was correct: first that of Elijah and then that of the Messiah.
3. The purpose of Elijah's coming was correctly seen as restoration.
4. Their only mistake was in literalizing the prophecy, by expecting Elijah the Tishbite personally (See the LXX!), and by exaggerating, or completely missing, the spiritual, individual, voluntary character of the results of his mission.

Elijah is coming and shall restore. How is this future tense to be reconciled with the Lord's next statement that "Elijah has already come"? He means that their free quotation from Malachi's book and time, then yet future, is correct. However, what was future for Malachi has already had its fulfilment in John the Baptist who has come "in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Lk. 1:17), even if he was not Elijah in person. (Jn. 1:21, 25) See my notes on 11:14 where this prophecy is discussed more fully.

And shall restore all things is a free, but good interpretation of Elijah's mission. In fact, *restore* (*apokatastései*) is the word used by the LXX translators. In Malachi's thought the *all things* is clearly moral renovation.

**MALACHI HIMSELF
IN HEBREW:**

Behold, I will send you
Elijah the prophet before
the great and terrible day
of the Lord comes.

And he will turn the hearts
of the fathers to their children,
and the hearts of the
children to their fathers,
lest I come and smite the
land with a curse.

(Mal. 4:5, 6)

**MALACHI
TRANSLATED BY LXX:**

Behold I send you Elijah
the Tishbite before the
great and famous day of
the Lord comes,

who will restore (a) heart
of (a) father to (his) son
and a man's heart to his
neighbor,
lest I come and smite the
land completely.

(LXX = 3:22, 23)

**GABRIEL'S
INTERPRETATION:**

He will go before him in
the spirit and power of
Elijah,

to turn the hearts of the
fathers to the children
and the disobedient to the
wisdom of the just, to
make ready for the Lord
a people prepared.

(Lk. 1:17)

The "fathers" in Malachi are the godly ancestors of the corrupt contemporaries of Malachi, as well as those of later times, "the children." Neither shares the same attitude toward God as the other. A common love for God which should have united them is missing. The mission of the great "Elijah" is to correct this by putting the godly heart of the fathers in the place of the degenerate heart of their descendents, and by leading the children to be like-minded with their godly ancestors and by turning the ungodly heart of the descendents toward what made their god-fearing ancestors what they were, lovers of God. Thus, the "Elijah" would prepare the way of the Lord to His people, that at His coming He might not have to smite the land with a curse. (Keil, *Minor Prophets*, II, 472)

The scribes with their hoary traditions and exaggerated notions about this text had been listening for the first whispers of an automatic, universal, almost mechanical renovation of the present order, a restoration with only superficial overtones, accomplished through the personal ministry of Elijah the Tishbite himself. (Cf. Sirach 48:10; see also Edersheim, *Life*, II, Appendix VIII, 706ff; Append. IX, 737 on Eccles. 48:10, 11 and relative references.) This, however, was not the purpose of Malachi's great "Elijah" nor the business of John the Baptist. For a people far from God and righteousness, the restoring of the original, physical aspects of their land, or even the returning of Israel to its home, are not of first importance. **Restoring all things** begins with getting men and women to repent and turn to God! Helping men to believe in Jesus Christ is fundamental to any attempts at **restoring all things**, and, until this is done, unregenerate men admitted to a restored Paradise will turn it into a hell on earth in five minutes. Repentance is the only real restoration of the proper state of things; nothing else even comes close! The only alternative God offered was destruction because of a refusal to repent. The entire message of Malachi was aimed at bringing men to an awareness that only in this condition of soul would men be ready to receive the Messiah, and that only in this spirit would they be ready to see in Him the realization of all God's promises and the hopes of their fathers. Repentance was the only way to avert destruction, not provoked by a world of nature out of joint, but by men who paid no attention to their God! But the materialistic, worldly-minded rabbis could not fathom this nor recognize the true realization of this kind of thinking when it was put into practice and preached by someone who restored men to fellowship with God like no one else had done for centuries. (See Jesus' sermon on John, Mt. 11) Ironically,

Jesus Himself was mistaken for "the Elijah" by His contemporaries, probably on the grounds of the marvellous moral reformation He was preaching. (Cf. Lk. 9:8, 19)

17:12 **But I say to you**, as I have already told you before (Mt. 11:14), Elijah is come already.

At this point, according to Mark (9:12b), Jesus made an interesting appeal to the prophecies: "Elijah does come first to restore all things; and how is it written of the Son of man? That he should suffer many things and be treated with contempt." (Note Tischendorf's punctuation which suggests that Jesus asked a question about the Messianic prophecies and then answered it.) Note the intentional parallelism in Mark: (9:12, 13)

12 How is it written of the Son of man? that he should suffer many things and be treated with contempt (as it is written of Him)	13 Elijah has come and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written of him.
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Was the persecution of the "Elijah" (John the Baptist) predicted in Scripture: "they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written of him"? Or does this phrase refer only generally to the coming "Elijah"? If this latter, then Jesus is only filling in the details of the fulfilment of the prophecy, while affirming that "Elijah has come . . . as it is written of him" (that he would). The fate of John is, then, a parenthetical remark, not specifically prophesied.

Some believe that what was written of the original Elijah, describing his rejection and suffering at the hands of Ahab and Jezebel, has had its historical repetition in the rejection and suffering of John at the hands of Herod and Herodias.

It is as if Jesus said, "Although the scribes do correctly tell you of the coming and restoration of Elijah, they do not tell you of the suffering of the Christ, but the SCRIPTURES DO. You have as much Scriptural reason to expect the despised and suffering Messiah as you do the coming Elijah, and should not lay so much emphasis on the one to the neglect of the other." While on the basis of Scripture the scribes were perfectly orthodox in insisting that **Elijah must first come**, they had totally missed its true, proper fulfilment in the person of John the Baptist. But these same theologians, so adamant in asserting that Jesus cannot be the Christ since Elijah had supposedly not

appeared to lay the necessary groundwork for the Messiah, need to re-examine other Bible prophecies concerning the humiliation and suffering of the Messiah, to see that their theological grasp of the Messiahship was faulty. A correct reading of the Messianic prophecies might lead to a truer understanding of the Elijah of Malachi, and vice versa.

Elijah is come already, and they knew him not. (Cf. Mt. 11:13f) **But they did to him whatever they pleased.** The ungodly in Israel laughed him off as a brassy-voiced revivalist or a religious crank. (Mt. 11:18; Lk. 7:30) Or they sent delegations to challenge his authority. (Jn. 1:19-25) Or else they cowardly surrendered his innocent head to the vengeful and immoral. (Mt. 14:1-12) **They knew him not!** If people could not recognize John the Baptist as the fulfilment of the great "Elijah" prophecy, what better results could be expected of them as they interpreted the great Messianic prophecies? And it was precisely such faulty interpretation as this that had misled the Apostles, and which had required that Jesus correct their false notions by being transfigured before them.

In answer to the Apostles' implied objection that Elijah's moral restoration would automatically obviate the monstrous death of the Messiah at the hands of the rulers of the elect people of God, Jesus responds, in effect, that not even the benefic ministry of the promised Elijah would eliminate or even compromise man's liberty. In fact, in the personal case of him who was "the Elijah," John the Baptist, **they did to him whatever they pleased.** Moral reformation does not mean universal destruction of human freedom to reject God's will or messengers. God has no intention of making people be good who do not want to, however much the theorizing scribes wished it. (See notes on 13:9; "Apologetic Value" after 13:43, esp. point 2. Also 13:10) In fact, even the prophecy of Malachi did not promise unqualified success: "Behold, I will send you Elijah . . . He will turn the hearts . . . lest I come and smite the land with a curse." (Mal. 4:5, 6) What if the hearts refuse to turn "before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes"? Some would hearken; most would not, so all that would be left for God to do was to smite Israel with the ban of utter destruction.

So also the Son of man will suffer at their hands, because they would not recognize Him either! John the Apostle, later, had to comment that Jesus "was in the world . . . yet the world knew him not. He came to His own home and His own people received Him not!" (Jn. 1:10, 11) Had the princes of this world recognized the

wisdom of God, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. (1 Co. 2:8) The fate already befallen John also lay in store for Jesus, as already intimated in 11:11-19. (See also on 14:1-13 Introduction.)

And as the prophet Elijah predicted by Malachi appeared in John the Baptist, so did the Lord come to His temple in the appearing of Jesus Christ. . . . Israel rejected its Savior, and was smitten with the ban at the destruction of Jerusalem in the Roman war. (Keil, *Minor Prophets*, II, 473f)

This second Passion Prediction mercilessly thrust the Apostles back into the fiery furnace of anxiety over Jesus' impending death, but the Transfiguration had now furnished them significant pieces in the puzzle whereby they could more readily grasp the paradoxical terms on which Jesus intended to be God's Messiah: the glorious Son of God and, at the same time, the suffering Servant of Javéh.

17:13 **Then understood the disciples that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.** Jesus had formally and publicly identified His forerunner as the coming "Elijah," but He did so with this premise: "If you are willing to receive it." (Mt. 11:14) Although they had probably heard Him say it, they obviously had not been open to receive it. The reticence to believe that John was really "the Elijah," while surprising in these ex-disciples of John (cf. Jn. 1:35-40 notes), is decidedly comprehensible. Since their vision of what the Elijah must restore had not matched the actual ministry of their former teacher, now that Jesus categorically declared the prophecy's fulfilment in John, they see that they had already missed the right interpretation as badly as did their scribes. Once more, in this humiliating way, they learn that the plan of God is different from their own schemes. Nevertheless, having beheld Jesus' glory, they now have strength to continue in His discipleship like never before. God Himself has convinced them that, everything else notwithstanding, they can trust Jesus to know what He is talking about and where He is leading them.

By pointing to its undoubted fulfilment Jesus has just authenticated Malachi 4:5, 6 as true prophecy and a trustworthy witness to God's will. Additional proof of the authority of that text is the proper, unshaken confidence of the Jewish scribes that divine necessity required that Malachi's words be fulfilled ("Elijah must first come"). This evidences Jewish acceptance of the prophecy and the book that contains it as backed by the authority of God.

The relative positions represented in this discussion may be

represented graphically as follows:

	MALACHI 4:5, 6	THE SCRIBES (and Apostles too)	JESUS
S E Q U E N C E	1. Elijah, "my messenger" (Mal. 3:1; 4:5f) 2. Messiah, "the Lord, the messenger of the covenant" (Mal. 3:1-3)	1. Elijah comes first. Disciples imply: "Did Elijah come second, i.e. at Transfiguration?" 2. Messiah comes second. Disciples imply: "Did you come first before Elijah?"	1. Elijah already came first = John the Baptist. 2. Messiah = Jesus
M E A N I N G	1. Elijah will come. 2. He will bring restoration of hearts. 3. Lest I smite the land with a curse.	1. "He will come personally." 2. "The restoration will be automatic, universal, mechanical and material." 3. "The curse is improbable, being rendered unnecessary by Elijah's success."	1. "One like Elijah" 2. "The restoration will be spiritual, hence voluntary, hence individual." 3. Death and suffering of the Messiah and His forerunner are still possible.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. The Transfiguration occurred "six days after" what event? How harmonize this with the fact that Luke 9:28 says "eight days"?
2. On what other occasions did Jesus select Peter, James and John for some special privilege to be the intimate observers of what occurred?
3. What information in the text helps us to decide up into what mountain Jesus went?
4. Describe the transfiguration itself by listing the ways the Synoptic writers tell about it.
5. What is the significance of Moses and Elijah respectively, that explains the propriety of their appearance with Jesus here?
6. What, according to Luke, was the topic of their conversation with Jesus?
7. Why did Peter propose to make three tents, rather than one only, or perhaps six (one each for the three Apostles, Jesus, Moses and Elijah)? Does Peter mean to build little shelters or large

tabernacles like the one Israel built in the desert?

8. Explain why the Apostles were so sleepy. (Lk. 9:32) It seems as if these three fall asleep at the worst moments, especially when Jesus is praying!
9. How does Peter's suggestion to build three tents confirm and conform so well with what we know of his character elsewhere?
10. What is the meaning of the sudden appearance of "a bright cloud"?
11. Why should the Apostles have been afraid as they entered the cloud which overshadowed them? (Lk. 9:34; cf. Mk. 9:6)
12. What is the meaning and consequent effect of what the voice said from the cloud?
13. Why did the disciples fall on their faces when they heard what the voice said?
14. On what other occasion(s) did God thus publicly and audibly recognize Jesus?
15. What is implied in the words: "my *beloved* Son"? "my *Chosen*"? (Lk. 9:35)
16. What happened to Moses and Elijah at the conclusion of the vision? Is this significant? If so, why? If not, why not?
17. Why did the voice have to say, "Hear ye Him"? Did the Apostles sometimes not listen to Jesus, hence would have needed this command? What is implied in this command?
18. What circumstances make it imperative that Jesus give such a prohibition to these disciples?
19. How long were they to keep the matter to themselves?
20. What, in this text, indicates that the disciples did not yet understand that Jesus must die for the world's sins?
21. What two predictions were discussed as Jesus and the three disciples came down from the mountain?
22. On what basis did the Jewish scholars affirm that, before the appearance of the Messiah, Elijah would first appear to set the stage?
23. To whom did God refer when He promised the sending of Elijah? Where is this reference found?
24. How is it possible to say that John the Baptist is "the Elijah" intended, although he himself denied being Elijah? (cf. Jn. 1:21)
25. What does this undoubted fulfilment of OT prophecy teach us about the nature of prophecy? That is, how are we to understand it? God promised that Elijah would come, but He did not mean the ancient Tishbite at all. Rather, He referred to another

man. By what sort of logic can Jesus, or anyone else, say that John the Baptist is the Elijah intended?

26. What is the central message of the Transfiguration? What do we learn about Jesus from it? What happened to Jesus that made the transfiguration take place? Why was the transfiguration only temporary in the person of Jesus? Where did He get that glorious light that shone out of, or through, His physical human nature? What other Bible passages would help to explain what we should see in this event?
27. When or where is Jesus permanently glorified?

Section 43

JESUS HEALS AND FREES A DEMONIZED BOY

(Parallels: Mark 9:14-29; Luke 9:37-43a)

TEXT: 17:14-21

14 And when they were come to the multitude, there came to him a man, kneeling to him, and saying, 15 Lord, have mercy on my son: for he is epileptic, and suffereth grievously; for oft-times he falleth into the fire, and oft-times into the water. 16 And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him. 17 And Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I bear with you? bring him hither to me. 18 And Jesus rebuked him; and the demon went out of him; and the boy was cured from that hour.

19 Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast it out? 20 And he saith unto them, Because of your little faith: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. (Many authorities, some ancient, insert ver. 21: "But this kind goeth not out save by prayer and fasting." See Mark 9:29)

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Where did the crowd of people come from? Why were they present here?