

## Chapter 17

### **Glory Revealed on the Mountain (17:1–8) (Mark 9:2-13; Luke 9:28-36; John 1:14)**

As with much in the life of Jesus, there is very little explanation as to why Jesus went up on the mountain and was transfigured. His ministry was a life of symbols. Instead of boasting or making showy claims, he instead “walked the walk” and left to his audience the requirement that they put the pieces together. So, the meaning here, like most every other part of the Gospel story, is found in **the symbolism of his actions**. These symbols are found in the Hebrew Scriptures, our Old Testament.

With that in mind, the first thing we notice is that “This verse, in which Jesus takes all the initiative, sets the scene with motifs reminiscent of Exod 24: six days, three disciples, a high mountain....”<sup>1</sup>

*“Then he said to Moses, “Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu....” (Exodus 24:1, ESV) .... “The glory of the LORD dwelt on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. Now the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel.” (Exodus 24:16–17, ESV)*

There are many similarities in Exodus 24 between Moses, “*the LORD*”, and with Jesus in Matthew 17. The most significant is “*the appearance of the glory of the LORD.*” We are to identify Jesus with *the LORD*. **That is the purpose of the transfiguration.**

***Matthew 17:1 And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.***

***six days....*** Mark agrees with Matthew saying that it was “after” six days, but Luke using less precise language says “about” eight days.”

*“And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them,” (Mark 9:2, ESV)*

*“Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray.” (Luke 9:28, ESV)*

Luke no doubt included the day of Peter’s confession as well as the actual day of the transfiguration while Matthew and Mark only included the time between these days.

Why does **Matthew mention six days at all?** It was probably because, “**The story of Jesus’ transfiguration was interpreted by means of Sinai motifs....**”<sup>2</sup> Jesus is teaching in

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<sup>1</sup> W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (vol. 2; International Critical Commentary; London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 693.

<sup>2</sup> W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (vol. 2; International Critical Commentary; London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 694.

the symbols of his actions which are designed to associate himself with Moses and with *the LORD*.

*“Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of the LORD dwelt on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud.”*  
(Exodus 24:15–16, ESV)

***Peter and James, and John....*** These three appear to be an inner circle of the Twelve. They were, along with Andrew, the first four disciples (Matthew 4:18-22) and they appear first in Matthews list of disciples (Matthew 10:2-4).

These three compare to the three that Moses took up on the mountain with him.

*“Then he said to Moses, “Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship from afar.”* (Exodus 24:1, ESV)

“Moses separates himself from the people and takes with him seventy elders and a special group of three people whose names are given: Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu. One strongly suspects that the informed reader is to recall this OT text.”<sup>3</sup>

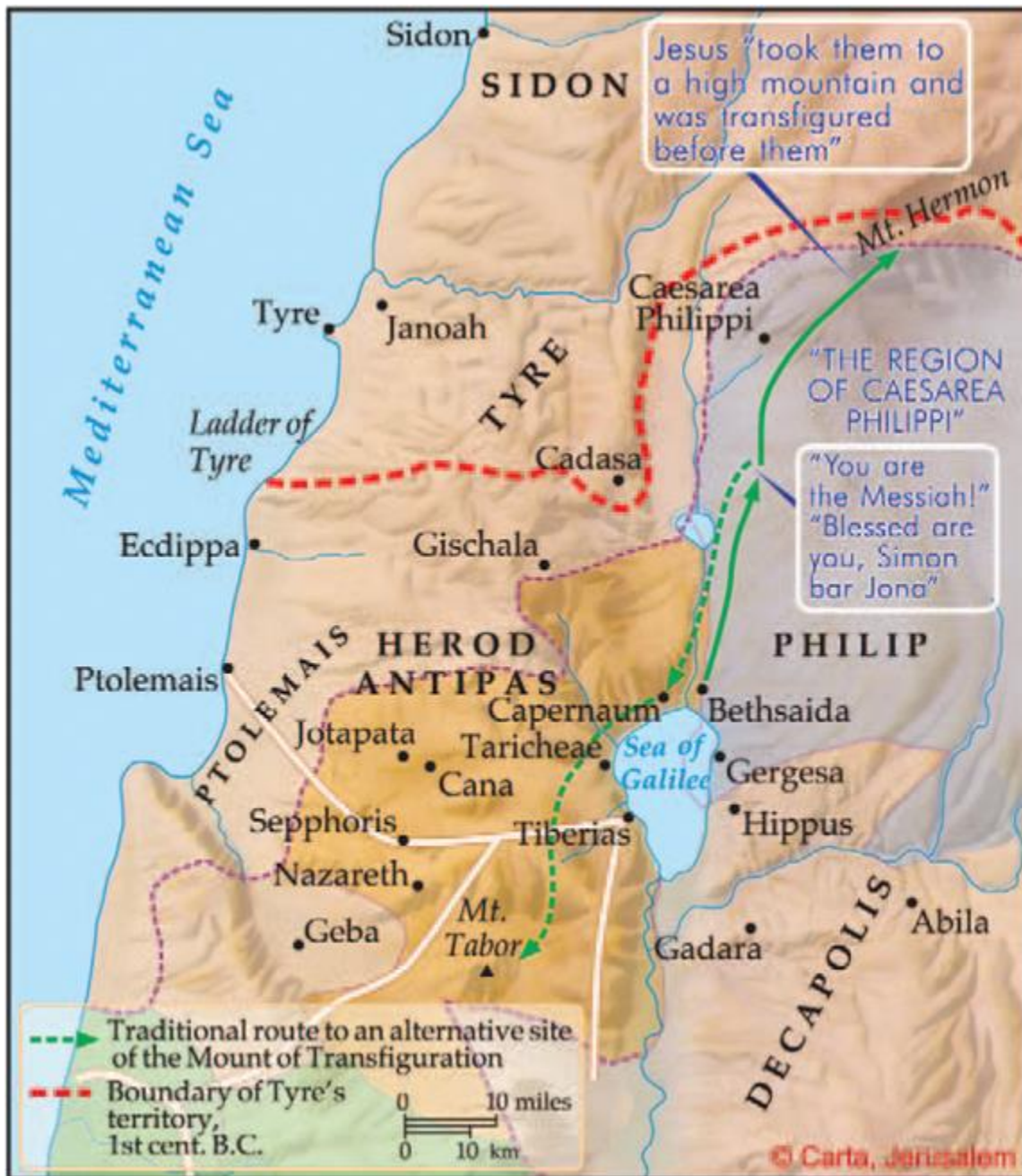
***a high mountain....*** As Moses went up on *the mountain*, so does Jesus.

The last physical location we had of Jesus and the disciples was at Caesarea Philippi in the far North. Mount Hermon is in this area and it is 2,826 meters in height. However, the traditional site is Mount Tabor which is by comparison much shorter at 588 meters in height. “But the fact that they will come down from the mountain to meet an apparently Jewish crowd aware of the healing reputation of Jesus and his group suggests a location further south....”<sup>4</sup> In fact, it could have been on any of several mountains in Galilee. The actual location is not important.

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<sup>3</sup> W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (vol. 2; International Critical Commentary; London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 694.

<sup>4</sup> France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 646). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.



A critical shift in the flow of the Gospel narrative is marked by a geographical move by Jesus to the northernmost point of the land of Israel. Somewhere in the region of Caesarea Philippi—likely not in the polis itself but certainly in a place under its aura and influence—Jesus prompted a moment of self-realization among his disciples. Who was he? Who were they? Peter spoke up: “You are the Messiah.” By these words, Peter also admitted that he was a Messiah-follower. Confessions such as this would build the Church. Afterward Jesus moved to a “high mountain” (Mt 17:1) ... where, transfigured with Moses and Elijah, he was confirmed from on high as the beloved Son of God.<sup>5</sup>

**Matthew 17:2** And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.

<sup>5</sup> Wright, P. H. (2012). *Rose Then and Now Bible Map Atlas with Biblical Background and Culture* (p. 199). Torrance, CA: Rose Publishing.

**transfigured** or **metamorphized**<sup>6</sup>.... The word *transfigured* is made up of two Greek words: μετα = change and μορφή = form. The meaning is therefore “a change of form.” It can be used literally, as here, or symbolically the way Paul does in 2 Corinthians.

*“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”* (2 Corinthians 3:18, ESV)

**shone**<sup>7</sup>.... The Greek word is *lámpō* [λάμπω], we get our English word *lamp* from it. But this lamp put out more light than could be imagined.

**his face shone like the sun**.... John, who was here on the Mount of Transfiguration, uses the term when discussing another eschatological scene of Jesus in the Book of Revelation.

*“In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.”* (Revelation 1:16, ESV)

Daniel had a similar experience with viewing a heavenly messenger.

*“His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a multitude.”* (Daniel 10:6, ESV)

The scene is intended to evoke the experience of Moses to his Jewish audience. Jesus is presented in the Gospels as that Prophet that was greater than Moses—a new Moses that would lead his people again to freedom from the foreign oppressor in a new exodus.

*“When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand as he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God.”* (Exodus 34:29, ESV)

This is not only a picture of what Jesus is but a picture of what we will be.

*“And those who are wise **shall shine like the brightness of the sky above**; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.”* (Daniel 12:3, ESV)

*“**Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father**. He who has ears, let him hear.”* (Matthew 13:43, ESV)

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<sup>6</sup> *transfigured* μεταμορφώω “...to take on a different physical form or appearance— ‘to change in appearance.’” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

<sup>7</sup> *shone* λάμπω “...to shine or to produce light, as in the case of heavenly bodies, lightning, candles, torches, etc.—‘to shine, to give light, to bring light.’” Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 172.

It is likely that “the transfigured Jesus is probably intended to show forth what believers will become...”<sup>8</sup>

*“Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears **we shall be like him**, because **we shall see him as he is.**” (1 John 3:2, ESV)*

**light**.... The Greek word is *phōs* [φῶς]; we get our English word *phosphorus* from it, a self-generating light.

**his clothes became white as light**.... More important than the new Moses, Jesus is presented as being the Ancient of Days Himself, God in the flesh.

*“As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire.” (Daniel 7:9, ESV)*

*“Out of the north comes golden splendor; God is clothed with awesome majesty.” (Job 37:22, ESV)*

Peter was present on the Mount of Transfiguration and says that they were “eyewitnesses of his majesty.” (2 Peter 1:16, ESV)

**Matthew 17:3 And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.**

Moses and Elijah.... “we see that they who on earth have been faithful to Christ, though they be dead, yet live in him, **and retain their personal identity**, and will hereafter have the same bodies, as on earth, but *glorified*.”<sup>10</sup>

“Moses, of course, was the great lawgiver, and Elijah an outstanding figure among the prophets. The two represent a way of saying that **the whole of the Old Testament revelation found its fulfilment in Jesus.**”<sup>11</sup>

We should also remember that “both Moses and Elijah went up on Mount Sinai (Horeb) to meet with God and see his glory (Exod 24:15–18; 33:18–23; 1 Kgs 19:8–13).”<sup>12</sup>

**“Moses and Elijah have most often in Christian exegetical history been taken to represent, respectively, the law and the prophets—which leads to the conclusion that in**

<sup>8</sup> W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (vol. 2; International Critical Commentary; London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 696.

<sup>9</sup> *light φῶς* “...light, in contrast with darkness ... usually in relationship to some source of light such as the sun, moon, fire, lamp, etc.—‘light.’” Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 172.

<sup>10</sup> Jerome H. Smith, *The New Treasury of Scripture Knowledge: The Most Complete Listing of Cross References Available Anywhere- Every Verse, Every Theme, Every Important Word* (Nashville TN: Thomas Nelson, 1992), 1068.

<sup>11</sup> Morris, L. (1992). *The Gospel according to Matthew* (p. 439). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press.

<sup>12</sup> France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 648). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

Jesus the Messiah and Son of God the law and the prophets are surpassed or fulfilled and confirmed.”<sup>13</sup>

**talking with him.** They are talking with Jesus not the apostles.

**Matthew 17:4 And Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.”**

**it is good that we are here....** ““It is good that we are here” in context means not so much “we are glad/privileged to be here” but rather “it is a good thing that we are here because we are available to do what needs to be done.””<sup>14</sup> Being a realistic man, Peter sees a problem. This is a hot and exposed area. Solution? Build a covered hut.

“A bare mountain-top is no place to entertain such august visitors: Peter, as a practical man, will provide them with accommodation befitting their dignity, using the best materials the mountain-top affords. The “shelters” (from the heat of the sun) would presumably have been made with branches and leaves, like those regularly made for the festival of Tabernacles.”<sup>15</sup>

**I will or Let us**<sup>16</sup>.... Peter will work with the other apostles to do this.

**tents**<sup>17</sup>.... The word “is used for the Feast of Booths, one of the three main Jewish festivals, celebrated in the autumn. It had important associations with harvest, but the practice of living temporarily in makeshift shelters particularly recalled the Exodus, and the festival was an occasion of covenant renewal.”<sup>18</sup> Jesus is the prophet greater than Moses. Moses gave us the first covenant, Jesus gives us the greater and last covenant, the new covenant. All of Matthew is a covenant renewal document.

“The Feast of Tabernacles, also known as the Feast of Booths and *Sukkot*, is the seventh and last feast that the Lord commanded Israel to observe and one of the three feasts that Jews were to observe each year by going to “appear before the Lord your God in the place which He shall choose” (Deuteronomy 16:16). The importance of the Feast of Tabernacles can be seen in how many places it is mentioned in Scripture. In the Bible we see many important events that took place at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles. For one thing, it was at this time that Solomon’s Temple was dedicated to the Lord (1 Kings 8:2).

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<sup>13</sup> W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (vol. 2; International Critical Commentary; London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 697–698.

<sup>14</sup> France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 649). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

<sup>15</sup> France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 649). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

<sup>16</sup> “Instead of “let us”, perhaps 0.5% of the Greek manuscripts, of objectively inferior quality, have “I will” (as in NIV, NASB, LB, TEV, etc.)” Pickering, W. N. (2013). (EMTV) *The English Majority Text Version. A Translation of Wilbur N. Pickering’s Majority Text of the Greek New Testament.*

<sup>17</sup> *tents σκηνή* “A booth, hut, tabernacle, tent, any covered or shaded place.” Zodhiates, S. (2000). *The complete word study dictionary: New Testament.* Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

<sup>18</sup> Nolland John. (2005). Preface. *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text.* Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

The Feast of Tabernacles takes place on the 15th of the Hebrew month Tishri. This was the seventh month on the Hebrew calendar and usually occurs in late September to mid-October.”<sup>19</sup>

**Matthew 17:5** *He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.”*

**cloud....** The cloud gives us another contact with Moses and Mount Sinai.

*“The glory of the LORD dwelt on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud.”*  
(Exodus 24:16, ESV)

“Twice before in the Hebrew Scriptures—during Israel’s wilderness wanderings (Exod 40:34–38) and during the dedication of the first temple (1 Kgs 8:10–11)—**the cloud had, as it were, “incarnated” God’s special presence....** The cloud now announces that special presence again. **The cloud, like the vision of Moses and Elijah, assures the church that Jesus is in sacred continuity with the Hebrew Scriptures.**”<sup>20</sup>

In Exodus 40, the cloud came upon the tabernacle, in I Kings 8 it came upon the temple, now in Matthew 17 it comes upon the one to whom the tabernacle and temple in their sacrifices pointed, Jesus Christ, *“the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”* (John 1:29, ESV). The tabernacle, the temple and Jesus are each centers of redemption and each covered by clouds.

And most important is the relationship of clouds to God himself. These are symbols that tell a story to the attentive reader. The observant Jewish listener may have remembered Isaiah 4 as well.

*“Then the LORD will create over the whole site of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day, and smoke and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory there will be a canopy. There will be a booth for shade by day from the heat, and for a refuge and a shelter from the storm and rain.”* (Isaiah 4:5–6, ESV)

So, in Jesus “we may have here an eschatological motif: the Shekinah has once again appeared.”<sup>21</sup>

**This is my beloved Son....** God’s revelation at Jesus’ baptism is now reported again.

*“and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”*” (Matthew 3:17, ESV)

**with whom I am well pleased....** Recorded in Isaiah and repeated in Matthew 12:18.

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/Feast-of-Tabernacles.html>

<sup>20</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 171.

<sup>21</sup> W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (vol. 2; International Critical Commentary; London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 701.

*“Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.” (Isaiah 42:1, ESV)*

“What does this twice-repeated Voice mean? *It means that the single most important fact that God wants the church and the world to know, barring none, is all that we have in Jesus of Nazareth.*”<sup>22</sup>

**listen to him....** “The additional words “Listen to him,”—an allusion to Deuteronomy 18:15—confirm Jesus is the Prophet like Moses (Deut 18:15–18; cf. Acts 3:22–23; 7:37). This does not mean Jesus is another prophet of Moses’ stature but the eschatological Prophet patterned on Moses as a type... As Moses’ antitype, Jesus so far outstrips him that when Moses is put next to him, men must “listen” to Jesus, as Moses himself said. The climax of biblical revelation is Jesus, the Son and Servant God loves and with whom God is well pleased. Even Moses and Elijah (the Law and the Prophets) assume **supporting roles** where he is concerned.”<sup>23</sup>

*“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—” (Deuteronomy 18:15, ESV)*

“The Father’s Voice does not say “listen to Me” or even “listen *also* to Me,” as if God the Father had important things to say to us independently of Jesus. Instead, God directs complete attention to his visible, audible, palpable Son. .... **Jesus is God the Father’s Word.** So if you want to listen to God, “listen to *him!*”<sup>24</sup> “for only in the visible Son do we really know the invisible Father (11:27). **Jesus does not eclipse the Father; he reveals him.**”<sup>25</sup>

“The command to hear or obey Jesus—directed to the disciples, not Moses and Elijah—probably pertains not solely to the future (‘listen to him from now on’) **but also looks back to the episode at Caesarea Philippi, where Jesus’ words about suffering were not easily digested.**”<sup>26</sup>

In the light of Jesus comments about his death and in light of Peter’s instance that this can never be, **it is important for these men to know that they must “listen to him.”**

*“From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.” (Matthew 16:21, ESV)*

They did not want to listen to this message but, they must.

<sup>22</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 172.

<sup>23</sup> Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 386). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

<sup>24</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 173.

<sup>25</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 173.

<sup>26</sup> W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (vol. 2; International Critical Commentary; London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 703.



**Matthew 17:6 When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified.**

**they fell on their faces....** “For falling on one’s face ... in the OT it is the human response to a meeting with God or with a heavenly being (Ezek 1:28; Dan 8:17; 10:9, 15).”<sup>27</sup> **God is the most terrifying thing in the universe.**

“just as you desired of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.’” (Deuteronomy 18:16, ESV)

**terrified or extremely terrified**<sup>28</sup> .... “The disciples’ fear on hearing God speak recalls that of the Israelites at Sinai: Exod 20:18–21; Deut 4:33; Heb 12:18–21.”<sup>29</sup>

“And I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, for the men who were with me did not see the vision, but a great trembling fell upon them, and they fled to hide themselves. So I was left alone and saw this great vision, and no strength was left in me. My radiant appearance was fearfully changed, and I retained no strength. Then I heard the sound of his words, and as I heard the sound of his words, I fell on my face in deep sleep with my face to the ground.” (Daniel 10:7–9, ESV)

**Matthew 17:7 But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Rise, and have no fear.”**

**touched....** It was a healing and comforting touch, it drove the fear from them. This is something to remember; whenever fear is present, **the presence and touch of Jesus is the key to driving the fear from our lives.**

If you want to be touched by someone, you will need to go to where that one is. We’re all fearful from time to time, perhaps even often. You may need to be touched often. So, do you want to be touched by God? Go to where God is; go to the Word of God, the people of God, the Church of God and prayer to God and you will be where God can be found and where you can be touched.

“The reference to the touch of Jesus links up with the thread of healing contacts initiated by Jesus: the touching of the leper (8:3), the fevered mother-in-law of Peter (v. 15), and the eyes of the blind (9:29; 20:34).”<sup>30</sup>

**Matthew 17:8 And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.**

<sup>27</sup> France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 650). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

<sup>28</sup> *terrified* – [exceedingly frightened] φοβέω σφόδρα. This English translation is made up of two Greek words: 1) φοβέω “...to be in a state of fearing—‘to fear, to be afraid.’”<sup>28</sup> 2) σφόδρα “...a very high point on a scale of extent and in many contexts implying vehemence or violence—‘exceedingly, greatly, violently, terrible.’” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

<sup>29</sup> France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 650). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

<sup>30</sup> Nolland John. (2005). Preface. *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*. Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

“What the disciples are left with is the prophetic vision of glory and the challenge to listen to Jesus as the one affirmed by the heavenly voice.”<sup>31</sup>

“This does not mean that they understood it fully; but it was a crucial step in the symbol-charged self-disclosure of Jesus that would be much better understood (2 Peter 1:16–19) following the Resurrection. For the present, it indelibly confirmed the disciples’ conviction that Jesus was the Messiah.”<sup>32</sup>

### **What are we to get from this story?**

Perhaps the same thing Peter did. Years later, Peter writes of this event in which he was present saying:

*“For 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 the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts,”* (2 Peter 1:16–19, ESV)

It is interesting that Peter saw people raised from the dead, the lame get up and walk, the blind see; storms were stopped with a word and he himself walked on water. But now in the later days of his life, the one thing that stands out is the majesty of Jesus on that Mount so many years earlier. The majesty of Jesus at that moment was so profound that this became the ultimate moment, the one memory that would never fade.

And John, who was also on that mount, says,

*“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”* (John 1:14, ESV)

So in summary, the transfiguration is to remind us what Jesus is:

*“I and the Father are one.”* (John 10:30, ESV)

And what we will be in Christ:

*“... you may become partakers of the divine nature....”* (2 Peter 1:4, ESV)

### **Glory and Suffering: Elijah, John and Jesus (17:9–13)**

***Matthew 17:9 And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, “Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.”***

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<sup>31</sup> Nolland John. (2005). Preface. *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*. Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

<sup>32</sup> Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 387). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

**Tell no one the vision**<sup>33</sup>.... “The word itself may indicate either a vision or a solid manifestation or sight. That the latter may be intended here is perhaps indicated by Peter’s request to build tents or booths. One does not make dwellings for intangible beings.”<sup>34</sup> They saw material people in a heavenly setting.

This is the fifth and last time Jesus commands his disciples to keep silent—8:4; 9:30; 12:16; cf. 16:20; 17:9.

*“Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.”*  
(Matthew 16:20, ESV)

**raised from the dead.** He drew this to their attention just six days earlier.

*“From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”* (Matthew 16:21, ESV)

This is the second time Jesus mentions his death and resurrection. He will do so three more times in the days ahead. See Mt. 17:22; 20:18; 26:2. He is preparing his disciples for this coming event.

As he did earlier, he instructs his disciples to keep these things secret because of the way the crowds would react. He is not the military leader that they seek, but a savior of sinners. The misguided enthusiasm of the crowd must not be allowed to divert him from the cross. “The glorious Christ is not to be preached before Easter, for without the cross there is no gospel.”<sup>35</sup>

But they still do not fully understand Jesus. Note Mark’s statement:

*“So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead might mean.”* (Mark 9:10, ESV)

**Matthew 17:10 And the disciples asked him, “Then why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?”**

At first reading, this question appears as an unanticipated change in the direction of the conversation. Where did this come from? It is true that Elijah was just on the mountain with them, but so was Moses. So, why are the disciples focusing on Elijah? And what does he have to do with the scribes?

Jesus has just revealed himself as the Messiah and in addition has introduced his death making it clear that his mission on this earth will soon be over. But there is a problem.

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<sup>33</sup> *the vision ὄραμα* “...an event in which something appears vividly and credibly to the mind, although not actually present, but implying the influence of some divine or supernatural power or agency—‘vision.’” Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 444.

<sup>34</sup> W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (vol. 2; International Critical Commentary; London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 713.

<sup>35</sup> W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (vol. 2; International Critical Commentary; London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 713.

Before the coming of the Messiah, Malachi says that Elijah must come first. The disciples are confused.

The disciples compared what they had just experienced in verses 1-9 with what Jesus had recently said about his death and resurrection and with Malachi's prophecy, they drew a logical conclusion. Is he not to come **before this great and awesome day of the Lord?** "The fact that Elijah has not returned seems to the scribes to negate the possibility that Jesus is the Messiah...."<sup>36</sup>

On the basis of what Jesus recently said and did, they saw that awesome day as upon them, but they did not see Elijah; so what gives?

So, "the disciples ask Jesus a question the official Bible teachers in Israel apparently threw at Christians every time Christians made messianic or near-messianic claims for Jesus: (1) "If your Jesus is the Christ you say he is, then why didn't Elijah come back to Israel first, and (2) why didn't your Elijah 'set everything right' when he came?" .... It had been standard expectation among the ancient people of God that the coming of Elijah would *precede* the coming of the Messiah and that when the Messiah came things would be much better."<sup>37</sup> This they found in Malachi.

*"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction."* (Malachi 4:5-6, ESV)

But the Jews did not believe Elijah had come and used this as proof that Jesus was not the Messiah. So the Jews said, "...yet, from the fact that Elias has not yet come, I must declare that this man is not the Christ."<sup>38</sup>

"This objection is met by Jesus with the judgment, expressed in veiled form ... that the Malachi prophecy regarding the return of Elijah has been fulfilled in John the Baptist."<sup>39</sup>

**Matthew 17:11 He answered, "Elijah does come [is coming], and he will restore all things.**

So, Jesus explains Elijah's role to them.

**Elijah does come [is coming]....** "Elijah does come' affirms the significance given to the Malachi text by the scribes—it will soon become clear that the ministry of John is meant to fulfil this expectation; 'and he will restore all things' echoes the following verse from Malachi, using the same form of the verb as in the LXX text **but opening up the possibility of a space between a coming of Elijah, now in the past as Jesus speaks, and**

<sup>36</sup> Joachim Jeremias, "Ηλ(ε)ιας," ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 937.

<sup>37</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13-28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 182.

<sup>38</sup> Thomas B. Falls with Justin Martyr, *The First Apology, The Second Apology, Dialogue with Trypho, Exhortation to the Greeks, Discourse to the Greeks, The Monarchy or The Rule of God* (vol. 6; The Fathers of the Church; Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1948), 221.

<sup>39</sup> Joachim Jeremias, "Ηλ(ε)ιας," ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 937.

a successful restoring role for Elijah, still outstanding.”<sup>40</sup> So, it seems that “Elijah’s coming and restoration of all things in the future.”<sup>41</sup> In other words, some of what Malachi said may be yet future. This was a view common to the ancient Church where we find “a wide patristic witness to Elijah’s still future coming....”<sup>42</sup>

**he will restore all things**<sup>43</sup>.... True, there had been a great revival under John, but still, not all was restored. And notice that after the resurrection they are still addressing this question; they are confused.

*“So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”” (Acts 1:6, ESV)*

*“whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.” (Acts 3:21, ESV)*

So, the restoration is not complete. This phrase opens up “the possibility of a space between a coming of Elijah, now in the past as Jesus speaks, and a successful restoring role for Elijah, still outstanding.”<sup>44</sup> So, putting these pieces together, it appears that Elijah *may* have a future role to play.

Jesus’ use of the future “*he will restore all things*” (17:11) suggest that all things were not restored, not yet. This also brings us back to what will happen if they do not respond to Elijah’s ministry which was actually in John the Baptist.

*“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.” (Malachi 4:5, ESV)*

*“And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.” (Malachi 4:6, ESV)*

There will therefore follow a “*great and awesome day of the LORD*” and “*he will strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.*” These appear to be the consequences of failing to respond to Elijah’s ministry in John. If so, then these consequences fell in A.D. 70 with the destruction of Israel, Jerusalem and the Temple.

Notice the story of the two witnesses in Revelation 11.

*“They have the power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying, and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood*

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<sup>40</sup> Nolland John. (2005). Preface. *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*. Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

<sup>41</sup> Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution* (Second Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 347.

<sup>42</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 183.

<sup>43</sup> *he will restore all things ἀποκαθίστημι* (future, active, indicative) “...to change to a previous good state—“to restore, to cause again to be, restoration.” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

<sup>44</sup> Nolland John, “Preface,” in *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (New International Greek Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), 708.

*and to strike the earth with every kind of plague, as often as they desire.”*  
(Revelation 11:6, ESV)

These two men “represent the powers that Elijah (I Kings 17–18; Luke 4:25) and Moses (Exodus 7 ff.) exercised in their ministries. Elijah called down fire from heaven to devour the soldiers sent to capture him and he shut up the sky to produce a great drought in Israel.”<sup>45</sup> They appear to be Moses and Elijah, the same two that were so recently on the mount with them. One must ask, do the judgment passages mentioned in Malachi address this setting, a destruction of Jerusalem setting? “*I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.*” (Malachi 4:5, ESV) and “*lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.*” (Malachi 4:6, ESV)

If this is the case, then John came in the spirit and power of Elijah, but Israel did not turn as was required. This resulted in the fulfillment of the second part of Malachi’s prophecy, the *awesome day* and the *utter destruction*.

***Matthew 17:12 But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands.”***

***But I tell you....*** “...Jesus now sets over against the accepted scribal teaching what “*I say to you.*” Where Jesus differs from the scribes is not in their reading of the scriptural promise, but in their failure to recognize when it has been fulfilled.”<sup>46</sup>

***Elijah has already come....*** Jesus addressed this very issue earlier.

*“From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come.”* (Matthew 11:12–14, ESV)

“...Mt. 11:14 seems to be designed to indicate that this interpretation of the figure of the Baptist is new and that the fulfillment of the Elijah prophecy does not take place in the form of a reincarnation.”<sup>47</sup> But in the form of John the Baptist.

***they did not recognize him....*** “Just as John was not recognized as fulfilling the office of Elijah, so Jesus will not be recognized as fulfilling the office of Messiah, except where there is a divine gift of recognition (11:27; 16:17). Being unrecognized means being misunderstood; and being misunderstood often means being mistreated: these were *John’s* experiences, and they will be Jesus’ experiences as well.”<sup>48</sup>

***did to him whatever they pleased....*** “John’s ultimate fate was not at the hands of those same religious authorities (14:3–12), but it is unlikely to have displeased them as

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<sup>45</sup> Ralph E. Bass, *Back to the Future: A Study in the Book of Revelation* (Greenville, SC: Living Hope Press, 2004), 269.

<sup>46</sup> France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 654). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

<sup>47</sup> Joachim Jeremias, “*Ἡλ(ε)ίας*,” ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 937.

<sup>48</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 183.

it disposed of a troublesome and too popular challenge to their authority—note how in 3:7 it is the “Pharisees and Sadducees” who are the immediate target of John’s invective. Antipas’ personal and political motives coincided at this point with the interests of the religious authorities, and so “they” did to him whatever they wanted.”<sup>49</sup>

***So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands.*** As he had recently drawn to their attention that he was to die and raise again, so now he again mentions his coming death.

“The Son of Man Jesus must also go the same way of suffering that John the Baptist went.”<sup>50</sup> This statement by Jesus “shows again how close the end is for Jesus, since Elijah [John] is already present as the forerunner of the Messiah, and how clearly He sees His passion before Him, since the fate of the Baptist is already known (Mk. 9:13).”<sup>51</sup>

*“From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”* (Matthew 16:21, ESV)

“Just as Jesus’ mission is closely linked with that of John ... so also are their deaths. If Jesus is carrying on where John left off, he cannot expect to meet with any better treatment at the hands of those who are threatened by their reforming zeal....”<sup>52</sup>

“Jesus’ point is general: the Baptist (Elijah) did fulfill his mission, but he was killed doing it. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer ... “at their hands” (v. 12b).”<sup>53</sup>

***Matthew 17:13 Then the disciples understood that he was speaking [had spoken] to them of John the Baptist.***

This statement suggest that even though they knew John the Baptist well, they didn’t really understand his role in fulfilling Malachi’s prophecy.

*“and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come.”* (Matthew 11:14, ESV)

“The startling conclusion is left implicit. If John was Elijah, then Jesus is the one whose way was prepared by John....”<sup>54</sup>

### ***Back to the Present: Frustration and Accommodation (17:14–27)***

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

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<sup>49</sup> France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (pp. 654–655). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

<sup>50</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew: A Commentary* (ed. Helmut Koester; Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2001), 400.

<sup>51</sup> Joachim Jeremias, “Ἡλι(ε)ίας,” ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 937–938.

<sup>52</sup> France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 655). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

<sup>53</sup> Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 389). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

<sup>54</sup> Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28* (vol. 33B; Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 499–500.

“Ever since Peter’s declaration that Jesus is the Messiah the story has focused not on the present situation of Jesus and the disciples but on what is to come, as Jesus has talked about what awaits him in Jerusalem (and about what it will mean for those who choose to follow him there) and about his vindication and glory which is to follow, while the vision on the mountain has also lifted the disciples out of the present situation and shown them a foretaste of that future glory. Now as they come back down from the mountain they are brought rudely back to the present as they find their fellow-disciples in severe difficulties with an attempted exorcism which has gone wrong.”<sup>55</sup>

***Matthew 17:14 And when they came to the crowd, a man came up to him and, kneeling before him,***

It does not say that this was a Jesus crowd, but every time a Gentile is addressed, it is noted that this is a Gentile. Therefore, the transfiguration was probably someplace in or near Galilee. That would explain why an apparent Jewish crowd had formed here, these would be people who were familiar with Jesus’ reputation.

***kneeling***<sup>56</sup>.... Kneeling is a good place to start when coming to Jesus.

***Matthew 17:15 said, “Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is has seizures and he suffers terribly. For often he falls into the fire, and often into the water.***

***have mercy on my son....*** Mercy is the common need of the human race.

***he has seizures*** or ***subject to fits***<sup>57</sup>.... **The translation by some of this word as *epilepsy is unfortunate.*** As a result of this translation, many with epilepsy have been called demon possessed. But in fact, this is not the Greek word used for epilepsy. “The normal term was *epilapsis* [ἐπίληψις] ....”<sup>58</sup> The Greek word in this context is *selēniázomai* [σεληνιάζομαι], an entirely different word which actually means “moonstruck” and through the Latin “lunatic.” A better translation here is “has seizures.”

The relationship between sickness and demon possession is not always clear in the Bible—or now. They are not necessarily related. Yet it does seem that some medical problems provide opportunity for Satan to afflict humans even more than otherwise.

***Matthew 17:16 And I brought him to your disciples, and they could not heal him.”***

That the disciples attempted to heal the boy was simply a part of their prior commission; **they attempted to do what Jesus commanded them to do.**

*“And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction.”* (Matthew 10:1, ESV)

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<sup>55</sup> France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 655). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

<sup>56</sup> *kneeling* γονυπετέω “...to kneel down before, with the implication of an act of reverence or of supplication—‘to kneel down, to kneel.’” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

<sup>57</sup> *epileptic* σεληνιάζομαι (subject to fits). “To be moonstruck, to be a lunatic. In Gr. usage equivalent to being epileptic, afflicted with epilepsy, the symptoms of which were supposed to have become more aggravated during certain lunar periods.” Zodhiates, S. (2000). *The complete word study dictionary: New Testament*. Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

<sup>58</sup> France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.



*“Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay.” (Matthew 10:8, ESV)*

As we can see in this next passage, they did this on many occasions during the ministry of Jesus.

*“The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!”” (Luke 10:17, ESV)*

**Matthew 17:17** *And Jesus answered, “O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him here to me.”*

This response was unexpected and at first reading seems rather harsh. It causes one to stop and ask, what’s going on here, what did I miss?

**faithless<sup>59</sup> and twisted<sup>60</sup> generation....** So, who are the faithless and twisted? At this incident are the crowd (17:14), a man (17:14), the son (17:15) and the disciples (17:16).

The son is the least likely, he is the victim of the demons and does not speak. The father has gone to the right place for help, Jesus’ disciples and then Jesus, there can be no criticism for this. The disciples might appear to be the object of the criticism because they failed to cast out the demons. However, although disciples are sometimes identified as having little faith, they are never called *faithless* nor are they called *twisted*. The only group left is **the crowd**. **It seem that they are the faithless and twisted; the use of the word generation would seem to support this.**

I think we should do some speculation as to why Jesus makes this comment. When Jesus arrived in a village, many responded as if the circus had come to town and viewed Jesus as something like a cross between a clown and a magician. It was exciting and entertaining and, as there was precious little entertainment available, an opportunity to take a break and have a party. These responses showed that the people were not men of faith, they were **twisted**. The word “twisted” is interesting. In the Song of Moses, Moses spoke of the generations of Israel.

*“They have dealt corruptly with him; they are no longer his children because they are blemished; they are a crooked and twisted generation.” (Deuteronomy 32:5, ESV)*

*“And he said, ‘I will hide my face from them; I will see what their end will be, for they are a perverse generation, children in whom is no faithfulness.’” (Deuteronomy 32:20, ESV)*

Here in Deuteronomy in the Song of Moses, Moses rehearses God’s faithfulness and Israel’s faithlessness calling them a twisted generation. And here, Jesus like Moses

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<sup>59</sup> *faithless* ἀπιστος “...pertaining to not believing, with the implication of refusing to believe—‘to be unbelieving, to be lacking in trust.’” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

<sup>60</sup> *twisted* διαστρέφω “To turn or twist throughout or to distort, pervert. Used metaphorically meaning to pervert; trans. spoken of persons meaning to turn away, seduce, mislead....” Zodhiates, S. (2000). *The complete word study dictionary: New Testament* (electronic ed.). Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

identifies Israel in the same fashion. Moses is speaking of the people of Israel as a whole, and Jesus' complaint sounds similarly general.

Jesus comments appear to be an allusion to Moses and that may not have gone unnoticed to many. "...it seems to me that this allusion is an instructive example of how something is **implicitly communicated by an allusion which can be understood only by someone aware of the original context and its interpretation....**"<sup>61</sup> This reminds us of the importance of studying the Old Testament as well as works on the history of the Middle East and works on the culture of the era. This equips us to recognize the allusions found in Scripture.

These words in Deuteronomy reflect the character of Moses' and Jesus' generations—evil, adulterous, faithless and twisted. It was upon these generations that their ministries crashed like waves upon the rocks, and often with as much result.

*"Yet they tested and rebelled against the Most High God and did not keep his testimonies, but turned away and acted treacherously like their fathers; they twisted like a deceitful bow." (Psalm 78:56–57, ESV)*

Before we go on we should take note of where Jesus just came from: the Mount of Transfiguration. The contrast of what he just experienced and this obvious display of faithlessness and perverted behavior was no doubt most disturbing and may be the cause of the reaction. After all these years of teaching and healing it must have appeared that this generation had understood little. And he knew that his time was running short.

**generation**<sup>62</sup>.... The use of the word generation by Matthew, which is almost always negative, refers to his fellow Jews living during one's life time.

*"But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates...." Matthew 11:16*

*"But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah." Matthew 12:39*

*"The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here." Matthew 12:41*

*The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. Matthew 12:42*

*Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first. So also will it be with this evil generation." Matthew 12:45*

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<sup>61</sup> Morris, L. (1992). *The Gospel according to Matthew*. Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press.

<sup>62</sup> *generation γενεά* "...people living at the same time and belonging to the same reproductive age-class—"those of the same time, those of the same generation." Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

*An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah.” So he left them and departed. Matthew 16:4*

*And Jesus answered, “O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him here to me.” Matthew 17:17*

*Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. Matthew 23:36*

*Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Matthew 24:34*

**So, we can conclude that it is Israel as a whole that Jesus is here addressing. By now they should be responding in faith but instead they prove themselves faithless and twisted, just like their fathers.**

**How long or until when?** There are echos of God’s frustration with Moses generation in this phrase.

*“And the LORD said to Moses, “How long will this people despise me? And how long will they not believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them?” (Numbers 14:11, ESV)*

**bear<sup>63</sup> or endure....** Jesus’ time on earth was limited; he was running out of time, and they were far from understanding his mission. Moses also said:

*“I am not able to carry all this people alone; the burden is too heavy for me.” (Numbers 11:14, ESV)*

In his human body, Jesus is also experiencing the burden of carrying these people.

**Bring him here to me.** This is where you want to bring problems. For us, it corresponds to bringing our problems to Jesus in prayer. “The paucity of prayer meetings among the people of God may be the single most deviant behavior in a perverse ... world.”<sup>64</sup>

So, let’s sum up. Jesus’ recent reminder of the glory of the Father in the transformation sets the background for our story. The failure of both the disciples and that generation was of like parcel with what Moses bore. Nothing had changed from Moses’ day until Jesus’ day. They were stubborn, evil, adulterous, faithless and twisted. And how long would he be able to minister? Time was running out. His holy frustration came to a head. The rebuke seemed harsh, but in fact it was well deserved—as it had been from the days of Moses, but now the Son of God was their teacher and they still didn’t get it.

**Matthew 17:18 And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him, and the boy was healed instantly.**

<sup>63</sup> *bear ἀνέχομαι* “...to be patient with, in the sense of enduring possible difficulty—to be patient with, to have patience, patience.” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

<sup>64</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 189.

**rebuked** or **ordered....** Jesus has the authority to order the spirit world.

**and the boy was healed instantly....** His power was such that he receives an instantaneous response. The boy didn't just "get better" over a period of time.

**Matthew 17:19 Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?"**

They had received from Jesus a ministry over unclean spirits, but they failed here and are not sure why.

*"And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction." (Matthew 10:1, ESV)*

**Matthew 17:20 He said to them, "Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you."**

**your little faith<sup>65</sup>....** Little faith is not to be confused with the no faith found in 17:17. "...the "little faith" with which Jesus has several times charged his disciples (6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8) has now proved to have serious consequences."<sup>66</sup> But it is still faith.

"...they have followed Jesus and are on a journey, which, despite all its ups and downs, is to be thought of as one of growing faith."<sup>67</sup>

"Perhaps the disciples had been treating their power to cast out devils as a new possession of their own—a kind of magic—they would go through their routine and the devil would come out! But that is not the way it was. There was nothing in the disciples themselves that overcame demons. It was God who in every case gave the power, and it was necessary for them to look to him and to act in humble faith."<sup>68</sup>

**grain of mustard seed....** Just a few words earlier, we read that the problem the disciples had was "**little faith**." Now we are told that the solution is a faith as large as a "**grain of mustard seed**." A mustard seed is the smallest of the garden seeds. So, is both the problem and the solution little faith? *That doesn't make any sense.* "If Jesus says our problem is Littlefaith and the solution is a little faith, then ... "The result is paradoxical, for the following words teach that faith, however *oligē* [little], can do marvels."<sup>69</sup> So, just how does Jesus use this idea found in, "grain of mustard seed?" Let's look at his parables.

<sup>65</sup> *little faith* ὀλιγοπιστία "...the state of having little or inadequate faith—to not have enough faith, to have limited faith." Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

<sup>66</sup> France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 662). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

<sup>67</sup> Nolland John. (2005). Preface. *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*. Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

<sup>68</sup> Morris, L. (1992). *The Gospel according to Matthew* (pp. 448–449). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press.

<sup>69</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 191.

*“He put another parable before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.” (Matthew 13:31–32, ESV)*

He follows this up with a parable about leaven, which is significant because of its size as well.

*“He told them another parable. “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.” (Matthew 13:33, ESV)*

So, there is no question that the smallness of the seed and leaven is significant but, ultimately, the point is the opposite, it is the largeness of outcome that is the focus, the growth of the kingdom. That’s how these parables develop and that is our point here in Matthew 17 as well.

From our context, it appears that the comparison between the “little faith” and the little “mustard seed” is found in the outcome. Little faith has no positive outcome. But, the faith of a little mustard seed has an enormous potential. The mustard seed grows into a bush 7 to 12 feet tall. **Moving mountains requires an enormous faith which is not present in “little faith.”** So, the focus is not on being little and staying little but on being little and growing to an enormous height. The point here is in the power of what one can be, not what one is. Little faith simply is little; it will remain little and do little. Mustard seed faith is little but will not remain so. The teaching is not that little faith is adequate to get the big job done; it is not adequate and that has been rejected. The teaching is in a little faith that will not continue to be little but will become huge. **It is not little faith that moves mountains, it is huge faith that moves mountains.** There is no indifference to insignificant faith here. Insignificant faith will not do, it is rejected and instead we are taught to grow that faith to unparalleled heights, there are great things to be done, there are mountains to be moved **and a great faith is needed to move them.** To sit back and say, “I don’t have much faith but still I can move mountains if God wants me to” is a cop out. What person with little faith has ever moved a mountain? The great things done in the Church have been done by men and women of great faith. **We may start as Mustard seeds, but we must end as Mustard trees. This is not a praise of little faith, it is a praise of little faith that grows to become a great faith, one that can move mountains.**

**this mountain....** “Mountain’ was a *common Jewish metaphor* for ‘difficulty,’ and the whole saying is colored with Oriental imagery. **Forgetfulness of this has led to strange misinterpretations of what can be done by those who have faith.”<sup>70</sup>**

“The moving of mountains was proverbial among the Jews for accomplishing something of very great difficulty (e.g., it was said that Rabbah was “an uprooter of mountains,” *Ber.* [Berakot] 64a; one who saw Resh Lakish in debate “would think that he was uprooting mountains and grinding them against each other,” *Sanh.*[Sanhedrin] 24a). The expression should, of course, be understood metaphorically. **Through the centuries pious souls have never been conspicuous for transferring physical objects such as**

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<sup>70</sup> Plummer, A. (1910). *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to S. Matthew* (p. 242). New York; London: Charles Scribner’s Sons; Elliot Stock.

literal mountains, but there are many instances on record where mountainous difficulties have been removed by the exercise of faith.”<sup>71</sup>

“When Jesus spoke about *removing mountains* he was using a phrase which the Jews knew well. A great teacher, who could really expound and interpret scripture and who could explain and resolve difficulties, was regularly known as an *uprooter*, or even a *pulverizer*, of mountains. To tear up, to uproot, to pulverize mountains were all regular phrases for **removing difficulties**. Jesus never meant this to be taken physically and literally. After all, the ordinary man seldom finds any necessity to remove a physical mountain. What he meant was: “**If you have faith enough, all difficulties can be solved, and even the hardest task can be accomplished.**” Faith in God is the instrument which enables men to remove the hills of difficulty which block their path.”<sup>72</sup>

It is important to remember that Jesus was availing himself of a common proverb understood in his day. His disciples had heard the proverb before (that’s what made it proverbial). Jesus was using their familiarity with the phrase to address faith. One can rest assured that the disciples did not discuss among themselves the circumstance on when they could or could not actually move one of the material mountains that were found in Israel.

But does such a great faith mean that one can get anything they want? “He does not mean that God will give us everything that we may mention, or that may strike our minds at random. On the contrary, as nothing is more at variance with faith than the foolish and irregular desires of our flesh, it follows that those in whom faith reigns do not desire everything without discrimination, but only that which the Lord promises to give.”<sup>73</sup> We see this idea used later by Jesus and by Paul.

“*And Jesus answered them, “Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ it will happen.”* (Matthew 21:21, ESV)

“*And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.”* (1 Corinthians 13:2, ESV)

**Matthew 17:21 However, this kind does not come out except by prayer and fasting.**<sup>74</sup>

Although some Greek manuscripts leave out verse 21,<sup>75</sup> Mark 9:29 includes something very similar demonstrating its ancient presence.

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<sup>71</sup> Morris, L. (1992). *The Gospel according to Matthew* (p. 449). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press.

<sup>72</sup> Barclay, W. (Ed.). (1976). *The Gospel of Matthew* (Vol. 2, pp. 167–168). Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster John Knox Press.

<sup>73</sup> Calvin, J., & Pringle, W. (2010). *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Vol. 2, pp. 326–327). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

<sup>74</sup> Less than 1% of the Greek manuscripts, of objectively inferior quality, omit this whole verse (as in NIV, [NASB], LB, [TEV], etc.). Pickering, W. N. (2013). (EMTV) *The English Majority Text Version*. A Translation of Wilbur N. Pickering’s *Majority Text of the Greek New Testament*.

<sup>75</sup> “It is found in the strong majority of manuscripts, and the commentaries on Matthew by both Origen and Jerome assume it and comment upon it.” Jeffrey A. Gibbs, *Matthew 11:2–20:34* (Concordia Commentary; Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2010), 870.

*“And he said to them, “This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.””*  
(Mark 9:29, ESV)

**prayer....** “There have been two big stories in Matthew 17, the Transfiguration and the healing of the disciples’ inability, and their chief lessons are symbiotic. For the church finds her *authoritative* power when she obeys the Transfiguration’s Voice to “Listen to him!” and she finds her *helpful* power when she hears the master’s counsel to “Talk to him!” in believing prayer.”<sup>76</sup>

**fasting....** Fasting reflects the passions of our flesh, eating, sex, but also pride, power, prestige, importance, honor and others. The purpose of fasting is to subdue the flesh and these passions. Reduced to a proper understanding as to what we are and what God is, one is now a proper tool to do great things for our Lord.

### **Second Prediction of the Passion (17:22–23)**

(Mark 9:30-32; Luke 9:43-45)

**Matthew 17:22** *As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, “The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men,*

**As they were gathering in Galilee....** “The last identifiable location for Jesus and his disciples has been Caesarea Philippi.”<sup>77</sup> Following this they were on a great mountain, however, we do not know where this mountain was located. Now they have returned to Galilee and **with many others are gathering in Galilee preparing a trip to Jerusalem for the Passover.** The group will begin the actual journey at 19:1.

**The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men....**

**about to or near**<sup>78</sup> The passion week is **near**. “The one who comes to men and who lives for them is about to be taken by them and be eliminated from them.”<sup>79</sup> This is not the first time that Jesus has predicted his death.

*“From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”* (Matthew 16:21, ESV)

*“Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.””* (Matthew 16:24, ESV) *“For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.”* (Matthew 16:27, ESV)

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<sup>76</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 195.

<sup>77</sup> Nolland John. (2005). Preface. *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*. Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

<sup>78</sup> *about to μέλλω* “to be at the point of, to be impending....” Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

<sup>79</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 200.

*“But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased. **So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands.**”* (Matthew 17:12, ESV)

**delivered**<sup>80</sup>.... This is the first time that the element of betrayal is discussed. Jesus will discuss this topic again in greater detail in Matthew 20:17-19.

*“See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death”* (Matthew 20:18, ESV)

**delivered into the hands of**.... **“God is the real author of this “handing over” ....** God uses the wrath of men to praise him and the hatred of humans to serve divine ends. The cross is finally God’s great work.”<sup>81</sup>

*“**Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.**”* (Isaiah 53:10–11, ESV)

**men**... “In biblical religion, “men” (*anthrōpoi*) are the inveterate enemies of God (cf. Ps 14). “Men” basically hate God. Luther, instructed by biblical religion, protested that “it is not true,” ... ‘that man can, by nature, want God to be God’; **on the contrary, man wants himself to be God and does not want God to be God**” (Luther, *Disputation against Scholastic Theology* [1517]...). This is the unflattering portrait of the human race in the biblical, Augustinian, and Reformational documents, and it is given expression here again in Jesus’ prediction, **“where no concrete enemies are mentioned any longer, just ‘men,’ who have always been the primal enemies of God....”**<sup>82</sup>

“Jesus saw, consented to, and predicted his Father’s “handover.” Jesus willingly put himself **between** “men” and God and was crushed—for us. Jesus made himself the Suffering Servant of Isaiah’s God.”<sup>83</sup>

**Matthew 17:23 and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day.” And they were greatly distressed.**

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<sup>80</sup> *delivered παραδίδωμι* “...to deliver a person into the control of someone else, involving either the handing over of a presumably guilty person for punishment by authorities or the handing over of an individual to an enemy who will presumably take undue advantage of the victim—to hand over, to turn over to, to betray.” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 484). New York: United Bible Societies.

<sup>81</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 200.

<sup>82</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 200.

<sup>83</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 201.



**and he will be raised on the third day....** The disciples did not seem to take note of this victorious end to the story. Instead, “the prediction of his rejection, suffering and death so dominated their thinking that they could not see beyond the death to the vindication and glory.”<sup>84</sup> **“The ancient commentators already noticed that the disciples appear not to react at all to the announcement of the resurrection.”**<sup>85</sup>

**And they were greatly distressed.** “After the passion prediction at Caesarea Philippi the reaction on Peter’s part is absolute refusal to accept Jesus’ prospective end: ‘Far be it from thee, Lord!’ By 17:23 this is no longer the response. Now the disciples, having listened to Jesus (cf. 17:5), understand and are reconciled to the inevitable. **They grieve precisely because they know all too well what the future holds....**”<sup>86</sup>

### ***Paying the Temple Tax (17:24–27)***

“A little knowledge of tax technicalities in Israel can be helpful in understanding our story’s drift. **Every Jewish male twenty years and older was required to pay a half-shekel (or two-drachma) tax each year to support the offering of temple sacrifices in Jerusalem.** The operative biblical texts were Exod 30:11–16 and Neh 10:32–33. The theological ideas of **atonement** and **ransom** inside these texts may be kept in mind while studying this Gospel paragraph.”<sup>87</sup>

The one who writes this story, Matthew, was a tax collector but not of the temple tax.

*“As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he rose and followed him.”*  
(Matthew 9:9, ESV)

No other gospel writer records this story of the temple tax.

***Matthew 17:24 When they came to Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma tax went up to Peter and said, “Does your teacher not pay the tax?”***

***they came to Capernaum....*** “The unidentified ‘they’ who come to Capernaum are best identified with the ‘they’ of v. 22 who were gathering in readiness for the trip to Jerusalem.”<sup>88</sup>

“Capernaum is the home of both Peter and Jesus (see at 8:14; 4:13) and therefore, as we shall see, the place where they would normally be expected to pay the temple tax.”<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (pp. 664–665). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

<sup>85</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew: A Commentary* (ed. Helmut Koester; Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2001), 412.

<sup>86</sup> W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (vol. 2; International Critical Commentary; London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 735.

<sup>87</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 202.

<sup>88</sup> Nolland John. (2005). Preface. *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*. Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

<sup>89</sup> Nolland John. (2005). Preface. *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*. Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

**two-drachma**<sup>90</sup>.... "...a drachma, a Greek silver coin equal in value to the Roman denarius or *dinar dēnárion* ... which represented an average pay for one twelve-hour day's work (Matt. 20:2). Didrachma, a double drachma. Each Jew used to pay yearly to God a *dídrachmon* into the temple treasury at Jerusalem, the sum which Moses ordered to be paid by every Israelite whenever the people were mustered (Ex. 30:12, 13)."<sup>91</sup>

**"The collection period was about a month, leading up to Passover."**<sup>92</sup> We know Jesus is going to Jerusalem and from this tax we can tell that he is going for Passover. We can see that now **Jesus is within a month of his crucifixion.**

In the first 17 chapters of Matthew, we have covered about 33 years of Jesus life. In these last 11 chapters, we will cover the last 30 days.

The **gathering in Galilee** is a part of our picture. We also see why they were gathering, it was to go to the Passover in Jerusalem. It was typical to gather and travel in groups. This made the trip safer, it becomes a traveling picnic with friends and family and they were not as likely to be accosted by criminal gangs.

**"Does your teacher not pay the tax?"** This question is important for earlier Jesus put himself above the temple, so they want to know, does he pay the temple tax?

*"I tell you, something greater than the temple is here."* (Matthew 12:6, ESV)

**Matthew 17:25 He said, "Yes." And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do kings of the earth take toll or tax? From their sons or from others?"**

**Yes....** For reasons known to Peter but not us, he is sure that Jesus pays these taxes. It is probable that he has seen him do so in the past.

**toll**<sup>93</sup>...**tax**<sup>94</sup>.... "Between them the terms are meant to cover the broad range of civil taxes imposed at the national level."<sup>95</sup> Jesus was not addressing the civil tax system but was using the terms and ideas of these taxes as an analogy with the temple tax.

**From their sons or from others?** "The reference is most naturally to the prerogatives of the royal family: **taxes sustain the king and his royal family (and its government); they**

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<sup>90</sup> *two-drachma διδραχμων* "Temple tax, formally, two-drachma, i.e., the value of which was two long days of common labor...." James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

<sup>91</sup> Zodhiates, S. (2000). *The complete word study dictionary: New Testament*. Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

<sup>92</sup> Nolland John. (2005). Preface. *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*. Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

<sup>93</sup> *toll τέλος* "...payments customarily due a governmental authority—'duty, tax, revenue.'" Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

<sup>94</sup> *tax κῆνσος* "...a tax paid by each adult male to the government—'tax, poll tax'" Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

<sup>95</sup> Nolland John. (2005). Preface. *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*. Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

are not levied on the royal family. .... Those without the royal blood are subject to taxation.”<sup>96</sup>

“...the contrast is not between citizens and foreigners, but between those of the royal household and those outside. Kings regularly tax their citizens, **not their families.**”<sup>97</sup>

“The point is that, just as royal sons are exempt from the taxes imposed by their fathers, so too Jesus is exempt from the “tax” imposed by his Father. In other words Jesus acknowledges the temple tax to be an obligation to God; but since he is uniquely God’s Son, therefore he is exempt (v. 26).”<sup>98</sup>

**Matthew 17:26 And when he said, “From others,” Jesus said to him, “Then the sons are free.**

**From others....** Taxes are collected from those that are not the king’s sons, those that are not of the royal household.

**Then the sons are free.** “The logical result of the reasoning Peter has pursued is that the king’s sons (and, of course, their dependents) are in a different relationship to taxes than the population in general; they are free from the obligation. Those who belong to the king’s household are exempt from the king’s taxes. **Since Jesus was in a special sense the Son of God, he was exempt from taxes to be paid to the temple of God,** and by extension his close servants were exempt too.”<sup>99</sup>

What Jesus was claiming here was that he was the Son of God and therefore of the royal family. As such he had no obligation to pay the Temple tax. He was from those called “**sons**” and not of those called “**others.**”

By means of this story Jesus is instructing them concerning his deity, he is the son of the Great King. The point is subtle and the audience is small, only Peter is present. However, Matthew includes it in his Gospel, it makes the point he has been pursuing from Matthew 1:1:

*“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.”* (Matthew 1:1, ESV)

Jesus is the son of the great king, Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.
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**Matthew 17:27 However, not to give offense to them, go to the sea and cast a hook and take the first fish that comes up, and when you open its mouth you will find a shekel. Take that and give it to them for me and for yourself.”**

<sup>96</sup> Nolland John. (2005). Preface. *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text.* Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

<sup>97</sup> Morris, L. (1992). *The Gospel according to Matthew* (p. 453). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press.

<sup>98</sup> Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 394). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

<sup>99</sup> Morris, L. (1992). *The Gospel according to Matthew* (pp. 453–454). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press.

**not to give offense**<sup>100</sup>.... Are you kidding me? Much of his ministry, Jesus went out of his way to give offense and now he carefully refrains from doing just that.

*“And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household.” (Matthew 13:57, ESV)*

*“Then the disciples came and said to him, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?” (Matthew 15:12, ESV)*

He went out of his way to pick grain and to heal on the Sabbath. He was intentionally giving offense! What is different now? It is not stated, but one might speculate. It appears that the religious leaders of the nation received Jesus' special attention and criticism. Offending them was central to his teaching method; others watching this were to learn in very practical ways. In doing this, he brought to the forefront God's true purpose in many of their laws. But in this case, these men are not central to the picture. Here we have the tax collectors, laymen. And those watching? They are the masses who are paying taxes. Here Jesus is identifying with the common man in his economic condition. There is no reason to offend them, no good would come out of it.

Jesus was of royal blood and therefore exempt from the tax. However, it would seem that Jesus carefully picked his battles. He could have made a scene over this and offended more Jews, but in order to stay his course, he avoided the confrontation and paid the tax. “What Jesus and his followers should avoid, if at all possible, is offending the **devout people** who, in collecting the temple tax, believe themselves to be serving God. Voluntary payment should be made in order to prevent others from inferring that Peter or Jesus has rejected the temple cult.”<sup>101</sup>

“The temple tax is to be paid, not because it is something God requires (of Jesus) but because refusal may cause offence. The lesson is clear. Personal freedom is delimited because it must be responsibly exercised, which means it must take into account the effect upon others....”<sup>102</sup>

The apostle Paul was also known for this kind of behavior as well.

*“For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them.” (1 Corinthians 9:19, ESV)*

*“For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” (Galatians 5:13, ESV)*

**go to the sea....** Under God's providence a fish is prepared for Peter. One is reminded of Jonah and the fish God prepared for him.

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<sup>100</sup> *give offense* σκανδαλίζω “...to cause someone to experience anger and/or shock because of what has been said or done—to cause one to be offended, to offend.” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

<sup>101</sup> W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (vol. 2; International Critical Commentary; London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 746.

<sup>102</sup> W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (vol. 2; International Critical Commentary; London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 748.

**shekel**<sup>103</sup>.... Since this coin was equal to two drachma it is enough for both Jesus and Peter.

There might be something to be learned here concerning our modern day tax system. In most countries of the world, one could make the case that taxes are so high that they are unethical and immoral. As such, one should therefore not pay the taxes. However, Jesus response “**not to give offense**” might be the proper response here as well. To go off attacking windmills, one would find themselves “off course” in their journey with God. One only has so much time and energy in life. To use that time and energy in a more positive effort to minister the word appears to be a far better option than to waste those elements on an unwinnable battle—a battle that does not give the appearance of service to God. One would simply “**give offense**” and not advance the kingdom at all.

In addition, one should give thought to the consequence of this battle on family and property. A family in disarray and property under attack by the government are additional **offenses** that strongly suggest that this is not the proper course of action for a Christian.

And it would be important to remember that Jesus did actually provide the funds to pay the taxes, presumably not only then but now.

### **The Relationship Between Sacrifice and Offerings**

Is there a relationship between Jesus comments on his death and resurrection (17:22-23) and the temple tax (17:24-27)? Or are they just isolated points?

The temple tax was a ransom (Exodus 30:12) and an atonement (Exodus 30:15, 16). Jesus’ comments on his death and resurrection were for the ultimate ransom and atonement.

“Christians believe that Jesus’ death and resurrection is now the one and only place where God gives atonement from sins and fellowship with himself; that is why the temple veil was split down the middle (27:51), and that is why God permitted the temple to be destroyed in AD 70—because ever since Holy Week, Jesus is the one Temple of God, the divinely authorized meeting place between God and people.”<sup>104</sup>

Because he is the one that will provide that ransom and atonement for Israel, it is foolish and sinful for Israel to demand a ransom and atonement from Jesus for the temple service.

He is the son of the king and thereby exempt from the tax and he is the sinless ransom and atonement and thereby exempt from making service at the temple. “Jesus is God’s temple in person and pays “the temple

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<sup>103</sup> *shekel* στήλη “...a silver coin worth two didrachma or approximately four denarii—‘stater, coin.’” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

<sup>104</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 202.