

The Transfiguration

Matthew 17:1—9

A review of the backstory will aid in understanding what the Transfiguration was all about. Prior to this Jesus and His Disciples were going throughout Israel preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom—the good news that the Kingdom that was promised in the Old Testament was finally going to be set up (Luke 16:16; Matthew 13:17; John 8:56; 1 Peter 1:10—11). As the nation of Israel turns her back away from the preaching of the Kingdom, Jesus begins to turn away from Israel and concentrates on teaching the Disciples what they need to know about the future Tribulation and coming of the glorious Kingdom. We can see this turning away from reaching out to Israel when Jesus began to preach using parables in Matthew 13. Those who were open to hearing were given the key to understanding them (Matthew 13:10—13).

With Jesus concentrating on training the Disciples to be the leaders of the Little Flock during the Tribulation He makes sure they know who He is and that the Kingdom will soon be set up. Peter knows that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God because the Father revealed it to him (Matthew 16:16—17). With that answer, Jesus assures Peter that he will be given special authority (the keys of Matthew 16:19) in the soon-to-come Kingdom. The assembly of believers will be built on him as Peter is built on Christ. Peter will be the head of the Kingdom Church just as Paul is the head of the Grace Church today (1 Corinthians 3:10—11).

Jesus then tells His Disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and be mistreated and killed by the leaders of Israel. Peter (and presumably the 12) rejects this truth, spoken by the Second Person of the Trinity. He was in effect calling God a liar. Peter was speaking from the flesh, not understanding spiritual things. Jesus continues to teach the Disciples that they must be willing to die just as He will die. This brings us to the Transfiguration.

The Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1—9; Mark 9:1—9; Luke 9:28—36)

A week after these events Jesus took Peter, James and John to a high mountain, probably around the Sea of Galilee. I believe it's significant that they were taken to a high mountain since mountains represent kingdoms with a high mountain indicating a kingdom over all others. Jesus was praying and He began shining as white as snow on a bright, sunny day. Moses and Elijah suddenly appeared with Jesus and they were talking. Luke gives the most details stating that the three Disciples were heavy with sleep and saw the two visitors only after they woke up. It's from Luke that we find out that Moses and Elijah were talking with Jesus about how He must go to Jerusalem and die (Luke 9:30—31). When the two men left, Peter, not fully understanding what he was saying, suggested they make three tabernacles (temporary shelters) to honor Jesus, Moses and Elijah. Then a voice came out of heaven saying: "This is my beloved Son: hear him." Jesus told them to tell no man what had happened until after Christ was raised from the dead.

This whole incident was given to the Disciples to encourage them and teach them. Just as Jesus was able to endure the shame of the cross by looking beyond that to the joy that would come afterward (Hebrews 12:2), the Disciples would need to be given a glorious hope for them to endure the Tribulation. This is the only recorded time that Jesus pulls back the curtain to reveal His deity. He was always God but chose to veil His deity to mankind relying fully on the Father for everything. It's significant that God came down to earth to the Disciples while Paul was caught up to heaven for God to show him His glory (2 Corinthians 12:2). Israel is always connected to this earth while today's believer in this Dispensation of Grace has a heavenly hope.

Not only should the Disciples be encouraged to see Jesus in His glory but also be encouraged to see Moses and Elijah. Their conversation with Jesus was about His upcoming journey to Jerusalem and His

subsequent death. They were emphasizing and confirming what Jesus told the Disciples a week earlier. At that time they had rejected what Jesus said then and God was still showing them what must happen to Jesus. This visitation should make it clear to them that there is absolutely life after death. The Kingdom they were so eager to see come into existence (Luke 19:11) will be populated with the Old Testament saints. Seeing the two of them should make this promise a tangible reality.

It's interesting to speculate why Moses and Elijah were selected to visit Jesus and the Disciples. Many believe they will come back as the two witnesses of Revelation (11:1—4). Others theorize the two witnesses will be Elijah and Enoch, mostly because they were both taken up without dying. The Two Witnesses are people raised up by God and given the power and spirit of Moses and Elijah. According to Malachi 4:5 Elijah was to come before the great and terrible Day of the Lord. Moses seems to fit the description in Revelation 11:6 of being able to strike the earth with plagues. In any case, I personally believe the actual two witnesses will appear as Moses and Elijah and not necessarily the actual people. Their appearance at the Transfiguration ties in with what will happen in the prophetic end-time events.

The Disciples were frightened out of their minds and Peter, not knowing what to say, thought it would be a good idea to build three tabernacles or temporary shelters in honor of Moses, Elijah and Jesus. The tabernacle Peter referred to is the small hut the Israelites would build to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. It's possible that the Feast of Tabernacles was happening within a few weeks and it may have been on Peter's mind. There were seven feasts Israel was to observe with each feast related to a prophetic event (See the chart: The Seven Major Feasts of Israel at <http://www.midactstruths.com/matthew-bible-study/>).

Passover	Jesus' death	} Spring Feasts
Unleavened Bread	Jesus' burial	
First Fruits	Jesus' resurrection	
Pentecost	Coming of the Holy Spirit	
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Trumpets	Tribulation	} Fall Feasts
Atonement	Second Coming	
Tabernacles	Millennial Kingdom	

Peter may not have been aware of the prophetic significance of what he was saying. As Jesus was revealing Himself as He will appear in the Millennial Kingdom, Peter was proposing they build temporary shelters. The Feast of Tabernacles points to the time of rest Israel will experience in the Kingdom.

While Peter was still speaking of building these tabernacles, a bright cloud overshadowed them all and the voice of the Father came out of the cloud saying that Jesus was His Son and that they need to pay attention to what He has to say. The Disciples rejected what Jesus told them about His imminent death just a week earlier and now the Father is telling them that they need to pay attention to what Jesus says.

Although the Disciples initially completely rejected what Jesus said when He told them He would go to Jerusalem and be put to death, they later began to understand what He told them. A week after Jesus originally told them about His death the Disciples were confronted with Jesus' death at the Transfiguration when Moses and Elijah were talking about it. Jesus once again told them of His death while in Galilee (Matthew 17:22—23) and instead of rejecting His words they were extremely sorrowful. A little while later when Jesus announced they needed to go toward Jerusalem because of Lazarus, Thomas boldly said that they needed to follow Jesus so that they may die with Him. It seems that by this time (perhaps 2—3 weeks after Jesus' initial announcement) the Disciples thought there was a possibility that He would die in Jerusalem. However, they didn't understand completely how the events were to play out. It is only after Christ was raised from the dead that they understood what He had told them earlier (Luke 24:6—9; 45).

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