

## Matthew 17:1–9

<sup>1</sup> After six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. <sup>2</sup> And he was transfigured before them; his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light. <sup>3</sup> And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, conversing with him. <sup>4</sup> Then Peter said to Jesus in reply, “Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” <sup>5</sup> While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud cast a shadow over them, then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” <sup>6</sup> When the disciples heard this, they fell prostrate and were very much afraid. <sup>7</sup> But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Rise, and do not be afraid.” <sup>8</sup> And when the disciples raised their eyes, they saw no one else but Jesus alone. <sup>9</sup> As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, “Do not tell the vision to anyone until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”

[Mt 17:1-9 is the gospel reading for Sunday, but v 10-13 are usually included with the boundaries of the pericope.]

<sup>10</sup> Then the disciples asked him, “Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?” <sup>11</sup> He said in reply, “Elijah will indeed come and restore all things; <sup>12</sup> but I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him but did to him whatever they pleased. So also will the Son of Man suffer at their hands.” <sup>13</sup> Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.



Image credit: Sunrise, Simon Berger, Pexels, CC

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## Context

The “Transfiguration” is the traditional gospel reading for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Lent. In the weeks of Ordinary Time between Christmas and Lent we read from Matthew’s “Sermon on the Mount” (Mt 5-7; Year A). On the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Lent we move “back” to Matthew 4 for the “Temptation/Testing” of Jesus in the wilderness – and now we “jump” ahead to Matthew 17.

Matthew 17 has many themes that are flowing around and through it. Jesus and his disciples are no longer in Galilee – they have withdrawn to the area of Tyre and Sidon (15:21). But they have not escaped on-going conflict with different sectors of secular and religious life.

Conflict is one of Matthew's key themes which occur throughout the gospel. This key motif moves the plot and portrays the struggles involved in the advance of the Kingdom (cf. 11:12). At the outset of Matthew's story, there was conflict between Herod the Great and the infant Messiah just born in Bethlehem (ch 2). John the Baptist announces Jesus and conflict arises between him and Israel's religious leaders over genuine righteousness (3:7ff). Satan himself tries to tempt Jesus to gratify his human needs and accomplish his messianic mission in ways that were disobedient to the Father (4:1–11).

Once Jesus' public ministry began, his teaching about righteousness in the Sermon on the Mount clashed with that of the religious leaders (5:20–6:18), and the people were quick to pick up on the contrast (7:28–29). This led to further, more intense controversies about the forgiveness of sins (9:1–8) and Jesus' associating with sinners (9:9–13). His ministry of exorcism led to the Pharisees' charges that he was collaborating with the devil (9:34; 12:22–24). Soon he had to warn his followers that their ministries would be attended with much opposition (10:16ff; cf. 24:9).

Many of the people who heard Jesus' teaching and saw his miracles did not repent and follow him, and he denounced them for their unbelief (11:16–24). The rules of Sabbath observance occasioned a heated dispute (12:1–14); and after that, skeptical religious leaders with evil motives asked Jesus for a sign (12:38; cf. 16:1–4). Jesus' parables of the Kingdom of Heaven also spoke of conflict engendered by varying responses to the message of the Kingdom (13:19–21, 38–39). Even the people in his own synagogue in Nazareth did not believe in his message (13:53–58). Jesus' teaching about inner purity clashed with the Pharisaic tradition of ritual purity through washing hands before meals (15:1–20; cf. 16:5–12).

Yet Jesus draws the good from the conflict: he prepares his disciples for mission (Mt 10) and for leadership following his own eventual departure. A key aspect of that preparation is that the disciples clearly know the identity of Jesus:

*“When Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter said in reply, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Jesus said to him in reply, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” Then he strictly ordered his disciples to tell no one that he was the Messiah. From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly from the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised.”*  
(Matthew 16:13–21)

With Jesus' identity confirmed among the disciples, their formation continues. R.T. France refers to the section surrounding our gospel readings as “Private Ministry In Galilee: Preparing The Disciples” and outlines it as follows:

- A. Teaching on Jesus' mission (16:21–17:27)
  - i. First announcement of Jesus' suffering and death (16:21–23)
  - ii. Discipleship will also involve suffering (16:24–28)

- iii. **A vision of Jesus' glory (17:1–13) □our reading**
- iv. The power of faith (17:14–20)
- v. Second announcement of Jesus' suffering and death (17:22–23)
- vi. The question of the temple tax (17:24–27)
- B. Teaching on relationships among the disciples (18:1–35)
  - i. True greatness (18:1–5)
  - ii. On stumbling-blocks (18:6–9)
  - iii. Care for the 'little ones' (18:10–14)
  - iv. 'If your brother sins ...' (18:15–20)
  - v. Forgiving personal offences (18:21–35)

At the beginning of Mt 19, Jesus and the disciples return to Judea.

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## Commentary

Matthew 17:1-13 is an instructional session for all the disciples – note that in v.10, Peter, James and John have been joined by the remainder of the group. Just as the preceding scene (16:13-28) juxtapositions the divine transcendence of Peter's confession of Jesus as Son of God based on a revelation from heaven (16:17) with Jesus' own teaching about the suffering Son of Man, so also in this scene the confession of the heavenly voice is juxtaposed with Jesus' self-confession as suffering Son of Man.

The description of the Transfiguration is brief—just the first three verses of Matthew 17. But the incident becomes the context for two significant incidents for the disciples.

- In the first, Peter's hasty response to the glory of the Lord (...*make three tents*) is corrected by the same heavenly voice heard at Jesus' baptism (17:4–8; cf. 3:17).
- In the second, Jesus once again forbids the disciples to make him known (cf. 16:20), which leads to their question about the future coming of Elijah (17:9–13).

Jesus answers their question cryptically in terms of a past coming of "Elijah," and when he compares his own future suffering to what has happened to this "Elijah," the disciples finally grasp that he is speaking of John the Baptist. Thus, the passage contains the transfiguration proper (17:1–3), a lesson on the fulfillment by Jesus of all that is promised in the Hebrew scriptures (17:4–8), and a lesson on the continuity of John the Baptist with Elijah of old and with Jesus himself (17:9–13).

## *The Transfiguration*

*And he was transfigured before them; his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light.*

What are to make of the Transfiguration? It is a familiar pericope of all three synoptic gospels that is perhaps too familiar and thus we are tempted to accept it and not stop and consider the significance of it. A limited number of modern scholars describe the narrative as a misplaced story of Jesus' resurrection, his second coming, his heavenly enthronement, and/or his ascension. In other words, Matthew inserted/retrojected a story here for his own narrative purposes. Under such a provision lays some misgivings about miraculous and extraordinary events. But should we really have been surprised by the events of the Transfiguration?

The transfiguration of Jesus is an amazing event but not totally unexpected for Matthew's readers. After all, Jesus had a miraculous birth, and his ministry began with the divine endorsement of his heavenly Father (3:17). Jesus had done extraordinary works of compassion and had taught the Law with an authority not inherited by any earthly authority. He had demonstrated supernatural control of natural processes by calming storms and feeding thousands of people with a few loaves of bread.

Thus, Jesus' transfiguration seems consistent with all that has been revealed so far in the gospel. Among the many things Matthew has narrated, we know this: Jesus is the Son of God, the fulfillment of Old Testament patterns and predictions, and he has promised a future Kingdom.

Consider the following:

- The transfiguration story recalls the baptism of Jesus and the voice from heaven designates him both the powerful Son of God and the weak suffering Servant (cf. 3:17). This commission is reconfirmed as Jesus begins to instruct his disciples on the meaning and cost of discipleship (16:24–28). Thus it is important that the scene follows the first passion prediction, confirming from heaven what had been questioned by Peter (16:23).
- The transfiguration story recalls and confirms Peter's confession (16:16). Although Peter was divinely inspired to confess, he still did not seem to grasp the full significance of that revelation. The transfiguration is its own witness to the fullness of the revelation.
- The transfiguration story connects the confession of Jesus as Son of God and Jesus' self-identification as Son of Man who suffers, is killed, and is vindicated by God, and will appear as judge at the parousia
- The transfiguration should not be viewed as the illumination of the man Jesus with an extrinsic glory but as the momentary uncovering of the Son of God's own intrinsic glory, which has been temporarily veiled and will be reassumed at the resurrection and ascension (John 17:4–5, 24; Phil 2:5–11; Col 1:16–19; Heb 1:1–4). In this the transfiguration story anticipates the eschatological events of the Resurrection.
- The transfiguration is an integral part of Matthew's high Christology and his eschatology. It authenticates both Jesus' divine identity and God's plan to occupy this world and rule it forever. By the transfiguration, the disciples were given a glimpse of not only who Jesus is but also what he will one day bring to this world (see 2 Pet 1:16–18). Moses and Elijah are worthy figures, but they are only supporting actors in the redemptive drama the disciples witness. As the scene ends, Moses and Elijah have exited, and only Jesus remains in the center of the stage. The "*listen to him*" of the transfiguration will become the "*teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you*" of the Great Commission (28:18-20)

And thus the transfiguration has significance for us. It gives us a glimpse into our destiny. Transformation begins already in this life. Seeing the glory of the Lord in the Spirit, the disciples are reminded that they were created in the image of him whose glory they see (2 Cor. 3:18). This is not mystical deification but a recovery/re-recognition of the divine likeness. It takes place in the ministry of the Spirit. It is not for an elite few but for all Christians. It is not just a hope for the future (cf. 1 Cor. 15:44ff.) but begins already with the Resurrection and the coming of the Spirit. It carries with it an imperative: "*listen to him.*" A significance of the transfiguration is that we obtain a glimpse of what we are and are becoming. As St Irenaeus famously said centuries ago: "The glory of God is the human person fully alive."

### ***Peter's Response***

As in 16:13-20, Peter again responds, again without a full understanding. Consider Peter's proposal to make three tents (*skēnē*; also "booth" or "tabernacle"). What did he intend? It has been variously understood as traveler's hut, the "*tent of meeting*" where God spoke with Moses outside the camp (Exod 33:7), a more formal tent used in the Festival of Booths (cf. Lev 23:42–43; Zech 14:16ff), and even as the Jerusalem Temple tabernacle. It is this last image that Matthew may have in mind as background – notwithstanding Peter's intention. It is the Temple tabernacle where the *Shekinah*, the fiery cloud that symbolized the continuing presence of God among the people, dwelt over the ark of the covenant. The response to Peter's proposal is three-fold (Boring, 364)

1. The heavenly cloud of God's presence appears, as on the tabernacle of Moses' day and the later Temple. As of old, the heavenly voice comes from the cloud, and the God who had previously spoken on Mount Sinai only to Moses speaks directly to them. The heavenly voice speaks in exactly the same words as at the baptism (see 3:17), confirming the identity and mission of Jesus declared there, and confirming the confession Peter himself had made in the preceding scene (16:16).
2. Although three transcendent figures are present, the heavenly voice charges the disciples to hear Jesus. As in the *Shema* (Deut 6:4), "hear" carries its OT connotation of "obey" and is the same command given with regard to the "prophet like Moses" whom God would send (Deut 18:15; cf. 13:57). The disciples fall on their faces in fearful response to the theophany, as in Exod 34:30; Dan 10:9; and Hab 3:2 LXX.
3. Jesus comes to them (only here and 28:18 in Matthew, another parallel between this scene and the resurrection appearances) and touches them, and they see no one but "*Jesus alone*." To focus all attention on Jesus and to distinguish him from Moses and Elijah, who have now disappeared, Matthew subtly rewritten Mark so that the word *alone* might stand here as the emphatic closing word of the scene. The heavenly visitors depart, but Jesus stays—Jesus alone. Without heavenly companions, without heavenly glory, *he* is the "tabernacle" (*skene*), the reality of God's abiding presence with us (cf. 1:23; 28:20). The disciples descend from the mountain into the mundane world of suffering and mission, accompanied by Jesus, God with us.

"*Coming down from the mountain*" corresponds to going up the mountain in 17:1 and rounds off vv. 1-9 as a complete scene. Jesus' calling the event a "vision" (only so in Matthew) does not imply the modern contrast between subjective experience and objective reality, which reduces the event to the disciples' subjectivity. Jesus raises no questions about the reality of the event. Rather, the designation "vision" relates the event to the visionary/apocalyptic tradition, as has 16:17 (cf. Dan 8:16-17; 10:9-12, 16-19). The mention of the Passion/Resurrection as the end of the scene is not an expression of the messianic secret, as in Mark, but it reminds the disciples of all the barriers they themselves have experienced in believing Jesus as Messiah will suffer and die. If they have had such problems comprehending and trusting Jesus' revelation to them, then how much more so will others have trouble believing the good news. Yet, it will be from a post-Easter perspective that others will be called to identify themselves with the disciples in the story.

Also laying in the background, another lesson each disciple, good and faithful Jews, needed to absorb was that as great as Moses and Elijah were, each was only God's servant, not his Son (3:17). Moses was the prototypical prophet, but he spoke of Jesus as the definitive eschatological prophet whose words must be heeded (Deut 18:15-19). Elijah's ministry courageously stood for the law of Moses, but Jesus as the definitive teacher of that law brings it to its ultimate goal (5:17-19).

### ***John and Elijah***

<sup>9</sup> *As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, "Do not tell the vision to anyone until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."* <sup>10</sup> *Then the disciples asked him, "Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?"*

The disciples have just experienced the Transfiguration and heard Jesus' prediction of his death and Resurrection – and then the disciples ask about Elijah. It may well seem an awkward shift in a conversation, but v.10 is not merely responding to v.9, but looks back at all of 16:13-17:9, portraying the advent of Jesus as the eschatological event, as the Messiah/Son of God who fulfills his ministry as the rejected and dying Son of Man, who will be vindicated by God at the resurrection. The disciples, who know already of Jesus' identification of John as Elijah (11:10, 14), voice the objection of the

scribal opponents of Matthew's church to the Christian claims: How can the Christ have come already, since the Scripture says that Elijah must come first (Mal 3:23-34)?

In short, Jesus' response is that Elijah has already come in the person of John the Baptist (vv.12-13). What is sometimes confusing is "*Elijah will indeed come and restore all things*" (v.11) Hadn't Elijah/John already come? Boring offers four suggestions (365):

1. The future tense simply reflects the quotation from Malachi,
2. The future tense may reflect the scribal expectations rather than Jesus' own understanding,
3. While Elijah/John had come the restoration in its fullness is still a future event
4. More likely, the future restoration of all things has already begun in the advent of John the Baptist.

That Elijah had already come is an important declaration. The understanding that Elijah has not yet come will appear again in this gospel (16:14, 27:45). Elijah/John is paralleled to Jesus: he was sent from God, was opposed and killed by members of the kingdom of this world, was Messianic in that he was the forerunner of the Messiah. And as it was with John, so with Jesus – this generation failed to recognize him because they were persuaded by the kingdom of this world. Beginning with John/Elijah, the disciples are forming the new citizenry of the kingdom of God.

### ***A Reflection***

Annemarie Reiner (of Adelaide, Australia) posted this reflection on the Transfiguration on her blog "Who Do You Say That I Am." It is a very nice reflection for this Lenten Season.

When we look at our Gospel today we can understand why daily reflection is so important. These three disciples (and the rest of them) didn't get who Jesus was until well after his death. They didn't understand what had happened at the transfiguration. They didn't understand what was happening as they witnessed Jesus' life. They didn't understand what was happening at the crucifixion. But they kept pondering their experiences over and over - if they didn't we simply wouldn't have the New Testament.

So what do we learn from this?

Every human life is filled with experiences from when we get up until we go to sleep and even in our sleep we experience our dreams. What do we do with these experiences?

Mostly we ignore them and then we forget them. Even the profound moments that come into our lives, we can shut the depth of their meaning out. We might have gone through a depression – do we take the time to ponder the meaning of this depression in my life or do I just think: thank God that is over and then fill our lives with all sorts of other distractions and then wonder why down the track I fall into another bout of depression?

I might have experienced walking with a loved one who has been sick and has died. Do I sit back and reflect upon the experience or is it too difficult to re enter this painful period, so we try and shut it out hoping it will go away.

I might have experienced a deep hurt. Do I ponder the experience considering my own reactions and responses to the hurt or do I totally throw blame on those who hurt me without any self reflection? So I become the victim in life and I go from one lot of blaming to the next without any examination of my own heart.

I might have deeply hurt someone myself. Do I take the time reflect upon my behaviour (even if it is down the track from the experience) so as to be confronted with what I have done. Or do I just keep running away from this self disclosure because it's too painful?

There are numerous life experiences that we all have. Many of these experiences are profoundly mysterious. Sadly many of them become buried and we lose the richness these experiences can offer us. Not only this but we now have multi million dollar industries offering all sorts of therapies etc to help people cope with the results of their non reflective lives.

Someone once said that a non reflective life is a life not worth living. It might be more accurate to say that a non reflective life is a life not lived – it is life rejected.

Jesus invites each of us to this holy mountain today. It might be shrouded in mystery – we may not have much of an idea who Jesus is yet – we may be confused by the experiences of life and feel lost – but Jesus says to us today to come with him. To trust him. To have faith in him. To keep thinking about our experiences but to do this with Jesus at our sides.

When we have the courage to come to the mountain with Jesus then we too may see something beyond our imagining. When we truly see Jesus transfigured (see Jesus as he truly is) then the life that Jesus offers us will begin.

A large part of the problem is that we really don't see who Jesus is. Jesus can become our own creation – a feel safe, feel good guy that we call upon when it suits us, and we try and mould Jesus to be what we want him to be. If we truly believed in Jesus we too would not know what to say, we would be frightened, but we would hear God saying to us: Listen to him. And even in all our blindness and ignorance all we would truly want would be to Listen to Jesus – we would hunger for Jesus – not the Jesus of our own making, but the Jesus who stands before us as mystery. Can we accept such a mystery?

We, the Body of Christ must also be transformed just as Jesus was transformed – but this cannot happen until we come to this mountain in all humility. Then the horrors our world is currently experiencing may begin to fade and the light will truly shine in the darkness.

In the coming week let us pray for the desire and will to come to the mountain that Jesus invites us too so that we may encounter the true mystery before us and then ponder for a life time its meaning for ourselves and the whole of creation.

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## Notes

**Matthew 17:1 after six days:** Some see this time reference as an allusion to the Siani revelation (Ex 24:16) or the feast of Tabernacles (six days after the Day of Atonement). Luke records “*eight days.*” Previously Jesus had said, “*Amen, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.*” (Mt 16:28) Some interpreters see this being fulfilled here only six days later.

**Peter...James...John:** They form an ‘inner circle;’ these three disciples are also taken apart from the others by Jesus in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:37) as Jesus’ chosen companions in a moment of private communion with God in 26:37; Moses also had three special companions (Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu) on the mountain – but the seventy elders were also present with Moses (Exod. 24:1, 9). **high mountain:** *hypsēlon oros*: the word *oros*, mountain presents no problem, nor does which metaphorically means “high”; the word *hypsēlon* can also mean “exalted” or “haughty.” The location has been identified with Tabor or Hermon, but probably no specific mountain was intended by the evangelist. Its meaning is theological rather than geographical, possibly recalling the revelation to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:12-18) and to Elijah at the same place (1 Kings 19:8-18; Horeb is the same as Sinai).

**Matthew 17:2 transfigured:** *metamorphōthē* – to transform, to change completely. What is described does not conform to the Greek idea of metamorphosis or to the idea of interior transformation elsewhere in the NT (e.g., Romans 12:2 or 2 Cor 3:18). The evangelist seems to be using the best word possible to describe a preview of the glory that will belong to Jesus in the eschaton and fullness of God’s kingdom

**his face shone like the sun:** this is a Matthean addition to other descriptions (e.g, Mk 9); the wording seems to echo Daniel 10:6 – as well as Moses in Ex 34:29-30. **his clothes became white as light:** see Daniel 7:9 where the clothing of God appears “snow bright.” For the white garments of other heavenly beings, see Rev 4:4; 7:9; 19:14 – and perhaps Mt 13:43, describing the righteous in heaven.

**Matthew 17:3 Moses and Elijah:** The significance of *Moses and Elijah* here has been variously understood as (a) representing the law and the prophets (though the fact that Elijah is not represented among the prophetic writings of the Old Testament is against this); (b) two of the three Old Testament

men of God who traditionally did not die (Enoch was the other; according to Deut. 34 Moses did die, but his burial by God had developed by the first century AD into a belief in his ‘assumption’); (c) two great leaders who talked with God at Mount Sinai; (d) the two whose ‘return’ was expected in connection with the Messianic age. The last seems most relevant in this context, where their appearance underlines the Messianic role of Jesus, though none of the others is thereby ruled out. It may also be relevant that both Moses and Elijah in their God-given missions experienced rejection and suffering. Jesus is thus indicated as the one in whom the pattern of God’s Old Testament servants reaches its ultimate fulfillment.

**Matthew 17:4 *three tents***: the booths in which the Israelites lived during the feast of Tabernacles (cf John 7:2) were meant to recall their ancestors’ dwelling in booths during the journey from Egypt to the promised land (Lev 23:39-42). The same Greek word, *skene*, here translated tents, is used in the LXX for the booths of that feast, and some scholars have suggested that there is an allusion here to that liturgical custom.

**Matthew 17:5 *cloud cast a shadow over them***: In the Old Testament the cloud covered the meeting tent, indicating the Lord’s presence in the midst of his people (Exodus 40:34-35) and came to rest upon the temple in Jerusalem at the time of its dedication (1 Kings 8:10).

***This is my beloved Son . . . listen to him***: This echoes the words of Matthew 3:17. The voice repeats the baptismal proclamation about Jesus, with the addition of the command listen to him. The latter is a reference to Deut 18:15 in which the Israelites are commanded to listen to the prophet like Moses whom God will raise up for them. The command to listen to Jesus is general, but in this context it probably applies particularly to the preceding predictions of his passion and resurrection (Matthew 16:21) and of his coming (Matthew 16:27, 28).

**Matthew 17:6-7 *When the disciples heard this...Rise, do not be afraid***: This text does not appear in the Marcan or Lucan versions. The language echoes Daniel 10:9-10, 18-19: “*When I heard the sound of his voice, I fell face forward in a faint. But then a hand touched me, raising me to my hands and knees. The one who looked like a man touched me again and strengthened me, saying, “Fear not, beloved, you are safe; take courage and be strong.”*”

**Matthew 17:6 *fell prostrate***: *epesan epi prosōpon autōn* – lit. “to fall on one’s face.”

**Matthew 17:9 *the vision***: *horama*, a noun used elsewhere in the New Testament (all in Acts) only for apparently ‘inward’ experiences. Matthew alone uses this word to describe the transfiguration. It is probably not useful to enquire how ‘physical’ the experience was; at least it impressed Peter as sufficiently real to require the erection of booths. But the whole scene is clearly ‘numinous’—light, brilliance, the cloud, a voice from heaven, the disciples’ fear, and the appearance and sudden disappearance of men of long ago. Nothing like it occurs elsewhere in the Gospels. ***until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead***: only in the light of Jesus’ resurrection can the meaning of his life and mission be truly understood; until then no testimony to the vision will lead people to faith.

**Matthew 17:10 *Elijah***: The clothing of John recalls the austere dress of the prophet Elijah (2 Kings 1:8). The expectation of the return of Elijah from heaven to prepare Israel for the final manifestation of God’s kingdom was widespread, and according to Matthew this expectation was fulfilled in the Baptist’s ministry (Matthew 11:14; 17:11-13). According to Mal 3:23-24 the return of Elijah will precede the coming of the Day of the Lord. But whether Elijah was to be the forerunner of the Messiah is not so clear.



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