

## The Transfiguration

### Matthew 17:1-13

Matthew 17:1-13 - *“Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; <sup>2</sup> and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. <sup>3</sup> And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. <sup>4</sup> Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”<sup>5</sup> While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!”<sup>6</sup> And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid. <sup>7</sup> But Jesus came and touched them and said, “Arise, and do not be afraid.”<sup>8</sup> When they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.*

*<sup>9</sup> Now as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, “Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead.” <sup>10</sup> And His disciples asked Him, saying, “Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?” <sup>11</sup> Jesus answered and said to them, “Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things. <sup>12</sup> But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands.” <sup>13</sup> Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist.”*

### Background Notes

In the last verse of Matthew 16 the Lord said to His disciples, *“Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.”* This prediction was fulfilled in Matthew 17 at the Mount of Transfiguration.

*“Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves...”*  
The Lord went up to a high mountain, taking only His inner circle of disciples - Peter, James and John. Which “high mountain” was it? The “traditional” Mount of Transfiguration, Mount Tabor, is southwest of the Sea of Galilee. Probably this was not the Mount of Transfiguration, because earlier in this chapter, just before the transfiguration event, the Lord and His disciples had come into the district of Caesarea Philippi (v3). Caesarea Philippi is about thirty miles north of the Sea of Galilee, in the foothills of Mount Hermon, so most likely the Mount of Transfiguration was one of the ridges of high peaks that comprise Mount Hermon.

In the Transfiguration, the Lord’s His glory was no longer veiled. His face was radiant like the sun, and even His clothing shone as white as the light. Since this event was a preview of the coming kingdom, does this mean that in our resurrected bodies we will be somehow clothed with garments of light? Maybe, but that’s pure speculation! One school

of thought holds that Adam and Eve had a radiance to their bodies before the Fall, and this radiance will be restored to the resurrected bodies. However, this is not Scripture. It's just speculation. Believers will have resurrected bodies - that's for sure - but Scripture does not say whether our resurrected bodies will be radiant and shine with light.

The bright cloud that overshadowed them was not a rain cloud or fog. It was the cloud of glory known in the Old Testament as "Shekinah glory." It was evidence of God's presence. Thus the voice of God was heard coming out of this cloud saying, *"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!"*

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. The Transfiguration was a preview of the coming kingdom.

We believe that the next event on God's calendar of end time events will be the "rapture" of the Church. At that moment all true Christians, both dead and alive, will be caught up to heaven and receive resurrected bodies. (Read 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4.) The seven-year Tribulation period on earth will come after the rapture, with all the judgments that are described in Revelation 4-19. After the Tribulation period the Lord will return to the earth and set up His glorious kingdom that will last for a thousand years (Revelation 20). We believers will return with Christ in our resurrected bodies, and we will reign with Christ in His glorious kingdom.

The Transfiguration was a preview or prophetic microcosm of this coming kingdom. And that's our doctrinal point: the transfiguration was a preview of the coming kingdom. The Lord will be here on earth in His body of glory, and He will be fully exalted for everyone to see and honor. In this prophetic picture, Moses and Elijah represent believers who will be present in this kingdom in their transformed bodies. Moses **may** illustrate believers who have died, while Elijah **may** illustrate believers who will be alive at the time of the rapture. (Remember that Elijah didn't die, but was taken up to heaven without death.) Peter, James and John, who were not transformed at the Mount of Transfiguration, **may** represent the believers who will come out of the Great Tribulation and enter the kingdom in their normal physical bodies.

The Transfiguration event fulfilled our Lord's statement in Matthew 16:28: *"Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."* The Transfiguration was a preview of the coming kingdom.

### 2. Elijah will restore all things before the coming kingdom.

*"Now as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, 'Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead.' And His disciples asked Him, saying, 'Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?' Jesus answered and said to them, 'Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things. But I say to you that*

*Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands.’ Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist” (v9-13).*

As they were coming down from the mountain, the Lord told His disciples not to tell anyone about this event until after His resurrection. Why did He say that? The Lord didn’t want this event known because He didn’t want the people to make Him a political king. This was not the time. The nation had already rejected Him as King. The Lord wanted people to accept Him as Messiah and Savior.

The disciples asked Him about the coming of Elijah, referring to the prophecy in Malachi 4:5: *“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.”* Notice the Lord’s answer: *“Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things. But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands.’ Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist.”*

Was the Lord is saying two different things here: that Elijah is coming in the future, and yet, Elijah has already come in the past, in the person of John the Baptist? How is this explained? This is what is known as a “dependent fulfillment” type of prophecy. In other words, the fulfillment was dependent on whether or not the people of Israel had received the Lord Jesus as their Messiah. If they had received Him, then John the Baptist would indeed have fulfilled the Elijah prophecy of Malachi 4.

John the Baptist had come in the spirit and power of Elijah. Luke 1:17 says, *“He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, ‘to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,’ and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”* Now look back at Matthew 11:13-14: *“For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come.”* If the nation of Israel had received the Lord and His offer of the Kingdom, then John the Baptist would have fulfilled Malachi’s prophecy about Elijah. But Israel rejected her King and His offer of the Kingdom, so the prophecy of the coming of Elijah has been postponed - but it will be fulfilled before the second coming of Christ.

It will possibly be fulfilled in the coming of the “two witnesses” in Revelation 11. One of those witnesses may literally be Elijah, or one of the witnesses will be a prophet coming in the spirit and power of Elijah. Who is the other witness of Revelation 11? Many Bible scholars believe that he will be Moses. However, he may be Enoch. Moses died, but Enoch and Elijah were the only two Old Testament saints who never died. The two witnesses of Revelation 11 die in the future Tribulation period, but then they’re raised back to life. The fact that *“it is appointed unto man to die once” (Hebrews 9:27)* supports the view that the two witnesses of Revelation 11 may be Elijah and Enoch, who never died. Elijah will restore all things before the coming kingdom.

## **Practical Application**

### **Let your zeal be guarded and guided by good theology.**

Peter was so excited about the Mount of Transfiguration experience that he exclaimed, *“Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah”* (v4). Peter had great zeal - but he had bad theology! Instead of elevating and exalting the Lord Jesus Christ, Peter lowered Him to the level of mere men. Peter’s theology had to be corrected. The voice of God was heard: *“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!”* After that the disciples saw **Jesus alone!**

Many people today make the same mistake that Peter made. They lower the person of Christ by making Him just “one good man among many.” Like Peter’s suggestion, these zealous - but mistaken - people build buildings to honor mere man as much as they honor Jesus Christ. Many other examples of sincere religious zeal mixed with bad theology could be given.

Don’t put your time and effort and money into things that will mean nothing 100 years from now! Let your zeal be guarded and guided by good theology.