

# Matthew 17 Commentary

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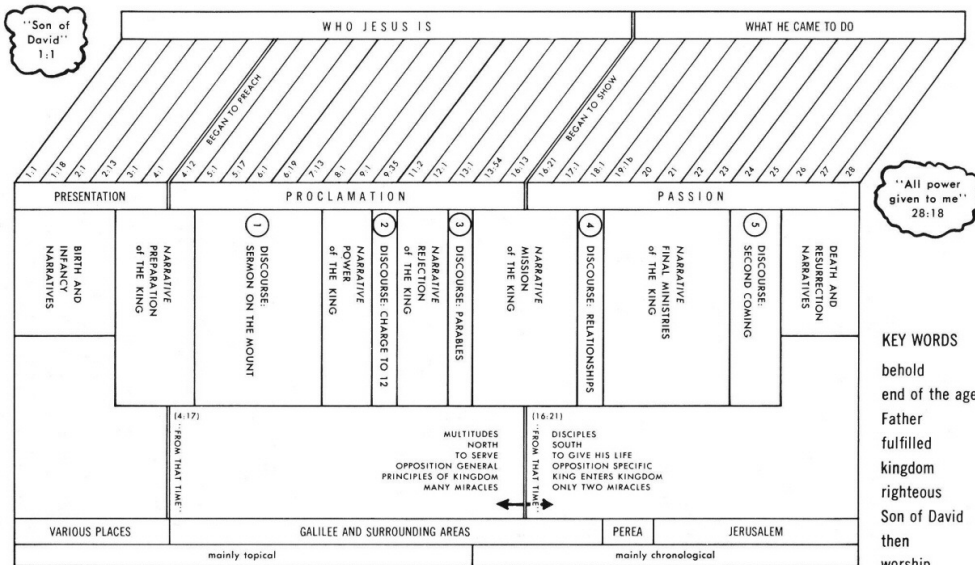
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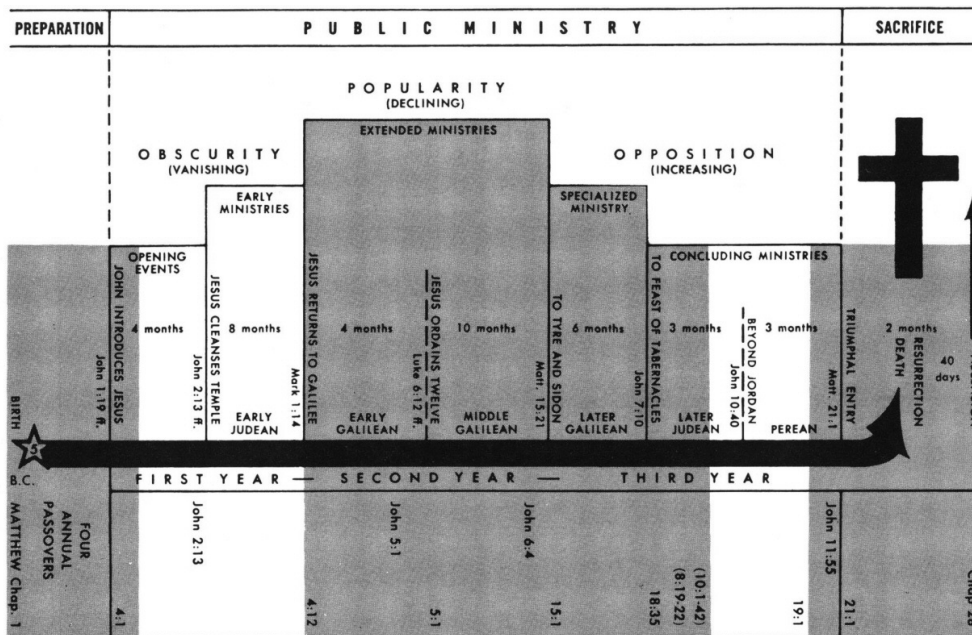
MATTHEW CONTAINS 15 PARABLES 20 MIRACLES KEY VERSES: 1:1 "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." 2:2 "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him."



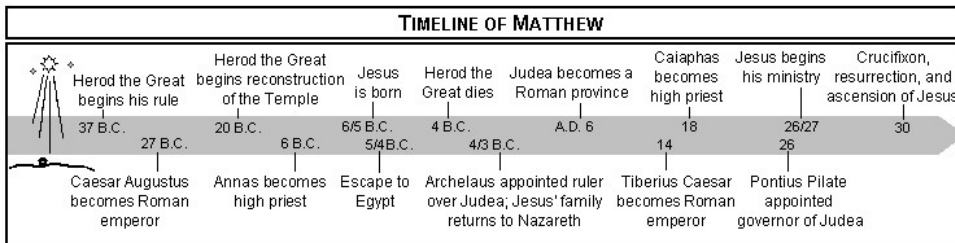
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## THE LIFE OF JESUS AS COVERED

BY MATTHEW (shaded area)



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Source: Borrow [Ryrie Study Bible](#)

**PLEASE NOTE - THIS PAGE IS INCOMPLETE AND IS UNDER CONSTRUCTION - JULY, 2024 EXPECTED TO BE COMPLETED IN 2024**

Matthew 17:1 Six days later Jesus \*took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and \*led them up on a high mountain by themselves.

- after: Luke, taking in both the day of the preceding discourse and that of the transfiguration, as well as the six intermediate ones, says it was eight days after. Mk 9:2-13 Lu 9:28-36
- Peter: Mt 26:37 Mk 5:37 Lu 8:51 2Co 13:1
- an high: 2Pe 1:18

Six days later Jesus \*took with Him Peter and James and John his brother,

James and John his brother - Jesus called them [Boanerges, which means Sons of Thunder](#)

and \*led them up on a high mountain by themselves. See [What is the significance of Mount Tabor in the Bible?](#)

Matthew 17:2 And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light.

- **transfigured:** Lu 9:29 Ro 12:2 Php 2:6,7 \*Gr:
- **his face:** Mt 28:3 Ex 34:29-35 Jn 1:14 17:24 Ac 26:13-15 Rev 1:13-17 10:1 Rev 19:12,13 20:11
- **His garments:** Ps 104:2 Mk 9:3

And He was transfigured ([metamorphoo](#)) before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white

as light.

**NET NOTES** - In 1st century Judaism and in the NT, there was the belief that the righteous get new, glorified bodies in order to enter heaven (1 Cor 15:42–49; 2 Cor 5:1–10). This transformation means the righteous will share the glory of God. One recalls the way Moses shared the Lord's glory after his visit to the mountain in Exod 34. So the disciples saw Jesus transfigured, and they were getting a sneak preview of the great glory that Jesus would have (only his glory is more inherent to him as one who shares in the rule of the kingdom).

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**Transfigured** (3339) **metamorphoo** from **metá** = denotes change of place or condition + **morphoo** = to form from morphe = form, shape referring to the essential form of a thing) has the basic meaning of changing into another form and is the term from which we get metamorphosis, which in biology denotes the amazing change of a lowly worm into a beautiful butterfly. So the change in view here is not a superficial fluctuation of fashion or conduct but a vital change revealing a new life. **Metamorphoo** describes Jesus' **transfiguration** in which His glory shined through His garments so that what Jesus really was on the inside was made manifest to Peter, John and James (Mt 17:2, Mk 9:2)

**Metamorphoo** describes the process by which that on the inside shows forth to the outside such that that everyone can see. In Romans 12:2 it describes an inward renewal of our mind through which our inner spirit is changed into the likeness of Christ.

The verb **morphoo** does **not** refer to what is **outward and transient**, but to what is **inward and real** and thus that which produces an outward expression which proceeds from and is truly representative of one's inward character and nature. Hence on the **Mount of Transfiguration** the glory which was Jesus' essential and eternal inner divine nature, shone outward, for a brief time and to a limited degree. In a similar way, the believer's inner redeemed (divine - 2Pe 1:4-[note](#)) nature is to continually be manifest outwardly in our daily thoughts, words and deeds.

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**QUESTION - [What was the meaning and importance of the transfiguration?](#)**

**ANSWER** - About a week after Jesus plainly told His disciples that He would suffer, be killed, and be raised to life (Luke 9:22), He took Peter, James, and John up a mountain to pray. While praying, His personal appearance was changed into a glorified form, and His clothing became dazzling white. Moses and Elijah appeared and talked with Jesus about His death that would soon take place. Peter, not knowing what he was saying and being very fearful, offered to put up three shelters for them. This is undoubtedly a reference to the booths that were used to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles, when the Israelites dwelt in booths for seven days (Leviticus 23:34–42). Peter was expressing a wish to stay in that place. Then a cloud enveloped them, and a voice spoke from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" (Matthew 17:5).

The cloud lifted, Moses and Elijah had disappeared, and Jesus was alone with His disciples, who were still very much afraid. Jesus warned them not to tell anyone what they had seen until after His resurrection. The three accounts of this event are found in Matthew 17:1–8, Mark 9:2–8, and Luke 9:28–36.

Undoubtedly, the purpose of the transfiguration of Christ into at least a part of His heavenly glory was so that the "inner circle" of His disciples could gain a greater understanding of who Jesus was. Christ underwent a dramatic change in appearance in order that the disciples could behold Him in His glory. The disciples, who had only known Him in His human body, now had a greater realization of the deity of Christ, though they could not fully comprehend it. That gave them the reassurance they needed after hearing the shocking news of His coming death.

Symbolically, the appearance of Moses and Elijah represented the Law and the Prophets. But God's voice from heaven – "Listen to Him!" - clearly showed that the Law and the Prophets must give way to Jesus. The One who is the new and living way is replacing the old – He is the fulfillment of the Law and the countless prophecies in the Old Testament. Also, in His glorified form they saw a preview of His coming glorification and enthronement as King of kings and Lord of lords.

The disciples never forgot what happened that day on the mountain and no doubt this was intended. John wrote in his gospel, "We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only" (John 1:14). Peter also wrote of it, "We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to Him from the Majestic Glory, saying, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased.' We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with Him on the sacred mountain" (2 Peter 1:16-18). Those who witnessed the transfiguration bore witness to it to the other disciples and to countless millions down through the centuries.

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**Related Resources:**

- [What is the Mount of Transfiguration?](#)

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

- behold: Mk 9:4 Lu 9:30,31
- Moses: Mt 11:13,14 De 18:18 34:5,6,10 Lu 24:27,44 Jn 1:17 5:45-47 2Co 3:7-11 Heb 3:1-6
- Elias: Mt 17:10-13 1Ki 17:1 18:36-40 2Ki 2:11-14 Mal 4:5, Elijah, Lu 1:17 9:33 16:16

**And behold ([idou](#)) Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him.**

**Henry Morris - Moses and Elijah** - It is significant that this experience was said by Jesus to be a vision rather than the actual physical presence of Moses and Elijah (Matthew 17:9). Moses was dead, whereas Elijah was still living, having been translated into heaven without dying (Deuteronomy 34:5,6; 2 Kings 2:11). So far as Biblical revelation is concerned, all the souls of the Old Testament saints (except Enoch and Elijah) were still confined in Sheol at this time, and were not released until Christ freed them at His death and resurrection (Ephesians 4:8-10). At that time, "many bodies of the saints which slept arose" (Matthew 27:52), but that great event was still in the future at this time.

**NET NOTES** - Commentators and scholars discuss why Moses and Elijah are present. The most likely explanation is that Moses represents the prophetic office (Acts 3:18–22) and Elijah pictures the presence of the last days (Mal 4:5–6), the prophet of the eschaton (the end times)

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**Behold** ([2400](#)) [idou](#) is the second person singular aorist middle imperative of eidon which means to see, perceive, look at. In the NT **idou** is used as a demonstrative particle that draws attention to what follows. **idou** in the [middle voice](#) means "you yourself look, see, perceive!" The [aorist imperative](#) is a command emphasizing "Do it now! Don't delay!"

In 2Cor 5:17 Paul uses **idou**, to get his reader's attention as he introduces the truth that the one who is now **in Christ** is a qualitatively new person. (see also notes above on "behold")

**Spurgeon** reminds us that "**Behold** is a word of wonder; it is intended to excite admiration. Wherever you see it hung out in Scripture, it is like an ancient sign-board, signifying that there are rich wares within, or like the hands which solid readers have observed in the margin of the older Puritanic books, drawing attention to something particularly worthy of observation." I would add, **behold** is like a divine highlighter, a divine underlining of an especially striking or important text. It says in effect "Listen up, all ye who would be wise in the ways of Jehovah!"

**Matthew 17:4 Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah."**

- **Peter said to Jesus:** Mk 9:5,6 Lu 9:33
- **it is good for us:** Ex 33:18,19 Ps 4:6 16:11 63:1-5 Isa 33:17 Zec 9:17 Jn 14:8,9 Jn 17:24 Php 1:23 1Jn 3:2 Rev 21:23 22:3-5

**Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah"**

**NET NOTES** - Peter apparently wanted to celebrate the feast of Tabernacles or Booths that looked forward to the end and wanted to treat Moses, Elijah, and Jesus as equals by making three shelters (one for each). It was actually a way of expressing honor to Jesus, but the next verse makes it clear that it was not enough honor.

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**QUESTION - [Was it bad that Peter wanted to make three tabernacles for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah \(Matthew 17:4\)?](#)**

**ANSWER** - Sometimes when God shows us something extraordinary, we miss the point entirely. At His [transfiguration](#), Jesus presented His three closest disciples (Peter, James, and John) with a stunning sneak preview of His resplendent glory: "His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus" (Matthew 17:2–3). Ever the impulsive one, Peter jumped into action, saying, "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" (Matthew 17:4, NKJV).

Peter wanted to honor Jesus, Moses, and Elijah by building three tabernacles—sacred shrines—one for each of them. But God interrupted the well-intentioned, albeit misguided, disciple: “While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!’” (Matthew 17:5). Peter had missed the point, and God intended to clear up all confusion.

First and foremost, the disciples needed to understand the superiority of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, far above Moses and Elijah. The presence of Moses and Elijah (who respectively represent the Law and the Prophets) was to signal the arrival of their long-awaited Messiah and the ushering in of the last days. Everything in Israel’s history had been pointing to the time when the Messiah would fulfill the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 5:17; Luke 24:27; Hebrews 1:1–2). God’s command, “Listen to him!” exalted the words of Christ above those of Moses and Elijah. Only Jesus was worthy of worship. The focus is not to be Jesus *and* anyone else; it is to be Jesus alone.

When the three disciples heard God’s voice, they fell to the ground in terror. Jesus calmed their fears, and when they opened their eyes again, Moses and Elijah were gone. Only Jesus stood in their midst, and their focus was back on Him alone (Matthew 17:6–8). As they walked down from the mountain, Jesus instructed Peter, James, and John, “Don’t tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead” (Matthew 17:9).

The news of the transfiguration was reserved for a later time, after the resurrection. If Peter had constructed three tabernacles at the site, keeping the revelation concealed until after the resurrection would have become impossible. And if Jesus’ closest disciples struggled to comprehend the significance of the transfiguration, how much more would others exploit and misunderstand it? Jesus knew the spectacle would only distract from His mission as He prepared to suffer and die on the cross.

Peter, James, and John would later testify boldly about the transfiguration after the resurrection. Peter never forgot seeing the “majestic splendor” of God’s glory with his own eyes, an experience that inspired him to preach confidently (see 2 Peter 1:12–21, NLT). Many years later, John would write, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

Peter wanted to make three tabernacles and stay there for an extended mountaintop experience. He wished to capture God’s presence in an earthly tent. But until the time of the future [millennial kingdom](#), God’s kingdom is a spiritual kingdom, separate from the material things of this world (John 18:36; Romans 14:17).

Peter’s desire to build three tabernacles revealed a common misconception among the Jews, who thought their Messiah would come and reign on earth as a triumphant king and not a suffering servant. Jesus knew His mission (and the mission of His followers) was to deny Himself and take up His cross. Peter would later preach that the Christian path to glory traverses trials and suffering (1 Peter 1:6–8, 11; 1 Peter 4:12–19). [C. H. Spurgeon](#) expresses it beautifully in his daily devotional *Morning and Evening*, “The cross must be carried before the crown can be worn. We must follow our Lord in his humiliation, or we shall never rest with him in glory” (Evening, November 14).

Indeed, the three men who witnessed Christ’s glory would follow in His footsteps. James would die by the sword as the first of the apostles to be martyred for Jesus (Acts 12:1–2). Peter would suffer greatly and eventually give his life for the Lord (John 21:15–19). John would be the last of the three to die, experiencing a life of extreme persecution and exile (Revelation 1:9).

**Matthew 17:5 While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!”**

- behold: Ex 40:34,35 1Ki 8:10-12 Ps 18:10,11 Lu 9:34 Ac 1:9 Rev 1:7
- a voice: Ex 19:19 De 4:11,12 5:22 Job 38:1 Ps 81:7 Jn 5:37 12:28-30 Ac 9:3-6
- This: Mt 3:17 Mk 1:11 9:7 Lu 3:22 9:35 Jn 3:16,35 5:20-23 Eph 1:6 Col 1:13 \*marg: 2Pe 1:16,17
- in whom: Mt 12:18 Isa 42:1,21 Jn 15:9,10
- hear: De 18:15,19 Ac 3:22,23 7:37 Heb 1:1,2 2:1-3 5:9 12:25,26

**While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased ([eudokeo](#)) listen to Him**

**NET NOTES** - This cloud is the cloud of God’s presence and the voice is his as well. Grk “**my beloved Son,**” or “my Son, the beloved [one].” The force of *γαπητός* (*agapētos*) is often “pertaining to one who is the only one of his or her class, but at the same time is particularly loved and cherished” (L&N 58.53; cf. also BDAG 7 s.v. 1). The expression **listen to him** comes from Deut 18:15 and makes two points: 1) Jesus is a prophet like Moses, a leader-prophet, and 2) they have much yet to learn from him.

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**Well-pleased** (take pleasure, be well pleased) (2106) [eudokeo](#) from **eu** = well, good + **dokeo** = to think) means literally to think well of and so to be well pleased, to take pleasure or delight in (This is the sense in which eudokeo is used in He 10:38). The idea is to find satisfaction in something or someone or to view with approval.

To **delight** means to take great pleasure, to give keen enjoyment, to provide a high degree of gratification.

In this regard it is notable that five of the first six uses (the Gospels) refer to the Father's taking pleasure in His Son (in Whom He was "well pleased") (cf. Matt. 3:17; 12:18; 17:5; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22; cp 2Pe 1:17).

A related sense is to be well pleased with some object and thus to like, prefer or approve of (1Th 3:1, 2Th 2:12). Be content, pleased, delighted (2Co 12:10)

**Eudokeo** means to consider something as good and thus worthy of choice (Lk 12:32, 1Cor 1:21, Gal 1:15). To be glad to do. To be willing. The sense is to take pleasure in doing, eg, in Lk 12:32 God expressed His pleasure by His willingness to grant His kingdom to His children. In 1Cor 1:21, God was "well pleased" or willing to save those who believe the Gospel.

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**Matthew 17:6 When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground and were terrified.**

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- Lev 9:24 Jdg 13:20,22 1Ch 21:16 Eze 3:23 43:3 Da 8:17 10:7-9 Da 10:16,17 Ac 22:7 26:14 2Pe 1:18

**When the disciples ([mathetes](#)) heard this, they fell face down to the ground and were terrified**

**NET NOTES** - Grk "they fell down on their faces." BDAG 815 s.v. πίπτω 1.b.α.β. has "fall down, throw oneself to the ground as a sign of devotion, before high-ranking persons or divine beings."

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**Disciples** (3101) [mathetes](#) from [manthano](#) = to learn which Vine says is "from a root *math*, indicating thought accompanied by endeavor". Gives us our English = "*mathematics*" - see [matheteuo](#)) describes a person who learns from another by instruction, whether formal or informal. Another source says mathetes is from from **math**- which speaks of "mental effort that thinks something through" and thus describes is a learner; a follower who learns the doctrines and the lifestyle of the one they follow. Discipleship includes the idea of one who intentionally learns by inquiry and observation (cf [inductive Bible study](#)) and thus **mathetes** is more than a mere pupil. A **mathetes** describes an adherent of a teacher. As discussed below **mathetes** itself has no spiritual connotation, and it is used of superficial followers of Jesus as well as of genuine believers. The Lord calls everyone to grow as a disciple (a learner of Christ; cf. also Mt 11:29,30), one who lives in faith, who lives in and by His Word in the power of the Holy Spirit.

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**Matthew 17:7 And Jesus came to them and touched them and said, "Get up, and do not be afraid."**

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- touched: Da 8:18 9:21 10:10,18 Rev 1:17
- Arise: Lu 24:5 Ac 9:6

**And Jesus came to them and touched them and said, "Get up, and do not be afraid"**

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**Matthew 17:8 And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus Himself alone.**

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- they saw: Mk 9:8 Lu 9:36 Ac 12:10,11

**And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus Himself alone**

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**Matthew 17:9 As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead."**

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- Jesus: Mt 16:20 Mk 8:30 9:9,10 Lu 8:56 9:21,22

- until: Mt 17:23 16:21 Lu 18:33,34 24:46,47

**As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, “Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead**

**Matthew 17:10 And His disciples asked Him, “Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?”**

- Why: Mt 17:3,4 11:14 27:47-49 Mal 4:5,6 Mk 9:11 Jn 1:21,25

**And His disciples asked Him, “Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first**

**Matthew 17:11 And He answered and said, “Elijah is coming and will restore all things;**

- and restore: Mal 4:6 Lu 1:16,17 3:3-14 Ac 3:21

**And He answered and said, “Elijah is coming and will restore all things**

**Matthew 17:12 but I say to you that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.”**

- and they: Mt 11:9-15 21:23-25,32 Mk 9:12,13 11:30-32 Lu 7:33 Jn 1:11 Jn 5:32-36 Ac 13:24-28
- but: Mt 11:2 14:3-10 Mk 6:14-28 Lu 3:19,20 Ac 7:52
- Likewise: Mt 16:21 Isa 53:3-12 Lu 9:21-25 Ac 2:23 3:14,15 4:10

**ut I say to you that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands**

**Matthew 17:13 Then the disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the Baptist.**

- the disciples: Mt 11:14

**Then the disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the Baptist**

**Matthew 17:14 When they came to the crowd, a man came up to Jesus, falling on his knees before Him and saying,**

- when: Mk 9:14-29 Lu 9:37-43
- kneeling: Mk 1:40 10:17 Ac 10:25,26

**When they came to the crowd, a man came up to Jesus, falling on his knees before Him and saying**

**Matthew 17:15 “Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is a lunatic and is very ill; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water.**

- have: Mt 15:22 Mk 5:22,23 9:22 Lu 9:38-42 Jn 4:46,47
- for: Mt 4:24 Mk 9:17,18,20-22
- he is: [Seleniazomai <Strong's G4583>,) from [selene <Strong's G4582>,) the moon, one who was affected with his disorder at the change and full of the moon. This is the case in some kinds of madness and epilepsy. This youth was no doubt epileptic; but it was evidently either produced or taken advantage of by a demon or evil spirit.

- for oftentimes: Mt 8:31,32 Job 1:10-19 2:7 Mk 5:4,5

**Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is a lunatic and is very ill; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water**

**NET NOTES** - Grk "he is moonstruck," possibly meaning "lunatic" (so NAB, NASB), although now the term is generally regarded as referring to some sort of seizure disorder such as epilepsy (L&N 23.169; BDAG 919 s.v. σεληνιαζομαι).

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#### **QUESTION - [Is epilepsy mentioned in the Bible?](#)**

**ANSWER** - An account of a boy with epileptic-like seizures is recorded in three of the four Gospels (Matthew 17:14–18; Mark 9:14–29; Luke 9:38–42). Only in Matthew's account (in the ESV and NKJV) is the word *epileptic* used to describe the boy; the NASB and KJV say "lunatic," based on the original Greek word's meaning of "moonstruck." The NIV says, "He has seizures." In Mark and Luke, the father of the boy states that his son is "possessed by a spirit" and "a spirit seizes him." Comparing the three accounts in the Gospels, the boy's symptoms included sudden screaming, foaming at the mouth, lack of speech, falling, rigidity, and self-harm.

Matthew 17:14–18 says, "When they came to the crowd, a man came up to him and, kneeling before him, said, 'Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and he suffers terribly. For often he falls into the fire, and often into the water. And I brought him to your disciples, and they could not heal him.' 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.' And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him, and the boy was healed instantly" (ESV).

It is important to note that epilepsy was the *father's* assessment of his son's situation. Jesus, Matthew, Mark, and Luke all call it a demon, and Jesus cast it out as He did other demons. The seeming discrepancy in the three biblical accounts is probably due to the fact that the father said a *lot* of things in trying to get Jesus' attention. He was distraught, desperate for help, and at a loss to describe what was happening to his son. The fact that the father speaks of epilepsy in Matthew's account and calls it a "spirit" in the other two Gospels does not create an irreconcilable difference. The father could easily have said all of the above as he described his son's condition. He did not know what was wrong. He only knew that he needed help.

The term *epileptic* is used only twice in the New Testament, in Matthew 17:15 and Matthew 4:24. The word translated "epileptic" comes from the Greek word for "lunatic." In those days, the term could be applied to any type of seizures or behavior that resembled insanity. In New Testament times, people had no way to differentiate between brain disorders and demonic possession. Little was known about the causes or treatment of epilepsy, traumatic brain injury, or dementia, so it is understandable that the father in Matthew 17 would describe his son's behavior as epilepsy. But we know from Jesus' treatment of this boy that the child was in fact demon possessed (Mark 9:26).

However, the Bible does mention epilepsy as a condition separate from demon possession. Matthew 4:24 says, "So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, **epileptics**, and paralytics, and he healed them" (emphasis added). Here epilepsy is listed with other physical ailments, indicating that epilepsy is a medical condition that can cause symptoms similar to demonic possession. Jesus healed epileptics, and He also cast out demons. The two conditions were not synonymous.

Although many inexplicable behaviors that affect the personality can be attributed to demonic oppression, we should never rush to judgment. Demons are still active and can [possess and oppress people](#). Prayer and spiritual warfare can enable us to help those who are oppressed (2 Corinthians 10:4; Ephesians 6:12–17). But brain abnormalities or injury can also affect human behavior and can respond to medical treatment. Jesus always treated the individual, and He rarely healed the same disease in the same way. This shows us that we should also respond to individuals with sensitivity and discernment, using everything at our disposal to help and heal any way we can.

#### **Related Resources:**

- [Can a Christian today perform an exorcism?](#)

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**Matthew 17:16 "I brought him to Your disciples, and they could not cure him."**

- and they: Mt 17:19,20 2Ki 4:29-31 Lu 9:40 Ac 3:16 19:15,16

**I brought him to Your disciples, and they could not cure him**



**Matthew 17:17 And Jesus answered and said, “You unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him here to Me.”**

- O faithless: Mt 6:30 8:26 13:58 16:8 Mk 9:19 16:14 Lu 9:41 24:25 Jn 20:27 Heb 3:16-19
- how long shall I be: Ex 10:3 16:28 Nu 14:11,27 Ps 95:10 Pr 1:22 6:9 Jer 4:14 Ac 13:18

**And Jesus answered and said, “You unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him here to Me**

**NET NOTES** - The rebuke for lack of faith has OT roots: Num 14:27; Deut 32:5, 30; Isa 59:8.

**Matthew 17:18 And Jesus rebuked him, and the demon came out of him, and the boy was cured at once.**

- rebuked: Mt 12:22 Mk 1:34 5:8 9:25-27 Lu 4:35,36,41 8:29 9:42 Ac 16:18 19:13-15
- from: Mt 9:22 15:28 Jn 4:52,53

**And Jesus rebuked him, and the demon came out of him, and the boy was cured at once**

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

- Mk 4:10 9:28

**Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, “Why could we not drive it out**

**NET NOTES** - Grk “coming, the disciples said.” The participle προσελθόντες (proselthontes) has been translated as a finite verb to make the sequence of events clear in English.

**Matthew 17:20 And He \*said to them, “Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you.**

- Because: Mt 17:17 14:30,31 Heb 3:19
- If: Mt 21:21 Mk 11:23 Lu 17:6 1Co 12:9 13:2
- faith: That is, as Bp. Pearce well remarks, a thriving and increasing faith, like a grain of mustard seed, which, from being the least of seeds, becomes the greatest of all herbs.
- a grain: Mt 13:31 Mk 4:31
- nothing: Mk 9:23 Lu 1:37 18:27

**And He \*said to them, “Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you**

**QUESTION** - [Can faith really move mountains?](#)

**ANSWER** - In order to correctly interpret a passage such as Matthew 17:20, we first look at the overall context of the passage. Jesus, along with Peter, James and John, had just come down from the [“mount of transfiguration,”](#) and they encounter a man with a demon-possessed child. The man tells Jesus that he brought his son to Jesus’ disciples, but they couldn’t cast the demon out (recall that Jesus earlier, in Matthew 10:1, gave His disciples the authority to cast out evil spirits). Jesus then chastises them for their lack of faith and then casts the demon out of the boy. When His disciples inquire as to why the demon didn’t obey their command, Jesus replies with the statement in Matthew 17:20. Their faith, He says, is small and weak. If it were the size of even the smallest of the seeds, the mustard bush, they would be able to “move mountains.”

The first thing that needs to be considered is the Bible’s use of literary techniques. The Bible is first and foremost God’s revealed Word; we want to be clear on this point (2 Timothy 3:16). While the Bible is God’s revealed Word, it is revealed to us by way of

language. God condescended—He lowered Himself—to speak to us in ways in which we would understand. Consider a father trying to communicate with his young child. The father has to condescend in order to be understood by the limited intellect and understanding of the child. This is analogous (though not identical) to the way in which God speaks to us.

The Bible employs many forms, or genres, of literature. There is historical narrative, poetry, prophecy, apocalyptic writing, and epistolary literature (to name a few). Among these various literary genres, several literary techniques are used—metaphor, simile, imagery, parable, allusion, irony, personification, paradox, and hyperbole. As readers of the Bible, we must recognize when these techniques are being used so we can properly interpret the meaning. For example, in John 10:7, Jesus says, “[I am the door of the sheep.](#)” How are we to interpret this verse? If we are too literal, we might start looking for a doorknob hidden somewhere on His body. However, if we understand this to be a metaphor, then we can begin to understand His meaning (Jesus is the way of access to eternal life, much like a door is the way of access into a room).

Another thing to consider in biblical interpretation is the context of the passage. More often than not, when we take a single verse out of its native context, we end up misinterpreting the verse. In the context of Matthew 17, Jesus rebukes the disciples for their weak faith and says that even if they had mustard seed-sized faith, they could command the mountain to move. Contextually, the mountain must refer to the demon that was afflicting the man’s son. Jesus tells His disciples that, if their faith was stronger, they could have commanded the demon to leave the boy, and it would be so. This was clearly the case in Matthew 10 when Jesus sent them out to cure diseases, cast out demons, and spread the gospel. Therefore, it is clear from the context that Jesus does not intend to assert that mustard seed-sized faith can literally move mountains. Rather, the expression Jesus uses was a common colloquialism of that day; to a Jew of Jesus’ day, a mountain is a metaphor signifying a seemingly impossible task.

Faith that can move mountains is not meant to imply a faith that can literally move literal mountains. The point Jesus was making is that even a little bit of faith—faith the size of a tiny mustard seed—can overcome mountainous obstacles in our lives.

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#### **QUESTION - [What does it mean to have mustard seed faith?](#)**

**ANSWER** - Faith is so vital to the Christian life that Scripture tells us that, without it, it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). Yet faith is such a powerful gift from God (Ephesians 2:8–9) Christ told His disciples that, with just a tiny measure of it, the size of a mustard seed, they could move mountains. So, what does it mean to have “mustard seed faith”?

We see the reference to “mustard seed faith” twice in Scripture. First, in Matthew 17:14–20, we see Christ’s disciples unable to exorcise a demon from a young boy, even though Jesus had previously given them the authority to do this very thing (Matthew 10:1). When they inquired of Jesus why they were not able to drive the demon out, the Master replied, “Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘move from here to there’ and it will move; Nothing will be impossible for you” (Matthew 17:14–20). Next, in Luke 17:6, Jesus tells His disciples, “If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it will obey you.” By using the uncommonly small mustard seed as an example, Jesus is speaking figuratively about the incalculable power of God when unleashed in the lives of those with true faith.

We know that this statement about moving mountains and uprooting trees by faith is not to be taken literally. The key to understanding the passages is the nature of faith, which is a gift from God. The power of faith reflects the omnipotent nature of the God who bestows faith on His own. The mustard seed is one of the tiniest seeds found in the Middle East, so the conclusion is that the amount of faith needed to do great things is very small indeed. Just as in the parable of the mustard seed (Matthew 13:31–32), Jesus uses rhetorical hyperbole to make the point that little is much when it comes from God. The mustard seed in the parable grows to be a huge tree, representing the tiny beginnings of Christianity when just a few disciples began to preach and teach the gospel. Eventually, the kingdom grew to huge proportions, encompassing the entire world and spreading over centuries.

So, too, does the tiniest bit of faith, when it is true faith from God, grow to immense proportions in the lives of believers and spreading out to influence all they come into contact with. One has only to read histories of the great men of the faith, such as Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs*, to know that superhuman feats were performed by those whose faith was, at one time, only the size of a mustard seed.

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#### **Matthew 17:21 [“But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.”]**

- this: Mt 12:45
- but: 1Ki 17:20,21 Da 9:3 Mk 9:29 Ac 13:2,3 14:23 1Co 7:5 2Co 11:27 Eph 6:18

## Related Passages:

Mark 9:29 And He said to them, "This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer."

**["But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."]**

**Matthew 17:22 And while they were gathering together in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men;**

- The Son: Mt 16:21 20:17,18 Mk 8:31 9:30,31 10:33,34 Lu 9:22,44 18:31-34 Lu 24:6,7,26,46
- betrayed: Mt 24:10 26:16,46 Ac 7:52 1Co 11:23

**And while they were gathering together in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men**

**NET NOTES** - The plural Greek term *ανθρώπων* (*anthrōpōn*) is considered by some to be used here in a generic sense, referring to both men and women (cf. NRSV "into human hands"; TEV, CEV "to people"). However, because this can be taken as a specific reference to the group responsible for Jesus' arrest, where it is unlikely women were present (cf. Matt 26:47–56; Mark 14:43–52; Luke 22:47–53; John 18:2–12), the word "men" has been retained in the translation. There may also be a slight wordplay with "the Son of Man" earlier in the verse.

## Related Resource:

- [How many times did Jesus predict His death?](#)

**Matthew 17:23 and they will kill Him, and He will be raised on the third day." And they were deeply grieved.**

- they shall: Ps 22:15,22-31 Isa 53:7,10-12 Da 9:26 Zec 13:7
- the third: Ps 16:10 Jn 2:19 Ac 2:23-31 1Co 15:3,4
- And they were: Jn 16:6,20-22

**and they will kill Him, and He will be raised on the third day." And they were deeply grieved**

**Matthew 17:24 When they came to Capernaum, those who collected the two-drachma tax came to Peter and said, "Does your teacher not pay the two-drachma tax?"**

- when: Mk 9:33
- tribute: "Gr. didrachma, in value fifteen pence." Ex 30:13 38:26 This tribute seems to have been the half shekel which every male among the Jews paid yearly for the support of the temple, and which was continued by them, wherever dispersed, till after the time of Vespasian.

**When they came to Capernaum, those who collected the two-drachma tax came to Peter and said, "Does your teacher not pay the two-drachma tax**

**NET NOTES** - Grk "Collectors of the double drachma." This is a case of metonymy, where the coin formerly used to pay the tax (the double drachma coin, or *διδραχμον* [*didrachmon*]) was put for the tax itself (cf. BDAG 241 s.v.). Even though this coin was no longer in circulation in NT times and other coins were used to pay the tax, the name for the coin was still used to refer to the tax itself. The temple **tax** refers to the half-shekel tax paid annually by male Jews to support the temple (Exod 30:13–16).

**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 the kings of the earth collect customs or poll-tax, from their sons or from strangers?"**

- Yes: Mt 3:15 22:21 Ro 13:6,7
- of their: 1Sa 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 the kings of the earth collect customs or poll-tax, from their sons or from strangers**

**NET NOTES** - The phrase their sons may mean “their citizens,” but the term “sons” has been retained here in order to preserve the implicit comparison between the Father and his Son, Jesus.

**Matthew 17:26 When Peter said, “From strangers,” Jesus said to him, “Then the sons are exempt.**

- Mt 17:17

**When Peter said, “From strangers,” Jesus said to him, “Then the sons are exempt.**

**Matthew 17:27 “However, so that we do not offend them, go to the sea and throw in 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 you and Me.”**

- lest: Mt 15:12-14 Ro 14:21 15:1-3 1Co 8:9,13 9:19-22 10:32,33 2Co 6:3 1Th 5:22 Tit 2:7,8
- and take: Ge 1:28 1Ki 17:4 Ps 8:8 Jon 1:17 2:10 Heb 2:7,8
- a piece of money: "Or, a stater, half an ounce of silver, value 2s. 6d., after 5s. the ounce."
- that take: 2Co 8:9 Jas 2:5

**However, so that we do not offend them, go to the sea and throw in 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 you and Me**

**NET NOTES** - The four drachma coin was a stater (στατήρ, statēr), a silver coin worth four drachmas. One drachma was equivalent to one denarius, the standard pay for a day’s labor (L&N 6.80).

#### **QUESTION - [What is the temple tax?](#)**

**ANSWER** - The temple tax was required of Jewish males over age 20, and the money was used for the upkeep and maintenance of the temple. In Exodus 30:13–16, God told Moses to collect this tax at the time of the census taken in the wilderness. In 2 Kings 12:5–17 and Nehemiah 10:32–33, it seems the temple tax was paid annually, not just during a census. This half-shekel tax wasn’t a large sum of money, but roughly equivalent to two days’ wages. According to the tractate *Shekalim* in the [Talmud](#), the temple tax was collected during one of the these Jewish festivals: Passover, Pentecost, or Tabernacles.

The temple tax is also mentioned in the New Testament in Matthew 17:24–27 when Peter was confronted by the religious leaders collecting the tax. The leaders asked Peter, “Doesn’t your teacher pay the temple tax?” The leaders may have been attempting to prove Jesus’ disloyalty to the temple or His violation of the Law. Peter affirmed that Jesus did pay the temple tax. When Peter came into the house where Jesus was, the Lord asked him, “From whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes—from their own children or from others?” Peter replied that kings collect from others because their children are exempt. Jesus’ point was that, since the temple was His Father’s house, Jesus was exempt. Why should the Son of God pay a tax to His own Father?

Even though Jesus, as the Son of God, and His disciples were exempt from paying the temple tax, they would pay the tax in order to not offend the Jewish leaders (Matthew 17:27). Jesus then instructs Peter to throw out a fishing line, which would result in a catch. When Peter opened the fish’s mouth, he found a coin that happened to be the correct amount for the temple tax for him and Jesus.

Jesus used the question about the temple tax to teach a lesson. Christians are free, but they must sometimes relinquish their rights in order to uphold their witness and not cause others to stumble. True freedom is not serving ourselves but others (see Galatians 5:13).