

## Matthew 17

There is no controversy between Jesus and the religious leaders in this chapter. Protestants who are committed to the doctrine of premillennialism (the idea that Jesus will return to earth and establish a literal reign on earth) argue that 16:28 (“the Son of Man coming in His kingdom”) refers to this chapter, 17:1-8. However, this paragraph does not refer to the kingdom, to Christ’s reign, or to His throne. Rather, the Transfiguration is about Jesus’ deity. He has predicted His death, burial, and resurrection in plain terms (16:21), which the apostles misunderstand. He will predict His death and resurrection again in this chapter (17:22-23). In between, Jesus’ appearance is changed, showing His true, divine nature. Even if He is killed, He has the ability to rise again.

Jesus will also cast out yet another demon (17:14-20) and He will illustrate His divine nature when it comes to paying the tax for the temple (17:24-27).

### TRANSLATION - 17:1-8:

**1** And after six days, Jesus took along Peter and James and John, his brother, and took them into a high mountain alone. **2** And He was transformed before them, and His face shone as the sun, and His garments became white as the light. **3** And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, speaking together with Him. **4** And after answering, Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, good it is for us here to be. If You desire, I will make here three tents, to You one and to Moses one and to Elijah one.”

**5** Yet while he was speaking, behold a shining cloud overshadowed them, and behold a voice out of the cloud says, “This is My Son, the Beloved One, in Whom I am pleased. Listen to Him.”

**6** And after hearing, the disciples fell on their faces and feared greatly. **7** And Jesus approached and, after touching them, said, “Arise and do not be afraid.” **8** And after lifting their eyes, no one they saw except Him, Jesus, alone.

### GREEK WORDS:

“To take” (ver. 1), to “lead or to bring” is only used here in Matthew, out of 10 occurrences. For Peter and James, see at 4:18, 21. “John” is found at 3:1, 4 and 4:21. “To transform” (ver. 2) is used here, Mark 9:2; Rom. 12:2; and 2 Cor. 3:18. The Greek word gives us the English word *metamorphosis*. “To shine” was used at 5:15-16. “White” was used at 5:36. “To appear” (ver. 3) is used 113 times, first at 5:8. “Moses” was first mentioned by Matthew at 8:4. He will be mentioned 7 times in Matthew: 8:4; 17:3-4; 19:7-8; 22:24; 23:2. “Elijah” is mentioned 29 times in the NT, 9 times in Matthew: 11:14; 16:14; 17:3-4, 10-12; 27:47, 49.

“Tents” (ver. 4) was a tent for the purpose of worship or a temporary home during the Feast of Tabernacles. It is used here only in Matthew; it is used 20 times in the NT. “Cloud” (ver. 5) is found here first in Matthew; again only at 24:30; 26:64. It is used 25 times in the NT. “Shining” is used 5 times: Matt. 6:22; 17:5; Luke 11:34, 36. “To overshadow” is used 5 times: here; Mark 9:7; Luke 1:35; 9:34; Acts 5:15. “Beloved” was first used at 3:17. “To be pleased” was used first at 3:17; 12:18.

“Face” (ver. 6) was first seen 6:16-17. “To fear” was first seen at 1:20; 2:22; 9:8. The adverb “greatly” was used first at 2:10. It is used 11 times in the NT. “To touch” (ver. 7) was first seen at 8:3, 15. “To lift” (ver. 8) is used only here in Matthew, out of 19 uses.

### PARALLELS:

This event is found also in Mark 9:2-13; Luke 9:28-36.

### OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

The cloud is reminiscent of the presence of Jehovah God in the OT, particularly in passages such as Exodus 24:16-17; Ezek. 1:4; 10:4. Elijah did not die; he was taken to heaven in a chariot (2 Kings 2:11). Moses died but he was buried by God and no one knew where

(Deut. 34:6). God's statement about His Son is based on Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1. The command to "listen" to Him is based on Deut. 18:15-19.

#### ARCHAEOLOGY:

The "high mountain" is not identified in the text and cannot be located today.

#### COMMENTS:

The "six days" from the prior discussion (17:1) simply attaches this event to the prior discussion. Luke writes that it was "some eight days" (9:28) later, which is not a contradiction. Both are different ways of saying "about a week." For this event, Jesus did not take all twelve apostles (we do not know why), but only Peter, James, and John (He took them, also, to Jairus' house: Luke 8:41-42, 51-56; and the Garden in Matthew 26:36-45). They went into a "high mountain" and Jesus' appearance changed before their eyes. Matthew explains what happened: His face shone as bright as the sun and His clothing became white as the light. Apparently what the men were seeing was Christ's divine nature showing through His humanity.

Suddenly, the great lawgiver, Moses, and the great prophet, Elijah, appeared, speaking to Jesus (about His coming death, Luke 9:31). Peter spoke up and offered for the three apostles to build shelters for each of these three. Peter did not grasp the significance of the event and apparently said the first thing that came to his mind! We do not know nor understand what Peter had in mind for these shelters, but apparently this thought suggested an equality among the three men.

These words were still in his mouth when a cloud from the Father engulfed the three men and a voice spoke from heaven, as it did at Jesus' baptism (3:17), identifying the nature of Jesus: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him." The apostles were afraid at the voice and the event and fell on their faces, extremely afraid. Moses and Elijah had disappeared when Jesus came to them, touched them reassuringly, and told them to arise and not to fear. When the apostles opened their eyes, they saw no one except the Son of God.

#### APPLICATION:

This event emphasized to the apostles the true, divine nature of Jesus Christ. But the most important purpose of the experience was to impress on their minds that Moses would not hold authority in the new kingdom nor would Elijah. Jesus was to have all authority and His teachings were to take prime importance in the preaching and teaching of the apostles. In the same way, the teaching of Jesus Christ ought to be the center and the foundation of the lives of individual Christians as well as the church itself (1 Tim. 3:15; Heb. 1:1-2). No one has authority to loose or bind on the church or Christians except Jesus Christ. By the same reasoning, everyone needs to hear and submit to the authority of Christ and to His teachings (Matt. 28:18). Peter refers to this event in 2 Peter 1:16.

The fulness of the Godhead dwelt in Jesus Christ (Col. 2:9). Therefore, He expressed the radiance of Jehovah God: Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3. This was the divine glory of the Son which He had before He came to earth: John 1:14; 17:5; Phil. 2:6-7.

Mankind must listen to and obey Jesus Christ if they desire to be saved from their sins: Heb. 5:8-9; 2 Cor. 5:10; John 12:48.

#### TRANSLATION - 17:9-13:

**9** And after their coming down from the mountain, Jesus instructed them saying, "To no one tell the vision until when the Son of Man from the dead is raised." **10** And the disciples asked Him saying, "Why, therefore, do the scribes say that Elijah it is necessary to come first?" **11** And after answering, He said, "Elijah did come and he restored all things. **12** And I say to you that Elijah already came and they did not recognize him but did in him whatever they desired; thus also the Son of Man is about to suffer by them." **13** At that time, the disciples understood that concerning John the baptist He spoke to them.

### GREEK WORDS:

“To instruct” (ver. 9) also means to “command” or to “order.” It was used at 4:6. It will be used again at 19:7; 28:20. This is the only use of the noun “vision” in Matthew or the Gospels. It is used 11 more times, all in the book of Acts. Here, it refers to something that is seen, not necessarily only in the mind. On “scribes” (ver. 10), see at 2:4. “Elijah” was used at 11:14 (see 17:3-4). “To restore” (ver. 11) was used at 12:13. After 17:11, it is used at Mark 3:5; 8:25; 9:12; Luke 6:10; Acts 1:6; Heb. 13:19. “To recognize” (ver. 12) or to “know fully” was first used at 7:16, 20; 11:27. “To suffer” was used at 16:21. “To understand” (ver. 13) was first used at 13:13-15, 19, 23, 51. For the phrase “the baptist,” see at 3:1.

### OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

Malachi predicted the coming of Elijah (4:5-6).

### COMMENTS:

As they descend the mountain after that unique experience, Jesus again commands His apostles not to tell anyone what they had seen, until after the Son of Man is risen from the dead. It is easy for us, from our perspective, to understand why. They could not completely understand what the Transfiguration meant until they could consider it in the light of the resurrection of Christ. Until this point, they’ve only been told about the resurrection. They had not seen it.

Yet, Jesus’ urge to silence stirred a question in their minds. They had seen Elijah with Jesus on the mountain and the prophets (Mal. 4:6), interpreted correctly by the scribes, said Elijah would precede the Messiah. Since they saw Elijah, what did that mean? Jesus clarified for them that Elijah had, in fact, come and the Jews did not recognize him, but did to him (“in” him) whatever they desired, including putting him to death. Similarly, Jesus predicted the Son of Man would also suffer at the hands of the Jews.

Understanding finally dawned on the apostles that Jesus had been speaking about John the baptist as “Elijah,” which is what He had plainly told them in Matthew 11:14. Elijah did “restore” all things in the sense that he prepared the Jews’ hearts for the reception of the Messiah; see Luke 1:15-17.

### APPLICATION:

It is not unusual for someone to be slow to understand certain biblical concepts. Jesus told His apostles in John 16:12 that He had more things to teach them, but they could not grasp them at that point. When the Holy Spirit came over them, they would understand better and more fully (John 16:13). The Hebrew writer states that some Christians were too shallow in their understanding and needed to grow more in their understanding (5:11-14). Peter will challenge Christians to grow in their knowledge (2 Peter 3:18). There is no text, contrary to the teaching of those who hold the doctrine of premillennialism, that Elijah will come again, physically, to earth. That idea is based on a perverted interpretation of Revelation 11:3-6.

### TRANSLATION - 17:14-20:

**14** And after coming to the crowd, there met Him a man kneeling to Him **15** and saying, “Lord, have mercy on my son, because he is epileptic and suffers awfully; for often he falls into the fire and often into the water. **16** And I brought him to Your disciples and they were not able him to heal.”

**17** And after answering, Jesus said, “O unfaithful generation and having become perverted, until when with you will I be? Until when will I endure you? Bring to Me him here.” **18** And Jesus rebuked him and the demon came out from him and the child was healed from that hour.

**19** At that time, after approaching Jesus alone, the disciples said, “Why were we not able to cast him out?” **20** And He said to them, “Because of your little faith.” For truly I say to

you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard, you will say to this mountain, 'Be removed from here,' and it will be removed. And nothing will be impossible to you."

#### GREEK WORDS:

"To kneel" (ver. 14) is used only here; 27:29; Mark 1:40; 10:17. "To have mercy" (ver. 15) is found first at 5:7; 9:27. To "be epileptic" is used only twice: 4:24; 17:15. "To suffer" was first seen at 16:21. "Fire" was seen first at 3:10-12. "Water" was first seen at 3:11, 16. "To bring" (ver. 16) was used first at 2:11; 4:24. "To heal" is used extensively in Matthew (16 times), after 4:23-24.

"Unfaithful" (ver. 17) is used here only in Matthew; it is used 23 times. It has the same form as the word "atheist," with the word for "God" preceded by the negative "a." This word, then, is "unfaith." "To be perverted" or to "be corrupt" is used only here in Matthew; it is also used at Luke 9:41; 23:2; Acts 13:8, 10; 20:30; Phil. 2:15. "To bring" is used first at 14:11, 18.

"To rebuke" (ver. 18) was first used at 8:26. "To come out" was used first at 2:6. "Demon" was first used at 7:22; it is found 63 times in the NT, "To heal" was used first at 4:23-24. "Child" was used first at 2:16. It can be understood as a servant (see 8:6, 8); here, it refers to a child as it is a synonym for "son" (ver. 15).

"To cast out" (ver. 19) was first seen at 7:4-5, 22. "To be removed" (ver. 20) was first seen at 8:34; 11:1; 12:9; 15:29. "To be impossible" is used only here and Luke 1:37.

#### GREEK GRAMMAR:

The verb "to become perverted" (ver. 17) is in the perfect tense, indicating something happened in the past and its effect is still felt.

#### PARALLELS:

This passage has its parallels in Mark 9:14-29; Luke 9:37-43.

#### OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

The reference to Jesus' generation being "unfaithful" and "perverted" reflects Moses' view of his own generation: Deuteronomy 32:5, 20.

#### ARCHAEOLOGY:

Verse 21 is missing in some manuscripts. Perhaps scribes added it here based on its appearance in Mark 9:29. "Fasting" appears to have been added by later Christian scribes.

#### COMMENTS:

This event is yet another confrontation between Jesus and the Adversary and his demonic servants. The first exorcism is found in Matthew 8:28-34; see comments there. This occurrence is unique in a few ways. While Jesus, Peter, James, and John were on the mountain for the Transfiguration, a father whose son was possessed by a demon, brought the boy to the other apostles so they would cast it out. They could not. The father waited until he could plead with Jesus for healing.

The father called on Jesus to have mercy on his son, because he was "epileptic." The Greek word is related to the word for "moon" because epilepsy was apparently believed to be connected, in some way, with the moon and / or its phases. In this specific case, demon possession was the cause of the illness. The boy suffered greatly. As a result of the demon possession, the boy frequently fell into fires or into water. The text does not indicate if this behavior was a side effect of the demon possession or if the demon was actually trying to harm or kill the boy.

Jesus rebukes His apostles and His audience as "unfaithful" or "faithless" or "unbelieving." In apparent exasperation, Jesus asked, "How long will I be with you? How long will I endure you?" The apostles and the crowds saw the evidence of Jesus' power, but too often they refused or neglected to draw the proper conclusion from the evidence: He is the Son of God. Jesus called for the boy to be brought. Once the demon was in His presence, Jesus

rebuked the demon and it came out of the boy and the boy was immediately healed of all the results of that demon possession. This will be the last exorcism recorded by Matthew.

Confused by their inability to cure the boy, when they were alone with Jesus, they asked why they were not able. Jesus responded that it was because of their little or “weak” faith. Emphasizing His next point, Jesus states that if they had or have faith as small as a grain of mustard seed, they would be able to remove mountains. In short, Jesus promised, “Nothing is impossible for you.”

#### APPLICATION:

While it is important to recognize, from this event, the power Jesus has over Satan and his demons (see chapters 8 and 12 for other exorcisms and comments there), the main point here is the apostles’ inability to cast out spirits. They had been given power to do this back in 10:8 and they had already done that some (Luke 10:17). We do not know how, but their lack of trust in Jesus Christ was their problem. Perhaps there was something unusual about this demon-possession that unsettled their faith. “To move mountains” is a proverb for accomplishing something that is perceived to be impossible (Isa. 40:4; 49:11; 54:10). Jesus does not literally mean that His followers can perform great feats of skill with their faith. He does challenge us to put into action the faith that we have. Only then can it grow.

#### TRANSLATION - 17:22-23:

**22** And they were gathered together in Galilee, Jesus said to them, “The Son of Man is about to be handed over into the hands of men, **23** And they will kill Him and on the third day, He will be raised.” And they grieved greatly.

#### GREEK WORDS:

“To be handed over” (ver. 22) was used first at 4:12; 5:25. “To be killed” (ver. 23) was used first at 10:28. “To rise” or to “be raised” was used first at 1:24; 2:13-14, 20-21. “To grieve” was used first at 14:9. “Greatly” was seen above at verse 6. It was used first at 2:10.

#### PARALLELS:

This prediction is paralleled in Mark 9:30-32; Luke 9:43-45. This is the second of three predictions of Jesus’ death in Matthew: 16:21; 20:17-19.

#### OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

The idea of God’s servant who suffers for others, found in Isaiah 53, is behind the suffering of Christ. See Acts 8:32-35.

#### ARCHAEOLOGY:

“Galilee” (ver. 22) was first seen at 2:22.

#### COMMENTS:

Once Jesus and His apostles were assembled together again back in Galilee, Jesus, for the second time (see 16:21), predicts His coming death and resurrection. Jesus would be “handed over,” both by the Jews (and specifically Judas; this verb is used for “betray”) and by God Himself (see Acts 2:23; Rom. 8:32). They would kill Him, but on the third day, He would rise. In the first prediction, Peter castigated Jesus for suggesting such (16:22-23). This time, the apostles all grieved greatly. Apparently they understood the idea of “being killed,” but they did not grasp the idea of “resurrection.”

#### APPLICATION:

See comments at 16:21 also. For Jesus to predict His death, burial, and resurrection is to show that He was a prophet. Of course, He was more than a prophet, but He knew what was going to happen. He also knew *how* He would be killed (John 12:32-33). The Jews stoned

to death (see Acts 7:58-59); the Romans crucified. Yet, Jesus was not in controversy with the Romans.

#### TRANSLATION - 17:24-27:

**24** And after their coming into Capernaum, there came those the double-drachma collecting, to Peter and said, “Your teacher, does He pay the double-drachma?” **25** He said, “Yes.” And after coming into the house, Jesus anticipated him saying, “What do you think, Simon? The kings of the earth, from whom do they collect the customs or poll tax? From their sons or from the others?”

**26** And after saying, “From the others,” Jesus was saying to him, “As a result indeed, free are the sons. **27** but in order that they might not be offended, go to the sea. Cast a fishhook and the rising first fish, take. And after opening its mouth, you will find a statera. That, after taking, give to them for My and your benefit.”

#### GREEK WORDS:

“Teacher” (ver. 24) was first seen at 8:19. “Drachma” is used only here in the NT. The word is used in the plural, perhaps for Jesus and Peter. “To tax” (the verb) is used 28 times, first at 7:28 which the connotation of “to finish.” The noun, used in verse 25, was used first at 10:22, with the meaning of “end.” “Poll tax” is used here; 22:17, 19; Mark 12:14. “Others” is used 14 times in the NT; only here in Matthew.

“Free” (ver. 26) is used 23 times in the NT; only here in Matthew. “To offend” was used first at 5:29-30. “Fishhook” (ver. 27) is used only here in the NT. “Fish” was used first at 7:10. “Statera” is used only here in the NT.

#### GREEK GRAMMAR:

“Was saying” (ver. 26) is in the imperfect tense, denoting an action occurring continuously in the past.

#### ARCHAEOLOGY:

“Capernaum” (ver. 24) was first mentioned at 4:13. It has not been mentioned since 11:23. Jesus did much of His preaching and teaching in this area. A “drachma” is a Roman coin. It was roughly equivalent to a denarius, a day’s wage. Two per person annually were used to pay for upkeep for the temple in Jerusalem (see Exo. 30:11-16; 38:25-26; Neh. 10:32-33; 2 Chron. 24:6, 9). After the fall of Jerusalem in A. D. 70, the tax went to maintain the pagan temple, of Jupiter Capitolinus, in Jerusalem. “Statera” was a Roman coin, worth four drachmas. The collection of this tax occurred about a month before Passover. It appears this is a year before Jesus is crucified. The “tax” and “custom” summarize all types of taxes.

#### COMMENTS:

Finally, Jesus returns to Capernaum. Soon afterward, tax collectors come to Peter to ask if their Teacher pays this specific tax. The form of the question suggests a “yes” answer, which is how Peter responds. We do not know if Jesus, in fact paid the tax before or not. Some scholars believe He did and only says now that He does not have to, only because He has clearly shown, through the Transfiguration, that He is the Son of God.

Once Peter returned to the house, Jesus “anticipates” him, asking His question before Peter has an opportunity to speak. Jesus asked His question in general terms: From whom do the kings of the earth collect taxes or customs? Did they collect such taxes from their own children or from others (non-family members). No doubt confused, Peter responds, “From others.” Kings did not tax their own families!

That being true, Jesus responds that the children are free! Jesus is the Son of God, which Peter has confessed in Matthew 16:16. If so, then He does not have to pay to support the temple (see Luke 2:49). Yet, in order not to offend others and create a scandal, Jesus wanted Peter to pay the tax. To accomplish this, Jesus predicted the finding of a coin in the

mouth of a fish. This is the only time a fishhook is mentioned in the Scriptures; normally the net is mentioned. But Jesus only needs one fish on this occasion. In the fish's mouth, Peter would find a "statera," which would be enough to pay the temple tax for Jesus and for Peter. Matthew does not record if Peter fulfilled the Lord's mission. We presume He did.

#### APPLICATION:

Jesus is controlling His schedule as much as it is within His power. He has told His apostles not to share the message of the Transfiguration (17:9). Earlier, He had told His apostles not to tell anyone that He was the Messiah (16:20). This event is recorded to illustrate this same principle. Jesus does not want to stir up trouble before it is time for His crucifixion. He is free from paying the temple tax since He is God's Son, but in order to avoid offending the Jews too early, Jesus does something He is not obligated to do: pay a tax. The next chapter of Matthew will focus on avoiding offending others. This event is also an implicit acknowledgment by Christ that He is the King's Son (Heb. 3:6).

Paul will emphasize that Christians might need to forfeit their rights in the interest of maintaining a relationship with fellow Christians: Romans 14:13-23; 1 Corinthians 8:9-9:1, 19-23; 10:29-33. The NT writers also require Christians to pay taxes to the civil government: Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17.