

Matthew 17a

Six days later where did Jesus go and who did He take with Him (v. 1)? He went to a high mountain top with Peter, James, and John..... they were Jesus' handpicked inner circle of disciples (cf. 26:37; Mark 5:37). They were evidently the best prepared and most receptive of the Twelve to receive this revelation.¹

What happened to Jesus when He got to the mountain top (v. 2)? Jesus underwent a metamorphosis. The Greek word that Matthew used is *metamorphoo*, meaning "to transform or change in form." It was not just His appearance that changed, but His essential form became different: He was transfigured. Probably Jesus assumed His post-resurrection body that was similar to, but somewhat different from, His pre-resurrection body (cf. 2 Peter 1:16-18; Revelation 1:16).²

This was a revelation of Jesus' glory. Up to now, His glory had been veiled in a body of flesh. But now His face and clothes became radiant like the sun and dazzling bright, because they radiated God's glory (cf. Exodus 34:29-30) and were a visible manifestation of His deity, The scene was a preview of what the Lord Jesus will be like when He comes back to set up His kingdom.³

Who else appeared with Him (v. 3)? Moses and Elijah appeared on the mountain in some visible form and talked with Jesus.....thus demonstrating unequivocally that there is conscious life after death.

Why Moses and Elijah? The scriptures don't tell us. Perhaps because Moses established the Mosaic covenant, under which Israel proceeded to live, and Elijah was arguably the greatest of the Old Testament prophets—because of his role in turning Israel back to God after their worst apostasy, i.e., Baal worship.⁴

What did Peter volunteer to do (v. 4)? Peter was deeply moved by the occasion; he had a real sense of history. Wanting to capture the splendor, he rashly suggested erecting three memorial tabernacles or booths—one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.⁵

The "tabernacles" that Peter suggested erecting were temporary structures that the Jews pitched for the Feast of Tabernacles every year. This was a seven-day feast that looked forward to the time when Israel would dwell in permanent peace and rest in the Promised Land (Leviticus 23:42-43).⁶

What happened while Peter was still speaking (v. 5)? God the Father covered them all with a brightly glowing cloud, then announced, *"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"* (cf. 3:17).

This authentication of the Son of God by the voice of God carried great significance for the disciples. Years later, when Peter wrote his second epistle, he referred to this event (2 Peter 1:16-18).

When the disciples heard the voice, what did they do (v. 6)? Stunned by the glory cloud and by the voice of God, this authentication of Jesus by the Father caused the terrified disciples to fall on their faces.⁷

When people see the glory of God revealed, and realize that they are in His presence, they feel terror. The Transfiguration was mainly for the disciples' benefit. Jesus brought the three disciples to the mountaintop, the Transfiguration happened before them, and the voice spoke to them. The disciples did not understand the significance of all that they saw immediately. However, it was a revelation that God continued to help them understand, especially after the Resurrection (cf. 2 Peter 1:16-19).⁸

What did Jesus do (v. 7)? He touched them and told them to get up and to not be afraid.

When the disciples looked up what did they see (v. 8)? When the Lord Himself told the disciples to get up ... they saw no one except Jesus, for Moses and Elijah had departed.

What was the purpose of the transfiguration? It confirmed several vital facts. One of these was the reality of a future kingdom. The very fact that the transfiguration took place attests to this. The presence of Old Testament saints on earth with Christ in a glorified state is the greatest possible verification of the kingdom promises in the Old Testament.⁹

What directions did Jesus give to the disciples (v. 9)? As this small group descended from the mountain, Jesus commanded the disciples to be silent about what they had seen until He had risen from the dead. The Jews, overanxious for anyone who might liberate them from the Roman yoke, would have welcomed Him to save them from *Rome*, but they did not want Him as a Savior from *sin*. For all practical purposes, Israel had rejected her Messiah, and it was useless to tell the Jews of this vision of Messianic glory. After the resurrection, the message would be proclaimed worldwide.¹⁰

What question did the disciples ask Jesus (v. 10)? The disciples had just seen a preview of Christ's coming in power and glory. But His forerunner had not appeared. Malachi had prophesied that Elijah must come prior to Messiah's advent (Malachi 4:5-6), so His disciples asked Jesus about this.

Elijah was prophesied to come and turn the hearts of the people back to God before Messiah appeared (Malachi 4:5-6). If that repentance happened, how could Jesus die at the hands of Israel's leaders (16:21)? The disciples were struggling to understand how Messiah's death could fit into what they believed about the forerunner's ministry.¹¹

How did Jesus reply to the disciples' question (vv. 11-12)? The Lord agreed that indeed Elijah had to come first as a reformer, but He explained that Elijah had already come. Obviously He was referring to John the Baptist (v. 14). John was not Elijah (John 1:21), but had come "in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1:17). Had Israel accepted John and his message, he would have fulfilled the role prophesied of Elijah (Matthew 11:14). But the nation did not recognize the significance of John's mission, and they treated him as they pleased. John's death was an advance token of what they would do to the Son of Man. They rejected the forerunner; they would also reject the King. When Jesus explained this, the disciples realized He was referring to John the Baptist.¹²

¹ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Matthew, 2025 Edition (published by Sonic Light), 453.

² Ibid., 454.

³ William MacDonald, Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1269.

⁴ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Matthew, 2025 Edition (published by Sonic Light), 455.

⁵ William MacDonald, Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1270.

⁶ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Matthew, 2025 Edition (published by Sonic Light), 456.

⁷ Louis A. Barbieri Jr., "Matthew," The Bible Knowledge Commentary: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Victor Books, 1985), 60.

⁸ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Matthew, 2025 Edition (published by Sonic Light), 458.

⁹ Ibid., 459.

¹⁰ William MacDonald, Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1270.

¹¹ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Matthew, 2025 Edition (published by Sonic Light), 460.

¹² William MacDonald, Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1270.