



Matthew

17-18

HPC Trinity Class Feb. 25, 2024

The Transfiguration story is also only found in Mark and Luke.



Jesus has already told his disciples that he was to be killed because of his teachings (16:21). Now he wants to give them hope and confirmation that his ministry is God's will.

[READ MT 17:1-3]

17:1---Jesus takes his three most trusted disciples to the top of a mountain.

The allusion to Moses in the Book of Exodus meeting God on a mountain top is obvious. In Moses' case, though, his face shone because it reflected a bit of God's glory, whereas with Jesus it was a total-body transfiguration (*metamorphoō*).

- Jesus = Moses
- Peter, James, & John = Aaron, Nadab, & Abihu

Why is "six days" mentioned? No good answer. Luke's version says "in about eight days," which was the Greek way of saying "about a week later."

Most likely, it reflects the time needed to travel from Caesarea Philippi (16:13) to the high mountain (17:1).

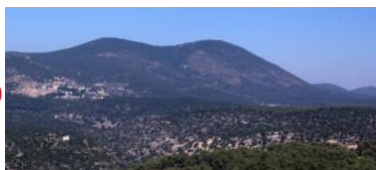
Which mountain? The Bible does not tell us.



Tradition says it was Mt. Tabor. But this is quite far from Caesarea Philippi (@100 miles), and it would have been a very roundabout route to their next stop in Capernaum (v. 24). Also, it's not really a very "high mountain" at 1,900 feet and had a walled fortress at its summit according to the ancient historian Josephus.



Mt. Hermon is closer and higher, rising 9,232 feet in elevation. It is the highest mountain in today's Israel. Many theologians consider Mt. Hermon to be the logical site for the transfiguration because it is high and is much closer to where Jesus and his disciples were. However, even in the summer it's cold on top. (Luke said these four spent the night at the summit [LK 9:27].)



Mt. Meron (or Miron) is the most logical. It is fairly high at 3,926 feet, and is only about a day-and-a-half walk from Caesarea Philippi. It is also on the road to Capernaum.

17:4---Peter gets carried away with enthusiasm. Building three tents or tabernacles would reflect back to Moses' time in the wilderness. It would also commemorate the Feast of the Tabernacles, when Jews would build a small shelter and lived in them for seven days. (Lev. 23:42-43). Then God speaks.

[READ MT 17:5]

17:5—This quote is the same words as when Jesus was baptized (MT 3:17). In both the Old and New Testament “the cloud” is identified with God. This would be considered the Shekinah glory mentioned in the OT---the presence and glory of God among us.¹

17:8---"When they looked up they saw no one except Jesus."

How do you interpret this sentence?

[READ MT 17:9]



"Don't tell anyone!" So far, how many times has Jesus demanded his disciples to not tell???

But this time it's different. Now, for the first time he also tells them that after he is raised from the dead they can tell others.

- Political messiahship was what the masses wanted. Jesus fit the bill, but that's not why he came in the first place.
- The resurrection has not yet happened. There will be no doubts after this.

[READ MT 17:10-13]

17:10—The prophet Malachi foretold this over 400 years earlier (Mal. 4:5). Now, John the Baptist has come in the spirit of Elijah, thus fulfilling the prophecy.

[READ MT 11:13-14] ...and like so many prophets before him, John was killed.

17:13—Understanding is key to discipleship. Until one *understands* the message of Christ and *spreads* that message, he is nothing more than a source of good information.²

Jesus Heals a Boy with a Demon [READ MT 17:14-16]

As Jesus and three of his disciples come down from the mountain they are confronted with a dilemma. (Shades of Moses coming off of Mount Sinai and finding a “problem??”) The boy had a demon we now call epilepsy.³

In Jesus' time sickness was presumed to be God's punishment for

¹ The word “Shekinah,” meaning “that which dwells,” is not in the Bible. It is only in the ancient Jewish writings. The thought in both OT and NT was that if the people were faithful God would be an over-arching presence; God would always be near.

² “in Matthew ‘understanding’ is essential to discipleship.” (Carson, pg. 389)

³ *Selēniazomai* (epilepsy) means “moon struck” because it was believed to be caused by the changing phases of the moon (*selēnē*). (Mounce, pg. 169.)

one's sins. Being that the victim was only a boy, the assumption of society would have been that he was suffering for the sins of his father.

[READ MT 17:17-20] Jesus lashes out: “unbelieving and perverse generation”⁴ and “How long shall I put up with you?” This frustration on Jesus’ part is rhetorical and is found in all three synoptic gospels. He is asking, “Why can’t this society understand my purpose?”

And he is disappointed in his disciples. Despite some earlier successes, these men were not taking Jesus’ as seriously as they should have: they were treating their discipleship as some kind of magic gift. The word *oligopistia* (“little faith”) only occurs in MT, but the five times it is used always refer to Jesus’ disciples.

- “Little faith” may not mean “small,” rather it may mean “poverty.” As Jesus explains, mighty things can spring from the smallest of seeds, but if the disciples had a namby-pamby attitude and belief system, that could also constitute “little faith.”⁵
- “Move mountains” was a common proverbial metaphor at that time, meaning that nothing could stop them if they had true faith. We use such figures of speech even today: “I’m so happy that my head is in the clouds;” “You can’t beat a dead horse;” “She has the voice of a nightingale;” etc.



Verse 21 is missing from most Bibles. It is widely believed that this verse was added later, being copied from MK 9:29: “This kind can come out only by prayer.”

17:22-23---Jesus again (16:21-24) tells the twelve that he will be killed and rise again. The books of Mark and Luke say that the disciples do not comprehend this. Matthew, however, digs a bit deeper—Jesus’ followers do understand that he will soon die for the cause; they do not understand the resurrection.

Temple Tax **[READ MT 17:24-27]**



The two-drachma tax was probably imposed by the Jewish leaders, not by the Roman civil government. Refusal to pay it would demonstrate that one wanted to withdraw from the religious community—a radical thing to do. “Even the Essenes at Qumran, who had separated from Jerusalem in protest against the temple and its priesthood, paid the half-shekel tax.”⁶

Half shekel	EX 30:11-16	Every census	Pre-Exile	All men 20+
1/3 shekel	NEH 10:32	annually	Post-Exile	
2 drachmas	MT 17:24	annually	Jesus’ time	All men 20-50

⁴ Deut. 32:5.

⁵ Carson citing French theologian Pierre Bonnard, pg. 391.

⁶ Mounce, pg. 171.

- Shekel = 4 days' wages. A Tyrian shekel contained 13 grams of pure silver. Value today of @\$12.
- Drachma = 2 days' wages

17:25-27---Jesus corrects Peter, but he will still pay the tax. Peter is told to get the money out of the mouth of a fish he will catch. This four-drachma coin will pay for them both. Or is this simply Jesus' way of saying, "Go catch a fish, sell it at market, and pay the tax with the proceeds."



YOU DECIDE

- If this is a miracle:
 1. it contradicts the moral principle that God doesn't do what we could do for ourselves.
 2. it twists Jesus ethics to appear that he uses his powers for his own benefit.
- Or is this simply Jesus' way of saying, "Go catch a fish, sell it at market, and pay the tax with the proceeds."?

Chapter 18 is mostly Jesus instructing his disciples, and it reads very much like an early church manual. In fact, "The Manual of Discipline" found at Qumran has many comparisons with Chapter 18.

The Greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven [READ MT 18:1-6]

18:5-6---Jesus is not advocating childlike thought and behavior. "The child is held up as an ideal, not of innocence, purity, or faith, but of humility and unconcern for social status."⁷ This passage is a restatement of Jesus' words in MT 11:25. Disciples who follow this behavior are welcomed not because

⁷ Carson, pg. 397.

they are great, mighty, or wise, but because they come in His name (i.e., they belong to Jesus.)

18:7-9---Very similar to MT 5:29-30.

Parable of the Lost Sheep [READ MT 18:10-14]

Again, we see this same story in Luke (LK 15:3-7). In MT's version Jesus is addressing his disciples; in Luke the audience is the scribes and Pharisees. Some scholars believe this is not a repetition, but that it is simply Jesus telling nearly the same story to two separate audiences and with different aims. A comparison of these two stories in the Greek text make this clear.⁸

The Sinning Brother [READ MT 18:15-20]

What do you do when a fellow believer sins against you? Jesus says:

v. 15---work it out between the two of you in private...but

WHAT IF IT
DOESN'T
WORK?



v.16---ask one or two others to listen and decide...but

WHAT IF IT
DOESN'T
WORK?



v. 17a---ask the church to intervene.....but

WHAT IF IT
DOESN'T
WORK?



v. 17b---simply let it lie. Treat him as you would a non-believer.

vss. 19-20 must be read with the sinning brother or sister in mind, not just in a general context, such as when friends simply pray together.

Parable of the Unmerciful Servant MT 18:21-35

[READ MT 18:21-22]

v. 21---“...up to seven times?”

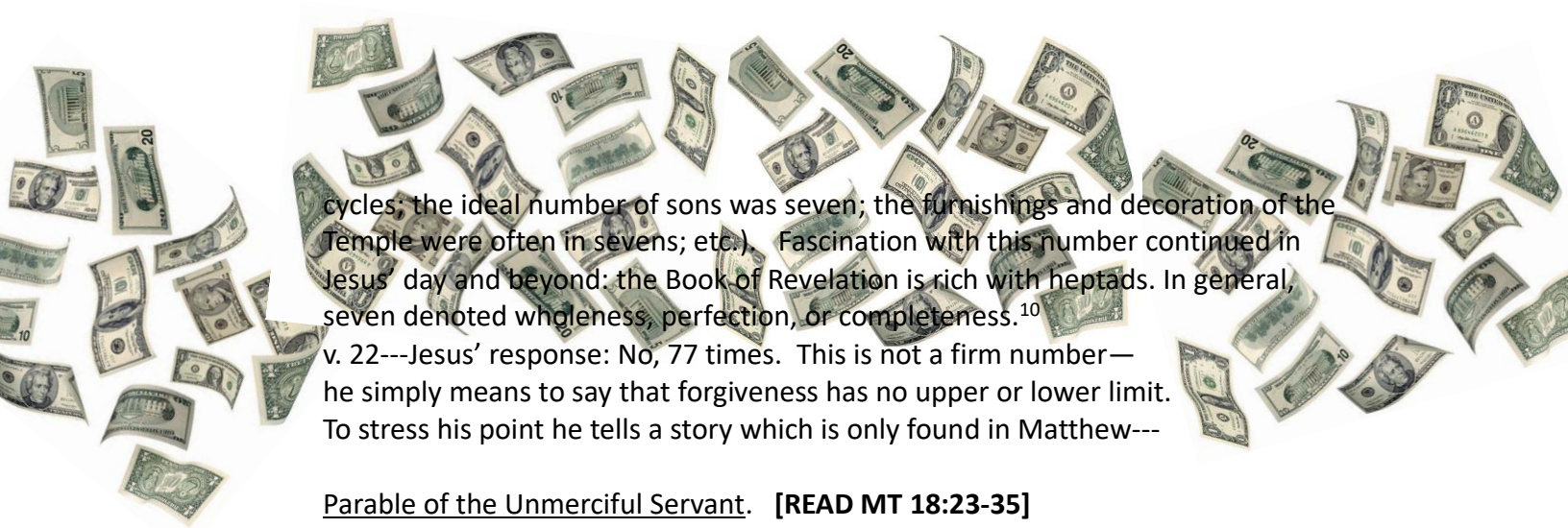
Rabbinic literature taught that “if a man sins once, twice, or three times, they forgive him: if he sins a fourth time, they do not forgive him.”⁹ Here Peter is demonstrating his big heart by stretching forgiveness to seven times.

The number seven had been considered a sacred number since ancient Egyptian times. That reverence to seven carried over into the Hebrew culture (e.g., famine and plenty came in seven-year



⁸ Ibid., Carson, pg. 400.

⁹ Mounce, pg. 177, citing the Mishnah *Yoma* 5.13.



cycles; the ideal number of sons was seven; the furnishings and decoration of the Temple were often in sevens; etc.). Fascination with this number continued in Jesus' day and beyond: the Book of Revelation is rich with heptads. In general, seven denoted wholeness, perfection, or completeness.¹⁰

v. 22---Jesus' response: No, 77 times. This is not a firm number—he simply means to say that forgiveness has no upper or lower limit. To stress his point he tells a story which is only found in Matthew---

Parable of the Unmerciful Servant. [READ MT 18:23-35]

- 1 talent = 3,000 shekels (see chart on page 3). In today's terms, he owed millions of dollars, maybe closer to one billion with inflation.
- v. 25---selling him and his family into slavery would be a horrible punishment but it wouldn't much money: the top price for a slave was only about 1 talent.¹¹
- v. 34---Torture was forbidden by Jewish law, but its practice was widespread. The hope was that under torture the debtor would reveal unacknowledged sources of money.¹²
- This evil servant will never be out of debt. Based on his cold-hearted attitude he will not be forgiven again by his master, and will forever be in the hands of the torturers (*basanistais*), not merely the jailers.

Works Cited

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- Mounce, Robert H. *Matthew: New International Biblical Commentary*. Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1991.

¹⁰ *Interpreter's*, vol. 4, "Seven."

¹¹ Carson, pg. 406.

¹² Mounce, pg. 178.