**Monday Evening Bible Study**

**February 13, 2023 – Matthew 17:1-9**

**Immediate Context**

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| Matthew 13:1-52 3rd Major Discourse of Jesus – Parables | Matthew 16:1-4 The Demand for a Sign |
| Matthew 13:54-58 The Rejection of Jesus at Nazareth | Matthew 16:5-12 The Yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees |
| Matthew 14:1-12 The Death of John the Baptist | Matthew 16:13-20 Peter’s Declaration about Jesus |
| Matthew 14:13-21 Feeding the Five Thousand | Matthew 16:21-23 Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection |
| Matthew 14:22-33 Jesus Walks on the Water | Matthew 16:24-28 The Cross and Self-Denial |
| Matthew 14:34-36 Jesus Heals the Sick in Gennesaret | **Matthew 17:1-13 The Transfiguration** |
| Matthew 15:1-9 The Tradition of the Elders | Matthew 17:14-21 Jesus Cures a Boy with a Demon |
| Matthew 15:10-20 Things That Defile | Matthew 17:22-23 Jesus Again Foretells His Death |
| Matthew 15:21-28 The Canaanite Woman’s Faith | Matthew 17:24-27 Jesus and the Temple Tax |
| Matthew 15:29-31 Jesus Cures Many People | Matthew 18:1-35 4th Major Discourse of Jesus |
| Matthew 15:32-39 Feeding the Four Thousand |  |

**Transfiguration parallels can be found in the other synoptic gospels:**

Found also inMark 9:2-10; Luke 9:28-36

The gospel of John doesn’t mention it.

It is also mentioned in 2 Peter 1:17-18.

**Helpful Scriptures**

**Genesis 22:1–2 (NRSV)**

*1 After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” 2 He said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you.”*

**Exodus 24:12–18 (NRSV)**

*12 The Lord said to Moses, “Come up to me on the mountain, and wait there; and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction.” 13 So Moses set out with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God. 14 To the elders he had said, “Wait here for us, until we come to you again; for Aaron and Hur are with you; whoever has a dispute may go to them.” 15 Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. 16 The glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the cloud. 17 Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. 18 Moses entered the cloud, and went up on the mountain. Moses was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights.*

**Exodus 34:4–10 (NRSV)**

*4 So Moses cut two tablets of stone like the former ones; and he rose early in the morning and went up on Mount Sinai, as the Lord had commanded him, and took in his hand the two tablets of stone. 5 The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name, “The Lord.” 6 The Lord passed before him, and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, 7 keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.” 8 And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth, and worshiped. 9 He said, “If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, I pray, let the Lord go with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance.” 10 He said: I hereby make a covenant. Before all your people I will perform marvels, such as have not been performed in all the earth or in any nation; and all the people among whom you live shall see the work of the Lord; for it is an awesome thing that I will do with you.*

**Exodus 34:28–35 (NRSV)**

*28 He was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the ten commandments. 29 Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. 30 When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him. 31 But Moses called to them; and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke with them. 32 Afterward all the Israelites came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the Lord had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. 33 When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face; 34 but whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he would take the veil off, until he came out; and when he came out, and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, 35 the Israelites would see the face of Moses, that the skin of his face was shining; and Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with him.*

**Leviticus 23:33–44 (NRSV)**

*33 The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 34 Speak to the people of Israel, saying: On the fifteenth day of this seventh month, and lasting seven days, there shall be the festival of booths to the Lord. 35 The first day shall be a holy convocation; you shall not work at your occupations. 36 Seven days you shall present the Lord’s offerings by fire; on the eighth day you shall observe a holy convocation and present the Lord’s offerings by fire; it is a solemn assembly; you shall not work at your occupations. 37 These are the appointed festivals of the Lord, which you shall celebrate as times of holy convocation, for presenting to the Lord offerings by fire—burnt offerings and grain offerings, sacrifices and drink offerings, each on its proper day— 38 apart from the sabbaths of the Lord, and apart from your gifts, and apart from all your votive offerings, and apart from all your freewill offerings, which you give to the Lord. 39 Now, the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the produce of the land, you shall keep the festival of the Lord, lasting seven days; a complete rest on the first day, and a complete rest on the eighth day. 40 On the first day you shall take the fruit of majestic trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days. 41 You shall keep it as a festival to the Lord seven days in the year; you shall keep it in the seventh month as a statute forever throughout your generations. 42 You shall live in booths for seven days; all that are citizens in Israel shall live in booths, 43 so that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel live in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God. 44 Thus Moses declared to the people of Israel the appointed festivals of the Lord.*

**Deuteronomy 18:15–22 (NRSV)**

*15 The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet. 16 This is what you requested of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said: “If I hear the voice of the Lord my God any more, or ever again see this great fire, I will die.” 17 Then the Lord replied to me: “They are right in what they have said. 18 I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command. 19 Anyone who does not heed the words that the prophet shall speak in my name, I myself will hold accountable. 20 But any prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, or who presumes to speak in my name a word that I have not commanded the prophet to speak—that prophet shall die.” 21 You may say to yourself, “How can we recognize a word that the Lord has not spoken?” 22 If a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord but the thing does not take place or prove true, it is a word that the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; do not be frightened by it.*

**1 Kings 19:8–18 (NRSV)**

*8 He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God. 9 At that place he came to a cave, and spent the night there. Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” 10 He answered, “I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.” 11 He said, “Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.” Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; 12 and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. 13 When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” 14 He answered, “I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.” 15 Then the Lord said to him, “Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael as king over Aram. 16 Also you shall anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel; and you shall anoint Elisha son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah as prophet in your place. 17 Whoever escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall kill; and whoever escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall kill. 18 Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.”*

**2 Kings 2:1–12 (NRSV)**

*1 Now when the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. 2 Elijah said to Elisha, “Stay here; for the Lord has sent me as far as Bethel.” But Elisha said, “As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So they went down to Bethel. 3 The company of prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, “Do you know that today the Lord will take your master away from you?” And he said, “Yes, I know; keep silent.” 4 Elijah said to him, “Elisha, stay here; for the Lord has sent me to Jericho.” But he said, “As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So they came to Jericho. 5 The company of prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha, and said to him, “Do you know that today the Lord will take your master away from you?” And he answered, “Yes, I know; be silent.” 6 Then Elijah said to him, “Stay here; for the Lord has sent me to the Jordan.” But he said, “As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So the two of them went on. 7 Fifty men of the company of prophets also went, and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. 8 Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two of them crossed on dry ground. 9 When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, “Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you.” Elisha said, “Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit.” 10 He responded, “You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not.” 11 As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. 12 Elisha kept watching and crying out, “Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!” But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.*

**Psalm 2:7–9 (NRSV)**

*7 I will tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to me, “You are my son; today I have begotten you. 8 Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. 9 You shall break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.”*

**Isaiah 42:1–4 (NRSV)**

*1 Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. 2 He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; 3 a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. 4 He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching.*

**Daniel 7:9–14 (NRSV)**

*9 As I watched, thrones were set in place, and an Ancient One took his throne, his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, and its wheels were burning fire. 10 A stream of fire issued and flowed out from his presence. A thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him. The court sat in judgment, and the books were opened. 11 I watched then because of the noise of the arrogant words that the horn was speaking. And as I watched, the beast was put to death, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire. 12 As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time. 13 As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. 14 To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.*

**Malachi 4:1–6 (NRSV)**

*1 See, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble; the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. 2 But for you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. 3 And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the Lord of hosts. 4 Remember the teaching of my servant Moses, the statutes and ordinances that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. 5 Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. 6 He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents, so that I will not come and strike the land with a curse.*

**Acts 3:17–26 (NRSV)**

*17 “And now, friends, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. 18 In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer. 19 Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out, 20 so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah appointed for you, that is, Jesus, 21 who must remain in heaven until the time of universal restoration that God announced long ago through his holy prophets. 22 Moses said, ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you from your own people a prophet like me. You must listen to whatever he tells you. 23 And it will be that everyone who does not listen to that prophet will be utterly rooted out of the people.’ 24 And all the prophets, as many as have spoken, from Samuel and those after him, also predicted these days. 25 You are the descendants of the prophets and of the covenant that God gave to your ancestors, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your descendants all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’ 26 When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you, to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways.”*

**2 Corinthians 3:4–18 (NRSV)**

*4 Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. 5 Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, 6 who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. 7 Now if the ministry of death, chiseled in letters on stone tablets, came in glory so that the people of Israel could not gaze at Moses’ face because of the glory of his face, a glory now set aside, 8 how much more will the ministry of the Spirit come in glory? 9 For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, much more does the ministry of justification abound in glory! 10 Indeed, what once had glory has lost its glory because of the greater glory; 11 for if what was set aside came through glory, much more has the permanent come in glory! 12 Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness, 13 not like Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside. 14 But their minds were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there, since only in Christ is it set aside. 15 Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; 16 but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.*

**Revelation 1:12–19 (NRSV)**

*12 Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, 13 and in the midst of the lampstands I saw one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest. 14 His head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, 15 his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters. 16 In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining with full force. 17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he placed his right hand on me, saying, “Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, 18 and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades. 19 Now write what you have seen, what is, and what is to take place after this.*

**Revelation 3:4–5 (NRSV)**

*4 Yet you have still a few persons in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes; they will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. 5 If you conquer, you will be clothed like them in white robes, and I will not blot your name out of the book of life; I will confess your name before my Father and before his angels.*

**Key Words/Phrases**

**Parallels to Moses :**

* Six days parallel the six days that the cloud covered Mount Sinai before Moses ascended it (Exodus 24:16).
* The high mountain (v. 1) parallels Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:12).
* The three disciples (Peter, James and John) parallel the three men (Aaron, Nadab and Abihu) who were invited to worship with Moses (Exodus 24:1) and who were later ordained as priests (Exodus 28:1).
* Jesus’ shining face (v. 2) parallels Moses’ shining face after his encounter with God (Exodus 34:29).
* God speaks from a cloud (v. 5), paralleling God’s call to Moses from a cloud (Exodus 24:16).
* God says, “Listen to him,” (v. 5), paralleling “You shall listen to him” (Deut 18:15).
* The disciples are afraid (v. 6), paralleling the fear of the Israelites when they saw Moses’ shining face.
* “Faithless and perverse generation” (v. 17) parallels “perverse and crooked generation” (Deut 32:5).

**After six days –** Six is an important number in the Bible. God created the world in six days, resting on the seventh. Hebrew slaves were required to work for their master only six years, being freed on the seventh.

**Peter, James and John** – These three tend form Jesus’ inner circle of disciples; (See Matthew 4:18-22; 26:37). Three disciples—Peter, James, and John—accompany Jesus to the mountain, just as Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu accompanied Moses (Exodus 24:1-9). We might wonder why Jesus chooses these three disciples to accompany him in the key moments of his life. Peter’s importance as the leader of the disciples is self-evident. John is traditionally considered to be “the one whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23), making him another obvious choice. The three disciples, Peter, James and John, will not appear again as the inner circle until Gethsemane (26:37). There they will accompany Jesus as he struggles through the night that culminates with his arrest (Matthew 26:36ff). The Transfiguration and Gethsemane are the two most intimate experiences that Jesus shares with his disciples, and the same three disciples witness both. How would you like to have been Andrew, Peter’s brother and be left out of the mix? It was Andrew and Peter, James and John who were the first to be selected to be disciples in Matthew’s gospel (see Matthew 4:18-22).

**A high mountain** – Which mountain is it? No one knows for sure! It is never clearly identified in Scripture.

* Mount Tabor, located between Nazareth and the Sea of Galilee, is a possibility, but Matthew speaks of a “high mountain” and Tabor is only 1900 feet high (580 meters)—and in Jesus’ time, a fortress occupied its summit, making it an unlikely site for a private gathering. The earliest tradition identifies Mount Tabor as the Mount of Transfiguration, and it is the location of the Church of the Transfiguration, which is built on the ruins of fourth-century church.
* Mount Hermon is a much higher mountain, almost 10,000 feet, and it is closer to Caesarea Philippi where the previous events in Matthew 16 took place. For these reasons, some scholars feel that Mount Hermon is a more likely candidate to be the Mount of Transfiguration.
* Mount Meron, 4000 feet high (1200 meters) and located 12 miles northwest of the Sea of Galilee seems a possibility as well.

The exact location is less important than what happens there. The high mountain symbolizes the place where heaven and earth meet—the place where God is revealed. The high mountain is also reminiscent of Mount Sinai, where Moses encountered God with such great consequence.

**Transfigured** – The Greek word for “transfigured” is μετεμορφώθη, from which we get the word metamorphosis. We use this word to describe the change that occurs when a caterpillar becomes a butterfly. It means to be changed or transformed. Jesus’ “face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white.” This reminds us of Moses at Sinai. After his encounter with God, Moses’ face shone so brightly that the people were frightened, and Moses had to wear a veil over his face (Exodus 34:29-35). The disciples know the Moses story and surely make this connection. See Romans 12:2; 2 Cor 3:18).

**Why Moses and Elijah? –** These two men…symbolize the coming of the messianic age, and their conversation with Jesus marks him out the more clearly as the Messiah who comes as the climax to their eschatological role. They represent the law (Moses) and the prophets (Elijah), the most authoritative portions of the Hebrew Scriptures—and they are two of the most important Old Testament figures. They are both associated with the “Mountain of God” (Exodus 18:5; 1 Kings 19:8). The Jews thought of Elijah’s return as ushering in the messianic age. In addition to Elijah’s appearance on the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus identifies John the Baptist as Elijah (Matthew 17:10-13).

**Moses –** Μωϋσῆς – The first and preeminent leader of the Israelites, who led the people out of Egypt to the threshold of the promised land; he is also the lawgiver and the archetypic prophet. He is the dominant individual character in the biblical narrative from Exodus to Deuteronomy. The text speaks of him in superlatives: “Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face” (Deut. 34:10).

The Gospel of Matthew, in particular, seems to present Moses as a prototype of Christ: like Moses, Jesus is endangered by a baby-killing tyrant at birth (2:1–18); he comes out of Egypt (2:13–21); he fasts for forty days and nights (4:2; cf. Exod. 34:28); he interprets the law of God on a mountain (chaps. 5–7); and he miraculously provides people with bread (14:13–21).

**Elijah –** Ἠλίας – In Hebrew, his name means, “my God is the LORD.” He was an Israelite prophet in the time of kings Ahab and Ahaziah, during the first half of the ninth century BCE. Elijah is the protagonist of four stories in the book of Kings; stories often called “the Elijah cycle”. As for Elijah himself, he is said to have come from the town of Tosabe in Gilead. His leather attire and his nomadic habits make it plausible that he belonged to a family of shepherds in Transjordan.

Story 1 – Drought, Zarephath, Mount Carmel, and Mount Horeb. In the first story dealing with Elijah (1 Kings 16:29–19:18), King Ahab erects a temple to Baal in Samaria and his Canaanite wife, Jezebel, brings in 450 Baal prophets. Jezebel then begins persecuting and killing prophets of the Lord. Elijah declares a drought to punish the nation for its idolatry. In so doing, he effectively challenges Baal in his very quality as a fertility god. He goes into hiding and is miraculously fed by God, who sends ravens to bring him food. He also goes, at God’s direction, to Zarephath and visits a widow; there a jar of meal and a jug of oil remain miraculously full, and the widow’s son is raised by Elijah from death. The drought finally ends after a contest between Elijah and the Baal prophets on Mount Carmel; the god who would answer his prophet’s call with fire from heaven would be vindicated as the true god. Elijah wins, God is vindicated, and Elijah’s Baalite antagonists are slaughtered by Elijah himself with the help of the people who have been convinced that “the LORD indeed is God.” Pursued by Queen Jezebel, who seeks vengeance, Elijah flees to Beer-sheba, where he sits under a broom tree and despairs of life. An angel miraculously provides him with food and drink and he is able to travel forty days and nights to Mount Horeb (Sinai), where he experiences a theophany involving wind, earthquake, fire, and silence, followed by the voice of the Lord. He is commanded to anoint Hazael, Jehu, and Elisha as three new protagonists in the fight against Baal.

Story 2 – Murder of Naboth. The second story involving Elijah (1 Kings 21) tells about the murder of Naboth. Ahab wants to purchase a vineyard from Naboth the Jezreelite, but Naboth refuses to sell. Noting her husband’s depression, Jezebel takes care of the matter by forging letters in Ahab’s name and setting Naboth up to be stoned to death on entirely false charges of having “cursed God and the king.” Ahab then goes to inherit the vineyard and is confronted by Elijah with a terrible prophecy of doom.

Story 3 – Ahaziah’s Inquiry. In the third story (2 Kings 1:2–2:17) Ahaziah falls ill and inquires of Baal-zebub of Ekron if he will recover. Elijah intervenes and sends the messengers back to the king with a prophecy of doom that he himself reiterates when summoned to the king’s presence.

Story 4 – Elijah and Elisha. The fourth story dealing with Elijah (1 Kings 19:19–21; 2 Kings 2:1–18) relates how Elisha becomes Elijah’s servant, following him until the day comes when he knows that God will take him away. Then Elijah is carried up into heaven in a whirlwind, accompanied by a chariot and horses of fire. Elisha inherits a “double share” of Elijah’s spirit and takes his mantle upon himself. This story serves primarily to introduce the Elisha cycle and seems aimed at establishing continuity between two great prophets of the past. In many ways, however, the two are quite distinct. Elijah is remembered as a zealot of the Lord fighting against idolatry and injustice, and Elisha is recalled primarily as a wonder worker who saved Israel during the Aramean crisis.

Elijah’s role as fighter against Baal and injustice is taken up in 2 Chron. 21:12–15. Elijah is also mentioned at the conclusion of the Nevi’im (Prophets) section of the Hebrew canon in Mal. 3:22–24, which identifies him with the Lord’s messenger of Mal. 3:1 who would return before the forthcoming “day of the Lord.” As such, he is described as both a priest and a teacher of Torah (Mal. 2:7); he is expected to purify the priesthood (3:2–3) and, as supreme teacher, to “reconcile fathers and sons.”

Jesus himself identifies John the Baptist as Elijah, who was to return and restore all things (Matt. 17:10–13). When Jesus cries in Aramaic, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani” (“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”), bystanders think that he is calling for Elijah to rescue him (Matt. 27:47–49).

**We will make three tents –** Peter offers to make three σκηνάς (*skenas*: tents or booths or dwellings), one each for Jesus, Moses and Elijah. He couches his proposal carefully, addressing Jesus as Lord, acknowledging the honor that the disciples are experiencing, and adding, “if you wish.” The last time Peter opened his mouth, Jesus soundly rebuked him (16:21-23), and Peter is being careful not to repeat that experience.

**Three tents –**

* *Skenas* brings to mind the Tabernacle—the dwelling place of God in the midst of the people on their wilderness journey. If it was appropriate for God to dwell in a tent in the wilderness, it must be appropriate for Jesus to dwell in a tent on the mountain.
* *Skenas* also brings to mind the Feast of Tabernacles. Zechariah 14:16-19 prophecies that the remnants of the nations will go up to Jerusalem year after year to worship the King, an allusion to the messianic age.
* Or Peter may be trying to prolong this mountaintop experience and avoid the time when the disciples will go down the mountain into the world again.
* Or Peter, a man of action, may simply feel the need to do something. Why tents? They just happen to be the first thing that pops into his mind—not without reason, as noted above—but the first thing that pops into his mind—a plan of action that, if Jesus approves, will allow Peter to get busy.

**Peter’s mistake –** What is his mistake? It could be that he errs by trying to prolong this brief experience. It might also be that he errs by making Jesus just one of three instead of the sole focus for this Transfiguration event.

**A bright cloud overshadowed them –** Recalls the cloud of glory at Sinai when God revealed God’s self; Jewish teachers spoke of the cloud of God’s presence as the shekinah.

**Voice from the cloud –** The voice interrupts Peter, repeating what was said at Jesus’ baptism (see Matthew 3:17), but adding “listen to him.” Sometimes God spoke with a voice from heaven (e.g., Gen 22.15– 18). Later Jewish teachers called this means of God speaking *a bat qol*; though they felt that it was an inferior substitute for prophecy, the prophet here also recognizes Jesus’ identity (v. 14). The voice here seems to blend allusions to two Biblical texts; the first is Ps 2.7, a promise to the Davidic line especially applicable to the promised, end-time Davidic ruler. For Mark (1.11), the second might be Gen 22.2, but Matthew probably intends an allusion instead to Isa 42.1, given the way Matthew translates this passage in 12.18.

**“This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!” –** Or, as the footnote indicates, “This is my beloved Son; with him I am well pleased; listen to him.” God’s words, “listen to him,” remind us of Moses’ words to the Israelites: “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet” (Deuteronomy 18:15).

**Don’t be afraid –** “Don’t be afraid” is a frequent scriptural theme. See Ezekiel 2.1– 2; Daniel 8.18; 10.11– 12). the encouragement not to be afraid is common in Biblical revelations (Genesis 15.1; 21.17; 26.24; Joshua 8.1; Judges 6.23). Fear is a common human experience, but scripture includes Godly reassurances that God’s people have nothing to fear from God or man (Exodus 14:13; Joshua 11:6; 2 Kings 19:6; Nehemiah 4:14; Isaiah 40:9; 43:1-7; Matthew 14:27; 28:10; Mark 5:36; Acts 18:9; Revelation 1:17-18).

**Don’t tell anyone –** In the previous chapter, Peter acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah, and Jesus commended him for his insight. Then Jesus “sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah” (16:20). Then Jesus told the disciples “that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised” (16:21). Now Jesus instructs Peter, James and John, “Don’t tell anyone what you saw, until the Son of Man has risen from the dead.”

**Son of Man –** The phrase “Son of Man” is used 30 times in Matthew’s gospel in 28 verses (Matthew 8:20; 9:6; 10:23; 11:19; 12:8; 12:32, 40; 13:37, 41; 16:13, 27, 28; 17:9, 12, 22; 19:28; 20:18, 28; 24:27, 30, 37, 39, 44; 25:31; 26:2, 24, 45, 64).

When spelled “Son of Man” (in the NRSV and other English Bibles), a title for Jesus employed especially in the Synoptic Gospels. With one exception (Acts 7:56) and apart from the citation of Ps. 8:4 in Heb. 2:6 (NRSV: “mortals”) and an allusion to Dan. 7:13 in Rev. 1:13, the term is used exclusively by Jesus in reference to himself. It is customary to classify the references in the Synoptic Gospels under three headings:

* Sayings in which Jesus refers to his present activity during his earthly ministry (e.g., Matt. 8:20; 11:19; Mark 2:10, 28; 10:45a);
* Sayings in which Jesus refers to his impending passion and/or resurrection (Mark 8:31; 9:9, 31; 10:33, 45b); and
* Sayings in which he refers to his future activity as Judge and Savior (e.g., Mark 8:38; cf. Luke 12:8; Mark 13:26; 14:62; Luke 17:22, 24, 26, 30).