

April 1-14 2019

Matthew 16–17; Mark 9; Luke 9

“Thou Art the Christ”

Summary: *Jesus warns against the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees—Peter testifies that Jesus is the Christ and is promised the keys of the kingdom—Jesus foretells His death and resurrection. Jesus is transfigured before Peter James and John on the mount—Jesus heals a lunatic, tells of His coming death, and pays taxes in a miraculous manner. Jesus is transfigured on the mountain—He casts out an unclean spirit—He teaches concerning His death and resurrection, who will be greatest and the condemnation of those who offend His little ones. The Twelve are sent out—Jesus feeds the five thousand—Peter testifies of Christ—Jesus foretells His death and resurrection—He is transfigured on the mount—He heals and teaches.*

Supplemental Jewish and Holy Land Insights **How does the literary rendering teach us a greater meaning for the transfiguration?**

A powerful chiasmus is used to help us remember this lesson. Matthew finds it important to relate the events of the transfiguration in a pattern that extends beyond geography or even chronological events. The New Testament is an incomplete chronology, since so few of the Savior’s actual days in mortality are mentioned. The following verse excerpts show the chiasmic teaching pattern in the chapter of **Matthew 16**. The dialogue occurs in the area of Caesarea Philippi, one of the northernmost towns in the land of Israel. “. . . I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” (**Matthew 16:19**) “From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.” (**Matthew 16:21**)

What was the highest tribute the Father gave?

The promise of sealing keys and a prophecy of three-days is followed by the transfiguration. It happened six-days later (**Matthew 17:1**), about the time it would take to travel sixty-miles on foot. According to the Prophet and President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Spencer W. Kimball, who recounted his experience on Mount Tabor in 1979, about sixty miles south of Caesarea Philippi. There, the highest witness of Jesus as the Jehovah, Son of God, was given. “While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.” (**Matthew 17:1, Mark 9:7**) President Kimball said about his visit, “I felt I was on the highest spot on the face of the earth.”

The verses that follow state the three-days and keys in reverse, a chiasm that centers on the Father's witness and tribute of His Son. "And they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again." (Matthew 17:23) "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: an whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (Matthew 18:18)

What can we learn from Heavenly Father's words?

These highest tributes rendered by the Father, "beloved" and "I am well pleased," are an example for us to use in place of "pride" or "I am proud of you." In 1989, Prophet and President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Ezra Taft Benson, gave a profound talk about removing "pride" and "proud" from our language. He taught that there is no justifiable use of the word "proud." He also said, "Pride is ugly." Being pleased is a tribute; being proud seems self-interested.

How does the transfiguration fulfill Jewish expectations?

As added insights, it is helpful to know about the seasonal and ritual traditions accompanying the transfiguration. It is likely that Jesus' remarkable transfiguration occurred during the very Sukkoth season when Jews expect the Prophet Moses (and others) to return, preceding the Messiah's advent. It is the custom to build small booths called tabernacles or in Hebrew, a sukkah. Sukkoth is a sequel to Passover (the first full moon after the first day of spring) when Elijah is expected. Sukkoth begins on the first full moon after the first day of fall, when seven guests, the Ushpazin, are expected.

Who are the guests?

"*Ushpizin*" is Aramaic for "guests," a reference to the seven supernal guests, "founding fathers" of the Jewish people, who come to visit us in the *sukkah* (the branch-covered hut in which we eat our meals throughout the festival of Sukkot), one for each of the seven days of the festival: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Joseph, David."

(https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/571505/jewish/The-Ushpizin.htm)

How was the transfiguration like the endowment?

The transfiguration may have been a special temple-like endowment for Peter, James, and John. "When Elijah came to the Prophet Joseph Smith, he was not a translated being, He was a resurrected being. He had received his resurrection, and he came to Joseph Smith just as did Peter, James, and John, and gave to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery--as he did to Peter, James, and John at the transfiguration--the keys of sealing power, so that the work now, not only for the living but also for the dead, may be done. Since the same ordinances are required for the dead as for the living, these keys also pertain to the salvation of the dead." (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation, Vol.2, Pg.119*) "I am convinced in my own mind that when the Savior took the three disciples up on the mount, which is spoken of as the "Mount of Transfiguration," he there gave unto them the ordinances that pertain to the house of the Lord and that they were endowed. That was the only place they could go. That place became holy and sacred for the rites of salvation which were performed on that occasion." (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation, Vol.2, Pg.170*) "The Savior took Peter, James, and John upon a high mountain and there he, with Moses and Elias, conferred upon these apostles the keys of the priesthood. At that time many things pertaining to the earth and its inhabitants were revealed to these apostles, for the earth was transfigured before them as it will appear when it receives its glory. The Lord consecrated and made holy the mountain top, instead of taking the apostles to the temple in

Jerusalem, because the temple had become a "den of thieves," having fallen into the hands of apostate Jews who did not worship the true and living God." (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation, Vol.2, Pg.233*)

What are the Biblical traditions of going to the temple?

There are traditions of going to the temple at Sukkoth, as noted in Jewish writings. Note the "foot festivals," that is "going to the temple," as well as the festival of Hannukah commemorating Jews regaining access to the temple area by Judas the Macabee in 164 B.C.E. "In the Torah there are three festivals that are known as (*regalim*), foot festivals or pilgrim festivals. These are Passover, Shavuot and Sukkot. On each of them every male Jew was expected to make a pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem." "Interestingly, the rededication of the Temple and the re-celebration of Sukkot paralleled the consecration of Solomon's Temple, which was also an eight-day dedication ceremony held on the festival of Sukkot." (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

What may have determined the dates of General Conferences?

The following information explains the two holiest convocations the Children of Israel were commanded to keep. The spring convocation is Passover and Sukkoth in the fall. General Conferences also coincide seasonally. "Sukkot (Hebrew for "huts" or "tabernacles"), a seven-day festival beginning on the 15th day of the month of Tishrei, which falls in September or October. (In the Diaspora an extra eighth day is celebrated.) One of its main observances is living temporarily in huts, called *sukkot*, resembling those in which the Children of Israel dwelt during their forty years in the wilderness after the Exodus from Egypt." "This autumn festival was the last of the three "pilgrim" festivals connected with the farming year. From all corners of the Land of Israel throngs of pilgrims used to make their way up to Jerusalem carrying the gaily decorated baskets of fruit and grain which they brought to the Temple as a thanksgiving offering. At the gates of the city the townsfolk greeted them with music. The pilgrims then ascended the broad staircase that led from the City of David to the summit of the Temple Mount, where they would present their offerings to the Priests." "This holiday was also the occasion for the consecration of the Temple built by Solomon and every seventh year on Sukkot, the Torah was read by the king before the assembled people. In his vision of the end of days, the prophet Zechariah foretells that all the nations of the world will assemble for the festival of Sukkot in Jerusalem to worship God." (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

How are the booths or sukkahs made?

"The *sukkah* is a structure with at least three walls, made of any material. It must be at least ten handbreadths in height, and in area at least seven handbreadths square. The roof covering, or *sekhakh*, is usually leafy branches, and these must be arranged so that there is more covered than open space." "In present-day Israel, as in other countries, Jews construct sukkot in their gardens, on the sidewalks, and on the roofs and balconies of their houses, just as they did at the time of the return from the Babylonian exile, as described in the Book of Nehemiah: "So the people went forth . . . and made themselves booths, every one upon the roof of his house, and in their courts, and in the courts of the house of God . . . and there was very great gladness." "When a family performs the mitzvah of the sukkah joyfully, they are said to be visited in the sukkah by seven "guests of the festival" (the ushpizin) who are present in spirit." (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

What added insight is there to putting-our-hand-to-the-plow?

There is a Mosaic law that relates to a yoke of unlike animals. The unfairness of plowing with a donkey and an ox is clearly visible when looking at the lesser creature. "Thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together." (**Deuteronomy 22:10**) Consider that the Lord wants to relieve us of the unfairness in life. He is saying, in effect, "I am carrying the burden; take advantage of it." In learning this principle, following Him and giving our burdens to Him (He has paid for them already), we cleanse our inner selves and are able to better serve Him. "Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved." (**Psalms 55:22**) The prophet Isaiah taught us that the Lord would relieve us from the yoke of our burdens. "For thou hast broken the yoke of his burden . . ." (**Isaiah 9:4**) In examining the small amount of material we have about Jesus' life, only 31-days described of His 33-years on earth, we see how privately and personally He takes burdens upon Himself. Therefore he said, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." (**Matthew 11:29**)