

April 10-16, 2023

Matthew 15–17; Mark 7–9

“ART THOU THE CHRIST”

Summary:

Matthew 15. The scribes and Pharisees contend against Jesus—He heals the daughter of a gentile woman—He feeds the four thousand.

Matthew 16. 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.

Matthew 17. 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.

Mark 7. Jesus reproves the Pharisees for their false traditions and ceremonies—He casts a devil out of the daughter of a Greek woman—He opens the ears and loosens the tongue of a person with an impediment.

Mark 8. Jesus feeds the four thousand—He counsels, Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees—He heals a blind man in Bethsaida—Peter testifies that Jesus is the Christ.

Mark 9. 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.

Supplemental Jewish and Holy Land Insights

How are sacred reports given in a “Gospel Code?”

A powerful chiasma
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 [31] of the Savior’s actual days in mortality are mentioned.) The following verses show the chiastic teaching pattern of Matthew. The dialogue begins in Caesarea Philippi, one of the northernmost towns in the land of Israel. “When Jesus came into the coasts (border or edge of town) of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And Simon . . . answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not

revealed [it] unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And 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. Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ. 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 16:13-21)

Where did it happen?

Note that a promise of **keys** and a prophecy of **three days** is stated. This Gospel account is followed by the **transfiguration** and the Father’s testimony that Jesus is His Beloved Son.

It happened six days later and, according to President Spencer W. Kimball (1895-1985), as stated in a special fireside on the Hills of Bethlehem in 1979, occurred on Mount Tabor about sixty-five miles south of Caesarea Philippi. In those days, one would travel about 10-miles a day on foot. There, at Mt. Tabor, the highest witness of Jesus as the Jehovah, Son of God, was given. That witness is the “center point of the chiasma. The reverse rendering in the verses that follow below.

<p>5 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.</p>	<p>6 For he wist not what to say; for they were sore afraid. 7 And there was a cloud that overshadowed them: and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him.</p>
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<p>(Matthew 17:1-7) 1 And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, 2 And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. 3 And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him. 4 Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.</p>	<p>(Mark 9:2-7) 2 And after six days Jesus taketh with him Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into an high mountain apart by themselves: and he was transfigured before them. 3 And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them. 4 And there appeared unto them Elias with Moses: and they were talking with Jesus. 5 And Peter answered and said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.</p>
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What do I learn from the Father’s testimony of His Beloved Son?

These highest recognitions rendered by Heavenly 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 Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) 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 compliment; being proud seems selfish.

When did it happen?

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*. The festival and High Day *Sukkoth* is a sequel to the festival and High Day called *Passover* (the first full moon after the first day of spring) when Elijah is expected. It begins on the first full moon after the first day of fall. 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*)

What prophetic witness do I have of the Transfiguration being an endowment?

“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*) 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 *Pesach* (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.)

How does General Conference echo the Biblical holy convocations?

The following information explains one of the two holiest convocations the Children of Israel were commanded to keep. The spring convocation is *Passover* and *Sukkoth* is in the fall. (Modern L.D.S. convocations called General Conference 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 marble 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." "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." (**Nehemia 8:14-16**) "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. Each day it is customary to invite and welcome one of these seven guests – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, (Joseph), Moses, Aaron and David -- by an appropriate recitation." (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**)

How does the reverse-rendering complete the chiasma?

The verses following the transfiguration complete the chiasmus. Again, we list them side by side for a comparison. "And while they abode in Galilee, Jesus said unto them, The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men: And they shall kill him, and the **third day** he shall be raised again. And they were exceeding sorry." (**Matthew 17:23**) "Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (**Matthew 18:18**) Following the transfiguration, the prophecy of three days and the gift of **keys** is repeated by Matthew and just the three days is repeated by Mark. Both create a chiasmus emphasizing the Lord's grand role, as well as including the principles of eternal keys and the three-days atonement as explanations of the experience Peter, James, and John had on the mount of transfiguration.