

Matthew 17:1-8

1. **Isolate the Literary Unit:** Matthew 17:1-8

2. **Identify the Setting and Characters:**

a. **Setting:** a high mountain

b. **Characters:**

1. Jesus

2. Peter, James and John

3. Moses and Elijah

4. God the Father

3. **Observe the Story (Are there any key words, phrases, or ideas? Are there any cause and effect relationships stated? What illustrations are used? Etc)**

- Six days have passed from Jesus proclaiming “Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom” (Matthew 16:28).
- Jesus takes only Peter, James, and John and leads them up a high mountain.
- Jesus is transfigured before them with His face shining like the sun and his clothes becoming white as light (2). The evangelist, though normally not as detailed, provides detailed imagery of the appearance of Jesus when He is transfigured.
- Moses and Elijah appear with Jesus and are talking with him. The evangelist makes several references to the Old Testament in this one scene.
- Peter again interjects boldly and inappropriately.
- While Peter is speaking, a cloud overshadows them, and a voice from the cloud says “This is my beloved Son. With whom I am well pleased; listen to Him” (5).
- The disciples fall on their faces and are terrified at the sound (6).
- Jesus comes and touches them (possibly symbolism with Isaiah 6), telling them not to fear, and when the disciples lift up their heads, they only see Jesus (7-8).

4. **Isolate the Different Scenes**

- a. **Scene 1:** 6 days pass and Jesus leads only Peter, James and John up a high mountain. (1)
- b. **Scene 2:** Jesus is transfigured before them, showing His glory, and Moses and Elijah appear with him. (2-3)
- c. **Scene 3:** Peter tells Jesus that he will make 3 tents for them to stay there. While Peter is speaking, a bright cloud overshadows them and a voice says “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him. (4-5)
- d. **Scene 4:** The disciples fall on their faces and are terrified. Jesus comes to them, touches them, and calls for them to “Rise, and have no fear.” (6-7).
- e. **Scene 5:** The disciples lift up their eyes and see only Jesus. (8)

5. Analyze the Narrative:

- a. **Identify the Rising Conflict:** 2-4: Jesus is transfigured before the disciples, Moses and Elijah show up, and Peter says he will build tents for them to stay there.
- b. **Identify the Climax:** 5-6: A bright cloud appears and a voice speaks causing the disciples to fall on their faces and become terrified.
- c. **Identify the Resolution:** 7: Jesus comforts His disciples by touching them and saying, “Rise, and have no fear.”
- d. **Identify the Following Action:** 8: The disciples lift up their eyes and see only Jesus.

6. Think about the Context

- a. **Immediate Literary Context:** The scene unfolds after Peter has confessed that Jesus is “the Christ, the Son of the Living God” (16:16), Christ has said that Peter is not setting his “mind on the things of God” when Peter tries to rebuke him for foretelling his death and resurrection (16:23), and Jesus proclaiming that “there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom” (16:28). The evangelist makes the link even more explicit when he shows that only 6 days have passed from the previous scene. The scene immediately following our story is Jesus commanding His disciples not to tell anyone about the vision until He is raised from the dead and showing them that John the Baptist was the Old Testament fulfillment of Elijah coming.
- b. **Whole Gospel context (narrative flow and structure):** Two themes are at play in this story which run through the Gospel. The first is the revealing of Jesus as Immanuel and the fulfillment of the promised messiah. It is interesting how Moses (representing the law) and Elijah (representing the prophets) appear with Jesus on the mountain along with the audible voice of God the Father, all pointing to Jesus as the messiah. The second is the failure of Peter and the disciples to understand the purpose of Jesus to suffer, die, and raise in order to secure salvation. It is no coincidence that the evangelist links this so closely with Jesus rebuking Peter. Once again, Peter fails to see the purpose of Christ and desires to pitch tents and stay on the mountain.
- c. **Redemptive-historical context:** The context of redemptive-history runs deep with this story because of the constant references to the work of God throughout the Old Testament with Jesus Christ being portrayed as the fulfillment of the law and the prophets which were all pointing to the coming of the Son of God to save His people from their sins.

7. Write a Summary Paragraph summarizing the main thrust of the story, understood in context, and addressing what this teaches us about God and ourselves.

This story is about seeing the glory of Christ and the Son of Man coming in His kingdom (16:28). Jesus Christ is the incarnate Son of God. Jesus’ glory shines bright like the sun and Moses and Elijah appear as a representation of the Old Testaments testimony of His glory. The Father shows up in a bright cloud and declares again “This is my son with whom I am well pleased” and the disciples rightly respond by falling on their face with fear and trembling. The Son is glorious indeed!

Additional Study Questions

- (1) Are there other texts in this Gospel which are parallels either verbally or conceptually? Identify how these parallel texts inform our understanding of this one?**

This story explicitly links to the baptism of Jesus in Matthew 3. Not only does the testimony of the Father echo Matthew 3:17 but the appearance of Moses and Elijah connects perfectly with Matthew's consistent use of prophecy going back specifically to Matthew 3:3 where he suggests that John the Baptist was in fact the "voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord." Matthew makes it clear that this is the desired connection by the immediate context following our story where Jesus affirms that John the Baptist was the fulfillment of Isaiah 40:3. The transfiguration on the mountain is also connected to the great commission in Matthew 28. Though Jesus tells the disciples not to tell anyone the vision now (9:9), He will tell them to tell all the nations exactly who He is in His commission.

- (2) Identify one or two other biblical texts – OT, rest of NT – that provide a significant theological connection to this Gospel passage and write a few sentences that unpack the significance of this connection.**

This story is in all three synoptic gospels providing a significant importance in the minds of the evangelists. There are many references to the Old Testament through imagery in this story but one of the most profound connections has to be the connection to the glory of God being shown to the Israelites in the wilderness. God always appeared to Moses on the mountain in a cloud (Exodus 24:15-16), a cloud guided the Israelites by day (Exodus 13:21), and The Lord appeared in the tent of meeting in a cloud (Exodus 33:9-10). This connection would have been inescapable to the Jewish recipients of this gospel and through this connection, Matthew makes it clear that Peter, James and John saw Christ's "glory as of the only Son from the Father" (John 1:14).