

17:1 *After six days*- Lk. 9:28 speaks of “about an eight days after”, reckoning inclusively and perhaps wishing to express the idea of ‘About a week later’.

*Peter, James and John*- Peter is mentioned first. An over-reaction against Catholic views of Peter can lead us to under-estimate the undoubted supremacy of Peter in the early ecclesia. He was in the inner three along with James and John, and in incidents involving them he is always mentioned first, as the leader (Mt. 17:1,2; 26:37; Mk. 5:37). He is the first to confess Jesus as Messiah (Mt. 16:13-17), the first apostle to see the risen Christ (Lk. 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5), the first to preach to the Gentiles. Being given the keys of the Kingdom is language which would have been understood at the time as the Lord making Peter the Chief Rabbi of His new ecclesia. The Acts record without doubt gives primacy to Peter as the leader and chief representative of Christ’s fledgling church. But, humanly speaking, he was the most unlikely choice. The one who in the eyes of the world and brotherhood should have sat a fair while on the back burner, done the honourable thing... in fact, many honourable things, in just keeping a respectful and bashful silence. And there is no lack of evidence that Peter himself would have preferred that. But no, he was commissioned by the Lord to specifically lead the church. The early church was to be built on the rock of Peter. Whether we like to read this as meaning the rock of Peter’s confession that Christ was the Son of God, or as simply meaning Peter’s work as the manifestation of Christ, *the rock*, the Acts record shows clearly that the early church was built upon the specific work of Peter.

*Brings them up*- Being led up [Gk.] a high mountain by the leader to be present at a theophany is very much the language of Moses taking Joshua and earlier another trio of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu) with him part way up Mount Sinai, and likewise experiencing a shining face (Ex. 34:29-35) and God’s voice from a cloud (Ex. 34:5). Moses returned from the Mount with shining face and the people were afraid- just as happened here (Mk. 9:6). Perhaps Peter vaguely comprehended all this when he wanted to build ‘tabernacles’, because this was the task given to Moses for Israel to complete. Lk. 9:32 speaks of the *exodus* which the Lord was to make at Jerusalem- a reference to His death. It was the Passover lamb which died at the Exodus- the implication is that now God’s people were free to leave Egypt. Again, those secular fishermen were being shown (through the obvious parallel) that they were none less than Joshua in this new Israel which was being created; and after the Lord’s departure, they were to take His place and lead God’s Israel into the Kingdom.

*Apart*- The idea seems to be that just as He had taken the twelve into Gentile areas for a period of intense teaching of them, so even within the twelve He focused upon these three and wanted to spend time alone with them. He “took” them means to desire association with, to come close to. This was His intention, and one wonders whether the transfiguration was therefore unexpected for Him. Previously when He had tried to get the twelve away by themselves, there had been unexpected events which hampered that, such as the crowds following them, and even in Gentile areas the Lord seems to have been surprised by the faith and need to perform miracles which He encountered. In this case, it would be unintentional that the transfiguration is recorded as

following straight after His words about His coming in His Kingdom; it wasn't as if the Lord said those words knowing that some would witness the transfiguration. According to Lk. 9:28, the Lord's intention was to go up the mountain "to pray", but whilst He prayed, the transfiguration occurred. See on 16:28.

Luke mentions that the Lord took Peter, James and John, started praying and then there was a theophany; but in their human weakness they missed much of it because they fell asleep. This was exactly the situation in the Garden of Gethsemane, with the same three involved; it was as if He was seeking to train them for it. They were "heavy" with sleep (Lk. 9:32), and the word is only used elsewhere in the Gospels to describe how the same three were "heavy" with sleep in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:43; Mk. 14:40). Even if Jesus Himself wasn't consciously doing this, we have here an example of how the Divine hand leads us through experiences in order to prepare us for others which are to come later in similar form.

17:2 *Transfigured*- Christ's transfiguration was a cameo of the change that should be apparent deep within us, for Paul says that *we* should likewise be transformed (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18 s.w.), and he uses a related word in speaking of how Christ is to be "formed" within us (Gal. 4:19). *Metamorphoo* means a change of *morphe*; not necessarily of essential nature, because we too are to be transformed in this life, and have a new *morphe* develop in us (Gal. 4:19). But it could be that the 'other form' in which the Lord now appeared was in the form in which He will be in the Kingdom. The idea of a change of *morphe* of the Lord Jesus recurs only one other time- in the hymn concerning the Lord's death in Phil. 2:6,7 where we read that although Had the *morphe* of God, He went through a seven stage progressive humiliation until He took on the *morphe* of a slave in the final death of the cross. One purpose of the transfiguration was for Moses and Elijah (who had both had Divinely arranged deaths or departures from ministry) to encourage the Lord concerning His upcoming death (Lk. 9:31). And yet He appeared as He will in the Kingdom, with shining Kingdom glory. The suffering and the glory were thereby manifested to and upon Him at the very same time, to show how inextricably linked they are. Perhaps too the point was being made that when He would hang there with the *morphe* of a dying and rejected slave, in Heaven's eyes, He was in Kingdom glory. John's equivalent of this is to record how the Lord spoke of His death as a 'lifting up', an idea which in Hebrew has connotations of 'glory'. The shame of the cross was only from the world's viewpoint, whereas from a spiritual viewpoint, His death was the very acme of spiritual glory. The blood drenched garment became in God's eyes a glistening white raiment (Lk. 9:29). This would explain why in one sense the transfiguration was a Kingdom vision, and yet it was also about the Lord's death. Peter later reflected that he could preach with conviction about the coming of Christ because he was present at the transfiguration (2 Pet. 1:16-18). The Kingdom element of the experience cannot be divorced from the fact it was also an encouragement from Moses and Elijah concerning the cross. Note that John was also powerfully inspired by the transfiguration, opening his Gospel with an allusion to it in saying that "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father" (Jn. 1:14). James likewise appears to reference the transfiguration when

he writes of how the Lord's glory is so surpassing that there should be no jostling for human glory amongst us His people (James 2:1). The descriptions of the Lord Jesus are very similar to the language used about the scene at His resurrection- Angels in shining garments (28:3; Lk. 24:4), frightened and uncomprehending disciples (28:5). And yet the theme of the conversation was the Lord's death (Lk. 9:31)- but it took place with a preview of the resurrection scene.

*Shine*- The same word used about the shining associated with the Lord's second coming (Lk. 17:24). Having taught that we too should be transfigured (2 Cor. 3:18 s.w.), Paul goes on to say that God has "shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). This is transfiguration language. We are to be transformed into that same image. He there becomes the picture of what each of us in Him are evolving into.

*As the sun*- The Lord's return will be as the rising of the sun (Mal. 4:2). The same figure is used for the Kingdom age and His return in Mt. 13:46 and Rev. 1:16.

*White*- The same word used about the white clothing of the Angels at the resurrection ("white as snow", Mt. 28:3, just as in Mk. 9:3; Mk. 16:5; Jn. 20:12). In the midst of the conversation about His upcoming death (Lk. 9:31), there was the encouragement of what the resurrection glory would be like. The same word is also used about the Lord's current appearance in Heavenly glory with clothes "as white as snow" (Rev. 1:14- the very phrased used in Mk. 9:3). Indeed, the description of the risen Lord in Rev. 1 has many connections with the language used about His appearance at the transfiguration. Again the idea was to show Him how He would be after His glorification, to motivate Him to go through with the *exodus* at the cross which He must fulfil at Jerusalem. "As the light" is hard to understand, but the Codex Bezae reads "as the snow", in line with Mk. 9:3.

Mark adds that the Lord's clothing was "white as snow, such that no fuller on earth can white them" (Mk. 9:3). The Hebrew mind would have obviously thought of the clothing of God Himself, the "ancient of days" of Dan. 7:9, which is described likewise. The comment that no *man* could ever make them so white is also a hint in that direction. He was clothed with the clothing of God. This doesn't make Him God, for Revelation has many descriptions of the faithful having the same kind of clothing. Against this background, the promise of Is. 1:18 becomes the more awesome- that even although our sins are red as crimson, yet they can become white as snow. This can only be achieved by the wearing of God's own clothing, the gift of His imputed righteousness, which Paul extensively glories in throughout Romans 1-8. Rev. 7:14 speaks of plunging our robes in the blood of the lamb, and them becoming white. It's all so paradoxical- that this whiteness cannot be achieved by man, no fuller on earth could do this, but by plunging [surely an allusion to baptism] into the red blood of Christ. This is the challenge of faith- to believe that the promised whiteness can be achieved through Christ. It was possible even in Isaiah's time, on the basis that God looked ahead to the work of Christ which as it were enabled Him to do this. Therefore the reference to "no fuller on earth" suggests that there is a

fuller in Heaven who can do this. And Mal. 3:2 is specific that the Messiah heralded by the Elijah prophet, John the Baptist, would be like "fuller's soap" in cleansing men through the judgment of their sins. David in the depth of his sin appealed to God to 'full' him ("wash me", but s.w. 'fuller'- Ps. 51:2,7); and this was done for him, on account of the future work of Christ which the Father then held in view. The Lord's glistening garments are therefore available for all of us. And it is with that connection that the scene there becomes no mere spectacle to behold in awe from afar, but a real picture of our own possibility before God.

Luke adds that the disciples "saw his glory" (Lk. 9:32). This is absolutely the language of Moses and the Old Testament heroes seeing Divine glory in theophanies, and like the disciples, hearing God's voice (Ex. 33:18 Heb. – "shew" is the same word translated 'to see' Isaiah- Jn. 12:41; Ezekiel- Ez. 1:28). Yet again the Lord was seeking to show those secular men that they were called to work on the level of Moses and the prophets in the new Israel which the Lord Jesus was creating out of manual labourers, prostitutes, tax collectors, swindlers and sinners. See on :5 *cloud*.

17:3 *There appeared-* See on :9 *the vision*.

*Moses and Elijah-* They appeared "in glory" (Lk. 9:31), as the Lord did- this is clearly a vision of the Kingdom. The Lord Jesus was the firstfruits from the dead, who opened the way to immortality. So there is no way that they were already glorified before His death and resurrection. It was a vision (:9), of the Kingdom. Just as Jesus was not then glorified Himself at that time, neither were they. They spoke of how the Lord was going to "fulfill" the *exodus* in His death at Jerusalem (Lk. 9:31). It was Moses who could supremely explain this to the Lord, having himself slain the Passover lamb and experienced the *exodus* made possible thereby.

*Talking with Him-* The transfiguration follows straight on from the Lord's talk about the Kingdom at the end of chapter 16. It was a foretaste of the Kingdom. Yet the Kingdom is fundamentally a *relationship* with God. Thus the foretaste of the Kingdom presented at the transfiguration was of faithful men in spiritual conversation with the glorified Lord Jesus, with His face shining as the sun as it will in the Kingdom, as the "sun of righteousness" (Mal. 4:2).

Luke adds that the disciples' eyes were heavy and they fell asleep at the critical moment. But earlier, "having remained awake", the same disciples were blessed with a vision of the Lord's glory (Lk. 9:32 RVmg.). If they had remained awake in the garden, they would have seen the Lord being glorified by Angelic visitation. But they didn't perceive how the circumstances were repeating, and thus didn't find the strength and inspiration which was potentially prepared for them through the similarity of circumstance.

17:4 *Peter... said-* Throughout the Lord's ministry, Peter had a mental barrier to the idea of his Lord suffering and dying. It could be argued that his desire to build tents and remain in the mountain of transfiguration was rooted in this- Moses and Elijah had just spoken with the Lord

Jesus about the path He must take to death (Lk. 9:31), and Peter somehow wants the Lord to stay there in the mountain (Mk. 9:5). And yet Peter's later preaching has so much to say about the Lord's death. And his letters contain quotations and allusions from Isaiah's suffering servant prophecies (1 Pet. 2:21 etc.). Further, if we accept the idea elsewhere discussed that Mark's Gospel is a transcript of Peter's preaching of the Gospel, it becomes significant that Mark's version of the Gospel likewise emphasizes Jesus as the suffering servant. Thus what Peter was once blind to, he made a special point of preaching. The content of his witness reflected his deep awareness of his past blindness- and therefore his appeal to others to 'get it' was the more powerful seeing that he himself had patently 'not got it' for some years. And it shouldn't be hard to translate his example into our daily experience, speaking of our weaknesses and former blindnesses rather than coming over as the self-congratulatory religious guy.

It is also possible to understand Peter's suggestion simply as the kind of inappropriate thing a man would say who wants to make a response to spirituality, but doesn't know how to. He wanted to do something material and physical- he simply didn't know what to say (Mk. 9:6). The response was the voice from Heaven telling Peter to *hear* Jesus, to respond to His word, rather than run around doing inappropriate works just because we feel we have to *do* something.

*Tabernacles*- See on 17:1. It may have taken much of the day to climb the mountain, and Peter was maybe thinking of where they were going to sleep for the night. Or was did he also have in mind a celebration of the feast of Tabernacles at that time? Later, Peter came to see his death as a taking down of a tent (2 Pet. 1:13), using the same word for the tabernacle he had wanted to build for his Lord at the transfiguration. Then, he had wanted the tent to be set up so that the time of the Lord's departure wouldn't come; so that the Lord would stay with them there, with Moses and Elijah, in what must have seemed like the Kingdom of God. Again, Peter didn't want the cross, neither for his Lord nor for himself. But by the time he wrote 2 Peter, he had learnt his lesson; he saw that his tent must be taken down. The vision of the glory of the Lord Jesus, the words of His coming death and future Kingdom, these were quite enough. There had been no need of the tent on the mountain, and now he saw there was no need for the tent of his body either. We are all the same. Our death will literally be a death with the Lord, in that our resurrection will be after the pattern of His (Rom. 6:5). Peter learnt this lesson from the transfiguration because he describes his coming death as his *exodus* (2 Pet. 1:15), just as Moses and Elijah had spoken then of the Lord's coming death (Lk. 9:31).

17:5- see on 16:16.

*Cloud*- Moses had previously entered the cloud of glory, seen God's glory and heard God's voice- on the top of a mountain. Moses' ascent into the mountain and into the very cloud of Divine glory was understood in Judaism as the very zenith of human spiritual achievement of all

time, coming so close to the very personal presence of God, never to be repeated amongst men. And now, three fishermen were having the very same experience. No wonder they feared as they themselves entered into that cloud (Lk. 9:34).

*This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased; hear Him-* This was literally the word of God, and yet it was actually a string of three quotations from God's word in the Old Testament: "You are My Son" (Ps. 2:7), "In whom My soul delights" (Is. 42:1), "Hear Him" (Dt. 18:15). It must have been a profound evidence of the Bible's Divine inspiration. The very voice of God repeating His own words as found in the Law, Psalms and Prophets- the three divisions of the Hebrew Scriptures.

*Hear Him-* This was intended to take the mind back to Dt. 18:15, where it was written that Messiah would be 'heard' by the faithful. But Peter fell down paralyzed with fear; he didn't really hear the son of God then. Yet in Acts 3:22, Peter quotes Dt. 18:15 and asks his hearers to obey the passage by hearing Jesus, through his preaching of Him. He was asking his audience to do what he himself hadn't done.

*17:6 Fell on their face-* The strong similarity with Moses (see on :5 *cloud*) was such that they felt utterly unworthy, which is what falling on the face is commonly associated with in the Old Testament (Abraham, Gen. 17:3; Joseph's brothers, Gen. 50:18; Moses, Num. 16:4; Balaam, Num. 22:31; Joshua, Josh. 7:6; Ruth, Ruth 2:10; Nebuchadnezzar, Dan. 2:46). Their fear is similar to Israel's when confronted with the sight of a similar theophany on a mountain. They felt, as we all do at times, that all this was beyond them. The Lord's comfort of them was not simply reassuring them that they were not going to be consumed by the vision, but more so encouraging them that they really could rise up to the height of the calling to be as Moses. Paul grasped the point when he invites us *each one* to see ourselves as Moses, beholding the glory of God in the face of Christ, "we each with unveiled face" (2 Cor. 3:18 RV). Each of us are as Moses, not just the church leadership, but each one of us who has entered a personal relationship with Christ and seen God's glory in His face.

*17:7* This is intentionally similar to the experience of Daniel in Dan. 10, with the Lord Jesus lifting up the disciples, who were feeling unworthy as Daniel did. Again, the disciples were being taught that in the new Israel, there are no heroes set in stained glass that are high above our possible reach. We are the heroes. Just as Daniel felt unworthy, so did the disciples- the connection made the point that the heroes of Judaism were also weak and felt their sinfulness, and on this basis the disciples were encouraged to be like them and rise up to their spirit.

*Be not afraid-* Their fear was not simply of the majesty of the moment, but more fundamentally their fear of being called to be as Moses- see on :6. A massive 23 times we find the Greek phrase

translated “Fear not” on the lips of the Lord Jesus. His consistent, persistent reassurance of His faltering followers, whose fear is often because of their own moral inadequacy, is significant indeed.

17:8 *Lifted up their eyes*- ‘Lifted up’, *epairo*, is surely intended to resonate with *egeiro* [“arise” / ‘get up’] of :7. The picture is given of the Lord bending down and touching them, as if they are children, and urging them to rise up. Instead, they just raise up their eyes, and see only Jesus. We really are invited to play ‘Bible television’ here. The scene is so imaginable. And again, the Gospel writers and speakers were emphasizing the weakness of even the three leading disciples. Peter spoke inappropriately, offering to make booths when instead God wanted him to ‘hear’ His Son; their fear is likened to the fear of unspiritual Israel at the theophany on Sinai; they are scared to get up in obedience to Jesus’ touch, raising their large childlike eyes to Him instead... Indeed the record of the transfiguration really stresses the disciples’ weakness, exhibited in the face of the Kingdom glory of their Lord and the earnest encouragement of Him by more spiritual men to go through with the cross- whilst they slept.

*No man except Jesus only*- In the Greek as well as in translation, this is really labouring the point. The “only”, *monos*, is redundant- they saw ‘nobody except Jesus’ is a statement which needs no further qualification, indeed grammatically it almost *cannot* be given further qualification, and reads awkwardly because of the *monos*, “only”, that is added. But the word “only” is added to emphasize that their focus was solely upon Him. That was the purpose of the event, and it had been achieved. Christ centeredness is the ultimate, final and total issue of our experience of Him, the Law and the prophets. The transfiguration ends with this total focus *monos* upon Christ; this was the practical effect of the theophany. John’s Gospel doesn’t record the transfiguration, but as so often, it is indeed alluded to. For John’s Gospel is full of references to seeing glory, to hearing the Son. It’s as if John presents Jesus to us a constant theophany, not one that three of the best disciples go up a mountain to see for a short period, but one which is continually before each of us, and which according to Paul’s allusions to it, draws us into its very process. For we too are transfigured as we like the disciples behold the Lord’s transfiguration (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18 s.w.).

17:9 *The vision*- Whilst this literally means ‘the thing seen’, the transfiguration was indeed a vision. Seeing that Christ is the firstfruits from the dead and that there is no conscious survival of death, it follows that at best Moses and Elijah were resurrected especially for the occasion. But they “appeared in glory” (Lk. 9:31), as if they were in the Kingdom. The Greek translated “appeared” has the strong sense of ‘being seen / observed’. This is how they were seen- another hint at a vision. When the event finished, Lk. 9:36 says that Jesus was “found alone”- but that is

a poor translation of *heurisko*. He was seen, perceived alone- again hinting that the entire experience was a vision rather than occurring in reality. The way that “Suddenly, when they had looked round about” they saw only Jesus, finding Moses and Elijah had disappeared (Mk. 9:8) would also hint at a visionary experience. Note that there is no suggestion that Moses and Elijah went off anywhere, let alone ‘returned’ to Heaven. The vision of them simply abruptly ended. They saw nobody “except Jesus only with themselves” or “they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus” (Mk. 9:8) would suggest that they were as it were looking at themselves from outside of themselves- again, ideas appropriate to a visionary experience rather than an actual personal encounter. And this is how the incident with Moses and Elijah began, for “there *appeared unto them* Moses and Elijah talking with Him” (:3). It was an appearance *unto them*, a vision which ended when they saw themselves from outside themselves and realized they were actually alone with Jesus. The language of ‘appearance’ used throughout the records of the transfiguration would also suggest that the incident with Moses and Elijah was an appearance *to them*, in their eyes and perception, rather than necessarily in reality.

*To no man*- This maybe connects with the fact that they saw “no man” except Jesus (:8); and so they are asked to tell the vision to “no man” until after the Lord’s resurrection. It could be that the Lord wanted them to retain their focus upon Him by not telling others but instead meditating personally upon what they had seen. The vision had been of the Lord’s resurrection glory- we noted above the similarities in language to the shining garments of the Angels at the resurrection scene. The Lord didn’t want people to think that He had already attained that glory without the cross. Even though in prospect He had that glory, He was insistent that no impression be given that He could attain it without passing through the cross. This was particularly important for Peter to appreciate, who several times entertained a hope that glory was possible for the Lord without the cross.

*Until*- The Synoptics each record the transfiguration. But did John? He saw it, and here he was commanded to tell it to others after the resurrection. It would be almost impossible for his Gospel record to not mention it. I have suggested that he actually begins his Gospel with the recollection of how he had seen the Lord’s glory at the transfiguration (Jn. 1:14 “we beheld His glory”), and that the whole Gospel presents Jesus in “glory” and being “beheld” or ‘seen’ in that glory.

Mark adds (Mk. 9:10) that “they kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean”. This comment indicates how secular they were; for the idea of bodily resurrection was well known within Judaism- the Pharisees believed that the dead would rise, although the Sadducees denied it. But the disciples were clearly unfamiliar with



the idea, because they simply hadn't been seriously religious people. The word for 'questioning' is used 10 times in the NT and always in a negative sense, mainly of the unbelieving Jews questioning the things of Christ. Thus it is used twice later in Mk. 9 (Mk. 9:14,16) about the Jews questioning about Jesus. Such questioning is so often an excuse for lack of faith, pressing for over-definition of everything as an excuse for disbelief. Instead of focusing on the glory of Jesus, they got distracted (willfully) by semantics, words and meanings.

17:10 *Why then say the scribes-* The disciples were evidently still under the influence of Judaism and the religious world around them, and this background died hard for them. "Why say the scribes...?", they reasoned, implying that their view was of at least equal if not greater weight when compared with that of the Lord Jesus [as they also did in Mt. 17:9,10]. He had to specifically warn them against the Scribes in Lk. 20:45,46; He had to specifically tell them not to address the Rabbis as 'father' (Mt. 23:8,9), implying they had too much respect for them. The way the disciples speak of the Scribes as if they have such a valid theological position reflects their upbringing and respect for the ruling elite of the synagogue (Mt. 17:10), with whom the Lord was at such total variance. They were concerned that the Pharisees had been offended by the Lord's words (Mt. 15:12). We again see here how the disciples were out of step with the Lord's thinking, pursuing their own mental agenda, and not doing that they had just been told- to 'hear Him'. For the Lord has just told them very seriously ("charged them") to not say anything about this experience until He was resurrected. But instead they are grappling with another issue- if this Jesus was really Messiah, well why hadn't Elijah come first, as the Scribes taught? Clearly we see them pursuing a line of thought which precluded their attention to what the Lord was so earnestly seeking to tell them.

*That Elijah must first come-* This provides another insight into the shallowness of their understanding. The transfiguration had persuaded them, at least for the moment, that Jesus was Messiah. But they were confused as to why the Elijah prophet hadn't come first. John the Baptist, whom they had followed and believed, had clearly cast himself in the role of Elijah. But it seems that they hadn't really grasped the significance of John's ministry at all.

17:11 *Elijah truly shall first come-* There can be no doubt that 'Elijah' will come in some form: "I will send you Elijah the prophet before the *coming* of the great and dreadful day of the Lord...lest I *come* and smite the earth" (Malachi 4:5,6). The coming of the Lord must therefore be preceded by Elijah's work. His mission will be to direct Israel's attention to God's Word, "lest I come and smite the earth with a curse" (Malachi 4:4,6). This was evidently not totally fulfilled by John the Baptist, seeing that the land was smitten after A.D. 70 due to Israel's failure to repent. "Lest I come..." is clearly referring to God's manifestation in Christ's second coming - it

is associated with the arising of "the sun of righteousness" (Malachi 4:2,6). Whilst John fulfilled the role of the Elijah prophet to those who truly repented (Mt. 11:14), he emphatically denied that he was 'Elijah' (John 1:21,23). This can only mean that the Elijah prophet is yet to come. Our Lord silences all doubt about this: "Elijah truly shall first come, and restore all things" (Mt. 17:11). Elijah's work will be to turn the hearts of Israel back to the patriarchs in repentance (Malachi 4:6 cp. 1 Kings 18:37), so that Christ comes to an Israel who have turned away from unGodliness (Is. 59:20). John being a mini-Elijah prophet, it is to be expected that the broad features of his ministry will be repeated in the work of the final Elijah prophet. John was called "the Baptist", so evident was his emphasis on water baptism. Indeed, the name 'John' and the image of water baptism are hard to separate. There is fair reason to think that 'Elijah' will also literally baptize. "That (Christ) should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water" (Jn.1:31) seems to make baptism a pre-requisite for accepting Christ. Indeed, Jewish theology expects baptism to be associated with the coming of Messiah and the Elijah prophet. Therefore the Jews asked John: "Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias" (Jn. 1:25).

*Restore all things*- The restoration of the Kingdom is ultimately Messiah's work (Acts 1:9-11). The restoring referred to here would therefore mean spiritual restoration. Mark's account of John's activities clearly alludes to the Malachi passages about the Elijah prophet, and the descriptions of Elijah's clothing, appearance and diet are clearly intended to help us identify him with a prophet like Elijah. The LXX in Mal. 4:5 speaks of how the prophet will *restore* the hearts of the fathers to the children. This confirms that the restoration to be achieved by the Elijah prophet is largely spiritual, psychological and internal. The more physical restoration of the Kingdom on earth is Messiah's work. But the Lord is placing Elijah's work in the future- because Israel had failed to respond to it. And yet what are we to make of the repeated descriptions in the Gospels of "all" Israel going out to John and repenting? My suggestion is that they were eager for a Messiah to come and save them from the Romans; John appeared looking like and alluding to Elijah, and so they were eager to accept him as an Elijah prophet, knowing that this heralded Messiah. They 'repented' because there was a clear connection made in Judaism between Jewish repentance, and the Elijah prophet and Messiah's coming. Thus: "Israel will fulfil the great repentance when the Elijah of blessed memory comes" (Pirque R. Eliezer 43 [25a]); and many other examples are quoted by Walter Wink (1). The Qumran documents even claim that the faithful would go out into the wilderness to the Elijah prophet and separate themselves from the unholy in Israel (1 QS 8:12-16) (2). Hence the intended sarcasm of the idea that in fact "all" Israel went out to the wilderness to John! Therefore their repentance was as it were self-induced and merely symbolic, because they believed it was part of a sequence of events which would lead to Messiah's coming and liberation from Rome. This would be a classic example of surface level spirituality and response to God's word, when in fact the response was motivated by selfish and unspiritual motives. No wonder John appealed to them to *really* repent.

The Lord says that Elijah comes “first”, *proton*, above all, most importantly, to achieve this restoration- the implication being that the fact John’s ministry had failed to bring “all” Israel to this position, meant that there must therefore be another Elijah ministry which would succeed before Messiah could come in glory. And this would indeed “restore” the *hearts* of Israel, as Mal. 4:5 LXX requires.

17:12 *They have done unto him*- Christ accused the Jews of rejecting John the Baptist (Mt. 17:12; Lk. 7:32–35), and on other occasions He commented on the fact that they had accepted his teaching, with the result that spiritually their house was swept and garnished (Mt. 12:44; Jn. 5:35). We can conclude from this that their *appearance* of accepting John’s message was spoken of by Jesus as if they had accepted it. Likewise Christ called the Jews both children of hell (Mt. 23:15) and children of the Kingdom (Mt. 8:12); the latter was how they perceived themselves. The things “done” to John surely include his death for the Lord goes on to say that He will “likewise suffer of them”, “of this generation” (Lk. 17:25). But it was the despised Herod who had John murdered. And yet Jesus here says that that generation had done that to John- despite the fact that he remained, it seems, immensely popular amongst that generation. Again the Lord is stressing that all the apparent response to John had not been sincere- the Jews who had seemingly responded to him were in fact as bad as apostate Herod and it was effectively *they* who had killed him. Naturally such language begged the response that no, it was Herod and his courtiers who killed John, not the mass of people. But the Lord is saying that effectively, it was that generation who had locked John up and killed him.

Mk. 9:12 adds more detail to the Lord’s words: “Elijah indeed comes first and restores all things. And how is it written of the Son of Man, that he should suffer many things and be set at nothing?”. His question was (as so often with Him) in answer and response to their unexpressed question- that surely Elijah is to have a successful ministry and then the Messiah would begin His Kingdom in glory. The Lord was asking them the question about the prophesied sufferings and rejection of Messiah in order to answer the question He could see in their minds. So often “He answered and said...” something, when no question was verbalized. But He perceived the question in the minds of His audience, such was His sensitivity. Only a week or so ago He had told them how messiah must “suffer many things” (Mt. 16:21) and now he uses the same phrase again- although it seems they had forgotten or not appreciated what He had then told them.

*Whatever they wanted*- Mk. 9:12 adds: “As it is written of him”. There seems no specific prophecy stating that the Elijah prophet would be unsuccessful, unless one really reads between the lines of Malachi’s prophecy about the Elijah prophet. More likely is that the “him” refers to the historical Elijah. All that was written of *him* had come true of John the Baptist, in that the alliance between Ahab and the manipulative Jezebel which led to Elijah’s persecution was

mirrored in that between Herod and the equally manipulative Herodias, which led to John's demise.

*Likewise shall also the Son of Man suffer of them-* Mk. 9:12 extends this in saying that He would likewise "suffer many things and be set at nought". Significantly, the same Greek word is used in Lk. 23:11 to describe how Herod "set at nought" Jesus at His trial; and it was the same Herod who had John the Baptist murdered.

17:13 *Then the disciples understood-* Towards the end of Matthew 12 and throughout chapter 13, the Lord had explained at length how Israel *en masse* had *not* "understood" (the same word is used) about John, but the disciples *had* understood (Mt. 13:13-15,19,23). He then solemnly asked the disciples whether they had "understood" (s.w.; Mt. 13:51), and they assured Him that they had. They are presented as children, saying they understand when they don't. The Lord commended them for understanding when the masses didn't. But this understanding was imputed to them by Him. On one hand we see His simple and pure love for them, counting them as understanding what they didn't; on the other, we see how His hope that they would understand paid off, for they did finally. And this is the practical outworking of imputed righteousness and the status that is counted to us "in Christ"- we are to live out that status in practice, and the Lord works patiently with us to ensure that we do. And likewise in our pastoral work with others; faith and love and hope in others are at times rewarded, although not always.

17:14 This meeting with the crowd occurred the day after the transfiguration (Lk. 9:37)- presumably they slept up the mountain for the night.

*Come to the multitude-* The transfiguration record is replete with references to the theophany on Sinai. Moses' return from the mount was to a faithless people of God, and the same is found here, in that the disciples had been unable to perform a healing which they had potentially been given the power to do.

Note how the three accounts dovetail so nicely: Jesus and the three with Him moved towards the crowd (Mt.), Jesus having noticed them from a distance (Mk.), and the crowd came towards them (Lk.). And as Jesus came (*erchomai*) towards the crowd, there came out of the crowd towards Him (*pros-erchomai*) the man who wanted a healing for his son (Mt.). Mark records that the people ran towards Jesus when they saw Him (Mk. 9:15- presumably His face was shining after the encounter, after the pattern of Moses), which explains why Luke says that the man had to 'cry out' from out of the crowd (Lk. 9:38- Gk. 'to holler', to get attention amidst the rush of all the others towards Jesus) and that Jesus firstly asked the Scribes what they were questioning His disciples about. We really can powerfully reconstruct the scene by putting the three different viewpoints together. Matthew focuses upon the man who came to Jesus wanting healing for his son. The best analogy is to cameramen. Matthew focuses close up upon one man; Mark is taking

a broader view of the crowd as a whole, and therefore picks up the brief question to the Scribes first of all- they made no answer that is recorded, and the Lord's answer to whatever questions they were asking was given in the healing miracle. That there are no actual contradictions of fact or chronology is to me a profound internal evidence of an inspired record, with a common Divine hand behind all the authors. If these were three uninspired men writing their recollections some time after the event, or uninspired people writing down what had been passed down to them as originating with those men, then for sure there would be contradictions. Because misremembering of detail is just part of our human condition, and the supposed lengthy process of oral tradition would inevitably have meant there was further corruption and unclarity added. The lack of contradiction in the accounts and the way they complement each other so perfectly has to me the hallmark of the Divine. Even witnesses who agree together to lie in court and rehearse their stories many times over- still end up contradicting each other. But that is not the case with the Gospels.

Mark adds: "All the crowd, when they saw Him, were greatly amazed; and running to Him saluted Him" (Mk. 9:15). They ran up to Him- and He add Peter, James and John with Him. This sentence in Greek is intentionally similar to the account of Acts 3:11, where again "All the people [cp. "all the crowd"] ran [s.w. "running to Him"] together unto them... greatly wondering [s.w. "greatly amazed"]. The response of the crowd to Peter and John in Acts 3:11 could not possibly have been contrived by them. Their experience at the return from the transfiguration was to prepare them for their own later witness, when without the physical presence of Jesus, they were Him to the world. And the same kind of carefully, sensitively planned education of us is ongoing now. Not only do situations occur and then repeat in essence later in our lives, but what we go through in this life will only have understood meaning in the Kingdom, when we shall put into eternal practice what we are learning now. But for now, there is an inevitable difficulty in attaching meaning to event, because we cannot foresee the billion situations in our eternities where we will put into practice what we are now learning.

17:15 *Have mercy*- This is a phrase commonly used by those who besought the Lord for a miracle. But later in the New Testament, the word is used almost exclusively concerning the Lord's spiritual grace and mercy specifically in providing salvation. We are left wondering, therefore, whether each of those who requested such "mercy" were not thinking solely of physical healing, although that was obviously very much in their minds, but also had a sense of their need for spiritual healing, forgiveness and salvation. And this was what led to their requests for healing being positively received by the Lord. For presumably there were many requests for healing which were not met, seeing that the majority of the Lord's miracles were done in three small villages (see on 11:20).

*My son*- His only child (Lk.).

*Lunatic*- English has the word “lunatic” to describe someone who is mentally ill. Literally it means one who is “moon struck”. It was once believed that if a person went out walking at night when there was a clear moon, they could get struck by the moon and become mentally ill. We use that word “lunatic” today to describe someone who is ill, but it does not mean that we believe mental illness is caused by the moon. If our words were written down and re-read in 2,000 years’ time, people might think we believed that the moon caused illness; but they’d be wrong because we are just using the language of our day, as the Lord Jesus did 2,000 years ago. The New Testament likewise reflects this association between the moon and mental illness. “They brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, and those which were lunatick, and paralytics; and He healed them” (Mt. 4:24 A.V.). The repetition of the word “and...” gives the impression that every kind of illness- physical and mental, understood and not understood- was healed by the Lord Jesus. “Lunatick” translates the Greek *selēniazomai*- “to be moon struck”, derived from the noun *selēnē*, the moon. It’s not true that some mental illnesses come from being moon-struck. But the idea is used, without correction- just as the idea of ‘demon possession’ is in the preceding phrase.

*Fire... water*- Descriptions of the rejected as gnashing teeth, cast into fire and water, wallowing helpless... is all the language of the demoniac (Mk. 9:18-22). This connection shows at least two things: that there will be a madness in the rejected, the tragic aimlessness of the demented. And secondly, that because the demoniac was cured, it is possible for a man whose behaviour leads to his condemnation *now* to still repent, before it’s too late. And yet although the rejected may appear demented, they may well not feel like this. They will gnash their teeth with anger, not least against themselves. Being cast into fire or water were both figures of condemnation. The young man felt he was worthy of condemnation- hence conviction of the Lord’s saving mercy would have been enough to cure him of the deep sense of unworthiness which he had.

17:16 *I brought him to your disciples*- Lk. 9:40 adds that he “besought” them, he begged them, to heal the child. According to Mark, when the father of the dumb child brought him to the disciples, he tells Jesus that “I brought unto thee my son”, but the disciples couldn’t cure him (Mk. 9:17 RV); he perceived Jesus as His followers, just as folk do today. The Lord had earlier given them power over “unclean spirits” (10:8)- but still they couldn’t heal him. The power given to them was therefore potential power, but it was no guarantee that they would actually do the works. Alternatively, we could conclude that that power was only given to them temporarily. Or, that there is a difference between the twelve, and the more general “disciples” / followers of Jesus. However it would have been strange indeed if the man had not brought his son to the

group of the twelve in the hope of healing. And it is the disciples, presumably the twelve, who then come to the Lord and ask why they could not perform the cure (:19).

*They could not-* They had no *dunamai* (possibility); Mk. 9:18 uses a different word- according to Mark, the man said that they “could not” using *ischuo* (more carrying the sense of physical power). The man therefore bewailed at least twice that the disciples couldn’t help; and he asks the Lord Jesus to help “if You can” (Mk. 9:22- *dunamai*). They did have the possibility; but they lacked the faith to actualize it (Mt. 10:8; Lk. 10:19,20 “I give unto you power... over all the power of the enemy... the spirits are subject unto you”). We too have been given potentials which require faith to exploit, and our failures to do so leave people with the impression that the Lord Himself is limited- for, like the disciples, we are His representatives in this world, and people coming to us are effectively coming to Him.

Mk. 9:23 adds that the father of the child was asked whether he could believe [i.e., that Jesus could cast out the demon]. The man replied that yes, although his faith was weak, he believed [that Jesus could cast out the demon]. His faith was focused on by Jesus, rather than his wrong beliefs. Faith above all was what the Lord was focusing on *in the first instance*. Mark also adds the detail that the Lord “asked his father: How long has this been happening to him? And he said: From a child. And often it has cast him both into the fire and into the waters to destroy him; but if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us. And Jesus said to him: Rather, if you can! All things are possible to him that believes. Immediately the father of the child cried out, and said: I believe! Help my disbelief?”. It is a feature of our nature that we can believe and yet disbelieve at the same time. We frequently commit the horror of limiting God in our attitude to prayer. All too often we see ourselves in the man who believed and yet still had unbelief: "If thou (Jesus) canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us. Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible" (Mk. 9:22,23). The man thought that Christ's power to help was limited: 'If you can do anything to help, well, please do'. The Lord Jesus turned things right round: 'If you can believe, anything's possible' - in other words, God can do anything, but His ability to directly respond to some particular need is limited by our faith, not by any intrinsic lack of ability within Himself. The man hadn't thought about this. He saw God as sometimes able to help a bit; Christ turned the man's words round to show that God's power is infinite, limited only by our faith. The word "believe" in Mk. 9:23 is omitted from many texts. Thus we could paraphrase: “Regarding that " If you can..." which you said- as regards that, well, all things are possible”. This is the view of F.B. Meyer and Marvin Vincent. The RV reads: “And Jesus said unto him, If thou canst! All things are possible to him that believeth”. It is clear enough that God at times limits His power. He *could* save everybody, indeed He wishes to do this, yet He allows human freewill to be genuine and meaningful, to the extent that not all will be saved. Israel in the wilderness “limited the Holy One of Israel". He was left by Israel as a mighty man powerless to save. The Greek word *dunatos* translated 16 times "mighty" is also 13 times translated "possible". God's might is His possibility. But our freewill can limit that might. All things are

possible to God, and therefore all things are possible to the believer- but if the believer has no faith, then, those possibilities of God will not occur (Lk. 1:49; Mk. 9:23; 10:27). And so I have no problem with a God who limits His omniscience.

17:17 *O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you?*- An example of the Lord's perhaps unconscious usage of His Father's words is to be found in this exasperated comment. Of course the Lord would have spoken those words and expressed those ideas in Aramaic- but the similarity is striking with His Father's Hebrew words of Num. 14:27: "How long shall I bear with this evil congregation...?". As a son comes out with phrases and word usages which 'Could be his father speaking!', so the Lord Jesus did the same thing. What I am saying is that the Lord was not merely quoting or alluding to the Father's Old Testament words, in the way that, say, Paul or Peter did. As the Father's Son, He was speaking in the same way as His Father, no doubt saturated with the written record of the Father's words, but all the same, there were those similarities of wording and underlying thinking which are only seen between fathers and sons. And His words of Mt. 17:17 = Num. 14:27 seem to me to be an example of this. It was the disciples who were faithless (:20). In chapters 12 and 13, the Lord had drawn a clear difference between the disciples, and the unbelieving surrounding generation. It seems that He now despaired of whether that distinction was valid; He sees them, in the heat of that moment of bitter disappointment, as no better than the masses who did not believe. The "faithless" will be condemned (Lk. 12:46 "his portion with the unbelievers", s.w.), and this is the term used about the world generally (1 Cor. 6:6; 7:12); or as the Lord puts it, this "generation". And yet the Lord uses it here about the disciples and again in Jn. 20:27. The very phrase "perverse generation" is used by Paul about the unbelieving world (Phil. 2:15). To use this term about the disciples is therefore significant; the Lord really felt that His faith and hope that they were different from the Jewish world had been misplaced. After His encounter with Elijah and Moses, he doubtless expected more of God's people.

This fits in with a Biblical theme- of people being confronted with acute spiritual temptation immediately after a highly spiritual experience. And this is true to life- so often, merely hours after a highly intense spiritual experience [e.g. at a breaking of bread meeting] we find ourselves assailed by temptation and spiritual depression. It's not that we are encountered by a physical person called 'Satan' immediately after our spiritual 'high'; rather it is a feature of human nature that the closer we come to God, the stronger is the tidal backwash of *internal* temptation immediately afterwards. Consider some examples:

- Noah walks off the ark, a superb triumph of faith, into a cleansed and pristine world, with the rainbow arch of God's grace above him- and gets dead drunk (Gen. 9:21-24).
- Moses renounced greatness, stood up for God's people and then left Egypt by faith, "not fearing the wrath of the king" (Heb. 11:27); and yet ended up fleeing in fear from Pharaoh (Ex. 2:14,15).



- Moses returned from the awesome meeting with God on Sinai and gave in to a flash of anger, during which he smashed the tables of the covenant- a covenant which had also been made with him personally.
- Israel were ecstatic with joy and confidence in God as they stood on the other side of the Red Sea- but very soon afterwards they were giving in to temptation in the wilderness, accusing God of intending to kill them and being careless for them.
- Judas went from the spiritual height of being present at the first "breaking of bread" meeting with the Lord Jesus, just prior to His death, directly into temptation from "the Devil" and then went out into the darkness of that night (Lk. 22:3).
- Soon after his spiritual triumph on Carmel, Elijah is to be found suicidal and bitter with God, and considering that the other faithful in Israel are in fact also apostate (1 Kings 19:4-11).
- Samson's life was full of giving in to spiritual temptation immediately after he had been empowered by God to do some great miracle.
- Immediately after having been saved by God's grace from a huge invasion (2 Sam. 11), David sins with Bathsheba and murders Uriah (2 Sam. 12).
- After the wonder of having a terminal illness delayed by 15 years in response to prayer, Hezekiah gives in to the temptation to be proud and selfish in the events of Is. 39.
- Soon after the wonder of the miracles of the loaves and fishes, the disciples hardened their heart to it and accused Jesus of not caring for them (Mk. 4:38; 6:52).
- Paul straight after his wonderful vision of "the third heaven" finds himself struggling with a "thorn in the flesh", a term I have elsewhere suggested may refer to a spiritual weakness or temptation (2 Cor. 12:7).
- After the wonder of baptism and the confirming voice from Heaven, Jesus was immediately assaulted by major temptation in the wilderness.

*How long-* This is surely the most graphic and intense expression of frustration in the entire recorded history of the Lord Jesus. His frustration was with how His disciples were not living up to their potential, and how faithless they were. And we daily exhibit the same terribly disappointing characteristics. But *how long* may not necessarily be a cry of exasperation- although it could be that. There can also be the sense of 'Until when?', and the time in view was the Lord's death. John's Gospel records the Lord several times speaking of how His hour or time had not yet come, and how He agonized until it did. That end point was clearly the moment when He cried from the cross "It is finished".

*Faithless-* When Jesus returned from the Mount of Transfiguration, He found that the disciples had failed to do a cure because of their lack of faith. He describes them as [part of] a "faithless generation" again indicating how the disciples were all too influenced by Judaism, the "generation" or world around them. The disciples and Judaism / the Jewish world are paralleled in Jn. 7:3,4: "Let your disciples see your work... show yourself to the world".

*Bring him... to Me-* The man had brought [s.w. "bring"] his son to the disciples, they couldn't heal him, and so the Lord asks for the child to be brought to Him personally. And yet He had taught that in their witness, the disciples were Him to this world. Coming to them was coming to Him. But He despaired that in this case, there was now a difference between them and Him. They were unable to manifest Him as they should because of their lack of faith. And there are times when our status as 'brethren in Christ' likewise fails, and we fail to be Him to this world and He has to intervene and reveal Himself more directly to men.

*Here to Me-* Mk. 9:19 records how He asked for the son to be brought *pros* Me, literally, 'here with Me'; but this is the same term used in the Lord's lament: "How long shall I be with [*pros*] you?". The Lord's physical presence was required for this miracle- the son must be "here" (Mt.), "with Me" (Mk.). But the Lord was making the point that He would not always be literally with them, and then such cures would have to be done by the disciples without His physical presence. And it seems He despaired as to whether they were ready for this.

17:18 *He departed-* There are a number of parallels between the language used of 'casting out' demons, and that used about healings. Jesus "rebuked" demons in Mk. 9:25, and yet He "rebuked" a fever (Lk. 4:39) and the wind (Mt. 8:26). Demons are spoken of as having "departed" (Mt. 17:18), yet we read of leprosy 'departing' (Mk. 1:42) and diseases 'departing' after cure (Acts 19:12). I'd go so far as to say that every case of a person being spoken of as demon possessed has its equivalent in diseases which we can identify today – e.g. epilepsy, schizophrenia. The peoples of the first century, and their predecessors, believed that demons and the Satan monster were somehow associated with water- that was why, they figured, the water mysteriously kept moving, and at times blew up into storms. When we read of God 'rebuking' the waters and making them calm or do what He wished (Ps. 18:16; 104:7; 106:9), we're effectively being told that Yahweh of Israel is so infinitely superior to those supposed demons and sea monsters that for God's people, they have no effective existence. The Lord Jesus taught the same lesson when He 'rebuked' the sea and wind during the storm on the lake (Mt. 8:26). The same Greek word is used to describe how He 'rebuked' demons (Mt. 17:18 etc.). I have no doubt that the Lord Jesus didn't believe there was a Loch Ness-type monster lurking in Galilee which He had to rebuke in order to save the disciples from the storm; and likewise He spoke of 'rebuking' demons as a similar way of teaching others that *whatever* ideas they had about demons, He was greater and was in a position to 'rebuke' them. Likewise He assured His men that they had the power to tread on snakes, scorpions, and all their enemies (Lk. 10:17-20). The image of a victorious god trampling his foes and snakes underfoot was well established in the surrounding cultures, and had entered Judaism. The Lord is teaching those fearful men that OK, if that's your perception of things, well, in your terms, you have ultimate victory through working 'in My name'. It must be noted that the man had previously described the boy's condition as being due to how "A spirit seizes him... and it *departs* from him with great difficulty" (Lk. 9:39). The condition was intermittent (consistent with viewing the condition as epilepsy rather than actual,

literal manipulation by a spirit or demon). Trying various remedies, probably including beating him, the condition ‘departed’. The Lord’s cure is described in the same terms, with the implication that it was total and permanent, rather than partial and temporary, as their ‘healings’ were. The Lord said that the ‘spirit’ would never again enter the boy (Mk. 9:25).

*From that very hour-* The immediate effect of the Lord's healings contrasted sharply with those of faith healers, both then and now.

Mk. 9:27 adds that the Lord touched him and lifted him up- exactly what He had done to the terrified disciples on the mount of transfiguration (Mt. 17:7 s.w.). By doing so, it was made apparent that the disciples (even the three best of them) needed healing themselves rather than being in a position to perform the miracles, as the Lord had hoped they could; and as indeed they could.

17:19 *Privately-* In a house (Mk.).

*Why could we not-* They were surprised at their inability, which suggests they had performed such cures before and had faith that they could do miracles. The Lord's explanation in the next verse that they had no faith ("unbelief", *a-pisteo*, no faith) would therefore have been hard for them to initially accept. His idea was that we either believe or do not believe, and often what seems to us as faith, even if it is admittedly small faith, is ultimately not faith. John's Gospel even more clearly presents faith as something one either has or doesn't have. And yet in reality there are gradations of faith, and the Bible recognizes this. The Lord's next comment that "*If* you [really, as you think] have faith as a grain of mustard seed..." was therefore speaking to their assumption that although their faith was small, they did actually believe. Again we see how the Lord sees to the inner, unexpressed thoughts and positions of His audiences, and addresses them. This presentation of faith as an absolute, a black or white position (and John's Gospel stresses this even more), is a huge challenge to examine our faith.

17:20 *Your unbelief-* See on :19 *Why could we not*. “Ye of little faith” (Lk. 12:22,28); they had “no faith” (Mk. 4:40). “Where is your faith?” (Lk. 8:25). They asked for their faith to be increased (Lk. 17:5). Luke records that the Centurion had more faith than the disciples (Lk. 7:9). The Gospel writers were very self critical regarding their own faith in the message they were now preaching. They openly admit that they didn’t have enough faith to cure the sick boy. Jesus told them this: it was “because of your little faith...if ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove...” (Mt. 17:20 RV). Think carefully what is going on here. They had not even faith as a tiny grain of mustard seed; they didn’t have the faith to cure the

boy. But Jesus says they did have “little faith”. He recognized what insignificant faith they did have. He was so sensitive to the amount of faith in someone, even if it was insignificant in the final analysis. We likewise need to be able to positively and eagerly discern faith in those we preach to and seek to spiritually develop. In a similar kind of way, God was disappointed that His people had not only been disobedient to *Him*, but they had not even been obedient to their conquerors (Ez. 5:7). He so values obedience, and had an attitude that sought to see if they would show it to at least someone, even if they had rejected *Him*.

*Grain of mustard seed-* This calls for obvious connection to the Lord's earlier likening of the Gospel of the Kingdom to a grain of mustard seed which then grows into a great tree (13:31; Lk. 13:19). The Lord then had been explaining that although the disciples' faith was small, and His plans for the Kingdom had tiny, almost invisible beginnings in that group of disciples, yet they would grow into the Kingdom. But now, in the heat of this disappointed moment, the Lord feels that the disciples don't even have such beginnings. In this frustration and deep disappointment we have yet another window into the Lord's utter humanity.

*This mountain-* Just a very small amount of real faith during this life will enable us to move "this mountain", perhaps referring to Mount Zion. The idea of Mount Zion being moved sends the mind to Zech. 14:4,5, describing how Mount Zion will be moved at the Lord's return; and also to Ps. 125:1, which speaks of how they who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be removed; and yet Christ said we *will* remove it by prayer. The point of these allusions is surely to show that real faith will bring about the coming of the Kingdom, which is a totally super-human achievement; the unshakeableness of Mount Zion is likened to the solidity of true faith. The Lord's point seems to be that if we truly believe, then the coming of the Kingdom will be brought about by our faith; the outcome of our faith in this life will be seen in the Kingdom. But what our faith will achieve in the Kingdom will be hugely out of proportion to what it really is now. But there is another way to read Mt. 17:20: "If ye have (now) faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall (in the Kingdom) say to this mountain (of Zion), Remove hence..."; as if in the Kingdom we will be control of the physical world as the Lord was even in His mortality. In this case, His commanding of the sea and waves will be shared by us in the Kingdom; not just sea and waves, but mountains too (Mt. 8:27).

But the Lord spoke these words at the foot of the mount of transfiguration, and the more comfortable interpretation would be to think of Him saying these words with a nod towards the mountain from which He had just come down. Real faith would enable that Kingdom experience to be replicated anywhere. The vision of the Kingdom which had been seen there could be moved anywhere- by faith. There was maybe another gentle encouragement for them to think in

terms of God's Kingdom as not being geographically limited, but capable of removal to the Gentiles, if they had faith. The Lord uses similar words after cursing the fig tree, symbolic of Israel and God's ultimate destruction of her: "If you have faith and doubt not, you shall not only do what is done to the fig tree, but even if you shall say to this mountain: Be taken up and cast into the sea, it shall be done" (Mt. 21:21). In that passage, the mountain is almost certainly a reference to Mount Zion. The sea was symbolic of the Gentile world, and so the Lord would be developing His teaching which began here at the mount of transfiguration- the things of the Kingdom, centered as they then were in the mountains of Israel, could be moved to the Gentile world by faith.

*Move from here to there, and it will move-* Ps. 46:2 was perhaps in the Lord's mind: "Therefore we won't be afraid though the earth shakes, though the mountains are moved into the heart of the seas". In this case, the Lord would be suggesting that if we have real faith, we will not fear the results of that faith. We will not fear mountains being cast into the sea; and it is fear which holds us back from faith, we unconsciously fear the answer we apparently seek in prayer.

*Impossible unto you-* With *God* nothing is impossible (Lk. 1:37- the only other occurrence of the word in the NT), but here nothing is impossible *unto us*. God's possibility is our possibility; and this is what the Lord was teaching the man who thought that it all depended upon the Lord's possibility alone. There are other instances where the extent and nature of the Lord's healing seems to have been limited by the faith of the recipient (Mt. 8:13 "as... so"; 9:29 "according to"; 12:22 "inasmuch").

17:21 *This kind-* This kind of demon? In this case, the Lord is again using their wrong ideas (in this case, about some demons being stronger than others) without really believing them, talking to them in terms which they understood.

*Go out-* Angels are of course active in answering our prayer, obeying the commanding voice of God Himself in Heaven- answers to prayer "go... out" by prayer and fasting (Mt. 17:21). The answer to prayer is therefore likened to a 'going out'- of the Angel and command from the throne of grace? This language of 'going out' is frequently used in the Old Testament about the going forth of the cherubim Angels. See Is. 37:36 for another example.

*By prayer and fasting-* Which evidently, the disciples should have done but had not. The Lord wasn't naive, although He was so positive. He told the disciples quite frankly here that they were full of "unbelief", and couldn't do miracles which He expected them to because they didn't pray and fast (:19-21). And yet when quizzed by the Pharisees as to why His disciples didn't fast, He said it was because they were so happy to be with Him, the bridegroom (Mt. 9:15). Here surely He was seeing the best in them. They come over as confused, mixed up men who wanted the Kingdom there and then and were frustrated at the Lord's inaction in establishing it. But He saw that they recognized Him as the bridegroom, as Messiah, and He exalted in this, and saw their lack of fasting as partly due to the deep-down joy which He knew they had. Perhaps they tried to do this miracle without even praying about it (Mk. 9:29). Or maybe they prayed only on a surface level, and it was not counted as real prayer. Only intense prayer could send forth this kind of answer from God; He does not act on emotional grounds, just because He feels sorry for somebody. It needs to be noted that initially the man's child was not cured because the disciples didn't have the faith to do it. This teaches that God's activity for others is partly dependent on the prayers of a third party. These words are applied to us all in 1 Cor. 7:5, the only other place in the NT where they occur together; we are to give ourselves to prayer and fasting in domestic married life with the passion and intensity required to perform a miracle.

17:22 *While they abode in Galilee-* Luke adds that the curing of the young man led to wonder and amazement at His healing power, but He wished the disciples to realize that the crowds would all the same turn against Him: "But while all were marvelling at all the things which He did, He said to His disciples: Let these words sink into your ears. For the Son of Man shall be delivered up into the hands of men" (Lk. 9:43,44). The note that He reminded them about His passion whilst they were still in Galilee is another hint at the Lord's structured approach to training the twelve. Before they went back to Jerusalem, He wanted them to be aware well ahead of time that He was going to His death. Mark adds that He didn't want people to know of His presence because He was teaching the disciples about His death. Once again we encounter the theme of the Lord intensely focusing upon His disciples rather than upon the masses of Israel. It could be argued that He could have healed far more people had He not had this policy; but His long term intention was to create a solid body of followers who would bring His message to the world after His death. And we must likewise achieve a balance between good deeds for the world, and the need for strengthening the body of believers.

*Shall be betrayed-* Mk. 9:31 puts this in the present tense- He *is* betrayed / delivered [s.w.]. The Lord likely said both- He shall be betrayed, [in fact] He is being betrayed / delivered. This is the sense recorded in John, of "the time comes but now is" (Jn. 4:23; 16:32). He knew that the essence of the delivering over to the Jews / Romans was happening right then, although the final delivering / handing over was when in Gethsemane He said that "the hour is come... the Son of

Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners” (Mk. 14:41). The word for ‘betrayed’ means literally to be handed over or delivered, and so the Lord’s statement wouldn’t have necessarily implied to them that there was to be a betrayal from amongst their own number.

17:23 *The third day He shall be raised again*- Clearly the rising again was at a specific moment, “the third day”. This is proof enough that the Bible intends us to see the Lord’s rising again as bodily resurrection and not some spiritual reincarnation over a period of time.

*Exceeding sorry*- Luke notes that the saying about the cross was “hidden” from them (Lk. 9:45). And yet in prayer to the Father, He rejoices that these things are not hidden from them (Lk. 10:21,23). This gives insight into the Lord’s present mediation for us in prayer- speaking of us as far better than we are. The message of Christ crucified was “hid” from them (Lk. 9:45; 18:34)- and Paul surely alludes to this when he says that this message is hid by the veil of Judaism from those who are lost (2 Cor. 4:3). Luke adds that straight afterwards, “there arose a dispute among them, which of them was the greatest” (Lk. 9:46). Time and again we see this in the Gospels- when the Lord speaks of His upcoming death, the disciples change the subject. This explains our own problem with mind wandering at the breaking of bread or in the study or even reading of the crucifixion accounts. This difficulty on focusing upon Him there is likely because His death requires our death and suffering, and subconsciously we realize that- and would rather not.

17:24 *They that received tribute money*- Matthew was also from Capernaum (9:9), so these were his one time colleagues. Josephus says that the temple tax was payable in March, a month before Passover. This would suggest that Matthew is now recording incidents in the final month of the Lord's life.

*The tribute money*- The half shekel (as RV) of the temple tax (Ex. 30:11-16). This had to be paid in the old coinage of Israel, and the money changers in the temple converted Roman money into this coinage at a large profit. It was their tables which the Lord overthrew.

*Came to Peter*- Even outsiders considered Peter to be representative of all the disciples (Mt. 17:24). “Peter and those with him” is how the group is described (Mk. 1:36; Lk. 8:45 Gk.; 9:32). Peter’s crucial confession that he believed that Jesus was the Son of God is repeated almost verbatim by all the disciples, some time later (Jn. 6:69; 16:30). He is portrayed as the representative disciple. It is Peter who answers when the Lord asks a question of them all (Mk. 8:29 cp. the other accounts). The way Jesus looks upon all the disciples as He speaks to Peter makes Peter some kind of representative of them all in the Lord’s eyes (Mk. 8:33). In Mt. 16:17 Peter is commended for having had the Father reveal Jesus to Him. Yet Mt. 11:27 says that the

Father reveals the identity of His Son to *all* who truly come to Him. Thus Peter is representative of all who have truly perceived the Son's identity in Jesus of Nazareth. In one Gospel, all the disciples ask a question, while in the parallel passage Peter is stated to have asked it (Mk. 7:17 cp. Mt. 15:15 and Mt. 21:20 cp. Mk. 11:21).

*17:25 Yes-* The question naturally arises as to why, then, the Lord miraculously provided a coin to pay the temple tax if He had already paid it; and why that coin only paid for Jesus and Peter, and not for the other disciples. Another question is why this tax had to be paid in Capernaum (:24) and not in Jerusalem or the home towns of the disciples. My suggestion is that the payment of that tax at that time and place was unnecessary, but the Lord did so in the spirit of His teaching about offering to go two miles when asked to go one; or offering the undergarment to him who asks your cloak. In commenting upon those teachings, I made the point that such offers restored the balance of power to the abused and took it away from the abusers, who would feel awkward accepting the offer. And we are therefore left to wonder as to whether the coin was really accepted by the questioners. It would've seemed a chronic waste of money to the unspiritual, but the Lord works on a higher level than the pragmatic and utilitarian.

The Pharisees taught that one could only worship in the temple if the temple tax had been paid (3). The Lord could have engaged with that wrong view in direct confrontation. But He didn't. In His gracious way, He once again went along with misunderstandings by paying what was required, and yet His example and teaching demonstrated that service to God was totally independent of such human demands. The children of God who are "free" from such taxes could be understood as all Israel, and more specifically, the new Israel, comprised of God's own Son and His disciples.

*Prevented-* The Greek word really means 'to anticipate'. Again we see the Lord's sensitivity in knowing what is in human nature. So often we read that He "answered and said..." when there had been no stated question. That acute sensitivity to human thinking and situations remains with Him to this day, and should be a great comfort to us at the day of judgment.

*The kings of the earth-* There was a double meaning here, for there is in Semitic languages 'the plural of majesty', whereby the plural can be used to speak of one great thing. The great king of the earth was God. His children are therefore free from the demands of men; but the Lord goes on to teach that we should all the same submit to those demands in order not to make them stumble. Another approach is invited by the possibility that the phrase "kings of the earth" has been consciously lifted from Ps. 2:2 LXX, which speaks of how "The kings of the earth... and the rulers... take counsel / were gathered together against Yahweh and His Christ". One of the many applications of this verse is to the rulership of the earth / land of Israel collaborating in the crucifixion of Christ and later of His disciples (Acts 4:26; note how He speaks of "the rulers of the Gentiles" in 20:25). There are indirect applications of Ps. 2:2 to the Jewish leadership in Mt. 22:34; 26:3,4. The priesthood of the time has been described as "A priestly aristocracy"; therefore the language of kingship was not inappropriate to them. Josephus speaks of the



priesthood as this: “The constitution became an aristocracy, and the High Priests were entrusted with the leadership of the nation” (*Antiquities of the Jews*, 20:10, 5). So it could well be that these rulers which the Lord was focusing on were the Jewish religious rulers and priests of the day, and their children were free from the temple tax. Yet the Lord argues that the disciples are likewise free from it- because they were the new priesthood.

*Children-* Again we note the high status the Lord argues for His followers- the children of kings, and in this case, the King of all the earth.

*Strangers-* The implication was that the Jews who paid the temple tax, considering it as the highest sign of their membership in God’s people (as it was a voluntary tax), were in fact thereby showing that they were strangers, Gentiles, and not His true children.

*17:26 Then the children are free-* Barnes summarizes the argument: “Kings do not tax their own sons. This tribute-money is taken up for the temple service; that is, the service of my Father. I, therefore, being the Son of God, for whom this is taken up, cannot be lawfully required to pay this tribute”. Peter later asks his sheep: “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man... unto governors... *as free*... honour all men” (1 Pet. 2:13-17). This is all evident allusion to the way he had once felt that as free in Christ and in Israel, he didn’t need to submit to men and pay taxes. But the Lord had gently rebuked him, and provided the coin to pay for them both (Mt. 17:25-27). The Gospels records would have been well known amongst the early believers; there is a tradition that at least the Gospel of Mark was learnt by heart as part of instruction for baptism. Peter’s readers would have known of the incident, and now, here he is telling them to learn the lesson he had had to learn. The Lord seems to make a concession to the inability of the surrounding world to understand Him, when He tells Peter that as God's people, they are free from the requirement to pay taxes to the present world. But "lest we should offend them", we should pay them (Mt. 17:27). As the Lord spoke to men according to their level of ability to comprehend Him (Mk. 4:33; and consider how He used the language of demons), so should we.

The statement that His followers were “free” from paying the temple tax was effectively a statement that the Lord’s greatness as “one greater than the temple” (12:6) meant that He was at liberty to therefore abrogate the teaching of Torah- for Ex. 30:13,14 did indeed stipulate a temple tax. His overturning of the tables of the moneychangers, who enabled the payment of the temple tax in practice (21:12-17) was likewise effectively stating that the temple tax law was not binding on His followers. The Lord taught that the tax should be paid so as not to offend the potential Christian faith of the Jews, rather than because it was a question of obedience to Divine law- because that law was ended.

Another consideration is that the Lord is alluding to the Jewish idea that the priests themselves were exempted from the temple tax (*Sheqalim* 1.8)- because He considered His followers the new priesthood. He had used the same argument in justifying why the disciples could grind corn on the Sabbath- they were, He implied, like the priests who could even eat the showbread on the Sabbath.

17:27 *Lest we should offend them*- This sets the scene for the Lord's sober teaching about the eternal danger of offending others (i.e. making them to spiritually stumble) in 18:6-9. His own example was of supreme effort not to offend others. He likewise carefully explained to His disciples the likely sequence of events surrounding His death "so that you should not be offended" (Jn. 16:1). But He also knew that they would be offended because of those things (Mt. 26:31). But so sensitive was He to the tragedy of others stumbling that He as it were laboured against His own foreknowledge, so that others would not be offended in Him. We are without doubt to take His example to ourselves, and go to any lengths to ensure that others do not stumble, especially because of us. The Lord specifically focused upon Peter, in order to teach him the extent we should go to in order not to offend others; because He had recently rebuked Peter for being a cause of stumbling to Him (Mt. 16:23). Not to offend others was a major plank of the Lord's teaching- it was the epitome of the kind of iniquity which would exclude from His Kingdom (Mt. 13:41), and literally any length must be gone to in order not to offend (cutting out own eyes, hands etc.; Mt. 5:29,30). Paul speaks of divisions and offences which are contrary to the doctrine learnt by the early Christians (Rom. 16:17). That "doctrine" or teaching would've been the Gospels themselves; and these teachings about not offending others were therefore up front as first principles in the early church. We do well to note that Paul brackets together divisions and offences; spiritual stumbling so often comes from division, and those who cause division thereby make others stumble. This is so true to observed reality amongst us- people spiritually stumble because of their exposure to divisions.

As the Son of God, walking freely in His Father's house, Jesus didn't have to pay the temple tax (Mt. 17:26,27). He could have insisted that He didn't need to pay it, He could have stood up for what was right and true. But doing this can often be selfish, a defence of self rather than a seeking for the Father's glory. And so He told Peter that "lest we should offend them", He would pay it. He was so hopeful for their salvation one day that He was worried about offending these wretched men, who weren't fit to breathe the same air that He did. We would have given up with them; but He worried about offending what potential faith they might have. The Lord spoke of not making the Orthodox Jews stumble by not paying the tribute; yet He goes on to say that one must beware lest we make the little ones who believe, to stumble (Mt. 17:27; 18:6). Is it not that He saw in Orthodox Jewry the beginnings of faith... a faith which was to come to fruition when a great company of priests were later obedient to the faith in Him? None of us would have had

that sensitivity, that hopefulness, that seeking spirit. It is truly a challenge to us. In those last six months, the Scribes and Pharisees repeatedly tried to trick the Lord. But He took the time to answer their questions, seeking to lead them to understanding and repentance- and His denunciations of them were probably softly and imploringly spoken, still seeking for the inevitability of future judgment to lead them to repentance. As the Son of God, walking freely in His Father's house, Jesus didn't have to pay the temple tax (Mt. 17:26,27). He could have insisted that He didn't need to pay it, He could have stood up for what was right and true. But doing this can often be selfish, a defence of self rather than a seeking for the Father's glory. And so He told Peter that "lest we should offend them", He would pay it. He was so hopeful for their salvation one day that He was worried about offending these wretched men, who weren't fit to breathe the same air that He did. We would have given up with them; but He worried about offending what potential faith they might have. Even at the end of His ministry, He still sought to convert them. He reasoned with them, using carefully prepared Old Testament allusions in the hope they would understand them, when we would almost certainly either have given up, or would just be gritting our teeth, trying to be patient with them because we didn't want to sin...but He was full of a genuine, unpretended desire for their salvation. See on 8:4.

Acting as He would act is really the whole key to not giving offence / causing others to stumble. He above all valued the human person to an extent no other human being has ever reached. When asked to pay the temple tax, which apparently few people paid in Galilee at that time, the Lord did so "lest we should offend them"- even though, as He explained to Peter, He was exempted from it, as the Son in His Father's house (Mt. 17:27). He could have appealed to higher principle. But the Lord was worried that somehow He might make these apparently mercenary, conscience-less legalists to stumble in their potential faith. We would likely have given up with them as not worth it. But the Lord saw the potential for faith within them. And only a few verses later we are reading Him warning that those who offend the little ones who believe in Him will be hurled to destruction (Mt. 18:6). Could it not be that the Lord saw in those hard hearted, hateful legalists in the ecclesia of His day...little ones who potentially would believe in Him? And His positive, hopeful view of them paid off. For a year or so later those types were being baptized, along with a great company of priests. People change. Remember this, and given that fact, try to hope for the best, as your Lord does with you. People *can* change, and they *do* change, even those whom at present you just can't abide in the brotherhood.

*Cast a hook-* Peter still carried his fishing tackle round with him in his pack, apparently. He had a strong attraction to fishing, almost making us wonder whether "Do you love Me more than these?" was a reference to the haul of fish lying there when the Lord spoke those words. His claim in Mk. 10:28 to have "left all" wasn't really totally true. He evidently had in mind how he had left his nets and walked away, following Jesus (Mk. 1:18). Then he thought he was

following Jesus in the way the Lord demanded. For some time later, the Lord “entered into one of the ships, which was (i.e. still, at that time) Simon’s...” (Lk. 5:1). Peter had been fishing all night in Jn. 21:3- strange, for a man who had so dramatically left his nets to respond to the Lord’s call. But after the miraculous catch of fishes, Peter “forsook all, and followed him”. Note that Mark’s [Peter’s] Gospel omits many incidents, but also uses the device of repetition to stress what the writer considers significant. Thus in Mk. 1:16 Peter tells us twice that he *was* a fisherman [cp. 14:68]. By the time of Lk. 18 and the conversation with the rich young man, Peter was confident he had forsaken all. But “I go a fishing” (Jn. 21:3) would suggest that even this forsaking of all had not been so dramatic. The boats were still there. The Lord had taught that following Him meant not just leaving behind for a moment, but selling up and giving the money to the poor. This Peter had not done. But he assumed that because he was physically following Jesus, well therefore what the Lord demanded of the rich young man, he had as good as done; for that young man wouldn’t follow Jesus, but Peter would. It is easy to understand how Peter reasoned- for the fact we are apparent followers of the Lord in a world which chooses to reject Him, can lead to an assumption that we must of course be following just as He asks of us.

*Piece of money-* A stater, a shekel (RV)- enough to pay two half shekel taxes, for Peter and Himself (see on :24).

The whole incident of fishing for the coin in order to provide the temple tax is somewhat strange at first blush- until we realize that it is in fact a further commentary upon the prediction of the Lord’s death which He has just made in the immediately preceding verses. The temple tax was Biblically described as “the atonement money” (Ex. 30:16), “a ransom for his soul” (Ex. 30:12), and this led the Jews to claim that all who paid it therefore were represented in the sacrifices offered on the temple altar. It’s therefore logical that this incident follows straight on from the Lord’s prediction of His death on the cross. The Mishnah made the connection clearly when commenting upon the temple tax: “R. Eleazar (the Amora) further said: a man would pay his Shekel and thus obtain atonement” (*Baba Bathra* 9a). The coin He provided was to be given “for Me and you”, the *anti* (translated “for”) suggesting that the coin was *instead of or representative of* ‘Me and you’. At least theoretically, the temple tax was used to buy the animals which were sacrificed- and so the Lord would be teaching that He provided the atonement money, the ransom, because He was the animal sacrificed. And He provided for both Himself and Peter, representative of all the disciples at this moment (see on :24), in that His sacrifice was the basis of His own redemption insofar as He too was human. If Matthew indeed is bringing out a more figurative aspect of the story, this would explain the rather strange way the questioners are recorded as asking “Does your Master *teleo* tribute?” (:24). *Teleo* means to fulfill; and this is how the word is usually used in the New Testament. There were more obvious words which could have been used to express the simple idea of ‘payment’. The usage of the word surely hints

at the Lord Jesus not just paying but fulfilling the type of the temple tax. It's noteworthy that here in Mt. 17 we have the second prediction of the Lord's sufferings and death. The first prediction was also followed by an allusion to the temple tax- the Lord speaks there of what a man could give "in exchange [s.w. 'ransom'] for his soul" (Mt. 16:26)- the very phrase used in the LXX of Ex. 30:12, which speaks of the temple tax as "a ransom for his soul". And in that same context in Mt. 16, the Lord speaks of His resurrection as being predicted in "the sign of the prophet Jonah", whereby salvation was in the mouth of the fish. And that theme is here continued. The third prediction of the passion is likewise followed by the statement that the Lord's death was "a ransom for many" (20:28)- yet another allusion to the temple tax of Ex. 30:12. The initial question was whether the Lord paid the temple tax. As so often, He answers the question with a meta principle which places the issues so far higher than the original question. He was providing the actual atonement money, ransom and sacrifice which the temple tax prefigured. He *was* those things. To ask Him to pay a coin to a corrupt religious leader was so irrelevant and inappropriate. And yet having made the point, in His grace and condescension to human weakness, He still pays the coin in concern that otherwise, the potential faith of those legalists might be somehow hindered.

## Notes

- (1) Walter Wink, *John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition* (Cambridge: C.U.P. 2006) p. 3.
- (2) More examples are given in Carl Kazmierski, *John the Baptist: Prophet and Evangelist* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1999) p. 26.
- (3) Jostein Adna, *The Formation of the Early Church*, (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005) p. 27.