

Introduction: We rejoice as we see Christ's glory on the Mount of Transfiguration, as our Lord took up the apostolic trio of Peter, James and John to be witnesses to that unveiled glory of the Lord. Jesus wanted to preserve such an eye-witness account so that it could be passed on to the whole church, as 2 Peter 1:16-17 proves. May these week's Bible notes further encourage us as we see more of God's revelation of eternal life through His Son.

Monday: read Matthew 17:9-13 & Matthew 18:1-4. It is amazing to see how the disciples quickly forget the glory of the Son of God which they beheld on the mountain – and instead glorify Elijah, thus repeating what they had *heard* from religious authorities of the day (the scribes, Matthew 17:10) who taught that the thunderous prophet of judgment, Elijah, must reappear before the Messiah could come. The Scribes also believed in the myth of Israel's self-righteousness, promising that both Elijah would come to reward Jewry and to wreak vengeance on the Romans. Even the Twelve wanted the vengeance of Elijah's ministry to vindicate their self-righteousness, while at the same time under-valuing their need for a Savior who would deal with their *own* guilt and sin. In the mind of the disciples, sin was the problem of *other people*, while Christ came to point the disciples to their *own sin and need for a Savior*. No wonder Jesus warns His disciples to “turn” away from their religious pride and then see the value of Jesus as the only Savior from sin (Matthew 18:1-4).

Meditate and Pray: Please sing the following hymn # 491 as a most urgent prayer, asking the Lord to open your eyes to your *own sin*, and saving you from the proud and deadly habit of condemning others in order to establish your own self-righteousness:

1 Take me, O my Father, take me;
take me, save me, through thy Son;
that which thou wouldst have me, make me,
let thy will in me be done.
Long from thee my footsteps straying,
thorny proved the way I trod;
weary come I now, and praying,
take me to thy love, my God.

2 Fruitless years with grief recalling,
humbly I confess my sin;
at thy feet, O Father, falling,
to thy household take me in.
Freely now to thee I proffer
this relenting heart of mine;
freely life and soul I offer,
gift unworthy love like thine.

3 Once the world's Redeemer, dying,
bore our sins upon the tree;
on that sacrifice relying,
now I look in hope to thee:
Father, take me; all forgiving,
fold me to thy loving breast;
in thy love for ever living
I must be forever blest.

Tuesday: read Matthew 17:10-13 and Matthew 27:45-49. The same misguided veneration of Elijah crops up again as Jesus hangs on the Cross in Matthew 27:45-49. The unbelieving crowd halts aid to a dying Jesus (the vinegar on the stick in Mt. 27:48) so that they can see if 'Elijah' will come. In this glorifying of this Old Testament prophet, these Jews show that they *hate* Jesus' loving forgiveness of sinners, desiring instead vengeance on all their foes.

They would have their distorted view of Elijah's vengeance fall upon the heads of the Romans – while all the while they are *blind* to their own personal need for a Savior!

Meditate and Pray: “*Lord, in these days of distorted political hopes, where so many in our nation seem determined to wreak vengeance on any and all who would stand in the way of their own selfish desires for personal happiness, prominence and power, keep us focused on the saving purpose for which Jesus came – not*

to exalt our fantasies of self-advancement, but to save and sanctify us from a life-time of sin. Keep us focused on the main fountain of forgiveness, and not on the carnal desires of the crowds around us. Amen."

Wednesday: read Matthew 17:1-9. Where should our focus be if we are to avoid the mistake of misunderstanding Elijah's purpose and seeking worldly power over our foes instead of a proper hunger for the coming of Christ's kingdom? The answer is given by Jesus in the simple command of Matthew 17:9, which reads as follows in the ESV: *And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead."*

Ah! Here is the key to understanding Scripture. It is as if Jesus were saying to the disciples and to us: "Study, reflect and speak of what you see in the Bible... only in light of the Resurrection!"

Meditate and Pray: Lord, thank you that we have the privilege of living the whole of our lives in the light of your Easter victory over sin and death. Give us joy in worshipping our risen Savior, and in studying all of Scripture in the light of His rising. Help the preaching of our church likewise to focus properly on Jesus, risen from the dead. Amen.

Thursday: read Matthew 17:9-13. According to Matthew 17:9, there would be a proper time to understand the roles of Moses and Elijah in the Old Testament, and their prophetic purpose in pointing to Christ. That time would be, "after the Resurrection!" Thus we learn that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the "starting point" for all Bible characters – including great men like Moses and Elijah!

Let's consider one way in which "starting" with the Resurrection of Jesus deepens our understanding of God's prophets of old. We start with the Resurrection at Easter *as the fulfillment of the hopes of the Old Testament prophets.* Elijah and Moses both prophesied in word and deed of the need for God's people Israel to "circumcise their hearts" in repentance and faith – as the only right response to God's redeeming work. Sadly, the people of Israel continued unrepentant and unheeding of this prophetic message. As Hebrews puts it, "God was not pleased" with most of Israel, and they died in the desert because of their sins.

Meditate and Pray: But let us give thanks that, when Christ arrived on the scene to do battle on the Cross with sin and Satan, Moses' and Elijah saw their message fulfilled and vindicated. God came to redeem His own by sending His Son as the final prophet of the Old Testament.

What joy for Elijah and Moses to meet Jesus on the mount and to bask in the light of their prophetic hope as it was fulfilled in the coming of Jesus! How do we sing of this prophetic hope fulfilled in Jesus, as Moses and Elijah finally behold the Lamb of God whose blood would be strong enough to finally and fully cleanse the sins of their people? Look at hymn # 242:

*Not all the blood of beasts
On Jewish altars slain
Could give the guilty conscience peace
Or wash away the stain.*

*But Christ, the heav'nly Lamb,
Takes all our sins away;
A sacrifice of nobler name
And richer blood than they.*

*My faith would lay her hand
On that dear head of Thine,
While, like a penitent, I stand,
And there confess my sin.*

*My soul looks back to see
The burdens Thou didst bear
When hanging on the cursèd tree,
And hopes her guilt was there.*

*Believing, we rejoice
To see the curse remove;
We bless the Lamb with cheerful voice,
And sing His bleeding love.*

Friday: read Matthew 17:9-13 and Hebrews 12:1: How beautiful that Moses and Elijah were not the only ones who saw their ministry vindicated by the revelation of glory on the mount of Transfiguration. The recently beheaded John the Baptist (Matthew 17:12) rejoiced from Heaven to see the glory of Christ as he met with Elijah and Moses! Do you think that John was aware of this meeting? Well, consider the words of Hebrews 12:1 as they are expounded by John Owen;

“When we are in our trials, which way so ever we look, we may (by faith) behold the face of some of other of these saints looking on us and encouraging us from the pages of Scripture...”

“All the saints that have gone before us do as it were stand looking on us in our striving, encouraging us in our duty, and read to testify unto our success with their applause...”

“The church triumphant has communion with the church militant. The assembly above has not lost its interest in the church below... As we rejoice in their glory, safety and happiness, so they are full of affections towards us, with earnest desire for our deliverance.” (John Owen, Vol 7 Hebrews, page 221; Vol. 1 page 259)

Meditate and Pray: Do we believe that there is such a close connection between the church on earth and in Heaven? In his joy at seeing Elijah and Moses with Jesus, Peter was not wrong to rejoice at this connection! After all, what is it that joins us with the saints in Heaven? Is it not that we are joined in union with the same Savior? Oh yes, dear earth-bound believer, struggling in the earthly pilgrimage of faith with “weary feet and slow” – We are one and the same family, brought together under one Head, even Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:10)! No wonder John the Baptist must have rejoiced to see the glory of Christ on the Mount!

Sat/Sun: read Hebrews 11:5, 27; Matthew 17:1-3 and 2 Kings 2:1-18. How early did the saints of old understand and believe in the reality of eternal life with God, and that God had the power to carry them through death into eternal joy in Heaven?

Well, according to Hebrews 11:5, God chose Enoch to be translated, though he was as early as the seventh generation from Adam (Jude 14). According to Genesis 5:22-24, Enoch lived for over 300 years, “walking with God” in communion and friendship, until one day God simply took him, body and all, to Heaven! Though undoubtedly many looked for this prominent prophet of old, whose ancient prophecy is contained in Jude 14-15, they could not find either his body or any signs of his death – because God translated him to Heaven without dying. Surely this was a testimony to others in Enoch’s evil days before the Flood, showing that God indeed was and is able to preserve the believer, body and soul, for everlasting life!

In the same way, God took Elijah up to Heaven in a whirlwind of glory in 2 Kings 2:11 – as further proof that God’s arm is long enough to reach down from Heaven and take the believer safely from this life – without any permanent scars from death.

But the most amazing statement about such amazing miraculous feats is that they were performed by sinners such as ourselves who nevertheless had the grace of faith. “By faith Enoch...” “By faith Elijah...”, and (lest we forget), ... “By faith Moses!”

Meditate and Pray: How then were these prophets of old able to endure this wicked world, and what are we to fix our eyes upon when the world seeks to pressure us into believing that, “this world is all there is?” Well, let Moses’ example in Hebrews 11:27 be our watchword:

“By faith Moses left Egypt, not fearing the king’s anger; he persevered **because He saw Him who is invisible.**”