

Gospel of Matthew



Suggested responses to questions about Matthew 17:1-27

Note: Be sure to respond to all the questions yourself before reading the suggested responses in order to make the most of this study.

1. There are interesting ways that Jesus' Transfiguration on Mount Tabor resembles Moses' meetings with God on Mount Sinai. In the Transfiguration and in Moses' encounter with God on Mount Sinai described in Exodus 24:15-18, the cloud of God's glory descends on the mountaintops, and in the Transfiguration and in Moses' experience in Exodus 34:4-5, God the Father remains unseen but speaks through a heavenly voice. Like Moses' face in Exodus 34:29, Jesus' face becomes radiant.
2. Paragraph 697 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains that the cloud is a manifestation of the Holy Spirit. Exodus 13:21-22 describes how God led the people of Israel through the desert: "And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way . . . ; the pillar of cloud . . . did not depart from before the people." Exodus 40:34-38 describes how the glory of God descended upon the tabernacle and continued to lead the Israelites on their wilderness journey: "Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud abode upon it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Throughout all their journeys, whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the people of Israel would go onward; but if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not go onward till the day that it was taken up. For throughout all their journeys the cloud of the LORD was upon the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel."
3. In Matthew 3:17, the voice from heaven speaks at Jesus' baptism, saying: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." In Matthew 17:5, the voice makes the same statement, but adds: "listen to him." John Paul II taught that the words of God at the Transfiguration repeat God's words at Jesus' baptism in order to show that "even after having traveled along a precise path in his public life, Jesus remains all the same the "beloved Son."
4. Moses and Elijah are representatives of the Law and the Prophets. Under the Old Covenant, God's glory was most closely associated with the Law and with the Prophets. Under the New Covenant, God's glory will be associated with his Son, Jesus, who's come to fulfill both the Law and the Prophets. Luke 9:30-31 reveals that Jesus spoke with Moses and Elijah about "his departure, which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem." Both Moses and Elijah experience spectacular "departures"—Moses from Egypt, in Exodus 12:37-38, and Elijah into heaven in a whirlwind in a chariot of fire, in 2 Kings 2:11. Revelation 11:3-8 describes "two witnesses" in the apostle John's vision of heaven in which Jerusalem is depicted as the "new Egypt." In Acts 1:9, a cloud is a symbol of the Holy Spirit, and Jesus is taken up bodily like Elijah. As

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the new Moses, Jesus will lead the descendants of the 12 tribes of Israel from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant, which encompasses all the nations of the world. Jesus' new exodus is from the Old Temple to the new Temple, which is Jesus' body, the Church. And the new exodus is from the old Jerusalem to the new Jerusalem, the heavenly city. Both Moses and Elijah audibly hear the voice of God and both of them are on a mountain at the time—in Exodus 3:4, Moses hears God speaking from within a bush that's burning but not consumed by the fire, and in 1 Kings 19:12, Elijah hears God speaking in a "still, small voice."

5. In Revelation 11:3-8, the apostle John sees "two witnesses" who greatly resemble Moses and Elijah. These two witnesses were granted "power to prophesy" alluding to the Law and the Prophets that prophesied about Jesus the Messiah, the lawgiver and prophet of the New Covenant. Revelation 11:6 explains that the two witnesses have "power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall"—an allusion to the drought attributed to the prayers of the prophet Elijah in 1 Kings 17:1—and that they have power to turn the waters "into blood, and to smite the earth with every plague"—which alludes to the plagues God brought upon Egypt, particularly the first one recounted in Exodus 7:20 when the Nile River was turned to blood.
6. Genesis 17:3 describes Abram falling on his face when God appears to him. In Ezekiel 1:28b, the prophet records that he, too, fell on his face when he saw "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD." In Revelation 1:17, the apostle John describes how he fell at the feet of Jesus as though dead when he saw the Lord in glory.
7. In Matthew 17:19, Jesus explains to the disciples that they were unable to drive the demon out of the epileptic boy because of their "little faith." And Jesus adds: "For truly, I say to you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you."
8. In Matthew 16:21, Jesus says he must go to Jerusalem and suffer, and then he predicts his death and Resurrection. In Matthew 17:22-23, Jesus repeats that he will be killed and on the third day be resurrected, but this time he specifies that it will be because "the Son of man is to be delivered into the hands of men." Although Judas will betray Jesus, it's Jesus who will deliver himself into the hands of men by going to Jerusalem. Peter previously was rebuked for attempting to talk Jesus out of this mission.
9. In his remarks about the Temple tax, Jesus is making the point the he's God and that Peter and the disciples are God's children. In Exodus 30:11-12, God instructs Moses: "When you take the census of the people of Israel, then each shall give a ransom for himself to the LORD when you number them, that there be no plague among them when you number them."
10. To prove that Jesus has come to fulfill the Law and the Prophets, Matthew 17:27 records that Jesus tells Peter how to find a shekel in the mouth of a fish. Jesus then instructs Peter to use that coin to pay the Temple tax for both of them. This single payment symbolizes the spiritual union that exists between Jesus Christ and Peter, the vicar of his Church.

Responses to the Questions for Reflection will vary.