

# Matthew 16b-17a

## Overview

The final section of the book focuses on the Lord's passion (Figure 1,<sup>1</sup> chart). Recall that Matthew used a repeated verse to punctuate the preparation of the twelve, reporting our Lord's preaching, teaching, and healing. He uses a similar device in this section, building it around four announcements by the Lord of his coming passion (Table 1, chart).

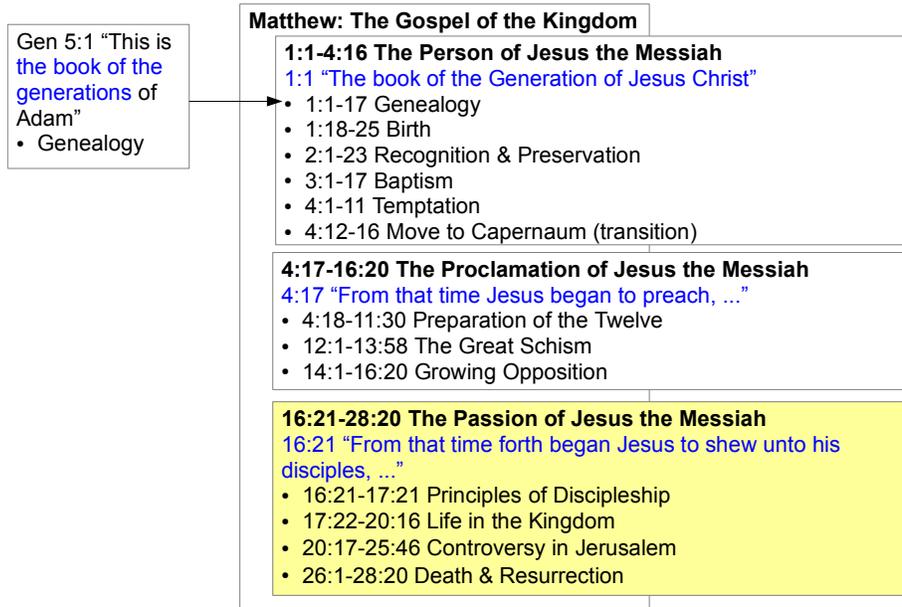


Figure 1: Structure of Matthew

These announcements share six elements.

1. They begin with the setting. The second and third show the geographical movement within the section, starting in Galilee, and then moving to Jerusalem.
2. The movement to Jerusalem is not just a circumstance. The Lord states it as his objective, and our attention is drawn in particular to the feast of the passover.
3. The third element describes his "betrayal," and the role of Israel's religious leaders in rejecting him. We will pay special attention to the verb "betray," which is also translated "deliver" in 20:19, when we get to these passages.
4. The fourth element records his death.
5. The fifth predicts his resurrection.
6. In each case, it is interesting to observe the response of his disciples to the announcement. There is a progression through the series of announcements.

These announcements suggest that this part of the book has four subsections. For now, we'll assume that the announcements introduce successive sections. But recall that ch. 4-11 also had a repeated summary of the Lord's teaching, preaching, and healing ministry, and these were not all

<sup>1</sup> I have shifted the main heading from "Jesus the King" to "Jesus the Messiah," since it is becoming clear with Peter's confession that the fact and nature of his Messiahship is what is really in view throughout. The first two sections climax in two of his titles: "Son of God" (3:17), and "Christ" (16:16). We'll see what the climax of the third is.

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16:21-22	17:22-23	20:17-20	26:1-2
21 From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples,	22 And <b>while they abode in Galilee</b> , Jesus said unto them,	17 And Jesus <b>going up to Jerusalem</b> took the twelve disciples apart in the way, and said unto them,	1 And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said unto his disciples,
how that he must go unto <b>Jerusalem</b> ,		18 Behold, we go up to <b>Jerusalem</b> ;	2 Ye know that after two days is the feast of the passover,
and suffer many things of the <b>elders and chief priests and scribes</b> ,	The Son of man shall be <b>betrayed</b> into the hands of men:	and the Son of man shall be <b>betrayed</b> unto <b>the chief priests and unto the scribes</b> , and they shall condemn him to death, 19 And shall <b>deliver</b> him to the Gentiles	and the Son of man is <b>betrayed</b>
and be <b>killed</b> ,	23 And they shall <b>kill</b> him,	to mock, and to scourge, and to <b>crucify</b> him:	to be <b>crucified</b> .
and be <b>raised</b> again the third day.	and the third day he shall be <b>raised</b> again.	and the third day he shall <b>rise</b> again.	
22 Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, ...	And they were exceeding sorry.	20 Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, ...	(Anointing in the house of Simon the Leper)

Table 1: Prophecies of the Lord's Passion

in the same position. So we should be prepared to adjust our understanding as we work through the rest of the book.

- 16:21-17:21 outline Principles of Discipleship: the need to deny oneself and be willing to die for the kingdom, and the rewards God gives to those who live by faith. It has three main scenes, all in Galilee:
  - The end of ch. 16 reports Peter's response to the Lord's announcement, and his instruction to the disciples about it.
  - 17:1-13 is the transfiguration.
  - 17:14-21 is the healing of a lunatic boy.
- 17:22-20:16 describe Life in the Kingdom, especially how believers are to live with one another in the church. These discourses are given as the band is on its way from Galilee to Jerusalem.
  - The Lord enables Peter to pay the temple tax.
  - Ch. 18 is the fourth of the Lord's great sermons. We have had the Sermon on the Mount (ch. 5-7), the missionary discourse (10), and the parables (13). This discourse tells how the church is to operate.

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- Ch. 19 contains several interactions: with the Pharisees on divorce, with the little children, with a rich man seeking to enter the kingdom.
- Ch. 20:1-16 is the parable of the householder hiring workers, illustrating how people come into the kingdom.
- 20:17-25:46 report Controversy in Jerusalem.
  - In 20:20-28, the mother of James and John seeks special status for them, triggering dissension among the disciples.
  - The end of ch. 20 is the healing of two blind men, recalling 9:27.
  - The first half of ch. 21 is the triumphal entry and the cleansing of the temple.
  - The second half is the cursing of the fig tree, followed (through 22) by debate with the Jewish leaders, and culminating in the woes against the leaders in ch. 23.
  - 24-25 are the fifth great discourse, on the Mount of Olives, concerning last things.
- 26:1-28:20 recount his Death & Resurrection.
  - 26 is the anointing in Bethany, the last supper, Gethsemene, the arrest and trial before the Jewish elders, and Peter's denial.
  - 27 describes the death of Judas, the Lord's hearing before Pilate, condemnation, and crucifixion, and the preparations for his burial.
  - 28 is his resurrection, and commission to the Twelve.

## 16:21-28, The First Announcement and its Explanation

### 21, Announcement

**21 From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples,**--Now that they have recognized him as the Messiah, he must spell out for them the implications of that office. They, and the multitudes as well, would readily recognize him as king and prophet, and indeed these are the two titles with which the multitude greets him when he enters Jerusalem (chart):

Mat 21:9 And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the **Son of David**: Blessed *is* he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest. 10 And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this? 11 And the multitude said, This is **Jesus the prophet** of Nazareth of Galilee.<sup>2</sup>

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2 The traditional analysis of Messiah is in terms of the offices of prophet, priest, and king. Kings and priests are frequently said to be anointed in the OT, but only two prophets are anointed, both namesakes of our Lord: Elisha (1 Ki 19:16) and Isaiah (Isa 61:1, though here it is the Servant who speaks, and not Isaiah in his own right). But this analysis leaves out another category, the sacrifices and implements of the tabernacle and temple.

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Mat 21:46 But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for a **prophet**.

But they are ignorant of his role as priest, and that is the focus of these predictions, as we shall see.

**how that he must go unto Jerusalem**--We know from John's gospel that the Lord traveled several times between Galilee and Judaea, but Matthew focuses our attention on this last journey.

**and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes**--Matthew often mentions the scribes, including some sympathetic references (8:19; 13:52; cf. 23:34). But the chief priests and elders have appeared only once each before now: the chief priests in 2:4, when Herod consults them about the birth of Messiah, and the elders in 15:2, when the scribes and Pharisees accuse the disciples of "transgress[ing] the tradition of the elders." These terms emphasize their authority and responsibility as representatives of the people, and their appearance in this third section of the book highlights the official nature of the rejection that is taking place.

**and be killed, and be raised again the third day**--This announcement is a complete surprise to the disciples.

Peter responds to this announcement. The Lord deals first with him, then turns to the larger group to instruct them on the principles that are involved.

### **22-23, Peter's Rebuke**

**22 Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee**--Peter's response shows that the Lord's endorsement in the previous paragraph hardly makes him an infallible teacher of the church. He may be out in front of the other disciples, but often in an erroneous way. Later he courageously follows the Lord to the house of the High Priest, only to deny him three times. And recall his words in Acts, when the Lord is instructing him concerning Cornelius (chart):

Act 10:13 And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. 14 But Peter said, Not so, Lord.

Those last three words just don't go together! Peter sometimes thinks he knows more than the Lord. See notes for an analysis of the error in Peter's rebuke.

**23 But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan**--He uses the same words that he addressed to Satan in the wilderness:

Mat 4:9 All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. 10 Then saith Jesus unto him, **Get thee hence, Satan**<sup>3</sup> for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

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3 TR, in agreement with the critical editions, has only *παγε*, but MT, in a tradition documented back to the fourth century, has *παγε σπισω μου*, exactly as here.

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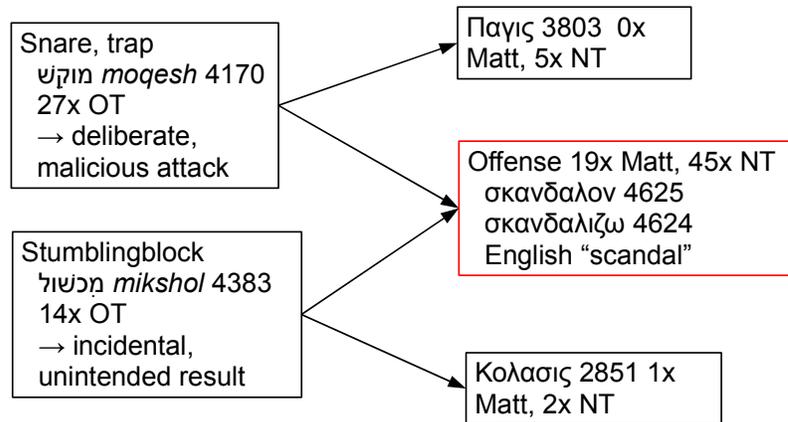
We were perhaps not surprised to hear an echo of the wilderness temptation in the actions of the Pharisees and Sadducees:

Mat 16:1 The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and **tempting** desired him that he would shew them a sign from heaven.

But now one of his own disciples becomes the agent of Satan. This is a sober warning of the adversary's wiles. He can use even our brethren to attempt to turn us aside. We must cleave close to the Lord ourselves to avoid being used in this way, and be lovingly alert in our dealings with one another to detect such intrusions.

**thou art an offence unto me:**--This is a very sober accusation. This noun σκανδαλον and the related verb σκανδαλιζω appear 19x in Matthew, more than in any other book in the NT. Clearly they reflect a major concern of Matthew.

The verb does not appear in the LXX, but the noun is used to translate two different Hebrew words (Figure 2, chart). The more common one, מִשְׁקָל, means "snare," a trap that one deliberately sets to capture an animal or an enemy. About half as often, the word corresponds to מִכְשׁוֹל, "stumblingblock," which suggests something that we do without malice, but that still has the capacity to cause another person to fall. What is going on here?



*Figure 2: The Ambiguity of Offense*

The notes contain an analysis of all instances of offense in Matthew, showing in each case who or what is offending whom, by what action, and what the consequences are. In terms of deliberateness (snare vs. stumblingblock), they fall into three categories (chart).

Six times Jesus offends people by his teaching and miracles (11:6; 13:57; 15:12; 17:27; 26:31, 33). For example:

Mat 15:10 And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand: 11 Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man. 12 Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?

Clearly he is not deliberately trying to snare people, but they stumble because they are not willing to hear the truth. He is not culpable in these cases. The offense is incidental (a stumblingblock, not a snare). The truth does not match what people want to hear.

Twice (13:21; 24:10) the Lord anticipates the offense that comes from persecution, which is

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clearly deliberate and intended to make people depart from the truth.<sup>4</sup> This is an example of a snare, not a stumblingblock.

Mat 13:20 But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; 21 Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.

Four times bodily members may offend us (5:29-30; 18:7-9).

Mat 5:29 And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast *it* from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not *that* thy whole body should be cast into hell. 30 And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast *it* from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not *that* thy whole body should be cast into hell.

Our members don't deliberately attacking us. Yet Satan exploits innate bodily impulses—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life—to tempt God's people (Genesis 3, Matthew 4) and that is a deliberate action. This example highlights that there may be distinct agents of offense. The immediate agent is not deliberate, but it is being encouraged by our adversary. In itself, such an offense is a stumblingblock (dangerous, but not malicious), but our adversary is eager to use it as a malicious snare.

In this taxonomy, Peter falls into this last category. He himself is not malicious toward the Lord, but the Lord teaches us to see behind his action a malicious Satanic influence. Because of the Lord's instruction, we are not ignorant of Satan's devices (2 Cor 2:11), and should be on guard against this pattern of attack.

**for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.**--Here is the root cause that makes Peter vulnerable to being used of Satan in this way: his attention and appetites have not been properly focused.

“Savour” is literally φρονεω (chart). The word appears only twice in the gospels, here and in Mark's parallel, but it is very common in Paul (26x). Literally it means “to think, consider, regard, set the mind.” “Savour” reflects the depth of our engagement, but it is important to understand it as a deliberate action, not a passive response. Think of “savoring” the taste of a very special cheese. The Lord is revealing to Peter that he has set his attention on earthly things, not on heavenly things. His view of the Messiah is still the nationalistic one, and does not take into account the divine work of redemption that is central to his mission.

Though this statement appears only in this episode in the gospels, Paul may be recalling this saying in some of his exhortations. Consider two examples:

Rom 8:5 For they that are after the flesh do **mind** the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.

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<sup>4</sup> 18:6 may fit here as well.

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Col 3:2 **Set your affection** on things above, not on things on the earth.

We choose what we think about, the ambitions we adopt and pursue, the personal priorities we set. These choices are reflected in how we spend our time, the books we read, the media we consume. In each case, we must choose between the things of God and those of men, the things of heaven and those of earth, the things of the Spirit and those of the flesh. If we set our affection on godly, heavenly, spiritual things, we will become more spiritual, and be a blessing and encouragement to our brothers and sisters in Christ. To the extent that we prefer worldly, earthly, fleshly things, we will not only stagnate ourselves, but may unwittingly become tools of Satan to snare our brethren and cause them to fall.

**24-28, Explanation to the Disciples**

These five verses should sound familiar. They repeat the thought and many of the expressions that the Lord used in 10:37-42 (Table 2, chart)

To understand the significance of this repetition, let's recall what was going on in ch. 10. In that chapter, the Lord called his disciples and commissioned them to preach. It follows a particular literary form, the commissioning form, which includes seven components: Introduction, Confrontation, Commissioning proper, statement of the Difficulty of the mission, Objection,

Matthew 10	Matthew 16
37 He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.	16:24 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself,
38 And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.	and take up his cross, and follow me.
39 He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.	25 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.
(28 And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.)	26 For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?
40 He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me. 41 He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. 42 And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.	27 For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.

*Table 2: An echo of 10:37-42*

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Reassurance, and Conclusion. In particular, it recalls the call of Moses by the Lord in Exodus 3-4 (Table 3, chart). The section echoed in ch. 16 is the last of the Difficulty-Reassurance sections.

So in our present section, the Lord is reminding the disciples of their commissioning. The reminder is particularly appropriate in the light of his announcement of his

coming death. In ch. 10, he contemplated the theoretical possibility that his followers might have to bear witness with their very lives. Now he tells them that they are about to witness an example, and reminds them of the standard that applies to them.

If he can remind them repeatedly of the demands of discipleship, it might be well for us to remind one another as well. Salvation is once-for-all, but we can all use a periodic reminder to remain committed to the Lord:

Heb 10:24 And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works:

**24 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me,**<sup>5</sup>--This is the expression that described his earlier relation to John (3:11 “he that cometh after me”) and with which he called the fishermen (4:19). What follows is not optional, but what “any man” who follows him must expect. He gives three requirements, the underlying principle, and a motivation.

**let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.**--He expects his disciples to do three things (chart).

*Deny himself:* The first step is to decide that our life is no longer about satisfying our own desires. This first command is very much in line with Paul’s instructions,

Rom 6:11 Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Col 3:2-3 Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. 3 For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.

Peter erred because he did “set his mind” on “the things that be of men” (v. 23). The first step for

<sup>5</sup> It is at least curious that in v. 23 and the temptation, Satan is told to go *οπισω μου*, the same expression used for the Lord’s disciples, though it is joined with the command *υπαγε*. Every knee shall bow...

Section	Moses, Exodus 3-4	The Disciples, Matt 9-11
Introduction	3:1, Moses is herding sheep	9:35-36, The Lord is ministering and observing “sheep without a shepherd”
Confrontation	3:2-6, God speaks from the burning bush	9:37-10:4, The Lord presents the need and calling the twelve
Commissioning	3:7-10, God sends Moses back to Egypt to deliver the people	10:5-15, The Lord sends the Twelve out to preach and heal
Difficulty/Objection alternating with Reassurance (4x)	3:11 Whom am I? → 12 I will be with thee 3:13 Who are you? → 14 I AM 4:1 They will not believe → 2-9 three signs 4:10 I am not eloquent → 11-12 I will teach thee	16-18 councils and kings → 19-20 take no thought how or what ye shall speak 21-22a family and all men → 22b-23 salvation and the Son of Man 24-25 false accusation → 26-33 fear not (3x) 34-38 family (3x worthy of me) → 39-42 reward (3x)
Conclusion	4:18-20 Moses prepares to return to Egypt	ch. 11:1, The Lord continues to minister

Table 3: The Commissioning Form in Exod 3-4 and Matt 9-11

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me as a disciple is to resolve that my life is not about coddling my physical, esthetic, or social appetites (1 John 2:16).

In the parallel position in ch. 10, the Lord spoke of the temptation to love family more than him. That was a specific example of coddling ourselves. Here he generalizes the requirement.

*Take up his cross:* This part of the instruction can be understood in two ways.

It is at least a reinforcement of “deny himself.” Paul refers to the cross in this way in Gal. 5,

Gal 5:24 they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.

But the Lord may be building on the previous statement, not just repeating it. For him, the cross was the mission for which the Father sent him. When he announced his passion, he said that he “must” go to Jerusalem and die. The necessity lies in the will of the Father, as we see in his agony in the garden. Having denied himself, the disciple must now submit himself to the mission that the Father has for him. “Deny himself” puts away my own desires; “take up his cross” focuses my attention on the Father’s priorities.

*Follow me:* In denying ourselves and submitting to the Father’s will, we are only doing what our Lord has already done. He asks nothing of us that he has not already demonstrated, and as we follow his example, we can be confident that the same Spirit who sustained him will sustain us.

**25 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.**--From the three requirements, we move to the underlying principle. We studied the parallel to this verse extensively in ch. 10. Both passages anticipate the risk of “losing” one’s life, but where in ch. 10 the alternative is “finding” it, here it is “saving” it.

“Life” is ψυχη, the same word translated “soul” in v. 16. It is the word that translates נַפְשׁ in the Shema, where we are told to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and abundance. When we studied that command, we learned that in the OT, the “soul” is the life force. At the very least, the Lord is calling on us to be willing to lose our lives, to die, in order to gain a greater life.

But “soul” can mean much more than physical life, as we saw in ch. 10 (chart):

Mat 10:28 And fear not them which **kill** **αποκτεινω** the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to **destroy** **απολλομι** both soul and body in hell.

In our verse, if the word means simply physical life, the Lord is saying that we must be willing to die for him. But v. 28 makes it likely that the word has a deeper meaning, dealing with the inner life, the seat of our personhood.

An important clue to the meaning of the expression comes in the LXX usage of the expression “to lose one’s soul,” **απολλομι** with ψυχη. The combination is common in Leviticus, where the two words consistently translate Hebrew expressions that our version renders as being “cut off” or “destroyed” “from among his people,” e.g.,

Lev 7:20 **that soul shall be cut off** from his people.

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To a Jewish hearer familiar with the Torah and its Greek version, “losing the soul” indicates being separated from the people of God. The destruction of the soul is what God does in hell (10:28), cutting a person off from the people of God.

So the choice that the Lord puts before us is a radical one. We must set aside our self-interest and serve him with all of our heart, soul/life, and abundance, or be cut off from the people of God. To motivate this requirement, he tells us what to expect, first negatively, then positively.

**26 For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?**--It is unfortunate that our translators changed the translation from “life” in v. 25 to “soul” in v. 26. The Lord is setting forth the consequences of his instruction, and first he gives the negative consequence. If we live for our own gratification and fulfillment, we will be cut off from the people of God. We will lose our life, not just physically, but eternally, as 10:28 warned.<sup>6</sup>

**27 For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.**--But there is a carrot as well as a stick. 10:41-42 repeatedly mentions that those who serve the Lord faithfully in spite of the personal cost will receive a reward, and the Lord repeats that theme here.<sup>7</sup> That reward takes place when the Lord returns in glory to set up his earthly kingdom.

**28 Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.**--This promise reinforces the positive motivation by offering reassurance of the Lord’s glorious return. Commentators debate extensively just what the Lord has in mind here, but Peter, referring to the transfiguration in the next chapter, later writes (chart),

2Pe 1:16 For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his **majesty**.<sup>8</sup> 17 For he received from God the Father **honour and glory**, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. 18 And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount.

For Peter, the transfiguration was a manifestation of the Lord’s coming glorious reign, and it seems easiest to understand this promise of the transfiguration. So the Lord promises a vision of his “coming” in the next chapter, but without either the angels or the rewards mentioned in v. 27.

So this chapter describes two events as the “coming of the Son of Man”: his coming in glory with his angels, and the transfiguration in the next chapter. We saw another in ch. 10:

Mat 10:23 But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say

6 The fourth difficulty-reassurance section in ch. 10 doesn’t have a negative motivation, but the reassurance in the third difficulty-reassurance section does, and that may form the basis for the reminder here.

7 Though the alignment of “reward” is an artifact of translation. ch. 10 does indeed use a noun for reward, μισθος, but the verb in 16:17 is simply αποδιδωμι (give).

8 Μεγαλειστης, promised to the Son of Man in Dan 9:27

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unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come.

I suggested there that the reference was the coming of the Lord to the disciples after his resurrection, described in Matthew 28. We will see another important prophecy of his coming in Matthew 24, which seems to line up with 16:27,

Mat 24:30 And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. 31 And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

So what does the Lord mean when he talks about his coming?

Recall the pattern of “manifold fulfillment”<sup>9</sup> that we saw frequently in Isaiah, in which an initial prophecy may be repeated down through history, sometimes in words and sometimes in events that foreshadow or partially realize the promise, until the time of the actual fulfillment (Figure 3, chart). For example, the notion that Gentiles will bless

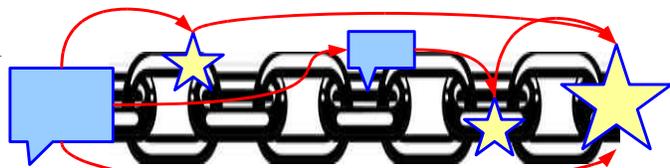


Figure 3: Manifold Fulfillment: blue = boxes = words, yellow stars = events

the seed of Abraham is rooted in Genesis 12 and reaches its ultimate fulfillment in the picture of kings bringing their wealth to the heavenly city in Revelation 21, but there are anticipations of it in Joshua 9, Psa 2 and 72, 1 Kings 10, throughout Isaiah, and in the three wise men of Matthew 2 (Figure 4, chart).

In the same way, the ancient promise that the Messiah will come to Jerusalem unfolds through time (Figure 5, chart). A convenient starting point is the promise to David in 2 Samuel 7, though we could go back further to the creation. We hear the promise repeated in the Psalms and prophets. Then in the NT, the wise men recognize the coming of the king. The transfiguration is a vision of the coming glory. He promises it again in Matthew 24. At the Great Commission, the Lord announces that he has received the

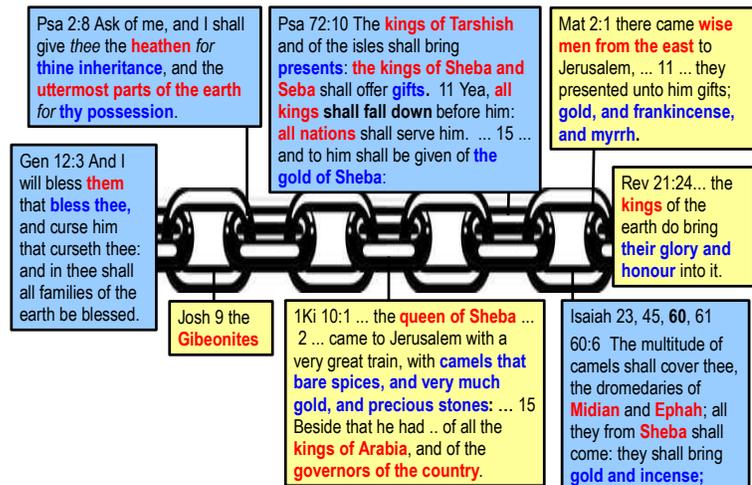


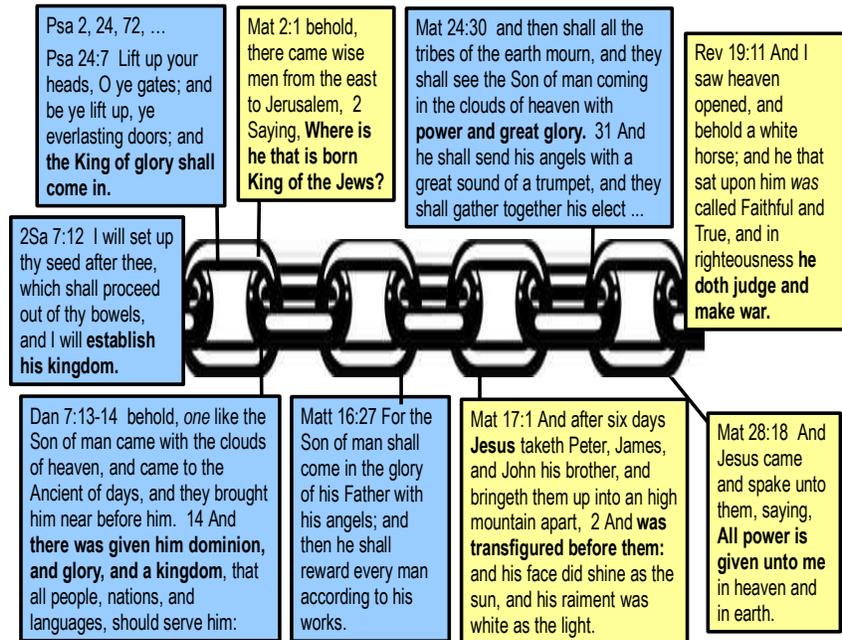
Figure 4: Manifold fulfillment in the blessing of Gentiles on Israel

<sup>9</sup> The term is due to Willis Judson Beecher, *The Prophets and the Promise*. Thomas Y. Crowell, 1905. The definition is my own, based on his discussion.

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authority promised in Daniel 7, and in Revelation 19 we finally see him coming in great glory to reign.

So when does the promised king come? In Bethlehem? At the transfiguration? In Galilee, after the resurrection? With the clouds and angels to set up his kingdom? The coming proper is the final one, in Revelation 19. That is when the promise of 16:27 is fulfilled. But along the way there are many reminders, many anticipations, in both word and event. In the next chapter we shall see one of them, and so shall some of those who were standing with the Lord at the end of chapter 16.



*Figure 5: Manifold fulfillment in the promise of the king*

## 17:1-13, The Transfiguration

Matthew relates first the events atop the mountain, then the Lord's comments to the three disciples as they descend.

### ***1-8, Instruction from the Father atop the mount***

**1 And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart,**--This event is yet another step in Matthew's presentation of our Lord as the second Moses (Table 4, chart).

- Chapter 2 presents him as the object of attempted infanticide by a wicked king (2:16)
- and as one who comes out of Egypt (2:14-15).
- In the Sermon on the Mount, he delivers God's law from a mountain (ch. 5-7).
- Now, he reveals God to three associates on a mountain:

**2 And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.**--We have suggested that the purpose of this episode is to anticipate the Lord's final coming "in the glory of his Father" (16:27), so it is appropriate that the Lord here exhibits that glory.

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His brightness recalls a prophecy of the coming kingdom from Isaiah (chart):

Isa 24:23 Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the LORD of hosts shall reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously.

Note the points of parallel:

- The Lord is on a mountain
- He is characterized by bright glory, overpowering the sun and moon.<sup>10</sup>

Matthew 17	Exodus 24
Mat 17:1 And after six days <b>Jesus ... bringeth them up</b> into an high mountain apart,	Exo 24:9 Then <b>went up Moses,</b>
taketh <b>Peter, James, and John</b> his brother,	and <b>Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu,</b> and seventy of the elders of Israel:
2 And was transfigured before them: ... 5 While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.	10 And they saw the God of Israel: and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness.

Table 4: *The Transfiguration and Exodus 24*

- He appears before “his ancients,” his elders. This is the only place that the Lord is described as having elders, who are usually the senior members of a nation, city, or family. They are probably faithful Israelites of times past: compare the 24 elders of Revelation 4-5, and the inhabitants of the heavenly city,

Heb 12:22 But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, 23 To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, 24 And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than *that of* Abel.

In this case, Moses and Elijah represent this facet of the prophecy.

So the echoes of Isa 24:23 confirm that this vision is indeed of “the Son of Man coming in his kingdom” (16:28).

**3 And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him.**<sup>11</sup>--Why are these two OT characters involved in this event? Why not Joshua and Isaiah, say, or David and Jeremiah? Several things bring these two men together in the OT, and that enhance this vision (chart): their role as mediators of the old covenant, their shared experience on the Mountain of

<sup>10</sup> This insight is suggested by a line in the eighth century hymn on the transfiguration by Cosmos the Melodist: “All light created paled there, and did him worship meet; the sun itself adored him, and bowed before his feet.”

<sup>11</sup> Matthew omits Luke’s description of the subject matter (9:31), “his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.” The point he wants to make is the glory of the coming kingdom, not the intervening humiliation.

## Matthew 16b-17a

God, and Malachi's prophecy relating them to the coming Messiah.

*First*, they represent the two main components of the OT, the Law and the Prophets, to whom the Lord frequently refers (4x in Matthew, more than any other NT book):

Mat 5:17 Think not that I am come to destroy **the law, or the prophets**: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.

Mat 7:12 Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is **the law and the prophets**.

Mat 11:13 For all **the prophets and the law** prophesied until John.

Mat 22:40 On these two commandments hang all **the law and the prophets**.

The law was given by Moses, and Elijah was a prominent example of a prophet. The Lord's claims rest on the OT, and here the two representatives of those components appear with him, confirming him as the culmination of the OT revelation.

The *second* similarity between Moses and Elijah, they both anticipated the Lord's experience here in meeting with God on a mountain. In fact, both Moses and Elijah met God on Mount Sinai, of which, as we have seen, this mountain is an echo. And both of them did so in the context of a 40-day fast, recalling our Lord's experience in the wilderness in ch. 4.

Moses received the law on Mt. Sinai, and later saw God (Exod 34). Each time he ascended the mount, he fasted for 40 days:

Deu 9:9 When I was gone up into the mount to receive the tables of stone, *even* the tables of the covenant which the LORD made with you, then I abode in the mount forty days and forty nights, I neither did eat bread nor drink water: = Exod 24

Exo 34:28 And he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water. And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments.

Several passages in the OT call this location Horeb, a descriptive name meaning "dry, sere."<sup>12</sup>

Mal 4:4 Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, *with* the statutes and judgments.

Elijah, fleeing from Jezebel, visited Horeb after a 40-day fast:

1Ki 19:5 And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise *and* eat. 6 And he looked, and, behold, *there was* a cake baken

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<sup>12</sup> The name "Sinai" סיני may derive either from the name of the moon god, or from the bush סנה from which the Lord called Moses in Exod 3-4 (cf. 3:12 When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain). Exod 3:1 describes the location as Horeb. The documentary hypothesis assigns them to different sources; they may refer to the region (Horeb) and a particular peak (Sinai); or Sinai may be the colloquial name while Horeb ("dry") may describe the characteristics of the region. The location is also called "Paran" and "the mountain of God."

## Matthew 16b-17a

on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again. 7 And the angel of the LORD came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise *and* eat; because the journey *is* too great for thee. 8 And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God.

There he met God, not in the wind, the earthquake, and the fire, but in the still small voice.

So both of these men met personally with God on a mountain, after denying themselves in a 40-day fast. The Lord also fasted for 40 days, though much earlier in his ministry, and now he shares with them the immediate vision of the Father.

The *third* similarity is the association of Moses and Elijah in Mal 4:4-5, the only other place in the Bible that the two are named together (chart). The context in Malachi strikingly recalls the lesson that the Lord is seeking to teach the disciples. He has instructed them on the need to deny themselves, assuring them of divine reward in the coming kingdom.

Mat 16:25 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. 26 For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? 27 For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.

This is exactly the proposition that Malachi's contemporaries are considering. Malachi relates how Israel doubted that God would reward them.

Mal 3:14 Ye have said, It *is* vain to serve God: and what profit *is it* that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the LORD of hosts? 15 And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, *they that* tempt God are even delivered.

But the Lord promises a day when he will reward those who serve him faithfully.

16 Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard *it*, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. 17 And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. 18 Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.

In that day, not only will the righteous be rewarded, but the wicked will be judged:

4:1 For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.

That day is marked by the coming of the promised Messiah, who will lead his people in destroying the wicked, just as in Revelation 19. Note that he is described as the rising sun,

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clothed in brilliant light, as the disciples saw Jesus at the transfiguration.

2 But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. 3 And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do *this*, saith the LORD of hosts.

In this context, he names Moses and Elijah together. The law of Moses is the basis on which God will judge the earth:

4 Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, *with* the statutes and judgments.

Elijah will come to restore the social fabric.

5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: 6 And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

In sum, the appearance of Elijah and Moses with the Lord on the mount draws our attention to Malachi's promise of the coming kingdom, as 16:28 had anticipated.

**4 Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.**--In the LXX, "tabernacle" is the regular translation for "booth," which describes a temporary shelter.<sup>13</sup> Peter expects them to be here for a while, and wants to erect shelters, much as Jonah did when he sat down to watch what would become of Nineveh:

Jon 4:5 So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and **there made him a booth**, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city.

The Lord told the disciples (16:28) that some of them would see the coming of his kingdom. Peter recognizes Moses and Elijah as harbingers of that kingdom, perhaps against the background of Malachi 3-4. He knows that this kingdom involves destruction of God's enemies, but there is no sign of this as yet, and he expects they may have to wait a while. Like Jonah waiting for the destruction of Nineveh, he wants to watch the show. He is still expecting the next step to be judgment on sinners, not the passion of the Messiah.

**5 While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.**--The beginning of this utterance is the same that was heard at the Lord's baptism,

Mat 3:17 And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

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<sup>13</sup> It is the dominant translation for סכה, but not dedicated, since it is also the dominant translation for אהל and משכן, describing the sacred tent (the tabernacle). The latter is clearly not in view here.

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Here is the Father's direct confirmation of what Peter perceived in his confession in 16:16. But now there is an addition: "Hear ye him." This command recalls Moses' prophecy in Deut 18,

Deu 18:15 The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; **unto him ye shall hearken**;

Like Jonah watching over Nineveh, they do not yet understand the true nature of his kingdom. This is not a time to watch for judgment, but a time to recognize the need for the Lord's sacrifice, and to spread his message of grace and salvation. They should stop trying to figure out things on their own, and pay attention to his instruction.

**6 And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid.**--This heavenly rebuke terrifies them, as people throughout the Bible are terrified when they encounter God.

**7 And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid.**--Here is a beautiful picture of the relation between the Father, the believer, and the Lord. We, acutely aware of our sinfulness, will naturally be terrified before our holy God, but the presence of our Savior enables us to put away fear and arise to serve him.

**8 And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only.**--Now is not the time for sitting and watching for judgment. 16:28 promised, not the kingdom, but a vision of the kingdom ("till they see..."), and that has been delivered. Now there is work to do.

### ***9-13, Instruction from the Lord Jesus on the way down***

**9 And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead.**--As in 16:20, he knows that they do not yet appreciate the true nature of his Messiahship. If they were to relate the vision, it would only stir up in others the same nationalistic, revolutionary tendencies that it did in Peter. They must first experience his sacrifice and resurrection before they can properly explain the vision (as Peter does in 2 Peter 1, using it to assure his readers of the certainty of the yet-future return of the Lord).

**10 And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come?**--The scribes, drawing on Malachi 4, did teach that Elijah would herald the coming of the Messiah. They have just seen Elijah. Surely that means that the kingdom is about to unfold. Why then all this talk about dying and rising?

**11 And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come,**--Not all that the scribes taught was wrong. The Lord confirms that Elijah will precede the coming of the Messiah for judgment.

**and restore all things.**--The verb ἀποκαθιστημι is the same as that used by the LXX in Mal 4:6 (LXX 3:23) to translate "turn" (chart):

Mal 4:5 Behold, I will send you **Elijah** the prophet before the coming of the great and

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dreadful day of the LORD: 6 And he shall **turn** the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

Malachi predicts the restoration of family relations; the Lord sees this as symbolic and anticipatory of a general restoration of all things. It is not wrong for them to look forward to such a restoration, which clearly has not yet taken place. In Acts, the disciples ask him again of this promised restoration, using the same verb,

Act 1:6 When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time **restore** again the kingdom to Israel?

He does not deny that it is coming, but says that the time is under the Father's control.

**12 But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed.**--He reminds them of what they heard in 11:14. John the Baptist filled the role of Elijah with respect to the Lord's first coming, but did not restore all things. Instead, he was killed by the wicked forces in the world.

**Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them.**--If the nation treated the forerunner in this way, can the Messiah expect any better reception?

**13 Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.**--Bit by bit, he is opening their understanding into what must happen before the kingdom takes the physical form that they so much desire.

## 17:14-21, Healing a Lunatic Boy

Matthew carefully distinguishes three groups in his book: the disciples, the (οχλος, sometimes translated "people"), and the religious leaders. Two of them mark this section into two scenes (chart). V. 14 introduces the first scene as dealing with the multitude, and the appearance of the disciples in v. 19 marks the second scene. Mark tells us that the religious leaders were also there, in the person of the scribes, but Matthew does not mention them.

### **14-18, Public, with the Multitude.**

**14 And when they were come to the multitude οχλος,<sup>14</sup>**--When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, the people were showing their lack of faith in the affair of the golden calf. Similarly, the Lord, the prophet like Moses, descends from the mount to encounter unbelief.

**there came to him a certain man, kneeling down to him, and saying, 15 Lord, have mercy on my son:**--The petition "Have mercy" ελεησον appears 21x in the LXX of the canonical books, mostly (19x) in Psalms, and always addressed to God. Nine times it is associated with the title "Lord," and in eight of these, all by David, the prayer is personal, "Have mercy upon me, O

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<sup>14</sup> Mark 9:14 notes that the scribes were there, apparently challenging the disciples' weakness. See Trench for comparison with the episode of the golden calf on Sinai. Matthew is not focused at this point on opposition from the leaders.

## Matthew 16b-17a

LORD” (Psa 6:2; 9:13; 27:7; 31:9; 41:4, 10; 56:1; 86:3). The expression appears first in the Psalms, and it is likely that David was the first to pray this prayer. For example (chart),

Psa 6:2 **Have mercy upon me, O LORD**; for I *am* weak: O LORD, heal me; for my bones are vexed.

Psa 9:13 **Have mercy upon me, O LORD**; consider my trouble *which I suffer* of them that hate me, thou that liftest me up from the gates of death:

Psa 31:9 **Have mercy upon me, O LORD**, for I am in trouble: mine eye is consumed with grief, *yea*, my soul and my belly.

Only Matthew echoes this expression in the NT:

Mat 15:22 And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, **Have mercy on me, O Lord**, *thou* Son of David;

Mat 17:14 there came to him a *certain* man, kneeling down to him, and saying, **15 Lord, have mercy on my son**:

Mat 20:30 And, behold, two blind men sitting by the way side, when they heard that Jesus passed by, cried out, saying, **Have mercy on us, O Lord**, *thou* Son of David. 31 And the multitude rebuked them, because they should hold their peace: but they cried the more, saying, **Have mercy on us, O Lord**, *thou* Son of David.

By echoing the OT expression, these people are recognizing Jesus as the Lord of the OT, the one who alone can solve their problems.<sup>15</sup>

This very Jewish petition first appears on the lips of the woman of Canaan! The background of this man is not made clear: the Lord is on his way back from Caesarea Philippi, on the outskirts of Jewish territory. Only with the blind men are we clearly in a Jewish context. While people of questionable pedigree are recognizing Jesus as Lord and the only source of mercy for their problems, the religious leaders, confident in their own security, are increasingly on the attack.

**on my son**—This is the third time we have seen a parent coming to the Lord on behalf of a child. The first was in the initial collection of miracles in ch. 9 (chart),

Mat 9:18 While he spake these things unto them, behold, there came a certain ruler,<sup>16</sup> and worshipped him, saying, My daughter is even now dead: but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live.

The second was the woman of Canaan:

Mat 15:22 And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto

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15 In three of these four cases, the petitioner adds, “Son of David” and identifying the one to whom David was calling with the promised son of David. We will see this paradox again in 22:41-45.

16 Matthew does not mention, if he knows, that this man is a ruler of the synagogue (Luke 8:41). Not all religious leaders rejected the Lord, as John’s narrative of Nicodemus makes clear. But Matthew focuses our attention on the dominant response of the establishment, which was to reject the Lord.

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him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, *thou* Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.

The father's concern here may reflect the emphasis on Malachi 3-4 in the Transfiguration, and in particular the ministry of Elijah in Mal 4:6,

Mal 4:6 And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

**for he is lunatick, and sore vexed: for oftentimes he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water.**--The nature of the boy's malady has been extensively debated. The description "lunatick" is literally "moon-struck," and some modern versions translate it "epileptic," but this Greek word is not used in this technical sense until the second century,<sup>17</sup> and the sequel shows demonic involvement. By the end of the episode, we'll better appreciate the complexity of the case.

**16 And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him.**--Again, the episode reinforces the lesson in the transfiguration that Jesus is the second Elisha, introduced by John as Elijah. Recall the history in 2 Kings 4, where Elisha restores the son of the Shunammite after Gehazi is unsuccessful. She and her husband were hospitable to Elisha, and the Lord gave them a son. Then he died (chart):

2Ki 4:18 And when the child was grown, it fell on a day, that he went out to his father to the reapers. 19 And he said unto his father, My head, my head. And he said to a lad, Carry him to his mother. 20 And when he had taken him, and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon, and *then* died.

She goes to Elisha to petition his help, and he sends Gehazi, his servant:

2Ki 4:28 Then she said, Did I desire a son of my lord? did I not say, Do not deceive me? 29 Then he said to Gehazi, Gird up thy loins, and take my staff in thine hand, and go thy way: if thou meet any man, salute him not; and if any salute thee, answer him not again: and lay my staff upon the face of the child.

But Gehazi was unsuccessful in recussitating the child:

2Ki 4:31 And Gehazi passed on before them, and laid the staff upon the face of the child; but *there was* neither voice, nor hearing. Wherefore he went again to meet him, and told him, saying, The child is not awaked.

Only when Elisha arrived was the child restored. Just so, in the present case, the disciples are unable to meet the father's request for his son, and must await the coming of the master.

The comparison of the disciples with Gehazi is unflattering, and not only because both were unable to deliver someone in need. Recall in 2 Kings 5 how Gehazi coveted the reward that Naaman the Syrian brought, and received in addition the leprosy of Naaman. In a few chapters, when James and John request positions at the Lord's right hand, their selfish ambition is reminiscent of Gehazi's failure. The Lord's words to the disciples in the second scene of this

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<sup>17</sup> See France, p. 659, note 10.

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episode are harsh: he describes them as lacking faith. Just associating with the Lord does not guarantee that we will be godly. We must be truly committed to him.

**17 Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation,**<sup>18</sup>--We have to resolve two issues here: the meaning of our Lord's words, and the intended recipients.

Consider the meaning first. The expression appears to be inspired by Moses' valedictory song in Deut 32, which is a *rib* describing Israel's failings (chart).

Deu 32:5 They have corrupted themselves, their spot *is* not *the spot* of his children: **they are a perverse and crooked generation.**

The transfiguration emphasized Matthew's presentation of Jesus as the prophet like Moses, and here he echoes Moses' rebuke to "the nation" who have fallen short of their expectations.

But who here corresponds to the nation? The plural pronoun "you" shows that he is speaking to somebody more than just the father. Are the disciples included in the group?

My sense is that they are not. Matthew has not mentioned them so far (though the father has). He has mentioned the crowd, in v. 14. The disciples do not interact with the Lord until v. 19. According to Mark, the crowd was initially gathered around the disciples, but when Jesus appears, they leave the disciples and throng him:

Mar 9:14 And when he came to *his* disciples, he saw a great multitude *οχλος* about them, and the scribes questioning with them. 15 And straightway all the people *οχλος*, when they beheld him, were greatly amazed, and running to *him* saluted him.

Throughout his book, Matthew distinguishes between the crowd or multitude *οχλος* and the disciples. They stand midway between the religious leaders and the disciples. Unlike the religious leaders, they initially support Jesus enthusiastically, but in the end they allow the leaders to persuade them to reject the Lord:

Mat 27:20 But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude *οχλος* that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus.

So it makes sense that his rebuke here is addressed to the crowd. Like the Israelites whom Moses rejected, they have no abiding faith in him, and they are "perverse," departing from the truth and liable to be turned aside by the leaders. He goes on to say to them,

**how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you?**--Again, his words echo the experience of Moses. Moses speaks in this way when the nation complains about the manna:

Num 11:11 And Moses said unto the LORD, Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant? and wherefore have I not found favour in thy sight, **that thou layest the burden of all this people upon me?** 12 Have I conceived all this people? have I begotten them, that thou shouldest say unto me, Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father beareth the sucking child, unto the land which thou swarest unto their fathers?

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18 See Meyer for persuasive argument that he is indeed referring to the disciples, not just to the crowd or the father.

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And after the nation listens to the fearful spies and refuses to go up and take the land, the Lord himself expresses this opinion:

Num 14:26 And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, 27 **How long shall I bear with this evil congregation,** which murmur against me? I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur against me.

Contrast the Lord's later promise to his disciples,

Mat 28:20 lo, I am **with you alway**, *even* unto the end of the world.

The disciples are also fickle, but the Lord has given them understanding that the multitude do not share. They (especially Peter) will prove fickle, and the Lord does not hesitate to rebuke them when appropriate, as we will see shortly. But having chosen them, the Lord deals patiently with them to bring them to maturity.

**bring him hither to me. 18 And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour.**--The description of the boy's symptoms in the other gospels are characteristic of epilepsy, and some have suggested that the reference to "the devil" is an accommodation to the superstitions of the day. But Matthew's use of two distinct verbs, "the devil ... departed" and "the child was cured," shows that he can perfectly well distinguish the two. There is no reason that an evil spirit might not exploit a weakness caused by a biochemical imbalance to gain control over a person. One can even speculate that the father, in earlier attempts to deal with a purely medical condition, might have engaged practitioners who dealt with demons, giving an entrance to the tormenter here. The two verbs give evidence that the boy's condition was a combination of epilepsy and demon possession.

### **19-21, Private, with the Disciples**

**19 Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out?**--They are right to be disappointed, for previously the Lord empowered them to deal with both illness and demons (chart):

Mat 10:1 And when he had called unto *him* his twelve disciples, he gave them power *against* unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease.

But the grant of his authority is not independent of their cultivation of the required spiritual resources to exercise it.

**20 And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief:**--This is a harsh rebuke, being the nominal form of the adjective used of the crowd in v. 17. In fact, perhaps because of the harshness, an early but rare variant arose<sup>19</sup> accusing them, not of unbelief, but of "little faith," the expression used elsewhere for their failures (6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8). But the majority reading,

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<sup>19</sup> The MT reading, and also (with the exception of  $\aleph$  and B) by far the oldest (going back to the 6<sup>th</sup> century, while the earliest other instance of  $\text{ὀλιγοπιστία}$  is 9<sup>th</sup> century).

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which is also very ancient, is clearly “unbelief.”

How can those elsewhere described as having “little faith” now be said to have none? Mark’s parallel to this episode includes a revealing exchange between the Lord and the father.

Mar 9:23 Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things *are* possible to him that believeth. 24 And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.

Here the father confesses to the same situation we see in the disciples: faith, and yet unbelief. The difference is that, led by the Lord’s questioning, he realizes the limitation of his own faith. So he asks the Lord to give him the kind of faith that be effectual against such a threat.

Like the father, the disciples would say, “I believe,” but they have not yet recognized their lack of the faith that the Lord must give. In Mark, the Lord gently prompts the father to recognize the limits of his own faith and cry out for help, and in Matthew, he does the same with the disciples.

His correction involves two related points: the need for faith, and the specifics of this case.

**for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.**--If they did have faith that God was able to heal the boy, they would have been successful. The amount of their faith is not at issue, but they must believe, and in this case they did not.

They had been commissioned to heal illness and cast out demons. In their heads they knew they should be able to do this, but that knowledge was not supported by trust in the Lord.

How can we move from knowledge to faith? The Lord’s second exhortation may hold the clue. Recall Paul’s principle that

Rom 10:17 faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

We need to meditate on God’s promises and ask him to make them real in our hearts. This may be the point of the Lord’s second principle:

**21 Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.**--He recognizes this particular case as unusually severe (perhaps because of the combination of illness and demonic activity). Time set aside before the Father to pray, based on the promises of Scripture, would build up one’s faith, and thus enable the miracle. We don’t know how long the Lord was on the mount with Peter, James, and John, but this was a time of focusing on the presence and power of God, and had prepared them (and the Lord in particular) to deal with a case for which the other disciples, in the comfort of their base camp, were unprepared.

## Notes

### **Peter's rebuke to the Lord**

What Peter actually says is  $\lambda\epsilon\omega\varsigma$  σοι κυριος. The expression  $\lambda\epsilon\omega\varsigma$  + dative personal pronoun appears plus eleven times in the LXX.

There are other cases as well (e.g., Deut 21:8 from כפר) where  $\lambda\epsilon\omega\varsigma$  governs the dative, though after a break.

Of the 34 instances  $\lambda\epsilon\omega\varsigma$  in all in the LXX, 20 have to do with forgiveness (סלה, נשא, נהם כפר). Note as an example Num 14:19-20,

Num 14:19-20 Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity

of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast **forgiven** this people, from Egypt even until now. 20 And the LORD said, I have **pardoned** according to thy word:

Though not using a “forgive” verb, Isaiah 54 clearly conveys this sense as well, in its context:

Isa 54:6-10 For the LORD hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God. 7 For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. 8 In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer. 9 For this *is as* the waters of Noah unto me: for *as* I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. 10 For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the LORD that **hath mercy on thee**.

Mercy רחם is what motivates the Lord's forgiveness.

Peter's rebuke is the recognition of the incongruity between the holiness he has observed in Jesus and the events that the Lord says are about to unfold. Only someone with great moral failings could be condemned to death by the Jewish court. Peter knows of no such faults in his Lord, but if there are such, he prays, “May God have mercy on you, may God forgive you.”

Ref	Prounoun	Heb or translation	Complement
Gen 43:23	2p	שלום	
Num 14:19	3p	נשא	
Num 14:20	3p	סלה	
2 Sam 20:20 ( <i>bis</i> )	1s	חלילה	אם
2 Sam 23:17	1s	חלילה	מן
1 Chr 11:19	1s	חלילה	מן
1 Macc 2:21	1p	“God forbid”	
2 Macc 10:26	3p	“have mercy”	
4 Macc 8:14	2p	“have mercy”	
Isa 54:10	2s	רחם	

## Matthew 16b-17a

Of course, that is precisely what the Father must not do, if the Lord is to accomplish his mission. Peter is correct that the events are appropriate for one bearing great sin. What he does not yet realize is that the Lord is bearing great sin—our sin. If the Father were to have mercy on him, the entire redemptive program would be thwarted.

It is worth noting that the great Messianic predictions, Psa 89 and 2 Sam 7, assure the promised Davidic king of God’s **טֹדֵן** but not his **נִקְרָא**. I need to see whether this tendency is continued throughout the OT. If so, it would be a striking indirect anticipation of the Messiah’s sacrificial role.

### Σκανδαλον, σκανδαλιζω

These terms appear 19x in Matthew, more than in any other book in the NT, and account for more than 0.1% of the vocabulary. Clearly they reflect a major concern of Matthew.

#### LXX Usage

Σκανδαλον is neither dedicated nor dominant for any Hebrew word, but it is the only term that combines the ideas of a snare **מוֹקֵשׁ** and a stumbling block **מִכְשׁוֹל**, a deliberate attempt to harm somebody and something careless that might trip them up.

	מוֹקֵשׁ	מִכְשׁוֹל	פַּח	רִשְׁתָּ
Σκανδαλον	7	3		
Σκανδαλιζω (none)				
Παγίς	8		23	8
Κολασίς		5		

Σκανδαλον is most common (7x) in the Pss.

#### Case analysis in Matthew:

Ref	N/V	Offender	Offended	Action	D(eliberate, <b>מוֹקֵשׁ</b> ) vs. I(ncidental, <b>מִקְשׁוֹל</b> )	Consequence to offender
5:29	V	Eye	Believer		I	Pluck it out to avoid hell
5:30	V	Hand	Believer		I	Cut it off to avoid hell
11:6	V	Jesus	Anybody	By the miracles and teaching, apparently—in response to JB’s question	I	Blessing for not being offended
13:21	V	Persecution	Believer	Experience of tribulation	D	
13:41	N	Things				Gathered by the angels to be burned
13:57	V	Jesus	People of Nazareth	Teaching in the synagogue	I	No mighty works

## Matthew 16b-17a

Ref	N/V	Offender	Offended	Action	D(eliberate, מוקש) vs. I(ncidental, מקשור)	Consequence to offender
15:12	V	Jesus	Pharisees	Teaching that food cannot pollute	I	
16:23	N	Peter	Jesus	Rejection of the passion prophecy		Called "Satan," commanded to depart
17:27	V	Jesus	Tax collectors	By not paying tribute	I	
18:6	V	Anyone	Little believers		D?	Worse than being drowned in the sea
18:7-9	N	Hand, foot, eye			I	hell fire (cf. 5:29, 30)
24:10	V	Persecution	Many	By tribulation	D	
26:31	V	Jesus	Disciples	By his passion	I	
26:33	V	Jesus	Peter	(Peter denies being offended)	I	

There are some clear groupings here:

- Six times Jesus offends people by his teaching and miracles (11:6; 13:57; 15:12; 17:27; 26:31, 33). Clearly he is not culpable in these cases. The offense is incidental (a stumblingblock, not a snare), the result of the mismatch between the truth and what people want to hear.
- Twice (13:21; 24:10) he anticipates the offense that comes from persecution, which is clearly deliberate and intended to make people depart from the truth. 18:6 may have in mind this kind of action as well.
- Four times bodily members may offend us (5:29-30; 18:7-9). They do not seem to be deliberate, but the Lord warns against the consequences. Yet recall that innate bodily impulses are what Satan tries to exploit in ch. 4 in order to attack the Lord, and that is a deliberate action. This example highlights that there may be distinct agents of offense, the proximate one incidental but the remote one deliberate.

In this taxonomy, Peter falls into this last category. He himself is not malicious toward the Lord, but the Lord teaches us to see behind his action a malicious Satanic influence.

**Peter's σκηνη, 17:4**

Consider OT parallels.

	סכה	סכות	אהל	משכן	
σκηνη	22	5	237	88	436
transliterate		11			
	31	19	345	139	

The construction ποιεω σκηνην is used in the following connections:

- Jacob, for his cattle, Gen 33:17
- Moses, of the Tabernacle: many references
- Booths for the feast of booths, Neh 8:15-17
- Booths for pagan deities, Amos 5:26
- Jonah's booth, 4:5, to wait and see what happens

The last is by far the closest parallel. People would erect temporary shelters when they expected to wait for a while in a place.