

Mark 9:2-13 ~ Scripture Verses

The Transfiguration

² After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. ³ His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. ⁴ And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

⁵ Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” ⁶ (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)

⁷ Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!”

⁸ Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.

⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. ¹⁰ They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what “rising from the dead” meant.

¹¹ And they asked him, “Why do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?”

¹² Jesus replied, “To be sure, Elijah does come first, and restores all things. Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected? ¹³ But I tell you, Elijah has come, and they have done to him everything they wished, just as it is written about him.”

[New International Version, NIV, 1984]

Mark 9:2-13 ~ Discussion Questions

1. When were you last speechless? What causes you to be speechless?
2. How do people react when they watch fireworks? Why?
3. Where did Jesus take Peter, James, and John? Why do you think he chose only three of his disciples to watch his transfiguration? If he chose three people from this room, would you be one of them? Why or why not?
4. What exactly does “transfigured” mean? There are three aspects to it. (Mark 9:3, 8:27-31, 2 Thessalonians 1:10)
5. Who appeared with Jesus during the transfiguration? What was significant about them? (Malachi 4:5-6, Mark 9:12)
6. How did Peter respond to the transformation? What did he want to do? How do you suppose you would have reacted? Have you ever been so surprised or “blown away” by some experience that you said or did something silly or absurd?
7. What did God say to the disciples with Jesus? What did he want them to do? (Mark 9:7, James 1:22-25) How often has God, the Father, spoken directly to people in the Old Testament? The New Testament?
8. What is implied to you personally by God’s command that we listen to Jesus?
9. What orders did Jesus give the disciples when they were coming down the mountain? (9:9) What did they do? (9:10) How does this contrast with other people Jesus told not to say anything about a miracle or healing?
10. What did the three disciples discuss among themselves coming down? (9:10)
11. The disciples asked Jesus about Elijah (9:11) and Jesus answered that he had already come. Huh? Who was he speaking about? What does this mean? (9:12-13)
12. What is the key message in the story of the transfiguration? (Hint: remember the most important question in the Bible that we looked at last week, i.e., Jesus asking, “who do *you* say I am?” Mark 8:29)

Mark 9:2-13 ~ Leader's Guide

1. When were you last speechless? What causes you to be speechless?

People are often left speechless after some great show or experience (fireworks, coronation, roller coaster, Cirque du Soleil, Billy Graham), a totally unexpected outcome or event (person on Extreme Makeover, outrageous price for something you thought was worth a couple of bucks, a jury that finds a guilty person innocent, an unexpected gift, being falsely accused of something). In general, I'd say that one becomes speechless more from surprise than from something marvelous or wonderful.

2. How do people react when they watch fireworks? Why?

3. Where did Jesus take Peter, James, and John? Why do you think he chose only three of his disciples to watch his transfiguration? If he chose three people from this room, would you be one of them? Why or why not?

Jesus led the three disciples "up a high mountain, where they were all alone." Jesus knew this would be a very special experience and wanted the few disciples he took to focus on that and that alone. On a guided tour, think about 12 people walking along together behind the guide, talking, looking at things, jostling each other. Generally, only the few in the lead next to the guide are intently listening and focusing on what the guide is pointing out.

Peter, James, and John had an especially close relationship with Jesus. They were also the ones he selected to go with him when he restored to life the daughter of Jarius (Mark 5:37).

We would all like to think that Jesus would choose us as someone to accompany him, but would he? Do you have a close relationship with Jesus? Do you depend upon him? Do you have absolute, total faith in him?

4. What exactly does "transfigured" mean? There are three aspects to it. (Mark 9:3, 8:27-31, 2 Thessalonians 1:10)

The transfiguration was:

A. A revelation of the glory of the Son of God, a glory hidden before the transfiguration. In the transfiguration, physically, Jesus' clothes became dazzling white, bright as a flash of lightning and the appearance of his face changed (Luke 9:29). Today, this glory is again hidden, but will be revealed when he returns.

2 Thessalonians 1:10 – ...on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.

B. A confirmation of the difficult teaching given to the disciples at Caesarea

Philippi, i.e., the transfiguration unambiguously answers Jesus' all-important question, "who do you say I am?" He is the Messiah. (Mark 8:27-30)

C. A beneficial experience for the disciples who were discouraged after having been reminded so recently of Jesus' impending suffering and death (Mark 8:31).

5. Who appeared with Jesus during the transfiguration? What was significant about them? (Malachi 4:5-6, Mark 9:12)

Moses and Elijah appeared. Moses appears as the representative of the old covenant and the promise of salvation, which was soon to be fulfilled in the death of Jesus. Elijah appears as the appointed restorer of all things.

Malachi 4:5-6 – ⁵“See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. ⁶He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.”

6. How did Peter respond to the transformation? What did he want to do? How do you suppose you would have reacted? Have you ever been so surprised or “blown away” by some experience that you said or did something silly or absurd?

Mark says in 9:6 that they were frightened (Matthew 17:6 says “terrified”). Peter suggested building three shelters. He may possibly have been thinking of a tent like the “Tent of Meeting” where God could again communicate with his people (Exodus 29:42-43) or, more likely thinking of the booths used in the Feast of the Tabernacles (Lev 23:42). In any case, he was eager to do something and not just stand by and be a spectator.

In honor of the seven-day Feast of the Tabernacles (or Festival of Sukkot), Jews are commanded to dwell in temporary shelters, as their ancestors did in the wilderness. The temporary shelter is referred to as a sukkah (rhymes with Book-a.)

A sukkah must have at least two and a half walls covered with a material that will not blow away in the wind. It may be any size, so long as it is large enough for one to fulfill the commandment of dwelling in it. The roof of the sukkah must be made of material referred to as sekhakh (literally, covering). To fulfill the commandment, sekhakh must be something organic that grew from the ground and was cut off, such as tree branches, corn stalks, palm fronds, bamboo reeds, or sticks. Sekhakh must be left loose, not tied together or tied down. Sekhakh must be placed sparsely enough that rain can get in, and preferably sparsely enough that the stars can be seen, but not so sparsely that more than ten inches is open at any point or that there is more light than shade.

7. What did God say to the disciples with Jesus? What did he want them to do? (Mark 9:7, James 1:22-25) How often has God, the Father, spoken directly to people in the Old Testament? The New Testament?

God said, “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!” The first part of the statement alludes to Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1.

Psalm 2:7 – I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, “You are my Son; today I have become your Father.

Isaiah 42:1 – “Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations.

The second part of the statement, “listen to him!” implies obeying him as well as hearing him. When God is involved, the only true hearing is obedient hearing.

James 1:22-25 – ²² Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. ²³ Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror ²⁴ and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵ But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.

In the Old Testament, God spoke to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, Solomon, and several of the early prophets. With the later prophets and in the New Testament, the primary voice of God is referred to as an “Angel of the Lord” and, later on, the Holy Spirit. Of course, Jesus speaks to many people. But only twice in the New Testament does God speak directly, once at Jesus’ baptism (Mark 1:11) and his transfiguration.

8. What is implied to you personally by God’s command that we listen to Jesus?

9. What orders did Jesus give the disciples when they were coming down the mountain? (9:9) What did they do? (9:10) How does this contrast with other people Jesus told not to say anything about a miracle or healing?

Jesus told them not to tell anyone what they had seen until he had risen from the dead. But after Jesus’ resurrection, the disciples were to tell everyone what they had experienced, for Jesus’ work would have demonstrated his true and full character as the Messiah.

The appearance of Moses and Elijah with Jesus and their later disappearance introduces the idea that Jesus’ message is not in conflict with that of Moses and Elijah. But neither is it just an addition to their words. His message replaces theirs. We do not follow the commands given through Moses *and* the commands given through Jesus. Rather we should listen to Jesus only. Moses and Elijah are removed. Their law is no longer in effect.

The disciples, even impetuous Peter, did not say anything about this event until much later (Acts). In contrast, every one of the people healed and who had demons cast out by Jesus went around telling everyone in sight about it. Do you do what you know Jesus wants you to do even when you are tempted to do something else?

10. What did the three disciples discuss among themselves coming down? (9:10)

As Jews, they were actually familiar with the doctrine of the resurrection; it was the resurrection of the Son of Man that baffled them because their theology had no place for a suffering and dying Messiah. Most of the Jewish sects (Pharisees, Essenes, Zealots) believed in resurrection of the dead except for the Sadducees.

11. The disciples asked Jesus about Elijah (9:11) and Jesus answered that he had already come. Huh? Who was he speaking about? What does this mean? (9:12-13)

This section can be a bit confusing. Traditional Jewish thought based on Malachi 4:5-6 held that Elijah must appear before the coming of the Messiah. The disciples reasoned that if Jesus really was the Messiah, as the transfiguration proved him to be, why had not Elijah appeared? In saying that Elijah had come, Jesus was actually using the name Elijah in a generic sense as the person who would prepare for the coming of the Messiah. His reference was actually to John the Baptist. When he says, “they have done to him everything they wished...” he was referring to Herod and Herodias who imprisoned and beheaded him (Mark 6:17-29). Just as Elijah was opposed by Ahab and Jezebel, John was opposed by a weak ruler and his wicked wife.

Thus, what is suggested in Mark 9:11-13 is:

- A. Elijah ministered and suffered in the days of the wicked Jezebel and Ahab.
- B. Elijah was a type of John the Baptist who, in turn suffered at the hands of Herodias and Herod.
- C. The Son of Man will, in turn suffer and be rejected by the Jewish leaders and the Romans.

12. What is the key message in the story of the transfiguration? (Hint: remember the most important question in the Bible that we looked at last week, i.e., Jesus asking, “who do *you* say I am?” Mark 8:29)

Mark 9:2-13 ~ Additional Discussion Questions

1. How did God appear to individuals or groups of people?

A. At the transfiguration (Mark 9:7) _____

B. To the Jews in the desert (Exodus 19:16-19) _____

C. To Elijah (1 Kings 19:11-13) _____

D. To Job (Job 38:1, 40:6) _____

E. At Jesus' baptism (Mark 1:9) _____

2. How do you think the nine disciples that Jesus did not take with him to the transfiguration felt? Have you ever been a member of a group, yet felt left out? How can you overcome this feeling?

3. Jesus predicted his own death in some detail a number of times. But the disciples still didn't seem to "get it." Are there some things you've heard or read from the Bible a number of times that you still don't quite get or understand?

Look up some of Jesus' predictions of his death, many of which he had not yet shared with them. Can you see why the disciples might be confused?

A. Matthew 12:38 _____

B. Matthew 20:17 _____

C. Matthew 26:1 _____

D. Luke 9:21 _____

E. Luke 18:31 _____

F. John 2:18 _____

G. John 16:2 _____

H. John 16:16 _____