

CHAPTER 17

INTRODUCTION TO MATTHEW 17

Ver. 1. *And after six days*, etc.] That is, so long after Christ's conversation with his disciples at Caesarea Philippi, Peter's confession of him, and the reproof he gave him, upon his intimating that he should suffer and die, and Christ's resentment of it; after he had discoursed about his disciples taking up their cross, and following him; and of men's losing and finding their lives; and after the promise, or prophecy, that he had given out, that some then present should not die, until he came into his kingdom. Mark says the same as here, (~~4002~~ Mark 9:2) but (~~4028~~ Luke 9:28) says, it was about an eight days after, which may be reconciled in this manner; Matthew and Mark leave out the day in which Christ delivered the above sayings, and that in which he was transfigured, and so reckon but six days; and Luke takes them both into the account, and makes it eight days, so that they all agree; and it appears, in short, to be that day seven night.

Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother: Peter is taken, though he had so lately offended his master; Christ did not bear the offence in mind, but freely forgave him, and still loved him: James was not the brother of our Lord, who was of that name, but the Son of Zebedee; as appears from John being his brother, who was the beloved disciple; these three were all favourite disciples, and were at other times admitted to be with him, when others were not, (~~4057~~ Matthew 26:37, ~~4057~~ Mark 5:37). Such a number was taken, as being proper and sufficient to bear witness of the truth of the following account of Christ's transfiguration;

and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart. Luke says, to pray; as he was wont to do, in such places. This mountain is generally said to be Tabor; but for what reason does not appear. Christ was going to Caesarea Philippi, when he had that discourse with his disciples, which this account is connected with; and though it was a week after, yet we have no intimation of his removing from these parts, with his disciples; only of his leading them up into a mountain: and quickly after this, we hear of him at Capernaum, which was ten miles from Mount Tabor. Dr. Lightfoot¹⁹³⁹ thinks, that this was the mountain, which Caesarea was at the foot of;

where formerly, the first idolatry was set up, one of Jeroboam's calves; and now the eternal Son of God is shown, in the confession of Peter, and in the illustrious demonstration of the Messiah. Since the goodly mountain Lebanon, and which was a very high one, was in those parts which Moses had a sight of before he died; why may it not be that, which he now descended upon, to be one of the witnesses from heaven, of Christ's transfiguration?

Ver. 2. *And was transfigured before them*, etc.] Peter, James, and John, before whom he was metamorphosed, or changed into another form; for not the substance of his body was changed, nor even the shape of it altered, only it received a more glorious form; that whereas before he appeared in the form of a servant, and looked mean and despicable, now he appeared in the form and majesty of God; or there was a divine glory; which from his deity showed itself in a visible manner through his flesh:

and his face did shine as the sun it had still the same appearance of an human face, but had such a dazzling glory upon it, as equalled the sun shining in its full strength:

and his raiment was white as the light: he did not put off his clothes, nor were the nature and substance, and fashion of them changed; but such rays of glory darted through his flesh, and through his clothes, as made them as bright and shining, as the light of the sun at noon day. Mark says, they became "exceeding white as snow, so as no fuller on earth can white them". The Vulgate Latin reads, "as snow", here; and so do the Ethiopic version, and Munster's Hebrew Gospel. Snow has a peculiar whiteness in it, and is therefore made use of, to express the glittering brightness of Christ's raiment; and the fuller is mentioned, who by the Jews^{f940} is called *sbwk*, and means one that whitens wool, or raiment, and such an one is here designed: not that any fuller makes garments of another colour white; for though this may be done, it is not the work of fullers, but dyers: but fullers, whatever colour garments are of, if sullied and spotted, can restore them to their native colour; and if white, can bring them to their former whiteness: now Christ's garments were as white, yea, whiter, than any such men could possibly make garments, that were white at first: what colour Christ's garments were of before, is not certain; now they appeared white, to the greatest degree of whiteness. Dr. Hammond^{f941} has a conjecture, that in the phrase "on earth", reference is had to the earth fullers make use of in cleaning, and which is called "fullers' earth"; and that the words are to

be rendered, “as no fuller, by or with earth can white them”; but if this will not bear, the sense is, that there is no fuller, nor ever was, or ever will be upon earth, that can make raiment so white as Christ’s was.

Ver. 3. *And behold there appeared unto them,* etc.] The disciples:

Moses and Elias; Moses the giver of the law, and Elias one of the chief of the prophets: one of them had been dead near a thousand and five hundred years, and the other had been caught up to heaven, about nine hundred years before this. The Jews sometimes speak of these two as together.

They say ^{f942},

“that the Shekinah never descends below, but **whyl aw hçm**,

“Moses and Elias” ascend above.”

Yea, they expect that these two will come together in future time; for so they represent ^{f943} a God saying to Moses;

“Moses, as thou hast given thy life for them (the Israelites) in this world, so in time to come (the days of the Messiah) when I shall bring Elias the prophet, **tj ak `yab µkynç**, “you two shall come together”.”

Now they came. Luke says, they appeared “in glory”: in glorious bodies, in a glory upon their bodies; like, though inferior, to the glorious body of Christ, now transfigured: that they appeared in their own real bodies, no doubt need be made; about the body of Elijah, or Elias, there is no difficulty; since he was carried soul and body to heaven, he died not, but was changed; and has ever since remained in a glorious body, in which he doubtless now appeared: and why this should not be the case of Moses, or why he should appear in another body, and not his own, I see not; for though he died, yet he was buried by the Lord, and no man ever knew the place of his sepulchre; and there was a dispute about his body, between Michael and the devil, all which are uncommon circumstances: so that it might be, that his body was, quickly after his death, raised and restored to him; or at this time, as a pledge of the resurrection of the dead, as Christ’s transfiguration was of his glory. The Jews have a notion that Moses is not dead, but is ascended, and stands and ministers to God, in the highest heavens ^{f944}: the appearance of these two with Christ, was to show, that Christ is the end of the law and prophets; that there is an entire agreement between him and them, and that they have their full accomplishment in him;

and also shows, that he was neither Elias, nor any of the prophets, as some took him to be; since he was distinct from them, and the chief and more glorious than any of them. If it should be asked; how came the disciples to know these two to be Moses and Elias, since they never saw them before, nor could have any statues or pictures of them, these being not allowed among the Jews; nor do the accounts of them in Scripture seem to be sufficient to direct them to such a thought; especially, since by their glorification, they must be greatly altered: it may be replied, they knew them, either by immediate divine revelation, or by the discourse that passed between them and Christ; for it follows,

talking with him. The Jews often speak of the appearance of Elias to their doctors, and of his conversing with them, and teaching them. Whether this is done with design to lessen the glory of this appearance, I will not say; however, they cannot reasonably object to the probability of this account, since they make it to be so frequent among themselves; though they look upon it as an high favour, and that such are holy good men, that are indulged with it, take an instance or two: thus they say ^{f945} of a certain person,

“Lo! the pious man, whom Elias used *hydhb y[tçm*, “to converse with”.”

And elsewhere it is said ^{f946},

“R. Phineas and R. Mari, the sons of R. Chasda, were godly men, *µhm[rbdm whyl aw*, “and Elias was talking with them”, and they were priests.”

What Moses and Elias were talking with our Lord about, is expressed by Luke, (see Gill on “~~408~~ Luke 9:31”).

Ver. 4. *Then answered Peter and said unto Jesus*, etc.] Which was, as Luke informs us, after he, and James, and John, awoke out of sleep; for it being night when Christ was transfigured, and they weary, were overpressed, and fell asleep on the mount, as they afterwards did in the garden with him: but when they were awaked, either by the talk of the men with Christ, or by the rays of brightness and glory, which darted from them, and especially from Christ, to their great surprise; they saw the glory that was upon him, and observed the two men that were with him, who appeared also in glorious forms; whom either by revelation, or the sequel

of their discourse, they knew to be Moses and Elias: and just as these were taking their leave of Christ, Peter, charmed with such objects, and with such delightful company, and pleasant conversation, he had the happiness of hearing part of, addresses himself to Christ and says,

Lord, it is good for us to be here; in this mountain, with thyself and such company; better than to be below among the throng and multitude, where nothing but misery and distress are to be seen, and noise and tumult heard; or it is better to be here, than to go to Jerusalem, and there suffer and die; the horror of which, is thought by some, still to abide on Peter's mind.

If thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles: tents, or booths, such as were made, at the feast of tabernacles, of boughs and branches of trees, to keep off heat, cold, and rains:

one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias; Luke adds, "not knowing what he said"; and Mark, "for he wist not what to say": the one representing him, as with the rapture and surprise, not himself; and the other, under the awe and dread of such majesty, as at the utmost loss what to say, agreeably to such a situation of things: not but that he knew what words he did deliver, and with what view; but he spake as a mistaken man, being ignorant of the design of this appearance; which was, not that this glory should continue, only that he should be an emblem and pledge of what was future; and besides, he was wrong in putting these two men upon an equal foot with Christ, each of them being to have a separate tabernacle as he; and he appeared to be quite out of the way, in proposing earthly tabernacles for glorified persons to dwell in, who had an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens: moreover, as to the mystical sense, Moses and Elias, the law and the prophets, were not to be considered as in distinct apartments, and separate from Christ, but as agreeing with him, and fulfilled and swallowed up in him; who only, according to the voice that followed, was to be heard and attended to, and not they, as distinct from him.

Ver. 5. *While he yet spake,* etc.] That is, while Peter was proposing the above to Christ, before an answer could be given by him, and which was unworthy of one, another scene of things presents, and a full answer is returned him by a voice from the Father; directing him and his fellow disciples, to attend to Jesus only, and not to Moses and Elias;

and behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; that is, Jesus, Moses, and Elias; the two last of which were seen no more; and which cloud covered them, as the cloud of glory covered the Israelites in the wilderness: and which, as it ceased at the death of Moses, the first prophet; one like unto it appeared at the declaration of Christ, as the greater prophet, spoken of, and typified by Moses. The disciples at its first appearance were not under it, and overshadowed by it; for Luke adds, “and they feared as they entered into the cloud”; there was such a solemnity and glory in it, as struck their minds with awe and fear, as they gradually came into it, and under it. This cloud, which is said to be a “bright” one, was a symbol of the divine presence, and a token of the love, grace, and favour of God; and expressive of the brightness and clearness of the Gospel dispensation, in distinction from the obscurity of the legal one, signified by the thick, dark, and black cloud, God descended in on Mount Sinai, when he gave the law;

and behold, a voice out of the cloud. The word “behold”, is prefixed both to the cloud and to the voice out of it, which were both wonderful and surprising; and which voice came from heaven, and from the excellent glory, from God the Father in heaven: as says Peter, who was now present, (~~GOIT~~ 2 Peter 1:17,18). Which said,

this is my beloved Son; not a servant, as Moses, Elias, and the rest of the prophets were: though as Mediator, and as considered in his office capacity, he was a servant; but in this clause, he is considered in his personal character and relation to the Father, as a divine person, who was the Son of God: not by creation, as angels and men are the sons of God; nor by adoption, as saints are; or on account of his miraculous incarnation, and resurrection from the dead; whereby indeed, he was manifested and declared to be the Son of God, which he was before; but on account of his natural relation to God, as his Father; he being the eternal, essential, and only begotten Son of God, in a way of filiation no creature is, and which, is ineffable by us. And as such he is dearly beloved of God his Father, being his image and the brightness of his glory; of the same nature and perfections with him, and equal to him. So he ever was, and will be, and that even in the meanest form and lowest condition, in which he has appeared: he was his beloved Son, when he was made flesh and dwelt among men, while submitting to ordinances, as to baptism, and obeying his Father’s will, when covered with reproach, and full of sorrows; when he hung upon the cross, and laid down his life for his people; which he showed, by concealing nothing from him; by putting all things into his

hands, and by appointing him the head of the church, the Saviour of the body, and the judge of quick and dead.

In whom I am well pleased: Mark and Luke have not this clause, but Peter, who was present, and heard the words spoken, mentions it, (~~6017~~ 2 Peter 1:17) which confirms Matthew's relation. This regards, not so much the well pleasedness of God with the person of Christ, which is expressed in the former clause; but signifies that he was in him, as Mediator, well pleased with all his people; he was well pleased with his righteousness he was working out, whereby the law was magnified, and made honourable; and with the sacrifice he was about to offer up, which would be of a sweet smelling savour to him, his justice being entirely satisfied with it; and with all he did and suffered in human nature; which were things that always pleased the Father, being according to his will, his counsel and covenant: and so he graciously accepted of, and was infinitely well pleased with all his elect, as considered in him, and represented by him, on account of his righteousness, sacrifice, and satisfaction:

hear ye him; as the former clause chiefly respects that part of his mediatorial office, the priestly, this regards his prophetic office principally, and also his kingly office; so that in this divine testimony, first his sonship is bore witness to, and then his several offices; which his sonship is the foundation of, and qualifies him to bear and execute. This clause has the very words which Moses delivered, when he spoke of the Messiah, the great prophet like unto himself, that should be raised up among the Jews; saying, "unto him ye shall hearken", (~~6018~~ Deuteronomy 18:15). So that these words, "hear ye him", most clearly point to Christ, as being this prophet, who is to be heard, and he only; not Moses, but he, the prophet Moses prophesied of; nor Elias, or any of the other prophets, but one greater than them all: hear and believe his prophecies, concerning his sufferings, death, and resurrection, lately delivered by him; listen to, and embrace his doctrines, as coming from God, and as having a divine impress upon them, and being confirmed by miraculous works; submit to his ordinances, and obey his commands, as king of saints; hear him always, and in all things.

Ver. 6. *And when the disciples heard it,* etc.] The voice out of the cloud, and which they apprehended came from God, and was uttered with so much majesty:

they fell on their face: not so much out of reverence, or for the sake of adoration, but as persons struck with astonishment and fear, and were as half dead; and so fell with their faces fiat to the ground, not being able to stand before God, to behold his majesty, and hear his voice:

and were sore afraid: they were filled with fear, when, awaking out of their sleep, they saw the surprising glory of Christ, and of the two men that were with him, insomuch that they knew not what to think, or say; and so they were when they entered into the cloud, and still more upon hearing the voice of God himself, even though it was a voice of love, grace, and mercy; (see ^{<RB>}Deuteronomy 5:24-26). But yet they were not struck with so much amazement and surprise, as not to know what was said; for they distinctly heard the words, rightly understood, and faithfully related them; from whom the evangelists had them, and which Peter perfectly remembered, and recorded many years after.

Ver. 7. *And Jesus came and touched them*, etc.] The disciples were at some little distance from Christ, but he observing the fear and surprise they were in, came to their relief and assistance; which he did not disdain to give, notwithstanding the glory he was covered with; but acts the part of a mediator between God and them, and lays hold on them to raise them up, whom the majesty of God's voice had cast down: the Persic version renders it, "he came and brought them to themselves"; who were just fainting and swooning away, at the awfulness of the voice:

and said, arise, and be not afraid: it is not the voice of an angry God, but of God well pleased with me, and in me with you; it is the voice of my God, and your God, of my Father, and your Father; arise, stand on your feet, take heart, and be of good courage, no hurt will come to you.

Ver. 8. *And when they had lift up their eyes*, etc.] And "looked round about", as Mark says, to see whether the same objects still continued, as Moses and Elias; and the bright cloud:

they saw no man; neither Moses nor Elias, who were both gone: signifying, that though the law and the prophets were till this time, they were now finished and completed, and the Mosaic economy was to be no more; as these men appeared no more after, nor will they till the second coming of Christ. And Mark has it, "they saw no man any more"; that is, these men any more, neither then, nor afterwards, "save Jesus only". Mark adds, "with themselves"; in the same form as before his transfiguration. Christ is

the only Mediator, Saviour, and Redeemer; the only Prophet, Priest, and King; and who only is to be, and can be beheld as such; and who does, and will abide with his people; and helps, comforts, and saves them, when none else can. Luke observes, that “when the voice was past, Jesus was found alone”; which was so ordered, that it might be a clear case, that this voice was only concerning Christ, and not either Moses or Elias.

Ver. 9. *And as they came down from the mountain*, etc.] Where all these things had been transacted,

Jesus charged them, saying, tell the vision to no man: by the “vision” is meant, as it is explained in Mark, “what things they had seen”; as Moses and Elias, and the bright cloud that overshadowed them, and Christ transfigured before them, in a surprising, glorious manner. These Christ strictly ordered Peter, James, and John, to speak of to no man whatever; no, not their fellow disciples; who either would be apt to disbelieve them, on account of the greatness of them, as Thomas did the resurrection of Christ afterwards; or lest they should be troubled and displeased, that they were not admitted to the same sight; and especially not to the multitude, or to any other person,

until the son of man be risen again from the dead; meaning himself and his resurrection, when such proof would be given of his mission, authority, and glory, which would make this account more easy to be believed: besides, he had told the Jews, that no sign, that is, from heaven, as this voice was, should be given, but the sign of the Prophet Jonas; referring to his resurrection, which would be a sure testimony of the truth of his Messiahship. This order of Christ was strictly observed by the disciples; for Luke, says, “they kept it close”; to themselves, in their own breasts; it lay concealed between these three; “and told no man in those days, any of those things which they had seen”: and Mark says, “they kept that saying within themselves”; only as he adds, they were “questioning one with another, what the rising from the dead should mean”: for they were not yet reconciled to the Messiah’s dying, which was contrary to their expectation of a temporal kingdom; and therefore could not tell what to make of his rising again, whether this had not some secret, mystical meaning; for of his resurrection from the dead, in a literal sense, they had no notion; though it was foretold in the writings of the Old Testament, and had been so lately affirmed by Christ himself.

Ver. 10. *And his disciples asked him, saying,* etc.] That is, these three, Peter, James, and John, before they came to the rest; whilst they were going down the mountain, or from it, to the place where the others were; for the rest knew nothing of the appearance of Elias, and so cannot be thought to join in a question concerning him.

Why then say the Scribes, that Elias must first come? That is, come before the Messiah comes; for certain it is, that this was the sense of the Scribes, as it was of the ancient Jews, and is still the opinion of the modern ones. They say^{f947},

“that in the second year of Ahaziah, Elias was hid; nor will he appear, till the Messiah comes; then he will appear, and will be hid a second time; and then will not appear, till Gog and Magog come.”

And they expressly affirm^{f948}, that

“before the coming of the son of David, רָצְבִּי וְהָיָה אֲבִי, “Elias will come to bring the good news” of it.”

And this, they say^{f949}, will be one day before the coming of the Messiah. And Maimonides^{f950} observes,

“that there are of their wise men that say, וְהָיָה אֲבִי יְצַמְחֵהוּ תַּיִב מִדְּוָק, “that before the coming of the Messiah, Elias shall come”.”

So Trypho the Jew, the same with R. Tarphon, so often mentioned in Talmudic writings, disputing with Justin Martyr, tells him^{f951}, that the Messiah,

“shall not know himself, nor have any power, **μέχρι αν ελψων Ηλιας**, “till Elias comes”, and anoints him, and makes him known to all.”

And hence the Targumist^{f952} often speaks of Messiah and Elias as together, and of things done by them; and in their prayers, petitions are put for them, as to come together^{f953}: this is founded upon a mistaken sense of (³⁰⁴⁵Malachi 4:5) and which is the general sense of their commentators^{f954}. Now the Scribes made use of this popular sense, to disprove Jesus being the Messiah: they argued, that if he was the Messiah, Elias would be come; but whereas he was not come, therefore he could not be the Messiah. The

disciples having just now seen Elias, are put in mind of this tenet of the Scribes, and of their use of it; and inquire of Christ, not so much about the truth of it, and the reason of their imbibing it, as why they were suffered to make use of it, to his disadvantage; and especially why they, the disciples, should be forbid publishing what they had seen; whereas, were they allowed to divulge this vision, and bear their testimony to this truth, that Elias had appeared, and they had seen him, it might be a means of stopping the mouths of these Scribes; and of convicting men of the truth of the Messiahship of Jesus, upon their own principles, and of confirming them that believed it: or else the sense is, whereas they had seen Elias, and he was gone again, without making any public appearance in the nation, their question is, how came the Scribes to say, that he should come first? and if there was any truth in this, how came it to pass, that he did not come sooner, even before Christ came in the flesh; and inasmuch as he did now appear, why he did not appear more publicly, as the person that was to come, at least, before the setting up of the kingdom and glory of the Messiah; which they might hope were at hand, and that Elias was come to usher it in: but that he did not appear publicly, and they were not allowed to speak of it, they wanted to know Christ's sense of these things; and took this opportunity as they came from the mountain, to converse with him about it.

Ver. 11. *And Jesus answered and said unto them,* etc.] By way of concession,

Elias truly shall first come: this is indeed a tenet of the Scribes, and it is also certain, that there is a prophecy in (³⁰⁴⁵Malachi 4:5) of the coming of Elias; of one that goes under that name, not of Elias the Tishbite, in person, but of one that was to come in his power and spirit,

and restore all things. The Syriac and Persic versions render it, “shall perfect, or complete all things”, that are prophesied of him; and shall put a period to the law and the prophets, and close the Mosaic economy, and direct persons to Christ; in whom are the perfection of the law, and the fulfilling of the prophets. The Arabic version reads it, “he shall teach you all things”; the whole of the Gospel being to be reduced to these two heads, repentance towards God, and faith in Christ; both which were taught by the true Elias: but the truest sense of the phrase is to be learned out of (³⁰⁴⁶Malachi 4:6). “He shall restore, **byçh**, he shall turn all things, the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their

fathers”; and as this is explained in (^{<4017>}Luke 1:17) “he shall turn the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, and make ready a people prepared for the Lord”: which is other, and better sort of work, than what the Jews assign to their Elias, whom they expect, and whom they make to be a restorer of all things, in their way: they often speak of his purifying ^{f955} of things, or pronouncing things pure, that were defiled; and among others, that he will purify bastards, and **μbyçy**, “restore them” to the congregation of the Lord ^{f956}. Though Maimonides ^{f957} denies, that when he comes he will pronounce defiled that which is pure, or pronounce pure, that which is defiled. They pretend ^{f958}, that he is now employed, and very busy, in writing everything that is done in every age; so that when he comes, he will be able to give an account of everything: and nothing is more common with them, than to say concerning any matter, that there is any doubt or difficulty about it ^{f959}, **why! a abyç d[j nwm ahy**, “let it be left till Elias comes”.

Ver. 12. *But I say unto you*, etc.] A way of speaking used by Christ, when he opposes and contradicts any of the tenets of the Scribes and Pharisees; (see ^{<4102>}Matthew 5:22,28,32,34,39,44) “that Elias is come already”; the person that was signified by, and prophesied of, under the name of Elias: for Christ refers not to the late appearance of Elias on the mount, but to the coming of a certain person some time ago; who came in the power and spirit of Elias, and was the forerunner and harbinger of him, the Messiah; as was said of him he should, “and they knew him not”; that is, the Scribes and Pharisees, who believed that Elias would come before the Messiah; and yet when he who was designed by him was come, they knew him not, they did not know him to be the Elias; they knew him under the name of John the Baptist, and seemed pleased with his ministry for a while, but afterwards rejected his doctrine and baptism, which is referred to in the next clause:

but have done unto him whatsoever they listed; they did not believe what he said, nor repent upon his preaching to them; they rejected the counsel of God he declared, not being baptized of him; they treated him with indignity and contempt, charging him with having a devil, and were well pleased when Herod put him to death; some of whom were doubtless among those that sat at meat with him; for whose sake, as well as for his oath’s sake, he ordered the execrable murder to be committed:

likewise also shall the son of man suffer of them. Christ takes this opportunity to confirm what he had said in the preceding chapter, concerning his sufferings and death; and his meaning is, that as sure as John the Baptist had suffered indignities, and death itself, so sure should the son of man suffer like things; if not from the same individual persons, yet from that generation of men.

Ver. 13. *Then the disciples understood,* etc.] By his saying that Elias was come, and by the account he gave of his ill usage, it was clear to them,

that he spake unto them of John the Baptist; and that he was the Elias that was to come, and was come: so that this observation, that according to prophecy Elias was to come before the Messiah, was no objection to Jesus being the Messiah; but on the contrary, since he that was intended by Elias was come, and had done his work and office, it was a confirmation of the truth of his Messiahship.

Ver. 14. *And when they were come to the multitude,* etc.] Which was on the next day, as in (⁴¹⁸⁷Luke 9:37) when Christ and his three disciples, Peter, James, and John, came down from the mount to the other nine, with whom the multitude of the people were; during their stay on the mountain,

there came to him a certain man; who was, as Mark says, “one of the multitude”; and as Luke, “a man of the company”: who had applied to the nine disciples on the behalf of his son, but without success, and was waiting till Christ came from the mount; who when he saw him, made up to him, and

kneeling down to him in the manner of a supplicant, doing him homage and worship; hereby showing his great esteem of him, and veneration for him,

and saying the following words:

Ver. 15. *Lord, have mercy on my son,* etc.] He addressed him with great marks of honour and respect, not only by gesture, but by words; he craves mercy, pity, and compassion; for the case he had to present, was a miserable one; and his earnestness and importunity he hoped might be excused, since it was for a child of his own. Luke adds “for he is mine only child”; and therefore his affection for him must be thought to be very strong, and he greatly concerned for its grievous affliction, and earnestly desirous of its health and life.

For he is lunatic: not a mad man, but troubled with the epileptic disease; upon which, as on madness or lunacy, the changes and full of the moon have an influence: hence the next clause,

and sore vexed, is rendered in the Arabic version, “and sore vexed at the beginning of full moons”; at which times, he had very grievous and frequent fits of his disorder:

for oftentimes he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water: which shows it to be the “epilepsy”, or “falling sickness”, he was afflicted with; which, whenever it seized him, whether by the fireside, or by the side of a river or brook, or any place of water, or in any other dangerous situation, he fell into it, not being able to help himself, or avoid any danger to which he was exposed. A larger account of this child’s disorder, and of the circumstances of his cure, are related by (~~4097~~ Mark 9:17,18) where this case will be more fully considered. (See Gill on “~~4097~~ Mark 9:17”). (See Gill on “~~4098~~ Mark 9:18”).

Ver. 16. *And I brought him to thy disciples*, etc.] To the nine, whilst Christ was with the other three upon the mountain: no doubt but his design was to bring him to Christ first; but he being absent, he applied to his disciples, and, desired them to make use of their power to heal him; and which they attempted, but without success:

and they could not cure him. This he said, partly to show the malignity and stubbornness of the disease, and partly to accuse the disciples of weakness; when he himself was as much in fault as they, as the following words show. Here the Jew ¹⁹⁶⁰ insults, and charges with contradiction, that in one place it should be said, that Jesus gave his disciples power to cast out unclean spirits, and here all the disciples could not cast a spirit out of one little child: but without any reason; let it be observed, that “all” the disciples were not present, the three principal ones were with Christ; besides, this was not owing to want of power in them, which Christ had conferred on them, and which they often made use of with success: but partly to their own unbelief, and partly to the unbelief of the father of this child, and others with him, as appears from what follows: and it is clear from Mark, that when he came to Christ, he had but little faith; he says to him, “if thou canst do anything, help us”; and after Christ had talked with him about his faith, he could only say, “Lord, I believe, help mine unbelief”.

Ver. 17. *Then Jesus answered and said,* etc.] Not to the disciples, but to the father of the child; (see ^{<4199>}Mark 9:19) and those that were with him, and the Scribes that were present, disputing with the disciples, upbraiding them with their weakness, and triumphing over them: “O faithless and perverse generation”; a way of speaking, which is never used of the disciples, and indeed could not be properly said of them; for though they often appeared to be men of little faith, yet not faithless; nor were they so rebellious, stubborn, and perverse, as here represented, though there was a great deal of perverseness in them: but the characters better suit the body of the Jewish nation, who, on account of the incredulity of this man, and those that were present, being of the same temper with them, are exclaimed against in words, which were long ago spoken of their ancestors, (^{<4635>}Deuteronomy 32:5) and from whence they seem to be taken.

How long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? Upbraiding them with the length of time he had been with them, in which so many wonderful works had been done among them, and yet they remained unbelieving and incorrigible; and intimating, that his patience and longsuffering would not always continue; and that in a short time, he should be gone from them, and they should no longer enjoy the benefit of his ministry and miracles, but wrath should come upon them to the uttermost: but however, whilst he was with them, notwithstanding all their unbelief and obstinacy, he should go on to do good; and therefore says,

bring him hither to me, meaning the lunatic child. These words also are directed, not unto the disciples, but to the father of the child; for so it is said in (^{<4141>}Luke 9:41) “bring thy son hither”; and so the Syriac renders it here *whyta*, “bring thou him”; though, as expressed in the plural number, may very well be thought to intend him, and his friends.

Ver. 18. *And Jesus rebuked the devil,* etc.] The words may indeed be rendered, “and Jesus rebuked him, and the devil departed out of him”; so the Vulgate Latin, and the Oriental versions; but the sense our version gives is certainly right; for it was not the father of the child Christ rebuked for his unbelief; this he had done already; nor the lunatic himself, as some have thought, either for his unbelief, or because he was possessed by the devil, for some sins of his own; which is not likely, since he was so from a child, and perhaps not now in his right mind, and capable of any rebuke: besides, the Evangelists Mark, and Luke expressly say, that he “rebuked the foul”, or “unclean spirit”: for though it was a natural disease which

attended this child, yet he was afflicted with it in a preternatural way, by the means of Satan; who, by divine permission; had a power of inflicting bodily diseases: and that this disease was effected by him, is clear from the manner of curing, by the dispossession of him; for when

he departed out of him; at the command of Christ, whose power he could not withstand, but was obliged, whether he would or not, to obey;

the child was cured from that very hour; directly, immediately, and continued well, and in good health. Hence the word rendered lunatic, in (^{f975}Matthew 17:15) is in several Oriental versions, translated in the sense of “demoniac”, or one possessed with a devil. The Arabic version renders it, “he is with a demon”: the Persic thus, “on whom a demon hath power”; and the Ethiopic after this manner, “an evil demon takes hold on him”. And it is usual with the Jews, to ascribe diseases to evil spirits; and perhaps this uncommon dispensation in the times of Christ, may give rise to such a notion; particularly, they ascribe this very same disease of the “epileptic”, or “falling sickness”, to the same cause, which they call ^{f961} “Kordicus”, or “Cardiacus”, the “Cardiac” passion, which one of their commentators ^{f962} explains thus.

“It is a disease which proceeds from the repletion of the vessels of the brain, whereby the understanding is confounded; wherefore it is one of the sorts **l pwnh yl wj** , “of the falling sickness”.”

Says another ^{f963} of them,

“It is **hdyç μç**, “the name of a demon”, that rules over such, that drink much wine out of the vat.”

To which others agree, saying ^{f964}, that one attended with this disorder, is one,

“whose understanding is confounded, **dç tmj m**, “by means of a demon”, who rules over such, that drink new wine; and lo! the spirit’s name is “Kardiacus”.”

From whence it is clear, that with them, the disease and the demon go by the same name; and that the former is from the latter.

Ver. 19. *Then came the disciples to Jesus apart*, etc.] Or “secretly”, as the Vulgate Latin, and Munster’s Hebrew Gospel read; that is, privately, and

when alone; and as Mark says, “when he was come into the house”; and was by himself, then came the nine disciples to him, to converse with him about this matter,

and said unto him, why could not we cast him out? That is, the devil, and so cure the lunatic; the Syriac and Persic versions render it, “why could not we heal him?” The lunatic; which only could be done by casting out the demon: they were concerned, fearing they had lost the power which Christ had bestowed on them, and wanted to know what they had done, which had deprived them of it; and what should be the cause of their late unsuccessful attempt, when they had so frequently triumphed over the unclean spirits, that were subject to them. Though they might have learned from the answer Christ gave to the father of the lunatic, and the general character of the Jewish nations in that answer, the true reason of their own inability; but this they took no notice of, imagining it belonged entirely to others, and not to them.

Ver. 20. *And Jesus said unto them, because of your unbelief,* etc.] The Arabic and Ethiopic versions read, “because of your little faith”, or “the smallness of your faith”; and so does one Greek manuscript; and which is what is doubtless meant by their unbelief; for they were not altogether destitute of faith, but their faith was very low, and their unbelief very great. Christ says, not because of the unbelief of the parent of the child, and those that were with him, though that also was a reason; but because of their unbelief, being willing to convince them of their unbelief, as he had done the father of the child, who had confessed it, and desired it might be removed from him: but lest they should think they had lost their power of doing miracles, Christ adds;

for verily I say unto you, if ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed; which was a very small seed, the least of all seeds, and is used very often proverbially by the Jews, to signify anything of a small quantity or weight ^{f965}, and is sometimes used of faith, as here; so speaking of the congregation of Edom, meaning the Christians, they ^{f966} say,

“they have not I drj I ç ^y[rg wmk hnwma, “faith as a grain of mustard seed”.”

And it is used in like sense in other eastern nations; and by Mahomet in his Alcoran ^{f967}, who says,

“We will appoint just balances in the day of resurrection, neither shall any soul be injured at all, although the merit or guilt of an action be of the weight of “a grain of mustard seed”.”

So that it has no reference to the quality of mustard seed, being hot and acrimonious; which has led some interpreters wrong, to compare faith unto it, for its liveliness and fervency: when our Lord only means, that if his apostles had ever so small a degree of faith in exercise, which might be compared for its smallness to this least of seeds, such an effect as he after mentions would follow; and which therefore is to be understood, not of an historical faith, by which men assent to all that is in the Bible as true; nor of a special, spiritual faith, by which souls believe in Christ, as their Saviour and Redeemer; for of neither of these can the following things in common be said; but of a faith of miracles, peculiar to certain persons in those early times, for certain reasons; which such as had but ever so small a degree of, as the apostles here spoken to might say, as Christ observes to them,

ye shall say to this mountain; pointing perhaps to that he was just come down from, which might be in sight of the house where he was,

remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove: meaning, not that it would be ordinarily or ever done in a literal sense by the apostles, that they should remove mountains; but that they should be able to do things equally difficult, and as seemingly impossible, if they had but faith, when the glory of God, and the good of men, required it. So that it does not follow, because the apostles did not do it in a literal sense, therefore they could not, as the Jew insultingly says ^{f968}; since it was meant that they should, and besides, have done, things equally as great as this, and which is the sense of the words. So the apostle expresses the faith of miracles, by “removing mountains”, (~~433D~~ 1 Corinthians 13:2) i.e. by doing things which are difficult, seem impossible to be done: wherefore Christ adds,

and nothing shall be impossible to you; you shall not only be able to perform such a wonderful action as this, were it necessary, but any, and everything else, that will make for the glory of God, the enlargement of my kingdom and interest, the confirmation of truth, and the good of mankind.

Ver. 21. *Howbeit, this kind goeth not out*, etc.] The Vulgate Latin renders it, “is not cast out”; and so do the Arabic version, and Munster’s Hebrew Gospel; and which confirm the more commonly received sense of these words, that they are to be understood of that kind of devils, one of which

was cast out of the lunatic, and was of the worst sort, of a fierce and obstinate kind; and having had long possession, was not easily ejected: and that there is a difference in devils, some are worse and more wicked than others, is clear from (^{<4025>}Matthew 12:45) and not of that kind of miracles, or kind of faith to the working of such miracles. Moreover, the above versions, as they fitly express the word **εκπορευται**, here used; (see ^{<4017>}Mark 9:17) compared with (^{<4057>}Matthew 15:17). So they pertinently set forth the dispossession of devils, who do not go out voluntarily, but by force; and this sort could not be ejected,

but by fasting and prayer: that is, in the exercise of a miraculous faith, expressed in solemn prayer to God, joined with fasting. It seems that Christ not only suggests, that faith was greatly wanting in his disciples; for which reason they could not cast out the devil, and heal the lunatic; but they had been wanting in prayer to God, to assist them in the exercise of their miraculous gifts; and that whilst Christ, and the other three disciples were on the mount, they had been feasting and indulging themselves with the people, and so were in a very undue disposition of mind, for such extraordinary service, for which our Lord tacitly rebukes them. This agrees with the notions of the Jews, who think that, by fasting, a divine soul ^{f969} **hçqwbm ta gyçt**, “may obtain that which is sought for”; and that among other things, for which a private person may afflict himself with fasting, this is one, **h[r j wr ynpm**, “because of an evil spirit” ^{f970}; which they think may be got rid of this way.

Ver. 22. *And while they abode in Galilee*, etc.] Munster’s Hebrew Gospel reads it **wkl hçkw**, “and while they were walking in Galilee”, for they passed through it, when they departed from hence; see (^{<4030>}Mark 9:30) and as they were going to Capernaum, and so onward, to the coasts of Judea, in order to be at Jerusalem at the feast of the passover; where, and when, Christ was to suffer: and observing that the time of his death drew nigh, he inculcates it again to his disciples a third time, that they might be prepared for it, and not be discouraged and terrified by it;

Jesus said unto them, the son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men: some copies read, “sinful men”; and so the angels report the words, in (^{<4247>}Luke 24:7) by whom may be meant the Gentiles, who, by the Jews, were reckoned very wicked men, and called sinners of the Gentiles. Now Christ intimates, that the son of man, meaning himself, should be betrayed by the Jews, into the hands of the Gentiles; than which, with the Jews,

nothing was reckoned a fouler action, or a viler crime; their canons run thus ¹⁹⁷¹:

“It is forbidden to betray an Israelite into the hands of the Gentiles, whether in his body or in his substance; and though he may be a wicked man, and a ringleader in sin, and though he may have oppressed and afflicted him; and everyone that betrays an Israelite into the hands of the Gentiles, whether in his body, or in his substance, has no part in the world to come.”

They forgot this rule, when they delivered Christ to Pontius Pilate. They go on to observe, that

“it is lawful to kill a betrayer in any place, even at this time, in which they do not judge capital crimes; and it is lawful to kill him before he betrays; but when he says, lo! I am about to betray such an one in his body, or in his substance, though his substance is small, he exposes himself to death; and they admonish him and say to him, do not betray: if he is obstinate, and says I will betray him, it is commanded to kill him; and he that is first to kill him, is a worthy man,”

Ver. 23. *And they shall kill him*, etc.] Put him to death, with the death of the cross; for the angels in rehearsing these words, affirm, that Christ told his disciples at this time, and in this place, whilst they were in Galilee, that he should be crucified, (²³¹⁷Luke 24:7).

And the third day he shall be raised again: this he said for their comfort; and it is observable, that when Christ speaks of his rising again, he makes mention of the exact time, the third day, on which he should rise, according to the types and prophecies of the Old Testament:

and they were exceeding sorry: that he should be betrayed into the hands of the Gentiles, fearing that another nation would come, and take away, and possess the worldly kingdom and grandeur they were dreaming of; and that he should die at all; and much more that he should die such a cruel and ignominious death, as that of the cross. They seem to have overlooked, and to have taken no notice of his rising again from the dead; which might have administered comfort to them, and have relieved them under their melancholy apprehensions of things; but this they understood not, nor indeed truly any part of what he had said; so Mark and Luke intimate: but then it may be said, how came they to be so very sorrowful, if they did not

know what was said? To which may be replied, that this might be the reason of their sorrow, because they did not understand what he said, and they were afraid to ask; they could not tell how to reconcile the betraying of him into the hands of men, and his sufferings and death, with their notions, that the Messiah should abide for ever, and should set up a temporal kingdom, in great splendour and magnificence; and what he meant by rising again from the dead, they could not devise; they could not tell whether all this was to be understood in a literal, or mystical sense.

Ver. 24. *And when they were come to Capernaum*, etc.] Called Christ's own city, (^{490B}Matthew 9:1) where he dwelt some time (^{409B}Matthew 4:13) and Peter had an house, (^{408A}Matthew 8:14) "they that received tribute money", or the "didrachms"; in Talmudic language, it would be מל קֶח יבג^{f972}, "they that collect the shekels": for not the publicans, or Roman tax gatherers are meant; nor is this to be understood of any such tribute: there was a tribute that was paid to Caesar, by the Jews; (see ^{427B}Matthew 22:17) but that is expressed by another word, and was paid in other money, in Roman money, which bore Caesar's image and superscription; and was exacted of them, whether they would or not: but this designs the collection of the half shekel, paid yearly for the service of the temple: the original of this custom, was an order of the Lord to Moses, upon numbering the people; that everyone that was twenty years of age and upwards, should give half a shekel as atonement money, or as a ransom for his soul; which was to be disposed of for the service of the tabernacle, (^{402B}Exodus 30:12-16). This does not appear to have been designed for a perpetual law, or to be paid yearly; nor even whenever the number of the people was taken, but only for that present time: in the time of Joash king of Judah, a collection was set on foot for the repair of the temple; and the collection of Moses in the wilderness, was urged as an argument, and by way of example; nor is any mention made of the half shekel, nor was any sum of money fixed they should pay; but, according to the account, it was entirely free and voluntary. In the time of Nehemiah, there was a yearly charge of the "third" part of a "shekel", for the service of the temple; but this was not done by virtue of a divine order, or any law of Moses, with which it did not agree; but by an ordinance the Jews then made for themselves, as their necessity required. Aben Ezra^{f973} indeed says, that this was an addition to the half shekel. Now in process of time, from these instances and examples, it became a fixed thing, that every year an half shekel should be paid by every Israelite, excepting women, children, and servants, towards defraying

the necessary charges of the temple service, and this obtained in Christ's time. There is a whole tract in the Jewish Misna, called Shekalim; in which an account is given of the persons who are obliged to pay this money, the time and manner of collecting it, and for what uses it is put: and so it continued till the times of Titus Vespasian, who, as Josephus says^{f974}, laid a tax of two drachms, the same with the half shekel, upon the Jews; and ordered it to be brought yearly into the capitol at Rome, as it used to have been paid into the temple at Jerusalem. We need not wonder that we hear of receivers of the half shekel at Capernaum; since once a year, on the "fifteenth" of the month Adar, tables were placed, and collectors sat in every city in Judea, as they did on the "twenty fifth" of the same month, in the sanctuary^{f975}. The value of the half shekel, was about "fifteen pence" of our money. The Syriac version renders the word here used, "two zuzim of head money": now a "zuz" with the Jews, answered to a Roman penny, four of which made a "shekel"^{f976}; so that two of them were the value of an half "shekel"; it is further to be observed, that shekels in Judea, were double the value of those in Galilee, where Christ now was: five "shekels" in Judea, went for ten in Galilee, and so ten for twenty^{f977}. The receivers of this money

came to Peter; not caring to go to Christ himself; but observing Peter a forward and active man among his disciples, they applied to him; or rather, because he had an house in this place, at which Christ might be:

and said, doth not your master pay tribute? or the "didrachms", the half "shekel" money. Had this been the Roman tribute, the reason of such a question might have been either to have ensnared him, and to have known whether he was of the same mind with Judas, of Galilee, that refused to pay tribute to Caesar; or because they could not tell whether he was reckoned as an inhabitant, or citizen of that city; for, according to the Jewish canons^{f978}, a man must be twelve months in a place, before he is liable to tribute and taxes; or because they might suspect him to be exempted, as a doctor, or teacher for the Jewish doctors, wise men, and scholars, were freed from all tribute and taxes^{f979} even from the "head money", the Syriac version here mentions; and which was a civil tax paid to kings^{f980}; to which sense that version seems to incline: the rule concerning wise men or scholars, is this^{f981}.

"They do not collect of them for the building a wall, or setting up gates, or for the hire of watchmen, and such like things; nor for the

king's treasury; nor do they oblige them to give tribute, whether it is fixed upon citizens, or whether it is fixed on every man."

But this was not the Roman tax, nor tribute, on any civil account, but the half shekel for religious service: and it may seem strange that such a question should be asked; and especially since it is a rule with them^{f982}, that

"all are bound to give the half shekel, priests, Levites, and Israelites; and the strangers, or proselytes, and servants, that are made free; but not women, nor servants, nor children; though if they gave, they received it of them."

But a following canon^{f983} explains it, and accounts for it: on the fifteenth

"(i.e. of the month Adar,) the collectors sit in every province or city, (that is, in the countries,) *l k tj nb ^y[bw*, "and mildly ask everyone": he that gives to them, they receive it of him; and he that does not give, *^tyl wtwa ^ypwk ^ya*, "they do not oblige him to give": on the five and twentieth they sit in the sanctuary to collect, and from hence and onward, they urge him that will not give, until he gives; and everyone that will not give, they take pawns of him."

So that it seems, there was a different usage of persons, at different times and places: our Lord being in Galilee at Capernaum, was treated in this manner.

Ver. 25. *He saith, yes,* etc.] Without any hesitation, knowing it had been his master's practice; and therefore as he had done it, did not doubt but he would again:

and when he was come into the house; that is, Peter, as both the Syriac and Persic versions express; when he was come into his own house, or at least into that where Christ was, in order to talk with him about this affair, the collectors had been speaking of to him, who seems to have been alone when they met with him; however, Christ was not with him:

Jesus prevented him; saying what he intended to say, on that head; for he being the omniscient God, though not present, knew what question had been put to Peter, and what answer he had returned; and therefore, before Peter could lay the case before him, he puts this question to him;

saying, what thinkest thou, Simon? How does it appear to thee, to thy reason and understanding? in what light dost thou consider this matter? what is thy judgment of it?

of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers, or others? What is the usual practice of earthly kings, whether of Judea, or of other countries? do their own children, sons, and heirs, such as are of their own family, pay? or is it only their subjects that are not of their family?

Ver. 26. *Peter saith unto him,* etc.] The Vulgate Latin reads, “and he said”: and so the Ethiopic, and Munster’s Hebrew Gospel; but without doubt Peter is meant, and rightly expressed; whose answer to Christ’s question is,

of strangers: meaning not foreigners, or such who formerly belonged to other nations, but were now taken captive, and brought into subjection; but their own native subjects, so called, in distinction from their domestics, their children, and those of their own family:

Jesus saith unto him, then are the children free; from paying custom, tribute, and taxes, and leaves Peter to make the application; and which he suggested might be made, either thus: supposing it was a civil tax, that since he was the son of David, king of Israel, was of his house and family, and heir apparent to his throne and kingdom; according to this rule, he must be exempt from such tribute: or, thus; taking it to have respect to the half shekel, paid on a religious account, for the service of the temple worship; that since he was the Son of the King of kings, for the support of whose worship and service that money was collected; and was also the Lord and proprietor of the temple, and greater than that, he might well be excused the payment of it.

Ver. 27. *Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them,* etc.] Though Christ could have maintained his right of exemption from payment, by such strong and clear reasons and arguments; yet he chose to forego it, lest any should be offended with him, and look upon him as a transgressor of the law; one that had no regard to the temple, and slighted the worship and service of it, and so be prejudiced against him, and his doctrines: which, by the way, may teach us to be careful to give no offence, to Jew or Gentile, or the church of God; though it may be to our own disadvantage, when the

honour and interest of religion lie at stake. This is following the example of Christ, who therefore said to Peter,

go thou to the sea; of Tiberias, which was near this city,

and cast an hook; a fisher's hook into it:

and take up the fish that first cometh up, and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: a "stater", as in the original text, the same with the *arytsa* of the Talmudists; and which word the Syriac version here retains, and was, they^{f984} tell us, of the same value with a "sela", or "shekel" of the province. The Arabic and Persic versions render it, by "four drachms", which also were the same with a "shekel": and so was just enough to pay the two half shekels, for Christ and Peter, and was worth, of our money, near "half a crown"; and not "nearly a crown", as in a late paraphrase is said, through mistake. This was a wonderful instance of the omniscience of Christ, who knew there was in such a fish, such a piece of money, as exactly answered the present exigence, and that that would come first to Peter's hook; and of his omnipotence, if not in forming this piece of money immediately in the fish's mouth, as is thought by some, yet in causing this fish to come to Peter's hook first, and as soon as cast in; and of his power and dominion over all creatures, even over the fishes of the sea; and so proved himself to be what he suggested, the Son of the King of kings; and to be a greater person than the kings of the earth, to whom tribute was paid: and yet, at the same time, it declares his great poverty as man, that he had not a shekel to pay on such an occasion, without working a miracle; and his great condescension to do it, rather than give offence by non-payment:

and take, and give unto them for me and thee; for the half shekel was expected of Peter, as well as of Christ, and he had not wherewith to pay it; and this Christ knew, and therefore provides for both. But why did not Christ pay for the other disciples, as well as for himself and Peter? It may be replied, that this money would pay for no more than two: but this is not a full answer; Christ could have ordered more money in the same way he did this: it may then be further said, that only he and Peter were looked upon as inhabitants of this place; and so the rest were not called upon here, but in their respective cities, where they might pay also, and, besides, were not now present.