

## **Matthew 17:1-9 NASB**

### **Do you expect to be transfigured?**

“Six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves.<sup>2</sup> And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light.<sup>3</sup> And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him.<sup>4</sup> Peter said to Jesus, ‘Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah.’<sup>5</sup> While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, ‘This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!’

“<sup>6</sup> When the disciples heard *this*, they fell face down to the ground and were terrified.<sup>7</sup> And Jesus came to *them* and touched them and said, ‘Get up, and do not be afraid.’<sup>8</sup> And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus Himself alone.

“<sup>9</sup> As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, ‘Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead.’”

**This text describes strange happenings.**

**If this scripture describes an actual event, what does it mean?**

**Was this a first century UFO encounter?**

**Perhaps a mountain“high”?**

**Does Matthew tell a credible story?**

**Most folks probably see no connection with this text and anything happening now.**

Learning the full story might make you feel differently.

Some rarely told details help us here.  
**I think you’ll find this account believable and some parts of it even humorous.**

**Consider some facts of this unusual event.**

**First, the context:**

Jesus didn’t decide on a whim to go on a day-hike and ask a few friends to go along.

Many scholars think Jesus and company climbed Mt. Hermon in Lebanon (9232 ft. high), which is 2500 ft. taller than the highest mountain in eastern U.S.

**God included this mountain experience as part of His overall project for Jesus.**

This same big plan also includes you and me.

God put us here, the Bible says, to test us for greater responsibility and assignments.

**God's tests often seem to us like pop-up, frustrating annoyances.**

**As Fenelon complained, "Hardly one fool goeth away, than another fool cometh."**

Some tests make no sense to us: **"Why do I have to put up with this?"** we moan.

**Many things we'd love to do, God forbids.**

Some folks want to forget God and indulge in every pleasure that suits their fancy.

**Many contemporaries enroll in a religion avowed 100 years ago:**

**"Let's start a new religion with one commandment, 'Enjoy thyself.'" <sup>1</sup>**

**Sounds like a fun idea until my party interrupts your sleep or my drone takes down your helicopter.**

**God forbids things that injure us, harm others, and divide people.**

**God didn't write laws to spoil our fun.**

He's the opposite of a finicky adult or a spoiled kid.

**What God forbids us to do isn't good for us.**

Some Bible books are tedious to read.

Old Testament books like Leviticus and Numbers seem especially boring.

I admit that I sometimes force myself to pay attention to certain sections during my annual read through the Bible.

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<sup>1</sup> *Children of the Ghetto*, Israel Zangwill (1864-1926)

## Leviticus itemizes daily, monthly, yearly rituals that God required of Israel.

Its lists include several animal offerings, but in each sacrifice he repeated the following:

“You are to present this food offering to the LORD: the internal organs and all the fat that is connected to them, <sup>15</sup> both kidneys with the fat on them near the loins, and the long lobe of the liver, which you will remove with the kidneys. The priest shall burn them on the altar as a food offering, a pleasing aroma. **All the fat is the LORD’s. This is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live: ‘You must not eat any fat or any blood.’”<sup>2</sup>**

**Why would the Lord tell Israel:**

**“I want that fat; don’t eat the fat”?**

**Does the Creator of the vast Cosmos need anything from one of the puniest planets in His Universe?**

Imagine coming across an anthill and noticing an ant lugging a tiny morsel of fat to the nest.



**Are you jealous of that ant’s treasure?**

**Ever had a hankering to keep an ant tidbit for your dinner?**

God needs the fat of any animal infinitely less than you desire that ant fat morsel.

**Ancients likely didn’t value the fat law, but now doctors and dieticians get the picture.**

**God’s commandments promote life and our well-being.**

People who think God’s laws unreasonable should consider this fat example.

**God’s life principles prove His wisdom.**

God put us here to honor him, which includes serving, respecting, and loving others.

His laws test our trust in our Creator.

**Human pride, greed, selfishness, and lust tempt us to reject God and his laws.**

**Folks deny God and snub his laws.**

<sup>2</sup> Leviticus 3 14-17 NIV

From our refusal to listen to God's wisdom, war, hate, famine, plague, and misery result.

God's plan brought his Son here to help us.

As an example for us, Jesus fully respected and obeyed the Father.



(Photo above).

During his ministry Jesus and the twelve traveled to a beautiful location in northern Israel known as

Caesarea Philippi.

At this location, Jesus asked the disciples:

“Who do people say I am?”

The disciples reported: **John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.**

- John the Baptist was beheaded a short time before.

- About 800 years prior, Elijah was taken into the clouds.
- Jeremiah had been dead about 600 years.

Some folks thought Jesus a new John the Baptist, Elijah, or Jeremiah.

“He (Jesus) said to them (the disciples), ‘But who do you say that I am?’<sup>16</sup> Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’<sup>17</sup> And Jesus said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven.<sup>18</sup> **I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church . . .**”<sup>3</sup>

People often misconstrue Jesus' reply to Peter's statement of belief.

Many assume that Peter is the rock on whom Jesus built his church.

Two Greek words cause me to question that assumption.

First, Peter=petros (πέτρος), a masculine noun.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 16:15-18 NASB

Second, the rock on which Jesus said he'd build his church is *petra* (πέτρα); the “α” ending indicating a feminine or neuter word.



**Petra often describes massive rock formations e. g., the ancient city of Petra.**

The Treasury and Great Temple at Petra, Jordan

**As Oscar Cullmann wrote: “Petros is used more for isolated rocks or small stones including flints and pebbles for slings.”<sup>4</sup>**

**Petros does not appear in the New Testament except as Peter’s nickname.**

This evidence leads me to think Petros (Peter) more resembles *Pebble* than *Rocky* or some rock-type foundation stone.

<sup>4</sup> *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. VI, p 95. Petros appears in the LXX (Greek translation) in 2 Maccabees 1:16 : “ Opening the secret door in the ceiling, they threw stones . . .” Petros is the masculine plural accusative of petros.

**The first four chapters of 1 Corinthians strictly caution against associating any name other than Jesus with the church:**

**“For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.”<sup>5</sup> Not Peter, Paul or any person.**

**Some intriguing facts lead me to think that Jesus chose Peter, James and John to go up the tall mountain to teach them humility.**

A) James and John gained the title: “Sons of thunder” likely for their quick tempers. **They once asked Jesus if he wanted them to call down fire from heaven on a Samaritan village that snubbed Jesus.**

B) Peter struggled with bluster and bravado. **When Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus, check out Peter’s reaction:**

**“And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. <sup>4</sup> Peter said to Jesus, ‘Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah.’”**

<sup>5</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:11

**Peter's "I" offer sounds as if he was trying to make himself look important.** Mark's Gospel plainly says Peter kept talking because all three disciples were "terrified."<sup>6</sup>

**The Creator's voice pointed them to Jesus.**

"While he (Peter) was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and...a voice out of the cloud said, 'This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; **listen to Him!**'"

**No amount of preaching and speculating equals reading God's word to find His will.**

"This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; **listen to Him!**"

At that, Peter, the "Rock" and the two "thunder" guys change into three scared puppies.

"They fell face down to the ground...terrified."

**They were close to eating rocks.**

**Too scared to even look up.**

<sup>7</sup> And Jesus came to *them* and touched them and said, 'Get up, and do not be

afraid.' <sup>8</sup> And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus Himself alone.

**Ever feel Jesus presence?**

**Ever feel his hand on your shoulder telling you to stop worrying and don't be afraid?**

**Read about Jesus in Scripture.**

Follow Jesus' example and do God's will.

**Tell him how you honestly feel.**

You'll feel his loving presence.

**Recall what the three first saw?** Jesus "transfigured before them...His face shone like the sun...His garments...white as light."

*Transfigured* is the Greek word from which *metamorphous* comes: change form, transform.

Politicians say they want to transform society.

**No lasting change can occur until we individuals model ourselves after Jesus.**

**Imitating other people disfigures us.**

Trust God, follow Jesus, and do not let the world change you.

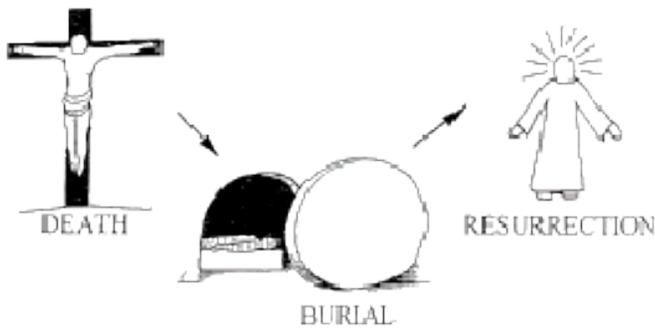
**God will transfigure you into Jesus' image.**

<sup>6</sup> C.f. Mark 9:6

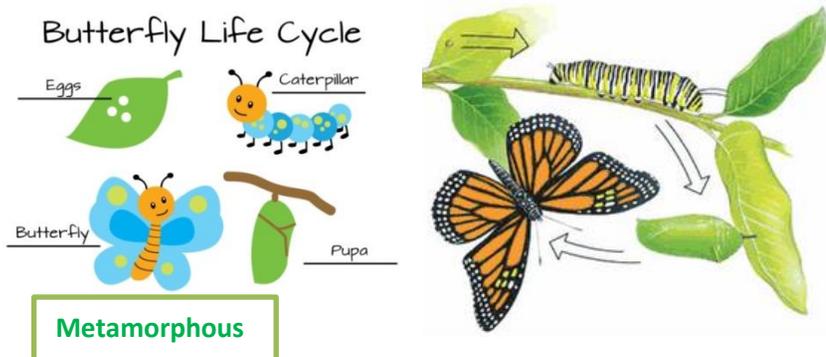
Jesus will transform these aging, wrinkled bodies to be like his resurrection body.

**To the church in Philippi:** “Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.”<sup>7</sup>

Meta-schematic



God changes crawly worms to butterflies.



*The empty Garden tomb, Jerusalem.*

**Peter James and John saw a preview of resurrection on the Mt. of Transfiguration. After Jesus overcame death, they and others witnessed his changed body. At his return, Jesus will transform our lowly bodies to be like his glorious resurrection body. Believe Him, trust him, honor God through him serve him, love others. You will never regret your decision.**

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<sup>7</sup> Philippians 3:20, 21 NIV