

Commentary on Mark 9:2-13

By L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Series*) for **Sunday, February 13 , 2011**, is from **Mark 9:2-13**. Five **Questions for Discussion** follow the *Bible Lesson Commentary*. The **[International Bible Lessons](http://internationalbiblelessons.org)** can be read at <http://internationalbiblelessons.org>.

Mark 9:2-13

2 Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them,

[This event may have been a foretaste of the *Kingdom of God coming with power* that Jesus spoke of in the previous verse; or, it may have been the event that fulfilled that prophecy in the previous verse—see last week’s lesson.] Moses took Joshua up the high mountain to meet God when he received the law from God; therefore satisfying a requirement of two witnesses that Moses’ law had been given to him by God. Jesus took three witnesses to see Him transfigured when He met Moses and Elijah. Previously, Jesus’ disciples listened to (or followed) the law of Moses; on the mountain top they learned from God the Father to listen to (or follow) Jesus, His Son, who (as God’s Son) was superior to Moses and Elijah.

3 and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them.

God’s abilities far exceed our human abilities. God can make white what we cannot make white. God can clean what we cannot clean. Though our sins be as red as scarlet, God can cleanse us and make our souls as white as snow. Only God can cleanse us from our sins when we trust in Jesus the Messiah as our Lord and Savior. Thank God He chose to cleanse and forgive us through the gift of His Son!

4 And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

Many Jews believed that Elijah would come before the Messiah came. Elijah and John the Baptist were different people, but Jesus said John the Baptist fulfilled this expectation of the people or the role of Elijah coming first. Moses was the great lawgiver, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. After breaking Moses’ law, we can thank God for the grace and truth of Jesus Christ that makes our forgiveness and new life possible. On the mountain top, Peter, James, and John saw the three most important people in Jewish history and expectation. Imagine how you would feel in this situation!

5 Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”

If we had experienced what Peter experienced, shortly after declaring Jesus the Messiah and then being rebuked by Jesus—for His decision to die on the cross was not going to be changed by Peter’s rebuke—we might very much want to make amends by doing what we think the situation merits, as Peter tried to do. However, God did not intend for the Jews to climb that mountain in order to give homage to these three men of renown or even to sit at their feet and learn from their teaching. Peter, James, and John (and all who would follow Jesus) needed to learn that Jesus (as the Messiah) was superior in every way to Moses and Elijah, for these two only pointed to the coming of Jesus and the need of His coming. The *Letter to the Hebrews* elaborates the theme of Jesus’ superiority.

6 He did not know what to say, for they were terrified.

Seeing Jesus transformed, and also seeing two of the most important leaders in their Hebrew history alive and standing before their very eyes, must have been terrifying indeed for these three disciples. In the Bible, people fell down in terror before angels they are so awesome. In terror, Peter felt he needed to say or do something right, having failed before. Though Peter got it wrong again, he was not condemned; he was corrected by God the Father.

7 Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!”

The disciples did not know what to do so God the Father told them to listen to Jesus, His Son. Jesus was not transfigured to follow Elijah or Moses, for He was greater than both. Jesus’ teachings are more important and supersede the law of Moses written on stone tablets, especially in the sense that Jesus enables us to obey the law of God—to love God and to love our neighbor—by His writing the law of God upon our hearts as the new covenant (as foretold by the prophets) in His blood made possible. Jesus has also sent us the Holy Spirit to guide and empower believers to walk in His ways.

8 Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

Moses and Elijah disappeared partly because the disciples were to listen to and follow only Jesus. The work of Moses and Elijah was completed; they were history. Jesus’ work was their future (and ours). Jesus would be the interpreter of the Scriptures for them (and us). Jesus would show the application of the law of love, because love moved Him to come to Earth to die a sacrificial death for us for the forgiveness of sins. In Jesus, we see the love of God in word and action.

9 As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Probably no one would have believed the three disciples if they had told their story before Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Seeing Jesus transfigured on the mountain top enabled them to recognize Jesus transfigured after His resurrection from the dead—He was the same Jesus before and after His death, only transformed. To have spread the news of His transfiguration prior to His death and resurrection would probably have drawn too much of the wrong kind of attention to Jesus. It would have promoted much skepticism and ridicule from Jesus' enemies. His enemies would have argued that the story was “made up” to draw a crowd of followers. By speaking of this after His resurrection, the three could help unbelievers believe—for they could tell them what Jesus looked like transfigured—and also tell them and us that we are to listen to Jesus now and not to the Old Testament law and prophets, which Jesus fulfilled and will fulfill.

10 So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead could mean.

The three disciples obeyed Jesus, but did not truly believe or understand His teaching that He would suffer and die—they thought He could never die—they did not understand “rising from the dead” though they had seen Moses and Elijah alive on the mountain top. On the mountain top, Jesus proved to them the hope of life after death for the children of God, because they had seen Moses and Elijah alive, but that did not explain “rising from the dead” to them. Jesus needed to both show and tell what a resurrected human body meant to Him and would mean to them.

11 Then they asked him, “Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?”

With the three disciples having recently seen Elijah, the disciples did not know the meaning of the scribes' teachings and debates about Elijah's coming before the Messiah. Peter, James, John and some of the others were trained fishermen, not trained theologians. They needed to know the answer to this question: since Jesus was the Messiah (which Peter had confessed earlier) should they now be looking for Elijah to appear publicly? If so, *how* and *when* should they be looking for him to appear?

12 He said to them, “Elijah is indeed coming first to restore all things. How then is it written about the Son of Man, that he is to go through many sufferings and be treated with contempt?”

John the Baptist came first to restore all things by preaching a message of repentance and faith in the Messiah's coming. Some hearts were restored and prepared to meet and receive Jesus, as were the hearts of some of Jesus' disciples when they followed John before meeting Jesus. Jesus wanted them to focus on the next big event, His sufferings, rejection, and death, which they could not imagine God would allow to happen. The three disciples heard from God the Father that Jesus was His Son, but Jesus maintained His humility by

emphasizing that He was the Son of Man, fully human. Therefore, the Christian church has taught through out history that Jesus is fully divine and fully human, fully God and fully man, rather than part God and part man.

13 But I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written about him.”

Jesus taught that when John the Baptist came and preached that had fulfilled the expectation of Elijah’s coming prior to the Messiah. The people who heard John preach did as they pleased; some followed his teachings and were baptized to prepare for the Messiah’s coming, while others rejected him and would not make the life changes John demanded. King Herod feared him, but rejected him; imprisoned him, and then beheaded him. No doubt those who were sincere bore fruits worthy of repentance and were prepared to follow Jesus.

[Feel free to leave your comments, conclusions, and thoughts as a Comment on the Bible Lesson Forum. We can learn from one another.]

Five Questions for Discussion

1. Why do you think Jesus chose Peter, James, and John to go up the mountain with Him to see His transfiguration? If you were one of those chosen, how would you feel? If you were one of those left behind by Jesus, how would you have felt? How might you deal with your feelings?
2. What does the experience of Peter, James, and John teach us about believing based on first hand experience? What must we learn about believing based on what we learn from trustworthy eye witnesses? What are some of the qualities of a trustworthy eye witness? Why are eye witnesses important? Why is carefully evaluating before receiving their testimony important?
3. What should it mean to us when we read what God the Father said to Peter, James, and John in Mark 9:7? How well do we do that? How might we improve?
4. Why do you think Jesus wanted His transfiguration kept a secret until after His resurrection? How do you think the resurrected Jesus looked compared to the transfigured Jesus? How do you think His body and clothing might have looked different transfigured and resurrected? Do you agree or disagree with the idea in the commentary that the transfiguration experience of the three disciples would enable them to help others believe in the resurrection of Jesus?
5. Of what value is it for the followers of Jesus to study about Moses and Elijah and the Old Testament?