

## Did the Transfiguration Fulfill Matt. 16:28?

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Revised: 2010 Feb 22

Speaking to a “crowd...with his disciples” (Mark 8:34), Jesus said this:

<sup>26</sup>For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? <sup>27</sup>For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. <sup>28</sup>Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.” (Matt. 16:26-28, ESV throughout unless otherwise noted.)

The Greek word μέλλω (*mello*) translated “going” in verse 27 might have been better translated *about*:

For the Son of Man is [about] to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.

*Strong’s Concordance* defines *mello* as follows:

1. to be about; 1a. to be on the point of doing or suffering something; 1b. to intend, have in mind, think to (*Strong’s*, 3195)

*Mello* has been rendered *about* or *at the point of* in numerous other passages:

As Jesus was *about* to go up to Jerusalem... (Matt. 20:17, NASB)

Are you able to drink the cup that I am *about* to drink? (Matt. 20:22b, NASB)

...a centurion had a servant who was sick and *at the point of* death... (Luke 7:2)

<sup>30</sup>And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, <sup>31</sup>who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was *about* to accomplish at Jerusalem. (Luke 9:30-31)

So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was *about* to pass that way. (Luke 19:4)

...what will be the sign when these things are *about* to take place? (Luke 21:7b)

But keep on the alert at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are *about* to take place... (Luke 21:36, NASB)

It was the preparation day, and the Sabbath was *about* to begin. (Luke 23:54, NASB)

<sup>31</sup>...The Jews said to him, “We are not permitted to put anyone to death,” <sup>32</sup>to fulfill the word of Jesus which He spoke, signifying by what kind of death He was *about* to die. (John 18:31b-32, NASB)

Seeing Peter and John *about* to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms. (Acts 3:3)

Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is *about* to die... (Rev. 3:2)

The list above is not exhaustive. There are many more cases where *mello* has been translated *about*. We are compelled to wonder whether the eschatological views held by the translators may have influenced their translation of Matt. 16:27.

Although the majority of translations ignore the full meaning of *mello*, not all do:

The Son of Man will *soon* come in the glory of his Father and with his angels to reward all people for what they have done. (CEV)

For the Son of Man is *about* to come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he will reward each one according to his deeds. (GNT)

For, the Son of Man is *about* to come in the glory of his Father, with his messengers, and then he will reward each, according to his work. (YLT)

Even the man widely considered the father of dispensationalism, John Nelson Darby, could not deny the meaning of *mello*:

For the Son of man is *about* to come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he will render to each according to his doings. (DARBY)

Clearly, Christ was saying the judgment was *about* to take place.

Perhaps the most convincing proof *mello* in verse 27 should be rendered *about* is Christ’s emphatic clarification which follows in verse 28:

Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.

So even if our translation of *mello* is rejected, verse 28 immediately raises the same issue: the return

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of Christ was supposed to take place a long time ago. However, futurist theologians anxious to avoid such an inconvenient conclusion struggle to interpret verse 28 in various ways:

This saying has been taken to refer either to (1) the transfiguration that follows; (2) the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; (3) Pentecost; (4) the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70; (5) the second coming of Christ in the future; or (6) an unfolding revelation of God's Kingdom in various ways, including the evangelism of the world.<sup>1</sup>

—*NLT Study Bible*

Others isolate verse 28 from the preceding verses about judgment and claim that it refers to Christ's ascension, i.e., Christ "coming" to the Ancient of Days (Dan. 7:13, NASB). This makes a total of *seven* markedly different interpretations, and there may be more.

### ***One more interpretation: Jesus meant what he said***

Only those who believe that all Bible prophecy has been fulfilled can avoid the usual exegetical acrobatics and simply take verse 28 at face value. We believe that most of Christ's listeners died, but "some" were still alive when Jesus returned to inaugurate the kingdom of God at the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The literal interpretation of verse 28 is supported by numerous other passages including these clear predictions from Luke 21 regarding the first-century destruction of Jerusalem:

Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise *your* heads, because *your redemption is drawing near*. (v. 28); <sup>31</sup>So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that *the kingdom of God is near*. <sup>32</sup>Truly, I say to you, *this generation will not pass away until all has taken place*. (vv. 31-32)

Those still waiting for the second coming face a seemingly insurmountable difficulty: no one alive at the time of Jesus could be alive today. However, most expositors offer an interpretation they believe provides an easy way out of this predicament. The majority suggest that when Jesus mentioned "coming

in his kingdom," he was actually referring to his transfiguration described in the following chapter. The opinion of Hughes and Laney is typical: "The words of 16:28 suggested that the transfiguration (17:1-8) would provide a foretaste of the Messiah's kingdom glory."<sup>2</sup> Likewise, Radmacher claims that "In the Transfiguration, Peter, James, and John saw a preview of the kingdom."<sup>3</sup> We shall test this almost universal interpretation.

### ***Transfiguration interpretation tested***

For the transfiguration to qualify as the fulfillment of Matt. 16:26-28, it must include several key elements:

1. Jesus coming "with his angels in the glory of his Father" (v. 27);
2. People being rewarded for what they have done, i.e., the judgment (v. 27). This would include people Christ was ashamed of (Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26). MacArthur writes, "Here...the Lord was concerned with the reward of the ungodly—final and eternal judgment";<sup>4</sup>
3. The "kingdom" (v. 28).

*Not one* of these vital components was apparent at the transfiguration. The following is a synopsis of Matt. 17:1-9:

1. Jesus takes Peter, James and John up a high mountain;
2. Jesus is transfigured (his face shines, and his clothes appear white);
3. Moses and Elijah appear;
4. A bright cloud overshadows the disciples;
5. A voice says, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him";
6. Moses and Elijah disappear;

<sup>2</sup> Robert B. Hughes and J. Carl Laney, *Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 413.

<sup>3</sup> Earl D. Radmacher, *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), Matt. 16:28.

<sup>4</sup> John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur Study Bible*, NASB ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2006), Matt. 16:27.

<sup>1</sup> *NLT Study Bible* (Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2008), Matt. 16:28.

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7. Jesus says, “Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.”

Immediately, we notice glaring inconsistencies between the prediction and the suggested fulfillment. At the transfiguration, the Son of Man *was* there, and he *was* changed to a certain glorified state (Matt. 17:2; Mark 9:3; Luke 9:29); however, there were no angels present, no people Christ was ashamed of, nor was there any sign of the judgment taking place. In fact, very little at the transfiguration resembled Christ’s description of “coming in his kingdom.” If Jesus *was* referring to the upcoming transfiguration when he made his prediction, we must wonder why he mentioned the judgment. It is *completely absent* from all three transfiguration accounts. What was the point of verses 26 and 27? It would be as though Jesus had said this:

1. Here’s a description of my coming;
2. Some standing here will live to see it;
3. When it occurs, it won’t appear anything like my description.

What a ridiculous interpretation! Yet that’s exactly what the popular teaching amounts to, and millions of Christians have accepted it without question. Recall some of the details associated with the judgment:

<sup>16</sup>For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup>Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. (1 Thess. 4:16-17)

At the transfiguration, the Lord did not “descend from heaven.” There *was* a “voice from the cloud,” but not a “cry of command” or “shout” as other translations render it (Matt. 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:34-35). There was no trumpet blast, nor any sign of the resurrection or rapture.

Since the judgment was a key element of the coming Jesus predicted, his second advent must be the event to which he was referring because the judgment was to take place at the same time. If the transfiguration is the fulfillment of Matt. 16:28, i.e., a preview of Jesus coming in his kingdom, it should appear unquestionably like the second coming.

However, it looks nothing like it. The disciples *were* “overshadowed” by a cloud, but it was a “*bright* cloud” unlike the “clouds and thick darkness” normally associated with a judgment of God (Joel 2:2; Zeph. 1:15). Notice especially Amos 5:20: “Is not the day of the LORD darkness, and not light, and gloom with no brightness in it?” No one was “caught up...in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.” And there was something else missing from the transfiguration: *the kingdom of God!*

Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.” (Rev. 11:15)

The voice from the cloud could not be described as “loud voices in heaven,” and it said nothing about the “kingdom of the world” becoming “the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ.” Also, we must wonder why Moses and Elijah were present. They were not mentioned in Matt. 16:27-28. Furthermore, if the transfiguration was about Christ’s *coming*, why was his *departure* the topic of discussion (Luke 9:31)? All these inconsistencies make the transfiguration interpretation appear weak at best.

### *The purpose of the transfiguration*

What was the transfiguration all about? Why were Moses and Elijah in the vision? To answer these questions, it is necessary to begin at Mount Sinai:

<sup>18</sup>Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off <sup>19</sup>and said to Moses, “You speak to us, and *we will listen*; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die.” (Exod. 20:18-19)

The people said, “we will listen.” So God began to speak to the Israelites through Moses. However, Moses would not live forever and was not even allowed to enter the Promised Land. Before his death, he warned the Israelites about the danger of taking up the ways of the heathen nations they would encounter (Deut. 18:9-14) and explained how he would be replaced:

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The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is *to him you shall listen* (v. 15)

Moses was redirecting their *listening* to a prophet. After Moses died, his prediction met an immediate fulfillment in Joshua:

Now Joshua the son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; and the sons of Israel *listened to him* and did as the Lord had commanded Moses. (Deut. 34:9, NASB)

First, the Israelites *listened* to Moses. Next, they began *listening* to prophets. Moses gave Israel God's Law. After Moses, a line of prophets spoke for God and continually reminded the people to keep that Law which became known as "the law of Moses." The Old Testament ends with this warning from the prophet Malachi:

<sup>4</sup>*Remember the law of Moses* My servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel.

<sup>5</sup>Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. (Mal. 4:4-5, NASB)

The "Elijah" in this prophecy turned out to be John the Baptist (Luke 1:16; Mark 1:2-4; Matt. 11:13; 17:11-13).

Moses and the prophets spoke for God in Old Covenant times. Israel was commanded to "listen" to them. In the gospels we notice Christ's high regard for "Moses and the Prophets," or "the Law and the Prophets" as the two great authorities in the history of Israel. Moses and the Law were synonymous. Elijah was arguably Israel's greatest prophet after Moses (Deut. 34:10-12) having raised the dead (1 Kgs. 17:17-24), and as we have seen, his name was associated with the Messiah's arrival (Mal. 4:5-6). At the transfiguration, we see Jesus standing with Moses (representing the Law) and Elijah (representing the prophets).<sup>5</sup> The voice from the cloud refers to Jesus and says, "listen to *him*" (Matt. 17:5). Then Moses and Elijah disappear leaving only Jesus. Clearly, the time had come once again for God's people to

redirect their *listening* to a new spokesman. The purpose of the transfiguration is never stated, but evidently, it took place to clearly demonstrate that Jesus was the official successor to Moses and the prophets. That is how the author of Hebrews portrays Christ:

<sup>1</sup>Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, <sup>2</sup>but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son... (Heb. 1:1-2)

Now God's people were being commanded to listen to *him!*

### *A preview of the kingdom?*

So what does the foregoing have to do with Matt. 16:26-28? Answer: *Nothing!* The transfiguration had nothing at all to do with the judgment or Christ "coming in his kingdom" with his angels. This leaves only one option: Matt. 16:28 refers to the *second coming* which was predicted to take place while some of Christ's contemporaries were still alive. Jesus paints a picture in verses 26 through 28 that is *identical* to his description of the second coming found in the Olivet Prophecy. Notice the similarities:

<sup>27</sup>And then *they will see the Son of Man coming* in a cloud *with power and great glory*. <sup>28</sup>Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because *your redemption is drawing near*...  
<sup>31</sup>...when you see these things taking place, you know that *the kingdom of God is near*. <sup>32</sup>Truly, I say to you, *this generation will not pass away until all has taken place*. (Luke 21:27-32); <sup>31</sup>When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and *all the angels with him*, then he will sit on his glorious throne. <sup>32</sup>Before him will be gathered *all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats*. (Matt. 25:31-32)

The key elements are the same:

1. The timing stated emphatically: "Truly, I say to you...";
2. A first-century arrival: "when you see these things taking place"; "this generation";
3. The Son of Man coming in power and glory accompanied by angels;
4. The judgment;
5. Redemption (reward for the righteous);

<sup>5</sup> "Moses and Elijah were the representatives respectively of the law and the prophets..." (Edward E. Hindson and Woodrow Michael Kroll, *KJV Bible Commentary* [Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1994], Matt. 17:1-9).

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### 6. The kingdom of God.

Any suggestion that Christ's coming in Matt. 16:26-28 refers to an entirely different event from his coming described in virtually identical terms in the Olivet Prophecy is unbelievable. If we "let the Bible interpret the Bible," we should let the Olivet Prophecy tell us the meaning of Matt. 16:26-28. Clearly, verse 28 refers to the second coming, not the transfiguration. Those who insist on abandoning the natural meaning of the text are motivated only by the presupposition that Jesus could not possibly have returned in the first century, not by details recorded in the transfiguration accounts.

Of course, if one really strains, *some* relationship between Matt. 16:26-28 and the transfiguration can be found. For instance, some argue, "Moses and Elijah will be in the kingdom; therefore, the transfiguration was a preview of the kingdom." But this feeble argument is nothing more than a desperate attempt to defend an erroneous position. The transfiguration is clearly unrelated to Christ's prediction in verse 28 since most of the key elements mentioned in verses 26 and 27 are missing, and major new characters are introduced. The coming in verse 28 is inextricably linked to the judgment in verse 27. It cannot be separated from the image of thousands of angels. In Matt. 16:26-28, Jesus is explaining the reality of the judgment, that most critical time when some would go to heaven forever (John 14:1-3; 1 Thess. 4:17), but others would suffer "eternal destruction" (John 3:16; 2 Thess. 1:9). He brings his sobering warning to a climax with this startling prediction: *It is so close that some of those present will still be alive when it takes place!* Verse 28 serves as an exclamation mark intended to punctuate his teaching. To divorce it from the preceding warning about the judgment does violence to the text and is simply outrageous. Why would Jesus halt such a riveting message at the climax and switch to a completely unrelated subject? *Unbelievable!*

Jesus promised his followers that the kingdom would soon come (Matt. 16:28).<sup>6</sup>

—Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary

### Conclusion

Matt. 16:28 refers to the second coming, and since some of Christ's contemporaries would still be alive when it occurred, it must have taken place at some point during the first century. The transfiguration interpretation is simply a desperate attempt to avoid this conclusion.

### Objections

**Objection:** You claim that Moses' prediction in Deut. 18:15 was fulfilled by Joshua. However, in his Pentecost sermon, Peter applied it to Jesus and "these days" (the first century):

<sup>22</sup>Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. <sup>23</sup>And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.' <sup>24</sup>And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days. (Acts 3:22-24)

**Answer:** It is highly doubtful Moses was thinking about Jesus when he said, "The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet." MacArthur says, "The singular pronoun emphasizes the ultimate Prophet who was to come."<sup>7</sup> However, there is no evidence in Deuteronomy 18 to support this. The singular is used to refer to Moses' immediate successor, Joshua, not Jesus. If Moses had been thinking ahead to Christ, it would have gone right over the heads of the people. For Moses, the issue was providing a successor after his 40 years of leadership, and the people would have understood it this way.

In the previous verse, Moses addresses a serious problem the people would face in Canaan:

for these nations, which you are about to dispossess, *listen to fortune-tellers and to diviners*. But as for you, the Lord your God has not allowed you to do this. (Deut. 18:14)

<sup>6</sup> Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary, 412.

<sup>7</sup> MacArthur, Deut. 18:15-19.

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The danger was *listening to “fortune-tellers.”* So Moses announces an alternative: “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen.” Obviously, Jesus, who lived more than 1,000 years later, was not the solution to the immediate problem. The prediction in verse 15 was clearly fulfilled by Joshua: “the sons of Israel *listened to him*” (Deut. 34:9, NASB). More prophets followed:

Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time. (Judg. 4:4); ...the LORD sent a prophet to the people of Israel. (ch. 6:8)

Barclay writes, “In Deuteronomy the hope and belief is that God will always raise up a prophet for His people.”<sup>8</sup>

Evidently, God inspired Moses to speak words that would later be *reinterpreted* by Peter. Other New Testament authors offer interpretations of Old Testament passages that seem quite unrelated to the original text. For instance, Matthew interprets Hos. 11:1 as a reference to Christ — “Out of Egypt I called my son” (Matt. 2:15) — “although the obvious original reference of the prophecy was to Israel,”<sup>9</sup> and the original was actually an *indictment* against God’s “son” (Israel):

- <sup>1</sup> When Israel was a child, I loved him,  
and out of Egypt I called my son.
- <sup>2</sup> The more they were called,  
the more they went away;  
they kept sacrificing to the Baals  
and burning offerings to idols. (Hos. 11:1-2)

Jesus too, indulges in this reworking of Old Testament passages. When indentifying Judas as the one who would betray him, he referred to Ps. 41:9:

I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, ‘He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.’ (John 13:18)

Here is the original verse from the Psalm:

Even my close friend in whom I trusted,  
who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.

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<sup>8</sup> William Barclay, *The Making of the Bible* (London: Cox & Wyman Ltd., 1961), 26.

<sup>9</sup> *Jesus and His Times* (Pleasantville: Reader’s Digest Association, Inc., 1987), 30.

The *KJV Bible Commentary* identifies the “friend”:

This obviously refers to Ahithophel, for he is called “the man of my peace” since he was one of David’s official counselors (II Sam 15:12)...As David’s friend, Ahithophel defected from the king and joined in Absalom’s conspiracy (see II Sam 15:12, 31; 16:15–23; 17:1–23).<sup>10</sup>

MacArthur calls Ps. 41:9 a “prophecy,”<sup>11</sup> and strictly speaking, it is; anything inspired by God that proceeds from the mouth of a prophet is a prophecy, and David was certainly a prophet. However, before Jesus referred to this verse, who would have regarded it as *predictive*? Not only is there no sign of a prediction, it speaks in the past tense. It might be called a *type*, but surely, no one would have considered it so had Jesus not spoken up.

Sometimes, New Testament characters declare a passage “fulfilled” when the original is not a prediction and provides no indication whatsoever that fulfillment is required. Barclay explains how the Jews interpreted Scripture:

It was a Jewish belief that all Scripture had four meanings—*Peshat*, which was the simple meaning which could be seen at the first reading; *Remaz*, which was the suggested meaning and the truth which the passage suggested to the seeking mind; *Derush*, which was the meaning when all the resources of investigation, linguistic, historical, literary, archaeological, had been brought to bear upon the passage; *Sod*, which was the inner and allegorical meaning. The initial letters of these words, P R D S, are the consonants of the word PaRaDiSe, and to enter into these three [sic (four?)] meanings was as if to enter into the bliss of Paradise. Now of all the meanings *Sod*, the inner, mystical meaning was the most important. The Jews were, therefore, skilled in finding inner meanings in Scripture. It was thus not difficult for them to develop a technique of Old Testament interpretation which discovered Jesus Christ all over the Old Testament.<sup>12</sup>

Some may find it disturbing to learn that Christ’s disciples, and even Jesus himself, interpreted the Old Testament in a way that, to us, may seem illegitimate

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<sup>10</sup> Hindson and Kroll, Ps. 41:9.

<sup>11</sup> MacArthur, John 13:18.

<sup>12</sup> Barclay, 45.

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or downright dishonest. However, this is, apparently, what they did. It's doubtful anyone employing such a mystical interpretive "technique" today would be taken seriously.

In Acts 3:22, Peter is presenting Christ as the "fulfillment" of Deut. 18:15, or what we might call the *antitype* of Joshua. However, it is clear the original prediction referred primarily to Joshua.

Now, lest some wonder whether all this demonstrates "double fulfillment," we hasten to point out that it does not. Moses' prediction, "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet" refers primarily to Joshua, but clearly implies a *line of many* prophets, Jesus being the last in the line. It cannot be said that Joshua was the first fulfillment, and Jesus was the second. If each prophet in the line is regarded as a separate fulfillment, then there were *multiple* fulfillments. A second fulfillment of Moses' prophecy would imply a *second line of prophets*. No one we know of has suggested such an interpretation. So the notion that all Bible prophecy is bound by some "law of double reference" finds no support here.

**Objection:** You have presented Matt. 16:26-28 as one paragraph creating the impression that Christ's reference to the judgment in verses 26 and 27 is connected to "coming in his kingdom" in verse 28. However, the NASB inserts a paragraph break at verse 28 suggesting a separate thought not connected to verse 27.

**Answer:** In some Bibles, a paragraph break may appear where there was none in the Greek source text. Such is the case here. The NASB isolates verse 28 as a one-sentence paragraph. However, there is no break in the NA/UBS Greek New Testament (GrNT) on which the NASB is based. The break in the NASB is puzzling since the corresponding verse in Luke has *not* been separated from the description of the judgment (Luke 9:25-27). The KJV, ESV, NIV and NLT correctly contain Matt. 16:26-28 in one paragraph.

**Objection:** Mark places Christ's prediction at the beginning of a new chapter as a preamble to his transfiguration account:

Chapter 8

<sup>36</sup>For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? <sup>37</sup>For what can a man give in

return for his soul? <sup>38</sup>For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

Chapter 9

And he said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power."

<sup>2</sup>And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them...

**Answer:** Chapters and verses do not exist in the original text. They were added much later and are not always consistent across the synoptic gospels:

The Bible was divided into chapters by Stephen Langton (who later became Archbishop of Canterbury) early in the 1200s. Robert Stephanus, a book printer from Paris, is credited with dividing those chapters into verses in 1551. The first complete printed Bible using the chapter and verse divisions was the Geneva Bible of 1560.<sup>13</sup>

Langton could not have been more inconsistent. In Matthew, he inserted the chapter break *after* Christ's prediction; in Mark, the break appears *before* the prediction; in Luke's account, there is no chapter break at all. According to the GrNT, a new paragraph should begin at Mark 9:2. This leaves verse 1 conspicuously isolated in modern Bibles. Obviously, it belongs in the previous chapter.

The intended meaning of the text is further obfuscated when uninspired topic headings are inserted by Bible editors. For instance, notice these headings beginning at Matt. 16:24 in *The MacArthur Study Bible*:

*Revelation of Jesus' Reward*

*Mk 8:34-37; Lk 9:23-25*

<sup>24</sup>Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. <sup>25</sup>"For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. <sup>26</sup>"For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? <sup>27</sup>"For the Son of

<sup>13</sup> Canadian Bible Society. (Online article no longer available.)

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Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS.

### *The Prophecy of the Second Coming*

*Mk 8:38-9:1; Lk 9:26, 27*

<sup>28</sup>“Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.”

### *The Transfiguration*

*Mk 9:2-13; Lk 9:28-36; 2Pe 1:17, 18*

**17** 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...

In the GrNT, verses 21 to 28 are contained in a single paragraph. However, not only does MacArthur retain the NASB’s illegitimate paragraph break at verse 28, he inserts his own topic heading. All this tampering makes it appear as though Jesus was merely dispensing random unrelated proverbs rather than presenting a single coherent message. At verse 28, MacArthur offers his readers a baffling explanation. First, he inserts the heading “*The Prophecy of the Second Coming*.” Then, in his study note, he writes, “it seems most natural to interpret this promise as a reference to the Transfiguration.” What heretofore unheard-of hermeneutical principle this interpretation is based on he does not say. If he thinks verse 28 refers to the transfiguration, he should have described it as *The Prophecy of the Transfiguration*. But since, by his own admission, it is a prophecy of the second coming, *the second coming must be the fulfillment*, not the transfiguration or anything else.

Presumably, chapters, verses, paragraph breaks and topic headings were added with good intentions. However, sometimes the result is a serious distortion of the intended meaning.

**Objection:** Peter refers to the transfiguration as the “coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” in 2 Pet. 1:16-18:

<sup>16</sup>For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. <sup>17</sup>For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to Him by the

Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” <sup>18</sup>we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with Him on the holy mountain.

So wasn’t the transfiguration a vision of the second coming? Many commentaries, including the *Believer’s Bible Commentary*, say it was:

We are justified in viewing Christ’s transfiguration as a prepicture of His coming kingdom. Peter describes the event as “the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:16). The power and coming of the Lord Jesus refer to His Second Advent.<sup>14</sup>

**Answer:** The Greek for “coming” here is *παρουσία* (*parousia*), the same word Jesus used in the Olivet Prophecy (Matt. 24:27, 37). However, *parousia* does not always imply the second coming. For instance, “the coming of the lawless one” (2 Thess. 2:9) was a *parousia*. In 2 Cor. 10:10, *parousia* is translated “presence” and refers to Paul, not Jesus. So Peter’s use of *parousia* does not necessarily refer to the second coming or suggest at all that the transfiguration was “a prepicture of His coming kingdom.” The phrase “the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” actually refers to the transfiguration, not the second coming. (See 2 Pet. 1:17-18.) The transfiguration was a *parousia*, and the second coming was a *parousia*; two separate *parousias*. Considering the lack of consistency between the transfiguration and Matt. 16:26-28, we are certainly *not* “justified in viewing Christ’s transfiguration as a prepicture of His coming kingdom.” There is no firm support for this interpretation to be found in 2 Pet. 1:16-18 or anywhere else in the New Testament. Moreover, we have clearly demonstrated that the transfiguration interpretation is suspect to the point of being completely unbelievable since the key features of the judgment and other related events are entirely absent. Furthermore, other timing statements made by Jesus confirm the natural meaning of Matt. 16:28 (see Matt. 10:23; 24:34; Luke 21:28, 31-32; Rev. 1:3; 22:10). When we add the numerous apostolic references to a return of Christ within the lifetime of

<sup>14</sup> William MacDonald and Arthur Farstad, *Believer’s Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), Matt. 16:28.

## Did the Transfiguration Fulfill Matt. 16:28?

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Revised: 2010 Feb 22

those in the first century, the true meaning of Matt. 16:28 simply cannot be denied. If we are then willing to *believe* that everything was fulfilled as predicted, there will be no need for a strained interpretation.

### *Closing Comment*

Ultimately, those who take the position that all Bible prophecy has been fulfilled can believe whatever they want to on this. They are actually free to believe that the transfiguration was the fulfillment of Matt. 16:28; the outcome of their eschatological system is not affected. It is only those who still wait for the second coming of Christ who feel *compelled* to accept this highly questionable interpretation for lack of anything more substantial. They perceive that Matt. 16:28, if taken at face value, would obliterate futurism. So they tell themselves that the transfiguration provides a way out. However, the coming Jesus referred to in Matt.16:28 included the judgment, which of course, was predicted to coincide with the second coming and arrival of the kingdom of God; and Jesus plainly said that some of those standing there that day would live to see it all. Baffled theologians, blinded by their futuristic presupposition, grasp for something to rescue their paradigm, but in the process, abandon sound exegesis and accept a bogus interpretation.

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