

17After six days Yeshua took with him Keifa, Yaaqov and Yohanan his brother, and led them up a high mountain alone. ²There he was transformed before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.

commentary

17:1 After six days – This portion is commonly known among scholars as “the Transfiguration.” Both Mattai and Mark (*chapter 9*) connect this incident with the previous passage by stating it took place exactly six days after. As stated in the previous chapter’s commentary, Mattai delves into the Kabbalah of Adam; this passage belonging to the same narrative deepens further into such Adamic tradition. The six days are an allusion to the six emotive sefirot, called Zeir Anpin (represented by the letter Vav in God’s sacred name, whose numeric value is six). If Malkhut is Earth, Zeir Anpin is Heaven (cf. *Rabbi Peretz Auerbach on the Zohar, the Rose: part 8*). The six days, therefore, represent a spiritual ascension to heaven through meditation, which in mysticism is denominated a Maasei Merkava experience. This is why Luke’s version adds the details that sleep had overcome the disciples and that Yeshua was praying. It is written that at the revelation on Sinai “a cloud” covered the mount “for six days” (*Exodus 24:16*). About this Rashi commented: “Whoever enters the camp of the Shekhina requires six days separation [from society]” (cf. *Yoma 3b*). Mattai therefore says afterwards: “Led them up a high mountain alone.” The high mountain is a symbol of revelation, as the prophetic revelations of Moshe and Eliyahu both took place when they were alone on a mount. Moshe had Yehoshua, Eliyahu had Elisha, and Yeshua had his three close disciples with him. Some scholars argue that the Transfiguration happened six days after Yeshua promised that “some of them would not taste death before seeing the son of man coming in his glory,” thus fulfilling it. These same scholars, however, acknowledge that if the promise was going to be fulfilled after such a short period of time, the mention of “not tasting death” is superfluous and absurd.^a

17:2 There he was transformed before them – Adam’s body before the fall was made of pure light. This body of light was then concealed with “coverings of skin” (see *commentary on chapter 16*). The disciples had a vision of Adam 2.0’s messianic body, also known as his angelic counterpart. The Aramaic for “was transformed” **וישתחלף**, was used often to refer to the phase change of the moon. Because, despite our flesh and blood animal body, this light is still concealed within our souls and can be found by transforming materialism into spirituality and reflecting the light of the Creator. Hence when Moshe spiritually ascended to the heavenly realm, “Moshe did not know that the skin of his face had become radiant” (*Exodus 34:29*). Rambam writes: “light emanated from his face and his holiness was like that of an angel” (*Yesodei haTorah 7:6*). During those days in the heavenly court, Moshe “took on the status of an angel, having no bodily needs” (*Shemot Rabbah 47:5*). “His physical functioning was elevated to that of an angel” (*Liqutei Sikkhot vol. 36, p. 172*). Similar was the vision the disciples had on Yeshua. That the tzaddiq has an angelic counterpart is taught in a midrash which states that in the vision of the Ladder, the angels that descended saw Yaaqov sleeping in Earth, whereas simultaneously, those who ascended saw him being installed in heaven (*Bereshit Rabbah 68:12*). Yaaqov’s angelic counterpart is the angel Israel, who exists as a spiritual force even before Yaaqov’s physical birth (cf. *Pirquei d’Rabbi Eliezer 35*). Similarly, Eliyahu the prophet was the spark of an angel and after his angelical ascension to heaven he himself became a heavenly angel (*Shaar haGilgulim 31:7a*). Similar statements are taught about another giant: Hanokh, the prediluvian patriarch, who is known for ascending alive to heaven and becoming the angel Metatron (abbreviated: Metat); a meta-angel that exists before humanity.

^a Cf. scholar C.K. Barrett, *Jesus and the Gospel tradition*, p. 85.

³And behold, there appeared before them Moshe and Eliyah, talking with him.

—commentary—

17:2 his face shone like the sun – It is taught: “The face of Moshe was bright like the face of the sun” (*Bava Bathra 75a*). And upon Hanokh’s transformation into Metatron it is written: “I transformed his flesh into torches of fire... I made his face bright as the splendor of the sun” (*Sefer Heikhalot 48C, ALT3:6*). This is, as it has been taught about the son of man: “There was one whose appearance was like that of a man, and his face was full of grace, like one of the holy angels” (*Enoch 46:1*). The sun is the glory of Zeir Anpin, who leads the moon, Malkhut.

17:2 clothes... as white as the light – White clothes are a symbolism for purity, repentance and absence of sin, as it is written: “At all times let your clothes be white” (*Ecc. 9:8*), meaning: Be always prepared (*Shabbat 153a; cf. Shaarei Teshuva 2:15*).

17:3 appeared before them Moshe and Eliyah – These are the agents of redemption. These three can be identified in the Qumranic sources as the king, the priest and the prophet. It is written: “He sent Moshe and his servants” (*Psalms 105:26*). “His servants” is in plural thus implying two, hence making Moshe and the two servants a triad. There were nine who entered the heavenly realm while being alive, and the first triad are: “Hanokh, Eliyahu and Messiah” (*Derekh Eretz Zutta, chapter 1*). This angelic trio is well known in many sources, such as the Hassidei Ashkenaz tradition or the Judeo-Christian apocalypse of Keifa, written during Bar Kokhva’s Revolt. Eliyahu being an angel has been stated above. Moshe can be interchangeable with Hanokh because the two are connected. In truth, MoShe משה in Hebrew is an acronym for Metatron the prince of the presence; “Metat Sar Hapanim” מטט שר הפנים. The book of Yovel says that Sar haPanim was the angel who gave the revelation to Moshe at the burning bush (*Yovel 1:26, 2:18*). Similarly, says the targum, the angel who taught wisdom to Moshe was Zagnugael – which is one of Metat’s 70 names (*Targum Yonathan on Exod. 3:2*). Hanokh was Moshe’s supernal teacher (*Liqutei Torah Vilna 19a*). This angel is Moshe’s own super-soul, for “each person’s angel is their own heavenly neshama” (*Gra. Commentary on Sefer Yetzirah 1:1, ofan 3, 3a*). The specific trio of Eliyahu, Sar Metat and Yeshua appear explicitly mentioned as angelic figures in the Makhzor, the prayer book for Yom Kippur and Rosh haShana, in the portion that deals with the Shofar blasts (cf. *Ohr Qodosh Makhzor, Qol Bo Makhzor, Sefer Shem Tov Qatan, Makhzor Rabbah*).

17:3 talking with him – Talking about what? It does not say. A later tradition, however, which Luke’s version records, states they were talking apparently about Yeshua’s fate. Luke follows the same tradition recorded in the book of Revelation, which mentions two witnesses – namely, the souls of Hanokh (Moshe) and Eliyahu, based on the two olives of Zechariah (cf. *Zechariah 4*). In the Revelation tradition (*Rev. 11:3-12*) they too suffer the same fate as Yeshua, being murdered and then revivified after three and half days, as the three: Eliyahu, Hanokh and Yeshua are different manifestations of the soul of Messiah ben Yosef, who is killed by the forces of the Other Side. Still, being that Revelation is highly symbolic, they and their death may merely be a metaphor, or it might be that it talks about those who would become martyrs for the sake redemption. Yohanan the Immerser represented Eliyahu as well and he was executed by Herod. Hanokh and Eliyahu are identified as ‘two witnesses’ by the Arizal. It is written: “My witness is in heaven and my testifier is on high” (*Iyov 16:19*). The Ari teaches here: “My witness is Hanokh and my testifier is Eliyahu, because he too is a heavenly angel” (*Shaar haGilgulim 31:7a*). This is because ‘my witness’ עדי has the same gematria as the long spelling of Metatron and ‘my testifier’ ושהדי has the same gematria as Eliyahu.

—relevant quotes—

“Did you not send them redemption, as it is said (*Psalms 105:26*): He sent Moshe and his servants? Likewise, send us two others corresponding to them, as it is said, Send out your light and your truth. The Blessed Holy One says to them (*Mal. 3:23 [4:5]*): Behold, I send them Eliyahu the prophet; this is the first one. And the second (*Isaiah 42:1*): Behold my servant, whom I uphold. Therefore it is said (*Psalms 43:3*): Send out your light and your truth. Let them lead me. Let them bring me to your holy mountain” (*Midrash Tehillim 43:3*)

⁴Then Keifa responded to Yeshua, My master, it is good for us to be here, and if you wish, we will make three tents—one for you, and one for Moshe and one for Eliyah. ⁵While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud covered them, and there was a voice from the cloud which said, This is my beloved son, in whom I have delight; listen to him! ⁶When the disciples heard this, they fell upon their faces terrified.

commentary

17:4 My master – Notice in the three synoptics the Greek is different. Mattai uses the term “master,” Luke says “teacher,” whereas Mark uses the Hebrew term “Rabbi,” which is probably the original as they spoke a Semitic language and the term is synonymous with the other two.

17:4 one for you, and one for Moshe and one for Eliyah – The Transfiguration is highly based on the Psalm which says: “Send out your light and your truth, let them lead me, let them bring me to your holy mountain and to your tents” (*Psalm 43:3*). The Midrash Tehillim – one of the earliest oral traditions about this triad – identifies in this Psalm the “light” and “truth” as the Messiah and Eliyahu. “The king Messiah is compared to light... and Eliyahu is a prophet of truth” (*Rashi on Psalm 43:3*). In an allusion to Psalm 105:26, the midrash also identifies a third character: Moshe Rabbeinu. The three together are “the servants” of redemption (*Read the entire quote from Midrash Tehillim above*). It is because the Psalm ends with the words: “let them bring me to your holy mountain and to your tents” that the Transfiguration happens on a mount and Keifa is later babbling about building tents for the three of them. Seeing that they were disappearing, Keifa may have wanted to make them stay. The word translated as “your tents” **משכנותיך** can be interpreted as well as: Your mishkan; your sanctuary, your dwelling-place, and even your inner-Shekhina, adding a mystical layer to his own words. Both in the Transfiguration and in the Midrash Tehillim the Messiah is introduced with a heavenly voice which recites Isaiah’s verse: “Behold my servant” (*Isaiah 42:1*). Hassidut uses the Psalm 105 in connection with prayer and enlightenment. It teaches: “It can happen that one is praying on a lowly level, and suddenly in a flash their soul is illuminated and rises to upper worlds, like a person ascending a ladder, as it is written, Send out your light and your truth, let them lead me – in reference to the supernal illumination (*Baal Shem Tov*). The Rabbi uses the words “upper worlds” and “ladder” as in an allusion to the angelic realm.

17:5 a bright cloud – This is the cloud of God’s immanence which is always present in mystical revelations, as it is written on the giving of the Torah: “Hashem spoke... from the fire and the dense clouds, a great voice” (*Deut. 5:19*). The cloud serves to conceal as well as to protect. “Moshe went into the cloud and climbed to the top of the mountain” (*Exod. 24:18*). Because he was surrounded and protected by the cloud, he was able to ascend the mount, which was like heaven. Similarly with Eliyahu, he was able to ascend heavens because he was surrounded by a whirlwind, which protected him, enabling him to be among the angels (*cf. Zohar 2:137a*).

17:5 a voice from the cloud – This is called in Hebrew a Bat-qol, a little voice, a heavenly voice (literally, the daughter of voice); the voice of the Shekhina, which is a minor form of prophecy; it is God’s reverberation in this world. As the fathers say: “Every day a Bat-qol goes forth from Mount Horeb” (*Avot 6:2*). The Bat-qol said to the disputes between Hillel and Shammai: These and these are the word of the living God (*Eiruvim 13b*).

17:5 This is my beloved son – The Midrash Tehillim uses Isaiah 42:1 in reference to Messiah. While previous passages offered an exact citation of such verse (*cf. Matt. 12:18*) the voice offers a paraphrase in which the word “servant” is intentionally substituted with “son.”

17:5 listen to him! – It is likewise stated about Rabbi Eliezer, “a heavenly voice came down and said: Why are you arguing with Rabbi Eliezer? The hallakha is entirely according to his opinion” (*Bava Metzia 59b*).

⁷But Yeshua came and touched them, saying, Arise, do not be afraid. ⁸When they looked up, they saw no man except Yeshua. ⁹As they were going down from the mountain, Yeshua instructed them and said, Do not speak of this vision before any man until the son of man has been raised from the dead. ¹⁰And his disciples asked and said to him, Why then do the scribes say that Eliyah must come first? ¹¹Yeshua replied, Certainly, Eliyah does come first so that everything will be fulfilled. ¹²But I say to you that Eliyah has come, and they did not recognize him, and they have done to him everything they wished. In like manner the son of man is going to suffer at their hands.

—commentary—

17:7 But Yeshua came and touched them – The approach implies there was a certain distance between them. By physical touching them he brought them back from their stupor and reminded them there was nothing to fear, as the spiritual world, although always there, is concealed from our eyes, as it is written: “Hashem opened the servant’s eyes and he saw the hills all around Elisha covered with horses and chariots of fire” (*2Kings 6:17*). The fire refers to the variable nature of a prophetic vision which takes place within the human intellect, for in truth, the spiritual world is abstract in nature (cf. *Rambam, Moreh Nevukhim 1:49*).

17:9 As they were going down from the mountain – As they were returning to the physical world.

17:9 until the son of man has been raised from the dead – In the simple meaning, he is talking about himself. However, we can learn a life lesson from this: After a successful time of prayer and hitbodedut we at times feel as if our nature has changed, as if we were already angels from heaven, and we wish to share our qedusha (holiness) with the entire world. Then we tell our neighbors to remove the straw that is in their eye. However, after a while, when the feeling fades away as we get assimilated back into the real world, we return to be our normal selves and realize our adamic nature is still fallen. Then those we admonished to remove the straw from their eye, they respond as Thomas says: “You see the straw which is in your brother’s eye; but you do not see the beam which is in your own eyes. When you cast out the beam from your own eyes, then you will see clearly to cast out the straw from your brother’s eye” (*Thomas #26; cf. Arakhin 16b*). Our testimony becomes then, for those without foundation, a reason to separate them further from Hashem rather than bringing them closer, khas veShalom. Hence, the teaching says: do not tell about this experience until the son of man has been raised from the dead; meaning, until the soul of Adam within becomes awakened. Here is the secret: The triad of redemption – Moshe, Eliyahu and Yeshua – are aspects within ourselves which work together to raise the adamic soul from a state of spiritual death. They represent Torah, emunah and prayer, and the three together are one source of life.

17:10 Why then do the scribes say – As they were descending from the mount, the three students began to discuss among themselves. The “why then” implies their question came up as a reaction to what they had seen and what Yeshua had just told them. Probably at this point they did not fully understand what Yeshua meant when he mentioned his own resurrection, and to them Yeshua seemed to imply he would come as “king Messiah” without Eliyahu – whom they had just seen in the vision – coming first to prepare the way. This clashed with their local synagogue teaching, for it is written: “Behold, I send Eliyahu the prophet to you before the great and dreadful day of Hashem” (*Malachi 3:23 [4:5]*). But Yeshua did not say this teaching was wrong; in his understanding it was already taking place.

17:11 so that everything will be fulfilled – in the Greek: “and he will restore all things,” in reference to the “hearts of the fathers” which he would turn back to Hashem in repentance (cf. *Rashi on Malachi 3:24*).

17:12 and they have done to him everything they wished – The martyrdom of Eliyahu haNavi of each generation seems to be a common topic in the texts of the Nazarenes. We see in the later book of Revelation the concept of two symbolical “witnesses” whose spirits resemble those of Eliyahu and Moshe, who are rejected and murdered (cf. *Rev. 11:3-11:7*). They parallel the two “sons of oil” that stand by the Lord of all the Earth (*Zech. 4:14*). These two are the priesthood and the kingship. Pinkhas, who received “priesthood forever” is Eliyahu, the Great Priest (*Num. 25:12-13; Targum Yonathan on Exod. 6:18*). Come and understand: The tzaddiq of the generation is the Creator’s garment, which he uses to bring what appears to be an angered face in the form of accusations against Israel. This was the case of Pinkhas and of Eliyahu, but in truth it was not anger, it was for the sake of peace (cf. *Mei haShiloakh vol. 1, Shemot, Ki Tisa 4*).

¹³Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about Yohanan the immerser. ¹⁴When they came to the crowd, a man approached him and bowed himself on his knees. ¹⁵He said, Master, have mercy on my son, for he is a lunatic and is suffering grievously. He often falls into the fire and often into the water. ¹⁶I brought him to your disciples, but they could not heal him.

commentary

Pinkhas' act of zealous righteousness brought anger among those in the tribe of Shimon, whose members sought to kill him (*Sifri on Parashat Balaq; cf. Sanhedrin 82b*). Eliyahu too had a zealous reaction against the prophets of Baal, after which Ahab and Jezebel sought to execute him (*1Kings 19:1-2*). This aspect of zealotry, seeking to bring Israel to repentance without considering one's own life, is the same spirit that Yohanan the Immerser had when he confronted Herod and called his fellow brothers to do teshuva. They are aspects of Mashiakh ben Yosef, who dies in his war against the evil inclination (cf. *Sukka 52a*).

17:12 in like manner the son of man – The paradigm of a tzaddiq suffering for the sake of peace is Yitzhaq's self-sacrifice at the hand of Avraham his father. Yitzhaq was 37 at the time of the aqaida (cf. *Rashi on Gen. 23:2; Beit Midrash*), which means he was not forced by Avraham, but rather he voluntarily agreed and offered himself for the sake of heaven (*Bereshit Rabbah 56:4*). This is the meaning of "they went together" (*Gen 22:6*); that "Yitzhaq was as willing to be sacrificed as Avraham was to sacrifice him" (*Pesiqta Rabbati 40*). The Vilna Gaon emphatically states that during Yitzhaq's aqaida, he was fulfilling the role of Messiah ben Yosef (*Qol haTor 1:23*). Come and see, for Messiah is the Yekhida soul of all the tzaddiqim, a part of the soul that is never separated from the Creator and that unifies everybody as one entity, for in truth in every son of Israel there is a spark of the soul of Messiah, we all form the mystical body of Adam and Messiah is considered its head (cf. *Liqutei Torah Pinkhas 86b; Liqutei Sikkhot vol 4. P. 134*). Therefore, Messiah himself is bound to suffer for the sake of reconciliation, for it is written about Messiah ben Yosef that "he will die as an atonement for the sins of the people" (*Ohr haHayim, vol. 5, pg. 1107*). About King Messiah it is stated: "King Messiah is subjected to sufferings in every generation according to the sins of that generation. The Blessed Holy One said, In that hour of the Redemption I shall resuscitate him, create him a new and he will no longer suffer" (*Pesiqta Rabbati 146b*). See how Yeshua alludes to this on verses 22 and 23. The Ramhal summarizes the concept with these words: "Suffering and pain may be imposed on a tzaddiq as an atonement for his entire generation. This tzaddiq must then accept this suffering with love for the benefit of his generation, just as he accepts the suffering imposed upon him for his own sake. In doing so, he benefits his generation by atoning for it, and at the same time is himself elevated to a very great degree... A higher type of suffering comes to a tzaddiq who is even greater" (*Derekh Hashem 2:3:8*).^b

17:15 for he is a lunatic – Lunatic; i.e., became crazy by the influence of the moon. The Hebrew equivalent is Shoteh, madman, insane, someone who is mentally unstable (cf. *Yerushalmi Terumah 1 [40b]; m. Rosh haShana 3:8; Mishne Torah, Hilkhos Edut 9:9*). Semitic manuscripts read: "for he is being tormented by an evil spirit." "Abba Binyamin says, If the eye had the power to see them, no creature could endure the demons. Abaye says: They are more numerous than we are and they surround us like the ridge around a field. R. Huna says: Every one among us has a thousand on his left hand and ten thousand on his right hand. Raba says: The crushing of the crowd in the congregation comes from them. Fatigue in the knees comes from them. The wearing out of the clothes of the scholars is due to their rubbing against them. The bruising of the feet comes from them" (*Berakhot 6a*). The word translated as "demons" is maziqim, which literally means: 'harmful ones' or 'pests.' The words "pestilence" and "destruction" from the Psalm 91 are traditionally understood to be adjectives for the evil spirits (cf. *Shabbat 8b; Rashi on Psalm 91:6*).

^b For more on the atonement that a tzaddiq brings through suffering see: Bava Metzia 84b; Sanhedrin 39a; Shabbat 33b; Yerushalmi Berakhot 2:8 (20a); Yerushalmi Yoma 1:1 (2a); Bereshit Rabbah 33:1; Shir HaShirim Rabbah 6:6; Zohar I:65a, I:67b, 3:17b. For more on Messiah being the unifying Yekhida soul of Israel see: Shaarei Teshuva Admur haEmtzai ch. 12; Sefer haMaamarim 5699, p. 207; Hitvaaduyot 5746 vol. 2, p. 119.

¹⁷Yeshua answered and said, You unbelieving and perverse generation, how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring the boy here to me.

¹⁸And Yeshua rebuked him and the demon came out of him, and the youth was healed at that moment. ¹⁹Then the disciples came to Yeshua in private and asked, Why were we not able to heal him? ²⁰He replied, Because of your unbelief, for amen I tell you, if there was faith in you as small as a mustard seed, you may say to this mountain, Move away from here, and it will move away. Nothing would be impossible for you. ²¹ -

textual variants

17:21 – Some manuscripts – including the Peshitta – add an extrapolation from Mark 9:27, “But this kind can only come out by fasting and prayer.”

commentary

17:20 if there was faith in you as small as a mustard seed – The archetypal mustard seed which grows into a tree whose height reaches the sky and becomes a shelter for the birds, and the beasts of the field take shade on it (cf. *Matt. 13:32*; see also *Daniel 4:8-9*). Authentic emunah works essentially in the same manner. It begins as a small spot which is planted in the heart of man, but as we work it and let it grow, it reaches heaven and manifests its ubiquitous nature, filling every aspect of existence, where we can comprehend that God is everywhere and everything. The author of Mark also adds that this kind of “mountain” or problem cannot be defeated without fasting and prayer. This means that the faith that begins as small as a mustard seed requires time of nourishment, we must grow our fidelity in Hashem through fasting and prayer, which are like fertilizing and watering the soil where the seed (i.e., the Torah) is then planted. As it says, “All your commands are emunah” (*Psalms 119:86*). Through them we connect with Heaven and perceive God’s sovereignty over creation. Then emunah (faith, fidelity) is better described as “bitakhon” (absolute confidence). Because it is known a tiny mustard seed on its own does nothing, but if it falls “on properly prepared soil” it then grows (cf. *Thomas #20*). It is thus written: “cultivate emunah” (*Psalms 37:3*). Emunah is synonymous with prayer, for it is written (*Exodus 17:12*), “his hands were emunah until sunset” which Onqelos renders: “his hands were spread out in prayer” (*Liqutei Moharan 7:1:3*).

17:20 Nothing would be impossible for you – “Eemunah is essential; everyone must search within and strengthen themselves in emunah” (*Liqutei Moharan II 5:1:2*). Only then, every enemy from the other side, every opposing force that appeared to be as big as a great mountain must leave at our command. The tzaddiqim, who are permanently connected to Hashem will not even notice the height of the adversary, as in the story of the twelve spies. Those without emunah claimed “There we saw the nefilim, sons of Anaq, descended from the fallen ones, and in our own eyes we appeared to be like grasshoppers” (*Num. 13:33*), “we were like ants compared to them” (cf. *Sotah 35a*). These are a big mountain before us, but those with emunah say: “we can surely overcome it” (*Num. 13:30*). We must have emunah, even as little as a mustard seed, that every obstacle in our lives prior to the coming of the messianic era will be destroyed, as the prophet says: “Great mountain, you will be flattened before Zerubbavel” (*Zech. 4:7*; cf. *Rabbeinu Bahya on Numbers 19:2, #19*). In the time to come, as our sages teach, we will perceive the evil inclination in the opposite manner; for when the Blessed Holy One will finally slaughter the yetzer hara “the righteous will cry and say, How were we able to overcome such a big mountain? And the wicked will cry and say, How were we not able to overcome such a small thread of hair?” (*Sukkah 52a*).

²²When they came together in Galilee, he said to them, The son of man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. ²³They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life. And the disciples were filled with grief. ²⁴And when they came to Kefar-Nahum, the collectors of the two-drachma of headtax came to Keifa and asked, Does not your teacher pay the two zuzim? ²⁵He said, Yes, he does. When Keifa came into the house, Yeshua anticipated him and said, What do you think, Shimon? The kings of the earth, from whom do they collect duty and taxes—from their own children or from strangers? ²⁶Keifa answered, From strangers. Yeshua said, Then the children are exempt. ²⁷But still, lest they be stumbled with us, go to the sea and cast the hook, and the first fish that will come up, open its mouth and you will find a stater. Take it and give it to them for me and for you.

commentary

17:22 The son of man is going to be delivered into the hands of men – See commentary on verse 12.

17:24 the collectors of the two-drachma – In Aramaic: zuzin זוזין. The Torah commanded to every male older than twenty to pay half a sheqel for the Sanctuary (*Exodus 30:13*). A whole sheqel equals four zuzim (*Rashi on Exodus 30:13*). Therefore half a sheqel is two zuzim.

17:26 Then the children are exempt – This allegory is directly derived from Scripture, as our sages teach: “Rabbi Nahman son of Rabbi Hisda levied a tax on the sages. But Rabbi Nahman son of Yitzhaq responded: This is a transgression against the Torah, Neviim and Ketuvim, because it is written in the Torah (*Deut. 33:3*): Although he loves all peoples, all his saints are in your hands... and they sit at your feet. This refers to Torah students who pound their feet from town to town and from country to country to study Torah receiving your words” (*Bava Bathra 8a*). Since they are in God’s hands, they are free from human taxes. The Talmudic passage then quotes from Scripture the verse (*Ezra 7:24*): “It is not permissible to impose tribute, head tax or land tax on them [i.e., on those who serve in the house of God]”. The Talmud uses this passage as evidence that the Torah students and sages cannot be taxed. Yeshua draws a similar parallel with the allegory of the child and the stranger. A king does not tax the children who live with him but only to strangers, and the Torah scholars are sons of God; they are saints who are “in your hands” and “at your feet” (cf. *Deut 33:3*).

17:27 a stater – A silver stater, depending on the region where it was minted, could have a value between three and four drachmae.

17:27 Take it and give it to them for me and for you – It is interesting that the narration does not tell whether Keifa obeyed, or whether the miracle ever took place. It only tells us the instructions. Come and see: Going to the sea and casting the hook can be a metaphorical lesson for us, if we have ears to hear.