



Excerpts from *The Great Physician*
For study related to the Bible Lesson July 12 - 18, 2010

Introductory Note – *The Great Physician*, Vols 1 & 2 were written by Vinton Dearing, who was Professor of English at UCLA where he taught the English Bible as Literature for forty years. The book is a composite translation of the four Gospels, organized by event rather than book, and includes a commentary. Because of the composite nature of the translation and commentary, the excerpts below may cover more topics than the citation in the Lesson. These excerpts have been compiled by Doug McCormick. The paperback two-volume set of books is available for purchase on amazon.com and a hardback study edition will be available in August through Amazon.com and at vintondearing.com.

SECTION VI – B20 (Mark 9:2 ... 12)

TRANSFIGURATION

[Mark 9:2-10](#) [Matthew 17:1-9](#) [Luke 9:28-36](#)

Continuing as before. “And after six days Jesus takes with [him] Peter and James and John and takes them up into a high mountain by themselves alone, and was transfigured in front of them.”

The Church of the Transfiguration is on Mt. Tabor, in central Galilee, but Jesus and his students are at the foot of Mt. Hermon and return to Galilee only later. Therefore Mt. Hermon, which rises to 9100 feet above sea level, is more likely to have been the place where the transfiguration occurred.⁷⁸

Each of the three Gospels uses different words to describe the transfiguration itself. Mark: “And his clothes became shining, very white, so much so that no clothes-cleaner on earth could whiten [them] so.” Matthew: “And his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light.” Luke: “And while he was praying, the appearance of his face became different and his clothes gleamed white like lightning.” His appearance was much like Moses’ when he came down from Mt. Sinai with the two stone tablets on which God had written the Ten Commandments. Moses’ face shone so that his people were afraid to look at him. The shining can be thought of as the reflection of God’s glory or as a radiant sense of the presence of God. We see radiant faces around us from time to time, and from time to time hear those who speak of moments of spiritual illumination being accompanied by a sense of being surrounded by bright light. From these experiences we can get some sense of what Jesus was feeling.⁷⁹

Continuing as before. “And Elijah with Moses was seen by them and they were speaking with Jesus.”

Luke adds that they spoke “about his [Jesus] ‘exodus,’ which he was going to fulfill in Jerusalem. And Peter and those with him had been weighted down with sleep [while Jesus was praying], but when they were fully awakened they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him.”

Moses and Elijah represent The Law and the Prophets, as they do in Revelation 11:3-6, where they are not named but described, one (Elijah) able to prevent rain, and the other (Moses) able to turn water to blood. Jesus’ communion with the Bible was so intense on this occasion that its two greatest examples of the power of God in human affairs appeared to Jesus’ students as the men themselves, both encouraging and warning him. Moses had ultimately failed of his goal of entering Canaan with his people because he did not listen closely enough to God, whereas Elijah’s more careful listening brought about his ascension. Their examples in these respects would have confirmed Jesus in his determination to obey his Father whatever

the cost.

Continuing as before. “And Peter says to Jesus in response, ‘Rabbi, it’s good for us to be here. And we’ll make three shelters, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.’ For he did not know what to say in response [to what they had seen].”⁸⁰

“And while he was speaking there came a cloud and overshadowed them. And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, hear him.’”

All three Gospels say the students were frightened by what they saw and heard. I quote Matthew: “And when the students heard it [the voice] they fell on their face and feared greatly, and Jesus came to them and grasping them said, ‘Rouse up and don’t be afraid.’”⁸¹

Continuing as before. “And suddenly they looked around and no longer saw anyone except Jesus alone with themselves. And as they were coming down out of the mountain he ordered them not to describe what they saw to anyone until the Son of man would arise from among the dead.” Mark adds, “And they grappled with what he said, arguing among themselves, ‘What is “the resurrection from among the dead?””

Footnotes

78. Queen Helena, the mother of the emperor Constantine and an early archaeologist in the holy places, supposed that Mt. Tabor was the site (*ABD*, IV, 1050), perhaps because Tabor and Mt. Hermon are associated in Psalm 89:12, and Egeria, toward the end of the fourth century, so described it (*ABD*, VI, 305). See *Egeria’s Travels*, p. 176 (the italics are explained in n. 1, p. 174). For more details see Kopp, *The Holy Places*, pp. 242-247. But the Bordeaux pilgrim (333) thought the place was on the Mount of Olives (see *Egeria’s Travels*, p. 160).

79. Moses’ face shining: Exodus 34:29-30.

80. “Shelters”: literally, “tents,” but the word was also used for the shelters of branches erected at the feast of Tabernacles or Booths.

81. Mark and Luke tell of the apostles’ fright at slightly different places in their narratives than Matthew does, but may be accepted as agreeing with him. See Matthew 17:6 (frightened by the voice), Mark 9:6 (frightened at seeing Moses and Elijah), Luke 9:34 (frightened when the cloud engulfed them).

THE QUESTION OF ELIJAH

Matthew 17:10-13 Mark 9:11-13

Matthew and Mark continue as follows. Matthew’s account has a smoother continuity, so I follow him, but Mark’s phrasing may be closer to what Jesus said, for we do not always express ourselves as smoothly in speech as on paper.

“And the students questioned him, saying, ‘So why do the scribes say Elijah must come first?’⁸²

“And he said to them in reply, ‘Elijah indeed is coming first and will restore all. But I say to you that Elijah came already, and they didn’t recognize him, but did to him whatever they intended. And in the same way the Son of man is going to suffer under them.’ Then the students understood that he spoke to them about John the Baptist.” In saying, however, that Elijah was coming and would restore all Jesus was speaking of the knowledge of God that Elijah exemplified.

Footnotes

82. “Elijah must come first”: it has been objected that there is almost no evidence outside the Bible that the scribes said this: for some articles in the debate see Morris M. Faierstein, “Why Do the Scribes Say That Elijah Must Come First,” *JBL*, 100 (1981), 75-86; Dale C. Allison, Jr., “Elijah Must Come First,” *JBL*, 103 (1984), 256-258;

Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "More About Elijah Coming First," *JBL*, 104 (1985), 295-296. As we have seen, Malachi 4:5 says Elijah will come before the day of judgment and John 1:21 says the Pharisees asked John the Baptist if he were Elijah.