

Question: In Matthew 17:4, how were Peter and his companions able to know that those men were Moses and Elijah?

Answer:

Let us begin by carefully reading the passage in Matthew 17:1-4 (ESV):

*1 “And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.
2 And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.
3 And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.
4 And Peter said to Jesus, ‘Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.’”*

Notably, the Scripture does **not** record Moses and Elijah explicitly identifying themselves. This implies that Peter and the others recognized them through another means—a **supernatural revelation** given by the Holy Spirit.

Theological Explanation:

The key theological insight here is the role of **divine revelation** (**Greek: ἀποκάλυψις - apokalypsis**), which is knowledge imparted by God to His people that cannot be attained by natural reasoning alone.

1. **Revelation by the Holy Spirit:**

Just as Peter was able to declare Jesus as the Christ because the Father revealed it to him through the Spirit (Matthew 16:15-17, ESV):

*15 "He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?'
16 Simon Peter replied, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'
17 And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah!
For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father
who is in heaven.'"*

Here, Jesus clarifies that spiritual truth about His identity comes **only by God's revelation**, not human insight.

2. **Recognition through the Word of God:**

Peter and the others would have been familiar with Moses and Elijah through their study of the Torah and the Prophets, foundational Scripture for any devout Jew. Moses represented the Law, Elijah the Prophets. Their appearance at the Transfiguration symbolized the fulfillment of the Law and Prophets in Christ (Luke 16:16; Matthew 5:17).

3. **Prayer and the Presence of God:**

The Transfiguration took place on a mountain, a biblical setting for divine encounters (Exodus 19:20; Psalm 2:6). It is fitting that God would reveal Himself there in a spectacular way to confirm Jesus' messianic identity to His closest disciples.

4. **Role of the Holy Spirit in Revelation:**

The Holy Spirit empowers believers to perceive spiritual realities (1 Corinthians 2:10-14). Without the Spirit, the disciples would not have understood the significance of what they saw.

How Did Peter and His Companions Recognize That Those Were Moses and Elijah?

Supporting Example — Revelation through the Spirit in Acts:

Peter's spiritual sensitivity is further illustrated in Acts 10:17-21 (ESV), when the Spirit instructs him regarding Cornelius's men:

*17 "Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might mean,
18 behold, the men who had been sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house and were standing before the gate.
19 And the Spirit told Peter to go with them without making any distinction.
20 These six brothers also accompanied him, and they entered the man's house.
21 And Peter declared, 'I am the one you are looking for. What is the reason for your coming?'"*

This shows how the Spirit gave Peter understanding and boldness to embrace God's new revelation, just as at the Transfiguration He enabled recognition of Moses and Elijah.

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Lessons for Believers Today:

- **Presence in Prayer:** When we position ourselves in God's presence, especially through prayer and meditation on Scripture, we open ourselves to the Holy Spirit's revelation (Psalm 25:14; John 14:26).
- **Study of Scripture:** Knowledge of God's Word is foundational for spiritual discernment. The Spirit does not contradict the Word but illuminates its truth (2 Timothy 3:16-17).
- **Assurance in Christ:** Just as Peter recognized Jesus as the Messiah by revelation, believers today can be assured of salvation and hope in Christ by the Spirit's witness (Romans 8:16).

Final Reflection:

Are you abiding in Christ, growing in the knowledge of Scripture, and open to the Spirit's guidance? The same Spirit who revealed the glory of Moses and Elijah to Peter desires to reveal Christ to you personally.

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Moses and Elijah?

“Maranatha!” — Come, Lord Jesus!

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