

10-2017

The Transfiguration of Jesus Christ

Harold Willmington

Liberty University, hwillmington@liberty.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/second_person



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), [Practical Theology Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Willmington, Harold, "The Transfiguration of Jesus Christ" (2017). *The Second Person File*. 9.
https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/second_person/9

This The Early Ministry of Jesus Christ is brought to you for free and open access by the Theological Studies at Scholars Crossing. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Second Person File by an authorized administrator of Scholars Crossing. For more information, please contact scholarlycommunications@liberty.edu.

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF JESUS CHRIST

- **THE OUTLINE**

“And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him. Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him. And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid” (Mt. 17:2-6).

- A. Note that the light was from within, and not from some gigantic cosmic spotlight suddenly focusing down upon Jesus.
- B. This was the same glory that once shone in both the Old Testament tabernacle (Exod. 40) and the temple (1 Kings 8).
- C. Christ’s eternal glory was not surrendered at the time of the incarnation, but rather was covered and contained by his fleshly body. The body of Christ was to the disciples what the veil of the tabernacle was to Old Testament Israel.
 - 1. Both “veils” housed and protected the glory of God from within.
 - 2. Both “veils” were broken at Calvary.
 - a. The veil of Jesus

“And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me’” (Luke 22:19).
 - b. The veil of the temple

“Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split” (Mt. 27:51).
- D. Satan tries unsuccessfully to imitate this inward splendor of Christ (2 Cor. 11:14).
- E. Peter here thoughtlessly suggests the building of three booths. It may be that at this time of the Feast of Tabernacles (booths) was being celebrated in Jerusalem. This was to be a type of the coming Millennium as well as a reminder of Israel’s redemption from Egypt (Lev. 23:34-44). But before this (the Millennium) could happen, another feast would take place—the Passover (Lev. 23:4-8 and Matt. 26-27). *“For even Christ, our Passover, is sacrificed for us” (1 Cor. 5:7).*
- F. Peter would never forget this great event. He later wrote about it (2 Peter 1:16-18).

- **THE ANALYSIS**

The Prophecy Involved

"Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom" (Mt. 16:28).

The Place Involved

". . . a high mountain" (Mt. 17:1). This was probably Mt. Hermon.

The Purpose Involved

"He ... went up ... to pray" (Lk. 9:28).

The Personalities Involved

There were seven:

- A. Peter, James, and John
- B. The Savior
- C. The Father
- D. Moses and Elijah

The Particulars Involved

". . . and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, 'Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.' While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!' And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid. But Jesus came and touched them and said, 'Arise, and do not be afraid.' When they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only" (Mt. 17:2-8).

- A. The Scriptures suggest that this may have been a night scene, for the three disciples had just awakened from a deep sleep (see Lk. 9:32).

Note that the light was from within, and not from some giant cosmic spotlight suddenly focusing down upon Jesus. His countenance was affected first, then His garments. This was the same glory that shone in both the Old Testament tabernacle (Exod. 40) and the temple (1 Kings 8). It would later be withdrawn because of Israel's

sin in the days of Ezekiel (Ezek. 10-11). Later it was revealed to the shepherds (Lk. 2:9), to the disciples (Acts 1:9), to Stephen (Acts 7:55), to Saul (Acts 9:3), and to John the apostle (Rev. 1:16). Finally, at Christ's second coming this glory will be revealed to the whole world. *"And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."* (Mt. 24:30)

B. Christ's eternal glory was not surrendered at the time of the incarnation, but rather was covered and contained by his fleshly body. The body of Christ was to the disciples what the veil of the tabernacle was to Old Testament Israel.

1. Both "veils" housed and protected the glory of God from within.

2. Both "veils" were broken at Calvary. *"And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me"* (Lk. 22:19). *"And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent"* (Mt. 27:51). Satan tried, unsuccessfully, to imitate this inward splendor of Christ (2 Cor. 11:14).

C. The word "transfigured" is *metamorphoo* in the Greek language. We get our word "metamorphosis" from it. It brings to mind a caterpillar in the cocoon coming forth as a butterfly. The transfiguration of Christ does not set forth His deity, but rather His humanity. Transformation is the goal of humanity. We shall experience this at the Rapture. Adam and Eve may well have been clothed by a light of innocence proceeding from within. But all this was lost through sin.

D. Note the previous description of Jesus as offered by John the Apostle:

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (Jn. 1:14).

A case could be made here that, in all the universe, the strongest object ever created by God was the earthly body of Jesus! Ponder this amazing thought: for 34 years this vessel of clay actually contained and confined the resplendent glory of Almighty God Himself, only allowing for one brief moment a tiny ray to escape, which temporarily blinded Peter, James, and John!

E. Why the appearance of both Moses and Elijah?

1. Because of what they represented—The main reason for the writing of the Old Testament was to prepare us for Christ. Jesus Himself testified of this:

"Search the scriptures ... they... testify of me" (Jn. 5:39). *"And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures, the things concerning himself"* (Lk. 24:27).

While He was on earth, Jesus had a very simple way of summarizing the entire Old Testament:

"Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets, I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil" (Mt. 5:17).

Why then the appearance of these two men?

Moses was there because he represented the Law.

Elijah was there because he represented the prophets.

2. Because of who they represented

"Why were Moses and Elijah, of all Old Testament people, present on this occasion? Perhaps these two men and the disciples suggest all the categories of people who will be in Jesus' coming kingdom. The disciples represent individuals who will be present in physical bodies. Moses represents saved individuals who have died or will die. Elijah represents saved individuals who will not experience death, but will be caught up to heaven alive (1 Thess. 4:17). These three groups will be present when Christ institutes his kingdom on earth. Furthermore, the Lord will be in his glory as he was at the transfiguration, and the kingdom will take place on earth, as this event obviously did. The disciples were thus enjoying a foretaste of the promised kingdom of the Lord (Mt. 16:28)." (The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Victor Books, Wheaton, Ill., 1983, p. 59)

3. Because of their future ministry during the Great Tribulation

Many believe that Moses and Elijah will be the two witnesses referred to in Rev. 11:3-12 (see also Mal. 4:4-5). If this is true, the transfiguration event would thus serve as a "trial run." In fact, Jesus had suggested this very thing on the way down from the mountain.

"And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things" (Mt. 17:11).

F. If the two witnesses in Revelation 11 are indeed Moses and Elijah, then consider:

1. During the transfiguration they speak of Christ's death in the city of Jerusalem.

"Who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem." (Lk. 9:31)

2. During the Tribulation they themselves will die in the city of Jerusalem.

"And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascended out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them. And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified." (Rev. 11:7-8)

G. Both Moses and Elijah had previously experienced a special revelation from God (see Exod. 33:17-23 and 1 Kings 19:9-13), and at the same place (Mount Sinai/Horeb). The transfiguration answered Moses' twofold request:

1. To see the glory of God (Exod. 33:18)

2. To enter the Promised Land (Deut. 3:23-25)

H. Peter here thoughtlessly suggests the building of three booths. It may be that at this time the Feast of Tabernacles (booths) was being celebrated in Jerusalem. This was to be a type of the coming Millennium as well as a reminder of Israel's redemption from Egypt (see Lev. 23:34-44). But before this (the Millennium) could happen, another feast would take place—the Passover (see Lev. 23:4-8 and Mt. 26-27). *"For even Christ, our passover, is sacrificed for us"* (1 Cor. 5:7).

I. Peter would never forget this great event. He later wrote about it (see 2 Pet. 1:16-18).

Jesus spoke to Moses and Elijah concerning his "decease" (Lk. 9:31). The word here is actually "exodus," and is used by Peter at a later date in describing his approaching death (see 2 Pet. 1:13-14).

J. Mark concluded the transfiguration event with the following words:

"And as they came down from the mountain, he charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, till the Son of man were risen from the dead. And they kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean." (Mk. 9:9-10).

The Jews were familiar with the doctrine of the resurrection (see Job 19:25-26; Isa. 25:8; 26:19; Hosea 13:14), but the resurrection of the Son of man astonished them, for their theology had no place for a suffering and dying Messiah. This is seen especially in John 12:32-39.