

What Really Happened on the Mount of Transfiguration?

Matthew 17:2-3: *2 And he was transfigured before them; and his face shone like the sun, and his garments became as white as light. 3 And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with him.*



The vision on the Mount of Transfiguration was one of those magnificent events in the life of Jesus that gives us some insight into just how remarkable his earthly ministry was. This vision had everything! It had Jesus' very appearance change to one of brightness and glory. It had the appearance of two Old Testament powerhouses talking with this glorious version of Jesus. It had the booming voice of God from heaven. And then it had the sudden removal of all these amazing elements, and the world became normal again. In the midst of all of the glory and splendor shown

here, we need to ask some simple questions: Why did this happen? What can we take away for our own benefit and understanding?

The three Gospel accounts of the Transfiguration are found in **Matthew 17:1-13**, **Mark 9:1-13** and **Luke 9:28-37**. We will combine them into one narrative to include all of the details to the best of our ability.

The context of all three Gospels leading up to the Mount of Transfiguration experience takes place six days beforehand. Jesus had just told his disciples that for them to be God-honoring, they each had to take up their crosses and follow him in order to serve in the glory of God's kingdom.

He then said this:

Matthew 16:28: *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** <932>.*

Kingdom: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #932 *basileia*; properly, royalty, i.e. (abstractly) rule, or (concretely) a realm (literally or figuratively)

Jesus was referring to the coming Transfiguration experience, as it is the next narrative in all three Gospels.

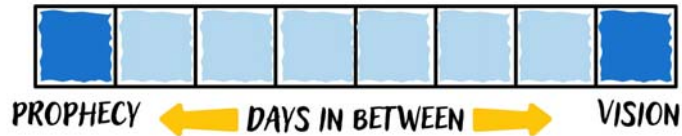
The fact that this was a vision of Jesus' future majesty was confirmed by the Apostle Peter much later:

2 Peter 1:16: *For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his **majesty** <3168>.*

Majesty: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #3168: *megaleiôtēs*, superbness, i.e. glory or splendor:—magnificence, majesty, mighty power

This is Peter talking about his firsthand experience on the Mount of Transfiguration. We will soon look at this more closely.

All three Gospel accounts say several days would pass before the prophecy came true. Matthew and Mark say six days later, and Luke says eight. They are both correct—it just depends on whether we are including the day Jesus predicts the vision and the day of the vision itself. It's not a contradiction; it's just a different way of expressing the time.



Jesus often retreated from everyone to the mountains to find solitude and fellowship with his Father. These retreats were beautiful “selah” (pause and consider) moments for him.

This time he brought Peter, James and John, as something miraculous was going to happen:

Matthew 17:1: ...Six days later (Luke records as eight days) Jesus took with him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves. **Luke 9:28–29:** 28 ...to pray. 29 And while he was praying,... **Matthew 17:2:** ...he was *transfigured* <3339> before them;... **Luke 9:29:** ...the appearance of his face became different... **Matthew 17:2:** ...and his face shone like the sun...

Transfigured: Strong’s Greek Lexicon #3339 *metamorphoo*;
to transform (literally or figuratively, “metamorphose”)

Another familiar use:

Romans 12:2: And do not be conformed to this world, but be *transformed* <3339> by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Christians are *transformed*; they are different from who they were before. They no longer conform to this world, but to God’s *good and acceptable and perfect will*.

In the Transfiguration scene, Jesus was still Jesus, but he transformed into a glorious representation of who he is.

Our own transformation in **Romans 12** is the transforming of a human being into a likeness of Christ as a result of God’s spirit working within. It changes us from conforming to earthly desires and pursuits to wanting to be like Jesus. It is a change from within, not merely an outward change like the painting of a face.

His face shone like the sun—in this vision, Jesus was portrayed with God’s majesty shining upon him. These three apostles were starting to get a glimpse of Jesus’ future glory, after his crucifixion and resurrection.

Malachi presents a similar prophetic reference along the same lines as Jesus' face shining like the sun:

Malachi 4:2–3: *2 But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall (free to go out to pasture). 3 You will tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day which I am preparing, says the LORD of hosts.*

This *sun of righteousness* reference is widely understood to be a Messianic prophecy, even though *sun* is spelled s-u-n rather than s-o-n. Malachi is the last book of the Old Testament with a 400-year gap of silence from God before the New Testament begins.

This *sun* in the Malachi prophecy represents Jesus in the most basic and clear sense. (Adding a layer, we understand it to also include his faithful followers in heaven.)

We have the gift of being able to look back at both Old and New Testaments. This prophecy in Malachi about Jesus the Messiah as *the sun of righteousness* connects to the account of the Mount of Transfiguration—*his face shone like the sun*.

Remember, this was the last prophetic message of the Old Testament. It actually has a dual meaning:

- It first prophesied the coming of Jesus 400 years later. There are no biblical writings until the New Testament opens with John the Baptist. More on this soon.
- Secondly, it also refers to the final work of Jesus and his church long after his resurrection. We understand *tread down the wicked...on the day which I am preparing...* to refer to a time of trouble to occur during the end times.

Back to the Mount of Transfiguration event:

Mark 9:3: *and his garments became radiant and exceedingly white, as no launderer on earth can whiten them.*

What a poetic description! This describes something so pure it's beyond human ability. This vision was beyond earthly imagination. Spectacular! *His face shone like the sun* and his garments became more radiantly white than a human launderer could make them.

Here are additional texts to show that Jesus, with his most faithful followers in heaven, will bring the brightness of God's glory:

Isaiah 60:1–3: *1 Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. 2 For behold, darkness will cover the earth and deep darkness the peoples; but the LORD will rise upon you and His glory will appear upon you. 3 Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.*

How many times do we see light and brightness in these scriptures? These references inform us of Jesus' ultimate mission—to bring light to a darkened world.

Satan is called *the prince of the power of the air* (**Ephesians 2:2**), and it is a dark world under his rule. Jesus returns to ultimately destroy Satan's rule and bring God's light back to earth.

When we see Malachi talking about the *sun of righteousness*, we can also see the power of the SON in that prophecy. When we look at the Isaiah scriptures, we see the brightness that changes the world. And, of course, when we look to Jesus, we see he is the embodiment of EVERYTHING. It just all fits!

In summary, we have discussed the following about the vision:

- Jesus' face shines like the sun,
- his clothes turn a blinding white, and
- other scriptures prophetically describe him as a light and brightness that dispels the darkness of the day of sin.



Jesus knew his Father had designed a **spectacular vision** for three of his apostles to witness. What began as a prayer on a mountain became a heavenly vision of **the majesty of Jesus** in a way no human could replicate. It is no accident that the description of Jesus was the first part of the vision's unfolding.

This is a truly remarkable event, as God's message through Jesus here was to be both unique and memorable!

**We have Jesus clearly defined in this vision as the main focus.
How do Moses and Elijah compare, and what was their role?**

Here is where we begin to weigh different approaches of understanding this magnificent event. First and foremost, Jesus is seen with great majesty, and, as we will see, both Moses and Elijah appear in clear supporting roles. Acknowledging this helps us keep our focus on the main thing: Jesus and his glory.

Back to the Mount of Transfiguration experience:

Luke 9:30–31: *30 And behold, two men were talking with him; and they were Moses and Elijah, 31 who, appearing in glory, were speaking of his departure which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.*

The apostles overhear their conversation about Jesus' impending death. We don't know how the apostles recognized the two as Moses and Elijah, because of course they had never met these men who had died thousands of years earlier.

Q. Did Moses and Elijah appearing in glory mean they went to heaven when Jesus went to heaven after his resurrection? If not, what does their appearing in glory represent?



This was a heavenly vision and was not real. They were not in heaven, nor did they go to heaven. Remember, those in the Old Testament, including the prophets, were never promised a heavenly reward. The call to heaven only came with Jesus (**John 3:13**).

This is why John the Baptist is described this way:

Matthew 11:11: *Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist! Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.*

Therefore, these honored men of Israel's history, Moses and Elijah, belong to the future earthly resurrection. They are not described as being "transformed" like Jesus.

This vision is obviously all about Jesus. We're going to suggest that on the most basic level, **Moses and Elijah represented the Law and the Prophets**. The Law came through Moses, who was the deliverer of Israel. Jesus himself said Elijah the prophet was powerfully represented by John the Baptist, who paved the way for Jesus' ministry.

MOSES = THE LAW ELIJAH = THE PROPHETS



In the vision, Moses and Elijah were speaking of Jesus' coming sacrifice on the cross, illustrating how the death of Christ was fully declared beforehand. Moses spoke of it as represented in the sacrifices of the Law, and all the Prophets declared it.

The "Law and the Prophets" theme ran throughout all of Jesus' ministry. It was there at the beginning:

John 1:45: *Philip found Nathanael and said to him, We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.*

Jesus' teachings encapsulated the primary message of the Law and the Prophets.

Jesus here is speaking with the Pharisees, who are trying to trap him into saying something they could twist around to make him look bad:

Matthew 22:35–40: *35 One of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, testing him, 36 Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law? 37 And he said to him, YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND. 38 This is the great and foremost commandment. 39 The second is like it, YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF. 40 On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.*

The Jews were looking for Messiah through the Law and the Prophets. Here, Jesus says everything the Law and Prophets depend on can be summed up by these two commandments: Love God and love your neighbor.

The Law and the Prophets “spoke” to Jesus. Through study, prayer, meditation and the help of the holy spirit, his studies of the Law and the writings of the Prophets showed how he was to complete his mission and his Father’s purpose for him. The writings of the Law and the Prophets showed him what to do, what to say and when.

This was represented in the vision when Moses and Elijah (depicting the Law and the Prophets) talked to Jesus.

This vision would have given Jesus great assurance that he was on the right path.

The conversation in the vision was about Jesus’ impending crucifixion.

After his resurrection, on the road to Emmaus, Jesus again pointed to this theme:

Luke 24:25–27: *25 And he said to them, O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into his glory? 27 Then beginning with Moses and with all the Prophets, he explained to them the things concerning himself in all the Scriptures.*

Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets—the old writings gave Jesus understanding. Then Jesus himself quoted from the Law and the Prophets to explain how they showed him to be the Messiah.

Let’s go back to the Malachi prophecy.

It was no accident that these last words of the last chapter of the Old Testament writings mentioned Jesus (*the sun of righteousness*) AND Moses AND Elijah:

Malachi 4:4–6: *4 Remember the law of Moses My servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel. 5 Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. 6 He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.*

We know this Malachi prophecy ties into our discussion about the Mount of Transfiguration because it's the only other place in the Bible where Moses, Elijah and a representation of Jesus as the *sun of righteousness* are mentioned together.

Remember, we said this prophecy has a dual meaning, applying both at Jesus' first advent and again at his second advent.

At his first advent, we know John the Baptist was pictured by Elijah because the Angel Gabriel quoted Malachi to Zacharias about John the Baptist's birth:

Luke 1:16–17: *16 And he (John) will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. 17 It is he who will go as a forerunner before him (Jesus) in the spirit and power of Elijah, (he then quotes from Malachi 4:6) TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.*

In this prophecy, the angel makes a direct connection between Elijah and a future prophet who would come to prepare people for the Lord. John the Baptist was that “Elijah.”

This is powerful because these are the last words of the Old Testament. The first action of the New Testament is the prophecy of John being born. The New Testament picks up where the Old Testament left off, 400 years earlier. The New Testament shows the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy.

Further, Jesus summed up this Law and the Prophets' focus as he described John to the crowds:

Matthew 11:11–15: *11 Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist! Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. 12 From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force. 13 For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John. 14 And if you are willing to accept it, John himself is Elijah who was to come. 15 He who has ears to hear, let him hear.*

Jesus himself confirmed this connection of “Elijah to John” for us.

Violent men take it by force—Later we will see how this phrase comes into play, after the vision ends.

The Law and the Prophets all pointed to Jesus.



Luke 9:32: *Now Peter and his companions had been overcome with sleep;*

This detail is only in the Luke account. The sequence of events seems to be: Jesus takes the three apostles to the mountain and he's praying, and he's praying, and he's praying...he's praying for so long that the apostles fall asleep. When they wake up, they see this vision in progress.

This wasn't the last time the apostles would fall asleep while Jesus was praying. He had a depth of connection to his Father that took time. They were mere men trying to keep up.

Luke 9:32–33: *32 but when they were fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. 33 And as these were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here... **Matthew 17:4:** ...if you wish... **Luke 9:33:** ...let us make three tabernacles: one for you, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah... **Mark 9:6:** For he did not know what to answer; for they became terrified.*

We know Peter was impetuous. We get the impression he was confused and didn't know WHAT to say. The first thing that stumbles out of his mouth is, *We can build three dwelling places for you three!* He's trying to be helpful and wants to serve in some positive way.

He is scared! This would be the expected response of seeing something so dramatic—wanting to serve the Lord Jesus, but not knowing what to do. We will soon read how Jesus was compassionate in his response.



Jesus knew there would be a significant event on this mountain, though it is hard to say what details he was aware of. God's message would come through the likenesses of those who had gone before and through the power of heavenly light showering over Jesus. Thus far, we see the point being **a focus on Jesus as the centerpiece** of all that had come before him.

The whole plan of God rested on Jesus' shoulders. He is the pivot point who makes it all come together. But to do that, he is first going to have to die. This is what the Transfiguration will point to, as we will see shortly.

It's hard to even imagine what Peter, James and John could have been thinking. They are essentially in the presence of God's glory through Jesus! How do you handle that?

As overwhelming as this experience had proven to be, there would be more. What came next?

The next elements of this Transfiguration event would elevate things even higher. So far, the vision showed three faithful individuals talking, albeit in the context of heavenly brightness and majesty. What would be added next would make this event a unique and undeniable display of heavenly love, power and acceptance from God, focused entirely on Jesus.

While Peter was blurting out about building tabernacles in his nervous energy, a bright cloud formed:

Luke 9:34: *While he was saying this, a... **Matthew 17:5:** ...bright... **Luke 9:34:** ...cloud formed and began to overshadow them; and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. **Matthew 17:5-6:** 5 ...and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, This is My beloved son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to him! 6 When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground and were terrified.*

So, first of all, Peter, stop talking and stop guessing what to do next. Just listen to Jesus!

The vividness of this vision is startling and terrifying. Now there is a bright cloud and a booming voice from that cloud.

The bright cloud was full of light and caused them to fear. Perhaps this showed them that even though clouds are generally a literal or symbolic sign of trouble, the brightness was a reminder that God's hand is ultimately over all things.

The voice also provoked fear, and rightfully so! There is nothing like being covered in a bright cloud and then hearing a powerful voice from heaven to remind us how utterly insignificant we are!



**THE VOICE SAYS "LISTEN TO JESUS,"
NOT "LISTEN TO MOSES AND ELIJAH."
ALL OF THE FOCUS IS ON JESUS.**

While these things provoked more fear, Peter described their purpose much later. Let's reread this verse:

2 Peter 1:16: *For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his **majesty** <3168>.*

Peter had been at the Mount of Transfiguration and saw firsthand the *majesty*, the splendor, the magnificence of the picture of Jesus in glory. Immediately after the event happened, the apostles weren't allowed to talk about it. Now, years later, Peter is writing about it.

Peter continues with the only time the Transfiguration scene is recalled in Scripture:

2 Peter 1:17-18: *17 For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to him by the Majestic Glory (God), **This is My beloved son with whom I am well-pleased**— 18 and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with him on the holy mountain.*

Peter describes the event with great enthusiasm, focusing on the majesty and the voice. It's this proclamation from God that makes the purpose of the Transfiguration clear.

This would be the second of three times that God would publicly speak on behalf of Jesus:



At Jesus' baptism:

Mark 1:9-11: *9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 Immediately coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opening, and the spirit like a dove descending upon him; 11 and a voice came out of the heavens: **You are My beloved son, in you I am well-pleased.***

A message from God to Jesus spoken in public!
You are My beloved son, in you I am well-pleased.



On the Mount of Transfiguration:

Matthew 17:5: *While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, **This is My beloved son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to him!***

A message to the disciples about Jesus, *Listen to him!*



After his triumphant procession into Jerusalem where the crowd shouted, Hosanna!

John 12:28: *Father, glorify Your name. Then a voice came out of heaven: **I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.***

Jesus had just ridden victoriously into Jerusalem for all to see and was proclaimed king before hundreds of thousands of people. Would Jesus bask in the pinnacle of that glory?

Hosanna is a Hebrew word, an exclamation of adoration. This could have been a temptation for him to have taken over and saved the people from Roman rule right then.

Some men from Greece asked to speak to Jesus:

John 12:23-24,27-29: *22 Philip came and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip came and told Jesus. 23 And Jesus answered them, saying, **The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24 Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.***

Jesus knew all of this adoration from the people would not last, as his death was imminent.

27 *Now my soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, Father, save me from this hour?...*

Jesus is verbalizing the fact that he is troubled, and he is going to have to die. Even though the people are shouting for him as though he were a king, things are about to change for the worse.

Jesus' human life is drawing to a close and literally the weight of the world is upon his shoulders.

How would Jesus respond? What should he do? How would those masses of people understand the seeming failure of his coming crucifixion?

Jesus never suggested there had to be a different way:

*...But for this purpose I came to this hour. 28 Father, glorify Your name. Then a voice came out of heaven: **I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.** 29 So the crowd of people who stood by and heard it were saying that it had thundered; others were saying, An angel has spoken to him.*



God says, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again. What is He talking about? What was glorified? What will be glorified?



Remember, this is all about a confirmation of Jesus. We suggest, when Jesus was born, the angels in **Luke 2:14 (KJV)** declared, *Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men.*

I have both glorified it...

Why *Glory to God* in Luke? Because the Messiah had been born. God's name had been glorified through Christ when Jesus left the heavens, coming to earth to be born a human being.

And will glorify it again...

Then Jesus is crucified. After his resurrection, **Philippians 2:9-11** says in summation, Jesus was given a name above all names *that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

God had been glorified by Jesus willingly leaving the heavens to become a human being, to begin his journey as Messiah.

Jesus willingly gives up his human life in crucifixion. After his resurrection and ascension, God is again glorified.

In the midst of these two things, God affirms publicly and to Jesus in **John 12:28** that Jesus has both glorified God's name and will glorify it again upon his death and resurrection.

*Father, glorify Your name. Then a voice came out of heaven: **I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.***

This voice from heaven confirmed and extended what it had said the first two times.

- 1 **At Jesus' baptism:**
This is My beloved son in whom I am well pleased to introduce Jesus as the Messiah.
- 2 **On the Mount of Transfiguration:**
Added *...listen to him!* to verify Jesus as the Messiah and the way to life.
- 3 **After his triumphant procession into Jerusalem:**
I have both glorified it and will glorify it through Jesus' sacrifice to confirm Jesus as the Messiah, as the one who brings us the glory of God.

Why were Jesus, Moses and Elijah talking about the crucifixion in the transfiguration scene? Because it all came together. Jesus is the center of the plan. In all three instances, the voice from heaven was a PUBLIC evidence of his mission and his acceptability.

God's powerful, booming voice says, ***I am with him, he is My son. Listen to him and watch what he does to honor MY NAME.***



Jesus was a man.
His life would be freely given
in sacrifice for the sins of Adam,
and therefore, the sins of the world.
His journey towards this sacrifice
was in many ways lonely.
This Transfiguration experience verified
the singular importance of his role
in God's plan **through the vision**
of Moses and Elijah.
It further verified his singular importance
through God's own audible proclamation
of who he was and the authority
God had given him.

This is a very strong and unmistakable message from God to Jesus and the three witnesses.

The further we go with this account, the more dramatic it becomes. God is offering Peter, James and John a glimpse of what majesty looks like!

The terrified apostles are all face down on the ground as a result of God's booming message. What else is going to happen?

We have seen the power in this experience by virtue of the fact that Peter, James and John were seriously afraid three different times. As we have already seen, the big takeaway for them was what Peter wrote so many years later about God's voice proclaiming and confirming Jesus. We see the takeaway for Jesus to be one of strength and focus. Every aspect of this vision verified the authority he had been given to fulfill God's plan for the world.

Let's go back to the apostles, face down and afraid:

Matthew 17:7-9: *7 And Jesus came to them and touched them and said, Get up, and do not be afraid. 8 And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone. 9 As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead.* **Mark 9:10:** *They seized upon that statement, discussing with one another what rising from the dead meant.*

They were instructed not to talk about this vision until Jesus had been resurrected, but they did not understand what Jesus meant by this.

After the fear and awe, Jesus tenderly touches them and tells them to get up, and *do not be afraid*. The vision had vanished, and now there was just Jesus who requested that they keep silent about it for now.

As the apostles are thinking about this experience, they begin to ask questions:

Matthew 17:10: *And his disciples asked him, Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?* **Mark 9:12-13:** *12 And he said to them, Elijah does first come and restore all things. And yet how is it written of the Son of Man that he will suffer many things and be treated with contempt? 13 But I say to you that Elijah has indeed come, and they did to him whatever they wished, just as it is written of him.* **Matthew 17:13:** *Then the disciples understood that he had spoken to them about John the Baptist.*

Earlier we looked at **Matthew 11:12**—*From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force.* What happened to John the Baptist? The wicked definitely killed him. He was taken by force.

As Jesus helped them understand the role John the Baptist played, it also fit into the **Malachi 4:1-6** prophecy—*Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD.* All the pieces specifically come together.

What did Jesus' answer actually mean? The **Mark 9:13** rendering indicated the fulfillment of Elijah's coming through John the Baptist. Jesus followed that up with how he himself would be treated.. *Elijah (John the Baptist) has come and they did not treat him well; nor are they going to treat me well.* He applies the prophecy to events the disciples had experienced.

“Elijah” (John) had come preaching repentance and yet wasn’t able to convert all of Israel.

The Matthew account can be interpreted in a wider manner with another dual application. Let’s look again:

Matthew 17:10–13: *10 And his disciples asked him, Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first? 11 And he answered and said, Elijah is coming and will restore all things; 12 but I say to you that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands. 13 Then the disciples understood that he had spoken to them about John the Baptist.*

Elijah is coming and he already came. How is that possible? Prophecy often has layered meanings. We need to pay attention to those layers to get the richness and depth of the prophecy.

Verse 11: *Elijah is coming*, giving the implication “he” (represented by Jesus’ church—his faithful followers) will also have a future work, to help *restore all things*.

Verse 12: Additionally, *Elijah* (represented by John the Baptist) already came. John was a representation, not a reincarnation, of Elijah. This is an important distinction. Elijah was a prophet who motivated change as did John in his own day. However, John was not able to *restore all things* or convert all people. This is how we know this prophecy also has a future application. This future work fits with the future application within the Malachi prophecy as well. The Matthew rendering adds that Jesus would also be mistreated like John was.

Verse 13: Peter, James and John got the “John the Baptist” connection but apparently the rest was beyond them. This is not a surprise after all that happened during this event! But they did understand that Elijah foreshadowed John the Baptist in their day.

(Jesus told them three times he would be persecuted, he would die and then be raised three days later. Yet when this happened, they were still confused.)

We quote Malachi to support the thought that at the time of Jesus’ second advent, there would be an Elijah-like activity:

Malachi 4:4–6: *4 Remember the law of Moses My servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel. 5 Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. 6 He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.*

We are looking for a future prophetic application. God will send “Elijah” *before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD*. We understand this to refer to the time of trouble we expect in our day, thousands of years after the time it was written. “Elijah” *will restore the hearts of the father... and the hearts of the children*, represented by the faithful followers of Jesus in heaven, who will be engaged with Jesus in the work of restoring the world of mankind in God’s kingdom. This work had a beginning and will have a fruition.

This Malachi prophecy is multi-layered. It had a literal fulfillment in the time of Elijah, which is why it stood as a symbol Malachi could use to prophesy about John the Baptist acting like an “Elijah,” and also to prophesy about a future fulfillment at Jesus’ second advent in our time.

The purpose of the Transfiguration vision:

- To prepare and encourage Jesus for the impending crucifixion—to confirm he was doing what he was supposed to be doing.
- For God to publicly announce He was pleased with Jesus and that the apostles should listen to him.

Luke 9:36–37: *36 ...And they kept silent and reported to no one in those days any of the things which they had seen. 37 On the next day, when they came down from the mountain, a large crowd met him (Jesus).*

They came down from the mountain and a large crowd meets them. This is the crowd where the man has a son with a “demon” that we believe was mental illness (See Episode #1356: “Are There Different Kinds of Evil Spirits?” for more). They are thrust right back to the gospel work of that time. They have just had this incredible Transfiguration vision of something glorious and in the future, and then they come back to the reality of the harshness of life.

With this unique and faith-strengthening experience in hand, the gospel work still needed to be done. It didn’t immediately change the work ahead of them regarding the mission of Jesus. Jesus still had to remain subservient to the will of God and go through the agony of the crucifixion.

The Transfiguration experience happened to strengthen and reaffirm to Jesus that he was doing what he needed to do in this next stage, and that the Father was with him.



The vision on the Mount of Transfiguration restated **God’s clear intentions** of working His plan of salvation through His son Jesus as the culmination of what the Law and the Prophets taught.

This dramatic and powerful restatement would reaffirm Jesus and would give Peter, James and John a rare insight into spiritual things.

Further, this experience based on Malachi 4 would have prophetic implications far down the road related to the second advent of Jesus.

All in all, this experience was yet another proof of Jesus as God’s son and of God’s plan for all of humanity.

This was God's way of encouraging His son to do something remarkably out of the ordinary. Jesus' entire life was spent not in doing his own will as a human being; rather, in doing the will of God. He listened, followed and acted accordingly. As his life came closer and closer to the crucifixion, the weight became greater and greater. But God was with him every step of the way.

He had Moses, Elijah, the Law and all the prophets of the Old Testament speaking to him through their writings. *You're doing the work. You are fulfilling these prophecies; keep going!*

This is My beloved son—listen to him!

**So, what really happened on the Mount of Transfiguration?
For Rick, Jonathan, Julie and Christian Questions...
...Think about it!**

All scriptures cited are from the NASB1995 translation unless otherwise noted.



Next episode
Episode 1370: Will God's Vengeance
Bring the End of the World?



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Bonus Material and Study Questions

The three Gospel accounts:

Matthew 16:28: *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.*

Matthew 17:1–13: *1 Six days later Jesus took with him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves. 2 And he was transfigured before them; and his face shone like the sun, and his garments became as white as light. 3 And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with him. 4 Peter said to Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for you, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah. 5 While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, This is My beloved son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to him! 6 When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground and were terrified. 7 And Jesus came to them and touched them and said, Get up, and do not be afraid. 8 And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone. 9 As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead. 10 And his disciples asked him, Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first? 11 And he answered and said, Elijah is coming and will restore all things; 12 but I say to you that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands. 13 Then the disciples understood that he had spoken to them about John the Baptist.*

Mark 9:1–13: *1 And Jesus was saying to them, Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power. 2 Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and brought them up on a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them; 3 and his garments became radiant and exceedingly white, as no launderer on earth can whiten them. 4 Elijah appeared to them along with Moses; and they were talking with Jesus. 5 Peter said to Jesus, Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three tabernacles, one for you, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah. 6 For he did not know what to answer; for they became terrified. 7 Then a cloud formed, overshadowing them, and a voice came out of the cloud, This is My beloved son, listen to him! 8 All at once they looked around and saw no one with them anymore, except Jesus alone. 9 As they were coming down from the mountain, he gave them orders not to relate to anyone what they had seen, until the Son of Man rose from the dead. 10 They seized upon that statement, discussing with one another what rising from the dead meant. 11 They asked him, saying, Why is it that the scribes say that Elijah must come first? 12 And he said to them, Elijah does first come and restore all things. And yet how is it written of the Son of Man that he will suffer many things and be treated with contempt? 13 But I say to you that Elijah has indeed come, and they did to him whatever they wished, just as it is written of him.*

Luke 9:28–37: *28 Some eight days after these sayings, he took along Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. 29 And while he was praying, the appearance of his face became different, and his clothing became white and gleaming. 30 And behold, two men were talking with him; and they were Moses and Elijah, 31 who, appearing in glory, were speaking of his departure which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. 32 Now Peter and his companions had been overcome with sleep; but when they were fully awake, they saw his glory*

and the two men standing with him. 33 And as these were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three tabernacles: one for you, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah—not realizing what he was saying. 34 While he was saying this, a cloud formed and began to overshadow them; and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. 35 Then a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is My son, My Chosen One; listen to him! 36 And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent, and reported to no one in those days any of the things which they had seen. 37 On the next day, when they came down from the mountain, a large crowd met him.

The three Gospel accounts are from Matthew 17 1–13, Mark 9:1–13, Luke 9:28–37.

We will combine them to include all of the details to the best of our ability:

Matthew 16:28: 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. **Matthew 17:1:** Six days later Jesus took with him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves. **Luke 9:28–29** 28 ...to pray. 29 And while he was praying... **Matthew 17:2:** ...he was transfigured before them... **Luke 9:29:** ...the appearance of his face became different... **Matthew 17:2:** ...and his face shone like the sun... **Mark 9:3:** and his garments became radiant and exceedingly white, as no launderer on earth can whiten them. **Luke 9:30–33:** 30 And behold, two men were talking with him; and they were Moses and Elijah, 31 who, appearing in glory, were speaking of his departure which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. 32 Now Peter and his companions had been overcome with sleep; but when they were fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. 33 And as these were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here;... **Matthew 17:4:** ...if you wish... **Luke 9:33:** ...let us make three tabernacles: one for you, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah... **Mark 9:6:** For he did not know what to answer; for they became terrified. **Luke 9:34:** While he was saying this, a **Matthew 17:5:** bright **Luke 9:34:** cloud formed and began to overshadow them; and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. **Matthew 17:5–9:** 5 ...and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, This is My beloved son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to him! 6 When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground and were terrified. 7 And Jesus came to them and touched them and said, Get up, and do not be afraid. 8 And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone. 9 As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead. **Mark 9:10:** They seized upon that statement, discussing with one another what rising from the dead meant. **Matthew 17:10:** And his disciples asked him, Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first? **Mark 9:12–13:** 12 And he said to them, Elijah does first come and restore all things. And yet how is it written of the Son of Man that he will suffer many things and be treated with contempt? 13 But I say to you that Elijah has indeed come, and they did to him whatever they wished, just as it is written of him. **Matthew 17:13:** Then the disciples understood that he had spoken to them about John the Baptist. **Luke 9:36–37:** 36 ...And they kept silent, and reported to no one in those days any of the things which they had seen. 37 On the next day, when they came down from the mountain, a large crowd met him.

Study QUESTIONS

Ep.1369: What Really Happened on the Mount of Transfiguration?

See:



<https://christianquestions.com/doctrine/1369-mount-of-transfiguration>

*Note: The parallel gospel accounts are found in **Matthew 17:1-13; Mark 9:1-13; Luke 9:28-37**

1. Describe the transfiguration scene on the Mount. Who was there? What happened? What does “transfigured” mean? How was Jesus transfigured – how did he appear in the vision? (Matthew 16:28, 2 Peter 1:16) How does Romans 12:2 apply this same Greek word to the Christian’s experience?
2. How are the Matthew 17:2, “*his face shone like the sun*” and the Malachi 4:2-6 prophecy related?
 - a. How do these prophecies outline the missions of both “Elijahs” (John the Baptist/Jesus’ followers—his church) and Jesus at both his first and second advent? (Matthew 17:10-13, also see page 14)
 - b. How do Mark 9:3 and Isaiah 60:1-3 add to our understanding of these missions?
 - c. Who will oppose them? (Ephesians 2:2)
3. Who were the two men talking to Jesus in the vision? Were these men transformed? What were the Old Testament prophets and John the Baptist (the last prophet before Jesus) promised as their future reward? How do we know they were not promised a heavenly reward? (Luke 9:30-31, Matthew 11:11, John 3:13)
4. Who or what did these two men represent in this vision? How were these two things important:
 - a. What was indicated by them talking about Jesus’ coming sacrifice on the cross? (John 1:45)
 - b. How did they influence Jesus’ teachings? What were they based on? (Matthew 22:35-40)
 - c. In what way did they “speak” to Jesus? How did they inform him? (Luke 24:25-27)
5. How do we know John the Baptist represented Elijah at Jesus’ first advent? What did John attempt to do during his life? Explain if he succeeded or not. (Luke 1:16-17, Malachi 4:6, Matthew 11:11-15)
6. Describe the three times God spoke publicly on behalf of Jesus? What did He say? What was the purpose for each time He spoke? How would this have affected Jesus? (Mark 1:9-11, Matthew 17:5, John 12:28)
7. What was the purpose of the vision on the Mount of Transfiguration? What did it do for Jesus at this critical period in his ministry? What did it do for Peter, James and John, who would go on as spiritual leaders of the apostles and the early Christian church? What would it tell us, (through the prophecies of its foundation in Malachi 4 and Isaiah 60) of our coming experiences and mission?
8. How do you feel transfigured/transformed from your former path? Has the knowledge of God’s plan for you changed your view of what is important in your life? How has God’s declaration of “*This is My beloved son—listen to him!*” reaffirmed your way and strengthened your steps with new determination?