

# WHAT ARE THE MEANING OF THE ELEMENTS IN THE TRANSFIGURATION OF JESUS

## BACKGROUND

Each element in the Transfiguration of Jesus has a symbolic meaning, including the people present and the words they spoke, all of which provides the true insight of the event and allows an exegesis (interpretation) of the event. Thus to really understand the Transfiguration and interpret correctly what the event means, especially for Christians today, including the words of Peter and God the Father's reply, each element needs to be explained, and this begins with an understanding of the prophecies about Messiah found in the Old Testament, along with the Feasts of Passover and Tabernacles (Booths). This is underscored by the relationship of Jesus and his actions to the purpose of each of the Feasts, especially those mentioned.

### Scripture: The Transfiguration of Jesus as found Matthew, Mark and Luke

<b>Matthew 17:1-8</b>	<b>Mark 9:2-8</b>	<b>Luke 9:28-36</b>
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 after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.	28 Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray.
2 And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun,	And he was transfigured before them,	29 And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered,
and his clothes became white as light.	3 and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them.	and his clothing became dazzling white.
3 And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah,	4 And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they	30 And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and

<b>Matthew 17:1-8</b>	<b>Mark 9:2-8</b>	<b>Luke 9:28-36</b>
talking with him.	were talking with Jesus.	Elijah, 31 who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. 32 Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake they saw his glory and the two men who stood 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."	5 And Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah."	33 And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah"—
	6 For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified.	not knowing what he said.
5 He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said,	7 And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud,	34 As he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. 35 And a voice came out of the cloud, saying,
"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." 6 When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. 7 But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear." 8 And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.	"This is my beloved Son; listen to him."	"This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!"
	8 And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw	36 And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found

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<b>Matthew 17:1-8</b>	<b>Mark 9:2-8</b>	<b>Luke 9:28-36</b>
	anyone with them but Jesus only.	alone.  And they kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen.

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## ELEMENTS OF THE TRANSFIGURATION

### **Witnesses: Peter, James and John**

The witness of the transfiguration were Peter, James and John.

Just prior to this experience Jesus promised in Matthew 16:28 that some of his disciples would not die until they saw His glory in the Kingdom – the Shechinah glory of God and this event is the fulfilment of that promise, witnessed by three, as required by the Law to established the truthfulness of the event.

### **Location**

Prior to this event they were in Caesarea Philippi (Mark 8:27) at the foot of Mount Hermon (2814 m high), which is the most likely mount they were on, not Mount Tabor, given by many as the traditional site of the Transfiguration

### **The Shechinah Glory**

Jesus face shone as the sun, and his garments became white as the light (*as no one on earth could bleach them* Mark 9:3), white and dazzling (Luke 9:29).

It was the Shechinah Glory; veiled by a human body – the glory of God shining out of the incarnate Christ, seen by three men.

### **Other people present.**

**Moses** who represented the Law

**Elijah** who represented the Prophets.

In this they represented the purpose of Christ's incarnation: to fulfil the Law and the Prophets. As Matthew 5:17 records: *"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill"*. Indeed, this appears to be the topic of their conversation.

## Words spoken

Moses and Elijah spoke to Jesus about his 'decrease' or 'departure' or 'exit'. Luke 9:30 "...*Moses and Elijah ... spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem (ESV).*" The Greek word *exodus* is used here, is the same word used in English to mean exit, exodus or to depart.

The term *exodos* points to The Exodus of Israel from Egypt, from slavery into freedom. The death of Christ would enable freedom from sin and liberation from the shackles of death.

## Symbolism of the Feasts of Jehovah

Of the Seven Feasts of Jehovah (see: [The seven feasts of Jehovah - A short synopsis](#)) Passover and Feast of Tabernacles are relevant. Jesus came to fulfil the Passover – being the Passover Lamb (John 1:36, 1 Corinthians 5:7, Hebrews 11:28), who died on Passover and rose on the first day of the Feast of First Fruits (Matthew 9:37, 1 Corinthians 15:20, 23), along with the Feast of Tabernacles, which speaks of the Millennial reign of Christ, as King, seated on David's throne (Amos 9, 11 etc.), being saved from the ravages of sin (John 7), and having entered the promised land as set out in Zachariah 14 etc.

## Symbolism of Moses and Elijah

The three, Jesus, Moses and Elijah conversed about the coming death of Jesus in Jerusalem. Thinking about this, it is clear why Moses and Elijah were present; Jesus was fulfilment of the Law and the Prophets. We also note that Moses had died but Elijah had not (he had been translated to heaven in a chariot of fire 2 Kings 2:11).

**Moses** was present to represent the saints that will be resurrected.

**Elijah** was present to represent the saints that will be translated to heaven as immortal beings during the Rapture (changed in "*the twinkling of an eye*" 1 Corinthians 15:52) while they are still living, without having to die first (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

## Death and resurrection leading to freedom and liberty

The death of Jesus and his coming resurrection would mean freedom for Christ from the limitations of his incarnation – he was limited in his use of his divine power.

When resurrected and ascended into heaven His glory would be revealed, which was exposed for a brief moment during this transfiguration.

His resurrection and ascension would free him from living on this earth stained with sin, for it must have been a great weight upon his holiness to deal with sinners every day. In three gospels it is recorded that Jesus said; "*O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you?*" (Matthew 17:17, Mark 9:19, Luke 9:41).

His death and resurrection would free the believer from death and the bondage of sin.

## Peter's interruption

We must first note that before the Transfiguration, Peter said: *"You are the Messiah, the Son of the God, the Living God"* (Mat. 16:16), showing that Peter knew who Jesus was. It is wrong to suppose that Peter did not know that Jesus was superior to both Moses and Elijah. And indeed most sermons on this topic are wrong because they do not consider the Jewish Feasts, which were obligatory and are significant in prophecy. What Peter failed to understand was that timing and the significance of Jesus' death and resurrection.

We also need to understand what Peter was actually saying. He suggested they build three tabernacles, or more rightly tents or booths, of the type used during the Feast of Tabernacles. This was because Peter viewed the Transfiguration as the fulfilment of Zechariah 14, when the Feast of Tabernacles will be re-established during Messianic Kingdom. He sees the Transfigured Christ as commencing the Messianic Kingdom, without realising Jesus needed to die and rise first. Thus Peter's response was right in once sense – Jesus would be King on earth during the Messianic Kingdom and every person on earth will need to observe the Feast of Tabernacles and live in booths/tabernacles for a week and worship the King (Zech. 14:16), but the timing of his request was woefully wrong.

Jesus had to first fulfil the Passover – to die as the first born, which comes before the Feast of Tabernacles; so for this reason the three tabernacles could not be build – but they will be in a time to come.

Thus in summary, Peter was one step ahead of Jesus – his thought was correct, but his timing wrong, thinking the Feast of Tabernacles was at hand, he wants to build tabernacles, when in fact it was the dawn of the final Passover, at which Jesus would die as the perfect lamb of God, following which He would rise again on the third day.

## The words of God the Father

Matthew 17:5 records God's response: *While he [Peter] 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!"* God the Father speaks audibly to all three men. This is the second time God the Father speaks audibly to men. The first was at Jesus' baptism (Mathew 3:17), the second, at His Transfiguration; and the third, at the end of His ministry (John. 12:28).

God says three things:

1. God affirms what Peter had confessed: Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and the Living One.
2. God is well pleased with Jesus, because Jesus is doing what the Father wills
3. God demands the three (and all people) listen to His son – "Hear Him"

The final imperative follows the Law the Prophets; it is now the Son that must be listened to, having the final revelation of God's plan of salvation (Hebrews 1:1-3)

## THEOLOGY OF THE TRANSFIGURATION

1. The transfiguration authenticates the Messiahship of Jesus Christ. Even though he had been rejected by the Jews, and eventually all by all men being forsaken by his disciples (Mark 14:50), he was accepted by God the Father: God was well pleased with Jesus. Indeed, God was pleased with his Messiahship.
2. The transfiguration pointed to the time when some would see the glory of the Son of Man on earth, in the Kingdom, thus pointing to the earthly Messianic Kingdom. It thus anticipates the coming earthly kingdom, where Christ is King. Peter reflects on this event in his second letter: 2 Peter 1:16 – 21 and highlights that these events were true, and not false information, and furthermore the event confirms the prophetic words of God.
3. The Transfiguration can be seen as a guarantee that all prophecies will be fulfilled and thus all Scriptures will be fulfilled.
  - a. This departure as discussed by Jesus, Moses and Elijah (Luke 9:31) would fulfill the Law and Prophets which pointed to the necessary death of Messiah.
  - b. The event had three eyewitnesses, (and recorded three times in the Scriptures) attesting to its truthfulness. Peter writes: *And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts;* (2 Peter 1:19), meaning that Peter believed this was the fulfillment of the prophecies.
4. It is the evidence of life after death by the presence of Moses (who died) and Elijah (who was translated as those alive at the rapture will be) at the transfiguration.
5. It shows a cost to Jesus – he had to veil his glory – once at his birth, and again to end the transfiguration in order to prepare for, and to die for the sin of the world.
6. The veiling of his glory reveals the extent of His love.

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Questions | *What are the meanings of each element in Jesus' Transfiguration*



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