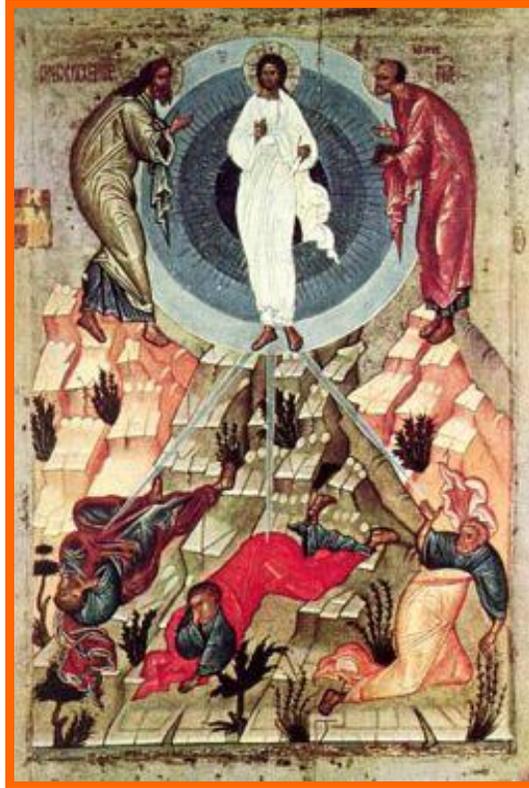


The Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-6)

Slide 1



¹After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. ²There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. ³Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.

⁴Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah."

⁵While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"

⁶When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. ⁷But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid." ⁸When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.

⁹As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

Introduction

The Transfiguration of Jesus is an event reported by the Synoptic Gospels in which Jesus was transfigured upon a mountain (Matthew 17:1-6, Mark 9:1-8, Luke 9:28-36). Jesus becomes radiant, speaks with Moses and Elijah, and is called "Son" by God. The transfiguration put Jesus on par with the two preeminent figures of Judaism: Moses and Elijah. It also supports his identity as the Son of God.

The original Greek uses the word "metamorphothe" (from which we get the English word metamorphosis) which was translated into Latin as Trans Figura, the changing of appearance or of the body itself.

In keeping with the Messianic secret, Jesus tells the witnesses not to tell others what they saw. The Messianic Secret is a phrase that refers to Jesus having commanded his followers not to reveal to others that he is the Messiah in certain passages of the New Testament.

An example is Mark 8:27-30:

²⁷*Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?"*

²⁸*They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."*

²⁹*"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"*

Peter answered, "You are the Christ.[a]"

³⁰*Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.*

Footnotes:

[a] Mark 8:29 Or Messiah. "The Christ" (Greek) and "the Messiah" (Hebrew) both mean "the Anointed One."

Context

Jesus has just told his disciples he must go to Jerusalem to suffer and die. Peter says to him this must not happen to him. Jesus says to him: "Get behind me Satan". (Matthew 16:21-23)

In Matthew's Gospel after the Transfiguration Jesus starts his journey towards Jerusalem.

The Gospel Accounts

The Gospels state that Jesus led three of his apostles - Peter, John the Apostle, and James the Great - to pray at the top of a mountain. Once at the top, Jesus became transfigured, his face shining like the sun, and his clothes a brilliant white. They state that Elijah and Moses suddenly appeared with Jesus and talked with him; Matthew and Mark do not say what the conversation was about, but Luke states that it was about Jesus' future death.

Once they had spoken with each other, the Gospels say that a bright cloud overshadowed them (Luke also says they entered into the cloud), and a voice from the cloud proclaimed, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," paralleling a similar event during the Baptism of Jesus. However, this time the voice adds, "Listen to him."

Moses and Elijah have been interpreted to represent the Law (Moses) and the Prophets (Elijah) respectively, and their recognition and conversation with Jesus symbolizing how Jesus fulfills "the law and the prophets":

Matthew 5:17-19:

¹⁷"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. ¹⁹Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

In the narrative, after the cloud dissipates, Elijah and Moses disappear, and Jesus and the three Apostles head down the mountain, Jesus telling his Apostles to keep the event a secret until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

2 Peter and the Gospel of John briefly allude to the event in their writings (2 Peter 1:16-18, John 1:14). Peter describes himself as an eyewitness "of his sovereign majesty":

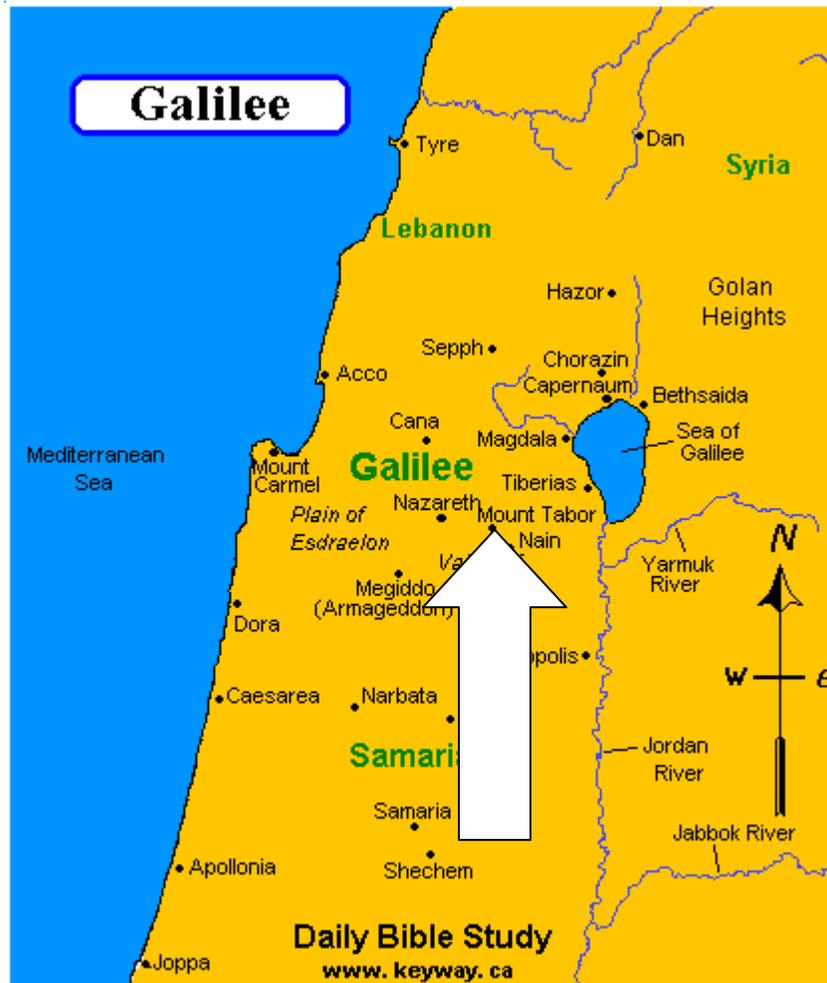
2 Peter 1:16-18:

¹⁶We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." ¹⁸We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.

The Location of the Transfiguration

Slide 2

Tradition states that the Transfiguration took place on Mount Tabor. Mount Tabor is a mountain in Galilee, located about 6 miles / 10 kilometers east of Nazareth and 11 miles / 18 kilometers west of The Sea Of Galilee. It has a height of 1,840 feet / 560 meters high, overlooking the Valley of Jezreel, it served as a boundary point between the tribes of Issachar, Naphtali and Zebulun. Jesus would have been very familiar with Mount Tabor, since He grew up within sight of it in Nazareth.



Slide 3



Mount Tabor

Slide 4 and Slide 5



Aerial view of the Church of the Transfiguration on the summit of Mount Tabor

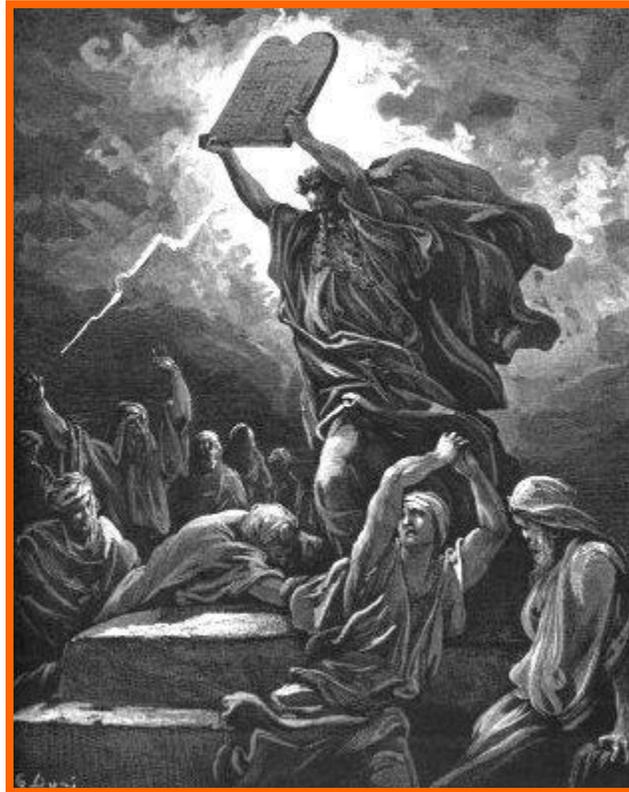
Moses

Slide 6

A great Hebrew prophet and legislator, and son of Amram of the Levitical tribe. He was born in Egypt, about 1570 B.C. In pursuance of a royal command that all male infants of Hebrew birth should be destroyed, Moses, to escape this fate, was laid in a basket among a clump of bulrushes on the banks of the Nile, and was discovered there by the daughter of Pharaoh, who adopted him as her son.

When he became a man, Moses began to form plans for the deliverance of the Hebrews from bondage. He murdered an Egyptian who had been abusing a Hebrew slave, and fled to Midian, where he served as a shepherd until his 80th year, when the Lord commanded him to guide the children of Israel out of captivity into the Land of Canaan.

He guided them through the Red Sea into the wilderness, and became their apostolic chief and law giver. After appointing Joshua as his successor, Moses died on Mount Pisgah, in sight of the Promised Land, at the age of 120.



Moses with the 10 Commandments

Jesus, the New Moses

There are multiple parallels and allusions in the Transfiguration to associate Jesus with Moses. Among these:

- The fact that the experience takes place on a mountain recalls Moses at Horeb, in the Sinai Desert.
- The triad of Peter, James, and John may be parallel to Exodus 24:1, when Moses takes Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu with him to the mountain. However, there are also seventy elders present in that context, and only Moses himself is allowed to ascend.
- The transfiguration's most obvious parallel is Exodus 34:29-35. Here, Moses comes down from the mountain with the skin of his face shining from being in God's presence. This caused the people to be afraid (like Mark 9:6), so Moses began wearing a veil over his face in public.
- The cloud, of course, is parallel to the shekinah cloud that hovered over the tabernacle and led the Israelites through the wilderness, serving as a constant reminder of God's presence. The combination of Peter's "tabernacles" with the appearance of the cloud immediately thereafter reinforces this association.
- Just as Christ and the three apostles were "overshadowed" with a cloud, Moses was covered in cloud atop Mount Horeb (Exodus 24:15-16). Also, Matthew's "bright" cloud might be similar to the fiery appearance of the Horeb cloud (Exodus 24:17).
- The "six days" that lead up to the transfiguration in Matthew and Mark remind one of Exodus 24:15-18, in which Moses ascends the mountain and a cloud covers it for six days before God speaks on the seventh.

Outside of the transfiguration context, Matthew especially draws attention to Jesus as the new Moses, the fulfillment of the Deut. 18:18-19 prophecy:

"¹⁸ I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. ¹⁹ If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account."

Other parallels include:

- In the birth narrative, the baby Jesus goes to Egypt and has to escape the clutches of Herod, who, like Pharaoh, orders that baby boys be killed.
- In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches with authority, expounding on the ten commandments and other aspects of the law.
- Jesus gives people miraculous bread, which corresponds to manna in the desert.

The list could go on and on...

Elijah

Slide 7

Elijah was a prophet in Israel in the 8th and 9th century BC. He appears in the Bible and the Qur'an. According to the Books of Kings, Elijah raised the dead, miraculously demonstrated that Yahweh (and not Baal) is God, and was taken into heaven on a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:11). Based on a prophecy in Malachi, Jews await his return as the harbinger of the Messiah.

Malachi 4:1-5

¹ *"Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire," says the LORD Almighty. "Not a root or a branch will be left to them.* ² *But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall.* ³ *Then you will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things," says the LORD Almighty.*

⁴ *"Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel.*

⁵ *"See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes.*

Slide 8



Elijah is taken up to Heaven

Jesus, Elijah (and more Moses) Parallels

- Jesus himself was confused with Elijah (Matt. 16:14, Mark 6:15). Jews at the time expected a return of Elijah associated with the coming of the Messiah.
- In Matthew and Mark, immediately following the transfiguration, Jesus speaks to the apostles about John the Baptist being the new Elijah:

Matthew 17:10-13

¹⁰The disciples asked him, "Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?"

¹¹Jesus replied, "To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things. ¹²But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands." ¹³Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist.

- Elijah and Jesus raised people from the dead (Elijah - The Widows's son (1 Kings 17:17-24) ; Jesus – Lazarus)
- Elijah and Jesus were attended to by Angels (1 Kings 19:5-7)
- Moses and Elijah are similar to Jesus in regard to their mysterious deaths. Elijah did not die, but was taken into heaven (2 Kings 2:11). It was prophesied that he would return (cf. above Malachi 4:1-5). And Moses is said to have been buried by God, so no one knew the location of his tomb (Deuteronomy 34:5-6).
- Both Moses and Elijah experienced theophanies on a mountain (Horeb, to be exact, for both of them – cf. 1 Kings 19 for Elijah, God was in the gentle wind).
- Jesus, Moses, and Elijah spent 40 days in the desert.

Slide 9



Mount Horeb, Sinai Desert

Slide 10



Christian Commemorations of the Transfiguration

Slide 11



The upper part of The Transfiguration (1520) by Raphael, depicting Christ miraculously discoursing with Moses and Elijah

In the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Feast of the Transfiguration commemorates this event. It is one of the twelve Great Feasts in the liturgical year of the Eastern Orthodox Church and is observed by it on 6th August. Traditionally, fruit is brought to church to be blessed on this day. The Transfiguration falls during the Dormition Lent, but fish, wine and oil are allowed to be consumed on this day in recognition of the feast.

The Dormition of the Theotokos is the Eastern Orthodox commemoration of the "falling asleep" or death of Mary, the mother of Jesus. It is celebrated on 15th August as the Feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God. It is preceded by a two-week fast from meat, dairy and oil.

The Roman Catholic Church also observes the feast on 6th August, as do the churches of the Anglican Communion.

