



Transfiguration

Matthew Chapter 17



The transfiguration of Jesus on “a high mountain” is familiar depiction of a moment-

ous event. The disciples left Caesarea Philippi and were heading toward Jerusalem after being taught their Master had to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hand of the elders, chief priests and scribes. Things that would lead to His death on the cross. In response, Peter takes the Lord aside and rebukes Jesus, “God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to you!” Jesus response, “Get behind me Satan...” probably got Peter’s attention. Six days later, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John to “a high mountain by themselves.” The Bible is silent as to the location of the Mount of Transfiguration. Traditionally, there are two mounts identified as possible locations. One is Mount Hermon, which would be the closest to Caesarea Philippi, rises to a peak of 9,232 feet and is the highest mount in the region. The other is Mount Tabor, depicted in the pictures above, was located on the Via Maris a connector road to Damascus. Even though it is only 1,886 feet in elevation, it was a historically strategic “high ground” and would have been on the way to Jerusalem.

Jesus, Peter, James and John are on the mountain, alone and Jesus was transfigured before them. What had been hidden is now apparent to the three disciples. In that moment, Jesus’ face shown like sunlight and His garments became as white light. They were given a glimpse of Christ’s glory, “the glory of God’s one and only Son, who came from the Father full of grace.” Then Moses and Elijah appear to them, talking to Him. This encounter is amazing! There have been many articles, opinions and commentary on why these two men were with Jesus and what they were talking about. It’s interesting, Moses, the mediator of the soon to be obsolete covenant between God and His people, is standing in the promised land, on the mountain, talking to Jesus, who was about to fulfill all prophecy and establish a new covenant between Himself and his people. And Elijah the prophet, who confronted kings, who confronted and destroyed the prophets of Baal, who went to heaven in a chariot of fire and did not taste death were in the presence of the Lord but from this time on prophets will no longer be necessary because “in these last days” God “has spoken to us in His Son”. One the great Law giver, the other the preeminent prophet were talking to Jesus about “His departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.” (Luke 9:31)

Peter’s initial reaction seems to be fear, “Lord, is it good for us to be here”. He seems to miss the significance of moment and suggests the three apostles build three tabernacles one for Jesus, Moses and Elijah. Those structures would have been reminiscent of what the Israelites lived in during the period immediately after the Exodus. (Lev 23:33-43). “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, listen to Him.” The shekinah glory of God surrounded them, and God speaks from within it. The word shekinah is not in the Bible. Jewish Rabbis created the word which literally means “he caused to dwell” and traditionally refers to the active presence of God. We see it in Exodus 13:21 as the Lord goes before the Israelites after they delivered from Egypt; We see it Numbers 9: 15-23 where the cloud covered the tabernacle, the tent of the testimony. We see it on the road to Damascus as Jesus confronts Paul in Acts 9:3-8. The disciples react in fear, cover their faces and fall to the ground. It is reminiscent of the Israelites reaction in Exodus 19:18-21, where God appears to the nation and they are so afraid the people tell Moses, “Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us lest we die.” We do not know how long the disciples remained fearfully prostrate but Jesus touches them and bids them to “Arise and, do not be afraid”. Looking up they see nothing but the sky, mountain and Jesus. Moses and Elijah were gone, the glory that shown in Jesus face and garments were once again concealed but what they had witnessed was burnt into their memory. A memory Peter records some 30 years later in his second epistle. 2 Peter 1:16-18)

Here, between two predictions of His suffering and death (Mat. 16:21; 17:22-23), God provides assurance and hope in the midst of the darkness. “Most Christians know of “mountaintop experiences,” encounters with God so rich that we want them to last forever. Such experiences are gifts of the Lord’s grace and foretastes of the coming age. But they are not meant to last on this side of glory. Our desire ought not to be like Peter’s desire in the transfiguration—to prolong our mountaintop experiences. Instead, we must call others to meet God not on a mountaintop but through faith in Christ alone.”(quote from Ligonier website).

1. Where did they go after they departed Caesarea Philippi? What happened six days after their departure? Who did Jesus take with Him? Who did Jesus talk to and what did they talk about? Why were the other two present on the mountain?

2. What was Peter's response to what he saw? What happened while Peter was speaking and how did Peter, James and John react? What did God say and is it familiar and what did God tell them to do? How did the disciples reaction to Jesus, Moses, and Elijah differ from their reaction upon hearing God's voice? Why?

3. What did Jesus do after this encounter (7)? What did the disciples see when they looked up (8)? Why did Jesus take these three men with Him? What did Jesus tell them to do? Why? When could they break their silence? Why? What question did the 3 disciples have and what do we learn from Jesus answer?

4. Describe in your own words the events depicted in verses 14 – 23. What was the man's request? Who did he initially take his son to and what was the result? How would you describe Jesus reaction in verse 17? What did the disciples ask and what was Jesus response? What does Jesus tell the disciples in verses 22-23?

5. Who did "those who collected the two-drachma tax" go to, what did they ask and what was the disciple's response? What was the two-drachma tax? What was Jesus question to the disciple, what was his answer and what was Jesus response?