

The Bible speaks of two comings of Jesus. At His first coming, Jesus was a servant, bringing salvation to fallen men. When He comes again, He will come in glory as a sovereign King to judge and rule the world. The first time Jesus came, the world mocked and ignored Him; the next time He comes the whole earth will see Him and every man, woman, and child will bow before Him as Lord of Lords and King of Kings. These two events are the focus of biblical prophecy.

In the Gospel of Luke, the first mention of Jesus' return comes from the mouth of Jesus Himself. In Luke 9:26 He says, "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory. . ."

In the previous context, Peter identified Jesus as the Messiah of God. Jesus then told the disciples that He must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and scribes. Then He will be killed and be raised up on the third day. The disciples were in shock. They surely assumed that if the Messiah were to die, the hope of the kingdom coming was gone; however, they would come to learn that even death could not stop the Messiah or the advancement of the kingdom.

9:27 "But I say to you truthfully, there are some of those standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God."

The "but" of verse 27 draws a contrast to the preceding verse, between the experience of those who are ashamed of Jesus at His coming and the experience of others (i.e. the disciples in their lifetime) (Marshall, 377-378).

Luke 9:27 is difficult, as seen by the many interpretations given for this verse. Some liberal scholars think that this is referring to Jesus' Second Coming and that Jesus was mistaken. "But this does not fit the language used. If some will not die *before* (or until) the event in question, the implication seems to be that they will die after it, which is impossible of the *parousia* [the Second Coming]" (Morris, 187). The liberal position is based on the belief that the Bible and Christ are fallible. For those who do not hold this opinion, the obvious refutation of this view is that had Jesus been speaking of the Second Coming, then He would have come again before they died. He didn't, so we know that wasn't what He was talking about.

Many others see verse 27 fulfilled at the transfiguration in verses 28-36; however, when parallel accounts are read, it is hard to see how this could be so. Mark says, "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*" (Mk. 9:1); Matthew 16:28 says, ". . . until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom." If the transfiguration happened *after* the kingdom of God came in power (Mk. 9:1) where is the evidence of a change? Furthermore, it seems overly dramatic to say, "some shall not taste death" when speaking of an event that happened only a week later (Garland, 390).

There are other interpretations as well.

To "see the kingdom of God" means to experience the kingdom (Marshall, 378). Luke frequently mentions that the power of the kingdom was already being experienced to a degree. In Luke 10:9, Jesus

told the apostles that when they healed people they could say, "the kingdom of God has come near to you." In 11:20 Jesus said, "If I cast out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you." In 17:21, He said, "The kingdom of God is in your midst." However, in Luke 9:27 it seems obvious that Jesus is talking about something future, a decisive stage in history, that will be recognizable beyond what they had experienced so far.

Having narrowed down the options, it seems most likely that Jesus is speaking of the events that follow the resurrection. It was after the resurrection that Jesus was declared both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36), was exalted to the right hand of God - a position of messianic authority (Acts 2:33; Eph. 1:19-23) - and displayed His authority by sending the Holy Spirit. It was also then that great numbers of both Jews and Gentiles believed. These are concrete evidences that the messianic era had come, that the kingdom of God *had come with power*" (Mk. 9:1). The kingdom that was inaugurated after the resurrection will be consummated when Jesus comes again.

9:28 Some eight days after these sayings, He took along Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray.

Eight days pass after Jesus' announcement in verse 27. It was then that Jesus took along Peter, John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. The mountain is not named so we must conclude that the place of the event was not significant; however, one popular suggestion is that it is Mt. Hermon near Caesarea Philippi where Peter confessed that Jesus was the Christ (Edwards, 280).

Peter, James, and John formed Jesus' inner circle of disciples; as such, they were often invited by the Lord to share more closely in some experiences with Him. In Luke 8:51, when Jesus healed Jairus' daughter, He did not allow anyone to enter with Him, except Peter, John and James. In Mark 14:33, He took Peter, James and John with Him when He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane just prior to His arrest. In Luke 9, they were invited to see Jesus' glory.

According to the law, three witnesses provided credible testimony. Deuteronomy 19:15 says, "Anything that is stated to be true must be confirmed in the mouth of two or three witnesses."

9:29 And while He was praying, the appearance of His face became different, and His clothing became white and gleaming.

The disciples were sleeping while Jesus prayed (9:32). They were probably physically exhausted from all the activity, but Jesus had also told them that He was going to be killed, so the stress was probably taking a toll on their bodies, as well.

While they were sleeping, the appearance of Jesus' face changed and His clothing became white and gleaming (9:29). Matthew says He was transfigured (Matt. 17:2); the Greek verb Matthew uses is *metamorphoo* (μεταμορφόω); a metamorphosis took place; Jesus went through a complete change of form. The apostles had known Jesus as a man. He had a physical body that looked like every other human being. He grew hungry, weary, and got thirsty just like everyone else they knew. But all of a sudden there was a metamorphosis. Jesus' essential *nature* didn't change, but His *appearance* did.

Matthew says His face blazed like the sun (Matt. 17:2). And Luke writes, "His clothing became white and gleaming." His clothing did not just become as white as clothing could be (Mk. 9:3); it became brilliant.

It should be made clear that the three disciples were not seeing light shining on Jesus; they were seeing the glory of God shining out of Jesus. His face was like the sun and His body blazed like lightning coming through His clothing. In verse 32 this radiant light is said to be "His glory." In 2 Peter 1:16, Peter says it was a vision of Jesus' majesty.

Three passages are particularly useful in understanding the transfiguration.

1. *Philippians 2:6-8*

Philippians 2:6-8 says of Jesus that "although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

In English the word "form" can simply mean outward appearance. For example, we could speak of a statue that was made in the form of man. Though it does not possess the attributes of man (i.e. it cannot walk, think, talk, etc.), outwardly it looks like a man. However, "form" in Greek had a more substantial meaning than this. "Form" included external appearance, but also referred to the essential nature and attributes of the thing. In other words, something said to be in the form of man would possess all the characteristics and inner nature of a human. In essence it would be human. Jesus was said to exist in the form of God and therefore possessed both the outward appearance (the glory— Jn. 17:5) and inward essence of God. What Paul asserts then, when he says that Christ Jesus existed in the "form of God," is that He had all those characterizing qualities which make God God, the presence of which constitutes God, and in the absence of which God does not exist. He who is "in the form of God" is God.

Though the Son of God was exalted far above all creation as God, He did not regard "equality with God something to be grasped" (2:6). That is, He did not view His position as something that He had to keep or hold on to; "instead of holding on to His own interrupted glory, He chose to set it aside" (Begg). He "emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, being made in the likeness of man."

In just what sense Jesus "emptied Himself" is greatly debated. Some say that He laid aside His divine attributes, but this hardly seems possible for if He did so, He would cease to be God. It is more probable that "to empty Himself" meant He "gave up all His rights" as God (Carson, 45), including the external appearance of deity. It means He divested Himself of the privileges that he enjoyed as God. He depended upon the Father to guide Him, and the Holy Spirit to empower Him. He lived as a man.

This is not saying that He gave up His essence as God, rather, it means that as God He took upon Himself human flesh – He added the internal nature and outward characteristics of man. He exchanged one mode of existence for another; instead of displaying Himself as God with all His external glory, He lived as a bondservant and served His creation.

We may say, then, that the eternal Son, existing in the form of God—robed with the glory of Deity in its external manifestation, possessing and exercising all the incommunicable functions of the true God—counted not this being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but with loving condescension emptied Himself, taking servant-form; and as a result of this one act His whole earthly life became the life of a bond-servant, in which he does nothing, speaks nothing, knows nothing *by Himself*: but all is under the power and direction of the Father through the Holy Spirit. In this sense, during His earthly sojourn, the “external glory” was utterly laid aside. “He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.” But there was another, an *inner* glory: and this glory, of which the external glory had been indicative, was still present, though veiled by the servant-form. He did not—it is not too much to say that He could not—empty Himself of this. And to those who came to know Him because their eyes were enlightened by the Spirit, His blessed inner glory became apparent in spite of the veil of flesh, so that they could witness that, “the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father) full of grace and truth.

(Alva J. McClain, THE DOCTRINE OF THE KENOSIS IN PHILIPPIANS 2:5-8; TMSJ 9/1 [Spring 1998], p. 93)

2. John 1:14

John gives a more picturesque way of stating what Paul had said in Philippians 2 (above).

John 1:14 says of Jesus, “the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

The word translated as “dwelt” literally means “pitched a tent” or “tabernacled.” In the OT, the tabernacle was erected at God's command so that His dwelling place might be established among His people (Ex. 25:8; 40:34 & w/ the temple I Ki. 8:10f.). The tent was covered by a cloud and the glory of YHWH filled it providing a visible manifestation of God's presence (Ex. 40:34 ff.). When God wanted Israel to move, the glory of God ascended from the tabernacle and led the people as a cloud of light in the day, and as a pillar of fire of light at night (Exo. 40:36-38). Later, when the temple was completed in 1 Kings 8:10-11, the glory of God came down into the Holy of Holies.

According to John 1:14, the place of God's dwelling is the flesh of Jesus. Jesus also calls His body the Temple in John 2:19-21. When John says, “we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father” he is drawing an obvious connection to the glory of God associated with the tabernacle. God who formerly manifested His presence among His people in the tent which Moses pitched, now, in a fuller sense, has taken up residence in the man Jesus (Zech. 2:10, 11; Ezek. 37:27-28).

At the transfiguration, the three apostles saw in Christ the same glorious, blazing light that filled the tabernacle and the temple. This is not God's glory that lingered on Jesus as it had on the face of Moses (Exo. 33:17 ff.; 34:29ff.); it was glory from within Him that evidenced His divine nature. The manifested glory shining from Jesus is the glory of the Father shared with His only Son.

In Matthew's record of the transfiguration, he also mentions the brightness of the cloud (Matt. 17:5) which is reminiscent of the Shekinah glory of God in the Old Testament.

3. Hebrews 1:3

Hebrews 1:3 says that the Son of God is "the radiance of God's glory."

"Radiance" is something that shines forth or is emitted from something else. As the rays of the sun cannot be separated from the sun itself, neither can the glory of God in Christ be separated from God. Piper says, "We see the sun by means of seeing the rays of the sun. So we see God the Father by seeing Jesus. The rays of the sun arrive here about eight seconds after they leave the sun, and the round ball of fire that we see in the sky is the image—the exact representation—of the sun; not because it is a painting of the sun, but because it is the sun streaming forth in its radiance."

If Christ possesses God's glory, it can only be because He is God (John 1:14; 2:11; 17:22; 2 Cor. 4:4; 2 Pet 1:16-18 [cf. Matt. 17:1 ff.] Mk. 13:26). Hebrews 1:3 is saying that Jesus is the sending forth, He is the shining out, of God. He expresses God's attributes, God's essence, and God's nature to us. In 2 Corinthians 4:6 Paul said that the glory of God shines to us in the face of Jesus Christ. He is the Lord of glory (1 Cor. 2:8).

Although God's glory in Christ was usually veiled, people could see it displayed through Jesus' miraculous works (Jn. 2:11). However, at the transfiguration, it was uniquely unveiled before Peter, James, and John.

Before His death, Jesus prayed: "Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was" (Jn. 17:5). That prayer was answered after His ascension into heaven. In Revelation 1:13-16, John (who was a witness of the transfiguration) had a vision of Christ. In that vision he said, "His face was like the sun shining in its strength. . . His eyes were like a flame of fire. . . and His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace." When Jesus appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus, He appeared in blazing glory (Acts 9:3-5). Jesus' glory was so intense that it literally blinded Paul, and resulted in him being led by others to Damascus. When Jesus returns, Matthew 25:31 says He will come "in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne." So great is His glory that the New Jerusalem "has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and *its lamp is the Lamb*" (Rev. 21:23). The sun will be embarrassed over how dim it will appear before the glory of God. Isaiah 24:23 says, "Then the moon will be confounded and the sun ashamed, for the LORD of hosts reigns on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and his glory will be before His elders."

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

Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus.

Both Moses and Elijah had eschatological roles: Moses was the model for the eschatological prophet (Deut. 18:18) and Elijah the forerunner (Mal. 4:5-6; Matt. 3:1-3; 11:7-10; 17:9-13). Both had strange ends*; both were men of God in times of transition, the first to introduce the covenant and the second to work for renewed adherence to it. Both experienced a vision of God's glory, one at Sinai (Exo. 31:18) and the other at Horeb (1 Ki. 19:8). Now, however, the glory is Jesus' glory, for it is He who is transfigured and who radiates the glory of Deity. Both suffered rejection of various kinds. Together they may well summarize the Law and the Prophets. This is more plausible when we recall that these two figures very rarely appear together in Judaism or in the New Testament. All these associations gain importance as the narrative moves on and Jesus is perceived to be superior to Moses and Elijah and, indeed, to supersede them (Carson, Matthew, 385).

[*NOTE: Carson simply says of Moses and Elijah that "both had strange ends." At the death of Moses, Satan contended with Michael for his body (Jude 1:9) and in the end Moses was buried by God in a place that no one knows (Deut. 34:6). Elijah never saw death, but was taken up into heaven by the chariot of God (2 Ki. 2:11).]

In Luke 9:31 it says that Moses and Elijah were conversing with Jesus about His departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. The Greek word for departure is "exodus." Moses of the Exodus and Elijah were talking about Jesus' exodus from this earth; they were discussing His death, affirming that this was God's plan.

9:32 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.

The disciples had slept, but when they woke up fully (which indicates it took a little time to awaken them), they saw Jesus' glory and the two men standing with Him.

9:33 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.

Peter recognizes that this is the best experience of his life; he says, "Master, it is good for us to be here." He wants to make three tabernacles, three dwelling places, so they can stay there permanently. He wants to honor these great people.

9:34 While he was saying this, a cloud formed and began to overshadow them; and they were afraid as they entered the cloud.

9:35 Then a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!"

9:36 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.

Matthew 17:5-9:

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."

The mention of Moses, *exodus* (ἔξοδος), glory, tabernacle, and now "cloud," are all words that draw strong associations to the OT. The cloud that overshadowed them was surely the glory of God. Matthew stresses this by calling it a "bright" cloud.

The fear that the disciples felt was the same fear that Moses experienced when he had completed the tabernacle. Exodus 40:35 says, "Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle."

They then heard a voice that came out of the cloud testifying, "This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!"

The scene ends with Jesus alone.

Some people wonder what was the purpose of the transfiguration.

First, it was an event that was Jesus' greatest self-disclosure to the disciples. The glory of God had shone from Him and the voice of God the Father testified of His approval of Jesus and of Jesus' identity.

Secondly, while the transfiguration does not fulfill the promise in 9:27, it is related to 9:26, when Jesus said He will come in glory. Although they did not see His glorious return, they did get a glimpse, or a preview, of His Second Coming glory at the transfiguration. They did not completely understand what had taken place, but after the resurrection they would. This experience instilled confidence and hope in the days that followed Jesus' ascension. Peter would remember it for life and declare to others, "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. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, 'This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased' -- and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain" (2 Pet. 1:16-18). They had seen Jesus as the powerful, majestic, glorious, messianic king and they knew beyond doubt that someday He would return in glory just as He said He would.