

Some Thoughts on Jesus' Transfiguration

1. On the Mount of Transfiguration Peter, James, and John received a preview of heavenly glory. They were privileged to see a display of Jesus' divine glory.
2. No one knows exactly where this unusual event took place. There is a tradition that says it was Mount Tabor, but that is extremely unlikely because Tabor was inhabited at that time. Another possibility is Mount Hermon, farther to the north. This mountain is 3 kilometres high and is snow covered all year, but Jesus and His three disciples could have been on one of the slopes of that mountain. We must admit, however, that we just don't know exactly where this unique revelation took place, and the exact location really doesn't make any difference.
3. On a number of special occasions, Jesus took only these three disciples with Him. On this occasion, Jesus wanted them to serve as witnesses who, in due time, could tell the world what they saw and heard there. The testimony of two or three witnesses is sufficient to establish the facts of any situation, so Jesus left the other nine disciples behind.
4. On that mountain, Jesus was transfigured. The Greek word for this transfiguration is the source of the English word *metamorphosis*. We use that word to describe the stages an insect passes through as it becomes a butterfly, but that process does not adequately describe what happened to Jesus here. "*His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.*" This reminds us of the brightness of Moses' face when he came down from Mount Sinai, but there Moses was only reflecting God's glory. It reminds us of the glory of the Lord that shone around the shepherds at Bethlehem on the night of Jesus' birth and of the bright, shining angel at Jesus' tomb on Easter morning. Here it was simply the way that Jesus' divine glory made itself visible. The humble Jesus would endure the depths of his humiliation in the near future, and here Peter, James, and John were prepared to face Jesus' suffering and death by being reassured that He was the Son of God carrying out His mission for the redemption of the world.
5. Suddenly, Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus. Evidently the three disciples recognised Moses and Elijah right away because God gave them that knowledge. Moses and Elijah discussed with Jesus His approaching suffering and death and resurrection, which would also reassure the disciples that Jesus gave Himself into the hands of His enemies knowingly and deliberately (see Luke 9:31).
6. We cannot say exactly why Moses and Elijah appeared rather than some other patriarchs or prophets, but we must agree that these two made a very convincing case for Jesus. Moses was the great lawgiver, and Elijah was one of the greatest of the prophets of the Old Testament. It is interesting to note that Elijah had been taken bodily to heaven, and now he appeared with Jesus in glory. When Moses had died at the age of 120 years, we are told in Deuteronomy 34:6 that God buried him in Moab and that no one knows where his grave is, and Jude makes an interesting but mysterious reference to the body of Moses in verse 9 of his epistle, where we are told that the archangel Michael disputed with the devil about Moses' body. We don't know when that happened or exactly what took place. It

seems possible, however, that the archangel took Moses' body to heaven. That would seem to fit very nicely with this account of Moses and Elijah appearing bodily with Jesus. We realise, of course, that God could resurrect anyone He might please. The important point to note here is that both of these Old Testament men of God were aware of Jesus' impending death. They also understood the reason for it, and they could strengthen and encourage Jesus as He faced that most difficult time.

7. An even more important testimonial came from a bright cloud that enveloped them. The voice of God the Father declared, "*This is my Son, whom I love. With Him I am well pleased. Listen to Him!*" This reminds us of the words the Father spoke at Jesus' baptism, at the beginning of His public ministry. Now the Father declares that He is pleased with everything Jesus has done since that time. His final approval of all Jesus' works will be proclaimed when the Father raises His beloved Son from the dead on Easter morning. The whole world needs to listen to Jesus and to believe what He tells us, for He is truth personified, and He is the only way to eternal life in heaven.
8. It was only natural that the disciples, as sinful men, should be terrified at the sight and at the sound of God's voice from heaven. But Jesus calmed their fears, as Moses and Elijah disappeared from sight. Peter's suggestion that he would build tents for Jesus and Moses and Elijah is another example of speaking before thinking. Overcome by the emotion of the moment, Peter had made a rather foolish proposal. Jesus did not even respond to Peter in regard to this matter. The departure of Moses and Elijah was answer enough.
9. On the way down the mountain Jesus instructed those three disciples not to tell anybody about His transfiguration until after His resurrection from the dead. Even the other nine disciples were not to know. There was enough selfish desire for preeminence among the disciples that they might have regarded this experience as an indication that Jesus had special places in His kingdom for this inner circle of three disciples. And it was very clear that the common people had wrong ideas about the nature of Jesus' kingdom and that they would only misinterpret this event to support their false ideas about that kingdom.
10. In due time, however, Peter could tell the world in his second epistle, "¹⁶ *We were not following any clever myths when we told you about the power of our Lord Jesus Christ and His coming. Rather, with our own eyes we saw His majesty.* ¹⁷ *For He received honour and glory from God the Father when such a voice was spoken to Him by the Sublime Glory, "**This is My Son, whom I love, and with whom I am well pleased.**"* ¹⁸ *We heard this voice, which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.*" (2 Peter 1:16–18).