



*Jesus's transfiguration looks back to Moses' transforming encounter with the God of Israel and points forward to the Son of Man, the Prophet-Like-Moses, ruling and reigning at the right hand of the Father*

BY DR. JIM SIBLEY

All three synoptic Gospels record the transfiguration of Jesus.[1] The drama and the details of these accounts of Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration call to mind the account of Moses on Mount Sinai. When you look at the details of the accounts, it is striking how many things line up. For example, after six days in which the glory of the Lord remained on Mount Sinai, Moses went up on the seventh day. Six days after the Father had revealed Jesus' identity to his disciples at Caesarea Philippi, on the seventh day they ascended the Mount of Transfiguration.[2] Coincidence?

When Moses went up on Mount Sinai, he was accompanied by Aaron and two others who were brothers, Nadab and Abihu. On the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus was accompanied by Peter and two others who were brothers, James and John.[3] Then there was the cloud. It has been said, "As Moses had entered the cloud and divine light with the result that his face shone, so Jesus shone with heaven's light, and before him appeared Moses and Elijah, the only Old Testament saints to receive a revelation on 'the mountain.'"[4] A. M. Ramsey, the 100th archbishop of Canterbury, noted that, "Moses went up into the Mount . . . and when he came down to the people the skin of his face shone. Here, in contrast is the new and greater Moses, whose face shines not with a reflected glory but with the unborrowed glory as of the sun's own rays." [5]



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Not only do these accounts include the fact that Jesus ascended a mountain and that his face and garments shone, but Luke's version gives the subject matter of the conversation Jesus had with Elijah and Moses, namely, "of his departure which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem" (v. 31). The word for "departure" is literally "exodus," so Jesus was speaking to them of his anticipated "exodus," which would take place in Jerusalem. You may not have noticed, but each account of the Transfiguration is framed on either side with Jesus' prophecies regarding his death. He would be leaving them—before long, He would ascend to the Father.



Matthew records the words of the voice from heaven that declared, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased" (17:5). This last phrase is taken from Isaiah 42:1 and identifies Jesus as the Servant of the Lord, who also is equated with the Prophet-like-Moses.[6] The voice from heaven continues with the admonition, "Listen to him!" This points directly to Deuteronomy 18:15 and to this One who is greater than Moses.

Peter's desire that three tabernacles be built may have been suggested by Moses' presence or perhaps by the Feast of Tabernacles, but it was rebuffed by Jesus for, as the Prophet-like-Moses and as God's beloved Son, he was to be the sole focus of attention and worship. The command to "listen to Him" could best be followed by becoming his disciple, even as Moses and Elijah were.

One author says, "Jesus' transfiguration moves thoughts both backward and forward in time: it is a replay of Sinai and a foretaste of things to come." [7] Not only does the Transfiguration point back to Moses, then to the Prophet-like-Moses and the Suffering Servant, but it also points forward to a future event in Messiah's life—his ascension. As Dale Allison says, "It is natural to see in [Matthew] 17:1-9 the greater-than-Moses theme; for, at the last, Moses and Elijah disappear, and the reader is left with the command to 'hear him,' that is, the only begotten Son of God, Jesus." [8] After everything else, we are left with Jesus alone—"Listen to Him!" Even when he is not physically present, we still hear him through the Spirit and the Word.

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## Footnotes

1. Matt 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; and Luke 9:28-36.
2. Exod 24:16; Matt 17:1; Mark 9:2.
3. Exod 24:1; Matt 17:1.
4. Jim Congdon, "The Mosaic Law and Christian Ethics: Obligation or Fulfillment?" in *Jews and the Gospel at the End of History*, ed. by Jim Congdon (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2009), 149.
5. Arthur Michael Ramsey, *The Glory of God and the Transfiguration of Christ* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1949), 120.
6. Dale C. Allison, Jr., *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 244. See also b. Sota 14a and G. P. Hugenberger, "The Servant of the Lord in the 'Servant Songs' of Isaiah: A Second Moses Figure," in *The LORD's Anointed: Interpretations of Old Testament Messianic Texts*, ed. Philip E. Satterthwaite, et al (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 119.
7. Dale C. Allison, Jr., *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 246.
8. *Ibid.*, 247.