



MBS044

A MESSIANIC BIBLE STUDY FROM ARIEL MINISTRIES



# THE TRANSFIGURATION OF THE MESSIAH



By Dr. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum



[ariel.org](http://ariel.org)

**THE TRANSFIGURATION OF THE MESSIAH**  
**By Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

I. THE OBSERVERS .....	3
II. THE TRANSFIGURATION.....	3
III. MOSES AND ELIJAH.....	4
IV. THE RESPONSE OF PETER .....	5
V. THE GLORY CLOUD .....	6
VI. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TRANSFIGURATION .....	7

© 1985, 2005 Ariel Ministries. All rights reserved.

No part of this manuscript may be reproduced in any form, except in brief quotation in a review or professional work,  
without written permission from the publishers. Cover illustration by Olivier Melnick.

Email: [Homeoffice@ariel.org](mailto:Homeoffice@ariel.org) • [www.ariel.org](http://www.ariel.org)



*... and he was  
transfigured before  
them; and his face  
did shine as the sun,  
and his garments  
became white  
as the light.  
Matthew 17:2*

NOTES

## INTRODUCTION

This is a study of the Transfiguration of Yeshua (Jesus) and its significance. The Transfiguration of Jesus is found in three Gospels: Matthew 17:1-8, Mark 9:2-8, and Luke 9:28-36. To get the full picture of what happened, all three Gospel accounts must be studied and compared.

### I. THE OBSERVERS

First, concerning the ones who observed the Transfiguration, it was not all twelve disciples but only three: Peter, James and John. Just prior to this experience Yeshua promised His disciples that some of them would not die until they saw His glory in the Kingdom. In Matthew 16:28, the promise Jesus made that, “some of them that stand here would not die until they saw the glory of the Son of man coming in his kingdom” was now fulfilled, and the some were Peter, James and John. These were the some who saw the Transfiguration. Furthermore, they went unto a very high mountain. Just before this event they were in Caesarea Philippi at the foot of Mount Hermon. So we take this mountain not to be Mount Tabor, which is the traditional sight of the Transfiguration, but rather Mount Hermon, the highest mountain in all of the Holy Land, being over 9,000 feet above sea level. As they came to a very high mountain, the Transfiguration occurred.

### II. THE TRANSFIGURATION

The three Gospel accounts of the Transfiguration read as follows:  
Matthew 17:2: *... and he was transfigured before them; and his face did shine as the sun, and his garments became white as the light.*

Mark 9:3: ... *and his garments became glistering, exceeding white, so as no fuller on earth can whiten them.*

Luke 9:29: *And as he was praying, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment became white and dazzling.*

In the Transfiguration, a transformation took place and suddenly a very bright light penetrated through the body of Yeshua, lighting up and whitening His clothes. What they saw was indeed the glory that the Son of Man will have in His Kingdom; they saw the Shechinah Glory itself. Throughout eternity past, Jesus had always been characterized by this very glory. But when Jesus became a man at the incarnation, the Shechinah Glory—the glory of the Messiah—was veiled by His human body. Only at one point in His life on earth did the Shechinah Glory penetrate through the physical frame of His body, and that was at the Transfiguration. When the Transfiguration occurred, it was the out-shining of the glory of God. The veiled-glory was unveiled for a few moments before these disciples.

### III. MOSES AND ELIJAH

Along with Yeshua, there were two other men from the Old Testament: Moses and Elijah. Why were these two men present and not others? There are two reasons. First, Moses was there to represent the Law, and Elijah was there to represent the Prophets. Remember, that the purpose of the coming of Yeshua was to fulfill the Law and the Prophets. In fact, Luke 9:30b-31 states: ... *Moses and Elijah; who appeared in glory, and spoke of his decease which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.*

The Greek word for “decease” is exodos. It is the Greek word from which our English word “exodus” is derived and some Bibles translate the word as “departure”. In other words, the topic of conversation among Jesus, Moses and Elijah was the coming death of Jesus in Jerusalem. Since the death of Jesus was the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets, that is one reason why Moses and Elijah happened to be there.

The second reason why these two men were there was that Moses had died but Elijah had not. Moses was there to represent the saints that will be resurrected. Elijah was there to represent the saints that will be translated or changed into immortal beings at the point of the Rapture, without having to go through the process of death. These saints will change in “the twinkling of an eye” while they are still living.

The fact that the term exodos is used is significant. The Exodus of Israel from Egypt meant freedom and liberation. The reason for discussing His death—His exodos—might be for three additional reasons.

First, His death and coming resurrection would mean freedom for Yeshua from all limitations, for when Yeshua became a man, He was limited in His use of divine power. In fact, even His glory was no longer visible because it was veiled, and was exposed only in these few moments. Yeshua's death would mean freedom from all the limitations imposed by the Incarnation.

Second, it would free Him from living in a world of sin. Jesus once said, "How long must I bear with you; how long must I bear with this wicked generation?" The holy Person of Yeshua having to live and walk among sinful men was always something that weighed heavily upon Him. His decease—His exodos—would indeed be a point of freedom for Him.

Finally, the exodos of Jesus would free the believer from bondage to sin.

#### IV. THE RESPONSE OF PETER

At this point Peter entered into the conversation and said in Matthew 17:4: *And Peter answered, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if you will, I will make here three tabernacles; one for you, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah.*

At this point Peter interrupted the conversation of the three men and suggested that he be allowed to build three tabernacles: one for Yeshua, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. In many, many sermons on this passage, Peter is very often castigated for the specific sin of wanting to put Yeshua on the same level with Moses and Elijah. By wanting to build three tabernacles instead of just one, some claim it meant that either Peter was elevating Moses and Elijah to be on a par with Jesus, or he was demoting Yeshua to be on the level of Moses and Elijah. However, that is not a correct interpretation of this passage.

Just before the Transfiguration, Peter was the one who said: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the God, the Living One" (Mat. 16:16). Peter clearly knew who Jesus was and he knew the Messiah was superior to both Moses and Elijah. He was not trying to put Jesus on equal par with the others or vice versa. Rather, this is a proper response, but Peter's timing was wrong.

Remember what Peter was seeing. He had seen the glory that the Son of Man will have in His Kingdom. Peter knew from Zechariah 14 that the Feast of Tabernacles was going to be fulfilled by the Messianic Kingdom. That is why, during the Messianic Kingdom, it will be obligatory for all to observe the Feast of Tabernacles. Preceding the experience, it is clear that Peter did not yet understand the program of death and resurrection. Now he was seeing the glory that Yeshua would have in the Kingdom and he expected that the Kingdom to be established at this time. He expected the Feast of Tabernacles to be

fulfilled at this time, and that is why he wanted to build the three tabernacles.

But because he did not yet understand the program of death and resurrection, he did not yet understand that the Feast of Passover had to be fulfilled before the Feast of Tabernacles could be fulfilled. So his response is not wrong; it was a proper response based upon the knowledge he had at that point and the truth, as he understood it. Although it was a proper response, his timing was totally wrong. For that reason, he was not allowed to build the three tabernacles, because it was Passover that Yeshua came to fulfill and not the Feast of Tabernacles. Therefore, in keeping with the promise of Yeshua, Peter saw the glory that the Messiah will have in His Kingdom.

## V. THE GLORY CLOUD

Matthew 17:5 records what happened next: *While he was yet speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold, a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.*

Suddenly the words of Peter were interrupted by the glory cloud descending upon Mount Hermon and taking in all three men. The glory cloud came down, and God the Father spoke audibly from amidst this cloud. Three times in the ministry of Jesus, God the Father spoke audibly from heaven. The first time was at His baptism (Mat. 3:17); second, at His Transfiguration; third, at the end of His ministry (Jn. 12:28).

This is the second time God the Father spoke audibly from heaven saying: ... *This is my beloved Son, ...*

This is the Messiah. Here, God the Father affirmed that which Peter had just recently confessed in Matthew 16:16 when he said, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the God, the Living One.”

Then God the Father said: ... *in whom I am well pleased; ...*  
Because Jesus fulfilled the will of the Father.

Thirdly, God the Father said: ... *hear ye him.*

They had heard the Law. They had heard the Prophets. Now they must listen to the Son, because the Son is the final revelation. That is the point of Hebrews 1:1-3, where the writer pointed out how, “in past times, God has revealed Himself in various ways and divers portions, but has, in these last days revealed Himself in his Son.” They must hear, listen, and obey the Son.

The cloud overshadowed all three men and, at that point and the disciples no longer saw the three men. They saw only the cloud and heard the voice of God the Father saying: *This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.*

Then, in Matthew 17:8, as if to drive home that same point, suddenly the cloud lifted: *And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one, save Jesus only.*

The purpose of seeing only Jesus was to drive home the point that He was the One they had to hear. They had heard the Law; they had heard the Prophets, now they had to hear the Son.

## VI. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TRANSFIGURATION

There are theological significances of the Transfiguration that should be carefully noted. First, the Transfiguration authenticated the Messiahship of Yeshua, which had been rejected by men but accepted by God. When God the Father spoke audibly, He said,

*“This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased, hear ye him.*

This authenticated the Messiahship of Yeshua.

Secondly, the Transfiguration anticipated the earthly Kingdom of the Messiah. This is seen in two ways. First, before the Transfiguration Jesus promised His disciples that some of them would not die until they saw the glory that the Son of Man would have in the Kingdom (Mat. 16:28). The some who did not die were Peter, James and John. When they saw the Transfiguration, they saw the glory that the Son of Man will have in the Kingdom. Thus, it anticipated the coming earthly Kingdom.

One of these three men, Peter, later wrote these particular words in II Peter 1:16-18: *For we did not follow cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honor and glory, when there was borne such a voice to him by the Majestic Glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: and this voice we ourselves heard borne out of heaven, when we were with him in the holy mount.*

When Peter reflected on the experience, he pointed out that, to him, it was an anticipation of the future power and coming of the Lord Jesus Christ; the coming of the Messiah in His Kingdom.

The third significance of the Transfiguration is that it guarantees the fulfillment of all prophecies; it guarantees the fulfillment of all Scriptures. This is also seen in two ways. First, according to Luke 9:31, the discussion which Yeshua had with Moses and Elijah concerned His coming exodus—His coming death, which would fulfill the Law and the Prophets. Secondly, the eyewitness of this event, Peter, wrote in II Peter 1:19-21: *And we have the word of prophecy made more sure; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts: knowing this first, that no prophecy of scripture is of private interpretation. For no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men spoke from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit.*

Again, from the background of the Transfiguration, Peter took this as evidence of the guarantee of the fulfillment of all Scripture.

The fourth significance of the Transfiguration is that it contains a pledge of the life beyond. Both Moses and Elijah were there. Moses did die, so he represented the resurrected saints. Elijah did not die, so he represented the translated saints. There is this pledge of the life beyond. The fact that these two men continue to exist, though one in spirit-form only, and the other in a glorified-body form who was translated, and yet were still present and able to communicate, shows the continuation of the life beyond death.

The fifth significance of the Transfiguration tells us what it cost Jesus to come. It meant He had to veil His glory twice. The first time His glory was veiled was at the Incarnation. Then, at the Transfiguration, the Shechinah Glory penetrated through the veil; but after the Transfiguration, it was veiled for a second time. What did it cost Yeshua to come? It meant He had to veil His glory twice.

Finally, the Transfiguration shows the measure of His love; He was willing to do all this on our behalf.✠

**NOTES****IF YOU ENJOYED THIS  
BIBLE STUDY,  
DR. FRUCHTENBAUM  
RECOMMENDS:**

*MBS009, 016, 020, 028, 031,  
032, 035, 036, 040, 043, 048,  
049, 056, 060, 061, 069, 070,  
075, 076, 094, 099, 127, 134,  
183, 185.*



