

The Transfiguration of Jesus

- By Rev. Fr. Nilindra Gunsekera sss



1. Introduction

The purpose of this article is to determine the narrative meaning and function of the Transfiguration Story by considering its impact upon its implied audience, after determining its precise literary genre and examining its main literary motifs. There is no consensus on the literary genre of the Transfiguration. According to R. H. Stein 'Is the Transfiguration Mk. 9:2-8 a Misplaced Resurrection Account?,' *JBL* 95 (1976), pp 79-96, it is a misplaced resurrection account. F. R. McCurley, 'And After Six Days' Mk. 9:2: A Semitic Literary Device,' *JBL* 93 (1974), pp 67-81, they are misplaced ascension stories. For Reid, "Transfiguration, pp 97-98 it is a pronouncement story. M. Smith, 'The Origin and History of the Transfiguration Story,' *USQR* 36 (1980), pp 39-44, it is a magical story. A. Del Agua, 'The Narrative of the Transfiguration as a Derashic Scientification of a Faith Confession Mk. 9:2-8' *NTS* 39 (1993), 340-354, it is a derashic signification. Moses, *Matthew's Transfiguration Story*, pp 89-91, argues that it is a theophany and an apocalyptic vision. It is our view that the Transfiguration Narrative is an epiphany as distinct from vision or theophany.

We believe that at this point of our *exposē* it would be useful to explain the meaning of the word 'misplaced resurrection account' or 'misplaced ascension story.' By misplaced is meant the reformulation of a historical event into a different context and setting. As we know the gospels are an inspired apostolic interpretation of the life of Jesus viewed from the enlightened perspective of the resurrection. Hence, a misplaced resurrection story or misplaced ascension story would mean that what had taken place after the resurrection or ascension had been included within the time frame of Jesus' public ministry. At the same time, it would be helpful to note what 'derashic' signification means. Derash is a form of midrash. In other words, derash is a further specification of the midrashic literary genre.

Midrash (Hebrew: מדרש; plural *midrashim*, lit. "study") is a Hebrew term referring to the not exact, but comparative (homiletic) method of exegesis (hermeneutic) of Biblical texts, which is one of four methods cumulatively called *Pardes*. The term *midrash* can also refer to a compilation of homiletic teachings (commentaries) on the Tanakh (Hebrew Bible), in the form of legal and ritual (Halakah) and legendary, moralizing, folkloristic, and anecdotal (Aggadah) parts.

According to the *Pardes system* of exegesis (interpretation), the approach to understand Biblical texts in Judaism is realized through *peshat* (literal meaning, lit.

"plain" or "simple"), *remez* (deep meaning, lit. "hints"), *derash* (comparative meaning, from Hebrew *darash* - "to inquire" or "to seek") and *sod* (hidden meaning or philosophy, lit. "secret" or "mystery"). The Midrash concentrates somewhat on *remez* but mostly on *derash*.

The *Pardes* typology describes four different approaches to Biblical exegesis in rabbinic Judaism (or - simpler - interpretation in Torah study). The term, sometimes also spelled **PaRDeS**, is an acronym formed from the name initials of these four approaches, which are:

- **Peshat** (פְּשָׁט) — "plain" ("simple") or the direct meaning of verse or passage^[1]
- **Remez** (רֵמֵז) — "hints" or the deep (allegoric) meaning beyond just the literal sense
- **Derash** (דְּרָשׁ) — from Hebrew *darash* - "to inquire" or "to seek", *i.e.* the comparative meaning; unraveling the midrashic meaning by comparing words and forms in a passage to similar occurrences elsewhere
- **Sod** (סוֹד) — "secret" ("mystery") or the mystical meaning of passage, as given through inspiration or revelation

Each type of *Pardes* interpretation examines the extended meaning of a text. As a general rule, the extended meaning never contradicts the base meaning. The *Peshat* means the literal interpretation. *Remez* is the allegorical meaning. *Derash* includes the metaphorical meaning, and *Sod* represents the hidden meaning. There is often considerable overlap, for example when legal understandings of a verse are influenced by mystical interpretations or when a "hint" is determined by comparing a word with other instances of the same word. The *Pardes* typology is quite similar to the contemporary Christian four-fold allegorical scheme.

Allegory in the Middle Ages was a vital element in the synthesis of Biblical and Classical traditions into what would become recognizable as Medieval culture. People of the Middle Ages consciously drew from the cultural legacies of the ancient world in shaping their institutions and ideas, and so allegory in Medieval literature and Medieval art was a prime mover for the synthesis and transformational continuity between the ancient world and the "new" Christian world. People of the Middle Ages did not see the same break between themselves and their classical forbears that modern observers see; rather, they saw continuity with themselves and the ancient world, using allegory as a synthesizing agent, bringing together a whole image.

There were four categories of allegory used in the Middle Ages, which had originated with the Bible commentators of the early Christian era. The first is simply the *literal* interpretation of the events of the story for historical purposes with no underlying meaning. The second is called *typological*, which is connecting the events of the Old Testament with the New Testament; in particular drawing allegorical connections between the events of Christ's life with the stories of the Old Testament. The third is *moral* (or *tropological*), which is how one should act in the present, the "moral of the story". The fourth type of allegory is *anagogical*, dealing with the spiritual or mystical as

it relates to future events of Christian history, heaven, hell, the last judgment; it deals with prophecies.

Thus the four types of allegory deal with past events (literal), the connection of past events with the present (typology), present events (moral), and the future (anagogical).

Hence, we conclude that with the aim of simplification *derash* could be understood as a form of allegorical interpretation.

2. The Genre of a Pivotal Mandatory Epiphany

The literary form that encapsules the Transfiguration Narrative is also found in the OT. A comparison between them sheds light on the specific characteristics of the genre. Hence, a comparison between the Transfiguration accounts of the Synoptics and Num 22:31-35; Josh. 5:13-15; and 2 Macc. 3:22-34 clearly shows that the Transfiguration is best understood as a ‘pivotal mandatory epiphany.’ It is pivotal because it occurs at a crucial stage of the gospel narrative (*fabula* of the story in a synchronic reading within the unfolding narrative: within the narrated story itself, and independent of redaction or editing by subsequent authors). The Transfiguration occurs immediately after Jesus’ first passion prediction. Just as the Transfiguration is preceded by the first passion prediction (Mk. 8:27-33; Mt. 16:13-23; Lk. 9:18-22) with the challenging call to anyone desirous of following Jesus to take up the cross and follow. The very next verses recount Jesus’ apocalyptic pronouncement concerning the response to the Kingdom of God.



The key to the Transfiguration Narrative is the significance of the appearance of Moses and Elijah in conversation with the transfigured Jesus. We must ask whether they simply represent the Law and the Prophets or whether they are examples of the glorified righteous? Elijah is a prophetic figure who attained glory without being put to death in the manner that Jesus will be. Moses dies a natural death under unusual circumstances as seen from the text (Ex. 34:). There are various biblical traditions surrounding the mysterious death of Moses. Hence, on face value it appears that their departure from earth was under very different circumstances. The seven literary motifs in the Transfiguration Narrative consist of: (1) the ascent to the mountain, (2) the transfiguration of Jesus, (3) the appearance of Moses and Elijah, (4) the suggestion of ‘Tents,’ (5) the overshadowing by the cloud, (6) the heavenly voice, (7) the presence of Jesus alone by himself.

3. Epiphany as Distinct from Theophany and Vision

R. A. Burridge says genre forms a kind of contract or agreement, often unspoken or unwritten or even unconscious, between author and reader by which the author sets out to write according to a whole set of expectations and conventions, giving the audience an initial idea of what they might expect to find. On the basis of this description of the function of genre it becomes clear that we must first determine the literary genre of the Transfiguration if we are to understand what the Transfiguration Story is seeking to communicate to the implied audience. We have already mentioned that the Transfiguration is an epiphany as distinct from theophany and vision. In this sense, we follow H. C. Kee in not using the word 'epiphany' as a term connoting the Hellenistic concept of divinization as in antiquity.

A theophany is defined as a disposition of literary motifs which describes a coming of God recognized by the terrifying circumstances that accompany it rather than by seeing the actual figure of God. Judg. 5: 4-5 represents the most original form of a theophany from which the others developed (cf. J. Jeremias). A vision is defined as a disposition of literary motifs which narrates the 'seeing' by a privileged individual of supernatural phenomena located mainly in the realm of heaven. A vision is thus an experience of 'heavenly realities' which even if reaching to and involving the earth, are viewed mainly within a supernatural or transcendent or heavenly context. The literary genre of vision can be subdivided into a number of categories. Eg. dream vision, call vision, apocalyptic vision, interpretive vision, heavenly journey (cf. C. Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity*, New York: Crossroad, 1982, pp 52-58).

Epiphany is a literary genre which contains a disposition of literary motifs which narrates a sudden and unexpected manifestation of a divine or heavenly being experienced by certain selected persons as an event independent of their seeing, in which the divine being reveals a divine attribute, action or message. Similar to a vision an epiphany presents a particular revelation or message to certain people, offering them an opportunity to play a role in God's salvific dealings with his people. There are various types of literary genre of epiphany. Egs. (1) Angelophanies (Gen. 18:1-15; Num. 22:22-35; Josh. 5:13-15; Judg. 6:11-24; 13:1-24; Mt. 1:20-25; 2:12, 13-15, 19-23; Lk. 1:8-20, 26-38; 2:8-15; 24:1-11; Mt. 28:1-8; Mk. 16:1-8; Acts 1:10-11). In angelophanies, the divine being is an angel or angels who deliver a message of God's plan of salvation to selected persons. (2) Sea Rescue Epiphanies in which Jesus functions as an epiphanic being who rescues his disciples by a revelation of a divine action (Mt. 8:23-27; 14:22-33; Mk. 4:35-41; 6:45-52; Lk. 8:22-25; Jn. 6:15.b -21). (3) Resurrectional Christophanies in which the Risen Jesus appears as the divine being from the heavenly realm (Mt. 28:9-10; Lk. 24:36-43; Jn. 20:11-18; 19-23, 24-29; 21:1-14).

Like the literary genre of theophany an epiphany narrates the coming of a divine being. In a theophany, the divine being remains invisible, and his coming is recognized only by its effects on nature. In an epiphany the divine being assumes visible form and

appears before the eyes of human beings. Like the literary genre of vision, the epiphany narrates the viewing of heavenly realities. In a vision the viewing is of heavenly realities or phenomena seen only through the eyes of a selected viewer mainly within a heavenly location or context. But in an epiphany the heavenly phenomena takes place on earth as an event visible to anyone privileged to witness it. However, there are elements of vision in this epiphanic literary genre of the transfiguration. In Matthew and Mark, the descent from heaven of the Holy Spirit like a dove upon Jesus after his baptism by John is narrated as an ‘interpretive vision.’ Matthew and Mark narrate a visionary experience of Jesus; only Jesus and no one else who may be present sees the Spirit descending on him. Luke at this point employs the literary genre of an epiphany rather than a vision. Unlike in the case of Matthew and Mark, Luke does not refer to seeing. But he narrates the descent of the Spirit in a way that the event could be visible to anyone present. By describing the descent of the Spirit ‘in bodily form’ (Lk. 3:22) he underlines the earthly reality of the event characteristic of the epiphany genre.

Acts 10:3-8 provides another excellent example of the difference between the literary genre of epiphany and vision. The devout Gentile centurion Cornelius experiences an angelophany. At first sight the experience of Cornelius appears to be a vision. Acts 10:3 begins with an explicit notice of what Cornelius saw in a vision. But a closer consideration reveals that it was actually an epiphany or more precisely an angelophany. Rather than a seeing by Cornelius into the heavenly realm through opened heavens, it narrates his seeing of the earthly event of a heavenly being, an angel, not remaining in heaven but ‘coming in toward him’ and speaking to him. In contrast to the previous epiphany in Acts 10:3-8, the text of Acts. 10:9-16 describes the purely visionary experience of Peter. Peter saw through the opened heaven an object like a sheet (Acts 10:11) within the heavenly realm. Although the object was ‘being lowered to the earth’ it never actually enters into earthly reality but remains within the heavenly framework of the vision. No one else on earth but peter would be able to see it. The distinction between an epiphany in which a heavenly being or angel actually enters into reality of the earthly domain as opposed to a vision is evident in Acts. 12:9, where Peter followed an angel out of prison not realizing that what was happening through the angel was real; he thought he was seeing a vision.

It must be noted that the modern terminology we are using to designate the ancient literary genres of theophany, epiphany and vision, does not necessarily correspond to the ancient vocabulary. The Greek word for vision - *ὄραμα* - (*horama*) can refer to either an epiphany (Mt. 17:9; Acts 7:31; 10:3), or a vision (Acts 9:10, 12; 10:17, 19; 11:5; 12:9; 16:9-10; 18:9).

4. The Transfiguration Narrative as Epiphany



The essential characteristics of the literary genre of an epiphany are found in the Transfiguration Narrative. The epiphanic action commences with the sudden and

unexpected Transfiguration of Jesus' external appearance so that he resembles a heavenly being but remains on earth (Mt. 17:2; Mk. 9:2-3; Lk.9:29). Jesus' Transfiguration into a heavenly being is only the beginning of a complex epiphanic action. The epiphany is a special private revelation of heavenly phenomena on the earth granted to three privileged witnesses. As spokesman for the three, Peter responds to the epiphanic action by offering to build three tents on the mountain, one for each of the heavenly figures. But then, suddenly, occurs yet another unexpected epiphanic action, as a heavenly cloud overshadows them (Mt. 17:5; Mk. 9:7; Lk. 9:34). This further epiphanic action continues as God's voice comes from the cloud identifying Jesus in distinction from Moses and Elijah. This commanding voice of God from the cloud brings the entire epiphany to its climactic conclusion. That Jesus alone is left there underlines that the command is to listen to him alone as God's Son. The epiphany has ended as the heavenly figures of Moses and Elijah have disappeared with the cloud, and Jesus no longer appears to be in a transfigured state.

The Transfiguration narrative presents the gospel audiences with a unique type of epiphany. It begins with an initial epiphanic action, the Transfiguration of Jesus closely coordinated with the epiphanic appearances of Moses and Elijah. The Transfiguration of Jesus into a heavenly being enables him to converse while still on earth, with the heavenly figures of Moses and Elijah. But this initial epiphanic appearance of Jesus, Moses and Elijah is followed by the closely related, further epiphanic action of the divine voice coming out of the sudden appearance of an overshadowing heavenly cloud. Therefore, the transfiguration narrative is a complex epiphany with more than one epiphanic appearance of heavenly phenomena. There are many precedents for this type of complex epiphany in the OT. (cf. Judg. 6:11-24; 13:2-24). So, the angelophanies of Gideon (Judg. 6:11-24) and to Manoah and his wife (Judg. 13:2-24) provide a literary precedent that helps the implied audience to recognize and understand what is going on in the Transfiguration Narrative. Both these angelophanies and the Transfiguration epiphany begin with an initial epiphanic appearance, and then, after an attempt to detain or prolong the appearance, a further epiphanic action is oriented toward the recognition of the true identity of the initially appearing epiphanic figure.

The Transfiguration epiphany center upon the recognition of the Transfigured Jesus' true identity, the climactic accent of the divine voice from the epiphanic cloud falls on the command 'Listen to Him' (Mt. 17:5; Mk. 9:7; Lk. 9:35). The question implied is whether the disciples will listen to Jesus as God's beloved/chosen Son. Understanding the transfiguration Narrative as a pivotal mandatory epiphany becomes clear when we make a detailed comparison of the account with Num. 22:31-35; Josh. 5:13-15; 2 Macc. 3:22-34.

5. The Transfiguration Narrative as a Pivotal Mandatory Epiphany

The Transfiguration Narrative belongs to the literary genre of mandatory epiphany or pivotal mandatory epiphany. A mandatory epiphany is an epiphany whose whole

orientation and final focus centers upon a specific mandate, a climactic command of an epiphanic being or voice to the recipients of the epiphanic activity. Secondly, the climactic command of the special type of mandatory epiphany with which we are concerned not only represents the final focus of the epiphany itself, but enunciates and refers the audience to a theme or topic of recurring central importance within the broader narrative context in which the mandatory epiphany is located. Because the command of this type of mandatory epiphany occurs at a pivotal point in the overall narrative, with significant contextual relations both prior and subsequent to the command, it becomes a pivotal mandatory epiphany.

In the case of the Transfiguration mandatory epiphany the pivotal mandate points out that Jesus, rather than Moses and Elijah is God's beloved/chosen Son, and directs the disciples and the audience to listen to him in order to understand the significance of the epiphanic appearance of the Transfigured Jesus in conversation with Moses and Elijah. The words of Jesus that the disciples are to heed are the words predicting his passion, death and resurrection, and the call to follow him to his death. This is a recurring theme of pivotal significance in the broader narrative context in which the mandatory epiphany is located.

6. Jesus' Transfiguration as an Epiphanic Motif

The epiphanic motif of Jesus' Transfiguration simply refers to the meaning and significance of the remarkable external change in Jesus' face and clothing. The literary background of the Transfiguration Narrative enables audiences to understand the significance of the Transfiguration or transformation of Jesus as a unique epiphanic motif. After an introductory temporal notice, the Transfiguration Narrative reports that Jesus took along three disciples and led them up a mountain. These three disciples serve as the special recipients of the pivotal mandatory epiphany. The sudden and unexpected epiphanic appearances commence immediately with the spectacular Transfiguration of Jesus (Mt. 17: 2; Mk. 9:2.b-3; Lk. 9:29). Matthew and Mark report that Jesus was Transfigured or Transformed - *μετεμορφώθη* from *μεταμορφόομαι* - (*metemorphothe* from *metamorphoomai*) before the three disciples. Luke says that while Jesus was praying 'the appearance' - *τὸ εἶδος* - (*to eidos*) of his 'face' - *πρόσωπον* - (*prosopon*) became 'different' or 'other' - *ἕτερον* from *ἕτερος* - (*heteron* from *heteros*) later referred to as 'his glory' - *τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ* - (*tēn doxan autou*) seen by the disciples (Lk. 9:32). Only in Matthew and Luke does the description of Jesus' Transfiguration explicitly include his face. Jesus' Transfiguration is further described in terms of his 'clothing' becoming extremely white. 'Shinning radiance' involves either the face or the clothes of Jesus. In Matthew, Jesus' face shone as the sun. In Mark, Jesus' clothes became so white that they were glistening, or gleaming or shinning. In Luke his white clothing were flashing or gleaming or dazzling like lightning. Therefore, the Transfiguration of Jesus is an epiphanic motif describing his external, proleptic, and temporal transformation by God

into a heavenly being while still on earth. At this point it would be helpful to explain the meaning of proleptic.

The word prolepsis (from the Greek *prolambanein*, to anticipate) can be: (1). A figure of speech in which a future event is referred to in anticipation. For example, a character who is about to die might be described as "the dead man" before he is actually dead. The same device can be used in non-verbal media such as film, where it is also called *flashforward*. (2) The anticipation of an objection. For example, a speaker might say "'Ah', you say, 'but that is impossible!'" Here the speaker is anticipating the objection 'Ah, but that is impossible!' from his audience—and is probably about to refute that objection before it arises. This form is more accurately called *procatalepsis*. (3) A philosophical concept used in ancient epistemology (in particular by Epicurus and the Stoa) to indicate a so-called "preconception."

This epiphanic Transfiguration of Jesus performs a two fold narrative function: (1) It enables Jesus, while still on earth to appear and speak to the heavenly figures of Moses and Elijah before the eyes of the disciples, (2) It points to Jesus' future and permanent attainment of glory in heaven. This two fold narrative function become clear when we investigate the background and meaning of (1) the statement of Jesus' *Transfiguration*, (2) the change of the appearance of his *face*, (3) His extremely *white clothing*, (4) the *shinning radiance* of his face/clothes.



6.a Transfiguration of Jesus

The verb *μετεμορφώθη* from *μεταμορφόομαι* (*metemorphōthē* from *metamorphōomai*) used in Matthew and Mark (Mt. 17:2; 9:2) to describe the Transfiguration of Jesus refers in a general sense to a transfiguration or change in form of some kind. What it means more specifically must be determined by the context. The verb in itself indicates that this external transformation of this physical appearance of Jesus was effected objectively from outside, by God (cf. use of the divine passive) rather than subjectively or interiorly by Jesus himself. It is not part of a mystical-like prayer experience, nor and answer to an implicitly voiced petition by Jesus. It is an external transformation effected by God in response to the praying of Jesus. In Lk. 9:29 this transformation should not be understood as a further description of Jesus' prayer itself (cf. – 'And as he was praying, the appearance of his countenance was altered, and his raiment became dazzling white'). Also we note that the change is in 'the appearance of his face' rather than just in his 'face.' This underlines the external nature of the transformation. G. Schneider, has explained how the phrase 'the appearance of his face' underlines visible external reality of the epiphanic event. That Jesus' transfigured state is later referred to as his glory (Lk. 9:32) indicates how he has been transformed into a heavenly being like Moses and Elijah who likewise were appearing in glory. The depiction of Jesus' transfiguration in the Synoptic gospels as an external change, a transformation from outside of Jesus effected by God, does not support those interpretations that speak of a 'revelation' or 'disclosure'

or ‘unveiling’ of an inner permanent glory or heavenly status which Jesus already possesses. Rather, Green, *Luke*, 380, says ‘... his inner being was made transparent to those who accompanied him. In other words the change Luke describes is a disclosure of Jesus’ status.’ C.H.T. Fletcher-Louis, *Luke-Acts: Angels, Christology, and Soteriology* (WUNT 94; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997) 49: ‘Jesus does not experience transformation into a *new* (or temporary) identity at the Transfiguration. Rather this is a revelation of the identity he already possesses.’ B. Blackburn, *Theios Aner and the Marcan Miracle Traditions: A Critique of the Theios Aner Concept as an Interpretative Background of the Miracle Tradition Used by Mark* (WUNT 40, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991) 121: ‘..... an indirect reference to the earthly Jesus’ hidden dignity, honour, and intimate communion with God.’ But as Gundry (*Mark*, 477) asserts rightly, ‘Nothing in the text implies that Jesus possesses a glory hidden at other times by his clothes and flesh.’ Rather he has been temporarily transfigured into a heavenly being while on a mountain still on earth.

With regard to the background of Jesus being Transformed by God many appeal to a Mosaic connection, in which Jesus is seen to be a second or greater Moses. In Ex. 34:29 (LXX – Septuagint or Greek translation of the OT) when Moses descended from Mount Sinai he did not know that ‘the appearance of the complexion of his face had become glorified’ while he spoke with God. The fatal flaw of this interpretation is that the transformation involves only the face of Moses, and *follows* his speaking with God. Jesus’ Transfiguration involves not only his face but also his clothing, and *precedes* his conversation with the heavenly figures of Moses and Elijah. The *glorification* of the face of Moses was a result of his encounter with God on Mount Sinai and not, like for Jesus, an epiphanic appearance that enabled him to have a heavenly encounter on a Mountain.



6. b The Face of the Transfigured Jesus

The Transfiguration of Jesus involves an explicit change in his face, in Matthew and Luke, but not in Mark. In Mt. 17:2, ‘his face shone as the sun’ (cf. Mt. 13:43), while in Lk. 9:29 ‘the appearance of his face became different.’ Luke does not explicitly specify how Jesus’ face became different, but the context strongly implies that his face, as in Matthew, became gloriously radiant. First, the change in his face is paralleled by ‘his clothes became dazzling white’ (Lk. 9:29), and later his transfigured state is referred to as ‘his glory’ (Lk. 9:32).

Several texts provide background that the ‘shining face’ of Jesus explicit in Matthew, and implicit in Luke, indicates his status as a heavenly figure:

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

- Mt. 17:2 And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light.
- Dan. 10:6 His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the noise of a multitude.
- Rev. 1:16 1:16 in his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth issued a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.
- Rev. 10:1 Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head, and his face was like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire.

Rev. 1:16 climaxes the description of the ‘one like a Son of Man’ (the Risen Jesus in heaven) that John saw in a vision (Rev. 1:13-16). Almost identical to Mt. 17:2 where the ‘face’ of the transfigured Jesus ‘shone like the sun,’ the ‘face’ of the heavenly Son of man in Rev. 1:16 was ‘like the sun shining in its might.’ Therefore that Jesus was Transfigures so that ‘his face shone like the sun’ (Mt. 17:2) indicates his temporary anticipation before death of his post-mortem resurrectional state of the righteous as angel-like heavenly beings and points to his permanent acquisition of this status after his death. Rev. 1:16 which we have associated with Mt. 17:2, the faces of heavenly beings have been compared with the radiance or shining of the sun. That the face of the Transfigured Jesus shone like the sun, thus indicates to the gospel audience his temporary transformation like one of the righteous into an angel-like heavenly figure (cf. Dan. 10:6; Rev. 1:16; 10:1) before his death and while still on earth. It is our view that the Transfiguration points to the resurrection.



6.c White Clothing of the Transfigured Jesus

The Synoptic gospels are unanimous that his garments became extremely white (cf. Mt. 17:2; Mk. 9:3; Lk. 9:29). As the transformation in the shining radiance of his face, so the transformation in the radiant whiteness of his clothing indicates that Jesus has been temporarily transformed into a heavenly figure (cf. Mk. 16:5 – the women who enter the tomb see a young man sitting on the right clothed in white; Lk. 24:4 – two men in white stood beside the disciples as they were watching Jesus’ ascension; Jn. 20:12 – two angels in white sitting there, where the body of Jesus had been lying). H. Ritt (Φῶς, *EDNT*, 3.448) states: ‘the optical motif of light is characteristic of epiphany narratives. The portrayal of heavenly figures of light with other-worldly radiance identifies such events as originating within God’s transcendence realm.’

Dan. 7:9 which describes God's clothing thus – God's clothing was like snow, white – illustrates how white of the Transfigured Jesus clothing signified his heavenly status. Harman, *Daniel*, 218: 'Not only does Yahweh have the white hair of an old man, his clothing is also as white as snow symbolizing unsullied majesty.' Goldingay, (*Daniel*, 165) states that it has the 'basic meaning of brightness and luminosity, thus nobility and splendour.'

In Rev. 3:5; 6:11; 7:9, 13-14; 19:14 there is reference to 'the white garments of the righteous in heaven.' In these texts we find a reference to righteous human beings are clothed in white garments as a heavenly reward (cf. Rev. 3:18). In John's vision into heaven (cf. Rev. 4:1), when he opened the fifth seal of the scroll, he saw under the heavenly altar the souls of those slaughtered for the word of God and the testimony they had (Rev. 6:9). After they cried out for vindication (Rev. 6:10), they were each given a white robe. That each of the martyred souls is given a white robe begins to fulfill in Rev. 3:5, that the one who conquers will be clothed in white garments as a heavenly reward.

In Rev. 7:9, John had a vision of a great crowd in heaven who stood before the throne of God and the Lamb, wearing white robes (cf. Rev. 7:10-12). Who are these who wear white robes? (cf. Rev. 7:13). They are the ones who have survived the times of the great distress and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb (cf. Rev. 7:14). In Rev. 19:14, John saw a white horse and a rider followed by armies in heaven on white horses, dressed in pure white linen. The white garments worn by this heavenly army of the righteous are like those promised to the victors as a heavenly reward (cf. Rev. 3:5), given to the martyred souls under the altar in heaven (Rev. 6:11), and worn by the crowd worshipping in heaven (Rev. 7:9, 13-14). Thus, the radiantly white clothing of the transfigured Jesus while on earth anticipates the heavenly reward and victory over death promised to the righteous after judgment. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 468: 'In Revelation, white robes appear to symbolize heavenly existence or worthiness of heaven.' Thus the radiantly white clothing of the Transfigured Jesus while on earth anticipates the heavenly reward and victory over death promised to the righteous after judgment. The white clothing of the Transfigured Jesus indicates his temporary heavenly glory. Thus the dazzling white clothing of the Transfigured Jesus is the glorious clothing of those in heaven, comparable to the glorious garments worn by the righteous in heaven.

6. d Shinning Radiance of The Transfigured Jesus

The Synoptics are unanimous that Jesus' face shone radiantly. The shining radiance of the Transfigured Jesus in Mt. 17:2 recall the previous promise in Mt. 13:43 that the 'righteous' will shine radiantly after judgment (Rev. 13:40-42) in the eschatological kingdom of heaven, which in turn recalls the promise in Dan. 12:3 that the wise shall shine radiantly. Thus the temporary shinning radiance of the face and the clothes of the Transfigured Jesus while still on earth expresses for the audience, his

anticipation of the final permanent shining radiance of the righteous as heavenly beings in the transcendent kingdom of heaven.

6. e Conclusion

The transfiguration of Jesus describes his external, proleptic, and temporary transformation by God into a heavenly being while still on earth. It points the gospel audience to Jesus' future and permanent attainment of glory in heaven as promised to the righteous after their death.

This rules out several other suggested interpretations. Jesus' transfiguration is not an internal self transformation, but an external transformation effected by God. It is not a revelation or disclosure of his otherwise hidden external glory but a temporary transfiguration or transformation of his external appearance. Although Jesus ascends the mountain which is close to the heavenly realm, to be transfigured, he does not ascend into heaven itself, but remains on earth.

The glorification of Moses on Sinai did not occur in an epiphany. It involved only his face. It followed his speaking with God. Jesus' appearance became temporarily angel-like or God-like. Jesus has not become an angel in the Transfiguration. His white clothing does not mean that he has become a heavenly priestly figure either. The temporary transfiguration of Jesus into a heavenly figure, enables the heavenly figures of Elijah and Moses to appear and speak with him. It is to the significance of this epiphanic appearance of Moses and Elijah with Jesus that we shall next investigate.

7. The Seven Literary Motifs of the Transfiguration

We have already mentioned the seven literary motifs in the Transfiguration Narrative. They consist of the following: (1) the ascent to the mountain, (2) the transfiguration of Jesus, (3) the appearance of Moses and Elijah, (4) the suggestion of 'Tents,' (5) the overshadowing by the cloud, (6) the heavenly voice, (7) the presence of Jesus, alone by himself. We have already discussed the theological significance of the first two. We have already discussed the first three literary motifs in the course of this exposé. We take up the analysis from the third point onwards, namely the appearance of Moses and Elijah. At the same time, we note that the theological importance of the heavenly voice and the presence of Jesus alone after the Transfiguration has been explained in the course of the analysis of the literary motifs numbered (3) – (5).



7.a The Appearance of Moses and Elijah

The epiphanic Transfiguration of Jesus into a heavenly figure has enabled the venerable figures of Moses and Elijah to appear from heaven with Jesus before the eyes of the three disciples. The Synoptics present a scene where Moses and Elijah were talking with the Transfigured Jesus indicating his association with them as heavenly figures. However, whereas Mt. 17:3 and Lk. 9:30 mention Moses first and coordinate him with Elijah in the expression ‘Moses and (καί - kai) Elijah,’ Mk. 9:4 mentions Elijah first. The Marcan expression reads ‘Elijah with (σύν- sün) Moses.’ Do the two expressions differ significantly? In the Marcan use of the phrase ‘Elijah with (σύν- sün) Moses’ we do not see a denigration or subordination of Moses to Elijah because the Marcan use of σύν- sün has been consistently with the aim of demonstrating that its object is the more notable party (cf. Mk. 2:26 – the preposition subordinates the members of David’s army to him as their superior; in Mk. 4:10 the preposition subordinates those around Jesus to the Twelve; in Mk. 8:34 the preposition subordinates the crowd to the disciples; In Mk. 15:27, 32 the preposition subordinates the two crucified robbers to Jesus). So Mark uses the preposition σύν- sün in order to enhance the grouping. The party mentioned second and introduced with the preposition σύν- sün, stand out for special emphasis. Rather than subordinating Moses to Elijah, Mark actually emphasizes the addition of Moses as enhancing their coupling.

There is no current consensus concerning the appearance of Moses and Elijah together and talking with the Transfigured Jesus. The most popular interpretation has been that together they represent Jewish scriptures, the Law and the prophets now fulfilled and surpassed by Jesus. Many other possible interpretations have been suggested: (1) both encounters God on Sinai/Horeb, (2) both were connected to the Law, (3) both were wonder workers, (4) both suffered rejection as prophets, (5) both were transformed or transfigured, (6) both were eschatological figures associated with the idea of restoration, (7) both represent the old covenant – (cf. Moses, *Matthew’s Transfiguration Story*, 129-130; Öhler, “Verklärung,” 205 no. 6; Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 868-869).

Some have emphasized the individuality of Moses and Elijah stating that each represents something different. The role of Moses is typological confirming the Exodus theme; the role of Elijah provides the scene with the eschatological dimension {W.L. Liefeld, ‘Theological Motifs in the Transfiguration Narrative,’ *New Dimensions in New Testament Studies* (eds. R.N. Longenecker and M.C. Tenney; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974) 173}. Moses and Elijah are respectively ‘predecessor and precursor to Jesus’ [Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34*, 499]. Moses typifies the prophetic office that Jesus will occupy, Elijah pictures the hope of the eschaton (Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 868). Most past interpretation neglect the epiphanic nature of the appearance of Moses and Elijah. What does it mean that these two prophetic figures of old are now suddenly appearing *from* heaven and talking with the transfigured Jesus?

The key to understand the significance of the appearance of Moses and Elijah to the way that these prophets attained heavenly glory after their lives on earth in contrast to the way that Jesus will ultimately attain heavenly glory. Moses and Elijah are not described as arrayed in glistening garments unlike the Transfigured Jesus because their heavenly status as venerable prophets of the past has long been established, although Lk. In 9:31 refers to them as ‘appearing in glory.’ All three epiphanic figures in the transfiguration Narrative – Moses, Elijah and Jesus – were prophetic figures who experienced, opposition, rejection, and suffering at the hands of their own people. Jesus alone would be put to death by his people. Although Elijah was rejected as a prophet he was never put to death by his people (cf. 2 Kgs. 2:11). Likewise the prophet Moses was never put to death. Moses attained heavenly glory either after dying peacefully at an old age (cf. Dt. 34:5) or according to some traditions by not dying at all but by being translated to heaven like Elijah and Enoch (cf. Enoch, although he was translated into heaven without dying, does not appear in the transfiguration epiphany because he was a primeval figure preceding salvation history, and not a prophet like Moses and Elijah). In contrast to Moses and Elijah, Jesus will attain heavenly glory, not by foregoing death or after a natural death, but by being raised by God after being put to death by his own people, as an innocent and righteous prophetic figure (cf. M. E. Thrall, ‘Elijah and Moses in Mark’s Account of the Transfiguration,’ *NTS* 16 (1969-1970), 314; Reid, *Transfiguration*, 124-125). It is our view that the epiphanic appearance of Moses and Elijah in conversation with the Transfigured Jesus is to indicate to the Gospel audiences that although Jesus will attain heavenly glory like Moses and Elijah, he, unlike them, will do so by being raised by God after suffering the unjust death of a rejected prophet (cf. 1 Macc. 2:58; Sir. 48:9).

We now set forth a brief synopsis of events surrounding the departure of Elijah. After the prophet Elijah escaped Jezebel’s attempts to murder the prophets of the Lord (1 Kgs. 18:4), he stated, ‘I am the only surviving prophet of the Lord’ (1 Kgs. 18:22). But Jezebel vowed to kill Elijah, so that he had to flee for his life and pray for death (1 Kgs. 19:2-4). Elijah told God that the Israelites ‘put your prophets to the sword; I alone am left, and they seek my life’ (1 Kgs. 19:10, 14). Despite these attempts on his life Elijah never died the death of a prophet. Instead, God took Elijah in a whirlwind ‘to the heavens’ (2 Kgs. 2:1). It was different in the case of Moses. After Moses killed an Egyptian, he fled to Midian and escaped Pharaoh’s attempts to put him to death (Ex. 2:11-15). Although Moses, the pre-eminent and peerless prophet (Dt. 34:10) experienced grumbling and rebellion from his people (Ex. 15-16; 32; Num. 16-17; 14:1-10), and although he would not enter the Promised Land but die because of the people’s sin (Dt. 1:37; 3:26-27; 4:21-22) he was never put to death by his people as a rejected prophet. Yet, the circumstances surrounding Moses’ death are extraordinary. God himself told him where he was to die (Dt. 32:50). So he died ‘at the Lord’s command’ (Dt. 34:5). God himself buried him in a specific place, ‘in a valley in the land of Moab opposite Beth-peor,’ the place of burial remain forever unknown to human beings (Dt. 34:6). The people of Israel mourned for him for a traditional thirty days (Dt. 34:8). Wevers, *Deuteronomy*, 559: ‘That no one knew his grave unto this day’ accents the uniqueness of the Moses phenomenon. Sonnet, *Deuteronomy*, 225: ‘These parameters are sufficient to rule out the construing of Moses’ disappearance as an ascension; yet they are not sufficient to found a gravesite cult.’

Josephus in *Antiquitates Judaicae* dramatically develops the biblical narrative of Moses death and burial by reporting that Moses, instead of dying, simply disappeared and returned to God. Josephus' dramatic enhancement of the peoples mourning for the revered prophet begins immediately after Moses told the people of his approaching death, but while he is still alive (L.H. Feldman, 'Josephus' portrait of Moses: Part Three,' *JQR* 83 (1993) 324-325). Hence, we conclude that Moses and Elijah appeared from heaven in conversation with the Transfigured Jesus in order to contrast the way that he will ultimately attain the same heavenly glory they enjoy.



7. b The Three Tents

Peter has proposed building three tents (cf. Mt. 17:4; Mk. 9:5-6; Lk. 9:33). What is the significance of the three tents? In the Synoptics gospels Peter exclaims, 'it is good that we are here.' Peter's uncertainty about the appropriateness of his suggestion is also apparent in various degrees (cf. Mt. 17:4; Mk.9:6; Lk. 9:33). The three tents seem to function as temporary dwellings constructed to honour of each heavenly figure with the hospitality of a place. The following suggestions have been proposed to explain the signification of the Tents: the tents allude to the temporary dwellings constructed at the feast of Huts/Tents/Tabernacles/Booths/*Sukkoth*. According to biblical tradition the Israelites would live in these huts for seven days during the feast as a commemoration of what God did for them in the Exodus event. Whereas, the Israelites made tents for themselves to dwell in during the feast, Peter proposes to make a tent each for the three heavenly figures, but not for the disciples.

The Tent of meeting operative while the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness (Ex. 33:7-11; Num. 11:16-17, 24-25; Dt. 31:14-15) also provides a possible background to the three tents. The Tent of Meeting was designed not only as a dwelling place for God, but pre-eminently as a place where God would appear in the form of a cloud and speak with Moses.

A third suggestion for the background of the three tents is the allusion to the eternal dwelling place for the righteous in heaven (Lk. 16:9; Jn. 14:2). The tents were meant to be earthly counterparts to the heavenly dwellings reserved for Jesus, Moses and Elijah, as righteous heavenly people (cf. Marshall, *Luke*, 386-387; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2.700; Öhler, "Verklärung," 208-209). Accordingly, the three tents that Peter offers would be earthly counterparts to the heavenly dwellings reserved for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah.

Other suggestions which we deem unsatisfactory are (i) the eschatological dwelling of the messiah (cf. against this view see Michaelis, "σκηνή", 380; Reid, *Transfiguration*, 135 (ii) the 'tent' that the prophet Jonah 'made' for himself (Jonah 4:5), (iii) God's promise to raise up David's fallen 'hut' or 'tent' (Amos 9:11).

The three main suggestions – Tent of Tabernacles, Tent of Meeting, Dwelling Place of the Righteous - contribute in total to what the author intends the gospel audience to hear in Peter's uncertain and confused offer to make three tents: (1) from their recall of the role of tents during the feast of Tabernacles the audience may think that Peter intends that the tents in an analogous temporary and festive way, celebrate and commemorate God's salvific activity evident in the appearance of the three heavenly figures, (2) from their knowledge that the tent made for the Tent of Meeting serves as a place where a heavenly being appears in glory and communicates with human beings, the audience may think that Peter intends the tents as an analogous place from which each heavenly figure may address the disciples, (3) from their familiarity of the tradition of eternal heavenly dwellings for the righteous, the audience may think of hospitable dwelling places Peter intends to build in an analogous way, for the heavenly figures while they are on earth. Yet, the narrative itself points out in various ways that Peter's suggestion was inappropriate. The Transfiguration offers only a temporary glimpse, a fleeting anticipation of the permanent heavenly glory Jesus will attain after his suffering and death – the resurrection!

The key point of connection between the transfiguration epiphany and the Feast of Tabernacles lies in the motif of 'making tents.' The key point of contact between the Tent of Meeting and the Transfiguration epiphany lies in the theme of communication of the heavenly with the earthly. The Tent of Meeting was a place where God would continually appear and meet with the people (cf. Dt. 33:9). Divine or heavenly communication is likewise the major theme of the Transfiguration Narrative. After Moses and Elijah appear from heaven and engage in conversation with the Transfigured Jesus on earth, the voice of God from the cloud, which is the climactic moment in this pivotal mandatory epiphany, directs the disciples to listen to what Jesus has to communicate. The key point of contact between the Transfiguration epiphany and the heavenly dwelling places also lies in the motif of 'making tents.' In Lk. 16:9 Jesus tells his disciples to make friends for themselves by means of dishonest wealth so that they may be welcomed into 'eternal tents' – αἰωνίους σκηνάς (*aiionious skēnas*).

In conclusion we surmise that Peter himself appears rather uncertain as to the appropriateness of making tents for each of the three heavenly figures. Hence, the audience cannot be exactly sure what Peter exactly had in mind. Tents and dwelling places play very important roles in biblical tradition. Hence, the audience may well think that Peter wants to build three tents, (1) to honour each heavenly figure and commemorate what God has done in bringing about this marvelous manifestation analogous to the commemorative role of the tents at *Sukkoth*, (2) to provide fitting locations for the heavenly figures to continue their glorious appearance and communicate divine instruction, (3) to furnish on earth appropriate hospitable habitations similar to the habitations of Abraham, the patriarch, and the righteous in heaven.

The appearance of the Transfigured Jesus is but a momentary anticipation of the permanent heavenly glory he will attain only after the suffering death and resurrection he has predicted for himself. It is this prophetic prediction of God's own beloved/chosen Son that the heavenly voice from the cloud commands the disciples and audience to heed.

7.c The Epiphanic Appearance of the Overshadowing Cloud

A further epiphanic action interrupts Peter's offer to make three tents. An overshadowing cloud suddenly and unexpectedly appears. There is no scholarly consensus as to whom precisely the cloud overshadows. Several possibilities have been proposed: (1) the cloud overshadows all six characters in the scene – Jesus, Moses, Elijah, Peter, James, and John {cf. Gundry, *Mark*, 460-461; Nolland, *Luke*, 9:21-18:34, 501; Bock, *Luke*, 1:1-9:50, 872-873; Nützel, *Verklärungserzählung*, 143, 246} (2) only the three heavenly figures {Öhler, "Verklärung," 210-211; Luz, *Matthäus*, 2.510-512; Gnilka, *Markus*, 2.35}, (3) only the three disciples {Hagner, *Matthew*, 14-28, 497; Green, *Luke*, 383-384; Reid, *Transfiguration*, 137; Fitzmyer (*Luke I-IX*, 802) says it is unclear whether the cloud overshadows all six or only the three disciples}, (4) only Moses and Elijah {Lohfink, *Himmelfahrt Jesu*, 190; J. Luzzarraga, *Las Tradiciones de la nube en la Biblia Y en el Juadismo primitive* (AnBib 54; Rome: Biblical Institute, 1973) 219}.

Heil argues that a close reading of the context show that the cloud has overshadowed *only Moses and Elijah*. All the Synoptic gospels use the Greek phrase - ἐκ τῆς νεφέλης (*ek tēs nephalēs*)– Mt. 17:5; Mk. 9:7; Lk. 9:35 (Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker, *Greek-English Lexicon of the NT*, on ἐκ denotes the direction from which something comes). Because the voice comes from the cloud in the direction of the disciples, they must be outside it. Furthermore, that the voice emphatically directs the disciples to listen to Jesus, indicates to the implied audience that Jesus is also outside the cloud.

Heil argues that the overshadowing cloud is an *oracular cloud* because it concludes by providing the oracular mandate of the pivotal mandatory epiphany, the theme of divine communication initiated by the conversation that the Transfigured Jesus had with Moses and Elijah. Based on the background provided by apocalyptic – eschatological traditions, the overshadowing cloud of the Transfiguration epiphany also functions as a *vehicular cloud*. It transports Moses and Elijah back to heaven.

The oracular function of the overshadowing cloud has precedents in Ex. 16:12.

Exodus 16:12 "I have heard the murmurings of the people of Israel; say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat flesh, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread; then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.'"

In both Ex. 16:10-11 and the Transfiguration Narratives the epiphanic appearance of a cloud indicates God's revelatory presence. B. S. Childs says: 'the real point of the verse is the sudden divine manifestation.' In Ex. 16:10-11 the oracle from the cloud of god's glorious presence functions as the decisive divine utterance that responds to the Israelites' grumbling about the uncertainty of procuring food for themselves in the wilderness. Similarly, the oracle from the cloud in the Transfiguration Narratives functions as the decisive divine intervention that responds to Peter's uncertainty regarding the building of three tents.

There are many biblical texts that refer to the oracular function of the overshadowing cloud (cf. Ex. 19:9; 24:15-18; 33:9; 40:35; Num. 9:18-23; 10:36; 17:7-10; Job 38:1). According to Wevers, (*Exodus*, 297) the “pillar of cloud” makes the divine presence concrete and fulfills “two necessary conditions: it hides God’s presence so that no one can see him, and it permits the people to hear him when he speaks to Moses.”

Through their knowledge of the above-mentioned literary traditions captured in the biblical texts, the implied audience is expected to interpret the function of the overshadowing oracular cloud as follows: The overshadowing cloud represents a further epiphanic appearance of God’s glorious presence, in addition to the epiphanic appearance of God’s glorious revelatory presence itself, in addition to the epiphanic Transfiguration of Jesus into a heavenly figure, and the epiphanic appearance of Moses and Elijah from heaven. The overshadowing cloud and the voice of God that comes from it interrupts and corrects Peter’s uncertain offer to make a tent for each heavenly figure.

Of the possible reasons why Peter wants to make three tents is to allow each, by analogy with the Tent of Meeting, to continue to receive and deliver divine communications. Ironically, God himself in the form of the cloud overshadows Moses and Elijah, who have been conversing with Jesus. As God in the form of a cloud spoke directly to Moses at the Tent of Meeting, so God’s voice from the cloud speaks directly to the three disciples of Jesus. Do they remain outside of the cloud? God’s voice directs them to listen to the divine communication of Jesus as god’s Son, who also remained outside of the overshadowing the cloud. By the end of the Transfiguration Narrative, the overshadowing cloud has separated Moses and Elijah from Jesus, and concealed them from the disciples, so that only Jesus remains. The overshadowing cloud serves to correct Peter’s offer to make three tents. Yet, by overshadowing Moses and Elijah, God himself in the form of a cloud indicates that Peter is mistaken. The overshadowing cloud is necessary to separate Moses and Elijah from Jesus and the disciples. God’s voice commands the disciples to listen at this point not to Moses and Elijah but to the Jesus who now stands alone.

Oracular clouds are not limited to traditions surrounding the Tent of Meeting. In Job. 38:1 also, the Lord spoke ‘through a storm and clouds’ - *διὰ λαίλαπος καὶ νεφῶν* – (*dia lailapos kai nephōn*).

What then is the resulting interpretation of the overshadowing oracular cloud? By the recall of the above mentioned biblical traditions, the implied audience of the Transfiguration Narratives, interpret the function of the overshadowing oracular cloud as follows:

The overshadowing cloud represents a further epiphanic appearance of God’s glorious revelatory presence itself, in addition to the epiphanic Transfiguration of Jesus into a heavenly figure, and the epiphanic appearance of Moses and Elijah from heaven. The overshadowing cloud and the voice of God that comes from it, interrupts and corrects Peter’s uncertain offer to make a tent for each heavenly figure. One of the

possible reasons why Peter wants to make a tent for each epiphanic heavenly figure is to allow each, by analogy with the Tent of Meeting, to continue to receive and deliver divine or heavenly communications. Ironically, God himself in the form of a cloud overshadows with the connotation of ‘dwells over’ or ‘makes a tent or covering over’ Moses and Elijah who have been conversing with Jesus. As God in the form of a cloud spoke directly to Moses at the Tent of Meeting, so God’s voice from the cloud speaks directly to the disciples, who remain outside of the cloud. God’s voice directs them to listen to the divine communication of Jesus as God’s Son, who likewise remains outside the overshadowing cloud, which by the end of the narrative has separated Moses and Elijah from Jesus and concealed them from the disciples, so that the disciples only see Jesus. Although not strictly necessary as a medium for the utterance of the heavenly voice of God, the overshadowing cloud serves to correct Peter’s offer to make three tents. But by ‘overshadowing’ with the subtle connotation of tenting over Moses and Elijah, God himself in the form of the cloud indicates to the implied audience that Peter is mistaken. The overshadowing cloud is thus necessary in order to dramatically separate Moses and Elijah not only from Jesus, but also from the disciples with God’s voice from the cloud commanding the disciples to listen at this point not to the venerable prophetic figures of Moses and Elijah who have disappeared into the cloud, but to Jesus who now stands there alone, authorized by God as his beloved/chosen Son.

Heil also argues that the overshadowing cloud is a *vehicular cloud*. Although it is not explicitly narrated that the overshadowing cloud has transported Moses and Elijah into heaven, the disappearance of the cloud together with the two heavenly figures implies that they have been transported by the cloud because there are biblical traditions to this effect. Thus the overshadowing cloud functions as a vehicular cloud which brings the epiphanic appearances of Jesus, Moses and Elijah to an end by transporting Moses and Elijah to heaven. The tradition of a vehicular cloud that transports selected persons or groups from earth to heaven is also found in 2 Kgs 2:11. Dan. 7:13 also depicts a vehicular cloud on which one like the Son of man comes to earth. The Testament of Abraham B 8:1-3 states that after archangel Michael went up ‘in the heavens’ and spoke to God about Abraham, God told Michael, ‘go and take up Abraham in the body and show him everything ...’ Then Michael took Abraham up ‘on a cloud’ (ἐπι νέφελης - *epi nephelēs*) in the body and bore him up to the river Oceanus, a heavenly river. From there Abraham has a vision of heaven (8:4 ff.). Also refer *Antiquitates Judaicae* by Josephus 4.8.48 § 326 which recounts how a cloud suddenly descended on Moses and he disappeared. As we have already observed when Josephus reports on the end of the earthly life of Moses, he narrates that when a cloud suddenly descended upon Moses he disappeared in a ravine. Although it is not explicitly stated that this cloud too Moses into heaven, it is implied as his disappearance into the cloud is equivalent to his ‘gone back to the deity.’ That Moses ‘disappeared’ in a cloud likens him to Elijah who also ‘disappeared from human beings’ at the end of his earthly life. In 1 Thess 4:17, Paul assures his audience that at the second coming of Christ they would all be re-united with their fellow-believers who have already died. The Lord himself will come down ‘from heaven’ and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then those who are still alive together with those who have died will be caught up ‘in the clouds’ to meet the Lord in the air, ‘and thus, we shall be with the Lord forever’ (1 Thess. 4:17). Here the clouds function as a

vehicle for transporting the living and the dead into the heavenly realm to be with the Lord forever in heaven. Similarly, in the Transfiguration Narratives Moses and Elijah are overshadowed by a cloud that not only conceals but also transports them back to heaven. In Acts 1:9, while the disciples were looking on Jesus was lifted up ‘and a cloud took him from their eyes.’ Just as a cloud took Moses and Elijah from the eyes of the disciples, and transported them back to heaven in the transfiguration Narratives, so a cloud took the risen Jesus from the eyes of the disciples and transported him to heaven. E.J. Richard, *First and Second Thessalonians*, (SacPag 11; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1995) 246: “While clouds were a frequent motif in OT theophanies (Ex. 16:10; 19:16 ff) they were also a divine and heavenly vehicle (Is. 19:1; Dan. 7:13) suggesting divine power and presence... The Pauline text is unclear whether the elect are borne heavenward on clouds as vehicle or are enveloped in the clouds as symbols of divine power and the heavenly sphere.” J.A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 31; New York: Doubleday, 1998) 210: “Borne up by God’s cloud, Christ is seen no more, and thus returns to glory at his Father’s right hand (2:33). The cloud is used in the OT sense of an apocalyptic sense of an OT stage prop, an instrument of God’s presence, power, or glory.” Rev. 11:12 is also an example of a vehicular cloud that transports selected individuals from earth to heaven.

In conclusion, we state that at the end of the Transfiguration Narratives in the Synoptics, the implied audience realizes that the epiphanic cloud has overshadowed only Moses and Elijah. The cloud representative of God’s presence, has not only concealed Moses and Elijah from the eyes of the disciples, but has also separated them from Jesus so that the disciples no longer see Moses and Elijah, but only Jesus. This is confirmed by the oracular function of the cloud in which the voice of God speaks ‘from the cloud’ to the disciples, who are thus outside the cloud, and directs them to listen to Jesus, the only one left standing there, who is also thus outside the cloud. Although a cloud is not necessary as a medium for the voice of God, the overshadowing cloud and the voice work together as an ironic interruption of Peter’s uncertain offer to make a tent each for the three heavenly figures. By way of analogy with the Tent of Meeting, Peter plausibly wants to make a tent in honour of each heavenly figure at which each can continue to deliver divine communication, thus prolonging and thus extending to the disciples the conversation they see but do not hear taking place between the three heavenly figures. By making a tent for each Peter places each on the same level, honouring each with an equal opportunity to speak, and thus prolonging the epiphanic event. But the overshadowing cloud ironically interrupts Peter’s offer to make tents. Then, adding to the irony, the voice of God himself utters a dramatic command to the disciples, the mandate of this pivotal divine epiphany, directing them and the audiences to listen not to Moses and Elijah at tents but to Jesus left standing there alone, authorized as God’s Son.

The vehicular function of the overshadowing cloud complements its oracular function. Since the disciples see only Jesus after the voice of God speaks from the overshadowing cloud deduces that the cloud has not only concealed Moses and Elijah but has transported them back to heaven from which they appeared in conversation with the Transfigured Jesus.

8. The Function of the Pivotal Mandatory Epiphany: Within the Antecedent Narrative

We shall now examine how the Transfiguration Narrative functions as a pivotal mandatory epiphany within the respective narrative context of the particular Synoptic gospel. We shall focus our study on the gospel of Mark.

We begin by considering how the implied audience responds to the Transfiguration Narrative as a pivotal mandatory epiphany based on its knowledge of biblical traditions and on what it has heard in the antecedent narrative.

8.a Mk. 9:2-8 – Marcan Transfiguration Narrative



The phrase “after six days” refers to an interval of time which connects the implied audience with Peter’s confession of faith, the first passion prediction and the call to participate in the suffering death and resurrection of Jesus (Mk. 8:27-9:1). M.A. Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel: Mark’s World in Literary- Rhetorical Perspective*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989) 205: “The specific time reference in Mk. 9:2 ‘after six days’ both connects the Transfiguration with the immediately preceding teaching session and separates it somewhat from it.”

In the previous scene, Peter ‘took aside’ Jesus and began to rebuke him for speaking openly the word (Mk. 8:32) about the divine necessity that he suffer and die before being raised (Mk. 8:31). After rebuking Peter (Mk. 8:33), Jesus then ‘summoned’ to himself the crowd with his disciples (Mk. 8:34) calling them to follow him in his passion death and resurrection (Mk. 8:34-38). That Jesus now, ‘took along Peter, James and John’ (Mk. 9:2) prepares the audience for a new and further private revelation regarding Jesus’ suffering and death, as well as the participation of others in it.

8.b Mk. 9:2-8 and the Antecedent Narrative

What is about to happen occurs nearly a week later. It indicates a new and separate event. This means that what is about to happen is not limited to a relationship only with the immediately preceding events and predictions (cf. Peter’s confession of faith, the first passion prediction, and the call to take up the cross) so that the Transfiguration Narrative would be simply the fulfillment of the promise given in Mk. 9:1. The implied audience at this point would hear an echo of the six days (Ex. 24:16). J.P. Heil, “The Transfiguration of Jesus: Narrative Meaning and Function of Mark 9:2-8; Matthew 17:1-8; and Luke 9:28-36,” *AnBib* 144 (Pontificio Istituto Biblico, Roma, 2000) disagrees although Nützel, “Verklärungserzählung, 161; Gnllka, *Markus*, 2.32; and W.L. Lane, “*The Gospel according to Mark: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition*

and Notes ,” (NICNT, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 317 agree. This is confirmed for the implied audience by the fact that Jesus ‘took along’ - παραλαμβάνει from παραλαμβάνω – *paralambanei* from *paralambanō*) Peter, James and John, prepares the audience for a new and further private revelation. B.D.Schildgen, *Crisis and Continuity: Time in the gospel of Mark*, (JSNT Sup 159; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998) 21 states that ‘taking along’ in Mk. 9:2 is an expression of ‘the movement in the crisis time in the gospel as Jesus journeys forward.’ This is confirmed by the fact that the disciples ‘taking along’ - παραλαμβάνουσιν from παραλαμβάνω - (*paralambānousin* from *paralambānō*) of Jesus in the boat (Mk. 4:36) led to a new and private revelation of his power to still the storm (Mk. 4:34-41). When Jesus previously ‘took along’ - παραλαμβάνουσιν from παραλαμβάνω - (*paralambānousin* from *paralambānō*) Jairus and his wife, and the three disciples, Peter, James, and John, (Mk. 5:40) it also resulted in a new and private revelation of his power to resuscitate a dead child (Mk. 5:35-43). A. Kretzer, “παραλαμβάνω” *EDNT* 3:30: “As a community building term in the broader sense παραλαμβάνω, is applied to the disciple-Jesus relationship (Mk. 4:36) and includes both the sphere of glorification (Mk. 5:40; 9:2 par.: Jesus takes three disciples along with him) and the experience of the crucifixion (Mk. 10:32 par. Mt. 17:1/Lk. 9:28: Jesus takes the disciples aside and speaks to them about his suffering; cf. Mk. 14:33 par. Mt. 26:27: the scene of the mount of Olives).”

As the implied audience has already heard, when Jesus previously ‘went up to the mountain’ (Mk. 3:13) and summoned those disciples whom he wanted, the mountain functioned as a place for the separation of the Twelve from the crowd. After Jesus alone ‘went to the mountain to pray’ (Mk. 6:46), the mountain is a secluded area close to the realm of heaven, functioned as a suitable place for Jesus to pray and from which to see the distress of the disciples below, as they were trying to cross the stormy sea. From a position of communion with God in prayer on the mountain with its celestial implications, Jesus appropriately made an epiphanic appearance, revealing to his disciples his power to walk on the sea (Mk. 6:48). H. Klein, ὄρος, *EDNT* 2.534: ‘The use of προσεύξασθαι (Mk. 6:46 par. Mt. 14:23; Lk. 6:12; 9:28) as well as the fact that the *mountain* is often the locus of extraordinary events can also function, however, to single out the mountain as the place of special proximity to God... That the mountain is high emphasizes its closeness to the heavenly realm.’ That Jesus now leads Peter, James and John up a ‘high mountain; prepares the audience for a revelatory encounter. The implied audience recalls the special encounters that selected individuals have had with God on mountains in the past (Gen. 22:12-14; Ex. 3:1-4:17; 19:3, 11; 24:13, 17; 1 Kgs. 19:8-11).

Jesus’ ‘transfiguration’ indicates to the implied audience his external, temporary, transformation by God into a heavenly being while still on earth. It points to the resurrection, which is his permanent attainment of glory in heaven as promised to the righteous after death. That ‘his clothes became very radiantly white’ (Mk. 9:3) further defines for the implied audience what is meant by the Transfiguration. The clothing that transmitted healing power to the sick who touched it (Mk. 5:27-30; 6:56) now radiates the extreme *whiteness* characteristic of the clothing of those who dwell in heaven. That no bleacher *on the earth* could whiten to this degree (Mk. 9:3) confirms the heavenly rather than earthly nature of Jesus’ transformed clothing.

Is Jesus on earth receiving a special revelation from the heavenly Moses and Elijah? Or is Jesus who was ‘speaking’ openly the word about the divine necessity to suffer and die before being raised now speaking that same word with Moses and Elijah? Does the appearance of the heavenly Moses and Elijah in close association with the Transfigured Jesus mean that he will also attain heavenly glory like them, without being subject to the death of a rejected prophet? Does Jesus receive a new revelation from God through his conversation with these two heavenly figures that reverses his previous prediction that he ‘must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed’ (Mk. 8:31)? Does it annul Jesus’ previous appeal for the crowd, the disciples, and the implied audience, who want to follow him to deny themselves, take up their cross, and lose their lives in order to save them (Mk. 8:34-35)?

Peter replies Jesus (Mk. 9:5-6), although the text does not indicate that he has been addressed by Jesus. So in ‘replying’ he acts as spokesman for the three chosen disciples. Peter addresses Jesus as ‘Rabbi’ – ‘my master’ or ‘my great one.’ This does not nullify his previous confession of Jesus as the Christ. Yet, it serves to illustrate that Peter has not seen Jesus as ‘the Christ’ who must suffer and be put to death by the leaders of his people (Mk. 8:31). My addressing Jesus as ‘Rabbi’ Peter associates Jesus closely with the Moses and Elijah who entered heaven without suffering and being put to death by their own people. Peter’s response ‘it is good to be here’ (Mk. 9:5) reminds the implied audience of Jesus’ prediction that ‘there are some standing *here* who will not taste death until they that the kingdom of god has come in power’ (Mk. 9:1). At the same time, the implied audience who have heard Jesus tell the Syrophoenician women who begged him to expel the demon from her daughter (Mk. 7:26), that ‘it is not good to take the bread of the children and throw it to the dogs’ (Mk. 7:27). This means that it would not be good, that is appropriate to God’s plan of salvation, according to which ‘the children; should be ‘fed first’ from the salvific benefits of the bread Jesus brings (cf. J. Wanke, *καλός*, *EDNT* 2.245: ‘καλός can be understood as that which is salutary and good before God; Mk. 7:27). Peter has misunderstood the function of the Transfiguration. Also by ‘here’ Peter and Jesus are referring to two very different locations. For Peter, ‘here’ (ὧδε - *hōde*) is the mountain of Transfiguration; for Jesus ‘here’ (ὧδε - *hōde*) is Ceasarea Philippi (Mk. 8:27), the location of Jesus’ first passion prediction. The implied audience is provoked to ask ‘Is Peter still ‘thinking the things of human beings’ rather than ‘the things of God’? (Mk. 8:33).

The three chosen disciples are terrified. The implied audience remembers that they were also terrified when Jesus stilled the storm (Mk. 4:41). That the disciples ‘feared a great fear’ led them to ask of Jesus ‘Who then is this?’ But at the mountain of the Transfiguration, the three disciples are so terrified that Peter ‘did not know what to reply’ (Mk. 9:6). Adding to the irony, the voice of God himself, without the provision of a tent like the Tent of Meeting and without speaking through such pre-eminent prophets as Moses and Elijah, proclaims a dramatic divine communication directly to the disciples, ‘This is my beloved Son; listen to him.’ What the implied audience (Mk. 1:1, 11) and the demonic world have already known (Mk. 3:11; 5:7), namely, the more profound identity of Jesus as God’s unique, beloved Son, God now finally reveals to the three disciples

(Mk. 9:7). God corrects Peter's misinterpretation of the epiphanic appearance of Jesus forcefully (for Peter had placed Jesus on the same level as Moses and Elijah by proposing to build a tent for each) by declaring emphatically that 'this *one*' is 'my beloved Son.' The disciples and the implied audience are to perceive that Jesus is more than "Rabbi" (Mk. 9:5) and 'Christ' (Mk. 8:29).

God's urgent command to 'listen to him,' the mandate of the pivotal mandatory epiphany of the Transfiguration pivots the audience back to and thus, reinforces Jesus' own appeals to 'listen to' and understand his teaching:

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| Mk. 4:2-3 | And he taught them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: "Listen! A sower went out to sow |
| Mk. 4:9 | And he said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." |
| Mk. 4:23 | If any man has ears to hear, let him hear." |
| Mk. 4:24 | And he said to them, "Take heed what you hear; the measure you give will be the measure you get, and still more will be given you. |
| Mk. 7:14 | And he called the people to him again, and said to them, "Hear me, to all of you, and understand: |
| Mk. 8:18 | Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember? |
| Mk. 9:7 | And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him." |

God's mandate for the disciples to 'listen to him' reminds the audience of Moses' promise that God would raise up from and for the people of Israel a prophet like Moses, so that 'you shall listen to him' (Dt. 18:15). The divine mandate to listen to Jesus as God's beloved Son especially refers the disciples and the implied audience back to what Jesus has just spoken in the preceding scene (Mk. 8:31-9:1).

By the time of the transfiguration scene there has been no indication that Peter, although he rebuked (Mk. 8:32) and was rebuked by Jesus (Mk. 8:33), or the crowds and the disciples have really heard and understood what Jesus has said.

Attentively listening to the words of Jesus about the necessity to follow him on his way to suffering and death, would enable the three disciples and the implied audience to realize how the Transfiguration epiphany prepares them to fulfill Jesus' promise that 'there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God come in power.' The transfiguration epiphany will thus enable them to see that 'the kingdom of God has come in power' already and paradoxically in the apparent weakness of Jesus' suffering, rejection, and death which some of them will witness before they 'taste' the bitterness of their own death as followers of Jesus. Gundry (*Mark*, 439) indicates that Mark 8:38 For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of man also be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels" – is to be interpreted as God not being ashamed of his Son even though others may be. H.-J. Van der Minde (γεύομαι *ENDT* 1.246 states that γεύομαι implies the moment of suffering). K. Brower, "Mark 9:1:

Seeing the Kingdom in Power,” *JSNT* 6, (1980) 41: “These shall see the kingdom in power, albeit power in weakness, and it may not be perceived as power. Nevertheless, in the cross of Jesus, God’s rule has been decisively established, shown by the darkness at noon and the rending of the veil, and witnessed to by the Roman centurion.” This does not rule out that they will also see that the kingdom of God has come in power when they see Jesus risen from the dead (Mk. 16:6-7).

‘Suddenly,’ that I simultaneous with the voice uttering the mandate, the three disciples look round and no longer saw anyone but Jesus alone with them (Mk. 9:8). This confirms for the implied audience that the cloud, which overshadowed Moses and Elijah has taken them back to heaven. Van Iersel, *Mark*, 297: ‘When the voice had died away the cloud has dissolved too. The disciples can freely look around again. Along with the cloud, Elijah an Moses have also vanished from sight. The implied audience presumes that they have returned to the heavenly world to which they belong.’ That Jesus was alone ‘with themselves’ reminds the audience how the disciples previously had only one loaf ‘with themselves’ in the boat (Mk. 8:14). On the metaphorical level the ‘one loaf’ symbolizes Jesus himself who can reveal his more profound character by satisfying his disciples with the ‘one loaf’ of his self revelation (Mk. 8:13-21). Although the disciples have only ‘one loaf’ (Jesus) with them in the boat the audience knows that because of Jesus’ previous miraculous overabundant feedings (Mk. 6: 30-44; 8:1-9), this ‘one loaf’ (Jesus) is sufficient to satisfy both physically with food and metaphorically with his self revelation.

In conclusion, we note the following. When the audience hears that ‘Jesus took along Peter and James and John, and led them up to a high mountain privately, alone’ (Mk. 9:2) they are prepared for the possibility of a dramatic revelatory encounter with God. That the three disciples became terrified at the epiphany of the Transfigured Jesus in conversation with Moses and Elijah was the reason Peter did not know what to reply (Mk. 9:6), when he responded to the revelation of the more profound identity of Jesus in relation to Moses and Elijah by suggesting the making of a tent for each (Mk. 9:5). But Peter is interrupted by yet another sudden and epiphanic appearance as a cloud overshadowed Moses and Elijah implicitly transporting them back to heaven. After Jesus’ baptism, God’s voice from heaven told Jesus, ‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased’ (Mk. 1:11). But now God’s voice from the cloud tells the three disciples, ‘This is my beloved Son; listen to him.’ What the implied audience (Mk. 1:1, 11) and the demonic world have already known (Mk. 3:11; 5:7), God now reveals directly to the three disciples (Mk. 9:7). God’s voice from the cloud serves as the pivotal mandate that distinguishes Jesus from Moses and Elijah as God’s beloved Son, and commands the disciples and the implied audience to listen to Jesus. The mandate thus pivots them back to the previous teaching of Jesus (cf. Mk. 4:2-3, 9, 23-24; 7:14; 8:18) especially his teaching about the necessity for him and his followers to suffer and to lose their lives (Mk. 8:31-38) before entering into the heavenly glory of god’s kingdom anticipated by Jesus’ Transfiguration.





8.b Mk. 9:2-8 and the Subsequent Narrative

We shall now consider how the Transfiguration Narrative, especially its pivotal mandate, relates to and prepares the audience for the subsequent Marcan Narrative. When Jesus and the three disciples came down the mountain of transfiguration, he ‘ordered them’ to tell no one what they had seen, until the son of man had risen from the dead (Mk. 9:9). This ‘order’ of Jesus serves as the first instance of what the disciples and the implied audience are to listen to, as enjoined by the pivotal mandate of God’s voice. It reminds the audience that after Jesus took these same three disciples – Peter, James and John (Mk. 5:37) – along with the parents (Mk. 5:40) of a little girl to witness the resuscitation of her from death, he strictly ‘ordered them’ that no one should know this (Mk. 5:43). The audience also remembers how Jesus similarly ‘ordered them,’ in this case, the crowd (Mk. 7:33), to tell no one, after he miraculously opened the ears and mouth of a deaf man with a speech impediment. But the more he ordered them, all the more did they proclaim (Mk. 7:36).

After Peter confessed Peter to be the Christ, Jesus immediately ‘rebuked them’ to tell no one about him (Mk. 8:30). These commands to silence impress upon the audience that the more profound character of Jesus as glimpsed in his miraculous healings (Mk. 5:21-43; 7:31-37), in Peter’s confession (Mk. 8:29), and in Jesus’ glorious transfiguration (Mk. 9:2-8), cannot be fully understood until he has risen from the dead (Mk. 9:9). As Lane (*Mark*, 323) notes: ‘The reality of his exaltation as the Transfigured Son, however, can be appreciated only when the significance of his sufferings has been grasped.’

The emphasis upon ‘*from the dead*’ in a forward position in the original Greek phrase - **ἐκ νεκρῶν ἀναστῆ** - (*ek nekrōn anatē*) meaning ‘from the dead has risen,’ within the statement, ‘until the Son of Man from the dead has risen,’ makes explicit what Jesus’ first passion prediction implies (Mk. 8:31), namely, that he will rise *from the dead* - **ἐκ νεκρῶν** - (*ek nekrōn*), three days after the Jewish leaders kill him. This emphasis upon Jesus’ resurrection *from the dead* - **ἐκ νεκρῶν** - (*ek nekrōn*), provides the disciples and the implied audience a key for understanding the significance of Jesus’ transfiguration. Although there is a definite emphasis upon ‘*from the dead*’ - **ἐκ νεκρῶν** - (*ek nekrōn*), the ultimate focus of Mk. 9:9 is upon Jesus’ triumphant *resurrection* over death. Gundry, *Mark*, 462: ‘Attention focuses on his resurrection from the dead, not on his death, as shown especially by the addition of - **ἐκ νεκρῶν** - (*ek nekrōn*), ‘from the dead’ in a forward position.’ Jesus’ Transfiguration gave the disciples a glimpse of his future resurrection to heavenly glory. But they have yet to make the connection between the necessity of his suffering and death, before his resurrection to heavenly glory. Therefore, God’s mandate to listen to Jesus (Mk. 9:7) directs the disciples and the audience to hear the connection Jesus makes between his necessary death, but subsequent resurrection when he demands silence about the transfiguration until he has ‘*from the dead been raised*’ (Mk. 9:9).

The disciples respond to Jesus’ command for silence by keeping his word to themselves, questioning what ‘the rising from the dead’ means (Mk. 9:10). They are

questioning what it means for Jesus as Son of Man (Mk. 9:9) in view of their experience of the Transfiguration epiphany. They have just seen the earthly Jesus Transfigured, without first dying and rising from the dead, into a glorious heavenly figure in conversation with Moses and Elijah (Mk. 9:3-4). So why is it necessary for Jesus as the Son of Man ‘to rise from the dead’ in order to attain heavenly glory? Gundry, *Mark* 463: “As such rising from the dead would not be meaningless to first century Jews. But the definite article is anaphoric: ‘*the* rising from the dead’ refers back to the *Son of Man’s* rising from the dead.” Lane, *Mark*, 324: ‘The disciples’ real question is, ‘What have death and resurrection to do with the Son of Man?’”



The disciples appeal to the teaching of the Scribes, one of the groups of Jewish leaders who will put Jesus to death (Mk. 8:31; cf. Mk. 2:6, 16; 3:22; 7:1, 5). This appeal to scribal authority is especially ironic for the implied audience who recall the response of those whom Jesus taught in the synagogue at Capernaum, for he was teaching them as one having authority and not as the Scribes (Mk. 1:22), and the divine mandate to listen to the beloved Son of God. Thus the disciples appeal to scribal teaching underlines their complete lack of understanding of the authority of Jesus as the beloved Son of God, even after the Transfiguration epiphany. The disciples’ objection that Elijah must come first is because the disciples believe that Elijah, who is considered the forerunner of the eschatological age has already returned as a heavenly figure, rather than undergoing an earthly mortal death. Hence, why is it necessary for Jesus who was also transfigured into a heavenly figure like Elijah, to die and rise as the Son of Man to inaugurate the eschatological age? So the disciples’ question, ‘Why do the Scribes say that Elijah must come first?’ (Mk. 9:11) is really an objection to the ‘divine necessity’ that Jesus die and rise to eternal glory. In answer to the disciples’ object Jesus says that Elijah does come first to restore all things (Mk. 9:12). Already Jesus is dispelling the erroneous notion that the Transfiguration epiphany constituted the return of Elijah. In Mk. 9:13 Jesus will explain that ‘they did to him (Elijah who returned) whatever they wished, as it is written of him. From the beginning of the Marcan Narrative the implied audience has known the John the Baptist, who wore a prophet’s clothing (Zech. 13:4) like Elijah (2 Kgs. 1:8), represents the expected Elijah figure sent by God to be the ‘messenger’ (Mal. 3:1, 23) who prepares the way for Jesus (Mk. 1:2-6). It is John the Baptist who restored all things by preaching a baptism of repentance, and all Judea and Jerusalem were baptized by him (Mk. 1:5). That John the Baptist as Elijah who had already come suffered and died in accord with the scriptural divine necessity – ‘as it is written - **γέγραπται** from **γράφω** (*gegraptai* from *graphō*) reinforces for the disciples and the audience that the Son of Man must likewise suffer ‘as it is written’ of him (Mk. 9:12), before rising from the dead (Mk. 9:9) to heavenly glory glimpsed at his Transfiguration. This is what the pivotal mandate (Mk. 9:7) directs the disciples and the audience to heed. Gundry, *Mark*, 465 indicates that the clause - *as it is written of him* - refers to the written record of the historical Elijah’s maltreatment (1 Kgs. 19:2), considered as a pattern for the maltreatment of Elijah returned as John the Baptist.

Coming down from the mountain of the Transfiguration, Jesus questions a ‘faithless generation.’ At first glance the report of the disciples’ failure to cast off the deaf and dumb spirit (Mk. 9:18) may suggest that they are the ones over whom Jesus laments thus. Yet the audience is told in Mk. 9:14 that a great crowd had gathered about the disciples who were arguing with the scribes. The verb **συζητέω** (*suzēteō*) is also used in Mk. 12:28 and Acts 6:9 with a negative connotation depicting an argument with hostile intent. Gundry, *Mark*, 489: ‘The faithless generation’ takes in the father and the crowd. It does not take in the disciples; for they stand opposite the crowd in the foregoing dispute. Jesus does not mention unbelief on their part when they ask him why they failed. It looks as though Jesus is condemning the crowd, including the child’s father and the Scribes for making the failure of the disciples’ an occasion to dispute the power of Jesus himself, whom the disciples represent and whose shared exorcistic ability they have demonstrated in the past’ (Mk. 6:13). Why do the disciples fail now despite having succeeded in exorcisms in the past? As signified by the misconception of Peter, the representative of the disciples (cf. Peter replies although Jesus had not addressed him – Mk. 9:5) about the purpose of the Transfiguration epiphany seen in the inappropriateness of his suggestion to build three tents, the disciples as a whole fail to understand the profound significance of Jesus’ true identity and authority; they do not listen to him, especially in his insistence on the divine necessity that the Son of Man should suffer, and with his followers, in order to be raised to heavenly glory. The mute and deaf son whom the distraught father has brought to Jesus symbolically characterizes the disciples who have remained metaphorically deaf and mute to the Transfiguration’s pivotal mandate directing them to listen to Jesus’ pronouncement regarding the necessity of his suffering (Mk. 9:12). Jesus’ pronouncement to the father that ‘all things are possible for one who believes!’ invites the father to acknowledge his faith in the divine healing power at work in Jesus. The father’s humble faith, ‘I believe, help my unbelief!’ extricates him from the faithless generation (Mk. 9:19). Only with a humble faith-filled prayer for God’s powerful help will the disciples succeed, not only to expel ‘this kind’ of mute and deaf demon from others (Mk. 9:28-29), but in overcoming their own metaphorical deafness and muteness to the divine necessity of following Jesus’ way of suffering and death before the resurrection into heavenly glory indicated by his Transfiguration.



Jesus’ second passion prediction (Mk. 9:31-32) and his announcement of his resurrection after death places emphasis upon his violent death: “The Son of Man will be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him; and when he is killed, after three days he will rise.” The addition of the passive participle, “having been killed” - **ἀποκτανθείς** from the verb **ἀποκτείνω** - (*apoktantheis* from *apokteinō*) immediately after the active verb ‘they will kill’ - **ἀποκτενοῦσιν** from the verb **ἀποκτείνω** - (*apoktenousin* from *apokteinō*) him underlines what the pivotal mandate is urging the disciples and audience to hear in order to understand the significance of Jesus’ Transfiguration. Gundry, *Mark*, 503-504 states that stress continues to fall on merciless violence.

Even as the stress continues to fall on merciless violence, the disciples continue in their blindness to the divine necessity of the suffering of the Son of Man in attaining

heavenly glorification. Now James and John want for themselves places of pre-eminence – seats at the right and the left – with Jesus in his glory (Mk. 10:37). Whereas Peter erred in suggesting the placing of Moses and Elijah in the same category of heavenly glory as Jesus by building three tents for each, James and John err by focusing only on the glory while neglecting the suffering and death (Mk. 10:37). James and John have heard Jesus speak of his coming in glory of his Father (Mk. 8:38) and have witnessed Jesus' temporary Transfiguration into a heavenly being (Mk. 9:2-3), they are blinded to the divine necessity of his suffering and death. So, Jesus underscores the need for James and John to 'drink of' and 'be baptized in' the same suffering and death he will undergo (Mk. 10:38-39), but reminds them that his glory is ultimately the glory of his Father, who has prepared the requested places of heavenly honour (Mk. 10:40). Jesus concludes with a further revelation about the significance of his death as freely accepted humble service for others before he enters into and comes again in glory; 'For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many' (Mk. 10:45).

After his triumphal entry into the city of Jerusalem, Jesus enters the Temple precincts and speaks to the Jewish leaders in a parable recounting the stubborn resistance of the Jewish leaders to God's salvific designs throughout the ages. In this parable he tells the Jewish leaders how the owner of the vineyard (God) finally sends to the tenants (the Jewish leadership) who have already killed or mistreated all the his servants (prophets), his beloved son, thinking,



'They will respect my son.' This reminds the audience of the transfiguration's pivotal mandate uttered by God's voice from the cloud: "This is my Son, the beloved; listen to him." That the tenants killed the 'beloved son' recalls Jesus' predictions that he will be killed by both the Jewish leaders and the Gentiles. That Jesus the beloved Son represents 'the stone which the builders rejected' in his quotation of Ps. 117:22-23, echoes his prediction that he must 'be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and the scribes.' As the beloved Son of God Jesus will be killed but vindicated. Although Jesus, 'the stone' will be rejected and killed, God will marvelously vindicate him by transforming him into the 'cornerstone' or 'head of the corner' (Mk. 12:10-11) which implies his resurrection from the dead. Jesus will attain the heavenly glory prefigured by his Transfiguration only after he is rejected and killed as God's beloved Son. Gundry, *Mark*, 663: '... becoming head of the corner refers to rulership following resurrection, not resurrection itself.'

Jesus' refutation of the teaching of the Sadducees is also connected with his insistence that he will be raised after being put to death. Jesus' Transfiguration into an angel-like heavenly figure, which foreshadows the future resurrection from the dead, is proof of his pronouncement that when the dead are raised they enter into heavenly existence that transcends earthly categories. Jesus cites Ex. 3:6 to illustrate that since the three patriarchs were already dead when God uttered this to Moses, it implies 'the power of God' (Mk. 12:24) to raise them from the dead. Gundry, *Mark*, 708-709: 'It is not enough to say that Jesus plays on Jewish belief that the patriarchs and martyrs are even now living to God. If they are already living to God without having been resurrected, where lies the necessity of a future resurrection? Jesus would be saying nothing to answer

the Sadducees question.’ If the disciples and the implied audience heed the transfiguration’s pivotal mandate to listen to Jesus (Mk. 9:7) they will hear in this pronouncement that although Jesus, unlike Moses and Elijah, will be put to death, he will surely be raised from the dead like the patriarchs, since God is ‘not the God of the dead, but of the living’ (Mk. 12:27).

Jesus makes another special private revelation to the three disciples who witnessed the Transfiguration, and also to Andrew, while sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the Temple (Mk. 13:3). Now, Jesus discloses to them that at the end of this world (Mk. 13: 24-25) people will see him as ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds with much power and glory’ (cf. Mk. 13:26; cf. Dan. 7:13-14). Whereas Elijah and Moses were transported by the divine overshadowing cloud back to heaven after their appearance in glory with the Transfigured Jesus on earth, Jesus after his resurrection will



be transported in clouds from heaven to earth, where he will send out the angels to gather together his elect from wherever they have been scattered (Mk. 13:26-27). That Jesus as the son of Man is still to come ‘in the clouds with much power and glory’ (Mk. 13:26) reminds the audience of Jesus’ previous prediction that as the Son of Man he is still to come ‘in his Father’s glory’ with the holy angels (Mk. 8:38). The Transfiguration’s pivotal mandate to listen to Jesus thus directs the disciples and the implied audience backward (Mk. 8:38) and forward (Mk. 13:26) to these two pronouncements about Jesus’ coming in glory, so that they will realize that the transfigured glory of Jesus before his suffering and death is only a preliminary glimpse of his final coming in glory after his suffering, death and resurrection (Mk. 8:31; 9:9, 12, 31; 10:33-34). Hence, the Transfiguration which provides the disciples and the implied audience with a glimpse of Jesus’ resurrected glory in heaven, eventually points further to the final coming in glory. The Transfiguration itself, and also the epiphanic heavenly cloud together with Jesus’ predictions of his coming in glory serve as important props in depicting this scenario of Jesus’ glorious second coming.

On this same day of his life, and two days before the feast of Unleavened Bread an anonymous woman anoints Jesus for burial (Mk. 14:1-3) thus, implicitly acknowledging that she esteems Jesus’ impending death. This woman stands in contrast to the disciples, who have not heeded the Transfiguration’s mandate to listen to Jesus concerning the divine necessity of his suffering and death. She poured out perfumed ointment on his head, while he was reclining at table in the house of Simon the leper at Bethany. Jesus interprets her lavish hospitable anointing as a prophetic gesture anticipating his upcoming burial (Mk. 14:8).

On the final day of his life in Jerusalem Jesus celebrates the Passover Meal. He interprets this meal with his disciples as a symbolic anticipation of his sacrificial death he must undergo before he partakes of the eschatological banquet in the kingdom of God. Although this is Jesus’ last meal on earth, which is also celebrated in a context of impending betrayal, he still looks forward to partaking of the heavenly banquet in the kingdom of God (Mk. 14:25) after his triumph over death through the resurrection. The

Transfiguration's pivotal mandate thus enjoins the disciples and the audience to listen to these words of Jesus in order to understand that his transfiguration into a heavenly figure portends his future partaking of the heavenly banquet in the kingdom of God that will occur only after his sacrificial death.

Even in the course of predicting that all his disciples will abandon him, Jesus again predicts his resurrection after death. Citing Zech 13:7 Jesus accentuates how his suffering and death are ultimately God's doing himself: "I will strike the shepherd (Jesus), and the sheep (disciples) will be scattered (Mk. 14:27). But after being struck by God with death, Jesus will also be raised by God (Mk. 14:28). Jesus also predicts Peter's denial of him. Peter's vehement objection that he will never deny Jesus, like the rest of the disciples who disclaim Jesus' prediction (Mk. 14:31), ironically points to their unwillingness to listen to the voice of the beloved Son. The disciples have not heeded what the Transfiguration's pivotal mandate has urged them to hear. Jesus has stated that after he has been raised by God he will go before the disciples to Galilee (Mk. 14:28). They continue in their state of metaphorical muteness and deafness to the voice of the beloved Son.



The disciples falling asleep at Gethsemane is another indication that they continue unmindful of the heavenly voice urging them to listen to the beloved Son. Jesus although tested by his distress and sorrow over his imminent death (Mk. 14:34) and voicing his human desire to avoid the cup of suffering and death, nevertheless submitted his own will to God's will that he suffer and die (Mk. 14:35-36). That Jesus 'finds' the three disciples 'sleeping' (Mk. 14:37) is precisely what he warned them against in his discourse preparing them for the time before his final coming: 'Watch, therefore; for you do not know when the Lord of the house will come ... and *find you sleeping*' (Mk. 13:35-36). The disciples' sleeping indicates their inability to stay awake and watch (Mk. 14:34) and points to their and the audiences potential failure to be prepared for Jesus' final coming in glory anticipated by his Transfiguration.

Having first commanded the disciples to watch at Gethsemane, Jesus now adds a second imperative 'pray' (Mk. 14:38). Heil, "The Transfiguration of Jesus: Narrative Meaning and Function of Mk. 9:2-8; Mt. 17:1-8; Lk. 9:28-36," (*AnBib* 144, Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, Roma, 2000) 191 says this addition of 'pray' to the earlier command to 'watch' indicates the significance and the power of Jesus' own prayer. Now that Jesus has prayed, he can summon, command and empower his disciples likewise to pray. That Jesus prays precisely while the disciples sleep and are unable to watch indicates to the audience that the prayer of Jesus is not only a model to be emulated, but the basis, source and empowerment of prayer. The sleeping disciples and audience can 'watch and pray' only because Jesus watched and prayed. They pray on the strength of Jesus' powerful prayer.

When Jesus returns after praying a second time he finds the disciples sleeping again (Mk. 14:39-40). Their inability to answer him reminds the audience of Peter's perplexed incomprehension of Jesus' Transfiguration. This illustration of the disciples'

continuing misunderstanding and underscores the importance and power of Jesus' prayer for them. Garret (*Temptations of Jesus*, 93) comments: 'Jesus is here admonishing his followers to *do as he has done*. In other words, Jesus' just-concluded petitions that the hour may pass, and that God may remove the cup were likewise prayers to escape the **πειρασμος** (Temptation). Jesus has beseeched God in order that he might himself avoid entry into the time of trial; now he exhorts the disciples to do likewise.' R.E. Brow, *Death of the messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave: A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1994) 206 says the parallel between Mk. 9:6 and Mk. 14:40 'suggests that in Mk. 14:40 the human frailty and misunderstanding of the disciples is being highlighted.' The disciples and the implied audience must heed the Transfiguration's pivotal mandate to listen to Jesus' command for them to watch and pray (Mk. 14:38; cf. 13:35-37). By praying the Gethsemane prayer of Jesus they can likewise submit their wills to God's will and follow Jesus' way of suffering and death, in order to share in the heavenly glory anticipated by his transfiguration.

Jesus further demonstrates the fortitude he gained through the Gethsemane prayer, when he stands before the High Priest and the assembly of Jewish leaders seeking to put him to death (Mk. 14:1, 55). By directly responding to the High Priest's question, 'Are you the Christ, the son of the blessed One?' (Mk. 14:61), with the words, 'I am' (Mk. 14:62), Jesus not only boldly affirms his true messianic identity but courageously accepts the death to which his confession will lead. The Transfiguration mandate bids the disciples (Peter is still present – cf. Mk. 14:54) and the audience to listen to this courageous confession of Jesus.

The attempt of some of the bystanders at Jesus' crucifixion to twist and distort his lament from Ps. 22:2, 'My God, my God (**Ελωι ελωι- elōi elōi**), into a mocked plea by saying, 'Look, he is calling Elijah' (Mk. 15:35), 'Let us see if Elijah comes and takes him down' (Mk. 15:36), illustrates their stubborn moral blindness the divine necessity of Jesus' death. The irony for the audience is that Elijah even Elijah cannot rescue Jesus, because as Jesus himself stated, 'Elijah has already come and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written of him' (Mk. 9:13). In the person of John the Baptist (Mk. 1:6; 6:14-29) Elijah has already come and suffered the same fate Jesus is now suffering in accord with God's will. Öhler (*Elia*, 139-153) refers to Elijah as a helper of those in distress. The Transfiguration's pivotal mandate urging the audience to listen to the Son of God particular to his passion prediction, in order to understand that unlike Elijah in the Transfiguration epiphany, who attained heavenly glory without being put to death, Jesus must suffer a death perpetrated by the leaders of his people before attaining heavenly glory foreshadowed by his Transfiguration.

For the overshadowing cloud at the Transfiguration of Jesus, the voice of God declared: 'This is my beloved Son; listen to him' (Mk. 9:7). But the disciples failed to listen to Jesus' pronouncements of the divine necessity of his suffering, death and resurrection, in order to understand his unique relation of sonship to God. The audience experiences a shocking irony when the Roman Centurion who witnesses Jesus' death is the only human being to confess his sonship: - 'Truly, this man was Son of God!' (Mk.

15:39). The Gentile Centurion utters this climactic confession after ‘seeing how he (Jesus) expired’ (Mk. 15:39). Jesus’ loud scream is not a cry of despair - φωνὴν μεγάλην – (*phōnēn megalēn*); the loud cry is the lamentful prayer of ‘the suffering just one’ uttered with complete confidence that his God had a purpose for abandoning him at this crucial moment. The Centurion ironically obeys the ‘voice’ (φωνή) of God in the transfiguration mandate to listen to Jesus (Mk. 9:7). He is able to acknowledge that Jesus was truly Son of God.

The Marcan gospel also concludes with a mandatory epiphany (Mk. 16:5-8) exhibiting allusions to the pivotal mandatory epiphany of the Transfiguration (Mk. 9:2-8). The audience associates the epiphanic angelic ‘young man’ clothed in a white robe (Mk. 16:5) with the epiphanic Transfigured Jesus, whose ‘clothes became very radiantly white’ such as no bleacher on earth could thus, whiten (Mk. 9:3). Whereas the whiteness of Jesus’ clothing indicates his temporary transformation into a heavenly figure, the white robe of the young man indicates the heavenly origin of this angelic figure who brings a divine revelation and mandate to the women who see him after they enter Jesus’ tomb (Mk. 16:5).

The angelic young man tells the women that although they seek Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified, ‘He has been raised! He is not here! Behold the place where they laid him’ (Mk. 16:6). The divine revelation that Jesus who was crucified and whom the women still expect to see crucified has now been raised by God confirms Jesus’ previous predictions of the resurrection following the divine necessity of his suffering and death (Mk. 8:31; 9:9, 12, 31; 10:34; 14:28). The heavenly young man thus reinforces the divine authority of these predictions, which the Transfiguration’s mandate urged the disciples and the audience to heed.

The young man then utters to the women the mandate of this mandatory epiphany: ‘But go and tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him as he told you’ (Mk. 16:7). Peter is singled out not only because he had distinguished himself from the other disciples by saying ‘Even though they all fall away, I will not’ (Mk. 14:29), but also because he was the disciple who ‘did not know what to reply’ (Mk. 9:6) at the Transfiguration that anticipated Jesus’ resurrection after death. That the Risen Jesus is going before his disciples to Galilee, fulfills his previous prediction to them that ‘after I have been raised up I will go before you to Galilee’ (Mk. 14:28). In seeing that the crucified one has been raised by the power of God, the disciples will ‘see that the power of god has come in power’ (Mk. 9:1).

Just as the disciples repeatedly failed to obey the transfiguration’s mandate to listen to Jesus’ predictions of his resurrection after death, so too the women at the tomb fail to obey the angelophany’s mandate to communicate the revelation of Jesus’ resurrection to the disciples. The women run away from the tomb in astonishment and say nothing to anyone because of their fear (Mk. 16:8).

9. Conclusion

It is thus left to the audience to make known the message of Jesus' resurrection which the fearful women are too amazed to utter. By pointing back to the beginning of the gospel at Galilee, the open end of the narrative invites the audience to continue the task of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of God (Mk. 1:1), not just in Galilee but beyond it to all peoples of the world (Mk. 13:10; 14:9), with the Risen Jesus going before them and leading the way.

The foregoing interpretation of Jesus' Transfiguration through chapters 1 – 8 of this exposé has significant theological ramifications. That Jesus attained the heavenly glory anticipated at his Transfiguration by suffering the humiliating death of a rejected prophet, which Moses and Elijah avoided, signifies a profound affirmation of the totality of our human condition. It gives new meaning to suffering and death for all Christians. Heavenly glory lies not in the wish to escape but in the courage to embrace rejection, suffering, and death.

