

Peter, James and John were privileged to witness a glimpse of Christ's glory when He took them with Him to the mountain where He would be transfigured. It was an experience that the three disciples would never forget and Peter refers to the experience briefly in his second epistle where he reminds his readers that the three of them were "eyewitnesses of his majesty" (2 Peter 1:16-18).

1 And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart,

"And after six days" – Six days after what? Matthew's account of the transfiguration immediately follows Jesus' statement in **Matt. 16:28**: "*Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.*" The gospels of Mark and Luke also give us this statement immediately followed by the transfiguration (Mark 9:1-13; Luke 9:27-36). The mention of the transfiguration happening six days later seems to connect the transfiguration to Jesus' statement in Matt. 16:28. Matthew and Mark agree that it was six days later but Luke says it was "about an eight days" which is either a rough estimate or perhaps he was including the beginning and ending days rather than only counting the number of elapsed days in between the events. The transfiguration fulfilled Jesus' statement because Peter, James and John were able to catch a glimpse of Christ's future glory that He will have in His kingdom.

"Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother" – These three disciples were apparently in Jesus' inner circle and He seemed to include them in some of His more personal moments (Matt. 26:37; Mark 5:37, 13:3). Jesus chose these three men to witness an event that would reveal even more of His nature as the Son of God.

"and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart" – Jesus wants to be secluded with these three men during this time and when it is over He will not want them to tell anyone of what they witnessed until after His resurrection (v. 9).

2 And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.

"And was transfigured [to transform or change in form] before them" – The Greek word for "transfigured" is *metamorphōō* and is where our English word "metamorphosis" comes from. Jesus' appearance changed as the internal glory of His deity began to radiate through His physical body. He obviously did not allow all of His glory to radiate or it would have killed the disciples. The LORD had to place Moses in the cleft of a rock and cover him with His hand to protect him when he asked to see the LORD's glory (Ex. 33:18-23). Even then Moses was only allowed to see the LORD from behind because the LORD said "*Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live*" (Ex. 33:20). The words "before them" indicates that Jesus did not attempt to hide what was happening from them since He obviously brought them to this mountain so that they could witness His transfiguration.

"and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light" – When Moses returned from being on Mt. Sinai with God, his face shone as a result of his exposure to the presence of God (Ex. 34:29-30). However, Moses only reflected God's glory; Jesus was radiating His own glory, so that the light radiating from his skin shone through his clothes, giving them an intense bright white appearance. **Mark 9:3** "*And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them.*"

3 And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him.

Not only did Jesus become transfigured, but two notable saints from the past, Moses and Elijah, appeared with Him and were talking with Him. Luke tells us that they were also "in glory" (the Greek word means "*splendor; brightness*") and were talking with Jesus about His coming death in Jerusalem. **Luke 9:31** "*Who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.*" Why Moses and Elijah? We can only speculate, but perhaps Moses and Elijah represented the law and the prophets, both of which predicted the coming of Christ and His eventual death. Some commentators have associated the appearance of Moses and Elijah with the two witnesses that will appear on earth during the tribulation period (Rev. 11:3-13) but it is mere speculation to draw that conclusion as well.

4 Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.

No doubt everything they were witnessing made an impression on the disciples. Peter was the type of person who felt he had to say something even when he had nothing to say, and he does so on this occasion. Luke 9:33 says that Peter did not know what he was talking about when he spoke and Mark 9:6 says Peter didn't know what to say because they were afraid. Luke 9:31 tells us that the three men had fallen asleep and had just awoken so perhaps they were still groggy and disoriented. Although some commentators believe that he was suggesting building three shrines, most believe that Peter was thinking about the Feast of Tabernacles, a week-long celebration in which the Jews dwelt in booths (tabernacles or tents) to commemorate their 40 years in the wilderness living in tents. The feast, taking place after the harvest, also looked forward to the peace and prosperity of the coming kingdom of the Messiah and so perhaps Peter thought it would be an appropriate way to celebrate this glimpse of the Messiah's kingdom that they were witnessing.

5 While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.

Peter was placing Jesus, Moses and Elijah on equal footing by suggesting a tabernacle be built for each of them. However, God the Father was quick to correct that idea by speaking from the bright cloud of His *shekinah* glory. This is the same manifestation of God's presence as was seen on such occasions as when Moses was on Mt. Sinai and even John's vision of heaven in the Book of Revelation. The voice of God reminds Peter and the other disciples that Jesus is the Son of God and that they should be listening to Him. Peter should shut his mouth and look to Jesus as the focal point of this scene.

6 And when the disciples heard *it*, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. 7 And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid. 8 And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only.

“And when the disciples heard *it*, they fell on their face, and were sore [exceedingly] afraid” – The disciples were no doubt already uneasy seeing Jesus transfigured and accompanied by two long-dead figures from Israel’s history – Moses and Elijah. When the presence of God manifested itself and they heard the voice of God, they were understandably overwhelmed with fear. They fell on their faces in a combination of humility and fear. Perhaps James and John thought that Peter had angered God with his words and that now they were in serious trouble.

“And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid” – Jesus quickly walks to where the three men are cowering on their faces to relieve them of their fear. He tells them to stand and to not be afraid. The redeemed have nothing to fear from God (**Rom. 5:1** “*Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*”). It is the wicked who should fear the Lord (**Psalms 7:11** “*God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day.*”)

“And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only” – As they stand to their feet they look around and see that everything has returned to normal. Moses and Elijah are no longer there and they are alone with Jesus once again.

9 And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead.

The apparent purpose in having Peter, James and John witness His transfiguration was to provide further evidence that Jesus is the Son of God. However, as they are coming down from the mountain Jesus commands them to not tell anyone about what they have seen until after His resurrection. Why would He not want the disciples to immediately proclaim their experience of witnessing such a powerful manifestation of Jesus’ glory and deity? One likely reason was so that the news of the transfiguration would not cause curiosity seekers to swell the ranks of the multitudes that were already following Him and hinder His journey to the cross. Another possibility might be that Jesus did not want people following Him in the hopes of seeing theatrical effects, like people going to see the circus. The most likely reason is to prevent the upsetting of the timetable of the crucifixion since the public proclamation of Jesus as Messiah would no doubt intensify the persecution of Jesus and cause the crucifixion to occur before the proper time.

10 And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come?

As they were coming down from the mountain, the disciples were apparently thinking about the things they had just seen. The sight of Elijah was obviously still on their mind and it apparently reminded them of something that scribes taught. The scribes, whose job it was to create new copies of the scriptures by transcribing them by hand (the printing press had not yet been invented), were also considered to be experts in the scripture. The scribes were teaching that Elijah would come before the establishing of the kingdom of the Messiah but the disciples wanted to know why this was being taught and whether or not it was true.

11 And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. 12 But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them. 13 Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.

“And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things” – Jesus confirms that the scribes are correct to teach that Elijah must first come to prepare the hearts of men for the coming of the Messiah (“restore all things”). The central OT passage that predicts this is **Mal. 4:5-6** “*Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.*”

“But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed [wanted]” – Even though the scribes recognized the fact that Elijah would come, they did not recognize him when he did come. Jesus points out that Elijah had already come as predicted, but instead of recognizing him and responding to his preaching in repentance (the purpose of Elijah’s coming as stated in Malachi’s prophecy) they treated him according to the sinful desires of their hearts. They rejected his call for repentance for they believed they needed no repentance. They did not respect his preaching and shed no tears when he died at the hands of Herod.

“Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them” – Jesus would also suffer rejection, persecution and death at their hands. John and Jesus both preached the same message (“Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” [Matt. 3:2; 4:17]), and the Jews did not want to hear that message from either of them. They killed the Messiah’s forerunner and they would soon kill the Messiah as well.

“Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist” – The disciples had already heard Jesus explain that John the Baptist was fulfilling the prophetic role of Elijah (Matt. 11:13-14), so they easily understood who Jesus was talking about.

Verses 14-27: When Jesus and the three disciples come down from the mountain, a father comes to Jesus to ask for help with his son who is afflicted with seizures (perhaps epilepsy). He had appealed to the disciples to heal the boy but they had been unable to help. Jesus heals the boy but the disciples want to know why they had failed. He replies that not only did they exhibit unbelief but this type of problem also required prayer and fasting to solve. Later Jesus repeats the warning that He will be betrayed into the hands of the Jews and be killed, but that He would rise again. As Jesus and His disciples come into Capernaum, Peter is approached by those who collected the temple tax and they indirectly demand that Jesus pay the tax that He owes. As Peter entered the house where Jesus was, Jesus informs Him that they, as children of God, were exempt from paying the tax. However, in order to avoid causing an unnecessary dispute, Jesus instructs Peter to go fishing and to open the mouth of the first fish he catches. In the mouth of the fish will be a coin that will be enough money to pay the temple tax for both Jesus and Peter.