

## BIBLE BACKGROUND

Luke 9:28-36

Verses 28-31

**About eight days after these words, taking Peter, James and John, he ascended the mountain to pray. While he was praying the appearance of his face changed and his clothing was gleaming white. And an amazing sight, two men were talking with him! They were Moses and Elijah. They appeared in glory, talking about his departure, which he was about to fulfill in Jerusalem.**

This event is linked to the previous one, the occasion when Jesus followed Peter's confession of faith in him as the Christ (9:20) with a strict and solemn warning to the disciple to not say anything and to be prepared for his suffering and death and to bear their own crosses. Other things must have happened in these eight days but Luke wants to emphasise the glory that is ahead of Jesus and of them all.

Only the inner three observe the transfiguration of Jesus. If his identity as the **Christ of God** was not to be revealed (21), then a much smaller number of disciples were to see something of Christ's true glory, namely, **Peter, James and John**. **Prayer** was the activity of Jesus at all major points of his ministry and reveals to the church that nothing can be achieved in the mission of God without reliance on him. Other significant moments of prayer occurred when Jesus was being tested in the wilderness (5:16), baptized (3:21), before he chose the 12 apostles (6:12), before he gave the disciples his prayer (11:1), and in the garden on the Mount of Olives before his arrest (22:41), not forgetting also the two prayers to his Father on the cross (23:34,46).

The description of **the appearance of his face** is not given. We can assume it was much like the **change** *επερον* to his clothing. Matthew speaks of a metamorphosis (17:2), a much deeper transformation. Perhaps what struck Luke was the appearance of **two men** identified as Moses and Elijah, whose identity Jesus revealed to his disciples on a later occasion. Moses and Elijah were the greatest of the Old Testament prophets; Moses because he freed the Hebrews from slavery and mediated the covenant of the law to God's people and Elijah, because he brought the Northern Kingdom back to the Lord during the tyrannical reign of Ahab.

**They too were seen in glory.** The saints share in God's glory, which Christ himself wins for them. This is the glory of Jesus' real home and the glory granted to him by the Father for his obedience to the cross (24:51). Thus, the men give encouragement to our Lord concerning his **departure** *εξοδus*, the very word used to describe God's act to save the people of Israel as they left Egypt and were led through the wilderness to the promised land. The New Testament salvation event was about to be **fulfilled** by Jesus in **Jerusalem**. The New Testament is a new exodus from God's judgement, sin, pain and the devil. It is the new covenant that supercedes the old (Heb 8:6).

Verses 32-36

**However, Peter and those with him were weighed down by sleep. When they awoke they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. When they began to separate from him (Jesus), Peter said to Jesus, "It is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah?" He did not know what he was saying. When he finished saying these things, a cloud overshadowed them. When they entered into the cloud, they were afraid. Then a voice came from the cloud saying, "This is my Son, the Chosen One. Listen to him." When the voice finished [speaking] they found Jesus alone. They were silent and they told no one in those days anything of what they had seen.**

**Peter and those with him were weighed down by sleep** *ὑπνω*, reminds us of the same three who were asleep from exhaustion and sorrow just before his 'exodus' via the cross (22:45,46). At moments of extreme significance when the Lord was about to reveal his power, his nature, and his will

to save, the disciples were asleep! Watchfulness is required so that the action of God in Christ is not missed.

**When they awoke they saw his glory.** Jesus displayed the same glory that Elijah and Moses had (31). Was there a difference between Jesus' splendour and the two prophets? Luke records the details about his clothing and face. Perhaps the disciples had no point of comparison when looking at Moses and Elija. It was Jesus' who was notably different from his usual appearance and this was commented on. Jesus was a man like Moses and Elijah. His divine essence always remains veiled in flesh but his true nature as the Son is declared via the cross and resurrection and the Father's affirmation. The declaration of God about his Son is connected to a discussion of his **departure**, involving suffering and death.

Peter understands who Moses and Elijah are. Again, their dress could have revealed this, the animal skins of Elijah and the robes of Moses. Peter wants the trio to remain in this state of glory **on the Mountain**, enabled by **three shelters** he proposes to construct. **He did not know what he was saying.** Luke comments on Peter's embarrassing ignorance, which is greater because of Jesus' clear statements of his end (22). When he next states that he is about to die, the disciples have no comprehension of his meaning (44,45 cf. 12:50; 17:25; 18:31-33; 24:7). Moreover, the very transfiguration reveals that Jesus does not belong in a house on earth.

**A cloud overshadowed them.** When Moses met with the Lord on Mt Sinai, cloud and smoke enfolded the mountain, indicating a theophany was taking place (24:15-18). When God gave the covenant to Moses his glory settled on the mountain and he spoke from within the cloud. The same God speaks in this event, **a voice came from the cloud saying.** God is transcendent and only his glory can be manifested. What he gave to Moses now comes to all Christians through God's Son. He revealed his glory to the three disciples and his word as well. But his word is no different to the words coming from Jesus. God told them, **listen to him.**

Jesus is different to the Father in that he is human but he is the same as the Father in respect of his divine nature as the Son. **This is my chosen Son** certainly expresses the love of the Father for his Son (3:22). But **chosen** εκλεγμενον implies selection, as the Hebrews were chosen from the nations beginning from Abraham, through Isaac and Jacob and then via Joseph and Moses then finally David. Isaiah 42:1 is the first use of the term **Chosen One**, who is the Messianic servant of Israel. The Jews expected him (23:35). Its roots also lie in the covenant with David when the Messiah would come from his royal line (Ps 2:7). The divined nature of Christ is affirmed by God's revelation of him as **chosen Son**. Jesus is the theophany of God. He is also the living presence of God in Israel. Formerly, his presence was in the temple, but here he indicates it is with Jesus (Ezek 37:27 et al). Zech 2:10 expresses a fuller and more generalized living amongst God's people. While kings were adopted as sons of God, Jesus is chosen by God and declared to actually be his son, through the cloud and the audible voice.

**Listen to him**, also mentioned in Dt 18:15,19, clearly expresses that **being the chosen Son**, Jesus' words are God's words and must be received as such. When the experience came to an end the three disciples **found Jesus alone**. There is ambiguity here. Was God simply choosing a man as his representative? The resurrection and ascension would finally make it clear that this figure, without glory and standing alone on the mountain, would indeed be God's Son (Acts 1:11).

**They were silent and they told no one in those days anything of what they had seen**, because the Lord told them not to (Mt 17:9) and also they did not understand (24:25).