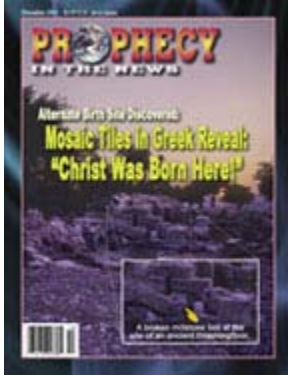


# A Window in Time: Time-Space and the Transfiguration

by [Gary Stearman](#)

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It was a unique moment, when time met eternity. Past, present and future merged into a single affirming event. It was as though the Lord placed His stamp and seal upon the comprehensive plan that we humans see as biblical history.

The account of the transfiguration was more than a vision ... more than a mere meeting of Jewish historical figures. It was a voyage into the future, and a preview of the Kingdom of God.

There, on the mountaintop, Jesus, the King, met with Moses the lawgiver and Elijah, representative of the prophets. At that moment, Peter, James and John became witnesses to something phenomenally miraculous. Time was speeded up, revealing the far future. Or, perhaps it moved at a speed beyond light, into a place where time, as we know it, ceased to exist. Whatever the case, this world was forever stamped and sealed with the promise of the Kingdom.

From that moment on, there could be no question about whether or not God's plan would be consummated. More to the point, the transfiguration proved that His plan has *already* been brought to completion.

Matthew's description of this momentous occasion is terse, factual and a masterpiece of dramatic focus:

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

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

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

*"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.*

*"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.*

*"And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid.*

*"And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid.*

*"And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only.*

*"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" (Matt. 17:1-9).*

Three Gospels – Matthew, Mark and Luke – carry this account. With minor variations, they all tell the same story. In general, they present the hope of humanity as resurrection into a glorified body. In this event, Jesus is featured from the perspective of His humanity. John, the Gospel that emphasizes His deity, omits the transfiguration narrative.

To His closest disciples, He revealed a truth about His Kingdom that had never before been expounded. Humanity was promised a resurrection into the realm of God's glory. Moses, Elijah and Jesus had all been born into human bodies, but were now seen in glorified bodies, clearly displaying the future hope of glory for all redeemed human beings.

In the narrative above, the word "*transfigured*" is translated from the Greek *metamorphoo*, meaning "to change into another form." An example from ordinary life is the butterfly that changes from a worm to a colorful creature endowed with the ability to fly. Paul's marvelous words about the rapture and resurrection of the redeemed are grounded in the transfiguration experience:

*"And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly."*

*"Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption."*

*"Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be **changed**,*

*"In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be **changed**."*

*"For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."*

*"So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory."*

*"O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? (1 Cor. 15:49-55)."*

Here, the word "*changed*" refers to being transformed into something entirely different. Of course, before Paul wrote these words, He had personally witnessed the risen and glorified Christ. But no doubt, he had also heard of the disciples' testimony concerning the transfiguration experience. They had testified of the change that would take place.

## **The Primeval Light**

Even more than the promise of physical resurrection and glorification, the transfiguration is a powerful testimony of an ancient teaching about the glory of God. Among the Jews, there is a long tradition that God's glorious light is invisible to the present sinful human population.

They believe that His spiritual light is thousands of times brighter than the sun. And they ask a question: If it is so bright, why then, can it not be seen? Rabbi Michael Munk, writing in *The Wisdom in the Hebrew Alphabet* (p. 174), briefly synthesizes Jewish history regarding this phenomenon:

*"Rabbi Dov Ber of Mezritch, successor to the Baal Shem Tov, explains that the great Primeval Light of Creation had been available to all, but when God saw that few people could be worthy of enjoying it, He concealed it. Where did He hide it? In the Torah. Therefore, through a diligent and unrelenting pursuit of an understanding of the Torah, one can attain a measure of God's wisdom — revealed from between its lines and letters. That is the Primeval Light! As Zohar puts it: the words of the Torah are likened to a nut which has an outer shell while its kernel is securely preserved inside (Midrash HaNeelam, Ruth)."*

To Gentile ears, this might at first sound like a strange and superstitious folk tale. But the inner light of the Bible functions in exactly this way. Munk mentions a book called *Zohar*. Its title, meaning "radiance," is dedicated to Jewish conjectures about the nature of God's revelation. It regards His light as being hidden to the ordinary man. And though we might not agree with all its premises, the Bible does, in fact, reflect its central notion.

In Hebrew, the Primeval Light is called *ohr haganuz*, meaning "hidden or stored light." It is the Light that is concealed in the Word.

When Jesus came, He revealed this light to His followers ... but *only* to His followers. Jewish religious authorities scoffed when once He told them explicitly that He was the source of the light:

*"Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12).*

And of course, John's Gospel opens with a well-known metaphysical treatise that provides the key to the ancient doctrine of the hidden light. It states a truth that is unparalleled in its clarity. To the ancient teachers of Israel, the Word was nothing more or less than the Creation, itself:

*"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

*"The same was in the beginning with God.*

*"All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.*

*"In him was life; and the life was the light of men.*

*"And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.*

*"There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.*

*"The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe.*

*"He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.*

*"That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.*

*"He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.*

*"He came unto his own, and his own received him not" (John 1:1-11).*

When Jesus came to Israel, it was as the Word. Jewish teaching states that God created the universe and everything in it by uttering the Word of Creation, spelled out by the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. These letters are considered to be the virtual raw material of all Creation. This is what John wrote about Jesus in John 1:1-11.

Indeed, He is that Light that shines in the darkness of this world. But though the Light was here during His lifetime, and later, through the ministry of His Holy Spirit, the world can't perceive it. To the high and mighty men of the first century (and today), Jesus was an ordinary man who made a false claim. They couldn't (and can't) see His hidden Light.

John's Gospel also mentions John the Baptist, sent as a witness of the Light. It should be noted that a clear

distinction is made between the True Light and any human agency that might bear witness of the Light. John the Baptist bore witnesses of the Light, but he was not the Light. Later, in a conversation with His disciples, Jesus spoke of John as Elijah, called "Elias" in the New Testament. Their interchange took place after John had been beheaded, and immediately following the experience of the transfiguration.

What they had just seen on the mountaintop resonated in their thoughts. They remembered — no doubt from the prophecy of Malachi, that Elijah would come prior to the Day of the Lord. With this in mind as they descend from that mountaintop experience, they asked Jesus a question:

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

*"And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things."*

*"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."*

*"Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist" (Matthew 17:10-13).*

In retrospect, we can see something that the disciples probably never really understood. John the Baptist — witness of the Light — had borne the spirit of Elijah. After his death, Elijah was seen in the glorified state. At the transfiguration, Elijah witnessed to the truth of the resurrection and the Kingdom age. He, of course, was accompanied by Moses. The two of them are witnesses to Christ's glory.

It is rarely mentioned that Malachi's prophecy — the last of the Old Testament — also features Moses and Elijah:

*"Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments."*

*"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" (Malachi 4:4-6).*

Here are two men, bearing witness to the reality of the Day of the Lord. Moses and Elijah ... the Law and the Prophets, testify through Malachi that there will, indeed, be a Judgment Day. Out of that judgment will come a new Israel, distinguished by spiritual revival and renewal.

### **Past, Present and Future**

Malachi ends with an exhortation to Israel. They are urged to remember Moses and Elijah. Thus, Moses begins and ends the Old Testament. He and Elijah constitute a witness to the certainty of the coming Kingdom.

From our present perspective, the Old Testament is past, but its prophecies speak of the distant future. In the meantime, Moses and Elijah at the transfiguration provide a reminder to Christ's followers that we will be glorified in the general resurrection.

In the future, these two men will witness in person. They will come to Israel at the time when the Tribulation Temple is erected. They are the two witnesses, who will bolster Israel's efforts when everything is turning against the brave nation. Eventually, even they will be eliminated by the Antichrist:

*"And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein.*

*"But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months.*

*"And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth.*

*"These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth.*

*"And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed.*

*" These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will.*

*"And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them.*

*"And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified" (Revelation 11:1-8).*

Who are these two witnesses? A number of candidates have been forwarded. But in fact, they are the same two who appear at the conclusion of the Old Testament and in the experience of the transfiguration. Note that they prophesy during the period when the Temple is erected ... the first 1,260 days of the Tribulation. Elsewhere in the New Testament, we read that this "Tribulation Temple" will become the central feature in the Antichrist's false religion.

Daniel 9:27 says, *"And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate."*

The Antichrist's covenant begins the seven-year Tribulation. For *"sacrifice and oblation,"* a temple must be present. At the midpoint of the seven years, he halts Temple worship and declares himself to be God, just as predicted in Daniel 11:36, where we read, *"... and he shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god ..."*

In the New Testament (Matthew 24:15), Jesus refers to this event as, *"the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION."* Paul expands upon the event in II Thes. 2:4, where he describes the activities of the *"son of perdition"* (his term for the Antichrist):

*"Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God."*

During the Antichrist's rise to power, the two witnesses are described in the Revelation passage above as having the ability to invoke the plagues brought against ancient Egypt at the time of the Exodus, and to stop rainfall. Since these are the works originally attributed to Moses and Elijah, how can they be anyone else?

## **A Trip to the Future**

Picturing Moses and Elijah as it does, the transfiguration experience links the past with the future. The

significant feature of that future is the Day of the Lord, resulting in the punishment of the wicked and the reward of the righteous. Just before taking Peter, James and John to the mountaintop, Jesus made a remarkable statement:

*"For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.*

*"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" (Matthew 16:27,28).*

Shortly after He said this, the four of them experienced a vision of the future. But was it just a vision? Apparently, the disciples didn't think so. To them, the future had become the present. Peter suggested that they build three booths. Such booths are routinely built every year at the Feast of Tabernacles. They are small, temporary structures, decorated with fruit, flowers and treasured objects, symbolizing the blessed life in the future Kingdom of David. There, every man will own his own home and property, living in peace and eating the fruit of his own fields. Booths symbolize the Kingdom Age.

During the transfiguration encounter, Peter took Jesus literally. From his perspective, he was *already* in the Kingdom Age. Moses and Elijah, who had been killed by the Antichrist and had risen from the dead, now occupied glorified bodies. This is in the future tense — even to us, today! But during the transfiguration, it was not the future to Peter, James and John. They were there. For them, the future had become the present!

So often, the Bible presents our time-space as a quantity that can be easily manipulated by God. But to live, as He does, in the "eternal now," the framework of time already exists in all its tenses. The transfiguration beautifully illustrates this fact.

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