

# Only Jesus (Luke 9:28-36)

## 1. The Revelation on the Mountain (v.28-29)

- Luke informs the reader that it was after “about eight days” from Peter’s confession that Jesus took the three (Peter, James, and John) with Him to a mountain.
- We are not informed of what mountain Jesus went to (most likely Mt. Hermon).
- Jesus took the three with Him to pray (v.28). The reference to prayer (3:21; 6:12; 9:18, 28-29; 11:1) on the mountain prepares the reader for a divine initiative or encounter.

Mountains are significant locations of Jesus’ ministry:

- He prays on mountains (v.28; 6:12; 22:39-41), He preaches on mountains (Mk. 3:13; Matt. 5:1), He performs miracles on mountains (Matt. 15:29-30; Jn. 6:2-3), He is tempted on a mountain (Lk. 4:5; Matt. 4:8), He calls the twelve disciples on a mountain (6:12-13; Mk. 3:13), He issues the Great Commission on a mountain (Matt. 28:16-20), He is crucified on a mountain (Mk. 11:1; 14:32; 15:22).

*It was on this mountain that as Jesus was praying, the appearance of His face was altered, and His clothes became dazzling white (v.20):*

- Jesus’ face was transformed (the Greek word is *metamorphosis*) as he was praying. We are not sure what He prayed for. Most commentators believe that He may have prayed about His impending death, as He did in Gethsemane, and/or for His disciples so they can be strengthened and encouraged.
- Moses’ face over a thousand years earlier had a similar experience when he came down from Mount Sinai after receiving the stone tablets (Ex. 34:29-35). His face shone after beholding the *glory* of the LORD. It was so bright that Joshua and the other leaders were terrified. The Hebrew word for *glory* means “heaviness” or “weightiness.”
  - The difference between Moses and Jesus is reflective, derivative, borrowed glory, and intrinsic glory. Moses’ face was simply a reflection of the glory of God, while Jesus’ face is the glory of God, as God does not give His glory to anyone else (Isa. 42:8).
- As Jesus prayed, the veil over the glory of His divinity was “pulled back.”
- This “appearance” of His altered face is intentional by Luke for two reasons: first, the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures) uses “shown/appearance” to describe the pattern of the tabernacle that the LORD showed Moses on the mountain (Ex. 26:30). Secondly, it is the same Greek word that is used at Jesus’ baptism (3:22).
- Luke is thematically linking Jesus’ transfiguration with the Tabernacle and baptism.

## 2. The Visitation on the Mountain (v.30-34)

- Luke informs the reader that Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory, were talking with Jesus (v.30). Many questions remain unanswered:
  - Where did Moses and Elijah come from? Moses has been dead for 1500 years, and Elijah for 900 years. What do they look like? How did Peter know?
- The gathering of Moses and Elijah is unprecedented in all Judaism and rabbinical writing. They may appear together again (Rev. 11:3-11) in a different context.
- Moses represents the Law, and Elijah represents the prophets, though both received instruction from the LORD on a mountain (Ex. 34; 1 Kgs. 19:1-18).
- Israel is commanded to remember the words of Moses and to expect Elijah, the prophet, before the great day of the LORD (Mal. 4:4-5).
- Moses and Elijah were frontrunners, and representatives of the Law and Prophets who testified about Jesus (Matt. 5:17-21; 22:34-40; Jn 5:39-44; Acts 10:43). Both Moses and Elijah saw the glory of the Lord and had famous departures (Ex. 31:18; Deut. 34:5-7; 1 Kgs. 19:8-11; 2 Kgs. 2:11).

What did Moses and Elijah discuss with Jesus? Jesus’ “departure” (*exodus*):

- The emphasis of Jesus’ exodus is only mentioned three times in the NT (9:31; Heb. 11:22; 2 Pet. 1:15).
- The verb tense indicates the three of them discussed for a while.
  - How much both Moses and Elijah knew before glory and what they know now puzzles theologians.
- Thematically, the exodus from Egypt is the foundational episode of redemption and formation of Israel into a people. In the same way, it becomes a foreshadowing of Jesus’ passion in which He redeems His people from the power of sin and creates His church.
- Ironically, Moses never entered the Promised Land during his lifetime, yet he discusses the new exodus with the One who barred him from entering it before he died (Deut. 32:51-52).

As Moses and Elijah departed, the disciples woke up from their slumber (v.32-33). Peter wanted to make three “tents” imitating the Feast of Tabernacles (Ex. 23:16; 34:22; Lev. 23:34; Deut. 16:13), which was a time of joyous remembrance of God’s provisions for the nation of Israel in the wilderness.

- While Peter knew what he said, he did not understand what he was saying, demonstrating that he still did not know Who Jesus was despite his prior confession (v.20, 33).

## 3. The Proclamation on the Mountain (v.35-36)

- Luke informs the reader that as Peter was “saying these things,” a *cloud* overshadowed “them” (Jesus, Elijah, Moses, Peter, James, and John).

A Shekinah Glory Cloud:

- A glory cloud was present among God’s people during the exodus (Ex. 13:21-22; 16:10; 19:16), symbolizing God’s presence with His people.
- The glory cloud was what Moses saw when God descended on the Tabernacle (Ex. 40:34-35), what Solomon saw when God’s presence filled Israel’s house of worship (2 Chron. 7:1-3), and what Ezekiel saw rising from the temple on the wings of the cherubim (Ezek. 10). *The Shekinah glory is the visible manifestation of God’s invisible majesty.*
- A cloud is mentioned at the ascension of Jesus (Acts 1:9) and clouds are mentioned when Jesus returns (Matt. 24:30).
- Luke’s account signifies God’s eschatological presence in the scene and continues the imagery at Mount Sinai, with the cloud covering the mountain (Ex. 24:15; 34:5). Just as Moses was on a mountain in a cloud, so is Jesus.
- In the book of Numbers, whenever the people opposed or were ready to assault Moses, the glory cloud of YHWH’s presence appeared (Num. 12:5; 14:10; 16:19, 42; 20:6). Peter wanted to build three shelters, and the cloud now comes out of nowhere and overshadows all of them. It is as if the cloud is now coming to Jesus’s defense.
- In the OT, the glory cloud overshadowed a place. Then it overshadowed Mary (Lk. 1:35), and now it overshadows them.
- To prevent confusion, Moses and Elijah exit the scene, and only Jesus is there, demonstrating that Moses and Elijah’s witnessing is complete: the one Whom they spoke about is here.
- The voice from heaven (presumably the Father) reveals the divine Sonship to the disciples (Ps. 2:7), Who is chosen beforehand as the Messiah of God (v.20) to fulfill the mission of the servant of YHWH (Isa. 42:1), commanding the disciples to listen to Him, as the final prophet foretold by Moses (Deut. 18:15, 18).
- This event will put an indelible mark on John and Peter as they will eventually understand the meaning of this: God has tabernacled among them (Jn. 1:14; 2 Pet. 1:16-19).