

The Transfiguration of Jesus

The verses describing the **Transfiguration of Jesus** differ slightly in how many days are said to have passed since the previous events:

Scripture Comparison: Timing of the Transfiguration

Gospel	Verse	Phrase Used	Timing Since What Event?
Matthew	17:1	"After six days "	After Jesus foretells His death (Matt. 16:21–28)
Mark	9:2	"After six days "	After Peter's confession & Jesus' teaching (Mark 8:31–9:1)
Luke	9:28	"About eight days after "	After Peter's confession & Jesus' teaching (Luke 9:22–27)

Why the Difference?

Here are the main explanations scholars give:

1. Inclusive vs. Exclusive Counting

- **Jewish time reckoning** often counted **part of a day as a whole day**.
- Matthew and Mark may be **excluding** the start and end days (i.e., full six days **in between**).
- Luke may be **including** both the beginning day (when Jesus spoke) and the day of the transfiguration, arriving at "about eight days."

This is similar to the way "**three days**" is used to describe the time between Jesus' death and resurrection, even though it's only parts of Friday, Saturday, and Sunday.

2. Stylistic Approximation by Luke

- Luke says "**about** eight days after," which signals approximation.
- Luke may round the figure to fit his literary or theological purpose (such as paralleling **Moses' 6 days of waiting + 1 day ascending** in Exodus 24:16–17).

3. Different Points of Reference

- It's possible that Luke includes **more events** between the prophecy and the Transfiguration, stretching the count.

Key Insight

The difference isn't contradictory but shows how **ancient writers used time references**:

- Matthew and Mark are more **precise** (6 days in between).
- Luke is more **approximate** and may have included **additional days or used inclusive reckoning**.

Teaching Tip

You can highlight this to show:

- The **reliability** of the Gospel writers despite minor stylistic variations.
- Their use of **Jewish idioms of time**.
- That all three agree on the **sequence of events**: **confession** → **prediction of death** → **Transfiguration**.

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If we consider the **7th day as a Sabbath**, it could explain why the Transfiguration occurred on the **8th day**, as Luke says. Here's how that might work:

Sabbath and the Timing of the Transfiguration

Hypothetical Timeline:

Day	Event
Day 1	Jesus predicts His death, calls for disciples to take up their cross (Matt. 16:21–28)
Days 2–6	Ordinary days (no major travel recorded)
Day 7	Sabbath — travel is limited (Exodus 16:29, Acts 1:12)
Day 8	Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up a high mountain → Transfiguration

Support for This Interpretation

1. Sabbath Travel Limits

- According to Jewish law, a “**Sabbath day’s journey**” was about **2,000 cubits** (~3,000 feet or ~0.6 miles).
- A **high mountain** (traditionally thought to be Mount Tabor or Mount Hermon) would have likely required **significant travel and climbing, not allowed on the Sabbath**.

2. Luke’s Phrase “About Eight Days”

- If Jesus waited through the Sabbath before ascending the mountain, then **Luke’s count includes**:
 - **The day of the teaching**
 - **Six days in between**
 - **The 8th day when they climbed the mountain**

This preserves the accuracy of Matthew and Mark’s “after six days” (**six full days pass in between**) while explaining **Luke’s inclusion** of the start and end.

Theological Echo: Moses on Sinai

- **Exodus 24:16**: "On the **seventh day**, the Lord called to Moses out of the cloud."
- The Transfiguration echoes Moses’ **mountain-top revelation**.
- Waiting until the **7th or 8th day** could be a **deliberate parallel** to Moses being called **after six days** of waiting.

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Mountain & High Mountain References in the Gospels

Gospel	Reference	Type	Description
Matthew	Matthew 4:8	<i>high mountain</i>	Satan shows Jesus all kingdoms
Matthew	Matthew 5:1	mountain	Jesus begins the Sermon on the Mount
Matthew	Matthew 14:23	mountain	Jesus prays alone
Matthew	Matthew 15:29	mountain	Jesus heals many
Matthew	Matthew 17:1	<i>high mountain</i>	The Transfiguration
Matthew	Matthew 28:16	mountain	Jesus gives the Great Commission
Mark	Mark 3:13	mountain	Jesus appoints the Twelve
Mark	Mark 6:46	mountain	Jesus prays alone
Mark	Mark 9:2	<i>high mountain</i>	The Transfiguration
Luke	Luke 6:12	mountain	Jesus prays all night before choosing the Twelve
Luke	Luke 9:28	mountain	The Transfiguration
Luke	Luke 22:39	mountain	Jesus goes to the Mount of Olives to pray
John	John 4:20	mountain	Samaritan woman discusses worship on this mountain
John	John 6:3	mountain	Jesus sits with disciples before feeding the 5000
John	John 6:15	mountain	Jesus withdraws to pray alone

The Transfiguration of Jesus

The Transfiguration of Jesus (Matthew 17:1–2; Mark 9:2–3; Luke 9:28–29) reveals Him in **radiant, divine glory** — a preview of His **post-resurrection** and **heavenly appearance**. Several other Scriptures describe Jesus in similar glorified or exalted form.

☀️ 1. Glorified Appearance of Jesus

Passage	Description
Revelation 1:12–16	Jesus appears to John with white hair, blazing eyes, a shining face , and a voice like rushing waters . His face shines like the sun — echoing the Transfiguration (Matt. 17:2).
Daniel 7:9–14	The Ancient of Days and the Son of Man are described in heavenly glory — white clothing, fiery throne, and dominion. Jesus later applies the “Son of Man” from this vision to Himself.
Acts 9:3–6 (cf. Acts 22:6–11; Acts 26:13–15)	Saul sees a blinding light from heaven and hears Jesus speak — a glorified post-ascension appearance.
Matthew 28:2–3	At the resurrection, the angel's appearance is like lightning , but Jesus also appears shortly after, resurrected and radiant .
Luke 24:31, 36–43	The resurrected Jesus appears suddenly, can vanish, and has a transformed but physical body .
Philippians 3:20–21	Paul says Jesus will transform our lowly bodies to be like His glorious body — affirming His glorified post-resurrection state.

🌟 2. Jesus Radiating God's Glory

Passage	Description
Hebrews 1:3	"He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature."
2 Peter 1:16–18	Peter recalls the Transfiguration directly: "We were eyewitnesses of His majesty... when we were with Him on the holy mountain."
John 1:14	"We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son..." — likely recalling the Transfiguration and His resurrection.
Exodus 34:29–35 (foreshadowing)	Moses' face shone with reflected glory after being with God. Jesus at the Transfiguration shines with intrinsic divine glory .
Isaiah 6:1–5	Isaiah sees the Lord in glory. John 12:41 says Isaiah "saw Jesus' glory and spoke about Him."

🧠 Summary Insight

The Transfiguration is unique in that Jesus' **divine glory shines through His earthly body** before His death and resurrection. Other passages:

- Confirm His **post-resurrection glory**
- Describe **heavenly visions** of Jesus in divine majesty
- Draw parallels to **Old Testament theophanies** and **radiance imagery**

The Transfiguration of Jesus

Luke 9:31 tells us that during the Transfiguration, Jesus, Moses, and Elijah were "speaking of His departure (Greek: *exodos*) which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem." The use of *exodos* alludes to the Exodus (departure) of Israel and also hints at a deeper theological meaning — a redemptive exit through suffering, death, and glory.

All three—Jesus, Moses, and Elijah—had unusual departures from this life, and their presence together highlights that shared theme.

Comparison: The Departures of Jesus, Moses, and Elijah

Person	Scripture	Type of Departure	Uncommon Elements	Theological Meaning
Jesus	Luke 23:46; Acts 1:9–11	Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension	Died on a cross, rose from the dead, ascended into heaven bodily	His <i>exodos</i> was a redemptive act, freeing humanity from sin and death — a new Exodus (Luke 9:31)
Moses	Deuteronomy 34:5–6	Died on Mt. Nebo	God Himself buried him, and his grave is unknown	His departure preserves mystery; Moses died outside the Promised Land, symbolizing the Law's limit
Elijah	2 Kings 2:11	Did not die; taken to heaven	Taken by chariots of fire in a whirlwind	Foreshadowed eternal life and God's direct power over death

Key Observations

- Jesus is the only one to experience death and resurrection, then ascend—showing His power over death and fulfillment of the Law (Moses) and the Prophets (Elijah).
- Moses' death is mysterious and divine — no one found his body. Jude 9 even hints at a supernatural dispute over his body, possibly prefiguring resurrection.
- Elijah was translated to heaven alive, bypassing death entirely. He is a prototype of those who will not taste death at Christ's return (cf. 1 Thess. 4:17).

Teaching Point

The Transfiguration unites:

- The Law (Moses)
- The Prophets (Elijah)
- The Gospel (Jesus)

Each left this world in a miraculous, divine manner, pointing to God's power over death and His unfolding plan of redemption.

The Transfiguration of Jesus

There is a **striking and deeply meaningful parallel** between the **Transfiguration on the mountain** and **Jesus' agony in the Garden of Gethsemane**. These two scenes act as **mirrored mountaintop and valley moments** in Jesus' journey toward the cross. Let's explore the connections:

Transfiguration vs Gethsemane

Element	Transfiguration (Glory)	Gethsemane (Agony)
Location	A high mountain (Matt. 17:1)	A low garden at the Mount of Olives (Matt. 26:36)
Time	Likely early morning or daylight	Night (Luke 22:39–46)
Emotional Tone	Radiance, glory, affirmation	Darkness, sorrow, anguish
Jesus' Appearance	Face shines like the sun, clothes dazzling white (Matt. 17:2)	Face to the ground, sweating like blood (Luke 22:44)
Heavenly Voice	"This is My beloved Son" — divine approval (Matt. 17:5)	Silence from heaven — Jesus asks, "Let this cup pass..." (Matt. 26:39)
Companions	Peter, James, John — sleeping then awake, witnessing glory	Same three — sleeping, missing His agony
Spiritual Conversation	Jesus discusses His departure with Moses and Elijah (Luke 9:31)	Jesus prays to the Father about the cup of suffering (Matt. 26:39)
Purpose	To reveal His glory before suffering	To submit His will to the suffering
Cloud or Light	Bright cloud overshadows them	Darkness looms (Luke 22:53: "This is your hour")

Theological Contrast and Unity

Theme	Transfiguration	Gethsemane
Divine Identity	Confirmed: "This is My Son"	Tested: "If it is possible..."
Glory vs. Suffering	Preview of resurrection glory	Full submission to crucifixion pain
Presence of Witnesses	Disciples witness glory but misunderstand	Disciples miss the agony and fail to watch
Prepares Jesus for...	The Cross (strength through vision of glory)	The Cross (submission through prayer in sorrow)

Summary Insight

- **Transfiguration:** Jesus is affirmed, glorified, and elevated before the suffering.
- **Gethsemane:** Jesus is alone, sorrowful, and humbled before the crucifixion.
- **Both** reveal Jesus' identity: one in **divine light**, the other in **sacrificial obedience**. Together, they show the full spectrum of the Son's **glory and humility**, offering a powerful lens into His mission of redemption.

The Transfiguration of Jesus

Peter’s suggestion to build **three shelters (or booths)** during the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:4, Mark 9:5, Luke 9:33) very likely alludes to the **Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot)**, and this connection is both **symbolic and theologically rich**.



Peter’s Shelters and the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot)



The Text:

“Peter said to Jesus, ‘Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.’” — Matthew 17:4 (cf. Mark 9:5; Luke 9:33)



Background on the Feast of Tabernacles

Aspect	Description
Hebrew Name	<i>Sukkot</i> = "booths" or "tabernacles"
Commanded In	Leviticus 23:33–44
Purpose	To commemorate Israel’s wilderness journey , when they dwelled in temporary shelters
Key Features	Living in booths for 7 days; celebration of God’s presence, provision, and glory in the wilderness
Messianic Expectation	Jewish thought connected Sukkot with the coming of the Kingdom of God and the Messianic Age (see Zechariah 14:16–19)



Why Would Peter Mention Shelters?

Peter’s suggestion reflects **confusion mixed with reverence**, and possibly the assumption that:

- The Kingdom of God had arrived:**
The appearance of Jesus in glory, alongside **Moses (Law)** and **Elijah (Prophets)**, may have led Peter to think the **Messianic Age** had begun. Building shelters could be a way to “**stay in the glory**” and celebrate this fulfillment.
- He associated the scene with Sukkot imagery:**
 - Sukkot celebrates **God dwelling with His people** — and here, **God the Son is radiant among them**, with a cloud (God’s glory) overshadowing them (Matt. 17:5).
 - Zechariah 14:16 says **all nations will come to Jerusalem to celebrate Sukkot** when the Messiah reigns — Peter may have thought **that time had come**.
- A desire to preserve the moment:**
Like trying to set up camp during a spiritual high, Peter wants to **memorialize the glory**, not realizing that **Jesus must first go through suffering before glory** (Luke 24:26).

The Transfiguration of Jesus



The Cloud and Divine Presence

- The **bright cloud** that overshadows them recalls the **Shekinah Glory** of God in the wilderness — the same cloud that filled the tabernacle (Exodus 40:34–38).
- This further connects the scene to **God’s presence during the original Exodus**, which Sukkot celebrates.



Theological Meaning

Symbol	Fulfilled in Christ
Booths (shelters)	God “tabernacling” among us (John 1:14: “The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us”)
Moses + Elijah	The Law and Prophets pointing to Jesus
Glory Cloud	God’s presence now centered in Christ
Peter’s misunderstanding	The kingdom will come, but first the cross (Jesus’ “exodus” in Luke 9:31)



Conclusion

Yes, Peter’s idea of building shelters is likely rooted in **Feast of Tabernacles themes** — the desire to dwell in God’s glory, the belief that the Messianic Age had arrived, and the instinct to commemorate divine revelation. But he misunderstood the timing and path: **glory would follow suffering**, not bypass it.

The Transfiguration of Jesus

The Greek phrase from the Transfiguration account — **ἀκούετε αὐτοῦ** (*akouete autou*, “Listen to Him!”) — has a powerful **Hebrew equivalent** rooted in one of the most important words in the Hebrew Bible:

Greek

Greek	Transliteration	Meaning
ἀκούετε (akouete)	<i>ak-OO-eh-te</i>	"You (plural) listen!" – imperative command
αὐτοῦ (autou)	<i>ow-TOO</i>	"to Him"

Hebrew Equivalent: שְׁמָעַ / *Shema*

Hebrew	Transliteration	Meaning
שְׁמָעַ	<i>Shema</i>	"Hear!" or "Listen!" – also means obey or heed
לוֹ	<i>Lo</i> or <i>elav</i>	"to Him"

So, the closest **Hebrew equivalent** to **ἀκούετε αὐτοῦ** is: **שְׁמָעַ לְאוֹ** (*Shema 'u elav*) "Listen to Him!"

Theological Significance

- Shema as a Key Biblical Word**
 - Deuteronomy 6:4:** “*Shema Yisrael...*” (Hear, O Israel...)
 - The word *Shema* means **to hear with the intent to obey** — not just physical hearing.
- Jesus as the Prophet like Moses**
 - Deuteronomy 18:15:**
“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me... to Him **you shall listen** (*elav tishmaun*).”
 - God’s voice at the Transfiguration **echoes this prophecy** directly:
“This is My Son... **Listen to Him!**”
- Greek “akouō” = Hebrew “Shema”**
 - In the **Septuagint** (Greek Old Testament), *akouō* is consistently used to translate *Shema*.

Summary

Language	Phrase	Meaning
Greek (NT)	ἀκούετε αὐτοῦ	"Listen to Him!" (command)
Hebrew (OT)	שְׁמָעַ לְאוֹ	"Listen to Him!" (command with obedience implied)
Root Word	שָׁמַע (<i>Shema</i>)	Hear, heed, obey

This makes the Transfiguration a **divine Shema moment** — God is saying,
“This is the One I promised... Obey Him.”

The Transfiguration of Jesus

The topic of **Elijah's return** and his connection to **John the Baptist** — and possibly a **future return** — touches on prophecy, typology, and eschatology. Let's break it down clearly:

Where Does the Old Testament Say Elijah Will Come?

Malachi 4:5–6 (last verses of the Old Testament)

*"Behold, I will send you **Elijah the prophet** before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And he will **turn the hearts of fathers to their children**, and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a curse."*

- This prophecy created strong **Messianic expectations** that **Elijah himself** would return **before the Day of the Lord**.
- Jewish tradition still **leaves a seat for Elijah** at Passover for this reason.

What Did Jesus Say About Elijah?

1. Matthew 11:13–14

*"For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to accept it, **he is Elijah who is to come**."*

- Jesus identifies John the Baptist as the fulfillment of the Elijah prophecy — **if people are willing to believe**.
- **Key phrase**: "if you are willing to accept it" — implying that this fulfillment depends on **spiritual perception**.

2. Matthew 17:10–13 (after the Transfiguration)

*"Elijah does come, and he will restore all things. But I tell you that **Elijah has already come**, and they did not recognize him... Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of **John the Baptist**."*

- Jesus affirms **two truths**:
 - Elijah **will come** (in a future sense)
 - Elijah **has come** (in a present sense through John the Baptist)

So, Did Elijah Come Once or Twice?

John the Baptist = Elijah in Spirit and Power

Prophecy	Fulfilled in
Malachi 4:5–6	John the Baptist, as a type of Elijah
Luke 1:17	"He will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah " (Angel to Zechariah about John)

- John the Baptist wasn't a reincarnation of Elijah, but he **functioned as Elijah's prophetic successor**.

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Future Return of Elijah?

Some interpret **Matthew 17:11** (“**Elijah *does* come and will restore all things**”) as leaving open the door for:

- **A future Elijah-like figure** before Jesus' **second coming**
- Or **Elijah himself**, who never died (2 Kings 2:11), returning as one of the **Two Witnesses** in Revelation 11

This view is common in some early church interpretations and **Messianic Jewish thought**.



Summary: The "Elijah Thing"

Reference	Content	Fulfilled in
Malachi 4:5–6	Elijah will come before the Day of the LORD	John the Baptist (spiritually)
Luke 1:17	John will go in the spirit and power of Elijah	John the Baptist
Matthew 11:14	“He is Elijah, if you are willing to accept it”	John the Baptist (conditionally recognized)
Matthew 17:11–13	Elijah will come and has come	John the Baptist now; possibly a future role
2 Kings 2:11	Elijah taken to heaven without dying	Basis for expectation of literal return
Revelation 11:3–6	Two witnesses with Elijah-like powers (shut the sky, fire)	Possibly Elijah + Moses , or symbolic