

Mark 9:2-10: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 00] Mark chapter 9 verses 2 to 10 For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified.

And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, This is my beloved son, listen to him. And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only.

And as they were coming down the mountain, he charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead might mean.

Mark chapter 9 is a turning point in the narrative. If the baptism of Christ initiated the first phase of Jesus' ministry, the transfiguration initiates the second. In the first phase, Jesus announced the kingdom, and in the second phase, he announces his coming death.

And a great shadow will come over the story at this point. Our passage begins with a strange statement about people not tasting death until they've seen the Son of Man coming in his glory.

[1 : 27] In each of the synoptic gospels, the transfiguration comes after such a statement. The transfiguration seems to be an anticipation of the later coming of Christ.

Daniel 7 and the glory of the Son of Man, for instance. It anticipates that. It previews the glory of the resurrected Christ, and also the glory of his later coming.

In 2 Peter chapter 1 verses 16 to 18, Peter describes this. In this passage, Peter is arguing that even though people are saying that Christ, may not be coming after all, that the disciples and the apostles are dying out, and Christ still hasn't shown up, that they saw his glory on the holy mountain, and they know that Christ will reveal his glory in his coming, which I believe refers in that context to the judgment upon Jerusalem in AD 70, and the end of the old covenant leading to the establishment of the new covenant on a new level.

It happens after six days, and this chronological detail is strange here. I mean, what is it being dated from? Is it really something that tells us anything of any significance?

Maybe it's connected to the Sabbath. After six days is the seventh day, it's the Sabbath. It could also, I think, more likely be associated with Exodus chapter 24 verses 16 to 18.

[3 : 10] The glory of the Lord dwelt on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud.

Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. Moses entered the cloud and went up on the mountain.

Jesus brings with him Peter, James and John. These are the three key disciples, the ones that he chooses in particular to be with him on specific occasions. They're the ones that see Jairus' daughter being healed, raised from the dead.

They're the ones that go with him to the Garden of Gethsemane. And so they have a particular close access to him. Peter will be the lead disciple in the ministry of the early church.

And James and John also have pivotal roles to perform. On the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus is transfigured. His glory is seen. This is not just a reflected glory.

[4 : 08] This is the glory of Christ himself, a glory from within. And he's accompanied by Moses and Elijah. Some have seen this as a reference to the law and the prophets. They also have similarities.

They're great witnesses. They're wilderness forerunners. They go before Joshua, who enters into the land, and Elisha, who performs great miracles within the land. And both of them seem to be connected to the character of John the Baptist, who is a forerunner of Christ.

John the Baptist is the one who's in the wilderness. He's associated with Moses in some ways there. He's also one who dresses like Elijah, who has conflicts with Herod and Herodias that are similar to the conflicts that Elijah had with Ahab and Jezebel.

Beyond this, both are associated with Theophanes at Horeb or Sinai. Moses goes up on the mountain and he sees God's glory at the top of Mount Sinai. And Elijah meets with God at Mount Horeb as well and sees the glory of God.

So they're both witnesses to the glory of God and they join Christ, who is the glory of God. Both, furthermore, are associated with the last days in various ways.

[5 : 18] A prophet like Moses, who will arise, according to Deuteronomy chapter 18. And then Elijah, who was to come, as spoken of by Malachi. In Christ, we see the glory of the last Adam and of the second man.

He's the glorified, radiant Son of Man, the one who comes into God's presence, into the presence of the ancient of days and inherits all kingdoms. Sinai was associated with a number of key things.

It was associated with the Theophany, as Moses saw the glory of God on the mountain, the cloud, the fire, and all these other things. It was associated with the tabernacle and the formation of that realm where God would dwell with his people.

It was associated also with the gift of the law. And we see these different elements here played out in different ways. Peter wants to build tabernacles. If the purpose of the tabernacle was to be a sort of movable mountain, a portable Sinai, Peter wants to move around the reality of this transfiguration, the reality of this appearance of God's glory, and take it with them as they move throughout the land.

And so the purpose of the tabernacles is to transport this Theophany. Peter longs to retain the reality of that place. But yet God's own cloud overshadows. God's theophanic cloud is far more glorious and powerful than any tent would be, any tabernacle would be.

[6 : 43] And that is what will lead the way. We also see in Christ, he is the high priest with glorious garments. He is dressed like the high priest in his glorious clothes, dazzling white.

And he is the one who will perform atonement for his people, just as the high priest was called to do. Sinai was also the site where God gave the law, his word to his people.

And here we see something similar. It's the one occasion in scripture where God declares directly concerning Christ, in his own words from heaven, it's his beloved son, listen to him.

This is the word of God to humanity. His son, who has been given to us, we must listen to him. So we see themes of tabernacles, see themes of the law, see themes of theophany and all these things that connect us with Sinai.

Going up after the sixth day, all of these things should remind us of what happened there. Jesus is accompanied by Moses and Elijah, but he is greater than Moses and Elijah.

[7 : 47] He alone is the one who will remain with them. They're the forerunners. He is the one who is God's son. He is the one who will lead them into the future. Jesus tells his disciples to keep the vision under wraps until after the resurrection.

There are things that can only properly be known in their own time, and the significance of the transfiguration will only become apparent from the vantage point of the cross and resurrection.

However, the cross becomes clearer from the vantage point of the transfiguration. When you see that Christ is the glorious high priest, the one who is all-powerful, the one who is the beloved son, when he goes to the cross, it becomes clear that he's doing that willingly and intentionally.

He's not someone who's overtaken by events. He's not someone who fails and is outwitted by his enemies. He is one who's doing this purposefully to redeem and atone for his people.

A question to consider, how might the Mount of Transfiguration, where the glory of Christ is revealed, be regarded as a vantage point from which the entirety of the scriptures can properly be viewed?