

Luke 9:7-9, 18-22, 28-36, 51 (DHT)

^{Luke 9:7} Now Herod the tetrarch heard all the things happening and was perplexed, for some said John had been raised from the dead, ⁸ also some that Elijah had appeared, also others that one of the ancient prophets had arisen. ⁹ Then Herod said, “I beheaded John, but who is this of whom I hear such things?”

^{Luke 9:18} While he was praying alone and his disciples were with him, he questioned them, asking, “Who do the crowds declare me to be?” ¹⁹ They answered, “John the Baptist; also others, Elijah; also others, that one of the ancient prophets has arisen.” ²⁰ He said to them, “Who do you declare me to be?” Peter answered, “The Messiah of God.” ²¹ But having strongly warned them, he instructed them to tell this to no one, ²² saying, “The Son of Man must greatly suffer and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes to be killed and to be raised the third day.”

^{Luke 9:28} Now about eight days after these words, and having taken Peter, John, and James, he went up the mountain to pray. ²⁹ While he was praying, the form of his face altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. ³⁰ And behold, two men—Moses and Elijah—began talking with him. ³¹ Having appeared in glory, they were speaking of his exodus, which he would soon fulfill in Jerusalem. ³² Peter and those with him were in heavy sleep; then having fully awakened, they beheld his glory and the two men standing with him. ³³ Now when they departed from him, not knowing what he was saying, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three tabernacles: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. ³⁴ Then, as he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them. They feared as they entered into the cloud. ³⁵ And a voice came from the cloud, saying, “This is my son, whom I have chosen; listen to him!” ³⁶ As the voice happened, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent; in those days they told no one anything of what they had seen.

^{Luke 9:51} When the days of his ascension began to be completed, he made up his mind to go to Jerusalem.

Asking the Question, “Who is Jesus?”

Who is Jesus? This is the question on the minds of character after character in our context in Luke’s gospel. Jesus did some healing, which got reported to John the Baptist. In response, in Luke 7:19, John the Baptist sent a response to Jesus asking, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” When Jesus dined with the Pharisees a woman anointed his feet with perfume. In Luke 7:49, when Jesus declared her sins were forgiven, the Pharisees asked, “Who is this who even forgives sin?” When the disciples woke up sleeping Jesus on the boat during a raging storm, in Luke 8:25 Jesus rebuked the wind and waves and they ceased in their power, which prompted even his disciples to ask, “Who is this to whom even nature is obedient?”¹

Jesus healed the sick, he raised a dead child to life, he forgave a woman of her sins, he commanded nature, and exorcized demons, which turned the region upside down, to the point that it reached even the ears of Herod. Those around Herod gave him several explanations: John

¹ Ironically, immediately after this encounter Jesus exorcized a demon-possessed man and the demons didn’t ask who he was; they knew and in Luke 8:28 declared him to be the Son of the Most High God.

the Baptist has been resurrected, or perhaps Elijah has been resurrected, or perhaps some other ancient prophet has been resurrected from the dead. Herod was left with the question, “Who is Jesus?” In the midst of praying, Jesus asked his disciples who were with him, “Who do the *crowds* declare me to be?” to which the disciples answered with the same words reported to Herod.² But then Jesus directed the question specifically to the disciple upon whom Jesus would build his church. Jesus asked Peter, “But who do *you* declare me to be?”

This is the question all of you must answer today: Who is Jesus?

The Story of Moses

To answer this question, we need to go back to the book of Exodus. The Children of Israel were enslaved for four hundred years and lifted up cries for deliverance to their God who heard them. Pharaoh instituted an infanticide against the newborns of Israel, but one of those children was delivered through the chaos waters. This boy, Moses, whose name means “delivered one,” was adopted by Pharaoh’s compassionate daughter who found him, and Moses grew up in the house of Pharaoh, educated in the ways of Egypt and his Israelite heritage. Seeing the oppression of his people, Moses intervened, murdering an Egyptian taskmaster and fled in disgrace from his native land and people.

While in the wilderness, Moses had a mountaintop encounter with YHWH. This Elohim of his ancestors issued a call to Moses to return to his people and deliver them decisively from slavery in Egypt. Moses did this, performing signs and wonders by the power of the Spirit before Pharaoh, his magicians, all of Egypt and Israel. Pharaoh gave up and let Israel go so they could worship their God in the wilderness, and so began Israel’s exodus from Egypt. But Pharaoh changed his mind and chased after them. This was when Moses parted the Sea and just as his infancy foreshadowed, Moses then delivered the nation of Israel through the chaos waters, by walking on dry ground between two walls of water that came crashing down onto Pharaoh and his army after the Israelites safely crossed.

Moses then led the nation on a journey; a journey to a mountain where the whole nation was commanded to ascend the mountain into the presence of YHWH to serve as a nation of royal priests, to mediate God’s glory to the nations. But their experience of the glory of YHWH left them utterly afraid so the nation implored for Moses to stand as a mediator between their Holy

² Actually, there are slight differences in the Greek but the substance is essentially identical.

God and their unholy selves. Moses spoke to YHWH face to face as one speaks to a friend (Ex. 33:11). This encounter with God was so intimate—a glimpse at the union we will experience in the age to come—that the face of Moses shone bright as a result, which caused more fear among the Israelites, so Moses wore a veil to cover the glory of YHWH shining from his face the rest of his life as the leader of Israel (see Ex. 34:29-35). Moses led Israel as a prophet, declaring YHWH’s word to them and performing signs and wonders. Moses led Israel as a priest, mediating between YHWH and the nation, interceding for the nation when they went off worshiping idols. Moses led Israel as a king, judging and deciding disputes as needed.

Moses led Israel from the mountain toward the land of Canaan, the Promised Land. But Moses, the prophet-priest-king of Israel disobeyed the word of the Lord, as did the faithless and crooked generation who turned against him, and they were all told by God that they would *not* enter the Promised Land, Moses especially. After all that they had witnessed YHWH do for them; after their decades-long wandering through the wilderness, the journey for that first generation would end in death; death but no glory. It was that second generation who had to wait out the wilderness wandering until death had run its course before they could enter the life toward which their exodus journey from Egypt was intended all along. By the end of the Pentateuch, Moses emerges as a suffering, rejected mediator whose necessary death outside the Promised Land paved the way for the nation to enter into the life God intended for them.³

However, before he died Moses left the nation with a collection of sermons, known to us as the Book of Deuteronomy. There are two passages in particular worthy of our attention: Deut. 18 and 34—for together, they form one of Israel’s earliest and great hopes or expectations of the future. In Deut. 18, “seven different ways of trying to discern the future or the will of the gods are mentioned... The list is long enough to indicate clearly that all the customary ways of discerning the divine will or plan by magic or divination are rejected. That naturally raises the implicit question, then, of how the people can divine or discern what God is going to do...”⁴

Deuteronomy 18:15-18 says this:

“YHWH your Elohim will raise up for you a prophet like me from the midst of your brothers. Listen to him! According to all that you asked of YHWH Elohim in Horeb on the day of the assembly, saying: Do not let me hear again the voice of YHWH our

³ Moessner 1983, 587.

⁴ Miller 1990, 151.

Elohim and let me neither see this great fire anymore otherwise I will die. And YHWH said to me: What they have spoken is straightforward. I will raise up for them a prophet from among their brothers like you and will place my words in his mouth; he shall speak to them all that I command him.”

How can the people “divine or discern” what God will do? “The answer is clearly set forth: *The Lord* will raise up a prophet” and he will do this on his own.⁵ This should lead us to wonder if this prophet like Moses who God would raise up is in fact Joshua, the protégé of Moses from the second generation who actually did get to enter the Promised Land.

From the final chapter of the Torah, Deuteronomy 34:4-5 says this: “And YHWH said to him [Moses]: This is the land that I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying: to your seed I will give it. I have caused you to see with your eyes but you shall not cross into it. So Moses, the servant of YHWH, died there in the land of Moab according to the word of YHWH.” And skipping down to verse 10: “But there has not arisen a prophet like Moses from Israel who knew YHWH face to face.” Clearly Moses did not write Deuteronomy 34. Verse 4 says “And YHWH said to *him*” not “said to *me*.” Verse 5 declares Moses died. Verse 10 refers back to the promise of Deuteronomy 18 to suggest the fulfillment has not yet come at some future date.

So who wrote this? In the course of Israel’s history,⁶ the unknown anthologists compiled the written and oral traditions of Moses and pieced the whole Pentateuch together with an intentional form and structure.⁷ The version we have today (the same version we have had for over two-and-a-half millennia) is the product of these anthologists—it was these individuals who provided the editorial closure to this first section of the Bible.

Whoever wrote Deuteronomy 34 made a profound claim about the continuation of Israel’s hope and expectation as it pertains to God’s promise from Deuteronomy 18 to raise up a prophet like Moses from the Israelites who would be taught directly by God, and to whom the Israelites and the world must listen. What was the anthologists’ profound claim? We are still waiting. The prophetic protégé Joshua was not the guy. The seer Samuel was not the guy. The prophetic prosecutor Nathan was not the guy. Neither the prophet Elijah nor his prophetic

⁵ Ibid, emphasis mine.

⁶ Likely in the late 700s BCE

⁷ Some say Joshua added the contents of chapter 34 to give closure to the writings of Moses—this is a minority position today. Others say that Ezra and/or Nehemiah provided the editorial closure in the aftermath of the exile—however, this does not seem feasible because Nehemiah reestablished the practice of the public-reading of the Torah, which would suggest an existing Torah; moreover, Josiah upon stumbling on a Torah scroll reoriented the nation of Israel to a posture of repentance, so this second view will simply not do.

protégé Elisha were the guy. There is a tension between the promise of Deuteronomy 18 and the realization of Deuteronomy 34; and this tension forced Israel to project into the future their expectation of a Mosaic-Messiah whom God would raise up; a hope that the Prophet-like-Moses, to whom they were commanded to listen, was still coming.

Luke’s Transfiguration Account

To say the transfiguration narrative has significance to the Gospel is an understatement. The transfiguration story is one of the few events that occur in all three synoptic gospels in “the same context and [with] the primary elements of the story [occurring] in the same sequence.”⁸ For example, all three accounts place the transfiguration as taking place after Peter answers the question: “Who is Jesus?” and after Jesus explicitly says: “The Son of Man must suffer, die, and be raised from the dead.”

While the Gospel of John does not have the transfiguration narrative, it seems like John relies on the event in his opening chapter where he equates witnessing the glory of God to seeing the light that shines in the darkness, and particularly in verse 14: “And the Word became flesh and tabernacle’d among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth,” and verse 17: “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus.” Outside the Gospel accounts, the [transfiguration] narrative is one of the few to be told in the epistles, where it is given an extraordinary theological role (2 Pet 1:16-18). Clearly this event was significant to the NT writers.⁹

Mark, Matthew, and Luke’s accounts do not shy away from utilizing a sense of mystery to veil the apocalyptic events that took place on the mountain. For instance, nowhere in the Bible are we told or is it even hinted at what mountain this took place on. The first speculation of where this took place in the extant literature comes from Origen in the early third century.¹⁰ Resolving the mystery of the specific location is of little concern to the Gospel writers.

Luke, however, tells the transfiguration narrative differently from Mark and Matthew. The first distinction in Luke’s account is that he places the transfiguration eight days after Jesus predicts his passion to the disciples. In Luke’s account, the purpose for ascending this unnamed

⁸ Reid 1989, 20.

⁹ Lee 2004, 143.

¹⁰ Origen suggested it was Mount Tabor. Considering the connections to Moses and considering Jesus frequents the Mount of Olives for late night prayer, if speculation is to be made Sinai or Olives should certainly outrank Tabor.

mountain is to pray. And whereas in Mark and Matthew Jesus commanded the disciples to be quiet as they descended the mountain, no such instruction is given in Luke; the disciples are quiet on their own after what they had witnessed.

What did Peter, James, and John witness?¹¹ Luke 9:29 says they witnessed the face of Jesus change form and his clothing became dazzling white before their very eyes. Luke actually refrains from using the Greek word for transfiguration. The word “transfiguration” doesn’t actually appear in Luke’s account. It has been suggested that Luke refrained from using this word so as to not trouble “Luke’s largely Gentile audience” due to “Roman-Hellenistic interpretations of metamorphosis” that associated the word with “pagan mythology” (Ringe 1983, 85; Lee 2004, 146). Whatever the reason, Luke does not call this mountaintop experience a transfiguration; he rather describes it in ways neither Mark nor Matthew do.

Distinct also from Mark and Matthew, Luke explicitly mentions the *doxa*—the sight of glory. The three disciples witnessed the *glory* of Christ and the two heavenly visitors. The three disciples also witnessed the topic of conversation between Jesus and the two heavenly visitors, something we don’t get in Mark or Matthew. In verse 31 Luke uses a critical term to summarize the glory-conversation. “They,” meaning Jesus, Moses, and Elijah “were speaking of his *exodos*.” Can you say that Greek word, *exodos*. In Acts 13, Luke describes Jesus’ *entry* into the world with the Greek word *eisodos*, which means an entering or coming into. *Eisodos* is the counterpart term to *exodos*, for departing from. “Exodos is an exceptionally unique word Luke employed to refer to his approaching death, and should be understood in contrast to *eisodos*, the word used for his arrival (Acts 13:24). The ultimate purpose of Jesus’ arrival would be realized by his [departure, which unites] the totality of his redemptive work [in Jerusalem: his] death, resurrection, and ascension.”¹²

The Journey of Jesus

The exodus of Jesus involves all of these things that must be fulfilled in Jerusalem. Isn’t it interesting that the Israelite Exodus is always described in reference to Egypt and not the Promised Land? It isn’t the exodus *to* the Promised Land; it’s always the exodus *from* Egypt. “In the biblical traditions themselves exodos refers particularly to the *beginning* event of that journey

¹¹ Additionally, in Luke’s account, when the befuddled Peter suggests building tents for Jesus and the heavenly visitors he refers to Jesus as “Master” rather than “Rabbi” or “Teacher.”

¹² Jackson 1997, 49.

(going out *from* Egypt) and not to its conclusion.”¹³ This discussion of Jesus with the heavenly visitors is about the journey of departing from Jerusalem, which verse 51 tells us culminates in his ascension from Jerusalem.

And what was Jesus to do in Jerusalem in the days that followed. As he told his disciples earlier in chapter 9 in his first prediction of his passion in the Gospel of Luke, he must go to Jerusalem to suffer, be rejected, be killed, and be raised from the dead. This exodus journey would not be pretty or fun for Jesus. The contrast between what Peter, James, and John witness on the mountaintop compared to what they witness on the cross is sharp. “The one who is transfigured on the mountain is the one disfigured by pain and death on the cross.”¹⁴ But make no mistake about it, this designation from the voice in the cloud onto Jesus at neither his baptism nor his transfiguration bestowed on him any title, power, or identity he did not already possess; rather, the mountaintop apocalyptic encounter revealed *to the disciples standing as witnesses* the glory and identity that Jesus has had since before creation. While the transfigured Jesus would be disfigured on the cross, just as is true of the story of all who are joined to him by faith, the story of Jesus does not end in death, for God raised up Jesus from the dead, as further testimony to who Jesus always was.

Like Moses, Jesus emerges in the story of the Bible as a suffering, rejected mediator whose death paved the way for the many to enter the life to which God has called us. But unlike Moses and the first wilderness generation, for Jesus and those united to him by faith, the story ends in death *and* glory. Our stories end in glory precisely through suffering and death. Certainly, “it cannot be accidental that in the post-resurrection discourse with the Emmaus-bound disciples, Luke deliberately balances off Jesus’ ‘exodus’ [departure] with its opposite, an [*eisodos*] entrance into his glory.’ ...Jesus’ going out in the suffering of the cross was counterbalanced by his entering in into the resurrection glory.”¹⁵ Just as the significance of the incarnation of Jesus becomes known through his death and resurrection, so also the significance to the death and resurrection of Jesus becomes known through the manner in which he entered into glory where he sits enthroned at the right hand of God then, now, and for all eternity.

¹³ Ringe 1983, 93.

¹⁴ Lee 2004, 152.

¹⁵ DeVries 1983, 8.

Answering the Question, “Who is Jesus?”

It was in the revelation of Jesus’ preexistent glory and identity that the voice came from the cloud that had overshadowed them: “This is my son, whom I have chosen; listen to him!”

The baptism and transfiguration of Jesus are the two instances in the earthly ministry of Jesus when the divine voice intervenes, and both involve designating Jesus as God’s Son. However, in the transfiguration high on a mountain, the voice from the cloud calls Jesus the “Chosen one” rather than the “beloved one” as he does in the baptism down in the water. At the baptism, the voice speaks with second-person pronouns, speaking directly to his Jesus. At the transfiguration, the voice speaks with third-person pronouns, meaning God was talking *about* Jesus *to* the disciples who stand as witnesses. In the statement that comes from the cloud, all three clauses have loaded significance. Although I have already introduced the back story for the lesser known of the three, the final clause, let’s take these three clauses briefly one by one.

“This is my Son.” For the voice to declare Jesus as the Son is a royal designation. In 2 Samuel 7, God’s covenant with David, God promised to *raise up* one of David’s offspring to whom God would be Father. The declaration of “Son of God” is to call an offspring of David the *royal* messiah. This messianic offspring of David, as we are told in Psalm 2:7, would rule as king as God’s Son. This first clause declares Jesus to be the long-awaited King.

“This is my Son, whom I have chosen.” For the voice to declare Jesus as the one he has chosen for the *exodus* task is inherently a mediatorial-servant designation. In Isaiah 42, the first of the four servant songs, God promised to *raise up* an individual who would take the place of the nation in being a Holy Spirit-endowed light to the nations through establishing justice. This suffering servant is designated in Isaiah 42 and 44 as the one “chosen” by God for such a task as that. So this second clause declares Jesus to be the long-awaited Priest.

“This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him!” For the voice to command Jesus as the one to be listened to is inherently a Prophet-Like-Moses designation. Only in Luke, what is spoken by the voice matches both in vocabulary *and in word order* to the LXX of Deut. 18:15b. Between describing the (1) face of Jesus as (2) shining after speaking to God (3) on a mountain, and blatantly calling the conversation an (4) exodus, Luke is clearly emphasizing Jesus’ identity as the long-awaited Prophet-like-Moses. As if Luke wasn’t clear enough, Luke (5) records this third clause *precisely* how it appears in the LXX in regards to God’s promise to *raise up* a

Prophet-like-Moses from among the Israelites. So this third clause declares Jesus to be the long-awaited Prophet.

A Prophet like Moses (who God would raise up), the servant who would innocently suffer to death to make atonement with his body for the sins of many (who God would raise up), and the royal heir to the eternal Davidic throne (who God would raise up); the divine voice brings together these three critical promises into one person, the long-awaited Prophet-Priest-King of Israel and the world, who God raised up after suffering and dying. “It is only in the transfiguration story that a completely satisfactory answer is given to the question of who Jesus is.”¹⁶ By conflating the expectations of the Mosaic-Messiah with the Davidic-Messiah and the Isaianic-Messiah, the question raised by John the Baptist, the disciples, the crowds, and Herod is definitively answered by God himself: Jesus is the Messiah of God to whom Israel, the nations, and all of you must listen and obey.

This is what Peter says, after all, along with John in Acts 3:13-26

“The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom *you* delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God *raised* from the dead. To this we are witnesses... I know you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his messiah would suffer, he thus fulfilled. Repent, therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out... Moses said, “The Lord God will *raise up* for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You must listen to him in whatever he tells you. And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people. And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days. You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, and in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. God, having *raised up* his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness.”

So the question all of you must answer this morning is this: “Who is Jesus?” Jesus is the Christ. “Christ” is not Jesus’ last name; it’s the Greek word for the Hebrew word *meshiach*, for messiah.

¹⁶ O’Toole 1987, 77.

The question “Who is Jesus?” can be answered by you as it was by Peter and believers globally and historically: Jesus is the Risen Messiah of God.

If Jesus is the Risen Messiah, then that changes everything. If Jesus is the Risen Messiah, the only proper response then is to listen to him; listen to him by submitting to his will, dying daily to the worldly desires of the self, living self-sacrificially, and enduring through suffering and even death on your own Christ-modeled exodus journey from this world into the glory of the New Jerusalem to come where we will all have face-to-face communion with the Lord Most High in the New Jerusalem.

Let’s pray.