

SIMON S. LEE

Jesus' Transfiguration  
and the Believers'  
Transformation

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen  
zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe*  
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**Mohr Siebeck**

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Simon S. Lee

# Jesus' Transfiguration and the Believers' Transformation

A Study of the Transfiguration and Its Development  
in Early Christian Writings

Mohr Siebeck

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To HyunJeong and Isaiah



## Preface

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February 2009

Simon Seunghyun Lee

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## Chapter 1

# Introduction

### 1.1 Topic / Thesis

In this study, I examine Jesus' Transfiguration story found in the narrative account of Mark, tracing the development of its multiple readings through the first two centuries of the Christian era. I pay special attention to texts in which Peter is described as being the main witness to the event – the Synoptic Gospels, *2 Peter*, *Apocalypse of Peter*, and *Acts of Peter*. I also analyze 2 Corinthians 3, in which Paul explains the transformation of the believers. In comparing Paul's account with that of Mark, I show that there are some common patterns or ideas behind their accounts and that both inherited certain views from early Christian traditions.<sup>1</sup>

The Transfiguration story is especially interesting for the study of early Christianity, since this story reveals Jesus' glory, or his luminosity; his glorious appearance is one of the most popular themes in early Christian writings. In these writings, those who witness Jesus' glorious appearance often gain credentials for their apostolic authority or for a truth claim for the genuineness of their messages (cf. 1 Cor 15:2–11). As we examine differing interpretations of these traditions, the Transfiguration story becomes a window through which we can take a peek at how different groups of people interacted with one another. I believe that although there was great diversity among different groups of believers in early Christianity, early Christians shared some common traditions and engaged in dialogue rather than existing in isolation, sometimes seeking harmony, other times marginalizing those with different opinions. In this process, early Christians interpreted common traditions similarly or differently in order to define themselves and their destiny. Interpretations were also influenced by particular cultural expectations, since early believers had to come to terms with surrounding cultures.

In this book, I contribute to the study of early Christianity by (1) helping bridge the gap between the study of the New Testament and the study of the apocrypha, (2) explaining how various Christian readers understood the Transfiguration story in ways that were particular to their own historical contexts, (3) fleshing out common ideas or patterns of thought as well

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term "Christian" anachronistically for the sake of convenience. I am aware of the debate regarding its use in the discussion of early Christianity.

as differences in various interpretations of the Transfiguration, and (4) locating the Transfiguration in the general phenomenon of metamorphosis with epiphany.

There is a distressing scholarly gap between the study of the New Testament and the study of the Apocrypha. Scholars from each discipline study their own texts in great detail, but they have not effectively compared the two corpora of texts with one another, nor have they explored how such a comparison might shed light on the history of early Christianity. Heeding François Bovon's call for the need to bridge the gap between the two corpora, it is my ambition to compare both groups of texts by focusing on the theme of the Transfiguration.

The Transfiguration, in which Jesus appears in a glorious form with Elijah and Moses, is a fascinating and complicated story. Modern scholarship on this topic, however, seems to have focused exclusively on possible backgrounds or sources for the Transfiguration or on literary dependencies among various documents containing the story. I am more interested in considering these sources as parts of the dynamic process of the complicated development of the Transfiguration, and exploring the Transfiguration story's multifaceted development in various narrative accounts.

In addition, I emphasize socio-historical aspects of the texts by showing how the development of the Transfiguration story reflects ancient readers' needs in their historical context. In this process, I believe that both specific historical events and multiple Jewish as well as Hellenistic ideas contributed to the various interpretations of the Transfiguration.<sup>2</sup> In view of this, the textual instances of the Transfiguration may offer us some indirect information about the emergence of various Christian groups which came about in conjunction with the ideological trends of the times – both Jewish and Hellenistic. The various tellings of the Transfiguration story indicate how these early Christians modified the trends in ways that were distinctive to their self-identity and that met their communal needs. As modern readers of the Transfiguration, we scholars must explore the developments of the Transfiguration, moving from one text to another as well as from one generation to another, in order to better grasp how and when this story may have functioned to resolve different historical issues of early Christian groups.

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<sup>2</sup> Following scholarly consensus, I do not draw a sharp distinction between Judaism and Hellenism in this time period, although I recognize that both had their own distinctive local features and particulars.

## 1.2 Theological, Historical, and Methodological Concerns

As interpretative questions and methods stand in reciprocal relationship with one another, both influencing and being influenced, choices of interpretative methods are made in response to the questions a reader brings to the texts under examination as well as to the current scholarship in the field. I have several major concerns: What are the common traditions relevant to the Transfiguration in Mark and the believers' transformation in Paul? How do the synoptic authors understand the Transfiguration, and in what kind of contexts do they locate it and with what sorts of implications? How do various later Christian readers in the second century understand the Transfiguration in ways that are similar to or different from interpretations of the first readers? What did metamorphosis (transfiguration / transformation) mean to people in antiquity? How is Jesus' transfiguration different from or similar to both the general Hellenistic concept of metamorphosis and the theophanic instances in the Hebrew Bible? Since all these issues are socio-historical, literary, and theological, I employ methods which are a synthesis of historical, social, theological and literary criticism.

First, instead of simply pointing out possible sources and antecedents of the Transfiguration and showing literary dependencies among various Christian texts, I speak about the various functions of the Transfiguration in Christian texts of the first two centuries, especially in texts where Peter is claimed to be the main eyewitness to the event. I explore the dynamic interpretive movement of the Transfiguration story as we move forward and backward, from one text to another and from one generation to another. I base my work to some degree on James Robinson and Helmut Koester's insight that behind the texts there are developmental processes in the history of ideas as well as a historic reality of the movement of their transmission.<sup>3</sup> I am also indebted to François Bovon's emphasis on the history of interpretation in the Synoptic Gospels and apocryphal texts.

Second, as this project explores the development of the story, I am careful to keep in mind that there were real people who venerated their founder Jesus, a Jew who experienced a tragic death on the cross, as one in unique relationship with God. These people had to live a real life with their belief system, being inextricably caught up in the course of their culture. From various sociological implications of the Transfiguration, they may have struggled to find solutions for their crises. In view of this, a sociological

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<sup>3</sup> James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester, *Trajectories through Early Christianities* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).



approach helps us better grasp how the Transfiguration story helped those Christians cope with their social reality.<sup>4</sup>

Third, my analysis of the development of the Transfiguration story also draws upon “tradition criticism,” which often supplements form criticism, and is sometimes called “the history of the transmission of traditions.” Since I am examining how the Transfiguration is understood in the Synoptic gospels as well as how later canonical and apocryphal texts interpret it similarly or differently, my project is about the history of the transmission of the Transfiguration during the first two centuries. For many scholars, “tradition criticism” is considered to be a part of historical criticism.

Fourth, I make use of various insights of historical criticism. One of the main purposes of historical criticism is to achieve an understanding of texts in their historical and cultural contexts. In order to situate texts in their own contexts, I pay attention both to the historical situations described in the texts and to those of their authors and first recipients. In order to understand the Transfiguration in various texts in light of the general phenomenon of metamorphosis in antiquity and of theophanic events in Judaism, I take advantage of the insights of the “history of religions” approach. According to this view, a reading of ancient texts such as the New Testament and the Christian apocrypha must be guided by the language, world view, imagery, and symbols of their own time period. Therefore, I posit that it is the Jewish as well as the Hellenistic concepts of metamorphosis and epiphany that both constrain and allow meaningful implications of the Transfiguration for its ancient readers. I analyze parallels in the contemporary literature and in the religious environment of my texts for comparison.

Fifth, in contrast to the method of historical criticism, literary criticism focuses on the written texts, dealing with vocabulary, grammar, style, and rhetorical figures. What is important for my purpose is redaction criticism, the study of editorial activity. Redaction criticism aids in my understanding of the kind of theological expressions the biblical and apocryphal authors employ in writing about the tradition of the Transfiguration, and how they change or modify the story. I also base my analysis upon diachronic and synchronic readings of the story.<sup>5</sup> The diachronic reading demonstrates how later authors’ new perspectives on Jesus alter the story that they received from their traditions. The synchronic reading shows how the Transfiguration story in each account is related to the rest of its entire literary context. This shows how the ancient writers develop or modify various

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<sup>4</sup> E.g. Gerd Theissen, *Social Reality and the Early Christians: Theology, Ethics, and the World of the New Testament*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992).

<sup>5</sup> On these methods, see Graham N. Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), especially part 1.

ideas found in the Transfiguration story in order to make the story fit into its new narrative contexts.

And finally, I explore the theological implications of the Transfiguration in its various interpretations. Here, I draw upon the recognition that these texts are not mere literary products of certain people at certain time periods, but are products of the theological understandings of religious groups of people. These people lived religiously devoted lives and anticipated their future destiny according to the theological orientations that they found in the texts.

### 1.3 Chapter Divisions

In chapter one, I begin with the Gospel of Mark, as it contains the earliest narrative account of the Transfiguration story. The Markan author had the Transfiguration story available orally; this story probably had Jesus' divine Sonship as its central message. In his redactional activity, Mark chose to situate the story in the context of Jesus' teaching at Caesarea-Philippi (Mk 8:27–9:13), claiming that Jesus is not only a human or human messiah from below, but also a divine being from above. Jesus not only transcends the division between the *heavenly* and the *earthly*, but also merges the two different realms in his life and ministry.

By placing the Transfiguration in a chiasmic structure, Mark also wants to show the correspondence between Jesus' teaching (8:31–38) and the Transfiguration (9:2–9). In Mark's version of the story, Jesus' revelation of his divine identity through the Transfiguration, which God confirms from a cloud, reinforces his previous teaching about his destiny and identity as well as about the destiny and identity of his followers. Furthermore, the Transfiguration event assures his followers that they will experience a similar transformation to Jesus' after having followed him along the same path of suffering and death. According to my literary analysis of the Markan Transfiguration, this story may have functioned to answer various questions raised by members of the Markan community regarding the identity of Jesus (Christology), their own identity (ecclesiology), the possibility of their transformation (anthropology), and what will happen at the end of the history (eschatology). In addition, my analysis reveals this community's strong conviction that Jesus' tragic death on the cross is a crucial part of God's salvation program as well as being divinely planned, and that their own suffering, perhaps in the milieu of destruction of the Second Temple, is also a necessary part of discipleship.

In chapter two, I look into the precursor to the Markan version of the Transfiguration by analyzing 2 Corinthians 3 and comparing it with Mark. I find this comparison interesting and fruitful, since the Moses transforma-

tion story functions as a basic storyline for both Paul and Mark. In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul is not only aware of the Mosaic transformation story along with its rich Jewish interpretive traditions, but also takes advantage of them in the defense of his apostleship. In this process, Paul promotes his ministry in the New Covenant beyond Moses' ministry in the Old Covenant. I do argue, however, that before the Mosaic transformation tradition reaches the hand of Paul, early Christian thinkers reinterpreted it for their Christological claim that Jesus goes beyond Moses as God's Son who carries God's glory. The first chapters of Hebrews are another independent witness to this claim.

My comparison of Mark and Paul demonstrates that both share many similar ideas which are also attested to in the Mosaic transformation tradition: (1) the term μεταμορφόομαι, (2) the motif of the glory in the face and (3) the transformative as well as legitimizing functions of the glory. These common themes clearly indicate that both Mark and Paul have taken advantage of the Mosaic transformation tradition for their description of Jesus' Transfiguration and the believers' transformation, respectively. Paul and Mark also share ideas not found in the Mosaic transformation traditions: (1) the paradoxical nature of glorification, (2) glorification in connection with the idea of the Suffering Servant and (3) the apocalyptic implication of glorification – standing before the Son of Man (Mk 8:38) or before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor 5:10). Since Paul's and Mark's transformation accounts are so deeply rooted in these ideas of the Suffering Son of Man<sup>6</sup> and the Mosaic transformation story, it is reasonable to conclude that behind their accounts there lies an early Jesus tradition in which Jesus is glorified through his experience of suffering and death and goes beyond Moses as God's Son and as the carrier of the divine glory.

In chapter three, I analyze the Transfiguration accounts of Matthew and Luke in comparison with the Markan Transfiguration, as the Markan story was first read by Matthew and Luke at the end of the first century CE. Both Matthew and Luke keep the basic storyline of the Markan Transfiguration intact: (1) Jesus' transfiguration in front of the three disciples, (2) Peter's proposal to build three tents, and (3) God's confirmation of Jesus' Sonship. Matthew adds a new motif, however: that of Jesus' brilliant face, and Luke introduces the term "glory" as well as "Jesus' exodus in Jerusalem." Both Matthew and Luke rehabilitate the disciples, especially Peter, by omitting Peter's misunderstanding of Jesus' mission or by emphasizing Peter's correct understanding of Jesus' identity as God's Son.

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<sup>6</sup> It is true that Paul tends to transform "the Son of Man" into "the Son" (cf. 1 Thes 1:10) and therefore, the phrase "the Son of Man" does not appear in the Pauline corpora. However, the idea of the Son of Man as the eschatological judge is still present in his writings.

In addition, in its immediate context of the Transfiguration, Matthew adds Jesus' establishment of his church on the rock, Peter. Matthew sees at the Transfiguration a new Sinai event between God and His people, now the church. For Matthew, the story functions as a foundational legend for his community and legitimates that community's recent separation from mainline Judaism. For Luke, the Transfiguration functions to resolve the tension raised by Herod's perplexity about Jesus' identity. By removing most of Mark 6–8, Luke makes chapter nine a single scene about Jesus' identity. Furthermore, by introducing a new theme of Jesus' exodus at the Transfiguration, Luke makes the story a prelude to Jesus' Travel account (cf. Lk 9:51), which will culminate at his resurrection and ascension in Jerusalem. Jesus' fulfillment of the exodus in Jerusalem is not the end of his story, but rather begins the exodus of the disciples. In his description of the story of the disciples, Luke attempts to reconcile the ministry of the Twelve with that of the Hellenists by making the visions of Stephen and Paul comparable to the three disciples' experience of the Transfiguration.

Next, I explore the understanding of the Transfiguration in the second century CE by analyzing 2 Peter, the *Apocalypse of Peter* and the *Acts of Peter*.<sup>7</sup> In chapter four, I examine 2 Peter and the *Apocalypse of Peter*, since they are often looked at together by scholars due to their great similarity in vocabulary, themes, and use of Peter as a pseudonym. 2 Peter shows that in the second century CE, the Transfiguration continued to be related to Christian anthropology (“partakers of the divine nature” in 1:4) and to Christology (Jesus' receiving honor, glory, and majesty from God the Father in 1:17). More importantly, however, the Transfiguration story functioned for some believers as evidence of Jesus' second coming at the Parousia (3:8–10). The connection between the Parousia and the Transfiguration had already been made by Mark when he used the concept of the Son of Man, the eschatological Judge. This connection is found in more detail in the *Apocalypse of Peter*, a second century apocryphal writing. In the *Apocalypse of Peter*, Jesus answers Peter's request for evidence of the certainty of the Parousia by revealing what will happen in paradise at the end of the time. Although the context is clearly reminiscent of the Transfiguration in the Synoptic version, it is not Jesus' transfigured body, but the glorified bodies of Moses and Elijah that signify the believers' transfigured bodies at the Parousia. In these two Petrine writings, Peter appears as the very guarantor of the Transfiguration story or of its legitimate version. This shows how church traditions are transformed into apostolic traditions and in turn, apostles become legitimate guarantors of traditions.

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<sup>7</sup> Although they are all ascribed to Peter, it is hardly the case that Peter himself wrote them. In this regard, they can be categorized as Pseudepigrapha.

In chapter five, I examine Peter's sermon on the Transfiguration and its reenactment in the form of polymorphy in the *Acts of Peter* (2CE). Even after the Transfiguration story was utilized and preserved in the canonical writings, it continued to be transmitted with various interpretations in multiple forms in later Christian apocryphal texts,<sup>8</sup> though not without experiencing its own "transformation" according to its new theological as well as historical contexts.<sup>9</sup> In Peter's sermon, the Transfiguration is interpreted in light of the Christian idea of incarnation and Greco-Roman mythology about polymorphism. While the incarnation reveals Jesus' human form, the Transfiguration demonstrates his glorious divine form. It is especially interesting that in the *Acts of Peter*, Jesus' Transfiguration is reenacted in the form of polymorphy in the experience of its community: Jesus appears in multiple human forms, as an old man, a young man and a boy. This polymorphy represents Jesus' on-going care for his people in multiple ways depending upon their particular needs. Similarly to the *Apocalypse of Peter* and 2 Peter, the *Acts of Peter* betrays the apologetic tendency of not mentioning Peter's failure in understanding Jesus' teaching of suffering and death. Instead, the Peter in the *Acts of Peter* emphasizes Jesus' role as the Suffering Servant and follows him on the path of martyrdom, where he experiences crucifixion with his head downwards.

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<sup>8</sup> I have in mind such texts as the *Apocalypse of Peter*, *Acts of Peter*, *Acts of John*, *Acts of Thomas*, *Shepherd of Hermas*, *Apocryphon of John*, *Gospel of Philip*, *Pistis Sophia*, *Treatise on the Resurrection*, and the *Acts of Philip*.

<sup>9</sup> The Transfiguration in this apocryphal literature often denotes Christ's divine unity among his polymorphic appearances and also offers a theological foundation for the disciples' own transformation – resurrection or polymorphy on earth.

## Chapter 2

# The Transfiguration Narrative in Mark (9:2–10)

## 2.1 Introduction

The Transfiguration is such a fascinating story that it has not stopped inspiring later Christian readers in multiple ways. But at the same time, because it is a polyvalent story with multiple traditions and implications, its readers will immediately notice how complicated the story is. Before it was utilized by the Markan author, the Transfiguration story probably enjoyed its own independent life orally. Also, Paul's description of the believers' transformation in 2 Cor 3 is an interesting parallel to the Markan Transfiguration story of Jesus, since they describe similar transformation phenomena by drawing upon the Mosaic transformation tradition and the Hellenistic transformation (metamorphosis) stories. The Markan story has been read by Matthew and Luke, and the author of 2 Peter had access to the story in a synoptic form, especially the Matthean version.<sup>1</sup> Even after it was preserved in scriptural writings, the Transfiguration story did not stop being interpreted in different ways in later apocryphal texts, such as the *Apocalypse of Peter*, *Acts of Peter*, *Acts of John*, *Acts of Thomas*, *Shepherd of Hermas*, *Apocryphon of John*, *Gospel of Philip*, *Pistis Sophia*, *Treaty on the Resurrection*, and the *Acts of Philip*.

The Transfiguration story in Mark manifests that its author is familiar with the Jewish traditions about messianic ideas and the Mosaic transformation story in Exod 34 and the Hellenistic metamorphosis stories by gods. The author is sophisticated enough to incorporate them into his own Christological presentation of Jesus in the Transfiguration story. Scholars who have worked on the Transfiguration have suggested several different sources from which it may have come and ways of understanding it: (1) as a misplaced resurrection narrative,<sup>2</sup> (2) as a story of a Hellenistic divine

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<sup>1</sup> For more on this, see Jerome H. Neyrey, "The Apogetic Use of the Transfiguration in 2nd Peter 1:16–21," *CBQ* 42 (1980): 504–19.

<sup>2</sup> Hans D. Betz, "Jesus as Divine Man," in *Jesus and the Historian*, ed. F.T. Trotter (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), 114–33; Rudolf Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), 259ff; C.E. Carlston, "Transfiguration and Resurrection," *JBL* 80 (1961): 233–40; and J.M. Robinson, "On the Gattung of Mark (and John)," *Perspective* 11 (1970): 99–129.

man,<sup>3</sup> (3) as an apocalyptic revelation,<sup>4</sup> (4) as part of the Sinai/Mosaic tradition,<sup>5</sup> (5) as a story related to the binding of Isaac,<sup>6</sup> (6) having to do with the Feast of Booths,<sup>7</sup> (7) as part of the enthronement pattern,<sup>8</sup> and (8) part of Epiphany/Christophany.<sup>9</sup> It is my conviction that, although each of these traditions contributed to Mark's Christological inquiry in a certain way, one single tradition cannot fully exhaust the implications of the Markan Transfiguration story. Its readers should be sensitive to different aspects of each tradition and, at the same time, should pay due attention to how Mark synthesizes them in his presentation of Jesus in the new narrative framework.

As the hermeneutical keys for the story, I especially find useful three main options from the list above, (1) the Mosaic transformation story with its ideology, (2) metamorphosis resulting in epiphany and (3) Jewish messianic ideas of the Son of God and the Son of Man. I propose that at the Transfiguration, within its immediate context of the Caesarea-Philippi incident (Mk 8:27–9:13), Mark is presenting a "two-level Christology"<sup>10</sup> on the axis of space – *one from above* and *the other from below*. The Markan Jesus appears to be a paradoxical combination of the heavenly Son / the Son of Man and the earthly suffering messiah. This combination is para-

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<sup>3</sup> Betz, "Jesus as Divine Man," 143–33; Barry Blackburn, *Theios Aner and the Markan Miracle Traditions*, WUNT (Tübingen: Mohr, 1991); Adela Yarbro Collins, "Rulers, Divine Men, and Walking on the Water," in *Religious Propaganda and Missionary Competition in the New Testament World*, ed. L. Bormann, K. del Tredici, and A. Standharter (Leiden/New York: Brill, 1994), 207–27; C. R. Holladay, *Theios Aner in Hellenistic Judaism* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977); J. D. Kingsbury, "The 'Divine Man' as the Key to Mark's Christology – The End of an Era?" *Interpretation* 35 (1981): 243–57; and W. L. Knox, "The 'Divine Hero' Christology in the New Testament," *HTR* (1948): 229–49.

<sup>4</sup> H.C. Kee, "The Transfiguration in Mark: Epiphany or Apocalyptic Vision?" in *Understanding the Sacred Texts*, ed. J. Reumann (Valley Forge, Pa: Judson Press, 1972), 135–52; and E. Loymeyer, *Das Evangelium des Markus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967), 178–81.

<sup>5</sup> J.A. Ziesler, "The Transfiguration Story and the Markan Soteriology," *ExpTimes* 81 (1969–70): 263–68.

<sup>6</sup> D. Flusser, *Jesus*, trans. R. Walls (New York: Herder & Herder: 1969); and A.R.C. Leaney, *The Christ of the Synoptic Gospels* (Auckland: Pelorous Press, 1966).

<sup>7</sup> Harald Riesenfeld, *Jésus transfiguré, l'arrière-plan récit évangélique de la transfiguration de Notre-Seigneur* (København: E. Munksgaard, 1947); and W.R. Roehrs, "God's Tabernacles among Men: A Study of the Transfiguration," *CTM* 35 (1964): 18–25.

<sup>8</sup> Riesenfeld, *Jésus transfiguré*.

<sup>9</sup> John P. Heil, *The Transfiguration of Jesus* (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2000); and John A. McGuckin, *The Transfiguration of Christ in Scripture and Tradition* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1986).

<sup>10</sup> I am borrowing this term from François Bovon, *Luke*, vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 372.

doxical, especially because the heavenly Son should subject himself to a human fate of suffering and death. Furthermore, the Markan “two-level Christology” is explained on the axis of time through Jesus’ transcending the temporal division of “present and future”: Jesus in the present is the Son of Man who will come back as the eschatological judge in the future.

For Mark, Jesus may not simply be an eschatological human messiah as the agent of God’s will found in Israelite traditions (*from below*), but also a divine Son of God who disguises his true divine identity in human form in order to accomplish his divine mission (*from above*).<sup>11</sup> In this scheme, the motif of secrecy has an important literary function for Mark, similar to the Homeric accounts of gods and to the stories of angels.<sup>12</sup> Jesus, having appeared on earth as a human being, reveals his true identity at the Transfiguration (epiphany) by changing his form from human to divine (metamorphosis).<sup>13</sup> Jesus’ belonging to the divine realm as God’s Son is further strengthened by the contrast between the heavenly three (Jesus, Moses and Elijah) and the earthly three (Peter, James and John). By placing the Transfiguration in the Caesarea-Philippi context, Mark further identifies a Jew named Jesus who suffers, dies, and rises from the dead *on earth*, with the *heavenly* Son of Man. In this presentation, the Markan Jesus can transcend the division of heaven-earth on the *spatial* axis.<sup>14</sup> At the Parousia, this Jesus, who lives a tragic life at some point in human history, will come back as the eschatological Son of Man with “his Father’s Glory”, accompanied by angels (Mk 8:38).<sup>15</sup> In this scheme, the ministry and life of the Markan Jesus is laid out through overcoming the division of present-future on a *temporal* axis.<sup>16</sup>

This Markan *Christological* and *eschatological* understanding of Jesus in the Caesarea-Philippi Transfiguration episode has further *apologetic* /

<sup>11</sup> Docetism has not yet evolved at this stage of Christian theology, and therefore, we may not read Docetism into the story. Also, as will be shown later, it was common in antiquity for gods to appear on earth in human disguises for intervention in human affairs – this, in turn, implies that the human domain is closely bonded with that of the divine.

<sup>12</sup> Joel Marcus, *Mark*, vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 525–27; and William Wrede, *The Messianic Secret*, trans. J.C.G. Greig (Cambridge, England: J. Clarke, 1971).

<sup>13</sup> Mark does not describe the descent of Jesus nor does he narrate the birth story of Jesus, as do Matthew and Luke. However, in the beginning of Mark, only supernatural beings such as God and demons recognize Jesus as a divine being, indicating his belonging to the heavenly realm (cf. 1:11; 1:23–24; 1:34; 5:7).

<sup>14</sup> The term Son of Man may not have been a fixed messianic title in that time period, but the term in Mark is definitive rather than generic.

<sup>15</sup> The word play on heaven and earth may indicate that Jesus needs to descend and ascend in order to travel through these spatial categories, although Mark does not explicitly flesh out those concepts of descent and ascent.

<sup>16</sup> These *temporal* and *spatial* axes will play a great role in the narrative description of Jesus’ descent and ascent in the *Ascension of Isaiah*.



*polemical, validating, ecclesiological, and ontological* implications for his followers. In addition, the issue of *spiritual enlightenment* in terms of understanding Jesus properly is also at issue. Just as Jesus experiences glorious metamorphosis (transfiguration) on his way to suffering and death, so also do his followers experience similar transfiguration, after having followed him in the same path of suffering and death.<sup>17</sup> This may indicate how the Markan community comes to terms with their founder's tragic death on the cross as well as their own suffering in the milieu of the destruction of the second Temple.

I will begin this chapter by first analyzing (1) the content and genre of the Transfiguration (9:2–11) and then, (2) explore its implication in the immediate context of the Caesarea-Philippi Transfiguration cycle (8:27–9:13). In this process, I hope to differentiate what the Transfiguration means on its own from what Mark intends the story to mean in its new literary context. Having analyzed the Transfiguration in its immediate context, (3) I will conclude by exploring the historical situation of the Markan community. I will examine what kind of socio-political exigency leads them to understand the Transfiguration in a way that is particular to the Gospel of Mark. I will place the Markan version of the Transfiguration on the map of its trajectories, pointing both at what comes prior to Mark and what comes next.

## 2.2 The Transfiguration as the Divine Credentials for Jesus' Sonship and His Ministry: *Exegetical Analysis of Mark 9:1–10*

In the Transfiguration story, the revelation of the heavenly identity of Jesus as God's Son functions as the main message. A mountain is used as the meeting place for heavenly and earthly beings, not least because it is considered to be halfway between earth and heaven. The appearance of Moses and Elijah from heaven makes Jesus important in the salvation history of Israel as their long-awaited messiah. However, their accompanying the transfigured Jesus indicates that he belongs to the heavenly realm, especially by creating a sharp contrast between the heavenly three (Moses, Elijah and Jesus) and the earthly three (Peter, James and John). Jesus' transfigured glorious body with the white clothes reinforces Jesus' belonging to the heavenly realm; and God's own divine testimony to Jesus' Sonship reaches the climax of the story. In this part of the discussion, I will ex-

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<sup>17</sup> This is the exact message that Paul conveys in 2 Cor 3 and 4. Although Paul and Mark describe the transformation differently, their message is the same: true discipleship through following Jesus' path of suffering and death and its final vindication through glorious transformation.

amine how each of these contributes to the Markan understanding of Jesus and his Sonship at the Transfiguration, especially by accounting for the Jewish ideas of the messiah, the Mosaic transformation tradition and the Hellenistic metamorphosis phenomenon.

### 2.2.1 Literary Structure (Mk 9:1–10)<sup>18</sup>

Jesus' prediction of the manifestation of the coming *Kingdom of God* to *some* (v.1)

- A. Jesus' *going up* to a high mountain with three disciples (v.2a)
  - a. Jesus' Transfiguration and his radiant garments (vv.2b–3) – *divine*: "visible"  
Appearance of Elijah and Moses (v.4):
  - b. Peter's proposal (vv.5–6a) – *human*  
Three disciples' response – being terrified (v.6b)
  - c. God's presence in cloud (v.7a) – *divine*: "audible"  
God's own testimony to Jesus' divine Sonship (v.7b)
  - d. Jesus is found alone – *human*  
With his disciples (v.8)

A'. Jesus' *going down* from a mountain with three disciples (v.9a)

Jesus' ordering of *secrecy* until the *resurrection of the Son of Man* (v.9b)

– disciples' wondering what Jesus' saying meant (v.10)

In this literary structure, we see that the Transfiguration story is framed by a kingship motif (9:1) and a resurrection motif (9:9–10) with similar implications of *limitedness*: "some" and "secrecy." Mark 9:1 is a redactional hinge between the prophecy of the Parousia (8:38) and the Transfiguration story.<sup>19</sup> Jesus here predicts that *some* of the disciples who listened to his previous teachings in ch. 8 will witness the Kingdom of God coming in power, not Jesus' enthronement. In its literary context, readers will not miss that the three disciples in the Transfiguration story are those *some* who will have that experience.<sup>20</sup> Then, we can easily conjecture that the

<sup>18</sup> My literary analysis is partially dependent upon Bovon's literary analysis of the Transfiguration in Luke (Bovon, *Luke*, vol.1, 371).

<sup>19</sup> E. Nardonnì, "A Redactional Interpretation of Mark 9:1," *CBQ*43 (1981): 365–84; and Joel Marcus, *The Mystery of the Kingdom of God* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 52. Also, A.D.A. Moses, *Matthew's Transfiguration Story and Jewish-Christian Controversy* (JSNTSup 122; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

<sup>20</sup> Ulrich Luz argues in his analysis of the Matthean version of the story that this prediction of the Kingdom of God reveals the evangelists' expectation of the imminent End Times. See Ulrich Luz, *Matthew*, ed. Helmut Koester, trans. James E. Crouch, 3 vols., vol. 2, *Hermeneia* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 387. He misses not only the narrative implication of the term *some*, but also the temporal hinge of "six days later" which connects both Jesus' prediction of the Kingdom of God and the Transfiguration. Most commentators agree that "after six days" expresses an interval of time which connects both what comes earlier (Kingdom of God) and what follows (Transfiguration). See Heil, 151; M. A. Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel: Mark's World in Literary-Rhetorical Perspectives* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 205; Morna Dorothy Hooker, *A Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Mark* (London: A & C Black, 1991), 214–15; and Robert H.