



THE GOSPEL OF  
**Luke**

**SESSION OBJECTIVE: LUKE 9:28-36**

To understand more about the transfiguration of Jesus.

## A Dream?

Have you ever had a dream that you woke up, but were actually still dreaming? And then when you finally woke up for real, you weren't sure what was a dream and what was real? I've always been a vivid dreamer, and there have been times I have awoken from a dream confused for several moments before I was able to make sense of what was what. In the words of Freddie Mercury, I often asked: "Is this the real life? Is this just fantasy?" Of course, after a few moments with a clear mind it seemed silly that I was ever confused in the first place. But for several moments in my life, the line between waking and dreaming has been a hard one to see.

In this week's passage, the so-called "inner-three" disciples, Peter, James, and John experience an almost unreal encounter with two Old Testament saints and a remarkable "transfiguration" of Jesus in a terrifying cloud. And to make matters even more confusing all of this took place right after waking from a deep sleep (Lk. 9:32). The text doesn't say this, but I can't help but think that the line between waking and dreaming for them in that moment must have been really difficult to see.

## The Transfiguration

Luke 9:28-36 recalls the remarkable Transfiguration of Jesus Christ. Below is a breakdown of some keywords, phrases, and unique details important to understanding the passage as a whole.

**EIGHT DAYS**

Verse 28 begins with an unusual temporal marker for Luke: “Now about eight days after saying these things.” This unusual accounting for time becomes even more confusing when Mark’s account is considered alongside it, for Mark indicates “six days” had passed, not eight. However, if one assumes that Mark is only counting the intervening days while Luke is including the day of Jesus’ teaching His disciples to take up their crosses and follow Him (Lk. 9:23), and also the present day of the Transfiguration, eight days is not contradictory.

Eight days may have some significance to it. It might be that Luke is drawing a parallel of some kind between the Transfiguration and the Feast of Tabernacles/Booths. John’s Gospel highlights the connection between Jesus and the Feast of Tabernacles more clearly, but there are some reasons to think that Luke is making this connection as well. For one, the Feast of Tabernacles is completed over an eight day period. Leviticus 23:36 says, “For seven days you shall present food offerings to the LORD. On the eighth day you shall hold a holy convocation and present a food offering to the LORD. It is a solemn assembly; you shall not do any ordinary work.” Beyond that, during the interaction between Jesus, Moses, and Elijah, Peter offers to make three “tents” or “tabernacles” so that each of them have a place to stay (See also: Zechariah 14:16-21).

Jesus’ connection to the Feast of Tabernacles is clear. The Feast would include two specific ceremonies. First, the people would carry torches around the temple, signifying that the Messiah would come as a light to the Gentiles (Is. 60:3; John 8:12; Acts 13:47). Beyond that, the priest would collect water from the pool of Siloam and pour it into a silver basin, signifying that God would eventually pour out His Spirit (Joel 2:28). In John’s Gospel, Jesus attends the Feast of Tabernacles and made these connections to Himself. On the last day of the festival, He stood up and proclaimed: “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him” (Jn. 7:37-38). The next morning, while the torches were still burning, He said: “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (Jn. 8:12).

**CHANGED**

Verse 29 says that while Jesus was praying, “the appearance of His face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white.” The transfiguration didn’t merely transform Jesus’ clothing, but His entire body. Even His face was changed. Matthew records that His face was shining “like the sun” (Matt. 17:2), a likely allusion to Exodus 34:29-35. However, Moses’ glory was a result of being in God’s presence, while Jesus’ glory came from within Him.

**THREE WITNESSES**

Jesus does not go up to the mountain alone, but Peter, James, and John accompany him. Again, there are multiple reasons for why Luke draws our attention to this. For one, it reiterates the kind of privilege that these three men in particular were privy to as Jesus’ closest disciples. Beyond that, there is an allusion to Exodus 24:9-11, wherein Moses went up onto a mountain to “see the God of Israel,” and with him were three men: “Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu.”

**MOSES AND ELIJAH**

One of the more surprising details of this passage is the inclusion of two well-known Old Testament saints, “Moses and Elijah” (Lk. 9:30). There are several reasons for why these two were likely there, but one of these reasons stands above the rest. Both men were both representative of something greater within the Old Testament itself. Moses represented *the Law* and Elijah represented *the Prophets*. Both the Law and the Prophets had spoken of a coming Messiah, and so together they came to witness what they had long since

foretold; the Messiah had finally come! While they are not mentioned again by name, it is likely that they are also present with Jesus two more times. After Jesus resurrection, Luke 24:4 says, “While they were perplexed about this, behold, *two men* stood by them in *dazzling apparel*. At the ascension of Jesus, they show up again: “And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, *two men* stood by them in *white robes*” (Acts 1:10). The coming of the Messiah was a monumental moment that had foretold many times over, and so it is fitting that the representatives of both were present at the fulfillment of such an occasion.

### **THE CLOUD AND THE VOICE**

The final detail that is significant is the audible voice of God. Verse 34 says, “A cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud.” Clouds are common in divine appearances (Ex. 13:21-22; 40:38). They are also a means of taking people up into heaven (Acts 1:9; 1 Th. 4:17; Rev. 11:12). The Lord Himself will come back to the earth with clouds (Rev. 1:7). That they are engulfed in such a cloud indicates a divine experience. This confirmed in verse 35: “And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!” These words were first spoken to Jesus at His baptism (Lk. 3:22), and now they are being uttered to His closest disciples. Peter even recalls this moment in 2 Peter 1:18: “We ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.” After the voice finished, Jesus was “found alone” and the disciples “kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen” (Lk. 9:36).

## **What About Now?**

One takeaway is that Jesus truly is more than a good teacher or moral man; He is God. He fulfilled all that the Law and the Prophets anticipated, and thus He can be trusted. Another takeaway is that God sometimes allows people to experience His glory. Our faith in a glorious and powerful God does not simply come from words written on paper, but from recorded experiences of individuals who were changed because they were allowed to witness God in action. Whenever we see or experience God’s divine work, it changes us and we testify to it.

## **Study Questions**

### **Day One**

1. Read Luke 9:28. How many days have passed since Jesus’ spoke to His disciples concerning His identity as the Christ? Who went with Jesus up the mountain?

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2. Read Luke 9:29. What was Jesus doing on the mountain? What happened to Him while He was praying?

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### **Day Two**

1. Read Luke 9:30-31. What two men appeared and began talking to Jesus while this was happening? What did they speak of?

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2. Read Luke 9:32. What were Peter and the other disciples doing while this was happening?

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### Day Three

1. Read Luke 9:33. What did Peter say to Jesus when he awoke? What was this a likely reference to? (Hint: See above notes)

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2. Read Luke 9:34. As Peter was speaking, what overshadowed all of them? How did they feel about this?

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### Day Four

1. Read Luke 9:35. What did they hear? What did the voice say? Why is this significant? (Hint: See above notes)

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2. Read Luke 9:36. What happened next? Did the disciples tell anyone about this?

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## Week 35 Discussion: Changed

The transfiguration of Jesus confirms one thing: God is capable of enacting change. In a similar way, believers are changed as well the moment they come to faith in Christ. Talk as a group about the changes in your life you have experienced as a result of following Jesus Christ.

1. Icebreaker: What's the biggest change you've experienced since becoming a Christian?
2. What has taken the longest to change thus far in your life?
3. What things immediately were changed when you came to faith?
4. Are there parts of your old life that you miss? Why or why not?
5. How did people in your life handle the changes in you? Were they met with positivity or negativity? Why?
6. How has the church helped you through your changed life the most?

## Takeaways:

1. Jesus brings Peter, James, and John onto the mountain to pray.
2. Jesus is transformed in the presence of Moses, Elijah, and God the Father.