

Christ in Prophecy

Galilee 4: The Transfiguration

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Opening

Dr. Reagan: One of the most mysterious events in the life of Jesus was what the Bible calls the Transfiguration. Why did this strange event take place? Where did it take place? And what is its significance for you and me? Stay tuned.

Program

Dr. Reagan: Greetings in the name of Jesus our Blessed Hope. I'm Dave Reagan, Senior Evangelist for Lamb & Lion Ministries and this is my colleague Dennis Pollock.

Dennis Pollock: Welcome to the Sea of Galilee. Once again this week we are going to take a look at the area where Jesus focused His ministry for 3 1/2 years.

Dr. Reagan: In this program we're going to take a look at the most mysterious event in the life of Jesus. It's called the Transfiguration.

Dennis Pollock: It occurred when Jesus took three of His disciples up on a high mountain and was suddenly transformed, or transfigured before them. His face began to shine like the sun and His garments became as white as the light.

Dr. Reagan: We are going to take a look at three questions concerning this event: Why did it occur? Where did it occur? And what is the meaning for us today?

Dennis Pollock: Let's begin with a map orientation.

Dr. Reagan: Here is a map of the Sea of Galilee and the area surrounding it. We are here at Tiberias, on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, and the headquarters of Jesus' ministry was located here at Capernaum, on the north shore. Scholars have come up with three possible sites for the Transfiguration. The traditional site is here in the Lower Galilee, in the Valley of Armageddon. In the midst of this valley is a very symmetrical mountain called Mount Tabor. The second site is in Upper Galilee, up here on the border between Lebanon and Syria, where the highest mountain in all of Israel is located, called Mount Hermon. In the time of Jesus, there was a city located at the base of that mountain called Caesarea Philippi. The third possible site for the Transfiguration is here on Mount Meron, which is located between Mount Tabor and Mount Hermon. Let's begin our quest for the meaning and site of the Transfiguration by going first to the traditional site, Mount Tabor.

This is the Valley of Jezreel, referred to in the book of Revelation as the Valley of Armageddon. Napoleon called it the greatest battlefield he had ever seen. Situated in the midst of the valley is Mount Tabor, which pops us from the valley floor like a large pimple.

Dennis Pollock: As you can see, Mount Tabor is really just a hill. Its top elevation is 1900 feet above sea level, which means that it rises about 1600 feet above the floor of the valley.

Dr. Reagan: The hill has always been an eye-catcher because it stands out so dramatically in the midst of the valley. Also, it is a beautiful hill because it is so symmetrical. Some have said that it looks like an upside down teacup.

Dennis Pollock: This hill was the scene of a very famous Old Testament battle. In the book of Judges, chapter 4, we're told that the children of Israel had been severely oppressed by the Canaanites for 20 years, when in response to their prayers, God raised up a woman named Deborah to be their deliverer. Deborah was both a prophet and a judge. She summoned a warrior named Barak and told him to assemble an army of 10,000 men to go to Mount Tabor. She prophesied that this would draw out the Canaanite army, and that God would give the victory to the Israelites. To say the least, this was a bold and risky plan, because the Canaanites had over 900 chariots and the Israelites, being a hill people, had no chariots at all. How in the world were a people on foot going to defeat an army with chariots? Well, the Bible says, "the horse may be prepared for battle, but victory belongs to the Lord." Just as Deborah prophesied, the Canaanite army arrived here with all its chariots as soon as the word got out that Barak and Deborah were on top of the hill with their army. The Canaanites must have been licking their chops, but God had a surprise in store for them. In Judges chapter 5 we're told that there was an earthquake and a sudden rainstorm. The valley was turned into a swampland and the chariots were rendered useless. The Israelites swarmed down from the hill and slaughtered the Canaanites, and the battle resulted in 40 years of peace for Israel. God really does good work.

Dr. Reagan: What a glorious day that was in the history of Israel. The story reminds me of a passage in Psalm 20, verse 7 where it says, "Some boast in chariots, some in horses, but we will boast in the name of the Lord our God." Well, folks, let's go up to the top of Mount Tabor and enjoy its scenic view. However I must say this that this is a very hazy day here in Israel so we're not sure what we'll be able to see from the top, but at least we will be able to see the churches that are located up there. As you can readily see, the view from the top of Mount Tabor is absolutely stunning. The Mount seems to be much higher looking down from the top, than it does from the ground looking up.

Dennis Pollock: The church you see behind us here on the summit of Mount Tabor is the Basilica of the Transfiguration, built in the 1920's by the Franciscans. It is located over the remains of several ancient churches dating back to the times of the Byzantines.

Dr. Reagan: Inside the church there is a beautiful mosaic that portrays Jesus transfigured, flanked by Moses and Elijah, with Peter, James and John looking on. This small Greek Orthodox chapel is also located on the summit of Mount Tabor. It is much simpler in style and adornment. The chapel is called the Church of St. Elias. It is named for the prophet Elijah who appeared, together with Moses, when the Transfiguration occurred.

Dennis Pollock: Well, what about it? This hill has been revered as the site of the Transfiguration since the 4th Century. Is it authentic or not? Dave, what do you think?

Dr. Reagan: Well, Dennis, the more I have studied this question, the more I have personally become convinced that this really is not the place where the Transfiguration took place.

Dennis Pollock: Okay, well then, how about giving us the reasons for that conclusion.

Dr. Reagan: OK. The first reason I would mention is the fact that the Jewish historian, Josephus, mentions in his writings that there was a Roman fortress on top of Mount Tabor at the time of Jesus. Now folks, the presence of such a structure here makes it highly unlikely that Jesus would have brought His disciples up here to experience an event as sensitive and significant as the Transfiguration.

Dennis Pollock: Well Dave, what about the fact that the Bible says that the Transfiguration took place on a “high mountain?”

Dr. Reagan: Well, I think that’s a very important point, Dennis. You know, this may be a very high hill, but it certainly is not a mountain. And that reminds me of another geographical argument folks, against this site a very convincing one. Let’s return for a moment to our map. We know from the Scriptures that six days prior to the Transfiguration, Jesus and His disciples were here in Caesarea Philippi. And the Scriptures tell us that when they departed that city, they returned here to Capernaum on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. Now folks, it just doesn’t make sense that they would have walked a day’s journey past Capernaum down here to Mount Tabor, when they could have ascended either of two really high mountains either Mount Hermon, or Mount Meron, here in route from Caesarea Philippi to Capernaum.

Dennis Pollock: So, folks, Mount Tabor is a very picturesque place with a lot of tradition going for it, but in truth, it’s very doubtful that the Transfiguration actually took place here. So, let’s head for an alternative site, Mount Meron, located halfway between here and Mount Hermon.

Dr. Reagan: And while we’re headed that way, let’s pause for a song about this glorious land. The song is entitled, “I Will Bless Those Who Bless My People,” and it is sung by Mike and Melissa Mott.

Song

I will bless those who bless My people. I will curse those who curse them too. For this I have promised to my servant Abraham, I will keep My word. I will bless those who bless My people. I will curse those who curse them too. For this I have promised to my servant Abraham, I will keep My word. Lord we bless. Lord we love Thy people. Lord we bless. Lord we love Thy land. We plead for, we pray for, intercede for Israel. Lord now move Thy hand.

Dr. Reagan: Well, here we are on the peak of Mount Meron. And folks, as you can see, there is a tremendous difference between the summit of this peak and that of Mount Tabor, there’s no beautiful churches, there’s no beautiful gardens. This has always been a very isolated and lonely place. This structure you see behind us was the former command post of a now abandoned Israeli military base. Now, before we talk about whether or not the Transfiguration took place here, let’s pause for a moment to enjoy the panoramic view. Like Mount Tabor, Mount Meron supplies another very spectacular

panoramic view. But this time, instead of the Valley of Armageddon, we are looking at the Upper Galilee. And on a clear day you can see the Sea of Galilee at a distance, today it is obscured by the haze.

Dennis Pollock: Mount Meron is twice as high as Mount Tabor. Where we are standing the elevation is almost 4,000 feet above sea level. That makes this the highest mountain located entirely within modern-day Israel. Mount Hermon, at 9,200 feet is much higher, but most of it is located in Syria.

Dr. Reagan: We are about 15 miles north of Capernaum. As I pointed out before, this site would not have been out of the way for Jesus and His disciples as they walked from Caesarea Philippi. Also, as I pointed out before, this has always been a very lonely and desolate place. A place that would have been very appropriate for the Transfiguration. Well we have just come down from the summit of Mount Meron to this nice roadside park that we passed on the way up.

Dennis Pollock: Dave, is there any other argument you can think of in favor of this place?

Dr. Reagan: Well, yes Dennis, I can think of one. The Gospels tell us that when Jesus and His disciples started descending the Mount of Transfiguration, they were met by a large crowd of Jews, including some religious leaders. And that little bit of information pretty well rules out Mount Hermon because it was located in pagan Gentile territory.

Dennis Pollock: So, to summarize, no Jewish multitude would have gathered near Mount Hermon, and Mount Tabor was too far out of the way, and certainly could not be construed as a “high mountain.”

Dr. Reagan: That’s right, Dennis, and that’s why this site here on Mount Meron is considered by some to be the authentic site. Well, folks we’ve come a little bit further down Mount Meron to the entrance to a town called Or HaGanuz.

Dennis Pollock: And we’re going to talk for a moment about the Transfiguration itself. Dave, how about reading the description of the Transfiguration from the gospel of Matthew for us?

Dr. Reagan: Okay, Dennis I’ll be glad to do that. Matthew says that six days after Jesus and His disciples were in Caesarea Philippi, Jesus took three of them, Peter, James and John up to a high mountain. And then he says, “And Jesus was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. Peter said to Jesus, ‘Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.’ And while he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, ‘This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!’”

Dennis Pollock: Well, thanks, Dave. Folks, let’s consider the most obvious question that emerges from this reading. What in the world, or you might want to say, what out of this world happened to Jesus when He suddenly began to shine like the sun?

Dr. Reagan: Dennis, you know, I believe that He suddenly began to manifest the glory that He left behind in Heaven when He took on the flesh. The very same glory that has been restored to Him now and which He will manifest again when He returns. In Philippians 2, we are told that before His incarnation, Jesus existed “in the form of God” and equal to God, but that when He became flesh, He “emptied” Himself of His divine glory, “taking the form of a bond-servant, being made in the likeness of men.” And in several places in the Scriptures we are told that when Jesus returns to this earth as King of kings and Lord of lords, He will manifest His glory again to all people. For example, in Isaiah 24 verse 23 it says that the Messiah will reign from Mount Zion in Jerusalem and that He will manifest His glory before the whole world. In like manner, in 2 Thessalonians 1:10 it says that He is returning to be “glorified before His saints” and to be “marveled at among all who have believed.” Now, Dennis, before you jump in, let me just ask you a question, OK?

Dennis Pollock: OK.

Dr. Reagan: My question for you is this: Why in the world did Moses and Elijah appear at the Transfiguration?

Dennis Pollock: Dave, I was going to ask you the same question!

Dr. Reagan: That’s what I thought.

Dennis Pollock: But I’ll take a stab at it anyway.

Dr. Reagan: All right.

Dennis Pollock: Well, my best guess is that Moses and Elijah appeared because they are symbols of the Law and the Prophets. And God the Father wanted to impress upon the disciples that Jesus is greater than the Law and He’s greater than the Prophets. And there is no doubt that the disciples needed that lesson because when Moses and Elijah appeared, Peter offered to honor them equally with Jesus by building tabernacles for all three.

Dr. Reagan: Yes, Dennis, Peter started behaving in his typical compulsive way, acting before thinking. But before he could do anything, God the Father stopped him in his tracks with the declaration, “This is My beloved Son. Listen to Him!” But let’s get back to your point Dennis, about the superiority of Jesus. Now aren’t there some scriptures that specifically confirm the superiority of Jesus over Moses and the Prophets?

Dennis Pollock: Yes, Dave. Two of them can be found in the book of Hebrews. For example, in Hebrews 3:3 it says this: “For He has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by just so much as the builder of the house has more honor than the house.” And in another passage from Hebrews, it says: “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers and the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

Dr. Reagan: And that brings us to the most important question: Why did the Transfiguration happen? Dennis, what do you think was its fundamental purpose?

Dennis Pollock: Well Dave, I believe the answer to that question is actually pretty simple. The Transfiguration was for the purpose of emphasizing to the disciples that Jesus really was God in the flesh.

Dr. Reagan: And Dennis, I would agree with that completely. And folks, there is no doubt that the disciples got the point. The Transfiguration is mentioned in three of the gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke. And although John does not describe it in detail, he refers to it in chapter one of his gospel where he wrote: “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

Dennis Pollock: Peter also refers to the Transfiguration in his second epistle where he presents a summary of the reasons for believing that Jesus was the Messiah. He states that he and other disciples were eyewitnesses of Jesus’ majesty. He then explains this statement in these words: “For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory: ‘This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased’ and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven, when we were with Him on the holy mountain.”

Dr. Reagan: So, they saw, they heard, and they never forgot. Dennis, before we leave this special place, let’s try to find an open field somewhere here in the Galilee and I want to remind our viewers of something else that happened, very special, at the base of Mount Meron.

Dennis Pollock: Let’s do it.

Dr. Reagan: If Mount Meron truly was the site of the Transfiguration, then near the base of it there would have been a large open field like this one, where one of my favorite stories concerning the healing ministry of Jesus took place. You see folks all the Gospel accounts say that when Jesus and His disciples came down from the Mount of Transfiguration, they encountered not only a crowd of Jews and Jewish leaders, but also a man with a demon-possessed son. Dennis do you remember that particular story?

Dennis Pollock: Sure Dave, I remember it well. The father told Jesus that his son had been possessed since childhood and that the demon had often thrown the boy into both the fire and the water. The father then said, “If you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.”

Dr. Reagan: Think of it folks, this man was speaking to God in the flesh, the one who had created his son, and he says, “If you can do anything.” And Jesus responded, “If I can do anything? All things are possible to him who believes.”

Dennis Pollock: And that’s when the man instantly cried out, “I believe, help my unbelief.” In response, Jesus cast the demon out of his son.

Dr. Reagan: “I believe, help my unbelief.” Folks, that’s a prayer all of us need to pray daily. Well, let’s go now to the third possible site of the Transfiguration, the area of Mount Hermon.

Well, folks, we have arrived at the site of the ancient Roman city of Caesarea Philippi. And that puts us at the base of Mt. Hermon.

Dennis Pollock: We have gone from Mount Tabor at 1,900 feet, to Mount Meron at 4,000 feet, to Mount Hermon that rises above us to a height of 9,200 feet.

Dr. Reagan: In the area where we are standing, and behind us, is where Caesarea Philippi was located. The city had a wonderful water source because this is where the headwater of the Jordan River is located. Let's take a look at that site. As the snows melt on the top of Mount Hermon, and the water comes down the side, much of it goes underground and then suddenly, it just springs out of the ground right here at the headwater of the Jordan River.

Dennis Pollock: And from here we are 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee, and we are only 45 miles from Damascus, the capital of Syria.

Dr. Reagan: This beautiful site was named Panias by the Greeks when this area fell under their control about 300 years before Christ. They named it that because they believed that one of their gods named Pan was born here in the cave that stands out so prominently at this site. Pan was their god of nature. Today, the site is called Banias, which is the Arab way of pronouncing Panias.

Dennis Pollock: Herod the Great built a temple here, which he dedicated to the Roman Emperor Augustus. Later, his son Philip the Tetrarch, who lived during the time of Jesus, decided to change the name of the city to Caesarea, also to honor the Emperor. But, since there was already a port city by that name, he ended up calling this city Caesarea Philippi.

Dr. Reagan: The point is that by the time Jesus began His ministry, this site was known far and wide as a center of pagan worship. A place where both Greek and Roman gods were honored.

Dennis Pollock: And that's probably the reason Jesus brought His disciples here. He most likely wanted to contrast Himself, as the one and only way to God, as opposed to the array of false gods that were worshiped here.

Dr. Reagan: So, standing in this area, surrounded by false gods, Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do people say that I am?"

Dennis Pollock: And they responded, "Some say John the Baptist; others Elijah; but still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

Dr. Reagan: And Jesus said, "Who do you say that I am?"

Dennis Pollock: And that's when Peter blurted out his famous confession: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God!"

Dr. Reagan: And Jesus replied, "Upon this rock [Peter's confession] I will build My church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it."

Dennis Pollock: All that famous and profound dialogue took place right here, at Caesarea Philippi.

Dr. Reagan: And this site gives it special meaning because that large cave behind us was regarded by many to be the entrance to Hades. Thus Jesus' comment that the gates of Hades would not prevail against His Church. Well, here we are again, where we started, on the shores of the beautiful Sea of Galilee. Dennis, let's sum up our study of the Transfiguration.

Dennis Pollock: Okay, Dave. Well folks, the Scriptures tell us that six days after Jesus and His disciples visited the city of Caesarea Philippi, the Transfiguration took place on a "high mountain."

Dr. Reagan: That could have happened, of course, on Mount Hermon, which is adjacent to Caesarea Philippi, but as we have already pointed out, that is highly unlikely.

Dennis Pollock: Regarding the meaning of the Transfiguration to us today, I would say that first and foremost, it affirms that Jesus was God in the flesh. And folks, that is a very important point. Mohammed never claimed to be God, nor did Moses or Buddha or Confucius.

Dr. Reagan: Jesus was God in the flesh, and that's the reason at the Transfiguration, when God the Father spoke, declaring Jesus to be the Messiah, He ended His declaration with a command: "Listen to Him!" And oh, how we need to heed those words today. The Church today is full of apostasy. And one of the most popular apostate teachings is that there are many, many roads to God the Muslim road, the Jewish road, the Hindu road, as well as many others. But what did Jesus say? In one of His most famous declarations Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

Dennis Pollock: And Peter later confirmed that statement in one of his sermons recorded in the Book of Acts when he proclaimed, "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."

If you are an unsaved person, I urge you to reach out to God today by repenting of your sins and making the same confession that Peter did: "You, Jesus, are the Messiah, the Christ, the Savior the Son of the Living God." And when you have done that, seek out a church where you can make that confession publicly and then witness it in Christian baptism.

Dr. Reagan: Well folks, that's our program for this week. We sincerely hope this program, and all our programs about the Galilee of Jesus have been a blessing to you.

Dennis Pollock: Until next week, the Lord willing, this is Dennis Pollock saying Shalom from the Galilee.

Dr. Reagan: And this is Dave Reagan saying, look up, be watchful, for our redemption is drawing near.

Group: Shalom from the Galilee!

End of Program