“Listen to Him!”: Angelic and Divine Typology in Mark’s Transfiguration Account

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Abstract

In this study I will argue that, while Matthew and Luke’s redaction of the Markan Transfiguration present Jesus as the antitype of Moses, Mark’s own account does not. Rather, Mark uses typology to narrate Jesus into the stories of Elijah and Moses, both of whom are described in the Jewish scriptures as ascending a mountain to talk with God in narratives in which the Angel of YHWH also features. Distinctive features of Mark’s account suggest that Mark wishes to associate Jesus, not with Moses, but with YHWH and his angel, using the scriptural ambiguity between the Angel of YHWH and Israel’s God to generate a similar ambiguity around the divine identity of Jesus. Consequently, Mark’s Transfiguration presents a “higher” Christology than that of the Transfigurations in the other Synoptic Gospels. In Mark’s Transfiguration, Jesus is compared, not to human prophets, but to the anthropomorphic manifestations of Israel’s God at Sinai and Horeb.

Keywords

Transfiguration – Gospel of Mark – divine identity – typology – Christology – Angel of YHWH
1 Introduction

In his classic study of the Transfiguration, Arthur Ramsey writes, “Implicit in Saint Mark’s narrative are the special themes of the other two synoptic narratives: in Saint Matthew, the comparison and contrast between Christ and Moses; in Saint Luke, the connection between the Transfiguration and the Cross.” Given that Matthew and Luke emphasise different aspects in their use of Mark’s Transfiguration account, it is possible that there are other aspects of Mark’s account that have not been fully appreciated. As Samuel Sandmel opined 50 years ago, “Mark in many treatments is explained incorrectly because Matthew and Luke (and John) are read with him.” Two examples should suffice to demonstrate this effect at work.

In David Litwa’s excellent book IESUS DEUS he gives extensive discussion to Mark’s Transfiguration account. But at two points he assimilates the Markan account to one of the other synoptics. He writes, “On the mount of Transfiguration, Peter assumes that the three luminous beings are divine and should receive some sort of cult ... (only one of the luminous beings, we soon find out, is God’s beloved son).” However, Elijah and Moses are only described as being in some sense luminous in Luke (οἳ ὄφθεντες ἐν δόξῃ, Luke 9:31), not in Mark where their appearance is not described. This is presumably an unconscious error. Later in the discussion, Litwa writes, “The second evangelist fuses the light emerging from Jesus’ clothing (Mark 9:3) to the light from the luminous cloud representing the Father’s divine presence, or kabod (v. 7).” This is not unconscious, but a deliberate assimilation as he acknowledges, “Matthew alone writes what the other synoptic writers seem to assume, namely that the cloud was φωτεινὴ (shining with light) (17:5).” Yet Mark only says that a cloud overshadows them (ἐπισκιάζω, Mark 9:7) – without the additional description in Matthew, it is shadow, not light which is described. In both instances, details are added to interpret Mark from the other synoptics.

A second example comes from Candida Moss’ important JBL article on the healing of the woman in the crowd (Mark 5:25–34). There she mentions, “the Markan Transfiguration (9:2–8), in which Jesus’ face shines as brilliantly

3 M. David Litwa, IESUS DEUS: The Early Christian Depiction of Jesus as a Mediterranean God (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2014), 133.
4 Litwa, 139.
5 Litwa, 143 fn 114.
as the sun.” Jesus’ face shining like the sun is a feature of Matthew’s Transfiguration (Matt 17:2), but not Mark’s. This is clearly an unconscious error, not least because at that point Moss cites her earlier article on the Transfiguration in which she specifically notes, in comparing Mark’s Transfiguration with Exodus 34:29–35, that “there is a significant difference in the subject of the illumination; in Mark it is Jesus’ garments which radiate whilst in Exodus Moses’ face is affected by the glory of the divine.”

These examples demonstrate the need for care in distinguishing Mark’s Transfiguration from its Synoptic parallels. Thus, the first task of this study is to present a comparative analysis of the Synoptic Transfiguration accounts, demonstrating how Mark’s Matthean and Lukan redactors have altered or obscured significant details in Mark’s own account – resulting in the need to interpret the Gospel of Mark on its own terms. I will then perform an intertextual reading of Mark’s Transfiguration alongside the scriptures alluded to in Mark’s account, namely, 1 Kings 19 and particularly Exodus 19–34. I will argue that the typology of Mark’s Transfiguration does not present Jesus as the antitype of Elijah or Moses, but rather narrates Jesus in the narrative role of Israel’s God and angel from the stories of Elijah and Moses, using the scriptural ambiguity between the Angel of YHWH and Israel’s God to generate a similar ambiguity about the divine identity of Jesus.

2 Synoptic Analysis

The Synoptic Transfiguration accounts are clearly related, telling essentially the same story and with a considerable overlap in wording. The argument

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8 At a late stage in developing this article I was pleased to find the basic thrust and several details of my exegetical argument here, had been anticipated by Günther Juncker’s unpublished PhD dissertation (Günther H. Juncker, Jesus and the Angel of the Lord: An Old Testament Paradigm for New Testament Christology, Unpublished Dissertation [Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2001]). The dissertation is accessible on ProQuest.com. One key difference between us is my framing of Mark’s account in contrast against Matthew and Luke’s. Juncker, on the other hand, takes a more harmonising approach, which suits his wider argument. I have not attempted here to interact with the whole thesis but only the section directly pertaining to this study, pp. 358–83.
here does not depend on Markan priority, or assume any particular relationship between Matthew and Luke. It suffices to show the differences between the accounts which result in different emphases to the same basic narrative. I will not describe every difference, only those I judge significant for this argument. Neither will I attempt to address the hermeneutical significance of all the distinctive features of Matthew and Luke, which are worthy of their own study. My focus here is on Mark’s account as distinct from Matthew and Luke’s accounts.

Mark and Matthew both begin the episode with “Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John.” Unique to Mark is the emphasis on the exclusiveness of the group (κατ’ ἵδιαν μόνους; Mark 9:2). Luke, on the other hand, sets the event “about eight days later”; specifically relates it to the preceding teaching (μετὰ τοῦ λόγου τούτου); and also informs us of Jesus’ intention to pray (προσεύξασθαι; Luke 9:28).

Luke alone mentions that Jesus’ Transfiguration occurs while Jesus is praying (καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ προσεύχεσθαι αὐτὸν; Luke 9:29). In the description of Jesus’ transfiguration itself we encounter subtle, yet critical differences. For Mark, “he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them” (Mark 9:2–3). Matthew also uses Mark’s language of transfiguration (μεταμορφόω) but adds, prior to the description of the clothes, “and his face shone like the sun” (Matt 17:2). This appears to be an assimilation to traditions around Moses’ appearance at Sinai. Luke omits the language of transfiguration and, similar to Matthew, describes a facial change prior to the description of Jesus’ clothing (τὸ εἶδος τοῦ προσώπου αὐτοῦ ἑτέρον; Luke 9:29).

Each Gospel employs slightly different terminology to describe Jesus’ clothing. For Mark they become a radiant, intense whiteness (στίλβοντα λευκὰ λίαν; 9:3). For Matthew, they become white as light (λευκὰ ὡς τὸ φῶς; 17:2). For Luke, they become like lightning (λευκὸς ἐξαστράπτων; 9:29). Unique to Mark is the further emphasis on the clothing, “such as no one on earth could bleach them”

10 Matthew adds τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ (17:1) to his list of the three disciples present with Jesus, which gives greater specificity to the description of John but appears to have no significance for the interpretation of the story.

11 A change which Wolter considers has not yet been convincingly explained (Wolter, Das Lukasevangelium).


14 Wiefel, Das Evangelium nach Matthäus, 309.
(Mark 9:3). So, in contrast to Matthew and Luke, Mark’s Gospel both omits any mention of the face and emphasises Jesus’ clothes.

The next event in the narrative is the appearance of Elijah and Moses (Mark 9:4; Matt 17:3; Luke 9:30). Both Matthew and Luke introduce it with an emphatic ἰδοὺ. Mark mentions Elijah first, but Matthew and Luke mention Moses first.15 All three Synoptics describe them talking with or to Jesus. It is at this point that Luke becomes most idiosyncratic, adding that Moses and Elijah “appeared in glory (δόξα),”16 that they discussed Jesus’ departure (ἐξοδος) which he was to fulfil (πληρόω) at Jerusalem, and that the disciples were sleepy but managed to stay awake and so saw Jesus’ glory (δόξα) and the two men (Luke 9:31–32). Luke’s distinctive use of ἐξοδος (elsewhere in the NT only Heb 11:22 and 2 Peter 1:15) appears to evoke both Jesus’ impending death, but also his redemptive work and resurrection or even Parousia.17

In response to the transfiguration of Jesus and appearance of Elijah and Moses, Peter makes his notorious suggestion to build three tents (σκήνη; Mark 9:5; Matt 17:4; Luke 9:33). Mark interprets Peter’s suggestion for us, he did not know how to answer for they – the disciples – were so afraid (ἐφοβήθησαν, Mark 9:6). Luke does not mention fear here, and reframes Peter’s ignorance: he just does not know what he is saying (μὴ εἶδως ὅ λέγει, Luke 9:33). Matthew omits any interpretation of Peter’s words.18 But Matthew also styles Peter as putting his request at Jesus’ discretion, ἐὰν θέλεις (Matt 17:4).19

Next a cloud overshadows them (ἐπισκιάζω, Mark 9:7; Matt 17:5; Luke 9:34). Only in Matthew is the cloud described as radiant (φωτεινός). For Luke it is the cloud that produces fear (φοβέω) in the disciples. Then a voice speaks from the cloud. For Matthew it is hearing the voice that causes the disciples to be exceedingly afraid (ἐφοβήθησαν σφόδρα, Matt 17:6).20 In Mark the voice declares, “This is my son, the beloved, listen to him.” Matthew and Luke share this declaration with changes: Matthew adds “with him I am well pleased,” assimilating this account to Jesus’ baptism (compare Matt 3:17; Mark 1:11);

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15 “Die von Matthäus gegenüber Markus (9,4) vorgenommene Umstellung deutet an, daß er in Mose das Gesetz, in Elia die Prophetie verkörpert sah (vgl. 5,17).” So, Wiefel, 309.
16 Perhaps suggesting that Jesus had ascended the mountain into the heavenly world, as some Jewish traditions held Moses did at Sinai (e.g., Philo, Moses 2.69), see Klein, Das Lukasevangelium, 346; Wolter, Das Lukasevangelium, 352.
18 Ulrich Luz, Matthew 8–20: A Commentary, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2001), 399.
20 Wiefel, Das Evangelium nach Matthäus, 310.
Luke, however, omits “beloved” and instead inserts “my chosen” (ἐκλέγομαι, Luke 9:35). “My chosen” appears to allude to Isaiah 42:1.21

The English translation, “listen to him,” masks a further subtle detail. Luke 9:35 has αὐτοῦ ἀκούετε. This appears to reflect the wording of LXX Deut 18:15, αὐτοῦ ἀκουσέσθε, which is again quoted by Luke in Acts 3:22.22 Although the manuscript evidence is not unanimous, Mark and Matthew appear to favour a different word order, ἀκούετε αὐτοῦ.23 This change is inconsequential in English translation, but potentially critical in allusive potential, as we shall see below.

After this point the Synoptics vary greatly in language but all describe how, after the voice has spoken, the disciples suddenly realise only Jesus is with them again (Mark 9:8; Matt 17:8; Luke 9:36). In Mark and Matthew, Jesus instructs them to tell no one about what they have seen until after “the son of man has risen from the dead.” In Luke we are only told that they kept silent about what they had seen “in those days.”

The preceding synoptic analysis reveals distinctive characteristics of each synoptic account. The focus of this study is Mark’s account, and comparison to Matthew and Luke serves to highlight Mark’s distinctive features against the other Synoptics.

First, the description of Jesus’ transfiguration in Mark is limited to his clothes. In Matthew we have a graphic description of his face and in Luke a less precise description of change. It seems that for Matthew, at least, the addition of a shining face brings this account closer to that of Moses in Exodus 34. Mark, on the other hand, not only omits the face, but has a longer description of Jesus’ clothes.

Second, both Matthew and Luke have other sources of light in the episode. Matthew’s cloud is radiant, while Luke’s Moses and Elijah appear in glory. Only in Mark’s account is Jesus the sole source of light. By adding additional light sources, Matthew and Luke detract from Mark’s portrayal of Jesus as the only radiant figure in the episode.

Third, each evangelist shows the disciples responding with fear. Fear is the expected response in any epiphany – an appropriate and scripted human response to witnessing a divine being made manifest. However, they each show this at a different point in the narrative. It seems likely that the placement of

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23 I here follow NA28, then. It seems most likely that either Luke’s word order or LXX Deut 18:15, or both, is what has influenced the transmission of Mark and Matthew. Given the relative neglect of Mark in the early church, in favour of Matthew and Luke, it seems unlikely that Mark would have influenced Matthew’s transmission.
fearful disciples serves to underline a particular point in the narrative that the evangelist wants to emphasise. Luke emphasizes the cloud, perhaps thinking of Exod 24:15–16. Matthew emphasizes the voice from heaven, perhaps thinking of the Israelites’ fear in Exod 20:19, or to underline that this heavenly voice is the God of Israel speaking. 24 In Mark, however, the disciples’ fear is neither a response to the cloud nor the voice, it is a response to witnessing Elijah and Moses talking with a radiant Jesus on the mountain. 25

Allison argues that “Matthew rescripted Mark in order to push thoughts towards Moses.” 26 Luke’s emphasis on Moses is complicated by an additional emphasis on Jesus’ suffering and “exodus,” and apparent assimilation to Gethsemane (the night time setting and sleepy disciples). 27 Yet both Matthew and Luke increase the resemblance of Mark’s account to the Mosaic theophanies of the Sinai sequence in Exodus 19–34. 28 This is seen in the several details discussed above: the development of a reference to Jesus’ face; the additional sources of light; and the narrative location of the disciples’ fear. Matthew and Luke present Jesus as a new and greater Moses in a form of typology. Moses is the type and Jesus is the antitype. There is, in Matthew and Luke’s understanding, a recurrent character to salvation history. God’s acts from the past are be reflected in God’s acts, specifically through Jesus, in the present messianic age. This typology can be further defined as a fulfilment or eschatological typology. 29 Usually, when Mark’s account is read, the same features that have been developed by Matthew and Luke are seen to point to the same typology. 30 However, I want to argue here that attention to Mark’s subtle differences results

24 For Luz, this makes the heavenly voice “the center” of Matthew’s account (Matthew 8–20, 394).
25 This gives the Markan narrative a second center of gravity, which needs to qualify, but does not negate, the suggestion that the heavenly voice is the climax. Cf. W. Richard Stegner, “The Use of Scripture in Two Narratives of Early Jewish Christianity (Matthew 4.1–11; Mark 9.2–8),” in Early Christian Interpretation of the Scriptures of Israel, ed. Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders, LNTS 148 (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), 111; Luz comments how the fear in Mark is “very strange” (Matthew 8–20, 395).
26 Dale C. Allison, The New Moses: A Matthean Typology (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1993), 244.
30 “The prevailing preoccupation with Moses-Sinai parallels has tended to obscure other more subtle and possibly more significant parallels,” so Juncker, Jesus and the Angel of the Lord, 359.
in a significantly different typological inference, even while the scriptural refer-
ent has not changed. In the foregoing Synoptic comparison, we can see how
each Gospel author has given a distinctive version of the same story. With our
emphasis on Mark, we are now alert to Mark’s unique features which must be
given full consideration if Mark’s account is to be read on its own terms.

3  The Literary Context of the Transfiguration in Mark

The Transfiguration is one of Mark’s Christological high points, identified as
such by its structural function in the Gospel, the heavenly phenomena of the
overshadowing cloud, and the declaration of Jesus as “my beloved son” by a
heavenly voice.31 As Ramsey writes, “The Transfiguration seems to stand at
a watershed in the ministry of Jesus, and to be a height from which the reader
looks down on one side upon the Galilean ministry and on the other side
upon the Via Crucis.”32

The Transfiguration occurs within the section that begins the second half
of Mark’s Gospel (8:31–9:13). This beginning of the second half mirrors many
elements from the beginning of the first (Mark 1:1–15).33 Jesus makes a new
beginning, ἀρχάω (8:31, cf. 1:1, ἀρχή).34 Instead of scripture speaking (1:2–3), Jesus
teaches (8:31–9:1). The prophet Malachi quoted in Mark 1:2 (Mal 3:1) is recalled
here through the appearance of both Moses and Elijah (Mal 4:4–5; “Remember
the teaching of my servant Moses ... I will send you the prophet Elijah ...”).35

Earlier, Satan tested Jesus in the wilderness (Mark 1:13), but here Satan does so
in the person of Jesus’ disciple, Peter (8:32–33). Like his original preaching
of the gospel message, Jesus teaches openly (8:32; cf. 1:14). There is a reiteration
of the promised coming of the kingdom (9:1; cf. 1:15).36 At a scripturally sym-

31 “Literally speaking, Mark makes the Transfiguration a kind of fulcrum for his book.”
Litwa, IESUS DEUS, 113.
33 Joel Marcus, Mark: 8–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary (New Haven,
Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002),
Black, 1991), 205.
36 Mark 8:34 is also “reminiscent of the first three call stories (1.16–20 and 2.14), which
brought home to the reader that anyone who wishes to follow Jesus should be pre-
pared to give up the security of family and livelihood.” So, Bas M. F. Van Iersel, Mark: A
bolic location, this time on a high mountain rather than in the Jordan, a heavenly voice declares Jesus to be “my beloved son” – ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός (Mk. 9:7; cf. 1:10). Finally, the section ends with a reference to John’s arrest (9:13; cf. 1:14).

Recognising this second “beginning” alerts us to the significance of what takes place here for comprehending the rest of the Gospel story that follows. Moreover, just as Mark’s prologue (1:1–15) was rich in scriptural allusions and echoes, so too we can expect to find significant use of scripture here as well.38

4 Scriptural Allusion in the Transfiguration

The ascent of Jesus and three of his disciples up a mountain to meet with God is surely among the stronger scriptural allusions within this section of Mark. It recalls two significant scriptural stories, that of Moses and that of Elijah (Exod 24, 34; 1 Kgs 19:8–18).39 Unlike some of Mark’s more subtle scriptural typologies this connection can hardly be denied as Elijah and Moses are described as being present (Mark 9:4). Various Jewish writings suggest that the return of scriptural heroes would feature in the eschaton (Mal 4:5; 4 Ezra 6:26; 14:9; 2 Bar 76:2; T. Ben 10:5–6).40 The appearance of Elijah and Moses must therefore, carry great significance.

38 On the use of scripture in the Markan prologue see discussion and references in Robinson, Markan Typology, 51–56.
4.1 *What Links the Two Figures?*

One of the indications that interpreters have missed something significant is the way that the focusing on a Moses typology leaves the presence of Elijah in the narrative without meaningful explanation. There are three standard explanations. First, in Jewish tradition both Elijah and Moses are “raptured” or “transported” to heaven without dying (2 Kgs 2:11; Josephus, *Ant* 4.8.48 §320–346).41 Thus they potentially, simply represent inhabitants of the heavenly world.42 Second, both Elijah and Moses had been given in scripture an expectation of eschatological return (Deut 18:15; Mal 3:23).43 Yet as Pesch observes, their presence here is not a return but only a temporary reappearance.44 Third, in Matthew and Luke, where the order of appearance in Mark is reversed, “Moses typifies the prophetic office that Jesus will occupy, while Elijah pictures the hope of the eschaton;”45 or they stand for the entirety of the scriptures in the sense of “law and prophets.”46 This explanation makes little sense when applied to Mark, not least because Elijah is mentioned first.

There is no doubting the heavenly and eschatological significance of these characters’ appearance. There is considerable doubt that Elijah effectively represents prophecy, not least because Moses is himself the paradigmatic scriptural prophet. There seems little need for Elijah’s presence at all, let alone to mention him first.

Dale Allison observes something that is frequently missed: Moses and Elijah are the only scriptural characters who converse with God on a mountain, specifically Sinai/Horeb.47 Moreover, both the Sinai and Horeb cycles feature the enigmatic angel of *YHWH*, a third important intertextual link between the two. It is these scriptural narratives, linked by a human interaction with both the angel of *YHWH* and with God on a mountain that best explain the joint presence of Moses and Elijah in this encounter with God on a mountain.48

Thus, any interpretation of the Markan Transfiguration must explore the

41 Wiefel, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, 309.
43 Wiefel, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, 309.
44 Rudolf Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium*, HThKNT 2 (Freiburg: Herder, 1979), 2.75.
46 This assumption is supported regarding Luke, as Moses and Elijah speak of Jesus’ “departure” in Jerusalem as a fulfilment (πληρόω, Luke 9:31) event. So, Wolter, *Das Lukasevangelium*, 352; see also Klein, *Das Lukasevangelium*, 347; for this interpretation regarding Matthew, see Wiefel, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, 309.
48 As Juncker correctly observes, because the mountain of Mark 9 is unnamed, its symbolic potential is enhanced, typologically it becomes Sinai/Horeb (*Jesus and the Angel of the Lord*, 363–64).
significance of both scriptural texts evoked by Mark, and not allow the focus on Moses, as developed by Matthew and Luke, to obscure Mark’s own focus, which is somewhat different. Elijah is mentioned first, and so requires at least equal consideration with Moses. The presence and priority of Elijah problematizes the assumption of a Moses typology.49

4.2 Elijah
Elijah is the first of the two prophets mentioned. With the mountaintop scene surrounded by the talk of persecution of both Jesus and his followers (Mark 8:31–38) and mention of Elijah/John the Baptist’s fate (9:13), the Transfiguration recalls Elijah’s encounter with the Angel of YHWH in the wilderness and YHWH at Mount Horeb (1 Kgs 19:1–18). Elijah was under the threat of death (1 Kgs 19:2) as is Jesus (e.g. Mark 3:6; 8:31). Both scenes take place after the death of prophets at the hands of a wicked king and queen (1 Kgs 18:4; Mark 6:14–29). Peter’s presumptuous verbosity (Mark 9:5–6) contrasts with Elijah’s silence until the voice speaks to him (1 Kgs 19:12–13). God’s voice interrogated Elijah (1 Kgs 19:9, 13) before comforting him (19:15–18). In Mark, God’s voice only declares that Jesus is his son (Mark 9:7) and speaks to the disciples, not Jesus (cf. 1:11, where Jesus is directly addressed).

4.3 Moses
Although Elijah is mentioned first by Mark, it is the story of Moses which the Transfiguration most resembles. Moses’ two ascents to meet with God in Exod 24:9–18 and 34:1–35 present a number of corresponding details with the Transfiguration: the otherwise puzzling reference to six days (Mark 9:2; Exod 24:15–17); the high mountain (Exod 24:12; 15–18; 34:3); the presence of a select group (Exod 24:1–2; 16); a transformed and radiant central character (Exod 24:29–30, 35); Jesus’ Transfiguration (μεταμορφόω, Mark 9:2) may have some connection to Moses’ glorification (δοξάζω, LXX Exod 34:29, 35);50 a fearful reaction by onlookers (Exod 34:29–30); an overshadowing cloud (Exod 24:15–16; 34:5); and a voice from that cloud (Exod 24:16; 34:5).51

These features have generally been recognised by Markan scholars as also generating a clear Moses typology. Donahue and Harrington are representative when they write, “The common features are so numerous that it is hard to

49 Juncker, 371.
50 Although this connection has been problematised above, it still needs further exploration.
escape the impression that the Transfiguration story presents Jesus as not only the Son of God but also a Moses figure." However, first, this interpretation leaves Elijah as an insignificant detail, the scriptural resonances unexplored, and fails to reckon with a crucial problem with the Moses typology – in Mark, Jesus does not talk with God on the mountain. Second, if Jesus’ radiance is of a type with Moses’ then it is distinctly inferior to it: Jesus’ himself does not shine and nor does his radiance last as long. This would then be a figuration which portrays Jesus as inferior to Moses. This would be contrary to the Christological tenor of Mark’s Gospel. However, reflection on these features reveals an alternative interpretation is possible.

5. Recovering Mark’s Distinctive Transfiguration

5.1 Who Is Talking to Whom?
Crucially, in both Exodus 24 and 34 Moses ascends the mountain to talk with YHWH, the God of Israel. In the Sinai cycle, YHWH only speaks to Moses, and is repeatedly described as doing so. This is also the case with Elijah in 1 Kgs 19:8–18 where Elijah ascends the mountain to talk with YHWH. Considering these narratives highlights that Mark does not show Jesus talking with God. Bruce Chilton finds “the three-handed conversation of Mark 9.4 is a striking departure from the Sinai motif.” However, there is a verbal clue to this puzzle. Elijah and Moses, who do talk with YHWH in scripture (συλλαλέω, Exod 34:35), in fact talk with Jesus here in the Gospel (ἦ σαν συλλαλοῦντες τῷ Ἰησοῦ, Mark 9:4). This distinctive word use provides an intertextual signal as to how to relate these two stories.

Further, in Exod 34:29 Moses’ face is changed when he talks with God (LXX: ἐν τῷ λαλεῖν αὐτὸν αὐτῷ). Jesus, though, is not changed by talking with God.

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53 In Luke, Jesus talks to God in prayer (9:28–29), but even this is hardly a strong parallel to Moses’ dialogue with YHWH.
54 Moss, “The Transfiguration,” 74 n. 21.
55 Exodus 19:9–10; 20:22; 24:3, 12; 25:4; 30:11, 17, 22; 31:1, 12, 18; 32:7, 9; 33:1, 9, 11.
56 Chilton, “The Transfiguration,” 122.
57 One of only 4 occurrences in the LXX and the only occurrence in the Pentateuch.
58 The only occurrence of συλλαλέω in Mark.
59 Stegner, “The Use of Scripture,” 115.
60 Whether or not μετεμορφώθη is a divine passive. Cf. Van Iersel, Mark, 294; Stein, Mark, 416.
He is changed before the cloud appears or the heavenly voice speaks. This is another significant departure from the pattern of Moses. As Juncker argues, Jesus is not acting like a new Moses, rather “Jesus stands on the mountain in the place of God.”

5.2 “Listen to Him!”
At the beginning of the Sinai sequence YHWH tells the Israelites that his blessing is dependent on their keeping the covenant and “if you listen to my voice” (the verb here ישוע, in the LXX rendered with ἀκούω, Exod 19:5). This theme is repeated later when, in the giving of the law, God promises to send an angel ahead of the Israelites. Critically the angel of Exod 23:20–33 “has to be considered a substitute for YHWH” because he has authority for judgement and YHWH’s name is in him. And so, just as the Israelites were told earlier to listen to YHWH (19:5), here they are told to listen to YHWH’s angelic substitute (εἰσάκουε αὐτοῦ, Exod 23:21). In the next verse the Hebrew makes explicit that YHWH speaks through the angel’s voice, “But if you listen attentively to his voice and do all that I say.” In the LXX the assimilation goes even further, to listen to the angel is to hear YHWH’s voice, “If by paying attention you listen to my voice and do all that I tell you” (Exod 23:22 NETS). This command to listen is echoed in Mark by the heavenly voice commanding ἀκούετε αὐτοῦ (Mark 9:7).

It is usually suggested that the command ἀκούετε αὐτοῦ (Mark 9:7), “listen to him,” may call to mind the prophet like Moses in Deut 18:18–19, of whom God says, “And the person who does not hear (LXX ἀκούω) his words, whatever the prophet may speak in my name, I will exact vengeance from him” (NETS, Deut 18:19). However, the wording in Mark 9:7 is much closer to that of LXX Exod 23:21; which has the advantage of being part of the Sinai cycle, a scriptural context already clearly evoked by the Transfiguration narrative. In Exod 23:21, these words are not spoken by YHWH about Moses, but by YHWH to Moses regarding an angel who has a unique status, “for my name is on him” (Exod. 23:21). In Mark this particular phrase is more prominent because, unlike

61 Thus Litwa (JESUS DEUS, 139) is wrong to argue that Jesus’ light is reflected from YHWH’s light. There is no suggestion in the Markan text that the cloud emits light at all.
62 Juncker, Jesus and the Angel of the Lord, 372.
63 Juncker unnecessarily restricts his analysis to one episode in the Sinai narrative, not recognising that a wider context could be evoked (362, but cf. 371).
66 Juncker, Jesus and the Angel of the Lord, 381–82.
Matthew and Luke, the heavenly command has not been expanded with additional phrases. Likewise, when God speaks from the cloud in Exodus 24:16–17 it is to address Moses. In the Transfiguration, the voice does not address Jesus, but the disciples. As the subject of God’s command “listen to him,” Jesus corresponds not to Moses but the angel. As the recipients of God’s speech from the cloud, it is not Jesus but the disciples who correspond to Moses.

This suggestion is supported by Jesus’ changed appearance. For van Iersel, Jesus’ bright shining “reflects that of the clothes and hair of the aged figure who sits on the heavenly throne in the vision of Dan. 7.9 ... For a moment, the three disciples see the Son of Man clothed with God’s glory.” Comparable is the description of God’s cloak (περιβόλαιον) in 1 Enoch 14:20 which is “brighter and whiter than any snow” (λαμπρότερον καὶ λευκότερον πάσης χίόνος). Alternatively, the shining clothes reflect Jewish and Greek descriptions of heavenly beings, reinforced by Mark’s statement that no one on earth could achieve such whiteness. At least, the shining clothes present Jesus as a heavenly being, an angel or a human made like an angel (cf. Mark 12:25). What they do not do here is present Jesus as a Moses figure, because in the scriptural accounts Moses’ clothes do not shine.

The possibility that Jesus is an angelic figure in the Transfiguration is not especially novel. Christopher Rowland suggests that the disciples “may have believed that they had seen Jesus in the form of an angelic envoy.” Klein states, “Jesus wird den Engeln gleich.” For Burkett the Transfiguration anticipates Jesus’ “angelification.” And Luz suggests Jesus’ appearance is modelled on the angel in Dan 8:16–17; 10:9–12, 16–19. These suggestions, however, are interpretations based on Jesus’ radiant appearance, and do not consider the scriptural context evoked in the narrative episode as a whole. Jesus’ temporary “angelification” is given context by the scriptural allusion of the heavenly voice

67 Van Iersel, Mark, 294.
70 Rowland, The Open Heaven, 368.
71 Klein, Das Lukasevangelium, 346.
73 Luz, Matthew 8–20, 398.
saying “listen to him.” The scriptural allusion is strengthened by Jesus’ angelic appearance.

However, I have now, perhaps confusingly, suggested two different typological referents for Jesus. Because Elijah and Moses talk with Jesus, he is figured as YHWH; because he is the subject of the heavenly voice and appears as an angel, he is figured as the Angel of Exodus. What prevents this dual identification dissolving into absurdity is the frequently ambiguous relationship between the Angel of YHWH and YHWH in the Jewish scriptures.

5.3 The Angel of the Lord
In the Jewish scriptures the Angel of the Lord is an ambiguous figure, “a supernatural, unidentifiable manifestation of YHWH,”74 who appears to modulate between being an angelic agent and YHWH personified.75 This scriptural ambiguity then led to considerable speculation and development of this figure in second temple Judaism and well beyond.76

The prime example of this ambiguity is clearly narrated in Judges where both Gideon and Manoah and his wife encounter the מלאך יהוה (Jud 6:11; 13:3, 15). However, upon realising this messenger is the angel of the Lord they are filled with fear and expect to die (6:22–23; 13:22). It is Manoah who interprets this fear for us, “We shall surely die, for we have seen God” (Jud 13:22). Here, to see the angel of YHWH is to see God. At the same time as this close identification between the angel and YHWH, it is also clear they are distinct. Gideon has a separate conversation with YHWH after the angel leaves (6:22–23) and God hears Manoah’s prayers, while the angel responds to them (13:9).77

The portrayal of the/an angel of YHWH is not consistent across the Hebrew Bible.78 On occasions the angel is indistinguishable from YHWH,79 but at other

74 Ausloos, “The ′Angel of YHWH,′” 7.
76 See the material surveyed in the later chapters of, Margaret Barker, The Great Angel: A Study of Israel’s Second God (London: SPCK, 1992).
points appears to be a distinct figure.80 This ambiguity meant that later interpreters could insist that the angel was in fact YHWH; or insist that it was only an angel (but of especially high status); or maintain the ambiguity themselves.81

Our present interest is in the Sinai/Horeb narratives which Mark’s Transfiguration account evokes. Here the ambiguity occurs in two directions: One, the close identification of the מלאך יהוה with YHWH; two, the anthropomorphic form of Israel’s God suggesting a figure in human form (or even “one like a son of man”). I will discuss the Sinai narrative in more detail below.

If Mark is indeed associating Jesus with the Angel of YHWH here, then he is not alone (although arguably the first extant example) among the early church. As Jarl Fossum has shown, Jude 5–7 identifies the angel of the Lord that saved Israel out of Egypt, imprisoned the fallen angels (cf. 1 Enoch 104–6, 11–12), and punished Sodom and Gomorrah, as Jesus in his pre-existent state.82 Fossum also discusses Justin Martyr’s argument that Jesus was the angelic Lord who destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah (e.g., Justin, Dia 56.22).83 So, Mark’s typology fits within the early Christian milieu where we find other evidence of speculation that Jesus pre-existed as the Angel of YHWH.

Less direct, but still pertinent, is the use of angel of YHWH imagery to portray Jesus in various early Christian documents, especially in Revelation. For example, in Rev 1:12–13 John of Patmos sees Jesus in terms of the Zechariah’s angel of YHWH figure, as well as angelic imagery from Daniel and Ezekiel.84 And Jesus is figured as Wisdom’s angel of the Exodus (Wis 18:15–16) in Rev 19:11–16 (see also 1 Chron 21:15–16; Exod 12:23–29).85 In the context of the New Testament church, an angelic typology in Mark’s Transfiguration would not be exceptional.


80 E.g., 2 Sam 24:15–16; 2 Kings 19:35, 1 Chr 21:14–30; 2 Chr 32:23–22; Isa 37:36; Zech 1:12. See further, von Heijne, The Messenger of the Lord, 49–50; Malone, “Distinguishing the Angel of the Lord,” 313; René López (“Identifying the ‘Angel of the Lord’ in the Book of Judges: A Model for Reconsidering the Referent in Other Old Testament Texts,” Bulletin for Biblical Research 23, no. 1 (2010): 1–18) goes too far in his attempt to describe a consistent pattern of the angel’s distinctiveness from YHWH across the entire Hebrew Bible. For a convincingly critique of López, see Malone’s article just cited. Regardless, the important issue for this study is not what the original authors and readers of the Hebrew bible made of this figure, but what first-century Jewish Christ followers would have or could have made of it.


83 Fossum, 228.

84 Carrell, Jesus and the Angels, 150; see also Stuckenbruck, Angel Veneration and Christology, 209–21.

85 Carrell, Jesus and the Angels, 91; but cf. Hannah, Michael and Christ, 151–56.
5.4 The Son of Man as an Angelic Figure

Mark's Gospel is all but ignored in studies of angel Christology, however, in addition to the narrative form of the Transfiguration and the evocative phrase “listen to him!,” another potentially significant Markan evocation of the angelic is the use of the expression/title “Son of Man.” Interpreters of Daniel 7:13–14 usually read the Son of Man as either the angel Michael (the “prince” of Dan 10:21; 12:1) or the suffering Jewish nation (the “holy ones” of Dan 7:15–29). However, Phillip Munoa has argued at length for the direct relationship between the Son of Man in Dan 7:13–14 and the angel of YHWH in earlier biblical traditions. He notes how both figures are “nameless, human in appearance, solitary, heavenly in association, possess divinely bestowed authority,” and act as “God’s agent of judgement and deliverance.” He effectively argues that Daniel's Son of Man figure can be interpreted in the light of the preceding angelic appearances in Dan 2–6.

Munoa also demonstrates that early Jewish interpreters of Daniel reinforced this theme, by explicitly referring to the angel of the Lord in their translations and additions. In the OG of Dan 3:25 the fourth figure in the furnace appears ὁμοίωμα ἀγγέλου θεοῦ. The “holy watcher” of Dan 4:13, 23–24 is described in the OG as ἄγγελος ἀπεστάλη ἐν ἰσχύι. In Bel and the Dragon 34–39, the ἄγγελος κυρίου brings Habakkuk to give food to Daniel. In the OG and Theodotian of Susannah the ἄγγελος κυρίου will bring judgement on the Elders who have falsely accused Susannah. In the OG it is the ἄγγελος κυρίου who stirs Daniel to save Susannah (Susa 44–45) and who burns the false witnesses with fire (Susa 60–62).

Munoa concludes that, “Son of Man’ should not be read in isolation as merely a non-titular expression for a human appearance, but as part of a traditional description of the angel of the Lord.” Here I am not suggesting that the expression Son of Man should be exclusively or even mainly read in this way read in this way in Mark. What I do want to argue, building on Munoa’s


88 Munoa, 154–57.


90 Munoa, 166.

91 See the cautions of Hannah, Michael and Christ, 156–58.
argument, is that one of the resonances that the expression son of man would have been capable of evoking was this mysterious, nameless scriptural angelic figure of Daniel 7. This was one of the interpretative options available to scripturally literate Jews hearing the phrase “Son of Man.” In which case the repetition of the phrase in the dialogue immediately surrounding the Transfiguration episode is significant for the thesis of an angelic typology (Mark 8:31, 38; 9:9). In particular, Mark 8:38 describes Jesus as a glorious figure at the head of an army of angels⁹² – any potential association with the son of man and angels has hence been activated by the dialogue immediately preceding the Transfiguration account.⁹³

5.5 Fear of God at Sinai
At the beginning of the Sinai cycle, YHWH says to Moses, “I am going to come to you in a dense cloud” (Exod 19:9) and then YHWH descends to the mountain (19:20). After the ten commandments are given, the people of Israel witness thunder, lightning, trumpet sounds and smoke, then they become afraid (LXX φοβέω), either of the meteorological phenomena or of hearing God’s voice (Exod 20:18–29). This narrative motif of fear conforms to the sequence in Luke (in response to the cloud, Luke 9:34) and in Matthew (in response to the voice, Matt 17:6), but not to the sequence in Mark where the disciples’ fear occurs before either cloud or voice manifest. Matthew and Luke have further assimilated their account to the Sinai sequence, but in doing so have changed the cause of the disciples’ epiphanic fear from Jesus’ transformation and conversation with Elijah and Moses to the cloud and voice.

Rather, Mark’s account resembles more the stories of Gideon and Manoah, for “Both feared for their lives when they realised without being told, that they had encountered the angel of the Lord.”⁹⁴ This motif of fear before a human figure revealed as “angelic,” combined with Mark’s emphasis on Elijah, serves to relativize the Sinai allusion and evokes a wider concept of the Angel of YHWH, who features in both Elijah and Moses’ narratives, and frequently causes fear in mortals. This is the moment of recognition; which Burkett claims is absent from Mark’s Transfiguration.⁹⁵ However just as uncomprehending fear is the response to Jesus’ other epiphanic moments in Mark (4:41; 6:50), here the

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⁹² “The prince of angels,” so, Carrell, Jesus and the Angels, 3.
⁹³ Juncker, Jesus and the Angel of the Lord, 376; Additionally, one of the figures potentially called to mind by Jesus’ transfigured appearance is the angel of Dan 10. On which see, Fletcher-Louis, Luke-Acts, 46–47.
witnesses to the further revelation of Jesus’ identity cannot express that identity with meaningful words (on Peter’s attempt, see below).

5.6 Seeing God at Sinai

Later in the Sinai cycle, Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy elders, ascend the mountain to see the God of Israel (Exod 24:1). It seems likely the three companions of Moses (plus seventy unnamed elders) are reflected in Jesus’ three companions. When Moses and company do see YHWH, only what is under his feet is described, but the presence of feet implies that they saw a human form (Exod 24:9–11). Moses then advances closer up the mountain and it is covered by cloud (Exod 24:15). Later Moses will make an extraordinary request to YHWH, “show me your glory” (הָיוֹן/δόξα, 33:18). And we read there again that YHWH has physical features, a back and a face, although the face cannot be seen (33:21–23), and a hand that covers Moses’ eyes (33:22–23), and so YHWH passes before Moses (34:6). Here it is worth observing that in the Transfiguration it is the disciples who witness Jesus’ glory (cf. 2 Peter 1:16–18). So, in this regard, typologically it is the disciples who again correspond to Moses but Jesus this time corresponds to YHWH. This correspondence is made stronger by that fact that Moses and the elders view a glorious human-like figure. On the Mount of Transfiguration God is not visible but Jesus is, and Jesus is the only glorious human figure described by Mark.

The claim of the Exodus text, that “they saw the God of Israel” understandably created some difficulty for Jewish interpreters. Regarding Exodus 24:10, R. Judah ben Ilai famously stated, “He who translates the verse literally is a liar, while he who adds to it is a blasphemer” (t. Meg 4.41; b. Kidd 49a). Out of a similar sensitivity, Targums Onkelos and Pseudo-Jonathan describe Moses and the elders seeing, not God, but his “glory.” A similar issue pertains to Isaiah’s vision of YHWH in the temple (Isa 6:1), which the Targums interpret the same way. John’s Gospel, however, asserts that Isaiah did not see God, or God’s glory, but Jesus’ glory (John 12:41). What John does for Isaiah’s vision – interpreting the figure on the throne as Jesus, Mark’s Transfiguration does for God’s anthropomorphic Sinai appearance. But Mark does this through scripturally allusive narrative rather than discourse.

Here, it is perhaps especially significant that in the Exodus passages YHWH appears as a man who has feet (Exod 24:10) and who stands beside Moses.

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96  Hamori, When Gods Were Men, 30–32.
97  Shortly before we are told God had inscribed the commandments with his finger (Exod 31:18).
98  Fossum, “Kyrios Jesus as the Angel of the Lord in Jude 5–7,” 227.
(Exod 34:5). The sometimes-anthropomorphic appearances of Israel’s Lord in the Jewish scriptures create the possibility that Mark could be reading Jesus back into those scriptural narratives and then applying that exegesis here in the Markan Transfiguration. Again Jewish tradition prepares the way for this because these anthropomorphic appearances of God were sometimes interpreted as being the Angel of YHWH. The ambiguity has come full circle, the Angel of YHWH could be understood to be YHWH, and the anthropomorphic appearance of YHWH could be interpreted as the Angel of YHWH. It is this ambiguity that Mark exploits in portraying Jesus as an angelic figure in his scriptural typology of the Sinai and Horeb narratives.

5.7  The Shining Face of Moses

After Moses has this closer encounter with YHWH’s glory his face begins to shine “because he had been talking with God” (Exod 34:29). As has been discussed above, a crucial difference between the Synoptic accounts is that Mark does not describe Jesus’ face. In Matthew especially, the radiance of Jesus’ face surely reflects a narrative assimilation to the glorification of Moses’ face at Sinai (LXX δοξάζω, Exod 34:29, 30, 35). Not only does Mark not include this detail, but Mark emphasises Jesus’ clothes being extremely white. By contrast Moses uses a veil, an item of clothing, to cover his radiant face, but his clothes are not mentioned as changed (Exod 34:33, 35).

Further, Moses’ radiant face is a result of speaking with God, which in Mark’s version of the episode Jesus has not done. Litwa suggests that Jesus is not revealed as a god in and of himself but is “enveloped in the nimbus of a higher deity” and receives light as a “reflection” of the light of God the Father. Likewise Burkett, states, “The parallel between Jesus's transformation and that of Moses on Mount Sinai indicates that it is not an epiphany but an impartation of divine radiance to a human being.” But both are vitiated by the fact that in Mark’s account there is no other light for Jesus to reflect and that Jesus’ radiance begins before God manifests in the cloud and/or voice. Rather, “whereas Moses’ Glory on Sinai was reflected, Christ’s glory was unborrowed.” In Mark’s account Jesus’ radiance is not attributable to anyone other than Jesus.

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100 Marcus, Mark 8–16, 631.
101 Litwa, IESUS DEUS, 139.
103 Allison, The New Moses, 243; following, Ramsey, The Glory of God, 120; see also, Juncker, Jesus and the Angel of the Lord, 373.
Within the Synoptics, Mark’s focus on Jesus’ clothes (τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ) alone is distinctive. If Mark is not presenting Jesus as Moses, but as a radiant angelomorphic figure who speaks with Elijah and Moses, then the most obvious option within Mark’s typological scheme is that Jesus is the angel of Exodus 23 and 1 Kings 19, the “supernatural, unidentifiable manifestation of ΥΗΒΗ.” 104

In the Transfiguration Jesus takes on the narrative role of the angel of the Lord or of Israel’s God in being the one that Moses and Elijah went up the mountain to talk with. By metamorphosing into radiance he is not imitating Moses whose face reflected the glory of God (δεδόξασται ἡ ὄψις τοῦ χρώματος τοῦ προσώπου αὐτοῦ, Exod 34:29). 105 God does not manifest in the cloud and heavenly voice until after Jesus has changed. Instead, Jesus enacts the narrative role of the one who made Moses’ face shine. As Tertullian puts it, “And with this glory (Moses) went away enlightened from Christ, just as he did of old from the creator” (Adv. Marc. 4.22.16). 106

5.8 What of Peter’s Tents?
The recognition of a Sinai typology in the Transfiguration account provides some much needed context for Peter’s intention to build tents (σκήνη) for Jesus, Moses and Elijah. It may be that Peter simply wants to detain the figures on the mountain and prolong the experience of Jesus glory. 107 Yet this ignores possible resonances σκήνη has with the Sinai narrative. Part of the law given at Sinai specifically concerns the tabernacle (משכן, Exod 25:9). And this is often offered as a referent. However, if Peter thought he was recreating the Exodus tabernacle it would not make sense to build three. 108 Equally problematic is the suggestion that it is a reference to the festival of Booths. 109

The remaining, and usually overlooked, Sinai reference to a tent is the “tent of meeting/testimony” (אהל מועד, σκήνη μαρτυρίου, Exod 33:7) which Moses used to meet with God. This cannot yet be the tabernacle, because the instructions for the tabernacle had only just been given and not yet implemented. If Peter’s tents are intended as a special place for prophets to meet with God, on the model of Exodus 33:7–11, then it would make sense that he would want to build one for each of the prophets in front of him. If Peter recognises he is

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105 Contra Juncker, Jesus and the Angel of the Lord, 362.
107 Wolter, Das Lukasevangelium, 353.
108 Contra Juncker, Jesus and the Angel of the Lord, 374.
109 See Klein, Das Lukasevangelium, 347; Stegner, “The Use of Scripture,” 116; Wiefel rightly considers such a typology “merkwürdig gebrochen” (Das Evangelium nach Matthäus, 309–10); in fact six booths would be required to celebrate the feast of tabernacles with six men on the mountain. So, Juncker, Jesus and the Angel of the Lord, 375.
seeing the events of Sinai recapitulated before his eyes, the production of a tent for each prophet is the logical next step. This, of course, undermines the typology of seeing Jesus as the Angel of YHWH – hence Mark’s narratorial insistence that Peter in fact did not know what to say (Mark 9:6), that is, that Peter’s immediate interpretation of the event should be ignored. What is wrong with Peter’s suggestion, in Mark’s view, is that it makes Jesus the equal of Moses and Elijah, but for Mark this is not sufficient.110 In this episode, Jesus is not to be seen as a Moses figure but as the manifestation of YHWH that Moses spoke to.

6 Conclusion

In this reading of Mark’s Transfiguration, I have argued that Matthew and Luke’s versions of the same story have influenced interpretation of Mark’s narrative which has its own distinctive features. When read in light of these distinctives, the usual approach of seeing a Moses typology is problematised, because this neither takes the presence of Elijah seriously, nor compares the narrative roles of Moses and Jesus accurately. In their respective scriptural stories, Moses and Elijah talk with God; but in the Transfiguration, they talk with Jesus. Who then is Jesus? God’s command “listen to him” was argued to more strongly evoke the Angel of YHWH at Sinai than the prophet like Moses of Deuteronomy 18. The frequent observation that Jesus assumes an angelic form in the Transfiguration, was used to highlight that in both the Sinai and Horeb mountain theophanies, called to mind by Elijah and Moses’ appearance on the mountain, the Angel of YHWH also figures prominently. Here, Mark’s distinctive placement of the disciples’ fear response, further conforms to scriptural characterisation of encounters with the Angel of YHWH. While this is the only place in the Gospel that Jesus assumes an angelic form,111 the angelic connotations of Son of Man language were noted. As well as the Angel of YHWH’s ambiguous identity, it was adduced that YHWH’s anthropomorphic appearances also generated angelic interpretations. The Angel of YHWH figure in the Jewish scriptures was sometimes employed by early Christian interpreters for their Christology, and this reading of the Transfiguration evinces that the Gospel of Mark does likewise.

James Dunn asks of Christopher Rowland and Jarl Fossum, “to what extent in these descriptions [of the angelic Christ] was there a deep reflection on the

110 Burkett, “The Transfiguration of Jesus,” 419.
111 Carrell, Jesus and the Angels, 230.
being of God, rather than conformity to a genre pattern?" What is evident in the Markan Transfiguration is deep reflection on the God revealed in the scriptures, and how Jesus might relate to that God – not in terms of ontological categories of later theological debates, but in terms of scriptural forerunners. The stock angelomorphic imagery says little on its own. Incorporated into Mark's scriptural typology it becomes far more specific. It is as if the disciples are witnessing a salvation-historical “flashback” to the theophanies experienced by Moses and Elijah and seeing Jesus as YHWH’s manifest representation. Moses and Elijah meet and talk with Jesus on the mountain, thus – to speak in literary terms – Jesus is narratively assimilated to the God of Israel. At the same time, the heavenly voice prevents a complete identification of Jesus with God. Just as God can speak about his angel as a distinct entity (Exod 23:20–21). Jesus is both God’s shining representative and the object of God’s speech from heaven.

In Mark’s Transfiguration, Jesus is not presented as the antitype of Elijah or Moses, because they are in the scene with him. Instead, he is typologically figured in the narrative role of the Angel of YHWH and Israel’s God. Elsewhere in the Gospel, Mark portrays Jesus as the fulfilment of salvation history and the eschatological recurrence and escalation of previous scriptural human figures. Potentially, this literary typology inserts Jesus directly into salvation history as an angelic manifestation of YHWH. Mark could be reading the anthropomorphic manifestation of Israel’s God in Exodus 19–34 and 1 Kings 19 as “Christophanies,” pre-incarnational appearances of Jesus in salvation history. This is not a necessary conclusion though, we do not need to commit Mark to pre-existence here. Equally this could be simply another instance of events from Jesus’ life story being related typologically to events in Israel’s past through scriptural allusion.

Either way, Mark’s Transfiguration presents a higher, more divine, Christology than that of the Transfigurations of Matthew or Luke, because in Mark’s Transfiguration Jesus is not the new Moses but is the re-manifestation of the divine figure who appeared at Sinai and Horeb, YHWH, the God of Israel with feet on.

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113 Fletcher-Louis makes the helpful distinction between the Transfiguration as a “transformation” – the first time Jesus has had this form, or as a “manifestation” – a revelation of a pre-existing identity (Luke-Acts, 224). He concludes that for Luke this is a manifestation, however such an argument for Mark is beyond the scope of this present study.
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