HEKHAL · READER'S EDITION

KATA ΜΑΘΘΑΙΟΝ 17

The Transfiguration on Tabor

Matthew 17:1–9 · he Metamorphosis

Hekhal Targum Project (machine-assisted draft; pending scholarly review)

PROVISIONAL EDITION · MACHINE-ASSISTED · NOT YET REVIEWED BY A CREDENTIALED EDITOR

Edition of 2026-08-13 · hekhal.org

About this edition

King James Version of 1611, public domain. The Greek text follows the Stephanus 1550 Textus Receptus, which underlies the KJV translation and is itself in the public domain. Synoptic parallels are noted where Mark 9:2–13 and Luke 9:28–36 preserve material the Matthean text compresses, intensifies, or omits. Hekhal hosts the passage as the bright counterpart of the Peniel-Gethsemane axis: the face of God seen in light rather than shadow, and the eschatological pole of the same encounter.

TRADITION	christian-mysticism
LANGUAGE	Greek
PERIOD	Composed c. 80–90 CE; Greek manuscript tradition
ATTRIBUTION	Ascribed to the apostle Matthew; modern critical view: anonymous Greek-speaking Jewish-Christian community drawing on Mark and the Q sayings tradition
TRANSLATION	Hekhal Targum Project (machine-assisted draft; pending scholarly review)
LICENCE	Public domain
ONLINE	https://hekhal.org/texts/tabor/

> **Cite this edition:** Hekhal Targum Project, trans. "The Transfiguration on Tabor." Hekhal reader's edition, 2026-08-13. https://hekhal.org/texts/tabor/

> What this is: a machine-assisted, provisional translation. Every rendering choice and every unresolved reading is recorded in the apparatus beside the text. If you read the original and something looks wrong, write to community@hekhal.org; corrections are credited.

Six days after Caesarea Philippi, where Peter has confessed Jesus as the Christ and where Jesus has spoken for the first time of his coming death, Jesus takes Peter and James and John apart and leads them up a high mountain. The mountain is unnamed in the gospels; the Byzantine tradition identifies it as Mount Tabor in Galilee. There, the text says, he is transfigured before them: his face shines as the sun, his garments become white as the light, Moses and Elijah appear and speak with him, a bright cloud overshadows them, and a voice from the cloud says: *this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him*.

The passage is the bright pole of the throughline that begins at Peniel and passes through Gethsemane. The same three disciples are chosen for the mountain and for the garden. Where Peniel sees the face of God in shadow at a ford and survives, and where Gethsemane sees the face of the Father turned in silence over the cup not removed, Tabor sees the face of Christ in light and is told to keep silent. Both encounters mark the witness; both leave the witness changed; the conditions of the seeing are the differential.

The Christian patristic and Byzantine traditions read the Taboric event as the central christological theophany of the gospels and as the foundation of the doctrine of the uncreated divine light. The principal elaboration is Gregory Palamas's *Triads in Defense of the Holy Hesychasts*, in which Tabor becomes the pivot for the distinction between the divine essence (unknowable) and the divine energies (knowable, and the same energies in which the saints are deified). Hekhal preserves the Greek opposite the King James English so that the working terms are tracked at the level the doctrine works on.

CROSS-REFERENCES

- Uncreated light (*φῶς ἄκτιστον*), the Palamite doctrine of the Taboric light as divine energy, not created radiance.
- Theosis (*θέωσις*), deification by participation in the same light the disciples saw on the mountain.
- Typos (*τύπος*), the figural mode in which Peniel reads forward into Tabor.
- Apophasis (*ἀπόφασις*), the negative-theological frame for the silence-command and the unspeakability of the essence.

The Transfiguration on Tabor

MATTHEW 17:1–9

CANONICAL

GREEK · GREEK NEW TESTAMENT · RECEIVED TEXT

MATTHEW 17:1–3 · THE MOUNTAIN AND THE SHINING

1 And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart,

2 And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the

ΚΑΤΑ ΜΑΘΘΑΙΟΝ 17 · Α-Γ

Καὶ μεθ᾽ ἡμέρας ἓξ παραλαμβάνει ὁ Ἰησοῦς τὸν Πέτρον καὶ Ἰάκωβο καὶ Ἰωάννην τὸν ἀδελφὸ

sun, and his raiment was white as the light.

3 And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him.

1

αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἀναφέρε
αὐτοὺς εἰς ὄρος ὑψηλὸ
.κατ᾽ ἰδία

καὶ μετεμορφώθη
ἔμπροσθεν αὐτῶν, κα
ἔλαμψεν τὸ πρόσωπο
αὐτοῦ ὡς ὁ ἥλιος, τὰ δ
ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ ἐγένετ
.λευκὰ ὡς τὸ φῶ

καὶ ἰδοὺ ὤφθησαν
αὐτοῖς Μωϋσῆς καὶ Ἠλία
.μετ᾽ αὐτοῦ συλλαλοῦντε

2

MATTHEW 17:4-6 · THE CLOUD

ΚΑΤΑ ΜΑΘΘΑΙΟΝ 17 · Δ-ς

AND THE VOICE

4 Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.

5 While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.

6 And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid.

3

ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ ὁ Πέτρος
εἶπεν τῷ Ἰησοῦ· Κύρι
καλόν ἐστιν ἡμᾶς ὧδ
εἶναι· εἰ θέλεις, ποιήσ
ὧδε τρεῖς σκηνάς, σ
μίαν καὶ Μωϋσεῖ μίαν κ
.Ἠλίᾳ μία

ἔτι αὐτοῦ λαλοῦντος,
ἰδοὺ νεφέλη φωτειν
ἐπεσκίασεν αὐτούς, κ
ἰδοὺ φωνὴ ἐκ τῆς νεφέλη
λέγουσα· Οὗτός ἐστιν
υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν
.εὐδόκησα· ἀκούετε αὐτο

καὶ ἀκούσαντες οἱ
μαθηταὶ ἔπεσαν ἐπ

πρόσωπον αὐτῶν κα

.ἐφοβήθησαν σφόδρ

4

MATTHEW 17:7–9 · THE DESCENT AND THE SILENCE-COMMAND

7 And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid.

8 And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only.

9 And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead.

5

KATA MAΘΘAION 17 · Z-Θ

καὶ προσῆλθεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς καὶ ἁψάμενο αὐτῶν εἶπεν· Ἐγέρθητ .καὶ μὴ φοβεῖσθ

ἐπάραντες δὲ τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτῶν οὐδέν εἶδον εἰ μὴ αὐτὸν Ἰησοῦ .μόνο

καὶ καταβαινόντων αὐτῶν ἐκ τοῦ ὄρου

ἐνετείλατο αὐτοῖς
Ἰησοῦς λέγων· Μηδεν
εἴπητε τὸ ὅραμα ἕως οὗ
υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐ
.νεκρῶν ἐγερθ

6

A reading

Where Peniel sees the face of God in the dark and survives,
Tabor sees the face of Christ in light and is told to keep silent.

The face is the same. The conditions of the seeing are the differential.

The passage opens with a temporal marker. *After six days*, Matthew and Mark say; *about an eight days after*, Luke says. The six days are not incidental. The hexaemeral count points back to the days of creation in Genesis 1, after which God rests; on the seventh, on the sabbath of the new creation, the disciples ascend the mountain and see the Son of man as he is. The Lukan count of eight points forward to the eschatological eighth day, the day after the sabbath, the day of resurrection. The dating is a typological device. It places the event outside ordinary chronology and inside the figural time of the Genesis week.

Three are taken: Peter, James, John. The same three who will later be asked to watch in Gethsemane. The framing parallel is structural and intentional. The witnesses of the bright pole are the witnesses of the dark pole. The narrative is binding the two scenes together at the level of the named.

The Greek of the shining is precise. *Metemorphothe* (μετεμορφώθη), the verb the tradition translates as *was transfigured*, is built on *morphe* (μορφή), form. He was

changed-in-form before them. The verb is rare in the New Testament; Paul uses it twice (Romans 12:2, 2 Corinthians 3:18) of the Christian's interior change. The Tabor passage and the Pauline passages stand in mutual light: what happened on the mountain is what is happening, in slower time, in the soul. *Elampse* (ἔλαμψε), shone, is what his face did. *Leuka hos to phos*, white as the light, is what his garments became. Mark intensifies the comparison: *stilbonta leuka lian hoia gnapheus epi tes ges ou dynatai houtos leukanai*, glistering, exceeding white as snow, so as no fuller on earth can white them (Mk 9:3). The garments shine with a whiteness that no terrestrial process can produce. The Markan emphasis presses the question that the Byzantine tradition will press more sharply: is the light created radiance or something other?

Moses and Elijah appear. The Law and the Prophets, the two figures who saw the face of God in shadow at Sinai and at Horeb. Moses is the figure of Exodus 33–34, who was placed in the cleft of the rock and saw the back-parts of God passing. Elijah is the figure of 1 Kings 19, who heard the still small voice on the mountain after the wind, the earthquake, the fire. Both have already seen what they saw, partially, in

shadow. Both appear here on the mountain in conversation with the one whose face is now shining. The figural reading is unmistakable: what the Law and the Prophets saw partially is now disclosed in person. Luke alone records the content of the conversation: *they spake of his exodus which he should accomplish at Jerusalem* (Lk 9:31). The Tabor light is in conversation with the Gethsemane cup. The bright pole is not severed from the dark one; the conversation on the mountain is precisely about the descent into the garden.

Peter speaks: *Lord, it is good for us to be here; if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles*. Mark adds the editorial note that Peter spoke because he *wist not what to say, for they were sore afraid* (Mk 9:6). The patristic tradition reads Peter's speech as the structural marker of the disciple's instinct to fix the encounter, to house it in tabernacles, to keep what was given. The instinct is honest and is not honored. The bright cloud (*nephele photeine*, νεφέλη φωτεινή) overshadows them in mid-sentence. The cloud is the Septuagint's *shekinah*, the cloud of glory at Sinai (Exodus 24:15–18) and over the tabernacle (Exodus 40:34–35). The voice from the cloud names what is seen: *this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him*. The Lukan variant preserves *ho*

eklelegmenos (ὁ ἐκλελεγμένος), *my chosen one* (Lk 9:35), with its echo of the Servant Songs in Isaiah 42. The voice is the voice of the baptism (Mt 3:17, Mk 1:11, Lk 3:22), now spoken in the presence of the three.

The disciples fall on their face. *Epesan epi prosopon auton* (ἔπεσαν ἐπὶ πρόσωπον αὐτῶν). The same posture Jesus will take in Gethsemane (*epesen epi prosopon autou*, Mt 26:39). The bodily figure is one. What stands them up is touch and a word: *arise, and be not afraid*. When they look up, only Jesus is there. The shining is not extinguished; it is folded back into the ordinary visibility of the Son. The Origenist reading takes this folding-back as the figure's pivot: the light was not added to him on the mountain and removed at the descent. The light is what he is; what changed was the disciples' capacity to see it.

Origen treats the passage in the *Commentary on Matthew* XII.36–43. Each of the three witnesses sees according to a different capacity, and the figural meaning lies in the differentiation. Origen reads the shining garments as the Scriptures, made luminous in the light of Christ; he reads Moses and Elijah as the Law and the Prophets, made

articulate in his presence. The reading is dense and influential and is the source of most subsequent patristic treatments.

John of Damascus's *Homily on the Transfiguration* consolidates the patristic tradition into the form that will be received in the Byzantine liturgy. The Transfiguration becomes one of the twelve great feasts of the Orthodox Church, fixed on August 6, with John's homily as its principal theological elaboration. The light is named as eschatological: what the disciples saw on the mountain is what the saints will see at the end, and what they participate in by grace already.

The decisive elaboration is Gregory Palamas's. In the *Triads in Defense of the Holy Hesychasts* (1338–1341), Palamas defends the hesychast monks of Mount Athos against the criticism of Barlaam of Calabria, who had argued that the light the hesychasts claimed to see in prayer was either created radiance or hallucination. Palamas reads the Taboric light as the pivot. The light on the mountain was not created. Created radiance is contingent and could not have shone from the body of the incarnate Word in this way. Nor was it the divine essence, which is unparticipable and unseeable. It was the divine energy (*energeia*, ἐνέργεια), the operation of

God ad extra, which is God himself in his self-disclosure and is participable. The doctrine of the essence-energies distinction is given its scriptural ground here. The Taboric light is uncreated; the seeing is real; deification (*theosis*) is participation in this same light. The Palamite settlement is received as Orthodox dogma at the Hesychast Councils of 1341, 1347, and 1351.

The throughline reads cleanly. Jacob at Peniel sees the face of God in shadow, on the dark side of a river, in struggle, and survives with a limp and a new name. Christ at Gethsemane, the new Jacob, sees the face of the Father turned in silence over the cup not removed, holds on through the night, and dies, and the death is the renaming. Christ on Tabor, between these two and outside their darkness, is seen by the witnesses in the light that is what he is. The bright pole and the dark pole are the same encounter under different conditions. Peniel and Gethsemane are the encounter as the witness can stand it before the end; Tabor is the encounter as it will be at the end, given in advance to three.

The passage ends with a silence-command. *Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead.* The hesychast reading takes this command not as a

withholding but as a condition of the seeing. Speech about the uncreated light, before the resurrection, would be speech about something the speaker does not yet possess in the right register. The silence is the mode in which the vision is rightly carried forward. The mystical tradition's recurring instruction to keep silent about the highest givens has its ground here.

The figure holds at both poles. God will sometimes come to you in the dark, in struggle, and the right response is to hold on. God will sometimes come to you in the light, on a mountain, and the right response is to keep silent. Both encounters mark the witness. Both leave the witness changed. The conditions of the seeing are the differential, and the differential is the whole content of the spiritual life.

The Greek of the shining is built on a small set of working terms. *Metemorphothe* (μετεμορφώθη), was transfigured, is built on *morphe* (μορφή), form, and shares its root with the Pauline *metamorphousthe* of Romans 12:2 and 2 Corinthians 3:18, where the verb names the

Christian's interior change. *Elampse* (ἔλαμψε), shone, is the action of his face. *Leuka hos to phos* (λευκὰ ὡς τὸ φῶς), white as the light, names the garments. *Nephele photeine* (νεφέλη φωτεινή), bright cloud, is the Matthean term for what the Septuagint calls the *shekinah*, the glory cloud of Exodus and Numbers. The Lukan variant *eklelegmenos* (ἐκλελεγμένος), chosen one, in 9:35 echoes the Servant Songs of Isaiah 42:1. *Episkiazo* (ἐπισκιάζω), overshadow, is the verb of the Annunciation in Luke 1:35. The Tabor cloud and the Annunciation cloud are linguistically one figure.

Colophon

The Transfiguration on Tabor. Hekhal reader's edition of 2026-08-13. Generated from the living edition at https://hekhal.org/texts/tabor/; the online text may since have been corrected. The English rendering and apparatus are released under the licence stated above (Public domain); you may copy, share and adapt them with attribution to Hekhal and a link to the online edition, under the same licence.

Hekhal is an open, sourced reference to the world's mystical traditions. New texts, maps and lexicon entries: hekhal.org. To fund the translation of a text that has none in English, see hekhal.org/sponsor.

© 2026 Hekhal · hekhal.org