

## God as Savior in Transformation and Conformation (1)

In this, the first of two articles, we explore how God our Savior operates as the agent in transformation—the process of God’s salvation to take us from being natural, fallen human beings to being transformed into the image of God so that we may express Him, as illustrated, or typified, in the Bible and in the natural realm. Transformation takes place through God our Savior operating, with Himself as the Holy Spirit as the essence, over the span of our human life; by putting us under various environmental circumstances, God is causing all things to work together for good to us, those who love God and who are called according to His purpose—transforming and conforming us to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:28-29).

In the Bible our transformation is the story of two forms (Gk. μορφή, “form,” the outward expression of an inward essence or reality)—the form prior to transformation and the form after transformation. Our human form was created by God in His image to express Him. Through the fall the God-created, natural, human form became corrupted by sin and death and expressed the self. Through the incarnation, human living, death, and resurrection of Christ, the divine essence was completely mingled with the human essence and form in Christ. In the believer, through the process of Christ’s death and resurrection, the God-created human form was redeemed, and the way was opened for a metabolic change to take place—the transformation of the human form through the impartation of the divine life and nature and the removal of the fallen, natural elements. Then the created, redeemed, human form is transformed, conformed, and matured with the divine life and nature to correspond to the divine and human form of Christ, to be built up as His dwelling place, His Body, and His bride. In this article we first briefly look at the words indicating transformation, conformation, and maturity (the end point of transformation and conformation). Then we look at illustrations and experiences of transformation in the Bible: precious stones, the changing of people’s names, the thornbush, the eagle, and the stages of transformation in Song of Songs. The precious stones

inscribed with (new) names are constituents of God’s building, the burning thornbush and the eagle illustrate the life of a member of the Body of Christ dependent on God for energy and strength, and the four stages of transformation in Song of Songs show how the female lover, as a type of the church, is prepared through transformation to be a bride, a mature counterpart, to match her husband, Solomon, a type of Christ.

*God is causing all things  
to work together for good to us,  
those who love God and who are called  
according to His purpose—  
transforming and conforming us  
to the image of Christ.*

### Transformation, Conformation, and Maturity

In the Old Testament two main words indicate transformation. The most significant is the verb *halaf* (“to pass on, away, through”), which sometimes indicates change; for example, it is used to indicate that the earth and the heavens will

change like putting off an old garment and putting on new clothes (Psa. 102:25-26; Isa. 34:4). *Halaf* can signify sprouting anew, like grass coming up anew in the morning after a flood but later being cut down and dried up—an illustration of transitory human life (Psa. 90:5-6). *Halaf* can also signify the sprouting again, for example, of a tree from its stump (Job 14:7), or the renewing of human strength like eagles’ wings (Isa. 40:31; 41:1). The second verb, *hafak* (“turn,” “overturn”), is sometimes translated “change,” but the change seems to be on the surface or temporary rather than a deeper process of transformation; for example, it is used to refer to the change of skin color (Jer. 13:23; Lev. 13:16), the turning of Moses’ staff to a serpent and back again (Exo. 7:15), and the temporary change to Saul as a result of the rushing of the Spirit of Jehovah upon him making him another man and even giving him another heart (1 Sam. 10:6, 9).<sup>1</sup>

In the New Testament the main word that indicates transformation is μεταμορφόω, which is similar to the English word *transform* (a compound of *trans*, meaning “across” or “change,” and *form*, meaning “visible shape”) is a compound of the preposition μετά (“after” or “with,” which in a compound sometimes means “change”) and the verb

---

μορφώ (“to make into a form,” “to form or shape”). The root of the word μορφώ is the word μορφή (“form”), indicating the outward expression of an inward reality.<sup>2</sup> Μορφή occurs three times in the New Testament. It refers to the form of God (that is, the outward expression of but not the inward, essential reality), which the Lord Jesus in His divinity existed in, which He emptied Himself of, or laid aside in His incarnation (Phil. 2:6). In incarnation He took the form of a slave, the inward essence and outward expression of His humanity (v. 7). After His death and resurrection He appeared to His disciples in a different form, a form in which His human form was transformed by, was saturated with, and fully expressed the divine essence (Mark 16:12). Μεταμορφώ occurs four times in the New Testament. Twice it refers to the Lord’s transfiguration, which caused Him to have a different outward expression as a result of the saturation, or the consummate mingling, of His humanity with His glorious divinity (Matt. 17:2; Mark 9:2). Twice μεταμορφώ refers to the believers’ transformation—by the renewing of the mind (Rom. 12:2) and by beholding and reflecting as a mirror the glory of the Lord (2 Cor. 3:18).

Related to transformation is the word συμμορφίζω (“conformation”). It is a compound of συν- (συν-) (“with,” “together”) and μορφίζω (“cause to have a form,” “make a form”), which comes from μορφή. The compound root occurs three times in the New Testament, once as a verb and twice as an adjective (σύμμορφος). We are being conformed (συμμορφίζω) to Christ’s death while knowing Him and the fellowship of His sufferings (Phil. 3:10); this is so that we can fulfill the goal of our predestination—to be conformed (σύμμορφος) to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29) and, ultimately, for the body of our humiliation to be conformed to the body of His glory at the time of our transfiguration (Phil. 3:21).

**T**ransformation, a metabolic change, issues in conformation, the shaping of life to the image of the first-born Son of God. When the process of transformation and conformation has been completed, we reach maturity. The Greek word τέλειος (“complete,” “perfect,” “mature”) is used to indicate maturity. It means that someone has come to the end (τέλος) of a process. It is translated “full-grown” six times. The full-grown are those with wisdom and understanding (1 Cor. 2:6; 14:20); they partake of the word of righteousness, the solid food, and not just the elementary teachings, the milk (Heb. 5:12-14), and they have “this mind,” a mind focused on pursuing and gaining Christ to the uttermost (Phil. 3:15). Paul aspired to present every man full-grown in Christ (Col. 1:28), and the saints are being perfected by the gifts unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ, until we all arrive at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph.

4:11-13). This practical oneness comes as a result of being unloaded from and being willing to drop all the minor and meaner doctrinal concepts that can cause division in the Body.

### Illustrations of Transformation

There are a number of illustrations of transformation seen in nature and in the Bible—in the types and in its description of the experiences of the believers. In transformation there is both continuity and change. There is continuity between the original form prior to transformation and the resultant form after transformation, yet there is also irreversible change, which may be very obvious from the perspective of the outward appearance of the two forms or may be apparent only when considering the intrinsic makeup of the two forms. This can be seen in the examples of transformation found in nature and in the Bible.

#### In Nature

In the realm of nature, we have the transformation of a caterpillar to a butterfly; here the outward difference between the two forms is very striking, but when a butterfly is examined more closely, it can be observed that certain inward characteristics of the caterpillar are retained.<sup>3</sup> In the transformation of petrified wood, there is continuity between the two forms before and after transformation, with the outward appearances looking almost identical but the intrinsic essence being completely changed—the cellulose molecules of the tree (made up of carbon, hydrogen, and oxygen) having been replaced by silicon dioxide. The queen bee, transformed from a regular worker bee larva to a queen by feeding on a special substance called royal jelly, outwardly still looks like a bee, although she is larger, lives much longer, and has the function of producing multiple eggs for the continuation of the hive.

#### Precious Stones

With the transformation of clay to precious stones the two forms have significant differences outwardly, but the basic chemical composition is retained after transformation. In the Bible precious stones indicate the transformation of the believers as material for God’s building.<sup>4</sup> In the transformation of the believers their created humanity is re-deemed, and the addition of the divine essence results in a glorious expression of God in humanity.

**I**n Genesis 2:12 we see three precious materials in the river—gold, bdellium, and onyx (Heb. *shoham*) stone. Onyx stone indicates transformation. Onyx is a fine grain quartz, with a chemical composition of silicon dioxide, which is a compound of the two most abundant elements in Earth’s crust—silicon and oxygen. Through heat and pressure deep under the earth’s surface and a hydrothermal

---

aqueous solution with the addition of trace elements, silicon dioxide is formed into precious stones such as onyx. With precious stones the natural, corruptible, changeable elements of the clay are removed, and they become chemically stable, transparent or translucent, displaying various colors, hence beautiful and suitable for adorning.

Onyx stones were part of the ephod and breastplate worn over the robes of the high priest (Exo. 25:7). Two onyx stones were set on the shoulder pieces of the ephod; the stones were each engraved on with the names of six of the twelve tribes of Israel (28:9-12). Also, on the breastplate of judgment was an onyx stone along with eleven other precious stones (also compounds of silicon dioxide), and each stone was engraved with the name of one of the tribes of the children of Israel (vv. 17-21). Aaron the high priest wore the breastplate with the stones that bore the names of the tribes of the children of Israel on his shoulders and on his breast in the presence of Jehovah when he entered the sanctuary. Aaron is a type of Christ as the High Priest bearing the believers as transformed precious stones in the presence of God.

Precious stones were also used to adorn the temple for beauty, indicating a connection between transformation and building typologically (2 Chron. 3:6). Jehovah also promised the children of Israel that He Himself will lay down their stones in dark mortar, lay their foundations with sapphires, and make their battlements of rubies and their gates of carbuncles and that all their borders will be precious stones (Isa. 54:11-12). The fulfillment of this promise to Israel concerning Jerusalem will ultimately consummate in the precious stones as part of the wall of the New Jerusalem.

In the New Testament Paul, Peter, and John associate precious stones with God's building. Paul states, "If anyone builds upon the foundation [of God's building, Christ] gold, silver, precious stones, wood, grass, stubble, the work of each will become manifest," since the work will be proved, or tested, by fire (1 Cor. 3:12-13). Precious stones signify the "transforming work of the Spirit with all its attributes. All these precious materials are the products of our participation in and enjoyment of Christ in our spirit through the Holy Spirit" (Lee, *Recovery Version*, v. 12, note 2).

Wood, in contrast to gold, signifies the nature of the natural man; grass, in contrast to silver, signifies the fallen man, the man of the flesh (1 Pet. 1:24), who has not been redeemed

or regenerated by Christ; and stubble, in contrast to precious stones, signifies the work and living that issue from an earthen source and have not been transformed by the Holy Spirit. (1 Cor. 3:12, note 3)

Peter develops the notion of stones for God's building, stating that we, "coming to Him [Christ], a living stone, rejected by men but with God chosen and precious...as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house into a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:4-5). We are not only precious stones but living stones, through regeneration and transformation. "We were created of clay (Rom. 9:21). But at regeneration we received the seed of the divine life, which by its growing in us transforms us into living stones" (Lee, *Recovery Version*, 1 Pet. 2:5, note 1), "that we may be built together with others as a spiritual house upon Him [Christ] as both the foundation and the cornerstone (Isa. 28:16)" (v. 4, note 1).

*Aaron the high priest wore the breastplate with the stones that bore the names of the tribes of the children of Israel on his shoulders and on his breast in the presence of Jehovah when he entered the sanctuary.*

John mentions precious stones, especially in the consummation of God's building work, the New Jerusalem. The Lord promises the overcomers in the church of Pergamos that He will give them a white stone, and upon the stone a new name will be written, which no one knows except him who receives it (Rev.

2:17). These overcomers have been transformed from people of clay in their natural being into white stones, with the color white indicating that they were justified and approved by the Lord in the midst of the church in Pergamos, the church married to the world. The new name also designates them as transformed persons, and the name "is the interpretation of the experience of the one who has been transformed. Hence, only he himself knows the meaning of that name" (Lee, *Recovery Version*, v. 17, note 4).

The wall of the New Jerusalem is constituted with precious stones. The light of the New Jerusalem is like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, as clear as crystal (21:11). The building work of her wall (the main material of the wall) is also jasper (v. 18), signifying that the whole city, as the corporate expression of God in eternity, has the appearance of God (4:3) and signifying "God expressed in His transmittable glory" (Lee, *Recovery Version*, 21:19, note 2). The foundations of the wall are adorned with every precious stone, the first foundation being jasper and the twelfth foundation, amethyst. Each foundation has the name of one of the twelve apostles inscribed on it. This indicates that these precious stones are a symbol of the transformed believers, represented by the apostles.<sup>5</sup>

---

The wall of the city and its foundation being built of precious stones signifies “the Spirit’s work of transforming the redeemed and regenerated saints into precious stones for the building of God’s eternal habitation that they may express God corporately in His all-permeating glory” (Lee, *Recovery Version*, v. 21, note 1).

### *The Changing of Names*

In the Bible another indication of transformation is the experience of a name being changed. The changing of a name signifies the changing of a person. The stones with names engraved on them, mentioned above, also signify that the person has been transformed—our old being has been terminated, and we have been brought into resurrection so that we may be another person. The changing of names coincides with the experience of transformation from a natural person to a transformed person. God changed the names of Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, and Peter. Paul’s name was also changed, perhaps as a result of his own realization concerning himself after his experience of some degree of transformation in the Christian life.<sup>6</sup>

**A**braham’s former name was Abram, meaning “exalted father” (ironic, since for a large part of his life he was childless). God changed his name from Abram to Abraham, meaning “father of a multitude,” when he was ninety-nine, at the time of the enactment of the covenant of circumcision, which signified the cutting off of the natural strength prior to the conception and birth of Isaac (Gen. 17:5).<sup>7</sup> Witness Lee indicates the significance of this name change:

In order to fulfill His eternal purpose, God needs not one exalted person but the father of a great multitude (cf. 1:28; 9:1). Hence, the changing of Abraham’s name, signifying the changing of his person, was for the fulfillment of God’s purpose. In spiritual experience, the real changing of a name is the change from “I” to Christ (Gal. 2:20) and from “I” to the grace of God (1 Cor. 15:10). Only Christ as God’s grace, not “I,” can bring forth the multitude needed to fulfill God’s purpose. (*Recovery Version*, Gen. 17:5, note 2)

Sarah’s name was also changed by God—from Sarai, meaning “my princess,” to Sarah, meaning *princess*; again, this indicates transformation. Lee expounds her name change in this way:

The word *my* before *princess*...indicates narrowness and particularity. Here, the changing of Sarah’s name signifies generality and suggests the enlarging and broadening of her person to make her a mother of nations (v. 16). As seen with both Abraham (v. 5) and Sarah, such a change requires the termination of our old and natural man so that we may be transformed into a new person who can produce seed and

care for others for the fulfillment of God’s purpose. (*Recovery Version*, v. 15, note 2)

Although Abraham experienced some amount of transformation, he, at the end of his life, aged one hundred forty, married again and bore six sons (25:1-2).<sup>8</sup> This is striking, since he considered his own body as dead at the time he begot Isaac forty years prior (Rom. 4:19). This indicates that although Abraham was old in his physical life, he was not fully transformed or mature in his spiritual life. One indicator of Abraham’s shortage in spiritual maturity is that there is no record of Abraham’s blessing anyone at the end of his life.

**M**aturity in life, along with blessing others, as the issue of transformation is seen in the life of Jacob:

God sovereignly arranged every circumstance, situation, and person in Jacob’s life and caused them all to work together for Jacob’s good, so that He could transform Jacob, a supplanter and a heel holder, into Israel, a prince of God. In particular, God used Jacob’s family, including his father, his mother, his brother, his uncle, and his wives and children, to deal with Jacob for his transformation. God’s dealing with Jacob is a full picture of the Holy Spirit’s discipline and His transforming work in the New Testament believers (Rom. 8:28-29; 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18). (Lee, *Recovery Version*, Gen. 25:26, note 1)

God changed the name of Jacob (“heel holder” or “supplanter”) to Israel (“one who struggles with God” or “prince of God”) first at Peniel, after Jacob wrestled all night with God, and God touched his thigh, indicating the limitation of his natural strength (32:24-25, 28).<sup>9</sup> This marks the beginning of Jacob’s transformation. Jacob’s name change is again mentioned at Bethel after his experiences with Esau and at Shechem (35:10).

At Peniel God changed Jacob’s name to Israel (32:28), but there Jacob did not have much experience of this new name. It was at Bethel that Jacob was actually renewed and became a new person, a transformed person (cf. Rom. 12:2). This kind of change can be experienced only at Bethel, i.e., in the proper church life. The church is altogether a new man (Eph. 2:15), and the church life is the new life of the transformed Israel (Gal. 6:16), which life is God in Christ. (Lee, *Recovery Version*, Gen. 35:10, note 1)

After this name change Jacob is referred to as Israel (Gen. 35:21; 37:3; 43:6; 45:28; 46:1, and especially from 47:29 until the end of the book, where he blessed his children and grandchildren). However, he is also still called Jacob, perhaps an indicator of his lack of and ongoing need for transformation, especially between chapters 32 and 35, but perhaps also a reminder of Jacob’s origin and his old nature prior to transformation (37:34; 42:4; 46:2, 15).

Up to chapter 37 Jacob had not attained maturity, which means to be “filled with the divine life that changes us” (Lee, *Recovery Version*, 37:1, note 1). But “after the time Jacob lost Joseph in chapter thirty-seven, we see no further change in Jacob’s life...His transformation was nearly completed...Jacob’s maturity began” (Lee, *Life-study of Genesis* 1203-1204).

Jacob’s blessing of others is an indication of his maturity.

After Jacob became mature, he blessed whomever he met. Wherever he went, he did nothing except bless others. When Jacob was brought before Pharaoh, the first thing he did was bless him (47:7). After talking a while with Pharaoh, Jacob blessed him again (47:10). Jacob was not only a blessed person; he was also a blessing person. (Lee, *Life-study of Genesis* 819)

Jacob’s transformation and maturity in life was demonstrated again when, upon hearing that his favorite son Joseph was still alive, his heart grew numb, but his spirit was revived (45:26-27). This indicates that “his soul and spirit had been divided (Heb. 4:12). This was a manifestation of Jacob’s maturity in life” (Lee, *Recovery Version*, Gen. 45:26, note 1). He also did not blame anyone regarding what happened to Joseph, which is a sign of transformation and maturity (v. 28).

When the Lord Jesus called Simon the son of Jonah, He gave him a new name, Peter or Cephas, translated “a stone” in Greek and Aramaic respectively (John 1:42).<sup>10</sup> Later, when Peter received the revelation concerning the Lord being the Christ, the Lord revealed further that He was the rock, or massive stone (πέτρα), upon which the church would be built, and that Simon, who was Peter, a stone (πέτρος), was material for the building of the church (Matt. 16:16-18). As a result, Peter was impressed that both Christ and His believers are stones, transformed persons, for God’s building (1 Pet. 2:5). After this name change to Peter, he was sometimes still referred to as Simon (e.g., Matt. 16:17; John 21:15-17) or Simon Peter (Matt. 16:16), indicating continuity with the past and perhaps reminding Peter of his old nature and his need for transformation.<sup>11</sup>

During the early stages of his first missionary journey, Saul of Tarsus also had a name change, from Saul, meaning “asked for” in Hebrew, the name of Israel’s first king, to Paul, meaning “small” in Latin, a self-effacing Gentile name

(Acts 13:9) appropriate to him being a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles (Rom. 15:16) and him being a slave of God and of Christ Jesus (Titus 1:1; Rom. 1:1). From that time on, he was referred to as Paul rather than Saul, and he also referred to himself as Paul in all his Epistles. “The change of name may indicate a change in life. In any case, after Paul was filled with the Holy Spirit here, he took the lead in the apostolic ministry all the way” (Lee, *Recovery Version*, Acts 13:9, note 1). Paul even indicates that he was less than the least of all saints as a recipient of grace (Eph. 3:8), as well as the foremost of sinners, being a former persecutor of the church (1 Tim. 1:15).

Becoming precious stones along with a name change indicate the transformation of the believers in nature and person for the building of the church as God’s house and for the church as the one new man, which takes Christ as its person.

*The changing of names coincides with the experience of transformation from a natural person to a transformed person. God changed the names of Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, and Peter.*

### *The Thornbush*

The thornbush that Moses saw burning but not consumed is another indicator of transformation. When he saw the thornbush, Moses was eighty years old and had spent the previous forty years of his life tending sheep at the backside of the desert. Thorns signify the curse from man’s

fall (Gen. 3:17-19), and the flame of fire signifies the glory of God’s holiness (Exo. 24:17; Deut. 4:24; Heb. 12:29).

The flame of fire burning within the thornbush signifies that the glory of God’s holiness would burn within and upon Moses, God’s called one, even though he was a sinner under God’s curse...The fact that the fire burned in the thornbush without consuming it indicates that God Himself, not Moses, would be the “fuel” for the burning (cf. Rom. 12:11; 2 Tim. 1:7; Phil. 4:13; Col. 1:29). (Lee, *Recovery Version*, Exo. 3:2, note 2)

Transformed persons are those who have the realization that in their fallen state they are like a cursed thornbush, but the flaming glory of the holy God can be the fuel for their life and work.

The burning thornbush also refers in a corporate sense to God’s redeemed people as His dwelling place (Deut. 33:16); this dwelling place is typified also by the tabernacle, which had the cloud of God’s glory upon it, with the appearance of fire at night (Num. 9:15-16). “Through the burning of the holy divine fire, the once cursed and redeemed thornbush is transformed to be God’s dwelling

---

place. This is God's economy" (Lee, *Recovery Version*, Exo. 3:2, note 2).

### *Mounting Up with Wings like an Eagle*

Another example of transformation in the Old Testament is that of an eagle, which is transformed by the molting and renewing of its feathers, enabling it to continue to fly. According to Isaiah 40:31, transformed persons are those who wait on Jehovah; they will renew their strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles; they will run and will not become weary; they will walk and will not faint. The significance of waiting on Jehovah, the eternal God (v. 28), is

that we terminate ourselves, i.e., that we stop ourselves with our living, our doing, and our activity, and receive God in Christ as our life, our person, and our replacement. Such a waiting one will be renewed and strengthened to such an extent that he will mount up with wings like eagles. He will not only walk and run but also soar in the heavens, far above every earthly frustration. This is a transformed person. (Lee, *Recovery Version*, Isa. 40:31, note 1)

The verb *renew* (Heb. *halaf* in the hiphil, "cause to pass away, change," translated ἀλλάσσω, "change," in Greek) in Isaiah 40:31 connects this passage with transformation in the New Testament, carried out by the renewing of the mind (Rom. 12:2). An eagle is a picture of the transcendent and saving God (Exo. 19:4; Deut. 32:11-12; Rev. 12:14) and of a transformed believer in ascension with eagles' wings enabling him to soar in the sky far above the earth (cf. Psa. 103:5, where his youth is renewed *hithaddesh* like an eagle). The thornbush and the eagle indicate how the transformed believers, as members of Christ's Body, depend on Him as the Head, the source of divine energy and strength for their living and work.

### *Stages of Transformation in Song of Songs*

A rich illustration of transformation is seen in Song of Songs. Song of Songs develops a theme that runs throughout the Bible, beginning in Genesis 2 with the rib of Adam, who is a type of Christ, the Husband, being built into Eve, Adam's counterpart, a type of the church as the wife (vv. 21-23). Song of Songs illustrates the four stages, with certain characteristics in each stage, that a believer, who is typified by the female lover, needs to progress through in order to attain transformation and maturity to match her husband, Christ, typified by Solomon. In the first stage the lover begins as a mare, signifying a strong natural person, pulling the chariots of Pharaoh, signifying Satan, who enslaves people living in Egypt, the world (1:9). But she is transformed to live "not by her natural life in relying on her natural strength but by the divine life in trusting in God

(a lily—2:1-2; Matt. 6:28) and looking to Him with a single eye (eyes like doves—[S. S. 1:15]; Matt. 10:16)" (Lee, *Recovery Version*, S. S. 1:9, note 2).

She progresses into the second stage, of living in oneness with the cross, signified by a dove in the clefts of the rock and in the covert of the precipice (2:14), which enables her to be delivered from the self and its introspection. In the third stage she is called to live in ascension, signified by four mountains (4:8) as the new creation in resurrection, where she is transformed to be a spiritual person, signified by pillars of smoke (3:6). She is strong like a pillar but flexible as smoke. She also becomes a bed, a palanquin, and a bride in union with her lover. "The union of the bed with its sleeper (vv. 7-8), the union of the palanquin with its rider (vv. 9-10), and the union of the bride with her bridegroom (v. 11) all signify the complete union of the lover with Christ, which has made her God's new creation in Christ's resurrection (2 Cor. 5:17)" (Lee, *Recovery Version*, S. S. 3:11, note 3). "Christ's transformed bride becomes mature in the riches of the life of Christ so that she becomes...a garden to satisfy Christ (4:12—5:1; 6:2-3)," and in the fourth stage "God's dwelling place with its protection (6:4a), the heavenly bodies as the universal light (6:10a), and a terrible army, which is the corporate overcomer—the Shulammitte (6:4b, 10b, 13)" (4:12, note 1). As the Shulammitte, she becomes the female counterpart of Solomon, matching him and typifying the New Jerusalem as Christ's counterpart, the same as He is in life and nature for eternity (Rev. 21:2; 22:17).

### **Conclusion**

Transformation is a metabolic change in life and nature, from the form prior to transformation to the form after transformation. The first illustration in the Bible of transformation is that of precious stones, a picture of transformed human beings. Certain Biblical figures have their name changed, indicating the transformation of their person. The consummation of God's building, the New Jerusalem, contains transformed precious stones with names new and old inscribed on them. The illustrations of the burning thornbush that is not consumed and of the mounting up with the wings of an eagle indicate the living and working of a transformed believer as a member of the Body of Christ, depending on Him as the source of divine energy and strength. Finally, Song of Songs illustrates the progression of a believer's transformation in four stages, from a mare pulling Pharaoh's chariot to the Shulammitte, the female counterpart of Solomon, a type of Christ; in this final stage she has become a transformed bride prepared and adorned for her Husband. These illustrations give us a rich picture as a background of transformation in the New Testament.

by Roger Good

---

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>A third word, *mur* (“alter,” “change,” “exchange”), occurs fourteen times. It is used to indicate physical features of the earth changing (Psa. 46:2), but it mostly means “exchange” (Lev. 27:10, 33).

<sup>2</sup>For further development of the meaning of *μορφή* and related words, see my article “*Μορφή*, Transformation, and Glorification” in *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 7, no. 1, April 2002, pp. 46-49.

<sup>3</sup>An interesting feature in the transformation of a caterpillar to a butterfly is that whereas the caterpillar is destructive, devouring plants, defoliating them ruthlessly, the butterfly is beneficial to the plant, drinking nectar from flowers and pollinating them, helping to produce the next generation of plants.

<sup>4</sup>Transformation into precious stones takes place “by the impartation of the Spirit (hydrothermal solutions) in our environmental circumstances (heat and pressure) combined with our created and redeemed human elements” (Good 75).

With building, both massive stones and precious stones are used. Christ is presented as the foundation stone, cornerstone, and topstone—massive stones for God’s building (Isa. 28:16; 1 Pet. 2:6; Eph. 2:20; Matt. 21:42; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:7; Psa. 118:22)—and the believers are presented as living stones (1 Pet. 2:5) and precious stones for the adornment of God’s building. It is striking that the wall of the New Jerusalem, the part of the city that is most observable from the ground and the initial point of contact for those outside the city, is constituted with precious stones, signifying transformed believers. The foundations of the wall are twelve precious stones inscribed with the names of the twelve apostles, as representatives of all the New Testament believers (Rev. 21:14, 18-21).

<sup>5</sup>See my article, “God as a Rock Producing Stones for God’s Building” in *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 20, no. 2, Fall 2015, pp. 72-76 for the significance of the colors and arrangement of the stones.

<sup>6</sup>A number of people were given names as a result of their living in a foreign land. Joseph was called Zaphenath-paneah by Pharaoh, king of Egypt (Gen. 41:45). Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were given names containing the names of Babylonian gods—Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, respectively—by the leader of the eunuchs of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon (Dan. 1:7). And Hadassah was given a Persian name, Esther (Esth. 2:7). The changing of names in these instances were attempts to mold these people to the culture of the land, not to reflect an inner transformation.

<sup>7</sup>The name change also came after Sarah’s suggestion that Abraham produce Ishmael with Hagar through the exercise of

natural wisdom and strength (Gen. 16:2). There is no record of Abraham’s life for a thirteen-year period following this, indicating God’s displeasure with this action and His rejection of Ishmael as the promised seed (v. 16—17:1, 18-19).

<sup>8</sup>Abraham’s natural endeavoring ended up causing problems to his descendants through Isaac even to this day. One of the descendants of Abraham and Keturah was Midian (Gen. 25:2), whose descendants were an adversary to the children of Israel (Num. 25:17-18; 31:2; Judg. 6:1). “Both the Ishmaelites and the Midianites represent the flesh, the natural strength. In addition, hatred (Gen. 37:8) is related to the flesh” (Lee, *Recovery Version*, 37:28, note 1).

<sup>9</sup>There is some uncertainty as to the meaning of the names Jacob and Israel. The name Jacob-el occurs in the Ancient Near East and probably means something like “may El protect” or “may El follow him closely” (Knohl 481). Others have stated that the naming of Jacob being associated with the word *‘aqeb* (“heel,” Gen. 25:26) or *‘aqab* (“attacker of the heel,” “supplanter,” 27:36) and other “wordplay concerning proper names” is not a matter

of scientific or linguistic etymology but “aetiology,” the study of origins (Ausloos, et al. 281). Interestingly, after God changed Jacob’s name to Israel, Jacob named the place on the river Jabbok (Heb. *Yabboq*), where he wrestled (*‘abeq*) with God, Peniel or Penuel (“face of God,” Gen. 32:30-31). The phonological and semantic similarities are

striking. As Herbert Marks states, “The etymology of Peniel... preempts what seems to have been an original etiology of Jabbok, prepared in the story by the key word פָּנִי (['bq] “wrestle,” vv. 25, 26)...As *ya‘āqōb* is changed by the angel to *yīsrā’ēl*, so *yabboq* is changed by Jacob to *pēni‘ēl*” (35).

<sup>10</sup>Apart from the Lord referring to Peter with the Aramaic name Cephas here, only Paul refers to Peter as Cephas (eight times in two Epistles: 1 Cor. 1:12; 3:22; 9:5; 15:5; Gal. 1:18; 2:9, 11, 14). Interestingly, Paul refers to him as Peter only twice (vv. 7-8).

<sup>11</sup>Sometimes the name is changed, and the old name is no longer referred to (e.g., Abraham and Sarah); at other times, the name is changed, but the former name is also used to indicate the continuity between the person bearing the old name and the new name (e.g., Jacob/Israel and Simon Peter). John frequently refers to Peter as Simon Peter (seventeen times), which is the same number of times that he refers to him by the name Peter. The only time that James refers to Peter, he calls him Simeon, the Hebrew form of Simon (Acts 15:14). Peter refers to himself both as Peter (1 Pet. 1:1) and Simon Peter (2 Pet. 1:1).

## Works Cited

Ausloos, Hans, et al. “The Study of Aetiological Wordplay as a

*Transformed persons are those  
who wait on Jehovah;  
they will renew their strength; they will  
mount up with wings like eagles; they  
will run and will not become weary;  
they will walk and will not faint.*

Content-Related Criterion in the Characterization of LXX Translation Technique." *Die Septuaginta—Entstehung, Sprache, Geschichte: 3. Internationale Fachtagung veranstaltet von Septuaginta Deutsch (LXX.D), Wuppertal 22.–25. Juli 2010*, edited by Siegfried Kreuzer, Martin Meiser, and Marcus Sigismund, Mohr Siebeck, 2012, pp. 273-294.

Good, Roger. "God as a Rock Producing Stones for God's Building." *Affirmation & Critique*, vol. 20, no. 2, Fall 2015, pp. 69-76.

Knohl, Israel. "Jacob-el in the Land of Esau and the Roots of Biblical Religion." *Vetus Testamentum*, vol. 67, 2017, pp. 481-484.

Lee, Witness. Footnotes. *Recovery Version of the Bible*, Living Stream Ministry, 2003.

———. *Life-study of Genesis*. Living Stream Ministry, 1987.

Marks, Herbert. "Biblical Naming and Poetic Etymology." *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 114, no. 1, 1995, pp. 21-42.

## Transformation in Romans

Transformation is a good word. In Greek this word includes the meaning of change, to have a change. Thus, the King James Version rendered this word in 2 Corinthians 3:18 as "changed" instead of "transformed." However, the King James Version translated the same Greek word as "transformed" in Romans 12:2. To render the Greek as "changed" is very inadequate. Transformation does not merely denote a change; it means that a substance is changed both in nature and in form. In English the words transformed or transformation also mean a change in both nature and form. This type of change is a metabolic change. It is not just an outward change, but a change in inward constitution as well as in external form. This change occurs by the process of metabolism. In the process of metabolism an organic element filled with vitamins comes into our being and produces a chemical change in our organic life. This chemical reaction changes the constitution of our being from one form into another. This is transformation.

Suppose that a person has a very pale complexion and that someone else, wishing to change his colorless complexion, applies some coloring to his skin. This, no doubt, produces an outward change, but it is not an organic change, a change in life. How then can a person truly have a colorful face? By daily absorbing into his body healthy food with the necessary organic elements. Because your body is a living organism, when an organic substance enters into it a chemical compound is formed organically by the process of metabolism. Gradually this inward process will change the coloration of your face. This change is not outward; it is a change from within, a change resulting from the process of metabolism.

According to the Bible, this metabolic change is termed transformation. In the process of transformation the life of Christ is added to our being. When His life, which is organic and filled with vitamins, permeates our being, a spiritual, chemical compound is formed. This changes our constitution both in nature and in form. This is transformation. It is not outward correction or external adjustment. It is absolutely an inward metabolic change in our organic element, a change in life and with life by the Lord Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18). In the process of transformation the divine element is wrought into us. If we keep in mind this proper understanding of transformation as we approach Romans 12 through 16, we shall realize that this portion of the Word is altogether different from what our natural concept would lead us to believe it is.

At the end of Romans 8 the life process reaches its completion. In chapter one we were sinners, mean, vile, and filled with evil. However, after passing through several chapters and coming to the end of Romans 8, we have been sanctified and conformed as sons of God. What a difference! At the end of Romans 8 we have become conformed sons of God, sons beloved of Him forever. Thus, the first eight chapters of Romans unfold the life process which brings us all the way from sinners to sons of God. Then in Romans 9 through 11 Paul affords us a revelation of God's selection, God's economy, and our destiny. In that portion Paul helps us realize how God selected us, made us as vessels to contain Him, intends to fill us with all the riches of Christ, and has established an economy regarding the order in which men will be saved. After speaking of these things Paul is ready to speak about the practice of life. At the beginning of Romans 12, Paul is prepared to tell us how to practice the very life in which we have been and are being processed. The practice of this processed life is the church life.

From the *Life-study of Romans* by Witness Lee, pp. 292-294