



# **Peninsula City Church**

## **An Amazing Thing**

### **Building on Hell**

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**11<sup>th</sup> June 2017 the AM Service**

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# Building on Hell

## An Introduction

**Q.** Why did Jesus leave Israel to reveal to His followers who He was and His mission?

Imagine a new Christ-follower has asked you this question, what would you say to them? They have just read the statement by Jesus “And I tell you, you are Peter, and upon this rock, I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt 16:18 ESV), and they wonder what it means? I don’t know about you, but I have heard various explanations of this section of Scripture. Some were downright weird, and others, well; let’s just say they were interesting attempts. Other explanations did seem to fit with the context the chapter and the context of the Bible.

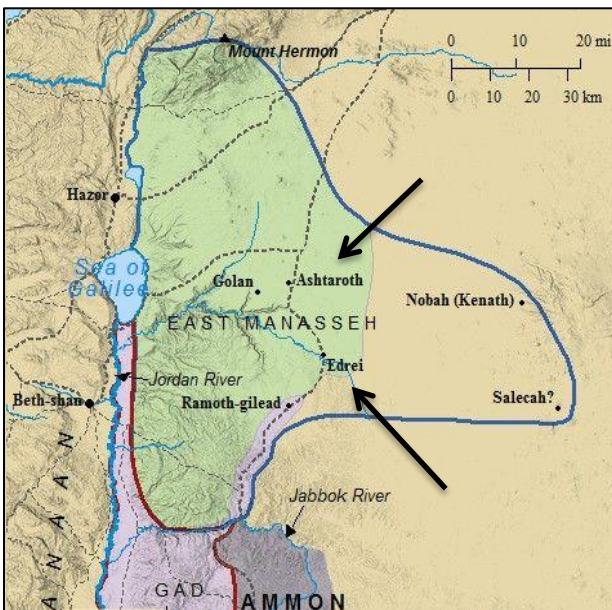


Here I will endeavour to answer the above question in light of this verse and the larger biblical context. Firstly I am going to do from a wider biblical context. Then secondly I will review it within the context of chapter 16 and then finally by way of the biblical application of this verse.

## 1. The land of giants and terrors

**Q.** Where was the land of the giants and terrors?

When we think about it, Lot (Abram’s nephew) was captured and rescued from a land where giants lived. On the Canaanite cuneiform<sup>1</sup> tablets, it is stated that the Ugarit<sup>2</sup> believed these giants to be the spirits of the dead warrior-kings come back from hell. Also, it suggests they believed that the cities of Ashtaroth and Edrei were the entryway to the Underworld - the gates of Sheol-Hades or hell).<sup>3</sup>



<sup>1</sup> “About this time war broke out in the region (four kings against five kings)...<sup>5</sup> One year later (i.e. in the fourteenth year of the reign of Kedorla’omer) Kedorla’omer and his allies arrived and defeated the Rephaites (the Giants) at Ashteroth-Karim (Ashtoreth of the two horns or peaks), the Zuzites (roving people) at Ham, **the Emites** (the terrors) at Shaveh-kiriathaim (plain of the double or two cities which was attacked by Kedorla’omer).” (Gen 14:1,5 NLT).

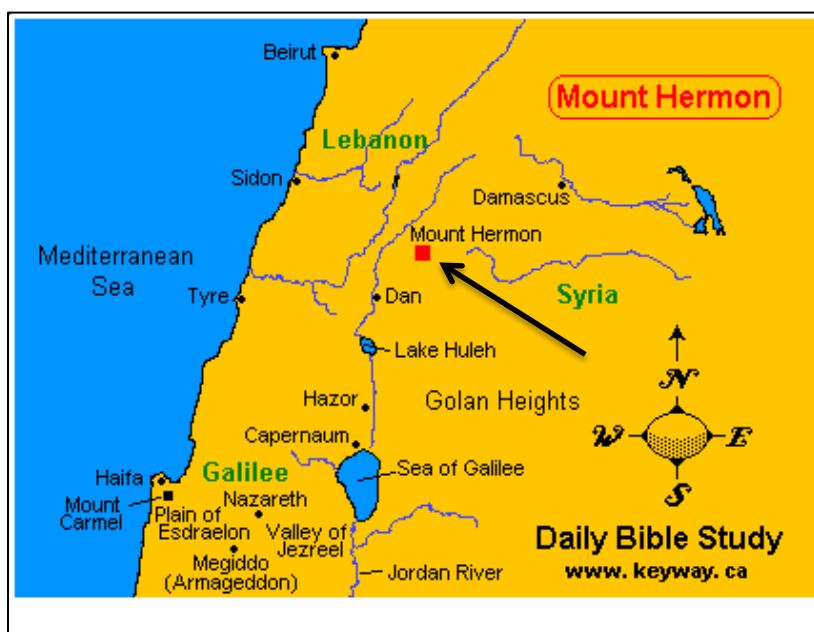
<sup>1</sup> “Cuneiform is a system of writing first developed by the ancient Sumerians of Mesopotamia c. 3500-3000 BCE.” From “Cuneiform.” <http://www.ancient.eu/cuneiform/> (31<sup>st</sup> May 2017).

<sup>2</sup> “Ugarit, ancient city lying in a large artificial mound called Ras Shamra (Ra’s Shamrah), 6 miles (10 km) north of Latakia (Al-Lādhiqīyah) on the Mediterranean coast of northern Syria.” From “Ugarit: Ancient City, Syria.” <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ugarit> (31<sup>st</sup> May 2017).

<sup>3</sup> Heiser, Michael S. *I Dare You Not to Bore Me with the Bible*. (Belling ham, WA: Lexham, 2014), 118.

2:10 “(A race of giants called **the Emites** (the terrors) had once lived in the area of Ar. They were as strong and numerous and tall as **the Anakites** (long-necked), another race of giants. <sup>11</sup> Both **the Emites** and **the Anakites** are also known as **the Rephaites** (the Giants), though **the Moabites call them Emites**. <sup>12</sup> In earlier times the Horites (the cave dwellers) had lived in Seir (hairy or shaggy from the Edomites), but they were driven out and displaced by the descendants of Esau, just as Israel drove out the people of Canaan when the Lord gave Israel their land.)... <sup>3:1</sup> Next we turned and headed for the land of Bashan (the fruitful land in what is now known as the Golan Heights), where King Og (long-necked) and his entire army attacked us at Edrei (a good pasture a chief city of Bashan, north of Jabbok river)... <sup>10</sup> We had now conquered all the cities on the plateau and all Gilead (the rocky region) and Bashan (the fruitful land), as far as the towns of Salecah (a town of or district of migration at the extreme eastern limit of Bashan and allocated to the tribe of Gad) and Edrei, which were part of Og’s kingdom in Bashan. <sup>11</sup> (King Og of Bashan was **the last survivor of the giant Rephaites**. His bed was made of iron and was more than nine cubits [4.1 meters] long and four cubits [1.8 meters] wide. It can still be seen in the Ammonite city of Rabbah)” (Deut 2:10-12; 3:1,10-11 NLT).

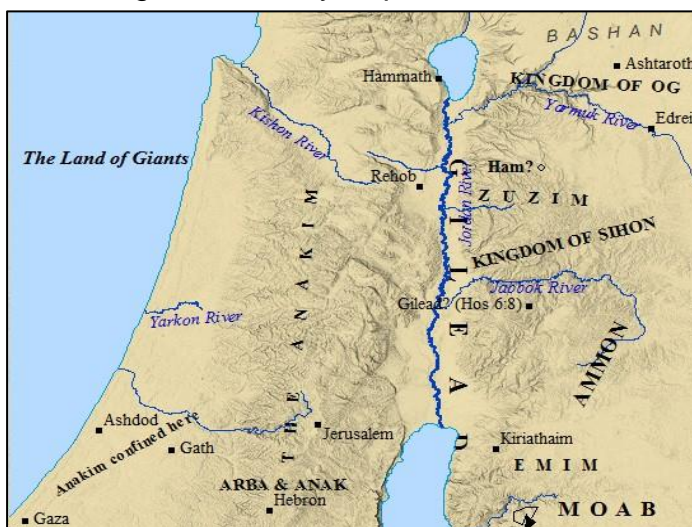
Joshua and Israel defeated the northern armies and then allocated this piece of land to



<sup>16</sup> “So Joshua conquered the entire region—the hill country, the entire Negev, the whole area around the town of Goshen, the western foothills, the Jordan Valley, the mountains of Israel, and the Galilean foothills. <sup>17</sup> The Israelite territory now extended all the way from Mount Halak, which leads up to Seir in the south, as far north as **Baal-gad** at the foot of **Mount Hermon** in the valley of Lebanon. Joshua killed all the kings of those territories, <sup>18</sup> waging war for a long time to accomplish this” (Josh 11:16-18 NLT).

The following verses in Joshua are the continuation of the previous section outlining the Kings conquered by Joshua and Israel. They defeated these kings on the way to possess the Promised Land. The main kings to note here are Sihon and Og the giant kings.

<sup>1</sup> “These are the kings east of the Jordan River who had been killed by the Israelites and whose land was taken. Their territory extended from the Arnon Gorge (containing a river and the surrounding valley in southern Palestine, which forms the border between Moab and the Amorites) to Mount Hermon (meaning a sanctuary a mountain on the north-eastern border of Palestine and Lebanon and overlooking the border city of Dan) and included all the land east of the Jordan Valley (Hebrew is the Arabah



or steppe or desert plain).

<sup>2</sup> King Sihon (meaning warrior, he was king of the Amorites at the time of the conquest and was defeated by Moses in Transjordan) of the Amorites, who lived in Heshbon (meaning ‘the stronghold,’ and was the capital city of Sihon, located on the western border of the high plain and on the border line between the tribes of Reuben and Gad), was defeated. His kingdom included Aroer (ruins, a city on the north bank of the river Arnon, the southern point of the territory of Sihon the king of the Amorites and later of Reuben), on the edge of the Arnon Gorge, and extended from the middle of the Arnon Gorge to the Jabbok River (meaning emptying, it was a stream that intersected the mountain range of Gilead, and flowed into the Jordan on the east about midway between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea), which serves as a border for the Ammonites. This territory included the southern half of the territory of Gilead. <sup>3</sup> Sihon also controlled the Jordan Valley and regions to the east—from as far north as the Sea of Galilee to as far south as the Dead Sea, including the road to Beth-jeshimoth (meaning house of the desolation, it was a place in Moab that was given to the tribe of Reuben) and southward to the slopes of Pisgah (i.e. the mountains of Pisgah, which include Mt. Nebo).

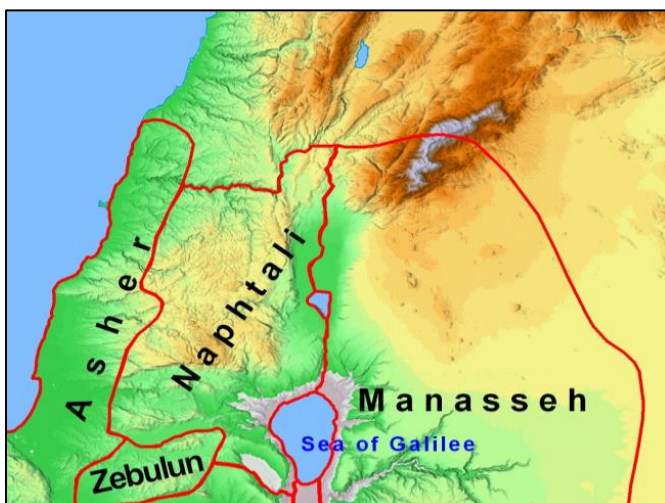
<sup>4</sup> King Og of Bashan, the last of the Rephaites, lived at Ashtaroth (meaning ‘star’ and was a female deity or goddesses of the Canaanite religion) and Edrei. <sup>5</sup> He ruled a territory stretching from Mount Hermon to Salecah in the north and to all of Bashan in the east, and westward to the borders of the kingdoms of Geshur (a tribe in South Palestine of or near the Philistines) and Maacah (meaning pressure, literally she has pressed, they were a people dwelling in Transjordan, probably descendants of Maachah). This territory included the northern half of Gilead, as far as the boundary of King Sihon of Heshbon” (Josh 12:1-5 NLT).

Then we also read in the book of Judges that,

<sup>1</sup> “These are the nations that the Lord left in the land to test those Israelites who had not experienced the wars of Canaan. <sup>2</sup> He did this to teach warfare to generations of Israelites who had no experience in battle. <sup>3</sup> These are the nations: the Philistines (those living under the five Philistine rulers), all the Canaanites, the Sidonians, and the Hivites living in the mountains of Lebanon from Mount Baal-Hermon to Lebo-Hamath. <sup>4</sup> These people were left to test the Israelites—to see whether they would obey the commands the Lord had given to their ancestors through Moses” (Jud 3:1-4 NLT).

The Book of first Chronicles states that,

“The half-tribe of Manasseh was very large and spread through the land from Bashan to Baal-Hermon, Senir, and Mount Hermon” (1Ch 5:23 NLT)



However, as time went on the place known as Baal Hermon and Baal Gad, became Bashan and then Caesarea Philippi. The last place name was after Philip the tetrarch and in honour of Caesar.

“In Old Testament times, the north-eastern area of Israel became a centre for Baal worship. In the nearby city of Dan, Israelite king Jeroboam built the high place that angered God and eventually led the Israelites to worship false gods. Eventually, worship of the Baals was

replaced with worship of Greek fertility gods.”<sup>4</sup> This region was also dedicated to Zeus “the god of the sky and ruler of the Olympian gods.”<sup>5</sup> Under Roman rule, the pantheon of Greek gods were given new names, and Zeus became Jupiter.

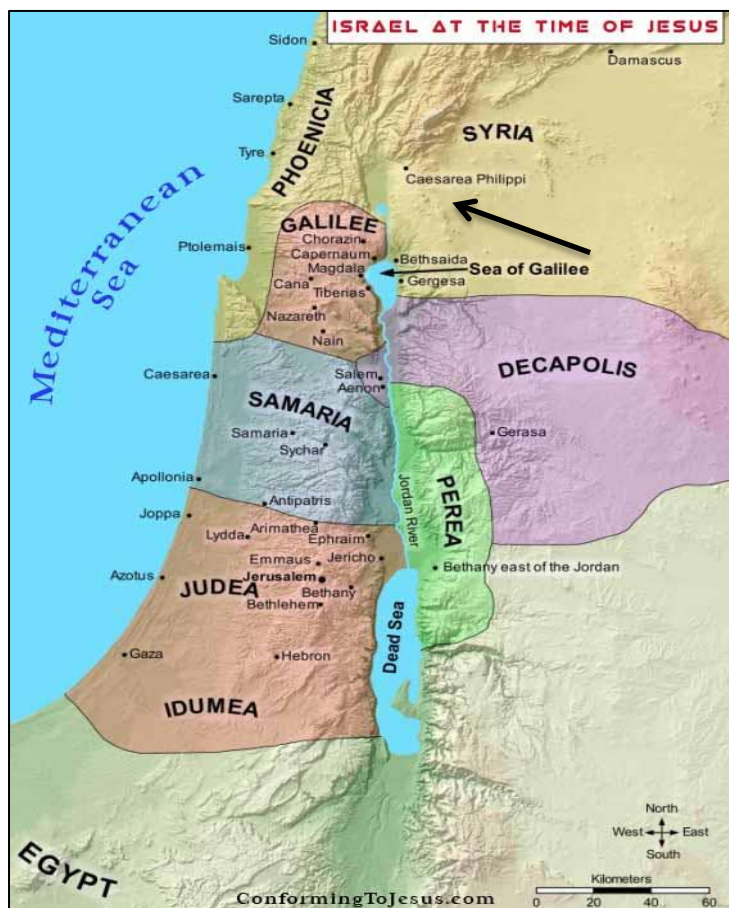
## 2. Jesus knew His Kingdom mission

**Q.** On what basis did Jesus say the time had come for Him to be glorified?

Jesus fully understood the times and interestingly, chose to deliver a ‘the purpose of the mission statement’ to His closest followers at a place called Caesarea Philippi. It was one of the many cities named Caesarea after the various Caesars. It is located at the South West corner of Mount Hermon, 40 kilometres north of the Sea of Galilee. It is thought to have had as many as 14 temples for Syrian Baal worship. Previously it was called Pnias (today it is called Banias or Banyas) and is believed to be the birthplace of Pan, the god of nature. It has been pointed out that,

“The first reference to Banias specifically, and by its Greek name, is in the work of the Greek historian Polybius.”<sup>6</sup>

It was in that pagan setting that He encouraged His followers and told them that He would build His church, which would be able to withstand the attack of satan. This was the place of the worst evils; hence it was called the gates of hell.<sup>7</sup> The gates were there for protection in case of attack to protect the city. They were also the place where the king’s representatives sat to give council and advice.



Peter made a powerful declaration about Jesus as He revealed who He was to His followers. According to Mark’s gospel, Jesus and His followers had just come from Bethsaida to this place known as the ‘Gates of Hell,’ which was in the region of Caesarea Philippi at the foot of Mount Hermon in Syria. It is here in this context that we find Jesus’ first use of the word church and it has to do with this conflict.



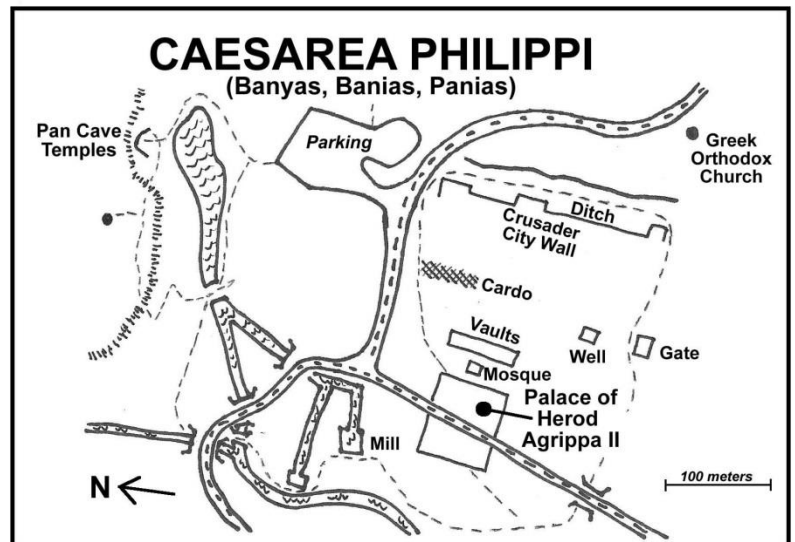
<sup>4</sup> “Gates of Hell.” <https://www.thatttheworldmayknow.com/gates-of-hell-article> (16<sup>th</sup> May 2017).

<sup>5</sup> “Zeus.” <https://www.greekmythology.com/Olympians/Zeus/zeus.html> (25<sup>th</sup> May 2017).

<sup>6</sup> Wilson, John Francis. *Caesarea Philippi: Banias, the Lost City of Pan*. (New York, NY: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 4.

<sup>7</sup> “Gates of Hell.” <https://www.thatttheworldmayknow.com/gates-of-hell-article> (16<sup>th</sup> May 2017).

<sup>13</sup> “When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi; He asked His disciples, ‘Who do people say that the Son of Man is?’ <sup>14</sup> ‘Well,’ they replied, ‘some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say Jeremiah or one of the other prophets.’ <sup>15</sup> Then He asked them, ‘But who do you (plural) say I am?’ <sup>16</sup> Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah (Christ), the Son of the living God.’ <sup>17</sup> Jesus replied, ‘You are blessed (spiritually prosperous), Simon son of John, because My Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being.’ <sup>18</sup> Now! I say to you that you are Peter (*petros*, meaning ‘a large but detached fragment of rock’), and upon this massive rock (*petra*, meaning ‘a large or massive rocky peak’) I will build My church, and all the powers (the city gates where council was sort from the king’s councillors by those who needed it) of hell will not be able to withstand the constant attack. <sup>19</sup> I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever you forbid (bind, prohibit) on earth will have already been forbidden (bound) in heaven, and whatever you permit (loose, allow) to be done on earth will be already permitted (loosed) in heaven.



<sup>20</sup> Then He sternly warned the disciples not to tell anyone that He was the Messiah. <sup>21</sup> From then on Jesus began to tell His followers plainly that it was necessary for Him to go to Jerusalem, and that He would suffer many terrible things at the hands of the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, but on the third day he would be raised from the dead” (Matt 16:13-21 NLT)

The place known as the ‘Gates of Hell’ or the place of the wicked dead was a real place in northern Israel.<sup>8</sup> It has been said that,

“The original Greek of the verse has Jesus speaking of Ἅιδης (Hades), and that Greek word is believed to be a translation of the Hebrew concept of שְׁאוֹל (Sheol), which like Hades was ‘the place where those that had died were believed to be congregated.’<sup>9</sup>

The phrase the ‘Gates of Hell’ was not a new idea, but was mentioned in the Old Testament. See, “Will it go down to the bars (gates) of Sheol (death)? Shall we descend together into the dust?” (Job 17:16 ESV).

“Have the gates of death been revealed to you, or have you seen the gates of deep darkness?” (Job 38:17 ESV).

“Be gracious to me, O LORD! See my affliction from those who hate me, O you who lift me up from the gates of death” (Ps 9:13 ESV see also v17).

<sup>8</sup> Reider, Steven. *Misconceptions: A look at God’s Word through First Century Hebraic Eyes*. (Bloomington, IL: Westbow, 2016), 7. Wilson, John Francis. *Caesarea Philippi: Baniyas, the Lost City of Pan*. (New York, NY: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 78-79. Keener, Craig S. *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 428-429. France, R.T. *The New International Commentary of the New Testament: The Gospel of Matthew*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 624-625.

<sup>9</sup> “Sheol.” <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/13563-sheol>. (25<sup>th</sup> May 2017).

“I said, In the middle of my days I must depart; I am consigned to the gates of Sheol for the rest of my years” (Is 38:10 ESV).

So when Jesus spoke of the ‘Gates of Hell,’ His followers would have known what He was saying. Therefore, the Jewish understanding of the cultural significance was that they would have known that Jesus was referring to the spiritual place known as the gates of the place of the dead. However, from a non-Jewish perspective,

“Because Caesarea Philippi stood near a cave with spring water flowing from it, the pagans naturally thought of the cave as a gate to the underworld.”<sup>10</sup>

Notice that Jesus also said in Matthew 16:19 that, “I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven,” He did not say the keys of the church. However, this kingdom authority was given to the new city that would be built i.e. the church. They have been given to the church by Jesus the King of the Kingdom of heaven. He introduced a new way of doing things that has been called the “heaven-to-earth principle.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, as Jesus said,

“Whatever you forbid (bind, prohibit) on earth will have already been forbidden (bound prohibited) in heaven, and whatever you permit (loose, allow) to be done on earth will be already permitted (loosed, allowed) in heaven” (Matt 16:19 NLT).

This is the religious language that the High Priest of the temple would have understood and used in his role as the representative of heaven. The binding and loosing were meant to be the language of God’s authority flowing from heaven to earth, but the religious system had reversed the order. What is interesting here, it that the tense used here by Jesus of these actions are perfect participles that is, it “shall be a thing already bound or loosed in heaven once for all (and remains that way for eternity).”<sup>12</sup> Consequently, it has been said,

“So to live from heaven to earth, you must also learn the secret of living, not from the past, and not from the present...*but from the future*...God’s future. Every problem you have will be answered, either in heaven or before. So, the secret is to live not from the problem, but from the problem solved, from the answer, before the answer... In the future, the battle is won... Live from its future victory... Live now from what will one day be, and you’ll live a life of blessing, and victory, on earth as it is in heaven.”<sup>13</sup>

Peter’s declaration regarding Jesus as the Messiah, was also recorded in the Gospel of Mark but in a more concise way,

<sup>27</sup> “Jesus and His disciples left Galilee and went up to the villages near Caesarea Philippi. As they were walking along, He asked them, ‘Who do people say I am?’ <sup>28</sup> ‘Well,’ they replied, ‘some say John the Baptiser, some say Elijah, and others say you are one of the other prophets.’ <sup>29</sup> Then He asked them, ‘But who do you (plural) say I am?’ Peter replied, ‘You are the Messiah.’ <sup>30</sup> But Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about Him.

<sup>31</sup> “Then Jesus began to tell them that the Son of Man must suffer many terrible things and be rejected by the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, but three days later he would rise from the dead. <sup>32</sup> As He talked about this openly with His disciples, Peter took Him aside and began to reprimand Him for saying such things” (Mk 8:27-32 NLT).

<sup>10</sup> “Gates of Hell.” <https://www.thatttheworldmayknow.com/gates-of-hell> (25<sup>th</sup> May 2017).

<sup>11</sup> Cahn, Jonathan. *The Book of Mysteries*. (Lake Mary, FL: Front Line, 2016), 301.

<sup>12</sup> “Matthew 16.” <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/egt/matthew/16.htm> (7th June 2017).

<sup>13</sup> Cahn, *The Book of Mysteries*, 301. The italics are his.



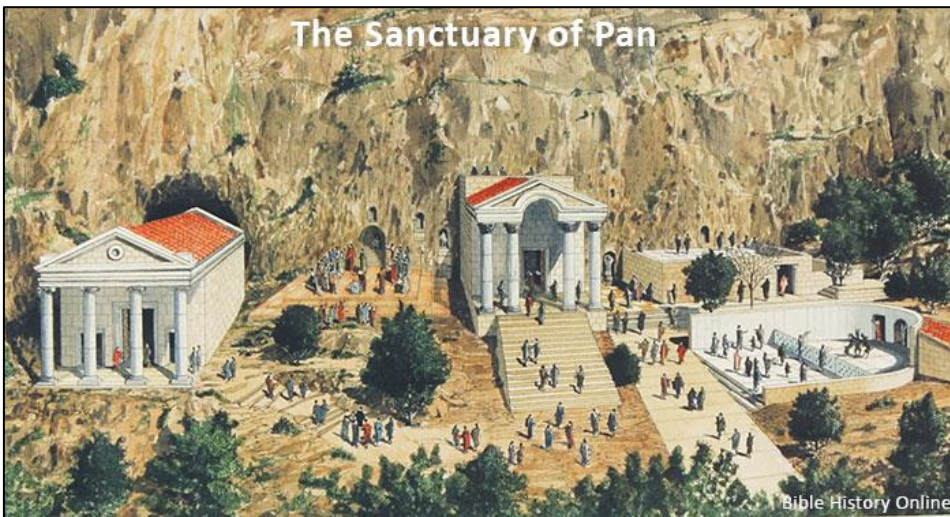
Luke also recorded this incident of Jesus taking His followers to Caesarea Philippi and gives some incite as to why He went there. Like Luke, He has left out what Matthew recorded regarding the Church and the Gates of Hell.

<sup>18</sup> “One day Jesus left the crowds to pray alone. Only His disciples were with Him, and He asked them, ‘Who do people say I am?’ <sup>19</sup> ‘Well,’ they replied, ‘some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say you are one of the other ancient prophets risen from the dead.’ <sup>20</sup> Then He asked them, ‘But who do you (plural) say I am?’ Peter replied, ‘You are the Messiah sent from God!’

<sup>21</sup> Jesus warned His disciples not to tell anyone who He was. <sup>22</sup> ‘The Son of Man must suffer many terrible things,’ He said. ‘He will be rejected by the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He will be killed, but on the third day, He will be raised from the dead...’ <sup>27</sup> ‘I tell you the truth, some standing here right now will not die before they see the Kingdom of God’ (Lk 9:18-22,27 NLT).

Hence, this was a physical place, but it was also a place of spiritual confrontation. In the third century BC under the Ptolemaic kings (originally reigning from the north of Israel before taking it over), the place became a place where sacrifices could be made to the Greek god Pan. The god

Pan was embodied as being half-man and half-goat usually playing the flute. He was the god of fright or panic (from where we get our English word panic). It was renamed during the Roman occupation after Caesar Augustus and after Herod Philip. Josephus mentioned that the Roman emperor Augustus gave Panias to King Herod, and he entertained Augustus here.<sup>14</sup> It has been said that,



“Caesarea Philippi, which stood in a lush area near the foot of Mount Hermon, was a city dominated by immoral activities and pagan worship of the Greek god, Pan. The Greeks named the city Panias in his honour... Years later, when Romans conquered the territory, Herod Philip rebuilt the city and named it after himself. But Caesarea Philippi continued to focus on worship of Greek gods. In the cliff that stood above the city, local people built shrines and temples to Pan... Jesus didn’t want His followers hiding from evil: He wanted them to storm the gates of hell... Standing as they were at a literal ‘Gate of Hades,’ the disciples may have been overwhelmed by Jesus’ challenge.”<sup>15</sup>



<sup>14</sup> Richardson, Peter. *Herod: King of the Jews and Friend of the Romans*. (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 234.

<sup>15</sup> “Gates of Hell.” <https://www.thatttheworldmayknow.com/gates-of-hell-article> (16<sup>th</sup> May 2017). 234

The events of Caesarea Philippi were the turning point of Jesus' ministry. It was here, outside of Israel and not in Jerusalem, but in the midst of paganism and devil worship that Jesus asked His followers, "Who do people say I am?" Now for Jesus, it was the physical place where He was standing that was the rock on which He would build His church, but also the place of spiritual war of worlds. "It was the foot of Mount Hermon, the demonic headquarters of the region.<sup>16</sup> The coming of Jesus heralded a new era for the only genuine kingdom (Matt 2:2). At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus stated His mission i.e. the institution of the Kingdom of God, (Matt 4:17). He sounded the death knell of the kingdom of darkness when He said, "I will build My church, and all the powers (gates) of hell will not be able to withstand the constant attack" (Matt 16:18). The attack was going to come from Jesus, and then there was to be the ongoing growth of His Church as part of the kingdom of God on earth.

### 3. The Transfiguration of the biggest giant

This event at the foot of Mount Hermon at Caesarea Philippi led into an amazing occurrence back in Israel. This powerfully revealed to three of Jesus' followers who He is, the Christ who is God. The event was the transfiguration, which was a glimpse towards the future of the coming King of Kings. He would through the power of His death, resurrection and ascension rule as the King of all creation. The three that Jesus took were Peter, James and John and on a mountain, Jesus was transfigured before them. Jesus underwent a supernatural transformation to reveal His divine nature. That transformation was a metamorphosis (from the Gk *metamorphoo* from the words *meta* denoting 'change' and *morphe* meaning 'form').

<sup>1</sup> "Six days later Jesus took Peter and the two brothers, James and John, and led them up a high mountain to be alone.<sup>2</sup> As the men watched, Jesus' appearance was transformed so that His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as light.<sup>3</sup> Suddenly, Moses and Elijah appeared and began talking with Jesus.<sup>4</sup> Peter exclaimed, 'Lord, it's wonderful for us to be here! If you want, I'll make three shelters as memorials—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.'<sup>5</sup> But even as he spoke, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, 'This is My dearly loved Son, who brings Me great joy. Listen to Him.'<sup>6</sup> The disciples were terrified and fell face down on the ground.<sup>7</sup> Then Jesus came over and touched them. 'Get up,' he said. 'Don't be afraid.'" (Matt 17:1-7 NLT).

See also Mark, who records this event with a little more detail as to the event,

<sup>2</sup> "Six days later Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them up a high mountain to be alone. As the men watched, Jesus' appearance was transformed,<sup>3</sup> and His clothes became dazzling white, far whiter than any earthly bleach could ever make them.<sup>4</sup> Then Elijah and Moses appeared and began talking with Jesus.<sup>5</sup> Peter exclaimed, 'Rabbi, it's wonderful for us to be here! Let's make three shelters as memorials—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.'<sup>6</sup> He said this because he didn't really know what else to say, for they were all terrified.<sup>7</sup> Then a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, 'This is my dearly loved Son. Listen to him'" (Mk 9:2-7 NLT).

Luke also recorded this event in his the Gospel and told us that Jesus went up on the mountain to pray,

<sup>28</sup> "About eight days later Jesus took Peter, John, and James up on a mountain to pray.<sup>29</sup> And as He was praying, the appearance of His face was transformed, and His clothes became dazzling white.<sup>30</sup> Suddenly, two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared and began talking with Jesus.<sup>31</sup> They were glorious to see. And they were speaking about His exodus from this world, which was about to be fulfilled in Jerusalem.<sup>32</sup> Peter and the others had fallen asleep. When they woke up, they saw Jesus' glory and the two men standing with Him.<sup>33</sup> As Moses

<sup>16</sup> Heiser, *I Dare You Not to Bore Me with the Bible*, 119.

and Elijah were starting to leave, Peter, not even knowing what he was saying, blurted out, ‘Master, it’s wonderful for us to be here! Let’s make three shelters as memorials—one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.’<sup>34</sup> But even as he was saying this, a cloud overshadowed them, and terror gripped them as the cloud covered them.<sup>35</sup> Then a voice from the cloud said, ‘This is My Son, My Chosen One. Listen to Him’ (Lk 9:28-35 NLT).

What stands out here is that Jesus chose to reveal to Peter, John, and James a side of Him that they had not seen up until this time. Jesus had made some strong statements in chapter 16, and here He showed why He could make such declarations. He was more than a mere person; He as was Peter had been shown, He is the Christ. He is the One who has been charged with establishing the reign of Kingdom of God here on earth.

#### 4. Building His Church for victory

An important aspect of Old Testament history regarding the conquering of towns is that the victors often built a new town or city on top of the ruins of the conquered city. The evidence of this sort of conquest building is seen in what are called ‘tells’ or ‘tels.’ A tel is a hill or mounds has been defined as follows,

“When a city begins to fall, its residents knock down the walls and build on top of the rubble. Over time the level on which the city is built rises on this mound or tel.”<sup>17</sup>

A modern example of this would be Tel Aviv in Israel. As has already been said ‘Tel’ essentially is a mound or hill, and the word ‘Aviv’ means “spring.” So, Tel Aviv is a place where a spring flows, which have some ruins of previous settlements now covering it with an archaeological mound.<sup>18</sup> Another example of this is Tel Megiddo, which is a mould where cities were built on top of each other of a 6000 year period.<sup>19</sup> The name Megiddo means ‘invading’ or ‘intruding’, so it was a mound of invading.



<sup>17</sup> “Tel.” <http://ancienthistory.about.com/od/greekarchaeology/g/040911-Tel.htm> (24<sup>th</sup> May 2017).

<sup>18</sup> “Hebrew Place Names – Tel Aviv and Be’er Sheva.” <http://www.hebrewtoday.com/content/hebrew-place-names-%E2%80%93-tel-aviv-and-be%E2%80%99er-sheva> (24<sup>th</sup> May 2017).

<sup>19</sup> Wigowsky, Paul John. *Pilgrimage in the Holy Land: Israel*. (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2013), 39-40. “Rewriting Tel Megiddo’s Violent History.” <http://discovermagazine.com/2015/nov/14-witness-to-armageddon> (31<sup>st</sup> May 2017).

Part of this building process was that the new occupiers of the conquered city would destroy the old city and rebuild it. They would reuse the old bricks, stones and building material plus adding some new material. Tel Megiddo is a great example of this process as stated below,

“The excavations have shown that the first town there was built in the early 4<sup>th</sup>-millennium bce. Megiddo was captured by the Egyptian king Thutmose III about 1468. The Israelites eventually took Megiddo, along with other cities of the area, and King Solomon rebuilt the city as a military centre; a number of the stables that have been excavated at Megiddo probably date to this time. A mutilated inscribed stele records the occupation of Megiddo by Sheshonk I, who became king of Egypt about 935 bce. King Ahaziah of Judah died at Megiddo about 842 bce, and King Josiah of Judah also died there (609 bce) while opposing the advance of the Egyptian king Necho II toward Assyria. The last traceable remains at Megiddo are from about 450 bce. Nearly 400 Phoenician ivories have been found at the site, showing influences from various culture areas of the Middle East.”<sup>20</sup>

So, what has this got to do with Jesus building His church? Well, remember that at the time of Jesus what He did Caesarea Phillippi was a physical place, but we need to remember that it was also an evil spiritual place known as the ‘Gates of Hell.’ Although the physical place of Caesarea Phillippi (Panias) still physically exists, there are no further sacrifices made in that place. However, we need to have our eyes opened and see it from a spiritual perspective. Jesus said that,

“Upon this rock, I will build My church, and all the powers the city gates of hell will not be able to withstand the constant attack” (Matt 16:18 NLT).

Jesus began the work of building His everlasting city made up of His church right on top of hell. So, after His death, burial; resurrection and ascension He began reigning over His Kingdom as the rightful King of kings. It has been said regarding His church that,

“Because the foundation of the Church is the deity of Jesus Christ, the church is indestructible.”<sup>21</sup>

He will lead His Church and the ‘Gates of Hell,’ or the place of centralised evil will not prevail. So then, behind the idea that the ‘Gates of Hell’ will not prevail “means ‘to be strong to another another’s detriment to overpower.”<sup>22</sup> The ‘Gates of Hell’ was the unseen evil spiritual realm ruled over by Satan who was overseeing the council of evil and death. However, the real unseen ruling spiritual realm that will prevail is not Satan’s domain, but that of Jesus Christ through His church. So as it has been said,

“It is the Church that Jesus sees as the aggressor. He was declaring war on evil and death. Jesus would build His Church atop the gates of hell – He would bury them.”<sup>23</sup>

Jesus has been building His church on the ruins of hell. In fact, Jesus has been using the broken, cracked, chipped, burnt and ruined stones from the city of hell. On this, Peter said in his first letter that,

<sup>4</sup> “You are coming to Christ, who is the living cornerstone of God’s temple. He was rejected by people, but He was chosen by God for great honour. <sup>5</sup> And you are living stones that God is building into His spiritual temple. What’s more, you are His holy priests. Through the mediation of Jesus Christ, you offer spiritual sacrifices that please God” (1 Pet 2:4-5 NLT).

<sup>20</sup> “Megiddo.” <https://www.britannica.com/place/Megiddo> (24<sup>th</sup> May 2017).

<sup>21</sup> Wuest, Kenneth S. *Wuest’s Word Studies: Golden Nuggets from the Greek New Testament for the English Reader*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1966), 55.

<sup>22</sup> Wuest, Kenneth S. *Wuest’s Word Studies: Treasures from the Greek New Testament for the English Reader*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1966), 47.

<sup>23</sup> Heiser, *I Dare You Not to Bore Me with the Bible*, 119.

So, all Christ-followers are redeemed stones from the kingdom of Satan and his city. This is the city on which Jesus Christ is building His city of the Kingdom His church. Paul has said that,

“For He (the Father) has rescued us (once and for all) from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us (once and for all) into the Kingdom of His dear Son” (Col 1:13 NLT).

So, we need to see things from this perspective. We need a kingdom of heaven perspective that sees His church as His city on a hill burying and built on the ruins of hell. He is using living stones to build His church the place where His Spirit lives. We need to bring the broken, cracked, chipped, burnt and ruined stones from the city of hell to the Master Builder and let Him repair these stones and then place them within the city of the Church of Jesus Christ.

## Some concluding thoughts

So, coming back to the opening question,

**Q.** Why did Jesus leave Israel to reveal to His followers who He was and His mission?

When Jesus said “I will build My church,” He meant “I” will build it and not “us.” Church history reflects Him doing this very thing. But it also reflects when we have gotten in the way or done things our way. We have put up divisions in His church where there was not meant to be one, painted in colours that He never chose, and brought in rules and regulations for living in His new city of the church that He never approved.

We were given a role, and that was to go out into the world and collect stones for the new city. We are collect the broken, cracked, chipped, burnt and ruined stones from the city of hell and bring them to the Master Builder for His used to build His church. Jesus’ intention is to bury hell under the His building, that is, His church. Who are the broken, cracked, chipped, burnt and ruined stones from the city of hell that we can bring to Jesus to use in His new city? That is the ones that can become the living stones that He is building into His spiritual temple. Remember that, the Father has rescued us (once and for all) from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us (once and for all) into the Kingdom of His dear Son.

We need to simply obey Jesus’ instruction and go out into the world with the Good News of the Kingdom of God and point the broken, cracked, chipped, burnt and ruined stones to the Master Builder for His use. It’s time we stopped trying to do what we were never meant to do, that is, build His church. That is Jesus’ role; ours is to make Christ-followers. It is the Church that Jesus sees as the aggressor. He was declaring war on evil and death. Jesus would build His Church atop the gates of hell – He would bury them.

We have already been “rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of His dear Son” (Col 1:13), but there are many who are still to be rescued and transferred. Have we lost our passion for our role and been attempting to do Jesus’ work? It is time for His church, to as John Wesley said,

“Light yourself on fire with passion and people will come for miles to watch you burn.”<sup>24</sup>

It has been rightly said that,

“Here we are in May of the year of our Lord, 2017 -- and the stakes are high. Very high. The Christian ministry has never been for the faint of heart. The ministry, biblically defined, is

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<sup>24</sup> Halcombm, Michael, T. W. *Kingdom Rhetoric: New Testament Explorations in Honor of Ben Witherington III*. (Eugene, OR: Wipf, 2013), x.

combat duty in spiritual warfare. We have been prepared to be front-line soldier and officers in that warfare. Today is a reminder of our commissioning when we were born again. We are sent out as ambassadors of the Gospel of Christ, as heralds of the Kingdom that cannot be shaken, as stewards of the mysteries of Christ, and good soldiers of King Jesus. In the centuries since the apostles, the ministry has not changed, the assignment has never changed, but the context has changed and changed and changed again.”<sup>25</sup>

We have taken a quick look backwards into the history of the ‘Gates of Hell,’ with the intention of a long look into the future for the Kingdom of heaven to effect the present.

“But as we went, we joined a line of faithfulness that reaches back to Moses and Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, John the Baptist and John the Evangelist, Peter and Philip, Paul and Apollos. It extends through generations punctuated by names such as Athanasius and Augustine, Luther and Calvin, Whitfield and Wesley, Owens and Edwards, Spurgeon and Moody.”<sup>26</sup> Then there’s Billy Graham, Don and Betty Dawson, Ken and Susan Hooper, Jim and Jan Jung, you and me...and so it goes on until His second coming.

Some start something others finish. Some plant and others water the fields of Christ. Some lay a foundation others build on that foundation. Jesus has been building His church on the ruins of hell. We need to be bringing Him stones to add to His building. So, in and through it all remember what Jesus said,

“This is the massive rock on which I will put together My church, a church so expansive with energy that not even the gates of hell will not be able to withstand the constant attack and keep it out, but will be buried!” (Matt 16:18).

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<sup>25</sup> Mohler, Albert. “As It Had Been the Face of an Angel” — A Commission for God’s Messengers.” (May 22, 2017). <http://www.christianheadlines.com/> (Accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2017).

<sup>26</sup> Mohler, Albert. “As It Had Been the Face of an Angel” — A Commission for God’s Messengers.” (May 22, 2017). <http://www.christianheadlines.com/> (Accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2017).