

JESUS DECLARES WAR

Matthew 16:13-20; Mark 8:27-30; Luke 9:18-21
Yeshua §85

Cathy and I had a rough two years of dating. Toward the end, I was looking for a decision from Cathy. I communicated clearly my desire to marry her, but she was indecisive still not sure about marriage and still thinking she might want to be a missionary. Long story short, to my great joy, Cathy decided she did want to marry me. Once she made that decision things kicked into gear and five months later, we were married.

As we will see in our study today, Jesus sought a decision from His disciples. Once made, Jesus responds with a decision of His own.

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MATTHEW 16:13–20 (ESV)

13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" 14 And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." 15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" 16 Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. 18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." 20 Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

JESUS' FIRST QUESTION TO HIS DISCIPLES

MATTHEW 16:13–14 (ESV)

13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" 14 And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

Jesus wanted to know from His men what they were hearing. In general, people were putting Jesus on par with the great prophets, but they didn't recognize Him as the Messiah.

Jesus then put the same question to the disciples.

JESUS' SECOND QUESTION TO HIS DISCIPLES

MATTHEW 16:15–16 (ESV)

15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" 16 Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Simon Peter served as the spokesman for the disciples. Peter emphatically declared his conviction that Jesus is the Messiah.¹

JESUS DECLARES WAR

MATTHEW 16:17–18 (ESV)

17 And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. 18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

Obviously Jesus was pleased with Peter's response and declares him blessed for having been given this understanding by his heavenly Father.

In verse 18, Jesus used a play on the word *rock*. As we will see, the place they were standing was full of rocks. The name *Peter* is from the Greek word *petros*. *Petros* is a masculine noun; it refers to a stone that can be held in one's hand.

Rock, as in the phrase, "and on this rock I will build my church", is *petra*. *Petra* is a feminine noun; it refers to a huge rock. It is the word that would be used to refer to Half Dome in Yosemite.

The rock to which Jesus referred could not be Peter because of the grammar and because *petros* and *petra* have different meanings.

So Peter was not the rock on which Jesus will build His church.

Some believe that Peter's confession, *You are the Christ, the Son of the living God* is the rock on which Jesus will build His church. And that's possible.

But I want to suggest a third possibility.

¹ *Christ* is the Greek equivalent for the Hebrew *Mashiach* (Messiah, Anointed One). *Son of the living God* is a Messianic phrase based on Messianic passages like Psalm 2.

The rock to which Jesus referred was neither Peter nor Peter's confession about Jesus; it was the rock on which they were standing!

They were standing in both a region and a place called *the gates of hell*!

Matthew 16:13 tells us that Jesus and His disciples were in Caesarea Philippi.

Caesarea Philippi was situated at the base of Mt. Hermon, the highest peak in Israel and the primary source for the Jordan River. In the Old Testament, this area was known as Bashan.

According to the Old Testament, Bashan was controlled by two kings—Sihon and Og—who were associated with the ancient giant clans: the Rephaim and the Anakim (Deut. 2:10–12; Josh 12:1–5). The two main cities of their kingdom were Ashtaroth and Edrei, home to the Rephaim (Deut. 3:1, 10–11; Josh 12:4–5).

These cities and their Rephaim inhabitants are mentioned by name in Canaanite cuneiform tablets written by the Ugarit people. The people of Ugarit believed the Rephaim were the spirits of dead warrior-kings. They also believed that the cities of Ashtaroth and Edrei were the entryway to the Underworld—the gates of Sheol.

It was here, at the outset of the divided kingdom, that Jeroboam set up a golden calf to create a religious center where Israelites could worship without having to return to Jerusalem (1 Kings 12:25–33).

For the disciples, Bashan was an evil, demonic area. According to Jewish tradition, Mt. Hermon was the location where the pre-Flood “sons of God” (demons) descended from heaven to carry out Satan's campaign to defeat the prophesy of Gen. 3:15. These demons came to corrupt mankind by having offspring with human women (Gen 6:1–4). These offspring were the Nephilim; they were the ancestors of the Anakim and the Rephaim—the people of Bashan (Num 13:30–33).

To make the region darker still, Caesarea Philippi was the center of worship for Pan, the god of nature; half man half goat. And it was a center for the worship of Zeus.

Just north of Caesarea Philippi looms a huge cliff. At the base of the cliff there is a cave out of which a large river flowed. Today the river is called the Banyas and it is much smaller than in biblical times. An earthquake over a century ago moved the main source of the river to another location nearby. It is one of the four sources of the Jordan river.

The significance of the cave for our study is that the locals believed that that cave was a gateway into Hades, the underworld. It was there they built temples to Pan and Zeus and participated in cultic worship involving blood sacrifices, drunkenness and sexual orgies. It was a stronghold of demonic activity.

Jesus and His disciples were literally at the place called *the Gates of Hades* or as we would say it in English, *the Gates of Hell*.

The rock to which Jesus referred was definitely not Peter and probably not Peter's confession about Jesus. More likely, it was the rock on which they were standing. They were standing in Satan's territory and it is in Satan's territory Jesus intends to build His church.² It was a declaration of war.

What did Jesus mean when He said, "...and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it?" Does He mean that the Church will survive the attacks of Satan and his evil forces? Possibly. But what we don't realize is that the word "against" is not present in the Greek. Translating the phrase without it gives it a completely different connotation: "the gates of hell *will not withstand it*."

In other words, Jesus sees the Church taking the battle to Satan, not just surviving Satan's attacks. It is the Church that Jesus sees as the aggressor. Satan and his evil forces will not be able to stop the Church.

Now that Peter and the other disciples are fully convinced Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus can kick things into gear. Peter and the other disciples will be the foundation of Jesus' Church and they will establish the Church through their eyewitness testimony to the life, teachings, blood sacrifice, death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah.

In light of the disciples' decision, Jesus declares war; He will build His Church atop the gates of hell and bury them.

² Notice the Church is future. The Church was born on Pentecost 33AD. It did not exist in the Old Testament contrary to Reformed, amillennial, replacement teaching.