

"Who do You say that I am?"

Caesarea Philippi

Mt. Hermon

. The snow-capped Mt. Hermon, located in the northern most part of Israel, is the highest peak in Israel and is at the southern end of a range of mountains that extend up thru Lebanon. The three countries of Israel, Lebanon, and Syria have a common border on Mt. Hermon which rises to over 9,000 ft above sea level. Mt. Hermon is mentioned many times in the Old Testament Beginning in Deut. 3:8. Although Mt. Hermon is not mentioned in the New Testament by name, it is thought that this was probably the mountain of the transfiguration of Jesus, since He was in this area just a few days earlier, and the place is identified as a 'high' mountain (**Matt 17:1**).

Matt 17:1 After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.

Caesarea Philippi, located on the southwestern slopes of Mt. Hermon, was originally named Panias in honor of the mythological Greek god Pan, who was worshipped by some ancient peoples who lived in this area. This area was considered to be the center of idolatrous worship for many years, including the period that Jesus was here. There are statues, or idols, carved into the sides of the rock facing around cave from which the water flows – considered by many to be the 'outlet of evil' into the world for many years, and a 'worship center' to many gods over the years to combat this evil.

"Caesarea Philippi" means the Caesarea of Philip. Philip the tetrarch (ruler or governor of a fourth of the Roman Empire) rebuilt the ancient city of Panias, calling it Caesarea in honor of Caesar Augustus. The designation differentiates this Caesarea from other cities of the same name. (The main city of Caesarea is the Roman city on the Mediterranean Sea coast built by Kings Herod & Agrippa [Acts 25]). This is the only recorded journey Jesus took into the territory of Philip. Near this location is the Spring of Banias (or Panias), which flows from a cave in Mt. Hermon, and is one of the

three primary sources of the Jordan River, all of which are located on or close to Mt. Hermon.

(Mat 16:13-19 NIV) When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" {14} They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." {15} "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" {16} Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." {17} Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. {18} And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. {19} I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

Peter has come a long way since their first encounter, but note how this response compares with a later event recorded in **Matt 26: 69-75:**

⁶⁹ Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. "You also were with Jesus of Galilee," she said.

⁷⁰ But he denied it before them all. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said.

⁷¹ Then he went out to the gateway, where another servant girl saw him and said to the people there, "This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth."

⁷² He denied it again, with an oath: "I don't know the man!"

⁷³ After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, "Surely you are one of them; your accent gives you away."

⁷⁴ Then he began to call down curses, and he swore to them, "I don't know the man!"

Immediately a rooster crowed. ⁷⁵ Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: "Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly.

In spite of a strong faith, have we, or someone we know, had a relapse of faith during some serious trial or difficulty? Perhaps we have asked ourself, "Can He forgive me again?" 70 x 7

The city of Dan was also located near Mt. Hermon, about four miles west of Pnias, but the city no longer exists. In the Old Testament nation of Israel, Dan was the most northern city as was referenced in the phrase, "from Dan to Beersheba" (**Jud 20:1; 1 Sam 3:20**).

Representing "all of Israel" – from extreme north to the extreme south Presently, two streams merge at this location and become another of the three primary sources of the Jordan River. There's actually four sources, but the fourth is not consistent, so not a major source.

All of this area north of the Sea of Galilee and east of the Jordan River, **between Lebanon & Syria**, is today known as the **Golan Heights** which was taken from Syria by Israel during the 1967 Six Day war. This fertile plateau is 1000-3000 feet in elevation and is a very productive area of farmlands. The city of **Golan was originally in this area** which was assigned to the half-tribe of Manasseh, and identified as the territory in Bashan to the east of the Jordan River in the northern area of Palestine (**Deut 4:41- 43; Josh 21:27; 1 Chron 6:71**) It was one of the six cities of refuge for the nation of Israel (**Josh 20:8**). The actual location of the city of Golan is today unknown.

As you drive the final 5-10 miles north to the west of the Jordan River, the road parallels the Lebanon border, and Lebanonise towns can be seen. Yellow signs on the barbwire fence along the highway warn of landmines, and a ready military is observed. All Israelis serve a three-year term in the active military, and then are in the reserves until about age 60, so technically almost every Israelite is in the military. The full-time military personnel always carry their weapons, even when dressed in civilian clothes. Reservist Israelis are allowed to carry arms. So it was not unusual to see many of the men, and some women, with a rifle over their shoulder, or a pistol stuck in their belt or back pocket; especially, as you got closer to some of the borders which have a greater potential of military or activist conflict.

Jesus told Peter (matt 16:17) that God had revealed to them the fact that Jesus was the Son of God, and they had also observed many miracles first hand. But we have this recorded to allow us to believe:

(John 20:28-31 NIV) Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" {29} Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." {30} Jesus did many other

miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. {31} But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

(1 Pet 1:8 NIV) Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,

Several thoughts to consider:

- (1) Is the nation of Israel (or the Jewish descendants) still God's chosen people?
- (2) Will the land of Israel (Jerusalem) ever again be a place of power for God's people?

(2 Ki 17:18-20 NIV) So the LORD was very angry with Israel and removed them from his presence. Only the tribe of Judah was left, {19} and even Judah did not keep the commands of the LORD their God. They followed the practices Israel had introduced. {20} Therefore the LORD rejected all the people of Israel; he afflicted them and gave them into the hands of plunderers, until he thrust them from his presence.

(Psa 44:9-14 NIV) But now you have rejected and humbled us; you no longer go out with our armies. {10} You made us retreat before the enemy, and our adversaries have plundered us. {11} You gave us up to be devoured like sheep and have scattered us among the nations. {12} You sold your people for a pittance, gaining nothing from their sale. {13} You have made us a reproach to our neighbors, the scorn and derision of those around us. {14} You have made us a byword among the nations; the peoples shake their heads at us.

But, what about God's promises to Abraham, Isaac & Jacob?

A – Gen 17: ; I – Gen 26: & J – Gen 35:

(Gal 3:26-29 NIV) You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, {27} for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. {28} There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. {29} If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Additional notes:

The main city of Caesarea is on the Mediterranean coast, and is also referred to as Herod's Caesarea built about 10 BC.

- Many Roman ruins including a large amphitheater, an amazing sea port (mostly under water today) and many Roman statues.
- Peter went to Caesarea to teach Cornelus (Acts 10)
- Paul returned to Caesarea at end of 3rd missionary journey & visited Philip (Acts 21:8) ⁸Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven.
- Phillip was one of the 7 appointed in Acts 6 to care for the widows
- After being arrested, Paul was taken to Caesarea by the Roman Gov. Festus (Acts 25) and then appeared before King Agrippa, himself.
- King Herod also constructed an aqua duct across the desert to carry water from the mountain streams to this area – a raised river bed, similar to a modern highway, except a water trough! About 10 km in distance; built during the 1st century AD