

# WHO AM I?

“You’re the Son of the Living God! The Messiah!”

## Caesarea Philippi

Originally named Paneas, this city sits at the base of Mount Hermon in Northern Israel and is now known as Baneas. Named for the Roman god Pan, the god of the wilderness, Philippi was then dedicated to Emperor Augustus by Philip, son of Herod the Great.

## Local Temples

Baneas contains many temples to gods, the primary of which is to Pan, god of shepherds and the wilderness. Other temples are dedicated to Augustus Caesar, Zeus, Nemesis, and the Sacred Goats.

## The Gates of Hell

The Temple of Pan includes a large grotto from which water used to stream heavily from a spring. The spring still runs and provides one of three sources for the Jordan River. Sacrifices of goats were made by throwing the goat into the spring which became known as, “The Gates of Hell.”



## Matthew 16:13-20

<sup>13</sup> Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” <sup>14</sup> And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” <sup>15</sup> He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” <sup>16</sup> Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” <sup>17</sup> And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. <sup>18</sup> And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades





## Jesus as Divine, Second Person of the Trinity

Traditional Christian belief is that Jesus is the Christ, the Son (or, second person of the Trinity) of God. Jesus is fully divine and fully human. A mystery, yes. Unfathomable, perhaps. True?

## Jesus as Human: Prophet, Miracle Worker, Teacher

Another perspective is that Jesus was simply human and especially gifted by God to shape the world, much like Ghandi, King, and many others. This was a major struggle for persons during Jesus' life and ministry; his claims of divine nature being cast as heresy. This concept did not preclude Jesus as Messiah for Jews of his day.

## Jesus as Divine, Not Human

Gnostics in the mid-first-century believed that Jesus was only divine and not human at all. To them, Jesus only appeared human, appeared to die.

will not prevail against it. <sup>19</sup> I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” <sup>20</sup> Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. (1989). (Mt 16:13–20). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

### *Jesus: Who is he to me?*

Jesus began the discussion in Caesarea Philippi with a question about other people's opinions—“Who do others say that I am?” The answers varied according to local understandings of important people. Was Jesus the reincarnation or risen John the Baptist or the risen Elijah? There are many answers still today: teacher, prophet, madman.

What other people think about Jesus isn't really important. As Jesus asked the question, “Who do you say that I am?” to his disciples, he asks of each of us today. Take a moment and ask yourself, “Who is Jesus to me?” Write down a few titles for Jesus that apply to your own life.

## Titles for Jesus:

Peter proclaimed Jesus, the Messiah (Anointed One) and Son of the Living God. This testimony to Jesus' identity is similar to what demons had said earlier in the ministry of Christ. Proclaiming him Messiah, or Christ, is a spiritual confession that Jesus is indeed sent by God specifically. "Son of the Living God," is a proclamation that has deep connotations, especially in Caesarea Philippi, where Philipp, the son of Augustus Caesar built a temple to his father, considered in Roman tradition a "living god."

In the midst of a grouping of pagan temples, why do you think Jesus asks the disciples, "Who am I?"

What are the "gods" of this generation? Where do you think Jesus might stand and ask us this question?

Do you believe Jesus asks the question to contrast devotion to other Gods? Explain your answer.

Lastly, how does your answer to Jesus' question about your understanding of his identity impact the "hold" other concepts/people/things have on you?

## Letting loose...

Jesus tells Peter that "what you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven..."

What kind of responsibility do you think this is? What is Jesus conferring on Peter?

How do you think Peter felt at this moment?

## How did they react?

Jesus' reaction to Peter's proclamation was one of simple confirmation. How do you think the disciples felt when they heard Jesus essentially proclaim himself Messiah?

How do you think they felt about Jesus instructions to Peter?