

Opening Thoughts

The Very Words of God

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Matthew 16:24 - 26

Think About It

Think for a moment about how Christians today view the church and the ways in which it impacts culture.

Would you say the church is on the offensive against evil, or has it taken a defensive position? Explain your answer and how you think it influences the ability of the church and the Christian community to impact culture for Christ.

DVD Teaching Notes

Pagan influence in Caesarea Philippi

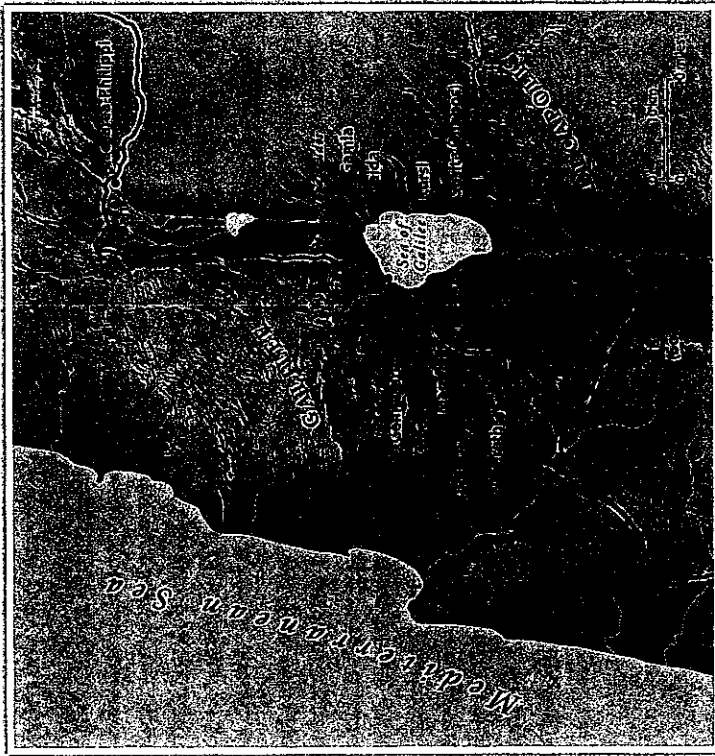
Jesus' message to his disciples

Lesson 3 -

Gates of Hades (Hell)

The mission of the church

On the map below note how far Caesarea Philippi was from Capernaum and the Sea of Galilee. Note also Mount Hermon, the beginnings of the Jordan River, and the city of Dan.



SEA OF GALILEE

1. What do you think the disciples might have been thinking as they traveled with Jesus to Caesarea Philippi — on the way there *and* on the way back?

2. Which images in this video — the flowing water, the cave, the “rock of the gods,” the “gates of Hades” — made the greatest impact on you and your understanding of Jesus and his message? Why?

3. How does the perspective that the church is to take the offensive rather than the defensive against evil, as represented by the “gates of Hades,” affect your view of ministry? How do you think it affected the disciples' view?

IDENTITY PROFILE

Who Was Baal?

- The fertility god of the Canaanites.
- Considered to be the supreme god because he had defeated the sea god and so controlled the sea and could prevent storms.
- Believed to have power over weather.
- Often depicted as a man with the head and horns of a bull, carrying a lightning bolt in his hand(s).
- Attractive to his followers because of his supposed ability to provide rain in a dry country.
- Supposedly went to the land of the dead, the underworld, each year and returned to bring rain to the earth and create abundant harvests.
- Was appeased through sacrifices, usually animals (1 Kings 18:23), although during times of crisis Baal's followers sometimes sacrificed their children (Deuteronomy 12:31; 18:9–11).
- Thought to have a mistress, Asherah—the fertility goddess. Believing that the sexual union of Baal and Asherah produced fertility, pagan worshippers engaged in immoral sex to entice the gods to join together and ensure good harvests.

Small Group Bible Discovery and Discussion

Our Hope Is in the Living God!

When the Israelites entered the Promised Land, they found a land of farmers who attributed its fertility to their god, Baal. The Israelites experienced their God in the desert and were easily enticed by the fertility gods of Canaan. They sometimes worshiped the God who had guided them to the Promised Land, sometimes worshiped the fertility gods, and sometimes worshiped both. As was true in ancient times, God's people still face the same choice: will we be totally committed to the one true, living God or will we place our trust in the dead "gods" of the places we inhabit?

Session Three: Gates of Hades (Hell)

1. What is the difference between the living God and idols such as Pan, the fertility god worshiped in Caesarea Philippi? (See Jeremiah 10:1–16.)
2. In the following passages, note the ways in which the living God of Israel demonstrated his supremacy over Baal, the dead god of the Canaanites.

Scripture Text	God's Power Demonstrated
Josh. 3:9–17	
Judg. 5:19–21	
1 Kings 17:1; 18:1, 21–45	
2 Kings 2:8, 11–14, 19–22	

DID YOU KNOW?

Water played a focal role in many confrontations between God and his people and Baal and the Canaanite people. Why? Perhaps it had to do with how ancient people viewed their natural world in relationship to their gods. For example, in the minds of ancient people, to have life you must have water. Life comes from god, so where there is water, there must be god. So when God stopped the Jordan River, withheld rain, or caused floods, it was more than a demonstration of his control over nature; it was an attack on the heart of pagan beliefs because it showed that his power was greater than that of the pagan gods.

3. After God led them into the Promised Land, what did the Israelites do? (See Judges 2:10 - 13.)

How did God respond to them, and how do you think he responds to us when we abandon our commitment to the living God?

4. What are some of the dead "gods" that people in our culture worship, and in what ways do these gods contrast with the true, living God?

5. In what ways do you see the community of Christians simply coexisting with, rather than confronting, the gods of this world?

What message(s) about the living God do we send to people around us when we don't stand against the gods of this world?

Memorize

This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance (and for this we labor and strive), that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe. 1 Timothy 4:9