

Liberty University

**Beyond Galilee: The Shift in Focus of the Ministry of Jesus Culminating at Caesarea  
Philippi**

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Beyond Galilee: The Shift in Focus of the Ministry of Jesus Culminating at Caesarea Philippi

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A Three-Fold Dedication:

To Dr. Douglas Bookman, whose extensive studies on the life of Christ inspired much of this

work;

To my Grandmother Helen, who spent her life in the study of Christ and the Bible and inspired

me to do the same;

And to my husband Anthony, whose encouragement and counsel led me to pursue higher

education, and whose leadership and wisdom continue to guide and teach me.

## **Abstract**

A study of the travels of Christ leads to new insights about his ministry and ministry foci at different times in his life. By segmenting the life of Christ into three major portions – public ministry, private ministry, and mixed-focus ministry – the reasons behind Christ’s different attitudes toward crowds and miracles and his different emphases in his sermons become clearer. Portions of the Gospels are better understood with this segmentation. The locations that Jesus traveled to and stayed in also play a part in understanding his motives. At times, Jesus was keen to show himself to the crowds, doing very large and public miracles such as feeding thousands of people or performing miraculous healings in largely Jewish areas. At other times, he took individuals away for private healings and requested they keep the miracles private. These more private encounters find Jesus in more barren, Gentile areas.

Despite spending much of his early ministry in Galilee, Jesus began to travel to less populated and more Gentile areas about halfway through his ministry. His focus switched from seeking out crowds to seeking out alone time with his twelve disciples. This marks the transition from public to private ministry in Christ’s life and is the focus of study for this dissertation. Jesus was able to accomplish an important discussion with the disciples at Caesarea Philippi, which was also the site of Peter’s confession and Christ’s transfiguration. These events are important conclusions to Jesus’s private, focused ministry with the disciples.

The times Jesus spent among the crowds as well as those times marked by close personal ministry to his disciples show his changing ministry focus throughout his life and lend important insights to a study of the life of Christ.

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## Chapter 1: Methodology and Goals

### Introduction

The life of Christ is a broad area of study which lends itself well to both personal discipleship and academic scholarship. While much has been done to contribute to this study, there is always more to learn and discover about the Messiah's life and impact during his time on earth. The topic to be studied in the dissertation relates the differentiation between Jesus's public and private ministries, especially as reflected in his travels around and beyond Galilee. Jesus's public ministry ended when he left Galilee after the feeding of the five thousand and he turned his attention to the disciples. A close reading of the narrative especially in Mark 6–9 reveals this change in ministry focus, and Jesus's travels further from Jewish and populated areas support the idea that Jesus was turning his attention to the Twelve.

During his time in Galilee, Jesus was a very public figure. He kept himself in areas of high Jewish concentration in the region and was a well-known individual in the public eye. The Pharisees and Sadducees in Jerusalem knew who he was (Matt. 22, Mark 3), and he became something of a folk hero in the more rural areas of Galilee. Jesus was ever ready to present himself to the crowds, doing very public miracles (Matt. 8, Mark 3) and teaching large masses of people (Mark 8). For example, Jesus often taught in local synagogues, and it was one of these public teachings which first added to his growing fame (Mark 1:21–28). Jesus's teachings were given with authority, and his miracles only further attracted the crowds. Jesus was keen to spread his name and message throughout Galilee and to saturate the land with his two-fold claim to be both Messiah and God come in the flesh (Mark 1:38). However, this all changed about two years into Jesus's ministry. After the feeding of the five thousand (Matt. 14, Mark 6), the Gospels of Matthew and Mark and to a lesser extent Luke show Jesus making further and further trips

around Galilee and crisscrossing the region in an attempt to dodge the crowds which followed him and spend time privately with the twelve disciples (Matt. 15–16, Mark 7–8). Jesus was hesitant to perform miracles, and when prompted to do a miracle he asked that the miracle be kept quiet (Mark 8:22–26). These instances are often given by some scholars to support the idea of a “Messianic secret,” in which Jesus was hesitant and even reluctant to claim Messiahship.<sup>1</sup> However, when Jesus’s public ministry is taken into account and read chronologically, it is clear that Jesus was merely changing ministry directions. Earlier in his ministry, he was very public with his claims to Messiahship, and the reactions of the crowds as well as the Jerusalem religious elite show that these claims were understood by those who heard them (Matt. 7:28–29; Mark 7:37, 8:11). In other words, no one doubted that Jesus claimed Messiahship. Jesus shifted tactics partway through his ministry, however, and when anyone proclaimed that he was Messiah Jesus asked that they stay quiet. His attention was turning to the disciples and their faith in him. The narrative reaches its climax when Jesus took the Twelve to the distant region of Syro-Phoenicia, near the very pagan and Gentile city of Caesarea Philippi. This city was known for its history of idol worship, and more recently in Jesus’s day the addition of emperor worship. Jesus brought the Twelve there to inquire of their faith in him, to tell them about his coming death on the cross, and to encourage their hearts and his in the transfiguration.<sup>2</sup>

Though the travels of Jesus are the focus of this dissertation, some introductory matters must first be addressed. A harmonization of the Gospel accounts is important in reconciling differences in narratives among the Gospels and coming away with the fullest picture of events

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<sup>1</sup> A few more well-known proponents of the Messianic secret view are William Wrede and David F. Watson.

<sup>2</sup> This paragraph is a compilation of information given by Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1999), and J. Dwight Pentecost, *A Harmony of the Words and Works of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981).

and details. Such a harmonization clarifies portions of the narratives which seem at odds with each other or do not fit perfectly together. Studying Christ's life and episodes which take place in his life, as well as recognizing patterns in ministry and travel, are what lead to successful harmonization. Proper harmonization also lends itself to an understanding of the chronology of the life of Christ, which is important to the study of this dissertation as well. Different Gospels give events in a different order, and not always chronologically. By harmonizing the accounts and establishing a chronology of the life of Christ, the same events may be studied in greater detail. Events which are not repeated in each Gospel are also given a place on the timeline and a fuller picture of the life of Christ emerges. Though a review of the early life and ministry of Christ will be given, the focus will remain on Jesus's larger public and private ministries and where the break between these two ministries happened. Similar to Christ's early years, the last year of Jesus's life will be given a brief treatment to round out the study of Christ's roughly three-year ministry. A final introductory matter concerns the geography of the land of Israel and plays a part in understanding the travels of Jesus. Jewish and Gentile areas, distances traveled between cities, and especially the great distance of Caesarea Philippi from Jewish districts give a better idea of Jesus's motives and the literal distance he was willing to go to have private time with his disciples. The geographical survey and timeline of events which happen in various places in the land will be included as an introductory matter as well.

After introductory matters, the dissertation will begin with a study of the travels of Jesus and purposes behind each segment of travel. This study will show the division of Jesus's ministry into public and private times, with his early ministry being public and later ministry private, or more focused on the Twelve. Next, the study will move to the area of Caesarea Philippi and its history as a worship site. Caesarea Philippi was used as a worship site since

ancient times and the progression of worship at the site from the Canaanites to the Greeks and Romans will support the idea of Caesarea Philippi as a completely pagan and infamous city in the minds of the disciples. This study will culminate in the addition of emperor worship by Herod the Great and the temple he built to Augustus. The purpose of this worship, and its effect on the area of Caesarea Philippi, will be included in this study. Finally, Jesus's conversation with the Twelve at Caesarea Philippi and the impact of the location on this conversation will be examined. This study will also include a consideration of the transfiguration and its purpose as it relates to the conversation at Caesarea Philippi. The goal of the study is to answer each question or exploration contained in the sections just listed, and to support the thesis statement. This study will add to the research being done regarding the life of Christ, and it is a further goal to publish this dissertation in the form of a monograph upon submission and successful defense.

The process of writing this dissertation is to take each chapter in turn, building upon each and reaching a natural and well-supported conclusion. An historical-grammatical method of exegesis will be used in the research on passages within Matthew 4–17, Mark 1–9, Luke 4–9, and John 1–6 with special focus on Matthew 14:15–17:9 and Mark 6:35–9:10. The dissertation will focus on Jesus's actions as he traveled further from Galilee, especially focusing on his drawing away to less Jewish areas and desire for more private healings or miracles. The historical use of Banias and Caesarea Philippi and what Jewish and Gentile people believed the site to be will also be included. The Bible and historical sources will be consulted, and ideas will be offered of where Jesus went in Syro-Phoenicia and how close to Caesarea Philippi he actually came, or if he went to the site directly. Finally, the conversation Jesus had with the Twelve at Caesarea Philippi will be studied, as will its importance and meaning given the location of the conversation and the purpose of Jesus's transfiguration following the conversation.

## Thesis

This dissertation will demonstrate the significance of Jesus's private instruction to the twelve disciples during the travel narratives in Mark 6–9 regarding the meaning of his death, burial, and resurrection.

## Review of Research

Several books on the life of Christ speak to Christ's travels outside of Galilee and his purposes behind these travels. *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* by Alfred Edersheim comments on Jesus's trip up to Caesarea Philippi with the twelve disciples and gives a few reasons for this lengthy journey away from Galilee.<sup>3</sup> *The Life of our Lord upon the Earth* by Samuel Andrews recognizes that Jesus went away from Galilee to teach and train his disciples.<sup>4</sup> Frederic Farrar comments on the retreat Christ made to Caesarea Philippi for his own renewal with the twelve disciples, and especially as that renewal pertains to the transfiguration.<sup>5</sup> Harmonies of the Gospels will also be used to establish a chronology of the life of Christ over the three Synoptic Gospels.<sup>6</sup> These literary sources give a helpful starting point for understanding Christ's travels in Matthew 14–17 and Mark 6–9, but these sources are overall very dated. The study of this dissertation will take the foundation provided by these and other authors and combine it with other sources as well as newer information to bring these ideas into more

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<sup>3</sup> Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. 1, 521.

<sup>4</sup> Samuel James Andrews, *The Life of Our Lord Upon the Earth: Considered in Its Historical, Chronological, and Geographical Relations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1954).

<sup>5</sup> Frederic W. Farrar, *The Life of Christ* (New York: Cassell Publishing, 1874), 26.

<sup>6</sup> Harmonies referenced are as follows: Robert L. Thomas and Stanley N. Gundry, *A Harmony of the Gospels* (San Francisco, HarperCollins, 1978); Steven L. Cox, Kendell H. Easley, A. T. Robertson, and John Albert Broadus, *Harmony of the Gospels* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2007); and A. T. Robertson, *A Harmony of the Gospels for Students of the Life of Christ* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1922).

contemporary times. This dissertation will also shed light on Christ's motives and purposes behind his travels and will give a helpful way to think about Christ's various ministry segments (namely as times of public and private ministry). One of the goals of this research is to add a more current study to the helpful but as mentioned older sources which exist on the subjects of Christ's travels and ministry objectives. By combining reliable but dated material, newer discoveries, and ideas arrived at during this study, a fuller picture of Christ's ministry and travels will come to life and will be a newer source for others to use in their own research journeys.

### **A Particular Review of Edersheim**

One of the most complete and thorough treatments of the life of Christ comes from the Reverend Alfred Edersheim (1825–1889). Published in two volumes, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* is a compendium of the life of Christ from the years leading up to the birth of Christ through his entire ministry and ascension as narrated in the Gospels. Volume 2 also includes a number of helpful related appendices, especially regarding the intertestamental period and Jewish beliefs and traditions. Edersheim wrote from a particularly helpful perspective as a converted Jewish man. As such he was familiar with the Jewish culture, which though ancient was also shared by Christ, as well as beliefs about Messiah which permeate even to the Jewish population today. Throughout his extensive work, Edersheim incorporated elements of rabbinic tradition and Jewish ideas and thoughts which his background as a Jewish scholar allowed him to weave throughout with ease. By writing from this point of view, Edersheim familiarized his readers with the Jewish context of Jesus and tied this context to what the Gospels narrate about Jesus's life and ministry.

As the work was originally published in 1883, the style of writing is rather different than what may be read in more modern works today, but such style nevertheless adds to the work as a

whole. Edersheim was very detailed and imagery-driven, allowing the reader to place himself on the dusty roads between Judean villages and imagine the sights and sounds of a busy festival day near the temple in Jerusalem. Though some artistic liberty may have been at work, Edersheim created a captivating and informative commentary on the events of the life of Christ. Not only that, but he also studied the deeper ideas communicated by Christ, such as the kingdom of heaven, Christ as the Jewish Messiah, and the messages of his sermons and parables. For the purposes of this dissertation, such insight is very valuable. A deep study into a particular time in the life of Christ is greatly helped by background information, cultural context, and connections between Jewish culture and messianic expectations to what Jesus said and did.

There are not many downsides to Edersheim's work other than its very old publishing date. Because it is such a thorough treatment of all areas of the life of Christ as well as useful background information, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* continues to be a helpful resource in a study of the life of Christ. One of the intentions behind this dissertation is to bring good and useful studies and arguments around the life of Christ, such as those found in *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, into the present day. There are more modern works which agree with Edersheim and which cover similar subjects, but none do so as thoroughly and completely as Edersheim. Various commentaries address specific issues and follow the biblical text, but lack the background information and narrative style of Edersheim. The treatment of the Gospels in the *Baker Commentary Series* as well as the *Understanding the Bible Commentary Series* are a few such adequate commentaries. These are excellent for addressing questions regarding the biblical text as well as connecting events of the Gospels. However, they do not integrate background information to the extent of Edersheim, nor do they give the unique Jewish or historical perspective as related to passages. Within his work, Edersheim also incorporated



timelines and chronologies. Again, these may be found as stand-alones in other works, but not so seamlessly incorporated as they are in *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. Harold Hoehner's *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, though another somewhat dated work, is one such chronology. This study in particular is immensely helpful in establishing a chronology of the life of Christ, though like any work dealing with chronology readers may find disagreement with some of his placement.<sup>7</sup> Again however, Hoehner's *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* is not interlaced with explanations and imagery of the events of the Gospels as is Edersheim's *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*.

Two places where Edersheim's *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* was particularly helpful regarding Jesus's ministry foci and travels was in its study of Mark 1 and Mark 6—9. As will be discussed throughout this dissertation, a shift occurred in Jesus's ministry between public and private ministry, which is seen in Mark 6—9. Among other clues to this shift, Jesus began to ask those he performed miracles for to keep quiet about the miracle, in order to not attract attention and to gain private time with his disciples. Some will note, however, that there are instances before Mark 6 in which Jesus did not wish his identity to be known. This leads to the idea of the Messianic secret, which will be discussed in a later section. However, in relation to Edersheim, he gives a treatment of this issue in *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* which allows for an earlier prohibition of Messianic acknowledgment and a later shift to privacy. In Mark 1:21–28, Jesus healed a man with an unclean spirit. During the exorcism, the demon acknowledged Jesus as “the Holy One of God,” and was told to “be silent” by Jesus (Mark 1:24–

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<sup>7</sup> One such place of disagreement per this dissertation is Hoehner's layout of passion week, namely that the triumphal entry took place on Monday instead of Sunday.

25).<sup>8</sup> Later, Mark 1:32–34 explains that the whole city of Capernaum was gathered at the door of the house where Jesus was staying, and “all who were sick or oppressed by demons” were brought to him (Mark 1:32). Jesus healed many and cast out many demons, “and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him” (Mark 1:34).

These two episodes describe Jesus forbidding the demons to say that he is the Messiah, but these events take place during Jesus’s public ministry. Edersheim explains that a confession of the Christ coming from the mouth of a demon “was wholly unfitting and incongruous.”<sup>9</sup> He goes on to remind the reader that Jesus had already been confessed by John the Baptist and by the Father himself; “it was not by such voices [as those of the demons] that He would have His Messiahship ever proclaimed.”<sup>10</sup> Such explanation is sufficient for the confession of demons, but only a dozen verses later in Mark 1 Jesus again requested silence regarding his identity, and this time from a cleansed leper. In Mark 1:40–45, Jesus cleansed a leper and told him to tell no one of the miracle, but to show himself to the priest (Mark 1:43–44). The man, however, “went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news” so much so that Jesus could not even enter a town for the crowds, but had to go to outlying rural areas and allow the crowd to come to him (Mark 1:45). The reasons for Jesus’s prohibition to the man are again given succinctly by Edersheim. As a law-abiding Jewish man, Jesus encouraged the man to follow the Mosaic law and go immediately to the priest to follow the rituals of cleansing as laid out in Leviticus 14.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the English Standard Version (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. 1, 323.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 332.

Even more pertinent to this study, Edersheim also highlights the background events of this cleansing.

After a very busy time in Capernaum, and after word began to spread of this miracle-worker, the Jewish authorities began to show an interest in Jesus. Beginning in Mark 2 (cf. Luke 5), the scribes followed Jesus and questioned him, thus beginning their ever-present badgering and at times harassment of Jesus as he spoke to the crowds and performed miracles. It is likely there was already a small band watching this miracle, and sending this man to “submit to all the requirements of the Law...was His testimony unto them [the scribes].”<sup>12</sup> Such an explanation allows for the strategic plans of Jesus, who knew his enemies and the people he ministered to, as well as his ultimate goals. Jesus epitomized his advice to his own disciples in Matthew 10:16 to “be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.” He knew the confessions of demons did nothing to aid his ministry or presentation to the people of Israel, he knew the intentions of the crowds when they would make him a king prematurely which would attract the attention of Rome, and he knew the scheming of his enemies and how to evade them in his answers and travels. From the start of his ministry, Jesus desired to publicly present himself as the Messiah of Israel, and to do so as completely and fully as possible. This required careful speech and location choices so he could reach as many as possible with his message without running into trouble which would halt his ministry prematurely. The travels of Jesus are another area of study which show this ministry progression, and where Edersheim is again helpful.

At the close of Jesus’s public ministry, Jesus had just fed the crowd of five thousand people and went away from them quickly as “they were about to come and take him by force to make him king” (John 6:15). On the next day, he told the crowd that he was the bread of life

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<sup>12</sup> Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. 1, 333.

from heaven and many turned away from the man they would have made a king only the day before (John 6:66). Here lays the rejection of Christ by the people and the beginning of his ministry shift from public to private and a focus on his twelve disciples.<sup>13</sup> A tracing of the travels of Christ takes him further and further from his previous locations in Galilee, surrounded by the crowds, to remote and desolate Gentile places where, if he was recognized, he quickly departed. From Syro-Phoenicia to the Decapolis, Jesus was consistently recognized and appealed to for miracles, to which he obliged. Nevertheless, his mission to the Twelve remained at the forefront of his mind. Even in Gentile regions he was recognized, and his fame as Messiah continued to spread.<sup>14</sup> As he continued to travel back and forth across the Sea of Galilee, he was continually recognized and at times even found by the Pharisees, who never let up with their questioning and requests for a sign (Mark 8:11). Likely already on his way to Caesarea Philippi, Jesus stopped once more in Bethsaida-Julias to the east of Galilee and was asked for one final miracle (Mark 8:22–26). Edersheim states clearly the intentions of Christ in regards to his disciples: “the disciples themselves showed how little even they, who had so long and closely followed Christ, understood His teaching, and how prone to misapprehension their spiritual dullness rendered them.”<sup>15</sup> The disciples were in need of direct and intentional training by their Messiah, who though they remained faithful to did not understand fully his teachings nor what would happen to him in Jerusalem. Edersheim, more than any other, traces this thread of ministry purpose through the travels of Jesus after the feeding of the five thousand all the way to Caesarea Philippi, and is again a hallmark of in-depth work in the life of Christ.

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<sup>13</sup> Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. 1, 486, 494.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 499.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 517.

One other title is deserving of mention in regard to this time in the life of Christ. *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ: A Study of the Life of Christ* by J. Dwight Pentecost and John Danilson is organized as a harmony and is helpful in studying the narrative of the Gospels, though like previous resources mentioned it is not the most recently published work (1981). Pentecost makes it very clear that a turning point in Jesus's ministry came after the feeding of the five thousand and the unpardonable sin. After these episodes of rejection, "He no longer pursued a public ministry but rather devoted Himself to teaching the Twelve how to continue the ministry that the Father had entrusted to Him."<sup>16</sup> Again, this follows the idea that Christ's travels reflect a change in ministry, and Pentecost is helpful in many aspects of this travel. Edersheim gives more background and detail as already mentioned, but these sources are very useful in establishing a chronology and purpose of Christ's ministry and tracing his travels as a reflection of that ministry.

### **Gospel Harmonization**

The usefulness of Gospel harmonization will be discussed more fully in a future section, and for this study is very important. Harmonization allows for the resolution of many problem passages of the Synoptics and also gives a fuller chronology of the life of Christ. For this study, *A Harmony of the Gospels* by Robert L. Thomas and Stanley N. Gundry was the harmony used the most.<sup>17</sup> It is not only comprehensive but also easy to use in its format and layout. The essays at the end regarding specific topics like dating events in the life of Christ are also helpful. This book does hold to a crucifixion year of AD 30 however, which is where the use of multiple

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<sup>16</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost and John Danilson, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ: A Study of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 231.

<sup>17</sup> Robert L. Thomas and Stanley N. Gundry, *A Harmony of the Gospels* (San Francisco, HarperCollins, 1978).

harmonies becomes a good practice. A. T. Robertson's *A Harmony of the Gospels for Students of the Life of Christ* is another good harmony which gives the year of crucifixion as 33 AD, which is the year held to in this dissertation.<sup>18</sup> The ministry years of Jesus are most pertinent to this study, and some would argue that this period need not be assigned particular years. However, a full chronology of Jesus's life helps set events during the proper time and gives more context to his ministry (especially regarding political circumstances and control of various regions in Israel). Not only the length of time devoted to specific focuses of ministry but the actual year are helpful when studying the life of Christ in detail, as this again may lend further context around the ministry of Jesus and what was happening in the land of Israel and area of the Ancient Near East which could have impacted his ministry. For an expanded chronology, Harold Hoehner's *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* is a good source for explanation and background material. This resource also addresses alternative viewpoints for dates and ministry lengths, which is a helpful interaction. For more in-depth cultural analysis, other sources were used and will be covered in a later section of this literature review.

### **Regarding Gospel Priority**

While there are excellent works on both sides of the Matthean/Markan priority debate, a few which stood out in this study for Matthean priority are next reviewed. Arthur Pink's *Why Four Gospels*, though dated (it was originally published in 1921), is a useful resource.<sup>19</sup> In his chapter on Matthew, Pink connects the Jewish aspect of the Gospel of Matthew to the Old Testament and the early Jewish audience which first received this Gospel account. Comparative

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<sup>18</sup> A. T. Robertson and John Albert Broadus, *A Harmony of the Gospels for Students of the Life of Christ* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 2011).

<sup>19</sup> Arthur Walkington Pink, *Why Four Gospels?* (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1990).

books are also useful in a study of Gospel priority. Two which offer good side by side comparisons of both Matthean and Markan priority are T. Desmond Alexander's *Discovering Jesus: Why Four Gospels to Portray One Person?* and *Rethinking the Synoptic Problem*, edited by David Alan Black and David R. Beck.<sup>20</sup> These two works offer a fair treatment of both sides, allowing the reader to come to their own conclusions as well as think through the support given for the other side of the argument, as well as criticism for their own view. While most readers are not likely to be convinced away from their own holdings of priority, a hard look at their own and the opposing side makes for a stronger idea of that held priority. It also aids in discussion with the other side, creating openings for agreement and understanding. David Alan Black's own work, *Why Four Gospels: The Historical Origins of the Gospels* gives a thorough treatment of Matthean priority, offering many good arguments for this view. His chapter on patristic tradition is a good summary of the historical argument for Matthean priority. Both a positive and negative of this work, however, is the creative license taken by Black. While there is likely some support for his descriptions of the circumstances around first century Gospel propagation and church ministry, these sections should be taken with a grain of salt, knowing that the descriptive language comes not from any primary source but from the mind of a reputable but maybe at times historically fanciful author. This book is helpful at imagining the circumstances in which the Gospels were written and proliferated, but again these circumstances are not all corroborated by standing historical evidence.

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<sup>20</sup> T. Desmond Alexander, *Discovering Jesus: Why Four Gospels to Portray One Person?* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010); David Alan Black and David R. Beck, eds., *Rethinking the Synoptic Problem* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001).

## Cultural Context

Books and articles which studied a particular aspect of ancient Jewish culture were especially helpful in understanding the culture in which Jesus was brought up and nuances which made their way into his ministry. These would be Jewish traditions and beliefs, both religious and cultural, and political views, especially regarding foreign powers like Greece and Rome. As already reviewed, Edersheim's *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* includes such cultural background material coupled with a study of its relationship to Jesus and his ministry. Other helpful, if more narrowly focused books, are as follows. The substantial textbook *The World of the New Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*, edited by Joel B. Green and Lee Martin McDonald gives good information about the view of women (useful for studying the associate shame around Mary's pregnancy) and children (useful for studying aspects of Jesus's boyhood).<sup>21</sup> Lynn H. Cohick's chapter 14 titled "Women, Children, and Families in the Greco-Roman World" in particular addresses many of these issues, and also gives some information regarding the apprenticeship of young boys in the Greco-Roman world. This chapter was very useful in a study of the early boyhood of Jesus and the type of environment in which he would have grown up. At the end of her chapter, Cohick gives an application of the information to particular passages in the Gospels and the New Testament. She especially addresses Elizabeth and Mary in their pregnancies, Jesus as a baby, and the presence of children during Jesus's ministry and teachings.

Another area of study regarding the Jewish culture of Jesus was the idea of who Messiah would be and what he would do in the minds of the Jewish people. This particular of Jewish

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<sup>21</sup> Joel B. Green and Lee Martin McDonald, eds., *The World of the New Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013).



culture comes up very often in the Gospels and was brought up by Jesus, his followers, and his enemies alike (Mark 8, Matt. 11, John 7), and is a key area of study in this dissertation. Joshua W. Jipp's *The Messianic Theology of the New Testament* is a useful resource to uncover Jesus's use of different names for himself to reveal his identity to the people of Israel without arousing the suspicion of the Romans.<sup>22</sup> Another good resource for this topic is David L.

Bartlett's *Christology in the New Testament*.<sup>23</sup> Such phrases as the "Lamb of God" and the "Son of Man" were used by Jesus and would have been immediately recognized by the Jewish people familiar with the writings of the Old Testament. Jesus often favored these names for himself, thus avoiding a proclamation of Messiah while still informing the people of who he was. The people's reactions when Jesus used such phrases are proof enough that they knew he was claiming to be Messiah. These reactions were usually in the form of a desire to either stone Jesus (John 10) or to make him king on the spot (John 6). Jesus kept control of both extremes and left the crowds no doubt as to who he was and claimed to be.

One of the reasons for Jesus's caution was to avoid making claims to kingship which the ruling Roman government would understand and thus make himself a traitor to Rome. Such a clash would have spelled the end to Jesus's ministry prematurely. A study of Roman treason and practices against treason aids in understanding this side of Jesus's motivations for strategic claims to his kingly title. C. W. Chilton's article "The Roman Law of Treason under the Early Principate" is a thorough treatment of this topic, as well as an education in potential consequences Jesus would have faced had he been found a traitor to Rome.<sup>24</sup> Of course Jesus's

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<sup>22</sup> Joshua W. Jipp, *The Messianic Theology of the New Testament* (Chicago: Eerdmans, 2020).

<sup>23</sup> David L. Bartlett, *Christology in the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2017).

<sup>24</sup> C. W. Chilton, "The Roman Law of Treason under the Early Principate," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 45 (1955).

crucifixion was a consequence of treason, and this article highlights Roman law against treason and other punishments which traitors faced. The article examines the history of treason against Rome and Rome's hatred of any threat to its power and throne. Another helpful work on this subject was *Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs: Popular Movements in the Time of Jesus* by Richard A. Horsley and John S. Hanson.<sup>25</sup> The messianic expectation present in first-century Israel did not stop pretender messiahs from testing Rome in this regard, and their fates show the need for Jesus's caution. A few pretender messiahs around the time of Christ are reviewed by P. W. Barnett in his article "The Jewish Sign Prophets."<sup>26</sup> Interestingly, some of these are even named in the biblical text, such as Theudas in Acts 5 and the Egyptian who led a revolt in Acts 21. Richard A. Horsley's article "The Sicarii: Ancient Jewish 'Terrorists'" gives historical information on this band of terrorists, of which Jesus's own disciple Simon the Zealot could have been a member.<sup>27</sup> These cultural studies of the time of Jesus lend more context and historical framing to the ministry of Jesus, where he ministered, and the people to which he ministered.

### **Jesus's Ministry**

A few key pieces used for the study of Jesus's ministry are Alfred Edersheim's *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, as already discussed in detail. J. Dwight Pentecost's *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ* is also a helpful volume in studying key points of Jesus's ministry

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<sup>25</sup> Richard A. Horsley and John S. Hanson, *Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs: Popular Movements in the Time of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Winston, 1985).

<sup>26</sup> P. W. Barnett, "The Jewish Sign Prophets, AD 40–70—Their Intentions and Origin," *New Testament Studies* 27 (1981).

<sup>27</sup> Richard A. Horsley, "The Sicarii: Ancient Jewish 'Terrorists'" *The Journal of Religion* 59, no. 4 (October 1979).

and ministry shift.<sup>28</sup> Pentecost is especially useful in situating single ministry events within the larger ministry context of Jesus. This is helpful for chronology and also understanding the purpose of Jesus's ministry at various points in his life. As this study focuses on the difference between the public and private ministry of Jesus, such a work is key in establishing Jesus's ministry timeline and finding where certain events fit on that timeline. Through such a study, a clear picture of the ministry shift of Jesus may be seen after the feeding of the five thousand from public to private ministry. Pentecost highlights this point of shift in his work and also explains the reasons behind the shift. He examines events and popular feelings about Jesus leading up to the shift from public to private ministry, and places these events, their results, and resulting feelings on one side or the other of the ministry shift as it happens. Robert Duncan Culver's *The Life of Christ*, though brief, also has good information regarding different time periods in the ministry of Christ, especially his time of devoted private ministry to the twelve disciples. That time of ministry is a focus of this dissertation and the detail in Culver's work is very helpful in the study.

Regarding Jesus's dependence on the Holy Spirit in his humanity, one especially helpful resource is Gerald F. Hawthorne's *The Presence and the Power: The Significance of the Holy Spirit in the Life and Ministry of Jesus*. This book keeps a good balance between affirming the deity of Christ while also explaining Jesus's heavy dependence on the Holy Spirit as fully man. By reading the Gospels from this perspective, Jesus's actions and even some problem passages make much more sense. Jesus's humanity also played a role in his discussion with the twelve disciples at Caesarea Philippi. His discouragement at their response to his news that he would die

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<sup>28</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost, *A Harmony of the Words and Works of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981).

brings new light to the week-long discussion held in that location, as well as the need for the transfiguration for the disciples and Jesus himself. Hawthorne's views will not be accepted by all, and indeed his chapter on the kenosis will ruffle not a few feathers, but it is a view nevertheless worth considering even by those who find themselves on the other side of the argument.

### **Archaeology of Israel**

One place which requires extra research in this study is reconciling events and places described by the Synoptic Gospels. As already noted, harmonization is useful for many of these places but some archaeological study is also needed. One instance is understanding where Jesus went when the text reads that he went to Bethsaida (Mark 6:31 and Luke 9:10 compared with Mark 6:45). When reading this text, it is unclear how Jesus started in Bethsaida, went across the lake, and ended in Bethsaida. What some further study reveals is that there were two towns called Bethsaida on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. One was to the west, a smaller fishing village in Galilee. This is the one where the feeding of the five thousand took place in Mark 6:45. The other, described as "a desolate place," is Bethsaida-Julias, a more remote town on the eastern shore of the lake in Syro-Phoenicia. This is the Bethsaida mentioned in Mark 6:31 and Luke 9:10. For help in solving this geographical dilemma, Carl E. Savage's *Biblical Bethsaida* is a most helpful resource, complete with maps and location descriptions.<sup>29</sup> Not only does his study situate Jesus's ministry in a particular geographical place, but it solves a potential geographical problem in the Gospels. The archaeology of Caesarea Philippi is also studied in detail and will therefore have its own section reviewing related literature.

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<sup>29</sup> Carl E. Savage, *Biblical Bethsaida: An Archaeological Study of the First Century* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011).

## Caesarea Philippi

The location of Caesarea Philippi was pivotal in the private ministry of Jesus to his disciples. It was at this place that Jesus was at last able to find alone time with his disciples to train and prepare them for his approaching death at Jerusalem. The worship site Banias in particular also played an extensive role in the conversation held at Caesarea Philippi, and historical and cultural features of the site came up in the discussion between Jesus and the twelve. A review of Caesarea Philippi as an ancient worship site as well as its role as a place of emperor worship in Jesus's day is necessary in this study. The most complete work found on the location is John Francis Wilson's *Caesarea Philippi*, which covers the history, archaeology, and pertinence to Christ's ministry of the site.<sup>30</sup> John F. Wilson together with Vassilios Tzaferis also give a "Historical and Archaeological Summary" in *Paneas: The Roman to Early Islamic Periods*, which details various excavations performed at the site and their findings.<sup>31</sup> This source is helpful in understanding worship practices at the site, especially beginning with Pan in the Greek pantheon and later the Roman introduction of emperor worship at Banias. Other archaeologically inclined works give more details into the configuration of structures and the worship practices at Banias. Elise A. Friedland covers the archaeology of the site extensively in her work *The Roman Marble Sculptures from the Sanctuary of Pan at Caesarea Philippi/Panias (Israel)* which gives a better understanding of the layout of the worship site and different elements included. Similarly, Andrea M. Berlin's article "The Archaeology of Ritual: The Sanctuary of Pan at Banias/Caesarea Philippi" assigns usages to these elements as they would

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<sup>30</sup> John Francis Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi: Banias, the Lost City of Pan* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2004).

<sup>31</sup> John F. Wilson and Vassilios Tzaferis, "Historical and Archaeological Summary," in *Paneas: The Roman to Early Islamic Periods. Excavations in Area A, B, E, F, G and H*, vol. 1, ed. Judith Ben-Michael (Jerusalem: The Israel Antiquities Authority, 2008).

have been employed by worshippers there. While the disciples did not go to the worship site directly, they would have had knowledge of Roman worship practices to some degree and would certainly have known of the emperor and Pan worship taking place at the site.

A study of the nearby site of Dan also comes into play regarding the history of the site within Israel, and Mark Walter Bartusch's *Understanding Dan* as well as Susan Ackerman's article "E-Dan" are both useful resources in understanding the politics and religious feelings at play in this area.<sup>32</sup> Going back to the time of the judges, the people of Israel were in Dan and near Baniyas, though it had always been a known Canaanite worship site. These sources make for a more complete understanding of Israel's history in these locations as described in the Old Testament, and the knowledge most Jewish people would have had regarding the site and its ancient location and history.

Some exploration into emperor worship at Baniyas is necessary, especially as it relates to Jesus's conversation with the Twelve in the regions of Caesarea Philippi. The emperor as a god is an especially pertinent subject and is addressed in the article "Discovering Herod's Shrine to Augustus" by J. Andrew Overman, Jack Olive, and Michael Nelson.<sup>33</sup> Jonathan Edmondson's *Augustus* is an exhaustive resource on this period of Roman history, and with some digging has valuable contributions to the study of Roman worship at Baniyas.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, Ian Worthington's *Alexander the Great: Man and God* traces the history of emperor worship, giving an idea of what went on at Baniyas and how the Roman population viewed its emperor.

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<sup>32</sup> Mark Walter Bartusch, *Understanding Dan: An Exegetical Study of a Biblical City, Tribe and Ancestor*, (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003); Susan Ackerman, "E-Dan," *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 13, no. 2 (September 2013).

<sup>33</sup> J. Andrew Overman, Jack Olive, and Michael Nelson, "Discovering Herod's Shrine to Augustus," *The Biblical Archaeology Review* 29, no. 2 (2003).

<sup>34</sup> Jonathan Edmondson, *Augustus* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).

Craig A. Evans's *Jesus and His Contemporaries* gives a timeline of emperor worship and is especially helpful in explaining Herod's role in bringing emperor worship within the borders of Israel.<sup>35</sup> These sources all point to one fact: the emperor was viewed as a god in the time of Jesus, and this was seen very clearly at Roman worship sites such as Baniyas. Jesus chose to hold an important conversation there with his disciples, in part for the privacy such a Gentile location offered, and in part because of what such a place represented.

At Caesarea Philippi, Peter made his great confession of Jesus as the Messiah. Knowing the background of Caesarea Philippi and the Roman worship practices which took place at Baniyas, such a confession takes on more weight. Jesus and his disciples ran the risk of trouble with Rome, yet this did not dissuade Christ from his message nor his followers from their faith in him. Darrell L. Bock's article "Faith and the Historical Jesus" draws connections between the Roman worship of the emperor to Peter's confession of Jesus as the Messiah King at Caesarea Philippi.<sup>36</sup> The confession of Jesus as a king in such close proximity to a pagan worship site shows the faith of the disciples despite unknowns, and also makes their confusion upon learning of Jesus's coming death more understandable. Nearby were monuments and temples built to emperors who had died, and here was Jesus who would surely deliver his people from their oppressors and establish his kingdom over his enemies. Such a king deserved monuments, worship, and more, yet he told the disciples plainly that none of that was to come, at least not immediately. The disciples were deflated, and Peter expressed the feeling of the group by his rebuke of Jesus. Peter, as the spokesperson, deserves some special study in the conversation, and

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<sup>35</sup> Craig A. Evans, *Jesus and His Contemporaries: Comparative Studies* (Boston: Brill, 2001).

<sup>36</sup> Darrell L. Bock, "Faith and the Historical Jesus: Does A Confessional Position and Respect for the Jesus Tradition Preclude Serious Historical Engagement?" *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 9, no. 1 (2011).

Timothy J. Wiarda's *Peter in the Gospels* is especially helpful in that study.<sup>37</sup> This work traces Peter's relationship to Jesus and has especially helpful insights regarding the conversation at Caesarea Philippi.

The transfiguration was the final event of Jesus's private ministry to his disciples at Caesarea Philippi, and served an important part in the encouragement of both Christ and the three disciples which witnessed it. Evans's *Jesus and His Contemporaries* gives a thorough study of this event, from the proposed locations of the Mount of Transfiguration to the theology of the transfiguration. Evans also offers an explanation for why the three disciples were told to keep the event to themselves rather than tell the waiting nine what they had witnessed. The work is a balance of historical, theological, and personal study which contributes greatly to the understanding of the events at Caesarea Philippi, and particularly to the transfiguration.

### Research Goals

The literature and research review above gives a detailed picture of the resources and scholarship already in existence regarding the life and ministry of Jesus. In particular, it focuses on the narrower scope of this dissertation, namely Jesus's travels away from Galilee because of his shift in ministry focus from public to private. The above sources, while useful and complete in many aspects, reveal some holes to be filled. Many sources do not bring up Jesus's ministry shift from public to private, and those that do are outdated. Other sources focus on a key aspect of Jesus's ministry or life but do not connect that aspect to a fuller picture of his overall ministry and ministry goals. As stated, these resources are helpful when combined, but an encompassing

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<sup>37</sup> Timothy J. Wiarda, *Peter in the Gospels: Pattern, Personality and Relationship* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019).



study on the ministry shift of Jesus from public to private, save for Edersheim's *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, is missing.

The goals and purposes of this dissertation center around a detailed study of the life of Christ. The change in ministry focus from public to private can be a source of confusion when reading the Gospels, and this dissertation will explore the transition and offer answers for the transition. At times in his ministry, Jesus was quick to engage with crowds and readily accepted their inquiries, requests, and challenges. This was typically Jesus's response in the first part of his ministry, which was very public. However, there are times in the Gospels when this was not Jesus's response. Questions around Jesus's sudden withdrawal from crowds, desire to avoid performing miracles, and requests for secrecy when he did perform miracles can arise from a straight reading of the Gospels and are not always easily explained or fleshed out in the text. These questions can make reading portions of the Gospels confusing, especially as the Gospels do not always report events chronologically. Even if a pattern does emerge, there are still times between Jesus's public and private ministries when he departed from the pattern. The best way to explain these patterns and differences is by sorting Jesus's three-year ministry into smaller ministry foci. By sorting events into public and private ministry times, patterns emerge and Jesus's motives and actions may be better understood. This may be done to some extent by a reading of the Gospels, but gaps exist and there are confusing portions, as stated above. Further research, chronology, and harmonization is needed to gain a better picture and timeline of Jesus's ministry. As a result, explanations and answers to those questions which arise around Jesus's motives and actions become more apparent. It is the goal of this dissertation to offer some of those explanations.

The ultimate goal and purpose of the dissertation as it relates to the field of life of Christ scholarship as a whole is to study the motives behind Jesus's travels and learn more about his ministry purposes at different points in his earthly ministry, thereby impacting how the Gospels are read and how the chronology of the life of Christ is understood. Coupled with robust research and a close reading of the Gospel accounts, these goals may be met and solutions to problems around the subject offered. As mentioned, a further goal is to add this research to that which already exists, especially because some of that research is very outdated in its detailed forms. Edersheim's *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* is first on the list to supplement, mostly because of the work's early date. Other sources, though more recent, leave out some key details or connections this dissertation will include. This dissertation will include a balanced amount of passage exposition, history, commentary, and to a lesser extent archaeological studies to reach a balanced and well-researched conclusion about Jesus's ministry, ministry shifts, and ministry goals especially as found in Mark 6—9. The hope for this dissertation is that it be published and join the ranks of studies on specific details of the life of Christ, thus adding to the research which is already present in the scholarly realm and giving other researchers a current and updated look at this portion of the life of Christ. A more current study on the ministry shifts of Christ is needed as many materials related to this particular part of his life were published many decades ago, and it is a goal of this dissertation to be one of these updated studies.

Using a historical-grammatical hermeneutic, Mark 6—9 primarily and Matthew 14—17 secondarily will be studied, along with other secondary Scripture passages. Each passage deals primarily with Jesus's retreat from the crowds to more secluded places. The dissertation will explore reasons for this retreat and offer suggestions for the retreat especially centered around a ministry shift. The dissertation will progress from the end of Jesus's public ministry through his

private retreats up through Caesarea Philippi and later the transfiguration. Introductory material to the life of Christ will be studied briefly, and key changes in the attitudes of the disciples as well as events in the life of Christ after the transfiguration will be briefly discussed in the conclusion. This encompassing method of study gives a more complete picture of the life of Christ, but again the focus will remain on Jesus's public and private ministries.

In order to give a fuller discussion on the life of Christ as narrated in Mark 6—9, other introductory matters will be covered first. Gospel harmonization and, as a related though shorter discussion, Gospel priority will be discussed. An important part of a complete study of the life of Christ is the establishment of dates, chronology, and timelines to better track events and shifts. Harmonization allows for the placement of events as narrated in the Gospels, especially the Synoptics. Many events are recorded in two or even all three Synoptic Gospels, but some are specific to only one Gospel account. By reading the Gospels in harmony, or in the case of this dissertation by using a harmony textbook, these events may be traced easily, similarities found, and individual events tracked on a timeline. This becomes an especially useful study when looking for shifts and patterns in the ministry of Jesus, as this dissertation does. Gospel priority comes into play when studying different harmonies, because Gospel priority can affect the books' harmonization outcomes. Though most harmonies will agree in a general sense, there are certain places in the life of Christ which fall under more debate than others.<sup>38</sup> Knowing the arguments for each side and having a stance can help in perceptively reading harmonies and can also allow for personal harmonization in conjunction with scholarly works already available.

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<sup>38</sup> Passion week is a good example of this debate. The day of each event of passion week as recorded by the Gospel writers can be different depending on the harmony author, and the actual date of events such as Christ's birth and death are also heavily debated topics.

Again, in the interest of a complete study of one portion of the life of Christ, some other introductory matters will also be discussed. The Jewish culture in which Jesus was raised, as well as outside influences such as Greek and Roman rule, play a part in his ministry. Knowing these cultural influences gives perspective and understanding to the crowd's and the religious Jews' reactions to Jesus's claims to be Messiah. The political influences are also helpful in a study of Jesus's travels in Mark 6—9. Jesus crossed political boundaries as he traveled outside of Galilee, and he did this in part because of who controlled those regions. If Jesus did not want to be in a Jewish area, he went to the Decapolis or to Syro-Phoenicia for example, which were controlled by Syria. A knowledge of Roman culture also comes into play in a study of Caesarea Philippi, where Jesus and the disciples ultimately landed for their private time together. An archaeological study of Caesarea Philippi and particularly Baniyas is included to learn the religious background of the site and its relation to Jesus's discussion with the Twelve held outside that worship area.

As the culmination of Jesus's private ministry to the disciples, Caesarea Philippi receives quite a bit of study in this dissertation. As it relates to the thesis and purpose of the dissertation, Caesarea Philippi marks the end point of Jesus's private ministry to his disciples. The conversation Jesus needed to have about his coming death, Peter's confession and the faith of the Twelve in their Messiah, and the glorifying transfiguration all happen here. The location and its history played a role in those events, especially as they related to Jesus as the Jewish King. Baniyas was a place of pagan worship and Roman emperor worship, and it was here that Jesus was acknowledged by his closest disciples as the King, and where he was revealed for a time in his glorified kingly state. Afterwards, Jesus's ministry continued more in its former public form, though with some private training sprinkled in. Caesarea Philippi was a key location in the travels of Jesus in Mark 6—9, and a complete study of the site is useful in developing Jesus's

ministry foci. These goals and purposes for this dissertation mark the need for current research into the ministry of Christ and his particular foci and shifts, and it is hoped the study will aid others in their quest for a better understanding of the ministry and life of Christ.

### Chapter Overview

As mentioned above, chapter two serves as a review of introductory matters pertinent to the study of Jesus and his shift from public to private ministry. Beginning with a discussion of the importance of harmonization, chapter two will move into a brief overview of popular harmonies of the Gospels and settle on one preferred harmony. Harmonization is an important aspect in any study in the life of Christ, and this study is no different. By combining the Gospel accounts of events such as Christ's travels to Gentile regions and his time in Caesarea Philippi, more may be learned about each area of study. The harmonization study leads into a discussion of chronology and a review of the life of Christ from his early years through the ascension. Though not much time will be spent on his early years and the background events before his public ministry began, it is still useful to study the life of Christ from the beginning. This holds true for the events after the transfiguration as well. Jesus's motives for going to Caesarea Philippi and spending time with the Twelve will be examined in this dissertation, and the level of success of his endeavor may be measured by the events after the group leaves Caesarea Philippi. However, the bulk of the study will be made of Jesus's public and private ministries. A geographical survey will be included as the last piece of chapter two. This survey will review the geography of the land of Israel as it pertains to the study and also include a timeline of where Jesus was and when in the study.

Chapters three, four, and five are the primary chapters of the dissertation and contain the major elements of study and discussion. Chapter three is focused on the shift of Jesus's public

ministry to private ministry based on his travels in Matthew 4—16 and Mark 1—8 primarily. The chapter begins with a review of the public ministry of Christ, including evidence of Jesus as Messiah which he gave during this time in his life. Two major events are used to support this assertion. The first is John's announcement of Christ as the "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). To John's Jewish audience which heard this proclamation, it would have been clear that he was speaking of the coming Jewish Messiah and naming Jesus as that Messiah.<sup>39</sup> The second event to be discussed is Jesus's Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5—7. In this sermon, Jesus made numerous references of himself as Messiah, and again the Jewish audience recognized these claims to Messiahship (Matt. 5:17–20, 7:21–29). These examples relate to the idea of the "messianic secret" proposed by some scholars and give reasons to reject this idea. The Early Judean Ministry of Jesus is covered, and much study is given to Jesus's time around Galilee. This discussion ends with the feeding of the five thousand and final rejection of Jesus as Messiah by the crowds. It is this rejection which led to Jesus's private retirements into more Gentile regions and shows the shift in his ministry focus to the twelve disciples. These travels included trips to Tyre and Sidon, the Decapolis, Bethsaida, and finally Caesarea Philippi. Events at each location are studied and Jesus's reaction to crowds and requests for miracles are given special attention. The alone time Jesus sought culminated at Caesarea Philippi and the events which took place there.

Before getting into the details of Jesus's time at Caesarea Philippi, chapter four discusses the history of the ancient site. Pan worship, the grotto, Roman worship practices, and the establishment of the Roman imperial cult are discussed in relation to the site. The imperial cult is further discussed, especially as it relates to the idea of a coming Jewish Messiah and the

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<sup>39</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 488.

messianic expectation that was present in Israel during the first century. Though the Bible says that Jesus went to the villages or districts of Caesarea Philippi and not to the worship site itself (Matt. 16:13, Mark 8:27), the worship practices at Caesarea Philippi do relate to the conversation Jesus has with the disciples and are therefore important to study. Leading up to the time of Christ and even after his ascension, the presence of false messiahs in Israel was rather common to life and was something the Romans were concerned about (Matt. 2).<sup>40</sup> Jesus's claim to kingship so close to a Roman worship site was bold to say the least. The disciples' faithfulness to Christ as he made these claims was tested at Caesarea Philippi, and though they proved faithful their further conversation showed they did not completely understand Christ's motives or intentions around his messiahship. These ideas come to light in the next chapter.

Chapter five returns to Jesus and his disciples at Caesarea Philippi and is an exposition of the conversation there. Peter's confession comes first and is broken into two parts. First, Peter confessed Christ as Messiah, or the Anointed One. Second, the confession in the midst of Roman imperial worship is discussed. This hearkens back to chapter four and the discussion around Roman rulers and their claim to ultimate kingship. In an area known for the imperial cult, Peter (who spoke for the disciples) confessed Jesus as the true King and the disciples affirmed their allegiance to King Jesus. The confession was followed by Jesus revealing that he would die and rise again. This is the first the disciples had heard Christ talk about his coming death plainly and their faith in their Messiah was shaken. Whatever their ideas about the coming Jewish Messiah were, they did not include ideas of him dying at the hands of their enemies. Chapter four is again referenced with the idea of Messiah as a military leader against Israel's enemies. The disciples trusted in Christ and expressed ideas of military victory at different points in their time with

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<sup>40</sup> Chilton, "The Roman Law of Treason under the Early Principate," 76.

Jesus. Even after the events at Caesarea Philippi, the disciples continued to be somewhat confused at what Jesus would accomplish as Messiah (Mark 10:37–40).<sup>41</sup> No doubt the disciples' reaction to Christ's declaration was a discouragement to Jesus as well, who desired encouragement from his closest friends as he prepared to set out for Jerusalem and the cross. Though his main goal for alone time with the disciples was to give them this news and prepare them to face his coming death, he was also in need of encouragement and support from the disciples. The next few days were filled with similar conversation and similar reactions by the disciples. This is why, on the sixth day, Jesus took his inner three disciples to witness his transfiguration, thus bolstering their spirits and his. Though the disciples at times still expressed confusion or misunderstanding around Jesus's mission, they were prepared to go to Jerusalem with him and continued to follow him. Peter, James, and John, though not allowed to share what they saw with the other disciples, could encourage the whole group in its faith in Jesus by their visibly renewed faith.

Chapter six is the conclusion of the dissertation and acts as a summary of presented information as well as a connector of each point to the overarching thesis. First, a summary of the travels of Christ is given, broken up by public and private ministry. The major events which break his ministry into these two parts are again discussed and show how they impacted the ministry break. Jesus's motives in each ministry segment are also discussed. The private retreats are reviewed, and Jesus's time at Caesarea Philippi is tied into the overall discussion. Jesus's alone time with the disciples was finally accomplished there, and he was able to have the conversation he so desperately desired. Though their reactions were not what he had hoped, the

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<sup>41</sup> Robert H. Stein, *Mark. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 484–485.



ensuing transfiguration was able to bolster their faith in him as well as encourage Jesus to continue toward the cross. A brief discussion of the post-transfiguration events concludes the study. This covers the attitudes of the disciples toward Christ, of Christ toward his coming death, as well as narrates Jesus's further travels to Jerusalem and his passion. This portion of Jesus's ministry was something of a mixed focus. Though he returned to the crowds, great miracles, and public teaching, his attention did not depart from the disciples. Jesus continued to teach and train the disciples and referenced his death more and more, reminding them of the reason he came and what he intended to do. The disciples remained faithful, though at times slow to understand. Finally, the thesis is once again expounded and concluded in this final chapter.

### Conclusion

The above literature was chosen, among other works, because of its relevance to this study, particular viewpoints offered, and respect of the authors within their fields. Edersheim was given the most attention because of his thoroughness in his study on the life of Christ. Every verse and event is accounted for in *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, along with useful references. Other works on the life and ministry of Jesus, such as Pentecost's *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ* and Hawthorne's *The Presence and the Power* address certain aspects of Jesus's ministry more completely than other works found. A harmony is useful in any study of the life of Christ, and Thomas and Gundry's *A Harmony of the Gospels* is a well-organized one. The work also includes helpful comments in the footnotes and back essays. Gospel priority, cultural commentary, and archaeology need to be studied to gain a fuller picture around the ministry of Jesus, and the works chosen for this study provide the scholarship necessary. Finally, as the thesis of this dissertation relies heavily on the events at Caesarea Philippi, various studies on that region were useful in understanding the Gospel events which took place there.

This dissertation will take the chronology offered by various Gospel harmonies and a reading of the New Testament text and combine it with the documented purposes of Christ through this chronology, either as explained in the New Testament or as studied by other scholars.<sup>42</sup> By studying chronology and purpose together, the ministry of Christ will be made more clear and his motives behind various actions, especially travels around or away from Galilee, will become more apparent. Such a study will bring clarity to the life of Christ and detail of his ministry which will aid in the reading and understanding of the Gospel accounts. Again, it is the intention of this dissertation to aid others in their research by providing new insights as well as a more up-to-date study of the ministry and travels of Christ.

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<sup>42</sup> The Thomas and Gundry harmony will be most closely followed because of its organization of the festivals listed in the Gospels and organization of the life of Christ around these festivals. Such an organization makes for a clear, biblically-backed method which also supports the three-year theory of Jesus's ministry.

## Chapter 2: Introductory Matters

### The Importance of Harmonization

#### A Gospel Harmonization Overview

In any study of the life of Christ, a harmonization of the Gospels is an important place to start because of the impact a harmonized reading has on understanding events and timelines. The Gospels, especially the Synoptic Gospels, often give accounts of the same events, but not with the same details or in the same order within the Gospel. This can lead to confusion over what the author is talking about at best, and source or redaction criticism at worst. One example to study is the cursing of the fig tree in Matthew 21:18–22 and Mark 11:12–14 and 20–25. In Matthew’s account, Jesus cursed the fig tree and the tree withered at once, with the disciples commenting on its withering in their presence. Mark’s telling gives a day between the cursing and the withering. Reading these two accounts together presents some conflict in the details of when the fig tree withered, or how long it took for the tree to wither. Harmonization comes into play in such an instance and avoids the need for the dismissive types of criticism.<sup>43</sup>

Gospel priority (Matthean, Markan, etc.) is also a factor to consider within the broader topic of harmonization. Though not necessarily an influence on harmonization, knowing where an author puts priority can aid in understanding their harmonization outcomes. Gospel priority is typically divided into two camps: Markan priority and Matthean (sometimes coupled with

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<sup>43</sup> A harmonized reading of the accounts shows that Jesus cursed the fig tree and the disciples saw the result the next day, as in Mark’s telling. The immediacy of the withering which Matthew recorded is merely an attempt to show that the tree did not take a long time to wither, but withered “at once,” or in a very brief span of time (such as overnight). Stanley E. Porter and Bryan R. Dyer, eds., *The Synoptic Problem: Four Views* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 45.

Lukan) priority.<sup>44</sup> Markan priority is also known as the two-source hypothesis because it states that “Matthew and Luke had before them two sources – Mark and Q.”<sup>45</sup> Markan priority is appealing because it is an explanation for the brevity of Mark, suggesting that Matthew and Luke expanded upon what was said in Mark. With this view, Matthew and Luke also make minor changes such as omitting redundant phrases and casting Jesus in a better light.<sup>46</sup> Alternatively, a Matthean priority, or Mark after Matthew and Luke, is known as the two-gospel hypothesis, assuming Mark had the two Gospels of Matthew and Luke to use in his composition of the Gospel after his name.<sup>47</sup> This was the view taken by the early church, but it remains less favored today than Markan priority. For other reasons, however, a Matthean priority will be used for this dissertation. David Alan Black makes a strong case for Matthean priority in his book *Why Four Gospels*, citing Matthew as “the earliest determination of the primitive church to preserve the teaching of its founder” and used in conjunction with Luke for the composition of Mark.<sup>48</sup>

### **A Brief Survey of Gospel Harmonies**

To aid in a harmonization of the Gospels, a survey of a few reliable harmonies is helpful. *A Harmony of the Gospels* by Robert L. Thomas and Stanley N. Gundry uses the Jewish festivals to structure a timeline for the life of Christ and organizes his life around these festivals.

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<sup>44</sup> Alexander, *Discovering Jesus*, 80.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 79–80.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> David Alan Black, *Why Four Gospels: The Historical Origins of the Gospels*, 2nd ed. (Gonzalez, FL: Energion Publications, 2001), 73. According to Black’s creative but not unfeasible hypothesis, Mark is a result of Peter’s witness to a Roman audience. Peter, presenting the gospel, had in front of him the Gospels of Matthew and Luke and read back and forth between the two as he presented. As his companion, Mark wrote down this sermon of Peter’s which became the Gospel of Mark.

Such an ordering uses especially the number of Passovers mentioned by the Gospel writers, with the number ranging from three to five depending on interpretation.<sup>49</sup> The interpretation of the festivals impacts the duration of the ministry of Christ and is used to support the one-year, two-year, three-year, and four-year theories, in addition to impacting how various passages are understood and whether they refer to a festival or not.<sup>50</sup> The Thomas and Gundry harmony is not without its issues, however. The authors hold to a crucifixion year of AD 30, giving a good example of why multiple harmonies ought to be consulted in a study of the life of Christ.<sup>51</sup> A consultation of multiple sources also often comes into play in harmonizing the passion week, as there is much debate around the events of each day as well as the actual day that Christ was crucified.<sup>52</sup> Harmonies consulted are as follows: *A Harmony of the Gospels* by Robert L. Thomas and Stanley N. Gundry, *Harmony of the Gospels* by Steven L. Cox, Kendell H. Easley, A. T. Robertson, and John Albert Broadus, *A Harmony of the Gospels for Students of the Life of Christ* by A. T. Robertson.<sup>53</sup> The Thomas and Gundry harmony will be most closely followed because of its organization of the festivals listed in the Gospels and organization of the life of Christ

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<sup>49</sup> Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 47, 51.

<sup>50</sup> A full discussion of the duration of Christ's ministry will be given in a later section. For now, suffice it to say that the three-year ministry view (and really a three-and-a-half-year view) will be used in this dissertation.

<sup>51</sup> A crucifixion year of AD 33 is held to in this dissertation and will be covered further in the discussion around chronology. For this portion, sufficient evidence is found for this date based on astrology and ministry length of both John the Baptist and Jesus. Though not a harmony, Harold Hoehner's *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* gives a good explanation for a crucifixion year of AD 33.

<sup>52</sup> Again, a full discussion of these issues is outside the scope of this section and will be expanded upon in a later section. A. T. Robertson's *A Harmony of the Gospels for Students of the Life of Christ* surveys the Passion Week well and concludes that Christ died on Friday (though he holds to a year of AD 29 or AD 30 rather than AD 33).

<sup>53</sup> Robert L. Thomas and Stanley N. Gundry, *A Harmony of the Gospels* (San Francisco, HarperCollins, 1978); Steven L. Cox, Kendell H. Easley, A. T. Robertson, and John Albert Broadus, *Harmony of the Gospels* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2007); and A. T. Robertson, *A Harmony of the Gospels for Students of the Life of Christ* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1922).

around these festivals. Such an organization makes for a clear, biblically backed method which also supports the three-year theory of Jesus's ministry.

### **Harmonization in Relation to the Chronology of the Life of Christ**

Along with harmonization, chronology is important to study in the life of Christ and is aided by harmonization. One area where chronology and harmonization play a role together is in determining Christ's ministry's duration. Harold Hoehner summarizes four chronological views of the life of Christ that are most often adhered to.<sup>54</sup> Each will be reviewed here.

The one-year theory is based off Luke 4:19 which quotes Isaiah 61:2, mentioning "the year of the Lord's favor." This is a rather ancient view first proposed by early Gnostic commentators and adopted by Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen.<sup>55</sup> Few modern scholars hold to this view, and those which do use the two Passovers in Mark 2:23 and Mark 14:1 to support their view, rather than the Old Testament quote. Jesus's ministry is said to fit into one year between the two Passovers. This understanding of Mark is accurate, as Mark only mentions the two Passovers explicitly. However, it must be remembered that Mark is a briefer Gospel than the others, and so leaves out portions of Jesus's ministry time. A year for Jesus's entire ministry is fairly implausible, especially when Mark is compared with the other three Gospels. The Gospel of John in particular highlights at least three Passovers, making this view very unlikely.

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<sup>54</sup> Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, 46–59.

<sup>55</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata* Book I, ed. Otto Stählin (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1985), 21. 146; Origen, *De Principiis* Book IV, trans. Henri Crouzel and Manlio Simonetti (Paris: Christian Sources, 1980), 1. 5.

The two-year theory uses the three Passovers in John for its timeline of a little over two years, but encounters problems because it requires a transposition of John 5 and 6.<sup>56</sup> Proponents of this view argue around the geographical settings of John 4—7 and determine that chapters five and six should be transposed to make Jesus's travels more linear. Rather than follow Jesus as he went from Samaria and Galilee (John 4), up to Jerusalem (John 5), back to Galilee (John 6), and then from Galilee to Jerusalem again (John 7), a transposition of chapters five and six would keep Jesus in Galilee and those events together until he went one time to Jerusalem. However, "there is no textual evidence whatsoever for any other order than the traditional one," and such a reordering does not completely solve supposed geographical dilemmas.<sup>57</sup> The question of travels is a good place to involve harmonization and compare Jesus's travels in other Gospels; in some cases, the Gospel author is not reporting things chronologically.<sup>58</sup>

The three-year theory uses the three Passovers mentioned in John and also adds a year of ministry (and thereby another Passover) between the Passovers in John 2:13 and John 6:4. Though this added Passover is not mentioned explicitly, there are other chronological references in John 4:35 and John 5:1 which seem to indicate the passing of another year. The events narrated are given seasonal descriptions that may be compared to the Jewish calendar, especially regarding feasts and agricultural events such as plantings and harvests. The Synoptic Gospels also give support for the three-year theory. The Synoptics all include the feeding of the five thousand which took place around the Passover mentioned in John 6:4. The Synoptics also

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<sup>56</sup> Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, 49–50.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>58</sup> In the instance of John 5 and 6, there are many events which are recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke that John leaves out, making it possible to read these chapters as having a gap in recording between the two. See Thomas and Gundry, *A Harmony of the Gospels*, 57–101.

mention the disciples plucking grain during the harvest season before Passover (Matt. 12:1, Mark 2:23, Luke 6:1). However, the Passover of that year could not have been the one mentioned in John 2:13 because the Passover of John 2:13 occurred very early in the Lord's ministry.<sup>59</sup> It was also not the Passover of John 6 as that was associated with the feeding of the five thousand. The result is a third Passover, falling between John 2 and John 6. This chronology is given in the text but not mentioned specifically. The Passover of John 11, which is the Passover of Jesus's death, is not counted by any sources as a measure of his ministry length, and it goes unmentioned in all Passover tallies. As such, the three-year theory uses the information given in all four Gospels, while using each to supplement the others where there are gaps.

The four-year theory again uses the Passovers in John as a timeline, though counting five Passovers instead of three as in the two-year theory. Proponents of this theory determine that a three-year ministry "compresses too many events into the last six months of His ministry" and that four years are more appropriate.<sup>60</sup> This view relies on the addition of an extra year to the Gospel of John (an additional Passover), which the Gospel text does not make clear. Furthermore, the addition of this extra year presents other chronological problems besides proving a four-year ministry duration. The four-year theory has not gained much traction in recent years and most scholars adhere to something closer to the three-year theory.

The view adhered to in this dissertation is the three-year theory, and specifically is expanded to a three-and-a-half-year ministry, "since Jesus' baptism and public ministry preceded the first Passover."<sup>61</sup> Having a timeline of Jesus's ministry length allows for the placement of

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<sup>59</sup> Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, 56.

<sup>60</sup> Johnston M. Cheney and Stanley A. Ellisen, *The Life of Christ in Stereo: The Four Gospels Combined as One*, ed. Stanley A. Ellisen (Portland: Western Baptist Seminary Press, 1969), 227.

<sup>61</sup> Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, 60.



events within his ministry and makes it easier to discover the length of time for each ministry focus (public, private, mixed). This can allow for a better understanding of the time it took for the message of Jesus to spread to various regions, as well as the reactions of his enemies, especially toward the end of his ministry when these reactions became stronger and more violent. Though a lengthy example of the relation between harmonization and chronology, this discussion is useful in establishing a rough timeline for Christ's ministry duration as well as demonstrating the usefulness of harmonization and chronology in tandem.

### **The Importance of Gospel Priority**

Related to harmonization is a discussion of Gospel priority. This argument has two major sides which are Matthean priority and Markan priority, with the latter being more popular among scholars. This may be broken down further into the two-gospel hypothesis (Matthew and Luke written before Mark) and the two-source hypothesis (Mark written before Matthew and Luke). The idea behind these titles is that in the two-gospel hypothesis, Mark was written after Matthew and Luke and therefore had these two Gospels to reference.<sup>62</sup> In the two-source hypothesis, Matthew and Luke were written after Mark and therefore had the Gospel of Mark as well as another document, denoted as Q, to reference.<sup>63</sup> This discussion often comes up as related to the Synoptic problem and attempts to reconcile similarities and differences among Matthew, Mark, and Luke. For the purposes of this dissertation, a discussion of Gospel priority is relevant as it relates to harmonization.

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<sup>62</sup> Alexander, *Discovering Jesus*, 80.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

Harmonization is a useful approach to studying the life of Jesus, as it organizes events and narratives from each of the Gospels and compiles them into a more organized system. Typically, harmonies are organized as charts so that each verse in one Gospel may be read with the corresponding verse in the other Gospels. Where information does not repeat, one Gospel column will be filled in while the others are left blank until the narrative picks up again. Though not without debate, harmonizations do a good job of filling in gaps in ministry found in some Gospels and reconciling problem passages among the Synoptics. Gospel priority comes into play when the fruitfulness and reliability of harmonization is questioned. While most Q advocates would not question the inspiration of Scripture, those who advocate the existence and use of Q in the Gospels should be investigated on their persuasion (or not) of the ability of Scripture to be harmonized. Given a source like Q, the Gospels are harmonized not among themselves but with this additional source. No evidence has been found of the existence of Q other than what may be pulled from the Gospels, and its influence on a harmonizer will be quickly apparent. Rather than take what is recorded in the Gospels and use internal evidence, Q becomes a secondary source which is needed to make sense of the Synoptics. The Gospels lose some organization and flow if they are recorded using a secondary source, and themes and patterns may not be as apparent. At best, harmonization becomes a practice worth doing but without much gain expected, and at worst, harmonization becomes an unfeasible pursuit.

Those in favor of source Q adhere to the two-source hypothesis, or Markan priority. Points of support center around the apparent editing of Mark in Matthew and Luke to either read in a more polished style or to cast Jesus in a better light.<sup>64</sup> In support of their position, many authors give examples within the text of the Synoptics to point out similarities or differences, and

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<sup>64</sup> Alexander, *Discovering Jesus*, 80.

show the need for a secondary source Q.<sup>65</sup> The following examples are given in Graham

Stanton's *The Gospels and Jesus*:

1. It is easy to suggest why Matthew and Luke might wish to expand Mark; it is more difficult to explain why Mark should abbreviate Matthew. Why would Mark leave out almost all of the Sermon on the Mount, yet find space to expand Matthew's narrative material (compare Mark 1:29–31 with Matthew 8:14–15)? Put more bluntly, if Matthew (and Luke) already existed, why was it necessary to produce Mark's Gospel? Almost all of Mark (90 percent) is found in Matthew.
2. Matthew and Luke often modify or omit redundant phrases in Mark to improve his rather unsophisticated literary style. In Mark 1:32 we read: "That evening at sundown. . . ." Matthew 8:16 uses the first phrase; Luke 4:40 records only the second.
3. Matthew and Luke modify a number of passages in Mark which could be understood as casting Jesus in a poor light. The phrase "is out of his mind" in Mark 3:21 is omitted in Matthew and Luke. Mark 4:38 records that the disciples asked, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" The parallel verses in Matthew 8:25 and Luke 8:24 omit "do you not care?"<sup>66</sup>

Where Matthew and Luke do not match up with Mark but do match up with each other is attributed to Q, thus completely the second source for Matthew and Luke as they wrote their Gospels. Much study has been done on Q, its influence on the Gospels, and its possible composition. Entire commentaries have even been written on Q, though again the source has not been found in any ancient state.<sup>67</sup> Markan priority can and often does influence an author's opinion around the Gospels and particularly harmonization. The same can be said for someone who holds Matthean priority too, though in different ways.

Matthean priority, or the two-gospel hypothesis, holds that Matthew was written first. Luke was also written before Mark and so Mark had two Gospels to work from. This hypothesis also assumes that Mark shares material with Matthew and Luke, which is in agreement with Markan priority (though of course the order is reversed). Support for Matthean priority centers

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<sup>65</sup> Black and Beck, eds., *Rethinking the Synoptic Problem*, 49–53.

<sup>66</sup> Graham N. Stanton, *The Gospels and Jesus*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 35–37.

<sup>67</sup> Markus Tiwald, *Sayings Source: A Commentary on Q* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2020).

especially on church history. The early church fathers penned that Matthew was written first and this view kept sway on the argument for centuries.<sup>68</sup> The witness of the patristics is perhaps one of the stronger pieces of evidence for Matthean priority, and this view also allows for an earlier authorship of the Gospels than Markan priority typically allows.

One interesting modification of the two-gospel hypothesis is David Alan Black's fourfold-gospel hypothesis. This hypothesis proposes that the order of the Gospels as they were written is Matthew, Luke, Mark, and John.<sup>69</sup> Black especially gives strong evidence for Matthean priority in his book devoted to the subject and offers a division of the early church which lines up with the penning of the Gospels.<sup>70</sup> Matthew corresponds to the Jerusalem phase, which was the earliest phase of the just-established New Testament church. This fits very clearly with the Jewish nature of the Gospel of Matthew, and it makes sense that such a Jewish book would follow directly after the Jewish Old Testament canon.<sup>71</sup> The second phase was the Gentile mission phase, which included Paul's missionary journeys and the increasing interaction and inclusion of Gentiles into the New Testament church. Luke's Gospel is said to have been written at this time. This again follows the narration and chronology of the spread of the Gospel given in the Bible, particularly in Acts. The final phase was the Roman phase, which is when Mark was written. Finally, the Gospel of John came later, near the end of the first century, and not as a Synoptic but rather a supplement to the first three accounts of the life of Christ. Because Matthean priority does not require a secondary source such as Q, it is a better option for

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<sup>68</sup> Black and Beck, eds., *Rethinking the Synoptic Problem*, 9.

<sup>69</sup> Black, *Why Four Gospels?*, 63.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 13–33.

<sup>71</sup> Pink, *Why Four Gospels?*, 16.

harmonization and organization of the Synoptic Gospels. The Synoptics may be looked at independently from any outside source and mapped according to what they say, whether that be very similar or with some differences. A complete harmony does emerge in this way, without the need for additional information or sources. Though such a harmonization can be debated regarding the placement of certain events, it is nevertheless complete and useful in a study of the life of Christ.

Though Matthean and Markan priority both have their pros and cons, the evidence weighs in the favor of Matthean priority, especially in terms of harmonization and historicity. Matthean priority is assumed in this dissertation, and though it does not come up very often in the discussion of Jesus's ministry and ministry foci, it is nevertheless an important background topic to have established. As noted, priority influences harmonization and chronology, both of which play a heavy role in a discussion of the life of Christ. When organizing events in the life of Jesus and tracing his ministry and travels, harmonization allows for a more complete picture of what is said individually by each Gospel writer. Gospel priority is important to establish as a basis for these subjects which take a more primary role in the discussion of Jesus's ministry. Markan priority's dependence on the secondary source Q makes it more difficult to reconcile with what is presented by the Gospels themselves and adds an additional element to harmonization. Though harmonies do not include a column for Q, the source is used to explain overlapping events or missing events, which may be done internally by a robust harmony of the Gospels themselves. Repeated material in the Gospels need not be explained by a secondary source, but rather by the nature of the *Synoptics* themselves, that is to *see together*. Repetition will naturally occur among authors writing about the same events, and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit must not be left out of the discussion. Jesus's words, actions, and miracles would be told in

similar fashion by eyewitnesses to the event, or by authors who interviewed eyewitnesses (in the case of Luke and perhaps Mark). Thus Matthean priority coupled with harmonization is offered as a solution to any perceived Synoptic problem and is the view taken in this dissertation.

## A Review of the Chronology of the Life of Christ<sup>72</sup>

### **Christ's Early Years and Ministry Background Events**

The Gospel of Luke gives the most detailed account of the early years of Jesus in Luke 1—2. The birth of Jesus is foretold in Luke 1:26–38, in conjunction with the events leading up to the birth of John the Baptist and John's birth. The chapter ends with an introduction to John's ministry, stating that "he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel." Chapter 2 is a familiar portion of Scripture, as it tells of the birth of Christ in Bethlehem, the manger he was laid in, and the angelic announcement to the shepherds of the birth of the Lord. Because Luke wrote to a Gentile audience (Theophilus), the events reported in his Gospel are connected less with Old Testament prophecy and more with the humble beginnings of the Jewish Messiah King.<sup>73</sup> These humble beginnings took place in Bethlehem where Joseph and Mary went to register for a census. Despite having family in Bethlehem, the events around the conception of the Lord were shameful to the family. It is likely that Mary and Joseph were not permitted to stay in the *καταλυμα*, or guest room of the family house, and were instead dismissed to the attached

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<sup>72</sup> Much of this chronology finds its basis in the teachings of Dr. Douglas Bookman of Shepherds Theological Seminary, specifically his "Introduction to the Life of Christ" (lecture at Shepherds Theological Seminary, Cary, NC, August 9, 2017).

<sup>73</sup> It is debated whether Theophilus was an individual or if a rendering of the Greek name "God-lover" is a more appropriate translation, referring to a group of Christians. Regardless, the audience is concluded to be Gentile. See John T. Carroll's and Jennifer K. Cox's *Luke: A Commentary* for a full explanation.

stable or nearby cave for their lodging.<sup>74</sup> Besides the location of his birth, those who celebrated his birth were also humble shepherds, though they were given the announcement by a host of angels. When Jesus was later circumcised in the temple, two righteous individuals recognized Jesus as the Messiah, but it does not seem that the ruling religious class had anything to do with the humble family.

The only other major event of the Savior's early life is recorded at the end of Luke 2. This is the story of the boy Jesus in the temple conversing with the teachers there (verses 41–52). When Mary and Joseph inquired why Jesus had stayed behind and not begun the return journey home to Nazareth after the Passover, Jesus answered “that I must be in my Father's house” (Luke 2:49). At this point, Jesus was twelve years old (verse 42), which was a year away from the age boys went to apprentice for their future occupation.<sup>75</sup> Jesus, gaining understanding about his identity as the Son of God, naturally went to the house of God to begin this apprenticeship. However, the chapter goes on to state that Jesus returned with Mary and Joseph “and was submissive to them,” continuing to grow “in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man” (verses 51–52). Though the Gospels do not give much insight into the early years of Jesus, a full study of his life requires a study of these quieter years as well. Jesus's childhood, though marked by a miraculous birth, was very ordinary, and this is important to remember during his ministry. Jesus showed himself to be the Messiah, but those witnessing his marvelous acts could not put from their minds his very average and unremarkable upbringing. As Jesus visited his

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<sup>74</sup> While the specific location of Christ's birth is a fascinating topic, a full discussion is outside the scope of this dissertation. Craig A. Evans, *Luke. Understanding the Bible Commentary Series*, ed. W. Ward Gasque, Robert L. Hubbard Jr., and Robert K. Johnston (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1990), 38.

<sup>75</sup> Lynn H. Cohick, “Women, Children, and Families in the Greco-Roman World,” in *The World of the New Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*, ed. Joel B. Green and Lee Martin McDonald (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 185, Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. 1, 144.

hometown, those who knew him as a child could not reconcile his claims with the normalcy of his childhood, which led to his rejection at Nazareth (Matt. 13:53–58). This rejection at Nazareth came near the end of Jesus’s public ministry, which is the next topic of study.

### **The Public Ministry of Jesus**

Luke and John both recount the background events of Jesus’s public ministry, which began after his baptism and temptation in the wilderness. Jesus’s baptism by John established Jesus’s messiahship even before his public ministry began, as he was identified by John as the “Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). The listening Jewish audience would have recognized the messianic meaning of the title Lamb of God and they would have known that John the Baptist was declaring Jesus to be the Messiah. Thus, Jesus’s claim to messiahship was made even before his public ministry officially began.<sup>76</sup> Harmonization is critical in understanding the events of Jesus’s baptism, as the Gospels of Mark and Luke give a slightly different account of the voice from heaven than that account in Matthew. In Mark and Luke, the voice spoke to Jesus (Mark 1:11, Luke 3:22). In Matthew, however, the voice spoke to John the Baptist (Matt. 3:17). Though the accounts differ, it is safe to conclude that both Jesus and John as well as any bystanders heard the voice declaring that Jesus was the Son of God.<sup>77</sup>

Though tempting to place the beginning of Jesus’s public ministry at his baptism, the Lord’s temptation in the wilderness should be placed before the commencement of his ministry, as he was yet preparing for ministry at that time. Luke even records that at the conclusion of his wilderness testing, “a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. And he

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<sup>76</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 484.

<sup>77</sup> A study of the Greek is helpful in this instance. In Mark and Luke, the second person singular personal pronoun *σὺ* is used, whereas in Matthew it is the third person singular *ὁὗτος*.



taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all” (Luke 4:14–15). Up until this point, Jesus was still an obscure Galilean, and Matthew notes that only after his temptation did Jesus begin to preach publicly (Matt. 4:17). What followed was the call of his disciples and the beginning of his public ministry.

Jesus spent the beginning months of his public ministry gathering disciples, performing the well-known miracle in Cana, and cleansing the temple at Jerusalem during Passover. These months may be termed the Early Judean Ministry of the Lord. Afterwards was the Great Galilean Ministry of Jesus when Jesus departed for Galilee after the arrest of John the Baptist (Matt. 4:12). Galilee was where Jesus spent most of his time and performed most of his miracles and teaching. The public ministry of Christ took up roughly two years of Jesus’s life and included his early time in Judea as well as the extensive time he spent in Galilee. During this time, Jesus sought out crowds, proclaimed that he was both Messiah and God come in the flesh, and performed many miracles to back up his claims. His purpose in doing so was to saturate the land with his claim to be both Messiah and God come in the flesh.

There was strategy in Jesus going to Galilee, especially as it related to the population of Galilee versus Judea. Around the time of the Maccabean revolt, many Jews moved from Judea to the more fertile and pleasant region of Galilee.<sup>78</sup> By the time of Jesus, most of the Jewish population of Israel was found in Galilee, despite Gentile influences in the area such as Roman towns and outposts.<sup>79</sup> The Jewish population remained faithful to its own religion but was not immune to these Gentile influences. This caused the zealous Judean Jews to look down upon Galileans but such disfavor did not seem to hurt the Galileans. The loyalty of the Galilean Jews

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<sup>78</sup> E. W. G. Masterman, “Galilee in the Time of Christ,” *The Biblical World* 32, no. 6 (December 1908): 406.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

was toward local synagogues more so than to the temple and the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, making the population more open to the message of Jesus despite the anger of the Judean Jews.<sup>80</sup>

There was also a political advantage to Galilee. Herod Antipas ruled Galilee and therefore “the Jewish leaders had no political leverage over Antipas (as opposed to Pilate in Judea),” and also no bearing on the Roman authorities acting in their favor against Jesus.<sup>81</sup> Jesus was able to reach the ears of many Jewish people, as well as avoid attracting the attention of the Romans stationed at Jerusalem and around Judea. Jesus provided ample proof of his claims and ample opportunities for the people to believe in him as Messiah, but he was ultimately rejected. The account of the unpardonable sin in Matthew 12:14–37 is the first instance of this rejection. In this account, the people are quoted as asking “Can this be the Son of David?” after Jesus healed a demon-possessed man (vs. 22–23). A better phrasing of the question, however, would be, “This can’t be the Son of David, can it?” with the rhetorical answer being, “No, it cannot.”<sup>82</sup> The Pharisees had already worked their opinion of Jesus into public knowledge, and the people had already made up their minds about him. Though Jesus had a great following, the people were not true disciples. Jesus realized this, but his twelve disciples did not. The final moment of rejection and the close of Jesus’s public ministry was the feeding of the five thousand, recorded in John 6. Jesus called himself the bread of life and compared himself to the manna that came from heaven during the time of Moses. After this teaching, “many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him,” and Jesus’s attention turned to the twelve disciples (John 6:66).

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<sup>80</sup> Pentecost and Danilson, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, 43–44, 73–74, 516–517; Douglas Bookman, “A Survey of the Galilean Ministry” (lecture at Shepherds Theological Seminary, Cary, NC, September 13, 2017).

<sup>81</sup> Bookman, “A Survey of the Galilean Ministry.”

<sup>82</sup> James Strong, *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible with Greek and Hebrew Dictionaries* (Nashville: Royal Publishers, Inc., 1979), 3385.

Jesus's ministry focus shifted after the feeding of the five thousand and rejection which he experienced at that event, from public ministry to private ministry.

### **The Private Ministry of Jesus**

For the next six months of Jesus's ministry, Jesus sought privacy and alone time with his disciples. Because his base was in Galilee, Jesus attempted to remain in that region and merely avoided crowds or public healings. Whenever he performed such healings, he told the healed person to not tell what had happened to them. This is perhaps one of the more confusing aspects of Jesus's ministry and a specific point to address. In his public ministry, Jesus was glad to have his name, message, and works spread abroad, and now seemingly all of a sudden he did not want anyone to tell about him. Why the change? It was due to the changing nature of his ministry and desire to have alone time with the disciples to teach them and prepare them for his coming death. While Jesus was hesitant to do miracles, he was unable to avoid the Jewish crowds in Galilee so began traveling to non-Jewish areas. His travels show a desire to remain close to his home base, starting first in Syro-Phoenicia and then going to the Decapolis and Bethsaida, but even these areas proved too public (Mark 7:24–37, 8:22). Jesus was recognized and was unable to be alone with his disciples. After traveling around Galilee with no success, Jesus finally went as far as Caesarea Philippi, where he was at last able to have the alone time he desired (Mark 8:27). It was here that Jesus told of his death openly and clearly for the first time, astounding and horrifying the disciples (Matt. 16:13, Mark 8:32). They could not believe that their Messiah would be killed, and they remained discouraged despite further conversation. To encourage himself and his disciples, Jesus was transfigured six days later. It was this event which bolstered the faith of the disciples after they learned of Jesus's coming death, and also encouraged the Lord to continue toward that death in Jerusalem.

### **A Time of Mixed Focus Ministry**

After around two years of public ministry and six months of private ministry, the following six months were a time of mixed focus between public ministry and continued private time with his disciples in preparation for the cross. At this point in Jesus's ministry, he still avoided Jerusalem save for feast days and remained instead in Judea and Perea. Jesus reverted to his habits of teaching crowds and doing public miracles to present himself as Messiah to the onlookers, but also remained focused on his disciples to prepare them for his death on the cross. The Gospels of Luke and John give the most insight to this period of Jesus's life. In John 7, Jesus went to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles. However, his brothers first mocked him, telling him to go and present himself to the people as Messiah. Jesus responded that he would not go, but later "he also went up, not publicly but in private" (John 7:10). Everyone at the feast was talking about Jesus, wondering if he would come and giving their opinion of his works (John 7:11–12). This supports the idea of Jesus as a local folk hero and someone that the whole region of Israel knew about. Because of Jesus's very public ministry in Galilee, word had spread about him and everyone wondered what he would do next, because they all realized that the Jewish leaders did not approve of his message (John 7:13, 25–26). Jesus taught in the temple and was even threatened with arrest (John 7:32). However, Jesus continued to speak, albeit not outright, of his coming death and to teach that his time had not yet come. Though the people did not understand, the disciples no doubt remembered the conversation at Caesarea Philippi and knew that Jesus would soon die. The people and even the Pharisees were divided about Jesus, and Jesus left Jerusalem until the Feast of Dedication (John 7:40–52; 10:22).

At the Feast of Dedication, Jesus was again confronted by the Jewish leaders but escaped and returned to Perea (John 10:31, 39–40). Jesus remained there and ministered until Mary and

Martha called Jesus to heal Lazarus. At this point, the disciples knew that Jesus would indeed die at Jerusalem, and they were fearful to go to Bethany to see Lazarus, as it was on the outskirts of Jerusalem (John 11:8, 16, 18). After Jesus miraculously raised Lazarus from the dead, the news of the miracle reached Jerusalem and the chief priests and Pharisees “made plans to put him to death” (John 11:53). John reports that because of this plot, Jesus “no longer walked openly among the Jews, but went from there to the region near the wilderness, to a town called Ephraim, and there he stayed with the disciples” for a little over a month until Passover (John 11:54). Jesus’s final trip to Jerusalem for the Passover marks the transition from his mixed focus ministry to the final events of his life.

### **The Final Events of the Life of Christ**

The final events of the life of Christ may be combined into the last several weeks of his time on earth and consist of his final trip to Jerusalem, the passion week, resurrection, and ascension. Jesus’s route to Jerusalem for the Passover is an interesting study in itself, and an important one in establishing a timeline for passion week. To avoid the Jews who might have sought him near Jerusalem, Jesus took a rather lengthy and roundabout route to Jerusalem. First, he went from Ephraim through Samaria up to Galilee (Luke 17:11). Bands of Jewish people would travel in large groups from Galilee to Jerusalem for feasts, and it was the intention of Jesus to join such a band, and likely allow his disciples to reunite with families for the feast.<sup>83</sup> Travel with such a band provided safety for everyone, but particularly for Jesus in avoiding the Jewish leaders. The travelers crossed the Jordan River into Perea and traveled the Rift Route along the Jordan. Because Jesus was with a band of Galilean Jews, it is understandable that this

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<sup>83</sup> Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, 347.

group would prefer the longer and more arduous Rift Route as opposed to a more direct route through hated Samaria (the Ridge Route). Near Jericho, the travelers crossed the Jordan again back into Judea and Jesus stopped in Bethany, just short of Jerusalem (Luke 18:35, 19:1, John 12:1). Such a route and stop in Bethany contrived to have Jesus arrive in Jerusalem on Sunday for the triumphal entry, keeping Sabbath in Bethany and arriving safely and untouched in Jerusalem despite the best efforts of his opponents.<sup>84</sup> A full study of the passion week is outside the scope of this study, but a summarized list of events is given here: triumphal entry (Sunday); cleansing of the temple (Monday and Tuesday); keeping of the Passover (Thursday night); arrest, trial, crucifixion, burial (Friday).

A discussion of Pilate's trial also deserves brief mention as it pertains to Jesus's identity as the King. Throughout his ministry, Jesus had been careful not to claim kingship outright because of the Romans. It was his desire to minister to Israel and fully present himself as the Messiah and God come in the flesh, and to offer the kingdom to the nation. However, to saturate the land with this claim and offer, Jesus had to be careful not to claim kingship outright. As his trial and crucifixion demonstrate, this was a valid consideration. During his trial, Pilate attempted to understand Jesus's identity, and could see that he made the religious Jews very angry by his supposed blasphemy (Mark 14:63, John 18:35). When the Sanhedrin brought Jesus to Pilate, they made sure to phrase their accusation of him in a way that would go against Roman ordinances, accusing Jesus of "forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king" (Luke 23:2). Pilate's interrogation centered on the idea of Jesus as a King, and even when Pilate was ready to free Jesus, the people convinced Pilate to crucify Jesus based on his supposed treason against Rome (John 19:12). Jesus was crucified because he claimed to be King, a claim

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<sup>84</sup> Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, 369–370.

he had been so careful to make clearly yet discreetly. His trial and punishment make it clear that he was right to do so. After his burial, Christ was raised early on the first day of the week (Sunday) and ministered for forty days before ascending into heaven from the Mount of Olives. Thus ends the earthly ministry of Jesus and the chronological review of his life. What follows is a study of Jesus's humanity, the theory of the messianic secret, and a geographical survey and timeline of Christ's life and ministry.

### An Excurses into The Humanity of Jesus

#### **Infancy and Childhood**

In a study of the life of Christ, it is important to realize and appreciate the perfect way in which Jesus was fully God and fully man. He did not lose divine qualities when he gained human qualities, nor did he lack any humanness because of his Godness. When reading the Gospels and studying his life, this must be remembered. A study of the humanity of Jesus becomes especially pertinent when studying and understanding his ministry and motives during his ministry. In this section, the boyhood of Jesus will be studied for examples, as well as a few case studies from Jesus's ministry. Two specific journeys of Jesus will be studied as well as they relate to the topic of this dissertation. The Holy Spirit's role in the life of Jesus, especially in his humanity, is the focus of this section.

From the time of his conception, the Holy Spirit was active in the life of Christ. The Gospels emphasize the Spirit's role in the life of Christ, even from before he was born (Matt. 1:18, Luke 1:35). There is no indication that Jesus, when he was born, was an all-knowing baby, but rather a normal infant who was raised by Mary and Joseph in their Jewish setting. Though the surroundings of his birth were unusual, he was taken and presented in the temple as specified in the Mosaic law (Lev. 12), and he was taken to live with his parents. Miraculous episodes are

sprinkled into the infancy of Jesus, such as Simeon and Anna at the temple (Luke 2:25–38), the worship of the wise men (Matt. 2:1–12), and the divine warning to Joseph to flee to Egypt (Matt. 2:13, 19).

When Jesus was a boy of twelve years old, he traveled with his parents to Jerusalem for Passover (Luke 2:41–51). What transpired is an example of the Holy Spirit’s work in the life of Jesus as a fully divine and also fully human boy. In this episode, Jesus was mistakenly left behind in Jerusalem at the end of the festival, and when Mary and Joseph found him he was “in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions” (Luke 2:46). Those who observed him “were amazed at his understanding and his answers,” and here is a small clue about the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the boyhood of Jesus (Luke 2:47). Though apocryphal writings suggest Jesus had divine knowledge and silenced the teachers in this instance, “Jesus is not presented here as a superhuman child.”<sup>85</sup> Rather, Luke presents the child Jesus as an extraordinary yet normal human boy “who had been well taught in the Old Testament, who possessed a deep love for the Scriptures and a keen insight into their meaning, and who had a thirst to know more about them.”<sup>86</sup> In Luke 2:47, the Greek word συνέσει is used to mean more than merely natural understanding, “but as something granted people by God.”<sup>87</sup> This noun brings attention to the work the Spirit of God was doing in the life of the boy Jesus, in giving him an understanding of the Scriptures to “exceed his human limitations,” and helping him to see truths in the Scriptures which would continue on into his adult ministry.<sup>88</sup> In his

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<sup>85</sup> Gerald F. Hawthorne, *The Presence and the Power: The Significance of the Holy Spirit in the Life and Ministry of Jesus* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1991), 104.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*



response to his parents, Jesus also gave some indication that he was beginning to understand who he was as the Son of God who ought to be in his Father's house (Luke 2:49).

Nevertheless, Jesus remained to those in his hometown and those who knew him as a boy as a very ordinary, normal child. At times in his adult ministry, the people questioned Jesus's teachings and miracles in reference to this ordinary upbringing. After teaching in the synagogue at Nazareth, the people "were astonished, and said, 'Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?'" (Matt. 13:54–56). After recording this same event, Luke adds that the people were outraged and attempted to throw Jesus down a cliff (Luke 4:22, 29). The wisdom and authority Jesus possessed did not, in their minds, match the normal and unremarkable upbringing they had witnessed in Jesus. Though Jesus was extremely bright and engaged with the Jewish Scriptures, his early life was not marked by miracles, mighty works, or other divine signs. This view is in direct opposition to what is presented in the apocryphal gospels. These accounts include episodes of Jesus speaking as an infant (Arabic Infancy Gospel 1), raising another child from the dead (Infancy Gospel of Thomas B 8:1–3), and even using his abilities to take advantage of and hurt other children (Infancy Gospel of Thomas A 4:1). Contrary to this extravagant fiction, Jesus had a normal and unremarkable childhood which no Jew would have recognized as miraculous or extraordinary.

Luke 2 ends with the phrase, "and Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man" (v. 52). Earlier in Luke 2:40, something similar was also said: "the child [Jesus] grew and became strong, filled with wisdom." That Jesus grew in wisdom indicates that he did not possess boundless wisdom. Rather he, as a human child, had to learn about the

Scriptures and himself within those Scriptures. By the Spirit, he gained wisdom in this regard, but he was not born with that knowledge. A similar description is used of John the Baptist as a boy in Luke 1:80, which reads, “the child grew and became strong in spirit.” The difference is in the stressed mental growth of Jesus, especially in the term “wisdom.” Jesus would be marked by an uncommon and constant filling of wisdom by the Holy Spirit which set him apart from John.<sup>89</sup> Again, this filling did not take place all at once, but was gradual and in conjunction with Jesus’s own devotion to the Scriptures and his lessons in righteousness from his parents. Luke 2:52 reiterates this in the light of Jesus’s submission as a human child to his earthly parents, despite the knowledge and wisdom he had already gained and sought after in Jerusalem.

The work of the Spirit in the boyhood of Jesus continued on into his adult ministry as the Messiah of Israel. Again, Jesus was fully God and fully man, and as a man depended on the Holy Spirit in much of his ministry. Philippians 2 is the famous kenosis passage, and verses 6–7 describe what Jesus did in becoming a man while remaining fully God. The passage reads, “...who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.” The word from which kenosis is derived is the Greek word κενόω, meaning to empty.<sup>90</sup> It may also be understood as to lay aside, make void, or deprive of force.<sup>91</sup> Though heavily debated, there is a way to reconcile the perceived contradiction of Jesus as fully God and fully man. Jesus, in becoming human, laid aside the independent access of his godly attributes.<sup>92</sup> He depended on

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<sup>89</sup> Hawthorne, *The Presence and the Power*, 100.

<sup>90</sup> Strong, *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance*, 2758.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1907), 703.

the Holy Spirit in his humanity, and this dependence was evident throughout his ministry. In the episode of the boy Jesus at the temple, Jesus misunderstood the timing of his role as the Son of God. He was not disobedient to his parents; as Luke 2:51 points out, he was submissive to his parents. Later in his ministry when Jesus changed directions in travel or encountered unexpected circumstances, he was not made imperfect by these episodes. Rather, as a man he was not omniscient but relied on the Spirit to direct him, and he was obedient to the Spirit's leading. Jesus did not make mistakes or forget where to go, but used his sinless yet still human mind to strategize and plan for what, according to his knowledge gained by the Scriptures and the wisdom given by the Spirit, he knew his ministry involved and led to. Quick gives a summary of the humanness of Christ and his dependence on the Spirit:

In His flesh, then, He was not conscious of anything of which human faculties, so placed and so conditioned at that particular point of time and space, could not have made him conscious... Yet by means of developing human faculties He trod man's path to God, taught about God, knew God, knew Himself as God's appointed man, all with an undeviating sureness such as no mere man could have shown.<sup>93</sup>

Jesus was the epitome of a man, sinless in all his ways and dependent on the Holy Spirit just as he commanded his followers to be dependent. Though fully divine, Jesus laid aside the independent access of his godly attributes and so became fully human while still maintaining complete divineness. It was necessary for him to learn, to be taught, to gain wisdom, and even to follow social structures in his boyhood and ministry. By the Spirit, Jesus understood the Scriptures, performed miracles, and knew himself to be the Son of God. A few case studies of the ministry of Christ will be looked at next in light of this view, and conclusions drawn especially around the ministry of Jesus as it relates to his travels.

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<sup>93</sup> Oliver Chase Quick, *Christian Beliefs and Modern Questions* (London: Student Christian Movement, 1923), 70–72.

### Case Studies of the Humanity of Jesus

In the Gospels, there are a few instances that read something along the lines of, “Jesus, knowing their thoughts,” or “Jesus, perceiving their thoughts” (Matt. 9:4, 12:25; Mark 2:8; Luke 5:22, 9:47; John 2:24). A reading of these passages can lead the reader to think Jesus was reading minds, and indeed this is a position held in scholarship. However, some reconciliation should be done in these cases between Jesus’s divine and human qualities. It is here that a discussion of the Holy Spirit’s work in the life of Christ becomes pertinent. As a sinless man with a sinless and perfect mind, Jesus was incredibly perceptive and able to read people. In these instances, Jesus could have been using these natural but perfected abilities to know what people were thinking.<sup>94</sup> In many cases, it is the minds of Jesus’s enemies which he is knowing, and their actions and thoughts were often predicable when it came to the words and miracles of Jesus. Another option is that Jesus as a prophet and “like the ancient prophets, was given power to discern this hidden thoughts of people, to see and know the hidden motives which governed their lives.”<sup>95</sup> In this case, the Holy Spirit gave him this ability. Jesus, in the kenosis, no longer independently accessed his omniscience and so instances of apparent mind reading or predictions of the future were Spirit-enabled and Spirit given.

At other times in his ministry, Jesus was among a great crowd when he seemed to disappear in order to escape trouble. In Luke 4, Jesus read the Isaiah scroll in Nazareth and declared that he was the fulfillment of the messianic prophecies found therein. The crowd was angered and drove him to a cliff in order to throw him off (v. 29). Verse 30 reads, “But passing through their midst, he went away.” Rather than assuming Jesus supernaturally disappeared, it is

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<sup>94</sup> Bookman, “A Survey of the Galilean Ministry.”

<sup>95</sup> Hawthorne, *The Presence and the Power*, 162.

better to remember his humanity in this instance. It could be that in the jumble of the people, Jesus was able to conceal himself and get away. It is also possible that “the passion of the crowd, once outside, may have abated somewhat.”<sup>96</sup> To be sure, Jesus performed miraculous, supernatural actions in his ministry (calming the storm, walking on water), but when these occurrences are found, it is important to remember that Jesus was fully man and dependent on the Holy Spirit for these acts. If, as a man, he could do something that could also be taken as divine, it is worth thinking about how he could have done the action through his human faculties. This keeps Jesus’s humanity from getting lost or set aside when it is just as important a feature of Jesus as his divine nature.

The alternative view is to see Jesus as something of an individual who masqueraded as a man, but was in reality the all-powerful, all-knowing God all the time. While this view gives great credence to Jesus’s fully divine nature, his humanity is lost. Philippians 2 makes it clear that Jesus “did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped” but rather emptied himself, “taking the form of a servant, [and] being born in the likeness of men” (Phil. 2:6–7). Were Jesus hiding his identity as God, it would seem he was still keeping his equality with God. Again, to be sure, Jesus was fully God, but when he came in the form of a servant, he set aside the access to his divine attributes that he might minister fully and completely as the perfect man. The miraculous works which he did perform were empowered by the Holy Spirit, who in his humanity Jesus relied upon. Such a relationship explains how Jesus could remain fully God, while still becoming and living as fully man on the earth. The Holy Spirit’s work and influence in the life of Jesus should not be forgotten, as it explains how Jesus could have been such a normal and fully human man, while at the same time able to prophesy and perform miracles. The

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<sup>96</sup> Evans, *Luke*, 62.

next section relates the Holy Spirit's role in the life of Christ as it pertains to his travels and ministry goals.

### **The Humanity of Jesus in His Travels**

As Jesus's ministry shifted from public to private, he began to travel outside of Galilee and further into Gentile and remote areas. There are a few questions to ask about this time in Jesus's life. Why did Jesus apparently fail in gaining alone time with his disciples until he went to Caesarea Philippi? Did he make a mistake traveling to Syro-Phoenicia and the Decapolis? If he knew he would be recognized in those places but he did not want to be recognized, why did he go? Did he foreknow he would minister to individuals in those places, making his goal public ministry to individuals rather than private ministry to his disciples? Jesus's humanity again answers these questions, and the specific answer centers around Jesus's need and ability to strategize.

When Jesus went to Syro-Phoenicia, he had already been rejected by the nation of Israel as her Messiah. The feeding of the five thousand and the unpardonable sin episode confirmed that rejection, and so Jesus turned his attention to the disciples. He had already gone across the Sea of Galilee to Gennesaret, which though not far from Galilee, was all the same a more remote and Gentile place (Mark 6:53–56). After being recognized, healing people, and teaching the crowd and Pharisees that had gathered, he went further away to the region of Tyre and Sidon in Syro-Phoenicia (Mark 7:24). Here the text clearly indicates that he was attempting to stay hidden from the people, but he was recognized (Mark 7:24). If Jesus had been omniscient, he would have known this would happen, and could have either gone with the intention of healing the Syro-Phoenician woman's daughter (rather than the intention to remain hidden), or he could have avoided that location and even that specific house and gone somewhere he would not have been

recognized. In his ministry, Jesus was not omniscient. He had the power to know what would happen in the future regarding himself, the disciples, and the temple, but this was in the same way the Old Testament prophets were given to know parts of the future.<sup>97</sup> In this instance, Jesus has a strategy determined to get alone time with his disciples. He would go to more remote areas where he may not be recognized, but when he was he changed directions and went somewhere else. Jesus did not make mistakes and still possessed omniscience as the Son. However, he had set aside access to that omniscience and depended on the Spirit and his own human but unfallen faculties to set a course for his ministry.

Jesus's trips to the Decapolis and Bethsaida again reflect this need to strategize. After being recognized in Syro-Phoenicia, Jesus went further away to the Decapolis, which was separated from Israel by the Jordan River (Mark 7:31). Perhaps there would be fewer Jews there who would recognize him and perhaps the people there would not have heard as easily as those in Syro-Phoenicia about him. Again, though, he was recognized and ministered to the people there before leaving again to try a different location. On his way to Caesarea Philippi, he went through Bethsaida and was stopped to heal a blind man (Mark 8:22–26). It is likely Jesus was already on his way to Caesarea Philippi, so why did he go through Bethsaida if he knew omnisciently that he would be stopped? Again, Jesus as a man did not know this. He followed the road as it led north and did not go around the town in order to avoid this healing. Rather, he went through Bethsaida, was unexpectedly recognized, and healed the blind man before departing. Jesus did not make a mistake in going through Bethsaida, and he did not supernaturally know he would be stopped there. He had strategized to go to Caesarea Philippi in order to gain alone time with his disciples, and the events at Bethsaida were unexpected but

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<sup>97</sup> Hawthorne, *The Presence and the Power*, 162.

handled in the moment. Jesus's dependence on the Holy Spirit in his life was not limited to his miracles. Jesus was fully God and also fully man, and therefore dependent on the Holy Spirit in his early life and during his ministry. His humanity was unfallen and perfect and he used his human faculties in a perfect way to strategize, determine, and minister to the crowds and to his disciples.

## The Messianic Secret

### A Brief History of the Argument

When discussing Jesus's pleas for secrecy in Mark 6—9, it is important to distinguish the differences between these accounts and the commands for secrecy to the leper and demon in Mark 1. These examples are often linked to other requests for secrecy found later in Mark's Gospel. Mark's apparent evidence for Jesus's desire to keep his messiahship a secret develops into the "messianic secret" theory which suggests that Jesus himself never claimed to be the Messiah, and that the ideas were added by the Gospel writers nefariously. The messianic secret is the idea that the Gospels, particularly Mark, show Jesus hesitant and even secretive to claim messiahship. Jesus never refers to himself outright as Messiah, which contributes to this idea, but the main source for this idea is Jesus's caution to people not to tell anyone that he is the Messiah. It is believed by those in this camp that Jesus did not ever claim to be Messiah, and the fact that he was Messiah was added only later. Mark, as the author of the Gospel by his name, added these covert features to his narrative to prove that Jesus was the Messiah but wished to keep it a secret from the general crowds.<sup>98</sup> This secret message was for a small circle of inner disciples

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<sup>98</sup> Ben Witherington III, *New Testament Theology and Ethics* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 728–729.



only. Interestingly, the idea that Mark added a messianic message later, though clandestine, means that Jesus did not believe himself to be Messiah. There is numerous evidence throughout Mark, the other Gospels, as well as in the New Testament, that show Jesus knew himself to be Messiah and claimed messiahship during his ministry on earth. The examples given in Mark of Jesus asking for secrecy have some similarities on the surface, but the secrecy asked for had multiple purposes depending on the time and context for which it was asked.

The idea of a messianic secret is a fairly new one, proposed by William Wrede in his book *Das Messiasgeheimnis in Den Evangelien (The Messianic Secret)* first published in 1971. In the introduction to his book, Wrede connects the idea of Jesus as Messiah with pre-conceived notions of Gospel readers to see him in nothing but that light.<sup>99</sup> Though from the start in Mark's Gospel Jesus asks for secrecy first from demons (Mark 1:25) and later from a leper (Mark 1:43), readers of the Gospel know Jesus only as Messiah and so acknowledge him thus. These passages could present trouble for the readers, because it does seem Jesus did not wish to be acknowledged as Messiah, and so Wrede's hypothesis comes into play. The messianic secret proposal gives an answer for Jesus's hesitancy to claim messiahship, and at times takes it beyond Jesus's desire for an accurate communication of the type of Messiah he was (spiritual rather than political deliverer). At its core, the messianic secret denies that Jesus claimed messiahship or believed himself to be Messiah. Wrede's proposal was enforced by the arrival of form criticism, which "began as an attempt to penetrate behind the written sources of the Gospels to uncover the earlier forms taken by the gospel story."<sup>100</sup> The out-workings of the form-critical method required that each Gospel, and every biblical writing for that matter, need have a life-setting

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<sup>99</sup> William Wrede, *The Messianic Secret*, trans. J. C. G. Greig (London: James Clarke Company, 2022), 7.

<sup>100</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *A New Perspective on Jesus: What the Quest for the Historical Jesus Missed* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 14.

which determined the form the book took. It is assumed in this line of thinking that the church and early Christian community “freely attributed” to the Gospels, and what modern readers have as a result is a modified version of the original.<sup>101</sup> As Dunn somberly writes, “consequently, there can never be any assurance as to how much or how little may go back to the setting of Jesus’ own mission” in the words of the Gospels.<sup>102</sup>

Although Wrede’s messianic secret thesis experienced some popularity near its start in the 1920s, its acceptance soon faded and today has been rejected by most theologians. The messianic secret idea continues to find a foothold among some scholars, but by and large most evangelical theologians do not hold to this theory. Rather, they give other reasons for the supposed secrecy of Jesus around his messiahship. Some propose that Jesus kept his messiahship a secret from the Jews because of the fear of Rome. Had Jesus told the Jewish nation that he was the Messiah, the people would have flocked to him, honored him as Messiah, and perhaps attempted to crown him king. This would have quickly reached the ears of Rome and been stopped, as had been the case for previous pretender messiahs (see chapter 4 on false messiahs and treason). As it was, the Jewish people did realize that Jesus claimed to be King, and they even attempted to make him this King (John 6:15). Jesus had shown that he was the Messiah, but he used other terms besides King to hide this from Rome. The messianic secret is not the only answer to Jesus’s perceived secrecy around his messiahship, but one that scholars should be familiar with, as well as the name Wrede associated with this hypothesis. It is not unclear why Wrede reached the conclusions he did, because Jesus does seem to ask for secrecy at points in his ministry. However, modern scholarship offers other explanations for Jesus’s requests for silence

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<sup>101</sup> R. Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word* (London: Nicholson & Watson, 1935), 12.

<sup>102</sup> Dunn, *A New Perspective on Jesus*, 14.

about his miracles and identity, and as will be argued, these reasons align better with the rest of Mark and the other Gospels than Wrede's messianic secret theory.

### **An Alternative Proposal to the Messianic Secret Theory**

In the world in which Jesus lived, loyalty to the emperor, or at least submission to the emperor, was a requirement of Roman Empire-controlled territories such as Israel. Jesus, his disciples, and the crowds would have been familiar with the laws around this submission, and Roman soldiers patrolling streets and keeping guard at forts and watch posts would have been a familiar sight. Rome was very harsh on rival kings, and there is some evidence for this within the biblical text itself. Especially during Jesus's trial before the High Priest and Pilate, some Roman law or at least reactions to Roman law may be observed. Though Caiaphas and the Jews were more concerned with Jesus's perceived blasphemy in calling himself the Christ and the Son of God (Matt. 26:63–66), they used a Roman argument to convince the Roman governor Pilate to put Jesus to death. Jesus had acknowledged his kingship before the Jews and Pilate, and the Jews knew that such a claim meant treason against Rome. They reminded Pilate, "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar" (John 19:12). Thus Jesus was sent to be crucified, and a man named Barabbas was released instead. This man "had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city and for murder," meaning he could have been part of a political plot against Rome (Luke 23:19).<sup>103</sup> The sentence of death for political criminals awaited Barabbas had he not been released, and instead fell on Jesus as another accused of treason against Rome.

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<sup>103</sup> Monique Cuany, "Jesus, Barabbas and the People: The Climax of Luke's Trial Narrative and Lukan Christology (Luke 23.13-25)," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 39, no. 4 (April 2017); David Lyle Jeffrey, *Luke* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2012), 452.

Jesus knew the dangers any hint of treason posed, and it was his desire to stay below Rome's radar in this regard. This is one explanation for the apparent furtiveness which Jesus showed around his ministry and particularly any proclamation of his messiahship. After Jesus fed the five thousand in John 6, the text reads that Jesus, "Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself" (John 6:15). Though not a command for secrecy, Jesus quickly escaped a situation which was apparently about to lead to his being crowned king. This would have meant a swift end to his ministry to Israel, as the Romans were quick to find pretender kings and deal with them harshly and completely.<sup>104</sup> Rather than meet this premature end, Jesus was quick to escape the crowd, and later delivered a message that would cause many to turn away from him and any potentially kingly claims he had made (John 6:66). Jesus had specific goals in mind for his ministry, and had these been cut short by an intervention from Rome, or changed because of the whim of the people, then his ministry would not have accomplished what he intended for it to accomplish. Therefore, Jesus was careful to saturate the land with claims of his messiahship, but in ways that would not attract the attention of hostile Rome. The specific ways in which he did this will be studied directly, but the specific passages which lead to the idea of the messianic secret will be studied first.

### **Textual Examples of Supposed Secrecy and Their Explanations**

The book of Mark is one of the better places to see examples of the supposed messianic secret. A few commonly appealed to passages will be studied, and an alternative explanation given. The first come in Mark 1:25, 34 and Mark 1:44. In Mark 1:25, Jesus healed a man with an

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<sup>104</sup> Chilton, "The Roman Law of Treason under the Early Principate," 76.

unclean spirit and forbade the demon from proclaiming that Jesus was “the Holy One of God” (Mark 1:24–25). Mark 1:34 is another example of this prohibition and reads that Jesus “healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.” These events took place at the beginning of Jesus’s public ministry in Galilee when he was only starting to go about the towns and villages to proclaim his message to be both Messiah and God come in the flesh. It is possible the Pharisees were witnesses to this event, but Luke does not mention their coming until Luke 5:17, which parallels Mark 2. Nevertheless, Jesus’s “fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee” after he cast out the demon in Mark 1:25, which gives some clue as to his silencing of the demons (Mark 1:28). Jesus was becoming a well-known figure in the region, with many followers and with many miracles to back his claims. The Romans were notoriously quick to find any hint of treason and stamp it out, thus keeping their empire safe from pretender kings. Had Jesus’s identity been revealed in a way they could understand it, it could have ended his ministry prematurely. The demons had no strategy in naming Jesus, only proclaiming who he was. Jesus, on the other hand, used other names for himself besides Messiah so as not to attract the attention of Rome. More will be said about this later. Some scholars affirm that Jesus did not want the demons to say who he was because of their nature as demons. He did not need such unclean mouths proclaiming his perfection as the Son of God, and so forbade them from speaking.<sup>105</sup> This proposal makes sense in the case of Mark 1:24, where the demon does not call Jesus Messiah but Holy One of God. Such a name would have been understood by the Jewish listeners but not necessarily a threat to Rome.

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<sup>105</sup> Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. 1, 323.

In Mark 1:44, Jesus again forbade a proclamation of himself, but this time from a healed leper. He commands the leper to “say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to them.” There are a few interesting areas of study in this short command which relate to Jesus’s desire for silence from the healed man. First, Jesus commanded the man to show himself to the priest and follow the rituals for the cleansing of a leper. These laws are to be found in Leviticus 14, where a full list of laws for the cleansing of a leper and of his house may be found. The last phrase is of special interest: “for a proof to them.” There are a few options based on the Greek text as to what is being proved and to whom. Stein sums these up clearly in his commentary on the book of Mark: “The explanatory ‘for a witness to them’ ( εἰς μαρτύριον αὐτοῖς , *eis martyrion autois* ) can be interpreted as a dative of advantage (‘as a witness to them [of your healing]’) or as a dative of disadvantage (‘as a witness against [their hardness of hearts and unbelief]’ or ‘as a witness against [those who say I do not keep the law]’).<sup>106</sup> Other examples of this expression appear in Mark, though like Mark 1:44 it is not always clear which meaning is intended. As the event takes place rather early in his ministry, before the hostility of the religious Jews had fully set in, it is likely that Jesus intended the man to go as a witness to the priests and to a larger extent all the people as a testimony of his healing.<sup>107</sup>

Thomas and Gundry include an interesting footnote in their *Harmony of the Gospels* on this passage. According to these authors, the leper was intended to go show himself to the priests “for the priests to verify the cleansing and announce to the nation the arrival of Messiah.”<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Stein, *Mark*, 108.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Thomas and Gundry, *A Harmony of the Gospels*, 53.

How could this be, as the cleansing of a leper was not one of the prophesied miracles of Messiah? Fruchtenbaum points out that the healing of leprosy had come to be viewed as a messianic miracle.<sup>109</sup> No one in the Old Testament, save for the special cases of Miriam and Naaman, had been healed of leprosy.<sup>110</sup> If Jesus did mean for the healed man to go and show himself to the priest as a proof of his coming as Messiah, the man did not do so and Jesus continued his ministry. Had the man obeyed and the priest proclaimed Jesus as Messiah, this could have begun the realization and repentance of the nation of Israel, thus ushering in Messiah's kingdom. In this case, any possibility of Roman pushback would have been irrelevant as the kingdom of heaven began.

Mark 6—8, which are focus chapters of this dissertation, include examples of Jesus asking those he interacted with to not reveal his identity, which again could be mistaken for the messianic secret. In Mark 6, Jesus did not ask anyone to keep his identity a secret, but it is clear that his identity was not a secret. Even in the more Gentile area east of the Sea of Galilee, “the people immediately recognized him” as a miracle-worker and brought those who needed healing to him (Mark 6:54). This happened “wherever he came, in villages, cities, or countryside,” and anyone sick received healing (Mark 6:56). As Jesus began his private ministry to his disciples, requests for secrecy became more frequent. Mark 7:24 records that Jesus “entered a house and did not want anyone to know, yet he could not be hidden.” Later, in Mark 7:31–37, Jesus attempted to perform a private healing and charged those who witnessed the miracle “to tell no one,” but again his wishes went unheeded (Mark 7:36). A final example is Mark 8:22–26, where Jesus was asked to heal a blind man. In this instance, Jesus took the man out of the village, and

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<sup>109</sup> Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Three Messianic Miracles* (Ariel Ministries, 2005), 4.

<sup>110</sup> Miriam was healed before the writing of the Torah, and Naaman was a Syrian who was not under the Law or required to follow the stipulations of Leviticus 14.

upon completing the miracle told the man to go home and to “not even enter the village” (Mark 8:23, 26).

All of these requests for secrecy have a common element: they happen during Jesus’s time of private ministry to the Twelve, which is the subject of this dissertation. This is the time in his ministry when Jesus was attempting to get away from the crowds and train his disciples for a time. When plotted on a map of Israel, the miracles took place further and further from Jesus’s ministry center in Galilee, as Jesus tried to avoid the crowds. These narratives make it clear that Jesus was a very recognizable figure, and everywhere he went he was ambushed by a crowd of some sort requesting healing. During this private ministry, Jesus did not deny healing or teaching moments, but after they were finished, he left quickly and asked for secrecy that he not be followed. Rather than examples of Jesus attempting to keep his messiahship a secret from the Jews, or even more that he himself was unaware of his messiahship, these examples show Jesus focusing on his disciples and trying to avoid public areas or recognition that would keep him from this dedicated time.

John 6:15 is an example that the people of Israel knew who Jesus was and recognized him as the Messiah King. The verse comes directly after the feeding of the five thousand and reads, “Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.”<sup>111</sup> Though Jesus had done other miracles associated with the Messiah up to this point such as casting out demons and healing lepers, after the feeding of the five thousand the people were ready to make him King. It is possible that they viewed the miracle of the loaves as part of the prophesied bounty that Messiah would bring (Jer. 31:12), and so attempted to make him King. The Gospels make it clear that it was indeed a

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<sup>111</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 679, 680.



bounty, as not only the crowds were filled but additional baskets of scraps were collected (John 6:13). Agricultural blessings were seen as the favor of God, and indeed the Lord had promised abundant harvests to the nation if the people obeyed the Lord (Deut. 28). By providing the crowd with more bread than they could consume, Jesus showed the blessing of the Lord on the people, by his chosen servant and Messiah. The large crowd of over five thousand people realized this blessing and attempted, in their great number, to honor Jesus as the King he showed himself to be. As a crowd numbering over five thousand, they likely could have succeeded had Jesus not perceived what was about to happen and escaped the situation.

Jesus clearly had the support of the crowds as it pertained to himself as a political figure only. The Jewish nation was desperate to be free from Roman control and was willing to follow someone like Jesus who could give them this freedom. Though he had communicated that he was more than merely a political king and his kingship required obedience and repentance, the people in this moment wanted his leadership only for the freedom it would bring them. Jesus knew that the nation was not ready to repent and follow him as the Messiah King, and also knew of the consequences accepting the people's kingship would bring from Rome. Thus he departed and did not allow the crowd to force their wish upon him.

The people's true feelings about Jesus show very clearly in the following pericope in John 6. When the crowds found Jesus in Capernaum, they flocked to him as Jesus said because they wished for more food (John 6:26). He next preached to them that he was the bread of life come from heaven, thus telling them that he had come from heaven, was greater than Moses, and was himself God. Though the people recognized him as a prophet, and maybe even greater than Moses, they were not willing to hear that he was from heaven.<sup>112</sup> Jesus called out their

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<sup>112</sup> Hawthorne, *The Presence and the Power*, 161.

unrepentance that though they had seen him, they did not believe him (John 6:36). Though they claimed they desired the bread that Jesus offered, they did not in fact have it in their hearts to accept his message and claim to messiahship. During this lesson, the Jews brought up Jesus's normal boyhood and doubted he could have come from heaven (John 6:42). Jesus again referred to himself as the Son of Man, requiring his followers to symbolically eat his flesh and drink his blood, which turned many of the disciples away (John 6:52–66). The people knew Jesus claimed divinity and it was not a secret among them nor by Jesus. Though he claimed messiahship in a covert way to avoid the Roman eye, there was nothing covert about it for the Jewish people.

### **Terms Jesus Used as Israel's King**

In order to avoid attention from Rome but still make it clear that Jesus was the Messiah, he did not call himself Messiah or King outright. Rather, he used names for himself which would have been immediately recognizable as messianic to a Jewish listener, but would not have mattered to a Roman. Son of Man was a particular favorite, used over eighty times in the Gospels. This was a name which referenced Old Testament prophecies, especially in Daniel 7. In Daniel 7:13–14, Daniel was given a vision of “one like a son of man” given dominion over the nations. It was said all nations would serve him and his kingdom would be over all the nations. This “dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed” (Dan. 7:14). This vision was understood in the Jewish context to be a picture of God – the Ancient of Days – and his Messiah.<sup>113</sup> Such a connection is clear to modern Christians reading Daniel, but even to ancient Jews the title “Son of Man” was messianic.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Willem A. VanGemeren, *Commentary on Daniel. Baker Illustrated Bible Commentary*. Ed. Gary M. Burge and Andrew E. Hill (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2019), 21–22.

<sup>114</sup> E. B. Pusey, *Daniel the Prophet: Nine Lectures, Delivered in the Divinity School of the University of Oxford* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1885), 404.

Especially concerning the prophecies in Daniel, the people were familiar with such prophecies as they related to their nation and even the current time and political situation in Israel in the first century. Messianic expectation was at a high, and Jewish people knew that Son of Man was a messianic title. By calling himself Son of Man, Jesus made it explicitly clear that he was claiming to be the Jewish Messiah. Very early on in his ministry, Jesus healed a paralytic and called himself Son of Man during this episode (Matt. 9, Mark 2, Luke 5). This title was used in association with the authority to forgive sins, something the Jewish audience knew only God could do. By claiming such a title and such authority to forgive sins, Jesus made it clear early in his ministry that he was the Messiah. He claimed messiahship without arousing the suspicions of Rome, but in a very clear way told Israel that he was indeed their Messiah.

Later in John 10, Jesus claimed that he was the Good Shepherd, another reference to the Jewish Old Testament Scriptures. After healing a blind man (a messianic miracle) and again referring to himself as the Son of Man (as above) in John 9, Jesus spoke with the Pharisees who questioned him regarding this miracle. In John 10, he gave a lengthy lesson on himself as the Good Shepherd in contrast to the strangers, thieves, and hired hands given to watch the flock. This imagery comes straight from Ezekiel 34, where the Lord rebukes the shepherds of Israel for not taking care of the sheep he had put them over. Because of their neglect, these shepherds would be punished by God and the Lord himself would be the good shepherd that watched over his sheep, caring for them and seeking out those who were lost to bring them back to the fold. Jesus expanded on this passage, saying he would lay down his life for the sheep and would not lose any sheep which the Father had given him.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 809.

By calling himself the Good Shepherd and referring back to Ezekiel 34, Jesus made himself one with God. If there was any doubt, the next pericope makes it abundantly clear that Jesus claimed to be God (John 10:22–39). Jesus was in Jerusalem for Hanukkah and the Pharisees and potentially Sadducees as well tested and questioned him. They asked him to tell them that he was the Christ plainly, but of course Jesus did not acquiesce. Had he called himself the Messiah directly, especially in Jerusalem, no doubt Rome would have caught wind of it and silenced him immediately. This would have ended his ministry before it was finished. Jesus was wise and strategic in the way he presented himself, making it clear even to his enemies who questioned whether he was the Messiah, while protecting himself from consequences of treason against Rome. To answer the Jews' question, Jesus again referred to himself as the Son of Man and went even further, declaring "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). This made it very clear that Jesus was claiming to be God and the Messiah, and the Jews' reaction to pick up stones to stone him prove they knew what he was saying (John 10:31). Jesus pointed out the hypocrisy of the Jews, that they would not believe in him nor in the works he did despite their clearly miraculous nature. "Again they sought to arrest him" after hearing his comparison of himself to the Father, but Jesus escaped (John 10:39).

Even though Jesus's enemies questioned him again and again whether he was the Messiah, the names he used for himself and the miracles he did testified to this fact. His enemies' reactions to these names and works show that they understood he did claim messiahship, even if they continued to ask him to say it outright. Jesus avoided the term Messiah not because he wanted to keep it a secret from his Jewish audience, and not because he did not believe himself even to be the Messiah (per the messianic secret idea). Rather, this was done for the Romans. The term Messiah carried with it kingly connotations, and the Roman Empire was

strongly against any threat to its control over the region. False messiahs who cropped up leading up to and during the first century were quickly done away with, and this would have been the fate of Jesus had he not been so careful with his words and titles. Calling himself Son of Man allowed Jesus to continue his lengthy ministry to the Jews in Judea and Galilee without arousing undue suspicion from Rome. Jesus was able to travel throughout the region saturating the land with his claim to be Messiah, all while making enemies only with the Jews and not with the Romans who could have more easily killed him. As Jesus traveled outside of Galilee in Mark 6—9, the people in the surrounding areas were still aware of his ministry, and had likely heard he was the Jewish Messiah. Jesus had trouble finding private time with his disciples because he was so easily recognized and known to be this important figure. When Jesus went to Caesarea Philippi, his identity as Messiah gave the conversation there another level, given the area's history and abundance of pagan worship and emperor worship. Jesus was indeed the King of the Jews, and his wisdom and shrewdness in using other terms to tell the nation this fact show not a messianic secret but a messianic strategy.

#### A Geographical and Geopolitical Survey of Israel and Related Timeline of Events

##### **A Geographical Survey**

The Gospel of Luke contains what is known as the Travel Narrative of Jesus, and this in combination with a harmonization of the other three Gospels gives a clear map of where Jesus went and when. Such a geographical survey is helpful in determining where Jesus was and when, and why he chose certain areas at different times in his ministry. To begin, Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, and was taken to Jerusalem shortly after (Luke 2:4, 22). Before returning home to Nazareth, however, an edict was given by Herod to kill the baby boys in Bethlehem because of his paranoia at a rival king. It is likely Mary and Joseph returned to Bethlehem after

going to Jerusalem, then Joseph was given a warning in a dream to flee to Egypt (Matt. 2:13). Jesus spent a few years there with his family until Herod died and it was safe to return. Matthew gives the idea that perhaps Joseph was considering moving to Bethlehem, “but when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there,” and instead went back to Nazareth (Matt. 2:22–23). The shame of Mary’s pregnancy led to the idea of moving to Bethlehem, but after a few years the shame and shock had worn off enough that the family could return to Nazareth. Jesus spent his boyhood there until Joseph’s death when Jesus, as head of the household, moved the family to Capernaum of Galilee (John 2:12, cf. Matt. 4:13). Capernaum became the homebase for Jesus’s public ministry, and most of his public ministry took place in Galilee. The wedding at Cana (though performed in Galilee), the cleansing of the Temple, and the Samaritan woman at the well may be termed the Early Judean Ministry of Jesus. What followed was an extended time in Galilee in order to saturate the land with Jesus’s claim to be both Messiah and God come in the flesh.

During his private preparation with the disciples, Jesus forsook Galilee for more Gentile areas, attempting to escape the crowds that were ever at his heels. Jesus traveled north first to Syro-Phoenicia, then across the Sea of Galilee to the region of the Decapolis (Mark 7:24, 31). Jesus attempted to return to Galilee, traveling to Dalmanutha on the western shore, but he was still found by the crowds so crossed again to Bethsaida (Mark 8:10, 22). In going to Bethsaida, Jesus was already on his way to Caesarea Philippi, where he was finally able to escape the crowds and minister privately to his disciples (Mark 8:27). The transfiguration also happened near Caesarea Philippi, which concluded Jesus’s private ministry to his disciples. The next six months were a time of mixed focus ministry, which found Jesus going to Jerusalem a few times and spending time in Perea to escape the Pharisees. Jesus traveled to Bethany to raise Lazarus

from the dead, then spent the remainder of his time in Ephraim until it was time to go to Jerusalem for Passover. As already detailed above, Jesus took a rather roundabout route to get to Jerusalem from Ephraim, crossing first through Samaria to Galilee then following the Jordan River south to Jericho and Jerusalem (Luke 17:11, 18:35). Jesus was in Jerusalem for his final passion, death, and resurrection. After his resurrection, Luke reports that Jesus traveled with two of his disciples to Emmaus outside of Jerusalem (Luke 20:13), John records Jesus appearing to his disciples by the Sea of Galilee (Tiberias in John 21:1), and Matthew mentions the disciples meeting Jesus in Galilee (Matthew 20:16). After forty days Jesus ascended into heaven from the Mount of Olives, to which he will return at the parousia (Acts 1:4, 9, 11–12). A full geographical survey of the ministry of Jesus is helpful in placing different events in the land of Israel and especially for understanding Jesus's travels and the purposes behind those travels. Understanding the politics of the region is helpful as well, and is the subject of the next section.

### **Geopolitics**

Jesus's primary audience was Jewish, and so he set his ministry in areas with heavily Jewish populations. In Judea, this meant the religious Jews who were loyal to the temple and Sadducees who controlled the temple and gave the population insight into the Scriptures and religious obligations. In Galilee, this meant a Jewish population again, but one shaped more by surrounding Gentile influences.

Though Isaiah 9:1 and by reference Matthew 4:15 both refer to Galilee as Galilee of the Gentiles, "major studies...have depicted a primarily Jewish population" in Galilee at the time of Jesus.<sup>116</sup> This was true not only during the time of Jesus but throughout the region's history.

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<sup>116</sup> Mark A. Chancey, *The Myth of a Gentile Galilee* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 22.

There is speculation as to why the region was given the name Galilee of the Gentiles, and the short answer is that it was not. Typically, Galilee was referred to by only that one word.<sup>117</sup> It is possible that “at an early time in Israel’s history, Galilee was known as a ‘district’ of nations...[or] it might reflect the Israelite experience of being encircled by gentile cities.”<sup>118</sup> This was certainly the case of Galilee during Jesus’s time, which on all borders was surrounded by foreign powers.<sup>119</sup> These Gentile neighbors came up often in the travels of Jesus from Mark 6—9 and included Syro-Phoenicia, the Decapolis, and later in Mark Perea and Samaria. Jesus’s base in Galilee allowed him close access to the Jewish population of the area, and also gave the option to travel outside Jewish areas, as his later private ministry required.

Though the exact population of Galilee is difficult to determine, it is possible to determine that “in the first century CE, its inhabitants seem to have been primarily Jewish, with only a few pagans;” only beginning in the second century did Gentile numbers increase.<sup>120</sup> Thus Jesus was right to base his ministry in Galilee if it was his intent to reach a large number of Jewish ears with his message. Rather than a heavily Gentile area, Galilee remained Jewish despite surrounding influences and a less strict devotion to the temple and ordinances from Jerusalem. As is seen in his time outside of Jewish borders, the Gentile populations of those areas had also heard the name of Jesus and were familiar with portions of his ministry. This was due in part to the highways and smaller trade routes which crossed through Galilee.

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<sup>117</sup> Chancey, *The Myth of a Gentile Galilee*, 170.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> Masterman, “Galilee in the Time of Christ,” 405–406.

<sup>120</sup> Chancey, *The Myth of a Gentile Galilee*, 61.



One of the reasons Galilee was so economically successful overall was because of the fertility of the land. Groves of olives, figs, and terraced hills were prevalent, and “even today when so much is neglected no part of Palestine is more productive” than the agriculturally rich land of Galilee.<sup>121</sup> Another reason the region experienced success was because of Herod Antipas’s activities, usually centered on economic success and Roman flattery. Though it was previously speculated that trade in and through Galilee could have been a contributor to the economic success of the region, archaeological data shows otherwise. Many coins and pottery examples show a region turned inward in terms of trading.<sup>122</sup> Major trade routes such as the King’s Highway bypassed the region on the east side of the Jordan River. The regions around Galilee were known for their trade, and to be “regional centers of Roman power and culture,” but not Galilee itself.<sup>123</sup>

When Herod Antipas gained control of the region, he came with plans to build Roman cities dedicated to the emperor. “To fund his ambitious city-building, [Herod] developed fishing into an industry” in Galilee, which shows up during Jesus’s ministry.<sup>124</sup> Many of Jesus’s disciples were fisherman or came from fishing backgrounds, and Jesus found them at this occupation when he called them (Matt. 4, Mark 1). The primary source of fishing in Galilee was the Sea of Galilee, on the shores of which Jesus based his ministry. Jesus’s headquarters were in Capernaum, which was just over five miles north from the village of Magdala. Magdala

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<sup>121</sup> Masterman, “Galilee in the Time of Christ,” 407.

<sup>122</sup> Sakari Häkkinen, “Poverty in the First-Century Galilee,” *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 72, no. 4 (2016).

<sup>123</sup> J. Andrew Overman, “Who Were the First Urban Christians? Urbanization in Galilee in the First Century,” in *Society of Biblical Literature 1988 Seminar Papers*, ed. J. David Lull (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 165.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

(translated *Tower of Fish* in Aramaic) was “the principle processing centre for the fish” caught by large crews working for the king, and as such would have been a very populated spot.<sup>125</sup> Jesus’s outpost at Capernaum was very close to this populated area, and no doubt many of the villages on the shore of the Sea of Galilee were heavily populated. People came from all over the region looking for work, and found it in this recently introduced fishing industry. Because of Herod’s measures, the Sea of Galilee had a heavy concentration of Jewish people living around it and as such Jesus could reach many people all at once with his message.

As mentioned, Herod came to power with plans to build cities in honor of the Roman emperor. The cities he constructed were Sepphoris and Tiberias. Sepphoris in particular could have been a major part of Jesus’s life. As a τέκτων or craftsman, Jesus’s father Joseph would have needed work near Nazareth.<sup>126</sup> It is likely that he was a stonemason and found this work at the building site of Sepphoris.<sup>127</sup> Here Jesus, as his apprentice during his boyhood, would have been exposed to the Gentile nature of a Roman construction site, as were other Jewish men working there. This idea lends itself again to the idea of Galilee as Gentile, though as has been shown, the region remained Jewish. Gentile influences were not unknown to Galileans, and they would have been much more familiar with Gentile ideas than their Judean neighbors to the south, but nevertheless they held tight to their Jewish identity. Though there were larger towns such as Sepphoris and to an extent Magdala, many of the towns remained small, especially going away from the Sea of Galilee.<sup>128</sup> The Jewish population of Galilee was not tempted to adopt Gentile

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<sup>125</sup> Overman, “Who Were the First Urban Christians?,” 165.

<sup>126</sup> Stonemason could be a better translation of τέκτων, rather than carpenter, if for nothing else than the prevalence of stones and lack of trees in Israel.

<sup>127</sup> Chancey, *The Myth of a Gentile Galilee*, 57.

<sup>128</sup> Masterman, “Galilee in the Time of Christ,” 408.

customs; rather, the people were exposed to and familiar with Gentile ideas and practices, but kept themselves separate from these ideas. This was not good enough in the minds of the Judean Jews, who viewed the Galileans as less devout Jews, as well as being less refined overall. Jerusalem, as the capital of the nation, was a center for Jewish scholarship and training. This is part of the reason why the boy Jesus was so keen to stay “in his Father’s house” discussing the Scriptures with the great teachers of Jerusalem (Luke 2:46).<sup>129</sup> Jerusalem was a polished, advanced, and religiously committed city, and by proximity Judea was as well. This did not carry over as much into Galilee, where the people were fishers and farmers, and where the interaction between Jew and Gentile was more common. This divide was considered by Jesus in his ministry, and especially when he wanted to avoid his enemies the Pharisees and Sadducees, he stayed away from Judea.

## Rome

In Alexander the Great’s and later Rome’s search for global conquest, Israel was not left behind. The region had been Hellenized to an extent as a Greek possession, and Rome in a way inherited the area upon the Empire’s rise to power. Though Israel maintained much of its independence in terms of political and religious ideas, the surrounding areas, particularly to the north and east, did not have this freedom. The Decapolis, mentioned in Mark 7, was a previously Greek outpost which in the time of Jesus maintained much of this Greek heritage. Decapolis means “Ten Cities,” but the holding was not limited to only ten cities.<sup>130</sup> This set the area apart from Israel as a Hellenized and identifiably Greek area. During the time of Jesus, the Decapolis

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<sup>129</sup> Hawthorne, *The Presence and the Power*, 103–104.

<sup>130</sup> Chancey, *The Myth of a Gentile Galilee*, 131.

was part of the Roman province of Syria, but maintained its Greek identity; some of the cities even claimed Greek foundations.<sup>131</sup> Similarly, Syro-Phoenicia was a province of Rome, which had a few implications for the region as well as for Israel to the south. The Roman Empire was “a system of territorial domination, social power, and economic exploitation,” and this system extended to Syro-Phoenicia and throughout the empire’s holdings.<sup>132</sup> When Phoenicia, as a part of Syria, was made a Roman State by Pompey in 66 BC, the people of a few of the major towns were given Roman citizenship, and the area experienced an increased level of economic success thanks to the easy trade of the *Pax Romana*.<sup>133</sup> The area appealed to Rome as a previous holding of the Seleucid kingdom, and offered a Roman standing in the region.<sup>134</sup> To the south, Israel and Jerusalem especially offered major pushback to Rome, and the Romans found in Phoenicia “a solution in which Rome would have firm control over...the Near East without engaging in new long-term wars.”<sup>135</sup> Israel would have avoided Phoenicia in the first place as a Gentile area, and even more so after the area came fully under Roman control. Jesus’s decision to go to Syro-Phoenicia was an attempt to gain alone time with his disciples. Though a place Jewish people may have been forced to visit for economic reasons, it was a place to which they would not otherwise travel.

Despite Israel’s pushback, the nation did not fully escape the power and influence of Rome. Herod especially was influential in bringing Roman culture and architecture to Israel, and

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<sup>131</sup> Chancey, *The Myth of a Gentile Galilee*, 131.

<sup>132</sup> D. J. Mattingly, *Imperialism, Power, and Identity: Experiencing the Roman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 75.

<sup>133</sup> Jesper Majbom Madsen, *From Trophy Towns to City-States: Urban Civilization and Cultural Identities in Roman Pontus* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020), 39.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

he was hated for it. Herod rebuilt the town of Sepphoris and also founded Tiberias and made them to be Roman cities within Israel. This was in an attempt to bolster the economy of Galilee and also to gain approval from Rome, but it “added only a Greco-Roman urban veneer to the cities;” the Jewish culture and religion remained the same up until the Bar Kokhba Revolt in AD 132.<sup>136</sup> These building ventures accounted for some of the growth of the region under Herod; people moved to Galilee for work and trade, especially those in the building industry.<sup>137</sup> However, it did not mean more wealth for the people who moved there. Instead, an influx of people meant less resources that the region could offer, but it did offer Jesus a concentrated population with whom he could share his message.<sup>138</sup> The local view of Sepphoris and Tiberias was one of suspicion, which would have been especially true for the more religious Judean Jew.<sup>139</sup> Whereas Jesus’s father Joseph could well have been a worker at Sepphoris and taken his young son with him to apprentice in his trade, those men of Judea would not have ventured so close, viewing the city as Roman, pagan, and perhaps even unclean.<sup>140</sup>

The founding of these two cities also created instability in the region. The cities took away farmable land, and they also drew former farmers and herders to live within the borders. The race for opportunity drove some Galileans to settle in less favorable areas of the region, which even contributed to the mortality of the lower class especially.<sup>141</sup> Herod, however, had

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<sup>136</sup> Jonathan L. Reed, “Instability in Jesus’ Galilee: A Demographic Perspective,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 129, no. 2 (2010): 343.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 345, 350.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 352.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 363.

<sup>140</sup> Chancey, *The Myth of a Gentile Galilee*, 57.

<sup>141</sup> Reed, “Instability in Jesus’ Galilee,” 364.

concern only for his reputation with Rome. The name given to the town of Tiberias was made to honor the Roman emperor Tiberius, and the activities contained therein were much more pagan and Roman than would have been accepted anywhere else in Galilee.<sup>142</sup> Herod Antipas, as tetrarch of Galilee, marked his rule over the province with pandering to Rome, economic endeavors that were not always favorable to the Galileans themselves, and a snubbing of Jewish culture and tradition that made him despised among the traditional Galileans. Relating Jesus's travels and purposes within a specific geographical area and political time is the focus of the next section.

### **A Closer Look at the Geography and Chronology of Mark 6—9**

The focus of this dissertation is Mark 6—9, therefore it is appropriate to narrow the focus of the geographical survey to these four chapters. Mark 6 begins with Jesus going from Galilee to Nazareth to teach in the synagogue, and later traveling around the surrounding villages to teach (Mark 6:1, 6). Mark 6:31 reports Jesus asking the disciples to come away to a desolate place, which Luke 9:10 confirms as Bethsaida. At this point in the discussion, a brief harmonization aside is appropriate. Mark 6:31 and Luke 9:10 speak of the same event of going across the lake to Bethsaida, but Mark 6:45 states that after the feeding of the five thousand in Bethsaida, Jesus “made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida.” How can Jesus begin and end in the same town, Bethsaida? A closer study of the region around the Sea of Galilee reveals that there were actually two towns named Bethsaida, and each right where the Gospels put them.<sup>143</sup> The Bethsaida referenced in Mark 6:31 and Luke

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<sup>142</sup> Masterman, “Galilee in the Time of Christ,” 406.

<sup>143</sup> Thomas and Gundry, *A Harmony of the Gospels*, 101.

9:10 was across the Sea of Galilee from the district of Galilee, in the land of Syro-Phoenicia. It was sometimes called Bethsaida-Julias in order to distinguish between the other Bethsaida, which was across the lake to the west.<sup>144</sup> Bethsaida-Julias matches the description in Mark of “a desolate place” away from the more commercial western side of the Sea of Galilee to which Jesus and his disciples could gain respite (Mark 6:31).

This town was in the region of Syro-Phoenicia, still with access to the Sea of Galilee but not within Galilee itself. It would have lacked the commercial fishing accoutrements of towns on the western shore such as Capernaum and Magdala. Bethsaida-Julias was just north of the proposed location of Gergesa, where Jesus healed the demon-possessed man and cast Legion into a herd of swine (Mark 5, Luke 8).<sup>145</sup> Though the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee contains tracts of land which are farmable, the shoreline is much rockier and more mountainous than the western shore. It was on top of these cliffs that the pig farmers kept their herd, and from these cliffs which the herd ran to its death in the accounts in Mark 5 and Luke 8. The area lends itself to a description of “a desolate place,” certainly more than the western shoreline. Nevertheless, Jesus was followed by the crowds which led to the feeding of the five thousand.

After the feeding of the five thousand, the disciples headed across the lake to the western Bethsaida while Jesus prayed alone on a mountain, joining them later in the famous walking on the water episode (Mark 6:45–48). The storm pushed the boat a bit off course and they landed in Gennesaret (Mark 6:53). Jesus healed people there and his name and works continued to be spread abroad (Mark 6:56). Jesus continued to heal and teach and two of his sermons are given in

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<sup>144</sup> Savage, *Biblical Bethsaida*, 113.

<sup>145</sup> Chancey, *The Myth of a Gentile Galilee*, 134.

Mark 7, perhaps preached in Capernaum.<sup>146</sup> After these teachings, Jesus began in earnest to try and lose the crowds which followed him, especially the Pharisees. He traveled first “to the region of Tyre and Sidon,” but was discovered by a Syro-Phoenician woman who asked him to heal her daughter (Mark 7:24–26). “Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis,” but even here he was found by the people who asked him to heal a deaf man (Mark 7:31–32). Jesus performed the healing but asked the people for secrecy of the miracle, which they were unable to provide (vs. 36).

Still in the Decapolis, Jesus performed the feeding of the four thousand (Mark 8:1). Though Herod Antipas was given control over Perea (north and east of the Sea of Galilee), it was later given to Herod’s son Philip.<sup>147</sup> This area included the Decapolis, a formerly Greek league of at least ten cities as the name suggests, but likely more.<sup>148</sup> Though many of the cities were made up of Gentile populations, there was often a Jewish minority in each.<sup>149</sup> In describing the feeding of the four thousand at the Decapolis (Mark 8), Mark does not “explicitly state that these crowds are non-Jewish.”<sup>150</sup> The cities of the Decapolis were mostly Gentile, but Jesus was well-known even outside of Galilee, and crowds often followed him as he crisscrossed the Sea of Galilee. As a Gentile area, Jesus’s ministry there was useful for the training of the Twelve to educate them in the Gospel’s connection to Gentiles.

After his time in the Decapolis, Jesus “went to the district of Dalmanutha” across the Sea of Galilee (Mark 8:1, 9–10). The Pharisees seem to have immediately accosted Jesus, asking

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<sup>146</sup> Thomas and Gundry, *A Harmony of the Gospels*, 109.

<sup>147</sup> Häkkinen, “Poverty in the First-Century Galilee.”

<sup>148</sup> Chancey, *The Myth of a Gentile Galilee*, 131.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 130–143.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.



again for a sign proving his claims, and Jesus gave only a short answer before retreating across the lake to the eastern shore (Mark 8:11–13). At this point it seems Jesus had set his sights on Caesarea Philippi. He was stopped in Bethsaida-Julias to heal a blind man, and in a desperate measure to continue on his way Jesus took the man out of the village, healed him, “and he sent him to his home, saying, ‘Do not even enter the village’” of Bethsaida-Julias (Mark 8:22, 26). When Jesus sent the man away after healing him outside of Bethsaida, he did so not in unkindness but in order to gain the alone time he needed with his disciples. Jesus clearly cared for the man as he took an extended amount of time to heal him, but he did not want the crowds that often came with these miraculous healings. Jesus, as fully man and reliant on the Spirit, did indeed heal this man miraculously. However, he was also in the middle of his strategy to take the Twelve far from areas which would recognize him, and so this man was sent away. Jesus was already on the road leading to Caesarea Philippi, and though it is unlikely any Jewish crowd would have followed him that far, a crowd could have caused a delay. Historically, crowds also included the Pharisees, whose favorite pastime was dogging the steps of Jesus, asking him for proof and attempting to trap him into a plain confession of messiahship. Jesus, desperate for this final attempt at solitude, sent the healed man to his home. Surely later he would prove a marvelous witness to the power of Jesus, but for now Jesus was on a mission to minister privately to his twelve disciples. After the healing, Jesus went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi where he was at last able to be alone with his twelve closest disciples (Mark 8:27).

Having established the basis of harmonization, chronology, and geography, it is now possible to move on to the next area of study in this portion of the life of Christ. What follows is a study of Christ’s ministry shift from public to private, based especially upon his travels.

### **Chapter 3: The Public Ministry of Jesus Shifts to Private Ministry based on His Travels**

#### **A Review of the Public Ministry of Jesus**

In preparation for the transitional nature of this chapter, it is helpful to begin with a review of what has so far been studied to better connect it with newer material. A review of the public ministry of Jesus is first offered before a study of his public travels and later his private retirements. The chronology, geography, and harmonization of the last chapter will all be utilized in this review and further study. In particular, this review will include the evidence given for Jesus as Messiah and the purpose of his public ministry. This chapter will continue to demonstrate – per the thesis of this dissertation – the significance of Jesus’s private instruction to the twelve disciples during the travel narratives in Mark 6—9 regarding the meaning of his death, burial, and resurrection.

#### **Evidence of Jesus as the Messiah**

Though Caesarea Philippi was the first time Jesus told the disciples “plainly” that he would suffer, be killed, and rise again (Mark 8:32), it was not the first time Jesus had claimed messiahship. During his public ministry, he gave ample evidence for his claim to be Messiah, and indeed made both this claim and the claim that he was God come in the flesh. Two examples of these claims during his public ministry are found in the announcement of John the Baptist and in the Sermon on the Mount.

In John 1, John the Baptist called Jesus “the Lamb of God” multiple times (vs. 29, 36), and in John’s Jewish context the people who heard this announcement would have immediately recognized its messianic implications.<sup>151</sup> John had already assuaged the crowd’s conjectures that

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<sup>151</sup> Jipp, *The Messianic Theology of the New Testament*, 106.

perhaps he was the Prophet, and such questioning on the part of the crowd makes the messianic expectation of John's day easy to see. Leading up to the time of Christ, there were many false messiahs in Israel, many of whom were readily accepted by the populace desperate for a political leader to free them from Rome's oppression. However, Rome was acutely aware of these messiahs, especially their tendency to pop up in Israel, and considered messianic claims treasonous. The Roman legal system carried swift and harsh punishment for treason, including death.<sup>152</sup> Despite such threats, the messianic expectation in Israel did not diminish, John the Baptist's conversations with his audience at the river Jordan show the level of expectation people had in Messiah coming soon.

When John the Baptist saw Jesus, he referred to him as the "Lamb of God" (John 1:29, 36). This was done both before and after Jesus's temptation in the wilderness. After Jesus's baptism, John bore witness that Jesus was indeed "the Son of God," this witness being public to those around him (John 1:34).<sup>153</sup> The titles of Lamb of God and Son of Man were both messianic, and were proclaimed to the large crowds gathered around John for his baptisms and teachings. When John called Jesus the Lamb of God, the Passover was near and on the minds of his audience, and the picture of the Lord's provision of a lamb for the Passover sacrifice as well as daily sacrifices would have been readily called to mind. Isaiah 53 refers to the Lord's provision of his servant as "an offering for guilt" (v. 10) and one who would go "like a lamb that is led to the slaughter" (v. 7). Jeremiah 11 repeats this idea, and the Jewish listeners would have made these connections. The title Son of God was also a familiar messianic reference from Daniel 7, and by giving Jesus these titles John made it clear who he believed Jesus to be. Even

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<sup>152</sup> Chilton, "The Roman Law of Treason under the Early Principate," 76; Mark Jeong, "The Collapse of Society in Luke 23: A Thucydidean Take on Jesus' Passion," *New Testament Studies* 67, no. 3 (2021): 326.

<sup>153</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 484.

very early in the ministry of Jesus, Jesus was acknowledged as Messiah in front of the crowds, and he accepted this title as appropriate and true.

Similarly, in his discussion of the law in Matthew 5, Jesus stated that he had come to fulfill the Law and Prophets “or brings them to their divinely intended goal, because they point to him.”<sup>154</sup> Again, a Jewish audience would have recognized in this discussion Jesus’s claims to be the Messiah whom the Law and Prophets referenced. It is likely that Pharisees were present at the Sermon on the Mount, and Jesus’s references to the Pharisees throughout the sermon could even be thought of as his pointing a physical finger at the group as he made his points (Matt. 5:20). Even the way in which Jesus framed his teaching points give the idea of a scribal audience. At the start of many of his points, Jesus began with, “You have heard that it was said...” or some variation of that statement. When the scribes spoke, they referenced not only the Torah but rabbinic traditions. Jesus giving his own inspired commentary on the Torah led to the crowd’s reaction at the end of his teaching: “The crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes” (Matt. 7:28–29). Jesus claimed interpretive authority throughout the Sermon on the Mount, and messianic authority particularly in Matthew 7:21–23. In this passage, “Jesus speaks of himself as the agent (7:21–23), and of his words as the standard (7:24–27), of eschatological judgment.”<sup>155</sup> In this way Jesus was above the scribes, Pharisees, and even Moses whom the Jewish people greatly revered as the one to whom the Torah was first given.<sup>156</sup> In Luke’s account of the Sermon on the Mount, he lists a series of woes in opposition to the beatitudes given to the poor, hungry, sad, and hated

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<sup>154</sup> David L. Turner, *Matthew. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*. Ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 162.

<sup>155</sup> Turner, *Matthew*, 224.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

(Luke 6:20–26). In his confrontation of his enemies who were likely on the fringes of the crowd, Jesus figuratively, if not literally, pointed a finger of accusation against this group. The scribes and Pharisees were notorious for their ill-treatment of the population which looked to them for religious leadership. Near the end of his ministry, Jesus severely rebuked the scribes and Pharisees for their hypocrisy and neglect of the flock of Israel (Matt. 23). Jesus had authority in teaching and rebuking, and this authority came through in his teachings and in how he interacted with the religious elite.

During his public ministry, Jesus did not openly speak about his status as Messiah, nor did he elaborate about the redemption he would provide as Messiah. However, that does not mean he never claimed messiahship. Those who heard his teaching or who heard others speak about him knew that he claimed to be the Messiah of Israel and the Son of God. The Jewish religious leaders were angry that Jesus could get away with this, because he never specifically used the term Messiah. Rather, he favored terms such as the Son of Man to describe himself, which again gave messianic connotations but which passed under the radar of the Roman rulers.<sup>157</sup> Jesus knew when the appropriate time was to openly name himself Messiah, and until then he used other terms.<sup>158</sup> However, these other terms were just as effective as naming and recognizing him as the Messiah of Israel. Another way Jesus made himself clearly a king was in his offer of the kingdom of heaven to Israel.

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<sup>157</sup> Jipp, *The Messianic Theology of the New Testament*, 68.

<sup>158</sup> Jesus especially favored the term “Son of Man” but other titles which he used of himself include “Chief Cornerstone,” the “I AM” statements found in John, and the stand-alone “I AM” statement of John 8:58.

## Jesus's Offer of the Kingdom

As part of his public ministry and overall purpose of coming as the Messiah of Israel, Jesus offered the kingdom of God to the people of Israel, an offer which was ultimately rejected. Though the Gospels mention the kingdom over one hundred times, the kingdom can be a subject of confusion among Christians. Scholars debate the type of kingdom which was offered (a physical, earthly kingdom or a spiritual, heavenly kingdom), and whether the kingdom has come, is yet to come, or has come in some sort of partial way. Though it is not the intent of this paper to discuss this subject in its entirety, a study of the kingdom is relevant to Jesus's ministry and particularly the end of his public ministry. First in the study is to answer the question, what is the kingdom which Jesus offered? The Gospel of Matthew describes the kingdom most fully, and so it is a good place to turn for this definition. In Matthew, both John the Baptist and Jesus proclaimed "an earthly kingdom that has continuity with the kingdom predicted in the Old Testament prophets."<sup>159</sup> The kingdom is physical, near, and the option is given to Jesus's hearers to accept the kingdom and be members of the kingdom. The idea of the kingdom was familiar to Jesus's Jewish audience and hearkened back to the great kingdom of David and the Lord's promise to David to keep an heir on his throne forever (2 Sam. 7:8–16). Jesus spoke often about the kingdom and used specific kingdom terminology to communicate with his hearers. As mentioned, the kingdom was ultimately rejected, which plays into the ministry shift discussed in this dissertation. Different elements of the kingdom will be briefly discussed as they relate to the ministry of Jesus.

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<sup>159</sup> Michael J. Vlach, "The Kingdom Program in Matthew's Gospel," The Pre-Trib Research Center, <https://www.pre-trib.org/pretribfiles/pdfs/Vlach-TheKingdomProgramInMatthew.pdf>.

When Jesus came to minister to the people of Israel, the nation was still under the old covenant and was a nation of the Old Testament. The people of Jesus's time were familiar with these Scriptures, including their national history, prophecies about the coming Messiah, and the kingdom that the Lord promised to David centuries before. Beginning in Genesis, Adam and Eve were the first examples of kingdom workers who, before the fall, governed the kingdom of God on earth. In the pre-fall garden, "the universal and mediatorial kingdoms were indistinguishable from each other;" that is, the kingdom ruled by God and the kingdom given to man to rule in a mediatorial fashion.<sup>160</sup> From very early on, the nation of Israel was a covenant nation, governed by various covenants from which it received its laws, promises, and warnings. After the fall, the Abrahamic covenant was given, which promised, land, seed, and blessing to Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3). A place of rule is necessary for a kingdom, and subjects are also necessary to a kingdom. The Lord promised these to Abraham, as well as a promise to bless him and those whom he would favorably interact with. The Mosaic covenant followed, which gave laws and commands for living under the kingship of Yahweh, and it also provided lists of blessings and curses for obedience and disobedience, respectively. These blessings and curses lists prove relevant to the discussion of the kingdom in the mind of Old Testament believers, as the kingdom blessings were dependent on the faithfulness of the people to the covenant the Lord had established with his subjects.

Many of the Old Testament prophets reminded Israel of her covenant with the Lord and the blessings that would follow repentance and obedience. Jeremiah especially emphasized national repentance as may be seen in Jeremiah 3, 5, and 18. Later, after the Davidic covenant

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<sup>160</sup> R. E. Beacham, "Universal and Mediatorial Kingdoms," in *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, ed. M. Couch (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1996), 235.

was established, kingdom blessings were again promised for obedience and kingdom blessings withheld for disobedience (2 Chron. 7). This cause-and-effect relationship is summarized well by Vlach:

If Israel repents then God blesses Israel. These passages assume Israel's disobedience and consequences for covenant betrayal. But hope exists. If Israel repents then kingdom blessings will arrive and a reversal of negative circumstances will occur. This includes spiritual salvation and physical prosperity, including the land.<sup>161</sup>

The book of Jonah is a good example of such repentance actually taking place and the blessings of God coming upon a nation, albeit a Gentile city rather than Israel. After Jonah proclaims condemnation for Nineveh unless the city repents, the people of Nineveh do in fact express remorse at their sin and repentance for their wrongdoings (Jon. 3:4–9). As a result, “God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it” (Jon. 3:10). Similarly, the kingdom established in Israel's midst was contingent upon the nation's obedience to the Lord's commands and acceptance of him as Israel's King. Looking ahead to Jesus's offer of the kingdom in his ministry, the same question should be asked: “‘Is Israel's repentance a precondition to the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom?’ The answer is, yes. ‘The restoration of Israel from worldwide dispersion will depend upon repentance (cf. Jer 3:11–18; Hos 5:13–6:3; Zech 12:1–10).’”<sup>162</sup> This need for repentance explains Jesus's many calls to Israel for repentance and his relation of that repentance to the kingdom at hand (Matt. 4:17).<sup>163</sup>

When Jesus spoke of the kingdom in his ministry, he often said it was “at hand” and called for repentance. This was started first by John the Baptist in his ministry (Matt. 3:1–2), and

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<sup>161</sup> Michael J. Vlach, “Israel's Repentance and the Kingdom of God,” *The Masters Seminary Journal* 27, no. 1 (Spring 2016), 163.

<sup>162</sup> William D. Barrick, “The Eschatological Significance of Leviticus 26,” *The Masters Seminary Journal* 16, no. 1 (Spring 2005), 97.

<sup>163</sup> Vlach, “Israel's Repentance and the Kingdom of God,” 166.



later said by Jesus (Matt. 4:17, 10:5–7, 11:20). The kingdom of heaven or kingdom of God was offered by Christ, the King in their midst, but the people could not come into this kingdom based on ethnicity alone.<sup>164</sup> Rather, like the Old Testament Israelites before them, they were required to repent in order to enter the kingdom. Similar to the Old Testament prophets, Jesus repeated many similar warnings to Israel to repent in order to experience kingdom blessings, and in this case the actual establishment of the kingdom. Matthew 13 is one place to turn for many parables from Jesus about the kingdom of heaven which also relate to the ministry foci of Jesus as presented in this paper. Though Jesus was still in his public ministry in Matthew 13, he had already experienced some rejection by many cities named in Matthew 11:20–24, and been questioned by the Pharisees about his healing on the Sabbath in Matthew 12:1–14. Matthew 12 also contains the episode of the Pharisees’ blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, marking their early rejection of Jesus and his message. Matthew 13 comes after these events. Whereas earlier in Matthew Jesus had spoken openly about the kingdom, he now spoke of the kingdom in parables to the crowds. Only the disciples were “given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 13:11). The parables ultimately “describe conditions between the two advents of Christ. While the Old Testament predicted both a suffering servant and a reigning Messiah, it did not explicitly state that there would be two comings of Jesus, separated by a considerable period of time. Matthew, thus, discusses kingdom conditions between His comings.”<sup>165</sup> The parables describe “sons of the kingdom,” who “evidence kingdom righteousness in their lives (see Rom 14:17)” during the

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<sup>164</sup> Vlach, “Israel’s Repentance and the Kingdom of God,” 170.

<sup>165</sup> Vlach, “The Kingdom Program in Matthew’s Gospel,” 13.

inter-advent age, between the two comings of Christ and before the kingdom of heaven is actually established.<sup>166</sup>

Without going too deep into millennial theology, the picture Jesus gives of the kingdom, both in his descriptions and warnings before Matthew 13, and in the parables given in Matthew 13, is that an earthly kingdom governed by Christ was offered and possible when Jesus came, but it was rejected by the people who were unwilling to repent. Therefore, the kingdom has not yet been established. However, there is some connection to the kingdom in the present age as given by the parables of Matthew 13, which speak of the sons of the kingdom who live their lives under righteousness as a reflection of the kingdom which will come at Christ's second advent.

The kingdom offered by Christ was an earthly, physical kingdom. This does not mean there were not spiritual aspects to the kingdom, but the kingdom offered by Christ followed in continuity from the Old Testament kingdom of Israel, especially as described in the Davidic covenant. The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5—7 gives clues about the kind of kingdom offered and the markers of that kingdom. There are also clues in the sermon that the kingdom is a future entity, though at the time the message was given it was still possible that the kingdom could have been initiated. Though it includes blessings given in present tense (Matt. 5:3, 10), these may also be read as future tense, which also aligns with later descriptions of the kingdom in the Sermon on the Mount.<sup>167</sup> In Matthew 6, Jesus taught his listeners to pray for the kingdom to come, indicating that it had not yet come (either in part or in full). Matthew 7:22 also uses the term “that day” in describing the time when people will attempt to enter the kingdom of heaven. “That day” or alternatively “the day of the Lord” is used profusely by the Old Testament

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<sup>166</sup> Vlach, “The Kingdom Program in Matthew’s Gospel,” 14.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

prophets to indicate the coming day of judgment when the Lord will judge and establish his reign over the earth (Isa. 2, 7; Ezek. 13, 30; Joel 1, 2, 3; Amos 5; Obad. 15; Zeph. 1; Zech. 14; Mal. 4). This would indicate that the prophets and Jesus both are referring to a coming day when the kingdom of heaven will be inaugurated.

Beyond the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus indicated that Gentiles would also be included in the kingdom of heaven, an example of which follows in Matthew 8. These examples continue in the ministry of Jesus, including in his treks to more Gentile areas during his private ministry to the twelve disciples. During these episodes, Jesus took time to heal or interact with Gentiles, and thus taught his disciples that the kingdom was not for Israel alone. Coupled with his presentation of the kingdom, Jesus performed many miracles associated with Messiah. These miracles, associated with the “messianic times included a reversal of conditions since the fall (see Isaiah 65).”<sup>168</sup> These miracles demonstrated both the legitimacy of Jesus’s offer of the kingdom, and gave a preview of health and forgiveness which will be the full reality once the kingdom is established.

Though the Pharisees doubted Jesus’s message from the start, the ultimate rejection of Jesus’s offer of the kingdom may be pinpointed to two specific episodes, which also marked the transition of his ministry from public to private. In Matthew 12, Jesus was accused by the Pharisees of using the power of Satan to cast out demons, after the people questioned whether Jesus could be the Son of David (i.e. Messiah) (Matt. 12:22–32). Jesus classified this sin as blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which would not be forgiven, and which marked the end of his offer of the kingdom to come directly. The Pharisees committed blasphemy because they attributed the work of the Holy Spirit to the work of Satan. Not only that, but they refused to

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<sup>168</sup> Vlach, “The Kingdom Program in Matthew’s Gospel,” 8.

recognize the messianic aspect of the miracle, and instead made the miracle a demonic work. Many of Jesus's miracles were associated with messianic prophecies in the Old Testament, and this included the casting out of demons. "Direct suppression of the demon realm characterizes the kingdom," and the miracles of Jesus support the idea that he had brought the kingdom to Israel, if it would be accepted.<sup>169</sup> The people of Israel had been offered the kingdom throughout Jesus's public ministry to Israel. Jesus, as the King, was able to make this offer, bring the kingdom's establishment, and also remove the offer barring acceptance and repentance. His withdrawal of the offer occurred after the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, when he stopped speaking of the kingdom as "at hand" or "near." Luke 19:11 begins a parable about the kingdom and its delay because of the unrepentance of Israel, which would only be "near" again as the tribulation began in the future (Luke 21:31).<sup>170</sup> The people had fully rejected Jesus and his offer, demonstrating their unrepentance by an inability to recognize his works as messianic, and the kingdom offer was withdrawn.

The second portion of the peoples' rejection and the mark of Jesus's transition from public to private ministry is after the feeding of the five thousand (Matt. 14:13–21, Mark 6:31–44, Luke 9:12–17, John 6:4–15). While all four Gospels give an account of the feeding of the five thousand, only John enumerates on Jesus's divisive sermon the next day which separated those who would continue to follow him from those who had rejected him (John 6:22–71). Drawn by the food provided for them by Jesus, the crowds had sought Jesus during the night in hopes of another free meal. Jesus said as much when the people expressed their desire to find him (John 6:26). They were not seeking after the Lord and his signs or message, but merely for

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<sup>169</sup> Vlach, "The Kingdom Program in Matthew's Gospel," 12.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

the earthly and temporal bread which he had given them the previous day. In the sermon that followed, Jesus called himself the bread of life that came down from heaven. This caused the Jews to grumble and recall his ordinary upbringing; they did not understand how he could say he came from heaven when they knew his earthly origins (John 6:41–42). That Jesus made himself equal with God in coming from heaven was blasphemous, unless it was true. The people had been provided messianic signs, fulfilled prophecy, and the testimony of Jesus that they could recognize him as the Messiah, yet they chose to reject him anyway. After the feeding of the five thousand, the bread of life episode marked the people's final rejection of his kingdom offer.

Although Jesus had already been rejected by the people and the Pharisees and the kingdom was delayed, Jesus continued to assure those who followed him that he was indeed the King and Messiah. This is one purpose of John 6. At the beginning of the chapter, John records Jesus's feeding of the five thousand where Jesus fed a multitude with five loaves and two fish. After Jesus fed the five thousand, he left the crowd which was about to make him a king by force (John 6:15). Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee, walked on water, and landed south of Capernaum in Gennesaret (Matt. 14:22–36, Mark 6:45–56). After some searching, the crowd found Jesus back at his headquarters in Capernaum and rather than fleeing again, Jesus began to teach them in the bread of life discourse. The crowd's reaction at the end of the sermon is of interest regarding Jesus's ministry shift.

In this conversation, Jesus made several statements that upset his Jewish audience, resulting in their ultimate rejection of their Messiah. First, he told them they were looking for him not because of his signs or message, but because they ate and had their fill (John 6:26). The people were not interested in the message Jesus presented, or even in the miracles he performed; they only wanted the literal bread he provided. They even asked for another sign to prove Jesus's

claim that he would give them eternal life because he was sealed by the Father if only they would believe (John 6:27–30). The people made their desire for eternal bread clear, but Jesus shocked his audience by his next statement. “Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger...I have come down from heaven...’” (John 6:35–38). Jesus explained that in order to have eternal life, they must have faith in him who came from heaven and who is greater than the manna that their fathers received in the wilderness. The crowds were with Jesus because he fed them miraculously, but they grumbled that he claimed to be from heaven (John 6:41). Jesus required that they take the bread he offered, and the Pharisees accused him of cannibalism. Jesus, with divine wit and an understanding of his enemies, mocked their response and said they indeed must eat his flesh and drink his blood to obtain eternal life.<sup>171</sup>

From the beginning of the conversation, it was obvious that the Jews were upset about Jesus’s claim of heavenly origin. Jesus was aware of their discomfort and continued to repeat himself. In verse 62, Jesus called out their offense and asked them, “what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?” The fact that Jesus came from heaven left his superficial followers in shock of the blasphemy Jesus would commit. After this discourse, “many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him,” in addition to those Israelites who had already rejected Jesus’s message (John 6:66). The crowds could not handle the reality of who Jesus was. They were there for the miracle of the food, not for the eternal bread of heaven that Jesus offered. When Jesus made claims that he himself was the bread from heaven, that he was with the Father in the past, and that he was superior to Moses and the manna in the wilderness, the crowds abandoned him. Jesus’s ministry shift had begun, and over the next few chapters of the Synoptics he would move away from a public ministry to the people of Galilee.

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<sup>171</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 696–697.

Jesus knew he had been rejected by Israel and his kingdom offer spurned, and so he turned his attention to the twelve disciples. Even in the immediate aftermath of the bread of life discourse, Jesus turned to them for affirmation, asking, “Do you want to go away as well?” (John 6:67). Peter, speaking for the group, confirmed their belief that they had nowhere else to go; Jesus had the words of eternal life and was indeed the Holy One of God (John 6:68–69).

Throughout his public ministry, Jesus claimed messiahship (if indirectly to avoid trouble with the Romans) and his claim was recognized by the people of Israel. This explains their questions to the Pharisees regarding his identity (Matt. 12:23), the Pharisees’ anger at Jesus’s claims (John 10:31), and ultimately his death (John 19:12). Jesus came to offer the kingdom of heaven to Israel. This was a physical kingdom ruled by Messiah and in fulfillment of the Lord’s covenant to David. The kingdom would be marked by peace, righteousness, and would supplant the Roman rule of Israel. The people of Israel often looked to Jesus as a deliver from Rome, but in the end this was only a portion of his kingdom offer. In order to inaugurate the kingdom, the nation had to first repent, much like the requirement for kingdom blessings in the Old Testament.<sup>172</sup> And much like their predecessors, the people of Israel were unwilling to repent. Thus the kingdom was delayed and Jesus refrained from speaking of the kingdom as an immediate commencement. Rather, the kingdom would still come but at a future time. In the meantime, kingdom blessings were to be withheld, though believers could still be part of the kingdom to come. These “sons of the kingdom” were to evidence the kingdom by their righteous lives, while the rest of the population would be recognized as outside of the kingdom because of their unrepentance.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Vlach, “Israel’s Repentance and the Kingdom of God,” 163.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 14

The blasphemy of the Holy Spirit marked the end of Jesus's offer of an immediate kingdom. After this, Jesus spoke of the kingdom as a future entity and in more mysterious parables and sayings. The disciples, as "sons of the kingdom" (save for Judas Iscariot) understood more about the kingdom than the crowds, but even they needed further training (Matt. 13:10–17). This was especially important in regard to Jesus's death, which would now certainly come because he had been rejected. Before looking closely at this private ministry, however, a closer look at the purpose of Jesus's public ministry, as well as his travels, will be studied.

### **The Purpose of the Public Ministry**

Jesus gave sufficient evidence that he was the Messiah of Israel, and those who heard his message realized this claim. However, in his public ministry the claim of Jesus was really two-fold. He claimed to be Messiah, and to be God come in the flesh. Near the end of the Gospel after his name, John wrote, "Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (John 20:30–31). As Messiah, Jesus was the promised Savior of Israel whom the prophets looked for and whom the nation watched for (1 Pet. 1:10). As God come in the flesh, Jesus was the Second Person of the Trinity who descended from heaven to live among the Jewish people in their midst. The physical presence of God had not been with the nation since the time of Jehoiachin and the Babylonian Exile (Ezek. 10:18). Jesus came as the presence of the Lord to offer the kingdom to the nation of Israel, an offer which was ultimately rejected. Though Israel was prepared to welcome her Messiah, the people's idea of who that Messiah would be and what he would accomplish differed from what Jesus came to be and do.



Though the Old Testament was clear enough for those reading it to understand Messiah's purpose, the generation Jesus came to was a self-serving one who chose a selective reading of the prophecies. The people looked for a political deliverer from Rome rather than a spiritual savior, and one who would come primarily for the Jewish people. Gentiles who followed Jewish customs and had become proselytes would be included, but Jewish ideas of Gentiles benefitting from Israel's blessings was limited. When John the Baptist came, Jesus acknowledged him as Elijah who was to come, but the people were unwilling to accept it (Matt. 11:14–17). The Pharisees especially were unwilling to believe, and it was that group which eventually persuaded the people against Jesus (Luke 7:30). The Pharisees, Sadducees, and even the High Priest Caiaphas had no respect for the kingdom that Jesus came to offer, nor for the claims he made about himself (John 11:49–50). Despite his ultimate rejection, Jesus made his two-fold claim over and over again in his public ministry, attempting to persuade the crowds who heard him that he was both Messiah and God come in the flesh.

When Jesus made his two-fold claim, he supported it with miracles throughout his ministry. In the Old Testament, it was known and even required that prophets support their prophecies with miracles. Moses and Aaron persuaded the people of Israel that Moses was sent by God to lead them out of Egypt by signs and miracles, and miracles marked much of Moses's ministry (Ex. 4:30–31). Deuteronomy 13:1–5 goes into detail about how a prophet's message should be tested. In the case of Deuteronomy 13, however, it is given in the negative sense. A prophet could give a message against what the Lord has commanded, and his message could be accompanied by a fulfilled sign or miracle. In this instance, the commands of the Lord outweigh the fulfilled sign and the prophet is to be put to death. However, a prophet and accompanying

signs was a well-known duo in the Old Testament. Other prophets such as Elijah, Elisha, and Jeremiah all gave miracles or fulfilled short-term prophecies with their message.

Jesus's message was confirmed by the signs and miracles which he did, which he himself pointed out to his accusers. As some of the Jews (likely the Pharisees) were getting ready to stone him, Jesus told them that even if they did not believe his message, they should "believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father" (John 10:38). After Jesus's ministry, the New Testament confirms this pattern. During his sermon in Acts 2, Peter reminded his hearers of the signs and wonders which Christ performed as evidence of his claims (Acts 2:22–24). Mark 16:19–20 says that as the disciples witnessed to people after Jesus's ascension, "the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs." The writer of Hebrews also affirms that the message of the Gospel has been confirmed by signs and wonders (Heb. 2:1–4). Paul reminded the Corinthian church that he had confirmed his apostleship to them "with signs and wonders and mighty works" (2 Cor. 12:12).

Both the Old and New Testament give evidence that a prophet's words were to be accompanied by works, and this was the purpose of Jesus's public ministry. As he saturated the land with his two-fold claim to be both Messiah and God come in the flesh, he did many miracles. Not only that, but his miracles were of a messianic nature. Prophecies had been given about what Messiah would do, and Jesus did these miracles. When John the Baptist's disciples inquired if Jesus was the Christ, he told them that "the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them" (Matt. 11:5). This "description of Jesus's ministry is drawn heavily from the Hebrew Scriptures (Isa. 26:19; 29:18; 35:5–6; 42:7, 18; 61:1)," and Jesus told John's

disciples to tell John of his works.<sup>174</sup> Not only that, but they were to tell John what they heard; in other words to tell John the message of Jesus. The works coupled with the message validated Jesus's claims and proved him to be both Messiah and God come in the flesh, and his public ministry served to give ample space to his message and his works as witness to the people of Israel.

## Public Travels

### **The Judean Ministry**

The public ministry of Jesus began in Judea after his forty-day temptation in the wilderness, then moved up to Galilee. Jesus began by calling his first disciples and performing his first miracle of turning water into wine in Cana. John 1 says that John was baptizing in “Bethany across the Jordan” (vs. 28), which is in Judea. Verse 43 says that the next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee, so he began his trip there, calling Philip and Nathanael as disciples likely in Bethsaida on the Sea of Galilee (vs. 44). John 2 begins with the wedding at Cana, another city in Galilee near Nazareth. As Nazareth was the boyhood home of Jesus, there were likely many who knew him for his whole life at the wedding. It was an appropriate place for Jesus to perform his first miracle, asserting his identity as a miracle worker in the eyes of the people and the Messiah as they would come to find out.

John next recorded Jesus's trip to Jerusalem for Passover, taking him back into Judea (John 2). In the temple, Jesus drove out the merchants and money-changers, and his disciples recalled the messianic prophecy from Psalm 69:9, and the Jews asked him for a sign of the authority he had to take such measures. Even early on in his ministry, Jesus was attracting

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<sup>174</sup> Turner, *Matthew*, 291.

messianic attention. His disciples who observed him recalled messianic psalms, and the religious leaders asked for a sign to go along with his drastic actions. In reply, Jesus offered a prophecy of his resurrection (John 2:19). The text indicates that neither the religious leaders nor the disciples realized that this was a resurrection prophecy until after Jesus was raised (John 2:22). During his time in Jerusalem, Jesus also had the famous conversation with Nicodemus, proving that at least some of the religious elite were interested in what he had to say (John 3). Jesus left Jerusalem with many believing in his name after they saw the signs he performed (John 2:23). Jesus himself, however, did not trust the crowd to be faithful to him or his message, proving himself to be wise as a serpent and harmless as a dove (Matt. 10:16).

After Passover, Jesus and the disciples retreated to the Judean countryside to baptize and preach (John 3:22). In an exchange with his disciples, John the Baptist again informed his listeners that Jesus was the Christ, for he was the bridegroom and John was merely the friend of the bridegroom (John 3:25–30, 34–36). Chapter 4 begins with a somewhat strange reason for Jesus to travel out of Judea. Jesus left Judea and departed for Galilee when he “learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John” (John 4:1). He took the unorthodox route through Samaria, though John does phrase it as a necessity (vs. 4). Traditionally, Jews avoided Samaria and encounters with the Samaritans because of their tainted past and somewhat varying beliefs from the Judean and Galilean Jews. This was a stigma that went back to the time of the Assyrian invasion, when the people left in Samaria intermarried with the foreigners sent by Assyria, thus creating a mixed race (2 Kings 17:24). Not only were the Samaritans historically a mixed race, but also a mixed religion (2 Kings 17:25, 29, 33). These religious differences continued into the building of a temple on Mount Gerizim and acceptance

of only the writings of Moses (John 4:20). During the time of Jesus, Jews would routinely take a longer route from Judea to Galilee for no other reason than to avoid despised Samaria.

Jesus, however, took the shorter way through the region and encountered the woman at the well in John 4. He continued his ministry with this individual, telling her that he could give her living water (vv. 4:10, 14), proving himself a prophet even in her personal marital matters (vv. 17–18), and finally telling her that he was the Messiah (vv. 25–26). The result is the woman's salvation and the belief of much of the town after Jesus spent two more days among the people there (vs. 39, 41). After two days Jesus finished his trip, arriving in Galilee to begin the Great Galilean Ministry.

### **Around Galilee**

The Early Judean Ministry ended after the arrest of John the Baptist, when Jesus went north to Galilee to continue his public ministry (John 4:3). His Galilean ministry is the second segment of Jesus's public ministry. During this time, Jesus did many miracles, sought out crowds, and continued to preach and prove his two-fold claim to be both Messiah and God come in the flesh with his miracles. Despite his multiple offerings of the kingdom to the Jewish people, his offer and he himself were ultimately rejected. This rejection came in two parts, but there is a hint of this coming rejection as early as Luke 4:16 when Jesus taught in the synagogue of his hometown of Nazareth. The text indicates that Jesus had a habit of teaching in the synagogue, and indeed he was viewed as a rabbi by his disciples and those who sat under his teaching.

In this instance, Jesus was handed the scroll of Isaiah and read Isaiah 61:1–2, a messianic prophecy which he applied to himself as he taught in the synagogue (Luke 4:22). Jesus's readings from the Isaiah scroll are recorded in Luke 4:18–19: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim

liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Jesus next declared that the reading from Isaiah was fulfilled in their hearing (Luke 4:21). At first the audience was receptive, but then they began to question Jesus's assertion. The people knew Jesus from boyhood and knew his family, and the normal (that is non-miraculous) childhood which they observed as Jesus grew up made the people question Jesus as Messiah.<sup>175</sup> In the end, Jesus was rejected and almost killed by his audience, certainly a foreshadow of what was to come.

Of note in Jesus's quote of Isaiah is where he chose to end his reading. Jesus knew that he had come to preach the gospel to the poor, to heal, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. These elements were "fulfilled in your hearing" at Nazareth. Isaiah 61 continues, "...and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to grant to those who mourn in Zion—to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes..." (Isa 61:2–3). Jesus ended his teaching in the middle of a sentence in Isaiah 61:2 for a reason. Jesus had also come to proclaim God's day of vengeance and to comfort the mourners, but for this time and moment in Nazareth he had come to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. The people of Nazareth heard this message and rejected it and the One who read it, providing a case study for Jesus coming ministry to and rejection by the people of Israel. They too would ultimately reject Jesus's message because of his claims about himself. This scene in Nazareth also confirms that Jesus did not shy away from messianic claims. He proclaimed the fulfillment of a clearly messianic passage to a crowd. Individuals who heard Jesus's sermon would have communicated with other people in the area

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<sup>175</sup> It is important here to remember that aside from Jesus's miraculous birth by a virgin, his childhood was very ordinary and normal. Jesus did not go around performing miracles, turning clay birds into sparrows, and hurting his playmates when they angered him (all accounts from the apocryphal book *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas*). Events recorded by Luke especially show that Jesus was aware early on that he was to be about the Lord's work (Luke 2:49), but it was a process of study and realization by which Jesus came to the knowledge of his messiahship.

and if Jesus intended to hide his message or messiahship, he certainly made a mistake. The Jewish audience understood what Jesus said, and in his hometown they wanted no part of his claim. Later, after the bread of life discourse, the crowds rejected him for claiming to be from heaven. The notion that Jesus shied away from telling the Jewish people who he was does not agree with the words he used when he spoke to them. Instead, Jesus recognized his identity, used specific messianic phrases which were identifiable to his Jewish listeners, and at the end of his public ministry was rejected as the Messiah he claimed to be.

Near the end of Jesus's public ministry, he experienced two episodes of rejection. The first moment of rejection was during the unpardonable sin episode (Matt. 12:14–37). Though there is some debate over what constitutes the unpardonable sin, the meaning relates to Jesus's messianic message.<sup>176</sup> In the pericope of Matthew 12:22–32, Jesus had healed “a demon-oppressed man who was blind and mute,” and the people wondered if this meant Jesus was the Son of David (vs. 22–23). The more accurate reading is a negative question asked by the people: “This can't be the Son of David, can it?” along with a negative answer: “No, it cannot.”<sup>177</sup> The Pharisees accused Jesus of working in league with the devil and equated his works with demonic-empowered works. This is the sin against the Spirit. The miracles Jesus did were in support of his messianic claims and “should have been viewed as evidence of his messianic status (12:23).”<sup>178</sup> Instead, the Pharisees not only refuse to believe Jesus is the Messiah but also slander the Spirit's work.

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<sup>176</sup> A few suggested meanings center around the rejection of a prophetic message, any rejection of the gospel, or general unbelief (Turner, *Matthew*, 323).

<sup>177</sup> Strong, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*, 3385.

<sup>178</sup> Turner, *Matthew*, 323–324.

The Pharisees committed the unpardonable sin because they had the Spirit-empowered evidential miracles of Jesus to confirm his messiahship, yet did not believe and even slandered the Spirit's work. It is therefore debatable whether or not the unpardonable sin is possible to commit today. People do not have Jesus performing miracles in front of them and the Spirit's clear hand working in Jesus, as the Pharisees did. However, people are still certainly accountable to respond positively to the claims of Jesus as laid out in Scripture, but whether rejection constitutes unpardonable sin is less likely. For the ministry of Jesus, however, this episode was the first moment of rejection and the beginning of the end of his public ministry.

The final moment of rejection and the conclusion of Jesus's public ministry came after the feeding of the five thousand in John 6. Jesus fed the crowd, and even had to withdraw afterwards because the people were ready to make him a king by force (John 6:15). When they found him again in Capernaum, Jesus accused them of seeking him out because they wanted more food, not because of his message or even because of the signs he performed (John 6:26). He was accurate in his estimation of the crowd, as the further dialogue shows. Incredibly, the people asked Jesus for a sign when he called for their obedience, having just witnessed his multiplication of five loaves and two fish to feed a multitude (John 6:30). When Jesus put himself above Moses and claimed heavenly origins, the people were offended at him (John 6:30). Jesus was offering the kingdom a final time, explaining the belief and repentance required, but the crowd was unwilling to repent and believe. In calling for the people to eat his flesh and drink his blood, Jesus mocked the Jews who took him so literally, alluding also to the abiding nature of kingdom citizens in the Son (cf. John 15).<sup>179</sup> As the bread of life, Jesus was the Messiah and the

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<sup>179</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 700.



promised King, but the people refused to believe him. They refused his heavenly claim, stating that they knew his father and mother (John 6:42), and were offended at him (John 6:60).

The text reads that after this episode, “many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him” (vs. 66). The Great Galilean Ministry and the two-and-a-half-year public ministry of Jesus had come to a close. The unpardonable sin and feeding of the five thousand/bread of life rejection represent when Jesus was rejected by the crowds who now knew who he was and had sufficient evidence to believe in him, yet did not. This ending was the beginning of the private ministry to the disciples, a taste of which is offered at the end of John 6. After many left him, Jesus turned to the Twelve and asked if they would leave him as well (vs. 67). Peter affirmed the group’s faith in Jesus as Messiah and acknowledged him as “the Holy One of God,” a messianic term (vs. 68–69).<sup>180</sup> From this point on, Jesus’s attention was focus on the private teaching of his inner twelve disciples to prepare them for what was to come.

As Peter’s affirmation showed, the twelve disciples knew by now, and even previous to this event, that Jesus was the Messiah. Even from when Jesus first called them, a few of the disciples expressed their recognition of Jesus’s identity from the very start. Two of John the Baptist’s disciples heard John call Jesus the Lamb of God and turned to follow Jesus instead (John 1:36–37). Andrew, one of these disciples, went to tell his brother Peter and said, “We have found the Messiah” (John 1:41). Philip also acknowledged Jesus as Messiah when he told Nathanael, “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth” (John 1:45). Peter’s confession of Jesus as the Messiah at Caesarea Philippi was not any new revelation. However, though they had seen his miracles, heard his teachings,

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<sup>180</sup> Francis Martin and William M. Wright, *The Gospel of John. Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture*. Ed. Peter S. Williamson and Mary Healy (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 133–134.

and knew him to be Messiah, they were as yet not prepared to see him suffer and die, and could not fathom his resurrection. Jesus's travels turn to private areas away from the crowds he previously sought, and his change in travels are evidence of his change in ministry focus.

### Private Retirements

As Jesus transitioned from a public to private focus of his ministry, he sought time away from the crowds to teach his disciples. Because Jesus remained such a public figure, it was difficult for him to find this alone time, even after the ultimate rejection of the crowds. The result is a crisscrossing journey around Galilee, with Jesus going further and further from his home base each time. A look at each potential teaching location as well as events which transpired there is the focus of this section.

#### **Tyre and Sidon**

After the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus attempted to cross the Sea of Galilee to Bethsaida but was blown off-course and landed in Gennesaret (Mark 6:45–53). He was recognized and for the next days or weeks, everywhere he went he was continually thronged by crowds looking for healing (Mark 6:56). Pharisees from Jerusalem also continued to accost him, and after a final lecture to the crowds and particularly to the listening Pharisees, Jesus and the disciples departed for Syro-Phoenicia (Mark 7:1–24). Though the Bible does not say specifically to which town Jesus went, he did go to a particular house, perhaps near the major town of Tyre (Mark 7:31). Jesus's desire for private time with his disciples is evident because he "did not want anyone to know, yet he could not be hidden" (Mark 7:24).

Jesus believed he could find the private time with his disciples that he desired in Syro-Phoenicia because, though it bordered Israel and even Galilee, the area was Gentile and its cities were larger than those of Galilee. It is likely that Galileans who needed to conduct business even

traveled to these larger cities for the economy and commerce they offered.<sup>181</sup> Perhaps Jesus thought that, among the larger Gentile crowds of the cities of Syro-Phoenicia, a small group of thirteen Jewish men would go unnoticed. It was also not uncommon for Jewish people to travel to Syro-Phoenicia, again for business, so their presence would not have been unusual. The area was also Gentile, and therefore possibly less familiar with the goings on of Israel to the south, including the presence of Jesus of Nazareth walking the land, teaching with authority, and performing miracles.

Though Jesus was the perfect Son of God, it must be remembered that as fully human, he strategized, planned, and adapted in his ministry. At this time in his ministry, he was seeking solitude with his disciples, and the narrative in Mark 6—9 shows that he was not following a predetermined route in order to gain this solitude. Jesus deliberated on the best areas this solitude could be had, and he took his twelve disciples to those places. Many times during this narrative, his attempts at solitude were hindered by those who recognized him, but this does not mean Jesus made a mistake, nor that he did not use the setback as a opportunities for ministry. Rather, Jesus interacted with those who asked for his attention, then reworked his route to go to another place that might offer solitude. Jesus remained fully God and fully man regardless of whether his original plans succeeded.

To return to Jesus's trip into Syro-Phoenicia, a Gentile woman from the region asked Jesus to cast a demon out of her daughter, and after a lengthy discourse he did so (Mark 7:25–30). There is some speculation that part of the training of the Twelve at this time was to not only teach them about when and how Jesus would die, but also to teach them that salvation had come

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<sup>181</sup> Bradley W. Root, *First Century Galilee: A Fresh Examination of the Sources* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 122.

not just for the Jews but also for the Gentiles.<sup>182</sup> Wherever Jesus went at this time seeking solitude for his disciples, he encountered individuals in Gentile areas asking for healing or other miracles. Jesus did not dismiss them, but fulfilled their requests in the presence of the disciples. His attention to the Gentiles during this time of private ministry is strong evidence that the gospel for the Gentiles was meant to be part of their lesson.

The primary goal of Jesus gaining alone time with his disciples was to tell them plainly that he would die. This was accomplished in Mark 8:31–32 and the resulting week-long conversation at Caesarea Philippi centered on this discussion (Mark 9:2). However, there was another element that became part of their training as Jesus traveled and attempted this alone time with his disciples. In going to Gentile areas, and in being recognized in these places, Jesus had many opportunities to interact with Gentile individuals. Rather than dismiss their requests and go about his way looking for solitude, at every turn Jesus spoke with those who approached him, taught them, and in many cases healed them. The gospel for the Gentiles became part of the disciples' private training, even though that privacy had not yet been accomplished.<sup>183</sup> At other times in his public ministry, Jesus spoke of and interacted with Gentiles, but this was often not well received. The account of the Roman centurion in Matthew 8 and to an extent Jesus's dealings with Samaritans come to mind (John 4). In Matthew 8, Jesus healed a Roman centurion's servant without even visiting the sick man. Jesus praised the faith of the centurion, who affirmed that Jesus needed only to speak and his servant would be healed. Jesus's disciples and the crowds which followed witnessed this miracle, as well as Jesus's praise for a Gentile's

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<sup>182</sup> Stein, *Mark*, 354; Kelly Iverson, *Gentiles in the Gospel of Mark: 'Even the Dogs under the Table Eat the Childre's Crumbs'* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2007), 179–180.

<sup>183</sup> Iverson, *Gentiles in the Gospel of Mark*, 57.

faith. It was an early example of Jesus's attitude toward Gentiles and his ministry to them and not only to Israel.

John 4 is the account of the Samaritan woman at the well. In Jesus's day, the Samaritans were hated by the Jews and "the Jews had no dealings with Samaritans" (John 4:9). Rather than follow the social customs of the day, Jesus interacted with not only a Samaritan, but a Samaritan woman who had a history of divorce and was living with another man when Jesus met her. This woman was an outcast, as evidenced by her coming to the well alone during the hottest part of the day.<sup>184</sup> Rather than ignore or avoid her, Jesus initiated a conversation with her, at which the woman herself was surprised (John 4:9). When the disciples returned, they too "marveled that he was talking with a woman," and a Samaritan woman at that, but they did not question his actions (John 9:27). As a result, Jesus and his disciples stayed in the town for two days, and many came to believe in Jesus as the Messiah. This would have been an impactful lesson to Jesus's disciples, who as Jewish men would have been taught to avoid the Samaritans. Jesus extended kindness to this town of Samaritans, and they were included in his gospel message. After his private ministry, Jesus continued to speak of and interact with Gentiles as well (Luke 10, 17).

At times during his ministry, Jesus did limit his message to Israel only. Near the end of his public ministry, Jesus sent the twelve disciples out, "instructing them, 'Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel'" (Matt. 10:5–6). This direct focus on the towns of Israel was intended as a final call to repent and accept Jesus as the Christ. Jesus's goal was to saturate the land with his claim to be Messiah and God come in the flesh, and this message was intended primarily for the Jewish nation. This did not mean that the Gentiles were not to be included, especially after Israel

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<sup>184</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 609–610.

rejected her Messiah. Indeed, even from Israel's earliest days Gentiles were given a way to be part of the nation (Exod. 12; Num. 9, 15). In the New Testament, it is clear that Gentiles are grafted into the people of Israel (Rom. 11), but this was a lesson the disciples had yet to learn and which they were given many examples of to observe during both the public and private ministries of Jesus.

### **The Decapolis**

When Jesus was unable to attain solitude in the region of Tyre, he “went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis” (Mark 7:31). This was another Gentile area where Jesus hoped some anonymity would aid in his private training of the twelve disciples. Though still on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, the Decapolis was across the lake from Galilee and south of most of the activity in that region. The people of the Decapolis were not Jewish, and many of the towns of the province took pride in their Greek heritage.<sup>185</sup> Despite its cultural and physical distance from Galilee, the name of Jesus had found its way there. Earlier in his ministry, “great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan” (Matt. 4:25). No doubt some of these followers took trips back to their homelands, and took the name and news of Jesus with them. When Jesus arrived in the Decapolis, people recognized him and asked for the healing of a deaf man (Mark 7:32). Jesus attempted to do the miracle privately but the more he charged the surrounding crowd to tell no one of the miracle, “the more zealously they proclaimed it” (Mark 7:36).

In this instance as well as the healing of the blind man in Bethsaida (which is covered in the next section), Jesus did more than merely speak or touch the man to heal him. For this man,

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<sup>185</sup> Chancey, *The Myth of a Gentile Galilee*, 131.

Jesus put his fingers in the man's ears, then spit and touched the man's tongue (Mark 7:33). Jesus then looked to heaven and spoke "Ephphatha," or "Be opened" (Mark 7:34). After these actions the man was cured and could both hear and speak clearly (Mark 7:35). The use of additional actions leads some commentators to believe this was a difficult miracle for Jesus to perform.<sup>186</sup> Jesus was at the end of his public ministry and run down by the never-ending needs of the crowds which followed him and by the constant badgering of the Pharisees. Perhaps in his desire for retreat to teach his disciples, he also sought rest for himself. Such a position is possible but unnecessary to read into the text. The actions Jesus performed were common in healings in his day and do not need to imply difficulty.<sup>187</sup> Jesus touched the man's ears, the place of deafness. The spitting causes more confusion, but "the use of spittle in healing (cs. John 9:6) is well documented" in Jewish practice and would not have been out of the ordinary even used by Jesus.<sup>188</sup> Some commentators also wonder why Jesus sighed and again posit his exhaustion. Again, sighing was part of ancient healing practices and likely something of a prayer-like gesture coupled with his looking up to heaven.<sup>189</sup> If anything, this prayer posture as well as the Aramaic utterance "Ephphatha" argue for a Jewish audience rather than Hellenistic.<sup>190</sup>

Though Jesus's intent in visiting the Decapolis was to gain alone time with his disciples, the healing of the deaf man could not be avoided. However, Jesus took measures to make the miracle private and, in this way, perhaps still gain the alone time he desired. Jesus took the man

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<sup>186</sup> Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 383.

<sup>187</sup> Stein, *Mark*, 360.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*

“aside from the crowd privately” (Mark 7:33), performed the miracle, and afterward told the man and any fringe witnesses not to tell what he had done for the man (Mark 7:36). Jesus’s travels to locations away from Galilee was a strategic action to get away from the crowds and be alone with his disciples. When confronted with someone who needed healing, Jesus continued to show compassion, but more privately versus in front of large crowds. Jesus had his ministry goals in mind, but remained kind when these goals were frustrated. Such an occurrence happened subsequently.

After the healing, a crowd gathered and Jesus performed the miracle of the feeding of the four thousand (Mark 8:1–9). Even if the audience was Jewish, the disciples learned again that Jesus was the humble Messiah who came to serve and save Israel, and put the people before himself. Though clearly a different episode than the feeding of the five thousand, there are some similarities. Despite Jesus’s own wish for rest and privacy, he had compassion on the crowds (Mark 6:34, 8:2). Likewise, the setting was in a desolate place where it was impossible to buy provisions (Mark 6:35, 8:4). The disciples were also incredulous at the idea of feeding such a crowd on both occasions (Mark 6:37, 8:4). Finally, the fare of bread and fish, the blessing, the satisfaction of the crowds, and the abundance of uneaten food all have corresponding verses in each event (Mark 6:38–43, 8:6–8). The faithlessness of the disciples at the feeding of the four thousand, having just recently witnessed the feeding of the five thousand, is sometimes questioned. It is possible they viewed Jesus’s rebuke of the people in John 6:26–27 as a sign that he would not perform such a miracle again, but in this they were mistaken.<sup>191</sup> Jesus showed compassion for the crowds and took the time to care for them and interact with them. Nevertheless, his desire for private time with the disciples was not fulfilled in the Decapolis, so

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<sup>191</sup> Thomas and Gundry, *A Harmony of the Gospels*, 113.



Jesus again crossed the Sea of Galilee, this time landing in the district of Dalmanutha (Mark 8:10).

### **Dalmanutha**

There is some debate about the location and even the reality of Dalmanutha. Mark uses the name for the town, but the parallel text in Matthew says the town is Magadan (Matt. 15:39). This town is also called Magedan or Magdala, which was the important fishing center of Galilee.<sup>192</sup> This gives two possibilities for where Jesus landed on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. It is possible he went to a small town or even merely an anchorage called Dalmanutha.<sup>193</sup> There is no record of a town of this name in ancient sources, but again if the spot was merely a small port or other stopping spot, perhaps it was not often recorded and therefore its presence has not survived into the modern day.<sup>194</sup> It could be that though Dalmanutha was on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, the town was smaller and less of a place of commerce and busyness than Capernaum. In going to Dalmanutha, Jesus likely hoped that he could gain the alone time he needed with the disciples in such a small fishing outpost, but it was still not to be. The Pharisees again went to Jesus and argued with him, asking for a sign as was their habit (Mark 8:11). Jesus did not indulge them but gave a short answer and got right back into the boat to depart for Bethsaida-Julias (Mark 8:12–13).

If Jesus landed at Magdala, his strategy would have been different than one which landed him at Dalmanutha. Rather than attempting to hide in a small village, Jesus could have used the crowded and hectic spot to hide in plain sight. The immediate presence of the Pharisees and

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<sup>192</sup> Overman, "Who Were the First Urban Christians?," 165.

<sup>193</sup> Stein, *Mark*, 374.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid*, 375.

Sadducees makes sense in Magdala. As a populated area, there would have been fishermen, tradesmen, and a steady stream of visitors. The remains of a synagogue were discovered in Magdala in 2009, making the presence of Pharisees even more feasible.<sup>195</sup> In Matthew's account, Jesus was also short in his response to the Pharisees and Sadducees, and told them the only sign they would receive would be the sign of Jonah (Matt. 16:4). Though debated, it is likely Jesus was referring to the three days Jonah spent in the whale and the three days Jesus would spend in the tomb before his resurrection.<sup>196</sup> Jesus accused the religious Jews of evil and adultery, seeking a sign when Jesus had already provided more than enough evidence to support his claim to be Messiah and God come in the flesh. Their final sign would be Jesus's own resurrection, which he had predicted and to which they would have no reply, other than to continued rejection.

After Jesus and his disciples had started their journey back across the lake, the disciples realized they had no bread (Mark 8:16). Jesus knew their concern, but warned them instead of the "leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod" (Mark 8:14). The disciples were confused at this lesson, wondering if their forgetting to bring bread was the point of his lesson (Mark 8:17). Jesus was aware of their confusion and their lack of understanding only highlighted their need for private training (Mark 8:21).

### **Bethsaida**

When Jesus and his disciples crossed the lake to Bethsaida, they went to Bethsaida-Julias. This was a town on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee and different from the Bethsaida south of Capernaum in Galilee. Jesus had just come from Galilee with no success at gaining the private

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<sup>195</sup> Mordechai Aviam, "The Decorated Stone from the Synagogue at Migdal: A Holistic Interpretation and a Glimpse into the Life of Galilean Jews at the Time of Jesus," *Novum Testamentum* 55, no. 3 (2013): 205.

<sup>196</sup> Turner, *Matthew*, 397.

time he needed with his disciples, and so he fled yet again across the lake. Because Bethsaida-Julias was not in Galilee, and because of its more desolate geography, Jesus was hopeful that he could stay here and train the Twelve. It is also possible that Jesus had set his sights fully on Caesarea Philippi at this point, and Bethsaida was merely a town to pass through. Surely Jesus would have stayed there had he gone undiscovered, but this was not to be, and the events of the private training are made the richer by taking place in Caesarea Philippi.

In Bethsaida, the residents again recognized Jesus and brought a blind man to him for healing. Rather than only lead him away from the crowd as he did in Dalmanutha, Jesus took the man out of the village entirely for the miraculous healing (Mark 8:23). As mentioned above, Jesus again used spittle, which was thought in ancient times to be a cure for blindness. Jesus also laid his hands on the man's eyes twice, again leading some to believe that Jesus was exhausted and the miracle was difficult for him to perform.<sup>197</sup> This is again unlikely. Some scholars read a symbolic meaning into the two-part healing, especially as it pertains to the disciples. The miracle "is interpreted as symbolizing the present blindness and lack of understanding of the disciples and their future 'healing.'"<sup>198</sup> However, this interpretation also reads Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi as the first stage of healing and their full realization of who Jesus was after the resurrection. Such a length of time between events and the recording of those events in Mark make it unlikely that such an interpretation was the intention of the author.<sup>199</sup>

After Jesus fully healed the blind man, he sent him back to his home commanding him to not even enter the village, in order to keep the crowds at bay (Mark 8:25–26). At this point Jesus

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<sup>197</sup> Stein, *Mark*, 392.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 392–393.

was already on his way to Caesarea Philippi and continued on that route to the destination that would at last bring private time for him and his disciples.

### **Caesarea Philippi**

After seeking private time with his disciples in Gentile and unpopulated areas, Jesus turned his sight on the distant city of Caesarea Philippi and took his disciples to that remote, Gentile, and to an extent dangerous area (Mark 8:27). Though the Bible makes it fairly clear that Jesus and the disciples went near Caesarea Philippi and not to the actual city, a study of their precise location as near as it can be determined is helpful. There are three options: the worship site at Caesarea Philippi, the city of Caesarea Philippi, and the district or villages of Caesarea Philippi.

The worship site of Caesarea Philippi will be covered in great detail in the next chapter, but a brief discussion is necessary here. In Jesus's day, the site was the home of a temple to Augustus as well as the worship site of the Greek god Pan. It had recently been built up by Herod the Great as a tribute to Augustus and was a popular spot among the soldiers stationed in and around Israel. Roman soldiers often took their leave at Caesarea Philippi both for its Hellenistic feel and Roman worship practices. Here was a taste of home, complete with religious features, architecture, and all the vice and sin that accompanied a pagan worship site. It was not a place that would welcome a Jewish person, and not one any Jewish person would choose to visit either. Any Jew wishing to remain ceremonially pure could not set foot in such a place, and the danger of such a place to a Jew needs hardly elaborated. The Roman soldiers were known for their brutality, and a solitary Jew who somehow found his way to the spot could easily have been used for sport and entertainment.

The city of Caesarea Philippi itself was also very Gentile, though the occasional Jewish person would not have been an unusual sight. It was somewhat incorporated within the worship site, though in later centuries the city was expanded beyond the worship site. It is possible, given their lengthy stay, that Jesus and the disciples ventured into the city, but not necessary. The villages around Caesarea Philippi could have offered what they needed for their stay, as well as accounted for the crowds which joined Jesus and the disciples at points during their trip to Caesarea Philippi.

The text is clear that Jesus and his disciples went to the district (Matt. 16:13) or villages (Mark 8:27) of Caesarea Philippi. As mentioned, it would have been useless and dangerous to go to the actual worship site of Caesarea Philippi, and there is not necessarily any reason that Jesus and the Twelve would have needed to go to the city either. Rather, per Jesus's intention to privately train his disciples, they found a small village in the area to stay, and could have even ventured into the hills for their daily discussions. At the very least, Jesus took Peter, James, and John up the slopes of Mount Hermon to witness his transfiguration, and it is possible the other nine disciples went part of the way into the foothills with them. Jesus stayed in the region, district, or villages of Caesarea Philippi, and there at last accomplished his task of privately training his twelve disciples.

Jesus had finally accomplished his goal to escape the crowds and was able to devote extended time to the disciples to warn them of his coming death. Because he had not yet told anyone clearly that he was to die, the disciples were surprised and disheartened at the news. Jesus was right in assuming they would need special time with him to first give them this news and assure their hopes in him as Messiah. The disciples were unprepared for a suffering and dying Messiah despite Old Testament texts which supported such a figure (Isaiah 53 in

particular). Jesus also needed time to prepare for the events in Jerusalem and needed the support of his closest friends as he looked to the coming Passover. Their response did not encourage him and despite further conversation they still were not accepting or supporting of his prediction. Therefore, “after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves” to be transfigured (Mark 9:2). Jesus took his inner three disciples to see him transformed in all his heavenly glory to bolster their faith and reassure them that he was indeed their Messiah. Though the group still needed encouragement and reminders after that event, it was enough to keep the group together both following and believing Jesus all the way to Jerusalem.

### Conclusion

As this chapter’s study has shown, Jesus’s ministry focus changed from public to private ministry, and the change was reflected in his travels. Jesus’s public ministry was centered in Judea and especially in Galilee, where crowds of Jewish people would hear his two-fold claim to be both Messiah and God come in the flesh. Jesus spent a better part of two years traveling throughout the region performing miracles and teaching the people. He offered the kingdom to Israel on the condition of repentance and belief, and word of him traveled throughout Israel and beyond. The crowds which followed Jesus were also witness to his many miracles supporting his claim and were provided all the evidence necessary to believe. Yet, in the end, they rejected him, his message, and his kingdom. The religious leaders’ blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and the abandonment of Jesus after his bread of life discourse narrowed his followers to those who knew and believed him to be the Messiah of Israel. It was to these twelve disciples Jesus now turned in order to train and prepare them for the events which were to come.

Jesus turned his attention to the disciples and sought time alone with them, which resulted in a tour of Galilee and the surrounding areas in an attempt to gain this alone time. After his rejection by the Jews during the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit episode and after the feeding of the five thousand/bread of life discourse, Jesus shifted his focus to minister privately to the Twelve. In an attempt to escape the crowds, Jesus first went north to Tyre and Sidon, but was recognized despite his desire to be hidden (Mark 7:24). He then went across the lake to the Decapolis, but was again recognized and asked to do a miracle (Mark 7:31). His time in the Decapolis was extended for the feeding of the four thousand, and afterward Jesus again sought solitude, but this time within the borders of Galilee.

Jesus took his twelve disciples to the small village of Dalmanutha (Mark 8:10), or as Matthew records to the large fishing village of Magdala (Matt. 15:39). Here too Jesus was recognized, this time by the ever-questioning Pharisees and Sadducees who demanded a sign from heaven. This was the first time the Pharisees and Sadducees had come together to attack Jesus, despite their hostility toward one another and differences in belief.<sup>200</sup> Such collaboration shows the hatred of the religious Jews toward Jesus intensifying, making his need to train the disciples and tell them of his coming death even more urgent. After leaving Dalmanutha/Magdala, Jesus went to Bethsaida-Julias, where he was recognized and asked to do a miracle. This was accomplished in private, but Jesus had already begun the long walk to Caesarea Philippi. It was there that he finally found a place to privately train the Twelve. This site was important for many reasons and will be studied in detail in the following chapter.

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<sup>200</sup> Thomas and Gundry, *A Harmony of the Gospels*, 114.

## **Chapter 4: The History of Caesarea Philippi**

### **Introduction**

Preceding chapters of this dissertation have covered the geography of Israel, a timeline of Jesus's ministry, and the travels of Jesus in detail. As Jesus turned his sights to Caesarea Philippi, an in-depth study of this important location becomes helpful. Though the Gospels do not mention Caesarea Philippi more than in passing, what transpired there is of utmost importance to the ministry of Jesus and his intentions to privately train his disciples at this point in his ministry. The account of Jesus and his disciples at Caesarea Philippi may be found in Matthew 16:13–20, Mark 8:27–30, and Luke 9:18–20. These accounts focus on the conversation between Jesus and his disciples, which is the subject of the next chapter. Despite a lack of description given in the Gospels, a study of the history, location, and practices at Caesarea Philippi sheds light on the conversation held there by Jesus and the Twelve and brings further understanding to this remote corner of ancient Israel.

### **A Study of Ancient Banias and Pan Worship**

#### **A Brief History of Banias**

The town of Caesarea Philippi is also called Banias, which by translation is also Pnias, a reference to the Greek god Pan. This site is located near Dan at the northernmost tip of ancient Israel. The area is situated near Mount Hermon and the headwaters of the Jordan River. With its lush greenery, flowing rivulets, and old wood forests, it is no wonder that the area and ancient Caesarea Philippi had been used for the worship of the natural elements and fertility deities for centuries. There is even evidence that the region surrounding Caesarea Philippi had been used



for pagan worship practices since the ancient Canaanites.<sup>201</sup> The Romans used the site as a place of emperor worship, and prior to that the Greeks worshipped Pan at the nearby grotto.<sup>202</sup> There is some belief that at the time of Jesus the grotto was thought of as the gates of hell, giving a visual meaning to Jesus's response to Peter's confession (Matt. 16:18).<sup>203</sup> More will be said about Pan and emperor worship in the next sections.

The region of Dan and specifically the area around Banias and the natural springs found there had been used for religious practices since the times of the Canaanites, with various cultures using Banias and its surrounding locales for pagan worship practices and cult activities.<sup>204</sup> The lush landscape of the place as well as the dark grotto and rushing water made it a choice place for the worship of fertility deities and natural elements. In the Early Bronze and Iron (Israelite) Age, the city was named Lashem or Laish and is mentioned in the Bible, especially regarding the tribe of Dan. Originally, Dan was given an area on the coast of the Mediterranean (Josh. 19:40–46). However, this was lost as Israel sought to take control of the Promised Land and so Dan went north “and fought against Leshem, and after capturing it and striking it with the sword they took possession of it and settled in it, calling Leshem, Dan, after

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<sup>201</sup> Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 76.

<sup>202</sup> Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. 1, 74, 88–89; James A. Brooks, *Mark*, vol. 23, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), 134.

<sup>203</sup> Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 79; Michael Heiser is the main proponent of this view, but there is insufficient evidence of this idea in ancient times (Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015)). However, there is little ancient historical support for this idea.

<sup>204</sup> Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 76.

the name of Dan their ancestor” (Josh. 19:47).<sup>205</sup> Though Dan was commanded, along with all the tribes of Israel, to worship Yahweh alone, the tribe exhibited idolatrous tendencies and stole household gods and other religious objects belonging to Micah, setting up the carved image in Laish after taking the city (Judg. 18:17–18, 30–31). Laish was in the hands of Dan until the Assyrian invasion and captivity in 734 BC (Judg. 18:30).<sup>206</sup> Even when inhabited by Israelites, the location of Baniyas was overrun with idolatrous worship and practices.

Much can be gathered about Canaanite and specifically Sidonian worship practices in the territory of Dan by the Danites’ own cultic worship practices found in Judges. When examining the religious objects found at Tel-Dan especially, “influence seems to stem from Phoenicia,” versus Aram or another location.<sup>207</sup> When compared with the geography of the region, such an influence makes sense based on factors of travel difficulty as well as distance.<sup>208</sup> Though far to the north and on the way to Damascus from southern Israel, Laish was closer to Tyre and Sidon on the coast. Not only that, but travel to Damascus would have been through the Hermon Mountain range and much more difficult in terms of terrain. Judges 18:7 even specifies that the people living in Laish at the time of the Judges were remote and “had no dealings with anyone.”<sup>209</sup> Though the Danites did not build their temple at Baniyas, it is possible they were

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<sup>205</sup> This story is given fuller reference in Judges 18, where Laish is mentioned in verses 7, 14, 27, and 29. The chapter mentions that the people there led quite lives “after the manner of the Sidonians,” but were removed from that people group (Judg. 18:7). This group would have come from coastal Phoenicia and were well-removed from that area in the foothills of Mount Hermon (see John H. Walton’s *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* for a full description). Association with Beth-Rehob is also speculated but unconfirmed (see John H. Walton’s *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*).

<sup>206</sup> Bartusch, *Understanding Dan*, 255.

<sup>207</sup> Ackerman, “E-Dan,” 166–167.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>209</sup> Though most translations of Judges 18:7 say that the people of Laish “were far from the Sidonians,” some commentators find evidence that Sidonians should actually be translated “Aram” (see Tammi J. Schneider’s “Judges” for one example).

influenced by worship practices at that site. The location of the ancient temple site at Dan is roughly three miles to the west of Banias, and surrounded by the same lush beauty and rushing water that accompanied the worship of the natural elements and fertility deities at Banias. This influence of nature carried on through the centuries, affecting Greek and Roman practices at the site as will be studied next.

### **The Introduction of Pan Worship at Banias**

As mentioned earlier, the worship site at Caesarea Philippi is Banias, or alternatively Panias. This comes from the name of the Greek god Pan, a deity in the form of a faun believed to be the god of the wild, shepherds, and music. The location of Banias at something of a crossroads of cultures meant that the controlling governance of the time also controlled what was practiced at the site. Beginning in the Hellenistic period in the late third or early second centuries BC, the Greeks introduced Pan worship at the site, which continued on into Roman times.<sup>210</sup> As in Canaanite times, the grotto, springs, and location of Banias among high cliffs and rushing water made it a prime location for the worship of a god of the wild such as Pan. Polybius describes these features in his account of the Seleucid victory over the Ptolemaic army in 200 BC, assuming “the Ptolemies identified the cave and the springs with the Arcadian god Pan.”<sup>211</sup> However, it is also possible that the Seleucid general Antiochus III dedicated the site to Pan after the battle as a recognition of the panic the god brought to the Ptolemaic soldiers.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Wilson and Tzaferis, “Historical and Archaeological Summary,” 173.

<sup>211</sup> Polybius, *The Histories* 16.18–19, W.R. Paton, trans. (Cambridge: Loeb Classical Library, 1927); Wilson and Tzaferis, “Historical and Archaeological Summary,” 173.

<sup>212</sup> Wilson and Tzaferis, “Historical and Archaeological Summary,” 173.

The city of Caesarea Philippi was not founded until the end of the first century BC by Philip the tetrarch, but it is clear that Pan was recognized and worshipped at Banias long before the establishment of Caesarea Philippi.<sup>213</sup> Archaeological digs have uncovered various religious elements used by worshippers of Pan since earlier times. These show that “a rather primitive form of the cult of Pan was practiced in the cave,” and a simple sanctuary was built in front of the cave.<sup>214</sup> Larger buildings and structures were not built at the site until later.<sup>215</sup> Greek influence spread quickly over the region as Alexander moved east in his conquests, and this influence is the foundation for early Pan worship. Because the site had since ancient times been a place of worship, it was only natural for the people of Greek rule to recognize the site as holy. Though the deities worshipped at Banias changed, the site itself stayed in its natural state. Even with the addition of buildings in the first century BC, Banias was most prized for its location nestled in the cliffs of Mount Hermon, presence of rushing water, and for the dark cave in the back of the rocks as a natural room for gathering.

After the Seleucid victory over the Ptolemies, Banias found recognition as a place of worship of Pan in writing.<sup>216</sup> The Seleucids were a Greek power in West Asia who fought and defeated the Egyptian Greek Ptolemies at Banias in 200 BC.<sup>217</sup> As Greeks, the Seleucids recognized Pan as part of their pantheon and as his name suggests, he was responsible for wild or panicked actions. It is therefore possible that after the victory, the site was given to Pan directly as thanks for the panic he caused in the Ptolemaic army. Though a rival army, the Ptolemies

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<sup>213</sup> Wilson and Tzaferis, “Historical and Archaeological Summary,” 173.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Polybius, *The Histories* 16.18–19.

<sup>217</sup> Wilson and Tzaferis, “Historical and Archaeological Summary,” 173.

could have known of the small cultic Pan worship at Banias even before the battle, and thereby recognized the site as one of Pan worship. Banias continued as a site for Pan worship, though large structures and extensive archaeological articles do not show up until the early Roman period. Control of the site passed from the Seleucids to the Hellenized Iturean dynasts, and even to Cleopatra for a time.<sup>218</sup> Again, throughout this changing of control, Banias remained quietly used but nevertheless occupied. Beginning in the late 20s BC, a local dynast named Zenodorus ruled under Augustus Caesar and controlled the territory of northern Israel. However, Augustus turned the territory over to Herod I in 23 BC, thus ushering in the time of Roman emperor worship.<sup>219</sup>

#### Herod the Great and the Temples to Augustus (Emperor Worship)

##### **The Roman Emperor as Messiah**

Though Pan worship remained a presence at the site during Roman times, Banias was expanded to include emperor worship, and this became the main focus of the site. In 19 BC, Herod the Great established the worship of Augustus at three separate sites including Banias, and this tradition “was later reconfigured to encompass a broader imperial cult.”<sup>220</sup> Despite some level of Jewish pushback at the other sites in Caesarea Maritima and Samaria-Sebaste, conflict was relatively non-existent at Caesarea Philippi. This was due to its Gentile nature and history as a worship site since Canaanite times, as covered in the previous section. The addition of the

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<sup>218</sup> Wilson and Tzaferis, “Historical and Archaeological Summary,” 173.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Elise A. Friedland, *The Roman Marble Sculptures from the Sanctuary of Pan at Caesarea Philippi/Panias (Israel)* (Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2012), 65.

deified Augustus to Pan and other idols was not a problem for worshippers, and if anything might have been seen as a positive development around Roman and Hellenistic relations.

The area of Caesarea Philippi was largely Gentile, and also a beautiful and refreshing spot. The park consists of a cave or grotto, high rock walls, and flowing spring rivulets. Above Banias, the springs of the Jordan flow down the slopes of Mount Hermon to cascade down in waterfalls and rushing streams all around the place. Within the rock walls of the high cliffs, cutouts may still be seen where small cult statues were placed for worship. Philip the Tetrarch inherited the city of Caesarea Philippi from his father Herod the Great, who had erected a temple to Augustus at Banias in addition to the ancient Pan worship practices.<sup>221</sup> After modifications, the site included not only the natural grotto but also the Court of Pan and the Nymphs, Temple of Zeus, Court of Nemesis, Temple to Pan and the Goats, the Augusteum, and the Tripartite Building (though the purpose of this building has not yet been determined).<sup>222</sup> In time, Caesarea Philippi became a retreat for the many Roman soldiers of the area to worship and rest, indulging in the vices which accompanied such a retreat.<sup>223</sup> Roman soldiers often came for such refreshment and expression of their devotion to Caesar at Banias, and Banias as well as Caesarea Philippi remained dedicated to Caesar.<sup>224</sup>

It must be remembered that emperor worship did not just prove a political association but was foremost in the religious consciousness of the population, meant as much for the people's

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<sup>221</sup> Fergus Kerr, "Comment: Why Caesarea Philippi?" *New Blackfriars* 1024, no. 89 (2008): 631.

<sup>222</sup> Friedland, *The Roman Marble Sculptures*, 51.

<sup>223</sup> Kerr, "Comment: Why Caesarea Philippi?," 631.

<sup>224</sup> Daniel M. Doriani, "Matthew," in *ESV Expository Commentary: Matthew-Luke*, vol. 8, ed. Iain M. Duguid et al. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020), 347.

religious needs as for the glorification of the emperor.<sup>225</sup> Herod was feverish in his desire to ingratiate himself to Augustus, and in building three temples to the emperor he established the Roman emperor cult in Israel. Important for the discussion of Jesus's revelation at Caesarea Philippi, "this Roman imperial institution played a pivotal role in spreading imperial propaganda and encouraging allegiance to the emperor, who was portrayed as a god" worthy of worship.<sup>226</sup> Caesar Augustus was worshipped as a god and referred to himself as divine during his lifetime, a trait which of course carried over to the worship of him during and after his life.<sup>227</sup> In their conversation, Jesus claimed divine quality, right to kingship, and requirement of allegiance which in the view of the emperor cult was the emperor's right and privilege alone. Not only that, but such seditious claims to kingship were not permitted in Rome or its territories, a topic which will be discussed in the next section. In seeking time alone with his disciples, Jesus took the Twelve to Gentile Caesarea Philippi for the express purpose of establishing his role as King and to prepare the disciples for the suffering he would endure. The choice of location only added to the meaning and gravity of the conversation held there.

The natural grotto at Baniyas is "presumably, the site of the earliest cult activity" and has a certain importance in Jesus's discussion with his disciples.<sup>228</sup> In Matthew 16, Peter confesses Jesus as the Christ, and Jesus promised that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against" this confession (verse 18). Some have speculated that it was the grotto that Jesus referenced and in

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<sup>225</sup> Yair Furstenberg, "The Rabbinic View of Idolatry and the Roman Political Conception of Divinity," *The Journal of Religion* 90, no. 3 (2010): 351.

<sup>226</sup> Overman, Olive, and Nelson, "Discovering Herod's Shrine to Augustus," 40.

<sup>227</sup> Edmondson, *Augustus*, 292.

<sup>228</sup> Andrea M. Berlin, "The Archaeology of Ritual: The Sanctuary of Pan at Baniyas/Caesarea Philippi," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, no. 315 (1999): 29.

Christian history, this grotto has come to be associated with the gates of hell.<sup>229</sup> The grotto's association with pagan rites has led Christians to "point to it as the origin of the term 'Gates of Hell' used by Jesus during his visit to the site," but this is not an historically accurate or a fair assumption to draw.<sup>230</sup> It is believed by some that Banias as the entrance to the underworld was an ancient Jewish belief and as such makes Jesus's statement more poignant and fitting in the location.<sup>231</sup> While this view has become widely accepted, there is little ancient historical support for the idea, and such a view can read something into the text that is not there. Though a complete discussion of this view is outside the scope of this paper, a few points must be made. First, early church evidence for this understanding is lacking. Although Christians, especially in Gentile areas, were familiar with the Roman or Greek fascination with the underworld, they did not claim any such fascination or attempt of placement of the underworld. In 1 Corinthians 15:29, Paul references people "being baptized on behalf of the dead." Though the meaning is disputed, it is clear in this verse that there was some interest by the unsaved Corinthians in the place of the dead, what happened to the dead, and what affect people on earth could have on the dead, and it is possible this interest could have found its way into the church.<sup>232</sup> However, in Jewish Israel, the place of Hades was unknown and not believed to have its entrance anywhere

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<sup>229</sup> Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 79.

<sup>230</sup> Kathleen Ritmeyer and Leen Ritmeyer, "Expeditions: Banias: The Fountain of Jordan," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 27, no. 4 (2001): 56–88.

<sup>231</sup> Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 79; H.H. Kitchener, "List of Photographs Taken in Galilee, with Descriptions," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 10, no. 3 (1878): 141–145.

<sup>232</sup> David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 559.



on earth, including the grotto at Banias.<sup>233</sup> More relevant to the discussion of Jesus with his disciples is the act of emperor worship that took place at Banias. Also pertinent is a history of false messiahs in Israel leading up to Jesus and a discussion of treason in Rome, which is the next point of study.

### **False Messiahs and Treason in the First Century**

The Roman emperor was worshiped as a god, and the Romans were keen to keep a tight political grip on their vast land holdings. This was often done by introducing Roman religious practices, though not requiring conquered peoples to adopt these practices. Israel was especially against the pagan ideas of Rome as well as Roman rule, and often expressed this opposition. As will be studied in the next section, messianic expectation was at a height around the first century, and this often led to the presence of messiah claimants in Israel. These false messiahs often sought political freedom from Rome and gained many followers. At times these messiahs portrayed themselves as kings under the Davidic line, which was considered treason by the Romans. A study of Roman law shows an escalation of punishment for treason beginning with Augustus and continuing through Tiberius, with the death penalty reinstated and supposed seditionists either exiled or killed.<sup>234</sup> This penalty was much more severe than it had been even a few decades before. Only those plotting against the life of the emperor had received the death penalty, and other more minor seditionists were allowed to go into exile to escape punishment, or

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<sup>233</sup> Shaul Bar, "Grave Matters: Sheol in the Hebrew Bible," *The Jewish Bible Quarterly* 43, no. 3 (2015), 151–152; Flavius Josephus, "Dissertation V: An Extract out of Josephus's Discourse to the Greeks, concerning Hades," in *The New Complete Works of Josephus*, trans. William Whiston (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999). (Note: Many believe this dissertation to be the work of Hippolytus of Rome.) The subject of the Jewish understanding of Hades (alternatively Sheol, Gehenna) could be a paper all on its own, but Josephus gives a sufficient introduction to the topic.

<sup>234</sup> Chilton, "The Roman Law of Treason under the Early Principate," 76.

later exile was given as punishment.<sup>235</sup> Near the beginning of the first century, Roman rulers desired to keep their tight grip on their large empire, and Israel was known for being a troublemaker. Even Josephus reports that it was the fault of the Jewish nation's civil strife and tyrants which "drew down upon the holy temple the unwilling hands of the Romans" in AD 70, hands which would have been stayed had it not been for the unacceptable and repeated sedition which Israel exhibited (*B.J.* 1.4).<sup>236</sup> Despite any and all efforts by Rome to curb rebellion, Israel continued to act as a thorn in the empire's side. Were it not for the important trade routes winding through the land and Rome's strategic outposts, Israel might have faced even harsher penalties than individual punishments and general oppression.

Anyone claiming kingship anywhere in the empire, including in Israel, would experience swift and severe punishment as an example to other would-be seditionists. This was a problem especially in first-century Israel because of the messianic expectation which existed in the nation, and which was often excited by the numerous false messiahs which made appearances before and after Jesus. Leading up to the time of Christ and even after his ascension, the presence of false messiahs in Israel was rather common to life and was something concerning to the Romans (*Matt.* 2).<sup>237</sup> Even within the gospels, individuals like Barabbas who were part of an insurrection are mentioned in evidence of the volatility of the times (*Mark* 15:7). Other biblical evidence of false messiahs comes by the words of Jesus himself in the gospels, as well as in other New Testament writings. In *Matthew* 24:4–5, Jesus warns of false messiahs who will come and "will lead many astray." These "deceivers who will come in Jesus's name probably do not claim to be

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<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>236</sup> Jeong, "The Collapse of Society in Luke 23," 326.

<sup>237</sup> Chilton, "The Roman Law of Treason under the Early Principate," 76.

Jesus himself but to be the Messiah.”<sup>238</sup> In this context, Jesus gave his disciples signs of the end of the age, but descriptions of false messiahs would have been easily understood by those living in the first century. Similarly, 2 Thessalonians, 1 John, and 2 John all contain warnings of false messiahs and deceivers who are to come in the end times.

Much of the information about first century false messiahs comes from Josephus, and a careful reading of his works can reveal “messianic claimants whose goal was the liberation of Israel.”<sup>239</sup> Many focused on political restoration, though there were elements of religious restoration present in many of their goals as well.<sup>240</sup> The book of Acts also contains at least three references to such pretender messiahs which so concerned Rome. The first is the mention of Theudas in Acts 5:36. The identity of this man in history is debated, but it is possible he was part of “insurgencies that arose in Palestine after the death of Herod the Great in 4 BC,” which Josephus describes as turbulent in his writings (*Ant.* 17.10.4 § 269–70; 17.10.8 §285).<sup>241</sup> In verse 37, Judas the Galilean is given as another rebel who “rose up in the days of the census.” This is likely the census called for by Quirinius and Judas and his followers opposed the taxation of the census (ca. AD 6; Josephus, *Ant.* 18.1.6 §23).<sup>242</sup> Another pretender messiah, Judas of Sepphoris in Galilee, was known as the “brigand chief” (*Ant.* 17.10.5 §§271–272; *J.W.* 2.4.1 §56). As Josephus wrote, this man began by plundering the royal arsenals and attacking other

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<sup>238</sup> Turner, *Matthew*, 573.

<sup>239</sup> Horsley and Hanson, *Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs*, 88–134; Ben Witherington III, *The Christology of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 84–85.

<sup>240</sup> Craig A. Evans, *Ancient Texts for New Testament Studies: A Guide to the Background Literature* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 434.

<sup>241</sup> J.B. Polhill, *Acts*, vol. 26, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 172–173.

<sup>242</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Acts. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 310.

would-be messiahs, but later turned his attacks on anyone in his path “in his desire for great possessions and in his ambition for royal honor.”<sup>243</sup> Simon of Perea, who gained popularity around the same time, claimed kingship and placed a crown on his head to signify his right to the throne.<sup>244</sup> He was followed by Athronges the shepherd of Judea, who also crowned himself king and exercised his “power for a long while, for he was called king” (*Ant.* 17.10.7 §§278–284). Another example of sedition is found in Acts 21:38, which references an Egyptian “who recently stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness.” Josephus summarized that this man and his followers attempted to bring down the walls of Jerusalem like those of Jericho, but the Romans attacked him at the Mount of Olives and he escaped (*J.W.* 2.13.5 §§261–63).<sup>245</sup> This was roughly three years before the events of Acts 21.<sup>246</sup> Just over one hundred years after Jesus, a revolt was led by the messianic pretender Bar Kokhba “against Rome that ended in 135 CE with the total banishing of all Jews from Jerusalem” (Josephus, *Ant.* 17.271–85; 20.97–99, 160–72, 188).<sup>247</sup> Even in Jesus’s own circle of disciples, one man was associated with a treasonous group. Simon the Zealot, with such a title, could have been part of the Sicarii, a sect which strongly opposed Rome and her sympathizers, and which was known for stabbing their enemies with short daggers called sicarii (Josephus, *Ant.* 20.186).<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Evans, *Ancient Texts for New Testament Studies*, 434.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>245</sup> Barnett, “The Jewish Sign Prophets, AD 40–70,” 681–83.

<sup>246</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 452; Bock, *Acts*, 774.

<sup>247</sup> Horsley and Hanson, *Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs*.

<sup>248</sup> Horsley, “The Sicarii,” 436.

Jesus was in the company of many pretender kings and false messiahs from around the time of Herod's death and even over one hundred years after the ascension. Each of these met swift and ruthless punishment by the Romans determined to keep charge of their unruly province. Jesus met the same fate as a seditionist (John 19:19), though of course the true purposes behind his death were far greater than political deliverance, and his outcome miraculous. Nevertheless, it was not uncommon for someone to make a claim to kingship in Israel, and Jesus's disciples would have been familiar with these claims as well as the punishment for making such claims. Given this history of false messiahship in Israel and Rome's devotion to her own leaders and emperor, Jesus's declaration that he was Messiah was bold to say the least, and both stunning and risky to the Twelve. Add to the already loaded claim to kingship a location which featured emperor worship, and the disciples were certainly impacted at Caesarea Philippi.

### **First Century Jewish Messianic Expectation**

As alluded to in the previous section, Jewish treason against Rome was coupled with the presence of many false messiahs around the first century, and much of this combination had to do with the great messianic expectation that was present in the land at that time. The Jewish Scriptures are full of prophecies concerning a coming Messiah, and the Jewish population looked for this figure through the centuries. As early as Genesis 4, the hope for the promised deliverer of Genesis 3:15 is evident in the names Eve gave to her children. In Genesis 4:1, Eve named her firstborn Cain (קַיִן), which sounds like the Hebrew word for *gotten* or *acquired* (קָנָה). When Eve's third son was born, she named him Seth (שֵׁט), which sounds like the Hebrew word for *set* or *appointed* (שָׂט). In her children, Eve looked for the coming deliverer and knew that he would

be provided by Yahweh to save humanity and bring them back to the Garden of Eden.<sup>249</sup> Though the wait was much longer than what Eve anticipated, nevertheless the hope and expectancy for a Messiah did not fade. Various psalms allude to the coming Messiah (Psalm 72 especially). Isaiah 50 and 52 allude to a coming servant who would take away the guilt of the people of Israel. Second Samuel 7:1–17 is especially important in establishing messianic expectation. Though this passage refers to a coming line of successors rather than one individual king, it is nevertheless “the seedbed from which all messianic expectations could grow.”<sup>250</sup> Micah 5 and Zechariah 2, 3, 12, and 13 give prophecies concerning a coming Savior as well. The people of first century Israel were also familiar with the prophecies of Daniel, especially the seventy weeks in Daniel 9 as related to the coming of Messiah. Daniel 9:24–27 prophesied that Messiah would be cut off in the sixty-ninth week, and according to some this placed the Jewish reckoning of Messiah’s coming right at the time of Christ.<sup>251</sup> This is one explanation for the messianic expectation present in Israel around the time of Jesus.

In the New Testament, a few examples of messianic expectation are given, and extrabiblical writings also give evidence to this expectation.<sup>252</sup> In Matthew 2, Herod was concerned when he heard the King of the Jews had been born in Bethlehem. In John 1, John the Baptist referred to Jesus as “the Lamb of God,” a title with clear messianic undertones which his audience understood and was prepared to hear and to a degree accept.<sup>253</sup> Perhaps the best example of Israel’s readiness to receive her Messiah is found in the account of the triumphal

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<sup>249</sup> Derek Kidner, *Genesis* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 81, 85–86.

<sup>250</sup> Wolter Rose, “Messianic Expectations in the Old Testament,” *In die Skriflig* 35, no. 2 (2001), 283, 284.

<sup>251</sup> Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, 123, 138.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, 280, 282.

<sup>253</sup> Jipp, *The Messianic Theology of the New Testament*, 106.

entry (Matt. 21, Mark 11, Luke 19, John 12). Crowds that would call for his death five days later shouted Jesus's praises and treated him as the coming King they so desperately looked for (Matt. 21:9). Messianic expectation was present in the years leading up to the ministry of Jesus, emphasizing that Jesus came at the perfect and appointed time for him to appear (Gal. 4:4). That his full purposes were revealed at Caesarea Philippi used the location to his advantage in emphasizing his rightful kingship and discovering the loyalty of his disciples.

### Conclusion

Since ancient times, Baniyas had attracted worshippers of various kinds to its environs. With its location in the foothills of Mount Hermon, flowing spring water, and forested surroundings, worshippers of Canaanite fertility deities were the first to come to the site, followed in the centuries by Greek worshippers of Pan and later Romans who added the element of emperor worship to the site. Not far away, Jewish false messiahs kept cropping up and were punished for treason. Nevertheless, messianic expectation grew and reached a climax around the time of Jesus. Such a history gives further import to Jesus's travels and conversation there. The Synoptic Gospels make it clear that Jesus did not go directly into Caesarea Philippi, nor did he go to Baniyas. Matthew states that Jesus and the disciples "came into the district of Caesarea Philippi" (Matt. 16:13) and Mark says that they went "to the villages of Caesarea Philippi" (Mark 8:27). Caesarea Philippi was a large and largely Gentile town at the foot of Mount Hermon in Syro-Phoenicia, the city and its districts far to the northeast of the Jewish centers of Galilee and Judea.<sup>254</sup> Though Baniyas is not mentioned in the Bible, it specifically was a place of

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<sup>254</sup> D.A. Carson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 467.

pagan Caesar worship in the first century, and even before that was a place of Pan worship.<sup>255</sup>

Caesarea Philippi itself did not have such a colorful history but nevertheless was in the time of Jesus associated with the Roman emperor cult at Banias. In the foothills of Mount Hermon in the green and verdant territory of Dan, the location was breathtakingly beautiful, but customs and practices there were not. Roman soldiers flocked to the area to refresh themselves, pay their tributes to Caesar at the worship site, and give themselves to the vices and pleasures such a pagan holiday afforded them. The Jews did not wish to be near the Romans or pagan uncleanness, and so kept their distance from the place.<sup>256</sup>

Jesus's conversation with the Twelve at Caesarea Philippi was one which he had been seeking to have for quite some time. By following the route of Jesus, it is clear he moved further and further away from Jewish centers and sign-seeking crowds in order to gain alone time with his disciples. He finally found such a place near Caesarea Philippi and the pagan worship site of Banias. In these regions, Jesus told the disciples that he would suffer, die, and rise again, but first he asked them who they believed him to be. Peter's confession that Jesus was the Christ holds incredible meaning on its own, and this meaning is only highlighted by the setting in which it was said. In confessing Jesus as Messiah, Peter and the disciples confirmed Jesus's claim to kingship even in the face of a political environment which did not tolerate any sort of threat to the already established throne. Rome's devotion to the throne was seen especially clearly at Banias, near the place where Jesus and the disciples had their own conversation about the Jewish Messiah King.

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<sup>255</sup> Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. 1, 74, 88–89; Brooks, *Mark*, 134.

<sup>256</sup> Bock, "Faith and the Historical Jesus," 14.



Banias was a known location of emperor worship, and Peter called Jesus the Christ, or Messiah. As the anointed Messiah, Peter ascribed kingship to Jesus, in direct conflict with the Roman emperor cult who worshiped at the site.<sup>257</sup> This cultural detail makes Peter's statement all the more powerful and shows the confidence the disciples had in their Messiah. Jesus established his messiahship in this way at Banias to drive home the devotion and allegiance the King of kings demands and deserves, even if it went against the pagan world. To the disciples, Jesus was a political deliverer such as Augustus was a political and military leader to the Romans. That he would humbly accept death at the hands of his enemies was something the disciples were not prepared to hear, but was the express purpose of Jesus bringing them to Caesarea Philippi in the first place. Before he was to suffer, Jesus had to prepare the disciples to meet the difficult but necessary aspect of Jesus's messiahship and way to his throne. Though Jesus was not the military deliverer the Jews expected at first, he nevertheless was and is the King, a fact Peter gave voice to and confessed in the face of pagan rituals and worship of an earthly Roman ruler. Not only that, but unlike the pagan emperor that was revered at Banias, Jesus is an eternal living King who will bring his followers with him to life everlasting and glorious. The particulars of this conversation are the subject of the next chapter.

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<sup>257</sup> Doriani, "Matthew," 347.

## Chapter 5: The Conversation at Caesarea Philippi

### Introduction

For the past six months of his ministry up until their arrival at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus had been attempting to gain alone time with the disciples. After the rejection from the crowd at the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus took the Twelve further and further from populated areas. At each potential place of private training, he was hesitant to do public miracles or engage the Pharisees when previously he had eagerly done so. Jesus knew the march to Jerusalem was soon approaching and as yet the disciples had not clearly been told of his coming death. It was the desire of Jesus to prepare them for this event and train them more privately and directly. Walks to Samaria, the Decapolis, and less populated spots around the Sea of Galilee had as yet proved unfruitful in gaining this alone time. It was not until going all the way to Caesarea Philippi that Jesus was at last unfollowed by the public and no longer harassed by his enemies. It was here in the beautiful and Gentile region around Dan that Jesus was able to speak at length with his twelve disciples about his death and resurrection, as well as lift their hearts by means of the transfiguration.

Christ's private ministry to the twelve disciples and especially his travel north to Caesarea Philippi was building up to one momentous conversation which in the mind of Christ was of utmost importance. He needed to prepare the Twelve for his coming death, and he needed to assure himself of their allegiance to him as Messiah. Up until then, the disciples had heard and missed allusions to the events Jesus was preparing to undergo at Jerusalem, and a clear explanation could wait no longer. Finally alone with the Twelve at Caesarea Philippi and near the ancient pagan worship site of Baniyas, Jesus asked the Twelve who they believed him to be, and also told his disciples plainly that he would die and rise again (Mark 8:27–29, 31–32). The

focus of this chapter is on the conversation held at Caesarea Philippi. Peter's confession is studied first, especially in light of how Roman rulers portrayed themselves and how they were perceived by the public. Given the worship of the Roman emperor at Baniyas and Jesus's and the Twelve's location near this ancient worship site, the conversation takes on deeper meaning. The location of Caesarea Philippi, near Baniyas, was a strategic and important choice for Jesus in getting time alone with his disciples, and the conversation there was given further meaning because of traditional emperor worship. When considered alongside the worship of Roman emperors and what was believed about these rulers, Peter's confession was not just a passing comment but a dangerous admission. Next in the study is an examination of Christ's declaration regarding his coming death and resurrection, including the effect this declaration had on the disciples. As evidenced by Peter's rebuke of Jesus, the news was not taken well. While the disciples expressed faith in Jesus as their Messiah, this understanding did not include the idea of Messiah dying at the hands of Rome. Such a statement discouraged the Twelve, which in turn disappointed Christ. The transfiguration bolstered this heavy crowd enough to see Jesus and the Twelve to Jerusalem for Passover. A study of the transfiguration, especially in light of the conversation at Caesarea Philippi, concludes the chapter.

### Peter's Confession and Related History

#### **Christ as the Anointed One**

When considering Jesus's time at Caesarea Philippi with his twelve disciples, many minds will go first to Peter's great confession of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God (Matt. 16:16, Mark 8:29, Luke 9:20). While Peter's confession is certainly a hallmark of the faith of the disciples, Caesarea Philippi is not the first time the disciples would have decided to believe Christ's message nor recognized who he was. A study of Jesus's public ministry shows that the

disciples were around Jesus a sufficient amount of time and witnessed his many miracles and teachings to know who he was before he asked them as recorded at Caesarea Philippi. However, Peter's statement taking place at Caesarea Philippi does have a significant meaning. Peter called Jesus *Χριστός*, the Christ, Messiah, or Anointed One.<sup>258</sup> The idea of Lord also applies, though this is often given as *κύριος*. This was the same title used for the Roman Caesar, such as Caesar Augustus who was worshipped at Caesarea Philippi.<sup>259</sup> Peter confessed Jesus as the true Messiah prophesied of in the Jewish Scriptures, and he spoke for the Twelve as a group in giving this assessment.<sup>260</sup> Similar to Mark, in Matthew's recording of the event, Peter confessed that Jesus was "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). This again went in the face of the Roman rulers, who claimed deity in their rule and were often considered descendants of the gods.<sup>261</sup> Peter's confession of these aspects of Jesus's identity at Caesarea Philippi take on new significance with the historic backdrop of Caesarea Philippi in mind, and also show the disciples' faith in Jesus and willingness to go against Rome in support of this faith.

Matthew 16 gives the most detailed account of Jesus's time at Caesarea Philippi with his disciples. Their conversation is also reflected in the other Synoptics and focused on who the world believed Jesus to be (Matt. 16:13–14, Mark 8:27–28, Luke 9:18–19), who the disciples believed Jesus to be (Matt. 16:15–16, Mark 8:29, Luke 9:20), Jesus's revelation to the Twelve that he would suffer and die and rise again (Matt. 16:21, Mark 8:31–32, Luke 9:22), and the secrecy with which Jesus wished this information to be kept (Mark 8:30, Luke 9:21). This study

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<sup>258</sup> Strong, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*, 5547.

<sup>259</sup> Bartlett, *Christology in the New Testament*, 28.

<sup>260</sup> Morna D. Hooker, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Mark* (London: Continuum, 2001), 206.

<sup>261</sup> Edmondson, *Augustus*, 293.

will focus on Peter's confession: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). The word *Χριστός* means the Messiah or Anointed One, who is the king.<sup>262</sup> This is reflected in English translations of Luke 23:2 which says that Jesus is "saying that he himself is Christ, a king" (emphasis added). The Messiah was the expected King to come, promised by the Lord in the Old Testament to come from the line of David and rule on David's throne forever (2 Sam. 7:16). As the Davidic Ruler, Messiah's kingly qualities were highlighted and expected by the Jewish population, who held on to this hope through exiles, defeats, and rule by foreign powers. During Rome's rule of Israel, the Jewish people were especially expectant of this Deliverer to come, and the Roman rulers felt the expectation acutely. As evidenced by Herod's fear of such a rival king in Matthew 2, the idea of the Messiah King was a threat to subsequent rulers in Israel, and by extension to Rome.

Roman emperor worship was a focus at Baniyas, and this element would not have escaped the minds of the disciples.<sup>263</sup> The biblical text narrates that they were in "the district of Caesarea Philippi," and as already mentioned no Jew would go to or likely even be allowed at Baniyas. It is unknown exactly where Jesus and the disciples were, but any location near Caesarea Philippi and the site of the imperial cult temple would have been close enough for these Jewish men. The disciples may have already been uncomfortable in such a location, and the activities which took place a short distance from their conversation spot would have been at the forefront of their thoughts. As they looked at their surroundings and remembered the pagan practices of emperor worship which Baniyas was known for, they would realize that Jesus accepted kingship and would expect reverence and allegiance from them. It must be repeated that the disciples were not on the

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<sup>262</sup> Mark L. Strauss, *Mark* (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins, 2017), 205–206.

<sup>263</sup> Kerr, "Comment: Why Caesarea Philippi?," 631. Much of this paragraph finds its citation in this source.

site of Banias, but the nearness of the locations in their mind would have been clear enough. The disciples would also have some idea what kind of devotion the cult worshippers expressed for their emperor, and would know the pride of the Romans in their ruling or deified emperor. As they translated this Roman expression of fealty to themselves regarding Jesus the Messiah, clear pictures of Jesus over his kingdom and they as loyal serfs would have driven Jesus's claim home in their hearts and minds. At this point, the disciples still did not have an idea of Jesus as the suffering servant King, and were likely excited and moved to prideful association with their Rabbi, the King of the Jews.

The crowds which followed Jesus recognized that he was a prophet and a special teacher, but Peter gave voice to the conviction of the Twelve that he was not just a prophet but the long-awaited Messiah. That such a statement was given near Banias with "its connection to Hellenistic religion" makes for an "implicit argument that Jesus is superior to their gods, including the emperor."<sup>264</sup> That the Jewish people considered their God superior to the false gods around them was not a new idea. Throughout the Old Testament, knowing the Lord was associated with wisdom and rejection of him made the person a fool. This is perhaps summed up best in Proverbs 9:10 and Psalm 14:1–2. Israel's rejection of idols as vain and foolish tools, and view of the foolish people who worshiped these creations is a staple in Old Testament prophetic literature (Isa. 44:9–20 is an especially searing example) and were ideas which continued into the first century. Israel's God had always been thought of as superior to other gods, and the coming Messiah possessed this superiority as well, especially true in terms of how the disciples thought of the coming Messiah. Rather than a suffering servant, it was believed that Messiah would be a political deliverer, and should he come in the first century then he would deliver the Jewish

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<sup>264</sup> Bock, "Faith and the Historical Jesus," 14.

people from Rome. Jesus's correction of this mentality shattered the disciples and will be studied in the next section, but a subsection on Roman rulers is first necessary.

### **Christ the Messiah Compared to the Anointed Roman Rulers**

The rulers of the Roman Empire were eager to keep a tight hold on their provinces and exercised strict punishment for anyone who threatened this hold. As seen in the previous section, this often included exile or death for treason. However, control was not limited to political ambitions but religious also. In the days of Jesus and even leading up to his time on earth, "in the Mediterranean world of late antiquity accession to the throne was as religious and theological, as it was political."<sup>265</sup> The location of Caesarea Philippi and Banias specifically was a reminder of this fact for Jesus and the disciples as well as anyone else who would visit. Much of the time these visitors consisted of Roman soldiers who took their leave in the refreshing town, and also paid their respects to the gods represented at Banias and especially in the emperor cult. Archaeologists have uncovered multiple places of worship at Banias, including a shrine to Caesar, shrine to Pan, temple to Zeus, and a dance floor of the sacred goats as Pan was often portrayed as a faun.<sup>266</sup> Digs inside the cave leading into the hill at Banias have also revealed items of worship.<sup>267</sup> Banias was long regarded as a place for worship, and this was built upon by the Greeks and Romans.

Though the Greeks did not establish a shrine to the emperor at Banias, they were no strangers to emperor worship. Alexander the Great claimed to be a god and was worshipped

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<sup>265</sup> Evans, *Jesus and His Contemporaries*, 53.

<sup>266</sup> Friedland, *The Roman Marble Sculptures*, 51.

<sup>267</sup> Wilson and Tzaferis, "Historical and Archaeological Summary," 173.

during his life, and this was continued by some patrons after his death.<sup>268</sup> The Ptolemies were especially open to this practice as Egyptian pharaohs were considered divine, and Alexander as ruler of Egypt fell under this category.<sup>269</sup> Though Israel remained firmly monotheistic, the nations around her accepted the Greek emperor as a god and this knowledge would have certainly made its way to Jewish ears. After Alexander's death, not every Greek king obtained the respect of a god but many did.<sup>270</sup> Ancient coinage depicts portraits of the Diadochi from the time, which was typically a privilege reserved for a god or city emblem. The tradition of king worship continued through Roman times, especially during the reign of Caesar Augustus. The emperors of Rome, like "the Greek despots before them, were hailed in deified terms," and such practice was found even within the borders of the Holy Land.<sup>271</sup>

In an effort to show his support of Rome and garner favor with the capital of the empire, Herod the Great took advantage of the history of worship at Banias and improved it for these purposes. In 19 BC, Herod built a temple dedicated to the worship of Augustus, who had given Herod the site in the first place.<sup>272</sup> This was in addition to the worship of Greek deities already taking place at Banias. The city of Caesarea Philippi itself was also improved by Herod in 2 BC and by his son Philip the Tetrarch after and became a hub of Roman activity.<sup>273</sup> Though a Jewish proselyte, Herod was quite pagan in his religious practices and preferred to please Rome over his own people. He built up two other cities in Israel and made them architecturally Roman,

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<sup>268</sup> Ian Worthington, *Alexander the Great: Man and God* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2004), 121.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>270</sup> Evans, *Jesus and His Contemporaries*, 54.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>272</sup> Friedland, *The Roman Marble Sculptures*, 65.

<sup>273</sup> Kerr, "Comment: Why Caesarea Philippi?," 631; Berlin, "The Archaeology of Ritual," 27.



providing ample space for Romans and other Gentiles to find a home in Israel.<sup>274</sup> This of course flew in the face of the Jewish populace, who abhorred such religious practices as the worship of the emperor and refused to participate in anything of the sort. In their hope and expectation for Messiah to come soon, the Jews resisted Roman rule and religion and held tightly to their monotheism. In Jesus, the disciples and many who witnessed his miracles believed they had found their Messiah.

Contrary to their unfaithful leaders and the heathen Roman emperors, Jesus exhibited kingly and godly qualities worthy of worship. His miraculous acts and faithful and knowledgeable teaching convinced many of his messiahship, though also convinced his enemies that he was a blasphemer (John 10:33). At Caesarea Philippi, the home of emperor worship and pagan practices just outside the borders of Israel in Syro-Phoenicia, Jesus continued to teach his disciples as their Messiah and was affirmed of their belief in him. However, this belief was also tested. Like many of their Jewish citizens, the twelve disciples hoped that Jesus would deliver them from the grips of Roman political rule and under his leadership Israel would regain its high standing in the Ancient Near East. When they learned that Jesus had not come to deliver them politically but spiritually, many of his followers were confused. At Caesarea Philippi, the Twelve were left not only confused but disheartened and dismayed. Jesus affirmed their belief in him as Messiah, but revealed that their wonderful Savior would die. The Twelve could not reconcile his death with their picture of Messiah, no matter how Jesus sought to correct that picture. Coupled with the news that he would die, Jesus revealed that he would rise again after three days,

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<sup>274</sup> Friedland, *The Roman Marble Sculptures*, 65.

assumably giving them hope that he would be with them at that time.<sup>275</sup> The disciples, however, could not get past the news that their friend and Messiah was going to be killed, and they were left confused and afraid. Their reaction, its effect on Jesus, and the remedy for the despondency of the group are the topics of the next sections.

## Christ's Death and Resurrection

### **The Wavering Faith of the Disciples**

Jesus's Jewish disciples would have been very familiar with the messianic texts of the Old Testament, and were equally participants of the messianic expectation of the early first century with the Jewish citizens around them. Even humble fishermen and relatively unschooled Jewish men would have learned the Torah from a young age and perhaps even aspired to a position of rabbi before family duties necessitated a life of trade. The people of Israel knew Messiah would come and deliver them from oppression, but the type of oppression he would deliver them from and how he would accomplish this deliverance were less clear. The twelfth-century Jewish rabbi Eliezer of Beaugency attributed messianic prophecies to a misunderstanding of Hebrew grammar on the part of the Christians, or even that "Christians have deliberately falsified their Bibles so as to enable the Christological interpretation."<sup>276</sup> More modern Jewish scholars also agree that Christians have modified the Hebrew translations to fit their theology, or some Jewish commentators simply ignore messianic passages in their works

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<sup>275</sup> As revealed in the raising of Lazarus, the Jewish people had some idea of a resurrection from their reading of the Old Testament (John 11:24). Passages such as Job 19:25–27, Psalm 49:13–15, Psalm 71:20, Isaiah 26:19–20, Ezekiel 37:7–10, and Daniel 12:2–3 reflect the idea of a coming resurrection, and this idea was even debated among the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matt. 22:23, Luke 20:27). The disciples likely believed in a coming resurrection but did not realize that it would be like the one their Messiah would initiate after his own death.

<sup>276</sup> Rabbi Eliezer of Beaugency, *Commentaries on Amos and Jonah (with Selections from Isaiah and Ezekiel)*, trans. Robert A. Harris (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2018), 88–89.

altogether.<sup>277</sup> Similarly, though not as dismissively, the Jewish people of Jesus's day were familiar with messianic prophecies but did not understand them to their full extent. This is seen most clearly in the response of the disciples of Jesus upon learning that he, their Messiah, would die.

In the account of the conversation at Caesarea Philippi, Peter and by association the disciples affirmed that they knew Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus had asked them what other said of them and what they themselves thought, and they expressed their faith in him. To give a modern illustration, by Peter's confession the disciples passed their undergraduate exam, and were now ready for the more difficult and strenuous process of earning their graduate degrees. This involved Jesus's own confession to the Twelve "that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again" (Mark 8:31). His suffering, rejection, death, and resurrection (a portion evidently overlooked by the disciples) were all made plain to the disciples, and they were hardly ready to hear this news. The purpose of Jesus's questions and conversation was not only to assure Jesus of the disciples' fidelity, but to also establish the disciples in their following of Jesus. This was done because of the ensuing conversation about Jesus's suffering and death, which the disciples did not expect or want to hear and which also affected Jesus in his humanity.

After their glowing affirmation of Jesus's messiahship, Peter and the disciples quickly lost heart when Jesus began to tell them that as Messiah, he would suffer and die. The Gospels of Matthew and Mark affirm that upon learning of his coming death, Peter took Jesus aside and rebuked him for saying such a thing (Matt. 16:22, Mark 8:32). Mark 8:32 reads: "And Peter took

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<sup>277</sup> See especially Rabbi Jeffrey K. Salkin, who in his numerous commentaries on Isaiah does not include the first four verses of Isaiah 9 in his commentary on Isaiah 9, and also works around Isaiah 49 and 53 in his commentary sets.

him aside and began to rebuke him.” There are two verbs of import in this verse. That Peter *took Jesus aside* is the Greek verb *προσλαβόμενος*, which literally is to take to oneself, “may portray a gesture of superiority or patronization by Peter.”<sup>278</sup> The picture is of Peter pulling Jesus away by his lapel as it were, quickly removing him from the group so that he may rebuke him, which brings up the next verb of interest.<sup>279</sup> Peter “began to rebuke him,” showing that he did not get to finish his rebuke as Jesus cut him off with a rebuke of his own, but nevertheless Peter was much upset at the words of the Lord and their effect on the group. Many times in the Gospels, the word *ἐπιτιμάω* is used of Christ: he rebuked the winds (Matt. 8:26), charged the crowds not to make him known (Matt. 12:16), and even after Peter’s confession warned his disciples to tell no one he was the Christ (Mark 8:30). Peter’s rebuke of Jesus is not quoted, but a few comments may be made about its likely contents: “there is individual initiative here, strong feeling and, seemingly, the assumption of a protective role.”<sup>280</sup> It is possible that Peter was also tempting Jesus to seek his own good and safety, as Jesus compares him to the ultimate tempter Satan.<sup>281</sup>

During their time with Jesus, the disciples had observed their Lord and Savior throughout his ministry. They knew who he was, what he could do, and to some extent what he had come to do. This last part, however, needed some additional training and correction from the Lord. The disciples knew that Jesus was the King and that he brought a kingdom offer to the nation of Israel, but what they did not understand was the rejection of this offer which Israel had made clear. The disciples were also unaware that their Messiah was preparing to go and die at

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<sup>278</sup> Stein, *Mark*, 402.

<sup>279</sup> Such a picture is based off the lectures of Dr. Douglas Bookman on the Life of Christ at Shepherds Theological Seminary in Cary, NC. Though such a description might not be culturally accurate for the time, the action and emotion is likely not too far off.

<sup>280</sup> Wiarda, *Peter in the Gospels*, 76.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*

Jerusalem, and Jesus needed to prepare and train them privately in all these matters. Though Jesus could perceive the sentiments of the crowd regarding himself, the disciples were more oblivious. When Jesus was finally able to have private training time with the disciples at Caesarea Philippi, the recorded narrative begins with Jesus asking the disciples who people said he was, and who the disciples thought he was (Mark 8:27–29). Once he confirmed their understanding of him as the Christ, he could reveal what would happen to him as the Christ (Mark 8:29). Though Jesus gave hints of his coming death, he “maintained a certain reserve respecting His sufferings, till their faith in Him as the Christ should have become sufficiently rooted to stand the strain of the storm soon to be raised by a most unexpected, unwelcome, and incomprehensible announcement.”<sup>282</sup> The disciples needed to be fully affirmed in their faith in Jesus as Messiah, even if their understanding was incomplete. Jesus took them to Caesarea Philippi because he knew their need for further training, but “only after hearing Peter’s confession was He satisfied that the strength necessary for enduring the trial had been attained.”<sup>283</sup>

Before beginning his teaching, Jesus warned the Twelve to tell no one of his identity. This command goes back to the habits of Rome to immediately silence any would-be king, and Jesus knew it was important that his identity as Messiah not be heard by Roman ears.<sup>284</sup> Even for the Jewish people, an affirmation of Jesus as Messiah could have stirred them up into making him a king, as they had already attempted to do (John 6:15). It could also have given the people

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<sup>282</sup> Alexander Balmain Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve: Or, Passages out of the Gospels, Exhibiting the Twelve Disciples of Jesus under Discipline for the Apostleship* (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2000).

<sup>283</sup> Ibid.

<sup>284</sup> Stein, *Mark*, 400.

false expectations about what Jesus would do as the King of Israel.<sup>285</sup> Doubtless the masses knew who Jesus was, and knew his closest followers recognized him as Messiah as well, but a straight and bold statement such as Peter's confession could have meant trouble had it been spoken to these impulsive crowds. As it was, the disciples were not prepared to hear what it meant for Jesus to be the suffering servant and die as Messiah, and the following week-long discussion at Caesarea Philippi proved their unwillingness to hear this information about their Messiah (Mark 9:2).

Though the text does not give an account for what was spoken between Jesus and his disciples, it can only be assumed that "it was filled up with thoughts and teaching concerning that Decease," and with the encouragement Jesus sought to give his disciples in the face of such news.<sup>286</sup> Even in the revelation that he would die, Jesus was quick to add that after three days he would rise again (Mark 8:31). When he first told them of his coming death, having never spoken of it plainly before to his closest followers, "he knew how harsh the one announcement would be to the feelings of His faithful ones, and it was natural that He should add the other, in the hope that when it was understood that His death was to be succeeded, after a brief interval of three days, by resurrection, the news would be much less hard to bear."<sup>287</sup> This, however, was not the case. It would seem the news of his resurrection did not even reach the ears of the disciples, for they were so absorbed in the news that he would die. Peter's rebuke was given for the death Jesus had predicted for himself, and said nothing of the miraculous and glorious resurrection that would come to pass as a result. Though no doubt Jesus continued to remind his disciples that his

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<sup>285</sup> Stein, *Mark*, 400.

<sup>286</sup> Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1999), 3.

<sup>287</sup> Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve*.

death did not mean the end, the Twelve were too disheartened to accept any good news that could come from such an event.

It is here that the wavering faith of the disciples was fully shown. As Peter quietly rebuked Jesus for his declaration of his coming death, Jesus turned to see his disciples huddled together, confusion, shock, and pain on their faces. Peter, as their swift and outspoken spokesman, took it upon himself to address the discomfort the group felt, but not until Jesus turned to look at the group did he push back and sternly rebuke Peter.<sup>288</sup> Despite recognizing who Jesus was and acting as his closest friends for the past two-plus years, the disciples could not imagine Jesus suffering and dying as the promised Messiah. It must be remembered that included in this teaching was the fact that Jesus would rise on the third day, but it seems this idea was not understood or was ignored in the face of the more distressing news that Jesus would soon die. Jesus, also upset during the conversation as will be discussed in the next section, proceeded to affirm his leadership and messiahship by confronting and rebuking Peter in front of the disciples, proving to them that he was telling the truth and that they should not be afraid of the news of his death. The verb *ἐπιτιμάω* is again used for Jesus's rebuke of Peter, but the contents of the rebuke are now included. Jesus commanded Peter to get behind him, a strong imperative commanding immediate departure and thereby temptation.<sup>289</sup> Inciting much debate, Jesus also called Peter Satan in his rebuke. Two major interpretations have been proposed regarding this accusation. The first and less likely is that Peter has been satanically indwelt in order to tempt Jesus.<sup>290</sup> Such an indwelling would have been met with a more severe penalty,

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<sup>288</sup> Stein, *Mark*, 403.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*

such as permanent out casting or a more severe rebuke. The second and more fitting interpretation is that “Peter has become a source of temptation like Satan,” and is commanded to return to the disciples where he belongs, rather than sending him away from Jesus permanently.<sup>291</sup> The addition of the phrase “you are a hindrance to me” in Matthew 16:23 may also be considered in the interpretation of Mark. The word translated hindrance in the Greek is *σκάνδαλον*, or stumbling block. Peter’s rebuke and desire for Jesus to focus on himself was a hindrance in the greater mission Jesus had come to accomplish. Jesus accused Peter of setting his mind on the things of man rather than on the things of God, showing that his concern for Jesus’s own welfare was man-centered and selfish. Peter had just expressed an understanding of who Jesus was as Messiah, but a misunderstanding of his mission which needed quick correction by the Lord, especially in light of the entire group of disciples.<sup>292</sup>

Though Peter did the talking, the rest of the disciples were equally distraught at hearing the news that Jesus would die. Jesus interrupted Peter’s rebuke because he saw the reaction his news and Peter’s words caused in the group. Though the text does not describe it, they were likely disheartened and shaken in their faith. As Mark records, Jesus took his three closest disciples to a high mountain to witness the transfiguration six days later. Likely during that interim before the transfiguration, Jesus continued to teach and prepare his disciples for his coming death. This was after all the entire point of his bringing them away by themselves to Caesarea Philippi, and what the travels of the past weeks had been trying to accomplish. Jesus was finally alone with the Twelve to teach and prepare them, and they were unable to accept the

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<sup>291</sup> Wiarda, *Peter in the Gospels*, 77.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.



news that their friend and Messiah would die. The effect this response had on Jesus will be discussed next.

### **Christ's Discouragement**

In his journeys around Galilee, to Syro-Phoenicia, the Decapolis, and now all the way to Caesarea Philippi, the training of his twelve disciples was at the forefront of Jesus's mind. Though they had been given hints of what was to come, they were unprepared for the news that their Messiah would die, and what this would mean for their faith and their relationship with Jesus going forward. Like the crowds around them, the disciples had at times been swept away with Jesus's miraculous acts and Spirit-filled teaching. They were at times overly proud to be in the inner circle of Jesus, trusted with tasks and given special abilities to work in ways similar to Jesus. Even after Caesarea Philippi, the disciples continued to struggle with hubris and needed additional teaching and correction from the Lord (Luke 9:46–56). Though the group had expressed fidelity during Jesus's public ministry, Jesus knew that the news of his death would require special care and encouragement despite their professed faith (John 6:68–69). This is one explanation for the secrecy which Jesus asked for regarding Peter's confession; his disciples were not prepared for what Jesus as the Christ was meant to do, and the crowds would be even less prepared (Matt. 16:20, Mark 8:30, Luke 9:21).<sup>293</sup>

Though the reaction of the Twelve is not described in detail in the Gospels, a few hints are given of their discouragement. First, when Peter took the Lord aside to rebuke him, Jesus turned and saw his disciples, then rebuked Peter (Mark 8:33). Though Peter surely would have received correction regarding his rebuke, Jesus immediately interrupted their side conversation

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<sup>293</sup> Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. 1, 529.

when he saw the Twelve. Their faces must have betrayed the shock and incredulity at his pronouncement of his coming death, and witnessing Peter's rebuke could have changed these expressions to confusion and misguided hope that perhaps Peter could convince their Messiah that these things could never be.<sup>294</sup> Another hint at the disciples' reaction is given in the introduction to the transfiguration. Matthew and Mark begin their accounts "and after six days," and Luke counts "about eight days after these sayings" (Matt. 17:1, Mark 9:2, Luke 9:28).<sup>295</sup> For around a week, Jesus had continued to teach and train the disciples, and especially prepare them for his coming death.<sup>296</sup> After a week, they were still discouraged and downcast; the transfiguration was the solution to their wavering faith. This will be discussed further in the next section, but it is pertinent to realize that their initial reaction of sadness and bewilderment was not overcome in a day, a few days, or even a week.

During this roughly week-long training period, there was an episode when Jesus was not alone with his twelve disciples but among a crowd. In Mark 8:34—9:1 (cf. Matt. 16:24–28, Luke 9:23–27), Jesus challenged his hearers to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow him and promised that "there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power" (Mark 9:1). The presence of a crowd demands some harmonization in this study when much has been made of the alone time Jesus wanted with his disciples, and the distance he was willing to go to find that alone time. At some point between Peter's confession and the transfiguration, a crowd joined Jesus and the Twelve for a

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<sup>294</sup> Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. 1, 529.

<sup>295</sup> There have been a few proposed solutions to these different counts. Thomas and Gundry conclude that the eight days in Luke "is an approximate figure for the six days of Matthew and Mark" (Thomas and Gundry, *A Harmony of the Gospels*, 119). Edersheim posits that the Sabbath could have come into play in the day count (Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. 2, 3).

<sup>296</sup> Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. 2, 2–3.

time. One possible solution uses the region around Caesarea Philippi to explain this crowd. As Jesus left Bethsaida with the Twelve after healing the man born blind, they walked to the regions of Caesarea Philippi which took them near Dan. Evidently from Bethsaida, “there were some disciples who had followed a little way behind,” but not all the way to Caesarea Philippi where Jesus and the Twelve had their private conversations.<sup>297</sup> At some point during the week, Jesus and the Twelve had gone back down the mountainous region of Caesarea Philippi to an inhabited area, where they were joined by this crowd. Jesus and the Twelve would have needed food and perhaps more permanent lodging even during their private training, and Dan as a nearby Israelite settlement provides such a place. There Jesus was recognized as the local folk hero that he was known to be, and there he was joined by something of a crowd and gave them his teaching. However, Jesus was not finished with his twelve disciples. After the six or eight days of training with no progress in rebuilding their faith, Jesus looked again to the heights of Mount Hermon. Like Abraham and Moses before him, the mountaintop promised reassurance which was further heightened by Jesus’s own knowledge of who he was. On Mount Hermon, Jesus would share with his inner three disciples a glimpse of this identity in all its glory, and experience to build and assure their faith, perhaps influence the other nine disciples for good, and encourage Jesus’s own heart in his place at the Father’s side and never out of his gaze. This study comes now to the transfiguration.

### The Transfiguration

In Mark 9:2–13 (cf. Matt. 17:1–13, Luke 9:28–36), the account of the transfiguration is told. After first telling his disciples of his coming death, Jesus continued to teach, train, and

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<sup>297</sup> Douglas Bookman, “The Training of the Twelve” (lecture in BE 613 at Shepherds Theological Seminary, Cary, NC, October 4, 2017).

prepare them for the trip to and events of Jerusalem coming within the year. Despite the care he must have taken and encouragement he must have given, the disciples remained disheartened and their faith in their Messiah wavered. This discouragement wore off on Christ as well, who wished for affirmation and comfort from his closest earthly friends but who were unable to give him any reassurance. After a week of this emotional training and need to affirm and rebuild his disciples' faith in him, Jesus took his inner three disciples "up a high mountain by themselves" (Mark 9:2). The account reads that Jesus "was transfigured before them, and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them" (Mark 9:2–3). There Elijah and Moses also appeared with Jesus, and spoke with him (vs. 4). Peter again voiced his thoughts, out of turn, and the voice of the Father came from a cloud to express his approval of Jesus (vs. 5–8). Jesus charged the three to tell no one what they had witnessed (vs. 9), and the pericope ends with the discussion between Jesus and the three disciples, especially regarding the prophecy from Malachi 4 that Elijah must come first (vs. 10–13). Each of these sections of the transfiguration will be studied more closely.

After six days of discussion about Jesus's coming death in Jerusalem, the disciples were still disheartened and unsure about Jesus's mission. Jesus took his inner three disciples – Peter, James, and John – to a high mountain to witness his transfiguration from the man Jesus to the eternal and worshipped Son of God (Matt. 17:1–8, Mark 9:2–8). The Gospels do not name Mount Hermon specifically, and conjecture has been made as to which mountain is the "high mountain" of the transfiguration. Traditionally, Mount Tabor has been proposed, and though its abrupt rise from the Plain of Esdraelon is impressive, it is still no more than a hill, and also far removed from Caesarea Philippi.<sup>298</sup> Mount Carmel, west of Cana and Nazareth and overlooking

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<sup>298</sup> Thomas and Gundry, *A Harmony of the Gospels*, 118.

the Mediterranean Sea, is also a suggested spot. This is the site of Elijah's stand against the false prophets and is a key mountain in the Old Testament (1 Kings 18). Again, however, Mount Carmel is more of a high hill than a mountain, and is again very distant from the location of Jesus and the twelve disciples at Caesarea Philippi.<sup>299</sup> The last and better option is Mount Hermon, which is north of Caesarea Philippi and rises an impressive 9,000 feet above the Golan Heights. To this mountain Jesus took the three, who upon arrival were "heavy with sleep" and did not witness the entire event (Luke 9:32).

Jesus is described as being transformed, or *μετεμορφώθη*, and his clothes are described as intensely white (Mark 9:3). Luke reports that "the appearance of his face was altered" (Luke 9:29), and Matthew says that "his face shone like the sun" (Matt. 17:2). It seems words fail the writers of the Gospels when trying to explain the other-worldly qualities the Savior assumed when he was transfigured. Two suggestions are often made regarding the appearance of Jesus during the transfiguration. It is possible that "the preincarnate glory of the Son of God broke through the veil of his humanity," yet this would require a hidden glory up to this point.<sup>300</sup> A better option is that it is a "glimpse of the glory of the Son of Man/Son of God in his future coming," especially considering the context around the transfiguration (the discussion of the coming of the kingdom of God in Mark 9:1).<sup>301</sup> Such a glimpse would accomplish the purpose of emboldening and affirming the faith of the disciples in their Messiah. To see Christ in his glory, despite knowing that he would die, would set their minds on the greater purpose of his coming and remind them that he was indeed the Son of God.

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<sup>299</sup> Evans, *Jesus and His Contemporaries*, 416.

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.*, 416–417.

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*, 417.

Moses and Elijah are reported as talking to Jesus “of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem,” but no other details are given of their conversation Luke 9:31.

Pertinent to this study is the suggestion that Moses and Elijah were sent to encourage Christ in his mission of salvation, especially considering the depressing conversation with his disciples of the past week. In taking time alone with the Twelve to tell them of his coming death, Jesus had hoped as well to gain some comfort from these, his closest friends and followers. The conversation with Moses and Elijah was the encouragement that Jesus needed in his humanity to continue toward the cross and death, knowing that glory awaited and resurrection was not far behind. Peter, as the outspoken leader, suggested the construction of three tents or booths for the three holy men present, but this is shown by Mark’s writing to be a mistake (Mark 9:6).<sup>302</sup> In the overwhelming presence of a theophany and the glory that surrounded it, Peter desired to honor Moses, Elijah, and Jesus in some way, and so suggested the building of booths. He is corrected quickly by a voice emanating from a cloud which suddenly overshadowed the group, identifying Jesus as God’s Son (Mark 9:7). Peter was not wrong in his desire to honor what he had seen, but who he was honoring. Jesus as the Son of God stood above Moses and Elijah, great men of God but far below the very Son of God.<sup>303</sup> Not only was Peter reproved but Jesus was again affirmed in his mission, and this time by the Father. The three disciples also, after “six days more of quiet waiting and growth of faith, and it was met, rewarded, crowned, and perfected by the sight on the Mount of Transfiguration.”<sup>304</sup> The transformation bolstered the faith of Jesus’s closest three

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<sup>302</sup> Evans, *Jesus and His Contemporaries*, 418.

<sup>303</sup> Evans, *Jesus and His Contemporaries*, 418; Wiarda, *Peter in the Gospels*, 79.

<sup>304</sup> Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. 1, 524.

friends and lifted his own gaze to the glorious purpose of his mission which was now nearing its end. What had been witnessed, though, was not to be shared with everyone.

Upon their descent from the mountain, Jesus “charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of Man had risen from the dead” (Mark 9:9). Similar to Jesus’s charge that Peter’s confession not be told to the crowds, what the three disciples had witnessed on Mount Hermon would only “cause confusion, for the way of vindication and glory for the Son of Man was via the suffering of the cross.”<sup>305</sup> Judas as well was still present in the group and had his own role to fulfill. Only after the resurrection would the followers of Christ know what he had meant in his references to a resurrection, and only then would Peter, James, and John fully understand what they had seen during the transfiguration. Their voices thus silenced, they turned their attention to the presence of Elijah and what the scribes meant in Malachi 4:5–6 when they prophesied that he would come before the kingdom. Their minds were still on Jesus’s transformation to glory as he would be in the kingdom, and they wondered how the kingdom was at hand when Elijah had not yet come. Jesus affirmed that Elijah would come at the end time, but also that he had already come in the form of John the Baptist.<sup>306</sup> The minds of the disciples were on the kingdom, and they had seen their Messiah in his glory. Though they did not understand all they had seen and though they still had questions, they also had their faith again and could, though not directly, bolster the faith of the remaining nine disciples.

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<sup>305</sup> Evans, *Jesus and His Contemporaries*, 423–424.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, 425–426.

## Conclusion

Jesus's conversation with the Twelve at Caesarea Philippi was one which he had been seeking to have for quite some time. By following the route of Jesus, it is clear he moved further and further away from Jewish centers and sign-seeking crowds in order to gain alone time with his disciples. He finally found such a place near Caesarea Philippi and the pagan worship site of Baniyas. In these regions, Jesus told the disciples that he would suffer, die, and rise again, but first he asked them who they believed him to be. Peter's confession that Jesus was the Christ holds incredible meaning on its own, and this meaning is only highlighted by the setting in which it was said. In confessing Jesus as Messiah, Peter and the disciples confirmed Jesus's claim to kingship even in the face of a political environment which did not tolerate any sort of threat to the already established throne. Rome's devotion to the throne was seen especially clearly at Baniyas, near the place where Jesus and the disciples had their own conversation about the Jewish Messiah King.

Baniyas was a known location of emperor worship, and Peter called Jesus the Christ, or Messiah. As the anointed Messiah, Peter ascribed kingship to Jesus, in direct conflict with the Roman emperor cult who worshiped at the site.<sup>307</sup> This cultural detail makes Peter's statement all the more powerful, and shows the confidence the disciples had in their Messiah. Jesus established his messiahship in this way at Baniyas to drive home the devotion and allegiance the King of kings demands and deserves, even if it went against the pagan world. The purpose of their conversation was not only to assure Jesus of the disciples' fidelity, but to also establish the disciples in their following of Jesus. This was done because of the ensuing conversation about Jesus's suffering and death, which the disciples did not expect or want to hear and which also

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<sup>307</sup> Doriani, "Matthew," 347.



affected Jesus in his humanity. To the disciples, Jesus was a political deliverer such as Augustus was a political and military leader to the Romans. Perhaps the disciples felt that Jesus was taking his time ascending to his earthly throne, yet they still affirmed that he was the Messiah and King.<sup>308</sup>

It was important for the disciples to voice this belief, because what Jesus told them next would crush their spirits and require nothing less than his transfiguration to regain their confidence in his messiahship. Peter, who so faithfully expressed his belief in Jesus as the powerful Messiah, almost in the same breath doubted Jesus's statement that he would suffer terribly and was harshly rebuked for his deviation (Matt. 16:21–23, Mark 8:31–33). That he would humbly accept death at the hands of his enemies was something the disciples were not prepared to hear, but was the express purpose of Jesus bringing them to Caesarea Philippi in the first place. Before he was to suffer, Jesus had to prepare the disciples to meet the difficult but necessary aspect of Jesus's messiahship and way to his throne. The disciples, however, were distraught with the confrontation of Jesus's suffering, and the faith which Peter had proved for the group quickly waned and foundered in the face of this looming event. Jesus, recognizing this great discouragement, took the three disciples of his close inner circle to witness his great transfiguration and encourage their hearts to renewed faithfulness and allegiance to their Messiah. The three could then be uplifted in their faith, and Jesus as well could gain encouragement from the event.<sup>309</sup> The disciples were solidified in their idea of Jesus as Messiah and better prepared to trust and follow him. Jesus rightly accepted worship as Messiah, King, Deliverer, and Savior, but the way in which he would gain these positions was not expected by

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<sup>308</sup> Robert Duncan Culver, *The Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), 168.

<sup>309</sup> Hawthorne, *The Presence and the Power*, 168; Culver, *The Life of Christ*, 170.

the disciples. Jesus was not the military deliverer the Jews expected at first, but nevertheless he was and is the King, a fact Peter gave voice to and confessed in the face of pagan rituals and worship of an earthly Roman ruler. Though his route to glory was longer, humbler, and more painful than the disciples realized, the disciples were more prepared to accept it after their training at Caesarea Philippi. After their private training, the disciples were solidified in their idea of Jesus as Messiah and better prepared to trust and follow him, even to Jerusalem and the cross.

## Chapter 6: Post-Caesarea Philippi and the Last Six Months of Ministry, Conclusion

### The Travels of Christ as Public and Private Ministry

This dissertation has focused on the travels of Jesus Christ and how they relate to his particular ministry at a given time. Early on, Jesus's ministry was very public. He sought to saturate the land with his two-fold claim to be both Messiah and God come in the flesh. In order to thus saturate the land, Jesus taught large crowds of people, performed very public healings and miracles, and engaged with the Pharisees over points of Scripture interpretation. Though never proclaiming his messiahship in title, Jesus accepted worship and acknowledgement as Messiah and the public was aware that Jesus claimed messiahship, even if they did not themselves believe. At the beginning of his public ministry, John the Baptist announced Jesus as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). John's Jewish audience would have recognized this description as messianic, and to erase any doubt John proclaimed, "I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God" (John 1:34). Jesus also described Messiah's kingdom in the Sermon on the Mount, again giving a clear message of messiahship. The travels of Jesus were mostly in Galilee, with trips to Judea and Jerusalem specifically mostly for feasts. Jesus was headquartered in Capernaum, and his family as well as many of the families of the disciples lived in that area. Besides proximity to family, Galilee had other benefits as a messianic outpost. The area was very Jewish, but of the sort that would accept the teachings of one of their own more so than the Jews of Judea. In Judea, the citizens were very loyal to the ruling Jewish class in Jerusalem and tended to abide by teachings which issued from the temple alone.<sup>310</sup> Galilee was also further from the heavy Roman outposts in Jerusalem and Judea, and therefore

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<sup>310</sup> Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, 43–44, 73–74, 516–517; Bookman, "A Survey of the Galilean Ministry."

Jesus could teach without attracting the attention of Rome. For the first roughly two years of Jesus's ministry, he was focused on the crowds. Jesus attracted attention everywhere he went, people knew who he was both in remote areas and in Jerusalem, and he welcomed large crowds and dispute from the Pharisees. Everything shifted, however, after these two years, and the travels of Jesus show this shift very clearly.

The unpardonable sin episode (Matt. 12:22–32) and the feeding of the five thousand (Mark 6:30–44) marked the end of Jesus's public ministry. The Pharisees had long ago rejected Jesus as Messiah, and between their influence and the crowd's own stubbornness and hard-heartedness, the people of Israel rejected him as well. Jesus had clearly shown that he was Messiah countless times over, but the teachings and miracles had not changed the people's hearts. Jesus knew the cross was coming and despite their faithfulness, the disciples were confused like the crowds on some points of his mission and required dedicated teaching. Jesus turned his attention to his disciples for private ministry, and his travels reflected this change in ministry. The Gospels, especially Mark 6:45—8:26, narrate the trips Jesus took further and further from his center of ministry on the shores of the Sea of Galilee in an attempt to be alone with the twelve disciples. Beginning in Bethsaida and Gennesaret, Jesus traveled up to the region of Tyre and Sidon, a Gentile land north of Galilee, but he was recognized and "could not be hidden" (Mark 7:24). He then crossed the Sea of Galilee to go to another Gentile region, this time to the Decapolis southeast of Israel (Mark 7:31). Jesus attempted a private healing, but news of his visit spread and resulted in the feeding and teaching of a crowd of four thousand people. Upon retreating to Dalmanutha, Jesus was immediately accosted by the Pharisees, whom he exchanged quick words with before fleeing again across the lake (Mark 8:10–13). In Bethsaida, Jesus healed a blind man privately, and it seems he was to be left alone after the miracle.

However, Jesus was taking no chances and continued northeast on to the very Gentile, very pagan, very Roman, and very dangerous region of Caesarea Philippi (Mark 8:27). Here Jesus was finally able to have the alone time he needed with his disciples to prepare them for his coming death and encourage them with the transfiguration. Jesus's next travels would take him near and eventually to Jerusalem for his passion, death, and resurrection.

By studying the chronology of Christ's travels, a clear division between public and private ministry becomes apparent. At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus sought out the crowds in Judea and especially in Galilee, preaching to many people and doing miracles in the sight of many people as well. Jesus desired to saturate the land with his claims of Messiah and God come in the flesh, and he achieved this goal in roughly two years. After he was rejected at the feeding of the five thousand, however, Jesus turned his attention to the twelve disciples. He withdrew from the crowds and was hesitant to do miracles. When made to do a miraculous work, he did it privately and asked the person not to tell what he had done for them. Jesus's travels reflected this withdraw. Instead of staying in areas of heavy Jewish population, Jesus took the Twelve further and further out of Jewish lands. By going to the northern territory of Tyre and Sidon, the eastern territory of the Decapolis, crisscrossing the Sea of Galilee, and finally retreating to the region of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus showed his desire for alone time with the Twelve. His purpose behind these travels and this desire for alone time was revealed at Caesarea Philippi, where Jesus told the disciples for the first time in plain terms that he would suffer, die, and rise again. Though they had followed him for the length of his ministry and believed him to be the Christ (as evidenced by Peter's confession), they were not prepared to see their Messiah suffer and die. Jesus too was desirous to be encouraged by the Twelve, but he was left disheartened at their response to his news. After six days of similar conversation, Jesus took his inner three disciples

to witness his transfiguration and bolster both their spirits and his. This shift in attitude is the focus of the next section.

## Post-Transfiguration

### **The Attitude of the Disciples**

During their time in the region of Caesarea Philippi, the disciples of Jesus experienced quite the range of emotions and reactions regarding their Messiah. At Peter's confession, the disciples (by Peter's representation) expressed their loyalty and belief in Jesus as Messiah and willingness to follow him despite the confusion of the crowds or the enemies of Jesus (Mark 8:27–29). Part of their excitement was in their belief that Jesus would soon usher in the kingdom, but their hopes for the kingdom would soon be crushed. Jesus told his closest friends, for the first time plainly, that he would die, and they were devastated (Mark 8:31–32). Despite Jesus also promising that he would rise again, “their highest faith had been followed by the most crushing disappointment” and they were floundering with this news.<sup>311</sup> Despite further conversation and teaching, the disciples remained shaken. Not until Jesus was transformed before Peter, James, and John did these inner three receive the confidence they needed to carry them and the remaining disciples through the rest of Jesus's ministry, as well as through the events of passion week.

After the transfiguration, Jesus “charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of Man had risen from the dead,” but that is not to say that the remaining nine of the disciples did not feel the effects of the transfiguration. Even before they were down the slopes of Mount Hermon, Jesus's transfiguration impacted Peter, James, and John and their minds were

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<sup>311</sup> Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. 2, 2.

less on the death of Christ and more on the resurrection, “questioning what this rising from the dead might mean” (Mark 9:10). “This refers no to the general rising of the dead...but specifically to ‘the’ rising of the Son of Man from the dead,” per Mark 9:9.<sup>312</sup> Whereas pre-transfiguration the disciples could focus on nothing but Jesus’s coming death, their attitude after the transfiguration was more hopeful and curious. These thoughts, though still clouded by thoughts and misunderstandings of Jesus’s coming death, carried over to the other disciples as well. As Jesus continued his ministry, the disciples discussed his coming kingdom rather than remaining depressed. The group knew that Jesus remained Messiah and would bring his kingdom, though they still did not understand how this would come about. The disciples also exhibited the need for further training, as most of their kingdom discussions were self-centered (Mark 9:34, 38; 10:37). Jesus continued to teach the disciples on his way to Jerusalem, which will be covered more fully in a subsequent section.

Though the disciples still did not understand the entirety of Jesus’s mission, they were no longer in despair after the transfiguration. Peter, James, and John had seen Jesus in his glory and their hearts were lifted, and their faith in their Messiah was restored. They could not share what they had seen with the other disciples, because in all likelihood they would misunderstand or misapply what they had seen. Judas was also present in the group, and such a glimpse into the Messiah’s glory was not meant for the betrayer. Certainly the wider crowds would mistake what they had seen and “misapplied to carnal Jewish purposes” what was not intended to be so applied.<sup>313</sup> Not until after the resurrection would the event of the transfiguration be spread abroad and make sense to those who heard of it in the context of Jesus’s death, burial, and resurrection.

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<sup>312</sup> Evans, *Jesus and His Contemporaries*, 424.

<sup>313</sup> Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. 2, 10.

Though Peter, James, and John had been chosen to witness the transfiguration “because they were better prepared” to witness, understand, and obey commands of the event, even they did not fully understand what they had seen. In the subsequent months, it was John who tried to stop a fellow follower from casting out demons (Mark 9:38); James and John who requested places of honor in the kingdom (Mark 10:37); Peter, James, and John who could not stay awake to pray with Jesus on the night of his betrayal (Mark 20:37, 40); and Peter who denied Jesus as he was under trial (Mark 20:68, 70, 71). The disciples, even those chosen to witness Christ’s glory, were still weak in their flesh and as yet unprepared for the events of passion week. The Twelve still needed further training, which would be provided. The week of training at Caesarea Philippi had not fully prepared them, and the nine disciples left at the foot of Mount Hermon proved the effect that Jesus’s news had on the group. They were downcast, unsure of their faith, and now left behind while Peter, James, and John, witnessed the faith-building transfiguration, in part because of the faith they had in their Messiah. While Jesus and the three disciples were on the mountain, a group approached the nine asking for them to cast a demon out of a boy (Mark 9:17). They were unable to do it, and this is attributed to their faithlessness. After Jesus heard the account of the boy’s father, he called the group including the disciples, a “faithless generation” (Mark 9:19), and later explained that the disciples were lax in their praying and thus could not drive out the demon (Mark 9:29). It is posited that this event is less to highlight the inability of the disciples and more to highlight the greater power of Christ, but the attitude of the nine disciples who had not witnessed the transfiguration nor been around the three that had comes through in this narrative.<sup>314</sup>

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<sup>314</sup> Evans, *Jesus and His Contemporaries*, 435.



After six days of discussion with his twelve disciples, they were no further in their understanding of his coming death, let alone his coming resurrection, and Jesus continued to be discouraged by their reaction. Though they did not abandon him, they needed a reminder that Jesus was still their King and Messiah, and that their faith in him should not waiver. Jesus also was weary and alone even among his friends.<sup>315</sup> The group was in need of heavenly encouragement, which came in the form of the transfiguration. However, though all twelve disciples experienced the discouragement associated with Jesus's revelation to them, only Peter, James, and John were asked to accompany Jesus up the mountain to witness the transfiguration. It is worth exploring the reasons behind this selection and what it meant for the encouragement of the group as a whole.

In Mark 9:1, Jesus predicted that "there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power." Though debated, it is best to understand this as a reference to the transfiguration, which follows beginning in Mark 9:2.<sup>316</sup> Peter, James, and John were Jesus's inner circle of disciples, often with him in a closer way than the other nine disciples. This may be seen in conversation and also near the end of Jesus's life, when in the Garden of Gethsemane he again took these three away by themselves to pray with him (Mark 14:33). The Twelve had already expressed their disbelief that their Messiah could die, and their misunderstanding of Jesus as Messiah would not have been helped by witnessing the transfiguration. Rather, their confusion and misunderstanding would have deepened, and furthermore they could have spread this confusion to the crowds.<sup>317</sup> Therefore Jesus took only

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<sup>315</sup> Evans, *Jesus and His Contemporaries*, 435.

<sup>316</sup> Thomas and Gundry, *A Harmony of the Gospels*, 118.

<sup>317</sup> Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. 2, 10.

the inner three, and afterwards warned them “to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of Man had risen from the dead” (Mark 9:9). After Peter’s confession, Jesus had given a similar command, because the Messiah which the people understood Jesus to be was not accurate (Mark 8:30). Similarly, having witnessed Jesus in his glory as he would be in his kingdom, the three disciples could have given the other nine disciples and by effect the public crowds a false hope about Jesus. Jesus knew there was no way to his kingdom and glory other than by the cross, and the disciples, let alone the nation of Israel, was not ready to accept this for their Messiah.<sup>318</sup> Jesus took a smaller group and warned them to keep what they saw to themselves to avoid confusion and keep his focus on the trial which he must soon endure.

After the transfiguration, the three disciples questioned and discussed what they had witnessed, both among themselves and with Jesus. First, they questioned what it meant that Jesus would rise from the dead (Mark 9:11). Despite a week of dedicated teaching and their witness of the transfiguration, the resurrection was still a mystery to them. And no wonder. Their Scriptures said nothing of Messiah’s resurrection, though there was evidence of a coming resurrection (Dan. 12:2, cf. John 11:24).<sup>319</sup> Relatedly, the disciples questioned the coming of Elijah as it related to the coming of Christ’s kingdom (Mark 9:11). The disciples had just witnessed Christ’s glory as it would be in his kingdom, and they had heard Jesus’s offer of the kingdom throughout his ministry. They knew the Old Testament Scriptures spoke of Elijah coming as a forerunner to the kingdom (Mal. 4:5–6), and so they wondered if what they had just witnessed on the mountain was this coming of Elijah. Jesus affirmed their understanding that Elijah would come first, but he

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<sup>318</sup> Stein, *Mark*, 423–424.

<sup>319</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 834.

corrected their thinking that it was a future event.<sup>320</sup> Rather, Elijah had returned in the form of John the Baptist, and therefore the suffering of the Son of Man would surely follow.<sup>321</sup> The three disciples who had witnessed Jesus's transfiguration were uplifted in their faith in their Messiah, though they still had questions regarding his future ministry. Their conversation on the descent of Mount Hermon reflected their desire, yet remaining inability, to understand all they had witnessed and all the Lord had told them. This further emphasizes Jesus's correctness in taking only his inner three disciples to witness what for the rest could have proved a confusing and misleading event.

Despite including only three of the disciples, the transfiguration was enough to bolster the spirits of all twelve disciples to continue in their faith in Jesus as Messiah and to continue to follow him in his ministry. The encouragement of the inner three leaders of the group would have been evident to the other nine, and the training they all received, though difficult to understand and apply, nevertheless had an impact. Jesus had accomplished his private training of the disciples, and he had shown a select few his glory. Though still unaware of all that would happen in Jerusalem, the group remained faithful to Jesus and in their belief that he would bring the kingdom soon. The transfiguration bolstered this faith and turned the minds of the disciples to more than just the death of Christ. This encouragement in turn impacted Christ, as will be studied in the next section.

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<sup>320</sup> Stein, *Mark*, 425–426.

<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.*, 426.

## **The Encouragement of Christ**

During the transfiguration, Jesus spoke with Elijah and Moses as he stood on the mountain in glory (Mark 8:4). Luke adds that they spoke “of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem” (Luke 9:31). Jesus had gone to Caesarea Philippi to prepare his disciples for his coming death, and gain encouragement from them to continue in his mission despite the rejection of the people of Israel. Their response was not one to encourage him. Six days later, Jesus took Peter, James, and John up the slopes of nearby Mount Hermon to be transfigured before them and receive the encouragement he needed to walk toward Jerusalem and the cross. As he was transfigured, Elijah and Moses appeared with him and “spoke of his departure” (Luke 9:31). There is some clue here to the encouragement this conversation offered Christ. Though these saints of old spoke of what was to be accomplished at Jerusalem, the word departure and not death is used. Perhaps Elijah and Moses reminded Jesus to where he would depart, that is heaven, away from the sins and pains of the earth. Jesus’s departure would also mean he had accomplished his mission to die and bring salvation, thus encouraging him toward the success of that mission and the unfathomable joy that the Savior had at last brought salvation to Adam’s race. The idea of departure also hinted at the coming resurrection and ascension when Jesus would be raised to life again and later taken into heaven in triumph.

The second part of Christ’s encouragement in the transfiguration came from the approval expressed by the Father. During Peter’s interruption, “a cloud came and overshadowed them,” and a voice emanated from the bright cloud (Luke 9:34). Each Synoptic Gospel records a slightly different quote of what the voice said. Matthew 17:5 states, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” Mark 9:7 says, “This is my beloved Son; listen to him.” Luke 9:35 says, “This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!” Similar to the Father’s approval of

the Son after his baptism in the Jordan River, the voice from the cloud affirmed Christ's Sonship and his identity as Messiah. The voice also commanded respect for the words Jesus spoke, likely harkening back to the conversation of the past week. The disciples were to heed the words of Christ regarding his death and resurrection, and were not to doubt what he said or who he was.<sup>322</sup> Though much of this affirmation was for the disciples' benefit, Christ was also reminded of his mission and identity and encouraged to continue on, knowing the Father was pleased.<sup>323</sup>

One of the ways Jesus showed his encouragement was in his continued ministry to the crowds after the transfiguration. Though he still took advantage of private moments with his disciples to teach and train them, Jesus was no longer avoiding the crowds as he had been at the start of his private ministry. Rather, he was again willing to engage with them, teaching and performing miracles. Jesus also debated with the Pharisees, who previously he had been especially eager to avoid. During his glorification on Mount Hermon and after hearing the Father's approval, Jesus regained the stamina needed to debate with the Pharisees, who never ceased to test him (Mark 10:2). Jesus also remained patient with the disciples, who continued to misunderstand their Messiah's mission and who also continued to focus on themselves and their potential role of importance in the kingdom (Mark 9:32, 10:37). Jesus was not at the Garden of Gethsemane yet. He continued to witness to the crowds and the disciples, remaining patient, gracious, and undaunted, knowing there was still work to be done. The disciples remained faithful to him, which was an encouragement, and the transfiguration had set the Lord's mind on the glory to come.

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<sup>322</sup> Evans, *Jesus and His Contemporaries*, 435.

<sup>323</sup> Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve*; Evans, *Jesus and His Contemporaries*, 435.

The disciples, even those who had not seen Christ's glory at the transfiguration, exhibited signs of awe and reverence whenever he spoke about his death and resurrection (Mark 9:32).<sup>324</sup> A reaction of holy fear compared to their reaction when Jesus first told them of his death shows progress in, if not their understanding, at least their respect for what Jesus told them. Whereas at the first they had been willing to let Peter take and rebuke Jesus for speaking of his death, now they were respectfully fearful to question what he meant about his death and resurrection whenever he continued to teach them about the events to come (Mark 9:32). Jesus remained their Lord and Messiah, and they were again his humble disciples, willing to listen to him, learn from him, and follow him, even if they did not understand everything that such a commitment entailed. This respect continued in the disciples as they followed Jesus to Jerusalem, aware of "his sense of destiny and desire to fulfill God's will."<sup>325</sup> The crowds who witnessed Jesus were also filled with fear, though this was less of a positive sense of awe "but rather a negative sense of being fearful" for the fate that awaited Jesus and possibly themselves as his followers at Jerusalem.<sup>326</sup>

Before the transfiguration, Jesus sought over and over to tell his disciples of his death and resurrection, desiring to prepare them for those events at Jerusalem and give them time to learn from him. Despite the fear news about his death would bring, Jesus was there to encourage them especially regarding his resurrection, and their support and faithfulness to their Messiah would have been encouraging to Jesus as well. However, this was not how the events played out. Rather, Jesus was rebuked by Peter and continued to teach them for six days, with no sign of

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<sup>324</sup> Evans, *Jesus and His Contemporaries*, 440.

<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.*, 479.

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid.*

their acceptance or any resulting joy or cheerfulness. Jesus then took his inner three disciples up the slopes of Mount Hermon to witness his glorious transfiguration, where he also spoke with Moses and Elijah of the coming events at Jerusalem, and where the Father also spoke his approval of the Son and command that those under him listen to him. After this event, Jesus had received the encouragement he needed to continue on to Jerusalem. His ministry during the next six months was mixed between private training of the disciples and public examples of his messiahship, and throughout he remained determined and encouraged to continue on to Jerusalem and the trials and glory that awaited him there. These last six months of ministry are the focus of the next section.

### **To Jerusalem and the Passion**

During the final six months of Jesus's life on earth, his ministry took on a mixed focus nature. After Caesarea Philippi, Jesus reentered the public light and was no longer hesitant to do miracles, speak to crowds, and interact with his enemies. However, he still took time away to speak privately with his disciples, and toward the very end of this period he withdrew further to avoid the murderous intentions of his enemies. The conversation and questions of the Twelve during this time reflect their training at Caesarea Philippi, and their remaining confusion about what they learned during that time. In Mark 9:30–32, Jesus again spoke to them about his death and resurrection, “but they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask him” (v. 32). This speaks not of incomprehension of the words themselves but an inability to accept “the truth and divine necessity of what he said.”<sup>327</sup> After they got back to Capernaum in Mark 9:33–37, the disciples were caught discussing who would be the greatest in the kingdom. Despite their

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<sup>327</sup> Evans, *Jesus and His Contemporaries*, 440.

apparent embarrassment (Mark 9:34), the disciples returned to this conversation again in Mark 10:35–45. After the three witnessed the transfiguration, and as the group turned their sights to the “kingdom fervor” of Jerusalem, their specific roles and leadership within the kingdom were on their minds.<sup>328</sup> The kingdom Jesus brought, however, had different measures for greatness. “Jesus’s messiahship and sonship meant for him being a servant (10:42–45), but the disciples thought that their unique role involved lordship and mastery over others,” as was common in the culture.<sup>329</sup> Jesus took the opportunity to teach about humility in the kingdom, but the lesson was difficult for the disciples to grasp.

In Mark 10:35–45 James and John requested to sit one on each side of him in his glory, and were again taught about humility and specifically the humility which Jesus would endure in a few short weeks. On the one hand, James and John were correct that Jesus was the Messiah and King and would act as judge over the world. However, they continued to neglect, as the group of disciples had, the coming passion that Jesus must endure.<sup>330</sup> The disciples kept their focus on earthly glory and still did not comprehend that such glory was delayed until Jesus’s resurrection. Even then, the kingdom would be delayed because of the unrepentance and rejection of Israel. At this time, “suffering precedes glory both for the Christ and for his followers,” and Jesus continued to teach the disciples thus.<sup>331</sup> Because the group as a whole did not understand Jesus’s coming death, the other disciples “began to be indignant and James and John,” likely because of their presumptuous and selfish request.<sup>332</sup> Jesus took the opportunity to again teach his disciples

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<sup>328</sup> Thomas and Gundry, *A Harmony of the Gospels*, 124.

<sup>329</sup> Stein, *Mark*, 443.

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.*, 484–485.

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*, 485.

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.*



about the kingdom that would come. This kingdom would be unlike the kingdoms of earth. Rather, it would be characterized by humility and service, just as Jesus came as a servant to those he loved.

During this time of mixed ministry, the disciples evidenced their continued confusion and misunderstanding about Jesus and what he had come to do, but their attitude from the beginning of the private ministry had changed. Though they were still confused that Jesus would die, and perhaps even hopeful that he would change his mind about how his role as Messiah must be fulfilled, nevertheless they continued to follow him and trust him.<sup>333</sup> Their questions reflected their attempts to understand what they had learned during their private training, and still their desire to reconcile their picture of Messiah with the life and predictions of Jesus. Jesus had accomplished his purposes during the private ministry to his disciples, though again they did not understand all they had been taught. The disciples remained encouraged to follow Christ, Jesus himself was motivated to continue his walk to Calvary, and the disciples reflected their desire to understand and their continued focus on the kingdom by their questions and conversations.

After the transfiguration, the disciples were still unsure about what to think of Jesus's announcement that he would rise from the dead (Matt. 17:22–23, Mark 9:30–32), but they continued to follow him and learn from him. They did not abandon Jesus and continued to believe that he was the Messiah. Though the understanding of the disciples was yet incomplete, Jesus was encouraged by their response and continued to teach them (Mark 9:30–31). He kept his attention on the disciples, but was also less hesitant to perform miracles, perhaps reflecting this encouragement as well (Matt. 17:17, Mark 9:14–19). Therefore, these roughly six months of

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<sup>333</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 416.

ministry may be termed a time of mixed focus ministry, as Jesus remained near Jerusalem and presented himself to the crowds in Judea and Perea while continuing to prepare his disciples for his death.<sup>334</sup> The timeline for these six months is roughly fall of AD 32 to spring of AD 33.<sup>335</sup> This time was split between Judea and Perea and included three trips to Jerusalem, including his final journey there. The Gospels of Luke and John must be consulted together, and harmonization is a key component of understanding these last six months. First, Jesus journeyed somewhat secretly to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles (Luke 9:51, John 7:1–10:21). On the way he interacted with individuals in the country, and once there he taught in the temple. This continued to cause divisions among the people and agitate the Pharisees, who sent officers to arrest him but who were themselves persuaded by Jesus's message (John 7:46). After the feast, Jesus stayed in Judea but avoided Jerusalem, attempting to saturate the land yet again with his two-fold claim to be both Messiah and God come in the flesh.

Jesus's second trip to Jerusalem was for the Feast of Dedication in with winter of AD 32 (Luke 13:22—17:10, John 10:22–42). Jesus performed miracles, taught many parables, and spoke of the kingdom. He interacted with his crowds and also taught his disciples in the process. During his time in Jerusalem, Jesus was asked by the Jews to tell them plainly that he was the Christ, and he answered, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). At that supposed blasphemy the Jews picked up stones to stone him and "sought to arrest him, but he escaped from their hands" and fled across the Jordan to Perea, where he remained until his final trip to Jerusalem (John 10:31, 39–40).

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<sup>334</sup> Bookman, "The Training of the Twelve."

<sup>335</sup> Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, 63.

In Perea, Jesus remained safe from those in Jerusalem who wished to kill him but continued to influence the crowds in the area, as well as train his own twelve disciples. The Pharisees attempted to lure him back to Jerusalem where they could more easily persuade the Romans to do their bidding against Jesus, but Jesus saw through their trickery and promised they would not see him there “until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!’” (Luke 13:31, 35).<sup>336</sup> In Perea, Jesus continued to teach the crowds and prepare his disciples for what would happen in Jerusalem just a few short months from then. Jesus stayed in Perea until he was summoned by the sisters of Lazarus to come and heal their brother (John 11). Though only two miles from Jerusalem, Jesus did not actually go to Jerusalem. Rather, he raised Lazarus and then retreated to Ephraim, north of Jerusalem (John 11:54). The raising of Lazarus was a crucial event in preparing the crowds in Jerusalem for Jesus’s triumphal entry, and is one of the reasons Jesus so easily entered Jerusalem without immediately being arrested (John 12:17–19). After Jesus raised Lazarus, the chief priests and Pharisees “made plans to put him to death,” and even plotted to kill Lazarus as well (John 11:53, 12:10), resulting in Jesus’s retreat to Ephraim until his final trip to Jerusalem.

When it was time to go to Jerusalem for Passover, Jesus took a roundabout but strategic route, traveling north through Samaria to Galilee, then south along the Ridge Route with a band of Passover pilgrims also making their way to Jerusalem (Luke 17:11, 18:35, 19:1). Jesus stopped in Bethany right before going into Jerusalem, again strategically (John 12:1). These travels kept Jesus from the murderous Jews in Jerusalem, while also allowing him to continue to teach the crowds and privately train the disciples. As this was a time of mixed ministry, Jesus found opportunities to remind the Twelve that he would die and rise again, and to prepare them

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<sup>336</sup> Evans, *Luke*, 156.

for these events (Mark 10:32–34). Upon arrival in Jerusalem for passion week, Jesus accomplished the triumphal entry by way of the crowd’s amazement and his strategic entry into Jerusalem. Jesus had intentionally stayed in Bethany right before the beginning of the Sabbath on Friday at sundown, whilst those who traveled with him had to continue on into Jerusalem to find lodging.<sup>337</sup> The crowds knew Jesus would come to Jerusalem for Passover, and the excitement and buildup resulted in the triumphal entry, where Jesus was welcomed by the crowds into Jerusalem and thus safe for a time from those who wished to kill him.<sup>338</sup> During passion week, Jesus cleansed the temple, kept Passover with his disciples, and was then arrested, tried, crucified, and buried (Mark 11—16). During this week, Jesus continued to teach the crowds and his disciples, committed to what he had come to do and accomplishing his final great and glorious mission of salvation. At the end of it all, everything Jesus had taught and prepared his disciples for had come true. Though they could not understand or fully accept his death and resurrection in Caesarea Philippi or during the six months between the transfiguration and his crucifixion, afterwards they were nothing but faithful and passionate to preach everywhere the message of salvation their Messiah had taught and shown them (Mark 16:20). The last six months of Jesus’s mixed ministry had warned both the crowds and his disciples of what they would witness in Jerusalem, and the memory of everything they had been taught carried the Twelve into the foundation of the New Testament church.

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<sup>337</sup> Douglas Bookman, “The Last Six Months” (lecture in BE 613 at Shepherds Theological Seminary, Cary, NC, November 1, 2017).

<sup>338</sup> Douglas Bookman, “Sunday: A Day of Messianic Presentation” (lecture in BE 613 at Shepherds Theological Seminary, Cary, NC, November 15, 2017).

### Thesis Expounded and Concluded

This dissertation has sought to demonstrate the significance of Jesus's private instruction to the twelve disciples during the travel narratives in Mark 6—9 regarding the meaning of his death, burial, and resurrection. Special emphasis was given to the conversation at Caesarea Philippi in relation to this private instruction. Though many aspects of the life of Christ could be chosen to study in detail, the reason for his sudden desire to be away from the crowds and alone with his disciples can present confusion but is a problem with a solution. Such a study serves to shed light on the specific ministry focuses of Jesus, and these changes in ministry are more clearly seen by tracing the travels of Jesus. To gain a fuller picture of these travels, a harmony of the Gospels, especially the Synoptics, is important. Chronology also plays a role in understanding when Jesus went to any one area. By studying his route and knowing the order in which he traveled to each place, the timeline and map may be compared with the narrative given in the Gospels. During the beginning of his ministry, Jesus stayed almost exclusively in Galilee. His purpose in this was to saturate a receptive land and people with his two-fold claim to be both Messiah and God come in the flesh. The area of Galilee was Jesus's homebase as it were, and also provided relative safety and freedom from the Jews and Rome to preach such a claim. As receptive as the Galilean Jews might have been compared to the Jews in Jerusalem, Jesus was ultimately rejected and thus turned his attention to his twelve disciples. Here is where a study of Jesus's travels coupled with the narrative clearly indicates a change in ministry focus.

During his time in Galilee, Jesus welcomed crowds and attention. He taught in synagogues and in the open air, performed many public miracles, and engaged readily with the Pharisees. After the clear rejection of the people, however, Jesus shifted his ministry from very public to very private. He was eager to tell the crowds of his kingdom and his mission, but they

rejected him. Thus he focused on his disciples to clearly tell them of his coming death and resurrection. Not only could they then know more about the kind of kingdom Jesus intended, but also how he would accomplish his mission. Mark 6—9 gives a map of Jesus's travels during this time and the various trips he took to try and be alone to train the Twelve. First he went from Galilee to Syro-Phoenicia, attempting to stay close to headquarters but far enough away in a Gentile land to train the Twelve. It was not to be, however, and Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee to the southeast corner of the lake and the Decapolis. This again was a more remote and Gentile area, but here again Jesus did not find peace. The crowds discovered him and brought to him a man who was deaf and with a speech impediment, and Jesus healed him, though attempting to do so privately (Mark 7:32–33). This resulted in another great feeding of four thousand people, after which Jesus sailed to the other side of the lake and landed at Dalmanutha. The Pharisees found him, however, forcing him back across the lake to Bethsaida. At this point it is likely that Jesus already had his sights set on Caesarea Philippi, and well he did for he was also found in Bethsaida and asked to heal a blind man. From there Jesus took the Twelve to the far region of Caesarea Philippi, where at last he escaped the crowds.

Finally Jesus could focus on preparing the disciples for his death, and their response showed their deep need for such private training. Peter, after his exultation of Jesus as the Christ, the Anointed One of God, immediately rebuked Jesus upon hearing of his coming death. Such a horrific thing could not happen to his Messiah, who was to bring political success and salvation to Israel at last. Peter in turn was rebuked, and the whole disposition of the group was that of discouragement and despair. The disciples could not imagine Jesus dying, and Jesus could not convince them otherwise that this was indeed to happen. As a result, Jesus took Peter, James, and John up the slopes of Mount Hermon to witness his transfiguration, thus bolstering their faith in

their Messiah and carrying them, the remaining nine disciples, and Jesus through the next six months of ministry and on the Jerusalem. There all Jesus had told them came to pass, and only after his death, burial, and resurrection did the disciples finally understand fully all Jesus had told them.

By harmonizing the chronologies presented in the Gospels and especially focusing on Mark, the travels of Jesus take on new significance as a window into his ministry focuses. As the Messiah of Israel, it was Jesus's first wish that the people of Israel would hear and accept his claim to be their Messiah, and God come in the flesh to bring his kingdom. His offer of the kingdom, however, was rejected. This despite the countless miracles and teaching that he gave as witness to his claims, as well as the many prophecies which were fulfilled by his life. The ministry of Jesus was for the people of Israel, but he was rejected by these people to whom he had come to minister. Those who remained were his faithful Twelve, who had followed him throughout his public ministry and who did not abandon him despite the rejection of the crowds. Jesus knew what lay ahead, and knew that it would be difficult for the Twelve to endure, whatever faithfulness they had shown. Thus for a time, Jesus turned his focus from the scornful crowds to the twelve disciples, who after Jesus had left them would carry his message to the ends of the earth and establish the church which would bear Christ's name. To these Twelve Jesus gave his careful teaching and undivided attention, desiring them to remain faithful and understand his full message and role as Messiah. Though this was not to be accomplished until after his resurrection, the private training the disciples received at the foot of their Lord certainly carried them through their own roles as the foundation of the New Testament church. A study into Jesus's public and private ministries, and his private ministry to the disciples at Caesarea Philippi, sheds light on the conversation Jesus had with the Twelve and his ultimate ministry to

them. Jesus had purpose behind his actions, and that purpose is explicated through this study of his travels in Mark 6—9.



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