

LESSON 10 – FROM THE DOWN-LOW TO THE GAUNTLET

Prior to the Christmas break, we had just moved into the NT regarding the meta-narrative. The main theme we talked about there was how what seems to be so obvious to us was not so obvious to the disciples. The OT passages regarding the Messiah were cryptic and weren't in one place and they certainly weren't clearly delineated as Messianic prophecies. To add to the confusion, there were three tracks regarding the Messiah. The first was that of a Davidic king – the vast majority of the Jewish population understood that one and clung to it in hopes of ridding themselves of the Roman yoke. That was the most natural and probably the most logical. Then there was the track of the “Son of man” which referenced an eternal being, ascending to the throne next to the Ancient of Days. That

wasn't on their radar. And lastly, there was the suffering servant, which made no sense to any of them. As we now know, Jesus is all three, though the part about the Davidic king has yet to come to its full fruition. Needless to say, had we been there, we wouldn't have figured it all out, either.

Now we are on the heels of the Christmas season, where we celebrate the birth of Jesus. And that is where He, Jesus, stepped into the world of humanity as a child. It was time to implement this part of the plan.

Only by becoming a man could God ensure that a human king from the line of David would rule over His people without falling into sin and straying spiritually. Only if that king died in the place of His people and rose from the dead could God rightly judge sin and provide salvation all at the same time. Only by the Messiah's death and resurrection would fallen

people still have a place in God's family council, ruling in that renewed Edenic kingdom as originally intended.

But how does this get done?

Jesus had to somehow make sure the supernatural powers of darkness manipulated men to kill without understanding what they were really doing.

1 Cor. 2: 6-8

6 Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. 7 But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. 8 None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

Jesus' ministry makes more sense against this backdrop.

It can be easy for us to read the NT and feel like Jesus' ministry was a bit random. After all, the Gospels don't always present the same stories and some of those stories are in a different order. But all Jesus did, leading up to His crucifixion – healing the sick, forgiving sinners, casting out demons and confronting hypocrisy were more than random acts of a traveling rabbi who occasionally worked miracles. There is more going on here – an important sub-text to what Jesus was doing. As I've said before – we need to read the Gospels like fiction, not because they are fiction – they aren't. But we should spot the patterns and ask ourselves why He does and says what He does and says.

His Ministry Begins

Jesus' public ministry began with His baptism. It is here that He is identified by God, as His son, (**Mk 1:11**) and John identified Him as the one who "takes away the sins of the world" (**Jn 1:29**). When we read these verses, we tend to go straight to the crucifixion, but the disciples weren't thinking that way and neither was anyone else.

Think about it... Jesus didn't begin speaking about His death until He was three years into His ministry. And when He did, it was unanimously rejected by the disciples (**Mt. 17:22-23; Mk 9:30-32**). The last thing they expected to hear was that their Lord and Messiah would soon die. That was the craziest thing they'd ever heard. They didn't understand that Jesus' death on the cross had been the plan from the beginning. Why not? Because the plan, as alluded to in the OT was cryptic. It was never presented with open clarity.

The Temptation of Christ

Shortly after His baptism, Jesus was driven by the Spirit into the wilderness where He was confronted by Satan (**Mt. 4:1; Mk 1:12; Lk 4:1-13**). Why the “wilderness?” Because that is where evil spirits resided in their worldview.

Why did Satan come to tempt Jesus? Because he knew He was the Messiah, on a mission to reinstall God’s home rule on earth. The Messiah (anointed one) was to be a king in the line of David. This is why Satan, as the “ruler of this world (**Jn 12:31**) understood Jesus would set His sights on the nations, the nations God had disinherited at the Tower of Babel incident – Satan’s dominion (**Dt. 4:19-20; 32:8-9**).

In the wilderness, Satan fired 3 salvos across the bow of Jesus. Most of us are somewhat familiar with this passage (**Mt 4:1-11**). Jesus

successfully navigated the temptation but look at the third strategy Satan used.

Mt 4:8-11

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. 9 And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” 10 Then Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written, ““You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.”” 11 Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

Satan took Jesus to a high mountain (Hermon) and offered Him... drum roll please... all the nations/ kingdoms of the earth, the very thing he presumed Jesus had come to reclaim. Satan offered what Jesus had come to retrieve, but it was with a compromise. Jesus would have to worship Satan, the ruler of this world, not God.

What does this offer tell us? It tells us that Satan had yet to realize that God's plan required the death of Jesus. And even though Jesus responded, He didn't really explain His refusal in detail. He essentially told Satan to get lost. All this means that Satan knew the objective, but not the means of getting the objective. For the remainder of the Gospels, something of a cat and mouse game is being played as a sub-plot. God would take back the nations through Jesus, but there was more to it. It was about rebuilding a family, from all nations, not just Israel, and sin still had to be atoned for. And God's rule would involve His children. The cross was essential for the redemption of humanity. It had to be part of the plan. Jesus wasn't tricked by Satan's offer, but Satan was/ had to be duped in due time. Will you now go back and read the Gospels with this sub-plot in mind?

Among his other titles, Satan is referred to as 'the accuser of the brethren.' He is something of a prosecuting attorney, with humanity being the defendants. Keep this in mind.

On the heels of His temptation Jesus did two things: He called his first disciples (Peter, Andrew, James and John) and healed a demon-possessed man (**Mk 1:16-28; Lk 4:31 – 5:11**). Both the healings and the calling of disciples continues and forms a pattern. Jesus continues to call disciples and eventually endues them with the power to heal and cast out demons (**Lk 9:1-5**).

The Numbers

Initially, Jesus called 12 disciples. The number isn't accidental. It corresponds to the 12 tribes of Israel. Israel was in view as the kingdom plan kicked off. **They are God's portion, chosen above all other nations (Dt. 32:8,9). The great**

commission was to begin with Israel and work its way out to the Gentiles (Acts 1:8). And Paul also saw things this way, beginning with his going to the Jews before reaching out to the Gentiles (**Rom 1:16**).

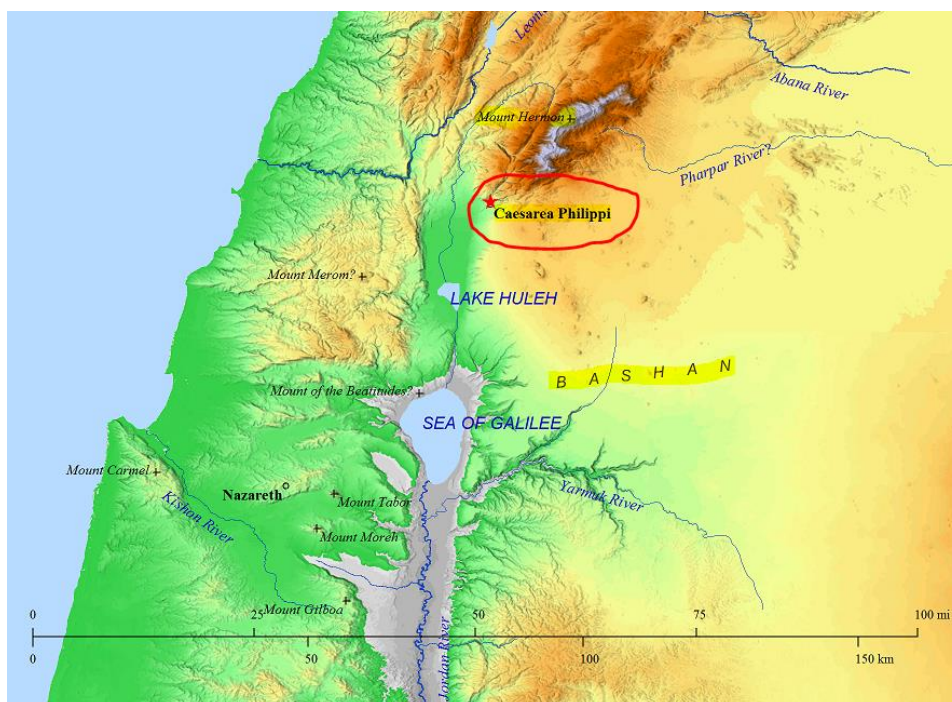
But Jesus didn't stop with the 12. **In Luke 10, He commissioned 70 more to heal and cast out demons (Lk 10:1,9,17).** This number isn't accidental either. It's the number of nations listed in Gen. 10 – the table of nations, the nations disinherited by God (**Dt 4:19-20; 32:8-9**). The numbers were a natural hyperlink to the Jewish crowds. **The calling of the 12 signified that the kingdom had come to Israel and the sending of the 70 signaled that the kingdom would take back the nations.**

When the 70 returned from their first mission they marveled that even the demons were subject to them. Jesus responded by saying that He saw Satan fall like lightning. The great

reversal was underway. Once people belonged to the family of God, Satan no longer had any claim on them. He was a prosecutor without a case!

Executing the Execution

Jesus preached the Gospel of the kingdom, healed the sick, and cast out demons for 3 years, but then, to His inner circle, His message changed. To make His point, Jesus took His disciples to the far north of Israel's territory.



It was a visual lesson. The Roman name of the place was Caesarea Phillipi, but to the Israelite, it was Bashan – the place of the serpent, the realm of the dead, the gates of Hell (Gen. 6 [hyperlink](#)). **It was in Bashan that Jesus would throw down the gauntlet by clearly asking, “Who do you say that I am?” (Mt 16:15-18).**

There has been a great deal of debate over the centuries as to who the identity of the “rock.” And there is a double entendre here, but for our purposes today, the key to understanding the term lies in the geographical context.

Explain:

- Caesarea Philippi lies in Bashan.



- Sits at the foot of Mt. Hermon.
- Double entendre – pagan temples and Hermon.
- Ground zero for Gen. 6.
- Seen as the gateway to the realm of the dead.
- The “rock” is the mountain and the “gates of Hell” mark the spot where they were standing. Also Mt. of transfiguration.

It is here that Jesus challenges the powers of darkness. Satan had gained claim over humanity at the fall in Gen. 3. Every human would then join him in the realm of the dead. The plan, the Gospel, was a frontal assault on the gates of Hell, (gates were a defensive

weapon) and the lord of the dead had been served notice that he and his minions didn't stand a chance, though the process of regaining the nations would take some time. **In Mt 16, Jesus went to the devil's front door and ushered a challenge to his claim. But why now, in this way?**

Because Jesus had to die at the hands of man and Satan had to be goaded into orchestrating that. But Jesus didn't stop there. He took it a step further on the Mount of Transfiguration (Mk 9:2-10).

Mk 9:2-10

2 And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, 3 and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them. 4 And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they

were talking with Jesus. 5 And Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” 6 For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified. 7 And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, “This is my beloved Son; listen to him.” 8 And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only.

9 And as they were coming down the mountain, he charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. 10 So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead might mean.

Mt. Hermon was the place – 8 shrines (tents) to pagan gods existed on the mountain at the time. Jesus picked this spot to reveal to His inner circle who He was – the embodied glory of God. **It was a challenge: “I’m here to take**

back what is mine! Come and get me! The kingdom of God is at hand! What are you going to do about it?” And actually, there’s nothing that Satan could do. (Billy Jack)

Then, immediately thereafter, Jesus turned towards Jerusalem and began telling the disciples He was going there to die. They didn’t want to hear it, but the gauntlet had been thrown down and Satan had been baited. The train had left the station and wouldn’t be stopped. And Satan and his minions went into overdrive, orchestrating the plans to kill Jesus. The trap was set. It is what Jesus wanted. His death was the key.

WHY DOES ALL THIS MATTER?

- **Jesus’ ministry was intentional, not random.**

- **He had established the kingdom here on earth, in order that one day in the future, a global Eden would be restored.**
- **Each of us, like the disciples, have a role to fulfill. Believers, having been brought into the family of God, have a role to play. We are brought in to be participants, not observers.**
- **In the sermon on the mount, among other teachings, Jesus intended to show us what Eden had been like prior to the fall; what could have been and what one day will be when God rules His family, free of death, disease and sin.**
- **There will be no hostile powers.**
- **God's ultimate kingdom is bigger than a garden and the land mass of Israel. The kingdom will be global and include people from every nation, tribe and color.**
- **Our task is to imitate Jesus. We are His imagers. We are to take care for both body**

and soul of our fellow imagers, leading people to faith in our king while strengthening their resolve to be loyal to Him.

- **No act of kindness will fail to be used by the Spirit to speak to someone's heart. No hearing of the Gospel is fruitless. Jesus' kindness matched His message. Neither diminished the other. This is a pattern we are to imitate.**
- **Lastly, we are reminded that intelligent evil has limitations and is vulnerable to kingdom vision and action.**
- **Jesus is sitting at the right hand of God with angels, authorities and powers having already been subjected to Him (1 Peter 3:22).**
- **We are "already, but not yet" co-rulers with Him (Col. 3:1; 2 Tim 2:12; Rev 2:26; 3:21).**

- **The gates of Hell will not prevail or withstand the progression of and completion of the church as God's kingdom on earth.**
- **No matter how it looks now, we win! But will we, as individual believers participate or merely be observers?**