

## **“On This Rock”**

*Now when Yahusha came into the parts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?” They said, “Some say John the Baptizer, some, Elijah, and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Mashiach, the Son of the living Elohim.” Yahusha answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. I also tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my assembly, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.” (Matt.16:13-18)*

There is a lot of contention surrounding this passage. It is the passage on which Catholic apostolic succession is founded. The Catholic teaching is that Mashiach is addressing Peter alone and affording him sole responsibility for the Gospel message, thus he is the leader of the first church and therefore the first pope. The basis of Catholic contention is the name Peter (*Gk. Petra*) means rock. The Protestant Church opposes this view. The Protestant view is that the term rock refers to the apostle’s declaration that Mashiach is the Son of Elohim and it is on Him that His kingdom will be built. In other words the rock is Mashiach Himself.

But Mashiach’s comment may go much deeper than either interpretation. Could it be that He was referring to the location where He made the statement? He and His disciples were at Caesarea Philippi (Mark.8:27) which is at the foot of Mount Hermon. In fact Mount Hermon dominates this area. Was Mashiach referring to where they were standing. This is a significance lost on most people and when fully understood, it becomes most appropriate that the apostle should make his declaration, “You are the Son of the living Elohim” at the foot of this particular mountain.

According to the apocryphal book of Enoch, Mount Hermon had a direct link with the ‘fallen angels recorded in Gen.6:1-4 as explained below. Thus, there is a lot of subtext in the above passage which takes us all the way back to the Exodus.

### **The Exodus Narrative**

After Receiving the Law at Mount Sinai the Israelites journeyed to Kadesh Barnea on the southern border of Canaan. It was from here that Moshe sent the twelve spies into the land. They returned and confirmed what YHWH had promised was true, ‘the land was flowing with milk and honey.’ But they added that they saw giants: the sons of Anak – the descendants of the Nephilim. There rest is history: the people refused to accept that YHWH would continue with His miraculous protection and give them victory over the Anakim and refused to enter the land. Thus they were sentenced to wander in the wilderness for forty years until that rebellious generation had died, only then would YHWH bring them into the promised land. But YHWH did not take this new generation back to Kadesh Barnea instead He took them by a different route up through Transjordan along the eastern side of the Jordan river. Why?

We need to pause here a moment and consider another historical point affecting the land of Canaan, that is, the spiritual situation YHWH wished to confront. The spiritual situation existing in Canaan went beyond the descendants of the Nephilim. Facing YHWH was the spiritual legacy having its roots in Babel and the disinheritance of the nations,

*When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the children of men, he set the bounds of the peoples according to the number of the sons of Elohim.\* For Yahweh's portion is his people. Jacob is the lot of His inheritance. (Deut.32:8-9).\*\**

\*There is some debate as to the correct rendering of this verse. Should it be 'sons of Israel' or 'sons of El?' Most translations are based on the Masoretic Text (7th-10th century AD) but earlier manuscripts: Septuagint (3rd - 2nd century BCE) and Dead Sea Scrolls (4Q37, or 4QDeutj) have 'sons of El'. Moreover, scholars agree this passage relates back to Babel and Israel did not exist at that time! If you read through the "Table of Nations" in Genesis 10, Israel does not even appear.

\*\* This passage requires some unpacking which is beyond this article. The passage links with Deut.4:19-20.

Hence through Israel YHWH was going to confront two hostile forces: the last vestiges of the descendants of the Nephilim/Rephaim located in the Transjordan and the people of the nations under the dominion of other gods and resident in the Land.

*Then we turned, and went up the way to Bashan. Og the king of Bashan came out against us, he and all his people, to battle at Edrei. YHWH said to me, "Don't fear him; for I have delivered him, with all his people, and his land, into your hand. You shall do to him as you did to Sihon king of the Amorites, who lived at Heshbon." So YHWH our Elohim delivered into our hand Og also, the king of Bashan, and all his people. We struck him until no one was left of him remaining. We took all his cities at that time. There was not a city which we didn't take from them; sixty cities, all the region of Argob, the kingdom of Og in Bashan. All these were cities fortified with high walls, gates, and bars; in addition to a great many villages without walls. We utterly destroyed them, as we did to Sihon king of Heshbon, utterly destroying every inhabited city, with the women and the little ones. But all the livestock, and the plunder of the cities, we took for plunder for ourselves. We took the land at that time out of the hand of the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, from the valley of the Arnon to Mount Hermon. (The Sidonians call Hermon Sirion, and the Amorites call it Senir.) We took all the cities of the plain, and all Gilead, and all Bashan, to Salecah and Edrei, cities of the kingdom of Og in Bashan. For only Og king of Bashan remained of the remnant of the Rephaim. Behold, his bedstead was a bedstead of iron. Isn't it in Rabbah of the children of Ammon? Nine cubits was its length, and four cubits its width, after the cubit of a man. (Deut.3:1-11).*

We are told that king Og was the last of the Rephaim a term linked to the Anakim and other giants of the Transjordan (Deut.2:11,20). This passage says Og reigned over Bashan and Josh.12:4-5 records him living in Ashtaroth and Edrei. Bashan, Ashtaroth and Edrei were significant names to Israel's neighbours who worshipped foreign gods. To quote Heiser,<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Unseen Realm

“Ashtarothe Edrei and the Rephaim are mentioned by name in Ugaritic texts <sup>2</sup>. In the Ugaritic language the location of Ashtarothe and Edrei was not spelled Bashan but was spelled *Bathan* meaning ‘serpent’ so that the region of Bashan was the place of the serpent.”

In Ugaritic texts Ashtarothe and Edrei were gateways to the underworld. YHWH used Israel to defeat the giants of the Transjordan but as we will see there is much more to Bashan/Bathan and its mount Hermon.

### **Mount Hermon**

YHWH deliberately took Israel up the Transjordan to this northern point to confront His enemy. But why this particular mountain? Messiah referred to this location as “the gates of hell,” and according to Enoch it was from this mountain that the fallen angels chose to launch their rebellion against Yahweh. One authority notes, that there were more than twenty temples dedicated to celestial gods at Mount Hermon and its environs.<sup>3</sup>

Mount Hermon held a crucial role in the unfolding spiritual conflict described in Israel’s journey. This mountain was not merely a geographical feature but was considered the very launch pad for the manifestation of the Nephilim and Rephaim—the offspring of the fallen angels. The origins of these beings set them apart from the other nations that surrounded Israel.

Unlike the nations that were disinherited by YHWH (Deut.32:8-9) whose people descended from Noah’s sons and from Adam as detailed in Genesis 10, the Nephilim and Rephaim were of a different pedigree. Their bloodlines were not traced to Yahweh’s creation; they were the product of other divine beings. As such, they did not belong to Yahweh, and their existence represented a direct challenge to His sovereignty.

YHWH would not permit the coexistence of His people with the progeny of other gods. These giants, as products of spiritual rebellion, had to be completely eradicated. Hence Mount Hermon, recognised as their place of origin, became a focal point in Yahweh’s plan to confront and destroy these rival bloodlines. But the extermination of these giants was not the end of the matter there was something far more significant at stake and Mashiach would accept this gauntlet, which takes us back to Matthew.

### **Back To Matthew**

*And on this rock I will build my assembly, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.*

It is now understandable why Mashiach chose the foot of this mountain to have the discussion He did with His disciples. It was the most fitting location for the declaration of who He was, “*You are the Son of Elohim*”

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<sup>2</sup> Ugaritic is an extinct Northwest Semitic language, common in Canaan. It was closely related to and sharing many features with biblical Hebrew and Phoenician. The name Beelzebul is from Ugaritic ‘*Baal Zebul*.’ (prince Ball).

<sup>3</sup> The name Hermon comes from the complicated verb חרם (*haram*) meaning to separate something from its natural habitat and consign it to the afterlife. In practice this may either mean to grab hold of something and utterly obliterate it forever, or else set it aside for its forever keeping or some special sacred service. (Excerpt from Abarim Publications’ Biblical Dictionary). Hence the ancient Israelite would have connected this mountain with destruction and the underworld.

and for His response *“On this rock I will build my kingdom.”* Equally fitting is His comment, *“ And the gates of Hell will not prevail against it.”* He was throwing down the gauntlet – baiting the enemy. He is putting the enemy on notice, *“ I am here, I have come to take back what belongs to My Father”* and He is making His statement at ground zero. A more exact translation would have been *and the gates of Hades will not withstand it.* What Mashiach is saying is that the powers of darkness are going to take a beating - it is a declaration of war, exactly as prophesied by Daniel, (Dan.2:45). The subtext hidden in this discourse is Mashiach declaring He is the inauguration of the Father’s plan of salvation and this location of Satanic dominance will become Satan’s tomb.

We now come to a tangential event – the transfiguration. The gospels do not give the name of the mountain on which this event occurred and the early Church allocated mount Tabor for the transfiguration. However, Mount Tabor is only small reaching 575metres high: hardly fitting Matthew’s description of a high mountain. On the other hand Mount Hermon reaches over 2800 metres which with its spiritual symbolism makes it the more likely choice. The Psalmist’s comment are of note, (Ps.68:15).

It is not by accident that the transfiguration also occurred on this mountain and only days after Mashiach’s declaration,

*After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James, and John, and brought them up onto a high mountain privately by themselves, and he was changed into another form in front of them. (Mark.9:2)*

The transfiguration confirmed His deity revealing His divine nature and confirmed the Kingdom of Elohim was at hand. There was no better location for YHWH to reveal Himself, His kingdom and re-establish His authority than on mount Hermon.

## **Conclusion**

Satan was well aware of who Yahusha was but what he didn’t know was Yahweh’s plan of salvation. Mashiach had baited the forces of darkness and they would take the bait. They would orchestrate His death in the belief this would be the end of Him. The Scriptures tell us that Mashiach like all of the dead went down to the underworld. But the apostle tells us He went to preach the good news of His kingdom to the spirits of darkness, to the souls of the fallen angels. But why would Mashiach consider it necessary to do this? For the answer we again need to back to Genesis and consider the true intention behind the fallen angels cohabitation with earthly women.

Resulting from the fall in Gen.3 YHWH prophesied Mashiach would establish His kingdom and bring an end to the powers of darkness a.k.a. Satan’s kingdom. It was to prevent the fulfilment of this prophesy that Satan’s fallen angels cohabited with earthly women thereby polluting the woman’s seed in the hope of preventing the arrival of Mashiach. However Satan’s intention was usurped by YHWH and the fallen angels imprisoned in the abyss – the pit. Unable to prevent the arrival of Mashiach, Satan had to devise a new strategy: kill Him. Unfortunately by organising Mashiach’s death Satan defeated himself and it was to make this known that Mashiach visited the fallen angels. Consider the following possible scenario:

Mashiach goes to the spirits of darkness the denizens of the underworld. When they see Him they gloat: He is in the same place as them, He's in the place of the dead and therefore they perceive him to be no better than them. In their eyes He cannot now fulfil prophesy thus, the kingdom of darkness has won. Mashiach replies, you think that because I am here it's game over and YHWH has lost. But let Me tell you, in promoting my death your master: Satan has caused his own demise. Because unlike you I am not staying: I am going to rise from here, from the dead and my resurrection will be your master's antithesis. Satan wants death: he wants all to be separated from Elohim. But I will rise from here, defeating death and Satan. My resurrection will inaugurate Elohim's plan for eternal life. What you should understand is that to overcome death there must be a resurrection and for a resurrection there must first be a death – a temporary death. Hence my temporary presence here.

Mashiach visited these demonic spirits to explain how, contrary to their perception, by orchestrating His death, Satan progressed Yahweh's plan of salvation thus Satan defeated Satan. He was announcing that unwittingly Satan caused his own demise. As an aside, each baptism is a personal resurrection and serves as a constant reminder to Satan of Mashiach's victory over him.

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