

'THIS' ROCK

“When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philip, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist; some Elias; and others Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But who say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answering said, Thou art the Christ the son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou Simon Barjona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say unto thee, Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” - Matthew 16:13-18.

At first reading, it seems strange that the Lord took His disciples on a two day journey, to the most northern part of Israel at the border with Lebanon, to ask the question, who do men say that I am? Could He not as easily have asked it in one of the local towns by the sea of Galilee? The question arose in the week before the Lord's death. For over three years He had proclaimed Himself the Son of God, only to be ridiculed and rejected.

The place, however, was highly significant. It was here that the children of Dan set up for themselves graven images making this location the cult centre for the Northern tribes of Israel (Judges 18:28-30). They called it Dan after the name of their father. Later it became corrupted to Pan, after the goat god; then to Panius. Because of pronunciation difficulties, it became Baniyas. The occupying power renamed it Caesarea Philippi after the Roman Emperor. To this day the place is dominated by a massive rock where niches cut out of the stone can be clearly seen, which once held the idols of Dan's day.

The disciples were challenged on the very spot that symbolised their forefather's rejection of the living God. The question really was, would they make the same mistake? Simon Peter's answer *“Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God,”* spoke for the disciples. The Lord then revealed the glorious truth that in contrast to Dan's rock, Peter's confession was THE rock upon which He would build His church.

But what about the nation? Would they accept Him? Sadly not. In less than a week's time they gave their answer, *“We will not have this man to reign over*

us".

How true the saying that "History has the habit of repeating itself!"

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