



REFLECTIONS

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In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

John 1:4-5 NKJV

Caesarea-Philippi

It seems like an unusual place to be drawn to, but Caesarea-Philippi was a stop on our most recent trip to Israel. We found the beautiful setting there seemingly not in keeping with the reputation it gained back in Jesus day. While history notes little about the beauty of the place, it does explain the practices there.

Caesarea-Philippi is located in the northern most part of Israel not far from the Syrian border. It was a pagan city where people gathered at a temple to worship Caesar and idols such as Baal, the fertility god, and the Greek god, Pan. They worshiped through practices of sexual immorality and wild partying; thus, Caesarea-Philippi became known in its day as Sin City.

As we toured the grounds on our visit there, we posed for a photograph in front of a cavernous opening in the mountainside. Inside the cavern was once thought to be an unmeasurably deep passage that led to the Gates of Hades where the dead were believed to descend after earthly life. So, it seems like an improbable setting for Jesus to bring his disciples. But that is one reason that made our visit so fascinating.

After leading his disciples more than 30 miles to this place, I can imagine Jesus addressing his disciples with his back to that cavernous opening in the mountainside where our photograph had been taken. There among all those partying people gathered to worship their idols, and in the midst of immoral sexual behavior all around, Jesus asked his disciples, "*Who do the people say I, the Son of Man, am?*"

So they said, "Some say John the Baptist, 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 and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matthew 16:13 -16 NKJV)

So, I am struck today that Peter accurately differentiated Jesus from the idols as the Christ, the Son of the Living God which may have been a reason enough for Jesus bring his disciples there. But also, in the image *I* have of the scene as it could have been back then, Jesus stands between his disciples and the cavern containing the Gates of Hades. And I believe He stands there still today protecting all who believe in him from the depths.

But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:12-13 RSV)

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