

**Episode:** Other Letters Series No. 12

**Narrator:** A demon

**Primary Scriptures:** Matthew 16:13-20

**Story Summary:** The early Christians had to be molded into the Church

**Location:** Israel

**Time:** 30-70 AD

**Suggested Memory Scriptures:** Acts 13:18

Caesarea Philippi is located near the northern border of Israel. If you go there today, you get to enjoy a beautiful pond and stream running in front of a series of caves and carvings in a red rock mountainside. The large cave is known as the Grotto of Pan, known as a place to worship the Greek god, Pan. Sacrifices to Pan were made there, and many people believed it was the home of many demons, maybe the opening to Hades.

It is very possible that Jesus and his apostles were looking at this cave as the events of Matthew 16:13-20 take place. Jesus began the conversation by asking who people said he was. The apostles offered up several options before Jesus asked them to say what they thought. Peter opined that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Jesus blessed Peter and said that answer was revealed by his Father in heaven. Jesus followed with, "And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." It is the first mention of the word "church."

The apostles must have been mystified. They knew the Greek word to be "ekklesia" meaning "the called out ones." What could Jesus have meant by that?

The answer started being made known on the day of Pentecost after the resurrection of Jesus. According to Acts 2, the Holy Spirit came on the few believers and they began to share the Gospel, followed by Peter preaching a powerful sermon. Everybody in the crowd heard the Gospel in their own language. Three thousand believers were added that day, followed by many others every day. They responded by devoting themselves to the teachings of the apostles and to fellowship.

Over the coming weeks the group of believers grow. In Acts 5:11, the thousands of believers are called the church! This is the embodiment of what God had long been planning. The Gospel was to be spread and lived out through groups of believers.

At first glance, this may not seem as big deal. For many centuries, God's people had been the Jews. They met together in the Temple and in synagogues. They were distinct from everybody else, they tried to live according to the commandments of God. So, what is the big difference?

Besides the difference in what the Christians and Jews believed, there was this huge difference – the Jews maintained their beliefs through the synagogues, but the Christians spread their beliefs through the church!