

## MESSIANIC CAMPAIGN—PHASE 3

THE FINAL GALILEAN OFFENSIVE | Summer 28 AD–Fall 28 AD

### Shoring Up Regional Support

With growing momentum behind him, Jesus launched a final, coordinated offensive in Galilee. No longer a scattered movement, his empire-building efforts became more structured, with his disciples deployed in pairs to spread the message. This mirrored ancient military scouting tactics—securing regional footholds while avoiding immediate confrontation with Rome. Yet, Jesus’ challenge to both the religious and political elite intensified.

John the Baptist, whose campaign once paved the way for Jesus, was executed by Herod Antipas—a clear warning that revolutionary figures would not be tolerated. This signaled a shift: Jesus’ mission would no longer operate in the relative safety of Galilee for much longer. His next moves—feeding multitudes in a wilderness setting, walking on water as a demonstration of divine authority over Chaos, and delivering his controversial “Bread of Life” discourse—thinned the ranks of his followers. Many abandoned him, as he knew would happen, when he refused to be a conventional messianic leader.

Retreating to Gentile regions like Tyre and Sidon, Jesus tested his disciples’ faith and refined his inner circle. At Caesarea Philippi, Peter finally declared Jesus as the Messiah. The Transfiguration, high on a mountain, cemented Jesus’ identity and prepared his followers for the final campaign: the march on Jerusalem.

—SCENE 14—

### THE COMMISSION & THE FALLEN PROPHET

Commission of Twelve, Beheading of John | Galilee, Near the Sea, Ituraea | Summer 28 AD

### Campaign Chronology

- **Synagogue Campaign** | Mt 9:35-38 | Mk 6:6
- **Commissioning of Disciples in Pairs** | Mt 10:1-42 | Mk 6:7-11 | Lk 9:1-5
- **Disciples Sent** | Mt 11:1 | Mk 6:12-13 | Lk 9:6
- **Herod Antipas & Jesus** | Mt 14:1-2 | Mk 6:14-16 | Lk 9:7-9
- **John’s Imprisonment, Beheading** | Mt 14:3-12 | Mk 6:17-29
- **Return of Disciples** | Mk 6:30 | Lk 9:10

## **Social, Religious & Political Context**

The Jesus movement was reaching a critical juncture. Until now, Jesus had been gathering followers, gaining influence, and subtly challenging the religious and political authorities. But two events marked a dramatic escalation—the beheading of John the Baptist and the commissioning of the Twelve. John’s execution at the hands of Herod Antipas sent a clear warning: messianic figures and their movements were being watched. His death was not just personal—it was strategic. Removing John was an attempt to decapitate the movement before it could spread further. Meanwhile, Jesus intensified his own offensive strategy, commissioning his closest disciples and deploying them in pairs. It also multiplied his influence, as his followers became heralds of the Empire, signaling an expansion of the movement.

## **Tactical Insight**

The commissioning of the Twelve was a tactical deployment. In doing so, Jesus was shifting his strategy—instead of working alone, he deployed disciples in pairs, creating a network of influence across Galilee. This mimicked military scouting tactics, where operatives moved ahead of the leader, gathering intelligence, securing alliances, and preparing the ground for larger movements. The Twelve were not just preachers—they were insurgents in a cultural and religious revolution. They healed, cast out demons, and announced the arrival of the Empire.

Pairs provided strength, protection, and credibility. Sending two disciples per mission ensured they could verify each other’s words, avoiding accusations of fraud (Deuteronomy 19:15). In a hostile environment, two travelers were safer than one, reinforcing their resilience against opposition. Working in pairs allowed one to speak while the other observed, improving adaptability and strategy.

John the Baptist’s beheading was a warning message from the authorities. John’s execution was a turning point. Jesus’ movement was no longer operating in relative safety. Herod Antipas’ paranoia had been growing, as John had openly criticized his unlawful marriage (Mark 6:17-18), making him a political nuisance as well as a religious one. But the real threat? John had become a rallying figure, his influence extending beyond religious boundaries into social and political resistance against oppression and corruption.

Herod feared Jesus after John’s death. John’s beheading was supposed to quell the rebellion, yet Jesus’ movement only grew stronger. Herod heard rumors that Jesus might be John resurrected

(Matthew 14:1-2). This wasn't just superstition. It reflected the authorities' growing fear that Jesus was continuing John's mission, but with even greater influence.

After their missions, the disciples returned with more strength and more tested for battle. They returned with greater confidence, hardened by opposition. Their reports provided intelligence and fuel for the strategy and tactics Jesus would employ in the next phase of his messianic campaign. He now had proof that his movement could survive beyond his personal, physical presence.

### **Strategic Questions**

1. Why did Jesus commission disciples now? With John eliminated, Jesus accelerated his mission, ensuring that his message would spread rapidly before authorities could shut him down.

2. What made John's death a turning point? His execution signaled that Rome and Herod were now actively suppressing messianic movements, increasing the urgency for Jesus to expand his operations.

3. Why was Herod so afraid of Jesus? Despite executing John, Herod could not kill the movement. And Jesus' growing influence suggested that the revolution was far from over.

4. Why did the disciples return stronger? Facing opposition firsthand toughened them, forcing them to rely on faith, strategy, and each other—a critical preparation for what lay ahead.

## **—SCENE 15— THE SURGE & THE SIFTING**

**Feeding of the People & Defeat of the Sea | Galilee, Near the Sea, Ituraea | Summer 28 AD**

### **Campaign Chronology**

- **Retreat to Bethsaida near Julias** | Mt 14:13-14 | Mk 6:31-34 | Lk 9:10-11 | Jn 6:1-3
- **Feeding of Five Thousand** | Mt 14:15-21 | Mk 6:35-44 | Lk 9:12-17 | Jn 6:5-13
- **Attempt to Make Jesus King** | Mt 14:22-23 | Mk 6:45-46 | Jn 6:14-15
- **Walking on Water & (Divine) Sonship** | Mt 14:24-33 | Mk 6:47-52 | Jn 6:16-21
- **Healings at Gennesaret** | Mt 14:34-36 | Mk 6:53-56
- **Bread of Life Discourse at Capernaum** | Jn 6:22-59
- **Defection among Followers** | Jn 6:60-71

### **Climate & Seasonal Context**

The Galilean summer was hot and dry, with temperatures often reaching 90°F (32°C). By this time of year, food scarcity was a growing concern, making Jesus' feeding of the five thousand even more remarkable. The crowds gathering around him were not just hungry for food but also for a leader—a deliverer—who could provide sustenance, security, and salvation.

### **Geographical Insight**

Jesus and his disciples withdrew to Bethsaida, located near the border of Philip's territory. This move had a strategic advantage: it placed them beyond the immediate jurisdiction of Herod Antipas, who had just executed John the Baptist. The region, known for its proximity to the Sea of Galilee, would soon serve as the stage for an even greater confrontation—Jesus' battle against the primordial enemy of God's order: the Sea.

### **Tactical Insight**

By feeding the 5,000, Jesus established himself as the Provider-King. The miraculous provision of food to a massive crowd echoed the wilderness provision of manna under Moses (Exodus 16). By feeding them, Jesus demonstrated his ability to sustain his people, reinforcing his identity as the one who would shepherd and sustain the true Empire of God.

But the event had another layer of significance. In the ancient world, a king who could provide abundant food was seen as divinely appointed. The crowds recognized this and attempted to force Jesus into kingship (John 6:15). Yet his kingdom was not of this world. Rather than leading a revolt against Rome, Jesus was preparing for a cosmic battle against a greater enemy: Chaos itself.

The famous incident in which Jesus walked on water was the second of the two-part battle between Jesus and the great primordial enemy, Chaos. For the ancient Near Eastern world, the Sea was not just water—it was Chaos incarnate, the physical place inhabited by the terrifying deity of Chaos. It was the realm of the primordial dragon, the domain of Leviathan (Job 41), Yamm (Canaanite myths), and Tiamat (Babylonian myth). Throughout the Hebrew Bible, only Yahweh could tame or trample the waters (Psalm 77:16-19, Isaiah 51:9-10). By walking on the Sea of Galilee, Jesus was doing what only God could do—subjugating Chaos, proving his divine Sonship, and demonstrating his authority over creation itself. The event mirrored the ancient battles between the chief deity and the forces of the abyss,

proving that Jesus, as the Son of God, was not merely a teacher or prophet. He was the one sent to defeat the ancient enemy of God and humanity. He was demonstrating to his disciples what they had misinterpreted the first time (Matthew 8), where he battled the Sea and silenced it. But this time, they realized just who he was, as they declared, “Truly this is the Son of God” (Matthew 14:33).

The next day, Jesus issued a theological challenge to the crowd: “I am the bread of life” (John 6:35). His words dismantled their expectations. They wanted a political king who would overthrow Rome and continue feeding them physical bread. But Jesus demanded complete allegiance. Many deserted him, unwilling to follow an empire that did not promise immediate victory but instead demanded absolute loyalty and faith.

### **Strategic Questions**

1. Why did Jesus refuse to become king after the feeding? His kingship was not about military power but divine rule over the world and cosmic forces. His battle was against Sin, Death, and Chaos—not merely Rome.

2. Why did Jesus walk on water? This was not just a miracle. It was a declaration of victory over Chaos, proving his Sonship and divine authority in line with ancient Near Eastern and Hebrew traditions.

3. Why did followers abandon Jesus after the Bread of Life discourse? They expected a messianic warrior but were given a king who demanded faith over force. Many could not reconcile their version of messianic revolution with that which Jesus was establishing. This was Jesus’ point, too. While communicating a deep theological point, he was also thinning out his movement. By this point, Jesus knew that he needed followers who had come to a certain level of commitment to his cause.

## **—SCENE 16— THE REFINING FIRE**

**Galilee, Near the Sea, Ituraea | Summer–Fall 28 AD**

### **Campaign Chronology**

- **Conflict over Uncleaness** | Mt 15:1-20 | Mk 7:1-23 | Jn 7:1
- **Greek Woman Near Tyre & Sidon** | Mt 15:21-28 | Mk 7:24-30
- **Healings in Region of Decapolis** | Mt 15:29-31 | Mk 7:31-37
- **Feeding of Four Thousand in Region** | Mt 15:32-38 | Mk 8:1-9
- **Return to Galilee, Opposition** | Mt 15:39-16:4 | Mk 8:9-12

- **Warning about Opposition** | Mt 16:5-12 | Mk 8:13-21
- **Healing of Blind Man at Bethsaida** | Mk 8:22-36
- **Peter's Recognition of Jesus in Ituraea** | Mt 16:13-20 | Mk 8:27-30 | Lk 9:18-21
- **Jesus Predicts Passion, Resurrection** | Mt 16:21-26 | Mk 8:31-37 | Lk 9:22-25
- **Jesus' Declaration of Coming Son of Man** | Mt 16:27-28 | Mk 8:38-9:1 | Lk 9:26-27
- **Transfiguration of Jesus (Mt Hermon?)** | Mt 17:1-8 | Mk 9:2-8 | Lk 9:28-36
- **Post-Transfiguration Discussion** | Mt 17:9-13 | Mk 9:9-13 | Lk 9:36
- **Healing of Demon-Possessed Boy** | Mt 17:14-20 | Mk 9:14-29 | Lk 9:37-43
- **Jesus' (2nd) Prediction of Fate** | Mt 17:22-23 | Mk 9:30-32 | Lk 9:43-45

### **Social, Religious & Political Context**

Jesus' rising influence had not gone unnoticed. His continued confrontations with religious authorities intensified the opposition against him. The Pharisees and scribes, who had long monitored his actions, escalated their scrutiny, especially over issues of purity laws, food traditions, and ritual uncleanness. This was not simply theological nitpicking. Purity regulations were central to Jewish identity under Roman rule, and Jesus' deliberate violations of these laws threatened to undermine the established order.

Meanwhile, Herod Antipas remained ever watchful. The execution of John the Baptist had already proven that perceived threats would be swiftly eliminated. As Jesus' movement grew, Herod's concern deepened, particularly with reports that Jesus was being hailed as a new prophet, perhaps even as John resurrected (Mark 6:14-16). The Galilean phase of Jesus' campaign was drawing to a close. If he remained, the confrontation would become unavoidable.

### **Tactical Insight**

Sensing the danger, Jesus took an unexpected turn: he withdrew from Jewish territory entirely, heading into Gentile regions like Tyre, Sidon, and the Decapolis, or "Ten Cities" region (Mark 7:24-37). This was more than just a retreat. It was a test for his disciples. Their nationalistic expectations of the Messiah made it difficult to accept that Jesus' message extended beyond Israel. The episode with the

Syrophenician woman (Mark 7:24-30) forced them to reckon with the radical inclusivity of the Empire of God. His healings among Gentiles and the second feeding miracle of 4,000 people in a non-Jewish region (Mark 8:1-9) signified that the coming Empire was not confined to Israel alone. Jesus' priority was Empire over nation.

Peter's confession was a turning point in Jesus' public campaign. Upon his return to Jewish territory, Jesus led his disciples north to Caesarea Philippi, a heavily Romanized city with deep pagan significance. Here, in the shadow of shrines dedicated to Caesar and the god Pan, Peter finally understood what the others had failed to see—Jesus was the Messiah (Matthew 16:13-20).

Yet immediately after this breakthrough, Peter faltered. Jesus began speaking of suffering, rejection, and death—ideas completely foreign to traditional messianic expectations. Peter, still clinging to a vision of a conquering warrior king, rebuked Jesus for suggesting such a fate. Jesus' reply was sharp: "Get behind me, Satan!" (Mark 8:33). The conflict was no longer just external, even his closest followers struggled to grasp the true nature of his mission.

As opposition grew, Jesus moved toward Mount Hermon, the site of the Transfiguration (Mark 9:2-8). This was no random event. It was a decisive moment of divine affirmation. Moses and Elijah appeared, symbolizing the Law and the Prophets, validating Jesus as their fulfillment. God's voice thundered from the heavens: "This is my Son; listen to him!" (Mark 9:7). This echoed divine coronation language found in Psalm 2. The setting itself was symbolic. Mount Hermon, in Jewish apocalyptic thought, was the mythological site where rebellious angels descended in the days of Noah (1 Enoch 6:6). This moment was more than a revelation of glory. It was a declaration of war against cosmic forces that had long held the world in bondage.

### **Strategic Questions**

1. Why keep his identity secret? Despite these revelations, Jesus strictly instructed his disciples not to tell anyone about his Messiahship (Mark 9:9-10). A premature declaration would trigger an immediate crackdown. Herod and the Jerusalem authorities would see him as a direct political threat. The people still misunderstood what kind of Messiah he was. They expected a revolutionary leader, not a suffering servant. His war was not against Rome alone—it was against Sin, Death, and Chaos. If the people sought to crown him as a political king in an earthly sense, they would miss the true battle entirely. The phase of open engagement was coming to an end. Now, Jesus turned his eyes toward Jerusalem—the final battleground.

2. Why did Jesus retreat to Gentile territory? By withdrawing from Galilee and venturing into Gentile regions like Tyre, Sidon, and the Decapolis (Mark 7:24-37), Jesus was not merely evading hostile authorities. He was making a profound statement about the scope of his mission. The Jewish expectation was that the Messiah would restore Israel's national glory, yet Jesus' actions challenged this assumption. His encounter with the Syrophenician woman (Mark 7:24-30) tested the disciples' understanding of God's kingdom. When this Gentile demonstrated greater faith than many of God's people, Jesus affirmed that the blessings of his Empire were not restricted by ethnicity. By healing Gentiles and performing a second mass feeding for 4,000 in a non-Jewish region (Mark 8:1-9), Jesus signaled that the redemption he was bringing extended beyond Israel to the nations.

3. Why did Jesus choose Caesarea Philippi for Peter's confession? Caesarea Philippi was a city steeped in imperial and pagan symbolism. Home to shrines dedicated to Caesar and Pan, it was a site where Rome's power and pagan religion intertwined. By leading his disciples there, Jesus deliberately set the stage for one of the most pivotal moments in his campaign. Peter's declaration—"You are the Messiah" (Matthew 16:16)—was a direct challenge to both Jewish and Roman expectations. Yet Jesus immediately shattered Peter's vision of a military conqueror by predicting his suffering and death. In this setting, where Caesar was worshiped as a god, Jesus revealed the true path of kingship—not through violent conquest, but through self-sacrifice. By choosing this location, Jesus made it clear: his kingdom would not be like the empires of the world, and his mission was far greater than national liberation.

**—SCENE 17—**  
**REGROUP & REINFORCE**

**Regrouping in Capernaum & Defense of the Weak | Galilee, Near the Sea, Ituraea | Fall 28 AD**

**Campaign Chronology**

- **Return to Capernaum** | Mt 17:24-18:35
- **Payment of Temple Tax** | Mt 17:24-27
- **Greatness in the Empire** | Mt 18:1-5 | Mk 9:33-37 | Lk 9:46-48
- **Warning against Harming Children & Others** | Mt 18:6-14 | Mk 9:38-50 | Lk 9:49-50
- **How to Treat a Sinful Sibling** | Mt 18:15-35

## **Climate & Seasonal Context**

As fall set in, the scorching heat of the Galilean summer gave way to cooler temperatures, making travel and public gatherings more manageable. This season of transition mirrored Jesus' own strategy—shifting from regional confrontations to final preparations before the march to Jerusalem. The next phase would not be a mere escalation but a decisive movement into enemy territory.

## **Geographical Insight**

Capernaum, Jesus' operational base, was not just a place of retreat but a staging ground for the next offensive. Unlike Nazareth, which had rejected him, Capernaum provided a mix of Jewish and Roman influences, a perfect setting for shaping the ideology of his disciples. Here, Jesus reinforced the true nature of his Empire, ensuring that his followers were ready for what lay ahead.

## **Tactical Insight**

The Temple tax incident was a key moment in Jesus' campaign. When asked about the Temple tax (Matthew 17:24-27), Jesus used the moment to expose the system's corruption. Rather than rejecting the tax outright—a move that would have made him an easy target—he subtly undermined it. Instructing Peter to retrieve a coin from a fish's mouth, he mocked the religious economy, showing that even nature provided more freely than the Temple elite. This wasn't just about taxation. It was a critique of a system profiting off God's people.

In redefining leadership rules, Jesus asserted that the greatest must become the least. The disciples, still thinking in worldly terms, argued over who was the greatest (Mark 9:33-37). Jesus shattered their assumptions by placing a child before them—a symbol of humility and powerlessness in their society. True leadership in God's Empire would not be about status or control, but servanthood. Those seeking power for themselves had no place in his movement.

Mercy, that is, forgiveness and protecting the weak, was highly scandalous. Jesus followed with teachings on forgiveness and responsibility (Matthew 18:6-35), warning against harming the "little ones." Unlike human society, where the weak were discarded, Jesus' Empire—which spanned both heaven and earth—defended them with the fiercest of heavenly warriors. The parable of the unmerciful servant (Matthew 18:23-35) made clear that forgiveness was not weakness. It was warfare against oppression, revenge, and the power.

## Strategic Questions

1. Why not march to Jerusalem yet? The disciples weren't ready. They still misunderstood power and leadership, expecting conquest rather than servanthood. Jesus had to reshape their thinking before they faced the full pressure of Rome and the Temple elite. The final march required absolute commitment, and they had to learn that the battle wasn't just external—it was within their own hearts.

2. Why did Jesus use a child to illustrate greatness in his Empire? In first-century Jewish and Roman society, children held little social status or power. They were dependent, vulnerable, and had no legal standing. By placing a child in their midst and declaring that the greatest must become like them (Matthew 18:1-5), Jesus completely inverted their understanding of leadership. His disciples were still thinking in terms of hierarchy and dominance, expecting that power in God's Empire would function like it did in earthly kingdoms. But Jesus redefined greatness as humility, dependence on God, and self-giving service. This lesson was crucial as they neared Jerusalem, where their ideas of power would be fully tested. To follow Jesus was not to climb the ranks of an elite movement, but to descend into servanthood, sacrifice, and suffering—as he would demonstrate.

3. Why did Jesus link children to the most powerful angels in heaven? In Matthew 18:10, Jesus makes an extraordinary claim: "See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven." At first glance, this may seem like a simple reassurance that children are under divine care. But in the context of ancient Jewish tradition, Jesus is saying something far more radical. The phrase "their angels" suggests not just any heavenly beings, but the most exalted angelic figures—the Angels of the Face—who, in Jewish thought, stood in the immediate presence of God. These were not ordinary messengers or warrior angels but the highest-ranking beings in heaven, and the only beings in the entire heavenly world powerful enough to withstand being in God's immediate presence without being destroyed. By saying that these are the angels assigned to watch over children, Jesus was making a staggering point: in the divine order, the weakest and most vulnerable in human society are attended by the highest-ranking celestial beings. This statement also carried an implicit warning: to harm or disregard a child is to oppose the very will of God, for they are under the care of his closest angelic servants. In Jesus' Empire, power belonged to those whom the world considered powerless. The protection of the weak was not optional—it was woven into the very fabric of the divine order.