

## THE LOCATION

Welcome to Mount Carmel! To be precise, there is no single “mountain,” but rather the Carmel range, and any point on the range can be called “Mt. Carmel.” The range itself begins at Haifa (north of Caesarea) on the Mediterranean and cuts across the land of Israel in a diagonal line from northwest to southeast. Though the range is longer, the northwestern 13 miles is Mt. Carmel. To the north of the range is the Jezreel valley, and the northern hill country is to the south.

The so-called “horn of Carmel” is the highest point on the range and is approximately 1,600 feet above sea level. This point, overlooking the Jezreel valley, has been a traditional spot for the “showdown” between Elijah and the 450 prophets of Baal for many centuries. The exact location of the Biblical even is unknown, except that it was on the Carmel range.

The word *Carmel* comes into English from the Hebrew *karem-el*, meaning, “the vineyard of God.”



## BIBLICAL SIGNIFICANCE

From the days of conquest under Joshua through the days of return under Nehemiah, Carmel is mentioned 22 times in the Hebrew Scriptures. Both King Saul and King David had encounters on Carmel, and it is mentioned in Isaiah and Amos. The Song of Solomon praises the bride for having a head like Carmel (Song of Solomon 7:5).

The most famous event on Mt. Carmel is known throughout the world, and found in 1 Kings 18:19-40, in which Elijah confronted the false prophets and summoned fire from heaven. The event was so dramatic that **when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The LORD, he is the God; the LORD, he is the God** (1 Kings 18:39). At the conclusion of the episode (often left out of the “fire on the altar” sermons), **Elijah brought them [the false prophets] down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there** (1 Kings 18:40).

The Kishon Brook (Kishon River) begins on the Mt. Gilboa range southeast of Carmel and travels northeast along the entire base of the Carmel range before emptying into the Mediterranean Sea. The river flows year-round. It is at the Kishon that Sisera encamped during the days of Deborah. Celebrating the defeat of Sisera, Deborah’s song celebrates the defeat at Kishon, saying, **The river of Kishon swept them away, that ancient river, the river Kishon** (Jdgs 5:21).

## AMAZING THINGS TO SEE

There is a small Catholic church, a portion of a monastery, at the top of the mountain. At the entrance you will see a statue of Elijah slaying these prophets of Baal. This statue was erected post 1948. An earlier version was destroyed by Muslim forces in the Battle for Independence of 1948.

From the rooftop of the monastery there is one of the greatest places in Israel to get a spectacular view of the Jezreel valley. This valley has an important place throughout history. From the Judges through the days of

the monarchy and into the time of the divided Kingdom through to the time of Jesus, the Jezreel valley is location of scores of Biblical events. On a clear day you can see to Nazareth on the mountains across the valley. And if the weather is perfect, you can see all the way to Mt. Hermon, at the northernmost point of Israel.

For those who are up for adventure, there is a mountain trail that walks along the mountain to the edge, with magnificent vistas. Look for the sign that says, "Way To The View." Here you will see the beautiful vegetation of the mountain and notice the unique volcanic stones that cover the mountain. Was it one of these stones that was used in Elijah's altar?

## MATTERS OF HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Just a few miles to the northeast of Carmel was the site of Napoleon's 1799 attempted siege of Acre, where he ultimately suffered defeat at the hands of the Ottoman Turks, leading to the abandonment of his efforts to conquer the eastern world.

In September of 1918 British General Edmund Allenby defeated the Ottoman Turks in the Valley of Jezreel, below Carmel. The Ottomans had reigned over "Palestine" (the name given the land by the Romans in A.D. 135) since 1417.

Mark Twain wrote about the Jezreel Valley in *Innocents Abroad* (1867). This book is controversial in the Arab Israeli conflict because it challenges the narrative that the Jews took the land from the Arabs, who had (according to the narrative) lived there for centuries. Twain wrote, "*There is not a solitary village throughout its whole extent [valley of Jezreel] — not for 30 miles in either direction... One may ride ten miles hereabouts and not see ten human beings. ... For the sort of solitude to make one dreary, come to Galilee ... Nazareth is forlorn ... Jericho lies a moldering ruin ... Bethlehem and Bethany, in their poverty and humiliation... untenanted by any living creature... A desolate country whose soil is rich enough, but is given over wholly to weeds ... a silent, mournful expanse ... a desolation ... We never saw a human being on the whole route ... Hardly a tree or shrub anywhere.*"<sup>1</sup>

## MODERN SIGNIFICANCE OF MT. CARMEL

There are three aspects of Carmel that are unique to the modern visitor.

First, on Carmel there are several *Druze* villages. The Druze are followers of a 1,000 year old religion claiming to be of the lineage of Jethro, father-in-law of Moses. Their religion is highly secretive. The Druze people are full Israeli citizens, loyal to the Israeli government, and known for their hospitality.

The *Carmelite Order* of monks and nuns is an order of mystical, hermit-lifestyle monks and nuns, founded in the Crusader era, in the Carmel region. Famous Carmelite's are mystics Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, both 16th Century Carmelites.

Finally, the *Jewish National Fund* planted millions of trees on the Carmel range during the early days of modern Zionism (1898-1948). The Carmel range has many forests of trees donated by Zionists from around the world to help bring the land back to life.

---

<sup>1</sup> Center for Judaic Studies Online. <https://cojs.org/excerpt-from-the-innocents-abroad-mark-twain-1867/> (accessed April 1, 2023).