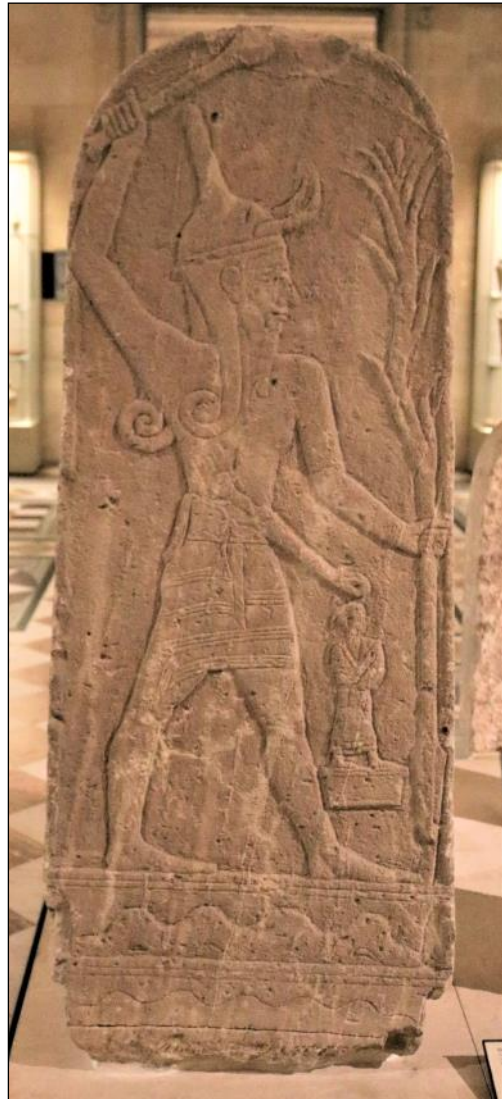


MOUNT CARMEL & HAIFA

Mount Carmel. The Baal Stela, as well as the Ugaritic texts, found at Ras-Shamra (ancient Ugarit) in Syria have informed us about the worship of a Canaanite deity known as Baal-Hadad. This god was believed to control the rains/storms and thus the fertility of the land. His voice was considered to be thunder, and his weapons were lightning bolts. The Baal Stela portrays this deity with a club in his right hand and a spear in his left hand. The spear is branched at the top, which represents either lightning or a stylized tree. Below his dagger is a lesser deity or king. There were local manifestations of Baal that were worshiped throughout Canaan; the designation often serves as a prefix to place names (Baal-_____).

Many Old Testament texts have the worship of Baal as their background, and the story of Elijah on Mount Carmel is one of these. Through the influence of the wicked queen Jezebel—who had been a Sidonian (Phoenician) princess—the Israelites became deeply entrenched in the Baal cult. There were 450 prophets of Baal, and 400 prophets of his female counterpart, Asherah. Elijah prayed that it would not rain (1 Kings 17:1; Jas. 5:17) in order to prove that Yahweh—not Baal—was the true God of the storm. After three years had passed, Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to a contest involving the lighting of sacrifices on Mount Carmel. However, Baal did not respond with fire (a lightning bolt) from heaven, even though his prophets mutilated themselves (1 Kings 18:24, 28, 29). Yahweh did respond to Elijah; his fire sent from heaven consumed the sacrifice, the wood, and the water in the trench (1 Kings 18:36-38). Then he sent an abundant rain, breaking the three-year drought (1 Kings 18:45).

Ugaritic literature emphasized the power of Baal's voice, but at Mount Carmel, there was no voice (*qol*; 1 Kings 18:26). Elijah taunted the false prophets to cry in a louder voice (*qol*; 1 Kings 18:27-28). In contrast, God later revealed himself to Elijah through a quiet voice (1 Kings 19:13).



Baal Stela (Louvre, Paris)

Mount Carmel can refer to a range that begins near the Mediterranean (above the modern city of Haifa) and extends to the southeast for twenty-four miles. It is referred to several times in the Old Testament (1 Sam. 15:12; 2 Kings 2:25; 4:25; Song 7:5; Is. 33:9; 35:2; Jer. 46:18; 50:19; Amos 1:2; 9:3; Nah. 1:4). Mount Carmel proper refers to the area on the northwestern end of the range, which is the traditional site of Elijah's confrontation with the prophets of Baal. This site matches the biblical data: A spring can be found below, the Kishon River is at its base, and the Mediterranean Sea is visible from there (1 Kings 18:33-35, 40, 43). A church building and monastery were built at this location in the nineteenth century A.D. to commemorate the site. The Catholic religious order that was established there is known as the Discalced Carmelites. (Discalced means "unshoed" or "barefoot.") Located at the base of Mount Carmel is the "Cave of Elijah" where some believe that Elijah lived and taught. Another traditional cave on the mountain is also associated with the prophet.



Statue of Elijah
Slaying a Prophet of Baal



Elijah's Hairy Mantle
And Leather Belt Are Seen in These Photos
(2 Kings 1:8; see Heb. 11:37)



Muhraqa (The Sacrifice) Sanctuary and Monastery (with Observation Deck)
(Disalced Carmelite Order)

The world of Baal worship seems very distant from us today. The thought of bowing down before an idol, offering animal sacrifices and burning incense at high places, or participating in cult prostitution in order to stimulate the fertility of the land seems quite ridiculous to most modern people. However, our culture is often guilty of the same misconceptions that the Baal worshippers had. Consider two of these:

(1) Some think that they can manipulate God through participating in some ritual. If they do x, y, and z, then God will give them whatever they want. We must not forget that God is the Creator and we are his creation. He is the Potter, and we are his clay. While we can seek blessings in prayer, he can always say no. We are to seek his will in our lives and not our own.

(2) Some think that they can limit God's role to some particular area of their lives. The Baal worshippers honored a god of the storm and fertility. However, their deity was not too concerned about their moral conduct. Some today want to worship a god like that—who will bless them but is permissive when it comes to their moral character. They can sit in church and sing praises on Sunday, but live however they want the rest of the week. However, the God of the Bible requires that we love him with our whole being all of the time.

Views from Mount Carmel



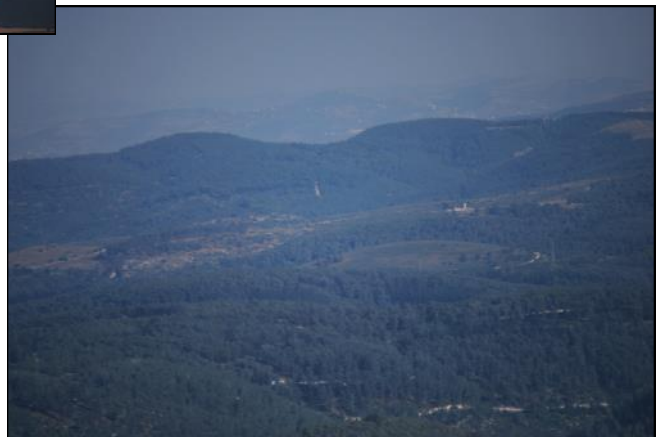
Jezreel Valley and Nazareth in the Distance
(Hometown of Jesus; Lk. 4)



Jezreel Valley and Mount Tabor
(Barak Led Israel Against Canaanites; Judg. 4)



Jezreel Valley and Hill of Moreh
(Gideon & 300 Men Fight Midianites; Judg. 7)

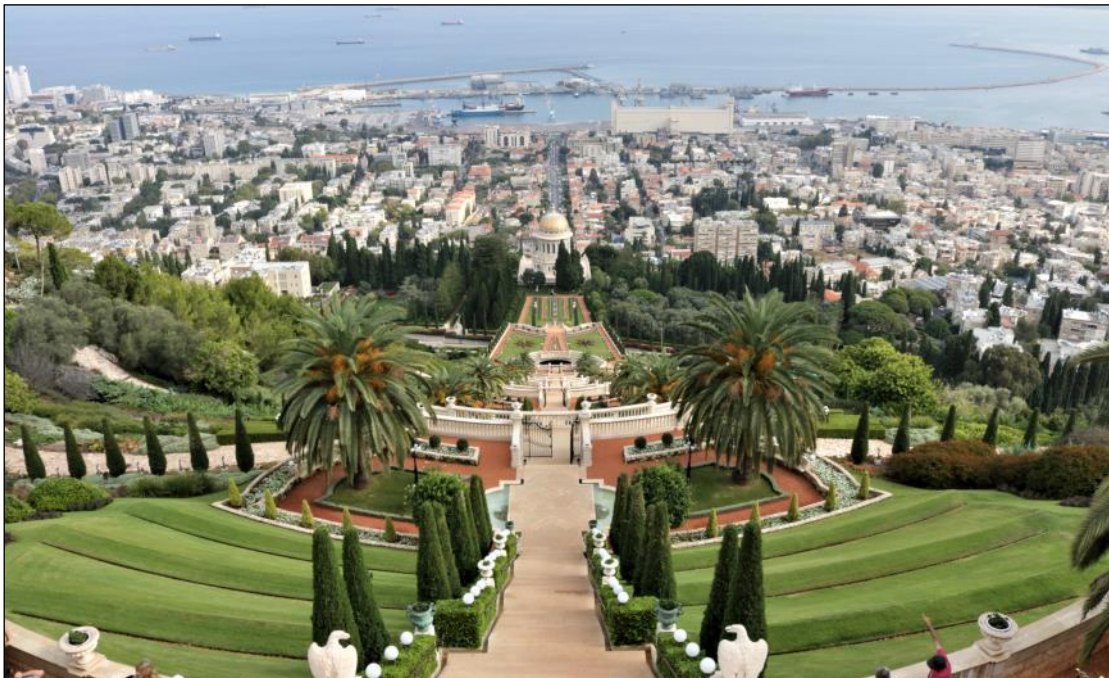


Mount Gilboa
(Site of Saul's Death; 1 Sam. 31)

Haifa. Located nearly 60 miles north of Tel Aviv, Haifa is a city on the Mediterranean coast. This port was settled as early as fourteenth century B.C., being variously known as Tel es-Samak, Efa, Hefa, Hepha, and Caipha(s). It was a dye-making center from about the third century B.C., using the expensive snail shells from the sea. Like Joppa, the city was controlled by several different entities over the history of its existence: Phoenicians, Persians, Hasmoneans, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Crusaders, Ottomans, British, and Israelis.

Haifa is located on the northern slopes of Mount Carmel. The first tier of the city is the lower port. The second tier, or middle part of the city, is comprised of the older neighborhoods. The third tier, or upper city, is made up of newer residences. As of 2022, Haifa has a population of about 285,000. The wider Haifa Metropolitan Area numbers 1,064,000. Haifa is the third largest city in Israel (behind Jerusalem and Tel Aviv) and the largest city in northern Israel. In comparison with other cities, Haifa is known for its industry, which includes refining petroleum. It has been said, "Tel Aviv plays while Jerusalem prays. But Haifa works!"

Haifa is a city known for its diversity. After Israel declared independence in 1948, Haifa became the gateway for Jews immigrating from Europe and the Soviet Union. In addition to its large number of Jews, the city is home to many Arabs, both Christians and Muslims. Surprisingly, Haifa has the second most important shrine of the Baha'i faith. This religion, which began in Persia in the mid-nineteenth century A.D., believes in the unity of all religions. They contend that Moses, Jesus, and Mohammed all addressed their various times. The remains of their prophet, the Bab, were buried in a mausoleum on the slopes of Mount Carmel in 1909. Later, a modern shrine was built over it and beautiful gardens were added.



Many museums of interest are located in Haifa today. Among these are the Hecht Museum (which tells the history of Israel), the National Maritime Museum (which provides models of sailing vessels throughout time), and the Dagon Museum (which gives the history of grain cultivation, storage, and distribution).