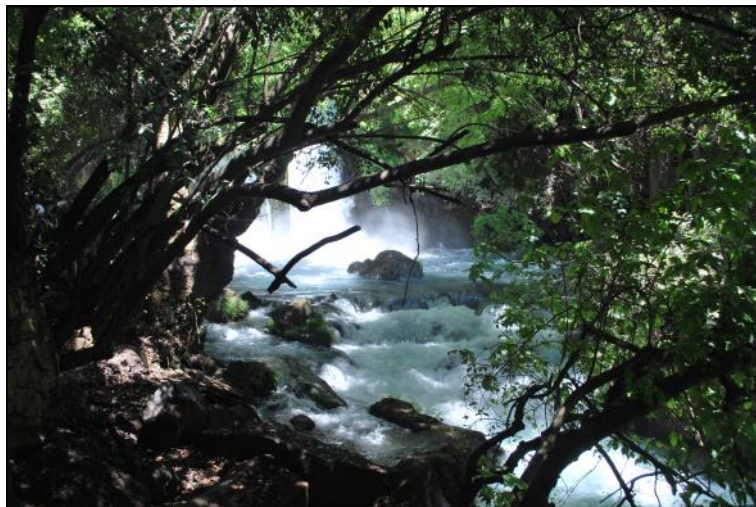


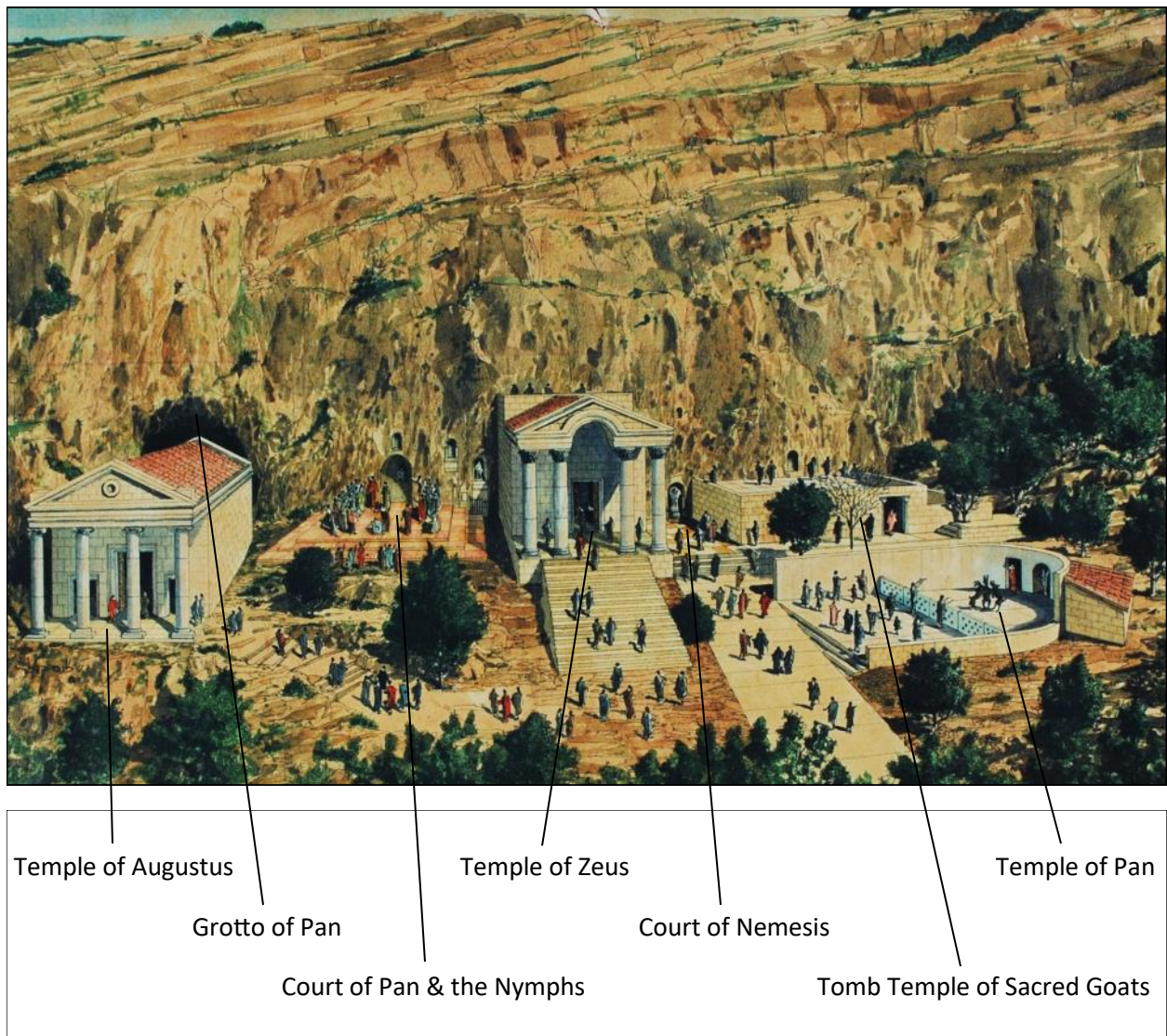
CAESAREA PHILIPPI

Banias. The site of Banias is located about twenty-five miles north of the Sea of Galilee. It was built at the foot of Mount of Hermon, by a spring (one of the sources of the Jordan River) and near the ancient city of Dan. The site is not far from the modern borders of Lebanon and Syria. One can find a beautiful waterfall in the vicinity today.



“Banias” is a corruption of the name “Panias” or “Panion” (“sanctuary of Pan”) into Arabic. The city received its name from the grotto dedicated to the Greek god Pan, which was located there. The spring at Banias comes from a large cave which used to be the center of worship and sacrifice to this pagan god. These rituals can be traced back to the third century B.C., resulting from the Hellenistic influence of Alexander the Great and the subsequent Seleucid Empire that controlled Syria to the north.

According to Greek mythology, Pan was half man and half goat. He was believed to be the god of shepherds, forests, and fertility. His name came from the Greek word *paein*, meaning “to pasture.” He was also considered the god of fright; it was believed that he would sneak up and scare people. This background explains the English word “panic.” He is portrayed as playing the flute (pipes). The cave in the cliffs at Banias was considered by some to be the birthplace of Pan.





Hermon River Springs



Cliffs and Cave (Grotto of Pan)



Cliffs on Either Side of the Cave



Cave (Grotto of Pan)



Niches Behind Court of Pan

Next to the cave (grotto of Pan) was the court of Pan (an open-air shrine), with niches carved out the cliffs. Above the huge niche and below the first small niche is a Greek inscription which reads, "The priest Victor, son of Lysimachos, dedicated this goddess to the god Pan, lover of Echo." Another inscription appears next to the second small niche which says, "For Pan and the Nymphs, Victor son of Lysimachos with his children dedicated a likeness in stone of Hermes, child of Maia, son of Zeus, having vowed it; the year 150." This dates the inscription to the second century B.C. (Murphy-O'Connor, 205-6.)

In 20 B.C., Augustus gave the city to Herod the Great. In response, Herod built a temple of white marble in front of the cave (grotto of Pan) to honor Augustus (Josephus *Wars* 1.21.3; *Antiquities* 15.10.3). After Herod died in 4 B.C., this city was passed on to Herod's son Philip.

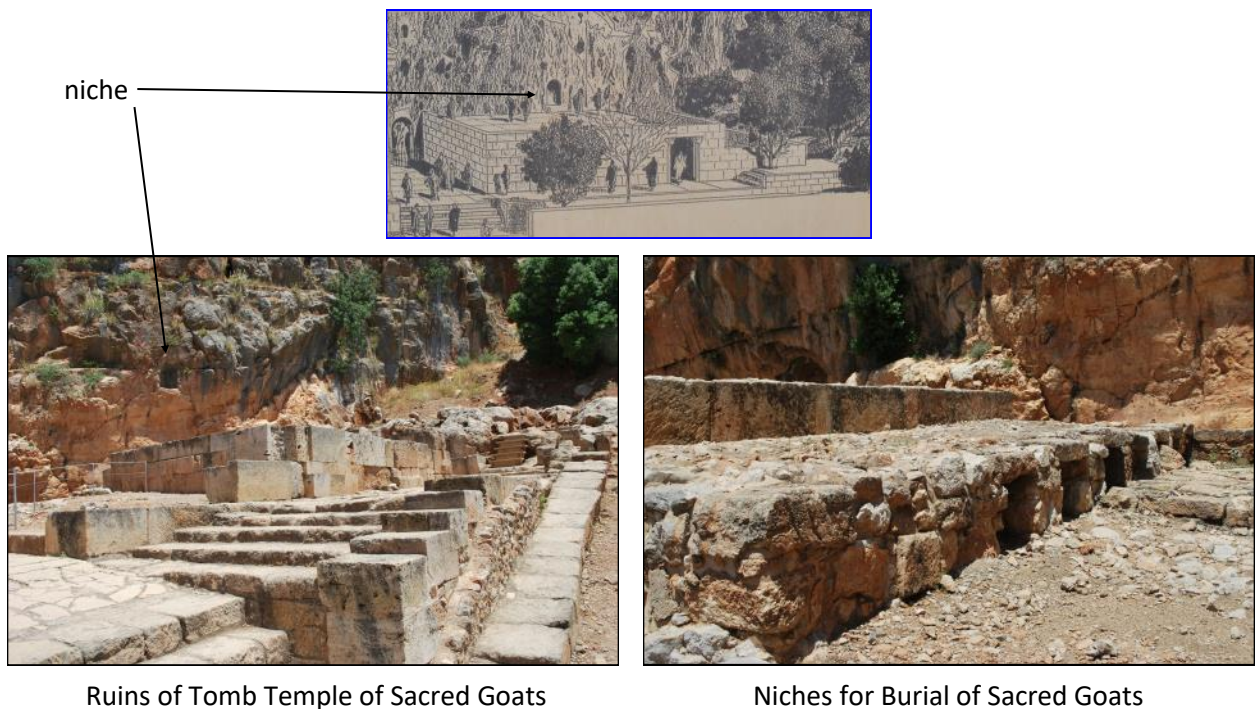


Close-up of Niches Behind Court of Pan (Where Idols Once Sat)

Other remains connected to the Pan shrine include a temple that was built in honor of the god Zeus, a court of the goddess Nemesis, and a tomb temple of sacred goats.



The Tomb Temple of Sacred Goats was built around A.D. 220, during the time of Emperor Elagabalus. The bones of goats used in the rituals were buried in the rectangular niches of the main hall. Other items that were buried there include glass vessels, pottery, and coins. The rituals were carried out on the roof of the temple, before the rock carved niche.



Caesarea Philippi. After coming to power, Philip built up Panias. This son of Herod the Great ruled Gaulanitis, Iturea, Trachonitis, and Auranitis (4 B.C.—A.D. 34). He called Panias Caesarea after Augustus Caesar (Josephus *Antiquities* 18.2.1; Wars 2.9.1) and Philippi after himself. This latter name distinguished it from Caesarea Maritima. Caesarea Philippi became the capital of Philip’s kingdom. Later on, Agrippa II (A.D. 52-100) developed the city and named it “Neronias,” but that name did not take (Josephus *Antiquities* 20.9.4).

Caesarea Philippi is only mentioned in the story of the good confession made by Peter (Mt. 16:13; Mk. 8:27). Between his ministry in Galilee and his ministry in Judea, Jesus took his disciples to this area in the north. It was a time of retreat and reflection before his death in Jerusalem. Likely, the transfiguration took place nearby on Mount Hermon—a high mountain (Mt. 17:1; Mk. 9:2).

When Jesus was in the area of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say I am?” After the disciples gave various answers (“John the Baptist,” “Elijah,” “one of the prophets”), he made the question more personal: “But what about *you*?” “Who do *you* say I am?” Then we read one of the most important statements made in the whole Bible. Peter confessed, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Mt. 16:16). This apostle recognized Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah, the Son of the one true God who is alive. Perhaps the phrase “living God” was intended as a sharp contrast to the pagan gods like Pan who were worshiped in the area.

Jesus responded by saying, “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” (Mt. 16:18). If Jesus and the apostles were near the cliffs associated with Pan, perhaps the rugged, red rock was suggestive of the imagery. Since the name “Peter” (*Petros*) means “rock,” Jesus was making a play on words. What did the Lord mean by the statement “on this rock I will build my church”? (1) It may be that “this rock” referred to Peter’s pivotal role in the establishment of the church, which began with his preaching on Pentecost in Acts 2. (Nothing in the passage, however, suggests that he was the first “pope” or that the New Testament teaches “apostolic succession”—contrary to Catholic theology.) (2) Another possibility is that “this rock” refers to the good confession. The church is established on trust in Jesus as the Son of God; the good confession is made prior to one’s baptism into Christ and his church (Acts 8:37; Rom. 10:9-10).

It is interesting that Jesus took his disciples to this area that honored Caesar, who ruled over a physical kingdom, the Roman Empire. The pagans worshiped the emperor at the temple in front of the cave (grotto of Pan). Jesus said he would build his own kingdom, the church (Mt. 16:18-19). The gates of Hades, no doubt pointing to his own death on the cross and burial in the tomb, would not prevent the establishment of this kingdom. Perhaps the cave (grotto of Pan), which was thought to lead to the Hadean world, was suggestive of this imagery.

Some distance from the Pan shrine are the ruins of the palace of Agrippa II, who reigned during the second half of the first century A.D.

