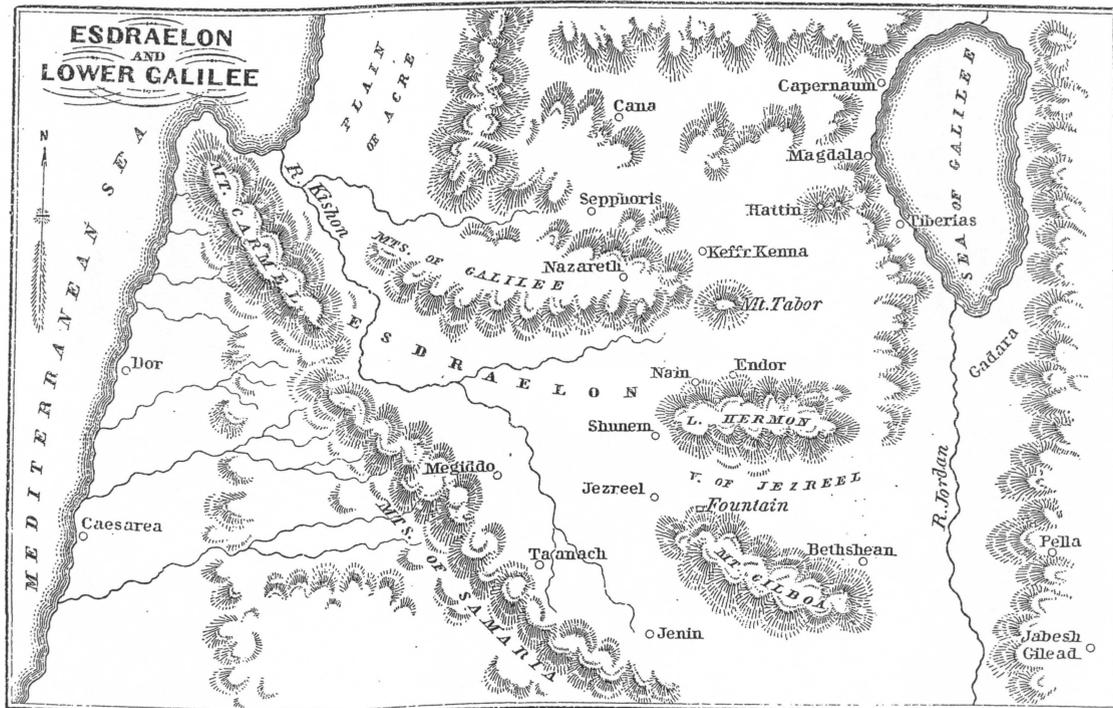


Mt. Carmel - Elijah's Victory Over 800 Theologians



Mt. Carmel – Elijah's Victory Over 800 Theologians

1A. The Introductory Description of Mt. Carmel:

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia has a very helpful and brief description of Mt. Carmel:

A beautifully wooded mountain range running for about 13 miles in a south-easterly direction from the promontory which drops on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea near Haifa, at the southern extremity of the plain of Acre, to the height of *el-Mahrakah* which overlooks the plain of Esdraelon. On the top of the promontory, at a height of 500 ft. the monastery of St. Elias stands. From this point there is a gradual ascent until the greatest height is reached at *Esfiyeh* (1,742 ft.), the peak at *el-Mahrakah* being only some 55 ft. lower. The mountain—usually named with the art., “the Carmel”—still justifies its name, “the garden with fruit trees.” The steep slopes on the N. and E., indeed, afford little scope for cultivation, although trees and brushwood grow abundantly. But to the S. and W. the mountain falls away to the sea and the plain in a series of long, fertile valleys, where the “excellency” of Carmel finds full illustration today. There are a few springs of good water; but the main supply is furnished by the winter rains, which are caught and stored in great cisterns. The villages on the slopes have a look of prosperity not too often seen in Syria, the rich soil amply rewarding the toil of the husbandmen. Oak and pine, myrtle and honeysuckle, box and laurel flourish; the sheen of fruitful olives fills many a hollow; and in the time of flowers Carmel is beautiful in a garment of many colors. Evidences of the ancient husbandry which made it famous are found in the cisterns, and the oil and wine presses cut in the surface of the rock.

Orr, James, General Ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960, I, 579.

2A. The Biblical Witness to Mt. Carmel:

1b. Vine culture:

2 Chron 26:10

Also he built towers in the desert. He dug many wells, for he had much livestock, both in the lowlands and in the plains; he also had farmers and vinedressers in the mountains and in **Carmel**, for he loved the soil.

2b. Symbol of beauty:

Song of Solomon 7:5

Your head crowns you like **Mount Carmel**,
And the hair of your head is like purple;
A king is held captive by your tresses.

Micah 7:14

Shepherd Your people with Your staff,
The flock of Your heritage,
Who dwell solitarily in a woodland,
In the midst of **Carmel**;
Let them feed in Bashan and Gilead,

As in days of old.
 Is. 35:2
 It shall blossom abundantly and rejoice,
 Even with joy and singing.
 The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,
 The excellence of **Carmel** and Sharon.
 They shall see the glory of the Lord,
 The excellency of our God.

3b. Symbol of majesty:

Jer. 46:18
 "As I live," says the King,
 Whose name is the Lord of hosts,
 "Surely as Tabor is among the mountains
 And as **Carmel** by the sea, so he shall come.

4b. Symbol of a happy and prosperous life:

Jer. 50:19
 But I will bring back Israel to his home,
 And he shall feed on **Carmel** and Bashan;
 His soul shall be satisfied on Mount Ephraim and Gilead.

5b. The languishing of Carmel speaks of God's vengeance upon the land:

Nah. 1:4
 He rebukes the sea and makes it dry,
 And dries up all the rivers.
 Bashan and **Carmel** wither,
 And the flower of Lebanon wilts.

6b. The decay of Carmel implies utter destruction:

Amos 1:2
 And he said:
 "The Lord roars from Zion,
 And utters His voice from Jerusalem;
 The pastures of the shepherds mourn,
 And the top of **Carmel** withers."

Is. 33:9
 The earth mourns and languishes,
 Lebanon is shamed and shriveled;
 Sharon is like a wilderness,
 And Bashan and **Carmel** shake off their fruits.

3A. The Topographical Importance of Mt. Carmel:

Here, too, ISBE has a helpful summary of the topography and geography of Carmel:

Roughly triangular in form, with plains stretching from its base on each of the three sides, the mountain, with its majestic form and massive bulk, is visible from afar. Its

position deprived it of any great value for military purposes. It commanded none of the great highways followed by armies: the passes between Esdraelon and Sharon, to the E. of Carmel, furnishing the most convenient paths. But the mountain beckoned the fugitive from afar, and in all ages has offered asylum to the hunted in its caves and wooded glens. Also its remote heights with their spacious outlook over land and sea; its sheltered nooks and embowering groves have been scenes of worship from old time. Here stood an ancient altar of Jeh (1 K 18:30). We may assume that there was also a sanctuary of Baal, since the worshippers of these deities chose the place as common ground for the great trial (1 K 18). The scene is traditionally located at *el-Mahrakah*, "the place of burnt sacrifice," which is still held sacred by the Druzes. A Lat chapel stands near, with a great cistern. A good spring is found lower down the slope. Just below, on the N. bank of the Kishon stands the mound called *Tell el-kissis*, "mound of the priest." From the crest of Carmel Elijah descried the coming storm, and, descending the mountain, ran before the chariot of Ahab to the gate of Jezreel (1 K 18:42 ff). Under the monastery on the western promontory is a cave, said to be that of Elijah. An older tradition locates the cave of the prophet at *al-Deir*, near *Ain es-Sih*. It may have been the scene of the events narrated in 2 K 1:9ff. Elisha also was a familiar visitor to Mt. Carmel.

(Adapted from the *ISBE*, I, 579, with points of the outline added by this writer.)

4A. The Traditional Place of Sacrifice:

Frank DeHass sets the stage for the contest between Elijah and the priests of Baal:

Mukhrakah, the place of burning, and traditional site of Elijah's sacrifice, is a truncated cone not over one hundred yards in diameter on the top, at the extreme south-eastern point of the Carmel range. It was probably at one time covered with a forest of oaks, as the trunks of several large trees are still standing; and it is just such an eminence as the followers of Baal would select for their worship. Some old foundations, a large open cistern, with many dressed stones lying round, would indicate that some kind of a temple had once crowned its crest. On the summit, where the Tishbite's altar is supposed to have stood, the native rock crops out, forming a natural platform which can be seen from almost every point on the mountain and terrace below. The locality, the name, and all the surroundings, favor the supposition that this is the identical spot where it was demonstrated by fire from heaven that there was still a God in Israel.

Buried Cities Recovered, or Explorations in Bible Lands, Philadelphia: Bradley, Garretson & Co., 1883, 247.

5A. The Unparalleled View from Mt. Carmel:

Every pilgrim to the top of Mt. Carmel revels in the incredible view. On a clear day, one can easily see Mt. Hermon almost 100 miles to the northeast; this writer has seen Israel's highest mountain from Mt. Carmel on many occasions. DeHass describes the vista in a very pleasing manner:

The view from this point is very grand. On the west and south all the plain of Sharon, and the sea-coast for fifty miles, can be seen; to the north the verdant mountains of Galilee, with Great Hermon in the distance, head and shoulders above his fellows, radiant in midsummer with the snows of winter. Eastward the view is unsurpassed; at your feet flows the Kishon, where the priests of Baal were slaughtered, and beyond it the

great plain of Esdraelon, not only the battle-field, but the granary of Palestine, yellow with its rich harvest ripe for the sickle. Tabor rises up beautifully directly in front of you, with the Jordan valley and mountains of the Hauran in the background. Next comes Little Hermon on the right, with the villages of Nain and Endor on her slopes, and Shunem at her base. One can almost fancy he sees the prophet's room upon the wall, and the Shunammite riding across the plain in the heat of the day, to tell Elisha of her son's sudden death. Then comes Gilboa, Mount Gilboa, where Saul and his three sons fell in the battle, and the shield of the mighty was cast away. On a low spur of the mountain jutting out into the plain are the ruins of Jezreel. This is the site of Naboth's vineyard. Here Ahab built his ivory palace, and three successive kings of Israel reigned. Here, also, Joram was pierced to the heart by Jehu, and the profligate Jezebel trodden under foot and thrown to the dogs. (*Ibid.*, 247-248).

6A. The Suitability of Mt. Carmel for the Contest:

The 450 prophets of Baal, and the 400 prophets of the groves (the pillars which represented Jezebel's goddess, Venus). All these would be clothed in their priestly "white robes and peaked turbans, and all the bravery of their sacrificial vestments."

Over against these stood (in the words of Geikie) "the solitary prophet of Jehovah, his rough sheepskin mantle over his shoulders, his simple linen tunic held together by a strap of hide, and his long hair hanging down his back or blown by the mountain breeze."

MT. CARMEL was the best place in all Israel for Elijah's purpose. Prof. George Adam Smith in his *Historical Geography of the Holy Land* speaks of its visibleness from all quarters of the country, — from Jaffa, from Tyre, from Mt. Hermon, from the hills of Naphtali, and even from the hills behind Gadara and Gilead, east of the Jordan. "In its separation from other hills, in its uselessness for war or traffic, in its profusion of flowers, its high platforms and groves with their glorious prospect of land and sea, Carmel must have been a place of retreat and of worship from the earliest times. Here the awful debate, whether Jehovah or Baal was supreme lord of the elements, was fought out for a full day in face of one of the most sublime prospects of earth and sea and heaven. It was a pulpit from which Elijah could preach to all Israel.

It must have taken some days to gather the people together on Carmel, with the 850 prophets of Baal from Samaria.

"On Carmel's crown now swarms a countless throng,
With one brave soul to stand for God 'gainst millions in the wrong." — *Geo. L. Taylor*.

Then early one morning the prophet in his simple garb is seen coming over the brow of the mountain. There is silence throughout the great assembly. Then "with a tongue every word of which was a thunderbolt," Elijah's voice rings out

How long halt ye between two opinions?

F. N. Peloubet and Amos Wells, *Peloubet's Select Notes on the International Lessons for 1915*, Chicago: The Westminster Press, 1915, 266.

Alexander Maclaren says that "the purpose, and the actors in this scene make it the grandest in history. A nation with its king has come together at the bidding of one man to settle no less a question than whom they shall worship" (*Ibid.*, 265).



MOUTH OF THE RIVER KISHON.

Biblia . Wittemberg 1534 . Hans Lufft



7A. The Significance of Carmel in the Ministry of Elijah and Elisha:

Bible students are well familiar with the biblical incident related to this pleasant and prominent mountain range. It is good, however, to rehearse briefly some of the main events relating to the mountain, associated with Elijah and Elisha:

Carmel is chiefly celebrated as the scene of Elijah's sacrifice. The exact spot is marked by local tradition, by the agreement of its physical features with the Scripture narrative, and by its name, *el-Muhrakah*, "The Sacrifice." It is about six hours' ride from the convent, over the crest of the ridge. I visited it from the Plain of Esdraelon, on the opposite or eastern side. It is on the brow of the mountain, and commands the whole plain to Jezreel and Tabor. Close to the base of the range, below the spot flows the river Kishon, where the prophets of Baal was (sic) slain; and just above the spot is a projecting peak, from which Elijah's servant saw the "little cloud, like a man's hand, rising out of the sea," (1 Kings xviii.)

Another episode of Bible history I read with new interest in this place. Elisha was here when the Shunamite's son died. Looking down one afternoon from his commanding position, he saw her "afar off" on the plain. He sent his servant to meet her; but she pressed up the mountain said "to the an of God." Dismounting hastily, she threw herself on the ground before him, "and caught him by the feet"—just as an Arab woman would still do under similar circumstances. Elisha, on hearing her tale of sorrow, sent away Gehazi with his staff to raise the dead child; but she, with all a mother's earnestness, exclaimed, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And he arose and followed her," (2 Kings iv.)

Carmel was the favourite retreat of both Elijah and Elisha. In the stirring times in which they lived, it was a fitting place for the prosecution of the great work of reform for which they laboured and prayed. It was central in position, and easy of access from all parts of Palestine. It afforded in its deep dells and dense thickets sufficient privacy for such as wished to pay secret visits to the men of God; and it offered a secure asylum to all compelled to flee from the persecutions of the idolatrous Ahab, and the cruelties of the infamous Jezebel. The situation of *el-Muhrakah* also struck me as peculiarly suitable for the head-quarters of the prophets. It could only be reached by a long and steep ascent. No man could approach it unseen; and any hostile party would be visible at a great distance. Beside it is a well with an unfailing spring, and upon it are the remains of a massive ancient building. (Porter, J. L. *The Giant Cities of Bashan and Syria's Holy Places*, London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1891, 236-238.)

8A. The Permanent Impact of the Vista Upon Visitors:

The Rev. J. L. Porter has captured what every observant pilgrim to the site (and many others) experiences:

Sitting on that commanding height, on a bright spring evening, I felt persuaded I was upon the scene of Elijah's great sacrifice. Beside and under me were probably the very stones of which God's altar was built, and over which played the heavenly flame. A few paces beneath me was the well from which the water was drawn, that the prophet's servants poured upon the altar. Around me were the thickets from which the wood was cut. Away at the foot of the mountain flowed the Kishon in its deep bed, which on that day ran red with the blood of Jehovah's enemies. There, stretching out before me, was the plain across which Ahab dashed in his chariot; and yonder, on its eastern border, I saw the little villages which mark the sites and still bear the names of Jezreel and

Shunem. Is it strange that when one thus visits the “*holy and historic places of Palestine*,” the grand events of Bible history should appear to be enacted over again, and should become to him living realities?

”Land of fair Palestine, where Jesus trod,
Thy runs and thy relics tell of God:
Thine everlasting hills with awe proclaim
The holy records of Jehovah’s name:
Thy fallen cities, crumbled into dust,
Pronounce the judgment of Jehovah’s just.” (Porter, *Ibid.*, 238.)

9A. The Important Contest on Mt. Carmel:

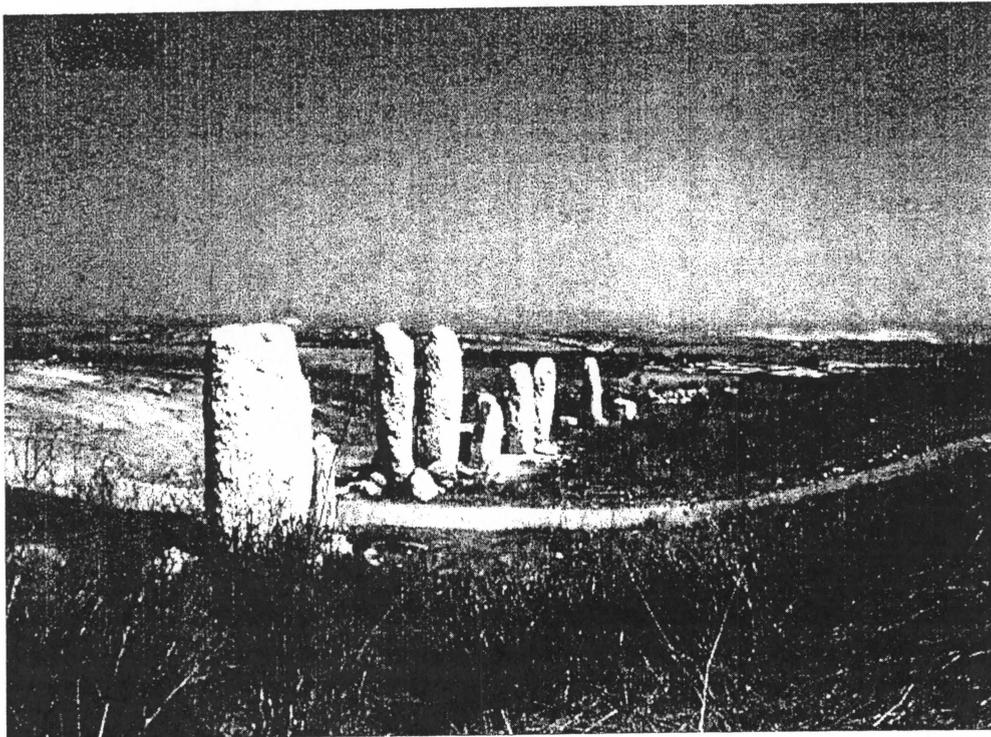
It is difficult to find a better summary of the contest between Elijah and the pagan priests on Mt. Carmel than that given by W. M. Thomsen in his classic volume, *The Land and the Book*. As a missionary for decades in Palestine and Syria, his insight into biblical places and biblical events are unequalled. Those believers unable to travel to Bible lands would be well served by securing Thomson’s work, either the one volume or three volume opus.

Near the close of this dreadful drought the king said to Obadiah, the governor of his house, “Go into the land, unto all the fountains of water, and unto all brooks; peradventure we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts. So Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself.” The latter went westward from Jezreel to the marshy grounds near Carmel, at the bottom of Esdraelon; and there Elijah met him, and said, “Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here.” The good man was terrified at the thought of carrying such a message to the enraged king. “As the Lord thy God liveth,” said he, “there is no nation or kingdom whither my Lord hath not sent to seek thee.” Elijah replied, “As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, I will surely shew myself unto him to-day.” Ahab seems to have been near at hand, for he quickly obeyed the summons; and when he saw Elijah he exclaimed, in anger, “Art thou he that troubleth Israel?” “I have not troubled Israel,” was the reply of the Tishbite; “but thou and thy father’s house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim. Now, therefore, send and gather me all Israel unto Mount Carmel, and the prophets of the groves, four hundred, which eat at Jezebel’s table.” The wicked but weak-minded king sank before the daring servant of God, his more wicked and resolute wife not being by his side. He hastily gathered the people to a remarkable and well-known spot on the eastern end of Carmel, where sacrifice had been offered to Jehovah in ancient times. But never before was there such a meeting as this, never such a momentous question to be discussed, such a mighty controversy to be settled. Elijah came unto all the people and said, “If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.” But the people, conscience-smitten, yet afraid of the king, answered him not a word. Then the prophet, to compel a choice, proposed the test of sacrifice, “and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God.” The irresolute multitude ventured to approve; the king could not resist; the priests dared not refuse. (Thomson, *The Land and the Book*, London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1884, 481.)

At this point it would be well to insert an observation on Elijah’s purpose for saturating the sacrifice and altar with water. William Smith, in his classic *The Student’s Scripture History. The Old Testament History*, hints at the subterfuge of the pagan priests which Elijah endeavored to forestall:

Elijah stood alone: but God was with him. His challenge is all the bolder, considering the juggling tricks with which the heathen priests were familiar, and which the king would be ready to abet. But it is on the side of Elijah that we find precautions taken against such tricks, and taken by his own desire. (Smith, *The Old Testament History*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1872, 522.)

Archeologists speculated that pagan priests used subterfuge in starting fires on altars. At Gezer 10 high stone pillars or *mazevoth* were found and examined. It seems as though secret tunnels led under what appears to be a pagan sanctuary. It is reasonable to suppose that the priests would use the tunnels to move under the altar and sacrifice and from there ignite the wood. The duped idolatrous worshippers would thus be led to believe that their god Baal, the god of fertility and fire, occasioned the conflagration. One can thus understand Elijah's precaution.



Now to continue with Thomson's fine description of the contest on Mt. Carmel:

Quickly the victims are upon the altars, and the priests call upon the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, "O Baal, hear us! But there was no voice, nor any that answered." Then Elijah mocked them: "Cry aloud, for he is a god: either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is on a journey, or *peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awakened.*" The poor priests, goaded to madness by this scorching irony, leaped in frantic despair upon the altar, crying aloud, "O Baal, hear us! and they cut themselves with knives and lancets after their manner, till the blood gushed out upon them." But in vain. "There was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded." Thus they continued until the time of the evening sacrifice. Then Elijah repaired the *altar of Jehovah, which was broken down*, placing twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob. A trench was dug round it, the wood arranged, the sacrifice upon it, and all was ready for the great decision; but, to make the trial doubly convincing, barrel after barrel of water was poured on, until it ran round about the altar and filled the trench. Then comes the solemn invocation: "Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I thy servant have *done all those things at thy word.* Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench." The whole multitude fell on their faces, crying out, "Jehovah, he is the God! Jehovah, he is the God!" And Elijah said to the people, "Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape." They did so, and brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there, near the base of that high Tell Kussis which you see in the mouth of the valley. Then Elijah said to Ahab, "Get thee up, eat and drink, for there is a sound of abundance of rain." Elijah himself returned to the top of Carmel, cast himself upon the ground, put his face between his knees and prayed—prayed earnestly for the rain; but it came not until his servant had gone up to the top and looked out on the Mediterranean seven times. Then the little cloud, as large as a man's hand, was seen to rise out of the sea, and Elijah sent word to the king, "Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not. In the meanwhile the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain." Thus the long drought of three years and a half was brought to a close. But the work of the prophet on this most eventful day was not yet ended. "Ahab rode and went home to Jezreel; and the hand of the Lord was on Elijah; and he girded up his loins and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel." This is the last, most strange, and most unexpected act of this great drama; and perhaps there is no one day's work in the whole history of man more wonderful than this. (Thomson, 481-482. [emphasis in the original])

9A. A Sober Reflection for Believers Today:

A little-known volume on mountains in the Bible by a German pastor poses a sobering question:

If Elijah were to step in front of us, would he not voice the serious lament as then and ask, "How long will you halt between two opinions?" Are not our hearts in many cases divided between God and the world? One wants to be a little religious, but not be completely serious with following the Lord. The procurator was a little religious, of whom we read that not much was lacking for Paul to convince him to become a Christian. But he remained what he was. The rich young ruler was a little religious, who came to Jesus with a question, but then departed because he did not like the answer. It is sad to observe such little-bit religion. The Lord is not satisfied with a little bit of faith. He does

only complete work and wants to have all of us. May the Lord deliver us from our little-bit with His abundant grace. Our God wishes to have our entire heart. (G. W. Ulrich-Kerwer, *Heilige Berge, [Holy Mountains]* Konstanz: Buch-und Kunstverlag von Carl Hirsch, A. G., 1913, 104-105, translated by this writer.)

SPIRITUAL PROGRESS OF A SINFUL PEOPLE



AT THE PRAYER OF ELIJAH, FIRE FROM HEAVEN CONSUMES A SACRIFICE.

I Kings 16:26

For he walked in all the ways of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and in his sin by which he had made Israel sin, provoking the Lord God of Israel to anger with **their idols**.

I Kings 18:21

And Elijah came to all the people, and said, "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD *is* God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." But **the people answered him not a word**.

I Kings 18:24

"Then you call on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD; and the God who answers by fire, He is God."

So all the people answered and said, "**It is well spoken.**"

I Kings 18:39



Now when all the people saw *it*, they fell on their faces; and they said, "**The LORD, He is God! The LORD, He is God!**"

SPIRITUAL PROGRESS OF A SINFUL PEOPLE IN 1. KINGS



AT THE PRAYER OF ELIJAH, FIRE FROM HEAVEN CONSUMES A SACRIFICE.

IDOLATRY 1. Kgs. 16:26

For he walked in all the ways of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and in his sin by which he had made Israel sin, provoking the Lord God of Israel to anger with their idols.

INDIFFERENCE 18:21

And Elijah came to all the people, and said, "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD *is* God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." **But the people answered him not a word.**

INTEREST 1. Kgs. 18:24

"Then you call on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD; and the God who answers by fire, He is God."

So all the people answered and said, "**It is well spoken.**"



INVOCATION 1 Kgs. 18:39

Now when all the people saw *it*, they fell on their faces; and they said, "**The LORD, He *is* God! The LORD, He *is* God!**"

Mt. Carmel – Elijah’s Confrontation with the Pagan Priests – 1 Kings 18:17-40

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7A. Elijah's Charge to the People: 40

- 1b. Arrest the idolatrous prophets:
- 2b. Avoid the escape of a single individual:
- 3b. Accompany them to the Brook Kishon:
- 4b. Assist in the execution of the religious renegades:

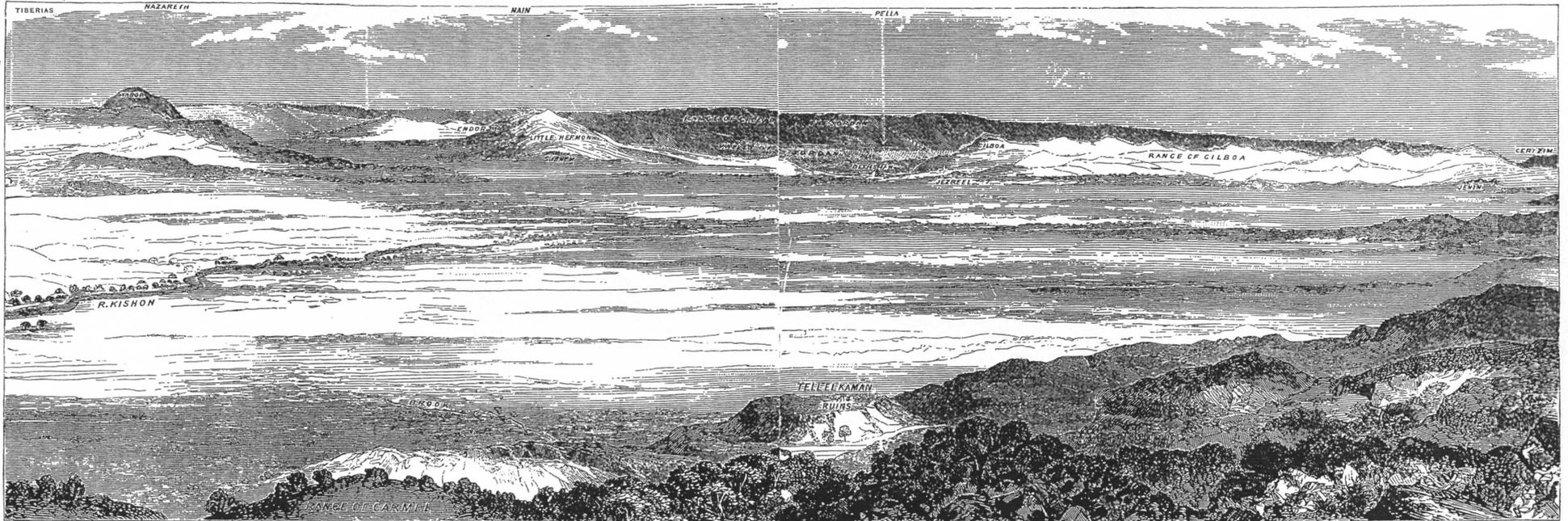
Elias tötet die Baals-Priester.



I. Buch von den Königen. Kap. 18, Vers 36—40.

NABLUS TO THE PLAIN OF ESDRAELON.

SAUL AND THE PLAIN OF ESDRAELON.



SKETCH PLAN OF THE PLAIN OF ESDRAELON AND THE

SURROUNDING DISTRICT FROM EL-MUHRAKAH.

From a Drawing by J. G. Crace, Esq.

Elija Elischa (Elia · Elisa)

