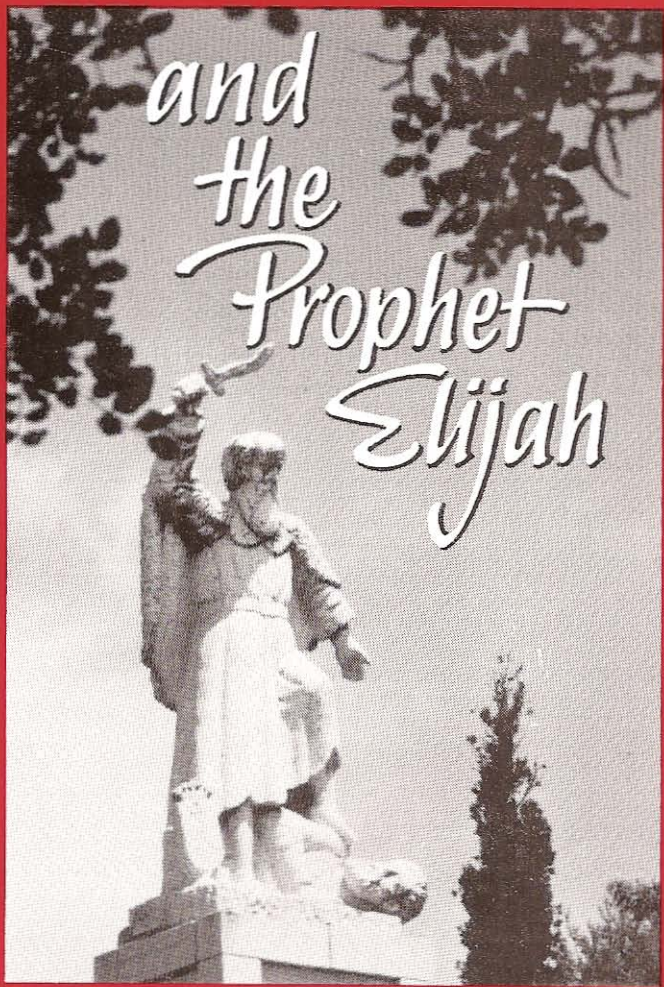


MOUNT CARMEL

*and
the
Prophet
Elijah*



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**MOUNT CARMEL
and the Prophet Elijah**

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The Carmel Range

The Carmel Range extends about 35 km from the Bay of Haifa on the Mediterranean Sea to the southwest, varying in width from 5 to 8 km. It rises to a height of 240 m above sea level. In Hebrew, Carmel is *Karmel* (כרמל), meaning "vineyard of God" or, more generally, "garden land".

Three parts of this mountain range are given special names:

1. *Rosh Ha-Karmel* (Headland of Carmel), also known as *Cape Carmel*. Bordering almost on the Mediterranean Sea, it is the site of the Carmelite monastery *Stella Maris*.
2. *Raan Ha-Karmel* (summit of Carmel), the highest point, near the Greek village of *Ibiza*.
3. *Karmel Ha-Karmel* (spur of Carmel), a high peak in the southeastern apex of the mountain range, where *El-Mishraq*, the place of the sacrifice, lies.

In the Bible this mountain range is mentioned not only in its geographical sense but as a symbol of truthfulness and wisdom: "The desert shall rejoice and blossom: ... The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Shevan" (*Isaiah 41:19*). "Your hand created you like Carmel" (*Job of Soloman 7:24*).

The mountain-crest has great fame, however, to the Prophet *Elijah*, who stayed and ministered there, whereby it became the scene of God's mighty deeds. Locally, it is called *Jebel Har Eliaz* (Mountain of the holy Prophet *Elijah*). Later the Prophet *Isaiah* also stayed on Mount Carmel, which is beset with caves.

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Historical Aspect

On the southeastern slope of Mount Carmel (Khanat Ma' Carmel), in the vicinity of the Druze village of Dalayn al-Karmel, lies the place commemorating the sacrifice of the Prophet Elijah, which was commemorated by fire from heaven. Hence the name El-Muhraqa (place of burning). Not far away, at the foot of the mountain, flows the River Kishon (Qishon), where, after the miraculous episode of fire falling from heaven, judgment was executed upon the priests of Baal (1 Kings 18:40). Rising beside the Kishon, Tell-Qassis (the Hill of the Phoenicians) perpetuates the memory of that occurrence.

In every way the vicinity of El-Muhraqa seems a likely location for the events recorded in 1 Kings 18. How far else along the Carmel Range in accord to the River Kishon possible. Moreover, on the slope of El-Muhraqa an rocky terrace, which is capable of holding a crowd the size depicted in the Bible narrative. The presence of an ancient fountain, *Beit al-Muhraqa*, on the edge of the terrace serves as a further confirmation that the site is of God's holy place in this area. The jar of water Elijah ordered to be poured over his altar could have been drawn from the spring.

A long Jewish tradition is attached to El-Muhraqa, associating it with Elijah. A circular monument of twelve stones, said to be the altar of Elijah, could be seen there, according to Benjamin of Tudela, writing in the twelfth century. In the following centuries rabbis and various other pilgrims attested to the existence of the monument, which apparently disappeared in the latter half of the sixteenth century.

At El-Muhraqa there is now a Carmelite chapel, opened in 1865. An altar made of twelve stones

from Mount Carmel stands at the centre of the chapel. In the garden in front of the chapel and monastery a statue of Elijah was erected.

Mostly suited for a contemplative life, Mount Carmel has, from an early date, attracted Christian hermits. Between 1206 and 1214 some hermits of Mount Carmel, desiring to lead a communal life, removed through the petition of Prince Binsar their King. This marked the founding of the Carmelite Order, which soon spread throughout Europe. In the following period the monks were repeatedly attacked by the Saracens. Many died a martyr's death for their faith. The name Valley of Martyrs (*Wadi al-Shahid*) has accordingly been attached to the valley at the foot of Mount Carmel, south of Haifa, where the first monastic settlements used to be. In 1291 the monks had to abandon the Holy Land.

After a long interval the Carmelites returned in the sixteenth century (1551) and erected a small monastery some 100 m. away from a cave, where the Prophet Elijah is traditionally said to have lived. In 1567 the monks there were driven away by Dahir al-Umar and the monastery was deserted. This large cave is called "Elijah's School of Prophets" or "Elijah's Cave".

On the present site of the monastery (*Sella Maria*), known and known as the "French Carmel", the Carmelites built in the eighteenth century a large church and monastery over another grotto in which Elijah is said to have lived. During Napoleon's campaign in 1799, this church was severely damaged. In 1821 Abdallah Pasha of Acre ordered the church to be totally destroyed. In 1826 the present monastery and church were opened.

From the Holy Bible

So Ahab sent to all the people of Israel, and gathered the prophets together at Mount Carmel. And Elijah came near to all the people, and said, "How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal then follow him." And the people did not answer him a word.

Then Elijah said to the people, "I, even I only, am left a prophet of the Lord; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men. Let two bullocks be given to us, and let them choose one bull for themselves and cut it in pieces and lay it on the wood, but put no fire to it; and I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood, and put no fire to it. And you call on the name of your god and I will call on the name of the Lord; and the God who answers by fire, he is God." And all the people answered, "I will follow you."

Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first, for you are many, and call on the name of your god, but put no fire to it." And they took the bull which was given them, and they prepared it, and called on the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, "O Baal, answer us!" But there was no voice, and no one answered. . . . And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their custom with swords and knives, until the blood gushes out upon them. And as midday passed, they danced in and the fire of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice no one answered, no one heeded.

Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come near to me"; and all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the Lord that had been thrown down. Elijah took twelve stones, according to the

number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob . . . and with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord. And he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two measures of seed. And he put the wood in order, and cut the bull in pieces and laid it on the wood. And he said, "Fill four jars with water, and pour it on the burnt offering, and on the wood." And he said, "Do it a second time"; and they did it a second time. And he said, "Do it a third time"; and they did it a third time. And the water ran round about the altar, and filled the trench also with water.

And at the time of the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said, "O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that thou, O Lord, art God, and that thou hast turned their hearts back."

Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt offering, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, "The Lord, he is God; the Lord, he is God."

1 Kings 18:20-39

Mount Carmel — A Message for Life

Standing on the vast and rugged crest of Mount Carmel with the spacious skies forming a dome overhead, we have a magnificent view of the Mediterranean Sea on the one side, and a panorama of Israel's countryside stretching far into the distance on the other. In this setting it is not hard to imagine the Prophet Elijah, in his great zeal for the Lord,

running to and fro across the Carmel ridge with a burning torch in his hand and casting flames into the land to stir the spiritually dead to life and set the wickedness aflame.

What was it that made Elijah so strong and fiery that he feared no man, not even Ahab, who sought his life? What made him so fearless that he accused the people to Mount Carmel, though he knew that they could kill him? Not aggression, nor a heroic nature prompted him, but love for God.

Elijah was zealous for the honor of God. He could not bear to stand idly by while his own beloved people did not return God's great love for them. He could not bear to see the people of God fail to honor Him with true faith and obedience. He could not bear to see them being misled to their God and the rule of Ahab, choosing idols to whom they gave their love and allegiance.

Elijah shows us the hallmark of true love for God — a burning zeal that knows no rest until it has also set others aflame with a fervent love for God. This zeal cannot endure if that the One whom we love is not loved. It is blazing fire consuming us to do everything in our power so that God alone will be given the glory. Like and again Elijah roared heathens in his zeal to reawaken a love of God among his chosen people. And God vindicated Elijah. When Elijah, in an impassioned appeal to the people of Israel, called upon the name of the Lord, the Lord answered by letting fire fall down from heaven to consume the truth of the prophet's words: they were denying God the love and honor that were His due.

Thus down through the ages Elijah's piercing question, "How long will you go stumbling with two

different opinions?" has resounded from Mount Carmel, challenging the people of God — whether of the Old Testament or the New. Elijah continues to speak today. Not only did he appear to Jesus on Mount Tabor, but he is present in spirit among us at Mount Carmel and continues us with the question, "Whom do you really serve and honor? God or your idols? You can only serve one master."

This message of long ago is of great importance today, because our human beings tend to doze in complacency and an apathy indifference, especially in spiritual matters. In Elijah's day the people had not completely rejected God; they merely continued to love someone to their idols at the same time. Compacently, they assumed that nothing was amiss in their religious life. The same is true of us today. We can be very religious and yet leave as much room for other things, which in actual fact mean more to us than God. But Elijah proclaims a holy, jealous God who will not tolerate a divided love. No one and nothing else may take His place. In His great love for us God desires our total dedication and love.

Today, as ever long ago, this means taking radical measures against the idols in our lives, casting them out. We can find out what our idols are by looking at our dream world and the desires we have. We can furthermore recognize them by asking, "What would be unbearable for us to lose if God were to take it away from us — be it a person, my job or some pleasure, material possessions or other things of this world?" That is what our hearts are bound to. That is our idol. And whoever loves God will not shrink from losing the death-blow to his idols. Even if it hurts, he "plucks out his eye" (Matthew 18:9). Indeed, whoever loves God will sever false attachments, making a radical

break with all that holds him captive and giving away those things to which he clings.

Perhaps we lack the strength to take such measures. But one path is open to us all. It is called "by faith." The more we sense our weakness, the more we need to call upon the One who can transform our unwillingness into willingness and break our chains — and that is Jesus. Everyone who battles powerfully against his sin is in the power of Jesus' act of redemption will experience release. Jesus will give him the strength to renounce his idols wholeheartedly. Then he will be constrained to give God what is His by right: the first place in his heart, which he previously gave others, and the first claim on his time, money, possessions and everything else that makes life worth living for him.

Today God is waiting for us to make a clean break with our idols and to turn to Him — and Him alone — with all our hearts. He is the holy, loving and loving God, who keeps the our love. But more than that: He is waiting for modern-day Eliphas, who have this fiery spirit of love and are jealous for God and His honor; men who yearn that God, who is despised by so many, will be loved above all else. God is waiting for people who are serious, not in judging others, but in offering their lives as a sacrifice. He is looking for people who are sincere with love for Him and genuine love to others, as Eliphas did long ago. If we do so, God will reward Himself to us, as He did to Eliphas. He will love us in return. He will endorse our service for Him, because we do it out of genuine love for Him, moving others to renounce their idols, to turn wholeheartedly to God, and to give Him their love. To this we have been called.

A Look into Your Heart

What could your idol be?

Anything that you value more than God — even though it may be good in itself — if it takes His place in your life.
Anything that you prefer to God, whom you are called to love above all else.

Your work, your career —
no time for Him.

Your reputation, your status —
no honor for Him.

Your family, wife, husband or child —
God does not have first place in your life.

Your house, your home —
instead of treasure in heaven.

Your vacations, your travels —
instead of time spent with God.

Your health, your appearance.

Every earthly thing that devotes for you the divine gifts received through fellowship with Him.

Everything that is more important to you than the LORD.

Prayer at the Site of Elijah's Sacrifice on Mount Carmel

O Lord, O Holy God,

Indeign in Your love, You have made us for Yourself, so that we might abide in You and love You above all else. Show me the instances when I have sinned against the First Commandment and have made an idol for myself, setting it next to You, the one true God. Shed Your light upon my life and show me the truth, that I may see what my idols are. Show me what my heart is not-attached to, what would be an unreasonable loss for me. Show me the dreams-world I am living in. Show me who or what occupies my thoughts more than You.

Let me tremble before Your holiness and before Your endless wrath, which is kindled against all idols that I tolerate in my life. By idolizing them, I have sinned Your holy commandment. Lord Jesus, I bring You my idols. Using them in Your cross. Help me to break with them through the power of Your redemptive. For You alone will I live. To You alone I give my love.

Amen.

Mount Carmel challenges us:

Be zealous and courageous for God, strive for His Kingdom. With holy zeal take over the smallest sin, that no idol may ever be loved in the inner sanctuary of your heart.

O Fire of God



O fire of God, with ardor / let both-
ful hearts a - rise / Give song of both and
be - come / Full - heart - ed souls to - claim

Awake dead souls, inspire them,
O Holy Land, arise.
With ardor love now for them
To give their lives to You.

Give zeal and fire and ardor,
Your pow'r to enlighten,
Let through our fervent calling,
Your Spirit life create.

O Spirit of Elijah,
Come, purify and purify!
Renew in us the ardor
Our God to glorify!

Mount Carmel
21.3.1998

Lord, Make Us Zealous for Your Name



Lord, make us zealous for Your name, / Our



hearts with adoration and desire, / That You



be loved and honored, / O Son of God de-



serve us now, / Our sin—y hearts with and



sin—desire, / Make us like Jesus—y heart.

O Spirit of God's power and fire,
Who once Elijah did inspire,
Kindle our hearts within us,
In fervent prayer our lives be spent,
That many souls may still expect,
And thus bring Your heart content.

O Holy Spirit, come, we pray,
Set right our hearts for clean away!
O guard us from temptation,
Pour out on us the fire of love,
True faith and courage from above,
To move each mighty mountain.

O Spirit that Elijah filled,
Take captive hearts and mind and will,
Let Your love burn within us,
That we, constrained by God's deep grace,
May love not cease, doubt or need
But spend ourselves for His kingdom!

Mount Carmel
17.3.1878

Elijah the prophet came once and said,
"O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,
Is it because I stand that thou art
God to Israel?"

1 Kings 18:26

Isaiah is a living sign to world today
that God lives and
His word is You and I am.

Isaiah of Babylon in the garden of Edom (Isaiah)