

# Happy New Year

- The beginning of a new year is the logical time for decisions and changes.
- “For many people, this is generally a time of year when there is reflection about how their year has gone, and what they’re looking forward to in the coming year,” Jane Ehrman, a behavioral health specialist at the Wellness Institute of Cleveland Clinic, told CBS News. “It’s also a time for people to check in with themselves and see what they can improve on in the coming year.”
- According to data from Google, these are the most popular New Year's resolutions:
  - Get Healthy
  - Get Organized
  - Live Life to the Fullest
  - Learn New Hobbies
  - Spend Less/Save More
  - Travel
  - Read More

# Happy New Year

As 2017 begins...

- What are your goals for the new year?
- What will your priorities be for your career or education?
- What will your family focus on this year?
- Will you establish new year's resolutions?
- What about your spiritual priorities for the new year?

**Today...**

**If the Lord is God, follow Him**

**1 Kings 18**

# Characters in the story - people

- **Ahab** - The son of Omri, whom he succeeded as the seventh king of Israel (ca. 869-850 b.c.). Ahab inherited his father's military virtues and maintained a strong and stable government. He successfully defended his country against the powerful Aramean kingdom of Damascus, which he defeated in several battles. Ahab is the first king of Israel to come into conflict with Assyria. He is also the first whose name is recorded on the Assyrian monuments where we learn that he put two thousand chariots and ten thousand soldiers on the battlefield against Shalmaneser III at Qarqar in 853 b.c. He reigned twenty-three years. Because of his idolatry, lust, and covetousness, Ahab is referred to as pre-eminently the type of a wicked king (2 Kings 8:18; 2 Chron. 22:3).
- **Jezebel** - the daughter of Ethbaal, the king of the Zidonians in Tyre, and the wife of Ahab, the king of Israel (1 Kings 16:31). This was the "first time that a king of Israel had allied himself by marriage with a heathen princess; and the alliance was in this case of a peculiarly disastrous kind. Jezebel has stamped her name on history as the representative of all that is designing, crafty, malicious, revengeful, and cruel. She is the first great instigator of persecution against the saints of God. Guided by no principle, restrained by no fear of either God or man, passionate in her attachment to her heathen worship, she spared no pains to maintain idolatry around her in all its splendor. The idolatry, too, was of the most debased and sensual kind." Her conduct was in many respects very disastrous to the kingdom both of Israel and Judah (21:1–29). A devotee of the Phoenician god Baal and a zealous missionary, she supported some 850 prophets of Baal and Asherah (1 Kings 18:19) and sought to suppress worship of Yahweh (1 Kings 18:4, 13).
- **Obadiah** - An Israelite who was chief in the household of King Ahab (1 Kings 18:3). Amid great spiritual degeneracy he maintained his fidelity to God, and interposed to protect The Lord's prophets, an hundred of whom he hid at great personal risk in a cave (4, 13). Ahab seems to have held Obadiah in great honor, although he had no sympathy with his piety (5, 6, 7). The last notice of him is his bringing back tidings to Ahab that Elijah, whom he had so long sought for, was at hand (9–16). "Go," said Elijah to him, when he met him in the way, "go tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here." (Not the author of the prophetic book in the Old Testament.)
- **Elijah** - An Israelite prophet in the times of kings Ahab and Ahaziah, during the first half of the ninth century b.c. Called the "Tishbite." Elijah's name means "Yahweh is my God." He lived in Gilead east of the Jordan River near a community called Tishbe.

# Characters in the story – pagan gods

- **Baal** - Baal is a Canaanite male weather god associated with thunderstorms. Rain was important to Canaanite agriculture, and Baal was consequently a god of fertility—a prodigious lover as well as the giver of abundance. Opposition to the worship of Baal is a persistent theme of the Israelite literature.
- **Asherah** - the name of a sensual Canaanite goddess Astarte, the feminine of the Assyrian Ishtar. Its symbol was the stem of a tree deprived of its boughs, and rudely shaped into an image, and planted in the ground. In the Ugaritic literature she is called 'Lady Asherah of the Sea,' a title that may signify 'she who treads on the sea.' Apart from her name, she has other connections with the sea. The cult of Asherah was ancient. Tyre seems to have been a major center for her veneration. The cult of the goddess Asherah and the use of the cultic object called asherah are persistently opposed in Israel's literature (Mic. 5:12-13; Deut. 16:21).

# What happened before 1 Kings 18?

- 1 Kings 16
- Omri was probably the strongest leader of the Northern Kingdom up to that time. Assyrian records dating from over a century later refer to Israel as “the land of Omri.” During Omri’s reign Ben-Hadad I, king of the Arameans in Damascus continued to add to his holdings to the north of Israel. Omri’s son, Ahab, had difficulty containing these Aramean aggressors. Also the Assyrian Empire was growing stronger and farther to the northeast under Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 BC) and proceeded to expand its territory as far west as the Mediterranean Sea. Faced by these threats on his north, Omri was able to protect Israel well enough to attack and defeat Moab to the southeast at the same time. This victory is referred to on the famous Moabite Stone. Another of Omri’s significant achievements was his alliance with the Phoenicians which was sealed with the marriage of his son Ahab to Jezebel, a daughter of the Phoenician king, Ethbaal (cf. 1 Kings 16:31).
- Omri was a powerful and politically effective king. But the major concern of the writer of 1 Kings was Omri’s spiritual condition. In this he was the worst Israelite king so far (vv. 25–26). Omri’s 12-year reign ended with his death and burial in his new capital city. His rule passed to his son, Ahab. Omri was the founder of the fourth dynasty of Israelite kings.

# What happened before 1 Kings 18?

- 1 Kings 16
- Ahab ruled Israel from Samaria for 22 years (874–853 b.c.). He was the most wicked king Israel had experienced, even worse than his father Omri who was worse than all before him (v. 25). Ahab's wickedness consisted of perpetuating all the sins of Jeroboam; he even considered them trivial. In addition Ahab married a pagan princess, Jezebel, who zealously tried to promote her depraved cult as the exclusive religion of Israel. Jezebel's father, Ethbaal, was king of the Sidonians (Phoenicians), with his capital in Tyre. Evidently Ahab was not forced to marry Jezebel; his choice to marry her is something for which the writer held him responsible.
- Ahab built a temple for Baal in the capital of Israel and constructed an altar for Baal in it. Asherah poles (cf. 14:15, 23; 15:13) were idols carved to stimulate worship of Baal's female counterpart. The writer repeated the seriousness of Ahab's sins for emphasis (16:33; cf. v. 30).

# What happened before 1 Kings 18?

Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord more than all who were before him. It came about, as though it had been a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he married Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went to serve Baal and worshiped him. So he erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal which he built in Samaria. Ahab also made the Asherah. Thus Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel than all the kings of Israel who were before him. 1 Kings 16:30-33

# What happened before 1 Kings 18?

- 1 Kings 17
- Elijah had been and was being prepared by the Lord to demonstrate to all Israel that Yahweh, not Baal, is still the only true God. Perhaps as Elijah heard reports of Jezebel's increasing maneuverings to replace the worship of the Lord with Baal worship his godly heart was stirred up. God gave him a mission. Armed with God's promise he walked westward to Samaria. Bursting into the palace, he hurled his ultimatum at King Ahab. He claimed that the Lord is the God of Israel, that He is alive (cf. v. 12; 18:10), and that he, Elijah, was God's servant. Elijah could confidently declare that there would be neither dew nor rain because God had promised to withhold these from the land if His people turned from Him to other gods (Lev. 26:18–19; Deut. 11:16–17; 28:23–24). God had apparently revealed to Elijah that He would honor that promise in Elijah's day. This would have struck at the heart of Baalism, for Baal-worshippers believed that their god was the god of rain! The drought, brought on by the true God, showed that He, not Baal, controls the weather. This was a remarkable demonstration of God's superiority and of the total inadequacy and falsehood of Baal worship.
- Having made his dramatic announcement, Elijah was told by the Lord to leave Samaria, return eastward, and hide in a ravine by the wadi Kerith, east of the Jordan River. Elijah had to hide because he would soon be hunted by the king (cf. 18:10). The exact location of this seasonal brook is not known; it was one of many streams that flowed during the rainy season but dried up when the weather turned hot. God promised to provide food and drink for His servant at this unlikely spot.
- Elijah obeyed the Lord, who miraculously provided for him as He had promised. God directed ravens, birds that normally neglect their own young (cf. Job 38:41), to bring bread and meat faithfully to Elijah every morning and evening. And he drank water from the brook. Through this unusual manner of nourishing His prophet physically, God was also nourishing Elijah's faith for later feats of spiritual strength.

# Prophet Elijah Predicts A Drought

## God Promises To Provide For His Own

Now Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the settlers of Gilead, said to Ahab, “As the Lord, the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, surely there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word.” The word of the Lord came to him, saying, “Go away from here and turn eastward, and hide yourself by the brook Cherith, which is east of the Jordan. It shall be that you will drink of the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to provide for you there.” So he went and did according to the word of the Lord, for he went and lived by the brook Cherith, which is east of the Jordan. The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he would drink from the brook. 1 Kings 17:1–6

**1 Kings 18**

Now it happened after many days that the word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year, saying, "Go, show yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the face of the earth." So Elijah went to show himself to Ahab. Now the famine was severe in Samaria. Ahab called Obadiah who was over the household. (Now Obadiah feared the Lord greatly; for when Jezebel destroyed the prophets of the Lord, Obadiah took a hundred prophets and hid them by fifties in a cave, and provided them with bread and water.) Then Ahab said to Obadiah, "Go through the land to all the springs of water and to all the valleys; perhaps we will find grass and keep the horses and mules alive, and not have to kill some of the cattle." So they divided the land between them to survey it; Ahab went one way by himself and Obadiah went another way by himself. 1 Kings 18:1-6

Now as Obadiah was on the way, behold, Elijah met him, and he recognized him and fell on his face and said, “Is this you, Elijah my master?” He said to him, “It is I. Go, say to your master, ‘Behold, Elijah is here.’ ” He said, “What sin have I committed, that you are giving your servant into the hand of Ahab to put me to death? As the Lord your God lives, there is no nation or kingdom where my master has not sent to search for you; and when they said, ‘He is not here,’ he made the kingdom or nation swear that they could not find you. And now you are saying, ‘Go, say to your master, “Behold, Elijah is here.” ’ It will come about when I leave you that the Spirit of the Lord will carry you where I do not know; so when I come and tell Ahab and he cannot find you, he will kill me, although I your servant have feared the Lord from my youth. Has it not been told to my master what I did when Jezebel killed the prophets of the Lord, that I hid a hundred prophets of the Lord by fifties in a cave, and provided them with bread and water? And now you are saying, ‘Go, say to your master, “Behold, Elijah is here” ’; he will then kill me.” Elijah said, “As the Lord of hosts lives, before whom I stand, I will surely show myself to him today.” 1 Kings 18:7-15

So Obadiah went to meet Ahab and told him; and Ahab went to meet Elijah. When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, “Is this you, you troubler of Israel?” He said, “I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father’s house have, because you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord and you have followed the Baals. Now then send and gather to me all Israel at Mount Carmel, together with 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of the Asherah, who eat at Jezebel’s table.”

1 Kings 18:16-19



The Carmel range of mountains, 1,742 feet in elevation at its highest point, extends about 30 miles to the southeast of modern-day Haifa from the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. It is a beautiful series of rounded peaks and valleys from which the sea can easily be seen.

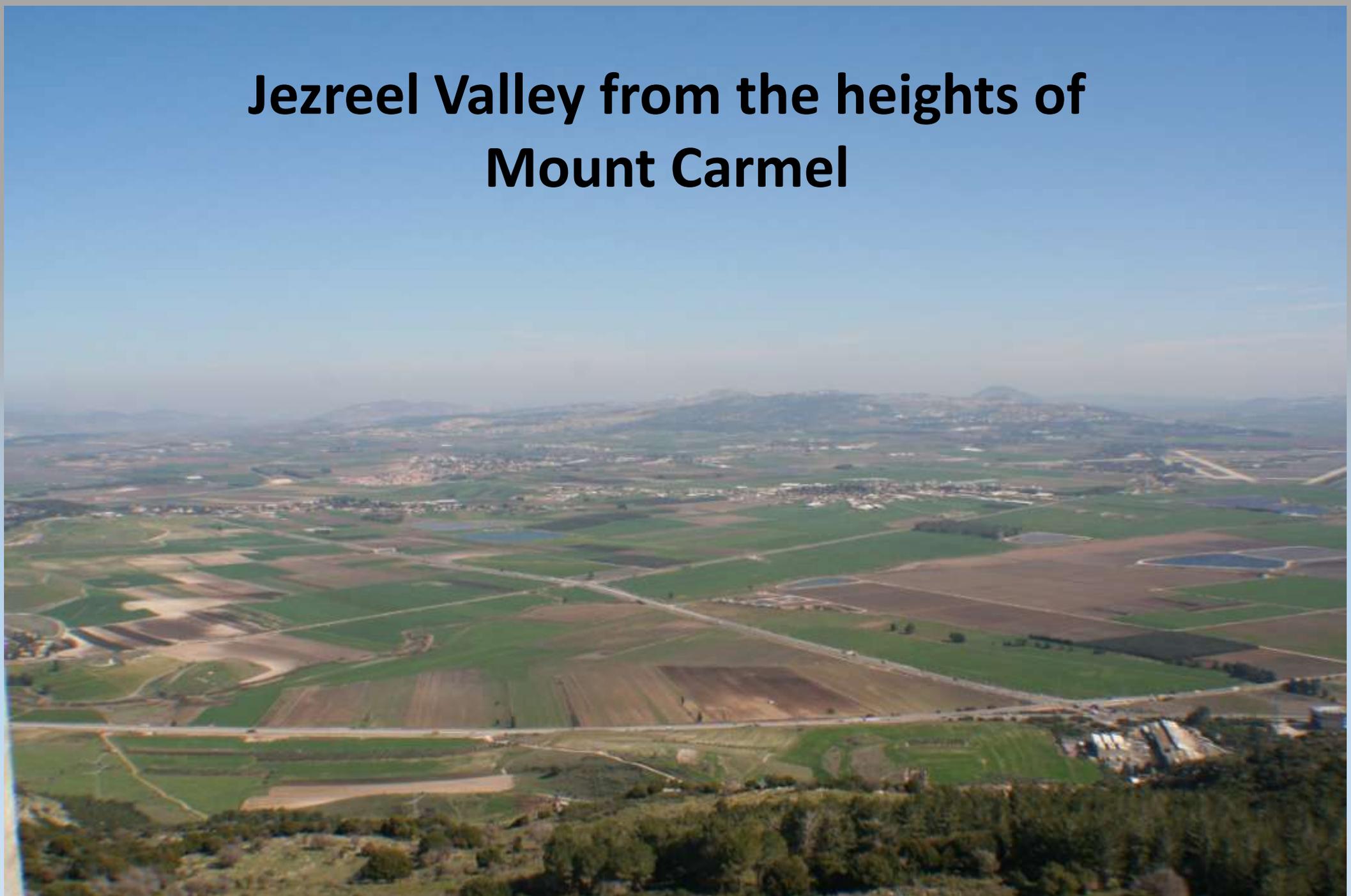


## Why Here?

Mount Carmel was agreed on by Ahab. It would be a fitting site since it lay between Israel and Phoenicia, the lands of the deities in question. Also Mount Carmel was regarded by the Phoenicians as the sacred dwelling place of Baal. No doubt Ahab was highly pleased with this suggested site for the contest because it would have given the Baal prophets a definite advantage; but this did not worry Elijah. It was also a geographically prominent location and thus a fit setting for Elijah's contest.

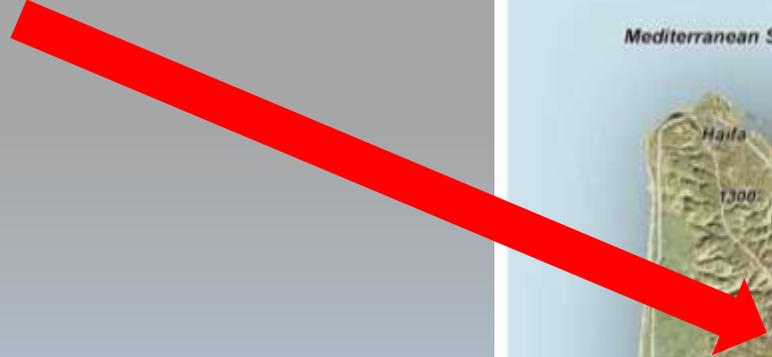
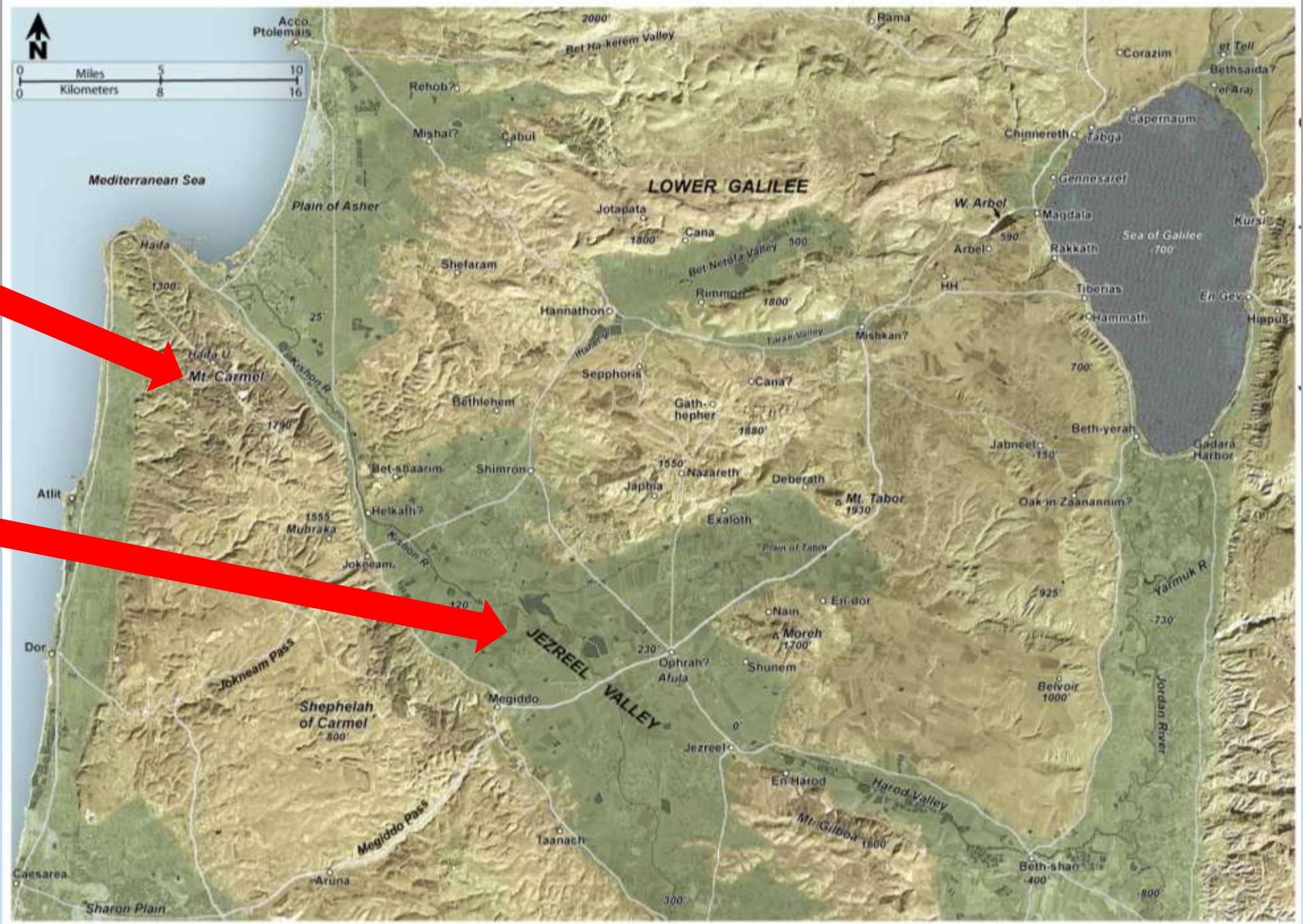
-Bible Knowledge Commentary

# Jezreel Valley from the heights of Mount Carmel



# Jezreel Valley from the heights of Mount Carmel





So Ahab sent a message among all the sons of Israel and brought the prophets together at Mount Carmel. Elijah came near to all the people and said, “How long will you hesitate between two opinions? **If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.**” But the people did not answer him a word. 1 Kings 18:20-21

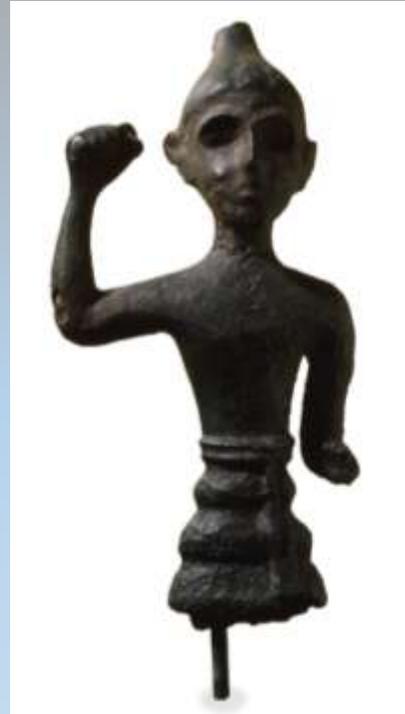
\*Apparently the Israelites thought that if Yahweh let them down they could turn to Baal, and vice versa. – Bible Knowledge Commentary

\*Elijah did not accuse the people of outright apostasy but of hesitating between two opinions. This suggests they had been trying to worship both Baal and Yahweh to secure the maximum advantages of both! Elijah swept away such syncretistic thinking. The people must make a decision: Yahweh or Baal. – New Bible Commentary

\*Elijah reproved the people for mixing the worship of God and the worship of Baal together. Not only some Israelites worshipped God and others Baal, but the same Israelites sometimes worshipped one and sometimes the other. This he calls halting between two opinions, or thoughts. They worshipped God to please the prophets, but worshipped Baal to please Jezebel and curry favor at court. – Matthew Henry’s Commentary

# Are you living “just in case”?

Small statues of Baal were found in the ruins of many Israelite homes, copied from the non-Jewish Canaanites living nearby



Baal worship was prevalent during the time of Moses, especially among the Moabites, the Midianites, and eventually spread to the Israelites. During the time of the Kings, the northern Kingdom of Israel were Baal worshippers as were many of the kings of Judah. Many Temples were erected to Baal and have been discovered by archaeologists. Places for worship of Baal were often high places in the hills consisting of an altar and a sacred tree, stone, or pillar.

-<http://www.bible-history.com/archaeology/israel/2-baal-bb.html>

## What gods have we copied from our neighbors?

# If the Lord is God, follow Him

Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! Deuteronomy 6:4

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, יְיָ אֶחָד:

The Shema is the oldest fixed daily prayer in Judaism, recited morning and night since ancient times. - <http://www.jewfaq.org/shemaref.htm>

Then Elijah said to the people, “I alone am left a prophet of the Lord, but Baal’s prophets are 450 men. Now let them give us two oxen; and let them choose one ox for themselves and cut it up, and place it on the wood, but put no fire under it; and I will prepare the other ox and lay it on the wood, and I will not put a fire under it. Then 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 said, “That is a good idea.” 1 Kings 18:22-24

So Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, “Choose one ox for yourselves and prepare it first for you are many, and call on the name of your god, but put no fire under it.” Then they took the ox 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 leaped about the altar which they made. It came about at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, “Call out with a loud voice, for he is a god; either he is occupied or gone aside, or is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and needs to be awakened.” So they cried with a loud voice and cut themselves according to their custom with swords and lances until the blood gushed out on them. When midday was past, they raved until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice (3 pm); but there was no voice, no one answered, and no one paid attention. 1 Kings 18:25-29

Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come near to me." So all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the Lord which had been torn down. Elijah took twelve stones according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord had come, saying, "Israel shall be your name." So with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord, and he made a trench around the altar, large enough to hold two measures of seed (about 13 quarts). Then he arranged the wood and cut the ox in pieces and laid it on the wood. And he said, "Fill four pitchers 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. The water flowed around the altar and he also filled the trench with water. 1 Kings 18:30-35

At the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice (3 pm), Elijah the prophet came near and said, “O Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, today let it be known that You are God in Israel and that I am Your servant and I have done all these things at Your word. Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that You, O Lord, are God, and that You have turned their heart back again.”

1 Kings 18:36-37

\*What compels us to trust God in 2017?

We remember His past faithfulness.

\*What should be the result of experiencing the power of God?

People’s hearts are turned back to Him again.

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. When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, “The Lord, He is God; the Lord, He is God.” Then Elijah said to them, “Seize the prophets of Baal; do not let one of them escape.” So they seized them; and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there. 1 Kings 18:38-40



# Kishon Brook/River



Now Elijah said to Ahab, “Go up, eat and drink; for there is the sound of the roar of a heavy shower.” So Ahab went up to eat and drink. But Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he crouched down on the earth and put his face between his knees. He said to his servant, “Go up now, look toward the (Mediterranean) sea.” So he went up and looked and said, “There is nothing.” And he said, “Go back” seven times. It came about at the seventh time, that he said, “Behold, a cloud as small as a man’s hand is coming up from the sea.” And he said, “Go up, say to Ahab, ‘Prepare your chariot and go down, so that the heavy shower does not stop you.’ ” In a little while the sky grew black with clouds and wind, and there was a heavy shower. And Ahab rode and went to Jezreel. Then the hand of the Lord was on Elijah, and he girded up his loins and outran Ahab to Jezreel. 1 Kings 18:41-46

\*Jezreel was King Ahab’s winter capital about midway between Mount Carmel and Samaria.

\*Elijah overtook him, running the approximate 25 miles with divinely given energy. – Bible Knowledge Commentary

**Looking west toward the  
Mediterranean Sea from the  
heights of Mount Carmel**



**What will we choose in 2017?**

# As we begin 2017...

Ask:

- Who, or what, has been my heart's focus?
- How can God heal me from the past?
- What do I need to put behind me?
- For what do I need to repent?
- How can God lead me in the new year?
- What am I looking forward to in the new year?
- As a follower of Jesus, what are my dreams for 2017?
- Will I commit to following the one, true God in 2017?

# If the Lord is God, follow Him... in the OT and NT

Joshua said, “If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” Joshua 24:15

Jesus said, “Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.” Matthew 7:13-14

# If the Lord is God, follow Him

- If God is the only sovereign and powerful Creator, follow Him
- If Jesus died on the cross for you, follow Him
- If you need forgiveness of sin, follow Him
- If Jesus is the only way to heaven, follow Him
- If the Holy Spirit is your guide and comforter, follow Him
- If you believe in the truth and power of the Bible, follow Him
- If your life has been changed forever, follow Him
- If you need the amazing grace of a Savior, follow Him

Every new year is a time for choices.

In 2017, what will you choose?