

Mt. Carmel is the northwestern extension of the mountains of Samaria. The Carmel ridge, whose Canaanite name means "Vineyard of El," rises to a height of 1,732 feet above sea level. According to Joshua 19:26, Mt. Carmel forms the southwest boundary of Asher. The River Kishon flows through the Plain of Jezreel and past the foot of Mt. Carmel (1 Kings 18:40). The limestone block that forms the mountain favors the formation of caves, many of which are to be found on its south slopes. Remains of human habitation in caves on the Carmel date to as early as 54,000 B.C.E. (see Slide 14). Its dense greenery, rich soil and wooded inclines led several biblical authors to use Carmel as a symbol of beauty (Jeremiah 50:19; Isaiah 35:2; Song of Songs 7:5). According to 1 Kings 18:17-46, the priests of Baal set up a Canaanite altar to Baal on top of Mt. Carmel. Elijah challenged the 450 prophets of Baal and decisively defeated them at Mt. Carmel. At the end of the account Elijah girded up his loins and ran before King Ahab's chariot to the entrance of the Plain of Jezreel (1 Kings 18:46).

The extreme west end of the Plain of Jezreel, seen here from Mt. Carmel, is called in Arabic the Muckraka, or the place of running, commemorating the victory of Elijah. On the east end of Mt. Carmel is the Cave of the Prophet Elijah, venerated by Christians, and the cave at the Mosque of el-Khader, venerated by Sephardic Jews, Christians and Moslems. The latter cave was cleaned in 1967 and found to contain about 100 graffiti in Greek and one in Hebrew dating from the fourth to the sixth centuries C.E.