

Mount Tabor.

By Teresa Craig

Introduction

At an altitude of 575 meters (1,886 feet) Mount Tabor sits prominently over the plain of Jezreel. It is 7 km (4 miles) from Nazareth and is recognized as one of the possible sites of Jesus' Transfiguration. (Matthew 17:1-9; Mark 9:2-8, and Luke 9:28-36)

The Byzantines established a church on Mount Tabor in the 4th century, dedicating it as the site of the Mount of Transfiguration. Over the centuries, pilgrims traveled here, climbing the 4,300 steps cut into the rock to reach the summit. In the 11th and 12th centuries the Crusaders fought to protect it from destruction by invading armies. Sadly, in 1263, the Mamluk Sultan Baybar destroyed every religious building here. The site remained desolate for nearly 400 years until the Franciscans were able to re-establish it as a holy site. In 1924 the Church of the Transfiguration was built, designed by the architect Antonio Barluzzi (the same architect who designed Church of the Beatitudes). The church has three naves which are separated by two rows of columns. The northern chapel is dedicated to Moses, while the southern chapel is dedicated to Elijah the Prophet. Also on the site is a Greek Orthodox Monastery.

Story

Psalm 89:11-12 states that Mount Tabor and Mount Hermon are lovely and beautiful. The seasons reveal this beauty. For Mount Tabor, after a winter with plentiful rain, the hillsides are covered with green grasses and wildflowers in yellow, purple, and red.



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During the Ottoman period, all the trees that had been on this mountain were cut down for fuel, but during the 1960s and 1970s the government of Israel made great progress in reforesting the mount and returning it to its Psalms-noted beauty. The air is fresh and the views spectacular. Is there any wonder that these mountains have been so strategic?

In the New Testament, we read of the Transfiguration of Jesus. In Matthew 17:1-9, Peter, James and John, travel with Jesus to a mountain where He is transfigured before them. The exact mountain is not mentioned in scripture so it is difficult to say which one it was. Many believe that Mount Tabor is the site.

Scripture says that Jesus' face, "...shone like the sun, and His clothes became white as light. And, behold there appeared Moses and Elijah talking with Him." The power and presence of God was obviously so strong on the mountain that Peter asked to build tabernacles to possibly keep Moses and Elijah with them.

In the Old Testament, Moses is the representation of Jewish Law, while Elijah represented the Jewish prophets, so when God's voice was heard from heaven, "This is My Beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; Listen to Him" (vs 5). This indicated to the disciples that the Law and the Prophets must now give way to Jesus. He is the completion of the Law and the fulfillment of the prophecies.

The first reference in scripture of Mount Tabor is in Joshua 19:22 as the border of three tribes: Zebulun, Issachar and Naphtali.

Next, in Judges 4, we read the story of Deborah and Barak, that after many years of oppressive control by the Canaanites, God spoke to Deborah, the prophetess and judge of Israel, that He was going to deliver them from Sisera, the commander of the Canaanite army of King Jabin of Hazor.

She related this word to Barak, but he hesitated; insisting that she go with him to battle. Deborah agreed but proclaimed that the victory over Sisera would be given to a woman. Barak agreed. He mustered 10,000 mighty soldiers to the top of Mount Tabor, and together they marched toward the Jezreel Valley to fight Sisera.



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God had gone before them. As the battle started, Sisera recognized his army was losing and in the turmoil of the battle, he fell off his chariot and retreated on foot, exhausted. At a neighboring village, Jael, the wife of Heber, the Kenite, recognized Sisera and called out to him to urge him to come into her home for safety. Yet, the safe place turned into his destruction. As he was fast asleep Jael took a tent peg and drove it into his head, thus killing Sisera. Truly, the Lord gave the victory to a woman, as Deborah had prophesied.

Mount Tabor is positioned at an important junction within Lower Galilee and the eastern end of the Jezreel Valley. The historic Roman Road, the Via Maris, at its base, passed here from the Jezreel Valley north toward Mesopotamia, then south toward Egypt.

Today, taxis traverse the mountain carrying pilgrims to the summit, rather than the historic religious rite of climbing 4,300 steps to the top. Commanding views of the Plain of Jezreel, Mount Carmel, and the mountains of Samaria can be seen.

Mount Tabor is a favorite place for adventurers who enjoy hang gliding as well as hiking and picnicking.

