
Caesarea Philippi

from the Thompson Chain Reference Bible

Caesarea Philippi was located at the foot of Mount Hermon, where, as a dashing sparkling stream, the most eastern source of the Jordan River rushes out from a cave at the base of a great cliff and sings its way on to join other sources of the famous river. Being well watered, the place has such a variety of trees, vines, and flowering shrubs as to make it one of the most beautiful localities in all the Holy Land.

In Old Testament times it had a shrine dedicated to Baal; while later the Greeks built a shrine to Pan, the god of nature, and called the place Paneas (the city of Pan).

In 20 BC Herod the Great built a white marble temple here, and dedicated it to Augustus Caesar. At Herod's death the city fell to his son, Herod Philip, who enlarged and beautified the place and named it Caesarea Philippi, in order to gain the favor of his emperor, Tiberius Caesar, and to distinguish it from the better-known and capital and seaport of Caesarea on the coast.

It was to this area of natural beauty that Jesus took his disciples for a brief period of rest and devotion, when, after a siege of prayer he asked them, "Whom say ye that I am?", and Simon Peter made the great declaration, "Thou art the Christ the Son of the Living God" (Matt. 16:16; Mark 9:18).

In medieval times (1120 AD) the Crusaders built a castle here on a mountain spur some 1150 feet above the gushing fountain, and called it the "Castle of Subeibeh."

Today, masses of building stone, pieces of broken columns, and half-buried arches are strewn over the site of the city. On the face of the great cliff about the grotto, from which emerges the stream, there are several niches, and a Greek inscription to the effect that "Pan and his Nymphs haunt this place." Another inscription speaks of the "Priest of the god Pan."

High on the mountain, overlooking Caesarea Philippi, stands the Castle of Subeibeh surrounded by walls ten feet thick, one hundred feet high, and strengthened by numerous round towers. The interior of the old fortress is an uneven area of four or five acres, dotted here and there by houses, cisterns, huge walls, and wide courtyards. The castle is old and worn by time and the elements, but is better preserved than many other castles of this area.

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