

Mt. Tabor (viewed from the Nazareth ridge)

Contributed by Stephen Langfur

Out of the Jezreel Plain emerges a mountain, perfectly rounded and symmetrical, 1400 feet above its surroundings, 1900 above sea level, a constant reference point in Galilee.

In the drama of its thrust, it has for ages attracted religious feeling. The tribes of Zebulon and Issachar are told to rejoice (Deuteronomy 33:19):

They shall call the peoples to the mountain. There they will offer sacrifices of righteousness, for they shall draw out the abundance of the seas, the hidden treasures of the sand.

Since Tabor stands on the border between them, it was probably the intended mountain. Hosea later condemned the cult on Tabor (Hosea 5:1 Hear this, O priests! Give heed, O house of Israel! Listen, O house of the king! For the judgment applies to you, For you have been a snare at Mizpah. And a net spread out on Tabor. Hosea 5:1).

Its thrust also led the Psalmist to couple it with the much higher Hermon (9146 feet above the sea): "Tabor and Hermon rejoice in your name." (Psalms 89:12)

Tabor, therefore, could compete with Hermon in the Byzantine period for the honor of being the "high mountain" upon which Jesus appeared transfigured to Peter, John and James (Matthew 17). In the late fourth century it won the contest, thanks to support from St. Jerome -- and, no doubt, from aging Byzantine tour guides.

Here, then, we recall Jesus' conversation with Moses and Elijah, both of whom received the Word from God on a mountain in Sinai. After Peter proposes building huts for the three, a voice comes from a cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!" The words echo those of Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15: "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him."

In the period of the judges, Barak was told to gather 10,000 men of Naphtali and Zebulon at Mt. Tabor (Judges 4:6). It is hard to imagine anyone attacking down such a steep slope: soldiers and horses would have had to keep the brakes on. An army might take refuge here, however, or safely muster before an assault. Thus in preparing the revolt against Rome, Josephus Flavius (36 – 100 AD), Jewish general, one of two directing the revolt against Rome in Galilee. After Vespasian captured him, he prophesied the latter would be emperor. When this proved true, the Romans honored him. He then turned historian, writing *The Jewish War*, *The Antiquities of the Jews* and many other books. Because of a paragraph about John the Baptist (and maybe a sentence about Jesus), the Church preserved his works. Josephus, then a general leading the Jewish rebels, fortified the top of Tabor with a wall, parts of which are still visible. The Roman general, feigning retreat, managed to lure the Jewish forces down to the plain, where he overwhelmed them. The story...

Today two churches, a Greek Orthodox and a Roman Catholic, grace the top of the mountain. The latter may be visited in Shoulders covered, legs covered below the knees, modest dress daily from 8.00 - 12.00 and 14.00 - 17.00.

(Tel. 04- 6732283). A bus cannot negotiate the zig-zag road. One ascends either by taxi (found just north of the Bedouin village Daburiyya) or by foot, following either the road or the marked trail. The view toward Megiddo, from the drive leading toward the Catholic church, makes it very worthwhile.