

Tablet of [Mount] Carmel: Wilmette Institute faculty notes

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Notes by Peter Terry and Ted Brownstein, edited by Jonah Winters:

First, Peter explained that "Carmel" has been interpreted by some to mean vineyard: words with the root "karm" have to do with grapes and wine and related things, and "el" is one of the Hebrew words for God." This would be supported by statements from the Writings, such as Shoghi Effendi's reference in *God Passes By*, p. 277. He refers to the Shrine of the Báb as:

A structure, at once massive, simple and imposing; nestling in the heart of Carmel, the 'Vineyard of God'; flanked by the Cave of Elijah on the west, and by the hills of Galilee on the east; backed by the plain of Sharon, and facing the silver-city of Akká, and beyond it the Most Holy Tomb, the Heart and Qiblih of the Bahá'í world; overshadowing the colony of German Templars...

In support of this meaning for "carmel," Ted noted that:

"...Carmel was the superlative 'garden' and came to be the chief exemplar of prosperous farmland. Thus when Amos described devastation of the land, it was Carmel he chose to describe. If Carmel withered, everything would wither: 'And he said, The LORD will roar from Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the habitations of the shepherds shall mourn, and the top of Carmel shall wither.' (Amos 1:2)

Further, Carmel became symbolic of any well cultivated land and was used of orchards, vineyards, etc. which were not geographically located near Mount Carmel. (Compare Isaiah 32:15.) Thus in Micah 7:14 and other verses, some Bible translations read 'orchard' (RSV) where others read 'Carmel' (KJV).'

Why then would Bahá'u'lláh or 'Abdu'l-Bahá or Shoghi Effendi refer to Carmel as the 'vineyard of God'? Not every 'vineyard' is the 'vineyard of God', and as Carmel has been famous as a religious site since the prophetic ministry of Elijah, and has always had meanings related to 'vineyard', it would seem that the reference is to Carmel as the 'vineyard' of the Lord, not an indication that the word Carmel itself means 'vineyard of God'. The triumph of Yahweh over the Baals and Astartes of Elijah's time established Carmel as the 'vineyard' of Yahweh long before the present epoch. While Sinai and Zion and Tabor and various other elevated places could be called 'mountain of the Lord', none of these, to my knowledge, could be called 'vineyard of the Lord'. Neither were their names related to 'vineyard' nor did any of them furnish 'fertile soil'. In case you have any doubts about the 'fertility of the soil' of Mount Carmel, pay a visit to the city of Haifa and see for yourself."

However, while the Bahá'í writings use the image of the "Vineyard of God" quite frequently, it is rarely applied to Mount Carmel. Its more common usage seems to refer to the kingdom of God on earth, especially as applied to the community of believers. (I could be way off, though — that's just what a

quick scan of the Writings seemed to indicate.) And indeed, dictionary etymologies for "carmel" tend *not* to define it as "vineyard. For example, Peter wrote, Ben Yehuda's dictionary of Hebrew gives these meanings: kerem = vineyard, grove
korem = vinedresser, wine-grower
karam = to work in a vineyard
karmiil = crimson
karmel = green wheat, fresh grains, fertile soil
karem and kerem = abdomen, belly
These dictionaries don't give the etymology of "carm-" + "-el."

Ted agreed:

"From a dictionary definition perspective you are correct. None of the Hebrew lexicons that I consulted give "vineyard of God" as a meaning for Carmel. However, the 'lamed' (Hebrew letter L' tacked on to the end of kerem) means something.

Hebrew roots are trilateral, that is they have three letters. Suffixes and prefixes can be added to the root to modify the meaning. The addition of a -t to a verbal root is the generic method of forming nouns from verbs. Mem (M) can be added to indicate instrumentality. -ut (oot) to indicate abstraction, such as malkut (kingdom from melek, king). Lamed is also used as a nominal suffix, but relatively rarely. Other examples of nouns formed with -l, are barzel (iron) and gibo`l (corolla). These all have a superlative sense as compared to their root. BRZ means to pierce, but the best way to pierce something in the ancient near east was with iron.

There is no consensus among scholars as to the meaning that an affixed lamed gives to a word. But I personally would see a link to 'El'. It is common to say that 'El' means God, but in its most basic sense it has the more generic sense of Mighty. Thus the lamed as a suffix indicating the superlative nature of its object could well derive from 'El'. Then, kerem is any old vineyard but Carmel is a superlative vineyard and perhaps by extension 'vineyard of God'.

Notes by Stephen Lambden:

Question: What is the historical/biblical background that would make these Zion and Mt. Carmel want to converse with each other?

Answer:

"Zion" is a topographical term which once designated the southeast hill of the later city of Jerusalem. It occurs some 150 times in the Bible, though not in the Qur'an. Today it mostly designates the area of the `Temple Mount' where the Dome of the Rock is situated. It is symbolic, among other things, of Jerusalem as the locus of the Israelite religion/Judaism.

As far I am understand it, from the Tablet of Carmel involves Carmel (= Bahá'u'lláh/The Bahá'í revelation) crying out to Zion (=

Jerusalem) the good news of the Bahá'í revelation. Carmel, symbolic of the 'new Jerusalem', invites Zion to faith as representing the previous edifice(s) of religion, especially the Judaic, the 'old Jerusalem' (= Zion). Various Biblical texts could be referred to in this connection. In the Hebrew Bible Zion/Jerusalem is personified and is the place where God cries out : "the Lord roars from Zion and utters his voice from Jerusalem.. and the top of Carmel withers" (Amos 1:2 cf. Joel 3:16, etc). Bahá'u'lláh seems to reverse this Biblical pattern in the light of the 'New Jerusalem' of his revelation symbolized by Mount Carmel.

Also interesting is the following passage from the Jewish homilistic midrashic work Pesikta de Rab Kahana (5th cent. CE?) where it is said in Piska ("section") 21 (details cannot be gone into here):

"At the [eschatological] restoration Sinai, Tabor, and Carmel will hymn Moriah [see 2 Chron. 3:1] - Mount Zion -- in song."

This Jewish tradition is echoed in the Tablet of Carmel -- though I am not saying that Bahá'u'lláh is citing or is directly influenced this text.

Pesikta de Rab Kahana also has it (in the light of Isaiah 2:2)that R. Phineas (c. 360 CE) said in the name of R. Reuben (c.300)that God would bring Sinai, Tabor and Carmel and build the [eschatological] Temple on their summits. The notion of personified "mountains" addressing one another thus has Biblical (and extra-Biblical) roots.

Also, the reference to "land and sea" (al-barr wa'l-bahr) crying out in the Tablet of Carmel -- and other Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh (e.g. Lawh-i Hirtik = `Tablet to the Templar leader George David Hardegg; see BSB 2:1 [June 1983] 32ff revised edition forthcoming) -- is rooted in various Qur'anic verses. See esp. Q.6:59,63,97; 30:41 cf. Qayyum al-asma' XXVIII). In various Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh "land and sea" seem to represent the totality of terrestrial locations perhaps symbolizing all humanity.

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