

86 Banias

Names (also known as)

Caesarea Philippi (during Christ’s time), Panias (around 3rd century BC), Baal-gad (during the OT times), Banyas, Caesarea Neronias, Caesarea of Philip, Caesarea Panias

Etymology

Banias was originally known as Panias named after the Greek god Pan (god of music, nature, goat herds, panic in your enemy and homosexuality). Then when the Arabs took the city they named it Banias as there is no “P” in Arabic. When Herod’s son Philip named it Caesarea Philippi he named it after Caesar and himself. Later Agrippa II named it Caesarea Neronias after Nero who gifted it to him.

Location/Description

Situated 40 kms (25 miles) north of the Sea of Galilee and at the base of Mt. Hermon, Banias is the location of one of the largest springs feeding the Jordan River.



Scriptural references

New Testament

Matt.16:13, Mark 8:27 - It is nearby this city that Peter makes his great confession that Jesus is indeed the Christ and then denied his need to be killed (Matt.16:13-28). It is also likely that the transfiguration occurred nearby to Banias (Mt Hermon is a “high mountain” – Matt. 17:1).

Famous characters

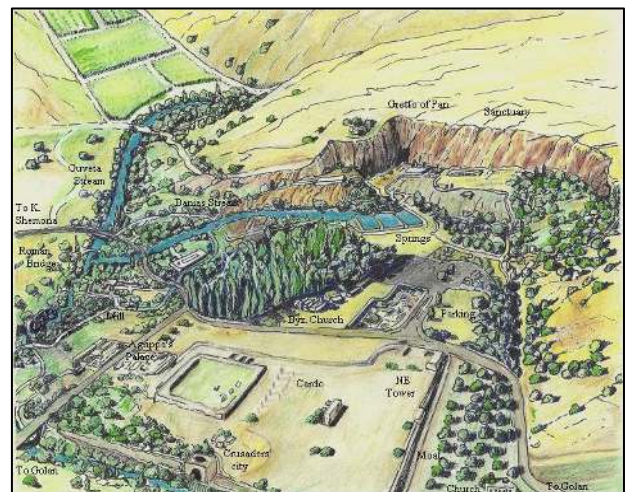
Jesus Christ
12 apostles
Herod
Agrippa II

Brief history

While not mentioned in the OT it is considered by many to be associated with the town of Baal-gad (Josh.11:17; 12:7; 13:5) which lies below Hermon, as does Banias. The Greeks developed the city and built a grotto by the waterfall dedicated to the god Pan.



The Seleucid kingdom governed the city until the revolt of the Jewish Hasmonean kings. Alexander Janneus conquered the area and also the Golan. Later the Romans gained control of Israel and the city was given to Herod the Great, who then built a temple there to honour Caesar. When Herod gave it to his son Philip the name was changed to Caesarea Philippi to honour Caesar once again and Philippi to distinguish it from Caesarea.



Philip then made it his capital and the city greatly expanded and grew under his rulership. It was during this time that Christ

would have visited the city with his apostles as they preached the gospel message.

During the Jewish revolt the city was spared destruction due to Agrippa choosing to side with Rome and it was used as a base by Vespasian and his forces. When Jerusalem was destroyed Titus came back to Baniyas and held a series of games to celebrate his victory during which many Jewish prisoners were put to death. After the war a Jewish community continued here but was mostly pagan.

As Rome converted to Christianity the city became a place of worship for the church and finding a stature there of Hadrian the Christians worshiped it as a stature of Jesus healing a woman. Starting in 635 AD Baniyas fell under Muslim rule and faced a rapid depopulation during this time.

During the time of the crusades the city was fortified and numerous battles were fought over and around it. At the end of the crusades, the town was again under Muslim rule and following a brief rulership by the Franks fell under the Ottoman Empire.

The city came under Jewish control once more on the last day of the Six Day War in 1967 when it was captured by the Golani Brigade. Baniyas is still a beautiful place to visit with a spectacular waterfall and river that feeds into the Jordan River.

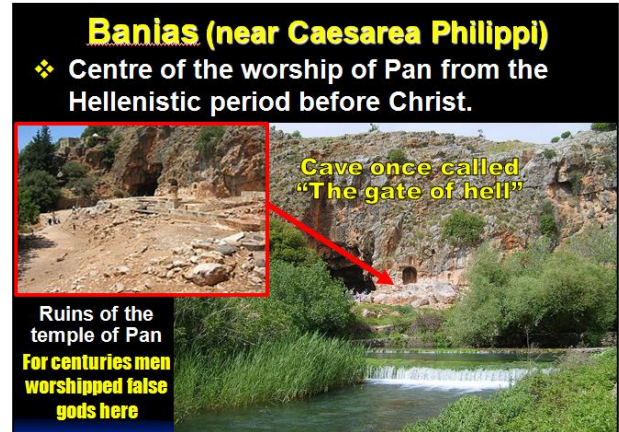


Today excavations have found a synagogue dating to the 11th century (see picture at right) as well as temple complexes dedicated to both Pan and Zeus, a bath house and a large palace from the 1st century AD.

What can we learn from Baniyas?

In Baniyas we should be reminded of Christ's question to the apostles; “Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?” On every side we daily hear and see people giving their answers to this question. They worship Jesus as God, twisting the gospel message in a way that suits their traditional doctrines. When we

see this, do we respond as Peter did and declare just who Christ is and what God's purpose in him truly is? Are we willing to stand up to the world and declare that Jesus is indeed the Christ, the son of the living God? We have been blessed with this hope and we are now tasked with preaching it to every living creature.



Matt. 16:15-18 - He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, **Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.** And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my ecclesia; and **the gates of hell** shall not prevail against it.

Sources:

Smith's Bible Dictionary; Hasting's Bible Dictionary; Wikipedia; biblewalks.com; bibleplaces.com; Frommer's guide to Israel

(Compiler – Dan Leadbetter)



Remnants of a Jewish synagogue at Baniyas