



ARBEL

WHERE REDEMPTION WILL START

If you ask any Mizrahi member which settlement was the first Mizrahi settlement in Israel, the answer you will probably receive would be Kfar Pines or Kfar Avraham. However, a careful check in the Mizrahi archives will reveal a different answer.

Driving on Route 77 eastwards will lead you to Tiberias. As you descend towards the Kinneret you will see a sign pointing to Arbel. Turning to Route 7717 will take you to the Arbel Valley. According to Chazal, this is where the *Geula* (redemption) will start. The Midrash describes Rabbi Chiya and Rabbi Shimon ben Chalafta walking in the Arbel Valley and watching the sunrise – a symbolic sign of the redemption:

“Rabbi Chiya and Rabbi Shimon Ben Chalafta were walking in the valley of Arbel and saw the light of daybreak. Rabbi Chiya said to Rabbi Shimon Ben Chalafta: thus will be the redemption of Israel- at the beginning, slowly, slowly, and as it goes it will develop and grow.”¹

The Arbel Valley was excellent for agriculture and described as a place where you will reap six times the amount of grains that you put in the ground.²

In this valley today, we have three Jewish settlements (*moshavim*) that bear the same names as their ancient predecessors – Kfar Chittim, Arbel and Kfar Zeitim. 95 years ago, in the month of Kislev, a group of 15 young families – representing the Mizrahi Organization – settled Kfar Chittim. One month later another 25 families joined them.

The Mizrahi weekly magazine at the time – *HaTor* – praised these settlers on November 23, 1923:

“...For about 20 years since the Mizrahi was founded we have waited for you and working hands like yours... for you will be the first pioneers of the first Mizrahi *moshav*... be strengthened, do not hold up or be weak... look around you... here is Tiberias before you, where the Mishna was arranged, our Oral Law, and you have arisen and arranged you lives in your new *moshav* according to the words of the Torah... many G-d be with you and strengthen your hands...”

They faced many problems – with the Arabs, with the Jewish Agency and among themselves, and eventually, by the end of 1931, they abandoned ship. Some remains of the first houses can still be seen today in the *moshav* – now non-religious – rebuilt in 1936.

If we continue west, we will reach Arbel. Arbel was already a Jewish settlement during the First Temple period. It was destroyed and rebuilt over and over again. Arbel became a symbol for hope, and the basis for the saying of Nitai the Arbelite, Head of the Sanhedrin in the 2nd century BCE (the time of the Chashmonaim): “Do not give up when destruction falls upon you.” From Arbel’s history he knew very well that destruction is not the end, and hope for redemption and rebuilding is just around the corner.

The symbolism of Arbel is also behind Rabbi Eliezer HaKalir’s words describing the Messiah arriving in the month of Nissan in the Arbel Valley. In the 7th century, in “The

Book of Zerubavel,” the Arbel Valley is described as the site of the War of *Gog UMagog*, a climactic battle that will precipitate the Final Redemption.

Driving towards the Arbel Cliffs you will see a sign proclaiming: “The Ancient Synagogue of Arbel.” Visiting the ruins you will notice that the entrance to the structure is from the east, and the main entrance is built of one stone (a monolith) forming a central main entrance and two smaller ones on both sides. This is just as the prophet described:³ When the Messiah comes, he will enter through the eastern gate [of Jerusalem], and a late Midrash⁴ describes the main entrance and two smaller ones made of one stone. The residents of ancient Arbel, who lived with the symbol and idea that the Redemption and the Messiah will come from here, built their synagogue according to the description in the Midrash.

Traveling in this area today we can see hints of the *Geula* in its blooming orchards, trees and flourishing agriculture, based on the prophecy of the signs of redemption: “But you, mountains of Israel, will produce branches and fruit for my people Israel, for they will soon come home.”⁵

1 Talmud Yerushalmi, Berachot 1:1.

2 Talmud Yerushalmi, Pe’ah 87:3.

3 Zechariah 14.4.

4 Midrash Zuta, Shir HaShirim 2, Psikat DeRav Kahana 18.

5 Ezekiel 36:8.

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