



**VIEW SOUTHEAST:** THE CAVE CLIFFS OF MT. ARBEL FROM THE TRAIL THAT ASCENDS TO THE TOP. SCALING THE CLIFFS TODAY IS POSSIBLE WITH THE HELP OF REBAR LADDERS EMBEDDED IN THE ROCK.

**BELOW (VIEW WEST):** THE NORTHWESTERN SHORE OF THE SEA OF GALILEE. NOTICE THE TRADITIONAL LOCATION OF THE MOUNT OF BEATITUDES BETWEEN TABGHA AND CAPERNAUM. SEE ALSO "HORNS OF HATTIN" ON PAGE 195.





**VIEW WEST:** MT. ARBEL (TOP LEFT) AND MT. NITAI (CENTER RIGHT) FROM THE PLAIN OF GENNESARET. WADI HAMAM, OR VALLEY OF THE DOVES, RUNS BETWEEN THE MOUNTAINS.

## MT. ARBEL

(SEE MAP ON PAGE 176)

The cliff of Mt. Arbel towers over the plain of Gennesaret (Ginosar Valley) with a wonderful view of the plain and the Sea of Galilee. The cliff's highest point is 594 feet (181 meters) above sea level. The Arbel Valley south of the cliff is home to three farming communities: Kfar Hittim, Arbel, and Kfar Zeitim (see the photos on page 178). The valley runs behind and below the cliff as it slopes south and west toward Moshav Arbel (see the top photo on page 179).

The Arbel National Park is home to mountain gazelles, wolves, badgers, hyenas, and martens, although it's unlikely you will see them during the heat of the day. Mornings are the best time, but you have to be sitting still. I've seen gazelles, wolves on the western end of Mt. Turan, and fox while hiking in the early morning hours but wasn't ready to get a picture.

### THE STORY

The history of Arbel and Nitai involves wars, rebellion, and bloodshed. During the Hasmonean period (see "Historical Sketch" in *Blessed Pilgrimage*, vol. 2), King Demetrius of the Seleucid Empire sent his general and advisor, Bacchides, into Judea for a second time. En route to Jerusalem, Bacchides's army "encamped against Mesaloth in Arbela, and they took it and killed many people" (1 Macc. 9:2). Josephus identified Arbela with the site we know today as Mt. Arbel.

Mt. Nitai got its name from the mid-second century BC sage Nitai the Arbelite, who was born here. He is best known for this adage: "Keep thee far from an evil neighbor and consort not with the wicked and lose not belief in retribution."<sup>1</sup>





**VIEW NORTH:** THE SIGN READS "MOSHAV ARBEL" IN HEBREW. THE RETIRED MACHINE STANDS IN FRONT OF AN OLIVE TREE ORCHARD THAT BELONGS TO THE FARMERS OF THE MOSHAV.

**BELOW (VIEW EAST):** THE ARBEL VALLEY, LOOKING TOWARD THE SEA OF GALILEE AND GOLAN HEIGHTS (TOP CENTER). THE PHOTO WAS TAKEN FROM THE EAST SIDE OF THE HORNS OF HATTIN (SEE THE BOTTOM PHOTO ON PAGE 179).







**VIEW EAST:** THE ARBEL VALLEY WITH MOSHAV ARBEL AT THE FOOT OF THE MOUNTAIN (CENTER). ON THE LEFT IS MT. NITAI. ON THE RIGHT IS MT. ARBEL WITH ITS CLIFF PEAK (TOP RIGHT). WADI HAMAM RUNS BETWEEN THEM.

**BELOW (VIEW WEST):** THE ARBEL VALLEY BELOW THE HORNS OF HATTIN. THE CLIMB IS STEEP BUT POSSIBLE FOLLOWING ANIMAL TRAILS. THE VIEW OF THE VALLEY MAKES THE EFFORT WORTH IT (SEE BOTTOM PHOTO ON PAGE 181).



## THE GALILEAN ZEALOTS AND HEROD THE GREAT

In 38 BC, the Roman general Marc Antony sent Herod the Great to suppress a rebellion by Jews “from the village of Arbela.” After Herod took Sepphoris without a fight (see “Sepphoris” on page 119), “he hastened away to the robbers that were in the caves, who over-ran a great part of the country, and did as great mischief to its inhabitants, as a war itself could have done.”<sup>2</sup> Josephus provided the following detailed description of the battle:

Now these caves were in the precipices of craggy mountains, and could not be come at from any side, since they had only some winding path-ways very narrow, by which they got up to them; but the rock that lay on their front had beneath it valleys of a vast depth, and of an almost perpendicular declivity; insomuch that the king was doubtful for a long time what to do, by reason of a kind of impossibility there was of attacking the place. Yet did he at length make use of a contrivance that was subject to the utmost hazard; for he let down the most hardy of his men in chests, and set *(continued on page 183)*





**VIEW NORTHWEST:** THIS PHOTO WAS TAKEN FROM ATOP MT. ARBEL, LOOKING ACROSS WADI HAMAM TO MT. NITAI (CENTER) AND THE MOUNTAINS OF LOWER GALILEE (TOP).

**BELOW (VIEW NORTHWEST):** THE CAVES OF MT. NITAI (CENTER) WERE ALSO FORTIFIED AND USED BY THE JEWS IN THEIR BATTLE AGAINST ROMAN RULE IN THE FIRST JEWISH-ROMAN WAR (66–74 AD).







**VIEW WEST:** THIS PHOTO WAS TAKEN FROM THE TOP OF MT. NITAI, LOOKING TOWARD THE HORNS OF HATTIN (TOP CENTER), WHERE SALADIN DEFEATED THE CRUSADERS IN 1187 AD (SEE "HORNS OF HATTIN" ON PAGE 195).

**BELOW (VIEW EAST):** THE EAST SIDE OF THE HORNS OF HATTIN WITH AN ANIMAL TRAIL (BOTTOM), WHICH LEADS TO THE TOP. NOTICE THE SEA OF GALILEE, THE DECAPOLIS CITY OF SUSSITA, AND THE GOLAN HEIGHTS (TOP LEFT).







**ABOVE AND BELOW:** SOME OF THE MANY CAVES ON THE SIDE OF MT. ARBEL, USED BY THE JEWS IN THEIR STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE DURING THE YEARS LEADING UP TO THE NEW TESTAMENT PERIOD.







**VIEW SOUTHEAST:** ETCHING BY JAN LUIKEN, 1649–1712. HEROD THE GREAT DEFEATED THE REBELS HIDING IN THE ROCK CLIFFS OF MT. ARBEL BY LOWERING ROMAN SOLDIERS IN SUSPENDED CHESTS.

them at the mouths of the dens. Now these men slew the robbers and their families, and when they made resistance, they sent in fire upon them.

Josephus's account continued with the story of a man who slew his entire family rather than surrender to Herod the Great, who waged this war against them:

Herod was desirous of saving some of them, he had proclamation made, that they should come and deliver themselves up to him; but not one of them came willingly to him, and of those that were compelled to come, many preferred death to captivity. And here a certain old man, the father of seven children, whose children, together with their mother, desired him to give them leave to go out, upon the assurance and right hand that was offered them, [he] slew them after the following manner: he ordered every one of them to go out, while he stood himself at the cave's mouth, and slew that son of his perpetually who went out. Herod was near enough to see this sight, and his bowels of compassion were moved at it, and he stretched out his right hand to the old man, and besought him to spare his children; yet did not he relent at all upon what he said, but over and above reproached Herod on the lowness of his descent, and slew his wife, as well as his children; and when he had thrown their dead bodies down the precipice, he at last threw himself down after them [see the event's depiction at the top of page 185].<sup>3</sup>

## **JOSEPHUS AND THE GREAT REVOLT**

Josephus was commander of Galilee when the great revolt broke out in 66 AD. Knowing the strength of the Roman legions and where they would attack, he “betook himself to make provisions for [the people’s] safety against external violence; and as he knew the Romans would fall upon Galilee, he built walls in proper





**VIEW NORTHEAST:** THIS PHOTO WAS TAKEN ABOVE THE HORNS OF HATTIN, LOOKING TOWARD MT. NITAI (UPPER LEFT), MT. ARBEL AND MOSHAV ARBEL (UPPER CENTER), THE SEA OF GALILEE, AND THE ARBEL VALLEY (CENTER).

places about Jotapata, and Bersabee, and Selamis. . . . Moreover, *he built walls about the caves* near the lake of Gennesar” (emphasis added).<sup>4</sup>

Josephus, writing about himself in the third person, gave the following instructions to his men:

He [Josephus] also continually instructed them in what concerned the courage of the soul, and the hardiness of the body; and above all he exercised them for war, by declaring to them distinctly the good order of the Romans, and that they were to fight with men who, both by the strength of their bodies, and courage of their souls, had conquered in a manner the whole habitable earth. He told them, that he should make trial of the good order they would observe in war, even before it came to any battle, in case they would abstain from the crimes they used to indulge themselves in, such as theft, and robbery, and rapine, and from defrauding their own countrymen, and never to esteem the harm done to those that were so near of kin to them to be any advantage to themselves; for that wars are then managed the best when the warriors preserve a good conscience; but that such as are ill men in private life, will not only have those for enemies which attack them, but God himself also for their antagonist.<sup>5</sup>

## THE GREAT COMMISSION

Some people believe Mt. Arbel is the place where Jesus commissioned His disciples to go into all the world, preaching the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ:<sup>6</sup>

Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, *into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them.*

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen. (Matt. 28:16, 18–20; emphasis added)

I prefer an *appointed* place more familiar to the disciples where we find symbols of life, not death. For example, the hill above the northern shore of the lake where Jesus said to Peter, “Feed my sheep” (John 21:15–17), or the mountain above the plain of Bethsaida where Jesus fed the five thousand (Matt. 14:14–20).<sup>7</sup>





A WALL SCENE DISPLAYED IN THE PARK DEPICTING THE BATTLE OF THE JEWS AGAINST HEROD THE GREAT. A FATHER SLEW HIS SEVEN SONS AND HIS WIFE, THEN TOOK HIS OWN LIFE RATHER THAN SURRENDER TO HEROD.

## ENDNOTES

1 Mishnah, Aboth 1, 7. The quote is from the Arbel National Park and Nature Reserve brochure. The prophet Alma said a similar thing to the people of Zarahemla about not associating with evil: “And now I say unto you that the good shepherd doth call after you; and if you will hearken unto his voice he will bring you into his fold, and ye are his sheep; *and he commandeth you that ye suffer no ravenous wolf to enter among you, that ye may not be destroyed*” (Alma 5:60, emphasis added).

2 Flavius Josephus, *Seven Books of the Jewish War*, in *The Genuine Works of Flavius Josephus the Jewish Historian*, trans. William Whiston (London, 1737), 1:16:2, <http://penelope.uchicago.edu/josephus>.

3 Josephus, *Seven Books of the Jewish War*, 1:16:4. The story reminds us of Hosea’s prophecy about the Assyrian king Shalmaneser, who conquered the northern kingdom in 722 BC. Arbel also played a role: “Therefore shall a tumult arise among thy people, and all thy fortresses shall be spoiled, as Shalman[eser] spoiled Beth-arbel in the day of battle: the mother was dashed in pieces upon her children” (Hosea 10:14).

4 Josephus, *Seven Books of the Jewish War*, 2:20:6.

5 Josephus, *Seven Books of the Jewish War*, 2:20:7.

6 They base this on the view from Mt. Arbel, looking out over the world. Reaching the cliff is not easy, however. I have climbed the face with the help of rebar ladders embedded in the rock. I have also approached Arbel from the south, hiking from Tiberias. Possibly the best route is through Wadi Hamam, then up to the mountain plain from the west (see the top photo on page 189).

7 President Nelson has said the work of gathering Israel on both sides of the veil is “the greatest challenge, the greatest cause, and the greatest work on earth today.” Russell M. Nelson, “Hope of Israel” (speech, Worldwide Youth Devotional, Salt Lake City, UT, June 3, 2018), Gospel Library. *Israel* in this context is not a reference to ancient Israel or the Jews. It is a temple word about people who make covenants with God in the House of the Lord. Israel in eternity is the family of Christ, the family of the faithful, those who are born again into a newness of life through the Atonement of the resurrected Lord (see John 3:1–21).