

LET US GO, WE PRAY THEE, UNTO JORDAN, AND TAKE
THENCE EVERY MAN A BEAM, AND LET US MAKE US A
PLACE THERE, WHERE WE MAY DWELL

(II Kings 6:2)

This chapter narrates how the disciples of the prophets were looking for living quarters, and on turning to Elisha, the suggestion was accepted. We will first explain why the disciples went to the Jordan to cut logs, what sort of living quarters they built from only one log, and then we will discuss other types of structures that were made out of wood from the forest.

The forests of the Land of Israel grew in three large geographical regions: on the rainy mountains which were the home of the common oak and the terebinth (*Pistacia palaestina*); in the Sharon region where the Tabor oak was found; and in the jungle of the Jordan. The latter is the lowest and hottest part of the Jordan Valley, where the ebb and flow of the Jordan saturate the earth at frequent intervals. Hence the banks of the Jordan were covered with the thickest forest of the whole country. This dense vegetation was the home of many wild animals in ancient times. According to Professor M. Zohari, the vegetation of the jungle grows in separate bands of species which extend from the river itself to the banks and beyond. The water is the home of the cane and the reed, and the winter- and spring-flooded area is the habitat of the poplar, the tamarisk and the willow. All these species, which grow in large amounts of water and on saline soil, are too weak and fragile to be used in the manufacture of permanent structures, for they cannot withstand the forces of nature over long periods. Their advantages lie in their rapid growth and their thick, shady branches. Thus the ancients used them to build huts, particularly in the arid and semiarid regions which do not receive much rainfall in the winter, and are subject to the extreme summer sun.

How did the disciples of the prophets manage with only one log for their hut? It would appear that the hut was circular in shape, and was built of one log which was stuck into the ground in the center of the circle. At a radius of 10 to 13 feet (3 to 4 m) around it, the builders dug a circular

channel, fixing the wide end of the branches into the ground, while the other end was tied to the vertical log in the middle. A narrow opening was left on the north side, which was sheltered from the sun, in the same way that the Indians do today. A hint of this practice is found in Job 27:18:

He buildeth his house as a moth [*'aash*], and as a booth that the keeper maketh.

The word *'aash* in Hebrew means a bird's nest and the "booth" is explained by Saadiah Gaon as a branch of nests, taken from the jungle of the Jordan. Hence there is some correlation between the round bird's nest and the watchman's hut.

Why did the disciples of the prophet move their living quarters and where did they settle? The first verse of our chapter (II Kings 6:1) offers an explanation:

And the sons of the prophets said unto Elisha, Behold now, the place where we dwell with thee is too strait for us.

It seems that Elisha's home of Abel-meholah in the southern Beth-shean Valley was, in fact, overcrowded, since all the agricultural land was cultivated. Thus, the disciples had to move to the Jordan jungle where there were flooded agricultural islands during the winter that could be cultivated by the farmers. This was probably an area of "no-man's land" because of the wild animals, and the river floods which often washed away both the soil and the human and animal inhabitants. The verse quoted tells us of the residences of the disciples:

... and let us make a place there, where we may dwell.

The hut, or booth, was built as a temporary place of residence in many parts of the country, and had several functions. It gave protection from the sun, serving the shepherds who roamed the wilderness, as in Leviticus 23:43:

That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt. . . .



The Jordan Valley.