

Jordan River

'Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan River to John, to be baptised by him' (Matthew 3:13).

Many people overlook the crossing at the Jordan River by the Children of Israel, believing it to be an insignificant event. It was actually as startling as the crossing at the Red Sea. It is the fact it is a 'river' and not a 'sea' makes people think it was a lesser miracle. It was not a narrow winding river as it is now, it was a deep, fast flowing body of water as described by Job. In this passage of Scripture, the Lord was speaking to Job about an animal we would call a dinosaur but is now extinct, with a tail the size of a cedar tree. Whatever animal it was, it was enormous and the Jordan River was so deep it came up to the creature's mouth. God said, "See now behemoth, which I made as well as (I made) you. He eats grass as an ox. Look at his strength in his thighs. His force is in the muscles of his belly. He moves his tail like a cedar tree. The sinews of his thighs are knit together. His bones are like tubes of brass. His limbs are like bars of iron. He is the first of the creation (of animals) of God. He Who made him gives him his tusks. The mountains produce food for him where all the animals of the field play. He lies under the lotus trees in the covert of the reed and the marsh. The lotuses cover him with their shade. The willows of the brook surround him. Behold, if a river overflows he does not tremble. He is confident though the Jordan River swells even to his mouth. Will anyone take him when he is on the watch or pierce through his nose with a snare?" (Job 40:15 to 24).

To look at parts of the Jordan River today, someone might try to leap over it but when the Israelites arrived at the banks of the Jordan centuries ago, it would have been over 100 metres wide and at that time, the river had overflowed its banks (Joshua 3:15). The Israelites may have felt the river was too wide and deep to cross. It had been over forty years since their parents had crossed through the Red Sea so the thought of another watery miracle may have been too hard to contemplate until Joshua told them God would do wonders for them. He was right. The river divided and they all walked over on dry land. They camped beside the river for three days. 'Joshua ... came to the Jordan with all the children of Israel. They lodged there before they crossed the river. After three days the officers went through the midst of the camp ... Joshua said, "Tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you." ... The waters which came down from above stood and rose up in one heap ... Then the Israelites crossed over opposite Jericho ... The priests who bore the Ark of the Covenant of God stood firm on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan and all Israel crossed over on dry ground until all the nation had crossed completely over the Jordan' (Joshua 3:1, 2, 5, 16 & 17).

The reason for the Jordan River crossing was to show the pagan nations the limitless power of God and to reveal to them, He would stand up for His people, Israel. Joshua said, "Israel came over this Jordan River on dry land, for the Lord your God dried up the waters of the Jordan from before you until you had crossed over, as the Lord your God did to the Red Sea, which He dried up from before us until we had passed over, so all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of God is mighty so you may fear (respect) your God forever" (Joshua 4:22 to 24). Joshua led the Israelites through the Jordan so they could inhabit Israel, the Land of the Covenant. The Lord God said, "I will remember My covenant with Jacob and also My covenant with Isaac and also My covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the Land" (Leviticus 26:42). Four days after crossing the Jordan River they celebrated Passover (Joshua 5:10), then the next day the manna stopped (Joshua 5:12). Not long after that God declared the Holy Land was holy ground (Joshua 5:15). One thousand, four hundred years later, Jesus was baptised in the same place where Joshua and the Israelites had crossed! The same riverbanks where the Israelites camped would have been there when Jesus was baptised. In 1927 an earthquake caused those same riverbanks to collapse into the Jordan River, blocking the flow of water for 21 hours.

The Jordan River starts at the Mount Hermon mountain range and flows south into the Dead Sea, 225 kilometres away and at 400 feet below sea level, it is the lowest river in the world. The width varies but is about 100 feet wide and the depth of the river varies between 2 and 10 feet deep in some places and between 50 and 200 feet deep in other places, depending on the season, and a bridge crosses the Jordan at the Jordan Valley. Many people like to be baptised in the Jordan. In the north of Israel, people can swim in the Jordan River, enjoy its beaches, go canoeing, kayaking or go rafting down the river, camp or hike along its beautiful, picturesque shores in the area near the Sea of Galilee. People can go fishing at the Jordan for carp, catfish or rainbow trout. The first reference to the Jordan River is in Genesis. 'Lot looked around and saw all the valley of the Jordan River and saw it was well-watered everywhere ... like the garden of the Lord ... So Lot chose the valley of the Jordan River for himself' (Genesis 13:10). The last reference to the Jordan River was in John's epistle. 'Jesus went beyond the Jordan River to the place where John had been baptising at first and there He stayed' (John 10:40).

Amen and God bless you.

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