

BETWEEN THE LINES

A Deeper Look...

#840- THE JORDAN RIVER: A Stream Through Zion

River Tales: It's really not much of a river as rivers go, but it certainly is ingrained into the heart of Judeo-Christianity. Let's review many of the river experiences of the Bible episodes...

- Genesis 12- Not directly mentioned but Abraham certainly crossed it.
- Genesis 32- First explicit reference to the river when Jacob comes home.
- Numbers 13- It may surprise you that the spies did not cross the river at this point.
- Numbers 32- Two and one half tribes view the east bank as desirable.
- Numbers 33- The new nation gets their first full view of the river and its valley.
- Numbers 34- It is a clearly defined border for a number of the tribes.
- Deuteronomy 1- Moses' last instructions were given by the river.
- Deuteronomy 4- It was on these banks that Moses shared he would not be crossing.
- Deuteronomy 34- The old patriarch takes one last, dying look across to the west bank.
- Joshua 1- The Lord gives three days for them to prepare to cross the stream.
- Joshua 2- Spies ford the river to survey the defenses of Jericho.
- Joshua 3&4- The feet of the priests make a path for a nation.
- Joshua 5- A mass circumcision is performed on the west bank.
- Joshua 22- An impending civil war is averted at a meeting by the river.
- Judges 7- Gideon pursues the enemy to the river.
- I Samuel 13- Israel escapes across the river after a military defeat.
- I Samuel 31- Same enemy, same song, second verse.
- II Samuel 2- The river becomes a buffer from the rebelling army.
- II Samuel 10- David crosses the river to meet an imminent threat head-on.
- II Samuel 17,18,19- David again crosses the river, this time to organize against his son.
- I Kings 17- The prophet is commanded to cross the river until the Lord sends him home.
- II Kings 2- Two prophets at the river. One leaves (for 875 years) and one remains.
- II Kings 5- An alien finds that God uses this stream and not those in his land.
- II Kings 6- Strange things float in this river.
- II Kings 7- The enemy has to flee back over this river again.
- Daniel 1- Not expressly mentioned, but was in the path of captives dragged away.
- Ezra 1- Can you imagine the feelings of captives returning home through the stream?
- Matthew 3- The Holy One of Israel wades down into the water.
- Matthew 4- Some come from beyond the river to learn of the new prophet of Israel.
- Matthew 16- The apostles rest in the headwaters and hear the great proclamation.
- Matthew 19 (and Mark 3,10, John 10)- Jesus crosses to minister in Perea.

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**Geography 101- Introduction to the Jordan:** How dare I say it's not much of a river? Well, judge for yourself...

- The upper Jordan is 68 square miles of streams, swamps, and lakes encompassed by three mountainous regions (Hills of Naphtali to the west, the Range of Hermon to the north, and the Golan heights to the east). This forces the water flow to the south.
- The source of the river is in the Hula Valley at the juncture of four streams: the Hermon, the Ayyon, Dan, and Senir. The Senir is near the northernmost settlement of Israel at Metulla. The Dan is actually a series of multiple springs. The Ayyon has a well-known waterfall (Tannur), which is referred to in II Samuel 20. The Hermon is the very probable site of the great statement of faith given in Matthew 16.
- The lower Jordan only extends for 75 miles as the crow flies but is easily doubled in length due to the circuitous path it takes to the Dead Sea.
- The elevation of the upper Jordan is 230' (69 m) above sea level. It drops to 650' (or 195 m) at the exit of the Sea of Galilee and drops to 1290' (387 m) below sea level when it finally reaches the Dead Sea. Therefore it is easy to understand why this river is called "Jordan". The name means "descender".

- Only two streams of consequence join the main river beneath the Galilee... the Yarmuk almost doubles the flow five miles (14 km) south of the lake and the Jabbok provides a bit less just a bit south of that.
- There are 27 "rapids" in the lower Jordan, but we're not really talking serious white water.
- The span of the river ranges from roughly 45-180' (15-60m) and varies from 3-12' (1-4m) deep.
- The flooding of the springtime makes the river rather unpredictable. Therefore there is no archeological evidence that there has ever been a settlement directly on the riverbank.
- Merrill claims that there was a 12-pier bridge spanning the river during the days of Jesus but many others dispute that. Most assume that there never were pontoons, bridges, or even active "barges" or "ferries" at any time. The river provided two rather obvious fording sites of its own.

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Villages of the River Valley: Though it's true that there were no towns with waterfront property, still there were many settlements in close proximity. Here's a fairly extensive listing going from north to south from the upper Jordan down to the Dead Sea outlet area...

Upper Galilee:

Dan- Canaanite "Laish" became northernmost landmark of the land... thus the reference of Judges 20, "from Beersheba to Dan". • **Caesarea Philippi-** Greek shrine, expanded by Herod's son, Philip (modern Banias). • **Kadesh of Naphtali-** Canaanite fortress which became a Levite city of refuge. • **Giscala-** Home of John, one of the three major zealot defenders of Jerusalem in 70 a.d. • **Hazor-** Joshua destroyed it. Later Deborah and Barak defeated Sisera at that site and Solomon rebuilt it. • **Chorazin-** A village that Jesus chided for its lack of acceptance of His ministry. • **Gamla-** A town of major slaughter during the first revolt against Rome, 70-73.

Lake Cities:

Capernaum • Bethsaida • Tiberias • Tagbha • Magdala • Gergesa • Hamat • Susita.

Lower Galilee:

Belvoir- A crusader town built over the ruins of an ancient village of little consequence. The fortress here provides a spectacular view of the lower river valley. • **Beth-shean-** Bodies of Saul and sons were displayed here by Philistines in I Samuel 31. One of the cities of the "Decapolis". • **Pella-** First Christians sought refuge here after destruction of Jerusalem in 70 a.d. Absalom met his death just outside of this village to the southeast. • **Abel-meholah-** Birthplace of the prophet Elisha. • **Succoth-** The last encampment of the 40 year journey. Jacob met Esau and then stayed here. Brass foundries in this village provided implements for Solomon's temple. • **Beth-barah-** Major fording site. Location of victories of Gideon and Jephthah. • **Phasaelis-** One of Herod's many building projects. A site to honor his brother. • **Gilgal-** First encampment west of the Jordan for the Israelites out of Sinai. • **Jericho-** Location of the first Joshuan victory and the home of Zaccheus. • **Bethabara-** A prime site for safety from the king and baptism... Mark 1.