

THE RIVER OF LIFE – THE JORDAN

In my DVD series, "Finding Your True North," I speak about the three flows of thought that you can trace from Genesis to Revelation. They are the "Scarlet Stream" (Sin), "The Crimson Tide" (Blood), and "The River of Life" (The Jordan River). Why do I call the Jordan by this name? Because wherever it flows, life flourishes. This narrow body of fresh water flows from Mount Hermon (north) for almost 200 miles to the Dead Sea (south). Its headwaters are the Banias, the Dan, and the Hasbani Rivers. The word "Jordan" refers to the "descending Dan River," or "down from Dan," the city from which it descends.



Figure 1 - The Jordan River - Photo by Rick Yohn

Though the Jordan flows north to south for about 150-200 miles, it is quite shallow, ranging from three to ten feet deep. Furthermore, its width ranges between 98 feet to one mile during flood stage. Floods occur during harvest season, which was the exact time when the Israelites crossed the Jordan on dry ground. Joshua records that significant experience when he journals the following thoughts, *"and as soon as those bearing the ark had come as far as the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the brink of the water (now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest)."* (Joshua 3:15 - ESV).

When I read this passage, I can't help but wonder what was going through the minds of the people. I can imagine someone saying to a friend, *"Why in the world would Moses bring us to the Jordan at this time of the year? Any other month and we could have walked across with no trouble. But now we have a one-mile barrier between the Promised Land and us. He seems to have a habit of getting us into impossible situations. I remember my Daddy telling me that Moses did the same thing when they first came out of Egypt. He said, 'Follow me' and took my Daddy and the others to the Red Sea. And now he claims that God led us here. What type of a God would expect us to cross the Jordan and then flood it? Moses probably thinks that our so-called miracle-working God is going to perform the same miracle here."*



Figure 2 - Map of the Jordan Valley South

Perhaps you have had a similar experience where you think God is leading you in a specific direction and you obey, only to run into a brick wall. It is at such times when God expects us to engage our faith by moving towards that impenetrable barrier. He may remove the resisting force. The Lord may also create a hole wide enough for you to pass through. Better yet, he may eliminate the issue altogether. It is at these times when God tells us to take our eyes off the problem and place them squarely upon Him. He is the God who makes a way when there seems to be no way.

The Jordan is the only body of water that was parted on two occasions. The first was when Israel crossed it on dry ground, and the Jordan stopped flowing from a town called Adam, down to the Dead Sea. The distance can be seen between the brackets in the above map. Some commentaries consider that the distance of dry land in the River ranged between 15-30 miles, depending on the exact location of Adam. That distance provided plenty of room for some two and a half million people to cross in a short period of time.

The second time someone parted the Jordan was when the Prophet Elisha was following his mentor Elijah. *"Then Elijah took his cloak and rolled it up and struck the water, and the water was parted to the one side and to the other, till the two of them could go over on dry ground."* (2 Kings 2:8 - ESV).



Figure 3 – My 2006 Group – Photo taken by Linda Yohn

Naaman, the leper, was cleansed in the Jordan after dipping seven times (2 Kings 5). This Jordan is the same river in which John the Baptizer baptized his cousin Jesus. And it is where I've had the privilege of baptizing close to 100 people over the years when leading tours to Israel. For some individuals, this is the first time they've entered the waters of baptism. However, for others, being baptized in the Jordan River is more of a symbolic identification with Jesus.

I've also enjoyed swimming in the frigid waters of the Jordan. The current can be swift at various times of the year, and I happened to pick one of those occasions. I had just completed kayaking down the river with my friend J.T. Anderson and decided to swim against the current. I've swum in competitive events, so I thought there would be little issue with swimming upstream. However, after five minutes using my best swim stroke, I stood up in the Jordan and looked to see how far I had gone. It was then I realized I was standing at the very spot where I began my swim.

Why do I refer to the Jordan River as "The River of Life?" I do so primarily because it is the life-giving water for both the Land of Israel as well as the Land of Jordan. Wherever it flows, trees and vegetation grow.



Figure 4 - Rick Yohn & J.T. Anderson - Photo by Linda Yohn

Likewise, the actual **"River of Life"** is **Jesus Christ** who gives life to all those who will come to the waters and drink. The Lord invited the Samaritan woman to drink of water that will forever quench her thirst. He said, *"If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."* (John 4:10). Our Lord continued by saying, *"Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."* (John 4:13-14)

Israel was expected to appear in Jerusalem for three significant Feasts throughout the year. They included the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Tabernacles (Deuteronomy 16:16). The Feast of Tabernacles or Feast of Booths was celebrated to remind the Jews that they lived in booths, or temporary shelters when they exited from Egypt (Leviticus 23:43). The Torah (the first five books of the Bible) taught Israel that they should make temporary coverings and live in them for seven days as a reminder of the Exodus.

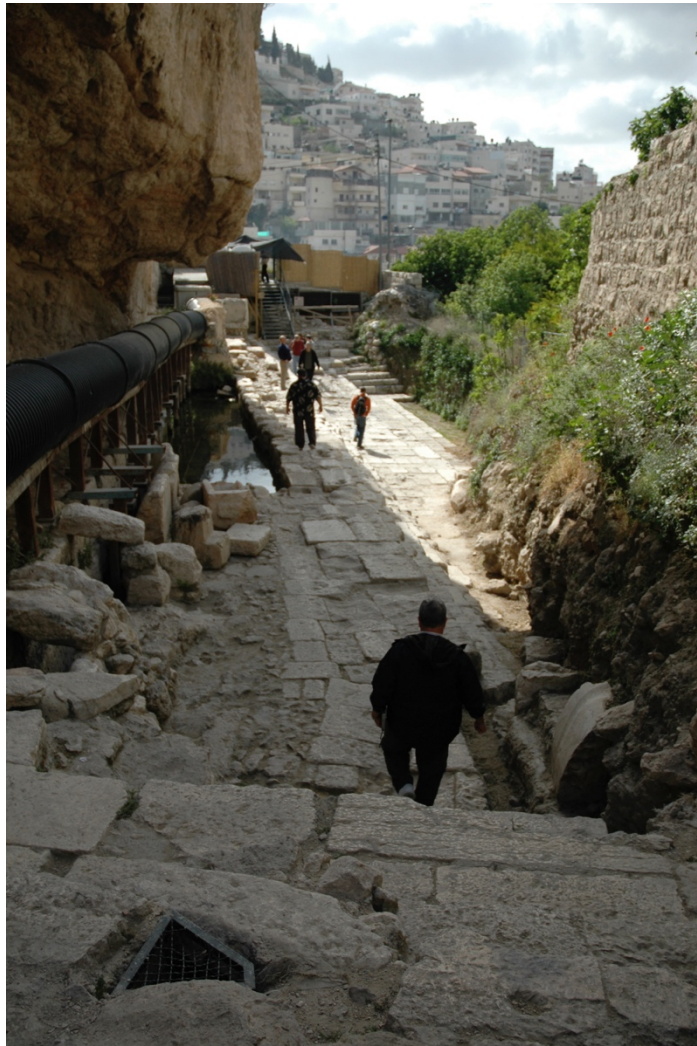


Figure 5 - The Pool of Siloam (2008) - Photo by Rick Yohn

But on the last day of that great Feast, two significant events occurred and included an emphasis on both **LIGHT** and **WATER**. The priests lit giant golden lampstands in the courtyard of the Temple. Those living a distance from Jerusalem could see the Temple that night due to the brilliance of both the giant lampstands and the people marching around the Temple with torches. The light was to remind Israel that God promised He would make them a light to the Gentiles so they could bring salvation to the world (Isaiah 49:6).

As One who kept the Law of Moses (the Torah), Jesus attended the Feast of Booths. And He took this occasion to teach a spiritual truth from a physical celebration. The first claim Jesus made that night centered the people's attention on **LIGHT** which coincided with the lighting of those giant lamps around the Temple Courtyard. He claimed, "***I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.***" (John 8:12). Jesus' claim to be the light of the world drew a swift and angry response from the Jewish leaders.

The second significant event that evening focused on **WATER**. A priest would lead a procession from the Temple down a steep decline to the Pool of Siloam (hidden since A.D. 70 until Eli Shukron, a leading archaeologist, uncovered it in 2004) at the southern tip of the City of David. The priest dipped a golden pitcher into the water and joined the procession up the steep incline to the Watergate of the Temple. He then paused until someone would blow the shofar. After the blowing of the shofar (a ram's horn or something similar), the procession would continue marching to a silver bowl into which the priest would pour the water. This act symbolized that the whole world would know the Messiah when He comes "*as the waters cover the seas*" (Isaiah 11:9).

Jesus made a second startling claim in the Temple that last night. The Scriptures tell us, "***On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, 'If anyone is***

*thirsty, **let him come to me and drink**. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.’ By this, he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given since Jesus had not yet been glorified. On hearing his words, some of the people said, ‘Surely this man is the Prophet.’ Others said, ‘He is the Christ.’” (John 7:37-41)*

Scientists inform us that man can live without food for a few weeks but only two days to a week without water.¹ But when we speak of the "spiritual realm of life," the stakes are a lot higher. If we ignore the **“Bread of life”** (John 6:35) and the **“Water of life”** (John 7:37), our spiritual inner-self goes on life-support. Like the Jordan River that provides life each day for the people of Israel, so does Jesus, our **“River of Life”** provide our daily nourishment through prayer and the reading/studying of God's Word.

So, the next time you read about the Jordan River, think of your River of Life, Jesus Christ. Why not ask Him to quench your thirst for spiritual reality, and feed you the nourishment for which you are searching?

¹ www.livescience.com