

# JORDAN RIVER

The Jordan (“Descender”) River begins at Mount Hermon and travels south through the Sea of Galilee and continues flowing until it empties into the Dead Sea. The distance from Mount Hermon to the Dead Sea is about 125 airline miles. The length of the Jordan River itself is nearly twice this distance (225 miles), taking into account all of its twists and turns.

The Jordan River is divided into two sections. The first is the Upper Jordan, which starts at Mount Hermon and runs down to the Sea of Galilee. The melting snow from Hermon as well as natural springs supply the river. From these headwaters, the Jordan travels south, passing

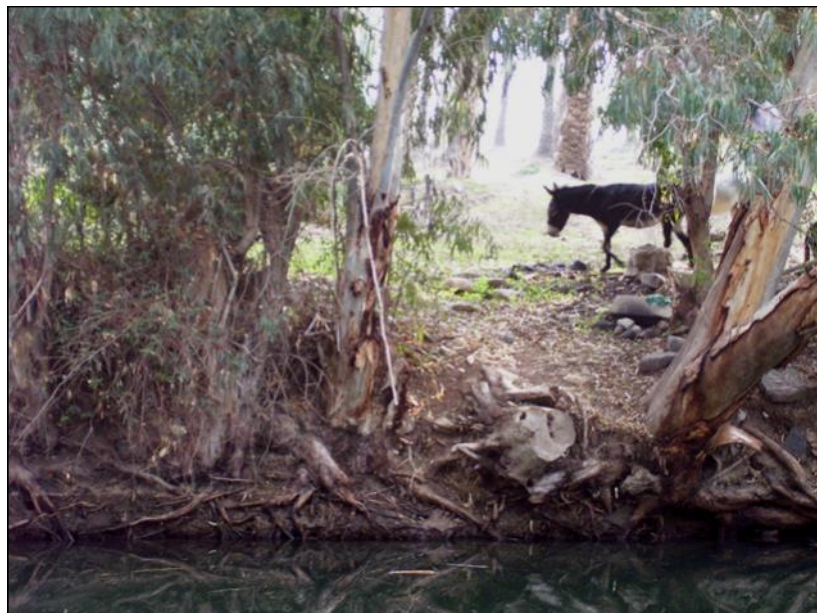


Two Headwaters of the Jordan: Dan River and Hermon River Springs

through the Huleh Basin. This area is a depression about 15 miles long and 5 miles wide; its southern end is about 15 miles north of the Sea of Galilee. This depression once held Lake Huleh as well as the marshes and springs surrounding it, which some identify as “the waters of Merom” (Josh. 11:5). These marshes may have been a source of reeds for the production of papyrus. Due to malaria, most of these waters were drained in the 1950s. Today, there is an 800-acre wildlife preserve where the lake once stood. From this area, the Jordan flows southward into the northern part of the Sea of Galilee. This lake is 13 miles long and 8 miles wide at its farthest points. It is the lowest fresh water source in the world.

The second section is the Lower Jordan that flows out of the Sea of Galilee and eventually empties into the Dead Sea. The distance between the two seas is about 65 airline miles. The river is much longer—about 135 miles—because of its snakelike path. Along the way, there are tributaries that would flood the Jordan River during the springtime rains. These tributaries would make fords on the Jordan—that is, deposits of silt resulting in sand bars. The

fords were places where it was easier to cross the Jordan; these were strategic places to block one's enemy in times of warfare (Judg. 3:28; 12:5-6). The valley of the Lower Jordan is also known as the Jordan Rift. "The jungle of the Jordan" lines both sides of the river (see Jer. 12:5; 49:19; 50:44; Zech. 11:3); at one time, this shady area was home to lions and other wild animals. Today, however, lions no longer inhabit the region.





The Bible alludes to the Jordan River many times. In the Old Testament, the Jordan serves as a dividing line between the tribes of Israel that settled in Canaan (west of the river) and those that settled in the Transjordan (east of the river). Those eastern tribes were Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. Joshua and the Israelites crossed the Jordan on their way to conquer Jericho and the land of Canaan. The Jordan was miraculously parted (Josh. 3:14-17), just as the Red Sea had been in the exodus from Egypt. Twelve stones were taken from the riverbed and set up as a monument nearby at Gilgal to commemorate the event (Josh. 4:19-24). The Jordan was parted once more in the days of Elijah (2 Kings 2:7-8). In the time of Elisha, the leper Naaman (an Aramean army commander) was instructed to dip seven times in the Jordan in order to be cleansed (2 Kings 5:1-14). After seeing the murky, green waters of the Jordan, one can better understand the frustrating tone of Naaman's question: "Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than any of the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?" (2 Kings 5:12).



In the New Testament, the Jordan River serves as the scene where John the Baptist was carrying out his ministry of immersing penitent Jews (Mt. 3:5-6; Mk. 1:5; Lk. 3:3; Jn. 1:28; 3:23). Jesus, even though he was sinless, came to John at the Jordan to be immersed—an event which marked the beginning of the Lord's ministry. Jesus' obedience was followed by the approving words of God the Father as well as empowerment by the Holy Spirit (Mt. 3:13-17; Mk. 1:9-11; Lk. 3:21-23).

A comparison of the Synoptic Gospels with the Gospel of John suggests that Jesus was immersed in the Jordan near Bethany, which was on the eastern bank (Jn. 1:26-28). The traditional site for Jesus' baptism (and Israel's crossing the Jordan in Joshua's day) is known in Arabic as Qasr el-Yahud ("Castle of the Jews"). A number of church buildings and monasteries have been built in this region over the centuries. The site was closed for many years due to land mines, but it was reopened to the public in 2011.



Franciscan Chapel on the West Bank (Israeli Side) Near the Jordan



The Jordan at Qasr el-Yahud





קמ"ט שמירת הטבע והגנים הלאומיים  
ضابط ركن المحميات الطبيعية، والحدائق الوطنية  
NATURE & NATIONAL PARKS PROTECTION AUTHORITY

המינהל האזרחי ליהודה ושומרון  
الإدارة المدنية في יהودا والسامرة  
JUDAEA & SAMARIA CIVIL ADMINISTRATION



## BAPTISMAL SITE – QASER EL-YAHUD

Please respect the site and obey the following rules:

- Heed the instructions of Israel Nature and Parks Authority personnel.
- You are traversing a military zone. Do not cross fences due to fear of landmines.
- Religious ceremonies are held at the site. Please respect ceremonies and worshippers.
- The river is Israel's border with the kingdom of Jordan – do not cross the river.
- Baptism in the river is permitted only in the designated area.
- The river water is not potable.
- Maintain quiet and appropriate dress.
- Driver, turn off your motor while parked.
- Keep the area clean.
- No fires allowed!
- Visitors may remain in the park only during opening hours: winter: 8:00–16:00; summer: 8:00–17:00.

Enjoy your visit!

Israel Nature and Parks Authority







Baptismal Site on the West Bank of the Jordan River





Greek Orthodox  
Church of St. John the Baptist  
on the East Bank of the Jordan River  
(Modern-day Jordan)

Because of water diversion for consumption and crop irrigation, the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River have been significantly shrinking. The water levels were much higher in Old Testament times. When the Israelites crossed over to take Canaan, the Jordan was at “flood stage” during the harvest season, after the spring rains had come (Josh. 3:15; 4:18). In response to the modern decrease in water, Israel has been establishing desalination plants along the Mediterranean coast. This technology provides them with a great alternative water source.