

# The Watering Place – The River Jordan



Christians are familiar with the Gospel story of Jesus being baptised by John the Baptist in the Jordan River. It was the prelude to Jesus' time of temptation in the wilderness and his public ministry. There are, however, stories from the Hebrew scriptures of the Jordan River.



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**Hebrew** Nəhar hayYardēn; **Arabic** Nahr al-'Urdunn

Meaning 'to go down' or 'to descend'  
Or sometimes in **Arabic** Al-Sharī'ah, the  
Watering Place

## Jordan River Facts

The River Jordan is formed from snow melt and water that flows down from Mount Hermon on its descent where it forms subterranean streams to surface in the springs.

These streams become the Hasbani River, the longest of the three rises near Hasbaya in Lebanon, the Baniyas River, flowing from Syria, and the Dan River, which begins and flows inside Israel. These rivers which on the plains above Galilee they merge into one river the Jordan.

From its source to its Dead Sea, some 1,410 ft (430 m) below sea level is a distance of 124 miles away (200 kilometres), the Jordan actually covers 223 miles (360 kilometres) due to its winding course.

See the link below for more information  
[https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Jordan\\_River](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Jordan_River)

## The Holy Jordan River

Three of the world's major religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—consider the river a holy place: Joshua is said to have parted the river's waters and then destroyed nearby Jericho; Jesus was baptized in the river according to the Gospels; and Mohammad and his closest companions are thought to have been buried along its banks.

(World Monument Fund 2008)

## The Jordan River under threat

The is due to over extraction of water from the river and its sources. The geopolitical situation where Israel, Palestine, Syria and Jordan all compete for water from the River Jordan.



The Jordan River is mentioned frequently in the Old Testament. In Genesis ` Lot lifted his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere (before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah) like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt. . . ` (Genesis 13:10)

Moses in Deuteronomy 3:23-29 is forbidden to cross the Jordan River and enter the Promised Land, that would be left to Joshua to lead the people across the Jordan River to freedom in the Promised Land. (Joshua 3)

The Jordan River becomes a symbol of liberation and the crossing into a new life with a faith and building a new nation not of slaves but of a liberated people.

The River Jordan is mentioned in the Gospels of Matthew 3, Mark 2 and in John 1. In John (3:26), we hear of John carrying out further baptisms. `Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified—behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!'



Jordan River park in Israel during summer 2011. Jordan River Chmee2 - Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 (3 photographs)

The baptism offered by John was seen as a sign of repentance from sin and a turning to a new life. Jesus' baptism was outwardly the same but there was a difference. We believe that Jesus was without sin but by going through this public religious act he identified with the ordinary people, it was also an act of humility. This public act was part of the inauguration of his public ministry.

Water was used as an outward sign of somethings that was happening inwardly. It was an experience more than only words. Something happened.

People still go to the Jordan River for baptism and closer to home people are still baptised. It is true fewer than in the past. The waters of baptism still flow but contained.



St Germain's Church ,  
Bobbingworth, Essex, England -  
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Within the Anglican tradition infants are often baptised, and a font is used. I will never forget a baptism I took. The font similar to the one on the left. The candidate was a toddler, rather hyperactive, no matter what I tried I could not hold him still to carry out the baptism. I knew the toddler liked water; I had put a generous amount into the font. I asked the mother to take the boys socks off, the shoes were somewhere on the floor. The toddler was sat on the font with his feet in the water and the baptism became play time with much water being splashed everywhere. It became a joyful occasion a sacrament, laughter and lots of water.

'Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.' Jesus said. For that moment it was that thin space where heaven and earth met, and water played a part.

The Jordan River is more than a Watering Place it is has come to symbolise much more. For many the Jordan River and the events associated with it have a spiritual significance. The scriptures through their stories offer hope, new beginnings as the people of Israel journeyed from slavery to freedom. It was a place where the Spirit of God moves as at Jesus' baptism. Through the waters of baptism, we are renewed, have a sense of belonging, of being members of a community of faith.

In our Baptism service we may use these words

We praise you, loving Father,  
for the gift of your Son Jesus.  
He was baptized in the River Jordan,  
where your Spirit came upon him  
and revealed him as the Son you love.  
He sent his followers  
to baptize all who turn to him. . . .  
and  
. . . We thank you for your Son Jesus,  
who has passed through the deep waters of death  
and opened for all the way of salvation.  
Now send your Spirit,  
that those who are washed in this water  
may die with Christ and rise with him,  
to find true freedom as your children,  
alive in Christ for ever.

Each Easter Day many of us will renew the promises made at our Baptism with this in mind our reflection will draw to the theme of repentance.

Slowly pour out a glass of water

Hear the water as it flows into the glass.

Find your favourite space for this time of prayerful reflection

Place the glass of water on a table and light a candle.

Slow down, breathe calmly, be comfortable and relax.



Let us remember that the Lord is here, and His Spirit is with us, washing away the dust and grime of our lives. His Spirit is poured out on all who thirst.

The song 'Peace is flowing like a river'



<https://youtu.be/D8IANKLqXDE?si=nKUOuOs2QQI2ATuW&t=16>

**Our reading from Mark** 1:2-11 (New King James Version)

*John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.*

*Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."*

Repentance is about us sincerely regretting our misdeeds, of turning away from sin, that is those times when we missed the mark. When we renew our baptismal promise we talk about rejecting evil and repenting of all that separates us from God and our neighbours, In doing this we turn to Christ our Lord, forgiven, renewed.

## Let us now pause and in a time of stillness reflect on our lives.

Reflecting on the times when we miss the mark is not about being obsessed by our wrongdoings but being open to the power of forgiveness.

### A Prayer of Forgiveness Prayer

Your forgiveness is total  
no notebook  
tape recorder  
or post-it note  
to remind you of that moment when.??..  
You take our confession  
offered with hands outstretched  
and gently  
like the loving heavenly Father that you are  
put it to one side to be forgotten  
No grudges, no itching for judgement  
No resentment or ill-will  
Not like us  
who find it easy to say sorry  
but so hard to forgive  
absolutely  
Forgive us, Father  
that we are often more willing  
to accept forgiveness than to forgive.... (John Birch)

When asked about how to pray Jesus gave these simple but profound words, so let them be our prayer:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name;  
Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done;  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation;  
but deliver us from evil. Amen

Our closing song is 'Shall we gather at the river'



<https://youtu.be/xHow0L6gPrs?si=gTxZ8J1Mk6v1QexN>

Lord, pour your Spirit upon us in a gracious, healing way. Make us agents of reconciliation as we live and may we bring a blessing to those we meet. Let us go in peace to love and serve the Lord. Amen

Fr Derek Akker

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(Derek is a retired Anglican Parish Priest and a member of the congregations of All Saints & St James. Prior to his ordination he was accredited as a Methodist Preacher in 1968 and served within the Methodist Church until returning to the Anglican Church in the mid 1980's)

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**Image - Impact of a drop of water.** Featured picture, Picture of the year, Picture of the day  
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