

Healing Waters

By Jordan Reanier

We all had to watch our steps as we walked above the ruins that were being excavated below. It had started to feel as though below the ground was the city, and we stood on the ledge of dirt walls that surrounded it. There wasn't only a few bold adventurers the wall had to support, but at the very least 80 others. All of these members in my tour group had decided to look at me as the family child in need of taking care of, yet I hardly noticed the age gap, since they were all just as curious and big-eyed about the world around us as I was, in every place we visited on our trip to the Middle East.

I was in Israel by a series of events I didn't think would ever happen. Ever since I was little and gazed at maps in the back of my dad's Bible, I wanted to go to Israel. I had forgotten this as the years went by as I slowly realized how difficult something like that would be for me until I was an adult. But when I was just barely fourteen years old, a minister visiting our church, David, announced to my dad he was going to Israel after my dad expressed my large desire to go. He approved of my going, but didn't think it would actually happen.

My grandpa helped with the first 700 dollars, and gave it to me in cash so I could feel what it was like to have that much money in my hand. We sent out emails to a few people, and in less than two weeks, due to the generous hearts of people associated with our ministry, my family and friends, in less than two weeks I had raised five

thousand thousand or so dollars just before the deadline at fourteen years old. I was going to Israel, and just by a hair. With such favor, something amazing must be in the process for once I got there. It was a sign from God that something amazing was going to happen, and he was going to use me to do it. Why else go through all the trouble?

The excavation site we visited was all rustic and ancient looking. Going there was a last minute stop that I hadn't been expecting that morning after we had returned from the marketplace. Some buildings were crumbling at the seams, while others looked perfectly polished and refurbished, yet they all looked like something out of a powerpoint slide a teacher used google images to make in order to teach kids about culture and history. I strayed behind the others for a long moment once we had walked down a makeshift set of wooden steps held together by nothing but the dirt under it. Right below us was one of the newer finds, and the area they worked hardest to preserve; a mosaic bath.

It was a moment preserved in a time none of us could touch. The floor was almost perfectly intact. Our tour guide told us that it was found within that condition and only had to be cleaned off. The others had walked ahead as my mind traced the intricate designs of purple, red, black, and orange. The edges were worn and pieces had gone missing from the large design of a square in various floral arrangements minimizing repeatedly until it had met the shapes' center. My imagination took me elsewhere, as it often does, picturing a woman with dark hair and a light robe over her shoulders, talking with the women and help of the house around her. A woman of perfect health, and

comfort in her surroundings. I spent a large portion of our time standing in front of the bath, daydreaming of being this woman myself.

“Jordan! What are you still doing over here?” a young, thin woman with light brown hair called to me.

The next group had already come and another explanation of the site was being repeated. This wasn't uncommon for me. I had already gotten lost on three other occasions on this trip for brief moments, and one of those times included earlier that day at the market. I joined the woman, whose boyfriend stood alongside her. A group of some of the younger people on our trip, aged between 20-30, had been waiting. Waiting for me, specifically.

I was well enough associated for everyone to have known me, not just for being the youngest person without a parent on the trip, but for being the girl that puked almost every time we had to ride the tour bus, no matter how long of a ride it was. Again, I was known for the scenes my body had played out for other people.

Just the night before, my vision had begun to blur, my stomach had begun to churn, and to this day I can't quite remember whether or not I passed out in Megan's' arms(my temporary guardian for the trip). I had stumbled all over the dining room buffet, unaware of where I was going or what I needed, and returned to my seat from the buffet with an empty plate filled with nothing but a few naked noodles and butter. Even then, I pushed it aside as the smell of starch and boiled water seemed to only make things worse. Megan escorted me to my room just then, and as soon as I had laid my head down on the bed for a moment, I was passed out and was the only one to miss the night service.

Almost everyone had remembered seeing me that way after I tried to approach David, the leader and organizer of the trip as a whole. He seemed to mistake my mumbled pleas for help as a request to sit with him, and in front of quite a few people, said this to me:

“Oh, I’m really sorry, Jordan. See, sometimes as a leader you have to make sure you have time to sit with everyone so they all feel included. We’ll get a chance to sit with you later. You understand, right?”

Right then I almost fell over and he had to help catch me. So of course, after such a scene, they all knew of me and my odd circumstances that not even I understood at the time. They all knew as much as I did; I had a habit of getting sick.

Because of this, these specific group members I was with seemed to be eager to see me that afternoon for a very specific reason, and not remembering where the others had gone, I unknowingly split off from the entirety of our group with the few of them. They felt the intense need to include me with one of their recent findings.

There was a small entry way that lead into the ground not too far from where the mosaic bathhouse where the rich, healthy woman had been wandering in my head. It smelled heavily of sulfur and for once, I felt like shivering in the hot desert of Israel. Logic is still lost on me as to why this area felt so different than the others. Any other colder, cave-like climate we had been in only served to make us all sweat. But this area was rejuvenating, hydrating, and refreshing.

“Are we even allowed to go down there?” I asked.

“Of course! It’s open to tourists,” said the woman’s boyfriend.

“What is it?”

The others had gone ahead of us at this time as the man explained to me that this area was rumored to be a place of significance in the Bible. I can't remember exactly what it was, but my research has lead me to believe that he may have been referring to a passage in Ezekiel 47. Though the healing didn't take place within this little nestled area beneath what the Bible describes as a temple, it was mentioned to have existed and had been ventured through by Ezekiel and God. People, or tourists in the very least, believed that the water was blessed by God, that immersing yourself within it would heal you of any ailments.

So of course, that was the reason they were waiting down below for me. Careful with each step, we entered the cool atmosphere of the small area. Though it felt amazing inside, the water was murky and dark. It had weeds and various dead plants clinging to the cave walls. There was a dry platform for us to stand and watch two others swim about.

I sure didn't want to do it. It looked disgusting, and for the rest of the day, I knew that my shorts would be clinging to my things and rubbing in all the wrong places. Though the others told me this was okay, that all I needed to do was go in until the ankle, and then to the knees. So after some time, they had convinced me.

It always seemed to me that in my Christian life, I needed some sort of magnificent story of my healing. I'd been struggling with it all my life, and especially since I was ten years old, yet no one could fully understand what was wrong with me. It had to be huge. It had to be, especially being a minister's daughter that operated in the gifts of the spirit.

Why couldn't it have been in the pool? It would have given my suffering meaning. If I could only have a good story to tell, maybe I wouldn't feel so terrible about being sick all of the time.

So, I began my descent into the water just below the knee, pinching my eyes shut, trying to concentrate. I thought, perhaps, if I tried as hard as possible, I'd feel something. Anything at all! Eventually, after my legs grew tired, I sat at the edge, kicking my feet in the water and watching the stillness become disturbed throughout the entire body of water. Ripples hit at the wall softly, and I became much more distracted with how wet I could slowly make them until our time had run out.

Maybe in the end, they had misinterpreted that section of the Bible. Then again, maybe not. It was described to heal, but most importantly heal the things around it as the waters that have been touched by Ezekiel. It brought life to the sick fish, to the dying trees that no longer bore fruit, and to the fisherman and collectors that would benefit from it. If I couldn't be healed, then I supposed that being present, repairing and healing others in my own way could suffice. It was a more plausible and attainable to be the healing water than to be healed by the waters in my mind.

I started to wonder why I was here. Before this occasion, I wasn't expecting healing. I did expect something great and spontaneous to happen, but not necessarily this. I'd raised the money, somehow, in a two-week time span to come, and if anyone asked me, I swore that I was there for a reason, that God was going to do something absolutely amazing. It was near the end of the trip, and until then, nothing amazing happened besides getting to explore a new world.

The bus had pulled out for us shortly after we left, and I lingered in the back during our walk there, hoping to avoid any conversation. I had hope, but disappointment was nothing new to me. As per any occasion that I had thought something would change, I kept up a smile on my face and tried to direct all conversation with Christians about my condition on another path.

When everyone was well and seated, I'd helped Muki, our tour guide, do a headcount. I was normally seated at the front of the bus, and so, during travel times, I didn't interact with many of the others besides the leader and his daughter that was around my age that sat up there with me. When some of those who had joined me in the little cavern where the "healing waters" were noticed me once again, two of them joined me up front temporarily to talk.

"You can't live like this forever, Jordan," I remember them telling me. "You have to have faith and walk out your healing, or things will never get better."

The pressure was on. Everyone seemed to be in agreement of this, even the leader of our tour. I wanted it. I wanted it so badly! It wasn't that I didn't believe it was just that maybe I never believed it would happen to me.

"You really do have to start believing that God can heal," the leader said to me.

"I do!" I defended happily. "I think it's already happening from back at the pools. My nausea is starting to go away."

This echoed throughout the bus in a wave. The majority of the people heard it, and I sat a couple seats back, just to prove it. Finally, I could interact with all sorts of people, like the social bug I was. *God is healing me. God is my healer. I am healed right now.* I

repeated in my mind as the bus pulled forward. That was what spiritual people said, right?

Throughout the trip, we all loved to sing. Specifically us younger kids that were on the trip. I'd been entirely confident and willing to show them my voice anytime they asked, and sang a variety of worship songs. It was a lot less for my own enjoyment and a lot more for my own sanity; we had listened to the same four songs the entire trip! The same worship CD's, and the music was corny and awful, even then. They had me and the leader's daughter pass around the microphone the tour guide used to spit facts at us.

This time, both tour guides were on our one bus, and both of them and the bus driver collaborated in what I should sing next after I asked them what it was they wanted to hear.

"Do something American," they all eventually agreed.

This confused me. It wasn't like I was singing a bunch of authentic Hebrew songs. But as it turned out, the same Christian songs they had played on the radio my entire life had been duplicated and translated, and were used quite often with the circles we had contact with. I knew every word by heart, but I hated those songs. But already I'd gotten in trouble for not singing enough Christian songs and singing too much of The Beatles and Elvis Presley.

"Well... I don't know what will be American enough," I said with a laugh.

"The national Anthem is American!" someone said.

Almost too American, I thought. I wasn't sure I had the energy for another song, but it was all celebration and smiles since I had claimed the Holy Spirit had healed my nausea and I could be interactive with them all rather than staring at the front bus window, in pain. But I wasn't about to let everyone down. *It might get better the more I tell myself I'm better. I have to have enough faith, and if I walk it out, maybe it will work.*

So I sang it. *Oh say can you see, by the dawns early light. What so proudly we hail, at the twilight's last gleaming. Whose broad stripes and bright stars, through the perilous fight. For the ramparts we watched were so gallantly streaming. And the rock-*

The most disgusting sound echoed throughout the bus. It sounded like I'd been rammed in the stomach with a pipe in the middle of a monstrous belch. Every soul in the bus heard it, and the microphone, especially, *felt* it.

Muki was always quick to react, pulling my hair back and sticking a bucket beneath my head as I hunched over. I'd lost. My body had defeated me, just as it always did. Apparently, I hadn't had enough faith. I hadn't tried hard enough. My face grew red hot in the face of all my peers, and once I was finished, I took the walk of shame back up to the front of the bus and sat quietly, alone, in the front seat. I was left alone to my thoughts, unable to understand why God failed to heal me *again* and why he'd let me look like a fool in front of everyone.

For the rest of the trip, I tried to actually take care of my body. The lack of water hadn't been helping, and Muki was always one to be handing it out to me as soon as I'd shaken the last few drips out of my last plastic bottle.

No great miracle happened that day. The healing waters were nothing but dirty water kept sacred for propaganda. Those waters would never be God. It was a place, and nothing more. When I'd come home, I still struggled to know what my trip meant. No one had a great revelation of who God was while I tried to minister. I had these ideals that I would change Israel and the world around me, that I'd be an ambassador for God. But truth be told, Israel changed me, instead. It was never about finding the big miracle or the cure, or even a moment of breakthrough. I had to see it all as it was- a dark cavern with murky water and algae growing up the walls.

He never met me at the historical sites. Even at the site where Jesus' tomb was proposed to be, I didn't feel anything. Others cried and shook as they prayed and touched the walls. God would never meet me at those places, and that included the waters. He met me on the bus, while I was throwing up, while I was too sick to enjoy myself. He didn't meet me where I wanted him to. He met me in the moments I wasn't proud of.