

# What is the significance of the Jordan River in the Bible?

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Jordan-River.html>

The Jordan River is a 156-mile-long river that flows north to south from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea. It lies on the eastern border of modern-day Israel and the western borders of both Syria and Jordan. Because of its great length and central location, the Jordan River is mentioned in the Bible over 185 times.

The Jordan River is mentioned indirectly in Genesis 13, where Lot and Abraham are dividing up the land to which God had led them. Abraham allowed Lot to choose his share first, and Lot chose the Jordan Valley, which was lush and well-watered due to the Jordan River (verse 10). This was a pivotal moment, as it not only established that Lot's character was selfish but also directed Lot toward the evil city of Sodom, which God later destroyed (see Genesis 18-19).

Many years later, as the Israelites journeyed from slavery in Egypt to the land God had promised them, the Jordan River acted as both an obstacle and pathway. The people had wandered in the wilderness for 40 years as a punishment for distrusting the Lord's care when He first brought them to Canaan; Moses himself was denied entry into the Promised Land and was only allowed to view it from a mountain across the Jordan before he died (Numbers 27:12; Deuteronomy 31:2; 32:48-52). It was the next generation of Israelites who stood on the banks of the Jordan, ready to enter Canaan at last. Only the Jordan River stood in their way now, and it was at flood stage (Joshua 3:15). At God's command, Joshua (the people's new leader) instructed the priests bearing the Ark of the Covenant to stand in the water of the river. They obeyed, and the Jordan immediately stopped flowing to make a way for the people to cross over on dry ground (Joshua 3:15-17). Then

began the conquest of Canaan; the tribes of Gad and Reuben and half of Manasseh settled on land on the east side of the Jordan River, but they helped their fellow Israelites with the taking of the Promised Land first (Joshua 1:12-18).

After the miraculous crossing of the Jordan River, Joshua had the people set up two memorials: twelve stones from the Jordan River were placed on dry ground, and twelve stones from the banks of the river were placed in the middle of the river where the priests had stood. Thus the location of God's demonstration of power on behalf of Israel was marked for generations to come (Joshua 4:1-9).

The Old Testament mentions the Jordan River many more times, usually in stories of the Israelites' battles and disputes. The river served as a strategic site in the war against the Midianites, led by Gideon (Judges 7:24-25). Later, King Saul and several of his sons perished in a battle near the Jordan River (see 1 Samuel 13). Several other passages mention the Jordan being crossed in order to engage an enemy (2 Samuel 2:29; 17:22; 19:17-18). The prophets Elijah and Elisha were associated with the Jordan River on many occasions: Elijah lived for a time near the Jordan (1 Kings 17:5), Elisha told Naaman the Syrian to bathe in the Jordan to be healed of his leprosy (2 Kings 5:10), and Elisha caused a sunken ax head to float on the Jordan (2 Kings 6:1-6). Both prophets crossed the Jordan River by miraculous means in 2 Kings 2:7-14.

In the New Testament, the Jordan River played an important role in preparing people for the ministry of Jesus Christ. John the Baptist preached at the river regularly and baptized everyone who repented (Luke 3:2-3). Jesus Himself came to John at the Jordan River to be baptized (Mark 1:9)—not to show repentance but to fully identify with us and “to fulfill all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15). It was at the Jordan River that God the

Father proclaimed His love for and pleasure with the Son and the Spirit descended upon Jesus at the commencement of His ministry (Luke 3:21-22).