

*jordan
the holy land*

JORDAN



Content

| | |
|--|----|
| Baptism Site / Bethany Beyond the Jordan | 3 |
| Hill of Elijah | 4 |
| Pisgah / Mount Nebo | 5 |
| Medeba / Madaba | 6 |
| Machaerus / Mukawir | 7 |
| Anjara | 7 |
| Prophet Elijah's Shrine | 8 |
| Mephaath / Umm Ar-Rasas | 9 |
| Gadara / Umm Qays | 10 |
| Gerasa / Jerash | 11 |
| Rabbath - Ammon / Amman | 12 |
| Petra | 13 |
| Arnon Valley / Wadi Mujib | 14 |
| Pella / Tabaqat Fahl | 15 |
| Umm Al-Jimal | 16 |
| Lot's Cave | 17 |
| Heshbon / Hisban | 18 |
| Rehab | 19 |
| Dibon / Dhiban | 19 |
| The Early Church in Aqaba | 20 |
| Map of Biblical Jordan | 21 |





Baptism Site / Bethany Beyond the Jordan

The Bible narrates that people used to travel from Jerusalem and Yahuda and from the countries bordering Jordan to be baptized by John the Baptist. “And it came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee” (Mark 1:9)

Jesus left Nazareth and went to Scythopolis (Baysan) and he spent the night close to Pella. On the second morning of his journey he continued to the east bank of the Jordan River and he arrived at Bethany beyond Jordan and went to John to be baptized by him in the river and stood in line with the repentant sinners. John recognized Jesus by inspiration from the Holy Spirit and tried to discourage him by saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” But Jesus answered him, ‘Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.’ Then he consented.” (Matthew 3:14-15).

John confirms the location of these events, saying, “These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.” (John 1:28).

St. Mary of Egypt

One of the famous legends regarding the area of the Baptism Site is about the life of St. Mary of Egypt who chose to live a disreputable life in Alexandria in her youth. She abandoned her past during a visit to Jerusalem and became a model of repentance. After praying to Virgin Mary in Jerusalem, she heard a voice telling her: “Cross the Jordan and you will find rest”. She crossed to the east bank of the river Jordan, and spent the last 47 years of her life living alone, praying and fasting in the Jordanian desert where she could be close to God. Before her death, she was found by Zosimus, the monk from a nearby monastery, who prayed with her and gave her Holy Communion.

A few days later Zosimus found her dead. He buried her, reportedly with the help of a lion that helped him dig her grave with its paws.





Hill of Elijah

This site has long been identified as the same place from which tradition says Elijah ascended to Heaven. Elijah, one of the most famous prophets sent to the people to bring them back from paganism, lived during the time of the rule of King Ahab in Israel. Ahab and his wife oppressed Elijah, and when Elijah grew old, God inspired him to leave and settle in what is today Jordan. When he and his successor Elisha arrived at the River Jordan, Elijah struck it with his cloak and parted the waters of the river. They crossed the dry land, and as they were speaking together upon the other side of the river, a fiery chariot came and carried Elijah into the heavens (2 Kings 2).





Pisgah / Mount Nebo

Mount Nebo is most known for being the site where Moses overlooked the Holy Land but did not enter it and where a church and a monastery were built to honor him. The book of Numbers (33:47) mentions that when the children of Israel moved from Almon Diblathaim they camped in the mountains of Abarim, before Nebo, and that the children of Reuben rebuilt the city (Numbers 32:38).

The city remained with the Moabites, according to Isaiah: “Moab will wail over Nebo and over Medeba; on all their heads will be baldness, and every beard cut off” (Isaiah 3-15:2). The Prophet Jeremiah (48:1) said of Nebo, “Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Woe to Nebo! For it is plundered.”

The Prophet Moses “went up from the plains of Moab to the top of Pisgah, which is across from Jericho. And the Lord showed him all the land...” but told him, “you shall not go over there.” (Deuteronomy 4-34:1). “So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD, and he buried him in the valley in the land of Moab opposite Beth-peor; but no one knows the place of his burial to this day.” (Deuteronomy 6-34:5).

In the fourth century three domed buildings were erected in the place of the current altar. The place used to have a hidden passage which contained graves decorated with mosaics. On both sides of the place there were two small churches for performing the burial prayers. The baptistery, which is in the northern section of the site, is decorated with mosaics, while the floor of the southern section is decorated with a large cross.





Medeba / Madaba

The book of Joshua mentions that Madaba and its neighboring areas were assigned to Jacob's eldest son with Leah; Reuben: "So their territory was from Aroer, which is on the edge of the Valley of the Arnon (Al-Mujib), and the city that is in the middle of the valley, and all the tableland by Medeba...And the border of the people of Reuben was the Jordan as a boundary. This was the inheritance of the people of Reuben, according to their clans with their cities and villages." (Joshua 23-13:16).



The Madaba mosaic map located in the Greek Orthodox Church is the oldest picture map of the entirety of the Holy Land that mentions the names of historical cities and rivers. The map is said to have been made during the second half of the sixth century due to its stylistic resemblance to that of the Church of the Apostles.



Machaerus / Mukawir

The 1st century AD Roman-Jewish historian Josephus, identified the awe-inspiring site of Machaerus (modern-day Mukawir) as the palace-fortress of Herod Antipas, the Roman-appointed regional ruler during the life of Jesus Christ. It was here, at this hilltop fortified palace overlooking the Dead Sea region and the distant hills of Palestine and Israel that Herod imprisoned and beheaded John the Baptist. He was beheaded after Salome's fateful dance. (Matthew 11-14:3)

On a clear night you can easily make out the lights of Al-Quds (Jerusalem) and Ariha (Jericho). Far removed from the tourist circuit, the quiet of this area transports you back into Biblical times. Indeed, shepherds and their flocks still find shelter in the myriad caves and grottoes around Machaerus. Hike down towards the Dead Sea from Machaerus and you will truly feel that you are on top of the world.

Anjara

It is believed that Jesus Christ, his disciples, and the Virgin Mary passed through Anjara in the hills of Gilead once and rested in a cave there during a journey between the Sea of Galilee, the Decapolis Cities, Bethany Beyond the Jordan and Jerusalem. The cave in Anjara has long been a holy place for pilgrims and has now been commemorated with a modern shrine, the Church of Our Lady of the Mountain. The cave was also designated by the Catholic Churches of the Middle East as one of the five pilgrimage sites for the year 2000.





Prophet Elijah's Shrine

The book of Kings mentions the homeland of Prophet Elijah stating, “Now Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, “As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word.” (1 Kings 17:1).

Clay articles from the Hellenic and Roman eras and the Arab Middle Ages have been found in the city. Additionally, a number of items such as mosaic stones, lanterns and ornamental items from the Byzantine era were also found. A pool carved in the rock was discovered one kilometer to the northeast of Lesteb. This site is also near the brook of Cherith mentioned in First Kings.

“And the word of the LORD came to him: “Depart from here and turn eastward and hide yourself by the brook Cherith, which is east of the Jordan. You shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there.” So he went and did according to the word of the LORD. He went and lived by the brook Cherith that is east of the Jordan. And the ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook.” (1 Kings 6-17:2).

The remains of one of the largest known Byzantine churches in Jordan can be found at the site. Artifacts from this site including marble carvings and small metal religious objects that are on display at the Ajloun Castle Museum.



Mephaath / Umm Ar-Rasas

While the origin of the Arabic name “Umm Ar-Rasas” remains a mystery to this day it wasn’t until the seven-teen century that archaeologist Jemer Deran suggested that Umm Al Rasas is in fact Mephaath mentioned in the Book of Joshua. Inscriptions in the churches of Umm Ar-Rasas validated Deran’s theory and proved that it was in fact Mephaath, which the Bible mentioned was located in land of Moab and which was also considered a refuge for those guilty of accidental killing (Joshua 20).

“And Moses gave an inheritance to the tribe of the people of Reuben according to their clans. So their territory was from Aroer, which is on the edge of the Valley of the Arnon, and the city that is in the middle of the valley, and all the tableland by Medeba; with Heshbon, and all its cities that are in the tableland; Dibon, and Bamoth-baal, and Beth-baal-meon, and Jahaz, and Kedemoth, and Mephaath” (Joshua 18-13:15)

“Judgment has come upon the tableland, upon Holon, and Jahzah, and Mephaath” (Jeremiah 48:21).

The main attraction is outside the city walls within the Church of St. Stephen, which contains a very large, perfectly preserved mosaic floor laid down in 718 AD. It portrays fifteen major cities of the Holy Land from both east and west of the River Jordan. This magnificent mosaic is second only to Madaba’s world famous mosaic map of Jerusalem and the Holy Land.





Gadara / Umm Qays

The old Decapolis city of Gadara (modern-day Umm Qays) is a spectacular destination. The structures of the city are a combination of Ancient Graeco-Roman ruins intertwined with houses of an Ottoman village built with black basalt stone giving the city a grand and unique feel. This area is also where Jesus performed the miracle of the Gadarene swine, casting spirits out of two demented men and into a herd of pigs which then ran into the waters of the Sea of Galilee and drowned.



“And when he [Jesus] came to the other side, to the country of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men met him, coming out of the tombs, so fierce that no one could pass that way. And behold, they cried out, “What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time? Now a herd of many pigs was feeding at some distance from them. And the demons begged him, saying, “If you cast us out, send us away into the herd of pigs.” And he said to them, “Go.” So they came out and went into the pigs, and behold, the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the waters.” (Matthew 32-8:28)



Gerasa / Jerash

The ancient city of Jerash prides itself for having an unbroken chain of human occupation dating back more than 6,500 years. During the pre-Roman era, and more specifically during the reign of Ptolemy III (246-222 BC), Jerash was a prosperous city. It was later captured by Alexander Jannaeus, the leader of the Jews (76-102 BC), and remained under Jewish rule until the Roman leader Pompey captured Syria and Palestine in the middle of the first century BC.

During the period of Roman paganism, Jerash was famous for its many huge temples. After the end of Christian persecution and the conversion of the Romans to Christianity, the city began to receive fame for its large churches. Today, twenty churches have been found in Jerash including: The Cathedral Church, Saint Theodoros Church, John's Church, Saint George's Church, and Saints Cosmas and Damian's Church.





Rabbath - Ammon / Amman

Amman, previously known as Philadelphia and as Rabbath Ammon, is one of the Decapolis Cities of the area and once served as the capital of the Ammonite tribes. Mentioned in the Old Testament, the previous name of Amman, Rabbath Ammon, was the name of Saint Lot's son. In the thirteenth century BC the Ammonite tribes united and formed a kingdom for themselves, predating the Israelite tribes, who were still living in the time of the Judges and did not form a kingdom until the time of the Prophet Samuel who anointed Saul as king in 1030 BC.

When David fled from Saul and his men, he found refuge and an ally in Nahash, king of Ammon. When Nahash passed away, his son Hanun succeeded him on the throne. When the people of Ammon saw that they had made themselves repulsive to David, they started preparing for a battle and hired mercenaries from Aram (Syria). When David heard of their plan he sent Joab and an army of the mightiest men to fight them. Then the people of Ammon came out and put themselves in battle array at the entrance. So Joab and the people who were with him drew near for the battle against the Syrians, and they fled before him. When the people of Ammon saw that the Syrians were

fleeing, they also fled, and entered the city and took refuge behind its wall and towers.



So Joab returned from the people of Ammon and came to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 14-10:1). Eventually David's army conquered the Ammonites. "And it came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle, that David sent Joab to fight the children of Ammon, he besieged Rabbath and destroyed the children of Ammon" (2 Samuel 11:1). The city is also mentioned in the New Testament as the land of martyrs where Christians were killed by the Romans.



Petra

Christianity came to Petra during its early stages. When the whole city became Christian, its inhabitants changed many of the tombs into churches, including the “Al Jara Grave” to a church in 447 at the time of Bishop Jazonous. Petra was a diocese during the Byzantine era, and as proof the remains of a Catholic cathedral are found there.

During the time of Jesus and the Apostles, one of the East Mediterranean’s greatest trading centres was located in the southern Jordan city of Petra, the extensive rock-cut capital of the Nabataean Kingdom.

Petra flourished during Nabataean rule from the 3rd century BC to the early 2nd century AD, when it was occupied by the Roman Emperor, Trajan. Petra seems to be mentioned in the Bible’s Old Testament under several possible names, including Sela and Joktheel (2 Kings 14:7).

During the Exodus, Moses and the Israelites passed through the Petra area in Edom. Local tradition says that the spring at Wadi Musa (Valley of Moses), just outside Petra, is the place where Moses struck the rock and brought forth water (Numbers 11-20:10). The Bible says that Moses was not allowed to enter the Holy Land but could only glimpse it from Mount Nebo, because he struck the rock with his rod to bring forth water, instead of speaking to it as God had commanded (Numbers 24-20:12).

Petra was almost certainly the last staging post of the three kings, who took frankincense, gold and myrrh to honour the baby Jesus in Bethlehem (Matthew 12-2:1). The King Aretas, mentioned in Corinthians 11:32, was a Nabataean king who ruled Petra.





Arnon Valley / Wadi Mujib

Arnon Valley is mentioned throughout the Old Testament: “Their territory was from Aroer, which is on the bank of the River Arnon (Al Mujib), and the city that is in the midst of the ravine, and all the plain by Medeba , This was the inheritance of the children of Reuben according to their families, the cities and their villages” (Joshua 23-13:16).

Arnon Valley is mentioned in the Books of Joshua (13 ,9 ,12:1), Judges (11:13) and Isaiah (2:16): “For it shall be as a wandering bird thrown out of the nest; so shall be the daughters of Moab at the fords of the Arnon”. It also appears in Jeremiah: “Tell it beside the Arnon, that Moab is laid waste.” (Jeremiah 48:20).



At King Mesha’s monument there is mention to his role in paving the road to Arnon River. When the Romans conquered the entire area, they paid special attention to the Mujib road. They paved it with stones and erected milestones. Some of it still remains there to this day. They also built castles and established military bases to protect caravans and travelers from the danger of the robbers.



Pella / Tabaqat Fahl

The city of Pella (Tabaqat Fahl) has been continuously occupied since Neolithic times and was first mentioned in the 19th century BC in Egyptian inscriptions. Its name was later Hellenized to Pella, perhaps to honor Alexander the Great's birthplace. During this period Pella was one of the cities making up the Decapolis. At the advent of Christianity, the religion was spread in Pella (Tabaqat Fahl) and the city was the site of one of Christianity's earliest churches. According to Eusebius of Caesarea it was a refuge for Jerusalem Christians in the 1st century AD who were fleeing the Jewish–Roman wars. The city was destroyed by the earthquake of 746 and a small village remains in the area.





Umm Al-Jimal

The city of Umm Al-Jimal was given this name because of its key location as a stop on camel caravan routes (“Jimal” means “camels” in Arabic). Umm Al-Jimal, like a few other sites in the area, was built using black volcanic rocks due to the paucity of timber in the area. Nabatean inscriptions and graves have also been found in and around the city.

A total of fifteen churches have been uncovered in the Umm Al-Jimal area. The oldest church is that of Eulianos which dates back to 345 AD. Others, like the churches of Claudius and Maseshous are named after either the architects who designed them or the charitable people who built them.





Lot's Cave

The infamous Sodom and Gomorrah and other cities of the Dead Sea plain (Cities of the Valley) were the subjects, including that of Lot, whose wife was turned into a pillar of salt for disobeying God's will (Genesis 19:26). Lot and his two daughters survived and fled to a cave near the small town of Zoar (modern-day Safi) (Genesis 22-15 :19). The Bible says Lot's daughters gave birth to sons whose descendents would become the Ammonite and Moabite people, whose kingdoms were in what is now central Jordan.

"So it was that, when God destroyed the cities of the valley, God remembered Abraham and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow when he overthrew the cities in which Lot had lived. Now Lot went up out of Zoar and lived in the hills with his two daughters....The firstborn bore a son and called his name Moab. He is the father of the Moabites to this day. The younger also bore a son and called his name Ben-ammi. He is the father of the Ammonites to this day." (Genesis 38-19:29)





Heshbon / Hisban

The Song of Solomon, which was written in the fifth century before Christ, points to the fact that Heshbon was famous for its two pools: “Your eyes are pools in Heshbon, by the gate of Bath-rabbim.” (Song of Solomon 7:4).

Deuteronomy (30–2:26) mentions that when Moses arrived at the Wilderness of Kedemoth he sent messengers to Sihon King of Heshbon “with words of peace, saying ‘Let me pass through your land. I will go only by the road; I will turn aside neither to the right nor to the left. You shall sell me food for money, that I may eat, and give me water for money, that I may drink. Only let me pass through on foot, as the sons of Esau who live in Seir and the Moabites who live in Ar did for me, until I go over the Jordan into the land that the LORD our God is giving to us.’ But Sihon the king of Heshbon would not let us pass by him, for the LORD your God hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate, that he might give him into your hand, as he is this day.”

On the 18th of December 746 an earthquake destroyed buildings and civilizations in Hisban and cities and villages in the region; the city of Hisban was able to sustain its civilization until the end of the eighth century. In addition to the excavated graves from the Roman and Byzantine eras, there are the remains of three churches. The remains of a church on top of the hill (Acropolis), the remains of a church on top of the hill on the east, and the remains of a church to the north of the hill.

Rehab

Rehab Banu Hassan is a biblical city mentioned in the second Book of Samuel (10:6), in which it was reported that the king of Ammon sent for and hired 20,000 Syrian men from Beth Rehob and from Zoba to fight in his army in the war against King David whose army came from Jerusalem under the leadership of Joab to defeat Ammon. The city is also mentioned in the book of Judges (18:28).

The most significant ruins of Christian Rehab include eight churches. Two of them are from the time of Biodorus the archbishop of Basra (Prophet Isaiah and Saint Mina in 634), another built during the era of Archbishop Aghabious (Saint Mary in 534) and five more churches built during the time of Archbishop Pauleoctus of Basra (Saint Baseleous in 594, Saint Paul in 596, Saint Sofia in 604, Saint Stephen in 620 and the Church of Saint Peter in 624).

Dibon / Dhiban

Dhiban (Dibon) is a biblical city that was populated starting with the Bronze Age (3000 BC). Some buildings from the Iron Age were also found on the city's hill. (or "one of the city's hills" if there are more than one.) It is mentioned several times in the Bible. "We overthrew them; Heshbon, as far as Dibon, perished; and we laid waste as far as Nophah; fire spread as far as Medeba." (Numbers 21:30). "And the people of Gad built Dibon, Ataroth, and Aroer." (Numbers 32:34) The city is also mentioned in the Old Testament by the name of Medeba (Numbers 21:30; Joshua 13:9)

Excavations reveal run-down buildings, streets and walls from different historical eras. Clay items were also found, the oldest of them from the ninth century BC. The area seems to have played an important role throughout the Iron Age (586-1200BC), as mentioned on Mesha's Stele, or Moab's Stone, a black basalt stone discovered in 1868 AD. Engraved upon this stone were the achievements and victories of the Moabite King Mesha in the middle of the ninth century BC.



The Early Church in Aqaba

Walls of the Aqaba church are preserved to a height of some 15 feet. (S. Thomas Parker).

The remains of the oldest known structure designed and built as a church have been found at the Jordanian Red Sea port of Aqaba. Pottery, such as Tunisian red-slipped tableware, from the building's foundations dates the church to the late third or beginning of the fourth century, according to its excavator, North Carolina State University archaeologist S. Thomas Parker. That the building was a church is indicated by its eastward orientation, overall plan (a basilica with a central nave flanked by side aisles), and artifacts, such as glass oil lamp fragments. In an adjacent cemetery 24 human skeletons, most interred in simple mud-brick tombs, have been excavated. Pottery and coins indicate that the cemetery, like the church, was in use in the fourth century, and one tomb yielded a fragmentary bronze cross, suggesting the deceased was a Christian. A bishop of Aila, as ancient Aqaba was known, was present at the Council of Nicaea convened by Constantine in 325 to debate the nature of the holy trinity and other matters. Participation of Aila's bishop in the council suggests the city had a significant Christian community.

The church, about 85 feet by 53 feet, had mud-brick walls built on stone foundations with arched doorways. Both the nave and side aisles appear to have been vaulted. Traces of red and black paint are preserved on the white plaster of one wall of the nave, but no images are clearly discernible. Seven stone risers from a staircase suggest the building had a second story. East of the nave are the chancel area and a rectangular apse. Only part of the chancel has been excavated, but two phases of a stone foundation, apparently for the screen, have been revealed.

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Map of Biblical Jordan



1. Bethabara/Bethany Beyond the Jordan+ Hill Of Elijah
2. Pisgah/Mt. Nebo
3. Medeba/Madaba
4. Machaerus/Mukawir
5. Prophet Elijah's Shrine
6. Lady of the Mountain- Anjara
7. Umm Ar-Rassas
8. Gadara/Umm Qais
9. Gerasa/Jerash
10. Rabbath-Ammon/Amman
11. Petra
12. Arnon Valley/Wadi Mujib
13. Eloth/Aqaba
14. Pella
15. Rammoth
16. Um Al-Jimal
17. Brook of Cherith
18. Jabesh-Gilead
19. Zaphon
20. Rehab
21. Succoth/Deir-Alla
22. Jabbok River
23. Heshbon/Hisban
24. Dibon
25. Aro'er
26. Sodom and Gomorrah
27. Kir-Moab
28. Zoar/Safi
29. Zared Valley/Wadi Hasa
30. Lot's Cave
31. Phaino/Feinan
32. Sela
33. Buseira
34. Mt. Hor/Aaron's Tomb

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