

## BETHANY BEYOND JORDAN “THE HEART OF THE HOLY LAND”

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The Authenticity of the baptism site is as pure as the testimonies of the Gospels, the pilgrims' accounts, the mosaic map of the Holy Land, and the archaeological discoveries at the site since 1997. All of these sources are crowned by official documents sent to the Royal Commission of the Baptismal Site by heads of churches throughout the world saying that Jesus was baptized east of the Jordan and the baptism site is one of the holiest sites for Christianity, asking for pieces of land to build their new churches, monasteries, and pilgrims' houses at the site; giving the site back its spirit after having been abandoned for a considerable amount of time. In other words, history is being written again; one generation after the other will understand the reason why the monastic life continued at the site and how the site became once again a pilgrimage site for believers who wanted to follow the trails of the prophets and be in physical contact with holy sites.

### **Important Biblical Events in Bethany Beyond Jordan**

Many important Biblical events took place at our cherished site, among the most important chronologically speaking after the death of Moses, are:

- Joshua crossing the Jordan River from this land towards Jericho with the 12 tribes of Israel after the death of Moses in the area of Mount Nebo (Joshua Chapters 1 to 5).
- Elijah dwelling in John the Baptist's spring (Brook Cherith), when the ravens brought him flesh and bread morning and evening (First Kings Chapter 17).
- Elijah and Elisha' coming from Jericho, crossing the Jordan River, and the ascension of Elijah to the heavens in a chariot and horses of fire (Elijah's Hill). Elisha' taking Elijah's mantle,

and going back towards Jericho the same way he had crossed it with Elijah (second Kings Chapter 2).

- John the Baptist coming in the spirit and power of Elijah to the place where Elijah ascended to the heavens (Elijah's Hill / Bethany beyond Jordan) (Luke Chapter 1:17)
- Jesus coming to Bethany beyond Jordan where John was baptizing and being baptized at the site (John 1:28 / John 3:26).

### **Examples of Sites Closely Related with Bethany beyond Jordan**

*Mount Nebo and Livias (Tall ar-Rāma)*

After the death of Moses in the area of Mount Nebo, Joshua took over, rested in the area of Livias, hence from the plains of the area of Bethany beyond Jordan led the 12 tribes of Israel toward Jericho crossing the Jordan River (Exodus and Joshua Chapters 1 to 5).

We note that Mount Nebo, Livias and Bethany beyond Jordan were important stops by many pilgrims following the trails of the Prophets in Holy Land. Parts of the pilgrimage route, a few stations, and some Milestones were discovered by a team of the Department of Antiquities during the last few years.

*Listib / Tishbe / Tall Mār Ilyās (Prophet Elijah)*

Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab "As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word".

Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah: "Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. You will drink from the brook, and I have ordered the ravens to feed you there". So he did what the Lord told him.

He went to the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan, and stayed there. The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook. Some time later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land (First Kings 17:1-7).

That is the reason why a large basilica is built at the top of the hill overlooking Listib having an inscription, which includes the name Elijah.

In short we can say that Elijah was born in Listib and ascended to the heavens from the area of Bethany beyond the Jordan. For this reason we have two sites in Jordan having the name (Elijah's Hill / Tall Mār Ilyās).

#### *Mukāwir / Macharius (John the Baptist)*

When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples to ask Him "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" Jesus replied "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor" (Matthew 11:1-6).

At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the reports about Jesus, and he said to his attendants "This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead! That is why miraculous powers are at work in him". Now Herod had arrested John and bound him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, for John had been saying to him: "it is not lawful for you to have her". Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people, because they considered him a prophet.

On Herod's birthday the daughter of Herodias danced for them and pleased Herod so much that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked. Prompted by her mother, she said "Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist". The king was distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he ordered that her request be granted and had John beheaded in the prison. His head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, who carried it to her mother. John's disciples came and took his body and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus (Matthew 14:1-12).

We can therefore conclude that John the Baptist started his ministry in Bethany beyond the Jordan, Baptized the people in the spring formed

at Elijah's Hill, Baptized Jesus on the eastern bank of the river Jordan, and was beheaded after being imprisoned at Mukāwir/Macharius.

#### *Umm Qays / Gadara (Jesus Christ)*

Jesus calms the storm while crossing to the eastern bank of Lake Galilee. When He arrived at the other side in the region of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men coming from the tombs met him. They were so violent that no one could pass that way "What do you want with us, Son of God?" they shouted "Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?" Some distance from them a large herd of pigs was feeding. The demons begged Jesus "If you drive us out, send us into the herd of pigs".

He said to them "Go!" so they came out and went into the pigs, and the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and died in the water. Those tending the pigs ran off, went into the town and reported all this, including what happened to the demon-possessed men. Then the whole town went out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him, they pleaded with him to leave their region (Matthew 8:18-34).

From Umm Qays Lake Galilee can be seen and the entire story of Jesus sending the demons into the herd of pigs, healing the demon-possessed men can be remembered.

N.B. The same story mentions the region of the Gerasenes (Luke 8:26) instead of the Gadarenes.

Therefore we can link many sites with the Baptismal Site as pilgrimage stations from where they can visit other sites spiritually linked with Bethany beyond the Jordan where Jesus was baptized, turning it once again into a pilgrims station as it once was.

Pilgrims throughout history paid attention, visited, and described the Holy Land. Following the trails of the prophets, many of these sites were discovered east of the Jordan and can be effectively used to encourage religious tourism starting from Bethany beyond the Jordan, enabling us to build the bridges of love and peace between different religions and cultures.

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### Bibliography

*The Holy Bible*



1. A helicopter view of Bethany beyond the Jordan (Mr. Zohrab Markarian).



2. A helicopter view of Mount Nebo from the east (Rustom Mkhjian).



3. A view from Mount Nebo to the Jordan valley plains (Rustom Mkhjian).



4. View of Listib from the east (Rustom Mkhjian).



5. The large basilica built in memory of Elijah (Rustom Mkhjian).



6. The peristyle area at Macharius (Rustom Mkhjian).



7. A general view of Macharius (Rustom Mkhjian).



8. A view from Umm Qays with Lake Galilee in the background (Rustom Mkhjian).