

PART 2 — ON THE BANKS OF THE JORDAN RIVER

IDENTITY AND POWER

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Jordan River

The Jordan has always
been a symbolic place of
transition for God's people.



ANCHOR TEXT: Read Mark 1:9-11 to gain some context for the lesson.

THE JORDAN RIVER

This has always been a place of transition—transitions of power, purpose, and impact.

In the days of Moses, the Israelites camped in the **Plains of Moab** on the eastern bank of the **Jordan River**, preparing to conquer Canaan (Numbers 22:1). As an old man, Moses passed the mantle of leadership to his protégé, Joshua (Deuteronomy 31:1-3). With the last of his strength, Moses climbed to the peak of **Mount Nebo** and surveyed the land of Canaan (34:1-3). He had brought God's people this far, out of the land of

slavery and into the wilderness. After Moses died on the mountain, Joshua would lead Israel through the Jordan into the land of promise (Joshua 3:14-17).

Nearly 1,000 years later, and just down the road, another transition took place beside this river. After a faithful life of ministry, the great prophet Elijah called all the prophets of God together, choosing Elisha to be the man who would serve as the Lord's representative after him (2 Kings 2:6-13). Once God had split the heavens to take Elijah up in a chariot of fire (2:11-12), He split the Jordan River again for Elisha to enter into his new season of

ministry (2:13-14). Wearing his predecessor's cloak, Elisha crossed over to Israel on dry land.

Fast forward almost another 1,000 years, and we encounter John the Baptist beside this same river. At the Jordan, only a few miles north of the Dead Sea, John called the people of Israel to repent and be baptized as an expression of their desire to turn back to the Father's heart (Mark 1:4). Then Jesus Himself came to be baptized, marking the moment when John's ministry of preparation ended and Christ's mission of the Kingdom began (Luke 3:21-23).

In Jesus' own words, John the Baptist was "the Elijah who was to come" (Matthew 11:14), the messenger who would announce the Messiah's arrival, as prophesied 400 years earlier (Malachi 4:5-6).

In each case, passing through the waters of the Jordan represented major transitions in God's plan of redemption.



Jordan Baptismal Site

Today, many people flock to the muddy waters of the Southern Jordan River to be baptized.

Every time a transition in ministry took place by the Jordan River—from Moses to Joshua, from Elijah to Elisha, from John the Baptist to Jesus—the transition brought with it an increase of power.

Moses led Israel with a shepherd's staff, but Joshua would lead them with a spear. Using Moses to guide them, God delivered His people into a season of identity formation, but through Joshua He brought them into a settled place of victory. With Moses, the Lord broke chains; with Joshua, He brought down walls (Joshua 6:20).

Many of us remember Elijah calling down fire from heaven to defeat the false prophets who were drawing Israel's heart away from God (1 Kings 18:36-40). On the banks of the Jordan River, Elisha asked for twice the blessing God had granted to Elijah (2 Kings 2:9). Granting his request, the Lord enabled Elisha to perform twice as many signs, wonders, and miracles.

**THIS HAS ALWAYS BEEN A
PLACE OF TRANSITION—
TRANSITIONS OF POWER,
PURPOSE, AND IMPACT.**

On these same banks, John the Baptist announced, "Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29)! Just as the heavens had opened up over the Jordan to receive Elijah, they opened again over Jesus' baptism as the Holy Spirit descended on Him in power and the voice of God sounded forth, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" (Mark 1:10). The Father confirmed John's declaration. This was the Son of God, the

Messiah, who had come to save sinners and reconcile them to their holy God forever.

We come to discover that the Jordan River is a place of identity. Here, Jesus launched His ministry with a firm declaration of who He is. That's what every one of us needs—to know our true identity in Christ.

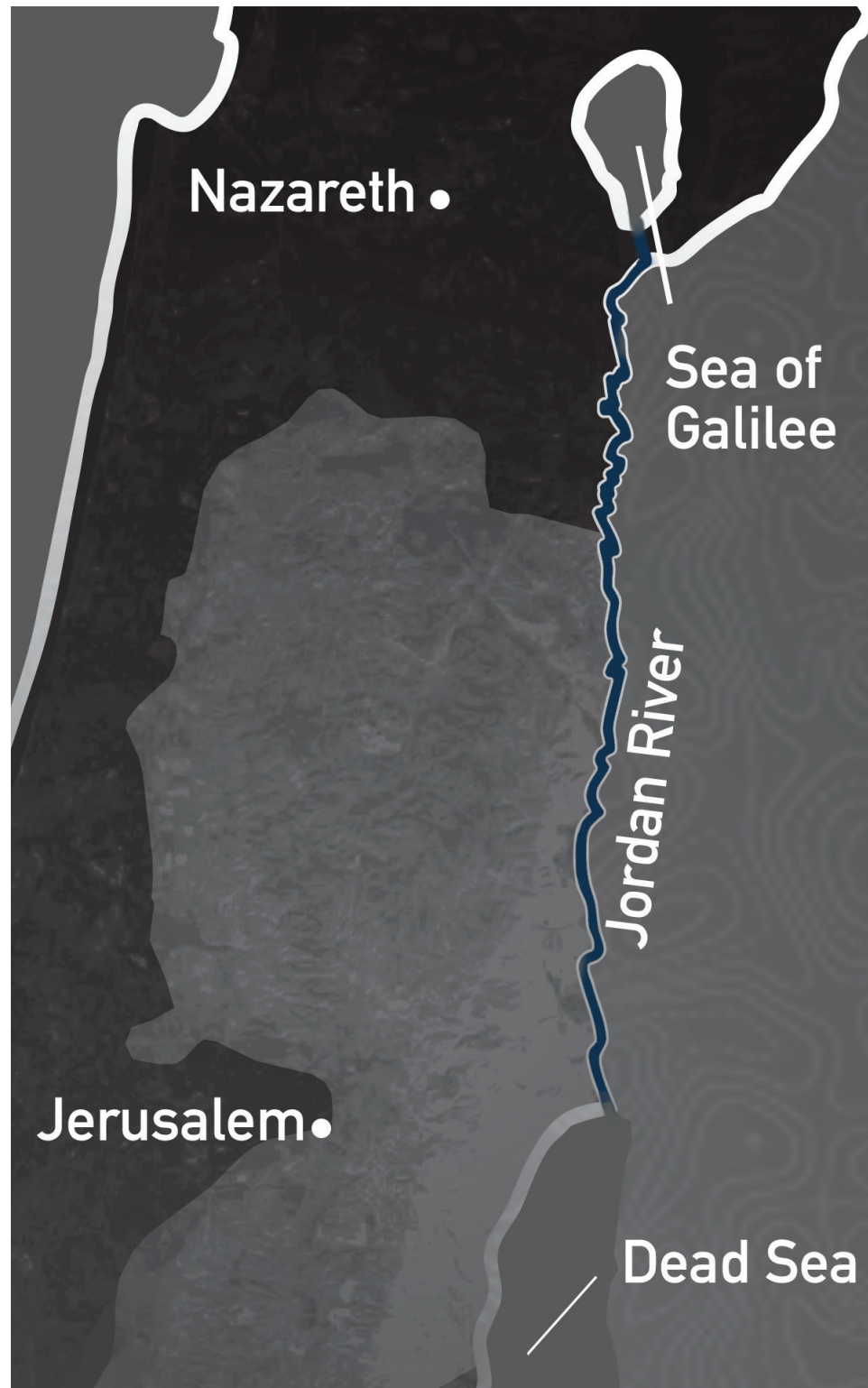
When we publicly express our faith in Jesus through baptism, we identify with His life, death, and resurrection. Although the Father's words spoken at Christ's baptism were a unique declaration over His only-begotten Son, our own relationship with Jesus is the source of our new identity as the children of God (Romans 8:14-17).

Too often, we live our lives out of insecurity. But once we receive God's gift of grace through His Son, our new identity is rock solid. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:38-39). We are His children; He chose us Himself.

Not only that, but God loves us. And because of Jesus' all-sufficient death on the cross for us, He is pleased with us in spite of our imperfections. When we anchor our identity in who Jesus is and what He has done to redeem us, we find freedom in knowing that God meets us right where we are. Then we begin to experience the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives—power to grow, power that transforms us into Jesus' likeness, power to minister to the people all around us. With our identity firmly rooted in Christ, we can make the transition from insecurity to acceptance, from wandering to conquering, from slavery to victory.

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FROM INSECURITY TO ACCEPTANCE,
FROM WANDERING TO CONQUERING...
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FROM SLAVERY
TO VICTORY.
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- ¹ The Jordan River is a place of transition (of power, purpose, and impact). What are some influential moments in your life that have shaped your heart, your direction, and your faith?
- ² Reread Mark 1:9-11. Which part of God's encouragement do you need most in your life right now? Explain why. (You're a child of God, God loves you, and God is pleased with you.)
- ³ How have you been defined by the thoughts and opinions of others? How are you learning to receive your identity from God?
- ⁴ Jesus' public ministry began after the Father affirmed His identity. What would change today if you lived in the confidence of what God says about you?
- ⁵ It was at Jesus' baptism that the Father declared His identity with stunning clarity. Have you trusted in Christ and been baptized? If you have, what was the impact of that moment for you? If not, what is holding you back from making that commitment?

🕒 EXTRA INFO

Today, the Jordan's flow is regulated by a series of dams. In the days of the Bible, however, this river was more than 12 feet deep, and during flood season it could swell to a mile in width! Nothing less than a miracle was required for anyone—especially a nation of 2 million people—to cross this river on dry land.

The Jordan River runs through a steep valley in a geological fault line that separates Asia from Africa. The physical division that separates these continental plates is most clearly seen where the Jordan River ends—at the Dead Sea, the shores of which are the lowest land on earth, standing at about 1,300 feet below sea level. Not only has the Jordan River marked major transitions in Biblical times, it also marks the boundary from one part of the world to another.

When Christ was baptized in Mark 1:10, the Greek word, *schizō*, is used to describe the heavens opening. This same word is later used in Mark 15:38 to describe the curtain in the temple being torn in two. Here, Mark is connecting Jesus' baptism to His death to reveal the completeness of His atoning sacrifice in reconciling a holy God to sinful people who turn to Him in faith.

Ancient Hebrew rabbis sometimes utilized a practice called "stringing pearls," where a teacher would weave different segments of Scripture together to make a point. In Mark 1:11, God the Father appeared to be doing something similar as He declared Jesus' identity. By stringing together quotations from the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings—"You are my Son" from Psalm 2:7, "whom I love" from Genesis 22:2, and "with you I am well pleased" from Isaiah 42:1—God was revealing how the three major sections of the Old Testament all point to Jesus as the Messiah.