

Day 5

Tuesday March 7 2023

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### Kasr El Yehud (Jordan River Immersion Site)

Qasr el Yahud ("Castle of the Jews") is the official name of a baptism site in the Jordan River Valley, Palestine. It is the western part of the traditional site of the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist (Matthew 3:13-17), in Arabic Al-Maghtas, a name which was historically used for the pilgrimage site on both sides of the river. It is also traditionally considered to be the place where the Israelites crossed the Jordan River, and where Elijah the Prophet split the waters and then ascended to heaven.

### Genesis Land - Eretz Breishit:

Biblical reenactments are good fun, but Genesis Land takes the experience to a new level. Meet a caravan of camels led by Eliezer, the servant of Abraham, on the way to the patriarch's tent. Make the acquaintance of Joseph and his brothers' mere minutes before the sibling rivals throw Joseph into the pit. Witness the matchmaking of Isaac and Rebecca by Eliezer, along with other beautiful and familiar stories. Experience the distinguished hospitality of Abraham, and stay overnight in his tent. In the morning, travel as our Biblical ancestors did, and ride on a camel!

Genesis Land (*Eretz Breishit* in Hebrew) is located in the Judean Desert, not far from Jerusalem. Against the backdrop of the breathtaking desert landscape, Genesis Land recreates the patriarchs' way of life. Make your own pita and bake it on the fire. Write a letter in ancient Hebrew on parchment scrolls. Create original pottery and mosaics. Ride camels along the ridge overlooking the spectacular riverbed of Wadi Qelt. Explore the Jericho Valley and Judean Desert on a jeep. Join a drumming circle at sunset, and watch the moon rise to the rhythm of the music.

Actors dressed as Biblical figures add unique flavor to this activity. "Abraham" welcomes you to his tent and offers you food and drink. The desert is the stage for Biblical stories which are enacted for you. Guests can don Bedouin-style robes to get into character themselves.

### Qumran

Ruins of a famous Roman period settlement on the north-western shore of the Dead Sea, home of the Essenes, a break-away sect. Scrolls, hidden in jars, were discovered in the caves around the site, and are an important contribution to Biblical and historical research and are regarded as one of Israel's most

precious national treasures. Qumran is located 70M above the level of the Dead Sea, which is about 1KM to the east. The site is 325m under the sea level. The hills of the Judean desert are located on its western side.

**Biblical times** = The site was built on a raised marlstone (Havar) hill above the Dead Sea. It is located on the path of ancient routes - a strategic mountain pass westwards to Hebron via the Qumran brook, and the southern coastal road along the Dead Sea. Qumran was established during the Iron Age, 7th/8th C BC, at the times of the Judean Kingdom. This fortress may have been one of King Uzziah's construction projects which the Bible reports (2 Chronicles 26 10): "Moreover Uzziah built towers in Jerusalem at the corner gate, and at the valley gate, and at the turning of the wall, and fortified them. Also, he built **towers in the desert**, and digged many wells". An ancient round water cistern was left from that period on the western side of the ruins of Qumran, and later incorporated into the Hellenistic period settlement. A rectangular fortress was built on the eastern side of the cistern, but was removed during the construction of the settlement 400 years later. Qumran may have been one of the desert cities listed in the Bible as part of the Judah tribe villages. Its name was either "Secacah" or "city of salt". Joshua 15 61-62: "In the wilderness, Betharabah, Middin, and **Secacah**, And Nibshan, and the **city of Salt**, and Engedi; six cities with their villages".

**Hellenistic period** = During the end of the 2nd C BC the site was resettled during the times of the Hasmonean kings - John Hyrcanus I or Alexander Jannaeus. The new settlers were a break-away sect known as the Essenes (or Essences), who populated the caves and oasis sites along the western shore of the Dead Sea. They preferred to live in a remote area, far from the normal life in the cities and villages of Israel. Qumran was a regional center, since most of them resided in caves and tents. It was built as a self-supporting communal village, functioning as a sort of Monastery (which is one of the oldest known). Josephus Flavius describes this sect, one of the main "three philosophical sects among the Jews", with a very detailed description. Excerpts from his book (Wars 2 Chapter 8) include: "...the third sect, which pretends to a severer discipline...these men are despisers of riches, and so very communicative as raises our admiration... And as for their piety towards God, it is very extraordinary...". Josephus also added that the Essenes were subdivided between themselves, each with slightly different practices.

**Roman period** = After the earthquake of 31BC in the Jordan valley, during the times of King Herod the Great, the settlement was severely damaged and deserted. The Essenes returned to rebuild the site in 4BC. During the Great revolt against the Romans, the sect sided with the rebels. John the Essene was a local hero and general in the rebel army, and a messenger on behalf of the government to recruit other cities to the Jewish forces (Wars 2 20 4): "John, the Essene, to the toparchy of Thamna; Lydda ... and Joppa, and Emmaus". He was killed in the military campaign near Ashqelon (Ascalon), as per Josephus (Wars 3 2 1-2): "This excursion was led on by three men, who were the chief of them all, both for strength and sagacity; Niger, called the Persite, Silas of Babylon, and besides them John the Essene". The residents of Qumran prepared themselves to the worst, and hid their precious treasures (the scrolls) in the caves. The Romans indeed conquered Qumran (68AD), destroyed it and dispersed the sect. According to Josephus, the Dead Sea ("lake Asphaltitis") was full of bodies from the Jordan valley cities and villages, killed by the Roman troops which were commanded by Placidus (Wars 4 7 6): "And now Placidus, after this good success that he had, fell violently upon the neighboring smaller cities and

villages; when he took Abila, and Julias, and Bezemoth, and all those that lay as far as the lake Asphaltitis, and put such of the deserters into each of them as he thought proper. He then put his soldiers on board the ships, and slew such as had fled to the lake...". Years later, during the Bar-Kochba revolt (132-135AD) a Roman Garrison was stationed here to control the regional traffic. They left after 20 years, and Qumran was abandoned and left in ruins for 1800 years.

**Modern Period =** In 1947 Bedouins shepherds discovered ancient scrolls in a local cave 1.5KM to the north of Qumran ("cave #1"). The area was excavated and additional scrolls and fragments were discovered in 11 caves around Qumran. The scrolls were hidden in jars, and were preserved relatively well due to the dry climate of the Judean desert. From the distribution of the location of the scrolls the archaeologists determined that Qumran was the nucleus of Essenes activity in the region, a sort of learning center for the sect. The buildings in Qumran included mainly public structures that hosted large public events, workshops and a scriptorium where the scrolls were written. Most of the residences were probably in tents around the center. A large cemetery of a thousand tombs were located near the ruins of Qumran, which further indicated that Qumran was a center for the Essenes sect.

### [The Dead Sea](#)

The Dead sea is a large salt lake east of the Judean desert. This is the deepest place in the world, situated on the Great Rift Valley (Syrian-African depression). Many points of interest are located around the lake, with nature reserves and ancient sites such as Masada, Ein Gedi and Qumran. It is one of the saltiest water bodies in the world - 34% - which gave it the Hebrew name "salt sea" (*Joshua 15:5*): "And the east border was the salt sea, even unto the end of Jordan". The salt levels make life inside the water impossible, hence the name "dead" sea. The Dead Sea is located to the east of the Judean desert, between Israel and Jordan. Its level is 420m under the sea level. The southern part of the lake is mostly dry or broken into evaporation pools. The shore along its western section is narrow, and may extend to 2-3 KM at the outlets of the brooks that flow from the Judean desert.

**Biblical history =** The Dead Sea is first referred in the war of the four kings against the five kings of the Dead Sea area (*Genesis 14 3*): "All these were joined together in the vale of Siddim, which is the salt sea". The five kings lost the battle, falling into slime (mud) pits (*Genesis 14 10*): "And the vale of Siddim was full of slime pits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and fell there; and they that remained fled to the mountain". The Bible tells about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the cities located on the south-east side of the Dead Sea (*Genesis 19 28*): "And he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain, and beheld, and, lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace". Lot, his wife and two daughters escaped just before the wicked city was destroyed, and fled to the outskirts of the nearby city of Zoar. Zoar is also mentioned in the Bible in connection to the departing of Abraham and Lot (*Genesis 13, 10*): "And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto **Zoar**".

## Floating in the Dead Sea

The Dead Sea borders Jordan, Israel and the West Bank and the shore is 1,388 feet below sea level, making it the Earth's lowest elevation on land. Everything about this lake is unique, especially the high concentration of salt! This means with the natural buoyancy, it's very easy to float.

CUTS AND RASH, OUCH! = Unless you like being in pain, make sure you do not have any cuts or rashes before getting into the water, after all it's like rubbing alcohol or as a matter of fact, salt on your wounds. But on the other hand, it is believed to be very, very healing.

DON'T SHAVE! = Do not shave a few days before getting into the water. The minor cuts and skin irritation after a shave might make it hard for you to fully enjoy the waters, especially when you feel your legs or your face burning.

LAY BACK AND RELAX = You will immediately find that by laying back, without any effort and no matter your weight, you will float!

DON'T DIP YOUR FACE IN THE WATER! = If you see a shiny coin or feel like grabbing a chunk of sea salt, don't do it! You definitely do not want to taste the water. And, if you open your eyes under the water, you will most likely have to run out of the sea to rinse your eyes at the shower and expect to have red eyes for the rest of the day.

FLOAT LIKE A BOAT = While floating, use your hand to navigate through the water, row slowly as if you were steering a boat, just make sure not to splash water into anyone's face!

DON'T STAY IN FOR TOO LONG = Your body will tell you when to leave the water, you'll start feeling a mild burning sensation, which means it's time to walk back to the hotel and enjoy a nice shower.