



# QASR AL-YAHUD

## THE TOWER OF THE JEWS

Many years ago, I took tourists to this border site on the western bank of the Jordan River, just north of where the waters empty into the Dead Sea and directly east of Jericho. I read to them from the Tanach, how on the 10th of Nisan about 3,300 years ago, *Am Yisrael* entered the Land here under the leadership of Yehoshua bin Nun after the death of Moshe Rabbeinu. When the Levites carrying the Ark of the Covenant stepped into the water it dammed itself upriver at Adam. “While all Israel were crossing over on dry ground, the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the L-rd stood on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, until the entire nation finished crossing over the Jordan.”<sup>1</sup>

“Is the Book of Joshua in the New Testament?” asked an IDF patrol soldier who overheard me. I responded with my own question, which is why would he ask that, and he answered that the only people who came to this site were Christians who read from the New Testament about Jesus being baptized there by John (both men thought to have been Second Temple-era Jews when ritual cleansing was very common).

Then and there, I decided I would bring as many people as possible to Qasr al-Yahud, Jews and non-Jews, teaching Tanach in situ, emphasizing the original connection to a place of such great importance for centuries of pilgrimage. And I have been privileged to do so.

The date of the crossing is quite significant – *erev* Pesach. The first

*chag* of the year dictates our unique lunar/solar calendar, for Pesach must be in the spring, signifying freedom and new beginnings. The river is full at the end of the rainy season; the deep Syria-African Rift collecting rain and melting snow from the watershed at Ba'al Hatzor, the Lebanese mountains, the Hermon and Golan flowing via the Kinneret then down to the Dead Sea.

Water immersion symbolizes renewal, from the flood of Noah, the crossing of the Reed Sea, *tevilla*, even birth itself. One can actually look at this seminal event in our history as analogous to the birth process: the spiritual conception of the nation with the giving of the Law at Sinai, 40 years in the desert, fed and completely cared for, the ‘birth passage’ across the Jordan River into the Land, *brit mila*, the mature actions of conquering, planting, building and sovereignty. The event is of such significance that it is told four times in the Bible. First by Moshe, then G-d to Yehoshua, Yehoshua to the people and then the actual narrative of the crossing.

Incidentally, Jewish mother that I am, I must share how the people ate, since the *manna* stopped being supplied after a month. Well, Israel’s harvest cycle starts in the spring. Pesach is the barley harvest, Shavuot – wheat (Megillat Rut takes place during the *Omer* in the grain fields of Beit Lechem, literally the ‘House of Bread’). The summer harvests of figs, grapes and pomegranates ripen at different times depending on the orchards’ elevation – and these fruits ripen earliest in the Jordan Valley due to the

extreme heat. So the conquest follows the ripening food east to west, up into the Hill Country as that first summer unfolds.

This site, near Jericho, is also associated with Eliyahu HaNavi from Gilad, on the east bank, who poignantly goes ‘home’ to die: “And Elijah said to him [Elisha], ‘Stay here now, for the L-rd has sent me to the Jordan...’ as they both stood at the Jordan. And Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water, and it divided to this side and to that side, and they both crossed on dry land.” After the chariot takes Elijah: “And he [Elisha] picked up Elijah’s mantle ...and he returned and stood on the bank of the Jordan...He too struck the water and it divided on this side and on that side, and Elisha crossed. And the disciples of the prophets who were in Jericho...”<sup>2</sup>

Later, Elisha performs a miracle for King Na’aman at the Jordan as well.<sup>3</sup>

Qasr al Yahud is associated with new beginnings and miracles. That’s why the 10th of Nisan is Aliyah Day in the reborn, sovereign State of Israel. And why you should go to Qasr al-Yahud, Tanach in hand, and celebrate the site of rejuvenation and modern miracles.

1 Joshua 3:17.

2 Kings 2, 2:6- 15.

3 Ibid, 5:10-14.

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