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Welcome to Jordan—the other holy land

It is not often appreciated how much of the biblical narrative is set in the land that we know today as Jordan. Abraham's cities of the plain were almost certainly here (Genesis 14:2), and Jacob met with God at Peniel (Genesis 32:31). The setting of the book of Job was in, or near, Jordan and the final wilderness wanderings of the people of Israel ended with them travelling almost the length of the country from Aqaba up to Abel-Shittim, opposite Jericho.

Moses was buried on nearby Mt Nebo from where he had looked out over the promised land, and after the conquest, two and a half tribes settled in Gilead. Ruth was from Moab. When Absalom rebelled, David fled to Mahanaim, and later Solomon's ships sailed up the Gulf of Aqaba. Elijah began and ended his days in Jordan and John the Baptist ministered in the Jordan valley and, according to Josephus, was executed at Machaerus. Most of the Decapolis cities were in Jordan, and the Gadarene swine incident (Matthew 8) probably took place in the Gadara city state. Jesus' normal route between Galilee and Judaea would

have been east of the Jordan, avoiding Samaria. Finally, Paul's 'Arabia' (Galatians 1:17) was the Nabataean kingdom that, for a time, had its capital at Petra.

To learn about the Ammonites, Moabites and Edomites, we must go to Jordan. Rehoboam, included in the genealogy of Jesus, had Moabite and Ammonite blood flowing in his veins (1 Kings 14:21). Sites in Jordan are invaluable for a better understanding of the contemporary Roman world of Jesus and Paul. Today, Arabs and Jews are cousins and their shared cultural heritage opens up insights into the world of the Bible.



Facing page: Wadi Rum in the south of Jordan is one of the most beautiful parts of the desert that covers three quarters of the country and has been home to the sons of Ishmael for centuries