



River of Life

BY BOB BLUNDELL

*A*long the muddied banks of the Jordan, thin reeds the color of sage reached toward the sky, bending gently in the breeze. A silver mist clung to the water's surface, and as the sun pierced the clouds, the haze glistened in the morning light. I would have preferred solitude, being alone with my thoughts and reflections. But there were other travelers standing along the water's edge who like me, had come to pay homage to this sacred place.

There was a surreal sense of calm and tranquility in the air. Human voices faded to whispers as if to acknowledge the respect the river demanded. The only other sounds were those created by God himself. The fluttering murmurs of the birds in the trees, and the gurgling melody of the water as it made its journey to the sea. I watched the flow run steadily past me, carrying leaves from the palms that dotted the banks. And etched along the surface there were deep furrows like scars on an ancient warrior. It was narrower than I had imagined, and the eddying stream was the color of burnt jade, dark and murky.

The ripples spun and turned along their path, and as I reflected on all that the Jordan had witnessed over the centuries, I was suddenly struck by my own frailty and insignificance. I closed my eyes and tried to imagine what it must have been like.

As the warmth of the sunlight touched my cheeks, I began to see it unfold before me. In the shallowest part of the river, stood a man. He had appeared one day walking out of the desert wearing clothing of camel hair and a leather belt. He was gaunt, with hair the color of wood smoke, and a beard tangled and twisted as a fisherman's net. His face was dark as tarnished bronze and chiseled with wrinkled lines of age. On the

shore behind him, a small fire sent wisps of blue smoke curling into the air. Huddled near the flames, seeking shelter from the chill, sat two of his followers. These men had left the lives they had known, committing themselves to the God he had been sent to prepare the way for.

I peered through the slate-colored mist and could see a second figure suddenly emerge from the opposite bank. He was clad in a simple alabaster robe that hung to his sandaled feet. Hair, the color of cinnamon, fell to his shoulders and I could see his mahogany eyes shining brightly in the sunlight like a candle flickering in a gentle breeze. I watched him as he stepped into the river and made his way across to the other side where the man stood.

When they came together, they embraced then they waded toward the middle, until dark streams of water swirled around their waists. And I watched as he baptized him just as he had done to so many others before him. As our Savior's head emerged from the surface, a dazzling beam of light suddenly cascaded through the clouds 'like a dove' sailing toward the earth. A thunderous voice came down from the heavens shaking the ground around me. "This is my Son in whom I am well pleased".

Wind gusted across the surface of the Jordan, churning a pale blue mist into the air, before disappearing, as if it were sucked into the clouds. As quickly as it had departed, calm settled over the ancient river. Slowly the images began to fade. My eyes fluttered open, and I squinted into the morning sunlight. There was a sweet smell in the air, like that of honeysuckle, and I took a deep calming breath. Below me, the dark water flowed tirelessly, always moving, relentless in its journey.

This river has seen many miracles over the centuries. New lives had been formed. People had stepped into the water, broken and full of despair, only to emerge with joy and peace in their hearts. Free of the bondage of sin. I knew this moment along the Jordan would remain with me. It would always be a reminder of the power and glory of God. And I was overwhelmed with gratitude that he had blessed me with the opportunity to be a witness to one of his greatest creations.