

# Jabbok, Penuel and Mahanaim

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## Jabbok - Eastern End

The headwaters of the Jabbok begin in [Amman](#) (ancient Rabbath-ammon) and the river flows to the north before heading west to the Jordan River. Though not explicitly stated, it seems likely that Abraham passed this way along the Jabbok River as he traveled from [Haran](#) to [Shechem](#) (later Jacob would travel on this route).

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## Jabbok River

In almost any reconstruction of Jacob's journey back to the Promised Land, he traveled down this valley pictured at right. Scholars debate the locations of Penuel and Mahanaim (see below), but everyone locates these sites somewhere in connection with this river. The natural terrain of this part of the valley would suggest that Jacob traveled on the south (right) side of the river at this point.



## Fords of the Jabbok

According to Genesis, Jacob first met the "angels of God" and named the site Mahanaim ("camps"; Gen 32:1-2). Mahanaim, according to this author, is the closer hill on the right side of the photo. From here, Jacob began to send waves of gifts to his brother Esau. Because he feared Esau and the 400 men with him, Jacob divided his family into two groups, and sent a gift of animals from his flock to Esau.

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## Fords of the Jabbok

Then Jacob took his family across the Jabbok River, but he spent the night alone on the opposite side. That night a “man” wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man touched the socket of Jacob’s hip, it was wrenched. Jacob then told the man, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.” Jacob’s name was changed to “Israel,” and Jacob called that place Peniel, saying, “It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared” (Gen 32:30). Peniel/Penuel is the hill pictured, according to this author.



## Jabbok River

This area was very significant in later Israelite history as well. After the death of Saul, his son Ish-Bosheth took refuge and ruled from Mahanaim (2 Sam 2:8). During Absalom’s revolt, David fled to Mahanaim (2 Sam 17:24-29). Mahanaim seems to be a Transjordan administrative center. Jeroboam I built his Transjordan capital at Penuel (1 Kgs 12:25), possibly in connection with the invasion of Pharaoh Shishak.

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## Tents

Genesis 31:33-34 (KJV): "And Laban went into Jacob's tent, and into Leah's tent, and into the two maidservants' tents; but he found them not. Then went he out of Leah's tent, and entered into Rachel's tent. Now Rachel had taken the images, and put them in the camel's furniture, and sat upon them. And Laban searched all the tent, but found them not."

Genesis 33:17 (NLT): "Meanwhile, Jacob and his household traveled on to Succoth. There he built himself a house and made shelters for his flocks and herds. That is why the place was named Succoth."