

## The Sea Of Galilee

'Jesus departed Tyre and Sidon and neared the Sea of Galilee. He went up into the mountain and sat there' (Matthew 15:29). 'The multitudes said, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee"' (Matthew 21:11).

Close to the northern end of the Syrian/African rift, lies Israel's Sea of Galilee, once called the Sea of Chinnereth (Numbers 34:11). It is known in Israel by the Hebrew word Kinneret, so called because of its harp-like shape. This beautiful sparkling blue gem has provided precious sweet fresh water for farmers, anglers and various populations for thousands of years. A fascinating body of water, it is not a salt-water sea but is actually the lowest fresh water lake in the world at about 680 feet below sea level. The depth of the water level varies but averages about 160 feet deep and the lake is not very big. The Sea of Galilee covers an area of over 160 square kilometres and would take about twelve hours to walk right around the 62 kilometre perimeter. It is nestled between the hills of the Golan Heights and the mountainous Galilee Region. From the shores of the Sea of Galilee, Capernaum can be seen across the lake and Mount Hermon can be seen in the distance. The coastline averages about a kilometre wide except on the northwest where the Plain of Gennesaret is about three kilometres wide, depending on the water levels. The north tip is where the Jordan River enters and the south tip is where the Jordan leaves. The Sea of Galilee was once called the Sea of Chinnereth (Numbers 34:11), the Sea of Tiberias (John 6:1) and the Lake of Gennesaret (Luke 5:1).

Water is a very precious resource in Israel and they pay constant attention to the water levels in the Sea of Galilee. Reeds covered in flowers grow along the banks when the lake is full. Over thirty different species of fish live and breed in the Sea of Galilee. Back in antiquity, Josephus said over two hundred and thirty fishing boats regularly used the lake. Fishing has been supporting the local economy on and off for thousands of years, including during the time of the ministry of Jesus. In modern times, about 2,000 thousand tons of fish are caught every year by both professional anglers and private fishermen enjoying a relaxing day out. For about four thousand years there has been a Hebrew-speaking Jewish population around the Sea of Galilee but the population began to grow in the 1800's and the 1900's as more and more Jewish people returned to the Holy Land from around the world. Some of these returning people had little or no farming experience so an agricultural centre was set up in 1908 to help teach basic farming practices. The land surrounding the Sea of Galilee has ideal conditions for growing crops. The soil is fertile, the climate is hot and there is an abundance of fresh water for irrigation. Grapes and figs can grow for ten months of the year with other types of fruit providing food all year round. Dairy farms were set up and the various farms provided the increasing population with good nourishment, and they still do.

The area is subject to sudden, sometimes violent storms. The Bible gives us examples of sudden storms when the disciples were out on their boat. 'When Jesus got into a boat His disciples followed Him. Behold, a violent storm came up on the Sea (of Galilee) so strong the boat was covered with the waves but Jesus was asleep. The disciples came to Him and woke Him up saying, "Save us Lord! We are dying!" Jesus said to them, "Why are you so fearful, O you of little faith?" He got up, rebuked the wind and the Sea and there was a great calm. The men marvelled saying, "What kind of Man is this, even the wind and the Sea obey Him?"' (Matthew 8:23 to 27).

Mark's account of this event is slightly different but he adds a few more facts. 'Leaving the multitude, the disciples took Jesus with them as He was in the boat. Other small boats were also with Him. A strong wind storm arose and the waves beat into the boat, so much so the boat was already filling with water. Jesus was in the stern asleep on the cushion and they woke Him up saying, "Teacher, do You not care we are dying?" He awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the Sea, "Peace! Be still!" The wind ceased and there was a great calm. Jesus said to them, "Why are you so afraid? How is it you have no faith?" They were greatly afraid and said to one another, "Who is this? Even the wind and the Sea obey Him?"' (Mark 4:35 to 41).

Luke wrote, 'On one of those days Jesus entered into a boat with His disciples and He said to them, "Let us go over to the other side of the lake." So they launched out and as they sailed Jesus fell asleep. A wind storm came down on the lake and they were taking on dangerous amounts of water. They awoke Him saying, "Master, master, we are dying!" He rebuked the wind and the raging of the water, and they ceased so it was calm. Jesus said to them, "Where is your faith?" Being afraid they marvelled saying one to another, "Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water and they obey Him?"' (Luke 8:22 to 25).

'Jesus made the disciples get into the boat to go ahead of Him to the other side while He sent the multitudes away. After He had sent the multitudes away, He went up into the mountain by Himself to pray. When evening had come He was there alone. The boat was now in the middle of the Sea (of Galilee). The men were distressed by the waves for the wind was strong. In the fourth watch of the night (between 3 AM and 6 AM) Jesus came to them walking on the Sea. When the disciples saw Him walking on the Sea they were frightened saying, "It is a ghost!" and they cried out for fear.

Jesus spoke to them saying, "Cheer up! It is I! Do not be afraid."

Peter said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the waters."

Jesus said, "Come!"

Peter stepped down from the boat and walked on the waters to come to Jesus. When he saw the wind was strong he was afraid and beginning to sink he cried out saying, "Lord, save me!"

Jesus stretched out His hand, took hold of him and said, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

When they got up into the boat the wind ceased. Those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him saying, "You are truly the Son of God!" When they had crossed the Sea they came to the land of Gennesaret' (Matthew 14:22 to 34).

The city of Magdala where Mary Magdalene originally came from, was on the mid-point coast of the lake pointing towards the Mediterranean Sea. Kerza was at the opposite side. Bethsaida was on the north. Nazareth was south. The public life of Jesus was spent mostly in Galilee and when His cousin John the Baptist was arrested Jesus withdrew into Galilee (Matthew 4:12) so it seemed to be a place of peace and comfort for Jesus. The north of Galilee was where Jesus conducted a lot of His earthly ministry. It was south of the Sea in the Jordan where Jesus was baptised. 'Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John (the Baptist) to be baptised by him' (Matthew 3:13). 'In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan' (Mark 1:9). 'Walking by the Sea of Galilee, Jesus saw two brothers, Simon Peter and Andrew casting a net into the sea for they were fishermen' (Matthew 4:18). 'Jesus went about in all of Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom and healing every disease and every sickness among the people' (Matthew 4:23). 'While they were staying in Galilee Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is about to be delivered up into the hands of men. They will kill Him and the third day He will be raised up (resurrected)." They were exceedingly sorry' (Matthew 17:22 & 23). 'Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is also called the Sea of Tiberias' (John 6:1).

Jesus was crucified in Jerusalem but after He was resurrected He met up with the disciples in Galilee. Jesus said, "After I am raised up (resurrected) I will go before you into Galilee" (Matthew 26:32). 'After the Sabbath as it began to dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (Jesus' mother) came to see the tomb. Behold, there was a great earthquake for an angel of the Lord descended from the sky and came and rolled away the stone from the door and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the (Roman) guards shook and became like dead men. The angel said to the two women, "Do not be afraid for I know you seek Jesus Who has been crucified. He is not here for He has risen just like He said. Come and see the place where the Lord was lying then go quickly and tell His disciples, 'He has risen from the dead and behold, He goes before you into Galilee where you will see Him. Behold, I have told you.'" The two women departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy and ran to bring His disciples word. As they went to tell His disciples behold, Jesus met them saying, "Rejoice!" They took hold of His feet and worshiped Him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brothers they should go into Galilee and there they will see Me." ... The eleven disciples went into Galilee to the mountain where Jesus had sent them. When they saw Him they bowed down to Him' (Matthew 28:1 to 10; 16 & 17). 'While the disciples were looking steadfastly into the sky as Jesus went, behold two angels stood by them in white clothing saying, "You men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus Who was received up from you into the sky will come back in the same way as you saw Him going into the sky" (Acts 1:10 & 11).

Amen and God bless you.

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