

# The Sea of Galilee



The Sea of Galilee, known by many names, is a central focus of life in Israel, and a source of inspiration to the Christian Church. It is called Kinneret, Lake of Gennesaret, and Lake Tiberias, a bow to ancient Roman rule.

Most of Jesus' ministry took place around the Sea of Galilee, the lowest freshwater lake on Earth. The lowest lake, not too many miles south, is the Dead Sea. To be eight miles wide and 13 miles long, it has had a great impact on the world.

On a recent trip to Israel, I listened to the guide from the terrace above the hillside where Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount. I could almost see the crowd sitting around the seashore, looking up at Jesus, waiting to hear his next words. Looking across the Sea of Galilee, I could see the "other side" the scripture talks about again and again. The other side where the maniac was healed, the other side where Jesus went for spiritual refreshment, the other side of the Jordan which actually flows through from north to south through this body of water.

There is a church there now, as there is just about anyplace Jesus did something that we know about. Terraces and gardens are all around, all with a view. Driveways and parking lots hold buses and vans who drop off pilgrims coming to see this land where Jesus walked.

This sea has always had special power. It teems with fish. Fishermen have plied their trade here for centuries, and still do. I met a rough, tough fisherman nearby, and talked with him as he readied his wooden boat to go and fish this water upon which Jesus walked.

Jesus called four of his disciples, Peter and Andrew, and James and John, not far from here, along the seashore of Galilee. He fed the 5000, he fished with his people, he did many of his miracles here.

What gives this sea its worth is not the beauty of the landscape, which is quiet spectacular. It is not the fish or the history or the beautiful mountains, or that it is a major source of fresh water for Israel even now.

It is Jesus. Jesus who called us to serve him. Jesus who calmed the storm in the middle of the sea, the master of the wind and waves. Jesus who calms those storms and goes out to fish with us today.

Jesus the Galilean, God come to earth at Bethlehem who lived there and miracled there. Jesus who went from there to die on the high mountain of Jerusalem for us so that we might live. Jesus who walks with us today, and will never leave us, he is the reason that Sea of Galilee is so important.

Just think of all the billions of Christians the man from Galilee has saved. Picture those who read the account of the fierce storm in the middle of the Sea of Galilees, the disciples petrified, thinking their boat would sink and they would die. And Jesus with a word calmed that storm, and ours as well.

We went out on a fairly large boat, about a hundred of us, a good distance from the shore, and cut the engine. There we read about Jesus calming the storm. there we looked back up to the Mount of Beatitudes and to the town of Tiberias. There we prayed and communed with one another and with that same Lord Jesus.

John Greenleaf Whittier, the great American poet born in 1807, felt this as well. "As on the Sea of Galilee," he writes, "the Christ is whispering peace."

He is ready to calm your storm. He is ready to offer you peace. He is ready to walk with you through the difficulties and offer you a vision for living which far surpasses any other.

I have walked with Jesus along the shores of Galilee, and walk with him now. I have faced the storms and every single time he has calmed them. I have been on countless fishing expeditions with Him, and never come home with an empty net.

Today he calls people to come back to him. He calls for empty churches to be filled, for new people to know eternal life, and for tired disciples to find new energy and purpose.

One of the classic visions of Galilee is after the resurrection, when the disciples had gone back to fishing and were catching nothing. He called out, “cast your net on the other side of the boat.”

When they followed his direction, the nets were so full they were about to burst. They pulled the net to shore, Peter as usual jumped out of the boat, and they had breakfast with Jesus, right there at the edge of the Sea of Galilee.

They knew it too. Because of Jesus, the Sea of Galilee, and billions of people, will live forever.