

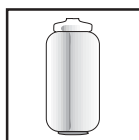
Daniel surrounded by lions, his three friends in the fiery furnace, Jonah, Elijah, Jesus carrying a lamb, Jesus and the disciples breakfasting upon the seashore and many more besides. One such book is *The Catacombs of Rome* by Benjamin Scott, described as “the substance of lectures originally delivered before an audience of working men in London”, in the 1890s.

What is equally interesting, however, is to learn that it was not until the fourth century that pictures began to appear bearing halos, crosses, Madonnas, Trinitarian symbology and all the paraphernalia of the apostate church. Might this be a remarkable reflection of the Constantinian earthquake of conversion to pseudo-Christianity (Rev. 6:12-17)?

What makes such a visit even more impressive is to bear in mind the accounts in Acts and

Romans of what Paul actually preached while he was in Rome. The ecclesia in Rome was a multi-cultural, multiracial group, as is evidenced by the twenty-seven Greek, Latin and Jewish names on the ecclesial roll, as noted in Romans 16. It was to people such as these that Paul “expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening” (Acts 28:23). It is true that he did not convince everybody (v. 24), but one is prompted to wonder why it is that, if Paul found prophecy so useful in preaching the gospel, more ecclesias do not make greater use of Old Testament promises and prophecies in their gospel proclamation activities.

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Around the Sea of Galilee

3. The fishermen

Tony Benson

ABOUT HALFWAY along the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee is a kibbutz called En Gev, founded in 1937. It nestles under the steep slopes of the Golan Heights, and from the War of Independence in 1948 until the Six-Day War of 1967 it was the subject of regular shelling by the Syrians from the heights above. The Israeli conquest of the Golan Heights in the Six-Day War brought peace. Now it has a popular hotel, where visitors stay in chalets or mobile homes under date palms and eucalyptus trees by the edge of the lake.

It is a lovely experience to spend some time here, overlooking the lake on which some of the disciples of Christ earned their living and over which they and their Master often sailed. In the course of a number of stays here I have experienced the calmness of the lake at sunrise, with pied kingfishers hovering over the water and a little egret standing sentinel by the water's edge;

supper overlooking the lake on a balmy evening with the sun setting behind the hills opposite; then, as darkness draws on, the lights of Tiberias opposite cascading down the slope like a waterfall; a stormy night, with the wind soughing in the trees and the rain lashing at the windows, provoking thoughts of Jesus and the disciples out on the lake in such fear-producing conditions.

En Gev is the home of Mendel Nun, who was born in Latvia in 1918, emigrated to Israel in 1939, and has lived at the kibbutz since 1941. He has become the greatest expert on the Sea of Galilee in all its aspects. His book about the lake is available only in Hebrew, but two booklets in English are available locally, *The Sea of Galilee and its Fishermen in the New Testament* and *Sea of Galilee: Newly Discovered Harbours from New Testament Days* (both published in 1989), and he has written articles in *Biblical Archaeology*

Review.¹ These booklets and articles are the source of material for this article.

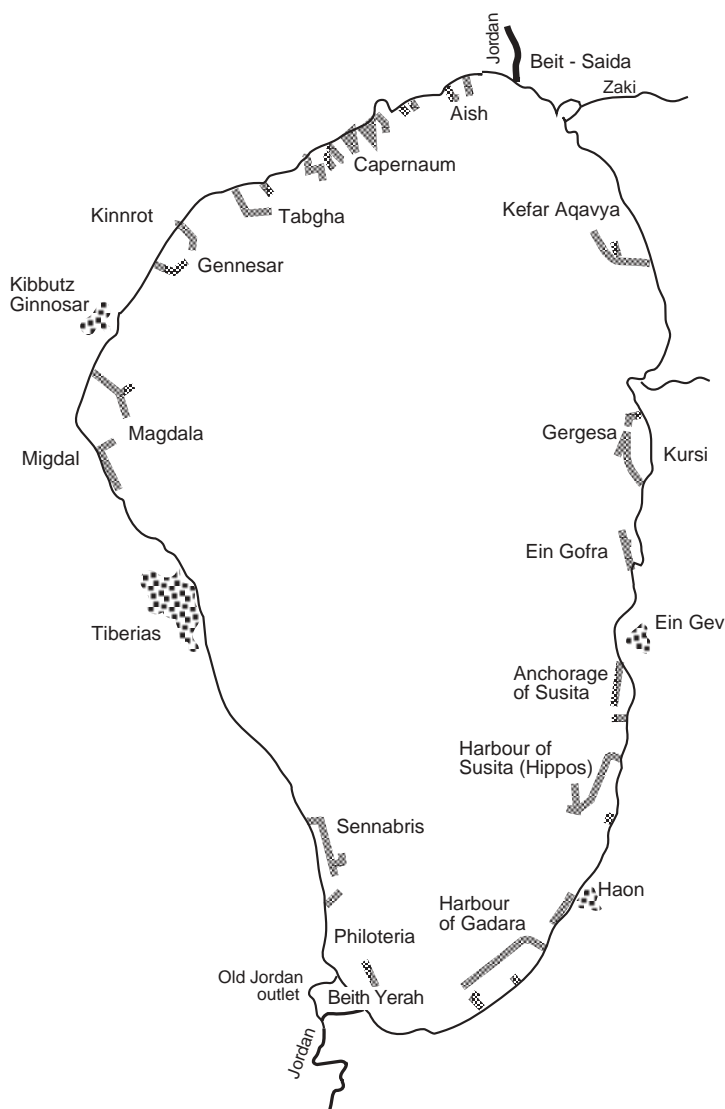
Fishing ports from the time of Jesus

The Sea of Galilee has virtually no natural harbours, and, unless boats were simply dragged onto the shore, the provision of artificial harbours is therefore required, especially in view of the sudden storms for which the lake is notorious. It was not until the 1970s, however, that the first such harbour was discovered, below the present waterline.

It is thought that the level of the lake was about four feet lower in New Testament times, with the waterline being as much as 150 feet further out. The reason for this change, says Mendel Nun, is that during the Middle Ages the outlet of the Jordan at the southern end of the lake became blocked with silt for a while, allowing the water level to rise. Droughts, and the increasing abstraction of water for Israel's burgeoning population, have lowered the waterline in recent decades, enabling more of these harbour remains to be discovered, especially at the end of the summer before the onset of a new season's rains.

In his 1989 booklet Nun refers to the remains of thirteen harbours having been discovered, but evidently more were discovered later, for his 1999 article refers to there being sixteen ancient harbours. Included amongst them are harbours found at Capernaum, Tiberias and Magdala, all towns mentioned in the Gospels. The harbours discovered usually have one or more short piers and a long curved breakwater, with only a narrow channel for boats to enter the harbour. This gave the boats good protection from storms.

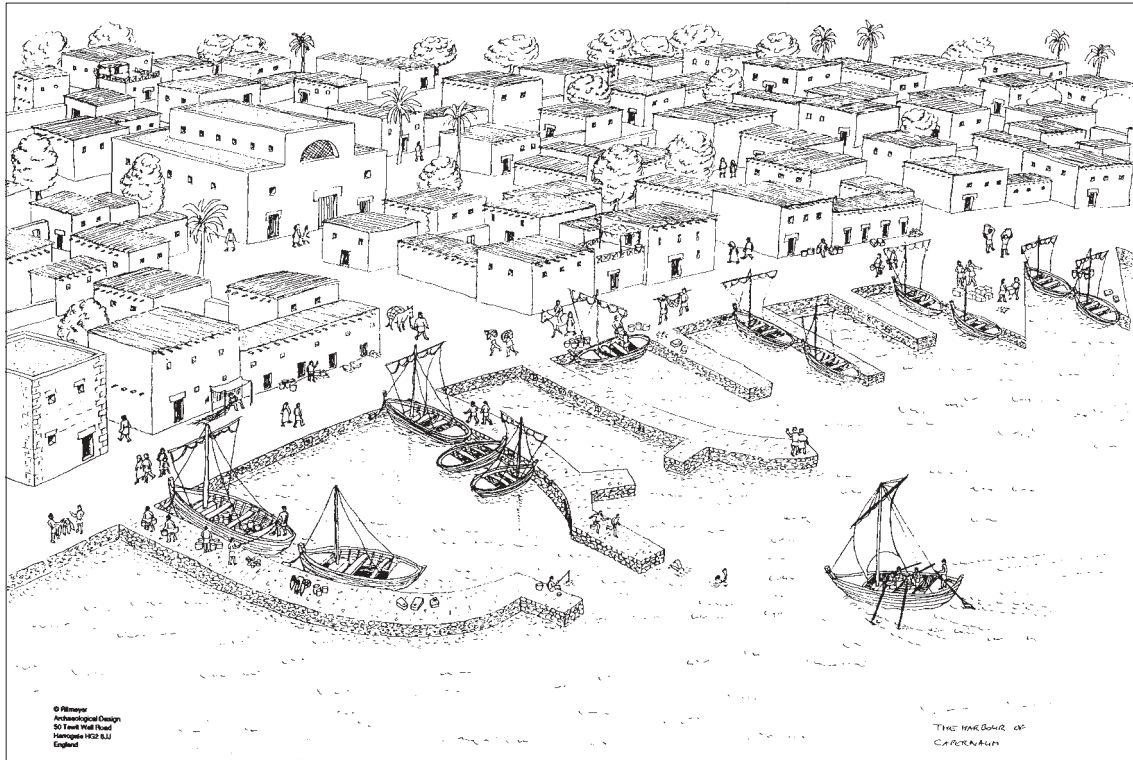
At one site, ancient Gergesa on the eastern shore, a shallow pool was discovered, thought to have been to keep fish in alive until they could be sold, and a building adjacent to the pier,



Sea of Galilee ancient harbours

thought to have been used for administration. Stone anchors and stone blocks to which boats could be moored were discovered at Tiberias, and at Gergesa a hundred small weights, which would have been attached to nets to keep them under the water. At Capernaum the remains

1. "Cast Your Net Upon the Waters: Fish and Fishermen in Jesus' Time", Nov./Dec. 1993; "Ports of Galilee: Modern Drought Reveals Harbors from Jesus' Time", July/Aug. 1999. See also "A Good Catch: Mendel Nun's Netful of Knowledge About the Sea of Galilee", Yadin Roman, *Eretz*, Autumn 1990.



Reconstruction drawing of the harbour at Capernaum.
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discovered indicate a promenade 2,400 feet (800 metres) long, with pairs of curved piers, short, straight piers and even triangular ones (see reconstruction drawing above). Somewhere here Matthew would have had his office for exacting tolls from the maritime traffic on the lake (Mt. 9:9).

The fish

There are three kinds of edible fish which are native to the Sea of Galilee. In addition grey mullet and silver carp have been introduced. In the late 1980s there were four large and sixty-five small fishing boats on the lake, with 165 fishermen, so fishing is important today, as it clearly was in New Testament times.

The well-known fish caught in Galilee is that popularly referred to as St Peter's fish, of which there are five species. The Arabs call it *musht*, which mean 'comb', because of the comb-like dorsal fin; the Hebrew name is *ammun*, which means 'nurse fish', because of its habit of carefully watching over its young for the first few days after hatching; and the Latin name is *Tilapia*.

Another of its habits is to take the eggs into the mouth after laying until they hatch, and this habit of carrying things in its mouth has led to the suggestion that the fish with the coin in its mouth caught by Peter was of this species (Mt. 17:27).

It is because of this supposed association with Peter that the fish is marketed as 'St Peter's fish', and the promenade at Tiberias is today lined with open-air fish restaurants all selling it, fried whole and served with chips, to tourists. It is the only large fish in Galilee that moves around in shoals, and must therefore have been the kind caught in the miraculous catches recorded in the Gospels (Lk. 5:1-11; Jno. 21:1-6).

The other large fish caught and eaten is the barbel, of which there are three species found in the lake. This fish does not live in shoals and is therefore caught individually. For this reason, despite the traditional identification referred to above, it is likely that the fish caught by Peter with a hook was a barbel.

The third type of edible fish found in Galilee is the sardine, a freshwater version of the fish



Fishermen from Kibbutz En Gev hauling in their empty nets

more commonly associated with the sea. These occur in large shoals, and were preserved by salting. This would have been the fish miraculously multiplied by Christ in his two miracles of feeding the multitudes, salted sardines being often eaten with bread by the common people. In the time of Jesus, Magdala was the centre of the fish salting industry, and it bore the alternative name Tarichea, meaning in Greek the place where fish are salted. Today sardines appear regularly as part of the buffet breakfasts which are the norm in Israeli hotels.

The nets

According to Mendel Nun, when he first took up residence at En Gev both Jewish and Arab fishermen used traditional fishing methods which can be related to the references to fishing in the Old and New Testaments. In recent years, however, more modern methods have increasingly been used, and it is not so easy today to see incidents of fishing on the lake which illustrate the Bible record. There are three main traditional ways of catching fish in numbers, each of which can be related to Bible references.

The dragnet

The seine or dragnet is a long wall of netting, as much as a thousand feet (300 metres) long. It is spread out from a boat 300 feet (a hundred metres) from the shore, and parallel to it, and towing lines are attached to each end and brought to the shore. A team of men then draws each towing line into the shore, moving also towards each other, gradually drawing the net together with fish in it of all kinds. These are then sorted out, with the edible ones kept and the others thrown away. In particular, there occurs in Galilee a species of catfish, which cannot be eaten under the Law of Moses because it does not have scales (Lev. 11:10), and these need to be separated out and thrown away.

There is a clear reference to fishing with a dragnet in the parable of Matthew 13:47-50. Here there is the only occurrence in the New Testament of the Greek word *sagēnē*, from which the word 'seine' comes, and the process described is clearly that of fishing with a dragnet: "the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat

down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away" (Mt. 13:47,48).

In the Old Testament the position is less clear. Ezekiel prophesied that the site of the desolated Tyre would become "a place for the spreading of nets" (26:5,14), as will be the shores of the Dead Sea in the Kingdom when its waters are healed by the river which will flow out from the temple at Jerusalem (47:10). It is the dragnet which is spread out in this way to dry after use, and Mendel Nun claims that the Hebrew word *cherem* used in these passages carries this specific meaning.

However, the position is less clear in Habakkuk 1, where three methods of fishing are referred to in a parable of how God allows the Chaldeans to work their will amongst the nations in various ways, as fishermen do in catching fish: "They take up all of them with the *angle*, they catch them in their *net* [*cherem*], and gather them in their *drag*" (v. 15). The first word, 'angle', clearly refers to catching fish with a hook and line, and it is the third which appears to mean a dragnet in the AV and other translations, with *cherem* referring to some other method of fishing.

Mendel Nun, however, translates the verse: "They take up all of them with the angle, they drag them with the seine, and gather them in their trapnet", claiming that the passage is "generally translated inaccurately", but he does not explain what a trapnet is. His way of rendering the different words is followed only by the Jewish Tanakh translation amongst the translations at my disposal to consult. The Hebrew word in Habakkuk 1 translated 'trapnet' by Mendel Nun occurs nowhere else in Scripture, though there are three closely related words which occur only once each, only one of which is clearly a reference to fishing: "they that spread nets upon the waters" (Isa. 19:8), referring to the fisherman of the Nile.

The cast net

The cast net is a circular net twenty to twenty-five feet (six to eight metres) in diameter with heavy weights round the edge. It is used by a single fisherman who throws it skilfully over an area where there is a shoal of fish so that it spreads out and sinks, trapping the fish. A type of cast net with a smaller mesh was used for catching sardines. In order to retrieve the net, the fisherman has to dive into the water and bring it up, enclosing the fish in its meshes.

There are two references to cast nets in the New Testament, both referring to the same incident: "And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea" (Mt. 4:18 cf. Mk. 1:16). The Greek word here, *amphiblestron*, means literally 'something thrown around', and clearly refers to this sort of net. According to Mendel Nun there are no references to this type of fishing in the Old Testament, though one wonders whether the 'trapnet' mentioned above might refer to this.

The trammel net

The third type of net was the trammel net. This is a net with three layers, the outermost and the innermost with large meshes and the middle one with a small mesh. Generally at least five trammel nets are used, attached to each other, each about a hundred feet (thirty metres) long. Trammel nets are laid as quietly as possible to touch the bed of the lake, with floats to keep the net upright, the result being a wall of netting across part of the lake. The boat then works its way round to the shore and approaches the net with much noise (oars splashing, feet stamping on the floor of the boat) with the purpose of driving the fish towards the net. The fish pass through the outer mesh and become entangled in the inner net.

Trammel nets are usually used at night when the fish cannot see the mesh and then avoid getting entangled in it. Fish are either extracted from the net by diving down, extracting them and putting them in a pouch, or by gathering the net up into a bundle, enclosing the fish, and bringing it into the boat, or, if land is near, dragging it onto the shore.

Mendel Nun says that the Hebrew word *matsod*, or similar, refers to this kind of net, although only one occurrence clearly relates to fishing: "For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net . . . so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them" (Eccl. 9:12).

The trammel net seems to be that represented by the Greek *diktuon*, the word used in the two records of miraculous hauls of fish. Also, although, as explained above, the nets which Peter and Andrew were fishing with when Jesus called them, as recorded in Matthew 4:18 and Mark 1:16, were the circular cast net, used by a fisherman working on his own, when both records go on to say that they left their nets and followed

Jesus the word used is *diktuon*. The use of the cast net was a relatively minor part of a fishing business compared with the use of trammel nets, which were capable of hauling in a large number of fish. In the same incident, James and John, together with their father Zebedee, are said to be mending their nets in their boat, the plural indicating the use of trammel nets where five or so are joined together.

The details in Luke 5:1-11 fit the use of the trammel net. The disciples had been fishing unsuccessfully at night: "Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing" (v. 5). Jesus was evidently able to discern by supernatural means the presence of a big shoal of fish, and presumably, given that fish were normally caught at night with trammel nets, when they could not see the mesh, the fact that great multitudes were actually caught in the day was also miraculous. It requires a number of fishermen to work effectively with trammel nets, and this was clearly the case here. There is reference to two boats, one belonging to Peter (and presumably Andrew too), the other to James and John. Though Andrew is not mentioned, his presence is implied by "they", with James and John being termed "their partners, which were in the other ship" (vv. 6,7).

As explained above, a trammel net would either be dragged into a boat, or dragged to the shore. In this incident, it appears that there were so many fish that the net could not be dragged into one boat, and the fish were extracted from the hauled up net and placed in both boats, to the point that they were beginning to sink (v. 7). Finally, at the beginning of this incident, the fishermen in the two boats were washing their nets. This was usually done after a night's fishing, and the nets were then hung out to dry before use the next night.

The details of the other miraculous catch of fish, recorded in John 21, do not entirely fit the use of trammel nets. The unsuccessful fishing trip was a nocturnal one, "that night they caught nothing", and there were seven disciples who went fishing, all in one boat (vv. 2,3), both these details fitting the use of trammel nets. However, only one net is mentioned, and the command of Jesus was to "cast the net on the right side of the

ship" (v. 6). Perhaps unusually only one trammel net was used, rather than a number tied together. In this incident Peter dragged the net to land (v. 11), which was what was done with trammel nets.

The weather

It is twice recorded that the disciples experienced severe storms on Galilee. In the first incident Jesus was in the boat but asleep, till he was woken by the terrified disciples, and calmed the storm (Mt. 8:23-27; Mk. 4:35-41; Lk. 8:22-25). In the second incident Jesus came to the disciples walking on the water, and the storm ceased when he got into the boat (Mt. 14:22-33; Mk. 6:45-52; Jno. 6:16-21). On both occasions the storm occurred after dark (Mk. 4:35; 6:47). Such storms are well-known to Galilean fishermen today. They blow up suddenly from the east in the early evening, the wind sweeping down from the Golan Heights through the gorges which run down to the lake.

The disciples when fishermen must have looked each day at the sky to see if they could interpret the weather, and Jesus, in talking to the Pharisees and Sadducees, refers to a well-known indication of the weather: "When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather today: for the sky is red and lowring" (Mt. 16:2,3). This observation is reflected in the English saying 'Red sky at night, shepherd's delight; red sky in the morning, shepherd's warning'.

Jesus also refers to another piece of weather lore: "When ye see a cloud rise out of the west, straightway ye say, There cometh a shower; and so it is. And when ye see the south wind blow, ye say, There will be heat; and it cometh to pass" (Lk. 12:54,55). Mendel Nun points out that, though the first part is true of the whole country, the second part is not true of Galilee but only of the south of the country, and refers to Luke being ignorant of the true position. However, this is not so, for at this stage in Luke's record the indication is that Jesus was in the south, staying at Martha and Mary's house in Bethany (10:38-42).

[\(To be continued\)](#)

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