



The Sea of Galilee

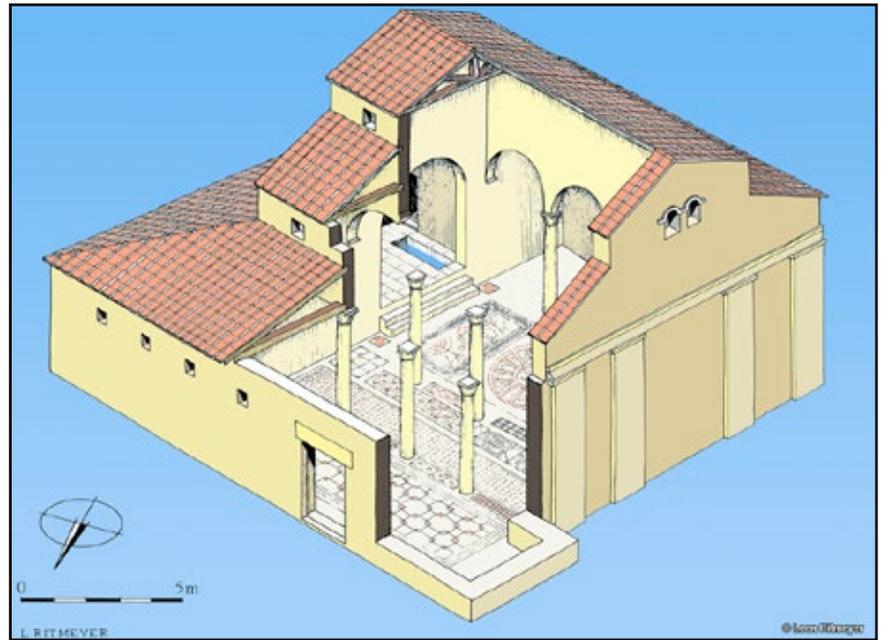
The “Sea” of Galilee is actually a lake. Only 13 miles at its very longest and seven miles wide at the widest point, the lake is the largest body of fresh water in Israel. It sits in a natural bowl, about 700 feet *below* sea level. The Golan Heights tower above the lake on its eastern shoreline at more than 1,000 feet *above* sea level. On the western side of the lake, the plains of the Galilee also rise quickly to 1,000 feet above sea level. As a result of being in this natural bowl, weather patterns can change dramatically and quickly on the water.

- The lakes has multiple names, including the Sea of Tiberias (John 6:1, 23; 21:1), Chinnereth (Numbers 34:11, Joshua 12:3), the Lake of Gennesaret (Luke 5:1) and Kinneret, which means “harp” or “lyre.”
- When his ministry began, Jesus moved from Nazareth to Capernaum. The communities along the northern shoreline of the lake were filled with conservative Jewish residents who took their faith very seriously.



Jesus spoke in the synagogues of “all the surrounding villages” of this area. (Matthew 9:35) Some of the villages (like Gamla) were radically conservative, producing the “Zealots.” Jesus included a Zealot among his disciples. Judas Iscariot might also have been among this group.

- Hippos (also known as Susita) is one of the original 10 cities of the Decapolis. It was thoroughly pagan. Whatever was off limits among the conservative Jews of Capernaum was celebrated in Hippos!
- The shoreline just south of Hippos is the most likely area for the region of the Gadarenes, or Gerasenes, made famous by the healing of a wild man who lived among the tombs.
- Tiberias has long been the largest city on the lake. Herod Antipas moved his palace from Sepphoris (near Nazareth) to Tiberias just in time to be near the ministry of Jesus. The two never met, however, until the day Jesus was crucified.
- The famous “Jesus Boat” was found at Ginosar during a drought in 1986. In a race against rising waters, the boat was actually floated to shore after it was wrapped with insulating foam.
- The ruins of Magdala and its First-Century synagogue were first discovered in 2009. In addition to the archaeological park, the ministry of Duc In Altum (“put out into the deep”) focuses on women in honor of Mary of Magdala. This village was apparently covered by a mudslide from nearby Mt. Arbel toward the end of the First Century. When it was discovered in 2009, it was buried underneath just 18 inches of dirt!



When you see the ruins of the synagogue at Capernaum, try to envision what residents would have known. This particular synagogue had one of the largest schools ever found attached to a synagogue. The Leen Ritmeyer illustration is a recreation of the Fourth Century (CE) synagogue in nearby Tiberias.

The Golan Heights and Northern Israel

The further away we travel from Jerusalem, the more we'll see of ancient pagan influences. Nowhere is that more obvious than when we travel to Banias, or as Jesus knew it, "Caesarea Philippi."

- The Jordan River begins at the base of Mt. Hermon. The closest tributary to the mountain is at Banias.
- The large cave at the base of Mt. Hermon once held an endless supply of water. An earthquake on New Year's Day, 1837 destroyed all the cities around the Sea of Galilee and closed this cave. The mysterious, instantaneous and never-ending supply of life-giving water made this location a place of pagan worship.
- The worship of Pan was so frightening and evil, our words "panic," "pandemonium" and "pandemic" remind us even today of how people felt when they came upon these cultic practices.

- The Greeks brought their gods with them to this region when Alexander the Great swept through the Middle East a little more than 300 years before Jesus was born.
- The Romans came next, instituting emperor worship in the same general time period of Jesus' birth. A temple honoring



When Jesus took his young disciples to Caesarea Philippi (Matthew 16), he was taking them to the most evil corner of Israel. Because of the water supply, they almost certainly followed the Jordan River and the road that led past Omrit, to Banias, and even on to Damascus.

Augustus as god was built over the cave at Banias, and on a high hill overlooking the Hula Valley at a site called Omrit. The illustration at the bottom of the next page is of a typical temple of Roman emperor worship. The ruins of Omrit are pictured next to the drawing. Herod the Great is believed to have been the builder of this temple.

- Caesarea Philippi was named in honor of the Roman emperor by Philip the Tetrarch, one of the sons of Herod the Great. It kept this name only while the Romans ruled. Another temple honoring Augustus was built over the cave at Banias (see the drawing at the upper left of the next page), insinuating that the gift of never-ending water was a gift of Caesar. Also pictured in the drawing (left to right) is the worship altar of Pan, a temple to Zeus and another place of Pan worship.
- And in a related matter, the tribe of Dan moved to this region when it tired of fighting the Philistines because of its assigned location in the Shephelah (see Judges 18). Unfortunately, this move put Dan in the direct path of the Assyrians, who completely destroyed the tribe. Dan is also the only one of the 12 original tribes missing from the list of tribes in Revelation 7:5-8.

Refresh your memory: Read Matthew 16-17

