



# STORMS

*on the Sea of Galilee*

Looking westward  
across the Sea  
of Galilee from  
Hippos.

**BY G. AL WRIGHT, JR.**

**E**VERYBODY TALKS ABOUT the weather. Even when we meet someone for the first time, we tend to talk about the weather. This article is about the weather. It is about one kind of weather. It is about one kind of weather in a particular location—storms on the Sea of

Galilee. How does knowing about the storms on the Sea of Galilee help us better understand and appreciate what we read in the New Testament?

### **Geographical Features**

Located at the northern end of the Jordan River Valley, the Sea of Galilee is 680 feet below sea level; measuring 13 by 7½ miles at its widest points, it covers approximately 64 square miles.

Many varieties of fish live in the fresh-water lake, making it ideal for those involved in the fishing industry.

A person can stand anywhere along the shore and see the expanse of the lake, which is defined by the mountains that surround it. The mountains differ in height reaching over 2,000 feet above sea level on the eastern side of the sea at the Golan Heights. With its green and blue hues,

the lake is beautiful to behold from any vantage point. The ancient rabbis said, “Although God has created seven seas, yet He has chosen this one as His special delight.”<sup>1</sup> But the beauty of this sea can turn ugly when a storm hits. What do we know about the storms on the Sea of Galilee?

### Storm Words

The New Testament records Jesus being involved with two storms on the Sea of Galilee. In the first, He walked on the water; in the second, He spoke and calmed a raging storm (Matt. 14:22-33; Mark 4:35-41).

The Gospel writers used four different Greek words that can help us understand the nature and character of these storms. Each word also occurs elsewhere in the New Testament in a symbolic sense. The symbolic usage helps illustrate the intensive force behind these words when used to describe a literal weather phenomenon. We will look at how the word is used

in a physical sense and then simply cite the reference for the symbolic usage. Looking up these verses in which words are used symbolically may help us better appreciate the force of the storms.

*Anemos*, which is translated “wind”<sup>2</sup> (Mark 4:39),<sup>3</sup> is used numerous times in the New Testament, but Mark 4:35-41 uses it in conjunction with two other storm words. The three, when used together, depict the kind of tempestuous force that rocks a boat and all who are in it! The word is used symbolically in Ephesians 4:14 and is translated “wind.”

*Kuma* is translated “wave”<sup>4</sup> (Mark 4:37). When used in these storm stories, it accentuates the unpredictability and instability of the situation. Jude 13 uses the word symbolically and translates it as “waves.”

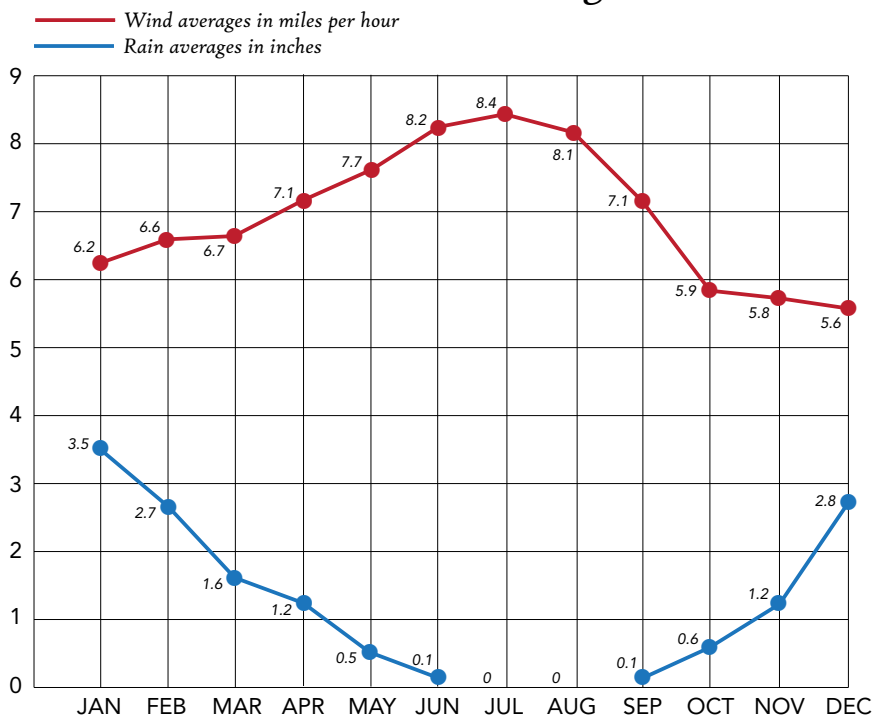
*Kludon* can be roughly translated as “rough water”<sup>5</sup> (“raging waves,” Luke 8:24). This word pictures a succession of waves that seem to

have no end. James 1:6 uses the term symbolically and translates it as “surging sea.”

*Lailaps* describes a severe windstorm or at its most extreme, a hurricane.<sup>6</sup> Used only three times (“windstorm,” Mark 4:37; “windstorm,” Luke 8:23; “storm,” 2 Peter 2:17), this term describes the most forceful of the weather conditions. This word depicts weather that is both threatening and violent. This word is used symbolically in 2 Peter 2:17.

These four words together, all used in the context of the storm stories in the New Testament, seem to point to three realities about these storms. They were sudden. They were unpredictable. They were often extremely violent. Do the meanings of these four words validate what we know about storms on the Sea of Galilee?

## Sea of Galilee Weather Averages



ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ BRENT BRUCE (1/65/1799)

**Above:** The pits with stone floors are saline pools at the fish market in ancient Magdala, which was the hometown of Mary Magdalene.

According to early historians, Magdala had a thriving salted fish export enterprise, which allowed the town to be self-sustaining.





PHOTO BY JAMES BALLA ON UNSPLASH



ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ BRENT BRUCE (145/6/2016)

**Above: Shore of the Sea of Galilee.**

**Left: Mosaic of a fishing boat, possibly dated to the 1st cent. AD. The mosaic shows two masts and the steering rudder on the boat's right (stern) side. In the lower right is a remaining partial image of a fish.**

## Storm Facts

Most researchers who have given time and energy to studying the topography of the Sea of Galilee and the nature of the storms that are recorded in the Bible agree that a storm on the sea can be characterized as sudden, unpredictable, and potentially violent. Several factors contribute to this conclusion. First, the location of the Sea of Galilee at the northern end of the Great Rift Valley and its thus being surrounded by mountains provide an optimum setup for the perfect storm. The winds that create the storm come across the mountains and drop suddenly and severely upon the lake below.

Second, the height of the mountains, particularly on the eastern side rising upwards of 2,000 feet above sea level, creates a natural collision course for the cold air descending from such a height to meet the warm air mass ascending from the lake below. Under such circumstances the collision comes suddenly and violently.

Third, the topography and the colliding of warm and cold air masses create swirling and unpredictable winds. What seems to be clear from both the geographical location of the Sea of Galilee and the words that are used about the storms on the sea is that they were

wind events, not rain events. The fierce windstorms would sweep over the Golan Heights, plunge passionately to the sea, and produce ferocious winds that would cause waves to rise over the top of a boat, striking terror in the hearts of those on board.<sup>7</sup>

The words that are used in the accounts of Jesus calming storms all point to the wind that blows the waves—with no mention of rain. It was the wind that agitated the sea, and it was Jesus who spoke and brought calm to both. 🌊

1. Todd Bolen, "The Sea of Galilee," Jerusalem Perspective, October 31, 1989, [www.jerusalemerspective.com/1476/](http://www.jerusalemerspective.com/1476/).

2. "άνεμος" (anemos, a strong wind) in Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* [BDAG], rev. and ed. Frederick William Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2000), 77.

3. All Scripture quotations are from the Christian Standard Bible (CSB).

4. "κύμα" (kuma, wave) in BDAG, 575.

5. "κλύδων" (kludon, rough water) in BDAG, 550.

6. "λαίλαψ" (lailaps; whirlwind, hurricane) in BDAG, 581.

7. "What Type of Storms Did Jesus Calm: Wind or Rain?" in *Lexam Geographic Commentary on the Gospels*, ed. Barry J. Beitzel (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2017), 177–80.

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