

WIND, WEATHER, AND THE SEA OF GALILEE

By Jerry M. Windsor

WHEN I STEPPED onto the boat for the first time, I felt a new kinship to the Sea of Galilee. Used mostly by tourists, the locals refer to this vessel as a “Jesus boat.” The weather was in our favor as we crossed that day. That is not always the case, however.

Unique weather conditions made possible a remarkable find along the shores of the Sea of Galilee in 1986. A prolonged drought and a receding shoreline led to the discovery of what is thought to be a first-century boat. Two brothers made the discovery along the muddy shores north of Tiberias.

For 12 days and nights, the Israeli Antiquities Authority and many volunteers carefully worked to extract the 27 foot long and 7 foot 5 inch wide boat. After an extensive 10-year preservation process, the boat is now on display at a museum in Ginosar, north of Tiberias.¹

Such extreme weather conditions as the 1986 drought are rare. Turbulent weather conditions, however, are not. Luke 8 describes Jesus and His disciples setting out across the lake (vv. 22-25). As they sailed, a squall came up and the boat was swamped. Jesus was asleep. Sensing grave danger, the disciples awoke Him. Jesus rebuked the wind and waves, and the storm subsided. Luke called it a storm,

but Matthew called it a tempest (KJV) or *seismos*, the Greek word for “earthquake” (8:24).² As the lake pitched and rolled, the disciples cried out, “*Epistata, Epistata*, we are drowning.” Some translations say they cried “Master, Master,” but the crew was really calling “Captain, Captain, we are perishing.”³

Jesus called for calm and immediately the wind and sea subsided. The *seismos* was instantaneous and so was the calm. The geographical features surrounding the Sea of Galilee and its location make the Sea susceptible to intense and unexpected, albeit brief, storms.⁴

The Sea of Galilee is in the northern part of the Jordan Rift Valley, which stretches from Mount





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Below: Winter storm on the Sea of Galilee.

Left: Mosaic pavement from Sousee

in North Africa helps us understand how some Roman period fishing boats looked.

Hermon southward to the Red Sea. A mountainous region bisects the land between the Mediterranean and the Sea of Galilee. Thus being located in the valley, the Sea of Galilee is some 700 feet below the surface of the Mediterranean, although the two bodies are separated by only about 30 miles. The Sea of Galilee is a large freshwater lake, 13 miles long and 8 miles wide.⁵

Flowing from the foothills of Lebanon Mountains through areas

of marsh, the headwaters of the Jordan River feed through Lake Huleh into the Sea of Galilee.⁶ Much of the Galilee's water also comes from the 9,000-plus foot snow-covered peaks of Mount Hermon. To show the contrast of the region, the annual precipitation at Mount Hermon is about 60 inches per year, but 120 miles south at the Dead Seam rainfall is rare.⁷

Modern-day Israel covers about 8,600 square miles; about three

percent of the land is covered with water, namely the Jordan River, the Sea of Galilee, and the Dead Sea. Precipitation comes primarily from the Mediterranean and moves eastward. Generally more rain falls on the Mediterranean side of the mountains than on the Jordan Valley side. For instance, Tel Aviv receives about 21 inches of rain per year, while the Sea of Galilee receives about 16.⁸ Annual rains begin in November and continue through May. Average rain spells last about two-and-a-half days. Even though the annual rains schedule is generally predictable, “[it] is not rare, even in the middle of the rainy season to have more than a month without rain.”⁹ Essentially no rain falls in Israel, though, from June through mid-October.

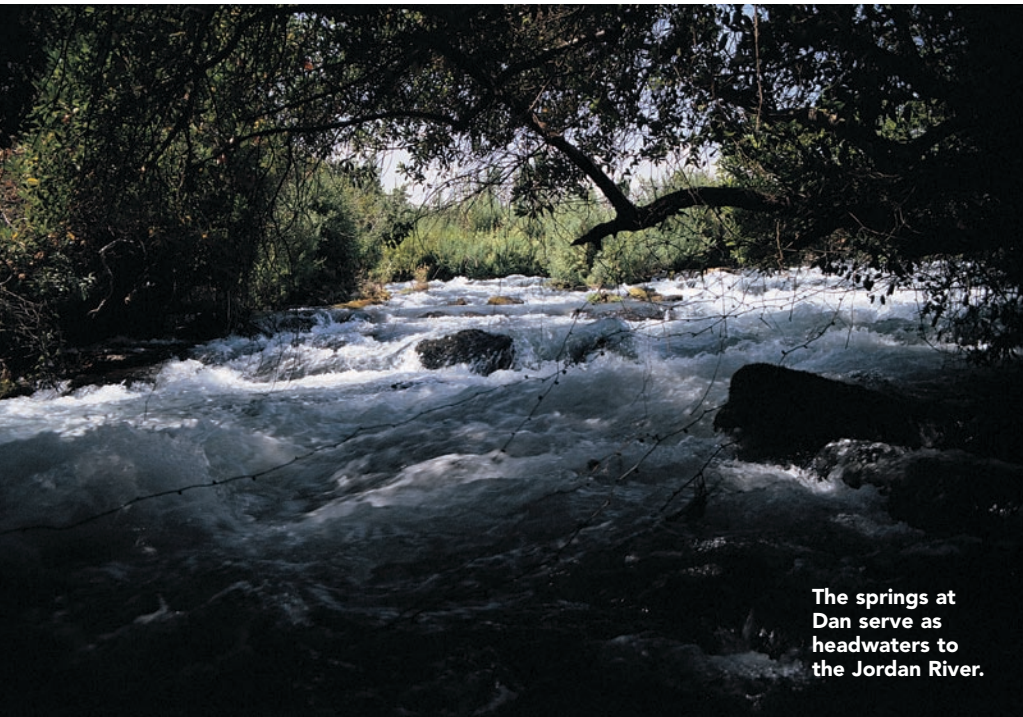
Being located “in a bowl,” with mountains to the north, west, and east, the Sea of Galilee is uniquely situated for crosswinds and weather currents. The upper air in the mountains is cooler,

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LESSON REFERENCE

ETB: Mark 4





The springs at Dan serve as headwaters to the Jordan River.



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Weather on the Sea of Galilee

Month	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Wind Direction	NW	N	NNW	NW	ESE	NNW	ESE	NNW	NNW	N	NW	NW
Wind Probability	10%	12%	12%	16%	27%	22%	29%	20%	22%	5%	3%	9%
Avg. Wind Speed (knots)	6	6	6	7	8	8	8	8	7	6	5	5
Avg. Air Temperature (°C)	9-18	9-20	11-22	13-27	17-32	20-35	23-37	24-37	22-35	19-32	15-26	11-20
(°F)	48-65	49-67	51-72	56-80	62-89	68-95	73-98	75-99	71-95	65-89	59-78	53-68
Avg. Precipitation (inches)	4.4	2.7	2.7	0.4	2.0	the dry season					2.0	3.5

while the air closer to the surface of the lake is warmer. The cooler air sinks, displacing the warmer air, forcing it upwards. This movement is exacerbated by the steep slopes of the surrounding mountains, resulting in sudden, dangerous storms. Additionally, moist air blows off of the Mediterranean and warm dry air comes from the deserts to the east—these factors converge resulting in disturbances that can bring sudden havoc and chaos.¹⁰

Along the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee are the ruins of the first-century fishing town of Capernaum. This town was Jesus' preaching headquarters and

the hometown of Peter, Andrew, Matthew, and possibly James and John.¹¹ Standing there today, one can imagine almost 2,000 years ago, when Jesus and His disciples left Capernaum and began to cross to the other side, towards Gerasa. When the *seismos* came up unexpectedly, though, Jesus used the opportunity to demonstrate His miraculous power as He calmed the storm and harnessed the elements. **B**

4. Roger Crook, "Galilee, Sea of" in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (HIBD), gen. ed. Chad Brand, Charles Draper, and Archie England (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 617.

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*

7. Gary Baldwin, "Hermon, Mount" in HIBD, 753.

8. Information regarding the average rainfall is from "World Weather Information Service: Israel Meteorological Service," World Meteorological Organization [online; accessed 18 March 2009]. Available from the Internet: www.worldweather.org.

9. Yair Goldreich, *The Climate of Israel: Observation, Research, and Application* (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2003), 70.

10. Denis Baly, "The Sudden Storms of Galilee," *Biblical Illustrator* 7:1 (Fall 1980): 62-64; Donald B. DeYoung, *Weather and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 99-100.

11. George W. Knight, "Capernaum" in HIBD, 263-65.

1. "The Story of Discovery Jesus Boat," Discovery Jesus Boat [online; accessed 10 December 2008]. Available from the Internet: discoveryjesusboat.com; Jesus Boats [online; accessed 10 December 2008]. Available from the Internet: www.jesusboats.com.

2. Herschel H. Hobbs, *An Exposition of the Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1966), 142-43.

3. *Ibid.*

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