

# Come Visit “The Galilee”

On December 25, 2009 my dad and I traveled to Israel for three weeks. In this article you will learn about Galilee, which was our favorite place to visit while we were in Israel.

The twittering of birds and the quiet ripples on the Sea of Galilee are the first sounds heard in the stillness of the morning. A big orange sun peeks over the mountains just to the left of where Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount; its rays stretch long fingers over the calm sea, and the brilliant glare sparkles in the water. What a peaceful morning—the same sight that Jesus saw 2,000 years ago.

I really enjoyed the ancient look of beautiful Galilee; churches and various shrines that mark some holy place color so many other regions in Israel. You really have to use your imagination in places like those, but in “The Galilee” you can truly see the original beauty of the seaside and the mountains. You can more easily picture the awesomeness of the storm and the perfect tranquility of the calm, Jesus teaching the multitudes of people, and the feeding of the five thousand, etc. Seeing these places makes your Bible just come to life. To be able to visualize what Galilee looked like in Bible times truly is amazing.

## The Extremes

The countryside is unforgettable with its extreme features. There are tall cliffs and flat plains. Among the green rolling hills, jagged limestone rocks jut out of the soil. Even with snowy Mount Hermon only forty-five minutes away, Galilee’s semitropical climate makes it a pleasant place to live. However, there are two distinct seasons, which range from temperate to tropical with plenty of sunshine. A rainy winter period stretches from November to May, and a dry summer season extends for the next six months. We were there in January, but even then the weather was absolutely beautiful! Temperatures averaged in the 70’s with only one or two days either in the 60’s or 80’s.

Galilee was first mentioned as the location of

Kedesh, a city of refuge in the hill country of Naphtali (Joshua 20:7; 21:32; 1 Chronicles 6:76). Galilee stretches from the upper Jordan River and the Sea of Galilee in the east, to the Plain of Jezreel (Megiddo) in the southwest (the boundary between Galilee and Samaria). Lake Hula is the top boundary and the western boundary runs by the Mediterranean Sea to Mount Carmel. All together, Galilee is 1,128 square miles in size and has a current population of 133,000.

## The Shepherd comes to Galilee

Jesus spent most of His ministry in Galilee, and the Bible often talks about Him by the seaside. It seems that He had a place of refuge in the mountainous terrain around the sea and was refreshed by the cool air and the peaceful view. He was raised in Nazareth, a part of Galilee. Eleven of His disciples came from Galilee, all except Judas, the only outsider, who was a Judean. Jesus also taught a good number of His parables (nineteen of thirty-two) and performed many of His miracles in Galilee. It was here that He had His most successful ministry. Because of the



beautiful climate, the area on the west side of the lake was a health resort, thus explaining why so many sick people were there. Mark chapter six tells about Jesus traveling there and finding many sick people and

healing them. In fact, there were so many that the villagers laid them along the sides of the streets, and as Jesus walked by, they could touch the hem of His garment!

## Goods of Galilee

Industry (59%), agriculture (28%), and tourism (13%) make up Israel's main economic activity. The country of Israel ranks fourth in the world for the production of fruit, even though it can comfortably fit inside Lake Michigan. Much of this comes from Galilee, which also produces olives, pomegranates, grains, grapes, citrus fruits, poultry, and wine. Galilee is also the producer of the most advanced irrigation system in the world! In the New Testament times fishing in the Sea of Galilee was an important business and the sea was teeming with fish. Just recently, however, the Minister of Agriculture, Shalom Simchon, announced a ban on all fishing in the Sea of Galilee for two years, since the number of fish has greatly decreased in the last decade. The ban started March 1, 2010 and ends February 28, 2012. Shalom Simchon plans to compensate all the fishermen who will be hurt by it, and he anticipates the increasing of the fish population this way.

## The People of Galilee

The main people groups in Galilee are the Arabs, Jews, Druze, and Bedouin. Here we find quite a clash of religions: Islam (the Arabs and Bedouin), Judaism (Jews), and Hikma (Druze). Many of these ethnic groups live within walking distance of each other, while others live miles apart. When the fall of Jerusalem occurred in AD 70, the Sanhedrin and many other Jews fled to Galilee. Soon Tiberius became a center for Jewish learning, and it was from here that the Mishnah and the Talmud originated.

There have been attempts made to increase the Jewish population in Galilee, but the Arabs and other ethnic groups still outnumber them. However, on July 6, 2009, Israel's housing minister Ariel Atias called for strict segregation between the Jewish and Arab population in the North (Galilee included). Ariel Atias considers it a national mission to "Judaize" or to "create a majority of Jews" in Galilee. The Arab lawmakers immediately condemned it, however. Mohammed Barakeh said, "Racism is spreading through the government, and Minister Atias is the latest to express it." Ariel Atias plans to recruit Jewish families to the North and already 600 families have signed up to move.



Currently, the population is 46.9% Jewish and 53.1% other. Christians are a definite minority because the government imposes strict laws against them. The government does not physically persecute Christians, but make it very difficult or impossible for them to renew their visas.

If a Christian is caught proselytizing, some of the Ultra-Orthodox Jews will actually throw stones at them. They are known to be violent. Eliat Levine and his family are Messianic Jews in Galilee. In the past few years, they have had two cars torched and their eleven-year-old daughter was interrogated at school for her family's supposed missionary activities. They have been evicted from two apartments and recently a car with loud speakers drove by their home saying that missionary Christians should be kicked out of Israel. Much of this trouble comes from the Haredi (Ultra-Orthodox Jews), while many other Haredi are dismayed by the violence. The Haredi have been known to protest and demonstrate against different things that go against their beliefs. For example, a decade ago in Jerusalem the Haredi asked a bus system to have segregated seating. Menachem Kenig, the leader of the group pushing for this subject said, "The one place where men and women are forced to be together is on the bus. People are crowded in, men and women push up against each other. There are sudden stops and sharp turns and men fall on the women. This really angers us; it is a violation of the concept of modesty that is at the basis of the Ultra-Orthodox community." There have been rocks thrown at buses, shattering windows and startling passengers. Menachem Kenig says that the violence was started by the Transportation Ministry's decisions to end a free segregated service his committee had launched, but others say that it was the Haredi.

## The Sea of Galilee

This is what the rabbis say about the Sea, "Although God has created seven seas, yet He has chosen this one as His special delight." This freshwater lake is Israel's main water supply. It also supplies various parts of Jordan and Syria. It is known for its fierce storms, caused by the collision of the cold air that comes down from Mount Hermon and the warm air around the lake. In March of 1992, a violent storm sent waves up to ten feet high crashing into downtown Tiberius, causing considerable damage. These storms can be life threatening to anyone out on the water at that time.

The Sea of Galilee is also the lowest freshwater lake on earth, 700 feet below sea level. Galilee usually gets twenty-five inches of rain annually. The land is also fed by the many beautiful streams that flow



from springs in the hills, and by the Jordan River, which is the largest river in Palestine. Located in the mountains, the Sea is an essential part of the Jordan River, which feeds it with water from snow-capped Mount Hermon, 9000 feet above sea level. As the Jordan travels its sixty-five-mile course from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea, it drops 590 feet, an average of nine feet per mile!

The lake is approximately thirteen miles long and six miles wide. Its shape somewhat resembles a harp, and some scholars think that the word Chinnereth (today the Sea is called Lake Kinneret) comes from a Hebrew word meaning harp.

## Facts Box

The word Galilee comes from "district" or "circuit".

25% of all Jews live in Galilee.

Galilee is a region, and therefore does not have its own official government.

-Hannah Keehn