

Sea of Galilee

This 'Sea' is, more accurately, a freshwater lake, fed by the River Jordan, which rises nearby to the north. It is situated about 60 miles (98k) north of Jerusalem, and lies in a depression of the Jordan Rift Valley where water gathers before proceeding along the Jordan Valley towards the Dead Sea below. The surface of the lake is about 700 feet (230m) below the Mediterranean (The Great Sea), and varies in depths from 80 to 160 feet (25-50m). The lake itself is almost 13 miles (21k) long and 8 miles (13k) at its widest point, at Magdala.

In Old Testament times it was called ***the Sea of Chinnereth***, referring in the Hebrew to its 'harp' shape. In the New Testament it is given three different names:

The Lake of Gennesaret

from the fertile plain to its northwest

[Luke 5: 1-11](#)

,
[Matthew 14: 34-36](#)

;
the Sea of Tiberias

, after the capital city built by Herod Antipas on its western shore

[John 6: 1-13](#)

,
[John 21: 1-14](#)

; and

the Sea of Galilee

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[Matthew 4: 18-22](#)

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Apart from its southern side, the lake is surrounded on all sides by steep cliffs and rapidly rising mountains, especially to the East to the Golan Heights. It is this topography that causes the sudden, violent storms upon the relatively warm surface of the lake, as cooler air rushes down from the surrounding heights. [Mark 4: 35-41](#)

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The presence of fresh water, milder climate, fertile soils and fishing attracted people to settle the lands around the lake. At the time of Jesus, there were 9 cities with populations of 15,000 or more, chiefly Bethsaida , Tiberias and Capernaum. Here Jesus called his disciples from their nets, [Mark 1: 16-20](#) from their various occupations, and drew crowds by his miracles and his teaching.

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