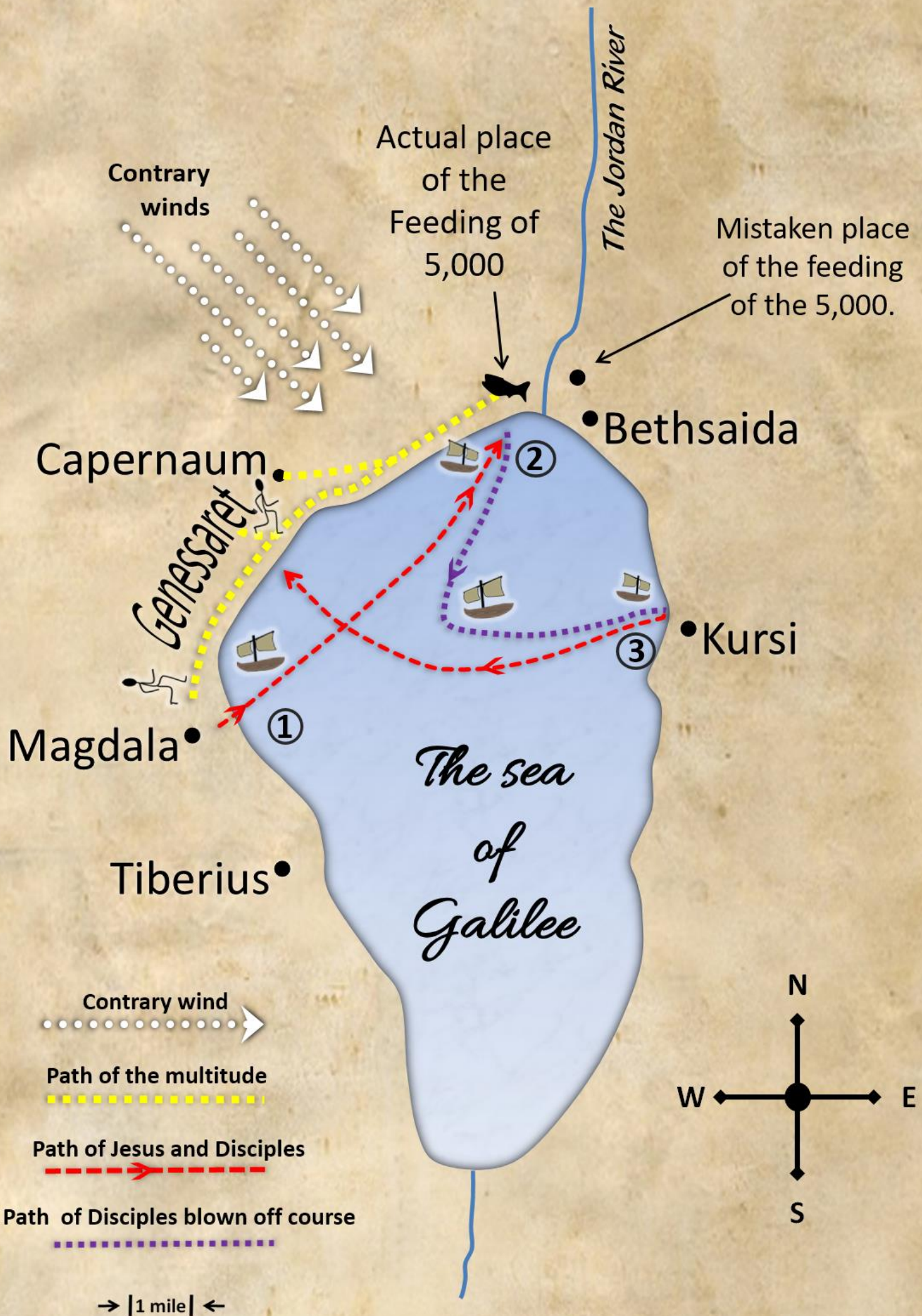


# The Actual Place of the Feeding of the Five Thousand.



By Mark Bach



Contrary winds

Actual place of the Feeding of 5,000

Mistaken place of the feeding of the 5,000.

The Jordan River

Capernaum

Bethsaida

Genessaret

Kursi

Magdala

Tiberius

The sea of Galilee

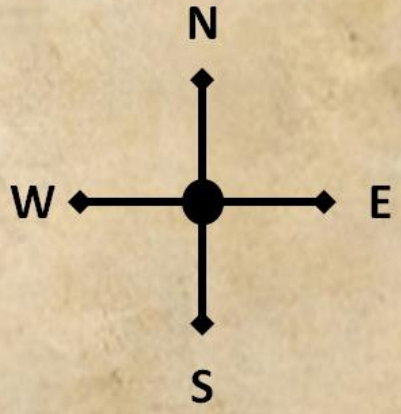
Contrary wind

Path of the multitude

Path of Jesus and Disciples

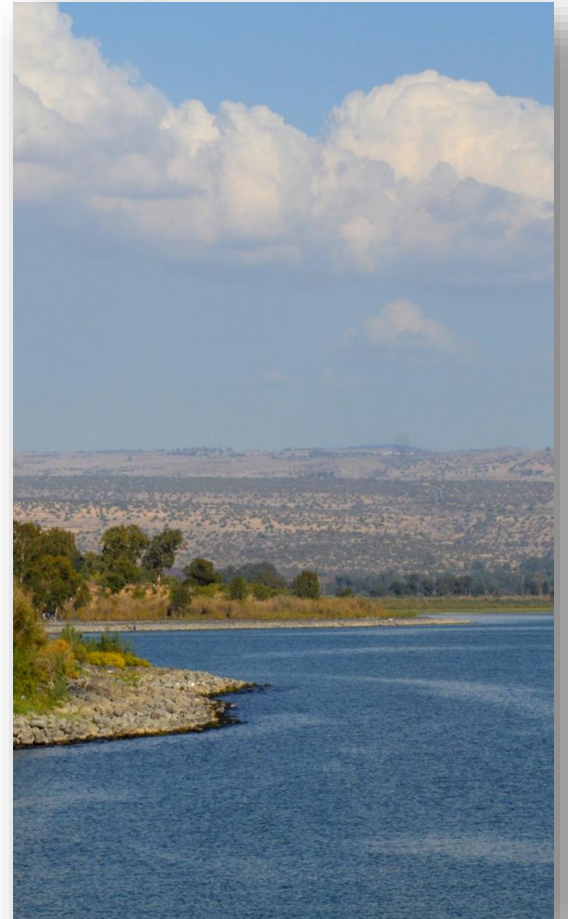
Path of Disciples blown off course

→ |1 mile| ←



The following study and outline is a short thesis on the subject of exactly where the feeding of the 5,000 actually took place. I have concluded that the most probable location this great event took place is the western side of the Jordan River where it meets the Sea of Galilee near Bethsaida. I have come to this conclusion after a great deal of intense study of the Scripture, historical, and archeological data, as well as considering new discoveries that have recently come to light. I want to prove this as the most sensible conclusion based on the following information. Let's look at the facts concerning this noteworthy miracle.

**1. First, notice that Jesus went to a place where the people who followed on land could follow along on shore while the disciples were traveling by boat.** The people followed out of the cities along the shoreline as Jesus and the twelve traveled by boat to where this event occurred. Look at Matthew 14:13 to verify this. *“When Jesus heard of it, he departed thence by ship into a desert place apart: and when the people had heard thereof, **they***



THE WEST SIDE OF THE GALILEE WHERE THE PEOPLE FOLLOWED THE ALONG SHORE

*followed him on foot out of the cities.”* So, we see that this event had to be in a place both accessible by land and by sea. John 6:1 says, *“After these things Jesus went over the Sea of Galilee, which is the sea of Tiberius.”*

**2. Next, we see that Jesus left from the Western shoreline of Galilee as the disciples had just been ministering in and near Nazareth prior to this miracle taking place.** The last recorded place that Jesus was prior to the feeding of the 5,000 was at

Nazareth, a place otherwise called Jesus' home country. See Mark 6:1, “And he went out from thence, and came **into his own country**; and his disciples follow him.” The apostles gathered with him in Mark 6:30. *“And the apostles gathered themselves together unto Jesus, and told him all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught.”*

**3. The people from several cities were able to follow and even run along the shore as Jesus traveled by sea.** Mark 6:33 states, *“And the people saw them departing, and many knew him, and ran afoot thither **out of all cities**, and outwent them, and came together unto*



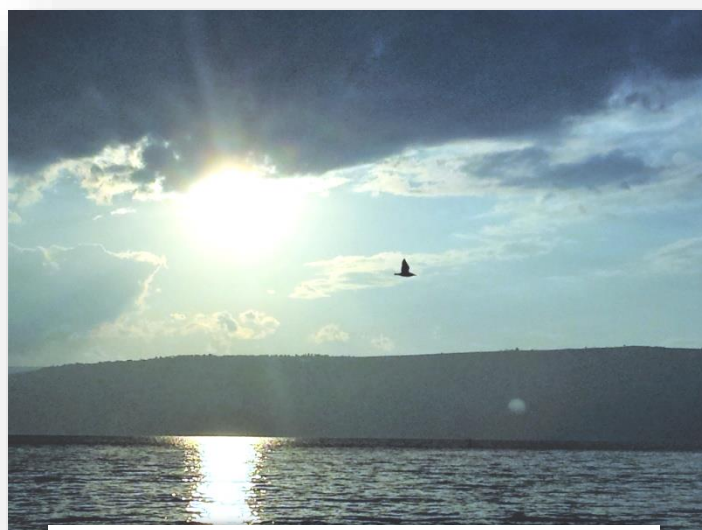
Modern dock at Capernaum

*him.”* The only way the people on land could do this would be if Jesus left by ship from around the area of Magdala. This was a place where the multitude could easily follow Jesus and the disciples along the coastline and also those who were from the other cities could join the procession as they all followed the boat. This would mean that the people on land would have to travel north and then eastward until they would have to stop at the Jordan River where it flows into the sea. This placed both Jesus and the people at the only place near the city of Bethsaida where this event could have occurred. Archeologists say that in that period of history there was no bridge for people to cross over the muddy Jordan that is still difficult to cross today where the Jordan empties into the sea.

**4. Look at the Biblical description of this resort's location.** This spot was a remote quiet desert place apart that also made a good resting place. Note- it could not have been at the city of Bethsaida itself. The place where this miracle occurred was said to be uninhabited, while Bethsaida was a well-developed

community. (Look up the recent discovery of Julias also known as el-Araj) Luke 9:10 tells us it was a private place “belonging” to the city of Bethsaida. Just recently, the actual tel of Bethsaida has been located on the east side of the Jordan River delta. The Jordan at that time was very difficult for a great multitude to cross, and still today, it would not be easy. The only place the people could run to was the west side of the Jordan. This was as far as they could easily go by land apart from the Lord doing a miracle in parting the Jordan River. Therefore, I conclude the miracle took place on the western side of the river from the city of Bethsaida. Jesus made this remote uninhabited spot the place where He spent the day teaching and helping the multitude prior to feeding them. Christ showed compassion to make this His stopping place as the multitude could proceed no further east because of the difficult barrier of the Jordan River. This is by necessity the place where the feeding of the 5,000 had to have taken place. Simply study the Bible account and you will have to agree.

**5. The place was a private place.** Luke 9:10 “*...And he took them, and went aside privately (The word private here means desolate) into a desert place belonging to the city called Bethsaida.*” Also, see Mark 6:32. It was a desert place- Luke 9:10, and Mark 6:31. In Matthew 14:13, it says “*...desert place apart.*” (Not a dry desert but a deserted place) It was near some villages, but not in the villages. “*And when it was evening, his disciples came to him, saying, This is a desert place, and the time is now past; send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves victuals.*” Matthew 14:15



LOOKING EAST OF THE GALILEE

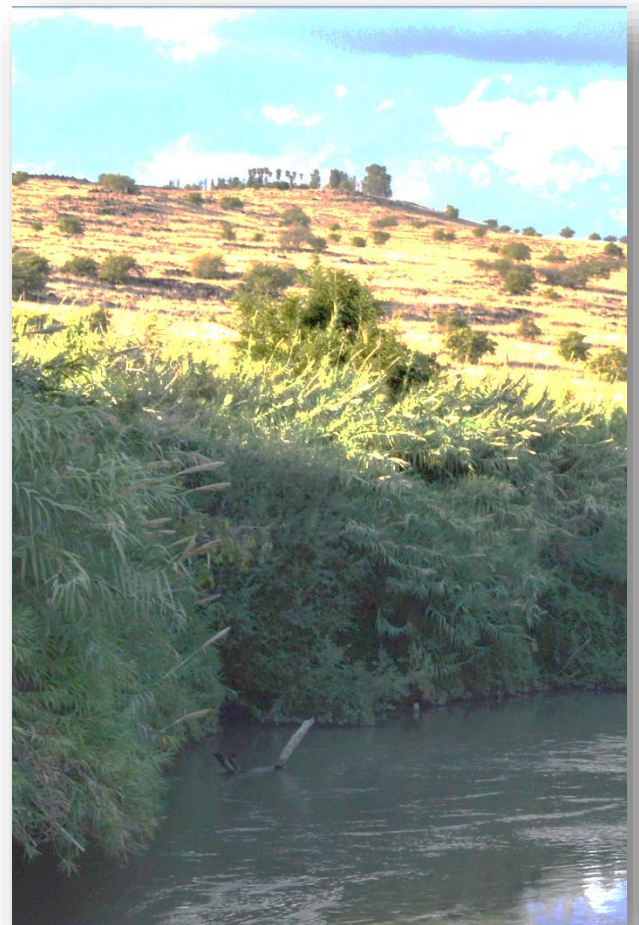
**6. It was a place that the people had to depart from to get to the villages.** Matthew 14:16 *“But Jesus said unto them, They need not depart; give ye them to eat.”*

**7. The place was remote by itself, and was a place of rest.** Mark 6:31 *“And he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and **rest a while**: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat.”*

If the feeding of the 5,000 occurred as some have stated on the east side of the Jordan, the place would have been an occupied place. This is where the city of Bethsaida is located. Yet we see on the western side, the event meets all that the Bible describes this place to be, including being an uninhabited desolate place.

**8. It was a place by a mountain.** There needed to be a gradually steeped mountain in this place where the aforementioned miracle occurred.

And our location under consideration is a place with a mountain. John 6:15 says, *“When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again **into a mountain** himself alone.”* Mark 6:46 *“And when he had sent them away, he departed **into a mountain** to pray.”* In Matthew 14:23 it says, *“And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up **into a mountain** apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone.”* The western side of the Jordan River delta meets this description.



THE MOUNTAIN WHERE JESUS  
MOST LIKELY PRAYED

**9. It was a well-watered place.** There was much green grass at that time of year (which John 6:4 states it was near the time of Passover). The Jordan River was a natural source for irrigating this region. This area having plenty of green grass makes it



MODEL OF 1<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY GALILEE BOAT FOUND IN SILT IN 1987 AT THE SEA OF GALILEE NOW AT GINOSAR MUSEUM

reasonable to assume that the children of Israel were at the site where the Jordan River enters the Sea of Galilee. We also observe it was a place for people to sit on the green grass. Mark 6:39 *“And he commanded them to make all sit down by companies **upon the green grass.**”*

Therefore, we see for there to be that much grass it would have been a well-watered place. *John 6:10 says, “Now **there was much grass** in the place.”*

**10. It was a place that needed to accommodate about 5,000 men, plus women and children.** Matthew 14:21 *“And they that had eaten were about **five thousand men**, beside women and children.”* In Mark, it said *“**five thousand men.**”* Mark 6:44 *“And they that did eat of the loaves were about **five thousand men.**”* In Luke, it says, *“all this people,”* and *“**about five-thousand men.**”* Luke 9:13, 14 *“But he said unto them, Give ye them to eat. And they said, We have no more but five loaves and two fishes;*

except we should go and buy meat for **all this people**. For they were about **five thousand men**. And he said to his disciples, Make them sit down by fifties in a company.” John 6:2, 9 says, “And a **great multitude** followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased.” Vs.9 says “There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among **so many?**”

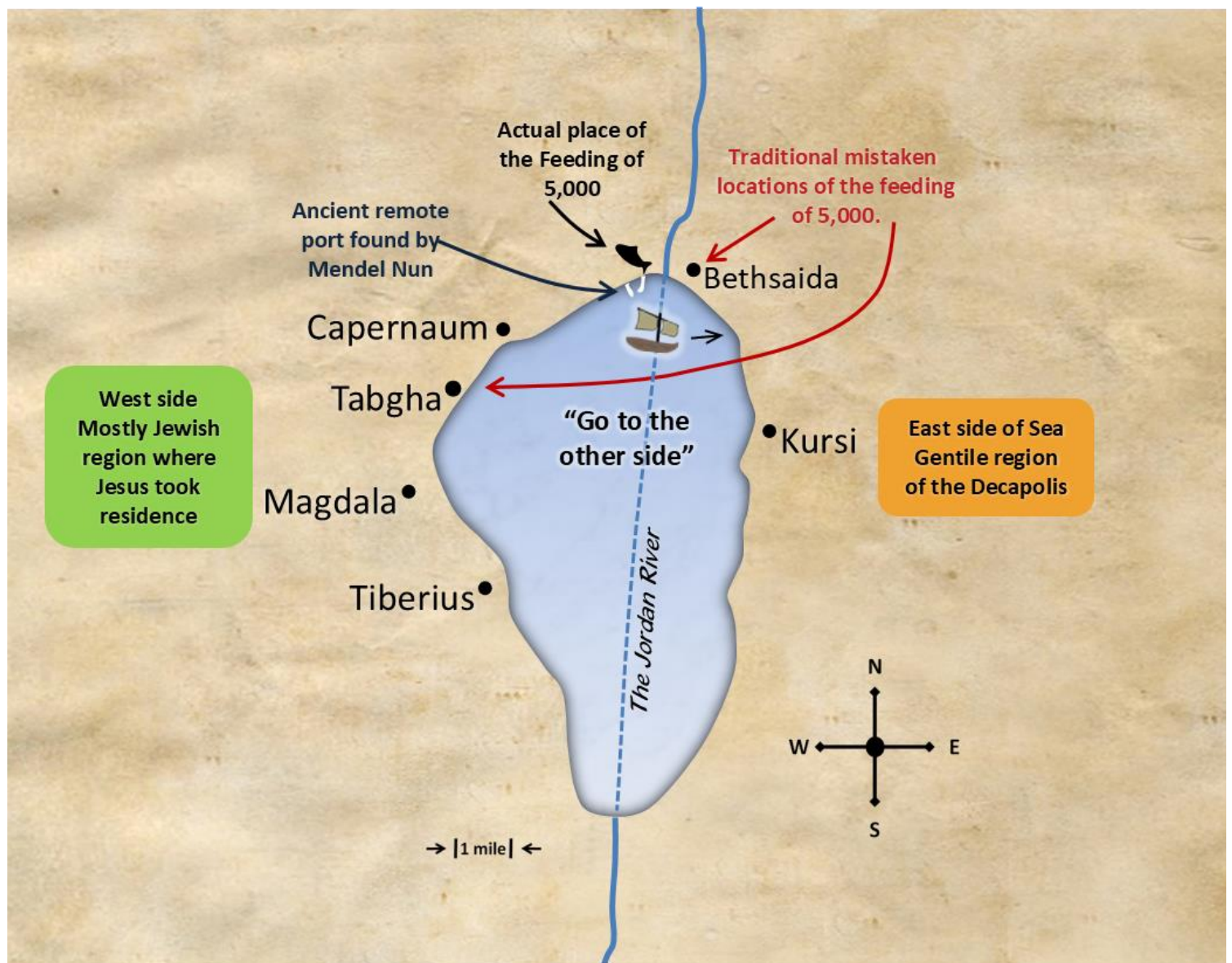


THE PETER FISH IN A FISHING NET. ONE OF THREE COMMERCIALY HARVESTED FISH NATIVE TO THE SEA OF GALILEE. OTHERS INCLUDE SARDINE AND BARBELL.

**11. It was a place the multitude could leave from and get back to their homes in a hurry.** Jesus sent the people away in Mathew 14:23 “And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone.” Mark 6:45-46 says, “And straightway he constrained his disciples to get into the ship, and to go to the other side before unto Bethsaida, while **he sent away** the people. And when he had **sent them away**, he departed into a mountain to pray.” Keep in mind that they needed to get home quickly. John 6:4 says “**And the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh.**”

**12. It was a place the apostles could leave from, and pass Bethsaida on the way out.** Based on our location under consideration, they would need to continue east on the Sea of Galilee past the Jordan River. Mark 6:45 says, “And straightway he constrained his disciples to get into the ship, and **to go to the other side before unto Bethsaida**, while he sent away the people.” In Matthew 14:22 it says, “And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go **before him unto the other side**, while he sent the multitudes away.”





Now, it is most likely the “*other side*” means the other side of the Jordan River at the town of Bethsaida. Jesus told the disciples to continue east to the other side of the Jordan from where they were.

You may note that all three of these men, Peter, Phillip, and Andrew at some point in time resided in Bethsaida. **Apparently, the disciples got another idea. They went the opposite direction the Lord told them to go, and like Jonah, they wound up in a horrendous storm.** Apparently, Peter wanted to leave and go the opposite direction Jesus told him to go. This route took the disciples away from Bethsaida toward Capernaum. Instead of heading east as Christ commanded, they went west. This disobedience got them into a huge storm. The apostles did not listen to Jesus' last instructions. In John 6:17 it says, “*And entered into a ship, and went over the sea toward Capernaum. And it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to*

them.” So, they headed for Peter's western home in Capernaum. **They went over the sea toward Capernaum.** Why did the disciples go toward Capernaum and not toward Bethsaida as Jesus said? Here are a few reasons. 1. Because, Peter was staying there in Capernaum and he wanted to dock his ship there, see Matt. 8:14 Peter would be tempted to go where the wind would normally blow, yet on this occasion, the wind was contrary. See Mark 6:48. Here is another reason- 2. Maybe it was because it was close to Passover and the disciples wanted to hurry home for the occasion. John 6:4 “**And the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh.**” 3. It was also dark. John 6:17 “*And entered into a ship, and went over the sea toward Capernaum. And it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them.*” Another reason may be the disciples knew that- 4. A big storm was brewing. John 6:18 says, “*And the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew.*” However, the most likely reason is that- 4. The people had plans to crown Jesus king in Capernaum as soon as they could get the people together.

**13. Many people wanted Jesus to be crowned king** and the west side of the sea was very much the Jewish section. See John 6:14,” *Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world. When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and **take him by force, to make him a king**, he departed again into a mountain himself alone.” We also note in Luke 9:11 where it says, “*And the people, when they knew it, followed him: and he received them, and **spake unto them of the kingdom of God**, and healed them that had need of healing.*” The topic was already about the kingdom of God. **It appears that as they attempted to go west to Capernaum God sent a contrary wind to blow them east, the direction Jesus commanded or constrained them to go.** The apostles got into the storm because of their disobedience to Christ’s command. As they*

traveled to Capernaum they got into one of the worst storms of their lives. John 6:18 says, "And the sea arose by reason of **a great wind that blew.**" Mark 6:48 says, "And he saw them toiling in rowing; for **the wind was contrary unto them.**" **Note: When we refuse to listen we too can get into some great storms in life. It is very toilsome when we go against God's word. I**



THE JESUS BOAT CROSSING  
FROM NORTH TO SOUTH  
LOOKING EAST

**believe this account can teach us of the added labors and dangers we encounter when we do not listen to the clear commands of Christ. Jesus knows how to direct our lives. Why not trust Him? "...and about the fourth watch of the night he cometh unto them, walking upon the sea, and would have passed by them."** In Matthew 14:24 it says, "But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary." When Jonah was disobedient and not going where God had sent him, he too experienced "great wind" Jonah 1:4 "But the LORD sent out **a great wind** into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken." As Jonah, the disciples got one of the hardest lessons of their lives.

Now, consider a contrary wind. While this direction of the wind was not allowing them to get to Capernaum, it would have blown them to the east side of the sea. This is probably where they spent the night. It was the area on the east side of the Sea where Jesus told them to go in the first place. He told them to "go before unto Bethsaida."

It is a known fact that the normal direction of the wind in a storm is from south east to the north-western direction, but in this unusual storm it blew the opposite way. This blew the Capernaum bound disciples out to sea

I believe they finally ended up on the eastern coast of the sea, very possibly at the port where the maniac was from. We find that at a later time, this is the area where the feeding of the 4,000 most likely took place. However, at this particular time we see these apostles of Christ were blown off course until the fourth watch of the night (from 3am until 6am). John 6:19 says, *“So when they had rowed about five and twenty or thirty furlongs [about 3 to 4 miles], they see Jesus walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the ship: and they were afraid.”* In Mark 6:48 it says, *“And he saw them toiling in rowing; for **the wind was contrary unto them:** and about the fourth watch of the night he cometh unto them, walking upon the sea, and would have **passed by them.**”* This is another reason to believe that the Lord was not pleased with the disciples' disobedience in not going where he originally told them. It says that Jesus walked upon the sea and would have passed them. He was not walking to his friends but around them. This is why we should listen to the Lord carefully, so we can be in favor with him and that he does not walk distantly from us in the sea of life.

When all hope seemed to have gone, Jesus came to their rescue. Matthew 14:25, *“And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea.”* We learn Peter got out of the ship to be with Jesus and needed rescued himself. See Matthew 14:29-31, Mark 6:50, and John 6:19-21. The winds ceased in Matthew 14:32. Notice that the ship was out at sea. Mark 6:47 Then when Jesus came into it, it was at land. See John 6:21. Now we see that since the wind was contrary to go to Capernaum, it most probable blew the ship and the disciples on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee on the other side from

their earlier destination of Capernaum. This would have placed the boat on the shore near Kursi on the east shore. This is most probably, where they spent the rest of the night, as they were exhausted and in much need of rest.

**Now, let's look at what happened the following day.**

The text seems to indicate that some people were standing across the sea from the disciples and were looking for a sign of a boat lost at sea in the previous night's storm. That is when they spotted the boat with Jesus on board as it headed into the harbor at



SUNRISE OVER THE EAST

the port of Genessaret. This the area next to Capernaum. John 6:22 says, ***"The day following, when the people which stood on the other side of the sea saw that there was none other boat there, save that one whereinto his disciples were entered [Note The people knew that when the boat left the night before that Jesus was not on board] and that Jesus went not with his disciples into the boat, but that his disciples were gone away alone."*** These people on the western shore of Galilee could not figure out how Jesus came from the east side of the shore without getting on the boat. (See Mark 5:1).

We also realize that the 'other side' was used when talking about the other side of the Jordan River at least 15 times in the Bible. This also was a statement sometimes meaning the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Also in this Bible account, we notice them morning after the storm when Jesus crossed the sea from the east side of Galilee, the people were waiting for him on the

west side. (See also Mark 5:21 the 'other side' and Luke 8:22, 40) Mark 6:53 says, "*When they had passed over, they came into the land of Genessaret* (See also Matthew 14:34).

(Note- Genessaret was right next to Capernaum.) Notice when they get out of the ship. It must have been in the bright light of late morning because the people "*knew him*" Mark 6:54 says, "*And when they were come out of the ship, straightway they knew him.*" Now, when the people realized that Jesus had come to them from across the sea the people ran to Jesus from the whole area. Mark 6:55 "*And ran through that whole region round about, and began to carry about in beds those that were sick, where they heard he was.*" Matthew 14:35-36 says "*And when the men of that place had knowledge of him, they sent out into all that country round about, and brought unto him all that were diseased; And besought him that they might only touch the hem of his garment: and as many as touched [him] were made perfectly whole.*" Now, keep in mind that Genessaret borders Capernaum where Jesus later ended up in the Jewish synagogue- see John 6:59

It is said by historians that springs in Capernaum feed the garden of Genessaret, which was 3 miles long by 1 mile wide. This shows how close these two areas were together.

After Jesus' arrival in Genessaret, He held a revival there. The revival probably took place that morning and afternoon on the day of Jesus arrival. Later Jesus ends up in Capernaum just a small distance from Genessaret.



FROM THE NORTH LOOKING SOUTH. THE SEA IS APPROX. 7 MILES WIDE BY 14 MILES LONG

Now look what happened on the day following the feeding of the five thousand. According to John 6, the people of Capernaum (earlier in the day) saw the boat with Jesus pass by them going next door to the port of Genessaret. See John 6:22 *“The day following, when the people which stood on the other side of the sea saw that there was none other boat there, save that one whereunto his disciples were entered, and that Jesus went not with his disciples into the boat, but that his disciples were gone away alone.”* Knowing that the previous evening the disciples got on the boat alone, the people were surprised to find Jesus on that boat that came from across the sea. That is because the people that left Jesus the night before knew Jesus could easily have walked from the west side of Jordan to Capernaum without a ship. Yet they saw him on the ship that was blown across the sea. Meanwhile, other boats came from Tiberius looking for Jesus where they (the men who received bread and fish at the feeding of the 5,000) left him the night before. (John 6:23 *“Howbeit there came other boats from Tiberias nigh unto the place where they did eat bread, after that the Lord had given thanks.”*)

Then later the same day, these same people came to Capernaum looking for Jesus. John 6:24 says, *“When the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, neither his disciples, they also took shipping, and came to Capernaum, seeking for Jesus.*

When they found that Jesus had been on the other side of the sea, they wanted to know when he made the crossing because they missed him as they went looking for him from Tiberius. This boat traveling north from Tiberius went to where Jesus fed the 5,000 searching for Jesus. When they traveled there, Jesus and the disciples arrived in the port at Gennesaret. Finally, this same search party arrived at Capernaum and met up with Jesus. John 6:25 *“And when they had found him on the other side of the sea...”* The other side here is referring to the other side of the

sea from where he had been the night before. The search party was speaking from Capernaum. At this point the search party had a question, "*...they said unto him, Rabbi, when camest thou hither?*" Here, Jesus addresses the crowd that wanted to crown him king the day before and discouraged them from this idea by a rebuke (see John 6:26-59). See also the final rebuke of Luke 7:1-23 and Matthew 15:1-20. So, with all this said, it makes perfect sense that the feeding of the five thousand took place, not on the east side of Jordan at Bethsaida, but on the west side of Jordan, the land that was controlled or owned by the community of Bethsaida, located just before Bethsaida. It was in the land belonging to Bethsaida probably where shepherds had grazing rights in the beautiful pastures found there.

It is interesting to note that an Archeologist from Israel named Mr. Mendel Nun discovered an ancient remote port close to this spot. This was one of many he found during a time when the lake was at a very low level from a severe drought in 1987. This ancient port was found near the very same location where I believe Jesus fed the 5,000 and did this great miracle. What is so significant about this ancient port is that there was no ancient tel of any kind found on the land there above the remote port. It is also interesting to note that with most ancient ports found around the Sea of Galilee today, adjacent city tels are found with them. This confirms that in Jesus day there was docking for the ship in this deserted place on the west side of Jordan. This remote port existed during Jesus' day. Therefore, when we look at all the evidence Biblically, historically, and archeologically we can conclude that on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee, west of the Jordan River was the place where the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 took place.

I invite comments on this article.

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