



The Jesus Boat

In 1986, Moshe and Yuval Lufan, brothers and fishermen from Kibbutz Ginosar, discovered an ancient boat buried in the mud near the shore of the Sea of Galilee during a period of extensive drought. The discovery of the boat, dated to the first century, rocked the archaeological world, as it may have sailed the Sea of Galilee during the time of Christ. Known now as the Jesus Boat, the vessel is 27 feet long, 7 feet wide and 4 feet high, and would have carried a single mast with a square sail, positions for four oarsmen, and a helmsman. On the Sea of Galilee in the first century it would have been among the largest of its type.

Scriptures don't tell us who owned the boat used in the events of Mark chapter 4, but we do know from Matthew 4:18-22 and Luke 5:3 that both Simon / Andrew and James / John (the sons of Zebedee) owned boats and were commercial fishing partners. Simon's boat would seem to be smaller than the Jesus Boat, as only Simon and Andrew are mentioned as the crew of their boat in Matthew 4:18. It was probably too small to carry Jesus and the twelve disciples. The boat belonging to James and John seems to have had a crew of at least four or five and would have been very similar to the Jesus Boat, as Mark 1:20 shows

Zebedee being left in their boat with hired servants when James and John answer Jesus' call. A boat like theirs was probably the boat Jesus taught from on that afternoon in Mark 4.

When we toured Israel in 2012, we had the opportunity to see the Jesus Boat (picture), and my initial reaction was that this boat, described as "large for its type", would have been overloaded, (or at the very least heavily loaded), while carrying Jesus and the twelve disciples on this overnight voyage across the Sea of Galilee. My frame of reference is our J/24 sailboat "Quicksilver" which we owned in the late 80's. It was several feet shorter than the Jesus Boat, but also several feet wider and much more stable, and I have a distinct memory of how overloaded Quicksilver felt on that summer evening in 1990 when I took Pastor Dave and five deacons out for an evening sail. (We ran aground on Cow Island ledge, but that is a different story.) An open fishing boat like the Jesus Boat, overloaded with 13 men and with significantly reduced freeboard, would be sluggish and quite vulnerable during a storm on the Sea of Galilee.

Mark 4:35-36

³⁵On that day, when evening came, He said to them, "Let us go over to the other side." ³⁶Leaving the crowd, they took Him along with them in the boat, just as He was; and other boats were with Him.

After a lifetime spent on or near the water I can see the scene in my mind. As evening approaches the land begins to cool and the winds become calm. Jesus finishes teaching and gives the command to go to the other side, and immediately falls asleep on a cushion in the stern. One of the experienced fishermen is at the helm of the boat and several of the disciples are at the oars. Other disciples are laying in uncomfortable positions on the boat, or sitting together speaking in hushed voices to avoid disturbing Jesus. As darkness gathers the heavily loaded boat pulls away from the shore and rows slowly east towards the land of the Gerasenes, followed by a little flotilla of similar

fishing boats. There is no hurry, the journey across the lake is only 5-6 miles, it will be an easy overnight trip.