

3. The choice of disciples and teaching of Jesus.

In our first discussion the proximity of the restoration works at Sepphoris and its probable influence on the boy Jesus living in Nazareth was mentioned.



The Sea of Galilee

We know from the bible that Jesus grew up in Nazareth in Galilee (Matthew 2:23) and that he had left Galilee to be baptised in the Jordan to be baptised by John (Matthew 3:13). When heard that John had been put in prison he returned to Galilee and went to live in Capernaum (Matthew 4:13).



Excavations of Capernaum with the Synagogue of Jesus (shown in the second discussion notes) in background

From then he began to preach and to choose his disciples. It is not clear how long after being baptised by John he was arrested, but this may have been a sufficient time for Jesus to have started activities in Judea before returning to Galilee, possibly explaining some apparent discrepancies with John's Gospel.

Morris¹ states that Matthew has preferred to start his account by emphasising fulfilled prophecy (see Matthew 1:22-3; Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 4:12-17; Isaiah 9:1-7). Jesus may have realised that with John arrested it was time for him to start his ministry. Galilee was a fruitful place to start. Josephus tells us that Galilee at that time was fully cultivated and there were many cities and villages, with even the smallest villages having over fifteen thousand inhabitants.²



We saw this model based on a 1986 archaeological discovery, 27 feet long, carbon dated to 40 ± 80 years, possibly the sort of boat used by Jesus's disciples. We sailed on a larger modern boat, but nevertheless gained a memorable mental picture of the size of the Sea of Galilee (Lake Tiberias or Yam Kinneret) as well as the traditional site of Jesus's sermon on the mount.



The Sea of Galilee from a modern "Jesus boat" with the area of the north western coast known as Tabgha in the background.

¹ Morris, Leon, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 79
² (Josephus, *Jewish War*, 3.43).



We had the obligatory stop at St Peter's Restaurant



It seemed discourteous to resist ordering the biblically-hallowed dish.



Caesarea Philippi is 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee where Jesus told Peter that he was the Rock on which he would build his church (Matthew 16:18).

Jesus in Tabgha

Names

BIBLICAL Magadan (Mt 15:39) means "The Waters of Good Fortune"
 Dalmanutha (Mk 8:10) is "The Region of His Stay" (apocryphal expression)

BYZANTINE Heptapegon is "The Spring of Seven"
 The Greek "Heptapegon" was mutated into the Arabic name

ARABIC Et-Tabega or Tabgha

HEBREW Ein Sheva is "The Spring of Seven"

Tabgha

First Feeding of the Multitude

Mostly Jews from Galilee

Location: Tabgha
Western Shore

Mt 14:13-21
Mk 6:30-44

BIBLICAL EVENTS that Took Place in Tabgha

- The Calling of the First Apostles (Mk 1:16-20)
- The Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:1ff)
- Healing of the Leper (Mt 8:1-4)
- The Miracle of the Multiplication
- Jesus' Walk on the Waters (Mk 6:45-52)
- Meeting with Peter and his Companions after the Resurrection (Jh 21:1ff)
- The Last Appearance of Jesus in Galilee (Mt 28:16-20), while Five Hundred Brethren (1Cor 15:6) were present

Tel Hadar

Second Feeding of the Multitude

Mostly Gentiles from the Decapolis

Location: Tel Hadar
Eastern Shore

Mt 15:32-29
Mk 8:1-10

John's Gospel (6:1-15) combines both feedings into one.

A reminder of important events of Jesus's ministry in Galilee

Morris makes the point that Galilee had a mixed population, causing the Jews in Jerusalem to look down on Galilee and showing that Jesus came for all.³ Hence Jesus's ministry in Galilee shows that although Jesus stated that he was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel when confronted by a Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:24) his message would have likely been heard by many Gentiles. But it was to take the insights of Paul and other apostles to reflect on Jesus's ministry, and particularly his passion, to see that Jesus's death and resurrection was for all humankind.

It is surely of religious importance to note that Jesus's disciples were not from the leadership of the Jews, instead, they were ordinary people – fishermen - from an unprepossessing background (Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:1-11). John's differing account (1:35-50) emphasises Nathanael's lack of guile. The

³ Morris, Leon, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 82

difference in the accounts should not surprise us; John's Gospel is dated at about AD 80, with any date between AD 55 and AD 95 being possible.⁴

Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5 – 7).



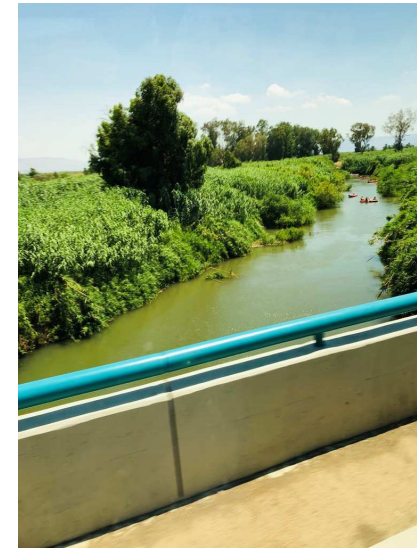
This illustration above the door of the Church of the Beatitudes reminds us of the obvious difficulties Jesus faced in getting profound religious truths over to crowds of possibly illiterate people without today's audio-visual aids. His choice of memorable parables based on familiar scenes, his symbolic miracles (such as turning water to wine at Cana in Galilee (John 2:1-11), and his healing all contributed to his message being widely spread and resulting in a large following.

The Church was built in 1938 on the traditional site of the Sermon on the Mount. It has an octagonal shape, representing the eight blessings of Jesus's Sermon on the Mount. It has a good view over the Sea of Galilee, and its surrounding gardens remind us of the fertile surroundings of Galilee.

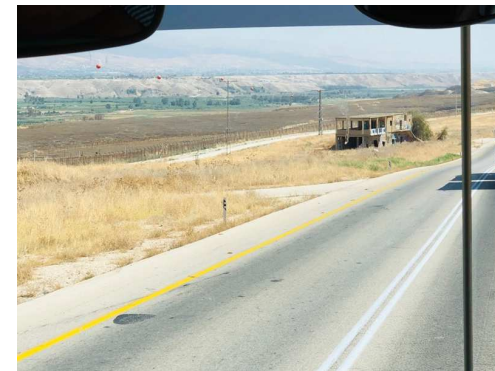


⁴ Carson, D.A. The Gospel according to John, 82

The Jordan valley – about 60 miles in a straight line from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea.



The Jordan river from our coach. Much reduced in size over recent decades.



The Jordan valley with the fence and military post on the West bank – a reminder of the separation of Israel from neighbours which we will again encounter in our fifth discussion.



Toward the southern end of the Jordan valley we saw the road sign to Jericho, a reminder of Joshua 6, now a sprawling town.

The Jordan river flows into the Dead Sea (2,590 ft below sea level), now much reduced in size as water from the Jordan is diverted for agriculture at an increasing rate.

Jesus did not have far to go to reach the desert to be tempted by the devil (Luke 4:1-13).

What the pilgrimage did for all of us was to give us memorable mental images:

- to remind us of the political status of the Israelites in Jesus's time
- to gain a clearer insight into the background influences on Jesus's ministry
- to reinforce his teaching by seeing their context
- to stimulate us to think of just what a monumental task Jesus faced in bringing a new message (repent and believe) to a people who were expecting a totally different Messiah who would lead a military campaign to overthrow the oppressing Roman presence.

But there was an intangible excitement, wonder, amazement at being in the places that Jesus knew and where he taught. A mere road sign to Nazareth or Jericho caused a frisson of excitement!

As Morris states in his commentary on Matthew 4:18 the people in mind who are living in darkness are those whose horizon is bounded by death. How true this is today for so many in our secular society! We will return to this thought in our next discussion of the central meaning of Christianity.