



VIEW NORTH: PLAIN OF GENNESARET. THIS PHOTO WAS TAKEN NEAR MAGDALA ON THE SOUTHERN END OF THE PLAIN. IT LOOKS TOWARD THE SUNLIT CITY OF SAFED (TOP CENTER; SEE "SAFED (ZEFAT)" ON PAGE 77).

BELOW (VIEW NORTH): PLAIN OF GENNESARET. I'M ON THE TRAIL THAT DESCENDS FROM MT. ARBEL EAST, THEN SOUTH TOWARD TIBERIAS. IT LOOKS DOWN ON KIBBUTZ GINOSAR (TOP CENTER), WHERE THE GALILEE BOAT WAS DISCOVERED.





VIEW WEST: THE FERTILE PLAIN OF GENNESARET LOOKING TOWARD MT. ARBEL (TOP LEFT) AND MT. NITAI (TOP CENTER). WADI HAMAM (VALLEY OF THE DOVES) RUNS BETWEEN THE MOUNTAINS (SEE “WADI HAMAM” ON PAGE 187).

PLAINS OF BETHSAIDA AND GENNESARET

(SEE MAP ON PAGE 204)

The focus of this section is the two plains on the western and northeastern shores of the Sea of Galilee. After feeding the five thousand on the plain of Bethsaida, Jesus crossed the plain of Gennesaret on His way to the synagogue of Capernaum, where he delivered His “Bread of Life” sermon (see “Capernaum” on page 235).

THE STORY

After Jesus was rejected by the people in Nazareth, “he went round about the villages, teaching.” He also called “the twelve, and began to send them forth by two and two. . . . And they went out, and preached that men should repent” (Mark 6:6–7, 12).

After completing their labors, “the apostles gathered themselves together unto Jesus, and told him all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught” (Mark 6:30). Jesus invited them to come with Him to a solitary place¹ where they could rest a while, “for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat” (Mark 6:31). Genuine service is rarely easy; it almost always requires sacrifice.²

Next, Jesus went with the apostles “by ship privately.” They may have started from the area around Capernaum since they ended up on the eastern side of the Plain of Bethsaida. According to Mark,

The people saw them departing, and many knew him, and ran afoot thither out of all cities, and outwent [ran ahead of] them, and came together unto him.



VIEW NORTHEAST: THE RAKKATH VALLEY (CENTER LEFT) WITH THE STEPS LEADING TO THE TOP OF TEL RAKKATH (RIGHT). THE PLAIN OF GENNESARET IS WEST OF THE TREE LINE ON THE NORTHERN SHORE OF THE LAKE (UPPER LEFT).

BELOW (VIEW NORTHEAST): JESUS FED THE FIVE THOUSAND ON THE PLAIN OF BETHSAIDA. AFTER SENDING HIS DISCIPLES AWAY, HE WALKED ON WATER TO MEET THEM DURING A STORM.





VIEW NORTH: THIS AREA IS ABOVE THE PLAIN OF BETHSAIDA, NEAR THE EAST CANYON THAT LEADS TO GAMLA. BEFORE HE FED THE FIVE THOUSAND, JESUS "WENT UP INTO A MOUNTAIN, AND . . . SAT WITH HIS DISCIPLES" (JOHN 6:1-3).

And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and he began to teach them many things. (Mark 6:33-34)

As the day wore on, the disciples became concerned that the people had nothing to eat. They said to Jesus, "Send them away, that they may go into the country round about, and into the villages, and buy themselves bread" (Mark 6:36). Jesus, knowing what He would do, asked His disciples, "How many loaves have ye? Go and see. And when they knew, they say, Five, and two fishes" (Mark 6:38). What followed is instructive because of how Jesus organized the people before He performed the miracle. Feeding five thousand people with only five loaves and two fish was not hard for Jehovah, who created worlds without number (see "Historical Sketch" in *Blessed Pilgrimage*, vol. 2). Jesus also taught the importance of order.

And he commanded [the disciples] to make all sit down by *companies* upon the green grass.

And they sat down in *ranks*, by *hundreds*, and by *fifties*.

And when he had taken the five loaves and the two fishes, he looked up to heaven, and blessed, and brake the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before them; and the two fishes divided he among them all.

And they did all eat, and were filled.

And they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments, and of the fishes.

And they that did eat of the loaves were about five thousand men. (Mark 6:39-44, emphasis added)



VIEW SOUTH: THE EASTERN SIDE OF THE PLAIN OF BETHSAIDA, LOOKING TOWARD THE SEA OF GALILEE (TOP), WITH A MOUNTAIN RIDGE OVERLOOKING THE PLAIN. THIS PHOTO WAS TAKEN A LITTLE SOUTH OF THE PHOTO ON PAGE 205.

BELOW (VIEW NORTH): THIS PHOTO WAS TAKEN EAST OF THE PHOTO ON PAGE 205, TOWARD THE EASTERN EDGE OF THE PLAIN OF BETHSAIDA BELOW THE MOUNTAIN (SEE PHOTO ABOVE).





VIEW SOUTHEAST: ONE OF THE MANY STREAMS THAT FEED INTO THE JORDAN RIVER FROM THE GOLAN HEIGHTS. SEE ALSO THE BOTTOM PHOTO ON PAGE 206.

Two qualities of Jesus stand out in this story. First, His house is a house of order. Jesus organized the people into groups before feeding them. Second, He turned to Heaven as He was about to feed those whom He loved and on whom He had compassion. Many of them, knowing Jesus, had come out of the cities to hear the word from Him who was “the Word” (John 1:1).³ There was order and compassion in everything Jesus did among the people.

After He fed the five thousand, we read that Jesus “straightway . . . 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” (Mark 6:45–46). Jesus, who was Himself God, performed ordinary tasks while submitting His will to His Father’s in all things. When Jesus appeared to the Nephites on the American continent, He said to them:

And behold, I am the light and the life of the world; and I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world, in the which *I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning.* (3 Ne. 11:11, emphasis added)

Bethsaida was the town that gave its name to the plain where the miracle of feeding the five thousand took place. The disciples, however, did not make land near their intended destination. They struggled at their oars, “for the wind was contrary unto them.” Jesus, who was “alone on the land,” witnessed their struggle “in the midst of the sea,” and went to them walking on the water. The disciples “all saw him, and were troubled.” Jesus did not hesitate to comfort them. Mark explained: “Immediately he *talked* with them, and saith unto them, Be of good cheer: it is I; *be not afraid*” (Mark 6:47–50, emphasis added).

The boat landed off course near “the land of Gennesaret,” where they “drew to the shore.” Immediately, when the people saw Him, they “ran through that whole region round about, and began to carry about in



VIEW EAST: THE NORTHERN SHORE OF THE SEA OF GALILEE (CENTER LEFT), LOOKING TOWARD TABGHA (SEE “TABGHA” ON PAGE 223 AND “CAPERNAUM” ON PAGE 235).

beds those that were sick, where they heard he was.” As Jesus made His way through the plain of Gennesaret, walking north along the shore to Capernaum, He ministered to the people wherever He found them:

And whithersoever he entered, into villages, or cities, or country, they laid the sick in the streets, and besought him that they might touch if it were but the border of his garment: and as many as touched him were made whole. (Mark 6:53–56)

JESUS IS OUR PERFECT ROLE MODEL

In 2024, President Oaks taught new mission leaders (mission presidents and their wives), “Teach your missionaries to study the life of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and to make His qualities their role models for mortality and all eternity.”

In the stories above, it is easy to lose sight of the lessons and focus on the extraordinary miracles Jesus performed, feeding the five thousand from five loaves and two fish and walking on water to reach His disciples who struggled at sea. In these miraculous acts and others like them, He exhibited powers we are not likely to duplicate in this life. He demonstrated qualities, however, that we can follow. To see them, we must look for them and do our best to emulate them. For example, we see Jesus reaching out to His Father in Heaven before and after He fed the crowds. We recognize His compassion for the people and His motivation to help them. Jesus recognized their need of a shepherd to help them. When He saw His disciples struggling on the water, He went *immediately* to help; He did not hesitate or wait. He comforted them as He approached with “Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid.” We are never alone when Jesus is near.

President Oaks encouraged the mission leaders to teach young people not only to study the life of the Savior but “to use Jesus Christ as their role model in all aspects of their lives, especially in loving others and in following His example of Christlike leadership. . . . What they should want to become is a devoted disciple of Jesus Christ, following His direction to ‘be perfect even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect’” (3 Ne. 12:48). Seeking perfection is part of Heavenly Father’s plan for the exaltation of His children. While achieving perfection is not possible in this life, it is possible in the next through the Atonement of Jesus Christ for all who learn to repent and keep God’s commandments.

Finally, President Oaks counseled, “We need to study the scriptures that record what [Jesus] said and did.” To study is more than to read. We look for Christ-like qualities to adopt that will help us think, speak, and do as He did.⁴ The scriptures contain insights on the character of Christ and how He ministered to those around Him. They are guides on how we should live.



VIEW EAST: THIS CAIRN MARKS “THE GOSPEL TRAIL” THROUGH THE PLAIN OF GENNESARET. A CAIRN IS A HUMAN-MADE PILE OF STONES PUT UP TO MARK A PATH AND GIVE DIRECTION.

ENDNOTES

1 The King James Version of the Bible says “they departed into a *desert* place.” Joseph Smith, in his translation of the KJV, changed *desert* to *solitary*. With its many water sources, this area is anything but a desert. See the photos on pages 206 and 207. Before the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus had the people “sit down by companies upon the *green grass*” (Mark 6:39, emphasis added).

2 King Benjamin taught the following about service and its purpose: “For the sake of retaining a remission of your sins from day to day, that ye may walk guiltless before God—I would that ye should impart of your substance to the poor, every man according to that which he hath, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and administering to their relief, both spiritually and temporally, according to their wants. And see that all these things are done *in wisdom and order*; for it is not requisite that a man should run faster than he has strength. And again, it is expedient that he should be diligent, that thereby he might win the prize; therefore, all things must be done in order” (Mosiah 4:26–27, emphasis added). To walk guiltless in life, we must repent and serve as Christ served. Rest and leisure are also important.

3 Elder Rasband asked, “We ‘hear Him’ [Jesus] in the words of scripture, but do we let them just sit on the page, or do we recognize He is speaking to us? Do we change? We ‘hear Him’ in personal revelation and promptings from the Holy Ghost, in answers to prayer, and in those moments when only Jesus Christ, through the power of His Atonement, can lift our burdens, grant us forgiveness and peace, and embrace us ‘in the arms of his love.’” Ronald A. Rasband, “Words Matter,” *Liabona* (May 2024), Gospel Library.

4 Mary Richards, “Teach Young People to Use Jesus Christ as Their Perfect Role Model, President Oaks Tells New Mission Leaders,” *Church News*, June 22, 2024, <https://www.thechurchnews.com/leaders/2024/06/22/president-dallin-h-oaks-teaches-jesus-christ-is-perfect-role-model-seminar-new-mission-leaders>.