



**VIEW NORTH:** THE EASTERN SHORE OF THE SEA OF GALILEE 2 MILES (3.2 KILOMETERS) NORTH OF EIN GEV AND 1 MILE (1.6 KILOMETERS) SOUTH OF GERGESA (KURSI). GERGESA IS ABOVE THE COVERED BANANA ORCHARDS (CENTER).

**BELOW (VIEW SOUTH):** THE EASTERN SHORE OF THE SEA OF GALILEE, LOOKING UP AT THE GOLAN HEIGHTS (TOP LEFT). BEFORE 1967, THE HEIGHTS WERE HELD BY THE SYRIANS, WHO SHELLED THE SETTLEMENTS BELOW.





**VIEW NORTH:** THE SOUTHERN END OF THE SEA OF GALILEE WHERE IT EXITS TO FORM THE JORDAN RIVER. THIS SPOT IS CLOSE TO YARDENIT (SEE “YARDENIT BAPTISMAL SITE” ON PAGE 293).

## 7

# SEA OF GALILEE

(SEE MAP ON PAGE 151)

When we think of Jesus’s three-year ministry, we think of the Sea of Galilee more than any one site in the Holy Land. The possible exceptions are the Mount of Olives and Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus atoned for the sins of all humankind. It’s nearly impossible to hear the words *Sea of Galilee* without thinking of Jesus. We see Him walking on water, healing the sick, and giving talks in the local synagogues, like the “Bread of Life” sermon in the synagogue of Capernaum (John 6; see “Capernaum” on page 235). Stories about Jesus in and around the Sea of Galilee figure prominently in the themes of General Conference talks, including one by President M. Russell Ballard entitled “Lovest Thou Me More Than These?”

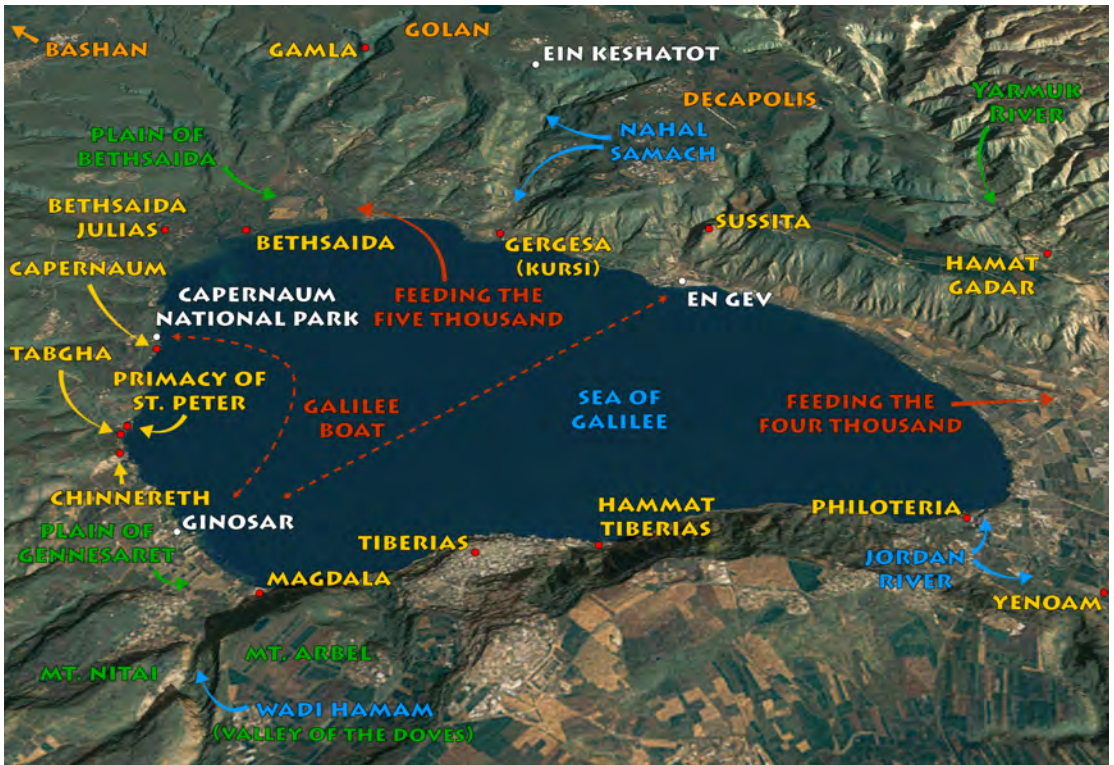
In November 2019, President Ballard and a friend visited the Holy Land, where they “reviewed and studied scriptures about Jesus Christ’s life.” They visited the Church of the Primacy of St. Peter on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee with its beautiful gardens and places for worship (see the photos on pages 156–157). The spot commemorates a visit between Jesus and His disciples when He appeared to them in Galilee after the resurrection. Peter and the other disciples had fished all night without success. They didn’t recognize the man standing on the shore as their Lord until He told them to cast their net on the other side of the boat and it was miraculously filled with fish. Then Jesus invited Peter and the other disciples to “Come and dine” with Him. When they had done so, Jesus asked His senior apostle, “Simon, son of Jonas, *lovest thou me more than these?*” (John 21:3, 11–15; emphasis added). President Ballard equated “these” with anything that keeps us from following Jesus, His example, and His teachings.



**VIEW SOUTHWEST:** TEL CHINNERETH (CENTER), OVERLOOKING THE PLAIN OF GENNESARET WITH MT. ARBEL, WADI HAMAM (VALLEY OF THE DOVES), THE HORNS OF HATTIN, MT. NITAI, AND THE HILLS OF LOWER GALILEE (TOP RIGHT).

**BELOW (VIEW NORTH):** THE WESTERN SHORE OF THE SEA OF GALILEE NEAR THE SOUTHERN END. THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE (CENTER LEFT) IS BET YERAH, OR PHILOTERIA IN NEW TESTAMENT TIMES.





**VIEW EAST:** SEA OF GALILEE MAP WITH MOST OF THE SITES MENTIONED IN THIS SECTION, INCLUDING SOME MODERN SITES IN WHITE.

This modern apostle, standing on the same seashore, “could almost hear [Jesus’s] voice asking, ‘Russell, lovest thou me more than these?’” He related the question to all people, and suggested the following:

The Lord may be asking us about how busy we are and about the many positive and negative influences competing for our attention and our time. He may be asking each of us if we love Him more than the things of this world. This may be a question about what we really value in life, who we follow, and how we view our relationships with family members and neighbors. Or maybe He is asking what really brings us joy and happiness.

Do the things of this world bring us the joy, happiness, and peace that the Savior offered to His disciples and that He offers to us? Only He can bring us true joy, happiness, and peace through our loving Him and following His teachings.

*We must always remember that our true happiness depends upon our relationship with God, with Jesus Christ, and with each other (emphasis added).<sup>1</sup>*

President Ballard quoted President Nelson, who asked similar questions:

Are you willing to let God prevail in your life? Are you willing to let God be the most important influence in your life? Will you allow His words, His commandments, and His covenants to influence what you do each day? Will you allow His voice to take priority over any other? Are you willing to let whatever He needs you to do take precedence over every other ambition? Are you willing to have your will swallowed up in His?<sup>2</sup>



**VIEW SOUTHEAST:** THE NORTHERN SHORE OF THE SEA OF GALILEE, LOOKING DOWN AT CAPERNAUM NATIONAL PARK. THE GALILEE BOAT DOCKS HERE AFTER CROSSING THE LAKE FROM KIBBUTZ GINOSAR.

**BELOW (VIEW WEST):** THE NORTHERN SHORE OF THE SEA OF GALILEE, LOOKING TOWARD CAPERNAUM NATIONAL PARK (UPPER RIGHT; YOU CAN SEE THE DOCK), TIBERIAS ACROSS THE LAKE (TOP LEFT), AND MT. ARBEL (TOP RIGHT).





**VIEW NORTH:** THE GALILEE BOAT (SOMETIMES CALLED THE “JESUS BOAT”) DOCKS AT KIBBUTZ GINOSAR. TOURISTS WHO WANT TO CROSS THE LAKE IN A BOAT JOIN A TOUR HERE, AT EN GEV, OR AT CAPERNAUM NATIONAL PARK.

## THE SEA SETTING

The Sea of Galilee is a freshwater lake some 700 feet (213 meters) below sea level. This confined depression enjoys a warm climate throughout the year but is subject to sudden shifts of wind and summer thunderstorms. The Gospels tell of two such storms. Matthew records that Jesus walked on the water to reach his disciples’ boat that “was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary” (Matt. 14:22–34). Mark describes another occasion when “there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full.” Responding to the fears of his disciples, Jesus “rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace be still” (Mark 4:35–41), demonstrating that as Creator, Christ has power over the earth, the elements, and the weather that covers the face of it. At His word, all of His creation obeys. Only women and men have free will to decide for themselves whether they will obey God in exchange for the happiness only He can provide.

Historically, Galilee was a crossroads between the nations of the ancient Near East. The mountains surrounding the lake form a natural barrier that funneled travel and communication through the plains and along the lake’s shores, making it the focus of the region. An international highway, known as the Via Maris, descended to the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee at the Plain of Gennesaret, linking the far-off centers of Egypt and Mesopotamia. In particular, the fifteenth century BC witnessed the rise of a new Egyptian empire whose expansion policy under Pharaoh Thutmose III (ca. 1490–1436 BC) brought Egyptian forces on numerous military campaigns to Canaan and Syria. These campaigns provide valuable background for later Biblical events and show that the Sea of Galilee region was a focus of Egyptian concern.

## NAMES

Different names appear for the Sea of Galilee. “Sea of Chinneroth” or “Chinnereth” is used in the Old Testament (Josh. 12:3, 13:27); “Water of Gennesar” in the accounts of the Hasmonean revolt (1 Macc. 11:67);



**VIEW EAST:** THE DECAPOLIS CITY OF SUSSITA (CENTER) OVERLOOKING KIBBUTZ EN GEV (BOTTOM CENTER). YOU REACH THE TOP BY HIKING THE TRAIL (CENTER) OR BY CAR UP SUSSITA'S SOUTH SIDE (RIGHT; SEE "SUSSITA (HIPPOS)" ON PAGE 285).

"Sea of Galilee" or simply "the Sea" (Matt. 4:18, 17:27; John 6:1) and sometimes the "Lake of Gennesaret" (Luke 5:1) or the "Sea of Tiberias" in the New Testament (John 6:1, 21:1); and "Lake of Gennesareth" by Josephus, the first century AD Jewish historian, in his commentary on the Jewish Wars.<sup>3</sup>

## **ECONOMY**

The warm climate and fertile soil of the plains around the lake nourish various extended-season crops, including tropical varieties like dates and bananas. Josephus's description of valley agriculture in the first century AD also included walnuts, fig trees, olives, and grapes:

One may call this place the ambition of nature, where it forces those plants that are naturally enemies to one another to agree together: it is a happy contention of the seasons as if every one of them laid claim to this country; for it not only nourishes different sorts of autumnal fruit beyond men's expectation, but preserves them a great while; it supplies men with the principal fruits, with grapes and figs continually, during ten months of the year, and the rest of the fruits as they become ripe together, through the whole year.<sup>4</sup>

The Plain of Gennesaret was known for its surplus of fruit, which sold in markets throughout Palestine. The area is still known for fruit production, primarily bananas. The lake industries also included dyeing, tanning, trading, fishing, boat building, and fish curing. Josephus describes a "great plenty of [ship building] materials, and a great number of artificers also" and reports on several kinds of fish in the lake. Fishermen brought fish to Taricheae for pickling, and from there they exported significant quantities to all parts of the Roman Empire. *Taricheae* is a Greek word that means "pickling places" or "place where fish were salted"; another name for the same place, Migdal Nunnaya, means "Tower of the Fishers."



**VIEW NORTHEAST:** THE NORTHERN SHORE OF THE SEA OF GALILEE, LOOKING ACROSS THE PLAIN OF BETHSAIDA (UPPER CENTER) TOWARD GAMLA AT THE END OF THE CANYON (TOP RIGHT).

Domestic and foreign trade also advanced the economy of the lake region. Grain from Golan was exported to Rome, while caravans from every direction passed through the plains or along the shores of the lake. The market day brought villagers from all over the region to sell their produce in the lakeside cities, creating familiar scenes from the Gospels: “And Jesus went . . . and much people followed him, and thronged him” (Mark 5:24). All these elements contributed to the busy life and economy of the Sea of Galilee and to the world in which Jesus Himself labored.

## **TRAVEL AND COMMUNICATION**

The cliffs rising from the Jordan River north of the Sea of Galilee channeled traffic in two directions: one road entered the lake region from the northeast through the Plain of Bethsaida before continuing to Capernaum; another road led west by Hazor and then south to the ancient town of Chinnereth. From Chinnereth, the road continued through the Plain of Gennesaret and either ascended the pass below Mt. Arbel or continued south along the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. In the twelfth century BC, an Egyptian scribe mentioned the latter route in an account of his travels, including a description of the main roads in the Canaan of his day. Hazor is mentioned in his list of cities, followed by a description of the road leading south to Hammath on the Sea of Galilee and Yenoam. We also know this road from the campaign of Seti I (Egyptian pharaoh, ca. 1303–1290 BC), who traveled from Yenoam to Hazor to restore Egyptian control. Yenoam is 2 miles (3.2 kilometers) south of the Sea of Galilee and dominates the roads traversing the northern end of the Lower Jordan Valley. Another road led east from Yenoam to Ashtaroth, the ancient capital of Bashan.

In biblical times, the Israelites found themselves in conflict with Egypt, Syria, Mesopotamia, Greece, and finally Rome. These struggles were most evident in the north and the region around the Sea of Galilee, mainly because of the ancient highways that carried the commerce and military might of the ancient world into the area around the lake.





**VIEW NORTHWEST:** THE NORTHWESTERN SHORE OF THE SEA OF GALILEE WITH THE CHURCH OF THE PRIMACY OF ST. PETER (CENTER RIGHT; BUILDING WITH ORANGE ROOF). YOU CAN SEE PEOPLE ON THE SHORE.

**BELOW (VIEW SOUTHEAST):** THE BANNER ON THE PRIMACY CHURCH READS: "800 YEARS SINCE THE PILGRIMAGE OF PEACE OF ST. FRANCIS TO THE HOLY LAND 1219-2019." IT'S FUN TO REALIZE THAT PRESIDENT BALLARD VISITED IN 2019.





**VIEW NORTH:** THE PRIMACY CHURCH GARDENS AND SMALL AMPHITHEATER WHERE VISITORS CAN RELAX, READ THE SCRIPTURES, AND CONTEMPLATE THE EVENTS THAT TOOK PLACE IN THIS AREA.

## **SETTLEMENT**

The number of cities that flourished around the Sea of Galilee during the first century AD leads us to believe this was an essential center of Galilee’s religious, social, political, and commercial life. Excavations at many of the towns reveal the region’s prosperity throughout history.

Tiberias was founded between 17 and 20 AD by Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee after his father, Herod the Great, died. It dominates the road leading up through the Jordan Valley from Jericho to Hazor, as well as the branch of the Via Maris that led through the Plain of Gennesaret from the Mediterranean. Tiberias was Herod Antipas’s most crucial building project. It supplanted Sepphoris as the capital of Galilee in the second century AD, making it a major center of Jewish life in that period.

Gennesaret is the name used in the Roman period for the Old Testament site of Chinnereth, one of the fenced cities of Naphtali. It rises above the Plain of Gennesaret, guarding a branch of the Via Maris between Mt. Arbel and Hazor (see top photo on page 150).

Capernaum is renowned as the home of Jesus after he withdrew from Nazareth. Matthew and Luke called Capernaum “his own city” (Matt. 9:1). For nearly two years, it was the center of his activities and the place in which he performed the greatest number of his recorded miracles. It was also where Jesus gave His sermon on the “Bread of Life” (John 6). A beautiful example of an early type of synagogue was discovered at Capernaum, reminding us that a Roman officer built a synagogue here for the Jews in Jesus’s day (Luke 7:1–10).

Bethsaida (“House of Fish”) was the home of Philip, Andrew, and Peter (John 1:44). It gave its name to the adjacent plain. Herod Agrippa I, grandson of Herod the Great, changed Bethsaida’s name to Julias in honor of the wife of Augustus, emperor of Rome.

Gergesa is near where the sharply incised hills of the Golan meet the shore. There, Jesus met “two possessed with devils,” which he cast out. The devils entered the bodies of a nearby herd of swine that “ran violently down a steep place into the sea” (Matt. 8:28–32; see the bottom photo on page 264).



**VIEW NORTH:** THE WESTERN SHORE OF THE SEA OF GALILEE BETWEEN TIBERIAS AND THE SOUTH SIDE OF MT. ARBEL (CENTER LEFT). BEHIND AND BELOW ARBEL IS THE VALLEY OF THE DOVES AND ANCIENT MAGDALA.

**BELOW (VIEW NORTHEAST):** THIS PHOTO WAS TAKEN WEST OF CAPERNAUM LOOKING ACROSS THE SEA OF GALILEE TOWARD THE EASTERN SHORELINE.



Sussita rested on a mountaintop overlooking the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee (see the photo on page 154; see “Sussita” (Hippos) on page 285). Steep gorges surround the city and naturally fortify it against invasion. In 63 BC, Pompey made it a member of the Decapolis, a district east and southeast of the Sea of Galilee that contained a mixed population dominated by Greeks. Merchandise was brought across the lake from Tiberias to Sussita and then to Damascus.

Philoteria was a Hellenistic settlement built over the ancient Canaanite city of Beth-Yerah (see the bottom photo on page 150). Today, the Jordan River leaves the lake south of Philoteria, but at one time there was a second outflow about a half-mile farther north. The southern outflow was probably man-made in antiquity as part of Philoteria’s defense system.

Sennabris was a twin city of Philoteria. Josephus mentions it in connection with the campaign of the Roman general Vespasian to the Sea of Galilee.

Ammathus was widely known for its hot springs. It is often referred to as Hammath Tiberias because of its Old Testament name, Hammath, which was a fortified town in the territory of Naphtali (Josh. 19:35; see “Hammat Tiberias” on page 171). It is part of the Hamat Tverya National Park today.

## MINISTRY OF JESUS AROUND THE SEA OF GALILEE

- **Matt. 4:18–22, Mark 1:16–20, Luke 5:1–11.** Walking by the Sea of Galilee, Jesus called out to Simon and Andrew his brother, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” And when the disciples “had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him.” And Jesus saw two others, James and John his brother: “And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they *straightway* left their nets, and followed him” (emphasis added).
- **Matt. 10:1–42.** “Jesus instructs and empowers the Twelve Apostles and sends them forth to preach, minister, and heal the sick—Those who receive the Twelve receive the Lord.”<sup>5</sup> Jesus “commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the *lost sheep* of the house of Israel” (emphasis added).
- **Mark 3:7–12, Luke 5:1–3.** Jesus spoke to the multitudes from a “small ship . . . lest they should throng him.” They included people from Galilee, Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, Transjordan, Tyre, and Sidon. Luke’s account: “And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret [Sea of Galilee], And saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets. And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon’s, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship” (see the photo on page 161).
- **Mark 3:13–19.** Jesus ordained Twelve Apostles in the hills near the Sea of Galilee, “that he might send them forth to preach, And to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils.”
- **Mark 8:1–19, Matt. 15:29–39.** Jesus fed the four thousand. About this miracle, Elder McConkie wrote: “This miraculous feeding of the four thousand is not a mere duplication or repetition of the feeding of the five thousand which took place a short time before near Bethsaida. Then our Lord was mingling with his own kindred of Israel; now he is teaching other hosts who in substantial part, being inhabitants of Decapolis, are presumed to be Gentile. Then he was laying the foundation for his incomparable sermon on the Bread of Life [John 6]; now he is prefiguring the future presentation of the living bread to the Gentile nations. And significantly, this mixed multitude from the east of the Jordan were more receptive, and took a more sane and sound view of the matchless miracle of feeding thousands by use of the creative powers resident in him, than did the members of the chosen seed.”<sup>6</sup>
- **Luke 5:4–11, John 21:6–8.** At Jesus’s command, the lake yielded large catches of fish. Peter, James, and John were “astonished . . . at the draught of the fishes which they had taken.” Jesus said unto Simon, “Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men. And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him.”
- **Matt. 8:23–27, Mark 4:35–41, Luke 8:22–25.** “And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea,



**VIEW EAST:** THE SOUTHEASTERN SHORE OF THE SEA OF GALILEE FROM THE WESTERN SHORE NORTH OF YARDENIT.

insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but [Jesus] was asleep. And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish. And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm. But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!” The astonishing miracles Jesus performed all bore witness of His divinity as the Son of God.

- **Matt. 14:22–33, Mark 6:45–52, John 6:16–21.** Jesus walked on the water. After feeding “about five thousand men, beside women and children,” He “constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away.” Mark identified the “other side” as Bethsaida on the northeastern shore. Knowing what was to happen, Jesus went up into a mountain to pray and was there alone until evening. “But the ship [with the disciples] was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night [between three and six in the morning] Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.”
- **Matt. 13:1–52, Mark 4:1–34, Luke 8:4–18.** Jesus taught a number of parables from the sea. The following is from Matthew’s account: “Went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea side. And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. And he spake many things unto them in parables.” On this occasion, Jesus gave the parables of the sower, the wheat and the tares, the grain of mustard seed, the leaven, the treasure hidden in the field, the pearl of great price, and the net cast into the sea. He also explained them to the disciples, saying, “Blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear” (see the photo on page 161).
- **Matt. 15:29–31, Mark 1:29–45.** Before feeding the four thousand on the southern end of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus spent time healing the multitudes: “And Jesus came nigh unto the sea of Galilee; and went up into a mountain, and sat down there. And great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus’ feet; and he healed them: Insomuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and they glorified the God of Israel.”
- **Mark 14:28, 16:7; John 21:1–23.** Jesus appeared by the Sea of Galilee after the resurrection. According to John, this was the third time Jesus showed Himself to His disciples. After they had eaten the meal Jesus prepared on the shore, He asked Peter: “Lovest thou me more than these? [Peter] saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. [Jesus] saith unto him, Feed my lambs.” Jesus asked Peter the same question two more times, maybe as a counterpoint to Peter’s three-times denial of Jesus. After Peter assured Jesus that he loved him, the Lord admonished him, “Feed my lambs . . . Feed my sheep.” This is the calling of a disciple, to feed the living bread and water to all who show interest in receiving it. The invitation is, Come unto Christ and be saved. Jacob, the younger brother of Nephi, described the effort: “We labored diligently among our people, that we might persuade them to come unto Christ, and partake of the goodness of God, that they might enter into his rest” (Jacob 1:7).



**VIEW NORTHEAST:** THIS IS ONE OF THE NATURAL COVES NEAR CAPERNAUM WHERE JESUS MAY HAVE LAUNCHED ONE OF PETER'S BOATS AND TALKED TO A MULTITUDE OF PEOPLE.

## ENDNOTES

1 M. Russell Ballard, “Lovest Thou Me More Than These?,” *Liabona* (Nov. 2021), Gospel Library.

2 Russell M. Nelson, “Let God Prevail,” *Liabona* (Nov. 2020), Gospel Library. President Nelson talked about the role of agency in the gathering of Israel and how we conduct our lives: “We can choose to be of Israel, *or not*. We can choose to let God prevail in our lives, *or not*. We can choose to let God be the most powerful influence in our lives, *or not*” (emphasis added). It is up to us.

President Nelson continued: “For centuries, prophets have foretold this gathering [of Israel], and it is happening right now! As an essential prelude to the Second Coming of the Lord, it is *the most* important work in the world!”

3 Flavius Josephus, *Seven Books of the Jewish War*, in *The Genuine Works of Flavius Josephus the Jewish Historian*, trans. William Whiston (London, 1737), 3.10.7, <http://penelope.uchicago.edu/josephus>.

4 Josephus, *Seven Books of the Jewish War*, 3:10:8.

5 LDS Scriptures, Matt. 10 chapter heading, Gospel Library. See James E. Talmage, “The First Disciples of Jesus,” in *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1965), chap. 11, Gospel Library.

6 Bruce R. McConkie, “Jesus Feedeth the Four Thousand,” in *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1965), 1:332–33.