

## LIFE OUTSIDE THE HOME Fishermen

One of the more frequently mentioned professions in the New Testament is that of fishing. Several of Jesus' disciples were fishermen. If you were to go back in time and visit a coastal Bible town, you would find many activities going on that were related to fishing.

### Where to Find Fish

Fishing was primarily done in the Mediterranean Sea or at the Sea of Galilee. Towns like Capernaum or Caesarea would be places where fishermen could be found. In Jesus' day, the Galilean fishing was so good that one could throw a net into the water from the shore and drag in the fish.

### How to Catch Fish

#### Hook and Line

Nearly all non-commercial fishing today is done with hook and line. Although this was not the most common way of catching fish in the New Testament, it was used from time to time. Peter is fishing this way in Matthew 17:27.

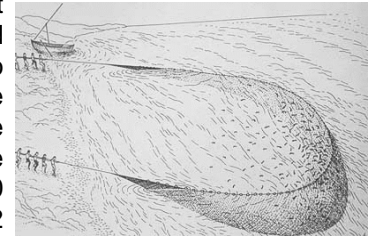
#### Hand Net



When Jesus called Peter and Andrew to be his disciples (Mk 1:16-17), they were fishing with a hand net by the Sea of Galilee. The hand net was made of mesh and measured about 15-25 feet in diameter. Weights were attached to the edges and a cord wound through the center of the net. The fisherman would "cast" the entire net into the water near the shore, then pull it in using the cord and retrieve the fish.

#### Dragnet or Seine

By far the most common method of fishing was to use a large dragnet. These nets would range from 750 to 900 feet long and 12 to 25 feet high.



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Ropes were attached so the net could be pulled out of the water. Corks were fastened on the top rope of the net to float it, while clay, stone, or lead weights were placed on the bottom rope to sink it and trap the fish. It took 16 men to handle the larger nets. To get the nets into the water, half the crew would stay near the shore holding one end of the rope, then a boat would take the net out and "spread" it. When the boat came back in toward shore, the rest of the crew would get out and everyone would help haul the net into land. The whole cycle took more than an hour and might be done seven or eight times in a day. The operation could also be accomplished with two boats as well, although this was much more difficult. One end of the rope would be taken by each boat, then the boats would move together, dragging the fish in. When the net was full, one boat would move around the other in a circle. The boats would maneuver so that the fish caught could be unloaded into the boats themselves— or sometimes, a shore team would land the fish.

Now knowing a little about this method of fishing, consider the parable of the dragnet in Matthew 13:47-50

<sup>47</sup>"Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. <sup>48</sup>When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. <sup>49</sup>This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous <sup>50</sup>and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

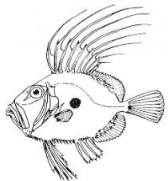
- ! Of what is the dragnet a picture?
- ! Who will be the "fish" thrown away?
- ! How can we ever be counted with the "righteous"?

## Spearing

A less common method of fishing was that of spearing. While fish could be caught this way, it was not practical for catching large numbers of fish in a day.



As you can imagine, the Bible fisherman was a very hard worker. The labor was intense. The work of hauling the nets out and back in demanded much strength, especially when the nets were full. The fisherman was also subject to the same troubles of fishing that plague fishermen today— sometimes the fish just aren't where you are fishing! There would be days of good catches and poor catches. Fishing was also quite dangerous, particularly on the Sea of Galilee. That body of water, even today, is known for its quick and violent storms. Skies can be clear one minute and dark the next. Being caught in the middle of a storm with a medium sized fishing boat— no life-jackets or life-boats— was not a good thing.



## What Fish Were Caught

The most common species of fish in the Sea of Galilee were (and still are) carp, sardines, mullet, and chichlid (dory). The latter fish are sometimes called "St. Peter's Fish."

## When Fish Were Caught

In 30 AD, with no refrigeration of foods, it was necessary to sell the fish fresh at the market or arrange for them to be preserved immediately. This was done by salting and drying the fish. Most fishing towns had some facilities for doing this, but there were also towns known for their fish-preserving operations. One such "salting center" was Taricheae (Magdala) on the Sea of Galilee.



A few fishermen on the Sea of Galilee still use hand drawn nets as they did in Bible times  
[users.northroute.net/~rpepper](http://users.northroute.net/~rpepper)

## Jesus the Great Fisherman

Surely the greatest references to fishing in the Bible do not have to do with "fish" at all. **Matthew 4:18-20**

<sup>18</sup> As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. <sup>19</sup> "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." <sup>20</sup> At once they left their nets and followed him.

With these words Jesus pictured the work of gathering people for His kingdom— bringing people to faith— like that of a fisherman who goes out and catches fish. This is the most important work that any Christian can do: to go out with the "net" of the Word of God and bring people in to Jesus' loving arms. Consider how fishing for fish and fishing for souls are similar.

It is hard work  
You do not always see results  
Only the power of God can fill the net  
Many are gathered  
The work is repeated day after day  
Once the net is being drawn in, the fisherman must not stop

For us Christians, the work of the fisherman in the New Testament is a powerful reminder of the work that we do as witnesses to Jesus. May Jesus' nets always be full as He shares His grace with more and more.



Sea of Galilee

## Resources

[http://www.ubfellowship.org/archive/j\\_arc/fishing2.htm](http://www.ubfellowship.org/archive/j_arc/fishing2.htm)  
[http://www.mutenasserin.net/mutenasserin/english/christ/day%20\\_%20bible.htm](http://www.mutenasserin.net/mutenasserin/english/christ/day%20_%20bible.htm)  
<http://www.bridgesforpeace.com/publications/dispatch/everydaylife/Article-24.html>  
*Manners and Customs of Bible Lands* by Fred H. Wight