

FISHING in the Bible

In Jesus' time, many fishermen worked on the big lake called the Sea of Galilee, and many fishing villages surrounded the lake. Some of these fishermen used a rod and line, like anglers today.

Cast net- Some fishermen used a cast net (Mark 1:16-17). This was a circular net, about five metres (17 feet) across. It had weights tied round the edge, and a rope tied to the middle. When fishermen could see fish in shallow water by the water's edge, he would wade into the water and drop the net over them. The weights pulled the net down, trapping the fish.

Seine net- If they were fishing from a boat, fishermen would often use a seine net (Luke 5:4). This was a long net, about three metres (10 feet) wide, that was let out behind the boat. It had corks fixed to the top to make it float, and stones tied to the bottom to weigh it down. Fish were caught in the net as the boat sailed along. Sometimes the boat turned in a circle so that the fish were caught in the middle of the net.

Fishing boats- The fishermen used small sailing boats that normally held only about four men. These boats had one big sail, and a long oar to steer with.

When they had finished a day's fishing, the men would lay out their nets to dry, and mend any tears in them.

Bible Dictionary- Animals living in water and breathing through gills; the profession and/or practice of catching fish to supply a family or society's need for food. Fish abounded in the inland waters of Palestine, as well as in the Mediterranean.

Old Testament Fish are mentioned often in the Bible. Fish were a favourite food and a chief source of protein ([Numbers 11:5](#); [Nehemiah 13:16](#)). The law regarded all fish with fins and scales as clean. Water animals that did not have fins and scales were unclean ([Leviticus 11:9-12](#)).

Methods of catching fish included angling with a hook ([Job 41:1](#)), harpoons and spears ([Job 41:7](#)), use of dragnets ([John 21:8](#)), and thrown hand nets ([Matthew 4:18](#)). Fish caught in the Mediterranean were brought to ports such as Tyre and Sidon. The Sea of Chinnereth or Galilee was also a fishing center. The fish were preserved in salt and brought to Jerusalem where they were sold at a specially named "Fish Gate" in the city. The strong currents of the Jordan River carried many fish to the Dead Sea where they died.

References to fishing as an occupation are rare in the Old Testament because, for the most part, in Old Testament times the Mediterranean coast was controlled by the Philistines and Phoenicians. The Israelites depended largely on foreign trade for their fish ([Nehemiah 13:16](#)). Two Old Testament texts ([Song of Solomon 7:4](#); [Isaiah 19:10](#)) speak of fishpools and fish ponds, possibly an indication of commercially raised fish or of fish farming.

The job of fishermen included catching the fish, salting and marketing the fish, mending nets, and keeping fishing boats in repair ([Ezekiel 26:5](#); [Mark 1:19](#)).

The most famous Old Testament fish was the great fish of the Book of Jonah (Jonah 1:17), one God prepared especially for the occasion and one whose species the Old Testament does not indicate.

New Testament During New Testament times commercial fishing businesses were conducted on the Sea of Galilee by fishermen organized in guilds ([Luke 5:7](#), [Luke 5:11](#)). Fishermen were hard workers, crude in manner, rough in speech and in their treatment of others ([John 18:10](#)). Fishermen owned their ships, took hirelings into their service, and sometimes joined to form companies ([Mark 1:20](#); [Luke 5:7](#)).

Fish provided food for the common people ([Matthew 14:17](#); [Matthew 15:34](#)). The risen Lord ate fish with the disciples in Jerusalem ([Luke 24:42](#)) and by the Sea of Galilee ([John 21:13](#)). The

primary method of preparing fish was broiling ([John 21:9](#)). The most famous New Testament fish was the one used to pay the Temple tax for Jesus and Peter ([Matthew 17:27](#)).

Theological The Bible contains numerous figurative uses of fish and fishing. Human helplessness is compared to fish taken in a net ([Ecclesiastes 9:12](#); [Habakkuk 1:14](#)). Fish caught in a net symbolized God's judgment ([Psalms 66:11](#); [Ezekiel 32:3](#)). Jesus mentioned fishing when He called disciples to be witnesses ([Matthew 4:18-19](#)). Jesus compared the kingdom of heaven to a net thrown into the sea and loaded with fish of many varieties ([Matthew 13:47](#)).

In early Christian churches, the Greek word for fish (*ichthus*) came to be interpreted as a cipher for Jesus. The first letter of each of the Greek words for “Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour” spell *ichthus*. We do not know when this cipher was first used; but once the identification was made, the fish became a standard Christian symbol.

Bible references and application

Ezekiel 47.1-12 Waters(of life and healing) flowing from the temple(from Christ and His work) vs 9 & 10 fish and fishermen. Salty water and mire(no healing and death v11).

Old Testament- Various references to an `evil net` e.g Ecc 9.12 like a snare.

Matt 4.17-19 Mark 1.16-17 *Fishers of men*. The Gospel net (`good` net). Disciples turned from rough men to preachers of the Gospel.

Matt 13.47-52 *Parable of the net*. Judgement day. Two groups- Good and Bad. Only two groups of people in the end. How are we to be made good? Could also mention the fish being carried by the current down the Jordan to the Dead sea, like life's journey without the Lord ending in Hell.

Luke 5.1-11 *The miraculous catch of fish (1)* Only with close trust and obedience to the Lord can man be greatly instrumental in winning the lost.

John 21.1-14 *The miraculous catch of fish (2)(after the resurrection)* Blessing and provision come only from the Lord. Ministers are fed by the work and feed others. Also, as elsewhere, the Lord eating with them after his death proves a physical resurrection.

Application by Spurgeon.

The parable of the net – Here, among men, the “kingdom of heaven” is as a seine or draw-net. It encompasses a great area of water, and entangles within it all kinds of creatures that move in the sea. The net-casting is a success, for the net gathered, and is full. Yet the success may not be so great as it seems; for the contents of the net are varied; it gathered of every kind. So long as it is in the water, it contains bad and good, of necessity. It cannot be otherwise; and it would be idle to set about sorting the things which it encompasses while yet in the sea. Only on the shore will be the place of separation: the worthless, useless, and corrupt will be castaways, even though they were once in a net; but the truly precious will be taken from the net and presented to their Lord.

The separation between “the wicked” and “the just”, who are in the kingdom, will be at the close of the dispensation. It will be accomplished` by the messengers of God, the appointed angels: it will be done infallibly, readily, fully, and finally. The doom of the wicked is described in terms which are terrible to the last degree. Those who would have us think lightly of the punishment-of the ungodly have no countenance in the teachings of the Lord Jesus. Neither does the idea that fire causes annihilation find any support from the metaphor here employed; for the furnace of fire “There shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”