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The “Jesus Boat”: A Glimpse into the World of First-Century Fishermen

In 1986 a first-century CE fishing boat was found submerged in the Sea of Galilee. Dubbed the “Jesus boat,” the craft has attracted the attention of scholars and tourists alike. It now has its own website (<https://www.jesusboat.com/story-of-the-Jesus-Boat>), museum, and gift shop.

New Testament scholars do not suppose that this is a boat actually used by Jesus and his disciples, but they are interested in the artifact nevertheless. The boat, eight by twenty-six feet, was rather poorly crafted; it was constructed from varied materials and had undergone numerous repairs. Thus it may represent a vessel typical of what would have been used by ordinary fishermen of the day.

The boat has a more narrow draft than anyone would have supposed and for this reason it would have sat much lower in the water than most would consider advisable. With some reflection, scholars have concluded that the lack of depth was intentional (and probably typical), because it would facilitate the hauling of nets filled with fish into the vessel.

The extremely low draught would, however, have one serious drawback: the boat could be easily swamped by waves and may have been vulnerable to sinking in a storm. Bible readers are

immediately reminded of Mark 4:37, “A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped.” It seems likely that the boats Jesus and his disciples used were at least similar to this one.

For more, see Jonathan L. Reed, *The HarperCollins Visual Guide to the New Testament: What Archaeology Reveals about the First Christians* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 68–69.