

Fishing and Fishermen in the Bible

Instructions: Read the following article and complete the “fill in the blank” and “true or false” activity on the next page.

In New Testament times, most Jewish people ate fish every day because it was easy to get and inexpensive. It was sold fresh but was often smoked or pickled.

There were several ways used to catch fish. Fishing rods were not used, but sometimes fishermen put out lines with baited hooks (Matthew 17:24-27). Sometimes they used spears (harpoons). Fishermen went out in a boat at night with a lantern held over the side of the boat. The light would attract fish so that they could be speared as they came close to the boat. John 21:3-11 tells us that some of the apostles fished all night and caught nothing. When they threw their net out on the other side, as Jesus told them to do, they immediately caught so many fish that they could not lift their net!

The most common way to catch fish was with nets. There were two kinds of nets. One was a dragnet about 8 or 9 feet wide and a hundred feet long (or longer). The dragnet had corks or floats on the top of the net and weights on the bottom. One boat would make a huge circle with the net, or two boats would hold the net between them. When the net was in a tight circle, the fishermen pulled the sides of the net together (like a huge bag) and pulled it to the shore.

The second kind of net was the casting net which was used mainly in shallow water. One or two men could throw this net from the shore or from a boat (Matthew 4:18). The casting net was round (about 15 feet in diameter) and had weights around the edge. When the net was thrown out into the water, the weights made it fall to the bottom of the lake, trapping fish beneath it. With a long rope connected to the center, the net could be pulled shut.

When nets were brought to shore to be emptied of their catch, fish that were good to eat were separated from the fish that weren't good to eat (bad fish) (Matthew 13:47-48). When fishing was over for the day (or for the night), the nets were spread out on the shore to dry. If their nets were torn, fishermen had to spend time repairing them before they were used again. James and John were repairing their nets when Jesus asked them to follow Him (Matthew 4: 21).

Being a fisherman was very hard work. Four of Jesus' apostles were fishermen: Peter, Andrew, James, and John. They were from Bethsaida, which was one of the fishing towns around the Sea of Galilee.

Fill in the Blank

Instructions: Fill in the blanks with words from the Word Bank. One word will be used twice.

WORD BANK: Spread, James, Peter, Lantern, Dragnet, Dry, Andrew, Cast net, John, Nets

- 1) The most common way to fish was with _____.
- 2) The _____ was about 8 or 9 feet wide and at least a hundred feet long.
- 3) The _____ was round and had a long rope attached to the middle.
- 4) The _____ was thrown out over the water by one or two men.
- 5) When fishing with a spear, fishermen would hold a _____ over the side (or front) of the boat to attract fish.
- 6) When Jesus called _____ and _____ to be His followers, they were using cast nets in the Sea of Galilee. (Mark 1:16)
- 7) When Jesus called _____ and _____ to be His followers, they were mending their nets. (Mark 1:19)
- 8) At the end of the day, nets were _____ out on the shore to _____.

True or False

Instructions: Write "T" beside each true statement and "F" beside each false statement.

- 1) _____ Fishing rods were often used by fishermen in New Testament times.
- 2) _____ Many Jews ate fish every day.
- 3) _____ All 12 of the apostles were fishermen.
- 4) _____ To attract fish to their boats at night, fishermen would hold shiny metal objects over the side.