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FINDINGS

A Cold, Hard Explanation for a Biblical Feat

In the night that followed the miracle of the loaves and fishes, as St. Mark tells the story in the New Testament, Jesus further astonished his disciples by walking on water.

It was a stormy night on the Sea of Galilee and the disciples were out in a boat, battling a contrary wind, when they saw Jesus approaching, as if a spirit. "And he went up to them into the ship; and the wind ceased," it is written in Mark 6:51. "And they were sore amazed in themselves beyond measure, and wondered."

Doron Nof also wondered, in a measured, scientific way. A professor of oceanography at Florida State University, he conducted an inquiry and found what might be a natural explanation: ice.

Writing in *The Journal of Paleolimnology*, Dr. Nof and his colleagues point out that unusual freezing processes probably occurred in the region in the last 12,000 years, icing over parts of freshwater Galilee. This has not hap-

pened in recent history, but there were much colder stretches 1,500 to 2,500 years ago.

The scientists note that Galilee has warm, salty springs along the western shore, an area Jesus frequented. The water above the springs does not con-
nect when it is cold. If air temperatures dipped below freezing, as sometimes happened then, surface ice could have formed thick enough to support human weight and inspire the biblical story.

From a distance, the scientists suggested, a person on the ice might appear to be walking on water, particularly if it had just rained and left a smoothed-out watery coating on the ice.

In a bow to biblical literalists and other skeptics, Dr. Nof's group concluded, "Whether this happened or not is an issue for religion scholars, archaeologists, anthropologists and believers to decide on."

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