

# 02-24 Site Overview: Church of the Primacy of Saint Peter

*Lecture Tour: Sea of Galilee Site, John 21, and Peter's Restoration Duration: 14m 25s | Date: February 24, 2026*

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## SITE OVERVIEW

- **Location:** Church of the Primacy of Saint Peter (modern name), located on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. The event described occurs after the disciples leave the site of the loaves and fishes (Tabgha), but the specific ancient name for this exact spot isn't given beyond being on the shore.
- **Date of Visit:** February 24, 2026.
- **Biblical References:** John 21 (specifically verses 2-14 for the miraculous catch of fish and verses 15-25 for the dialogue between Jesus and Peter).

## HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

- **Key events that occurred at this site:** This is the traditional location for Jesus' third post-resurrection appearance to his disciples. Key events include the miraculous catch of 153 fish, the breakfast of fish and bread on a charcoal fire prepared by Jesus, and Jesus' reinstatement of Peter following his three denials.
- **Time period(s) covered:** The post-resurrection period of Jesus' ministry, circa 30 AD.
- **Historical figures associated with the site:** Jesus, Simon Peter, and the "disciple whom Jesus loved" (traditionally John).

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

- **Physical features, excavations, or artifacts mentioned:**
  - A flat, ventilated wall inside the modern chapel.
  - A rock inside the chapel, traditionally identified as the table ("Mensa Christi") where Jesus served the disciples breakfast.
  - Twelve heart-shaped stone bases for columns located outside the chapel, near the water's edge. Dr. Schilling notes that the visibility of these bases depends on the water level of the Sea of Galilee.
- **How the archaeology confirms or illuminates the biblical account:** The site preserves the memory of the biblical event. The twelve column bases may be symbolic of the twelve apostles. The proximity to the water aligns perfectly with the setting described in John 21.

- **Any scholarly debates or alternative interpretations noted:**
  - **The number 153:** Dr. Schilling cites New Testament scholar D.A. Carson, who stated, “If the evangelist has some symbolism in mind connected with the number 153, he has hidden it well.” Other scholars suggest no significance, while a fisherman on a tour simply noted that “every fisherman counts his fish.”
  - **The miracle of the catch:** Dr. Schilling presents a local, naturalistic explanation without invalidating the miracle. He notes that local fishermen say the sun’s glare can prevent those in a boat from seeing a school of fish. It’s *speculated* that Jesus, from his vantage point on the shore, could see the fish and simply directed the disciples to the correct side of the boat.

## DR. SCHILLING’S KEY POINTS

- **Main arguments or insights presented:** The primary focus is on the Greek words for “love” used in the dialogue between Jesus and Peter in John 21. Jesus asks Peter twice if he loves him with *agape* (unconditional, self-giving love), but Peter responds both times that he loves Jesus with *phileo* (brotherly/ friendship love). The third time, Jesus switches his question, asking Peter if he is even his friend (*phileo*), which grieves Peter.
- **Connections drawn between sites, events, or themes:**
  - He connects the dialogue to Peter’s three earlier denials, reframing the common interpretation. It’s not just a simple reinstatement but a profound challenge from Jesus about the nature of Peter’s love and commitment.
  - He mentions a type of fish in the Sea of Galilee, the cichlidae (C-I-C-H-L-I-D-A-E), which are mouth-brooders. After releasing their young, they often hold objects like stones or coins in their mouths. This is used as a naturalistic parallel to the story of Peter finding the temple tax in a fish’s mouth.
- **Any corrections to common misconceptions:** The common pastoral explanation that Jesus asks “Do you love me?” three times simply to correspond to Peter’s three denials is an oversimplification. The nuance of the Greek words *agape* and *phileo* reveals a much deeper theological challenge about the nature of discipleship: Jesus desires to be Lord of all, not just a “buddy” or “friend.”

## GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

- **Relationship to other biblical sites:** The site is located on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, near Tabgha (site of the multiplication of loaves and fishes). The water level is determined by rain and snowmelt from Mount Hermon.
- **Strategic/trade route significance:** Not explicitly mentioned, but its location on the Sea of Galilee places it in the center of Jesus’ Galilean ministry, a region sustained by a thriving fishing industry.
- **Terrain, water sources, or natural features mentioned:** The shoreline of the Sea of Galilee is the primary feature. The water level fluctuates, impacting the visibility of the archaeological remains (the column bases).

## QUOTABLE MOMENTS

- On the number 153: “If the evangelist has some symbolism in mind connected with the number 153, he has hidden it well.” (Quoting D.A. Carson)
- On the Greek words for love: “Jesus looks at Peter and he says, ‘Peter, do you agape me?’ ... and Peter answers, ‘Lord, you know I phileo you.’”
- The central challenge: “He wants to either be Lord of everything in your life or not Lord of anything. Because when you only make him Lord of certain things, it confuses people.”
- The final question to the group: “He don’t want to be our friend. And so you ask, do you, God, believe me? Lord, may we come to the place where we’re able to respond to you with a positive answer. Lord, I love you more than anything.”

## PERSONAL NOTES

- The distinction between *agape* and *phileo* is a critical interpretive key for John 21. Is this distinction universally accepted among Greek scholars, or is it debated?
- Dr. Schilling notes John wrote in Greek but Jesus and Peter were speaking Aramaic. How does this linguistic transmission affect our confidence in the specific word choices John makes to convey the original intent?
- Follow up on the archaeology of the twelve heart-shaped column bases. What is their proposed date and original function? Do they belong to the 4th-century or 5th-century Byzantine church structures known to have existed here?