

TABGHA

Tabgha is a site located on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee, between Ginosar and Capernaum. It was known in ancient times by the name Heptapegon, which means “seven springs.” Tabgha is actually the Arabic form of that Greek name; the Hebrew name is Ein Sheva. This was a well-watered, shaded area as well as a popular spot for fishing.

Tabgha is the *traditional* site for two important events in the New Testament: the feeding of the 5,000 (Mt. 14:13-21; Mk. 6:30-44; Lk. 9:10-17; Jn. 6:1-15) and Jesus’ restoration of Peter after his resurrection (Jn. 21:1-17). A third event, the Sermon of the Mount (Mt. 5—7), is also placed nearby, between Tabgha and Capernaum.

A church building was first constructed on the traditional site of the feeding of the 5,000 in the fourth century A.D. According to Epiphanius, this structure was built by Josepos of Tiberius, a Jewish convert to Christianity who was commissioned by the emperor Constantine to erect church buildings in Galilee. It was, however, replaced by another structure in the fifth century, which was destroyed in the seventh century. The modern Church of the Multiplication of the Loaves and Fishes was built in 1982 over the pre-existing structures.

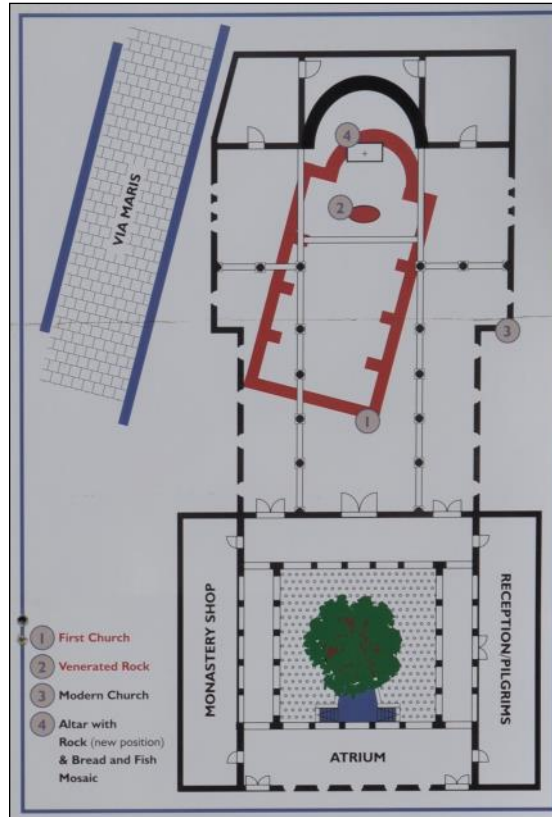


Diagram of Superimposed Churches

The famous mosaic of the loaves and fish dates back to the fifth century. There are two fish, one on either side of a basket containing four small loaves (each with a cross in the center). Presumably, the fifth loaf would be inside the basket.



Mosaic of the Loaves and Fish

An inscription, possibly from the artist, says, “Lord, remember Sauros, in this holy place.” Another inscription is in honor of the benefactor: “To the memory and repose of the sponsor, the holy Patriarch Martyrios.”

While Tabgha could have been considered a “solitary” or “remote place” (*eremos*), there are great difficulties in locating the miraculous feeding of the 5,000 there. (1) Luke 9:10 associates the miracle with Bethsaida, which was located on the northeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. (There may have been more than one place by this name, which means “house of fishing.”) (2) After the miracle, Jesus sent his disciples “to the other side” of the lake, and “when they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret” (Mt. 14:22, 34). This language does not fit Tabgha, which is at the northern corner of the plain of Gennesaret. The miracle had to have been performed on the eastern side of the lake.



Mosaic of Waterfowl and Marsh Plants



Mosaic of Nilometer

The Church of the Primacy of St. Peter can also be found at Tabgha. This is the traditional place where Jesus cooked a fish and bread breakfast for his disciples and then restored Peter, who had denied him three times prior to his crucifixion (Jn. 21:1-17). The chapel was built in 1933 by the Franciscans from the local basalt. A much earlier structure at this place dates to the fourth century A.D.



Church of the Primacy of St. Peter

The name given to the modern chapel reflects the Catholic doctrine which makes Peter the head of the church and the first pope. It is true that Jesus reinstated Peter as an apostle and called him to be a leader among his people—a role that Peter marvelously fulfilled (Acts 1—12; 1 & 2 Peter). However, Peter was not the head of the church; that role belongs to Jesus alone (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18). Further, Peter was not infallible; Paul did not hesitate to rebuke him to his face when he was out of line with the truth of the gospel (Gal. 2:11-13). Further still, Peter did not set himself up to be the head bishop; instead he humbly described himself as a “fellow elder” in the church (1 Pet. 5:1-2). All of the apostles served a foundational role in the church (Acts 2:42; Eph. 2:19-20; 3:5); and the idea of “apostolic succession” finds no support in the New Testament.



Baptistry at Tabgha (Fifth Century A.D.)
(See the comments on the baptistry in the *Bethlehem* section.)