

Simon Peter with Adam Hamilton

Lesson #1

The Call of the Fisherman

Scripture to have on hand

Luke 5: 1-5; 6-11

One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret,^[a] the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God. ² He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. ³ He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.⁴ When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch."⁵ Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets."

⁶ When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. ⁷ So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. ⁸ When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" ⁹ For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, ¹⁰ and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people." ¹¹ So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

Luke 3:3

He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

John 1:35-42

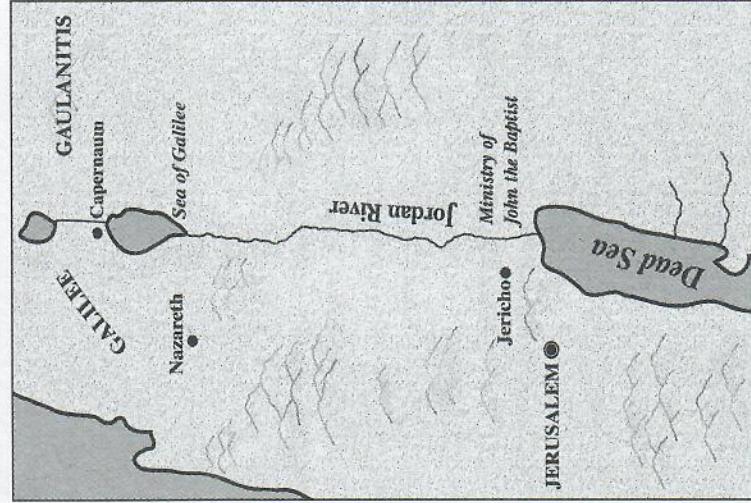
³⁵ The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. ³⁶ When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" ³⁷ When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. ³⁸ Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?" They said, "Rabbi" (which means "Teacher"), "where are you staying?" ³⁹ "Come," he replied, "and you will see." So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon. ⁴⁰ Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. ⁴¹ The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). ⁴² And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter^[a])

hands and the strong arms of the men who made their living in this way.

With all of this background in mind, we're ready to explore the Gospel stories involving Simon, starting with his first-time encounter with Jesus, as well as a subsequent encounter at which time Simon answered Jesus' call to join him in order to "fish for people."

From Simon to Peter

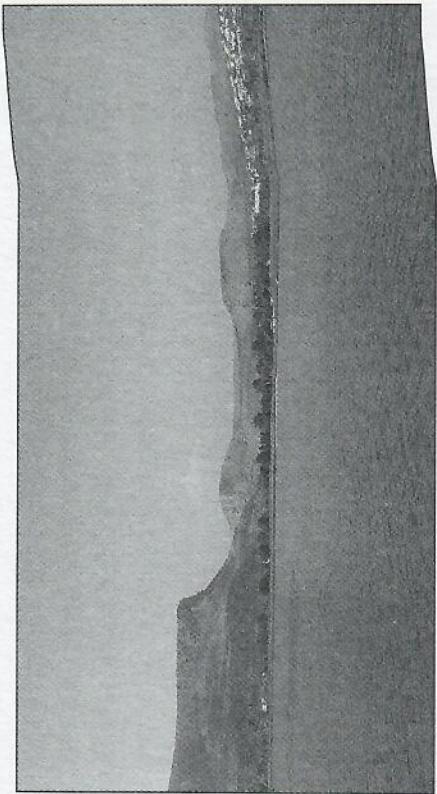
We often think that the first encounter Simon had with Jesus was on the seashore of the Sea of Galilee. But John's Gospel tells us they first met months earlier. Jesus grew up in Nazareth, about sixteen miles due west of the southern tip of the Sea of Galilee. But at the age of thirty, he traveled sixty miles southeast, as the crow flies, to a place



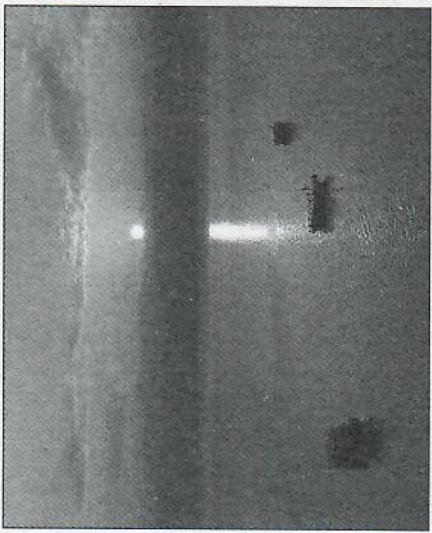
along the Jordan River, just before it flows into the Dead Sea, where his cousin John the Baptist was preaching and baptizing. John refers to this as "Bethany beyond the Jordan."

No one knows where this site is. But the story is remembered both in Jordan and Israel at a place east of Jericho, where, on both banks of the Jordan, pilgrims now step into the muddy water of the Jordan to recall their

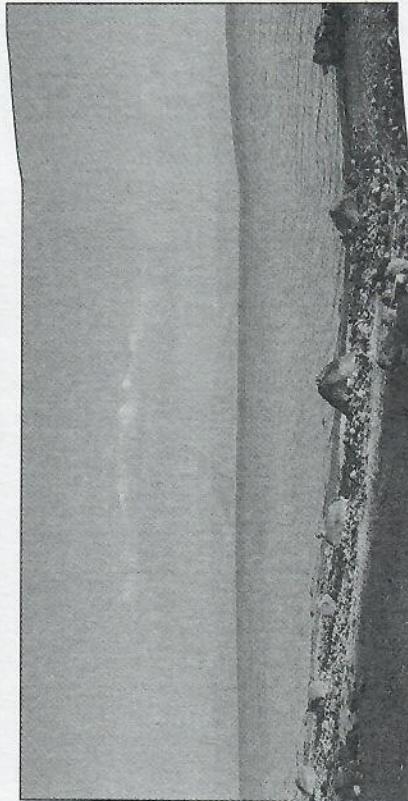
SIMON PETER



Top: A view from the Sea of Galilee looking toward (from left to right): Mount Arbel, Magdala, and Ginosar.



Center: Sunrise over the Sea of Galilee.



Bottom: From Tabgha on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, looking south as the sun was preparing to set.

If Jesus were to give you a nickname describing the potential he saw in you, not the person you are but the person you could become, what nickname would you hope he might choose for you? Beautiful? Selfless? Courageous? Bold? Servant? Loving? I'd want him to call me 'Faithful,' not because I am a faithful disciple, but because that is what I long to be.

After this initial encounter between Jesus and Simon Peter, Jesus headed into the wilderness of Judea—a desert-like area near the site where John was baptizing. He went to fast and to seek God, and there he was tempted and tested. Meanwhile Simon, Andrew, Philip, and Nathanael returned to Galilee, to their everyday lives, having renewed their commitment to God. I suspect they were also quite curious about this man, Jesus, whom they had just met.

A month and a half went by following Peter's first encounter with Jesus. He'd returned to his fishing business with his brother and the sons of Zebedee, James and John. And while Simon and Andrew had grown up in Bethsaida, as adult men they now lived in the town of Capernaum, four miles west of Bethsaida, a town also located on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee.

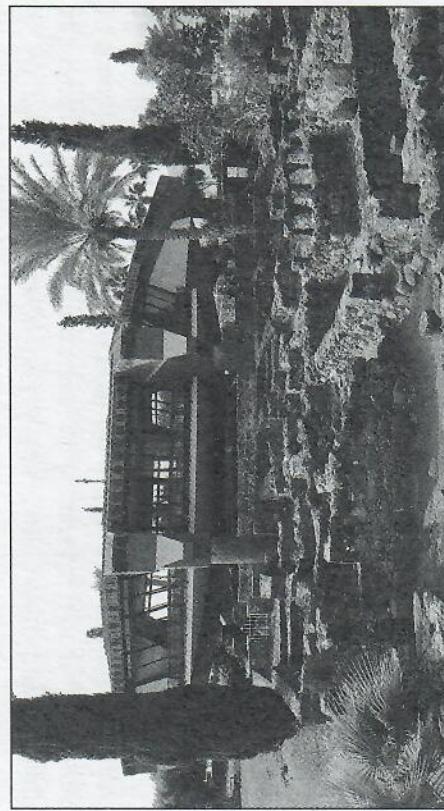
Simon had married, likely when he was fourteen to sixteen years of age. His wife was from Capernaum, and the young couple likely had moved into living quarters that had been added to the home she'd grown up in. Capernaum was in Galilee proper, and the taxes in Galilee were lower than those in Gaulanitis, which provided an incentive to live in the hometown of Simon's wife rather than in Bethsaida.

Run by the Franciscans, the archaeological site of Capernaum is one of my favorite places in all of the Holy Land. Walking on the excavated remains of the city, you know you are walking where Peter walked, in the town where he and his family lived, and in the place where so many Gospel stories took place. We do not always know whether Jesus was here or there when we traverse the Holy Land, but Capernaum became Jesus' hometown during his three years of public ministry, with Jesus apparently living in

the home of Simon Peter's mother-in-law where Peter himself lived. If you are walking anywhere in Capernaum, you are likely walking where Jesus walked.

A visit to Capernaum will take you to a large modern church that looks like a spaceship, built atop and hovering over the ruins of an ancient church. Beneath the church are the ruins of an old house that was expanded a couple of times. This home, it is believed, was the home of Simon, his wife, her mother, and Jesus himself when he was staying in Capernaum. (Matthew 4 notes that Jesus settled in Capernaum, and in Matthew 9:1 it is referred to as Jesus' "own city.")

The village was home to as many as 1,500 people by some estimates. It was located very near if not actually on a major trade route linking Egypt to Damascus, which then went on to the major cities to the east—a road often referred to as the Via Maris (Way of the Sea) or the International Trunk Road. From the most ancient of times, this road conveyed trade and travelers from Africa to Asia. A mile marker for this trade route can be seen among the stones at Capernaum. This strategic location



In 1990 the Franciscans built the Church of St. Peter over the ruins of what are believed to be the first-century home of Simon Peter, where Jesus lived as Peter's guest when he was in Capernaum. In the foreground you can see the foundation walls of some of the homes in ancient Capernaum built of black basalt stone.

