

Byzantine Bethsaida and the
House of St Peter
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In a series of presentations, the speakers discussed the historical, archaeological, and geographical evidence surrounding the identification of the ancient city of Betzaida (Bethsaida). They focused on two primary sites, et-Tell and El-Araj, and evaluated their suitability as the location of Betzaida based on various factors. The presentations highlighted the importance of Betzaida in biblical and historical accounts, as well as the need for a thorough investigation of its location. They examined archaeological findings at both sites, such as architectural remains, pottery, coins, and other artifacts, in order to determine the time periods in which they were inhabited.

At et-Tell, evidence of an Iron Age city and the remains of a large gatehouse were discovered. However, the site's distance from the Sea of Galilee raised questions about its identification as Betzaida, a city known for its fishermen. Proponents of et-Tell argued that a lagoon once extended to the site, but the speaker pointed out that this lagoon likely existed 10,000 years ago rather than during the first century when Betzaida was inhabited.

Meanwhile, at El-Araj, excavations revealed a rich Roman layer, including walls, pottery, coins, and fishing weights. An electromagnetic survey showed a densely built-up area, indicating a significant settlement during the Roman period. Additionally, a Byzantine church was uncovered at El-Araj, which featured inscriptions referring to the apostles and was likely dedicated to Saint Peter.

Overall, the evidence presented in these talks suggests that El-Araj is the more likely location of the ancient city of Betzaida. The Roman layer found at El-Araj, its proximity to the Sea of Galilee, and the presence of a Byzantine church connected to the apostles all support this identification.