

TIBERIAS

Tiberias is located on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee in Israel, about 650 feet below sea level. It is about three miles south of Migdal Junction (ancient Magdala) and six miles northwest of the southern tip of the Sea of Galilee. The city is surrounded on the other sides by a mountainous landscape. The name “Tiberias” is mentioned twice in the Bible in the phrase “Sea of Tiberias” (Jn. 6:1; 21:1), another name for the Sea of Galilee, and once as the city from which boats sailed (Jn. 6:23).

Tiberias is actually two cities combined—Hammath and Tiberias. Both were walled cities in ancient times, located about a mile apart. Hammath was to the south; it is known today as Hammath Tiberias. The city may be referred to as a part of Naphtali’s allotment in Joshua 19:35. It was famous for its warm baths; the area contains hot springs that are among the hottest natural springs in Israel at 140 degrees Fahrenheit. Hammath Tiberias must be the equivalent of the Emmaus described by Josephus (*Antiquities* 18.2.3; *Wars* 4.1.3).

Tiberias was to the north of Hammath, being built between A.D. 17 and 20 by Herod Antipas. It was named for the Roman Emperor Tiberius (A.D. 14-37). Antipas was one of the sons of Herod the Great; he was the tetrarch over Galilee and Perea (4 B.C.—A.D. 39). This ruler made Tiberias the capital of Galilee, replacing the previously chosen Sepphoris. Antipas minted coins featuring the name Tiberias to show the importance of the city.

Several key references to Herod Antipas appear in the Gospel Accounts:

- 1) The Herodians, supporters of Antipas, opposed Jesus (Mt. 22:16; Mk. 3:6; 12:13).
- 2) The wife of Herod’s steward was healed by Jesus, and she supported his ministry (Lk. 8:1-3; 24:10).
- 3) Antipas put John the Baptist in prison and then had him beheaded (Mt. 14:1-12; Mk. 6:14-29).
- 4) Antipas wanted to kill Jesus; Jesus referred to him as “that fox” (Lk. 13:31-32).
- 5) Pilate sent Jesus to Antipas, because Jesus was from his jurisdiction in Galilee; Antipas asked Jesus many questions and mocked him as a king (Lk. 23:6-12).

Tiberias was built on an ancient graveyard, so Jews did not want to live in the unclean city (see Num. 19:16). However, Antipas compelled some to live there anyway. He populated the city with a mixture of Galileans, foreigners, and freed slaves. He gave land grants and built houses at his own expense for the poor (Josephus *Antiquities* 18.2.3).

This city was built on a grid system, in the Greco-Roman style. It possessed a stadium, a forum, a theater, and baths. The Roman theater, which dates from the second to third century A.D., was discovered in 1989-1990. It would have seated at least 5,000 people. The theater was found at the foot of Mount Berenice, which may have been named after the sister of Agrippa II (Acts 25:23). A lavish royal palace was built on top of Mount Berenice, being decorated with statues of animals that were offensive to the Jews (Josephus *Life* 12). On the other hand, a synagogue was constructed in Tiberias to accommodate the Jews; Josephus referred to it as a *proseuche* or “place of prayer” (Josephus *Life* 54).

During the First Jewish Revolt, Josephus fortified the city. However, when the Romans came, the city opened its gates to Vespasian and were thus spared from destruction. Tiberias became the center of Jewish learning after the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. It developed into an important spiritual center when the Sanhedrin relocated there. (Earlier, the Sanhedrin had moved from Jerusalem to such places as Jamnia and Sepphoris.) By the end of the second century, Tiberias was established as one of four Jewish holy cities, along with Jerusalem, Hebron, and Sepphoris. It was home to many Jewish scholars. This city was the location for the writing of the Mishnah, completed about A.D. 200, and the Palestinian (Jerusalem) Talmud, finished around A.D. 400. Work on the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible was also performed in that place. The tombs of Rabbi Akiva (second century) and Moses Maimonides (twelfth century) are located there.

Tiberias was conquered by the Arabs in 637. Later, in 1033, it was destroyed by an earthquake; in 1099, the Crusaders rebuilt the city. Saladin conquered Tiberias in 1187. The city suffered great decline until it was revived by the Ottoman Turks. It was devastated again by an earthquake in 1837. Modern day Tiberias was founded under the British mandate in 1922. It became a part of the independent state of Israel in 1948.

The new city spreads out to the sides and top of the old city. The population, which is predominantly Jewish, numbers approximately 45,000. It is known as a resort area, having many hotels as well as restaurants, cafes, and pubs. There are many tourist attractions, including water activities on the lake and water parks near the beach. Tiberias also hosts an annual marathon, which is the longest running full marathon in Israel that attracts many world class athletes.

Due to the unique nature of Tiberias and the way it has grown over the years, there are four major areas: (1) In the south, there are the ruins of the old city of Hammath, with its hot springs. This area is known as Hammath Tiberias (National Park). (2) In the center, the ruins of the Roman city can be found, with Mount Berenice to the west. (3) In the north central section, the Ottoman city can be seen. (4) In the north, there is the modern Israeli city, with its high rising hotels.



Building with Sign Reading “Hammat Teverya: Origin of the Springs”



Arches (Part of a Roman Bath?)



Severus Synagogue Dating to 4th Century A.D.
(Contains Mosaic with Zodiac, Menorahs, and Torah Ark)



Ruins of Byzantine / Crusader Church on Mount Berenice



Closeup of the Ruins on Mount Berenice



Perforated Anchor
In the Apse of the Church



Crusader-Ottoman Building
 Part of Crusader Fort (12th Century A.D.)
 Incorporated into Daher el-Omar Fortifications (18th Century A.D.)



Synagogue Dated to the 6th Century A.D.
 (Next to Crusader-Ottoman Building)

Mosaic Dedication from the Synagogue:
 "Proklos Son of Krispos"
 (Perhaps the Benefactor or Artist of the Mosaic)



Ossuaries Displayed at the Site

Ossuaries were commonly used by the Jews and others from the first to the fifth centuries A.D. They consisted of a rectangular stone box with a lid. Those belonging to wealthier people were often engraved with ornate geometrical and floral designs. Some have been found with the owner's name inscribed on them.

After a person died, he was laid in a tomb until his body decomposed. Then a family member would place his bones in an ossuary and put it in a niche at the back of the tomb. Sometimes the skeletal remains of several family members were placed in one of these small boxes.



Upper Millstone (Two Different Angles) Used for Grinding Grain



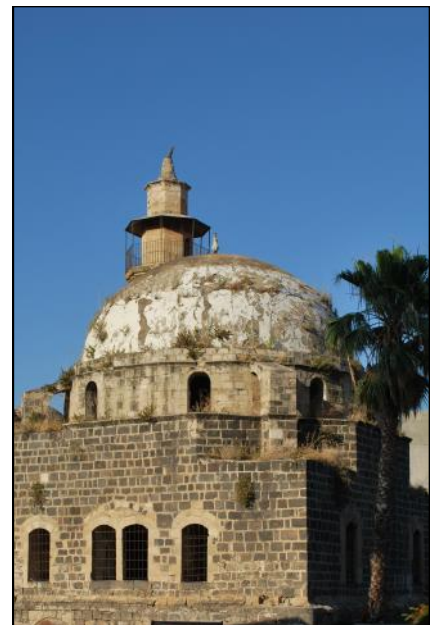
Lower Millstone Shaped Like a Cone
(Which Fit Under the Upper Millstone)



Diagram of the Mill Put Together
(A Wooden Bar Fit in the Square Socket
and Was Turned by a Donkey)



Al-Amari Mosque
(Built by Daher el-Omar in 18th Century A.D.)





Leonardo Plaza Hotel



Water Park by the Sea of Galilee



Covered Boats by the Sea of Galilee