

# 73 Tiberias

## Names (also known as)

Hebrew – תְּבֵרְיָה - Tveria, Arabic: طبرية, Ṭabariyyah; Modern Greek: Τιβερίάδα - Tiveriáda

## Etymology

Tiberias = “from the Tiber (as river-god)” (Thayer).

## Location/Description



Tiberias is located on the western shore of the sea of Galilee 3.2 km (2 miles) south of Magdala, greatly enlarged and beautified, and named Tiberias in honour of Tiberias Caesar in circa 20 AD by Herod Antipas. It was one of ten towns around the sea (the Decapolis), each one not having less than 15,000 inhabitants.

Because Tiberias was situated on the edge of the ancient walled town Rakkath (Josh. 19:35), or Hammath, whose cemetery lies beneath it, it was avoided by strict Jews in Christ's time. Christ apparently did not visit the city, noted for its luxury and laxness as a hot water bath resort (Matt. 11:8).

The hill that towers over the old city is called Berniki, 190 metres above the old city (see photo below taken from the hill). The hill is named after the sister of King Agrippa II. It is in ruins and waiting to be excavated. On the top and slopes of this hill King Herod Antipas built his fort, palaces and government buildings. From the hill was the source of the

water for the city, which was served by an aqueduct.

## Scriptural references

### New Testament

John 6:1,23; 21:1

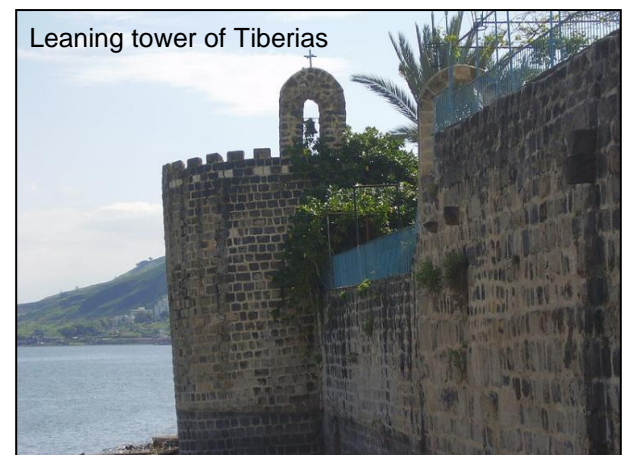
## Famous characters

Herod Antipas, Tiberias Caesar, Philip the tetrarch of Ituraea and Trachonitis, Herodias, Salome



## Brief history

Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great and the tetrarch of Galilee (Matt. 14:1; Luke 3:19) founded the city of Tiberias around AD 20. The city was named in honour of the Roman emperor Tiberius, who ruled from AD 14-37. Antipas built the city according to the Hellenistic-Roman conventions of his time, including within it a stadium, forum, public baths and a lavish royal palace adorned with animal statuary, which was offensive to Jews. Tiberias was thus a city that was thoroughly Gentile in character. Antipas also constructed a large synagogue to accommodate its Jewish inhabitants. As Tiberias grew in importance as both an urban and an administrative centre, the Sea of Galilee became known as the Sea of Tiberias (John 6:1).



It was here at Tiberias that Herodias, the wife of Philip, seduced Herod Antipas (her husband’s brother) leading to the divorce by Herod of his wife, the daughter of Aretus ruler of Damascus and his unlawful marriage to Herodias. Aretus was later to make him pay dearly for his treachery.

Herod Antipas not only acquired the devious, vengeful and ambitious Herodias, but also her salacious daughter by Philip, Salome, who was to play a critical role in the death of John the Baptist (Mark 6:17-29).

### Archaeology

A 2,000 year-old Roman theatre was discovered 15 meters below ground near Mount Bernike in the Tiberias hills. It seated over 7,000 people.



Remains of the Roman theatre

### Coin of Herod Antipas



The photo above is of the first coin minted by Herod Antipas at Tiberias in circa 20-21 AD. The coin shows an upright reed surrounded by Greek letters that read 'of Herod Tetrarch'.

Also it bears a date equivalent to 20-21 AD. It is made of bronze and is only 16 millimetres in diameter. Presumably the reed on the coin was intended to indicate the location of the city, as reeds grew on the shore of the Sea of Galilee.



View of Tiberias in 1862

### Sources:

New Unger’s Bible Dictionary  
NIV Archaeological Study Bible  
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiberias>

(Compilers – Darren Peeler/Jim Cowie)