

Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, built Tiberias on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, naming it after the Roman emperor Tiberius. He founded it upon a Jewish cemetery and the small village of Rakkat (Joshua 19:35). Tiberias is not mentioned in the New Testament except as an alternative name for the Sea of Galilee, "Lake Tiberias." In spite of its controversial origins on a cemetery, Tiberias was an important city with a mixed Jewish and non-Jewish population. Tiberias became a great Jewish intellectual center after the failure of the two Jewish revolts against Rome in 66-73 and 132-135 C.E. Rabbi Judah the Prince moved the Sanhedrin, or religious court, to Tiberias about 200 C.E. At Tiberias the Palestinian (also called the Jerusalem) Talmud was completed about 400 C.E. By the sixth century C.E. in Tiberias the pointing of the Hebrew text of the Bible to indicate vowels and the cantillation to designate melody were completed. A Christian church was built here for the first time in the fourth century C.E. Many synagogues and churches were here when the Moslem armies took the city peacefully in 637 C.E. Tiberias changed hands several times during the Crusades, but in 1247 it passed into the hands of the Sultan of Egypt. Most of the towers and ancient buildings to be seen today in Tiberias, such as this well-preserved portion of a medieval castle, date from this time or later.