



**VIEW SOUTHEAST (COVER PHOTO):** THIS PHOTO WAS TAKEN FROM THE TRAIL THAT DESCENDS FROM MT. ARBEL. IT LOOKS TOWARD THE EASTERN SHORE OF THE LAKE AND MODERN TIBERIAS (UPPER RIGHT). TEL RAKKATH IS THE SUNLIT MOUND.

**BELOW (VIEW NORTH):** THIS PHOTO WAS TAKEN FROM TEL RAKKATH, LOOKING DOWN ON THE RAKKATH VALLEY. SAFED IS ON THE MOUNTAIN AT THE TOP OF THE PHOTO (CENTER; SEE "SAFED (ZEFAT)" ON PAGE 77).





**VIEW SOUTHWEST:** THE SOUTHERN, OLDER PART OF TIBERIAS WITH THE HILLS OF LOWER GALILEE RISING ABOVE THE CITY IN THE BACKGROUND.

## TIBERIAS

(SEE MAP ON PAGE 151)

Tiberias is a city on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, about 8.5 miles (13.5 kilometers) from its northern shore and 6 miles (10 kilometers) from its southern. During the New Testament period, Tiberias was the administrative center of the settlements around the lake. It sometimes gave its name to the lake as “the sea of Tiberias” (John 6:1, 21:1; see “Names” in chapter 7, “Sea of Galilee,” on page 153).

Tiberias was founded by Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great. The New Testament refers to Antipas as “Herod the tetrarch” (Matt. 14:1) and “king Herod” (Mark 6:14). He built the city on the fortified Israelite town of Rakkath (Josh. 19:35; see the photos on page 162), between Chinnereth to the north and Hammat Tiberias to the south, naming it after the Roman emperor Tiberius (see “Hammat Tiberias” on page 171).

The cultivatable land around the city was small, so the people relied on fishing and other industries (e.g., glass and pottery making, mat weaving, woodwork, wool weaving). According to Josephus, the population of Tiberias, when founded, was mixed, consisting of landless people and freed slaves. Here is his description of the city between the years 26 and 36 AD, the approximate time Jesus ministered in the area:

And now Herod the tetrarch, who was in great favour with Tiberius, built a city of the same name with him: and called it Tiberias. He built it in the best part of Galilee, at the lake of Gennesareth [Sea of Galilee]. There are warm baths at a little distance from it, in a village named Emmaus. Strangers came and inhabited this city; a great number of the inhabitants were Galileans also: and many were necessitated by Herod to come thither out of the country belonging to him; and were by force compelled to be its inhabitants. Some of them were persons of condition. He also admitted poor people; and those such as were collected from all parts to dwell in it. Nay some of them were not quite free men. And these he was a benefactor to, and made them free in great numbers: but obliged them not to forsake the city, by building them very good houses at his own expences; and by giving them land also. For he was sensible that to make this place an habitation was to transgress the Jewish ancient laws; because many sepulchres were to be here taken away, in order to make room for the city Tiberias.<sup>1</sup>



**VIEW SOUTH:** THE SOUTHERN PART OF TIBERIAS AND THE SEA OF GALILEE. HAMMAT TIBERIAS IS ON THE SHORE OF THE LAKE JUST BEYOND THE ORANGE-ROOFED BUILDING (UPPER CENTER; SEE "HAMMAT TIBERIAS" ON PAGE 171).

**BELOW (VIEW NORTHEAST):** THE NORTHERN, NEWER PART OF TIBERIAS WITH ITS MODERN HOTELS OVERLOOKING THE SEA OF GALILEE.



Because tombs were discovered and desecrated during the construction of Tiberias, the town was shunned by observant Jews who thought it was unclean. When the First Jewish Revolt broke out in 66 AD, half the citizens of Tiberias opposed Josephus, the Jewish commander in Galilee. The other half, consisting of the city's wealthiest citizens, favored the Romans. Thus, the citizens of Tiberias surrendered the city to Vespasian when he arrived in 67 AD.

After R. Simeon b. Yohai purified Tiberias in the first half of the second century, "it was chosen by the Jewish patriarch and his Sanhedrin as their residence. Tiberias remained the capital of the Jews in the country until the transfer of the religious authorities to Jerusalem after the Arab conquest in the seventh century."<sup>2</sup>

## PHARISEES

This is an excellent place to say a few words about the Jewish sect known as the Pharisees in Jesus's day, who were the forerunners of the great rabbis who protected and maintained legalistic Judaism in Tiberias and elsewhere after the destruction of the Second Temple (Herod's Temple) in 70 AD. The German historian Emil Schürer wrote:

According to Josephus, the Pharisees concerned themselves with the strict interpretation and observance of the Torah,<sup>3</sup> and spared themselves no efforts to fulfil the law in every detail. "They are reckoned to interpret the laws exactly." "They pride themselves on the exact interpretation of the law of the fathers." . . . Their party was the nucleus of the nation, distinguishable from the rest only by their greater strictness and consistency.<sup>4</sup>

Jesus openly criticized the Pharisees for hypocrisy and greed and as the children of those who killed the prophets. They had, according to Jesus, "omitted the weightier matters of the law, *judgment, mercy, and faith*: these ought [they] to have done" (Matt. 23:23, emphasis added). Jesus continued:

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.

Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous,

And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.

Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. (Matt. 23:27–31)

The mission of prophets is to testify of Jesus Christ and His righteousness. It has always been so. Aaron, in the Book of Mormon, opened the scriptures to the people about the coming of Jesus Christ to the old world and the universal resurrection of the dead. He taught "there could be no redemption for mankind save it were through the death and sufferings of Christ, and the atonement of his blood" (Alma 21:9). Ammon, Aaron's brother, taught King Lamoni "all things . . . pertaining to righteousness. And he did exhort [the people] daily, with all diligence; and they gave heed unto his word, and they were zealous for keeping the commandments of God" (Alma 21:23). These prophets, Aaron and Ammon, lived in the Americas during the first century BC. They, along with others, testified that Christ would be born in the land of Jerusalem, visit the Americas after His resurrection,<sup>5</sup> and redeem humankind on conditions of repentance.<sup>6</sup>



**VIEW NORTH:** THE TIBERIAS CHAPEL OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS, OVERLOOKING THE SEA OF GALILEE (SEE PHOTO BELOW). IN 2024, IT IS THE ONLY CHURCH-OWNED PROPERTY IN ISRAEL.

**BELOW (VIEW NORTH):** THE VIEW MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH HAVE DURING SHABBAT SERVICES. THIS PHOTO WAS TAKEN FROM THE BALCONY OF THE CHURCH (ABOVE), LOOKING DOWN ON TEL RAKKATH (CENTER) AND THE LAKE.



The Jewish leaders in Jesus's day had lost sight of the message and were unable to recognize the Messiah when He came in fulfillment of all the prophets had taught concerning Him.<sup>7</sup>

## SANHEDRIN

The following explanation of the Sanhedrin appears in the *Bible Dictionary* of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints:

The Jewish senate and the highest native court in both civil and ecclesiastical matters. Under the presidency of the high priest it regulated the whole internal affairs of the Jewish nation. It is first definitely mentioned in the days of Antiochus the Great (223–187 BC), but it may date from a somewhat earlier period. . . .

The powers of the Sanhedrin were extensive, for the Greek and Roman masters of the Jews granted them a considerable amount of self-government. . . .

At the time of the Lord its jurisdiction was restricted to Judea proper. In Galilee Christ was beyond its power (John 7:1). Its decisions were nevertheless regarded as morally binding all over the Jewish world. Thus we find it issuing letters to the synagogue of Damascus, ordering the arrest and removal to Jerusalem of the Christians of that place.

The next explanation appears in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*:

Great Sanhedrin usually means the supreme political, religious, and judicial body in Palestine during the Roman period, both before and after the destruction of the Temple, until the abolishment of the patriarchate (c. 425 C.E.). The precise definition of the term Sanhedrin has engaged the attention of historians in the past century, owing to the apparent conflict between the Hellenistic and rabbinic sources as to its nature and functions. While in the Hellenistic sources, in Josephus and the Gospels, it appears as a political and judicial council headed by the ruler, the tannaitic<sup>8</sup> sources depict it chiefly as a legislative body dealing with religious matters, and in rare cases acting as a court—for instance, to try a false prophet or high priest.<sup>9</sup>

Jesus was tried by the Sanhedrin and found guilty of blasphemy. He was silent except to witness that He was indeed the Son of God, the great "I Am."<sup>10</sup>

## MOVEMENT OF THE SANHEDRIN IN GALILEE

After the destruction of the Second Temple in 72 AD, the Romans allowed R. Johanan b. Zakkai to organize an academy for rabbinical studies at Jabneh, 13 miles (21 kilometers) south of Joppa (see "Joppa" in *Blessed Pilgrimage*, vol. 4). Zakkai worked for the renewal of the nation's religious leadership, which he felt would have to depend on loyalty to tradition rather than on the Temple. Even though important sages of the time opposed his views, Zakkai succeeded in transferring many observances associated with the Temple either to the synagogue or to the Sanhedrin. Animal sacrifice, however, was not transferred. The Jews believed the words of Hosea, "For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings" (Hosea 6:6), showing that pious deeds are an atonement equal to that offered by the Temple. They had forgotten the ultimate purpose of animal sacrifice. They relied on rabbinical teachings, laying aside the clear witness of the prophets concerning Jesus Christ. After explaining the purpose of parables, Jesus said to His disciples: "Blessed are your eyes, for they *see*: and your ears, for they *hear*" (Matt. 13:15–16; emphasis added). What we see and hear about Jesus Christ is a choice we must all make.

In about 80 AD, Rabban Gamaliel filled the office of *nasi*, or president of the Sanhedrin, which had reconvened in Jabneh under Zakkai. "He saw his life's work as the strengthening of the new center at Jabneh



THESE ROMAN MILESTONES, DISCOVERED IN TIBERIAS, WERE SET UP ON THE ROAD BETWEEN TIBERIAS AND HAMMAT TIBERIAS, REMINISCENT OF THE ANCIENT ROAD THAT PASSED THIS WAY TO BETH SHEAN IN THE LOWER JORDAN VALLEY.

and the concentration and consolidation of the people around the Torah, constituting an authority that would be capable of *filling the place of the Temple*” (emphasis added).<sup>11</sup> His work at Jabneh laid the foundation for the Mishnah, which “supplements, complements, clarifies and systematizes the commandments of the Torah.”<sup>12</sup>

After the Romans destroyed Judea following the failure of the Bar Kokhba revolt (131–135 AD), the Sanhedrin moved to Usha in Galilee. Simeon b. Gamaliel II, son of Rabban Gamaliel of Jabneh, was forced into hiding during the persecutions following the revolt. As a result, he was absent from the first session of scholars at Usha and was appointed nasi of the Sanhedrin at the second session.<sup>13</sup> After the persecutions ended, the sages of Usha sent this message to the Elders of Galilee: “Let everyone who has learned come and teach, and everyone who has not learned let him come and learn.”<sup>14</sup> Thus, the synod [of Usha] inaugurated all the activities of the Sanhedrin: the teaching and study of Torah as well as legislative and judicial functions.” It was an important stage in the compilation and codification of the Mishnah.<sup>15</sup>

After Usha, the Sanhedrin moved to Shefaram and then to Bet Shearim, where Judah ha-Nasi lived (see “Bet Shearim Necropolis” on page 145). Judah was the son of Simeon b. Gamaliel II and was responsible for the redaction of the Mishnah. Toward the end of Judah’s life, the Sanhedrin moved to Zippori, apparently because Judah’s health was poor and he found the air in Zippori to be healthier (see “Sepphoris (Zippori)” on page 119). Judah dedicated himself “to the strengthening of the economic position of the Jews in [Palestine], their settlement on its soil, and to shaping the country’s national religious institutions.”<sup>16</sup> In the first half of the second century AD, the Sanhedrin was moved to Tiberias, which remained the capital of the Jews until the Arab conquest (seventh century AD), when the religious authorities moved back to Jerusalem. For the movement of the Sanhedrin in Galilee, see the maps on pages 108 and 111.

## ENDNOTES

1 Flavius Josephus, *Twenty Books of the Jewish Antiquities*, in *The Genuine Works of Flavius Josephus the Jewish Historian*, trans. William Whiston (London, 1737), 18:2:3, <http://penelope.uchicago.edu/josephus>.

2 *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed. (2007), s.v. “Tiberias,” by Michael Avi-Yonah, Abraham J. Brawer, Efraim Orni, Shimon Gibson.

3 The first five books of the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

4 Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 BC–135 AD)*, vol. 2, rev. ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Ltd., 1979), Kindle.

5 Jesus taught the following: “As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And *other sheep* I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd” (John 10:15–16, emphasis added). When Jesus visited the Americas after His resurrection, He taught the following: “And verily I say unto you, that ye are they of whom I said: *Other sheep* I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd” (3 Ne. 15:21, emphasis added; see verses 11–24 for the full passage). And to Joseph Smith, He said: “Behold, I am Jesus Christ, the Son of God. I came unto mine own, and mine own received me not. I am the light which shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not. I am he who said—*Other sheep* have I which are not of this fold—unto my disciples, and many there were that understood me not” (Doctrine and Covenants 10:57–59, emphasis added).

6 The Book of Mormon account of Jesus in the Americas is called the fifth gospel (see 3 Ne. 11–30). President Hinckley provided this synopsis of the Book of Mormon: “The ancient record from which it was translated came out of the earth as a voice speaking from the dust. It came as the testimony of generations of men and women who lived their lives upon the earth, who struggled with adversity, who quarreled and fought, who at various times lived the divine law and prospered and at other times forsook their God and went down to destruction. It contains what has been described as the fifth Gospel, a moving testament of the new world concerning the visit of the resurrected Redeemer on the soil of this hemisphere.” Gordon B. Hinckley, “The Cornerstones of Our Faith,” *Ensign* (Nov. 1984), Gospel Library.

7 As a second witness, the Book of Mormon speaks plainly about the life and mission of Jesus Christ, His atoning sacrifice, and His divinity as God’s Only Begotten Son. The Bible is our first witness. Unfortunately, over the centuries, the Bible lost “many parts which are plain and most precious; and also many covenants of the Lord.” In the beginning, Bible teachings went forth “in purity . . . according to the truth which is in God” (1 Ne. 13:24–29). In a day when some are beginning to question God’s existence and Christ’s mission, we need the Book of Mormon’s second witness more than ever.

8 The Tannaim were Jewish scholars who lived before the temple’s destruction in 70 AD and during the century and a half following. They compiled the oral traditions of religious law that were later codified by Judah ha-Nasi as the Mishnah in the early third century AD. See “Safed (Zefat)” on page 77.

9 *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. “Sanhedrin,” by Hugo Mantel.

10 See Matt. 26:57–68, Mark 14:53–65, Luke 22:63–65. See also “Gethsemane” and “The Garden Tomb” in *Blessed Pilgrimage*, vol. 3.

11 *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. “Gamaliel, Rabban.”

12 “The term ‘mishnah’ . . . when used as a proper noun (‘the Mishnah’) it designates the collection of rabbinic traditions redacted by Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi (usually called simply ‘Rabbi’) at the beginning of the third century CE.” *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. “Mishnah,” by Stephen G. Wald.

13 *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. “Simeon Ben Gamaliel II,” by Israel Burgansky.

14 Synod of Usha, Song R. 2:5, no. 3.

15 *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. “Usha, Synod of,” by A’hron Oppenheimer.

16 *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. “Judah ha-Nasi.”