The Good Samaritan Inn
Mosaic Museum

Welcome to the Inn of the Good Samaritan

The Good Samaritan Inn, Tel:
www.parks.org.il | +972-3-6338230

The mosaic museum at the Inn of the Good Samaritan showcases a large and fascinating collection of ancient mosaics unparalleled in Israel. The spectacular mosaics, dating from the Byzantine period (fourth–seventh centuries) were collected from churches and Jewish and Samaritan synagogues throughout Judea and Samaria and from the synagogue in Gaza. The mosaics illustrate the cultural, artistic and religious concepts of Jews, Samaritans and Christians who lived side by side in the land of Israel during the period of the Mishnah and the Talmud. These magnificent mosaics were brought here for conservation by experts and public display. They are shown here in two groups: The larger mosaics are exhibited outdoors and the smaller are in the rooms of an air-conditioned building.

The museum complex is a historic structure in its own right. It consists of the remains of a road station from the Second Temple period, which was used by pilgrims to Jerusalem coming from Galilee and Gilead. Remains have also been discovered here of an inn from the Byzantine period that served Christian pilgrims on their way from Jerusalem to the baptismal site at the Jordan River. On display in the courtyard are ancient architectural elements collected from the ancient sites where the mosaics were found. Near the archaeological site is a lookout with a view of the ancient road and the edge of the desert east of Jerusalem.

The site got its name in the Byzantine period, when it was a lookout with a view of the ancient road and the edge of the desert east of Jerusalem. The site is a convenient natural topographic passage between the Jerusalem Mountains and the Dead Sea.

The Inn of the Good Samaritan is situated on a small plateau halfway between Jerusalem and Jericho and the Dead Sea. The ancient road, just like the modern one, takes advantage of a convenient natural topographic passage between the Jerusalem Mountains and the Dead Sea.

The small rise here is built of red rocks that geologists call the Hattura Formation. The name derives from the sound of the site's Arabic name, Hattura. In Arabic, the inn of the Good Samaritan is called Khan al-Hattura. The small ascent to this ridge has been known since Bible days as the Ascent of Adummum (adammum comes from a Hebrew word meaning red), while the Crusader fortress north of the highway was called Castrum Rouge ("Red Fortress").

History of the Site

Bible times – The Bible mentions the Red Ascent as a border point between the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. Then the border went up toward Debir from the Valley of Achor, and it turned northward toward Gilgal, which is before the Ascent of Adummum, which is on the south side of the valley (Joshua 15:7). The valley mentioned here is Wadi Prat (Wadi Qelt), which crosses the Judean Desert north of the ascent.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

The New Testament parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) became widely known in the Christian world. In it, Jesus describes a man on his way from Jerusalem to Jericho who was attacked by thieves, who stripped him, beat him and left him for dead. A passing priest and Levite gave him no help. And then a passing Samaritan went to the man, poured oil on his wounds and bandaged them, put him on his own animal and led him to the nearest inn. The next day he gave the innkeeper two denarii to continue to care for the man, and pledged to pay any extra expenses for his care.

The parable was meant to illustrate the biblical injunction to "love your neighbor as yourself." Some scholars believe that the original parable spoke of the three classes in Jewish society at the time – priests, Levites and Israelites, and was intended to show that it is not a person's status that determines his character. On the contrary, people of supposedly lower status can, by their character and actions, be better people than those of higher social standing.

The parable of the Good Samaritan came to symbolize an act of mercy that seeks no reward.
The road from Jericho to Jerusalem was an important one. Beginning in Bible times, pilgrims from Galilee took it to Jerusalem. In later times, Christian pilgrims used it to reach the baptismal site at the Jordan River, not far from Jericho.

**The Roman period (Second Temple period)**

- Excavations at the site revealed finds from the first century BCE and the first century CE. On the hill to the northwest a palace was discovered from the time of Herod, where the king and his entourage would stop on their way to his palace in Jericho. Remains were found in the palace of a bathhouse, a mosaic floor and rooms decorated in frescoes and stucco. At the end of the Second Temple period, the palace may have been converted into an inn, becoming the backdrop for the parable of the Good Samaritan.

On the slopes north and south of the ancient road, rock-hewn caves were discovered from the Second Temple period. Pottery, glass and metal vessels, lamps, and numerous coins were found in them from that time. In one of the caves, near the road going down to Jericho, a mosaic museum, an audiovisual presentation about the parable of the Good Samaritan is screened.

- The Byzantine (Talmudic) period – Eusebius, who became the bishop of Caesarea in the fourth century CE, described this site in his work Onomasticon, containing names of settlements and geographical locales. “In the lot of the tribe of Judah, a little village, now deserted. The place is called Maleadamim on the road going down from Jerusalem to Jericho.”

Jerome, who lived at the end of the fourth century CE and translated the Bible into Latin, notes that at his time there was a castellum militium, a military fortress, at the site. He says that the place was called Ma‘ale Adummim, “Red Ascent” because of the blood spilled there by robbers. Jerome was the first to associate the Red Ascent with the parable of the Good Samaritan, he seems to have based the connection on an ancient Christian tradition.

During the Ottoman period and thereafter – On the southern side of the Mamluk inn a six-room, rectangular structure was built, which served as a way station and police headquarters. The doorway to this structure was in the southern wall. During the British Mandate it was renovated and manned by police to protect travelers from robbers. This is the structure that now houses the mosaic museum.

**Mosaics in the Land of Israel in the Byzantine Period**

Mosaic art, which began to develop in the Greek world in the eighth century BCE, reached this country in the Hellenistic period (fourth century BCE). By Roman times, magnificent mosaic floors were found throughout the country, with marvelous depictions of biblical and mythological stories, as well as scenes of hunting, war, nature, daily life and more. In the Byzantine period (fourth–seventh centuries CE), mosaic art became widespread and was the main type of flooring for public buildings and even private homes.

**Cruciform lattice**

Mosaic work requires a great deal of skill, involving builders, stone cutters, artists and craftsmen. A medium-sized church floor required more than two million mosaic stones.

Most of the mosaics in early churches featured geometric patterns. From the mid-fifth century, the design concept became more intricate, with complex geometrical designs. The most common design consisted of grape vines creating medallions surrounding depictions of animals, plants, fruit trees and daily agricultural life. Many mosaics depicted daily life in the Nile valley.

Similar mosaics adorned the floors of synagogues. At that time, Jews tended to relax their observance of the commandment prohibiting human and animal imagery, synagogue mosaics throughout the country featured figures of gods and mythological creatures, as well as depictions of the zodiac and of women. In many cases clearly Jewish symbols were added, such as the Ark of the Covenant, the ram’s horn, incense pan, palm frond and citron.

Samaritan mosaics depict many symbols shared with Judaism. However, they frequently also show the Table of the Showbread and trumpets instead of ram’s horns (see the el-Hirbeh synagogue). Samaritan decorations were apparently closer to a literal understanding of the Pentateuch, keeping strictly to the ban on images.

Rabbi Gamaliel said: “Every law which the Samaritans have accepted, they are more punctilious in observing than the Jews” (Tosefta, Pesachim 2, 2).

The Samaritans praying facing Mount Gerizim in their synagogues. Their languages of prayer are Samaritan Hebrew and Aramaic, and their script, as can be seen in the mosaic museum, is early Hebrew. Their robust maintenance of their faith meant that Christianity was late in making inroads into Samaria. In the sixth century CE, Emperor Justinian forcibly converted the Samaritans and closed down their synagogues. As a result, the Samaritans revolted and most of the population was killed.