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The Good Samaritan Inn
Mosaic Museum

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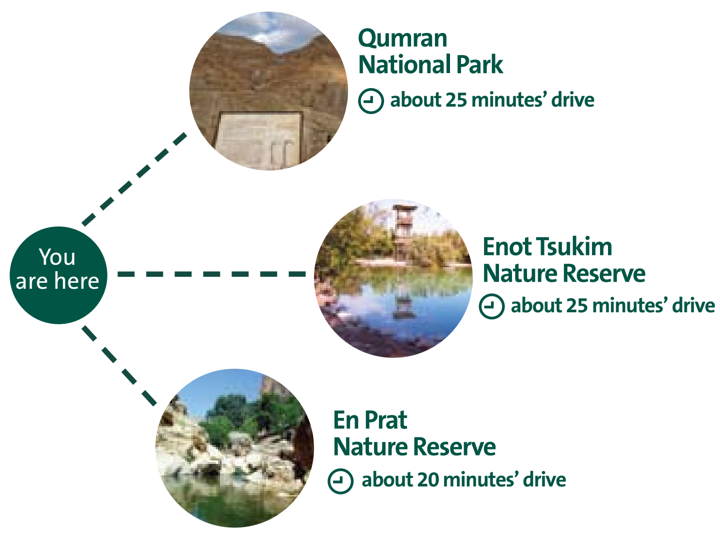

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The Good Samaritan Inn, Tel: 02-6338230

A lioness from the Gaza mosaic

Rules of Conduct

- Do not harm the antiquities: Do not carve on them, walk on them or pour water on them.
- Do not collect "souvenirs" from remains scattered in the area.
- Do not enter places that are off-limits for visitors.
- Do not cross fences or roll stones.
- Please keep the area clean.

Location of the Good Samaritan Inn Mosaic Museum

The museum is on the southern side of the Jerusalem–Jericho road (road 1) between kilometer markers 80 and 81. The interchange affords easy access from whichever direction you approach.

To reserve a guided tour for a group, email: good-shomroni@npa.org.il

Hours:

Daily from 8:00 to 17:00.

During winter time, the site closes one hour earlier.

On Fridays and holiday eves, the site closes one hour earlier.

Entry is permitted up to one hour before closing.

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Welcome to the Inn of the Good Samaritan

Mosaic from Deir Qal'a on display at the museum

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 exibited 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 remnants 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 identified as the inn mentioned in the New Testament parable of the Good Samaritan. The mosaic exhibition was established on the initiative of the archaeologist Dr. Yitzhak Magen, who served as the head of the Judea and Samaria Archaeology Unit.

Good to Know

- You can tour the site with an audio-guide, which provides detailed information about the museum's exhibits.
- Most of the museum is accessible to persons with disabilities.
- A detailed booklet about the mosaics on display is available for a small fee.

Geography

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 Hatrurim Formation. The name derives from the sound of the site's Arabic name, Hatrura. In Arabic, the Inn of the Good Samaritan is called Khan al-Hatrura. The small ascent to this ridge has been known since Bible days as the Ascent of Adummim (*adummim* 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 Adummim, 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 Samaritan room in the Good Samaritan Museum

The cistern at the Inn of the Good Samaritan

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.

An ambo, or preaching lectern, from the Beit Sila Ruins

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 Hellenistic and the Roman periods (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 frescos 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 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 Maledamim 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 militum, 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 conntection on an ancient Christian tradition rooted in Second Temple times.

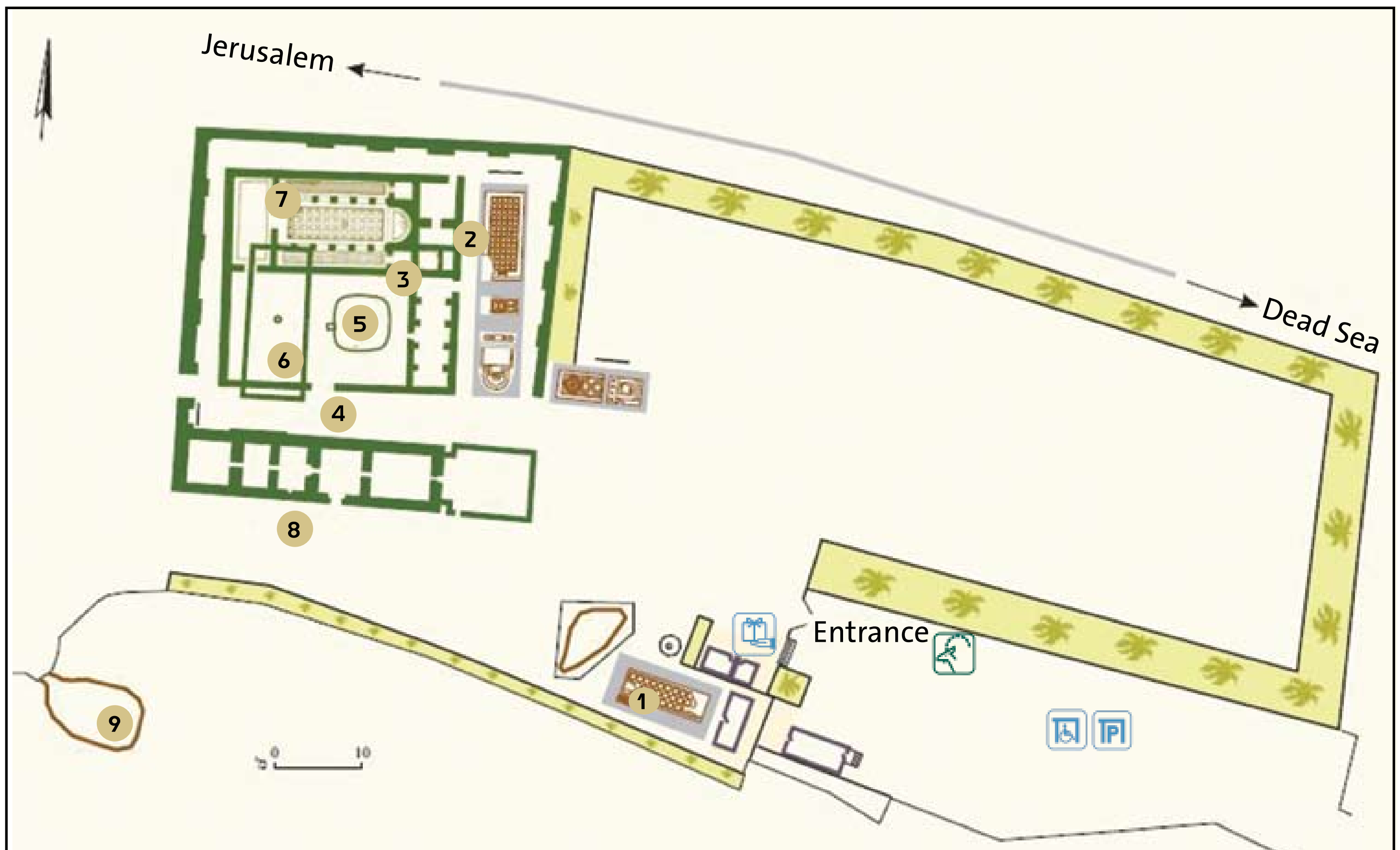
In the sixth century CE an inn for pilgrims was built here. It was square (24 x 26 m) with an interior courtyard surrounded by rooms, in the center of which was a cistern and to the north, a large church. On the east was a courtyard used to house animals. The church had a narthex (vestibule), apparently with three doorways leading to the main hall. Two rows of columns divided the hall into a nave and two aisles. The church had a mosaic floor featuring geometric designs. The mosaic was discovered in 1934, and from then on its stones began to be taken by pilgrims. It has been completely reconstructed.

The inn continued in use in the Early Islamic period. A milestone dated to 720 CE was found near the site.

The Crusader period – During this time the site underwent major development because of the extensive pilgrim traffic on the nearby Jericho road. North of road 1, remains were found of the "red fortress" (Castrum Rouge), built by the Knights Templar from 1169 to 1172. The fortress, which measured 60x70 m, was surrounded by a rock-hewn moat about 4 m deep. Walls and rooms with vaulted ceilings were also built. The entrance to the fortress was in the southwestern wall, approached by a bridge spanning the moat. The fortress was abandoned after the Crusaders were defeated in the Battle of Hattin in 1187 CE.

At the foot of the fortress, where the museum now stands, an inn was built and water cisterns dug. The inn, which Crusader sources called Cisterne Rouge, was square (34x36 m), with a central courtyard surrounded by rooms with cross-vaulted ceilings. The entrance was on the south,

The church



1 Dwelling cave from Second Temple times
2 Remains of Second Temple-era structure
3 Second Temple-era cistern
4 Byzantine-era Inn of the Good Samaritan
5 Cistern from the Byzantine period
6 Cistern from the Crusader period
7 Church of the Good Samaritan
8 Museum of the Good Samaritan
9 Dwelling cave from Second Temple times

facing the ancient road. In addition to the Byzantine-era cistern, which continued in use in the Crusader period, another huge cistern was dug, 16.6 m long, 7 m, wide and 7.5 m deep. The Crusader inn and cisterns apparently continued in use in the Mamluk period (14th–15th centuries).

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 BEC) . 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.

Mosaic from the Brachot Ruins

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 changed and mosaics began to depict figures. 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

Cruciform lattice

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.

Bird in a mosaic from the Beit Sila Ruins