



VIEW NORTH: THE COVERED MOSAIC FLOOR OF THE HAMMAT TIBERIAS (SEVERUS) SYNAGOGUE (CENTER). SEE PHOTOS OF THE FLOOR ON PAGE 172. THE TOMB OF RABBI MEIR (CENTER LEFT) IS ALSO VISIBLE.

BELOW (VIEW NORTHWEST): THE WESTERN SHORE OF THE LAKE JUST NORTH OF HAMMAT TIBERIAS (SEE ABOVE).



BELOW (VIEW EAST): THE VIEW FROM ABOVE HAMMAT TIBERIAS, LOOKING TOWARD THE EASTERN SHORE OF THE LAKE.





VIEW NORTH: THE BUILDING OF HAMAM SULEIMAN (UPPER CENTER WITH WHITE DOME). THE POOLS (CENTER) ARE FED BY HOT SPRINGS AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC. ADDITIONAL POOLS ARE IN THE BUILDING ACROSS THE STREET (UPPER RIGHT).

HAMMAT TIBERIAS

(SEE MAP ON PAGE 151)

Since more than one Hammat exists, this one is called Hammat Tiberias to distinguish it from the others. Archaeologists believe Hammat Tiberias was once a separate city built on the ruins of biblical Hammath (Josh 19:35). Today, Tiberias and Hammat Tiberias have merged into one city (see “Tiberias” on page 163).

There are seventeen thermal springs within Hammat Tiberias National Park. A system of underground channels carries the hot water to the baths at about 140°F (60°C). Many believe the minerals in the water have curative powers that alleviate conditions such as eczema, psoriasis, and fungal infections. Other benefits of the water include naturally detoxing your skin, while high concentrations of silica can soften rough or dry skin. Hot water also relaxes the mind and helps with blood circulation. People come from all over to bathe in the mineral-rich thermal springs.

THE SEVERUS SYNAGOGUE

The synagogue went through three building stages. The first was built about 230 AD over the ruins of an earlier public building. The second is from the third and fourth centuries AD. The beautiful mosaic floor comes from this time (see the photos on pages 172 and 174). An inscription found in the excavations contains the name Severus, which is how the synagogue got its name. The translated Greek inscription reads: “Severus, disciple of the most illustrious patriarchs completed [the synagogue]. Blessing on him and on Loullos the supervisor.” The third synagogue was built after an early fifth-century AD earthquake destroyed the second one. It was a larger structure with two rows of columns that divided its main hall into three spaces, similar to other Galilean synagogues. The third synagogue was in use until the eleventh century AD.



VIEW SOUTHWEST: THE MOSAIC FLOOR OF THE HAMMAT TIBERIAS (SEVERUS) SYNAGOGUE. THE ROUND PANEL IN THE MIDDLE DEPICTS A ZODIAC WHEEL SURROUNDING HELIOS, THE SUN GOD (SEE PHOTO BELOW).

BELOW (VIEW NORTHEAST): THE MOSAIC FLOOR IS PART OF THE SECOND SYNAGOGUE (THIRD TO FOURTH CENTURIES AD). THE SOUTHERN PANEL (TOP) DEPICTS THE HOLY ARK AND TWO SEVEN-BRANCHED CANDELABRAS.





VIEW SOUTH: THE "ROMAN SPRING" AND THE REMAINS OF A ROMAN BATHHOUSE. THE PARK WAS CLOSING THE DAY I WAS THERE, AND I COULDN'T WALK AROUND TO GET A BETTER PHOTO. THE INSET PHOTO IS FROM THE PARK BROCHURE.

TOMB OF RABBI MEIR

Rabbi Meir was a fourth-generation Tana (Jewish sage) and one of the most respected during the codification of the Mishnah (139–163 AD). His tomb looks down on Hammat Tiberias next to the Sea of Galilee (see the top photo on page 174). A synagogue was built over the tomb, divided into Ashkenazi (blue dome) and Spharadic (white dome) areas. According to legend, Rabbi Meir was buried standing up, waiting for the Messiah.

The Romans outlawed the study of the Torah after the Bar Kochba revolt (132–135 AD). Rabbi Meir and four others continued studying secretly before they were found out and escaped to Babylon. After Jewish persecution died down, Rabbi Meir returned to Israel to reestablish the Sanhedrin and renew Jewish learning. He was one of the sages responsible for the continuation of the Jewish people.

THE GREAT HEALER

A life devoted to Torah study, while important, does not rise to the level of peace and healing available through Jesus Christ. Elder Gong highlighted aspects of Christ's healing that go beyond forgiving sin:

Jesus Christ's Atonement can deliver and redeem us from sin. But Jesus Christ also intimately understands our every pain, affliction, sickness, sorrow, separation. In time and eternity, His triumph over death and hell can make all things right. He helps heal the broken and disparaged, reconcile the angry and divided, comfort the lonely and isolated, encourage the uncertain and imperfect, and bring forth miracles possible only with God.

We sing hallelujah and shout hosanna! With eternal power and infinite goodness, in God's plan of happiness all things can work together for our good. We can face life with confidence and not fear.¹



VIEW WEST: TOMB OF RABBI MEIR (CENTER LEFT) AND THE HAMMAT TIBERIAS NATIONAL PARK, INCLUDING THE ENTRANCE (BOTTOM RIGHT) AND POOLS (BOTTOM CENTER). THE SEVERUS SYNAGOGUE IS BEHIND THE TREES (BOTTOM LEFT).

BELOW (VIEW SOUTHWEST): THE THERMAL BATHS OF HAMMAT TIBERIAS IN 1925. THE WHITE DOME (CENTER) SITS ATOP THE HAMAM SULEIMAN BUILDING² (SEE THE PHOTO ON PAGE 171).





VIEW NORTH: THE WESTERN SHORE OF THE SEA OF GALILEE WITH TIBERIAS (TOP RIGHT) AND HAMMAT TIBERIAS (BOTTOM RIGHT). THE TOMB OF RABBI MEIR (CENTER RIGHT) AND THE SEVERUS SYNAGOGUE (BOTTOM RIGHT) ARE ALSO VISIBLE.

ENDNOTES

1 Gerrit W. Gong, “All Things for Our Good,” *Liahona* (May 2024), Gospel Library. Elder Gong taught: “Left on our own, we may not know our own good. When ‘I choose me,’ I am also choosing my own limitations, weaknesses, inadequacies. Ultimately, to do the most good, we must be good. Since none save God is good, we seek perfection in Jesus Christ. We become our truest, best selves only as we put off the natural man or woman and become a child before God.” He also taught the following: “Lived with faith, trials and sacrifices we would never choose can bless us and others in ways never imagined. We increase faith and trust in the Lord that all things can work together for our good as we gain eternal perspective; understand our trials may be ‘but for a small moment’; recognize affliction can be consecrated for our gain; acknowledge accidents, untimely death, debilitating illness, and disease are part of mortality; and trust loving Heavenly Father does not give trials to punish or judge. He would not give a stone to someone asking for bread nor a serpent to one asking for a fish. . . . When we trust God and His love for us, even our greatest heartbreaks can, in the end, work together for our good.”

2 The Hamam Suleiman building was built in 1780. It was a Turkish bathhouse in use until the 1940s. It has since been reconstructed and houses a small museum displaying artifacts found in the Hammat excavations. If you compare the black-and-white photo from 1925 with the photos taken of the area today, you begin to get an idea of the progress the Jews have made in transforming the land into a place of beauty. Samuel Clements (Mark Twain) observed the following about the area after his visit to Israel in 1867: “These unpeopled deserts, these rusty mounds of barrenness, that never, never, never do shake the glare from their harsh outlines, and fade and faint into vague perspective; that melancholy ruin of Capernaum; this stupid village of Tiberias, slumbering under its six funereal plumes of palms.” He wasn’t very complimentary of the land in the 1800s but described what he saw. A lot changed in the 1900s, especially after 1948.