

The most arresting feature of the synagogue is this elaborate mosaic in three panels from the fourth-century C.E. phase, called the Synagogue of Severos, after its major donor. The mosaic embodies some of the finest Jewish art in Israel. At the bottom, near the ancient entrance, a set of Greek inscriptions honors the donors of the mosaic. To the right and left of the donors' names stand two lions. The large middle panel has at its corners four female figures representing the seasons of the year (see Slide 83). In the round medallion set into the square panel one sees a full zodiac with all 12 signs (see Slide 82). A later wall has bisected the panel. The zodiac is to be read counterclockwise with its first panel (center left) at the very top. In the center of the zodiac, a fine representation of Helios, or Sol Invictus (the Unconquerable Sun), with rays streaming from his head, drives his chariot directly at the observer (see Slide 84 for a close-up view). The top panel depicts the Torah shrine, two menoroth and other holy objects (see Slide 85).

For other depictions of Helios, see Slides 120 and 131.