

June 13--Masada (some climb, others museum), Oasis Ein Gedi, Swim Dead Sea

This morning **Perry Myers, Sr** prayed for us

Hebrew words: **Hot –ZILL-ooH** Help! (this is funny—in true need I would think the sound of the voice would say it all—just like we understand the language of cats, dogs and cattle in times like these; maybe it is so we can understand shopkeepers if they ask if they can help us find something—although the sound of a polite question mark is universally understood as well)

Down by the Dead Sea, with the elevation well below sea level, there is **more oxygen** in the air, **more bromine** in the air, and people feel relaxed.

Today we will first go to **Masada**. We will be divided into two groups, like sheep and goats. One group will take the Snake Trail up to Masada; the other will look at the museum and shops below, and then take the cable car to the top, looking down at our hikers below. Steve and I were in the chicken group (yesterday's hot climb up Bet She'an was enough to tell us that we couldn't do the Masada).

There was a warning to take TWO bottles of water—one would not be enough. As it happened, *Perry Myers, Sr.* nearly didn't make it (he had had a joint replacement) but he finally did make the entire climb. *Perry Myers, Jr.* has a wonderful way with children—even though he didn't know the language, he comforted a wailing child along the trail, and encouraged her to take just a few more steps with her mother, and then some more... she made it up, too. I have seen him other times—he just has a calming, encouraging presence.

The top of Masada is only 45' above sea level. The surface of the Sea and its shores is 1349' below sea level.

During Jesus' day, the size of the Dead Sea is the same as it is today. The Sea has shrunk from previous centuries, and **a land bridge present in Jesus' day is exposed again now.** That land bridge is partly why Masada was chosen for a fortress—to protect the roads, and the farmers and traders of those days. King Herod made part of his money by selling salt.

Masada was the mountain fortress constructed by King Herod that was occupied by Jewish rebels after the Jewish revolt in the first century. The rebels defended themselves from a Roman army for months. When it appeared that the Romans would finally conquer the fortress hundreds of rebels committed suicide rather than be taken prisoner by the Romans. Although this fort is not mentioned in the Bible it does give insight into the Roman military method as well as the life of King Herod and his construction.

Source: <http://www.ebibleteacher.com/imagehtml/masada.html>

Although Masada has a grisly past, today grand operas (this year Aida) are offered there at night, along the base, with 7000 seats, fireworks, and special lighting effects. Ronny Simon took his wife to the opera—quite pricey, and he doesn't really like opera, but he definitely enjoyed this one because of where it was and how they did everything.

So there were 11 of us who stayed sheepishly behind to see the museum and a video below while the 20 others (including Ronny) climbed the Masada on a trail like wild goats. Ronny told Kathy Larsen to head for the sky lift at a certain time so that we would be able to see the hikers, and hopefully meet the hikers at the top without either group waiting too much.

It was fun seeing our hikers as we went on the sky lift. It was really hot—there were also some women in long black dresses hiking the trail (Ultra-Orthodox women, I think). As we waited on top, we saw a Dead Sea starling—black, but with an orange band on its wings. Later we saw some Dead Sea ravens—much bigger than ordinary ravens. Perry Owen, Sr. just about didn't make it up, but he did, and we all cheered for him. It was a very hard climb. Ronny said this was probably going to be his last. The path is 17% elevation. *Niki Wulf*, who climbed it and also walked down, said she had done the Grand Canyon—but Masada was a harder hike.

Best Season: Winter, Spring, Fall **(you will note they omitted Summer!—when our group climbed!!!)**

Users: Hikers

Hike Summary: The east entrance to Masada has an aerial tram running to the top of the mountain fortress. This is, of course, the easy way up. Most tourists to Masada use the aerial tram for the roundtrip, many for the trip up only, returning down the Snake Path, and relatively few use the Snake Path for both up and down. Any fit hiker should have no problem making it up and back on the Snake Path. A note of warning: the Snake Path is a narrow, steep, climb up a shear mountain face, and is entirely exposed to the sun. Be prepared by wearing a hat and bringing sufficient water. Finally, start early before the heat of the day – and it gets very hot here during most of the year.

From the east visitor center, cross the access road, and follow the signs across the wadi and past the ancient Roman fort. The trail begins to ascend as soon as you are across the wadi, although the first leg of approximately 0.5 mi is not steep. The grade increases after that and begins switching back before you are above the loose rock at the base of Masada. Once above the loose rock, much of the trail becomes steps cut into the shear face of the rock wall that made Masada such a formidable fortress. The top of Masada is 1200' above the trailhead.

At the top of the mountain, one can spend several hours touring the ancient ruins. Don't miss Herod's Palace and baths at the north end of the mountain, the Roman siege ramp on the west side of the mountain, and the cisterns throughout.

Source: <http://www.yourhikes.com/HikePages/HikePage.aspx?HikeID=1141>

In 70 AD, about the time the Temple was destroyed by the Romans, Jewish rebels fled to Masada. The Romans put up a siege, and conquered. Josephus told the story, based on 2 women and a few children who hidden in cisterns and survived the slaughter. When the Roman conquest seemed imminent, the leader said to the people: Do you want your wives and children raped, and sent into slavery? Then let the Romans find no living people when they come, as come they will. The men drew lots, writing their names on potsherds, to see who would be the last 10, and then the last man to be alive before the Romans came in.

We saw some of these potsherds with names in the museum. But the most interesting thing to me in the museum was a Roman soldier's sandal. Look at your hand. Look at how long it is from the heel of your palm to end of fingers—that was the length of the sole. It was narrow, too—put down your little finger—the remaining fingers are the width of the shoe. Look at the width of your thumb—that was the toe of the shoe. Those

Roman soldiers were short and small. In England, by the town of Bath, we saw a Roman suit of armor—it, too, was for a short, small individual.

From on top of Masada, we could see the land bridge: on the other side is Persia. Herod built a great palace here. On the west side (which is a shorter distance up), the Romans built a siege ramp.

Masada is one of 3 big symbols for Israel today. The Western Wall and the Holocaust Museum are the other two. Today, members of some units of the [Israel Defense Forces](#), climb Masada and declare "[Masada Shall Not Fall Again](#)", in Hebrew, at their graduation from basic training.

At the time of Herod and Jesus, **Jewish society was split into 4 major groups:**

- The majority were **Pharisee** (religious, but not nationals). Solomon and Isaiah had invited *all* nations to the Temple.
- **Sadducees** were the 2nd group: their positions were given to them by the Romans
- The 3rd group were the **Essenes**, who lived by the Dead Sea, and wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls. They were essentially pacifist, but they did join in war. However, when they lost, they hid.
- The 4th group were those who wanted a Judaism free of the excesses of the Pharisees and Sadducees—and they were nationalists. Under the Romans, Israel had no standing army, but these were the **Zealots**, and they were rebels.

Herod was disliked in Jerusalem, and needed a shelter in the desert—but he presented his fortress to his Roman leaders as an opportunity to protect the eastern border against Persia for the benefit of Rome. So the fortress was built to “guard” the land bridge, for intelligence. But the fortress later became a base for counter-attack.

In 6 AD, Judea was declared a province, and needed another census. Some Roman governors were ex-slaves, but Judea was a difficult province. Caligula ordered his image put in the Holy of Holies.

At this time Britain was rebelling from Rome under Queen Boadicea. The Germans were rebelling against Rome. In 64 AD a Roman leader “mooned” the Jewish people celebrating the Sabbath. To the Jews, it was now their time for revolt.

With Rome under attack—Britain, Germany—the Zealots thought the time was right for revolt. Rome responded. Rome brought the 2nd Legion all the way from Britain, and the 15th Legion all the way from Romania. King Agrippa II, in Caesarea Philippi, sent his legion to crush the rebellion.

Masada is not in layers. There were **cisterns**—when it rains it really does. Up on top, at the time of Herod’s fortress, there was a **market garden—people carried dirt up there** to make this garden. Herod’s fortress involved a quarry—carving the hard limestone dolomite. All the fortress was surrounded by walls. Why? The instruction

book for Romans was followed. Nearly all Roman towns looked alike in public constructions.

Later, the Zealots lived within the walls. Timber helped fortify the walls against battering rams. The rainy season is November-April.

On top of Masada, we went into buildings and saw original plaster and paint on the walls—even given the desert preservation, seeing art, in its original place, from 2000 years ago was amazing! The painters used lots of greens and reds, but no yellows or blues. Plaster insulates, and makes the rooms cool.

As we walked around the top of Masada, we saw an Israeli fighter jet, an F-16. Modern stories and ancient history are together.

Josephus was quite a writer. He was appointed historian for Rome. One story had to do with the generals appointed by Caesar. If the emperor fell ill, the generals wanted to be nearby. Once there were 4 generals, all near a sick emperor. Galva was the general from Germany. The Spanish general killed Galva. Then the Balkan general killed the Spanish one. Then the Judean general, Vespasian, headed for Rome, took over, and conquered Jerusalem utterly, in 69 AD. He did nothing in or to Masada at the time, but he allowed people to enter Jerusalem—but not leave, so that the people in Jerusalem would starve and then riot among themselves. In 70 AD the Temple was destroyed. Masada was still in peace.

As we walked around, we saw places that have been left un-excavated. Although Masada was identified in 1842, it wasn't really excavated until an Israeli expedition from 1963-1965. Knowing that new methods will be developed, archeologists of today always leave at least 20% untouched, waiting for future archeologists.

The first group known to live atop Masada was some Jewish Maccabeans (the 500 years between the Old and New Testament).

Then Herod wanted a resort/fortress and did his great building program (he was the one who wanted to kill the baby Jesus; we know a little better when Jesus was born because we know King Herod died sometime around March/April of 4 BC (historian Josephus wrote that he died after a lunar eclipse, and those dates are findable for scientists today). King Herod the Great built a lot of cities—this Masada was just one among many. He also rebuilt the Temple—the one the Romans later destroyed in 70 AD, and the one where the curtain was torn in the Holy of Holies by the earthquake when Christ died on the cross (Christ was crucified, technically courtesy of the Romans, but truly because of the sins of all humanity, including my own).

The Jewish Zealots came to Masada sometime after King Herod died (he died in 4 BC), and they added a cleansing facility (a mikveh, allowing full immersion), and converted a stable into a synagogue.

As we walked around the palaces and buildings on top of Masada, occasionally we would see a black reconstruction line—everything below the black line was original.

Now why would the Romans have bothered to attack Masada? It really didn't protect anything—that was just King Herod's excuse for building a hideaway for himself. The reason probably was that the Romans wanted to prove that they would come and hunt you down if you rebelled against Rome. Jerusalem was gone, but the Zealots, with their home camp up on Masada, had made raids against the Romans and generally stirred up people against the Romans.

The Snake Path, coming from the East, climbs the highest part of Masada. But the western end of Masada isn't so high above the surrounding land, and the Romans built their siege ramp up that side.

Standing on top of Masada, we looked down on some big, diamond-shaped earthen works far below. These were the Roman camps. They used 7000 slaves every day, getting their own water from the Oasis of En Gedi nearby, building the ramp up to Masada. The defenders could see all this during the months of building the ramp, and fortified only that part of the wall where the ramp would come. The Romans used psychological warfare, too—they built 3' high stone walls around their camps—but from above, there is loss of perspective, and those walls looked like they were 7-9' tall.

At the beginning of Passover, in April of 73 AD, the Zealots made a decision. According to Josephus, who listened to the stories of 2 women who survived by hiding in a cistern, Eleazar, the leader of the synagogue, gathered the men. He presented the decision for mass suicide. Not all immediately agreed. Then the Romans set the wooden wall on fire, and the wind helped the Romans. The Zealots fought for one day. Then Eleazar presented his suicide challenge again, and this time the answer was 'yes'. They killed the women and children first. Although Judaism prohibits suicide, if I give you permission to take my life, then according to rabbinical scholars it somehow doesn't count as suicide. The plea was to end as free people. Masada is now seen as a symbol of freedom, the very essence of a nation. They chose not to live as slaves and under the domination of Rome. Ronny reminded us of the Dead Sea Scrolls, found not far from here. The prophet Ezekiel, taken to Babylon, saw a vision of a Valley of Dry Bones.

Ronny Simon says that modern Israel IS the fulfillment of the Valley of Dry Bones.

Israel's symbol **of national existence** is **Masada**.

Israel's symbol of **religious existence** is the **Wailing Wall**.

Israel's symbol of **human existence** is the **Holocaust Museum**.

As we stood atop Masada, and considered these things, we noticed the man-made ramp. It doesn't go to the very top because it was dropped 60 feet by an earthquake in the 1800's. We saw Dead Sea Ravens (much bigger than ordinary ravens) soaring with flexed wings.

Although today is indeed summer, and the guidebooks say that June is not a good time for hiking, Ronny Simon said today is “more pleasant” than any day in June that he remembers. Looking down from the sky-lift, we saw girls, dressed in long black skirts, hiking Masada. Up above, we visited with them: they were Orthodox girls from a Jewish school in Toronto, Canada.

The Dead Sea today has receded back to the margins it had when Jesus lived, showing the land bridge to Persia and everything. The spa at the Ein Gedi Kibbutz, where we are staying, is only 18 years old. In 1993, the Dead Sea was right close to the spa; today we take a shuttle down to the beach, about a mile away. The kibbutz itself was founded in 1953, and originally supposed to be only for agriculture, but today it is a spa and botanical garden, and goes with the tourism.

After we left Masada, we drove to the **Oasis of En Gedi**. Here David and 600 of his men were hiding from King Saul (**I Samuel 23, 24**). We considered **Saul’s great opportunity vs. David’s great opportunity**. Saul thought that David was trapped, and Saul took his whole army to go after David and his men. David learned of this, and prayed to God. God said yes, Saul will come, and yes, your leaders will betray you. Saul and David were on opposite sides of the mountain at En Gedi. Saul had mobilized his whole army, during wartime, to stop what they were doing and go after David. David was in hiding in the strongholds of En Gedi. Saul took 3000 elites to chase David and his 600 ragtag soldiers. Saul was human, and entered a cave to relieve himself—the same cave in which David was hiding. **Just because God seems to open a door doesn’t mean we should go through it.** David’s men told David: God gave this chance to you! But David did not kill Saul—although he cut off the hem of Saul’s robe, possibly to show that he *could* have killed King Saul right then. However, David’s conscience began bothering him: he had shown disrespect to Saul. The Bible says, “The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord”. David said to Saul, “Look, here is the hem of your robe. Let the Lord judge between us.” We shall be known by our fruits. King Saul said to David, “My son! May the Lord reward you.” **Saul’s view of God** was that God was on Saul’s side, to give Saul stuff. **David’s view of God** was that God is to be served.

We climbed in the Oasis of En Gedi, in the area where all this story had happened, and we went to the waterfall that was up in the cliffs.

Then we returned to the Ein Gedi Kibbutz, and we went swimming in the Dead Sea. It was really a lot of fun. It reminded me of the Great Salt Lake in Utah, but there were no Bonneville Salt Flats around it—instead, there was uneven land, and warnings about sinkholes if you went off any paths. Also, the Dead Sea is much saltier: around every rock or piling that stuck up out of the water, there were lots of crystals of salt. But the salt is not simply table salt. There are many minerals in it, and even poisonous ones. We waded out, and then essentially sat down in the water, leaning back—you were floating! Even if I TRIED to stand up (the bottom had dropped away so you wouldn’t be touching bottom) I couldn’t—Chuck Larsen Jr. said you could, but it took a lot of effort and balance to do it. While waiting for the shuttle to go back to the kibbutz, we visited with a very pleasant German couple.

This evening, after supper, Ronny agreed to meet and simply talk with any who wished. Steve and I wished. I think most of us came—we sat in chairs in a conference room at the kibbutz. It was ok that I took notes—but what he said would be from him, not the tour company, just him. He is recently retired from the Israeli army—he was in intelligence.

- Herod made several fortresses: Masada was the nicest.
- Seeing other fortresses, like Herodian, would involve use of passports.
- 25% of the country is in Palestinian hands. Nobody knows the legal status.
- Hamas is in Gaza; the PLO is in the West Bank.
- If Israel knows somebody is planning to shoot rockets at Israel, “we go in and take care of it”.
- For the past 6-7 years Gaza and the West Bank have been fairly peaceful. But Ronny is afraid it won’t be quiet for too much longer.
- “Settlements” are third-generation towns of 30,000 to 40,000 people.
- Netanyahu is generally a conservative hawk, but he is trying to make coalitions.
- After WWII, most of Galilee and Gaza were divided into 6 pieces, with some going to Jews, and some to Arabs.
- No matter what, it is hard.
- Jerusalem is very tough to decide—maybe it needs to be under international law. Who gets Temple Mount? It is sacred to Jews, Muslims and Christians.
- Who knows? Talk is easy.
- Maybe there can be tunnels under the Mount to accommodate Jews.
- Muslims will NEVER accept a Jewish state in Arab country. The Koran teaches that Jews are only good for slaves. (Then why does Israel always beat them?)
- Some issues CANNOT be solved.
- *Katie Mines* apologized for President Obama’s recent proposed solution to Israeli problems: that the Jews give back all land acquired since 1967 to the Palestinians. *I seconded her comment*—it really irritated me last year as an American when the Mexican president presumed to tell the United States how to handle illegal immigration when Mexico has even harsher laws protecting themselves, and I don’t want the USA to be telling other nations how to behave and do business either.
- *Ronny* said Israel may very well have to go along with President Obama’s proposal. The main thing is to avoid bloodshed. In the past, there have been many concessions by Israel—and Muslims see that as weakness and push even harder. However, the reason Israel may need to go along with it is to maintain a Jewish majority—to keep enough Jews in Israel to maintain a majority.
- Officially the British held this land for the Jews. In 1918 the British were given a mandate to establish a homeland for the Jews.
- Ronny said that he prefers democracy, and welcoming people. It is unrealistic and even immoral to deport Palestinians. Maybe encourage, maybe offer money to leave. But to drive into a village, load people in trucks—NO. That’s wrong.
- Most Palestinians in Gaza are originally Sudanese or other Arabs.
- Some West Bank people have lived in the area since the 7th century AD.

- Ronny thinks all will be peaceful, or reasonably so, until September, 2011, when people go to the United Nations. IF Palestine becomes a state, then they can sign treaties, like with Iran, saying if anybody attacks you we will attack them. The best deal would be if Jordan would take control. In 1987 we begged Egypt to take Gaza—they didn't. Right now Israel is in control, and is indeed occupying. The Arabs feel that Israel is trying to conquer all the land from the Tigris to the Euphrates, and as proof they show the two stripes on the Israeli flag.
- Ronny feels that Masada is his people. In the Bible, the Jews were the only ones given land. But Muslims believe the true text gives the blessing to Ishmael.
- The Muslims are growing. They have large families. In Europe, the average number of children is 0.7 per family. The average size of Muslim families is 9.5. Arafat said that we are going to win through the womb.
- Ronny says Israel needs to be, and is, in a defensive position. It is not Arab, it is religion. Today Israel has the Iron Dome protection system against rockets.
- Israel may indeed need to become geographically smaller.
- Israel's strongest allies still include the USA, including President Obama.
- There is talk of more killings in Afghanistan and in Yemen since President Obama was elected. But every president has a right to try. So far nobody has succeeded. How do you even talk with a nation with mothers willing to send all their children to be suicide bombers??
- The USA, Australia, New Zealand, and yes, Germany are allies of Israel.
- The demilitarized zone is all of Sinai. There are no Israelis there.
- Israel does have a sophisticated navy, which can go where they wish. They have no aircraft carriers, but they do have submarines.
- Israeli's keep people in the military reserve until age 40.
- The last time Israel mobilized, in 2006, more people came than ever before. There was 110% participation—they did not even have enough sleeping bags for all the people showing up to fight.
- Arabs are not poor. Nearly all have Internet. If you Google, there are 10,000 anti-Israeli sites and only 1,000 pro-Israel sites. *Note: when we came home, we opened a letter from Jews for Jesus, an organization we have long supported. They said their site had been hacked, and filled with anti-Semitic writing and pornography. They apologized for needing to close their website down.*
- Once Muslims are in a majority in a country, they are commanded to take over. This happened in Kosovo.
- How did Israel win in 1948? They were motivated, and the Palestinians were quarreling among themselves, as they did for centuries.
- When and where did Ronny learn the Bible? He did in public schools in Israel; the Bible is studied, as history and as stories. In the Orthodox schools, they only teach the Talmud, no mathematics. Ronny says he likes to read history, for fun.
- Pastor Chuck says the Bible does explain things. Ronny says that is true, but there are also other beliefs and un-beliefs.
- Katie Mines said if we contact our congressmen, to telephone, not e-mail.
- Ronny said please talk to people. Evangelical Christians know little about Israel.
- **Chestnut Livermore said we gotta pray for these Arab peoples.**