

PILGRIMAGE IN THE HOLY LAND: ISRAEL
CHAPTER 5 – Dead Sea – Masada – Ein Gedi

Morning at the Dead Sea



Sunrise on the Dead Sea. Sun rises over the eastern hills of ancient Moab – modern country of Jordan. The view is from the Leonardo Hotel on the Dead Sea. The Dead Sea is both the lowest point in Eurasia at 418 meters (1,371 ft) below sea level and falling, and the deepest hypersaline lake in the world at 330 m (1,083 ft) deep and 799 m (2,621 ft) below sea level. It is also one of the saltiest bodies of water on Earth with a salinity of about 30%. This is about 8.6 times greater than the average ocean salinity. It measures 67 kilometers (42 mi) long, up to 18 kilometers (11 mi) wide, and is located on the border between the West Bank, Israel, and Jordan, and lies in the Jordan Rift Valley. The main tributary is the Jordan River.



Getting ready to float in the Dead Sea. Tourists flock to its shores to test its incredibly buoyant waters. The lowest body of water in the world, it has such a high salt content it is impossible to sink. The water is so mineral-laden that it is around 26% solid. The therapeutic qualities of the water and its mud have been touted since ancient times, and spas are dotted along its shores.



Stanley tests the saline waters of the Dead Sea, being careful not to get the salty water into his mouth or eyes. Stanley floats effortlessly, like a cork, in the salty water. There are no fish in the salty waters.



Sign on the beach: “Go in Peace”



View of the Dead Sea from the Leonardo Hotel.

The Jordan River is the only major stream flowing into Dead Sea. There are no outlet streams. The water level is receding to alarming levels due mostly to irrigation of the Jordan River, both in Israel & Jordan. Plans are being discussed to dig a channel from the Red Sea, Gulf of Aqaba in order to bring it back to past levels.

It is important to read Ezekiel’s prophecy regarding this body of water in Ezekiel

47:7-11 – “When I arrived there, I saw a great number of trees on each side of the river. He said to me, “This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, where it enters the Sea. When it empties into the Sea, the water there becomes fresh. Swarms of living creatures will live wherever the river flows. There will be large numbers of fish, because this water flows there and makes the salt water fresh; so where the river flows everything will live. Fishermen will stand along the shore; from En Gedi to En Eglaim there will be places for spreading nets. The fish will be of many kinds—like the fish of the Great Sea. But the swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they will be left for salt.”

[Bus Ride to Masada -- from Leonardo Hotel, south end]

Marian: “...feeling totally blessed with this group. But I want to help you understand and appreciate that if I do something a little quicker than it seems it should be done – it’s for your own good.” (laughter)

Paul: “Thanks, Mommy.”

Marian: “Where did you hear that before? “OK, so we’re going to drive along the shore of the Dead Sea. Right now, we’re next to the pans – the area that is used to take out the minerals. The southern end is much shorter than the northern end, so we use this end for taking out the minerals. And in a moment, you’ll see a canal on the right-hand side that actually brings water from the northern side, because this side originally had already dried up. We had taken out all the water. So that’s our major mineral reserve. [The entire southern end of the Dead Sea has big evaporation pans that is used to get the industrial chemicals potash, caustic soda, magnesium metal, and sodium chloride.]

“The only other thing that we had was copper, but the mines are closed right now. Otherwise, Israel is a country that has nothing going for it. And I beg you to remember that. If you saw agriculture – when we drove along the coast, and when we drove along the Jordan Valley – this is all new. This wasn’t here a hundred years ago. It’s just to show you what can happen when a prophecy comes true.

“As you probably know, there are two promised lands: the one here, and America. And it’s a little bit hard sometimes to choose between them. But, we are living in God’s land, and we see amazing things. Someone mentioned a few days ago – and I just want to say, ‘How can we not see that we are going through momentous times?’”

“And that brings us to the subject we’re going to start with – the fortress of Masada. First of all, Masada, it comes from the Hebrew word ‘metzuda’ – which means a fortress. It is a natural fortress. It’s a rock, and you see the rocks on the left are 400 meters above us. When we go on Masada, we’ll be at sea level. Like I said before, you don’t need sunscreen down here (at Dead Sea level) – anybody has a problem with the sun, when we get to Masada at sea level, if you use sunscreen, take that with you.”

Pilgrim: “Are we going to the baptismal site today.”

Marian: “Yes, of course. That’s why I need your cooperation today. It’s a new site, a national park. Now, national parks are not allowed to close before four o’clock. They’re not allowed to. But that’s a new site, and I guess there was no one there, so they just closed up. That was not something I was expecting to have happened. Usually, it closes around four o’clock, and the site is vacated by five o’clock. That’s the general idea.

“So, anyway, what we’re going to do is: we’re doing Masada, we’re doing Ein Gedi. And at Ein Gedi, we’re going to have sandwich lunch to save time. And if I see it’s getting late, we’ll just take the sandwiches on the bus. And from Ein Gedi, we’re going straight to the site where the baptism happened. And I’ll explain why – for me – that is such an important site, and something that I don’t want you guys to miss. And then we’ll come back and do Qumran, which is interesting, but doesn’t have the same importance spiritually that the Jordan River will have for me, and maybe probably for you – for everyone.

“So, we’re starting out with Masada. And I’m going to need your cooperation to keep together with me, and get through things in the time I’ve allotted for that. So, Masada is a fortress. And it’s a natural fortress, way up in the mountains, on top of the plateau. But all four sides of the rock are disconnected from this mountain range. So it is a natural fortress. And the person who built the fortress there was a man called Herod the Great – to differentiate from the ‘not-so-great.’ He was king of Judea from the year 40 (BCE). Now, king of Judea – we already know – was the area of the tribe of Judah. You remember the one tribe that survived – because the Levites don’t have territory – so the one territorial tribe that survives is Judah. Not by chance – the prophecy says, ‘the scepter shall never depart from Judah.’ [Genesis 49:10] Judah is the tribe that survives. And so the land became to be called Judea. Some of you may have been asleep when I explained that yesterday. So I just went over it again very briefly.

“Herod was king of Judea, but he was not a Judean. He was Jewish, but not Judean. His mother was Nabatean. His mother was a princess of the Nabateans;

their capital is Petra. And the Nabateans are the ancient people of Edom, which – when the Judeans were taken off into exile – came into this area and became known as the Idumeans. If you’ve never heard of it, forget it right now. But if you have, now you know who I’m talking about. Herod belonged to the Idumeans, and the Idumeans were converted to the Jewish religion in the year 165 (BCE).

“So I’m using the word Judea as a national entity – a region, and the name of a nation, and I’m using it as a religion – Jewish. This is the case for the Jewish people: we are a people with a religion. It’s not like America – you can be American, but all different religions. If you’re Judean, you are Jewish. Herod was Jewish. He was converted into the religion. But his tendencies were Greco-Roman, as I explained to you at Caesarea. And so the people hated him. But they also hated him because he killed off the rightful kings of Judea – the Hasmoneans. The Hasmoneans were the very ones who kicked out the Greeks, took back autonomy, and once again -- in the year 165 (BCE) – there was an autonomous Judean kingdom. It ends a hundred years later with the sons of the Hasmoneans rowing (fighting) between them. And that’s how Herod gets to the throne.

“If anyone is superbly interested in the story, we can at another time maybe take an evening and sit and talk at length. (Something that does not happen) But for now, what we need to know is that he was totally hated by the population because of his tendencies towards the Greco-Roman world, and because he killed off the Hasmoneans. He married a Hasmonean princess – a Jewish princess. Not a good idea, by the way. I always tell people, ‘Do not marry a Jewish princess.’ (laughter) But he did, and he loved her – according to his biographer. But he was jealous. And I now have to tell you that Herod was totally paranoid – completely paranoid. You’ll learn what paranoid means today when we talk about Herod. He thought she’d been unfaithful to him – and, even after she had borne him children, which were going to be the continuing dynasty – he killed her (Mariamne). He also killed the high priest, who was her brother – Aristobulus. The people totally hated him for that. And then he killed his own children.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herod_the_Great

“So when Herod dies, there’s no one strong enough to take over from him in that there was no strong Herodian ruler. And from there, things go downhill, until the Roman governors that are brought in to rule. Herod ruled with the backing of Rome – that’s the most important thing I need to tell you. Without Rome, Herod could never have been king – the people hated him. Herod ruled with the backing of Rome, the Romans had already conquered the country in 63 BCE (or BC) in the time of Pompey. The people hated the Romans. The Romans had no understanding of the Jewish people. And in the year 66 (CE), everything erupted into an enormous rebellion. We call it the Great Revolt. The rebellion of 66 was a

country-wide rebellion against the Romans. When anybody rebels against Rome, they simply move in their legions. Rome moves in four legions. And from 66 to 70 (CE), it conquers the country. And by the year 70, they had conquered Jerusalem, and destroyed the temple. But, it wasn't over yet.

“During this period – just before or at the beginning of the birth of Yoshua – it's hard to know the actual year of birth. But around the time of the birth of Yoshua, the Jewish people had many different ways of practicing, just like they have today. And some of the groups were very extreme. And on the rock fortress of Herod was one of the most extreme of all the groups – a people called the sicarii. [<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sicarii>]

“And even though the temple had been destroyed, they were still continuing. In fact, they're on the top of the rock of Masada, which you now see on your left-hand side – and they're all together just 1,000 people (men, women, children, soldiers). One thousand people are up there, continuing a rebellion against the Roman Empire. What does the Roman Empire do? It doesn't say, 'Oh, they're in the desert, we don't care.' It sends 10,000 legionnaires here. And the next three years – from 70 to 73 AD – the Romans are based around the base of Masada.



“You see the mountain coming up, and on the left you see the Snake Path. And there's a cable car that goes up – luckily the Romans left behind their cable cars – so we're going to be ok. (laughter) We're going to go up and come back by cable car. The Romans are based around that rock fortress. You can also see - to the front of it - the three levels, which is the northern palace. We also call it a

‘hanging palace’ – not where you hang people, but in Herod’s case it could have been – but we call it literally hanging into the rock there. And we will go to see that part of Masada.

“We’re actually going to be leaving the bus quite soon. And, although most of you know the story, I’ll be telling the story of what happened during that three years between the Romans around at the base, and the 1,000 people above. When you look at a rock like that, you have to ask yourself, ‘How on earth can you conquer a mountain like that.’ That’s what we’re going to find out right now.

“What I want you to do right now, my dears, is get ready – what you want to take with you for our walk around Masada. Number one – really important – is a hat. And I will now demonstrate. (Marian puts on her hat) And number two of importance is a bottle of water. We’re going into the visitor’s center. I will be getting the tickets – it doesn’t take very long – and then if there is a necessity to visit the toilet, it is there for your convenience.”



This isolated mountain-top fortress about 440 m (1,300 ft) above the banks of the Dead Sea was fortified as early as the 1st or 2nd century BC and then enlarged and reinforced by Herod the Great, who added two luxurious palace complexes. On Herod’s death the fortress passed into Roman hands, but it was captured in AD 66 during the First Revolt by Jews of the Zealot sect. After the Romans had crushed the rebels in Jerusalem (AD70), Masada remained the last Jewish stronghold. Held by less than 1,000 defenders, it was under Roman siege for over two years before the walls were breached in AD73.

Painting of what Masada looked like with its walls and mountain-top fortress. The cliffs on the east edge of Masada are about 451 m high, dropping off to the Dead Sea, and the cliffs on the west are about 100 m high; the natural approaches to the cliff top are very difficult. The top of the plateau is flat and rhomboid-shaped, about 600 by 300 m. There was a casemate wall around the top of the plateau totaling 1400 m long and 4 m thick with many towers, and the fortress included storehouses, barracks, an armory, the palace, and cisterns that were refilled by rainwater. Three narrow, winding paths led from below to fortified gates.

Masada (video at visitor's center)

"Drama in which Jews, Romans, and idealists fight to the death. ... film Masada, featuring the rebel leader Eleazar ben Yair (Peter Strauss) and Roman commander Flavius Silva (Peter O'Toole).

"However, in the movie, unlike real life, nobody deals with personal dilemmas and struggles. ...

"Start with King Herod, who ruled under the auspices of the Romans, built himself a magnificent fortress here on the mountain, which would be a sanctuary in troubled times. And, believe me, he really had troubles. Herod, like any other king, built his palace to the highest standard of his day. One of them is this western palace. Herod's architect was probably a short guy. (laughter) What can I tell you, this king loved the good life.

"Until now we spoke about Herod. It was the splendor of Herod's style that made Masada what it is today.

"The year 66 AD – the Jews rebel against the Roman Empire. Four years later the temple is destroyed. Jerusalem falls. Everywhere else the rebels were suppressed. Masada is the last stronghold for the Jewish rebels. They lived from food in the storerooms, and they drank water from the cisterns kindly left behind by Herod long ago. [testimony of an excavator finding shards of pottery with Hebrew letters on them.] "Throughout the revolt, groups of rebels sought asylum at the fortress. About a thousand rebels gathered at the fortress in the heart of the wilderness. In 70 AD, the Roman legion arrived with thousands of armed soldiers and deployed themselves around the mountain. An enormous war machine. And the movies do it best – after the Romans, of course.

"The Romans built an attack ramp – sent fire on the wall – and in the evening, when the wall was burning, the Roman army returned to its camp, thinking that the whole affair would be over by morning.

"But Eleazar had ideas of his own. This is it, the last night. We have reached the climax of the drama. The events actually took place – the decision to choose slavery or death. The speech of Eleazar: 'The time has now come ... let our wives die before they are abused. And our children before they have tasted slavery. And preserve us in freedom as a monument – that we preferred death before slavery.'

“Once Yigael Yadin was asked which artifact he valued the most: ‘These ostraca, these potsherds, the lots – on which the rebels wrote their names -- that were cast to determine the order in which the people would die, and the ten men who remained to fulfill the death of their fellow-men. The lots were drawn to determine who would kill the last man who would fall upon his own sword. “In the morning, the Romans arrived. Besides two women and a few (5) children (who had hidden), everyone was dead. After the drama came silence. “The silence was broken this century after nearly two hundred years by a community of Byzantine monks. Twelve hundred years later, the first explorers came and rediscovered the mountain. Then the members of the youth movements came and saw the symbol of heroism in Masada. After them came the hikers and the tourists. Masada had become a focus of pilgrimage. “No matter what, Masada has become the symbol of staunch resistance against a fierce enemy. And if it is a symbol, then perhaps this might be some kind of victory. “Ladies and gentlemen, I invite you to climb the mountain.”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zz8CL7HiJhY>

The Spielberg Jewish Film Archive - The Story of Masada



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QOyEIpE6BI0> (video of the cable ride to the top of Masada)

According to Flavius Josephus, a First century Jewish Roman historian, Herod the Great fortified Masada between 37 and 31 BCE as a refuge for himself in the event of a revolt. In 66 CE, at the beginning of the First Jewish-Roman War (also called the Great Jewish Revolt) against the Roman Empire, a group of Jewish

rebels called the Zealots (kana'im, "zealous ones", commanded by Elazar ben Ya'ir (who may have been the same person as Eleazar ben Simon), who objected to Roman rule of Judea (as the Roman province of Iudaea, its Latin name) took Masada from the Roman garrison stationed there. In 70 CE, they were joined by additional Zealots and their families who were expelled from Jerusalem by the other Jews living there shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem (and the Second Temple), and for the next two years used Masada as their base for raiding and harassing Roman and Jewish settlement alike.

Marian: "The Roman forces set themselves up to attack from the easiest point, and the easiest point is from the other side (the western side). So as the Romans go there, that's where we're starting from. And we're going to the famous ramp that we saw in the film, built by the Romans to get to the top of the plateau. We're walking right across to the other side.

"We have a beautiful view of the Dead Sea as we're walking across. Larry just asked a very important question, and I think I should make it clear – when you build a fortress, and it's palatial, you usually have two reasons: one for the palace and one for the fortress. The fortress – because Herod had to defend his country. He's king of Judea. You've got to defend your country. This is one of the entrances, because – even in the time of Herod – you could go across the Dead Sea here. North of us it's 400 meters deep; south of us it's only 20 meters deep. Here it was only half a meter in the time of Herod. And so people could on their horses just ride across. Today that area is dried up. You can actually see the ford that they would have come across. Now, because everybody hated Herod, he knew that if he had to take refuge from his people, it would have to be somewhere in the desert – near his Idumean followers. And that's why we're on the border of Idumea here, and that's why we're also in the desert. Apart from the fact that Herod held his family here during the time that he was kicked out of Jerusalem and had to get help from the Romans – his family stayed up here. And his family stayed up here because it had already been a Hasmonean fortress. So this is an entrance to the country from the east. Herod must protect his country. This is the eastern entrance – here is your fortress. But then he's also thinking of himself. If he ever has to take refuge, this is the best place to do it. So it is a palatial fortress, because if he has to take refuge, he wants to do it in style. So in the film, you say the western palace with the beautiful mosaics. But we're not going there – we're going straight to the ramp."

Walking to the ramp across the top of the fortress. The width of the fortress is about 300 meters wide; the length is about 650 meters long.



The site of Masada was identified in 1842 and extensively excavated in from 1963 to 1965 by an expedition led by Israeli archeologist Yigael Yadin. A pair of cable cars now carries those visitors who do not wish to climb the ancient Snake Path, now restored on the eastern side of the mountain (access via the Dead Sea road). The area remained largely untouched by humans or nature in the past two millennia, due to the location's remoteness from human habitation and its arid environment. The Roman ramp still stands on the western side and can be climbed on foot. Many of the ancient buildings were restored from their remnants, as were the wall-paintings of Herod's two main palaces, and the Roman-style bathhouses that he built. The synagogue, storehouses, and houses of the Jewish rebels were also found and restored. The meter-high circumvallation wall that the Romans built around Masada can be seen, together with eleven barracks for the Roman soldiers just outside this wall. Water cisterns two-thirds of the way up the cliff drain the nearby wadis by an elaborate water system, which explains how the rebels managed to have enough water for such a long time.

Marian: “From here you can see the ramp. You can see that the Romans filled in the valley, reached the top of the fortifications – and you notice no wall from there to here. The wall is gone, right? It continues all the way around on either side, but here it’s gone. This is where the Romans break in. Now, in one moment, we’re going to stand just beyond there, and we’re going to see the large boulders that should have been thrown down against the Romans building the ramp, like we saw in the film. Only the boulders that were supposed to be rolled down, we didn’t find at the bottom. If they did what they say in the film, ‘roll down the boulders,’ we should have been finding them down there. And they’re up here.

So we come to the question, ‘How did the Romans manage to build that ramp when the people up here could have stopped them? So we have a question. And in order to answer that question, we need to know one major fact. The rebellion in 66 was a religious rebellion, and in that religious rebellion you had extremists, ultra-extremists, and ultra-ultra-extremists. The people up here are the ultra-ultra ones. OK? So, make sure you get a photo of the ramp – this is where you want to get it. And then we’re going to stand by the rolling stones – my favorite Mick Jagger (of the Rolling Stones rock group) stones.

“Josephus tells in his story that when the Romans tried to break down the wall, it was very easy. It was made of these stones. And you saw in the film, when you push out one, the rest of the wall falls down. Now, they’re taking three years to build the ramp. So in that time, the defendants knew that it was possible to build a second wall just inside that would have stood here. Remember we saw in the film – the wood – the wooden wall they were building? And inside (the wall) was earth. Now when they bang (with the battering ram), they just compact the earth. So when the Romans saw that, that’s when they sent their fire arrows. Remember, we saw it in the film. Then something amazing happens. Josephus writes: ‘At first the fire went against the Romans.’ The people up here are very religious, they’re ultra-ultra orthodox. When they saw that the arrows of fire that they sent on the wood went against them – against the Romans – they said, ‘God is with us.’ But then he writes like this: ‘Then suddenly the wind veering as if by divine providence’ – in other words, when the wind changed direction and went against them, this was a sign from God that it’s all over. Very important to understand; because if we don’t understand the religious context, we can’t understand the suicide. They are not coming up here to die. They’re coming up here to live, but when they get a sign from God that it’s all over, that’s when they’re going to commit suicide – which is not suicide, because we heard that one person kills the other, and only one person commits suicide.”



A shot of the ramp from the top.

The rampart was complete in the spring of 73 CE, after approximately two to three months of siege, allowing the Romans to finally breach the wall of the fortress with a battering ram on April 16. When they entered the fortress, however, the Romans discovered that its approximately 1000 defenders had set all the buildings but the food storerooms ablaze and committed mass suicide rather than face certain capture or defeat by their enemies (which would probably have led to slavery or execution). Because Judaism strongly discourages suicide, however, the defenders were reported to have drawn lots and slain each other in turn, down to the last man, who would be the only one to actually take his own life. The storerooms were apparently left standing to show that the defenders retained the ability to live and chose the time of their death over slavery. This account of the siege of Masada was related to Josephus by two women who survived the suicide by hiding inside a cistern along with five children and repeated Elazar ben Yair's final exhortation to his followers, prior to the mass suicide, verbatim to the Romans.

“We’re walking along the wall. This is the breaking point. And we have these stones over here, which we should have found down below, and I still did not explain why they’re up here. So join me. (walk onward) Now, the family leaders will go to the synagogue – this is the site where the decision was made. It would not be made anywhere else. The decision was made here not to wait for the next day. When the wall is broken down, the Romans go back down to their camp. They don’t come in at night. They go back down. And so at that night – after the wall is broken – there is a decision to be made: shall we fight the next day, or shall we

take from the Romans the possibility of victory. You can't have victory over an empty place.”



The place where the Wall of the Fortress was breached.

In 72 CE, the Roman governor of Iudaea, Lucius Flavius Silva, marched against Masada with the Roman legion X Fretensis and laid siege to the fortress. After failed attempts to breach the wall, they built a circumvallation wall and then a rampart against the western face of the plateau, using thousands of tons of stones and beaten earth. Josephus does not record any major attempts by the Zealots to counterattack the besiegers during this process, a significant difference from his accounts of other sieges against Jewish fortresses, suggesting that perhaps the Zealots lacked the equipment or skills to fight the Roman legion. Some historians also believe that Romans may have used Jewish slaves to build the rampart, whom the Zealots were reluctant to kill because of their beliefs.

“Look down below us. You can see once again two camps. The first one – just in front of the seating, you see – and in front of that, closer towards us, is a square, which is an unreconstructed Roman camp. And on either side of that is walls, and what you can see is the walls – the siege wall – goes all the way down. Look how it goes down into the ravine. That’s quite a siege wall. Just beyond the siege wall here, you have a large Roman camp. Can you see that one? And you may have heard the other guide, who shouted so the group could see that the people down below could shout and hear. So Silva – the Roman general – would be able to shout up here, and the people here would be able to hear him.”



According to Josephus, Masada was the last rebel stronghold in Judea. In 73 CE, the Roman Tenth Legion Fretensis, led by Flavius Silva, laid siege to the mountain. The legion, consisting of 8,000 troops among which were auxiliary forces, built eight camps around the base, a siege wall, and a ramp made of earth and wooden supports on a natural slope to the west.

“Let’s go see the water situation. Here is a nice diagram (or model) of the water system. And the gentleman just before me showed what happens. (a cup of water is filled from a faucet) You can see here: if the water falls on those hills over there, and it then is captured in an aqueduct, it would fill the cisterns on either side there. [Marian pours the cup of water on the metal model, demonstrating how the water would flow into the cisterns] There’s a snake path that goes down to the cisterns. 40,000 cubic meters of water in eleven cisterns. You go down at night, you bring it up by donkey. You fill up the large cistern that you’re going to see on the left-hand side when we walk up the stairs, and you have plenty of water all day. The Romans, on the other hand, are over there – they don’t have it. Look down here – you can see holes – those are the cisterns. They’re still there. They’re enormous. (walk on to overhang)



Model of Masada and the Water System/Cisterns. Water cisterns two-thirds of the way up the cliff drain the nearby wadis by an elaborate water system, which explains how the rebels managed to have enough water for such a long time. Guide Marian poured a bottle of water in the grooves (streams or wadis), and we watched as the water flowed into the large cisterns (wells) carved into the mountain-side fortress.

“The person who did the building up here is Herod – this is Herod the Great. He has Roman engineers working for him. And paid laborers. And he built an aqueduct to bring the water from there to here – by gravity. So it’s raining over there, it’s going into an aqueduct, and gravity will bring the water into these cisterns here. When the Romans build the ramp, they destroy the aqueduct. But, there is enough water here for three years. How do I know? I was very lucky and had a mathematician on one of my tours, and I said 40,000 cubic meters. And he said, ‘What’s that?’ I said, ‘I have no idea.’ He said, ‘That’s 72 liters a person per day for three years. No lack of water. So you see how they filled it up, and then they had water.”

[At Herod’s ‘hanging’ palace (northern)]

Marian: “This, of course, was sea view property. (laughter) But guys, that means you had a person like Herod who understood a view. 2,000 years ago – to understand a view was pretty amazing.

“Now, my dears, you remember there are those ‘Mick Jagger’ stones – and they’re in the wrong place for us? So, if we want to understand why they weren’t

rolled down, we need to go back to what we were talking about at the beginning – that the people up here are ultra-orthodox-extreme religious. In the Jewish religion we have 613 commandments. 610 of them – you don't have to do if you need to save your life. Forget that, forget that, forget that – save your life. Three commandments only you must not forego. And one of them is what happened here. One of them is: You must not kill your brother to save yourself. It's the number one commandment. It's the most important. It's not an unusual commandment. It was very often with tribes that you didn't want to deplete your numbers – you must not kill a brother to save yourself.

“Now, when I tell you the Romans know this, you could be skeptical. Unless I tell you how the Romans got to be an empire, which I'm not going to do right now – but I may do a little bit in the bus. You have to know your enemy. And what the Romans knew was this law. So, I'll give you one example of how they knew. Did you know that the first temple and the second temple are destroyed on the same day? Exactly the ninth of Av. Av is the month – the day is the ninth of Av. [The Hebrew month of Av (or Menachem-Av, the consoler of Av) is the fifth of the twelve months of the Jewish calendar. The name Av literally means "father." It derives from the root which means "to will" or "to desire." Av usually occurs in July–August on the Gregorian calendar.

<http://www.inner.org/times/av/av.htm>]

“First temple and second temple. Roman knew that if it destroys the second temple on the day that we had wept for the destruction of the first temple -- that would be morally so destructive for the Jewish people. They're in Jerusalem, they were in there for months, but they don't destroy the temple. Josephus tells it like this (paraphrase), he says: “One day, a Roman soldier tripped over, his torch fell out of his hand, and against the temple wall, and suddenly it was ablaze. And Titus is standing by and weeping, ‘Oh, my gosh. What shall we do?’” On the ninth of Av. You understand what they did? They waited for that day. And for the people, it was the same day. But the Romans knew. And the Romans knew you cannot kill a brother to save yourself.

“So the Romans are not building the ramp. They took the Jewish slaves. Now you will ask: ‘How did those slaves do it?’ Because those were not the ultra-ultra extreme orthodox. Those were people who didn't believe in the next world. Remember, the people up here are very religious, they believe in the next world. They want to stay alive – let me stay alive for today, who knows what tomorrow will bring. And I don't want to go into the context of how many times we see that in all sorts of places. Just let me live another moment, even if the situation is desperate.

“So, those Jewish people who were willing to be slaves, they were building the ramp. The people up here cannot kill their brothers. They don’t even roll the stones down -- because they trust in God. And because they trust in God – and at the last moment they see that God has made a different decision for them – that’s when they decide to kill themselves. And because we saw the film, we know that it’s not a suicide, but men kill the children and wives, and then there’s ten, and one is left. Now, you may also remember in the film, they said, ‘every person has their favorite spot up here.’ We’re standing right now near mine. I don’t know why Yigael Yadin got so excited about the pottery bits – mine’s much better.



Model of the Herod’s magnificent three-tiered northern palace on the cliff of Masada. Massive fortifications, palaces and storehouses were designed to protect Herod in case of protracted war; he also built hanging gardens, a swimming pool, an elaborate bath-house, vast stores, a synagogue and ritual baths, protecting the whole by sentry towers set at intervals along an encircling wall.

“Third level down – we have three levels – this level, the master bedroom, balcony. The level below us was a revolving restaurant, and below that was the discotheque. (laughter) Really, it was rooms that were only for pleasure. It wasn’t living quarters. But Herod is not the kind of guy to run up from level to level when he needs toilets, so every level had toilets.

“So you remember there was one person left of the sicarii who is going to commit suicide. The others have been killing the others. If you were the last person, and you have to set fire to everything, you don’t want to get caught in that fire.

Where would you go? Down there (pointing to lower level of northern palace) – to the third level down. Why am I telling you this? When they made the excavation, they couldn't find skeletons. A thousand people commit suicide, and no skeletons – where do we know the story is wrong? But you have to understand the Roman mind-set. They're not going to start burying people so we can find skeletons. They're going to cremate – that's what you do in the Roman world. They would make a pile of bodies, cremate them, and use this as a garrison. They would not go down to the bathrooms on the lower level. They had no reason to.

“So down there (pointing at lower level) we found – first of all, this is my favorite – a woman's hair in the original plait, and her skeleton. Holding a small child. All this is in the Israel museum.

“So, my understanding is – there's no other way to read this find – that has to be that last person, who went down there, had an extra five minutes with his wife – and when the Romans stopped coming in – then he kills himself.

“Take some photos, and we're going to see the model over there. And we're going out from that side. [at model of Masada] Master bedroom here, your balcony, revolving restaurant, discotheque. There you go.



Storeroom at Masada. When the Romans eventually entered the fortress, they found ample stores of show that it was not lack of provisions that caused the surrender; otherwise they found nothing but piles of corpses and a deathly silence. According to Josephus, two women and five children who had been hiding in the

cisterns on the mountaintop told the Romans what had happened that night, on the 15th of Nissan, the first day of Passover.

“Now, I want to show you something, and I want you to keep it in mind for the next place we’re going. [walk to storerooms] Now, you had to get through that wall (western gate) to get into Masada, and then you had to get through that wall (balcony) to get to Herod’s northern palace. Now, this is what I want to show you. It’s the storerooms, and I want you to look at the way they’re built. Because I’m going to show you later today – I hope and pray we get there on time – another room that looks just like this. Only – because it was found somewhere else – they gave it a different explanation. But, once you’ve seen what storerooms were like 2,000 years ago – when I’m going to show you the storeroom that I’m going to show you – you will immediately realize why. So, these are the storerooms that Herod built for Masada. And we’re going to walk through them, in a moment. And from there, we’re already going back to the cable car.

“About the storerooms – very important, my dears – I was just asked how reliable the Josephus account is. Josephus tells us about the storerooms, that when they committed suicide, they burnt their stores, they burnt their supplies of food, because they didn’t want that to fall into Roman hands. But they left three storerooms not fired, because they wanted the Romans to know that they hadn’t committed suicide of hunger. When they made the excavation – that’s exactly what they found. We can see them – with the black lines – so we get some idea of the height. Some of them have not been excavated. We do that on purpose. Always leave something for the next generation to excavate.

“We’re walking through the storerooms, to the other side. And then we’re going to the cable car.”



The story of Masada was recorded by Josephus Flavius, who was the commander of the Galilee during the Great Revolt and later surrendered to the Romans at Yodfat. According to Josephus, the first fortress at Masada was built by Jonathan the High Priest – apparently the Hasmonean king Alexander Jannaeus (103-76 BCE). Some scholars tend to identify Jonathan with the brother of Judah the Macabbee, who became high priest in 152 BCE. Herod, who ruled from 37 BCE to 4 BCE, was well aware of the strategic advantages of Masada. He therefore chose the site as a refuge against his enemies, and as a winter palace. During his reign, luxurious palaces were built here in addition to well-stocked storerooms, cisterns, and a casemate wall. After the death of Herod in 4 BCE, and the annexation of Judea to the Roman Empire in 6 CE, the Romans stationed a garrison at Masada.

Josephus relates that one of the first events of the Great Revolt of the Jews against the Romans, which broke out in 66 CE, was the conquest of Masada by the Sicarii, a group that got its name from a curved dagger, the sica, which they carried. The Sicarii were headed by Menahem, son of Judah the Galilean, who was murdered in Jerusalem in 66 CE. After the murder, Eleazar Ben Yair fled from Jerusalem to Masada and became commander of the rebel community on the mountain. It was a varied group, which apparently included Essenes and Samaritans. The last of the rebels fled to Masada after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE and joined those already at the fortress under the command of Eleazar Ben Yair.



Movie 'Masada'

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mk5LVFs3LIQ>

Flavius Silva (actor Peter O'Toole), commander in Roman Palestine, wants to reach a reasonable compromise with the Jewish Zealots and withdraw his legion. Events and personalities in Rome, however, lead to his besieging the fortress of Masada. There the engineering genius of the Romans must fight both the harsh climate and landscape, and the passion and ingenuity of Eleazar Ben Yair (actor Peter Strauss) and his people.

Marian: "The victory does not go to the Romans, for they are gone. The Victory goes to the Jews, for they are still here. The battle cry of modern Israel is – Masada shall not fall again!"



Ride back down the cable car to Masada Museum and Visitor's Center. Reflection on the story of Masada, where the rebel leader Eleazar Ben Yair gave two speeches in which he convinced the leaders of the 960 members (or more) of the community that it would be better to take their own lives and the lives of their families than to live in shame and humiliation as Roman slaves. In Josephus' own words: "They had died in the belief that they had left not a soul of them alive to fall into Roman hands. The Romans advanced to the assault ... seeing none of the enemy but on all sides an awful solitude, and flames within and silence, they were at a loss to conjecture what had happened here. Encountering the mass of slain, instead of exulting as over enemies, they admired the nobility of their resolve and the contempt of death displayed by so many in carrying it, unwavering, into execution." [Josephus Flavius, The Wars of the Jews, VII, 395-406]

[end of excursion at Masada]

[Ride to Ein Gedi, Nature Reserve]

Marian: "Ein Gedi is a nature reserve, with waterfalls – very beautiful. There we'll talk about a very famous story of Saul searching for David, and David finds Saul – otherwise, indisposed.

"Just before we read it (biblical passage), this quite incredible story, I do want to mention one or two things about the fortress of Masada, because I want to make it quite clear – you saw in the film that this hill, or this fortress, became a symbol in Jewish history. And I want to make that a little clearer. You could think,

that's a pretty bad way for a country to end. But, you see, my dears, we know God works in mysterious ways. And, the thing is, when we tell the story, we're here to tell the story. When we ask, 'Who does the victory go to?' – it does not go to the Romans. Now, you should be asking, 'Why do they commit suicide?' Why don't they fight to the last man, because that's what my kids ask. My kids grow up, go into the army – a little bit different from the American army, because our boys are close to us and we can visit them and call them – well, they ask, 'Why don't we ask to the last man?' And I want to explain that, because in the Roman system, if you do not conquer, there is no triumph. And the triumph is when you take the people off to Rome, and you march them through the streets of Rome, and you go through the Triumphal Arch – that's a triumph.

“At Masada there is no triumph. You cannot have a victory over an empty hill. There was no first one into the battle, which would have been the prerogative of Silva. He would have been the first one through the wall. So there was no triumph – that was taken away from the Romans. And that's why – I would say – the victory goes to the Jewish people. Especially because we are here to tell the story 2,000 years later.

“But, there is something else we need to ask – a small question – before we arrive at Ein Gedi. And that is: 'When a thousand people commit suicide, we wonder how many Romans were lost in the battle?' So, 10,000 Roman legionnaires, 1,000 Jewish people – How many Romans were lost? When we say 10,000 soldiers, we consider that one legion.

Kim: “We have no idea.”

Ellen: “None.”

Marian: “Thank you, Ellen. Ellen gets 5,000 points. The answer is: Absolutely none. That's why, my dears, they don't attack immediately. They don't attack immediately, because if they attack immediately – they ran up the hill – they would have lost several thousand. By waiting down for three years, they also caused the sicarii – which are fighters by nature – to lose the will to fight. That's what they were trying to do. If you look at Roman history, it's siege after siege.

“Do you remember I said this is a World Heritage Site? All the other siege sites were destroyed, because people would use the stones to build houses and other buildings. Here in the middle of the desert, everything the Romans built remains to us. And why I consider Josephus Flavius reliable is, because everything he tells us, we find it.

“So the site of Masada that became a symbol – we lost our country because we did not have a strong enough army – this became a symbol, when we became a new country, for the army – for the Israeli army. And one part of the army, the Armored Corps, goes up to Masada when they give their oath of allegiance when they join the Israeli army – they give an oath of allegiance. And the boys who go into the Armored Corps, who give their oath of allegiance here, their oath says a few words: ‘Masada shall not fall again.’ That’s why – the first thing Israel did – was build up its army.

[Entering Ein Gedi nature reserve]



“Now, we’re changing the subject on to Ein Gedi. Ein Gedi, a nature reserve. And we’re going to read the story of Saul and David:

Leslie: "I’ll be reading from 1 Samuel, Chapter 24:1–22"

1 When Saul returned from following the Philistines, he was told, “Behold, David is in the wilderness of Engedi.” 2 Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel and went to seek David and his men in front of the Wildgoats’ Rocks. 3 And he came to the sheepfolds by the way, where there was a cave, and Saul went in to relieve himself. Now David and his men were sitting in the innermost parts of the cave. 4 And the men of David said to him, “Here is the day of which the LORD said to you, ‘Behold, I will give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it shall seem good to you.’” Then David arose and stealthily cut off a corner of Saul’s robe. 5 And afterward David’s heart struck him, because he had cut off a corner of Saul’s robe. 6 He said to his men, “The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD’s anointed, to put out my hand against

him, seeing he is the LORD's anointed." 7 So David persuaded his men with these words and did not permit them to attack Saul. And Saul rose up and left the cave and went on his way.

8 Afterward David also arose and went out of the cave, and called after Saul, "My lord the king!" And when Saul looked behind him, David bowed with his face to the earth and paid homage. 9 And David said to Saul, "Why do you listen to the words of men who say, 'Behold, David seeks your harm'? 10 Behold, this day your eyes have seen how the LORD gave you today into my hand in the cave. And some told me to kill you, but I spared you. I said, 'I will not put out my hand against my lord, for he is the LORD's anointed.' 11 See, my father, see the corner of your robe in my hand. For by the fact that I cut off the corner of your robe and did not kill you, you may know and see that there is no wrong or treason in my hands. I have not sinned against you, though you hunt my life to take it. 12 May the LORD judge between me and you, may the LORD avenge me against you, but my hand shall not be against you. 13 As the proverb of the ancients says, 'Out of the wicked comes wickedness.' But my hand shall not be against you. 14 After whom has the king of Israel come out? After whom do you pursue? After a dead dog! After a flea! 15 May the LORD therefore be judge and give sentence between me and you, and see to it and plead my cause and deliver me from your hand."

16 As soon as David had finished speaking these words to Saul, Saul said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" And Saul lifted up his voice and wept. 17 He said to David, "You are more righteous than I, for you have repaid me good, whereas I have repaid you evil. 18 And you have declared this day how you have dealt well with me, in that you did not kill me when the LORD put me into your hands. 19 For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him go away safe? So may the LORD reward you with good for what you have done to me this day. 20 And now, behold, I know that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand. 21 Swear to me therefore by the LORD that you will not cut off my offspring after me, and that you will not destroy my name out of my father's house." 22 And David swore this to Saul. Then Saul went home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold."

Marian: "I have to really thank Leslie for such a beautiful reading of that story. It's a great story. I want to also point out that this is actually a norm in desert life – it's a norm that we know from Bedouin life, because they have blood feuds. If you find your enemy asleep – or indisposed; and we heard how Saul was indisposed – I want to be very polite here – in the cave. If you find your enemy unable to defend himself, and you leave a sign that you could have killed him, he must make up with you. And that's exactly what happens here.

“And we are hearing about the corner of the robe – remember I tried to explain the fringe? That must be worn by the Jewish people. And you saw the fringes of the religious people. And we’ll see a lot more when we get to Jerusalem. Well, this is the fringe of the corner – remember Leslie read, ‘he cut the corner of his robe.’ This is something very important. It may have even been the personal identity of the person. It may have been, as it was in ancient countries, that the way you knotted your thread was your symbol.

“By the way, that’s the kibbutz of Ein Gedi up there, and in the reading it is called ‘the source of water of the wild goats’ – Ein Gedi, Ein is the source of water, and Gedi are the wild gazelles or desert goats.

“So what we need to take into account is not by any chance that David cuts off the corner – he knows what he is doing. So we take into account how important the hem of the garment – the fringe – is in the ancient world.

“Now, we dears, we have come to Ein Gedi. And we are still on time. We’re going into Ein Gedi. When we come out, there is a kiosk with sandwiches. You can – if you decide to do so – bring the sandwiches with you and eat when we get to the baptismal site.”

Paul: “Yes. Good idea.”

Marian: “Unless you are hungry, in which case we can eat right now. [the group decides it can wait] OK, so we’ll go inside the nature reserve. I want to show you the waterfall there. Water in the desert is always pretty amazing. We’ll talk a little bit about this desert area, and show you these famous trees – the acacia trees. We’ll probably have a lot of gazelles around – I hope so. They usually come right close up to us.”

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ein_Gedi

Marian: “The acacia is the most important tree in the Bible because this is the tree that Moses uses in order to build the Ark of the Covenant. (exclamations – “Ah!”) Why would God command this tree for the building of the ark? Because, my dears, that’s all we have in the desert. (laughter)

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acacia>



Beside the Acacia tree, known as the tree of the desert. The acacia tree has thorny branches, and it is thought by some scholars to have been the branches that made up the “crown of thorns” that was placed on the head of Yeshua.

“Now, if you touch it, it’s thorny – be very careful. These thorns are really, really prickly. There’s little ones here, but as the branch gets bigger, the thorns get much worse, and harder. And we think that this made the ‘crown of thorns.’ (exclamations – “Ah!”) You see how thorny it is.

Tony: “OK, let’s move on.”

Paul: “You’re not interested in trees, are you?”

Marian: “I’m not supposed to do this, but – [she breaks off a little branch with thorns to show the group, and have them touch the thorns] OK, so pass this around. Be very careful. But can you imagine the crown of thorns?”

[walk toward waterfall, contemplating the crown of thorns]

Marian: “It must have been a fortified area – higher up – that David would have used. [pointing out several caves high up in the crags]



We notice some ibex high up on the plateau. Later, we see more of them near the road.



Marian: “They have a field school up there.”

Paul: “I was going to ask you about the animals here. What kind of animals are here?”

Marian: “Did you see the rock rabbits? They’re called hyrex.”

Paul: “So that’s what they are.”



[At the waterfall]



On the western shore of the Dead Sea about 35 miles southeast of Jerusalem, the

extreme conditions of the area made habitation prohibitive except near the freshwater springs. En-gedi contained a hot water spring coming from the side of a limestone cliff, producing semitropical vegetation. This vital oasis was allotted to Judah's tribe for an inheritance (Jos. 15:62). The area became known for its palms, vineyards, and balsam (Sg 1:14; Josephus's Antiquities 20.1.2). This ancient site was southeast of the oasis at Tell el-Jarn near modern 'Ain Jidi. In 2 Chronicles 20:2, En-gedi was called Hazazon-tamar and was involved in several Old Testament events. Kedorlaomer conquered the Amorites here (Gn 14:7); when David fled from Saul he found refuge in the many caves of the region (1Sam 23:29); and in Ezekiel's vision of Israel's restoration, fishermen would catch fish from the Dead Sea from En-gedi to En-eglaim (Ez 47:10).

Ein Gedi is famous as a lush oasis in an otherwise barren landscape. Several springs provide plentiful water to support a luxuriant mix of tropical and desert vegetation. The site is mentioned in the Bible for its beauty (Song of Songs - 1:14) – “My beloved is unto me as a cluster of camphire (henna) in the vineyards of En-Gedi.”

On the drive from Ein-Gedi to our next stop, we pass another oasis – named Ein Feshka – home of the ancient Essenes.

