

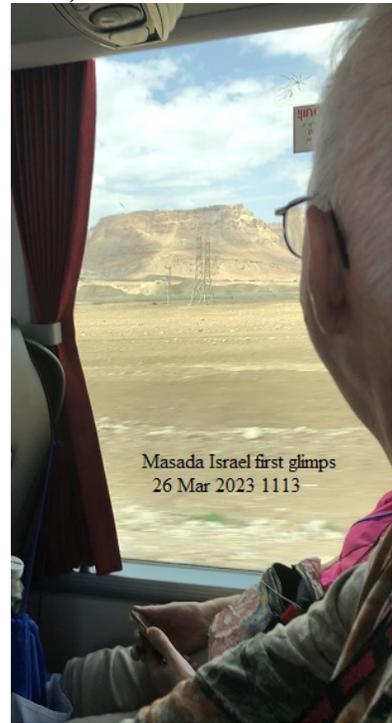


The Half Shekel Journals of 2023 by Pastor Ed Rice
#23022 Sun 26 Mar Masada, Dead Sea

It was obvious that Eli, our Israeli guide, was most excited about our trip to the top of the mesa called Masada. His excitement rubbed off on each of us as we gathered at the base of the cliffs and watched the cable cars climb the suspended ascent of the face of this majestic mountain. With an x-military exuberance he gave review of some of what we would see once we were on top of this natural fortress sprung out of the desert floor. I watched our group and determined that most were not aware of all the history that Eli would unfold there.

Eli and Pastor Lee both kept the dire ending of this tragic history close, knowing the power of this tragic account was best comprehended when the prelude was well set. Eli was a craftsman at unfolding the narcissist, paranoid nature of Herod the Great, interweaving it into his extravagant Masada palace he built, the amazing water mongering methods he developed, and the long term logistics in place which provided a lavish perpetual existence in this harsh environment atop a barely accessible mountain. Our guide laid all that foundation well before he introduced the post Herod residents who made this their holdout, ... their final holdout. Eli remained somber as he gave heart felt details of what all unfolded here on this mountain top fortress.

Bev and I had walked through and never forgot the powerful emotions of learning



Masada Israel first glimps
26 Mar 2023 1113



Masada's history in our 2009 visit. I was privileged on this trip to teach in a worship service atop of Masada, and made the focus on Satan's desire to destroy the Jews, and God's upcoming final victory. We had visited here only five months ago, and researched extensively the fuller history and meaning of this amazing wilderness mesa beside the Dead Sea. I recall here in this journal, as best I can, much of that history with insights from the larger history of antisemitism.



Cables look kinda thin

LOOK how high we are!

I'm sure this is safe, right?

Masada, in Hebrew and on modern maps called “*Met-Sada*”, stands as a grand monument on the shores of the Dead Sea. The mesa like rock plateau stands atop 1,300 foot cliffs overlooking the Dead Sea. It is an awesome conformation and a monument to three things; 1) to man’s unnatural hatred of God’s chosen people Israel, 2) to a man’s elaborate, extravagant, and psychotic life, and 3) to a fortress with extraordinary archaeological exploration and findings. This was to be a remarkable afternoon in our exploration of God’s holy land.

Our bus pulled out of the Ein Gedi



Reserve parking lot and turned south for a 13 mile drive on Highway 90. Sandwiched between the Dead Sea and the mountainous wilderness to the west, the drive itself was intriguing. Gorges and canyons opened into the low land desert where their rivers turned to dusty trickles and dumped into the sea. Off in the distance we can see the flat top mountain called Masada rise out of the desert floor. It was the most impressive topography.

The flat top mountain loomed before us as our wide eyed group gathered in the parking lot and stared up the side of the sheer cliff.

We followed behind Pastor

Pickett and Eli as we made our way through the welcome center and they arranged for our entry and ride on the cable cars. Bev and I were excited to be here again, but there was still a nervous tension in the air as our group waited in line for the suspended driverless cable car, that would dangle us 1,000 feet above the desert floor. I was not sure how many people were supposed to jump into one of these contraptions, but about ten more than should have crowded in to the car ahead of us as it loaded. The automatic doors attempted to close but were blocked by the last passengers cramming in. Attendants pushed on the overflow until the glass doors slid past them. We watch through the glass as passengers repositioned to get



“comfortable” for the accent. It made us a little uncomfortable, but we all glanced at each other with smiles that said it would be okay. We stared at the crammed full car as it lurched into motion and left the station. We kept our smiles, but tension increased as we waited for the next car.

When it comes to phobias a suspended cable car has a good majority covered. A large group of strangers, crammed into a tight area, tightly confined there, with no control over the situation, dangling hundreds of feet in the air, and when two or three smart alicks shift from side to side, so does the whole cable car. Those who had reasonable control over their phobias could look out and wave to the hiking teams as they got tinier and tinier on the hiking trail far below us. The view we had was breathtaking. So were the phobias.



When the doors finally opened at the top of our gentle glide with the spectacular view, the adventure of ascent was not quite complete. We stepped out on a narrow metal mesh gangplank that was suspended above nothing, ... and that nothing went on for three score and ten cubits straight down. I am not afraid of heights, but I am afraid of falling large distances. White knuckles gripped the gang plank hand rail, and I did not venture to look down until my feet were on solid rock on the short path to the top of Masada. Wow!

I called Masada a threefold monument, let me address the least to the greatest. The archaeological

digs all over this mountain fortress are impressive. Recall again that archaeology is 10% find, 90% imagination. Wall foundations, artifacts, mosaics, and plaster fascia, bath houses, interconnected cisterns and every archaeological dig found on this mountain top have kept “imagination” here very active. What was built here? How, why, and when was it built? What was built



underneath? What did these walls see and hear? Humans armed with inquiring minds are always on a quest to find out more, to uncover the past, to dig a little deeper.

In March, college students, who normally attend to the digs, were in school, but just the same several archaeological sites were still open and being explored here in the fortress atop Masada. The archaeological extravagance was intriguing. Who discovered what-when still intrigues some of us, and the line demarking what was original and what was reconstructed still put good running shoes on active imaginations.



A second monument here was for Herod the Great, who reigned from 37 BC to 4 AD and was psychotic. He was probably not deserving of the “Great” title, except that he was greatly psychotic, and quite a great builder¹. Here on Masada he built an elaborate Roman bathhouse to support his more elaborate, even exotic, palaces. Herod's northern palace was chiseled into the rock of the northern cliff edge and hung out with nothing but that three score and ten cubits of drop as his backyard. A paranoid recluse might have considered the rocky reef



of the Mediterranean Sea a remarkable backdrop of privacy and protection, but this, on Masada, had that beat hands-down. The palaces, the Roman bathhouse, the swimming pool, the elaborate water resources found on Masada, and then all the archaeological wonder that exposed them, were amazing monuments found on this mighty fortress. But they pale in comparison to the depravity of man that was put on full display on this mountain plateau. That is the third monument found at Masada, it is an ugly monument.

Mankind has an unnatural hatred for God's chosen people Israel. A genuine believer understands that antisemitism is a manifestation of Satan's opposition to God. Masada is an important post-AD² cog in Satan's attempt to totally annihilate God's chosen people Israel by genocide. It is not unprecedented. From Genesis 3:15 to

1 Herod built the 2nd Temple and lavish palace-fortresses at Caesarea, Masada, Jericho, and Herodium.
2 AD is a Latin abbreviation of “Anno Domini” meaning “In the year of our Lord.” “Post -AD” refers to the period after the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jeremiah 22:30³, Satan does all he can to destroy the seed line of Messiah. Cain and Abel, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, Ruben, Jacob's rejected first born (cf 1Chr.5:1-2), Joseph, all the drama of Genesis, and all the lineage of kings, these record Satan's attempts to foul and destroy God's chosen seed line of Messiah.



One can easily see that the seed line is a dynamic ongoing battle which ends up including harlots, Moabites and misfits. Its outcome is cast before the foundation of the earth, but its participants are not! God works with man, and man's free will, to accomplish his purposes. He still does; John Calvin's predestination, election, and fatalism ideologies be gone!⁴ God is dynamically working with man in real time. That is on prominent display throughout the Bible, but is only seen by the Bible student that is not engulfed in other preconceived ideas. God is dynamically working with man in real time, he did then, and does now. So when God stops the clear revelation of this

seed line, declaring king Jehoiakim childless, Satan has to take another tact. He chooses genocide, striving to wipe out every living Jew.

If you have read the book of Esther you know about Haman the son of the Agagite, and you see Satan's new hand; his first attempt using genocide. You might rehearse the recorded drama of that account and relish God's providence and victory, even when God's name is found nowhere in the book. One might also dig out some Apocryphal inter-testament history books, they are man made and not Scripture, no matter what Rome says, but we learn about the villainous



3 *Genesis 3:15 "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." Jeremiah 22:30 "Thus saith the LORD, Write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days: for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah."* Jehoiakim was the last of the kings of Judah, God calls him Coniah, meaning "Jehovah will establish", and apparently God ends the kingly seed line of Judah in this verse, but according to Matthew 1:11-12, God does a righteous "bait and switch" wherein man, and more so Satan, loses track of the seed line of David which is the seed line of Messiah.

4 The Westminster Confession, accepted by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, John Calvin, and Calvinists, is IN ERROR and contradicts the Holy Bible when it states in chapter 3, "God unchangeably ordained (and decreed) whatsoever comes to pass." In the Holy Bible, prayer changes things (2Kings.20:1-6), and the "whosoever"s choose their own destiny (John.3:16-19, Rev.22:17).

Antiochus of Syria and the Maccabean revolts. Les Crawford, director of The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry in Australia, tells us:

Antiochus Epimanes, meaning 'Antiochus the Mad' or 'Maniac' ... unleashed his fury on Jerusalem when he returned from Egypt. First, he killed Jason, the last of the Zadokite high priests. He also ordered the massacre of about 40,000 Jews and sold a similar number into slavery. But this was merely the beginning. His persecution of the Jewish people knew no limits.

Antiochus installed a Seleucid garrison to control Jerusalem and proceeded to stamp out the Jewish faith using murder and torture. Toward the end of 167 BC, he issued a series of devastating decrees that included forbidding Temple offerings and installing pagan altars and images for people to offer sacrifices of pigs and other unclean animals in the Jewish sanctuary. He also outlawed circumcision and Sabbath observance, and he burned Torah scrolls and forced dietary violations. Disobedience was punishable by death— usually a gruesome one.



The climax of the attack on Judaism came when Antiochus offered a pig on the pagan altar to Zeus that had been erected in the Jerusalem Temple. The desecration foreshadows the future, prophetic “abomination of desolation” associated with the Antichrist (Dan. 11:31; 12:11).

The action provoked courageous resistance from the Jewish people, but Antiochus’s garrison initially crushed it. Under the leadership of Mattathias and his son Judah, the Jewish forces grew strong enough to defeat Antiochus’s army. This victory enabled the rededication and restoration of the Temple, a remarkable moment in Jewish history celebrated annually in the festival of Hanukkah.⁵

Ergo Satan was not able to corrupt the seed line of Christ, nor annihilate the Jew's who brought us the Messiah. And, not surprisingly, Christ bruised Satan's head. “Now, Satan must do all he can to keep God's immutable plans from coming to pass. Satan must prevent the fulfillment of God's covenant promises to Israel.”⁶

5 <https://israelmyglory.org/article/villainous-antiochus/> Israel My Glory January/February 2023, Article “Villainous-Antiochus” by Les Crawford, pg 19.

6 <https://israelmyglory.org/article/the-never-ending-hatred/> Israel My Glory January/February 2023, Article “The Never-Ending Hatred - Why does antisemitism refuse to die? What evil fuels this illogical, never-ending hatred?” by Ty Perry, pg 14-17

What happened at Masada in 74 AD is the tail end of Satan's first post-AD attempt at annihilating all Jews. It is dramatic. It is tragic. Many try to erase it from history, to refute Josephus' record of it, and even to call the Jews, who died here on Masada, repulsive Zealots who deserved to die. Just the same it was the hand of Satan himself and his zeal to revenge himself against Israel's deliverance of the Messiah, just as is described in upcoming prophecy of Revelation of Jesus Christ chapter 12. Note particularly verse 13, *“And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child.”*



Masada was only Satan's precursor.

Josephus reports that over a million Jews were slaughtered or carried into captivity in the AD 63-74 Jewish revolt against Rome. Jerusalem was destroyed and burned by future emperor Titus until not one Jew remained in Israel. The Roman governor of Judaea, Lucius Flavius Silva, headed a Roman legion and laid siege to Masada to kill the thousand who remained. Such demonic hatred and persecution would pursue Jews to this day.



Bruce Scott writes in his article “Away With Them”:

In the centuries that followed, Jewish people were expelled from cities and kingdoms throughout medieval “Christian Europe,” including Germany, Austria, Hungary, the Papal States, and Italy. One such ill-famed expulsion resulted from the edict of English King Edward I (of William Wallace [Braveheart] fame) in 1290. Thousands were evicted from their homes and forbidden to return to

England for almost 400 years. In 1394, King Charles VI expelled all Jews from France.

However, the most infamous expulsion occurred in Spain. On March 31, 1492, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella signed the Alhambra Decree (Edict of Expulsion), which was not made public until May 1, shortly after they commissioned Christopher Columbus to embark on his historic voyage to the New World.

The Alhambra Decree threw the Jews out of Spain lock, stock, and barrel, adding that any who remained would “incur the penalty of death and the confiscation of all their possessions.” They had until August 1 (9th of the Hebrew month Av) to comply. This expulsion dismembered the largest Jewish community in the world at the time.⁷

The article continues to describe the “ethnic cleansing” undertaken by the Catholic Church which perpetuated wholesale slaughter of Jews with the cruelest means. The hatred and slaughter of God's chosen people continued into Protestant ranks. Scott

⁷ <https://israelmyglory.org/article/away-with-them/> Israel My Glory January/February 2023, Article.

continues in his article:

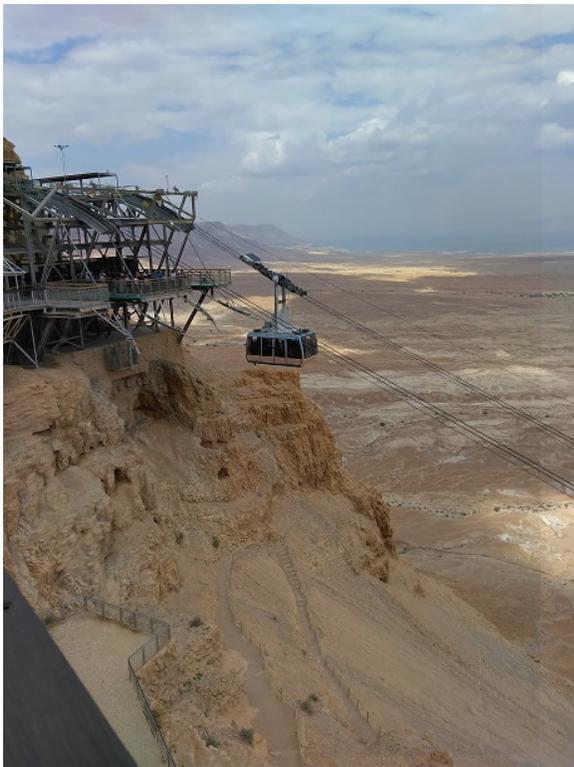
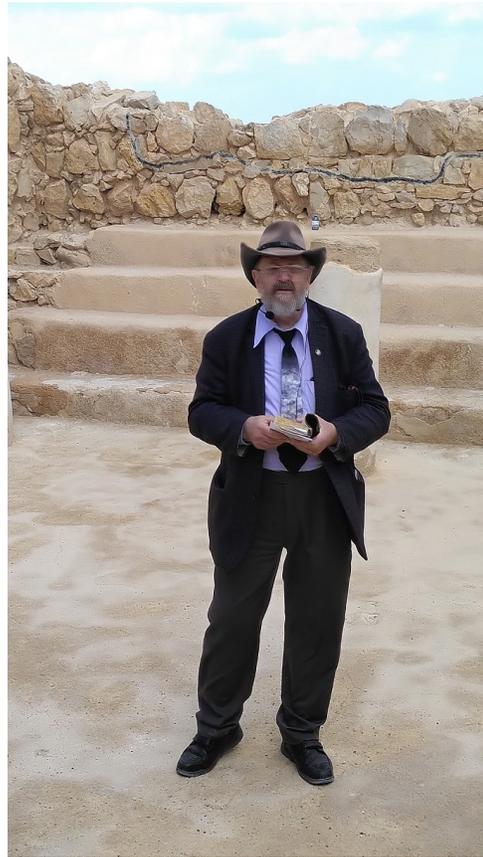
It wasn't only Catholics who advocated expelling the Jews. In 1543, Martin Luther, leader of the Protestant Reformation, wrote a 13-part booklet titled "On the Jews and Their Lies".

It spewed such vitriolic hatred of the Jewish people that it influenced the German perception of Jews for centuries to come and helped Adolf Hitler and the Nazis justify their "final solution to the Jewish question," an euphemism for the annihilation of European Jewry.

Toward the beginning of his ministry, Luther was more congenial toward the Jewish community, thinking Jews might believe the gospel after he restored the doctrine of justification by faith. But when they failed to accept the gospel, he began to despise them.

He wrote "On the Jews and Their Lies" three years before he died. It is a polemic against a Jewish publication in which the author debates an imaginary Christian. Luther not only challenged the Jewish author's interpretation of Scripture, but also vented his animosity toward all Jews. He held nothing back. "Next to the devil," Luther wrote, "a Christian has no more bitter and galling foe than a Jew."⁸

Martin Luther called Jewish people "venomous, bitter, vindictive, tricky serpents, assassins, and children of the devil who sting and work harm stealthily wherever they cannot do it openly." He also gave credence to the commonly accepted libels of the



day that Jewish people kidnapped and mutilated Christian children and deliberately poisoned wells. (This very libel led to the massacre of thousands of European Jews during the Black Death plague in the mid-14th century.)

The tail end of the Roman Empire's hatred for, and destruction of a million Jews, happened on the highland desert plateau called Masada. It is presently one of the most popular tourist attractions in Israel receiving 750,000 visitors per year. We were twenty-two of them, twenty two that should never forget what Rome, in league with Satan himself, did here. The Roman Empire, spiraling into obliteration because of the judgment of God, reached out with its evil fingers and attempted to wipe all of God's chosen people Israel off the face of the earth. They burnt and destroyed the temple and all of Jerusalem in 70 AD, and then with one final villainous campaign they reached to the

8 Ibid. pg 22.

top of a fortress in a barren wilderness to kill off the thousand Jews that still defied their evil. If we learn nothing else from this tour of Masada, learn this, antisemitism is diabolical, it is a manifestation of Satan himself; Satan “*opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped*” (2Thes.2:4); he will do whatever it takes to prevent the fulfillment of God's covenant promises to Israel, but he will fail. Masada is thus a vile taste of the great lengths that Satan would take, through the hands of evil men, to destroy the Jew.

In 1948 Israel was given back what God said was rightfully theirs and a slogan was born to commemorate their homecoming; the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) units are still sworn in on Masada's southern point with that powerful affirmation for the Jewish state, “Masada, shall never fall again.” In that swearing in ceremony Elazar Ben Yair's words⁹ are read atop that mesa:



“Since we long ago, my generous friends, resolved never to be servants to the Romans, nor to any other than to God himself, who alone is the true and just lord of mankind; the time is now come that obliges us to make that resolution true in practice... I cannot but esteem it as a favor that God hath granted us, that 'tis still in our power to die bravely, and in a state of freedom. Which hath not been the case of others, who were conquered unexpectedly. 'Tis very plain that we shall be taken within a days time: but 'tis still an eligible thing to die, after a glorious manner, together with our dearest friends.”¹⁰



9 “Since we long ago resolved never to be servants to the Romans, nor to any other than to God Himself, Who alone is the true and just Lord of mankind, the time is now come that obliges us to make that resolution true in practice... We were the very first that revolted, and we are the last to fight against them; and I cannot but esteem it as a favor that God has granted us, that it is still in our power to die bravely, and in a state of freedom.” from <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/elazar-ben-yair-speech-at-masada> (Accessed 01/02/2024).

10 <https://www.ifcj.org/news/fellowship-blog/masada-shall-never-fall-again> International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, Fellowship-blog article, 21 May 2018. (Accessed 01/02/2023)

A Christian with their Bible open to the Revelation of Jesus Christ might be found in full agreement with their slogan, “Masada, shall never fall again.” Our bus lumbered out of the parking lot of Masada National Park. Some of us were somber, but all of us were knowing who holds the future, and carried a better perspective which would better enable us to fulfill Psalm 122:6-9,

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces. For my brethren and companions’ sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee. Because of the house of the LORD our God I will seek thy good (Ps.122:6-9).

There was one more stop for the day, the bus turned south and we headed for a salty beach on the southern end of the Dead Sea, we were headed for the David Dead Sea Hotel¹¹ (31°12'09.23"N 35°21'41.03"E). The visit to, and float in, the Dead Sea was so extraordinary it requires another Half Shekel to cover it all. The hotel and the kosher supper were every bit as exotic as their advertisements. That would end our Lord's Day.



On deck, Day 12, March 27th.at Timna Park and Solomon's Pillars, then hours at the Model Tabernacle, and a restful repose on the Red Sea at Eilat.



11 The David Dead Sea Hotel is a luxury resort and spa, located in the scenic Ein Bokek resort, along the bank of the Dead Sea. The hotel's vast amount of amenities and facilities means that guests can choose between a tranquil and serene stay or a vibrant and entertaining experience. The hotel is fully equipped with a deluxe spa, multiple restaurants, dining rooms, bars, pools, saunas, and much more. For a truly unforgettable Dead Sea travel experience, this is certainly the place to stay. <https://deadsea.com> see david-dead-sea-hotel (Accessed 01/02/2024)