

MASADA, EIN GEDI KIBBUTZ AND THE DEAD SEA

Taba, Egypt, is a great base for reaching some of the wonderful sights and sites in this part of the world. Sandra and Jack Jackson having been to Mount Sinai and St. Catherine's Monastery (Sunrise over Mount Sinai, Magna July 2006) a few days later set off on a journey to Masada, the Dead Sea and the Kibbutz Ein Gedi

Just four of us from our hotel in Taba, boarded the mini-bus at 5 a.m. with carrier bags containing breakfast and water for the day ahead.

As we drove along the 9 km to the Israeli border, I wondered if this second trip would live up to our first trip, of seeing the Sunrise over Mount Sinai and visiting St. Catherine's Monastery at the foot of the mountain. The Monastery of Santa Katarina is the smallest diocese in the world and the oldest Christian monastery in existence and houses the richest collection of icons and precious manuscripts. I had certainly come away amazed by all I had seen and feeling more spiritual. Anyway, today I was looking forward to floating in the Dead Sea but being nervous of heights I wasn't sure about the cable car to Masada's plateau!



Passports and baggage were checked at the border and money changed to Shekels. On the other side of the border we were met by our guide who led us to another mini-bus, which picked up two more tourists from Eilat, a popular Israeli holiday destination



The early morning darkness lifted as we left the busy city behind and the scenery was now desert, mountains and dazzling sun shine. Thoughts of prophets 'crying in the wilderness' sprang to mind. As we continued along the road to Masada and the Dead Sea, our guide told us some history of Masada mountain: This mountain had a flat, diamond shape top, rising 2000ft above the level of the Dead Sea, half a mile long and 220 yards wide. In the year 40 BC Herod the Great, built a huge, magnificent palace on top of Masada; later

how a Jewish group held out against Roman occupation of Judea. On the journey our guide pointed out date and olive plantations and a game reserve where Biblical animals, including ostriches and wild goats, were bred. It seemed the time passed quickly as we munched through our breakfasts, gleaning all this information.

We arrived at Masada Museum before 9 a.m. at the bottom of the mountain, we were checked for hats, sunglasses and water, then taken up on a cable car with a few more parties of people, to the summit.

The views from the top of Masada were breath-taking and awesome, various shades of yellow everywhere from the desert and rocks, stretching as far as the eye could see.

Our guide beckoned us to a water cistern that filled, by collecting water from the ‘wadis’ of the desert during the couple of flash floods that happen every year or so. ‘Wadis’ are dried river beds that look like veins etched in the desert, waiting for their ‘life-blood’ – water. From there on it was a bit like starting your first day at a job for the water board!! We were shown how the water was stored and places it was used. Besides being used for drinking water it was used for religious purposes, bathing and steam rooms. Beautiful original Herodian mosaics and tiles still remained, as in the Jewish tradition patterns with no depictions of people or animals.



It was a truly memorable place to visit and a time to realise the ultimate sacrifice Jewish people on this mountain paid rather than be slaves to the Romans. Masada was a stronghold of the Jews in their revolt against the Roman occupation of Judea (66 AD). In 73 AD the defenders decided to die, in accordance with their law, rather than become enslaved. The site is an Israeli national monument. We have been looking out for the 1981 film ‘Masada’ with Peter O’Toole, but no luck so far.

After we rested near the Museum and drank cold glasses of freshly juiced dates and fresh fruits the best I have ever had, then went on to Ein Geid Kibbutz and Botanical Gardens for a buffet style lunch, it was almost as if we had entered the Garden of Eden, with the miracles of God’s creations all around, beautiful flowers and trees, an oasis in the desert. Again – an unforgettable place surrounded by mountains and palm trees – the lunch was almost a wedding feast!



Not far away was Ein Gedi Spa - the lowest point on earth, as we drove there we passed Sodom and Gomorrah. Here Lot’s wife was turned into a pillar of salt. It was as if we were turning the pages of the Old Testament.

At the Spa we had a short bathe in a sulphur mineral bath, smelt like rotten eggs, but afterwards my skin felt so smooth.

Then we were led to the outside spa, where there were large containers of Dead Sea mud, we had great fun covering ourselves with this and after letting it dry, we showered it all off again. A shuttle bus nearby then took us down to the Dead Sea and we enjoyed the experience of floating without any effort. I clung onto the hose pipes for support though just in case I floated away. There was a Jewish lady next to me, I admired her salt crystal she had found in the water and then she insisted I should have it, unfortunately my body bobbed in another direction and the salt crystal was claimed by the Dead Sea once more!

As we entered the Spa to get dressed and get ready for our homeward journey, I was suddenly aware of vast numbers of people who had come here, their pilgrimage to the Healing Waters of the Dead Sea. Young and old, people in wheelchairs and on stretchers. I felt so lucky, so privileged and I silently wept and prayed for miracles for them.

As we passed the mountains and desert, again I could almost hear echoes of prophets crying in the wilderness. I felt reassured by Ezekiel's message of the power and glory of God.

Yes it was a wonderful second trip, rounded off by ice-cream made from the milk of the cows at a breeding farm on the journey back to Taba. And there was still more to come - Dahab and Jerusalem.

Sandra Jackson

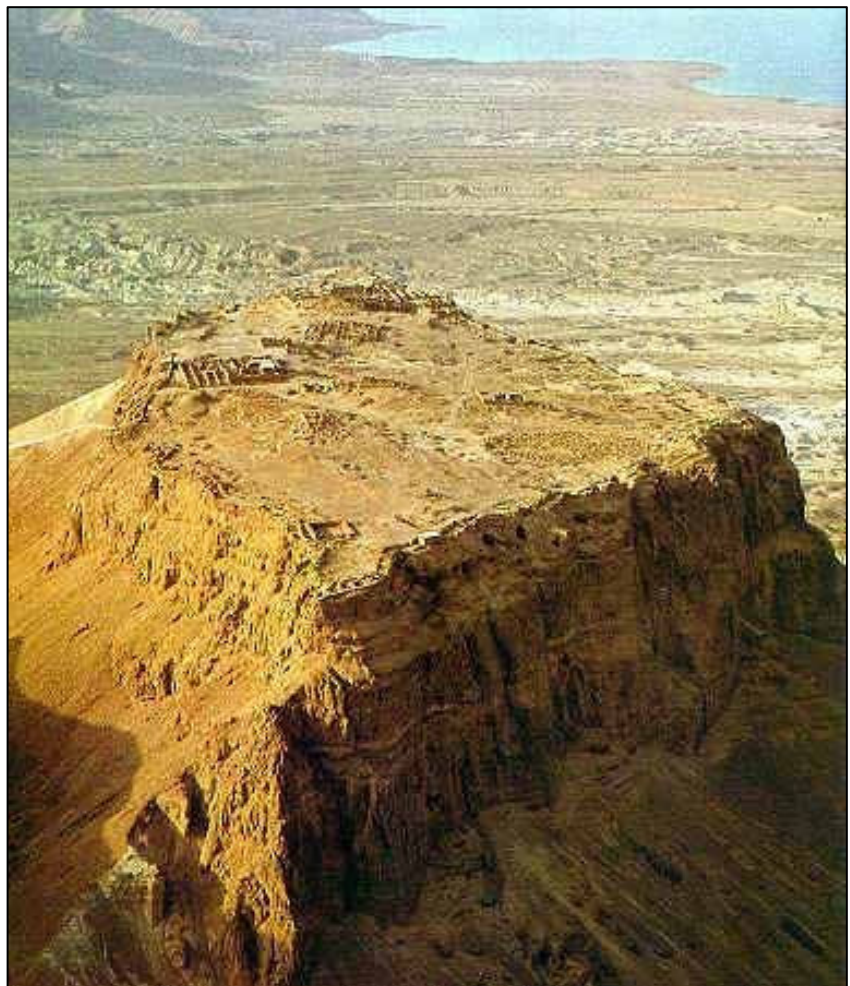
To be continued

EZEKIEL 37.7-9

7 So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone.

8 I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them.

9 Then he said to me, 'Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.



Masada