

SHALOM MY FRIENDS,

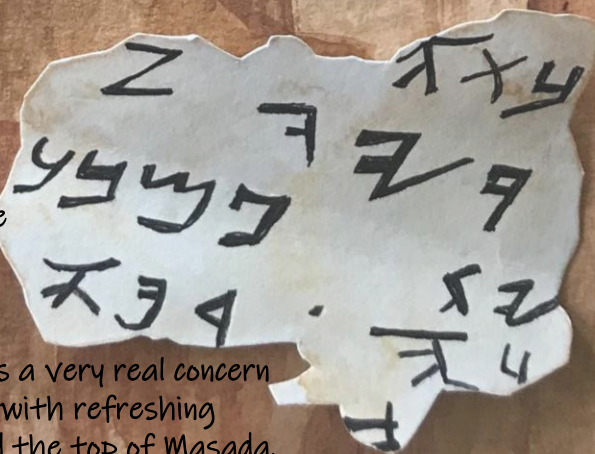
I had never thought that waking up at 3 am in the morning would ever be worth it – did you? As we buckled up into the rental van for our ride through the darkness of the predawn morning to Masada we were more than half asleep. Some of us dozed on the ride as the van followed the twists and turns around the barren hillsides as we went down down down into the Jordan valley. We were following the road of the parable of the Good Samaritan, the road from Jerusalem down to Jericho. Do you remember that parable that Jesus taught?

I think I must have dozed off on the drive down because the next thing that happened was waking up at the bottom of Masada. We had arrived over halfway down the Israeli side of the Dead Sea and there in front of us was the cliff faced sides of the Masada mountain. We parked underneath and made our way up the elevators to the visitor center. Wiping the sleep out of our eyes we checked that our camel packs were filled with water and that we each had some trail mix or granola bars. Water is very important here; it gets so hot that you need more than just water – you need electrolytes. Do you know what those are? They are minerals dissolved in your body's fluids, and when it is very hot outside you lose these and need to drink Gatorade or an electrolyte drink to get them back into your body otherwise you can get very sick. The heat down at Masada can exceed 40 degrees in the summer so that was part of the reason why we left in what seemed to be the middle of the night to drive the 2 hours to Masada. After checking our supplies and re-tying shoelaces we were ready to begin our hike.

Masada is a natural fortress that is mentioned back during the time when David hid in the wilderness, it is called 'the hold' in the Bible and is the Hebrew word Masada. It is the perfect fortress as its cliff sides measure about 450 meters high. Situated in the Judean dessert next to the Dead Sea makes it a very inhospitable place to be let alone live! As we hike up what is called the "snake path" we wind up, twisting and turning around boulders & rock, the only sound we can hear is the crunch of our feet on the stones and our breathing getting harder as we continue to climb up the steep side to the top of the mountain. The quicker in our group make it up in an hour and wait for the rest of us slower ones that took an extra 20 minutes. Finally we reach the top just as the sun begins to dawn. Seeing the light of the sun pierce through the darkness and across the red mountains of Moab where Ruth came from is an awe-inspiring sight. It reminds us of the verse in the Psalms "What is man, that thou art mindful of him?" (Psa 8:4) as we stand silently looking at the most beautiful sunrise we have ever seen in our lives. Even in the desert where only one type of tree, the Acacia tree, can survive and grow, the power of God in his wondrous creation is amazing! As the sun's rays continue to shine brighter and brighter it reminds us of hymn 361

"Our hope and expectation, O, Jesus! Now appear!
Arise, thou Sun, so longed for, O'er this benighted spherel
With hearts and hand uplifted, We plead, O Lord, to see
The day of earth's redemption that brings us unto thee!"

We sat and ate our breakfast of granola bars before reading the first portion of our daily Bible readings – Doing a Bible reading is always the best way to start the day! It was mandatory that everyone drink a whole bottle of Gatorade before we continued our day. Heat exhaustion was a very real concern so a hat was on every head and we refilled our camel packs with refreshing ice cold water from one of the water stations placed around the top of Masada.



Masada was dug up by an Israeli archeologist called Yigael Yadin extensively between 1963 and 1965. Since it is so far away from any human habitation and in the middle of the desert, the site remained largely untouched and safe from human hands. Yigael Yadin discovered that Herod the Great had built 2 palaces on Masada, one of which had 3 levels down the side of the cliff overlooking the Dead Sea. Herod the Great was called "the Great" because he had so many special buildings built. He was a very evil man who had all the babies aged 2 and under in Bethlehem killed in Matthew 2:16.



As we walk around the ruins of the palaces on the top of Masada we see mosaic tiles and painted walls, even heated bathroom floors! There is a dovecote or a place for pigeons to stay that were used to send messages by air to other towns and cities, especially Jerusalem. Herod was clever and tried to make the Jews like him – which actually never worked! During the time of the revolt against the Romans around AD70 a group of Jews fled to Masada and hid there. They had enough food and water to last for a long time – years! But the Romans had time on their side, do you know what they did? They built fortresses and camps around the bottom of Masada, with a 2.6 mile wall so that it was completely surrounded. When you look down from the top you can actually see

the ruins of all of these, including much of the wall! Then they started having Jewish slaves build a giant ramp up to Masada. That ramp was 1,968 feet (600 m) long and rose 200 feet (61 m) to the fortress wall! On April 15, in the year AD73 the Romans collapsed a hole into the wall and expected to find the Jews to fight but instead found only a couple women and children that were put in an empty water cistern to tell the Romans the news that everyone else was dead, because they would rather die than be slaves to the pagan Romans. That was the last hold out and after this most of the Jews were taken captive and scattered through the whole Roman Empire. This was in fulfillment of what the Bible said!



When Yigael Yadin and his team dug up Masada, they excavated the area of the synagogue and were amazed and astonished when they found fragments of scrolls of the Old Testament there (Genesis, Leviticus, Psalms,

Deuteronomy and Ezekiel). The most amazing find was the section of Ezekiel that we call the "Dry Bones" prophecy. We sat on the stone benches in the synagogue and read Ezekiel 37. God says that the dry bones are the whole house of Israel. Just like the prophecy says Israel was dead like the dried out bones after the time of Masada – there was nothing left. But God brought them back out of the graves of the holocaust of Europe just as it said to make them a nation again. The most exciting part hasn't happened yet though, it keeps going to say that God will put his spirit into them and they will know that God has done this. Then one king, Jesus Christ, will reign over them and they will



be cleansed and saved by God! We are all waiting and watching for Jesus to come back to fulfil the end of this prophecy. It would be amazing see God's people, the Jews, recognize Jesus Christ as their Messiah and King!

Shalom until next time;
Crazy Auntie Lindsay

Ps: they planted a date seed that they found in Masada from AD 73 and it sprouted in 2005 and is now growing into a tree – they've named it after the oldest man in the Bible, do you know who that is?