

40 Masada

Names (also known as)

Hebrew - מצדה *metzadá* - "fortress"

Location/Description

Masada is an ancient fortification in the Southern District of Israel situated on top of an isolated rock plateau on the eastern edge of the Judean Desert, overlooking the Dead Sea.

Masada is located 20 km (12 mi) east of Arad (a city in the South District of Israel). It is located on the border of the Negev and Judean Deserts, 25 kilometers (15.5 mi) west of the Dead Sea and 45 km (28 mi) east of Beersheba).



The cliffs on the east side are 400m (1300 ft) high and on the west are 90m (300 ft) high. The top is 500m (1800ft) by 270m (890 ft). The fortress had walls 13 feet high, with many towers.

Scriptural references

The Hebrew word *metsûdâh* occurs 22 times in the O.T. – often of Yahweh as the ‘fortress’ of His people.

Famous characters

Herod the Great
Lucius Flavius Silva
Roman Legion X Fretensis

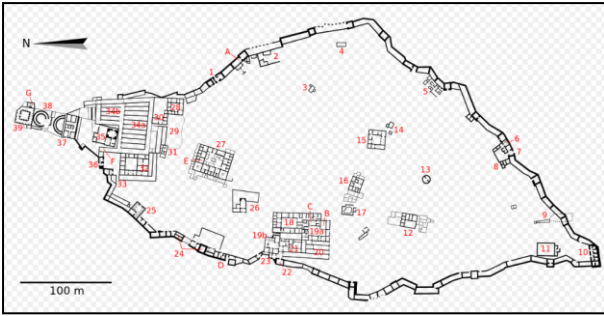


Brief history

Herod the Great built palaces for himself on the mountain and fortified Masada between 37 and 31 BC. (Herod: 74/73–4 BC), also known as Herod the Great and Herod I, was a Roman client king of Judea, referred to as the Herodian kingdom. He has been described as "a madman who murdered his own family and a great many rabbis", "the evil genius of the Judean nation", "prepared to commit any crime in order to gratify his unbounded ambition" and "the greatest builder in Jewish history". He is known for his colossal building projects throughout Judea, including his expansion of the Second Temple in Jerusalem (Herod's Temple), the construction of the port at Caesarea Maritima, the fortress at Masada and Herodium.

Upon Herod's death, the Romans divided his kingdom among three of his sons—Archelaus became ethnarch of the tetrarchy of Judea, Herod Antipas became tetrarch of Galilee and Peraea, and Philip became tetrarch of territories east of the Jordan.

According to Josephus, the Siege of Masada by troops of the Roman Empire towards the end of the First Jewish–Roman War ended in the mass suicide of the 960 Sicarii rebels and their families hiding there.



Almost all historical information about Masada comes from the 1st-century Jewish Roman historian Josephus. The site was first fortified by Alexander Jannaeus in the first century BC. Herod the Great captured it in the power-struggle that followed the death of his father Antipater. It survived the siege of the last Hasmonean king Antigonus II Mattathias, who ruled with Parthian support. In 66 AD, a group of Jewish rebels, the Sicarii, overcame the Roman garrison of Masada with the aid of a ruse. After the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 AD, additional members of the Sicarii fled Jerusalem and settled on the mountaintop after slaughtering the Roman garrison. According to Josephus, the Sicarii were an extremist Jewish splinter group antagonistic to a larger grouping of Jews referred to as the Zealots, who carried the main burden of the rebellion. Josephus said that the Sicarii raided nearby Jewish villages including Ein Gedi, where they massacred 700 women and children.



In 73 AD, the Roman governor of Judaea Lucius Flavius Silva headed the Roman legion X Fretensis and laid siege to Masada. The Roman legion surrounded Masada, and built a circumvallation wall and then a siege ramp against the western face of the plateau.

According to Dan Gill, geological investigations in the early 1990s confirmed earlier observations that the 375 foot (114 m) high assault ramp consisted mostly of a natural spur of bedrock. The ramp was completed in the spring of 73, after probably

two to three months of siege, allowing the Romans to finally breach the wall of the fortress with a battering ram on April 16. Romans took the X Legion and a number of auxiliary units and Jewish prisoners of war, totalling some 15,000 troops in order to crush Jewish resistance at Masada. A giant siege tower with a battering ram was constructed and moved laboriously up the completed ramp. Originally, Jewish rebels on top of Masada threw stones at those building and constructing the ramp. When this plan was realized, the Romans put captured Jewish prisoners from previously conquered towns to work the ramp. The Jewish people on top of Masada stopped killing those who built the ramp, choosing not to kill their fellow Jews, even though they understood this might result in the Romans penetrating the fortress. The walls of the fortress were breached in 73 AD. According to Josephus, when Roman troops entered the fortress, they discovered that its 960 inhabitants had set all the buildings but the food storerooms ablaze and committed mass suicide or killed each other. Josephus wrote of two stirring speeches that the Sicari leader had made to convince his fellows to kill themselves. Only two women and five children were found alive. Josephus presumably based his narration upon the field commentaries of the Roman commanders that were accessible to him.

The year of the siege of Masada may have been 73 or 74 AD.

Masada was last occupied during the Byzantine (Eastern Roman Empire) period of rule, when a small church was established at the site.

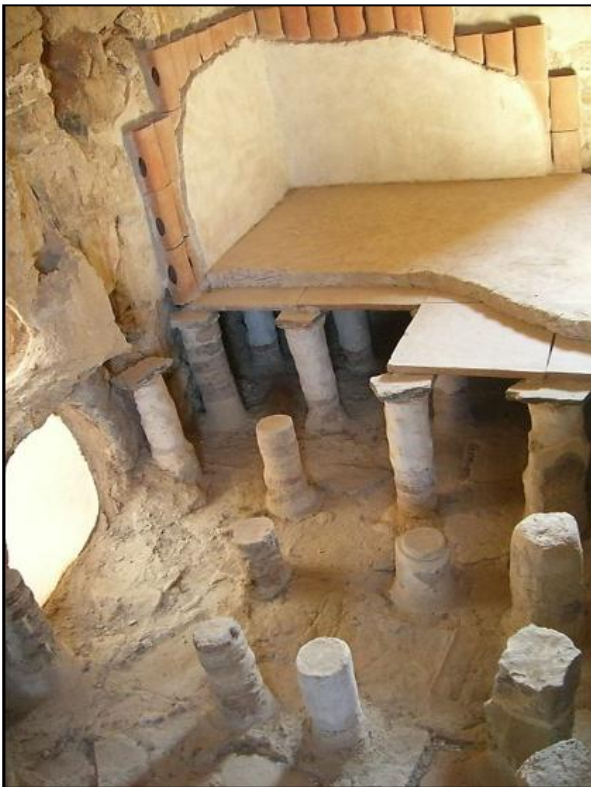




Above: Ritual bath at Masada



Above: The northern palace



Above: Thermal baths at Masada

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(Compilers – Ian Macfarlane/Jim Cowie)

Ps. 115:9-
"O Israel!
trust thou
in Yahweh,
Their help
and their
shield, is
he! (Roth.)

