



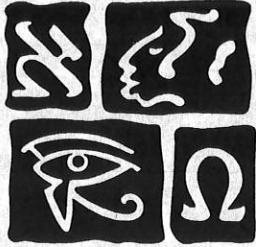
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John W. Welch
**Masada and the World
of the New Testament**
A Preview Lecture

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Masada and the World of the New Testament: A Preview Lecture

John W. Welch

Thank you everyone and welcome to this evening's preview, the third of our preview lecture series. I'm glad you share the enthusiasm that I have for Masada, ancient scrolls, and the world of the New Testament. I think that of all the things I've been involved in here at BYU, this is certainly one of the most exciting projects that we've had come along in a long time.

I've been asked to give a preview. When you go to the movies, a preview is a brief presentation—just enough to reward you for coming but leaving you wanting to see more. Well, I hope not to tell you too much tonight. I want to point out some interesting questions that you should ask yourself as you prepare to come to the exhibit and to preview a few of the things that you'll want to watch for when you visit the coming unusual exhibitions.

I'd like to begin by thanking my colleague, Dr. John Hall, who gave the first of our preview lectures, who helped us in separating Roman reality from Hollywood hype and in seeing Masada from the Roman point of view. Of course from the Roman perspective, the people at Masada were indeed little more than rebels, criminals, and dangerous threats to the public order. And, for a Roman, few values surpassed the keeping of the peace and the maintenance of *Pax Romana*. The rebellion of the Jews began in Galilee, about A.D. 66. War broke out there, partly as Jews took advantage of some of the political instability in Rome at that time. The rebellion was brought under control fairly quickly, and one of the Jewish commanders was a man named Josephus Flavius. Rather than being taken captive and perhaps committing suicide with some of his own men, Josephus chose to surrender, and he became an informant—a traitor as far as the Jews were concerned—helping the Romans then to march around the rest of Galilee and other places, putting down Jewish rebellions. The rebellion spread to Masada, where a group of rebels took a fortress that had been previously fortified and built by Herod

the Great, and they held out there for a while. The war also spread into Jerusalem, and eventually Jerusalem was surrounded by Roman soldiers, by a wall, and then was destroyed in A.D. 70. About three years later the Romans decided that they would go out against the last holdout of Jewish resistance, which was then located at Masada, and that's where our story of Masada begins.

I'd also like to thank Dr. Marti Lu Allen, who gave the second of our preview lectures. Her lecture focused on the details of the amazing story of the excavation of Masada in the 1960s. A team of volunteers came from all over the world to participate in the excavations organized by Yigael Yadin. (In 1976 Yadin came to Brigham Young University and gave a forum speech. When you come to the exhibit and watch the introductory video, you will hear Yadin's voice and see some of the recordings of the forum speech that he gave here twenty-one years ago.) Marti Lu talked about some of the artifacts from that remote excavation site that will be coming here to BYU. The site was largely untouched and was amazingly well-preserved—complete with such things as the Jewish rebels' makeshift quarters in Herod's palaces, which they occupied and converted for their own purposes. The *ballistae*, stone balls that were launched by Roman catapults from down below up into the fortress, were all over the upper top of Masada. The top of this plateau is about seven hundred yards long. It's a large enough area that the rebels, as they lived there, were able (to a limited extent) to plant crops and farm while they were surrounded by Romans and couldn't come in or out of the fortress. The excavation also discovered a layer of ash—the sober remains of the torching of Masada by its defenders, who chose to set the entire fortress on fire and commit suicide rather than yield to the Romans as they realized that the capture of Masada was inevitable. This kind of physical evidence (the layer of ash) was a very interesting and important confirmation of that part of Josephus's story. Many of the blocks of the

buildings of Masada, though they had fallen down over the years, were still right in the place below where they had once been, and the excavators could put them back up into place, restoring much of the original look of the palaces and the buildings built there by Herod and others, making Masada one of the most popular tourist destinations in Israel today.

We are very lucky to have these things coming to BYU and are anxiously awaiting the arrival of these rare and wonderful treasures. Some of the things that will be coming are rather ordinary items, but they tell an extraordinary tale. Herod's dinner plates and table service will be part of the exhibit, as will storage jars, some of them with Herod's name written on them. Herod had about ten years' supply of food up there on the top of this fortress, which allowed him to anticipate being able to hold out against any kind of siege.

Among the remains found at Masada were weapons, pieces of cloth, belt buckles, sandals, cosmetic implements, and eleven small pieces of pottery with letters or names on them. Are these the eleven lots that were drawn by the last of these warriors or rebels as they decided the order in which they would finally commit suicide? Yigael Yadin thought that they were those lots.

In addition, actual Dead Sea Scrolls were found at Masada. Fourteen of them were quite possibly brought directly from Qumran, which is about thirty miles north of Masada. Excavators with whom I've spoken tell the story of the thrill of their lives as they were carefully brushing away the dust, watching the name of Jehovah on one of those scrolls appearing suddenly out of the sands that had covered those scrolls for two thousand years. Among the scrolls are fragments from Deuteronomy, the Blessing of Moses at the end of the book of Deuteronomy, Psalm 150, and a portion of the book of Leviticus, which for the Jews is the holiest of the books in the Bible. Interestingly, that fragment of Leviticus was torn—apparently intentionally

defaced by people, maybe the Romans, who came in and found the material. Also recovered was the Wisdom of Ben Sira, one of the most popular Hebrew or Jewish texts with wisdom literature in it; a sectarian text, unique to Qumran, called the Song of the Sabbath; and also part of the scroll of Ezekiel.

What we have here are fascinating fragments of a blockbuster story. The artifacts more than make up for their simplicity by virtue of their rarity. Think how few artifacts we actually have from first century Judea. We have some, but not many, and most of them come from Masada. It's nothing like the Cairo Museum for the first century archaeology of Palestine. The Cairo Museum is crammed with massive and opulently exquisite treasures of the pharaohs. But the Israelites left all of that when they returned to the rocky, hill country of Judea. And what's more, the people of Masada were on the low end of those economic surroundings.

I'm often asked, "What will people get out of the Masada Exhibit?" And the answer, I think, is, "The more they bring to the exhibit, the more they will get out of it." We will do everything we can to help you as you come: there will be models of Herod's palace, an introductory film, and an audio guide. BYU Studies is publishing the English translation of the Hebrew catalog with over a hundred color photographs of objects in the exhibit; and in addition, BYU Studies will be publishing as its next issue a special issue of over 350 pages long on Masada and the world of the New Testament.

Besides the material that we are bringing for Masada, I thought as long as we were bringing all of these things from Masada, why not bring a few more items from Qumran? The adjoining Dead Sea Scroll Exhibit is sponsored primarily by FARMS and is in addition to the actual scroll materials from Masada that will be in the Masada Exhibit. This second exhibit will display full-sized leather replicas of a number of Dead Sea Scrolls, including the Great Isaiah Scroll, which is twenty-four-

feet long. This is a replica, but that is what people travel all the way to the Shrine of the Book in Jerusalem to see; when you go there, you also see a replica. But there will actually be other artifacts from Qumran, including a small four-horned bronze incense altar. This ancient model of the altar in the Temple of Jerusalem is on loan from a collector in Norway. There will be an actual pot from the caves of Qumran, and other ancient scrolls, one of which we call the "Alma Scroll." This was discovered only a few miles north of Masada. Sixty years after the fall of Masada, there was a second Jewish revolt, led by Bar Kokhba. This document that is coming from the Shrine of the Book is a deed. One of the parties mentioned in that deed, which is a partitioning of a leasehold estate, was a man named Alma ben Yehudah. This is the document that Hugh Nibley and several Latter-day Saints took quite an interest in about twenty-five years ago. And in addition, computers displaying FARMS's premier Dead Sea Scrolls CD-ROM and many more things will be on exhibit.

In many ways you will see more of Masada and perhaps more of Qumran in 1997 in Provo than you might by going to Jerusalem. And probably this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for many of you to see actual Dead Sea Scroll materials. We are honored and fortunate to have this exhibit coming, and it's based largely on the goodwill and sterling reputation of many people in the BYU community who have made this possible. When I saw this exhibit for the first time in Jerusalem a few years ago, I was with Alan Ashton, and we immediately started thinking about the possibility of bringing this to BYU. We asked if the curator was in the building and were told that Gila Hurvitz was in her workroom not far away. We went, found her, and asked if she would be interested in having this exhibit come to the United States, especially to Brigham Young University. The Archaeology Department and all the major departments of the Hebrew University on Mount Scopus is only a

stone's throw away from the BYU Jerusalem Center. Gila thought very shortly, just for a minute or two, and said, "We are neighbors here in Jerusalem. We should be neighbors with this project in the United States." And with that, the coming of the Masada exhibit was launched.

Slides

Masada is located on the west shore of the Dead Sea. Qumran is only thirty miles north. Jerusalem is up in the mountains. The map you will see at the beginning of the Dead Sea Scrolls exhibit shows various places where archaeological discoveries of manuscripts have been found, Masada being one of them. This is where the Bar Kokhba materials were found. Again, so many of the sites are right down here in the Dead Sea area.

As you drive from the Dead Sea, going west, you see the cliff of Masada. At the Dead Sea, of course, you're thirteen hundred feet below sea level; the top of this cliff is right at sea level, so these cliffs are over a thousand feet high and this whole area stands as an isolated, natural fortress just protruding up out of the area. You get an idea of the steepness of the sheer cliffs that made this fortress a natural place for people to hide.

From the top of the mountain fortress, you get a distant view, looking off to the Dead Sea in the background. The Hanging Palace is on the north end, and this is the ramp that was built by the Romans in order to get up to the top.

The Northern Palace, built by Herod the Great, was a spectacular construction project. You can imagine getting all of the workmen, and the equipment, to build walls all around the top of this; it's a double wall called a casemate wall. And there are a number of structures all over the top of this. The Northern Palace has storage and other administrative facilities, housing areas, rooms, and so on. The marvelous

portico has a spectacular view. In fact, from this point you could look all the way to the north to the end of the Dead Sea and probably see the smoke rising as the Romans destroyed the village of Qumran. Other terraces down below were kind of luxury terraces, and you could get up and down from one to the other on an internal staircase within the cliffs. The lower terrace had columns—evidence of the Hellenistic cultural influence on the architecture; it was beautifully constructed—a spectacular site.

What did they do for water up there? Herod carved twelve huge cisterns out of the solid rock and then built a whole series of rain gutters all the way around this mountain so that when the flash flooding came in the winter, every drop was collected and would run off into these large water tanks. There was enough food and enough water on Masada to hold out for ten years.

This fortress was quite comfortably set up. Foundations were discovered underneath the flooring for a Roman-type steam bath. So it was a place of great luxury. This was a marvelous palace.

The walls of the fortress were plastered and then painted over to make it look like Italian marble. They had done so well that the reputation was that this fortress was in fact lined with marble. In fact it wasn't, but just from looking at it, you wouldn't know. It's kind of like the Mormon pioneers who took the pine from the local mountains and painted it to look like oak. If you don't look very closely, it's a pretty good copy.

The designs are simple though. One thing that was quite surprising was that Herod, even though he was a Hellenistic-type king and had a deep friendship and alliance with Rome, did not decorate his palace with any artifacts or images that would have been offensive to Jews. Herod was a Jew, but he was a Idumaeon, and some people have wondered how faithful a Jew he was. These designs speak of a

considerable degree of orthodoxy. In fact they also found some pots there that said "for the priestly tithing." So one might think Herod and other people here were tithe payers.

There were several step-down pools. These are apparently ritual immersion baths. The Jews who occupied this site at the end of its existence were observant Jews. Twice a day, morning and night, they had to immerse themselves in living or running water—water that had been collected in a special way.

And surprisingly, the excavators also found a synagogue. This is the oldest synagogue that has been excavated archaeologically. It dates to the time of the apostles Peter and Paul and is probably similar to the kinds of synagogues that Paul would have gone into when he was preaching.

Looking a thousand feet down from the top of Masada, you can see the outlines of Silva's camp. All around Masada you can still see the remains of the Roman camps that encircled and eventually conquered the site.

The ramp is on a natural spur so they didn't have to build the whole thing, but they had to level it out and raise it considerably to push a siege tower up right against the wall. The last forty or fifty feet were accomplished by the siege tower, which then knocked down the walls. You see from the top view that it is fairly steep and that it is a very large ramp.

Moving thirty miles to the north, we see a picture of the caves of Qumran where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found. One of those scrolls was the Manual of Discipline, which will be a part of our exhibit. The Manual of Discipline is basically the Doctrine and Covenants, if you will. I mean, it's the rules of the community here at Qumran telling how they would enter into this particular community by way of covenant, consecrating or giving up all of their property, covenanting to keep the teachings of the community secret. The community was headed by a group of twelve elders and

three priests. That's about where the similarities [with the Doctrine and Covenants] end. There were strict penalties for the violation of any of the rules of the community. If you fell asleep in a lecture, you served one month's penance. And if you spoke in anger to one of the priests or leaders of the community, you served one year.

Finally, pots in which the scrolls were buried will be on display in the exhibit, and as I mentioned, one of these pots is actually on loan from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It was bought in 1976 when Hugh Nibley was over in Jerusalem.

Questions to Think About

Let me now talk more specifically about some of the questions that you might want to think about and ask yourself as you come to the exhibit and as you study these materials. Let's start with maybe an obvious one. Masada was built by Herod. What kind of a person was he and what other things did he do? This is the same Herod, Herod the Great, known to you from the Christmas story. He has a reputation for being a very brutal man, and he did kill a number of his political opponents and several of his own family members to secure his very precarious position as king and ruler of Judea. He was also a very complex person: he was very subtle and very astute. As a politician, he made a shrewd switch of loyalty just at the right moment from following and being aligned with Marc Antony to gaining the favor of Augustus Caesar. That turned out to be a stroke of genius because his loyalty to Caesar paid off throughout his life.

One of the things that Herod was given was a lot of land and the right to control most of that part of the Eastern Mediterranean to help stabilize an otherwise difficult situation for the Romans. In order to do that, Herod undertook a number of

construction projects; Masada was only one of them. A great seaport, an artificial harbor, was built at Caesarea. A marvelous palace at Jericho was built. The great Temple in Jerusalem, the one that Jesus spent a great deal of time in, was built by Herod as well. A number of these places are, of course, mentioned prominently in the New Testament.

Not only did Herod spend a lot of money locally, within Judea, but he made gifts all over the Eastern Mediterranean. At one point, he bailed out the Olympic Games, which were almost in bankruptcy and were threatening to go out of existence. He said, "I'll do this as long as you call me the president of the Olympic Games and erect a monument to my honor, forever." He received an honorary degree as Friend of Rome, and you might be surprised learning the many ways in which he was faithfully Jewish. In fact, he would not allow his daughters to marry anyone who was not circumcised. So he was fairly strict in his own practice of certain Jewish rules.

He had ten wives himself, which of course ended up causing him no end of family troubles. As you might imagine, a man like that is going to need a place like Masada. Eventually, Augustus Caesar gave Herod the right and honor to appoint his own successor, which may have created more problems than it solved. Herod had so many sons, it was difficult to know how to divide up his kingdom, and in the end some of his sons even tried to kill him. Herod was able to have them convicted and put to death, but toward the end of his life, he became rather neurotic about the question of who might be the next king of the Jews. In the end, Herod learned that no success with Rome can compensate for failure in the home.

When you think about Herod's great impact on Judea, I hope you will wonder about Herod's legacy to Christianity. We know him for the slaughter of the infants in Bethlehem, but maybe his conspicuous neuroses about appointing his successor

had a lot to do with that. I even wonder if the Wise Men knew what kind of a situation they were walking into when they came and asked Herod, "Who will be the next king of the Jews? We have seen his star." Some historians doubt the story of the massacre of the infants, and of course the number of them is greatly exaggerated in the tradition. Bethlehem, at this time, was a very small village, probably only about a thousand people. If there were twenty male babies under the age of two, that would have been a lot. It was also near the Herodion, one of Herod's great fortresses, and so his command could have been carried out rather quietly, and it wouldn't have been very much noticed. It also would have been quite in character with Herod—and even more in character with his son, Archelaus, who ushered in his reign, Josephus tells us, with the massacre of three thousand citizens—victims who were sacrificed to God and whose corpses filled the temple in Jerusalem during a festival. I guess Archelaus wanted to prove that he was a chip off his father's block.

More significantly, in the long term, Herod did more than any other to strengthen the position of Jews throughout the Roman Empire. His gifts to cities wherever Jews lived and throughout Judea (places like Damascus, Syria, Asia Minor, other places in Greece, and so on) resulted in the Jews enjoying several privileges in the Roman Empire, which allowed them to worship as they wished, recognizing their religious needs, their desire to travel to Jerusalem, and allowing them as communities to pay large temple taxes and send those shekels to Jerusalem in large amounts each year. (This is the temple tax, by the way, that Jesus was asked if he and his disciples paid.) People estimate now that ten percent of the Roman Empire during the time of the New Testament was Jewish. There are one hundred thousand Jewish burials found in the catacombs of Rome, where there were thirteen synagogues. So wherever Paul went, wherever the Christian apostles went, spreading the gospel in the second half of the first century, their first stop was always

to local Jewish synagogues, and those synagogues owed much of their existence to Herod the Great.

Another question you might wonder about when you come to the exhibit (and bring your friends) is, Where did Herod get all the money it would have required to build these palaces, fortresses, cities, and temples? He got his resources from many different angles. Taxes of course were one way. One year alone, for example, he collected one hundred talents of gold or silver (we're not sure which) from Galilee. He also had rents and revenues. He had a monopoly on the balsam groves down by Jericho. And one of the things that I'm most curious about is his arrangement with Rome, which gave Herod the right to control the sale of one-half and the revenue from the other half of all the copper from the island of Cyprus. In Greek, the word for Cyprus, *kypros*, means "copper," and Cyprus was one of the main sources of copper for the entire Roman Empire. This must have been a tremendous cash flow, in addition to that from tariffs and other things coming in through places like Caesarea. And he had the temple tax, which poured in.

Herod's wealth at the end of his life was estimated at one thousand talents. (A talent, by the way, if it was a Jewish talent, is about 20 kilograms, or 44 pounds. So, a talent of gold, 44 pounds, is a lot of gold. If it was a Tyrian talent, then it was 42 kilograms, or almost 95 pounds.) The wealth of the Temple in Jerusalem, over which Herod also had control, is stated by Josephus at ten thousand talents. This is the equivalent of a couple billion dollars. I calculated it out. I think it's four billion dollars. It's a lot of money. I wish we had some of those talents to display—they won't be coming. They were all taken to Rome.

The wealth of Herod helps us to put in perspective some of the things that we also find in the New Testament. Consider, for example, the parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18. A certain servant was brought to give an

accounting to his king. The servant, you may remember, owed the king a debt of ten thousand talents. When the servant begged for leniency and worshiped the king, the king was moved with compassion and forgave the entire debt. That same servant, however, then went out and found one of his fellows who owed him one hundred pence and demanded payment. When the king learned what had happened, he reinstated the ten thousand-talent debt in full. Now, not only does that large debt represent an impossible sum, worth perhaps several billion dollars in today's markets, but against the historical background of the temple of Herod, it's noteworthy that ten thousand talents was exactly the value of the entire temple treasury, as stated by Josephus. Thus, the unforgiving servant may in fact represent the king of the Jews, or the temple high priest, in whose hands God had entrusted the keeping of that huge amount of sacred wealth. No one else in Judea could conceivably have held that kind of money, and thus there may be a political upshot to the parable of Jesus, which would read something like this: despite the great debts and offenses of the rulers of the temple against God, they can be readily forgiven by God, so long as they will beg his forgiveness and worship him. When asked, however, to be generous to a commoner in need of a small amount, the rich rulers of the temple will be unmoved, and as a consequence, they will be personally held accountable for the loss of the entire temple treasury.

Let me add one final thought on Herod and the timing of his life. It seems to me that Christianity arose at a very unique moment in Jewish history. The birth of Christ came shortly after the establishment of the *Pax Romana*. Prosperity had been brought throughout Rome and throughout the Roman Empire. All the construction projects and the influx of wealth into Judea and Galilee would have caused sharp social dislocations. Families would have been moved from their traditional locations. Many people would have recently taken new occupations.

They would have been open for new innovations. Culture wars were going on as Hellenistic and Roman influences began to be sharply felt in the area, and these issues were argued and were sharply defined. You had some Jews who felt like they should be in the world and of the world—those were the Sadducees. Others felt that they should be in the world but not of the world—the Pharisees. There were some who thought they should be out of the world and not of the world—the Essenes at Qumran. And then there were some who thought they should be out of the world and militantly against the world—these are the people who lived at Masada. Into this unsettled world, Jesus offered answers and led the way out of darkness. If he'd been born a hundred years before or a hundred years after, I leave it to you to wonder how the history of Christianity would have turned out.

Well, next, when you come to the exhibit, I hope you will try to determine, Who were these people at Masada? You'll have to decide this question for yourself. After Masada grew to be a powerful Zionist symbol in twentieth-century Israel, the Israelis are quite divided over this subject. Of course, if you have three rabbis, you always have five opinions. As I was talking to Gila Hurvitz the other day, she said, "There are now twenty-five Masadas in Israel." So there are many different opinions about what went on there.

I'll just ask you one question: What do you want to call them? Traditionally, they have been called Zealots. That's what Yigael Yadin liked to call them. People today are tending away from calling these people Zealots. It's viewed as too complimentary and too favorable. It's also a bit confusing because Josephus calls many groups zealots. There were factions of Zealots and zealots in different decades. This group at Masada, by the way, is not the group of zealots with which Simon the Zealot, one of Jesus' apostles, was apparently associated.

So if we don't call them Zealots, what next? Josephus also calls them the *sicarii*. This comes from a Latin word *sica*, which means "dagger." So these are literally "the dagger men." You can be sure they didn't call themselves that. No Jew would have used a Roman word, a Latin name, to identify themselves. It's a very pejorative term. Dr. Hall tells me that the best translation is "thugs." And that they were. They were violent, militant people—some of them were, some of the time.

Well, so what do we call them? They weren't really warriors. They were not trained soldiers. Revolutionaries? Well, maybe. Rebels? Certainly they were. Josephus also calls them robbers, or bandits, and points out that they would raid and rob like pirates and brigands. One raid on a village nearby called Ein Gedi resulted in them driving out the men, killing the women and children, and taking the food back up to Masada. That was in A.D. 67. But those kind of raids were going on all over Judea while the capital city of Jerusalem was in disorder. Josephus says, "Disorder in the capital gave the scoundrels in the country free license to plunder; and each gang after pillaging their own village made off into the wilderness."¹ No portion of Judea was spared these raids, so can we identify that exclusively or particularly with what's going on at Masada? Were those people that did that raid in A.D. 67 the same who were there in A.D. 73? We can't be sure.

Some people view these rebels at Masada as cowards because they chose not to fight to the last man, but they did spend a lot of time chipping stones and rolling big rocks down on the Romans. It was only when the end was inevitable that they chose to commit suicide rather than be subjected to any torture or death that was certainly to follow.

¹ Flavius Josephus, *Jewish War*, trans. H. St. J. Thackeray (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1928), 4.407.

Were they heros? Are they like Davy Crockett at the Alamo? Maybe they're zealots with a little z. Well, each of these terms is loaded as a label, and you're going to have to decide what you want to call them yourselves. But bear in mind as you do that one man's robber is another man's hero. The view from the top of these robbers is that they were violent, destructive criminals whose very existence, like the Gadianton Robbers, threatens public order. But from the people down in the grassroots—to the oppressed or the dis-empowered—social bandits like Robin Hood can become sympathetic folk heros who set out, at all costs, to right what they and many of their fellow citizens perceive to be fundamental wrongs. Without understanding both sides of this explosive social and political phenomenon, observers will never come to grips with the essence of the dynamics behind Masada.

I also hope, as you're wondering about these people, that you will not discount the religious dimensions of these people at Masada. The coins they struck and that were found at Masada bear the inscription, "For the redemption of Zion." They believed in redemption. They believed in the final victory and that divine intervention would finally prevail, allowing them as a small group perhaps to defeat the whole Roman Empire. They swore oaths that they would never surrender, and so it was partly for religious purposes and reasons that they did not surrender to the Romans. A group of them did escape and found their way to Egypt, where they were tortured by the Romans after they had tried to brew up another revolution in Alexandria, in Egypt. Josephus records their religious devotion; Josephus doesn't often say very many nice things about these people, but he was amazed at this particular account:

Nor was there a person who was not amazed at the endurance and—call it which you will—desperation or strength of purpose, displayed by these victims. For under every form of torture and laceration of body, devised for the sole object of making them acknowledge Caesar as lord, not one submitted nor was brought to the

verge of utterance; but all kept their resolve, triumphant over constraint, meeting the tortures and the fire with bodies that seemed insensible of pain and souls that wellnigh exalted in it. But most of all were the spectators struck by the children of tender age, not one of whom could be prevailed upon to call Caesar lord.²

They believed in serving only one master, namely God. They were there with families. In fact, by A.D. 68, Josephus says that many of them on Masada “had grown accustomed to the fortress.”³ I guess you could get comfortable living in Herod’s palace, but because of that, they wouldn’t venture out further on raids of the countryside. Maybe some of them even repented a little bit. They had their ritual baths. Some of their clothing has *gammadia* on it. These are L-shaped or *gamma*-shaped pieces of cloth stitched onto their clothing. These kinds of square markings on clothing are also found in the Bar Kokhba materials, at the Dura-Europos excavations, and later in Christian mosaics at Ravenna; and although we don’t know from iconography what these mean, they appear to have some religious significance. They believed in the survival of the soul over the flesh. They had their synagogue and their scrolls. For sure, they were extremists with a militant past and present, but you can’t understand them without taking their religious motivations somehow into account.

Above all, as you go through the exhibit, I hope you will stop and ponder and ask yourself, What do these artifacts teach us about the daily life in the world of the New Testament? You’ll see sandals that were found with the bodies of some of these people. These aren’t Birkenstocks. They’re plain leather sandals, open to the dirt and sand of the desert. They make me think, when I look at them, of the statement of John the Baptist: “One mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose

² Ibid., 7.417–9.

³ Ibid., 4.507.

shoes [sandals] I am not worthy to unloose" (Luke 3:16; see also Mark 1:7; John 1:27). These sandals would have been similar to those worn by Jesus, John the Baptist, and others in that century.

You'll see wine jars. Stop and think about Jesus talking about not putting new wine into old containers (see Matthew 9:17; Mark 2:22; Luke 5:37), about Jesus turning water into wine (see John 2:9).

You'll see keys and think of Jesus saying to Peter, "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom" (Matthew 16:19). In those days, keys didn't look like they do today. What did their keys look like? What might Peter have thought as Jesus made that statement to him?

You'll see oil lamps. These are lamps similar to the ones that would have been referred to in the parable of the ten virgins (see Matthew 25:1-13). There were ten virgins, five who had oil in their lamps and five who did not. These lamps are from that same century, the same culture, the same types of people as you have in that story.

If you think about the wealth and the talents [in this exhibit], you realize that even a person with one talent had quite a lot. That's one percent of the annual tax revenue from the entire area of Galilee. You'll see the people at Masada casting lots to determine the order in which they will die. Well, we also have, in Acts 1, the apostles meeting after the death of Judas: And they prayed, and "gave forth their lots [or 'they gave lots to them,' as one manuscript reads], and the lot fell upon Matthias" (Acts 1:26).

You'll see the synagogue and items from it. Think of Jesus in the synagogue in Nazareth taking out the Isaiah scroll and reading from it, saying, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:21). Also in the synagogue, think of Stephen disputing with members of the synagogue of the Libertines, the Syrians, and the

Jews from other Greek cities in Acts 6. With the immersion pools you might think of baptism, which was performed in early Christianity by immersion.

When you see the Dead Sea Scrolls, especially the Ben Sira document, you might think of some of the wisdom literature that was important to the Jews in the first century A.D. Jesus said we should not pray with vain repetitions (see Matthew 6:7); Ben Sira has the same advice: "Do not babble in the assembly of the elders, and do not repeat yourself when you pray" (Ben Sira 7:14). Jesus taught, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35); the Ben Sira text teaches, "Do not let your hand be stretched out to receive and closed when it is time to give" (Ben Sira 4:31). Jesus told the story about the man who had laid up much goods after many years and then took his ease and said, "Eat, drink and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee" (Luke 12:19–20); in Ben Sira, we find a similar sentiment, expressed: "One becomes rich through diligence and self-denial, and the reward allotted to him is this: when he says, 'I have found rest, and now I shall feast on my goods!' he does not know how long it will be until he leaves them to others and dies" (Ben Sira 11:18–9). Paul taught that we should "weep with them that weep," in Romans 12:15; the Ben Sira text says, "Do not avoid those who weep, but mourn with those who mourn" (Ben Sira 7:34).⁴

And also when you think of robbers, when you think of these bandits, these people out pillaging and plundering, remember that Jesus spoke often of robbers. In the temple, he said, basically, "You have made my Father's house a den of robbers" (see Jeremiah 7:11; see also Matthew 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46). I know that the

⁴ All Ben Sira quotations are from David Rolph Seely, "The Masada Fragments, the Qumran Scrolls, and the New Testament," *Masada and the World of the New Testament* (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 1997), 294, 295.

English translation says "a den of *thieves*," but the translation there is a weak one, and it should be "robbers." The word is a very clear and technical legal term, and actually Jesus is quoting from Jeremiah, where they did get the translation right, by the way, where it says a "den of robbers." And also think about the good Samaritan: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho" (Luke 10:30), and you indeed do go *down* from the mountaintops of Jerusalem, down to the shores of the Dead Sea by Jericho. Once again, the translators haven't served us well. They say that the man "fell among *thieves*," but the Greek is clear that he is falling among *robbers*, who indeed would have been out in that region, much as these robbers that we encounter at Masada, the *lestai*, are involved in the stories of the revolts and the political unrest that permeated Judea during these years. Paul talked about traveling in perils of robbers, and ultimately Jesus was crucified between two robbers, while a third robber named Barabbas went free.

I hope when you come to the exhibit you'll have an experience similar to what you might have were you to go to Israel. Going to Israel is a powerful experience. It was a surprise to me. When I went for the first time, I thought I was well prepared. I'd seen a lot of pictures. I'd read a lot of books. But I wasn't prepared to experience the personal dimension of learning that takes place there. It's more than just understanding a few background details. It's more than seeing just the setting or connected contexts in which these things occurred. You experience and receive a dimension that comes from being a part of that place. It's a feeling of becoming a part of it. It's a type of engagement with the past that fosters empathy and breathes into the subject a breath of life. Nothing takes the place of that kind of concrete experience.

I hope that when you come and think about Masada, you might picture yourselves somehow sitting on the Mount of Olives forty years before the fall of

Masada, imagining yourself listening to Jesus foretell what you now read in Matthew 24. At Masada, we see the power of Rome and the passion of the Jews—the enormous, ponderous power of Rome, building that ramp, stone by stone, and the extreme, dogmatic belief at Qumran and probably at Masada as well, that God would destroy all the sons of darkness—Romans or Jews—and deliver the victory to a small group of Jews who considered themselves exclusively the Sons of Light. These two forces sooner or later were likely to collide. And as Jesus prophesied, that collision would sweep up in its path even the heart of Judea, the city of Jerusalem. Jesus said:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, . . . how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house [meaning the Temple of Herod], is left unto you desolate. . . . And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple [that they were still standing and not desolate, I suppose]. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. (Matthew 23:37–8; 24:1–2)

Jesus gave plenty of warning, and yet the fall of Jerusalem—and the fall of Masada—still brought about the climactic conclusion of the conflict that brought to pass the fulfillment of that prophecy of Jesus. (By the way, the execution of James the Just caused the exodus of most Christians from this area, and so they were largely out of this pan and into another fire in Rome when the Jewish War was going on in Galilee, Jerusalem, and at Masada.)

Finally, I hope you will notice some Latter-day Saint angles as you walk slowly through this exhibit. After being driven from Missouri in 1838, the Latter-day Saints had plenty of reason to think of the fighters at Masada as heroes, and so it is interesting that in an editorial in the *Times and Seasons* published in July 1841, an article appeared about the story of Masada. It carried, however, the following caveat as an introduction by the editor: “The following thrilling account of self

devotedness of the Jews, scarcely has its equal on the pages of history. Although such a course must be condemned, it shows their attachment to their ancient religion, the God of their fathers, and also their abhorrence of the Romans."⁵

Latter-day Saints may find plenty of other details that are interesting here but none are more connected to them than the fragment of Ezekiel 37 found at Masada. Chapter 37 of Ezekiel begins with the prophecy of the valley full of bones. You wonder if the people at Masada didn't look out at the valleys below them with the Roman soldiers encamped around them as they read this very text. "Son of man," the prophet asked, "can these bones live? . . . I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live" (Ezekiel 37:3, 5). And breath comes "from the four winds" (verse 9), the prophet continues. And the bones are brought back to life and become a great army (see verse 10). Did that text play a role in the beliefs and the preaching and the convictions of the people at Masada?

The last time I was at Masada, I was there with a guide named Amnon, who was a veteran of the Six-Day War. He was one of the first soldiers into the northern part of Jerusalem. He read to us this text with great emotion, great passion, and he equated it with the return of Israel coming from the four corners of the earth, the winds blowing life back into this land and symbolized by the fact that Masada should never fall again.

The first time I was on Masada, I was there with another guide, a very sensitive young student named Hillel, who was worthy spiritually of that name. After we had been at Masada, we were standing outside of the Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem. He took time to read exactly the same text from Ezekiel 37, now in a different

⁵ *Times and Seasons* 2/8 (15 July 1841): 476.

context, thinking of the resurrection promised to those many Jews who died in the Holocaust.

I had spent a week with each of these guides, and in the process, they had learned a great deal about the Book of Mormon, about Latter-day Saints. In fact, as we were going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, Hillel got the microphone and said, "Look everyone, look at those Bedouin tents. Those are just like Lehi would have lived in." So after each of these guides finished reading this text from Masada, I said in each case to them, "Read on. Don't stop with verse 10." They looked at me kind of strangely in both cases but did keep reading and soon came to verses 16 through 17, which says: "take thee one stick, and write upon it, For Judah . . . : then take another stick, and write upon it, For Joseph . . . : And join them . . . and they shall become one in thine hand." "You see," I told them, "this is our chapter too." Hillel was especially touched, and later that night when I called to say goodbye to him, he said that he had just been reading "our chapter" to his wife, showing her things that they had never seen in their Bible before.

Well, Brothers and Sisters, I certainly invite each one of you to come and experience, in person, the story of Masada. Come and see it in the context of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the world of the New Testament.

For an extended discussion of all these themes, see Masada and the World of the New Testament (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 1997).

