



**The Half Shekel Journal** by Ed Rice  
**Vol XVI Day 7 Mon 2 Feb: The Dead Sea**

Day 7, Monday, 02 Feb 2009, Every day built

with anticipation for us. On this day we would finally enter Jerusalem. But between us and it lay the history books and works of Josephus' accounts of the tremendous hallmark of Jewish patriotism, Masada. The second reason that Israel was a 1<sup>st</sup> century wonder of the world was now up to my knee caps. We were up at dawn and found our way to the salty beach of the dead sea before breakfast. Pastor Carpenter demonstrated the improper way of entering in as he ran from the shore and jumped head first into the sea. The mineral content of the Dead Sea is so high and the water so dense that even Baptist Preachers float, but getting it into your eyes and mouth made for an ordeal not to be repeated. Bobbing on top of the water, being very careful not to get any in our eyes or mouth was an awesome, indescribable experience.



We swam/walked out to where the water was over our head and could continue 'walking' because our heads and shoulders were still not under the water. Those of us who had the courage to relax and lay back found we could bob on only about 3 inches of water. The even braver rolled over and floated on their belly with their head and face still completely out of the water. The second wonder which made Israel a 1<sup>st</sup> century wonder of the world was this sea, where 'everything floats'. Back at our room we showered,



rinsed and reshowered my sweats and Bev's swim suit in a futile attempt to remove all the salt. We hung the wet clothes and sneakers in the desert sun on our balcony and went down to our Mediterranean Kosher breakfast.

Ronnie, had recommended we remove all jewelry and not shave before jumping into the Dead Sea. The later was not a

problem, in that I had not shaved since my 1995 retirement from the military. There I was required to be clean shaved and in a tie for my 13 years as an officer, the shave was gone, but I kept the tie for my service in the Lord's army. It took me half an hour of grease laden string stretching pulling to get my wedding ring off. My beard had been on for only 11 years, but that ring had been on my finger for 34 of my 37 years of married life. I had lost my original while working under my car in Tuxedo Trailer Park, as an E-3 in the USAF at Rome NY. We scrounged around enough to buy a new one the year my second son, Shane was born and I had not removed it since. Now it was clamped into my 3 ring notebook until I could get it resized to fit it over my arthritic swollen knuckle, which still throbbed from trauma. The white ring left encircling my tanned finger looked like a wedding ring still, as Bev and I renewed our vows over the gold band, now in my note book. The dream of a life time unfolding in these 10 days and the 1<sup>st</sup> removal of the band, made an appropriate atmosphere for repeating again "until death do us part." I love being in love, and the 'empty nest' has been more blessed than Bev and I had ever planed or imagined, although we had thoroughly done both.

The ascent up the sheer 1000 foot edge of Masada would take 45 min of dedicated hiking and still not get us above sea level. Our dawdling at the Moriah Classic of the Dead Sea necessitated our taking the 62 second ride in the cable car instead, that plus I think Ronnie and Brian were concerned that we had no cardiologist on standby. The usual excitement in our guide was subdued into a serious graveness as we approached Masada and he told of the military recruits pre-dawn ascent to the top of Masada and the chant "Masada will never fall again." This sites tour was marked by solemnity and awe. The 'snake walk' that took us from the cable car through the wall on top was narrow. It was my mistake to lean over the rail and look straight down at the tiny people moving below. Fear gripped my chest as I stepped back with the thought of a 1,000 foot free fall. One pastor, who shall be unnamed in this accounting, stayed behind at the museum for fear of these kind of heights. The fear now moving to my belly gave him a more courteous regard. I don't have a fear of heights until I look down once and remember



previous cataclysmic encounters with them. We each eagerly stepped off the gangway onto solid rock and left the precipice behind.

This large plateau had impressive height and surely housed an impregnable fortress. Herod the Great, the king we love to hate, had built the double walled Roman fortress at this great altitude below sea level, and was so pleased with the location that he built an extravagant three tiered palace at its northern extremity.

Ronnie recalled for us how Herod's palace at Caesarea was immaculately isolated with the whole Mediterranean sea as his back yard. Here, after the 1000 foot shear drop, Herod's back yard was Engedi and wilderness, ... like stepping off into eternity. We toured the palace ruins, the hot and cold baths, the steam rooms, saunas and intricately plastered and painted (1<sup>st</sup> century fresco still displayed throughout) spacious living quarters of a King gone mad. We kept in awe and knowledge that this was but secondary to our purpose here. We circled the north west edge of the tremendous height as Ronnie pointed out the intricate waterways that brought plenteous waters from the cavernous cisterns miraculously filled annually by precious rains in this arid environment. It was inconceivable that Masada had such rich resources of water at the height above the Dead Sea. Remember this room, Ronnie noted, it is called the lottery room. Periodically our guide pointed out the Roman encampments that surrounded this impenetrable structure and baited our minds for the tremendous Roman siege which took place here just after the horrific fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

