



The Half Shekel Journal by Ed Rice
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We had a long pause overlooking the western face of Masada. You could clearly pick out the Roman engineered, Jewish slave built ramp to carry up the powerful Roman battering rams. Ron pointed out the location where the two stone walls of Herod were breached and the wooden walls, barricaded with tons of sand, were set aflame. He told of a thousand Jews who withstood and mocked the Roman conquerors until 73 AD, and their wavering confidence in their impregnable stronghold. There were some with us who had never read Josephus' ¹ detailed description² of the siege here, and they moved with us to the site of the fallen Synagogue where Ron in a hushed, solemn, unrelenting description told, in intimate detail, the events of the last day of the siege on this sacred ground. Thirty years as a professional guide kept his emotion in check as he revealed the unimaginable in torrid detail. On two occasions prior to this penning I have attempted to reveal the same heart wrenching detailed accounting and could not bear through, and I shall here leave the description of the fate of the 976 souls in this 73 AD siege of Masada to the historian or the professional guide who will take you there. Being on that mount and hearing that description from Ronnie, who, in an early dawn swore his military allegiance in these footprints, was moving beyond description. Here it should only be affirmed that "Masada will never fall again."

For 40 years my minds eye had overlooked the city of Jerusalem. I recalled asking Vern and Loise Tubbs, youth pastor at Tuscorora Baptist Church in the 1960s, why we sing "We are marching to Zion, beautiful, beautiful Zion, we're marching upward to Zion the beautiful city of God" and he showed me two things. II Samuel 5:7 and a large tattered picture overlooking the city of Jerusalem which hung on his office wall. We were on the bus which had its nose pointed to the city on a hill, the city where God's King would rule the world from the Throne of David. "Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion." (Psalm 2:6) We were headed to the place where Jehovah God dwelt. "Sing praises to the LORD, which dwelleth in Zion: declare among the people his doings." (Psalm 9:11)

Our guide reported we were leaving Masada, 1,300 feet below sea level and headed to Jerusalem 2,300 feet above sea level, ascending to the city of God. Today we left the lowest place on God's earth literally and would ascend to the highest place on God's earth figuratively. Awesome. From the lowest parts of the earth to the city of God. Evangelist Dale and Opel Lingbaugh were ministering at Gang Mills, Faith Baptist Church when Opel clipped Little Pilgrim's sin burden off of his flannel graphed back and it fell to the

1 Josephus (AD 37 – c. 100),^[2] also known as Yosef Ben Matityahu (Joseph, son of Matthias) and, after he became a Roman citizen, as Titus Flavius Josephus,^[3] was a first-century Jewish historian and apologist of priestly and royal ancestry who survived and recorded the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70^[4]. His works give an important insight into first-century Judaism. (From Wikipedia accessed 5/29/2009)

2 See "THE WARS OF THE JEWS; or the History of The Destruction of Jerusalem" by Flavius Josephus, Book VII *Containing the interval of about three years. From the taking of Jerusalem by Titus, to the sedition of the Jews at Cyrene.*, Chapter VIII *Concerning Masada and those Sicarii who kept it; and how Silva betook himself to form the Siege of that Citadel. Eleazar's speeches to the besieged*, Chapter IX. *How the people that were in the fortress were prevailed on by the words of eleazar, two women and five children only excepted, and all submitted to be killed by one another*, and Chapter X *Concerning Jonathan, one of the Sicarii, that stirred up a sedition in Cyrene, and was a false accuser[of the innocent.]* pp204-212 as Translated by William Whiston, A. M., London.

floor of that basement Sunday School room. I looked to the old rugged cross depicted on that flannel covered board, I told God that's what I wanted from Him, and He saved me from my sin burden before Pilgrim's paper burden settled on the floor. God saved me from the penalty of sin that night, the power of sin that week and will save me from the presence of sin someday soon, when I arrive in "Zion, the beautiful city of God." My harmonica was in my book bag beside me. If I had not so slaughtered the tune earlier I would have played it on the bus ride, "We are marching to Zion." In 1960 God took my soul from the lowest parts of the earth and stood it on a rock in his presence, the highest place a soul could ever be.

We passed Jericho with little notice. So little notice that it seemed disrespectful of the blind man that Jesus healed and Zacheaus that "wee little man, a wee little man was he, He climbed up into a sycamore tree, for the Lord he wanted to see." Jesus saved him just outside Jericho, and the next week Jesus paid all his sin debt on a hill called Calvary. The city that Joshua marched 7 times around passed with far too little notice but we needed to be in Jerusalem by dark.

Bedouins still use camels. Not because of their stamina in the desert, nor their ability to maneuver in hot sand, a Yamaha is better on all counts. They use them to attract tourists who pay handsomely to ride the ugly creatures while cameras go clicking in rapid succession. We passed several camps of them, and those sporting Camels would have persuaded our stopping except for Brian and Ronny's relentless drive to keep us on a schedule. The Bedouin's camps had shabby huts and tents, dumpy looking places with satellite dish antennas always near by. I wondered where they got their electricity and if big screen TV's ran off of 12 volt systems. More so I wondered when we would leave this dry barren desert and see Jerusalem. Both happened almost simultaneously. Brown Bedouin camps turned into green suburbs and as fast again we were filing off the bus. Ronny's choice location afforded not a glimpse of the city until we walked together up a knob which peeked over at a splendid panoramic view of the city. The effect was all that he was looking for in a dozen preachers. He let us enjoy the moment and then led in a Hebrew prayer of blessing commonly recited (in Hebrew) at the first sighting of Jerusalem. Bev and I stood hand in hand at the board fence and overlooked the city. I am glad we clicked a few pictures but they are for others. What we saw from that vantage is burned into our memory for the rest of our half over lives here. Then we will visit Jerusalem daily for 1000 years, and then live in the New Jerusalem for ever. For a Christian, the Bible is clear about those things. I hope you are as clear on it as well.

Upon entry into the city of Jerusalem we embarked on the traditional Via Dolorosa visiting the traditional fourteen stations of the cross as is the tradition for all Holy land tours. Baptists are traditionally very skeptical of the traditions of man and are forever leaning on every 'jot and tittle' of the inerrant infallible words of God in "All Scripture" instead.

Traditions are very errant, very fallible and always used by the master deceiver to lead people away from the cross of Jesus Christ. Such is never more literally true than when the traditional Via Dolorosa leads people deep into the old city to a cross within the city wall, while the Scripture says "Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come." (Heb 13:12-14) If that were the only error that Catholic tradition had sucked into Mel Gibson's production of the death of Jesus, it is sufficient error. After all, rat poison is 99.9% good edible food.