



# MASADA

Isolated on a crag rock at the southwestern tip of the Dead Sea looms the ruins of King Herod's fortress called Masada. It was here that nearly a 1,000 besieged Jews voluntarily killed themselves when faced with defeat at the hands of the Roman Army in 73 A.D.

Excavations have revealed the story told by historian Josephus Flavius, who described how 960 people drew lots to establish who should die and who should put them to death. This fortress was built by King Herod as a place of retreat and refuge in the event of a rebellion by the people. It proved to be the last stronghold for the Jewish people as the Roman armies under Titus swept through Israel. The Jewish patriots were able to withstand the Romans for three years, yet Titus was determined to eradicate this rebellion and leave no remnant of hostility. The armies built encampments around the fortress and then constructed a ramp on the western side of the plateau, which literally took years. When the ramp was complete and the fortress doors burned and battered down, the invading armies only found two women alive. The rest had taken their lives rather than live in slavery and bondage.

Masada has become a shrine and a symbol to the new nation of Israel. "Masada shall not fall again!" is the proud oath which cadets swear during the impressive graduation ceremony of Israel's military academy.

