

FAITH LESSONS
On the Life and Ministry of the Messiah
(vol 3)

In the Shadow of Herod (1/8)

Fortress Herodium (or, Herodion)

Herodium or **Herodion** (Hebrew: הרודיון), (Arabic: هيروديون) is a hill shaped like a truncated cone (758 m / 2,487 ft above sea level), 12 kilometers (7 mi) south of Jerusalem, within a West Bank district, built as a fortress palace by King Herod the Great.

This is the quote of the Jewish Historian Josephus with respect to the fortress:

“ This fortress, which is some sixty stadia distant from Jerusalem, is naturally strong and very suitable for such a structure, for reasonably nearby is a hill, raised to a (greater) height by the hand of man and rounded off in the shape of a breast. At intervals it has round towers, and it has a steep ascent formed of two hundred steps of hewn stone. Within it are costly royal apartments made for security and for ornament at the same time. At the base of the hill there are pleasure grounds built in such a way as to be worth seeing, among other things because of the way in which water, which is lacking in that place, is brought in from a distance and at great expense. The surrounding plain was built up as a city second to none, with the hill serving as an acropolis for the other dwellings. ”

—War I, 21, 10; Antiquities XIV, chapter 13.9

Herodium was conquered and destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 71, when Lucilius Bassus and his X *Fretensis* were on their way to Masada.

The location of Herod's tomb is documented by Roman historian Flavius Josephus, he writes:

"And the body was carried two hundred furlongs, to Herodium, where he had given order to be buried."

Flavius Josephus provides more clues about Herod's tomb which he calls Herod's monuments:

"So they threw down all the hedges and walls which the inhabitants had made about their gardens and groves of trees, and cut down all the fruit trees that lay between them and the wall of the city, and filled up all the hollow places and the chasms, and demolished the rocky precipices with iron instruments; and thereby made all the place level from Scopus to Herod's monuments, which adjoined to the pool called the Serpent's Pool."

FAITH LESSONS

On the Life and Ministry of the Messiah

(vol 3)

Following the description/writings of Josephus, Hebrew University Professor Ehud Netzer reported on May 8, 2007, that he discovered Herod's gravesite atop of tunnels and water pools, at a flattened desert site, halfway up the hill to **Herodium**, 12 kilometers (7 mi) south of Jerusalem - the precise location given by Josephus.

JERUSALEM (AP) — May 8, 2007 An Israeli archaeologist on Tuesday said he has found remnants of the tomb of King Herod, the legendary builder of ancient Jerusalem, on a flattened hilltop in the Judean Desert where the biblical monarch built a palace.

Hebrew University archaeologist Ehud Netzer said the tomb was found at Herodium, a site where he has been exploring since the 1970s.

Netzer said a team of researchers found pieces of a limestone sarcophagus believed to belong to the ancient king. Although there were no bones in the container, he said the sarcophagus' location and ornate appearance indicated it is Herod's.

"It's a sarcophagus we don't just see anywhere," Netzer said at a news conference. "It is something very special."

Netzer led the team, although he said he was not on the site when the sarcophagus was found.

Stephen Pfann, an expert in the Second Temple period at the University of the Holy Land, called the find a "major discovery by all means," but cautioned further research is needed.

He said all signs indicate the tomb belongs to Herod, but said ruins with an inscription on it were needed for full verification.

"We're moving in the right direction. It will be clinched once we have an inscription that bears his name," said Pfann, a textual scholar who did not participate in Netzer's dig.

The fragments of carved limestone found at the sandy site are decorated with floral motives, but do not include any inscriptions.

Herod became the ruler of the Holy Land under the Romans around 40 B.C. The wall he built around the Old City of Jerusalem during the time of the Jewish Second Temple is the one that can be seen today. He also undertook massive construction projects in Caesaria, Jericho, the hilltop fortress of Massada and other locations.

It has long been assumed that Herod was buried at Herodium, but decades of excavations failed to turn up the site until now. The first century historian

FAITH LESSONS
On the Life and Ministry of the Messiah
(vol 3)

Josephus Flavius described the tomb and Herod's funeral procession.

Herodium was one of the last strong points held by Jewish rebels fighting against the Romans, and it was conquered and destroyed by Roman forces in A.D. 71, a year after they destroyed the Second Temple in Jerusalem.

Palace = 45 acres

Bethlehem

Ruth 1:16-22

16And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God:

17Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.

18When she saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her.

19So they two went until they came to Bethlehem. And it came to pass, when they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi?

20And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me.

21I went out full and the LORD hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the LORD hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?

22So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter in law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab: and they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest.

The Bible identifies Esau as the twin brother (though not an identical twin) of Jacob, the grandson of Abraham. Jacob became the father of the Israelites after God (Genesis 35:10) renamed Jacob "Israel." Thus Esau shared his mother's womb together with the founder of the nation of Israel. See story of Rebecca, Genesis 25. Although Esau was Isaac's first-born entitled to inherit Isaac's wealth and blessing, Esau sold his birthright to his younger brother Jacob (Israel). The descendants of Esau and Israel led divergent paths while the Israelites spent approximately 400 years in Egypt before returning to the land of Canaan in modern-day Israel. Thus, the Edomites laid claim to having established kings and a kingdom long before the Israelites.

Rebecca (Gen 25:21-23):

21And Isaac intreated the LORD for his wife, because she was barren: and the LORD was intreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived.

22And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to enquire of the LORD.

FAITH LESSONS
On the Life and Ministry of the Messiah
(vol 3)

23And the LORD said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger.

Older will serve the younger (Jacob) – Num 24:17

17I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth.

Herod was a descendant of Esau (an Edomite)

Herod the Great was born around 73 B.C. He was the second son of Antipater the Idumaeen, a high ranked official under Ethnarch Hyrcanus II, and Cypros, a Nabatean. A loyal supporter of Hyrcanus II, Antipater appointed Herod governor of Galilee at 25. The Idumaeen family, successors to the Edomites of the Hebrew Bible, settled in Idumea, formerly known as Edom, in southern Judea.

Edom (Hebrew: **עֲדוֹם**, Standard *Edom* Tiberian *ʿĒḏôm*; "red") is a name given to Esau in the Hebrew Bible, as well as to the nation descending from him. The nation's name in Assyrian was **Udumi**; in Syriac, in Greek, **Ἰδουμαία** (Idoumaía); in Latin, **Idumæa** or **Idumea**.

The Edomite people were a Semitic-speaking tribal group inhabiting the Negev Desert and the Arabah valley of what is now southern Israel and adjacent Jordan. The region has much reddish sandstone, which may have given rise to the name "Edom". The nation of Edom is known to have existed back to the 8th or 9th century BCE, and the Bible dates it back several centuries further. Recent archeological evidence may indicate an Edomite nation as long ago as the 11th century BCE. The nation ceased to exist with the Jewish-Roman Wars.

Compare what Herod the Great (an earthly king) left behind (glorious ruins) with what we have from Jesus (world has never been the same).

- FL: No matter what it looks like out there, Jesus is King.

Do we dare to live as though the power we have within us is greater than anything against us? We don't live that way. We live s though God is NOT strong enough to overcome the evil we face.

- FL: Matthew 2:1 – “In the days of Herod the King, Jesus was born.”

FAITH LESSONS
On the Life and Ministry of the Messiah
(vol 3)

My Rock and My Fortress (2/8)

Masada (a romanisation of the Hebrew מצדה, *Metzada*, from מצודה, *metzuda*, "fortress") is the name for a site of ancient palaces and fortifications in the South District of Israel on top of an isolated rock plateau, or large mesa, on the eastern edge of the Judean Desert overlooking the Dead Sea. Masada became famous after the First Jewish-Roman War (also known as the Great Jewish Revolt) when a siege of the fortress by troops of the Roman Empire led to a mass suicide of the site's Jewish Sicarii fugitives/freedom fighters when defeat became imminent.

According to Josephus, a first-century Jewish Roman historian, Herod the Great fortified Masada between 37 and 31 BCE as a refuge for himself in the event of a revolt. In 66 CE, at the beginning of the First Jewish-Roman War against the Roman Empire, a group of Judaic extremist rebels called the Sicarii took Masada from the Roman garrison stationed there.

For the next two years (according to Josephus) the Sicarii used Masada as their base for raiding and pillaging Roman and Jewish settlements alike. Archaeology indicates that they modified some of the structures they found there; this includes a building which was modified to function as a synagogue facing Jerusalem,

The cliffs on the east edge of Masada are about 1,300 feet high and the cliffs on the west are about 300 feet high; the natural approaches to the cliff top are very difficult. The top of the plateau is flat and rhomboid-shaped, about 1,800 by 900 feet. There was a casemate wall around the top of the plateau totaling 4,300 feet long and 12 foot thick with many towers, and the fortress included storehouses, barracks, an armory, the palace, and cisterns that were refilled by rainwater. Three narrow, winding paths led from below to fortified gates.

In 72 CE, the Roman governor of Iudaea Lucius Flavius Silva marched against Masada with the Roman legion X *Fretensis* and laid siege to the fortress. After failed attempts to breach the wall, they built a circumvallation wall and then a rampart against the western face of the plateau, using thousands of tons of stones and beaten earth.

The rampart was complete in the spring of 73, after approximately two to three months of siege, allowing the Romans to finally breach the wall of the fortress. When they entered the fortress, however, the Romans discovered that its 936/7 inhabitants had set all the buildings but the food storerooms ablaze and committed mass suicide rather than face certain capture, defeat, slavery or execution by their enemies.

Because Judaism strongly discourages suicide, however, Josephus reported that the defenders had drawn lots and killed each other in turn, down to the last man, who would be the only one to actually take his own life. The storerooms were

FAITH LESSONS
On the Life and Ministry of the Messiah
(vol 3)

apparently left standing to show that the defenders retained the ability to live, and chose the time of their death over slavery. Excavations have since shown that the storerooms were burnt although whether by the defenders or the Romans will never be known. This account of the siege of Masada was related to Josephus by two women who survived the suicide by hiding inside a cistern along with five children, and repeated Elazar ben Yair's exhortations to his followers, prior to the mass suicide, verbatim to the Romans.

There are some who believe that not all the Jews committed suicide, as that is taboo under Jewish law. These zealots were believed to have fought to the death, or until Roman arrest.

David hid in a mountain fortress of the Wilderness (Masada?).
fortress = masada = God = rock = shield

Psalms 18:1-3

- 1 I love you, O LORD, my strength.
- 2 The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer;
my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge.
He is my shield and the horn ^[a] of my salvation, my stronghold.
- 3 I call to the LORD, who is worthy of praise,
and I am saved from my enemies.

The Jewish Sicarii fugitives/freedom fighters believed to live in slavery was wrong; the most important thing is to be free. It is better to die at our own hands, they believed, than to turn our lives over to the pagans.

Despair turns to courage ... "Masada will never fall again."

Are there people in America committed to our freedom? Jesus' freedom differs from our own in that it represents freedom of the heart.

It is wrong to owe allegiance to anyone/anything (including the Constitution, American flag, etc) but God.

Is Jesus' giving of self on the cross as a sacrifice any different than the approach taken by the Jewish Sicarii fugitives/freedom fighters?

Can we imitate their passion for serving God?

"More than words."

FAITH LESSONS
On the Life and Ministry of the Messiah
(vol 3)

The Time Had Fully Come (3/8)

200BC – Jerusalem's temple had become illegitimate and priests of the day simply used the temple to establish what they had deemed appropriate.

Essenes believed they had been called to be prepared to reestablish the true priesthood.

The **Essenes** (sg. *Essene*, IPA: [ɛ'sin]) were a Judaic religious group that flourished from the 2nd century BC to the 1st century AD.

Some modern scholars and archaeologists have argued that Essenes inhabited the settlement at Qumran, a plateau in the Judean Desert along the Dead Sea, citing Pliny the Elder in support, and giving credence that the Dead Sea Scrolls are the product of the Essenes. This view, though not yet conclusively proven, has come to dominate the scholarly discussion and public perception of the Essenes.

Following the qualification above (that it is correct to identify the community at Qumran with the Essenes) and that the community at Qumran are the authors of the Dead Sea Scrolls), then according to the Dead Sea Scrolls the Essenes' community school was called "Yahad" (meaning "oneness of God") in order to differentiate themselves from the rest of the Jews who are repeatedly labeled "The Breakers of the Covenant", especially in their prophetic book-scroll entitled "Malhama" (meaning "The End Time Great War") in which the master of the Essenes (referred to as "The Teacher of Righteousness") prophesied that the so-called "Breakers of the Covenant" Jews will be on the side of the Antichrist.

The Essenes seem to have arisen after the Maccabean revolt (167-160 B.C.). Sometime between 152 and 110 B.C. at least some of the Essenes, perhaps only the leaders, retreated to Qumran, on the shores of the Dead Sea. There they stayed until the Parthian invasion of 40 B.C. or the earthquake of 31 B.C. forced them to leave. At that time they settled in the regions around Jerusalem. Soon after Herod the Great's death (4 B.C.) at least some of the Essenes returned to Qumran. Some seventy years later Essenes were involved in the revolt against the Romans. The survival and persistence of the Essenes as a separate group after A.D. 70 is still debated.

Many scholars have found traces of Essenism within such later sects as the Ebionites, the Mandaeans, and the Karaites. Also still undecided is the importance and influence of Essenism within pre-A.D. 70 Judaism and early Christianity. It has often been dismissed as a peripheral Jewish sect or hailed as the very seedbed of the Christian faith. Both of these positions are too extreme. It is more likely that the Essenes were one expression of a widespread pietistic reaction to the pragmatic and tepid spirit of the official Judaism. From the ranks

FAITH LESSONS

On the Life and Ministry of the Messiah

(vol 3)

of such a reaction the early church would have drawn heavily. The Dead Sea Scrolls were found in 1945, yet it took 50 years for the information to leak out about these extraordinary people. The type of society that the Essenes had practiced for 200 years was very similar to early Christianity recorded in the book of Acts. This important scriptural document shows that the early Christian sect lived in communities and encouraged its members to hold all of its possessions in common, just like the Essenes did for the previous two centuries! Both the practice of baptism and of the sharing of the wine are recorded as part of their practices long before Jesus and John the Baptist popularized them.

The Essenes were a third religious sect during the time of Christ that lived away from the towns. Instead they lived in simple communities. The Essenes practiced the seventh day Sabbath, believed in reincarnation, non-violence to all living creatures and the sharing of all material possessions. They were uninvolved in the politics of the Sadducees and Pharisees and shunned publicity. Because of the discovery of dead sea scroll material, this ancient sect and their teachings are back alive. The dead sea scrolls were hidden by this ancient people long ago in the caves of Qumran. Josephus writing around 80 A.D. said that the Essenes were Jews by birth but seemed to have a greater affection for one another than they did for the Pharisees and Sadducees. Their piety toward God was extraordinary. They wore hand woven garments. They used no profanity. They were ministers of peace and they spent a great deal of time studying the writings of the ancients.

Essenes were a branch of the Pharisees who conformed to the most rigid rules of Levitical purity while aspiring to the highest degree of holiness. They lived solely by the work of their hands and in a state of communism, devoted their time to study and devotion and to the practise of benevolence, and refrained as far as feasible from conjugal intercourse and sensual pleasures, in order to be initiated into the highest mysteries of heaven and cause the expected Messianic time to come. Examples(?):

Luke 2:25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.

Luke 23: 50 Now there was a man named Joseph, a member of the Council, a good and upright man, 51who had not consented to their decision and action. He came from the Judean town of Arimathea and he was waiting for the kingdom of God. 52Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body. 53Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock, one in which no one had yet been laid.

A glance at the Essene oath of initiation confirms the statement of Philo that love of God, or reverence for His Name, love of man, or pursuit of righteousness and

FAITH LESSONS
On the Life and Ministry of the Messiah
(vol 3)

benevolence, and love of virtue, or humility and chastity, were the chief aims of the Essene brotherhood.

John the Baptist seems to have belonged to the **Essenes**, but in appealing to sinners to be regenerated by baptism, he inaugurated a new movement, which led to the rise of Christianity. The silence of the New Testament about the **Essenes** is perhaps the best proof that they furnished the new sect with its main elements both as regards personnel and views. The similarity in many respects between Christianity and Essenism is striking: There were the same communism (Acts iv. 34-35); the same belief in baptism or bathing, and in the power of prophecy; the same aversion to marriage, enhanced by firmer belief in the Messianic advent; the same system of organization, and the same rules for the traveling brethren delegated to charity-work; and, above all, the same love-feasts or brotherly meals.

The New Israel

- Came out to the desert to prepare the way of the Lord – system of obedience – God’s walk
- Lived at “end of age” – this generation shall not pass away
- The people for whom the prophecies were written

Acts 2:14-21 (pentacost) **Peter Addresses the Crowd**

14Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. 15These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! 16No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

17" 'In the last days, God says,

I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.

18Even on my servants, both men and women,

I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.

19I will show wonders in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.

20The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.

21And everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

2 Cor 6:14-17 **Do Not Be Yoked With Unbelievers**

FAITH LESSONS
On the Life and Ministry of the Messiah
(vol 3)

14 Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?
15 What harmony is there between Christ and Belial^[b]? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? 16 What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people."^[c]

17 "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord.

- FL: God's work in history is not a sudden change (e.g., Christianity began, in part, two centuries earlier with the Essenes). He slowly unfolds His plan to reclaim His world.
- FL: This community seems a stark contrast between good and evil ... do we? Can't be both.
- FL: The truth is out here ... if you want it, come and find it/join us.

The tendency is for Christians to say the same thing ... isolate themselves as an expression of the impact it hopes to make on the world ...

FAITH LESSONS
On the Life and Ministry of the Messiah
(vol 3)

No Greater Love (4/8)

Matthew 5: 1-10 (Sermon on the Mount)

1And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him:

2And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,

3Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

5Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

6Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

7Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

8Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

9Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

10Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 7: 16-18

16Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?

17Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.

Matthew 6: 25-33 (The lilies of the field)

25Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

26Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

27Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

28And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:

29And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

30Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?

31Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?

32(For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

33But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

FAITH LESSONS
On the Life and Ministry of the Messiah
(vol 3)

Sea of Galilee – most of Jesus' ministry was in this vicinity between the towns of Capernaum, Chorazin, and Bethsaida. What one sees there today is much the same Jesus saw in His day.

The Parable of the Lost Coin (Luke 15)

8"Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? 9And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' 10In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

In Roman architecture, **insulae** (singular *insula*) were large apartment buildings where the lower and middle classes of Romans (the plebs) dwelled. The floor at ground level was used for tavernas, shops and businesses with living space on the higher floors. These houses were often constructed at minimal expenses for speculative purposes. The insulae were therefore of poor construction and prone to fire and collapse. For our purposes, the insula was a family dwelling place/complex with a single courtyard. As the family grew, each son would build an addition to the complex ...

My Father's place (John 14)

2In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. 3And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. 4You know the way to the place where I am going."

The bride-to-be is "bought with a price." The groom-to-be then goes to prepare their new home (as an addition to his father's home). He will return ONLY when his father says the new addition is ready to receive the bride and groom. Hence, the bride-to-be must remain prepared, not knowing the time her groom will come for her.

The Day and Hour Unknown (Matthew 24)

36"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 37As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 38For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; 39and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 40Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. 41Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.

FAITH LESSONS
On the Life and Ministry of the Messiah
(vol 3)

42"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. 43But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. 44So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

Consequently, brides-to-be would prepare and gather in the courtyard when a groom and his party were arriving—they had no way of knowing which groom was coming for his bride!

The Parable of the Ten Virgins

1 At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.

2 Five of them were foolish and five were wise.

3 The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them.

4 The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps.

5 The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

6 At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!'

7 Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps.

8 The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.'

9 'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.'

10 But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

11 Later the others also came. 'Sir! Sir!' they said. 'Open the door for us!'

12 But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.'

13 Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

Jesus the Way to the Father (John 14: 2-6)

2 In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.

3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

4 You know the way to the place where I am going.

5 Thomas said to him, Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?

6 Jesus answered, I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me.

All of us will gather around a single courtyard. The best man accompanies the bride and groom to their new home ... he waits just outside the door until the

FAITH LESSONS
On the Life and Ministry of the Messiah
(vol 3)

groom indicates the marriage has been consummated. At that time, the best man announces the joyful union to family and friends and the celebration begins!

John the Baptist Prepares the Way (Matthew 3)

1In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea 2and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." 3This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

"A voice of one calling in the desert,
'Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.' "

4John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. 5People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. 6Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

7But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? 8Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. 9And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. 10The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

11"I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. 12His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

The Baptism of Jesus (Matthew 3)

13Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. 14But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

15Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.

16As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. 17And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

Whatever happens at Galilee will reach the rest of the world! Love, community, support – only way we can become the kingdom He describes.

Jesus Begins to Preach (Matthew 4) – makes His way along the via Maris

12When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee.

13Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali— 14to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah:

15"Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali,

FAITH LESSONS
On the Life and Ministry of the Messiah
(vol 3)

the way to the sea, along the Jordan,
Galilee of the Gentiles—
16the people living in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of the shadow of death
a light has dawned."

17From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

God had a plan for the nation of Israel. Moses came down from the mountain with God's law (first five books of Old Testament). Jesus gave us His sermon—His battle plan—on a mountain, too.

- FL: Change the world. One effective way to do so is to leave a legacy of children who love the Lord like you do!

FAITH LESSONS
On the Life and Ministry of the Messiah
(vol 3)

The Rabbi (5/8)

Gamla (Hebrew **גמלא** *Gamla* or *Gamala*) was the capital of the Jewish Golan from 87 BCE to 68 CE when it was sacked by the Romans. Its remains can still be seen in the Golan Heights, territory seized by Israel in the Six Day War. The city appears to have been a Seleucid fort (2nd century BCE) which later became a civilian settlement. Jews inhabited it from the last quarter of the 2nd century BCE. Josephus Flavius was the Commander of Galilee during the Jewish Revolt against Rome and in 66 CE fortified Gamla as his main stronghold on the Golan (Antiquities of the Jews 13:394).

The name of Gamla comes from the Arabic word for camel, *gamal*, because of its curious location on a narrow ridge 10 kilometers due north of the Lake of Galilee. The ridge is surrounded on three sides by ravines and looks a bit like the back of a camel. The eastern end of the ridge has a high hump. Gamla was established on the southern side, in the "saddle."

The city existed already in the Early Bronze time (about 5000 years ago); after the Bronze Age the city was abandoned.

New settlers arrived at Gamla around 150 BCE. They may have been Babylonian Jews who returned to their homeland, after the Persian emperor Cyrus allowed the return of imprisoned peoples. Although the aim of most Jews would have been to reach Judah, maybe they found Gamla a convenient place to maintain their connections with the East.

Gamla is mostly known as a rebel town in the First Jewish War. After a fierce fight against the Romans all its 9,000 citizens were killed (5,000 while trying to escape). Because of this harrowing event, Gamla sometimes received the nickname "the Massada of the North."

Josephus describes Gamla's natural defence on three sides by steep ravines. Other natural advantages were a perennial spring and its location on the route to Babylon. The Romans attempted to take the city by means of a siege ramp, but were repulsed by the defenders; only on the second attempt did they succeed in penetrating the fortifications and conquering the city.

In the wall, made of square basalt stones, signs of battle can be observed until today. In the section next to the synagogue, a little bit down the hill, the wall was breached in a 'v'-shape. This is a result of the Roman siege in 67, a few years after the Romans and Jews had started the First Jewish War.

FAITH LESSONS
On the Life and Ministry of the Messiah
(vol 3)

Gamla fell three years before Jerusalem (70 CE). The Romans first directed their war effort to the north, their aim was to conquer Galilee and the Golan and then move south to Juda and Jerusalem.

The Romans had good reason to destroy Gamla: it was the central stronghold of the Zealots (fanatic Jews who opposed the Roman occupiers with force) east of the Sea of Galilee.

Luke 19: 41-44

41As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it 42and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. 43The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. 44They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."

The synagogue developed as a community center, of sorts, not a temple. Jesus visited the synagogues in all of the towns and villages of Galilee.

The men of the synagogue would speak of their experiences with God – no preachers! Something we, as Christians, have lost today.

Jesus Rejected at Nazareth (Luke 4)

14Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. 15He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.

16He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. 17The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

18"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to release the oppressed,

19to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

20Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, 21and he began by saying to them, "**Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.**"

FAITH LESSONS
On the Life and Ministry of the Messiah
(vol 3)

Amazing how God has arranged history so the passage Jesus read was to be the passage He needed to read!

The **tallit** (Hebrew: Hebrew: טלית), also called **tallis** (Yiddish, plural *taleysm*), is a **prayer shawl** that is worn during the morning Jewish services (the *Shacharit* prayers) in Judaism, during the Torah service, and on Yom Kippur and other holidays. It has special twined and knotted fringes known as *tzitzit* attached to its four corners. The tallit is sometimes also referred to as the **arba kanfot**, meaning "four corners." According to Rabbinic Judaism, the important part of the tallit is the tzitzis.

Tassels

Tzitzit or **tzitzis** (Ashkenazi) (Hebrew: Biblical ציצית Modern ציצית) are "fringes" or "tassels" worn by observant Jews on the corners of four-cornered garments, including the *tallit* (prayer shawl). In Orthodox Judaism, they are worn only by men. The Torah states in Numbers 15:38: "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them, that they shall make themselves fringes on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and they shall put on the corner fringe a blue (*tekhelet*) thread."

Wearing the tzitzit (plural: *tzitziyot*) is also commanded in Deuteronomy 22:12, which says: "You shall make yourself twisted threads, on the four corners of your garment with which you cover yourself." Various reasons are given for the commandment. The Torah itself states: "So that you will remember to do the commandments". In addition, it serves as a reminder of the Exodus from Egypt (Numbers 15:40). The Talmud equates its observance with that of all the mitzvot.

The *fringe* (*tzitzit*) on each corner is made of four strands, each of which is made of eight fine threads (known as *kaful shemoneh*). The four strands are passed through a hole (or according to some: two holes) 1-2 inches (25 to 50 mm) away from the corner of the cloth. There are numerous customs as to how to tie the fringe. The Talmud explains that the Bible requires an upper knot (*keshet elyon*) and one wrapping of three winds (*hulya*). The Talmud enjoined that between 7 to 13 *hulyot* be tied, and that "one must start and end with the color of the garment." As for the making of knots in between the *hulyot*, the Talmud is inconclusive, and as such poskim ("decisors of Jewish law") have varyingly interpreted this requirement. The Talmud described tying assuming the use of *tekhelet* dye, however, following the loss of the source of the dye, various customs of tying were introduced to compensate for the lack of this primary element.

Though many methods exist, the one that gained the widest acceptance can be described as follows:

FAITH LESSONS
On the Life and Ministry of the Messiah
(vol 3)

The four strands of the tzitzit are passed through holes near the four corners of the garment (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 11:9-11,15) that are farthest apart (10:1). Four tzitziyot are passed through each hole (11:12-13), and the two groups of four ends are double-knotted to each other at the edge of the garment near the hole (11:14,15). One of the tzitzit is made longer than the others (11:4); the long end of that one is wound around the other seven ends and double-knotted; this is done repeatedly so as to make a total of five double knots separated by four sections of winding, with a total length of at least four inches, leaving free-hanging ends that are twice that long (11:14).

Before tying begins, a Hebrew blessing is said: *Baruch atah Adonai Elohainu Melech HaOlam, asher kiddishanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu la'asot tzitzit* ("Blessed are you, Lord, our God, King of the universe who sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to make [the] tzitzit.).

The two sets of strands are knotted together twice, and then the *shamash* (a longer strand) is wound around the remaining seven strands a number of times (see below). The two sets are then knotted again twice. This procedure is repeated three times, such that there are a total of five knots, the four intervening spaces being taken up by windings numbering 7-8-11-13, respectively. The total number of winds comes to 39, which is the same number of winds if one were to tie according to the Talmud's instruction of 13 hulyot of 3 winds each. Furthermore, the number 39 is found to be significant in that it is the gematria (numerical equivalent) of the words: "The Lord is One" Deuteronomy 6:4).

5 knots (5 books of Moses); 4 spaces (YHWH), 613 laws, one and only one God.

Jesus criticizes Pharisees as hypocrites for trying to look important and above everyone else (e.g., twirling their tassels).

Hem of garment (tassels) – Mark 5:21-34

21When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake. 22Then one of the synagogue rulers, named Jairus, came there. Seeing Jesus, he fell at his feet 23and pleaded earnestly with him, "My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live." 24So Jesus went with him.

A large crowd followed and pressed around him. 25And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. 26She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. 27When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, 28because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." 29Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.

FAITH LESSONS
On the Life and Ministry of the Messiah
(vol 3)

30At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?"

31"You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?' "

32But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. 33Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. 34He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."

Hers was a confession of faith: I believe YOU are the savior, not a hypocrit like the Pharisees.

- FL: Jesus' model: Love one another.

FAITH LESSONS
On the Life and Ministry of the Messiah
(vol 3)

Language of Culture (6/8)

Tzipori (Hebrew: צִיפּוּרִי), also known by the Greek **Sepphoris**, in Latin **Dioceserea**, and the Arabic Saffuriya (Arabic: صـفـوريـة) or **Suffurriye**, is located in the heart of the Lower Galilee about 6.5 KM. northwest of Nazareth, on a hill 285 meters above sea level midway between the Mediterranean and Lake Kinneret (Sea of Galilee), with abundant spring water and a fertile valley around it. It is the site of a rich and diverse historical and architectural legacy that includes Assyrian, Hellenistic, Judean, Babylonian, Roman, Byzantine, Islamic, Crusader, Arabic and Ottoman influences.

Interest on the part of Biblical archaeologists is related to the belief in Christian tradition that the parents of the Virgin Mary, Anna and Joachim, were natives of Sepphoris, which at the time was a Hellenized town.

The city dates to the era of the Maccabees in the second century B.C.E. and was described by the first century C.E. Jewish historian, Josephus Flavius, as "the ornament of all Galilee." The city may get its name from the Hebrew word "tsipor"(bird) because the view from the town gives a sense of flying. Zippori is mentioned in many Jewish sources of the first centuries of the common era. Founded in the Hellenistic era by Alexander Janneus, it was captured by the Romans in 37 BCE when the inhabitants fled in the midst of a snowstorm.

The Jews of Zippori did not join the revolt against Rome in 66 C.E.; instead, they opened the city gates to the legions of the Roman Emperor Vespasian and surrendered. On coins minted in Zippori at that time, the city is named Eirenopolis, "city of peace."

In the 14 centuries between the rule of Herod of Antipas and that of the Ottoman empire, the city reportedly thrived as a center of learning, with a diverse, multiethnic and multireligious population of some 30,000 living in relatively peaceful coexistence

On the other extreme was the small community of **Nazareth**.

Nazareth was an insignificant agricultural village not far from a major trade route to Egypt, the Via Maris. It is not mentioned in the Old Testament, Josephus, or rabbinic writings.

James Strange, an American archaeologist notes that "Nazareth is not mentioned in ancient Jewish sources earlier than the third century AD. This likely reflects its lack of prominence both in Galilee and in Judaea." Strange first estimates Nazareth's population at the time of Christ to be "roughly 1,600 to 2,000 people", and in a subsequent publication at "a maximum of about 480." Some historians have argued that the absence of textual references to Nazareth

FAITH LESSONS

On the Life and Ministry of the Messiah

(vol 3)

in the Old Testament and the Talmud, as well as the works of Josephus, suggest that a town called 'Nazareth' did not exist in Jesus' day.

Many writers suppose that ancient Nazareth was built on the hillside, as required by scripture: [And they led Jesus] "to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw him down headlong" (Lk 4:29). However, the hill in question (the Nebi Sa'in) is far too steep for ancient dwellings and averages a 14% grade in the venerated area.

Homes and tombs built of stone masonry with back rooms of natural or rock-hewn caves were also found in Nazareth that date to the Roman era (63 BC to 324 AD).

Contrast population of Nazareth (300-480 – 25 families) to the 30,000+ living just 3.5 miles to the northwest in Zippori. Would the cultures differ? In what ways?

Herod Antipas (short for Antipatros) (before 20 BC – after AD 39) was an ancient leader (tetrarch, meaning "ruler of a quarter") of Galilee and Perea. He is best known today for his role in the events that led to the executions of John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth.

Antipas was a son of Herod the Great, who had become king of Judea, and Malthace, who was from Samaria. His date of birth is unknown but was before 20 BC. Antipas, his full brother Archelaus and his half-brother Philip were educated in Rome.

Antipas was not Herod's first choice of heir. That honor fell to Aristobulus and Alexander, Herod's sons by the Hasmonaean princess Mariamme. It was only after they were executed (c. 7 BC), and Herod's oldest son Antipater was convicted of trying to poison his father (5 BC), that the now elderly Herod fell back on his youngest son Antipas, revising his will to make him heir. During his fatal illness in 4 BC, Herod had yet another change of heart about the succession. According to the final version of his will, Antipas' elder brother Archelaus was now to become king of Judea, Idumea and Samaria, while Antipas would rule Galilee and Perea with the lesser title of tetrarch. Philip was to receive Gaulanitis (the Golan Heights), Batanaea (southern Syria), Trachonitis and Auranitis (Hauran).

Because of Judea's status as a Roman client kingdom, Herod's plans for the succession had to be ratified by Augustus. The three heirs therefore travelled to Rome to make their claims, Antipas arguing he ought to inherit the whole kingdom and the others maintaining that Herod's final will ought to be honored. Despite qualified support for Antipas from Herodian family members in Rome, who favoured direct Roman rule of Judea but considered Antipas preferable to his brother, Augustus largely confirmed the division of territory set out by Herod

FAITH LESSONS
On the Life and Ministry of the Messiah
(vol 3)

in his final will. Archelaus had, however, to be content with the title of ethnarch rather than king.

After inheriting his territories when the kingdom of his father Herod the Great was divided upon his death in 4 BC, Antipas ruled them as a client state of the Roman Empire. He was responsible for building projects at Sepphoris and Betharamphtha, and more importantly for the construction of his capital Tiberias on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee.

Builder ... or, Scholar?

The common conception of Joseph is that he was a carpenter (Matthew 13:55), however, this is a mistranslation of the Greek word, *tecton* (*tekton*), which more accurately should be called "general contractor," or more provocatively, "Master of the Craft" (Gardner, 2001). In fact, the *Protoevangelium of James*, 1[1] which concerns the lives of Jesus' parents, specifically identifies Joseph as a general contractor. The Blueletter Bible offers various translations of *tekton* - (1) a worker in wood, a carpenter, joiner, builder, (2) any craftsman, or workman (e.g., the art of poetry, maker of songs), and (3) a planner, contriver, plotter, or (4) an author.

When one looks at the parables which Jesus told, they were often about constructing a building, rather than making an object. This indicates that his experiences along these lines were more architectural (i.e., builder) rather than artisan (maker).

Even more challenging is the concept that *tecton/tekton* is best translated as scholar, since the original Aramaic word is *naggār*, which translates as craftsman or scholar (Wilson, 1992, p. 893). Indeed several notable authors (e.g., Thiering, 1992; Wilson, 1992; Vermes, 1973) believe that Joseph is best understood as a scholar, and it's as the son of a scholar that Jesus is more readily understood, rather than the son of a carpenter. Certainly this image of the scholar is more consistent with Luke's (2:46-47) tale of the 12-year-old Jesus in the Temple, where "...all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers."

This, in a round about way, leads us to the question, "How did Jesus afford to do as He did?" Luke tells us about Joanna's assistance.

FAITH LESSONS
On the Life and Ministry of the Messiah
(vol 3)

Luke:

- FL: Wealth is a tool ... much like everything we receive from God.

Jesus was familiar with the theater, understood royalty, and was politically savvy. Greek for actor is hypocrite (used 17 times by Jesus). Those who role play with the expectation of reward (applause). They merely put on a show. Matthew 6: 1-5 prompts us to not do deeds to be seen by men. Matthew 6:16-18 teaches us not to look sad (like the hypocrites). The parable taught in Luke 19:11-15 refers to a real-world king, Herod Antipas. Tax collectors (Luke 7:34) represent the establishment, the administration. Today, we would refer to them as politicians. As we see, Jesus mingled not only with the lepers and down-trodden, but also people of wealth, power, and cultural prowess.

- FL: We must be prepared to do likewise; isolation is NOT the way to make change. Instead, if we plan to impact our world, we need to understand where and how our culture is shaped (e.g., politics, media, journalism).

FAITH LESSONS
On the Life and Ministry of the Messiah
(vol 3)

Misguided Faith (7/8)

The **Crusades** were a series of military conflicts of a religious character waged by much of Christian Europe during 1095–1291, most of which were sanctioned by the Pope in the name of Christendom. The Crusades originally had the goal of recapturing Jerusalem and the sacred "Holy Land" from Muslim rule and were originally launched in response to a call from the Eastern Orthodox Byzantine Empire for help against the expansion of the Muslim Seljuk Turks into Anatolia.

The traditional numbering scheme for the Crusades includes the nine major expeditions to the Holy Land during the 11th to 13th centuries. Other unnumbered "crusades" continued into the 16th century, lasting until the political and religious climate of Europe was significantly changed during the Renaissance and Reformation (as well as the subsequent Counter-reformation).

The Crusades were, in part, an outlet for an intense religious piety which rose up in the late 11th century among the lay public. A crusader would, after pronouncing a solemn vow, receive a cross from the hands of the pope or his legates, and was thenceforth considered a "soldier of the Church."

On a popular level, the first crusades unleashed a wave of impassioned, personally felt pious Christian fury that was expressed in the massacres of Jews that accompanied the movement of the Crusader mobs through Europe, as well as the violent treatment of "schismatic" Orthodox Christians of the east. During many of the attacks on Jews, local Bishops and Christians made attempts to protect Jews from the mobs that were passing through. Jews were often offered sanctuary in churches and other Christian buildings, but the mobs broke in and killed them anyway.

Some modern historians in the west express moral outrage—for example Steven Runciman, the leading western historian of the crusades for much of the 20th century, ended his history with a resounding condemnation:

"High ideals were besmirched by cruelty and greed.. the Holy War was nothing more than a long act of intolerance in the name of God".

In short, the Crusades represented a most violent means used to present/spread the gospel of peace!

Heights of Issachar

FAITH LESSONS
On the Life and Ministry of the Messiah
(vol 3)

The Crusader fortress of **Belvoir**, located on a hill of the Naphtali plateau, 20 km. south of the Sea of Galilee and about 500 meters above the Jordan Valley, was originally a part of the feudal estate of a French nobleman named Velos who lived in Tiberias.

The builders of the fortress called it Belvoir (beautiful view) because of its magnificent view, which takes in the Gilad Mountains in Trans-Jordan.

The Crusader fortress was built circa 1140, during the reign of Falk Dango (1142-1131). When the Crusaders originally settled the ridge, they established a fortified agricultural farm here. In 1168, the Order of Hospitalers purchased the land and turned it into one of the most important Crusader fortresses in Eretz Israel. The fortress overlooked the route from the Jordan Valley to Damascus and the route from Nahal Tabor west to the coastal plain and the Via Maris.

The fortress built by the Hospitalers was so strong that it withstood all Saladin's attempts to seize it (1187-89). Only after a year-and-a-half-long siege, when all the land around them had been captured, did the defenders consent to sign the surrender agreement and move to Zur, a city that was still in Crusader hands.

The fortress here is the best restored and only completely excavated Crusader-period fortress in Israel. The fortress is composed of an external castle with a donjon at its center, a five-sided wall, and a twenty-meter-wide, twelve-meter-deep moat. Towers are positioned at the corners of the fortress.

The security of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem in the twelfth century was dependent upon a network of fortifications, mainly along its eastern border which was vulnerable to Muslim attacks.

The Crusader fortress of Belvoir is located on a hill of the Naphtali plateau, some 20 km. south of the Sea of Galilee and about 500 meters above the Jordan Valley. It overlooks the winding Jordan River below and faces the hills of Gilead in today's Kingdom of Jordan. Belvoir Fair View was aptly named by the Crusaders. In Hebrew it is known as Kohav Hayarden Star of the Jordan which preserves the name of Kohav, the Jewish village which existed nearby during the Roman and Byzantine periods. The Muslims called it Kaukab al-Hawa Star of the Winds.

The first structure on the hill was modest; it was part of the feudal estate of a French nobleman named Velos who lived in Tiberias. He sold it to the Order of the Hospitalers in 1168; the Hospitalers understood the strategic importance of the site and erected a huge fortress with impenetrable defenses. From Belvoir, the garrison could closely watch the bridge over the Jordan which served as the eastern entryway from Gilead into their Kingdom, as well as the roads in the valley leading to the Galilee.

FAITH LESSONS

On the Life and Ministry of the Messiah

(vol 3)

Belvoir consisted of an outer square fortress which enclosed a smaller, inner square fortress. Its walls were built of large basalt ashlar held together by U-shaped iron joints. Well-protected cisterns for the storage of rain water guaranteed the water supply in times of siege.

The Outer Fortress

The outer square fortress measures 110 x 110 m. A huge, external tower surrounded by a low wall (a barbican) was built on the eastern side, which controlled the dead space on the slope of the hill, both visually and with fire power. The main entrance to the fortress was via an outer gateway from the southeastern corner. From here, one proceeded up a paved ramp to the top of the external tower, turned back and continued to the inner gate of the fortress. This fortified gate was closed with a wooden door covered with metal and locked from the inside with a heavy wooden beam which fit into slots in the doorposts. A secondary entrance to the fortress was from the west, via a bridge suspended over the moat, which could be raised or destroyed when the fortress came under attack.

A man-made moat, 20 m. wide and 14 m. deep, surrounded the fortress on three sides while the steep slope and the external tower protected its eastern side. The moat was dry and was meant to prevent siege engines, such as battering rams and assault towers, from coming close to the fortifications.

Huge towers rose at the four corners of the fortress, with additional towers between them at mid-point. The broad bases of the towers slope towards the bottom of the moat, to prevent tunneling under them. In the upper stories of the towers were loopholes protected by covered recesses. The placement of the towers is such that the entire circumference of the fortress walls could be covered by cross fire. Almost every tower incorporated sally ports into the moat, with narrow staircases; the steps are unusually high, undoubtedly to make enemy penetration from the outside more difficult.

In the courtyard between the walls of the outer fortress and the inner fortress were large halls covered with vaults. These served as stables, storehouses and living space and gave access to defensive positions on the roofs.

The Inner Fortress

Inside the outer fortress and separated from it by the courtyard was the inner fortress (keep, donjon). It was a square, 50 x 50 m. structure, two stories high and surrounded by a wall with towers at the corners. This inner fortress could withstand siege even after the main, outer fortress had fallen into enemy hands. The main entrance was from the west. In its center was an open courtyard surrounded by vaulted spaces which served as refectory, kitchen, meeting hall,

FAITH LESSONS

On the Life and Ministry of the Messiah

(vol 3)

stores, living quarters etc. The upper story served as the command headquarters of the fortress and included the apartments of the the knights, as well as a small chapel built of limestone and roofed with cross vaults.

The fortress of Belvoir served its purpose as a major obstacle to the Muslims goal of invading the Crusader Kingdom from the east. It was attacked by Muslim forces in 1180 but its mighty fortifications withstood the attack.

After the victory of the Muslim army under Salah al-Din (Saladin) over the Crusaders at the battle of the Horns of Hittin, Belvoir was besieged. The siege lasted a year and a half, until the defenders surrendered on 5 January 1189.

The fortifications of Belvoir were dismantled in 1217-18 by the Muslim rulers who feared the reconquest of the fortress by the Crusaders. In 1240 Belvoir was ceded to the Crusaders, by agreement; lack of funds did not permit them to restore the fortifications and it returned to Muslim control a few years later.

- FL: We, as Christians, must own up to the fact the Crusades is part—a dark part—of our history. We need to understand the betrayal associated with this term, and we need to clearly indicate this chapter of our history is over—we renounce it, and we respect all people. It is only then we have any rightful place to share Jesus with them.

Unprecedented Muslim call for peace with Christians

By Peter Graff

Thu Oct 11, 10:37 AM ET

More than 130 Muslim scholars from around the globe called on Thursday for peace and understanding between Islam and Christianity, saying "the very survival of the world itself is perhaps at stake."

In an unprecedented letter to Pope Benedict and other Christian leaders, 138 Muslim scholars said finding common ground between the world's biggest faiths was not simply a matter for polite dialogue between religious leaders.

"If Muslims and Christians are not at peace, the world cannot be at peace. With the terrible weaponry of the modern world; with Muslims and Christians intertwined everywhere as never before, no side can unilaterally win a conflict between more than half of the world's inhabitants," the scholars wrote.

"Our common future is at stake. The very survival of the world itself is perhaps at stake," they wrote, adding that Islam and Christianity already agreed that love of God and neighbor were the two most important commandments of their faiths.

FAITH LESSONS

On the Life and Ministry of the Messiah

(vol 3)

Relations between Muslims and Christians have been strained as al Qaeda has struck around the world and as the United States and other Western countries intervened in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Such a joint letter is unprecedented in Islam, which has no central authority that speaks on behalf of all worshippers.

The list of signatories includes senior figures throughout the Middle East, Asia, Africa, Europe and North America. They represent Sunni, Shi'ite and Sufi schools of Islam.

Among them were the grand muftis of Egypt, Palestine, Oman, Jordan, Syria, Bosnia and Russia and many imams and scholars. War-torn Iraq was represented by both Shi'ites and Sunnis.

Mustafa Cagrici, the mufti who prayed with Benedict in Istanbul's Blue Mosque last year, was also on the list, as was the popular Egyptian television preacher Amr Khaled.

"MAINSTREAM VOICES DROWNED OUT"

The letter was addressed to the Pope, leaders of Orthodox Christian churches, Anglican leader Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams and the heads of the world alliances of the Lutheran, Methodist, Baptist and Reformed churches.

Williams said he welcomed it as "indicative of the kind of relationship for which we yearn in all parts of the world."

"The call to respect, peace and goodwill should now be taken up by Christians and Muslims at all levels and in all countries," he said.

A Vatican official in Rome said the Roman Catholic Church would not comment until it had time to read the letter.

Aref Ali Nayed, one of the signatories and a senior adviser to the Cambridge Interfaith Program at Cambridge University in Britain, said the signatories represented the "99.9 percent of Muslims" who follow mainstream schools and oppose extremism.

"In Islam we have had a problem for some time now where the mainstream voices are drowned out by a minority that choose violence," he said.

Nayed said organizers of the letter had set up an ad hoc network among Muslim leaders that could lead to more cooperation in future.

"These people don't take their signatures lightly," he said. "We are trying to institutionalize this so we don't lose it."

The overture to Christians could be followed by similar letters addressed to Jews or secularists, he added.

FAITH LESSONS

On the Life and Ministry of the Messiah

(vol 3)

Pope Benedict sparked Muslim protests last year with a speech hinting Islam was violent and irrational. It prompted 38 Muslim scholars to write a letter challenging his view of Islam and accepting his call for serious Christian-Muslim dialogue.

Benedict repeatedly expressed regret for the reaction to the speech, but stopped short of a clear apology sought by Muslims.

The new letter argues in theological terms, giving quotes from the Koran and the Bible that show both Christianity and Islam considered love of God as their greatest commandment and love of neighbor as the second greatest.

"The basis for this peace and understanding already exists," it said. "It is part of the very foundational principles of both faiths: love of the one God and love of the neighbor."

FAITH LESSONS
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(vol 3)

Living Water (8/8)

Finding oneself in the wilderness makes water very special. In geography, an **oasis** (plural: **oases**) is an isolated area of vegetation in a desert, typically surrounding a spring or similar water source. Oases also provide habitat for animals and even humans if the area is big enough. The location of oases has been of critical importance for trade and transportation routes in desert areas. Caravans must travel via oases so that supplies of water and food can be replenished. Thus, political or military control of an oasis has in many cases meant control of trade on a particular route.

Wadi **Ein Gedi** (Hebrew: עין גדי, lit. *Kid Spring* (as in young goat); KJV Bible **Engedi**) is an oasis located west of the Dead Sea, close to Masada and the caves of Qumran. It is known for its caves, springs, and its rich diversity of flora and fauna. Ein Gedi is mentioned several times in biblical writings, for example, in the Song of Songs; "My beloved is unto me as a cluster of henna flowers in the vineyards of Ein Gedi" (1:14). Accorded to Jewish tradition, David hid from Saul in the caves here; "And David went up from thence, and dwelt in the strongholds of Ein Gedi" (Samuel 1 24:1). See also Psalms 63:1ff and Psalms 42:1-2.

Ein Gedi is a sanctuary for many types of plant, bird and animal species. The vegetation includes plants and trees from the Tropical, Desert, Mediterranean and Steppian regions, such as Sodom apple, acacia, jujube and poplar. The many species of resident birds are supplemented by over 200 additional species during the migration periods in the spring and fall. Mammal species include the ibex and the hyrax.

In Second Book of Chronicles it is identified with Asasonthamar (Cutting of the Pain), the city of the Amorrhian, smitten by Chedorlaomer in his war against the cities of the plain. Book of Joshua enumerates Ein Gedi among the cities of the Tribe of Judah in the desert Betharaba, but the Book of Ezekiel shows that it was also a fisherman's town. Later on, King David hides in the desert of Engaddi and King Saul seeks him "even upon the most craggy rocks, which are accessible only to wild goats". Again, it is in Ein Gedi that the Moabites and Ammonites gather in order to fight against Josaphat and to advance against Jerusalem "by the ascent named Sis". Finally, Song of Solomon speaks of the "vineyards of Engaddi"; the words, "I was exalted like a palm tree in Cades" ('en aígialoîs), which occur in Ecclus., xxiv, 18, may perhaps be understood of the palm trees of Ein Gedi.

Living Water

FAITH LESSONS
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Jeremiah 2:13

"My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water."

Jeremiah 17:13

"O LORD, the hope of Israel, all who forsake you will be put to shame. Those who turn away from you will be written in the dust because they have forsaken the LORD, the spring of living water."

Jesus Talks With a Samaritan Woman (John 4)

1The Pharisees heard that Jesus was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John, 2although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. 3When the Lord learned of this, he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.

4Now he had to go through Samaria. 5So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 6Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

7When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" 8(His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

9The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

10Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

11"Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? 12Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?"

13Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 14but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

- FL: Life is like the wilderness. We need a place we can go to and "taste God"—our own Ein Gedi!