



The World After Christ, an LDS  
Perspective  
(0 A.D. - Present)

**VOLUME 2**

**Epoch 1** – 0 A.D. – 313 A.D.

The Fall of Jerusalem, The Growth of Christianity, The Early Years of Christianity, Masada

**Epoch 2** – 313 A.D. – 712 A.D.

The Fall of Rome, Attila the Hun, The Barbarian Tribes, Settling of Europe

**Epoch 3** – 712 A.D. – 1054 A.D.

Feudalism, Manorialism, Life in Medieval Europe

**Epoch 4** – 1054 A.D. – 1453 A.D.

The Magna Carta, Joan of Arc, The Hundred Year's War, The Black Death

**Epoch 5** – 1453 A.D. – 1649 A.D.

The Church of England, The Thirty Year's War, Protestantism, The Inquisitions, The Huguenots

**Epoch 6** – 1649 A.D. – 1848 A.D.

The Great Composers, The Industrial Revolution, The English Empire

**Epoch 7** – 1848 A.D. – 1918 A.D.

Unification of Germany, Nationalism, The Balkans, Darwinism, The Potato Famine

**Epoch 8** – 1918 A.D. – 1945 A.D.

The Depression in Europe, Stalin, Spanish Civil War

**Epoch 9** – 1945 A.D. - Present

The Vietnam War, The Fall of the Soviet Union, A Reunited Germany, Cold War, Current Events

(Excerpt on next page)

# Masada

The World After Christ, an LDS Perspective, Volume 2.  
"Masada" is found on pages 13-19.

With the fall of Jerusalem, the Romans decided to teach the Jews a stern lesson, one that would serve as a warning to any other conquered nation that dared to rebel against Rome. The Jews were to be marked as a people, different from all others, deserving of punishment and required to meet special obligations. To penalize them the Romans forbade the reconstruction of the Jerusalem Temple. The tax that the Jews had previously paid voluntarily for its upkeep was now imposed on them by force, but it went not to Jerusalem but to Rome to support the pagan temples. This tax outraged their religious feelings, yet it had to be paid by all Jews throughout the Roman Empire, even those in lands and cities far from the seat of rebellion. Centuries later, long after the Roman Empire had fallen and new societies had risen in its place, discriminatory measures such as these continued to be taken against the Jews.

To celebrate his victory, Titus built a triumphal arch in the Roman Forum. Carved on it were Jewish captives carrying their sacred Temple objects through the streets of Rome in Titus' victory procession. In the Holy Land, Jewish property was confiscated. No Jew was allowed to own land in the country. Many were forced from their homes to live in lands where they would always be treated as foreigners. No Jew was allowed to settle in Jerusalem. They were permitted to visit the ruins and recite prayers at the site of the Temple, but Roman troops were stationed there to see that they did not linger.

For three years after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., some Jews continued to fight the Romans. In three desert citadels that had originally been fortified by Herod, bands of Zealots kept alive Jewish resistance. Two of the forts, Machaerus, located on the eastern side of the Dead Sea, where John the Baptist had been killed, and Herodium, (see map 14 in the pre-1999 edition of the LDS publication of the Bible) in the wilderness of Judea near the town of Bethlehem, surrendered. The third however, Masada, held out longer. On an isolated mountain top, accessible only by two narrow paths that could easily be defended against a whole army by a few soldiers, Herod had built his own fortress called Masada, about twenty-five miles south of Jerusalem. The word Masada is a Hebrew word which means mountain fortress. Masada has cliffs that rise 1,300 feet. The top of the rock on which the fortress was built measures 1,900 feet long and 650 feet wide. One trail that led to it was called the Serpent. It was so narrow and twisting that a man climbing it had to place one foot directly ahead of the other in order to avoid falling into the deep gorge beneath. One false step would send him to his death.

The serpent path resembles that animal in its narrowness, and its perpetual windings; for it is broken off at the prominent precipices of the rock, and returns frequently into itself, and lengthening again by little and little, hath much ado to proceed forward; and he that would walk along it must first go on one leg, and then on the other; there is also nothing but destruction, in case your feet slip; for on each side there was a vastly deep chasm and precipice, sufficient to quell the courage of everybody by the terror it infuses into the mind. (Josephus, Wars of the Jews, book VII, chapter VIII, verse 3)

The fortress, with 18 foot high walls, and 38 towers for defense, was located in one of the most inhospitable areas in the world, overlooking the Dead Sea, which at 1,291 feet below sea level, is the lowest point on earth. The desert surrounding the fort was only rock and sand, but the flat summit of Masada had a few acres of soil that could be tilled. Twelve large cisterns, which could hold approximately 10,000 gallons of water each, were cut into its rock, and stored whatever rain fell in that arid land. If it rained even a few days a year, a besieged group might hold out indefinitely.

The Zealots at Masada were led by a man named Eleazar ben Ya'ir, one of the Sicarii leaders who had commanded some of them during the siege of Jerusalem. In 66 A.D., at the start of the Jewish War, a group had attacked the Roman garrison at Masada and captured it, and it had remained in Jewish hands. The Romans had never bothered to retake it, both because they thought it would be too costly in troops, and because they believed that after the fall of Jerusalem all Jewish resistance would end. When the Zealots fled the city and arrived at Masada, they found enormous supplies of barley and wheat, olive oil, wine, and dates placed there a full century earlier by Herod and perfectly preserved in the dry air of the Dead Sea basin. The vast cisterns of the fort held ample supplies of water, as long as strict rationing was imposed.

All through the rest of A.D. 70, 71, and the first part of 72, the Zealots continued to occupy Masada and harass the Roman authorities whenever they could, as well as disrupt Roman rule in the area. At first the Romans paid little attention to them, dismissing them as a mild nuisance, but as the Zealot raids continued, the Romans began to take notice. What annoyed them even more than their losses in the Zealot raids was the harm to their prestige. How could the local Roman governor and commanders face their imperial masters when they seemed unable to put down a small group of Judean rebels? A large force was necessary, and such a force was not available to the Romans in the first year or so when they were busy trying to establish order in the country after the long savage war.

In A.D. 72, however, the new Roman procurator of Judea, Flavius Silva, considered that the country was now quiet enough and the population sufficiently terrorized into acceptance of Roman rule. He decided that the time had come to move against the one fortress that still held out, Masada. Silva was a general and had been one of Titus' top

commanders in the conquest of Jerusalem two years earlier. He had to make certain of victory, so he took the noted Tenth Legion and additional troops, estimated to be between 16,000 to 25,000, against the 960 zealots held up in Masada. (A Legion was an army of about 5,000 men, commanded by a Roman General.) Marching his forces to Masada, Silva established eight camps around the base of the fortress at key points to house the large Roman army. The camp remains can still be seen today.

Silva set his Jewish slaves to work building a powerful siege wall completely encircling the fortress. It was more than two miles long, and six feet thick, and ten feet high. He built this wall to prevent the Zealots from raiding his troops and to stop them from escaping. When all this work was completed, General Silva commenced the final stage of his operation. Silva knew they could not fight and climb at the same time, and they certainly could not climb with heavy weapons. They would become too easy a target and prey for the defenders on the top. The only way to break through the Zealots' defenses was to build a sloping ramp reaching to the summit. Up this ramp he could move his troops in a solid body, together with siege engines and a battering ram, and hurl his powerful strength against a single point in the Zealot's defensive wall.

They took earth and stones and began to build their ramp to the 1300 foot top of Masada. They trampled down the earth and stones so that the surface was hard. Wooden scaffolding was used to hold the earth in place. To this day a person can see the protruding tips of timber. The structure was cone-shaped, narrow at the bottom and broadening to a width of about 650 feet near Masada's wall. Its length was also 650 feet. A defensive tower with platforms and covered areas were built to protect the men who shot arrows and threw stones at the defenders, while other troops rammed the wall to Masada with their battering ram. Troops operating the ram were covered by a leather canopy to protect them from the heavy stones or boiling oil which the defenders from above would pour down on their heads.

For months the defenders had been watching the Roman build-up. They could follow every step and hear almost every sound. The rebels had kept piles of ammunition, stone balls, one hundred pounds each, at key points along the wall to fling at anyone trying to scale the wall. We can gather from archaeological remains that up to the final days they were hopeful that they might hold out. Despite their fearful hardships, their morale was high, but when the siege tower was erected and the battering ram brought up, Eleazar and his commanders realized that the end could not be far off. Unable to keep the ram from the wall, because of the arrows and catapult stones the size of grapefruits from the Romans on the tower, the Zealots knew that the fortress wall would be breached any minute. So they improvised and built an inner wall at the point where the battering ram would penetrate the fortress wall. This was one which could be put up quickly yet built in such a way that it would better meet the threat of the battering ram. They erected what was in fact a wooden casemate, two parallel walls made of long wooden beams, except that the space between was not left empty but was filled with earth, and boards were nailed across the frame to prevent the earth from falling out. It was an ingenious answer to the powerful Roman weapon, whose blows, far from causing further damage, simply would beat the earth into a more solid and compact barrier.

However, the Sicarii made haste, and presently built another wall within that, which should not be liable to the same misfortune from the machines with the other: it was made soft and yielding, and so was capable of avoiding the terrible blows that affected the other. It was framed after the following manner: they laid together great beams of wood lengthways, one close to the end of another, and the same way in which they were cut: there were two of these rows parallel to one another, and laid at such a distance from each other as the breadth of the wall required, and earth was put into the space between those rows. Now, that the earth might not fall away upon the elevation of this bank to a greater height, they farther laid other beams over across them, and thereby bound those beams together that lay lengthways. This work of theirs was like a real edifice; and when the machines were applied, the blows were weakened by its yielding; and as the materials by such concussion were shaken closer together, the pile by that means became firmer than before. (Ibid., Book VII, chapter VIII, verse 5)

After examining the new wall, Silva decided he would strike at its one weakness, the timber. He ordered his men to get flaming torches, and hurl them at the new barrier. They did, and the wood soon caught fire. Within moments, the whole section was ablaze. Then there occurred a remarkable and unusual event. Suddenly the wind veered around, blowing the flames back in the faces of the Romans and threatening to set afire their siege tower and battering ram. Josephus tells us that this strange happening "plunged the Romans into despair." We can well imagine that the hopes of the Jewish Zealots on the other side, only a few yards away, must have soared. Eleazar's joy was Silva's gloom, and Roman despair was Zealot hope. Now, with the change of the wind, the defenders must surely have thought that Providence had come to their rescue at the last minute.

Hope died quickly, as quickly as the wind again veered and resumed its former direction, carrying and flinging the flames against the wall, turning it into one solid blazing mass. Then, says Josephus, "the Romans, having assistance from God, returned to their camp with joy, and resolved to attack their enemies the very next day; on which occasion they set their watch more carefully that night, lest any of the Jews should run away from them without being discovered." (Wars of the Jews, Book VII, chapter VIII, verse 6) It was evident that the Romans would now overcome the defenders, the last unconquered Jews in the Holy Land. Still the Zealots refused to surrender. Although they knew that they could hold out no longer, they vowed to die rather than give in to the Romans. Josephus describes the sad scene and has recorded the words used by Eleazar which inspired the Zealots to kill themselves and die in freedom rather than become slaves to the Romans.

*Since we, long ago, my generous friends, resolved never to be servants to the Romans, nor to any other than to God himself, who alone is the true and just Lord of mankind, the time is now come that obliges us to make that resolution true in practice. And let us not at this time bring a reproach upon ourselves for self-contradiction, while we formerly would not undergo slavery, though it were then without danger, but must now, together with slavery, choose such punishments also as are intolerable; I mean this, upon the supposition that the Romans once reduce us under their power while we are alive. We were the very first that revolted from them, and we are the last that fight against them; and I cannot but esteem it as a favour that God hath granted us, that it is still in our power to die bravely, and in a state of freedom, which hath not been the case with others who were conquered unexpectedly. It is very plain that we shall be taken within a day's time; but it is still an eligible thing to die after a glorious manner, together with our dearest friends. This is what our enemies themselves cannot by any means hinder, although they be very desirous to take us alive. Nor can we propose to ourselves any more to fight them and beat them....*

*Wherefore, consider how God hath convinced us that our hopes were in vain, by bringing such distress upon us in the desperate state we are now in, and which is beyond all our expectations; for the nature of this fortress, which was in itself unconquerable, hath not proved a means of our deliverance; and even while we have still great abundance of food, and a great quantity of arms and other necessaries more than we want, we are openly deprived by God himself of all hope of deliverance; for that fire which was driven upon our enemies did not, of its own accord, turn back upon the wall which we had built: this was the effect of God's anger against us for our manifold sins, which we have been guilty of in a most insolent [arrogant] and extravagant manner with regard to our own countrymen; the punishments of which let us not receive from the Romans, but from God himself, as executed by our own hands, for these will be more moderate than the other.*

*Let our wives die before they are abused, and our children before they have tasted of slavery; and after we have slain them, let us bestow that glorious benefit upon one another mutually, and preserve ourselves in freedom, as an excellent funeral monument for us. But first let us destroy our money and the fortress by fire; for I am well assured that this will be a great grief to the Romans, that they shall not be able to seize upon our bodies, and shall fail of our wealth also: and let us spare nothing but our provisions; for they will be a testimonial when we are dead that we were not subdued for want of necessaries; but that, according to our original resolution, we have preferred death before slavery. (Ibid., Book VII, chapter VIII, verse 6)*

Not all responded in the same way to Eleazar's appeal. Some were eager to do as he had said, preferring death to slavery. Others were moved by compassion for their wives and children and certainly not by becoming their own executioners. They exchanged glances with each other and the tears in their eyes betrayed the sentiments of their minds. So Eleazar addressed himself particularly to those who were weeping with the utmost earnestness.

*...We revolted from the Romans with great pretensions to courage; and when at the very last they invited us to preserve ourselves, we would not comply with them. Who will not, therefore, believe that they will certainly be in a rage at us, in case they can take us alive? Miserable will then be the young men, who will be strong enough in their bodies to sustain many torrents! Miserable also will be those of elder years, who will not be able to bear those calamities which young men might sustain! One man will be obliged to hear the voice of his son imploring help of his father, when his hands are bound: But certainly our hands are still at liberty, and have a sword in them: let us die before we become slaves under our enemies, and let us go out of the world, together with our children and our wives, in a state of freedom.*

*This it is that our laws command us to do; this it is that our wives and children crave at our hands, nay, God himself hath brought this necessity upon us; while the Romans desire the contrary, and are afraid lest any man should die before we are taken. Let us therefore make haste, and instead of affording them so much pleasure, as they hope for in getting us under their power, let us leave them an example which shall at once cause their astonishment at our death, and their admiration of our hardiness therein. (Ibid., Book VII, chapter VIII, verse 7)*

Now the response was unanimous. So long as there was hope, they had fought, believing, too, that they were the instrument of God's will, through whom the Romans would be conquered and Jewish freedom regained. Now, with disaster inevitable, it was clear that the will of God was the reverse of what they had hoped, and death was welcomed. They had little time left, and they moved quickly to do the grim deed that they had decided to do.

So they went their ways, as one still endeavouring to be before another, and as thinking that this eagerness would be a demonstration of their courage and good conduct, if they could avoid appearing in the last class: so great was the zeal they were in to slay their wives and children, and themselves also! Nor indeed, when they came to the work itself, did their courage fail them as one might imagine it would have done; but they then held fast the same resolution, without wavering, which they had upon the hearing of Eleazar's speech, while yet every one of them still retained the natural passion of love to themselves and their families, because the reasoning they went upon, appeared to them to be very just, even with regard to those that were dearest to them; for the husbands tenderly embraced their wives and took their children into their arms, and gave the longest parting kisses to them, with tears in their eyes. (Ibid., Book VII, chapter IX, verse 1)

Having killed their wives and children while still embracing them, Josephus concludes the sad scene with this description:

*So they not being able to bear the grief they were under for what they had done, any longer, and esteeming it an injury to those they had slain, to live even the shortest space of time after them -- they presently laid all they had in a heap, and set fire to it. They then chose ten men by lot out of them, to slay all the rest; every one of whom laid himself down by his wife and children on the ground, and threw his arms about them, and they offered their necks to the stroke of those who by lot executed that melancholy office; and when these ten had, without fear, slain them all, they made the same rule for casting lots for themselves, that he whose lot it was should first kill the other nine, and after all, should kill himself. Accordingly, all those had courage sufficient to be no way behind one another, in doing or suffering; so, for a conclusion, the nine offered their necks to the executioner, and he who was the last of all, took a view of all the other bodies, lest perchance some or other among so many that were slain should want his assistance to be quite despatched (killed); and when he perceived that they were all slain, he set fire to the palace, and with the great force of his hand ran his sword entirely through himself, and fell down dead near to his own relations.*

*So these people died with this intention, that they would not have so much as one soul among them all alive to be subject to the Romans. Yet was there an ancient woman, and another who was of kin to Eleazar, and superior to most women in prudence and learning, with five children, who had concealed themselves in caverns under ground, and had carried water thither for their drink, and were hidden there when the rest were intent upon the slaughter of one another. These others were nine hundred and sixty in number, the women and children being withal included in that computation. (Ibid. Book VII, chapter IX, verse 1)*

Is a person, or a group of people, ever justified in taking their own lives? Were these people justified to perform this mass suicide to keep themselves from falling into the hands of the Romans? Suicide is man's deliberate attempt to end his own life, thus taking out of the hands of the Lord the decision when our mortal life is to end and we are to be called home to God. The principle of the Gospel regarding suicide is stated in this manner:

*Suicide consists in the voluntary and intentional taking of one's own life, particularly where the person involved is accountable and has a sound mind. Mortal life is a gift of God; it comes according to the divine will, is appointed to endure for such time as Deity decrees, and is designed to serve as the chief testing period of man's eternal existence. It is the probationary state or time during which man is tried and tested physically, spiritually, and mentally. No man has the right to run away from these tests, no matter how severe they may be, by taking his own life. Obviously persons subject to great stresses may lose control of themselves and become mentally clouded to the point that they are no longer accountable for their own acts. Such are not to be condemned for taking their own lives. It should also be remembered that judgment is the Lord's; he knows the thoughts, intents, and abilities of men; and he in his infinite wisdom will make all things right in due course. (Bruce R. McConkie, Mormon Doctrine, Suicide, page 771)*

At the dawn of the following morning, the Romans prepared their scaling ladders in order to make an attack, but they were astonished upon not hearing any noise but the crackling of the flames and were totally at a loss. They gave a loud shout, as if giving the signal for the attack and expected to receive an answer from the Zealots. This noise alarmed the women in their place of retreat, who immediately came out and related the events that had transpired the night before. Unable to believe this story of the two women and the five children who were with them, they extinguished the flames. When they got to the palace and found the bodies of the deceased lying in heaps, their exulting in triumph of joy that they might execute their enemy was changed to admiration for them. They admired the virtue and dignity of mind with which the Jews had been inspired, and wondered at their contempt of death by which so many had been bound in one solemn pact. Thus, seven years after it had begun, the great war against the Roman Empire ended, in utter defeat for the Jews.