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Introduction

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Introduction

From March to September 1997, many of the artifacts excavated by Yigael Yadin at Masada in the 1960s will be on display at the BYU Museum of Art. That exhibition from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem will be supplemented by an adjoining exhibition of actual Dead Sea Scrolls and other ancient Jewish items. BYU Studies is one of the principal sponsors of these exhibits as these rare pieces come to the United States.

In connection with these exhibitions, which offer the opportunity to see original artifacts from the awe-inspiring fortress of Masada, which fell to the Romans in A.D. 73, and from nearby Qumran, BYU Studies offers two special publications. First is the English translation of the Hebrew catalog for the Masada exhibition. Edited by Gila Hurvitz of the Hebrew University, the catalog contains numerous color photographs and concise reports by leading scholars who have devoted their careers to excavating, preserving, and analyzing the archaeological remains of Masada. The second publication is this special issue of *BYU Studies*, which focuses on Masada and the world of the New Testament. This volume strives to take readers back into the first-century world of Herod, Josephus, Peter, and Jesus.

Every item from the ruins at Masada or Qumran suggests something about the broader setting in which early Christianity arose. For example, the sandals from Masada are no doubt similar to the sandals worn by John the Baptist, Jesus, and his disciples; the oil lamps found at Masada illustrate the kinds of lamps that may have been carried by the young women in the parable of the ten virgins; Herod's dinnerware evokes images of the parables of Jesus involving

great aristocratic banquets; the Roman weapons found on that site remind us of the strength of Rome throughout the province of Judea; and so on. We hope that each ancient artifact and its modern explication will give the reader concrete images and new insights that will enrich the understanding of individual passages as well as the overall context of many details mentioned in the New Testament.

The following studies offer solid information about the material culture of first-century Judea. Even though the story of Masada itself has recently become significantly politicized and rightly re-examined in the scholarly literature, these developments do not diminish the importance of this archaeological site as a source of information about the world of the New Testament. Because our primary interests lie in discussing the ancient artifacts themselves, we have not attempted in this volume to homogenize the diversity of opinions that exist concerning the final hours at Masada or what motivated the overzealous people who died there.

In organizing and editing these materials, we have grouped them according to the main divisions of the Masada exhibition. The first section deals with Herodian times and culture. The essays in this section ask such questions as, What kind of person was King Herod the Great, the main builder of Masada and the king of the Jews mentioned early in the gospels of Matthew and Luke? How rich was he? How many construction projects did he undertake, and what was his influence in Judea and Galilee? What Hellenistic influences did he and others bring into Palestine around the birth of Christ?

The next two sections discuss the people who died at Masada and some of the artifacts from their daily life. Sometimes these Jewish rebels are called Zealots, but Josephus more specifically calls them the Sicarii (the “Dagger Men,” from the Latin *sica*, which means dagger). Although the use of the latter term has recently become more politically and academically correct, it seems unlikely that the Sicarii called themselves by this pejorative Roman moniker. What they actually called themselves remains unknown. To be sure, this confusion only reflects the complicated political situation that existed in Palestine throughout the first century A.D. Many questions about these people remain to be explored: Who

were these people? Were they outlaws, brigands, freedom fighters, or social heroes? How did they live? What daily artifacts did they use (keys, lamps, sandals, coins, wine jars)? How religious were these people? Where did they worship? Were their pools used for ritual immersion baths? What sacred texts did they use? What do the remains of their time at Masada tell us about the typical daily or religious life of people in this part of the world during the New Testament era?

Next, the Masada exhibition displays several Roman artifacts left from the Roman siege and conquest of Masada. These objects raise questions about the Roman presence in Judea: How, when, and why did the Romans establish control over Judea? How intrusive was the Roman military presence? How was the army organized? What weapons did they use? These details may remind the readers of references to Roman governors, soldiers, and weapons in the New Testament and of the disastrous end of the Jewish revolt, fulfilling the prophetic warning of Jesus to Jerusalem that “there shall not be left here one stone upon another” (Matt. 24:2).

The dramatic end of Masada as told by Josephus is borne out in large part by the archaeology. Yet, to the very end, questions remain: What was the role of lots and divination in the ancient world, and did Yadin find the actual lots drawn at Masada to determine the order of the final suicides? How reliable is Josephus in his history of Masada, and by implication in his records generally—all of which are very important in reconstructing the history of the world of the New Testament?

We hope the essays in this volume will provide interesting discussions of questions such as these. Our intention is to engage and explore these topics without being exhaustive or absolute. Also, because so much of our limited knowledge about Masada and the history of first-century Judea ultimately runs back to the accounts of Josephus, a certain amount of overlap exists from one study in this volume to the next. We trust that any repetition will be a friendly and helpful redundancy. Unless otherwise indicated, all citations of Josephus are to the Loeb Library edition.

We express great appreciation to the authors and editors who have responded promptly and enthusiastically to the tasks involved in producing this special issue of *BYU Studies*. Nancy R. Lund, managing

editor of *BYU Studies*, has copyedited and coordinated the project as a whole. Many interns and volunteers have assisted with source checking and formatting individual details. Karl E. Batdorff and Marny K. Parkin have gone the extra mile in typesetting. Executive editor Doris R. Dant has done the final copyediting, supervised the graphics, and provided numerous polishing touches.

BYU Studies is honored to collaborate with the Hebrew University in many aspects of the Masada exhibition. As a neighbor of the Hebrew University on Mount Scopus in Jerusalem and as a friend to many throughout the Middle East, Brigham Young University is pleased to be associated with the Hebrew University and the Israel Antiquities Authority as this fascinating and informative material comes from Masada to the United States.

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February 1997