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The Newsletter of The Society For Biblical Studies

Jesus and Pan, *cont'd.*

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way to Hades,' a cavern yawning before him like a tomb? And is it a coincidence that during the reign of Tiberius, Pan was not the only 'god' to have died, but in fact God incarnate, Jesus Christ, also died, and he is proclaimed by the Church as the living and eternal Lord of Pan/All?

The Rev. Bert Gary is a United Methodist minister and a member of the faculty of The Society for Biblical Studies. He leads pilgrimages in the Holy Land. In addition to his fresh insights into biblical backgrounds, he has a special interest and expertise in ornithology.

Masada, *cont'd*

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Judas hangs himself. In ancient Israelite society, murder was not noble. Suicide was not heroic. It was the ritual acknowledgement of the futility of one's own cause.

Josephus tells the story of a group of treacherous Israelites called Sicarii who betray their own people and end up acknowledging the futility and vanity of their own cause in the symbolic act of taking their own lives. On the night of Passover, more 900 Sicarii—according to Josephus—receive symbolic justice for their act of murdering over 700 fellow Israelites at Ein Gedi also on the night of Passover.

Like Josephus' narrative, the Gospels are written in the aftermath of the First Judean Revolt against Rome. They tell a story of a treacherous Israelite, Judas Iscariot, i.e., the knife wielder, who betrays to death a fellow Israelite. Then, to demonstrate that he accepts the futility

and vanity of his cause, Judas, like the Sicarii on Masada, meets death by his own hands on the night of Passover.

Josephus is careful to avoid any frontal critique of Rome and its army in his narrative. Neither do the Gospel authors, writing at about the same time as Josephus, offer much by way of critique of Rome. Like Josephus, the authors of the Gospels (and Acts) are Israelites. Indeed, like Josephus, the Gospel writers' most scathing criticism is directed not against Rome, but against fellow Israelites. Like Josephus, they are writing in the aftermath of the Judean revolt against Rome and they do not want to aggravate Roman suspicions about Judeans by suggesting any disloyalty to Rome. These similarities are not coincidences. If we ignore them or allow them to be obscured by the popular fictions about Masada and the 'last stand of the Zealots,' we miss an important way of gaining insight into the meaning and purpose of the Gospel narratives in their original contexts.

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The Newsletter of The Society for Biblical Studies

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May 2011

The Christian Significance of Masada

The Rev. Peter J. Miano

Mark Twain once said, "Never let the facts get in the way of a good story." The usual telling of the Masada story is one part nationalist myth and one part Disneyland entertainment. The facts never get in the way! Indeed, the facts are usually ignored and so is the Christian significance of the site. However, prior to its exploitation by modern Israeli tourism, the last occupants of the site were Christian monks. Moreover, the original telling of the story of Masada illuminates our reading of the passion narratives in the

Gospels. It also assists in the contextualization of all New Testament narrative writings. These observations merit careful consideration. However, they are obscured by the popular sensation surrounding Masada. Rarely do they enter the public discourse.

No archaeological site in Israel generates as much sensation and popular interest as Masada. The site and the popular story about it figure prominently in the collective imagination of the Israeli public. Foreign tourists, too, are attracted to the site both for its stunning location and for its dramatic story. Lost in the sensation is the significance of the site to Christians.

Perched on a desert mountaintop about 1,300 feet above the floor of the Dead Sea valley, Masada, meaning 'mountain fortress,' is in a striking setting. It offers spectacular views across the Dead Sea to the mountains of Jordan and north towards Ein Gedi. It is approached either by foot along the well worn 'serpentine,' by way of the Roman ramp, or by the cable car, which itself never fails to illicit its share of excitement.

Equally arresting is the story of Masada. It has been the subject of TV mini dramas and is a feature of any guided tour

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Jesus and Pan

the same name.

Banias or Banyas---Arabic spellings of Paneas---is the ancient city at the foot of Mt. Hermon dedicated to the god, Pan. (Herod Philip, a son of Herod the Great, renamed the city Caesarea Philippi after himself.) The ruins of a temple dedicated to Pan are nearly obliterated now, yet the cave in which the god's great statue stood is still there, and votive niches in the cliff wall also remain.

In the same way that Banias is named for Pan, Mt. Hermon is named for Pan's father, Hermes. The god Hermes was the son of Zeus and Maia. Being best known probably as "the messenger of the gods," perhaps it is not surprising that Hermes' name (Mercury in Roman mythology) came to the English language in the word

hermeneutic, which has to do of course with linguistic studies and interpretation and translation, most often associated with biblical exegesis.

However, Hermes was also the conductor of the souls of the dead to Hades, the place in Greek mythology where dead peoples' souls go to wander around in boredom.

Pan---the Greek word for "all"---was among other things the guardian of thresholds. His job was to frighten you when you reached a threshold in life. That is where we get the word pan-ic!

Putting this together, in the Cave of Pan at Caesarea Philippi stands a statue of Pan, guarding the threshold to the cave. This cave is in Mt. Hermon, named for

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A Holy Land in Conflict

The Rev. Clayton Childers

You cannot visit the Holy Land today and remain untouched by the profound sense of fear and conflict that permeates the entire region. People are pitted against people, family against family, religion against religion, nation against nation. This is the backdrop that millions of people pass through every year on their way to visit the many holy sites found in that region of the world. Each of these “pilgrims” is faced with a choice, to either ignore or engage. On a recent trip to the Holy Land sponsored by the General Board of Church and Society thirteen clergy and laity chose to engage.

The pilgrimage, which lasted

tion and Leadership Formation, “Peter Miano brings a wealth of knowledge of the ancient sites and culture, the formation of early Christianity, and a sensitive awareness of the current context. His approach makes this the type of trip General Board of Church and Society is eager to support.”

The group visited a number of the historic Christian sites. Pausing to read the Sermon on the Mount at a site where Jesus may have taught his disciples years before. Riding a boat on the Sea of Galilee and watching a crew member demonstrate the ancient technique of casting a fishing net. Visiting the Qumran archeological site where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered. Kneeling in prayer in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, drinking water

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from February 22 – March 5, was called *Holy Land Holy People*. It was organized in collaboration with Dr. Peter Miano and The Society for Biblical Studies of Boston. Participants, representing a number of conferences from across the United States, were able to travel to Palestine, Israel and Jordan and visit with people in each place. “ This is not your typical Holy Land trip, that is why we made a commitment to make this happen,” said Neal Christie, GBCS Assistant General Secretary for Educa-

tion and Leadership Formation, “Peter Miano brings a wealth of knowledge of the ancient sites and culture, the formation of early Christianity, and a sensitive awareness of the current context. His approach makes this the type of trip General Board of Church and Society is eager to support.”

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The Society for Biblical Studies is A non-profit (IRC 501c3) organization. Our mission is to reform biblical scholarship by making it accessible, relevant and useful to the broader Church; to redeem the tradition of pilgrimage from commercial tourism; and to renew the mission of the church. We design and deliver journeys of contextual study of the Bible in the lands of the Bible. We are ecumenical, interfaith and inclusive. We invite you to participate in a ministry of reconciliation, to reach out across geographical, religious, ethnic, and cultural boundaries. We are dedicated to socially responsible travel.

Jesus and Pan, cont’d

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Hermes, the conductor of souls to Hades. The Cave of Pan logically came to be known as the ‘gateway to Hades.’ So, if you were to die and you did not get panicked by Pan, your soul would cross the threshold of the cave, and Hermes would take you to Hades from there!

Jesus' time at Caesarea Philippi was in a way a Gethsemane in the north. He had left Herod Antipas' territory. Four reasons for heading north are mentioned in the Gospels. Jesus had just heard of the death of John the Baptist (Matthew 14:9-13); Herod was looking for him (Luke 9:9); the disciples were tired from their missionary journeys (Mark 6:30-31); and the crowds had tried to take him and make him king by force (John 6:15). Any one of these would be reason enough to bug out, but taken together, it is easy to see why Jesus needed time away.

Luke makes it clear that at Banias Jesus was alone in prayer, and the disciples were with him (9:18). It is in the context of problems and pain back in the Galilee, in seclusion and in prayer at this northern pagan city, that Jesus becomes circumspect about things to come. The nature of his ministry/messiahship are in focus again, as they were in the temptations in the Judean wilderness. In the story of Peter's confession and in the temptations of Jesus, Satan makes an appearance, and both are times of struggle and loneliness.

After Jesus told them he would go back to Jerusalem to die, and after he and Peter had "the screaming match at Caesarea Philippi" (Mark 8:31-33), Jesus

stayed six days longer there (Mark 9:2). Six days longer. We have no way of knowing what went on that week. But in light of Jesus' revelation of suffering and death, there was probably not a lot of rest and relaxation.

After six days (Luke says eight), he took his "inner circle" with him up to a high mountain apart (Mark 9:2) by themselves (Matthew 17:1) to pray (Luke 9:28). Obviously the only high mountain in the

Is it a coincidence in Matthew, that in the vicinity of that cave known as the gateway to Hades, Jesus gave the keys to the kingdom to Peter, proclaiming that the gates of hell would not prevail against it?

vicinity is Har Hermon. (Mt. Tabor then is certainly a traditional site for pilgrims.) There he takes on an unearthly appearance, and he is visited by Moses and Elijah. The prophet of Mt. Sinai and the prophet of Mt. Carmel meet Jesus on Mt. Hermon. The servant of Yahweh who stood down Pharaoh, and the servant of God who stood down 450 prophets of Baal, spoke with Jesus concerning his upcoming confrontation with the Judean authorities on Zion, on Moriah, and on Calvary (Luke 9:31).

Moses and Elijah turned to leave so Peter and company proposed booth construction, and immediately one of those

thick mists rolled in. The voice proclaimed essentially what it had proclaimed at Jesus' baptism (Matthew 3:17 and 17:5). It is interesting how the baptism and temptations are joined, and how the scene at Banias and Hermon are joined. At the southernmost point of the Jordan River, affirmation of God's voice led to struggle in the Judean wilderness (Mark 1:11-12). Conversely, at the Banias Spring (the northern headwaters of the Jordan River), struggle led to the affirmation of God's voice on Hermon. We have come full circle in the fullness of time, for the baptism and temptations mark the beginning of Jesus' Galilean ministry (at the end of the river), while the prediction and transfiguration mark the end (at the beginning of the river). After the events in the north, Luke says, he set his face toward Jerusalem (9:51). Mark says he began striding ahead of them, and the disciples were amazed and afraid (10:32).

Five coincidences? Is it a coincidence that it is on Hermon, named for the messenger god, that Jesus got the message from Moses and Elijah that steeled his nerve

and sent him on his way, and three disciples got the message, from the highest source, of who Jesus was and that they should "listen" to him? Is it a coincidence that as Jesus stood at the threshold of his own fate, he struggled and hesitated six days before the Temple of Pan, the god of panic and thresholds? Is it a coincidence in Matthew, that in the vicinity of that cave known as the gateway to Hades, Jesus gave the keys to the kingdom to Peter, proclaiming that the gates of hell would not prevail against it? Is it a coincidence that Jesus would ponder his own death at ‘the gate-

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Holy Land in Conflict, *cont’d.*

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Memphis, TN. where MLK, Jr. saw the promised land, but was crucified by a gun. The night before, he preached about “The Bloody Pass” and the Good Samaritan, what happens if we didn't stop. *Rev. Chris Henson*

I will never forget my spouse Allison, drawing water from Jacob's Well as the Samaritan woman did so long ago. After tasting that cool refreshing water we heard the story from John's Gospel, the air saturated with the Holy Spirit, I could see Christ there with the Samaritan woman, there with us all huddled around this well. *The Rev. Robert English*

Our visits to the refugee camp and the Bedouin village brought sharp focus to the plight of average Palestinian families living daily life both inside the walls (West Bank) and (unrecognized – without public services) in Israeli territory. I cannot imagine living daily life in either situation, as if perpetually confined to unrelenting control and uncertainty. *Allan Nixon*

My heart weeps for the people of Palestine. After seeing their struggles firsthand, I intend to do all in my power to spread the word to those in the United States who need to hear it. *Hannah Nixon*

...they fear the world will forget that they have lost their lands and homes. They continue to maintain that they have a right to return and claim the land that is rightfully theirs...

I did not realize the Western Wall of the Temple where people from all over the world come to pray is now segregated. As women, we were limited to a small area on

the south side. They use moveable barriers to separate the men and women, and I suspect that that the women’s area gets smaller each week.

I put the following prayer in one of the few cracks on the women's end of the wall, where it promptly fell out. I tried again. Women's prayers don't seem welcome there.

I offered the following prayer: *Lord God, Almighty One, In this time, and in this place, Make your justice roll down like waters, And your righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.*

Teri Nilson Baird

The Rev. Clayton Childers is director of Annual Conference Relations with the General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church. He led a pilgrimage for young clergy to Palestine in February 2011.

Masada, *cont’d*

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Temple. He recounts a number of anecdotes to emphasize the group’s treachery, including their attack on the Judean settlement of Ein Gedi. On that occasion, the Sicarii descended from their mountain fortress and attacked the settlement on the night of Passover. Over 700 men, women and children—all Judeans—were slaughtered by the Sicarii, i.e., by those who are regarded in the popular Masada fiction as heroes. Slaughter is hardly a noble, heroic act—neither is treachery against one’s own people. In light of Josephus’ narrative, it is difficult to see how any modern interpretation of the Masada story can render the defenders as heroes. If these are heroic models, we need fewer of them.

I have already pointed out that Jesus included among his apostles at least one Zealot who was called Simon (Luke 6:15, Acts 1:13). More significant is the fact that he also included a member of the Sicarii—Judas, who betrayed him. As I often point out on our programs, all scripture comes to us in a heavily modified form. For one thing, all scripture comes to most of us in an English translation. This translation obscures the meaning of Judas’ name. *Iscariot* does not readily strike one as denoting an identity with the Sicarii. Often in scholarship, the name *Iscariot* is translated as *the one who is from Kerayot*, i.e. the village. However, there is no known village of that name. Further, if one were to transliterate the Latin word *Sicarii*, i.e., the ones of the knife wielders, into Aramaic, which was the native language of Jesus and all Israelites in Judea, it would be rendered *Iscariot*. Thus, in addition to Simon the Zealot, Judas was at least the second of Jesus’ 12 apostles who was somehow associated with an anti-establishment Judean sub-group.

Not only does Judas Iscariot’s name telegraph his identity, so does his conduct. He betrays to death a fellow Israelite on the night of Passover, just as the Sicarii slaughtered over 700 fellow Israelites at Ein Gedi, also on the night of Passover. Just as the Sicarii defenders of Masada end up taking their own lives, so

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Masada, *cont’d.*

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of Israel. Tour guides—even Palestinian ones—rarely forget to relate the ancient story of heroic sacrifice to modern Israel. Indeed, in the popular imagination, the defenders of Masada are a symbolic stand-in for modern Israelis. Both are represented as patriotic, heroic defenders holding out against overwhelming odds, willing to sacrifice all for their righteous cause rather than submitting to ignominious defeat. As an illustration of the collective consciousness of the Israeli people, no site tells us more about modern Israel. The sincerity of the storytellers is not the subject of this essay. For now, I am

A Holy Land in Conflict, *cont’d.*

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Bethlehem for several nights, shopping in stores owned by Palestinians and purchasing locally made fair trade products and crafts. Significant program time was spent hearing a wide variety of perspectives from indigenous Christians and other groups about the concerns of Palestinians and Israelis on the current crisis of Palestinian self-determination.

On a day trip the group traveled to southern Israel to meet with families from a “unrecognized” Bedouin village. There are an estimated forty-five of these “unrecognized” villages of Bedouin people living within Israel’s borders that do not appear on Israeli maps. The Pilgrimage group was hosted by Bedouin families from this community and then taken on a tour. They were able to see a number of ways the village was taking initiative to develop itself and establish a higher standard of living for its people. Recently, the community dug a well and ran water to all of the homes in the community. They have also been able to tap into an internet broadcast signal and have installed a wireless connection that measures “3G.”

interested in how the actual, original telling of the Masada story illuminates the significance of the site for Christians.

Modern interest in Masada was precipitated by the excavation of the site from 1963 to 1965 by Israeli general turned archaeologist Yigal Yadin. The 1967 War enabled Israel to construct a new road that made access to the site from Jerusalem much more convenient. Since then it has been a standard visit on almost every guided tour in Israel as well as a mandatory destination for school excursions. Many of Yadin’s findings are the produce of his fertile imagination. They have been reexamined and overturned. For example, his claim to

Some months ago the community pooled their resources and built a new concrete block home for a widow from the community but, but because the village is not recognized, the new home was bulldozed by the Israeli government.

Moving from place to place was somewhat difficult because of the dividing wall which has been built around Israel. Even the name of this dividing wall is in dispute, depending on who you ask. Many people in Israel will call it a ‘security fence’ while Palestinians refer to it as the ‘Apartheid Wall.’

The group travelled to the Al Arub Refugee Camp where they heard stories from Palestinian refugee families who had been displaced from their homes decades ago. Some have lived

have discovered the bodies of 28 defenders is now regarded as imaginary. They were Roman bodies. Nonetheless, the story has attained a life of its own, obscuring archaeological fact and Christian significance as well.

For providing information about the dramatic events at Masada, Josephus’ narrative about it is more important than the archaeology of the site. Josephus is a 1st Century writer. He is an historian of sorts, but one should take care to note that ‘history’ as it was understood in the 1st Century is very different than ‘history’ as it is understood today. Then and now, history is always more about the

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their entire lives at the refugee camp. Even though the life is hard, and opportunities are limited they do not want to move from the camp because they fear, if they are dispersed, the world will forget that they have lost their lands and homes. They continue to maintain that they have a right to

time was spent hearing a wide variety of perspectives

return and claim the land that is rightfully theirs. The presence of camp itself serves as a prophetic witness to the injustice that occurred to their families decades before.

In welcoming their American visitors the Palestinian women demonstrated

extravagant hospitality and warmth. However, they also expressed passionate feelings of betrayal and anger toward President Obama’s administration who, just days before, had vetoed

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Holy Land in Conflict, *cont’d.*

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a United Nations Security Council resolution which would have condemned Israel’s ongoing construction and expansion of Jewish settlements on Palestinian land in the West Bank. The United States was the only Security Council member to vote against the resolution.

Participants later talked with two Jewish Israelis. Both believe Israel has a right to exist as a “Jewish State” but hold very different views on its size and scope. The first of these, Lydia Eisenberg, has lived in a kibbutz (a communal town) which was established in the 1920’s. It has been her home for several decades and now a number of her children and grandchildren are making it their home as well. She showed the group a cemetery and reminisced about a number of her friends who are buried there. She feels a profound attachment to the land as the place where she has found meaning and purpose for living. While affirming Israel’s right to exist she does not believe in the right of Israel to establish settlements in the Palestinian occupied territories and sees the settlements a significant obstacle to peace in the region.

The second perspective came from Hagi Ben Artzi, a Jewish settler who lived the Beit El Settlement. It is a Jewish town built on Palestinian land in the West Bank. Ben Artzi unapologetically maintains that the State of Israel has a right to possess all the ‘promised land’ mentioned in Hebrew Scripture “from the Nile River in Egypt to the Euphrates River in Iraq.” This would require that Israel takeover large parts of Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq. This is a scary prospect for anyone who hopes for peace with justice in the Middle East. In all fairness, this is not at all the majority view in Israel. Even many of the Jewish settlers would reject this radical perspective.

The group also heard from Avihai Shallot, a young Israeli who represented the group *Breaking the Silence*. *Breaking the Silence* is composed of former Israeli soldiers who have committed

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Masada, *cont’d*

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interpretation of facts than it is about facts themselves, but that truism was taken for granted in the ancient world. The values of the modern world persuade us that history should always be about facts. We project this modern preference back onto ancient writers. Consequently, we frequently misread ancient texts, biblical texts included, through our modern lenses. Since no reader in the ancient world really expected the unvarnished truth from a text, ancient authors were less constrained by a presumed need to depict facts. They were always ready to embroider their narratives with editorial details about the *significance* of events and opportunities for self-aggrandizement were rarely passed by. This is true of the Gospel writers no less than it is of Josephus. Their concern was to answer the question “*What does the event mean to us?*” When we read ancient texts, we would do well to suspend our modern historical preferences and values and try to adopt those of an ancient reader. In approaching any ancient text, one should ask how an ancient reader would approach it.

It is significant that Josephus is a Judean author. He is one among many 1st Century Judean authors, but he is unique in that he was resident in Judea. No other Judean author was. The authors of the Gospels are also Israelites, but they did not reside in Judea and Galilee and do not claim to be eye witnesses, as Josephus sometimes does. Like Josephus, the Gospel writers probably also were socially situated in the upper echelons of society, although perhaps not quite as high and not enjoying

such lofty privilege as Josephus. Paul was situated socially somewhere relatively high on the social ladder, too. He refers to himself as an “Israelite” (2 Cor. 11:22) and as a member of the “people of Israel” (Phil. 3:5), but he does not claim extensive experience in or familiarity with Judea. Because Josephus was resident in Judea, because he wrote at about the same time as the authors of the Gospels and only slightly later than Paul, his writings are an invaluable source in our efforts to

contextualize Gospel history.

In his autobiography, Josephus tells us that he was raised in Jerusalem and that he was of the class of the Sadducees, i.e., the upper crust of Judean Jerusalemite society. He tells us that he was affiliated with the Pharisees and that for a time, he was among the Essenes. Scholars usually identify this latter group with the community at Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls, although these identifications are circumstantial at best. One could call them ‘wishful.’ Josephus does not neglect to remind his readers that he was the commander of the Judean forces in the

Galilee during the 1st Judean revolt against Rome. Like Paul, he never fails to appeal to his pedigree to improve his credibility with his readers. This was a standard rhetorical strategy.

Josephus is our only literary source for the celebrated events that transpired on Masada. Far from telling a story of ‘heroic self sacrifice’ or ‘collective suicide,’ which are popular euphemisms, Josephus tells a story of ignoble treachery and wholesale murder. It should not be overlooked that when Josephus wrote his narrative, his patrons were the Roman

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emperors Vespasian and Titus and their wives. It is equally significant that Josephus was writing at about the same time as the authors of Matthew and Luke and perhaps Mark as well, who were his contemporaries.

Josephus was a client of Roman emperors. So ingratiated was he to his elite Roman patrons, that he adopted the names *Titus* and *Flavius*, a standard Roman custom. Like the authors of the Gospels, Josephus was a thoroughly Hellenized/Romanized Israelite. Thus, no one should expect that he would write a narrative that would indict Rome’s actions in its suppression of the Judean revolt. Josephus does tell some rather unflattering stories about Roman figures, including Pontius Pilatus, but his narrative of the massacre at Masada removes the Romans from complicity in the deaths of the defenders.

If critique of Rome was ever part of Jesus’ preaching, there is precious little, if any, evidence of it in the Gospels. Even though Pilate condemns him and Roman soldiers nail him to the cross, the Gospel narratives of Jesus’ passion take pains to depict these Roman agents as disinterested pawns in the drama,

subject to orders or beholden to special interests. The prime movers in Jesus crucifixion, are not Roman, but the Judean Jerusalemite authorities and an evidently blood thirsty mob. Josephus also takes

pains to exonerate the people of Israel in the eyes of his intended audience, the Roman public. This is where the defenders of Masada come in to the picture. They are Josephus’ rather convenient scapegoats. In modern story telling, the defenders of Masada are almost always regarded as *Zealots*, a notorious Judean sub-group. The Zealots are known to us not only from Josephus, but also from the Gospel of Luke (6:15) and the Book of Acts (1:13). The author of Luke/Acts includes *Simon the Zealot* among Jesus apostles. However, Josephus clearly identifies the defenders, not as Zealots, but as *Sicarii*. The name derives from their use of daggers (Latin = *sicar*) to accomplish political objectives. They were 1st Century Judean terrorists. Josephus is careful to differentiate the

Zealots from the Sicarii. He regards the latter as a treacherous group of social deviants. He blames them for precipitating the Judean revolt against Rome and ultimately for the destruction of the

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Holy Land in Conflict, *cont’d.*

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to “telling the truth” about their experiences serving in the Israeli military as they attempted to maintain Israeli control of the Palestinian West Bank and Gaza Strip. Shallot spoke sincerely about his personal experience serving in the Israeli Army in the Palestinian Territories. Video clips of his message are available on the blog of Matthew Kelley, a participant, at matthewkelley.blogspot.com

None of the American pilgrims had ever been to the Holy Land before and all of them will be using stories from their experiences to enhance their ministries for years to come. The trip also offered an opportunity to hear first hand from people affected by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. These conversations will enable participants to become better pray-ers, more informed interpreters and more engaged advocates for peace and justice for all involved.

It is amazing to walk the same roads Jesus walked and imagine what his life was like. I will always remember the morning we gathered along the path leading from Capernaum to Nazareth. It ran beside a small creek, surrounded by tall, rocky mountains. At the base of the mountains there was green pasture land which was covered with patches of bright yellow flowers. Peter Miano mentioned that it is entirely possible Jesus walked along this same path and over these same mountains 2,000 years ago. This is the place we chose for our Sunday morning worship service together. I’ll never forget that inspiring service as we broke the bread, shared the cup and remembered together the life giving ministry of Christ.

Here are a few short remembrances from this year’s participants:

I was overcome standing on Mt. Nebo considering Moses seeing the Promised Land, but never entering it. My mind travelled from Mt. Nebo to the one in

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