

## Outline of events at Masada

- ❖ Masada was the last Jewish Holdout, (it took 7 months to finally conquer.)
- ❖ They were conquered by the Romans, led by General Silva.
- ❖ Began by building a wall around Masada in order to prevent escape. (it was 6 feet thick and over 2 miles long.)
- ❖ There were 15,000 people surrounding Masada waiting to take it down.
- ❖ The Romans then built a ramp in order to proceed with the next step of the siege: to attack with stone, and arrows, battering rams, and spears, swords and fire.
- ❖ Anxious to take the mountain, the Romans worked very enthusiastically to build the ramp (and tower to which the battering ram would be placed.)
- ❖ During the building, the Roman Artillery was at work shooting up darts, stones, pots of fire etc.
- ❖ During this time, many bloody battles took place on the ramp in an attempt to prevent the Roman advancement. – one such brave Jew went so far and stood up from behind the wall on top of Masada, and cast down a large stone breaking the head of the ram off. He then proceeded to carry it back as a prize while being shot by five arrows.
- ❖ The Romans built a tower from atop of the ramp (90 feet tall) and plated with iron so it couldn't be burnt. From it, the Romans cast flaming pots while from below, the new ram kept on pounding.
- ❖ The wall finally cracked.
- ❖ The Jews anticipated that their wall would eventually give way under the pounding of the ram, so they built a new wall behind the stone one made of wood planks, and filled with earth in the middle to cushion the blows.
- ❖ Silva realized the pounding was only strengthening the wall, so he turned via a different route... to burn it.
- ❖ As the fire burned the wall, there was a sudden shift in the wind and it started burning back at the Romans, causing them to retreat. [The Jews thought a miracle happened and that they were now saved.] But just as quickly, the wind shifted again and the Romans watched gleefully as the fire consumed the wall.
- ❖ By morning, the wall would be down and the Romans can lay planks across the wall and finally make their way into the fortress and put these long tantalizing 7 months to an end... they

couldn't wait.

- ❖ Dawn came. And smoke arose from behind the walls. — the Romans, with weapons in hand, made their way up the ramp, through the breach in the first wall, and over the char of the second, and quickly reassembled once inside.
- ❖ The fire seemed to have spread.
- ❖ The Romans started to advance, yet no one attacked. — no Jewish warrior could be seen anywhere.
- ❖ All the Romans heard were the crackle of flames as every building seemed to have been burning and smoke clouded the air.
- ❖ The Romans hesitated, then gave a loud shout at once, like a battle cry, to try and draw the defenders out. — the echoes died away slowly.
- ❖ Finally, they heard the voice of an old woman coming through the smoke.
- ❖ A group of soldiers went forward and found her standing in the entrance of an underwater cistern. Crouching behind her was an older woman with five children there too. Their eyes were wide, yet they said nothing.
- ❖ All seven were brought back to the head officer as he interrogated the woman. The story she told made him squirm in anger. — “She must be lying!” he shouted. — he quickly turned and barked out an order to his men as they quickly began to advance again.
- ❖ They spread out, swords at hand as they slowly approached the largest building they could see. — there they came upon the first of the bodies.
- ❖ Much later, bewildered and shaken by what they saw, they clustered around the women to hear their story. — the woman told...

The night before, after the wooden wall was set ablaze, the leader of the zealots, Eleazar ben Yair, came to a decision. He knew the Romans were only waiting until morning before they attacked again. He saw the fires flickering all along their security wall down below to prevent the Jews from escaping.

He called to the other zealots and said to them, "Long ago, we vowed never to serve the Romans, nor any master but G-d, because He alone is the true and just lord of mankind. We were the very first to rebel against the Romans, and now we are the last to continue the fight. I believe G-d has granted us a favor. He had given us a chance to die in freedom. It is clear now that we shall be captured by the end of the coming

day. But before then, we can still choose to die as free men, together with our loved ones. This is one thing our enemies cannot prevent, no matter how much they desire to capture us alive... let us show them that we would rather die in freedom than live in slavery,  
Come! Our hands are still free to hold our swords. Let us use them now to give ourselves honorable deaths. Let us leave this world nobly, not as slaves of the Romans, but as free men... with our wives and our children beside us..."

- ❖ They acted swiftly so not to change their minds. Each man kissed their crying families for the last time before putting their sword through them.
- ❖ Before they could continue with themselves, Eleazar had them gather all their possessions and burn them as well so the Romans would have nothing to loot.
- ❖ However, he had them leave the food, and not burn it, to show that they died at will, and not because there were forced to.
- ❖ Ten men were then chosen to kill the remaining men, as they lay down next to their families, awaiting their deaths.
- ❖ Out of the ten who remained, lots were drawn for one person to kill the remaining nine before killing himself. Before he died, he set fire to the palace, and then proceeded to lie down beside his family.
- ❖ 960 zealots huddled together in death as the smoke and flames spread. Only two women and five children remained.

- What are some of the things we can learn from this story?

1. fighting for what you believe in, when you feel it important, (to an extent of course. I wouldn't recommend dying for not being able to watch a TV show or something.) As we learn in Pirkei Avot, "*Im ein ani li, mi li, ... im lo achshov, aimotai*"
2. why the story happened in the first place in order to not replicate it again. The beit hamikdash was destroyed and the people killed because the people were not united and helping each other, more importantly, *sinat chinom*. — when these types of things are happening, these types of results will occur, (we see this also by the story of Rabbi Akiva's students etc.)