



## THE FORTRESS MASADA

The plateau Masada is located in the remote Judean desert. Because this desert was bordered by the more fertile mountain ridge of the land of Israel, Masada was close to more hospitable areas. The attraction of the location for Herod was that he could quickly leave Jerusalem for the safety of his impregnable fortress (1) if the Jewish people revolted, or (2) if his Roman master, Antony, were to give his kingdom to Herod's enemy to the south, Cleopatra. Masada was also located near the southern areas of Nabatea and Idumea, the countries of Herod's origin. Therefore, Masada's primary function was to provide Herod with an emergency escape. In spite of the luxury and the cost of the fortress-palace's construction, there is no evidence that Herod spent much time here.

Notice the main entrance from the east. This trail, winding across the face of the mountain, was called the Snake Path. It is a testimony to Herod's vigor that he created a fortress in such a remote location so difficult for him (and therefore others as well) to reach. At the top was a heavily guarded gate that provided a final barrier to anyone wishing to enter Masada.

The barren wilderness around underscores the ingenuity of Herod's workmen, who were able to provide adequate water to the fortress from the infrequent floods that swept through the wadis on either side of the mountain. The wadi on the left can be seen. A wadi to the right emerges from behind Masada.

The three-tiered Northern Palace can be seen on the right side of the mountain. Great retaining walls held up the lowest level, a testimony to the genius of Herod's engineers and their vision for creating structures that defy nature. The chalk-colored soil in the foreground was at one time beneath the Dead Sea, which has since receded to about a mile away.