

THE DEAD SEA

THE LOCATION

The Dead Sea is a saltwater lake bordered by Jordan to the east and Israel to the west. It is approximately 50 miles long and 10 miles wide.

The Dead Sea is located in the Great Rift Valley, which stretches over 4,000 miles from Syria to Mozambique. This valley is a result of tectonic activity between the Asian and the African plates. The Dead Sea is actually a part of the Jordan Rift Valley, which stretches from Syria to the Red Sea, which itself is part of the Great Rift Valley. The Dead Sea is the lowest point in the valley, and the lowest point on earth, at 1,407 feet below sea level. Its waters are so rich in mineral content that they cannot support most living organisms.

THE BIBLICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Dead Sea is mentioned in four places in the Bible, under two names. In the Old Testament, the Dead Sea is referred to as the "Salt Sea" (Genesis 14:3) and the "Sea of the Plain" (Deuteronomy 3:17, KJV and "Sea of Arabah" in other translations). It is also mentioned in the prophecy of Ezekiel concerning the future healing of the waters of the Dead Sea (Ezekiel 47:8-11). Although not mentioned directly, there is a reminder of the nearby Dead Sea in the story of Lot and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:23-28).

MATTERS OF HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Other than events of Scripture, the only major matters of historical significance around the Dead Sea were the siege of Masada and the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in Qumran. We write in more detail about these in their respective places in this study.

AMAZING THINGS TO SEE

Every traveler would want to plan on taking a dip in the Dead Sea! Be sure to lather up with the mineral-rich mud before heading out to the water. The mud can help to exfoliate and soften the skin, and the water can help to soothe aching joints and muscles. The high salt content of the water means that it's easy to float, so sit back and relax while taking in the breathtaking views of the surrounding mountains, characterized by dramatic cliffs and desert landscapes, making for a truly unique and unforgettable experience. Note that the high salinity content will remind you of any cuts or sores on you at the time, and that the water itself is harmful if ingested.

Ein Bokek is a resort town located on the Israeli side of the Dead Sea, south of Masada, and tour groups as well as Israeli families often vacation there. Most of the hotels have an indoor heated pool with Dead Sea water, perfect for a Dead Sea experience in the comfort of your hotel.

MATTERS OF MODERN SIGNIFICANCE

The Dead Sea has long been a source of minerals and is still an important site for mineral extraction today. Potash, magnesium, and bromine are among the minerals extracted from the Dead Sea and its surroundings.

Over the past few decades, the water level of the Dead Sea has been dropping at an alarming rate of almost three-feet per year, threatening the unique ecosystem and creating environmental and economic challenges for the region. The drop is due to agricultural usage upstream from the Jordan River. Several projects have been proposed to address this problem, including a canal from the Red Sea, which would supply water to the Dead Sea. However, there are concerns about the potential environmental impact of such a canal. In addition, other projects have been proposed to reduce water consumption and increase water recycling in the region.

MASADA

THE LOCATION

Masada is located about 58 miles southeast of Jerusalem and about 12 miles north of Ein Bokek on the shores of the Dead Sea. It is situated on a rock plateau overlooking the Dead Sea and the surrounding desert landscape. The location was chosen because the natural terrain provided excellent defensive capabilities against potential attackers.

THE BIBLICAL SIGNIFICANCE

There is no mention of Masada in the Scripture. The fortress is located on a plateau that is difficult to reach, making it easier to defend from potential attacks. It was for this reason that King Herod the Great fortified Masada between 37 and 31 BC as a refuge for himself in the event of a revolt. Therefore the fortress existed throughout the time of the writing of most of the New Testament, but was not significant to the Biblical account.

MATTERS OF HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Herod's fortress was located on the summit of a rocky plateau known as Masada, overlooking the Dead Sea and the surrounding desert landscape. The fortress was built in the late first century BC and was built as a refuge for Herod the Great in the event of a revolt. It is not known if Herod was ever present at the fortress. Today, archaeological remains of a beautiful palace area can still be found at the site.

The Jewish Revolt against the Romans in 66 AD ended with the destruction of the Second Temple and the sacking of Jerusalem in 70 AD. However, a group of Jewish patriots continued to resist the Romans from Masada until 73 AD. Led by Eleazar ben Ya'ir, these patriots took refuge in the fortress and held out against a Roman siege for several years.

The Roman forces, led by Flavius Silva, eventually breached Masada's defenses and prepared to storm the fortress. However, when they reached the top of the plateau, they found that the Jewish patriots had committed mass suicide rather than surrender to the Romans. According to the historian Josephus, who chronicled the Jewish Revolt and the siege of Masada, 960 Jewish men, women, and children died in the mass suicide.

The number of Roman soldiers involved in the siege of Masada is not definitively known. However, according to the historian Josephus, who chronicled the Jewish Revolt and the siege of Masada, the Roman forces consisted of several legions, including the Tenth Legion, which was responsible for laying siege to the fortress. The total number of soldiers involved in the siege is estimated to have been between 8,000 and 15,000.

Today, Masada is a revered symbol of Jewish resistance and resilience in the face of oppression. Visitors can tour the fortress and learn about the story of the Jewish patriots and the Roman siege. The site is also an important part of Jewish history and is often visited by Jewish groups and individuals as a way of connecting with their heritage.

AMAZING THINGS TO SEE

The views from the top of Masada are breathtaking, with sweeping vistas of the Dead Sea and the surrounding desert landscape. Visitors can take a cable car to the top of the plateau or hike up the winding path to the fortress. The site also features a museum with exhibits on the history of Masada and the Jewish Revolt. In addition to the Herodian palace, tourists can peer over the remaining gate complex to see the siege ramp built by the Romans and their slaves, as well as the synagogue built by the Jewish patriots.

MATTERS OF MODERN SIGNIFICANCE

Masada is an important site for archaeological research and preservation. In recent years, the site has undergone extensive preservation efforts to protect the archaeological remains from erosion and other environmental factors. The site is also a popular tourist destination, with thousands of visitors each year coming to learn about the history of Masada and the Jewish Revolt.