



Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

Masada. The word itself causes every true son of Israel to rise in respect.

The year was 66 A.D. The fortress, on the western bank of the Dead Sea, was the focal point of the Jewish uprising against the Roman oppressor. The trauma of the mad emperor Caligula's order to have his statue set up in the Temple was more than the Jewish zealots could stand. After evicting the Roman garrisons, they went on to seize Jerusalem and take possession of all Judea and Galilee. It took the Roman general Vespasian and his son Titus three years to suppress the revolt, first in Galilee and then in Judea. The main revolt ended with the siege of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and the destruction of the Temple and most of the city.

Then, three years later, Flavius Silva, governor of Judea and Roman general, led the siege against the last Jewish stronghold — Masada.

The fortress, built by Jonathan the high priest, brother and successor of Judas Maccabaeus, and later strengthened by King Herod, was considered impregnable with its 37 towers 75 feet high and enclosing limestone wall 18 feet high and 12 feet wide.

Silva's army, however, was too much. Cutting off the outside world with their legions, they left the 960 Jewish men, women and children virtual prisoners in the fortress.

While the helpless Jews watched from the walls and

towers, the Romans built a huge siege dam, rising up from the plains below to the gates of the bastion. Then they began pulling their siege tower, which contained an iron battering ram, up the dam. When it reached the fortress wall, Masada was doomed.

Rather than surrender, however, the Jews — to the man — committed suicide, leaving behind a storehouse of food to let the Romans know they chose death rather than dishonor.

This last week, as I visited Masada which is about 35 miles southeast of Jerusalem, I heard my guide say, "Masada shall not fall again." Somehow, for the modern Israeli, this ancient fortress symbolizes both his ability to resist a world bent on his destruction and his determination not to be overwhelmed.

Like the cry, "Remember the Alamo," roused the Army of Texas to defeat the Mexicans at San Jacinto, so the cry of the modern sons of Abraham, "Am Yisroel Chai!" (the people of Israel shall live) still stirs the children of Israel to stand firm.

America could use a fresh dose of such heroism. With no cause to fight for, we fight each other. Housewives and businessmen alike do battle at the gas stations while the oil moguls rake in their profits. Dissidents, fed from our welfare rolls, kidnap our finest citizens and make impossible demands for ransom. Let's pray it will not take another Masada — or Alamo — to waken our nation and bring us together in unity.