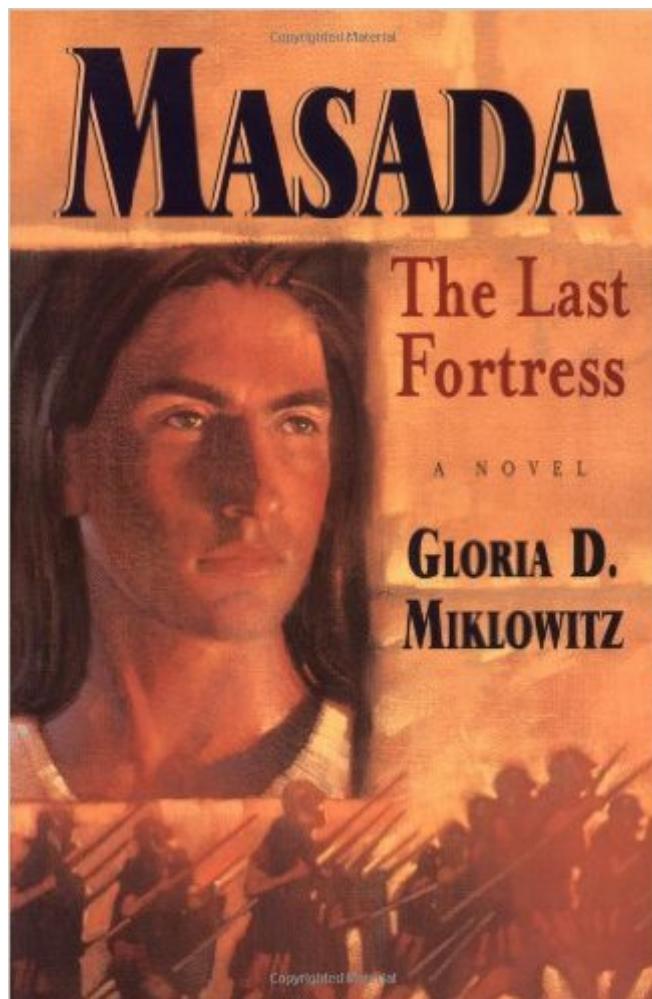


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Masada: The Last Fortress



Synopsis

In the year 72 C.E., after a four-year war between Rome and Judea, only one fortress remains to be taken: Masada, high above the Dead Sea in what is now Israel. Two years later, the commander of the famous Roman Tenth Legion, Flavius Silva, marches toward Masada to capture or kill the 960 Jewish zealots who hold it. In this eloquent and powerful novel, we meet 17-year-old Simon ben Eleazar, son of the Jewish leader of Masada. Apprenticed to Masada's only physician, Simon learns to help victims of the enemy's onslaught as he struggles with his love for Deborah, the intended of his best friend, and with the painful decision he must ultimately make.

Book Information

Lexile Measure: 850L (What's this?)

Paperback: 198 pages

Publisher: Eerdmans Books for Young Readers (August 13, 1999)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0802851681

ISBN-13: 978-0802851680

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.6 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars (See all reviews) (22 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #701,119 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #38 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Religious > Jewish #87 in Books > Teens > Historical Fiction > Asia #107 in Books > Teens > Historical Fiction > Ancient

Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

Customer Reviews

I was looking forward to using *Masada* in our homeschool but it absolutely fell short of my expectations, although my son enjoyed what I read aloud to him. He would give it 5 stars. Instead of posting his rating, I'm posting mine so the reviews are a bit balanced since everyone else seems to really love it. ;-) I wanted to add a little perspective of someone who didn't. *Masada* is about 17 year old Simon and his friends as they live in the fortress of Masada with a group of Jewish refugees. It's written from Simon's perspective (as well as a Roman general's), as if he wrote his thoughts and observations down in a journal. The story is full of description, so you get a good feel for life in the fortress - little details aren't left out like the flapping of wash in the breeze and women balancing

jugs on their heads while getting water from the cistern. I found the writing to feel slightly stilted though. I also felt like the characters were a little bit flat and I never really "cared" for any of them, despite the interesting and emotion laden circumstances. Besides the conflict between the Jews and the Romans there is also some conflict and tension between Simon and his friend John because they both love the same girl, Deborah. I felt it was over the top for my son's age (he was in 5th grade at the time). An example from the book: "...heedless of propriety, conscience, reason, and loyalty, I stepped forward now and took her in my arms. Like a startled dove, she struggled to escape. I brought her close, captured in my embrace, and waited as her first distress became acceptance, surprise, and then wonder. When I kissed her lips, her body, suddenly attentive, sensed mine, and responded to it. Soon my mind no longer listened or functioned.

This book helped me put names, faces, and personalities to the people of Masada. Nobody knows exactly what happened or how, of course. We can imagine that the people would have wanted us to know their story. The author takes the facts that we do know and weaves them into a story of the way it might have happened. That is helpful as we weigh those ideas with those of other sources before formulating our own ideas. Even for those of us who are Christians living in America, just hearing 'Masada' evokes strong thoughts and feelings. It stirs up questions about who these people were and what their lives must have been like during the Roman army's siege against them. How terrified they must have been! We wonder what we would have done. When I visited Masada last year, we sat outside looking at the view of the Dead Sea. I wondered how many times the people of Masada sat staring at that same view, hearing the noises of the soldiers camped out below them, maybe smelling the pots of food cooking, pondering the fate that awaited them, hoping that other options would save them, knowing that time was growing short and they would not be able to live out the dreams they had for the future. Our tour guide handed us two items that had been found at Masada, a coin and a woman's ring. These were obviously copies, of course, but everyone got very quiet as we transitioned from viewing the 'place' and the 'event' into thoughts about the individual people who held a coin like that in their hands, who wore that delicate little ring. I tried to imagine the person who wore that ring. Was it her wedding ring? Was she young, or old? Did she have children? Did she agree with the decisions that were made? Did she have a voice? What were their lives like during those days?

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