ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS FROM PROFESSOR WILBURN'S CLASS

From Dr. Yinon Shivtiel & Adam Schonbrun

1) After rappelling into the caves and detaching the ropes when the Romans would come, how would they get out if they detached the ropes?

In each steep cave, the inhabitants had hewn into the rock loops for their ropes. They were thus, able to use new ropes for the next day.

2) Was there enough room in the cave shelters for all people in the settlements or was it reserved for maybe the more wealthy or royal families?

For many of the inhabitants of the settlements, there was an option of sheltering in concealed underground caves. However, in the cliff caves, space was limited to the defenders/fighters and their families. Dr. Yinon stresses that there were over 1,500 shelters found in the Galilee.

3) Josephus was known to have some of the earliest records of Jesus. What are some of his most significant records that help define history about Jesus?

Josephus Flavius writes about Jesus/Yeshua in his book Antiquities. He is described as a man who performs miracles and that many people are following him. And they see in him the moshiyach/messiah.

4) Why did the Jews not try to rebel against the Romans, but rather kill themselves or surrender? Also, were the caves gender specific since some of the caves might be harder for women and children to climb into?

The Jews did fight back, using guerilla tactics, because they had no organized army since the Hasmonean Period. They chose to kill themselves in order not to be slaves in the paganic world. The women and children were pulled up or lowered down in baskets.

5) I learned that Josephus was held captive for a while, but he was rewarded after Vespasian became Emperor. I did not understand why Vespasian let him out of captivity. Please explain.
Josephus was saved because he predicted Vespasian's ascent to Caesar. His last name of Flavius was in honor of his patrons: Vespasian and Titus.

6) Was the preparation of these caves organized by a central authority or rather a trend among villages?

We are quite certain that the preparations and fortifications were organized by Josephus and other local commanders of Galilee. The cave defense system pre-dates in some cases the era of Josephus.

7) During your 20 years of research, what cave and or settlement did you enjoy the most and why?

Dr. Yinon says that Mt. Arbel was the most attractive site because he and an archeological team found two synagogues there that prove the Jews used these shelters.

8) How did the refugees go about molding or creating stairs for the ritual bath?

They chiseled grips for hand and foot out of the rocks.

9) How many examples of ritual baths in caves did you find?

Dr. Yinon found 5.

10) How does it feel to have contributed so much to history from your findings?

It has uplifted Dr. Yinon's spirit and strengthened his Jewishness.

11) How does it feel to have seen and touched where your ancestors may have lived?

It reaffirms my Zionist commitment to my People & our Land.

12) Has anyone been hurt during your archaeological excavations over the many years of your research?

Yes. The most serious injuries were tick bites carrying dangerous viruses.

13) What are your research plans now?

My research now is focusing on the concealed underground shelter system.

14) Is there an estimate of how many caves there are that have been undiscovered (possibly by accounts written in Josephus Flavius’ books)?
Josephus mentions caves over 22 times, he does not list a specific number. Dr. Yinon is still searching the Israeli landscape for more…

15) Were the ritual baths found in the caves possibly ancient Roman baths (since there were artifacts found belonging to earlier eras than the Second Temple period in several locations), or was there proof with artifacts that they were specifically for Jewish rituals (since the caves seemed to have mainly purposed as shelters for the Jewish peoples during uprisings of the Second Temple period)?

According to the Mishna(Talmud), we know exactly what the measurements for a mikva/ritual bath are… And what Dr. Yinon found all fit those specifications.

16) Is there an estimation of the length of time it took these ancient peoples to chisel out halls, rooms and openings in these caves (with the tools they had or the possible amount of people who worked on them)?

Because most of these caves are from limestone, which crumbles easily, and therefore, we must take into account that the number of people involved and the gradual work was done within a year or two…

17) During the video conference, Dr. Shivtiel mentioned that there are emergency shelters for every single residence of Israel today, and I was wondering what those were like. Are they underground? Are there connected underground tunnels to one central area? Do all buildings (businesses and family residences) have them? How often have they been used? Are they prepared with food, water and waste systems?

The average Israeli residence has a SAFE room. Usually they are rooms with reinforced concrete and iron doors to be sealed. These rooms often have emergency provisions, including water and food. These rooms were used when Saddam Hussein sent SCUD missiles in the first Gulf War and when the Hizbullah and Hamas shoot katusha rockets. All schools and hospitals and public buildings are required by law to have shelters.

18) In Dr. Shivtiel's article, one of the cliff settlements was claimed to be closed to research because it has been classified as a nature reserve. Are there any efforts being made to reverse the policy, and would you expect to find any more key discoveries in the caves?

In the next week, after the nesting of the eagles in the Amud stream area of Galilee (near Safed), we will receive official permission to rappel into the mouth of these caves.

19) Please elaborate on what the pottery shards reveal about the lives of the refugees in the caves.

Dr. Yinon has found cooking-pots and jugs for olive oil, wine and date honey.