
Chapter 26

THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS
AND THE NEW
JERUSALEM OF SIMON

WHILE ALL OF THE ACTIVITY of Simon building a New Jerusalem and enlarging the Temple was wonderful if God had decreed it and the majority of Jewish people at first thought it was God-ordained (including the author of the Book of Enoch, as we will see), we now possess historical evidence that a minority of people (and they were a vigorous and headstrong body of Jews) soon began to object most strenuously to these actions of Simon the Hasmonean. Whereas almost all Jews thought Simon began his reign as a “Good Priest,” a minority of priests and laity later began to express horror and disdain of Simon when he demolished the Temple and the original city of Jerusalem and began to build his new Temple and new city. His new Temple and City met with utmost resistance by a group of

Jewish people. These are the mysterious people who wrote many of the Dead Sea Scrolls of which we are now familiar.

At this time, this vocal minority of priests and laity began to call Simon “the Wicked Priest.” These Jews had their own plan of a Temple to be built in the Jerusalem area. It was discovered among the Dead Sea sectarians and scholars now call it “the Temple Scroll.” This minority of Jews felt that the Jerusalem that they were then observing in their midst and the Temple of Simon the Hasmonean should actually be abhorred and avoided by righteous Jews who wanted to retain a proper Sanctuary as ordained by their forefathers as shown in their “Temple Scroll.” What we find in these newly discovered scrolls is anger against Simon the Hasmonean and his successors.

The Dead Sea Scrolls Speak of These Actions of Simon

Who were these people who steadfastly objected to the actions of Simon regarding *his* Temple and *his* Jerusalem? Thankfully, we now are blessed with historical records only made available in the last fifty years (known as the Dead Sea Scrolls) that tell of the hostility that one group of priests and laity had to this tearing down of the national landmark (the ruined Temple), destroying the old city of Jerusalem, rebuilding the walls and the city of Jerusalem in a newer area to the north and west of the former city and Temple.

The principal people who wrote or adhered to the teachings found in the documents known as the Dead Sea Scrolls became very anti-Jerusalem, and they got that way because they passionately abominated the actions of “the Wicked Priest” who brought corruptions to pass (as they viewed them) in the area of the holy city of Jerusalem. It was not Jerusalem itself or the Temple of God itself that they hated, but it was the *new* Jerusalem and the *new* enlarged Temple of Simon that they abhorred.

So, the whole group (though it was a minority in Israel) turned their backs on the Jerusalem and the enlarged Temple that was built by the orders of Simon the Hasmonean. They did not feel that Simon was following the right pattern (or design) for the Temple of God that was to exist as the end of the age. Simon did not build his city or Temple in the “proper” and “ordained” manner and *his*

Temple was not according to their plans as maintained in what has become known as their "Temple Scroll."

While they may have agreed with Simon and the mainline Jewish authorities that the polluted Temple that Antiochus Epiphanes had desecrated needed to be replaced, it was not felt by them that Zion had to be torn down and a *new* Jerusalem selected in its place. The changes of Simon appeared to go too far. At least, when one reads the strictures mentioned in several of the scrolls, this is the impression that one gets. The Qumran people did not like the *new* Jerusalem being built on the western hill and the new Fortress called the Baris that later became Fort Antonia.

The Dead Sea Scrolls Show this Utter Antipathy

Let us now notice this historical evidence that comes from the Dead Sea Scrolls (many of which were composed at this very time of Simon the Hasmonean and written in response to these momentous and awesome achievements accomplished by Simon and the Jewish people who helped him). These people who objected to Simon left the society they once held in esteem and retreated to the desolate regions of Judaea or to towns scattered over the land. They made their headquarters at a place called Qumran that was located on the northwest shore of the Dead Sea. Just who were these Jewish people who came to hate "the Wicked Priest" of Jerusalem?

Many scholars, who have been associated with studies of the Dead Sea Scrolls from the very beginning of their discovery, believe that the person consistently mentioned in various manuscripts of the Scrolls as "the Wicked Priest" was Simon the Hasmonean. Professor Frank Moore Cross of Harvard University has held this belief for almost fifty years, and his belief is followed by the mainstream of scholarship, such as Professor Geza Vermes of Oxford University. Hershel Shanks of the Biblical Archaeology Society and publisher of *Biblical Archaeology Review* summed up the various theories concerning the identity of this "Wicked Priest" in his book *Understanding the Dead Sea Scrolls* (1992).

Out of the many theories, the main consensus of opinion accepts that "the Wicked Priest" was Simon the Hasmonean. The historical

period fits well with the chronological teaching of the “Teacher of Righteousness,” and there are many other factors that sustain this approach.

[In order for this present treatise not to be too long, I refer the reader to the various works of the above scholars and the overview by Hershel Shanks for their historical reasons in selecting Simon. The scholars who follow Professor Cross provide very powerful evidence that Simon the Hasmonean was indeed “the Wicked Priest” of the Dead Sea Scrolls.]

Brief Analysis of the Dead Sea Scrolls

The manuscripts of the Dead Sea sectarians are many and varied. There are a few complete manuscripts, some large fragments and various sized fragments down to minute portions so small that scholars can hardly read them. The latest attempt (in late 1996) to give to the general public all the remaining contents of the scrolls that remained untranslated over the years is that of Wise, Abegg & Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*. All types of subjects are covered in the scrolls. In overview, there are copies of Old Testament books and commentaries. There are extra-biblical books. There are private Psalms, doctrinal works, calendar matters, etc. The main works that help to identify these sectarians is a *Manual of Discipline* and a work called the *Damascus Rule*. The latter along with some commentaries on biblical books show reasons why there was an antagonism between the opinions of the Dead Sea sectarians and the “Wicked Priest” along with the mainline Jewish people at Jerusalem.

When the subjects of the various books of the sectarians are viewed collectively, scholars can reasonably place (by observing their subject matters) the chronological periods (in the majority of cases) within which the various compositions were written or referred to. The *Damascus Rule* gives three periods of time that actively interested the writers of the Dead Sea sectarians. After mentioning a period of 390 years from the capture of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar to the defilement of the Temple by Antiochus Epiphanes, the writer (called “the Teacher of Righteousness”) spoke of three periods. The first was of 20 years when the docu-

ments showed Israel generally in harmony among themselves (their Psalms, etc., showing mainly that the enemies of Israel were the Gentiles). In this early period, even the one who became “the Wicked Priest” was loved and esteemed. But then, a major change takes place in their attitudes. This early period of harmony was followed by two periods of 40 years. The beginning part of the first 40 years (when Simon the Hasmonean really began to flourish) shows the commencement of a great clamor between rival priestly groups, a deep anger over the tearing down of “the everlasting heights,” the “removal of the Landmark,” an erroneous building of the city of Jerusalem with brand new walls and the defilement of the Temple. The emergence of these new and abrupt destructions and desecrations were promoted by Israelites, not by the Gentiles.

Because of these radical changes in the enlarged Temple and rebuilding Jerusalem in other areas, the “Teacher of Righteousness” and his group of priests and laity removed themselves from mainline Jewish society and they began to condemn the Israel that then was. As time went on, however, their writings start to moderate the harshness and a sense of “acceptance” and “resignation” sets in. There is even the suggestion that the sectarians should not fight the “rebels” in Jerusalem but to reluctantly accede to the mainline wishes because Jewish Messiahs (both priestly and kingly) would soon arrive to straighten out the calamitous mess the country had gotten into. This attitude of resignation on the part of the sectarians (because they considered that the present “wickedness” had been preordained by God) could be placed chronologically in the final 40 years of the sectarian’s prophetic scheme (though the sectarians themselves thought this final period would be the time of war when Israel would emerge as victor over all the nations of the earth).

This chronological information in the work called the *Damascus Rule* (focusing on the latter part of the second century before the Common Era) helps to place the main body of manuscripts written by the people of the Dead Sea Scrolls into the period of Simon the Hasmonean. Let us now look at some of the historical events that these scrolls reveal.