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## *Chapter 25*

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# A NEW TEMPLE HAD TO BE BUILT

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**M**OVING “MOUNT ZION” to the southwestern hill and building up the *Baris* north of the Temple (which finally became Fort Antonia) is not all that Simon and his contemporaries performed. When they looked at the state of the Temple (its walls and buildings) that had been utterly profaned by Antiochus Epiphanes with some rebellious Jewish renegades who controlled the Temple Mount between the time of Antiochus and Simon the Hasmonean, they were appalled at the destruction and desecration that had been accomplished to the Temple over that twenty-five year period.

The Temple was standing in its place as a hulk of profaned architecture that bore no signs of holiness or sanctification. Something also had to be done to the Temple itself. Simon, who was the High Priest of the nation, along with the other Jewish authorities in Jerusalem decided to completely renovate the Temple and to make a new type of Jerusalem for the people of Judah. Indeed, when Simon got through rebuilding the Temple and Jerusalem, he had

created a type of “New Jerusalem” that looked nothing like it appeared from the time of Solomon down to the time of Antiochus Epiphanes.

Simon and the Jewish authorities, for all practical purposes, built a new Temple and a new city of Jerusalem. The construction of a new Temple was done in two stages. It started with the actions of Judas Maccabeus about twenty years before Simon began to reign. Notice what the Jews did in 164 B.C.E. after the desolation of the Temple by Antiochus Epiphanes. Judas Maccabeus (the older brother of Simon the Hasmonean) had the Temple purified and rededicated as best he could. In doing so, he caused the Altar of Burnt Offerings to be torn down and the old stones stored away in the region of the Temple Mount. He then had a new Altar built in its place.

“He chose blameless priests, devoted to the law; these purified the Sanctuary and carried away the stones of the Abomination [an idol shrine] to an unclean place [such as the Valley of Hinnom]. They deliberated what ought to be done with the altar of burnt offerings that had been desecrated. The happy thought came to them *to tear it down*, lest it should be a lasting shame to them that the Gentiles had defiled it; *so they tore down the altar. They stored the stones* [of that altar] *in a suitable place on the Temple hill*, until a prophet should come and decide what to do with them. Then they took uncut stones, according to the law, and built a new altar like the former one. They also repaired the Sanctuary and the interior of the Temple and purified the courts.”<sup>514</sup>

The rebuilding of the Altar of Burnt Offerings and refurbishing the earlier Temple was done about twenty years before the reign of Simon the Hasmonean. This “purification” by Judas Maccabeus was the *first occasion* when the festival called Hanukkah was ordained for the Jewish people. It is normally believed that this is the only occasion when this festival was ordained for the Jews to observe, but this is not what history tells us. There were to be *two additional times* when the *new* Festival of Hanukkah was to be sanctified. These two other occasions will be explained shortly.

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<sup>514</sup> I Maccabees 4:42–50, italics and words in brackets are mine.

## Why Simon Decided to Build a New Temple

It was at first thought proper by Judas Maccabeus that a simple purification of the Temple structure was all that was necessary to resume a sanctified ceremonial service at the holy place. But the “purification” of Judas was only a partial affair. The High Priesthood soon fell to Alcimus who was the priest in charge of the Temple for the next five years. Alcimus was a thorough going Hellenist and as a last act of rebellion against the principles of true religion as viewed by righteous Jews started to tear down the inner wall of the Temple to allow Gentiles unrestricted access into the sacred enclosure.<sup>515</sup> The author of Maccabees states that these actions brought about his untimely death that many Jews thought was God’s judgment upon the rebellious priest.<sup>516</sup>

These abominations of the High Priest Alcimus were a further pollution to the Temple. This made the former attempt at purifying the Sanctuary by Judas to be looked on by the Jews as incomplete. Indeed, for twenty years after the debaucheries by Antiochus, the Temple could not be adequately purified because of the Gentile troops in the Syrian garrison (in the *Akra* — the City of David). With the *Akra* located alongside the Temple, the Syrians continually harassed the Jewish worshippers who attempted to enter the Sanctuary.<sup>517</sup> This situation after Alcimus continued for 15 years while the Syrians were in the *Akra*.

The fact is, the Temple had been so utterly desecrated for three years by Antiochus Epiphanes and his supporters (both Gentiles and Jews) that only minor repairs could be done by Judas and others while the Syrians occupied the *Akra* garrison. This was also the case after the defilements caused by Alcimus. Simon, however, defeated the Syrians in the *Akra*. This allowed Simon and the Jewish authorities to focus their attention on the Temple once again. What they witnessed before them was a sad spectacle to behold. The only appraisal that could adequately describe what they observed was that of the prophet Daniel. It was to them an “abomi-

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<sup>515</sup> I Maccabees 9:54–56.

<sup>516</sup> *Ibid.*, verses 56–57.

<sup>517</sup> I Maccabees 1:36.

nation of desolation.”<sup>518</sup> To the Jewish authorities this signified (through the prophecies of Daniel) that God had accounted the building and its site as utterly *desolate* and thoroughly stripped of all holiness.

Recall that Antiochus gave orders to set up the idol of Zeus Olympus in the Holy of Holies. He also dedicated the whole of the Temple structure to the worship of Zeus. He even commanded many swine to be offered on the altar with their grease splattered on the stones in all areas of the Temple (including the holiest parts).<sup>519</sup> Even that did not end the pollution. Second Maccabees laments:

“The Gentiles filled the Temple with debauchery and revelry; they amused themselves with prostitutes and had intercourse with women even in the sacred court. They also brought into the Temple things that were forbidden, so that the Altar was covered with abominable offerings prohibited by the laws.”<sup>520</sup>

One can only imagine the filthy graffiti and other defilements that marred the majority of the stones of the Temple. In the prophecies of Daniel the word “desolation” was used to appraise the condition of the once beautiful Temple. To Simon and the Jewish authorities, this was the only adequate word to describe the wrecked Temple standing in front of them. The scars of pollution embracing the Temple were so deep that the Jewish authorities considered its condition as being “abominable” and “desolate.”

When they looked closely at the biblical revelation about the situation they were witnessing, they were able to determine that no amount of repair or washing down could erase the evidence of the corruption. They read about the judgment of God found in the Holy Scriptures in Ezekiel 7:22. The teaching in that verse showed that God had formerly decreed that once the Temple in the time of Nebuchadnezzar had been stripped of its furniture and taken to Babylon, God then reckoned *the whole of the Temple* (not simply a part of it) as thoroughly polluted and without the slightest holiness.

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<sup>518</sup> Daniel 11:31; 12:11.

<sup>519</sup> *Antiquities* XIII.8.2.

<sup>520</sup> II Maccabees 6:4,5.

Simon and the Jewish authorities were also able to read in the Law of Moses what should be done with polluted houses that could not be purified because of the utter contamination and desolation that accompanied them. In Deuteronomy 7:26 Moses stated that if any abominable thing (like an idol) was brought into a house, even the whole house itself should be destroyed along with the abominable thing because that single abomination contaminated and desolated the whole house.

There was also the example of Achan and his family. When Achan was found with a single accursed thing in his baggage, not only was Achan and his family destroyed but also all his baggage had to be consumed together because that one item contaminated the whole.<sup>521</sup> As a matter of fact, if an Israelite's house had been so contaminated with the evidence of leprosy throughout the house, its house and its belongings had to be destroyed together.<sup>522</sup> The specific instructions were:

“The priest ... shall break down the house, the stones of it, and the timber thereof, and all the mortar of the house; and he [the priest] shall carry them forth out of the city into an unclean place.”<sup>523</sup>

In this case, God ordered the house and its stones to be deposited in an “unclean place.”

Since the Temple was considered the “House of God” on earth, Simon and the Jewish authorities reasoned that the same command for destruction for a polluted house also applied to the Temple. It was likewise “a house.” When Simon (in his position as High Priest) looked upon the whole structure of what once had been the Holy Temple of God, he and the Jewish authorities decided it was impossible to cleanse the House of the Lord in a proper way from its *desolate* state.

They decided to follow the laws of Moses, which applied, to all houses in Israel (and God's House was no exception). The Mosaic commands said to tear down the contaminated house and place its polluted stones in an unclean area. With the commands of Moses

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<sup>521</sup> Joshua 7:11–26.

<sup>522</sup> Leviticus 14:33–45.

<sup>523</sup> Leviticus 14:44–45.

staring them in the face, Simon and the Jewish authorities determined to tear down the contaminated “House of God” and *to replace the whole Temple* with a new sanctified one. When one looks at the historical evidence closely, this is the only conclusion that can be rationally believed. Simon built a brand new Temple.

### **The Extraordinary Authority that Was Given to Simon**

Simon was given full legal authority by the people and Sanhedrin of Israel to perform all these momentous and unprecedented accomplishments, which the generality of the nation came to see were necessary. In looking at the history of all the Jewish leaders who lived from the period of Solomon to the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in 70 C.E, no one but Simon could have performed such official changes in altering these civil and sacred sites.

The truth is, Simon was given extraordinary authority of the highest order to accomplish what he did, and his word became law to the whole of the Jewish nation no matter where they lived. If some Jews objected to what Simon ordered, they were forced to flee Judaea (or to hide in remote and desolate areas, and there was a minority who did flee) because Simon demanded complete and absolute obedience to his commands. Jews had to submit to Simon or be excommunicated from the society. Remember that Simon was not only the High Priest of the Jewish nation, he was also their king. Besides that, he was given complete dictatorial powers by all the authorities of the Jews to perform his tasks. Even the surrounding Gentile rulers (including as far afield as the government of Rome) recognized the supreme power bestowed on Simon to accomplish his duties.<sup>524</sup> One should read all of I Maccabees 14:41–49. I will quote it in full.

“The Jewish people and their priest have, therefore, made the following decisions. Simon shall be their permanent leader and high priest until a true prophet arises [such as Deuteronomy 18:15–19 states]. He shall act as governor general over them *and SHALL HAVE CHARGE OVER THE TEMPLE* to make regulations con-

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<sup>524</sup> I Maccabees 14:38–40.

cerning its functions [he had full control over all activities of or about the Temple — even changing its site if he wished], and concerning the country, its weapons and strongholds, in a word, he SHALL HAVE CHARGE OVER THE TEMPLE [this authority was repeated twice in the text of Maccabees to emphasize his supreme power over the Temple]. *He shall be obeyed by all.* All contracts made in the country shall be dated by his name [this shows a new era had begun for the Jewish nation]. He shall have the right to wear royal purple and gold ornaments. *It shall not be lawful for any of the people or priests to nullify any of these decisions, or to contradict the orders given by him, or to convene an assembly in the country without his consent, to be clothed in royal purple or wear an official gold brooch [in a word, Simon assumed dictatorial authority in everything].* Whoever acts otherwise or violates any of these prescriptions shall be liable to punishment. *All the people approved of granting Simon the right to act in accord with these decisions,* and Simon accepted and agreed to act as high priest, governor general, and ethnarch of the Jewish people and priests and *to exercise supreme authority over all.*<sup>525</sup>

What outstanding and extraordinary authority Simon was given! No other Jewish king in history ever had such supreme power placed in his hands. His powers were so extensive that people looked on his commands or precepts as if they were the very precepts of God. To accomplish what Simon had to do, it was essential that he have that all-encompassing authority.

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<sup>525</sup> I Maccabees 14:41–47, italics are my emphases, words in brackets are mine.