
Chapter 27

RESISTANCE TO SIMON'S RULE



WHAT WERE SOME of the essential grievances against “the Wicked Priest” that the people of the Dead Sea Scrolls displayed? Cross and Vermes believe them to be the Essenes mentioned by Josephus, Philo and other classical writers and this evaluation makes perfectly good sense to me. To find out what their censuring was about concerning “the Wicked Priest,” look at the very beginning of a major document of the Dead Sea Sect that is called “The Damascus Rule.” This is a treatise that basically describes their reason for leaving mainline Judaism at the time of Simon the Hasmonean. Their leader and spokesman whom they called “The Teacher of Righteousness” wrote it. This person was a priest who became disenchanted with the prevailing opinion of the king and priesthood who ruled in the Jerusalem of his time.

This leader stated some castigating judgments on the Jewish society of his day. He was not at all pleased with what was developing in Jerusalem by the central authorities who were then

ruling. In these references, I will give the beliefs of the “Teacher of Righteousness” and add my own remarks of explanation in brackets. The page references are to the second edition of Geza Vermes’ translation.

“This was the time of which it is written, *Like a stubborn heifer thus was Israel stubborn* (Hosea 4:16), when the Scoffer [the Man of Lies] arose who shed over Israel the waters of lies [the Scoffer deceived ALL Israel]. He caused them to wander in the pathless wilderness, laying low the everlasting heights [what was intended to remain high and lofty for long ages *he had cut down and laid low*], abolishing the ways of righteousness and removing the boundary [other translators render the word ‘boundary’ as ‘landmark’ — that is, the Scoffer had removed a single ‘landmark’] with which the forefathers had marked out their inheritance, that he might call down on them [Israel] the curses of His Covenant and deliver them up to the avenging sword of the Covenant. For they sought smooth things and preferred illusions (Isaiah 30:10) [Israel preferred the teachings of false prophets and false seers] and they watched for breaks (Isaiah 30:13) [that is, the breaking down of a high wall] and chose the fair neck [of a stubborn heifer as in Hosea 4:16].”⁵²⁶

This demolishing of the “everlasting heights” (I take to be Mount Zion — they took three years to do it) and moving the “Landmark” (repositioning Zion up to the “Upper City”) was just too much for the person called the “Teacher of Righteousness” (who was himself a priest). He was scolding the main bulk of the people of Israel living in his time for doing these things that were being engendered by the “Wicked Priest.” The “Wicked Priest” did the dastardly thing of “laying low the everlasting heights.” In a new translation, Cook renders this interesting clause as “he brought down the lofty heights of old.”⁵²⁷

Indeed, that is the very thing that Simon did. This eyewitness description of tearing down lofty heights was not a figure of speech. Those heights in Jerusalem had been literally cut down to

⁵²⁶ Translation of Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, p.83, the scripture references in the parentheses are those of Professor Vermes, the words in brackets are mine.

⁵²⁷ Cook’s translation, “The Dead Sea Scrolls,” p.52.

the ground. This reference shows that it was this Scoffer (the “Man of Lies”) who had caused the nation of Israel to lay low or to cut down the elevated areas which were supposed to have been in “everlasting” existence.

This reference is a central proof that such topographical changes were being made in Jerusalem at the very time that the other historical records show that Simon was cutting down Zion (the *Akra* — the “everlasting heights”). The agreement is so precise that the records must be speaking about the same thing. Simon did in fact cut down the “everlasting heights.”

The Biblical Description of the Loftiness of the Original Zion

It has puzzled scholars for the past two centuries when they read descriptions of Zion by writers of the Old Testament who were eyewitnesses, and compare the present geographical situation of the southern part of the southeast ridge with those biblical accounts. There is *no comparison* at all, because the southern part of the southeast ridge is now so low in elevation that Josephus had to rename the area “the Lower City.” But how do the biblical writers describe that very region which existed in their times? Look at Psalm 48:1–4 as understood by the NIV.

“Great is the Lord, and most worthy of praise, in the city of our God, *his holy mountain*. It is beautiful *IN ITS LOFTINESS*, the joy of the whole earth. Like the *UTMOST HEIGHTS* of Zaphon is Mount Zion, the city of the Great King. God is in her citadels; he has shown himself to be her fortress.”

The original “Mount Zion” was *a very high mountain* relative to the other mountains that made up Zion. The biblical emphasis is its *loftiness*. It was the fact of its elevated eminence that characterized it as impregnable to conquest by various writers of the Holy Scriptures. And now, we now have historical evidence from eyewitnesses that these “lofty mountains” which once existed in the southeast ridge were cut down to the bedrock in the time of Simon the Hasmonean. The original “Mount Zion” had been chopped down to the ground by Simon and the Jewish authorities at Jerusalem and they were building a New Jerusalem at a different site and

enlarging Temple itself. These are the very actions that the Dead Sea sectarians were scolding the priests and people of Jerusalem about. What added fuel to the fire of the “Teacher’s” rebuke was the motivation for those “evil deeds.” It was not the Gentiles who had done the destruction (as one might suppose was understandable), but, forsooth, it had been promoted and accomplished by the top authorities in Israel, including the High Priest himself. This was just too much! It was Israel itself who caused the “everlasting heights” to be laid low. Those “everlasting heights” had been cut to the ground. When one applies the literal meaning to the texts, it fits the time of Simon precisely.

The “Wicked Priest” Removed the National Landmark

But that was not all. This Scoffer [the Man of Lies], according to the “Teacher of Righteousness,” also was guilty of “removing the landmark” (a single landmark, a *gebhul* in Hebrew) which had served ancient Israel as a standard for measuring their inheritance in the land of Canaan. This “Landmark” was the central *gebhul* from which and by which “the forefathers had marked out their inheritance.” This “Landmark” could be nothing else than a reference to Mount Zion (as I will soon show). When the “Teacher” was rehearsing historical events that had influenced Israel, he mentioned the period of the Judges at the start of section VIII of the *Damascus Rule*. This season before the time of Saul he called “the period of destruction of the land.” This is when the Philistines took the Ark of the Covenant to their own territory. This shrine of the Ark was the central part of the Sanctuary that made the Tabernacle holy. The “Teacher” spoke of this earlier example: “In the period of destruction of the land [by the Philistines] arose *the removers of the landmark* [the *gebhul* was removed] and [this] led Israel astray.”⁵²⁸ In this case, it was the Philistines who removed the *gebhul*.

This early Landmark (*gebhul*) that the “Teacher of Righteousness” was talking about was located at the central shrine called the Tabernacle situated on Mount Shiloh. And indeed, it was at the

⁵²⁸ Burrows translation, words in brackets mine.

religious and secular headquarters of the nation (at Zion) where all the standards of weights, linear measurements and monetary values were determined for the nation. It was also where the months and years were evaluated to take place for the religious and secular calendar of all the Jews. In a word, in their inheritance of the land in the eyes of the Israelites, the standard centerpiece of all inheritance was Mount Zion (the *gebhul*, which was viewed by Israel to be the place of residence of God on earth). It was this central “Landmark” area (not plural as Gaster translated the word) that was reckoned as the navel of Israel and for the whole earth.

Look more at this. The word “Landmark” in Hebrew is *Gebhul*. In Psalm 78:54 we read of “the *Gebhul* of his [God’s] Sanctuary” at Mount Zion. The Septuagint Version (abbreviated LXX) written near the time the Dead Sea Scrolls is important to the issue of what the word *Gebhul* meant to the Dead Sea sectarians because that translation of the Bible was composed near the time the sectarians wrote. The LXX said *Gebhul* meant “Mountain” and the Psalmist equated that *Gebhul* with *Har* (Mountain) in the second part of verse 54. The use of the word “Mountain” for *Gebhul* in the LXX is proof that the word was taking on *that* type of meaning by the time the Dead Sea sectarians were beginning to write. The LXX gives a plain and simple contemporary meaning to the word and this is a most important indication regarding its real significance in the Scrolls.

Indeed, the word *Gebhul* had a long geographical history of meaning a “Mountain” or a “mountain district” (note the mountainous area called *Gebal* in Ezekiel 27:9 which refers to the district of the Mountains of Lebanon, and Psalm 83:7 which is probably a place in the Mountains of Edom). The Arabs later adopted the term as their main word for “Mountain” and it was common to call Mount Sinai by the term *Jebel Musa* and even “Gibraltar” at the southern tip of Spain was a corruption of *Jebel Tarik* (the “Mountain of Tarik”) who was leader of the Berbers.

That *Gebhul* was equal with *Har* by the LXX translators shows this was a common meaning of the word by the time of the Dead Sea sectarians. This contemporary usage is important. And in Psalm 78:54 we are told that it was a mountain purchased by the

right hand of God for Israel. By extension, it also meant “*Territory*” or “*Area*.” And what was this “*Gebhul* [Mountain] of his Sanctuary” used for? The next verse in Psalm 78:55 tells us. “He cast out the heathen also before them, and divided them an inheritance by line [by *allotment* from the *Gebhul*], and made the tribes of Israel to dwell in their tents.” This is what the “Teacher of Righteousness” stated was the meaning of *Gebhul* in the *Damascus Rule*.⁵²⁹ The *Gebhul* was used to mark out the inheritance of the early Israelites. Clearly, this *Gebhul* was the mountain region of the Temple. Later, in Psalm 78:68–69, the text shows that “His Sanctuary” (that is, the “*Gebhul*”) was “Mount Zion,” and it housed the territory of the Temple (wherever the Temple was located). What was now happening in the time of the “Teacher of Righteousness”? Not only had the “everlasting heights” (the original Zion) been cut down to the bedrock by the priests at Jerusalem, but even the *Gebhul* (the *Mountain of Zion*) was removed to the “Upper City.” This is what Simon the Hasmonean did. He “removed the *Gebhul*” by destroying Mount Zion and by moving the name Zion to the *southwest* hill. He also built a new Temple..

Even if the “Teacher of Righteousness” agreed that the former Temple had been so defiled by Antiochus and Alcimus that a new Temple had to be built, the “Teacher of Righteousness” did not like the situation that Simon was building a new and enlarged Temple and it was not being constructed in the form sanctified by the “Temple Scroll” that the Dead Sea sectarians held dear. Indeed. He may have objected to *any* building of a new Temple at the time. This seems to be the case when one reads all of the material in the Dead Sea Scrolls concerning this matter. It looks like the “Teacher of Righteousness” wanted no new Temple built at all until one of the Messiahs (of David or Aaron) would be on earth to accomplish the task. Until that time, the people of the Dead Sea Scrolls would have been content to call their own community “the proper Temple of God” without resorting to a physical Temple at Jerusalem.

⁵²⁹ Col.I, line 16.

Dead Sea Sectarians Show Destruction in their Psalms

In the commentary of Qumran on the Book of Isaiah where the prophet said “I will remove its hedge [wall] so it can be devoured; I will break its fence [rampart] so it can be trampled,” the text of the Dead Sea interpreters states that the ones doing this destruction were: “the Men of Mockery who are in Jerusalem.”⁵³⁰ They were demolishing the walls of Jerusalem and creating other walls and bulwarks. In a work of the Dead Sea sectarians called “A Lament for Zion,” which Cook places in the Hasmonean period for composition, we read about the ruin of Zion. Cook translates the text:

“Ash heaps are now the home of the house of [Israel].... [How] lonely [she sits], the city [once full of people].... the princess of all the nations is as desolate as an abandoned woman.... All her fine buildings and [walls] are like a barren woman.... like those bereft of their only children, Jerusalem keeps on weeping.”⁵³¹

True enough, Simon had thoroughly brought down to the ground the “heights of old Zion” and he “moved the *Gebhul* (Mount Zion)” to the Upper City of his new and enlarged Jerusalem.

At this very period of time this “Teacher of Righteousness” wrote several Psalms that describe his anguish and sorrow at what he saw around him that was happening to his country. One should read all of his Psalm numbered VI.⁵³² This was one of the hymns sung by the Dead Sea community. Near the beginning of his Psalm, he made the statement that he had stood up among the wicked and proclaimed the truth, but he had been demoted and despised. This confrontation no doubt took place among those of the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. He tried unsuccessfully to plead for his opinions among his fellow priests and Israelite brothers. For the most part his appeal fell on deaf ears. To the “Teacher of Righteousness,” the destruction of old Jerusalem taking place in his midst was a disaster of the first magnitude. To him, God’s society was being destroyed. The parks and forests of the land were being

⁵³⁰ Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, p.211.

⁵³¹ *Ibid.* p.238.

⁵³² Column III line 19–36, *not* the biblical Psalm, but the one composed by the “Teacher of Righteousness.”

ruined. The walls of clay and even the platform for the dry land had been eaten away. The foundations of the very mountains had been destroyed. Even the base strata of the flint rocks had been torn away. He was talking about a great destruction in the land of Israel of which he was an eyewitness. I will use the translation of Professor Burrows who renders the Psalm in meter. The words in brackets are mine.

“For I took my stand [before others] in the border of wickedness, and with the hapless in their lot; but the poor man’s soul was in dread, with great confusion [in the society].... the cords of death surrounded me inescapably; the torrents of Belial [Satan] flowed over all the high banks [high banks built to protect the land] like a fire eating into all their springs destroying every green or dry tree in their channels, it [the torrents] rushes about with flashes of flame, until all who drink of them are no more; into the walls of clay it eats [the walls were being eroded and destroyed], and into the platform of the dry land [the level areas were being eroded]. The foundations of the mountains are given to the flames [mountain foundations were being destroyed]; the roots of flint become torrents of pitch [the underground rock strata were ruined]. It [the flame] devours the great abyss; the torrents of Belial bust into Abaddon; the sentient beings of the abyss roar with the eruptions of mire. The earth cries out at the ruin [at the ruinous destruction of the land] which has been wrought in the world [aided by Israelite opponents of the ‘Teacher’]; all its sentient beings shout; all who are upon it go mad and [the fires] melt in utter ruin. God thunders with the noise of his might, and his holy dwelling [in heaven] re-echoes with his glorious truth; the host of heaven [the angels] utter their voice; the eternal foundations melt and shake; and the war of the mighty ones of heaven rushes about in the world and turns not back until the full end decreed forever; and there is nothing like it.”

Even allowing for poetic exaggeration, this destruction described by the “Teacher of Righteousness” (that he claimed to have seen with his own eyes) was very much like what Isaiah 29:4–6 said would occur when the City of David would be destroyed by God himself. “Thou shalt be visited of the Lord of hosts with thunder, and with earthquake, and great noise, with storm and tempest, and the flame of devouring fire.”⁵³³ This is precisely what the

⁵³³ Isaiah 29:6.

“Teacher of Righteousness” said happened. True enough, but Simon went even farther. What Simon the Hasmonean did in Jerusalem in the wake of those seismic disturbances mentioned by the “Teacher” could be described as a thorough destruction of the former City of Jerusalem. And while it was clear that God had a hand in performing the seismic disturbances, it was Simon who accomplished the final destructions that led to the rebuilding of a new Jerusalem (or Zion) in the Upper City.

Once the old Jerusalem was destroyed, Simon and the Jewish authorities simply made another City of Jerusalem in place of the other (Simon even enlarged the city) and he made an enlarged Temple in the same area as the former Temples (with the approval of the generality of the people of Judaea). But the “Teacher of Righteousness” and the Essenes, however, did not approve this rebuilding of Jerusalem and enlarging the Temple. While they no doubt admitted that the former City of David and the earlier Temple had been polluted beyond repair (and the “Teacher” could see the hand of God in the initial earthquake and fire), but he and those of Qumran wanted the *new* City of Jerusalem and the *new enlarged* Temple to be built by the Messiah who would rebuild the City and Temple in conformity with the “Temple Scroll.” Simon was NOT doing this. He avoided following the geographical parameters of the “Temple Scroll.”

In fact, the Qumran people were praying for the restoration of what they considered to be the “true Zion.” They wanted things built according to their own “Temple Scroll” that gave elaborate details on how the proper Sanctuary should be built and administered. Those details were different from those established by Simon.⁵³⁴ So, it was not Jerusalem *per se*, or the Temple *per se* that they objected to (because their writings show they were people who held the teachings of Moses with an extreme regard), but it was the *new* Jerusalem and the *new* enlarged Temple being built in Jerusalem that they now were witnessing that they objected to. These were the unauthorized construction projects (according to them) of the “Wicked Priest.” We find that the “Teacher of Right-

⁵³⁴ See *The Temple Scroll*.

eousness” objected most strenuously to the building projects of Simon and the mainline people of Jerusalem.

Fury Concerning the Buildings of the “Wicked Priest”

There are writings among the manuscripts found in the Dead Sea area which show that they held in abhorrence the building projects of the “Wicked Priest.” Let us now look at some of their strictures that they accumulated with vehemence against the “Wicked Priest” (Simon the Hasmonean) and his allies who ruled Jerusalem.

To learn about the construction projects of the “Wicked Priest,” one has to look at some of the various names that the “Wicked Priest” was called among the Essene groups. The Qumran sects called him by several names. The one that he was generally denominated in their document called the *Damascus Rule* was “the Scoffer” (or, “Man of Lies”). This personality, however, may or may not be equal with the “Wicked Priest.” Another personality or authority was “the Spouter of Lies.” Some scholars feel the “Scoffer” (or, the “Man of Lies”) is not a reference to “the Wicked Priest” himself, but to a collaborator called the “Spouter of Lies” who is mentioned in other Dead Sea Scrolls. Whatever the case, both “the Spouter of Lies” and the “Wicked Priest” (Simon the Hasmonean) were certainly in collaboration with one another. The truth is, there is no distinct context in the various documents to distinguish the two. This is no doubt the reason why there is some confusion in identifying the personalities in a dogmatic sense. Indeed, Professor Cross acknowledges that the “Spouter of Lies” may be different from the “Wicked Priest.”

But what or who was the “Spouter of Lies”? Professor Cross translates the term as “False Oracle.”⁵³⁵ Cross states: “The main point is that the False Oracle leads the assembly to build a false congregation, a faithless Israel over against the Essene elect.”⁵³⁶ Designating this “Spouter of Lies” as a “False Oracle” is a most

⁵³⁵ *The Ancient Library of Qumran & Modern Biblical Studies*, Revised Edition (Baker Book House), p.154.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.155.

propitious and revealing interpretation. This shows it could refer to someone who was inspired beyond the realm of human originality.

Could this have been a divine voice from the Temple approving of all the actions of Simon the Hasmonean? The word “Oracle” can refer to the Holy of Holies in the Temple at Jerusalem,⁵³⁷ or to anyone who claims to speak directly from God. It also refers to voices that came from various inner sanctums of the Gentiles, or (in the case of Israel) from the Holy of Holies in Jerusalem. Such a preternatural voice from the Temple could have given credence to all of Simon’s actions.

It could well be that the “Teacher of Righteousness” is referring in his mention of “the False Oracle” to what Jewish theologians would call a “Bath Kol” (a voice of God) which on occasion did come from the inner sanctum of the Temple at Jerusalem. Josephus mentions such an Oracle when the twenty-four priests went into the Temple on the Day of Pentecost in 66 C.E. and heard voices (like an Oracle) saying: “We are departing hence.”⁵³⁸ There are numerous other examples in Jewish literature of similar Oracles either coming from the Temple or sometimes “out of the sky” to give divine or supernatural teachings. Jews of later times did not consider that these “Oracles” were always telling the truth or that they came from God.⁵³⁹ Even the New Testament mentions to beware what people calling themselves “prophets” might teach because there were many false prophets who had gone out into the world.⁵⁴⁰

The “Teacher of Righteousness” in the *Damascus Rule* did not think the Oracle was telling the truth because he designated it as a “False Oracle.” Professor Charlesworth, in his excellent translation, shows the force behind the “False Oracle.” There was: “One who weighs the wind and the Spouter of Lies.”⁵⁴¹ A “weigher of the wind” was one who “utilized the Spirit” (or used a “spiritual

⁵³⁷ II Samuel 16:23; I Kings 8:6.

⁵³⁸ *War* VI.5,3.

⁵³⁹ For example, see *Berekoth* 52a.

⁵⁴⁰ I John 4:1.

⁵⁴¹ Charlesworth, vol. I, p.29.

force”) to prompt the “Spouter of Lies” (or, the “False Oracle”) to give his teachings. This literary connection seems to support the belief that the “False Oracle was submitting to a “spiritual voice” from the heavens as a means of promoting his teachings and his building programs within Jerusalem and throughout the region of Judaea. It appears that Simon appealed to some kind of divine instruction. The Dead Sea sectarians were against it. They pejoratively gave him the title of “Precept, the Precept.”⁵⁴² They thought he considered himself to be like God Himself who was able to spout forth divine commands and precepts on his own authority. If this is Simon the Hasmoenean who is being referred to, it makes sense because he was given supreme power by the main Jewish authorities to accomplish his awesome tasks that he felt compelled to administer.⁵⁴³

The Oracle Told Simon to Build the City and Wall

The reason for the castigation by the “Teacher of Righteousness” was because this “False Oracle” was commanding Israel to build a city, and that a certain wall should be constructed. The “Teacher of Righteousness” considered the building of this city (along with the wall) to be against the principles of God that he and his fellow priests and laymen had been following. These maneuvers, however, formulated by this “False Oracle,” were being heeded by the “Wicked Priest” (Simon the Hasmoenean). Let us notice some of these commands to build a city, a town and a wall that the “False Oracle” was demanding. The “Teacher of Righteousness” referred to this in his commentary on the Book of Habakkuk.

In this commentary, the “Teacher of Righteousness” first gave a biblical verse that he wished to comment about and then he provided his rendition of what the verse meant, always applying its fulfillment to the very days in which he was writing. It is an interesting fact that the Qumran sectarians are almost always shown as believing that they were living in the final days before the King-

⁵⁴² *Damascus Rule*, Col.4, line 19.

⁵⁴³ I Maccabees 14:41–47.

dom of God would appear.

Note the verse in Habakkuk. It has to do with the building of a city with blood and founding a town through lies. In this case, as we will soon see, the city in question turns out to be Jerusalem.

“Woe to him who builds a city with blood and founds a town upon falsehood! Behold, is it not from the Lord of Hosts that the peoples shall labor for fire and the nations shall strive for naught? (Habakkuk 2:12,13). Interpreted [by the ‘Teacher of Righteousness’], this concerns the Spouter of Lies [Cross translates this phrase as the ‘False Oracle’] who led many astray that he might build a city of vanity with blood and raise a congregation on deceit.”

Note that this “Spouter of Lies” (or, the “False Oracle”) is accused of building a city upon falsehood. And what happened in the time of Simon the Hasmonean? He tore down old Jerusalem and rebuilt the city of Jerusalem in the north and west of where the former city had been. He also built up the lesser towns of Gazara and Beth-Zur.⁵⁴⁴ This building of cities and towns by Simon was an abomination to the “Teacher of Righteousness.” This anger of his was especially expressed toward Simon’s *new* city of Jerusalem and his *new* enlarged Temple which was not being constructed in the manner suggested in the “Temple Scroll.”

When one analyzes the simple statements in many of the Dead Sea Scrolls, it can easily be seen that the strictures uttered by the “Teacher of Righteousness” and his allies are centered on what they considered to be the illegality of tearing down “the everlasting heights,” the removal of the national “Landmark” (Zion) and re-establishing Zion in the Upper City. They considered the construction of unlawful walls, buildings and a new Jerusalem in the wrong places to be anathema. They were totally antagonistic to the defilement of old Jerusalem by the “Wicked Priest” and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. These historical events mentioned in the Dead Sea Scrolls precisely fit the period of Simon the Hasmonean.

⁵⁴⁴ I Maccabees 14:7.