
Chapter 28

SIMON'S BUILDING PROJECTS

THE VERMES' TRANSLATION of *The Damascus Rule* gives some interesting narration. We read that the "Teacher of Righteousness" said that his period was a "time when Israel sinned and defiled the Temple." Who was the person responsible for doing these "abominable things"? Was he a Gentile doing these things in the Land of Israel as one might expect? No, it was Israel itself and its "Wicked Priest" (Simon the Hasmonean) who were responsible for doing harm to the Temple. There were *three things* that the "Teacher of Righteousness" held against the "Wicked Priest" and those who followed him in Jerusalem. He said they were committing fornication, they had greed for riches, and "the third is profanation of the Temple."⁵⁴⁵

What was happening with the Temple was of paramount importance to the "Teacher of Righteousness." He also was angry about certain buildings that the people of Israel were then constructing

⁵⁴⁵ Vermes' translation, p.86.

that he considered unauthorized and not in conformity to the teachings of God. He no doubt thought those structures should be built by the Messiah (NOT Simon). Simon's architectural endeavors to the "Teacher" were being achieved before the proper time.

The "Wicked Priest" was causing Israel to be "builders of the wall and those who daub it with plaster (Ezekiel 13:10)."⁵⁴⁶ They were erroneously building a new wall. As a result, they were epithetically called "the Builders of the Wall or the Rickety Wall."

The term "Rickety" was a pun used by the "Teacher of Righteousness" (though that is the meaning of the Hebrew) because the actual wall being built by Israel was no doubt strongly constructed. This wall was probably that which Simon was erecting to protect the new city and the new Temple and it was different from the walls that once surrounded Jerusalem. I personally feel that this was the eastern rampart of the Haram esh-Sharif above the Kedron Valley that was built in a north/south direction (up to what is called the "Seam" near the southeast corner of the present Temple wall). The architecture of the stones in that eastern wall is certainly Hellenistic in design (and many archaeologists accept this Hellenistic origin of the east wall of the area known as the Haram). The stones do not belong to the period of Solomon though later peoples erroneously called that eastern wall of the Haram "Solomonic."

The "Teacher of Righteousness" was infuriated over the building of this major wall in Jerusalem. He said that God "hated the builders of the wall and His anger was kindled against them and against all those who followed them."⁵⁴⁷ The "Teacher of Righteousness" held this construction program of the "Wicked Priest" in utter contempt. In no way did he believe that this type of building up Jerusalem was a proper thing to do. Notice his full invectives that he issued in his Commentary on Habakkuk 2:12-13. It describes the activities of Simon the Hasmonean in perfect detail. I will give Yadin's translation.

"Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood and establisheth a city by iniquity! Behold, is it not of the Lord of Hosts that the peoples

⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.89.

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.90.

shall labour for fire and nations weary themselves for vanity? Its hidden interpretation refers to the Preacher of Falsehood [Cross renders this phrase as 'False Oracle'], who misled many into building a city of vanity through bloodshed and into forming a congregation [of Israelites] through lies for the sake of his glory, to compel many to toil in labour of vanity [in building the city] and to make them pregnant with works of lies [building projects that were based on false ideas], and thus their labour will be to no avail, and they will enter the judgments of fire, because they have cursed and insulted the elect ones of God."⁵⁴⁸

This shows the indignation and anger that the "Teacher of Righteousness" was expressing when he witnessed the leveling of parts of Jerusalem and the Temple areas. Besides this, the rebels (as he viewed them) also rebuilt the city and enlarged the Temple with different dimensions from those in the Holy Scriptures or in the "Temple Scroll" that the Dead Sea sectarians held in esteem.

Destruction of the Temple/Jerusalem Was Abhorred

The main concern of the "Teacher of Righteousness" was Israel's destruction of the earlier city of Jerusalem and rebuilding Zion in a different place by Simon the Hasmonean. Continuing his commentary on Habakkuk 2:17, the "Teacher of Righteousness" called attention to the biblical text which read:

"For the violence done to Lebanon [a symbolic name for the Temple] shall overwhelm you, and the destruction of the beasts shall terrify you, because of the blood of men and the violence done to the land, the city, and all its inhabitants."

We will read in a moment the interpretation of the "Teacher of Righteousness" about this violence and destruction that he considered was done to Lebanon [the Temple], the city and the land, but to understand the above verse, it will be helpful to review some of the general symbolic usages that mainline theologians among the Jews were then adopting to explain the prophetic texts of the Scriptures. Jewish theologians usually accepted that the term "Lebanon" was a symbol *for the Temple* because the timber that was used in

⁵⁴⁸ Yigael Yadin, *The Message of the Scrolls*, p.97, the words in brackets are mine.

its building came from Lebanon. The “beasts” were normally taken to be Gentiles or evil Israelites.

The normal symbolic understanding by mainline Jews of the meaning of the above prophecy, would have interpreted that Habakkuk (the original prophet) was angry because Lebanon [that is, the Temple] had been subjected to violence and destruction. Also that men of blood had done violence and ruin to the land of Israel, to the City of Jerusalem with its buildings and parks that made up the city, and that the inhabitants of the city and land had suffered as a consequence.

Let us now look at the interpretation of Habakkuk 2:17 as understood by the “Teacher of Righteousness.” He attributed the passage of scripture to his own time — specifically to the time of Simon the Hasmonean. His interpretation was similar to what we would expect normal Jewish theologians to give, but with the “Teacher of Righteousness,” he turned the meaning into the castigation of his own enemies living in his time. Here is what he said:

“Interpreted, this saying concerns the Wicked Priest [Simon the Hasmonean], inasmuch as he shall be paid the reward which he himself tendered to the Poor. For Lebanon is the Council of the Community [a phrase the Dead Sea Sect used on occasion for the Temple]; and the beasts are the Simple of Judah who keep the Law. As he himself [the Wicked Priest] plotted the destruction of the Poor, so will God condemn him [the Wicked Priest] to destruction. And as for that which He said, Because of the blood of the city and the violence done to the land: interpreted, *the city is Jerusalem* where the Wicked Priest committed abominable deeds and defiled the Temple of God. The violence done to the land: these are the cities of Judah where he robbed the Poor of their possessions.”⁵⁴⁹

The “Teacher of Righteousness” was stating in plain and simple words that the Wicked Priest had destroyed what he considered to be the true and proper site of Zion (David’s City) at Jerusalem. Even the other cities of Judaea suffered as a consequence. What Simon the Hasmonean was doing was transforming the whole of

⁵⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.289, the words in brackets are mine.

Judaic society in Jerusalem and Judaea by having them accept a new Temple. The “Teacher of Righteousness” was upset with it.

More Qumran Documents Showing Simon’s Rebuilding

This does not end the references about the “Wicked Priest” (Simon the Hasmonean) in the Qumran documents. In what is called “A Messianic Anthology” or “Testimonia,”⁵⁵⁰ there is a further scriptural reference in which a commentary by either the “Teacher of Righteousness” or a lieutenant provides lessons for the community of people whom they served. I will quote the whole section from Vermes’ translation. The words in single brackets are those of Vermes, but those in double brackets are mine.

“When Joshua had finished offering praise and thanksgiving, he said: ‘cursed be the man who rebuilds this city! May he lay its foundation on his first-born, and set its gate upon his youngest son’ (Joshua 6:26). Behold, an accursed man, a man of Satan [[Simon the Hasmonean]], has risen to become a fowler’s net to his people [[he was an Israelite who had gone astray]], and a cause of destruction to all his neighbors. And arose [[the text here is obscure]], both being instruments of violence. They have rebuilt [[Vermes has: Jerusalem ‘rebuilt and have set up’]] a wall and towers to make of it a stronghold of ungodliness ... [[ellipsis]] in Israel, and a horror in Ephraim and in Judah ... blasphemy among the children [of Israel. They have shed blood] like water upon the ramparts of the daughter of Zion and within the precincts of Jerusalem.”⁵⁵¹

This was the “Teacher of Righteousness” making a clear curse against the “Wicked Priest” (Simon the Hasmonean) for his *rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem!* This Simon (with the help of another person because the last part of the curse speaks of “two people”) was rebuilding a wall with towers that could act as a stronghold. The “two people” referred to could be Simon and his son John Hyrcanus. It was John Hyrcanus who gave the final order (in 124 B.C.E.) for celebrating the full dedication of the renewed Temple at Jerusalem. The “Teacher,” however, thought this was an act of blasphemy being done “upon the ramparts of Zion and

⁵⁵⁰ 4Q175.

⁵⁵¹ Vermes, p. 296, the words in single brackets are those of Vermes.

within the precincts of Jerusalem.” This curse suggests strongly that Simon had destroyed the old Jerusalem and its walls and he was now constructing another city of his own choosing in a different area west and north of the original Jerusalem.

The “Teacher of Righteousness” and his followers would have nothing to do with these actions which they considered to be blasphemous. However, the vast majority in Israel agreed with the “Wicked Priest” and his actions. This is why the “Teacher of Righteousness” and his community had to flee the general society and take up residence in remote areas. They then began to call themselves the “Council of the Community” (a term the Dead Sea people applied either to the physical Temple, or to themselves as a community of people who represented the true “spiritual Temple of God”). They, in effect, abandoned their normal recognition of sanctity for the *new* Temple of Simon and also for the *new* City of Jerusalem that Simon was building. They retreated from normal Jewish society (at the first) to await the Messiah who would build a proper Temple and City of Jerusalem.

These admonitions by the people of Qumran fit the period of Simon the Hasmonean perfectly, once the proper history of Simon is restored (as I have attempted to do in this book). What we find is a dual evidence of proof. While the restored history that I have presented makes the recorded accounts in the Dead Sea Scrolls more understandable, those accounts in the scrolls also support in a remarkable way what I have been showing in the restored history. The accounts complement one another.

The fact is, we now have a much better picture of what was happening in Jerusalem in the last part of the second and in the beginning part of the first century before the Common Era. We should all be thankful for the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Scrolls help us in a profound manner to straighten out the historical occurrences (that most scholars and religious authorities know nothing about) at this crucial time in the history of the world.