

essenes

The Essenes

(by Kent Dobson-Summarized by Fred Nelson)

1. The *context* of Jesus' teachings is vital to our understanding of them. (ie. If you want to understand Shakespeare, you must have some understanding of Elizabethan England.)
2. The Dead Sea Scrolls were written by the Essenes of Qumran 100 BC to 66 AD. (500 Scrolls)
3. The doctrine of the Essenes is important to Jesus. Josephus records three significant people groups during the time of Jesus: the Pharisees; the Sadducees; the Essenes (the Essenes called themselves the *yahad*, the Community; the devoted; the elect; the poor, the real Israel) They lived in Qumran near the Dead Sea, Jerusalem, Damascus, and Engedi.
4. The Maccabean Revolt - A group of Jewish priests began the revolt against the Selucids (who had outlawed Torah, circumcision, etc). These Maccabean priests became the Hasmoneans who ultimately became Hellenize (very Greek and pagan). Many Pharisees and Sadducees embraced this Hellenization. There was a group of priests who found this unacceptable, and they followed the "teacher of righteousness" (little is known about him) into the dessert near the Dead Sea.
5. They moved to the dessert to prepare the way for the Lord. John the Baptist baptized within 2 miles of their community. He reflected much Essene theology. Mark 1:2-8 "A voice of one calling in the desert . . ."
6. They used a solar calendar, but the Jews in Jerusalem used a lunar calendar. (Judaism is a religion of *what* to do and *when* to do it.) The Essenes felt the temple was unclean.
7. They studied the OT and strictly adhered to it. The Essenes also wrote and studied the writings of their sages. Their Scribes worked in scriptoriums. They believed that they ate in the presence of angels.
8. They were obsessed with ritual purity and frequently immersed themselves in mikvahs (baptismals.) Each time they wrote a word for God they had to go immerse themselves in a mikvah for purity.
9. They raised sheep and goats and grew date palms. (Date palm honey is likely the type of honey that is referenced in the Bible.)
10. In order to join their movement a student must pass three stringent exams that revealed one's knowledge of the Old Testament. If the student passed all three, his personal belongings were merged with those of the community, and they gave him a white robe, a loin cloth, and a pick ax.
11. They practiced a very simple common meal in which they broke bread first and followed with wine. Mark and Luke record the last supper being eaten in this order.) Most Jews ate the meal in reverse fashion.
12. The Essenes believed in "predestination." They were the only group of the time to have a "systematic theology." The Pharisees prided themselves on an openness of theology
13. They also believed in a spirit/flesh dualism. The *sons of light* and the *sons of darkness*. John 12:36
14. Angels and spirits were at war according to the Essenes; they believed that man was corrupt. Anything good in you came from God. Man had to *prove* his election.
15. The Essenes did not participate in temple ceremonies except for the payment of the tithe.
16. They were wiped out by the Romans in AD 66.

17. *Halakhah* means in Hebrew *to walk*; the yoke (interpretation) on the OT. In studying the Torah Jews are obsessed with "how, what, where, and when am I to do it?"

18. They refused to submit to passion. They were motivated by the purity laws of the temple. This *halakhah* (interpretation, exegesis, yoke) of the Essenes would have been outlandish to most Jews because they so valued children. In Matt 5:27 and Matt 19:11-12 Jesus appears to be like the Essenes.

19. Most great Jewish teachers had a key "proof text" for their unique *halakhah*.

20. Regarding *divorce* Jesus used the same proof text from Genesis 2:24. Pharisees believed that a man could divorce his wife for burning the biscuits (but they valued marriage and said that the "altar of God sheds a tear when a couple divorces.")

21. On the Sabbath question Jesus spoke against the Essene teachings.

22. *Machloket* = a difference in rabbinic opinion.

23. They opposed the wealth of evil men. They called themselves the "poor" or the "poor in spirit." They lived communally. They were totally committed to the poor. Jesus seems to have a similar view of wealth - Mark 10:17-27 & Luke 16:8 (learn from the sons of darkness.)

24. If you were not an Essene, you were called a "son of darkness" and were destined for judgment and hell.

25. The Essenes thought that the "apocalypse," the end of world was at hand. They talked about the final great battle between the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness much as depicted in the book of Revelation. (The War Scroll from Qumran and the Book of Revelation have some similarities.)

26. From Zechariah the Essenes believed in 2 Messiahs and a Prophet. They believe that one of the Messiahs would be from the Priestly line and an Essene as well. The other Messiah would come from the line of David.

27. It appears that none of the Jewish people groups except the Essenes were expecting a divine Messiah. The Essenes were expecting a Messiah who was both a: 1) suffering servant 2) and God in the flesh.

28. The Essenes did two things that prepared the way for Jesus: 1) they were totally committed to the text and 2) they lived pure lives.

VIP 29. Jesus disagreed with the Essenes on the extent of loving one's neighbor. They believed in loving *only* those they perceived as the Sons of Light. They taught that they must hate the Sons of Darkness (ie. the Romans.) Jesus taught in Matt 5:38-48 *the right way to live*; Jesus **taught that perfection in God's eyes was synonymous with loving one's enemies.**

Is 40:1-3 NIV

1 Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. 2 Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. 3 A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.

