

The Essenes

Last week, we talked about the Essenes. Today, we talk about their thoughts and theology a little bit more.

The Essenes were a group of people who decided to separate themselves from all other movements like Pharisees, Sadducees, and Zealots in ancient Israel. They existed from the 2nd century BC to the 1st century after Christ.

The Dead Sea Scrolls are the library of the Essenes. The Dead Sea Scrolls includes, copies of Hebrew Bible and some other documents. These other documents are about the community rules, the Essenes' belief system, Messiah, and Bible interpretation.

There were two groups of the Essenes, the larger group who lived in different places in the ancient world, and the smaller group who lived in the Qumran settlement, **in the wilderness of Judea**.

The small group of Essenes, who lived in the Qumran settlement, looked after of the library, studied the Scriptures and their own documents, meditated, and lived a communal life as equals.

They were vegetarians, pacifists, and believed in a Messiah, resurrection, immortality, and afterlife.

They believed that they are the sons of light through understanding the word of God and building a community on the basis of the word of God. Light, the word of God, and communal life were the three elements of their belief system. They called themselves the sons of light, and others the sons of darkness.

They also believed in the concept of the tree of life. The position of human being is in the centre of the tree: The earthly forces below him and the heavenly forces above. A perfect human keeps the balance between the two. (look the picture)

Now, there is a question to ask?

Why did the smaller group of the Essenes choose to live in a secluded place like Qumran, in the middle of the wilderness?

The Essenes who lived in Qumran had a different mission. They believed that their belief system and their communal life, which was on the basis of equality, could keep them from corruption, greed, and war.

According to them, their life style had three advantages:

First, they could prove to God that they are the true sons of light, because they have been able to live on the basis of the prophets' visions.

Second, they could convince God that they are ready to receive the Messiah.

Third, their success in living in harmony, peace, and wisdom has made them new humans. And these new humans will be the first followers of the Messiah. The Messiah will need a group of devoted, strong, and wise followers to expand his message and save all other people.

Now we may ask why did they choose to live in the wilderness.

On the basis of the Bible's teachings, the wilderness is a safe place for leaders, prophets, and devoted followers to grow and stay pure and focused.

Kings or authorities have no interest in the harsh environment of the wilderness. But, the wilderness provides enough for those who are after peace, wisdom, and transformation.

Some scholars say that Jesus could be an Essene leader. But, many believe that the gospels give us a different explanation.

The main difference between Jesus and the Essences is that Jesus never separated himself from other groups and members of the society. Jesus lived among people. He actually spent most of his time with different groups of people, from Pharisees and Sadducees to common people and outcasts.

Interesting enough, we may still hear the voice of the Essenes in one of the Gospels. And this Gospel is **the Gospel of John**. The Essences believed that they were the sons of light, they believed strongly in the word of God, and they were waiting for the Messiah, the Savior, to come in order to establish a new order and a new life on earth.

And this is how the Gospel of John begins:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.

In him was life, and that life was **the light of men**. **The light** shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. **The true light** that gives **light** to every man was coming into the world, but the world did not recognize him.”

Maybe, John in his introduction is talking to the Essenes, and telling them that the light that they were waiting for has finally come.

And this is how the Gospel of John ends:

“This disciple is the one who testifies to these events and has recorded them here. And **we know** that his testimony is true. Jesus also did many other things. If they were all written down, **I** suppose the whole world could not contain the books, that would be written”.

So, there is a disciple who dictates, and there is a WE, a group of followers, who writes down: the verse says: **we know that his testimony is true**. This **WE** who writes down the Gospel, could be the members of the Essenes in Qumran.

There should be a reason, that we do not hear anything about the Essenes in Qumran, seventy years after Jesus. There is a possibility that the Essenes in Qumran came to believe, that their project was complete now, because of Jesus presence.

Let us pray:

O heavenly Father, who has filled the world with beauty:
Open our eyes to observe your gracious hand, in all your works;
that rejoicing in your whole creation, we may learn to serve you, with
gladness; for the sake of him, through whom, all things were made, your
Son, our Lord Jesus Christ Amen.