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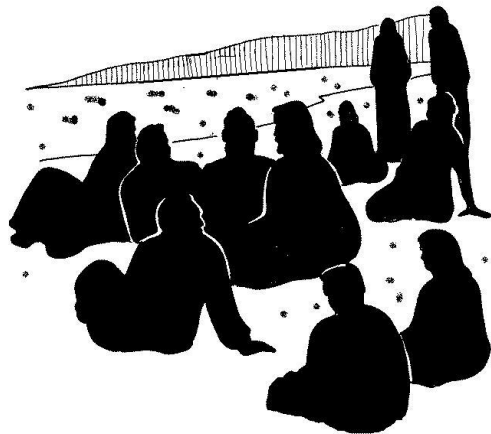
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Jewish Religious Parties at the Time of Christ

Part Two: The Essenes



Written by Robert C. Jones
Acworth, Georgia

Christian Theology and History Adult Sunday School Courses

Robert Jones

www.sundayschoolcourses.com

I've always been a strong believer in adult Sunday School classes and Bible studies in our churches. And many churches have quality, Biblically-based adult-focused programs. Unfortunately, just as many churches tend to downplay adult education, focusing on children's education (not a bad thing in itself), or focusing on the needs of the "unchurched", where topics such as church history and theology are often purposely ignored.

Yet there is a strong need for adult education focused on both the Bible and the basic tenets and history of the Faith. Among the reasons:

- Not all adults come from a strong childhood background in the church – adult Sunday School classes/Bible studies may be their first serious introduction to what Christianity is all about
- Christianity (and especially Evangelical Christianity) is under constant attack from the media and popular culture (movies, music, etc.). We need to give fellow Christians the tools to defend the Faith against attack (or to provide a "ready defense" as Peter says in 1 Peter 3:15)
- Even adult Christians that have a strong Biblical background often know little about the origins and history of their Faith

To better meet the needs of adult Christians (both those mature in their Faith, and those just starting out in the "School of Christ"), I've written a series of courses that focus on the history of the Christian Church (including the Jewish roots), as well as the development of doctrine in the Church. The topics represented in these courses are intended to both further the participant's walk in the Faith, as well as serve as a starting point for Christian apologetics.

While the primary purpose of these courses is for use in churches, they also may be useful for High School and College projects, especially the courses focused primarily on historical aspects.

One note: these courses are primarily written from an Evangelical Protestant viewpoint (I come from a Reformed Church background), but I hope I've given ample time to other points of view throughout the various courses.

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Introduction

We all know the story. A group of pious monks called *Essenes* (“Pious Ones”) living an idyllic life on the shores of the Dead Sea, churning out dozens of religious texts that, 2,000 years later, would stun the world. But is the story really true?

Prior to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, what we know about the Essenes comes primarily from three secular historians of the 1st century – Josephus, Philo of Alexandria, and Pliny the Elder. While both Josephus and Philo are quite chatty about the Essenes, and seem to indicate that the Essenes acted like a religious order, neither historian says anything about them living in the desert. Pliny the Elder, on the other hand, does say that the Essenes have “only palm trees for company”, which could indicate that Pliny believed at least some of the Essenes lived in a desert community.

Fast-forward to the mid-20th century, and a massive treasure trove of ancient documents found in caves above an archaeological site known as Qumran, in the Judean desert. Included in the over 800 scrolls discovered (the bulk of which range in date from about 150 B.C. to 68 A.D.) are several texts that can be described as the “constitution”, or set of rules of a Jewish religious group. Many of the rules outlined in these documents (the *Manual of Discipline* (a.k.a. *Community Rule*), *Damascus Document*, *Messianic Rule*) match closely, but not exactly, with the descriptions of Josephus and Philo. However (somewhat disappointedly), none of the Dead Sea Scrolls mention the name *Essenes* (or the Pharisees or Sadducees, for that matter). Rather, the “sectarians” refer to themselves as the “sons of Zadok”, or the “sons of light”.

So, the question remains – were the documents found at Qumran the library of the Essenes? Were they the library of a heretofore-unknown Jewish “monastic” group? Or were the scrolls the library of the Temple of Jerusalem, removed to the caves of the Judean desert as the Roman legions approached c. 70 A.D.?

This course will examine the accounts of the secular historians (Josephus, Philo, and Pliny), to build a portrait of the Essenes as they knew them. We will then examine the Dead Sea Scroll documents that seem to have a “sectarian” flavor, and see how well they correlate with the secular historians accounts. We’ll also take a look at how later Christian monastic movements either paralleled or emulated the Essene model.

This course is meant to be a companion course to my *Dead Sea Scrolls and Christianity* and *Jewish Religious Parties at the Time of Christ: Part One - Pharisees and Sadducees* courses.

Essene Quiz

1. T/F The Essenes are mentioned in the New Testament
2. T/F According to secular contemporary historians, there were about 100,000 Essenes living in 1st century Judea
3. T/F The reason for the Maccabean Revolt in the 2nd Century B.C. was to kick the Romans out of Palestine
4. T/F The reason it was called the Maccabean Revolt is because a family named Maccabeus led the fighting
5. T/F According to secular 1st century historians, the Essenes are Nazirites that decided to live in the desert

6. T/F Based on the dating of the “sectarian” scrolls of the Dead Sea, the Teacher of Righteousness could be Jesus Christ
7. T/F Historian Flavius Josephus was a Roman centurion in his younger days
8. T/F All sources indicate that the Essenes never carried weapons
9. T/F The New Testament indicates that John the Baptist was the “voice of one calling in the desert” of Isaiah 40:3
10. T/F The Essenes never bathed, as they believed that it washed away essential body oils
11. T/F History has recorded the names of no Essenes

First Century Secular Historians

Philo of Alexandria (15/10 B.C. – 45/50 A.D.)

“...and yet no one, not even of those immoderately cruel tyrants, nor of the more treacherous and hypocritical oppressors was ever able to bring any real accusation against the multitude of those called Essenes or Holy. But everyone being subdued by the virtue of these men, looked up to them as free by nature, and not subject to the frown of any human being, and have celebrated their manner of messing together, and their fellowship with one another beyond all description in respect of its mutual good faith, which is an ample proof of a perfect and very happy life.” (*Every Good Man is Free*, Philo of Alexandria, C.D. Yonge translation)

Philo of Alexandria was a noted Jewish philosopher of the first half of 1st Century A.D. He was noted for his Greek (Hellenized) religious philosophy, sometimes referred to as *neoplatonism*.

Philo comes into our story here because he wrote several pages about the Essenes in his work *Every Good Man Is Free*. Other than (possibly) the Dead Sea Scrolls, it is the oldest significant extant description of the Essenes, pre-dating Josephus by several decades.

Key aspects of Philo’s description of the Essenes follow (C.D. Yonge translation).

- **There were about 4,000 Essenes** - “...in number something more than four thousand in my opinion.”
- **They didn’t sacrifice animals** - “...not sacrificing living animals...”
- **Study was an important part of their daily routine** – “...but studying rather to preserve their own minds in a state of holiness and purity...”
- **They lived in remote or rural areas** - “These men, in the first place, live in villages, avoiding all cities on account of the habitual lawlessness of those who inhabit them...”
- **Their goal was not to accumulate wealth** - “Of these men, some cultivating the earth, and others devoting themselves to those arts which are the result of peace, benefit both themselves and all those who come in contact with them, not storing up treasures of silver and of gold, nor acquiring vast sections of the earth out of a desire for ample revenues, but providing all things which are requisite for the natural purposes of life”.
- **They were pacifists** - “Among those men you will find no makers of arrows, or javelins, or swords, or helmets, or breastplates, or shields; no makers of arms or of military engines; no one, in short, attending to any employment whatever connected with war, or even to any of those occupations even in peace which are easily perverted to wicked purposes...”
- **They didn’t engage in commerce** – “...for they are utterly ignorant...of all commercial dealings...”

- **They didn't believe in slavery** - "...and there is not a single slave among them, but they are all free..."
- **The Sabbath was holy; there was a hierarchy based on age** - "Now these laws they are taught at other times, indeed, but most especially on the seventh day, for the seventh day is accounted sacred, on which they abstain from all other employments, and frequent the sacred places which are called synagogues, and there they sit according to their age in classes, the younger sitting under the elder, and listening with eager attention in becoming order."
- **They were especially pious** - "They also furnish us with many proofs of a love of virtue, such as abstinence from all covetousness of money, from ambition, from indulgence in pleasures, temperance, endurance, and also moderation, simplicity, good temper, the absence of pride, obedience to the laws, steadiness, and everything of that kind; and, lastly, they bring forward as proofs of the love of mankind, goodwill, equality beyond all power of description, and fellowship, about which it is not unreasonable to say a few words."
- **They lived communally** - "...they all dwell together in companies, the house is open to all those of the same notions, who come to them from other quarters..."
- **They had no personal possessions** - "...their expenses are all in common; their garments belong to them all in common; their food is common, since they all eat in messes...For whatever they, after having been working during the day, receive for their wages, that they do not retain as their own, but bring it into the common stock, and give any advantage that is to be derived from it to all who desire to avail themselves of it".
- **They took care of their sick and aged** - "...and those who are sick are not neglected because they are unable to contribute to the common stock..."

Flavius Josephus (37 A.D. (?) - 100 A.D.)

"For there are three philosophical sects among the Jews. The followers of the first of whom are the Pharisees; of the second the Sadducees; and the third sect, who pretends to a severer discipline, and called Essenes. These last are Jews by birth, and seem to have a greater affection for one another than the other sects have." (*Jewish Wars*, Book 2 Chapter 8, William Whiston translation)

Flavius Josephus was a Jewish aristocrat that led rebel troops against the Romans in Galilee during the First Jewish Revolt (66-73 A.D.) He later betrayed the Jews, and served the Romans. In his retirement as a Roman gentleman farmer, he wrote two massive historical works - *The Jewish War* and *Jewish Antiquities*. He discusses the Essenes in both works, and, curiously enough, in far more detail than he discusses the Pharisees or Sadducees, much better known religious sects to modern day Christians. (Photo from *The Life and Works of Flavius Josephus*, translated by William Whiston, 1736)



A summary of the writings of Josephus about the Essenes follows (William Whiston translation).

- **They believed in predestination**- "But the sect of the Essenes affirm, that fate governs all things, and that nothing befalls men but what is according to its determination." (*Jewish Antiquities*, Book 13, Chapter 5)
- **They believed in life after death** – "The doctrine of the Essenes is this: That all things are best ascribed to God. They teach the immortality of souls, and esteem that the rewards of righteousness are to be earnestly striven for..." (*Jewish Antiquities*, Book 18 Chapter 1)

- **At some point, they had been cast out of temple worship** – “...and when they send what they have dedicated to God into the temple, they do not offer sacrifices, because they have more pure lustrations of their own; on which account they are excluded from the common court of the temple, but offer their sacrifices themselves...” (*Jewish Antiquities*, Book 18 Chapter 1)
- **All possessions were held in common** – “...that institution of theirs which will not suffer anything to hinder them from having all things in common; so that a rich man enjoys no more of his own wealth than he who hath nothing at all...”
- **The Essenes were 4,000 in number** - “There are about four thousand men that live in this way...” (*Jewish Antiquities*, Book 18 Chapter 1)
- **They didn’t marry** – “They neglect wedlock, but choose out other persons’ children, while the are pliable, and fit for learning; and esteem them to be of their kindred, and form them according to their own manners.” (*Jewish Wars*, Book 2 Chapter 8)
- **They dwell in multiple cities** – “They have no certain city but many of them dwell in every city; and if any of their sect come from other places, what they have lies open for them, just as if it were their own; and they go into such as they never knew before, as if they had been ever so long acquainted with them.” (*Jewish Wars*, Book 2 Chapter 8)
- **They did occasionally arm themselves** – “For which reason they carry nothing with them when they travel into remote parts, though still they take their weapons with them, for fear of thieves.” (*Jewish Wars*, Book 2 Chapter 8)
- **Like Medieval monks, their day seems to have been divided into “hours”** – “After this [sunrise] every one of them are sent away by their curators, to exercise some of those arts wherein they are skilled, in which they labor with great diligence till the fifth hour.” (*Jewish Wars*, Book 2 Chapter 8)
- **They practiced water purification** – “...and when they have clothed themselves in white veils, they then bathe their bodies in cold water. And after this purification is over...” (*Jewish Wars*, Book 2 Chapter 8)
- **They eat communally** – “...they go, after a pure manner, into the dining room; as into a certain holy temple, and quietly set themselves down; upon which the baker lays them loaves in order; the cook also brings a single place of one sort of food, and sets it before every one of them...” (*Jewish Wars*, Book 2 Chapter 8)
- **They don’t swear oaths...** - “...whatsoever they say also is firmer than an oath; but swearing is avoided by them, and they esteem it worse than perjury; for they say, that he who cannot be believed without [swearing by] God, is already condemned.” (*Jewish Wars*, Book 2 Chapter 8)
- **Except when they swear oaths** – “And before [a novitiate] is allowed to touch their common food, he is obliged to take tremendous oaths...” (*Jewish Wars*, Book 2 Chapter 8)
- **They were scholars** – “They also take great pains in studying the writings of the ancients, and choose out of them what is most for the advantage of their soul and body”. (*Jewish Wars*, Book 2 Chapter 8)
- **There was a three year probationary period for admittance into the sect** – “But now, if any one hath a mind to come over to their sect, he is not immediately admitted, but he is prescribed the same method of living which they use, for a year...after this demonstration of his fortitude, his temper is tried two more years, and if he appear to be worthy, they then admit him into their society.” (*Jewish Wars*, Book 2 Chapter 8)
- **They practiced excommunication** – “But for those that are caught in any heinous sins, they cast them out of their society; and he who is thus separated from them...” (*Jewish Wars*, Book 2 Chapter 8)
- **They had a judicial system** – “But in the judgments they exercise they are most accurate and just; nor do they pass sentence by the votes of a court that is fewer than a hundred. And as to what is once determined by that number, it is unalterable.” (*Jewish Wars*, Book 2 Chapter 8)

- **They strictly observed the Sabbath** – “Moreover, they are stricter than any other of the Jews in resting from their labors on the seventh day; for they not only get their food ready the day before, that they may not be obliged to kindle a fire on that day, but they will not remove any vessel out of its place, nor go to stool thereon.” (*Jewish Wars*, Book 2 Chapter 8)
- **They had a hierarchical system** – “Now after the time of their preparatory trial is over, they are parted into four classes; and so far are the juniors inferior to the seniors, that if the seniors should be touched by the juniors, they must wash themselves, as if they had intermixed themselves with the company of a foreigner.” (*Jewish Wars*, Book 2 Chapter 8)
- **They were brave in the face of adversity** – “...and indeed our war with the Romans gave abundant evidence what great souls they had in their trials, wherein, although they were tortured and distorted, burnt and torn to pieces, and went through all kinds of instruments of torment, that they might be forced either to blaspheme their legislator, or to eat what was forbidden them, yet could they not be made to do either of them, no, nor once to flatter their tormentors, or to shed a tear...” (*Jewish Wars*, Book 2 Chapter 8)
- **They were renowned for their prophetic abilities** – “There are also those among them who undertake to foretell things to come, by reading the holy books, and using several sorts of purifications, and being perpetually conversant in the discourses of the prophets; and it is but seldom that they miss in their predictions.” (*Jewish Wars*, Book 2 Chapter 8) [Note: Josephus mentions several Essenes with prophetic ability, including Judas, Manahem, and Simon]
- **There was more than one order of Essenes** – “Moreover, there is another order of Essenes, who agree with the rest as to their way of living, and customs, and laws, but differ from them in the point of marriage, as thinking that by not marrying they cut off the principal part of the human life, which is the prospect of succession; nay rather, that if all men should be of the same opinion, the whole race of mankind would fail.”

There is remarkable similarity between the descriptions of Philo and Josephus, even though they were written decades apart. There are a few discrepancies:

- Philo says they avoided cities; Josephus says they were “city dwellers”
- Philo says they were radical pacifists; Josephus says they carried weapons on trips to defend themselves

But all in all, remarkable agreement between the two historians, even down to the number of Essenes - 4,000.

However, still no mention of a desert...

Pliny the Elder (d. 79 A.D.)

Pliny the Elder led a varied life, serving as a cavalry commander in the Roman army, procurator of Spain, and commander of the fleet of the Bay of Naples. He was also a writer and scholar, and published his 39-book *Natural History* in 77 A.D. It is in this work that Pliny discusses the Essenes. Like Philo and Josephus, he discusses them with enthusiasm bordering on reverence.

“On the west side of the Dead Sea, but out of range of the noxious exhalations of the coast, is the solitary tribe of the Essenes, which is remarkable beyond all other tribes in the whole world, as it has no women and has renounced all sexual desire, has no money, and has only palm-trees for company. Day by day the throng of refugees is recruited to an equal number by numerous accessions of people tired of life and driven thither by the waves of fortune to adopt their manners. Thus through thousands of ages --

incredible to relate -- a race in which no one is born lives on forever; so prolific for their advantage is other men's weariness of life!

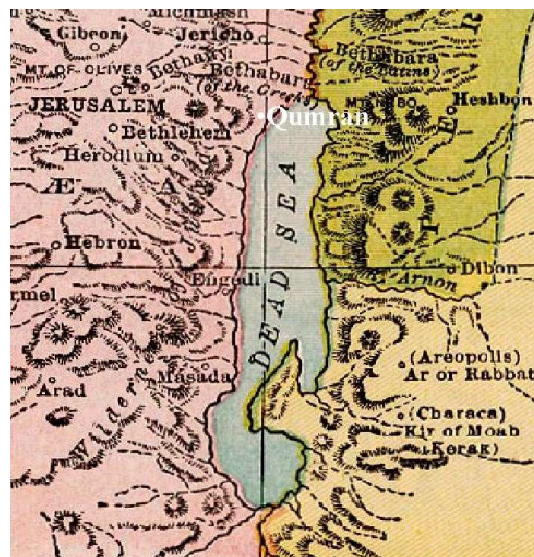
Lying below these (Essenes) was the formerly town of Engedi, second only to Jerusalem in fertility of its land and in its groves of palm trees, but now like Jerusalem a heap of ashes.

Next comes Masada, a fortress on a rock, itself also not far from the Dead Sea. This is the limit of Judaea.”
(Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, Book 5, Chapter 18,
<http://www.geocities.com/Paris/LeftBank/5210/plinesen.htm>)

Here, finally, we hear a connection between the Essenes, the Judean desert, and the Dead Sea. Pliny also echoes Philo and Josephus in terms of identifying that the Essene “tribe” “has no women and has renounced all sexual desire, has no money...”

Pliny also underscores how a religious sect that doesn’t believe in marriage propagates itself – “persons tired of life and driven thither by the waves of fortune to adopt their manner”.

Note also the text “Lying below these (Essenes) was the formerly town of Engedi”. If one views that “lying below” means “south of”, then it could be interpreted that this passage says “Engedi lies south of the Essenes [Qumran is north of Engedi]”.



Classic map “Palestine in the Time of Christ” (© Ages Software 1997). Note that Engedi is south of Qumran.

So, the Essenes sure sound like a bunch of monks, and some of them even live in the desert, which brings us to 1947/48, and the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls...

The Dead Sea Scrolls



View of some of the Dead Sea Scrolls caves (photo by Barbara Brim)

Beginning in 1947/48, over 800 scrolls have been discovered in Judean desert caves, near the archaeological site of Qumran. Two hundred of the scrolls were ancient copies of Old Testament books (a 1,000 years older than the previously oldest extant copies of the Old Testament). What has been especially intriguing about the discovery was the content of the other 600 scrolls – previously unknown Psalms, Old Testament commentaries (Isaiah, Hosea, Nahum, Habakkuk), apocalyptic writings, and a set of scrolls that seemed to define the laws of an unknown Jewish sect.

Father Roland de Vaux, who excavated the Qumran site in 1951/56, first promulgated the view of the site as an Essene monastery, and that the scrolls were the library of the Essenes. This view has since been challenged by others that 1) say that there is no evidence of any connection between Qumran and the scrolls themselves and 2) the wide diversity of viewpoints contained within the scrolls make it more likely that the scrolls are the library of the Temple of Jerusalem, brought to the Judean desert for safe-keeping during the Roman siege in 68/70 A.D., and then forgotten.

I don't necessarily view these two viewpoints as mutually exclusive. If our goal is to better understand the Essenes, the question is, "Are there any Essene documents among the Qumran Scrolls?", as opposed to "Is this an Essene Library or a Temple Library?" (Assumedly, both libraries would contain documents from diverse sects and philosophies).

In answer to the question posed above - "Are there any Essene documents among the Qumran Scrolls?" – the answer is probably yes. The two most important to adding to our understanding of the Essenes are *The Manual of Discipline* (a.k.a. the *Community Rule*) and the *Damascus Document*. Both appear to be the constitution of an unnamed Jewish sect – dare we even say, an unknown Jewish *monastic* sect. There is enough commonality between the two documents to assume they are from the same group – although they may represent slightly different points on the timeline regarding the development of the sect. (Note: Some people have postulated that the *Manual of Discipline* contains the rules for the celibate monastic branch of the sect, and the *Damascus Document* contains the rules for the lay members of the sect. Josephus in *Jewish Wars* mentioned two such branches.)

In addition to these two "foundation" documents, several other documents found at Qumran may also shed light on the beginnings of the Essenes, including:

- *Habakkuk Commentary*
- *Psalms Commentary*
- *Messianic Rule*

We'll examine the potential significance of these later three documents in another section.

Essene constitutions?

Manual of Discipline

"And this is the order for the men of the community who have offered themselves to turn from all evil and to lay hold of all that he commanded according to his will, to be separated from the congregation of the men of error, to become a community in law and in wealth, answering when asked by the sons of Zadok, the priests who keep the covenant..." (*Manual of Discipline*, Burrows translation)

The *Manual of Discipline* (also known as the *Community Rule*) was originally found in two pieces in Cave 1. When combined, it appears to be an almost complete document. It measures about 9.5" x 6'. Underscoring the potential significance of the document is the fact that ten additional (fragmentary) copies were found in Cave 4.

The curious title was given to the book by Millar Burrows, who, as director of the American School of Oriental Research in 1947, was one of the first to examine the scroll. Burrows thought that its "combination of liturgical directions with rules concerning procedure in the meetings of the group and the personal conduct of the members" reminded him of a similar book used in the Methodist Church, called the *Manual of Discipline*. (Burrows, p. 24)



The document contains the rules, or the "constitution" of a mysterious religious order. It has been compared with the Christian *Didache* and *Apostolic Constitutions* of the 2nd-4th centuries.

The document appears to be in four parts, named by Burrows as "Entering the Covenant", "Two Spirits in Man", Rules of the Order", and "The Closing Psalm". We'll examine some excerpts from this document in other sections of this study, but it is worth quoting from the "Entering the Covenant" section at the beginning:

"...the order of the community; to seek God... to do what is good and upright before him as he commanded through Moses and through his servants the prophets...to love all the sons of light, each according to his lot in the counsel of God, and to hate all the sons of darkness, each according to his guilt in vengeance of God." (*Manual Of Discipline*, Burrows translation)

Damascus Document

The *Damascus Document*, so named because there are seven references to Damascus contained within, was first found in a Cairo *genizah* in 1897 by Solomon Schechter of Cambridge. Like the *Manual of Discipline*, multiple copies of the document were found in the Dead Sea Scrolls (at least ten). Also like the *Manual of Discipline*, the document describes a series of statutes regarding a mysterious religious order, which may have called itself the "sons of Zadok":

"The Sons of Zadok are the elect of Israel, those called by name, who will abide at the end of days."
(*Manual of Discipline*, Burrows translation)

The document is in two parts. Part One is a "History/Exhortation"; Part Two is the statutes or laws. Intriguingly, the Damascus Document refers to many of the same characters described in the Habakkuk and Psalms commentaries – The teacher of righteousness, the man of the lie, the preacher of the lie, etc. are all mentioned. Because of this similarity in characters, many people feel that the two must have been written by the same sect. The document also refers to "the decision of those who entered the new covenant in the land of Damascus", which could possibly refer to the foundation of the sect.

"The Sectarrians"

None of the aforementioned documents that are seemingly Essene in origin identify the name of the group or sect that wrote them. The only seeming identification given in the texts is "the sons of light" or the "sons of Zadok" (possibly, the Chief Priest under Kings David and Solomon.)

As mentioned earlier, 1st century Jewish Historian Josephus tells us that there were three Jewish sects at the time of Jesus - was the Qumran sect one of those three, or was it a group whose name is lost to history? What do the scrolls themselves tell us about the sect? Taking the *Damascus Document* and the *Manual of Discipline* together (and assuming that they are rules for the same sect), we might make some of the following statements about the sect:

- They were headed by a "superintendent" or "examiner", who seemed to be both teacher and Chief Financial Officer
- Judicial decisions were made by the assembled members of the group
- Apparently there was community ownership of property (However, the scrolls are a bit ambiguous on this point - the *Damascus Document* talks about 2 days wages from each person being given to the "poor and needy" each month). As mentioned previously, this could reflect that the *Damascus Document* is the set of rules for the Lay branch of the Essenes mentioned in Josephus).
- There appears to have been a required two-stage (one year each) probation period for entry into the sect
- They were very focused on ritual purity
- They believed that their purpose was to prepare the way of the Lord by the study of the Law

"When these things come to pass for the community in Israel, by these regulations they shall be separated from the midst of the session of the men of error to go to the wilderness to prepare there the way of the LORD...This is the study of the law, as he commanded through Moses..." (*Manual of Discipline*, Burrows translation)

- Prayer was an important element of their daily worship
- They were "a holy house for Israel, a foundation of the holy of holies for Aaron." (*Manual of Discipline*, Burrows translation)
- Those that violated Mosaic law willfully were excommunicated
- They scrupulously obeyed the Sabbath
- There was some degree of hierarchy – "the lesser obeying the greater". "Priests and elders" were seated first in community meetings.

In terms of the theology of the sect, the following statements could be made:

- They believed in divine election (predestination)
- They appeared to have strong apocalyptic and eschatological views

“But God in the mysteries of his understanding and in his glorious wisdom has ordained a period for the ruin of error, and in the appointed time of punishment he will destroy it forever.” (*Manual of Discipline* Burrows translation)

- They defined good and evil in terms of light and darkness
- Man is weak and utterly dependent on God
- Salvation appears to be through 1) the law 2) following the teacher of righteousness and 3) confessing before God “we have sinned”

“But all who hold fast to these ordinances, going out and coming in according to the law, and who listen to the voice of a teacher and confess before God, ‘We have sinned...’ who give ear to the voice of a teacher of righteousness...they shall prevail over all the sons of the world, and God will forgive them, and they shall see his salvation...” (*Damascus Document* , Burrows translation)

As one can tell from the list of attributes above, there are many similarities between the descriptions of the Essenes from Josephus/Philo, and the Dead Sea Scrolls “constitution” documents. There are enough similarities between Josephus and the scrolls to at least build a case for the Sectarrians being Essenes, as the following quote and table demonstrate:

“Todd Beall concluded that there are 27 parallels between Josephus and the scrolls regarding the Essenes, 21 probable parallels, 10 cases in which Josephus makes claims about the Essenes that have no known parallels among the scrolls, and 6 discrepancies between them.” (*The People of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Essenes or Sadducees?* James C. Vanderkam, Bible Review, April 1991)

Josephus/Philo	Dead Sea Scrolls
Abbreviations used: JA = <i>Jewish Antiquities</i> , JW = <i>Jewish Wars</i> , DD = <i>Damascus Document</i> , MOD = <i>Manual of Discipline</i>	
“Nor is there any one to be found among them who hath more than another; for it is a law among them, that those who come to them must let what they have be common to the whole order...” (JW, Book 2, Chapter 8)	“If the lot determines that he is to be admitted to the community...his wealth and wages shall be put at the disposal of the man who has supervision over the wages of the masters.” (MOD)
“...their expenses are all in common; their garments belong to them all in common; their food is common...” (Philo of Alexandria)	

Josephus/Philo	Dead Sea Scrolls
<p>“They also have stewards appointed to take care of their common affairs, who every one of them have no separate business for any, but what is for the uses of them all...” (JW, Book 2, Chapter 8)</p>	<p>“And this is the order for the superintendent of the camp: He shall instruct the many in the works of God...and every one who is added to his congregation he shall examine him as to his works...and no man shall make an agreement for buying and selling unless he has told the superintendent who is in the camp...” (DD)</p>
<p>“But now if any one hath a mind to come over to their sect, he is not immediately admitted, but he is prescribed the same method of living which they use for a year... for after this demonstration of his fortitude, his temper is tried two more years; and if he appear to be worthy, they then admit him into their society...” (JW, Book 2, Chapter 8)</p>	<p>“When he has completed a year within the community, the masters shall be questioned about his affairs...the new member shall not touch the sacred drink of the masters until he has completed a second year among the community of men.” (MOD)</p>
<p>“But for those that are caught in any heinous sins, they cast them out of their society.” (JW, Book 2, Chapter 8)</p>	<p>“Any man of them who transgresses a word of the law of Moses overtly or with deceit shall be dismissed from the council of the community and shall not come back again.” (MOD)</p>
<p>“...they pass sentence by the votes of a court that is fewer than a hundred...” (JW, Book 2, Chapter 8)</p>	<p>“And this is the order for the judges of the congregation: There shall be as many as ten men chosen by the congregation according to the time.” (DD, Burrows, p. 359) “There shall be in the council of the community twelve men...” (MOD)</p>
<p>“Now after the time of their preparatory trial is over, they are parted into four classes; and so far are the juniors inferior to the seniors, that if the seniors should be touched by the juniors, they must wash themselves, as if they had intermixed themselves with the company of a foreigner.” (JW, Book 2, Chapter 8)</p> <p>“...they sit according to their age in classes, the younger sitting under the elder, and listening with eager attention in becoming order.” (Philo)</p>	<p>“And this is the order of the session of all the camps: They shall be enrolled by their names; the priests first, the Levites second, the sons of Israel third, and the proselyte fourth.” (DD)</p>

Josephus/Philo	Dead Sea Scrolls
"But the sect of the Essenes affirm, that fate governs all things..." (JA, Book 13, Chapter 5)	"To those whom God has chosen he has given them for an eternal possession..." (MOD)
"They also avoid spitting in the midst of them..." (JW, Book 2, Chapter 8)	"A man that spits into the midst of the session of masters shall be punished thirty days." (MOD)
"A priest says grace before meat; and it is unlawful for any one to taste of the food before grace be said. The same priest, when he hath dined, says grace again after meat..." (JW, Book 2, Chapter 8)	"...the priest shall stretch out his hand first to pronounce a blessing with the first portion of the bread and the wine..." (MOD)
"Nor is there ever any clamor or disturbance to pollute their house, but they give every one leave to speak in their turn..." (JW, Book 2, Chapter 8)	"...so that each may render his opinion to the council of the community. A man shall not speak in the midst of his neighbor's words, before his brother finishes speaking" (MOD)

(Josephus translations from William Whiston; Philo translations from C.D. Yonge; *Manual of Discipline* and *Damascus Document* translation from Burrows)

There are some differences between the Scroll writings, and those of Josephus and Philo. For example, Josephus tells us that the Essenes numbered about 4,000, and "they have no one certain city, but many of them dwell in every city" – certainly a different picture from this seemingly monastic desert sect. Also, the teacher of righteousness, who is so prominent in several of the scrolls, is not even hinted at in Josephus. Finally, there is no mention in Philo or Josephus (or Pliny) of the elaborate (364 day) calendar system used by the Scroll sectarians.

However, one must keep in mind that the *Manual of Discipline* and the *Damascus Document* date to 100-200 years earlier than the histories of Philo, Josephus, and Pliny the Elder. As in the United States today, there is less discussion of Founding Father George Washington than there was 100 years ago. It is quite possible that the Teacher of Righteousness was a hot topic in documents written within 20 years of the founding of the sect, but had faded in every day consciousness 150 years later. The same thing could be said about the calendar situation – hot topic in 100 B.C., institutionalized, so not mentioned, in 60 A.D.

As far as the issue of "many of them dwell in every city", cited in Josephus, this is somewhat counterbalanced by Philo, who states "these men, in the first place, live in villages, avoiding all cities on account of the habitual lawlessness of those who inhabit them", which would indicate that even in Philo's time, the Essenes inhabited more remote locations (some have suggested that Qumran was the center of Essenes, sort of like Citeaux would later be for the Christian Cistercians). And, of course, we have Pliny the Elder's comment that Essenes live "away from the western shore [of the Dead Sea], far enough to avoid harmful things, a people alone...companions of palm trees."

In summary, while not all of the 800 scrolls in the Dead Sea Scrolls are necessarily Essene in origin (for example, there are some scrolls that date back as early as 250 B.C.), the "sectarian" scrolls probably *are* Essene in origin.

Where did the Essenes come from?

The 1st century secular historians are silent as to the origins of the Essenes. And, of course, Essenes appear nowhere in the Old or New Testaments. Compounding matters is the fact that the name “Essenes” (meaning, variously, “Pious Ones”, Holy Ones”, or “Healers”) may be a descriptor as opposed to an actual name. We have no idea how the “Essenes” referred to themselves.

In terms of discerning the origins of the Essenes, we can fairly divide the primary theories into “pre-Dead Sea Scrolls discovery” and “post-Dead Sea Scrolls discovery”. As it turns out, they are not mutually exclusive.

Pre-Dead Sea Scrolls theories

Prior to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, a common theory for the antecedents of the Essenes revolves around (scant) mention in the Apocrypha (1st and 2nd *Maccabees*) about a group called the Hasideans (meaning “the pious”). The references to the Hasideans are quoted in full below

“⁴²Then there united with them [Mattathias and his sons] a company of Hasideans, mighty warriors of Israel, all who offered themselves willingly for the law. ⁴³And all who became fugitives to escape their troubles joined them and reinforced them. ⁴⁴They organized an army, and struck down sinners in their anger and renegades in their wrath; the survivors fled to the Gentiles for safety.” (1 Mac. 2:42-43, NRSV)

This would seem to indicate that the Hasideans were war-like – “mighty warriors of Israel”. But wait, we next meet the Hasideans when they seek peace from the Seleucids. Alcimus was a high priest appointed by the Seleucids:

“¹²Then a group of scribes appeared in a body before Alcimus and Bacchides to ask for just terms. ¹³The Hasideans were first among the Israelites to seek peace from them, ¹⁴for they said, “A priest of the line of Aaron has come with the army, and he will not harm us.” ¹⁵Alcimus spoke peaceable words to them and swore this oath to them, “We will not seek to injure you or your friends.” ¹⁶So they trusted him; but he seized sixty of them and killed them in one day, in accordance with the word that was written...” (1 Macc 7:12-16, NRSV)

We can ascertain that it was important to the Hasideans to have someone from the Levitical priesthood with them, a fact which assumes greater importance when we factor in the post-Dead Sea Scroll discovery data.

The above section doesn’t seem to reflect well on the Hasideans, because they seem to be willing to abandon the Maccabees. However, there is one more reference to the Hasideans, in 2 Maccabees. The speaker is the evil priest Alcimus:

“⁶“Those of the Jews who are called Hasideans, whose leader is Judas Maccabeus, are keeping up war and stirring up sedition, and will not let the kingdom attain tranquility...” (2 Macc 14:6)

In this passage, the Hasideans are viewed as the fomenters of the revolt, who faithfully follow Judas Maccabeus! So, warriors, seditionists, or pacifists – take your pick from the references to the Hasideans in 1st and 2nd *Maccabees*. So, is there enough information here to definitely associate the Hasideans with the Essenes? The



answer is no - one could equally speculate that the Hasideans are the predecessors of the Pharisees (or that the Essenes and the Pharisees had a common root in the Hasideans). However, it is at least a coherent theory.

Post-Dead Sea Scrolls theories

“And this is the order for the men of the community who have offered themselves to turn from all evil and to lay hold of all that he commanded according to his will, to be separated from the congregation of the men of error, to become a community in law and in wealth, answering when asked by the sons of Zadok, the priests who keep the covenant...” (*Manual of Discipline*, Burrows translation)

With the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls, the good news is that we potentially have a great deal more information about the origins of the Essenes. The bad news is that most of it is in “code” – the term “Essene” appears nowhere in the scrolls.

Five documents in particular give clues as to the origins of the Scroll sectarians. Three are the “constitution” documents – *Manual of Discipline* (a.k.a. the *Community Rule*), the *Damascus Document*, and the *Messianic Rule*. Two others are commentaries – *Commentary on Psalms*, and *Commentary of Habakkuk*.

In the passages below from the *Damascus Document*, we can discern several points of interest regarding the foundation of the Essenes:

- The foundations of the sect were in 2nd century B.C. (“390 years” after Nebuchadnezzar)
- The sect operated for twenty years, and then were joined by a “Teacher of Righteousness”
- There was a “congregation of traitors” who had “departed from the way”, headed by a “scoffer” “who shed over Israel the waters of lies”

“For when they were unfaithful and forsook Him, He [God] hid His face from Israel and His Sanctuary and delivered them up to the sword. But remembering the Covenant of the forefathers, He left a remnant to Israel and did not deliver it up to be destroyed. And in the age of wrath, three hundred and ninety years after He had given them into the hand of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, He visited them, and caused a plant root to spring from Israel and Aaron to inherit His Land and to prosper on the good things of His Earth. And they perceived their iniquity and recognized that they were guilty men, yet for twenty years they were like blind men groping for the way.

And God observed their deeds, that they sought Him with a whole heart, and he raised for them a Teacher of Righteousness to guide them in the way of His heart. And he made known to latter generations that which God had done to the latter generation, the congregation of traitors, to those who departed from the way. This was the time of which is written, *Like a stubborn heifer thus was Israel stubborn*, when the Scoffer arose who shed over Israel the waters of lies.” (*Damascus Document*, Vermes translation)

Further passages add other items of interest:

- The sect separated themselves “from the congregation of the men of injustice”
- The sect will be united “under the authority of the sons of Zadok, the Priests who keep the Covenant”.

The “original” “sons of Zadok” was the line of high priests that were descended from Zadok, the priest under King David that was given the task of anointing Solomon king. The importance of this priestly family is underscored in these passages from Ezekiel:

“These are the sons of Zadok, who are the only Levites who may draw near to the LORD to minister before him.” (Ez 40:46, NIV)

“But the priests, who are Levites and descendants of Zadok and who faithfully carried out the duties of my sanctuary when the Israelites went astray from me, are to come near to minister before me; they are to stand before me to offer sacrifices of fat and blood, declares the Sovereign LORD. They alone are to enter my sanctuary; they alone are to come near my table to minister before me and perform my service.” (Ez 44:15-16, NIV)

High priests came from this priestly family until the time of the Hasmonean Dynasty, in mid 2nd-century B.C. This fact may be key to understanding the origins of the Essenes.

“And this is the Rule for the men of the Community who have freely pledged themselves to be converted from all evil and to cling to His commandments according to His will. **They shall separate from the congregation of the men of injustice and shall unite, with respect to the Law and possessions, under the authority of the sons of Zadok, the Priests who keep the Covenant**, and of the multitude of the men of the community who hold fast to the Covenant.” (*Community Rule*, Vermes translation, emphasis added)

“Whoever approaches the Council of the Community shall enter the Covenant of God in the presence of all who have freely pledged themselves. He shall undertake by a binding oath to return with all his heart and soul to every commandment of the Law of Moses in accordance with all that has been revealed of it to the **sons of Zadok, the Priests, Keepers of the Covenant and Seekers of His will...**” (*Community Rule*, Vermes translation, emphasis added)

“The sons of Zadok are the elect of Israel, the men called by name who shall stand at the end of days.” (*Damascus Document*, Vermes translation)

“The sons of Levi shall hold office, each in his place, under the authority of the sons of Aaron. They shall cause the congregation to go and come, each man in his rank, under the direction of the heads of family of the congregation – the leaders, Judges, and officers, according to the number of all their hosts – **under the authority of the sons of Zadok the Priests...**” (*Messianic Rule*, Vermes translation)

References like the one below to a “New Covenant” in the “land of Damascus” give the impression that the sect was a breakaway group from *something*, and that they left (Jerusalem) to set up headquarters in “Damascus”, which could refer to the Damascus in Syria (which seems unlikely, because Syria was the seat of Seleucid power), or it may have been a code name for some other place (Qumran?)

“...members of the New Covenant in the land of Damascus...” (*Damascus Document*, Vermes translation)

So, we’re finally at a point where we can bring all of these elements together to suggest an origin for the Dead Sea Scroll “sectarians”, or the Essenes. The original Essenes, the Hasideans mentioned in 1st and 2nd *Maccabees*, were one group that formed to fight against the totalitarian rule of Antiochus Epiphanes IV, who desecrated the Temple c. 169 B.C.

Twenty years later, Jonathan Maccabeus (brother of Judas Maccabeus) became both chief priest and political leader of the Jews (a practice which would continue throughout the rest of the Hasmonean

rule). Jonathan was not in the line of the Zadokite priests (which dated back to the time of David and Solomon). Thus, Jonathan's assumption to the office of Chief Priest interrupted a line of succession that had lasted (more or less) for hundreds of years.

As a result, some Zadokite priests broke away from the Temple, and started their own sect (or joined with the remnants of the Hasideans), to create the Essene sect that would be spoken of so enthusiastically 200 years later by the 1st century historians.

Various Scroll scholars over the years, including Geza Vermes, Millar Burrows, and Lawrence Schiffman have suggested a similar chronology. Below is one example:

"I believe the sect was formed when a group of Sadducean [i.e. Zadokite] priests left the Temple service in the aftermath of the Hasmonean takeover of the Temple soon after the Maccabean revolt, probably by about 152 B.C.E." (*New Light on the Pharisees*, Lawrence Schiffman, Bible Review, June '92)

The Teacher of Righteousness

One of the most intriguing figures in the Dead Sea Scrolls is the Teacher of Righteousness, mentioned specifically in the *Habakkuk Commentary*, *Psalms Commentary* and the *Damascus Document*, and (perhaps) by inference in the *MMT* and *Thanksgiving Scroll*. Some scholars view that the teacher was the leader or founder of the sect. Certainly, the teacher is accorded special powers:

"This means that the wicked man is the wicked priest, and the righteous man is the teacher of righteousness." (*Commentary on Hab 1:4*, Burrows translation)

"This means the teacher of righteousness, to whom God made known all the mysteries of the words of his servants the prophets." (*Commentary on Hab 2:1*, Burrows translation)

"And God observed their works, that they sought him with perfect heart; and he raised up for them a teacher of righteousness to lead them in the way of his heart." (*Damascus Document*, Burrows translation)

"...this concerns the Priest, the Teacher of [Righteousness whom] God chose to stand before Him, for he established him to build for Himself the congregation of..." (*Commentary on Psalms*, Vermes translation)



In some places, the teacher seems to have almost messianic properties:

"...the arising of him who will teach righteousness at the end of days." (*Damascus Document*, Burrows translation)

"This means all the doers of the law in the house of Judah, whom God will rescue from the house of judgment because of their labor and their faith in the teacher of righteousness." (*Commentary on Hab 2:4*, Burrows translation)

We are told that the teacher of righteousness suffered unfairly at the hands of the "wicked priest":

“The wicked priest, whom, for the wrong done to the teacher of righteousness and the men of his party, God delivered into the hand of his enemies, afflicting him with a destroying scourge, in bitterness of soul, because he acted wickedly against his elect.” (*Commentary on Hab 2:8*, Burrows translation)

“This means the wicked priest, who persecuted the teacher of righteousness in order to confound him at the indignation of his wrath, wishing to banish him; and at the time of their festival of rest, the Day of Atonement, he appeared to them to confound them and make them stumble on the day of their fasting, their sabbath of rest.” (*Commentary on Hab 2:15*, Burrows translation)

While the “wicked priest” is not specifically identified, we know his character and destiny:

“The wicked priest, who was named according to the truth when he first took office; but when he had begun to rule in Israel, his heart was lifted up, and he forsook God and betrayed the statutes for the sake of wealth. He plundered and assembled the wealth of men of violence who rebelled against God. He took the wealth of peoples, adding to himself iniquity and guilt; and ways of abominations he wrought, in all impurity of uncleanness.” (*Commentary on Hab 2:5*, Burrows translation)

“God will execute judgment upon him and destroy him, as he plotted to destroy the poor. And as for what it says, ‘for the blood of a city and violence to a land’, this means the city, that is Jerusalem, in which the wicked priest wrought abominable works and defiled God’s sanctuary.” (*Commentary on Hab 2:17*, Burrows translation)

Almost from the time that the scrolls were initially found, the guessing game started – who was the teacher of righteousness? Who was the wicked priest? Among the theories:

- The teacher of righteousness was Onias III, the Chief Priest who was deposed by Syrian King Antiochus Epiphanes in c. 175 B.C. (see Appendix)
- The wicked priest could be Jason, the brother of Onias and successor as high priest, or Menelaus, who succeeded Jason. Menelaus was the patron of Antiochus Epiphanes IV
- The wicked priest could be Alcimus, who slaughtered 60 of the Hasideans during the Maccabean Revolt
- The teacher is Jesus (this early theory in Scroll scholarship seems to have been definitively eliminated, as the “teacher” scrolls date 100 years before the birth of Jesus)
- The teacher and the wicked priest are “super-individual” figures, and do not represent actual historical personages
- Geza Vermes has written that the “Wicked Priest” could only be Jonathan Maccabeus:

“The chronological guidelines established in the preceding section locate the period in which this individual flourished between the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes (175-164 BCE) and the probable date of the foundation at Qumran (150-140 BCE). During that time, five men held the office of High Priest. Three of them were pro-Greek: Jason, Menelaus and Alcimus. The remaining two were the Maccabee brothers, Jonathan and Simon. All the Hellenizers can be eliminated as candidates for the role of ‘Wicked Priest’ since none can be said to have enjoyed anything like good repute at the beginning of their ministry. Jason and Alcimus fail also because neither was killed by an enemy, as implied in 1QpHab VIII-IX. Jason died in exile (2 Mac. v, 7-9) and Alcimus in office (1 Mac. ix, 54-6). The Maccabee brothers, by contrast, meet all the conditions. The careers of both men fall easily into two stages, marked, in the case of Jonathan, by his acceptance of the High Priesthood from Alexander Balas, and in the case of Simon by his willingness to become a hereditary High Priest. Both were also ‘instruments of violence’ and both died by violence. Jonathan is nevertheless to be chosen rather than Simon because he alone suffered the vengeance of the ‘Chief of the Kings of Greece’ and died at the hands of the ‘violent of the nations’, whereas Simon was

murdered by his son-in-law (I Mac. xvi, 14-16). A gallant defender of Jewish religion and independence, Jonathan succeeded the heroic Judas in 161 BCE when the latter fell in battle. But he qualified for the epithet 'Wicked Priest' when he accepted in 153-152 BCE from Alexander Balas, a heathen usurper of the Seleucid throne who had no right to grant them, the pontifical vestments which Jonathan was not entitled to wear. Captured later by a former general of Alexander Balas, Tryphon, he was killed by him at Bascama in Transjordan (1 Mac. xiii, 23)." (*The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, Geza Vermes, p. 60/61)

Under this latter theory, the Teacher of Righteousness was a Zadokite priest who left the Temple in protest when a non-Zadokite, Jonathan, assumed the High priesthood. Unfortunately, this individual's name is lost to history.

Was John the Baptist an Essene?

One of the more enigmatic figures in the New Testament is John the Baptist. First, we're told that John lived in the desert "until he appeared publicly to Israel":

"And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the desert until he appeared publicly to Israel." (Luke 1:80, NIV)

Once he began his ministry, he preached a "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins":

"And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." (Mark 1:4, NIV)



John's baptism attracted enough attention in its time to have been recorded by Jewish historian Josephus 50 years later in his "Jewish Antiquities". Note the emphasis Josephus puts on the "remission of sins" aspect of the baptism.

"2. Now some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod's army came from God, and that very justly, as a punishment of what he did against John, that was called the Baptist: for Herod slew him, who was a good man, and commanded the Jews to exercise virtue, both as to righteousness towards one another, and piety towards God, and so to come to baptism; **for that the washing [with water] would be acceptable to him, if they made use of it, not in order to the putting away [or the remission] of some sins [only], but for the purification of the body;** supposing still that the soul was thoroughly purified beforehand by righteousness..." (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, Book 18, Chapter 5, emphasis added)

With what we now know about the Essenes, could John have been raised an Essene – in the desert – at Qumran? Certainly, the Essenes attached a lot of importance to water purification. Qumran (if, indeed, it was the Essene capitol), had an elaborate system of cisterns, and five ritual baths (Photo: Qumran cistern with steps, Biblical Archaeology Society). And both 1st century secular sources, and the *Manual of Discipline/Community Rule* discuss the importance of water purification:

"He shall be cleansed from all his sins by the spirit of holiness uniting him to His truth, and his iniquity shall be expiated by the spirit of uprightness and humility. **And when his flesh is sprinkled with purifying water and sanctified**



by cleansing water, it shall be made clean by the humble submission of his soul to all the precepts of God.” (*Community Rule*, Vermes translation)

“They shall not enter the water to partake of the pure Meal of the men of holiness, for they shall not be cleansed unless they turn from their wickedness, for all who transgress His Word are unclean.” (*Community Rule*, Vermes translation)

“...and when they have clothed themselves in white veils, they then bathe their bodies in cold water. And after this purification is over...” (Josephus, *Jewish Wars*, Book 2, Chapter 8)

Finally, both the *Manual of Discipline*, and all four Gospels attach special significance to Isaiah 40:3. In the Gospel versions, John is explicitly identified as “A voice of one calling in the desert”

“And when these become members of the Community in Israel according to these rules, they shall separate from the habitation of unjust men and shall go into the wilderness to prepare there the way of Him, as it is written, *Prepare in the wilderness the way of...make straight in the desert a path for our God.*” (*Community Rule*, Vermes translation)

“In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

“A voice of one calling in the desert,
‘Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.’” (Matt 3:1-3, NIV)

It should be noted that there are also two references in the Old Testament that connect water purification with remission of sins - Ez 36:25, Psalms 51:1-3.

So was John the Baptist an Essene? It seems to be a reasonable postulation.

Why aren't the Essenes mentioned in the New Testament

One of the great mysteries of Essene/Scroll scholarship is the fact that the New Testament doesn't mention the Essenes, although it mentions the other three groups of Josephus – Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots. It is especially mysterious given the fact that Josephus wrote more about the Essenes than about the Pharisees and Sadducees combined, and all of the 1st century secular historians wrote about the Essenes with such respect and enthusiasm. Why no Essenes in the New Testament? Here are some possibilities:

- Because the Essenes lived in remote places, Jesus never came in contact with them during his ministry. Plus, with only 4,000 Essenes in the Levant, they made up a very small portion of the population (there were, for example, about 80,000 people living in Jerusalem alone during the time of Christ).
- Some of the apostles of Jesus/followers of John the Baptist were Essenes, so it wasn't thought necessary to identify an “inside” group in the New Testament.
- The Essenes appear somewhere in the New Testament under another name or description (Essenes means something along the lines of “Pious Ones”, “Holy Ones”, or “Healers”).

Jewish monks/Christian monks

Assuming that the group we call the Essenes is the sect described in Philo, Josephus, Pliny, the *Damascus Document*, and the *Manual of Discipline*, we see remarkable similarities between this group,

and later Christian monastics. Some of the rules and attributes of the Essenes that seem to closely parallel the later Christian monastic rules include:

Essenes	Christian monasticism
Abbreviations used: JA = <i>Jewish Antiquities</i> ; JW = <i>Jewish Wars</i> ; MOD = <i>Manual of Discipline</i> , Burrows translation	
They were headed by a “superintendent” or “examiner”, who seemed to be both teacher and Chief Financial Officer	Headed by an Abbot or prior, who had absolute authority - “He is believed to hold the place of Christ in the monastery, since he is addressed by a title of Christ.” (<i>Rule of Benedict</i> , Chapter 2)
Judicial decisions were made by the assembled members of the group	Chapter house - “As often as anything important is to be done in the monastery, the abbot shall call the whole community together and himself explain what the business is; and after hearing the advice of the brothers, let him ponder it and follow what he judges the wiser course.” (<i>Rule of Benedict</i> , Chapter 3)
<p>“Nor is there any one to be found among them who hath more than another; for it is a law among them, that those who come to them must let what they have be common to the whole order...” (Josephus, JW, Book 2, Chapter 8)</p> <p>“If the lot determines that he is to be admitted to the community...his wealth and wages shall be put at the disposal of the man who has supervision over the wages of the masters.” (MOD)</p>	<p>“Above all, this evil practice [private property] must be uprooted and removed from the monastery. We mean that without an order from the abbot, no one may presume to give, receive or retain anything as his own, nothing at all – not a book, writing tablets or stylus – in short, not a single item...” (<i>Rule of Benedict</i>, Chapter 33)</p>
<p>There appears to have been a required two-stage (one year each) probation period for entry into the sect</p> <p>“When he has completed a year within the community, the masters shall be questioned about his affairs...the new member shall not touch the sacred drink of the masters until he has completed a second year</p>	<p>Novitiate periods of varying lengths were required – the Benedictines had a 12-month novitiate period “If after due reflection he promises to observe everything and to obey every command given him, let him be received into the community.” (<i>Rule of Benedict</i>, Chapter 58)</p>

Essenes	Christian monasticism
Abbreviations used: JA = <i>Jewish Antiquities</i> ; JW = <i>Jewish Wars</i> ; MOD = <i>Manual of Discipline</i> , Burrows translation	
among the community of men.” (MOD)	
Tended to live in remote areas or small villages	Tended to live in remote areas or small villages (especially Cistercians, Carthusians)
Prayer was an important element of their daily worship	Day divided into “hours” - Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, Nones, Vespers, Compline - in which prayer was an important element. “Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous laws.” (Psalms 119:164, NIV)
Those that violated Mosaic law and the community rule willfully were excommunicated “Any man of them who transgresses a word of the law of Moses overtly or with deceit shall be dismissed from the council of the community and shall not come back again.” (MOD)	Among the Benedictines, excommunication in degrees - Rebuking in front of the community, exclusion from table and oratory, shunning, “strokes of the rod”, banishment from the community
“...they all dwell together in companies, the house is open to all those of the same notions, who come to them from other quarters...” (Philo)	“The monks are to sleep in separate beds...If possible, all are to sleep in one place...A lamp must be kept burning in the room until morning.” (<i>Rule of Benedict</i> , Chapter 22)
“They neglect wedlock, but choose out other persons’ children, while they are pliable, and fit for learning; and esteem them to be of their kindred, and form them according to their own manners.” (Philo)	Monastic celibacy; children of nobleman (rarely the first born son) were often turned over to monasteries to be raised in the church
“...they shall eat in common and pray in common and deliberate in common...” (MOD)	Communal meals, communal observation of the “hours”, Chapter house
“After this [sunrise] every one of them are sent away by their curators, to exercise some of those arts wherein they are skilled, in which they labor with great diligence till the fifth hour.” (Josephus, JW, Book 2, Chapter 8)	“Idleness is the enemy of the soul. Therefore, the brothers should have specified periods for manual labor as well as for prayerful reading.” (<i>Rule of Benedict</i> , Chapter 48)

Whether the rules of the Essenes were later emulated by St. Benedict or St. Augustine, or rather simply paralleled, we cannot say. But we can say that there were striking similarities between the “Jewish monks” of 2,000 years ago, and Medieval Christian monasticism.

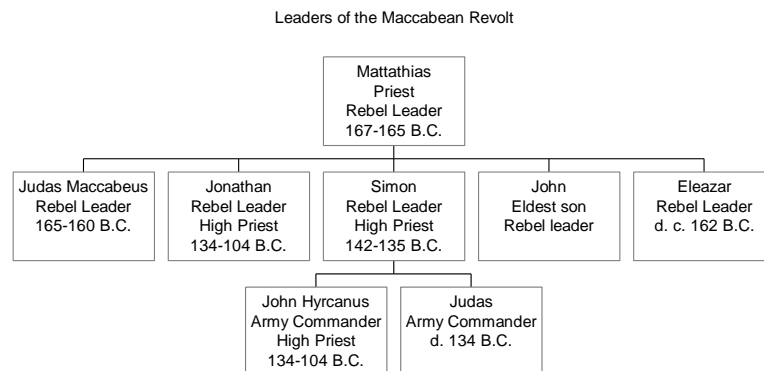
Appendix

Timeline

Date	Event
c. 430 B.C.	Malachi is written (the end of the Old Testament)
334-323 B.C.	Alexander the Great conquers the East
323 B.C.	Alexander the Great dies of a fever, probably after a drinking binge
320 B.C.	Ptolemy 1 of Egypt conquers Jerusalem
c. 250 B.C.	First of the Dead Sea Scrolls are written
200 B.C.	Antiochus III (223-187 B.C.) of Syria defeats Ptolemy V of Egypt and annexes Palestine
c. 188 B.C.	Antiochus III defeated in battle by the Romans, and forced to pay huge war reparations (Peace of Apamea)
175 – 164 B.C.	Rule of Seleucid ruler Antiochus Epiphanes IV, who may have been the prototype for the “abomination that causes desolation” in Daniel
173 B.C.	Jewish High Priest Onias III deposed by Antiochus Epiphanes IV and replaced by his brother Jason (priesthood to the highest bidder)
171 B.C.	Jason ousted by Menelaus as High Priest (priesthood to the highest bidder)
c. 169 B.C.	Antiochus Epiphanes IV loots the Jerusalem Temple treasury
c. 167	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Antiochus Epiphanes IV: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desecrates the Temple in Jerusalem Establishes a military garrison in Jerusalem Maccabean revolt under Judas Maccabeus begins
165 B.C.	Judas defeats Syrian commander Seron at Beth-horon
Dec. 164 B.C.	Judas occupies Temple area, and rededicates it (commemorated by the festival of Hanukkah)
163 A.D.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Judas fights in Idumea (Edomites), Galilee, Transjordan (Ammonites), Philistia Antiochus Epiphanes IV dies during a campaign in Persia; Regent Lysias has prince declared king as Antiochus V Eupator
162 B.C.	Syrian throne seized by Demetrius I; Syrian commander Bacchides occupies Jerusalem, and installs Alcimus as high priest and governor
162-161 B.C.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Syrian King Demetrius sends a new general, Nicanor, against Judas; Judas wins a great victory Judas negotiates treaty with Romans
c. 160 B.C.	Death of Judas in a battle against Bacchides; Brother Jonathan (youngest son of Mattathias) takes command of

Date	Event
	the revolutionary forces
152 B.C.	Jonathan becomes High Priest after cutting a deal with Syrian King Alexander Balas
mid-2 nd century B.C.	Qumran site is re-occupied after a long abandonment
146 B.C.	Jonathan kidnapped, and then murdered by Syrian General Trypho; brother Simon takes command
146-134 B.C.	Rule of Simon as governor and High Priest <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through diplomatic and military successes, Judea is freed from foreign influences (142-141 B.C.) • The sons of Simon, John and Judas, defeat Syrian General Cendebeus • Simon (and his sons Judas and Mattathias) murdered by his son-in-law Ptolemy
141 – 37 B.C.	Rule of the Hasmonean dynasty in Palestine
134-104 B.C.	Rule of John Hyrcanus, eldest son of Simon, as High Priest and ethnarch
103-76 B.C.	Rule of Alexander Jannaeus – breakout of Civil War between pro-Sadducean and Pharisee forces
63 B.C.	Pompey annexes Palestine
63-40 B.C.	Rule of Hyrcanus II
37-4 B.C.	Herod the Great rules as puppet king of Palestine (end of the Hasmonean Dynasty)
68 A.D.	Last of the Dead Sea Scrolls are written

The Maccabean Revolt



The Maccabean Revolt, started in 167 B.C. by a Jewish Priest named Mattathias, was one of the defining moments of Jewish history. One of the high points of the Revolt, the rededication of the Temple, is still commemorated today by the Jewish Festival of Hanukkah.

At the time of the revolt, Palestine was under the control of the Seleucid King Antiochus Epiphanes IV. Antiochus (possibly the “abomination that causes desolation” in Daniel) was 1) hard up for money and 2) determined to Hellenize the territories controlled by him. These two factors would put him on a collision course with the Jews in Palestine.

In order to get more money for his depleted treasury, Antiochus IV on at least one occasion looted the Jerusalem Temple treasury (c. 169 B.C.). This act followed in the footsteps of his predecessor Seleucus IV (187-175 B.C.) who had done the same thing. Antiochus also put the Jerusalem High Priest position up to the highest bidder – High Priests Jason and Menelaus both achieved their positions through bribes to the Seleucid King.

In c. 167 B.C., Antiochus intensified his attempts at Hellenization by desecrating the Temple in Jerusalem. The act is vividly described in 1 Maccabees 1:54-61:

⁵⁴Now on the fifteenth day of Chislev, in the one hundred forty-fifth year, they erected a desolating sacrilege on the altar of burnt offering. They also built altars in the surrounding towns of Judah, ⁵⁵and offered incense at the doors of the houses and in the streets. ⁵⁶The books of the law that they found they tore to pieces and burned with fire. ⁵⁷Anyone found possessing the book of the covenant, or anyone who adhered to the law, was condemned to death by decree of the king. ⁵⁸They kept using violence against Israel, against those who were found month after month in the towns. ⁵⁹On the twenty-fifth day of the month they offered sacrifice on the altar that was on top of the altar of burnt offering. ⁶⁰According to the decree, they put to death the women who had their children circumcised, ⁶¹and their families and those who circumcised them; and they hung the infants from their mothers’ necks.” (NRSV)

These outrages would lead to a revolt that would eventually kick the Seleucids out of Palestine. The revolt was named after the nickname of one of its greatest leaders – Judas Maccabeus, or Judas “the hammer”.

The revolt started when a Priest from Modein named Mattathias refused to commit an apostasy ordered by the King's men in Modein. Mattathias ended up killing both an officer of the king, and a Jew that agreed to commit the apostasy. 1 Maccabees 2:23-28 describes the scene:

²³When he had finished speaking these words, a Jew came forward in the sight of all to offer sacrifice on the altar in Modein, according to the king's command. ²⁴When Mattathias saw it, he burned with zeal and his heart was stirred. He gave vent to righteous anger; he ran and killed him on the altar. ²⁵At the same time he killed the king's officer who was forcing them to sacrifice, and he tore down the altar...
²⁷Then Mattathias cried out in the town with a loud voice, saying: 'Let every one who is zealous for the law and supports the covenant come out with me!' ²⁸Then he and his sons fled to the hills and left all that they had in the town." (NRSV)

Mattathias may have fled to the hills, but a great revolt would grow out his actions. Mattathias would only live for another year, but the revolt would succeed under the leadership of his five sons – John, Simon, Judas, Eleazer, and Jonathan. Three of them would lead the rebel forces in succession (Judas, Jonathan, and Simon), and two would rise to the position of High Priest and Ruler of Judea (Jonathan and Simon).

When Mattathias was on his deathbed, he turned the reins of the revolt over to his son Judas. The scene is described by 1st century Jewish historian Flavius Josephus:

"I exhort you, especially, to agree one with another; and in what excellency any one of you exceeds another, to yield to him so far, and by that means to reap the advantage of every one's own virtues. Do you then esteem Simon as your father, because he is a man of extraordinary prudence, and be governed by him in what counsels he gives you. Take Maccabeus for the general of your army, because of his courage and strength, for he will avenge your nation, and will bring vengeance on your enemies. Admit among you the righteous and religious, and augment their power." (*Jewish Antiquities*, Book 12, Chapter 6)

Judas won a number of battles against the Seleucids, and in December of 164 B.C., Judas occupied the Temple area in Jerusalem, and cleansed and re-dedicated the Temple. After the rededication, the Jewish Festival of Hanukkah was established, and it is still celebrated today. The establishment of the festival is described in 1 Maccabees 4:59:

⁵⁹Then Judas and his brothers and all the assembly of Israel determined that every year at that season the days of dedication of the altar should be observed with joy and gladness for eight days, beginning with the twenty-fifth day of the month of Chislev." (NRSV)

In c. 160 B.C, Judas fell in battle against Seleucid commander Bacchides. 1 Maccabees commemorated the event by using language that had heretofore only been used to describe the great Kings of Israel's past – "How is the valiant man fallen, that delivered Israel!"

The revolt didn't end with the death of Judas Maccabeus, though. His brother Jonathan, and later his brother Simon took over the leadership of the revolt. By skillful manipulation of a state of disorder in the Seleucid line of succession, Jonathan was eventually named High Priest. After his death, his brother Simon took over as ruler, and in c. 142 B.C. the last vestiges of Seleucid control of Israel ended:

⁴¹In the one hundred seventieth year the yoke of the Gentiles was removed from Israel, ⁴²and the people began to write in their documents and contracts, 'In the first year of Simon the great high priest and commander and leader of the Jews.'" (1 Maccabees 13:41-42, NRSV)

Descendents of Mattathias would rule as High Priests and ethnarchs until the time of Herod the Great (37 A.D.) This long period of family rule is known as the Hasmonean Dynasty.

Three books of the Apocrypha record events of the Maccabean Revolt (1, 2, 4 Maccabees).

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About the Author

Robert C. Jones grew up in the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania area. He made his living as a hotel lounge band leader/musician from 1974-1981. In 1981, he moved to the Atlanta, Georgia area, where he received a B.S. in Computer Science at DeVry Institute of Technology. From 1984-2009, Robert worked for Hewlett-Packard as a computer consultant.



Robert is an ordained elder in the Presbyterian Church. He has written and taught numerous adult Sunday School courses (see front inside cover). He has also been active in choir ministries over the years, and has taught the *Disciples* Bible Study five times.

Robert is also President of the Kennesaw Historical Society, for whom he has written several books, including "The Law Heard 'Round the World - An Examination of the Kennesaw Gun Law and Its Effects on the Community", "Retracing the Route of the General - Following in the Footsteps of the Andrews Raid", and "Kennesaw (Big Shanty) in the 19th Century". A new book, "Images of America: Kennesaw", was published by Arcadia in 2006.

Robert has also written several books on ghost towns in the Southwest, including in Death Valley, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, and Mojave National Preserve.

In 2005, Robert co-authored a business-oriented book entitled "Working Virtually: The Challenges of Virtual Teams". His co-authors were Lise Pace and Rob Oyung.

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