

Who were the Essenes?

The Essenes were a Jewish mystical sect somewhat resembling the Pharisees. They lived lives of ritual purity and separation. They originated about 100 B.C., and disappeared from history after the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The Essenes are not directly mentioned in Scripture, although some believe they may be referred to in Matthew 19:11, 12 and in Colossians 2:8, 18, and 23. Interest in the Essenes was renewed with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which were likely recorded and stored by the Essenes.

It has been popular among some scholars to claim that John the Baptist was an Essene. There are some similarities between John and the Essenes: 1. John was in the desert (Luke 1:80). The Essenes were in the desert. 2. Both John and the Essenes used Isaiah 40:3 to describe themselves as the voice in the wilderness. 3. The baptism (or washing) practiced by John and the Essenes required a change of heart. At the same time, there are significant differences between John the Baptist and the Essenes: 1. The Essenes hid themselves away from society in the wilderness. John was a very public figure. 2. John had a much stricter diet (Luke 7:33) than did the Essenes. 3. John preached Jesus as the Messiah. The Essenes did not recognize Jesus as Messiah, but they thought that the Teacher of Righteousness would himself be an Essene. 4. There was a strong organization among the Essenes that was missing among John the Baptist's disciples. So, was John the Baptist an Essene? While it is possible, it cannot be explicitly proven either biblically or historically.

The Essenes as a sect of Judaism do not exist today. However, there are fringe groups that call themselves Essenes. One such group is the Essene Church of Christ, which declares itself to be "the authorized custodians and chief disseminators of the true teachings of Lord Christ and Lady Christ." They share similarities with all cults and

false religions: their "holy book" is something other than the Bible; they rely heavily on mysticism and occult revelation; they believe they and they alone possess truth; they deny the Trinity; and they deny biblical doctrines including original sin, heaven, hell, and salvation through Christ. As purveyors of false doctrine, modern "Essenes" are to be avoided.