

Essenes, Herodians and Zealots

By John Schneier

Essenes



The Essenes were a contemplative sect of Jews during the time of Christ. Lamenting the worldliness and banality of everyday life in Palestine, they resided in the outlying deserts, preparing for the “end days.” They lived in complete isolation from the Jewish community, angry over their impurities in worship, ritual law and overall wickedness in daily living. Stoic in their beliefs, rituals and values, they carried on their lives in a spirit of “true purity,” intending to be a “remnant” of sorts for the Jews. The Essenes abandoned Jerusalem out of protest

Even though it can't be proven, from what we know about John the Baptist in Sacred Scripture, it can be at least inferred that he exhibited many of the lifestyle characteristics of the Essenes. Contemplation, isolation and purification were the constant themes of his life, themes extremely similar to the Essenes. He lived a sort of hermetic life in the desert, preaching for the purification of Israel for the coming of the Savior.

“CATHOLIC ENCYCLOPEDIA: Essenes” At New Advent,
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05546a.htm>. 9
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Herodians



One of the many sects that existed throughout the time of Christ, the Herodians were distinctive in their support and allegiance to the Jewish King Herod and his familial descendents. Thus, they were more of a political alliance than one dealing with religious issues. Because Herod received all of his authority from the Roman government, the Herodians were also extremely supportive of the Romans along with the Sadducees. Because the Herodian dynasty of kings had a primarily foreign influence, the Herodians were seen as the primary enemies of the Essenes because of their role in the desecration of Judaism, according to the Essenes. The Herodians also saw Jesus as a threat to the political power of Herod and the Romans, prompting them to join the Pharisees in their quest for his execution. They are mentioned repeatedly in the Gospels, particularly in his discourse concerning “what belongs to Caesar.”

(Mark 12: 13-17, RSV)

Zealots



On the opposite end of the Spectrum of the Sadducees were the Zealots. Violently opposed to the foreign occupation of Palestine by Roman forces, they worked not only for the expulsion of the Romans, but for the elimination of any Roman sympathizers. Thus, they were hated by the Sadducees and the followers of the foreign-born Herodian line of kings. At their height, around the rebellion against the Romans in 66-70 AD, the Zealots sometimes turned to terrorism to accomplish their goals. Some of the more notable Zealots were St. Simon (called the Zealot in Matthew 10 and Mark 3, to distinguish him from Simon Peter) and Barabbas, the prisoner exchanged for Christ, at the discretion of Pontius Pilate.

(Matthew 10: 4, Mark 3: 18, *NAB*)

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/656131/Zealot>