

## ANCIENT DESCRIPTIONS OF THE ESSENES

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**Philo of Alexandria, in *Quod Omnis Probus Liber* 75-87, written circa 20 A.D.** – They were a sect of Jews, and lived in Syria Palestine, over 4000 in number, and called *Essaei*, because of their saintliness; for *hosio* = saintly, is the same word as *Essaeus*. Worshipers of God, they yet did not sacrifice... accumulated not gold or silver, nor owned mines... Least of all were any slaves found among them...their conduct was regulated by the laws of their fathers, which could not possibly have been conceived by the human soul without divine inspiration... they sat down in ranks, the older ones above the younger. ...Another, who was very learned in the Bible, would expound whatever was obscure in the lesson read, explaining most things in the tradition of the past by means of symbol (allegory). [They lived their lives by the avoiding of oaths, by veracity... their equality, their fellowship passing all words. For no one had his private house, but shared his dwelling with all... they threw open their doors to any of their sect who came their way. They had a storehouse, common expenditure, common raiments, and common food eaten in common meals. The aged among them were objects of reverence and honor, and treated by the rest as parents by real children.

**Pliny the Elder (circa 70 A.D.), in *Historica Naturalis*, book v, chapter 17** – The *Hessenes* live on the western side away from the shores (of the Dead Sea)...They live without woman renouncing all sexual love. They eschew money, and live among the palm-trees...for thousands of ages (strange to tell) the race is perpetuated, and yet no one is born in it. Below them lay Ein-Gadi...Next comes Masada, a fort on a rock, and, like the former, not far from the Dead Sea. And here ends our account of Judea.

**Josephus *History of the Jewish War* II:119-161 (vii, 2-14)** – 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 aspires to a severer discipline, are called the Essenes. These last are Jews by birth, and seem to have a greater affection for one another than the other sects have. These Essenes reject pleasures as an evil... 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 from them according to their own manners... These men were despisers of riches... those who come to them must let what they have be in common to the whole order... and if any of their sect come from other places, what they have lies about 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. 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... The management of their bodies is such as children use who are in fear of their masters... [They] offer up certain prayers which they have received from their forefathers... [and] they then bathe their bodies in cold water. And after this purification is over, they every one meet together in an apartment of their own, into which it is not permitted to any of another sect to enter; while they go, after a pure manner, into which it is not permitted to another sect

to enter; while they go; after a pure manner, into the dining-room, as into a certain holy temple, and quietly set themselves down... a priest says grace before meat... They dispense their anger after a just manner, and restrain their passion. ... Whatsoever they say also is finer 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. But now, if any one hath in 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, while he continues excluded; and they give him a small hatchet, and the aforementioned girdle, and the white garment. And when he hath given evidence, during that time, that he can observe their continence he approaches nearer to their way of living, and is made a partaker of the waters of purification; yet is he not even now admitted to live with them; for after this demonstration of his fortitude, his temper is tried two more years, and if he appears to be worthy, they then admit him into their society. And before he is allowed to touch their common food, he is obliged to take tremendous oaths; that, in the first place, he will do no harm to anyone, either of his own accord, or by the command of others; that he will always hate the wicked, and be assistant to the righteous; that he will ever sow fidelity to all men, and especially to those in authority, because no one obtains the government without God's assistance... that he will neither conceal anything from those of his own sect, nor disclose any of their doctrines to others, no, not though anyone should compel him so to do at the hazard of his life. Moreover, he swears to communicate their doctrines to no one any otherwise than as he received them himself; that he will abstain from robbery, and will equally preserve the books belonging to their sect, and the names of the angels... [T]hose that are caught in any heinous sins, they cast them out of their society... They also think it a good thing to obey their elders... [T]hey are stricter than any other of the Jews in resting from their labors on the seventh day... they will not remove any vessel out of its place, nor go to stool thereon... they dig a small pit, a foot deep with a paddle (which kind of hatchet is given them when they are first admitted among them); and covering themselves round with their garment, that they may not affront the divine rays of light, they releave themselves into that pit, after which they put the earth that was dug out again into the pit; and even this they do only in the more lonely places, which they choose out of for this purpose; and although this easement of the body be natural, yet it is a rule with them to immerse themselves after it, as if it were a defilement to them. [A]s for death, if will be for their glory, they esteem it better than living always... resigned up their souls... expecting to receive them again. For their doctrine is this: the souls are immortal... they allot to bad souls a dark and tempestuous den, full of never-ceasing punishments... they hope they have reward after their death... bad men... suffer immortal punishment after their death. 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.

***Antiquities of the Jews XVIII: 18-22 (I, 5)*** - ...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...

*Antiquities of the Jews XV: 373-379 (x, 5)* – Menahem...had the foreknowledge of the future events given by God...Herod was satisfied with these replies, and gave Menahem his hand, and dismissed him; and from that time he continued to honor all the Essenes. ...many of these Essenes have, by their excellence virtue, been thought worthy of this knowledge of divine revelations.