



The Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls

New Covenant Lutheran Church
February/March 2026
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Session 5: Celibacy, Marriage and Priesthood

What do you think of when you hear/read the word “celibacy”?



Perfect Holiness

Ancient historians, like Josephus, Philo and Pliny, remarked how unusual it was for Essenes to be celibate. (These 3 ancient historians tell us Essenes were celibate, but their surviving literature does not.)

1QS 5:1-7

Not because being celibate meant they couldn't have sex. But because an all-male group can't sustain itself, yet the Essenes have sustained themselves by other means.



Perfect Holiness

Essenes thought they were the true Priesthood, that their compound at Qumran was the true Temple, in fact that it was the true “Holy of Holies”

Therefore, they had to be truly holy to serve in and live in the Holy of Holies. They had to be as Holy as the High Priest who served in the Holy of Holies, by following the Law strictly.

Following the Law strictly, includes the Law prohibiting sex between a married Priest and his wife, because they were ritually impure for 1 day after sex.

Since the whole compound was the Holy of Holies to Essenes, they had to avoid anything the Law said made them unclean for any length of time.

Perfect holiness included celibacy, but Not defined by celibacy.



Celibacy

Some OT prophets were celibate

Jesus, Paul and John the Baptist were celibate

**Temple Priests had to be temporarily celibate while serving
in the Temple**

**Despite the Jewish mantra “be fruitful and multiply”
celibacy was honored**

Holiness in the Camps

Those Essenes who married, who lived in the “camps” in cities throughout Israel lived in accordance with the Law (as taught by the Essenes). CD 7: 4-7

“another order of the Essenes” Josephus War 2: 160

There were men, women and children (families) Essenes.

In Jerusalem, there was an Essene neighborhood/”quarter”

Because Jerusalem held the Temple, the Jerusalem Quarter was mostly celibate men who strove toward “perfect holiness”

But Essene families lived there as well.(we don’t know the percentages of each group here or throughout Israel.)



Holiness in the camps

Archaeology has shown us there is an “Essene Gate” in Jerusalem.

A short distance outside that gate archaeologist found a ritual baths and a latrine.

Archaeologists also found Essene graves nearby.

Archaeologists have also traced a path from the Essene Gate all the way down to Qumran.



Holiness in the camps

Essenes in the camps followed the Essene Rules version of the Law.

Ritually bathed frequently to restore/maintain holiness.

Wherever there were at least 10 men, there had to be at least one priest.

CD 13:3



Marriage

Essenes seem to pattern their belief about marriage from the Book of Tobit

More egalitarian, more romantic than Judaism

Christian marriage is more similar to Essene concepts than Judaism concepts

Marriage

Tobin 8:4-8

Paul Ephesians 5:21-25

**Today, we get all hung up on “Wives, be subject to your husbands”
but ancients weren’t and that isn’t what would have made Paul’s
teaching new/controversial**

Paul addresses women directly as their own moral agent

Even more startling to ancients is the emphasis on Love

**Jewish and Greco-Roman culture would find the emphasis on Love
revolutionary, and yet Greco-Roman culture would ultimately adopt
the love ideal between man and woman over their ideal of love
between man and boy**



Divorce

Essene reading of OT, Mosaic law rules regarding divorce and Jesus view are strictest

Deuteronomy 24:1-4—What it says and what it doesn't say

More strict than Pharisees Rabbi Shammai or Rabbi Hillel

Rabbi Shammai strict, literal

Rabbi Hillel sought to find legal principles that were easier to observe in practice

Jesus Mark 10:2-12

Priesthood

Essenes and early Christians had a priesthood within the priesthood

Priesthood of all believers and leadership priesthood

Threefold Clerical Leadership

OT priesthood:

High Priest

Priests

Levites

Essenes:

Overseer

Priests

Levites

NT Church:

Bishop

Presbyters

Deacons

NT and earliest church fathers developed this leadership hierarchy

Jesus declares Himself to have the special status at the top of the hierarchy Matthew 12:1-6; 16:13-19

Priesthood

The Teacher of Righteousness at Qumran

Priestly family of Levi, a Zadokite

Zadok, descendent of Aaron, Ezekiel 40:46

At Qumran, all were considered priests...but there was a hierarchy within the Yahad 1QS 2:20-23

- 1. Priests—ranked “according to the perfection of their spirit”**
- 2. Levites**
- 3. Children of Israel**
- 4. Proselytes**

They enter in this order, they sit in this order, they inquire in this order



Priesthood

Luke 22:24

Jesus' disciples trying to rank themselves

Like the Essenes, Jesus said Whoever wants to be the greatest has to be the last, and the last will be the greatest.

Unlike the Essenes, Jesus meant it.

The slide features a yellow banner at the top with the word "Priesthood" in large, bold, black font. Below the banner, the text is centered and consists of four lines of bold, black text. The background is white with a repeating pattern of small, light-colored icons, including various symbols like arrows, circles, and geometric shapes. A green curved line with a black dot at its end is positioned at the top left, overlapping the yellow banner.

Priesthood

So, we are all Priests!

Do you feel like a priest?

Do you try to “rank” yourself?

Do you feel any additional responsibility?