

Contemporary Mystic Christianity Bible Self-Study Supplement

The mystic sage, Emerson, says: "When a child comes forth from its mother's womb, the gate of gifts closes behind it." To a woman who learns to surround herself and fill her consciousness with only the good, the beautiful and the true, an unworthy ego cannot come; the strength of her love and aspiration will draw to her, unerringly one who is worthy of her ideals.

Prelude to the Gospels

"God Moves in Mysterious Ways"

The four hundred years that separate the Old Testament from the New have been referred to inaccurately as the "silent" centuries. The Old Testament closes with the events recorded in Ezra and Nehemiah and the New Testament opens with the birth of Christ Jesus.

God moves in mysterious ways His wonders to perform. Divine guidance may be seen through calamity as well as through prosperity. The Babylonian exile was a time of growth and preparation. Cyrus in 527 B.C. gave to Persia the mastery of the East; his first act was to sanction the return of the Jews and their rebuilding of the Temple. The restoration of Jerusalem took place between 444-332 B.C.

Alexander and the Dispersion

Alexander the Great, king of Macedonia, built new cities along the Mediterranean. To these came large numbers of Babylonian captives as soon as the cities were thrown open to Jewish colonists. The Dispersion (332-301 B.C.) is mentioned in the Epistles of both Peter and James.

At the death of Alexander his empire was divided among his generals. Egypt and Palestine became the possession of the Ptolemies, and were captured in 198 B.C. by the Syrians. The reign of Antiochus IV was a time of bitter persecution and cruelty for those who aspired to keep alive the light of the new age. During this time many teachers and seers were raised up to give help and encouragement to the faithful, though they were compelled to perform their work in secret and to remain unknown. This dark period is responsible for many of the apocryphal books, all of which bear an inner significance hidden beneath historical data. The Book of Daniel was one of these so written that those who were able to interpret between the lines might find strength, courage, and a renewed inspiration, despite all persecutions and atrocities, to press on and become worthy to pass unharmed through the fiery furnace and to face undaunted the lion's den.

The Book of Maccabees (the hammer) is also a product of this period of persecution. An edict had been issued that everyone refusing to worship the Greek gods or to make

sacrifices to them should be imprisoned and later burned at the stake. This led those of the non-conformist faith to seek safety in unfamiliar and secluded places, from which they came forth in open rebellion upon hearing of an assault that had been made on an aged priest named Matthias. This elder of Israel lived with his three sons, Simon, Jonathan, and Judas in a mountain village named Modern, about twenty miles north of Jerusalem. The Syrian officers demanded that Matthias renounce God, and at the same time a renegade Jew attempted to desecrate the altar. Thereupon Matthias struck down both the officer and the Jew. This incident so aroused the persecuted people that they came forth from their hiding places by the thousands, marching and singing through the country, destroying idols and restoring the religion of Jehovah. The Book of Maccabees which records this uprising is a wonderfully inspiring record of high courage, daring fearlessness, and supreme dedication to the ideals of the spirit.

The grand old Matthias was succeeded at death by his son Judas. Judas was a military genius and waged successful battle with the Syrians, driving them out of the country even though their army outnumbered his ten to one. He used the one hundred and thirty-sixth Psalm as a national anthem. (The purpose of a national anthem is to attract, conserve, and focus the forces of a Race Spirit for the benefit of its people.) Jehovah, being the Race Spirit of

the Jews, was thus able to render powerful aid. It is significant that the army of Judas entered Jerusalem on December 25th. Amid great rejoicings they re-dedicated the Temple and restored the service just three years after its destruction by Antiochus (165 B.C.). This event is still commemorated, on what is now Christmas Day, as the Feast of Lights or the Feast of the Dedication, although Hebrew scholars say there is evidence that this Feast dates at least from the Exile, if not earlier.

The momentous happenings of these so-called silent centuries were all a preparation for the one supreme event, *the coming of the world Saviour*.

Four years after the Restoration, Judas fell on the field of battle. He was succeeded by his brother Jonathan, after whose rule came that of Simon, and the golden age of Jerusalem (143-105 B.C.) Simon was a father to his people and under his regime came peace, happiness, and prosperity.

The Essenes

During this time there appeared on the banks of the Jordan, that mystic Brotherhood known as the Essenes, a small sect, numbering about four or five thousand. It existed in the days of the Jonathan Maccabees, and constituted one of the three dominant Jewish sects, the

other two being the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Philo, the Hellenistic philosopher born in Alexandria 20 B.C. and who lived until 60 A.D., was an Essenian

Members of the Essene Order did not lay up treasures of silver or gold, but provided themselves only with the necessities of life. They regarded contentment of mind as the greatest of riches. They made no instruments of war and repudiated every inducement to covetousness. There were no slaves, but all were free, equal, and served each other. They were instructed in piety, holiness, righteousness, and economy; guided by a three-fold rule — love of God, love of mankind, and love of virtue. Their love of God was manifested beautifully in their constant and unalterable holiness of life. Their love of virtue showed itself in their indifference to money, fame, and pleasure; also in their life of chastity, simplicity, and modesty. Their love of man was exemplified in benevolence, equality, reverence, and care of the aged. There was neither abject poverty nor great wealth among them. They despised riches and held all things in common. Strangers were always welcomed as brothers, without money and without price. All living things were to them a part of God's life and therefore sacred.

It was their highest ideal to become fit temples for the Holy Ghost (I Cor. 6:19), to perform miraculous cures, and to become worthy forerunners of the Messiah. They were

taught humility and purity as the chief virtues and they lived in retirement from the world.

They regarded the body as the soul's prison house, and sought trials and difficulties, rejoicingly for they had learned that "wisdom is crystallized pain." They gloried in martyrdom, preaching and singing to God even in their sufferings. They not only forgave their enemies but sought to benefit them, and blessed even the criminals despite their destruction of life and property. Their food consisted chiefly of bread, water, wild roots, and fruit. They neither ate meat nor wore woolens. The habitual garment was the flowing white robe of linen such as was worn by the Master when He came to John for baptism.

The rising and the setting Sun marked times for sacred ceremonials, when the solar orb was greeted with hymns of praise. The Essenes adhered strictly to the rule of never using the power of the spoken word before sunrise unless it pertained to holy matters. All meals were considered a holy sacrament and were begun and finished with prayer. The teaching held paramount was complete control of all passion and emotion, and its importance was stressed from the very beginning even in the training of the youngest neophytes.

Members of this Holy Order served their fellow men in a threefold capacity; namely,, that of minister, prophet, and

physician. As ministers they brought peace to the soul; as physicians, healing to the body; and as prophets, predictions that seldom failed of fulfillment. The holy and beautiful life of the Essenes exemplified the words of the Master when He said, "He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it, and he that saveth his life shall lose it." In renouncing the temporal life they won for themselves the glory of that, which is eternal.

The Essenes required of their candidates a three-year period of probation. They were grouped into four classes, two for celibates and two for married members. Before candidates were admitted to the inner Mysteries they were obliged to pass three days and three nights in meditation in a lonely grotto. The only food and drink permitted was fruit, bread, and water. They were called Therapeutes, meaning "servant healers." Their salutation was, "Peace be with you." The largest community was near Alexandria in a lonely valley by the sea of Moria.

Such was the devout piety of this mystic order which lived several hundred years before the advent of the Christ, their purpose to prepare the way for His coming. Joseph and Mary were high Essenian Initiates. John the Baptist and Jesus were reared under their care. They protected Joseph, Mary, and Jesus during their flight and stay in Egypt, and helped and protected the disciples and the Seventy who

went out without purse or script. They were found throughout Judea and Egypt and were absorbed into the Christian sect after the Ascension.

The Essenes were teachers and messengers of the esoteric, or secret teachings, of the new and deeper phases of religion. They did for their age, country, and religion what similar Schools and Orders have done in like manner before and since their time. The inner teachings are always present and available to those who qualify to receive them. In Judges the esoteric body was known as the Nazarenes; in Kings they are referred to as the School of the Prophets; and in Maccabean times they were called Hasidees. It was in the holy time of Christ Jesus that this unbroken line of interpreters of the veiled truths of spiritual realities became known as Essenes, or as the name signifies, "children of peace."

The other two sects previously referred to, namely the Pharisees and the Sadducees, were the representative exoteric groups of the time. They held to the letter of the law and were bound by formalism in worship. Both sects occupy a conspicuous place in the history of the Gospels, and both received the most scathing denunciations of the Christ.

The word "Sadducees" is probably derived from "Zadokites" or "Sons of Zadox." Zadox was a priest in

Jerusalem in the time of David and Solomon, and his sons represented the hereditary priesthood. When the Maccabean rulers also became high priests the entire priestly group became their adherents and were then called Zadokites and later Sadducees. The Sadducees did not believe in a future life nor in the immortality of the soul.

During the Exile a group called the Levites worked with and developed the art of music and song. They came to bear the name Hasidim which means "saints" or "pious ones." They also developed the observance of the Sabbath and various feast days. Their work was beautifully spiritual in its inception, and music was used to accelerate the neophyte's spiritual development through rhythm and harmony. Later the work began to degenerate through the circumscription of form and ceremonial which was prominent in the days of Christ Jesus. They thus became rigid adherents to written and traditional law. During the degeneracy of the priests of the Syrian rule, they organized themselves into a separate group, described in II Maccabees as "The Assembly of the Hasidim." As later Maccabean high priests made political power their chief object, they withdrew entirely, and their opponents, the Sadducees, ironically termed them Pharisees, or separatists, which name remained with them throughout the remainder of their history. In their punctilious observance of the letter of the law they neglected the

practice of fellowship, justice and mercy, and thus drew upon themselves the Master's denunciation.

The Sadducees were interested primarily in the increase of political power and cared little for religion. The Pharisees were centered chiefly in the preservation of religious ceremonial and ritual. They were the men of long and loud prayers. They had no political ambitions.

These two factions of exoteric religion were in constant conflict, yet together they composed the principal religious tribunal of the time, the Sanhedrin. This body was composed of seventy-one members drawn from the two opposing parties. The Sadducees were wealthy aristocrats; to them belonged King Herod who persecuted Jesus. The Pharisees came from the people. The predominant power in the Sanhedrin depended upon which party was in control.

In the Essenes rested great spiritual power. True to the manner in which all spiritual undertakings are accomplished, they worked quietly and unostentatiously. From their ranks came John the Baptist, the forerunner, the "herald of glad tidings." Two of their highest initiates came out into the world and became the parents of the most Holy Child, Jesus.

It is possible to trace the origin of this Holy Order for thousands of years. When the Sun last passed through

Taurus at the Vernal Equinox and was approaching the cusp of Aries, the Sign of the Lamb, about 2000 B.C., there appeared in Egypt a new order of rulership under the Hyksos or Shepherd Kings, invaders from Arabia. Manetho, the famous and wise historian, tells us that these kings ruled for many years and that Egypt was indebted to them for much useful knowledge and great expansion of artistic endeavor.

As Abraham's chronology is placed at about 1900 B.C., it is evident that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the sons of Jacob, all belong to this period. Manetho states that the 15th and 16th Dynasties were Hyksos Dynasties. It was during the rulership of these Semitic Hyksos kings that Joseph became Prime Minister of Egypt. During this time Egypt was the principal home of the Mysteries, whose esoteric signature is given in the sign Libra, the sign which is descending in the west when its opposite, Aries, is rising in the east. For such is the rule of the heavens: as the sign of the Vernal Equinox governs the outer, exoteric affairs, its opposite, the sign of the Autumnal Equinox governs the inner, esoteric, or initiatory development. Thus the kingship of Egypt, as the Taurian Age declines, passes into the hands of the Shepherd Kings, when the initiatory work is figured in Libra.

The Theban monarchs succeeded in expelling this foreign dynasty in 1600 B.C., however, and Egypt then entered upon a five-hundred year period of military conquest — a condition very typical of the Aries influence on a primitive level.

The Israelites under Moses were driven out by Amasis I, founder of the 18th Dynasty, and with this event we observe materialism finally superseding the things of Spirit in the land of Egypt: Akhnaton, the great Pharaoh of monotheism is persecuted and his religion destroyed after him, while the Light passes down into the Land of Canaan with Moses and the children of Israel, and the decline of Egypt has begun.

According to an obscure tradition, the mystic Shepherd Kings after their expulsion from Egypt, gathered in a certain place named Avaris and remained there for a time, the Egyptians being unable to dislodge them. Later they passed through the wilderness into Syria and into a country now known as Judea, where they erected a city afterwards called Salem and where, much later, Melchizedek bestowed upon Abraham the mystic rites of the Order. This city became known later as Jerusalem, the holy spot that for thousands of years had been impregnated with mighty spiritual forces generated by wise and holy men in preparation for the coming of Christ Jesus.

It was in Jerusalem that Christ ordained His most advanced disciples in this same Order of Melchizedek. This was His last work upon the earth. Unheralded and unsung, members of this sacred Order appear from time to time when benighted humanity has special need for their services. Their ministry is unceasing, though often unseen and unrecognized. Jerusalem, the spiritual center of the world, is constantly being flooded with their emanations of light and power. And there again upon the banks of the Jordan, beside the Sea of Galilee, and in the environs of the Holy City, these same Shepherd Kings will establish, together with the Master Jesus and the Disciples, the greatest spiritual school the world has ever known. This will be in preparation for the glorious day of the second coming, which the mystic city of Jerusalem shall know even as it knew His first coming.

— ***Corinne Heline***