

Religious Beliefs in Ephesus

“Spiritual Disneyland”

Judaizers: meant to live as a Jew in accordance with Jewish customs

- Some Jewish Christians had some doubts as to whether
- Gentile Christians could be regarded as people of God if they did not conform to the requirements of the Law.
- Many of the people had themselves circumcised and practiced Judaism because of their fear of the Jews

Ephesus: Judaism mixed with the early stages of Gnosticism

“The Circumcision Party” combined the demand for Gentile adherence to the Law and an ascetic ritualism with a zeal for visions of angels, with some Gnosticizing tendencies to promote an experience of divine wisdom and knowledge and to depreciate matter and physical resurrection and redemption.

- They claimed to be teachers of the Law 1Tim 1:7
- They leaned less towards circumcision but more towards forbidding marriage and promoted food laws 1Tim 4:3
- Claimed to impart a spiritual knowledge” (gnosis) whose source was, in the words of an oracle applied to them (demonic spirits) 1Tim 4:1-3/6:20
- Denied Christ’s resurrection, His physical incarnation and death. (this became a full blown Gnostic belief in the 2nd century) Source: dictionary of Paul and his letters

Greek Mythology & Idolatry

Ancient beliefs rooted in myth’s of the gods dwelling on earth like humans and often living in ungodly and immoral lifestyles.

- **Bachus:** god of wine and patron of the arts; worshipped through drunken orgies and feasts.
- **Cybele:** was one of the mother goddesses. Men who wanted to enter temple priesthood were required to undergo a ritual sex change, these were called Eunuchs.
- **Artemis/
Aphrodite:** goddess of fertility and childbirth; worshipped through sex with temple prostitutes, they were worshipped in 33 places all over the world. Ephesus temple was the greatest of all.
- **Gnosticism** (gnosis = knowledge) (Gnostics = the knowing ones)
 - A combination of Greek philosophy mixed with other religions, especially Judaism and later Christianity. It was in its early developing stages during the Epistles but by the late 100’s A.D. and it was a serious threat to Christianity.
 - Simon Magus was the father of Gnosticism (Acts 8:9-24)

Beliefs: Dualistic philosophy – All matter is evil, only spirit is good.

- There is complete separation of God and the world.
- Whoever created the world is evil, He is not the true good God
- God could not touch evil matter, so He could not directly create the world.
- He sent out a series of emanations of Himself, the last emanation in this chain was the Hebrew God.
- Ialdabaoth was His name. He could deal with evil matter and created the world.
- He was ignorant, arrogant and evil. Since He is evil anything He says should be rebelled against.
- In the garden of Eden, the serpent was the hero because he brought Adam and Eve out of deception the creator placed them in.
- The serpent showed them knowledge (gnosis) the way to salvation.
- Eve was the mediator between the serpent and man that brought knowledge to Adam and the human race.

Female spiritual principal: “Divine Mother” that teaches Eve, who then teaches Adam.

- Focus on feminine mediators that helped men get more knowledge (gnosis) that brought them closer to God.

Lifestyle:

- Asceticism or Libertinism
- To Gnostics sin was never the problem of humans but rather ignorance.

Christianity:

- Jesus was the son of the true good God; He brought knowledge from the true good God. Jesus becomes a teacher, a revealer and a spiritual master. Some Gnostic writers said the crucifixion was not actually Jesus. Others said it was only His fleshly part, but He hovered above the cross and laughed. Some said Jesus never actually had a body, but was a spirit that adapted him self to human eyes. He never left footprints and He never blinked.

Greek Philosophy/Syncretism “Mystery Religions”

The attempted blending together of different beliefs and practices

- Mystery religions crept in Ephesus and the rest of Asia Minor through the concept of Cosmological Dualism which came in from Persia and also the Greeks (Plato)
 - **Reason:** people wanted to know how to deal with an evil world and a good God, questioning how God could be good if there is suffering, death, wars, social injustices etc...
 - **Result:** Mystery religions offered a way of salvation from an unspiritual earthly existence.
- **Cosmological Dualism:** separation of heavenly and earthly spheres.
 - The belief that the created world was evil and was totally separate from, and in opposition to the world of spirit.
 - Heaven being the spiritual sphere of all good things, and Earth, material things and man, being evil sphere of pain and suffering.
 - The supreme God dwelt in unapproachable splendor in this spirit world, and had no dealings with the world of matter.
 - Only those initiated or granted special “secret knowledge” could escape their earthly existence.
- **Heaven, Spirit, → __, __, __, __, __, __, __, 7 Spheres → Earth**
 - Gap = “Fullness” for that sphere (Pleroma)
 - 7 spheres separate man from God. Each sphere is ruled by principalities and powers who guard the spheres by barring the souls who are seeking to ascend to a higher level in escape from the realm of darkness below.
- **Elemental Spirits:** Earth, Water, Fire, Air
 - These were spirit powers that were thought to be controlling the affairs of the natural world.
 - They can be described as personal beings and were thought to control a person’s fate, controlling the heavenly realm and a person’s access to it.
 - People lived in fear of these spirit’s, these spirits must be appeased before one could attain to higher spirituality

Ephesians may have been tempted to believe that they needed more than Jesus to be set free from them.

- **Asceticism:** Believed matter is evil, the body is evil, only spirit is good.
 - The practice of renouncing the comforts of society. Leading a life of self-denial or self-discipline
 - Adopted strict food laws to keep the desires of the body minimal. Things such as fasting were done to reach the spiritual sphere and escape the evil earthly presence.
 - Physical denial was a means of preparation for visionary experience and participation in angelic worship with angels. These visions were a means of gaining fullness of salvation, reaching divine presence and obtaining esoteric “secret” knowledge
 - People thought the body was evil, so to be spiritual they needed to punish the body, they also forbid marriage.

They did not understand that they were created in the image of God. So they went to extremes with strange rituals to have a spiritual experience. They were trying to fill the gap to achieve fullness by their own works.

- **Libertinism:** opposite of asceticism. It led to a licentious lifestyle with no moral boundaries.
 - The body is of no eternal importance, it is completely disconnected
 - They indulged their bodies in every pleasure they could.
- **Salvation:** it was not defined as the forgiveness of sin, but the ascent of the soul. Either at death or through special or esoteric “secret” knowledge and through ecstatic experience, during ones lifetime a person could “transcend”. Sexual intercourse was a common ecstatic experience, considered to be an act of worship like in the worship of Artemis. Ceremonial washings, sacramental meals, astrology, blood sprinkling, all rituals to obtain this salvation.

Asian Mysticism

- These mystery religions influences were from conquest and trade with the orient, reaching the Roman Empire around 300 B.C.
 - These various cults tried to escape earthly existence through Magic, Arts or Esoteric Knowledge.
 - Mithras cult was the most popular in the Roman Empire.
- **Rituals:**
 - Cults practiced these to gain spiritual experiences and the hope of union with a god would deliver you, such as by ceremonial washings, sacramental meals, astrology, orgies, blood sacrifices, ecstatic worship.
- **Seven Spheres:**
 - Adaptation of Greek dualism, but more added with seven layers between this earthly and the spiritual planes.
 - The gap between the spheres “fullness” people believed each sphere was ruled by powers and principalities that guard each sphere and must be appeased or defeated to pass by to the next sphere.

Roman Religion

- Mostly they just copied the ancient Greek gods and myths and gave them a Latin names
- Emperor Cult: Promoted first by Augustus, deified the Caesar and set up temples all around the Roman Empire for his worship

False Teachers/Doctrines/Religions

- Gnostic Elitism: 1 Tim. 6:20b; 2:4, 13-14; 4:10; Titus 2:11
 - Eve brings life and knowledge to Adam
 - Salvation only to a select few
 - Explains why the word “all” is so important
- No Bodily Resurrection: 1 Tim. 1:19-20; 2 Tim. 2:18
 - Body evil = no resurrection (Hymenaeus/Philetus)
- Asceticism: 1 Tim.4:3-5; 2 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:15; Col. 2:16-18
 - All matter is evil
- Antinomian License: 1 Tim. 6:5; 5:22; 2 Tim. 3:6; Titus 1:11,16
 - God’s grace covers all (Grace Abusers)
 - Opposite of Asceticism - everything goes, immoral behavior
- Myths and Genealogies: 1 Tim. 1:4-7; 4:7; 2 Tim 4:4; Titus 1:14-16; 3:9
 - Rooted in Judaism traditions and laws
AND/OR
 - Rooted in Gnostic storytelling
- Divisive Debaters: 1 Tim. 1:4; 6:4; 2 Tim. 2:14, 23; Titus 3:9
 - Questions, disputes and senseless controversies

Source: First and Second Timothy and Titus: Interpretation, A Bible-Commentary for Teaching and Preaching by Thomas C. Oden p 9,10