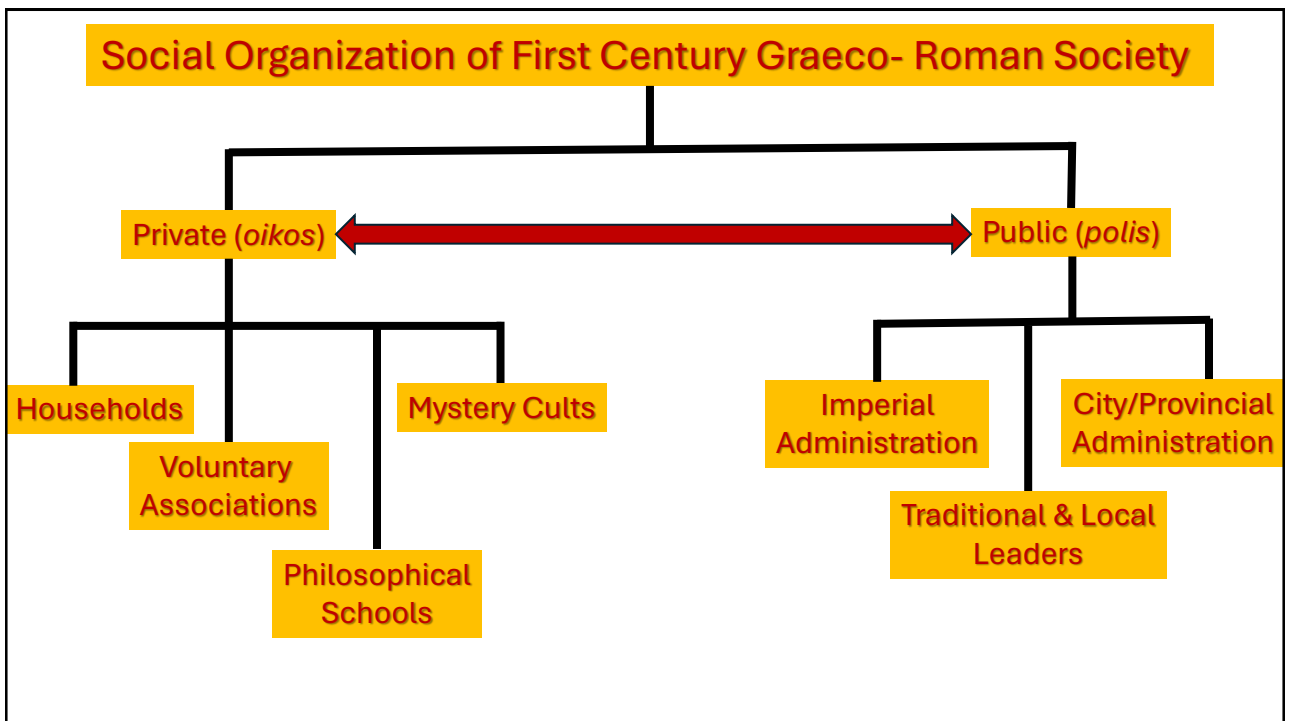


# Graeco-Roman Philosophical Schools and Interpretation of the New Testament

Daniel Institute  
BD IV 414 (Biblical Studies)

Dr Annang Asumang

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## The Gospel encounters the “Influencers” of Graeco-Roman Culture: Acts 17:16-21

While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. <sup>17</sup> So he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the market-place day by day with those who happened to be there. <sup>18</sup> A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him. Some of them asked, ‘What is this babbling trying to say?’ Others remarked, ‘He seems to be advocating foreign gods.’ They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. <sup>19</sup> Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, ‘May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?’ <sup>20</sup> You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we would like to know what they mean.’ <sup>21</sup> (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)

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**How did the predominant Graeco-Roman philosophical schools of thought impact the Mediterranean societies and what was the nature of their interactions with first century Christianity?**

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## Learning Outcomes

1. How did the Apostle Paul distinguish himself in his letters from the Sophists of his time?
2. Use examples from the New Testament to illustrate the similarities and differences between first century Stoicism and Christianity.
3. Explain the features of Epicureanism in the first century Mediterranean world and the different responses by some New Testament Christians.
4. Some scholars postulate that Jesus' ministry was similar to the Cynic philosophers of His time. What are the merits and demerits of this theory?

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## Graeco-Roman Religions and Philosophical Schools

- **Definition of Philosophical School**
  - A group of philosophers and their students who shared a specific tradition or approach to philosophical inquiry expressed in commonly held beliefs, methods, and teachings often traced to a founder about fundamental questions concerning existence, knowledge, values, reason, and language.
  - In Graeco-Roman conception, membership a school was regarded as philosophical apprenticeship and tended at least originally, to be more patronized by those with means and leisure to study. Some schools, such as medicine are to be distinguished from philosophical ones.
- **Social organization**
  - As a school subscribed to a tradition, it tended to be organized as a social group for the purpose of maintaining as well as disseminating, and where necessary defending their beliefs
  - This organization therefore involved important features of initiation, fellowship, and discipline. In later centuries AD some of the schools took on the earliest features which became Universities
  - Due to their independence philosophers of similar schools in the same "tradition" differed from each other. Summaries of what one philosophical school is said to believe may therefore not be true of each and every philosopher of that school
- **Relation with Religion**
  - The schools did not necessarily constitute as a "religion" but culturally expressed themselves through religious language, beliefs and practices. Accordingly, they constituted one expression of Graeco-Roman religion
  - As schools tended to write and some to publicly debate over doctrine, and in some cases devoted themselves to convert people from elites to ordinary people, their canons of books served as gateway for understanding the theological features and tenets of Graeco-Roman religion. They were the "wisemen" of the Graeco-Roman world.
  - Several parallels between these writings and the New Testament provide avenues for investigating the similarities and differences, and plausible interactions between first century Christianity and the cultural and religious context of the Graeco-Roman world

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Everett Ferguson

The religion of many in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, especially among the educated, was philosophy. Philosophy provided a criticism or reinterpretation of traditional religion and offered its own moral and spiritual direction. Each philosophical school had its own way of life (*agōgē*) with distinctive beliefs and practices. The various schools of philosophy formed communities of "believers" around a revered master and his teachings. They had their "interdenominational" rivalries and conversion stories. Philosophy even had its holy men ("saints") and martyrs (notably Socrates). The various schools provided the worldview and practical guidance for life that religion does for many today. A person did not normally go to the priest of the local cult for an interpretation of the nature of reality or for moral advice. One turned more often than not to a philosopher for an answer to these questions. Although the popular religion did not give much ethical guidance, poets and philosophers provided a conscience for the age. Some even saw philosophy as bringing a kind of conversion and cleansing of the soul, although it was a redemption worked by one's own strength. Philosophy contributed to the impulse toward monotheism, but in general the god of Hellenistic-Roman philosophy was impersonal.

Ferguson, Everett. *Backgrounds of early Christianity*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2003. Pages 300-301

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## Philosophical Schools of Relevance to New Testament Interpretation

1. The Sophists & Socrates
- ~~2. Pythagorean School~~
3. The Academy (Platonism)
4. Philo's School of Middle Platonism
- ~~5. The Lyceum (or Peripathetic School, Aristotelean School)~~
6. The Garden (Epicureanism)
7. The Stoa (Stoicism)
8. Cynicism
- ~~9. Skepticism~~
- ~~10. Essenes of Qumran & Dead Sea Scrolls~~

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Significant Greco-Roman Philosophies & Schools					
	Main Focus	Distinctive Teaching / Influence	Characteristics	Possible Influence in NT	Sources / Adherents
(Middle) Platonism	True (invisible) nature of reality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Based on teachings of Plato (420-347 BCE)</li> <li>Ideal forms vs. earthly shadows</li> <li>Ideal forms are eternal and exist in the "real" world</li> <li>Humans perceive this "real world" through the senses via the copies of earthly forms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Blend of Platonic, Aristotelean, and Stoic thought</li> <li>Transcendent god behind all</li> <li>Rational element eternal given by "demiurge"</li> <li>Passions introduced "mortal" elements = passions / appetites</li> <li>Ascend to deity through philosophy frees people from reincarnation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Platonic thought entered Judaism through Hellenization evident in Philo, Wis. of Sol. (9:8)</li> <li>Some find Platonic ideas in Heb 8:1-5 though this is disputed</li> <li>ANE lit &amp; the HB already conceive of another reality beyond the visible world</li> <li>Polemic against the "desires of the flesh"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plato's Dialogues</li> <li>Cicero</li> <li>Plotarch</li> <li>Philo</li> <li>Clement of Alexandria</li> <li>Origen</li> </ul>
Stoicism	How to live a meaningful, virtuous life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Founder = Zeno of Citium (333-262 BCE)</li> <li>3-fold way of life:                             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>self-sufficiency: contentment in moral character;</li> <li>freedom: not captive to passions;</li> <li>apatheia: undisturbed from the lower passions</li> </ol> </li> <li>Wisdom found in valuing only things under one's control while ignoring things not under one's control</li> <li>Reality is material (even god and spirits are material)</li> <li>Spark of divine in everyone = make no distinction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Things under one's control: conception, choice, desire, aversion, i.e. everything of our own doing</li> <li>Things not under one's control: our body, property, reputation, office, i.e. everything not of our own doing</li> <li>Freedom and wisdom are found in being apathetic about anything not under one's control</li> <li>Emphasized embracing fatalism</li> <li>Lived "according to nature" = purpose for which something / someone exists</li> <li>"Kinship of humanity" = no Greek, barbarian, free, slave</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Josephus compares Pharisees with Stoics &amp; Paul was a Pharisee</li> <li>Paul quotes a stoic poet, Aratus (Acts 17:28), and stoics were present in the audience</li> <li>Focus in NT ethics on not being dominated by the flesh</li> <li>Living according to one's purpose (i.e. for the Lord) lies behind some NT ethics (cf. 1 Cor 6:13 = body is for the Lord)</li> <li>Stoics developed the ethical diatribe which is used by Paul, Hebrews, and James</li> <li>Gal 3:28 = no Jew, Greek, slave, free, etc (OCCL 539)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Epictetus' Enchiridion</li> <li>Zeno, the founder was first a Cynic</li> <li>Dio Chrysostom</li> <li>Marcus Aurelius</li> <li>Musonius Rufus</li> <li>Seneca</li> </ul>
Cynicism	How to live "according to nature"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Founder = Antisthenes (445-360 BCE) &amp; Diogenes of Sinope (412-324 BCE)</li> <li>Criticized people's dependence on reputation and slavery to opinion and material things</li> <li>"Shameless life" = only antidote to dependence</li> <li>Openly exposed the "sins" of everyone around them</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appears to have developed in response to fate</li> <li>Lived "according to nature" = independent of all externals; bare essentials</li> <li>Called "dogs" for their public brashness, open speech (parrhesia), and open behavior (sex, defecation, urination)</li> <li>Begged for their existence and wandered around</li> <li>Rejected: law, family, gender, race, wealth, education</li> <li>Taught via chreia</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Crossan argues Jesus was a cynic</li> <li>Paul denied race, gender (Gal 3:27-8), but elsewhere he maintains these distinctions</li> <li>magnificia occurs in 2 Cor 3:12; 7:4 (30+ other occurrences)</li> <li>Paul denied being a "peddler" of the Gospel (2 Cor 2:17)</li> <li>Jesus &amp; disciples did not look Cynic since they wore sandals and double tunic, and carried a bag w/straw (Mk 6:7-9)</li> <li>Crates gave up a fortune to be a Cynic, and Jesus asks the rich to give up their fortunes and follow him</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Diogenes of Sinope "the dog"</li> <li>"Cynic revival" in 1st century</li> <li>Left no writings, but there are pseudonymous epistles attributed to famous Cynics dating to the 1st centuries BCE/CE</li> </ul>
Epicureanism	How to enjoy life now	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Founder = Epicurus (341-270 BCE)</li> <li>Reality is only material (copied from Plato)</li> <li>mechanistic explanation of all phenomena</li> <li>Gods may exist but are completely uninterested and detached from humanity</li> <li>"Fourfold remedy":                             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nothing to fear in God</li> <li>Nothing to feel in death</li> <li>Good is easily enjoyed</li> <li>Pain is readily endured</li> </ol> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Difficultly involving ethics for others</li> <li>Considered atheistic due to their view of the gods</li> <li>Lived communally and held things in common</li> <li>Emphasized free will over fatalism</li> <li>Death = dissolution of one's atoms</li> <li>Universe created by chance (atoms) - reality is material</li> <li>Practiced "psychagogy" = guidance of souls + frank speech</li> <li>Pleasure of soul = expectation of bodily pleasure + absence of pain</li> <li>Politically deviant due to withdrawal from civic duty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Saducees are not explicitly compared with Epicureans by Josephus, but the overlap would be obvious to his readers</li> <li>Epicureans were present in the audience of Paul's Acts 17 speech</li> <li>Acts 2 describes the church as having all things in common</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Piso</li> <li>Galpurnius</li> <li>Cassius</li> <li>Atticus (Cicero's friend)</li> <li>Zeno of Sidon</li> <li>Philostratus of Gadara</li> <li>Lucretius</li> <li>Diogenes Laertius</li> </ul>
Skepticism	We can't know anything for sure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Founder = Pyrrhon of Elis (365-270 BCE)</li> <li>Thoroughgoing agnostics on everything</li> <li>Senses are easily deceived</li> <li>Dogmatism is rejected because the true nature of reality can never be known for certain</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Called "academics"</li> <li>Employed dialectical method like Socrates</li> </ul>	?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Timon of Phlius</li> <li>Cicero (influenced by others too)</li> </ul>
Pythagoreanism	What's your number?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Founder = Pythagoras (c. 580-500 BCE)</li> <li>Coined the term "philosophy"</li> <li>Reality is or imitates numbers</li> <li>"Transmigration" of soul = reincarnation</li> <li>Soul = fallen divinity / body = tomb or prison</li> <li>Freedom obtained through remaining pure of soul from the pollution of the body</li> <li>Practiced silence, ascetic living, self-examination, abstinence from certain parts of animals, no beans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nature of reality centered around mathematics</li> <li>Influenced Plato on the nature of the soul, judgment &amp; death, and that the soul is more important than the body</li> <li>Discovered musical intervals used today which he believed explained the universe</li> <li>"Tetractys" or "tetrads": 1 = a point; 2 = a line; 3 = a surface; 4 = an object</li> <li>Believed earth was spherical</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Josephus compares Essenes with Pythagoreans but the connection is unclear</li> <li>Unless Pythagoreans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plato was heavily influenced by him</li> <li>Golden Verses</li> <li>Pythagorean theorem</li> </ul>
Peripatetics (Aristotle & Aristotelianism)	Let's take a stroll	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Based on teachings of Aristotle (384-322 BCE)</li> <li>God was utterly transcendent (like Epicureans) but immaterial (unlike Epicureans)</li> <li>Will of God enacted through lesser gods so as to avoid contacting matter</li> <li>Rational part of humans = "seed of God"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Peripatetics are so-called either because Aristotle taught while walking or because of the public path at the Lyceum</li> <li>Pupil of Plato but rejected his view of the immortal soul since it was inseparable from the body &amp; the theory of ideal forms</li> <li>Believed the earth to be stationary sphere</li> <li>Later philosophers managed to synthesize Plato and Aristotle and minimized their disagreements</li> </ul>	?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Alexander the Great (taught by him)</li> <li>Medieval Christianity greatly influenced by Aristotle</li> </ul>

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## Two Potential Errors in Using Literary Evidence

### • Parallelomania

- Premature attribution of literary dependence due to similarities or parallels
- Frey 2014:210 – "The task is no more simply collecting parallels, nor determining literary dependence, but rather contextually texts by means of other texts, putting them in perspective, and reconstructing discourses not only between Jews and Jesus-followers, but rather within a wider Jewish framework in which the early Christian tradition emerged"

### • Anachronism

- Retrospectively reading contemporary or later ideas back into historical documents because of same or similar terminologies.
- Reading modern trans-Atlantic American slavery back into slavery of Biblical times

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## The Sophists

- While not an organized school, the Sophist tradition is widely regarded as the beginning of the Graeco-Roman philosophical tradition and certainly the group from which Socrates, regarded as the father of the philosophers, emerged
- The name meant “one who could make you wise” and they were well sought after from the fifth cent BC as itinerant public speakers, lawyers and private tutoring of aristocrats on the fundamental art of public persuasion. They were relativistic.
- By the first century, Sophists were hailed as the “celebrities” or “showmen” of the Graeco-Roman world establishing lucrative fee-paying schools around the cities where they delivered public lectures in halls, temples and theatres. Intense rivalries also developed between different Sophists who competed with each other for pupils.
- Their arrival to a city was hugely anticipated and the event accompanied by razzmatazz labelled as the Sophist’s εἶσοδος (entry; cf., 1 Thess 2:1). They tended not to write and thus very little by way of the contents of their teaching exists despite widespread knowledge of their methods and fame.
- Some philosophers such as Plato and later, Aristotle had dim view of their methods and often criticized them as charlatans, hence the use of the pejorative term “sophistry” to distinguish their trade from “scientific” philosophy. Alternatively, some Sophists developed the penchant for criticizing the “stuffy” philosophers. But such distinction must be placed in context. For example, Plato who himself criticizes the Sophist also admits in his tract *Sophists* 231b that their methods were “noble”.
- In this regard scholars continue to debate how different Socrates was from his contemporary Sophist given the similarities. He definitely emerged from their circles. Most scholars believe the difference laid in the moral purpose of their philosophizing rather than the methods and contents.
- The Socratic tradition which gave rise to the school system increasingly regarded the Sophists as pursuing monetary gain and fame through their philosophy whereas the schools regarded themselves as belonging to a higher moral purpose. It thus became important for philosophers to issue disclaimers, as Paul did (e.g., 1 Thess 2 & 1 Cor) that he was not a Sophist.

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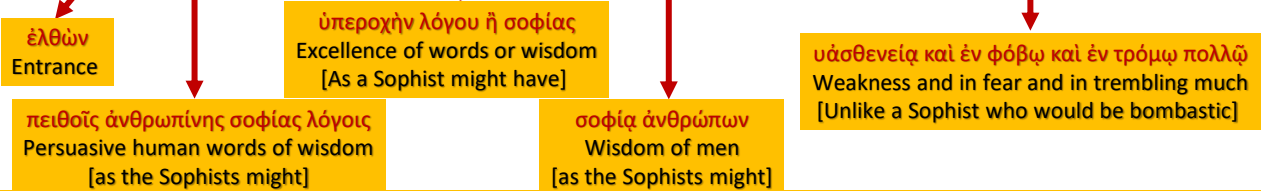
## Socrates & the Sophists

- While he distinguished himself from the Sophists of his day, Socrates (470-399 BC) he worked on the kinds of questions which had been raised by the Sophists and thus his contemporaries frequently associated him with the Sophists.
- His style and focus was to cross-examine students, in adversarially graded series till they themselves arrive at the answers. In that regard, his philosophical quest was deeply anthropological as he placed the human soul as central to discovering the truth, in contrast to the pre-occupation of the Sophists with abstract principles and ideas.
- Paradoxically, the two major sources of information on Socrates, namely Plato’s *Dialogues*, and Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* present diverging evaluations of his impact and character. This perhaps reflects Socrates’ style as his approach triggered the philosophical system in the student and thus likely to lead to how the student responded to those triggers.
- At a fevered time of Athen’s history Socrates became controversial and unpopular and was eventually arrested on a charge of impiety, that is, challenging the gods and the religion, and also for questioning the “democratic” order. Refusing to be exiled, he was executed by drinking poison
- After his death, his students took up his teachings in different directions but they all seemed to have been in agreement that his death amounted to martyrdom in relation to his philosophy. Over the centuries he became a legendary figure so much so that even some scholars have suggested that Luke’s presentation of Apaul in Athens in Acts 17 was modelled after Socrates.

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## Paul as an Anti-Sophist in Corinth (1 Cor 2:1-5)

When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power.



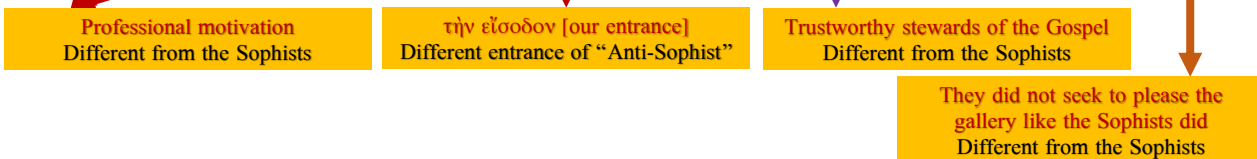
**“Paul repudiated the sophistic method of ‘presenting himself’ when he came to Corinth...[not] projecting an image of himself”**

Winter, Bruce W. Philo and Paul among the Sophists. Vol. 96. CUP Archive, 1997. Page 157

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## Paul distinguishes himself from Sophists in Thessalonica (1 Thess 2:1-6)

You know, brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not without results. We had previously suffered and been treated outrageously in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in the face of strong opposition. For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. On the contrary, we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts. You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed – God is our witness. We were not looking for praise from people, not from you or anyone else, even though as apostles of Christ we could have asserted our authority. Instead, we were like young children among you.



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Paul was in constant danger of being caricatured as a Sophist which would undermine the mission. He sought to counter such caricatures by distinguishing himself and pointing to (a) the contents of the Gospel he preached, (b) the power of God that was miraculously transforming his hearers, and (c) his professional methods, ethical motives, and ministerial conduct in his entry to the cities

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### Platonism & the Academy

#### • Plato the Man

- Born in Athens in 439 BC, became pupil of Socrates at age 20 and later regarded himself as mediator of the teachings and personality of his mentor.
- But he also travelled a fair bit and interacted with other philosophical traditions and in the process developed rich philosophical treatises.
- Returning to Athens to convert a gymnasium to the Academy, named after a nearby shrine, *Acedemus*.

#### • Organization of the Academy

- Religiously a cult of philosophical heroes, it was also politically useful for training statesmen who became known for fomenting subversive and anti-democratic sentiments in Greece
- Students joined and stayed at different lengths of time
- Devoted to study of mathematics and dialectics. He modified the Socratic method into a less adversarial dialogical method. Rather than anthropological focus of Socrates, he sought to characterize philosophy in terms of ideas which over time became the pure superior “ideal” to the world of “real”

#### • Key tenets of Platonism

- Dualistic Eternal existence of perfect forms or ideas with their counterpart in physical world
- God and matter are incompatible and concept of the soul's immortality
- Knowledge is innate and can be recollected and drawn as relationship between ideas
- Pursuit of truth, beauty, and virtue as fundamental aspects of human existence
- Most influential texts are Plato's *the Laws*, *Timaeus* & the *Dialogues*

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## Three Historical Phases of Platonism

### Early Platonism:

- From time of Plato to 260BC
- Formative period of basic building blocks of Platonism
- Open ended speculative period

### Middle Platonism:

- From 130 BC to 270 AD.
- Modifications of Platonism with ideas from Stoicism and Aristotelianism
- Synthetizing period with other philosophies

### Neoplatonism:

- From 200 AD to 600 AD
- Attempts to reinterpret Platonism in light of rapid changes of the time
- Deconstructive phase of Platonism

## Key tenets of Middle Platonism

### Dualism:

- Dualistic view of reality, the perfect realm of forms or ideas correspond to physical imperfect objects called “shadows”

### Hierarchy in Reality:

- Concept of a hierarchical structure of reality, with the forms at the highest level and the material world at the lowest.

### Ethics:

- Emphasis on ethics and the pursuit of virtue as a means to attain happiness and fulfillment.

### Key points of Theology:

- Demiurge or Maker of all things, preexistent matter out of which the world is made, and ideas as the patterns by which things are made.

### Key Philosophers of relevance

- Philo of Alexandria
- Plutarch 46-119 AD
- Writer of Wisdom of Solomon [9:8]

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## Philo of Alexandria & New Testament Interpretation

### • Philo the Man

- Jewish philosopher with Roman citizenship in Alexandria 15BC to 50AD
- Regarded as most influential scholar of Hellenistic Judaism of the time and later Alexandrian Christianity (especially Clement and Origen)
- Main contribution is in his writings aimed at synthetizing Middle Platonic philosophy with Jewish worldview in a seamless fashion and applied to what was evidently a deep-seated piety
- Regarded as a statesman, and after a pogrom against Jews in Alexandria, he led an embassy to petition emperor Caligula in 40AD for reassertion of Jewish rights

### • Key works of Philo

- Homiletic style of his works as well as the focus on interpreting Scripture indicate a close relationship with the local synagogue/school
- 70 treatises, but 50 currently extant, in 3 categories
  1. Commentary Series on the Pentateuch, of four parts, (i) *Life of Moses* which also serves the function of a preface to the commentaries, (ii) *Questions and Answers on Genesis and Exodus* which is a commentary on Gen 2:4-28:9 and Ex 6:2-30:10, (iii) *Allegorical Commentary* on Gen 2:1-41:24, and (iv) *Exposition of the Law* in the Pentateuch;
  2. Philosophical Works, likely aimed at pupils in his school
  3. Apologetic treatises

### • Philo and the New Testament

- Parallels with John's Gospel, especially the Logos of John 1 (Jn 1:1-3 vs. *De Ebrietate* 152)
- Parallels with Pauline Letters especially use of athletic imagery for exhortations
- Parallels with Hebrews e.g., Melchizedek typology (Heb 7-8) and the idea of perfection (Heb 2:10; 5:9-6:1; 7:28)

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## Parallels between Christology in Hebrews and Philo's Writings

Term	Philo	Christology of Hebrews
<b>Firstborn</b>	<i>Quis rerum divinarum heres sit</i> 225	1:6
<b>Firstborn Son</b>	<i>De confusione linguarum</i> 146.	1:2, 5, 8
<b>Instrument (of creation)</b>	<i>De agricultura</i> 51.	1:2
<b>Wisdom</b>	<i>De migratione Abrahami</i> 6.	1:3
<b>Image of God</b>	<i>De specialibus legibus</i> I, 81.	1:3
<b>Angel</b>	<i>De agricultura</i> 51.	1:4-2:16
<b>Moses</b>	<i>De migratione Abrahami</i> 23.	3:1-6
<b>House of God</b>	<i>De migratione Abrahami</i> 4-6	3:1-6; 10:21
<b>All-severer</b>	<i>Quis rerum divinarum heres sit</i> 225	
<b>Sword</b>	<i>Quis rerum divinarum heres sit</i> 130	4:12-13
<b>Great High Priest</b>	<i>De fuga et inventione</i> 110	2:17; 3:1; 4:14-8:1

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### Stoicism in the Graeco-Roman World

- **Three Periods of History**

- **Early Stoicism:** From Zeno around 300 BC when group met in a particular porch in Athenian agora called Stoa to the late 200BC led by Chrysippus. Period of laying foundation of Stoicism and distinguishing from Epicureanism
- **Middle Stoicism:** 200-100 BC under Panaetius and Posidonius. A further period of refinement in its engagement with Middle Platonism
- **Roman Stoicism:** Imperial period, became fashionable in political circles and ultimately pushed by Emperor Marcus Aurelius (121-180AD)

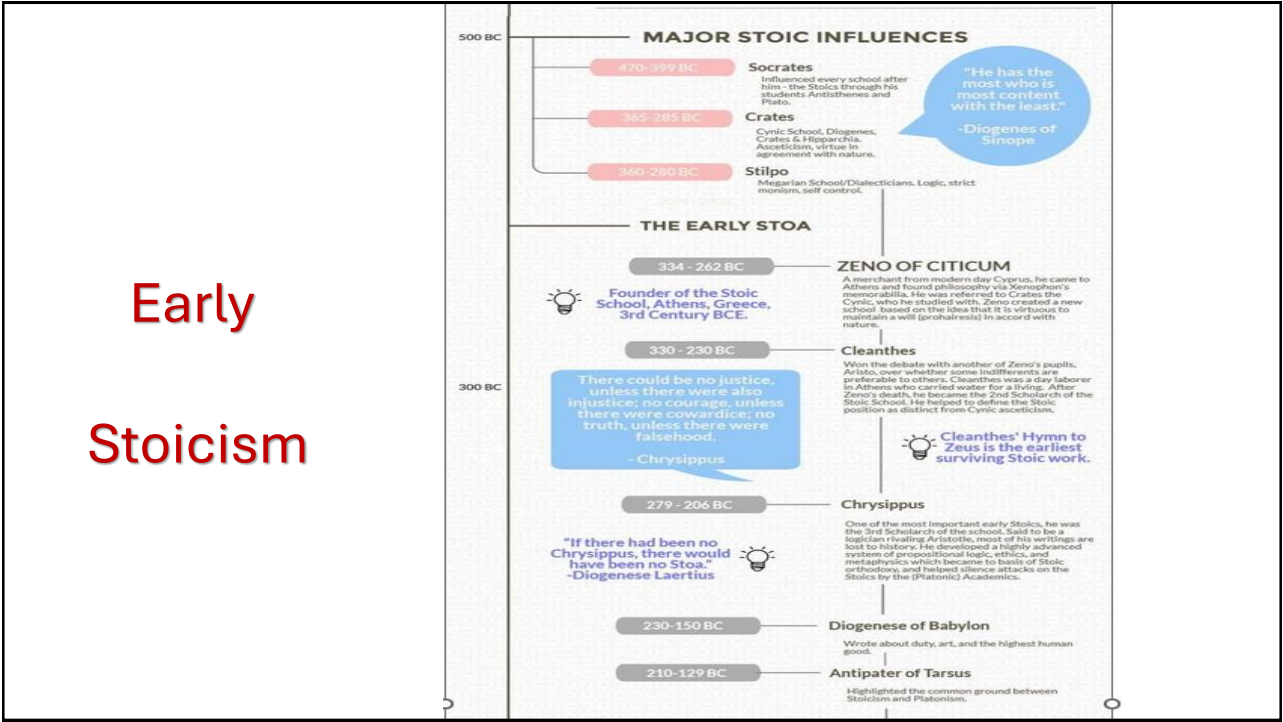
- **Three Pillars of Stoic Doctrine**

- **Physics [theology]** – soul of philosophy; only bodies have beings. Nothing is therefore immaterial; God, the world, emotions and words that are spoken are all bodies or material. Each material has three elements, the name of it, the idea it represents and the material itself. And each matter has its own spirit or pneuma. This theology undergirds Stoic pantheism as the gods immanently possesses all materials
- **Logic [epistemology]** - bones and sinews of philosophy; truth is a perception that must be believed. The belief that the universe was orderly and so any problem can be solved using this order. Emotion was an unnatural movement or “false judgements” of the mind and hence a problem that must be solved and bring order to it.
- **Ethics [behaviour]** – flesh of philosophy; purpose is to become wise and lead a good life. In other words, it is structurally, Eudaimonistic ethics as happiness (eudaimonia) personal well-being as the ultimate telos. Key virtues are wisdom, justice, moderation and courage. To achieve these, one must live in harmonious accord with nature. The soul is absorbed into the world order such that life after death, even if it existed was irrelevant. Suicide is a human right and demonstrates the person's freedom.

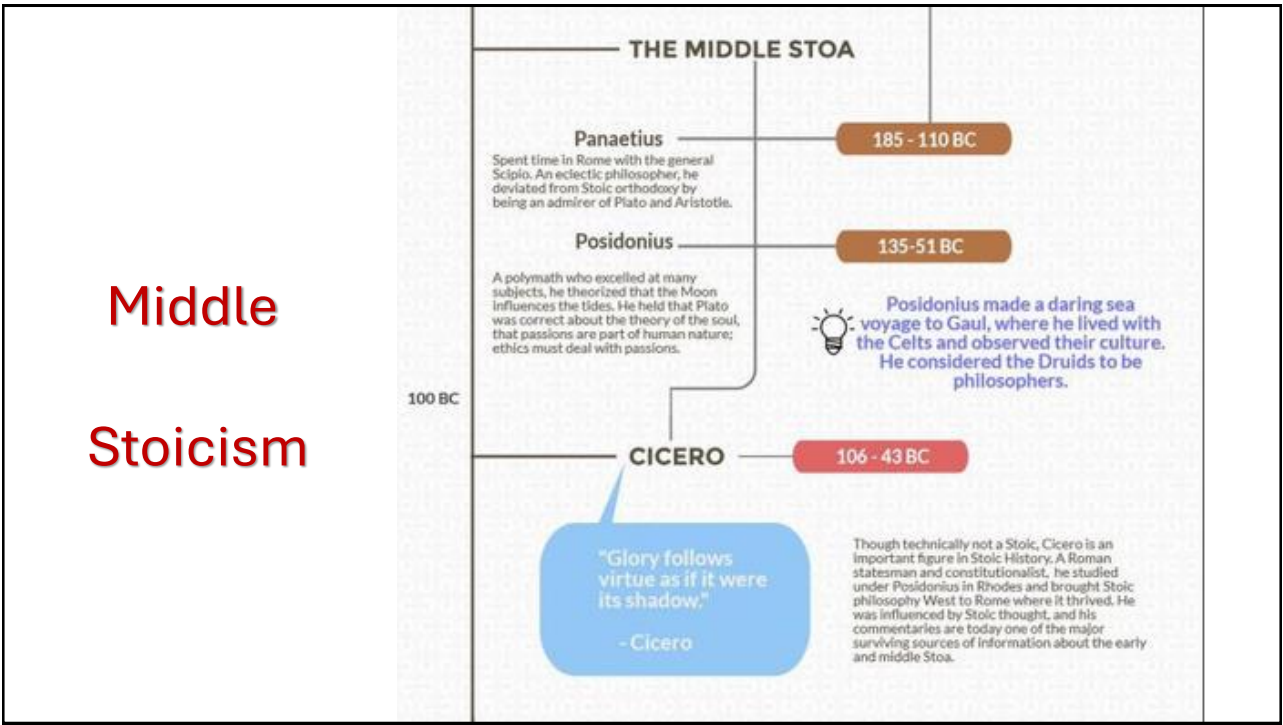
- **Three key Stoics in New Testament times**

- Seneca (4BC-65AD)
- Musonius Rufus (25 – 95AD)
- Epictetus (50-135 AD)

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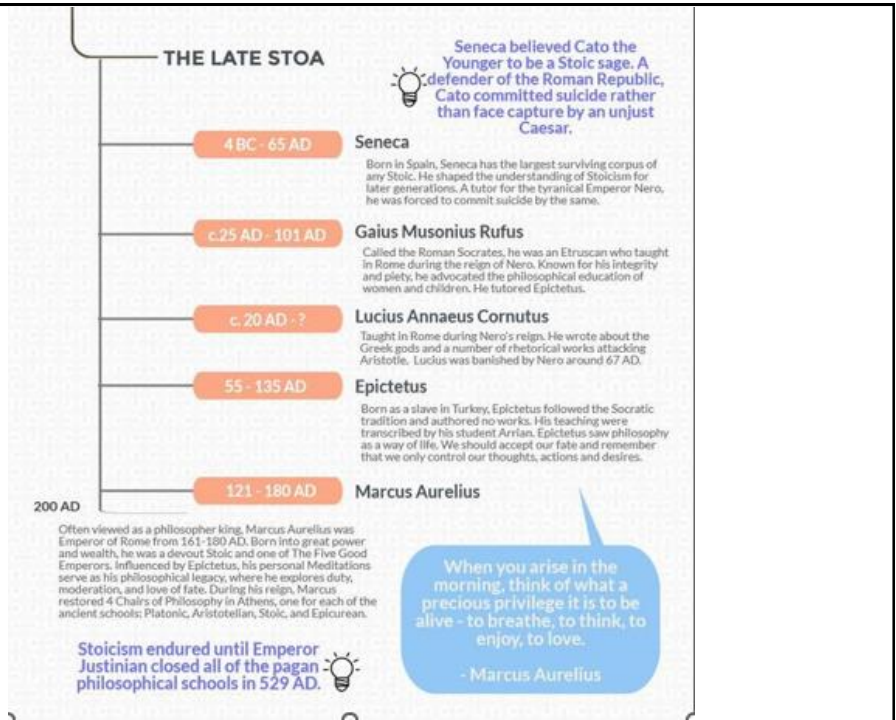


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# Roman Stoicism



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## Summary of Stoicism

- **Founder** = Zeno of Citium (333-262 BCE)
- **3-fold way of life:**
  1. **self-sufficiency:** contentment in moral character;
  2. **freedom:** not captive to passions;
  3. **apathy:** undisturbed from the lower passions
- Wisdom found in valuing only things under one's control while ignoring things not under one's control
- Reality is material (even god and spirits are material)
- Spark of divine in everyone = make no distinction

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## Stoicism and New Testament Christianity

- **Some Common Vocabularies**

- E.g., Spirit, conscience, Logos, virtue, self-sufficiency, boldness of speech, and reasonable service

- **Some Common Ideas**

- E.g., persistent evil in human beings, the need for self-examination, brotherhood of humanity, denial of the world's values, and emphasis on inner freedom from external circumstances
- Instructions on institutions like marriage, family and government [e.g., Eph 5:21-6:9; Col 3:18-4:1; 1 Pet 2:13-3:7]

- **Some Glaring Differences**

- Transcendent God and Christology
- Revealed faith
- Spirit empowered life

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## Comparison between Christianity and Stoicism

	Christianity	Stoicism
Metaphysics	The world was created by a God external to it.	The world-God self-created out of a fiery conflagration.
Metaphysics	God occasionally suspends the laws of nature (miracles).	Everything happens by cause and effect (no miracles).
Ethics	Ten Commandments.	Four cardinal virtues.
Ethics	Teachings of Jesus.	Three disciplines of Epictetus.
Practice	Reading of selected passages from Old and New Testaments.	Reading of selected passages from Seneca, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius.
Practice	Evening prayer.	Philosophical journaling.
Practice	Fasting on holy days.	Fasting as an exercise in self restraint.

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## A Supposed Parallel between Paul & the Stoic Epictetus

### Paul [Romans 12:1-2]

Therefore, I urge you (**παρακαλῶ**), brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy (**οἰκτιρῶν**), to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper (**λογικὴν**) worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind (**νοός**). Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.

### Epictetus [Diatribes. 1.16.15, 20-21]

If we had sense (**νοῦν**), ought we to be doing anything else, publicly and privately, than hymning and praising the Deity, and rehearsing His benefits (**χάριτας**)?... If, indeed, I were a nightingale, I should be singing as a nightingale; if a swan, as a swan. But as it is, I am a rational being (**λογικός εἰμί**), therefore I must be singing hymns of praise to God... and I exhort (**παρακαλῶ**) you to join me in song.

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## Compare & Contrast Paul with Epictetus

“Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, ‘The two will become one flesh.’ But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit. Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honour God with your bodies.”

[Paul; 1 Cor 6:15-20]

“You are a distinct portion of the essence of God and contain a certain part of him in yourself. Why then are you ignorant of your own kinship? Why do you not remember, when you are eating, who you are who eat, and whom you feed? When you are in the company of women, when you are conversing, when you are exercising, when you are disputing, do you not know that it is the Divine you feed, the Divine you exercise? You carry a God about within you . . . and you do not observe that you profane him by impure thoughts and unclean actions.”

[Epictetus; Dissertations 2. 2.8]

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Bruce Metzger

Like other educated men of his day, the apostle Paul was acquainted with a certain amount of Stoic teaching. . . . Paul's letters contain occasional phrases that have a Stoic ring. . . . At the same time, however, the parallelism is more in the realm of words than basic ideas, for the theological presuppositions and the springs of Paul's actions were very different from those of a Stoic philosopher.

Bruce Metzger

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### Epicureanism (The Garden) in the Graeco-Roman World

#### • Epicurus & the Garden

- From Athens, lived 341-270 BC, bought a house with a Garden, hence name of school
- It was egalitarian, admitting women and people of all social classes including slaves
- Was loathed at the time as it was secluded from society and constantly clashed with other philosophical schools for their dismissiveness

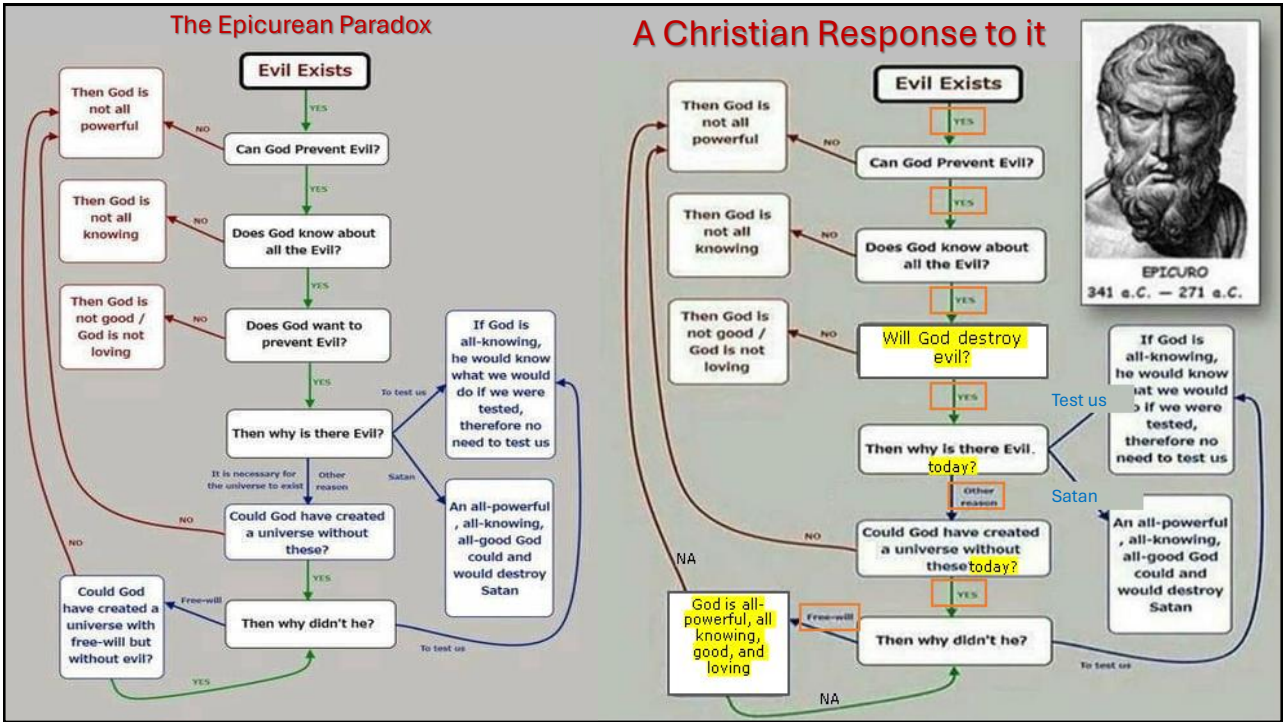
#### • Epicurean Theology

- **Physics:** Even if gods existed, they were irrelevant to human existence. World is a random combination of atoms; the soul consists of fine atoms which disperse at death and so we cease to be when death comes.
- **Epistemology:** Sense perception is basis of all reason. Some Epicureans espoused hedonism, that is pleasure or happiness, defined as absence of pain, as the ultimate purpose of existence
- **Ethics:** Philodemus summarizes, in his four- fold cure: "Nothing to fear from god, nothing to worry about in death. Good is easy to obtain, and evil easy to endure" (Herculaneum Papyrus 1005, 4.9-14). All religions was superstition and people should instead seek justice and peace.
- **"Paradox of evil":** Fourfold argument against theodicy or divine providence – (a) Cosmology (world came by chance so God cannot be relevant), (b) human freedom (providence destroys human freedom), (c) unfulfilled prophecy (no divination or foretelling is possible) & (d) Justice (injustice in the world suggests God is not in control).

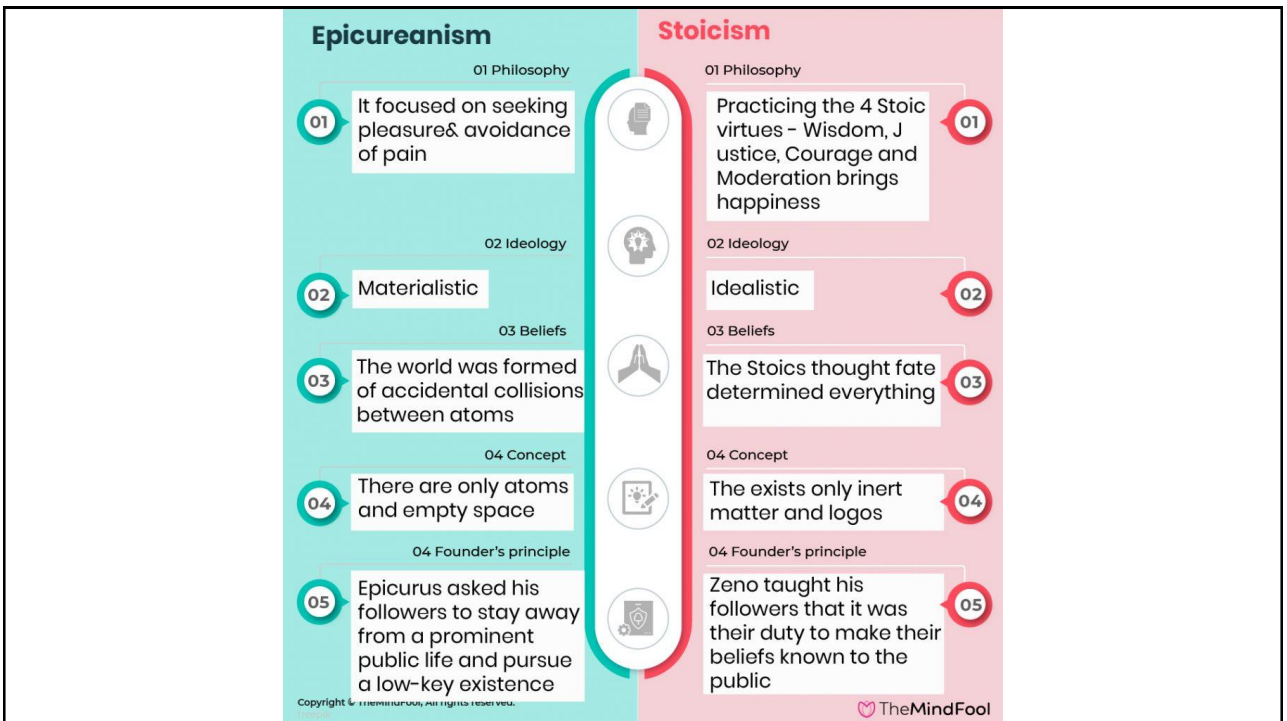
#### • Prominent Epicureans

- Epicurus (341-270 BC)
- Philodemus (110-35 BC)
- Lucretius (95-55BC)

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## Summary of Epicureanism

- **Founder** = Epicurus (341–270 BCE)
- Reality is *only* material (opposite of Plato)  
mechanistic explanation of all phenomena
- Gods *may* exist but are completely uninterested and detached from humanity
- **“Fourfold remedy”**:
  1. Nothing to fear in God
  2. Nothing to feel in death
  3. Good is easily enjoyed
  4. Pain is readily endured

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Graham Tomlin

“Epicureanism can be described as a philosophy where knowledge is closely linked to power. It claimed to offer true knowledge of the way things are. In fact, Epicurean ethics and philosophy are largely based upon its understanding of the physical structure of the universe. The soul is made of fine particles that cannot exist outside the body; the soul simply disperses at death, the body returning to the primordial store of matter; all that happens is explained by the random movement of primary particles, and the gods are not concerned with human life. Once these essential physical principles have been grasped, the appropriateness of the Epicurean way of life becomes clear. All fear of death, the gods, and all dis-ease in life are shown to be irrational and banished. Lucretius often makes the point that a knowledge of the true nature of things is the key to happiness.”

Tomlin, Graham. "Christians and Epicureans in 1 Corinthians." *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 20.68 (1998): 51-71. Page 55

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## Were the Sadducees Epicureans?

Sadducees	Epicureans
Did not believe in a resurrection (Mk 12:18-27; Lk 20:27; Acts 4:1-3)	Death is final and no afterlife
Materialists who did not believe in spirits nor angels (Acts 23:6-8)	Everything, including the soul is made up of atoms
Liberal theologians (Matt 16:1-12)	Anti-religionists of the day
Deny providence (Josephus, <i>Jewish Wars</i> 2.164)	Questioned divine providence and theodicy

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Not all scholars are persuaded that the Sadducees were fully paid-up Epicureans. These scholars argue that the Sadducees' rational theology coupled with their aloof aristocratic lifestyle and their thorough Hellenization and Romanization resulted in the perception of those who did not share their outlooks such as Josephus to associate them with the Epicureans or use the Epicureans as a model to characterize them. Even so, it is nevertheless not impossible, again given their Hellenization, that the Sadducees would have adopted some of the attractive elements of Epicureanism while rejecting others, certainly the hedonism.

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## Epicureanism in First Century Corinth reflected in 1 Corinthians

- **Knowledge:**
  - The claim by those who had “knowledge” that has given them power (e.g., 1 Cor 8:1-7; 13:8-12) was a familiar one with Epicureans.
- **Resurrection Questions:**
  - Slogan quoted in 1 Cor 15:12 – “how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead” would most suit Epicurean influences
- **1 Cor 15:32-34:**
  - Hedonistic Epicureans were sometimes referred to as “beasts” (15:32)
  - Quotation of Menander in 1 Cor 15:33
- **Nature of Death:**
  - Question in 1 Cor 15:35 was typically posed by Epicureans
- **Sexual Morality:**
  - Sexual hedonism condemned in 1 Cor 6 co-existing with interest in celibacy in 1 Cor 7 was a typical Epicurean inconsistency
- **Idolatry:**
  - Dismissive claim of non-existing idols in 1 Cor 8 likely influenced by Epicurean philosophy

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## Epicureanism in Asia Minor & Second Peter

	Epicurean Influence	Answer from 2 Peter
Cosmology	World is made of atoms, and nothing will change (2 Pet 3:2-3)	2 Pet 3:5-11 “...Since everything will be destroyed...You ought to live holy and godly lives
Prophecy	Rejection of prophecy as “cleverly devised stories” (2 Pet 1:16)	2 Pet 1:16-21 “...prophecy never had its origin in the human will”
Ethics	Licentious and hedonistic lifestyle (2 Pet 2)	2 Pet 2:1-16 “...Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight...”
Justice	Scorning about justice delayed (2 Pet 3:4)	2 Pet 3:10-18 “...But the day of the Lord will come like a thief...”

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## Cynicism and the New Testament

### • Brief History

- Founded by Diogenes (400-325 BC) in Corinth, who adopted the word “cynic” (*kunikos*, meaning “dog-like”) comparing his life to “shameless” stray dogs
- Advocated self-sufficiency with living on barest minimum and many adopted a wandering lifestyle, begging for alms as they travelled. They were thus not exclusive
- Stoicism developed from cynicism, but whereas the former formulated abstract ideas, cynicism focused on practical way of living
- Their texts have not survived but anecdotes are scattered in different sources
- Some scholars claim that an attraction of cynicism was its openness to different social classes so that upper class “intellectual” cynics existed alongside Plebeian (popular) cynics. The public behaviour differs with the social class

### • Key Beliefs

- Employed a diatribe style of teaching and conveying their philosophical ideas. They also employed short anecdotes called *chreia* as basis or scenario for teaching.
- With the motto “fear nothing, desire nothing, possess nothing”, the Cynics aspired to the simplest of living.
- Virtue is a life lived in accord with nature which itself offers the direction on how to live the good life. This good life is defined as reason, self-sufficiency, and freedom.
- Sometimes they deliberately performed non-conventional acts such as feigning madness or even defaecating in public to demonstrate their ethics
- They placed stress on *parrhesia* (freedom or boldness of speech)

### • Relevant Philosophers

- Dio of Prusa (40-112 AD)

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## Summary of Cynicism

- Appears to have developed in response to fate
- Lived “according to nature” = independent of all externals; bare essentials
- Called “dogs” for their public brashness, open speech (*parrhēsia*), and open behavior (sex, defecation, urination)
- Begged for their existence and wandered around
- **Rejected:** law, family, gender, race, wealth, education
- Taught via *chreia*

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## Cynicism and New Testament Interpretation

### • Gospels & Cynicism

- Jesus' demand that the rich young ruler should give up his riches to follow Him (Matt 19:16-30) has been suggested to be an example of Cynic demand
- Some scholars have suggested that the *κυνάρτιοις* (dogs) which Jesus referred to in the exchange with the Syro-Phoenician woman in Mk 7:24-30 & Matt 15:21-28 was Cynic beggars and not a derogatory remark about all Gentiles as some suggest
- Jesus' use of parables has also been compared to the *chriea* employed by Cynics

### • Paul & the Cynics

- Paul's references to speaking boldly or freely, *παρρησιά* (e.g. Eph 6:19-20; Phil 1:14; Rom 15:15; 2 Cor 3:12; 7:4) was also a common emphasis by the Cynic philosophers. But the term was not a monopoly for the Cynics, and in any case, just like many philosophers of his day, especially the Stoics, Paul often distinguished himself from the "uncouth" Cynics (e.g., 2 Thess 3:7-10).
- Paul's self-characterization as weak and suffering apostle in 1 Cor 4:9-13 has also been suggested as reflecting some of the situation of Cynic philosophers. Most scholars believe however that even though there are parallels, these do not reflect deliberate self-casting as a Cynic philosopher.
- Paul's denial in 2 Cor 2:17 that he was not like the "many" *καπηλεύοντες* (peddling) the word of God has also been suggested to indicate of having Cynic instincts, but this is more likely the Apostle rejecting comparison with the Sophists who indeed charged fees for their speeches. On the other hand some popular Cynics indeed accuse Sophists for the same charge that Paul denies. Saying something a Cynic would also have said does not necessarily make one a Cynic.

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## Compare and Contrast Jesus' ministry and the Cynics

Jesus	Cynic Philosophers
Matt 8:20: "the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."	Homeless "dogs"
Mk 3:21: "they went to take charge of him... 'He is out of his mind.'"	Behaved as if they were mad
Matt 4:23-25: "Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching... Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him"	Itinerant wanderers
Matt 13:54: "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?"	Witty speeches but no miracle workers
Matt 10:9-15: "Do not get any gold or silver or copper to take with you in your belts no bag for the journey or extra shirt or sandals or a staff, for the worker is worth his keep. Whatever town or village you enter, search there for some worthy person and stay at their house until you leave..."	Cynics did not seek for homes to stay. Unlike the disciples, they travelled with cloak, staff and purse (Diogenes Laertius, <i>Vitae philosophorum</i> 6.22-23, 34
Mk 4:33-34: "With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. He did not say anything to them without using a parable"	Cynics employed short anecdotes called <i>chriea</i> as part of their teaching
Resurrected and reigning Lord	Dead and buried

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Questions?