

The Jewish Synagogue

1) Origin

- a) Term – word means to “lead, bring together, gather.” Predominant use applied to festive gatherings or assemblies.
- b) Birth of the Synagogue – uncertainty led to various theories – Levy “beginnings of the synagogue are shrouded in obscurity.”
 - i) Jews of Jesus’ day traced it back to Moses (targum, Josephus, and Acts 15:21)
 - ii) Exilic Period – no temple – captives separated from Jerusalem. Psalms, Jeremiah, Ezra, and Nehemiah. Julius Welhausen contends that the synagogue dates from the Exile and arose in Babylon out of the necessity of providing some local center as a substitute for the temple.
 - iii) Post-exile – arose out of need to focus on law (Nehemiah) and prayer
 - iv) Creation of Hellenized Judaism and introduced by the Essenes (Friedlander)
 - v) Tradition – number of synagogues in Palestine in first century A.D. – 400.

2) Spread of the Synagogue

- a) Oldest synagogue dates to Egypt – Elephantine papyri dates to third century B.C., Greece second century B.C., and Palestine first century A.D.
- b) Synagogue became synonymous with the Diaspora. Whenever a Jewish settlement appeared, a synagogue followed. (10 families were enough to form a synagogue.) The wandering Jew became the vehicle for the spread of the synagogue. This Jewish institution saturated the Mediterranean world and provided a platform for the spread of Christianity.

3) Function of the Synagogue

- a) Identity – structure – marked the Jew off as distinct and different:
 - i) Talmud required the synagogue to be at the highest point in the city or the tallest building if possible.
 - ii) Building was usually situated near water, river, or sea and faced Jerusalem – the east.
 - iii) Furnishings included: the holy ark (a rectangular shaped closet which contained the torah), a *parochet* (a curtain in front of the holy ark simulating the barrier of the holy of holies, the *ner tamid* (the light near the ark that used oil for its fuel), and the *bema* (lectern for the reader).
- b) Community – solidarity
 - i) Hospitality toward stranger and traveler – larger synagogues had an adjoining structure used as a hostel where food and lodging was provided.
 - ii) Meeting place for laymen and an assembly point for communal life. Public decisions about almsgiving, divorce pleas, and widow’s dole.
- c) Apologetic – Philo “houses of instruction”
 - i) Responsible for the survival of the Jew – aided in combating Hellenism.
 - ii) Formal – Classroom instruction from elementary school through adulthood. Until the coming of the synagogue the family served as the vehicle for the education of the child. Teacher was called a *hazzan* and along with the study of the law the children were expected to study the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic.
 - iii) Informal – incorporated in worship experience specifically the reading of the torah.
- d) Worship
 - i) While the temple existed the worship of the common man took place through his surrogate, the priest. The synagogue gave the layman an opportunity to be involved in worship without the presence of the priest.
 - ii) Services took place on market days – Mondays, Thursdays, and Sabbath.
 - iii) Elders sat at the front facing the congregation – women and children were separated from the men and boys. The rich sat up front, the needy in the back.
 - iv) The service was divided into two parts – a liturgical/devotional section and an instruction section.

4) Significance for the New Testament

- a) New Testament uses the word 60 times.
- b) This institution played an important role in the ministries of Jesus and the apostles and influenced the beginning of the church.
 - i) This hub of Jewish life was an ideal platform for Jesus and Paul to confront the community with the gospel.
- c) Liturgy of the service has greatly influenced the order of the service in the church.
- d) Significance of synagogue worship lies on the emphasis in lay participation – the priesthood of the believers.
- e) Church's survival may have depended upon the very nature of the synagogue. The synagogue was flexible, mobile, and able to weather even the worst storms of persecution.

Jewish Festivals and Feasts

Introduction:

The Jewish religious calendar noted the weekly Sabbath observance, the monthly New Moon, and the annual festivals. The three great pilgrim festivals – Passover, Weeks (Pentecost), and Tabernacles brought large numbers to Jerusalem from Palestine. The word for a feast is *mo'ed* and means “a set time” or “a place of assembly:” *hag* was reserved for the three major festivals.

Passover (Pesach)

Historical moment: The Passover and the Week of Unleavened Bread that followed it were often treated as one festival. The Passover, the festival of freedom, commemorates the dramatic deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage. The Exodus from oppression was a festival of redemption. The word “Passover” (Exodus 12.11-13) refers to the angel of the Lord that will “pass over” (*pesach*) the houses whose door posts are identified with the smeared blood of the lamb.

Significance: The Exodus is to the Jew what the cross is to the Christian. The question of Jesus’ last supper meal with the disciples and the identification of Christ as “our Passover Lamb.”

Pentecost (Shabuoth)

Historical moment: “Pentecost” means “fifty” and was originally an agrarian celebration that marked the conclusion of the spring grain harvest. Later associated with the giving of the law on Mt. Sinai.

Significance: Jews eat dairy products (*torah* is compared to milk in Song of Songs 4.11), read the book of Ruth (events of book during harvest time, tradition born and died on Shabuoth), and study the law through the night. The birth of the Church at Pentecost (Acts 2).

Tabernacles (Sukkoth)

Historical moment: The Feast of Booths or Tabernacles was the most popular festival with the people and commemorated the living in tents during the wilderness wanderings. The observance of tabernacles included a procession of the people carrying palm branches (*lulab*- palm shoots bound together with 3 myrtle twigs and two willow branches) and citrons which were waved aloft during the daily singing of the Hallel (Psalms 113-118) as an expression of joy.

Significance: According to Josephus, Antiquities, Alexander Janneus was pelted with citrons for pouring the water on the ground instead of in the basin next to the altar indicating the Sadducean contempt for the Pharisaic custom – as a result his troops butchered 6000 worshippers in the temple courts. The customs of tabernacles (John 7.2,14) provide the background for Jesus’ statements, “If anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink” (each morning of the feast the priests brought water from the fountain of Siloam and poured it out as a libation on the altar) and “I am the light of the world” (John 7.32, 8.12). Four large menorahs were set up around the temple courts and kept burning each night.

Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)

Historical moment: This was not a feast but a solemn fast day – a day of repentance and prayer for forgiveness. Rabbis have three explanations for the feast: day when Adam sinned and repented; or when Abraham was circumcised; or the day when Moses returned after atoning for the sins of the golden calf. The scapegoat (*azazel*) may refer to a place, precipice, a personality (demons and fallen angels, or an action “to put wholly aside) was driven out into the wilderness and driven over a cliff.

Significance: The modern Jew sees this day as an opportunity for repentance and a holy fast day. This day is significant in the writing of Hebrews (5.5, 10.4). On this day in 1973 the Arab nations attacked Israel.

Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah) or Lights

Historical moment: The most popular of the post-biblical feasts in Judaism, it commemorates the rededication of the temple in 164 B.C. after its profanation by Antiochus Epiphanes (1 Macc. 4.42 – 59) in 167 B.C. This festival was associated with the lighting of lamps. Huge candelabra were lit and the people danced with torches in their hands and the light lit up Jerusalem. The festival is associated with the book of Judith.

Significance: Hanukkah symbolizes mainly the victory of the few over the many, and courage of the Jews to assert themselves as a people. The name Feast of Dedication appears in John 10.22.

Feast of Purim

Historical moment: Purim celebrated the deliverance of the Jews from their enemies as recorded in the book of Esther.

Significance: The two days of the festival are characterized by a carnival and worldly spirit when the Jew attempts to find psychological relief from the constant adherence to what might have become an intolerable burden of loyalty to the Torah. Esther is read as a reminder of the triumph of the Jewish people. The reader is required to read the names of Haman's 10 sons (Esther 9.7-9) in one breath to signify their simultaneous deaths. Whenever the name of Haman is read, the congregations react by stomping their feet, hissing, gesticulating and shouting. The Talmud allows the Jewish people to let their hair down during these days and torah violations are not serious (drunkenness, cross-dressing, and a man is not responsible for damaging another's property during this time). Three-cornered pies (*hamantashan*- "Haman's ears") are eaten during this feast.

The Sanhedrin

1) Origin

- a) Terminology
 - i) Greek word *synhedrion* has several meanings: a council of war, a judicial body, the Areopagus, the highest council in Athens.
 - ii) "Sanhedrin" is the hebraized or aramaized form of *synhedrion*.
- b) Inception – lack of positive historical information regarding the origin – theories:
 - i) Mosaic – the council of 70 elders given to Moses in Numbers 11:16
 - ii) Post-exilic – after the return of the exiles from Babylon an assembly was formed to protect the sanctity of the Torah.
 - iii) Most scholars favor an organized aristocratic governing tribune among the Jews during the Greek period. Religious license granted under the Ptolemies.
 - iv) Hoenig contends that the Sanhedrin evolved as a democratic and specialized "Torah legislative body" during the peaceful Hasmonean era, 142-63 B.C. Ferguson: "the immediate antecedent of the Sanhedrin in NT times was the council of elders or senate of Hasmonean times."
- c) Number of Sanhedrin – difficulty in reconciling the differences between the Greek and rabbinic sources – were there two or one?
 - i) Sanhedrin of NT and Josephus and *Beth Din* of rabbinic literature were the same institutions existing at different periods – *Beth Din* post A.D. 70 and Sanhedrin pre A.D. 70.
 - ii) Sanhedrin and *Beth Din* different institutions existing simultaneously – one of which survived.

2) Composition

- a) NT era the Sanhedrin was composed of chief priests, elders, and scribes. A council of high priestly aristocracy and prominent laymen presided over by the high priest.
- b) After A.D. 70 the *Beth Din* replaced the Jerusalem Sanhedrin and the President (*nasi*) and council of scholars interpreted the law. Rome came to recognize the position of the *nasi* and his council as the body through which local government in Palestine could be administered.
- c) Membership – appointed for life and traits of character included learned, humility, and popular with fellow man. Disqualifying factors were age and no children.

3) Procedure

- a) Members sat in a semi-circle facing one another
- b) Met daily except on festival days and the Sabbath during the hours between the two daily sacrifices (7:30 am and 3:30 pm). Before the court commenced business each day its members would recite the *shema* and the decalogue.
- c) A verdict of guilty could not be rendered on the same day of the trial and the accused was dressed in mourning clothes.
- d) In civil and ceremonial cases the taking of the vote began with the head of the Sanhedrin. In judgments impacting life and death, voting began "at the side" with the younger members in order that their vote might not be influenced by that of an elder member.

4) Jurisdiction

- a) Sanhedrin exercised judicial, legislative, and executive functions. Jewish supreme court on matters of the interpretation of the law. The judgment rendered by the Sanhedrin was irrevocable and final.
- b) Jewish tradition claims that this body had the jurisdiction to try a tribe, false prophet, or high priest, initiate an aggressive war, and renovate the city or temple courtyard.
- c) Sanhedrin had criminal jurisdiction – what of capital punishment? John 18:31 vs. Stephen and temple balustrade.
- d) In a complex environment the Jew could look to the Sanhedrin for a semblance of stability and law and order.

Philosophical Schools

- 1) **SOPHISTS**—(5th century B.C. during the golden age of Athens) – “one who could make you wise.” Goal of the sophist was to instruct and equip people in the art of public speaking and rhetoric. The Greek world placed a premium on the art of persuasion in public life: in the political assemblies, army, and law courts. The sophists wandered from city to city giving public lectures and impressing audiences with their eloquence and skillful arguments.” Ferguson sums up their importance: “The Sophistic movement was not the birth of thought, but it was the birth of conscious intellectualism. The Sophists raised questions that were central to the Hellenistic philosophical schools, and they provide the background to Socrates and Plato.”
- 2) **SOCRATES (469-399 B.C.)** – “The stress on individualism in Hellenistic philosophy found its basis and an exemplar in Socrates.” (F 307) To paraphrase Cicero, Socrates brought philosophy down from heaven to earth and focused on the realities of daily life encountered by the individual. He was not a Sophist and this sage did not give public lectures. Socrates knew almost everyone in Athens and through probing questions helped people to define crucial concepts like justice, piety, and beauty. He never gave an answer but steered the dialogue along the path of self-discovery. His belief was that if a person defined right action he would do it. In Socrates’ day Athens was at war with Sparta and his message viewed as seditious and critical of the city democracy. He was charged with corrupting the youth and not worshipping the gods but introducing a new *daimon*. In his trial Socrates remained defiant and this led to his tragic end – the drinking of the cup of hemlock.
- 3) **PLATO (429-347 B.C.)**
 - a) **Life** – He came from an aristocratic family in Athens and his life was shattered by Socrates’ death. He left Athens for 12 years after his mentor’s suicide arguing that he could not support a democracy that put to death a citizen like Socrates. On his return to Athens after 387 B.C. he began to teach near the grove sacred to the deity *Akademos*. He taught for 40 years and his school came to be known as the Academy.
 - b) **Thought** – Plato selected the literary genre of dialogue {answer and question} to reflect the teaching method of Socrates. The Dialogues fall into three periods. The *Republic* offers a theory of the ideal state; the *Laws* present the actual detailed prescriptions for public and private life and concentrate on religion. The *Timaeus* yields three ultimate principles: The 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. Plato’s thought – “ideas” are real but the “particulars” in the world are imperfect imitations of the idea. (His use of ‘ideas’ is difficult because for us ideas are in the mind but for Plato they are not mental nor physical but outside space and time). All ideas (forms) are summed up in the one ultimate idea of the Good (principle of perfection). Plato has no personal God and the closest to the biblical ‘living God’ is his World Soul. His “Myth of the Cave” in the *Republic* 7 (514A-19A) is one of the great myths of literature and in this allegory we catch an insight into Plato’s philosophy of ideas and his mission as a philosopher.

Christianity offers a significant point of contact and correction to Platonic philosophy: his emphasis on a spiritual reality distinct from the body and his doctrine of immortality. Western thought has adopted the Platonic idea of a human as two distinct entities: the body is the vehicle of the invisible soul. The *Phaedo*, a conversation between Socrates and his friends in his last hours, argues for the immortality of the soul. The soul is by definition life (psyche) and survives the body at death. The real self possesses divinity and its home is not earth but the sphere of the planets. Distinguish Plato's view and the Christian doctrine of a resurrection of the body. Plato's epistemology (theory of knowledge) is related to his view of the soul. Knowledge is innate and recollection. Ideas are *a priori* - known independently of experience. Platonic influence came to the fore not in the Hellenistic age but in the early centuries of the Christian era. Key influences: nonmaterial reality, deathless soul, idea of a cosmic religion, {beauty of celestial order above} and a just society.

4) ARISTOTLE AND THE PERIPATETICS (384-322 B. C.)

- a) **Life** – He was born at Stagirus (father a doctor) and came to Plato's academy at the age of 17. When Plato died Aristotle left Athens and was invited by Philip to tutor Alexander the Great. He returned to Athens in 334 B.C. and founded his own school. The buildings he rented had a covered walk around a courtyard, which gave the name Peripatetic to his school.
- b) **Thought**– Aristotle started with the “particulars” (individual things) in the world and tried to categorize them into *genera*, whereas Plato started with the ‘universals’ (idea, form) and moved to specifics.
God- Aristotle allowed for a multiplicity of unmoved movers but he does not explain how they would have been related to the prime mover. His “God” was a part of the structure of reality but not outside it or its cause.
Soul- Soul is the organizing principle of the body and can be distinguished only in thought not in fact.
Theory of Knowledge- Aristotle reversed Plato's epistemology arguing that knowledge is derived from sense experience.
Ethics – human beings have rational faculties and the supreme good is the rational life.
- c) Aristotle's **Influence** – Alexander the Great ushered in massive change in his world and philosophies thereafter pursued practical morality and the ordered metaphysical worlds of Plato and Aristotle receded into the background. Aristotle's impact on Christian thought was to come centuries later.

5) SKEPTICISM

- a) **Thought-** The Greek philosopher would examine a phenomenon and either reach a decision or opinion (dogma) or suspend judgment (epoche). If a person could not come to a conclusion then that person suspends judgment. To the skeptics all the other schools were dogmatic and this was the chief philosophical malady that needed a cure.
- b) **Proponents** – Pyrrho (c. 360- c. 270 BC) could not find the purpose of life and gave up the search and “suspended judgment.” At this point he discovered that he had found the goal he sought. (His experience was like that of a painter who could not make the picture come out right, gave up and threw the paint at the canvas – and then it was just right).
- c) **Influence of Skepticism** – This negative philosophy might debate the theoretical questions but it did not provide an answer to the question of how does one live. Christians recruited the polemic of this philosophy and directed it at the other philosophical schools.

6) CYNICISM

- a) **Beginnings of Cynicism** - Diogenes of Sinope (c.400-c. 325 B.C.) is seen as the founder of the Cynic way of life and the first to be given the epithet Cynic (“dog”) because of his shamelessness in public (the behavior of dogs). Whatever is natural is not indecent even in public. He advocated a life of simplicity, autonomy, and austerity.
- b) **Cynic Characteristics** – “In order to excite censure they exposed themselves to scorn by deliberately acting against the conventions of society: using violent and abusive language, wearing filthy garments, performing acts of nature (defecation, sex) in public, and feigning madness (F 329). These iconoclasts believed that a life of virtue could be attained by one’s moral effort, and thus they rejected the claims of fate over an individual’s life. They rejected Stoic dogma and traditional religion. The Cynic was known for his boldness of speech, his radical individualism, and sense of moral superiority. “The wandering Cynic philosophers became a common feature of the early empire. Their distinctive appearance – woolen cloak, walking stick, beggar’s bag, and long beard – identified them throughout the Med. World...The Cynics exercised much influence, not in getting people to adopt their way of life but in practical guidance in the affairs of life.” (F 330) The Cynic way of life attracted deadbeats and imposters who loved the notoriety and alms.
- c) **Influence of Cynicism** – “The Cynics contributed much to popular philosophy and popularized certain key themes of moralists. From the 1st century A.D. to the end of antiquity the Cynic beggar-philosopher was a common feature in the cities of the Roman world. Popular philosophers could be found haranguing the people in the marketplace and wherever people gathered. By renouncing possessions, wearing a philosopher’s cloak, and practicing self-affliction, the Cynics were of the important strands leading to the Christian monk.” (F3300)

7) STOICISM

- a) The two principal philosophical schools of the Hellenistic Age were the Stoics and Epicureans (Acts 17:18). Both focused on ethics but developed comprehensive explanations of reality.
- b) **Beginnings of Stoicism (Early Stoa): Zeno (335-263 B.C.)** Possibly a Phoenician who came to Athens about 313 B.C., Zeno was a merchant who began teaching in a colonnade at the side of the public market, the famous *Stoa Poikile* (the Painted Porch which served as a public hall) in Athens. He developed a complete philosophical system of three branches – logic and theory of knowledge, physics and theology, and ethics. His main task was to protect man from fear and disturbance and claimed that the goal of life was virtue.
- c) **Middle Stoa -Panaetius (c. 185-109 B.C.)** was from a noble family in Rhodes. After studying in Athens he moved to Rome in 144 B.C. where he became a part of the circle that gathered around Scipio and included the Greek historian of Rome, Polybius. He returned to Athens to head and rejuvenate the Stoic school for the last 20 years of his life. He adapted Stoicism to the Romans, making it suitable for a people ruling the world. **Posidonius (c. 135-50 B.C.)** – if “decorum is the word for Panaetius; enthusiasm is the word for Posidonius.” (F340) He studied science and philosophy and may be compared with Aristotle.
- d) **Later Stoa (Roman Stoicism):** The Roman representatives of Stoicism in the first and second centuries A.D. show an exclusively ethical and practical concern. Stoicism had a broad range of appeal- from the slave Epictetus to the emperor Marcus Aurelius. **Seneca (c. AD 1-65)**- born in Cordoba, Spain. He came from an equestrian family and his brother Gallio became proconsul of Achaia (Acts 18:12). Tutor to Nero until compelled to commit suicide in A.D. 65 for an alleged conspiracy against the emperor. His principal philosophical writings are the 10 ethical treatises [*Dialogues*] and a collection of 124 *Moral Epistles*. “His writings subordinate philosophy to moral exhortation and show a philosopher who was a moral director.” (F343) Seneca’s moral life was hardly congruent with his ethical credo. Positively, Seneca’s sentiments have more nearly approximated Christian teaching than those of any other classical philosopher. Tertullian described him as ‘always our Seneca’ [*On the Soul* 20]. **Musonius Rufus (A.D. 30-101)**- twice exiled from Rome the cardinal aspect of his teaching was the practical exercise of virtue. “Several features of his moral teaching are of interest to students of early Christianity: he is the clearest of any ancient writer on the equality of man and woman (Frgs. 3-4); he believed marriage to be a complete partnership.” **Epictetus (c. A.D. 55-c. 135)** the son of a slave woman, he was born at Hierapolis in Phrygia. He made his way to Rome and grew up in the household of Epaphroditus, a freedman and secretary to Nero. He was a cripple with an affinity for philosophy. Epictetus attended the lectures of Musonius Rufus until he began teaching on the street corners and in the forum after his manumission. Banished with other philosophers in A.D. 89 he set up ‘office’ in Nicopolis, Greece where students from Rome and Athens came to sit at his feet. Flavius Arian, a student published his notes on Epictetus’ teaching in the *Discourses* and the

Enchiridion. **Marcus Aurelius (A.D. 121-180)** –*Meditations* [‘To Yourself’] record the emperor’s journal of Stoic philosophical thoughts.

- e) **Stoic Thought:** the purpose of philosophy is found in the practical life.
Stoic Physics: Materialistic understanding of the physical world (even God, words, and world are material) -Pantheistic view that the divine reality (logos-reason), *pneuma* (breath), *pronoia* (providence) permeates everything (like water and wine mix).
Stoic Logic and Epistemology: the universe is orderly and reason is the soul’s guiding principle and controls it. All souls remain in existence until the world conflagration.
Stoic Ethics: Virtue- the goal or end of life. Since human beings are rational, and the rational principle pervades the universe, the virtuous person lives in accord with reason (logos) - means to live harmoniously/in accord with nature. (This becomes possible because in the human soul the guiding principle, reason, is a spark of the divine creative fire which brought the whole cosmos in its completeness into being.) Determinism- in life we are given a predetermined script to live out. “Everything is subject to an unavoidable inevitability [fate] . . . everything which happens to one must be accepted with resignation: sickness and pain, a good and bad reputation, liberty and slavery, life and death. In fact one must suppress all feelings which might impede the course of nature or cast doubt upon its wisdom. One must attain complete *apatheia* or insensitivity.” (de Villiers 185)
- f) **Influence of Stoicism:** Taught the brotherhood of all people who were in fact equal because they shared in the divine Reason. This principle suited a multi - national Roman Empire and secured a greater appreciation of slaves and improvement of their lot. They condemned vices and imperialism. Christianity and Stoicism used some common vocabulary (Spirit, conscience, Logos, virtue, self-sufficiency, and freedom of speech). The “Household Rules” (Eph. 5:21-6:9; Col. 3:18-4:1) in form and content reflect Stoic influence and share a similar ethos (humankind’s persistent evil, the need for self-examination, humanity’s kinship with the divine, denial of the world’s values and emphasis on inner freedom from external circumstances).
- g) **Radical differences**—Stoicism had no personal God only an immanent God; the God of Scripture is the Creator of the universe and not equated with it as in Stoic pantheism; in Christianity the universe has a beginning, purpose, and end not the Stoic cycle; it remained a philosophy of the intellectual elite whereas Christianity was for the masses and related all classes of people to a personal Savior with moral power; stoicism had no personal immortality but on death the divine spark was absorbed back into the Whole. “Stoicism was a creed of despair and acquiescence; it looked down on the Christian virtues that depend upon the affirmation “God is love.” Stoicism’s apathy basically denied the emotional side of human experience. Christianity by contrast brought joy and hope into the world . . . Again, even where the teaching on social ethics was similar, the motivation was fundamentally different. Christians, ideally act benevolently not merely in fulfillment of the obligation of a common kinship in the universe or even in God, but because they have learned self-sacrifice and active love from God in Christ. Self-respect, not love, was Stoicism’s driving force.” (F 347).

8) EPICUREANS

a) Epicurus and his school (341-270 B.C.)

Born on the Athenian island of Samos, at the age of 19 he journeyed to Athens to study philosophy at the Academy. In 306 he opened his own philosophical school in the city in a house with a magnificent garden (came to be known as the 'philosophy of the Garden'). He had devoted followers who lived on the property austerely and cut off themselves from the world. Epicurus admitted women (including courtesans) and slaves to his community and advocated the placid pleasures of the mind, friendship, simplicity, and contentment. For him there was no reason to eat, drink, and be merry today if you are going to have a headache from it tomorrow. (The Cyrenaic school founded by Aristippus propagated the sensual view of pleasure). Poor health and intense suffering led to a frugal life. A father figure to his followers, he formed communities of his followers and wrote letters of instruction to them. **Lucretius (94-55 B.C.)**- this Latin poet provides a useful exposition of the Epicurean system and debunks religion-"the fear of death and belief in gods who punish must be eradicated root and branch." [deVilliers 182]

b) **Epicurean Thought:** Epicurus turned his back on metaphysics and the philosophical traditions of Plato and Aristotle.

Physics: He borrowed from the pre-Socratic philosopher Democritus for his physical theory. He was a materialist and argued that nature consists of matter (atoms-invisible building blocks) and space. Nature has no purpose and there is no creation as the world is eternal. This physical theory was the death knell of religion for Epicurus. He did believe in the gods, however, but claimed they never interfaced with nature or humanity. (Epicurus had a theology without a religion). He held that there was no after life and when the physical body dies the soul, made up of atoms disintegrates. "Epicurus wanted to save humanity from the darkness of religion. Oracles, divination, magic, etc. are humbug. He saw religion as a source of fear; therefore the banishing of the gods brought peace and the possibility of a good life." (F352) Like the Christians they were labeled "atheists" by pagans because of their rejection of traditional religion and the separation of their communities from ordinary life.

Epistemology: sense perception is the basis of all reason. Reason cannot refute sense experiences because it is predicated on it. (For Aristotle reason uses the senses but for Epicurus reason is something constructed out of the senses).

Ethics: the central platform of the Epicurean construct. The goal (*telos*) of life was the pursuit of pleasure (hedone). (This is not self-indulgence as the modern understands it). Epicurus' hedonism derived from his empiricism- life is made up of feelings of pain and pleasure. It is human nature to seek pleasure rather than pain. The pleasures one should seek pertain to the equilibrium of the soul. Tranquility, the absence of agitation (*ataraxia*) was the highest good. Epicurus valued friendship as one of the basic joys and pleasures of life replacing ambition and other desires.

- c) **Epicurean Influence:** The practical attraction of Epicureanism is seen in a summary from Diogenes an Epicurean [A.D. 200]: “Nothing to fear in God; Nothing to feel in death; Good [pleasure] can be attained; Evil [pain] can be endured. “The Epicureans and Stoics were the chief rivals for the allegiance of educated people in the Hellenistic Age. Both had a primary emphasis on ethics and made philosophy a way of life that could be its own religion with converting power. As Epicureanism had an extreme antecedent for its hedonism in the Cyrenaic philosophy, so Stoicism had an extreme antecedent for its denial of the world in Cynicism, As Epicureanism drew its physical theory from the pre-Socratic philosopher Democritus, so Stoicism was indebted for part of its physical theory to the pre-Socratics philosopher Heraclitus. Both . . . sought to liberate humans from fate, to make them self-sufficient and indifferent to externals. Their major concerns- undisturbedness (*ataraxia*) in Epicureanism and passionlessness (*apatheia*) in Stoicism . . . (latter) said in effect,” Let us neither eat nor drink, for tomorrow we die.” . . . Epicureanism advocated a quiet and peaceful life. The life of ‘the Garden;’ it took no interest in public affairs. Stoicism, as indicated by its name, ‘the Porch,’ was set in the middle of public life and affairs. Stoicism developed in the direction of upholding the structures of society and the traditional religion. Its more active creed appealed to more persons, especially among the Romans, and exerted more influence. Nevertheless, one anecdote is revealing. A stoic was asked once why Stoics sometimes became Epicureans, but Epicureans never become Stoics. He replied, “Men many become eunuchs, but eunuchs cannot become men.” [F355-56]