

Religion in the Roman Empire First Century

1. Judaism: mainly trying to reach God's standard of holiness through the keeping of the law of the Old Testament and priestly sacrifices.

2. Greek mythology/idolatry: ancient beliefs rooted in myths of the gods dwelling on earth like humans and often living in ungodly and immoral lifestyles. Dionysus/Bachus- god of wine and patron of the arts; worshiped through drunken orgies and feasts.

Cybele- one of the mother goddesses. Men who wanted to enter temple priesthood were required to undergo a ritual sex change.

Artemis/Aphrodite- goddess of fertility and childbirth. The main temple was in Ephesus with temple prostitution a common act of worship.

3. Greek philosophy:

Cosmological dualism- the belief in the duality of the heaven and the earth. Heaven being the spiritual sphere of all good things, and earth, material things and man, being the evil sphere of pain and suffering.

Elemental spirits- the powers of the four elements: earth, fire, water, and air that controlled the heavenly realm and a person's very fate.

Asceticism- the practice of renouncing the comforts of society and leading a life of self-denial or self-discipline. Things such as fasting were done to reach the spiritual sphere and escape the evil earthly presence.

Libertinism- the opposite of asceticism; a licentious lifestyle with no moral boundaries since the body is of no eternal importance.

4. Asian Mysticism

Mystery Religions: influence from conquest and trade with the Orient, reaching this area around 300 BC These various cults tried to escape earthly existence through magic arts or esoteric knowledge. The Mithras cult was the most popular among the Roman Empire.

Rituals- practiced by cults to gain spiritual experiences such as ceremonial washings, sacramental meals, astrology, blood sacrifice, orgies, and ecstatic worship.

Seven spheres- adaptation of Greek dualism, but more added with seven layers between this earthly plane and the spiritual plane. The gap between these spheres was known as the "pleroma" or fullness. People believed each sphere was ruled by powers and principalities that guard each sphere and must be appeased or defeated to pass by.

5. Roman religion: mostly just copied the ancient Greek gods and myths and gave them Latin names.

Emperor cult- promoted first by Augustus, deified the Caesar and set up temples all around the Roman Empire for his worship.