

The Worldview Of 1st Century Believers

Somehow we've picked up the idea that first century believers were either ignorant, or totally focussed on spiritual matters. This comes from our Christian-centric church teaching. We may have also taken in the idea that the Jews of that time were very religious people, totally focussed on the Torah and WHWH. Again, this has happened because of our Israel-centric, Bible-centric teaching from the church.

Both of these ideas are assumptions with no basis of reality because we weren't there to check it out. We do have some writings from that time (such as the historian Josephus¹), but these don't allow us to make sweeping statements.

So what was the worldview on 1st century people of the Middle East, especially the Jews?

(1) As Jews, they were strongly influenced by their time in Babylon during their exile there. The writings of the rabbis greatly changed from then on, culminating in a collection of their thoughts in the 2nd century Talmud². This was the teachings they ascribed to as being next in importance to the Torah.

(2) The intertestamental writings³ from the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes⁴ and Zealots were commonly read by learned people, especially the wealthy men. A lot of these are included in what we call the Apocrypha⁵.

(3) From their background history in Mesopotamia⁶, where their ancestor Abraham came from, they were steeped in their myths and legends as part of secular life. The Assyrians⁷ and the Babylonians⁸ both came from Mesopotamia and their influence through trade, commerce and their empires greatly impacted the inhabitants of the Middle East. The empire of the Hittites⁹ of Asia Minor also extended to the area of Canaan and their influence also impacted the Israelites.

(4) From their time in Egypt, there would have been a remnant of myths and legends, as well as worldviews and cosmologies which were passed down from generation to generation. These were in the psyche of the Israelites.

(5) Greek was the language, philosophy¹⁰ and lifestyle of the 1st century even though the Romans had defeated the Greeks and taken over their empire. In fact Greek philosophy¹¹ continued to be taught in Europe¹² centuries later – it was that influential. The Jews spoke Koine Greek¹³ and they had the OT translated into Greek (called the Septuagint¹⁴) and into Aramaic¹⁵ (the language of Samaria, the northern Kingdom of Israel, where Jesus grew up). Greek ideas influenced 1st century people to meet in synagogues and discuss philosophical and theological matters, to read texts for themselves and also to read aloud to groups. They read Greek literature and philosophies, as well as fictional materials.

(6) Roman was the big social and cultural influence in the 1st century. Where ever their empire went the job of the governor was to implement “Rome” in that region so that the culture and landscape changed to copy “home”. Even though the people hated the Romans and their invasion of their territory, the Roman culture, literature, paganism, etc., infiltrated the lives of the people, even subconsciously.

1 – en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Josephus

2 – en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talmud

3 – en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intertestamental_period

4 – en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essenes

5 – en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apocrypha

6 – en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mesopotamia

7 – en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assyria

8 – en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babylonia

9 – en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hittites

10 – en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Greek_philosophy

11 – en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hellenistic_philosophy

12 – en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_East_and_Latin_West

13 – en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Koine_Greek

14 – en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Septuagint

15 – en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bible_translations_into_Aramaic#Jewish_translations

All these influenced the attitudes and beliefs of 1st century people prior to coming into the Kingdom. They would have still been in their minds after that, despite being reprogrammed in spiritual matters. This is quite plain from the references to extra-biblical texts in the NT writings.¹⁶ These weren't used for spiritual training, but as 'scaffolding' to help readers of the letters build spiritual information.

To help you get 'your head around' all this, below are links to three books by Michael S. Heiser which will provide a backdrop for your comprehension.

BACKGROUND: *Michael is a scholar in the fields of biblical studies and the ancient Near East. He earned his M.A. in Ancient History (major fields: Ancient Israel and Egyptology) and his Ph.D. in Hebrew Bible and Semitic Languages.*

- “The Bible Unfiltered – Approaching Scripture on Its Own Terms” [LINK](#)
- “The Unseen Realm – Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible” [LINK](#)
- “Reversing Hermon – Enoch, the Watchers, and the Forgotten Mission of Jesus Christ” [LINK](#)

If you email me I'll send you a free sample of each of these so you can find out something about them before deciding to buy the books

Laurence

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(Readers will need to look up for themselves any scriptures alluded to in this document)

16 – e.g. Acts 17:28 and Titus 1:12

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Enoch#References_in_the_New_Testament
www.gotquestions.org/book-of-Jasher.html