

# The Church Heads West an Introduction to the Issues (Part II)

by Robert Wurtz II

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*Philo Judaeus, a Jewish scholar and philosopher, blended Greek philosophy with Jewish thought, influencing the development of early Christianity and its separation from Jewish roots.*

**Scripture:** Proverbs 3:5, John 1:1, 1 Corinthians 1:22, Colossians 2:8, 2 Timothy 3:16

**Topics:** "Early Church History", "Biblical Interpretation"

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## Description

Robert Wurtz II delves into the life and teachings of Philo of Alexandria, a Jew who blended Greek philosophy with Jewish thought and Scripture. Philo, a contemporary of Jesus and Paul, aimed to reconcile Greek intellectualism with Jewish belief by applying an 'allegorical' hermeneutic to the Scriptures, seeing them as containing both a literal and hidden meaning. His works, preserved by the Christian church, were seen as suspect by some Jews for reflecting Greek philosophy, yet were viewed favorably by Christian writers who found parallels between Philo's ideas and the Gospel of John, particularly the concept of the Word or Logos of God.

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## Transcript

PHILO JUDAEUS "Philo of Alexandria" (20 BCE - 50CE)

Philo Judaeus was a Jew and a contemporary of both Jesus and Paul. He was a native of Alexandria, Egypt. He received the best Jewish education, and was trained also in gentile learning-grammar, rhetoric, philosophy, geometry, poetry, music. Having been wealthy he was enabled to devote his career to scholarship. The Alexandrian Jews wielded great influence in the contemporary Roman Empire. In the winter of 39 AD - 40 AD, he was spokesman of a letter sent to Rome to protest against "Emperor worship." The mission failed. Caligula would not heed grievances, which would cease worship of himself. Keep in mind, the period between 30 BCE and 70CE saw many additions to the most momentous epoch in history.

Philo was a Jew by nationality and nurture, an oriental mystic by accident of residence. He was a Greek humanist by higher education and professional study, an ally of the Roman governing classes, familiar with their intellectual perspective. Moreover, he dedicated himself to two tasks and tried to weld them into unity. On the one hand, he wrote for educated men in Greek-Roman society, attempting to explain, often to justify his racial religion before them. The ancient state religion was growing weak and Philo taught Jewish faith as the "desire of all nations." On the other hand, he confronted his "orthodox" Jews and their

separatist traditions. He went a long way towards blending Judaism with Greek culture to further the process of Hellenism among the Jews. Most scholars agree that he was not familiar with the Hebrew Bible and did most of his work in the Greek translation known as the SEPTUAGINT.

Philo blended Greek Philosophy with Jewish thought and Scripture. He tried to remain true to the dogmatic deductions found in scripture; but that tends to be difficult when there is a mixture of two exclusive religions or philosophies. Taking the Old Testament he applied the "allegorical" hermeneutic that Origen would later champion. Philo taught that the Scriptures contain two meanings: a "lower" meaning, obvious in the literal plain sense of the text; and a "higher," or "hidden" meaning, perceptible to the "initiated" alone. This was not a new concept even then, but would eventually evolve into what we know today as Gnosticism. In this way he found it possible to reconcile Greek intellectualism with Jewish belief. Philo's writings were preserved by the Christian church. Many Jews thought his writings were suspect because they reflected Greek philosophy rather than Hebrew tradition, while the church viewed his works as close to the thoughts of the church fathers. Many Christian writers saw parallels between Philo and the Gospel of John, for example-especially in his idea of the Word, or Logos, of God being in the beginning with God (John 1:1). Some have gone as far as to say that Philo is the father of NEO-Platonism, but this cannot be said dogmatically. From Plato to Philo and on to Neo-Platonism we see developing one of the great threats to early Christianity and a great cause of separation even farther from its Jewish Roots. From this point we might say that Christianity in terms of its foundation had moved from Jerusalem to Ephesus; it would not be long until it would pack its bags once again and moved to Rome.

**\*\*Notes\*\***

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<http://31.1911encyclopedia.org/N/NE/NEOPLATONISM.htm>

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