

CHURCH HISTORY

Preparation of the World for Christianity

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Early Church History, part 2

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. It was no mere accident that Jesus Christ showed up on the scene of history when he did. God, in his providence, had prepared the world for the coming of Christ and Christianity. This was God's hour for the greatest event in history — the arrival of God's Son, Jesus Christ, into the world.
- B. Galatians 4:4 says, "But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son." From this time on, the world would never be the same, for Christ and Christianity were destined to make their mark upon mankind and alter the course of history.

II. THE ROMAN EMPIRE

- A. The armies of Rome had conquered the then known Western World and had established Roman law throughout the Empire. The political unity of the Empire and the long peace had fostered commerce, which in turn sent businessmen all over the Roman world. This great empire prepared the physical scene for the spread of the gospel in the following ways: 1) it gave peace in place of constant tribal warfare; 2) it built a great network of roads and bridges that made travel possible all over the then known world; 3) it cleared the sea of pirates so that trade by sea and travel by ship became common practice; and 4) it protected its citizens from robbers and rioting. These means of communications were set up by Rome to move her armies, but God used them to spread the gospel of peace throughout the world. The extension of Roman citizenship to individuals throughout the provinces was of immense advantage to such preachers of the gospel as possessed it. For example, the Apostle Paul was a Roman citizen and did not hesitate to use his citizenship for protection when necessary.

- B. Uhihorn makes this observation about the empire of Rome:

“All the people of the Old World hitherto had lived and labored apart, all their gains and achievements, their riches and treasures, their works of art and scientific results, their ancient traditions and legends, their gods and rites of worship, all existing elements of culture and forces of civilization, were now comprised in one empire. [The Roman Empire] united in itself all the cultivated nations of its time” (*The Conflict of Christianity with Heathenism*, p. 15.).

III. THE GREEK LANGUAGE

- A. The common language of the Roman Empire was not Latin but Koine (common) Greek, which was the language of the people. This provided the early Christian missionaries with an open door to preach in the common language of the people of the Empire. Also the Greek New Testament was written in Koine Greek. This could only be the working of a Divine Mind.
- B. The Greek language had its beginnings in 1500-900 B.C., which is often called the formative period. Greece, at this time, was divided into three states, and each of the states had its own dialect. Sparta spoke Doric, Athens spoke Ionic, and Thebes spoke Aeolic (backwoods Greek). These cities fought and Athens dominated, therefore Ionic became the general language of the people.
- C. From 900-322 B.C. the Greek language entered a new phase called Classical Greek. This is sometimes called Attic Greek, and it was the ruling dialect. Attic Greek, being a dialect of Ionic, was the language of Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates, and it is one of the great literary languages, for through it the deepest and most complex thoughts can be expressed. In time, however, the language began to break down — especially as Greek began to be spoken broadly as a second language.
- D. Philip of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great, was able to unite all the states of Greece. After his death his son Alexander the Great, a military genius, was able to take the Greeks to great victories and to spread the Greek culture. Alexander’s empire lasted from 334-323 B.C. In order for Alexander to unite all the dialects of Greece, there had to be a common language. Thus, the Koine (common) Greek was developed. The Koine period covers 322 B.C. to A.D. 529. Alexander was a conqueror and a statesman, and construction, not destruction, marked his conquests. He spread the Greek language and

Greek culture in Asia Minor, Syria, Egypt, Persia and Western India. He founded many Greek cities in these foreign lands for the preservation of Greek culture and language. Alexander accomplished all this before his death at the age of 33.

- E. God providentially guided Greek affairs to bring the Greek language into full bloom. Greece was conquered by Rome, but Rome stole, copied, and borrowed much of the Greek culture, including the Koine Greek which was spoken in much of the world. Some have said that Greek civilization conquered Rome. Thus, Koine Greek became the commercial language of the Roman Empire. The Greek language is considered by some to have been the best medium ever known for expressing theological and philosophical ideas.
- F. The Greek language became the world language — one that enabled the early Christians to communicate with all their hearers in the Roman world. When the Christians quoted the Old Testament to the Jews and Gentiles, it was from the Septuagint, a Greek version of the Old Testament compiled and translated more than two hundred years before Christ.

IV. PHILOSOPHICAL DETERIORATION

- A. The pagan cults and mystery religions lost their hold on the people in general. Greek philosophy made many people doubt their gods whose strange activities had begun to fade into myth and legend. The Roman gods came into disrepute, and many officials of the Empire continued to encourage religion only because such belief served to curtail revolt among the common people. The Roman state religion was clearly a political affair that offered no peace of mind to disturbed souls. There was a tremendous moral vacuum in the Gentile world.
- B. Judaism became cold, calculating and legalistic. The religious leaders in Jerusalem were more interested in traditionalism than they were in a living Messiah. Rome looked favorably on the Jews, and Jews in business became residents in various parts of the Empire. There was scarcely a city that did not have a synagogue. These synagogues became the first mission fields of the early Christians.

V. LOW MORALITY

- A. The moral condition of the then known world was deplorable. Romans 1:24-32 gives a vivid description of Rome and the Gentiles in general in the first century A.D.
- B. Slavery had produced shocking deterioration in slaves and masters. Half the people in the Roman Empire were slaves to the other half.

VI. FATALISM

- A. Fatalism and despair, characteristic of the East, moved westward and affected the outlook of the Roman world.
- B. Eastern religion had its effect on Rome, and the philosophies of the day pessimistically left little hope for a man in life or after death.

VII. CONCLUSION

- A. Under such conditions the gospel came with its promise of peace, pardon from sin, and rest for the heavy laden. Here was assurance, forgiveness, life, and salvation in Christ.
- B. This was the message that struck home, and the fullness of time made the rapid spread of this gospel possible.
- C. The message of Christ has not changed in two thousand years, and Christ is still meeting the spiritual needs of men in this day as he did in the first century.