



***J. GRESHAM
MACHEN***

***THE LITERATURE
AND HISTORY
OF NEW TESTAMENT
TIMES***



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PART I:

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The Historical Background of
Christianity

The Early History of
Christianity

By John Gresham Machen

PHILADELPHIA, PA.
THE PRESBYTERIAN BOARD OF PUBLICATION
AND SABBATH SCHOOL WORK

INTRODUCTION

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The general purpose of this course of lessons has been set forth in the introduction to the Student's Text Book. There is a tendency in the modern Church to neglect the study of Bible history. Such neglect will inevitably result in a loss of power. The gospel is a record of something that has happened, and uncertainty about the gospel is fatal weakness. Furthermore the historical study of the apostolic age—that age when divine revelation established the great principles of the Church's life—is the best corrective for a thousand vagaries. Much can be learned from modern pedagogy; but after all what is absolutely fundamental, both

for teacher and for student, is an orderly acquaintance with the Bible facts.

The Teacher's Manual, therefore, is intended not merely to offer suggestions as to methods of teaching, but primarily to supplement the teacher's knowledge. A teacher who knows only what he actually imparts to the class is inevitably dull. The true teacher brings forth out of his treasure things new and old.

The sections in the Teacher's Manual, since they are intended to be supplementary, should not be read until after careful attention has been paid to the corresponding sections in the Student's Text Book. Moreover, both sections together are of course in themselves insufficient. They should be supplemented by other reading. Suggestions about reading have been put at the end of every lesson. Here, however, a few general remarks may be made.

Davis' "Dictionary of the Bible" and Purves' "Christianity in the Apostolic Age," which have been recommended even to the student, will be to the teacher almost invaluable. The earnest teacher will also desire to refer to good commentaries on The Acts. The commentaries which have been mentioned in connection with the individual lessons are based upon the English Bible; but every teacher who has any knowledge of Greek, however slight, should use, instead, the commentary of Knowling, in "The Expositor's Greek Testament." For the life of Paul, Lewin's "Life and Epistles of St. Paul" and the similar book of Conybeare and Howson are still very valuable for their vivid and extended descriptions of the scenes of the missionary journeys. A similar service is rendered, in more up-to-date form, by the

various works of Ramsay. Stalker's "Life of St. Paul" is a good handbook. M'Clymont's "New Testament and Its Writers" contains instructive, though very brief, introductions to all of the New Testament books. Hastings' "Dictionary of the Bible" and "Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels" number among their contributors many writers of many opinions. They are rich in references to the vast literature of modern Biblical discussion.

The writer of this course has derived information from many quarters. Definite acknowledgment of indebtedness, since no originality is claimed, may be regarded as unnecessary. It is a pleasure, however, to render special thanks to Rev. Professor William Park Armstrong, D. D., of Princeton Theological Seminary, whose wise counsel has been of incalculable assistance at many points.

The actual presentation of the lessons will, of course, vary according to the needs of the classes and the preferences of the teachers. The Student's Text Book may often provide a convenient order of presentation. That book is intended not merely to be read, but also to be studied. It is to be regarded as a sort of outline of the course.

The "topics for study" are intended to serve a double purpose. In the first place, they will test the student's knowledge of the lesson material; in the second place, they will afford encouragement to special investigation. Individual topics may often be assigned for thorough treatment to individual students, while the class as a whole may use all the topics as guides to a general knowledge.

Personal interest in the individual students is of the utmost importance. Instruction has a tenfold value when it

is backed by friendship. The relation of the students to the Church should be a matter of especial concern. If any member of the class has not confessed his faith in Christ, the study of this year offers abundant opportunity for a word in season. Our study reveals the Church as a divine institution. Shall we then stand aloof?

In this course the teacher has the opportunity of introducing young people of maturing minds to the historical study of the New Testament. There could be no more inspiring task. Carried about with every wind of doctrine, the Church is sadly in need of an assured anchorage. That anchorage should be sought in history. Ignorance is weak; sound knowledge, sought with prayer, and blessed by the Spirit of God, will lead to a more stalwart and more intelligent faith.

LESSON I

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THE NEW TESTAMENT

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This is an introductory lesson. It should be used, first of all, to answer intelligent general questions about the New Testament. Some of these questions will be discussed briefly under Sections 1 to 3, below.

The historical study of the New Testament, based upon a study of the circumstances under which the individual books were written, will probably be new to many of the students. The new point of view should be used to awaken interest.

The climax of the lesson should, however, be a presentation of the unity of the New Testament as the very Word of God to us. Historical study should be made—and can be made—subservient to reverent and thankful obedience.

1. THE ORIGIN AND MEANING OF THE NAME

The English word "testament" comes from a Latin word. The equivalent Greek word is hard to translate. As used in the Greek Bible it may mean either "covenant" or "testament." Usually it should probably be translated "covenant."

The phrase "new covenant" occurs about five times in the New Testament. In none of these passages does the phrase refer to the "New Testament" in our sense. It designates a new relationship into which men have been received with God. The old covenant was made, through the mediatorship of Moses, with the Hebrew nation; the new covenant, hinted at in prophecy, Jer. 31:31, and instituted by the Lord Jesus, I Cor. 11:25, was made with all those, of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, who should through faith accept the salvation offered by Christ. Those who believe become, like Israel of old, God's chosen people, and enter into the warmth and joy of the divine communion. The names "old and new covenants," then, were applied first to these two special relationships into which God entered with men. Afterwards the names were applied to the books in which the conditions of those relationships were set forth. Perhaps it would have been better if we had started to say "New Covenant" where we now say "New Testament." At any rate the idea alluded to in the name is

the inspiring idea, realized in Christ, of an alliance with God. The New Testament is the divine treaty by the terms of which God has received us rebels and enemies into peace with himself.

2. ONE BOOK, OR A COLLECTION OF BOOKS?

In the first place, the New Testament may be treated in every respect as a single book. That course is adopted by many of the most devoted lovers of the Bible. By them the Bible is treated simply as a textbook of religion. Passages are quoted indiscriminately from all parts of it, without much regard to the context. The wide differences of form and of spirit among the various books are ignored. The historical implications of the books are of course accepted as true, but practically they are left quite unassimilated.

Now let us be quite plain about one thing. The men who use the Bible in this way are right in the main point. They treat the Bible as the guide of life for time and for eternity. And if by the use of the Bible we can come into communion with God, we can afford to miss a good many other things. Nevertheless, the Bible is as a matter of fact not a mere textbook of religion, and if we treat it as such we miss much of its richness. If the Bible were merely a systematic treatise, it would be far easier to interpret. The interpreter would be spared a great deal of trouble, but the burden would be heaped upon the preacher. As it is, the Bible is itself a preacher, because it is in such close contact with the actual experience of men of flesh and blood. Its general teachings are given us in large measure only through the medium of history, through the medium of example. In

order to arrive at the general truths, therefore, intellectual labor is often necessary. God has made things harder for the intellect that he may strike home the more surely to the heart. If Paul had written a systematic theology, the New Testament way of salvation might in some ways have been plainer than it is. It would have been plain to the intellect, but it would have needed interpretation to the heart. Conviction can be wrought only by the immediate impact of personal life. The theology of Paul, of itself, might be a dead thing; the religious experience of Paul, interwoven with his theology, and bared before us in the epistles, is irresistible.

In the second place, the historical form of the Bible may be considered at the expense of its spiritual content. The Bible may be treated simply as a storybook. Such a method of treatment is exceedingly common to-day. "The Bible as literature" is its slogan. This treatment has simply missed the main point altogether. It is incomparably inferior to that treatment which takes the Bible as a mere textbook of religion. The Bible as an addition to the world's history or the world's literature has, indeed, considerable educational value. But it does not give eternal life.

A third method is possible, and that third method is right. The historical and literary form of the Bible is recognized to the full. But it is regarded not as an end in itself, but as a means to an end. Historical study is necessary not only to establish to the modern man the saving facts of the gospel, but also to do justice to the dramatic narrative form in which God has revealed to us his eternal will.

It is nearer the truth, then, to say that the New Testament is a single book than to say that it is a collection

of books. Its parts differ widely among themselves, in authorship, in date, in circumstances, in aim. Those differences must be studied carefully, if the full meaning is to be obtained. But widely as the New Testament writings differ among themselves, they differ yet far more widely from all other books. They presented themselves originally to the Church with a divine authority, which is foreign to the ordinary writings of men. That authority has been confirmed through the Christian centuries. Those who have submitted their lives to the New Testament have never been confounded. The New Testament has been to them the voice of God.

3. THE FOUR DIVISIONS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

(1) **THE GOSPELS.**—Christianity is based upon historical facts. Attempts, it is true, are often made to separate it from history. But they are bound to result in failure. Give up history, and you can retain some things. But you can never retain a gospel. For "gospel" means "good news," and "good news" means tidings, information derived from the witness of others. In other words, it means history. The question whether religion can be independent of history is really just the old question whether we need a gospel. The gospel is news that something has happened—something that puts a different face upon life. What that something is is told us in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. It is the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

(2) **THE BOOK OF THE ACTS.**—The Book of The Acts is a history of the extension of Christianity from Jerusalem out

into the Gentile world. It represents that extension as guided by the Spirit of God, and thus exhibits the divine warrant for the acceptance of us Gentiles, and for the development of the Christian Church. It provides the outline of apostolic history without which we could not understand the other New Testament books, especially the epistles of Paul. It illustrates to the full what has been said above about the value of the historical form in which the Bible teaching is presented. By reading this vivid narrative we obtain an impression of the power of the Holy Spirit which no systematic treatise could give.

(3) THE EPISTLES.—The Epistles of the New Testament are not just literature put in an epistolary form, but real letters. It is true that the addresses of some of them are very broad, for example, those of James and of I Peter; and that some of them contain no specific address at all, for example, Hebrews and I John. But the great majority of them, at least, were written under very special circumstances and intended to be read first by very definite people.

The chief letter-writer of the New Testament was the apostle Paul. To a certain extent he used the forms of letter-writing of his time, just as everyone to-day begins a letter with "Dear Sir." Within the last twenty years a great number of Greek private letters, dating from about the time of Paul, have been discovered in Egypt, where they have been preserved by the dry climate. It is interesting to compare them with the letters of Paul. There are some striking similarities in language; for both these letter-writers and Paul used the natural language of daily life rather than the extremely artificial language of the literature of that period.

To a certain extent, also, Paul used the same epistolary forms. The differences, however, are even more instructive than the resemblances. It is true, the Pauline epistles are not literary treatises, but real letters. But on the other hand they are not ordinary private letters intended to be read and thrown away, like the letters that have been discovered in Egypt. Most of them were intended to be read originally in churches. It is natural, then, that they should have been written in a loftier style than is to be found in mere business communications and the like. And if Paul uses the epistolary forms of his time he uses them in an entirely new way. Even the mere openings of the epistles are made the vehicle of Christian truth. "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"—there is nothing like that in contemporary letter-writing. The openings of the Pauline epistles form an interesting study. They are varied with wonderful skill to suit the varied character and subject matter of the letters that follow. Paul is never merely formal.

The letters of Paul differ widely among themselves. The Epistle to the Romans is almost a systematic exposition of the plan of salvation. Philemon is concerned with a little personal matter between Paul and one of his converts. But even where Paul is most theological he is personal, and even where he is most personal, he is faithful to his theology. Theology in him is never separate from experience, and experience never separate from theology. Even petty problems he settles always in the light of eternal principles. Hence his letters, though the specific circumstances that gave rise to them are past and gone, will never be antiquated.

(4) THE APOCALYPSE.—The Christian life is a life of hope. Inwardly we are free, but our freedom is not yet fully realized. We are in danger of losing our hope in the trials or in the mere humdrum of life. To keep it alive, the Apocalypse opens a glorious vision of the future. The vision is presented in symbolical language. It is not intended to help in any calculation of the times and seasons. But it shows us the Lamb upon the throne—and that is enough.

IN THE LIBRARY.—Davis, "Dictionary of the Bible": articles on "Bible," "Canon of the New Testament," "Covenant," "New Testament," and "Testament."

LESSON II

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THE ROMAN BACKGROUND OF CHRISTIANITY

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Christianity is not a human product. It is not to be explained by what preceded it on the earth. It is a new beginning in history, an immediate exercise of the divine power.

But though Christianity was not produced by men, it operates upon men, and upon men subject to all the ordinary conditions of earthly life. Primitive Christianity, then, which we shall study this year, cannot be understood

fully without an examination of the historical conditions under which it arose.

In the class, the lesson should probably be approached through the New Testament examples of the general principles which are outlined in the lesson helps. Examples will be found in the passages assigned in the Student's Text Book, and others should be sought for elsewhere.

1. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE EMPIRE

By the middle of the first century before Christ the power of the Roman republic extended around the Mediterranean Sea. Victories abroad, however, were accompanied by serious troubles at home. The increase of wealth and the importation of slave labor had produced unfortunate social conditions. The realm had become too large to be administered adequately by the old republican government. Individuals sometimes obtained practical control of affairs, and the state was torn by civil wars. Finally, in 49 B. C., Julius Cæsar entered Rome at the head of an army, and Roman liberty was at an end. After the assassination of Cæsar in 44 B. C., there was a succession of civil wars, and then, by the victory of Actium in 31 B. C., Octavius, who later assumed the name of Augustus, became sole ruler. Augustus died in A. D. 14.

Subsequent emperors during the first century were: Tiberius (A. D. 14-37), Caligula (A. D. 37-41), Claudius (A. D. 41-54), Nero (A. D. 54-68), Galba, Otho and Vitellius (A. D. 69), Vespasian (A. D. 69-79), Titus (A. D. 79-81), Domitian (A. D. 81-96), Nerva (A. D. 96-98), Trajan (A. D. 98-117).

2. ROMAN ADMINISTRATION UNDER THE EMPIRE

The general advantages of the Roman imperial government have been considered in the Student's Text Book. It will here be advisable to consider one or two features a little more in detail. Much of what follows can be illustrated from the New Testament; for the acquaintance of New Testament writers, especially of Luke, with Roman administration is not only accurate but also minute. The students should be encouraged to seek New Testament illustrations for themselves.

(1) THE PROVINCES.—The provinces of the empire are to be distinguished from the territories of subject kings or princes. The latter were quite subservient to Rome, but were given more independence of administration. A good example of such a subject king, theoretically an ally, but in reality a vassal, was Herod the Great, who ruled over all Palestine till 4 B. C.

The provinces themselves were divided into two great classes—imperial provinces and senatorial provinces.

The imperial provinces were under the immediate control of the emperor. They were governed by "legates," who had no regular term of office, but served at the emperor's pleasure. The imperial provinces were those in which, on account of unsettled conditions, or for the defense of the empire, large bodies of troops had to be maintained. Thus, by keeping the appointment of the legates exclusively in his own hands, the emperor retained the direct control of the all-important power of the army. A good example of an imperial province is the great province of Syria, with capital

at Antioch. Palestine was more or less under the supervision of the Syrian legate.

Districts different from the great imperial provinces, but, like them, under the immediate control of the emperor, were governed by "procurators." Judea, from A. D. 6 to A. D. 41, and from A. D. 44 on, is an example.

The senatorial provinces were governed by "proconsuls," chosen by lot from among the members of the Senate. The proconsuls served for only one year. Even over these provinces and their governors the emperor retained the fullest supervisory authority. The senatorial provinces composed the central and more settled portions of the empire, where large standing armies would not be needed. Examples are Achaia, with capital at Corinth, and Cyprus with capital at Paphos. Proconsuls of both of these provinces are mentioned in the New Testament by name.

(2) LOCAL GOVERNMENT.—The Romans did not attempt to introduce perfect uniformity throughout the empire. The original Greek unit of political life was the city, and Greek cities were scattered over the east before the Roman conquest. With regard to local affairs, many of the cities retained a certain amount of independence. It is interesting to observe the local peculiarities of the cities described in The Acts.

In addition to the Greek cities, many of which were more or less "free" in local affairs, many "Roman colonies" had been established here and there throughout the empire. The original colonists were often veterans of the Roman armies. Of course the populations soon came to be mixed, but Roman traditions were cultivated in the colonies more than

elsewhere. A number of the cities of The Acts were colonies, and one, Philippi, is expressly declared to be such. Acts 16:12. In that city the Roman character of the magistrates appears clearly from the Lucan narrative. There were "prætors" and "lictors."

(3) ROMAN CITIZENSHIP.—Before New Testament times Roman citizenship had been extended to all Italy. Italy, therefore, was not a province or group of provinces, but was regarded as a part of Rome. Outside of Italy Roman citizenship was a valuable special privilege. It raised a man above the mass of the provincial population. Some of the advantages of it appear clearly in the New Testament narrative. Because Paul was a Roman citizen he was legally exempt from the most degrading forms of punishment, and had a right to appeal to the court of the emperor. Roman citizenship was sometimes acquired by money, but Paul inherited it from his father.

3. ROMAN RELIGION

Under the empire, Rome was possessed of a state religion. The ancient gods of the republic were retained. There were great divinities like Jupiter and Mars, and there were numberless private divinities of individual households. The ancient religion had, indeed, undergone modifications. New divinities in plenty had been received. But the reception of the new did not involve abolition of the old. On the contrary, the gods of other peoples could be accepted just because they were regarded as nothing but the Roman gods under different names. Thus, long before the Christian era, there had been a thoroughgoing identification of the gods of Greece with the gods of Rome. The Greek Zeus, for

example, was identified with the Roman Jupiter; the Greek Ares with the Roman Mars. The gods of countries other than Greece were also received, though, as far as the city of Rome was concerned, with some conservatism.

In the Roman world, religion was a national affair. Worship of the national gods was not only piety, but also patriotism. Patriotism and religion were inseparably connected. Support of the gods of Rome, even where personal faith in them had been undermined, was considered to be the duty of every loyal citizen.

The political aspect of Roman religion appears most clearly in the worship of the Roman emperors. This remarkable development appears from the beginning of the empire. Augustus, indeed, refused to receive divine honors, at least in the west. But in the east even he was worshiped, and as time went on the reluctance of the emperors disappeared. Some of the worst of the emperors were most insistent upon their own divinity.

Perhaps the first impulse of the modern man is to regard the Cæsar cult simply as a particularly despicable form of flattery. In reality it was more than that. It was not established by imperial edict. It was not dictated primarily by servile fear. The Greek inhabitants of the empire really regarded Augustus as their saviour. And so he was, as far as any man could be. He saved them from the miseries of civil war, and from the rapacity of the degenerate republic; he gave them peace and happiness. And they responded by regarding him as a god.

To them it was natural. To them it was nothing new. Alexander the Great had been regarded as a god long

before the Christian era. His successors in Syria and in Egypt had also received divine honors. To the genuine Romans, the thing did not come so easy. The Cæsar cult, at least at first, was not developed in the west. But even the Romans could worship the emperor's "genius" or spirit, and from that to the actual worship of the emperor was but a step. Essential to the whole process of deification, both in Rome and in the east, was the close connection in ancient thinking between deity and humanity, and between religion and the state. If patriotism is religion, then the king is a god.

The Cæsar cult was the most palpable incorporation of the state religion. Worship of the emperor, therefore, might well be the test of loyalty to Rome. It could be practiced by skeptics and philosophers. It could be practiced by the devotees of all religions—save two. Jews and Christians alone could not bow at the emperor's shrine, for their God was a God who could brook no rival. He was not merely the greatest among many. He was the only Lord, Maker of heaven and earth.

4. THE ROMAN EMPIRE AND SUBSEQUENT HISTORY

Between Christianity and the Roman state, with its official religion, a life-and-death struggle was inevitable. But in the providence of God it was delayed. The empire was used not to crush Christianity but to open the world before it.

But was the empire really identical with the world? It seemed so to the Romans and to the Greeks. To them the empire was the world. And they were right. Not, of course,

in a literal sense. In the first century after Christ, vast civilizations—for example the civilization of China—were already in existence. There were great peoples of whom the Romans had never heard. But Roman arrogance has at last been vindicated. For Rome was in reality the key to subsequent history. Rome was the parent of Europe, and Europe is moving the world. Even China is at last being opened to the civilization of Rome. The Romans were right. He who could master Rome would be master, one day, of the world.

It has been a long process. But God's plans are sure. Christianity appeared at the one time when the world was open before it. By the power of the divine Spirit it conquered the empire. The empire dominated its barbarian conquerors. The barbarians are the parents of modern civilization. Modern civilization is invading the earth's remotest bounds. China, at last, is within our ken. Realms long closed have at last been opened. Another great opportunity! An opportunity for greed and selfishness! An opportunity for a dismal skepticism! And an opportunity for the Church of God!

IN THE LIBRARY.—Hastings, "Dictionary of the Bible": Adeney, article on "Cæsar"; Gwatkin, articles on "Roman Empire," and "Rome." Hastings, "Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics": Iverach, article on "Cæsarism." Westcott, "The Two Empires," in "The Epistles of St. John," pp. 250-282. Ramsay, "The Cities of St. Paul," pp. 48-81.

LESSON III

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THE GREEK BACKGROUND OF CHRISTIANITY

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The purpose of the present lesson is to make the student feel that the gospel was from the beginning a real gospel in a real world. If we isolate the early preaching from its environment, we make it seem like an unreal thing. Study of New Testament times makes the New Testament itself become a more living, a more interesting book.

In the Student's Text Book an outline of the Hellenistic age has been provided. It has been supplemented below by illustrative material. But in the class the lesson can probably be best approached from the side of the New Testament itself. In what languages is the Bible written? How did the New Testament come to be written in Greek? What other languages are mentioned in the New Testament? What light do these passages shed upon the linguistic conditions of the time? What is the attitude of the apostles toward Greek thought? Is that attitude altogether unfavorable, or did the early missionaries ever lay hold upon the higher aspirations of their Gentile hearers (Athens)? Where did the missionaries come into contact with heathen superstition? (Several fine examples in The Acts). What was the moral condition of the Greco-Roman world? How was the Hellenistic age like our own? Why did God send our Lord just in the first century? What was the social condition of the early Christians? Do you think that was an advantage or a

disadvantage? What men of higher position are mentioned in the New Testament? Questions like these will serve to relate the general expositions in the lesson helps to the New Testament itself. The lesson helps are intended to provide merely the presuppositions necessary for intelligent study. God working for real men in a real world—that is the subject of the lesson.

1. THE HELLENISTIC AGE

The Greek world culture which prevailed after the conquest of Alexander was widely different from the Greek life of the classical period. The earlier period is called the "Hellenic" period, the later period is designated as "Hellenistic." When Greek thought made itself master of the world, it became mingled with numberless foreign elements. The mixture appears most clearly, perhaps, in the sphere of religion. Polytheism was capable of indefinite expansion. New gods could easily be identified with the old, or else be received along with them without a conflict. The religion of the Greco-Roman world is therefore different from that of ancient Greece. It is a curious mixture of the most diverse beliefs. Nevertheless, the whole deserves to be called Hellenistic, because even the most strikingly non-Grecian elements were usually subjected more or less to the subtle molding of the Greek spirit.

The Hellenistic age used to be despised, but among modern scholars it is coming into its own. Its literary products are admittedly inferior to the glories of the earlier age, but even in literature its achievements are not to be despised, and in other spheres it is supreme. Notably in

mathematics and in natural science it was the golden age. Euclid, the geometrician, lived three centuries before Christ.

The learning of the Hellenistic age was centered in Alexandria in Egypt, a city which had been founded by Alexander the Great. Athens had, perhaps, ceased to possess the primacy. That fact is typical of the time. Greek culture had ceased to belong to Greece in the narrower sense. It had become a possession of the world. The great library of Alexandria was a sign of the times. The Hellenistic age was an age of widespread learning.

When Rome became master of the eastern world, conditions were not fundamentally changed. Rome merely hastened a process that was already at work. Already the nations had been brought together by the spread of Greek culture; Roman law merely added the additional bond of political unity. The Roman legions were missionaries of an all-pervading Hellenism.

The Greco-Roman world was astonishingly modern. It was modern in its cosmopolitanism. In our own time the nations have again been brought together. The external agencies for their welding are far more perfect to-day than they were under the empire. Even the Roman roads would be but a poor substitute for the railroad and the telegraph and the steamship. But on the other hand we lack the bond of a common language. In some ways the civilized world was even more of a unit in the first century than it is to-day.

The cosmopolitanism of the Roman Empire was a God-given opportunity for the Church. In a cosmopolitan age, if a man has something to say, he will not lack for an audience. His message will be understood in one place as well as in

another. The lesson is obvious for the Church of to-day. Again God has opened the world before us. If we have a message, in God's name let us proclaim it while yet there is time.

2. THE GREEK BIBLE

The Church originated in Palestine. The first missionaries were native Jews. Yet even they had been affected by the cosmopolitanism of the time. Even they could use Greek, in addition to their native language. And Paul, the greatest of the missionaries, though a Jew, was a citizen of a Greek city. The Church from the beginning was able to speak to the larger world.

One difficulty might possibly have arisen. The Christian mission was not carried on merely by the oral word. From the beginning Christianity was a religion with a Book. And that Book was not Greek. On the contrary it was intensely un-Grecian. The Old Testament is intolerant of heathen ideas. It is deeply rooted in the life of the chosen people. How could a Hebrew book be used in the Greek world?

The difficulty might have been serious. But in the providence of God it had been overcome. The Old Testament was a Hebrew book, but before the Christian era it had been translated into Greek. From the beginning Christianity was provided with a Greek Bible. It is always difficult to make a new translation of the Bible. Every missionary knows that. The introduction of a new translation takes time. It was fortunate, then, that a Greek-speaking Church had a Greek Bible ready to hand.

Everything was prepared for the gospel. God's time had come. Roman rule had brought peace. Greek culture had produced unity of speech. There was a Greek world, there were Greek-speaking missionaries, and there was a Greek Bible. In the first century, the salvation that was of the Jews could become a salvation for the whole world.

3. THE PAPYRI

The world in which the gospel was proclaimed is deserving of careful study. How shall it be investigated?

The most obvious way is to study the literature of the period. Until recent years that was almost the only way. But that method is partial at best. For literature is after all but an imperfect measure of any age. The society that is found in books is an idealized society, or at any rate it is the society of the great. The plain man is unrecorded. His deeds are not deemed worthy of a place in history.

Within the last thirty years, however, the plain people of the ancient world have come remarkably into view. They are revealed to us in the "non-literary papyri."

"Papyri" are pieces of papyrus. Papyrus was the common writing material of antiquity up to about A. D. 300, when vellum, or parchment, came into general use. Unfortunately papyrus, which was made from the pith of the papyrus plant, is not a very durable substance, so that ancient papyri have been preserved until modern times only under exceptionally favorable conditions. These conditions are found in Egypt, where the dry climate has kept the papyrus from disintegration.