

THE "WITNESS" MANUALS, No. 3.

B.C. and A.D.

or

How the World
was Prepared
for the Gospel



By W. E. VINE, M.A.

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GLASGOW: PICKERING & INGLIS, Printers and Publishers.
LONDON: ALFRED HOLNESS, 14 Paternoster Row, E.C.4.

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How the World was Prepared for the Gospel

"The Gospel of God, which He promised afore by His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning His Son,"
"Christ Jesus, Who gave Himself a ransom for all; the testimony to be borne in its own times" (Rom. 1. 1-3; 1 Tim. 2. 5, 6).

BY
W. E. VINE, M.A.

Author of "The Roman Empire in Prophecy," "The Twelve
Mysteries of the Bible," "The Scriptures and
How to Use Them," etc.

GLASGOW:

PICKERING & INGLIS, PRINTERS AND PUBLISHERS.
LONDON: A. HOLNESS, 14 PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.
BATH: "ECHOES OF SERVICE" OFFICE, 1 WIDCOMBE CRES.

And through most Booksellers and Depots.

FOREWORD.

A SPIRIT of inquiry in matters of religion is not only permissible but praiseworthy. God anticipated with no disfavour the questions of children, and enjoined the answers to be given (Exod. 12. 26; 13. 14, &c.). Did the questions of disciples ever fail to elicit from the Lord Jesus adequate response? It is refreshing to find anyone with sufficient interest to ask questions on subjects dealt with in the Bible. How much precious time is wasted in profitless gossip! But most of the difficulties which puzzle Christians would be solved if Holy Scripture itself were searched. Here, for example, is a question which is sometimes asked: Why were 4000 years allowed to elapse before Christ came, and unnumbered generations to pass away in comparative darkness, who, had the opportunity been afforded them, might have enjoyed the sunlight of Emmanuel's presence? We know from the Bible that it was "in the fulness of the time" that "God sent forth His Son," though before that "He had not left Himself without witness." But why was this "fulness of the time" so long delayed, and the full light withheld? Men need eyes as well as light, and to spell before they can read. To explain, at least in part, how God carried out this indispensable preparatory training, and especially by what process the scattered and divided nations were at the psychological moment rendered accessible to the spread of the Gospel is the purpose of this booklet. The God of Redemption is not only the God of Nature, He is also the God of History.

W. HOSTE.

B. C. and A. D.

or

How the World was Prepared for the Gospel.

Introductory.

IN His prayer recorded in John 17 the Lord Jesus spoke of His disciples as having been given to Him "out of the world" (verse 6), not out of the Jewish nation, be it noted, but out of the world at large, the world of humanity alienated from God. This association of God's chosen people with the idolatrous Gentiles is deeply significant; it indicates at once the grave condition of that highly favoured nation, and the necessity for the separation from it of those who were to become the bearers of the Gospel to mankind. The people of Israel had refused to "subject themselves to the righteousness of God" * (Rom. 10. 3), despite all that He had done on their behalf. Yet their very failure prepared the way for the display of His sovereign grace in the sacrifice of Christ His Son and in the message of salvation through Him.

In addition, however, to His dealings with

* The quotations are taken from the Revised Version.

Israel under the law, the world around was prepared by being rendered accessible, not only to the heralds of the Gospel, but also to the written message of the New Testament. And in the providence of God this accessibility was brought about at the very time when the period of the law was drawing to a close, and the age of Gospel grace approaching. The distinction between the two periods is briefly expressed in the conventional signs "B.C." and "A.D."

Scripture makes it clear that the time of the incarnation of the Son of God had been pre-determined in the divine counsels. Thus, in writing to churches in Galatia, consisting chiefly of Gentile converts, the Apostle says that they, Jews and Gentiles alike, had been "held in bondage under the rudiments of the world: but when *the fulness of the time* came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, that He might redeem them which were under the law" * (Gal. 4. 3, 4). The law revealed God's standard of holiness, and man had shown himself unable to attain to that standard by his

* It is to be noticed that Paul puts Gentile idolatry on a level with the teachings of Judaism, for in accepting Judaism instead of the Gospel these Galatian believers were turning "*back again to the weak and beggarly rudiments,*" to which they desired "to be in bondage *over again*" (verse 9). It follows that the teachings of the Judaizing proselytizers and their own former system of idolatry were alike regarded by God as "weak and beggarly rudiments."

own efforts. But the time of probation had run its course, and now God sent forth His Son. "What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the ordinance of the law might be fulfilled in us" (Rom. 8. 3, 4). That the dispensation of law had drawn to its close is further indicated in the opening words of the Epistle to the Hebrews: "God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets...hath *at the end of these days* spoken unto us in His Son," that is to say, at the end of the days of the dispensation of law. "The end of these days" was "the fulness of the time." Further, in the same epistle the time of the manifestation of Christ to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself is described as "*the end* [or, better, *the consummation*] *of the ages*" (9. 26, see margin). All preceding ages had looked on to this manifestation of Christ, and to it all succeeding ages will look back.

Again, that there was a special time appointed for the sending forth of the Gospel is stated in 1 Timothy 2. 5, 6: "there is one God, one Mediator also between God and men, Himself man, Christ Jesus, Who gave Himself a ransom for all; the testimony to be borne *in its own times*." In writing to Titus, too, the Apostle

speaks of the time chosen for the declaration of eternal life through the Gospel; God promised this life "before times eternal, but *in His own seasons* manifested His Word in the message" (Titus 1. 2, 3).

Israel: A Review.

Thus far the direct statements of Scripture. A brief sketch of the course of the nation of Israel from its inception until it became ripe for the intervention of God in the sending forth of His Son provides a striking proof of man's powerlessness, even under the most favourable conditions, to attain to righteousness, and, consequently, of the necessity for the sacrifice of Christ and the message of the Gospel.

About nineteen centuries before the present era, in the prospect of sending forth His Son to 'partake of flesh and blood' (Heb. 2. 14), God called Abram, a man of Chaldean Ur, to leave his home and to sojourn in Canaan, now called Palestine, the land in which the Divine purposes for the salvation of man through His Son were, in the fulness of the time, to be accomplished. This man's descendants were brought by a course of remarkable circumstances into Egypt, and there, during a period of four hundred years, grew into a nation known as Israel, after the name of Abram's grandson. Having become enslaved during this time under the yoke of the

Pharaohs, they were delivered by the direct intervention of God, and brought out from bondage under the leadership of Moses. After forty years of wandering they were led by his successor, Joshua, into the land of Canaan, whither God had called their ancestor. Prior to the Exodus from Egypt He had appointed for them the annual Feast of the Passover to commemorate their deliverance. During the period of wandering He gave them the Mosaic laws and ordinances, established the Tabernacle of the Testimony, with its ceremonies and sacrifices, and enjoined upon the people a strict obedience to all He had commanded.

Declension and Captivity.

Although the people repeatedly affirmed "all that the Lord hath spoken will we do," they speedily showed their inability to fulfil their pledge; and, more than this, they constantly rebelled against Him and grieved Him (Psa. 78. 40), so much so that the period of forty years spent in the wilderness became known as "the provocation" (Heb. 3. 8).

After they were settled in Canaan they further departed from His ways, and though, during the government first of their judges and then of their kings, they were once and again brought through repentance to spiritual and temporal prosperity, more or less prolonged, they con-

stantly resisted the will of God, rejecting His Word and His prophets. At the commencement of the reign of the fourth king, Rehoboam, ten tribes revolted and formed themselves into the kingdom of Israel, as distinct from that of Judah, which remained loyal. Idolatry then became rampant, and eventually the whole nation lapsed into a condition so grievous that both kingdoms were overthrown, and the people carried away into captivity to Assyria, first the northern tribes of Israel (2 Kings 17. 6; 721 B.C.) and ultimately the tribe of Judah (2 Kings 25. 6-11; 597-586 B.C.). How sadly they abused their privileges is tellingly described in 2 Kings 17.7-23. Such had been the goodness of God to them that "in all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them: in His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bare them, and carried them all the days of old. But," continues Isaiah, "they rebelled, and grieved His holy Spirit: therefore was He turned to be their enemy, and Himself fought against them." The Lord had "spread out His hands all the day unto a rebellious people, who walked after their own thoughts" (Isa. 63. 9, 10; 65. 2).

Since the time of the captivity of Judah no king of the house of David has reigned over the nation. When Nebuchadnezzar removed the people to Babylon, the period called "the times

of the Gentiles" (Luke 21. 24) commenced, which has not yet ended. The occupation of Palestine by the successive Gentile powers, which come before our notice in the following pages, marks a further development of the purposes of God in the preparation of the world for the Gospel.

By the rivers of Babylon the captive people, mourning the loss of their country, were led to contemplate the evil which had been the cause of their downfall. There they were taught by prophets the lessons of the past and the purposes of God for the future, and were stimulated to expect, despite all that had occurred, the fulfilment of His promises; thus their spiritual vitality was maintained in exile. Hence the enthusiasm of the comparatively small part of the nation which in the year 538 B.C. was permitted by Cyrus, the Persian monarch at that date, to return from captivity to Palestine (Ezra 1).

The majority of the nation, however, did not take advantage of the decree granting this permission; Israel as a whole remained permanently scattered. Those who returned numbered little more than forty-two thousand (Ezra 2. 64). The sorrows of their exile exerted a unifying influence upon these Jews. They left Chaldea as a company of colonists to form not a kingdom, but a religious commonwealth. While they were still politically tributary, they had

freedom to develop along religious lines ; " from being the centre of a kingdom, Jerusalem became the centre of a creed."

The Effects of Exile.

Recognising the judgment of God in their captivity they were drawn to seek the more devotedly to His testimonies. Moreover, contact with the grossness of the eastern religion led them to a clearer apprehension of the purity of their own. Previously in their own land they had been contaminated by the idolatrous polytheism of the corrupt nations around them ; to such an extent had they multiplied their idols that Jeremiah describes the number of the gods of Judah as according to the number of its cities, and the altars to Baal alone as according to the number of the streets of Jerusalem (Jer. II. 13). But captivity had done its work. Never again would they return to polytheism. The Jewish remnant that came back to Palestine stood firm in the faith of the ancient declaration of Moses, " Hear, O Israel: Jehovah our God is one Jehovah " (Deut. 6. 4). Monotheism had become lastingly established, a fact which has an important bearing upon the attitude of the Jews of later date toward Christ, and the heinousness of His offence, in their eyes, in making Himself God (John 10. 33).

Again, the return of the Jewish remnant to

Palestine quickened anew the expectation of the speedy fulfilment of the high destiny of the nation, an expectation which was fostered by the prophets, under whose spiritual guidance they continued. To this the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah, the contemporaries of Ezra (cp. Ezra 5. 1), bear ample witness. The time came, however, when the last of the prophets, the last, that is, prior to "the greatest of all the prophets," had given his final message. A message of hope it was, sufficient to sustain the spirit of expectancy; Elijah would be sent by Jehovah of hosts, and would turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers (Mal. 4. 6).

Period between Old and New Testaments.

With the cessation of the prophets the Jews were left for wellnigh four centuries to hear the voice of God through their written messages, together with the other records of Holy Writ. Would this residue of the nation now manifest either the will or the power to keep the law of God? Was there hope that righteousness would characterise the people now that they were delivered from the contamination of idolatry? Despite the law and the prophets the national tendencies were downward, and issued in a rigid adherence to the letter of the law rather than to its spirit, and in an extension

of the details of the ritual enjoined by God. With the establishment of the synagogues and the rabbinical schools, valuable as these were in themselves, the reading of the law came to be a perfunctory institution. The law itself was flagrantly disregarded. Private life became burdened by a superabundance of external observances and ordinances appointed not by God but by the religious leaders, who used them to maintain a domination almost absolute. To what lengths this formalism proceeded is evidenced by the words of Christ in applying Isaiah's prophecy to the men of the time when He was on earth, "This people honoureth Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men" (Mark 7. 6, 7).

The results of these developments were, as might be expected, two features characteristic of the last stage of decadence, one a hypocritical formalism, unaccompanied by righteous living (cp. Matt. 23. 25), the other a departure from the ancient faith into scepticism, manifested especially in the rise and progress of Sadduceeism, the "New Theology" of the close of the age.

External Influences.

The gradual declension which we have traced received an impetus from the course of external affairs which now calls for brief notice.

Two hundred and four years after the return under Ezra, the youthful Greek commander, Alexander the Great, entered Asia on his victorious march to overthrow the Medo-Persian monarchy. While territory after territory was brought under his sway, the spirit of religious fervour among the Jews served to maintain the comparative freedom of the people during the period of storm, and their settled belief in the unity of God proved an impregnable rock against the pantheism of the Greeks. But the influence of the Greeks was felt in another way. The city of Alexandria, which the conqueror founded in Egypt, 332 B.C., and named after his own name, became the centre of Greek philosophy and culture. Alexandrian learning spread far and wide. Among those who were brought by Alexander to inhabit the city was a considerable number of Jewish colonists, who thenceforward spoke the Greek language, and had free access to its literature; colonies of Jewish merchants were also settled throughout the various countries under Greek government.

Thus, during the last three centuries before Christ, beside the Judaism of Palestine, there arose a Greek, or Hellenistic, Judaism with its centre in Alexandria, and with a Jewish-Greek literature, which rapidly spread through the countries around the Mediterranean, and the most noteworthy production of which was the

Septuagint translation of the Old Testament. How this directly prepared the way for the Gospel is noticed later on. This welding together of the language of intellectual culture and the religion of Judaism, this admixture of philosophy and faith, tended to create a scientific conception of theology, and gave an impetus to the advance of sceptical speculation.

Peaceful dispersion among the Gentiles would have had the serious effect of begetting indifference to the home country, as has been the case since, had not fierce persecution arisen there. In 170 B.C. Antiochus Epiphanes, king of Syria, plundered Jerusalem, and with indescribable cruelty slaughtered or enslaved large numbers of the people; they were compelled, under penalty of torture and death, to sacrifice to idols, and the statue of Jupiter was erected on the altar of burnt offering. All this forced the Jews to a realisation of their national unity. Deliverance came through a patriotic family of the Asmonæans, known as the Maccabees, the head of which was an aged priest named Mattathias. His son, Judas Maccabæus, at the head of a powerful army, after several victories, re-took Jerusalem (165 B.C.). This restoration had the effect of stirring anew the expectation of the promised Messiah, an expectation evidenced in the Apocrypha, the uninspired writings of the period.

Progress of Scepticism.

But the fires of patriotism were quenched ere long. Hopes were not fulfilled. Roman legions tramped over the lands of Alexander's conquests and colonisations. In 63 B.C. Pompey besieged Jerusalem and subjugated Judæa to the Roman Government. Thus the Jews, so far from being exalted to a leading position among the nations, now became subject to a power whose hold on their land was stronger than that of any previous foe. The Messiah had not come, nor was even the prophecy of Malachi concerning the coming of Elijah fulfilled. Such apparent delays of God's providence, while they did not obliterate the hope that the glorious destiny of the nation would be fulfilled, did not, on the other hand, serve to retard the sceptical tendencies of the time.

A change had come, indeed, over the world. Old ideas had been breaking down, and men had become largely convinced of the futility of existing systems of theology and philosophy. While, however, on the one hand sceptical despair and infidel indifference had settled on the hearts of men, on the other there was a spirit of expectancy, an anticipation of better times. Stoic and Platonist philosophers expressed wistful hopes, and Roman poets sang of a golden age to come, an age of peace and good will among men.

Gross Darkness.

The spiritual condition of the Jewish race was now at its lowest ebb. An Edomite king, Herod the Idumean, was appointed by the Gentile power to rule over the people, a significant climax in the history of the descendants of Jacob and Esau. "The virgin of Israel was fallen... was cast down upon her land" (Amos 5. 2). "The people sat in darkness" and in the "shadow of death" (Matt. 4. 16). That nation "in darkness," in whose midst the light of the glory of God had shone! That people in "the shadow of death," who had been promised life through the fulfilment of His commandments (Lev. 18. 5). Alas for man! if left to himself to recover from the effects of the Fall and attain to righteousness.

"The Fulness of the Time."

Thus the long period with its lessons of human sin and helplessness had run its course. "Man's extremity is God's opportunity." The nation, nay, the world, was ripe for God's intervention. Rome, whose past had been one of almost unremitting war, ceased for the time its warring. A strange stillness had come over the world.

"Nor war, or battle's sound
Was heard the world around."

When the night is darkest the day-spring is at hand, and He Who "turneth the shadow of

death into the morning" had prepared His salvation "before the face of all peoples" (Luke 2. 31).

A little town in Judæa, a humble home in Galilee, upon these the eye of God was resting. The Scripture must be fulfilled. A journey must be taken from Nazareth to Bethlehem; the mighty Roman Empire must be moved for this; no family throughout its vast territories, containing 120,000,000 people, but must be affected for the purpose of this one journey. "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD as the water courses: He turneth it whithersoever He will" (Prov. 21. 1). A decree goes forth from the great Cæsar "that all the world should be enrolled" (Luke 2.1). Officials are busy, households are astir from Gaul to Egypt, from Persia to Spain.

The "fulness of the time" had come. The Virgin "brought forth her first-born Son," "born under the law," "born . . . a Saviour . . . Christ the Lord;" B.C. was over, A.D. had come! Thus did the Son of God humble Himself that in His atoning death and in His resurrection He might lay the foundation of the Gospel, and, in the power of life from the dead, commission His followers to go forth to the world with the message of grace (Matt. 28. 18). Out from the nation's darkness and deadness they were brought, drawn by the "Light of men" to be bearers of light and life to the world.

The Old Testament a Preparation.

The substance of the Gospel lies enshrined in Old Testament history and prophecy. The nation, Israel, therefore, which gave birth to the writers, was itself the medium of God's preparation for the proclamation of the Gospel, inasmuch that the Old Testament became a constant court of appeal for the evangelists. In its pages was revealed the sinfulness of sin, and in them was foretold and foreshadowed the remedy. Perhaps nowhere in Scripture are the Gospel themes of Old Testament prophecy stated more concisely than when the apostle Peter speaks of them as "the grace that should come unto you, . . . the sufferings of [lit., unto] Christ, and the glories that should follow" (1 Pet. i. 10, 11).

In the introduction to his treatise on the Gospel the Apostle Paul propounds the question: What advantage had the Jews over other nations, and what is the profit of their religion? "Much every way," he answers, "first of all that they were intrusted with the oracles of God" (Rom. 3. 1, 2). To these "oracles" the Lord Jesus Himself appealed in authenticating His claim to be the Messiah. Incidents in Israel's history assumed a new significance when interpreted of Him. Witness His words to Nicodemus concerning Moses and the serpent of brass (John 3. 14). Again, in the presence of

the doubts of two of His followers, after His resurrection, He preceded the revelation of His identity by interpreting "in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24. 27). The preachers of the Gospel, too, following the example of their Master, pointed to these Scriptures as substantiating the message they proclaimed. Witness the appeals of Peter, on the day of Pentecost, to the Psalms (Acts. 2. 25-36), and his message uttered shortly after in Solomon's porch, that "the things which God foreshewed by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ should suffer, He thus fulfilled" (3. 18), and his words to Cornelius and his household, basing the promise of remission of sins through the Name of Christ upon the testimony of the prophets (Acts 10. 43). Witness Stephen's denunciation of his accusers, and his counter-accusation that their fathers had killed "them which shewed before the coming of the Righteous One" (7. 52). Witness also the testimony of Paul in Antioch of Pisidia, (13. 27-47), and before Agrippa (26. 22, 23), and the frequent quotations from the Old Testament in the Epistles of the New. Thus the former Scriptures, the true meaning and purpose of which were unknown to the nation at large, and even to its professional teachers, proved to be ordained for the confirmation of the Gospel.

The Way Open.

By the retrograde course of highly favoured Israel, by their utter failure to fulfil His law and attain to the righteousness He demanded, God had proved the ineradicable sinfulness of man and his helplessness to obtain salvation for himself, and had thereby prepared for the display of His superabounding grace in the atoning sacrifice of His Son and in His message of reconciliation. "Israel, following after a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law. . . . Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by works" (Rom. 9. 31, 32). Sufficient evidence had been given that by the works of the law no one could be justified. Salvation must come through a Saviour, and must be received by faith. "By Him every one that believeth is justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts 13. 39); by Him, the "one Mediator between God and men."

This was the glad tidings of salvation, this "the testimony to be borne." "Its own times" had come, and its messengers went forth, indwelt and endowed by the Holy Spirit.

The highways of the nations were open to them; the civilised world had been consolidated under the authority of Imperial Rome. Roman roads constructed for Roman legions lay free for

Christ's evangelists. Roman laws would protect them. The scattered Jews had established synagogues in numerous cities, providing places in which to preach. More wonderful than all, the language, and to a large extent the customs, of one nation were in general use throughout almost every nation of the Empire.

To the thoughtful reader of the New Testament certain questions present themselves. How came it to pass, for instance, that Paul, a Jew, writing to Romans, should use neither the Latin language nor the Hebrew, but the Greek, and that James and Peter, also Jews, writing to Jews, should adopt the same tongue? To answer this question it is necessary to follow the course of events connected with the Greek nation prior to the time in which the New Testament was written, and note the way in which God secured that people everywhere should be able to hear and to read its contents.

The Greeks: A Review.

It remains now to trace the ways of God among the nations whereby this was brought about, and the world rendered accessible to the Gospel.

Early in their history the Greeks had been a nation of colonists. During two centuries, from 750 B.C. onward, the spirit of colonisation was especially active, and settlements were estab-

lished in Italy, Sicily, North Africa, Asia Minor, and in the district north of the Ægean Sea. Cities soon sprang up enriched with the commerce and arts of a luxurious civilisation. Thus was the foundation laid for the rapid extension of Greek influence at a later day.

Among the most powerful of the colonies were those of the west of Asia Minor. Lack of political union, however, brought them under the domination, first of the Lydian King, Croesus, and then of the Persian, Cyrus. This Cyrus it was who, in 538 B.C., gave permission to the Jewish exiles in Babylon to return to Jerusalem (2 Chron. 26. 22, 23; Ezra I. 1-3). Yet the colonists continued to maintain throughout the next century a hardy spirit of independence, ever ready to break out against their oppressors, who in turn learned to appreciate the prowess and ability of their conquered foes. In the year 405 B.C. Artaxerxes II. ascended the throne of Persia. At that time his younger brother, Cyrus,* was governor of the greater part of what is now known as Asia Minor. The latter was bent on dethroning his brother in Persia, and for this purpose, recognising the superior qualities of Greek soldiers, he enlisted the services of over ten thousand of them, and marched against him.

* To be distinguished from the Cyrus of Scripture

Decline of the Persian Empire.

Though Cyrus was defeated and slain (401 B.C.), and his army had to retreat, a considerable number of his men settled in Persia, thus extending Greek influence to the Far East. Subsequent events manifested the weakness of the Persian rule, and during the years following the death of Cyrus, the Greeks of Asia Minor, assisted by armies from Greece itself, Hellenised (*i.e.*, subjected to Greek influence) the whole country. The result was that by the year 370 B.C. Asia Minor, practically a Greek province, was largely independent of Persian rule. And now began that series of revolts by which the great monarchy of the East was gradually compelled to relax its hold on its western territories, and the way was prepared for the world-wide power of the Greek nation whose progress we are considering.

Following on the series of successful uprisings in the various towns of Asia Minor, Egypt, wearied of Eastern despotism, broke loose from the conqueror for a time (361 B.C.). Phoenicia, a country long connected with Greece by commercial intercourse, followed suit.

This breaking away from Persian domination prepared the way for the overthrow of the Medo-Persian Empire, and for the sudden rise and expansion of Greek rule, which in

its turn prepared a highway among the nations for the spread of the Gospel in that tongue.*

The Greek Empire.

The conqueror was at hand in the person of Alexander the Great of Macedon, the military genius who ascended the throne of Greece before he was twenty (336 B.C.), and died at the age of thirty-two, monarch of a world-wide empire.

In 334 B.C. Alexander set out from Greece to invade Persia. He rapidly subdued Asia Minor, Syria, Phoenicia, and Gaza, but spared Jerusalem, moved, it is said, by Jaddua, the high-priest, who, warned by a dream, went out to meet him. Before starting from Macedon, Alexander had

* The place of this great Gentile power in the revelation given to Nebuchadnezzar through the prophet Daniel (chap. 2) should be noted. That revelation covers the long interval of Gentile dominion from the captivity of God's earthly people and the abolition of their kingdom until the end of the present age, when Gentile dominion will cease and the kingdom revert to Israel under the sovereignty of the King of kings (verse 44). By the time of which we are writing much of the prophecy had been fulfilled. Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom had fallen and had been succeeded by the Medo-Persian, and now, as we have shown, the time allotted to the latter was drawing to its close. "Another third kingdom of brass" was arising which should "bear rule over all the earth" (verse 39). Comparison with Daniel 8. 20, 21 makes it clear that the kingdom of Greece was the one referred to. The Greeks had become conscious of their own strength and of the weakness of the Medo-Persian power.

seen in a dream a figure like Jaddua's, which had promised to give him dominion over Persia. Struck by the resemblance of the high-priest to the man of the vision, he was turned from his intention, and offered sacrifice. Zion was once again saved from the power of the desolator. Egypt received him with open arms, and there he founded Alexandria, the first and most important of the many cities to which he gave his name. In October, 331 B.C., he defeated Darius himself at the decisive battle of Gaugamela, near the Tigris. Darius fled eastward, but was overtaken and slain.

That victory* gave Alexander the dominion of all Asia. For seven years he reigned as the Great King, and died in a drunken debauch in June, 323 B.C.

Diffusion of the Greek Language.

Alexander was not merely a consummate general and a conqueror of nations, he was a far-sighted statesman. He had projects for the amalgamation of the various units of his empire and for the Hellenisation of the whole. If the amalgamation was never achieved the Hellenisation was abundantly fulfilled. The speech, manners, and customs of the Greeks became prevalent everywhere. He planted numerous

*It fulfilled the third part of the vision interpreted by Daniel (chap. 2).

colonies, built cities, and summoned colonists from Greece to inhabit them, so that they became centres for the diffusion of Greek influence throughout Western Asia and Egypt. His treasury at Babylon, after the defeat of Darius, contained £11,000,000, which he used for the enrichment of soldiers and colonists, a policy which greatly stimulated commercial activity. The peoples of the various countries around Palestine thus came largely under the influence of Greek character and modes of thought. After Alexander's death the Empire was partitioned among his four generals (cp. Dan. 11. 4), two of whom in particular continued the development of his schemes. Further cities in various countries were built and Hellenised, and during the next two centuries, immediately preceding the birth of Christ, the Greek nation impressed its stamp upon language, commerce, and civil life in general. Although racial independence was everywhere maintained, the power of Hellenism developed a similarity in education, literature, and social feeling. The non-Greek inhabitants of districts where Greeks had been settled began to speak and to write "Hellenistic Greek," that is to say, the dialect in common or general use. This was the language of the Septuagint and of the New Testament, and to the former of these we must now turn our attention.

The Greek Bible.

Alexandria rapidly became the principal centre of Greek culture and literature. The settlement there of a considerable Jewish population and the influence of Hellenism upon it have already been pointed out. Here, then, during the early part of the second century B.C. the Greek translation of the Old Testament called the Septuagint was made. The version soon became generally used by Grecian Jews even in their public worship; its influence, however, was wider still, for by it on the one hand the knowledge of Judaism was conveyed to the Gentile world, and on the other the Greek language, "the most exact form of expression," was requisitioned for the Hebrew religion, "the most spiritual mode of conception." The rapid and wide circulation of the Old Testament in Greek was manifestly an important element in the preparation of the world for the spread of the Gospel.

The Greek Language in the Roman Empire.

Since one of the longest of the Epistles of the New Testament was written in Greek to the Christians in Rome, it remains to be seen how, despite the conquest of Greece and Asia by the Romans, the spell of the Greek language was maintained in Italy. According to the interpretation of the vision of Nebuchadnezzar a

fourth empire was to arise "strong as iron" (Dan. 2. 40). This empire was holding sway over the nations at the birth of Christ. The Romans took eleven years (200-189 B.C.) to break the power of Alexander's successors, and thereby to gain the ascendancy over the third empire. Greece itself became a Roman province in 146 B.C. But the Greek language was not displaced in any country. Italy itself had long been colonised in the south by Greek settlers, and the Romans had become familiar with the language, both in their own country and by direct intercourse with Greece. The knowledge of the tongue everywhere in use formed an essential part of a Roman education. Rome possessed a universal empire, but Greece had left a universal language, a language which could be used by the mixed nationalities as a common medium of intercourse. The way was now prepared for the writers of the New Testament to do their work.

In the history of nations and the fulfilment of prophecy regarding them, we have seen the overruling providence of God in the preparation of these nations for the preaching of the Word, and for the reception of the New Testament in the Greek tongue. The world had been prepared for the language, and the language had been prepared for the world.

We have thus an answer to the question just

now propounded as to why the Greek language was used by Paul, the Jew, in writing to Romans, and by James and Peter in writing to Jews ; in fact, why each writer of the New Testament used this tongue.

The People's Tongue.

There is a further point of great importance. If the world at large had been thus linguistically prepared for the message of the New Testament, the language and style of the New Testament writings was exactly suited to the needs of the common people. In fact, the form of the Greek language used was called the *Koinē*, or common tongue. That is to say, the New Testament was not a literary work for the educated classes. The age of the famous classical works of Greece had long gone by. The style of the New Testament was that of the homely and everyday intercourse of the time. The writers did not set out to write literature. As a recent writer has put it,* "the Holy Ghost spoke absolutely in the language of the people. . . . The writings inspired of Him were those

' Which he may read that binds the sheaf,
Or builds the house, or digs the grave.'

The very grammar and dictionary cry out against men who would allow the Scriptures to appear in any other form than that 'understood of the people.'"

*Dr. J. H. Moulton, "A Grammar of N.T. Greek," Vol. I., p.5.

Recent Discoveries.

And this is abundantly confirmed by the discovery during the past century, in the tombs and dust heaps of Egypt, of non-literary writings dated during the period in which the New Testament was written, and by the special attention which has been paid to them in recent years. Their importance was not duly realised till nearly the end of the nineteenth century. They are chiefly written on papyrus, and consist of a great variety of the everyday writings of the common people, perhaps the most interesting for our purposes being the private letters. The importance of these papyri lies in this, that while until their discovery there was no Greek writing of the first few centuries of this era extant (the earliest known copies of the New Testament were made in the fourth century), we are now able to study the style and phraseology of the time when the apostles wrote. And the resemblance in this respect between these non-literary writings and those of the New Testament is most striking. Thus we have ample proof that the language of the latter is that of the vernacular, of the ordinary life in the countries of the empire we have been considering.

The study of the Egyptian papyri and other similar writings has revealed that a large number of New Testament words, not elsewhere found in Greek writings, and so regarded until recently

as purely Biblical, coined, so to speak, for spiritual purposes, were in common use in the 'Hellenistic' or everyday Greek of the time.

It is obvious how greatly the conditions we have been describing facilitated the spread of Christianity. The manifest design in it all, on the part of Him Who "worketh all things after the counsel of His will," bows the heart of the believer in adoring recognition of His wisdom and providence. The Lord had ordained that at the close of the period B.C. there should be a whole empire with comparative uniformity of tongue, each component nation of that empire preserving its own language, so that in the early centuries A.D. the Gospel messages of the New Testament might be read immediately in all lands whither they were sent.

The circumstances outlined in these latter pages are strikingly illustrated by the history of events in modern days. In committing His testimonies largely to the Teutonic races and in granting them during the past few centuries a preponderating influence throughout the four continents, God has prepared the world for the spread of the Word of Life. Nations have been permitted to establish mighty empires, but God has had purposes beyond the ken of statesmen, and now there are but few countries in which the Gospel has not been proclaimed.

It is important to remember, however, that the

purpose of God in this age is not the conversion of the world through the preaching of the Gospel. The idea is fascinating, but it has not the support of Scripture. He has visited the Gentiles "to take out of them a people for His name" (Acts 15. 14). Thus it is that the Church has been, and is, in process of formation, and consists of all who, in Christ, are given to Him "out of the world." "The whole world lieth in the Evil One" (1 John 5. 19), and will continue to do so until the end of this age of which he is the god (2 Cor. 4. 4). Then the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven "in flaming fire, rendering vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus" (2 Thess. 1. 8). This passage alone makes it clear that the whole world will not in this age be converted through the Gospel. Through the preparations, therefore, of which we have spoken, God's purpose has been the separation of men out of the world unto Christ, Whose kingdom is not of this world, so that suffering with Him now in His rejection they may hereafter be partakers with Him of His glory. Happy they who by faith receive Him Whom the Gospel proclaims (John 1. 12).

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