

33) and also limited by time. (Whatever is missing in Acts 2:39 as to the definition of time is clearly supplied in other places, such as 1 Corinthians 13:8-13.) It was “unto you [those Jews assembled], and to your children, and to all that are afar off [the Gentiles such as Cornelius and those referred to in the epistles]” (v. 39). This limit by time has been expounded by Brethren E. Whittaker and R. Carr, John Allfree, Ron Abel, Graham Pearce and myself, among others.

*The bestowal of the Holy Spirit gifts, such as we read of in 1 Corinthians 12, was a later development, the Holy Spirit being imparted by the laying on of the hands of the apostles.*

This is a complex statement, in fact two statements in one. Leave out the example of 1 Corinthians 12 and it is easy to observe that the statement is invalid, as we see in Acts 8, where the apostles bestowed the Spirit upon the baptized believers in Samaria. Who gave Philip the Evangelist the Spirit? Acts 21:8 says he was an evangelist or teacher, and this was a Spirit gift (Eph. 4:11). He was not an apostle, so it is incorrect to say only the apostles received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Either he was one of the 120 who initially received it at Pentecost or he was one of those 3,000 or

5,000 baptized who received the gift of miracles and perhaps healings (Acts 8:6,7).

It is true that 1 Corinthians 12 was written about twenty-five years after Pentecost, and the establishment of that ecclesia was about five years earlier. But these two events are not time markers as to when the Holy Spirit gifts were first poured out. What is recorded in Acts 8:18 was obviously occurring from the time Christ’s twelve disciples became apostles (2:42,43). If it was really “a later development”, when did these gifts get given to the apostles?

What Peter quotes in Acts 2 from Joel 2 proves that Brother Harrison’s statement that “The bestowal of the Holy Spirit gifts . . . was a later development” is false. The expectation of those in Acts 1, and the dramatic events at Pentecost in Acts 2 when those believers who were assembled were filled with the Holy Spirit, describes in condensed form what happened. We get the details of the widespread outpouring of the Holy Spirit by reading the other chapters of Acts, and from the epistles.

*This exchange of views is now concluded—  
T.B.*

# The influence of Hellenism on Jewry

Malcolm Edwards

*One of the strengths of the Scripture record is that it never contrives to establish its own veracity. Yet much undesigned detail is found to establish its claim to be inspired truth. The evidence in the New Testament of Greek influence on Jewry at that time is just one important testimony to this.*

**T**HE QUESTION by the Roman captain to the Apostle Paul at the entrance to the fortress in Jerusalem, “Canst thou speak Greek?” (Acts 21:37), confirms what history itself declares, that in the eastern areas of the Roman Empire Greek was the main spoken language of that time, particularly amongst the educated classes. Rome had only been masters in the region for a little over 100 years, and to the average Jew in Palestine Latin was still a relatively new language. Hence Pilate caused the superscription on the cross to be written in the three commonly used current

languages: Hebrew (Aramaic), Greek and Latin.

Grecian influence, known as Hellenism, was still dominant in Judea at that time, having slowly infiltrated into Jewish culture over a period of some 250 years. However, this culture was a mixed blessing. Thus the

background of the New Testament is noticeably different from that of the Old Testament.

## Alexandria and the Septuagint

In 333 B.C. Alexander the Great defeated the Persians at Issus, and embarked on a career of conquest extending to India. His famous conquest of Tyre a year later robbed Persia of her Mediterranean power, and in 331 B.C. he penetrated further south, into Egypt, where he established a sea port in the Nile Delta, which was named Alexandria in his honour.

Seeing the island of Pharos a short distance from the coast, Alexander ordered the construction of a causeway, almost identical to the one he had built to conquer the island of Tyre, thus creating a double harbour that exists to the present day, although the causeway itself has long been silted over.

It was actually on Pharos, at the far end of this causeway, that the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, later called the Septuagint (LXX), was said to have been made by a team of seventy-two Jewish scribes. When completed,

folklore. Thus, by the opening of the first century A.D., the LXX was in common use in Palestine. That the apostles themselves used it is seen by comparing their Old Testament quotations with today's version of the LXX.

### Greek folklore in Judaism

When Luke in Acts 17:21 describes the Athenians as spending their time "in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing", it confirms what seems true of Greek thinking generally at that time. The Hellenistic influence on Judaism



**View of Alexandria showing the silted-over causeway built by Alexander the Great**

(Picture: © iStockphoto.com/Amr Hashim)

they presented the translation to the book-loving Ptolemy, the current Greek ruler of Egypt, in return for the release of several Jewish slaves. Of this translation, Josephus writes:

"Accordingly, when three days were over, Demetrius took them, and went over the causeway seven furlongs long: it was a bank in the sea to an island. And when they had gone over the bridge, he proceeded to the northern parts, and shewed them where they should meet, which was in a house which was built near the shore, and was a quiet place, and fit for their discoursing together about their work".<sup>1</sup>

It was now about 220 B.C., and the Greek Empire had been divided into its four sections, Egypt and Palestine being in the Ptolemaic division. Thus the Jewish colony in Alexandria grew to become a renowned centre of Jewish learning, but this was at the expense of their absorbing a considerable amount of Greek superstition and

is seen in the mass of superstition that had penetrated it by the turn of the first century, much of which is found in the Talmud and termed by the rabbis "the ways of the Amorite". Most of it was trivial in the extreme. Take, for example, the strange abhorrence of nail parings: "Who buries the parings is righteous; who burns them is pious; who throws them away is wicked". Similarly, regarding bread crumbs: "Crumbs left about a house cause poverty, because on Saturday and Wednesday nights, harmful spirits alight upon them".

However, superstitions about Hades were much more influential. Hades was originally the name of the Greek god of the underworld, but amongst the Jews of Christ's day the name had become synonymous with the supposed region itself, and they had, over time, embellished it with

1. *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book XII, ch. 2:13.

their own teaching about 'Abraham's bosom'. But, in the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus in Luke 16, Jesus neatly turned the fiery Hades legend against the Pharisees, after they had openly condemned his eating with publicans and sinners (15:1,2). Jesus cleverly reversed the roles so that *they* were seen to be the rich man in torment, and the publicans and sinners became the blessed Lazarus in "Abraham's bosom".

### **Demons and souls**

The apparently widespread superstition about demons was regarded by the Lord much more seriously, in that he quickly saw it as a hindrance to his own teaching. There was only one way to cut through such delusion. Jesus never passed up an opportunity to show how instant and complete were his cures compared with the hit-and-miss efforts of the local exorcists. Thus the Lord's power was always demonstrated as being infinitely greater than that of so-called demons, and his Divine authority was very soon vindicated.

From Mark 4:34 we learn that at the end of each day Jesus "expounded all things" to his disciples. It is extremely likely that these daily explanations also included the sorting out of any confused thinking about foreign superstitions.

It should not surprise us that belief in the immortality of the soul had likewise infiltrated Jewish thinking, since it originated from the teaching of Plato and was developed in later Greek teaching. Thus the Talmud contains both Biblical and non-Biblical teaching about the afterlife. There are quite plain references to the resurrection and "the world to come", but in a few places there is the odd comment about surviving souls.

### **Hellenist opposition to Paul's preaching**

The greatest benefit of spoken Greek was in its assistance in the spreading of the gospel in Gentile lands, and it certainly proved to be so in Paul's preaching in Asia Minor and Greece. However, many of the Hellenist Jews, particularly those of Alexandria, were both knowledgeable and most inflexible. Thus, like Stephen before him, the newly converted Saul of Tarsus had early battles with them in Jerusalem (Acts 9:29). Nevertheless, in Paul's own preaching abroad his policy remained "to the Jew first", as long as Jews would listen; but once their opposition extended to violence, he turned to the much more receptive Gentiles.

But the apostle also recognised that internal problems must inevitably arise in the community

from certain Jewish believers over uncircumcised Gentile converts, for, in spite of the agreement at the Council of Jerusalem, as recorded in Acts 15, there grew up pockets of hostile Jewish believers, who brought discord to the young ecclesias. Of these Jews Paul wrote, "to whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you" (Gal 2:5).

### **Certain Greeks**

Who were those "Greeks" who asked to see Jesus (Jno. 12:20)? Were they Greek-speaking Jews or just Gentiles? It seems very likely that they communicated in Greek, and one clue that they were the latter is that they communicated initially via Philip, whose non-Jewish name suggests he had a Greek-speaking background. A further indication is that he seemed unsure how to handle the matter, and involved Andrew before they together informed Jesus.

Yet from the record it seems at first that the Lord had no comment to offer on the matter of Gentile conversion, and if so it seems totally out of character. But perhaps his use of "any man" in verse 26 was an early chink in the opening of the door of salvation to the Gentiles: "If *any man* serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be".

### **A law unto themselves?**

Finally, Paul's use of the term "Greeks" in the Epistle to the Romans is not a little confusing, but it seems mostly to apply to believing Gentiles. For example, how are we to understand 2:14, where he speaks of Gentiles not knowing the law who "do *by nature* the things contained in the law"? It seems likely that this refers to Gentile believers in their naturally uncircumcised condition, for this harmonises with "uncircumcision *which is by nature*" in verse 27. The meaning is somewhat obscure, but the apostle seems to be arguing that, being in the natural state of uncircumcision, believing Gentiles, brought up without any obligation to the Mosaic Law, are still responsible to the *spirit of the Law*, as expressed in the teaching of Christ.

Thus it was, with well-paved Roman roads now in place and the Greek language widely spread abroad, with the Scriptures already available in the Greek tongue, and, most of all, the new gospel of the Kingdom of God in their hearts, the apostles and other early preachers were enabled to fulfil the Lord's last command on earth, to go forth and teach all nations.