

How God Prepared the World for the First Coming of Christ

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But when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. (Galatians 4:4, 5)

In amazing ways God prepared the world for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The world consciously and unconsciously entered into God's plan. The four corners of the civilized world were made ready for His coming. Oh, I know they forgot to put the welcome mat out, and they went so far in one quarter as to even put up a sign that read in effect: "Keep off this world." The world then and now is saying, "Go home, God, we don't need You."

However, four great ethnic divisions of the human family were made ready for the first coming of Christ. First, the nation of Israel; second, the Oriental races; third, Greece; fourth, Rome. Each one of these performed its particular part in the coming of Christ into the world. Each one had a separate mission. When they all are fitted together, you can see that there was a pattern and a design on the part of God when He sent His Son into the world. It was when the fullness of the time was come that God sent forth His Son. He *prepared* the world for the coming of His Son. And when we look back over the centuries and see that there is one design and one pattern, it should make the most skeptical, cynical person become a believer in Him. Let's consider these four different divisions of the human family and see how each was prepared.

Israel

Look at Israel first because it is easiest to see. There is so much of Scripture that deals with the nation Israel in God's plan. Israel has special significance in the coming of the Savior into the world. Kurtz, the great German historian, said, "Judaism prepared salvation for man, and heathenism prepared man for salvation."

The Lord Jesus Christ said to the Samaritan woman at the well, "Salvation is of the *Jews*." He was accurate, of course. Paul, writing to the Romans, speaking of his people the Israelites, gave eight identifying fingerprints, and one of them was: "... of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came ..." (Romans 9:5). Jesus Christ came out of Israel. He came into our world from this nation, and Israel had been prepared for His coming.

If you go back over the history of Israel, you will find that there are two major divisions in God's preparation of this nation. One is the period of *isolation*; the other is the period of *dispersion*. Or, to put it another way, one is the period of *segregation*, and the other is the period of *integration*. You ask, "Is God today for integration or is He for segregation?" God votes both ways.

For Israel there was the period of segregation (see Genesis 12-45). God reached down, first of all, into Ur of the Chaldees. You must remember that Jewish people came out of the East; they belong to the Orient. God drew Abraham out of the Tigris-Euphrates Valley and told him to leave not only the high civilization of Ur of the Chaldees, his business, and his friends, but also God wanted to get him away from all his relatives. He said, "Leave them all, and I'll bring you into a land that I will show you." He brought Abraham into the land of Canaan for a period of isolation during which God was preparing this man and his progeny, his race, if you please, for from Abraham came Isaac, Jacob, and the twelve sons of Jacob.

Then down into the land of Egypt they went, where there was that brief period of dispersion (Genesis 46 – Exodus 12). They spent four hundred years in the land of Egypt, mixing with those heathen down there and adopting many of their customs. They became just as bad as the

Egyptians as far as idolatry was concerned. Then God called Moses and said in effect, “I want you to take My people out of this land. I want you to bring them into the land of Canaan; I want to put them in a very special place.” God took them out and brought them yonder to Mount Sinai and said, “There’s one thing I have in mind, Moses, for these people, that they be a peculiar people.” And everything that God gave them was different from the nations round about. If the surrounding nations went this way, God said to His people, “You go that way. I want to keep you separate.” Finally, He put them in Canaan at the crossroads of the world where three continents mingled. The most amazing thing is that when the tramp, tramp, tramp of the nations of the world went by during the period in which the Israelites were faithful to God, He kept them a separate people. All that time He was preparing them for the coming of the Savior and preparing a lineage or line for His coming into the world.

Then the period of dispersion came, when God sent them back into the East from whence they had come, back to the Tigris-Euphrates Valley to mix with what were then the great nations of the world. They rubbed shoulders with the East, and they rubbed shoulders with the West. In their period of dispersion they carried to the world the greatest theological statement in the Old Testament: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD” (Deuteronomy 6:4). Millions of nomads, Arabs wandering over the desert today, will listen to the summons to prayer from a minaret and say the same thing, “Allah is one God.” Out to a polytheistic world Israel gave the message. One of the greatest historians said that once Greece rubbed shoulders with Judaism, polytheism was dead in Greece because Greeks were an intellectual people and would not follow idolatry, having come in contact with Judaism. Down yonder as Israel went into captivity, they disseminated the knowledge of the living and the true God. From then on, they walked the highways of the world, carrying a pack, doing business, building synagogues in every place, telling out: “Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God is one LORD – Jehovah our *Elohim* is one *Elohim*.” That was their mission. All was preparation for the coming of the Messiah.

Then you come to the period of the prophets. Each prophet, as he spoke to the local situation, did not stop there but looked down through the ages and prophesied of events far in the future. When the prospect for national survival was darkest, the prophets saw it the brightest because God revealed to them the coming of the Messiah. They all pointed to His coming, so that when *the fullness of the time* was come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law. The nation of Israel was prepared for the coming of the Messiah. From their Scriptures they knew *where* He was to be born (Matthew 2:6) and they should have known *when*. They believed the Old Testament Scriptures that He was coming, but they did not believe that He had arrived. God had prepared them for the coming of the Messiah.

Oriental Races

The second group, the Oriental races, were prepared for Christ’s coming. That’s where the majority of the population was in His day; it is where the majority of the population is today. Sometimes when I get on the freeway, I think that the majority of the population is here, but it is not. My friend, you find it in the Orient. That’s where most people are.

The prophet Daniel saw the interpretation of the vision which God gave to Nebuchadnezzar. He saw an image composed of four different metals: the head of gold, the breast and arms of silver, the belly and thighs of brass, the legs of iron, the feet part of iron and part of clay (see Daniel 2). Those four different metals represented the four great world powers. Two of these nations were Oriental powers: Babylon, the head of gold, and Media-Persia, the arms and breast

of silver. Both were descendants of Ham. They represent the Orient. You and I are living in a day when world control has been in the hands of the ethnological division of the human family descended from Japheth. I think that Japheth is coming to an end in his rulership of the world shortly. But the first great world powers were Hamitic.

The head of gold under Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon represented absolute autocracy. It represented a despotic power reposed in one man so that his whims became law. If he wanted men in a fiery furnace, they were thrown into a fiery furnace. Nobody questioned him. The kingdom that followed was Media-Persia. Media-Persia represents material riches. Probably no nation ever brought together so much of the wealth of the world as Media-Persia did. The world still stands in amazement at the wealth and the display of the Oriental courts of that day. These two nations, Babylon and Media-Persia, represent the Orient, the mysterious East, the land of the occult where there are contrasts and contradictions. Side-by-side, for centuries, wealth and wretchedness have been co-existing, squalor and splendor walk hand in hand, plenty and poverty go together, the purple and the perishing live in the same town and on the same side of the railroad tracks. Vast multitudes yonder in the Orient have been dying in rags right beside great riches. Solomon exemplified this also, for Solomon was the one who gathered together the wealth and the wisdom of the world. And Solomon made this statement, speaking for them: "He that trusteth in his riches shall fall ..." (Proverbs 11:28). May I say to you, the East went down rich. Will Rogers said, when we in America entered the Depression, "America is the only nation on record that's going to the poorhouse in a Cadillac!" He was wrong, because he did not know history. That had been true of the Orient – they went to the poorhouse in purple and gold and silver in their day. But the gold and silver could not save them.

Abraham had come out of Ur of the Chaldees, out of that mysterious land. In captivity Israel went back into that land, and some never came out.

When the nations of the East lost their power, the East was like a dead battery that was run down. The ragged religions of that land didn't help any; they offered no hope. Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, Taoism, Shintoism, offered no help or hope for them. At the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Orient was perishing, and there was a great longing in the hearts of the miserable mobs of the East. Also, an air of expectancy had spread throughout the world. Suetonius, the Latin historian, relates that "an ancient and definite expectation had spread throughout the East, that a ruler of the world would, at about that time, arise in Judea." Tacitus, the Roman historian, made a similar statement. And Schlegel, the German historian, states that Buddhist missionaries traveling to China met Chinese sages going to seek the Messiah about A.D. 33. Paul was saying no idle words when he witnessed of Christ's resurrection to a Roman king, "This thing was not done in a *corner!*" We find yonder on the day of Pentecost that there were Parthians and Medes in Jerusalem (see Acts 2:9). The East was represented.

It was an Ethiopian eunuch out of the dark continent of Africa who heard the Scriptures explained as he was returning from Jerusalem (see Acts 8). He was the first Gentile converted to Christ, and "he went on his way rejoicing." He took the gospel into Africa.

Thomas, the doubting apostle, did not go to the Roman Empire. Rather, there is an abundance of historical evidence that he went into India and even into China with the good news of Christ.

Out of that wretched and miserable East there came to Jerusalem wise men. Where men were suffering and dying they came with the urgent question, "Where is He that is born King of the Jews? We have seen His star in the East, and are come to worship Him." In the fullness of the

time, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law. The Orient had been made ready.

Greece

Now we turn to the third ethnological division, the Greeks. The Greeks were the third world power that Daniel mentions. The Greco-Macedonian civilization was one of the greatest civilizations this world has seen. The basic philosophy of Greece was a striving to produce the perfect man. They tried to bring man to the place of physical and mental perfection. They didn't do much for him spiritually, but they certainly worked on him physically and mentally. The Greeks gave genius to the world as no other nation has. At the time that David was singing the sweet psalms in Israel, just a few miles away yonder in Asia Minor, the poet Homer was walking in rags and singing his story. As someone has commented, Homer went into twenty-five towns that would not give him bread but that afterward claimed to be the place of his birth.

Then several hundred years went by, and about the third century before Christ, in the Paraclean age, Greece erected upon the horizon of history a glory of Greece that covered the Acropolis and ran down to the ends of the earth – so much so that today it has affected every walk of life, even architecture. You can't build today a humble church or a courthouse that does not in some way reflect upon the genius of the Greeks. It was during that period that Socrates, Demosthenes, Plato, Xenophon, Sophocles, and Euripides appeared – each of them a genius in his line. Philosophy and poetry and drama and athletics and government were carried to the highest degree in this particular period. Then came Alexander the Great out of Macedon, uniting the Greek states for the first time and marching an army over the world to do something that, unbeknown to him, God wanted done. I want to give you Houson's statement regarding Alexander:

He took up the meshes of the net of civilization, which were lying in disorder on the edges of the Asiatic shore, and spread them over all the countries which he traversed in his wonderful campaigns. The East and the West were suddenly brought together. Separated tribes were united under a common government. New cities were built, as the centers of political life. New lines of communication were opened, as the channels of commercial activity. The new culture penetrated the mountain ranges of Pisidia and Lycaonia. The Tigris and Euphrates became Greek rivers. The language of Athens was heard among the Jewish colonies of Babylonia; and a Grecian Babylon was built by the conqueror in Egypt and called by his name.

Alexander took Greek civilization to the ends of the earth, and may I say that he accomplished a purpose: God was disseminating a language that was to become the vehicle of the gospel, the Greek language. Every book of the New Testament was originally written in Greek. And that most amazing of all apostles, Paul, could stand and speak one language yonder in the "agora" (marketplace) in Corinth or on Mars Hill in Athens or in the amphitheater in Ephesus or in the Mamertine prison in Rome, and be understood by all. He was a master of the Greek language – his marvelous epistle to the Romans is proof of that. He knew the Greek language, and he could use it to preach Christ all over the Roman Empire. *God had prepared the Greeks for the coming of Christ into the world* at just the right moment. The Old Testament had previously been translated from Hebrew into Greek and was called the Septuagint. The Old

Testament in Greek is one of the best of the translations that we have today. Luke wrote his Gospel record to the Greek world and, in effect, said to them, “You have been seeking all these years for the perfect man. I present Him to you: the Lord Jesus Christ. I am a doctor, and I looked at Him physically. He grew physically in favor with God and man. He grew as a normal person down here upon this earth. But I examined Him,” said Dr. Luke. “He was a *perfect* Man. He died upon a cross for the sins of the world, and He was raised from the dead.” When Paul took that gospel throughout the Roman world, Luke traveled with him. One of the last things Paul wrote was “only Luke is with me.” Luke, the man who in a sense put his stethoscope down on Jesus Christ, said to the Greek world, “You never found the perfect man, but here He is.” In the fullness of the time, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law.

Rome

God prepared the Romans for the coming of Christ. If you had told Caesar Augustus in the first century A.D. that he was nothing but a pawn on a chessboard carrying out God’s wishes when he put his name to a tax bill, he would have laughed at you. But from our vantage point of about two thousand years we can look back to see that it is true. Of course, Augustus couldn’t see it, but he was a puppet being moved by God’s hand.

Rome was the empire of iron. Their philosophy in one word was power. Power. I’m afraid that Rome is misunderstood today, and we ought to know something about it in this hour – because, you see, Rome did not die. It lives on. The Roman Empire tried to solve the world’s problems in another way. Again I would like to give you a quotation from Gregory concerning Rome. Notice that their philosophy sounds familiar:

He [Rome] was to try whether human power, taking the form of law, regulated by political principles of which the regard for law and justice was most conspicuous, could perfect humanity by subordinating the individual to the state and making the state universal.

Neither Hitler, Mussolini, nor the Communists were the first to try making the state a sovereign and even a god. Rome did that. What a tremendous reminder! Look further at Rome. With physical force, the Roman conquered the world. With his executive power, he organized it, for he was an organizer. He gave good government – that is, if you can call his government *good* – to every people, tribe, and nation of the world. He built roads; he gave them *good* roads. God made sure of that because over those roads the gospel was to go to the hinterlands. Under Rome’s domination law and order prevailed. Read the four Gospels again, and see how law and order prevailed in Jerusalem. Roman soldiers were there to enforce the law. That was the thing that Rome gave to the world, and their emphasis was on justice. Listen to Gregory again:

It was justice practically omnipotent and omnipresent, and so neither to be resisted nor escaped, justice which never dreamed of mercy until the work of conquest and consolidation was done. It made men long for mercy because it demonstrated to them that there was no hope for them in righteous law.

What a picture! They upheld justice, and all over the Roman Empire which covered three continents in that day – all the way from the pillars of Hercules to the Euphrates River, all the way from the cold mountains of Scotland down to the burning sands of the Sahara Desert – there was law. There was that Roman judge like Pilate, and on his desk there was the image of Janus.

We get our word January from him. He was represented with two opposite faces, that is, he looked in both directions, seeing both sides of a case. Rome said to every people they conquered, “We will not destroy your customs. You go right on living your lives. Only one thing: we will govern you. We will run things, and we will give you justice. Every one of you can come to us and get justice.” Every Roman court stood for justice. Isn’t it an anomaly, isn’t it ironical, that Jesus Christ was crucified on a *Roman* cross? Crucified by the nation that boasted of *justice!*

By the time Paul the apostle, that little Jew, crippled and almost blind, started down those Roman roads, speaking the gospel of Christ, the world was ready to listen to him. One of the things that arrested their attention – oh, it is so important – he said, “I have obtained *mercy!*” The world was tired of justice.

You know that most people say today that they want justice from God. A man said to me in Altadena many years ago on his death bed, “You let me alone, preacher. All I ask of God is justice.” I said, “Wait a minute, is it really justice you want or mercy?” He finally had to admit that what he actually wanted was mercy. You see, we have mercy and justice confused. Justice condemns you. The law condemns you, and the law was given that “every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God” (Romans 3:19).

And “by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight” (Romans 3:20). Does God mean the Mosaic Law? *No*, He means *any* law. By deeds of Roman law, or any law, no one can be justified. Paul went out into the Roman world. He wrote the epistle to the Romans, in which he said, “By the deeds of law there shall no flesh be justified.” That Roman world, down under the heel of Rome, hearing of nothing but justice, was crying out, not for justice, but for *mercy!* Paul came and said to them, “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 for sin, condemned sin in the flesh” (Romans 8:3). But now “by grace are ye saved through faith ... not by works” – not by works!

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast. (Ephesians 2:8, 9)

Oh, not by works but by grace! Out over that Roman Empire were sixty million slaves and sixty million free men, but none of them were free; they were all under Roman law. They all sighed for a salvation that could deliver them. In the fullness of time God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law.

Our contemporary world is equally as needy as it was under Roman rule. Honestly, we haven’t come very far in that long span of time, except technologically. In our day there is both *plenty* and *poverty*. America has a headache with an abundance of surplus, and in India and in China, where most of the population of the world live, they go to bed with empty stomachs. And, my friend, they won’t be filled on Thanksgiving or Christmas while the Western world sits down to gorge itself on food it doesn’t need. The world is equally as needy, equally as wretched, as it was all those centuries ago.

Why Four Gospels?

The Jew was the man of prophecy. When Matthew wrote his Gospel record he directed it to him, gathering up the Old Testament prophecies and presenting the Man who fulfilled them: “Here He is – the Messiah!”

The Oriental was the man of plutocracy and the man of poverty. The man who had pearls and gold and diamonds in such abundance that on the scales they would balance his body weight, had the same spiritual need as the man begging for bread. He was still hungry and still thirsty. The Gospel of John was written to him, and John quotes our Lord when He says, "I am the bread of life; he that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst" (John 6:35).

The Gospel of Luke was directed to the Greek, the man of perfection, the man of philosophy. Dr. Luke wrote, "Look, here He is, the perfect Man."

The Roman was the man of power, the man of politics. With him in mind Mark wrote a brief Gospel in staccato fashion, one miracle after another. He presented Jesus Christ as the Man of action.

But the world is needy still. Idealism is all but dead. Mankind is bankrupt intellectually. There is not a leader in the world who is outstanding, not one. We are not producing giants in any field of endeavor. Modern literature reflects this. One of our modern writers gives her estimation: "Modern literature is a mirror on the ceiling of a brothel." What a picture!

In these four Gospels is the Man Christ Jesus, God, who took upon Himself human flesh. My friend, He can meet your need. Are you hungry? Are you thirsty? Are *you* tired of life? A young lady on the telephone said to me not long ago, "If you don't give me a reason for living, I intend to take my own life." Are you tired of life today? Maybe you have been looking in the wrong areas, maybe you have been going to the wrong places, maybe you are listening to the wrong voices. I point you to Jesus Christ, who still is the Savior of the world.

It's black outside right now. You know it. I don't have to tell you that. Men in high places are pessimistic and frightened about the future.

My friend, I have some good news for you. There is a little glimmer of light breaking on the horizon right now, and it shows up brighter because it is so dark down here. This One who came about two thousand years ago is coming again! I'm willing to risk being called a fanatic in saying that I think God is preparing the world right now for the return of Jesus Christ. He is coming again! This is the hope of the world. I point you to Him, the mighty Son of God, the Savior of the world and the only One who can meet your need.