
a *Grace Notes* course

The Acts of the Apostles

Section I: Acts 1 to 7

an expositional study
by Warren Doud

Lesson 15: **Acts 6:1-6**

Acts 6:1-6

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Instructions

Begin each study session with prayer. It is the Holy Spirit who makes spiritual things discernable to Christians, so it is essential to be in fellowship with the Lord during Bible study.

1. Study the lesson by reading the passage in ACTS, studying the notes, and studying the other passages of the Bible which are cited. It is a good idea to read the whole book of Acts regularly, perhaps at least once a month. This will give you a good overall view of the events in ACTS.
 2. Study the topics in the same way, paying close attention to all of the Bible verses which are mentioned.
 3. Review all of the notes in the ACTS study and the topics
 4. Go to the Quiz page and follow the instructions to complete all the questions on the quiz. The quiz is "open book". You may refer to all the notes and to the Bible when you take the test. But you should not get help from another person.
 5. When you have completed the Quiz, be sure to SAVE the file.
 6. Return the completed Quiz to Grace Notes, either by e-mail or regular mail. There are instructions below in the Quiz section.
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Acts 6:1-6

Acts 6:1 And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations.

“the number of the disciples was multiplied”

There was a continual evangelistic effort going on, and this was bringing about a considerable growth in numbers in the community of Christians in Jerusalem. Because of the growing persecution, more and more people were experiencing privation. When a Jew became a Christian, he would be cut off from any help he might receive from the Jewish community. Widows, for example, who would have received financial help from the Temple funds set aside for that purpose, would have been cut off as soon as it was found out that they were Christians.

When money is involved, you can expect that there will be controversy, as some people’s expectations are not met. It is very difficult, in any case, to make a fair and equitable distribution. Mistakes will be made; deserving recipients will be overlooked, and sometimes the undeserving will receive funds.

Here, there is an added problem. The same lines of division exist among the Christians that characterized their relationships as Jews, namely, that some of them were Hebrews, or Aramean Jews (speaking Aramaic), and others were Jews who came from a Greek culture, and who spoke Greek, Hellenists. As these two types of people were brought together into local Christian congregations, the great differences between them would cause considerable problems, at first, until the majority could absorb the great Grace doctrines of the Christian life and begin to move away from their former lives, under the teaching and edifying ministry of the Holy Spirit.

“murmuring”

(NAS: **complaint**), from *goggusmos*, “to mutter; to murmur.”

This is the sort of grumbling that starts out as a private complaint and, because it continues and

grows, soon becomes public. Note that it was not the widows themselves who were complaining, but other were concerned on their behalf.

“Grecians”

The word “Greece” is from the Latin *Graeci*, the name given to them by the Romans, who applied to the whole people the name of the first tribe the Romans came across, the *Graioi*, a Boeotian tribe that took part in the colonization of Cyme in Italy.

The various Greek communities referred to themselves by the name Hellenes; they called their country Hellas, and their language the Hellenic language [*h ‘ellhniki glossa*]. Even today, the Greeks use these names, and the official name for Greece is “The Hellenic Republic” [*HELLINIKI DIMOKRATIA*]. A Greek person, then, is a Hellene.

(NAS: **Hellenists**) from *Ellenistōs* The Revised Version says “Grecian Jews,” because “Grecians,” in English, might be thought to mean Gentile Greeks. In the NAS, “Hellenists” means Jews.

The word **Hellenist** refers to a Jew, not a Greek, who comes from outside Palestine, from such areas of Greek influence like Alexandria or Cyrenia (coast of Libya). The contact of Jews with Greeks first began when Alexander forcibly settled 8,000 Jews in Egypt, in the Nile delta, where they formed a large part of his new city, Alexandria. From Egypt the Jews gradually spread along the whole North African coast. Jews were also removed by Seleucus Nicator, from Babylonia to Antioch and Seleucia, and under various persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes and other Greek rulers, scattered themselves through Asia Minor, Greece, Macedonia, and the Greek islands of the Aegean.

The majority adopted the Greek language, and many forgot the Aramaic dialect which had been the Jews’ language since their captivity.

“Hebrews”

Any man was a **Jew** [*ioudaios*] who could trace his descent from Jacob. The word “Jew” is a racial identity.

A **Hebrew** was a Jew who spoke Hebrew and retained Hebrew customs, following the ancient religion closely.

The Hebrews whose families had come from Aram were called **Arameans**. This word refers to Aram, or Padan-Aram, the district of Mesopotamia surrounding the city of Haran, and the territory included the city of Damascus. Aram was the 5th son of Shem, Noah's oldest son; Haran was the elder son of Terah and Abraham's brother; he was the father of Lot. The Jews from these areas spoke Aramaic (Assyrian), as did the Palestinian Jews of the time of Christ. Parts of the Old Testament were written in Aramaic, and Jesus spoke Aramaic.

Note: King Ahab fought against Ben-Hadad, king of Aram, whose capital was Damascus.

The distinction between a Hebrew and a Hellenists was a distinction within the Jewish nation, not between the Jews and other nations. Paul calls himself a "Hebrew of Hebrews," that is, a Hebrew and of Hebrew parents, speaking Hebrew and following Hebrew customs.

In this verse, both Hebrews and Hellenists are Christian believers, but there is still the line of cleavage between the two groups, which had the potential for conflict.

A **Hellenizer** was a Jew who followed Greek philosophy and culture instead of the Jewish religion and practices.

TOPIC: HELLENISTS AND HEBREWS

TOPIC: GREEK HISTORY (SEE GRACE NOTES WEB SITE)

"were neglected"

imperative passive of [paraqewrew], meaning, "to examine things placed beside other things," hence, "to overlook," hence, "to neglect."

There was help available from the Christians' common fund for those who had a genuine need. There was, at this time, quite a lot of money available, as we have seen Barnabas and others selling property and donating the proceeds for the purpose of charitable giving. In a few years, however, these funds had run out, and we see in later chapters of Acts the apostles Paul and

Barnabas carrying donated funds back to Jerusalem from Christian congregations in other countries.

It is a debated question how this service, in which the Hellenistic widows felt they were being overlooked, was executed in the period depicted in Acts 6, whether by the distribution of portions to those in special need or by the arranging of common meals. The latter is more likely. For it means that the overlooking of the Hellenistic widows was probably no mere matter of partiality, and therefore of petty wrangling for the better portions, but a radical difference of opinion on whether they should be admitted to the fellowship and therefore whether they really belonged to the community. Possibly such issues as the attitude to the Law and to the strict Jewish concept of purity were already involved. For the committing of this service to the Hellenistic Seven surely implies rather more than a purely external release of the leaders of the community from administrative duties.¹

TOPIC: THE POOR (SEE LESSON 7)

Acts 6:2 Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.[KJV]

"the twelve

– would have included Matthias, the apostle chosen by election in chapter 1.

In Acts 6 we see that the apostles recognize that part of a Christian's duty and ministry is to provide care for the genuinely poor people in the congregation, but that the priority must be placed on the preaching and teaching ministries.

"the multitude of the disciples"

The whole church, not just the 120 disciples.

"it is not reason"

It was not "desirable (NAS); fitting; proper" for the apostles to give up, or delegate to others, the

¹ Robertson, A. T., "New Testament Greek", discussion on DIAKONEW.

doctrinal ministry which the Lord had given specifically to them.

The distributions had become a lot of work. There were by now thousands of believers, probably hundreds of which would have had need for assistance. Those who still had their jobs, bank accounts, houses, lands, were among the fortunate few, and as the persecutions continued, the ranks of the needy would increase greatly. The apostles were always at the center of all this activity and were called on day and night for all kinds of assistance, spiritual and practical. It became necessary to divide the work appropriately, so that the teaching ministry did not suffer.

Acts 6:3 Wherefore, brethren, look you out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.[KJV]

“of good report”

Greek: *marturoumenou*, present active participle of *marturew*, “to bear witness to”. The participle is translated “attested; approved; witnessed.”

The Christians were to choose people of proven good character and integrity, people they could trust to be impartial in handling delicate matters.

Principles for choosing people for duties in a local church are found in many passages of Scripture.

Eph. 4:22-31 describes the general results of Christian growth for any believer; and anyone who serves the Lord in any capacity must have these traits. **Titus 1:6 to 2:3** describes the type of people that Titus was to try to find to lead the churches on Crete.

“full of the Holy Spirit”

That is, spiritual and not carnal. The men must be believers, and because they were, the Holy Spirit would indwell them. However, they must also be filled (controlled) by the Spirit, because genuine function in the Christian life can only be carried out when the believer is in fellowship.

“and wisdom”

The deacons must minister by Scripture principles. In this case, they must understand grace principles for finances among Christians. Grace principles

for handling money in the Plan of God are considerably different from commercial business principles.

A deacon must be a “grace thinker”; and here are some of the characteristics of grace thinking:

- Filled with the Holy Spirit and occupied with Christ
- A master of the details of life: as such, a person is a giver, not a taker, because of knowing that all prosperity is from God.
- Forgiving, not vengeful
- Not jealous, in fact rejoicing with others who get recognition or promotion
- Not given to approbation lust
- Prefers rather to serve than to be served

“we may appoint”

This is the **future** active indicative of *kaqistemi*. Since it is the future tense, the English “may” is a weak word; the word “shall” should be used here. The apostles definitely intend to appoint men to these tasks, although the church members are to make the choice.

Note: the Greek of the Textus Receptus does use the aorist active subjunctive here, which permits the translation “may.”

Acts 6:4 But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.[KJV]

“we will give ourselves continually”

The verb is *proskarierhsomen*, which implies concentration on one’s duties and steadfastness. Notice the NAS translation “we will devote ourselves.” In this passage, the high priority of the spiritual ministry over the material is emphasized, not that the latter is unimportant, but the spiritual ministry has eternal importance.

“to prayer”

The apostles, and all the disciples, depended continually upon God

“the ministry of the Word”

Here again, the word “ministry” is *diakonia*, the apostles are devoting themselves to the

“deaconship” of the Word of God. Compare Acts 9:31, “and were edified.”

There are several steps leading to growth in Christ, edification. God the Father provided the written Scriptures as the revelation of His thoughts to mankind. He also provides spiritual gifts to believers, “dividing them severally as He will.” Among the spiritual gifts are those for communicating Bible truth, listed in Ephesians 4:11 as “apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.”

As a Christian studies the Bible, he must be filled with the Holy Spirit, in order for the Spirit to be in control and function in His teaching ministry, because Bible truth is “spiritually discerned.” Bible teachers guide and facilitate a believer’s learning.

Edification, then, takes place as the believer (1) understands doctrine, (2) places his faith in the concepts of Scripture, in effect replacing his human viewpoint with God’s “opinion,” as expressed in the Bible, (3) is edified (built up) by the Holy Spirit’s work in applying the doctrine to the life.

The Bible teacher, an apostle in this case, has a critical role in this process, because he provides the academic training in doctrine that a Christian needs to be able to understand divine viewpoint. The apostles were called “deacons” in 2 Cor. 6:4 (“ministers of God”); Eph. 3:7 (Paul: “of which I was made a minister...”); Col. 1:23 (“... of which I, Paul, am made a minister.”)

In Romans 15:8, the Lord Jesus Christ is called “the minister (diakono~) of circumcision.”

Acts 6:5 And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch:[KJV]

All the names of the chosen men are Greek, from which some commentators have concluded that all of them were Hellenists. However, it was fairly common for Hebrew Jews to have both a Greek and a Hebrew name.

But to have had some Hellenists among the seven would have satisfied the congregation that all the Grecians would receive fair treatment in the distributions.

“Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch”

A proselyte was any non-Jew who lived among the Jews.

The word “proselyte” is from the Greek *proshluto~*, a “stranger” or “foreigner”, a person who has come from his own people to live in a new country, with people of another culture.

Among the people who lives among the Jews, all of those who were not descendants of the twelve sons of Jacob, were known as “strangers,” or “proselytes.” The Jews recognizes two types of proselytes, the “proselytes of the gate” and the “proselytes of the covenant.”

The “proselytes of the gate” were people who wanted to live among the Jews but who would not submit to circumcision. However, they usually acknowledged Jehovah as the true God, avoided idolatry; but they were not obliged to observe any of the Mosaic institutions. They were not allowed to eat the passover or partake of any of the sacred festivals.

The “proselytes of the covenant” adopted the Jewish religion completely, even agreeing to follow the rite of circumcision, observe all the ceremonies of the Law. In fact, they were no different from the Jews in their culture and practice, except that they had once been “heathen,” or gentile. They had the same rights, spiritual and secular, as the Jews themselves.

It seems likely that Nicolas was a “proselyte of the covenant,” although there is no proof of this. The Jews would not associate with a proselyte of the gate; and, although these are Christians in this setting, they were probably not so far removed from their Jewish culture, and accompanying prejudices, as to have easily associated with a gentile who did not practice Judaism.

Nicolas is not mentioned again the Bible, but some of the Church Fathers have some comments about him. Some say that the sect of the Nicolaitans, mentioned in Rev. 2:6,15, derived from Nicolas; and Iranaeus and Epiphanius agree with this

concept. However, there is no evidence of this derivation.

Acts 6:6 Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.[KJV]

The seven men were “set before the apostles”, that is, they called the seven in together to meet with the apostles. It is implied that the men chosen were acceptable to the apostles.

Note that these men are not called deacons; in fact the closest thing that comes to a title is what we read in Acts 21:8, where Philip is called “the Evangelist” and “one of the seven.”

This was the first ordination service, establishing the principle that appointing a person to a ministry is a serious matter and should be done with prayer and great consideration.

Hellenists and Hebrews

from Conybeare and Howson, “The Life and Epistles of St. Paul,” Chapter 2.

We have seen that early colonies of the Jews were settled in Babylonia and Mesopotamia. Their connection with their brethren in Judea was continually maintained; and they were bound to them by the link of a common language. The Jews of Palestine and Syria, with those who lived on the Tigris and Euphrates, interpreted the Scriptures through the Targums, or Chaldean paraphrases, and spoke kindred dialects of the language of Aram; and hence they were called Aramean Jews.

We have also had occasion to notice that other dispersion of the nation through those countries where Greek was spoken. Their settlements began with Alexander’s conquests and were continued under the successors of those who partitioned his empire. Alexandria was their capital. They use the Septuagint translation of the Bible, and they were commonly called Hellenists, or Jews of the Grecian speech.

The mere difference of language would account in some degree for the mutual dislike with which we know that these two sections of the Jewish race regarded one another. We were all aware how closely the use of a hereditary dialect is bound up with the warmest feelings of the heart. And in this

case the Aramean language was the sacred tongue of Palestine. It is true that the tradition of the language of the Jews had been broken, as the continuity of their political life had been rudely interrupted. The Hebrew of the time of Christ was not the oldest Hebrew of the Israelites; but it was a kindred dialect, and old enough to command a reverent affections. Though not the language of Moses and David, it was that of Ezra and Nehemiah. And it is not unnatural that the Arameans should have revolted from the speech of the Greek idolaters and the tyrant Antiochus, a speech which they associated moreover with innovating doctrines and dangerous speculations.

For the division went deeper than a mere superficial diversity of speech. It was not only a division, like the modern one of German and Spanish Jews, where those who hold substantially the same doctrines have accidentally been led to speak different languages. But there was diversity of religious views and opinions. This is not the place for examining that system of mystic interpretation called the Kabbala, and for determining how far its origin might be due to Alexandria or to Babylon. It is enough to say, generally, that in the Aramean theology, Oriental elements prevailed rather than Greek, and that the subject of Babylonian influences has more connection with the life of St. Peter than that of St. Paul.

The Hellenists, on the other hand, were Jews who spoke Greek, who lived in Greek countries, and were influenced by Greek civilization, are associated in the closest manner with the Apostle of the Gentiles. They are more than once mentioned in the Acts, where our English translation names them “Grecians” to distinguish them from the heather or proselyte “Greeks.” Alexandria was the metropolis of their theology. Philo was their great representative. He was an old man when St. Paul was in his maturity; his writings were probably known to the apostles; and they have descended with the inspired Epistles to our own day. The work of the learned Hellenists may be briefly described as this – to accommodate Jewish doctrines to the mind of the Greeks, and to make the Greek language express the mind of the Jews. The Hebrew principles were “disengaged as

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much as possible from local and national conditions, and presented in a form adapted to the Hellenic world.”

All this was hateful to the Arameans. The men of the East rose up against those of the West. The Greek learning was repugnant to the strict Hebrews. They had a saying, “Cursed be he who teacheth his son the learning of the Greeks.” We could imagine them using the words of the prophet Joel (3:6), “The children of Judah and the children of Jerusalem have ye sold unto the Grecians, that ye might remove them from their border,” and we cannot be surprised that even in the deep peace and charity of the Church’s earliest days, this inveterate division reappeared, and that “when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews.” (Acts 6:1)

It would be an interesting subject of inquiry to ascertain in what proportions these two parties were distributed in the different countries where the Jews were dispersed, in what places they came into the strongest collision, and how far they were fused and united together. In the city of Alexandria, the emporium of Greek commerce from the time of its foundation, where, since the earliest Ptolemies, literature, philosophy, and criticism had never ceased to excite the utmost intellectual activity, where the Septuagint translation of the Scripture had been made, and where a Jewish temple and ceremonial worship had been established in rivalry to that in Jerusalem, there is no doubt that the Hellenistic element largely prevailed. But although (strictly speaking) the –Alexandrian Jews were nearly all Hellenites, it does not follow that they were all Hellenizers. In other words, although their speech and the Scriptures were Greek, the theological views of many among them undoubtedly remained Hebrew.

There must have been many who were attached to the traditions of Palestine, and who looked suspiciously on their more speculative brethren; and we have no difficulty in recognizing the picture presented in a pleasing German fiction, which describes the debates and struggles of the two tendencies in this city, to be very correct. In

Palestine itself, we have every reason to believe that the native population was entirely Aramean, though there was no lack of Hellenistic synagogues (see Acts 6:9) in Jerusalem, which at the seasons of the festivals would be crowded with foreign pilgrims, and become the scene of animated discussions. Syria was connected by the link of language with Palestine and Babylonia; but Antioch, its metropolis, commercially and politically, resembled Alexandria; and it is probable that, when Barnabas and Saul were establishing the great Christian community in that city, the majority of the Jews were “Grecians” rather than “Hebrews.” In Asia Minor we should at first sight be tempted to imagine that the Grecian tendency would predominate; but when we find that Antiochus brought Babylonian Jews into Lydia and Phrygia, we must not make too confident a conclusion in this direction. We have ground for imagining that many Israelitish families in the remote districts (possibly that of Timotheus at Lystra) may have cherished the forms of the traditional faith of the eastern Jews, and lived uninfluenced by Hellenistic novelties.

The residents in maritime and commercial towns would not be strangers to the western developments of religious doctrines; and when Apollos came from Alexandria to Ephesus (Acts 18:24), he would find himself in a theological atmosphere not very different from that of his native city. Tarsus in Cilicia will naturally be included under the same class of cities of the West, by those who remember Strabo’s assertion that in literature and philosophy its fame exceeded that of Athens and Alexandria. At the same time, we cannot be sure that the very celebrity of its heathen schools might not induce the families of Jewish residents to retire all the more strictly into a religious Hebrew seclusion.

That such a seclusion of their family from Gentile influences was maintained by the parents of St. Paul is highly probable. We have no means of knowing how long they themselves, or their ancestors, had been Jews of the dispersion. A tradition is mentioned by Jerome that they came originally from Giscala, a town in Galilee, when it was stormed by the Romans. The story involves an anachronism and contradicts the Acts of the

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Apostles (Acts 22:3). Yet it need not be entirely disregarded, especially when we find St. Paul speaking of himself as “a Hebrew of the Hebrews” and when we remember that the word “Hebrew” is used for an Aramaic Jew, as opposed to a “Grecian” or “Hellenist.” Nor is it unlikely in itself that before they settled in Tarsus, the family had belonged to the Eastern dispersion, or to the Jews of Palestine. But, however this may be, St. Paul himself must be called a Hellenist; because the language of his infancy was that idiom of the Grecian Jews in which all his letters were written. Though, in conformity with the strong feeling of the Jews of all times, he might learn his earliest sentences from the Scripture in Hebrew, yet he was familiar with the Septuagint translation at an early age.

It is observed that when he quotes from the Old Testament, his quotations are from that version, and that, not only when he cites its very words, but when (as if often the case) he quotes it from memory. Considering the accurate knowledge of the original Hebrew which he must have acquired under Gamaliel at Jerusalem, it has been inferred that this can only arise from his having been thoroughly imbued at an earlier period with the Hellenistic scriptures. The readiness, too, with which he expressed himself in Greek, even before such an audience as that upon the Areopagus at Athens, shows a command of the language which a Jew would not, in all probability, have attained, had not Greek been the familiar speech of his childhood.

But still the vernacular Hebrew of Palestine would not have been a foreign tongue to the infant Saul; on the contrary, he may have heard it spoken almost as often as the Greek. For no doubt his parents, proud of their Jewish origin, and living comparatively near to Palestine, would retain the power of conversing with their friends from there in the ancient speech.. Mercantile connections from the Syrian coast would be frequently arriving, whose discourse would be in Aramaic; and in all probability there were kinsfolk still settled in Judea, as we afterwards find the nephew of St. Paul in Jerusalem (Acts 23:16).

We may compare the situation of such a family (so far as concerns heir language) to that of the French Huguenots who settled in London after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. These French families, though they soon learned to use the English as the medium of the common intercourse and the language of their household, yet, for several generations, spoke French with equal familiarity and greater affection.

Moreover, it may be considered as certain that the family of St. Paul, though Hellenistic in speech, were no Hellenizers in theology; they were not at all inclined to adopt Greek habits or Greek opinions. The manner in which St. Paul speaks of himself, his father, and his ancestors, implies the most uncontaminated hereditary Judaism. “Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I.” (2 Cor. 11:22) “A Pharisee” and “the son of a Pharisee.” “Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews.”

Hellenism

Hellenism is a term that may be used in various senses: it has sometimes been applied to the whole of distinctively Greek culture, including that of the days before Alexander the Great (336–323 B.C.); it is more commonly employed, however, of the civilization that spread through much of the ancient world in the wake of Alexander’s conquests. We shall here use it in this latter sense.

I. INTRODUCTION

Alexander’s conquests covered an immense area and brought him sovereignty over many nations. He proposed to solve the problems of ruling so heterogeneous a group of people and bringing coherence into his empire by eschewing a narrow nationalism and imposing a culture that would transcend national boundaries, in which all people could be at home. Basically, this meant that the Greek way of life would be extended to the non-Greeks, but in the process there ensued an amalgam of Greek and non-Greek ideas, so that the resulting Hellenism was far from being purely Greek. Nevertheless, Greek culture dominated the

whole, and the result is not unjustly called Hellenism.

Sometimes Greek influence concerned more or less surface matters like the wearing of Greek dress, or athletic contests modeled after the Greek games. Sometimes it penetrated deeply into the realms of religion and philosophy. Hellenism was all-embracing. Alexander encouraged a thorough mixing of the conquerors and the conquered by intermarriage. He himself set the example and many of his officers and men likewise married women from the conquered peoples. Alexander died too soon to be able to accomplish his aim, but the policy of hellenization lived on after him.

We should not understand this as an unwelcome policy ruthlessly enforced from above. Doubtless it was this in some cases, and it was in this way that the Jews, for example, encountered it. Yet even they used the language and accepted some of the ideas, although many of them rejected the religion and the immorality. On the whole, people eagerly welcomed Hellenism. The Greeks had notable scholars, artists, and scientists, and many were impressed by the superiority of the Greek achievement. Thus people everywhere were ready to learn the language and adopt the culture of the conquering Greeks. It became fashionable to adopt the latest Greek fads.

The small city-state of earlier days seems to have been at the basis of the greatest Greek achievements. At their highest and best, Greek art and thought have never been surpassed in the minds of many. Names like Plato and Phidias conjure up thoughts of an excellence of which any civilization might well be proud. The little city-states of ancient Greece produced a notable group of outstanding men. Curiously, this did not persist when Greece became one nation and developed into a mighty empire. But although the city-state produced the men and the ideas, it was by means of the empire that the ideas were effectively spread abroad among the greatest number of people. Many factors were involved, but we shall concentrate only on the following.

II. GREEK LANGUAGE

This was a potent force in the whole process. It became known in most places, with the result that it became a kind of *lingua franca*. It was a great convenience for the first Christian missionaries that when they went abroad with the gospel they did not have to learn another language. All over the known world people were brought in contact with one another by the medium of the Greek tongue; a further advantage was that with Greek they had access to the treasures of Greek literature.

III. COSMOPOLITANISM

To a questioner who asked to what country he belonged, Socrates is said to have replied, "I am a citizen of the world"; and Diogenes gave his adherence to the same concept when he called himself *kosmopolitex* "world-citizen." In the days of the city-state, people had tended to confine themselves largely to local affairs; but with the stirring of the pulses brought about by Alexander's conquests and the consequent contact with new lands and peoples, people began to look down on narrow nationalism and to cultivate an outlook on life that deserved the name "cosmopolitan." This did not mean that on occasion there might not be a concentration on purely local issues, but it did mean that merely local concerns were never allowed to dominate.

This caused trouble for "provincials" like the Jews and later the Christians. When people of every nation other than the Jewish found it quite possible to subject local customs and ideas to cosmopolitan ones, it was a mystery to cultured people why the Jews could not. Specifically, the Jewish and Christian refusal to conform to custom by accepting a mild form of idolatry did not make sense to the Hellenists, who did not take the gods very seriously and could not see why these provincials did. When we read of Jews or Christians who came into conflict with those who embodied the Hellenistic spirit we should not understand this as a purely local clash. Nor, at least as far as the Hellenists were concerned, was it a purely religious issue. For them it represented a conflict between a small group with a provincial outlook and many others who had a worldwide outlook. The cosmopolitans never could

understand the obstinacy with which the provincials clung to their narrow outlook.

IV. GREEK SCIENCE

The Greek spirit of free inquiry found outlet in many directions, and the scientific contributions of the age were impressive. In astronomy, the Ptolemaic geocentric picture of the universe is noteworthy. In the pre-Ptolemaic period many Greeks had quite different ideas, some thinking of the earth as a sphere moving around the sun. R. H. Pfeiffer draws attention to the work of Aristarchus of Samos, who gauged the sun's volume to be three hundred times that of the earth. He concluded from this and other considerations that the earth rotates on its axis and moves around the sun (HNTT, p. 112). With the acceptance of the Ptolemaic system, people came to think of the earth as central to the universe and of the sun, moon, and planets as moving around it. Another notable scientific feat was that of Eratosthenes of Cyrene, who calculated the circumference of the earth at 252,000 stadia. This has been worked out as 39,681 km (24,662 mi), not so very far from modern measurements. The mathematical studies of Euclid and the discoveries of Archimedes in the physical sciences are so well known they hardly need mentioning. It was a period when people were discovering a great variety of things about their environment.

V. LITERATURE

People were not interested only in scientific endeavor, for the humanities thrived as well and literature was popular. Poets like Callimachus of Cyrene and Theocritus of Syracuse flourished, and some poets wrote on more or less scientific themes. Menander wrote widely acclaimed comedies.

Special mention should be made of the historians. Hellenistic historians did not understand their task in quite the same way as does the modern scientific historian, being more concerned with the dramatic and the sensational. The abbreviator of Jason of Cyrene, who produced 2 Maccabees, tells us in well-known words: "We have aimed to please those who wish to read, to make it easy for those who are inclined to memorize, and to profit

all readers" (2 Macc. 2:25). This was the kind of thing at which many historians aimed, and the results were varied. Some were too concerned with the pleasant and let the claims of literary form override respect for the facts; others were too didactic. But the best of them produced valuable histories, e.g., Polybius, who is normally regarded as first-rate. Josephus is another whose history is both well known and valuable. We owe a good deal to the historiographers of the Hellenistic period, even if we must be on our guard against attaching too much weight to the propagandizing and the striving for dramatic effect that characterizes some of them.

VI. PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy was, of course, a prime interest of cultured Greeks. The great traditions of Plato and Aristotle were continued, although perhaps the best-known school was that of the Stoics. Many were attracted by its solutions of metaphysical problems and by its offer of peace of mind. Others were followers of Epicurus, though one should bear in mind that in modern times his teaching has often been misrepresented. He taught that pleasure is the aim of life, but he did not conceive of pleasure in merely sensual terms, since he held that it is virtue that enables one to enjoy true pleasure. Other schools also flourished and philosophical views varied greatly, including some that were highly skeptical. It is clear that the Greeks of this age took great delight in wrestling with profound problems and in examining critically the solutions others put forward.

They were not, however, concerned with only purely theoretical issues. Many of them were profoundly interested in ethics and made every effort to promote virtue. One reason why some philosophers were not interested in religion was that the religions they knew did little to promote morality. It is true that the philosophers found it difficult to achieve the ethical standards they advocated, but at least they were concerned with getting people to lead good lives.

They taught people not to be dominated by their passions. Detachment was a necessary characteristic of the wise person, and it enabled him to rise above the promptings of his own lower

nature. Many saw mankind as nothing but the plaything of a blind fate. But the philosopher did not allow himself to yield to despair, aspiring, rather, to a freedom of spirit that would enable him to rise above the circumstances of life.

VII. RELIGION

The Hellenistic world had many religions, though some of the variety was mitigated by the tendency to regard a god worshiped in one place under one name as identical with another god worshiped elsewhere under another name. Thus the Greek Zeus was identified with the Roman Jupiter. Hellenistic religion is of perennial interest to the Christian, for some maintain that certain features of Christianity are derived from the Hellenistic religious environment. Traditional Greek religion, centering on the gods of Olympus, had little influence at this time, for the development of Greek thought had deprived the earlier myths of their credibility. This does not mean that nobody took the Olympian deities seriously; some people undoubtedly did, although for most people there was no dynamic, no conviction in the official cultus.

It was otherwise with the mystery religions. Some, like the Eleusinian mysteries, were Greek and ancient. But more typically, they were comparatively recent arrivals from the East that flourished when transplanted to the West. Not a great deal is known about the details of these cults, for the devotees vowed to keep secret what went on and the vows must have been quite well kept. It is known, however, that the members were put through a horrifying initiation, which led to an experience of peace. The adherents were given the promise of immortality. These cults had an enthusiasm and a vitality that was lacking in the official Olympian religion. Thus they made a wide appeal and were a witness to the unsatisfied longings of the human heart.

The Eleusinian mysteries go back to great antiquity and, while not strictly Hellenistic, are typical of much Hellenistic religion. They center on the spring rites with the thought of the deity dying and rising again. The ritual was accompanied by the myth that told of Persephone, the daughter of Demeter, being carried off to the

underworld by Hades, and of how eventually she was released for more than half of each year. Some of the other mysteries seem to have been of essentially the same type, such as those of Dionysus, Adonis, and Osiris, though each had its own variations. Thus the Dionysian rites were characterized by a wild ecstasy. Female devotees (the maenads) would be caught up in a supposedly divine frenzy in which they tore apart living animals and ate their bloody flesh.

Orphism was another religion with an air of wildness about it, though we should also notice that it had some interesting ideas about both heaven and hell. Probably the only other such religion we should notice is Mithraism. The worship of Mithras was of great antiquity in the East, but it did not become important in the Roman world until the 2nd cent A.D. Mithras underwent many transformations during his long history, but at the time of his popularity in the West he appears to have been a sun god especially beloved by soldiers. It was the Roman legions who carried his worship everywhere. Associated with it was the taurobolium, a rite in which the initiate was placed in a pit covered with boards on which a bull was slain in such a manner that the blood flowed through and drenched the worshiper below. He believed that he thereby was filled with the strength and other qualities of the beast. Mithraism spread widely during the early centuries of our era and some scholars have seen it as a serious threat to Christianity. But it faded away before the reality and the vitality of the Christian faith.

Various Hellenistic religions contain parallels to Christian rites and teachings, which some of the Apostolic Fathers explained as parodies inspired by the devil. There is no reason for holding, as do some, that the Christians borrowed from the Hellenistic cults. While there is no reason why Christianity should not have taken over what was good from any source, the facts seem to show that Christianity was not inspired by the mysteries. It arose, rather, from the revelation made in the OT followed by the coming of the Son of God. Christianity brought people a real salvation, one accomplished by the Son of God Himself. The Hellenistic religions witness to the deep longings

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and needs of the human soul, but they cannot satisfy them. God in Christ does.

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Lesson 15 Quiz

The following questions relate to your study of this lesson.

To answer a question, type your response in the space provided after the word "Answer:". A question may be True/False, multiple choice, fill in the blank, or short answer type.

The last question requires you to write one or two paragraphs in "essay" form. Use the space provided; it will expand to accommodate your response.

You have choices about sending the quiz back to Grace Notes.

- If you received an email file containing the quiz, you can use the REPLY feature of your e-mail application to open the quiz. Enter your answers in the reply message. Then SEND the message to Grace Notes.
- You can enter your answers on these pages, then send the whole file back to Grace Notes as a file attachment. As an alternative,
- After you answer the questions here, copy and paste the whole list of questions into a new MS Word document; then, send the new file to Grace Notes as an attachment. The new file will, of course, be much smaller than this main file.
- Finally, you can print the Quiz pages on your printer and send your response back to Grace Notes in the regular mail. If you do this, send the mail to:

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1705 Aggie Lane

Austin, Texas 78757 USA

Whichever transmission method you use, when Grace Notes receives your completed Quiz, the next lesson will be sent to you, by the same means you received this one. EXCEPT: when you have sent in the FINAL QUIZ, we will send your certificate to you, by regular mail.

This Quiz may have Multiple Choice, True/False, Fill-in-the-Blank, and Short Answer questions. Type your responses after the word "Answer:" following each question. The last question is an essay question and requires you to write a few sentences. Type your response following the questions.

1. Christian widows could still expect to receive financial help from the Temple priests. [True/False]

Answer:

2. The Jews who spoke Greek were known as _____.

Answer:

3. To be a true Jew, a person had to be able to trace his lineage back to the patriarch _____.

Answer:

4. The district of Mesopotamia which surrounded the city of Haran was known as _____.

Answer:

5. Matthias, the elected apostle, was included among the twelve apostles mentioned in this chapter.

[True/False]

Answer:

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6. A Hellenizer was a Greek man who wanted to be a Jew. [True/False]

Answer:

7. Philip the Apostle, and Philip the Deacon, are the same man. [True/False]

Answer:

8. The Jews recognized two types of proselytes: _____ and _____.

Answer:

9. Which of the seven new deacons can we definitely say was not a Jew?

Answer:

10. Most Jews who spoke Greek and who settled in Egypt lived in the city of _____.

Answer:

End of Quiz
