

The Roman World and Early Christianity

Lesson 4

The Origins of Christianity

Key Terms and People

Jesus leader who came to be known as Christ and was believed to be a savior

apostle close follower of Jesus

Paul apostle who played a key role in the spread of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire

Diaspora moving away of the Jews from their homeland in Judea

bishop head of all churches in one area

Peter first apostle who helped spread Christianity through Syria and Judea

pope head of the Christian Church

Constantine Roman emperor who ended persecution of Christians

Before You Read

In the last lesson, you read about life in the Roman Empire.

In this lesson, you will read about the development of Christianity.

As You Read

Use a chart to identify leaders and their contributions to the development of Christianity.

THE LIFE AND TEACHINGS OF JESUS

Why did people believe Jesus was the savior?

One group of people that lost its land to the Romans was the Jews. Many Jews wanted the Romans to leave their land.

Others hoped for the coming of the Messiah—the savior. According to Jewish tradition, God promised that the Messiah would restore the kingdom of the Jews.

Jesus was born in Judea. At about age 30, Jesus began to preach. His message included many ideas from Jewish traditions, such as the principles of the

Ten Commandments and the belief in one God. According to close followers, who were later called **apostles**, Jesus performed many miracles. His fame grew. Some believed him to be the long-awaited Messiah. Roman leaders feared he would incite the people. The Romans arrested Jesus and put him to death.

After his death, Jesus' followers said that he appeared to them again and then went to heaven. They said this proved he was the Messiah. They called him Christ. This is the Greek word for “savior.” His followers came to be called Christians.

Lesson 4, *continued*

1. Why was Jesus put to death?

CHRISTIANITY SPREADS THROUGH THE EMPIRE

How did Christianity spread through the empire?

At first Jesus' followers were all Jewish. Later, under one apostle, **Paul**, Christians began to look to all people, even non-Jews, to join the church. The leaders of the early church traveled throughout the empire spreading the teachings of Jesus.

During this time, Jews made attempts to break free of the Romans. These movements did not succeed. Most Jews were driven from their homeland into exile. This scattering of the Jews is called the **Diaspora**.

At the same time, Roman leaders tried to punish the Christians. Some were put to death or killed by wild animals in the arenas.

2. What did the Romans do to the Jews?

A WORLD RELIGION

Why did Christianity spread?

After almost 200 years, millions of people across the empire became Christians.

Christianity spread for several reasons. First, it accepted all believers, rich or poor, male or female. Second, it gave hope to the powerless. Third, it appealed to those who were bothered by

the lack of morality in Rome. Fourth, it offered a personal relationship with God. Fifth, it offered the promise of life after death.

As the church grew, it became more organized. Priests were in charge of small churches. **Bishops** were in charge of all the churches in one area. The apostle **Peter** became the first bishop in Rome. After this, the bishop of Rome came to be the **pope**. The pope was the head of the Christian Church.

In AD 313, Christianity entered a new era. The Roman emperor **Constantine** said that Christians would no longer be persecuted. He gave his official approval to Christianity. A few decades later, Christianity became the empire's official religion.

While Christianity grew in power, it went through changes. Church leaders sometimes disagreed over basic beliefs and argued about them. To end conflicts, the beliefs of the Church were recorded in the New Testament. The bishop Augustine, as well as other church leaders, further helped to define the teachings of Christianity. These men have been called the Fathers of the Church.

As Christianity continued to rise, the Roman Empire weakened.

3. How was the church organized?

Lesson 4, *continued*

As you read about the rise of Christianity, fill in the charts below.

How did each of the following people influence the development of Christianity as a new religion?	
1. Jesus of Nazareth	
2. The Jews	
3. Pontius Pilate	
4. Peter	

How did each of the following help to promote the spread of Christianity?	
5. <i>Pax Romana</i>	
6. Paul	
7. Constantine	
8. Theodosius	