

## LESSON 1

# Early Christianity

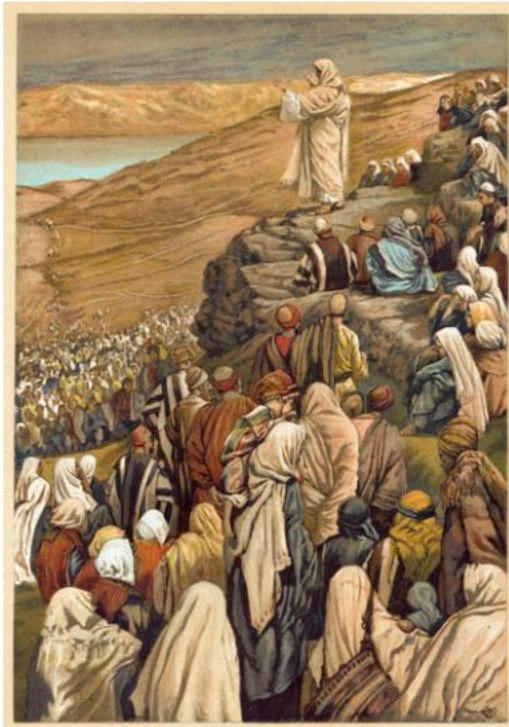
### ESSENTIAL QUESTION

- *What are the characteristics of a leader?*

People traveled from far and wide to listen to Jesus of Nazareth speak. His followers were of all ages and from all walks of life. But how could he share his teachings in a way that everyone would understand? To do this, Jesus taught his followers using parables, or short stories about everyday life that included an important moral or lesson. One of Jesus' most famous parables is about wise and foolish builders:

“ Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash. ”

— from Matthew 7:24–27, *New International Version*




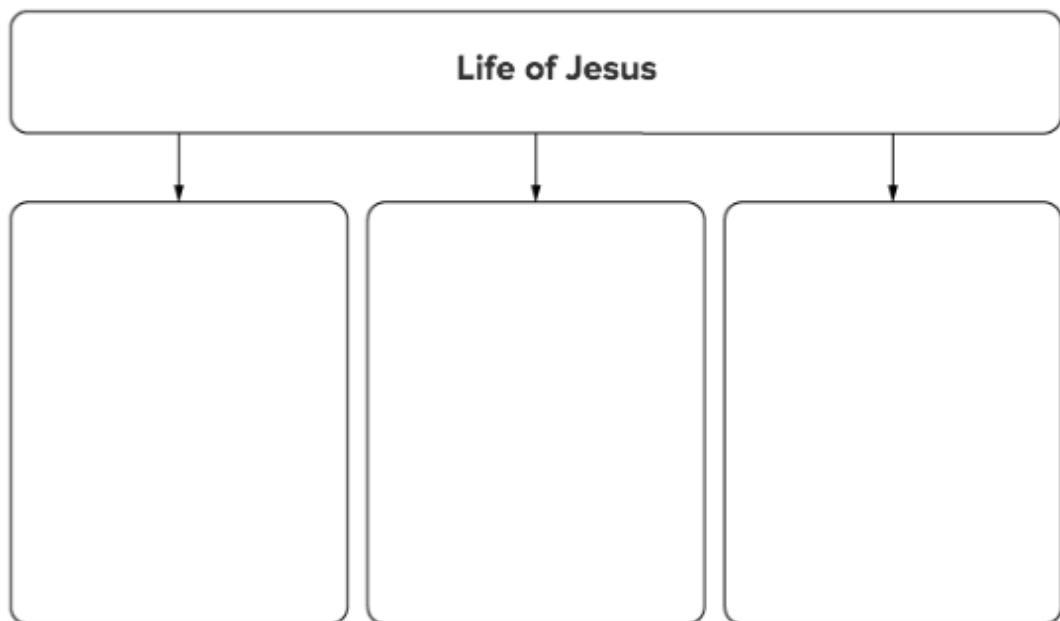
Jesus shared many of his teachings through parables. [Painting by James Tissot, *The Sermon of the Beatitudes*, 1886-1896 C.E.]

THE  
STORY  
BEGINS...

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## ANALYZING KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

 **Read closely to identify three things we know about the life of Jesus. Use a chart like this one to list the information. Explain the significance of how Jesus preached.**



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# JUDAISM AND ROME

## GUIDING QUESTION

*How did the Jews respond to Roman rule?*

The Romans allowed Judaism (JOO•dee•IH•zuhm) to be practiced throughout the empire. In Judaea and Galilee, however, Romans ruled the Jews with an iron hand. Many Jews hoped that God would send a deliverer to rescue them from Roman rule. They wanted the kingdom of Israel to be restored.

## CONTROL BY ROMANS

The Romans had taken over Judah in 63 B.C.E., but they allowed Jewish kings to rule it. In 6 C.E., Augustus made Judah a Roman province and called it by the Roman name of Judaea (joo•DEE•uh). Augustus replaced the Jewish ruler with a Roman governor, called a procurator (PRAH•kyuh•RAY•tuhr). Judaea was now more tightly controlled by the Roman Empire.

The Jews disagreed among themselves over how to deal with the Romans. Some Jews wanted to avoid conflict with their rulers. They preferred to cooperate with them. Others limited their contact with Roman officials and continued to practice Jewish traditions. Some Jews completely ignored the Romans. They established communities in remote places, away from Roman rule. Jerusalem, however, remained their holy city.

## JEWISH REVOLTS

One group of Jews believed that they should fight the Romans for their freedom. These people, called Zealots (ZEH•luhtz), rebelled against Roman rule in 66 C.E. The Romans, however, brutally crushed the uprising. They destroyed the Jewish temple in Jerusalem and killed thousands of Jews.

The ruins of an ancient Jewish fortress called Masada (muh•SAH•duh) stand on a mountaintop in southeastern Israel. After Jerusalem fell to the Romans in 70 C.E., about 1,000 Jewish defenders overtook the Masada fortress. For almost two years, these defenders held off an army of 15,000 Roman soldiers.

In 73 C.E., the Romans broke through the walls of the fortress but found only a few Jewish survivors—two women and five children. The others had taken their own lives rather than surrender to the Romans. The fortress is now recognized as a symbol of Jewish heroism.



*An armed group of Jews captured this mountain fortress of Masada from the Romans. They defended it against a Roman army that outnumbered them 15 to one.*

**INTEGRATING VISUAL INFORMATION** Why do you think the Jews wanted to control Masada?

The Jews organized another unsuccessful rebellion in 132 C.E. In response, the Romans forced all Jews to leave Jerusalem. The Romans then declared that Jews could never return to the city. Many Jews, mourning the loss of their city, established communities elsewhere. The scattering of Jewish people to different parts of Europe, Asia, and Africa is known as the Jewish Diaspora.

By 700 C.E., the Jews had settled in regions as far west as Spain and as far east as Central Asia. In later centuries, they settled throughout Europe and the Americas.

Although the Jews were scattered around the world, they kept their faith alive. They did this by studying and following their religious laws and traditions.

## CHECKING FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. **SUMMARIZING** Who were the Zealots?
2. **EXPLAINING EFFECTS** How did the revolt in 132 C.E. affect the Jews of Judaea?

# JESUS OF NAZARETH

## GUIDING QUESTION

*Why were the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth important to his followers?*

A few decades before the first Jewish revolt, a Jew named Jesus (JEE•zuhs) grew up in a small town called Nazareth (NA•zuh•ruhth) in Galilee (GA•luh•LEE), the region just north of Judaea. In about 30 C.E., Jesus began to travel throughout Galilee and Judaea, preaching to people about his ideas. A group of 12 close followers called disciples (dih•SY•puhlz) traveled with Jesus.

## WHAT WAS THE MESSAGE OF JESUS?

According to the Christian Bible, Jesus preached that God was coming soon to rule the world. Jesus urged people to turn from their selfish ways and welcome the kingdom of heaven. He preached that God **created** all people and loved them the way a father loves his children. Therefore, people should love God and one another. In this way, they would be obeying God.

Jesus' message reinforced the Jewish teachings: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" and "Love your neighbor as yourself."

The teachings of Jesus are summarized in his Sermon on the Mount. Jesus preached on a mountainside to a crowd of thousands. In the sermon Jesus gave the people simple rules to live by called the "Beatitudes." He told people that it was not enough to follow religious laws. People had to love God and forgive others from the heart. According to Matthew, this is what Jesus instructed:


“ Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite [hit] thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at law and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel [force] thee to go a mile, go with him twain [two]. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you. ”

— *Matthew 5:38–44*, King James Bible

# THE BEATITUDES

*The Beatitudes are sayings or teachings intended to guide people. They are part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon includes the Lord's Prayer and nine Beatitudes for leading a better life.*

 **Directions: Read the information in the table and answer the questions below.**

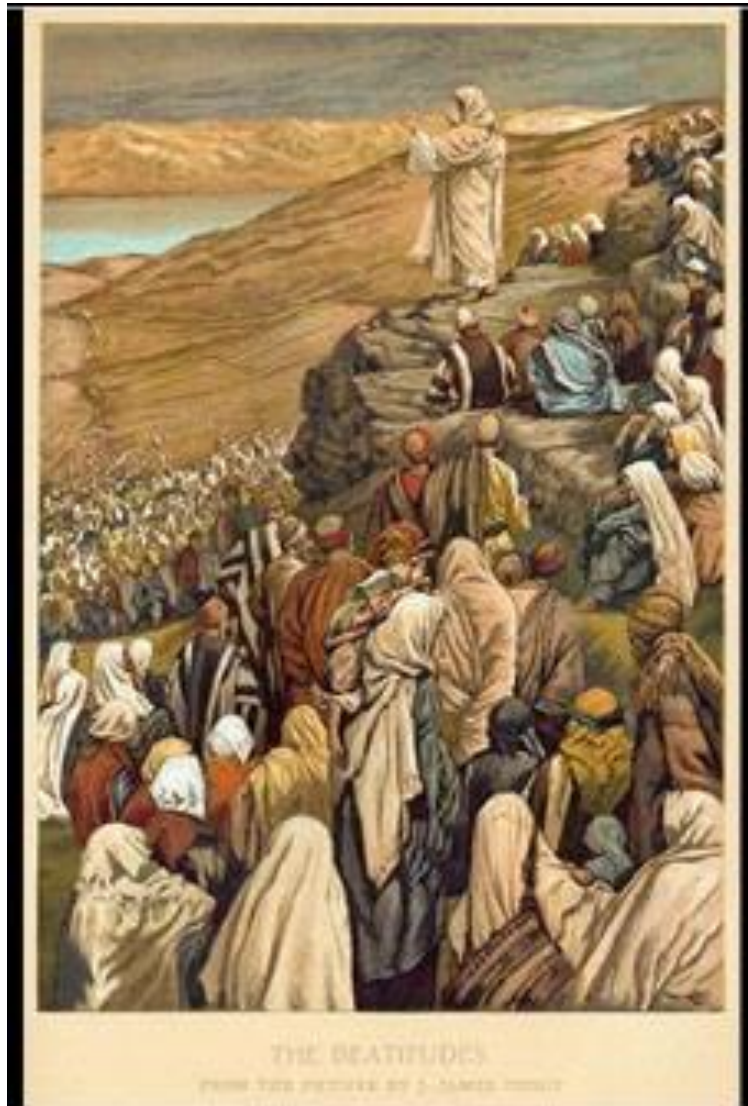
A few selected Beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:3–12, Revised Standard Version (RSV).
"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."
"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."
"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the Earth."
"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."
"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."
"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."
"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."

**1. CITING TEXT EVIDENCE** Jesus says the meek—or humble—shall inherit the Earth. What do you think he meant by this?

**2. ANALYZING POINT OF VIEW** Based on what Jesus says in the Beatitudes, what kind of people is he speaking to in his sermon?

## RELIGIOUS ART

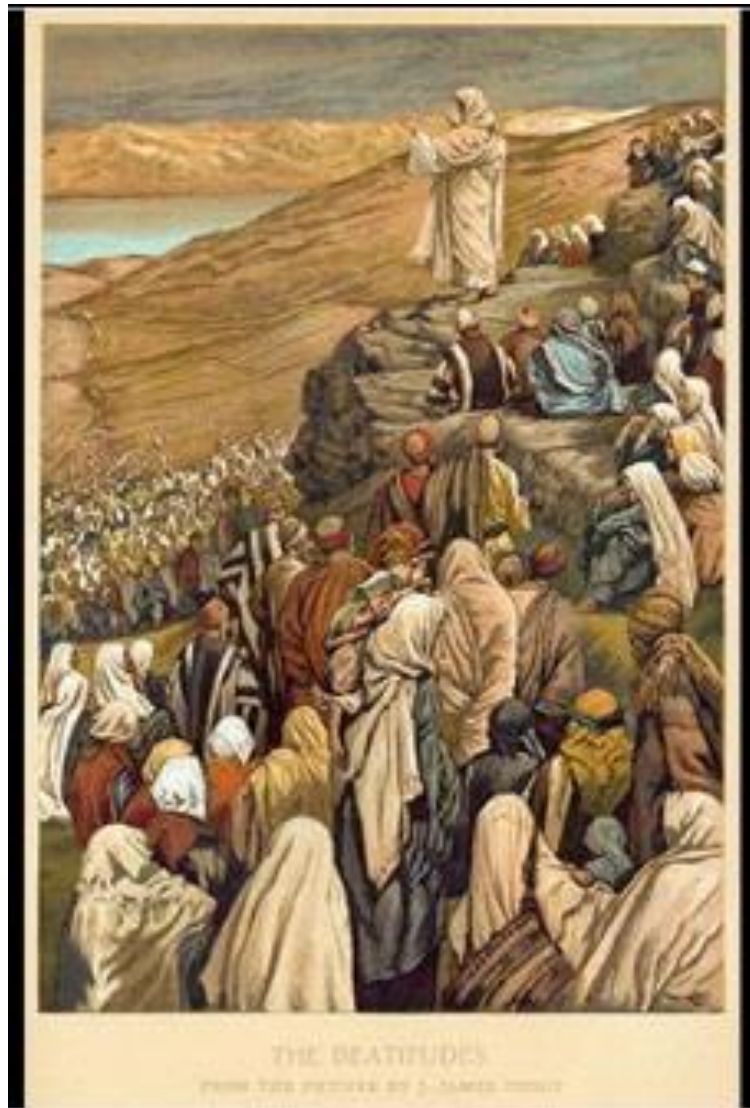
**Directions: Use the slide show to view more information about the Sermon on the Mount.**



**"Sermon of the Beatitudes," by James Tissot**

The New Testament includes the sermons that Jesus gave his followers. During the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus addressed followers with a series of blessings, known as the Beatitudes. The blessings and sermon have inspired Christian artists for centuries. As you view the paintings in this slide show, think about the different viewpoints of the artists.





This depiction of the Sermon on the Mount shows Jesus standing high over a great crowd. The features of both Jesus and his listeners are hidden by flowing robes. The focus is less on the features of the individual figures and more on the crowd.

Note how the rugged, barren landscape seems to stretch on and on, with an endless stream of followers flowing up the mountain to hear Jesus speak. This suggests the power of Jesus' message to attract many followers.



**"The Sermon on the Mount and the Healing of the Leper," by Cosimo Rosselli and Piero di Cosimo, 1481-1482**

Cosimo Rosselli and his assistant, Piero di Cosimo, painted this image for the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican. The chapel is famous for its artwork.

The Sermon on the Mount, shown on the left side of the image, is considered the basis of Christian teachings. Notice that another scene, Jesus healing a diseased leper, appears to the right of the sermon scene.



“The Sermon on the Mount,” by Claude Lorrain, c. 1656

Claude Lorrain became a famous landscape artist after painting for Pope Urban VIII and King Philip IV of Spain. His version of the well-known biblical scene showcases his skills at representing peaceful and beautiful countryside scenes.

Note that the painter chooses to focus on the quiet landscape more than on the people in the scene. The inclusion of gentle animals such as sheep also heightens the sense of peacefulness.



"Sermon on the Mount," by Carl Bloch, 1877

Danish painter Carl Bloch painted his version of the Sermon on the Mount for the Chapel at Frederiksborg Palace in Denmark in 1877.

This depiction greatly emphasizes the close-up figure of Jesus. Note the expressions on the faces of the people in the crowd.

Jesus spoke using everyday language. He often preached using **parables** (PA•ruh•buhlz). These were stories about things his listeners could understand, using events from everyday life. They helped people **interpret**, or explain, the ideas Jesus taught.

In one parable, Jesus told of a Samaritan man who saw an injured traveler by the side of the road. Even though the injured man was not a Samaritan, the passerby helped him. In another parable, Jesus told the story of a father who forgave his son's mistakes. He welcomed his prodigal—or wasteful—son back into the family. Both parables taught that God is like the concerned Samaritan or the forgiving father. He loves people who have erred and will forgive them if they trust in him.

## PARABLES

 **Directions: Use the images to answer the question below.**



*The parables of the Good Samaritan (top) and the Prodigal Son (bottom) are shown here. In each case, one person is helping another. These two paintings were created by an English painter and an Italian painter more than 1,500 years after the life of Jesus.*

**INTEGRATING VISUAL INFORMATION** What do you think of today when you hear that someone is a “Good Samaritan”?

## HOW DID CHRISTIANITY BEGIN?

Jesus and his message sparked strong reactions from people. His followers spoke of times in which he healed the sick and performed other miracles. Stories about him were widely told. Many believed he was the Messiah, or the promised deliverer. Some Jews felt Jesus was deceiving people and opposed him. Roman rulers feared his preaching and growing influence and popularity. They viewed Jesus as a threat to law and order.

At the time of the Jewish holy days of Passover, there was growing tension between the Romans and the Jews. The Romans brought statues of the emperor into Jerusalem, the holy city of the Jews. Many Jews saw these statues as false idols and objected to their presence. The Jews had also grown weary of Roman rule and high taxes. Many Romans were angry because the Jews refused to worship statues of the Roman emperor.

In about 33 C.E., Jesus traveled to Jerusalem with his 12 disciples to celebrate the Jewish holy days of Passover. When he arrived in the city, an enthusiastic crowd greeted him as their promised deliverer. In an event known as the Last Supper, Jesus celebrated the Passover meal with his disciples.

# JESUS AND HIS DISCIPLES

 **Directions: View the image and answer the question below.**



*At the end of the 1400s C.E., the Italian artist Leonardo da Vinci created this famous painting of Jesus. Called The Last Supper, it was painted on a wall in Milan, Italy.*

**INTEGRATING VISUAL INFORMATION** What do you think is happening in this illustration of Jesus and his followers?



# BETRAYAL OF JESUS

After the meal, however, one of Jesus' closest followers betrayed him. Leaders in Jerusalem arrested Jesus to prevent trouble from erupting in the city. They may have charged Jesus with treason, or disloyalty to the government. He was questioned by the Roman governor and sentenced to death.

According to the Christian Bible, Jesus was crucified, or hung from a wooden cross, and died. Romans regularly crucified criminals and political rebels. The followers of Jesus were greatly saddened by his death. According to Christian belief, Jesus rose from the dead three days after his death and appeared to some of his disciples.

Early Christian writings state that Mary Magdalene, one of Jesus' followers, was the first to see him alive again. The message of Jesus' **resurrection** (REH•zuh•REHK•shuhn), or rising from the dead, led to the birth of Christianity. During this very early period, Christians were still one of the many groups that made up Judaism.

**Directions: Read the biography and answer the question below.**

## BIOGRAPHY

### MARY MAGDALENE

A practical, down-to-earth woman, Mary Magdalene went with Jesus during his travels throughout Galilee. Biblical accounts of the life of Jesus maintain that she was present during his crucifixion and burial. These accounts also say she and two other women went to his tomb a few days after he was placed there. Finding it empty, Mary hurried to tell the other followers. She then returned to the tomb with Peter, also a follower of Jesus.

[Stained glass window designed in 1800s C.E.]



**INFERRING** What risks did Mary Magdalene face by being loyal to Jesus?

## **✓** CHECKING FOR UNDERSTANDING

- SUMMARIZING** How did Jesus reinforce traditional Jewish teachings?
- IDENTIFYING CAUSES** What caused the tension between the Jews and the Romans?

# WHO WERE THE APOSTLES?

## GUIDING QUESTION

*How did early Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire?*

The early Christian leaders who spread the message of Jesus were called **apostles** (uh•PAH•suhlz). The apostles first spoke to the Jews in Judaea and Galilee. The apostles then traveled to other parts of the Mediterranean region. Small groups of Jews and non-Jews in the Greek-speaking cities of the eastern Mediterranean believed the message about Jesus.

Those who accepted Jesus and his teachings became known as “Christians” and referred to Jesus as “Jesus Christ.” The word *Christ* comes from *Christos*, which is a Greek term that means “the anointed one.”

The first Christians formed churches, or local groups for worship and teaching. Early Christians met in homes of men and women. At these gatherings, Christians prayed and studied the Hebrew Bible and early Christian writings. They also ate a meal similar to the Last Supper to remember the death and resurrection of Jesus.

## EARLY CHRISTIAN LEADERS

Apostles played an important part in the growth of Christianity. Peter and Paul were two important apostles in the early Christian church. Peter was a Jewish fisher from Galilee. He had known Jesus while he was alive and had been one of the 12 disciples Jesus had chosen to preach his message. According to Christian tradition, Peter helped set up a Christian church in Rome after the death of Jesus. Today, the center of the Catholic branch of Christianity is still located there.

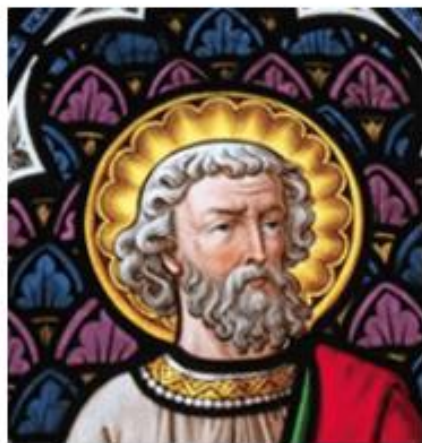
 **Directions: Read the biography and answer the question below.**

### BIOGRAPHY

#### PETER

Most of what we know about the disciple Peter comes from the Christian Bible. According to tradition, Peter deserted Jesus when Jesus was arrested in the garden outside Jerusalem. Later, Peter felt ashamed and regretted his lack of courage. In the years following the death of Jesus, Peter emerged as a respected leader of the earliest Christian community.

[Artist's stained glass re-creation]



**CITING TEXT EVIDENCE** Why do you think Peter deserted Jesus when Jesus was arrested?

Paul of Tarsus was another important Christian apostle. He was a well-educated Jew and a Roman citizen. He was raised as a loyal Roman who, as an adult, distrusted the Christians. Saul—his Hebrew name—at first tried to stop Christian ideas from spreading in Judaea and Galilee. The chief Jewish priest in Jerusalem then sent him to Damascus, a city in neighboring Syria. There, he was supposed to stop Christians in the city from spreading their ideas.

According to Christian belief, while he was traveling to Damascus in Syria, Paul saw a great light and heard the voice of Jesus. As a result of this encounter, Paul soon became a Christian and devoted his life to spreading the message of Jesus.

Paul traveled throughout the eastern Mediterranean region and founded numerous Christian churches. Many of his important letters to churches in Rome, Greece, and Asia Minor are found in the Christian Bible.

**Directions: Read the biography and answer the question below.**

## BIOGRAPHY

### PAUL OF TARSUS

Paul was born in the town of Tarsus, in what is now Turkey. His parents were prominent Jewish Roman citizens. When Paul was about 32, he converted to Christianity. Paul then became one of the greatest Christian missionaries of all time. He traveled across Asia and Greece, converting people to Christianity and starting churches. As a result of Paul's work, Christianity spread.

The epistles of Paul in the New Testament are 13 letters that Paul wrote to his friends and to churches. These texts show that he was a dedicated and passionate believer in his new faith. After Paul's death, one of his followers collected some of the letters and published them. Much of the New Testament in the Christian Bible is based on Paul's writings and the people he influenced.



*Before becoming an apostle, Paul of Tarsus tried to stop the spread of Christian ideas. After he came to believe in Jesus, Paul became one of the most influential leaders of the early Christian movement. [Sculpture, 1800s C.E.]*

**INTEGRATING VISUAL INFORMATION** Why do you think Paul at first tried to stop the spread of the message of Jesus?

## WHAT ARE BASIC CHRISTIAN BELIEFS?

The early Christians were monotheistic. They believed in one God, not the many Gods of Rome. They believed that Jesus was the Son of God. They believed he had come to save people. By becoming Christians and by accepting Jesus and his teachings, people could gain **salvation** (sal•VAY•shuhn). They would be saved from their sins, or wrongdoings, and allowed to enter heaven. Like Jesus, people would be resurrected after death and join God in everlasting life.

Because of their faith in Jesus, Christians began to believe in God in a new way. Like the Jews, Christians believed in the God of Israel and studied the Hebrew Bible. However, many Christians also believed in the Christian Trinity, which comes from a word meaning “three.” In Christian belief, the Trinity refers to the three persons of God: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These teachings became the basis of the Christian faith.

During the 100 years after Jesus’ death, Christianity won followers throughout the world. The peace and order established by the Roman Empire gave people the ability to spread the Christian religion.

### CHECKING FOR UNDERSTANDING

- 1. ANALYZING POINTS OF VIEW** What did early Christians believe?
- 2. EXPLAINING CAUSE AND EFFECT** Why were the apostles important to early Christianity?

## WHAT WRITINGS SHAPED CHRISTIANITY?

Church leaders also preserved stories about Jesus and the writings of the apostles. Jesus did not write down what he said or did. His followers, however, passed on what they remembered about him.

By 300 C.E., four accounts of the life and teachings of Jesus were widely known. Christians believed that four apostles of Jesus—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—wrote these accounts.

Each account was called a **gospel** (GAHS•puhl), which means “good news.” Christians later included the four gospels with the writings of Paul and other early Christian leaders. Together, these works became known as the New Testament. The New Testament was added to the Greek version of the Jewish sacred writings, which Christians called the Old Testament. Together, these works formed the Christian Bible.



# LESSON 1 REVIEW AND ACTIVITIES

## Time and Place

1. **EXPLAINING CAUSES** How did Jewish traditions survive after 132 C.E.?

## Building History–Social Science Analysis Skills

2. **EXPLAINING CAUSE AND EFFECT** How did the apostles spread the message of Jesus?

3. **INFERRING** When Jesus said “Love your neighbor as yourself,” what was his message?

4. **SUMMARIZING** Why did Jesus have disciples?

## Writing About History

5. **INFORMATIVE WRITING** In a paragraph, explain why there were growing tensions between the Romans and the early Christians.

## Collaborating

6. **PRESENTING** With a partner, compare and contrast the beliefs of the early Christians with the beliefs of the Romans and the Jews. Present your ideas to a small group or to the class.