

The Development of Christianity

GUIDE TO READING

The BIG Idea

Ideas, Beliefs, and Values

Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire and eventually became the state religion of Rome.

Content Vocabulary

- procurator (p. 169)
- clergy (p. 173)
- New Testament (p. 170)
- laity (p. 173)

Academic Vocabulary

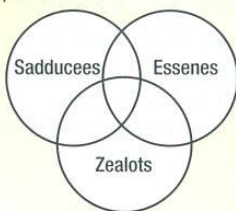
- guarantee (p. 168)
- structure (p. 173)
- transformation (p. 170)

People and Places

- Judaea (p. 169)
- Aegean Sea (p. 170)
- Jerusalem (p. 169)
- Theodosius the Great (p. 173)
- Jesus (p. 170)
- Constantine (p. 173)
- Simon Peter (p. 170)
- Paul (p. 170)

Reading Strategy

Summarizing Information In the diagram below, identify the political views held by the three groups.



NORTH CAROLINA STANDARDS Ninth Grade World History

6.06 Trace the development of internal conflicts due to differences in religion, race, culture, and group loyalties in various areas of the world.

8.02 Compare major Eastern and Western beliefs and practices, including but not limited to Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Shinto, and locate their regions of predominance.

8.03 Classify within the broad patterns of history those events that may be viewed as turning points.

Christian views on God, human beings, and the world were quite different from those of the Greeks and Romans. For example, Christian beliefs held that one would be taken care of and his or her needs met by seeking righteousness from one God. In contrast, Romans believed in many gods, even accepting foreign gods and philosophical practices into their culture. The rise of Christianity marked an important break with the dominant values of the Greek and Roman worlds.

Religion in the Roman Empire

MAIN IDEA Prior to Christianity, Roman religion involved the worship of a number of gods and goddesses and the belief that Rome had earned the favor of the gods.

HISTORY & YOU How has the immigration of people from other parts of the world influenced religion in the United States? Read to learn how various religions and beliefs from the Hellenistic east affected religion in the Roman Empire.

Augustus brought back traditional festivals and ceremonies to revive the Roman state religion, which had declined during the turmoil of the late Roman Republic. The official state religion focused on the worship of a number of gods and goddesses, including Jupiter, Juno, Minerva, and Mars. In addition, beginning with Augustus, emperors were often officially made gods by the Roman Senate, thus bolstering support for the emperors.

Roman Religion

The Romans believed that the observance of proper ritual by state priests brought them into a right relationship with the gods. This **guaranteed** peace and prosperity. Indeed, the Romans believed that their success in creating an empire meant that they had earned the favor of the gods. As the politician Cicero claimed in the first century B.C., "We have overcome all the nations of the world, because we have realized that the world is directed and governed by the gods."

At the same time, the Romans were tolerant of other religions. They allowed the worship of native gods and goddesses throughout their provinces. They even adopted some of the local gods.

After the Romans conquered the states of the Hellenistic east, religions from those regions flooded the western Roman world. The desire for a more emotional spiritual experience drew many people to these religions. They promised their followers an entry

Ritual and Roman Religion

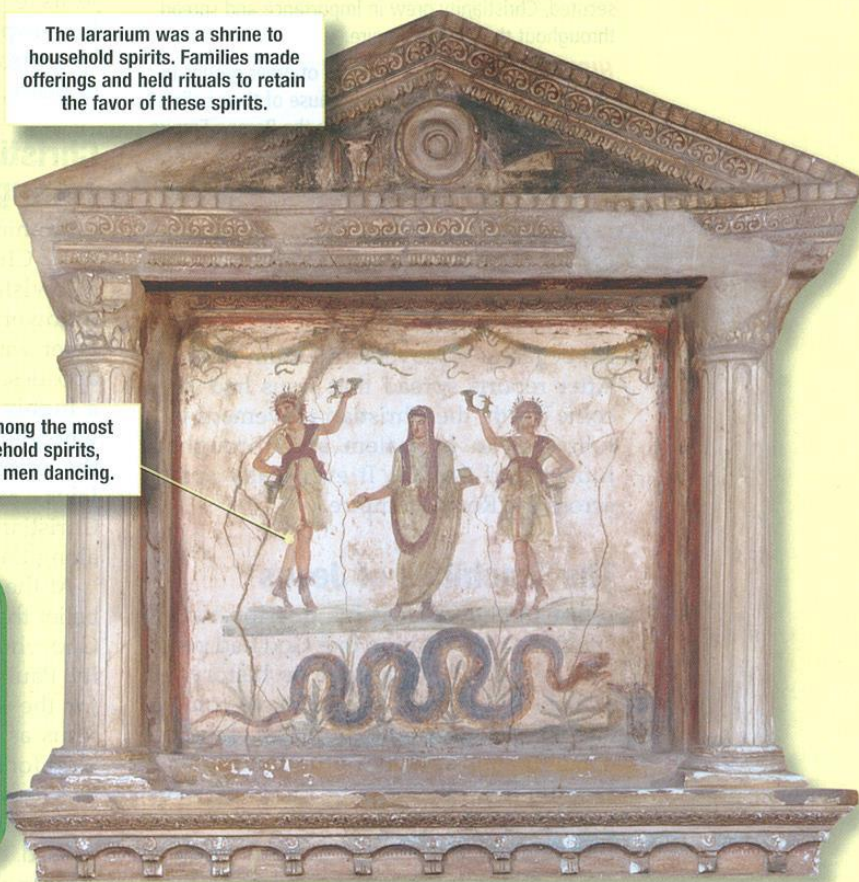
Romans believed that gods and spirits controlled all aspects of life. Domestic spirits protected the home and family, while the gods of the official, or state, religion protected the whole empire. Many of Rome's gods were added through conquest and expansion. The deities acquired from the Greeks, such as Zeus, whom the Romans called Jupiter, became the most influential. All gods and spirits were honored with shrines, offerings, and rituals. Romans also viewed their emperors as gods. Temples were built to honor them and people worshiped them as a way of showing loyalty to the empire.

The *lararium* was a shrine to household spirits. Families made offerings and held rituals to retain the favor of these spirits.

The *Lares* were among the most significant household spirits, depicted as young men dancing.

DOCUMENT-BASED QUESTIONS

1. **Describing** What does the shape of the shrine resemble?
2. **Considering** Why might the Romans have thought their emperors became gods? Why might this transformation have been important to the Roman Empire?



into a higher world of reality and the promise of a future life superior to the present one. It was believed that, by participating in these ceremonies, a person could communicate with spiritual beings and open the door to life after death.

Judaism in the Empire

In Hellenistic times, the Jewish people had been given considerable independence. By A.D. 6, however, **Judaea**, which embraced the lands of the old Jewish kingdom of Judah, had been made a Roman province placed under the direction of an official called a **procurator**.

Unrest was widespread in Judaea, but the Jews differed among themselves about

Roman rule. The priestly Sadducees (SA•juh•SEEZ) favored cooperation with Rome. The scholarly Pharisees (FAR•uh•SEEZ) held that close observance of religious law would protect them from Roman influences. The Essenes lived apart from society, sharing goods in common. Like many other Jews, they waited for God to save Israel from oppression. The Zealots, however, called for the violent overthrow of Roman rule. In fact, a Jewish revolt began in A.D. 66, only to be crushed by the Romans four years later. The Jewish temple in **Jerusalem** was destroyed.

✓ Reading Check **Explaining** How were religion and government connected in the Roman Empire?

The Rise of Christianity

MAIN IDEA Although Christians were initially persecuted, Christianity grew in importance and spread throughout the Roman Empire.

HISTORY & YOU Do you know of other groups in history that were persecuted because of their beliefs? Read to find out why Christians in the Roman Empire were persecuted.

A few decades before the revolt, a Jewish teacher named **Jesus** traveled and preached throughout Judaea and neighboring Galilee. These teachings, known as Christianity, began as a movement within Judaism. After reports spread that Jesus had overcome death, the Christian movement won followers in Jerusalem and throughout Judaea and Galilee. It eventually spread across the Roman Empire.

The Teachings of Jesus

Jesus believed that his mission was to complete the salvation that God had promised to Israel throughout its history. He stated: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." Despite his adherence to the Law, Jesus' primary emphasis was on the **transformation** of the inner person: "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets."

Jesus said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. This is the first commandment. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus shared these and related ethical concepts with other prominent Jewish teachers, but he gave them particularly eloquent and influential expression. The concepts—humility, charity, and love toward others—later shaped the value system of Western civilization.

Jesus' preaching stirred controversy. Some people saw him as a potential revolutionary who might lead a revolt against Rome. His opponents finally turned him over to Roman authorities. The procurator Pontius Pilate ordered Jesus' crucifixion.

After the death of Jesus, his followers proclaimed that he had risen from death and had appeared to them. They believed Jesus to be the Messiah (anointed one), the long-expected deliverer who would save Israel from its foes and inaugurate an age of peace, prosperity, and monotheism.

Christianity Spreads Through the Empire

Prominent apostles, or leaders, arose in early Christianity. One was **Simon Peter**, a Jewish fisherman who had become a follower of Jesus during Jesus' lifetime. Peter was recognized as the leader of the apostles. Another major apostle was **Paul**, a highly educated Jewish Roman citizen who joined the movement later. Paul took the message of Jesus to Gentiles—non-Jews—as well as to Jews. He founded Christian communities in Asia Minor and along the shores of the **Aegean Sea**.

At the center of Paul's message was the belief that Jesus was the Savior, the Son of God who had come to Earth to save humanity. Paul taught that Jesus' death made up for the sins of all humans. By accepting Jesus as Christ (from *Christos*, the Greek term for Messiah) and Savior, people could be saved from sin and reconciled to God.

The teachings of early Christianity were passed on orally. Written materials also appeared, however. Paul and other followers of Jesus had written letters, or epistles, outlining Christian beliefs for communities they had helped found around the eastern Mediterranean. Also, some of Jesus' disciples, or followers, may have preserved some of the sayings of Jesus in writing. Later, between A.D. 40 and A.D. 100, these accounts became the basis of the written Gospels—the "good news" concerning Jesus. These writings give a record of Jesus' life and teachings, and they form the core of the **New Testament**, the second part of the Christian Bible.

By A.D. 100, Christian churches had been established in most of the major cities of the eastern empire and in some places in the western part of the empire. Most early Christians came from the Jews and the Greek-speaking populations of the east. In the second and third centuries, however,

an increasing number of followers were Latin-speaking people.

Roman Persecution

The basic values of Christianity differed markedly from those of the Greco-Roman world. In spite of that, the Romans at first paid little attention to the Christians, whom they regarded as simply another sect of Judaism. As time passed, however, the Roman attitude toward Christianity began to change.

The Romans tolerated the religions of other peoples unless these religions threatened public order or public morals. Many Romans came to view Christians as harmful to the Roman state because Christians refused to worship the state gods and emperors. The Romans saw the Christians' refusal to do so as an act of treason, punishable by death. The Christians, however, believed there was only one God. To them, the worship of state gods and the emperors meant worshiping false gods and endangering their own salvation.



SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY, A.D. 325–600



The Roman government began persecuting (harassing to cause suffering) Christians during the reign of Nero (A.D. 54–68). The emperor blamed the Christians for the fire that destroyed much of Rome and subjected them to cruel deaths. In contrast, in the second century, persecution of Christians diminished.

By the end of the reigns of the five good emperors (A.D. 180), Christians still represented a small minority, but one of considerable strength.

Roman Empire Adopts Christianity

Although Christians were persecuted in the first and second centuries, this did nothing to stop the growth of Christianity. In fact, it did just the opposite, strengthening Christianity in the second and third centuries by forcing it to become more organized. Fear of persecution meant that only the most committed individuals would choose to follow the faith.

TURNING POINT

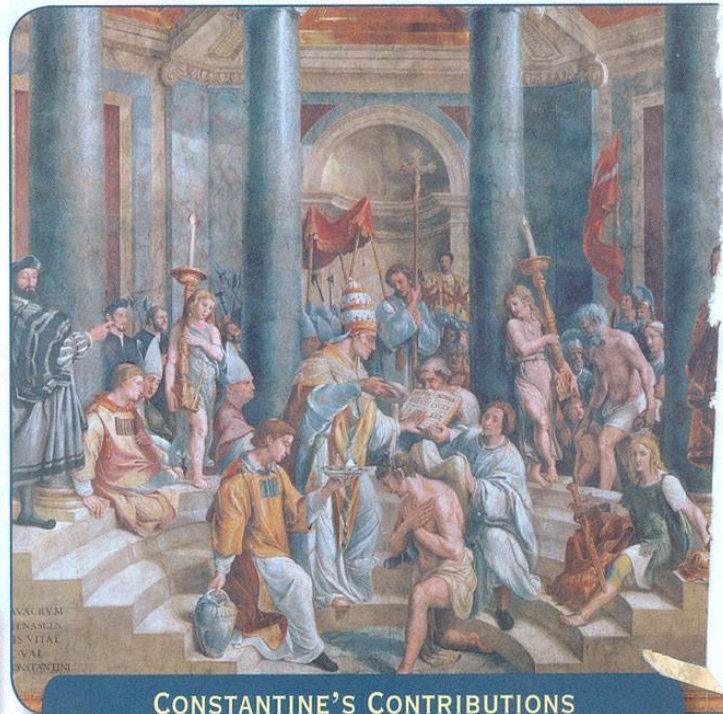
THE SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE

The conversion of Emperor Constantine aided in the spread of Christianity. Although he did not make Christianity the official religion of the empire, he took an active role in protecting Christians and in shaping the religion. With the Edict of Milan and later edicts, Constantine made Christianity a "permitted" religion and gave Christians back confiscated property. He also convened the Council at Nicaea to organize and unify Christianity. Constantine also ordered the construction of churches. In A.D. 380 Emperor Theodosius I made Christianity the official religion of the empire.

DOCUMENT-BASED QUESTIONS

This fresco shows Constantine being baptized, an event which may not have occurred. The work is in the Pope's apartments in Rome and was completed by Raphael's students after the painter died in 1520. The painting illustrates the significance of Constantine's role in the spread and legitimization of Christianity.

1. **Summarizing** How did Constantine support the Christian movement?
2. **Speculating** What do you think might have happened to Christianity if it had not been officially recognized before the Roman Empire fell?



CONSTANTINE'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY

312	Constantine's conversion
313	Constantine issues the Edict of Milan proclaiming the official tolerance of Christianity in the empire
325	Constantine convenes the Council of Nicaea to organize and unify Christianity
333	Constantine orders the construction of churches. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre is completed.

Crucial to this change was the emerging role of the bishops, who began to assume more control over church communities. The Christian church was creating a new **structure** in which the **clergy**, or church leaders, had distinct functions separate from the **laity**, or the regular church members.

Christianity grew quickly in the first century. It took root in the second century, and by the third century, it had spread widely. Why was Christianity able to attract and maintain so many followers?

First, the Christian message had much to offer the Roman world. The Roman state-based religion was impersonal and existed for the good of Rome. Christianity was personal and offered salvation and eternal life to individuals. Christianity gave meaning and purpose to life.

Second, Christianity seemed familiar. It was viewed by some as similar to other religions, offering immortality as the result of the sacrificial death of a savior-god. However, Christianity did not require painful or expensive initiation rites like some other religions at that time. Also, Jesus had been a human figure who was easy to relate to.

Finally, Christianity fulfilled the human need to belong. Christians formed communities bound to one another. In these communities, people could express their love by helping one another and offering assistance to the poor and the sick. Christianity satisfied the need to belong in a way that the huge Roman Empire could never provide.

Christianity proved attractive to all classes, but especially to the poor and powerless. Eternal life was promised to all—rich, poor, aristocrats, slaves, men, and women. As Paul stated in his letters to the Colossians and the Galatians, “And [you] have put on the new self . . . Here there is no Greek nor Jew . . . barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.” Although Christianity did not call for revolution, it stressed a sense of spiritual equality for all people—a revolutionary idea at the time.

Some emperors began new persecutions of the Christians in the third century, but their schemes failed. The last great persecution was by Diocletian (dy•uh•KLEE•shuhn) at the beginning of the fourth century. Even he had to admit, however, what had become obvious in the course of the third century: Christianity and its followers were too strong to be blotted out by force.

In the fourth century, Christianity prospered as never before when **Constantine** became the first Christian emperor. Although he was not baptized until the end of his life, in 313 Constantine issued the Edict of Milan, which proclaimed official tolerance of Christianity. Then, under **Theodosius the Great** (A.D. 378–395), the Romans adopted Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire.

✓ Reading Check **Explaining** Why and how did the Christian church become more organized in the second and third centuries?

SECTION 4 REVIEW

Vocabulary

1. **Explain** the significance of: guarantee, Judaea, procurator, Jerusalem, Jesus, transformation, Simon Peter, Paul, Aegean Sea, New Testament, structure, clergy, laity, Constantine, Theodosius the Great.

Main Ideas

2. **Describe** the beliefs and practices of Roman religion prior to the spread of Christianity.
3. **List** the ethical concepts voiced by Jesus.
4. **Contrast** the beliefs of the Roman state religion with the beliefs of Christianity in a chart like the one below.

Roman State Religion	Christianity

Critical Thinking

5. **The BIG Idea Explaining** Explain why Romans began to accept Christianity and why it took so long for it to be accepted by the state.
6. **Drawing Conclusions** Explain why the Romans persecuted Christians despite their general religious tolerance.
7. **Analyzing Visuals** Examine the fresco on page 172. Compare the figures standing at the top of the steps on the left and right side of the fresco. Which one represents the Roman era? What era might the other represent?

Writing About History

8. **Expository Writing** Research why Romans thought Christianity was dangerous to their empire. Compare these arguments to actual Christian doctrine and practices. Present your findings in an essay. Show that your sources corroborate your position.

History ONLINE

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