

UNIT 5:

Christianity, Islam, and the Crusades

Day 1

Nov. 27 or 28

Pre-assessment-Starter

Day 1: Nov. 27 or 28

1. How were early Christians treated in Rome?
2. Why was Christianity so popular?
3. How did Christianity become a different religion from Judaism?
4. Where did Christianity begin?
5. What Roman emperor made Christianity legal in the empire?

What is Christianity?

Christianity



The religion of Christianity originated in the mid-1st century in the Middle East. It began as a Jewish sect and is based on the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire, and by the year 300, about ten percent of the empire's subjects were Christian.

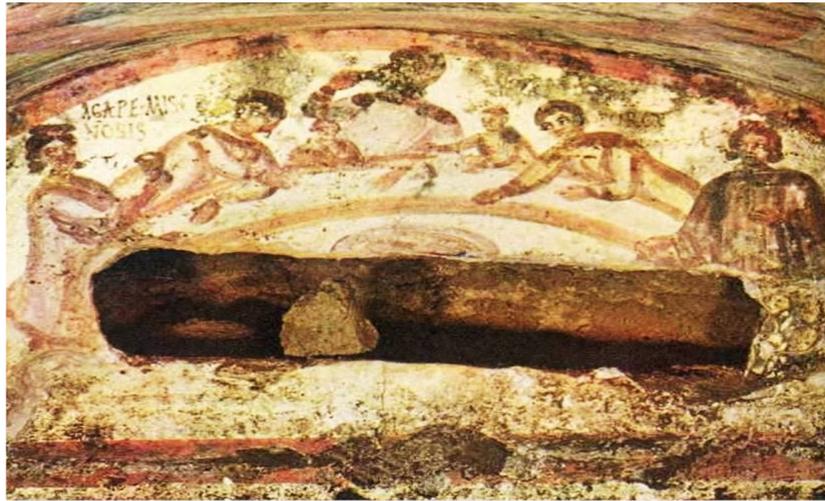
The Good Shepherd, painted 250-300 CE in the Catacomb of Priscilla

CHRISTIANITY

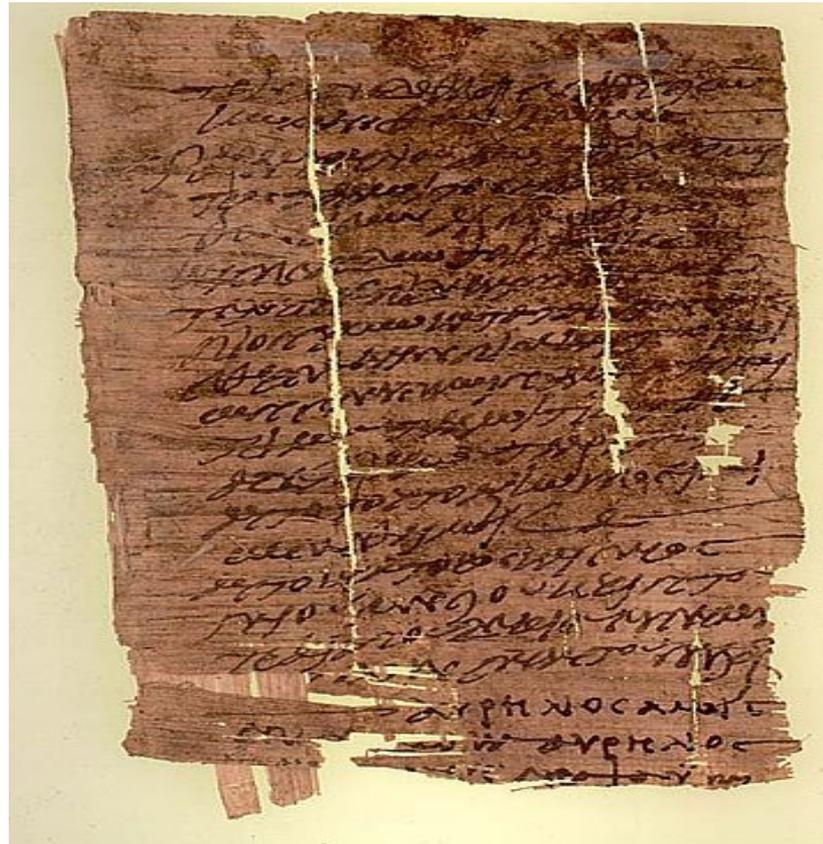


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Roman Persecution of Christians



Libelli were documents given to subjects of the Roman Empire during the reign of Emperor Decius that certified they had performed pagan sacrifices, which were against Christians' religion. Pictured here is a libellus from 250 CE. Failure to perform pagan sacrifices could result in execution by authorities of the Empire. Some Christians were martyred when they didn't offer pagan sacrifices, while others fled, forged libelli, lied, or obliged authorities to avoid injury or death.



*Why did the Roman Empire
persecute the Christians?*

According to the textbook...

Roman Christianity. Through the work of Paul and others, Christianity spread through the Roman world. There were many reasons for this growth. The Christian message of love and eternal life after death, regardless of social position, appealed to many. Roman religious toleration also contributed to its spread. Historians estimate that by about 300, some 10 percent of the Roman people were Christian.

Persecution. As Christianity spread through the Roman world, some local officials feared that the Christians were conspiring against them. As a result, they arrested and killed many Christians. However, those killed were seen by the early Christians as martyrs, people who die for their faith and thus inspire others to believe. Even many non-believers were impressed by the martyrs' faith.

Although Christians often were persecuted at the local level, large-scale persecution by the Romans was rare during the first two centuries after Jesus's life. As it grew, however, some rulers came to see Christianity as a threat and began persecuting those who practiced it.

Imperial Approval. The spread of Christianity through Rome was hastened by the conversion of the emperor Constantine to the religion in the early 300s. His conversion was apparently triggered by a vision that he claimed to have experienced just before a battle in 312. Before the battle, tradition says that the emperor saw a cross of light in the sky inscribed with the words “In this sign, conquer.” After winning the battle, Constantine became a patron of Christianity. In 313 he issued the Edict of Milan, which made Christianity legal within the empire. Although Constantine did not actually ban the practice of other religions, his support for Christianity helped it to spread more rapidly through the Roman Empire.

Thus, from a tiny religious minority, Christians eventually grew to constitute a majority of the population. In 391 Emperor Theodosius outlawed public non-Christian sacrifices and religious ceremonies. As a result, polytheism gradually disappeared from the empire.

Source: *World History: Human Legacy, written by Ramirez, Stearns, & Wineburg in 2008 and published in Texas.*

Textbook Questions:

1. What was the relationship between the Roman Empire and Christianity?
2. Why did the Roman Empire persecute the Christians?

Document B: Tacitus (Excerpted from Original)

In 64 CE, during the reign of the unpopular emperor Nero, a great fire destroyed Rome. The following is an excerpt from The Annals, a history of the Roman Empire written by the Roman historian Tacitus in 116 CE. Tacitus wrote and lived during a time period when Christians were persecuted in large numbers.

All human efforts and all the lavish gifts of Emperor Nero did not **banish** the belief that the great fire was the result of Nero's order. To get rid of the report, Nero placed the guilt and the most exquisite tortures on a group hated for their **abominations**. This group was called Christians by the people.

An arrest was first made of all those who pleaded guilty. Then, upon their information, an immense multitude of Christians was convicted, not for the crime of setting the city on fire, but for the crime of hatred against mankind. **Mockery** of every sort was added to their deaths. They were torn by dogs and eaten, or were nailed to crosses, or were thrown into to the flames and burnt alive.

Source: The Annals, written by Tacitus in 116 CE.



Vocabulary

banish: to send someone away from a place as a punishment

abominations: shameful, disgusting habits or actions

multitude: a large gathering of people

mockery: to make something seem foolish or absurd

Document B Questions

- 1) (Sourcing) Who is Tacitus? When did he write this?
- 2) (Close Reading) According to this account, why did the Roman Empire persecute the Christians?
- 3) Do you think this is a trustworthy document for trying to figure out why the Roman Empire persecuted Christians? Why or why not?

Document C: Professor Cassel's Article (Excerpted from Original)

The following is an excerpt from an article written by David Cassel in 1998 and published in Christian History and Biography, a journal on Christian history. Cassel is a Professor of Theological Studies at Hanover College in Indiana.

Romans incorporated many religions into their empire. As long as devotees continued to observe Roman religious **rites**, they were free to worship any god they wished. Christians, however, refused to acknowledge any god but their own . . . [and] refused to participate in any non-Christian religious rites, to serve in the army, or to accept public office. . . .

A stranger complaint of Roman critics of Christianity was this. . . . They were thought to be involved in bizarre and terrible religious rituals such as Thyestian feasts and Oedipean [practices]. . . . In these two myths, Thyestes eats his own children, and Oedipus kills his father and marries his mother.

How could Romans associate these myths with Christianity? Most likely the critics misread the Christian Scriptures. New Testament writers referred to their fellow Christians as brothers and sisters . . . and encouraged them to greet one another with a "holy kiss." . . . This could have been misunderstood . . . especially if a married couple were referred to as a brother and sister in Christ. This perspective may have been intensified by the secrecy of early Christian religious services, which were open only to baptized Christians.

The charge of **cannibalism** could also have arisen from a false understanding of the Christian Scripture and **liturgy**. The very words of the **Eucharist**, "Take and eat, this is my body broken for you," could be misread in a literal, cannibalistic sense by a reader that did not understand the metaphor.

Source: "Defending Cannibals," written by David Cassel in 1998.

Vocabulary

rites: religious or social custom

cannibalism: the act of eating human flesh

liturgy: ways of worshiping

Eucharist: a Christian ritual

Document C Questions

1. (Sourcing) Who wrote this document? When was it written?
2. (Close Reading) According to the author, what are the “strange complaints” Roman critics had of Christians?
3. (Close Reading) According to the author, what are some of the reasons why the Romans thought these things about Christians? List two to three.

Document C Questions (cont.)

4. (Corroboration) How does this document's description of what Romans thought of Christians compare to Tacitus's account?
5. Do you think this is a trustworthy document for trying to figure out why the Roman Empire persecuted Christians? Why or why not?

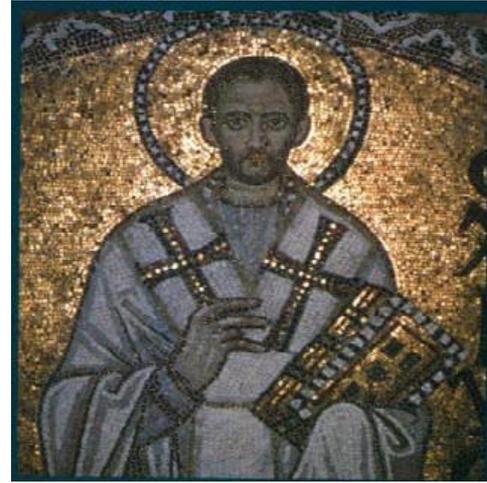
Discussion:

After reading the documents, do you think the textbook account should be re-written? Why or why not? If so, how would you change the textbook

The rise of Christianity

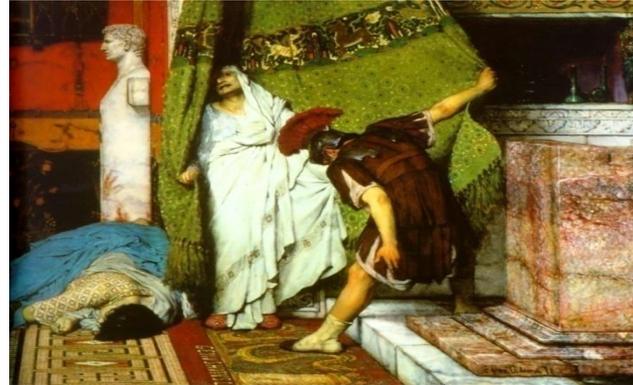


JESUS TEACHING HOW TO PRAY



Religious Diversity in the Early Roman Republic

- Rome tolerated the varied religious traditions of the people they conquered
- As long as citizens showed loyalty to the Roman gods and the divine (godly) nature of the emperor, then they could worship other gods
- Most of the conquered people were polytheistic



Divisions in Judea

- The Romans conquered Judea in 63 B.C.E.
 - Where most Jews lived at the time
- Jews were monotheistic and did not believe in worshipping other gods
- Romans excused the Jews from worshipping the Roman gods so as to not violate the Jewish beliefs



Divisions in Judea

- **Zealots** were Jews who believed that a **Messiah** (Savior) would be sent in the form of an anointed king from their God to lead the Jewish people to freedom
- Several times, the Jewish Zealots would rebel against Rome
- The last time led to the destruction of Jerusalem and the **Diaspora** (dispersal) of the Jews in the 2nd century C.E.



The Ministry of Jesus Christ

- What we know about Jesus comes from the first four books of the New Testament that are known as the Gospels (Old English for “Good News”)
- According to the Gospels:
 - His mother, Mary, was told by an angel that she would give birth to the messiah, the son of god
 - Grew up in Nazareth
 - At age 30, he began preaching in villages near the Sea of Galilee



The Ministry of Jesus Christ

- According to the Gospels:
 - Performed miracles of healing and taught large groups of people
 - Recruited 12 close followers called Apostles
 - Chief apostle was Peter



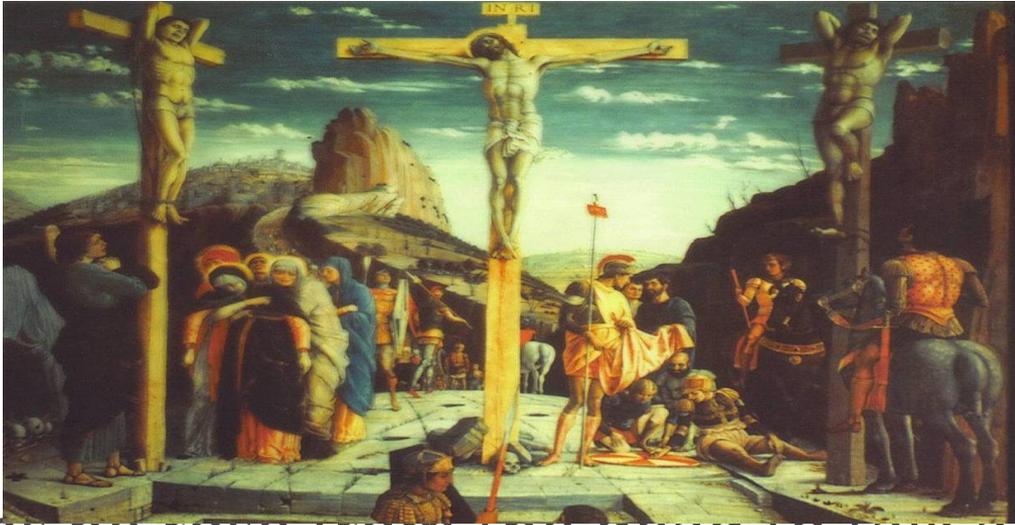
The Ministry of Jesus Christ

- Jewish priests felt Jesus was a threat to their authority in Jerusalem
- Romans thought he might lead a possible new rebellion in Judea
- He was betrayed by one of his disciples



The Ministry of Jesus Christ

- He was tried, condemned to death, and crucified



- Bible claims he rose from the dead to talk and teach his apostles commanding them to spread his teachings
- Bible claims after 40 days, he rose to heaven

The Teachings of Jesus Christ

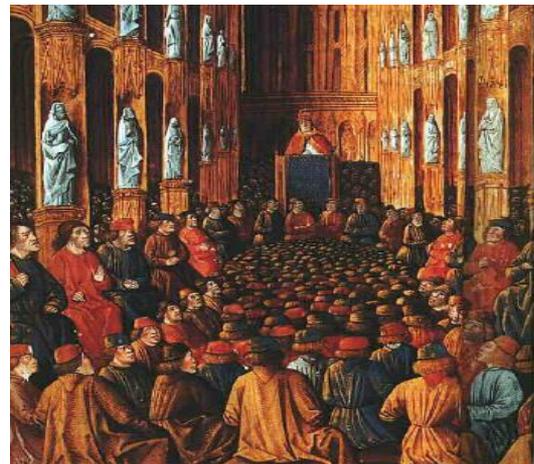
- Emphasized God's love for all
- Taught the need for justice, morality, and service to others
- A person's responsibility was to love God and their neighbor
- Jesus emphasized the need for forgiveness in one's life for their own mistakes and forgiveness to be given to those who give you offense

The Spread of Christianity



Christianity's Appeal

- Jesus had welcomed all people, especially the humble, poor, and oppressed
- Comfort was found in the message of love
- Equality, human dignity, and the promise of a better life beyond the grave
- Taught discipline and moderation which was in line with Greek and Roman teachings



Christianity's Appeal

- Missionaries could teach easier because:
1. The Roman Empire was unified through roads and safe sea lanes
 2. Early documents were written in Greek and Latin, common languages across the entire empire
 3. Martyrdom provided strong examples of the faith of individuals

Rome Accepts Christianity

- Roman persecution ended in 313 C.E. when **Constantine** issued the **Edict of Milan** which granted the freedom of worship to all citizens of the Roman Empire
- Image of a cross in the sky before battle



- Emperor **Theodosius** made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire 80 years later



The spread of
Christianity after the
death of Jesus
325 - 600







117 AD