

Lesson 2 The Early Christians

MAIN IDEAS

Belief Systems The disciples of Jesus spread his teachings and tried to convince others to believe in him.

Belief Systems After having a vision of Jesus, Saul changed from being a persecutor of Christians to a leader of Christians.

Geography Paul traveled to many of the great cities of the Roman Empire, seeking to convert people to Christianity.

Jesus' Disciples

ESSENTIAL QUESTION What did Jesus' disciples do after his death?

The Early Church

- Jesus' first disciples were Jews, felt he fulfilled Messiah prophecies
- Early church stressed sharing property, meals; practicing charity
 - all members were equal; appealed to women, slaves
- Disciples wanted to spread Jesus' message, convert others

Conflict Arises

- Jews divided world into Jews and **Gentiles**—non-Jews
- Early church members disagreed whether or not to convert Gentiles
 - some thought Gentile converts should observe the Torah
- Roman leaders ignored Christians at first
 - they and Christians considered Christianity a sect of Judaism
 - Jewish leaders did not

REVIEW QUESTION

On what beliefs was the early Christian church based?

The Conversion of Saul

ESSENTIAL QUESTION What change did Saul undergo?

The Road to Damascus

- Saul, who was born a Jew, became an early leader of the Christian church
- In beginning, Saul opposed church; later wrote how his faith changed
 - he was on road to Damascus pursuing runaway converts
 - had sudden conversion; came to believe Jesus was Jewish Messiah

Saul Becomes a Believer

- Saul joined church in Damascus, began to convert Gentiles
- Saul was born in Tarsus in Asia Minor, city with Greek influences
 - cultural, political background helped him convert nonbelievers
 - had Roman citizenship, could travel freely, knew Jewish law
- Used Roman name—**Paul**—when traveling
 - became a **missionary**—person who spreads faith by converting others

REVIEW QUESTION

What happened to Saul on the road to Damascus?

Paul's Journeys Spread Christianity

ESSENTIAL QUESTION Where did Paul travel, and why?

The Journeys

- Pax Romana and good roads aided Paul in his travels
- Paul made four missionary journeys; each took several years

Changes to Christianity

- Paul and others altered Christianity to make conversion easier
 - Paul felt Gentile conversion to Judaism was unnecessary
- Christianity became separate from Judaism
 - became more appealing to Gentiles, spread throughout empire

The Letters

- Paul started many new churches, wrote letters to them
- Letters explained Christian beliefs
 - became part of New Testament's **Epistles** ("letters")
- Paul wrote that Christianity removes barriers between people
 - Jew, Greek, slave, man, woman are "all one in Christ Jesus"

Paul's Death

- Paul was accused of bringing Gentiles into temple in Jerusalem
 - taken into custody, imprisoned for two years
 - he demanded to be tried before Caesar in Rome
 - arrived in Rome in A.D. 60 and was held under house arrest
- Paul probably died in Rome, possibly after being persecuted by Nero
 - **persecuted**—opposed or harassed

The Legacy of Paul

- Most influential of early apostles, or messengers of Jesus
 - journeys, letters helped spread the church to nations of the world

REVIEW QUESTION

How did Paul change Christianity?

Lesson Summary

- Jesus' disciples tried to persuade other Jews and debated whether to seek Gentile converts.
- Saul, a persecutor of Christians, became the most important early Christian missionary.
- Paul's conversion of Gentiles established Christianity as a new faith.

Why It Matters Now . . .

More than any other person, Paul contributed to the growth of Christianity as a worldwide religion. All over the world, many churches and cities are named in his honor.