

EARLY CHRISTIANITY

Mark It on the Map

Have students turn to the world map on page 4 and locate the Mediterranean Sea and the lands that border it. Have them note the relationship of this area to the rest of the world, and especially to the United States. Then focus on the map of the Mediterranean world and have them point out the countries they have studied previously. As they read through the issue, let them refer back to this map and locate the sites mentioned.

Vocabulary

astrologer	disciple
apostle	parable
Pharisee	persecute
Gentiles	prophecies
missionaries	evangelist
heresies	gnosis
edicts	catacombs
niches	paganism
Reformation	

Introduction

Have students read the “Message From the Editors” on page 2. Call attention to the third paragraph that explains the issue will focus on the beginnings of Christianity. Explain that there are not only several branches of Christianity, including Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Protestantism, but there are many divisions within the branches. Within Protestantism, for example, are Baptist, Episcopalianism, Lutheranism, and Pentacostalism. Ask students to discuss what the term *Christianity* means to them.

Questions for Discussion

- On what charge was Jesus brought to the Jewish court?
- Why is the cross a symbol of victory to Christians?
- What was Saul’s Roman name? Why did Saul have a Roman citizenship?
- Why was Paul persecuted and later arrested?
- What is the Ascension?
- Who were the writers of the four Gospels? For whom did each write? What did each write about?
- What are the two basic beliefs of Christianity?
- Make a list of the various church officials in the early Christian church. Next to each title, write the duties and responsibilities of this official.
- What is the purpose of baptism? What rules did the early Christians follow concerning the baptism of new members into their faith?
- Who was Pliny?
- What is meant by the Holy Trinity?
- What were the three major heretical movements in the early Christian Church? When did each occur? What was the basic conflict between each movement and the official Christian Church?
- Who was responsible for the first mass persecution of Christians? What event led to this persecution?
- What purposes did the catacombs serve for early Christians?
- What happened at the Council of Nicaea?
- How did Christianity spread to the Americas?

Writing Workout

Students may complete one or more of the following activities:

- Read the words of Paul in his First Letter to the Corinthians on page 2. Write your own letter to the Corinthians explaining Paul's words.
- Using information from the article on page 9, "Parables: The Obvious and the Obscure," write a short parable. Under it, write the simple meaning of your parable as well as the secondary meaning.
- Write a one-page essay explaining why Pentecost is often referred to as the birthday of the Church.
- In your own words, explain what you think the words of "The Lord's Prayer" mean.
- Imagine that you were one of the rabbis in the temple when young Jesus entered during the Passover Feast and spoke to your group. You have to report on the incident to the other members of your community. What will your report say? Write the report as a one-page essay.
- On page 27, in "The Spread of Christianity" article, it states that the early followers of Jesus Christ came to be called "people of the way." Write an essay explaining the meaning of this phrase and how it was coined.
- After reading "A Roman Official Reports on Christians" on pages 31–33, write an essay explaining what you think Trajan meant when he said, "Truly, it sets the worst example and is not worthy of our rule."
- If you were given a chance to explore catacombs in Italy, North Africa, or Asia Minor, which area would you choose and why? How would you go about your exploration. What do you think you might find. Give specific answers and well thought-out reasons for them.
- Describe how Constantine's accession as emperor of the Roman Empire affected the lives of the early Christians. Use "A Persecuted Faith Becomes a World Religion" on pages 36–40 to help you write, but also try to think of other ways which are not mentioned in the article.

Viewpoints

Students may complete one or more of the following activities:

- The spirit of God appeared as a dove at Jesus' baptism. What do you think the dove symbolizes? Why do you think so?
- On page 6, mention is made of people objecting to Jesus including sinners and outcasts among his followers. Jesus answered their objections saying, "People who are healthy do not need a doctor; sick people do. I have come to call sinners, not the righteous." Write your interpretation of Jesus' statement.
- Jesus used parables to convey the ideas he wished to teach others. Discuss why you think parables might be a good way to teach a lesson. Have you learned any lesson that was first taught as a parable? What was it?
- Each of the writers of the Gospels has his own symbol: Mark has the lion, Matthew an angel, Luke a ram, and John an eagle. Why do you think these animals were chosen? What do you think might have been the reason Mark had the lion, Matthew the angel, and so on?
- Not all early Christians agreed on the beliefs and practices that members of their group should follow. As a result, several heretical movements developed and their leaders were punished. Why do you think such movements developed? Why did leaders of the early Christian Church feel they had to punish those whom they considered heretics?

- The Romans refused to tolerate any subject who refused to honor Rome’s gods. Why do you think they made this an official policy?

Get Into Art

Students may complete one or more of the following activities:

- Read the description of what happened ten days after the Ascension on pages 16–17. Illustrate the Apostles meeting together in Jerusalem after the Ascension and the subsequent appearance of tongues of fire over their heads. Write a phrase or title that clearly describes the event.
- Use the paintings and the article “The Spread of Christianity” on pages 26–30 to illustrate and explain one of the following practices: baptism, the Eucharist, and Christian worship service. Display your illustration in the classroom.
- Review the major heretical leaders in the early Christian Church: a Gnostic, Arius, Marcion, and Montanus. Choose one and design a poster that will explain the beliefs of the movement for which he is responsible.
- Imagine you are a soldier preparing to follow Constantine into battle when you hear his order to place the Greek letters *X* and *P* on your shield. Create a design for your shield with those letters.

“Play” Time

Have students read “Young Jesus in the Temple” on pages 24–25. Divide the class into five groups. Assign each group one of following parts: Jesus, Jesus’ friend, the moneychangers, the rabbis, and Mary and Joseph. Have each group create dialogue, make clothes, gather appropriate props, and choose a member to be the actor. Then set aside time for the class to rehearse and perform the play.

Words With a Past

- Have students choose a word from “Fun With Words” on pages 22–23 to create a skit or design a poster that incorporates into it the derivation and meaning of the word.
- Challenge students to make up one sentence using at least five of the six words explained in the “Word Origins” and “Word Stories” sections on pages 22–23. Have students share their sentence with the class.
- Copy and distribute several pages from a Christian prayer book. Have students read about the expression “Amen” on page 23. Then ask them to look for the expression “Amen” in the prayer sheets. Invite volunteers to read aloud a prayer using the translated meaning “thus it is” or “so be it.”

Host a Guest

Invite a member or leader of the Christian community to speak to your class about Early Christianity. Be sure to provide time for questions and answers.

Research Projects

Students may complete one or more of the following:

- Research the nine Beatitudes. Write each of the beatitudes on a sheet of paper. Below each write your interpretation of its meaning.

- Research one of the twelve apostles. Find out who he was, what profession he followed, and what happened to him after the death of Jesus.
- Research the major differences between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Relate your findings to Christianity and Judaism.
- Research the history of the *Hagia Sophia* in Istanbul, Turkey, from its beginnings to the present day.
- In what ways did Constantine's interaction with the early Christians affect the Roman Empire.

Then and Now

- Paul's Roman citizenship gave him certain special privileges, such as the legal right to stand trial in Rome. Find out what other special rights a Roman citizen had? What special rights do United States' citizens have today?
- Paul was the first Christian missionary. Find out about missionaries today. Where are they? With whom are they working? What type of work do they?

Class Projects

- After students have read "Jesus the Savior" on pages 5–8, divide the class into seven groups. Assign each group one of the following: the events preceding and including the birth of Jesus; his boyhood; his young manhood; his life as preacher and teacher; his final days; his trial and death; and his resurrection. Have them review and then illustrate the events. Invite volunteers to explain the groups' work before displaying the illustrations in the class.
- After students have read "A Roman Official Reports on Christians" on pages 31–33, discuss personality traits. Focus on the traits of Pliny and Trajan. Divide the chalkboard into two columns. Add the headings **Pliny** and **Trajan**. Further subdivide each of these columns into two more columns. Add the headings **Personality Trait** and **Reason**. Have students name adjectives which best describe the personalities of each of these two Romans and their reasons why.

Class Research Projects

- Divide the class into four groups and assign each group one of the following: Palm Sunday, Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday. Let each group research and prepare an essay, a short play, an illustration, or a diorama to explain the significance of the day and the traditional observances followed on that today.
- Divide students into four groups and let each research the various Christian denominations that have developed since early Christianity. Have them write the name of the sect, the date it was founded, who founded it, and the reason the denomination began. Once the reports are done, invite groups to share their findings with the class. As a class, create a time line of major events. Note and invite comments on clusters and gaps on the time line. As a follow-up have students research the historical events that correspond to the periods with a lot of religious activity as well as those periods with little religious activity. Ask students to point out any correlations they find.

Time Line Activity

Ask students to look at the time line on pages 44–45 and read over the dates and events noted. Have students select those which they feel are most important in the history of Christianity. List these dates in chronological order on the chalkboard and ask for reasons why each should be considered a key Christian date. Repeat the exercise with dates the students did not consider key.

Literature Enrichment

Get a copy of Paul's letters to the Corinthians and read excerpts to the class. Then have a class discussion as to their purpose and meaning.

Film Enrichment

Show the video *Testament: The Bible and History*, recommended on page 47. Have students share what new information they learned from the video and how the video helped them better understand what they have studied.

Just For Fun

Students may complete one or both of the following activities:

- After reading “Paul: A Man With a Message” on pages 11–13, find a partner to play the board game “Paul’s Journeys” on pages 14–15. Read the introduction and the directions. You will need coins, die, and a copy of the Christian Bible. Read the stories of Paul’s travels from the Book of Acts as listed on the game board.
- After reading “The Earliest Sources of the Christian Church” on pages 16–19 and “The Lord’s Prayer” on page 20, unscramble the words and fill in the blanks in “A Christian Scramble” on page 21.

Follow These Footsteps

Jesus	Mary	Peter
Judas Iscariot	Paul	Mark
Matthew	Luke	John
Marcion	Pliny	Trajan
Arius	Montanus	Theodosius I
Nero	Constantine	Martin Luther
John Calvin		