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CHAPTER 14 | LESSON 1 The Origins of Christianity

Jesus: Teacher and Healer

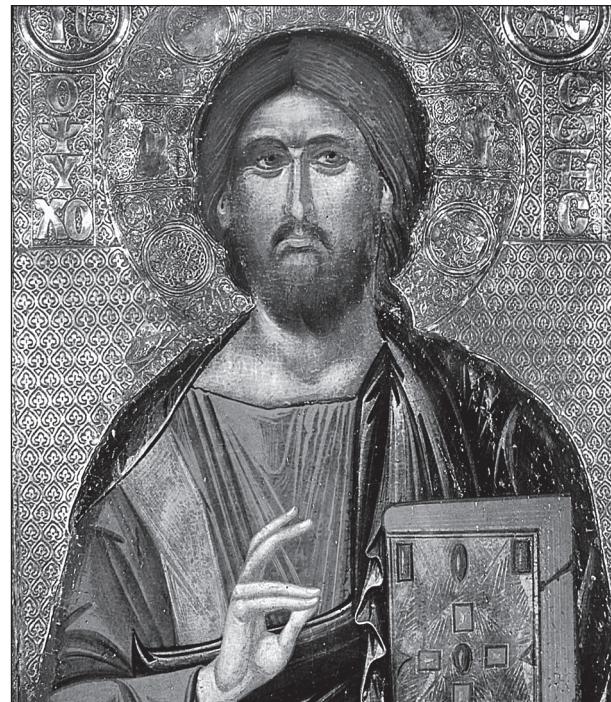
Jesus was a Jew whose life and teachings led to the birth of Christianity. Jesus lived two thousand years ago. He lived and preached in Galilee, a region in what is now Israel.

Early Years The New Testament of the Bible contains four books called the Gospels. Written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, the Gospels are firsthand accounts of the life of Jesus. They contain stories of Jesus' early life and of his years as a teacher and healer.

Perhaps the best known of the Gospel stories tells of Jesus' birth. Although Jesus' mother, Mary, and her husband, Joseph, lived in Nazareth, they were required to pay taxes in Bethlehem. Mary was close to giving birth when she and Joseph made this journey. According to the Bible, Mary had been visited by the angel Gabriel. He told her that she would have a child who would be the Son of God. Although surprised, Mary accepted this news as God's will. Not long after arriving in Bethlehem, she gave birth to Jesus. All of the inns at that time were full, so Jesus was born in a stable.

The Bible goes on to say that both shepherds and kings came to honor the newborn. The three kings were from the Orient. They warned that King Herod of Judea had learned of a prophecy. It said that the king of the Jews was about to be born. Because Herod wanted to keep his power, he planned to kill male children under the age of two. Aware of the danger, Mary and Joseph took Jesus and fled to Egypt. They lived there for several years before returning home to Nazareth. Not much is known about Jesus as a young man, except that he was a carpenter. He learned this trade from Joseph, who also practiced carpentry.

The New Testament records a number of miracles performed by Jesus. The first occurred at a wedding he attended with his mother at a place called Cana. Mary noticed that the wine had run out, which



she thought would embarrass the bride and groom. Knowing that Jesus was no ordinary young man, she asked him to provide more wine. As there was no place to acquire more, Jesus was being called upon to do something extraordinary. He hesitated, for he did not wish to draw attention to himself. However, he could not disappoint his mother. Jesus quietly turned water into wine.

Jesus' Ministry When he was about 30, Jesus began his ministry of teaching and healing. He taught about God's love, and about the importance of showing love to others. He quickly attracted followers, who wandered with him from place to place. Jesus soon chose 12 apostles, or missionaries, to spread his message. Among them were Matthew and John, two of the four writers of the New Testament Gospels. The remaining apostles were Peter, Andrew, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Judas, and Simon. James the Elder and James the Younger were also apostles.

According to the Gospels, Jesus healed the

HISTORY MAKERS: JESUS CONTINUED

blind, the sick, and the lame. He did so in the name of God, and emphasized that faith was needed by those wishing to be healed. He had great compassion, which he showed by both his actions and his words.

The Gospel of Matthew records one of his most well known sermons. Given on a mountainside before more than 5000 people, it is called the Sermon on the Mount. In it, Jesus named those whom God would bless. Those named include peacemakers, the meek, those who show mercy, and those who mourn. Also included are those who seek to live a moral life and those who suffer as a result.

Jesus attempted to reform religious thought and practices in a number of ways. One was through new ideas, such as: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. . . ." Jesus further taught that, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:37, 39) Another of his teachings was to ignore religious rules that he believed went against God's wishes. One such rule did not allow the practice of healing on the Sabbath, the Jewish holy day. Jesus ignored this rule. He also took direct action. Jesus drove out money changers from the temple because he felt that business had no place in a house of worship.

Through his ministry, Jesus gained enemies as well as followers. Politically, he was considered a threat to authority and a rabble rouser—one who stirs up unrest.

Arrest and Crucifixion Shortly before his death, Jesus shared a Passover meal with the apostles. Because it was the last time they were together, this occasion has become known as the Last Supper. After the meal, Jesus went to pray in the nearby Garden of Gethsemane. One of his apostles, Judas, told Roman soldiers where to find Jesus. The soldiers arrested Jesus on a charge of blasphemy, which means to speak ill of God. Jesus was tried and found guilty. Then Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, sentenced Jesus to death by crucifixion. Jesus was nailed to a wooden cross and died.

Resurrection According to the New Testament, Jesus' body was removed from the cross and placed in a tomb. Three days later some women discovered that the body was gone. Angels told them that Jesus had been "raised." Christians refer to this event as the resurrection. They believe that Jesus was raised from the dead and returned to God.

After his death, Jesus' teachings, life, and resurrection became the basis for Christianity, one of the world's great religions. The root of the word *Christianity* is *Christ*, one of many titles referring to Jesus. Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus on Christmas and his resurrection on Easter.

Review Questions

1. Who was Jesus?
2. How old was Jesus when he began his ministry?
3. Why did Jesus choose apostles?

Critical Thinking

4. **Summarizing** What were the main elements of Jesus' ministry?
5. **Drawing Conclusions** Why would the apostles have been in danger after Jesus' execution?
6. **Understanding Cause and Effect** Why did Jesus' preaching about God's love lead to his crucifixion?