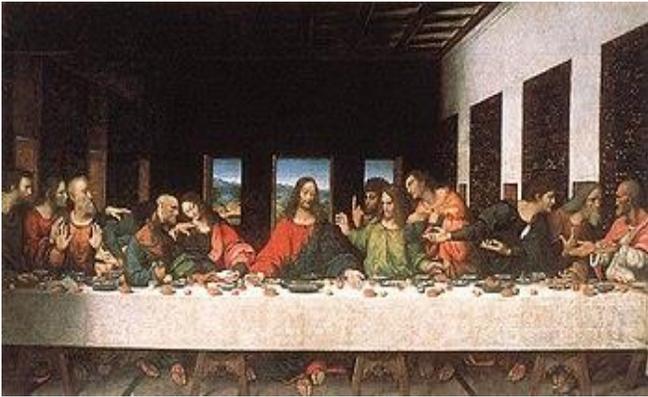


6.2.6 Analyze the origin and spread of major world religions as they developed throughout history

Christianity

Basic Beliefs

Around the beginning of the first century (around 2000 years ago), a Jewish teacher from Bethlehem named Jesus founded Christianity. According to many first century writers, Jesus claimed to be the promised Messiah (savior of the Jewish people) and the son of God. Most Jews disagreed and did not follow Jesus. Jesus represents the person that all Christians want to be. Roman rulers feared his preaching and growing influence and popularity. They viewed Jesus as a threat to law and order.



Romans charged Jesus with treason and disloyalty to the government. He was questioned by the Roman governor and sentenced to death. Jesus lived for 33 years before being crucified by the Romans in Jerusalem. According to the Christian Bible, Jesus was crucified, or hung from a wooden cross, and died. His followers believe that when he was crucified by the Roman government, he was actually dying to pay for humankind's sins. His disciples claimed that, after three days, he resurrected, or rose from the dead and ascended to heaven. Many Christians believe that people can only be forgiven through faith in Christ.

Questions about basic beliefs:

1. Who is the founder of Christianity?
2. What religion was Jesus?
3. Where was Christianity founded?
4. Why and where was Jesus crucified?
5. What did Jesus' disciples claim?

The early Christian leaders who spread the message of Jesus were called Apostles. Those who accepted Jesus and his teachings became known as "Christians" and referred to Jesus as "Jesus Christ." The first Christians formed churches, or local groups for worship and teachings. The early Christians believed in one God, not the many gods of Rome. They believed that Jesus was the Son of God. They believe he had come to save people. By becoming Christians and accepting Jesus and his teachings, people could gain salvation. They would be saved from their sins, or wrongdoings, and allowed to enter heaven. Like Jesus, people would be resurrected after death, and join God in everlasting life. Because of their faith in Jesus, Christians began to believe in God in a new way. Like the Jews, Christians studied the Hebrew Bible. Unlike the Jews, Christians believe that Jesus was the Messiah promised in the Old Testament. Christians believe that there is only one God, but that this one God consists of 3 "persons" commonly known as the Trinity:

- God the Father
- God the Son
- The Holy Spirit

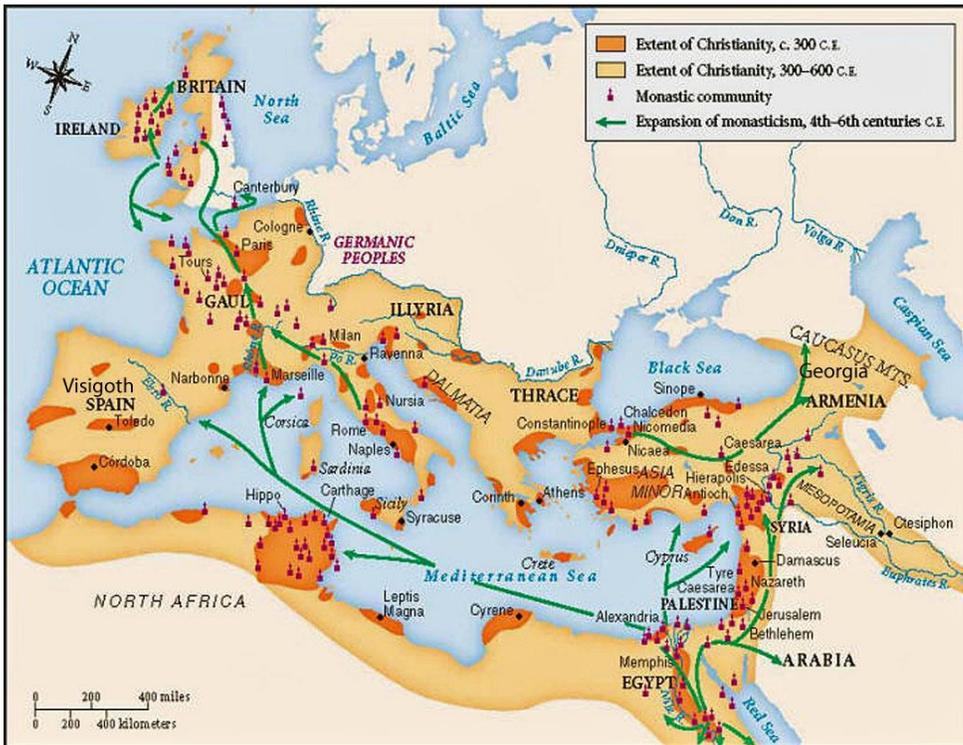
6. What do Christians believe? (6 or more)

As the disciples and apostles spread the message of Jesus, many people in the Mediterranean world became Christians. Several factors helped Christianity spread throughout the empire. Areas controlled by the Romans were generally peaceful. Well-constructed roads meant Christians could easily travel from one region to another. Most people in the empire spoke Latin or Greek. This allowed Christians to communicate with them about the message of Jesus. Christians set up many churches throughout the Mediterranean, and Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire. Probably the most important figure in the spread of Christianity after Jesus' death was named Paul of Tarsus. Paul was so influential that many people consider him an additional Apostle. After he died, Paul was named a saint, a person known or admired for his or her holiness.

7. What factors helped spread Christianity? (5)

As the number of Christians grew, some Romans believed that they were dangerous. They thought Christians were a threat to the empire. Romans expected everyone to worship the emperor as a god. The Christians, like the Jews, however, believed that only God could be worshipped. During the first century, Rome ruled much of Southwest Asia. Many Roman emperors launched bloody campaigns against the new faith. Christians often suffered arrest, torture, and persecution. Persecution means punishing a group because of its beliefs or differences. Some emperors had Christians thrown into public arenas to be torn apart by wild animals. They were brutally executed for their beliefs. Nero had some lit-on fire to serve as human torches. We call such people who suffer death for their religious beliefs martyrs. Because their religion had been banned, Christians were often forced to meet in secret. To arrange their meeting, they used secret symbols to identify people who shared their beliefs. One of the most common symbols they used was the fish. The fish became the Christian symbol because the Greek word for fish begins with the same letter as the Greek words for Jesus and Christ. The dove symbolizes the Holy Spirit because the Bible teaches that when Jesus was baptized, the Holy Spirit descended from Heaven in the form of a dove.

8. How were Christians persecuted?



Because the early church largely had to meet in secret, it didn't have a single leader to govern it. Instead, bishops, or local Christian leaders led each Christian community. The bishops helped people understand and live by Christian teachings. One of the bishops' most important duties was leading Christians in celebrating the Eucharist. The Eucharist was the central ceremony of the Christian church. It was created to honor the last supper Jesus shared with his Apostles. During the Eucharist, Christians ate bread and drank wine in memory of Jesus' death. The most honored of all the bishops was the bishop of Rome, or the pope. The word pope comes from the Greek word for father. Gradually the pope's influence grew, and many people in the west came to see him as the head of the whole Christian church. As the church grew, so did the influence of the papacy, the office of the pope. In the following centuries, the Christian church expanded to have a presence in what is now Spain, France, Italy, Greece, and Turkey. It also grew in northern Africa.

Christian standing in Rome changed when the emperor himself became a Christian. Constantine converted to Christianity and removed bans against the practice of Christianity. Constantine built several great churches. It was then that the Roman Empire became the Holy Roman Empire, and its capital relocated from Rome to Constantinople (formerly Byzantium and now Istanbul). The development of Christian groups derived from major and minor splits. Despite opposition and intense persecutions, Christians successfully spread their faith throughout much of the known world. One of Constantine's successors, Theodosius, banned Greek and Roman religions. He made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire.

9. What caused the persecution of Christians to stop?

The Christian place of worship is called a Church. They are often built in the shape of a cross with the altar facing east towards the rising sun. The Christian spiritual leaders are called priests or ministers. The Bible is the Christian holy book. It is divided into the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament contains scriptures that were written before Jesus's birth. The New Testament contains scriptures written after Jesus' death. **Parts of the writing contained in the Old Testament are also sacred to Jewish and Muslim people.** The cross is the main symbol. It reminds Christians that Jesus died on the cross to save them.

10. What is the connection between a part of the Christian holy text and other religions?

11. Complete this chart on Christianity:

Name of spiritual leaders	Holy book	Name of meeting place	3 symbols of Christianity

How is Christianity similar to other religions?

Christianity shares a number of beliefs and practices with other religions, particularly Judaism and Islam. With Judaism and Islam, Christians believe in one God, who created the universe and all that is in it. All believe that this God is active in history, guiding and teaching his people. Christianity and Judaism share the same roots. The Old Testament and the Torah (Jewish Holy Book) have the same content. The Jews are awaiting the coming of a Messiah or Savior, while Christians believe that Jesus Christ was the Savior and are now waiting for his second coming.

How is Christianity different from other religions?

Christianity came to regard Jesus as in some sense God's presence in human form. This was unacceptable to most Jews. Judaism is defined by a covenant made between God and the Jewish people. Part of this covenant is the Law, a set of religious and ethical rules and principles. Most Christians came to regard both this covenant and Law as in some sense superseded by Jesus' teaching and the community that he established. On the night he died, Jesus talked about establishing a "new covenant" based on his death and resurrection. Jews believe that there is one God like Christians do, but they do not believe that this one God consists of 3 "persons."

How is Christianity like other religions? How is Christianity different from other religions?

Christianity is the world's biggest religion, with about 2.2 billion followers worldwide. **It is based on the teachings of Jesus Christ** who lived in the Holy Land 2,000 years ago. Through its missionary activity Christianity has spread to most parts of the globe.