Social Studies 6 **Name** _____

Christianity

In the first century AD, a new religion arose in a Roman **province** on the eastern edge of the Mediterranean Sea. In ancient times, this area had been known as Canaan, but had been renamed Palestine. It included regions such as Samaria, Judea and Galilee. In a town named Nazareth, a Jewish man named Jesus began the religion that would come to be called Christianity. At about the age of 30, Jesus began traveling from town to town to share his ideas. Like other Jews, Jesus believed in one god. He used **parables**, or stories, to teach simple ideas such as love for god and love for other people. To help him spread these ideas, he chose 12 men, called apostles. They traveled with him and, after his death, spread his teachings even further.

According to the Hebrew Bible, God planned to send a messiah, or savior, to make the world a better place. Many people believed that Jesus was the messiah and began to refer to him as *Christos*, the Greek word for savior. Many of the most well known teachings of Jesus come from a **sermon** he gave to a group of people gathered on a hillside. This "Sermon on the Mount" included: *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the Earth. … to him who strikes you on the right cheek, offer the other also, and from him who takes your coat, let him have your cloak also. Give to him that asks of you, as you would wish that others would do to you, do so to them.*

Many people, especially the poor, were very attracted to these teachings. On the other hand, Jewish and Roman **authorities** saw Jesus as a source of trouble. Jesus often criticized the religious leaders who preached holiness but did nothing to help the poor or sick. The Romans were afraid that he would lead a **revolt** against the government, and as a result, Jesus was arrested and executed by the Romans. The Christian Bible teaches that after his crucifixion, Jesus was resurrected, or brought back to life. To his apostles and early followers, this was the proof that he was the savior they had been waiting for. The story of the crucifixion and resurrection became a central idea of Christianity and is celebrated each year with the Christian Holy Day called Easter.

After the death of Jesus, his followers set out to spread his teachings throughout the Roman Empire. They traveled from town to town to teach and write about the life and ideas of Jesus. The most influential of these men never even met Jesus, and had actually tried to stamp out the Christian faith. The Christian Bible tells the story of Paul of Tarsus, a Roman citizen who worked to stop the spread of Christianity. He had a vision of Jesus and became convinced that the Christian way was correct. From that point on he dedicated his life to traveling as a missionary for the new church. During his travels he wrote many letters that now are part of the New Testament. Books of the Christian Bible such as Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon are all from the writings of Paul.

As the new religion spread, the Roman government became worried and made it illegal. Christians were **persecuted** and executed. Paul was beheaded and Peter, another of Jesus' apostles was crucified for the crime of spreading the Christian message. Ordinary Christians were arrested and some were killed at the Colosseum by gladiators or animals, as a source of entertainment for the people of Rome. This treatment lasted for over two hundred years.

Despite the mistreatment, Christianity continued to grow throughout the empire. In 313AD, the Roman Emperor Constantine made Christianity legal with the Edict of Milan, a document that declared Christianity to be equal to other religions in the Roman Empire. Just before he died, in 337AD, Constantine was baptized and became the first Christian Emperor of Rome.

Less than 60 years later, in 395AD, Emperor Theodosius made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire.