

Christianity Spreads

By the 60s C.E., Christians were beginning to attract the notice of the Romans. Christian preachers traveled along the roads of the empire, winning converts to their new religion. Both Paul and Peter, a close friend of Jesus, preached in Rome. Initially, Rome was not unfriendly to Christians. What was another god, among so many?

However, Christians refused to worship the other Roman gods. Worse, they would not accept that the emperor was a god. Their way of life seemed to be an insult to Roman customs. Instead of wealth and luxury, they preached about simplicity. Recalling Jesus's message of peace and love, many refused to serve in the army.

As the number of Christians increased, many Romans viewed them as a threat to Roman order and patriotism. Eventually, the Christian religion was declared illegal.

Some emperors were determined to make an example of these disloyal citizens. For refusing to honor the Roman gods, Christians were sentenced to die in cruel and painful ways. Some were crucified, and some were burned to death. Others were brought into arenas, where they were devoured by wild animals in front of cheering crowds.

Instead of destroying the new religion, the Christians won new followers by facing death bravely. Christianity offered many people in the empire a sense of purpose and hope. It taught that even the poor and enslaved could look forward to a better life after death if they followed the teachings of Jesus.

Gradually, people of all classes and backgrounds began to adopt the new faith. By 300 C.E., millions of Christians resided in the Roman lands of Europe, North Africa, and western Asia. Also, Christian communities were established around the Mediterranean and further east, through Persia and into Central Asia.

At the beginning of the lesson, you read about the emperor [Constantine](#) and how a victory in battle made him favor the Christian religion. In 313 C.E., Constantine announced the Edict of Milan in which he gave Christians the freedom to practice their religion openly. Future emperors also accepted the new faith. Emperor Theodosius I banned all pagan sacrifices. By 380, Christianity was the official religion of the Roman Empire.

