

Chapter 1 – Beginnings

THE CHURCH OF THE APOSTLES

A.D. 30-100

Chapter Goals

In this chapter you will:

- Explore the early Church's Jewish roots
- Learn that at Pentecost the Holy Spirit inspired the followers of Jesus to continue Jesus' work in the world
- Consider why the Church proclaims trust in God, salvation through Jesus, and personal and social conversion
- Discover how the Church grew into a diverse, hope-filled community centered on Christ

Jewish Roots of the Church

Activities to do throughout the first section

- Faith Activity - page 6
- Faith Activity - page 8
- Faith Activity – page 9 (only 3 differences with a graphic organizer, not a report).
- Handout 1:1

Jewish Roots of the Church

First thoughts:

- What images symbolize the Church for you?
- What aspects of the Church are most meaningful to you?
- What do you think the Church was like in its beginning stages?
- Where dose the Church fit into your life today?

Jewish Roots of the Church

Christian community spread out from Jerusalem to Rome and then to the civilized world

Through the work of Jesus' followers, Christianity had strong roots in the world even before the last Apostle died.

The Church was born through the power of the Holy Spirit

A People and a Culture

We, as Christians, must look back on the **Hebrew** people to understand how people of the time viewed Jesus.

- We must look back to patriarchs to understand God's relationship with his people in the O.T.

The beginning of the O.T. describes God's creation of the world in seven days. From a Christian perspective, Christ's Resurrection is the "eighth day" of creation since through it God's glory is manifest in a new creation. As Adam was the first human being, Jesus is the "New Adam."

Jesus identified himself as the one who can accomplish what the people longed for and what God promised.

Jesus Christ was the Messiah of which Isaiah has spoken of and would save the world of suffering and sin.

A People and a Culture (con't)

God spoke to Abram and told him to believe in Him alone rather than the many gods of the pagans. He then made a **covenant** with Abraham.

Christianity professes a monotheistic faith – belief in one, true God.

The one God is three in one – the Trinity.

The covenant made with Abraham is fulfilled and made new in Christ.

Remember – Jesus was Jewish! The only way we can understand Jesus and his followers is by understanding His Jewish roots.

The Exodus Reveals a Loving God

Moses was ordered to negotiate with the Egyptian pharaoh to get the Israelites out of captivity. He then led them out of Egypt which is known as the **Exodus**

Jews celebrate the Exodus through **Passover**.

- God didn't just free the ancient Israelites from slavery; he also frees their descendants from spiritual slavery today!

The Exodus and Passover are connected to the **Paschal Mystery** because Catholics proclaim that we have been set free from the slavery of sin through Jesus.

The Jews of Israel and the Hellenistic Jews

Christianity grew during a time of **Hellenization**.

The Ark of the Covenant was taken in 587 B.C when the Babylonians destroyed the kingdom of Judah and the Temple of Jerusalem which dispersed the center of Jewish life. This 50 year period where Jews were separated is known as the **Babylonian Captivity**. This is when synagogues were developed.

In 539 B.C, Cyrus defeated the Babylonians and allowed the Jews to return to Judah. Many did return but some did not and these people were known as the Jews of the diaspora.

In 331 B.C, Alexander the Great conquered Persia and Greek culture dominated. Jews living in this area were influenced by the culture around them and they were known as Hellenistic Jews or Hellenists.

The Jews of Israel and the Hellenistic Jews (con't)

Hellenistic Jews were urban and wealthy who interacted with their non-Jewish neighbors while those in Israel were generally rural and poor and were isolated from their non-Jewish neighbors

Hebrew scriptures were translated in Greek (Septuagint) because many Jews of the diaspora communicated in Greek.

Judaism of the diaspora became different from the Palestine Judaism.

In 63 B.C., the Palestine came under Roman rule. This spread the Hellenists. Many of the first followers of Jesus and Christianity came from this Hellenistic Jewish population

The Jews of Israel and the Hellenistic Jews (con't)

The **Babylonian Captivity** and the **diaspora** placed many Jews in the middle of other cultures. **Hellenization** brought a broadening of Judaism firmly into the Greek culture and in turn brought many Greek elements into the Jewish faith. As a result, Christianity emerged not just from the Judaism of Palestine, but from a Hellenized Judaism. Christianity spread quickly among the Hellenized Jews, thus paving the way for the conversion of many Gentiles. Thus, Christianity soon became a religion to be reckoned with in the Roman Empire.

Built on the Good News

Activities to do during the second section:

- Faith Activity – page 11 (using Matthew 21:23-32, Acts 1:6-14, Luke 6:20-26, or Luke 17:20)
- Faith Activity – page 13
- Faith Activity – page 16 (5+ sentence paragraph)
- Read “The Shield of the Twelve Apostles” handout

Built on the Good News (con't)

Most of what we know about Jesus comes from the four New Testament books known as the Gospels, which focus on the life and teaching of Jesus.

Jesus called for repentance, a conversion of heart and mind, so that people could know and align themselves with God the Father.

Jesus told the people that if they would accept the new way of being and acting that Jesus preached, they would participate in the reign of God.

Jesus' miracles represent and reinforce his message of the coming of the kingdom of God.

Through Jesus' Resurrection, he conquered sin and death and all that separates us from the love of God.

Jesus returned to heaven – body and soul – in his Ascension

The Holy Spirit came upon the first Christians at Pentecost, often called the birth of the Church.

Pentecost

Many people gathered in Jerusalem for the Shavuot feast. Some of Jesus' Apostles and disciples were together in an upper room where they tried to make sense of what happened during the previous weeks.

The Holy Spirit was sent to them in the upper room that day. They were filled with the Spirit and began to understand their new role.

The Holy Spirit empowered these people to spread the Good News of Christ. On this day, the new Church had gained 3,000 inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Beginnings of the Church

Activities to do during the third section:

- Faith Activity – page 19 (Getting Inside Scripture)

The Beginnings of the Church (con't)

The Acts of the Apostles presents the link between Jesus and the Church

Many Early Christians believed that the “coming of the reign of God” would happen in their own lifetimes and that the world as they knew it would end. That is, Jesus would come again and take all believers with him to heaven. As time passed, however, Jesus’ followers came to see that this was not going to happen immediately.

Jesus’ followers sought guidance from the Holy Spirit to establish ways by which Christ’s presence would remain active in the world.

Over time, the Church clarified its structures so that the faith community had leaders and other members who serve in a variety of roles.

The Beginnings of the Church (con't)

Just as Jesus chose Peter and the Apostles to lead his fledging community during its beginning stages, so the successors of the Apostles – the pope and bishops of the Church – lead the Church acting in the person of Christ today.

The Catholic Church has continued to be an apostolic Church – that is a Church rooted in the preaching and authority of Peter, the Apostles, and their successors. This is called apostolic succession, and it is the foundation of the Church being apostolic. Apostolic is one of the four identifying characteristics or **marks of the Church**.

Architects of the Early Church

We don't actually know what inspired so many people to join the Church because we have very little information about it but there are some aspects listed in the book that served as an inspiration.

The members of the Church embody the message of the Holy Spirit.

Gamaliel's Words of Wisdom

Gamaliel told the Sanhedrin to stop trying to persecute and kill the Apostles because if it was God's will, then it would be successful but if their words were of human origin, it would fail.

Christians Inspire Hope

Activities to do during the last section:

- Faith Activity – page 23
- Read “Mary and the Church” handout
- Read “Demas – A Footnote to History” handout

Christians Inspire Hope (con't)

The first followers of Jesus continued to see themselves as Jews. They worshiped in the Temple, attended synagogue services, and followed the Law of Moses. They also met in each other's homes to share meals.

The Christian Jews considered the sharing of a meal on Sunday a special event, since it was the Lord's Day. On Sundays they gathered for the "breaking of bread" – the Eucharist.

The Acts of the Apostles presents the image of Christian living closely together, awaiting Jesus, and growing in number.

Acts reports that the early Christians sold their possessions and gave the proceeds to the Apostles for equal distribution. Food and goods were shared in common and distributed according to need. This new way of being together was one reason for the appeal of early Christianity.

Early Christian Communities: Unity out of Diversity.

Most of Jesus' original followers were born and raised in Palestine but eventually followers were gained from the Jewish diaspora and Greek non-Jews known as **Gentiles**. Gentiles did not actually convert the Judaism and were known as "God-fearers."

The Roman Empire's official religion of the first century was not meeting the spiritual needs of many so these people turned to Christianity.

Gentile Converts

Deciding who could join the new Church community was a discussion because some Jews couldn't even sit down to share a meal with Gentiles because of the strict dietary laws. Since Jewish and Gentile practices were so different, it was difficult to decide if they could be in the same Christian community.

Cornelius, a Roman God-fearer, and Peter both received messages from an angel to meet. They meet and feel the Holy Spirit with them. Peter orders the Gentiles to be baptized.

Because so many Jews were still not happy about sharing a meal with these Gentile Christians, there was still a heated debate about them being part of the Church. This resulted in the **Counsel of Jerusalem**. Some Christian Jews taught that Gentile converts had to be circumcised and this was a debate among many leaders. The leaders announced that Gentiles would be free from circumcision and other Jews dietary laws.

Because of the CoJ, Gentiles were full members of the Church and became the majority.