

# The Spread of Christianity

Interestingly, the first community of Christians was Jews. This group believed that Christ, by example of his teachings and through resurrection, had brought a new vision and spoke as an equal to God. As converts to Christianity increased, the religion spread. The most influential early missionary was Paul. A missionary is someone who does religious work in foreign lands.

Before conversion, Paul was actually fervently rooted in the Jewish faith. He was called Saul of Tarsus and even witnessed the persecution of Christians. However, he claimed to have been dramatically converted by God, whereupon he began preaching. This is why he changed his name to Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles. Gentile means a Christian as opposed to a Jew.

As can be seen on the map below, Paul journeyed tirelessly. He preached that the Old Law, or the Laws of Moses, should be replaced by faith in Christ. Only through Christ, said Paul, can a person live a life of kindness and joy, ultimately being saved and reaching Heaven.

Of course, tensions arose between Jews and Christians. Some Jews wanted to preserve Jewish ways within Christianity. Ultimately, Paul succeeded in separating the two religions and spreading the Christian faith. But this success was hard won. At first, Christianity was declared illegal by the Romans, and for 300 years Christians suffered persecution. Around 64 CE, both Paul and the chief apostle, Peter, were martyred at the hands of the Roman emperor, Nero. It was not until the early 4th century that Christianity was legalized by Constantine the Great. By 300 CE, Christianity became the accepted religion of Rome, spreading throughout the empire.

Paul's journeys are recounted in the New Testament, Acts of the Apostles chapters 13–28. The Letters of Paul, also part of the New Testament, consist of thirteen letters Paul wrote on his journeys.

