

Notes on Christianity

Originated within Judaism. Began as a Jewish sect. Founded on teaching of **Jesus** (Yeshua) of Nazareth, a Palestinian Jew. Jesus preached primarily to Jews. Christianity was not established as a religion separate from Judaism until after Jesus' death. The Christian movement began to spread to Gentiles (non-Jews) later, largely through the efforts of Paul more than forty years after Jesus' death. (The oldest book of the "new testament" (Mark) could not have been written before then because Mark mentions the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem by the Romans. That event is known to have occurred in 40 CE.)

In traditional Christian doctrine, Jesus is believed to have been resurrected from the dead and to have ascended into a place beyond this world and to be the **messiah** who will someday return to bring about the "Kingdom of God". The authors of the "New Testament" (the **Gospel** writers) do not begin to develop these characteristically non-Jewish doctrines about Jesus until about 68 CE. The other books of the new testament are written over several decades. This must be so because some of them repeat parts of others.

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is often taken to summarize his teachings:

Beatitudes or pronouncement of blessings on persons with certain qualities such as meekness, mercy, purity of heart.

Claims to impose even higher standards than those in traditional Jewish moral teachings: especially non-resistance to evil and loving one's enemies. Taught many lessons in the form of **parables** stressing the point that each sinner's repentance is

cause for great rejoicing. Rather than indicating anyone of the Ten Commandments to be supremely important, teaches that **love of God and of one's neighbor** as even more fundamental than all of the Law. Jesus does not present any specific set of beliefs that all of his followers must adhere to, but does insist that he is making no change in the Jewish laws of the old testament. His sayings in different parts of the new testament seem to indicate different kinds of demands on those who seek salvation and eternal life. In some places he seems to say that good work is more important than faith (in him as God's son). In other places he seems to say that faith in him is the only thing by which a person may be saved.

Later theologians maintain that only an act of **faith**, personal loyalty and commitment of one's life to Jesus, rather than mere intellectual assent, is what **salvation** and **redemption** and **eternal life** depend on. According to the Book of Acts, "there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved". Jesus' messiahship and future return to Earth is developed into the idea that Jesus was himself divine, the **son of God**. This idea is directly related to the central doctrine of Christianity: the **Atonement**. According to this doctrine, God had to become a human being, suffer, endure persecution and death in order to atone for the original sin of all human beings. Although no one deserves this atonement, it is the only way that sinful humanity could have the opportunity to be saved by accepting God's son as savior. Those who do not accept Jesus as God's son and savior are doomed to eternal torment in Hell.

Jesus lived in a time of Roman occupation and keen messianic expectations. During the period of his public ministry, he is believed to have performed wondrous deeds such as healing the sick casting out demons and changing water into wine. The Gospels describe several post-resurrection appearances in which Jesus directs his disciples to spread his teachings to all people.

Paul (formerly the Pharisee, Saul of Tarsus) a missionary, blends the unsystematic teachings of Jesus with ideas of Greek Philosophy to convert large numbers of non-Jews. Paul interprets Jesus' death as part of God's plan to save humanity. Paul expounds doctrine of **original sin**, the doctrine that, through the first sin of Adam, all his human descendants are lost and estranged from God. Jesus' sacrifice of himself, perfect and without sin, takes on the punishment of death that each human being deserves and so restores all people to God's favor, gaining for them at least the possibility of salvation.

Apostle's Creed, in about 325 CE by the Council of Nicea establishes standard doctrines of the **trinitarian** nature of God (as one god in Three persons of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In early modern times, (15th - 16th centuries) as consequences of the efforts of such Protestant reformers as Martin Luther, and Jean Calvin, Christianity splits into many (several hundred) denominations over various points of doctrine.