

Chapter 14

The Birth of Christianity

Before You Read: Previewing Key Concepts

The Big Idea below is a general historical idea that will be applied to the Mediterranean region in this chapter. Rewrite this idea as a question that can be answered as you read. Here is an example of a question:

How did Christian beliefs challenge Rome?

Watch for the answer(s) to your question as you read the chapter.

Big Ideas About the Birth of Christianity

Government New ideas and beliefs can challenge a government's authority, leading to change.

The Romans were in general tolerant of the religious beliefs of people they ruled. However, they did expect the people to worship the emperor and to allow temples to be built to Roman gods. Jews and Christians were unwilling to do either. This unwillingness caused conflict with Rome.



Integrated Technology

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- Interactive Visuals
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INTERNET RESOURCES

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- WebQuest
- Homework Helper
- Research Links
- Internet Activities
- Quizzes
- Maps
- Test Practice
- Current Events



BRITAIN

ATLANTIC
OCEAN

SPAIN

20°W

MEDITERRANEAN
REGION

WORLD

A.D. 25

26–29

Jesus conducts his public ministry.

75

70

Romans storm Jerusalem and destroy the Temple complex.

125

120

Roman Empire reaches its height under Hadrian.

65

Buddhism takes root in China.

100

Moche culture arises in South America. (deer-head figure, Peru) ▶



Spread of Christianity in the Roman Empire, to A.D. 600

INTERACTIVE

- Christian areas, 325
- Additional Christian areas, 600
- Boundary of Roman Empire, 395



180
Reign of Emperor
Marcus Aurelius ends.



313
Emperor Constantine ends
persecution of Christians.
◀ (bust of Constantine)

175

225

275

A.D. 325

220
China's Han Dynasty falls.
(bronze horse, Han Dynasty) ▶



300
Aksum kingdom
emerges in Africa.

The Burning of Rome

Background: Fire! In A.D. 64, wind swept flames across the Circus Maximus, Rome's huge racing arena. Afterward, much of the city lay in ruins. A nasty rumor about Rome's emperor, Nero, began to spread almost as fast as the fire had. People whispered that the unpopular emperor had set the fire so that he could rebuild Rome, including a grand new palace. The emperor said that the unpopular Christians had started the fire. But not all Romans blamed the Christians, as you will read.

Roman coin depicting Nero ►



The baker is opening his shop near Rome's Christian neighborhood. Every morning, Christians come to buy bread at his bakery. Some Romans hate the Christians because they keep to themselves and refuse to worship the Roman gods. It's true that they don't go to the theater and the races and their men don't join the army. They're also poor, and they wear old clothes. But they're good neighbors and good customers. The Christians the baker knows would never start a fire.

The baker was lucky. His shop still smells smoky, but at least it didn't burn in the fire. As he sets things back in order, he feels sad that his Christian customers suffered so terribly. Because they were unpopular, they were easy for the emperor to blame. To stop people from saying that he set the fire, Nero told everyone it was the fault of the Christians.

The baker has heard that hundreds of Christians who survived the fire died terrible deaths afterward. At Nero's order, many were burned, while others were hanged on crosses or ripped apart by dogs. Nero conducted these executions right in his gardens. The public was invited, but the baker was too disgusted to go.

It's difficult for the baker to understand the Christians' religion. Even so, he doesn't believe any group should suffer such an awful punishment. He wonders whether the Christians who survived will be too afraid to come back to buy his bread.

What do you think will happen to the Christians in Rome?

Reading & Writing

- 1. READING: Character** An important person in a story is a main character. Think about the character of Nero in this story. With a partner, discuss the character of the emperor Nero as revealed in his actions. Then make a list of words to describe the emperor.
- 2. WRITING: Persuasion** Imagine that you have observed Nero's executions of Christians. You know that they didn't set the fire. You want to persuade others to join a revolt against the cruel emperor. Think about the consequences of a revolt. Then make a poster to persuade others to support your cause.

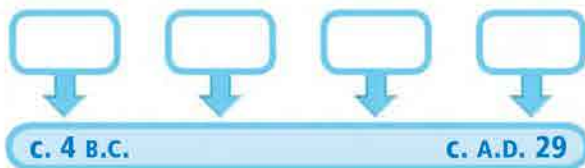
MAIN IDEAS

- 1 **Belief Systems** Christianity built upon the Jewish belief in one God and the concept of a Messiah.
- 2 **Belief Systems** The disciples of Jesus came to believe that he was the Messiah.
- 3 **Belief Systems** According to the Gospels, Jesus was executed but rose from the dead. Christians believe that this makes freedom from sin and death possible for everyone.

TAKING NOTES

Reading Skill: Explaining Sequence

To sequence events is to put them in an order based on when they happened. As you read Lesson 1, make notes of things that happened in the life of Jesus. Create a time line like this one to sequence the events.



 Skillbuilder Handbook, page R15



▲ **Cross** The cross is a symbol of Christianity. Some crosses are simple objects made of wood. Some are made of gold and adorned with jewels, like the one shown above.

Words to Know

Understanding the following words will help you read this lesson:

moral the lesson taught by a story (page 468)

The moral of Jesus' story about the Good Samaritan is the importance of love.

divine of, from, or like God (page 470)

Some Jews began to believe that Jesus was more than human, possibly even divine.

afterlife an existence or life thought to follow death (page 470)

Christians believe that beyond death there is an afterlife.

The Origins of Christianity

TERMS & NAMES

Jesus
Gospel
disciple
parable
crucifixion
resurrection

Build on What You Know Religion plays an important role in many people's lives, perhaps your own as well as others'. A new religion called Christianity grew out of Jewish beliefs and the ideas of a Jewish teacher named **Jesus**.

Christianity's Jewish Roots

- 1 ESSENTIAL QUESTION** How did Christianity build on Jewish beliefs about the future?

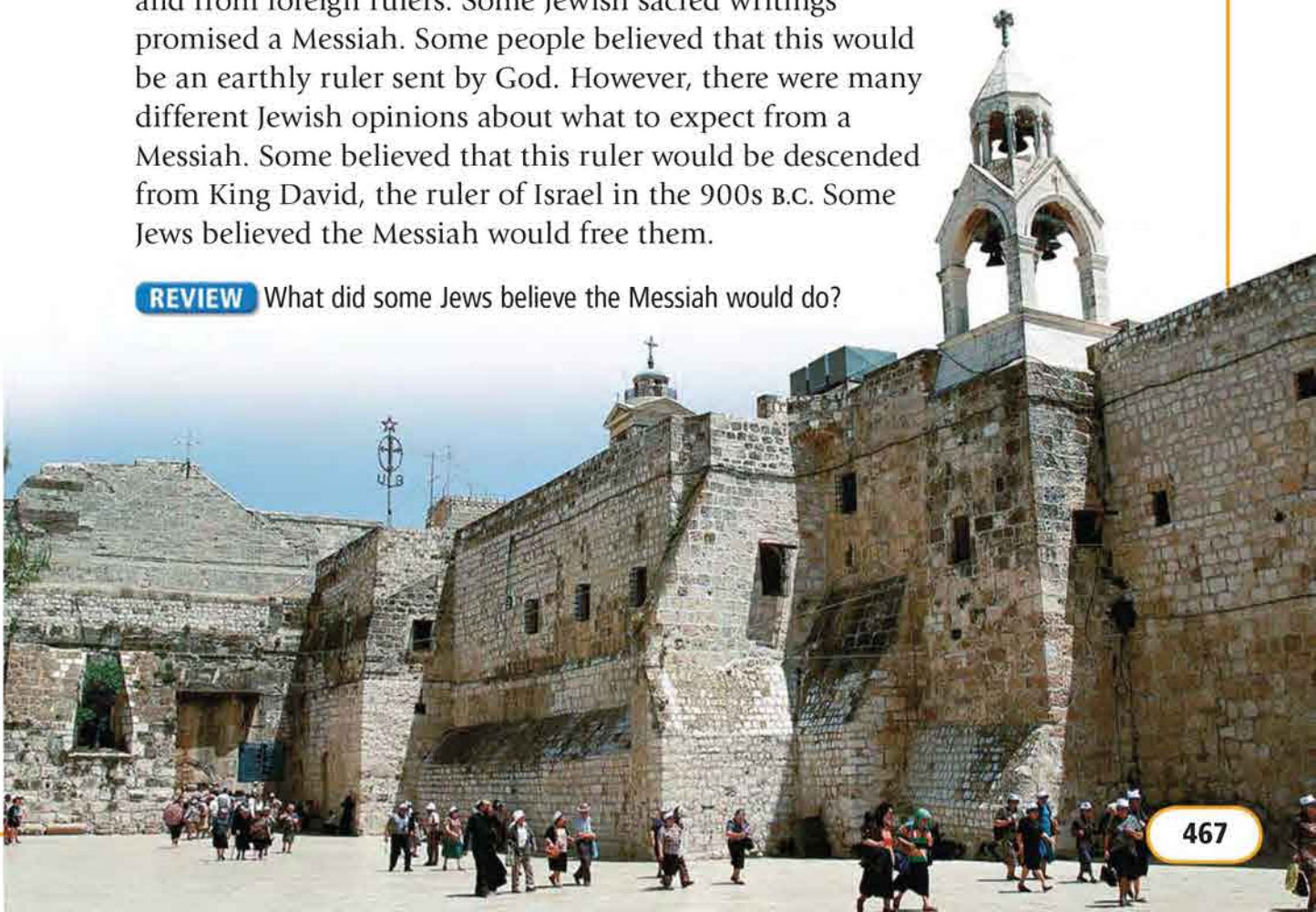
In 63 B.C., the Romans conquered the Jewish kingdom of Judah, also called Judea. Although the Jews had their own kings, these Jewish rulers had to be approved by Rome.

During their history, the Jews had frequently been treated badly. Many wanted to be delivered from oppression and from foreign rulers. Some Jewish sacred writings promised a Messiah. Some people believed that this would be an earthly ruler sent by God. However, there were many different Jewish opinions about what to expect from a Messiah. Some believed that this ruler would be descended from King David, the ruler of Israel in the 900s B.C. Some Jews believed the Messiah would free them.

REVIEW What did some Jews believe the Messiah would do?

Connect to Today

Bethlehem This photograph shows the Church of the Nativity (below left) in Bethlehem, supposedly built upon the site of Jesus' birth. The building to the right is a monastery. ▼



The Life of Jesus

2 ESSENTIAL QUESTION Who did the disciples of Jesus believe he was?

As a Jew born in the Roman province of Judea, Jesus followed many of the teachings of Judaism. However, he also taught certain ideas and practices that differed from what others were teaching.

Birth and Early Life We know about Jesus from four accounts called the **Gospels**, written after his death by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The Gospels and other writings make up the New Testament.

According to the Gospels, Jesus was born in Bethlehem and grew up in Nazareth. Christians would later celebrate his birth on the holiday of Christmas. In the Gospel account, Jesus was raised by Mary and by Joseph, a carpenter.

Jesus' Followers As a young adult, Jesus became a traveling teacher. Biblical accounts say he cured the sick and lame and performed other miracles, such as turning water to wine.

Jesus began to gather followers. His closest followers were called **disciples**. Jesus' 12 disciples were Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, James (son of Alphaeus), Simon, Thaddaeus, and Judas Iscariot.

The Teachings of Jesus Jesus preached justice, compassion, and the coming of God's kingdom. He often delivered these messages in the form of **parables**, or stories with morals. Three of Jesus' best-known parables are those of the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, and the Lost Sheep. (See Literature Connection, pages 472–475.)



Vocabulary Strategy

The meaning of the word *disciple* can be figured out by using **context clues**. The rest of the sentence tells you that disciples are close followers. *Disciple* comes from a Latin word meaning "student" or "pupil."

Jesus' most famous teachings were given in the Sermon on the Mount. The sermon opens with the Beatitudes (bee•AT•ih•TOODZ), or blessings. In this sermon, Jesus encouraged people not only to obey the law but also to change their hearts. People shouldn't simply refrain from killing; they should also love and pray for their enemies. Jesus encouraged his followers to live simply and humbly.

Despite his teachings, Jesus angered some people who heard him preach. For example, Jesus forgave people who had broken religious laws, but many Jewish leaders thought only God could grant this kind of forgiveness. Jesus also associated with sinners, whom religious leaders treated as outcasts. Most shocking was the claim of some of Jesus' followers that he was the Messiah they had long been waiting for.

REVIEW What form did Jesus' teachings often take?

Primary Source

Background: One of Jesus' most famous sermons is called the Sermon on the Mount. In this speech, he made a number of memorable statements that have become known as the Beatitudes. Some of them are at right. Below is the Sermon on the Mount as pictured in a French manuscript of the 1200s.



from the Beatitudes

- Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
- Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
- Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.
- Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.
- Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
- Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Matthew 5:3–9

DOCUMENT-BASED QUESTION

What do these sayings of Jesus suggest about his view of the oppressed? Does he seem to identify with the rich and powerful or the poor and weak?

The Death of Jesus

3 **ESSENTIAL QUESTION** What belief about Jesus did Christians think made an afterlife possible?

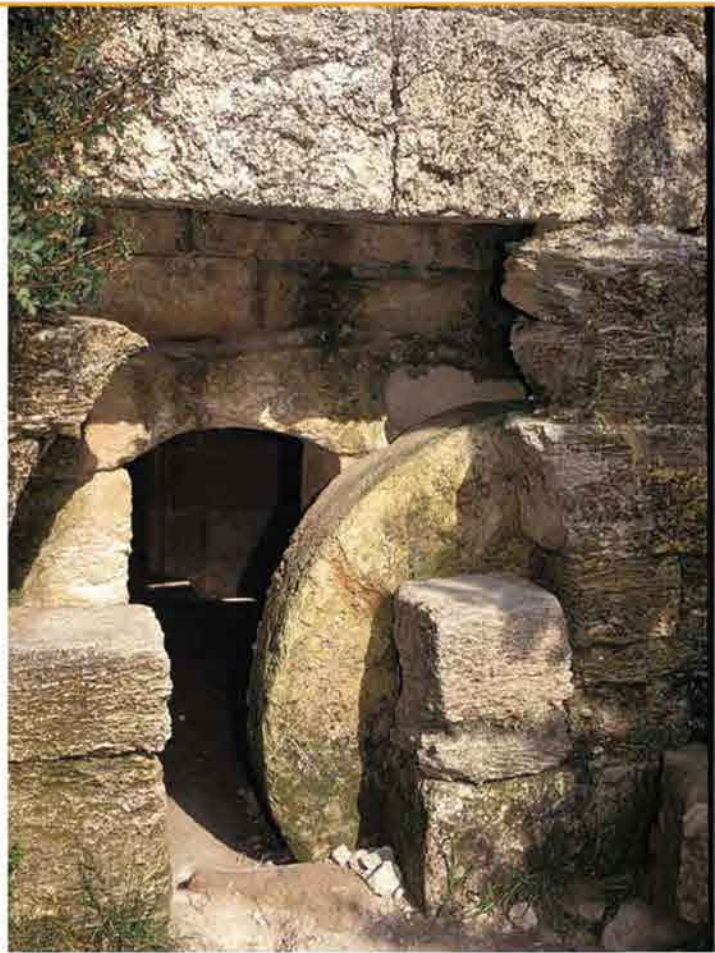
The claim that Jesus was the Messiah, or Jewish liberator and ruler, threatened the Romans because it questioned their political power and authority. The claim also shocked many Jewish leaders.

Arrest and Trial According to three of the Gospels, Jesus' followers hailed him as king when he journeyed to Jerusalem to celebrate the Jewish holy day of Passover. In that city's holy Temple, Jesus publicly criticized how the Temple was being run. Jesus was arrested and turned over to the Romans for punishment.

The Story of the Resurrection The Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, ordered Jesus to be executed by **crucifixion**, or hanging on a cross until he suffocated. After Jesus died, a huge stone was placed in front of the tomb where he was buried.

On the third day after his execution, according to the Gospels, some of his followers reported that the stone had moved and the tomb lay empty. Others said they had seen Jesus and had even walked and talked with him.

These accounts of Jesus' **resurrection**, or return to life, proved to many of his followers that he was divine. They came to believe that Jesus had been willing to give up his own life for the sake of God's kingdom. Through his death and resurrection, God was bringing new life into the world. This was a world in which sin would no longer prevail and even death would be defeated. Jesus' followers said anyone who believed this would share in the life of God.



▲ Tomb This burial chamber dating from the time of Jesus was sealed with a round stone.

According to Christians, Jesus' crucifixion took place on a Friday, and his resurrection on a Sunday. The Christian holidays Good Friday and Easter Sunday, which recall these two events, have been celebrated ever since.

REVIEW What event made Jesus' followers believe their leader was divine?

Lesson Summary

- Some Jews believed a Messiah would give them political power and religious freedom.
- Jesus' teachings stressed compassion, justice, and the coming of God's kingdom.
- Accounts of Jesus' resurrection made some people believe Jesus was divine.



▲ **Relief Sculpture**
The fish is a Christian symbol dating from ancient times. This fourth-century fish with a cross is from a Christian cemetery in Egypt.

Why It Matters Now . . .

Jesus and his earliest followers were Jewish. Eventually, however, more and more non-Jews converted to Christianity. Today about a third of the people in the world are Christians.

1 Lesson Review

Terms & Names

1. Explain the importance of

Jesus	disciple	crucifixion
Gospel	parable	resurrection

Using Your Notes

Explaining Sequence Use your completed graphic to answer the following question:

2. What actions of Jesus in Jerusalem preceded his arrest?



Main Ideas

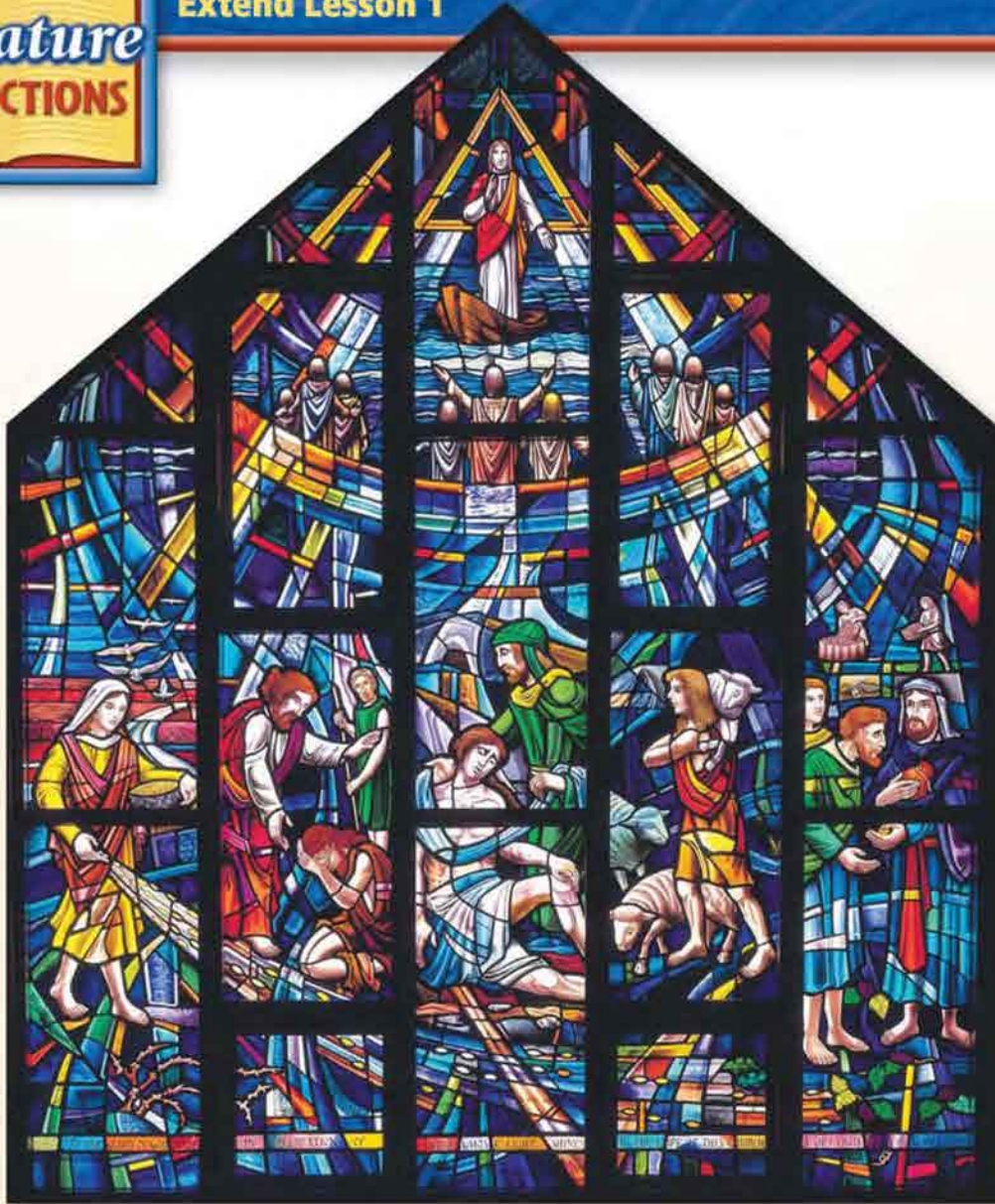
3. What great power ruled over Judea in the time of Jesus? (See map on page 463.)
4. How do we know about Jesus' life and about his teachings?
5. What did accounts of Jesus' resurrection prove to his followers?

Critical Thinking

6. **Determining Historical Context** What historical conditions made some Jews in Judea likely to accept Jesus as their Messiah?
7. **Drawing Conclusions** Why might Jesus have used parables to deliver his message?

Activity

Writing a Parable Think of an important lesson you would like to teach. Then write a brief story to teach your lesson. Read your parable aloud to your class.



Two Parables of Jesus

Background: Jesus was a teacher. He often taught by telling parables, or stories that teach lessons. His teachings were based upon ideas from the Jewish tradition. Two of his most famous parables are those of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son. The latter deals with God's call for the lost soul to repent. The version of the Prodigal Son is taken from *Everlasting Stories* by Lois Rock. (See page R58 in the Primary Source Handbook for the Parable of the Lost Sheep.)

The Good Samaritan

The scene Jesus uses for his parable is the rocky road from Jerusalem to Jericho. This trade route was dangerous and narrow, with sudden sharp curves that made it a favorite place for thieves. Also, the road dropped more than 3,400 feet in elevation in 17 miles. Jerusalem is 2,300 feet above sea level. Jericho is near the Dead Sea, which is 1,300 feet below sea level and the lowest place on Earth.

One day, as Jesus was talking with his disciples, a man stood up and approached him respectfully. "Teacher, I have a burning question to ask," he said. "What must I do to have everlasting life?"

"What do the scriptures say?" Jesus asked him in return. "What do you think they mean?"

The man was quick to reply: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind' and, 'Love your neighbor as you love yourself.'"

"That's right," said Jesus. "Do this and you will live."

The man wanted to know more, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

Jesus began a parable, one of the stories he was famous for when sharing his teachings. "Once there was a man on his way from Jerusalem to Jericho. Bandits attacked him. They beat him up, took his valuables, and left him there half dead."

Those listening to the parable thought what a fool the man must have been to travel alone on that dangerous road. Beaten, robbed of all he had. The poor man.

Jesus went on, "And by chance a man was going down that road. He saw the injured fellow, but walked by on the other side of the road."

"Next," said Jesus, "came another traveler. This person went over to look, then hurried away."

His listeners knew what was coming. There would be at least one more traveler—good parables needed someone who was different from the rest.

"A Samaritan who was traveling passed that way, . . ." A few in the crowd caught their breath. A stranger all the way from Samaria wouldn't be expected to help.

"He saw the man and had pity on him. He cleaned and bandaged his wounds, and then lifted him onto his own donkey. They went

The Good Samaritan The Samaritan helps the wounded traveler in this detail of a stained glass window. ▼



together down the steep road until they came to an inn. That night, the Samaritan cared for him, and when he left the next morning, he paid the innkeeper two days' wages. "Take care of him," he said to the innkeeper, "and whatever more I owe you, I will pay on my way back."

Jesus asked, "What do you think? Which of the three was a neighbor to the man attacked by robbers?"

"The one who treated him kindly," replied the questioner.

Jesus said, "Go and do the same."

REVIEW Who treated the crime victim best?

The Prodigal Son

Jesus told this story:

"There was once a man who had two sons. They worked together on the land and made a good living. As he grew up, the younger son began to dream of what he would do if he had his father's riches, and then he made a plan.

"'Father,' he announced one day, 'when you die, I will inherit some of your wealth. I want to have it now, while I am young.'

"'My dear son, I fear you are making a mistake,' pleaded the father. But it was no use. Sorrowfully, his father divided his property between his two sons.

"Within days, the son sold it and set off for a country far away. There he found much on which to spend his money, with extravagant lodgings and stylish clothes and rich food. Friends gathered around him, eager to come to his parties. He was delighted. But his money soon dwindled away.

"Then, out of nowhere, famine struck the land and the price of everything soared. With nothing left to sell, the young man became desperate.

"He found himself a job . . . but it was of the very worst kind, looking after pigs. He carried a basketful of bean pods to the field they had

The Prodigal Son The father welcomes his returning son in this detail of a stained glass window. ▼



rooted into dust and tipped the food on the ground in front of them. I wish I could eat bean pods, he thought, as he watched them munching. No one gives me anything.

"He began to think of the family farm and the servants who had looked after the flocks. 'They always had more than enough to eat,' he remembered. Then he lifted his head. 'I shall go back to my father,' he said, 'and admit that I have done wrong.'

"So he made the long journey home. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him. He ran to greet him and kissed him. The son hung his head. 'Father, I have sinned against God and against you. I am no longer fit to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired workers.'

"His father simply waved his hand. 'Hurry!' he called to the servants. 'Bring a robe for my son, a ring for his finger, and shoes for his feet. Then let us prepare a feast.'


"So it was done. The party began, and the elder son returned from the fields to hear music and dancing. 'What's going on?' he asked a servant.

"Your brother has come back,' he was told. 'Your father has prepared a feast to celebrate.'

"At that, the elder brother grew so angry he would not even go into the house. His father came out to welcome him in.

"I have worked for you all these years and yet you have done nothing for me!' the son complained.

"The father replied, 'You are always here with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be happy—your brother was dead, but now he is alive; he was lost, but now he has been found.'"

 **Primary Source Handbook**
See the excerpt from the New Testament: Parable of the Lost Sheep, page R58.

REVIEW Why was the older brother angry?

Reading & Writing

- 1. READING: Theme** In which of these parables does the theme of forgiveness seem important?
- 2. WRITING: Narration** Imagine that you are the elder son in the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Write a narrative of your brother's return, in which you explain your point of view.