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Section



Foundations of Religion – Christianity



This section of the syllabus aims:

- To explore the context into which Jesus was born.
- To identify the Gospels as the main source of knowledge about Jesus.
- To examine the meaning of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus for his followers, then and now.

The Context



the Holy Land, the Roman Empire, ancient Judaism, messianic expectation

Looking at the beginnings of Christianity requires us to go back over 2,000 years ago to a small region in the eastern Mediterranean. The foundations of the world's largest religion are set in a very different time, place and religious understanding than exist today.

Many people are aware that Christianity is based on the teachings of a person known as Jesus, but how much is known about Jesus and where does the information come from?



There are no historical pictures of Jesus, only people's images of him, which can very much depend on the perspective of the person. Discuss how one person's image may be very different from that of another person. Why is this so? Is it important?

Here are some facts about Jesus:

- Jesus was Jewish.
- He was born sometime between 4 and 6 BCE.
- He lived most of his life in Galilee, a northern province in Israel.
- He was executed by the Romans in the city of Jerusalem during the rule of the local governor, Pontius Pilate.



BCE refers to year before year 1 and means before the common era.

CE refers to year after year 1 and means the common era.

To look at the beginnings of Christianity is really a historical study because before looking at the story of Jesus, we need to understand the historical setting for the story.

The Holy Land

Jesus was born and lived in what is modern-day Israel. This was an area in the ancient world that was constantly under foreign domination. In the centuries before Jesus, it had been taken over many times: by the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks and finally the Romans. The reason empires wanted to take over the area was because of its location – it is at the crossroads of three continents: Europe, Asia and Africa, and, therefore, is a valuable trade route and strategic controlling point.

The area had different names over the centuries, including Canaan, Judea, Palestine and Israel. At the time of Jesus, the area was divided into different provinces by the ruling Romans, who designated governors to rule each one.



The Holy Land

The area around the country currently called Israel. It has had various names and rulers throughout history, once known as Canaan and sometimes Palestine. This area is the Promised Land in Judaism and it is the country Jesus lived and died in.



- On the map of the Holy Land, note the names of:
1. The three provinces: Galilee, Samaria and Judea.
 2. The towns: Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Nazareth.
(These towns are associated with the life of Jesus.)
 3. The geographical features: the Dead Sea, River Jordan and Sea of Galilee.

Draw the map into your copy book. Make sure to give it a title and to label it fully.