

## Study of the New Testament

There are so many ways to study religion and Christianity, but which way is the best?

The themes which are critical to the study of Christianity during the writing of the books of the New Testament which are discussed in *From Jesus to Christ: The First Christians* include Jewish culture and daily life in which Jesus grew up in, the active life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, and Christianity in the early church after the death of Jesus. Although there are plenty of factors that influenced the spread of this religion, these themes consistently are brought up as the main factors to the movement. The documentary, *From Jesus to Christ: The First Christians* highlights these themes telling the story of Jesus through these various perspectives in order to illustrate a more complete and true picture.

The Jewish culture which Jesus was born into is critical to the context of the history of Christianity due to how Jewish culture influenced how the people interpreted and received the new idea of Christianity as well as the claims that Jesus Christ made. Rome was the dominant power during that time period and *From Jesus to Christ: The First Christians* describes how it was under this political climate in which Jesus was born into. There is evidence of more sophisticated architecture than had originally been thought to exist in Sepphoris. This is described to be surprising due to the originally held view that Jesus was born into a peasant family. Galilee was a Jewish part of the world and at the time this meant that the people there celebrated Jewish fests, read the texts, worshiped in synagogues, and this applies to how Jesus grew up and was raised by his parents. Jesus grew up in this environment and this shaped his worldview, consequently Jesus' teachings which evolved from the Jewish religion rather than it being a complete fabrication. The teachings of the Essenes and of John the Baptist, who knew Jesus might have also helped shape his teachings. That particular Jewish sect and John the

Baptist were apocalyptic preachers and believers and this is a good explanation for how the teachings of Jesus seem to emphasize the same urgency and imminence of the coming of "The Kingdom of Heaven" which is seen in the gospels.

Another, and arguably the most important influence on Christianity, Jesus of Nazareth, an important and influential figure, is key to understanding how the religion is shaped today. The documentary describes how Jesus was born in Judea which at the time was ruled by the king Herod the Great and began teaching around the age of thirty years old. Jesus taught his moral lessons through the use of parables and the majority of his teachings had a strong emphasis on the kingdom of God and the idea that the people must perform good deeds. Jesus interacted much with the poor, sick, and needy. This greatly influenced the morality of the religion stating that good works play a critical role, and an indicator of salvation. Jesus also apparently performed many miracles which led to a great band of followers. Because Jesus' teachings were founded on the ideas of Jewish apocalyptic beliefs, his parables reflected this worldview. His teachings were adopted by many from a range of social classes, especially the poor and socially outcast due to his emphasis on compassion, justice, generosity, and forgiveness, and these ideas are still ever present today.

Jesus was not the only influential figure on the shaping and molding of the Christian religion. After Jesus died, his disciples and followers were confused and uncertain of the meaning and what to do next. The apostles' belief in Jesus' resurrection led them to be motivated to spread and preach this knowledge to others outside of the Jewish community making Christianity a large and diverse movement. Christianity spread through influential writers and early church fathers, the most notable mentioned throughout the documentary being Paul, formerly known as Saul of Tarsus. Paul was originally a Jew who persecuted Christians but a

mysterious encounter led him to radically transform his life and devote himself to the spread of the gospel to gentiles across the nations. The documentary, *From Jesus to Christ: The First Christians*, describes how Paul did change the emphasis on Jesus' message from salvation through works to instead a salvation through faith. This greatly influenced most of the modern protestant practices who more closely follow Paul's teachings on salvation and the Christian life. Christian gatherings were a common part of the early church and created a community of believers who became the foundation on which the entirety of Christianity was built upon. The gospel was shared through those communities to both Jews and Gentiles, preaching salvation for all who believed and put faith in the Christ. Because of Paul, Christianity spread beyond the original Jewish roots which had a deep emphasis on keeping the law, and instead became a religion of belief rather than culture and practice.

The class Introduction to the New Testament dove into various aspects of the culture and history of the early church. The documentary succinctly connected the majority of the influences and contributors to Christianity which make it what it is today. The history of the New Testament can be studied from various perspectives and the context of how Christianity came to be is rich in history and culture. The individuals and influences outlined in the documentary, *From Jesus to Christ: The First Christians* provide deep insight into the development of Christianity into what it is today. The culture of the early Jews in which Jesus grew up in, Jesus' ministry, and the mission of the early Christians, Paul, and the apostles were all outlined in the video and are highlighted as the main contributors to what made the religion of Christianity what it is known and practiced as today.