

TIMELINE

Christianity

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| c.4 BCE–0 CE | Jesus born |
| c.27–33 CE | Jesus crucified |
| c.37–100 | Josephus |
| c.50–60 | St. Paul organizes early Christians |
| c.70–95 | Gospels written down |
| c.150 | Last of New Testament writings |
| c.185–254 | Life of Origen, who supports allegorical interpretation of Bible |
| 306–337 | Constantine emperor of Roman Empire |
| 325 | Nicene Creed; Council of Nicaea affirms divinity of Jesus |
| 354–430 | Life of St. Augustine, influential formulator of Christian doctrines |
| 379–395 | Christianity becomes state religion under rule of Emperor Theodosius |
| c.480–542 | Life of St. Benedict and creation of his monastic rule |
| 800–1300 | Middle Ages in Europe; centralization of papal power |
| 1054 | Split between Western and Eastern Orthodox Church |
| 1095–1300 | The Crusades |
| 1182–1226 | Life of St. Francis of Assisi |
| 1225–1274 | Thomas Aquinas |
| 1232 | The Inquisitions begin suppressing and punishing heretics |
| 1300s | Proliferation of monastic orders |
| 1412–1431 | Joan of Arc |
| 1453 | Gutenberg Bible published |
| 1478 | Spanish Inquisition set up |
| 1509–1564 | Life of John Calvin |
| 1517 | Martin Luther posts 95 Theses; Protestantism begins |
| 1534 | Church of England separates from Rome |
| 1545–1563 | The Council of Trent; Roman Catholic Reformation |
| 1624–1691 | Life of George Fox, English founder of Quakers |
| 1703–1791 | Life of John Wesley, founder of Methodist Church |
| c.1720–1780 | The Enlightenment in Europe |
| 1859 | Charles Darwin's <i>The Origin of Species</i> challenges beliefs in creation by God |
| 1910–1997 | Life of Mother Teresa |
| 1945 | Discovery of the Nag Hammadi manuscripts |
| 1947 | First Dead Sea Scrolls discovered |
| 1948 | World Council of Churches formed |
| 1962–1965 | The Second Vatican Council |
| 1988 | Churches reopened in Russian Federation |
| 2000 | Pope John Paul II asks forgiveness for sins of the Roman Catholic Church |
| 2002 | Boston's Roman Catholic Bishop resigns in growing scandal over sexual abuse by priests; seven women claim ordination as Roman Catholic priests |
| 2005 | Pope Benedict XVI's papacy inaugurated |

Challenges to the authorities

As Jesus traveled through Galilee, many people gathered around him to be healed. Herod Antipas, a Jew who had been appointed by the Romans as ruler of Galilee, had already executed John the Baptist and may have been concerned that Jesus might be a trouble-maker, perhaps one of the **Zealots** of Galilee who were stirring up support for a political uprising against the Romans. Jesus therefore moved outside Herod's jurisdiction for a while, to carry on his work in Tyre and Sidon (now in Lebanon).

According to the gospels, Jesus was also regarded with suspicion by prominent Jewish groups of his time—the emerging **Pharisees** (the shapers of rabbinic Judaism), **Sadducees** (the temple priests and upper class), and the scribes (specially trained laymen who copied the written law and formulated the oral law of Judaism). Jesus seems not to have challenged Mosaic law, but rather, its interpretations in the evolving rabbinic traditions and the hypocrisy of some of those who claimed to be living by the law. It is written in the Gospel of Matthew that the Pharisees and scribes challenged Jesus's disciples for not washing their hands before eating. Jesus responded:

*"What goes into the mouth does not make a man unclean; it is what comes out of the mouth that makes him unclean. . . ."*²⁴

*"Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You who are like whitewashed tombs that look handsome on the outside, but inside are full of dead men's bones and every kind of corruption. In the same way you appear to people from the outside like good honest men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness."*²⁵

Many seemingly anti-Jewish statements in the New Testament are suspected by some modern scholars as additions or interpretations dating from the period after Jesus's death, when rabbinic Judaism and early Christianity were competing for followers. Nevertheless, more universal teachings are apparent in such stories attributed to Jesus. For instance, in all times and all religions there have been those who do not practice what they preach when claiming to speak with spiritual authority.

Jesus is said to have also confronted the commercial interests in the Temple of Jerusalem, those who were making a living by charging a profit when exchanging money for Temple currency and selling animals for sacrificial offerings:

So they reached Jerusalem and he went into the Temple and began driving out those who were selling and buying there; he upset the tables of the money changers and the chairs of those who were selling pigeons. Nor would he allow anyone to carry anything through the Temple. And he taught them and said, "Does not scripture say: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples?'"²⁶ But you have turned it into a robbers' den."²⁷ This came to the ears of the chief priests and the scribes, and they tried to find some way of doing away with him; they were afraid of him because the people were carried away by his teaching."²⁸

According to the gospel accounts, Jesus appropriated to himself the messianic prophecies of Second Isaiah. It is written that he privately asked his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ."²⁹ "Christ" is

Greek for "anointed one," a translation of the Aramaic word *M'shekha* or **Messiah**, which also means "perfected" or "enlightened one." His disciples later spoke of him as the Messiah after he died and was resurrected. And his follower Martha, sister of Lazarus whom Jesus reportedly raised from the dead, is quoted as having said to Jesus, "I now believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God who was to come into the world."³¹ Some contemporary biblical scholars have concluded, however, that Jesus rejected the title of Messiah, for it might have been misunderstood.

According to the gospel tradition, a transcendental phenomenon, the "**Transfiguration**," was witnessed by three disciples. Jesus had climbed a mountain to pray, and as he did:

He was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. . . . When lo, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him."³¹

The presence of Moses and Elijah (who in Jewish apocalyptic tradition were expected to return at the end of the world) placed Jewish law and prophecy behind the claim that Jesus is the Christ. They were representatives of the old covenant with God; Jesus brought a new dispensation of grace.

Jesus claimed that John the Baptist was Elijah come again. The authorities had killed John the Baptist, and, Jesus prophesied, they would attack him, too, not recognizing who he was. John quotes Jesus as saying things like "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me"; "I am the light of the world"; "You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world"; and "Before Abraham was, I am."³² Jesus characterized himself as a good shepherd who is willing to lay down his life for his sheep. Foreshadowing the **Crucifixion**, he said he would offer his own flesh and blood as a sacrifice for the sake of humanity. His coming death would mark a "new covenant" in which his blood would be "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."³³

It is possible that such passages defining Jesus's role were later interpolations by the early Christians as they tried to explain the meaning of their Master's life and death in new terms during the decades when the New Testament was in the process of formation.

Crucifixion

The anti-institutional tenor of Jesus's teachings did not endear him to those in power. Jesus knew that to return to Jerusalem would be politically dangerous. But eventually he did so, at Passover. He reportedly entered the town in a humble way, riding on a donkey and accompanied by supporters who waved palm branches and announced him as the Messiah, crying,

"Hosanna! Blessed be he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed be the kingdom of our father David that is coming! Hosanna in the highest!"³⁴

However, Jesus warned his disciples that his end was near. At the Last Supper, a meal during the Passover season, he is said to have given them instructions for

At the Last Supper, Jesus foretold his death and instructed his disciples to maintain mystic communion with him through a ceremony with bread and wine. (The Last Supper, attributed to Francisco Henriques, fl. 1500–18 [detail].)



a ceremony with bread and wine to be performed thenceforth to maintain an ongoing communion with him. However, one of the disciples would betray him, he said. This one, Judas, had already done so, selling information leading to Jesus's arrest for thirty pieces of silver.

Jesus took three of his followers to a garden called Gethsemane, on the Mount of Olives, where he is said to have prayed intensely that the cup of suffering would pass away from him, if it be God's will, "yet not what I will, but what thou wilt."³⁵ The gospels often speak of Jesus's spending long periods in spontaneous prayer addressing God very personally as "Abba." It is possible to interpret Jesus's prayer at Gethsemane as a confirmation of his great faith in God's mercy and power. In the words of New Testament theologian Joachim Jeremias:

Jesus takes into account the possibility that God may rescind his own holy will . . . The Father of Jesus is not the immovable, unchangeable God who in the end can only be described in negations. He is not a God to whom it is pointless to pray. He is a gracious God, who hears prayers and intercessions, and is capable in his mercy of rescinding his own holy will.³⁶

Nevertheless, after this period of prayer Jesus said, according to Mark's gospel, "It is all over. The hour has come."³⁷ A crowd including Judas approached with swords and clubs; they led Jesus away to be questioned by the chief priest, elders, and scribes.

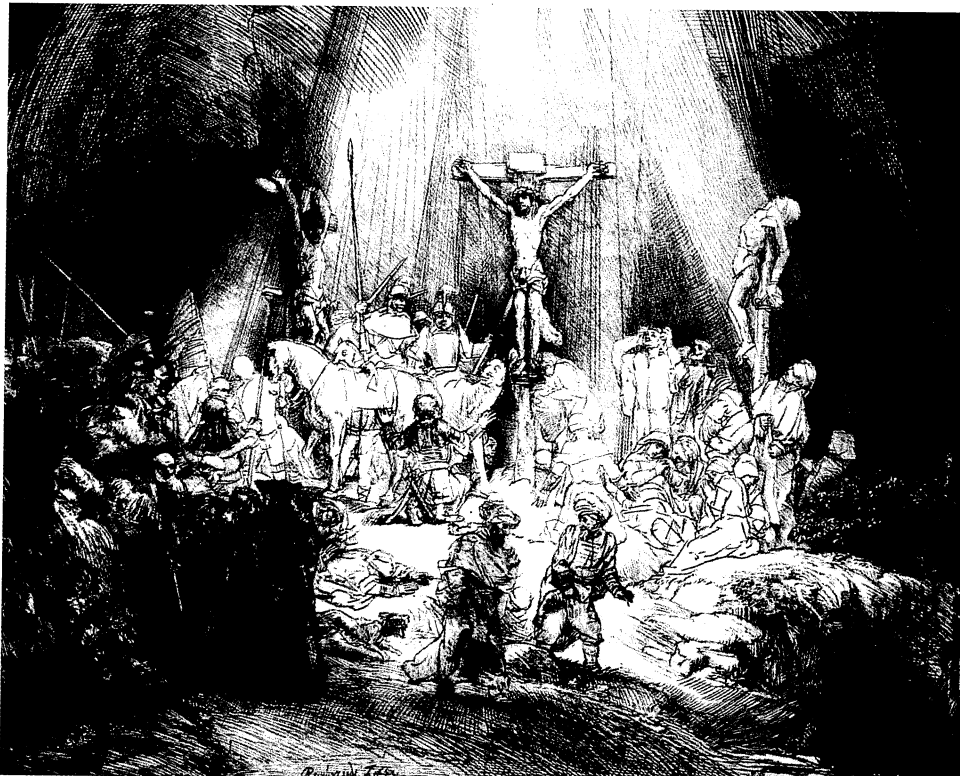
All four gospels include "**passion narratives**" describing Jesus's sufferings during his betrayal, trial, and execution by crucifixion. Matthew and Mark report

a hearing before the high priest, Joseph Caiaphas. The high priest asked Jesus, "Are you the Christ?" Jesus reportedly answered:

You have said so. But I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.³⁸

Caiaphas pronounced this statement blasphemy, punishable by death according to Jewish law. However, under Roman occupation the Sanhedrin (supreme Jewish court made up of chief priests, elders, and law teachers) was forbidden to pass the death sentence. Therefore Jesus was taken to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, for sentencing. To Pilate's leading question, "Are you King of the Jews?" Jesus is said to have replied, "You have said so."³⁹ According to the biblical accounts, Pilate seems to prefer to let Jesus off with a flogging, for he sees no reason to sentence him to death. Nevertheless, the crowd demands that he be killed on the grounds that he is a challenger to the earthly king, Caesar. The Gospel of John reports extraordinary dialogues between Pilate and Jesus as the crowd clamors for his execution. For instance, according to the Gospel of John, Pilate asks Jesus, "What have you done?" and Jesus reportedly replies:

My kingdom does not belong to this world. My kingly authority comes from elsewhere." "You are a king then?" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "King is your word. My task is to bear witness to the truth. For this was I born; for this I came into the world, and all who are not deaf to truth listen to my voice." Pilate said, "What is truth?" and with those words went out again to the Jews.⁴⁰

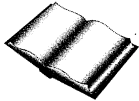


The Crucifixion,
p. 228
MARK

Jesus's Crucifixion was interpreted by many later Christians as the sacrifice of an innocent lamb as atonement for the sins of humanity. Another interpretation was that God gave "himself or herself" in love, drawing the world into a loving relationship with the divine. (Rembrandt, The Three Crosses, 1653.)

At last, unable to pacify Jesus's critics, Pilate turns him over to his military guard for execution by crucifixion, a form of death by torture widely used within the Roman Empire. In this method, the victim was typically tortured or beaten brutally with whips and then hung or nailed onto a wooden cross to die as a hideous example to intimidate the public. The guards put a crown made of thorns on Jesus's head and paraded him and his cross to the hill called Golgotha ("Place of the Skull"). It was probably used frequently for such executions. The accusation—"This is Jesus, King of the Jews"—was set over his head, and two robbers were crucified alongside him. The authorities, the people, and even the robbers (one of them, at least, according to Luke) mocked him for saying that he could save others when he could not even save himself.

Jesus hung there for hours until, according to the gospels, he cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"⁴¹ This is the first line of Psalm 22, which is actually a great proclamation of the faith in God of one who is persecuted. Then Jesus died. This event is thought to have happened on a Friday some time between 27 and 33 CE. A wealthy Jewish disciple named Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for Jesus's body, which Joseph wrapped in a linen shroud and placed in his own tomb, with a large stone against the door. A guard was placed at the tomb to make sure that no followers would steal the body and claim that Jesus had risen from the dead.



The Resurrection,
p. 229
MARK



CHRISTIANITY:
Resurrection Story

Resurrection and Ascension

That seemed to be the end of it. Jesus's disciples were terrified, so some of them hid, mourning and disheartened. The whole religious movement could have died out, as did other messianic cults. However, what is reported next in varying gospel accounts seemed to change everything. Some of the women who had been close to Jesus and had traveled with him from Galilee—Mary Magdalene, plus, according to different gospels, Mary mother of James, Joanna, Salome, and perhaps others—visited the tomb on Sunday to prepare the body for a proper burial, a rite that had been postponed because of the Sabbath. Instead, they found the tomb empty, with the stone rolled away. Angels then appeared and told them that Jesus had risen from death. The women ran and brought two of the male disciples, who witnessed the empty tomb with the shroud folded.

Then followed numerous reports of appearances of the risen Christ to various disciples. He dispelled their doubts about his **Resurrection**, having them touch his wounds and even eating a fish with them. He said to them, as recounted in the Gospel of Matthew:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.⁴²

The details of the appearances of the resurrected Jesus differ considerably from gospel to gospel. However, some scholars think that to have women as the first witnesses to the empty tomb suggests that there must be some historical truth in the claims of Jesus's Resurrection, for no one trying to build a case would have rested it on the testimony of women, who had little status in a patriarchal

society. Feminist scholar Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza finds deep meaning in the presence of women disciples at the time of Jesus's death and resurrection. The gospels mention a woman who anoints Jesus, a sign that she recognizes him as the Messiah. (According to the Gospel of John, this was Jesus's close follower, Mary of Bethany, sister of Lazarus.) The reports that it is women who faithfully visit the tomb suggest that, as Schüssler Fiorenza puts it,

Whereas according to Mark the leading male disciples do not understand this suffering messiahship of Jesus, reject it, and finally abandon him, the women disciples who have followed Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem suddenly emerge as the true disciples in the passion narrative. They are Jesus' true followers who have understood that his ministry was not rule and kingly glory but diakonia, "service" (Mark 15:41). Thus the women emerge as the true Christian ministers and witnesses. The unnamed woman who names Jesus with a prophetic sign-action in Mark's Gospel is the paradigm for the true disciple. While Peter had confessed, without truly understanding it, "you are the anointed one," the woman anointing Jesus recognizes clearly that Jesus' messiahship means suffering and death.⁴³

It was the Resurrection that turned defeat into victory for Jesus, and discouragement into powerful action for his followers. As the impact of all they had seen set in, the followers came to believe that Jesus had been God present in a human life, walking among them.

According to two gospel accounts, after the resurrected Jesus appeared to his disciples, encouraging them to carry the gospel to the whole world, he ascended into heaven. The end of the gospel of Mark, which is thought to be a later addition to the chapter, adds, "and sat down at the right hand of God" (Mark 16:19). Some Christians believe that Jesus miraculously ascended bodily into the highest heaven, an invisible realm in the sky where God is sitting with Jesus beside him, as an advocate for his faithful followers. Whether understood metaphorically or literally, the **Ascension** is an article of Christian faith. It is further extended in the Acts of the Apostles into belief that Jesus will return bodily to the earth in the future:

As they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."⁴⁴

Books of the New Testament

Gospels

Matthew
Mark
Luke
John

The Acts of the Apostles

The Letters of Paul

Romans
1 and 2 Corinthians
Galatians
Ephesians*
Philippians
Colossians*
1 and 2* Thessalonians
1 and 2 Timothy*
Titus*
Philemon

The General Epistles

Hebrew
James
1 and 2 Peter
1, 2, and 3 John
Jude

Revelation

*Scholars question whether these letters were written by Paul or by others using his name as a pseudonym, in the custom of the times.