

Lecture 9: *The Emergence of Christianity*

1. Jesus and the First Christians

- A. The Life of Christ in Context
- B. The Christian Message
- C. Paul and the Spread of Christianity

2. The First Christians Communities

- A. An Urban Religion
- B. The First Christian Communities

3. Religious Diversity in the Empire

- A. Religion vs. Spirituality
 - The limits of the Roman polytheism and the appeal of Christianity
- B. One of Many Religions
 - The Example of Dura Europas, 256 AD

Life of Jesus and Early Christian Texts

Jesus of Nazareth (ca. 4 B.C.E. – 30 C.E./A.D.) (spoke Aramaic) – recognized by his followers as the ‘**Anointed One**’ = the *Messiah* (in Hebrew) or **Christ** = *Christos* (in Greek) – as mentioned in the Jewish Bible or Old Testament.

Early Christian Texts:

- 1) **Gospels** (= “the good news”), short texts attributed to followers: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Dated between 60-90 AD. (Mark’s text probably oldest ca. 65 AD). – all probably written in Greek.
- 2) **Letters of Paul**, or Pauline Epistles (= letter in Latin), ca. 49-62 AD.
- 3) Apocryphal Gospels, non-canonical texts, example: Gospel of Thomas
- 4) Acts of the Apostles – deeds and doing of Christ’s first followers.

Paul of Tarsus (Saul) (ca. 10 AD – 67 AD) – opening up of Christian message. Under Paul first followers of Jesus called “men of Christ” = *Christianoi* = “Christians” in Greek.

Religious Diversity in the Later Empire

Case Study: The Example of **Dura-Europos**: Christianity in context

Roman settlement period, ca. 113-256 AD – a frontier town
Falls to the Sassanians Empire in 256 AD
Archeological excavation in 1920s-30s

Emblematic of religious diversity in the later Roman Empire:

Standing structures:

- Mithraeum, Mithras (Iranian god popular among Roman soldiers)
- Synagogue
- Christian House-Church and Baptistery