

Forgiveness Explodes Across the World

The following is a list of theories that people have given for why Christianity has spread across the world-

- a. People were gullible until the 20th Century and would easily accept any new ideas.
- b. Jesus was just an ordinary guy but ideas and myths about Him gradually grew until centuries later people worshipped him as God. This powerful myth that had developed was very attractive in its later forms.
- c. People just accepted Christianity because everyone accepted it.
- d. People just accepted Christianity so they could live a happier life.
- e. People are just Christians because their parents are Christians. Christianity has just multiplied over the centuries by family growth.
- f. Christianity started out in Christian countries that forced people to believe in Jesus.
- g. Christian missionaries provide education and modern facilities which wins the primitive people over.

What God Has to Say

(The exact dates are not recorded in the Bible but have been worked out by piecing together what the Bible says)

1. Use the Bible references on the map. How (who and why) did Christianity spread over the first 30 years ?

Fill in the table after the map.

2. The Bible tells us, in at least three ways, that there were Christians in Rome before Paul arrived -
i. Paul wrote the letter to the Roman Christians before he had been there (Rom 1:7,13,15, 15:23).
ii. Christians from Rome met Paul when he was on his way to Rome (we read in Acts 28:14-15).
iii. Read Acts 18:1-4. The Jews Aquila & Priscilla (most likely Christians then) were expelled from Rome.
From your answer to question 1, suggest some likely ways that the gospel could have got to Rome before Paul ?

3. What do the following verses tell us about the spread of Christianity across the world ?

Genesis 12:1-3

Acts 2:47

Isaiah 49:6 (1-6)

Acts 11:21

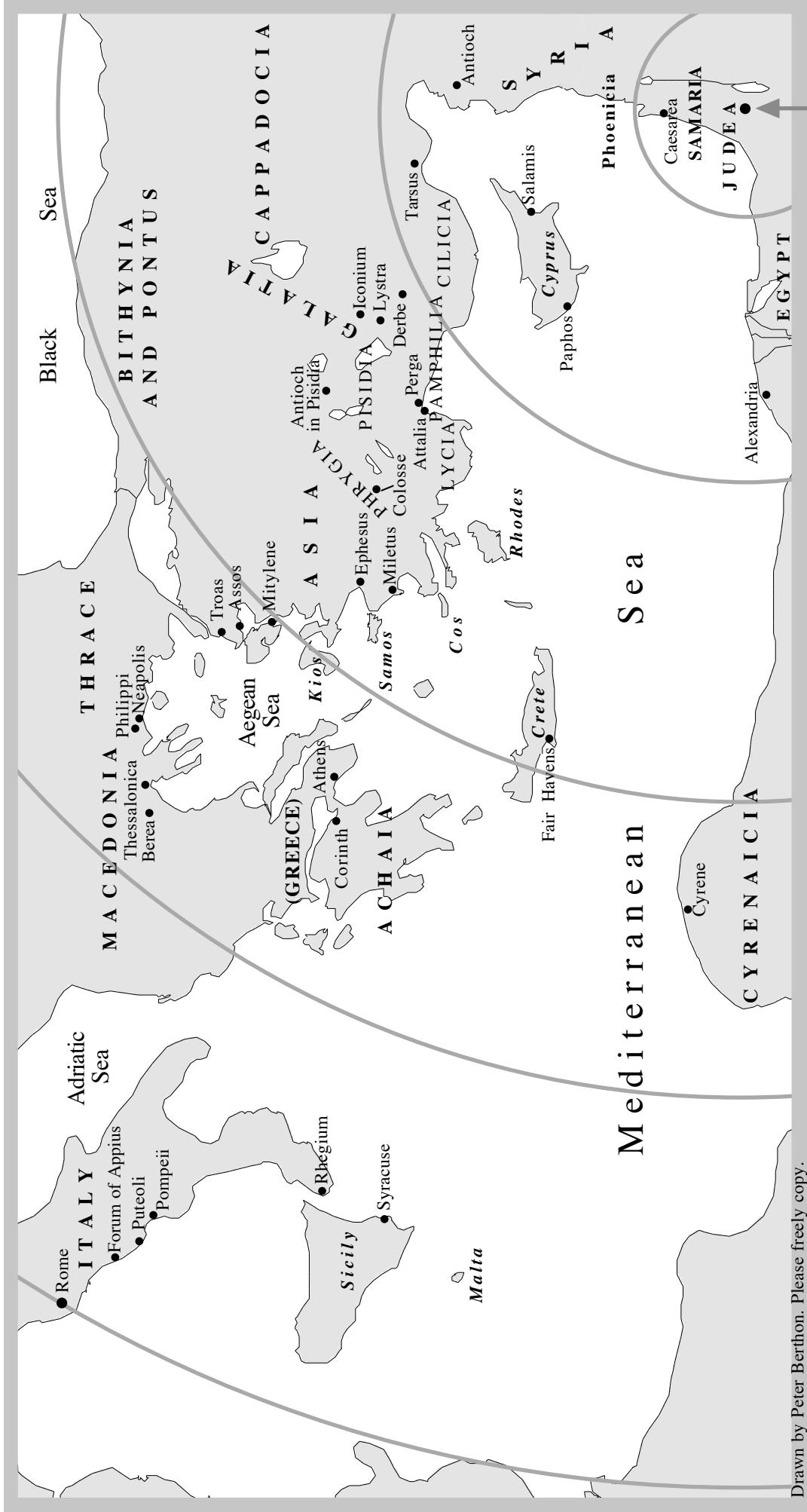
4. Briefly discuss the following statement -

“Yes I am a Christian but it seems odd to me that people should be so concerned for others around the world to become Christians.”

5. How do these events in the first 30 years of Christianity show the falsehood of some of the theories ‘a’ to ‘g’?

Conclusion

- Why is it significant that the growth of Christianity is verified by Romans, Jews and Archaeology ?
- Which theory seems more likely as to the rapid growth of Christianity ?
because of ‘a’ to ‘g’ ? or because Christianity is the truth ?
- How can you be a part of Christianity spreading further in the world ?



Drawn by Peter Berthou. Please freely copy.

Acts 28:13-16, 28-31 (by 60 AD)

Acts 17:10-12, 16-17, 18:5 (by 52 AD)

Acts 13:2, 13-16, 38, 48-52 (by 48 AD)

Acts 9:28-31, 11:19-26 (by 40 AD)

Acts 8:1-5 (by 35 AD)

Scale: 0 300 600 900 1200 kms

The Spread Of Christianity In The First 30 Years

Jerusalem
 Jesus dies and rises
 Acts 1:1-8
 (30 AD)

Date	Bible Verses	Who?	How did the gospel advance?	Locations? <i>Circle on Map</i>	Applications to us? <i>In light of whole Bible</i>
30 AD	Acts 1:1-8 Acts 2:14,36-40				
30-35 AD	Acts 8:1-5,12				
35-40 AD	Acts 9:28-31 Acts 9:32-35, 10:23b-24a Acts 11:19-26				
40-48 AD	Acts 13:2,13-16, 38-45,48-52 Acts 14:1-2				
48-52 AD	Acts 17:1-5 Acts 17:10-12 Acts 17:16-18, 32-34 Acts 18:1-8 Acts 18:18-20				
52-60 AD	Acts 24:1,27 Acts 25:10-12 Acts 27:1-2 Acts 28:13-16, 23,28-31				

Other Sources

How do the following verify what we have seen about Christianity and what light do they shed on 'a' to 'g' ?

Source 1 • The Roman Historian, Tacitus, writes about the fire in Rome in 64 A.D.

To dispel the rumour that he was to blame "Nero fastened the guilt [of the fire] and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilate, and a deadly superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judea, the first source of the evil, but also in the City [Rome], ... an arrest was made of all who confessed; then upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of arson, as of hatred of the human race. Besides being put to death they were made to serve as objects of amusement; they were clad in the hides of beasts and torn to pieces by dogs; others were crucified, others set on fire to serve to illuminate the night when daylight had failed."

Source 2 • The Roman Governor of Bithynia, Pliny, writes to the Emperor in ~112 A.D.

Pliny writes to the emperor seeking advice about a troublesome group known as "Christians", some of whom he had in prison at the time. Pliny said "many of all ages and every rank and also of both sexes" are involved. They had spread into "not the cities only, but also the villages and country". Because of this movement the temples had become unpopular and people who sold animals for sacrifices had gone out of business.

"I ask them if they are Christians. If they admit it I repeat the question a second and third time, threatening capital punishment. If they persist I sentence them to death, for their inflexible obstinacy should certainly be punished"

"They [Christians] maintained, however, that the amount of their fault or error had been this, that it was their habit on a fixed day to assemble before daylight and recite by turns a form of words to Christ as a god; and that they bound themselves with an oath, not for any crime, but not to commit theft or robbery or adultery, not to break their word, and not to deny a deposit when demanded. After this was done, their custom was to depart, and to meet again to take food, but ordinary and harmless food. To find out the truth concerning them I applied torture to two maidservants "

• How does this particularly affect theory 'b' ?

Source 3 • Archaeological Sources and inscriptions

- Christian inscriptions were found in the buried city of Pompeii in Italy (See the Map). The city was buried by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 A.D. and only in modern times has it been unearthed.
- Many subterranean cemeteries called catacombs have been discovered Europe, North Africa, Syria and the most extensive ones in Rome. These contain many Christian inscriptions including the Greek word for fish - 'ICHTHUS' which also stood for **I**esus (**J**esus) **CH**rist (**C**hrist) **TH**eou (of God) **U**ios (Son) **S**oter (Saviour). The catacombs were constructed from the end of the 1st century to the 5th century A.D.
- Thousands of other archaeological finds have verified the cities, regions, distances to towns, specific people, culture, lifestyle, trade and major events that are described throughout the Bible.

Source 4 • Jewish Historian, Josephus, born in 37 A.D.

In ~93 A.D. Josephus writes about James (the brother of Christ) and others being put to death.

" ... convened the judges of the Sanhedrin and brought before them a man named James, the brother of Jesus who was called the Christ, and certain others. He accused them of having transgressed the law and delivered them up to be stoned"

He also wrote the following. Although certain parts of this are contested by some, most agree about its basis -

"About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, *if indeed one ought to call him a man*. For he was one who wrought surprising feats and was a teacher of such people who accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. He was [called] the Messiah. When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing amongst us, had condemned him to be crucified, those who had in the first place come to love him did not give up their affection for him. On the third day [they reported that] he appeared to them restored to life, for the prophets of God have prophesied these and countless other marvellous things about him. And the tribe of Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared." (doubted sections italicised and possible omissions bracketed)

Source 5 • Jewish Rabbi, Elizer, in ~95 A.D.

Elizer wrote a bitter letter to warn people against following Jesus and becoming a Christian.

[speaking as though it was predicted by a prophet] "... saw that there was a man, born of a woman, who would rise up and seek to make himself God, and cause the whole world to go astray ... Give heed that you go not astray after that man; for it is written, God is not a man that he should lie. And if he says that he is God he is a liar, and he will deceive and say that he departeth and cometh again at the end. He saith and he shall not perform."

• How does this affect theory 'b' ?