**Depth Study 1: Christianity**

**Origins (Birth Of Jesus-Council of Nicea: 6 BCE-325 CE)**

Historical and Cultural Context of the Beginning of Christianity

**Summary:**
- **Power was centred in Jerusalem** during first century Judaism
- **Fierce sectarian rivalry** existed between the different Jewish sects, particularly between the Pharisees, Sadducees and the Zealots who sought to control the direction of the religion
- The **Messianic expectation**, a central tenet of Jewish belief reached a high point during the time of Jesus. Jewish speculation that the Messiah was to be a political saviour was the result of **centuries of political oppression by the Romans**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roman</th>
<th>Jewish</th>
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</table>
| **Historical** | • Judaism founded by Abraham and his covenant with God thousand of years before Jesus. Jews are the ‘chosen people.’
|                | • Centred in Judea, under Roman Empire
|                | • Seeking Messiah based on Old Testament prophecies |
| **Cultural**   | • Lived under Roman Rule, resentment
|                | • Supposed freedom subject to Roman authority
|                | • Economy funded by agriculture and fishing, as well as Roman projects
|                | • Class segregation, upper consisting of scholars, and lower of labourers
|                | • Segregated from Gentiles
|                | • Beliefs centred on Sabbath day
|                | • Greek language
|                | • Traditional, strict family life
|                | • Communal village living |

| Pharisees      | • Dominant in synagogue. Opposed Roman rule, and upheld practical/oral applications of written law |
| Sadducees      | • Priest aristocracy of temple, upheld only written laws. Cooperated with Roman Rule. |
| Zealots        | • Pharisaic in view, highly responsible for Jewish Revolt (66-70 CE) |
| Essenes        | • Secluded religious order on edge of Dead Sea. Celibate, male community in a strict society. Responsible for Dead Sea Scrolls. |
Jesus Christ

• Whilst Jesus is typically known as the founder of Christianity, he **did not seek to establish a new religion.** Rather he intended to **reform the tradition in the spirit of the prophets.**

• The main focus of Jesus' preaching was the **reign of God.**

• The reign of God envisages a world where God's values such as love, peace and cooperation are realised. This vision, that was inaugurated through Jesus' ministry, will be completed at the end of time. Until then it is the responsibility of the followers of Jesus to live in accordance with these values and to lead others to them. Subsequently, the reign of God is considered to be a present yet future reality.

Jesus' Life: A Summary

• Jesus is believed to have been born of a virgin in Bethlehem

• Jesus was baptised by John the Baptist

• He preached around the region of Galilee and attracted disciples some of whom were women and many were socially disadvantaged

• Jesus taught in parables mostly concerning the reign of God

• In the Gospels he is frequently depicted as a healer or a miracle worker

• Jesus' preaching brought him into conflict with the Jewish authorities

• Jesus' ministry took him to Jerusalem where he stayed for the Passover

• He was arrested and sentenced to death by crucifixion

• He was placed in a tomb and appeared to his disciples after being raised on the third day

• The synoptic problem and modern biblical scholarship reminds us that the Gospels were written for a particular target audience as a way of passing on the faith of the community rather than with the intent of providing an accurate historical account of the life of Jesus

(Examined in detail overleaf)

Why is Jesus the model for Christian life?

• He was the spurring force of Christianity and thus his example should be followed

• His teachings are the basis for modern Christian ethics

• Christians believe Jesus is divine, and thus has authority over mankind

• Jesus was sinless, a quality Christian’s strive for in daily life

• Jesus embodies moral living in the simplest sense by displaying desirable qualities

• Jesus offers a direct link to God through his own divinity, through his teachings of the ‘reign of God,’ and through his own prayerful life
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Details</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Birth Of Jesus</strong></td>
<td>Born during massacre of innocents.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Baptism Of Jesus</strong></td>
<td>Jesus is baptised by John the Baptist. Acknowledges Jesus as Messiah and begins his Ministry.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Begins Preaching In Galilee</strong></td>
<td>Jesus begins his ministry in Galilee. Links to Hebrew scripture and fulfilment of prophecies.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sermon on the Mount</strong></td>
<td>Jesus’ main teachings. Foundation of modern Christian ethics.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Jesus’ Miracles</strong></td>
<td>Jesus’ miracles. Reinforces authority of God and spreads the Word.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Jesus’ Parables</strong></td>
<td>Assists with visualisation and appropriation. Links to Hebrew scripture.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Jesus’ Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem</strong></td>
<td>Jesus enters Jerusalem as Messiah. First proper recognition of authority. Palm Sunday, prelude to Passion.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>The Greatest Commandment</strong></td>
<td>Jesus is tested by the Pharisees and demonstrates his knowledge. Symbolic of change.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>The Last Supper</strong></td>
<td>Celebration of Passover. Jesus’ initiates new covenant in reminiscence of the Jewish covenant. Foundation of Eucharist.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Jesus is Arrested and Trialled</strong></td>
<td>Jesus is arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. He is trialled by Pilate, sent to Herod, then sent back. He is sentenced to death by crucifixion. Accordance to scripture.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>The Crucifixion</strong></td>
<td>Links to scripture, “all condemn him.” New ‘lamb of God.’</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Jesus’ Death</strong></td>
<td>Sacrifice to save mankind from sin, Jesus’ mortality is stressed. Acknowledgement of Messiah.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Burial of Jesus</strong></td>
<td>Tomb is given to Jesus, link to earlier teachings.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>The Resurrection</strong></td>
<td>Foundation for main Christian belief. Divinity of Jesus stressed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Great Commission</strong></td>
<td>Foundation for Christianity, authority passed on.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>The Ascension</strong></td>
<td>Jesus raised into heaven, seated at the “right hand of God.”</td>
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Development of Early Christian Communities

33-70 CE (Initial Wave)

- Begins with the Pentecost soon after Jesus’ death. Disciples begin preaching in Jerusalem after being commissioned by Jesus.
- Church leader is Simon Peter
- Message spreads beyond after Peter is forced to flee to Antioch. James becomes leader in Jerusalem
- Christianity remains sect of Judaism.
  - Christians (Nazarenes) follow Mosaic Law and teachings are based on Hebrew Scripture. However, a Eucharist meal is celebrated and Baptism is practiced
  - St Paul’s preaching happens simultaneously throughout the Mediterranean
- Little importance put on formalisation, as the belief was that Christ’s second coming was imminent

The Council of Jerusalem (49 CE)

- The Council occurred to discuss whether new Gentile Christian converts (reached through Paul’s work) were required to follow Jewish law?
- Mainly concerned circumcision before Baptism
- Outcome resulted that Christian’s must only abandon all pagan idols and follow 10 commandments, as well as commit to Jesus’ teachings
- Opened Christianity to the wider world, beyond the ‘chosen people,’ and signals the beginning of complete separation
- Failed Jewish Revolt of 66-73 CE forced mass migration from Judea after destruction of temple of Jerusalem
- Spurred a requirement for formalisation of belief
- Until around 100CE, Christianity split from Judaism due to the death of the Apostles and the delay of the second coming. Formalisation was required, which made the split necessary

Persecution

- Early Christians faced persecution from Jews and Romans
  - Jews: Angered by the results of Council of Jerusalem. Pharisees fearful of Roman repercussions of continuations of Jesus’ teachings.
  - Romans: Scapegoat persecution, blamed Christians because they were hated by society (EG- Great Fire of Rome, Emperor Nero, 64CE)
  - First martyr (witness to faith) was Stephen, whom was stoned in c. 35 CE
  - Persecution was often on local levels by Jewish groups
  - Grander persecution occurred under Roman authorities

Official Religion

- Edict of Milan (313) granted by Constantine legalised Christianity in the Roman Empire and ordered the end of persecutions
- Nicene Creed created at the Council of Nicaea (325), the official beginning of Christianity
- Became state church of Roman Empire in 380 CE
**Denominations**

**Anglicanism**
- Protestant Reformation: King Henry VIII
- Leader: Archbishop of Canterbury
- Prominent in countries with ties to England
- Lambeth Conference: Centrality of scripture
- Two sacraments: Baptism and Lord’s Supper

**Catholicism**
- Historical alignment to the apostles
- Leader: Pope, direct lineage from Peter
- Seven Sacraments
- Tradition and scripture in ethics
- Guidance of the Holy Spirit

**Protestantism**
- Protestant Reformation: Martin Luther
- Many branches and sub divisions: EG- Lutheran, Calvinist, Baptist
- Scriptural emphasis and justification through faith
- Two sacraments

**Pentecostalism**
- Emphasis on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit
- US Protestant congregations within the 1900’s
- Independent or localised groups and congregations
- Lively worship including speaking in tongues, emphatic worship, less formal
- Young congregations
- Second Coming is imminent

**Orthodoxy**
- East West Schism: Eastern Orthodox Churches
- Equal value of tradition and scripture
- Patriarch of Constantinople
- Seven Sacraments
- Sacred icons
The Bible

Approaches to Bible Scholarship

fundamentalism: the understanding that upholds the strict literal interpretation of the Bible
interpretative: the understanding that the Bible should be interpreted and made relevant to modern life

The Bible is also applied differently across Christian denominations. For example, Catholics believe that tradition and church teachings illuminate the meaning of scripture. Protestant churches, instead, believe in a concept of ‘scripture alone,’ requiring scriptural basis for church teachings.

Why is the Bible an important aspect of Christianity?

• The Bible is the normative for Christianity, as it identifies key beliefs and identifies key religious foundations
• The Bible is believed to be inspired by God, representing his authority and providing a connection between humanity and the divine (revelation)
• The Bible contains salvation history, previous instances of divine intervention
• The Bible contains Christian ethics
Principal Beliefs of Christianity

The Divinity and Humanity of Jesus:
- Jesus was human, and thus capable of human emotion and suffering, as well as death.
- He was also divine, and thus capable of miracles.
- Jesus ascended into heaven after being resurrected.
- Disputed amongst early Christians, resolved by Council of Nicea.

Luke 22: 44  Jesus experiences anguish
John 1: 14  “The one and only Son, who came from the father.”

The Death and Resurrection of Jesus
- Jesus was crucified by Roman authorities (his Passion).
- As human, he could die.
- Being divine, Jesus conquered death and was resurrected.
- Jesus died to save us from sin, and allowed the Resurrection of all at Final Judgement.
- The ultimate salvation, proof of future resurrection of all people.

Mark 15: 37  Jesus dies
Mark 16: 6-7  Jesus’ resurrection
Mark 16: 19  Jesus’ ascension

The Nature of God and the Trinity
- Monotheism and transcendence.
- One God, three distinct persons.
- Central dogma and deepest mystery.
- The Holy Trinity:
  God the Father: Creator of the Universe (Gen 1:1)
  God the Son: Redeemer of Life (John 14: 6-7)
  God the Holy Spirit: The Sanctifier (Acts 2: 1-5)
Revelation
• God’s interference with history and interaction with humanity
• Reveals hidden or obscured truths
• Proof of God’s love for humanity
• Ultimate Revelation: Jesus
• Bible is a record of revelation and revelation in itself

Exodus 3: 1-6  God and Moses
Jonah 1: 1-2  God and the Jewish prophets
John 3:16  Jesus
Acts 2: 1-12  Holy Spirit (Pentecost)

Salvation
• Humans require deliverance from sin by God
• Salvation made available to all through Jesus’ death and resurrection
• Fully revealed in heaven, salvation achieved only through God’s grace

John 10:10  “I have come that they may have life.”

The Heart and Foundation of Christianity

• Humanity and Divinity of Jesus Christ
• Death and Resurrection
• Salvation

Expressed in the Nicene Creed!
Ethical Teachings

The 10 Commandments
- Moses: Mt Sinai (Old Testament)
- Primary Christian duties
- First 4: Relationship with God
- Final 6: Relationships with Others (Thou shalt not...)
- Summation of Christian ethics

The Beatitudes
- Jesus: Sermon on the Mount/Plain
- Christian virtues: A model/template for Christian life
- Inversion of Values: EG- The poor will be rewarded in the Kingdom of God
- Life of Holiness

Commandment of Love
- ‘Love the Lord with all your heart’
- ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’
- Agape: Profound love equally encompassing enemy and friend
- Ultimate summary of Christian ethics
- Based on Hebrew Scripture (10 Commandments)
- Universal to Christians

The Importance of Ethics in Christianity:
- Provide guidance to make informed moral decisions
- Model for Christian life: Life and Ministry of Jesus
- Guidance for modern ethical issues: EG- Abortion
- Difficult to gauge in overall sense
Personal Devotion: Prayer

- Communication or expression to God as a form of worship
- Broad, culture based, no set method or doctrine
- Can be public or personal

Public Prayer

- Congregations
- Formal
- Based around Christian festivals or religious occasions
- Jesus: God is present whenever two or more gather in his name

Personal Prayer

- Formal Prayers such as the Our Father (Jesus’ example) or the Rosary
- Informal prayers, improve and foster a personal connection to God
- Can be verbal/non/verbal

Scheduled Worship: Morning and evening prayer, grace at meals, thanksgiving and worship

Quiet Times: Reflection, meditation, relaxation, self evaluation: Im

Prayers of Intercession: Broad range, to God or Saints. Asks for God’s intercession or support in life

Prayers of Praise: Thanksgiving, worshipping God

Bible: Reflection or research into relevant Biblical passages

KEY QUESTIONS:

Describe the sociopolitical, cultural and historical context into which Christianity emerged.
Identify the five main Jewish sociopolitical groups and describe their beliefs.
Describe the events which lead to Christianity splitting from Judaism. What event encompassed this?
Why were Christian’s persecuted in early Christian history? Describe the chain of events which lead to decline in this persecution.
Examine the life and ministry of Jesus with reference to the Bible.
Why is Jesus a model for Christian life?
Identify the major denominations of modern Christianity and how they formed.
Describe the two major approaches to Bible scholarship.
What are the main sections of the Hebrew Scripture?
Why is the Bible important to Christians?
What are the core beliefs of Christianity?
What are the core ethical teachings of Christianity? Why are they important to Christians?
Describe the various types of personal prayer and the Christian view on prayer.
Analyse how the Bible expresses Christian beliefs and ethics and guides personal devotions.