

Name: _____

Date: _____

The Growth of Christianity

The Roman Empire had an official religion that focused on the worship of several gods and goddesses. As the Roman Empire conquered its neighbors, it took over the lands of people with different religions. At the time, most religions had more than one god. Many conquered peoples did not mind honoring Roman gods along with their own. However, in one of the conquered areas, Judea, Jewish people refused to follow Rome's religion. The Jewish people believed in one God. It was against their religion to worship many gods.



A Jewish man named Jesus traveled and preached about God in Judea and Galilee. Jesus said that believing in God would bring eternal life. He told people that they should show sympathy and mercy to the poor and helpless. His religious speeches made Roman leaders angry. They thought Jesus might lead a Jewish political revolt against Rome. The Roman government ordered Jesus to be put to death. After Jesus died, his followers said that Jesus had risen from the dead and appeared to them. They believed that Jesus was their savior. Christianity, a religion based on Jesus' teachings, began to spread.

After Jesus' death, Christian leaders took up where Jesus left off and continued to preach his message. They started Christian communities in Asia Minor and along the shores of the Aegean Sea. By 100 A.D., Christian churches had been set up in most major cities in the Roman Empire.

The Roman Empire let people practice other religions as long as they did not cause any trouble. However, Roman officials decided that Christianity was harmful because Christians refused to worship state gods. Government leaders saw this as treason, or political disloyalty. The punishment for treason was death.

The Roman government began to persecute Christians, or make them suffer. Many Christians were killed for their beliefs. The persecution in the first and second centuries did not stop the growth of Christianity. Christianity was appealing to many people, especially the poor and powerless, so the religion grew.

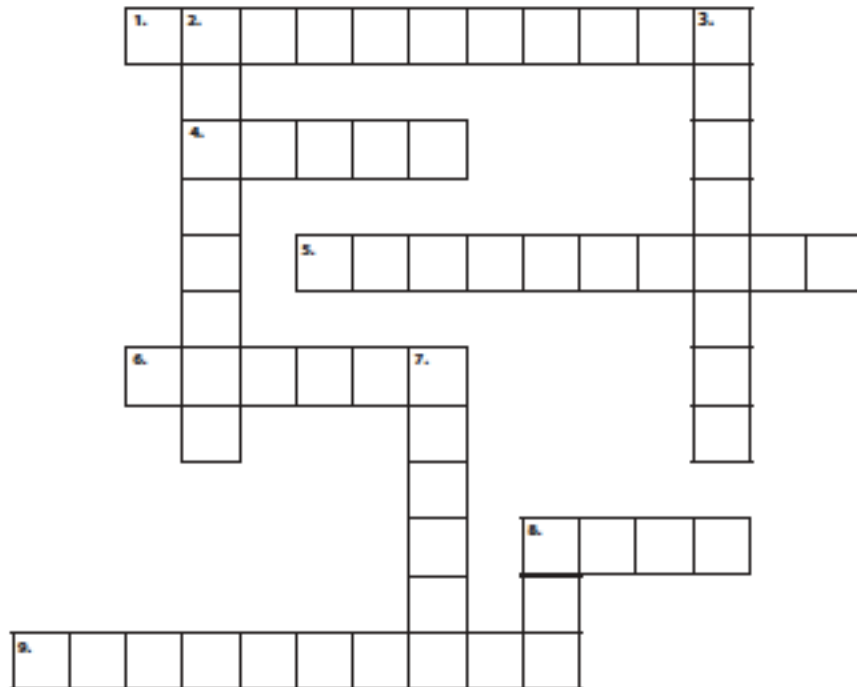
After years of persecution, Roman officials eventually understood that Christianity could not be destroyed by force. In the fourth century, Constantine became the first Christian emperor of Rome. In 313 A.D., he passed the Edict of Milan, which said Christianity should be allowed by the state. Less than 80 years later, under Theodosius the Great, Christianity became Rome's official religion.



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Crossword Puzzle

Write the best answer in each blank, and complete the crossword puzzle.



ACROSS

1. Christian leaders started _____ in Asia Minor and along the shores of the Aegean Sea.
4. Roman officials realized that Christianity could not be destroyed by _____.
5. _____ refused to worship Rome's state gods.
6. Jesus' followers believed that Jesus was their _____.
8. Even though many Christians were killed, the religion continued to _____.
9. The Roman government _____ Christians.

DOWN

2. Christianity eventually became Rome's _____ religion.
3. Jesus preached that the poor and helpless should be shown _____ and mercy.
7. Roman leaders thought Jesus might lead a Jewish political _____ against Rome.
8. Most religions had more than one _____.