Information About Christianity

Followers of Christianity are called Christians. They believe in one God—the God of Abraham, often called Yaweh in English. Abraham lived in the Middle East about 4,000 years ago at a time when most people believed in many Gods. However, Abraham believed that only one, all-powerful God had created the world.

Christians believe that God made an agreement, or covenant, with Abraham. This agreement said that Abraham and the future generations of his family—his descendants—would be God’s chosen people in return for their faith and obedience. These people became the Hebrews. Today they are called Jews.

Christians base their religion on the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, known as Jesus Christ. Jesus was a Jew who is said to have been born in Bethlehem, near the city of Jerusalem, around the year 4 B.C. During his life he traveled around northern Palestine teaching about a new covenant between God and the Jews. Those who followed Jesus’ teachings broke away from other Jews. These followers became Christians, worshipping God in a new way that focused on Jesus’ teachings.

The Christian idea of God is called the Trinity because Christians believe God has three parts: God the Father, God the Son (Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit (God’s presence on earth). Therefore, all Christians believe that Jesus was part of God, and most Christians believe Jesus was both human and divine (God-like). Christians believe that Jesus died on a cross, was buried, and rose from the dead three days later. They believe Jesus then ascended to heaven to be with God the Father. The story of Jesus’ life is recorded in the Christian holy book, called the Bible.

The Christian Bible has two parts—the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament is the history of the law and the stories of the prophets—the ancient Hebrew messengers of God’s word. The Old Testament also contains psalms, or prayers written in
The goal of Christianity is to achieve salvation. The state of salvation is the eternal (never ending) life of one’s soul with God in heaven. The opposite of salvation is damnation, or eternal suffering in hell. Christianity holds that those who sin (turn away from Jesus’ teachings) without being sorry will suffer damnation.

Christians believe that a person achieves salvation in two ways. The first way is to follow Jesus’ teachings about living a moral (good) life. The second way is to participate in the sacraments—sacred ceremonies in which Christians experience the Holy Spirit. Some Christian groups practice as many as seven sacraments. However, all groups recognize baptism and communion to be sacraments. Baptism is the ceremony of introduction into Christianity. The ceremony re-creates Jesus’ own baptism in the River Jordan. Communion—commonly called the Lord’s Supper—re-creates Jesus’ breaking of bread and sharing of wine before His death, at the Last Supper.

Christianity requires that only people who are specially trained can carry out Christian teachings and ceremonies, and preside over (be in charge of) the sacraments. Christian ministers—also called priests or pastors—lead Christians in worship in holy buildings called churches. The most important service occurs on Sunday. During the worship service, Christians experience the sacraments, recite their basic beliefs, pray, and read from the Bible. The minister delivers a religious speech, or sermon, related to the Bible readings.

Christianity has three main groups, or sects: Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant. Followers of all three believe that God continues to reveal his teachings to the world. All Christian sects consider Jerusalem the holiest city because that is where they believe Christ died and rose from the dead.