

In the beginning there was a man, he called himself Jesus. He was born under some questionable circumstances. Anyway, his birth isn't really important, neither is his life for that matter, at least not to the early church. The important factor for the early church is Jesus' death, or rather his tendency not to stay that way for more than three days.

The early church never would have started if Jesus hadn't risen from the dead. Much of the preaching hinged on this very concept. This is probably because the average life expectancy of your average God at the time was, well, forever. And it would look really bad on the Christians' record if they had the son of God and he died after thirty some years. Besides, the idea had great salability; lets face it, Christianity is like the religious version of Tupperware: Keep the dead fresh.

So, Jesus had come back from the dead[£], and after he had finished some other business he was going to return and clean things up a bit. Unfortunately for the early Christians he didn't say when. And so they all packed up their bags and waited for his return. They really thought he would be back any minute.

First weeks went by, then months, then several years, and Jesus still didn't appear. Some of the Christians probably got together and conceded to the point that, well, Jesus wasn't showing up and maybe they had misinterpreted his words[§]. And so, they finally decided to move on, what with the boredom of sitting around twiddling their thumbs waiting for the second coming of some messiah with a really bad sense of timing. They decided to go out into the world to spread his word[†] and the misguided assumption that- hey! really! - he would be back any minute now; you could practically smell him.

The majority of the early Christians were Jewish, and the Jews weren't really into spreading much of anything. But once the religion hit the Gentiles, it spread like wild fire[‡]. It eventually spread throughout the world like a gaseous vapor dispersing into the atmosphere, slowly seeping into every corner and crevice. And eventually it snuck into the domain of the Roman Empire.

In the Big R.E. Gods grew like blades of grass. There was a veritable menu of Gods to choose from. Some were of course mere appetizers, but others were main courses to reckon with ("Yes, I'd like a double order of Serapis, hold the Isis."). Many say that Christianity had a tremendous impact on the fall of the Roman Empire. No offense meant to the Church, but fighting the Roman Empire at that time is much like getting into a fist fight with a man who has recently drunk half his weight in alcohol. He might injure you lightly as he accidentally keels over, but no matter how hard you hit him, he was on his way down anyway.

Early preachers were considered to be any member of the group who suddenly got possessed by the Holy Spirit. In fact, it was not uncommon for members of the group to spontaneously experience psychotic episodes during services, which seemed to be standard operating procedure for most of the respectable religions of the day. It was considered the highest order of religious experience[§]. Which, if true, probably means that the largest percentage of the world's holy men are presently confined to sanitariums, and which also adds more clout to the statement, "You've got to be crazy to believe in God."

The one idea that separated the early Christians from the Roman pagans was the idea of brotherly love, and non-violence which extended to all. This might tend to make one wonder what a "Christian Soldier" is. I'm pretty sure the Crusades were a bit more than just a bunch of men traveling all the way to the Holy Land to issue the occupants a stern warning. But with nonviolent affection like that, who needs a shot of Drano on the rocks chased by a hydrochloric enema?

[£] Perhaps the same is true of Elvis and actually many stars who die in their prime.

[§] Although he wasn't around long and he didn't leave a forwarding address.

[†] Even if they weren't quite sure what it meant.

[‡] Or like a bunch of Gentiles who have caught on fire.

[§] If you didn't keel over twitching and mumbling you didn't have enough faith.

