

# [Bede conversion of king edwin and the](https://assignbuster.com/bede-conversion-of-king-edwin-and-the/)

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Bede was trying to create a commonidentity and the notion of the ‘ same race’ so you could argue that this extractis presenting the ‘ common idenitity’ as Christianity. It is important to understand that theknowledge of this period is one which has been presented through clerics andmonks like St Bede. When examining the extract presented by Bede it is vital tounderstand the key issues that arise from the document itself. The presentationof ‘ religion’ throughout this extract affects our understanding as King Edwinwas said to have been a pagan and ‘ he remained a devout one for a great portionof his life’.

1Thisholds signifance as the spread of Christianity throughout Britain led many inbelieving that Christianity would answer questions that were ‘ unknown’. Thesource itself examines King Edwin’s conversion to Christianity. However, it canbe argued that even though Bede’s extract signifies the spread of Christianityis it questionable as to the extent at which people ‘ remained’ Christian as itwas said that many reverted back to ‘ paganism’. Bede’s document allows us tounderstand the importance of ‘ religion’ in particular the spread ofChristianity, as well as surfacing key problems like ‘ kingship’. Theconversion shows links to the ‘ top-down’ model and how the ‘ ruler used types ofpower to bring the conversion onto people’ 2thisis reflected through King Edwin in the Bede extract as he used his ‘ power’ toultimately lead the conversion of the kingdom of Northumbria. The extract allows you to recognize the stages that had ledto the conversion of King Edwin and the kingdom of Northumbria towardsChristianity.

The focal point of Bede’s extract begins with the narrative onthe meeting with the council. In which King Edwin had previously witnessed avision whereby the figure shadowed and could be argued to have been Pauilnus fromthis they had decided for a ‘ new doctrine’ and ‘ new worship’. A counterargument from another source has argued that within the extract Paulinus ofYork (missionary) had a lot of input in the conversion of King Edwin. Collins(1991) states ‘ Paulinius had accompanied the queen to Northumbria and began theconversion of the king’s followers’3, however, this contrasts with the extract as Bede presents Edwin to have broughtabout the conversion. It can therefore be argued that Paulinus’s inputultimately led to the spread and conversion of the Northumbrians as well as theKing. Bede has portrayed this an extract which unveils the spread of as well asgetting rid of previous pagan beliefs. The common questions that are raisedfrom this extract is that even though there was a spread of Christianity muchof the religious beliefs was resistance from pagans and many of which hadreverted back to paganism after the conversion of King Edwin. Many historiansincluding Barrow (2011) argued that, ‘ Ray Page has attacked Bede’s reliabilityas a source for Anglo-Saxon paganism’ 4and Jennings (2008) makes the point that Bede was a ‘ Christian monk with apolitical viewpoint, especially as regarding the lineage and legitimacy of hiscurrent royal dynasty and culture’.

5Bede’s extract has a number of reoccurring themes some ofwhich include the importance of religion and kingship during the Middle Ages. Rollason(2012) states that ‘ the clear implication is that their power, or at leasttheir military success was a grant of God’. The source portrays Bede’s views onEdwin’s Kingship as one which had been given by God as well as one whichincluded his authoritative role as ‘ King’. The importance of religion ishighlighted throughout as ‘ Bede’s conscious use of biblical parallels andreligious symbolism in the conversion accounts’ 6whichsignify the deeper meanings within the source. Bede’s ending of the extractreinforces the theme of ‘ religion’ with the reference of ‘ Casting into it aspear’. The (Longinus) Roman solider was said to have ‘ pierced Jesus in hisside with a lance’ 7this was significant as Coifi was echoing the action of the Roman soilder andthe way in which Coifi had pierced the shrine it was a way of allowing peopleinto the Christian faith and he had ultimately done the same for theNorthumbrians.

The focus on historical debateamongst historians focused on the extent at which Bede’s source of the EcclesiasticalHistory of the English people highlighted the spread of Christianity. Stafford2012 claims that ‘ Bede knew Christianity was displaced paganism as the officialreligion throughout these kingdoms’  8theextract reflects this belief as previous pagan ‘ idols’, ‘ alters’ and ‘ temples’all which represent a religious purpose are said to have been destroyed withChristianity replacing previous practises. The development of identity for theEnglish was formed by Bede as he created a common identity which can be arguedas ‘ Christianity’. When understanding the spread of Christianity during themiddle ages it is evidently clear by Collins (1991) who states that ‘ AngloSaxons kingdoms and all their inhabitants were pagan until the arrival of themission to Kent’ 9 suggesting that previously paganismhad been dominant, however this soon changed. Barrow (2011) argues that they’tended to concentrate on Bede’s Christian message’ 10andthe extract allows us to understand Bede’s portrayal of the spread of Christianityamongst the Northumbrian and King Edwin as well as enhancing the impact throughhis use to language as he ends the source with ‘ rejoicing in the knowledge ofthe worship of the true God’ suggesting the recognition of Christianity as wellas signifying the importance of King Edwin’s conversion and the impact amongstthe kingdom. The extract of Bede allows us tosummarise the extract as well as understand the spread of Christianity amongstthe kingdom within England.

Bede’s extract enables us to understand theimportant figures who played a significant role within the conversion of KingEdwin and the Northumbrians. The questions which are raised by this extract arethe extent at which the conversion to Christianity was regarded as a ‘ powerfulconversion’ as after the death of King Edwin many of the people were said tohave reverted back to paganism. This further questions whether the conversioncould be considered as a ‘ forced conversion’. Lastly, the understanding inwhich we gain from monks like Bede are questionable in understanding the’truth’ of this event as of these monks write from a Christian perspectivewhich could be argued to affect the overall source. 1 Mayr-Harting, Henry. The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England.

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