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Christian History Made Easy Participant Guide

7. Session 1 — The First Christians (AD 1-100)

This opening session argues that church history matters because the gospel is rooted in real historical events. It traces the first century of the church: how two events—the fire in Rome (AD 64) and the fall of Jerusalem (AD 70)—led Rome to see Christians as a separate, dangerous sect, and how believers held their faith through waves of persecution.

Key takeaways

- History matters for three reasons: the gospel is historical, understanding history helps us apply God's Word, and God's work spans more than our own generation.
- The first Christians were Jewish and saw faith in Jesus as the fulfillment of Israel's hopes; they still worshiped at the temple and kept Jewish customs.
- Nero was the first emperor to officially persecute Christians, blaming them for the AD 64 fire; Peter and Paul are believed martyred under him.
- Later emperors mattered too: Vespasian/Titus destroyed Jerusalem and the temple (AD 70); Domitian demanded worship as 'lord and god,' and Christians refused.

- Martyrs like Polycarp and Blandina met death with grace, joy, and forgiveness—turning persecution into witness.
- Apologists like Tertullian argued that hatred of Christians came from ignorance, and that understanding the faith turns enemies into disciples.

Passages worth keeping

“Eighty-six years I have served Christ, and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my king, the one who has saved me?”

Polycarp's steadfast refusal to deny Christ under threat of death.

How it connects

The chapter frames persecution not as defeat but as the very way the gospel spread—God present with his people, turning suffering into testimony.

Scripture referenced

- **Acts 2:14–36; 3:17–25** -- Peter's early sermons explaining Jesus as fulfillment of Israel's hope.
- **John 15:18–25** -- Jesus foretells the world's hatred and persecution of his followers.
- **1 Peter 4:12–16** -- Rejoice in sharing Christ's sufferings rather than being ashamed.

- **James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 1:6-9** -- God uses trials to strengthen and refine faith.