

**Jones, Timothy Paul**

Christian History Made Easy (Rose Bible Basics)

---

## **6. Who Were the Christians, Anyway?**

This chapter explains how, in the first century, followers of Jesus went from looking like a Jewish sect to being seen as a separate and dangerous group. It centers on two fires—Rome (AD 64) and Jerusalem (AD 70)—that pushed Christians and Jews apart and triggered waves of persecution. It then asks why Christianity kept growing even when believing could get you killed.

### **Key takeaways**

- At first Rome treated Christians as a Jewish sect, which offered legal cover. By AD 100 the two faiths were clearly separate groups.
- When Rome burned in AD 64, Nero blamed the Christians. He was the first emperor to publicly treat Christianity as its own religion—and to persecute it. Peter and Paul died in this period.
- Christians were disliked before the fire: they rejected all other gods, which Romans saw as arrogant and unpatriotic (sacrifices were thought to protect the empire).
- Their customs were misunderstood. Talk of eating Christ's 'body and blood' and calling each other 'brothers and sisters' led to false charges of cannibalism and incest.

- Christianity challenged the social order—welcoming slaves, women, and unwanted infants as equals—which offended Roman society.
- The Jewish revolt ended with Jerusalem's fall in AD 70 and the temple's destruction. Afterward people avoided odd sects, isolating Christians further.
- Later emperors (Domitian, Trajan) formalized persecution. 'Apologists' like Justin Martyr defended Christians as law-abiding, not criminals.
- The church grew because God met real human longings: for moral guidance, for personal worth (especially women and slaves), and for a personal relationship with a God who became flesh and suffered.

## 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 before his execution—the model of faithful witness under persecution.

*“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female.”*

Paul's words that Christians lived out, upending Roman social hierarchy.

## How it connects

The martyrs (Blandina, Sanctus, Polycarp) endured because they saw their own suffering reflected in the crucified Christ—faith held not by comfort but by union with a God who suffered first.

## Scripture referenced

- **Galatians 3:28** -- Equal worth of all people; basis for welcoming slaves and women
- **Deuteronomy 6:4; 1 Timothy 2:5** -- One God—why Christians rejected Roman gods
- **John 1:14** -- The Word became flesh; Justin's link between faith and philosophy
- **1 Peter 2:13-17** -- The believer's submission to the state, even under a hostile empire
- **Isaiah 53:3-7; Hebrews 2:17-18** -- A God who shares human suffering; strength for the martyrs