

The First Official Persecutions of the Early Church

A.D. 64-100 (REV25)

	First Persecution	Second Persecution
Date	July 19, A.D. 64	A.D. 95
Emperor	Nero	Domitian
Occasion	Fire of Rome	A tax to fund the construction of a new temple to Jupiter on the Capitoline Hill in Rome
Details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The fire lasted nine days and completely “gutted ten of the fourteen districts of the city, brought untold suffering to a population of about one million.”¹ • When some of Nero’s many enemies began circulating a (probably fictitious) rumor that he had started the fire himself, he shifted the blame to the misunderstood Christian community of Rome. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was originally aimed at the Jews who refused to pay a tax designed to construct the Temple. • Still seen as a n offshoot of Judaism, Christians also suffered. • In addition, Domitian insisted upon and enforced emperor worship. When the Christian community refused, they were viewed as treasonous.
Effect on the Early Church	“The penalty suffered by many of the supposed incendiaries was burning at the stake at night to light the gardens near Nero’s circus in the Vaticanus section of Rome. Some were crucified and others thrown to wild beasts or mad dogs.”	Believers suffered: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Martyrdom • Dispossession of property • Banishment
Effect on Apostles	Paul was martyred. Peter was martyred.	John was exiled to Patmos, where he received the Revelation.
Remarks	In this persecution, Christians were not punished for their beliefs, but for the crime of arson.	“It is not clear that John’s exile was instigated by the emperor, however; probably local opposition in the province of Asia was responsible for that.”

¹ Quotations from Howard Frederic Vos, *Exploring Church History*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1994, p.27.