Roman Persecutions of Early Christians

Dates	Emperor	Famous Martyrs, Other Comments
AD 64	Nero	Paul, Peter
c.90-96	Domitian (81-96)	Clement of Rome, John (exiled to Patmos)
98-117	Trajan	Ignatius, Symeon, Zozimus, Rufus
161-180	Marcus Aurelius	Polycarp; Justin Martyr
202-211	Septimus Severus	Irenaeus
235-236	Maximus the Thracian	
249-251	Decius (249-251)	*libelli* issued to those who sacrificed to Roman gods
257-260	Valerian (253-260)	Origen, Cyprian
303-311	Diocletian (284-305)	perhaps the most vicious of the Roman persecutions

Recommended for Further Reading:

Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church*
Robert Lewis Wilken, *The First 1000 Years*
Henry Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*
Paul Barnett, *Jesus and the Rise of Early Christianity*
S.M. Houghton, *Sketches from Church History*

If you have further questions or comments feel free to email me:

Core Seminars—Church History

Class 1: Early Church: Beginnings & Persecution (until AD 311)

"*…And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria,… Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word."* Acts 8: 1, 4

"Let us, therefore, hold steadfastly and unceasingly to our hope and the guarantee of our righteousness, who is Christ Jesus, who bore our sins in his own body upon the tree, who committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth; instead, for our sakes he endured all things, in order that we might live in him. Let us, therefore, become imitators of his patient endurance, and if we should suffer for the sake of his name, let us glorify him. For this is the example he set for us in his own person, and this is what we have believed." (Polycarp, *Letter to the Philippians*)

I. WHAT IS CHURCH HISTORY AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

A. God commands us to be students of the past

B. We are 'relatives' of those who came before us

C. "There is nothing new under the sun"

D. We should be humbled and encouraged

II. THE POLITICAL, CULTURAL, AND RELIGIOUS CONTEXT OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY

A. Judaism

B. The Roman Empire

C. Greek philosophy and religions

III. THE EXPANSION OF CHRISTIANITY

A. Roman empire sets the stage

B. Why did people become Christians?

IV. ROMAN PERSECUTIONS

A. Reasons for Persecution

B. Apostolic Martyrdom

-**Paul**: imprisoned under Nero, then beheaded in Rome
-**James the brother of John**: was beheaded by Herod (Acts 12:2)
-**Thomas**: shot with an arrow in India
-**Peter**: imprisoned under Nero, then crucified upside down in Rome
-**Simon the Zealot**: crucified in Africa
-**Mark**: founded the church in Egypt and was burned alive in Alexandria
-**Bartholomew**: beaten, crucified, and beheaded in Armenia
-**Andrew**: crucified in Ethiopia
-**Matthew**: killed with a spear in Ethiopia
-**Philip**: crucified and stoned in Greece
-**James the brother of Jesus**: ordered stoned by the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem
-**John the apostle**: exiled to Patmos, died of natural causes

C. Major Persecutions:

D. Galerius relents; the Church survives persecution. Can it survive acceptance?