

Persecution in the Early Church (1)

1. Martyrdom of Stephen (*Acts 6-7*)
2. Persecution of Christians in Rome by Nero (*Tacitus, Annales 15.38-44*)
3. Persecution of Christians in the Province (*Pliny the Younger, Letters 10.96-97*)

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1. Martyrdom of Stephen (*Acts 6-7*)

The book of the Acts of the Apostles was probably written between 60-70AD. It was written by Luke, who accompanied Paul of some of his mission trips. Paul was present at the martyrdom of Stephen, so possibly Paul was the direct source of information for Luke.

> **Read together** Acts 6.1-15 - the accusation

> **Discuss:** what was the exact accusation against Stephen? How would you have responded to such accusations?

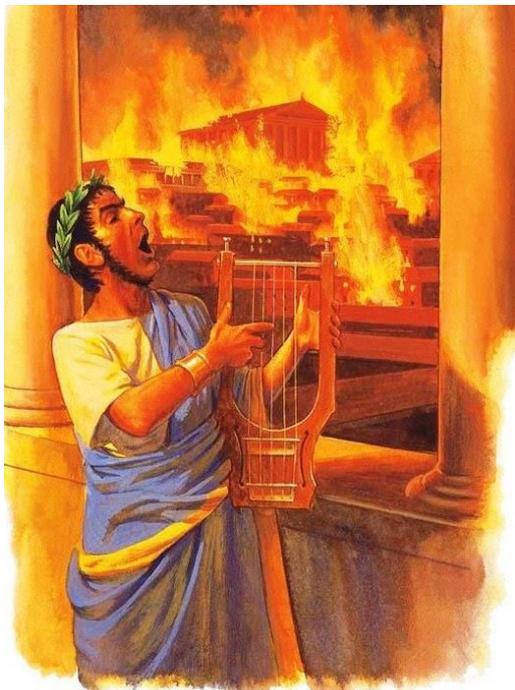
> **Read together** Acts 7:1-59 - the sermon by Stephen

> **Discuss:** How did Stephen respond to the accusation?

> **Discuss:** What do we learn from the vision and the prayer of Stephen?

2. Persecution of Christians in Rome by Nero (*Tacitus, Annales 15.38-44*)

Tacitus, a Roman Senator, wrote a valuable history of the Roman Empire; thanks to him we have a rather detailed description of why and how Nero persecuted the Christians in Rome. This persecution took place ca. 64 AD; Tacitus wrote this book about 50 years later.



Beside oral history, he most likely depended on Roman archival sources as well.

> **Read together** Tacitus, *Annales* 15.38-43 - The fire of Rome and what Nero did

> **Discuss:** Why was Nero being accused of having lit the fire?

> **Discuss** What were the steps Nero took in order to help the people?

> **Discuss:** Does Tacitus accuse Nero of being responsible for the fire?

> **Read together** Tacitus, *Annales* 15.44

> **Discuss:** What religious actions did Nero take?

> **Discuss:** What was the image of the Christians in Rome? Why?

> **Discuss:** Did Tacitus hold the Christians guilty?

3. Persecution of Christians in the Province (*Pliny the Younger, Letters 10.96-97*)

Pliny the Younger was governor of Pontus-Bythinia from 111-113AD. He corresponded with Emperor Trajan about many matters of state. One of those issues was how he was supposed to persecute the Christians. According to Pliny it was not reasonable.

> **Read together** the letter of *Pliny to Emperor Trajan*.

> **Discuss:** How does Pliny describe the Christians, their meetings, and the state of Christianity in his province?

> **Discuss:** What was Pliny's method of persecuting the Christians?

> What were the hesitations of Pliny?

> **Read together** *Trajan's Response to Pliny*

> **Discuss:** What advice did Trajan give?

> **Discuss:** What do you think of Trajan's 'liberal' approach?