

## 1 **The Early Church and Roman Persecution**

*"Hail, Lord of the Earth, Invincible, Power, Glory, Honor, Blessed, Great, Worthy art Thou to inherit the kingdom."*

Ancient inscription in praise of the emperor

## 2 **The Persecution of Emperor Nero, AD 64**

- A great fire burned most of Rome.
  - Nero likely started the fire.
  - He blamed Christians to deflect popular anger from himself.
  - Many Christians were arrested and killed.

## 3

- This was the first major persecution of Christians by Romans.
- It was typical of early persecutions in three ways.
  - Temporary
  - Local
  - Fueled by the hostility of pagans for Christians

## 4 **The Problem of Emperor Worship**

- The Roman government tolerated the religions of its conquered peoples as long as the emperor was worshipped.
  - "Always room for one more" in a polytheistic system.
  - Emperor worship was a way of promoting loyalty to the emperor and unity under him.

## 5

- Judaism was the only religion exempted from emperor worship.
  - At first, Christians were considered Jews, and also exempted.
  - Christians soon lost this exemption.
    - It became clear that they were distinct from Jews.
    - Jews were a closed group of limited size, while Christians sought converts and grew in numbers rapidly.
    - A fast-growing group refusing to worship the emperor seemed threatening.

## 6

- Christians' refusal to worship the emperor resulted in severe, though sporadic, persecution.
- Christians would not compromise on this point.
  - The emperor's claims were blasphemous.
  - Much of the Book of Revelation may be interpreted as describing the conflict between Christians and the satanic pride of the emperor.