

# Christian History Made Easy

*"Here you have a beautifully simple, beginner-friendly telling of Christian history, a precious heritage." —J.I. PACKER*

12 weeks to a  
better understanding  
of the key events  
and people  
every Christian  
should know



# Christian History Made Easy

## Leader Guide

*Timothy Paul Jones, PhD*

*Developed with Jennifer R. Garrison*

**This Leader Guide accompanies the**

*Christian History Made Easy* 12-session DVD-based study

(ISBN 9781596365254 or ISBN 9781596365261)

***and***

*Christian History Made Easy* Participant Guide

(ISBN 9781596365285)





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## About This Study

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“We have,” the author of Hebrews remarked, “so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us” (Heb. 12:1). The Apostles’ Creed echoes, “I believe ... in the communion of the saints.”

What these ancient words seem to suggest is that when Christians gather, it isn’t only the living that are present. In some way that transcends human understanding, the saints of the past are present too. Their presence around us points us toward Jesus Christ, “the author and perfecter of our faith” (Heb. 12:2). This cloud has grown far fuller since the first century AD, as millions who have embraced the gospel have faced death and found themselves “at home with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:8). Together, these many men and women form the history of Christianity—a vast and beautiful story that is, if you are a Christian, your story too!

Yet many Christians find it difficult to make sense of this story. The history of Christianity can seem overwhelming, confusing, even boring—but, in truth, this story is far from boring! The history of Christianity is the story of reformers and revivalists, martyrs and crusaders. It’s the true story of how the good news of Jesus has spread around the globe. It’s the story of God’s Spirit working through ordinary people in extraordinary ways. This story enables God’s people to read their Bibles better, to evaluate their beliefs more wisely, and to understand why other Christians do what they do. The purpose of this study is to introduce you to this exciting story in a way that anyone can understand and enjoy.

This study is designed for twelve 60-minute sessions with the video portion for each session lasting 25–35 minutes. The teaching time can be expanded to twelve 90-minute sessions by using the *Christian History Made Easy PowerPoint*® presentation or other study materials included in the *Christian History Made Easy Complete Kit*. (At the end of this Leader Guide there are suggestions for leading an additional session for groups that plan on meeting for thirteen weeks.)

Participant Guides for class members contain: session outlines to follow along with the video, key terms and definitions, charts, study questions and activities for further learning.

## About the Author

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### ***Dr. Timothy Paul Jones***

Timothy Paul Jones is a bestselling and award-winning author, scholar, and professor of leadership at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He has earned the Bachelor of Arts degree in biblical studies and pastoral ministry, the Master of Divinity with focus in history and New Testament, as well as the Doctor of Philosophy.

Dr. Jones has authored, coauthored, or contributed to more than a dozen books. He has also written numerous articles for popular ministry magazines and academic journals including *Discipleship Journal*, *Religious Education Journal*, *Christian Education Journal*, and *Perspectives in Religious Studies*. Dr. Jones has contributed to two highly-regarded reference works, *Nelson's Dictionary of Christianity* and *Nelson's New Christian Dictionary*. He has been the recipient of the Baker Book House Award, the North American Professors of Christian Education Scholastic Recognition Award, and the 2009 Retailers' Choice Award from *Christian Retailing* magazine.

Despite his strong academic pedigree, Dr. Jones has shown a unique ability to communicate in an appealing, accessible style through books such as the award-winning *Christian History Made Easy* and the best selling *The Da Vinci Codebreaker* (coauthored with James Garlow). Dr. Jones has been featured on Fox News and WGN, commenting on religious trends and topics. He is represented by Nappaland Literary Agency ([www.nappaland.com](http://www.nappaland.com)) and blogs at [www.timothypauljones.com](http://www.timothypauljones.com).

Dr. Jones resides in Louisville, Kentucky, with his wife Rayann and daughters Hannah and Skylar. Over the past two decades, he has had the privilege of serving as a pastor in several churches. In these contexts, he saw how learning about theology and church history could help Christians to flesh out their faith in amazing ways.

### ***Leader Guide developed with Jennifer R. Garrison***

Jennifer R. Garrison is adjunct instructor in the School of Theology at Campbellsville University. She has earned two master's degrees from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, one in Christian Education and the other in Ministry-Based Evangelism. She is also a candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Jennifer resides in Campbellsville, Kentucky, with her husband Shane and their two sons, Isaac and Ethan.

## Get the Complete DVD-Based Kit

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The Kit (ISBN 9781596365254) includes everything you need to teach *Christian History Made Easy* using professionally produced video sessions, leader and participant guides, and a PowerPoint® presentation.

The Kit includes:

- DVD with 12 video sessions
- One printed *Christian History Made Easy* participant guide (ISBN 9781596365285)
- One printed *Christian History Made Easy* leader guide (ISBN 9781596365278) + PDF leader guide
- One printed copy of the award-winning, full-color *Christian History Made Easy* handbook (ISBN 9781596363281)
- *Christian History Made Easy* PowerPoint® presentation on CD-ROM (ISBN 9781596363410)
- PDF files for posters, fliers, handouts, and bulletin inserts for promotion

***Available at [www.ChristianHistoryMadeEasy.com](http://www.ChristianHistoryMadeEasy.com) or [www.rose-publishing.com](http://www.rose-publishing.com) or by calling Rose Publishing at 1-800-532-4278. Also available wherever good Christian books are sold.***

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# SESSION I

## The First Christians

*AD 1–100*

Why on earth does history matter, anyway? History matters because it's the story of how God works among his people in his world!

In the first century AD, two specific historical events—a fire in Rome and the fall of Jerusalem—caused Christians to be seen as a separate and dangerous sect. Roman governors and emperors mocked Christians, threw them to the beasts, and burned them at the stake. Yet, no matter what anyone did, God remained present among his people, working at every turn to cause the gospel to spread through the testimony of the church.







## ***Session 1 Outline***

1. History matters because:
  - a. The gospel matters. The gospel is rooted in historical events.
  - b. God's Word matters. The better we understand history, the better we can apply God's Word.
  - c. God's work matters. History reminds us that God's work includes more than our own generation.
2. What happened after Acts 28?
  - a. Persecution after the fire in Rome, AD 64 (Nero)
  - b. Division after the fall of Jerusalem, AD 70 (Vespasian, Titus)
  - c. Deification of emperors in their lifetimes, AD 81–96 (Domitian)
  - d. Deepening persecution of Christians; Ignatius, Polycarp, and Blandina martyred.

## ***Roman Emperors***

Emperor	Reign	Description	Death
Nero	AD 54–68	The first part of his reign was peaceful, but in the second part he ordered the deaths of his chief advisors, many wealthy nobles, and even his own mother. When a massive fire in Rome struck in AD 64, he avoided culpability by blaming the Christians for it and ruthlessly persecuting them. Paul and Peter are believed to have been martyred during Nero's persecution.	Committed suicide
Vespasian	AD 69–79	Ruler after Nero who was instrumental in quelling a Jewish uprising in Jerusalem and eventually ordering his son Titus to destroy Jerusalem and the temple.	Died of illness
Titus	AD 79–81	One of Vespasian's sons, who as a military leader before becoming emperor, destroyed the temple in Jerusalem in AD 70.	Died of illness
Domitian	AD 81–96	Vespasian's youngest son, he is known for being the first emperor to demand the title "lord and god" of himself. (Traditionally, emperors were deified after their death.) He severely persecuted Christians in the later part of his reign.	Assassinated

## Before the Gathering

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- Obtain a *Christian History Made Easy* Participant Guide (ISBN 9781596365285) for each class member.
- In the *Christian History Made Easy* handbook, read the Introduction “Why Does Church History Matter?” and chapter 1.
- Preview the video segment Session 1 and PowerPoint® presentation chapter 1.
- Study Hebrews 11:1–12:2 and Revelation 22:13. Incorporate in your notes and discussion a few facts that you learned from this study.
- Complete the lesson in the Participant Guide for this session.
- If you will be using the video or PowerPoint® presentation, ensure that components are connected and tested beforehand.
- Pray for guidance as you lead this session.

## Goals for the Gathering

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Through this session, participants will be able to:

- Articulate the importance of learning about great individuals and historical movements that have brought Christians to their present place in history.
- Gain a new understanding of the “great cloud of witnesses” as this “cloud” continues to grow to include all who follow Jesus Christ.
- Examine their own lives and consider their role in the present church and how they will one day be identified among “the great cloud of witnesses.”

## Get Them Talking (10 minutes)

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Read Hebrews 11:1–12:2 and Revelation 22:13. Since the passage from Hebrews is lengthy, consider creative ways of looking at this text together, such as (1) organize your group into smaller groups of two or three and have each group read a small section of the passage; each group can then summarize for the whole group; (2) print the passage and read it aloud—responsively or in unison—as a group. Focus attention on Hebrews 12:1–2.

## Take a Closer Look (30 to 60 minutes)

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Watch the video segment for Session 1. (30 minutes)

Optional: Review the content of the video using the PowerPoint® presentation chapter 1. (30 minutes)

## Seek the Central Truth (15 minutes)

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The “great cloud of witnesses”! Who can be found in this number? After those included in the list of witnesses found in Hebrews 11, many other Christ-followers have been added. According to one tradition, Simon Peter felt unworthy of the honor of a death identical to that of Christ, and said, “I beg you executioners, crucify me thus, with the head downward and not otherwise.” His famous request to be crucified upside down was heard and represents an example of true humility and great love for his Savior.

Paul likewise died for the sake of Christ. Though his Roman citizenship likely kept him from death by crucifixion, he was martyred nonetheless. Paul, like Peter and many who have come after him, gave his life so the gospel could go forward. Their refusal to renounce Christ resulted in their death, but God used their faithfulness to expand the reach of the gospel.

Consider the following statements from history about Peter and Paul: “Peter, because of others’ unrighteous envy, endured not one or two, but numerous labors; and when he had at length suffered martyrdom, departed to the place of glory due to him.... Paul also obtained the reward of patient endurance, after being seven times thrown into captivity, compelled to flee, and stoned. After preaching both in the east and west, he gained the illustrious reputation due to his faith, having taught righteousness to the whole world, and come to the extreme limit of the west, and suffered martyrdom under the prefects” (Clement, *To the Corinthians*, 5).

Peter and Paul are only two examples of Christ-followers who now stand among the “great cloud of witnesses.” Their great love for Christ drove them to great sacrifice. And great as their sacrifices were, they were still incomparable to the greatest sacrifice of all, given by Jesus Christ.

## Wrap It Up (5 minutes)

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End your time together with a prayer similar to this one: “God, we thank you for the men and women of history who make up the great cloud of witnesses. Thank you for leaving to us a record of their example. Help us to examine our own lives and to respond faithfully to the goodness you have shown us in Jesus Christ. Work in us to press the gospel forward in our everyday lives, as so many have done who have come before us. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.”

Strongly encourage class members to complete the Participant Guide activities for this week (Session 1).

Optional: Obtain a prayer update from ministries that serve persecuted Christians, for example, Voice of the Martyrs [www.persecution.com](http://www.persecution.com) or Open Doors [www.opendoorsusa.org](http://www.opendoorsusa.org). Remind participants that Christianity is not Western, Eastern, or American—it’s a global faith. Praying for persecuted Christians is one of the most powerful things we can do for our brothers and sisters around the world—and it’s the number one thing persecuted believers ask for! Pray together as a group or, if time is short, ask participants to commit to praying at least once in the coming week for a specific region or country where Christians face persecution.

## Work Together

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Sacrificial living and giving is a common thread that runs throughout Scripture and church history. Sacrifice your time and energy this week by serving as a group in your church or community to honor those who have gone on before. Take time to walk through your church or community cemetery, cleaning and straightening as needed. Select one or more graves of individuals with living relatives that are still part of your church or community to decorate with flowers or plants. Discuss the spiritual heritage that the individual has left to your community. Reach out to the individual’s living relatives, and communicate to them how that person has impacted you, your church, or your community.