SESSION 3

Rome Resists the Gospel

DAYLIGHT PREVIEW

Fearing the Baby; Fearing the Man

We are all familiar with Herod's fear of Jesus. The Roman ruler, who had been assigned the outpost of Israel as his jurisdiction, was so fearful of this baby that he tried to have Him killed. But the opposition did not end with Herod. It continued for many years after Jesus' resurrection and ascension when His followers found their way to Rome—the home of much cruelty, as seen in the gladiatorial games. And it was in the face of much cruelty and opposition that Christians first spread the gospel, some at the cost of their lives. First, the king feared the baby, and later, the people feared the Man.

COME TOGETHER

Icebreaker Questions

1 Joe Stowell begins this session in Bethlehem by talking about Jesus' birth. What do you like the most—and the least—about Christmas?

2. Chariot racing was all the rage in ancient Rome. Since it was quite dangerous, auto racing might be the closest modern equivalent. How excited do you get about auto racing? Do you have a favorite driver?

3. The gladiatorial games were the other big sport in Rome. For you, what sport or athletic activity seems the closest thing to that today?

FINDING DAYLIGHT

Experience the Video

Feel free to jot down Video Notes as you watch the presentation by Joe Stowell. Use the space below for those notes.

VIDEO NOTES

The appointed time

Israel on the fringe

Bethlehem

Tension in Rome

Jesus and the disciples

Circus Maximus

Spectator sports

More cruelty was coming

Hope for believers

Heavy price to pay

Conflict between Christians and Rome

Discussion Time

DISCOVER GOD'S WORD

Discussion/Application Questions

1. **Joe Stowell notes that God, in His "appointed time," sent His Son to be born into the midst of a bustling, powerful, pagan Roman Empire—in a stable in Bethlehem. And immediately the coming of God's Son created tension for the leaders of Rome. Read about that in Matthew 2:1–18.**

   Herod, also known as Herod the Great, was the first of many rulers from his family line who were referred to as "Herod." Though not an ethnic Jew, he was appointed king of Judea by the Roman Senate in 40 BC and died shortly after Jesus was born (see Matthew 2:19).

   a. What motivated Herod to take such horrific action in Bethlehem?

   b. How much would God's plan for Jesus—and Jesus himself—be deterred by such actions?

2. **How do you suppose the citizens of the Roman Empire could justify the violence, including the taking of life, that was part of the games at stadiums like the Circus Maximus?**

3. **Is such bloodlust totally foreign to our world today?**

4. **Joe notes that generally Rome was one of the most tolerant and inclusive religious empires in the history of the world.**

   Why, then, did Rome see this small Jewish spin-off as a troublesome, and even potentially dangerous, sect?

5. **Joe points out that nothing could be further from the truth, as the apostle Peter demonstrated in his letter to Christians who were beginning to suffer persecution. Read 1 Peter 2:13–17.**

   Some Bible translations have "king" in verses 13 and 17, while others have "emperor." Peter was no doubt thinking of Nero, the emperor at the time.

   How do Peter's words speak to the perception that Christians were a threat to the empire?

6. **The letter to the Hebrews, written by an unidentified author, was likely written not long after Peter wrote 1 Peter. Read Hebrews 10:32–34, a passage dealing with the readers' persecution.**

   How would this public persecution actually open the hearts of people to the message of these early Christians?

7. **In the last two sessions, Joe has shared how Jesus came at just the right time in history. Read Galatians 4:4–5 with that in mind.**

   When we put together what we've learned in the last two sessions in regard to the world situation at the time of Jesus' birth and the ensuing "birth" of the church, how does it reinforce Paul's insight that "the time had fully come" (Galatians 4:4)?

BRINGING IT HOME

First Peter 2:13–17 tells us to submit to governing authorities, showing them honor and respect.

How hard is it for you to have that kind of attitude toward politicians and governing authorities?

DAYLIGHT ON PRAYER

Spending Time with God

1. Read 1 Peter 2:17 again and pray for yourself and each other to have the attitude that this passage calls us to have toward God, fellow believers, and governing authorities.

2. Do you have any prayer requests to share with the group?

DAYLIGHT AHEAD

Still in Rome, Joe Stowell visits a church to view and discuss a painting called *The Calling of St. Matthew.* As he describes the painting, he discusses Jesus' selection of people like Matthew—a hated tax collector—and he wonders why this kind of person was who Jesus wanted. And why Peter, the hot-headed impetuous one? But these are the ways of Jesus, the Man with the revolutionary way of thinking and the One who knew exactly what He was doing. There is an art lesson in Session 4—one we can all learn from.