

Discussion Guide
for

AN EMPIRE CONQUERED

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DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR
An Empire Conquered

Background

An Empire Conquered is a moving docu-drama filmed on location in the “eternal city,” Rome. This film brings to life the intriguing days of early Rome, when the power of the *Pax Romana* was unchallenged throughout the known Western World. In the three hundred years that followed the reign of the all powerful Octavian Augustus, who died in 14 A.D., Rome was confronted by a controversial religion known as Christianity. Infiltrating even the ranks of the imperial household and the powerful Roman Senate, the followers of Christ, though cruelly persecuted and martyred for their beliefs, eventually won over the entire Roman Empire to their faith.

This documentary tells a part of the story of those early martyrs. It looks at five such Christians who lived in Rome during those turbulent years. These were martyrs who were willing to make the ultimate sacrifice of their lives rather than deny their faith.

Great pains were taken to verify the facts presented in this docu-drama. The details of each of the martyr’s lives were compared with a number of sources, including church records and archaeological data. Conflicting or questionable data was eliminated. Special efforts were taken in the details of the production design, including wardrobe and props. Experts were present at all locations to ensure the historical accuracy during each step of the production. Through special arrangements with the Italian government, hard to attain permits were granted to shoot on locations that are usually off limits.

Discussion Questions

AUGUSTUS:

Octavian Augustus was the most powerful Roman Emperor of all time. His *Pax Romana* established relative peace throughout the Western World. Why was this an ideal time for the spread of Christianity?

In the legend of Augustus' visit to the sorceress, why do you think he had her killed after she did what he asked?

Do you think Octavian considered that the "Palestinian King" would militarily conquer Rome?

Reflect: The religious and political leaders in Palestine also misunderstood Christ's kingdom. Have there been times in your own life when you have misunderstood what God was doing? Have you found times when your faith has been misunderstood or resented by others? Are we sometimes looking for external circumstances to change, when instead God wants to change our heart?

CLEMENT:

It's quite possible that St. Clement, the fourth bishop of Rome and a disciple of St. Peter, was actually a slave. What does that suggest about the social structure of the Early Church?

The jealous husband's assertion that his wife was involved in an adulteress affair or worse yet, an orgy, was actually a common rumor spread about Early Church activities. What are some of the misconceptions about the Church today?

Reflect: The jealous husband's physical blindness reflected his spiritual blindness as well. Do our physical ailments sometimes reflect our spiritual maladies? How can prayer help?

CECILIA:

Stories of many martyrs surviving cruel tortures and multiple execution attempts are numerous. In the case of St. Cecilia what purpose would God have possibly had for allowing her to live three days after the soldier's attempt to decapitate her?

As the patron saint of music and musicians, St. Cecilia exemplifies someone who used her talents to tell others about the love of Christ. What talents do you have that could be used to glorify God?

Reflect: In spite of her impending death, St. Cecilia continued as a vital witness for the validity of faith in Jesus Christ. How effective are you at laying aside your own pain to help someone else who needs to hear words of encouragement?

APOLLONIUS:

Saint Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 1:18 *“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”* How does the Roman Senate’s response to Apollonius’ testimony exemplify this passage?

What do you think was his most compelling argument for his faith in Jesus Christ?

Reflect: Apollonius states very eloquently that even if Christianity was proved to be false, he would gladly follow this teaching that instructed men how to lead such “good lives while we wait in the hope of the future.” If you were on trial for your faith, would there be enough evidence from your “good life” to convict you?

AGNES:

Perhaps the most heinous policy of the Roman government was that of taking children away from Christian parents and executing them for the parents’ refusal to sacrifice to the Emperor. Why do you think they adopted this policy? What does it say about the Romans’ value of life?

St. Agnes was first taken to a brothel where she was supposed to be raped by the young men who frequented the establishment. What message did the government hope to send to the Christians with this policy?

Reflect: For many Christians the thought of losing a loved one, particularly a child, is extremely painful. However, Jesus says very clearly in the Gospels, *“Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me;”* (Matthew 10:37). Have you given your loved ones into the care of Jesus?

Additional Resources

The Early Church is a vast but little known treasure for the Christian church. If you found this program of interest and value, we would commend to you other Early Church resources from Gateway Films/Vision Video.

A.D.

This is a six-hour adaptation of the original Vincenzo LaBella (producer of *Jesus of Nazareth*, *Marco Polo*, etc.) production of twelve hours shown repeatedly on nationwide television. The contents cover the material contained in the Book of Acts. This is a dramatic series with an all-star cast. The contents follow the Biblical accounts quite faithfully. This is an excellent resource for the study of the Early Church in its Jewish and Roman setting. The program comes with a 52-page leader and discussion guide that provides a format for a 12-week study series.

From Christ to Constantine: The Trial and Testimony of the Early Church

This is a series of six half-hour video programs that comes with a complete curriculum for six or twelve sessions. The curriculum also includes a leader's guide, reproducible student worksheets, and a full color companion book.

The six video programs cover

- (1) **Foundations:** What happened to the twelve apostles?
- (2) **Spread:** The Word was for all. An impossible task. How did they bring their message to the world?
- (3) **Accusation:** Believers were subject to many charges, some outrageously false and others true.
- (4) **Persecutions:** The mightiest empire in history outlawed them and persecuted them. What happened and why?
- (5) **Testimony:** A close-up look at heroes who would pay with their lives rather than deny their faith.
- (6) **Transition:** Constantine granted the church legality and favor. Was this a bane or blessing? Why did the church succeed?

This series has won several noteworthy awards including Houston Film Festival, Columbus Film Festival, CINE Golden Eagle, Religion in Media—Angel Award.
