

The World is Divided

Bible Glossary, People & Places

Rome

Sermon Reference

Rome serves as the backdrop for the sermon series, emphasizing its historical significance as the center of the known world during the time of Jesus Christ and the early Apostles.

Background Context

Rome, the epicenter of the Roman Empire, stood as the pinnacle of ancient civilization's sophistication, power, and influence. In a burgeoning metropolitan landscape, the Roman Forum lay at its heart, where influential decisions molded the course of history, and where the Senate convened to deliberate the empire's fate. The city's foundations date back to the mythical brothers Romulus and Remus, with Romulus traditionally credited as Rome's founder in 753 BC. As the republic blossomed, Rome's domains expanded, absorbing cultures and peoples — willingly or otherwise — under its dominion.

During the Imperial period, the city witnessed the rise and fall of powerful figures such as Julius Caesar and Augustus, who redefined the boundaries of power within the Roman system. Christianity, initially a fringe movement, found a foothold here and grew despite periods of brutal persecution. Over time, Rome became a key center for the Christian Church, with Peter and Paul, apostles of Jesus Christ, both said to have been martyred within its walls. The eventual official embrace of Christianity under Emperor Constantine in the 4th century had profound ramifications for the religion's development and spread.

The Forum, a bustling hub of commerce, law, and governance, gradually lost its secular significance as Rome's political center shifted. With the Western Empire's decline and eventual fall in 476 AD, Rome's grandeur faded, and the Forum fell into disrepair, its once-magnificent structures crumbling with the passage of centuries. In the Middle Ages, the site was even relegated to agricultural use, earning the moniker 'Campo Vaccino' or Cow Field, a stark symbol of the empire's faded glory.

Today, Rome's ruins stand as a testament to the empire's former might and as an archaeological treasure trove. Its history serves as a rich tapestry for theological reflection on power, division, and the Christian mandate for peacemaking, as reflected in the sermon. In modern times, Rome remains a vital cultural symbol and a center of Christian pilgrimage, the Vatican City nestled within its bounds, housing the papacy and St. Peter's Basilica.

Importance in the Bible

Rome's importance in the Bible is multifaceted. It was the political and cultural hub of the Empire during the spread of Christianity, the location of the martyrdom of key apostles, and also served as a metaphor in the early Christian texts for worldly power and governance. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, a foundational text of Christian doctrine, illustrates the complexities of Christian life within the larger Roman society. Additionally, the city's transformation from a pagan capital to a Christian stronghold speaks volumes about the faith's growth and the ways in which the Gospel message permeated and influenced the dominant powers of the time.

Roman Forum

Sermon Reference

The Roman Forum is highlighted as the historical site of political and judicial power where decisions affecting the ancient world were made, setting the stage for discussions of division and unity within the context of the sermon.

Background Context

The Roman Forum was the pulsing heart of ancient Rome, a plaza bordered by the ruins of several important ancient government buildings. It was the central square where the life of the Roman citizens played out. Political activities, legal proceedings, and public speeches, as well as commercial affairs, took place within this influential district. Over centuries, from the time of the Republic through to the Empire, the Forum expanded and was adorned with temples, basilicas, and vibrant public spaces, symbolizing the might of Rome.

Notable structures within the Forum included the Senate House, or Curia, where senators convened to discuss and direct the Republic and later the Empire. Processions and triumphs, marking the victories of Roman generals, paraded through the Forum, further cementing its role as a stage where Rome's narrative was celebrated and enshrined. Religious rites and festivals were also a fixture within the Forum, showcasing the polytheistic tapestry that predated Christianity's establishment as Rome's official religion.

As Rome's dominance waned, the Forum mirrored the Empire's fortunes. The sackings by Visigoths and Vandals during the 5th century and the subsequent decline of centralized power left the Forum abandoned to the elements and the ravages of time. The area became known for its ruins rather than its once-stately edifices. Centuries later, during the Renaissance, interest in the Forum's history and preservation rekindled, marking the beginnings of modern archaeology and a deeper appreciation for Rome's imperial past.

The Forum's role as a civic center ended long before Christianity's rise to prominence, yet its ruins and memory continued to influence the cultural and political landscape of Europe. During the time of the early Church, the Forum represented the old order, the ways of life that Christianity was set to challenge and transform. Its transformation from a vibrant center of human achievement to a forgotten relic mirrors the sermon's narrative of division and the potential for restoration through God's intervention.

Importance in the Bible

The Roman Forum itself is not directly mentioned in the Biblical texts, but as a representative of the power and governance of ancient Rome, it provides a backdrop against which the New Testament events unfold. It symbolizes the authority that early Christians navigated as they spread the Gospel. The Roman authority and its institutions were integral to the context of the New Testament, especially as they related to the persecution of Christians, the missionary journeys of Paul, and the spread of Christian communities throughout the Roman Empire.

Babel

Sermon Reference

Babel is presented as a counterpoint to Pentecost in the sermon. The division and confusion that resulted from the events at Babel are contrasted with the unity and clarity brought by the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

Background Context

The Tower of Babel, a narrative found in Genesis 11:1-9, recounts a time when humanity spoke a single language and sought to build a tower reaching the heavens. The story serves as an etiological myth explaining the origin of multiple languages. It was a collective human endeavor to achieve greatness and prevent dispersion across the earth. The tower's construction was driven by a desire for fame and a refusal to obey God's command to spread out and populate the earth.

According to the narrative, God, observing humanity's actions, decided to confound their language and scatter them across the earth to halt the project. This divine intervention created linguistic diversity, hindering the builders' cooperation and causing them to abandon the tower. The site became known as Babel, which in Hebrew is associated with confusion; this wordplay reflects the outcome of their efforts—as a place where God mixed the speech of the world.

In historical context, Babel has been associated with various Mesopotamian ziggurats, particularly in the region of Babylon. These massive step-towers were both religious and cultural symbols of Mesopotamian cities. The narrative of Babel thus not only illustrates themes of pride, disobedience, and human limitation, but also reflects a broader awareness of Near Eastern culture within the ancient Israelite worldview.

Theologically, Babel's story has been interpreted as a cautionary tale against hubris and the pursuit of human glory apart from divine will. It's a pivotal moment in the Biblical narrative that sets the stage for the subsequent stories of Abraham and the founding of a distinct people through whom God would reveal His purpose. Babel's disunity contrasts with later Biblical themes of redemption and reconciliation, ultimately pointing forward to the reconciliatory work of Jesus Christ and the unity among believers as exemplified at Pentecost.

Importance in the Bible

The Tower of Babel story is critical for understanding the Bible's perspective on human pride, divine sovereignty, and the fragmentation of human societies. It illustrates the pitfalls of human

ambition without adherence to divine guidance and sets the narrative stage for God's intervention in human history through a chosen lineage, nation, and ultimately, Jesus Christ. It demonstrates the human condition's need for the redemptive work found in the Gospel, which transcends language and cultural barriers to unite believers in Christ.

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