

Against Antisemitism (Auschwitz)

Bible Glossary, People & Places

Abraham

Sermon Reference

Genesis chapter 12 verses 1-3 - The blessing to Abraham constitutes a focal point of the sermon.

Background Context

Abraham, formerly Abram, stands as a monumental figure in biblical history. His story unfolds in Genesis, beginning from chapter 11. Originally from Ur of the Chaldeans, he is called by God to leave his country, his people, and his father's household for a land that God would show him. Abraham's journey of faith, including the trials and triumphs, forms the bedrock of his identity and legacy, earning him the title 'father of many nations' and 'friend of God'. His faith was credited to him as righteousness, setting a precedent for the righteousness that comes by faith. The significance of Abraham stretches beyond the physical heritage of the Jewish people; it encompasses spiritual dimensions affecting all humankind. As a patriarch, his life events are not merely historical accounts but also typological foreshadows of Christ's sacrificial work and the inclusion of gentiles into the promise of faith. His willingness to sacrifice Isaac, upon God's command, parallels the Father's sacrifice of His Son, Jesus. The covenant established with Abraham had both immediate implications for his offspring and eternal implications that reached forward to the redemptive work of Christ. Through Abraham's lineage, according to both the flesh and the spirit, comes the Messiah, Jesus Christ, fulfilling the promise that through Abraham's seed, all nations of the earth would be blessed.

Importance in the Bible

Abraham is revered as the progenitor of the Jewish people and a pivotal ancestor in the lineage of Jesus Christ. His legacy of faith transcends time, serving as a perpetual testament to unconditional trust in God's promises. The Abrahamic covenant outlined in Genesis 12:1-3 establishes a framework for understanding God's unfolding plan of salvation and the role of faith in inheriting the promises of God. The concept of 'blessing and cursing' relative to Abraham's descendants becomes central to the message of the sermon and to the Christian imperative to bless and not curse the Jewish people.

Pharaoh

Sermon Reference

Pharaoh's oppression of the Israelites and order to kill Hebrew male infants as an example of ancient anti-Semitism.

Background Context

The title 'Pharaoh' in biblical text refers to the ruling monarchs of ancient Egypt, with several pharaohs mentioned throughout the scriptural narrative. The most significant and infamous Pharaoh concerning the history of the Israelites is the unnamed king during the time of Moses, recorded in the book of Exodus. This Pharaoh's hard-heartedness and his subsequent encounters with Moses place him in stark opposition to the God of Israel. His refusal to let the Israelite slaves go, despite the devastating plagues that ravaged Egypt, became emblematic of defiance against divine will. The socio-political atmosphere under this Pharaoh was one of severe oppression and brutality towards the Israelites. The exponential growth of the Israelite population incited fear in the Egyptians, leading Pharaoh to implement harsh slave labor and ultimately, the genocide of Hebrew male infants. This decree of infanticide is a poignant example of historical anti-Semitism within scripture and showcases the themes of persecution and deliverance that are central to Jewish identity. It also sets the scene for God's dramatic intervention in the lives of His chosen people and the archetype of deliverance that recurs throughout biblical and salvation history.

The exodus led by Moses, following Pharaoh's capitulation, underscores the theme of liberation and serves as a foundational event in the collective memory of the Jewish people. It foreshadows the greater spiritual liberation through Christ who leads His people out of the bondage of sin. In a wider historical sense, Pharaoh becomes the archetypal oppressor, embodying the forces of evil that rise against God's purposes. The subsequent drowning of Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea serves as a testament to God's judgment against oppressors and a warning to all who would seek to harm God's people. The story of Pharaoh is thus a cautionary tale, illustrating the futility of resisting God's sovereign will and the inevitable downfall of those who oppress His chosen.

Importance in the Bible

Pharaoh is a crucial figure in biblical theology, representing the antithesis of godly leadership and the ultimate failure of secular power against divine authority. The liberation from Pharaoh's grip is not only vital to Israelite history but also carries salvific echoes throughout scripture as a symbol of God's redemptive power. This narrative becomes a touchstone for the Jewish understanding of persecution and deliverance, as well as a foreshadow of the ultimate deliverance offered through Christ. Pharaoh's story demonstrates the seriousness of God's warning to bless rather than curse the descendants of Abraham.

Haman

Sermon Reference

Haman's plot to destroy the Jews in Persia as a historical example of anti-Semitism.

Background Context

Haman the Agagite, a significant antagonist within the biblical book of Esther, is notorious for his scheme to annihilate the Jewish people in the Persian Empire. Elevated to a position of high rank by King Xerxes, Haman becomes incensed when Mordecai, a Jew, refuses to bow to him out of reverence solely for God. Haman's pride and subsequent wrath lead him to devise a plot not only to kill Mordecai but to exterminate all Jews throughout the empire. His actions underscore a recurring theme in Scripture and human history: the enmity against the Jewish people and the peril it brings to their existence.

The narrative of Haman takes place in a context where the Jewish people are living in diaspora, dispersed across a vast empire and subject to the whims of rulers and statesmen. The vulnerability of the Jews in this foreign environment amplifies the significance of Haman's plot, which, if successful, could have led to the genocide of the Jewish population. The casting of lots, or 'Purim,' to determine the date of this planned annihilation gives the name to the Jewish festival that commemorates the subsequent deliverance. Haman's conspiracy, however, is thwarted by the courageous actions of Esther, the Jewish queen, and Mordecai, demonstrating that God's providential care extends to His people, even in exile. The reversal of fortunes—that Haman intended for the Jews becomes his own fate, as he is executed on the gallows he constructed for Mordecai. This dramatic turn of events is celebrated annually at Purim, reinforcing the deliverance theme that is central to the Jewish and Christian faiths. Haman's historical role as a persecutor of the Jews contributes to the broader tapestry of salvation history. It highlights the persistent existence of evil that seeks to destroy God's chosen but ultimately fails.

Importance in the Bible

The account of Haman is paramount in both Jewish tradition and Christian understanding of God's protective love for His people. It exemplifies the enduring truth that God stands with the Jews, evident through His intervention in perilous times. Haman becomes a literary and historical touchstone for anti-Semitic evil, with his story reinforcing the biblical admonition to bless rather than curse the seed of Abraham and to recognize that opposition to God's people will not ultimately prevail.

Herod

Sermon Reference

King Herod's massacre of male infants in Bethlehem as a New Testament example of anti-Semitism.

Background Context

King Herod, also known as Herod the Great, is a ruler of Judea at the time of Jesus Christ's birth, as detailed in the Gospel of Matthew. His reign is marked by considerable political savvy, extensive building projects, and a ruthless desire to maintain power. The biblical account of Herod's reaction to the news of the birth of a new 'king of the Jews' reveals his tyrannical character. Unsettled by the prophecy of a forthcoming Messiah and the visitation of the Magi, Herod initiates the tragic 'Massacre of the Innocents' in Bethlehem — a brutal attempt to kill the infant Jesus.

The event of Herod's massacre is an early instance of New Testament anti-Semitism, with the aim of preventing the rise of a Jewish Messiah who was foretold to become the king of the Jews. Historically, Herod's rule is situated within the Roman Empire's framework, where local client kings like Herod held tenuous positions of authority under the oversight of Roman governance. Herod's paranoid and violent response to Jesus' birth signals the inherent threat the Messiah posed to established political structures. In a theological sense, Herod is a figure who contrasts sharply with the humility and divine mission of Jesus. His determination to destroy Jesus, thereby undermining God's redemptive plan, parallels the broader resistance against God's unfolding salvation history.

Importance in the Bible

King Herod's place in biblical narrative offers a sobering reflection on the lengths to which human authority will go to preserve power in the face of God's purposes. His attempt to kill Jesus reflects the broader hostility towards the Jews and God's Messiah, fulfilling prophecies of suffering and persecution. The Massacre of the Innocents is a poignant example of God's sovereign will to preserve the line of Abraham and ensure the unfolding of His plan of salvation, aligning with the sermon's theme of standing against all forms of anti-Semitism.

Auschwitz Birkenau

Sermon Reference

The primary location that anchors the discussion of anti-Semitism and the critical need to stand against it.

Background Context

Auschwitz Birkenau, also known as Auschwitz II, stands as the most infamous of the Nazi extermination camps. Located in Poland, it was established by the Nazi regime during World War II and became central to their 'Final Solution' — the plan to exterminate the Jewish people. The camp symbolizes the epitome of human cruelty, dehumanization, and the horrors of the Holocaust. Its construction began in 1941, and over the course of its operation, it is estimated that 1.1 million people were killed, with Jews constituting the vast majority of the victims. The site included various sections, such as labor camps, gas chambers, and crematoria where mass murders were systematically carried out. The selection process upon arrival, conducted by Nazi doctors, determined who would be immediately killed immediately and who would be subjected to grueling forced labor until death.

The scale and efficiency of the genocide perpetuated at Auschwitz have made it a lasting symbol of the Holocaust's atrocity and the profound suffering endured by the Jewish people and other victim groups. Auschwitz Birkenau now serves a poignant educational site that teaches future generations about the dangers of unchecked hatred, prejudice, and the consequences of anti-Semitism. The barracks, ruins of gas chambers, and personal artifacts of victims at the memorial site offer a solemn testament to the lives tragically lost and the necessity of preserving memory to prevent the recurrence of such evil. Historically, Auschwitz Birkenau represents the systematic and industrialized nature of the Nazi genocide, distinguishing it from prior forms of persecution faced by Jews throughout history.

The camp's role in the Holocaust profoundly impacted the post-war world, leading to a reevaluation of human rights and international law, and it played a part in garnering support for the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. It remains a powerful emblem of the need to vigilantly counter anti-Semitism and to uphold God's mandate to bless the descendants of Abraham.

Importance in the Bible

While Auschwitz Birkenau is not mentioned in the Bible, its significance in the sermon relates directly to the scriptural mandate to stand against evil and to support the Jewish people. The atrocities committed here serve as a stark reminder of the destructive capabilities of anti-Semitism and the need for Christians to oppose such hatred in all its forms. The call to remember and to learn from the Holocaust is aligned with the biblical principle of seeking justice and the obligation to love and defend those who are persecuted, as the prophets and Christ Himself taught.

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