

Responding Rightly

Bible Glossary: People & Places

Auschwitz-Birkenau

Sermon Reference

Auschwitz-Birkenau, the site of horrific atrocities during the Holocaust, serves as the backdrop for a discussion on the Christian response to the Jewish people.

Background Context

Auschwitz-Birkenau, located in modern-day Poland, stands as a symbol of one of the gravest tragedies in human history—the Holocaust. Built originally as a concentration camp and later used for mass extermination, Auschwitz was the largest of the Nazi German death camps. It was a complex with multiple sites, including Auschwitz I, the main camp, and Auschwitz II, also known as Birkenau. The camp was operational from 1940 until it was liberated by the Soviet Army on January 27, 1945. Over this period, it is estimated that 1.1 million people were killed here, with the vast majority being Jews. The name 'Auschwitz' has become synonymous with the Holocaust, a term derived from the Greek word 'holókauston', which originally referred to a burnt animal sacrifice offered to a god.

Auschwitz's role during the Holocaust was multi-faceted. It was a place of forced labor, a center of medical experimentation led by figures such as Dr. Josef Mengele, and a site of systematic and industrialized murder. The scale and efficiency of the atrocities committed at Auschwitz represented the zenith of Nazi Germany's 'Final Solution to the Jewish Question', a state-sponsored plan for the annihilation of the Jewish people. The camp itself comprised a vast network of gas chambers, crematoria, barracks, and torture facilities. Its infrastructure facilitated the execution of genocide with chilling precision and led to the loss of millions of lives.

The historical significance of Auschwitz in the context of the Jewish people is immeasurable. It stands as a testament to the resilience and suffering of a community that faced near obliteration. Moreover, it highlights the dangers of unchecked hatred, bigotry, and ideological extremism. The memory of Auschwitz serves as a haunting reminder to humanity of the depths of depravity possible when human dignity is stripped away and when people are treated as lesser beings. The international community, in response to the Holocaust, ratified the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in 1948, aiming to prevent such events from ever happening again.

In the aftermath of World War II, Auschwitz and the Holocaust became driving forces behind the movement for the establishment of a Jewish state in the historical land of Israel. This movement, known as Zionism, was propelled forward by the international community's recognition of the

need for a homeland where the Jewish people could live in security and self-determination. The State of Israel was declared in 1948, and since its inception, the memory of the Holocaust has been a central component of its national identity and ethos, representing both the horror of the past and the hope for a future free from such persecution.

Importance in the Bible

While events like the Holocaust do not appear in the Bible itself, the context of Auschwitz is used in the sermon to underline the historical suffering of the Jewish people and the Christian obligation to support, understand, and share the message of Jesus Christ with them. It serves as a stark reminder of the Christian duty of compassion, empathy, and evangelism towards the Jewish community.

David Ben-Gurion

Sermon Reference

David Ben-Gurion was mentioned as the head of the Jewish Agency who declared the establishment of the State of Israel.

Background Context

David Ben-Gurion was a primary founder of the State of Israel and the first Prime Minister of Israel. Born as David Gruen in 1886 in Płońsk, then part of the Russian Empire (now in Poland), Ben-Gurion was an instrumental figure in the Zionist movement, advocating for the establishment of a Jewish homeland. His passion and leadership were rooted in the conviction that the Jewish people needed a state of their own, particularly in light of the rising tide of anti-Semitism and the horrors of the Holocaust.

Before the establishment of Israel, Ben-Gurion served as the head of the Jewish Agency, essentially acting as the pre-state government for the Jewish population in Palestine. Ben-Gurion's vision for Israel was one of a socialist, democratic, and secular state that would welcome Jews from all parts of the world. He was deeply involved in the diplomatic efforts and negotiations leading to the United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine in 1947. On May 14, 1948, following the expiration of the British Mandate for Palestine, he proclaimed the independence of Israel in a small museum in Tel Aviv, which now bears his name. This marked a watershed moment in Jewish history and fulfilled the ancient longing for a return to Zion.

Ben-Gurion is known for his leadership during the early years of the State of Israel, particularly during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, when the newly formed state managed to survive the military onslaught of multiple Arab armies. His tenure as Prime Minister saw the development of the nation's infrastructure, the absorption of hundreds of thousands of Jewish refugees from war-torn Europe and Arab countries, and the establishment of the Israeli Defense Forces. He also oversaw controversial events, such as the approval of the reparations agreement with West Germany in 1952.

Beyond his political achievements, Ben-Gurion was a man of culture and a great believer in the importance of education. His legacy includes the founding of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Israel Institute of Technology (Technion). He retired from political life to settle in Kibbutz

Sde Boker in the Negev desert, promoting the development of this remote part of Israel. David Ben-Gurion passed away in 1973, leaving behind a legacy as one of the most significant figures in Jewish history and the shaping of modern Israel.

Zionism

Sermon Reference

Zionism is referred to in the sermon as a political movement advocating for the establishment of a Jewish state, seen as a solution to global anti-Semitism.

Background Context

The term 'Zionism' emerged in the late 19th century, coined by Nathan Birnbaum, to describe the national movement for the return of the Jewish people to their homeland and the resumption of Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel. The movement's name is derived from 'Zion', a hill in Jerusalem that is one of the most significant and emotive symbols in Jewish religion and culture. Zionism combines a historical longing with a modern political aspiration, arising in response to centuries of persecution in diaspora and the severe anti-Semitism experienced in Europe and Russia. Theodor Herzl, an Austro-Hungarian journalist, played a pivotal role in modern Zionism's founding when he organized the First Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland, in 1897.

Zionism encompasses a variety of ideologies, but at its core, it aims to create and support a Jewish national state in Palestine, the ancient land of the Jewish people. The movement gained momentum following the Balfour Declaration of 1917, in which the British government expressed support for the establishment of a 'national home for the Jewish people' in Palestine. Zionism was not without controversy, facing opposition from various quarters including Palestinian Arab nationalism, as the rise in Jewish immigration led to tensions and conflicts in the region. Zionism's goals transformed dramatically in the wake of the Holocaust. The utter devastation and mass murder of European Jewry at the hands of Nazi Germany and its collaborators underscored the necessity of a Jewish state for survivors and refugees. Following World War II, Zionist efforts intensified, and were met with increased violence in Palestine. The United Nations ultimately passed a Partition Plan in 1947, which recommended the division of Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states. Despite the surrounding Arab states' rejection of the plan and subsequent invasion, the Jewish state of Israel was declared and established in 1948.

Since the establishment of Israel, Zionism has focused on maintaining a Jewish demographic majority, responding to external threats, and ensuring the security and prosperity of the Jewish state. Zionism also remains a source of debate and contention in international politics, particularly in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the rights of Palestinians. Despite its complexities and the ongoing tensions it engenders, Zionism has been successful in its primary aim of providing a sovereign homeland for the Jewish people.

Importance in the Bible

Zionism is significant in the context of biblical prophecy as it relates to the return of the Jewish people to their ancestral homeland. This connection is seen as a fulfillment of God's promises in Scripture, such as in the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, where the ingathering of the Jewish exiles and the establishment of a sovereign Israel align with prophetic visions of restoration.

League of Nations

Sermon Reference

The sermon references the British Mandate for Palestine, which was issued by the League of Nations, and aimed to establish a Jewish homeland.

Background Context

The League of Nations, established in 1919 after World War I, was an international organization designed to maintain world peace and promote cooperation among countries. One of the key issues it addressed was the distribution and governance of former Ottoman Empire territories, including Palestine. The League of Nations' mandate system was a solution to this, where countries like Britain were given temporary control over regions with the goal of leading them towards independence and self-governance. Britain's Mandate for Palestine included the Balfour Declaration's intent to establish a 'national home for the Jewish people' within its territories.

The mandate period in Palestine was characterized by growing tensions and violence between the Jewish immigrant communities and the indigenous Arab population. Both sides held national aspirations that became increasingly irreconcilable. The Jewish community in Palestine, or the Yishuv, established political, economic, and military institutions that would later become the foundation of the State of Israel. British policies fluctuated over the mandate period, at times restricting Jewish immigration and land purchases, which was a response to Arab pressure and uprisings against the mandate and increasing Jewish presence.

The League of Nations itself faced criticism and encountered many challenges during its existence, ultimately failing to prevent the outbreak of World War II. However, its mandate system and the decisions made under its auspices had lasting impacts on international relations and the map of the Middle East. The end of British rule in Palestine led the United Nations, the successor to the League, to propose a partition plan in 1947, which attempted to resolve the competition between Jewish and Arab national movements through the creation of two separate states. The legacy of the League of Nations' mandate system and its application in Palestine is complex and controversial. The desired peaceful transition to self-governance was marred by conflict and bloodshed and was never fully realized as envisioned. The British Mandate for Palestine ended with the establishment of Israel in 1948, amidst war and conflict, leaving behind a legacy of unresolved issues that still affect the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to this day.

Hamas

Sermon Reference

Hamas is mentioned as a faction that opposes the State of Israel and calls for its obliteration.

Background Context

Hamas, an acronym for Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya (Islamic Resistance Movement), is a Palestinian Sunni-Islamic fundamentalist organization that was founded in 1987 during the First Intifada, an uprising against Israeli occupation in the Palestinian territories. Hamas originated as an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood and has since evolved into a key political and military force within the Palestinian landscape, particularly in the Gaza Strip. Its charter, originally written in 1988, called for the establishment of an Islamic state in all of historic Palestine, including the area comprising the State of Israel.

Hamas is known for its social service networks, which include schools, hospitals, and other community structures that have contributed to its popularity among Palestinians. However, it is also designated as a terrorist organization by several countries, primarily due to its involvement in suicide bombings, rocket attacks, and other acts of violence aimed at Israeli targets. The group's stated goals have included the liberation of Palestine and the destruction of Israel, which they view as an occupying force in an Islamic waqf, or an inalienable religious endowment.

After winning the 2006 Palestinian Legislative Council elections, Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip by force in 2007, leading to a political split with the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority in the West Bank. Since then, Hamas has governed Gaza under a blockade imposed by Israel and Egypt, aimed at restricting the flow of goods and weapons into the territory. Hamas and Israel have engaged in several conflicts, with each round of fighting resulting in significant casualties and destruction, primarily in Gaza. Hamas's ideology and actions are a source of contention and controversy, contributing to the complexities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Its refusal to recognize Israel, its militant resistance, and the impact of Israeli retaliatory measures on civilian life continue to be obstacles to peace-making efforts. Various attempts at reconciliation with Fatah and the formation of a unity government have been made, but tensions and frictions persist. The international community views a resolution to the conflict as essential to regional stability and peace.

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