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Roman roads, Greek language, Jewish Diaspora, Hellenistic view, Babylonian tradition, spiritual crossroads, Stoicism, Epicureanism, mystery religions, radical love, personal transformation, Paul's mission, cultural adaptation, shared language, human connection

SPEAKERS

Sarah, John

- S** Sarah 00:00
Ever feel like you need a time machine, like, just hit a button and escape to, I don't know, ancient Rome maybe. Yeah,
- J** John 00:05
grab some sandals, try on a toga,
- S** Sarah 00:07
exactly. Well, today we're your time machine. Get ready to explore first century Palestine, the
- J** John 00:15
time of Jesus. We're
- S** Sarah 00:16
going deep into this world. And trust me, it's more connected to our own than you might think. It's
- J** John 00:20
true. When you think connected world, you probably picture smartphones and the Internet

true. When you think connected world, you probably picture smartphones and the internet, right?

S Sarah 00:25

But this deep dive, it's gonna change how you see things. We're cracking

J John 00:29

open the Urantia Book, specifically paper 121, the times of Michael's bestowal. And

S Sarah 00:35

don't worry, you don't need to be a scholar to get it. We're breaking it down, making it crystal clear. Think

J John 00:41

of it this way. How do ideas spread when you don't have Twitter

S Sarah 00:46

or Facebook or even a printing press for that matter? That's

J John 00:49

the question, isn't it? Back then, going viral was a whole different ballgame.

S Sarah 00:53

Okay? So no internet, no mass media. How did News travel back then? Smoke signals, carrier pigeons. Picture this, Roman roads. Okay, roads, I got it. But what do roads have to do with anything? They weren't

J John 01:07

just roads. They were like, uh, ancient super highways criss crossing the entire landscape.

S Sarah 01:13

Okay? I'm picturing those old Roman chariots kicking up dust, not

J John 01:17
exactly Instagram, but you get the idea. These roads were the information arteries of the ancient world.

S Sarah 01:23
Okay? So news could travel, but people weren't speaking Latin on Twitter, right? Yeah. Back then, there were a zillion different languages.

J John 01:29
Weren't there, you're right. Communication could get pretty tricky, but there was a secret weapon, Greek, oh, Greek, like the philosophers, that's the one. Greek was, like, the universal language back then, everyone from, you know, scholars to merchants, they all spoke Greek, so kind of like English today, yeah, something like that. It meant ideas could jump from person to person with, like, zero language barrier. That makes

S Sarah 01:52
sense, shared language check. But there had to be more to it than just roads and small talk, right? What else made this era such a melting pot.

J John 02:01
Ah, well, don't forget about the Jewish Diaspora, the what and now the diaspora. It's like, imagine a network of Jewish communities spread out all over the vast Roman Empire. So instead of everyone living in one place, exactly, we're talking from Spain all the way to like Iraq. Wow. That spread out. It was like the original LinkedIn, connecting people across continents. Okay, so instead

S Sarah 02:24
of trending on Twitter, a message back then could spread through this ancient network, it's like the original retweet. You

J John 02:31
got it. But hold on, there's another layer to this, because it wasn't just about external connections. Within Judaism itself, there were some serious divisions.

S Sarah 02:40
Whoa. Wait. You mean it wasn't all one big, happy family,

J John 02:43
not exactly, okay? Imagine debating the meaning of a text like really getting into the nitty gritty. That's what was happening

S Sarah 02:50
with the Torah, okay? The Torah, that's like their Bible, right?

J John 02:53
Exactly. And there were two main camps, two different ways of understanding it. There was the Western interpretation, more influenced by Greek thought, Hellenistic view, right? Yep, that's the one. And then you had the Eastern interpretation, rooted in Babylonian tradition. So

S Sarah 03:07
like, two totally different ways of looking at the same text. That's intense. Can you give you an example? Like, how would that actually play out? Sure.

J John 03:15
Think about dietary laws, keeping kosher. Okay, yeah, the Western more Hellenistic thinkers, they might say, Hey, as long as you're honoring the spirit of the law, maybe you could be a little flexible with

S Sarah 03:27
the specifics. So like a more modern take on Ancient Rules, you could say that.

J John 03:32
But then the Eastern Babylonian tradition, they might say, hold on. These laws are here for a reason. We need to follow them to the letter. No exceptions.

S Sarah 03:40
Wow. Talk about a recipe for some awkward family dinners, right? It wasn't

- J** John 03:44
just about food, though. This was about who held the power, whose voice got to define the faith. That's
- S** Sarah 03:50
a power struggle we still see today, right? Who gets to decide what's true according to religious texts? Exactly?
- J** John 03:56
It's a timeless debate. And remember, all of this is happening under Roman rule. So you've got this internal treasure cooker within Judaism. And at the same time, the Gentile world is undergoing its own spiritual shifts. Okay,
- S** Sarah 04:09
so the Gentiles, meaning non Jewish folks, yeah, right. So what were they up to?
- J** John 04:16
You got it? It wasn't just the Jewish community grappling with these big questions. It was like the whole Roman world was hitting the spiritual crossroads.
- S** Sarah 04:23
So what were their options if you were, like, a spiritual seeker back then, what was on the menu besides, you know, gladiators and stuff? Well,
- J** John 04:30
if you were a thinker, an intellectual type, you might have been drawn to the philosophical schools. Stoicism was big at the time. Stoicism,
- S** Sarah 04:36
right? Weren't those the guys who were all about, like, being super disciplined.
-

- J** John 04:41
Yeah, exactly virtue reason, keeping a stiff upper lip, no matter what sounds a little intense for my taste, you and me both, but that was their thing, keeping those emotions in check,
- S** Sarah 04:51
okay, so not exactly the life of the party. What other philosophical flavors were there
- J** John 04:56
on the flip side, you had Epicureanism, which was all about. Pleasure, happiness, avoiding pain. Sign me
- S** Sarah 05:03
up. Although Something tells me it wasn't all just lounging around eating grapes.
- J** John 05:07
You're right. They weren't just about indulging in every whim. They had a more nuanced view than their reputation might suggest.
- S** Sarah 05:17
Okay, well, that's good to know, but still, it seems like both stoicism and Epicureanism were more for the I don't know the elites like not your average person on the street.
- J** John 05:25
That's a good point. They were definitely more popular with the educated class. So what about everyone else?
- S** Sarah 05:29
Yeah, what did your average Roman turn to for spiritual fulfillment? Well, this
- J** John 05:34
is where things get really interesting. This era saw the rise of the mystery religions.

S Sarah 05:39
Mystery religions. Okay, now You've piqued my interest. What are we talking about here? Think

J John 05:43
secret rituals promises of a better afterlife, a more personal connection with the Divine. Hold on secret

S Sarah 05:49
rituals and promises of a better afterlife, this is starting to sound kind of familiar,

J John 05:54
exactly. It's like the ancient world had its own version of self help movements or even some New Age stuff.

S Sarah 06:00
So are you saying that people back then were just as obsessed with self improvement and finding deeper meaning as we are today?

J John 06:07
It's a tale as old as time, right? That humans search for something more, something bigger than ourselves. It takes many forms, but the longing is the same. I can see

S Sarah 06:18
that. So let's recap for a second. We've got Roman roads connecting the Empire. Greek is the universal language. Jewish communities hoping for the Messiah,

J John 06:25
and Gentiles exploring everything from stoicism to mystery cults.

S Sarah 06:29
It's like a powder keg of cultures and ideas. And this is the world Jesus walks into



John 06:35

precisely, yeah, and talk about making an entrance. Here comes Jesus, this carpenter from Nazareth turning expectations upside down. His message was both radically counter cultural and strangely familiar all at the same time. Okay,



Sarah 06:49

but what was so radical about it? He wasn't preaching in some alien language. Was he true?



John 06:53

He was very much a product of his time, but his message challenged the prevailing Jewish worldview in some pretty fundamental ways. Remember those debates we talked about strict adherence to the law versus evolving interpretations. Yeah, the kosher food fight,



Sarah 07:07

good times



John 07:08

right now. Imagine the tension when this guy starts saying, Love your enemies. Well, wait



Sarah 07:12

what? Love your enemies. That's like the opposite of what everyone was saying back then, exactly. It



John 07:17

flew in the face of the entire legal system of the time, which was all about retribution, an eye for an eye and all that. It's



Sarah 07:24

hard to imagine someone dropping a message of like radical love and forgiveness in that climate. Did anyone even listen? That's



John 07:31

just it. His message was so different, so counterintuitive, that it cut through the noise. He spoke

just it. His message was so different, so counterintuitive, that it cut through the noise. He spoke to a deep longing in the human heart, a longing that went beyond those religious and political divides.

S

Sarah 07:41

Okay, that makes sense. But how is Jesus's message any different from, say, those mystery cults that were so popular, weren't they promising salvation and a better afterlife too?

J

John 07:52

That's a great question, and it gets to the heart of what set Jesus apart. See, the mystery cults, they were all about, initiation, secret knowledge rituals. You had to be in the club to reap the benefits. What

S

Sarah 08:03

was like an exclusive VIP lounge for the afterlife, pretty much.

J

John 08:07

But Jesus, His message was the opposite. It was radical accessibility. He was saying the kingdom of God is within you. You don't need a secret handshake or a magic potion. It's about a personal transformation, a direct connection with the Divine.

S

Sarah 08:21

So instead of saying, perform this ritual and you'll be saved, he was saying, change your heart.

J

John 08:27

Exactly. It's about internal transformation, not external rituals.

S

Sarah 08:31

So we've talked about Jesus, his message, the impact it had, but we can't forget about the guy who took that message on the road, right? You mean Paul? Exactly, Paul the guy who turned it into a movement, at least. That's how it seems to me. Yeah, you could say

J

John 08:43

that Paul is essential if you really want to understand how Christianity went from like this small

Jewish sect to, well, a global religion, right? It's a huge

S

Sarah 08:52

leap, and honestly, I'm a little fuzzy on the details. Give me the Paul 101, Crash Course. Okay,

J

John 08:58

so imagine Paul as this, like ultimate translator, building bridges between cultures, because you've got Jesus's message deeply rooted in Jewish tradition, exactly. So Paul has to take that and make it resonate with the Gentile world.

S

Sarah 09:10

So he's like the ancient world's influencer, making sure the message goes viral, reaches a whole new audience.

J

John 09:17

That's a great way to put it, and he was good at it, like, really savvy. It wasn't just about translating languages, either. Paul. He drew on all this knowledge Greek philosophy, the Stoics, the Epicureans, all that, yep, even the mystery religions. He wove those threads into his teachings about Jesus. Wow. Talk

S

Sarah 09:35

about knowing your audience. So how did that go over? Were people into it?

J

John 09:39

It was mixed bag, honestly. I mean, on the one hand, his approach was brilliant, like he found a way to make the message click for people who are already searching, you know, yeah, those

S

Sarah 09:49

spiritual seekers we talked about,

J

John 09:51

right? Like he emphasized this idea of salvation through faith in Jesus,

- S** Sarah 09:56
which would have resonated with anyone familiar with, say, the myth. To recall exactly,
- J** John 10:00
because they were all about personal redemption, too. So he's finding that common ground. But like I said, it was a mixed bag. Not everyone was thrilled with Paul's adaptations. You could say, oh yeah. Who wasn't happy? Well, some of the early Christians, the ones who were really rooted in Jewish tradition,
- S** Sarah 10:18
they probably felt like he was, I don't know, watering down the message or something. That's
- J** John 10:22
exactly like he was straying too far from Jesus's original teachings.
- S** Sarah 10:26
It's that classic tension, isn't it, staying true to the original message versus adapting for a new audience. It never goes away. I mean, think about how bands change their sound to appeal to a wider audience,
- J** John 10:38
or how movies get remade for different cultures,
- S** Sarah 10:41
right? Sometimes it works. Sometimes not so much. It's a debate that's
- J** John 10:45
still going strong, even now, but the fact that it was happening back then, well, it shows you how complex it all was and how human really, these were real people grappling with these big questions, trying to figure out how to live out their faith in let's face it, a pretty messy world. Yeah,
- S** Sarah 11:03

it makes you realize we might have our smartphones and the internet and all that, but some things never really change, do they? We started by talking about Roman roads, and here we are still asking the same questions about faith, identity, how to make a difference.

J

John 11:16

It's amazing, isn't it, how relevant this ancient story still is, and it makes you wonder, What will people say about our information superhighway 2000 years from now,

S

Sarah 11:26

right? Well, they look back out of Twitter threads and be like, Wow, so profound. I mean, who knows, but I kind of doubt

J

John 11:33

it probably not. But on a more serious note, what we can take away from all this is that even in a world that's like drowning in information. The fundamentals of connection, they still matter. Shared languages, common experiences, a good story. Those are the things that bring people together, that help ideas spread. Whether it's Ancient Rome or the digital age, it's

S

Sarah 11:54

that human need to connect, right? It transcends time and technology. So as you're scrolling through your feed today, remember those lessons from first century Palestine. Think about how you're connecting with others, how you're sharing your own story. You might not be starting a global movement, but hey, you never know. Keep asking those big questions. Keep diving deep.