

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA, NY**The Rev. Fr. Arthur W. Ward Jr., Rector*****“Israel, Palestine, and the Coming of Christ”****(understanding our present and future in light of the past and the witness of God's Word)****“Called to Be the Chosen People of God” (part 1)*****I. INTRODUCTION**

A. October 7, 2023 – a shocking and barbaric attack. When several thousand members of Hamas, the Palestine terrorist government of Gaza, attacked Israelis towns and villages with the targeted murder of innocent men, women, and children it marked another brutal example of the ongoing hatred of the Jew and the evil in this world. Why such an attack? Why the worldwide protests against Israelis and Jews? Why the increase in antisemitism recently? Why do we always seem to be drawn back to the Israel and its conflict with its neighbors? This study will seek to answer these and other questions pertaining to the plan of God and the political and religious affairs of mankind.

B. Hatred of the Jew – no other people group has been persecuted throughout history in numbers (per capita) than the Jews. The Egyptians, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, the Seleucids, the Romans, the Christians (Roman and Orthodox Churches, Crusades, Inquisition, Luther,) the Nazis, the Arabs, the Palestinians, and the Iranians have all sought to persecute Jews – and who can forget? Students on American college campuses!

C. A Divine Role - It should give one pause to wonder why? Something more is going on. For while there has been no other people group persecuted to the extent of the Jewish people, one could also contend that there has been no other people group that has influenced our world more than the Jews.

In 1899, after returning from a visit to Palestine, Mark Twain wrote these insightful words:

“If the statistics are right, the Jews constitute but one quarter of one percent of the human race. It suggests a nebulous puff of star dust lost in the blaze of the Milky Way. Properly, the Jew ought hardly to be heard of, but he is heard of, has always been heard of. He is as prominent on the planet as any other people, and his importance is extravagantly out of proportion to the smallness of his bulk. His contributions to the world's list of great names in literature, science, art, music, finance, medicine, and abstruse learning are also very out of proportion to the weakness of his numbers. He has made a marvelous fight in this world in all ages and has done it with his hands tied behind him. He could be vain of himself and be excused for it. The Egyptians, the Babylonians, and the Persians rose, filled the planet with sound and splendor, then faded to dream-stuff and passed away; the Greeks and Romans followed and made a vast noise, and they were gone; other people have sprung up and held their torch high for a time, but it burned out, and they sit in twilight now and have vanished. The Jew saw them all, survived them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert but aggressive mind. All things are mortal but the Jews; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?” Twain ends on this insightful question!

The answer is found in God's Word! History is “His” or “God's” Story!” And to understand the purpose of God's plan is to understand the role the Jews play in that history and ultimately in the salvation of

the world. There is a reason why in **Jn. 4:22b**, Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at the well, ***“Salvation is from the Jews.”*** Why the Jews? This study will answer that question.

D. What this study will seek to accomplish

1. to become familiar with God’s Word as it pertains to the people of Israel, the salvation history of the world, the political and spiritual realities of our world, and the coming of Christ.
2. the role we play in being God’s people – reflecting Christ as the Body of Christ and being kingdom-minded in our words and actions.

E. The Sign of the Fig Tree – in Jesus’ teaching concerning the signs of His return, our Lord said, ***“Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near; 33so, you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door. 34“Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.”*** (Mt. 24:32-34). Throughout the Scriptures the fig tree represents the people of Israel. Thus, the words, when the fig tree *“puts forth its leaves”* points to a “rebirth” of the nation. That exactly happened on May 14, 1948, when the nation of Israel became a member of the family of nation literally in a day. How and why did that happen? The answer is found in the Holy Scriptures and in the history of the Jewish people. However, before we can understand the miracle and significance of the rebirth of Israel, one needs to go back to look at why Israel was called into being in the first place.

II. The Witness of the Covenants (Everything Always Goes back to the Covenants God has made with His People!)

Human history hinges on Christ’s first coming and culminates with His Return or second coming. Our Old Testament provides the foundation for both comings. **“Old Testament” is another way of saying Old Covenant.** Covenant is the term used to denote a binding agreement that God makes with mankind. Every covenant usually has four main components: **a promise, a sign, an obligation, and a fulfillment.** While there is often an obligation on man’s part, God will fulfill the covenant regardless of whether man fulfills his end of the covenant. Thus, God’s covenants with mankind can be conditional and and/or unconditional. This latter point we will discuss further below as it will be important for understanding the role of Israel as God’s Chosen People.

God’s covenants are made with mankind and in time and space. Therefore, they are both **historical and eternal realities**. The five main covenants of the Old Testament are the Edenic Covenant, the Noahic Covenant, the Abrahamic Covenant, the Mosaic Covenant, and the Davidic Covenant. We cannot fully understand world history, salvation history, i.e. the significance of Christ’s coming both his first and second comings unless we understand the covenants of the Old Testament.

A. Edenic Covenant – also known as the Covenant of Life, was the covenant God made with Adam and Eve AND their progeny (us!) that stipulated that they could enjoy of all God’s blessings in life as long as they did not eat from the tree of the knowledge of God and evil (**Gen. 2:17**). This, therefore, was a conditional covenant based on the choice of Adam and Eve. They disobeyed God and as a result death entered the human experience – both spiritual and physical because their whole being was tied to God’s power to sustain them. Thus, a break in their relationship with God meant a break in their life source. And yet, even though this was a conditional covenant God seeks to maintain it! He does not end Adam and Eve’s lives but covers them with animal skins and gives them a promise – the first indication of the coming of the Messiah in Holy Scripture! **Genesis 3:15: *And I will put enmity (open hostility) between you and the***

woman, and between your seed (offspring) and her Seed; He shall [fatally] bruise (lit. “crush”) your head, and you shall [only] bruise His heel.”

B. Noahic Covenant – the covenant God made with Noah and his descendants (all of mankind) following the flood that covered the entire earth and killed most animal life is an example of a purely unconditional covenant (**Gen. 8:20-9:17**). God promises never again to destroy the earth with a flood. Man doesn't have to do anything in relation to this covenant. The rainbow is a sign of this unconditional covenant.

C. Abrahamic Covenant – it shouldn't surprise us that the call of Abram happens after the God's judgment upon Babel and the scattering of mankind into many nations. God now will work His plan of redemption through one nation. The seed of that nation begins with the man Abram.

1. God's promise to Abram - the first promises of the covenant God made with Abraham are found in **Gen. 12:1-4**: *“Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 2And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3I will **bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse**, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” So Abram went, as the LORD had told him...”*

Abram, whose name means “father,” leaves his homeland and sets out with his family, servants, and property for a new “promised” land. We read in **Gen. 13:5-7**, *“Abram took his wife Sarai and his nephew Lot, and **all their possessions which they had accumulated, and the people which they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan**; so they came to the land of Canaan. 6Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. Now the Canaanites were in the land at that time. 7And the LORD appeared to Abram and said, **“To your descendants I will give this land**.” So he built an altar there to the LORD who had appeared to him.”*

Next, we see that in **Gen. 13:14-15**: *“The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, **“Now raise your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward, and eastward and westward; 15for all the land which you see I will give to you and to your descendants forever**.”*

And then in **Gen. 15:1-7** we read, *“After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, **“Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great**.” 2Abram said, “O Lord GOD, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” Then behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, “This man will not be your heir; **but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir**.” 5And He took him outside and said, “Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” And He said to him, **“So shall your descendants be**.” 6Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness. And He said to him, **“I am the LORD who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it**.” God seals the covenant with the sacrificing of various animals. After which, 18 says, **“On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying “To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates.”***

Note the promises: 1) a son would be born and through that son he would have many descendants 2) there is “promised” land forever, and 3) through his progeny the whole world would be blessed. 4) The blessing of the covenant would be received by faith (covenant's obligation). BUT then Abram doubted God!

2. Abraham's disobedience— Abraham broke the covenant when he doubted God's promise of an heir and instead listened to his wife Sarai to have a child through Hagar, his wife's maid servant rather than trust God to provide a son through Sarai! What happened as a result of this act of disobedience? We find out in **Genesis 16**: *Now Sarai, Abram's wife had borne him no children, and she had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar. 2So Sarai said to Abram, "Now behold, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children. Please go in to my maid; perhaps I will obtain children through her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. 3After Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Abram's wife Sarai took Hagar the Egyptian, her maid, and gave her to her husband Abram as his wife. 4He went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her sight. 5And Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done me be upon you. I gave my maid into your arms, but when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her sight. May the LORD judge between you and me." 6But Abram said to Sarai, "Behold, your maid is in your power; do to her what is good in your sight." So Sarai treated her harshly, and she fled from her presence.*

7Now the angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur. 8He said, "Hagar, Sarai's maid, where have you come from and where are you going?" And she said, "I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarai." 9Then the angel of the LORD said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit yourself to her authority." 10Moreover, the angel of the LORD said to her, "I will greatly multiply your descendants so that they will be too many to count."

11The angel of the LORD said to her further, "Behold, you are with child, and you will bear a son; and you shall call his name Ishmael, because the LORD has given heed to your affliction. 12"He will be a wild donkey of a man, his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand will be against him; and he will live to the east of all his brothers."

13Then she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, "You are a God who sees"; for she said, "Have I even remained alive here after seeing Him?" 14Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; behold, it is between Kadesh and Bered.

15So Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. 16Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to him."

Sarai and Abram lacked faith in God's Word. They were impatient with the Lord and His promise. As a result, Ishmael was born, a boy born not of the Spirit but of the flesh. He could not be the true heir of Abram. Note that God says about him - his descendants will also be too many to count. Moreover, he will be a violent and insolent man. Conflict will result wherever he goes. We will come back to the historic and spiritual significance of Ishmael in a moment and how this division is still with us today. But first it is important to note that again God shows mercy after Abram broke the covenant!

3. God's mercy (loving kindness – in Hebrew "hesed")

God's covenant with Abraham is repeated with added clarification in **Gen. 17:1-8; 15-22**: *"When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, 2that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly." 3Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, 4"Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. 5No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. 6I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. 7And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting*

covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. 8And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.”

Then God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, **but Sarah shall be her name. 16**“**I will bless her, and indeed I will give you a son by her. Then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her.**” 17Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, “Will a child be born to a man one hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?” 18And Abraham said to God, “Oh that Ishmael might live before You!” 19But God said, “**No, but Sarah your wife will bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. 20**“As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I will bless him, and will make him fruitful and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall become the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. 21**“But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this season next year.”** 22When He finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham.

Later, when Isaac became a man, the Lord renewed this covenant with him: “To you and to your offspring I will give all these lands” (Gen. 26:3). And then God did the same with Isaac’s son Jacob: “The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring” (Gen. 28:13). Later after Jacob “wrestled with God” (the angel of the Lord), God changed his name to “Israel” which initially meant “to strive with God” but then became the name for the people of God. The details are given in **Gen. 32:24-32: “Jacob was left alone (at night), and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. 25When he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he touched the socket of his thigh; so the socket of Jacob’s thigh was dislocated while he wrestled with him. 26Then he said, “Let me go, for the dawn is breaking.” But he said, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.” 27So he said to him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Jacob.” 28He said, “Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed.” 29Then Jacob asked him and said, “Please tell me your name.” But he said, “Why is it that you ask my name?” And he blessed him there. 30So Jacob named the place Peniel, for he said, “I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved.”**

Thus, the Abrahamic covenant marked the beginning of what would become the Jewish nation. God would be known as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They would become a great people first known as the Hebrews during their time in Egypt. However, they would be eventually persecuted and enslaved by the Egyptians for 400 years until God raised up Moses to be His leader for the people of God to set them free from their slavery in Egypt. In **Exodus 3-** God appeared to Moses in a burning bush and told him to tell the people that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is literally **“I AM who I AM!”** From that declaration came the new name for God – *Yahweh* which simply means “being.” **Ex. 3:14-16: “God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM”; and He said, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” 15God, furthermore, said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations. 16“Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, “I am indeed concerned about you and what has been done to you in Egypt.”**

D. Mosaic Covenant – after their deliverance from slavery in Egypt, God made a new covenant with Moses and the people of Israel. They were to be God’s people expressed through obedience to God’s law revealed on Mt. Sinai (the Ten Commandments). They were to be a kingdom of priests to the world and a light to the Gentiles. How? By obedience to the law. We read in **Ex. 19:1-6: “On the third new moon after the people of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that day they came into the wilderness of Sinai.**

2They set out from Rephidim and came into the wilderness of Sinai, and they encamped in the wilderness. There Israel encamped before the mountain, 3while Moses went up to God. The LORD called to him out of the mountain, saying, “**Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel:** 4‘You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. 5Now therefore, **if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; 6and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel,”**

And then in **Dt. 5:1-3:** “And Moses summoned all Israel and said to them, “Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the rules that I speak in your hearing today, and you shall learn them and be careful to do them. 2The LORD **our God made a covenant with us in Horeb.** 3Not with our fathers did the LORD make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive today.”

Thus, the Mosaic Covenant was a conditional covenant. And yet, it would also be an unconditional covenant because even though the majority of the people would rebel against God and thereby lose His blessing and face His judgment, they still remained His Chosen People! Otherwise, the prophesied Messiah would have no people to which to come. In fact, there always is a remnant of true believers in every age since the time of the Exodus.

We are seeing how the reality of God’s Kingdom is being set up through the revelation of the divine covenants. **Every kingdom has four elements – 1) a ruler 2) a domain or area of rule - land 3) subjects and 4) laws.** Both the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants build a foundation for all four elements.

III. The Challenge of Islam

Next study we will see the significance of the Davidic covenant, the final covenant in the Old Testament, as well as the New Covenant that Jesus establishes with His coming. However, for the final part of our study, we need to look at **how the division between Ishmael and Isaac still affects us to this day.** In fact, this division is why we have ongoing conflict in the Middle East, and it will be why we will continue to see conflict there until the Lord returns. This division is the result of the birth and spread of Islam, the world’s second largest religion.

A. What is the crux of the problem with Islam? Muhammad claimed to be a biological heir of Abraham through Ishmael! According to this false and evil prophet, the Jews and the Christians corrupted the true message of God. Isaac is not the real heir of God’s promises to Abraham. Since Muhammad is the true descendant of Abraham through Ishmael, his message now is the most important one. Why? Muhammad claimed to receive direct revelation from God that had the same authority as the original revelations to Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. Thus, this false prophet claimed to be in direct succession with the Old and New Testament prophets. So how did he come to this conclusion?

B. Origins - Islam was founded by Muhammad (AD 570–632) in the midst of religious pluralism, idolatry, and division among his Arab people. Born in the city of Mecca on the Arabian Peninsula, Muhammad’s father died before he was born while his mother died when he was six years of age. He was raised by his grandfather and then his uncle, Abu Bakr. At the age of forty, he had become a successful businessman when he began receiving a series of visions or “revelations” which were later written down. These writings became known as the Qur’an.

At the time, his people worshipped the seven planets, the moon, and the stars. Many venerated family household gods and various angels. Others were involved in fire worship contributed by the Magians from Persia. There was also a corrupt form of Judaism and heretical Christianity present.

According to Islam, Muhammad was visited by the angel Gabriel in the year 610 and told that God's previous revelations to the Jews and to the Christians had been corrupted. As a result, God was revealing His word and will a third time through Muhammad.

Of the pantheon of gods worshipped in the day, Muhammad was “led” to choose the one known as “Allah” (Arabic for “the god”) as the only true God. He began preaching in Mecca, inviting the people to join him in his new faith, but most rejected his message.

In the year 622, Muhammad and his small band of followers migrated to a city called Yathrib, now renamed “Medina” (“city of the prophet”). There they established the first Islamic state. The Muslim calendar begins from the day of this migration (the hijira or “flight”).

Muhammad's hatred of idols led him to place an immense emphasis on the unity and transcendence of God. At first, he believed that Jews and Christians would accept his message and had his followers kneel toward Jerusalem to pray. When they did not, he taught them to turn their backs on Jerusalem by bowing toward Mecca, as is their practice today.

Muhammad's culture was characterized by tribal warfare, brutality, and promiscuity. He emphasized divine control and opposed religious liberty and the separation of religion and state. In his worldview, since Allah is Lord, he must be Lord of all. Thus, Muhammad created a civilization, not merely a religion—a way of life for all people, governing personal autonomy and all morality. Islam attempts to provide the answers to every conceivable question of belief and daily life.

Islam's growth worldwide has been the fastest of any religion in history. Within a single decade, AD 622–632, Muhammad united the nomadic tribes of the Arabian peninsula into a single cohesive nation, gave them a monotheistic religion in place of their polytheistic tribal faiths, organized a powerful society and state, and launched his worldwide movement.

Muhammad died in 632 and was succeeded by Abu Bakr. Under his reign and afterward, Islam continued to spread, promoted by extensive military campaigns. Within a century after the death of Muhammad, the Islamic empire stretched from Arabia west through North Africa, to Southern France and Spain; also north of Arabia through the Middle East and east throughout Central Asia, to the borders of China. In the process, Islamic expansion took in much of the oldest and strongest Christian territory.

The spread of Islam in Western Europe was finally checked in France by Charles Martel at the Battle of Tours in AD 732, exactly a century after the death of Muhammad. Spain was later reclaimed for Christianity, but a wide belt of territory from Morocco to Pakistan and Indonesia remained Muslim and is so today.

Muhammad left no designated heirs. The “caliphs” (Arabic for “successors”) continued his movement, led first by Abu Bakr. Soon, however, divisions began to emerge. Most Muslims followed the caliphs and their successors; these are known as Sunnis today. But some believed that the fourth caliph (Muhammad's son-in-law) was the true successor to Muhammad and have supported his successors; they are the Shiites (“party of Ali”). Eighty-five percent of Muslims are Sunnis; 15 percent are Shiites, living primarily in Iran but also in Iraq, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Syria and Lebanon.

C. Islam's Basic Beliefs and Practices ("*Islam*" means "*submission*" or "*surrender*")

1. view of God - Islam's view of God can be stated very succinctly: "*Your God is One God: there is no God but He, Most Gracious, Most Merciful*" (**Qur'an 2:163**). The Qur'an makes clear its rejection of the Trinity: "*Say not 'Trinity': desist: it will be better for you: for God is one God: glory be to Him*" (**4:171**).

The Qur'an also explicitly rejects the divinity of Jesus: "They do blaspheme who say: 'God is Christ the son of Mary'" (5:72); "They do blaspheme who say: God is one of three in a Trinity: for there is no god except One God" (5:73); "Christ the son of Mary, was no more than an apostle" (5:75).

Muslims believe that God has sent three hundred and thirteen prophets to humanity and are required to memorize the twenty-five most important. Of these, the most significant were Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad. Muslims believe that Jesus was born of a virgin (3:47; 19:20) and that he lived a sinless life and ascended to heaven without passing through death. However, they reject the atonement and the doctrine of salvation through faith in Christ.

2. view of humanity - human beings live completely under the sovereignty of God: "*Those whom God willeth to guide, He openeth their breast to Islam; those whom He willeth to leave straying, He maketh their breast close and constricted*" (**6:125**). "God wills it" is a common expression in Islam.

3. view of authoritative writings - the Qur'an is the final revelation of God for Muslims and the central focus of their faith and lives. All of life must be submitted to its revelation and laws. According to Muslim teaching, the Qur'an was given by divine miracle through Muhammad when the prophet was illiterate: "*It is He who sent down to thee (step by step) in truth, the Book, confirming what went before it*" (3:3). In addition to the Qur'an, the Hadith (a collection of the "sayings" of Muhammad) and the Sunna (the record of the personal customs of Muhammad and his community) give guidance for Muslim life. But the Qur'an is the only divine revelation.

4. view of salvation

a. salvation is achieved by submission to Allah: "*So believe in God and His Apostle; and if ye believe and do right, ye have a reward without measure*" (**3:179**).

b. submission is expressed through adherence to the "**five pillars**" which express the essentials of Muslim life and practice:

1) the "witness" ("shahadah"): *La ilaha illal lah Muhammadur rasulul lah—"There is no god but Allah, Muhammad is Allah's messenger."* Every Muslim must declare this aloud at least once in his life very slowly, with deep meaning and full commitment; most Muslims repeat it many times each day.

2) prayer ("salah") with directed motions, five times a day, facing toward Mecca, the holy city.

3) almsgiving ("zakah"), donating approximately 2.5 percent of all one's income and permanent annual worth to the poor. This is an act of worship.

4) fasting ("sawm"), especially during the month of Ramadan, which commemorates the giving of the Qur'an. From dawn to sunset every day of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, a Muslim refrains from eating, drinking, smoking, and sexual relations.

5) **pilgrimage (“hajj”)** to Mecca at least once for every believer who is physically and financially able to make the journey.

5. **ijihad (“holy war”)** can be declared the unequivocal religious duty of a Muslim man as the will of God. Many Muslims believe that dying as a martyr in a declared holy war is a guaranteed path to paradise.

6. **strict morality is a hallmark of Muslims** - most obey strong prohibitions against drinking wine, eating pork, gambling, and practicing usury (charging interest). They invoke the name of Allah at the slaughter of all animals. They also require a specific dress code: men must be covered from navel to knees; women must cover their entire bodies except for their face and hands, with women above the age of puberty required to cover their faces while going out and meeting strangers. Pure silk and gold not allowed for men, men cannot wear women’s clothes, women cannot wear men’s garments, and the symbolic dress of other religions is not allowed.

7. **view of heaven** - Muslims believe that there will be a final day of judgment, the consummation of history, and the assigning of heaven and hell to all persons on the basis of their acceptance or rejection of the message of God and their accompanying good works. Allah is depicted as weighing good and bad works on a delicate scale of balance which is accurate even to the weight of a grain of mustard seed (7:5–8; 21:47; 23:103–5).

D. Islam, Christianity, and Israel

How do Muslims relate to Jews and Christians? Because Islam began in the Middle East AFTER Christianity and Judaism, it has always had some reference to both. Islam’s holy book, the Qur’an, maintains this reference to Christianity, speaking specifically of Jesus and the Christian religion.

Islam is completely independent of Christianity in faith and philosophy. There is almost no direct quotation in the Qur’an from either Testament. All we know for certain is that Muhammad was aware of Jews and Christians and knew something of their history. Tragically, the “Christianity” Muhammad encountered was heretical and gave him an erroneous picture of Christ and his followers.

As noted earlier, Muhammad claimed to be a biological heir of Abraham through Ishmael. Through this tie, Muhammad saw himself as the establisher of the true religion of the one God in Arabia. He maintained that the religion Abraham bequeathed to the Arabs became corrupt. He claimed to receive direct revelation from God identical in content with the original revelations to Abraham, Moses, and Jesus and thus claimed to be in direct succession with the Old and New Testament prophets.

Muslims have historically tolerated Christians and Jews as “people of the Book” in that they have a revelation related, though inferior, to that of Muslims. Nevertheless, various regulations are imposed on Christians and Jews in Muslim lands. One of the most difficult is the law against a Christian’s converting a Muslim, accompanied by an absolute prohibition against a Muslim’s accepting Christianity.

In addition, recent persecution of Christians has made tensions much greater between the two faiths in many nations of the world. Moreover, many Muslims, especially in the Middle East, believe that Israel should not even exist. The Jews are “trespassing” on Islamic land and should be removed. As a result of this animosity, peace with Israel has been and will continue to be an enormous challenge.

IV. St. Paul's Warning

One of the earliest letters written by the Apostle was the letter to the Galatians (the church in Galatia – a region in Asia Minor). In the letter Paul addresses Jewish Christians who believe that Gentiles must first become Jewish before they can put their faith in Christ. Paul argues against this highlighting the reality that human beings are no longer accountable to the demands of the Mosaic law not that Christ has died for our sins and risen from the dead. All people, whether Jew or Gentile can have an eternal relationship with God through Christ! In **Galatians 4:21-31**, the Apostle Paul uses the example of Hagar (her son, Ishmael, was the result of Sarah and Abraham trying to fulfill God's promise through their own will and efforts) and Sarah (whose son, Isaac, was the result of God's miracle of grace) to show the contrast between those who follow God based on "keeping the law" and those who follow God based on faith in Jesus Christ. Many Jews had turned the law of God into an idol where true acceptance by God was based on how well you followed the law. Such thinking Jesus rebuked as does Paul. The same error is found in Islam! It is totally based on following Muhammed's interpretation of God's laws. You become a slave to the cult leader and his various rules and regulations. See Paul's explanation below:

Galatians 4:21-31: *"Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? 22For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. 23But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. 24Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. 25Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. 26But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. 27For it is written, "Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband." 28Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. 29But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now. 30But what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman." 31So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman."*

Amazingly, nearly 600 years before the rise of Islam, the Apostle warned against receiving visions from angels that contradict the gospel message! Paul wrote in **Galatians 1:6-8**, *"I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; 7which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. 8But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! 9As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!"*

That is exactly what happened with the coming of Islam! Today fundamentalist Islam continues to be a threat to freedom loving people everywhere. This is especially true in the Middle East. It is why the modern-day state of Israel is always fighting for its existence. Next week we will continue to look at the role God's covenants play in salvation history as well as in our world today as well as look at how God has used the Jewish people to accomplish His purposes for mankind.