

Session 01**Introduction****Proposed schedule for first term**

- 1) Introduction
- 2) Israel - Chosen People.
- 3) Israel - Theocracy , Covenant Community, National Failure
- 4) Israel - Prophetic Community/Messianic implications of the Feasts
- 5) Messiah through Jewish eyes
- 6) Jesus rejected by Israel
- 7) Disaster and the New Judaism
- 8) Replacement Theology
- 9) Jews and Christians, Zionism and Propaganda Wars

Study plan We will not be attempting a comprehensive exploration of each of the three religions and their political and social structures. We do need to know what they share in common and the fundamental ways in which they differ. We also need to discover how their stories intersect and interact, often resulting in conflict and conquest. Each has a vision of God enshrined in a holy book and each looks to a foundational leader who shaped that vision - Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad..These texts are crucial to understanding the various truth claims and their implications for the future.

Cautionary note. This topic tends to be emotive and often generates more heat than light. As Christians we approach this study believing that God created all human beings in His image, and that "He desires all to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth". We are enjoined to love everyone, including those who hate and persecute us, and desire their salvation. So we must distinguish between religious persuasion and action on the one hand, and the followers of that religion on the other. We should not be inhibited by spurious charges of racism, intolerance, "Islamophobia", or the claim that there should be immunity from criticism. For instance we should show love towards Muslims while at the same time exercise our right and responsibility to examine Islam in a rigorous way, both in terms of doctrine and practice.

Similarly we should examine Jewish beliefs and practices in the light of the whole Bible and lovingly point to Jesus (Jeshuah) as the fulfilment of their Scriptures without fearing to be considered anti-Semitic. We also need to confront church teachings that deny God's eternal covenants with the Jewish people, resulting in anti-Semitism and persecution, and underpinning current attempts to delegitimize the nation of Israel .

The present state of the world - The "Arab spring" was followed by radical Islam and the "Christian winter"; The Arab/Israeli conflict focussed on Palestine; The rise of anti-Semitism in Europe; The rise of the Islamic State (IS) with "ethnic cleansing" of centuries old Christian communities and competing Muslim sects; ; increasing secularization and shrinking Christian influence in the public space; the increasing numbers and influence of Muslims in western societies; creeping Islamization; campaigns by organizations, including Christian groups and denominations, to delegitimize Israel; confusion as to the real nature of Islam - a religion of peace or violence?

What are we to think and do? Is it mostly a matter of politics and history or does religious belief lie at the very core of these issues? People with a secular/humanist worldview find this almost impossible to comprehend, but if it is true then a "solution" that ignores it is doomed to failure.

Three Monotheistic Religions?

- **Israel** "Hear O Israel; The LORD is our God and He is One" Deut. 6:4. The Trinity is a stumbling block to Jews but is, nevertheless, a mystery hidden in their own Scriptures, e.g. Gen. 1:1, 26, 18:2, 22, Psalm 2, Isaiah 9:6-7, 48:16.
- **Church** "I and my Father are One" John 10:30; "Before Abraham was I AM" John 8:58. "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" John 14:9, c.f. John 1:1-3, 14:15-23, 17:20-23, Rev: 21:5-6 (God the Father), 22:1-13, 16 (The Son).

- **Allah** "There is no God but Allah - do not say that God has a son" "God has no partners". To deny this is considered a great sin.

The same God? All believe in a Creator God but after that there are increasing distinctions.

Names

- **Israel.** El was the name used for God in the surrounding culture. Israel used the plural Elohim - probably to designate majesty/uniqueness, see Gen. 14:18-19" "El-Elyon"- Abraham's God initially reveals Himself through the name of the supreme god of the pantheon, c.f. Acts 17:23. Then He revealed Himself through **personal relationship and covenant**. as the "**God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob**". Finally revealed His personal Name **Yahweh** to and through Moses; He is also described as **Father** Isaiah 63:16, Mal.1:6a, Jer.31:20, and **Husband of Israel**, Ezek. 16:6-8, Jer. 2:2-3, 31:32.
- **Church.** Father is the particular, personal, Name by which God made Himself known through His Son Jesus. His declared purpose is to come down and live among His people, John 1:14, 14:23, 2Cor. 6:16-7:1, Rev. 3:30, 21:1-3, 22:3-4. This was an extension of God's relationship with Israel, Exodus 19:17-20, 25:8, 40:34-38.
- **Islam.** Allah was the name for the chief god of the pantheon at Mecca and in a similar way as with El this was adopted as the "generic" name for the god of Islam. Allah does not have a personal relationship with human beings. They are his slaves, expected to submit to him. Thus does not have another personal name connected with relationship, despite being described as "the merciful, the compassionate"..

Attitude and revelations

- **Israel.** One of the chief characteristics of Yahweh is contained in the Hebrew word "hesed" - a big word that cannot be fully translated by a single english word - "**faithful love, abounding grace**" in the context of **covenant**, Psalm 103:4, c.f. 2Sam. 7:15, Lam. 3:22. He longs for His people even in their sin and rebellion, Hos. 11:8-9, and, as a committed husband, seeks their return, Hos. 2:16, 19-20. He has bound Himself to His chosen people Israel in an everlasting covenant of love, Jer. 31:3-6, 35-37. **The second great commandment is to love neighbour as self.**
- **Church.** A similar pattern is present in the New Testament. God loves the church and sent His Son for our salvation, John 3:16, as our heavenly Husband, Eph. 5:25-29. That love was revealed in the New Covenant, sealed in His blood, Matt. 26:26-29, Heb. 10:16-22, Rev. 5:9-10. We are commanded to love our enemies, Matt. 5:43-48.
- **Islam.** There is no grace; Allah is described as merciful, but this is cold and without offer or means of redemption. There is no direct engagement or intimacy with his people. To Allah are attributed words of eternal enmity towards Jews and Christians coupled with a requirement for Muslims to humiliate and kill them when opportunity arises.
S98: 5-7 Surely those who disbelieve from among the people of the Book and the Pagans shall be in fire of hell, to dwell therein forever. They are the worst of all creatures Surely those who believe and do good deeds, (Muslims) are the best of all creatures. H 4030 "Do not greet Jews or Christians with peace; if you meet one of them on your way then push them over a ditch or a narrow path".

Three Abrahamic Faiths?

- **Israel.** "Then God said: "... **Isaac**; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, *and* with his descendants after him"". Gen. 17:19
- **Church** "All who are of faith are children of Abraham" Gal. 3:7
- **Islam** "Abraham said to God "O that **Ishmael** might live before You!" ... God said "**As for Ishmael**, I have heard you ... and I will make him a great nation .but I will establish My covenant with Isaac ..."" Gen 17:18, 20.

Three foundational prophets

- **Israel.** **Moses** ⁰But since then there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, in all the signs and wonders which the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt, before Pharaoh, before all his servants, and in all his land, and by all that mighty power and all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel." Deut 34:10-12, Ex. 7:1, Num. 12:1-8.

- **Church. Jesus** "And the LORD said to me: '... I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. And it shall be *that* whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require *it* of him" Deut. 17:17-19, . "And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!" Luke, 9:35, 4:16-21, 24:44..
- **Islam. Mohammad** "There is no god but Allah, and Mohammad is his prophet". He is the final and the seal of the prophets. **S61:6**. "And (remember) when 'Iesa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary), said: "O Children of Israel! I am the Messenger of Allah unto you confirming the Taurat [(Torah) which came] before me, and giving glad tidings of a Messenger to come after me, whose name shall be Ahmed." Mohammad received the true and eternal version of the revelation of god - the Koran, **S26:192** " Surely this Qur'an is a revelation from the Lord of the Worlds. The trustworthy Spirit (Angel Gabriel) brought it down upon your heart so that you may become one of those who are appointed by Allah to warn the people in a plain Arabic language."

Are the issues ethnic, political, or religious?

The answer is "Yes"! but this conceals a complex situation.

- **Who is a true Jew?** Birth (mother), circumcision, conversion, religious practice, history, nationality? The practice of Jewish religion is almost exclusively by people who consider themselves to be Jews (by descent through the maternal line). A great many Jews are secular yet continue to participate in the cultural aspects of Jewish religion. Jews who believe in Jesus as Messiah are considered to have abandoned their Jewish identity and may be prevented from immigration. "Messianic Jews" in the land of Israel now number about 10,000.

Approximately 50% of world Jews live in Israel and 50% in the Diaspora, although most of these regard Israel as the homeland of the Jewish people. They are composed of many ethnic groups as a result of intermarriage over a long period but have preserved Jewish identity through beliefs and customs. A significant number of Arabs have genetic connection with Jews as a result of forced conversion to Islam in earlier times.

About 20% of the population of Israel is Arab, a mixture of Muslim and Christian, the latter group in relative decline. Jews have no interest in mission to convert others to their religious beliefs and no ambitions to conquer or colonize land beyond the portion of the Biblical area west of the Jordan, variously with or without the region of Samaria.

- **Who is a true Christian?** By baptism, family connection, nationality, tradition, nominal, personal faith? **Christianity** is the largest world religion. It is multiethnic, in serious decline in the north and west but growing and vigorous in the south and east, despite persecution. Historically, and also in the recent past, various sections of the church exercised political power as "state religions". This continues to be an issue in some places where ethnicity and religion largely overlap, e.g. the Balkans. The marriage of Christianity to political power commenced with Constantine in the 5th century virtually made religion and nationality co-extensive and was a major factor in persecution of Jews in succeeding centuries. It is important to note that this was/is a corruption of Christianity and a departure from, rather than a requirement of, Biblical revelation. Secularization in the West and persecution elsewhere is helping to redefine the church as a community of faith and practice. However, from a Muslim viewpoint the West, with all its secular evils, is Christian and at war with Islam. On the other hand, for the first time in centuries considerable numbers of Muslims are becoming Christians and the same is true in Communist countries, both in the face of severe persecution.

- **Who is a true Muslim?** By birth, nationality, conversion, duress, semi-secular, Sufi, "moderate, "extremist"? Islam since its inception in the 7th century has been a political and territorial religion. Religion, law, and rule are one single entity. Ultimate authority is focussed in the caliph, the head of the worldwide nation of Islam (the Umma). For centuries an enormous empire (the Ottoman Empire) stretched from Spain to China, conquering by force large areas that had formerly been "Christian". The explicit goal of bringing the whole world into submission to Allah (the meaning of "Islam") was being realized. Then a catastrophic process intervened; "Christian" nations increased in power and created empires that included many Muslim lands. The unthinkable was happening; history was being reversed! Christians and Jews are supposed to be inferior and subservient to Muslims. Any territory that has been conquered for Allah remains Islamic to the end of time and must be recovered. This is very significant in the present context, not least in the Arab/Israeli conflict. A movement began in the early part of the 20th century to "correct" the situation, principally in Egypt in the form of the Muslim Brotherhood. This coincided with the discovery of vast oil deposits in Muslim areas, providing Islam with the key to the political, financial, and military power required to reverse the "abnormal" situation. Failure (refusal) to grasp the nature of Islam as an intrinsically territorial/political/military religion is at the root of the dangerous misunderstanding

Israel

Church

Islam

of current world events. This understanding of Islam is firmly rooted in its Scriptures and the example of its founding prophet - i.e. it is orthodox Islam, whereas "political Christianity" is an aberration and corruption of its sources.

We need to go back and examine the origins, sacred texts, truth claims, and interactions between these three major movements in world history. This will provide a basis for our understanding and help us answer the question, "How then shall we live?"