

ISAAC and ISHMAEL – CHRISTIANITY and ISLAM

INTRODUCTION

From the descendants of Isaac and Ishmael, sons of Abraham, came the founders of the two main religions of the world today - Christianity and Islam. Isaac's mother was Sarah, Abraham's wife, and Ishmael's mother was Hagar, Sarah's maid servant. This study involves a brief history of Isaac and Ishmael, and a comparison of their descendants Jesus Christ and Mohammed, and the Christian and Islamic religions they introduced.

THE CALLING OF ABRAHAM

God called Abram to be separated from his own family and leave Ur, which was in Mesopotamia his native land, to go to Canaan, a foreign land, where eventually his descendants would form the nation of Israel. God promised Abram, **“in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”**

Now the Lord had said to Abram:

“Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you I will make you a great nation; I will bless and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” Gen 12:1-3.

It grieved Abram that he had no heir, and that his inheritance would go to his steward, Eliezer of Damascus, but God assured Abram that his heir would come from his own body.

“And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, ‘This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.’ Then He brought him outside and said, ‘Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.’ And He said to him, ‘So shall your descendants be.’ And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.” Gen 15:4-6.

When some years had passed and nothing had happened, Sari, Abram's wife, believing that she was past the age of child bearing, decided to take the matter into her own hands, and bring it about by substituting her Egyptian maid servant Hagar for herself, a practice condoned by society of that age. Her decision was not initiated by God, but came from her carnal fleshly mind rather than her spirit.

“Then Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar her maid, the Egyptian, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan. So he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress became despised in her eyes.” Gen 16: 3-4.

When Hagar became pregnant, she mocked Sari, but then fearing Sarai's' retaliation, she fled. An angel stopped her, telling her to return and submit to her mistress, issuing the following prophecy.

“Behold, you are with child, and you shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, because the Lord has heard your affliction. He shall be a wild man; his hand shall be against every man,

and every man's hand against him. And he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren.” Gen 16:11-12.

The angel’s prophetic statement in Verse 12 reveals two facts that shed light on the nature of the Arab nation, the descendants of Ishmael.

- Ishmael would be **“a wild man; his hand shall be against every man, and every man's hand against him.”** Throughout history Arab nations have been engaged in continual conflicts with other nations, and among factions in their own midst.
- **“He shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren.”** The meaning of the second statement is that Ishmael’s wild nature that precipitated animosity against all men, would be manifested in all future generations, even to the present day.

Mohammad’s failure to leave a clear line of succession resulted in perpetual internal war following his death, and still continues today, fourteen centuries later. Two factions, Shias and Sunnis, believe their leaders to be rightful successors to Mohammad, and that they have been entrusted with the responsibility of perpetuating Islamic truth.

Sunnis believe this responsibility was entrusted to the first Caliph, Abu Bakr, close friend and adviser to Mohammed. Succeeding Caliphs are chosen by consultation and election. Their line of truth is based on tradition, and what they believed Mohammed said and manifested in his life. Sunnis make up 90% of the Muslim population.

Shias and Sunnis have the same basic doctrinal beliefs, and cohabit the same counties, but Shias believe that Mohammed’s leadership was passed on to his cousin and son-in-law, Ali, and then through an hierarchical line of their successors called Imams, who are appointed by Allah. They believe that Imams are sinless, and their pronouncements are infallible, having been given to them by Allah. Shias make up 10% of the Muslim population. Violence is so ingrained in Islam that it has never completely stopped being at war, either with other religions, or within itself.

Wikipedia states that 95% of wars being fought in the world today involve Muslims.

GOD’S COVENANT WOULD BE FULFILLED THROUGH ISAAC

When he was ninety nine years old, God again spoke to Abram, negating Sarai’s attempt to gain the heir of promise by Hagar, by declaring that it was Sarai herself who was to conceive and bring forth the promised heir.

“Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying: ‘As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations’...Then God said to Abraham, ‘As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name’...And Abraham said to God, ‘Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!’ Then God said: ‘No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him.” Gen 17:3-19.

This promise was consolidated in Verse 21, which added, **“...My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you...”**

Traditionally the first born son was to be the heir, and so Abraham said to God, **“Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!”** But this could never be accepted by God because Ishmael was not of His initiation, but of Sarai’s carnal mind, and these readings show that God was adamant that His covenant with Abraham would be directed through Isaac and not Ishmael. This meant that all of the nations of the world would be blessed through Isaac, **“and with his descendants after him.”** Ishmael and his descendants were to have no part in God’s covenantal promise of blessing of all the nations of the world.

When Ishmael was conceived, Abraham’s name was Abram, meaning *“Exalted Father.”* Now, some thirteen years later when Isaac was conceived and God’s covenant was established, his name was changed to Abraham, meaning *“Father of Many,”* looking ahead to being the ‘father’ of universal Christendom.

At the same time Sarai’s name, was changed to Sarah, both names meaning *Princess*, but the latter indicating her new relationship with God as mother of Isaac, through whom God’s covenant was conveyed.

Later, God enquired of Abraham, **“Where is Sarah your wife?”** So he said, **“Here, in the tent.”** And He said, **“I will certainly return to you according to the time of life, and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son....”** Gen 18:9-10.

“And the Lord visited Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as He had spoken. For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him — whom Sarah bore to him — Isaac.” Gen 21:1-3.

THE TEST THAT PAVED THE WAY FOR JESUS AS THE “SPOTLESS LAMB OF GOD.”

Abraham was the father of the nation of Israel, and because Jesus Christ came forth from Israel, Abraham may be considered the father of the Christian religion. Some years later, when Isaac the heir of the promise, was a lad, God imposed a test on Abraham that was to have a profound bearing on the sacrificial offering of Jesus Christ as the “Spotless Lamb of God,” as a sin offering for all mankind.

“Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.”

Then He said, “Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.”

So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him...and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the alter upon the wood. And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.

But the Angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” So he said, “Here I am.”

And He said, “Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.”

Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son. And Abraham called the name of the place, The-Lord-Will-Provide; as it is said to this day, "In the Mount of the Lord it shall be provided."

Then the Angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, and said: "By Myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son — blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed [Jesus Christ] all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice." Gen 22:1-18.

God swore by Himself, that because Abraham had not withheld his only son, the heir of the promise, that he would be **"the father of many nations,"** He would extend that promise of blessing to all the nations of the world: **"In your seed [Jesus Christ] all the nations of the earth shall be blessed."** Every person in the world is now eligible for eternal salvation through belief in Jesus Christ.

Because Abraham, representing Israel and Christendom that was born out of it, was obedient to God in offering his only son as a sin offering, God promised His own Son to be a sin offering for the salvation of all mankind.

Why was the test of Abraham's obedience necessary? God is a God of justice and righteousness, and even Satan was given his right to justice. Abraham, representing future Christendom, was willing to offer his only son as a sacrificial offering, giving God the just right to offer His own son as a sin offering for all mankind, that any who would believe would inherit eternal life. Adam, representing mankind, had disobeyed God and obeyed Satan, bringing all mankind under the power of Satan. Now Abraham, representing future Christendom, showed his obedience to God in his willingness to offer his son as a sacrificial offering, allowing God to likewise offer His own Son to deliver mankind from the bondage of sin and death. Satan had to acknowledge that all of his claims for justice had been fulfilled.

THE DOCTRINE OF ISLAM

INTRODUCTION -- Some Islamic Terms

Before proceeding on with this study of Islamic doctrine, it may be helpful to explain some Islamic terms that relate to the ambitions and growth of Islam.

ISLAM is the name of the Islamic religion.

MUSLIMS is the name of its adherents.

JIHAD: means 'striving in the way of Allah' to retain and extend the Islamic faith throughout the world.

Greater jihad refers to inner spiritual struggle.

Lesser jihad refers to outer struggle with the enemies of Islam. Many interpretations of this includes physical warfare.

SOME ISLAMIC MOVEMENTS

Muslim Brotherhood: This is a Sunni Islamic organisation founded in Egypt in 1928 by Hassan al-Bann, as a political, religious, and social organisation, aiming to restore Islam from modernistic tendencies, and return it to its more traditional roots. These quotes from its founder, Hassan al-Bann, and Mustafa Mashhur, leader of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt from 1996 - 2002, reveal its tendency to radicalism and violence.

“Allah is our goal; The Prophet is our Leader; The Quran is our Constitution; Jihad is our Way; Death in the service of Allah is the loftiest of our wishes; Allah is Great; Allah is Great.” Hassan al-Bann.

“This is followed by the power of arms and weapons...This is the role of Jihad.”

“The youth should know...problems of Islam and Muslims, and they can be resolved neither by negotiation nor by recognizing the enemy’s right to the Islamic land it stole. Rather the only option is Jihad for Allah, and this is why Jihad is the way.” Mustafa Mashhur

The Muslim Brotherhood has been outlawed as a terrorist organisation by a number of countries. Many radicalised Muslim groups have association with the Muslim Brotherhood.

Hamas: Hamas is a Sunni organisation affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, founded in 1987, an Islamic Resistance Movement with the agenda of liberating Palestine from Israeli occupation. Since 2007 it has been the governing authority of the Gaza Strip.

Hezbollah: Is a Shi’a Islamic militant group and political party based in Lebanon. It was founded in 1985 and its paramilitary is the Jihad Council.

Taliban: Is an Islamic fundamentalist political movement in Afghanistan that emerged in the mid-1990s in northern Pakistan. From 1996 to 2001 it held power in Afghanistan and enforced strict Sharia law.

Al-Qaeda: Is a militant Sunni Islamic organisation, founded by Osama bin Laden and others in 1988. It aimed to influence the world by undertaking international atrocities, mounting attacks on civilian and military targets in various countries.

IS: Islamic State has been an ideological aim of many militant Islamic jihadist groups over the past decades, envisioning all Islamic countries united as a religious and political entity.

Below are some of these groups with similar aims to Islamic State, sometimes referred to by the Arabic title ‘**Daesh.**’ Islamic State claims religious, political and military authority over all Muslims worldwide, and the enforcement of Sharia law. The United Nations and many Muslim groups have rejected this statehood.

ISIL: Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, founded in 1999 and had association with Al-Qaeda. The Levant refers to an unspecified area around the eastern Mediterranean.

ISIS: Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. This extremist group emerged from the original group formed in 1999, and has the agenda of occupation and ruling territories. It claims to be a legitimate caliphate whose

laws and politics are based on the teachings established by Muhammed. Some of these laws and practices include crucifixion, slavery, amputations and beheadings.

SHARI LAW

Shari Law is a code of law based on the moral teachings of the Koran and the Hadith, embracing a wide range of living activities, such as dress and hygiene. In some countries more radical punishments like stoning, flogging, and beheading are still practiced.

THE TRILOGY OF ISLAMIC DOCTRINAL TEXTS

Most people believe that the doctrine of Islam is completely portrayed in the Quran or Koran, but in fact the complete doctrine is expressed in a trilogy of texts, the Koran, the Hadith, and the Sira.

The **Koran** outlines the doctrine of Islam, based on the teachings of Mohammed, believed to be personally directed to him by Allah. Muslims believe that Mohammad's words and actions are a divine pattern of living for all humanity. The Koran only takes up about 14% of the total size of the Trilogy Texts.

The **Hadith**, compiled after Mohammad's death by later Islamic clerics, is made up of a collection of hadiths, or traditions, based on what Mohammed said or did. The Hadith makes up about 60% of the Trilogy.

The **Sira** is an account of events in Mohammad's life, and occupies about 26% of the Trilogy.

THE FIVE PILLARS OF THE ISLAMIC FAITH

There are five pillars which have general acceptance as being essential to the Islamic faith. They are:

Declaration of faith

This declaration of faith is obligatory for all Muslims: **“There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah.”**

Obligatory prayer

There are five set times for obligatory prayers: dawn, noon, afternoon, evening, and night, and they are performed whilst facing Mecca. Muslims must wash before prayers as a sign of purification. Prayers are said in a series of set physical positions; bowing with hands on knees, standing, prostrating, and sitting in a special body position. Prayers may be performed in everyday locations, but the mosque is the preferred venue.

Compulsory giving

Giving of alms from accumulated wealth is an important aspect of Islamic life, as it is said to promote purification and spiritual growth.

Fasting in the month of Ramadan

Muslims traditionally fast and purify their lives during the holy month of Ramadan.

Hajj: Pilgrimage to Mecca

The Hajj is a Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca which occurs annually. Muslims who are financially and physically able, are required to make a pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca at least once in their lifetime. During the six days of the pilgrimage there are prescribed rites that take place in different locations. They include wearing ihram (two white sheets) on the last six miles to Mecca, entering into an inner state of holiness, walking seven times around the Kaaba, a shrine located in the centre of The Grand Mosque, and touching the sacred 'black stone' which is set as the Eastern corner stone in the Kaaba. Islamic tradition says that the stone, which descended from heaven, dates back to Adam and Eve.

ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY COMPARED

THE KORAN'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS KAFIRS, OR UNBELIEVERS

The word 'kafir' is the word used in the Islamic trilogy to describe those not of their faith. Although translated in English as 'unbelievers,' which is emotionally neutral, to more extreme Muslims kafir is a word that evokes utter contempt and disdain. The Trilogy devotes about 60% of its content to how to deal with the Kafir.

SOME VERSES IN THE KORAN ADVOCATING VIOLENCE

Below are some of the over one hundred verses in the Koran that could be interpreted as encouraging violence.

Quran (2:216) - **"Fighting is prescribed for you, and ye dislike it. But it is possible that ye dislike a thing which is good for you, and that ye love a thing which is bad for you. But Allah knoweth, and ye know not."**

Quran (4:74) - **"Let those fight in the way of Allah who sell the life of this world for the other. Whoso fighteth in the way of Allah, be he slain or be he victorious, on him We shall bestow a vast reward."**

Quran (4:89) - **"They but wish that ye should reject Faith, as they do, and thus be on the same footing (as they): But take not friends from their ranks until they flee in the way of Allah (From what is forbidden). But if they turn renegades, seize them and slay them wherever ye find them; and (in any case) take no friends or helpers from their ranks."**

Quran (5:33) - **"The punishment of those who wage war against Allah and His messenger and strive to make mischief in the land is only this, that they should be murdered or crucified or their hands and their feet should be cut off on opposite sides or they should be imprisoned; this shall be as a disgrace for them in this world, and in the hereafter they shall have a grievous chastisement."**

Quran (8:12) - **"I will cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieve. Therefore strike off their heads and strike off every fingertip of them."**

Quran (9:88) - **“But the Messenger, and those who believe with him, strive and fight with their wealth and their persons: for them are (all) good things: and it is they who will prosper.”**

Quran (48:29) - **“Muhammad is the messenger of Allah. And those with him are hard (ruthless) against the disbelievers and merciful among themselves.”**

DIFFERENT ATTITUDES OF CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM TO OPPOSITION

The Old Testament dispensation with its rites, laws and prescribed punishments, ended with the advent of God’s new covenant, which began with the birth of Jesus Christ and the doctrine of Christianity, which is revealed in the New Testament. To find out Christianity’s attitude to opposition to its doctrine, and hatred directed towards themselves, we must study the New Testament, and in particular, what Jesus had to say about it. For instance:

“You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven...”
Matt 5:43-45.

The most important commandment of the New Testament is that we love one another as Jesus Christ loves us.

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” 1 John 4:7-11.

By comparison, whilst the Koran requires Muslims to love and care for those of their own faith, Islam’s attitude to those who oppose its doctrine is entirely different. The Koran incites Muslims in all ages to join in jihad to destroy all other religions until only Islam remains.

Both Islam and Christianity have the desire that the whole world is converted to their religion. However their way of achieving their aim is vastly different. Christianity endeavours to conquer the world by evangelism, so that everyone who hears and believes the gospel of salvation has eternal life.

On the other hand Muslims engage in jihad, endeavouring to bring about their aim through violence. An example is their assault on Buddhism, which was all but eliminated in the Indian subcontinent by militant Muslims.

A Christian’s attitude towards Muslims?

Christians may have an attitude of aversion to Islamic ideology and its propensity to promote violence, but their proper attitude towards Muslims themselves should be one of love and concern for their eternal wellbeing. Ultimately there is a desire for Muslims that they accept the Christian faith and receive the Lord’s salvation.

The Koran's attitude to Christians and Jews

The Koran says Christians and Jews are special, referring to them as the "People of the Book." Many Muslims say that "we are all descendants from Abraham," but the reality is that Christians are not accepted by Islam unless they believe that

- Christ was a man who was a prophet of Allah
- there is no Trinity
- Jesus was not crucified nor resurrected
- He will return to establish Sharia law
- accept that Mohammed was the last prophet of God.

The reality is that both Christians and Jews have suffered persecution and massacres in countries conquered by Muslim armies, including the Middle East, North Africa, Turkey, and parts of Europe.

VERSES ADVOCATING VIOLENCE INCITE RADICALISATION AND TERRORISM

The New Testament of the Christian Bible, and the Islamic Koran contain the foundational doctrinal beliefs on which both religions stand. Whereas the New Testament has no passages calling for violence, the Koran contains over one hundred verses that could incite Muslims to violence against nonbelievers for the sake of Islam. By comparison, there are comparatively few verses promoting the virtues of religious tolerance and universal brotherhood.

The violent verses of the Koran have played a key role in promoting radicalisation, terrorism, and genocide. Muslims who do not join the fight are called 'hypocrites' and warned that they are not favoured by Allah, and will have no part in the glories that await those who take part in jihad. On the other hand, those who lose their lives in an act of terrorism are told that they will go straight to heaven, where great rewards await them. Young Muslims who become disenchanted with their lack of purpose and the shortcomings of modern society are an easy prey to extremist Muslims, who expound Allah's pleasure in those who engage in jihad for the sake of Islam, and the immediate heavenly rewards that follow their death. They are not told that Satan, who in the bible is called the 'Destroyer,' and 'a murderer,' is the real instigator of all violence and destruction, and their real lot after their terrorist acts will be hell, rather than heaven.

Most Muslims integrated into Christian countries are peace loving citizens who desire to be accepted as normal members of the society of their new country. Many do not know or want to believe, what the Koran really says in its verses promoting violence, and its attitude towards unbelievers. They prefer a more moderate interpretation that is closer to the Christian ethic of love for all mankind. Some just ignore violent promoting passages, or subjectively interpret them in a manner that fits their personal moral preference. However the bottom line is that Islamic ideology cannot be changed without losing its veracity as the actual words and directions of Mohammed.

THE LIFE OF MOHAMMED COMPARED TO THAT OF JESUS CHRIST

Mohammad was born in Mecca in 570 AD, and died in Medina in 632 AD. He was orphaned by the time he was six years old and was taken care of by his grandfather then his uncle. Islamic tradition says that he grew to be a respected and trustworthy member of Meccan society. Mohammad was deeply religious and often retreated into the desert for prayer and meditation. At the age of 40, whilst meditating in a cave, Mohammad reportedly encountered the angel Gabriel, who gave him revelations that were recorded in the Koran, and further revelations until shortly before his death.

Mohammed became a military commander rather than an evangelist, and his prophetic message was established by force and military conquests rather than persuasion. His message was rejected in Mecca, and he was forced to retreat and settle in Medina, where he became a prominent leader. Enmity between the Meccans and Mohammad remained very strong, and he embarked on a series of raids on Meccan caravans. This was followed by ensuing wars between Mecca and Medina.

In 627 an army of over 7000 Meccans marched against Medina, but when confronted by unfamiliar trenches around the city that negated their cavalry, they instigated an unsuccessful siege, and finally were forced to retreat without gaining a foothold in Medina.

Mohammad was informed that some members of a Jewish tribe located in the vicinity of Medina had collaborated with the Meccans. After the withdrawal of the Meccan army the Jewish community was confronted by Mohammad. They endeavoured to establish a surrender, but Mohammad turned down a request for mercy, and around 700 men and teenage boys were beheaded and the women and children were enslaved. Mohammad took one of the widowed woman as a wife for himself.

From 622 to 632, with Mohammed as their military commander, the Muslim conquests overcame all opposition and Islam was established all throughout the whole of the Arabian Peninsula. After Mohammed's death in 632 the Islamic conquests continued and by 750 AD the largest empire to that time had been established, extending from the Atlantic Ocean through the Mediterranean area and the Middle East to the borders of China and India.

By comparison, historical and biblical accounts of the life of Jesus Christ show Him to be the epitome of the moral standards of love, peace, and concern for the wellbeing of mankind that He preached and that eventually played out in His sacrificial death on the cross to procure the salvation of the whole world.

Jesus' kingdom was not of the world gained by military force, but a spiritual kingdom, born and nurtured by the power of the Holy Spirit. He did not enforce His authority on those in His kingdom, but came to be a servant of mankind. He told His disciples, **"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave — just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."** Matt 20:25-28.

Jesus attracted followers by His love and concern for the well-being of mankind, and His tireless works to set them free from Satan's control. **"...God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him."** Acts 10:38-39.

WHAT ABOUT OLD TESTAMENT ETHNIC CLEANSING?

Some critics of Christianity cannot reconcile the ethnic cleansing in the Old Testament to the doctrine of love in the New Testament. We are looking at two vastly different historical periods and two spiritual dispensations, the old cleansing out the evil from the land so that the new could be established. It may be compared to a gardener preparing a bed before planting seeds. It would be totally unproductive unless the weeds were removed and the soil cultivated. First though, we must understand how the land became totally dominated by evil.

Two spiritual entities contend against each other for the control of the population of the world. Satan, the god of all evil, wickedness, and destruction, attempts to gain possession of a men's souls. When someone willingly and persistently engages in a sin such as lust, Satan has a legal spiritual right to implant a demon spirit of lust in that person, greatly increasing his propensity to engage in lust. As more and more fleshly desires are allowed to dominate, Satan may eventually gain complete control of the whole person, leaving him without any chance of rehabilitation. Such was the state of the nations the Israelites were ordered to eliminate. The whole population of each nation was under the complete control of Satan, practicing all kinds of evil like sacrificing their children to Molech. Their eternal destiny was set with Satan in hell.

The other spiritual entity is God, creator of heaven and earth, upholding all life by His eternal Spirit. He is the God of justice and righteousness, full of grace, mercy, and loving kindness, without blemish of any kind. Evil entered the world because God gave man a freewill to follow His ways or those of Satan, and eventually the whole world came under the sway of Satan. God sent His Son to deliver mankind from Satan's control through the salvation of Jesus Christ

It was God's plan to pave the way for Christ's entry into the world by first establishing a nation through whom He could communicate His commandments and will, and by animal sin offerings, prepare people to receive the offering of His Son Jesus Christ as atonement for the sins of mankind.

God chose Canaan to be the homeland of the Israelites, but before they could possess it He had to cleanse the land from every trace of Satan's control, knowing that the Israelites would be drawn into the habits and idolatry of the former inhabitants. However before God set out to cleanse the land, He waited patiently until the peoples sin reached the extent that everyone was under the control of Satan, and their eternal destiny set in hell. God told Abraham that he could not settle in Canaan until the iniquity of the Amorites was complete. **“But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.”** Gen 15:16

When Abraham bargained with God to spare the Sodomites, God promised He would not destroy Sodom if only five righteous people could be found in it. God sent Jonah to Nineveh to preach repentance, and prevent its destruction. It was only when the nations had accepted Satan's control and their eternal destiny was set, that God moved to take the land out of Satan's control.

WHY DO CHRISTIANS BELIEVE THAT CHRISTIANITY IS THE ONLY VALID RELIGION?

The validity of the Christian faith rests on the fact that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, sent to the earth by God to procure the salvation of mankind. Perhaps the most compelling evidence that Jesus is the Son of God is from Old Testament prophecies. Only God knows the end of all things before they actually happen. In the Old Testament there are over forty prophecies concerning the life history of Jesus, some dating back to more than a thousand years before His birth. E.g.

- **“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel”.** Isa 7:14.
- **“For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment**

and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.” Isa 9:6-7.

- **“And the Lord said to me, Throw it to the potter — that princely price they set on me. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord for the potter.”** Zech 11:13. (Jesus was betrayed for thirty pieces of silver, and when Judas tried to return it to the High Priests, they used it to buy a potter’s field, designated for a place of burial for the unknown dead.)
- **“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son”.** Hos 11:1. (An angel told Joseph that Herod, who had tried to murder the baby Jesus, was dead, and that it was safe to leave Egypt and return to Jerusalem.)
- **“For the transgressions of My people He was stricken. And they made His grave with the wicked — but with the rich at His death...”** Isa 53:8-9. (Jesus was crucified between two criminals, but Joseph of Arimathea, a wealthy follower of the Lord was granted permission to take Jesus’ body, and buried it in his own tomb.)
- **“They also gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.”** Ps 69:21. (Fulfilled when Jesus was offered vinegar to drink on the cross.)
- **“I gave My back to those who struck Me, and My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting.”** Isa 50:6. (Describing the tormenting by Roman soldiers before He was crucified.)
- **“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; [Jesus Christ] He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.”** Gen 3:15. This prophecy was addressed by God to the serpent, who represented Satan, and the woman’s seed represented Christ. Jesus would bruise Satan’s head, or authority. This was fulfilled when the seventy returned with joy after have been given authority to cast out demons and heal the sick. Jesus said, **“Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you.”** Luke 10:19-20. (Satan was to bruise Jesus’ heel, or departure, by precipitating His crucifixion.)

Psalm 22 contains a passage describing the acute agony of the suffering He was to endure on the cross.

“Many bulls have surrounded Me; strong bulls of Bashan have encircled Me. They gape at Me with their mouths, like a raging and roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; it has melted within Me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and My tongue clings to My jaws; You have brought Me to the dust of death. For dogs have surrounded Me; the congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet; I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me. They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots.” Ps 22:12-18

When John the Baptist’s disciples asked Jesus for proof of His divinity, He replied by saying to tell John what they saw Him doing - dead people were restored to life, the sick were healed, the blind received sight, the lame walked, and people were delivered from demon spirits - miracles that could only happen by God’s presence in Him.

After He was resurrected He was seen on a number of occasions by His disciples, and then by over five hundred witnesses, many of whom witnessed His final ascension through the clouds to heaven.

Ultimately, belief that Christianity is the only valid religion is based on the reason why God sent Jesus Christ His Son to earth, and why He had to suffer the death of the cross.

- God sent Jesus to earth to reveal His nature and love for mankind through His teaching, and miraculous ministries that set the oppressed free from Satan's control.
- God sent Jesus Christ His Son to be a sacrificial offering to bear the punishment for the sins of mankind, so that all those who confess their belief that Jesus is the Son of God, and that He has borne the punishment for their sins, are counted righteous in God's eyes, and are eternally saved. On the cross it was not Jesus who was being punished, but the sins of mankind. On the cross Jesus represented mankind, or more pertinently, the sin of mankind facing God's judgment and death sentence.

“For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” 2 Cor 5:21.

- A Christian's relationship with Jesus Christ is not limited to worshiping the Lord in heaven. His Spirit now indwells all those who receive it by faith. Paul prayed, **“that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith”** Eph 3:17. Jesus came that we might have abundant life and a personal relationship with Him through His indwelling Spirit. He said, **“I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”** John 10:10.

How does this compare with other religions? Did Mohammed, or founders of any other religion bear the punishment for the sins of mankind so that they might receive eternal life? All have died, and their tombs are here on earth to this day.

In other religions salvation is based on works, and reaching a certain standard of perfection, without any certainty of salvation. In Christianity, those who believe in Jesus Christ, and confess their belief, know that they are eternally saved. Jesus said to those who were rejoicing in their authority to cast out demons, **“do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.”** Luke 10:20.

And finally, the Christian God is a God of love who **“so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”** John 3:16-17.