

## HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 10/16/2023

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

***ONE AT ONE*** – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, October 17 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for the people of the Middle East and for all who have suffered loss over the recent actions in Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza. Pray for comfort for those who grieve and/or are suffering injury or loss of home. Ask GOD that avenues for peace and justice might be found and that all GOD'S people throughout the world might be treated with the goodness that GOD offers.*

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A well-known politician recently made the statement, "All Arabs are antisemitic." I suspect a lot of people believe this with the understanding that antisemitic refers to hatred of Jews exclusively. But this understanding is technically not correct.

The Wednesday Bible study classes know that the term "Semite" originates with the biblical story of Noah. Following the flood that destroyed all living creatures except those in the ark, it was Noah and his family who were left to repopulate the earth with human beings. Noah and his wife had three sons, each of whom was married. These three couples became the forerunners of all the people of the earth. Genesis gives a detailed listing of the different tribes that descended from the three sons, Shem, Ham, and Jephtha, and where each tribe settled. Of particular importance to the Bible narrative are the descendants of Shem, the Shemites, who later became known as the Semites.

Following the line of Shem, the Bible records his offspring down to Abram, who was later renamed Abraham by GOD. To Abraham, GOD promised to make him a great nation (many descendants) and to give him a land in which to live. This promise was made specifically when Abraham was seventy-five and Sarah, his wife, was sixty-five, and well past child-bearing age. Deciding to "help" GOD fulfill GOD'S promise of a son, Sarah convinced Abraham to have relations with her handmaid, Hagar. Being a slave owned by Abraham and Sarah, Hagar had no choice. She became pregnant through Abraham and gave birth to a son, Ishmael. Fourteen years later, Sarah miraculously became pregnant and gave birth to Isaac, and it was through Isaac that GOD'S promise to Abraham would be fulfilled.

But Abraham loved both his sons, and though GOD said the covenant, the promise of blessing, would happen through Isaac, Abraham also asked for some blessing for Ishmael. GOD, indeed, promised to bless Ishmael, saying that he would become the father of twelve tribes. Isaac also became the forefather of twelve tribes. The descendants of Abraham through Isaac are known today as the Hebrews or Jews. The descendants of Abraham through Ishmael are known today as the Arabs. But both the offspring of Ishmael and the offspring of Isaac come down from Abraham who is in turn a descendant of Shem and are therefore Semites.

In its original form, a Semite is a member of any of a number of nations of people in the Middle Eastern region. These include the Akkadians from the area around Mesopotamia (Iraq and Iran), the Phoenicians (from the eastern part of the Arabian Peninsula), the Arabs (the nomadic people of the south, central, and western Arabian Peninsula), and the Hebrews. So, the Arabs and the Jews are both Semitic.

Today, the term "Semite" has come to be understood by many as referring solely to the Jews. To be "antisemitic" is to be biased against or have a hatred toward the Jews. The abuses and persecutions the Hebrew people have experienced over the centuries have contributed to this understanding. But, the statement of that politician about Arabs being antisemitic is wrong, because Arabs are also Semitic.

The situation in the Middle East is very complicated today with biases and prejudices going all the way back to Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Ishmael, and Isaac. The Bible tells us that Abraham loved both his sons who indeed

made him the father of a great nation—many people. The Bible also tells us that GOD loves all people and desires what is best and good for everyone. Yet the Bible is also filled with stories of hatred, abuses, revenge, battles for self-preservation, and more. It is complex and difficult. In our efforts to do GOD’S will, though, there is one thing of which we can be certain—our prayers need to be for peace and for the good of all.

In CHRIST'S love,  
Pastor Jeffrey