

**KISSING COUSINS OR THE HATFIELDS AND McCOYS?
{THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT}
(Rick Yohn)**

Few of us would disagree that politics, religion, skin color, language, and boundaries often divide humanity into a tribal mentality. For example, consider the Middle East. Jews and Arabs, living in the land of the Bible, continuously experience conflict, and yet they have a lot in common.

True, they often behave like the Hatfields and McCoys, a feud between two families that emerged soon after the Civil War, but most of them come from a common ancestor known as Abraham. In fact, the three great world religions of Judaism, Muslim, and Christian all look to Abraham as their father. And though we, who are Gentiles, don't have a blood or DNA relationship with Abraham, many of those in the Middle East do, whether they are Jews or Palestinians, or whether they follow Judaism, the Muslim faith, or no faith at all.

DNA: Let's first consider the scientific evidence. According to an article entitled, "Jews Are The Genetic Brothers Of Palestinians, Syrians, And Lebanese", research has concluded the following: "The study, published in the May 9 issue of the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, found that Jewish men shared a common set of genetic signatures with non-Jews from the Middle East, including Palestinians, Syrians, and Lebanese, and these signatures diverged significantly from non-Jewish men outside of this region. **Consequently, Jews and Arabs share a common ancestor and are more closely related to one another than to non-Jews from other areas of the world.**"¹

LANGUAGE: Besides a common ancestor for their blood and DNA, both Jews and Arabs speak a "Semitic Language." What do we mean by that statement? If we go back to Noah's three sons, we discover where each son went. Japheth moved to the north area (Europe), Ham to the south (Africa), and Shem to the east and south-east (Asia & Arabia). Without getting lost in the weeds, the Semitic languages can trace back to one of the sons of Noah by the name of Shem. From the name Shem comes the word "Shemites" or "Semites." Three of the Semitic languages in the Middle East are Arabic, Hebrew, and Aramaic, and the Old Testament was written primarily in Hebrew with some Aramaic passages. Let me illustrate it by considering what we call the "Romantic Languages," such as French, Italian, and Spanish. Though they derive from a common language, if you speak Spanish, you won't necessarily speak French or Italian due to the differences within each language. Likewise, though many in the Middle East speak both Arabic and Hebrew, most are proficient in only one of the two languages. Now let's consider family relationships.



¹ New York University Medical Center And School Of Medicine. "Jews Are The Genetic Brothers Of Palestinians, Syrians, And Lebanese." ScienceDaily. ScienceDaily, 9 May 2000. <www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2000/05/0005090036

LOT & HIS DAUGHTERS: From Noah and Shem our next focus is on Abraham's nephew Lot. Since the two of them had large flocks and herds and were running out of space, Abraham and Lot separated. Lot went down to the area of Sodom, which at the time was lush and beautiful, while Abraham remained where he was. But during God's judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah, he spared Lot and his family (except Lot's wife, who paused to reflect on what she was leaving behind and looked back at the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. This refusal to quickly move on resulted in losing her life and becoming a pillar of salt). Lot now was without a wife, and his two daughters were without husbands. So the older daughter plotted with her sister to encourage her father Lot to drink enough wine to put him to sleep. Then each daughter slept with their father and had a child by him. From the one child came the Moabites and from the other, the Ammonites. Each of these nations became both neighbors and enemies of the Jews. Today, the Jordanians are living in the former land of the Moabites and the Syrians in the former territory of the Ammonites. Since Lot was the nephew of Abraham, that makes them distant relatives of the Jews.



Figure 2 - amazingbibletimeline.com

ABRAHAM: Along with science and language, we can also trace these blood-related people groups back to Abraham. Recall that when God encountered Abraham, telling him to leave everything he knew and move to another country, Abraham was childless. Therefore, when God informed him that he would be the father of many nations, the reality seemed to be impossible. At the time of that promise, Abraham was seventy-five years old, and Sarah was ten-years-younger. So as the years passed and Abraham still had no son, his wife Sarah told him to fulfill God's promise by sleeping with her handmaiden, Hagar. The result was that Abraham felt satisfied he had helped complete what God promised years earlier.

As time passed, God appeared to Abraham again and dropped a bombshell on him. He told Abraham, and I paraphrase, "Remember that promise of a son I gave you some years ago? Well, it's time for me to deliver on that promise." At this point, Abraham was both startled and confused. Why did he need another son? Ishmael was his son who enjoyed the rights of the firstborn. Wouldn't he fulfill the promise God had made? Actually no. Ishmael was the brainchild of Sarah and Abraham, not God. The Lord informed Abraham that the child about whom He was speaking would come from both Abraham's and Sarah's bodies.

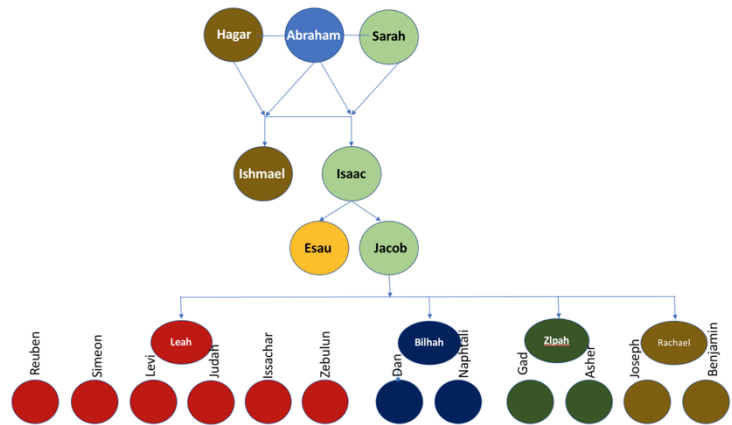


Figure 3 - Chart by Rick Yohn

Can you imagine the emotional turmoil within Abraham? "How will I explain this to my son Ishmael? His half-brother Isaac is going to receive the promise of the covenant that God made with me?" Though

God promised to bless Ishmael and make him into a great nation, Ishmael would not be a part of the contract God made with Abraham. And the result of this was a rivalry between the two brothers which would last for the next 4,000 years.

Rick and Aly, my son and daughter-in-law have just returned from Israel. During their time in that land, they experienced first-hand what I am writing about - cousins and brothers fighting one another. They've been up on the Golan and have looked across into Syria, the present-day enemies of Israel. Syria is in chaos today and has been in a civil war for the past seven years. President Obama drew a red-line and warned Syria not to cross it. When Syria crossed the red-line, the U.S. remained silent. Today the conflict continues with Russia and Iran siding with King Assad, along with Hezbollah who is fighting against Israel from Syria. Mix this with the U.S. helping the Syrian Kurds fighting against Isis, and you have one giant civil war. So not only are Arabs fighting Arabs. Muslims are also fighting Muslims. And all of this chaos is occurring in a relatively small piece of real estate. And most of the participants, except the U.S., want to see Israel thrown into the Sea. What is behind all of this conflict? Politics? Religion? Differing world views? To answer this question, let's look behind the curtain and discover who is stirring the pot.



Figure 5 - Rick & Aly Yohn on The Sea of Galilee (June of 2018)

A LOOK BEHIND THE CURTAIN - The Apostle Paul unmasks the real enemy of the Jews. No, it's not the Arabs. It's not the Muslims. They are merely the pawns of the unseen world described in Ephesians 6. Paul writes, *"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms"* (Ephesians 6:12). Though hidden from our physical sight, a real spiritual enemy exists. The Prophet Daniel mentions his own experience when he informs his readers how God answered one of his prayers, an answer that had been delayed three weeks due to spiritual warfare. As Daniel waited for God's answer, an angel appeared to him saying, *"Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia"* (Daniel 10:12-14). Daniel is telling us about the spiritual warfare that takes place in the spiritual realm, with God's forces against those of the Devil. It's the same spiritual forces that you and I battle day after day, though most of the time we are completely unaware of what goes on behind the physical realm. Instead of fighting against the Devil by humbling ourselves before God and resisting our enemy, we too often take it out on what we see and hear.

That is what is keeping the hatred stirring in the Middle East. Palestinians and Jews may be fighting one another, but it is the demonic forces of evil who are cheering them on in the battle. The real enemy plants hatred in the heart and encourages that hatred to spread throughout a child's education. Eventually, the hatred spills out in the streets.

THE CURE FOR HOSTILITY - However, there is a cure for the hostility you find in the Middle East. It's the same solution that removes hatred from those of us who don't live in the Middle East. I'm speaking of a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. He removes hostility, resentment, anger, and an unforgiving spirit. One of my dear friends is a Christian Arab who lives in Nazareth, Israel. His name is

Munir Sayegh. Two other friends of mine are two of my favorite tour guides (Amir Tsarfati and Ronnie Cohen). Munir has been our bus driver on several occasions while Amir or Ronnie have been our Jewish guides. In this photo, from left to right are Munir (Arab), me (Gentile), Amir Tsarfati (Jew), and Ronnie Cohen (Jew). We all claim Abraham as our father in the faith and three of those in the photo claim Abraham as their father in the flesh. I am the one who has been “grafted” into this Semitic family of Arab and Jew.

Though Arab and Jew may be related, distrust and hostility continue to prevail. And without a change in the heart, there will be no peace. But as you've seen in the above photograph, God's redemption for the four men in the photo produces God's love for each other. Only through Christ, can Jews and Arabs live more like Kissing Cousins and less like the Hatfields and McCoys.



Figure 4 - Photo by Linda Yohn - Israel Friends Meet