



Zionism Unsettled: A Congregational Study Guide

Wasatch Presbyterian Church

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The Study Guide breakdown for a 4-week course is given on page 65.

The Israel/Palestine Mission Network of the Presbyterian Church (USA) website is at: <https://www.theipmn.org/>

The videos are at the following link on that website (under Teaching Tools/Visit Our Vimeo Video Collection): <https://vimeo.com/user26145817>

- “WPM” stands for “Why Palestine Matters” (April 2018).
- “SH” stands for “Steadfast Hope” (April 2011).
- “ZU” stands for “Zionism Unsettled” (January 2014). (These videos are at the end of the collection.)

Timeline is on pages 62-63.

“Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world’s grief. Do justly, now. Love mercy, now. Walk humbly, now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it.”

- An interpretive translation of the Jewish Talmud by Rabbi Rami Shapiro

“It’s complicated.”

Ask yourself:

How would full equality under the law
change things?

Part 1:

- Toward a New Framework
- Palestine, Israel and the United Nations
- Political Zionism
- Constantinian Religion
- The Concept and Practice of a Jewish State

Toward a New Framework:

Why should the church discuss Zionism?

Considering ways in which an ideology – i.e., political and religious doctrine – has been a driving force of the conflict.

- Zionism: The ideological movement established to remedy Jewish victimization. It evolved from a “far-fetched theoretical framework to a politically empowered Jewish resettlement project.”
- Palestinian critiques of Zionism:
 - Rashid Khalidi (American historian)
 - Nur Masalha (Palestinian writer and historian)
 - Edward Said (Palestinian-American academic)

- Jewish critiques of Zionism:
 - Adam Shatz (American writer) (2004 book)
 - Ben Ehrenreich (American journalist) (2009 Los Angeles Times article)
 - Tony Judt (British historian, essayist, university professor)
 - Peter Beinart (American columnist and journalist)
 - Henry Siegman (American author)
 - David Remnick (American journalist and writer)
 - Philip Weiss (American journalist)
 - Ilan Pappé (Israeli historian)
 - Ian Lustick (American political scientist)
 - I.F. Stone (American journalist and writer) (1969 essay titled “Holy War” in the *New York Review*)

“Israel is creating a kind of moral schizophrenia in world Jewry. In the outside world the welfare of Jewry depends on the maintenance of secular, non-racial, pluralistic societies. In Israel, Jewry finds itself defending a society ... in which the ideal is racial and exclusionist.” – I.F. Stone, 1969.

“For me the Arab problem is also the No. 1 Jewish problem. How we act toward the Arabs will determine what kind of people we become: either oppressors and racists in our turn like those from whom we have suffered, or a nobler race able to transcend the tribal xenophobias that afflict mankind.” – I.F. Stone, 1969.

A role for the church in the discussion – why?

- Christian anti-Semitism was a major factor in the rise of Jewish Zionism.
- Christian Zionism is a major factor in support for Israeli governmental policies harming Palestinians and impeding a just peace.
- The U.S. government has been biased in its role supporting Israel.
- There has traditionally been a taboo on speaking about these issues in interfaith settings.

It is time to speak the truth in love to one another.

This study explores the theological and ethical exceptionalism of Jewish and Christian Zionism.

Exceptionalism: the sacred claim of special status.

- “History has demonstrated with tragic repetition the straight line from sacred claims of special status to separation, prejudice, discrimination, and violence toward other peoples.”
- Exceptionalism is not unique to Zionism. All three Abrahamic faiths – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – suffer from theological and ethical exceptionalism. (Examples given on pages 7-8.)
- “The fundamental assumption of this study is that no exceptionalist claims can be justified in our interconnected, pluralistic world.”
- “The challenge of interfaith relations is to find a way to respect theological differences and historical experiences that give rise to them while preventing them from becoming excuses for injustice toward those who find themselves on the outside.”

Palestine, Israel and the United Nations:

Israel claims legitimacy as a state based on the U.N. Partition Plan. On 11/29/1947, the U.N. General Assembly adopted the plan as Resolution 181. (33 voting for, 13 against, 10 abstentions.)

How did we get to the Partition Plan?

British Mandate for Palestine:

Britain conquered Palestine (formerly part of Ottoman Syria) at the end of 1917. By that time, Britain had made several conflicting agreements:

- Husayn-McMahon Correspondence (1915-1916)
- Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916)
- Balfour Declaration (1917)

Balfour Declaration (Nov. 2, 1917): [ZU pg. 11]

“His Majesty’s Government views with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.”

- Britain was granted a Mandate for Palestine on 4/25/1920 at the San Remo Conference.
- British army ruled Palestine until a civil administration was established 7/1/1920.
- On 7/24/1922, the League of Nations formally adopted a British mandate for Palestine, which incorporated the principles of the 1917 Balfour Declaration in the mandate.
 - The Balfour Declaration was incorporated into the preamble of the Mandate and Article 2.
- Britain transferred the eastern bank of the Jordan River to Abdullah ibn Huseyn of the Hashemite dynasty and appointed him King of Jordan.
- Under the terms of League of Nations A-class mandates (Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine) each such mandatory territory was to become a sovereign state on termination of its mandate. By the end of World War II, this occurred with all such mandates except Palestine. The League of Nations itself ceased to exist on 4/20/1946, handing over all its assets to the United Nations.

https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/british_mandate_for_palestine

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The plan divided Palestine into 3 parts: a “Jewish state,” an “Arab state,” and with Jerusalem to be a “*corpus separatum*” under an international trusteeship system. Refer to the maps on page 18 in ZU.

Note the statistic on pg. 10 of ZU: “The future Jewish state was granted 55% of the total land area and the future Arab state, 45%. At the time of partition, Palestinian Arabs owned approximately 93% of the land in Palestine; Jews 7%.”

Green: Palestinian land
White: Jewish land, then Israeli land



Demographics of the proposed Partition Plan (based on 1945 data):

Territory	Arab and other population	% Arab and other	Jewish population	% Jewish	Total population
Arab State	725,000	99%	10,000	1%	735,000
Jewish State	407,000	45%	498,000	55%	905,000
International	105,000	51%	100,000	49%	205,000
Total	1,237,000	67%	608,000	33%	1,845,000

Data from the Report of UNSCOP: 3 September 1947: CHAPTER 4: A COMMENTARY ON PARTITION

The United Nations collection of documents on the Collection of Palestine:
“United Nations Information System on Palestine” (UNISPAL):
<https://www.un.org/unispal/>

U.N. Resolution 181 (the “Partition Plan”):
<https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-185393/>

Chapter 3: Citizenship, international conventions and financial obligations:

1.Citizenship. Palestinian citizens residing in Palestine outside the City of Jerusalem, as well as Arabs and Jews who, not holding Palestinian citizenship, reside in Palestine outside the City of Jerusalem **shall**, upon the recognition of independence, **become citizens of the State in which they are resident and enjoy full civil and political rights.**

Chapter 2: Religious and Minority Rights:

2. No discrimination of any kind shall be made between the inhabitants on the ground of race, religion, language or sex.

3. All persons within the jurisdiction of the State shall be entitled to equal protection of the laws.

8. No expropriation of land owned by an Arab in the Jewish State (by a Jew in the Arab State) shall be allowed except for public purposes. In all cases of expropriation full compensation as fixed by the Supreme Court shall be paid previous to dispossession.

Political Zionism: Seven different definitions given on page 11:

1. **The national movement to create in Palestine "a Jewish and democratic state."** [A common formulation.]
2. **"The establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish People."** [From the Balfour Declaration of 1917.]
3. **"...[T]he first manifestation of the approach of our redemption."** [A religious definition, and one that is included in the prayer books of the four major American Jewish "denominations."]
4. **"An ideology of Jewish nationalism. Refers primarily to the establishment and building up of a politically independent Jewish state in the historic land of Israel."** [Rabbi Brant Rosen, *Wrestling in the Daylight: A Rabbi's Path to Palestinian Solidarity*, 2012.]

5. “The national movement for the return of Jewish people to their homeland and the resumption of Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel.” [Jewish Virtual Library definition.]

6. “...[T]he preoccupation with Jewish vulnerability and suffering [i.e., ‘our eternal victimhood’], and the sense of entitlement to the land [of Israel].” [Mark Braverman, *Fatal Embrace: Christians, Jews, and the Search for Peace in the Holy Land*, 2010.]

7. Privilege allotted to one group and denied to other groups based on ethnicity and/or religion, i.e., state-sponsored ethnic discrimination and ethnic cleansing. [A common view among human rights groups.]

Five major leaders who shaped the Zionist project from its beginning in the 1890s through the present:

1. Theodor Herzl (Viennese journalist; wrote The Jewish State in 1896).
2. Vladimir Jabotinsky (Russian-born, immigrated to Palestine; founded the Revisionist Party, of which the Irgun Zvai Leumi paramilitary group was an offshoot).
3. David Ben-Gurion (immigrated from Poland to Palestine in 1906; first Prime Minister and Defense Minister of Israel in 1948).
4. Menachem Begin (immigrated to Palestine in 1942, rose to commander of the Irgun; first Likud prime minister in 1977).
5. Binyamin Netanyahu (Israeli prime minister 1996-1999; 2009-2021; 2022-present).

Alternatives to political Zionism. Proponents of “Cultural Zionism” (ZU pg. 12):

1. Ahad Ha'am. Predicted that the pursuit of an independent state would erode “the true spirit of Judaism” (the ethical teaching of the Hebrew prophets) and “beget in us a tendency to find the path of glory in the attainment of material power and political domination.”
2. Rabbi Judah Magnes. (A founder of Hebrew University in Jerusalem.) (ZU, pg. 16)
3. Martin Buber (social philosopher). (ZU pg. 16)
 - Writing after the 1948 war, Buber stated: “The cry of victory does not have the power of preventing the clear-eyed from seeing that the soul of the Zionist enterprise has evaporated.... Yes, a goal has been reached, but it is not called Zion.... [The] day will yet come when the victorious march of which our people is so proud today will seem to us like a cruel detour.”

Jabotinsky: “Zionism is a colonizing adventure, and therefore it stands or falls by the question of armed force. It is important to build, it is important to speak Hebrew, but unfortunately, it is even more important to be able to shoot.”

David Ben-Gurion: “I am for compulsory transfer [of the Palestinians out of Palestine]; I do not see anything immoral in it.”

- Two months prior to Israel declaring independence in May 1948, Ben-Gurion and his advisors had already adopted the Haganah’s “Plan Dalet,” which called for the systematic and total expulsion of Palestinians from their homeland.

From December 1947 until the armistice between Israel and its Arab neighbors in 1949, this strategy of ethnic cleansing would force all the inhabitants from more than 500 Palestinian villages, totally and deliberately destroy the structures in 400 Palestinian villages, create 750,000 Palestinian refugees, kill most who resisted the dispossession of land and homes, and prevent the return of Palestinian refugees to their homes after cessation of hostilities.

“Judaizing” the Land: (ZU pg. 13 and also pg 60).

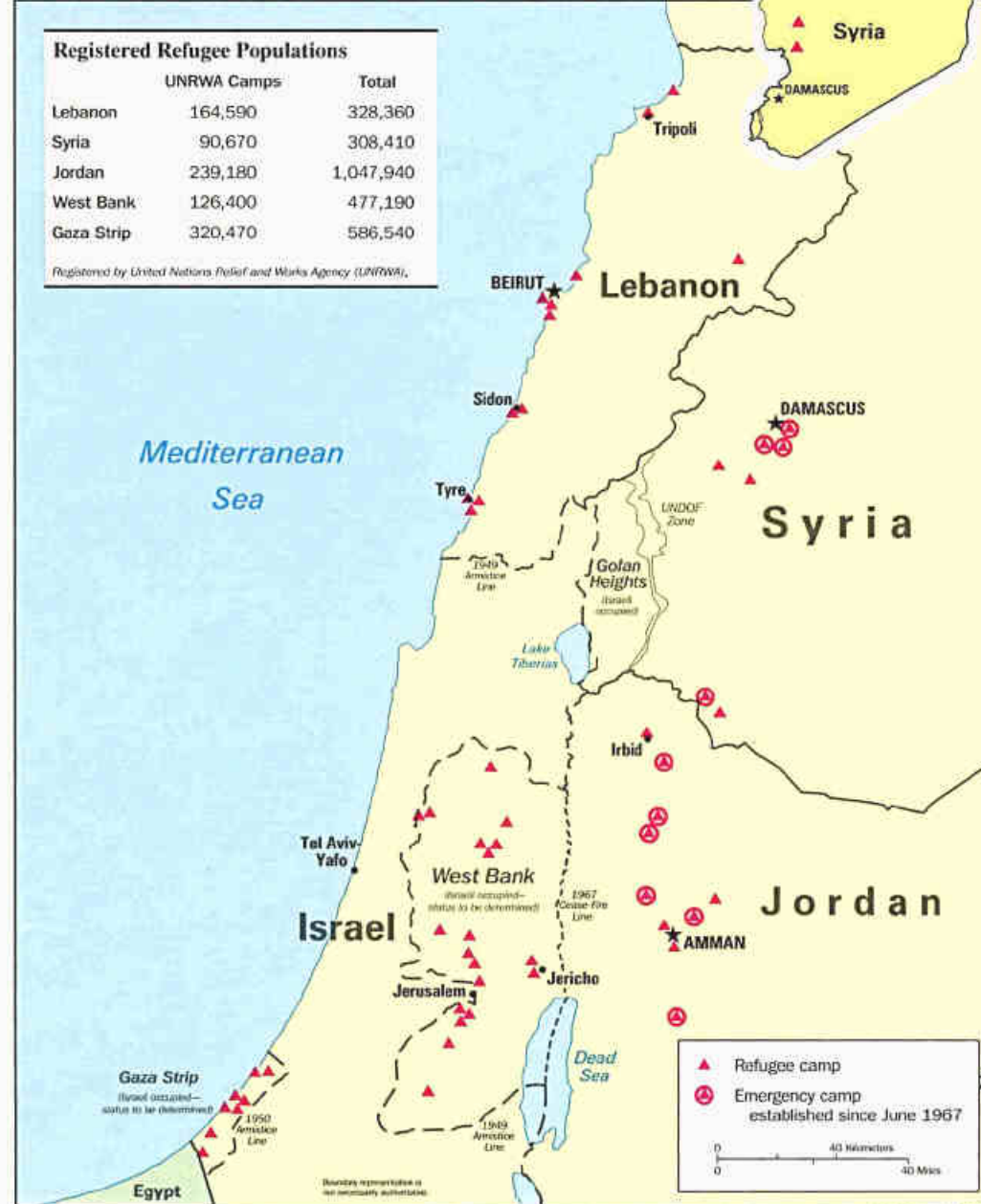
See map of over 500 Palestinian villages depopulated by Jewish soldiers and paramilitaries in 1948.

Some 750,000 Palestinians fled or were driven out in the fighting between 1947-1948 and not allowed to return to their homes when the fighting stopped. This is the genesis of the Palestinian refugee population. This population has swelled to at least 5.9 million Palestinian refugees currently registered with UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees), with more in the diaspora who are unregistered.

UNRWA runs 58 refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem.

UNRWA
refugee
Camps
1993

Official UNRWA Palestinian Refugee Camps, November 1993



The Concept and Practice of a Jewish State:

Menachem Begin:

- Glorified armed revolt: “Out of the blood and tears and ashes a new specimen of Jew was born, a specimen completely unknown to the world for over eighteen hundred years: the FIGHTING JEW.”

Binyamin Netanyahu:

- Has demanded that the Palestinians recognize Israel as a “Jewish state.”

Constantian Religion:

Refers to the year Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity in 312 C.E. Some historians identify this as the date after which anti-Jewish contempt became systematic and pathological.

Refers to James Carroll's influential study "Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews." A scathing critique of and apology for centuries of Christian mistreatment of the Jewish people.

Lists several critics of "Constantinian Judaism":

- Martin Buber
- Judah Magnes
- Rabbi Brant Rosen
- Theologian Marc Ellis

The Interfaith Ecumenical Deal:

Silence on the Christian side brings no criticism of anti-Semitism from the Jewish side.

Marc Ellis lifts up a vision of what might occur when Church leaders "have finally learned the central lesson of Christian complicity in the Holocaust." The lesson, Ellis writes, is not only that Christians have erred toward the Jewish people, but that more universally, "The ultimate sin is silence in the face of injustice."

Questions for Reflection:
Pages 15 and 23