

# BOOK STUDY GUIDE

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“This guide consists of two types of questions. One type highlights information important to focus on in the chapter. The other type of question is for people to use in discussions and for written reflections on issues discussed in the chapter, which has stimulated their thinking. Included are page numbers, particularly where it is hard to find in the text where the topic of the questions is discussed. Also included are two reflection statements, which people wrote during the two studies of this book we did with others.”

# THE BIRTH OF SABEEL

## Chapter One

1. Identify two pivotal events that impacted Naim Ateek's early ministry and contributed to his developing a Palestinian theology of liberation. How did they set the stage for what was to come? (pp. 4-5)
2. What is the meaning of "intifada", and yet what do people tend to associate with this word? What was important about the first intifada (p.6)?
3. Why would Israel have chosen to aid the emergence of Hamas ? (pp. 7-8)
4. How did a conflict that had its origins in European colonial and imperialist ideologies make it essential that Christians develop a theological response and critique it with an authoritative message of the Bible? (pp. 10-11)
5. How does a Palestinian liberation theology that speaks to the Palestinian community living under occupation help to restore a balance between Christ's divine and human natures? (pp. 11-14)

### For Reflection

1. "Once we have a vision of the liberator Christ, we have to critique any theology that silences the people of God in the face of evil." (p. 12) Where do you see churches and church leaders silenced and Christians afraid to speak the truth to power?
2. The Palestinian Christian community chose for its movement's name "Sabeel" (p.10), meaning "the way", "the path" and "the spring of fresh water". How would you describe the path that Sabeel has chosen to follow and the water from which it is nourished?

# THE GENEROUS OFFER OF THE PALESTINIANS

## Chapter Two

1. What was the reaction of Palestinian extremists to the Israeli army and air attacks, and how did these attacks affect the peace talks? (p. 23)
2. Rather than further peace, how did the period after the Oslo Accords result in further consolidation of Palestinian land and entrenched injustice? (p. 23)
3. How has Israel's unwillingness to implement international law and desire for more Palestinian land affected the peace processes between 1988-2003? (p.25-26)

4. Between 1987-2006 what was the most common tactic used by Israel to weaken or undermine attempts at peace initiatives? (pp. 23-24)
5. How does the absence of a “symmetry of power” in the region affect the way atrocities in the occupied territories are interpreted to the international community? What is the role of the US in this interpretation? (pp. 25-26)
6. How does the Israeli lobby impact the US government's ability to be an impartial negotiator for the Palestinians and Israelis? (pp. 26-27)
7. Why don't more Americans recognize that the US's support for Israel encourages Middle East violence and Muslim resentment toward the US?
8. What was the offer which the Palestinians made at Camp David-Taba talks, and who turned down the offer? (pp. 33-34)

### **For Reflection**

1. How does disturbing the peace and advocacy and a widow's cries for justice relate to the Palestinian/Israeli conflict?
2. How is Jesus' criticism that "scribes and Pharisees tithe mint and cumin but forget justice and mercy" applicable to the way religious leaders today are interpreting the Palestinian/Israeli conflict?
3. How do you understand “justice can never be divorced from faith and love”? (p.22)

## **THE BREEDING OF VIOLENCE**

### **Chapter Three**

1. What was the religious make-up of Palestine in the early 20th century, the level of violence during this time, and what changes with WW1? (pp. 37-38)
2. What were the factors in the early 20th century outside of Palestine, which resulted in the displacement of the indigenous people (pp. 38-39)?
3. What role did the better organized & financed Zionists play in the formation of Israel? (pp. 39-41)
4. How did the Palestinians react after the Nakba to losing much of their land and what were Israeli responses? (pp. 42-43)
5. After the 1967 War and the Israeli military occupation over the West Bank, Gaza and Jerusalem, how did the Israelis increase control over the Palestinians? (pp. 43-44)
6. With the eruption of the first then second intifadas, Israel realized the Palestinians were not giving up their right of self-determination. What methods of control did Israel use to subjugate the Palestinians? (pp. 44-45)

7. To sustain an impression of victimhood, Israel needed to continually regenerate the myth that it is a peace-seeking victim, which has "no partner for peace", but how does it escape world condemnation? (pp. 45-46)
8. What elements consolidate "one of the most comprehensive and lethal systems of control and suppression the world has ever seen?" (pp. 44-46)

### **For Reflection**

1. Describe some of the ways that Israel regenerates the myth that it is the peace-seeking victim with "no partner for peace".
2. Israel has lost its soul. Comment.
3. As a child, Naim Ateek witnessed an accident, which he described at the beginning of this chapter. When asked to testify about what he had seen, his father advised him simply to tell the truth. How would you describe the place of "truth" in this conflict?

## **THE BIBLE AND THE LAND**

### **Chapter Four**

1. While many Muslims are secular and not interested in religious argument, what theologies of the land of Palestine are part of religious tradition? (pp. 51-52)
2. "The issue of the land is the heart of the conflict in the Middle East. Because the Zionists wanted the land without the people who inhabited it, the major policies and laws of the state of Israel were designed to strip Palestinians of their land." (p. 56) What rationalizations have been used to do this and which have been most effective in the way your church or community understands the issues? Which are the most difficult to counter?
3. What is an exclusive and an inclusive Old Testament theology of the land? (pp. 56-58)
4. Study the biblical passages in this chapter. (pp 58-64) What does each say regarding the land? Which speaks most directly to you?

### **For Reflection**

1. The basic questions for Christians are: Can we justify biblically any exclusive claim by Jews over the land? From a New Testament perspective, can we conclude that Jews have a legitimate exclusive claim? Comment. (p.58)
2. Do you have any thoughts on the division of the land and on what basis (biblical or human rights) do you make these recommendations?

# **JONAH, THE FIRST PALESTINIAN LIBERATION THEOLOGIAN**

## **Chapter Five**

1. Who were the Assyrians, and why did Jonah prefer their destruction to helping them repent? (p.6)
2. What has been the general interpretation of the book of Jonah, and how has the church used this interpretation? (p.71)
3. Naim Ateek has come to understand the book of Jonah in a more radical and revolutionary way. How is this expressed in each of these areas: (pp. 73-75)
  - a) a theology of God?
  - b) a theology of the people of God?
  - c) a theology of the land?
4. What were the ethnic and demographic conditions in Palestine that the writer of Jonah was addressing in his narrative? (pp. 72-73)

## **For Reflection**

1. Jonah is the first Palestinian liberation theologian. Explain.
2. Considering the contemporary conflict in Israel and Palestine, respond to the statement: "We are interested in divine rights not human rights".
3. How can the theological message of Jonah serve as a bridge linking the Old and New Testaments?

# **THE THEOLOGY AND POLITICS OF CHRISTIAN ZIONISM**

## **Chapter Six**

1. Define Christian Zionism. (p. 80)
2. What would you include in a list of the main tenets of Christian Zionist theology? (pp. 80-81)
3. Why did Christians in the nineteenth century in Great Britain and then the United States start asking questions about the second coming of Jesus? (pp. 83-84)

4. What events between 1917-1967 confirmed for the Christian Zionists that history was heading toward the fulfillment of God's purpose? When did American Christian Zionists become a formidable ally of Israel ready to support Israel politically in the US Congress? (pp. 84-86)
5. How would you counter one or both of the statements that:
  - a) Christian Zionists have a literal belief in an inerrant and infallible Bible
  - b) All biblical prophecies will be fulfilled literally (pp. 90-91)
6. How is the founding of Israel very important for Christian Zionists and a sign that the End Times are near? (p. 86)
7. Since September 11, 2001, what forces have worked to consolidate the relationship between the Christian Zionists and Jewish Zionists? (p. 86)

### **For Reflection**

1. One principle is clear: any religion that does not promote justice, truth, peace, love, forgiveness, and reconciliation among people has lost its rudder and is undeserving of respect. Comment
2. How would you counter some of the Christian Zionists biblical arguments about the return of Jesus? (pp. 90-91)
3. One of the disturbing abuses of the Bible comes from the phenomena of Christian Zionism (p.78). How does Christian Zionism represent an abuse?

## **SON OF DAVID OR SUFFERING SERVANT?**

### **Chapter Seven**

1. What groups existed in Jesus' time through which people could express opposition to the Roman occupation? Which would have been appealing to you? (pp. 93-95)
2. How does Naim Ateek describe the way of Jesus? (pp. 95-96)
3. What are two Messianic strands within the Jewish tradition? Which one is the more popular & what are its implications? (pp. 96-98)
4. How will salvation & liberation be brought about within the writings of Second Isaiah? (p. 97)
5. Which Messianic strand became the most prominent within the early church? (pp. 99-100)
6. How do the gospels and Acts work with these traditions?

### **For Reflection**

1. What does it mean to be "stuck with David"?
2. What is the contemporary relevance for you of the Suffering Servant?

# **SADDAM, SODOM, AND THE CROSS**

## **Chapter Eight**

1. Did the First Intifada improve the Palestinian image worldwide? (p.104)
2. What were the successes of the First Intifada, (beginning 1987) and what caused it to peter out? What was the role of the international community? (pp. 105-106)
3. What did the Iraq Study Group recommend related to the Arab-Israeli conflict, and why do you think they included this recommendation in a study about the Iraq War? (pp. 108-109)
4. How does Naim Ateek explain the US government confronting the injustice of Iraq's one year occupation of Kuwait, while being blind to the injustice of the twenty-five year Israeli occupation of Palestine? (pp. 106-107)
5. How does the story of the destruction of Sodom relate to the issue of "collateral damage"? (pp. 109-110)

## **For Reflection**

1. Naim Ateek gives four paradigms representing the human condition. "The paradigm of the cross requires that we choose to serve others rather than to dominate them, to provide for their welfare rather than to participate in their exploitation. It calls us to absorb the pain of negotiations and even insult rather than retaliate with threats and attempts to humiliate the other. It moves us to take risks "(pp 111-112). Can nations, as well as individuals hope to aspire to this model?
2. What is "the way of empire?" How does the United States participate in this "way"? What would be needed to have a different way? (pp. 113-114)

# **SAMSON, THE FIRST SUICIDE BOMBER**

## **Chapter Nine**

1. Why was 1993 an important date in the history of violence in Israel and Palestine? (p. 115)
2. Give the statistics in this chapter on the number of Palestinian suicide bombers and Israelis killed by them from 4/94 to 9/00 and from 9/00 to 3/08, and the Palestinians killed during this period. (pp. 115- 120)

3. Describe the variety of reasons (personal, political, and religious), which might cause an individual Palestinian to choose to be a suicide bomber? (pp. 116-120)
4. Briefly tell the story of Samson, who is viewed by many Jews and Christians as a freedom fighter and a hero. Then discuss whether or not he could be described as a suicide bomber. (pp. 122-123)
5. What are Muslim perspectives on Palestinian suicide bombings? (pp. 117-120)

### **For Reflection**

1. Samson prayed to be strengthened “only this once...for one act of revenge.” Jesus prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Naim Ateek has described eight points as the Christian position regarding the use of violence. If President Obama announced he would base his foreign policy on these points, how would you respond? Are there any of the points you would choose to exclude? Explain.
2. “We will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks: nations shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.” (Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:3-4) How do American Christians take the words of Isaiah and Micah seriously when our government arms many countries, including Israel, and is the biggest weapons manufacturer in the world? (pp. 128-129)

## **DANIEL OR JUDAH MACCABEUS**

### **Chapter Ten**

1. On return from exile, what did Ezra & Nehemiah instruct the Jews about the way to live with the many non-Jews now living in Israel? (pp.30--31)
2. What did Ezekiel say about the division of land to members of the tribes of Israel and others? (p.132)
3. What does the book of Job say about his relationship with God and his faith traditions? (pp. 132-133)
4. What does Second Isaiah say about who God calls to achieve his purposes? (pp. 133)
5. Define the Daniel and Judah strands that developed after the exile and became more evident just before the close of the Old Testament (pp. 134-136)

### **For Reflection**



1. What is the book of Daniel saying about nonviolent resistance at a time when many Jews were violently resisting the Greek occupation of their land? (pp. 134-136)
2. Jesus chose the ethic of nonviolence, drawing on the strands of Suffering Servant and Daniel. How would you describe this ethic, using the three scripture passages on (pp. 136-137)
3. While blaming the Palestinians for the failure of 13 major peace initiatives since 1967, Israel is unwilling to implement international law & UN resolutions. What then is Israel's ultimate goal?

## **WHOSE JERUSALEM?**

### **Chapter Eleven**

1. Why did Nehemiah tell the Samaritan governor, the Ammonite and Arab they had no right to share in the rebuilding of Jerusalem? (pp. 142-143)
2. What did Jesus tell the Samaritan woman about the worship of God and Jerusalem and how has the theology of the land changed from what you learned in Nehemiah 2:19-20?
3. What does it mean to say, "The history of Jerusalem has been written with blood?" (p. 140)
4. Are there aspects of our own culture/government which are considered characteristics of empire and a new Jerusalem?

### **For Reflection**

1. Do you see any parallels between the returning Jews to Judea in the 6th and fifth centuries BCE and the returning Jews to Israel from 1948 to the present?
2. People tend to cling to places, especially so-called holy places, as we have a need to sacralize the material? Do you have such a place? Describe its importance and does this help you to understand in a deeper way why Jerusalem is so important to some Jews, Christians, and Muslims?
3. Do you feel we can use the Bible as a source for general guidance on the complex issue of Jerusalem? What are the dangers when we use Bible texts to figure out a political and religious situation?

## **ISRAEL'S PREDICAMENT**

## Chapter Twelve

1. Naim Ateek says that Israel has a goal that takes precedence over peace. What is that goal? How does that lead to Israel's predicament? Can you think of other goals which might also take precedence over peace? (pp. 153-154)
2. How would you respond to the statement that the Palestinians are the obstacle to peace? (pp. 153-156)
3. What is the difference between citizenship and nationality in Israel? How does this effect the importance of Israel being recognized as a Jewish state? (pp. 154-155)
4. Jeff Halper says that "Israel presents itself as a western democracy...and, on the surface, it resembles one. In fact, it is something quite different, an ethnocracy based on an Eastern European tribal nationalism." What is an ethnocracy? (p. 157)
5. What are the parallels between the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and apartheid South Africa? (pp. 158-159)

### For Reflection

1. "All that is needed for the triumph of evil is that good people do nothing." How does this Edmund Burke's quote relate to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories and the role of the United States and the world community?
2. This chapter describes a "transformed Zionism" and a "new theology"? (p.162) How would each contribute to the resolution of the conflict?

## THE TWO-STATE SOLUTION IS NOT ENOUGH

### Chapter Thirteen

1. What has been the historic position of the Palestinians regarding "ownership" of the land, and how is this supported by Ateek's definition of a nation? (pp. 165-166)
2. Israel's basic policy has been to prevent the emergence of a Palestinian state, and so its motives regarding the Palestinians have never been pure." (p.167) One of the "myths" used is that historically there was never an independent state called Palestine, and therefore Palestine has no right to exist. How successful is this argument?
3. Why did Naim Ateek call the plan to partition Palestine into two states a "masterful trap?" (pp. 168-169)

4. What is Sabeel's current position on the two state solution, and what principles do you consider essential to reach resolution of this conflict? (pp. 169-170)

### **For Reflection**

1. "The demands of justice take precedence over the demands of security, because it is justice that produces security, not the reverse." What does this mean to you in relation to Israel/Palestine?
2. What are your thoughts on Naim Ateek's proposal for a settlement -- including the refugees, the settlements, Jerusalem and the Old City? (pp. 171-176)

## **FROM JUSTICE TO FORGIVENESS**

### **Chapter Fourteen**

1. What has been the cost to the Palestinians and to the Israelis of this prolonged conflict? (pp. 178-179)
2. "This book is a plea for the use of nonviolence in conflict resolution". (p.179) Do you feel that nonviolence is the only path for the Palestinians in their struggle? (pp. 179-180)

### **For Reflection**

1. Ten basic rules are laid down in the book, "Gandhi's Way. Choose one rule from the list that would be effective in working with a current situation in the conflict between Israel and Palestine. (pp. 181-183)
2. Why is peace not enough? What else is needed? What part does justice play in truly resolving the conflict, and what elements are required for there truly to be justice? (pp. 183-184)

### **Reflection Paper on Chapter One**

#### **"The Way of Sabeel"**

Reading this chapter, I am again reminded about the meaning of the word "sabeel" and what the organization "Sabeel" brings to the work for justice. The path -- the way -- the points of action. We must move, take steps. It is so easy,

and understandable with such a complicated issue, to be worn out in the study of it, but learning, discussion, while necessary, are not enough. We must move, lift our voices, take a prophetic stand against injustice and oppression, witness for peace, advocate for the actions that will create just structures. All of these are action words, words of movement down the path toward a destination.

But the path, the way, is not a random one -- headed in any direction. It is nurtured by a spring of fresh water -- the living word of God. This word rejects violence and oppression as methods for achieving peace -- for there is no peace without justice. The chosen way is that of nonviolence. This is the way of Jesus. This is the path of Sabeel.

## **Reflection Paper on Chapter Five**

### **“Excerpts From a Yom Kippur Sermon”**

As I was reading this chapter, I remembered I had read a sermon on Jonah given at a Yom Kippur afternoon service on the book of Jonah. The rabbi spoke of Jonah running from God’s request to go to the Ninevites. She speculated that perhaps Jonah refused to go to Nineveh because he would learn that his God shows compassion to everyone, not just the Jews.

The rabbi spoke about the Palestinian and Israeli conflict and pointed out that, only when we realize that Israelis and Palestinians are God’s children, and sense that both people are deeply wounded victims, that the Jews will have started their journey to Ninevah. She also noted that “the other” are guilty of closing their eyes to the suffering of others, but made it clear that Jews are not to focus on what the other is doing, but should work to fulfill God’s expectations of them.

After spending some time in the belly of the whale, Jonah goes to Ninevah and tells the Ninevites to repent. Jonah then denies any connection between their repentance and God’s role in it and sits and pouts under a vine. The rabbi asks, “Do you think that Jonah’s unwillingness to help others is the way to protect his people? Do you think that other’s suffering has nothing to do with you?”

The rabbi ends her sermon pointing out that we live in a world filled with people like Jonah who have forgotten how to recognize and respond to the sacred in each other. People who no longer understand that we are interconnected and the security and well being to one people affects the security and well being of all. She hears God urging the Jews to “Go there, meet them, help them to change, so that we all can have peace.”