

A Study Guide for:

A PALESTINIAN THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION—

THE BIBLE, JUSTICE, AND THE PALESTINE-ISRAEL CONFLICT

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STUDY GUIDE: THE INTRODUCTION

1. The Introduction begins with Rev. Ateek recounting the traumatic story of his family being forced from their home in Beisan in 1948, and going to Nazareth where they lived as refugees. Have you ever experienced such a significant disruption in your life's circumstances? Describe the event and your response. (p. 1)
2. Rev/ Ateek also describes the faith of his father, whose trust in God continued throughout the family's new life in Nazareth. Have you had a personal "mentor in faith" at any point in your life? (p. 3)
3. Over 750,000 people were dispossessed in Palestine by the end of the 1948 war. Most people in the West were not aware of the extent of this injustice. How does Ateek account for this? Do you agree with his assessment? (p. 2-3)
4. How does Rev. Ateek describe the spirituality taught by Western missionaries to the Palestinian Christian community? Was this theology adequate to address the injustices of the Nakba?
(p. 3)
5. "Liberation" is often associated with armed struggle, conflict and violence. How does Palestinian Liberation Theology bring a new understanding of liberation, and of the methods necessary to bring it about to the oppressed? (p. 4-5)
6. For Christians, Jesus models how to love and care for our brothers and sisters. What must this love and care look like to bring "life in all its fullness" to all of God's people?
(p. 6)

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CHAPTER 1 LIBERATION THEOLOGY WORLDWIDE

1. What is the context for the development of liberation theology? (p. 9)
2. Rev. Ateek describes three liberation theologies and the oppressive systems each has confronted. Do you have experience with any of these movements? Describe. (p. 10-11)
3. What oppressive system birthed Palestinian Liberation Theology? How has the Bible been used to support this system? (p. 11)
4. How does accepting that Jesus Christ reveals a loving God who desires the freedom of all people, liberate the scriptures from Zionism? (p. 11)
5. How is liberation theology a “lived theology?” (p. 12-13)
6. What specific emphases does liberation theology add to traditional theology? How does “our principle of interpretation, Christ”, help us interpret and understand the scriptures, particularly the Old Testament? (12-13)

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CHAPTER 2 WHO ARE THE PALESTINIAN CHRISTIANS?

1. Reviewing pages 15-17 of this chapter, what stands out for you regarding the indigenous inhabitants of Palestine? (pp. 15-17)
2. What were the results of the “first major schism” within the church during the 4th and 5th centuries? Are these results felt today? (pp. 17-19)
3. What were the effects of the coming of Islam in the 7th century? What was the impact on the Christian community? (P. 19)
4. What impact did the “second major schism” and the coming of the Crusades have upon the Churches of the 11th century? (p. 19)
5. What factors created the “forth major schism” within Palestinian Christianity? (pp. 21-22)
6. The Zionist movement was established in 1897 under Theodore Herzl. What was the primary intent of the movement? Did movement leaders differentiate between Muslims and Christians regarding their intent? Define political Zionism. What is Christian Zionism? (p. 21)
7. Describe the UN Partition Plan of 1947. Do you agree that the division of Palestine was “totally unjust and absurd?” Explain your answer. (pp. 21-22)
8. What systems of control has the Israeli government used to keep the Palestinians under its domination? (p. 23)
9. What is the mandate for the work of Palestinian Liberation Theology? Are you drawn to work in any of these areas?(pp. 23-24)

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CHAPTER 3 THE THREEFOLD NAKBA

1. What is the Nakba and when did it occur? (p. 25)
2. How did the Balfour Declaration of 1917 impact the population of Palestine? (p. 25)
3. Rev. Ateek describes the human Nakba. What elements stand out most strongly for you? (p. 26)
4. What actions on the part of the Zionist militias and then the State of Israel contributed to the Nakba that the Palestinian people experienced? (pp. 27-28)
5. What challenges to their faith did Palestinians experience during the time of the Nakba, and have these challenges been resolved? (pp. 28-29)

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Chapter 4: “Other Historical Events that Led to the Emergence of Palestinian Liberation Theology

1. Respond to the quote from Erich Fromm:

The claim of the Jews to the land of Israel cannot be a realistic political claim. If all nations would suddenly claim territories in which their forefathers lived two thousand years ago, this world would be a madhouse. (p. 31)

And to the statement:

It is totally nonsensical and irrational that Jews can claim the land of Palestine because their ancestors lived in it thousands of years ago, while the indigenous Palestinians who have never left it should be barred from it. But that is precisely what happened. (p. 31)

2. How did the tragedy of the Holocaust “speed up” the implementation of the Balfour Declaration? (p. 32)
3. What contributed to the Palestinians being perceived as a “bunch of Arabs” and “collateral damage” as the movement toward Israel’s statehood proceeded? (pp. 32-33)
4. As a new dedication to interfaith dialogue developed, what sentiments contributed to the “Ecumenical Deal” and the statement by Marc Ellis that what was required was “eternal repentance”? (pp. 33-34) Define the “Ecumenical Deal” and how it is still alive in churches and perhaps in western societies at large. How does it undermine justice for the Palestinians?
5. How did the increasing emphasis on the religious form of Zionism (as opposed to the secular form) cause major shifts in the Israeli political parties? (pp. 34-35)
6. How was the Hebrew Bible used to bring Jewish and Christian Zionists together, and how were these two groups able to ignore their profound theological differences? (p. 35)
7. What has taken the place of the Holocaust to justify the ongoing oppression of the Palestinians? What does this solution demand of Palestinian liberation theology? (p. 36)
8. What factors contributed to the First Intifada? (pp. 36-37)

9. Where did Palestinian liberation theology begin, and what was the context for “doing theology” at this time? (pp. 37-38)

10. How did Jesus represent a model for being a liberator? (PP. 38-39)

11. How did the emergence of a liberation theology result in a return to a more authentic faith and commitment in the service of God? (p. 39)

CHAPTER FIVE RECLAIMING THE HUMANITY OF JESUS

1. "Palestinian Liberation Theology is the outcome of faith encountering context." What is your understanding of these words? (p. 41)
2. What question does liberation theology lead us to examine and answer? Do you have experience applying this question to a situation with which you are familiar? (p. 41)
3. What are the three components of liberation theology? (p. 41)
4. What does it mean that "love and justice are two sides of the same coin"? (p. 41)
5. How was recognizing Jesus full humanity a "turning point" for Palestinian Christians struggling with the Nakba? (p. 42)
6. What is the importance of Luke 4: 18-19 for Palestinian Liberation Theology, and for us today? (pp. 42-43)
7. How is Luke 18:1-8 relevant to Palestinians? Does it also speak to us? (pp 43-44)
8. What does it mean that liberation theology is anchored in Jesus Christ as liberator? (p. 44)
9. Rev. Ateek says that the most useful hermeneutic tool for interpreting scripture is Jesus Christ. Define biblical hermeneutics. Some prefer love as a hermeneutic tool. Which understanding is most useful to you in interpreting scripture. (pp 44-45)

CHAPTER SIX DEVELOPMENT OF RELIGIOUS THOUGHT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

1. How does Rev. Ateek understand that we are to read difficult Old Testament texts “that can be detrimental to our faith?” (pp. 47-49)
2. How has the Bible been used to justify Zionists claims of their rights to the land of Palestine and of the need for expulsion of Palestinians? How does the use of the Christ hermeneutic challenge this view? (p. 50)
3. How does Palestinian Liberation Theology deal with the demand for ethnic annihilation and with the picture of God as “vengeful”? (pp. 50-51)
4. What does the story of Amalek tell us about God, and about the prophet Samuel? How are Palestinians seen as the modern day Amalekites? (pp. 52-55)
5. Respond to one of the “examples” of situations on the ground in Palestine-Israel described on pp. 57-58.
6. Describe the exclusive strand of theology advocated by the prophet Ezra, and the context from which it emerged. What kind of god did Ezra believe in? (pp. 58-60)
7. How did Ezekiel’s vision of God challenge the old tribal understanding of God and the boundaries of exclusivity? (pp. 61-63)
8. What is your understanding of who constitutes “the people the land?” Are there other points of view that need to be considered? (pp. 61-63)
9. Israel has no constitution and there is no common Israeli nationality for all citizens. Explain. (p. 64)
10. “It seems that modern Israel has remained bound by the demands of Leviticus rather than Ezekiel.” Explain. (p. 64)
11. “It is not that God has evolved and changed from being vicious, violent, and exclusive to becoming merciful, kind, and inclusive. Rather, it is the human theology of God that has undergone the great transformation.” Or, others might say that “through God’s revelation and inspiration the knowledge of God developed. Others might add the importance of human reason.” Where do you stand on this important question? (pp. 65-66)
12. Ezekiel critiqued several theologies his day regarding: collective punishment, the land of Palestine and its indigenous people, and Jerusalem. How are these issues still with us today? (pp. 67-71)
13. How did the question of whether God was a God of war or of peace develop in the Old Testament? (pp. 71-76)

14. What are the three significant lessons the writer-theologian of Jonah intended to relay? Does this story have relevance — spiritual, moral, theological, political — today? (pp. 76-80)

15. The Conclusion presents the movement toward an inclusive understanding of God. Critique the steps of this movement. (pp.81-82)

CHAPTER SEVEN CHRIST IS THE KEY

1. Rev. Ateek states that “by the time of Jesus the oneness of God was not in question within the Jewish religious community. What was always open to question was God’s nature and character.” Explain his argument. Do you agree? (pp. 83-84)
2. How does Ateek describe the linkage of the two “great commandments” and Jesus’ opening up of an inclusive application? (pp. 86-87) Critique this argument.
3. What are the “three great revolutions” that Jesus introduced? Which one means the most to you? Explain. (pp. 87-89)
4. What do the scriptures include under “Jesus reinterprets the tradition” mean to you regarding the way to relate to those outside of one’s own group? (pp.90-93)
5. How does Paul work with the tradition of ancient Israel in terms of Jew/Gentile and the promise to Abraham of the land? Where do you stand regarding these issues? (pp. 93-98)
6. The Gospel of John reinterprets a number of issues in light of faith in Jesus Christ. Describe how creation, election, ritual purity and the temple are interpreted in the light of Christ. (pp. 99 - 100 and pp. 103-104)
7. The important issue of the land is also reinterpreted in the light of Christ. How do you understand this interpretation, and do you agree with it? (pp. 101-103)

CHAPTER EIGHT JUSTICE AT THE CENTER

1. While “Justice is foundational for the resolution of the Palestine-Israeli conflict”, what has contributed to justice not being realized there. (pp. 105-106)
2. How does Rev. Ateek describe the issues and challenges of regarding Israel as a “democratic state?” Would you agree that Israel is more of an ethnocracy than a democracy? Explain your answer. (pp. 106-111)
3. Palestinians have been denied basic rights under the Israeli government. What issues regarding Palestinians’ basic rights must be addressed for there to be a just solution to the conflict? (p. 111)
4. How has Israel defied the UN Resolutions — the 1947 Partition Plan and Security Council Resolution 242? (pp. 111-112)
5. Several solutions to the conflict have been proposed — a two-state solution, a one-state solution, and a bi-national solution. How has Israel responded to each of these solutions? Which solution do the Palestinians favor? What solution do you favor? Explain. (pp. 111-115)
6. What issues complicate resolving the status of Jerusalem? What principles does Rev. Ateek feel must be included in any solution? How has the move of the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem complicated a just resolution? (pp. 115-117)
7. What does Rev. Ateek see as the role of non-violence in the Palestinians demand for liberation? (pp. 117-119)
8. What are the seven dimensions of a Palestinian Liberation Theology of justice? Are all seven needed? Are they all possible? Explain your answer. (pp. 119-121)
10. What is your response to “The Peace Circle”? (pp. 121-122)

CHAPTER NINE THE EMERGENCE OF SABEL AND ITS FRIENDS

1. After the Nakba in 1948, what was the situation for Palestinians who lived in the part of Palestine that became the state of Israel? (p. 123)
2. What were the five major factors Rev. Ateek identifies as being involved in the Palestinian Christian struggle for justice and peace? Describe the importance of each. (pp. 124-129)
3. What is your response to the Kairos Palestine document?
4. Describe the beginnings of Palestinian Liberation Theology and International Friends of Sabeel. What are the meanings of the word Arabic word “sabeel?” What were the strengths and the challenges of this movement? (pp. 129-131)
5. What are the guidelines for establishing a Friends of Sabeel group in countries around the world? What are the major aims of each of the FOS groups that have been established? (pp. 132-138)

CHAPTER TEN THE HEART OF FAITH AND ACTION IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

(Note by the author of the Study Guide, Susan Bell)

A PALESTINIAN THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION presents a number of complex issues — Liberation Theology, the Palestinian Christians and their history, religious thought in both the Old and New Testament, and justice. While it is clearly important to understand these issues, and how they relate to one another, those who have worked as advocates for the Palestinian people know that understanding alone is not sufficient. Palestinians are suffering in multiple ways right now. The government of the US is threatening to end support for the United Nations agency UNRWA that aids Palestinian refugees.

What is needed are people who both understand and are willing to commit to action. The reflection questions for this chapter, hopefully, will help the reader explore where more information is needed, what issues he/she may feel most called to address, what groups are involved in this area of advocacy, and how to begin to become an advocate for the Palestinians.

1. Working with the guidelines for Palestinian Liberation Theology, express in your own words your understanding of what Palestinian Liberation Theology embraces. Which of the guidelines are most essential for you as you work with becoming an advocate for the Palestinians? (pp. 139-141)
2. What does Rev. Ateek mean when he states, “we can no longer say simply that the Bible is the word of God?” Where then do we find the “word of God?” What is your position? (pp. 141-142)
3. Why does Rev. Ateek say that the “sequence” of the three essential pillars for resolving the Palestine/Israeli conflict is important? (p. 142)
4. Rev. Ateek says that “on the surface it is easy to say that the heart of religious faith is to love God and neighbor.” Why is this statement insufficient? What other questions need to be addressed? Are there “neighbors” that you need to get to know and understand?
5. “The hermeneutic key of love of God and love of neighbor, together inseparably, can help us determine the mind of Christ for our daily life and help us measure what is the right and authentic relationship we can enjoy with God and with our fellow human brothers and sisters.” This is the essential tool that we must use at every decision point in our lives. Do you agree that this is the recipe for a life lived to the fullest potential? How do you understand your life in relation to this statement? (p. 147)

6. How are truth and justice related in the Palestinian struggle? What does it mean to attend to “the present reality on the ground” and to “the emphasis on how things ought to be”? What is mandated for Palestinian advocates to do? What methods are appropriate? (pp.147-149)

7. Why is the olive tree a rich symbol for the Palestinians? (p. 149)

8. As “servants of God’s kingdom”, which of the disciplines listed speaks most personally to you? Which is the most difficult? (p. 150)