The (un)Holy Land

UNDERSTANDING THE PALESTINE/ISRAEL CONFLICT

A guide for Irish Methodists
Introduction and Biblical considerations
How did we get here, and what role might Scripture play in the conversation?

PREAMBLE

This (un)Holy Land project is a resource to help you study, reflect and respond to life in Israel and Palestine. It can be used for group study or be engaged with as a personal study guide to complete in your own time.

This study guide contains four sections with additional appendices that provide opportunities for further study, should you wish to continue your learning and go deeper with the material and the issues.

The four sections are:

01 - Introduction and Biblical considerations
02 - History, Hostility and Realities on the ground
03 - Major themes within and through the conflict
04 - Possible responses to what has been learned
+ Appendices to aid further study

This guide is interactive. Each session is available to download, particularly for use in study groups. Videos appear throughout the guide and can be watched with internet access, or downloaded to present to a group.

If the issues and the learning inspire you or your group to travel further, you will hopefully also have a chance during 2023/24 to participate in an optional Peace Pilgrimage to the Holy Land. This will be a pilgrimage to the land of Jesus that intentionally meets with differing voices from the conflict. Details will become available early 2023.
INTRODUCTION

Walking off the plane at Ben Gurion airport, outside Tel Aviv, can be a hazardous enough experience. The weather at the end of the Med can be brutally hot if you arrive in the summer, and the security can be brutally thorough no matter what time of the year you arrive. More than anything, as you exit the airport and drive towards Jerusalem, there is a sense of being in a well-resourced developed country. You will drive past McDonalds fast-food outlets, on tarmac motorways, with lit-up glitzy advertising for morning radio shows and skin remedies. You will experience the notion of being in a wealthy, liberal democracy.

If you happen to be going from Jerusalem towards the West Bank – an action the Israeli government has been discouraging for years, almost to the extent of banning visitors to the Palestinian West Bank travelling through Israel, you will drive until you get to a concrete Wall, up to 26ft high in places, keeping Israel and Palestine separated. If you are journeying through the Wall, say to Bethlehem where global Christianity memorialises the birthplace of Christ, then you will travel through a strong military checkpoint guarded by young men and women of the Israeli military holding immense firepower in their arms.

The treatment you receive will be nothing compared with the extra attention you receive when coming back into Israel through the same checkpoint.

Through the Wall, you may feel as though you have travelled back 40 years.

The glitzy advertisements and the tarmac motorways are gone. The conduits are smaller, dustier, dirtier and noisier than on the other side. You may find yourself sharing the road with a donkey or two. You may sense you have come through the Wall from a developed western liberal democracy into a developing nation.

On one trip, our driver at Ben Gurion airport greeted us with, “Welcome to Israel, welcome to the Holy Land.” When driving through the Wall and meeting our Palestinian tour guide, the tour guide proceeded to introduce himself with the words, “Welcome to the land of Jesus, the Holy Land, or should I say the Unholy Land?”. Thus began an education into the real lives of real people living as real occupiers and real occupied – a journey that continues in this participative resource.
In 2019, Kairos Palestine, an organisation which speaks on behalf of churches based in Jerusalem, issued a Cry for Hope, calling on churches throughout the world to stand alongside the Palestinian people in opposition to plans by Israel to officially annex large parts of the West Bank. This call was prompted by an announcement by the Israeli Prime Minister that he planned to annex more than 30% of the West Bank that had been occupied by Israel after the 1967 Six-Day War, in line with the Trump Middle East Peace Plan.

An invitation was sent to Irish church leaders, including the President of the Irish Methodist Church, inviting them to endorse the Cry for Hope. The then Methodist President stated that he was not mandated to undertake such action and passed on the request to the Church’s General Committee. In turn, the General Committee initiated a small working group to look at some of the issues involved in the Palestine/Israel conflict, in order that church members could be better informed for prayer and action in relation to the continuing tragedy of the illegal occupation, repression, and violence in the Holy Land. The aim of this resource, under the direction of Methodist Conference, is to develop the conversation and understanding of current realities in the land where Jesus walked, and to call us to action.
Irish Methodist Involvement

Many Irish Methodists have visited Palestine/Israel either as pilgrims or as part of various programmes for justice and peace.

- **Julian Hamilton**
  - who has led encounter groups between Irish, Palestinian, Israeli and British young adults (in Ireland, Palestine, and Israel) as part of the ‘*Space To Breathe*’ programme.

- **Andrew Kingston**
  - who has led several pilgrimage groups from Ireland.

- **Gillian Kingston**
  - who has represented the Methodist Church and Ecumenical bodies and who, in 2015, presented the annual World Methodist Peace Prize to Daoud Nassar at the *Tent of Nations* near Bethlehem.

- **Gary Mason**
  - who has been involved in political explorations as part of the organisation ‘*Rethinking Conflict.*’

- **John Parkin**
  - who served as an Ecumenical Accompanier in 2016 as part of the World Council of Churches Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel.

- **Laura Rankin**
  - who has been part of the ‘*Space To Breathe*’ programmes organised by Julian Hamilton.
Biblical considerations in the conversation around Israel and Palestine

The Bible is a complex document.

It is poetry, it is narrative. It is history, it is love-letters. It is biography, it is dreams. It is metaphor, it is court records. It is song, it is contracts. And it is more. Princetown Professor of New Testament, Brian Blount, reminds us “Scripture can never be the last word, because it is the living word.” Scripture invites us to conversation, not discrimination. And our Holy Bible should inspire us towards life in all its fullness – a fullness in exploration and imagination within its pages, never obfuscation or demand.

The Bible does contain apparently contradictory narratives.

It is unwise to select one verse or passage and give to it ultimate authority without considering other passages that offer a different perspective. The scribe Ezra, for example, was determined to forge a ‘pure’ nation in the restored Jerusalem of the Persian period. He decreed that foreign wives and their offspring should be expelled. Other parts of the Old Testament, on the other hand, call for kindness to strangers in an inclusive way, while the books of Jonah and Ruth even embrace traditional enemies (Assyrians and Moabites) within the love of God and the life of the nation.

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Writing from his stance of Palestinian Liberation Theology, Canon Naim Stfan Ateek contrasts the exclusive and essentially sectarian texts of the Old Testament with the inclusive texts that are more in accord with a Christian understanding of the Old Testament.\(^2\) Ateek points out that for Christians, Jesus is the key to interpreting the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible). Ateek invites us to consider that Old Testament passages which contradict Jesus' inclusive message of love and reconciliation have no authority for us.

Such passages include:

- Numbers 33:50-53 (…you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land before you…), with its interpreted claim of divine sanction for the ethnic cleansing of Palestine;
- Nehemiah 13:23-31 and Ezra 9 & 10 – with tearing apart of ‘mixed’ marriages;
- Deut. 23:3-4, 6 - with the vengeful exclusion of Ammonites and Moabites;
- Deut. 20:16-18 (…annihilate them – the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hevites and the Jebusites…) with this command to annihilate the Canaanites – moving toward Deut. 25:17-19 (…you shall blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven…) as the specific eternal destruction of the Amalekites.

While these passages above are being ‘dismissed’ by many Christian teachers and preachers as not connecting to the message and mission expressed in the person of Christ, there are also more readily accessible notions of theology within the Hebrew Bible that do align more fully with the message of Jesus.

The thrust of the prophets’ message in the Old Testament scriptures, which Christians of course share with Jews, is a call to justice and righteous living. (Micah 6:8) [**what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God**]. Biblical texts that seem to justify genocide and human rights abuse (Josh. 1-11 and the passages referenced above) are recognised as not compatible with the God revealed in Jesus Christ.

We note from the inclusive texts of the Old Testament, e.g. Genesis 12:3, that Abraham is blessed in order to be a blessing to **all** the families on earth ['All the families of the Earth will be blessed through you'] and that strangers are to be honoured ['You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt’ - Exodus 22:21].

In Ezekiel (Ezek. 47:21-23) there was to be an equal distribution of the land between Jews and resident aliens, who were to be regarded as citizens of Israel.

\(^2\)Ateek, 2017, *A Palestinian Theology of Liberation*
Leviticus (Lev. 19:33-34) also emphasizes the point that aliens are to be equal citizens.

The vision of the prophets (Isaiah 2:2-4 and Micah 4:1-4) is that Zion (Jerusalem) is a symbol for international peace and reconciliation, where people meet in friendship and love in the presence of the One Unique God.

The Old Testament contains many different traditions that have been edited together by scholars with a variety of interests, and from a variety of perspectives. While there certainly are texts that call for exclusion, there are also eirenic (conciliatory) and inclusive texts. We would want to argue that it is the latter that are in accord with a Christian understanding of the Scriptures, based on the Way of Jesus of Nazareth.
What is Christian Zionism: Why does it matter?

An overview of Christian Zionism is provided by the Church of England priest the Rev Dr Stephen Sizer, who wrote a paper for ‘The Ireland Palestine Alliance.’

The logical flow of a Christian Zionist viewpoint is outlined by Sizer arguing that the early British pioneers of Zionism held the belief that the ‘return’ of Jews to the Holy Land would initiate the ‘End Times.’

The battle of Armageddon would then precede the return of Christ.

In this scheme, two thirds of Jews are to be slaughtered in the last battle and the other third given the opportunity to convert to Christ.

Influential British politicians who supported Christian Zionism included figures such as Lord Shaftesbury, Lord Palmerston, David Lloyd George and Lord Balfour who saw the strategic value to the British Empire of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. One British Governor of Jerusalem, Roger Storrs, envisaged that Palestine could become, ‘a little loyal Jewish Ulster in a sea of hostile Arabism.’

In such an imperialist view, it is noteworthy that the Jewish Homeland exists to protect British interests such as the Suez-Canal sea route to India and the oil pipeline from northern Iraq.

In Ireland, an influential activist in the Christian Zionist movement was the Anglo-Irishman John Nelson Darby who founded the Plymouth Brethren and then the Exclusive Brethren fellowships. He had been an Anglican curate in County Wicklow but fell out with his bishop. In the early nineteenth century he attended prophetic conferences on unfulfilled Bible prophesies in Powerscourt House, hosted by Lady Wicklow. Darby travelled extensively through Europe and North America promoting his beliefs.

While Christian Zionist beliefs are not mainstream in the Ireland of today, it is noticeable that some independent churches do subscribe to Christian Zionist views. In America political figures

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Introduction and Biblical considerations

such as Mike Pompeo and Mike Pence are on public record as being influenced by Christian Zionist beliefs. These realities played a role in the direction of United States policy towards the Middle East during the Trump administration – the most severe decision being the move of the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Christian Zionism has been declared a heresy by the Middle East Council of Churches. The former right-wing Israeli Prime Minister, Netanyahu, has also stated that without Christian Zionism there would have been no modern State of Israel.

The American website www.christianzionism.org provides a comprehensive overview of the issues involved in Christian Zionism from its origins in mid-nineteenth century evangelical circles in Britain to the White American Evangelical support for the state of Israel today. This website has been prepared by American theologians and is particularly important because of the dependence of Israel on American military, economic and diplomatic support.
Introduction and Biblical considerations

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

What aspects of ownership to the Holy Land by the State of Israel do you see as legitimate? Why / why not?

How do you read/interpret texts of exclusion? How do you read/interpret texts of inclusion? Can you think of real examples in your experience of these issues?

How do you feel reading a brief analysis of Christian Zionism?

Are there ways in which you can progress your own understanding of the issues faced by Palestinian Christians? Note, the Christians in Palestine are lauded as vital presence in our most sacred Holy spaces (such as Bethlehem), at the same time, they are having their lands confiscated and human rights shattered – is there a ‘Christian response’ to such realities?
A very rough time line

Depending on your personality, there is either nothing more frustrating, or else more freeing, than being ‘lost’ on a journey. Maps, physically or on a screen, can help locate you – which again is either enlightening or frightening (!) and they can also help you move forward.

By far the more important inquiry when trying to genuinely engage with the question, ‘where are we?’ is the question ‘how did we get here?’

So – how did we get here? How did the region we know as The Holy Land get to be the political and military (un)Holy Land (words first heard in Bethlehem) of inequality and occupation?

The following is a very rough time-line with three ‘windows’ to help understanding and interpretation. The ‘windows’ are simple – 7000 years ago, 700 years ago, and 70 years ago.
7000 YEARS AGO

The land we know today as the Holy Land is part of the fertile crescent linking Egypt and Mesopotamia and stands in history as one of the places on earth which saw the rise of urban civilisation. The origin of writing, the domestication of animals and the first farmers are all historically connected to the Jordan Valley. Tel es-Sultan, an excavated site on the outskirts of Jericho, shows a 10,000 year old tower, pointing towards the region as vital in the development of humanity. Getting together to grow things and tend animals first happened along these banks, and the world has never been the same since. Great empires such as Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome have all made their mark on this ancient landscape. Names such as Pharaoh Rameses II, Ashurbanipal (King of the world, King of Assyria), Nebuchadnezzar (King of Babylon), Cyrus the Great of Persia, Alexander the Great, Antony and Cleopatra are all part of the unfolding drama.

Into this epic scene are inserted the ‘insignificant’ kingdoms of Jerusalem and Samaria, which had a brief period of glory under King Solomon before reverting to the role of pawns squashed between the larger empires of the Nile and the Euphrates.

According to the scholar William Albright, from the rise of David’s kingdom to the fall of Samaria in 721BC was 279 years. The fall of Jerusalem in 587BC happened just 134 years later. The exile of Jerusalem’s leading citizens in Babylon and Persia was probably the time when the Hebrew Scriptures were edited into their current form. This was the beginning of the Bible as we know it.

These tiny Hebrew Kingdoms, that flourished and fought between 1000BC and 587BC, bequeathed to the world a literature of epic story, poetry, legend, and prophetic imagination that was collated into the Hebrew Scriptures or Old Testament by exiled scribes in Babylon around 500 years before Christ. The monotheistic world presented in the text is perhaps the single most important offering to world history from this text. In that writing, the world moved from gods everywhere and in everything to One, Holy, Creator God, above all, through all and in all. The world would not be the same again, when God moved out of the corn (the fertility cults) and into the canvas of the whole sky. The monotheistic faiths of Judaism, Christianity and Islam have been inspired and informed by this ‘Book of Books’.

The stirring pronouncements of the 8th century prophets underline that rulers are to be subject to principles of justice and fairness, and condemned when they abuse power for personal gain. Notions of
justice and individual responsibility have found their echo in contemporary declarations of human rights, such as the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, published in 1948, with its assertion of the essential equality of all human beings.

At the entrance to Tel es-Sultan in Jericho a plaque confidently claims that this city is the oldest city in the world and reaches back 10,000 years. But did the walls of Jericho come ‘atumbling down’ as the American Spiritual has it, or is this a piece of skilful Biblical propaganda? Certainly, archaeological evidence in the excavations by Dame Kathleen Kenyon suggests that all may not be as it seems. She traced the origins of Jericho to Mesolithic (middle stone age) hunters 9000 BCE to the first walled town 8000 BCE and the beginning of arable agriculture. But of the Israelite invasion she concluded that in the relevant period there was no walled town for Joshua to conquer. The ‘Blitzkrieg’ of Joshua, (chapters 1-11), with a description of the total annihilation of the prior inhabitants, just does not tally with other parts of the Old Testament, where the Hebrews come to terms with the people of the land.

Biblical scholar W. Johnstone also argues that the archeological evidence for the annihilation of the Canaanites is (to date) scant, with the evidence pointing to a much more subversive movement of assimilation and settling.⁴ In Joshua Ch. 9 a deal is done with some of the people of the land while Joshua 16 makes it clear that the Canaanites are still there. In Judges the people are tempted time and again to worship the Baal fertility gods (e.g., Judges 2 and 3). The great contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (I Kings 18) is a clash between the moral demands of the Covenant and the rain gods of Canaan. There was no swift replacement of one population by another and many Old Testament scholars (with Johnstone) believe that there was a gradual infiltration into the land rather than an invasion.

⁴William Johnstone, 'Exodus' https://www.amazon.co.uk/William-Johnstone-Exodus-Testament-Paperback/dp/BO0RWLYXLM/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=W+johnstone+Exodus&qid=1633607602&s=books&sr=1-1
700 years ago Christian knights from western Europe were clashing with Muslim warriors for control of the holy sites of Jerusalem. If there were no 'infidel' to hand, or else the journey to Jerusalem was a bit too far, there were always heretical Cathars in France, or pagan Estonians and Latvians in the Baltic who could be slaughtered instead. Some Crusaders who didn't make it to Palestine were content to attack Jews in Germany or to sack the city of Constantinople.

The first Crusade followed a call to arms by Pope Urban II in 1095 and offered salvation in heaven for those who fought and died in a 'Holy War' to reclaim the holy sites (the same idea that motivates Jihadists today). Bloodshed and horrifying violence were committed in the period of the Crusades, bringing lasting shame on the memory of European Christendom. The friendship between Francis of Assisi and Saladin is one glimmer of relief in this bloody story.
History, Hostility, and Realities on the Ground

70 YEARS AGO

In 1947, bankrupted and exhausted by the Second World War, Britain relinquished its colonial mandate in Palestine and handed the problem of increasing tension between indigenous Palestinians and immigrant Jews from Europe over to the newly established United Nations. At that time Jews formed about one third of the population in Palestine and owned 7% of the land. The United Nations proposed that the land be divided into two states with Jews having 55% of the land and the Palestinians 45%. Jerusalem was to remain as an international city, recognising its importance for the three ‘Abrahamic faiths’ - Christians, Jews and Muslims. This proposal was accepted by the Jewish leaders but rejected by the Arab leadership (see Brunton). In the ensuing struggle the more numerous, better armed, and organised Zionist forces conquered 78% of the land and expelled up to three quarters of a million Palestinians who were not allowed to return to their homes.

They and their descendants form the current Palestinian refugee population. Over 500 Palestinian villages were emptied and bulldozed. Trees were planted where vibrant communities had once lived.

This Jewish Voice for Peace video outlines the background to the founding of Israel.

The video asks, ‘What would happen if you built a refuge for persecuted people in a place where other people already live?’ Palestine was not the ‘Land with no people for a people without a land’ that the Christian Zionists talked about. It was already inhabited before the Zionist nationalists started emigrating to the region from the end of the nineteenth century. In 1948 David Ben Gurion declared the founding of the State of Israel. He also initiated a carefully prepared plan to ethnically cleanse Palestine of as many Palestinians as possible. This plan has been described and documented by the Israeli historian Ilan Pappe, who studied Israeli State papers from that period before they were withdrawn from public scrutiny.

Palestinians remember this as the Nakba (catastrophe). The process of colonisation continues with the eviction of Palestinians from their homes in East Jerusalem to make way for Jewish Settlers. This, together with attacks on the Al Aqsa Mosque, was the spark for the recent violence between Israel and Hamas in May 2021.

Ilan Pappe - The ethnic cleansing of Palestine
https://www.amazon.co.uk/Ethnic-Cleansing-Palestine-Ilan-Pappe/dp/1851685553
The realities on the ground

The State of Israel was declared by David Ben Gurion in 1948. The Declaration of Independence issued was a liberal document that promised equality for all, regardless of race, religion, or gender. This Declaration has never been formally adopted by Israel, which discriminates in terms of access to land, services, immigration rights and legal protection in favour of Jews. The current regime in Israel/Palestine has been declared by Kairos Palestine (Christian Palestinians), B’Tselem and Yesh Din (Israeli human rights NGOs), and Human Rights Watch to be a form of ‘apartheid’. Apartheid is a crime under international law. The 2018 Jewish Nation State Law boldly states that, ‘Israel is the historic homeland of the Jewish people and they have an exclusive right to national self-determination in it’. The Bill also refers to ‘the development of Jewish settlement as a national value and will act to encourage and promote its establishment’.

After the war of 1948, regarded as a war of independence by Israeli Jews and as The Nakba (catastrophe) by Palestinians, Israel had control of 78% of Mandate Palestine. Around 750,000 Palestinians, who had been driven from their homes, now became refugees. The West Bank came under Jordanian rule and the Gaza strip under Egyptian rule.

After the Six-Day War of 1967 Israel occupied Gaza, the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights. International Law, in the form of the Fourth Geneva Conventions (1949), states that occupation shall be for strict military necessity. Once the occupier is no longer threatened, they should withdraw. The occupier may not transfer its own population onto the occupied land and should protect the indigenous population and manage the natural resources of the area for the benefit of the local population. Despite these legal obligations, Israel has refused to abide by numerous United Nations Resolutions (e.g. U.N. Resolution 242) which called on Israel to withdraw from occupied territories. Israel argues that the Palestinian territories are not occupied but ‘disputed’ and that the Fourth Geneva Conventions do not apply. An International Court of Justice judgement of July 2004 rules that the Fourth Geneva Convention ‘is applicable to the Palestinian territories…occupied by Israel.’ Since 1967, Israel has encouraged the establishment of settlements of Israeli Jews on Palestinian land and uses natural resources such as water for its own benefit.

In 2020 there were 250 illegal settlements of Israeli Jews in the West Bank, with a population of 460,000 settlers. In East Jerusalem there were thirteen settlements with 225,000 settlers. On the Golan Heights there were 20,000 settlers. (Figures after Lynk). In the West Bank, settlements control 42% of the land. Palestinian land continues to be expropriated, houses demolished, and people...
expelled from their homes. Israel has never defined its borders and a process of creeping expansion and annexation is taking place with the dispossession of Palestinians.

These figures are correct at the time of writing, (early 2022), but the number of settlers present and the percentage of land under control by Israel in Palestine, are likely to have increased by the time you read this.

On the 26th May 2021 the Dáil (Parliament in Dublin) unanimously adopted a motion which states that the continuing expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank amounts to \textit{de facto} annexation. Under the 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, annexation is a ‘crime of aggression.’
**SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

How much of this historic background is ‘new’ to you? Does any of it surprise you?

How do the figures on illegal Israeli settlements make you feel?

Do you agree/disagree on internationally accepted notions of an occupying force? Is occupation ever acceptable within a Christian worldview?

What has your experience of occupation been? Have you ever lived under anything that could be described as an occupation? Have you ever been, knowingly or unknowingly, an occupier?
Major themes within and through the conflict
Major themes within and through the conflict

Major players, Major challenge

Currently (early 2022) there is a stalemate in Israel/Palestine relations. Israel remains in total control, occupying the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights, and holding Gaza under siege. The expansion of Jewish Settlements on stolen Palestinian land in the West Bank continues. In occupied East Jerusalem, Judaisation of the city involves ethnic cleansing in areas such as Sheik Jarrah and Silwan through the quasi-legal confiscation of Palestinian homes. De facto annexation continues.

Israeli politics are fractured into numerous small parties, including fundamentalist religious parties and settler organisations. This makes government formation difficult. Recently Israel had three general elections within a twelve-month period. In the West Bank, the Palestinian Authority is dominated by the Fatah faction, but there have been no elections for the past 16 years. In Gaza, western countries pressed for elections in 2006, but then refused to accept the result when the Hamas party topped the poll. Internationally, many governments are reluctant to press Israel or hold it to account for its violation of international law, while the United States of America continues to arm and fund the state of Israel. The EU-Israel Association Agreement gives favourable trade relations with Europe. Britain, as the former colonial power which helped to create the mess, is notable for its relative silence on Israeli human rights abuses.
GEOPGRAPHY

The Holy Land is roughly the size of Wales and would fit into Ireland around four times over. There are parallel geographical zones: the coastal plain; the central hill country; the Jordan Valley; with the Jordanian Plateau to the east. The Jordan Valley is a classic rift valley and forms the beginning of the African rift system, with eastern Africa breaking away from the rest of the continent. The Dead Sea lies at the lowest point on the Earth’s surface - the evaporation of the Lake waters leads to the concentration of mineral salts. The area has a Mediterranean climate with warm wet winters and hot dry summers. The geology is dominated by Cretaceous limestone (the same age as the chalk of Britain and Ireland). This limestone yields the creamy white building stone of Jerusalem. Aquifers (water bearing rocks) are mainly sited in the West Bank and the Israeli authorities have been careful to incorporate these into the areas that they control. Water is a major issue of dispute, with Palestinians being denied the right to deepen wells or bore new ones, while water is supplied in abundance to the illegal settlements.

HISTORY

In the nineteenth century the whole of the Levant region was part of the Ottoman Empire. During the First World War the British encouraged the ‘Arab revolt’, promising Husain, the Sheriff of Mecca, that he would become the ruler of the lands liberated from Turkish rule. In the event, France and Britain divided much of the Middle East between themselves, under the terms of the secret Sykes-Picot agreement. The League of Nations ‘mandated’ France and Britain to rule their respective spheres (Syria and Lebanon for France and Palestine and Iraq for Britain) and bring them to self-governance. The province of Palestine came under British administration and was ruled as a Crown Colony.

1917 – During the Great War, the Balfour Declaration signed by the Foreign Secretary, Arthur James Balfour, was written to Lord Rothschild as a representative of the Zionist Congress. This committed the British Government to use its best endeavours for the ‘establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people.’ There was a clause in the Declaration stating, ‘that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of the existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine.’ The first part of the Declaration was honoured, the second part was not. British Prime Minister Johnston described the Balfour Declaration to be ‘bizarre’, ‘tragically incoherent’ and ‘an exquisite piece of Foreign Office fudgerama.’ Others have labelled it the biggest blunder in late British imperialism.

1917 – 1947 – Palestine was administered by Britain. Jewish immigration from Europe took place and tensions arose between the immigrants, who bought land from absentee landlords, and the indigenous Arab population who were pushed off the land. After the Second World War Britain decided to withdraw from Palestine and handed over the contested land to the newly formed United Nations.

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6The Levant is an historical term for a large geographical area
Major themes within and through the conflict

1948 – As British troops prepared to leave Palestine, Jewish leaders declared a new state of Israel. Neighbouring Arab states then went to war with Israel. Jordan annexed the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Around 750,000 Palestinians were expelled from Palestine in the Nakba (catastrophe). Over 500 Arab villages and communities were depopulated and destroyed by Israel.

1956 – Israel, Britain and France invaded Egypt after Egypt nationalised the Suez Canal.

1967 – After rising tension in the region, Israel attacked Egypt. Syria and Jordan joined in the Six-Day War during which Israel occupied East Jerusalem, the West Bank, Gaza, the Golan Heights, and Sinai. Another 300,000 Palestinians were ejected from their homes. Settlement building activity for Israeli Jews, illegal under international law, began in the West Bank.


1982 – Israel invaded Lebanon to expel the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) leadership. The Israeli army stood by as their Christian Phalangist allies massacred over 1000 Palestinians refugees in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Beirut.

1987 – The first intifada (uprising) of Palestinians began in the Occupied Territories. Stone throwing youths faced Israeli tanks. In Gaza, the Islamist Hamas movement was formed, initially with Israeli encouragement.

1993 – Secret talks in Norway produced the Oslo Accords which were supposed to result in the gradual handing over of autonomy by Israel to the Palestinian Authority. This did not happen, and the Israeli occupation continues.

2000 – The second intifada erupted. This escalated with suicide bombers killing civilians in Israel.

2002 – The Israeli army launched Operation Defensive Shield in the West Bank. The Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem was besieged after gunmen took sanctuary there.

2006 – The second Israel-Lebanese war broke out after Hezbollah abducted two Israeli soldiers.

2008 – Israel launched Operation Cast Lead – a three-week invasion of Gaza to prevent Hamas and other groups from launching rockets into Israel. Almost 1,400 Gazans, including 333 children, were killed. 13 Israelis were also killed.

2012 – Operation Pillar of Defence was directed against Gaza lasting one week, during which 167 Palestinians and 6 Israelis were killed.

2014 – Operation Protective Edge against Gaza lasted 50 days. 2,104 Palestinians and 73 Israelis were killed.
Major themes within and through the conflict

2021- Following threatened evictions of Palestinians in Sheikh Jarrah, East Jerusalem, and heavy-handed policing at the Al Aqsa Mosque, large scale violence once again broke out with rockets being fired from Gaza and aerial bombardment of Gaza by Israel. There was also inter-community violence between Jews and Palestinians in certain 'mixed' Israeli towns. Around 250 Gazans, including 66 children, and 12 Israelis were killed in eleven days of intense violence.

ANTISEMITISM

Persecution of Jews in European history is a shameful fact that must be fully acknowledged. Prejudice against Jews in Europe played a critical role in the desire of the Jewish nationalist Zionist movement to create a Jewish State. Theodore Herzl, a founder of the Zionist movement, was convinced that Jews would never be fully accepted into European society and he lobbied the Ottoman Sultan and European politicians to enable the emigration of Jews into Palestine.

The horrors of the Second World War in which National Socialist (Nazi) theories of racial superiority led to the genocide of the Holocaust/shoah, need to be fully recognised in their brutality, and with shame. It is estimated by the Holocaust Museum USA\(^7\) that over 17 million people were murdered by the Nazis during the Second World War, over 6 million of them Jews. Those numbers are almost too big to contemplate: 6 million Jews. That is just below the population of the entire island of Ireland. After the horror of the Holocaust, many survivors sought refuge either in Palestine or America.

Christian history has experienced blights of antisemitism stemming from the notion that the Jews killed Christ and thus deserved their fate. Such significant Christian figures as the early church fathers, Tertullian and Origen through to Augustine (who argued Jews should not be destroyed but left to suffer because of their treatment of Christ), expressed antisemitic theology. Coming through the ages, giants from opposite ends of the Church, such as Martin Luther and Pope Pius XII, both expressed antisemitic language (in Luther's case vehemently so - "First, to set fire to their synagogues or schools ... This is to be done in honour of our Lord and of Christendom, so that God might see that we are Christians ...\)

The words of celebrated Catholic theologian Hans Küng are noteworthy here: - "Nazi anti-Judaism was the work of godless, anti-Christian criminals. But it would not have been possible without the almost two thousand years' pre-history of 'Christian' anti-Judaism...\(^9\) It should be noted that

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8Martin Luther, 'On the Jews and their Lies' 1543.

Major themes within and through the conflict

Palestinians were not and are not responsible for antisemitism in history, rather they are the victims of the victims of antisemitism.

All forms of racism are to be deplored and attempts have been made to define the specific form of racism known as antisemitism. The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition (IHRA) is controversial because of the examples that are attached to it. These examples assert that criticism of Israel or calls to use economic pressure through the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement are intrinsically antisemitic. This has been used by Israel and by governments such as those of Germany, the UK and the USA to deflect legitimate criticism of Israel's discriminatory policies toward Palestinians. The American peace group ‘Jewish Voice for Peace’ and other Jewish organisations see the IHRA definition as an attack on free speech. The more recent Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism, signed by over 200 scholars in Israel, is a balanced definition, and should be preferred to the IHRA definition.

10https://jerusalemdeclaration.org/
Some questions for discussion

What particular aspects of this potted history, geography, sociology and theology most grabbed your attention? Why?

How do you feel reading about Christian antisemitism through the ages? Have you ever witnessed / experienced antisemitism?

What aspects of the reporting above do you want to know more about, and why?

What links / narratives / experiences connect your reading of the above to any aspect of your life on this island of Ireland? Can you make any links to Irish/Northern Irish history, geography or social realities?

Does the island of Ireland share any experiences / realities on the ground, with the Holy Land?
Possible Christian responses to what has been contained in this study guide
How might Christians respond? Repent? Re-learn? Can we have helpful conversations on the Holy Land?

A RESPONSE TO VIOLENCE

Radical peace churches like the Quakers and Mennonites reject violence in all circumstances. In this they are in accord with the early Christian community, which also held to a pacifist position. Historically, most other Christian denominations, whilst wanting to see peace prevail, would argue for a right to self-defence and for coercion by lawful authorities to restrain criminal behaviour. Classic notions of ‘Just War Theory’ emphasize the proportionate use of force. In the violent clashes between Israel and Palestine, Israel characteristically uses disproportionate force, as the numbers of civilians killed in Gaza show. Between the years 2000 and 2021, 1,276 Israelis have been killed in the conflict (half of which were military deaths), and 10,216 Palestinians have been killed (the percentage of civilian deaths is highly disputed, but most human rights organisations put it at more than 50%). The primary violence in the region comes from the illegal occupation by Israel of Palestinians’ territory, which is accompanied by land expropriation, demolition of Palestinian homes, persecution of Bedouin communities and large-scale imprisonment of Palestinians who resist the occupation in any way. The way to achieve a solution peacefully requires the application of diplomatic and economic pressure.
Possible Christian responses to what has been contained in this study guide

Kairos Palestine\(^\text{11}\) emphasizes that such pressure is not punishment or revenge, but action to 'put an end to the existing evil, liberating both the perpetrators and the victims of injustice.'

Regarding the notions of \textbf{CONFLICT} that emerge when discussing questions of violence, Kairos Palestine, representing Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant churches in the Holy Land, is quite clear in calling for an end to the illegal occupation of Palestine by Israel. Their primary demand is for justice. They call on Christians throughout the world to support the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement (BDS), not as an act of revenge, but as a nonviolent way of putting pressure on the State of Israel to change its policies. In the case of apartheid in South Africa, BDS was an important factor in bringing about change.\(^\text{12}\)

\textbf{SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION}

Where in the New testament do you read Jesus confronting violence? What happens, and why?

What do you note about the life – and the death – of Jesus in conversations about violence and the results that it brings?

Do you consider violence can ever be justified?

What do you think a Christian response to violence should be? Can you witness any prevalence of it in what you know about the Holy Land?

\(^{11}\text{https://www.kairospalestine.ps/}\)

\(^{12}\text{As an example of the growing language around apartheid in Israel, see the work of Rev Brian Brown \textendash\ 'Apartheid South Africa: Apartheid Israel', a retired Methodist minister who was actively involved in the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa}\)
Jews claim a long link with the Holy Land, but Palestinians also have historic claims to the land and have lived in Palestine for centuries. Studies like that of the Israeli professor, Shlomo Sand, argue that some of the Palestinians are probably descended from the original Jews of the Roman period, whilst many contemporary Jews are descended from Turkic people such as the Khazars. Attempts to reverse historic population movements would lead to complete chaos. The USA is largely made up of descendants of settler colonialists. Large parts of Britain were colonised by Anglo-Saxons and later Vikings, displacing the original ‘ancient British Tribes’. Our island of Ireland adds to this discussion in a big way. Understanding where we came from is a vital way to figure out how we got here and where we’re going. Knowing how we (on this island) got here isn’t always easy …

In your family you might well talk about these 100th anniversary years of the founding of Northern Ireland as a moment in history when ‘the 26 counties chose to leave the United Kingdom – they ran away, turned their back on Britain, leaving the country divided and violent.’ There is no discussion to be had, other than the painful separation and loss of 26 counties, dividing families and homes and causing only suffering.

You might have other family members who will gaze through a different lens. 100 years ago the people who lived on this island ‘received most of their island back after hundreds of years of Imperial British Colonialism that, at one time, was the cause of the slaughter of thousands of men, women and children in the name of God and country.’ At another time laws were passed banning the Irish language, Irish music, Irish stories and mythology. At other times the Crown sent the biggest forces known in the world with the newest fighting machines to subdue the Irish and keep them in order.

While we are in this conversation, let us also note that the ‘Irish’ we are writing about came from Scandinavian Viking tribes, who intermarried and mingled with native Celtic tribes who had been on this island from c.300BC, but started arriving c.700BC. “Basically there were four different sets of Celtic invaders: the Priteni, the Bolgic, the Lagin, and the Goidels, or Gaels. Each of these groups, once they had established themselves, intermingled with each other and also with the Irish,” who originated in modern day Germany. The original English invasion of Ireland came from the Normans, who were French. Perhaps the central hope in these conversations is that we (Christians) would be people who, wherever we find ourselves, in whatever ‘Age,’ decide to create just and equitable societies that embrace diversity. There are no divinely ordained rights to land.
**Possible Christian responses to what has been contained in this study guide**

**SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

In Scripture to whom does the earth belong?

Can you think of anywhere in the New testament where questions of land, ownership, occupation arise? Where? What happens in these texts?

In what ways might understanding history as, ‘how we got here,’ help us to know where and who we are? In what ways can understanding ‘how we got here’ be a challenge to us?

What do you think a Christian response to history should be? What would it mean for that response be prevalent in the Holy Land and even in Ireland?
A RESPONSE TO CHOSENNESS

Old Testament theologian Walter Bruggeman\(^{15}\) points to the motif of Israel as a chosen people, as intrinsic to the Old Testament narrative. But the question is: chosen for what? For privilege or to model a form of community in which the marginalised are cared for, the stranger included, and where justice and righteousness prevail? The Academic Director of the Bethlehem Bible College, Munther Isaac, points out that in the Bible the land belongs to God and is given with conditions to the chosen people, who must act justly or else be vomited out of the land. Election does not mean privilege. In the Old Testament the community of ‘Israel’ is not defined by genetics and there are numerous instances of ‘foreign marriages.’ For example, Psalm 87 includes enemies, rivals, and foreigners (Egyptians, Babylonians, Philistines, Syrians and Ethiopians) within the community of faith. This reality points strongly towards the words of Rev Dr Sahr Yambasu, President of the Methodist Church in Ireland (2021-2022), whose Presidential theme was ‘People first, under God.’

“People matter; different people; and all people matter to God: male and female, old and young, heterosexual and homosexual, girls and boys, rich and poor, single and married, widows and divorced, Christians and non-Christians, people of faith and those of none, black, brown and white people, citizens and foreigners, Jews and gentiles, every nation and tribe - great and small – are all equally important to God.”\(^{16}\)

To bring Geography into the question of Biblical chosenness (note: in Zionism chosenness is inextricably linked to the gift of the Land), it is worth noting the Biblical boundaries of Israel stretch from the Euphrates to the Nile – i.e. the whole known world of the day. The boundaries of the promised land in texts such as Daniel 7:14, Micah 5:4 and Isaiah 54:3-5 point towards the promised land as an ever-expanding reality that is meant to embrace ‘all peoples, nations and languages.’ In the New Testament, through the full redeeming work of Christ, Gentiles inherit the promise made to Abraham through faith in Christ.

Biblical scholar Gerhard Lohfink stipulates an understanding of election as a full and encompassing, a wide and embracing US – all of Us. “Election must also be understood in this sense. The election of a single people from the many nations does not imply preference for once over the others or discrimination against the others in favour of the chosen one; election of one people is for the sake of the others. The chosen people are to become a sign to other peoples of what God plans to do with the world as a whole.”\(^{17}\)

In Methodist understanding, John Wesley differed from the theology of John Calvin in specific ways – the concept of chosenness/election is one central place where they parted understanding. For Calvin some were elected before the dawn of time to be with God forever, leaving those not chosen, the ‘unelected,’ to eternal damnation in hell. The outworking of this theology is that God has chosen

\(^{15}\)https://www.amazon.co.uk/Chosen-Reading-Bible-Israeli-Palestinian-Conflict-ebook/dp/B0149FP11M

\(^{16}\)https://static1.squarespace.com/static/604f6c4cbaa61721597a264b/t/60c72b1db986d114d0718f9b/1623665437979/Sahr+Yambasu+Installation+Sermon%5B67%5D.pdf

Possible Christian responses to what has been contained in this study guide

people to live in light and life, and because God is sovereign, (all controlling). He has, therefore, also chosen people to live in darkness and damnation. This is not a Methodist understanding. Wesley reacted against the Calvinism of his day by boldly pointing in his journals that faith was not quite enough (!), it had to be met with action. Faith in Christ was actions with Christ for the outworking of God's salvific purposes in the world.

The writing of Mark Lau Branson sheds light on this:

"Among Calvinists and Lutherans in Wesley's day, as among some evangelicals of our day, one's assent to this doctrine of "salvation by grace through faith " was the issue of orthodoxy. God does everything that really matters, and humans simply agree that it's true. But the theological justification of Calvinism stopped short in Wesley's thinking. He later commented in 'his journal that the overblown role of "faith" among Calvinists and Lutherans could be seen as their "fear of popery, being so terrified with the cry of merit," that they then dismissed the other commandments. He believed faith to be a condition, a human responsibility. He was convinced that human volition and action were important. God's extension of saving grace was the starting point, but Wesley could not agree that faith alone saved or that predestination established the course, both being positions which discounted human decision. The importance of spiritual disciplines and works of righteousness in the world could not be discarded under the pretense that God does everything and that we are simply to be passive as we wait for whatever God effects. To believe is to trust (a holistic, relational response), not just to give assent (solely an intellectual, doctrinal response). Imputed justification should lead to imparted justice. Jesus' death and resurrection bring mercy and justice for rebirth and new life. Wesley spoke on these good works in a sermon on Christian perfection:

'First, all works of piety such as public prayer, family prayer and praying in our closet, receiving the Supper of the Lord, searching the Scriptures, by hearing, reading, meditating, and using such a measure of fasting or abstinence as our bodily health allows. Secondly, all works of mercy, whether they relate to the bodies or souls of men, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, entertaining the stranger, visiting those that are in prison, or sick, or variously afflicted, such as the endeavouring to instruct the ignorant, to awaken the stupid sinner, to quicken the lukewarm, to confirm the wavering, to comfort the feeble-minded, to succour the tempted, or contribute in any manner to the saving of souls from death. This is the repentance and these the fruits meet for repentance which are necessary to full sanctification. This is the way wherein God hath appointed his children to wait for complete salvation.'

It was the recognition that entrance into the faith was simply that - a beginning to an entirely new approach to life—that provided the most far-reaching contribution of Wesley's thought:

'And at the same time that we are justified - yea, in that very moment- sanctification begins. In that instant we are "born again, born from above, born of the Spirit." There is a real as well as a relative change We are inwardly renewed by the power of God. We feel "the love of God shed abroad in our

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18This article appeared in Radix Magazine (17:5), Summer, 1986, pp. 3-8. Mark Lau Branson is former Holmer L. Goddard Associate Professor of Ministry of the Laity at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA.
heart by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us” [Romans 5:5], producing love to all [human]kind, and more especially to the children of God, expelling the love of the world, the love of pleasure, of ease, of honour, of money, together with pride, anger, self-will and every other evil temper; in a word, changing the “earthly, sensual, devilish mind” into “the mind which was in Christ Jesus” [Philippians 2:5].”

All of this is to note that issues of ‘chosenness / the elected’ remain central, and divisive, in a Judeo-Christian faith. Whether it is a passport to heaven hereafter, or a right to a physical geographical location throughout all time and age, the questions of whom God blesses and why remain central to the conversation.

In one understanding, if God blesses US, then what WE have received from God belongs to us for us.

In another understanding, if God blesses All of us, or Blesses All through us, then the blessing is from God to God’s world, for God’s pleasure, God’s reward, God’s joy. And what is God’s, is graciously gifted to us. All of us.

**SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

What does it mean for you to be Chosen? Do you consider yourself chosen as a Christian?

Can you think of anywhere in the New testament where questions of ‘being chosen’ arise? Where? What happened / happens in these texts? Why?

How does a theological mindset which moves from ‘God has blessed US’ to ‘God has Blessed ALL of US’ affect how we treat ownership, property, resources, and material possessions?

What might Christianity in Ireland / The Holy Land look like, if we chose to believe everyone was chosen by God? Is this understanding possible from Scripture? Why / why not?
The Future

ONE STATE, TWO STATES, THREE STATES?

Since 1948 most western democracies have argued that a two-state solution offers the best way forward for a resolution to the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine. In this case, Israel would accept the ‘green-line’ cease-fire boundary of 1948 as the boundary of Israel. The UK and Ireland currently hold this position. However, the creeping land theft by Israel in the Occupied West Bank and the massive settlement building programme pursued by Israel make the two-state solution a remote possibility. Many commentators now argue for one state, but a state where all the citizens have equal rights. This could be a bi-national state, where different ethnic, cultural and linguistic traditions have parity of esteem. Clearly the idea of a Jewish state as a democratic state is an oxymoron. It has been stated many times that a Jewish state, which discriminates against non-Jews, amounts to apartheid - and under international law apartheid is a crime.
CONCLUSION

The Academic Dean of Bethlehem Bible College, Munther Isaac, points out that there is no scriptural justification for the claim that modern Israel is in continuity with Israel in the Old Testament and has a divine right to the exclusive possession of the Holy Land. In the Old Testament there is a move from the tribal to the global and the law (Torah) espousing justice and mercy is to apply to the whole world for the benefit of all people. The community of ancient Israel was called to ‘be a light to the Nations’ - to model a just society where the poor, the stranger, and the marginalised are included and valued.

To be ‘chosen’ is not a guarantee of privilege, rather it is a call to service.

There is much in the current realities of Palestine and Israel that should give us deep pause for thought.

a. Palestinian Christians in the Kairos Palestine document, ‘A moment of truth,’ state that distortions of Christian Faith, such as Christian Zionism, are not just mistaken, they are heresy, a denial of the Gospel of love. Earlier British expressions of Christian Zionism (e.g. in the Balfour Declaration) served British imperial interests, such as protecting the route to India and oil pipeline from Iraq. Britain has much to repent of in its imperial past, including its failures in the administration of Mandate Palestine.

b. Kairos Palestine and other Human Rights organisations (e.g. B’Tselem, and Human Rights Watch) describe the current Israeli regime as ‘Apartheid’. That is, one religious and ethnic group (Israelis) are preferentially treated at the expense of another group (Palestinians). Veteran South African anti-apartheid activist Brian Brown spells out in detail how modern Israel qualifies to be labelled as an apartheid state. Under modern international law, apartheid is a crime and should carry consequences, yet Israel has favourable trade arrangements with the EU and the UK.

c. The Israeli occupation of the West Bank and siege of Gaza contravenes international law. Under the terms of the Fourth Geneva Convention indefinite military occupation of land or the transfer of one’s own citizens onto occupied land are strictly forbidden. Israel ignores the numerous UN resolutions that call upon it to withdraw from the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Governments who are signatories to the Fourth Geneva Convention have a duty to uphold international law. This means that the Irish and British governments should take steps to ensure that Israel fulfils its obligations under international law.

What should a Christian response be, when our governments do not uphold international law?

Churches have a moral obligation to uphold human rights wherever they are violated. The late Archbishop Desmond Tutu pointed out that our silence in the face of the ongoing oppression of the
Possible Christian responses to what has been contained in this study guide

Palestinians shames us all, to be neutral in the face of oppression is to take the side of the oppressor. The clear position of the World Communion of Reformed Churches in their Handbook Palestine (links appear to this in the Appendices of this resource) is a welcome response to the Kairos Palestine ‘Cry for Hope’ document.

Christian churches must acknowledge and lament all past expressions of racism, including anti-Semitism, and should strive to stand with any oppressed people against oppression and brutalisation.
Possible Christian responses to what has been contained in this study guide

A PRACTICAL RESPONSE

You have worked through this resource, gaining education and knowledge – what is your response now?

Consider:

a. In 2010 the British Methodist Conference called on Methodists to boycott goods made within or connected to Israeli Settlements. The current CFB (Churches Finance Board) investment policy with respect to Israel and Palestine policy states that “the CFB aims not to invest in any company that is directly or materially involved in activities that are in breach of international law, or is complicit in violations of human rights as defined by the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” Unfortunately, the Ministers Pension Fund withdrew from the CFB on the grounds of fiduciary duty.

Should Irish Methodists now support moves to clarify the Methodist ethical investments policy regarding Palestine/Israel?

Kairos Palestine calls on churches to support the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement (BDS) as a non-violent way of bringing pressure on the government of Israel to end its discriminatory policies towards Palestinians. Such action was strongly supported by Archbishop Desmond Tutu who wrote a letter to Israelis in 2014 in which he said, ‘Those who continue to do business with Israel, who contribute to a sense of “normalcy” in Israeli society, are doing the people of Israel and Palestine a disservice. They are contributing to the perpetuation of a profoundly unjust status quo.’ Tutu pointed out that boycott of Apartheid South Africa had been an important factor in bringing change to what seemed like an intractable situation. He wrote, ‘The withdrawal of trade with South Africa by multinational corporations with a conscience in the 1980s was ultimately one of the key levers that brought the apartheid state – bloodlessly – to its knees. Those corporations understood that by contributing to South Africa’s economy, they were contributing to the retention of an unjust status quo.’

Should your local church be investigating its own connection to goods / industry attached to an Israeli economy that prioritises military spending? The Israeli government since 1960 has spent an average of 12.5% of its GDP on military resources (compare to an international average of 1.5%)\(^1\)

b. Can you continue the conversation in this resource by now running a discussion group yourself using this material? Who do you know who has an interest/opinion on the issues contained in this resource, but has not been part of your study group? Can YOU take it upon yourself to run this group with some other folks?

\(^1\)https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/israel-military-spending-gdp/article6407962/
c. There are plans to run another Peace Pilgrimage from Ireland to Palestine and Israel in 2023/24. This opportunity will provide a space for religious pilgrimage and learning, but will also continue the conversations begun in this resource, by holding meetings / seminars every day with people living these realities on the ground; e.g. Palestinian families, peace activists from all sides, Israeli settlers, and many more. This truly is a one-off experience to deepen understanding of the region. Express your interest in finding out more by signing up HERE and we will send you information.
Appendices

i.

**US and THEM**

The late, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks wrote, "When religion turns men into murderers, God weeps. So the book of Genesis tells us. Having made human beings in his image, God sees the first man and woman disobey the first command, and the first human child commit the first murder. Within a short space of time 'the world was filled with violence'. God 'saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth'. We then read one of the most searing sentences in religious literature. 'God regretted that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain' (Gen. 6:6). Too often in the history of religion, people have killed in the name of the God of life, waged war in the name of the God of peace, hated in the name of the God of love and practised cruelty in the name of the God of compassion. When this happens, God speaks, sometimes in a still, small voice almost inaudible beneath the clamour of those claiming to speak on his behalf. What he says at such times is: Not in My Name."\(^{20}\)

Members of the writing team for this resource have walked around the streets of Hebron, and witnessed radical Jewish settlers (there illegally, according to international law) stroll those streets with guns. There is a tangible sense of bullying and friction in the air in Hebron – one of the most contested cities, as it is home to the Ibrami Mosque and Synagogue, purported resting place of the bones of Abraham, Sara, Jacob, Leah, Issac and Rebecca. (the cave of Macpelah in Genesis).

There is intimidation on a regular basis of Palestinian homes in the centre of the city, there have been forced removals of Palestinian families, shops closed by military order, and a 100 million dollar offer from an American Jew to Abdulraouf Al-Mohtaseb, a Palestinian owner of a home/shop closest to the Mosque and Synagogue, to purchase his home. Over 1200 military servicemen and women from the Israeli army are stationed in the centre of Hebron in order to protect an estimated 400 settlers. Violence, intimidation, brutality, military strength and the strong-arm of greater firepower keep the centre of Hebron a tense and dangerous place. All in the name of the God who told the Patriarch buried there that "all peoples on the earth will be blessed through you."\(^{21}\) It's hard to imagine that God meant the blessing to all would come through superior military might. I suspect that same God utters, as Jonathan Sacks did, 'not in my name.'

This reality points to the most basic of all human tendencies.

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\(^{21}\)Gen 12
Look after US over here, and be suspicious of THEM over there.

US versus THEM is not a phenomenon of the last 70 years in Palestine / Israel, nor was it invented with the last 100 or 800 years of Irish history. It goes back far. Very far.

Charles Darwin had a problem – in every society he studied, he witnessed what he termed ‘survival of the fittest,’ where the strongest, best resourced, and fittest would be the champions of all, and therefore should be the only survivors. There was, however, a phenomenon he could not at first explain.

Altruism.

Giving of oneself / resources / energies on behalf of another.

This, at times, led to a survival of the weak. Not the fittest.

In survival of the fittest, only the strong should survive, and the weaker would disappear in larger numbers than the rest. However, Darwin’s studies showed ‘altruism’ was prevalent in every society he studied. The strong looking after the weak. The fittest and best making alteration for the struggling and those in trouble. This should not have happened – in a survival of the fittest, the last standing is the strongest. Altruism in such a society is a bad survival strategy. But Darwin witnessed it everywhere.

Something more seemed to be happening.

Darwin went on to answer his own conundrum by demonstrating the following. Altruism – giving toward another - is seen most prevalently in the care and attention of the ‘in-group.’

‘Those like me.’

The family, the tribe, the church, the nation, the race, the gender - those who are in my corner. It turns out, according to Darwin, that just like the meerkat who will stand watch for incoming predators in order to guard and protect his/her family, emitting a scream if a predator arrives, thereby giving their own location away, but allowing a family to escape, we too, as humans, can be remarkably altruistic and self-giving for those like US.

We, the tribe, the nation, the church, the sisters, the brothers, the company – when we are connected as an US we are bound together, connected, in community and in safety.

Of course, there is one important thing to note - when we have an US, we automatically create a THEM, those not like US.

This is what leads ultimately to discord, separation, suspicion, anger, fear. ‘We’ must protect ourselves against the ‘them’ of ‘them out there.’

They can bring danger – they are unknown - they have different languages, abilities, colours, traditions, appreciations, values, experiences, hopes and fears. When faced with an experience of ‘the other,’ our basic human need for security and safety can very easily morph into creating an exclusion zone towards anyone / anything that we cannot fully understand or control. It makes sense – indeed it is human nature to look after what is yours, and most of the time these human traits (at their best) can help us experience love, care, attention, safety and security. Yet, at their worst, these tendencies lead
Appendices

to fear, exclusion, protectionism and even violence. It can even lead to demonizing the other. Such moments occur when relationships are strained and attacked. When all is well, life can be smooth, but under attack, our tendency to activate protectionisms for us, demonise the other, and build walls to keep THEM out and US safe will always come to the fore.

ii. What conversations does this diagram inspire? Is it helpful, not helpful?
In what ways can we as Christians openly and confidently engage in conversations with people of other faiths without feeling either superior or inferior?

![The primary teaching of every religion?](image)

iii. References & Further Reading
Appendices

Books, Documents, and Videos
(Other references are included in the text)

DOCUMENTS

Kairos Palestine – A Christian Palestinian Movement. See especially -
   2. Cry for Hope: A call to decisive action (www.cryforhope.org)

Kairos Ireland - that justice and peace might embrace (www.kairosireland.org)
World Communion of Reformed Churches Focus Palestine: a WCRC Handbook 2021 (Error! Hyperlink reference not valid. PDF)
Sabeel-Kairos UK paper on Christian Zionism by Stephen Sizer

B’Tselem https://www.btselem.org/publications/fulltext/202101_this_is_apartheid

Amnesty International (February 2022)
Israel’s Apartheid Against Palestinians: Cruel System of Domination and Crime Against Humanity

BOOKS

Brown, Brian (2021) Apartheid South Africa! Apartheid Israel. Church in the Market Place Publications (to purchase email kairosireland@gmail.com)

Chapman, Colin (Revised Ed. 2015) Whose Promised Land: The continuing conflict over Israel and Palestine


Isaac, Munther (2020) The other side of the wall. Inter Varsity Press

Obaida Akram Abdurahman Jawabra, 17, was shot dead by Israeli forces with live ammunition today around 8 p.m. local time in Al-Arroub refugee camp located near the southern occupied West Bank city of Hebron. Obaida sustained a gunshot wound to his chest during a demonstration at the entrance of the camp located near Route 60, the main route in the West Bank connecting Hebron and Jerusalem. An Israeli soldier deployed about 70 meters (230 feet) away fired the fatal shot, according to eyewitnesses interviewed by Defence for Children International - Palestine.

Video (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JjAsFhYOwGc)

The video produced by Defence of Children International describes Obaida’s experience of imprisonment and his dream to become a chef.

The Jewish Voice for Peace video outlines the background to the founding of Israel in cartoon format. https://youtu.be/Y58njT2oXfE

Amnesty International report and video issued on 1st February St Bridgit’s Day Israel’s apartheid against Palestinians - Amnesty International

100 Balfour Road short Film 2017
A ten-minute film that drastically outlines the effect of the Balfour declaration as an ordinary family are expelled from their home and forced to live in their own back garden shed. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fAIW_bKOZx8

The History of the Israel and Palestine Conflict
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4r1EmEni2Rw
A brief (10minute) youtube video attempting to explain the conflict from a neutral point of view

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict explained
Another viewpoint attempting to explain the roots of the current crisis in the region. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ngFYOLOkmal

Why are Israel and the Palestinians fighting over Gaza? (BBC article)
https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/20436092

Worship
Week of Prayer for Christian Unity Booklet 2022