

Christian Perspectives on the Holy Land

A
LAND
FULL
OF
GOD

Edited by Mae Elise Cannon

Foreword by Aziz Abu Sarah & Daniel Roth

STUDY GUIDE

By Jennifer Maidrand

Outreach Manager for Churches for Middle East Peace

**Foreword,
Aziz Abu Sarah and
Rabbi Dr. Daniel Roth, “Multiple Narratives
Toward Peace”**

- Abu Sarah and Roth state that operating with an understanding that only one narrative is true creates a mentality that an enemy or “other” narrative exists. Can you name a time when you witnessed this divisive approach to peace work, either from another or yourself?
- What hesitations or worries do you have in approaching all narratives presented in this book with an open mind?

**Introduction,
Rev. Dr. Mae Elise Cannon**

-What do you think of Cannon’s claim that choosing one side over the other creates a false dichotomy and actually hinders progress towards peace? As you enter this study, reflect on how you understand the various “sides” of issues in Israel and Palestine and whether you identify with one more than the others.

Cannon points out that many authors in this book speak about the land with various terms—Israel, Judea & Samaria, occupied Palestinian territories (oPt)—and notes that these names connote different political meanings and views. How do you typically refer to the land and where did you learn that term?

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-Cannon suggests that the typical approach of presenting “balanced” perspectives most often excludes recognition of the imbalances of power that exist starkly within those issues. How might you incorporate questions regarding power into your study of the narratives in this book?

1, Dale Hanson Bourke, “Beginning to Understand the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict”

-Summary: Bourke shares about his journey of working through his discomfort and ignorance to become more educated about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict where he slowly learned how to listen, learn, and pray with individuals on all sides of the conflict.

-Bourke describes the power that narratives hold in breaking stereotypes. He explains that oftentimes when you meet people, their stories can be confusing and often present challenges to narratives and assumptions you previously held. Reflect on a time when someone you met had a narrative that was different or much more complex than you imagined or previously understood.

-Bourke believes that through beautiful interactions and moments of reconciliation, the impossible occurs and peace is possible in the land. Have you witnessed any examples of seemingly impossible moments of reconciliation?

2, David Neff, “We Need One More Common Friend”

-Summary: Neff reflects on his experience forming friendships with Jews and Christians, Israelis and Palestinians, and suggests that doing so is an important step in learning how to stand with both Israel and Palestine.

-Neff describes the story of a Palestinian-American friend who lamented that Zionism had served as a barrier in keeping him from connecting with his Jewish neighbors. What other barriers might keep those on opposing sides of the conflict from interacting and truly “seeing” one another?

-Reflect on the barriers you’ve encountered that have hindered your ability to see another’s perspective or experience.

- Have you ever tried to be a “common friend” to two opposing sides? If you were successful in maintaining such a friendship, what factors contributed to that success?

3, Rich Nathan, “How Should Christians Relate to the State of Israel?”

-Summary: Nathan reflects on his relationship to the State of Israel as a Jewish Christian and suggests that Christians must engage in peace and reconciliation in Israel and Palestine as guided by themes of biblical justice.

-Reflect on the following questions that Nathan raises in his chapter: What are the implications of believing that the Bible claims that the land of Israel belongs to the Jewish people? What does this affirmation communicate to Palestinians and the larger Arab world?

-How does praying to and having faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob offer an opportunity for Christians to be in solidarity with Jews?

-How does Nathan define biblical justice and what are the examples he gives of it? Does anything about this description challenge or surprise you?

4, Address of His Holiness Pope Francis, “Speech at the Presidential Palace with Palestinian Authorities in Bethlehem”

-Summary: His Holiness Pope Francis speaks on the necessity for people of all faiths to come together to “find the courage to be generous and courageous in the service of the common good, the courage to forge a peace which rests on the acknowledgment by all of the right of two states to exist and to live in peace and security within internationally recognized borders.” (p. 42)

-What does it mean for Pope Francis to speak of the need for peace and security in Israel and Palestine? What authority and/or expertise does he bring to this topic?

-Pope Francis asserts that for Palestinian Christians to be able to continue their role as active peacemakers in Palestine, they must be able to maintain their role as full citizens with their fellow neighbors/sisters & brothers. What are ways in which the full citizenship of Palestinian Christians might be under threat?

5, Judith Mendelsohn Rood,

“I am Jewish: Reflections on Jewish Identity in the Holy Land”

-Summary: Rood reflects on her spiritual journey and experience living as a Messianic Jew in Israel and argues that Christians must testify of God’s presence in the land and pray for a good future together in it under God.

-Rood asserts that “We must accept one another on God’s terms, not our own.” (p. 55) Make a short list of how God might view and accept others in your life. Reflect on how integrated those ideals are with how you perceive others.

-What boundaries does Mendelsohn Rood deconstruct when it comes to identity and religious conflict? What lessons might Christians learn from Muslim philosophers who sought to build pathways for peace between all religions?

-In the last two paragraphs of her chapter, Mendelsohn makes several provocative arguments related to the viability of a Palestinian state and the necessary reasons for recognizing the identity of Palestinians and Jews. Do you agree with her closing statements? Why or why not?

6, Dr. Tony Maalouf,

“God’s Chosen People and the Land of Abraham”

-Summary: Maalouf analyzes the patriarchal narratives of the Hebrew Bible, otherwise known as God’s promises to Abraham, and argues that popular readings of these scriptures misconstrue the relationship between Ishmael’s descendants (Arabia) and Isaac’s descendants (Israel), and wrongly interpret a history of enmity between them. He claims that both peoples are included within God’s blessing and that Christians must look for opportunities to serve as careful interpreters, peacemakers, and upholders of Abraham’s moral example.

-On the issue of the Abrahamic blessings and Israel/Palestine, Maalouf states that Christians are responsible for carefully examining “scriptures, biblical history, and secular history as well, looking for reconciliation grounds in line with their calling to be peacemakers.” (p.65) What are the grounds for reconciliation that Christians can engage in as peacemakers? - What biblical history have you learned in the church about Hagar and Sarah, and Abraham’s sons Issac and Ishmael?

- How does Maalouf’s explanation of the Ishmael narrative align or differ from your own readings of the Scriptures?

7, Dr. Michael L. Brown, “Will God Really Bless Those Who Bless Israel Today?”

-Summary: Brown examines biblical narratives of promise and poses the question of how America and Christians worldwide should treat Israel. He argues that God played a role in the contemporary migration of the Jewish people to Palestine and that God’s promise to bless those who bless Israel persists today.

-Brown sees God’s hand preserving the ancient people of Israel throughout history, but claims that not everything the modern nation-state of Israel does today is righteous and that contemporary Christians should not blindly support all the nation’s decisions. What do you think about this claim? Do parts of it resonate with you or bring up tension? Is it possible to “bless” the descendants of Jacob while criticizing Israel?

- What parts of Brown’s chapter do you agree or disagree with? Why or why not?

8, Rev. Dr. John E. Phelan Jr., “The Land of Israel and the Problem of Supersessionism”

-Summary: Supersessionism is pervasive among Christians and has borne detrimental impacts on the Jewish people throughout history. Phelan argues that Paul’s writings do not justify supersessionist theologies and that Christians ought to uphold the right of Jews to live safely in their homeland.

-After reading Phelan’s chapter, how do you understand supersessionism? Is this something you’ve learned in the course of your engagement with the church?

-Phelan distinguishes that “the land of Israel remains in the plan of God” and allows Jews a right to their historic homeland, but that Israel is not above scrutiny for unlawful actions and oppression of Palestinians (p. 84). In what ways do his claims challenge or resonate with you?

-Phelan’s chapter highlights the question of how Christians ought to regard and be in relationship with those of other faiths. What Scriptures come to mind when you think of how Christians are called to treat all humankind?

9, Dr. Andrea Lee Smith, “Land & People”

-Summary: Smith approaches the question of justice in Israel and Palestine from the perspective of Native thinkers and argues that we must reimagine structures of nationhood and sovereignty in order to achieve a shared and just existence of all peoples in the land.

-Smith offers a reading of 1 Samuel that contextualizes self-determination within a framework of justice for all, and a reading of Ephesians that calls for a radical reenvisioning of how people relate to land. In what ways do these interpretations resonate with or challenge you?

-Smith suggests that the liberation of one peoples cannot occur without the liberation of all peoples. How might such an understanding shape how you/your community approaches questions of justice and peace in Israel/Palestine?

10, Dr. Clayborne Carson with Rev. Dr. Troy Jackson, “Martin Luther King, Jr.’s Hope for a Better Israel”

-Summary: Carson and Jackson draw connections between nonviolent tactics employed by Civil Rights organizers and the growing nonviolent resistance movement among Palestinians, which they believe is a hopeful source of peaceful change in Palestine and Israel.

-By drawing on the writings and speeches of King, the authors articulate a Christian commitment to strongly oppose anti-Semitism and cultivate relationships of solidarity with them, while also remaining staunchly opposed to injustice and oppression in any form. Where/how do either of these views fit into your own faith values and commitments?

-In learning about King’s speech about Israel, how do you think his teachings about equality and justice might speak to current realities in the Holy Land today?

**11, Dr. Donald M. Lewis,
“A Very Short History of Christian Zionism”**

-Summary: Lewis provides a brief overview of the history of Christian Zionism, highlighting the ways in which its theological underpinnings have evolved and shaped it into a dynamic and diverse movement.

-Lewis highlights a range of racist and anti-Semitic ideologies that are woven into the history of Christian Zionism. Does having an understanding of that history of violence and harm impact how you interpret the ways Christian Zionism manifests in the present?

-How might this historical analysis of Christian Zionism inform how you interact with Christian Zionism, either in your own beliefs or those of others?

**12, Dr. David P. Gushee,
“Christian Just Peacemaking and Israel-Palestine: A Quick and Dirty Historical Account of What We are Calling Israel-Palestine”**

-Summary: In his chapter, Gushee explores a brief political history of Israel and challenges the popular theological lenses through which Christians often approach Israel. He argues that a grounded understanding of history, a respect for international law, and a commitment to God’s love of all people are the foundation of just Christian peacemaking in Israel-Palestine.

-Gushee challenges Christians to learn about the history and politics of Israel-Palestine without first jumping to interpret the situation theologically. Have you ever tried this approach? If so, what was the experience like for you?

-What is one element of the history or conflict in Israel-Palestine that you think having a better understanding of would help shape a vision of just Christian peacemaking? Make a plan to learn more about that topic.

13, Susan Michael, “Across the Israel Divide”

-Summary: Michael analyzes the divide between support and opposition for the state of Israel, and argues that Christians must formulate their opinions based on God’s covenant with the Jewish people and an assessment of the facts in this situation, which in her view strongly favor Israel.

-Michael argues that “A true Christian perspective on the Holy Land” is “built on a genuine love for all the peoples caught in this conflict and based on an honest assessment of the facts.” (p. 145) How do you interpret this statement? Does Michael’s assessment of facts align with your understanding of the facts at hand?

-According to Michael’s account, what are the principal reasons Palestinian experience injustice? Based on your own observations and research, what other reasons and/or realities might contribute to the injustices that Palestinians experience?

14, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, “Palestine and Apartheid”

-Summary: In this chapter, Archbishop Tutu reflects on themes of God’s bias towards the oppressed that are consistent throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, and calls Christians and Jews to take up God’s vision of justice to bring about a just and compassionate world.

-Archbishop Tutu draws some striking parallels between apartheid South Africa and the current context in Palestine. Do any of those parallels resonate with you or challenge perceptions you hold of Israel-Palestine? If so, why do you think that is?

-Archbishop Tutu lifts up the peacemaking process in South Africa as an example of what is possible in the Middle East. Are there ways in which you can imagine such a process to be possible? Do you agree with his affirmation that the Jewish tradition of seeking a just world is essential for the collective wellbeing and freedom of all people?

15, The Honorable John Kerry, “Remarks at the Gaza Donors Conference”

-Summary: In his speech, former Secretary of State, John Kerry appeals to those invested in rebuilding Gaza and urges them to seek a genuine resolution to the conflict, arguing that authentic peace, security, and dignity for Israel and Palestine cannot be brought about by cease-fires and the status quo.

-Kerry claims that “even the most durable of cease-fires is not a substitute for peace. Even the most durable of cease-fires is not a substitute of security for Israel and a state and dignity for the Palestinians.” (p. 155) What do you think he means by this? What are potential pathways towards sustainable peace, security, and dignity for both Israel and Palestine?

16, Dr. Paul Nathan Alexander, “Protestifying: A Pentecostal Reflection on Interfaith Learning and Political Action”

-Summary: Alexander shares several years of lessons learned while engaging in interfaith peacework regarding Israel and Palestine, and encourages readers to center love and listening in their work to build peace, security, and wellbeing for Israel and Palestine.

-Alexander argues that we must “let hope die” in order to be able to participate in building a better Israel and Palestine. (p. 167) How does this argument sit with you?

-Throughout this chapter, Alexander grapples with the challenge of engaging in interfaith dialogue and advocating for specific political changes and policies regarding Israel and Palestine. Is this a tension you have experienced? If so, what are the methods or pathways you’ve found effective to engage?

17, Statement of Principles, “Millennial Voices for Peace”

-Summary: This statement calls for an end to all violence, vengeance, terror, and hatred in Israel and Palestine, and advocates for the mobilization of US resources to establish peace and justice in the Holy Land.

-What about this statement challenges you? What about it do you find encouraging or affirming?

-Millennial Voices for Peace understands their role as Christians to be ambassadors of peace and reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians (2 Cor. 5:18-20). Do any other scriptures come to mind that affirm this call?

18, Dr. Bob Roberts, “Barriers to Peace”

-Summary: In this chapter, Roberts recounts his own “conversion” story as it relates to several political prejudices he held, and unpacks the ways in which he unknowingly created barriers to peace in Israel/Palestine as an Evangelical Christian.

-Roberts vulnerably shared about prejudices and harmful ideologies that he had learned from his community. What practices did he engage in to unlearn these damaging beliefs? What remained his theological guide or center throughout this process?

-Did Roberts’ story reveal any places in your own thinking about Israel/Palestine where you might ask the following questions: “Is that right? Do they know them? Do [I] know them? Are [my] actions or [my] attitudes contributing to a culture of hate or a culture of love and peace?”(p. 181)

19, Dr. David A. Anderson, “Middle East Crisis and Peace Building”

-Summary: Anderson argues that listening to others and engaging in genuine conversation is necessary to heal the deep cultural, political, and religious divides between us and bring about our shared desires for peace, prosperity, and respect.

-Anderson believes that bringing respectful, interreligious dialogue into Middle East peace work “provides the ability to seek common ground by elevating the conversation to a higher ground.” (p. 187) What challenges and opportunities do you foresee this approach might bring?

-Anderson provides a list of biblical resources that inspire his vision for interfaith conversations and peace efforts. Do any other resources from your faith tradition come to mind?

20, Dr. Darrell L. Bock, “Hope in the Midst of a Mess”

-Summary: Bock urges us to consider the complexities of the conflict in Israel/Palestine, and suggests that any movement towards peace in the region will be dependent on genuine listening, forgiveness, and a change of heart on both sides.

-Bock suggests that “seeing the dispute only from one angle can also contribute to the cycle of violence and retribution.” (p. 190) Can you think of one or more issues related to Israel/Palestine where you have listened to only one perspective or angle? How might this contribute to unhealthy dialog and structures of violence?

-He also poses the question, “What is it like to be seen and viewed with suspicion automatically because of the environment where one lives?” (p. 190) If you have ever experienced similar prejudices against you, reflect on how your experience and that of Palestinians might overlap. If you have not had such experiences in your life, take a moment to reflect on what living with such constant prejudices against you would be like.

21, Jerry White, “Navigating Minefields: Explosive Wisdom for Modern Pilgrims”

-Summary: White recounts his work advocating for the removal of non-operational minefields in Israel, and highlights the need for inclusive visions for any such justice work.

-White's long journey towards forwarding the platform for cleaning up minefields in Israel is inspiring and full of perseverance, yet he acknowledges that it was necessary for an Israeli child to set off a mine for the issue to be brought to national attention. What might that dynamic indicate about the valuing of Palestinian lives and non-Israeli lives by the Israeli government?

-White shares impactful wisdom that a friend shared with him: “being right doesn't win you friends, or get the job done.” (p. 198) What guidance or lessons might that caution offer to Christian peacebuilding efforts in Israel/Palestine broadly speaking?

22, Shane Claiborne, “Standing Beside the Vulnerable”

-Summary: Claiborne uses the parable of the Good Samaritan as a model for how Christians are called to engage in conflict and violence in the Middle East—with a conviction that every life matters to God and must be honored and protected.

-Claiborne urges that all injustices—whether due to gun violence or the denial of life for Gazans—“should break our hearts because part of the image of God is wounded in the world.” (p. 208) What barriers and/or excuses do you think exist that keep us from viewing all people as a part of the image of God?

-Claiborne shares that witnessing injustice in Palestine interrupted his theology and thinking. Can you think of any examples where injustices have shaken up or challenged your theology or beliefs?

23, Carolyn Custis James, “The Power of Unlikely Friendships”

-Summary: James uses unlikely friendships of her own and the lessons she learned from them as a window into possibilities to grow unsuspected friendships and conversations across political divides in Israel/Palestine.

-What unlikely friendships have surfaced in your own life and what have you learned most from them?

-James implores biblical stories where God cares for and utilizes marginalized people to suggest that God often works through the most destitute among us. How might this notion help us think about where and in whom we see God moving and working in our world today, especially as it relates to Israel/Palestine?

24, Lynne Hybels, “A Truer and Deeper Peace”

-Summary: Hybels reflects on what she has learned from time spent with peacemakers in Israel and the West Bank and concludes that true peace comes through shared brokenness, vulnerability, and a willingness to see others as God does.

-Hybels believes that the military occupation of the West Bank “deeply harms the security, freedom, and dignity of both Palestinians and Israelis.” (p. 224) What are ways that the military occupation of the West Bank might harm both Israelis and Palestinians? How might these different yet shared experiences be a tool for uniting individuals across political and religious-theological divides?

-Hybels proclaims that we need a peace that emerges from God's love and “a spiritual transformation and healing that pulls us to that place where we are free to see and love the other as God does.” (p. 226) Reflect on this call. How does it inspire, challenge, and/or resonate with you?

25, Eugene Cho, "Overrated: The Holy Land and Discipleship"

-Summary: In this chapter, Cho shares his conviction that we are more in love with the idea of changing the world than we are with actually changing it and argues that "in seeking to do justice and kingdom work in the Holy Land, we have to be open to the reality that God will challenge us, change us, and transform us."

-Cho explains that "occupation" is a technical term "to describe the effective provisional control of a ruling power over a territory which is not under the formal sovereignty of that political entity." (p. 230) How does this understanding challenge, enhance, or resonate with how your previously understood descriptions of the military occupation of the Palestinian Territories?

-While sharing his experience of witnessing the trials of Palestinian children, Cho claims that "there are times when perspective doesn't justify an unconscionable injustice." (p. 230) What do you think he means by this? What examples can you think of where an individual or group perspective does not justify an injustice committed?

26, Jim Wallis, "Praying for Peace in Jerusalem"

-Summary: Wallis encourages American Christians to promote solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that are pro-Israeli, pro-Palestinian, and pro-peace, and recognize the dignity, religious values, and truths of all.

-Wallis insists that we must recognize that "Christians—regardless of their intentions—have often been an obstacle to peace in the region." (p. 238) How does it feel to hear this statement? Can you think of any ways that Christians at large, or your community, in particular, may have contributed to obstacles to peace in the region?

-What do you think of Wallis' claim that any successful movement for peace must be Christian, Muslim, and Jewish? What strengths and challenges might come with such an approach (feel free to draw upon any relevant personal experiences)?

**27, Dr. Joel Hunter,
"Jews, Christians, and Muslims:
Finding a Way to Peace"**

-Summary: In this chapter, Hunter calls Christians to be in relation with their Jewish and Muslim neighbors, arguing that such relationships will yield new understandings of peace and cooperation efforts and will enhance one's own faith.

-Hunter claims that in order for "the major Abrahamic faith communities to work together to help create world peace, we must each, in our own communities, see that our own future lies in the well-being of those of other groups in our communities." (p. 247) Have you ever considered how the well-being of other communities might affect the livelihood and future of all communities? Does that notion impact how you think about any one community involved in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

-What might an interfaith approach to Israel-Palestine education and peace work look like in your community?

**28, Bill Hybels,
"How to Create a New Conversation about
Israel-Palestine in Your Church"**

-Summary: Hybels recounts his church's journey in introducing conversations about Israel-Palestine in their community and shares insightful lessons they learned along the way.

-Hybels shares that anyone who wants to be a part of conversations about Israel-Palestine must commit themselves as a lifelong learner. Can you think of a time when you approached a difficult conversation as a learner and a time when you came as a knowledgeable person on the subject? What was the difference between how you engaged with others and what you learned?

-Read Hybel's tips on engaging your community in peacemaking (p. 262) again. Identify three key areas that you/your church community might be able to focus on and work towards over the next 6 months.

29, Dr. Tony Campolo, "Christians as Agents of Reconciliation"

-Summary: Campolo challenges Christians to live into their call to be agents of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18) and commit themselves to address the racism, social injustices, and harmful Christian teachings interwoven in the conflict in Israel-Palestine.

-What section of this chapter most challenged you or encouraged you to better engage in peacework in Israel and Palestine?

-Campolo highlights racism and injustices perpetrated against both the Jewish and Palestinian people. What challenges do you anticipate Christians might face in addressing these wrongs, especially given their roles in perpetuating them historically?

-What comes to mind when you envision Christians as "agents of reconciliation" in the Holy Land?

Epilogue, "Pursuing Peace and Strengthening Presence: The Atlanta Summit of Churches in the USA and the Holy Land"

-Summary: The Atlanta Summit of Churches in the USA and Holy Land was a gathering of heads of churches from across the U.S. and Holy Land whose purpose was to join in ecumenical unity to work towards the end of the Israeli occupation and lasting peace in the Holy Land.

-The statement issued by the leaders who participated in the summit affirms the responsibility of the Christian Church in playing an active role in speaking truth to power and bringing a peaceful end to the conflict. Does your church community currently embody such a responsibility? If not, how might you play a role in introducing these values?

-Take a few minutes to read the section titled "Issues Requiring Our Attention" again (p.275-277). Make a list of 4-5 issues that you can commit to engaging in over the next year. Share and discuss your commitments with others in your community and consider where and how you might collaborate.