

INTRO

The setting of nearly the entire Christian Bible takes place in a region known as Palestine - what many call the Holy Land. A “promised land” is a major recurring theme in the Old Testament (the Jewish scriptures). The setting of the New Testament’s stories of Jesus is this same land. The Book of Acts and letters to churches share Christianity’s beginnings, which radiate outward from the Holy Land. And thousands of years later, conflict in that same land is at the center of international news today.

The history of the region, leading up to and since Israel’s declaration of statehood in 1948, has been defined largely by territorial disputes and violence. Multiple peoples and groups have religious, historical, political, and residential ties to that land, and international sentiments and policies have only complicated...well, just about everything.

The latest violent chapter began on October 7, 2023, with an attack on Israel out of Gaza. An estimated 1,200 Israelis were killed in the attack, and some 250 taken hostage. Israel’s response has left over 24,000 dead, according to Palestinian authorities, among whom two-thirds are thought to be women and children.** This conflict has ignited waves of anti-Palestinian and antisemitic sentiment, with calls for vengeance, justice, ceasefires, and even genocide across the international community.

HOLY LAND

Trying to Understand People & Place

**a Brewed Theology
conversation starter***

***As of this writing, in January 2024. Data from the Associated Press:*

<https://apnews.com/article/israel-hamas-war-live-updates-01-15-2024-966bd5a9375e7439dd3de5fc113a7e7d>

Christian understandings of the Holy Land and responses to conflict are also complex. General apathy, advocacy for freedom and equity for Palestinians, and American partisan-political support for Israel are just some of the Christian sentiments regarding Israel-Palestine. Some extreme positions view conflict in the Holy Land as a sign of end times and Jesus’ return. This conversation asks participants to consider and clarify these perspectives.

A few important notes about this Crafted Conversation: this is *not* intended to facilitate a *debate* between Israeli and Palestinian positions. Devastating losses have been inflicted and suffered by both “sides.” While you may (and will) certainly bring your opinions, our objective is futhering *understanding* of the people and place of the Holy Land. On the same note, some of the conversation and materials offered reference sources from *prior* to the most recent October 7th conflict, to emphasize an effort to grasp the wider regional issues, and not the most recent season of violence. With that in mind, *do your homework*, and exercise some curiosity about your world.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

What do you *know* about Israel and Palestine? Perhaps more importantly: *what do you not know*? What have you heard or read? Have you ever been forced to relocate? What *place* do you feel most tied to? Has your home or livelihood ever been threatened by an outside force? Do you know any Jews? Muslims? Palestinian Christians? What are their thoughts here? Does your local or wider church have stances or connections to the Holy Land? What is the “right” thing to do for people living in the Holy Land? What do you think Jesus wants?

BIBLE BASICS

- **Genesis 12:1-3** – The Call of Abram (soon “Abraham”), & the first of many promises of land. Who are his descendants?
- **Jeremiah 32:37-41**, and **Ezekiel 34:11-16** – Two places where Zionists (those who advocate for Jews’ return to Jerusalem) derive their theology. *Try to find the context for these passages.* What do you make of them?
- **Micah 6:8** – What God asks of us. How are we doing? (Also: Micah foretells Jesus’ city of birth. Where is that today?)

ESSENTIAL READINGS and VIDEOS* (click the **headings** for links to knowledge)

Hey there. We know there's a LOT here, because there's a lot to try to understand. Do what you can. Pace yourself.

TERMS, BACKGROUND, DEFINITIONS

A good place to start. Browse this 2014 article summarizing groups, history, definitions, and questions about the Israeli-Palestinian situation. Provided by the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ.

ISRAEL-GAZA – HISTORY OF THE CONFLICT

Read this BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) article on the *history* of the conflict in Gaza. Thorough and helpful.

A GUIDE TO WHAT THE ISRAEL-PALESTINE CONFLICT IS ABOUT

An explainer by Al-Jazeera (a media company out of Qatar). How does this read differently from the BBC source above? (BONUS: Check out the embedded video.)

GAZA IN MAPS

Another BBC article, specifically on Gaza, with maps and how the place and people have shifted since October 2023.

WHAT IS “ZIONISM”?

In its simplest terms, it's the effort to establish Israel as a nation for Jews, and gathering the Jewish people to it. “Christian Zionism” furthers this by adding anticipation of Jesus’ return and the end-times to Zionism.

- Read this explainer on [History.com](#), here, and/or this [brief summary by the Anti-Defamation League](#), here.
- Read the Pro-Israel article “In Defense of Zionism” by Michael B. Oren, former Israeli ambassador to the U.S..
- Read this by Amnesty International, [calling Israel’s treatment of Palestinians “apartheid.”](#) (From Feb 2022)
- Read this “[fact sheet](#)” explaining Christian Zionism, its views, and issues. By the Religion Media Centre, U.K.

THE ELCA PRESIDING BISHOP ON ISRAEL-HAMAS

Read this statement from ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton from October 2023 regarding the Hamas-Israel conflict. Does your wider church denomination have public statements or reactions?

WATCH A VIDEO (OR FOUR)

Check out one (or more, or all) of these videos explaining the Israel-Palestine conflict. (Click the titles for links.)

- [Conflict in Israel and Palestine through 2015](#) – by *Crash Course World History* (12:52)
- [The Israel-Palestine conflict: a brief, simple history](#) – by *Vox*, from 2015 (10:18)
- [History of Israel-Palestine Conflict](#) – by *History on Maps*, for a more cartographical view, from 2021 (10:55)
- [The complicated history of conflict between Israel and Palestinians](#) – by *PBS NewsHour*, from 2023 (10:04)

We at Brewed Theology claim no authorship or ownership of suggested readings, the links provided, or their host websites. Links connect to their original sources. If a link is broken, please contact your facilitator or report it to brewedtheology@gmail.com. Homework is proven (at least in our minds) to boost thoughtfulness and conversation. While not required, it is highly suggested.