

The (Un)Holy

by Dorcas and Noel Gordon



Opening Prayer:

Lord of all, we lay before you the wrongs which have been committed in the past and which are still being committed today. It is becoming increasingly difficult to hope that things will ever change in the future. Help us Lord to continue to trust in your Word as we look forward to the joy known in Easter Sunday. We ask that you would renew the courage of those in positions of power to help them to speak out against injustice and to work for a just peace. Lord, in your mercy...

(Sabeel Wave of Prayer, March 29, 2018)¹

Scripture:

Matthew 15: 21–28, Luke 18: 1–8

Lament, found in several biblical passages means to “cry out.” It can be a prayerful plea to God for help or a complaint to God over systemic injustice that needs redress. In these two texts, women cry out against the oppressive system of patriarchy, which has been codified in law, both societal and ecclesial.

In Matthew’s gospel, a gentile woman approaches Jesus and asks for healing for her daughter. He ignores her, but she continues to cry out. The disciples find her cries so irksome that they ask Jesus to send her away. He responds only to the disciples, denying her appeal. However, the woman

This is the fourth of four studies on the Land of Palestine. We began these studies in the November/December 2017 issues of *Glad Tidings*.

Land of PALESTINE

persists, imploring him, countering every argument he makes. In the end, he recognizes she has a strength of character that will persist in calling out—naming the injustice of limiting God’s call to a particular religious and cultural group—until he responds. In the story, she, a gentile woman with a demon-possessed daughter, is someone Jesus and his disciples would be expected to ignore, but she refuses to be ignored and cries out against unjust cultural and religious expectations. Jesus recognizes the strong faith within her to lament and to keep on lamenting until her cries are heard and a positive response results.

In the story of the widow facing the power of an unjust judge, once again we hear lament, a crying out against the unjust structures that keep her life less than it should be. She cries out again and again until the judge calls for



her dismissal, fearing she will give him a “bruised eye.” In first century Palestine, the widow is the one who is supposed to receive protection under Torah law, which indicates that if a widow cries out, calling attention to any abuse, God will hear her cry and God’s wrath will burn hot (Exodus 22: 21–24).

This story speaks to how Torah law has been interpreted to support the word of the powerful—their interpretation of the law becomes what is. Added is their claim that this is what God intended in the Torah. Even more incriminating, in a 1st century system of patronage the judge’s primary allegiance was to those who appointed him not to justice. In other words, it was possible to apply the law so that it appeared impartial and just, but actually supported an oppressive social structure.

Through her lament, the widow goes public. She condemns the system for what it is and calls it to be what it should be. Walter Wink, in addressing systems of domination, states, “Whenever anyone steps out of the system and tells the truth, lives the truth—that enables everyone else to peer behind the curtain too.... If the main pillar of a system is living a lie, then it is not surprising that the fundamental threat to it is living the truth.”²

Lament—a powerful way to cry out against oppressive systems and to call for redress. In so many cases, social, political and economic systems whether in governments, families, or the church have become so much the way things are that this pattern appears natural.³ But it is something constructed and like the widow in Luke’s gospel, it is important to go public and declare all systems of oppression to be sinful. Their structure is not divinely or biblically ordained but humanly fashioned. Yet in so many cases, oppression that claims a biblical warrant is the most difficult system to dismantle because it understands itself to be “divinely” ordained.⁴ Thus, as Reformed Christians we need to look at our role in perpetuating violence against Palestinians both in their bodies and in their souls. No system should be supported that causes marginalization and oppression .

In 2009, the Jerusalem Christian leaders in the *Kairos Document: A moment of truth; A word of faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering* called upon Christians around the world

to hear their cries for justice, asking us to come and see what it means to live under the oppression of occupation. In June 2017, Palestinians again wrote to the international Christian community describing today's Palestine as a place where discrimination and inequality, military occupation, and systematic oppression are the rule. The letter states: "Today, we stand in front of an impasse and we have reached a deadlock. Despite all the promises, endless summits, UN resolutions, religious and lay leader's callings—Palestinians are still yearning for their freedom and independence and seeking justice and equality." The coalition expressed its concern with Israel's "systemic assault on Palestinian creative resistance," and with the fact that religious extremism is on the rise, with religious minorities paying a heavy price.

The letter continues its plea for help from the ecumenical movement, stating, "We need brave women and men who are willing to stand in the forefront. This is no time for shallow diplomacy Christians."

The letter urges Christian churches worldwide to take several actions, to:

- recognize Israel as an apartheid state;
- condemn the Balfour declaration as unjust;
- take a clear theological stand against any theology or Christian group that justifies the occupation and privileges one nation over the other based on ethnicity or a covenant;
- stand against religious extremism;
- revisit and challenge religious dialogue partners;
- lead campaigns for church leaders and pilgrims to visit Bethlehem and other Palestinian cities;
- defend the right of Palestinian Christians to resist the occupation creatively and non-violently;
- create lobby groups in defense of Palestinian Christians; and
- create a strategic program within the World Council of Churches to lobby, advocate, and develop active programs towards justice and peace in Palestine and Israel.

This letter expressed in strong language the urgent situation of the people in Palestine: "We are on the verge of a catastrophic

collapse,” the letter states. “This could be our last chance to achieve a just peace. As a Palestinian Christian community, this could be our last opportunity to save the Christian presence in this land.”⁵

According to our Palestinian Christian sisters and brothers we have one more opportunity to respond before it is too late. With such finality in mind, this fourth study on the land of Palestine focuses on lament, crying out once again against the unjust practices and laws in Israel that oppress the Palestinian people, both Christian and Muslim. It also cries out against the financial support given by the United States to Israel for modern military warfare while at the same time purporting to be a fair and just mediator of the conflict. It decries the myths that continue to exist, the disinformation that Israel feeds to a gullible world. It cries out against the unjust division of water, the use of Palestinian land to test toxic substances, and the apartheid wall as a form of land annexation.

A recent report (March 2017) carried out by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UNESCWA) declared that, according to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, “Israel has established an apartheid regime that dominates the Palestinian people as a whole.” The report continues:

Aware of the seriousness of this allegation, the authors of the report conclude that available evidence establishes beyond a reasonable doubt that Israel is guilty of policies and practices that constitute the crime of apartheid as legally defined in instruments of international law.⁶

The Executive Secretary of this body, Rami Khalaf, noted that Israel, encouraged by the international community’s disregard for its continual

Definition of Apartheid

Apartheid is a crime against humanity. Not only does international law prohibit that crime, it obliges States and international bodies, and even individuals and private institutions, to take measures to combat it wherever it is committed and to punish its perpetrators. The solution therefore lies in implementing international law, applying the principles of non-discrimination, upholding the right of peoples to self-determination, and achieving justice. (UNESCWA Report)

violations of international law, has succeeded over the past decades in imposing and maintaining an apartheid regime that works on two levels. First, the political and geographic fragmentation of the Palestinian people which enfeebles their capacity for resistance and makes it almost impossible for them to change the reality on the ground. Secondly, the oppression of all Palestinians through an array of laws, policies, and practices that ensure domination of them by a racial group and serve to maintain the regime.⁷

Writing this part of the study on March 30, the commemoration of Land Day in Palestine, we are only too aware of how dire the situation is. On Good Friday, Israel attacked, with rubber-coated steel bullets, live ammunition, and tear gas dropped by drones, thousands of unarmed Palestinian civilians participating in the Land March. Statistics report that “fourteen protesters were killed that day as occupation snipers opened fire on a mass demonstration held at various points along Gaza’s eastern boundary with [Israel] in what Palestinian human rights group Al-Haq described as “a calculated, unnecessary, disproportionate, and indiscriminate use of lethal force.”⁸

Lament, crying out against injustice, must continue but it cannot be the final word of this study series, celebration is—celebration of the indomitable human spirit of the Palestinian people who continue to find ways through their own ingenuity and courage, and with the cooperation and support of their Jewish and international advocates, to resist peacefully the humiliation and violence of occupation. We want to leave you with some of their stories.

Land Day

Land Day is the occasion marking Israel’s decision in March 1976 to expropriate, in violation of international law, about 2000 hectares of land around two Palestinian villages to establish new Jewish settlements and a military training camp. In a collective response on March 30, marking one of the first displays of mass coordinated action by Palestinians inside Israel, Palestinians demonstrated from across Galilee in the north all the way to the Negev in the south. Six Palestinians were killed by Israeli forces and more than 100 were injured. Since then, March 30 has been commemorated annually by Palestinians as Yom al-Ard (Land Day) across historic Palestine and in the Palestinian diaspora.⁹



Stories of Popular Resistance:

THE VILLAGE OF IQRIT:

Tucked away a few kilometers from the Lebanese border with little to announce its presence, is the village of Iqrit. All of its Christian inhabitants were forced to flee to Lebanon or the Israeli village of Rameh, after they were expelled by Jewish forces in 1948. Despite the promise that they would be returned in two weeks' time, the villagers were never allowed to return. In 1951, in response to a formal appeal from the Iqrit villagers, now Palestinian (Arab) Israeli citizens, the Israeli Supreme Court ruled that the former residents be allowed to return to their homes. Before that happened, the Israeli Defense Force, despite awareness of the Supreme Court decision, destroyed this previously Christian village on Christmas Day, 1951. For almost 70 years, the villagers have been fighting a legal battle despite the fact that 10 years ago the supreme court ruled rejecting their demand to be allowed to reclaim their land. The original villagers and their descendants—now around 1,500 people scattered across northern Israel—are allowed only to hold services monthly in the church and bury their dead in the cemetery. All attempts to cultivate its lands are uprooted by the Israeli Lands Administration.¹⁰ Yet the descendants of the original community continue to hope that they might return home.

The Iqrit community association has been offered support by Israeli politicians on both the right and left, and from Israeli artists and

Pray for peace in Palestine/Israel:

<http://presbyterian.ca/2018/05/15/prayer-for-peace-in-palestine-israel/>

intellectuals. Father Souhail Khoury, the priest of the church, says he grew up listening to his parents reminisce about their lost land. “We are all in different villages and towns now, but this is the place where we still meet every month as a family,” he said. “This is the place we call home.”¹¹ For further information and updates about Iqrit, including information about financial donations, go to www.iqrit.org/. Further information is found on <https://wagingnonviolence.org/feature/demolished-palestinian-village-comes-back-life/>.

OMAR HAJAJLEH AND THE VILLAGE OF AL WALEJA IN THE WEST BANK

“The Hajajleh house is the only one in Al-Walaja on the Israeli side of the separation barrier. For years, the Israeli state tried to get the family to leave, but they refused. Four years ago, following a petition to the High Court of Justice, the Defense Ministry reached a settlement with the family through which a tunnel under the separation fence was built for them at a cost of four million shekels (\$1.1 million). A large iron gate was built inside the tunnel—the house’s only entrance.

The agreement details family members’ rights in entering and leaving their home. For instance, for anyone except a family member to pass through the gate, the family must submit a request to the Israeli-Palestinian liaison office 48 hours in advance, and it will be approved subject to the usual security permits. The family can’t have more than 10 guests at a time; no guest may arrive after midnight or spend the night, and no merchandise can pass through the gate. If the family violates these terms, they will be denied the ability to open the gate independently, and instead the gate will be opened three times a day for an hour each time and passing through it will be subject to a security check.”¹² For more information on the occupation and its effect on the Palestinian people go to <https://www.btselem.org/>.¹³

AHED TAMIMI

Ahed Tamimi is a teenage Palestinian activist from the village of Nabi Salih

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May they prosper who love you. Peace be within your walls, and security within your towers." For the sake of my relatives and friends I will say, "Peace be within you." For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good.

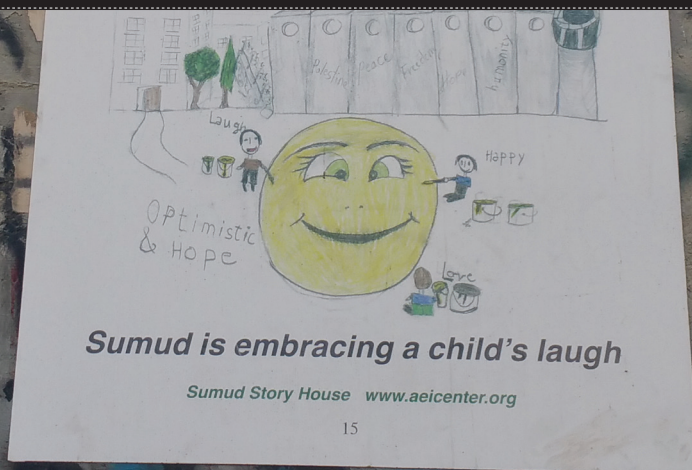
Psalms 122: 6–9

in the occupied West Bank. Best known for appearances in images and videos in which she confronts Israeli soldiers, she is presently serving an eight-month jail term for slapping and kicking the soldiers who had just shot her fifteen-year-old cousin in the head at close range.

She is but one of the numerous children arrested and tried by a military tribunal. According to UN figures, since June 1967 when martial law was imposed on the West Bank, between 750,000 and 800,000 men, women, and children have been arrested and prosecuted in Israeli military courts. Each year this works out to between 500 and 700 children. The minimum age of criminal responsibility in a military court is twelve.¹⁴ Contrary to the civilian court system, the children who are arrested are not only denied the right to have their parents or a lawyer present when being interrogated but are often subjected to violence and threats when arrested. On the website of B'Tselem is a description of each part of this process: https://www.btselem.org/publications/summaries/201803_minors_in_jeopardy.

The Executive Summary of a recent investigation into the Israeli military's treatment of children, conducted by UNICEF, stated the following:

Following an increasing number of allegations of ill-treatment of children in military detention, UNICEF has conducted a review of practices related to children who come into contact with the military detention system, from apprehension, to court proceedings and outcome. The review further considers whether the military detention system is in conformity with the Convention on the Rights of the Child as well as the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment, or Punishment. This paper is a result of this review and analysis of practices. It concludes that the ill-treatment of children who come in contact with the military detention system appears to be widespread, systematic, and institutionalized throughout the process, from the moment of arrest until the child's prosecution and eventual conviction and sentencing.



All photos have been provided by the author or The Presbyterian Church in Canada and the Women's Missionary Society. They are from previous participants of study tours to the Middle East.

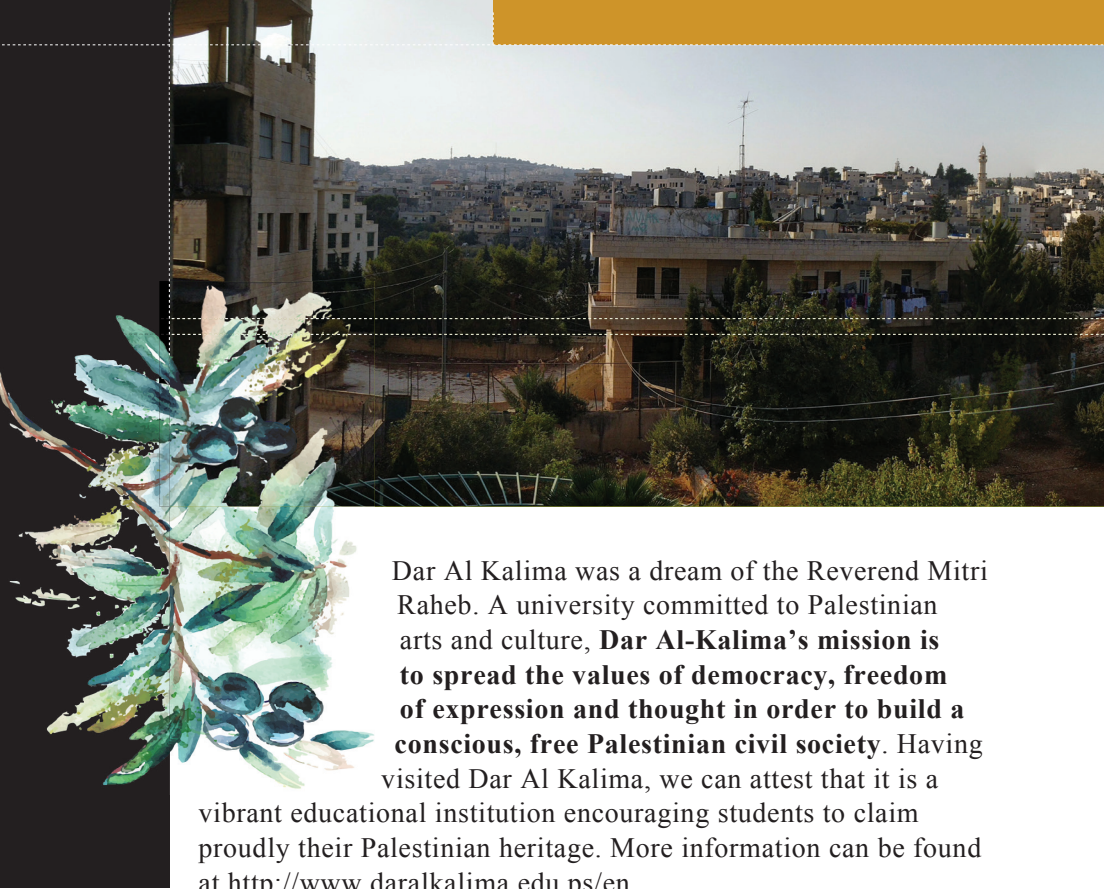
It is understood that in no other country are children systematically tried by juvenile military courts that, by definition, fall short of providing the necessary guarantees to ensure respect for their rights.¹⁵

Palestinian Organizations Promoting Dignity and Security for all Palestinians:

Many Palestinian organizations work hard to maintain the dignity and security of all Palestinians subjected to the oppression of occupation.

One such grassroots organization, **WI'AM a Palestinian Conflict Resolution/Transformation Centre in Bethlehem**, is committed to conflict transformation, restorative justice, and meditation. The latter is a type of meditation that focuses on the Arab tradition of reconciliation, Sulha. WI'AM also serves as a community centre for peace building, sustainable development, empowerment, and hope. You can find them at www.alaslah.org.

Unique is the work of Professor Mazin Qumsiyeh at the University of Bethlehem who with his wife Jessie has committed his professional and personal life to building a **Palestine Museum of Natural History (PMNH)** and the **Palestine Institute for Biodiversity and Sustainability (PIBS)**. He encourages young people to preserve the ecology of Palestine with numerous programs of Youth Education and Empowerment. He is also a writer and peace activist whose work and thinking can be found at <http://www.palestinature.org> or at his personal website <http://qumsiyeh.org>.



Dar Al Kalima was a dream of the Reverend Mitri Raheb. A university committed to Palestinian arts and culture, **Dar Al-Kalima's mission is to spread the values of democracy, freedom of expression and thought in order to build a conscious, free Palestinian civil society.** Having visited Dar Al Kalima, we can attest that it is a vibrant educational institution encouraging students to claim proudly their Palestinian heritage. More information can be found at <http://www.daralkalima.edu.ps/en>.

Al-Haq is an independent Palestinian non-governmental human rights organisation based in Ramallah, West Bank. Established in 1979 to protect and promote human rights and the rule of law in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), the organisation has special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council. Further information on its work is found at www.alhaq.org/about-al-haq/vision-mission-and-goals.

Israeli Advocates for Palestinians rights:

B'TSELEM, AN ISRAELI HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATION

Founded in 1989, B'Tselem: The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories works to end Israel's occupation in acknowledgment of the fact that ending the occupation regime is the only way to forge a future in which human rights, democracy, liberty, and equality are ensured to all persons living between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean



Sea. B'Tselem is committed to documenting and publicizing human rights violations while also exposing the injustice, violence, and dispossession that lie at the very core of this regime of occupation, challenging its legitimacy in Israel and abroad and helping to expedite its end.

An independent, non-partisan organization, the name B'Tselem, literally means “in the image of” in Hebrew(Genesis 1:27): and is used as a synonym for human dignity. For more information go to <https://www.btselem.org/>.

Two Israeli organizations committed to Palestinian rights are **Zochrot**, an organization which has been fairly successful over the past few years in raising the Nakba to the awareness of the broad Jewish public(zochrot.org), and **Rabbis for Human Rights**, an Israeli human rights organization that describes itself as “the rabbinic voice of conscience in **Israel**” (rhr.org.il/eng/).

Initiatives directly supported by The Presbyterian Church in Canada (PCC):

ECUMENICAL ACCOMPANIMENT PROGRAM IN PALESTINE AND ISRAEL (EAPPI)

EAPPI is a program of the World Council of Churches established in 2002 after the heads of Churches in Jerusalem called for a protective international presence in the Palestinian Territories. EAPPI supports Palestinians and Israelis in their non-violent actions and advocacy efforts for a just peace, respect for human rights, and an end to Israel’s occupation of Palestinian land.

Ecumenical companions (EAs) come from around the world to spend three months in Palestine and Israel experiencing the impact of occupation on people's lives. They provide a protective presence to people and communities that experience the worst of the violence perpetrated by Israeli settlers' and the Israeli army.

Dozens of Canadians, in their 20s to their 70s, have volunteered as EA's and a least six have been Canadian Presbyterians. To learn more about EAPPI, go to www.eappi.org. To enquire about volunteering, contact the Rev. Glynis Williams, Associate Secretary, International Ministries at the Presbyterian Church in Canada (<http://presbyterian.ca/contact/staff/>).

PLANTING OLIVE TREES

In the PCC Gifts of Change pamphlet, this initiative is described in the following way: "Keep hope alive for farmers in Palestine by planting an olive tree. Olive trees are the basic source of livelihood and nutrition across the Mediterranean basin. They are also an ancient symbol of peace. Palestinian farmers have seen their mature trees uprooted, burned, and destroyed, depriving them of their income and their traditional way of life. Many of the trees are hundreds even thousands of years old."

The description continues "you can help the East Jerusalem YMCA and YWCA of Palestine reach their goal of replanting 8,000 olive trees each year, replenishing the orchards of affected farmers." For information about purchasing an olive tree go to <http://presbyterian.ca/gifts%20of%20change>.

Individuals, old and young, are invited to come and take part in the annual olive harvest. It is an opportunity to meet Palestinian farmers and activists from around the world. Information can be found at <http://www.jai-pal.org/en/campaigns/olive-tree-campaign/olive-picking-program>.

STUDY TOURS OF PALESTINE

The Kairos Document 2009, a word of Faith, Hope and Love from the midst of Palestinian suffering invites Christians from around the world to come and see what it means to live under occupation. In response to their invitation, a sixth study tour sponsored by the PCC will take place from May 6–17, 2019. We are privileged once again to give leadership to this tour.

Over 10 days, we will visit many of the places and organizations listed above and in the previous three study sessions. To see places referred to in the Biblical story and to hear first-hand of the commitment of Palestinians, along with their Israeli supporters, to the well-being of their people whose ancestors inhabited this land since the time of Jesus, can be life-changing. So, come join us in 2019.

For more information, go to <http://presbyterian.ca/im/missiontrips/> or call Matt Foxall at 416-441-1111 or 1-800-619-7301 ext.259.

BOYCOTT, DIVESTMENT, AND SANCTIONS

While the PCC does not support a general boycott of Israeli goods, Justice Ministries does make available a list of goods that are produced, according to international law, in illegal Israeli settlements.

In addition, there is a recommendation from the 134th General Assembly "that presbyteries and congregations be encouraged to promote the purchase and distribution of products and services from the Occupied Palestinian Territories through organizations, such as the Zatoun organization, Holy Land Handicraft Cooperative Society, Holy Land Artisans, and the Alternative Tourism Group from Ramallah, both to assist the Palestinian people, and as a means of promoting awareness of the situation of Palestinians living in the occupied territories." To learn more, or for a list of Palestinian products and of those made in Israeli settlements that are available in Canada, go to <http://presbyterian.ca/justice/middle-east/>.



“In the absence of hope, we cry out our cry of hope.”

Kairos Document

Conclusion when there is no conclusion:

Mindful of the words of Walter Wink, quoted earlier: “Whenever anyone steps out of the system and tells the truth, lives the truth—that enables everyone else to peer behind the curtain too.... If the main pillar of a system is living a lie, then it is not surprising that the fundamental threat to it is living the truth,” it is only right that this study session end with words of lament from Palestinian Christians to Christians worldwide.

“In the absence of all hope, we cry out our cry of hope. We believe in God, good and just. We believe that God’s goodness will finally triumph over the evil of hate and of death that still persist in our land. We will see here “a new land” and “a new human being” capable of rising up in the spirit to love each one of his or her brothers and sisters.”¹⁶

To this we can only say, Amen, may it be so.

Palestine / Israel

May 6-17, 2019

A Moment of Truth Witness Tour

Early Bird Registration Deadline: November 5, 2018

Participant Contribution: \$3500

Registration Deadline: January 21, 2019

Participant contribution: \$4000

This tour, led by Noel and Dorcas Gordon, will help you begin to discover some of the complex issues in Israel and Palestine. Designed for ministers and lay leaders of all ages.



For more information go to
presbyterian.ca/missiontrips or contact:
Matt Foxall, Mission Trip Coordinator
mfoxall@presbyterian.ca • 1-800-619-7301 x259



- ¹ Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center is a Christian liberation theology organization based in Jerusalem. Every Thursday the Sabeel Centre sends out worldwide wave of prayer, asking the churches worldwide to remember and pray for the specific needs and concerns of the Palestinian Christian community.
- ² See William Herzog, *Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), pp. 215-232 for a full exposition of this parable. Quote from Walter Wink (*Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in an Age of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992) is on pp. 228-229.
- ³ Elizabeth E. Johnson, *She Who is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroads, 1994), p. 23.
- ⁴ Johnson, *She Who is*, p.23.
- ⁵ <https://www.article1collective.org/2017/06/open-letter-from-christian-palestinians-to-the-world-council-of-churches-and-the-ecumenical-movement/>
- ⁶ <https://www.unescwa.org/news/escwa-launches-report-israeli-practices-towards-palestinian-people-and-question-apartheid>
- ⁷ <https://www.unescwa.org/news/escwa-launches-report-israeli-practices-towards-palestinian-people-and-question-apartheid>
- ⁸ Palestinian Update 129: palestineupdates11@gmail.com@mail184.suw121.mcdlv.net
- ⁹ <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/inpictures/2015/03/land-day-palestinians-walk-memories-150329121424807.html>
- ¹⁰ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iqrit>
- ¹¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/may/15/return-iqrit-palestinian-village-israel>
- ¹² <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium.MAGAZINE-living-in-a-prison-though-i-have-the-key-1.5629025>
- ¹³ B/Tselem is a Jewish Human Rights group
- ¹⁴ Gerard Horton, "Breaking a Generation," in Naim Ateek, et al., *The Bible and the Palestine Israel Conflict* (Jerusalem: Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Centre, 2014), pp. 173-179 describe the process of arrest etc. ending with six recommendations.
- ¹⁵ UNICEF Report on Children in Israeli Military Detention: Observations and Recommendations; https://www.unicef.org/oPt/UNICEF_oPt_Children_in_Israeli_Military_Detention_Observations_and_Recommendations_-_6_March_2013.pdf
- ¹⁶ The Kairos Document (2009), p. 12.