



Israel, Palestine and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Did you know the Bible and Christianity came out of Palestine?

The Bible was written by people who were oppressed by regional powers and empires. The Word of God, proclaimed by the prophets, inspired and sustained them to resist and to overcome oppression. The geographical area where the Bible originated was called Palestine for the longest period throughout the past three millennia. In this context, the Gospel of Jesus Christ proclaimed good news to the poor, release to the captives and the promise of justice. For the past 2,000 years, the native Palestinian Christians have been announcing this message of hope in the face of consecutive oppression. They continue to hold on to the same message in the face of the Israeli occupation that began in 1948.

Palestinian people live under a consistent and systematic process of apartheid and face expulsion from their land by Israel. This has become even more urgent nowadays with the massacre of Gaza's population in what the International Court of Justice¹ has declared as "plausible genocide." These tremendous and violent actions of displacement, starvation, and annihilation of human lives and infrastructure reveal the shadow side of the State of Israel: a geographic occupation and demographic replacement of Palestine. This looks like eradicating Indigenous people from Palestine and replacing them with a Jewish population, brought mostly from Europe, North and South America, through the constant creation of new illegal Israeli settlements in Palestine. As such, it is a clear case of settler colonialism.² This situation has been recognized as a violation of international law, as well as the defining of Israel as an apartheid state.

Many confuse the modern state of Israel with the biblical Israelites, thus doing harm to the Indigenous inhabitants of Palestine who belong to diverse faith communities. The modern state of Israel is not the biblical Israel. This is a distortion, hijacking and weaponizing the biblical promises for political ends in support of a highly militarized and oppressive state structure, the State of Israel. This developed the myth of ethnic and racial superiority of Jews over the Arabs. This perversion is not new and in fact occurred at the founding of the United States through the Doctrine of Discovery. European Christians believed that God had chosen them and given them the divine right to conquer the Americas, Africa and Asia. This understanding brought genocide and the conquest of Indigenous land throughout the world. Later, Zionism secularized this biblical narrative, altering the Bible to become a nationalistic and racial entitlement over the land and people of Palestine. The Bible, which is meant to proclaim the promise of liberation, has become a tool for colonization. We reject this usage of our sacred text.

Did you know we as Presbyterians are called to act for justice in Palestine/Israel?

- Because biblical teaching is being distorted to justify the oppression and suffering of Palestinian people and the taking of their land.
- Because the gospel calls us to costly solidarity, as exemplified by Jesus in both his teaching and actions, which means we have to speak out when people are suffering.
- Because Palestine is the cradle of Christianity, and we care deeply about the life and well-being of our Christian siblings in this land.
- Because we are complicit in the oppression of Palestinians as our U.S. tax dollars pay for the weapons that are killing innocent people and children in Palestine.

Did you know the PC(USA) has been working with local people in the Middle East for 200 years?

- In response to the cries of our Palestinian Christian siblings, we have been calling for peace with justice since 1948. More recently, the PC(USA) has:
 - Rejected the ideology and theology of Christian Zionism. (pc-biz.org/search/3001235)
 - Divested from U.S. companies supporting the Israeli occupation of Palestine. (pc-biz.org/search/4595)
 - Committed to divest from Israeli government bonds. (pc-biz.org/search/3001375)
 - Along with Amnesty International and our regional partners, recognized the situation in Israel/Palestine as one of apartheid. (pc-biz.org/search/3000773)
 - Alongside the United Nations, denounced the siege of Gaza that began long before the present onslaught on Gaza. (pc-biz.org/search/3000866)
 - And affirmed the right of Israel to exist as a sovereign nation, and the rights of the Palestinian people to exist as a sovereign nation. (pc-biz.org/search/3000055)
- We have numerous regional partners, such as Kairos Palestine (kairospalestine.ps), a Palestinian Christian movement that advocates for ending the Israeli occupation and achieving a just solution to the conflict, and B'Tselem (btselem.org), the Israeli human rights organization that was among the first internationally respected organizations to confirm that the situation of Palestinians met the legal definition of apartheid.
- As a denominational member of Churches for Middle East Peace, we seek to influence U.S. policy in the region. We work with many other U.S. churches for peace with justice in Palestine and Israel. Our denominational membership in Churches for Middle East Peace (cmep.org) offers you access to their action-oriented resources.

Did you know we have many denominational resources to support your stand with our Palestinian and Israeli partners as they advocate for peace with justice, such as ...

- Our Washington office, which can connect you with the actions of your representatives to facilitate making your voice heard on U.S. policy toward the region.
- Our Middle East office, which can put you in contact with our partners in the region and give you a glimpse into their lives (vimeo.com/492500217) through our “come and see” visits.
- Our study guide (pcusa.org/resource/denouncing-antisemitism-and-islamophobia), Denouncing Antisemitism and Islamophobia, which can help you maintain your interfaith relations while speaking out against injustice.
- The Palestine Justice Network (thepjn.org), which was mandated by the General Assembly to advocate for Palestine. The Palestine Justice Network (formerly the Israel Palestine Mission Network) has multiple congregational/small group curricula, speakers available for your local church, and a network of over 250 Presbyterian members to offer you a community to support your work and our church’s stance on justice for the Palestinian people.
- Our website hosts a landing page with resources (pcusa.org/how-we-serve/global-engagement/israel-palestine-ministries) available on our wider work on Palestine and Israel.

1 The International Court of Justice is the principal judicial organ of the United Nations. It was established by the United Nations Charter in June 1945.

2 See Mitri Raheb, *Decolonizing Palestine: The Land, The People, The Bible*, New York, 2023.