



CHRISTIANS for
SOCIAL ACTION



THE CHURCH'S WITNESS

THEOLOGY, PEACEMAKING, AND THE HOLY LAND

A FOUR-PART SERIES + REFLECTION GUIDE

ARTICLES AUTHORED BY REV. DR. MAE ELISE CANNON

INTRODUCTION

The Holy Land is not only a place of contested borders and political struggle — it is also a place where theology has done real work. It has shaped how many Christians understand Scripture, land, suffering, power, and even whose lives are seen as grievable.

In this four-part series, Rev. Dr. Mae Elise Cannon invites us to look more closely at how Christian belief has influenced the story of Israel and Palestine — sometimes illuminating a path toward peace and sometimes helping to justify exclusion, dispossession, and harm. Moving through biblical interpretation, modern history, lived experience, and faithful Christian response, this series asks questions many churches have too often avoided:

- What happens when theology is used to sanctify inequality?
- How should Christians read Scripture in the context of modern nation-states?
- And what might it look like for the church's witness to become part of healing rather than part of the wound?

We created this guide to help you move through the series slowly — whether you are reading on your own, with friends, or as part of a church, classroom, or small group. Each section includes a summary, key themes, and reflection questions to help you pause and pay attention:

- What assumptions have shaped the way you understand this region?
- What in these essays feels clarifying, and what feels difficult?
- What would it mean to pursue peace without avoiding truth, justice, or grief?

Our hope is that this resource helps readers move beyond inherited narratives and easy answers toward deeper discernment, greater humility, and a more faithful practice of Christian peacemaking.

KEY THEMES

1. THEOLOGY IS NEVER ONLY THEORETICAL.

The way Christians interpret Scripture shapes moral imagination, political assumptions, and real human consequences in Israel and Palestine.

2. MISREADINGS OF THE BIBLE HAVE HELPED JUSTIFY HARM.

Certain interpretations of Genesis, covenant, and “promised land” theology have been used to bless domination, displacement, and inequality rather than peace.

3. THE MODERN CONFLICT IS NOT AN ANCIENT INEVITABILITY.

Israelis and Palestinians are not locked in a timeless biblical feud; the current crisis is rooted in modern political history, nationalism, occupation, and contested power.

4. WALLS, CHECKPOINTS, AND BLOCKADES DO MORE THAN RESTRICT MOVEMENT.

They reshape daily life, fracture relationships, deepen fear, and harden the conditions under which dehumanization grows.

5. CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY CAN EITHER REINFORCE INJUSTICE OR RESIST IT.

Frameworks like Christian Zionism and dispensationalism are not abstract systems alone; they influence how Christians interpret the land, the state of Israel, and the suffering of Palestinians.

6. THE TEST OF THEOLOGY IS NOT ONLY WHAT IT CLAIMS, BUT ALSO WHAT IT PRODUCES.

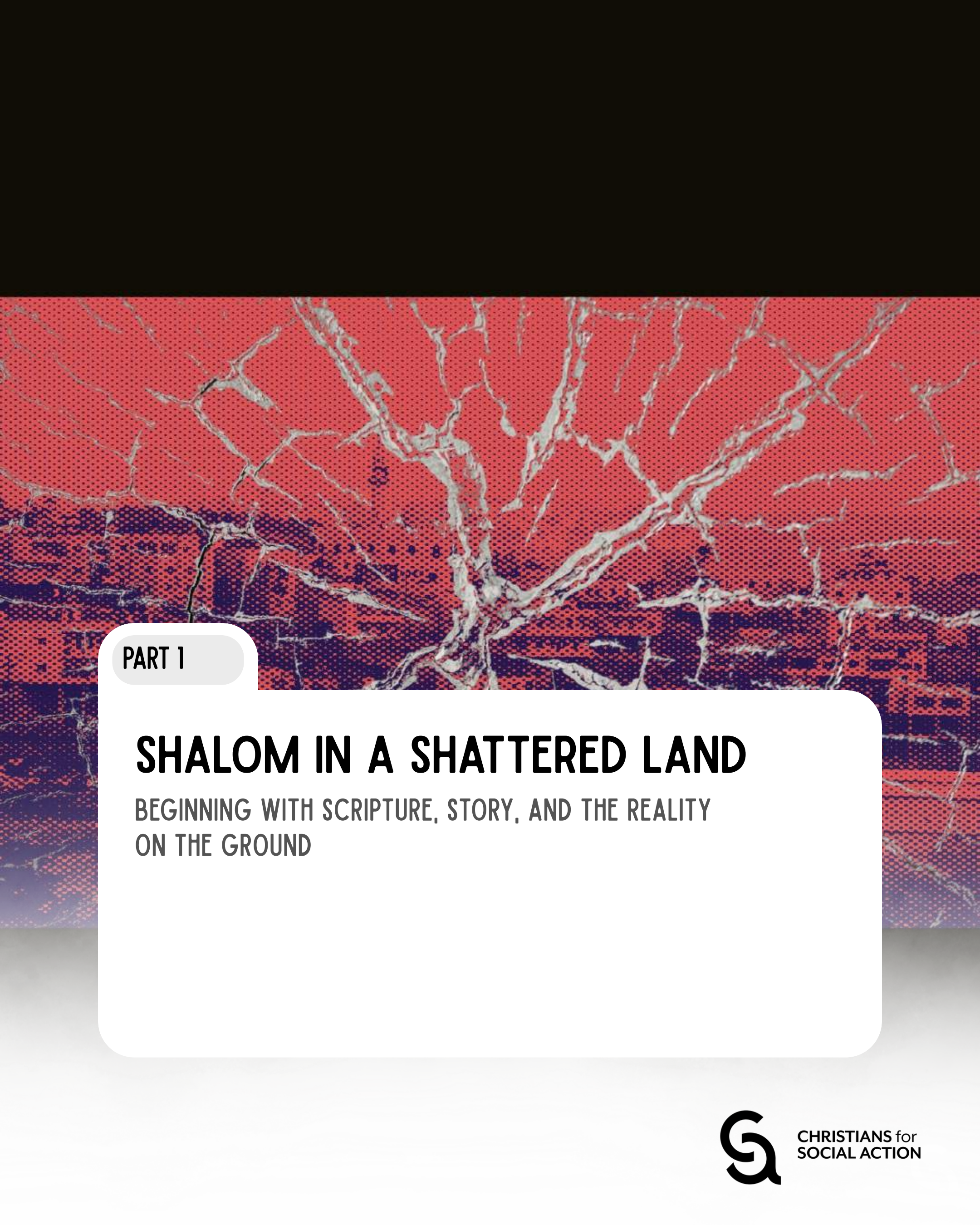
Jesus’ statement that “You will know them by their fruits” calls Christians to examine whether their beliefs lead toward dignity, mercy, justice, and peace.

7. SOLIDARITY REQUIRES LISTENING TO THOSE WHO ARE SUFFERING.

Faithful response begins not with easy answers, but with attending to Palestinian pain, Israeli fear, the witness of the Palestinian church, and the grief carried by all peoples of the land.

8. CHRISTIAN PEACEMAKING IS ROOTED IN JUSTICE AND LOVE.

Peace is not the avoidance of conflict, but the pursuit of truth, dignity, and repair — embodied through prayer, advocacy, and faithful presence.



PART 1

SHALOM IN A SHATTERED LAND

BEGINNING WITH SCRIPTURE, STORY, AND THE REALITY
ON THE GROUND



CHRISTIANS for
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In Part 1, Dr. Mae Elise Cannon situates us in the lived reality of Israel and Palestine, introducing the historical, political, and theological tensions that shape the region today. With attention to both Scripture and contemporary experience, she invites us to move beyond abstraction and toward a more grounded understanding of what is at stake not only geopolitically, but spiritually.

Concepts of peace are present in all three of the Abrahamic traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

In fact, in the Middle East, one greets someone in Arabic by saying “salam alaykum” (السلام عليكم), meaning “peace be upon you.” On days of Shabbat, from sunset to sunset, Jews around the world say the same in Hebrew, “shalom aleichem” (שָׁלוֹם אֵלֵיכֶם), a way of invoking blessing and an invitation to peace.

And yet in parts of the world where people say those greetings of peace most prolifically, decades of violence, unrest, and hostilities have run rampant. The lands of the historic Holy Land extend far beyond the contemporary geopolitical boundaries of the State of Israel and include ancient Mesopotamia, from the Tigris to the Euphrates River; the Mediterranean coastline and the lands that surround it from Lebanon to the Sinai Peninsula; and Egypt, Iraq, Syria, and other parts of the Levant.

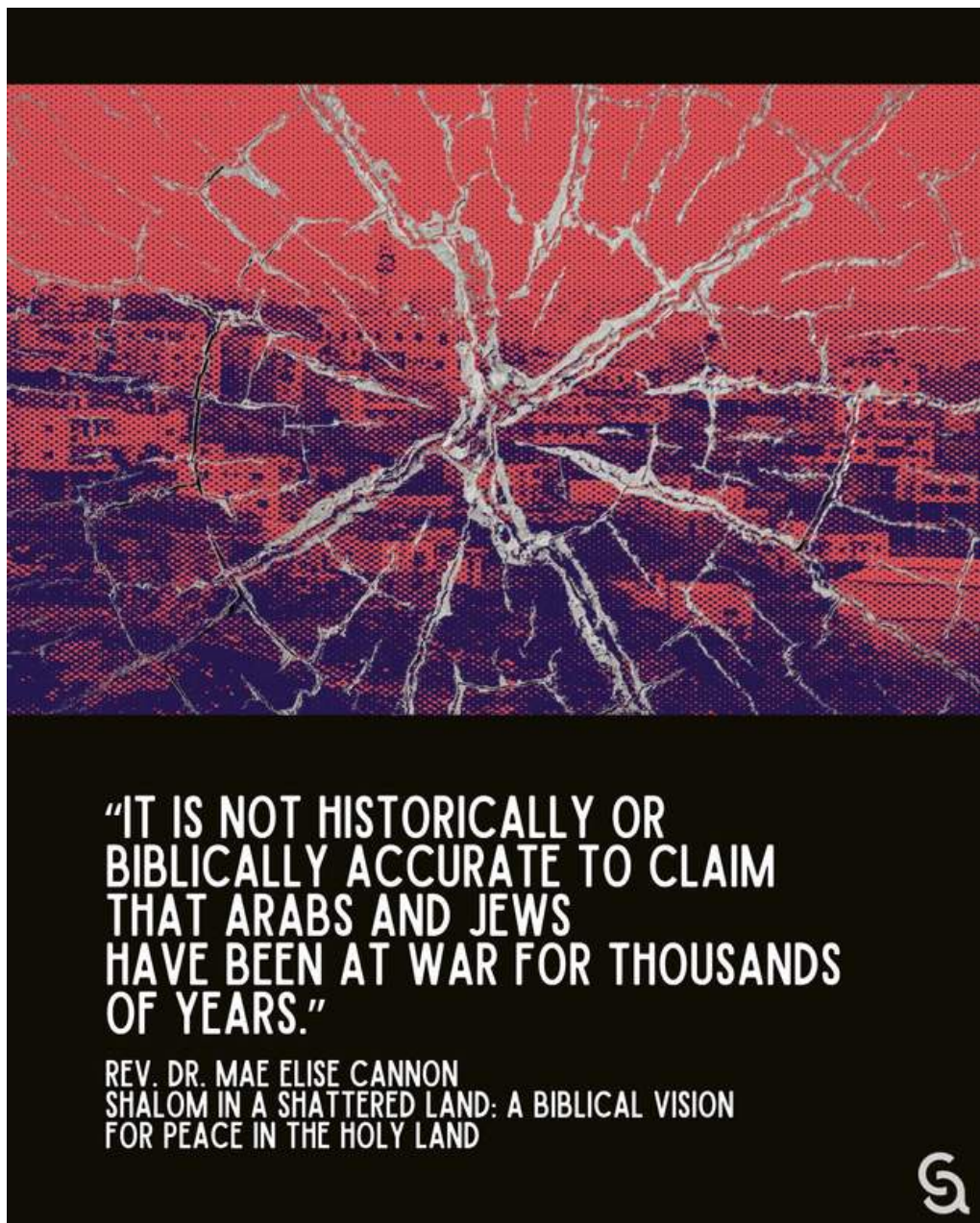
These places are written about in both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, and are home to Christian and Jewish communities that have lived in those places for thousands of years. Broad sweeps of history often categorize the Holy Land as never having had peace, highlighting the conquests by Roman emperors and the “holy wars” of the Crusades between the 11th and 13th centuries.

Nonetheless, for the majority of the last millennium, under the reign of the Ottoman Empire, the historic Holy Land enjoyed hundreds of years of pluralism and a lack of war and violence. In fact, until the division of the Middle East by Western powers after the First World War, the land of Ishmael, Isaac, and Jacob existed mostly in peace.

So where did these ideas of a land “wrought with conflict” and “shattered by violence” come from? For Western Christians, particularly those reading the Old and New Testaments in English, there has been a significant fallacy about how the “descendants of Abraham” have been at battle throughout history. It is fundamentally not true that Arabs and Jews have been at war for thousands of years and that their discord was written by God in the text of the Bible.

Consider the well-known story of Abraham, whom God promised would have descendants, which we read about in Genesis 12:1-3:

“THE LORD SAID TO ABRAM, ‘GO FROM YOUR COUNTRY, YOUR PEOPLE, AND YOUR FATHER’S HOUSEHOLD TO THE LAND I WILL SHOW YOU. I WILL MAKE YOU INTO A GREAT NATION, AND I WILL BLESS YOU; I WILL MAKE YOUR NAME GREAT, AND YOU WILL BE A BLESSING. I WILL BLESS THOSE WHO BLESS YOU, AND WHOEVER CURSES YOU I WILL CURSE; AND ALL PEOPLES ON EARTH WILL BE BLESSED THROUGH YOU.’”



But, Abraham and his wife, Sarai, being old, didn’t trust in the promises of God, and instead Abraham sought to have a family with their Egyptian slave, Hagar.

Christian interpretations have assumed that Hagar was rejected by God — telling the story of how the descendants of Isaac, born to Sarai and Abraham, were privileged by God, while the son of Hagar, Ishmael, was rejected. However, that is not the story that the Scriptures tell.

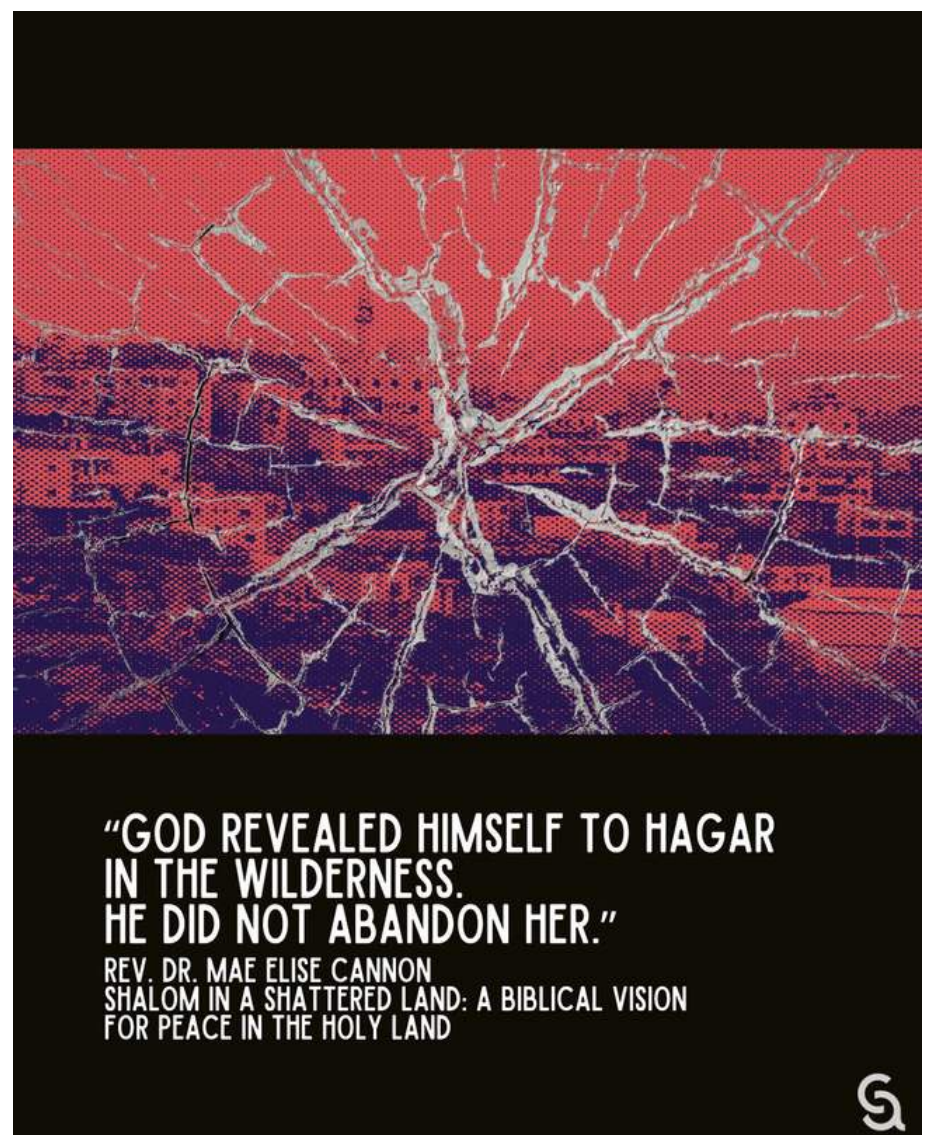
In fact, Genesis 16 tells of how Sarai “mistreated” Hagar (16:6), and Hagar fled into the desert. When we read about this encounter, we must ask: How did God respond to Hagar in her distress? The first thing we read is that an “angel of the Lord found Hagar” (16:7). Then the angel of the Lord says to Hagar that Ishmael will be a “wild donkey of a man” who will live in “hostility toward all his brothers” (16:12). An English reading of the text seems pretty clear: Ishmael would live in conflict.

However, a more thorough reading of this passage is required, including in the original language and text. That comprehensive exegesis is beyond the scope of this essay, but I would encourage you to reread the biblical story carefully. “Wild donkey of a man” is widely understood to mean that Ishmael would be fiercely independent and live his life with autonomy — i.e., not a slave — which could be viewed as a great asset.

Many scholars say that God’s promise was actually a blessing, quite the opposite of a curse! Sunday school teachers throughout the United States and the West have taught that Genesis 16 means that Arabs and Jews would be at war until the Second Coming of Christ and the end of days.

What, in fact, happened when Hagar was in the wilderness?

God gave her the name for her unborn son, saying, “You shall name him Ishmael” which means “God hears” (16:11). Hagar responded and identified God as “El Roi,” the God who sees. God revealed himself to Hagar in the wilderness. He did not abandon her; he did not tell her she and her descendants would be cursed. Rather, God appeared and responded to Hagar’s needs.



In a profound book by biblical scholar Dr. Tony Maloof of Dallas Theological Seminary, *Arabs in the Shadow of Israel: The Unfolding of God's Prophetic Plan for Ishmael's Line* that talks about the promises of God to Hagar and how these chapters in Genesis are so often interpreted in light of Western anti-Arab prejudices.

How does the story of Isaac and Ishmael end?

God promises Abraham that he will bless Ishmael and his descendants (Gen. 17:20), and after Abraham's death, the brothers come together to bury their father (25:9). The following verses then tell the account of the family line of Ishmael and the account of the family line of Abraham. These brothers were not battling upon their father's death, but rather, side by side they buried their father in peace. The contemporary story of Israelis and Palestinians is just that — a story of modern times.

In the 19th century, Western anti-Semitism and nationalist movements gave rise to the Jewish Nationalist movement that, in the late 1800s, set a goal to restore the Jewish people to their historic homeland. At the time, the indigenous people of the Holy Land included Jewish, Christian, and Muslim people, including Arabic-speaking Jews and people of the land whose ancestors had been present for thousands of years.

At the turn of the 20th century, the new Jewish Zionist movement brought the immigration of Jewish people from various locations around the world, predominantly Europe, long before the horrors of the Holocaust and Nazi Germany. The detailed history of this contemporary geopolitical conflict extends beyond the scope of this short introduction, but what is most important to understand is that the decades of war, violence, and occupation ongoing today began in the 20th century.

Local Arab communities revolted against both Jewish immigration and the British mandate instituted after the First World War. Many call 1948 the “year it all began.”

In Arabic, the events are known as the Nakba, or Great Catastrophe, referring to the more than three-quarters of a million local Arab Palestinians who were displaced from their homes and land. Hundreds of Palestinian villages were destroyed, thousands killed, and the modern nation-state of Israel was established.

That population of Arab refugees became the Palestinian refugee population, many of whom still today long for the Right of Return, and live in refugee camps in Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon, or other parts of the Middle East.

For Jews coming out of the Shoah, with the catastrophic horrors of more than 6 million Jews and millions of Eastern Europeans and other minorities killed, the newly established State of Israel was considered a miracle. The world rejected the Jewish people after World War II, and the struggle for a safe place where there would be no discrimination or violence against them was real.

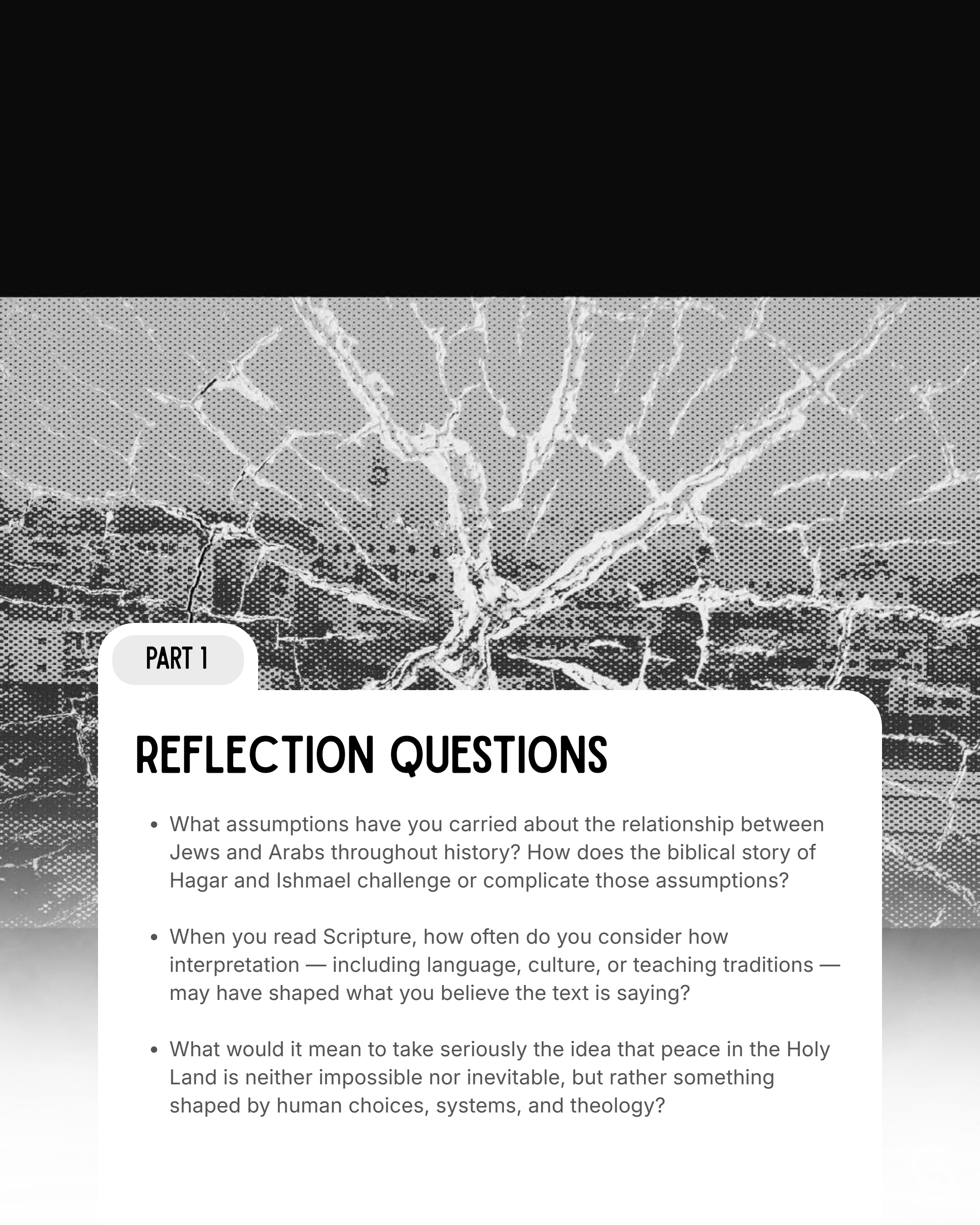
Throughout the first decades of the State, Israelis feared another catastrophe at the hands of neighboring Arab countries, which supported the Palestinian cause. After the 1967 Six-Day War between Israel and its neighbors, Israel took control of East Jerusalem and the West Bank. The country annexed parts of Jerusalem, while the West Bank became occupied. A military occupation, with Israeli security and civil control ruling over the vast majority of the territory, continues to this day. Peace may still be far off in the future of the Holy Land.

But we must understand contemporary history in order to be able to find ways to move forward that address unresolved issues that have only arisen in past decades. This history is short. Less than 100 years have passed since the time of the establishment of the Israeli state.

Today, Palestinians long for the same self-determination, freedom, and equality that Jews sought for themselves decades ago. The dehumanization and destruction of Palestinian lives and culture must be brought to an end if there is ever truly going to be peace and security for all of the people of Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. Mother Teresa saw things very clearly when she said,

“IF WE HAVE NO PEACE, IT IS BECAUSE WE HAVE FORGOTTEN THAT WE BELONG TO EACH OTHER.”

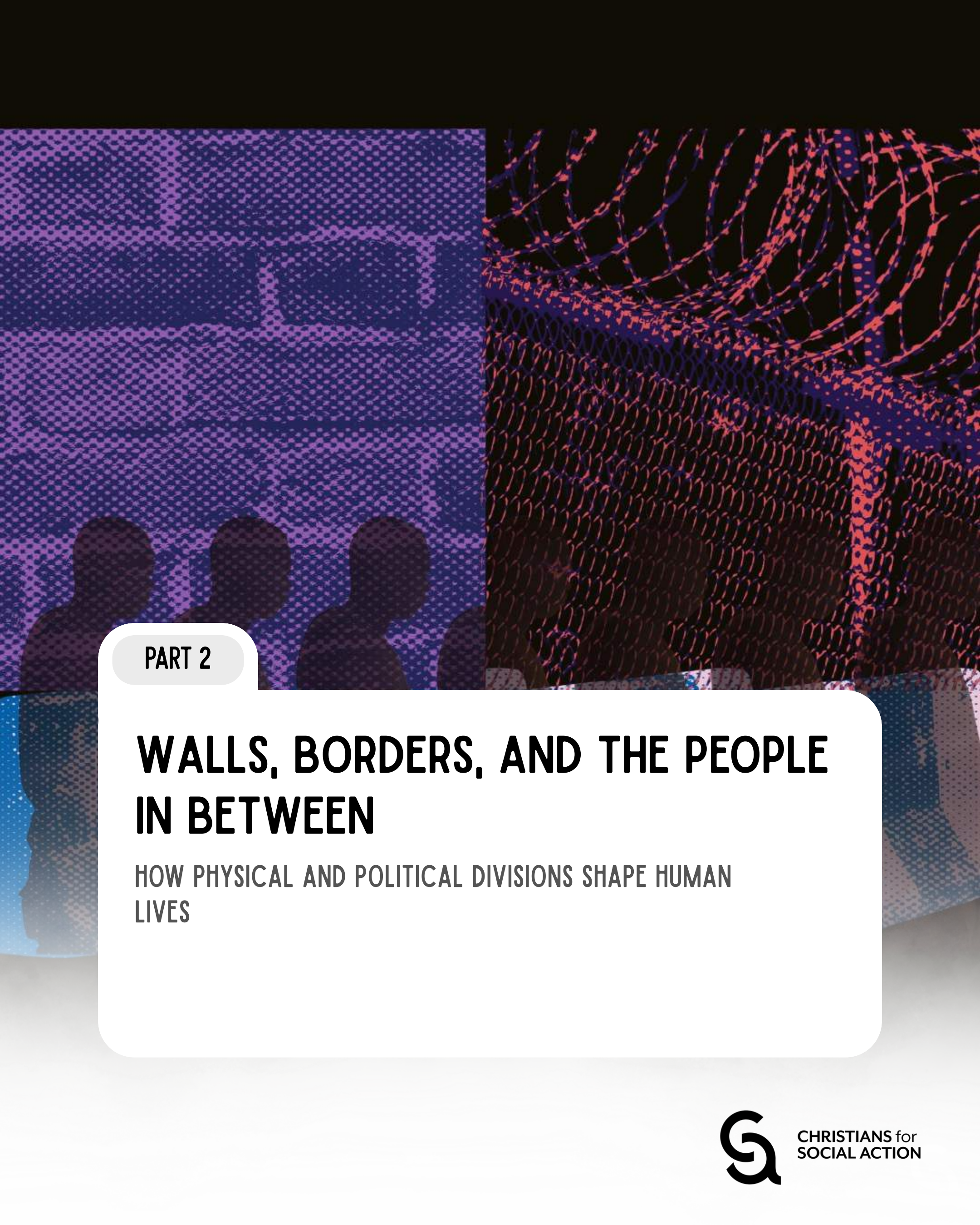
Contemporary solutions must be sought to address decades of human rights violations and injustices. The common humanity of Palestinians must be respected if there is ever to be peace for all of the people of the land. The futures of Israelis, both Jewish and Palestinian citizens of the state, and Palestinians living in the occupied territories, continue to be inextricably linked. Might it be a future of true peace.



PART 1

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What assumptions have you carried about the relationship between Jews and Arabs throughout history? How does the biblical story of Hagar and Ishmael challenge or complicate those assumptions?
- When you read Scripture, how often do you consider how interpretation — including language, culture, or teaching traditions — may have shaped what you believe the text is saying?
- What would it mean to take seriously the idea that peace in the Holy Land is neither impossible nor inevitable, but rather something shaped by human choices, systems, and theology?



PART 2

WALLS, BORDERS, AND THE PEOPLE IN BETWEEN

HOW PHYSICAL AND POLITICAL DIVISIONS SHAPE HUMAN
LIVES



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Part 2 turns to the structures that divide — walls, checkpoints, borders — and the ways these realities affect daily life for both Israelis and Palestinians. Dr. Cannon explores how systems of separation are experienced on the ground and reflects on what it means for Christians to bear witness in a context where movement, access, and dignity are unevenly distributed.

In spring 2024, I spent time at the Gaza border in an Israeli kibbutz community that had been attacked on October 7, 2023. Amidst the horrors and atrocities of that day, and the months that followed, one of the women said to me, “I grew up swimming off the beaches of Gaza.” She lived only a few short miles away from the Mediterranean, which could be seen on a clear day. “Those were different times,” she said.

For those of us paying attention to Gaza since October 2023, it is hard to understand what life was like in Israel, East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza in the decades prior to the Second Intifada that occurred during the early 2000s.

I’ve heard stories from Palestinians all the way north in the city of Jenin about how “Israelis used to always shop in our markets in the occupied territories.” When I asked why, they explained that products were, as they continue to be, significantly cheaper.

The West Bank and Gaza boast beautiful natural areas for hiking or swimming, in addition to including many of the historic Jewish sacred places and sites. Only 25 years ago, it was not uncommon for Jewish Israelis to spend time not only in various parts of East Jerusalem, but in the West Bank, and yes, even in Gaza. Why did this end? Where did the divisions come from?

While fear and even hatred play a role, the separation between Israelis and Palestinians today is also due to literal, physical, man-made walls. Since the early 2000s, Israel has built more than 900 barriers within the West Bank. These walls divide Palestinian communities from Palestinian communities, and Palestinians from Israelis.

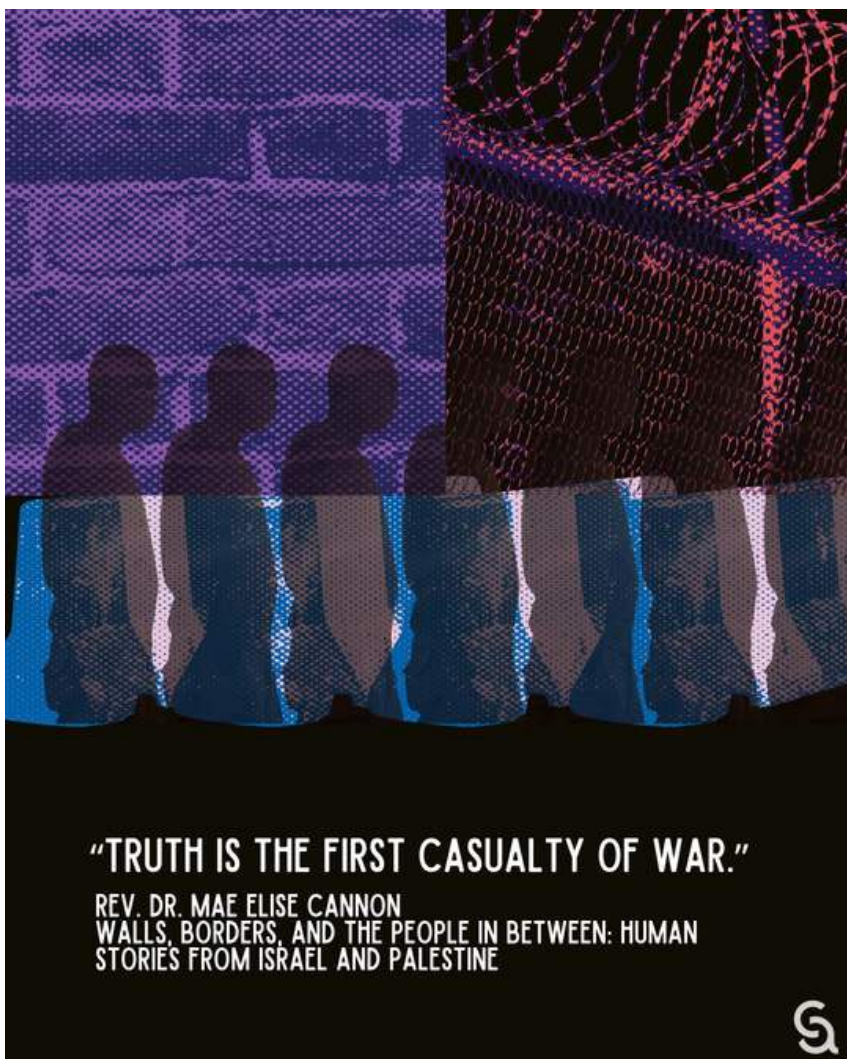
The main separation barrier is called the “apartheid wall” by Palestinians. Israelis call it the “security fence.”

The separation wall runs twice as tall in cities and is three times as long as the Berlin Wall. International visitors and Palestinians who wish to cross the wall have to go through security checkpoints. Giant red signs are posted at these checkpoints warning Jewish Israelis not to enter, telling them the area is “dangerous to your lives.” In July 2004, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) deemed the separation barrier illegal.

These barriers emerged out of the Oslo Peace Agreement of the early 1990s. While they were intended to be a temporary agreement facilitating the creation of a Palestinian state, the Oslo Accords created many of the separations and divisions that we see physically, creating barriers between Israelis and Palestinians today.

One of the fundamental assumptions of the agreement was that Palestinians and Israelis needed to be “further separated” (i.e., segregated) in order for the Palestinian Authority to be able to build up the capacity for self-governance.

The entire area of the West Bank continued to be under Israeli authority and decision-making in its entirety since 1967; thus, the internationally understood political term of “occupation” applies. Under the Oslo Agreement, in 1995, the West Bank was divided into three territories of control: Areas A, B, and C.



The main Palestinian cities, including Bethlehem, Ramallah, and Hebron, were under Palestinian civil and security control in Area A.

While this is what things look like on paper, it is not uncommon for the Israeli military to conduct raids and military missions in Area A. Area B constitutes the areas surrounding settlements and outside of the cities and is, again, at least on paper, under Palestinian civil and Israeli security control.

And Area C, constituting more than 60 percent of the West Bank, is entirely under Israeli civil and security control. More than three-quarters of a million settlers living in the occupied West Bank live in Area C. While formal annexation of the West Bank has been discussed and received preliminary votes in the Knesset, Israel's parliament, today, few dispute that the West Bank is already de facto annexed by Israel.

The history of Gaza and its de facto "borders" can be a bit more complicated. But Gaza's most recent history includes an almost complete blockade by Israel via land, sea, and air that began after Hamas succeeded in the January 2006 elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC).

Hamas received 44.45 percent of the vote, winning 74 of the 132 PLC seats, and Hamas's candidate, Ismail Haniyeh, became Prime Minister. Hamas refused to recognize the State of Israel and the Oslo Accords Agreement, and the United States considers it a terrorist organization because of its history of suicide bombings and other violence against Israeli civilians. In response to the success of Hamas, the United States, United Nations, European Union, and Russia (the Quartet) imposed an economic embargo on Gaza, and Israel withheld millions of dollars of tax revenue from the Palestinian Authority.

Later that year, armed militants from Gaza entered Israel via a tunnel and attacked Israeli troops, killing two Israeli soldiers and taking a 19-year-old wounded Israeli soldier named Gilad Shalit into Gaza at gunpoint.

At that point, Israel instituted a complete blockade of Gaza: the military cut off access to Gaza via sea, land, and air. Gilad Shalit was held in Gaza for more than five years. Shalit was released in 2011 in a prisoner exchange where more than 1,000 Palestinian prisoners were released in return. The checkpoints at Gaza's borders with Egypt and Israel are tightly controlled by the Israeli military, which permits very few people to enter or exit the territory, and only then with Israeli permission.

The blockade of Gaza, now two decades long, has meant untold hardships for the more than 2 million people living in the Gaza Strip, even prior to the Hamas attacks on the South of Israel on October 7, 2023, that killed roughly 1,200 people, and an additional 245 were taken captive into the Gaza Strip.

In 2012, the UK independent news outlet The Guardian published an article about how the Israeli government had been accused by critics of “intentionally limiting” the calorie count allowed into Gaza during the blockade. Reports released from the Israeli defense ministry under a court order showed that the Israeli military had made “precise calculations of Gaza’s daily calorie needs to avoid malnutrition” as a part of their implementation of the blockade between 2007 and 2010.

And these accusations came years before the charges of using intentional starvation as a weapon of war were levied against Israel during the 2023 to 2025 atrocities in the Gaza Strip. The death toll of the Israel/Hamas War as of December 2025 was 71,269 individuals killed and 171,232 people injured. By September 2025, the majority of the world’s experts declared the atrocities in Gaza as genocide.

These physical barriers between people have created some of the largest divisions between Israelis and Palestinians in modern history. The days of Israelis swimming on the seashore near Gaza seem unfathomable given the degree of violence, hatred, death, and destruction carried out between Israel and Hamas over the past two years.

The majority of news, stories, and the exposure of suffering of the “other side” has also never been more limited, with Israeli news outlets being described by an Israeli human rights activist as “propaganda not unlike that of Russia under communism,” and Palestinian and Arab news sources are no less biased. Indeed, as the ancient Greek playwright Aeschylus said,

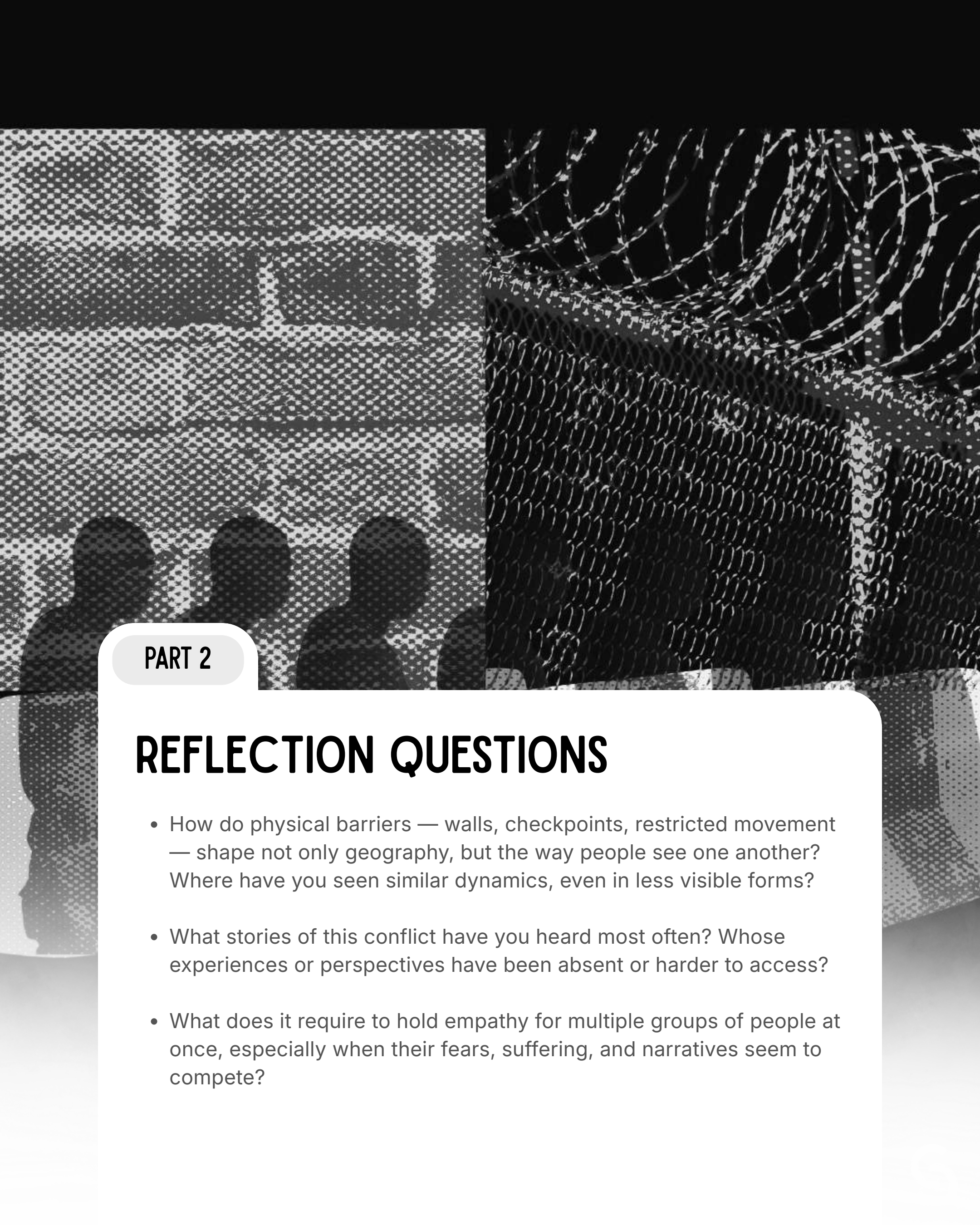
“TRUTH IS THE FIRST CASUALTY OF WAR.”

While walls and checkpoints prevent Israelis and Palestinians from meeting or mingling, powerful voices, including both the Israeli government and Hamas leaders, urge each community to see the other as a dangerous enemy.

The few years immediately after the Oslo Accords in the 1990s felt like a time of great hope, where programs and people-to-people initiatives between Israelis and Palestinians flourished.

More than a quarter of a century later, the climate for peace and reconciliation, let alone the application of human rights and justice, seems to have never been further away on the horizon. Yet, we must remember times in the past where Jews, Christians, and Muslims have lived side by side in peace.

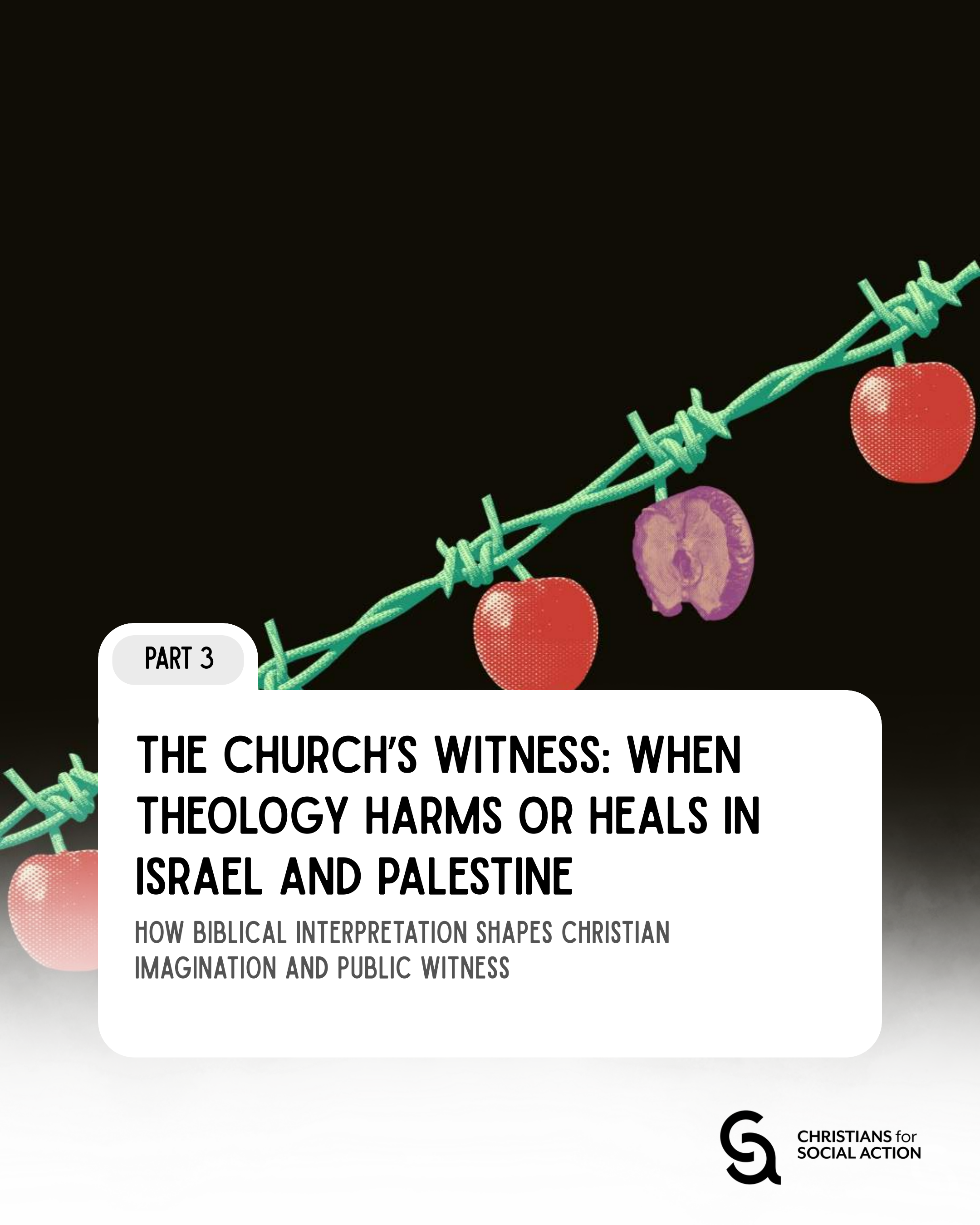
Only when the common humanity of all people is recognized and protected, when there is equality, human rights, and self-determination for all of the people of the land, will there be peace.



PART 2

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How do physical barriers — walls, checkpoints, restricted movement — shape not only geography, but the way people see one another? Where have you seen similar dynamics, even in less visible forms?
- What stories of this conflict have you heard most often? Whose experiences or perspectives have been absent or harder to access?
- What does it require to hold empathy for multiple groups of people at once, especially when their fears, suffering, and narratives seem to compete?



PART 3

THE CHURCH'S WITNESS: WHEN THEOLOGY HARMS OR HEALS IN ISRAEL AND PALESTINE

HOW BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION SHAPES CHRISTIAN
IMAGINATION AND PUBLIC WITNESS



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In Part 3, Dr. Cannon examines the theological frameworks that often undergird Christian perspectives on Israel and Palestine, including Christian Zionism and dispensationalism. She traces how these interpretations of Scripture influence political alignment and moral reasoning, and she raises critical questions about their real-world implications.

Zionism, historic and contemporary, is not monolithic. Nonetheless, both Christian and Jewish Zionism have their roots in the return of a Jewish nationalistic movement to the historic land of biblical Israel.

In the United States, a movement began in the mid-19th century that included American Christians who sought the “restoration” of the Jewish people to their historic homeland. Restorationists at that time included both conservative and fundamentalist Christians, alongside Protestant Liberals. The restorationist movement became a precursor to contemporary Christian Zionism and the belief that the Jewish people must be restored to historic Israel in order for the Second Coming of Christ to occur.

The First Jewish National Congress in 1897 defined the goals of Zionism to “recognize a legally secured homeland in Palestine for Jewish people.” The three primary tenets of Christian Zionism at that time included the restoration of the Jewish people to Palestine (as the territory was named under the Ottoman Empire), reconstitution of the priesthood, and the rebuilding of the ancient temple that had been destroyed in 70 A.D.

What are the theological assumptions that lead to these fundamental beliefs of Christian Zionists?

One of the foundations begins on the assumption that the Jewish people are the descendants of Isaac and thus, as [Part 1](#) of this series discussed, are blessed by God. In Genesis 12:2-3, God promises Abraham,

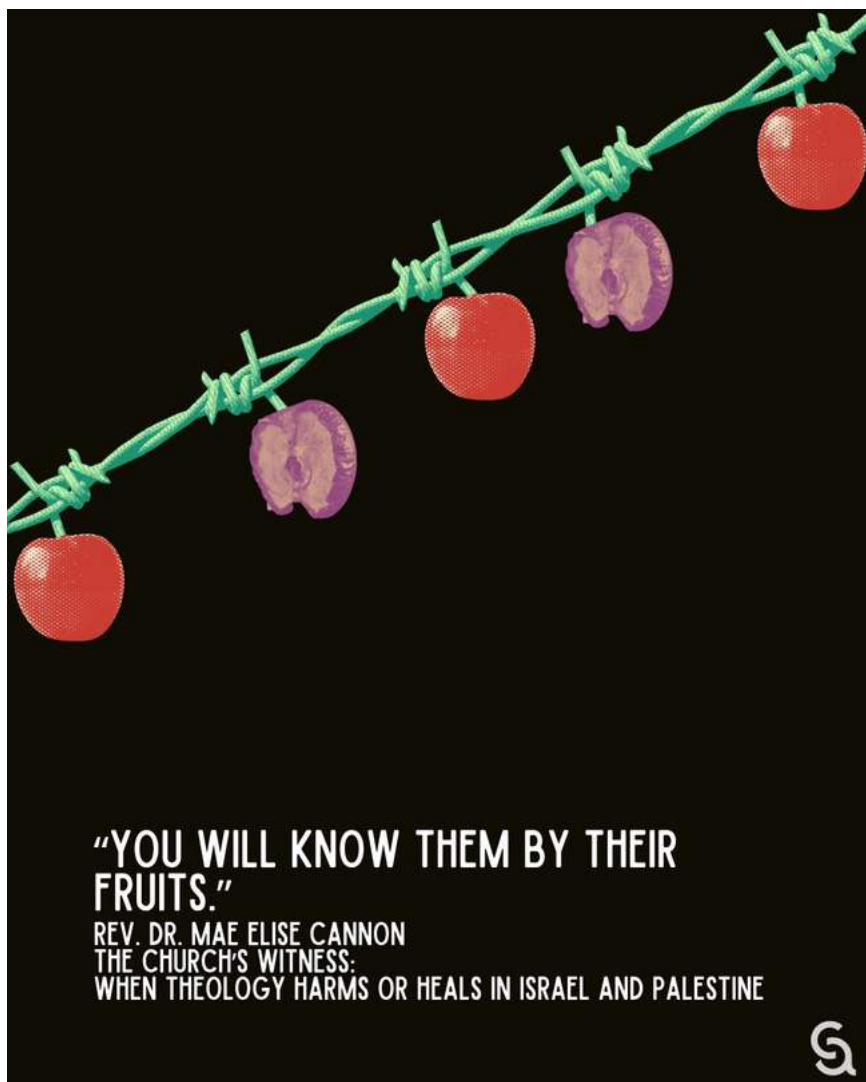
“I WILL MAKE YOU INTO A GREAT NATION, AND I WILL BLESS YOU; I WILL MAKE YOUR NAME GREAT, AND YOU WILL BE A BLESSING. I WILL BLESS THOSE WHO BLESS YOU, AND WHOEVER CURSES YOU I WILL CURSE; AND ALL PEOPLES ON EARTH WILL BE BLESSED THROUGH YOU.”

Most Christian Zionists assume that the “you” in this passage doesn’t refer to the international Jewish community, but rather refers specifically to the contemporary modern nation-state of Israel that was established in historic Palestine in 1948. This conflation of “biblical Israel” and the political state of Israel is deeply problematic.

The majority of the more than 7 million Jews who live in Israel are not observant, or particularly religious. In addition, roughly 20 percent of the modern nation-state of Israel are Christian, Muslim, or non-religious Palestinian citizens of the State (also known as Arab Israelis).

Another theological assumption of Christian Zionism rests on the belief that God gave the land of historic Israel to the Jewish people exclusively as the “promised land.”

Ardent Jewish Zionists adhere to the belief that the Jewish people should be restored to the whole or complete land of Israel, the Hebrew term Eretz Israel HaShlema, which refers to all of the territory from Eilat, along the Red Sea, to Euphrates, parts of Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Palestine, Iraq, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia.



Ardent Christian Zionists would agree, often sending millions of dollars from around the world in support of the Jewish settler movement that establishes outposts and settlements on land in the occupied West Bank, the land that is designated to be the future state of Palestine.

While many Jews and Christians believe that God intended for Abraham’s descendants to share the land with other peoples, settlers and their supporters believe that God’s promise is that only Jews will live in the land.

They affirm that Jews can and should take control of the land and remove all non-Jewish peoples by any means necessary, including through war and violence.

Numerous books have been written about the land promises of God and the theological implications. Consider further study in New Testament scholar Gary Burge's books *Whose Land, Whose Promise? What Christians Are not Being Told about Israel and the Palestinians* and *Jesus and the Land: The New Testament Challenge to "Holy Land" Theology*.

Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) hosted a very popular mini-course on the question of *How Strong Is the Biblical Basis for Christian Zionism?* with Dr. Colin Chapman and Embrace the Middle East. Chapman argues against restorationism and asserts that the New Testament shifts to a fulfillment theology focused on the spiritual kingdom of God, not the modern nation-state of Israel.

He argues that the false theologies of Christian Zionism support a modern conflict rooted in the dispossession of land and instead advocates for the Bible to be used as a tool for peacemaking, not the justification of political claims. Chapman supports attempts toward peace that are rooted in justice, peace, and mutual respect for all people, both Jewish and Palestinian.

Dispensationalism can provide a theological undergirding for many Christian Zionists, even those who are not familiar with the term. Christian dispensationalism arose in the decades following the restorationist movement and asserts a theological framework that God works differently in distinct periods of time or "dispensations."

Emphasis includes the literal interpretation of Scripture, with a significant focus on the end times. While God has separate and distinct plans for the people of God (Israel) and the church, a repercussion of dispensationalism is that prophecies about Israel (often applied to the modern nation-state) are taken literally and seen as a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies.

These theological assumptions often result in political support for the State of Israel, rather than seeing the actions of the state as a secular political mechanism distinct from the movement of the global Jewish community.

One of the main complaints against Christian Zionism is the assumed ethnocentric superiority of one people group over another. Namely, the idea that God would deem some people (i.e., the Jewish people) to be privileged in his eyes over others. New Testament passages about the role of Christ in bringing salvation and forgiveness of sins must be theologically reconciled to theologies that are present in the Hebrew Scriptures of the Christian canon.

Take, for example, New Testament passages like Romans 3:23 that say, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Other New Testament passages that have divergent interpretations and theological beliefs include Romans 11, which talks about the Old and New Covenants of God. Verses from Romans 11 refer to a “deliverer from Zion” quoting the prophets of Isaiah and Jeremiah. The passage also includes a description of the role of the Gentiles in receiving the promises of God. The verses, at first reading, may seem quite obscure talking about how the Gentiles have been “grafted in among others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root” (11:17).

This passage uses the metaphor of the olive tree to describe the relationship of God to both the Jewish people of historic Israel and the Gentiles who have come to faith because of their beliefs. The Gentiles (wild branches) have been “grafted in” because of their faith, suggesting that non-Jews might also share in the promises of God. The question of how the Old Testament promises of God to the Jewish people change, become fulfilled, or continue are the basis on which Christian Zionists and anti-Zionists have their disputes.

Those who oppose Christian Zionism often believe in a theological assumption called “fulfillment theology.” In Christ’s coming to earth in the person of Jesus, the promises of the Messiah of Israel have been fulfilled, including his life, death, and resurrection. The Covenant of God made to the Jewish people is not repealed, but instead fulfilled and expanded upon, and the relationship between God and the Israelites becomes redefined (or transformed) by the reality of Christ having come.

As Romans 11 referenced, the Gentiles are then invited into receipt of the promises of Genesis 12:3 so that not only will the descendants of Jewish people be blessed, but instead an emphasis is placed on the church, the body of Christ, which becomes “heir to the promises made to Israel.”

Many proponents of Christian Zionism accuse their opponents of a theology called “Replacement Theology.”

Replacement theology is the basic idea that the covenant between God and the Jewish people shifted in favor of the New Covenant, where the church replaces the favored position of the Jewish people. Critics of replacement theology argue that the assumptions can promote and encourage anti-Semitism and neglect to acknowledge the historic and favored role the Jewish people have had in relation to the Abrahamic covenant.

Fulfillment theology, on the other hand, acknowledges two Covenants: both the Abrahamic Covenant between God and the Jewish people and a new covenant between God and the church.

How does one make sense of these theologies related to the State of Israel? In the New Testament, Jesus very clearly states,

“YOU WILL KNOW THEM BY THEIR FRUITS.” (MATT. 7:15-20)

In other words, as other passages in the Scriptures reference, the actions and deeds of people will provide evidence of the Christian faith. James says,

“BE DOERS OF THE WORD, NOT HEARERS ONLY...” (1:22)

He continues,

“FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS DEAD.” (2:26)

In other words, what are the effects on people of our theological assumptions? Conservative interpretations of the Scriptures demand that the Scriptures never contradict themselves.

Following that belief, would God ever demand that his people perpetuate injustice in the manifestations of his teaching? Through the Scriptures, both Old and New, God consistently calls for justice and love of not only neighbor, but enemy (Matt. 5:43, Rom. 12:9-21).

Would the God of justice call for Christians to support one people group over another (Israelis over Palestinians)?

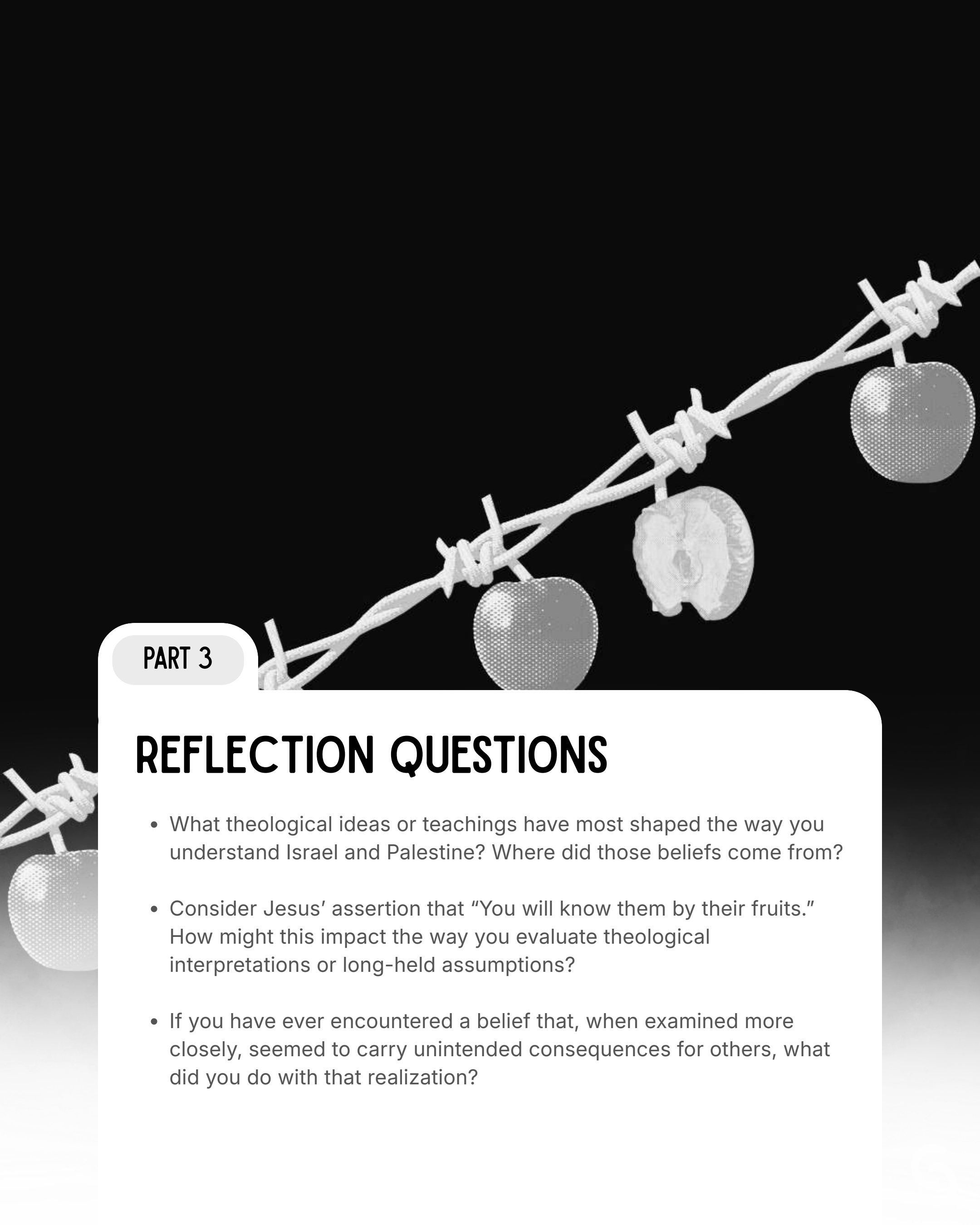
All Christians, regardless of their theological assumptions and political beliefs, must be willing to ask the question, “What are the repercussions of my beliefs and how do they affect people?”

The belief in Jewish restorationism justified the displacement of almost 1 million Palestinians in 1948 as a part of “God’s divine plan.” That refugee population today continues to suffer displacement and occupation. Jesus came as the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6, John 14:27), not as someone who desired to create divisions between people.

Jesus calls for love of neighbor and of enemy. Might it be possible for the Jewish people to have a special role in God’s divine plan? And is it possible for that to be so without injustices being wrought against an entirely different people group?

Rather than supporting the aspirations of one people group over another, consider the parable of the Good Samaritan, the man considered an enemy to the Jews. Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan showing mercy, love, and kindness to the man on the side of the road in need of help. The commandment to followers of Christ is the same:

“GO AND DO LIKEWISE.” (LUKE 10:37)

A black and white illustration of a branch with thorns and fruit. The branch enters from the bottom left, curves upwards and to the right, and then curves downwards and to the right. It has several thorns. Three fruits are attached to the branch: a round fruit at the bottom left, a heart-shaped fruit in the middle, and a round fruit at the top right. The background is dark.

PART 3

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What theological ideas or teachings have most shaped the way you understand Israel and Palestine? Where did those beliefs come from?
- Consider Jesus' assertion that "You will know them by their fruits." How might this impact the way you evaluate theological interpretations or long-held assumptions?
- If you have ever encountered a belief that, when examined more closely, seemed to carry unintended consequences for others, what did you do with that realization?



PART 4

BECOMING REPAIRERS OF THE BREACH

A CHRISTIAN VISION FOR JUSTICE, PEACE, AND FAITHFUL PRESENCE



CHRISTIANS for
SOCIAL ACTION

In Part 4, Dr. Cannon reflects on the call of the church to embody a witness rooted in justice, mercy, and reconciliation — not abstractly, but in concrete ways that honor the dignity of all people. Drawing on Scripture and the life of Jesus, she invites Christians to imagine a different posture — one that resists domination, refuses indifference, and seeks peace grounded in truth and repair.

**“BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS, FOR THEY SHALL BE CALLED THE CHILDREN OF GOD.”
(MATT. 5:9)**

What is the call of the Christian church in light of the decades of violence and injustice perpetuated on the Palestinian people in the Holy Land?

And how should Christians respond to the centuries of antisemitism experienced by Jewish people globally?

And, in light of the issues addressed in previous essays in this series, how can Christians honor the Scriptures and Christian ethics and theology in their engagement with Jews, Christians, and Muslims in the Holy Land?

The church has been called to be a light to the world (Matt. 5:14-16), to do good (Gal. 6:10), to seek justice (Isa. 1:17), and to respond to the needs of those who are suffering (Ps. 82:3-4). What does that look like specifically in response to today’s current realities in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories?

1. PRAY FOR WISDOM AND DISCERNMENT

“REJOICE ALWAYS, PRAY CONTINUALLY, GIVE THANKS IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES; FOR THIS IS GOD’S WILL FOR YOU IN CHRIST JESUS.” (1 THESS. 5:16-18)

Prayer is not a passive response, but rather an active one. Many Christian Zionists “pray for Israel,” meaning they pray for the success, domination, and physical prowess of the state.

How might God shape and change our hearts and minds if we pray for the people of the land rather than the political powers that rule it?

- Pray for the people of Israel: Jewish and Palestinian, Muslim, Christian, and Druze.
- Pray that God would reveal wisdom and discernment to all who pray, and to those on whose behalf we pray.
- Pray that truth would prevail and that the reality of current circumstances — including the experience and suffering of millions of Palestinians living under military occupation and control — would no longer be ignored by the people of Israel or by the world.
- Pray against settler extremism and violence on all sides.
- Pray that justice might prevail without physical resistance and military domination.
- Pray for the safety and security of all people in the land, that mothers would not have to fear for the lives of their children.
- Pray that Palestinians and Israelis might once again live as neighbors without hatred toward the other after decades of violence and discord.
- Pray that Palestinians might experience self-determination and freedom, which they have sought for nearly a hundred years.

2. MOURN WITH THOSE WHO SUFFER

“REJOICE WITH THOSE WHO REJOICE; MOURN WITH THOSE WHO MOURN. LIVE IN HARMONY WITH ONE ANOTHER.” (ROM. 12:15–16)

To grieve alongside those who mourn demands that one must know their suffering.

- Listen and learn about the stories of Palestinians. Over the course of devastating violence in Gaza these past two-plus years, Palestinian lives and stories continue to be dehumanized. Rarely do we hear the story of men, women, and children and learn about their hopes, dreams, and aspirations.
- Learn the stories of people in Gaza and what life is like under occupation in East Jerusalem and the West Bank.
- Learn the stories of Jewish Israelis and their fears and realities.

- Ask that God would give empathy and love for all of the people of the land. When I worked at World Vision, the Christian international development agency, we often prayed the prayer of its founder, Bob Pierce: “Break my heart for the things that break the heart of God.”
- Ask God to bring empathy and to allow our hearts to be broken for all who suffer.
- Respond with a spirit of love and kindness, mourning for the stories of grief, suffering, and loss. Having empathy for mothers who have lost their children and for young people who have become orphans does not mean one has to compromise on advocating for justice, human rights, and equality. In fact, one’s argument that justice prevails is only strengthened when people exercise empathy toward those who have suffered, regardless of what side of the line they might live on.

3. SOLIDARITY WITH THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

“BE DEVOTED TO ONE ANOTHER IN LOVE.” (ROM. 12:10)

Do not ignore the cry of the church in Palestine. Rev. Dr. Munther Isaac has asked global Christians,

“WHERE WERE YOU WHEN GAZA WAS GOING THROUGH A GENOCIDE?”

The killing and maiming of tens of thousands of Palestinians has happened while the world could watch the almost daily bombing and devastation of the Gaza Strip. For over 2 years, 735 days, the more than 2 million people living in Gaza experienced not only daily warfare perpetuated upon them, but also the deliberate restriction of humanitarian assistance, food, and basic health needs being allowed into the territory.

The Palestinian church suffered alongside their family members in the Gaza Strip and begged the global community to respond. The less than 1,000 Christians living in Gaza before the war suffered attacks on the two major remaining churches in Gaza, the St. Porphyrius Orthodox Church (October 19, 2023) and the Holy Family Latin Catholic Church (July 17, 2025). The Anglican Al Ahli Hospital was bombed on October 17, 2023; struck by airstrikes on April 13, 2025; and invaded by Israeli forces on June 5, 2025.

Hundreds of Christian institutions, facilities, and programs were decimated and destroyed, including those belonging to Greek Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant churches, and ministries like Dar al Kalima University run by Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb from Bethlehem.

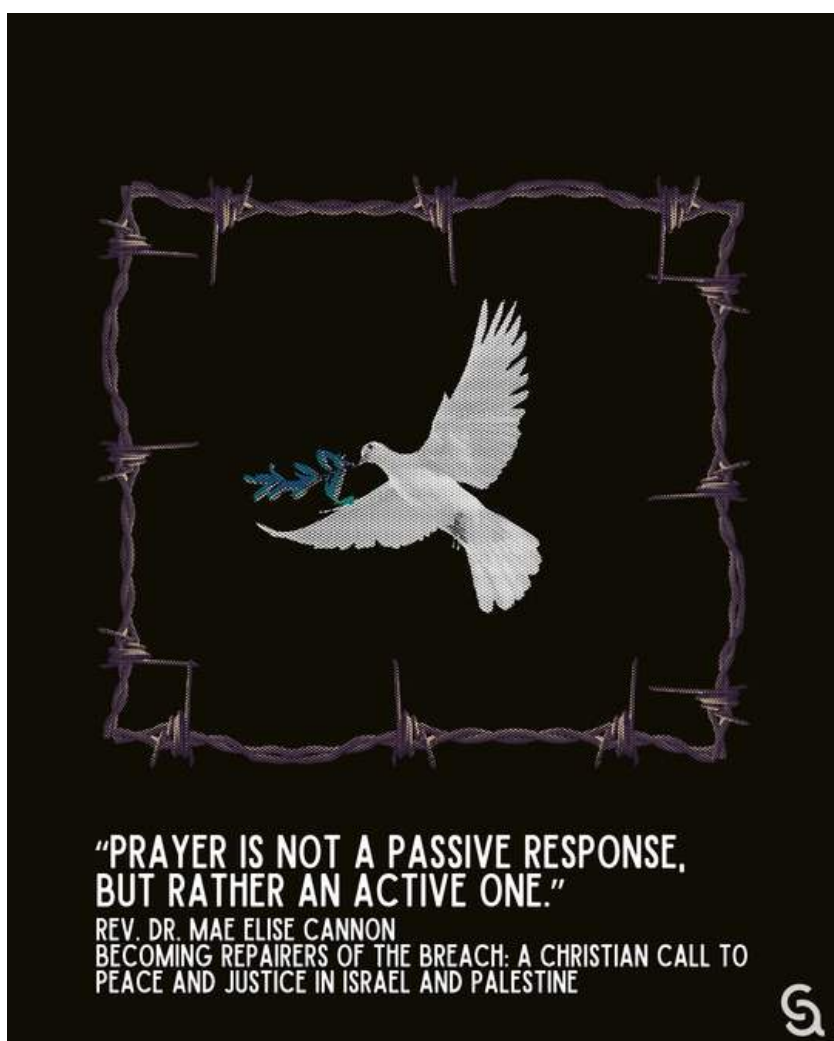
Palestinian Christians issued “A Call for Repentance: An Open Letter from Palestinian Christians to Western Church Leaders and Theologians” after the attack on St. Porphyrius Orthodox Church in October 2023, saying,

“WE WATCH WITH HORROR THE WAY MANY WESTERN CHRISTIANS ARE OFFERING UNWAVERING SUPPORT TO ISRAEL’S WAR AGAINST THE PEOPLE OF PALESTINE.”

And while recognizing the voices who have advocated for justice for Palestinians and stood alongside them, the church leaders continued,

“WE WRITE TO CHALLENGE WESTERN THEOLOGIANS AND CHURCH LEADERS WHO HAVE VOICED UNCRITICAL SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL AND TO CALL ON THEM TO REPENT AND CHANGE.”

For the sake of Christian witness, these Christian organizations criticized the “severely distorted moral judgment” in regards to the situation in the Holy Land.



What does solidarity with the church in Palestine look like? In November 2025, Palestinian Christians issued a very specific call for the global community via the Second Kairos Palestine document. Read the document and consider its assertions, including that truth must be named. The document demands the naming of reality, specifically that “the war that has left behind hundreds of thousands of martyrs and wounded, and nearly 2 million displaced people,” that experts have unequivocally called the state’s actions a genocide, and that the ongoing treatment of Palestinians in all of the occupied Palestinian territories is undergoing colonization and ethnic cleansing.

The final call of the church in the Kairos document includes a commitment to work for the good of the land of all humanity:

“UNTIL THE DAY WE LIVE FREE IN OUR LAND TOGETHER WITH ALL OF THE INHABITANTS OF THE LAND IN TRUE PEACE AND RECONCILIATION FOUNDED ON JUSTICE AND EQUALITY FOR ALL OF GOD’S CREATION, WHERE MERCY AND TRUTH MEET, AND RIGHTEOUSNESS AND JUSTICE KISS EACH OTHER.” (PSALM 85:10)

4. ADVOCATE FOR JUSTICE AND SUPPORT LIBERATION

“LEARN TO DO RIGHT; SEEK JUSTICE. DEFEND THE OPPRESSED.” (ISA. 1:17)

Solidarity is not only a spiritual posture; it also demands physical action. What does advocacy look like?

Advocacy can include spiritual, social, economic, legal, and political actions on behalf of a cause or a people group. Organizations like ours, Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP), provide educational and awareness opportunities to engage and learn, in addition to direct opportunities to engage with elected officials in Washington, D.C., to call for U.S. government policies that will no longer be complicit and participatory in the ongoing occupation and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people.

American Christian denominations and organizations, including CMEP, will be hosting a joint advocacy summit on May 5-7, 2026, on Capitol Hill that will include the opportunity for people to meet with their Senators and elected members of Congress. Join hundreds of other Christians in taking actions to respond to the injustices in Palestine and Israel.

PARTNER WITH REPAIRERS OF THE BREACH

**“LET US CONSIDER HOW WE MAY SPUR ONE ANOTHER ON TOWARD LOVE AND GOOD DEEDS.”
(HEB. 10:24)**

The possibilities to learn and engage with others who are already actively involved with this work are abundant. Identify organizations that are bridging the gap and working for human rights, equality, and justice.

Numerous Christian ministries — like Tent of Nations, Bethlehem Bible College, Musalaha, and many others —do incredible work and regularly have opportunities to engage, like the May 26-30, 2026 Christ at the Checkpoint Conference in Bethlehem. Groups like Standing Together, the Parents Circle/Families Forum, and Combatants for Peace bring together Israelis and Palestinians to acknowledge the joint humanity and suffering while working to end the occupation.

In addition, Israeli human rights organizations work on their respective areas of focus, including groups like Breaking the Silence, where former Israeli soldiers share accounts of injustices perpetuated during their time in the Israeli military; HaMoked, the oldest Israeli human rights organization offering legal assistance to Palestinians; B'Tselem, which documents and reports on human rights violations; Gisha, working on human rights specifically related to Gaza; and Yesh Din, focusing on settlements, to name just a few. Palestinian human rights organizations, often under attack for their very existence, are numerous and include Jahalin Solidarity, Mossawa Center for Advocacy for Palestinians in Israel, Defense for Children International (DCI), and other groups doing incredible work for human rights in Palestine.

PURSUE PEACE AND SEEK TO LOVE ALL

“DO NOT REPAY EVIL FOR EVIL. BE CAREFUL TO DO WHAT IS RIGHT IN THE EYES OF EVERYONE. IF IT IS POSSIBLE, AS FAR AS IT DEPENDS ON YOU, LIVE AT PEACE WITH EVERYONE.” (ROM. 12:17-18)

Archbishop Oscar Romero was a stalwart advocate of the poor and oppressed in El Salvador. Romero preached the all-powerful love of Christ, saying,

“AMID HATRED...LET US NOT TIRE OF PREACHING LOVE; IT IS THE FORCE THAT WILL OVERCOME THE WORLD.”(1)

Romans 12:9 says,

“LOVE MUST BE SINCERE. HATE WHAT IS EVIL. CLING TO WHAT IS GOOD.”

Christian engagement in advocating for peace must be compelled by love. As 1 John 4:19 says,

“WE LOVE BECAUSE GOD FIRST LOVED US.”

Might the love that we profess that comes from Christ Jesus be the most powerful force as we seek peace in the Middle East and around the world.

ENDNOTE

(1) Romero, Oscar. *The Violence of Love*. Orbis Books, 2021.



PART 4

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Which of the practices outlined — prayer, lament, solidarity, advocacy, or relationship — feels most natural to you? Which feels most difficult or unfamiliar?
- What might it look like for your faith community to move beyond awareness into sustained engagement with issues of justice, peace, and human dignity?
- How do you hold together love and truth in situations marked by deep injustice and suffering? Where do you feel tension between compassion, conviction, and action?

WAYS TO TAKE ACTION

LEARN (FORM A MORE FAITHFUL IMAGINATION)

- Read this series slowly with others, allowing time for reflection and conversation.
- Listen to voices from the region — Palestinian, Israeli, and especially the local church — whose experiences are often overlooked.
- Examine the theological frameworks you've inherited. Where did they come from, and how have they shaped your understanding of this conflict?

PRAY & LAMENT (REFUSE INDIFFERENCE)

- Pray not only for peace in the abstract, but for the people of the land — Palestinians and Israelis, across religious and cultural lines.
- Incorporate prayers of lament into personal or communal worship, naming suffering, injustice, and grief without rushing to resolution.
- Ask God to cultivate empathy, humility, and discernment as you engage these realities more deeply.

LISTEN & STAND IN SOLIDARITY (DRAW NEAR TO SUFFERING)

- Seek out the voices and witness of Palestinian Christians, whose perspectives are often marginalized in Western churches.
- Make space to hear stories of grief, fear, and loss from multiple communities without immediately trying to resolve or explain them.
- Consider how your church or community might acknowledge and respond to the global church's call for attention, prayer, and action.

ADVOCATE (PURSUE JUSTICE IN PUBLIC LIFE)

- Learn how U.S. policy and global politics impact the realities on the ground, and consider how your voice might contribute to more just outcomes.
- Engage your elected officials with a commitment to human rights, dignity, and the protection of all people in the region.
- Support organizations working toward peace, accountability, and justice, including groups led by those directly affected.

WAYS TO TAKE ACTION, CONT.

PARTNER (JOIN WHAT IS ALREADY HAPPENING)

- Identify and support organizations working for peace, reconciliation, and human rights in Israel and Palestine.
- Explore opportunities to learn from or engage with ministries connected to the region, including educational programs, pilgrimages, or conferences.
- Consider how your church might build ongoing relationships with organizations committed to justice and peacemaking.

PRACTICE PEACE (LIVE IT WHERE YOU ARE)

- Reflect on how fear, division, or dehumanization show up in your own context — and how you are called to respond differently.
- Cultivate practices of neighbor-love, especially toward those you might perceive as “other.”
- Remember that peacemaking is not only global work; it begins in the relationships, communities, and systems closest to you.

REPAIR (COMMIT FOR THE LONG TERM)

- Move beyond one-time engagement toward sustained attention, learning, and action.
- Encourage your church or community to integrate justice, peacemaking, and global awareness into its ongoing life and teaching.
- Ask what it might mean — personally and collectively — to become “repairers of the breach” in a world marked by division and harm.

A PRAYER FOR PEACE, JUSTICE, AND FAITHFUL WITNESS

GOD OF MERCY AND TRUTH,

YOU SEE THE LAND WHERE SO MANY HAVE PRAYED YOUR NAME —
AND WHERE SO MANY NOW LIVE WITH FEAR, GRIEF, AND LONGING.

YOU SEE WHAT WE STRUGGLE TO HOLD TOGETHER:
HISTORIES MARKED BY SUFFERING,
STORIES SHAPED BY LOSS,
LIVES BOUND TOGETHER IN WAYS WE DO NOT FULLY UNDERSTAND.

YOU HEAR THE CRIES WE ARE TEMPTED TO OVERLOOK —
THE ANGUISH OF THOSE DISPLACED FROM HOME,
THE FEAR OF THOSE WHO LONG FOR SAFETY,
THE GRIEF OF PARENTS, THE SILENCE OF THE WORLD,
THE PRAYERS RISING FROM CHURCHES TOO OFTEN IGNORED.

MAKE US A PEOPLE WHO DO NOT TURN AWAY.
GIVE US COURAGE TO EXAMINE WHAT WE BELIEVE
AND HUMILITY TO RECOGNIZE WHERE WE HAVE BEEN MISLED.

GIVE US WISDOM TO READ YOUR WORD WITH CARE —
NOT TO JUSTIFY HARM,
BUT TO SEEK JUSTICE, MERCY, AND TRUTH.

TEACH US TO LOVE BEYOND OUR ASSUMPTIONS.
TO LISTEN BEFORE WE SPEAK.
TO GRIEVE WHAT HAS BEEN LOST.
TO REFUSE EASY ANSWERS THAT COME AT THE COST OF OTHERS

A PRAYER FOR PEACE, JUSTICE, AND FAITHFUL WITNESS, CONT.

WHERE THERE IS DEHUMANIZATION, MAKE US ATTENTIVE.

WHERE THERE IS DIVISION, MAKE US PEACEMAKERS.

WHERE THERE IS INJUSTICE, MAKE US STEADFAST.

WHERE THERE IS SUFFERING, MAKE US PRESENT.

AND IN ALL THINGS, SHAPE US INTO PEOPLE

WHOSE LIVES BEAR GOOD FRUIT.

GIVE US ENDURANCE FOR THE LONG WORK OF REPAIR —

UNTIL JUSTICE AND PEACE ARE NO LONGER DISTANT HOPES,

BUT LIVING REALITIES FOR ALL WHO CALL THAT LAND HOME.

IN THE NAME OF JESUS, THE PRINCE OF PEACE,

AMEN.

AUTHOR



REV. DR. MAE ELISE CANNON

Rev. Dr. Mae Elise Cannon is Executive Director of Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) and is ordained with the Reformed Church in America (RCA). Cannon formerly served as the Senior Director of Advocacy and Outreach for World Vision U.S. on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC; as a consultant to the Middle East for child advocacy issues for Compassion International in Jerusalem; as the Executive Pastor of Hillside Covenant Church located in Walnut Creek, California; and as Director of Development and Transformation for Extension Ministries at Willow Creek Community Church in Barrington, Illinois.

Cannon holds an MDiv from North Park Theological Seminary, an MBA from North Park University's School of Business and Nonprofit Management, and an MA in bioethics from Trinity International University. She received her first doctorate in American History with a minor in Middle Eastern studies at the University of California (Davis), focusing on the history of the American Protestant church in Israel and Palestine, and her second doctorate in Ministry in Spiritual Formation from Northern Theological Seminary.

She is the author of several books, including the award-winning Social Justice Handbook: Small Steps for a Better World, and editor of A Land Full of God: Christian Perspectives on the Holy Land.



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