

STUDY GUIDE:

Faith in the Face of Empire, by Mitri Raheb

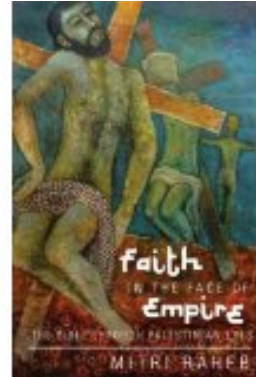
Questions for reading and discussion: the Challenge for North American Christians

For the leader—

THREE-SESSION OPTION:

- 1—Introduction – Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 1-42)
- 2—Chapters 3-6 (pp. 43-84)
- 3—Chapters 7-9 and Epilogue (pp. 85-130)

The study questions are intended for use by participants as they read the book, so be sure to distribute the questions in advance of each session. The questions then form the basis of discussion for each session. Choose questions that you feel will be most interesting to your group.



There are several film clips suggested for each chapter, which may best be used at the beginning of each session. Choose the film that seems the best fit for your group.

Note: At the beginning of Session 2, be sure to show this short (2 minute) video, “/Palestine, a Land in Fragments,” which shows how Palestinian land has been taken for Israeli settlements, roads and the separation wall:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ewF7AXn3dg> If you use the second suggested film clip for Session 2, “The Big Picture,” the “Land in Fragments” segment is included.

FOUR-SESSION OPTION: If you have time for four sessions, you can use this schedule:

1. “The Stones Cry Out” – the story of Palestinian Christians in their own words (56 min.): <http://www.thestonescryoutmovie.com> This film would provide background—and be a good introduction to the study.
2. Introduction – Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 1-42)
3. Chapters 3-6 (pp. 43-84)
4. Chapters 7-9 and Epilogue (pp. 85-130)

Another video resource:

- Dr. Raheb, talking about the book in a lecture at Yale Divinity School: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CMJ49iivAjq> (32 min.)

Books by or about Israelis and Palestinians that can be used for further study:

- *Blood Brothers*, Elias Chacour. Chosen Books, 1984, 2003
- *The General's Son: Journey of an Israeli in Palestine*, by Miko Peled, Just World Books, 2012
- *The Hour of Sunlight*, by Sami al Jundi and Jen Marlowe, Nation Books, 2011
- *The Lemon Tree* Sandy Tolan. Bloomsbury, 2006
- *Toward a Jewish Theology of Liberation*, Marc H. Ellis, 2004

For more resources, see: http://rmselca.org/world/peace_not_walls/

Session 1—read Introduction, Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 1-42)

INTRODUCTION

- List some ways you see the bible as a product of the region we call the Middle East.
- Pastor Raheb reads the bible in his context—the Middle East. How is his reading different from how you usually read the Bible?
- How might “prophetic imagination” speak in your community today? What might a prophet say in your neighborhood or town?

CHAPTER 1: History and the Biblical Story

- How does the Palestinian context shape their view of biblical and church history? How is their view different from yours?
- List three things that surprised you as you read about the history.
- Name one thing you read that you would like to learn more about.

CHAPTER 2: A Prelude to a Palestinian Narrative

- Think about your own family’s roots—what is your narrative? How is it similar to/different from the Palestinian narrative?
- How has this chapter changed your view of “empire”? (Or not changed it?) Is the US an empire?
- What belief/understanding of yours was challenged by this chapter?

FILM CLIP—

- “Love Your Enemies” (11 min) with Daoud Nassar who farms on his land surrounded by Israeli settlements: <http://oregonsynod.org/peace-not-walls/love-your-enemies> (you might want to skip the intro)
- “The Checkpoint” (8 min) with former Israeli soldiers who served at checkpoints <http://oregonsynod.org/peace-not-walls/checkpoint>
- “Seven Keys to Understanding” (10 min): <http://oregonsynod.org/peace-not-walls/keys-to-understanding>

Session 2—read Chapters 3-6 (pp.43-84)

CHAPTER 3: The Geo-Politics of the Middle East

- Ch. 3 speaks of “Religion as the default response to the geo-politics of the region” (p. 45)– how do you see (or not see) this playing out today?

CHAPTER 4: Palestine

- Give a couple of examples of biblical themes of liberation from occupation (p. 53).
- Look up some of the maps referred to in this chapter

CHAPTER 5; The Empire

- Study some maps of Palestine today, showing the checkpoints, wall and areas A,B and C (start with www.ochapt.org, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Occupied Palestine)
- What are some connections between settlements and the other ways Israel controls Palestinians—resources, terror, exile, access to Jerusalem and the Temple/Al Aksa mosque?
- “...both supposedly liberal Western theology and conservative and fundamentalist theology are uncritical of the State of Israel ...choosing to ignore the presence and suffering of the native Palestinian people.” (pp. 65-66). What do you think?

CHAPTER 6: The People of Palestine

- “...the whole New Testament is a collection of narratives that challenge the then-existing exclusive national and religious narratives....it calls people to reflect on the entire process of identification as misleading.” (p. 72) How do you see this? Does Jesus’ message challenge the exclusivity and exceptionalism inherent in our Christian and U.S. identities?
- As a country, who is our neighbor, according to Jesus’ story?
- Read one of the reports from EAPPI (Ecumenical Accompaniment) volunteers in the West Bank: <http://blog.eappi.org>
- Think about the characterizations of biblical groups in this chapter. Identify one new idea you discovered.

FILM CLIP—choose one from the video accompanying the *Steadfast Hope* study guide:

http://www.israelpalestinemissionnetwork.org/main/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=184

- Chapter 1: “A Tale of Two Peoples” – Israelis and Palestinians living on the land (11 min.):
- Chapter 2: “The Big Picture” – understanding Israeli settlements (17 min):

Session 3—read chapters 7-Epilogue (pp. 85-130)

CHAPTER 7: God

- It is easy to identify empire in the bible; the Roman Empire is the classic example of empire. What is the empire today?
- Where does the author find hope? What narrative is the basis for his hope?
- The author says that the failure of governments has led to the rise of fundamentalist religion. What do you think?

CHAPTER 8: Jesus

- Name some ways Jesus interacted with the Roman Empire.
- How does the author propose that faith can dismantle the empire?
- What is the role of community in Jesus' liberating ministry? In the Palestinians' resistance to Israel's occupation?
- How do the ministries of Christmas Lutheran Church—the school, senior programs, university, after-school activities—illustrate the vision of liberation Mitri Raheb has articulated in this chapter?

CHAPTER 9: Spirit

- Given recent attacks sponsored by ISIS and other terrorist groups in the region, how do you feel about the author's comments on war and military solutions on pp. 109-110? And also on "creative resistance" on pp. 120-121?
- How can the Spirit help us to "recover [our] courage and focus again on [our] mission"? (p. 113)

EPILOGUE: Imagination and Hope

- If "peace dictated by the empire is not desirable, doable or durable," then what are some solutions that we might offer to help make peace?
- What are tangible things each of us can do to have an impact on the Palestinian/Israeli crisis?

FILM CLIP—

- "Dar al-Kalima University, Hill of Hope" (6 min):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AGPvkqeyhHA>
- Bright Stars and Diyar ministries of Christmas Lutheran Church (12 min.):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kZ4kXBnkUM4>