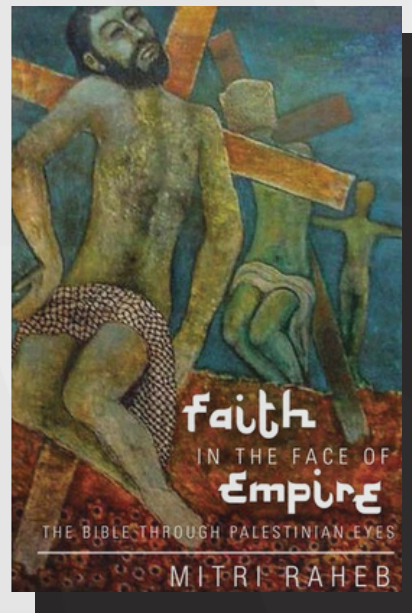


PAGES FOR PROGRESS

Study Guide:

“Faith in the Face of
Empire: The Bible
Through Palestinian Eyes”

Mitri Raheb



Preface

The third cohort of Pages for Progress gathered virtually spring of 2025 for a Lenten study of Mitri Raheb's book, "Faith in the Face of Empire: The Bible Through Palestinian Eyes." When the cohort began, a ceasefire was in place in Gaza, but by the end of our time together, Israel broke the ceasefire with Hamas, and violence returned to the region. It was a reminder of the continuous unrest and its impact on the land and its people.

In the following pages, you'll find an overview of each session along with detailed guidelines. This study guide is designed for use in small groups within your local church, district, annual conference, ecumenical groups, or neighborhood communities. Meetings can be held in person or virtually. Additionally, this guide includes supplementary resources on the topic and practical ways for individuals and groups to take action.

If you have any feedback or questions on this study guide, please email seminars@umcjustice.org, we'd love to hear from you!

This study guide is the result of the thoughtful discussions from the spring 2025 cohort. A heartfelt thanks to everyone in the cohort!

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Structure

Unlike previous Pages for Progress book studies, this book is a work of theology. For this reason, there is no separate theological grounding section as in previous Pages for Progress guides; instead, the theological reflections are woven throughout the discussion questions.

This study is structured into three sessions. Each session is approximately 90 minutes long and features a welcome, communication guidelines, discussion questions, and closing. Additionally, this resource guide includes a section on “Actions Steps to Take for a Just Peace in Israel and Palestine.”

Reading Assignments by Session

Session One: Introduction to Chapter 3

Session Two: Chapter 4 to Chapter 6

Session Three: Chapter 7 to Epilogue

Session Overview

WELCOME

(approximately 10 minutes)

Begin with prayer.

This is also an opportunity to get to know the group and establish communication guidelines. We recommend the [Communication Guidelines](#) created by The Kaleidoscope Institute.

Respectful Communication Guidelines

R take RESPONSIBILITY for what you say and feel without blaming others

E use EMPATHETIC listening

S be SENSITIVE to differences in communication/cultural styles

P PONDER what you hear and feel before you speak

E EXAMINE your own assumptions and perceptions

C keep CONFIDENTIALITY

T TOLERATE ambiguity because we are not here to debate. There are no “winners” or “losers”

S STEP UP/STEP BACK If you notice that you are speaking a lot, step back to create space for others to speak. If you notice that you have much to share but not, take courage and speak up so that others can learn from you. (*Not from Kaleidoscope Institute, but from previous study groups.)

(Source: [The Kleidoscope Institute's “Respectful Communication Guidelines”](#))

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (approximately 1 hour)

Each question is designed to deepen engagement with the assigned readings, exploring the chapter's themes and the social, historical, and political analysis through a faith lens. It is recommended to share the questions in advance, allowing participants time to reflect and develop their responses.

If you have a large group, we recommend breaking up into smaller groups/breakout rooms for the book discussion.

CLOSING (approximately 15 minutes)

Close each session by asking the group to share any insight from their small group discussion (if small groups were used) for the good of the larger group. Or provide time for individual reflection through journaling.

Consider visiting Church and Society's “Take Action” page for the latest opportunities to engage with U.S.

Congressional members on the conflict in the Middle East. Also consider highlighting one or two items in the “Action Steps to Take for a Just Peace in Israel and Palestine” section located at the back of this guide.

End each session with a reminder of the assigned chapters for the following gathering and a benediction.

The cohort ended each session with the benediction given by Bishop Woodie White at the 1996 General Conference in Denver, Colorado. Feel free to close with the benediction by Bishop Woodie White or with another prayer.

Benediction

And now,
May the Lord torment you.

May the Lord keep before you the faces of the hungry, the lonely, the rejected and the despised.

May the Lord afflict you with pain for the hurt, the wounded, the oppressed, the abused, the victims of violence.

May God grace you with agony, a burning thirst for justice and righteousness.

May the Lord give you courage and strength and compassion to make ours a better world, to make your community a better community, to make your church a better church.

And may you do your best to make it so, and after you have done your best, may the Lord grant you peace. Amen.

Sessions

Session One: Introduction to Chapter 3

WELCOME (15 minutes)

Say: Welcome to the first session of Pages for Progress as we read and study, “Faith in the Face of Empire” by Mitri Raheb. Since this is our first gathering, let’s go around and get to know each other. Please share your name and why you decided to join this study.

Pause for a time of sharing.

Pray: God of Justice. We thank you for the opportunity to gather. We thank you for this opportunity for fellowship. We thank you for the conversations that we are to have. May it open our eyes, stir our hearts, and put faith into action. May your Spirit guide us. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

Say: Since this is our first meeting. We will spend a few minutes on communication guidelines to create a safe space for everyone to share and discuss.

Create or introduce Kaleidoscope Institute’s Respectful Communication Guidelines.

BOOK DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (1 hour)

Introduction

Question #1 - In the introduction, Raheb writes, "Prophetic imagination helps us see beyond the current realities, and Christian hope empowers us to move to put a new vision into action." How might prophetic imagination, as described

If you have a large group, break into small groups.

by Raheb, offer a framework for addressing the ongoing situation in Gaza? In what ways can Christian hope inspire tangible actions or solutions in the face of conflict and suffering?

Question #2 - Raheb states in the introduction that the Bible is a product of the Middle East and that he reads it within the context of the region's geopolitics and its people. How does this perspective challenge or expand your understanding of scripture? In what ways might considering the Bible through the context of the Middle East influence your interpretation of its messages and teachings?

Chapter 1

Question #1 - Raheb states, "The one who interprets assumes power; the one who dominates the story makes it his-story, her-story, literally creating history." How do Raheb's concepts of memory—ecclesial amnesia, religious amnesia, and political amnesia—shape biblical narrative and church history? What aspects have been omitted or forgotten over the *longue durée*, and what are the consequences of these omissions for today both in biblical/theological understandings and politically?

Chapter 2

Question #1 - Consider what Raheb details regarding the scholarship of Keith Whitelam, Michael Prior, and Walter Brueggemann that questions the typical discourse of Israel and biblical conquest. How can our faith challenge colonial ideology?

Question #2 - Read the [Kairos Palestine document](#), "[A Moment of Truth](#)," which challenges churches in the West to revisit theologies that justify crimes against Palestinians and dispossession of their land. How can your congregation and community take up this call from Palestinian theologians to stand alongside the oppressed and work toward peace, justice, security, and love for Israelis and Palestinians?

Chapter 3

Question #1 - How does Raheb's rhetorical question—"Middle of where and east of what?"—challenge an empire-centric view of the world? In what ways does this question highlight the "colonial past and imperial present?" How does de-centering dominant geopolitical narratives impact our understanding of history, identity, and biblical interpretation?

Question #2 - Raheb states, "I began to see religion as the default response to the geo-politics of the region." How do you see this dynamic playing out in today's world? In what ways does religion continue to shape political and social responses to geopolitical conflicts? What are the implications of this intersection between faith and politics?

CLOSING (approximately 15 minutes)

Allow participants to share insights and encourage a brief moment of silence after each contribution to let the ideas sink in. Depending on the character of the group, you may continue with the group reflection and skip the individual reflection or provide time for individual reflections.

If divided into small groups, bring the groups back to the main group.

Group Reflection (5 minutes)

Say: I want to thank everyone for the rich discussions we've had today. As we wrap up, let's take a few minutes to hear reflections from today's discussions. Who would like to share any insights or reflections? What stood out to you, and how can that learning be applied to our larger group?

Individual Reflection (5 minutes)

Say: Now, I invite you to take a moment to reflect personally. If you have a journal with you, feel free to jot down any thoughts, questions, or reflections that have come to mind during today's session. What are you taking with you, and how might you carry it forward?"

Offer some quiet time for journaling.

Take Action (2 minutes)

Consider emphasizing one of the following during this closing segment:

1. Visit the Church and Society's "Take Action" page, which provides current opportunities to engage with U.S. Congressional Members regarding the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East.
2. Highlight one or two action items from the "Action Steps to Take for a Just Peace in Israel and Palestine" section at the back of this guide.

Announcements (1 minute)

Say: Before we end, a quick reminder: for our next gathering, please make sure to read Chapters 4 through 6. Here are the questions for our next gathering. If you can, please read the questions before our next meeting and begin to reflect on them.

Closing Benediction (2 minutes)

Close the meeting with the Benediction by Bishop Woodie White (located in "Structure") or a prayer of your choosing.

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Session Two: Chapters 4 - 6

WELCOME (15 minutes)

Say: Welcome to the second session of Pages for Progress!
Let us start with prayer.

You may ask for a volunteer to lead in prayer or use the prayer below.

Pray: God of mercy and justice, we thank you for this time to gather to connect, share, learn, and grow. We ask that you help us to act courageously for justice. Help us to speak honestly in the face of injustice and violence. May your Spirit continue to be with us. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Remind everyone of the Communication Guidelines created during the first session or Eric Law's Respectful Communication Guidelines.

BOOK DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (1 hour)

Chapter 4

Question #1 - Raheb states "liberation from occupation is a central theme throughout history and plays a major role in the bible." What biblical narratives and themes illustrate liberation from occupation, and how do they help us better understand Palestine?

If you have a large group, break into smaller discussion groups.

Question #2 - Consider the biblical accounts of internal fighting and division. What parallels, if any, exist between these narratives of infighting and lack of unity and the current political and social struggles in Palestine and Israel?

Chapter 5

Question #1 - Empires develop similar theologies, policies, and tactics. They inherit policies, refine them, and pass those policies on from one empire to the next." How do practices such as limiting movement, controlling resources, imposing terror, enforcing exile, and restricting access to

religious shrines reflect these recurring tactics in empire-building? What parallels can be drawn between Israel's policies and those of past and current empires?

Question #2 - Raheb argues, "Empires can't survive by their military, political, and economic power and might alone. Rather, the justification of the empire has to be based on a higher logic; the violation of human rights needs to have something akin to divine purpose and to be set within an ideological and theological framework." He suggests that the myth of the Judeo-Christian tradition, particularly within the Christian Right's belief in Israel's role in salvation history, plays a key role in this justification and thus perpetuates the imperial theology. Why do liberal, conservative, and fundamentalist theologies remain uncritical of the state of Israel and maintain a pro-Israeli bias? How does religious ideology influence political stances and the perception of Israel's actions?

Chapter 6

Question #1 - In Chapter 6, Raheb reflects on the question, "Who is my neighbor?" and explores the differences between the Old and New Testaments. He argues that the Old Testament emphasizes the "triangle of God, land, and people," while the New Testament focuses on "reconciling the different groups in the land." How is the concept of a neighbor understood in present-day Palestine, and how should we define neighbors?

Question #2 - Raheb argues that "the state is seen somehow as a logical necessity—but not as the solution." What is his reasoning for why statehood alone is insufficient? What alternative models of coexistence could be envisioned, and why is it challenging to explore new solutions?

CLOSING (15 minutes)

Allow participants to share insights and encourage a brief moment of silence after each contribution to let the ideas sink in. Depending on the character of the group, you may continue with the group reflection and skip the individual reflection or provide time for individual reflections.

If divided into small groups, bring the groups back to the main group.

Group Reflection (5 minutes)

Say: I want to thank everyone for the rich discussions we've had today. As we wrap up, let's take a few minutes to hear reflections from today's discussions. Who would like to share any insights or reflections? What stood out to you, and how can that learning be applied to our larger group?

Individual Reflection (5 minutes)

Say: Now, I invite you to take a moment to reflect personally. If you have a journal with you, feel free to jot down any thoughts, questions, or reflections that have come to mind during today's session. What are you taking with you, and how might you carry it forward?

Offer some quiet time for journaling.

Take Action (2 minutes)

Consider emphasizing one of the following during this closing segment:

1. Visit the Church and Society's "Take Action" page, which provides current opportunities to engage with U.S. Congressional Members regarding the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East.
2. Highlight one or two action items from the "Action Steps to Take for a Just Peace in Israel and Palestine" section at the back of this guide.

Announcements (1 minute)

Say: Before we end, a quick reminder: for our next gathering, please make sure to read Chapter 7

through the Epilogue. Here are the questions for our next gathering. If you can, please read the questions before our next meeting and begin to reflect on them.

Closing Benediction (2 minutes)

Close the meeting with the Benediction by Bishop Woodie White (located in “Structure”) or a prayer of your choosing.

Session Three: Chapter 7 to Epilogue

WELCOME (15 minutes)

Say: Welcome to our third session! Before we begin, let's begin with a word of prayer.

You may ask a participant to lead the group in prayer. If no one volunteers, you may lead the group in your own prayer or open with the prayer below.

Pray: God of Mercy and Justice we invite your Holy Spirit into this space. We ask that you dwell in this fellowship. We ask that you open our eyes and open our ears so that we may come to know more of who you are. Help us to carry the weight of our complicity and responsibility. Help us to remain steadfast in the midst of lament. We thank you for this time. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Remind everyone of the Communication Guidelines created during the first session or the Kaleidoscope Institute's Respectful Communication Guidelines.

BOOK DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (1 hour)

Chapter 7

Question #1 - Hebrew 4:15 states "For we do not have a high priest, who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are." Where does the Raheb find hope? What is the basis of this hope?

Question #2 - In the last paragraph of Chapter 7, it is stated, "The politics of the superpowers in the last two centuries and the failure of international governing bodies in creating a just peace have pushed people to religion." Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not? How have global political dynamics and the shortcomings of international institutions influenced the rise of fundamental religious movements? Can you think of specific historical or contemporary examples where this has been evident?

Chapter 8

Question #1 - In Chapter 8, Raheb writes, "The belief in Jesus as the yearned-for Messiah replaced the idea of divine intervention with direct intervention of the faithful. It was now those believed in Christ who had to step into this world to engage and to bring change to the empire." What are some ways that faith can dismantle the empire? How is resistance an act of faith?

Question #2 - Consider Mark 1:38-39, "Jesus replied, 'Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.'"³⁹ So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons." Raheb argues that Jesus' "program was to go precisely where no politician would ever tread, where no religious leader would ever head, that is, to the villages and remote towns whose names were barely known." Reflect on the ministries in your congregation, do they align with this mission? How are the ministries speaking to the vision that Jesus proclaimed to Palestine?

Chapter 9

Question #1 - How does the story of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13) serve as a counter-narrative to the narrative of empire? In what ways does the Spirit challenge systems of power and control? How might this understanding shape the way we apply this counter-narrative to our understanding of what is happening in the Middle East and within your community?

Question #2 - How does the concept of "creative resistance," as described by Raheb and the Kairos Palestine document, reshape our understanding of nonviolent struggle in the face of oppression? In light of the recent violence in Palestine, what does creative resistance look like for advocates and allies, and how can we engage in meaningful actions that support justice and peace?

Epilogue

Question #1 - In the Epilogue, Raheb quotes Isaiah 65:25, “The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent-its food shall be dust” to envision the new reality of the Middle East. What does this new reality look like in our world today? In what ways can we actively participate in creating a reality that reflects this vision of liberation, both globally and within our own communities?

Question #2 - How can we embody Raheb’s definition of hope as “faith in action in the face of the empire” in our efforts for a just peace in Palestine and Israel? What tangible steps can we take—locally, nationally, and internationally—to advocate for justice, reconciliation, and lasting peace in the region?

CLOSING (15 minutes)

Allow participants to share insights and encourage a brief moment of silence after each contribution to let the ideas sink in. Depending on the character of the group, you may continue with the group reflection and skip the individual reflection or provide time for individual reflections.

If divided into small groups, bring the groups back to the main group.

Group Reflection (5 minutes)

Say: I want to thank everyone for the rich discussions we've had today. As we wrap up, let's take a few minutes to hear reflections from today's discussions. Who would like to share any insights or reflections? What stood out to you, and how can that learning be applied to our larger group?

Individual Reflection (5 minutes)

Say: Now, I invite you to take a moment to reflect personally. If you have a journal with you, feel free to jot down any thoughts, questions, or reflections that have

come to mind during today's session. What are you taking with you, and how might you carry it forward?

Offer some quiet time for journaling.

Take Action (2 minutes)

Consider emphasizing one of the following during this closing segment:

1. Visit the Church and Society's "Take Action" page, which provides current opportunities to engage with U.S. Congressional Members regarding the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East.
2. Highlight one or two action items from the "Action Steps to Take for a Just Peace in Israel and Palestine" section at the back of this guide.

Closing Benediction (2 minutes)

Close the meeting with the Benediction by Bishop Woodie White (located in "Structure") or a prayer of your choosing.

Action Steps to Take for a Just Peace in Israel and Palestine

1. Learn more about the United Methodist Church's call for a just peace in Israel and Palestine:

You can learn more by reading the 2020/2024 Book of Resolutions, #4108, "Opposition to Israeli Settlements on Palestinian Land," which outlines the United Methodist Church's call for peace. The Church opposes occupation, annexation, displacement, and confiscation of Palestinian land and water resources and calls for nonviolent responses and an end to military aid to the region.

2. Read the Kairos Document:

In 2009, Palestinian Christians issued a call to Christians around the world to take decisive action in support of a just peace in the Holy Land. Read the document, "A moment of truth: A word of faith, hope, and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering", and learn more about how you can resist occupation and dispossession in the Holy Land:

<https://www.kairospalestine.ps/index.php/about-kairos/kairos-palestine-document>

3. Educate yourself and your local community on the situation in Israel and Palestine:

Encourage members of your congregation to learn from all perspectives by inviting speakers to church events, reading books, using audiovisual resources in educational forums, and getting information from organizations like United Methodists for Kairos Response (UMKR) at www.kairosresponse.org. UMKR is a movement of thousands of United Methodists in dozens of annual conferences throughout the United Methodist Church, whose goal is to bring about a just peace for Israelis and Palestinians.

4. Participate in non-violent economic measures that will aid in ending the occupation:

The United Methodist Church does not support a boycott of products made in Israel; rather, the opposition is to products made by companies operating in occupied Palestinian territories. Call on companies that profit from or support settlements to stop business that contributes to serious violations of international law, promotes systemic discrimination, or otherwise supports ongoing military occupation or attempted annexation. We also call upon United Methodists to support investments in the Palestinian economy.

5. Join in interfaith activities that will help bring peace to both Palestinians and Israelis:

Reach out to local synagogues, mosques, and Christian faith groups by engaging in interfaith and ecumenical dialogue on nonviolent ways to promote justice and peace in the Holy Land. This includes supporting and participating in the work of international organizations, such as the Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine & Israel and Christian Peacemaker Teams, to provide protection for Palestinians and Israelis seeking nonviolently to end the occupation.

6. Hold discussions on faith and displacement:

The Christian faith has been falsely weaponized to call for displacement, violence, and annexation in the Holy Land. We must defend the Bible from false interpretations, especially from those calling for the persecution, exploitation, and elimination of entire people groups. Hold discussions in your congregations about how our faith stands for peace with justice, utilizing this letter from Friends of Sabeel of North America: <https://www.fosna.org/the-fosna-blog/christian-leaders-and-activists-stand-against-forced-displacement>

7. Advocate to your elected officials to support a just peace in the Holy Land:

Meet with your Representatives and Senators to ask that they support a durable ceasefire, avoiding a regional war,

stopping arms sales to Israel and all military aid to the Middle East, resuming funding to the United Nations Relief Works Agency (UNRWA), ceasing displacement and settler violence, and addressing root causes of violence. The main legislative asks right now for Congress is to support Senator Sanders' Joint Resolutions of Disapproval on arms sales to Israel as well as UNRWA funding restoration. One of the most effective tactics for influencing decision makers is an in-person meeting. You can also call your elected officials at the Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121 or utilize our [action alerts](#) to send an email.

Additional Resource:

United Methodist Resources

- Book of Resolutions, #4108 “Opposition to Israeli Settlements in Palestinian Land”
- Book of Resolutions, #4109 “United Nations Resolutions on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict”
- Book of Resolutions, #4217 “The Church Caring for Palestinian Children”
- Book of Resolutions, #4219 “Addressing Israeli Detention of Children”

Books by Mitri Raheb

- Decolonizing Palestine: The Land, The People, The Bible
- I am a Palestinian Christian
- Bethlehem Besieged
- The Politics of Persecution
- The Cross in Contexts: Suffering Redemption in Palestine
- Sailing Through Troubled Waters: Christianity in the Middle East
- The Intervention of History: A Century of Interplay Between Theology and Politics in Palestine
- Shifting Identities: Changes in the Social, Political, and Religious Structures in the Arab World
- Diaspora and Identity: The Case of Palestine
- Palestinian Christians in the West Bank: Facts, Figures, and Trends
- Bethlehem: A Sociocultural History

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