

Session Three: Theology Matters

Objectives:

- *To highlight the importance of responding to the specific ask of Palestinian Christians to “revisit” our theology as an essential piece in supporting peace with justice in the Holy Land.*
- *To gain a basic understanding of the often implicit theological assumptions that shape Christian attitudes towards Israel.*

Preparation:

- *Participants should read in Kairos Palestine: Authors’ opening statement, Section 2.3-2.5, “Our land has a universal mission” and Section 6.1, “Our word to the Churches of the world”; Kairos USA: Part 2 and Steadfast Hope: pp. 12-14*
- *Facilitator should print out Handouts 3.1-3.3; Handouts 3.1 and 3.2 should have enough copies for everyone to read (perhaps 1 copy per 2 people); make enough copies of 3.3 for each participant to use.*

Welcome (5 min)

- *Read Mark 1:14-15, 21-28:*

“After John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee announcing God’s good news, saying “Now is the KAIROS! Here comes God’s Kingdom! Change your hearts and lives, and trust that this is Good News!”

“Jesus and his followers went into Capernaum. Immediately on the Sabbath Jesus entered the synagogue and start teaching. The people were amazed by his teaching, for he was teaching them with authority, not like the legal experts. Suddenly, there in the synagogue, a person with an evil spirit screamed, ‘What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are. You are the holy one from God.’ ‘Silence!’ Jesus said, speaking harshly to the demon, ‘Come out of him!’ The unclean spirit shook him and screamed, then it came out. Everyone was shaken and questioned among themselves, ‘What’s this? A new teaching with authority! He commands unclean spirits and they obey him!’ Right away the news about him spread throughout the entire region of Galilee.”

Introduction: Why this matters (15 min)

- Both the Kairos Palestine and Kairos USA documents spend significant time discussing Christian theology and the use of Scripture as critically important for Christians like us in the U.S. to study in relation to this conflict. Why?
- *Distribute “**Handout 3:1: Kairos Palestine and Kairos USA Theology**”*
 - *Read aloud these passages (may have participants take turns reading aloud).*
 - *Discuss:*
 - *Why does it matter what sort of theological assumptions we have?*

- Why does it matter how we interpret scripture?
- Where have we seen, in our history and even today, the use of theology and scripture in ways that have harmed people?
- *Summary:*
 - What is at stake here is whether or not we are proclaiming a Gospel that is really Good News for all.
 - What is at stake here is whether or not we are living out a theology that matches what we say we believe. If we proclaim a theology that creates this much suffering and violence in another part of the world, are we really proclaiming what Christianity is about?

Theologies that shape us today (30 min)

- *Opening comments:* Having read in preparation pp.12-14 of Steadfast Hope, let's make sure we understand what these theologies are about.
- In a sense, deicide, supersessionism, and Christian responses to Holocaust theology on the one hand, and Christian Zionism on the other hand, are all Christian theologies that are wrestling with core questions about how Christians and Jews should relate: *(as a group, discuss some or all of these questions below, using the pages from Steadfast Hope as informational starting point)*
 - What to do about the fact that Jesus came and established a new covenant? How does that relate to the one established with Abraham and the ancient Israelites?
 - What to do about the fact that Christianity ended up becoming a separate religion from Judaism, and therefore in competition with it?
 - How to think about the role the Jewish people play in the Christian understanding of salvation?
 - In light of the history of Christian violence against the Jewish people, violence that was supported by our theologies and interpretation of Scripture, what do we need to reject from our tradition?
 - At the same time, what have we rejected or overlooked from our tradition that we need to reclaim as essential to understanding our faith?

Break (10 min)

Theology and the Holy Land (30 min)

All of these questions we've been exploring, which can be discussed and debated in the abstract, became urgently relevant once we focus in on the assumptions about claims to the "Holy Land." Who has a right to this land? How do you support this claim? Are these claims necessarily exclusive—that is, for one group of people only? The entire question of whether Jews, Christians, Muslims and others can share the Holy Land and live in peace turns on how we apply our theological and biblical understandings of God's will for this land to our current context.

- Distribute “**Handout 3.2: Christian Zionism and Replacement Theology.**” This will take you through the readings and discussion questions.

Reflection (25 min)

- *Make a transition to a more reflective space. This may mean moving into a circle of chairs if the group was not already in such a configuration. You may also choose to put in the circle a candle or other object that might mark the space as open to God’s voice and to a spirit of communal support.*
- *Introduce:* We’ve looked at how certain theological assumptions impact how Christians view the current situation in Israel-Palestine. These (religious) assumptions shape – implicitly and explicitly – our country’s political policy towards a secular nation state.
- And while we can see that the theology matters on the scale of global politics, it also matters to us personally.
- Distribute “**Handout 3.3: Personal Worksheet**” and writing utensils.
- *Explain:* Let’s spend a few moments reflecting on how the challenges we’ve explored to these pervasive theological views also challenge us and our own theological perspectives.
- Take a few moments to jot down your own thoughts in response to the following prompts. You will be invited to share from this later, but you do not have to. This is for you.
- *After participants have had about 5-10 minutes to reflect and write, invite those who feel led to share something from what they have written. Introduce by stating that this is a time for people to simply name what they are wrestling with, not a time for engaging in debate or to try and answer others’ questions. The facilitator might choose to use a talking piece or other tools for creating a space for people to name struggles and sit with them prayerfully and in support of each other, regardless of whether they agree with what others are struggling with.*

Closing Prayer (5 min)

- You might re-read the Mark 1 passages listed above.

Total estimated time = 120 minutes