

Praying for Israel and Palestine

Since October 2023 many U.S. campuses have been divided on the issues surrounding the conflict in Israel and Palestine. InterVarsity campus staff and students have asked for a resource to help them bring this situation and the people suffering in it before the Lord in prayer. This is intended to be a starting point.

Our Invitation

Followers of Jesus believe that all people have inherent worth and value as image bearers of Creator God.¹ We are called to seek justice, love mercy, and walk humbly after God as compassionate ministers of reconciliation.² We are to make peace and denounce violence in every instance.³ May you hold fast to these calls as you reflect, pray, and act.

A Wider View

We cannot interact with current events independent of our own faith and context and careful recognition of the importance of historical context. Every person was formed in their mother's womb and reflects the image of God.⁴ That is true for Palestinians and Israelis. Both are worthy of our love, compassion, care, and efforts for peace. Contextually, an important distinction must be made between ethnically Jewish people, their faith, the established state of Israel and its politicians and military. Simultaneously, a distinction must be made between the ethnically Palestinian people, the Christian and Muslim faiths practiced by those populations, and the various governing authorities in Gaza and West Bank including Hamas and the Palestinian Authority. These are different populations as well. All of these people are made in the image of God.

What happened?

Since October 7, 2023, Hamas has [killed ~1400 Israeli civilians](#) and kidnapped approximately 250 people. Hamas was designated as a terrorist group by the United States in 1995. However, they were democratically elected in 2006 to govern the Gaza Strip which is occupied by Israel. In response to this armed assault, Israel declared war on Hamas, with support from the United States. The Israeli Military have killed [nearly 29,000, injured nearly 60,000 people](#), and left [19,000 orphans](#) as of February 19, 2024.

Background

The current conflict between Israel and Palestine is decades long. Any serious conversation must engage both the terrible antisemitism that led to the [Holocaust](#) and the violent deaths and displacement of [750,000 Palestinians in 1948 \(referred to as the Nakba\)](#), and the cycles of disproportionate violence between them over the last 75 years. Israelis and Palestinians struggle today under rising global antisemitism, Islamophobia, and racialized and religious terror between one another and towards them by others. In this conflict, both groups see their existence as under constant, existential threat (for more perspectives on history you can read: [The Road to 1948](#)). For the last several decades, the United States and Western Europe have backed the state of Israel politically, economically, and militarily.

Christian Perspectives

Sincere students of the Bible have different views on its teaching about the role of Israel today. Some connect the modern state of Israel to biblical prophecies, while others disagree. The former, the majority of whom live in the United States, usually support the actions of the present-day state of Israel without reservation. Conversely, the majority of the global Christian church disagrees with this view of Israel and opposes the use of Scripture to justify both the ongoing occupation and the current violence. To learn more about Christian peacemaking in the region, visit [The Telos Group \(@thetelosGroup\)](#) and [The Churches for Middle East Peace \(@ChurchesforMEP\)](#).

¹ Gen 1:27

² Micah 6:8; 2 Cor 5:18

³ Rom 12:18; Matt 5:9

⁴ Ps 139:13; Gen 1:27

Read

"Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone 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. **Do not take revenge**, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord. On the contrary. 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good." - Romans 12:9-21

Reflect

1. What are your initial thoughts and feelings as you review this material and reflect on the news, social media, and other information you have been exposed to?
2. What people and institutions shape your worldview around how you see your faith and this conflict?
3. Romans 12:15 calls us to mourn with those who mourn. What connections can you draw between the discrimination and conflict suffered by your people or those you care about in the United States and those suffering from the conflict in both Palestine and Israel?

Respond

1. **Lament:** God calls us to grieve the enormous loss of human life. [Hamas killed close to 1,200 people and took 212 hostage](#); and the Israeli military has [killed 29,000](#) Palestinians with the death continuing to rise. All of this is atrocious and wrong. Each of the Israelis and each of the Palestinians who have been killed and those suffering now are loved and precious to Our Father. Pray your grief to God. If you have trouble, you can write your own psalm of lament using Psalm 13 as a model.
2. **Intercede:** One way to think of prayer is that we are asking God to make what is into what He always intended it to be. He did not intend for there to be Islamophobia, antisemitism, genocides, terror attacks, airstrikes, and more. Ask God to make things right, bring healing, and send His peace.
3. **Act:** After you pray, talk with your friends and/or faith community about how you can come alongside the Muslim, Jewish, and Christians of Middle Eastern and North African descent. Lovingly confront antisemitism and Islamophobia on campus and do your best to bear witness to the love of Christ through loving and listening to your neighbors.