

THE DIVIDING WALL video study guide

Introduction

Separation wall. Security fence. Segregation zone. Apartheid wall. Palestinians and Israelis have given a variety of names to the walls and fences that the Israeli military has been erecting throughout the occupied territories since the summer of 2002. In Qalqilyah, Jerusalem, and parts of Bethlehem the “fence” is an eight to nine meter concrete wall; in other places it is a zone demarcated by razor wire and/or electric fencing, complete with trenches, patrol roads, trace path for footprints, and cameras. The State of Israel says this barrier is being built for security reasons, to protect its citizens from violent attacks such as suicide bombings. Palestinians, joined by Israeli peace workers, however, view the walls and fences as an attempt to solidify Israel’s control over the land and water resources of the occupied territories.

The separation wall is indisputably a humanitarian disaster for hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, who are being cut off from farmland, water resources, schools, hospitals and family by the barrier. In this video you will encounter Palestinians whose lives have been devastated by the wall. You will also meet Israelis and Palestinians who are working for a future of bridges instead of walls, and will learn about the efforts of Christian aid organizations such as Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), World Vision and Catholic Relief Services to assist communities affected by the wall’s construction.

Almost every day brings news of violence in Israel/Palestine, both in the form of violent death and injury of Palestinians and Israelis alike and in the form of house demolitions and land confiscations. Military closures, curfews and restrictions on movement also mark daily life for Palestinians. The physical, legal and psychological walls that divide Israeli from Palestinian (and Palestinian from Palestinian) become seemingly stronger and higher. How to proclaim and work toward a future of bridges instead of walls? In the shadow of the walls and razor wire, Palestinian and Israeli peacemakers are living out an alternative vision of reconciliation in opposition to the dominant practice of violence, domination and dispossession. Will we join them?

Questions for Discussion

1. What did you know about the separation wall before watching this video? Why do you think Israel is building the wall in the occupied West Bank? Why do Na’ama Nagar, Alex Awad and Nael Salman think the wall is being built? How does this compare with why the State of Israel says it is building the wall?
2. “Good fences make good neighbors,” according to one character in Robert Frost’s poem “Mending Wall.” The narrator of the poem, however, says that “Something there is that doesn’t love a wall.” When do walls and fences make for “good neighbors” or for peace? When do they not? Do you think that the walls and fences Israel is building in the occupied territories are making good neighbors?
3. William and Wafa’ Sahouri describe life as a “nightmare,” since their home is threatened with demolition and they fear being enclosed by the walls and fences of the separation barrier. Have you ever lived with constant anxiety about where you would live or about whether or not you could get to school or work from home because of physical barriers?
4. The prophet Micah speaks of a day when people will sit in security under vine and fig tree (Micah 4:4). What are the sources of insecurity for people like Assam, Rami, Na’ama and Abdel-Latif? What would it mean for them to live in security today? What are the sources of insecurity in your community? What would need to change in order for there to be security?
5. What walls — physical, legal, psychological — do our communities erect that harm or dispossess others? What barriers do we build that serve as obstacles to reconciliation?
6. In a context of ongoing violence, land confiscation, and walls and fences that cut people off from jobs, school, family and health care, how should Christians work for peace?
7. Assam, the farmer from Jayyous, says that he relates to his land as one of his children. Do you own land? How do you relate to land? What are some biblical images for our relationship to land? What are some biblical resources for grappling with the gift of land and the pain of exile from one’s land?
8. Both Israeli Jews and Palestinians have strong attachments to Jerusalem — spiritual, social, economic and political. The wall, however, is separating Palestinians in Jerusalem from Palestinians outside of Jerusalem and in some cases is dividing Palestinian neighborhoods of Jerusalem from each other. Can such a wall make for peace?

For Further Action, Study and Reflection

Pope John Paul II and other Christian leaders, from Protestant to Orthodox, have spoken of the Holy Land's need for bridges instead of walls. Have Christian education classes think of artistic ways to show a future of bridges triumphing over a future of walls. Contact MCC's offices in Washington, D.C., or Ottawa, Ontario, for ideas about how to share these artistic visions with your elected officials. [See last page for contact information.]

MCC belongs to Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP), a coalition of churches and church-related organizations that works for a future of justice and peace for Palestinians and Israelis alike. Look on the CMEP Web site for ideas about how to urge your government to work for justice, peace and reconciliation in Israel/Palestine.

Plan a Sunday of prayer and advocacy at your church focusing on Israel/Palestine. Include prayers for Palestinians and Israelis — for their security, freedom from violence and future of peace and reconciliation. Contact MCC's offices in Ottawa and Washington, D.C., for ways to communicate your congregation's prayers and hopes for peace, justice and reconciliation in Israel/Palestine with government officials.

Throughout Scripture, land is described as a gift from God. Explore the different strands of the Bible's approach to land. What responsibilities and obligations come with the gift of land? Is God's gift of land only for one people?

The writer of Ephesians presents a vision of reconciliation in which Jesus Christ destroys the "dividing wall of hostility." Read commentaries on Ephesians — such as Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld's volume in the Believers Church commentary series (Herald Press 2002) — and learn more about the epistle's understanding of reconciliation. Is the reconciliation we find in Christ individual, or is it also corporate?

Recommended Resources

Videos

Stuck with the Truth. Produced by Canadian Friends of Sabeel in 2002. Palestinian Christians speak of the reality of Israeli occupation. Available from all MCC offices.

Walking the Path Jesus Walked. Produced by MCC in 2002. Hear Christians from Syria, Palestine and Egypt share their faith, and learn about the enduring, vibrant witness of the historic Christian churches of the Middle East.

Books

Ateek, Naim Stifan. *Justice and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation*. Orbis Books, 1989.

Burge, Gary. *Whose Land? Whose Promise? What Christians are Not Being Told about Israel and the Palestinians*. The Pilgrim Press, 2003.

Carey, Roane and Jonathan Shainin, eds. *The Other Israel: Voices of Refusal and Dissent*. The Free Press, 2004.

Halper, Jeff. *Obstacles to Peace: A Re-Framing of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict*. ICAHD, 2004.

Pappe, Ilan. *A History of Modern Palestine: One Land,*

Two Peoples. Cambridge University Press, 2003.
Shlaim, Avi. *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*. W.W. Norton & Company, 2001.

Organizations

Stop the Wall (www.stophthewall.org): Photos, narratives, case studies, maps and fact sheets concerning the separation wall and its impact on Palestinian communities.

Applied Research Institute-Jerusalem (www.arij.org): Timely case studies of Israeli settlement activity and wall construction from the leading Palestinian research institute focusing on natural resources use. Excellent resource for maps of the wall and of Israeli settlement expansion.

Israeli-Palestinian Bereaved Families for Peace (www.theparentscircle.org): A joint Israeli-Palestinian initiative spearheaded by families of people killed in the conflict.

Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (www.icahd.org): MCC partner organization leading the Israeli campaign against the separation wall.

Churches for Middle East Peace (www.cme.org): This ecumenical coalition, of which MCC is a member, provides regular suggestions for how to advocate for justice, peace and reconciliation in Israel/Palestine.

More Resources

Middle East Resource Box for children. Produced by MCC. One part of the box presents the West Bank, with stories and photos of present-day Palestinian children. Also includes a curriculum about Iraq.

A Middle East Reader is a booklet produced by MCC which gives basic information on the Middle East, its religions, major political players and conflicts.

Sisters, Friends — Middle East Reader on Women is a booklet produced by MCC that introduces Middle Eastern women with a kaleidoscope of stories. The stories, written by MCC women, describe their encounters with Middle Eastern women, women much like themselves who have become their friends.

Constantinianism, Zionism, Diaspora: Toward a Political Theology of Exile and Return, MCC Occasional Paper #28, by Alain Epp Weaver.

MCC Contact Information

MCC Canada Ottawa Office
803-63 Sparks St.
Ottawa, ON K1P 5A6
Tel.: (613) 238-7224
E-mail: assistant_ottawa@mennonitecc.ca

MCC U.S. Washington Office
110 Maryland Ave., NE Suite 502
Washington, DC 20002
Tel.: (202) 544-6564
E-mail: mccwash@mcc.org