

EXILE



Salt of the Earth: Palestinian Christians in the Northern West Bank

Study Guide (leader version)

<http://www.saltfilms.net>

Summary: This session addresses ideas of home and exile. We will meet Yvonne, who shares her memories of losing her family home in Haifa.

Supplies: Everyone should have a Bible. Bring blank paper, markers (and other art supplies as desired), and copies of this session's student guide. If you have a wall map, find and mark Haifa, Burqin, and Zababdeh on it.

3 *Prayer and introduction*

min Greet everyone. If your class is following the Daily Walk, you may invite people to share reflections they may have from last week. Hand out the student guides and blank sheets of paper as you introduce today's study: *Today, we will meet Yvonne, who shares her memories of losing her family home in Haifa (HIGH-fa). We will struggle with the meaning of home.* If you have a map, you may point out the locations of Haifa, Burqin (bur-KEEN), and Zababdeh (za-BAHB-deh). Invite someone to open the session in prayer or use the sample prayer at right.

Sample Prayer
Merciful Lord, open our hearts and minds to you. Move and shape us with your word and love. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

10 *Question*

min Invite students to think quietly about what "home" and "homeland" mean to them and to write or draw their thoughts and feelings on the blank sheet of paper.

5 *Scripture*

min Introduce the first reading: *Psalm 137 expresses the shock and agony of a people who have lost their homes, their homeland, and their holy city.*

Invite someone to read aloud Psalm 137: 1-6.

Introduce the second reading: *This passage in Hebrews encourages people who have been persecuted for their faith in Christ to look to a heavenly and not an earthly home.*

Invite someone else to read aloud Hebrews 11: 13-16.

Leader Notes Psalm
In 587 B.C., the Babylonian army sacked Jerusalem and took the Israelites into captivity. This psalm expresses the people's agony and grief of losing their homeland and holy city.

Leader Notes Hebrews
This letter is addressed to people who have known persecution, imprisonment, and loss of property because of their faith (10:32-34). They are encouraged to continued endurance in their faith, surrounded by a cloud of witnesses—faithful people who have gone before. The promise and homeland they sought, and that we are to seek, are not of this earth but rather of heavenly nature.

20
min

Film
Show “Exile”
segment of the
film.

Leader Notes film

After an opening scene of Jenin Refugee Camp, we see Yvonne and her family playing music. She is playing the drum, or *tabla*, her older son Marwan is playing the violin, and the younger son is playing the *oud*, a traditional stringed instrument.

Yvonne lives in Zababdeh, a predominantly Christian town near Jenin. As she shows family photos to her grandchildren, she remembers her childhood in a part of Haifa with Arab, Jewish, British, and German residents. Fearing the violence of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, her family left their home and most of their belongings, entrusted the house key to their Jewish neighbor, and went to Yvonne’s grandparents’ town of Burqin until it was safe to return. After the war, Burqin was in the Jordanian-controlled West Bank, and Haifa was in the new state of Israel. Yvonne and her family, like 750,000 Palestinians who fled or were forced from their homes, were not allowed to return to their homes in Israel. Not all Palestinians left land that became Israel; approximately 150,000 remained (like Yvonne’s cousin’s family) and were granted Israeli citizenship in 1966. Often called “Arab Israelis,” these people and their offspring are 20% of Israel’s population.

Yvonne tries to go from Zababdeh to Burqin, 8 miles away. To restrict Palestinian movement within the West Bank, the main road was destroyed in 2001, so she takes a roundabout route, which has been blocked by an earthen mound. She chides a man on the road, asserting that people should remove the mound and refuse to be penned in by the military. The man says they must take a long detour through Jubriat to get to Burqin.

In Burqin, they go to the family that keeps the key to the Orthodox church. The pajama-clad couple urges them to have coffee. They agree to coffee after visiting the church, which is revered as the site where Jesus healed the ten lepers in Luke 17. Yvonne says lepers lived in the cave, and food was passed down to them through a hole, still visible in the church. She asks about the oil (olive oil used for the lamps) she had requested for her recently operated-on eye. She explains that the church, where her grandfather had been priest, remains a place of healing and miracle through God’s power. She prays as she stands in front of the altar and finishes by kissing an icon of Jesus with Mary.

Sharing coffee afterwards, Yvonne talks about how she felt as a child during the war. She and her family feared they would be slaughtered by Zionist forces. She says it felt like they were being invaded by people who wanted to take their land and homes and kill them. (Such fears among Palestinians were multiplied by reports, and exaggerations, of massacres, notably Deir Yassin in which approximately 100 civilians were killed by the Irgun and Lehi, two Zionist paramilitary groups.) Yvonne’s family took refuge in the church, where they stayed and prayed for protection. The real meaning of the miracles of the church in Burqin, according to her, is that God hears prayer. Yvonne says they had to start over after the war from nothing. And referring to the ensuing years of conflict and occupation, Yvonne jokes that every ten years, Israel comes and zeroes out the odometer, forcing people to start from zero again: “The car keeps running until the odometer hits zero again. Then we change it and move on to the next place.”

Leader notes film continued

Yvonne wants to go to Haifa to receive treatment for her eye, visit her relatives, and look at her old home. To get permission, she goes to the Israeli military's District Coordinating Office (DCO) at Salem Military Camp, the arbiter of all requests from Jenin District residents to travel between West Bank districts, leave the West Bank, or go to Jerusalem. Prior to the current, particularly violent conflict which began in September 2000, most such permissions were unnecessary or relatively accessible. This footage is less clear because it was taken with a hidden camera. The camp is undergoing construction related to the Separation Barrier, and she has difficulty finding the path. To enter the camp, she and others negotiate a crumbling path bordering a six-foot-deep trench. They enter by holding onto the fence to keep from falling and then swinging themselves in. After an initial ID check, she proceeds to the waiting area. Not shown in the film is the waiting area, with lines for purchasing magnetic IDs, getting travel permissions, and for families and lawyers of prisoners held there. After seven hot hours, Yvonne is told her documents are incomplete and she is refused permission. She does not try again.

Later, Yvonne talks on the phone with her cousin's daughter in Haifa, and describes the trip to Salem Camp. She tells her she was refused permission, but that the filmmakers want to come anyway to see her old home. In Haifa, Yvonne's cousin, her husband, and her daughter, who are Arab Israelis, go to the old family home. On the street, Yvonne's cousin says that her aunt (who fled Haifa and became a refugee in Jordan) was allowed to visit Haifa and recognized the family home from the two olive trees in front. They walk around the old home, which has been built upon and around over the years. A child from a neighboring home comes out to ask in Hebrew what is happening.

Yvonne's son Marwan deliberates about whether to leave or stay in Palestine. All his life has been in wars; he jokes that it has made him an old man, turning his hair white. He has been to the US twice. Footage from his recent trip to California was taken by him and his family there. He shares the difficult situation that many Palestinians find themselves in: he does not want to leave—he'd prefer to stay in his homeland. But as the situation continues to deteriorate, people will continue to leave.

15 Questions

min In groups of 2 to 4, discuss:

1) *Have you ever felt like Yvonne? Like the psalmist? What did it or would it feel like to lose your home?*

2) *What does it mean that, as Christians, our homeland is a heavenly one? How then should we treat our homes, others' homes, and the rest of the world we live in?*

4 Closing and prayer

min Solicit prayer concerns from the group and close in prayer, using your own or the sample prayer at right. Remind group of Daily Walk opportunities and plans for the next meeting.

Sample prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, we pray for refugees, for the homeless, and all who feel alienated from your love and care. May your grace surround them and may we all find our place in your kingdom. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

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| <h2>Daily Walk</h2> <p>An invitation to daily prayer and witness</p> | |
| <p>Daily Prayer: <i>Frame your daily walk with this series in prayer—feel free to use your own prayer or the one provided:</i></p> <p>Merciful Lord, restore us to yourself; renew and reconcile us. Let your grace stream over this world, that those who feel as orphans and homeless may find hope and refuge in you. In Christ's name I pray. Amen.</p> | <p>Daily Action: Available online: http://www.saltfilms.net/guides/exile-student.pdf</p> <p>Day 1) <i>Read Scripture:</i> Lamentations 5.</p> <p>Day 2) <i>Hear from a Holy Land Christian:</i> Selections from Fr. Elias Chacour's book <i>Blood Brothers</i>, which covers his childhood growing up in Biram (a town in the Galilee), Biram's depopulation and destruction, his development into a young man, and early years as a Melkite priest. (Fr. Chacour was named Archbishop of Galilee in February, 2006.) http://www.meei.org/who/bookBB.pdf</p> <p>Day 3) <i>Learn more:</i> Facts and figures about Palestinian refugees from Badil Resource Center for Palestinian Residency & Refugee Rights. http://www.badil.org/Refugees/facts&figures.htm</p> <p>Day 4) <i>Be inspired:</i> Israeli group Zochrot helps Jewish Israelis hear Palestinian stories of loss. http://www.nakbainhebrew.org/index.php?id=390</p> <p>Day 5) <i>Share:</i> Take time to tell someone new about how you've been moved this week by this Study Series. Invite him/her to pray with you.</p> <p>Day 6) <i>Act:</i> Help meet the needs and show hospitality to refugees. http://www.churchworldservice.org/Immigration/</p> |