

Leader's Guide for Syria: The Burden of Memory and The Hope of the Gospel.

Week One of Four

Part I, A, B, and C summarize the impact of decisions following World War I as the Ottoman Empire collapsed and countries were “mandated” by the League of Nations to the occupying forces of Great Britain and France. Important actions included the Balfour Declaration of 1917, the Sykes-Picot agreement, and the creation of the state of Israel. Also included is the history of the Church in Syria.

Begin or end with the singing of the hymn at the end of Part III (found in the hymnal *Glory to God*, page 372). Optional: Hymns 346: For the Healing of the Nations, or Hymn 340: This Is My Song.

Questions for discussion:

1. How do you understand the impact of the experience of colonialism on an occupied country? One commentator said it left a residue of conflict and suspicion between different segments of society; later leaders seeking to form a nation have struggled to find a way of uniting the countries in any way other than through force. Does this help you to understand the Middle East?
2. Baathism is the governing system followed by Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. How does it differ from Baathism inside Iraq?
3. How has the approach used by the PC(USA) for foreign missions changed? What are the challenges of doing mission in Syria?
4. What have been the challenges facing the Christian church in Syria over the centuries and even today, as a faithful minority in a Muslim-majority country?

5. How does the establishment of the caliphate in Syria compare with our Protestant belief that “church and state” should operate separately? How would a Christian theocracy endanger the church?
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The following hymn reminds us of how far our present world is from what God wants. Yet this is not just wishful thinking; it is a call to action, a summons to participate in the fulfillment of God’s desire for all earth’s people to live in radical peace.

O For a World

*O for a world where everyone respects each other's ways,
Where love is lived and all is done with justice and with praise.*

*O for a world where goods are shared and misery relieved,
where truth is spoken, children spared, equality achieved.*

*We welcome one world family and struggle with each choice
that opens us to unity and gives our vision voice.*

*The poor are rich, the weak are strong; the foolish ones are wise.
Tell all who mourn: outcasts belong, who perishes will rise.*

*O for a world preparing for God's glorious reign of peace,
where time and tears will be no more, and all but love will cease.*

Hymn number 372, *Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013.

The text is by Miriam Therese Williams, 1987; the music by Carl Gotthelf Glaser, 1828; it was arranged by Lowell Mason, 1839.