

Israel, Palestine, the gospel, and peace-making

No part of the world demonstrates more the desperate need for the reconciliation that comes through Christ. Many Israelis and many Palestinians regard this small corner of the planet (and Jerusalem in particular) as theirs alone and see the fight as a holy war. Through the centuries, no city has been contested more than Jerusalem.



Israel, which has occupied Palestine since 1967, is home to 8.5 million people. In the Palestinian areas (the West Bank and Gaza Strip), five million people squeeze into an area 1/3rd the size of Israel.

Israel is 75% Jewish, 17% Muslim and 2% Christian. Palestine is 88% Muslim, 9% Jewish and also 2% Christian.

Jewish and Palestinian diasporas

About half of all Jewish people live outside Israel, mostly in the USA. Their numbers are falling through low birthrate, emigration to Israel, mixed marriages, secularism and conversion to other religions.

The Palestinian diaspora (nearly two-thirds of all Palestinians) has lived in refugee camps for generations, especially in Jordan and Lebanon.

Pray for the Jewish people. The numbers of them turning to Christ are increasing. Some join 'Messianic' (culturally more

Jewish) congregations; many more belong to mainstream Christian churches. Many groups in Israel - the ultra-orthodox, Soviet Jews, Ethiopian Jews, Arabs and Druze, as well as children and young people - remain little reached by the gospel.

Pray for the Palestinian people in their almost hopeless situation. Few have the opportunity to discover the gospel. Palestinian Christians themselves are isolated and ignored even by the thousands of Christian tourists to Israel. Their numbers are falling through emigration. Yet thousands remain, tenacious witnesses to Christ.

Pray for reconciliation. A quiet revolution in relationships between Jewish and Arab Christians, despite their vastly different backgrounds and historical enmity, is demonstrating how Christ can break down the walls that divide. Pray for a wider, Christ-centred reconciliation between Jew, Arab, Muslim and Christian after centuries of hurt.



The ancient land of Iraq, a birthplace of civilisation, (current population 39 million people) has been a patchwork of competing forces since the US-led ousting of former strongman Saddam Hussein in 2003. Governments in this largely Muslim land have been mostly Shia-led but have struggled to rebuild the country in the face of corruption, division and sectarian violence. Most Iraqi families have experienced trauma.

Iraq's traditional Christian community is a survivor from the 1st century. Its many sufferings, and particularly the rise of the 'Islamic State' led many to flee. With the defeat of IS, traditional Christians are returning to their villages on the Nineveh Plain. Iraq's instability continues to threaten their safety, though, especially at the hands of other Islamist groups.

Out of the conflict, an Iraqi evangelical church has also emerged, perhaps 50,000 strong, a dramatic increase since the few hundreds of evangelicals in Saddam Hussein's time. Many of them have Muslim or even extremist backgrounds. They encountered Christ through evangelical witness, gospel radio, and especially through visions and dreams of Jesus.

Unreached peoples in Iraq are many: the Shia Arabs of the south, the Marsh Arabs (who are possibly descendants of the ancient Sumerians), and the more than one million Bedouin.

- Pray for leaders for the churches. Some male leaders have been killed, targeted by Islamists. Many times their widows have continued with the pastoral and discipleship work.
- The Kurdish people live mostly in their autonomous region within Iraq. Kurds too have seen the birth and growth of an evangelical church, a first for their people. Praise God for this movement to Christ and pray for it to deepen and widen.
- Iraq has suffered years of war, invasion, corruption and violence. Iraqis have seen the destruction of the basic infrastructure that underpins civilisation. 'Liberation' has not liberated them. Pray for the healing of the nation.