

ASCENT TO JERUSALEM

Pilgrimage, Politics, and Peacemaking in the Holy Land

The People of the Land

2. Palestinian Christians

Psalm 122 (*A Song of Ascents*)

¹ I was glad when they said to me, “Let us go to the house of the Lord!”

² Our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem.

a. Distracted pilgrims

Your first visit to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre will be bewildering. Perhaps even disappointing. Western Protestants want the places where their Lord was crucified and rose again to feel holy, transcendent, authentic. We’ve read [our Bibles](#) so we imagine the crucifixion on a rocky hilltop maybe shaped like a skull, and we know that Jesus was buried in a garden and that his tomb had a rolling stone.

What we *don’t* expect, or want, is an ornate overlay of marble slabs, shiny mosaics, and giant candlesticks adorning an inscrutable maze of colonnades and chapels. Rather than smoldering incense we prefer the scent of morning dew. Give us *pure* history please, rather than time-damaged tradition.

That is why, when we cross an ocean in our Jesus quest, we find ourselves out of place in parades of cross-bearing pilgrims, led by brown-clad, chanting Franciscans, with Orthodox monks doing crowd control. No surprise that so many Protestants love to worship at the cultured British **Garden Tomb**, an evocative site north of the Old City that was not heralded as Golgotha until the 19th century—the day before yesterday in Middle East time. It is a spiritual oasis. Archaeologists have shown that Jesus wasn’t crucified there, to which one might reply: but he *should* have been!

b. Christian Holy of Holies

What if we beheld centuries of embellishment and overlay not as an annoying distraction but as a reminder—as mementos left behind by pilgrims whose peculiar processions with candle and cross preserved the faith for those who would follow? What difference would that make?

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre, dating back to the 4th century, remains our best (and only serious) candidate for the actual site of Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection. According to Eusebius, Emperor Constantine resolved “to render the blessed locality of our Saviour’s resurrection an object of attraction and veneration to all,” ([Life of Constantine, Book III](#)) by removing a pagan Temple, uncovering “the most holy cave” and erecting over the spot a most glorious monument. Constantine’s church was in fact much larger than what we see today. Thus began the Golden Age of Christian pilgrimage.

Over the centuries, this church survived Persian assault (614), Fatimid destruction (1009), Crusader reconstruction (1149), fires (1808, 1949), earthquake (1927) and, of course, the footfalls of countless pilgrims. All of which makes it wondrously confusing to explore—a transcript of sacred history, full of stories and secrets.

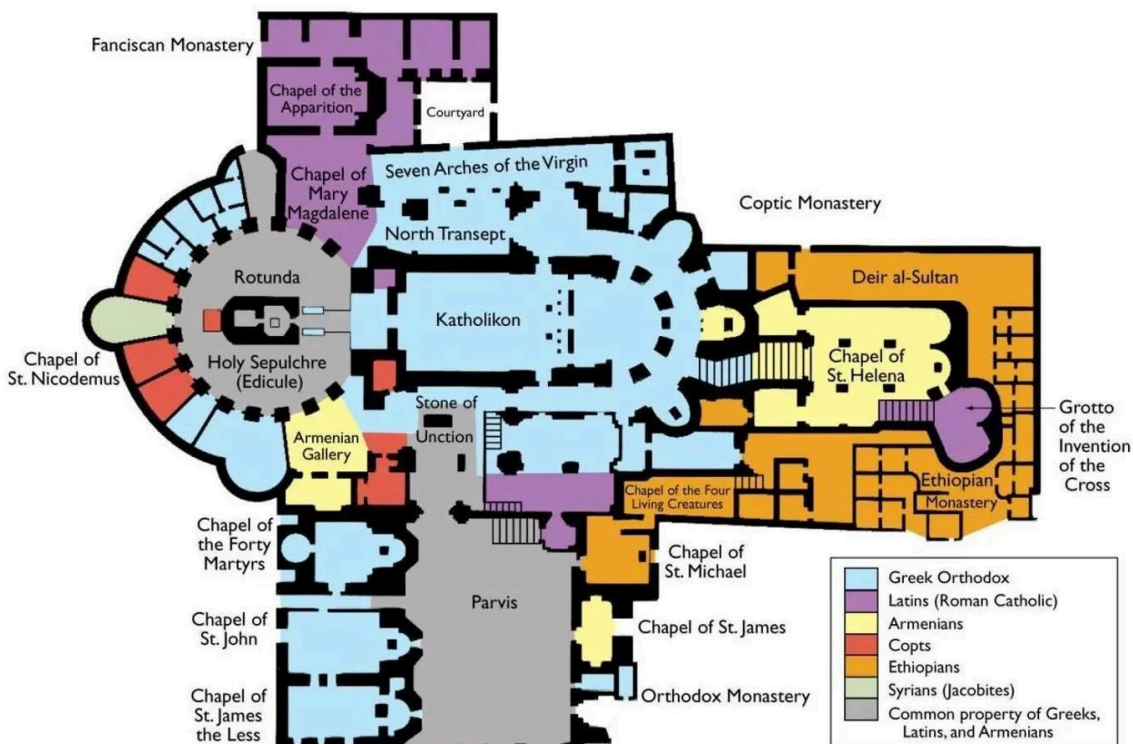
This is the only church in the world where first-century Herodian, second-century Hadrianic, fourth-century Constantinian, eleventh-century Byzantine, twelfth-century Crusader, nineteenth century neo-Byzantine, and twentieth-century modern masonry are visible in one place. The church is not only a monument to the culminating events of the Gospels but also a record in stone of the Christian saga.

Raymond Cohen, *Saving the Holy Sepulchre* (2008), 3.

c. Who's in charge?

One of those secrets is about who is in charge. As it turns out, authority over the church is distributed across six (*six!*) different Christian denominations, each of whom knows exactly which parts are theirs, and when they can hold services. This strict distribution of space and time, called the *Status Quo*, goes back to 1852 when an Ottoman Sultan granted jurisdiction to the three dominant traditions: **Greek Orthodox**, **Armenian Orthodox** and **Latin** (or **Roman Catholic**). In the years since, three smaller Eastern churches have gained their own slices of the pie: the **Coptic**, the **Syrian**, and the **Ethiopian Orthodox**. Hovering over these six ecclesial authorities is the **Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan** which, since 1924, maintains custodianship of Jerusalem's holy sites.

Church of the Holy Sepulchre



(Mapsontheweb)

Sadly, partisan rivalry under this shared roof is not uncommon. As Dominican scholar Jerome Murphy-O'Connor says: "the frailty of humanity is nowhere more apparent than here." (*The Holy Land: An Archeological Guide from Earliest Times to 1700*, 2008)

Conflicts can erupt for the silliest of reasons, like stair-sweeping, flag-bearing and ladder-moving—whatever might threaten the precarious *Status Quo*.

[Holding The Key: Jerusalem's Church of the Holy Sepulchre](#)

Video Transcript:

"At the very place where many Christians believe Jesus Christ was crucified and then resurrected, now stands the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Shared by six denominations, it is a church riven by a confusing and complex series of spiritual battles placing it at the very heart of the Middle East. However, the church's gatekeeper is not a Christian; members of a Muslim family have locked and unlocked the Holy Sepulchre's front door every day for the last 800 years. In this 2007 film, Al Jazeera explores the background to this unusual story and how it reflects the meeting of a wide range of people despite their religious differences. February 25, 2018: In a rare move, the church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem has been indefinitely closed in protest against what church leaders say is "discriminatory" Israeli policy aimed at weakening Christian presence in the holy city. Church leaders said Israel was violating the status quo at the site, which is one of the holiest in Christianity, at an "unprecedented level". Holding The Key was first broadcast on Al Jazeera English in February 2007." (Al Jazeera Feature Documentary)

But not all grievances are trivial. In the 11th century Rome's Crusaders, on arrival in Jerusalem, set up a *Latin* Patriarch to displace the *Greek*, a situation that Muslim conqueror Saladin reversed when he overtook Jerusalem 88 years later. In 1856, the Greeks and Armenians came to blows during the ceremony of the Holy Fire on Easter Saturday. Painful memories linger.

Tempting as it might be to focus on inhouse drama and petty territorialism, we should instead be marveling at the longevity and diversity of Christianity in the Land since the days of the apostles. And we should be seeking ways to support these sisters and brothers who are doubly vulnerable, caught between hammer and anvil, as we shall see.

d. Wait, there are Christians in the Holy Land?

Some express surprise to learn there are any Christians living in the Holy Land *at all*, since the media often portray the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict as a religious standoff between Muslims and Jews. Others assume, incorrectly, that Middle Eastern Christians are relative latecomers, converted recently from Islam by missionaries from the west.

Jesus' first disciples were all Jewish, as were the 3,000 who joined the movement on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-47), some of them only in town for the festival.

THE NATIONS OF PENTECOST ACTS 2:9-11

© Mark Barry 2009 | visualunit.me | Please do not republish without permission, but feel free to copy for personal use.



[The Nations of Pentecost \(updated\) | VISUAL UNIT](#)

But there were signs from the beginning that the Jesus movement would go global. Early in the book of Acts, an Ethiopian court official responds to Philip's teaching (Acts 8:26-40). Likewise Cornelius, the God-fearing Roman centurion, accepts Peter's message (Acts 10:1-48). And although Paul would seek out local synagogues in each town he visited (Acts 3:5, 14:14; 16:13; 17:1, 10, 17; 18:4; 19:8; 28:17), he proclaimed his gospel to Gentiles as well as Jews. With the success of the apostles' Gentile mission across the Mediterranean, Jesus' surging band of loyalists would begin to look more like a new, non-Jewish religion than a messianic sect within Judaism.

The conversion of Roman Emperor Constantine in the 4th century meant the end of persecution and the beginning of Christendom. Most Westerners focus on the church's westward, Rome-ward expansion. But we should not ignore parallel movements east into regions like Mesopotamia, today's Iraq and Iran, where the churches, monasteries, scholarship and spirituality rivaled the Christianity of Europe through the late Middle Ages.

Likewise waves of migrants from the Arabian peninsula converted to Christianity, long before the rise of Islam. Indeed, as Baylor historian Philip Jenkins has observed, "if we are ever tempted to speculate on what the early church might have looked like if it had developed independently, avoiding the mixed blessing of its alliance with Roman state power, *we have but to look east.*"

(Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity*, 2009)

Over the centuries, Middle Eastern Christianity has surmounted countless obstacles: imperial hostility, doctrinal division, the spread of Islam, European Crusades, Mongol raids, Ottoman subjugation, two World Wars, the Palestinian refugee crises of 1948 and

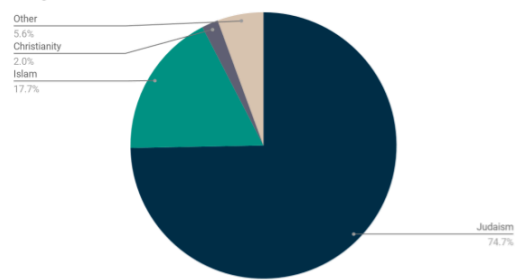
1967, and waves of emigration. In the war of 1948 alone, 35% of Palestinian Christians lost everything; in a few months the percent of Christians in Palestine dropped from 8% to 2.8% (Mitri Raheb, *The Politics of Persecution*, 2021, 88).

In spite of so many upheavals, many Christians in the Land today have hardy, ancient roots, even if others have arrived more recently. Sadly, for many of us in the West their faces are unfamiliar; their stories are unknown.

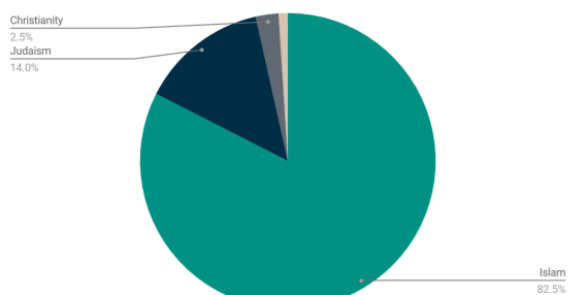
MEET THE PALESTINIAN CHRISTIANS



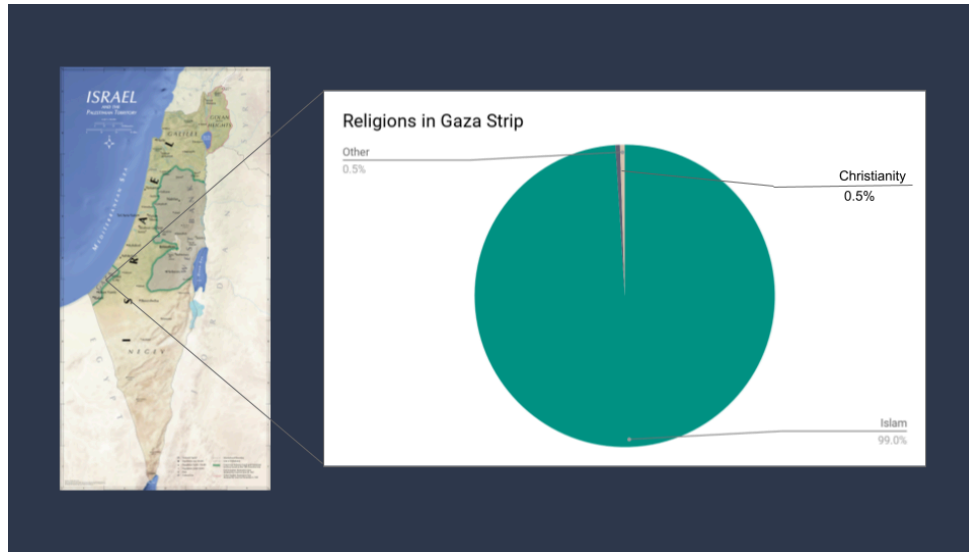
Religions in Israel



Religions in West Bank



Note that Judaism in the West Bank is a result of Israeli settlement, which violates the Fourth Geneva Convention



e. Big Fat Greek . . . Orthodox

Worldwide today 250 million Christians identify as **Orthodox**, a fraternity of communions—Greek, Armenian, Russian, Syrian, Coptic, etc.—each with its own Patriarch but all sharing an ancient theology marked by mystery and ritual. To enter an Orthodox church is to cross a threshold, to depart from normal time, as poet John Betjeman reminds us in his poem, “Greek Orthodox” in *A Few Late Chrysanthemums* (John Murray, 1954):

*The domed interior swallows up the day.
Here, where to light a candle is to pray,
The candle flame shows up the almond eyes
Of local saints who view with no surprise
Their martyrdoms depicted upon walls
On which the filtered daylight faintly falls.*

When Orthodox Christians gather, services run long (by Western standards). Congregants come and go, move about freely, cross themselves, kiss stuff and each other, bow and share the bread of communion. Every move in the liturgy is symbolic. Every icon and fresco brings heaven to earth. All is sacred. Cycles of feast and fast mark the calendar and, when there’s a baptism, a wedding, a funeral, the whole village shows up in solidarity.

Back in the Holy Sepulchre church, **Greek Orthodox** monks control more space than any other group. Perhaps this makes sense, since about half of all Christians in the Palestinian territories are **Greek Orthodox**. Their monks stand out in the crowd, with dark hair tied back in ponytails, full beards, black robes and cylinder hats.

We Holy Land pilgrims have Greek Orthodox Christians to thank at every turn.

To celebrate Christmas in Bethlehem (Luke 2:7) is to descend into the grotto beneath the altar of the Greek Orthodox **Basilica of the Nativity**.

To hike the desert hills east of Bethlehem, or Wadi Qelt from Jerusalem down to Jericho (Luke 10:30), is to discover stunning 5th century Greek monasteries—**Mar Saba** and **St. George**.

To relive Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness (Matt 4:1-11) is to ascend to the Orthodox **Monastery of the Temptation** that clings to cliffs above Jericho.

To drink the waters of Jacob's well where Jesus met the Samaritan woman (John 4:5-6) one must descend beneath the altar of the Orthodox church dedicated to St. Photini in the city of Nablus.

To sample beer in the oldest brewery in the Middle East means a taxi ride to **Taybeh**, a majority Orthodox village that may be biblical Ephraim where Jesus sought refuge after the raising of Lazarus (John 11:54).

To celebrate Jesus' cleansing of ten lepers (Luke 17:11-19), one must travel north to the village of Burquin, where ancient Samaria met Galilee, and enter the quaint, and truly ancient, Byzantine **Church of St. George**.

To hear the legend of **St. Nicolas** requires a visit to his Church in Beit Jala, an Orthodox town next door to Bethlehem.

To visit what might be **Golgotha**, site of the crucifixion (Mark 15:22; John 19:17-18), one must climb a steep stairway and approach the altar of an Orthodox chapel that sits upon ancient bedrock.

More important than limestone and bedrock are the living stones (1 Peter 2:5; Ephesians 2:19-22), the Christians alive today in the Holy Land whose stories we rarely hear. The Very Reverend **Emmanuel Awwad** is the Greek Orthodox Priest serving the imperiled Palestinian village of Aboud. Listen as he calls us to show Christ's love in the midst of conflict.

CLIP of Emmanuel Awwad CMEP interview: SHOW 1:34 to 2:45 (71 seconds)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2jxPfTc8dfs&t=22s>

The Search for Peace and Justice in the Holy Land: Ties to the Holy Land with The Very Reverend Emmanuel Assad

The Very Reverend Emmanuel Assad is the Greek Orthodox Parish Priest serving in the Palestinian village of Aboud. In this interview Reverend Assad describes the challenge of being a witness to Jesus Christ under occupation in Palestine. He lives in Ramallah and has served the parish of Aboud, a Palestinian village in the West Bank north of Ramallah, for eight years.

Video Summary:

"The Search for Peace and Justice in the Holy Land" presents the compelling narrative of The Very Reverend Emmanuel Assad, a Greek Orthodox Parish Priest in the Palestinian village of Aboud. Serving in a land riddled with conflict, Reverend Assad shares the unique challenges faced by Palestinian Christians under Israeli occupation. Despite these hardships, his message is one of love and brotherhood, emphasizing the importance of Christian presence in Palestine. He speaks of the coexistence of Muslims and Christians in Aboud and calls for global peace and reconciliation, urging American Christians to support and provide hope to the Palestinian Christian community facing emigration and diminishing numbers. Reverend Assad's testimony is a powerful reminder of the enduring spirit of faith and the pursuit of peace in the Holy Land.

f. Don't forget the Oriental Orthodox

Other communities, known collectively as the *Oriental Orthodox* family, each have about 2,500 members in the Land. They detached from the (Greek) Orthodox Church way back in the 5th century, for reasons theological and political, but they share beliefs and remain in communion with each other which, for us disunified Protestants, is quite a feat.

Tradition has it that two of Jesus' disciples, Thaddeus and Bartholomew (Mark 3:18), brought Christianity to **Armenia** which by the early 4th century formally embraced the faith, the first nation to do so. Armenian pilgrims soon arrived in Jerusalem and have been here ever since.

In the heart of the Armenian Quarter is the glorious Cathedral of St. James, built on the spot tradition says Herod Agrippa executed **James, son of Zebedee**.



Jerusalem: Armenian Quarter
(Wikipedia)

Acts 12:1-3

¹About that time King Herod laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the church.

²**He had James, the brother of John, killed with the sword.** ³After he saw that it

pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. (This was during the Festival of Unleavened Bread.)

Author Willim Dalrymple describes the Armenian Quarter as “the last substantial community of permanent Christian exiles resident in Jerusalem. The surprise isn't that the others have disappeared. It is that the Armenians have managed to remain.” (*From the Holy Mountain*, chp.5)

In the Holy Sepulchre, Armenian monks care for a subterranean Chapel dedicated to St. Helena, mother of Constantine, where your fingers can trace countless Crusader crosses chiseled into the walls.

In 1915 some 10,000 Armenians arrived in the Land fleeing genocide. Fast forward to today, after the Arab-Israeli War of 1948 and years of tension, and a majority have emigrated. Today's Armenian remnant resides quietly behind the walls of the least clamorous and most private Quarter of the Old City.

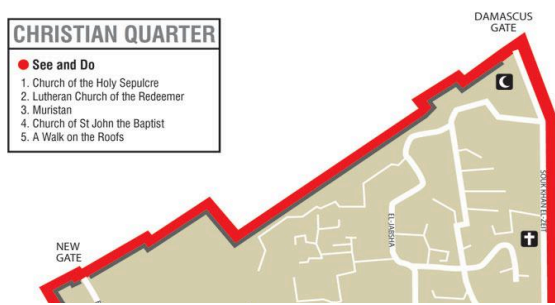
With more time we would tell the stories of other Orthodox communities in the Land:

- of the **Copts** from Egypt, the church of martyrs who point back to St. Mark and who gifted the church with monasticism;
- of the **Ethiopians**, who claim as their own the Queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10:1-13) and the eunuch whom Philip evangelized (Acts 8:26-40), and whose contested territory in the Church for several centuries running is—not even kidding—on the roof;
- and of the **Syrians**, whose quaint Church of St. Mark hovers, they believe, over the house of Mary, mother of John Mark (Acts 12:12-17), whose Upper Room Jesus chose for his Last Supper (Mark 14:12-16) and then served as the very first house church (Acts 1:21-26).

Likewise, we could tell of the **Maronite** and **Melkite** Christians who belong to the **Eastern Catholic** tradition. **Eastern Catholics**, numbering about 4,000 in the West Bank, began as Orthodox but later aligned with the Catholic Church which allowed them to retain their own local leadership and liturgical practices. One (confusing) example: although single priests may not get married, married men may be ordained as priests.

g. One Thousand Years of Western Christianity

Ever since the Crusaders arrived almost 1,000 years ago, the Holy Land has been drawing Christians from Western Europe, for pilgrimage, service and evangelism. Within the last 200 years, the profile of Western churches has increased dramatically.



Today, the Land is home to about 15,000 **Latin** or **Roman Catholic** Christians. The Franciscan Order is official custodian of many holy

sites: at the Holy Sepulchre and Nativity churches, of course, but also Shepherds' Field (Luke 2:8-19), Cana (John 2:1-11), the Jordan River (Mark 1:4-11), the Mount of Olives (Luke 19:28-44), and more. Jerusalem: **Christian Quarter**

(source: Wikipedia)

Each Friday afternoon the Franciscan friars offer Christian pilgrims a gift. They lead the public procession along the Via Dolorosa, the route Christians have used since the 14th century to follow Jesus from Pilate's tribunal to the cross to the grave. Those who find a congested, ecumenical parade through the chaotic souk too irreverent might remember that Jesus' forced death march was likely as frenzied, maybe moreso.

Not at all surprising in a Land so ancient, **Protestant** Christians do not dominate, although their cultural influence is impressive. There are only about 2,500 Anglicans, a similar number of Lutherans, and smaller bands of Baptists, Christian and Missionary Alliance, Christian Brethren, Church of God, Church of the Nazarene, Dutch Reformed, Pentecostal, and Seventh Day Adventists—active in education, healthcare, childcare, eldercare, peacemaking, pilgrimage and evangelism.

Many Palestinian Protestants are Evangelicals; [Bethlehem Bible College](#) is a vibrant center of Evangelical learning. It was not until 2019, however, that the Palestinian Authority [granted legal recognition](#) to the *Council of Local Evangelical Churches in the Holy Land*. Palestinian Evangelical identity is further complicated by the fact that millions of fellow Evangelicals around the world are ardent **Christian Zionists** whose allegiance is with the state of Israel, and who show little regard for non-Jews in the Land. Listen to this plea for recognition from Reverend Munther Isaac, Palestinian theologian and Bethlehem pastor:

[Rev Dr Munther Isaac on Christian Zionism as Imperial Theology](#) SHOW 17:30 to 18:04 (44 seconds)

Video Summary:

In this video, Rev. Dr. Munther Isaac, a Palestinian pastor theologian, addresses the overlooked plight of Palestinian Christians within the Christian Zionist narrative. He points out the irony of Christian Zionism that imagines Israel was established on vacant land, erasing Palestinian existence and rights. Isaac criticizes the exclusion of Palestinian voices in discussions about their own land. By challenging the claim that Jews have a divine entitlement to the land, Isaac invites a more inclusive understanding of the Israel-Palestine conflict that recognizes the historical and ongoing presence of Palestinians. He urges Christian communities to reconsider narratives that ignore the forgotten voices of Palestinian Christians, that disregard the legitimate claims and existence of its native people.

Similarly complicated are relations between Palestinian Christians and the growing **Jewish Christian** (or **Messianic**) community, a unique fellowship we shall consider in our next episode.

h. Once a Church, Soon a Museum?

With so much history and rich diversity, the bad news is that the Christian presence in the Holy Land is in peril.

Christians today make up about 2% of the population of **Israel** (around 165,000 people, concentrated in Nazareth and other villages around Galilee), less than 2% of the West Bank, (about 50,000 people, mostly living in Jerusalem's Old City and the Bethlehem area), and less than 1,000 individuals (0.0005%) in Gaza, which is more than 99% Muslim.

In 1947, the year before the modern state of Israel emerged, Bethlehem was 85% Christian. Today that number is 15%, an inversion caused by incoming waves of Muslim refugees, lower birthrates, and Christian emigration.

When we ask *why* indigenous Christians are exiting Jesus' neighborhood, [the number one reason they list](#) is economics.

"A stunted local economy, devastating violence, and the complications of living under occupation quickened the emigration pace of Christians from Bethlehem and elsewhere in the West Bank."

Bishara Awad & Mercy Aiken, *Yet in the Dark Streets Shining*, 178.

The Palestinian economy is [utterly dependent upon Israel](#) for work and construction permits and for access to farmland. They face restrictions on movement and competition for resources; employment is often precarious, opportunities are limited, and security is non-existent.

Since *Christian* Palestinians generally have better connections in the West than do Muslims, it is easier for them to sail off in search of fortunes abroad. Several years ago, the CBS show *60 minutes* examined the plight of Christians in the Holy Land.

[Christians of the Holy Land](#) SHOW 2:58 to 4:41 (103 seconds)

Video Summary:

60 Minutes delves into the challenging circumstances faced by Christian Palestinians in the Holy Land, emphasizing their dwindling numbers in Jerusalem's Old City, only 11,000 of the 800,000 residents are Christians, and their historic contributions to Christianity's global spread. It highlights how their strong connections in the West facilitate migration in search of better opportunities. The narrative sheds light on the complex political landscape, including the impact of Israeli settlements and the security barrier built to keep

Palestinian terrorists out of Israel, but that severely isolates the West Bank, significantly affecting the Christian minority. Through interviews with local religious leaders, the program captures concerns over Jerusalem's transformation into a "spiritual theme park." It also highlights the pressing reality of Bethlehem, described by residents as an "open air prison" due to the encircling wall built for security purposes. This segment showcases the deep-rooted tensions and challenges facing Palestinian Christians living in their homeland.

In future episodes we'll review some history and consider the challenges Christians face daily in this conflicted context where extreme nationalism and religious sectarianism, of both Islamic and Jewish varieties, are on the rise.

As we've seen, Christians are a minority among Palestinians, even as Palestinians—Christian and Muslim alike—are a marginalized population within the Jewish state. Concentric circles of vulnerability.

And yet. And yet many Christians who *could* emigrate are steadfastly resolved to remain in the Land. As "living stones" they feel called: to support family, to stand in solidarity with fellow Palestinians, to advocate for a just peace, to stay Home.

For this resolve they pay a price.

2. Resources

The People of the Land

2. The Palestinian Christians

1. Christian Pilgrimage to the Land Called Holy

The People of the Land

2. Palestinian Christians
3. Jews and Judaism
4. Muslims and Islam

The Battle for the Land

5. The History of the Israel-Palestine Conflict
6. The Christian Battle for Jerusalem
7. Realities on the Ground

Blessed are the Peacemakers

8. Imagined Futures, Consequential Voices, Holistic Blessings

Warm-up Readings

John 19:17-30

¹⁷ and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called *The Place of the Skull*, which in Hebrew is called *Golgotha*. ¹⁸ There they crucified him, and with him two others,

one on either side, with Jesus between them.¹⁹ Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, "*Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.*"²⁰ Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek.²¹ Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" ²² Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written." ²³ When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top.²⁴ So they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it." This was to fulfill what the scripture says, "They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots."²⁵ And that is what the soldiers did. Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son."²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.²⁸ After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), "I am thirsty."²⁹ A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth.³⁰ When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Acts 8:26-40

²⁶ Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a wilderness road.) ²⁷ So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship²⁸ and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah.²⁹ Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over to this chariot and join it."³⁰ So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?"³¹ He replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him.³² Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this:

Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth.³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth."

³⁴ The eunuch asked Philip, "About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" ³⁵ Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus.³⁶ As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?" ³⁸ He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip [baptized](#) him.³⁹ When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.⁴⁰ But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he

was passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

Kraft, Dana. [A Glimpse into the Life of the West Bank's Last Christians](#). *Haaretz*, Dec. 2017. "28 percent of West Bank Christians said they would emigrate today if they had the opportunity and 24 percent of Muslims said the same, citing lack of hope for peace and a lack of jobs."

The Holy Land: [A Historical Timeline](#) (SeeTheHolyLand.net)

Questions to Ponder and discuss

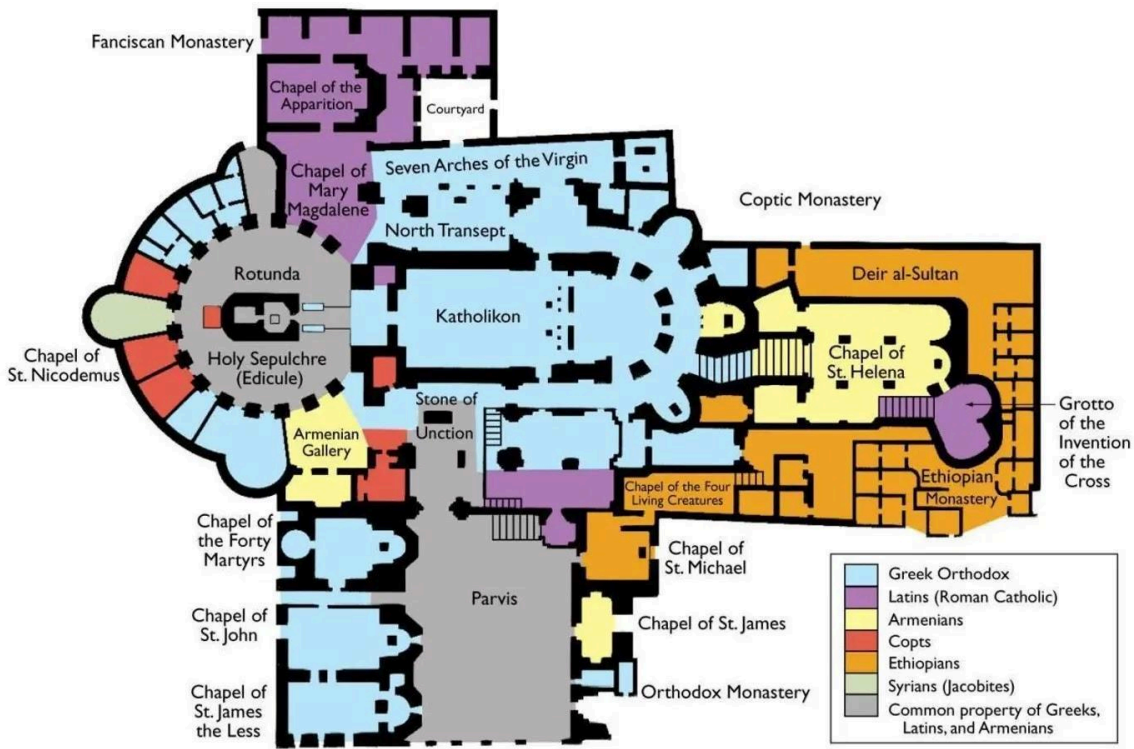
1. Are some places on earth **more holy** than others? What makes a place holy? Is there a Christian equivalent to Judaism's *Temple Mount* and Islam's *Mecca*?
2. What is your personal experience with **Orthodox Christianity**? With **Roman Catholicism**? Which of their traditions and practices do you appreciate? Why might some Evangelicals migrate to Catholicism or Orthodoxy?
3. Does your tradition incorporate **icons** in worship? Does it distinguish between **veneration** (honor) of **saints** and **adoration** (worship) of **God**? (See *Readings and Resources*.)
4. In what ways have your **worship practices** been influenced by your **culture**? In what ways are they **counter-cultural**?
5. Does your tradition strive to recreate **first century** (New Testament) **Christian worship practices**? Why and how?
6. What do you have in common with **Palestinian Christians**? What are some differences?
7. Is it important that a **local Christian community** continues to thrive in the Holy Land? Why or why not?

Terms You will Hear

Basilica of the Nativity Constantine Fresco Jerusalem / Jerusalem	Church of the Holy Sepulchre Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan Icon Orthodox Christianity
--	--

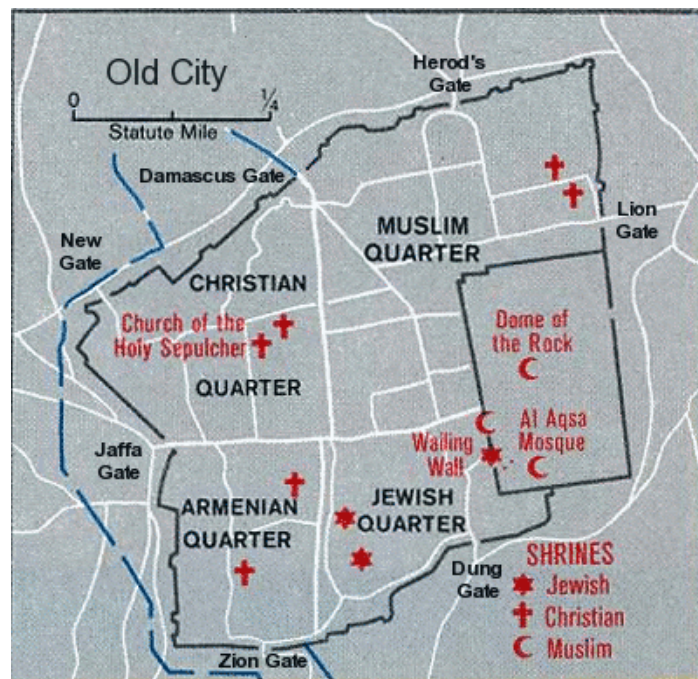
Images and Maps

Church of the Holy Sepulchre



(Mapsontheweb)

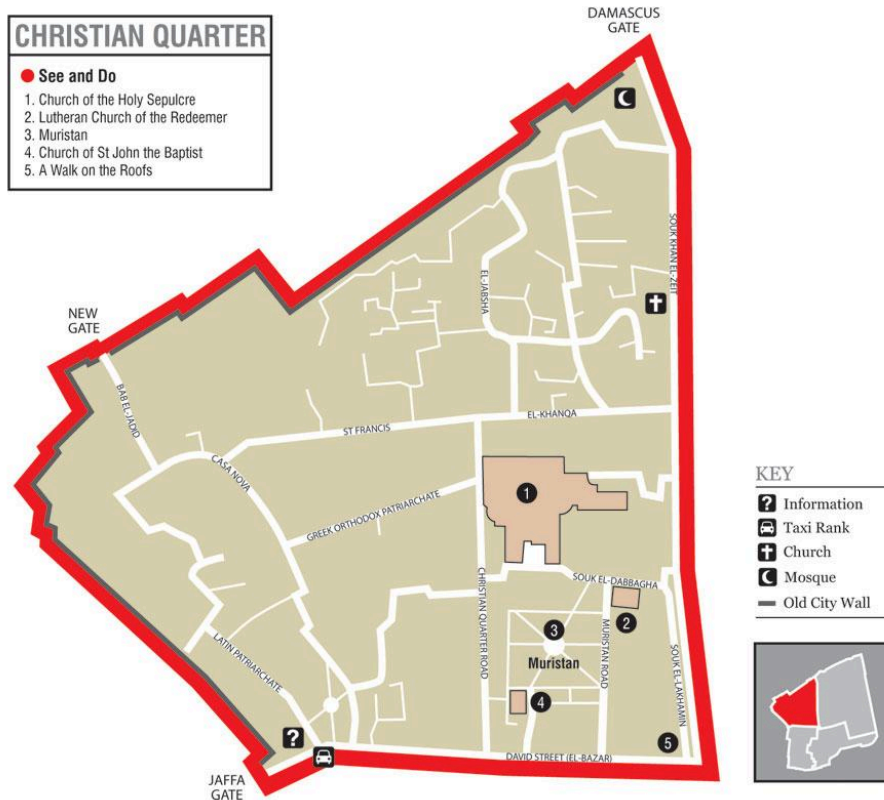
[Jerusalem Old City](#) (Wikipedia)



Jerusalem: Armenian Quarter (Wikipedia)



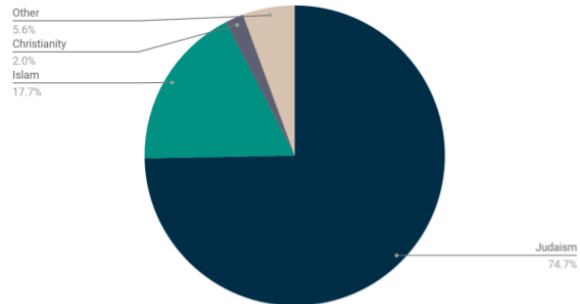
Jerusalem: Christian Quarter (source: Wikipedia)



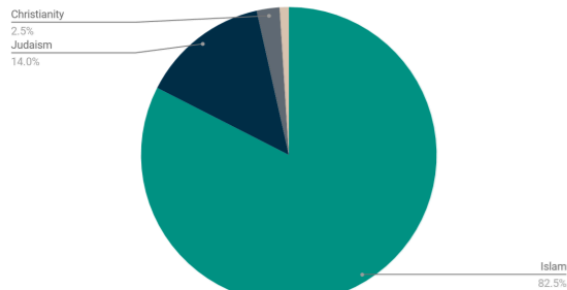
MEET THE PALESTINIAN CHRISTIANS



Religions in Israel



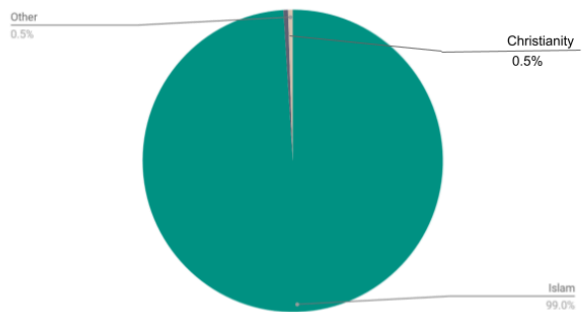
Religions in West Bank



Note that Judaism in the West Bank is a result of Israeli settlement, which violates the Fourth Geneva Convention



Religions in Gaza Strip



Meet the Palestinians Image by CMEP Curriculum

Readings and Resources for the Curious

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre

Cohen, Raymond. *Saving the Holy Sepulchre: How Rival Christians Came Together to Rescue their Holiest Shrine*. Oxford, 2008.

Cohen, Raymond. "The Church of the Holy Sepulchre: A Work in Progress" *The Bible*

and Interpretation, May 2009.

<https://bibleinterp.arizona.edu/articles/sepulchre>

Jacobs, Frank. "The Christian Church so holy that Muslims hold the keys" *Big Think*, April 28, 2021. <https://bigthink.com/strange-maps/holy-sepulcher/>

Reilly, Hilda. [The Church of the Holy Sepulchre and its Quarrelsome Custodians](#)

Christian Presence and Denominations in the Holy Land

Bailey, Betty Jane, and J. Martin Bailey. *Who Are the Christians in the Middle East?* Grand Rapids, Mi: Eerdmans, 2003.

Cannon, Mae Elise and Kevin Vollrath, "Spiritual Synchronicity: Icon Veneration in Evangelical and Orthodox Religious Practices in the 21st Century" *Religions* 12, no. 7: 463.

<https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12070463>

Patheos. "Religion Library: Eastern Orthodoxy"

<https://www.patheos.com/library/eastern-orthodoxy/ritual-worship-devotion-symbolism>

Jenkins, Philip. *The Lost History of Christianity: The Thousand-Year Golden Age of the Church in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia--and How it Died*. Harper Collins, 2008.

Mathewes-Green, Frederica. "12 Things I Wish I'd Known."

<https://www.frederica.com/12-things/>

Masalha, Nur. *Palestine: A Four Thousand Year History*. Zed, 2018.

Siecienski, A. Edward. *Orthodox Christianity: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford, 2019.

Palestinian Christian Perspectives and Biography

Ateek, Naim. *A Palestinian Christian Cry for Reconciliation*. Orbis, 2008.

Awad, Bishara & Mercy Aiken, *Yet in the Dark Streets Shining: A Palestinian Story of Hope and Resilience in Bethlehem*. Cliffrose, 2021.

Bush, Andrew. *Learning from the Least: Reflections on a Journey in Mission with Palestinian Christians*. Cascade, 2013.

Chacour, Elias. *Blood Brothers: The Dramatic Story of a Palestinian Christian Working for Peace*. Chosen Books, 2003.

Chacour, Elias. *We Belong to the Land: The Story of a Palestinian Israeli Who Lives for Peace and Reconciliation*. Notre Dame, 2001.

Isaac, Munther, *The Other Side of the Wall: A Palestinian Christian Narrative of Lament and Hope*. IVP, 2020.

Katanacho, Yohanna. *The Land of Christ: A Palestinian Cry*. Pickwick, 2013.

Raheb, Mitri. *I Am a Palestinian Christian*. Fortress, 1995.

Christian Presence, Resilience and Decline

Allen, John J., Jr. "[Christians nearly absent in Holy Land](#)." *National Catholic Reporter*. August 4, 2011.

Kraft, Dana. [A Glimpse into the Life of the West Bank's Last Christians](#), *Haaretz*, Dec. 26, 2017.

Perry, Tom. [In Holy Land, Christians a Community in Decline](#). *Reuters*. Oct. 20, 2010.

Raheb, Mitri, ed. *Palestinian Christians: Emigration, Displacement, and Diaspora*. Beit Jala: Latin Patriarchate Press, 2017.

Raheb, Mitri. *The Politics of Persecution: Middle Eastern Christians in an Age of Empire*. Baylor, 2021.

Sharp, Heather. [Holy Land Christians' decline](#). *BBC News Middle East*. December 15, 2005.

Demographics and Statistics

Alper, Becka A. "[5 facts about Israeli Christians](#)." *Pew Research Center*. May 10, 2016.

Halon, Eytan. [Israel's Christian population grows to 177,000 citizens](#), *Jerusalem Post*,

December 23, 2019.

Sabella, Bernard. "Palestinian Christians: Historical Demographic Developments, Current Politics and Attitudes Towards Church, Society and Human Rights:

[The Sabeel Survey on Palestinian Christians in the West Bank and Israel](#) – Summer 2006" February 12, 2007.

"The Christian Population" [Jewish Virtual Library](#)

Jerusalem Inter-Church Centre: Palestinian Christians [2009 Fact Sheet](#)
[Central Bureau of Statistics](#)

Cook, Jonathan. [Palestinian Christians](#) *Americans for Middle East Understanding*

(53),

2020.

[Adalah](#) (The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel)

[Fact Sheet: Palestinian Citizens of Israel](#). IMEU.

[Palestinian Christians in the Holy Land](#). IMEU.

Veneration, Adoration, Love and Worship

Catholic Answers: [Saint Worship](#).

Lepojärvi, Jason. "Worship, veneration, and idolatry: observations from C. S. Lewis" *Religious Studies* 51 (4, 2015), 543-562.

Lewis, C. S., *The Four Loves*. Harcourt Brace, 1960.