

MISSIONS ATLAS PROJECT

MIDDLE EAST

Gaza Strip and West Bank

Snapshots Section

Country Name:

Gaza Strip and West Bank. Some authorities name the area Palestine (see *Operation World*)

Country Founded in:

1949

Population:

3.88 million

- 1,428,757—Gaza
- 2,460,492—West Bank

Government Type: (national, regional and local)

Palestinian National Authority

Geography/location in the world:

The Gaza Strip is in the Middle East bordering the Mediterranean Sea. Gaza Strip is situated between Egypt and Israel.

West Bank is also in the Middle East, directly west of Jordan, with Israel on the east.

Number of people groups:

2

Picture of flag:



Religion Snapshot

Islam—80%

- Gaza—98.7%

- West Bank—75%

All religions and % for each:

Islam—80%

- Gaza— 98.7%
- West Bank—75%

Judaism—12%

- Gaza—0.6%
- West Bank—17%

Roman Catholic— 1.9%

Orthodox—0.45%

Druze—2.00

Government interaction with religion:

Both territories have basic religious freedom. The Palestinian Authority does not have a constitution, but the basic law provides for religious freedom.

There was a law in 1977 that calls for the prohibition of proselytizing; however there has been no reporting of the enforcement of the law. Missionaries have been allowed to proselytize.

Mission Atlas Project

Country Profile

Basic Facts

Name:

Gaza Strip and West Bank; sometimes called Palestine

Demographics: –

Gaza—

The nearly homogenous population of the Gaza Strip was estimated at 1.4 million in 2006. Gaza is the capital and largest city with approximately 400,000 inhabitants. The population of the Gaza Strip is growing at a rate of 3.71%. Very little growth comes from migration. The population of Gaza Strip is young, as the median age is 15.8 years.

Age Structure—

- 0-14 years—48.1%
- 15-64 years—49.4%
- 65+ years—2.6%

Birth Rate—39.45 births/1000 population

Death Rate—3.8 deaths/1000 population

Net Migration Rate—1.48/1000 population

Total Fertility Rate—5.78 children born/woman

Sex Ratio—1.04 males/female

Life Expectancy at birth—71.97 years (Male—70.67/Female—73.34)

Infant Mortality Rate—22.4 deaths/1000 live births

Arabs, particularly Palestinian Arabs, make up 99.4% of the population of the Gaza Strip; only about 0.6% of the population is thought to be Jewish. The Jews are Israeli settlers.

The cities and towns located within the Gaza Strip are Beit Hanoun, Beit Lahia, Deir Al-Balah, Gaza (City), Jabalia, Khan Yunis, and Rafah.

- Beit Hanoun has a population of about 35,000, mostly coming from a Bedouin background.
- Beit Lahia has a population of about 40,000.
- Deir Al-Balah has an estimated population of 49,000.

- Gaza City has a population of 400,000, made up primarily of Muslims, but with a small Christian community. The city has grown significantly and has continued to grow since Palestinian refugees began flocking in after the 1948 Arab-Israeli war.
- Jabalia has a population of 103,646. It is actually the largest Palestinian refugee camp, and is currently one of the most densely populated places on earth.
- Khan Yunis has an estimated population of 200,704. The area contains both a city and a refugee camp.
- Rafah has a population of about 96,000. About 44,000 of those are distributed between two of the town's refugee camps. Gaza's only airport, the Yasser Arafat International Airport is located immediately south of the city.

Gaza's population began to see great changes in the 1940s, as refugees began to flock in. In 1940, Gaza's population had been 21,300, but within fifty years it was 125,000. Also by 1996, the surrounding area, known as the Gaza Strip had a population of 963,000, where nearly 80% were refugees.

West Bank—

West Bank is home to nearly 2.5 million Palestinians, with an additional 187,000 Israeli settlers. The population is growing at a rate of 3.06%.

Palestinian Arab—83%

Jewish—17%

Age Structure:

- 0-14 years—42.9%
- 15-64 years—53.7%
- 65+ years—3.4%

Sex Ratio—1.04 males/female

Median Age—18.3 years (Male—18.2/Female—18.5)

Birth Rate—31.67 births/1,000 population

Death Rate—3.92 deaths/1000 population

Total Fertility Rate—4.28 children/woman

Infant Mortality Rate—10.15 deaths/1,000 live births

Life Expectancy—73.27 (Male—71.5/Female—75.15)

Net Migration—2.8 migrants/1000 population

CIA WorldFactbook

Wikipedia

Operation World

Language:

The National/Official language of the West Bank and Gaza is Standard Arabic, however there are actually 6 languages recognized in the territories. Levantine Bedawi Spoken Arabic, South Levantine Spoken Arabic, Standard Arabic, Domari, Samaritan, and Samaritan Aramaic are recognized in the territories, the last two however are dead or extinct languages.

While Arabic and Hebrew are both widely spoken throughout the Palestinian territories, English is also widely understood. And while Arabic is the official language, it is reported that Hebrew is more widely used, as more Palestinian Arabs know and use Hebrew than the Israeli settlers know and use Arabic.

Both Arabic and Hebrew are languages within the Semitic language family.

- Arabic
 - Arabic is the largest living language within the Semitic language family and has more than 100 million speakers worldwide. The written, literary form of Arabic is called Classical Arabic. The Qur'an is written in Classical Arabic. Today, Modern Standard Arabic is used in writing and formal speech. Modern Standard Arabic is set as the literary standard throughout North Africa and the Middle East. Thus, any literate Arab can read and comprehend the written form. Arabic is written from right to left, using the Arabic alphabet, which makes no distinctions between capital and lower cases lettering. It is not even necessary for Arabic to be written on a straight line. This Literary Arabic is the actual official language the Arab world and is the only Arabic taught in the schools.
- Hebrew
 - Hebrew is spoken by 7 million people worldwide. The Tanak (Hebrew Bible/Old Testament) is written in Classical Hebrew. Hebrews is referred to as Jews as "The Holy Tongue."
 - After the 2nd century, when the Jewish population was exiled by the Roman Empire, Hebrew ceased to be a spoken language, and was only preserved as a literary language. During the mid-19th century, Hebrew was revived as a narrative language due to the Haskalah movement. Then, due to Zionism, a Jewish linguist by the name of Eliezer Ben-Yehuda began to revive Hebrew as a modern language, both written and spoken. Several words were adapted from the Tanak, borrowed from Yiddish and other various languages. This Modern Hebrew became an official language of Palestine in 1921, and then the official language of the State of Israel in 1948.
 - The Hebrew language uses a distinct alphabet with 22 letters, and no vowels. It is read from right to left. Modern Hebrew is written with what is called Jewish Script, traditionally known as square/block script.

Wikipedia
www.ethnologue.com

Society/Culture:

Life in the Palestinian territories is difficult. The Palestinians are currently a people without a country, surrounded constantly by violence. They are forced to live either as displaced persons or as refugees. They have been engaged in a longstanding war with Israel for many years, thus, many of the younger generations have never experienced a time of freedom and peace.

Unemployment poses a major problem for the numerous refugees within the Palestinian Territories. Even when jobs are found, many are underpaid. Through the years, many Palestinians from Gaza in particular have attempted to find work within Israel, such as waiters, street cleaners, or dishwashers. However, the borders are often closed, preventing the Palestinians from crossing over and working, and causing an even greater financial hardship for the Palestinian Territories. While some have found adequate jobs within the urban areas, many live in the rural areas as subsistence farmers. Others however, are forced to dwell in refugee camps that have been established by UN Relief Workers Agency. Most of the refugees live in cement block huts with no running water or electricity.

The family is the central unit of society, and arranged marriages are still customary. Women are often married young, and are expected to fulfill the traditional homemaking role of cooking, cleaning, and taking care of the needs of the family. They are regarded well in society and given much respect from the males in their household. Men are the leaders of the families.

While the older generations of Palestinians continue to dress traditionally, with men wearing long, loose robes with a headscarf, and women wearing long, loose, black dresses, the younger generations are beginning to wear more Western-style clothing.

Palestinians place a high value on education. Within the Palestinian territories, even the children living in the refugee camps attend school. They can receive free education and school materials within a school run by the UNRWA. There are both public and private schools available to Palestinian children. The Palestinians hold the highest percentage within the Arab world, of university graduates. Just within the five Palestinian Universities in the West Bank, there is an enrollment of approximately 5,000 students.

While the majority of Palestinians are Muslims, the culture revolves around an Islamic, lunar calendar. The central holidays are Ramadan, Eid Al-Fitr, Eid Al-adha, the First of Muharram, Mawoulid An-Nabawi, and Eid Al-Isra wa Al-Miraj.

- **Ramadan** is the Muslim holy month. It is a month of complete fasting from dusk until dawn. Muslim's believe that the Qur'an was revealed to Muhammad during this month. The days are intended to be a time of prayer and contemplation. Eating, drinking, and smoking are forbidden during the daylight hours.
- **Eid Al-Fitr** is a three day celebration, breaking the fast and marking the end of Ramadan.
- **Eid Al-adha** is a three day feast of sacrifice at the end of the month of pilgrimage to Mecca (the Hajj). People will typically visit their relatives during this Eid, as they

did with the Eid Al-Fitr. It is common for children to receive gifts. All private businesses, government offices, and schools are closed during this feast.

- **First of Muharram** is the Muslim New Year. While schools and businesses are closed for the occasion, the day is not celebrated on the level of the secular New Year. Friends and family typically gather for dinner.
- **Mawlid al-Nabi** is a celebration of Muhammad the Prophet's birthday.
- **Eid Al-Isra wa Al-Miraj** is a feast celebrating the evening journey Muhammad made to heaven. Muslims in Yemen typically spend the day fasting and reciting passages from the Qur'an.

Some Palestinians however are Christian, and so Easter, the Day of Ascension, the Feast of the Assumption, Christmas, and Boxing Day are also celebrated by some.

An International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People was established and declared as a political observance in 1977. It is recognized on November 29.

West Bank Barrier:

The Israeli government began building a wall/barrier in West Bank in 2002, which has remained a highly controversial subject. It is currently a 420 mile barrier, made with a concrete base and a 15 foot wire/mesh structure, completed with watchtowers, razor wire and a 12 foot ditch. It is said to have electronic sensors placed alongside it to report the footsteps of anyone crossing the barrier.

Israel claims the barrier has been constructed to prevent Palestinian suicide bombers from crossing into Israel. The International Court of Justice however, ruled in 2004 that the barrier breaches international law and should be dismantled. However, the ruling was not binding, and has since been rejected by Israel. Parts of the wall have been forced to be rerouted to reduce hardship on the Palestinian lives, but the wall does still stand.

Such barriers, which are actually located in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, plus the heightened military presence, prevents the Palestinians in these areas from leaving the borders of the occupied territories. Residents are often not even allowed to visit family members located in the other territory.

WorldMark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life, Volume 3, 1997.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3111159.stm
www.wikipedia.org

Government:

In the Palestinian territories of the Gaza Strip and West Bank, there is no true central government structure in place. They were intended to be self governed by the Palestinians, and the

relationship between the local and central government is to be defined by the Palestinian constitution and laws. The Palestinian National Authority, which is the interim administrative organization established to nominally govern these territories, was set up in 1994.

However, lack of a true Palestinian central government, coupled with Israeli occupation, pushed institutions into the leadership role. It is people supported municipalities and NGOs that provide the services related to health, education, manufacturing, agriculture, and research in West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Technically, the West Bank and Gaza have local administrations, but no local governments.

Currently the structure of the Palestinian Authority is based upon three branches of power—executive, legislative, and judiciary.

- The executive branch is led by the president, who is directly elected by the people. The president serves as the commander-in chief of the armed forces. The president has the right to appoint the prime minister, who serves as the chief of national security. The prime minister then selects a cabinet.
- The legislative branch is made up of the Palestinian Legislative Council, which is an elected body of 88 representatives. This body acts as a parliament. The Council has the right to approve the cabinet members selected by the prime minister. The Council has proven to hold significant power.
- The judicial branch has yet to be fully formalized.

Both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip have been divided into areas and governorates in accordance with the signing of the Oslo Accords. Each territory is divided into three areas—A, B, & C, where A is controlled by the Palestinian Authority, B is under Palestinian civilian and Israeli security control, and C is fully under Israeli control. The territories are then also divided into 16 governorates, which are then divided into 16 electoral districts.

Economy:

Both of the Palestinian Authority territories have experienced a decline in economic conditions since the second intifadah in September 2000. Gaza has a slightly lower economic situation than the larger West Bank territory. The economic downturn was brought on by the Israeli closure policies, which have disrupted labor and trade access as well as administrative structures. The situation was detrimental for the economies, and had it not been for international aid valued at \$1.14 billion, both economies would have likely completely collapsed. The aid opened opportunities for reforms in the government's financial operations.

In the Gaza strip, once the Israelis withdrew in September 2005, an opportunity for economic growth emerged; these opportunities have not really been seized as the Israeli military were active in Gaza in 2006.

The international community has placed a financial embargo on the territories, interrupting progress.

For the most part, the economy is full of small family businesses which produce textiles, soap, olive-wood carvings, and mother-of-pearl souvenirs.

The currency in both Gaza and West Bank is based on the new Israeli Shekel.

- Exchange Rate—4.4565 ILS/USD

Budget—

- Revenues—\$1.23 billion
- Expenditures—\$1.64 billion

GDP Purchasing Power Parity—\$5.327billion

GDP Official Exchange Rate—\$3.45 billion

GDP Real Growth Rate—4.9%

GDP Per Capita—\$1,500

GDP Composition by sector:

- Agriculture—8%
- Industry—18.2%
- Services—73.9%

Labor Force—

- Gaza—259,000
- West Bank—568,000

Unemployment Rate—20.3%

Population Below Poverty Line:

- Gaza—63.1%
- West Bank—45.7%

Inflation Rate—2.9%

Agriculture Products

- Olives
- Citrus
- Vegetables
- Beef
- Dairy

Export/Import partners (Gaza)

- Israel
- Egypt
- West Bank

Export/Import partners (West Bank)

- Israel
- Jordan
- Gaza

Exports—\$301 million
Imports—\$2.44 billion

There are 993,818 Palestinian Refugees in Gaza and 705,207 in West Bank.

CIA World FactBook

Literacy:

91.9% of the population over the age of 15 can read and write. Significantly more males than females are literate.

- Males—96.3%
- Females—87.4%

Land/Geography:

The Gaza Strip and West Bank are both located within the heart of the Middle East, and play a major role in the Israel/Palestine land disputes.

Gaza—

The Gaza Strip is the smaller of the two territories, and is a strategic slice of land bordering the Mediterranean Sea, Israel, and Egypt. The land is strategically located along the Middle East and North African trading routes.

Gaza is only about 360 square kilometers, making it about twice the size of Washington, D.C. The terrain of the Gaza Strip is flat to rolling hills, and is mostly a sand-dune covered coastal plain. Only 29% of the land is arable. Mostly Gaza's land is barren. Droughts are a real concern and are considered a national hazard for the area.

The climate is mostly temperate. Gaza typically has dry and hot summers with mild winters. Environmental issues of the area include desertification, salination of the fresh water supply, sewage treatment, water borne disease, soil degradation, and the depletion and contamination of underground water resources.

West Bank—

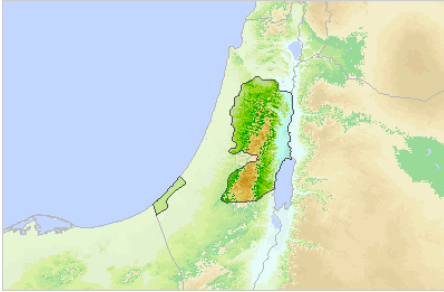
The West Bank is the larger of the two Palestinian Authority territories, and is a landlocked region located just west of Jordan. As to size, West Bank is 5,860 square kilometers, and basically is just slightly smaller than the US State of Delaware.

Most of the terrain of West Bank is rugged, with some vegetation in the western region. West Bank houses a mountain range that runs through the middle of the territory, becoming broader and more elevated as it runs south. In the north, there are mostly rolling hills. The area is mostly

barren in the east. Only 16.9% of the land is arable. Droughts are frequent and pose as a national hazard.

The climate is temperate, but it varies some with the various altitudes throughout the region. West Bank has warm to hot summers and cool to mild winters.

The main environmental concerns are having an adequate supply of fresh water and an adequate sewage treatment. The elevation in West Bank ranges from -408 meters with the Dead Sea, to 1,022 meters with Tall Asur.



<http://www.shootingonlocation.com/countryguide/we.htm>



http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/palestine/images/gaza-west-bank_map.jpg

History

These two Palestinian territories have an extensive history that dates back thousands of years, to the early days of the Old Testament. Gaza was a part of the Philistine territory, while the West Bank houses ancient cities such as Bethlehem, Hebron, and Jericho, which make up the land formerly known as Judea and Samaria.

Ottoman Empire

In 1516, the Turks invaded and overtook Palestine, making it a part of the ever expanding Ottoman Empire. Palestine remained under the Turks until the Ottoman Empire was defeated in the 20th century during WWI.

Twentieth Century

It was during the 20th century that many changes came about for the Palestinian areas. Until 1948, the Gaza Strip and West Bank, along with the modern state of Israel, constituted an area known as Palestine. It was after the war of 1948-49, that the land was divided into the three respective parts as they are known today of Israel, Gaza Strip, and West Bank.

During the First World War, as the Ottoman Empire was being defeated, both the Arabs and the Jews were made promises of the future of the Palestinian lands. There were controversial and

conflicting decisions made during this time involving the Hussein-McMahon Correspondence (1915-1916), the Sykes-Picot Agreement in 1916, and the Balfour Declaration in 1917.

To begin with, the Hussein-McMahon Correspondence officially began with what is known as the Damascus Protocol. Basically, the document was a statement declaring that the Arabs would revolt against the Ottoman Empire and align with Great Britain. The result was to be a recognized, independent Arab nation. The Arabs understood this as a formal agreement, and acted in accordance with the Arab Revolt which began in June of 1916.

However, in May of 1916 a secret understanding between the French and British governments took place, known as the Sykes-Picot Agreement. The agreement was actually negotiated in November of 1915. In this agreement, the British were given control of Jordan, Iraq, and Haifa, while France received control over Southeastern Turkey, Northern Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. The area soon known as Palestine was scheduled to be under international administration. Many saw this agreement in direct conflict with the previous Hussein-McMahon Correspondence. The terms and conditions of this agreement were reaffirmed in April of 1920 at the inter-Allied San Remo conference. It was with the Balfour Declaration of 1917, that the plans for the Jewish homeland were slated to be established within Palestine.

The British Mandate of Palestine was the official name of the territory that was in existence from 1920-1948. This area included the modern day state of Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority governed territories. This was a mandate of the League of Nations, but entrusted to the United Kingdom. The mandate was given for the establishment of a Jewish national homeland. While there had been a small Jewish population living in Gaza up through the 20th century, violent riots and demonstrations in 1929 forced this population to diminish and move on. Through the years following WWII, the British position within Palestine steadily diminished. The UK sought to terminate the mandate in 1947, handing the responsibility over to the United Nations. The Arab-Israeli War of 1948 officially ended the mandate's policies.

In 1947, the United Nations General Assembly voted to partition Palestine into a Jewish State and an Arab State, as well as an internationally administered enclave centered in Jerusalem. The area of West Bank was designated as belonging to the Arab State. After the war that arose upon Israel's declaration of independence on May 15, 1948, West Bank fell under Jordanian rule, and Gaza fell to the Egyptians. While the Gaza Strip was under Egyptian rule, the Gazan citizens were given no citizenship, and most of the population lived on UN relief efforts.

The borders between Egypt and the Gaza Strip were closed. During the Suez-Sinai War, Israel came in and occupied the Gaza Strip, but they soon left due to international pressure. Nevertheless, several years later, in the war that broke out in June of 1967, Israel captured West Bank and the Gaza Strip, claiming control of the territories. Since this time, both West Bank and the Gaza Strip have been labeled as Occupied Territories. The population is mostly Palestinian Arabs. In 1964, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) was established, based in Jerusalem. Yasser Arafat became the leader of the PLO in 1969.

By the 1970s Israeli Jewish settlers began settling in the West Bank, implementing large scale housing developments. This process heightened conflicts between the Arabs and the Israeli

Jews. While in 1978, the Camp David Accords included a plan of implementing Arab self rule in West Bank, this has yet to fully take effect.

Political turmoil in the West Bank was also greatly heightened in 1982 due to Israel's attack on Palestinian armed bases. Thus, in the West Bank, Israel increased their military presence and instituted military curfews. In 1987, the First *Intifada* began in the Gaza Strip. During this Palestinian uprising which lasted until about 1990, the Palestinians were struggling to obtain independence as well as basic political and human rights. The Palestinian armed resistance mainly was focused on creating an autonomous infrastructure including schools and clinics. This uprising was heavily publicized by the media. While the uprising basically took place in the Gaza Strip, it prompted attacks and protests by the Palestinians in the West Bank as well. This caused Israeli retaliation resulting in economic decline, unemployment, reduced living standards, and hundreds of Palestinian deaths.

Peace negotiations were attempted in 1991 at the Madrid Conference. By the end of the Intifada, and the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, 1,162 Palestinians and 160 Israelis had died. The Oslo Accords were signed to further negotiate and implement plans for peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians. The signed agreement called for Israel to withdraw their military forces from many areas of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. It created the Palestinian Authority in affirmation of the Palestinian right to self government. The agreement was that the Palestinian rule would be in power for a temporary five year period, and at the end, more negotiations would be made resulting in a permanent agreement.

As the self government was to occur in gradual phases, the Palestinian territories were divided into three zones known as Area A which was immediately under full control of the Palestinian Authority, Area B which would be under Palestinian civil control but Israeli security control, and Area C which the settlements would remain under full Israeli control, while the Palestinian civilians themselves would be under Palestinian control. While both the Palestinians and the Israelis were skeptical, the agreement was signed. So, by the middle of 1994, a limited, yet autonomous Palestinian Authority began to exercise control within the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

By 1996, the Palestinian National Council was established as official elected legislation, and Yasser Arafat was elected as the chairman. Arafat was titled president by the Palestinians. In February of 1996, after a bomb attack in Israel, Israel closed its borders with both the Gaza Strip and West Bank. In fact, a 60 kilometer long security barrier was constructed as a border between Israel and the Gaza Strip. The wall was erected under the leadership of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, and completed in 1996. The barrier completely encircled the Gaza Strip.

While the Palestinian Authority's interim self governing period officially expired as of 1999, further decisions and agreements had not concluded. Negotiations were attempted, yet unsuccessfully established at the 2000 Camp David Summit, the Taba Summit, and the Geneva Accords.

Recent History

The violence continued through to the new millennium as more Palestinian attacks broke out in 2000. The violence was triggered on September 28 as Ariel Sharon went to the Temple mount in Jerusalem, also home of the Al-Aqsa mosque. Many false reports were spread that Sharon entered the holy mosque, causing unrest among the Palestinians. Attempts for negotiation, including the Mitchell Report and US President Clinton's Bridging proposals, to end the violence began in October, but attacks continued and by the end of the year, no agreement had been established by the UN.

It is understood that Palestine was not willing to respond or agree to the proposed terms. Violence continued through 2001 and 2002. On March 12, 2002, Saudi Arabia made attempts at calming the violence. Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah made a radical proposal, which was incorporated by the UN Security Council Resolution 1397. The violence nonetheless continued. In May of 2002, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon visited the US in an attempt to advance a peace agreement. However, Sharon's visit was shortened due to a Hamas related suicide bombing in Israel.

By the end of May 2002, Yasser Arafat signed into law the constitution of the Palestinian transitional state, known as the Basic Law. The law basically stated that the Palestinian law would be based upon the principles of Islamic law.

By June of 2002, after more Palestinian suicide attacks, the Israeli forces reoccupied the West Bank. More attempts at peace failed throughout the year, and the violence and suicide attacks continued.

On April 29, 2003, during the time of the War in Iraq, Mahmud Abbas (Abu Mazen) was elected as the Palestinian Prime Minister. Nevertheless, the violence continued. On April 30, the United States released an updated road map for the Palestinians. As a result, on June 4, after a meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Sharon and US President Bush, Abu Mazen called for peace and an end to the violence. Nevertheless, the Islamist extremist group leaders of the Hamas and Islamic Jihad vowed to continue with their violent attacks.

Israel did begin dismantling a few of their illegal outposts; however around the same time, on June 10, Israel attempted to assassinate Hamas leader Ahmed Rantissi. Thus, this only ignited the tension. This was followed by various Hamas suicide bombings, and on August 21, Israel assassinated Hamas leader Ismail Abu Shanab. Israel moved into the West Bank in order to run security clean up operations, and Abu Mazen along with the head of Gaza security, Mohamed Dahlan, began to take action and stand against the Palestinian terrorists. Abu Mazen then renounced this move, and claimed on September 4, that he would not act against the terrorists. He resigned on September 6, and Ahmed Qureia (Abu Ala) was appointed as the new Palestinian Prime Minister. Palestinian terrorist bombings and Israeli invasions continued nonetheless.

The Geneva Accord was launched December 2003. The agreement was to be a final settlement, with both sides conceding much. Israel was to relinquish sovereignty in Arab areas of Jerusalem and the Palestinians were to renounce the right of the Palestinian refugees to return to Israel. Nevertheless, Israel's government as well as the Palestinian extremists rejected and denounced the agreement.

In the midst of 2003 elections in Israel, an issue referred to as the Security Barrier or Security Fence arose. The barrier was to be constructed along the 1948 established Green line, erected to prevent Palestinian suicide attacks within Israel. A comparable barrier had been set up in Gaza, serving to effectively reduce penetration to zero. The wall, being advocated by the Israel Labor party, was opposed by Ariel Sharon's Likud party, as it would actually serve to create a de-facto border which would divide Jerusalem and separate the majority of the Israeli settlements within the West Bank from Israeli security and protection.

Sharon won the election, and eventually modified and adopted the barrier concept. He had the route of the wall changed to where all the Israeli settlements would not be alienated. However at the same time, the new route was going to leave many Palestinians blocked from their places of work. The International Court of Justice began hearing cases and protests brought against the barrier. About 30 countries including the US and most of the EU criticized the barrier as it was likely to become a hindrance to peace. On July 9, the ICJ ruled that the barrier did in fact violate human rights and that it must be dismantled. However, Israel declared they would not dismantle it, but would rather change the route to better meet the Court's requirements. Within populated areas, the barrier takes the form of a cement wall, but most of the length of the barricade is actually a fence.

Also during the 2003 elections, the Israel Labor Party proposed a plan suggesting that Israel should unilaterally withdraw from the Gaza Strip and parts of West Bank. Sharon and his Likud party rejected this proposal, viewing it as defeatism. Nevertheless, Sharon eventually decided to propose his own disengagement, or unilateral withdrawal plan. The plan still received much Israeli opposition. In April of 2004, Sharon traveled to the US, and discussed the plan with President Bush. In May of 2004, Sharon modified the plan before implementing was begun. And actually, before the program was begun, Israel engaged Gaza with a military operation known as Operation Rainbow, killing more than 40, causing thousands to be homeless, and reigniting international frenzy. Once the disengagement plan was passed through the Israeli parliament in October of 2004, the National Religious Party actually left the government.

Meanwhile, there was much chaos and turmoil within the Palestinian territories. Gaza, under the leadership of Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei, turned into an atmosphere of disunity and disorder. Violence erupted on July 18, 2004, causing Arafat to reorganize his security forces. Qurei ended up resigning his position.

On November 11, 2004, Yasser Arafat, the Palestinian Authority Chairman died. Palestinian elections were organized, and on January 9, 2005, Mahmoud Abbas was elected as President of the Palestine National Authority. Abbas was invited to by US President Bush to the White House, significant as for many years; no Palestinian leader had been welcome in the White House.

Abbas immediately called Palestinian factions to put an end to the violence and to negotiate a truce. Meanwhile, Palestinian police were sent throughout Gaza with the intention of preventing further terrorist attacks and violence. Both sides agreed to a summit conference in Egypt on February 8, 2005. While peace was agreed upon, the peace nevertheless came to an end by a

suicide bombing February 25 in Tel Aviv. Abbas responded by condemning the attack and subsequently made several arrests.

Also about this time, on February 20, the disengagement plan was approved by both the Israel Knesset and cabinet, calling for the unilateral evacuation of 21 settlements in Gaza and 4 in West Bank. The evacuation was to be completed by the summer of the same year, and be coordinated under the Palestinian Authority. In March, a conference was held in London, calling for organizing financial support for the Palestinian government.

During June, the US put an end to their ban on diplomatic visits to the Gaza Strip.

Despite all efforts for compromise and peace, violence continued. After a summit between Sharon and Abbas in June 2005, Israel launched air attacks on Gaza, claiming they were resuming the policy of targeting and killing Islamic Jihad terrorists. So, within Palestine, demonstrations and even violence were aimed towards their leadership. The Hamas party began to gain popularity. Abbas made efforts to work with Hamas, calling them to cease the violence and to join his political agenda. By early July, a truce was made and Abbas invited the Hamas and Islamic Jihad parties to join a unity government. Just a few days later however, the truce was broken, and on July 15, violence once again erupted.

Meanwhile, efforts towards Israeli disengagement continued, despite the Israeli settlers protest. Actual Israeli evacuation of all the settlements in Gaza and four in West Bank began on August 15, and was completed by August 24. So, Israeli disengagement from the Gaza Strip was completed as all of their military forces and many Israeli civilians completely withdrew from the Gaza Strip. In fact, approximately 8,500 Israeli citizens were forced to relocate at this time.

Shortly after, a passage was opened between Gaza and Rafah in Egypt, so as not to completely cut Gaza off from the rest of the world.

In January of 2006, Sharon suffered a severe stroke, causing Israel's leadership to fall to the new Kadima party under Ehud Omert. Furthermore, with the Palestinian elections on January 26, the radical Hamas party won a victory over the Fateh party, winning 74 of the 133 seats in the Palestine Legislative Assembly. European and US leaders however, stated they would not be working with the Hamas, nor would they continue to provide any type of aid until the Hamas recognize Israel.

Meanwhile, in Israel, the Kadima party continued to gain more seats and more power, diminishing that of the formerly dominating Likud party.

As most of the international community cut off their aid to the Hamas government, Iran and Russian worked to support the new government. The Hamas established a new security militia, led by Jamil Abu Samhadana, leader of the Palestinian Popular Resistance Committee. It was quickly declared illegal by President Abbas, who responded by organizing a Fateh led militia. Violence erupted. Palestinians were thought to be smuggling in weapons through tunnels built from the Egyptian border. Little was done to stop the smuggling.

On November the 26, 2006 a surprise truce was announced between Palestine and Israel, solely concerning the Gaza Strip. The truce in effect did little to end any violence, as rockets continued to be fired towards Israeli towns from Gaza.

Through 2006, Palestinian President Abbas continued to work towards forming a unity government. He hoped to have a government which could recognize Israel, end all violence, and be recognized by the West. After repeated negotiations failed, Abbas announced he was going to dissolve the government and call for new elections unless the Hamas agreed to his proposed unity government. This announcement once again reignited tensions and violence erupted between the Palestinian factions.

As of June 2007, President Abbas dismissed the Hamas led government and declared a state of emergency. He appointed Salam Fayyad as the new Prime Minister. Abbas is working to quickly set up elections in the Gaza Strip, and has declared he will govern by presidential decree until proper elections have been held. According to the Palestinian Basic Law, he has thirty days to legally rule by decree. While Abbas' action has received acknowledgment and support from the US, Hamas denies the actions and claims to still have control of Gaza. Ismail Haniya still claims his role as Prime Minister. On Thursday, June 14, the Hamas soldiers overtook most of Gaza, as they captured the presidential compound and the Fatah's Preventative Security force headquarters.

It is possible that the West Bank and Gaza will effectively split, but a unity government is the aim.

<http://www.fsmitha.com/h2/y23z-gaz.html>

http://en.allexperts.com/e/p/pa/palestinian_territories.htm

Infoplease.com

Wikipedia.com

Encyclopaedia of the Orient, "Gaza Strip."

"Israel and Palestine: A Brief History" Mideast Web. www.mideastweb.org/briefhistory.htm

"Abbas appoints new Palestinian Prime Minister." http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6756079.stm

"Abbas sacks Hamas-led Government" http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6754499.stm

Christian History

Christianity in Palestine dates back to the first century, the beginning of the Church, and the life and resurrection of Jesus Christ himself. The very first people called Christians were Jews from the Holy Land (Israel/Palestine.) The major turning point for the situation in the Holy Land was the time of the Jewish Revolt of Bar Kokhba in the second century. During this time various circumstances changed, particularly for the Christians. Simon Bar Kokhba, the commander of the revolt, was thought by many Jews to be the Messiah, thus alienating the Jewish Christians, who maintained that Jesus was the Messiah.

The revolt caught the Romans off guard, but by the summer of 135 the Romans had completely and brutally crushed the rebellion. At this point, Rome offered no mercy to the Jews or their traditions, renamed Jerusalem, and changed the name of the country from Israel to Palestine. Many Christians fled as well. Jerusalem, known as Aelia Capitolina, became a pagan city state which the Jews were barred from entering.

By 313, with the conversion of the Roman Emperor Constantine to Christianity, there was a new Christian presence within the Holy Land. Through the centuries, Christians flocked to the area. Palestine became a home to Greek, Armenian, Georgian, Egyptian, and Syrian Christians. Within time, Christianity became predominate in the Holy Land, where Christians were the majority of the population. Many famous theologians made the area their home and the land was governed by the Byzantine emperor.

But within the 4th and 5th centuries, the churches began to resent Byzantine intervention and involvement. And, by 640, Muslim Arabs moved in and seized Jerusalem. Initially, the Christians welcomed the Arabs and used their help to overthrow and expel the Byzantine armies. While this worked to cast out the Byzantine presence, the Muslims Arabs were not viewed on friendly terms for long. The Muslims made servants of the Christians and forbid the Christians from proselytizing Muslims. The church steadily declined, yet many of the Christian sects survived including the Greek Orthodox, Ethiopian Orthodox, Nestorians, Syrian Orthodox, and the Coptic Christians. Most of these groups however experienced many changes, including the adoption of the Arabic language. Over the next centuries, conditions only worsened for the Palestinian Christians, as they were heavily taxed and persecuted by their Muslim overlords. While the Byzantine emperor occasionally intervened, attempting to help alleviate the Christians' situation, this ended once the empire fell to the Turks in 1453.

By the nineteenth century, Palestine's Christian population had dropped considerably, as it numbered approximately only 15,000. The majority of the Christians were of the Greek Orthodox tradition. Through the century, the Christian numbers began to once again increase, as the Ottoman's power declined and European powers became involved. Also through these years, Protestants in the West began to send their missionaries to the Holy Land.

When the British began their occupation of the Holy Land in 1917, the Christians welcomed the British Mandate and found release from the Turk's power.

While Christians are promised "freedom of religion, conscience, education, and culture" in the constitution of Israel, in reality, the Palestinian Christians are somewhat discriminated against as they have fewer opportunities for work and education. So, not surprisingly, since the founding of Israel in the 20th century, large numbers of Palestinian Christians have fled Palestine, which actually accounts for much of the Christian population within the surrounding Arab countries.

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/newsletter/2003/aug8.html>

www.wikipedia.org

The World Christian Encyclopedia, 2nd Ed. Vol. 1, "Palestine."

Religions

Non-Christian

Islam

Islam, which is the second largest religion in the world, is a monotheistic, Abrahamic religion that developed out of the teachings of a 7th Century Arab named Muhammad. The word *Islam*

itself actually means “peace,” or “submission” and denotes the concept of completely surrendering to God (Allah). Muslims revere the Qur’an as their holy book; they believe it is God’s revelation to Muhammad, the final prophet, restoring the original faith of Adam, Abraham, and the other prophets. The fundamental concepts of the religion are known as the Five Pillars:

1. Shahada—Confession/testimony
 - Most important and foundational pillar.
 - “There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet.”
 2. Salat—Prayer
 - There are five daily fixed times of prayer.
 - You must pray facing towards Mecca.
 - It is an expression of gratitude and worship to God.
 3. Zakat—Almsgiving
 4. Sawm—Fasting
 - Compulsory during Ramadan
 - Requires abstinence from food, drink, and sex from sunrise to sunset.
 5. Hajj—Pilgrimage to Mecca
 - Everyone who is able is to make the pilgrimage at least one time.
- Gaza Strip—98.7% Muslim
 - West Bank—75% Muslim

Judaism

This is a monotheistic, Abrahamic religion with a 4,000 year history. It is the religion of ancient Israel, and their descendants, known as Jews. Jews devote themselves to the study and observance of spiritual and ethical principles provided through and embodied in the Hebrew Scriptures and the Talmud. They are still awaiting the promised Messiah.

- Gaza Strip—0.60% Jewish in 1997
- West Bank—17% Jewish in 1998
- Because the Israeli’s are the predominant, if not only, followers of Judaism in the area, due to Israel’s Disengagement Plan in 2005, these numbers have probably significantly decreased. The Jews were to be removed from the area. Twenty-one civilian Israeli settlements were evacuated in Gaza and four within West Bank. It is reported that in Gaza more than 9,000 Israeli residents were instructed to leave or be evicted by August 16, 2005.

Samaritanism

- There are about 500-600 committed Samaritans near Nablus in West Bank, close to Mount Gerazim.
- Samaritan believers have much in common with Jewish believers.
 - Consider themselves to be true worshippers of Yahweh
 - Importance on Torah/Pentateuch as a holy book outlining a way of life
 - Look for the Messiah

- Same ideas concerning a final judgment, rewards, punishments, circumcision, Sabbath, diet, and laws.
- However, the Samaritans worship on Mount Gerazim and overly elevate Moses.

Roman Catholic

The Roman Catholic Church reports some 5 groups with over 20000 members and 37000 affiliates.

Orthodox Groups

Eight different Orthodox Groups exist in Gaza and West Bank. The Greek Orthodox has around 6000 members, The Armenian Apostolic has around 400 members. The Coptic Orthodox has around 444 members,. The Romanian Orthodox Church has around 275 members. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church as 2 congregations and around 30 members.

Church of the Saint Family in Gaza—200 adherents

Protestant/Evangelicals/Pentecostals

Assemblies of God report 12 congregations with around 220 members

Episcopal report 3 congregations with around 350 members

Association of Baptists Gaza Baptist Church—this is thought to be one of only three Christian churches serving the 2000 Christians in Gaza. This church houses the only Christian library in Gaza.

Southern Baptist have been working in Gaza since 1911.

Lutheran

A German Lutheran presence has been in the West Bank. They arrived to the area in 1860 and have around 380 members

Seventh Day Adventists report 4 congregations with over 400 members

Church of Christ have 2 congregations with less than 100 members

Church of the Nazarene have 1 congregation with around 45 members

Christian & Missionary Alliance have 1 congregation with 40 members

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4514822.stm; *Operation World*

People Groups

00000

Jew, Israeli (8,000) (187,000)

Israeli Jews live as settlers in the Palestinian territories of West Bank and Gaza, but only make up a very small percentage of the population. They are Hebrew speakers.

The Israeli Jews traditionally adhere to Judaism; however, it is becoming increasingly more common for the religion to have more social value than religious value, if any at all. In fact, it is estimated that from two-thirds to three-fourths of the Israeli Jews are actually non-observant.

Nonetheless, there are very few Christians among them, thus they are among the least reached peoples in the world.

The Bible and many evangelistic and discipleship resources and tools are available in the Hebrew language.

11686, 12264

Palestinian Arab (1,904,705) (2,214,774)

Palestinian Arabs fall into a category classified as Levant Arabs. "Levant" is a broad term that includes several groups of Arabs: the Jordanian, Palestinian, Iraqi, Arabic Jewish, Chaldean, and Syrian Arabs. Today, several hundred thousand Levant Arabs live along the northern edges of the Arabian Desert. They are spread from Israel to Kuwait and as east as Iran. Small groups can also be found in North Africa.

Palestinian Arabs actually did not exist as such until the 20th century. Up through the 19th century, those living in the Middle East mostly defined themselves in terms of religion, rather than nationality. Thus, the Muslims in what came to be known as Palestine, more readily identified with their Muslim brothers throughout the area, rather than the nearby Christians and Jews.

It was in 1920 that the British, in line with European nationalism, carved out a section of land to be known as "Palestine." While none of the Muslims were in favor of this move, after watching Southern Syria cease to exist, by December of the same year, the Palestinian Arabs rallied together and established an independent Palestinian state in order to defend Palestine. The majority of the Palestinian Arabs live in West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Since the uprisings in 2000, those in Gaza are not permitted to travel to or enter West Bank, thus the Palestinian Arabs find themselves confined within the tiny Gaza territory.

Thus, the Palestinian Arabs have had a close association with Islam throughout their history; and the vast majority of them are Muslims. However, there has long been a sizable contingent of committed Christians among the Palestinian Arabs.

The Palestinian Arabs in West Bank/Gaza speak the South Levantine dialect of Arabic. Portions of the Bible are available. The Jesus Film and other recordings of the gospel are not available.

Palestinian Arabs can be found in villages near fertile regions and in the foothills of less arid regions. Though they are found in towns they are still tribal. Sheiks rule the various tribes.

Social life is important to Palestinian Arabs. One will remove their shoes when entering an Arab's home. Coffee is often served to guests. There are different classes of Arab social structure. Women wear veils in town and in the home. It is becoming more acceptable for Arabs to choose their own mates but arranged marriages still exist. Children are valued as an asset and women therefore are valued for their ability to bear children.

The Palestinians Arabs are strong adherents to Sunni Islam. There are only a few known Christians among the Palestinian Arabs and conversion can be very costly. Less than 2% of the Palestinian Arabs in these territories are Christian. Many Palestinian Arabs live in restricted areas and it is challenging to present them with the gospel. There are no agencies or active church planting done among the ethnic group.

12265

Samaritan (688)

The Samaritans, who are neither Jew nor Arab, have a complex identity. They have been able to maintain good relations with both Palestinians and Israelis.

The Samaritans are thought to originally have been inhabitants of the district of Samaria, and are descended from the population exchange that occurred when the Assyrians conquered the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC. The population of the Northern Kingdom was blended with people from Babylon, Avva, Hamath, Sepharvaim, and Cuth. The Samaritans were rejected by the Jews of the Southern Kingdom.

Technically, the Samaritans are a part of the Arab World, Assyrian/Aramaic People Cluster. They are alternately referred to as Shamerim and Shomronim. The Samaritans are among the least reached peoples, and have few, if any believers among them. They practice their ethnic religion known as Samaritanism, which is very similar in practice to Judaism. These Samaritans speak an Arabic known as South Levantine Spoken.

Today there is actually a small, pure community of devout Samaritans who have not lost their identity through intermarriage. Most of them lived in the West Bank, in Kiryat Luza which is near the Mount Gerazim, just south of Nablus.

These Samaritans are observant followers of their religion, which is almost identical in practice to Judaism. They observe Passover every year at the site of their old, yet destroyed temple on Mount Gerazim. The Day of Atonement is their holiest day, the Sabbath is strictly adhered to, and their High Priest is their political representative.

They tend to participate in Palestinian life, while some of the Samaritans in Israel participate in Israeli society.

There are portions of the Bible translated, but the entire Bible has yet to be completed in the South Levantine Spoken Arabic. There are a few resources available, such as a Bible in Your Language listing, an Unbound Bible, the Four Spiritual Laws, and Global Recording listings.

www.joshuaproject.net

www.peoplegroups.org

Missiological Implications

1. Evangelical Christians and Churches should consider Gaza and West Bank as needy mission fields—both for the Jewish and the Islamic peoples. The difficulty of the effort must not block the efforts for evangelization
2. Evangelical Christians and Churches mount evangelism among these people and not rely only on social and medical efforts
3. Evangelical Christians and Churches must seek ways to alieve the many social and physical needs in these areas. The gospel should be proclaimed *by word and by need*.
4. Evangelical Christians and Churches should share methods for witnessing to Muslims and Jewish people.
5. Evangelical Christians and Churches should major on the spiritual needs in the area and not get caught up in the political struggles.
6. Evangelical Christians and Churches should investigate the methods of Messianic Synagogues as means to introduce the Gospel to the peoples in this area