

MISSIONARY ATLAS PROJECT

MIDDLE EAST

SYRIA

Country Snapshot

Country Name: The Syrian Arab Republic (*Al-Jumhuriya al-Arabya as-Suriya*)

Country Founded in: gained independence from France in 1946

Population: 19,314,747 (July 2007 est.)

Government Type: Socialist republic since 1973

Geography/location in the world: It is located in the Middle East, bordering the Mediterranean Sea, between Lebanon and Turkey

Number of people groups: 24 (peoplegroups.org)

Picture of flag:



Religion Snapshot

Major Religion: Sunni Islam 74%

All religions: Other Muslim Sects (such as Alawite and Druze) 16%; Christian (various denominations) 10%;

Government interaction with religion:

Islam is not considered to be the religion of the state, only of the head of the state under the 1973 constitution, but it is also the religion of the majority. Freedom of religion does exist as sanctioned by Syrian law.

Syria Country Profile

Basic Facts

Country Name:

The Syrian Arab Republic (*Al-Jumhuriya al-Arabya as-Suriya*)

Demographics

Syria's 2000 population was estimated at 17,758,925. However, the population jumped in 2006, according to the CIA World Factbook, to 18,881,361. Also, in the Israeli-occupied region of the Golan Heights, it is estimated that the population may be as high as 40,000 people.

The population includes 20,000 Arabs (18,000 Druze and 2,000 Alawites) and about 20,000 Israeli settlers. There is an estimated 3 percent of the Syrian population is over the age of 65. Most of the population lives in the Syrian capital of Damascus and then live in the second largest city of Syria, Aleppo.

Age Structure:

0-14 years: 37% (male 3,592,915/female 3,384,722)

15-64 years: 59.7% (male 5,779,257/female 5,500,887)

65 years and over: 3.3% (male 296,070/female 327,510) (2006 est)

Median Age:

total: 20.7 years

male: 20.6 years

female: 20.9 years (2006 est.)

Population growth rate:

2.3% (2006 est.)

Birth rate:

27.76 births/1,000 population (2006 est.)

Death rate:

4.81 deaths/1,000 population (2006 est.)

Source: <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/sy.html>, WORLDMARK: *Encyclopedia of the Nations, Asia & Oceania*, Volume 4, Tenth Edition

Language

The official language of Syria is Arabic and is considered to be the majority language. Many children in school start learning English or French at an early age. Kurdish and Armenian are the principal minority languages. Aramaic and Circassian are also widely understood.

Society/Culture

Family is considered to be the center of life in Syria. Children stay living with their parents until they get married, so it is not uncommon to see a 35 year old unmarried woman or man still living at home. Getting married and having children are of top priority in Syrian culture. Having arranged marriages are still common, with first cousins being the top contenders as the best match. The act of having more than one wife is legal, but not a common site in the larger cities. Divorce is very rare, but when a divorce is granted, the father is gets custody of the children. It is customary for the eldest child to take care of his or her parents when they get to be in their later years.

Weddings are a major social event and last for days at a time. The actual marriage, or the exchange of vows, sometimes takes place days or weeks before the wedding reception. A religious figure, the imam, performs the ceremony and the marriage contract is signed. The contract is signed before the presence of witnesses and the mahr (dowry) is given by the groom's family to the bride's family. Christian marriages also require a dowry to be paid to the bride's family. The wedding reception is a huge celebration that involves a big party with all the family and neighbors celebrating this event. Depending on how wealthy the family is, the bride can change 4 to 5 times into different wedding dresses that range from traditional Syrian dresses to western-style wedding dresses.

After a death, there is a three-day mourning period that involves relatives, neighbors, and friends coming to visit the family of the deceased. Women will wear black as a sign of mourning for many months. Urban women will tend to wear black for six months and rural women can stay wearing black for up to a year.

Secular Holidays:

Union Day- February 22

Revolution Day/Women's Day- March 8

Arab League Day- March 22

Evacuation Day- April 17, commemorating the day that the French left Syria in 1946 and granting Syrian independence.

Martyr's Day- May 6

Security Force Day- May 29

Army Day- August 1

Marine's Day- August 29

Veteran's Day- October 6

Flight Day- October 16

Correction Movement Day- November 16

Day of Mourning- November 29

Peasant's Day- December 14

Religious Holidays:

Christmas- both Orthodox and Western Church dates

Easter- both Orthodox and Western Church dates

'Id Al-Fitr- a three-day festival at the end of the month of Ramadan

'Id Al-Adha- a three-day feast of sacrifice at the end of the month of pilgrimage to Mecca

Muslim New Year- first of Muharram

Muhammad's birthday

'Id Al-Isra was Al-Miraj- a feast celebrating the nocturnal visit of Muhammad to heaven from Jerusalem.

Source- *WORLD MARK: Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life*, Volume 3-Asia and Oceania

Government

After independence, Syria made several attempts at establishing a constitution. A provisional constitution adopted in April 1964 was suspended in 1966 and replaced to some extent by a continuing series of edicts. The fundamental law that thus emerged considered Syria a socialist republic forming part of the Arab homeland, required that the head of state be a Muslim, recognized Islamic law as a main source of legislation, ordained collective ownership of the means of production, but permitted some private ownership.

The constitution of March 12, 1973, embodying these principles and ratified by popular referendum, vests strong executive power in the president, who is nominated by the Ba'th Party and elected by popular vote to a seven-year term. The president, who appoints the cabinet (headed by a prime minister), also serves as commander-in-chief of the armed forces and as secretary general of the Ba'th Party. The unicameral People's Assembly has 250 members who are elected every four years, but who have no real power. Suffrage is universal, beginning at age 18.

The Arab Socialist Ba'th Party is Syria's dominant institution. Only the Ba'th Party may carry on political activity in the armed forces. The Ba'th Party was founded in 1947 with goals of Arab liberation, Arab unity, and socialism. Ba'thists attained control of the government in 1963, but the party became divided into two factions, a wing of doctrinaire socialists and a more pragmatic wing. Assad, then minister of defense and a strong nationalist, seized power in a bloodless coup in November 1970 and purged the doctrinaire Ba'thists from the government. The Ba'thists have relied for public support on the minority Alawi sect, of which Assad is a member, and on the rural sector of the population generally. During his years as president, Assad appointed Ba'thist Alawis to influential positions in the government and in the military and security services. When Assad died on June 10 2000 the Ba'th Party held a party congress- its first since 1985- and elected Bashir Assad secretary-general. Bashir Assad succeeded his father as president the next month.

The Syrian legal system is based partly on French law and partly on Syrian statutes. Minor infringements are handled by Peace Courts, more serious cases go to courts of first instance. There are civil and criminal appeals courts, the highest being the Court of Cassation. Separate State Security Courts have jurisdiction over activities affecting the security of the government. In addition, Shari'ah courts apply Islamic law in cases involving personal status. The Druze and non-Muslim communities have their own religious courts. There are no jury trials.

Source: *WORLD MARK: Encyclopedia of the Nations, Asia & Oceania*, Tenth Edition; <http://www.cafe-syria.com/Government.htm>

Economy

Syria is considered to be an agricultural country and produces high amounts of raw cotton, dried fruits, olives, and other vegetables. Syria was plagued with a severe draught during the late 1990's which affected their production of their agricultural goods. They also rely heavily on the production of crude oil, even though Syria is not one of the strongest Middle Eastern countries for producing oil. Syria has run into a problem in that many of their young educated professionals seek out employment in other countries. In 2001, Syria legalized private banking. In 2004, four private banks began operations. In August 2004, a committee was formed to supervise the establishment of a stock market. Nevertheless, the economy is still very much controlled by the government. The Syrian economy is very much affected by declining oil production and exports, weak investment, a high unemployment rate, and a lack of an adequate amounts of water caused by drought.

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy_of_Syria;
<https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/sy.html>

Literacy

Since 1967, all Syrian schools, colleges, and universities have been under close government watch. The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education are primarily responsible for all aspects of administration, including the development of curriculum. Schooling is mandatory for six years, and higher education is paid for by the government at the

four Syrian universities. In 2003, the literacy rate in Syria was about 76.9% of the population with 89.7% of the male population being literate and 64% of the female population being literate. In high school, students must study either English or French for at least two years.

Source: <http://countrystudies.us/syria/37.htm>; *WORLDMARK: Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life*, Volume 3-Asia and Oceania.

Land/Geography

Syria is located in southwest Asia, at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea, Syria has an area of 185,180 sq km (71,498 sq mi). It is slightly larger than the state of North Dakota. Syria is bounded on the north by Turkey, on the east and southeast by Iraq, on the south by Jordan, on the southwest by Israel, and on the west by Lebanon and the Mediterranean Sea.

The climate varies from the Mediterranean type in the west to extremely arid desert conditions in the east. The summers are hot and the winters are mild in the coastal regions of the country. In the mountains, the summer heat is moderated according to elevation and the winters are much more severe. The desert areas have extremely hot summers and varying winter temperatures ranging from 70 F (21 C) to below freezing. The average temperatures in the capital city of Damascus range from 70 F to 109 F in August and from 25 F to 61 F in the month of January. Rainfall averages about 30 inches on the coast, around 50 inches in some mountain areas, and less than 10 inches in the eastern three-fifths of the country of the country. In dry years, rainfall may be reduced by half.

Source: *WORLDMARK: Encyclopedia of the Nations, Asia & Oceania*, tenth edition.

History

Pre 20th Century History

Often called the Cradle of Civilization and the Gateway to History, Syria contributes to the knowledge of the development of civilized man. Syria's natural boundaries, however, did nothing for the security of the land. The strategic location of the territory made it vulnerable allowing many conquerors and attackers who invaded to conquer Syria. Syria has been a great crossroad for trade between the Mediterranean and the East. Among the contributions of Syria are the facts that it exported the Alphabet to the West and has been linked to Religion from the beginning, from the Semitic Deities to the monotheistic faiths.

Excavations that took place in an area called Ebla which lies in the northern part of Syria reveal that Syria was a thriving center of a Semitic empire going from the Red Sea north to Turkey and east to the Mesopotamian region around 2500 BC. The Great Kingdoms of Ebla and Mari thrived in this era from 3000 - 2000BC. These kingdoms are the sites of where the invention of writing began. Found in both are tablets of Cuneiform writing (wedge shaped syllables), the royal archives have been a source of controversy due to its links with the Old Testament Ebla, as for Mari 17000 tablets were found. These kingdoms lasted about 1000 years due to their cultural development, their rising trade with both Mesopotamia (the land between the Euphrates and the Tigris) and the Mediterranean, and due to the irrigation of the Euphrates. Both

of these kingdoms were taken over by the Akkadians from Mesopotamia and then by the Amorites at the end of this period. The Akkadians were the source of Semitic language that became the basis for the Phoenician, Aramaic, Hebrew and Arabic languages. Damascus was settled at that time and gives the city the world's oldest continuously occupied city and one of the world's oldest cities.

The Phoenicians (c.1600-c.800) developed an advanced civilization along the Syrian and Lebanese coastlands which included trade, industry, and seafaring. There were many conquerors that were attracted to this area because of its wealth such as the Hittites, Egyptians, Assyrians, Persians, and others. In the 4th Century BC, Syria fell to Alexander the Great, then by the Persians, and then by the Seleucids.

By the 1st Century BC, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Transjordan was conquered by the Roman empire and set up as the province of Syria. Christianity spread throughout this region especially after Constantine the Great recognized it as an official religion in the 4th century.

Damascus fell to the Arabs in 637 and soon Islam spread and became the official religion of the area. Arabic became the official language with the spread of the new Arabic culture and religion. Damascus flourished under the Umayyad caliphs and became the capital of the Islamic empire. It lost its important status after the Abbasid took over and made Bagdad their prime location. After this, Syria fell to various invaders including the Byzantines and the Crusaders from Western Europe. Some parts of Syria fell under the grips of the Seljuks and Ayyubids, a Kurdish dynasty. The latter was most prominent under its leader Salah ad-Din. During the 13th century, Mongols invaded Syria, and for 200 years parts of Syria were ruled by the Mamluks, who ruled it from Egypt through local governors. In 1516, the Ottomans defeated the Mamluks and Syria became a province of the Ottoman empire for the next four centuries.

Modern History

During World War I, Sharif Hussein of Mecca joined forces with the Allies and set up a revolt against the ruling Ottomans. After the war, with British forces in control, the formal entry of Allied troops into Damascus was made by Arab forces under Faisal, Hussein's son, October 30, 1918. Faisal and the Arab nationalists did not want a French presence in Syria and claimed independence under the terms of agreements between the British government and Hussein. In March 1920, Faisal was sworn in as king by a congress representing Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine.

However, Syria was divided into British and French mandates. In June, the French dethroned Faisal and installed local administrations of their own choosing. Syrians did not like the French presence in their country and there was a continued unrest until World War II. In 1941, Free French and British forces wrested control of Syria from Vichy France. A few years later, under pressure from the British and American governments, France permitted elections and the formation of a nationalist government in 1944. The UK and the US officially recognized Syrian independence in 1944, and the last French troops departed on 17 April 1946. In 1945, with the end of World War 2, the French tried to uphold their influence over Syria. Syria, however, became a charter member of United Nations. In 1946, the British intervened, and

took control over anti-French demonstrations. Syria participated in 1948 in the joint Arab warfare against the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 and shared the defeat.

On March 30, 1949, The Kurdish leader, General Husni I-Zaim and his junta took power but Zaim was overthrown by Syrian officers on August 14 and shortly thereafter was executed. A new constitution was enacted in September 1950 and Hashimu I-Atasi was elected president. In 1951 Syria experienced border clashes with Israel, provoked by a Israeli drainage project in the zone between the two countries. In November of that year, a new military coup took control and placed Shishakli as head of government. President Atasi resigned soon after.

A new constitution, in 1953, put heavy limitations on civil liberties. In March 1954 a military group forced Shishakli out of office, reinstated Atasi, and restored the constitution of 1950. Syrian politics orientated itself towards the Soviet dominated bloc, and with the Western attacks on Egypt in 1956, Syria became even more anti-Western. Tension increased with Turkey in 1957 and Syria asserted that Turkey was preparing for an US backed attack. The United Nations help defused the controversy. Syria in this period received increased economic aid from the Soviet Union.

In 1958 (February 21) the United Arab Republic, was established and made a union of Syria with Egypt. Gamal Abu I-Nasser became president of the union. Nasser dissolved all political parties of Syria and also introduced regulations on the size of land property. The opposition increased in Syria, much coming from irritation over the modernization efforts taken by Nasser. The Army took control over Damascus on September 28 and declared new independence for Syria. Nasser did not take any measures to defeat this move. A provisional constitution was approved through a referendum, and a national government was established. This new government made a few concessions to the important Ba'th party as well as to pan-Arabists.

A military coup, put central Ba'th leaders in power without bloodshed in March 8, 1963. A national council is set up, and headed by Major General Amin el-Hafez. There were attempts to unite Iraq and Egypt with Syria, but soon the discussions came down to only Iraq and Syria. With the overthrow of the Iraqi branch of the Ba'th party, the discussions on unity between Iraq and Syria came to an end. A presidency council made up of 5 members, 3 civilian and 2 military was set up, replacing the national council. A new coup in 1966 ended the influence of foreign Ba'th intellectuals over Syrian politics. From this time on, Syria was governed through the Syrian Ba'th. Nuur ad-Din il-Attasi became the deputy prime minister of Syria.

1967 June, Syria participated in the Six-Day War against Israel, and suffered defeat and the loss of territory. The Golan Heights in the southwestern corner of the country, near the border to Israel. This military defeat was followed by a quarrel inside the government on who is to be blamed for the Syrian inadequacy. The so-called nationalist wing was headed by Defense Minister Hafez al-Assad, while the socialist wing was headed by Salah Jadid. In 1970 Assad came out as the victor of the political struggle, and forms government.

Two parties that had helped with the fight for independence, the Nationalist Party and the People's Party, dominated Syrian political life after World War II, but did not last long with various military coups taking over with the eventual take over by the Ba'ath Party and General Hafez al-Assad in 1971 and a permanent constitution was ratified on March 12, 1973.

On October 6 of that year, Syrian troops launched a full-scale attack against Israeli forces in the Golan Heights, as the Egyptians attacked in the Suez Canal area (Yom Kippur War). After the UN cease-fire of October 24th, Israel remained in control of the Golan Heights, and Syria boycotted peace negotiations that were held in Geneva. However, on May 31st, 1974, Syria signed a US-mediated disengagement accord with Israel, restoring part of the Golan Heights was annexed by Israel in 1981; outside powers criticized and did not recognize the annexation.

Rebellion staged by the Muslim Brotherhood in Hama and Aleppo in March 1980. In June of that year there was an attempt on Assad's life. Membership in the Muslim Brotherhood was made into a capital offence, and a period with hard and violent actions against the members started. In 1982, Governmental attacks on members of the Muslim Brotherhood, left thousands of dead. Estimates vary between 5,000 and 25,000 killed in Hama.

Assad is elected president in mock elections in 1985 with a majority of 99,9% of the votes. United States accused Syria of supporting international terrorism in 1986. Both countries recalled their ambassadors. The next year, the US ambassador returned to Syria. Subsequently Syria closed the training camps of Abu Nidal. By 1990, Syrian had control over Lebanon was assured after that Syrian-friendly forces gained control over Lebanon.

In recent years, Syria has intervened militarily in neighboring Arab states to secure political ends. Syria pulled its forces out of Lebanon in 2005, having come under major pressure from the international scene after the assassination of the Lebanese former premier Rafik Hariri. A UN report came out stating that Syria and pro-Syrian Lebanese officials were part of the assassination. Syria, however, denied any involvement with the killing of the Lebanese premier. The government has dealt harshly with domestic opposition. Thousands are thought to have been killed in the crackdown on the 1982 uprising of the Muslim Brotherhood in Hama.

In 1991 Syria participated with troops on the international side in the Gulf War against Iraq. President Assad died, and his son Bashar al-Assad was quickly put into the position as heir to the presidency in June 10, 2000. The formal recognition took place one month later, on July 10.

On October 5, 2003, Israel bombed a site near Damascus, claiming that it was a training ground for Islamic Jihad. Syrian authorities claimed that the area was used entirely for civilian purposes. On September 21, 2004, Syria began dismantling troops in Lebanon, following international pressure. This was the beginning of the end of the strong Syrian influence over Lebanese politics and economy.

After Hafez Al-Assad's death in 2000, and the assumption of power by his son, Bashar al-Assad Syria has shown greater reformist and moderate tendencies than in previous times. These changes included releasing dozens of political prisoners and a visit to Turkey to mend decades of poor relations. However, its links to militant extremists, such as Hezbollah, and a

legacy of corruption and government control made many other countries doubt Syria and tend to distrust the country. In September 21, 2004, Syria began dismantling troops in Lebanon, following international pressure. This was the beginning of the end of the strong Syrian influence over Lebanese politics and economy.

Source: <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/worldguide/destinations/middle-east/syria/essential?a=culture>, http://news.bbc.us/2/hi/middle_east/country_profiles/801669.stm, *WORLDMARK: Encyclopedia of the Nations, Asia & Oceania*, Tenth Edition. http://i-cias.com/e.o/syria_5.htm

Christian History

Christianity emerged very early on in Syria. One finds the Apostle Paul blinded by the Lord and converted on the road to Damascus and after the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, Antioch became the Christian center of the eastern half of the Roman Empire. Antioch became a hot bed for the Christian controversies going on during the early days of the church concerning the nature of Christ, with Nestorians and Jacobites becoming increasingly separated from the rest of the church following the Council of Chalcedon in 451.

The Catholic Uniate emerged in Syria in 1181, the Maronites coming under the full authority of Rome in 1516. Protestant missionaries arrived in Syria seeking Jewish and Muslim converts, but many converts came about from the other Christian churches that were already present in Syria. The Syrian Christian community began more within the peasant and farming community, but has evolved within the urban communities today.

Source: *World Christian Encyclopedia, Second Edition, Volume One: The World By Countries*

Religion

Non-Christian Religions

Islam-

Islam is considered to be the majority religion held by Syrians and makes up about 89% of the population. Muslims came to Syria and conquered them in AD 636. Damascus was the central city of the Umayyad empire between 660 and 750. In latter years Syria was ruled by Egyptian Mamelukes, Asian Mongols, and Ottoman Turks. Most Muslims in Syria adhere to the Sunni sect, but there can be found Alawites, Ismailis, and other Shiite sects. Currently, the ruling family in Syria belong to the Alawite sect.

Druzes-

The Druzes are predominately found in the southern area of Djebel where their population exceeds 380,000 people. They are a mysterious group and combine elements from Judaism, Christianity, and Islam together. They originated from the 11th Century when their founder, Darasi, identified Egyptian caliph al-Hakim as the incarnation of Allah.

Yazidi religion

Yazidi Religion was founded during the 12th century and has taken elements from various religions such as Judaism, Islam, Zoroastrianism, and Nestorianism. However, it adheres to more Islamic beliefs than the other religions or sects mentioned. It was begun by a man named Shaikh Adi who was thought to be the incarnation of the fallen angel Malak Ta'us. There are about 19,000 Yezidis living at the city of Aleppo.

Judaism

Many Syrian Jews left after World War II, but a small Arabic speaking Sefradic community has remained to this day in Syria.

Orthodox Churches

Greek Orthodox forms the strongest Christian community in Syria. It is Greek only in its Byzantine traditions, since the services and liturgy are in Arabic and its members and leaders are Arabs. It is historically the mother church of the Jacobites, who broke away in the 6th century, and the Greek Catholics (Melkites) who separated in the 16th century. There are about 150 congregations and 162,000 members.

Armenian Orthodox is the third largest Christian community in Syria, after the Greek Orthodox and the Catholic churches. They have a Monophysite tradition and are mostly found in Aleppo. There are about 23 congregations and 135,000 members.

Syrian Orthodox or Jacobites comes from the Monophysite tradition. They can be found in Aleppo, Homs, and the extreme northeast in the Qamishli area across the Turkish border from Tour Abdin where their ancient monastic institutions are located, Deir el-Zeferan and Deir Gabriel. There are about 25 congregations and 50,279 members.

Assyrian Church of the East is a small community in eastern Syria, but more of them can be found in Iraq and Iran. There are about 26 congregations in Syria and about 26,374 members.

Greek Catholic (Melkite) is the largest Christian community in Syria. There are five other Catholic groups in Syria: Armenians, Syrian, Maronite, Latin, and Chaldean. There are a total of 226 Catholic congregations in Syria with 162,000 members.

Protestants/Evangelicals/Pentecostals

National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon

The first Protestant to explore mission work in Syria was a member of the London Jews' Society in 1822. The American Board began work in Beirut in 1823, and then moving to Syria in 1848. In 1879, it transferred its work to the Presbyterian Church in the USA. Other early groups were the North American Reformed Presbyterian Mission and the Danish Mission to the Orient.

During the 1940s these 3 joined together to form the autonomous National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon, which is affiliated in the Presbyterian tradition. It is now declining in number because of people emigrating to other countries. There are currently 46 known congregations and 4,790 members.

Union of Armenian Evangelicals-

It is strong in the northern part of Syria where many Armenians settled after fleeing Turkey after World War I. The Armenian Union and National Evangelical Synod form the largest Protestant population in Syria that comprises approximately 36,000.

Source: *Operation World: When We Pray God Works*, 21st Century Edition.
World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World, Volume 1: The World By Countries, 2nd Edition.

People Groups

12175

Adyghe (Circassian) (50729)

Their primary religion is Islam. The Bible is translated into their language. Also, there are Gospel recordings found in their language and the Jesus film is translated for them. There is no active church plant among this people group and they are less than 2% evangelical. They originate from the Caucasus region.

By the mid-1860s, roughly 90% of the Adyghe (Cherkess) population had been either killed or forced to flee to various parts of the Ottoman Empire. In Syria, they can be found in five villages in the Golan Heights region. However, after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, many of them settled in the poor districts of Damascus. Many of them sought asylum in the United States and settled in New Jersey and New York City. The ones that stayed in Syria have managed to do well and many hold jobs within the government and the military. They speak Arabic, Adygey, and English. Although they adhere to Islam, they are considered by many other Arabs liberal in their beliefs.

12176

Alawites (1576627)

The Alawites are a minority group found in the mountains of Syria. They come from a sect from the Shiites of Islam which are known as Twelver Shia. They are hard to reach since they are very secretive about their faith and do not let strangers into their lives very easily. They mix some Christian beliefs, pagan beliefs, and Islamic beliefs.

The Alawites believe that Ali was a manifestation of Allah. They believe that people were once stars in the world of light, but fell onto earth because of disobedience. They believe that they must be reincarnated seven times before they become stars again and return to the world of light where Ali is prince. If they are sinful, they will be reborn as Christians until their atonement is complete. Infidels will be reborn as animals. They follow a book entitled, "Kitab al-Majmu".

There are few known Alawite Christians and there is no known missionary work to evangelize these people.

12177

Arab (344605)

They mostly adhere to Sunni Islam, but there is a large portion of the population that adhere to Shiite Islam. There is an evangelical representation in Syria trying to evangelize the Syrian Arabs, but still very small. There are Syrians that adhere to the Orthodox faith, but many follow it because it is family tradition. They are less than 2% evangelical.

12178

Arabic, Levantine Bedawi Spoken (88778)

They are a Bedouin group from eastern Egypt. Bedouins are known for having a nomadic lifestyle. They mostly adhere to Sunni Islam, but many combine folk Islamic beliefs as well. There is no active church among this people and they are less than 2% evangelical.

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Armenian (446,000)

Armenian history is has been full of death and blood especially during World War I where they were caught between the Russian and the Ottoman Empires. Some 1,750,000 Armenians were deported into Syria and Mesopotamia by the Ottomans. Syria holds the most Armenians in the Arab world and are found in the city of Aleppo. Many of them adhere to the Armenian Orthodox Church. There are few Protestants among the Armenians.

12181

Assyrian (34460)

This ethnic group originated in Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Syria. Many have migrated to Europe and America because of heavy persecution from Islamic communities. They are believed to descend from the ancient Akkadians. Babylonia was a colony of Assyria. Most Assyrians speak a modern form of Syriac, an Eastern Aramaic language whose dialects include Chaldean, Turoyo, and Assyrian. They are very proud of their heritage and culture. They adhere to the Assyrian Orthodox Church.

12182

Bedouin Arab (574343)

They are a nomadic people and follow the teachings of Islam, but also adhere to folk Islam which mixes in superstition and Orthodox Islam. They are hard to reach since they do not trust outsiders who do not come from their community, but are very hospitable to strangers that need a helping hand. There very few, if any, known believers.

12185

Chaldean, Neo-aramaic (6340)

The Chaldean people originated in Iraq and speak an eastern Aramaic language. They belong to the Chaldean Catholic Church. Chaldean script is sometimes used to refer to the Eastern Syriac alphabet. They are very proud of their heritage, history, and culture. They usually like to live in their own communities. There are very few known evangelicals among them and are considered to be unengaged by the missionary community.

12187

Druze (861513)

They are a Muslim mystical group. They are very secretive in their beliefs and rituals and only their members know what happens in their meetings. They are very proud of their heritage and culture and are very loyal to the country that they live in. They can be found in Israel, Lebanon, and Syria. They hold the Quran as sacred, but also have a series of other books bound in a collection entitled "Kitab Al-Hikma", the book of wisdom.

They believe in the transfiguration of the soul which means that at death, one's soul is immediately reincarnated and it is reborn into another life. Their concept of heaven and hell is spiritual in nature. They are less than 2% evangelical, but there is an initial church planting movement that has been going on within the past 2 years.

12188

Iraqi Arab (86152)

They mostly adhere to either Sunni or Shia Islam. Many have fled their homeland because of war and the hardships of life that war has brought on. Many have fled for religious or political reasons also. There is a translation of the Jesus Film found amongst them and there is an effort within the evangelical community to reach out to the Iraqi Arabs. The number of evangelical Christians remains very low.

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Jew, Syrian (6000)

Syria has a long history of having a Jewish community present. However, many Syrian Jews have fled Syria and their largest community can be found in Brooklyn, New York which constitutes a community of about 40,000. They adhere to the Jewish faith and hold on to their Jewish heritage and culture. There are very few Syrian Jews that practice the Christian faith.

42865

Jordanian Arab (34460)

They mostly adhere to the Sunni Islamic faith. There actually is a growing number of Jordanian Christians and a growing number of evangelical missionaries working among the Jordanian Arabs. Many Jordanians who are Muslims are merely Muslim by name and only follow its traditions.

42866

Kurmanji (1077467)

The Kurds speak the dialect. They are ethnically connected to the country of Kurdistan. They mainly live in the mountains of Syria and are generally farmers. Throughout history, the Kurds have never had a country to call their own. For many years, Syria tried to revoke the Kurds of their Syrian citizenship and deport them, deny them educational opportunities, and medical attention. However, their situation got better when Hafiz Assad came to power. They belong to the Islamic faith since the Arabs came to conquer them in the seventh century. There are very few known evangelicals among this group. There are Bible translations, the Jesus Film, and Gospel recordings done in their native language.

12190

Lomavren (422236)

A mixed language spoken by the Lom people, or Posha. It appeared at the contact between the Indo-Aryan language spoken by the proto-Romani ancestors of the contemporary Lom and Roma people and the Armenian language. Their primary religion is Islam and they are less than 2% evangelical. There are currently no Christian materials translated in their language.

42867

Maalula (17230)

An ancient Syrian Christian village that is located in the eastern slopes of Al-Qalamoun mountains in southern Syria. There are two ancient monasteries found in the village. Most of its inhabitants belong to the Greek Orthodox Church. There is however a growing number of evangelicals among these people. They speak a form of the Aramaic language.

42868

North Syrian Arab (2067635)

They speak the Levantine dialect which is spoken in Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, and Jordan. They mostly adhere to Sunni Islam and very few of them are evangelical Christians.

12193

Persian (19024)

They adhere to the Shiite sect of Islam and there are very few evangelical Christians among them. There are Christian materials translated in the Farsi language such as the Bible and the Jesus Film.

12189

Shiites (1126163)

Syria is divided between the Shitte sect and the Sunni sect of Islam. The Shittes are considered to be more zealous and passionate about their faith. There is a very small number of Christian evangelicals among the Shiite Muslims of Syria.

12198

Syrian Arab (11160528)

Mostly adhere to Sunni Islam, but there a large majority that belongs to Shiite Islam and its many sects. There are missionaries that are trying to reach the Syrian Arabs, but there is not a church planting movement among them.

12199

Syrian Aramaic (8880)

They are a group that are part of the Syriac Orthodox Church and have a long heritage with being in Syria. There are very few evangelicals among them.

12201

Turk (51691)

Many Turks moved to Syria seeking a better life for themselves and employment in Syria. They mostly adhere to Sunni Islam. They are very nationalistic and take great pride with their history and culture. There are Christian materials available to them in their language, but there are very few evangelicals among them.

12202

Turkmen (38046)

They originate from Turkmenistan and later migrated into the Caucus region where they learned to use the Russian language and continually use it. They are mostly herders and farmers. They also work as crafty tradesmen in bazaars. They originally took on the heretical Christian belief of the Nestorians, but then were conquered by the Muslims and adhered to Islam.

12205

Zott Gypsy (12682)

In Syria they adhere to Sunni Islam, but they adhere to whatever faith in whichever country that they live in. They are not trusted within the countries that they live in. They are known for deceiving people and for being thieves. However, not all gypsies are like this and have tried to work honestly to prove themselves. They are hard to reach, since they are not trusting of others who are not from the gypsy community.

Missiological Implications

The Syrian community has a respect with the Syrian Christian minority, thus giving missionaries a deeper respect with Syrians who are Muslims or come from the Orthodox background. However, many have a tolerance to the Christian message and do not mind them being in their country, but they do not believe that Muslims can convert to another faith since Muslims believe that is the ultimate betrayal to Allah.

1. Evangelical Christians and Churches should pray for peace in Syria and the other regions in the area.
2. Evangelical Christians and Churches should seek ways to meet physical and social needs in Syria
3. Evangelical Christians and Churches should develop methods for evangelizing followers of Islam and members of Orthodox churches and train local believers in the use of these methods.
4. Evangelical Christians and Churches should develop methods for sharing the Good News with Jewish peoples in Syria. These methods might well follow the approach of Messianic Synagogues or some method resembling the approach to help the Jews in Syria to turn to Jesus Christ without leaving their Jewish culture.
5. Evangelical Christians should encourage Syrians who live outside of Syria to train to be evangelists when and if they return to the country.

Pictures – See attached folder.

Links

<https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/sy.html>

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/worldguide/destinations/middle-east/syria>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syria>

<http://www.syriatourism.org/>

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/sytoc.html>

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3580.htm>

<http://www.arab.net/syria/>

<http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0108016.html>

<http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/syria/index.html?inline=nyt-geo>

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/country_profiles/801669.stm

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<http://www.ameinfo.com/syria/>

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<http://hrw.org/doc/?t=mideast&c=syria>

