

## Christian Refugees from Syria and Iraq

When Evangelicals hear about Christians in the Middle East, they typically assume three things: Firstly, that all the people of the Middle East are Muslim. Secondly, that those who are Christian are converts from Islam. Thirdly, most Western Evangelicals assume that the Middle Eastern Christians are Evangelical or that they are born again!

Although there are many converts from Islam in the Middle East, yet the majority of the Christians in the Middle East belong to the historic Christian churches- the Greek Orthodox, the Coptic Orthodox of Egypt, The Catholic and the Armenian Orthodox churches, to name a few! These Christians adhere to the Nicene Creed but in contrast to Evangelical Christians their worship involves historic mass rituals that might look strange to the Western Evangelical mind.

In fact, Christianity existed in the Middle East since its beginnings...

### Iraq

Here's a page about the Iraqi Christians:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity\\_in\\_Iraq](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity_in_Iraq)

The emptying of Iraq from its Christian population began in the 1980's during the Iraq and Iran war. It continued during the first Gulf war in the 1990's and continued further during the war to oust the Iraqi dictator in 2003.

Christian survivors long believed they could maintain a foothold around the city of Mosul (the ancient Nineveh). But Thousands of Christians were forced from their homes in 2014 to escape the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS) - remaining in IS-controlled territory as a Christian is effectively a death warrant. In a ghastly reminder of Nazi savagery against Jews, Christian homes were marked with the Arabic letter ن for Nazarenes—Christ followers— Christians also face abduction, attack and sexual abuse at the hands of extremists. Even in parts of Iraq free of IS, the law is based on Sharia (Islamic law). Mosul Christians who were unable to

leave were given three choices: convert to Islam, pay the tribute tax (unspecified amount that could be increased at any time) or face certain death!

Many Iraqi Christians who lived in the Mosul area fled to the northern Iraqi Kurdistan which is relatively safe. However, most of these Iraqis Christians, having seen the worse of Islam, left their country hoping to go to the West where they can rebuild their lives. Many ended up waiting for their visas in the country of Jordan. According to the 2015 census in Jordan 131000 Iraqis live in Jordan.

## **Syria:**

Syria's Christian community is one of the oldest in the world, going back two millennia. The apostle Paul was converted on the road to Damascus, while some Christians from the town of Maaloula can still speak Aramaic, the language of Jesus. At the start of the Syrian war, they made up about 10% of Syria's 22 million people. Despite their minority status, Christians have long been among Syria's elite. They have been represented in many of the political groups which have vied for control of the country, including the secular Arab nationalist and socialist movements which eventually came to the fore.

Although, like other Syrians, they had very limited civil and political freedoms, Christians are believed to have valued the rights and protection accorded to minorities by Hafez al-Assad, who was president between 1971 and 2000, and by his son Bashar, the current president. A large proportion of the country's Christians also tolerated or supported the Assads, whom they saw as guarantors of stability and the relative freedom of worship granted by their government.

When pro-democracy protests erupted in Syria in March 2011, many Christians were cautious and tried to avoid taking sides. However, as the government crackdown intensified and opposition supporters took up arms, they were gradually drawn into the conflict

The Syrian war, now in its fifth year did not spare the Christian community. Thousands have been forced from their homes by the threat from hardline Islamist rebels and jihadist militants. In areas seized by the jihadist group Islamic

State (IS), Christians have been ordered to convert to Islam, pay jizya (a religious levy), or face death. In the Syrian province of Hassakeh in February 2015, hundreds of Christians are feared to have been kidnapped by militants. Senior Christian clerics have also been kidnapped by unknown gunmen. Suspicion for the abductions has fallen on the Nusra Front, al-Qaeda's Syrian affiliate. The Christian communities of Syria, have been systematically targeted; their churches have been attacked and desecrated; their priests, monks, and nuns murdered; and generally discriminated against by the anti-government forces supported by Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, and their allies .

- Here's a Wikipedia article about Syrian Christians:  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity\\_in\\_Syria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity_in_Syria)
- Here's a web pages that details **10 Facts About Syria Christians From History to Everyday Life**: <http://goo.gl/Agq2Yr>

## Refugees:

- 4.6 million Syrians are refugees, and 6.6 million are displaced within Syria; **half are children**. Most Syrian refugees remain in the Middle East, in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt; about 10 percent of the refugees have fled to Europe.
- Jordan has 1.2 million Syrians according to the Jordanian 2015 census.

## Why are Syrians fleeing their homes?

1. **Violence:** Since the Syrian civil war began, 320,000 people have been killed, including nearly 12,000 children. Some estimate that about 1.5 million people have been wounded or permanently disabled. The war has become more deadly since foreign powers joined the conflict.
2. **Collapsed infrastructure:** Within Syria, healthcare, education systems, and other infrastructure have been destroyed; the economy is shattered.
3. **Children's safety:** Syrian children — the nation's hope for a better future — have lost loved ones, suffered injuries, missed years of schooling, and witnessed violence and brutality. Warring parties forcibly recruit children to serve as fighters, human shields, and in support roles

## Why do Syrians want to emigrate?

1. Most Syrians that I know want to leave this war torn area known as the Middle East. This region has experienced wars and civil wars since 1948. To name a few:
  - The 1948 war for the establishment of Israel. 1967 Arab Israeli 6 day war.
  - 1970 Black September war in Jordan
  - 1973 October/ Yom Kippur war
  - 1975 Lebanese civil war until 1990
  - 1980 Iraqi Iranian war
  - 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait
  - 1991 Desert Storm to dislodge Iraq from Kuwait- First Gulf war.
  - 2003 Second Gulf war to topple Saddam Hussein.
  - 2006 Israeli war on Lebanon with Hezbollah.
  - 2011 Syrian conflict/ war
  - 2013/2014 ISIS takes over large swaths of land in Iraq and Syria.
  - The list can go on!
2. Syrian refugees in the Middle East have no hope to settle permanently in the Middle Eastern countries. The rich Gulf States accepted no Syrian refugees. The poorer Arab countries offer no hope financially. Most have to look for financial aid from the United Nations or other aid organizations including churches.
3. The present laws in the Arab countries offer no hope to any refugee to become a citizen. Although all Arabs speak the same language, yet individual countries will rarely grant citizenship to individuals from other countries, especially the poor. I have many Egyptians, Iraqis and Lebanese in my congregation who have been living in Jordan, some for over 30 years, and have yet to obtain citizenship. Their residency has to be renewed yearly and they can be asked to leave anytime. So, the refugees have no hope and are looking for a place they can call home- for themselves and their children.