

Holy Land



Children at a Barnabas-funded Christian school in Bethlehem

If things remain like this, there'll be no Christians left in Gaza." With these words a Christian woman living in the Gaza Strip in July 2012 voiced her concern for the future of Christ's people in the Holy Land. The land where our Lord Jesus Himself lived is not an easy place to be a Christian. Competing claims to the territory mean that it has long been a site of violent uprisings and instability, and many Christians are caught up in a conflict that is not their own.

In the 1950s, 90% of Bethlehem's population were Christian, but today, the Christian population is estimated at only 30%. The economy of Bethlehem is heavily dependent on the tourist trade, but after the second Palestinian *intifada* (uprising) began in 2000, tourist numbers dropped. Many Christians were employed in the tourist trade and therefore lost their jobs. Tourism has now begun to pick up in Bethlehem, and more Christians have employment. But despite this, living conditions in the Bethlehem area are not easy, and Christians can also face discrimination and other pressures.

Christians in Gaza, who are thought to number only about a thousand, have been under the Islamist yoke of the militant group Hamas since 2007. Although the Christian presence is officially tolerated, under Hamas several of their shops and schools have been vandalised, and they are regularly harassed and intimidated. No arrests have been made by the government, and crimes against Christians go largely unreported. Christian leaders also receive warnings in advance of Christian holidays against any public display of their faith.

Messianic Jews, who number around 20,000, can experience violence and harassment from Orthodox Jewish groups as well as official discrimination. One Christian woman who emigrated to Israel in 2011 had her citizenship revoked after six months because of her affiliation with Messianic Judaism.

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