

Participate in Learning: *Palestine*



1 Weigh In

Agriculture is a large industry in Palestine. Close to 50 percent of all cultivated land consists of olive groves, making it the chief crop in the region. Some of these olive trees are hundreds, if not thousands, of years old.

2

The Palestinian Territories are within the country of Israel, just as Quebec is within the country of Canada. The ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Territories has made practising Christianity extremely difficult throughout the region. In comparison to Palestine's 85 percent Muslim-majority population, evangelical Christians represent less than two percent. In addition to experiencing the targeted hostility associated with being born in Palestine, followers of Jesus are also subjected to widespread persecution from those within their own communities who strongly oppose their faith.

3

As a result of the increasing conflict and persecution, many Palestinians feel they have no choice but to flee the region. It is estimated that 55 percent of the world's refugees come from three territories globally, and Palestine is one of them.

4

Palestinian culture is highly collectivist; meaning that, relationally, people's lives are largely interdependent and group centric. In collectivist societies, the well-being of the group tends to be more important than the well-being of an individual. Family ties are extremely strong and serve as the determining factor in most major decisions. Additionally, interpersonal relationships take precedence over personal goals. For example, it is common for people to alter their plans to host someone in their home, even when there is little to no advance notice.

1. While Canada's climate typically ranges between extremely cold winters and very warm summers, the temperature fluctuations in Palestine throughout the year are less severe, making it an ideal environment for growing olives and other tropical fruits. What role does the environment play in the types of agriculture a region can produce? Experiment: Plant an ornamental cabbage during this autumn season, as well as a tomato plant. Observe the effects that the cooler seasonal temperatures have on the plants.

2. The two most important commands Jesus gave were to: 1) love the Lord our God with all our hearts, and 2) love our neighbours as ourselves. All the other Biblical commandments centre around these two. Read 1 John 4:7-21 aloud. What is the role of the Israeli and Palestinian church in living out Jesus' commandments in the midst of the country's ongoing conflict? How has the conflict's divisiveness added to the isolation that many Palestinian Christians are experiencing? Please spend some time in prayer on behalf of these suffering believers.

3. Palestinian refugees are forced to leave behind their homes, properties, possessions, families, friends and sources of income. If you ever lost everything, and were forced to leave your residence, where would you go – especially if you didn't have the support of a caring church community?

4. Learn the differences between individualistic and collectivist societies. What are some of the challenges collectivist cultures may face when relating to those that are individualistic? What important values can we learn in our highly individualistic culture when examining collectivist cultures? What is one helpful attribute of collectivism that you would like to apply to your life here in Canada?

One Way

Denying being made in the image of God, Muslims instead find identity in serving their deity, Allah. They believe that their god breathed life into human beings during creation, but that there is no distinction between us and animals. According to their beliefs, Allah shares no attributes with anyone, including members of humanity. They state that the only way to know him is through the prophets and the authoritative teachings of the Quran. A Muslim's relationship with their god is strictly that of "slave" to "master." There is no assurance of heaven, no unconditional love, and no personal relationship, only service to Allah in hopes of being 'good enough' for heaven.

The Bible teaches that, in the beginning, God created humans in His image, distinguishing them from the rest of creation (Genesis 1:27). Being made in God's image, humanity then possesses the capacity to express His moral attributes – including holiness, love, righteousness and wisdom, to name a few. Christians are invited to enjoy a personal relationship with God, which was made possible through the sacrificial provision of His Son Jesus Christ. Through this personal relationship, believers find their identity in being God's sons and daughters; joint heirs with Christ in inheriting the Kingdom of heaven. When Christians serve God, as a desire from the overflow of their redeemed hearts, they are filled with hope, expectation and unconditional love (Romans 8:14-17).

Way Out

In regions where followers of Jesus are heavily persecuted, it can be difficult for Christian leaders to receive vitally needed Biblical training. The Palestinian Territories are no exception. To combat this need globally, VOMC has created the Glenn Penner Scholarship Award (GPSA), which is designed to help emerging Christian leaders from hostile or restricted nations pursue, with excellence, Biblical and professional training. In collaboration with established Christian educational institutions, this scholarship aims to equip potential leaders in the persecuted world theologically and Biblically within an academic setting. In Palestine, VOMC partners with Bethlehem Bible College by granting selected students Glenn Penner Scholarship Awards. This scholarship funding, in turn enables these students to better equip, lead and evangelize others within their Palestinian communities.

Sources:
Understanding the Times – A Survey of Competing Worldviews by Dr. Jeff Myers and Dr. David A. Noebel
<https://operationworld.org/locations/palestine/>
<https://www.everyculture.com/No-Sa/Palestine-West-Bank-and-Gaza-Strip.html>
<https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook>
<https://culturalatlas.sbs.com.au/palestinian-culture/palestinian-culture-family>
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/6/20/infographic-world-refugee-day-journey>

Recommended Reads

Once an Arafat Man: The True Story of How a PLO Sniper Found a New Life by Tass Saada and Dean Merrill (adult); *Son of Hamas: A Gripping Account of Terror, Betrayal, Political Intrigue and Unthinkable Choices* by Mosab Hassan Yousef and Ron Brackin (adult); *In the Backyard of Jesus* by Steven N. Khoury (adult); *The Bronze Bow* by Elizabeth George Speare (teen).