

Session 1

Here we are



Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory (IOPT) is made up of areas of land to the east of the Mediterranean Sea. Lebanon and Syria are to the north, Jordan is in the east, and Egypt is in the south-west. This is where many of the stories in the Bible are set! Since 1948, this area of land has been divided into two: Israel and Palestine. Palestine is now often referred to as 'the Occupied Palestinian Territory' as it is under occupation by Israel. Israel enforces the occupation with its military.

Fun facts

Read through the facts and then try quizzing each other to see how much you remembered:

- The colours of the Palestinian flag are black, white, green and red. These colours are on the flags of many Arab countries.
- The colours of the Israeli flag are blue and white. The flag has a star of David on it.
- Arabic is the main language in Palestine and Hebrew is the main language in Israel. The words for "Hello" are very similar in both! In Arabic it is "Salaam" and in Hebrew it is "Shalom".
- The Dead Sea is a large salt lake that borders both Israel and the West Bank. It is the lowest point on earth and is too salty for any fish to live in.
- The River Jordan marks the eastern edge of Israel and the West Bank. The Bible says Jesus was baptised in the Jordan! The West Bank gets its name from being on the 'west bank' of the river.



Activity

Find Israel and Palestine on a map. They are located in Western Asia and connect Asia and Africa. Historically, this was a very important location as lots of traders passed through it as they crossed continents. Because it was on a trade route, lots of different empires wanted to control it. This area has been controlled by the Babylonian, Persian, Roman, Greek, Ottoman, and British empires!

Today there are two main areas to Palestine: the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Can you find both of them? How big are they compared to the UK?

The population of this area has always been diverse; as well as Arab people, there have been Jewish and Christian communities living in Palestine since the religions began. The Bible is full of stories about Jews and early Christians who lived in this area. There are lots of places that are mentioned in the Bible that you can still visit, like Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and the Sea of Galilee.

Across the world, Jewish people have been discriminated against throughout history. In the nineteenth century, a movement called Zionism arose. Zionists wanted to create a Jewish state in historic Palestine, as this is where Jewish people in biblical times lived. The idea was that Jewish people around the world could move to the new state and be safe from persecution. This became particularly important after the Holocaust, and more Jews fled to Palestine as refugees from Europe.

In 1948, the state of Israel was created by the United Nations. The land was partitioned (separated) into two and many Palestinians were forced to leave their homes. Although Israel was meant to be a safe place for Jewish refugees, the partition plan created Arab refugees. Palestinians call this time the *Nakba*, or catastrophe.



Prayer

Dear God,

We pray for people who have been victims of discrimination, and we pray for people who have been made refugees because of conflict and violence. Help us make your world a place where all people can feel safe and accepted.

Amen

Bible link

“Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:

‘May they prosper who love you.

Peace be within your walls,

and security within your towers.’

For the sake of my relatives and friends

I will say, ‘Peace be within you.’

For the sake of the house of the Lord our God,

I will seek your good.” Psalm 122:6-9



Jerusalem has been a city of great religious and political importance since biblical times. When the state of Israel was created in 1948, the United Nations said that Jerusalem would be an international city that was administrated by the UN rather than by Israel or Palestine. Today, both Israel and Palestine claim Jerusalem as their capital. Internationally, most countries recognise Tel Aviv as the capital of Israel. Palestinians want East Jerusalem to be their capital, but Palestine is not officially recognised as a state by the United Nations. East Jerusalem has been ‘annexed’ by Israel since 1967, which means that Israel’s army took control of it and declared that it belonged to Israel.

Both Israelis and Palestinians argue that they have a right to live in the land. What do you think a peaceful city would look like? How should we act to build peace when there has been a lot of hurt in the past?



Discussion

There has been a physical barrier separating Israel and the West Bank since the 2000s. In some places this is a wall, and in other places it is a high fence. Israel built it as they said they needed to protect themselves from attacks by Palestinians. Palestinians argue that the barrier crosses over the internationally recognised borders, which makes their land smaller, and restricts their ability to move between areas for work or to access facilities.

Think about the town or village where you live. How do you get to school or to your friend’s house? Imagine that a high wall was built near your house. How would you get to school or your friend’s house now? How long would it take? Have a discussion with your group about how this would make you feel.

