



AFEDJ

American Friends of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem

Bearing Witness

A Journey with Holy Land Christians

GETTING TO KNOW THE HOLY LAND

Jordan

Jordan

*“I tell my teachers, take an umbrella.
God will provide the rain.”*

–Dua’a Bisharat of Saviour’s School in Zarka on how she faces daily challenges in Jordan

Geography

- Bound on the east by the Arabian Desert, in the north by the Yarmuk River valley, and on the west by the River Jordan, the Dead Sea, and the Wadi Arabah
- Marked by desert regions, river valleys (or wadis), and the mountainous northwest
- Part of a region once known as Transjordan (or the land east of the Jordan River)
- Over the centuries its geography has been of central importance to Muslims, as a large portion of the passage of the Hajj from Istanbul to Mecca continues to exist today as a north-south highway, providing a significant amount of trade in addition to the passageway for pilgrims.

Population

- 11 million inhabitants (33% are under the age of 14)
- 2.9 million are non-citizens (refugees, legal and illegal immigrants)
- 95% Arabs (Jordanian and Palestinian)
- One-half to two-thirds of Jordan’s population are Palestinians.
- There is also a significant minority of Bedouin, who were by far the largest indigenous group before the influx of Palestinians following the Arab-Israeli wars of 1948–49 and 1967.

Religions

- 97% Sunni Muslim
- 2.2% Christian (67% Greek Orthodox; plus Catholic, Syrian Orthodox, Protestant)

Government and Politics

Jordan is a constitutional monarchy based on the constitution established in 1952. The king exercises his power through the government he appoints which is responsible to the Parliament. The monarchy of Jordan is not ceremonial. The king has significant influence over the affairs of the country. The king appoints and dismisses the prime minister and cabinet and may dissolve the National Assembly at his discretion.

King Hussein ruled Jordan from 1953 to 1999, surviving several challenges to his rule, drawing on the loyalty of his military, and serving as a symbol of unity and stability for the Jordanian and Palestinian communities in Jordan. King Abdullah II of Jordan has been sovereign since the death of his father, King Hussein, in 1999. Abdulla reaffirmed Jordan’s peace treaty with Israel and its positive relations with the United States. He has focused the government’s agenda on economic reform. Abdullah is popular in Jordan and internationally for maintaining Jordanian stability and is known for promoting interfaith dialogue and a moderate understanding of Islam.



Mediterranean Sea

Lebanon

Beirut

Damascus

Syria

Iraq

Sea of Galilee

Golan Heights

Yarmuk

Jordan River

Irbid

Ar Ramtha

Ajloun

Jerash

Mafraq

Salt

Zarqa

Wadi as Sir

Amman

West Bank

Tel Aviv

Ramallah

Jerusalem

Dead Sea

Madaba

As Safawi

Azraq ash Shishan

Al Umari

Israel

Al Karak

Al Qatranah

Jordan

Talilah

Al Hasa

Bair

Jurf ad Darawish

Ash Shawbak

Petra

Maan

Al Jafr

Ras an Haqb

Saudi Arabia

Aqaba

Al Mudawwarah

0 25 50 km
0 25 50 mi

Economy

Since 2011, Jordan has seen slowed economic growth and rising public debt which have led to a worsening of poverty and unemployment in the country. The country's top five economic sectors – government services, finance, manufacturing, transport, and tourism – have been negatively impacted by the Syrian civil war.

- 23.3% unemployment; youth unemployment is near 50%, and the women's labor force participation rate is 14%, one of the lowest in the world.
- Impacted by climate-related hazards including significant temperature increases and increased incidents of drought.
- Heavily dependent on fossil fuel imports – Jordan relies on imported natural gas for 95% of domestic energy needs; limited natural resources.
- Among the most water-poor countries in the world.
- Services, including public administration, defense, and retail sales, form the single most important components of Jordan's economy in both value and employment.
- The country's location in the volatile Middle East has led to high military expenditures; the Jordanian military is considered to be among the most professional in the region, and is well-trained, organized, and equipped.

Education

- The great majority of the population is literate, and more than half have completed secondary education or higher.
- Jordan has three types of schools—government schools, private schools, and the UNRWA schools that serve Palestinian refugee children.
- The Ministry of Education supervises all schools and establishes the curricula, teachers' qualifications, and state examinations; it also distributes free books to students in government schools and enforces compulsory education to the age of 14. Most students attend government schools.
- The quality of government schools varies widely. There are elite public schools in Amman whose graduates mostly attend university. However, most public schools are underfunded, resulting in low teacher wages, large class sizes, and a lack of modern educational resources.
- Just over 2.5% of Jordan's total population is enrolled at university, which is relatively high for a developing country.

Infrastructure

- There are 2 major roads in Jordan, the north-south Desert Highway from Amman to Aqaba and the east-west highway from Al Mafraq to the Iraqi border.
- A very small rail system is used for transporting raw materials to the southern port of Aqaba.
- There are 3 main airports – 2 international and 1 military.
- A thoroughly modern communications system is partially privatized; many people use cellular phones and pagers, and Internet access is widespread.
- 98% of the population has access to electricity with 90% supplied by the state-owned National Electric Power Company.
- Rising temperatures, reduced rainfall, and limited vegetation plus a rapidly increasing population are pushing the nation's available water resources to the limit.



Refugees

Millions of refugees from different conflicts currently live in Jordan. The country has more than two million Palestinian refugees registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), and about 655,000 Syrian refugees registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Jordan has 10 Palestinian refugee camps and 5 refugee camps for Syrians. In total, there are more than 3 million refugees living in Jordan, a country with a total population of 11 million. The influx of Palestinian refugees, largely due to the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, not only altered Jordan's demographics but has also affected its political, social, and economic life. More recently (2018), Syrian refugees have sought asylum in Jordan.

- 19.5% of Syrian refugees live in camps (131,300)—almost all in Zaatari (81,000) and Azraq (43,934). The remaining 542,000 are mostly in Jordan's urban areas, concentrated in Amman (26%), Irbid (18%), and Al Mafraq (12%).
- In 2020, UNICEF found that 85% of Syrian refugee children in Jordan lived below the poverty line. UNICEF reported that 94% of these children under age five face “multidimensional” poverty, where they did not have basic needs met, such as education or healthcare.
- About 370,000 of the 2 million Palestinian refugees in Jordan live in UNRWA refugee camps. Jordan is the only Arab country to grant wide-scale citizenship to Palestinian refugees.
- Palestine refugees are allowed access to public services and healthcare, as a result, refugee camps are becoming like poor city suburbs.

Everyday Life and Challenges

Jordan is among the most politically liberal countries of the Arab world, and although it shares in the political troubles affecting the region, its rulers have expressed a commitment to maintaining peace and stability. However, Jordanians are faced with many challenges domestically. Refugees impact everyday life for most Jordanians. 80% of Syrian refugees live in urban centers, not in refugee camps. The influx of refugees strains Jordan's economy, municipal services, education, and healthcare. Poverty is high and many middle-class families struggle with the cost of living which is steadily rising. Jordan recently has had violent incidents driven by frustration with the deterioration of the economic situation. Climate change is impacting the economy with clean water access becoming difficult and expensive. Jordan law criminalizes several freedoms that exist in the United States such as speech critical of the king, foreign countries, government officials and institutions, Islam and Christianity. Women need the permission of a male guardian to marry for the first time, and marriages between Muslim women and non-Muslim men are not recognized. Women cannot travel abroad with their children, as men can, without the permission of their child's father or male guardian or a judge.

Recent History

- Part of the Ottoman Empire until 1918 and later a mandate of the United Kingdom, Jordan has been an independent kingdom since 1946, today known as the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.
- During the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, Jordan intervened in Palestine together with many other Arab states.
- Following the war, Jordan controlled the West Bank (so named because it lies just west of the Jordan River) and in 1950 annexed these territories, holding them as a "trustee" pending future settlement.
- In 1951 King Abdullah was assassinated at the Al-Aqsa Mosque by a Palestinian militant, amid rumors he intended to sign a peace treaty with Israel.
- Jordan signed a military pact with Egypt just before Israel launched a preemptive strike on Egypt to begin the Six-Day War in June 1967. Jordan and Syria then joined the war.
- In 1988 Jordan renounced its claim to the West Bank and recognized the Palestine Liberation Organization as "the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people..
- In 1999, Abdullah II ascended the throne upon the death of his father Hussein, who had ruled for nearly 50 years. Abdullah embarked on economic liberalization and his reforms led to an economic boom which continued until 2008.
- Jordan was left largely unscathed from the violence that swept the region during "Arab Spring" in 2011, despite an influx of 1.4 million Syrian refugees and the emergence of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

Finding Jordan in Scripture

Mt. Nebo (*Deuteronomy 34*)

The Jordan River (*2 Kings 2:3-14*)

Bethany beyond the Jordan (site of Jesus' baptism) (*Matthew 3*)

The Dead Sea (*Ezekiel 47:7-12*)

Edom (*Mark 3:8*)

Moab (*Ruth 1*)

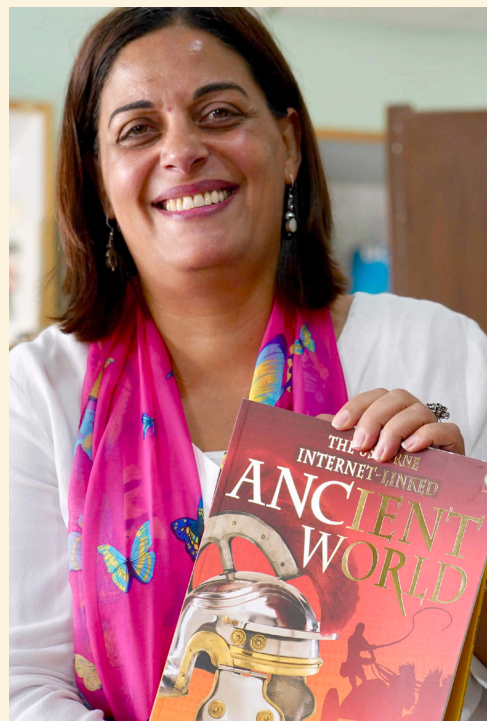
Aaron's Tomb (in Petra) (*Numbers 20:22-29, 33:38-39*)

Philip and the Ethiopian (*Acts 8:28-40*)

Meet **Dua'a Bisharat**

Dua'a Bisharat has been at Saviour's School in Zarqa, Jordan since 1994. She started as a kindergarten teacher and became director of the school in 1999. Dua'a is from the small, northern Jordan village of Shatana. She is the youngest of nine children in her family, all of whom received good educations, thanks to their parents who always pushed their children to succeed in school.

Dua'a is a strong school leader. She told us, "Every year is different. Every year I look forward to seeing how we can achieve more, grow, and change for the better. At the end of each day I reflect on something new I've learned from our students, teachers, or parents. My passion for teaching and learning will never stop and what motivates me the most is seeing my students grow."



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American Friends of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem
25 Old King's Highway N. Suite 13
Darien, CT 06820
www.afedj.org

Authors: Sharon Ely Pearson, Heidi Shott, John Lent
Design: Peg Golden Arrington
Video: Five Pebbles Productions
Images: AFEDJ and Shutterstock.