



AFEDJ

American Friends of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem

# Bearing Witness

A Journey with Holy Land Christians

GETTING TO KNOW THE HOLY LAND

## The West Bank and Ramallah

# THE WEST BANK and RAMALLAH

*“The West Bank is not a ‘conflict zone.’ It’s a territory where Jews enjoy citizenship, free movement, due process, and the right to vote for the government that controls their lives while Palestinians are denied all these rights. That’s not ‘conflict.’ It’s oppression.”*

– Peter Beinart, Editor-at-Large, *Jewish Currents*; Professor of Journalism and Political Science, Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism, City University of New York

## Geography

- A landlocked territory bordered by Jordan and the Dead Sea to the east and by Israel (by a demarcation “green line”) to the south, west, and north
- Mostly composed of north-south–oriented limestone hills (conventionally called the Samarian Hills north of Jerusalem and the Judean Hills south of Jerusalem)
- Average height of 2,300 to 3,000 feet with hills descending eastwardly to the low-lying Great Rift Valley of the Jordan River and the Dead Sea
- A hot, dry climate except for elevated areas that are slightly cooler
- 2,173 square miles

## Population and Political Boundaries

- 3.2 million Palestinians
- 670,000 Israeli settlers (220,000 in East Jerusalem)
- 30% under 15 years of age<sup>1</sup> and 3.6% over 65
- The Oslo Accords divided the Palestinian West Bank into three administrative zones: Area A, B, and C.

**Area A** comprises approximately 18% of the West Bank and is under Palestinian political and military control. It contains the major cities – Ramallah, Bethlehem, Nablus, Jenin, Tulkarem, Qalqilya, Jericho, and 80% of Hebron. The only illegal Israeli settlements in Area A are in Hebron. Israeli citizens are not allowed to enter this area. However, since 2002 Israeli armed forces conduct regular raids, often at night, into area A.

**Area B** comprises approximately 22% of the West Bank and is under Palestinian civil law and shares security responsibilities with Israel. In reality, Israel holds almost complete military control over this area, with limited cooperation from Palestinian police. This area covers the vast majority of Palestinian agricultural land with approximately 440 Palestinian villages and no illegal Israeli settlements. Areas A and B are often called the “islands” as they are separated by Israeli-only infrastructure and the illegal settlements in Area C.

**Area C** comprises approximately 60% of the West Bank and is under almost complete Israeli control. This area contains all (apart from in Hebron) Israeli settlements and settler roads, with large buffer zones around them. The Palestinian Authority is responsible for providing education and medical services to the approximately 300,000 Palestinians in over 500 villages and towns. Some 400,000 Israeli settlers reside in approximately 230 settlements in Area C.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/brief-report-on-the-population-of-palestine-at-the-end-of-2021/> (accessed June 14, 2022).



## Palestinian Territories

Area A

Area B

Area C

The  
West  
Bank

Gaza

Ramallah

Jerusalem ■ ■ East Jerusalem



## Ramallah

- Ramallah is the cosmopolitan heart and the cultural, commercial, and governmental hub of the West Bank.
- The city serves as the de facto administrative capital of the State of Palestine. It includes the official residence of the President of the Palestinian National Authority, the Palestinian Legislative Council, and the headquarters of the Palestinian Security Services.
- Ramallah has many museums and cultural centers, and a notable nightlife scene. There is an international dining scene, with many restaurants serving alcohol and an eclectic range of bars throughout the city.
- Ramallah is home to foreigners working in NGOs, as journalists and for human rights organizations.
- While historically a predominantly Christian town, Muslims constitute a majority of Ramallah's 40,000 residents, with Christians making up a significant minority of almost 20%.

## West Bank Religions

- 80-85% Muslim (mostly Sunni)
- 12-14% Jewish
- 1-2.5% Christian (mostly Greek Orthodox)

## West Bank and Ramallah Economy

- Ramallah has experienced a construction boom in recent years. This has been attributed to relative stability and Western donor support to the Palestinian Authority. Ramallah's buoyant economy continues to draw Palestinians from other West Bank towns where jobs are fewer.
- Hundreds of millions of dollars in aid flowing into the city have boosted Ramallah's economy greatly since the end of the Second Intifada in 2005.
- In contrast to the relative economic prosperity of Ramallah, the overall economy of the West Bank is chronically depressed.
- The unemployment rate is one of the highest in the world, especially for women (which is 50% according to the World Bank).
- For those who have employment, the average daily wage in the West Bank for Palestinians is about \$30.
- Palestine has long had an abundance of natural resources, ranging from fresh ground water, arable land and, more recently, oil and natural gas. Since 1948, these resources have been compromised and exploited by Israel through a variety of measures, including widespread Palestinian dispossession of land and exploitation of water.



- For Palestinians, agriculture is more than a source of income or an economic category. It is tied to the people's history, identity, and self-expression.
- This agricultural heritage is best represented by the olive tree, some of which are hundreds of years old. About 80,000 to 100,000 Palestinian families rely on the olive harvest, which takes place every year between October and November, for their income – including more than 15% of working women. The olive sector generates \$160 – \$200 million in good years.

## Education

- Education is highly valued by Palestinian families. 95.4% of Palestinian children are enrolled in basic education.
- Compulsory basic education includes Grades 1 to 10 – divided into the preparatory stage (Grades 1 to 4) and the empowerment stage (Grades 5 to 10).
- Secondary education and a few vocational secondary schools cover Grades 11 and 12.
- By age 15, nearly 25% of boys and 7% of girls have dropped out of school, while 22.5% of boys and 30% of girls aged 6-15 years with a disability have never enrolled in school<sup>2</sup>.
- Youth unemployment rate is 40% in the West Bank; qualifications currently acquired by many young people do not match those of the job market, which in-turn affects their motivation to continue learning; life-skills education is critical to enhancing young people's future integration in the job market<sup>3</sup>.

## Travel

- Ramallah (as well as many other West Bank cities and towns, including Bethlehem) is divided from Jerusalem by a massive separation wall.
- The main way through the wall is the Qalandia checkpoint, the primary Israel Defense Forces (IDF) checkpoint between the northern West Bank and East Jerusalem.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/mena/reports/state-palestine-out-school-children> (accessed December 1, 2022).

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/westbankandgaza/overview> (accessed December 1, 2022).



- Israeli restrictions on movement imposed on Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, result in a life of constant uncertainty, making it difficult to perform everyday tasks or make plans.
- There is no functioning airport in the West Bank.

### **Infrastructure**

- Water is a prized commodity. Palestinian homes have water collection tanks on their roofs because of intermittent electricity and water supply.
- Israeli settlements are green and lush on the tops of West Bank hillsides as they receive water piped in.
- 40% (and growing) of the West Bank is taken up by Israeli infrastructure consisting of settlements, military bases, and closed military areas.
- The Separation Wall isolates about 9% of the land and approximately 25,000 Palestinians from the rest of the country.
- Israel controls nature reserves and the roads that accompany them is off-limits or tightly controlled to Palestinian usage.

### **Everyday Life and Challenges**

There are many occasions when violence and chaos threaten a dangerous disruption of everyday life in Palestine, even for those who are not directly involved. This is particularly true in the Palestinian refugee camps where as many as one-third of all Palestinians live.

For other Palestinians, the daily struggle is getting an adequate education. Palestinian children often must walk several kilometers to get to a school and occasionally this means walking by settlements that aren't necessarily friendly to them.

Too often, daily life in Palestine involves navigating your way through an endless series of checkpoints and regulations that inhibit travel and restrict access to medical aid or visiting families in other parts of Palestine.

Yet despite all these restrictions, Palestinians deal with these struggles and continue living meaningful lives. Palestinians work hard to overcome these difficulties to find a better future for themselves and their families.

### **Recent History**

- Following the founding of the State of Israel in 1948, Jordan controlled this part of Palestine and named it the West Bank – territory west of the Jordan River.
- Israel gained control of the West Bank during the Six-Day War in 1967.
- The people of the West Bank have lived under Israeli military occupation since 1967.



## Finding the West Bank in Scripture

**Basilica of the Nativity, Bethlehem, West Bank** (*Luke 2:1-7*)

**Shepherds' Fields and The Shepherds' Field Chapel (Sanctuary of the Gloria in excelsis Deo), Bethlehem, West Bank** (*Luke 2:8-20*)

**Mount of Temptation Monastery, Jericho, West Bank** (*Matthew 4:1-11*)

**Jacob's Well (Well of Sychar) in The Greek Orthodox Church of St. Photina, Nablus (Shechem), West Bank** (*John 4:1-42*)

**Rachel's Tomb, Bethlehem, West Bank** (*Genesis 35:20*)

**Joseph's Tomb, Nablus (Shechem), West Bank** (*Joshua 24:32*)

### Meet **Iyad Rafidi**

More than 200 years ago, Iyad Rafidi's family left the Christian village of Rafidias in the northern West Bank to settle in the Muslim town of Al-Bireh near Ramallah. Iyad began his education career at the Arab Evangelical Episcopal School in Ramallah shortly after graduating from Birzeit University in 1986. He taught mathematics in the upper grades until 2005 when he was named headmaster of the school. In his 37 years at AEES, Iyad has worked tirelessly to provide a quality education to the students he and his staff serve and to offer a school climate that promotes tolerance, democracy, love, and understanding. Preparing the Christian and Muslim students from



Ramallah and the surrounding villages and town for successful futures is at the heart of his work. He says, "I am always inspired by the founders of AEES who worked and gave endlessly to the school. I am also motivated by my background because I come from a generation of Palestinians who have lived with and struggled with the occupation. We are a generation that values our community and serving others."

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