



Spreading Hope in the Middle East

# Christian Palestinian Arabs

-by Yohanna Katanacho

Some people are surprised by the presence of Christians in Israel and Palestine. They think that all Arabs are Muslims and that all Israelis are Jews. In reality, God has preserved his multi-ethnic and multicultural church in the Holy Land for the last 2000 years! Let's look at the church in Palestine and unpack the label "Christian Palestinian Arabs" in order to better understand these Christians and their calling.

## They Are Christians

"Christian" is a term full of nuance, especially in Palestine. These Christians are shaped by radically diverse histories, beliefs and traditions, but generally they can be placed into four classifications: Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant. The Orthodox branches were dominant in Palestine until the 18th century when the Greek, Armenian, and Syrian Catholic churches were founded - an event that led to a new missionary era in the region. Since that time, missionaries have contributed to the creation of a growing community of small Arab Evangelical churches and God's family identity continues to diversify. This complex diversity could be unparalleled in the world and reflects the unique nature and calling of the church in Palestine -- but this diversity is not without a high cost. Most (if not all) of these church families have experienced struggles and ruptures which have divided the local family of God. But this church has the potential to communicate in unique ways to the world through both her old and new treasures.

## They Are Palestinians

Two comments about the term "Palestinian" are important. First, this label is not Arabic. It is associated with the Philistines, although the Philistines are ethnically and culturally distinct from Palestinians and a genealogical connection can't be established. However, their similar name, shared adversity against Israel and their interest in the same land have led some to incorrectly connect the Philistines as the ancestors of the Palestinians. Second, the label "Palestinian" is associated with nationalism. Nationalism among Palestinians



The strategy of John Stott Ministries is to train those who will train others in their own language, in their own culture, and in their own way to help deepen the faith of their nations.

(continued)

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**John Stott Ministries also supports 50  
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Christian Palestinian Arabs (continued)

was mainly coined in the twentieth century within the context of Colonialism and Zionism, the same ideologies that led to the establishment of modern Israel and initiated the Arab-Israeli conflict. As a result of the establishment of the modern Israel in 1948, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians became refugees and lost their precious olive trees, vine gardens and ancestral homes. More than 400 Palestinian villages and towns were destroyed and more than 50,000 Christians became refugees. Unfortunately, the enmity from this war determines the relationship between these two peoples to the present day. Israeli Jews are still looking for security and Palestinians are still seeking justice. Neither is having peace.

### They Are Arabs

The label "Arab" is ancient and it is arguably associated with the following Old Testament figures: Ishmael, Job, Jethro, Jael (who killed Sisera), Jether (David's brother-in-law), Queen Sheba, and the authors of Proverbs 30 and 31. Interestingly, many pre-Islamic Arabic kingdoms had become Christian (for example, the Nabateans) and Philip the Arab (244-249 A.D.) was the first Roman Emperor to adopt Christianity. This rich Christian tradition dwindled when Islam became the central factor of determining Arabs' identity. With the upper hand, Muslims and their religious worldviews eventually dominated.



Palestinian Baptism

### They Are Bearing Fruit

How can these Christians bring true fruit to the region? Christian Palestinian Arabs must be conversant with their biblical and Christian heritage and must be bold in their future expectations. We need to rebuild the "church of the Arabs", transcend denominational differences and incarnate our Christian faith.

Instead of mourning dwindling numbers we should focus on presenting Christ to Muslims and to Jews, formulating an Arabic gospel that highlights the love of God, especially to enemies. The expression of God's heart must present Christ as the owner and sustainer of Israel and Palestine, and as the means of a healthy coexistence in a pluralistic context.

But how can we accomplish these tasks without godly leaders? Where do we find proper training that captures the minds and hearts of student pastors? Thankfully, in response to this need, God has raised and sustained colleges like Bethlehem Bible College (Bethlehem, Palestine) and created fruitful partnerships with organizations like John Stott Ministries. These partnerships are a sign of hope and an answer to many Palestinian prayers and needs. Therefore, even if the tasks are huge and the political situation is gloomy we will continue to trust in the Lord, anticipating the resurrection of the church of the Arabs and the spread of the Kingdom of Christ in the Middle East. Only his kingship can bring true justice and impeccable peace.

*Yohanna Katanacho is a current JSM-Langham Scholar studying at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. He will be a featured speaker at JSM's 30th anniversary celebration on November 6, 2004 in Wheaton, Illinois.*



Bethlehem Bible College Students

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JSM is a member of Langham Partnership International (LPI).

# Field Report

"All over the world, this Gospel is bearing fruit and growing."  
– Colossians 1:6

**One of the most significant events in building the Albanian Church was held earlier this year. A new generation of Albanian church leaders gathered to learn how to preach and teach effectively at a JSM-Langham Preaching Seminar.**

**Just imagine...** only a few years ago there was not one single church in all of Albania. As a result, it is vital that the first wave of Albanian pastors has a strong understanding of the place of preaching and the centrality of the Word of God. For three days the 100 Albanian believers who attended these seminars listened to warm, practical exposition of God's Word as well as instruction on how to preach. In addition to this preaching seminar, JSM has also supported the Albanian church with bible commentary translation projects and Christian book publishing support.



**"The Lord through you has set free a passion in my heart for preaching the Word of God."**



**100 Albanian church leaders learned how to study, expound and apply the Word of God.**



**New evangelical Bible commentaries in Albanian were distributed to pastors.**



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## Inside This Issue



Current JSM-Langham Scholar Yohanna Katanacho explains "Christian Palestinian Arabs". Yohanna is a featured speaker at JSM's upcoming 30th Anniversary Celebration



An Albanian pastor tells JSM-Langham Preaching staff: "The Lord through you has set free a passion in my heart for preaching the Word of God."



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### A Word from John Stott



"The chief characteristic of Christian leaders, [Jesus] insisted, is humility not authority, and gentleness not power."

**Important Note:**  
Please read...and pray!

As most JSM supporters and newsletter recipients know, we rarely talk about the ministry's financial situation. However, JSM's income over the summer months was much lower than usual.

Please pray about our financial needs and make a special gift if you are led to do so. Thank you!

Please Send Donations To:

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# Celebrate with us!



John Stott, Langham Int'l Director Chris Wright and JSM-Langham Scholars will converge on Wheaton, Illinois November 6th; we hope you will be there too!

**John Stott Ministries celebrates its 30th anniversary with a major event on November 6, 2004 in Wheaton, Illinois. Main speakers include: Dr. Antonio C. Barro, President of South American Theological Seminary in Brazil, Dr. Douglas Carew, Vice-Chancellor of the Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology in Kenya, and Yohanna Katanacho from Bethlehem Bible College, JSM-Langham Scholars all. John Stott will be the keynote speaker and Dr. Chris Wright will be featured too. Spaces are going fast, so email for details to [info@johnstott.org](mailto:info@johnstott.org).**