

MID-EAST e-NEWS

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Welcome

Sometimes it is difficult to present information about the various 'trouble spots' in the Middle East without appearing to be ignoring the offenses of one side or another. This is especially true when referring to 'Palestine,' which we do in page 3. Also, on page 1, (with a related news item on page 2) you can find an introduction to the issue of Christians in the Middle East, also not an easy topic to address. Between these two articles is another, also not to be undertaken lightly, but for a different reason. Travel through Arabia on the Hejaz Railway, and reflect on the 60 days it used to take travelers on the camel caravans.

Email your responses to pkclark@pmbx.net & check the web for back issues.

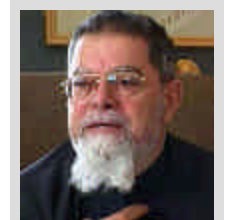
Christians in the Middle East

Today, with almost the entire Middle East being dominated by Islam, it may be forgotten that by the 7th Century most of the region had accepted the gospel. The bulk of the population of what is now Jordan, Israel, Egypt, Turkey, Syria and Iraq were Christian when the Islamic invasion conquered their territory and offered them the alternatives of resistance and death or submission and subservience. In the years since then many saw that they would live as second class citizens if they did not accept the Muslim faith. This came to include more than just paying the obligatory tax, the *jizya*, upon which the early Islamic economy depended. The fact of life under Muslim rule meant that Christians could not testify against Muslims in court – only *for* them, if the opportunity arose. Similarly, a Christian could not defend himself against Muslim aggression, because it would result in his death. Since his word would mean nothing in a trial, a Muslim could act against him and his household with impunity.

Christians and Jews are considered *dhimmi* (lit. 'in the care of') by Islam. This term refers to the official acceptance of these religions by Islam, though from the aspect of tolerance, rather than approval. Other groups under this umbrella are Zoroastrians, Sikhs and Mandeans. The degree of tolerance has varied, however, since the time when leading scientists under Islamic rule were Christians and Jews. That the mother of the Fatimid Caliph, Al-Hakim, was an Orthodox Christian, as is the wife of Yasser Arafat, brings up two points that we have mentioned before: Muslim men may marry Christian women, but Christian men do not have that freedom (see page 2), and, in the Middle East the term Christian refers to the society of one's birth, rather than to the practice of one's faith. Additionally, (but not to say that his faith was not genuine) Tariq Aziz, who is now in prison, was a Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq under Saddam Hussein. He is from the Chaldean Catholic population of Mosul.



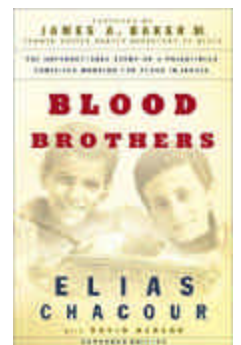
Tariq Aziz (born 1936)



Elias Chacour
(born 1939)

The small numbers of Christians in Middle Eastern countries reflects the uninterrupted pressure they have experienced over nearly 1500 years. (It must be remembered that the Crusades did not relieve this pressure at all, but exacerbated it both by slaughtering local Christians, and by increasing the animosity of Muslims towards them.)

In Israel and the West Bank the Christians lived primarily in Galilee (especially Nazareth), Acre, Haifa, Jaffa and Gaza, as well as Jerusalem and the towns on its north and south, Ramallah and Bethlehem. Elias Chacour, is a Melkite Christian from Galilee. The school that he began in Ibillin with 82 students in 1982 now has more than 4,000 students – Christian, Muslim and Druze and Jewish. His book, **Blood Brothers**, describes his work of Christian reconciliation in the community that Ibillin has become.



In future issues of *e-NEWS* we shall try to inform readers of the conditions of the Christians in and around the Middle East. Refer to page 2 for an account from August 5th in the West Bank.

The Hejaz Railway

Throughout the Ottoman period the Sultan was responsible for ensuring the safety of the annual *Haj* to Mecca. This involved payment of large sums to the local Bedouin tribes, to ensure that they did not attack the camel caravans.

In 1908 the Hejaz railway was begun, along the traditional route between Damascus and Medina. Costing \$16 million, the rail line reduced the journey from two months and about \$80 (at 19th C. prices) in the desert heat, to four days and \$7 of rail travel.

At its height the railway transported as many as 300,000 pilgrims per year. It must be remembered that this was at a time when there were no territorial borders between Istanbul and Medina. The whole line, and its extensions towards Baghdad and Haifa, was Ottoman land.

This changed after the First World War, and it was never again viable to restore the damaged line. Some portions are still in operation, particularly between Damascus and Amman, and between Hisa and Aqaba (on a newer line) in the south.

For more information and pictures visit www.nabataea.com and click on **Nabataea Today**.

Taiba Village

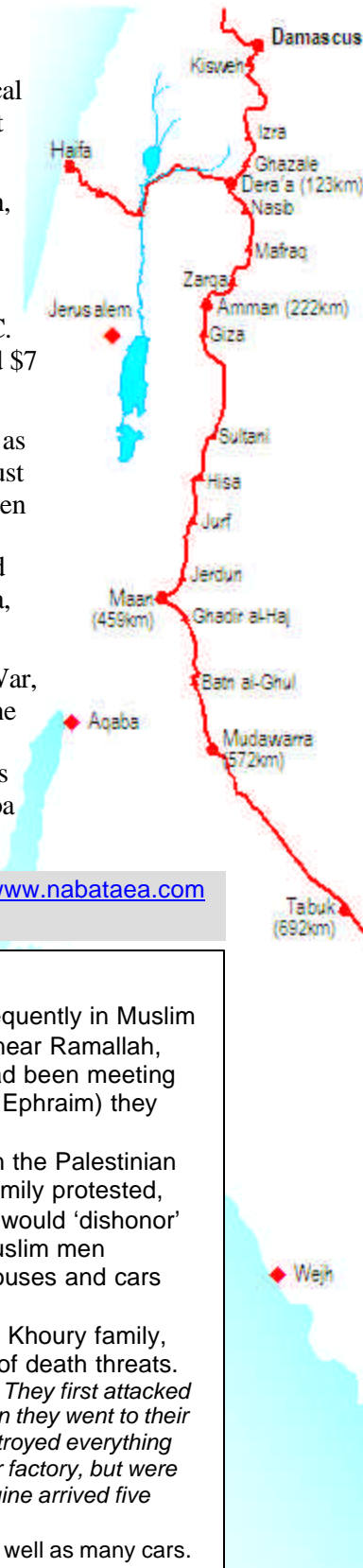
The issue of 'honor killing' arises too frequently in Muslim countries. When a family in Deir Jarir, near Ramallah, found that their 30-year-old daughter had been meeting with a Christian from Taiba (the Biblical Ephraim) they forced her to take poison.

They buried her body secretly, but when the Palestinian Authority discovered the situation the family protested, wanting to avoid an investigation which would 'dishonor' them. In reaction, on 3rd August 500 Muslim men attacked the village of Taiba, burning houses and cars and looting some of the residences.

The 'offender' belonged to the Christian Khoury family, but he had fled the town in anticipation of death threats. *"Some people saw them carrying weapons. They first attacked houses belonging to the Khoury family. Then they went to their relatives. They entered the houses and destroyed everything there. Then they tried to enter the local beer factory, but were repelled by PA security agents. The fire engine arrived five hours later."* (Jerusalem Post, 8/5/05)

More than a dozen houses were burned, as well as many cars.

Refer to: <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=JPost/JPArticle/ShowFull&cid=1125831262546&p=1101615860782>



Damascus Station



Steaming in Amman



In the south of Jordan diesel engines transport phosphates to Aqaba



Wrecked train near Mudawarra

The Palestinian Territories

The map below shows the outline of the West Bank (in **black**). The history of the area has been covered on various occasions in e-News: integrated into the kingdom of Jordan soon after the armistice agreement of 1949, the territory was lost by Jordan in the 3rd Arab-Israeli War, the 6-Day War of June, 1967 (See **e-NEWS** 1, 2, 16, 17 & 18).

Since then attempts have been made to resolve the call for the West Bank to be returned to Arab administration, from the UN resolution calling for the return of territory seized during the war (UN SC Res. 242), President Carter's attempts to broker peace, and Jordan's renunciation of its claim on the West Bank in favor of the cause of the Arab Palestinians.

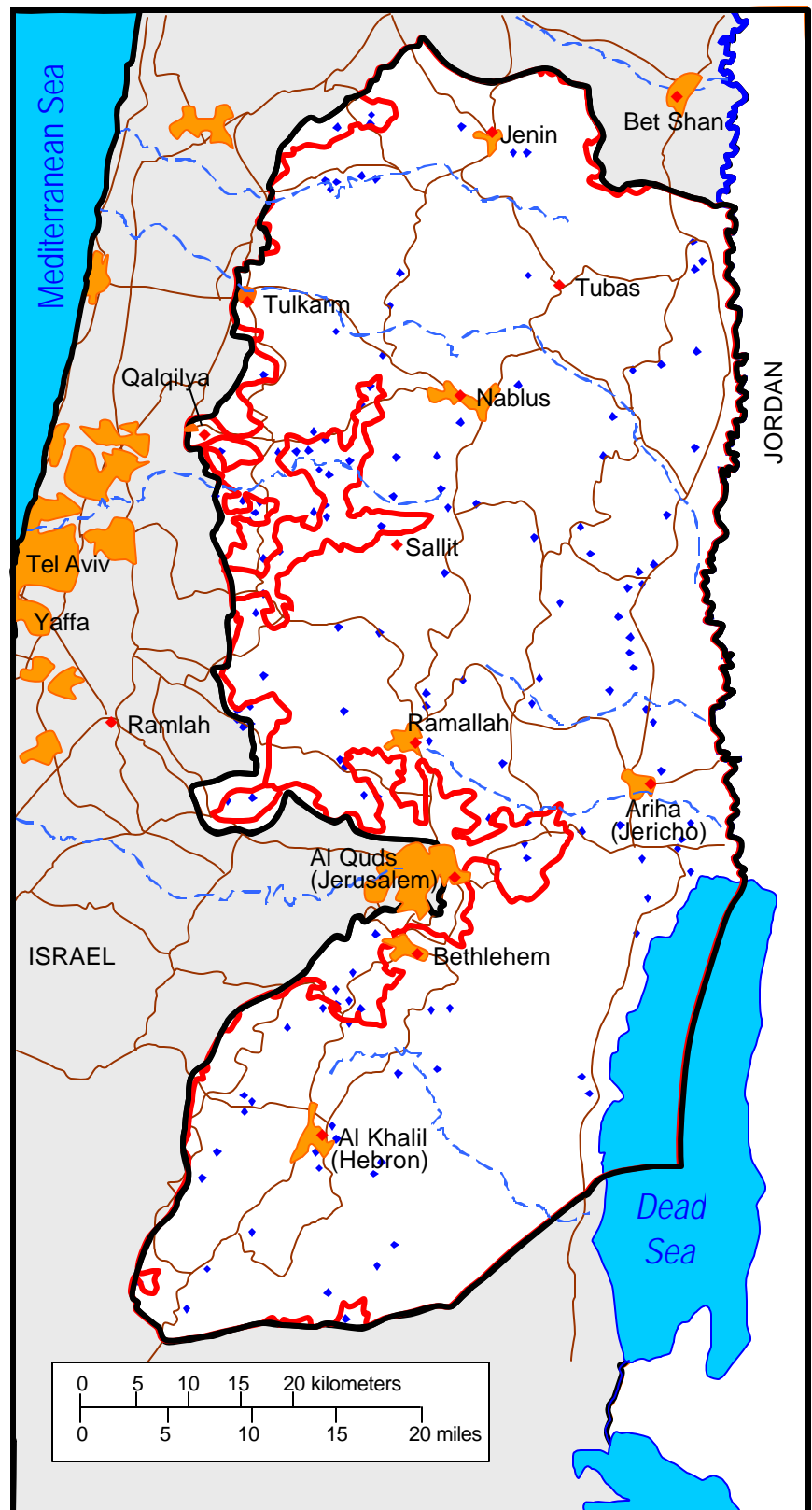
The Oslo Declaration of Principles was signed by Shimon Peres and Mahmoud Abbas in September, 1993, and was followed by the creation of the PNA from the PLO. The intention was that the PNA would progressively acquire geographical control of the West Bank, and gradually assume responsibility for the administrative functions of Education, Health, Tourism, Welfare and Taxation. In some areas the PNA would also be responsible for policing and security, and would eventually take over this role for the whole of the West Bank.

The schedule did not proceed according to plan, and in 1996, when Benjamin Netanyahu was elected Prime Minister of Israel, only 3% of the West Bank was under Palestinian control. The 1998 Wye Summit, promoted by President Clinton, concluded in an agreement to transfer 13% more of the West Bank to PNA control.

The second Intifada broke out in September of 2000, and since then various cities have passed in and out of PNA hands, as widespread violence, and particularly suicide bombings, has caused Israel to assert control in an attempt to reduce attacks against its citizens.

During the period since 1967, settlements have developed around the West Bank. The population in settlements has grown from 800 in 1972 to 234,000 in 2004, in about 138 separate settlements (indicated in **blue**), some frequently unoccupied, and others (3 settlements, including Maale Adumim) with over 20,000 residents.

To protect its population from violent attacks the government of Israel is building a Separation Barrier (shown in **red** on the map). To protect some of the settler population in the West Bank, this barrier frequently departs from the 1949 'green line' to incorporate as much as an additional 10% of West Bank territory.



Next Issue: Jerusalem

This Month

Aug	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	Sep	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15			
	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W		F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T			
Europe											France expels militant to Algeria							Italy expels Islamists to Morocco, Tunisia																	
Africa											UN refugee chief visits Darfur & Chad												SLM boycott Darfur talks												
Asia											Dagestan bomb kills 3 police					Philippines ferry bombed-30 hurt					Ugandan rebels attack S Sudan														
Pakistan							400 bombs around Bangladesh by Islamic group					Dagestan bomb derails train-no injuries					Aceh disarmament begins																		
Pakistan						1 st round of elections-10 die in violence					Elections violations claimed					Govt. Islamists challenge Israel talks					Afghan refugees riot at UN camp														
Afghan.	NATO helicopter crashes					4 US die in convoy bomb					Roadside bomb kills 1 US					6 abducted,		13 militants killed, 44 arrested			Attempt to kill defense minister fails														
	Election (on Sunday, 18 th) spurs Taliban activity					2 US die in bombing					40 militants killed in Koregnal valley					Indian PM visits Kabul					killed on 3rd		Taleban kill 8 police		Failed suicide bomb kills 2		Pakistan arrests 21 border militants								
Arabia						Al Qaeda leader killed in Medina					Arab League objects to Iraq charter					Dammam: police 3-day siege & shoot-out w/ militants					Libya to re-establish Saudi ties														
Iraq	Charter deadline extended 1 wk					Charter deadline extended 3 days					Tribal fight-pro-Qaeda v pro govt.					US/Iraq battles insurgents in Tel Afar					UK soldier killed in Basra														
Iraq	Zarqawi aide killed by forces in Mosul					Bomb cuts electricity for oil pipelines					Militant sites hit nr Syria					11 killed in Hit, 9 in Baghdad					Assault against Haditha rebels														
Iraq	Draft Charter may go to October referendum. Saddam trial begins October 19 US deaths: 8/2: 1,787, 8/7: 1,828, 9/13: 1,890					Bus station bomb kills 43					Sadr militia clash with other Shia in Najaf					Shia festival bomb-16 die					Baghdad Int Ministry attacked					Green zone shelled by insurgents									
Iraq	4 US killed in Samarra					Suicide bomb, & insurgent attack, 20 die					Shia bridge stampede-950+ die					Najaf handed over to Iraqi troops					Amended charter approved for vote														
Iraq	Romania offers Iraq debt relief					36 bodies found in mass grave					2 US killed in Iraq					2 UK killed in south					US worker freed after 9 months					Baghdad bombs-182+ killed									
Iraq	3 pro-election Sunnis killed					Impasse w/ Sunnis over Charter					3 criminals executed					4 US contractors killed nr Basra					29 die in bombings														
Iraq	Hawija councilman killed					Sunnis demonstrate against charter, Baquba, Tikrit					Basra car bomb-16 die					Shia cleric murdered																			
Iraq	Sunnis oppose charter points					Talabani convoy attacked, 18 die					Basra Shia pro-Charter march					Assault against insurgents in Tal Afar-200 dead, 315 held																			
Iraq	US/insurgents clash in Rawah					Charter issued over Sunni objections					Sunni teen dies saving Shia					Baghdad airport closes for bills due																			
Iran											UN questions source of enriched uranium					Will share nuclear data																			
Turkey											PKK declares 1-month ceasefire					EU questions Turkey position on Cyprus					UK & France approve Turkey EU talks														
Lebanon											Grand Prix held in Istanbul					Troops clash with Kurds in Batman					Turkey refuses EU call to recognize Cyprus														
Lebanon											Bomb in Beirut shopping center					Hizbollah rockets hit N. Israel					Security chiefs arrested over Hariri death					Calls for President Lahoud to resign									
Syria	Kurds clash with police										Militant group raided, 5 killed										Clash with Islamists in NE (Hasaka)														
Jordan											Rockets fired at US ship in Aqaba-set on timers by Iraqi group										12 jailed for embassy bomb attempt														
Egypt											4 police killed in Sinai, Bedouin assist attackers					Election monitors banned					National elections-Mubarak wins 86%														
Egypt																					Cairo theatre fire kills 29					Opens Gaza border (for a few days)									
Israel	Troops begin enforcing settlement pullout					4 West Bank settlements cleared, by 23rd					Tulkarm:IDF kill 5 inc 2 bystanders					Netanyahu challenges Sharon					Rafah-Egypt crossing to be closed 6 months														
Israel	Settlers removed from Gaza & 4 WB settlements by IDF in 1 week of action.					Troops forcibly remove settlers from Gaza - completed on 22 nd					Land appropriated for Maale Adumim fence					US questions Maale Adumim in security fence					117 new houses planned for Ariel					Cabinet votes not to demolish synagogues					Supreme court calls for barrier adjustment to avoid Palestinian hards hip				
Israel	WB settler kills 4 Palestinians					Egypt agrees to patrol S. Gaza border					Israeli guard attacked at Cave of Patriarchs, Hebron					Suicide bomb at bus station-10 injured					Gaza pullout completed					At UN Sharon calls for compromise									
Palestine	Calls for calm as Israeli pullout begins.					Barenboim concert in Ramallah					Orthodox students knifed in Old City -1 dies					Maale Adumim expansion on hold					School tuition sparks unemployment riots					Attempts to enter vacated settlement-1 killed									
Palestine						Rockets fired from Gaza into Sderot					PFLP said to be back in Gaza					Gunmen ambush soldier nr Morag					Explosion in Gaza City					Muslims attack Christian village-'Ephraim'					Palestinians burn empty synagogue				
Palestine						Pres. Bush calls for return to Roadmap					Hammas video threatens Israel					Hammas names its leaders					Moussa Arafat killed by gunmen					Abbas: order is restored									
Palestine																Climbing IDF tank, teen killed					Looting of equipment left by Israelis														