



# IRAQ TURKEY ISRAEL

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**“Blessed are those who  
are persecuted because of  
righteousness, for theirs is  
the kingdom of heaven.”  
— Matthew 5:10 (NIV)**

Across the Middle East Bible Societies are working under challenging and difficult conditions to bring the Word of God to people in their countries, all of which has only been made worse by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Last year, we brought you the stories of three of those Bible Societies: Iraq, Turkey, and northern Israel. Their stories bear many of the same hallmarks: persecution, struggle, and working in environments where the mission is sensitive. Many of you responded generously to support this work enabling these Bible Societies to continue working in their countries under difficult circumstances.

This year, with your support, we are continuing to journey with these Bible Societies: Iraq, Turkey, and northern Israel as they continue to face many issues they are unable to bear alone.

Bible Society Lebanon  
General Secretary  
Mike Bassous has fun  
with refugee kids in  
Kurdistan, Iraq.

PHOTO CREDIT:  
© BIBLE SOCIETY IN IRAQ

## IRAQ

In Iraq, a Christian-minority country, Christians are only now beginning to recover from the horror that was inflicted upon them by the Islamic State (ISIS) between 2014 and 2017.

For centuries, the Nineveh Plains had been considered a stronghold of Christianity in the Middle East, anchored by a series of traditionally Christian towns and villages throughout the region.

But in 2014, ISIS overtook the Nineveh Plains forcing more than 100,000 Christians, along with other minority groups such as Yazidis, to flee to the neighbouring autonomous region of Kurdistan.

**Churches, monasteries, businesses, and private homes were torched, torn down, or badly defaced.**

It was a blow to one of the world's most ancient Christian communities which had experienced a sharp rise in sectarian violence after the US-led invasion in 2003, which led the Christian population to fall from 1.2 million to around 250,000 or 1% of the population today.

However, in July 2017, the city of Mosul was liberated from ISIS by Iraqi forces. Then, with the aid of the Nineveh Plains Reconstruction Project and local churches, towns such as Qaraqosh and Teleskof began rising from the ashes again. Currently between 50% – 60% of Christians have returned to the region.

In the midst of all of this, the Bible Society of Iraq is working to bring the comfort and hope of the Bible to people. **In its unique context it operates out of two offices, one in Erbil which serves the northern part of the country and one in Baghdad which serves the southern part of the country. This means that it has to cover double the operational expenses including rent and other costs. There are also many daily challenges such as electricity which is only available for two hours a day with the remainder coming from generators.**

**With the economy ever diminishing due to the pandemic, there is little or no chance of local fundraising occurring through Bible sales. The majority of Scriptures are either subsidised or given away for free.** However, the staff have continued to implement projects, including the distribution of Bibles and holistic aid, trauma healing, and running two children's programmes in the Baghdad region.

Recently, they carried out a Bible distribution to some Yazidi people, who had experienced a terrorist attack on their camp, and whose tents had been burnt to the ground. Along with Bibles the staff provided them with food, water, blankets, clothes, and kitchen utensils.

**“May God bless you because you have provided me with clothing to cover myself,” one woman said, crying.**

Having genuine conversations is at the heart of this work. “Who are these people who are helping us? They don’t know us. How come they love us?” asked one man. “They love you because Jesus Christ taught us to love all people. This is written in the Bible that you just refused to take!” replied a volunteer. At which point the man had a change of heart saying, “No, no, no! I want to take a Bible and to read it!” he said.



**PRAY FOR THE SAFETY OF THE STAFF IN IRAQ, AND THAT BIBLE MISSION WILL CONTINUE IN THAT COUNTRY.**

# TURKEY

Meanwhile, in Turkey, another Christian-minority country, the mission is continuing in spite of the challenges of the pandemic. Turkey, too, has strong Christian roots but like Iraq its Christian population has diminished and now makes up only 0.1 percent of the population.

**Fundamental to the Bible Society of Turkey’s work is its Bible shop in Istanbul. The shop provides a space for people who would otherwise have little or no contact with Christianity to be able to come and have conversations with the staff about the faith.**

And there are many stories to tell, such as that of the archaeologist who after excavating churches wanted to learn more about Christianity. The staff in the Bible shop engaged with him about the faith, and he left, satisfied, with a Bible. Then there was the woman who came in enquiring about the famous Sumela Monastery in northern Turkey. She stayed in the shop for more than two hours and the staff were able to have a deep conversation with her about Christianity.

**A Turkish man takes an interest in the Scriptures displayed in the shop window.**

PHOTO CREDIT:  
© BIBLE SOCIETY IN TURKEY



Young people, also, are drawn to the shops. One young woman who said she had not been planning to go to the shop somehow ended up there anyway. She cried as she listened to the staff and promised to come back. Another young woman who had been practising an alternative religion came in.

**After visiting several times, she came back to say that she had become a believer!**

So, there is much work occurring that is bearing much fruit! There are further opportunities arising as well as Bible Society will soon be opening another shop in Izmir on the Aegean coast. This has come about after a request from local churches. They are also supporting the project as two of them are either providing a suitable building or funding a portion of a staff member's salary. Bible Society is also planning to open a Bible Centre in Istanbul where it will be able to house its library and provide a Christian space for conferences and Bible exhibitions.



**GIVE THANKS FOR THE CURIOUS MINDS OF TURKISH NON-CHRISTIANS, AND PRAY THAT THE BOOKSHOPS FACILITATE FURTHER GOOD CONVERSATIONS THAT LEAD PEOPLE TO JESUS.**



# ISRAEL

In northern Israel, where Jesus had much of his ministry, the religious landscape is no less complex. In modern times, the Arab-Israeli Bible Society (AIBS) looks after Bible mission in the area. Here, Christians are in a double-minority as this part of Israel is predominantly Arab but the country as a whole is, of course, predominantly Jewish.

Like the rest of Israel the people of northern Israel have been suffering as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Schools have been closed and unemployment has increased with around 50% of workers in this area now unemployed. But despite these difficulties the AIBS has been working with churches, schools, families, and individuals to provide programmes to encourage and support people along with distributing Scriptures.

One of its initiatives has been to develop a series of workshops over Zoom for parents on topics such as anxiety, time management, mental and physical health, parenting, and financial management.

"In the workshops I received a toolbox to enable me to cope during the pandemic. I was introduced to new, practical ways of understanding the Word of God. The sessions helped me to set boundaries for my children, especially in the areas of screen time and time management," said Abla, a mother.

"The sessions were very helpful for parents especially in this challenging period to give them ideas on how to

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**These girls are taking part in a family day, a pre-Covid ministry run by AIBS.**

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## An Israeli woman takes a break at one of the workshops.

PHOTO CREDIT:  
© BRITISH AND FOREIGN BIBLE SOCIETY



deal with their kids and to know they are not alone in this situation," said Anne, a primary school principal.

AIBS has also been conducting workshops for women and families. In May this year it conducted a workshop for a group of women from local churches on the topic of the 23rd Psalm. The teaching enabled the women to see how the Good Shepherd can work in their lives in many different ways.

One participant has experienced a lot of tragedy this year. Her husband died, her family all caught COVID, her two sons were in a car accident, and her daughter was diagnosed with cancer. Yet at the end of the workshop, she said that she had found the peace of Jesus Christ.

AIBS has also been distributing Bibles and Scriptures. In March, it distributed 80 Bibles to mothers at Mother's Day events. At Easter, it provided 70 children's Bibles to children at a church event. It supplied Christian literature for the English Hospital Nazareth Trust, which has installed 15 literature boxes throughout the hospital so that people can access the material.

It also created 150 prayer videos based on the book of Psalms which relate to the Middle Eastern context.

**"These prayers helped me to enter into the presence of God. It expressed my deepest desires as a person who needs God," one university student said.**



**PRAY FOR GOD'S GUIDANCE FOR THE MISSION, AND THAT AIBS' FINANCIAL NEEDS WILL BE MET.**

Mrs supporter, the Bible Societies of Iraq, Turkey, and northern Israel are working under challenging conditions to bring the hope and peace of God's Word to people in their countries.

Never has this work been more urgent than now as they wrestle with the ongoing complexities of carrying out mission in their Christian-minority countries along with reaching out to people who are being impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Will you prayerfully consider making a gift to support the operations of the Bible Societies of Iraq, Turkey and northern Israel so that they can continue carrying out the mission?

By so doing you will be enabling them to continue reaching out to people with the precious Word of God. These include Christians in Iraq who are struggling to maintain a foothold in their own country, enquirers about the faith from many walks of life in Turkey, and women and families in northern Israel. Thank you and God bless you!

Yours sincerely,



A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Neels Janse van Rensburg'.

Neels Janse van Rensburg  
CEO

**Dina Katanacho,  
(General Secretary  
of the Arab-Israeli  
Bible Society)  
and her small  
team minister to  
people in a difficult  
context and who,  
like her, are part of  
a minority in Israel:  
Christians who  
are Arabs, living  
in Israel, but with  
Palestinian roots**

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Bible House • 144 Tory Street • Private Bag 27 901, Marion Square, Wellington 6141  
Freephone: 0800 424 253 • Tel: 64 4 384 4119 • CC22121 • [www.biblesociety.org.nz](http://www.biblesociety.org.nz)



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