



# Israel

## State of Israel

### Asia

### Geography

**Area** 20,700 sq km. A further 7,540 sq km of the West Bank, Gaza and the Golan Heights have been controlled by Israel since 1967.

Population	Ann Gr	Density
2010	7,285,033	1.71%
2020	8,306,679	1.21%
2030	9,219,268	1.01%

The Palestinian Authority, although under Israel administration, is treated separately.

**Capital** Jerusalem 783,000; but not recognized internationally. **Other major cities** Tel Aviv 3.3 million; Haifa 1.0mill. **Urbanites** 91.7%. **Pop under 15 yrs** 28%. **Life expectancy** 80.7 yrs.

### Peoples

**Jews** 75.5%. 28 groups. Israeli Jew 23.1%; Russian Jew 13.6%; Romanian Jew 5.6%; Polish Jew 5.5%; Eastern Yiddish Jew 4.7%; Maghrebi 4.4%; Spanish Jew (Ladino) 2.7%; Yahudic 2.3%; Beta Israel/Falasha (Ethiopian) 1.8%; Hungarian Jew 1.3%; Dzidi 1.2%; German Jew 1.2%; French Jew 1.1%; Yemeni Jew 1.0%; Bukharic Jew 1.0%.

**Arabs** 20.4%. Israeli Arab/Palestinian 16.5%; Druze 1.8%; Bedouin 1.3%.

**Other** 4.1%. European, African, Chinese, Thai, Filipino, North and South American. The numbers are probably significantly larger.

**Literacy** 96.9%. **Official languages** Hebrew, Arabic. Numerous immigrant languages from all over the world are spoken. **All languages** 48.

**Indigenous languages** 33. **Languages with Scriptures** 12Bi 1NT 6por.

### Economy

Modern, sophisticated industrial state. Well developed high-tech, bio-tech, chemical and agricultural sectors. Many start-up companies. Brakes on further growth, however, include the high burden of defence expenditure due to

security issues, the cost of absorbing new immigrants and the growing crisis of lack of water (despite extensive desalination and reuse). Israel lacks natural resources and needs to import petroleum, coal, grains and military hardware. Large gas and oil deposits under the Mediterranean could significantly alter Israel's energy status.

**HDI Rank** 27<sup>th</sup>/182. **Public debt** 76.8% of GDP. **Income/person** \$28,409 (60% of USA). **Unemployment** 8.2%.

### Politics

The founding of Israel in 1948 ended 1,900 years of exile for the Jews. Six wars with surrounding states in 1948, 1956, 1967, 1973, 1982-85, 2006 plus the Gaza War in 2009 have kept the country on a war footing. Repeated military engagement in Lebanon, the rising pressure of Palestinian civil unrest, the *intifada*, acts of terrorism by Islamist groups (Hamas, Hezbollah, others) and the increased threat from Iran have sapped Israeli stamina. Israeli society remains deeply divided on the peace process, the future of Jewish settlements in the Disputed Territories and the future of Jerusalem and of the Golan Heights. The four-way division of political parties (left, right, far right religious, Arab) means that coalitions generally must be formed – giving disproportionate influence to the ultra-orthodox Jewish *Haredi* minority. Repeated efforts by the UN, USA and others to facilitate a peace deal have met with only limited success. Divisions internally (in Israel and in the Palestinian Authority) as well as fundamentally irreconcilable and deeply held convictions on both sides make long-term solutions very difficult to envision.

### Religion

All religions are free to minister within their own communities. Jews who follow Messiah Jesus, however, have in the past been denied legal standing as a religious body and faced difficulties obtaining premises for fellowship. This changed in 2009, enabling Messianic congregations to register as houses of prayer and religious entities. Reform and Conservative Jews are often marginalized by ultra-Orthodox influence, which applies constant pressure to limit freedom of religion through anti-conversion laws and persecution of Messianic Jews.

Religions	Pop %	Population	Ann Gr
Jewish	75.40	5,492,915	1.5%
Muslim	16.70	1,216,601	2.5%
Non-religious	3.81	277,560	3.3%
Christian	2.04	148,615	0.5%
Other	1.90	138,416	2.3%
Baha'i	0.15	10,928	1.7%

The Jewish population is approximately 25% Orthodox, 20% secular and the rest somewhere in the middle.

Christians	Denoms	Pop %	Affiliates	Ann Gr	TransBloc	Pop %	Population	Ann Gr
Protestant	43	0.18	13,000	5.9%	<b>Evangelicals</b>	0.4	31,045	5.6%
Independent	25	0.24	17,000	5.3%	<b>Renewalists</b>			
Anglican	1	0.02	2,000	0.0%	Charismatics	0.3	22,472	4.9%
Catholic	3	0.99	72,000	-0.6%	Pentecostals	<0.1	3,080	4.5%
Orthodox	7	0.57	42,000	-0.8%				
Marginal	2	0.04	3,000	3.6%				

  

Churches	MegaBloc	Congs	Members	Affiliates
Catholic Ch (5 rites)	C	80	42,604	72,000
Greek Orthodox Ch	O	11	23,750	38,000
Messianic Assemblies	I	160	6,000	12,000
Assoc of Baptist Chs	P	20	800	3,000
Baptist Conv Israel	P	30	1,500	3,000
Jehovah's Witnesses	M	21	1,480	2,960
Assemblies of God	P	15	1,150	1,500
Episcopal Church	A	3	833	1,500
Seventh-day Adventist	P	44	800	1,200
Coptic Orthodox Ch	O	2	639	1,150
Other denominations[65]		1245	6,565	12,400
<b>Total Christians[81]</b>		<b>510</b>	<b>86,121</b>	<b>148,710</b>

  

# Answers to Prayer

- 1 **Within Israel, interest in the gospel is increasing**, notably among Jews, and especially in the last few years. The hard shells that surround Israelis are beginning to crack open to the gospel. The numbers of Messianic Jews are rising rapidly, now up to 12,000 or possibly even higher. Some of these even come from a *Haredi* background. Messianic Jews are becoming a recognized part of Israeli society, but greater growth has intensified persecution.
- 2 **Globally, there is a significant response to the gospel** among the 14.5 million Jews. Even the more conservative estimates indicate an unprecedented response, and some of the more optimistic claims exceed 100,000 said to be linked with Messianic congregations. Most of these believers are in North America as well as Russia, Ukraine and the UK. A much larger number have integrated into mainstream Christian churches.

# Challenges for Prayer

- 1 **The return of Jews to Israel** was a watershed period in Jewish history; it is finally likely that Israel is the nation with the world's largest population of Jews. Many see this as a fulfilment of prophecy (Ezekiel 20:32-34, 36:16-24). The majority returned to their ancient land in unbelief, but a movement to Messiah Jesus is occurring mostly among returnees from Eastern Europe, Russia and Ethiopia. Pray for the nation's spiritual restoration (Romans 11:25-31). There is currently an increased intensity in Israel's spiritual life. Many thousands of Jews are turning to God, fervently praying and turning to Scripture.
- 2 **Israeli-Arab conflict in the Holy Land** moved to a new level over a century ago, intensifying since 1948. Resolution is elusive due to competing claims and agendas. Both sides lay claim to the land, and all human efforts to resolve this conflict have failed. Pray that both sides will find true reconciliation and genuine Shalom through Jesus the Messiah.

a) **The threat of violence and war from outside persists.** Between the 2005 withdrawal of settlers and soldiers from Gaza and the controversial 2009 invasion, over 3,500 rockets were fired into Israel from Gaza. Hezbollah's growing strength, Al Qaeda's threats and Iran's increasingly strident rhetoric

all point to potential trouble on the horizon.

b) **The as-yet-unfinished security barrier** is planned to effectively separate Palestinian and Jewish areas, making movement and access very difficult and exacerbating tensions. Pray that it would not unduly restrict free movement of Palestinian citizens of Israel. Pray that Jesus, who destroyed the wall of separation of hostility between God and man, might also bring reconciliation between Israeli Jew and Palestinian Arab.

**3 The Jewish mindset toward Christianity**, often characterized by animosity and part of a long and painful history, is a barrier to be overcome. “Christian” nations are seen to be destroyers of the Jewish nation whether by persecution (as in the Holocaust) or by proselytization. Pray that the gospel may be understood as a fulfillment of their Jewish heritage, and pray that a widespread turning to their Messiah might come. Those who oppose the gospel are more active than ever; pray also that all attempts to restrict religious freedom and to deny the Jewish identity of Messianic believers may ultimately cause even more Jews to come to faith.

**4 The Christian Church in Israel is fragmented**, although soundings of unity are beginning. It is comprised of about 80% Arabs, 12% expatriates (Egyptian, Ethiopian, Greek, Russian, Armenian, Italian, others) and 8% Jews. There are Catholics (five rites), Orthodox (nine traditions) and Protestants/Independents (over 20 denominations, many individual congregations and over 100 mission agencies). Pray for spiritual unity that transcends history, ethnic conflict, national origins, eschatology and secondary areas of theology.

**5 Followers of Jesus in Israel** are likewise a mix of Messianic Jews, foreign believers and Arab-Israeli Christians. All three groups have grown recently – especially Messianic and expatriate believers – the result of both immigration and conversion. There are over 120 Hebrew-speaking gatherings. Russian-speaking congregations are the next-largest number (as many as 50), followed by eight Amharic-speaking (Ethiopian) congregations and a smattering of fellowships in various European languages. Israeli-born Messianic Jews are around 1,000. Pray for:

a) **Boldness in witness and perseverance of faith** despite difficulties and opposition. The *Haredi* regard evangelicals as subversive and a threat to Judaism, and therefore malign and occasionally harass them. Tolerance of Christians and Messianic Jews is high, but proselytism is increasingly opposed, especially by the ultra-Orthodox.

b) **Full legal rights of immigration** and social acceptance in the face of national, social and family pressures. Israeli law states that national identity and religious identity of Jews are one; secular Jews can become citizens, but Christian Jews cannot.

c) **Clarity of teaching and understanding about their Jewishness** – there needs to be a cultural identity without compromising New Testament truth. There are now Bible training colleges in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Haifa and Nazareth for the formation of capable leaders.

d) **Arab evangelicals** are more numerous in Protestant and Independent denominations – but total fewer than 4,000. Of these, only a few dozen are Muslim-background believers. The number of those coming to faith is growing at an encouraging rate, but they emigrate to the West just as rapidly.

**6 Unity between Messianic Jews and Arab Christians.** A quiet revolution in relationships between Jewish and Arab believers is beginning in the Holy Land. The recently formed Convention of Evangelical Churches in Israel (and an equivalent organization in the Palestinian Authority) is a major step forward. Jewish and Arab believers cooperate in ministry through the National Evangelism Committee. Their joint outreach efforts into Muslim areas are well received. Many other grassroots initiatives, often unreported, see these two groups of believers, from very different backgrounds, blazing a trail of reconciliation and friendship that is an example to the rest of the region. But some others question or are even opposed to such developments. Pray that there might be grace among all who call upon Jesus/Yeshua/Isa to love, support and bear with one another.

**7 Major outreach challenges:**

a) **The ultra-Orthodox Haredi** are only 10% of the population, but they see themselves as the preservers of true Jewishness in Israel. They maintain a policy of political engagement with cultural detachment. More than 50% live below the poverty line. Strong religious legalism makes them quite difficult to reach. Pray that many more of these modern Pharisees may become like Nicodemus, a process that is already happening.

- b) **Jews from the former Soviet Union and Poland** are now the largest component of the population. They have changed Israel and are more receptive than most groups to the gospel, already comprising the majority of Messianic Jews. Many still need to be evangelized.
- c) **The Ethiopian Jews** (Beta Israel) have become a disillusioned, largely impoverished urban underclass since their immigration to Israel a decade ago. They number around 120,000; among them are fewer than 2,000 Messianic believers.
- d) **The Arabs.** Over 90% are Muslim, yet they also comprise the majority of Christians in the Holy Land. They are being slowly squeezed out by a combination of Israeli discrimination, Islamist persecution and international ignorance and apathy toward their plight.
- e) **The Druze community** (120,000) in Israel as well as in the West Bank and the Golan Heights. They are very close to outsiders, but a movement to Jesus is beginning and accelerating. Opposition from within the Druze community toward Druze followers of Jesus will be intense.
- f) **Guest workers.** Since the Palestinian workforce was reduced for security reasons, a number of Romanian, Chinese, Filipino, Ghanaian and Nigerian workers took their place, and, more recently, Sudanese refugees have come in through Egypt. The Israeli government is cracking down on illegal workers, but there are a substantial number of Christians among them.
- g) **Young people and children.** They face security threats and an uncertain future, irreligious attitudes, New Age concepts and many cults and deviant groups seeking to win the hearts of the younger generation of Israelis. The children of poorer immigrants face intense disadvantages, both economically and educationally.

**8** **The Protestant missionary force** is impossible to enumerate, due to security concerns and the presence of so many who enter as tentmakers. It certainly exceeds 1,000. At times the hardness of the ground and unfulfilled visions can lead to disillusionment, but Israeli society is generally quite open. Many are searching for real solutions to the uncertainty, conflicts and suffering. Years of sowing seeds and breaking down long-held prejudices against Christianity are now bearing fruit. Foreign Christians must work to encourage and support the growing local congregations and ministries who are increasingly reaching out. Literature ministry is another area of fruitful contribution. The Ministry of the Interior often makes visas difficult to obtain or renew for Christian workers.

**9** **Jews of the dispersion** (those outside Israel) are declining in numbers through a lower birth rate, emigration to Israel, mixed marriages, secularism and conversions to other religions. There are now an estimated eight million Jews outside of Israel. The largest concentrations are in the USA (5.3m), former USSR (1m), France (500,000), Canada (370,000), Britain (280,000), Germany (200,000) and Argentina (180,000). There are 1.6 million Jews just in New York. In the USA, there is much openness, elsewhere less so. More workers are needed in places such as France. Pray for the ministry of **JFJ** (216 workers globally), CPM (161), MT, CWI, CMJ, Caspari Center and others; their work involves long hours of patient, loving ministry to individuals and families. Pray for a greater sensitivity on the part of Gentile churches toward problems of Jewish survival and for the Jewish remnant within the Church.

## **10** Supportive ministries:

- a) **Christian literature** and Scripture are of great importance in spreading the gospel due to the multiplicity of languages – Jews have returned to Israel from scores of nations. In addition to humanitarian work, The Bible Society distributes over 110,000 Bibles, NTs and Scripture portions annually. **OM** is also highly involved in literature distribution. *HaGefen Publishing* and *Keren Ahvah Meshihit* are both publishers that translate and produce literature into Modern Hebrew, including children's and digital media. Pray for Christian publishing houses and for increased production of Christian literature and Scripture in Hebrew, Russian, Arabic, Amharic and other languages. There are four Messianic Jewish periodicals, some having a readership beyond the Messianic Jewish community. Many homes have a NT. Pray for the fruitfulness of God's Word in the land of Israel.
- b) **Student work has grown**, but the need for ministry to teenagers and young adults is still keenly felt. The **IFES**-linked student movement Fellowship of Christian Students in Israel has 10 groups with 150 students. Hearts to Serve is another ministry for students; both focus on reconciliation between Israeli and Palestinian students.
- c) **Films on the life of Jesus.** The JESUS film is completed in 10 languages (Hebrew, Yiddish, Russian, Romanian, Modern Standard Arabic, English, Polish, Hungarian, Amharic and Adygey). Other

Christian films are also having an impact. Pray for widespread distribution, and pray for effective follow up to inquiries generated by such films.

- d) **Radio.** TWR, FEBA, IBRA and *Netivyah* together broadcast many hours in Hebrew, Russian, Arabic and other languages by radio and Internet.
- e) **Websites** with material, resources and discussions about the nature of Jesus as Messiah are available in many languages. The Internet is widely and heavily used in Israel and has massive ministry potential. Pray that the Spirit may draw seekers to these sites.