

MID-EAST e-NEWS

An electronic journal of the Middle East, for those who want to be informed.

FREE

Subscribe by email to
receive this every 2
weeks!

Issue No. 53 Texas

November 14th, 2005

<http://www.morethantourists.com>

Contexts

Topical

Jordan Bombing 1
Letter from Bethlehem 3

Political

The Alawis 2

Calendar

This Month in the Middle East 4

Welcome

The events in Jordan really brought home the proximity of Middle Eastern violence to workers there. The Hyatt is where JETS seminary holds its annual graduation ceremonies, and we have played Christmas carols in the same foyer in previous years.

The reaction of the population is encouraging, as we see them more and more alienated from this kind of violence. Let us not forget that politics and military action is not where this battle is truly being fought.

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

Jordan Bombings

In e-News we do not try to bring you up-to-the-minute news, but the events in Jordan this past few days enable us to provide you some information you may have missed. Let me do this by providing snippets from recent emails.

11/10/05 Dear friends, More needless death. Raw terror hit Amman last night. It has rippled to Palestine.

Many Palestinians were murdered there. One was a friend, Mousab Khorma (photo attached), ex-PALTEL CEO, the company I helped found. He was currently working at the Cairo Amman Bank as Vice Chairman of the Board. He and I have a history of heated public debates about the best way to develop the telecom sector in Palestine. As we are learning, he was at the Radisson SAS wedding and was sitting next to his fiancée. She got up to go to the bathroom. When she returned, her 32-yr-old fiance was dead. What a waste of human life!

We spent most of last night tracking down loved ones. My brother-in-law, who owns a flower shop in Amman, was at the Radisson SAS to deliver flowers to the wedding at 8pm, 1 hour before the explosion.

11/10/05 As a security measure, the government announced late last night that all government offices, embassies, banks and schools would be closed today. As I drove to the office this morning to send out this quick update, I was struck at how quiet and normal the city is this morning. I expected people to be out "checking things out", but it seems they are enjoying an unexpected morning at home!

By watching CNN, etc., you probably know as much or more than I of what is happening here. I do want to remind you, though, the news tends to "hype" situations to increase their viewer ratings...so whatever you hear, tone it down several notches and you'll get a more realistic picture of how things are for us.

11/12/05 We are all safe and well as far as I know. I was at home when everything happened, and I live very close to the Hyatt so I could hear the sirens. I sat glued to the TV news for hours but the coverage wasn't revealing anything new so I finally gave up. The following day there were nationalistic demonstrations in several parts of the city, both in front of the hotels and in other areas. People seem to be responding in a positive way, although everyone is shocked that this has happened. Most of the agencies here have

recommended that their people stay away from places frequented by foreigners for a few days, although I think the caution is probably not necessary.

11/14/05 The attached picture is a picture of our Baptist School Family (students, teachers, principals, & PTA members - 600 persons in all) marching... in our West Amman area to support peace in Jordan. Since today, November 14th, is also the birthday of the late King Hussein, the rally seemed like a fitting tribute to the late king and to his legacy of promoting peace in the Middle East.

11/14/05 In God's sovereignty He laid it on the heart of our Bible speaker [on Saturday] to entitle his first message, "Surviving the Storms of Life." As we left Amman we began seeing how our daily lives will be changed as a result of what happened. First, major grocery stores no longer allow you to park near the entrance. Then, there were many checkpoints going towards the Dead Sea. Other cars had to empty their trunks and passengers. After speaking with me briefly, the office waved us on. As we approached the hotel entrance guards stopped us. A locked gate closed the roadway. We had to stay in the car while they examined everything in the backseat and trunk. Coming home this evening we saw that metal detectors have also been installed at doors of large supermarkets.

As horrifying as the bombings were, it has resulted in a sense of real solidarity. Remember how the terrorists thought 9/11 would bring the US down but it only made us stronger? That's what I sense is happening here. It is amazing to watch.



The Alawis

During the early period of Islam – AD 630 to 800 – a number of branches of the religion formed from the Shia offshoot. (Many of these were described in issue e-News 15.) Three of those made their home in the rugged mountains of Syria; the *Assassins*, the *Druze* and the *Alawis*. The assassins gained their notoriety (and bequeathed the name) through their use of political murder, primarily of their Abbasid and Seljuk rulers, to achieve their ends. Nominally Muslim, they are rejected by mainstream Islam.

The Druze are a significant portion of the population in Lebanon (where they have been allocated seats in government), Syria (where they form the majority in the area around ‘Jebel Druze’), and in Israel (where, they participate in the military).

The **Alawi** are also known as *Nusayri* after one of their founders. At the fall of the Hamdanid dynasty in 1004 they were driven out of Aleppo and resettled in Latakia. They fought the Crusaders but later allied with them against the Ismailis. They have been oppressed by the more conservative Islamic dynasties (particularly the Sunni), including defeats by the Kurds in 1120, and under Saladin (a Kurd himself) after his conquest of the Crusaders.

Throughout the Ottoman period (1520 onwards) the Alawis were oppressed by the Turkish Sultans, who killed nearly 100,000 of them in the initial conquest of Syria. An Alawi attack on the Ismaili town of Masyaf was repulsed in 1832 by the Ottoman *Pasha* (governor) of Damascus.

After WWI the French created an autonomous province for the Alawis, *Alouites*, on the Syrian coast. Never achieving independence, it was incorporated into Syria in 1937. A large number of Alawis also lived in **Hatay**, the province to the north of Latakia. When France ceded Hatay to Turkey in 1939 there was much resistance to the annexation.

The founders of the Syrian **Baath party** were involved in the initial but unsuccessful resistance against annexation, but their organization grew stronger during the years following the Second World War. After a series of coups and a 3-year period of union with Egypt (as the *United Arab Republic*) a group of Alawi military officers led the Baath party to control the government in 1963. The group strengthened their power until 1971 when **Hafez al Assad** emerged as president of Syria after a purge of the older Baath leadership.

When the Muslim Brotherhood of the city of **Hama** rebelled against Assad he attacked the town of 350,000, killing as many as 20,000 in a massacre intended to prevent future uprisings. The Muslim Brotherhood had always opposed the syncretistic Alawis, considering them as infidels. Since the constitution of Syria demanded that the president be a Muslim, Assad had pressured the Shia leader to affirm the Alawis as true Muslims in 1974. Most Shia and Sunni groups still deny the validity of this ruling.



The castle at Masyaf is being restored by the Aga Khan foundation.



Hafez al Assad died in 2000 and was succeeded by **Bashar**. Their power, however, has always resided as much in their Alawi roots as in their individual strengths. One of the key figures implicated by the investigation into **Rafik Hariri**'s assassination is a brother-in-law of Bashar al Assad. Today, understanding Syria's involvement in Lebanon, and its relations with Iran, depends upon recognizing the role of the Alawi in Syria's government.

In Lebanon Alawis are one of the 18 recognized sects (along with Druze) and have a statutory two seats in parliament.

About 13% of Syria's population (1.6 million) is Alawi, and they also live in Lebanon (200,000), and Turkey (1/2 million), where they are known as Alevis.

An Arab Pastor writes...

Dear friends and prayer partners,

Finally we got it! Over a year and a half ago, [the Palestinian Arab pastor & his wife] submitted our applications to the Israeli Ministry of Religious Affairs to issue us clergy visas to stay legal in the land of [our] birth. On Tuesday, July 11, 2005, [he] made the final visit to the ministry of Interior and he came out with a year and a half visa on both of our passports. What a relief! During the past year and half, we rigorously filled applications and refilled them, made appointments and remade them, waited for hours in unfriendly offices, argued our case again and again to non-sympathetic ears and we wondered whether we were going to pass all the Israeli security checks that loomed before us. The nightmare is over! Thank you for your prayers on our behalf.

Our personal challenge is over but the great challenges of the people of this land are far from ending. The apartheid wall is being constructed at a fast speed, Palestinian lands continue to be confiscated, homes of the poor continue to be demolished to make space for the rich and powerful and those who control the news continue to demonize the oppressed.

Nevertheless, it is not all gloom and doom. [The pastor] had opportunities to travel and share and spoke to churches and groups in both Minnesota and Kansas. Typically, after he lectures on current issues relating to the Arab-Israeli conflict, someone will ask the question: Is there any hope? We believe there is, and we base our position on the following factors:

Increased Interest In Non-Violence Among The Palestinians

The immense losses of the Palestinians during the second Intifada (uprising) brought many of them to the conclusion that violence will not serve their cause. The majority of Palestinians are now returning to non-violent means and approaches in addressing their cause. Palestinian violence, although it is a reaction to much injustice against them, has been, for years, the excuse for the enormous injustices Israel inflicted upon them. Even though we may hear of a militant attack here or there, the overwhelming majority of Palestinians are now condemning such attacks.

Commitment Of Mahmoud Abbas (Abu-Mazen) To The Political Process

While Arafat was alive, we never knew whether his government was totally committed to a political solution. We believe that Arafat was a pragmatist; he would use any method to liberate his country, violent or non-violent. The new president, Mahmoud Abbas, is committed to a negotiated political discourse. He is working very hard to bring the Israelis to negotiate with him in good faith and, on the other front, to bring the various Palestinian militant factions to give up their armed struggle and engage in the political dialogue. If he succeeds in transforming the militants and engaging them in the political process, the Israelis can not accuse the Palestinian leadership of terrorism and slam the door closed to negotiations.

The Revival Of The Peace Camp In Israel

The Israeli peace camp in Israel that was very strong in the eighties and nineties experienced close to a total collapse in the years of the second uprising 2000-2004. Ironically, peace groups who are traditional enemies of Sharon are now supporting him fully in his move to disengage from Gaza. **However**, Israeli peace activists have also been organizing marches and demonstrations against the apartheid wall, **the construction of which Sharon supports**. They have been standing alongside Palestinians and international volunteers in exposing the evils of the wall and the occupation.

The Ministry

We see our commitment to Christ leading us to be faithful eyewitnesses to what goes on around us in this land. Our schedules include more than expressing our opinions on the political situation. Here is what is happening in our ministries.

Bethlehem Bible College is now producing an hour-long program for a local TV channel. An 8-10 minutes long Bible lesson entitled: '*A PLACE, AN EVENT AND A MESSAGE*'. True to the title, each week students take footage at a place such as Gethsemane, Jericho or Qumran and there [the pastor] shares about the historical and spiritual significance of the place.

At Bethlehem Bible College

As the college is expanding and reaching out to students in new places the finances are not keeping up. **BBC is the only interdenominational college in Israel/Palestine that is training future leaders for the Palestinian church**. Because of the economic situation most of our students are not able to pay their tuition.

Visit us at: www.bethlehembiblecollege.edu



