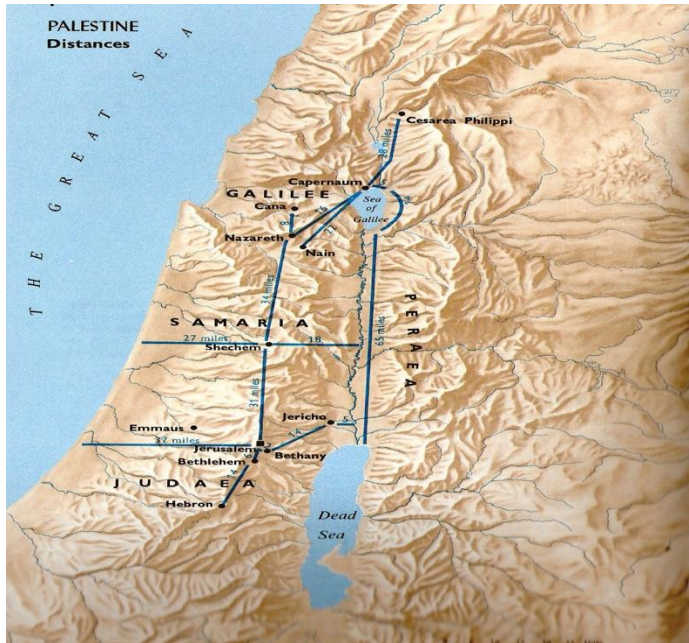


Who are the Christians in the Holy Land.

The local Christians presently living in the Holy Land are the descendants and heirs of the first primitive Christian community who lived in the First Century AD, experienced the death, resurrection of Jesus Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit and believed in Jesus Christ as their Saviour. They were the first people Jesus called the “living stones” in the First Epistle of Peter¹ and the “salt of the earth” in the Gospel of Mathew. In the beginning, these early Christians originated from the Jewish, pagan, and Arab communities. In addition, every nation and civilisation that came, settled, and eventually departed, left behind some of their traditions and beliefs. These traditions and beliefs merged with those existing within the Christian community in the Holy Land.

There were also Christians from outside the Holy Land, who came to serve and protect the Christian shrines and churches there. For example, Byzantine Emperor Constantine I had churches erected on many of the Christian holy sites. He also had monasteries built all in many parts of the country. Later, Pope Urban II commissioned the Crusaders from Europe to free the Holy Land (especially the Church of the Holy Sepulchre) and local Christians from their “tormentors” and to combine warfare in the defence of Christianity with a form of penance for sin. After St. Francis visited the Holy Land in 1219, many of his followers visited the holy sites despite harsh conditions and hostile Muslim rule. These monks served the existing Christian communities as clergy and some established their own parishes and churches.



The New Testament of the Bible gives clear reference to the geography of the country during Jesus' time. For example, the Gospel of Luke identified Jesus' travel from Nazareth to Galilee, while the Gospels of Mathew and Mark identified Jesus' baptism at the River Jordan (possibly near Bethany-across-the-Jordan). The Gospel of Mark also records Jesus' time spent at the Judean desert, or wilderness, where the Satan tempted Him three times. The New Testament provides the reader with clear geographical information about Jesus' travels and the places he visited.