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The Middle East, North Africa, & Europe

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SYRIA

Ancient Aram

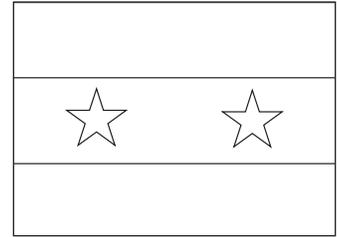
HISTORY'S HEADLINES

Syria (SEER-ee-uh) has been the home of many different people, including the Canaanites fought by Joshua, the ancient Phoenician seafarers, and the people of Aram. Aram was a neighbor of ancient Israel, just as Syria is a present-day neighbor of modern Israel. The Bible tells many stories about Aram. In one story, a top general of Aram named Namaan was healed when he washed in the Jordan River because the prophet Elisha told him to do so. In another story, the Arameans tried to attack Israel, but God used Elisha to help Israel escape. Aram's army tried to kill the prophet, but the Lord's angels circled around Elisha in flaming chariots. God then struck the whole army blind, until Elisha released them to go back and warn their king not to attack again.

By the time of Jesus, Aram had become Syria, and it was a Roman province. Paul was converted while traveling to the city of Damascus. When Paul arrived, a follower of Jesus named Ananias met him, restored his sight, baptized him, and told him that his mission was to be a witness for Christ. Later, another city of Syria named Antioch became the headquarters for Christianity. It was in Antioch that believers in Christ were first called Christians. The church in Antioch had been started by friends of Stephen, a man killed in Jerusalem for teaching about Jesus. Paul came to Antioch with Barnabas and witnessed there for a year, building up the church. From Antioch, in Syria, the gospel spread to Asia Minor (Turkey), Greece, and the Empire's capital in Rome.

TOUR OF TODAY

The major religion in Syria today is not Christianity but Islam. You may wonder how this happened. Around the year 600 A.D., Arab Muslims took over Syria. Christians still lived there, but over time the country became mostly Muslim as the Arab conquest continued over a thousand years. Yet Christians always kept living in Syria, and today ten percent of the country's population is Christian. The Christians in Syria live mainly in big cities, like Damascus and

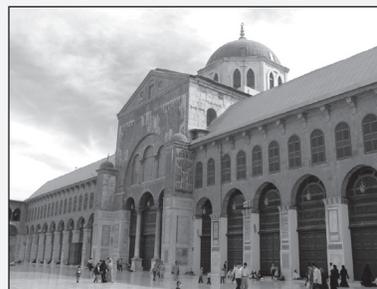


FAST FACTS

Capital City	Damascus (duh-MAS-kus)
Major Cities	Damascus, Aleppo, Tartus
Languages	Syrian, Arabic
Population	22,198,110 (July 2010 est.)
Religions	Islam, Christianity
Landforms	Syrian Desert, Mt. Hermon
Bodies of Water	Mediterranean Sea, Euphrates River
Climate	Desert, Steppe; rainy winters
Resources	agriculture, oil, industry, tourism
The Road to Damascus	Saul was traveling to Damascus to persecute Christians, but on the way, Christ met him and changed his mission and his name.
Flag	Based on the Pan-Arab colors. Two stars represent Egypt and Syria.



St. Paul was blinded when Christ appeared to him on the road to Damascus, Syria. Syria later became a center for Christianity until the Muslim conquest.



This Muslim mosque, or temple, was built in 715 A.D. It was built on top of a Christian church. Inside, there is a shrine with the head of John the Baptist.

Aleppo. In Damascus there is St. Ananias Church, located on the same street that St. Paul met Ananias over 2,000 years ago.

