

BREAKING DOWN  
THE BARRIERS:  
WORKING FOR  
PEACE IN A  
HOLY LAND

POVERTY



christian  
aid

## Introduction: Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory

After more than six decades of conflict, the lives of many people in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory are characterised by fear, oppression and poverty. And yet in our churches and places of worship, it is often a topic we shy away from discussing, considering it too difficult or controversial.

A solution to this conflict is vital – not just for the security and well-being of Israelis and Palestinians alike, but also for the stability of the Middle East and ultimately for relationships across the world. Now is the time to open up discussion, face the challenges head on, and unite in a vision of a world based on justice and equality.

This booklet is designed to help you to understand more about the situation, and direct you to the voices of those that live there and experience the reality of the conflict everyday. It is not here to prescribe a solution, and perhaps you will have more questions than answers at the end. But our hope is that you'll be inspired and informed to act for justice and peace, and encourage others to do the same.

34.5% of Palestinians live below the poverty line<sup>1</sup>



The church of St John Baptist and the Dome of the Rock in East Jerusalem

Christian Aid/Alfreda Ross

## Context and overview of the conflict

It's undeniable that this part of the world has played a pivotal part in history for thousands of years. From being one of the oldest sites of agricultural activity in the world to the birthplace of the three Abrahamic faiths, its rich cultural heritage and unique diversity have at times placed it at the centre of the world.

Yet at the same time as being the home of great leaders, ideas and places, it has also seen conflict on a huge scale. And it is this legacy of division that defines its recent history and the current situation.

Despite this, Christian Aid and our partners believe in and hope for a better future – one free from violence, oppression and poverty.

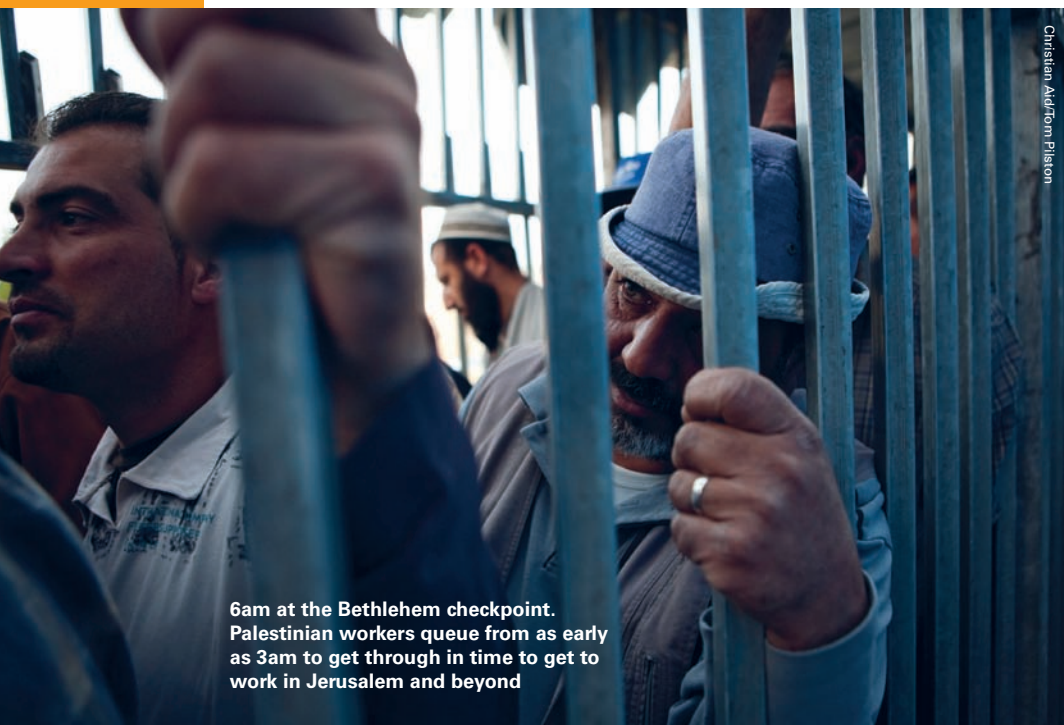
Our partners stand up for their beliefs, often at great cost, to bring about positive change in peoples' lives.



The entrance to Aida refugee camp, Bethlehem

Christian Aid/Alfreda Ross

39% of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip are unemployed – one of the highest figures in the world<sup>2</sup>



6am at the Bethlehem checkpoint. Palestinian workers queue from as early as 3am to get through in time to get to work in Jerusalem and beyond

Christian Aid/Alfreda Ross

## Timeline of recent historical events in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

Pre-1917	The defeat of the Ottoman Empire sees Palestine and surrounding areas carved up by France and Britain. The development of Zionism as a political movement, pioneered by Theodor Herzl in 1895, bolsters immigration of Jews to Palestine.	resulting in 280,000 Palestinian refugees. UN resolution 242 calls for Israeli withdrawal from 'territories occupied during the recent conflict'.	
1917	The Balfour Declaration promises a national homeland for the Jews in Palestine, without violating the rights of the non-Jewish population living there.	Large numbers of Israelis move into settlements in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip contrary to international law.	1970s
1922	Britain rules Palestine under the British Mandate.	Restrictions on Palestinians and confiscation of land for settlements culminates in the first Palestinian intifada – characterised by strikes, marches, civil unrest, and attacks on Israeli troops – which is suppressed by force, curfews and road closures.	1980s
1930-1936	Jewish immigration to Palestine swells due to persecution in eastern Europe.	The 1993 Oslo Accords fail to provide peace or security for either side. A wave of Palestinian suicide bombings cause several hundred Israeli civilian deaths.	1990s
1936-1939	The Arab Revolt (or Great Uprising) causes the death of many Jews and Arabs. A White Paper issued by Britain limits Jewish immigration to 15,000 per year for five years.	The second intifada breaks out, ignited by the visit of Israeli leader Ariel Sharon to the Haram a-Sharif (Temple Mount). Severe movement restrictions for Palestinians create dire shortages of basic items such as water, medicines and fuel.	2000
1939-1945	Under Hitler's Nazi regime, more than 6 million Jews are killed in the Holocaust. Immigration to Palestine by Jews fleeing persecution continues, despite British restrictions. Many Jews are interned in camps on their arrival.	Israel starts building the separation barrier in the West Bank. The International Court of Justice advises the route is illegal because it does not follow the Green Line.	2002
1947	The UN partition plan divides Palestine into 44% for indigenous Arabs and 56% for Jews. Arabs reject the proposal. Clashes between Arab and Jewish groups escalate.	Israel unilaterally dismantles the Gaza Strip settlements, but maintains control of air, land and sea access. Restrictions on the movement of goods and people increase. Rocket fire from the Gaza Strip at civilian communities in Israel intensifies.	2005
1948	Israel declares independence and war breaks out with Arab states. Around 750,000 Palestinians flee violence, becoming refugees. Israel gains control of 78% of territory; the West Bank and Gaza Strip are administered by Jordan and Egypt respectively.	Hamas wins Palestinian elections, judged free and fair by observers, but Hamas is boycotted by Israel and many other states. Internal tension results in Hamas controlling the Gaza Strip and the Palestinian Authority controlling the West Bank.	2006
1949	Following the war, international agreements determine the armistice line, known as the Green Line, demarcating the borders between Israel and the West Bank and Gaza Strip.	Rockets fired from the Gaza Strip persist. Israel launches Operation Cast Lead, a 27-day military offensive that leaves 1,400 Palestinians and nine Israelis dead. The blockade intensifies.	2008-09
1950s	While Palestinians in Israel are given citizenship, those who fled are denied the right of return. Mass Jewish immigration to Israel and state-building begins.	Talks fail to deliver a solution, and peace remains elusive.	2012
1967	Tensions eventually spark the 1967 Six Day War. Israel begins military occupation of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem,		

**Both the Jews and Arabs of this region clearly have painful histories. Displacement, persecution, death and loss are evident throughout the decades.**

**This history has undoubtedly influenced and shaped the situation today in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory. However, history cannot and should not be used as an excuse to sustain the conflict. For the situation to change there must be justice, reconciliation, and forgiveness**

33% of Palestinian families do not have enough food<sup>3</sup>

## Christian Aid's work

### History

Christian Aid was established in the aftermath of the Second World War to help European refugees, including Jewish refugees, who had lost everything. In the 1950s, as our work expanded all over the world, we provided aid to Palestinians displaced in the war following the creation of Israel in 1948.

### Partnership

Since then we have joined in partnership with more than 20 Israeli and Palestinian organisations to protect human rights, help people to access services and

resources, and build a peace based on justice for all. From emergency relief to long-term development, our partners reach some of the poorest people, regardless of religion or nationality.

### Justice

We believe that all people are made in the image of God, and that each person deserves a life of freedom, opportunity and dignity. For these reasons we support the rights of all Palestinians and Israelis to live in safety and security, and believe their rights are indivisible from each other.

## 'I can do something to change it'



Tzvika Besor (above) is a Jewish Israeli, living in Tel Aviv. Like many Israelis, he enjoys a good standard of living. However, Tzvika isn't content to live the good life when others are suffering.

'I've never ignored the occupation,' he explains. 'It's always been a moral abomination. I've thought this since I was 11 years old – what's different now is that I understand I can do something to change it.'

Tzvika has become an active human rights campaigner with Christian Aid partner Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI).

ACRI is Israel's leading civil and human rights organisation. It works to ensure that everyone enjoys full recognition of their rights and represents Israelis and Palestinians, as well as migrant workers, refugees and asylum seekers. Its work stretches from legal representation, to lobbying

and advocacy, and education and awareness raising.

In 2010, Tzvika was the mastermind behind ACRI's Action a Day campaign, which focused on the Palestinian village of A-Twaneh. It was one of 134 villages in the West Bank not connected to a permanent water supply, despite Israel being obligated under international law to provide it.

ACRI mobilised hundreds of Israelis who bombarded the Israeli parliament every day with letters, emails and videos about the lack of water in A-Twaneh. The result, just a few months later, was that this small village was connected to a water supply for the first time. 'It was the most exciting thing in my professional life so far,' says Tzvika.

The success of this campaign is about more than water. It's about the result that ordinary people can have when they stand against injustice, and for human rights.



A-Twaneh village is now connected to a piped water supply

498 Israeli civilians were killed in the conflict from 2000-2011

6,237 Palestinian civilians were killed in the same period<sup>4</sup>

Girls attend a centre run by Christian Aid partner the Culture and Free Thought Association (CFTA) to improve life for the children of Khan Yunis refugee camp in the Gaza Strip



Christian Aid/Simon Townsley



### **‘We make just enough to live on’**

Mohammed Masa'id (above) is a Palestinian farmer in the Jordan Valley. He faces insurmountable problems, not least because the land he works on is surrounded by Israeli settlement farms. As well as taking the lion's share of water, these farms have access to markets that Palestinian farmers cannot reach due to Israeli restrictions on their movement and exports.

‘We make just enough to live on – no farmer can save money here, if he's lucky he'll survive on it for the year, or pay last year's debts,’ Mohammed says.

Christian Aid supports the Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committees (PARC), a pioneering organisation in the field of agricultural and rural

development. It supports small-scale farmers, including women in rural areas, and works with them to improve their ability to make a living from farming and develop a strong Palestinian agricultural sector.

PARC has formed cooperatives to bring together farmers in the Jordan Valley, including Mohammed. They provide training and equipment, and help farmers to lobby for access to markets.

‘PARC has helped us with the water problem in the last few years by building storage tanks and underground irrigation systems,’ Mohammed explains. ‘Now we can irrigate our crops more often, and save the water if it's not needed.’

## **Settlements: why focus on them?**

### **The law**

Settlements are illegal under international law as they violate Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits the transfer of the occupying power's civilian population into occupied territory. This has been confirmed by the International Court of Justice, the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention, and the United Nations Security Council.

### **A cause of poverty**

The built-up areas of settlements cover just three per cent of the West Bank; however, 43 per cent of the West Bank is off-limits to Palestinians as it is allocated to regional settlement councils.<sup>6</sup>

Palestinian land seized for settlement building and future expansion has led to a shrinking space available for Palestinians and to extensive demolitions of Palestinian homes and displacement of people.

In 2008, the World Bank stated that addressing the inherent problems within the Palestinian economy ‘will entail increasing the economic space available for Palestinian urban and rural development in the West Bank, including addressing the increasingly entrenched and expanding impact of Israeli settlement activity...’.

### **An obstacle to peace**

Settlement construction, expansion and encroachment on Palestinian land are key factors behind the

fragmentation of the West Bank, including the isolation of East Jerusalem. This undermines the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, which is critical for a viable solution to the conflict.

### **Christian Aid's position**

We believe that settlements will continue to expand unless action is taken that backs the routine statements of condemnation from the international community.

We call for the UK and Irish governments to ban settlement produce. Settlements are illegal under international law and Christian Aid believes that it is the role of governments to protect the consumer from purchasing goods from an illegal source. Moreover, this trade perpetuates the settlements by making them economically profitable.

A ban on trade with Israeli settlements is not a ban on trade with Israel, which we do not support, neither is it a call for a boycott.

622 structures owned by Palestinians were destroyed in 2011<sup>7</sup>



The separation barrier at Bethlehem

## Getting your church involved

### Act

**Write collectively as a congregation or individually to your MP/TD about why you feel a settlement produce ban is a good way for the government to support peace efforts and a viable solution (you can find a template letter at [christianaid.org.uk/iopt](http://christianaid.org.uk/iopt)).**

Raise the issue with your denominational leaders at conferences and national meetings.

Talk to your church group about why settlements are such an obstacle to peace and Palestinian development, using the case study of PARC's work in the Jordan Valley.

Organise a pilgrimage to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory. Use an ethical tourism company and arrange to meet with organisations/individuals working for peace in the region.

Invite an ecumenical companioner who has recently returned from the region to your church to talk about the restrictions that Palestinians face in their daily lives. You may wish to consider serving on the ecumenical accompaniment programme. See [eappi.org/](http://eappi.org/)

Engage in interfaith dialogue in your community.

### Learn

You can find more resources, including policy reports and stories, on Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory at [christianaid.org.uk/iopt](http://christianaid.org.uk/iopt)

Continue your study further and hear from more voices in the region. Ideas include hosting a book club, or film night. Suggestions for films include *Lemon Tree*, *Little Town of Bethlehem*, *Arna's children* and *The Law in these Parts*.

Invite a Christian Aid speaker from your local area office to come to share stories, images and videos from our partners and support your church to take action.

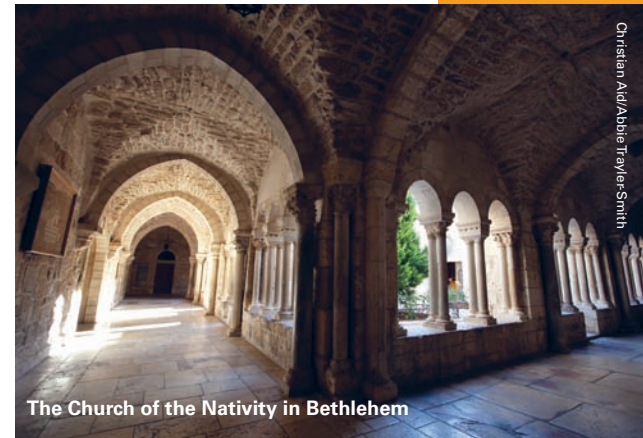
### Pray/worship

Use the bible study in this booklet with your church small group.

Meet the church leaders and Christian communities in the occupied Palestinian territory – the 'living stones' of the region. The Kairos document (a call from Palestinian Christians to the church worldwide) is one way that we can be challenged to support peace and justice. See [kairospalestine.ps/](http://kairospalestine.ps/)

Use key dates, such as Christmas/Advent, Easter and Lent, and dedicate a service to highlight the situation in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory.

Join in the World Week for Peace in Palestine and Israel each year. Visit [worldweekforpeace.org](http://worldweekforpeace.org)



The Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem

Christian Aid/Abbie Trayler-Smith

Pray for peace and justice in the region regularly.

### Give

Hold an awareness and fundraising event in your church – this could be a film evening, a special service with a retiring collection, or even a sponsored event.

If you're part of a United Reformed Church, you can support our partners in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory through Commitment for Life. See [christianaid.org.uk/resources/churches/commitment-for-life.aspx](http://christianaid.org.uk/resources/churches/commitment-for-life.aspx)

Christian Aid's Church Partnership Scheme has just launched a new project with the YMCA rehabilitation centre in Bethlehem. To find out how your church could support this, see [christianaid.org.uk/getinvolved/partnership-scheme/index.aspx](http://christianaid.org.uk/getinvolved/partnership-scheme/index.aspx)

9x more water is consumed per capita by Israeli settlers in the West Bank than Palestinians<sup>9</sup>



An Israeli settlement in the West Bank

9.4% of West Bank land is currently cut off by the separation barrier, isolating 6,500 Palestinians in the closed area between the Green Line and the barrier<sup>8</sup>

Christian Aid/Tom Pilsion

## Bible study

A woman prays in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem

Christian Aid/Tom Plinston

Every year Christians flock to the Holy Land, many to undertake religious pilgrimage and gain insight into their faith. It can be amazing to see these holy sites and make connections that enrich our spiritual journey; but there is also richness in exploring the radical and surprising interactions that Jesus had with people in these places. This study challenges us to consider our response to conflict; our relationship with those affected by it; and to learn from how Jesus responded to difficult issues in his own place of worship.

Read Luke 13:10-19 (Jesus heals a crippled woman on the Sabbath).

Consider the way in which Jesus used this place of worship as:

- a place for teaching – the traditions and laws are important to him (13:10)
- a place to engage with challenging and controversial issues – somewhere that difficult questions were posed, explored and answered (13:12-14)

- a place for compassion – he shows how the rules were meant to bring life that is full and free (13:16)
- a place of equality and liberty where all are given what they need – be that healing, forgiveness, answers, or challenges.

### Opening question

Where else in scripture does Jesus allow himself to be interrupted because of the compassion he feels? Discuss these (eg Mark 10:17-23/Luke 17:11-15).

### Activity

Connecting with the compassion that God feels for those suffering is a vital part of our Christian life. Reread the timeline featured earlier in this leaflet and consider:

- at which points do you feel most compassionate?
- who does God challenge us to be compassionate towards? Do we find it easier to be compassionate towards some people rather than others?

### Deeper questions

- What would Jesus see in the Holy Land today, and how would he demonstrate compassion with equality in the midst of conflict and occupation?
- Healing on the Sabbath, and in the synagogue, was against religious law and would have shocked those present. In identifying Jesus as a religious teacher, they made assumptions about his responses and actions; on this

day he surprised them. This conflict is a very contentious issue in the church, often provoking strong personal and theological perspectives. How might Jesus surprise all of us in his response to our assumptions?

- Is your place of worship somewhere where challenging issues are confronted and compassion is embraced? How could this be done to a greater extent?

### Closing reflection

Luke 13:18-19 reflects on how God's kingdom can flourish in our world. From the narrative of 10-17, we might deduce that compassion and freedom are essential elements of this. Let us pray that God will give us the courage and the heart to love all people, and justice even in the most challenging of circumstances.

The old city in East Jerusalem, where all three Abrahamic faiths come to worship

Christian Aid/Tom Plinston

## Prayer

Reaching peace and unity can often seem impossible, until we remember the man whom we follow.

So we think of Jesus, whose feet trod the streets of Jerusalem, and the country roads of the Holy Land. He met with Samaritans, talked with women, and touched the lepers, He challenged social barriers, hatred and prejudice.

So we pray for the Spirit of peace that dwelled in Jesus  
To flow into Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory;  
To bring healing where the pain seems too great,  
To bring reconciliation and unity  
Where there have been generations of hatred.

Father we trust in your power to bring great transformation,  
And we hear your call for us to be makers of peace,  
and workers for justice.  
Be at work in us, and in those for whom we pray,  
in Jesus' name.

Amen



Christian Aid/Charlotte Marshall

**'What is the kingdom of God like? And to what should I compare it? It is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in the garden; it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches.'**

**Luke 13:18-19**

Please tear out and keep this prayer card

**Pray without ceasing  
(1 Thess 5:17)**

**Transfigured by prayer:  
hope for peace in a  
Holy Land**



## Frequently asked questions

### Is Christian Aid impartial in the conflict?

Christian Aid stands in solidarity with Israelis and Palestinians who are seeking a just peace. We believe firmly in the right of all people to live in peace and security, free from violence and fear. We stand against any form of racism or discrimination, including against Israelis or Palestinians, and condemn all violence against civilians as inhumane and illegal under international law.

### What is Christian Aid's theological view of the conflict?

Christian Aid's mandate is to strengthen the world's poor, firm in the belief that all people are made in the image of God and therefore of equal worth. We stand with the oppressed and marginalised, regardless of religion, race or creed. We do not sign up to a particular theological view on the land of Israel. Our theological view on development and poverty concerns broken relationships: both between people on earth, and between God and humanity. We believe strongly in New Testament principles of justice and peace and see these as central to any solution to the conflict.

### Does Christian Aid support a two-state solution?

Christian Aid does not believe in prescribing a solution to the conflict based on one-or two-state solutions. However, we do insist that whatever solution is negotiated, to be viable it must accord both Israelis and Palestinians the right to live in peace and with justice. Christian Aid's report *A Question of Viability* (see [christianaid.org.uk/resources/policy/middle\\_east.aspx](http://christianaid.org.uk/resources/policy/middle_east.aspx)) outlines the essential elements we feel are necessary for a truly viable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

#### Endnotes

**1** UNDP, 'Fast facts about the OPT', 2011, [undp.ps/en/index.html](http://undp.ps/en/index.html)

**2** The World Bank, 2010, [siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWESTBANKGAZA/Resources/WorldBankSep2010AHLCReport.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWESTBANKGAZA/Resources/WorldBankSep2010AHLCReport.pdf)

**3** WFP Socio-Economic and Food Security Survey, 2010, [unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/66C53BE02A462CE18525787000686ECC](http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/66C53BE02A462CE18525787000686ECC)

**4** B'Tselem fatality statistics, 2011, [old.btselem.org/statistics/english/](http://old.btselem.org/statistics/english/)

**5** *By Hook and by Crook: Israeli Settlement Policy in the West Bank*, B'Tselem report, 2010,

[btselem.org/download/201007\\_by\\_hook\\_and\\_by\\_crook\\_eng.pdf](http://btselem.org/download/201007_by_hook_and_by_crook_eng.pdf)

**6** UN OCHA OPT factsheet, 2012, [ochaopt.org/documents/ocha\\_opt\\_settlements\\_FactSheet\\_January\\_2012\\_english.pdf](http://ochaopt.org/documents/ocha_opt_settlements_FactSheet_January_2012_english.pdf)

**7** UN OCHA OPT factsheet, 2012, [ochaopt.org/documents/ocha\\_opt\\_demolitions\\_factSheet\\_january\\_2012\\_english.pdf](http://ochaopt.org/documents/ocha_opt_demolitions_factSheet_january_2012_english.pdf)

**8** UN OCHA OPT maps, 2011, [ochaopt.org/documents/ochaopt\\_atlas\\_barrier\\_affecting\\_palestinians\\_december2011.pdf](http://ochaopt.org/documents/ochaopt_atlas_barrier_affecting_palestinians_december2011.pdf)

**9** *Beyond scarcity: Power, poverty and the global water crisis*, UNDP, 2006, p216, [hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR06-complete.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR06-complete.pdf)





Christian Aid is a Christian organisation that insists the world can and must be swiftly changed to one where everyone can live a full life, free from poverty.

We work globally for profound change that eradicates the causes of poverty, striving to achieve equality, dignity and freedom for all, regardless of faith or nationality. We are part of a wider movement for social justice.

We provide urgent, practical and effective assistance where need is great, tackling the effects of poverty as well as its root causes.

[christianaid.org.uk](http://christianaid.org.uk)  
[christianaid.ie](http://christianaid.ie)

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**Front cover: the historic site of the Church of the Transfiguration, Mount Tabor**

Christian Aid/Charlotte Marshall

**Back cover: a Hasidic Jew passes a Palestinian in the old city of Jerusalem. Its position at the centre of the three Abrahamic faiths has made it one of the most contested cities in history**

Christian Aid/Abbie Trayler-Smith

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