

# 2022 BIBLE DAY

Once comprising 10 % of the Arab population in the Holy Land, the Palestinian Christian population has experienced a steady decline in numbers over the previous century. Due in part to emigration and comparably lower birth rates, Christians today represent a mere 2.5 % of the total West Bank population. Many of these are “traditional” Christians rather than active believers, comparable to many people in nominal Christian countries in the Western world. This minority in the West Bank is further divided into no less than 13 different denominations, ranging from Eastern Orthodox and Latin Catholic to Evangelical and Baptist. The Bible Day is an annual effort of the Palestinian Bible Society to bring these different denominations together, as well as to spark an interest in the Bible among nominal, non-active Christians; an essential task among the already minority Christian community.

For a long time, PBS



has arranged special women’s groups across the West Bank to address the concerning lack of biblical knowledge identified. Over the years, PBS has equipped these groups with healthy Bible teaching and motivation; this persistent work now culminating with PBS’s Bible Day, arranged for the 28th of October 2022 and aimed specifically at these women’s groups, with the goal of encouraging them to reach out to others in ministry. The theme for this year was “Women in the Bible”, the event circling around the Samaritan Woman to whom Jesus spoke at Jacob’s well in Sychar. This well still exists to-

day, in the crypt of the Church of Saint Photina in Nablus.

Originally intended to be held in this church, the Bible Day event was unfortunately required to relocate due to ongoing unrest in the Nablus area. After much consideration of the security situation, the decision was eventually made to host the event at the Saxum Visitor Center, located in Abu Gosh, some 15 kilometres west of Jerusalem. This change in location, however, added further layers of bureaucracy to the event. Not only did the majority of PBS’ staff need special permits to be able to leave the West Bank, these permits also had to be arranged for the women in the three visiting groups. A lot of work and prayer went into all of this. PBS Director Nashat Filmon reflects:

As the Saxum Visitor Center was only able to host about 50 people at a time, the decision was made to run the program three times, and divide the visitors into three groups arriving at different times, thus allowing 150 visitors on the day. Three buses with the women’s groups from Bethlehem, Birzeit and Zababdeh were arranged.



*The guide walking through the Sinai Peninsula with the women’s group from Bethlehem.*



*Mary telling her story.*

*“I praise God for the series of miracles that we witnessed during the Bible Day – permits for the staff, permits for the participants, organising everything from food, worship, preaching the location – Everything was amazingly orchestrated by His hand!”*

Upon arrival, the groups were welcomed with a beautifully laid information table overflowing with flowers, and given breakfast or a lunchbox, depending on the hour. We joined one of the groups on a guided tour



*The music team leading worship during one of the services.*

around the courtyard, where a gigantic map, spanning from ancient Ur to Joseph's Egypt, was carved into the stones under our feet. While practically walking in the footsteps of Abraham and Moses, the guide vividly explained the stories of the Old Testament. Suddenly we found ourselves standing face to face with biblical Ruth, listening as she shared her amazing story. After the Old Testament conclusion of the return from exile in Babylon, we entered the build-

ing complex and continued down to the lower floor. At the foot of the stairs, we gathered around a model of New Testament Jerusalem, cut into the floor. The room was dark and a dot of light, accompanied by a narrator's voice, moved across Jerusalem, tracing Jesus' last few days. At Calvary, the light faded away on the cross and we were met by silent darkness, until, from the empty grave, a bright light again appeared, spreading across the en-



*Before leaving the venue, the visitors were given gift bags and PBS's new family Bible.*

tire city and eventually lighting up the whole room. This was truly a spectacular experience. Continuing the tour, the guide led us through a dimly lit corridor, its walls telling the New Testament story in chronological order. Turning each corner, we encountered more biblical characters, including Jesus' mother Mary, and Mary and Martha; these meetings culminating in the Samaritan women's touching retelling of how Jesus broke the norms of the day and not only spoke to her, but also offered her His living water.

After this walk through biblical history, it was time to join the service in the church hall, where a special music team was leading the worship. PBS had created several videos, in which we were reminded of the many God-enabled women of the Bible. Further encouragement was given in the preaching of Bishop William Shomali of the Roman Catholic Church, who had a very strong message in which he called for more women in ministry.

The service, repeated three times for the different groups, was also live streamed and watched by many people who were unable to attend the physical event. The live stream received much positive feedback from the remote attendees.

Despite the late change of location and its related challenges, the 2022 Bible Day turned out to be a blessed

event which called the women deeper. The women returned home in high spirits, and we pray each one feels ready to embrace God's calling on her life. A grateful Nashat Filmon captures the purpose of the event in his summary:

*"We are thankful for God's answers to all of our prayers, and we are grateful that we were able to encourage, equip and enable the women of the Holy Land to be empowered and strengthened and find their roll within the churches and the society."*



*Nashat Filmon with our Samaritan Woman.*