



Iraqi Christian Foundation
Int'l Org Advocating for the Rights of Middle East Christians
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Brief Summary on Iraqi Christians:

Iraqi Christians consist of Chaldeans, Syriacs, Armenians, Assyrians, and Arab Christians, with Chaldeans representing the largest group at 80% of the worldwide number of Christians from Iraq. Most Iraqi Christians are Catholics, with a smaller percentage belonging to the Orthodox denomination and a small number of Protestants. A 1987 Iraq census placed the number of Christians in the country at 1.4 million. In 2003, there were 1.5+ million Christians living throughout Iraq, from as far north as Zakho to as far south as Basra, Iraq. There are currently an estimated 250,000 Christians remaining in Iraq. Chaldeans, Syriacs, and Assyrians speak languages derived from Akkadian and Aramaic languages; Aramaic is the language spoken by Jesus Christ, and the oldest continuously spoken language in the world. Chaldeans, Syriacs, Assyrians, and Armenians were converted to Christianity in the first century AD by Apostles.

A. Who are Iraqi Christians:

- i. **Chaldeans (80% of Iraqi Christians):** Majority of Iraqi Christians are Chaldeans who are native to Iraq and descendants of the ancient Mesopotamians. Chaldeans speak Chaldean-Aramaic; also known as the Chaldean language, which derives from Akkadian-Babylonian and Aramaic. Chaldeans lived throughout Iraq prior to 2003. Some of the Chaldean towns in Iraq are Tel Keppe (a/k/a Telkaif), Batnaya, Alqosh, Baqofa, Tesqopa (a/k/a Telskuf), Karemlash, Ankawa, Araden, Mangesh, Duhok (certain areas), Zakho (certain areas), and Inshik. Chaldeans are members of the Chaldean Catholic Church, headquartered in Baghdad, Iraq. The Chaldean Catholic Church is a successor Church to the Church of the East founded in Mesopotamia (Iraq) in the first century AD. His Beatitude Chaldean Patriarch Cardinal Louis Rafael Sako currently heads the Chaldean Catholic Church and leads the Chaldean people; his official title is “Patriarch of Babylon of the Chaldeans.” The largest population of Chaldeans outside of Iraq, is in Detroit, Michigan area, where an estimated 200,000 Chaldeans live, and in San Diego, California, where along with other Western states another 100,000 Chaldeans live.
- ii. **Syriacs (10% of Iraqi Christians):** Iraqi Syriacs make up around 10% of the global population of Iraqi Christians; this includes both the Syriac Catholics (8%) and the Syriac Orthodox (2%) members. Syriacs are also descendants of the ancient Mesopotamians and speak a dialect of Aramaic known as Syriac, which originated in Syria & Southern Turkey. The three largest Syriac towns in Iraq are all in the Nineveh Plains: Qaraqosh, Iraq (a Syriac Catholic town of 50,000 population pre-ISIS), Bashiqa, Iraq (a Syriac Catholic town of 10,000 pre-ISIS; although Yazidis are the majority in Bashiqa), and Bartella, Iraq (a Syriac Orthodox town of 20,000 population pre-ISIS). His Beatitude Patriarch Joseph III Yonan is



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the head of the Syriac Catholic Church and based in Lebanon; His Holiness Patriarch Ignatius Aphrem II is the head of the Syriac Orthodox Church and based in Syria. The largest population of Syriacs is in Syria and Europe; in the U.S., the largest population of Syriacs live in the New York area.

- iii. **Assyrians (5% of Iraqi Christians):** Assyrians make up 5% of Christians from Iraq. Most of today's Assyrians are from Iran, followed by Turkey. After the 1915 Ottoman Genocide against indigenous Christians, some of the Assyrians native to Iran and Turkey fled into Iraq, while others went to Syria and Lebanon. Assyrians are also descendants of the ancient Mesopotamians and speak Assyrian-Aramaic. Assyrian towns/villages are in the Duhok and Zakho area of Iraq. Assyrian towns in Iraq include Barwar, Baznaya, Sarsing, and Nahla. There are two Assyrian Churches: Assyrian Church of East (headquartered in Erbil, Iraq); and the Ancient Church of the East (headquartered in Baghdad, Iraq). Both of the Assyrian Churches were originally headquartered in Turkey, but after WWI they were forced to flee. The largest population of Assyrians are based in Chicago, where an estimated 80,000 Assyrians live, plus there is a considerable population in Los Angeles, California.

- iv. **Armenians (3% of Iraq's Christians) and Arab Christians (2% of Iraq's Christians):** Most Armenian and Arab Christians live in large cities, such as Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra. Armenians are native to Anatolia (known today as Turkey). Armenians have been living in Mesopotamia (Iraq) for several hundred years, while a portion came into Iraq as refugees after the Armenian Genocide of WWI. Armenians speak the Armenian language, and most Armenians belong to the Armenian Orthodox Church, but a minority of Armenians belong to the Armenian Catholic Church. In 2014, ISIS drove out the remaining Armenian and Arab Christians from Mosul, Iraq (as well as driving out the remaining Chaldean and Syriac Christians from Mosul). According to the Armenian community, there were roughly 40,000-45,000 Armenians in Iraq in 2003; today, there are about 4,000 remaining Armenians in Iraq.

B. Iraqi Christian towns in Nineveh Plains, Iraq.

There are 9 major Christian towns in the Nineveh Plains, Iraq; 6 of them are Chaldean Catholic towns and overseen by local Chaldean leaders/Chaldean League and the Chaldean Catholic Church. The remaining 3 are Syriac Christian towns. Pre-ISIS the Syriac towns were run by local governors/Mayors and the corresponding Syriac Church. Since ISIS left, the Shabak-Shia militias have taken away local self-governance away from the Syriacs in Bartella, Iraq, and are attempting to forcibly change the demographics of Bartella and the other native Christian towns in the area. For the Chaldean towns in Northern Nineveh Plains, the security has been divided up between the Peshmerga forces (who are in Tesqopa, Baqofa, and Alqosh), and the Iraqi PMU Babylon Movement (a group run by a Chaldean named Rayan Al-Kaldani) who has taken over the security in Tel Keppe and Batnaya. Chaldeans and Syriacs want these forces to



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leave the area, to keep the Nineveh Plains united, and to return local self-governance, including regarding security, to the leaders of these towns with assistance from an international force or the Iraqi Army (non-PMU).

There are smaller Christian towns in Nineveh Plains, but these are the 9 major ones:

- i. **Chaldean towns in Nineveh Plains, Iraq:** Tesqopa, Batnaya, Tel Keppe, Baqofa, Karemlash, Alqosh (all North of Mosul, except for Karemlash which is Southeast of Mosul). All of these towns were taken by ISIS, except for Alqosh, Iraq. Tel Keppe used to be an entirely Chaldean town, but now it is 60% Arab Sunni and 40% Chaldean. The remaining towns mentioned are entirely Chaldean Catholic towns.
- ii. **Syriac towns in Nineveh Plains, Iraq:** Qaraqosh (Syriac Catholic town), Bartella (Syriac Orthodox town), and Bashiqa (Syriac Catholic town; although, as noted above, Yazidis make up the majority in this town); all 3 are Southeast of Mosul.

Please feel free to contact the Iraqi Christian Foundation with any questions or requests for further information at +1.248.602.0509 or info@iraqschristians.org.