Bold Believers

KIDS of COURAGE

in Syria
Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body.

—Hebrews 13:3

Kids of Courage is a division of The Voice of the Martyrs, Inc. (VOM), a Christian missionary organization dedicated to serving persecuted Christians through spiritual and practical assistance and leading other members of the Body of Christ into fellowship with them.

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**Capital**
The capital of Syria is Damascus.

**Size**
In area, Syria is a little larger than the state of Oklahoma in the United States.

**Main Language**
Arabic is the official language of Syria.

**Time**
At 6 a.m. U.S. Central Standard Time, it is 2 p.m. in Syria.

**Unit of Money**
The Syrian pound is the main unit of money in Syria, just as the dollar is the main unit in the United States. One hundred piasters equals one Syrian pound.
Travelers and Conquerors in Syria
Many groups have lived in Syria over the centuries. The groups introduced new customs and laws during their stay. Muslim Arabs arrived in the seventh century, and today most Syrians are Muslims and the main language is Arabic.

The following are some of the groups who conquered Syria or settled there. You may recognize some of their names from Bible stories.

*Babylonians, Canaanites, Hittites, Muslim Arabs, Romans, Greeks, Turks, Phoenicians, Persians, Assyrians, Amorites, Mongols, Mamluks, the French*

Syria became an independent country in 1946.

The “Dead Cities”
The “Dead Cities” are a large group (hundreds) of small villages near Aleppo, Syria. The people who lived in the villages all left before the 10th century.

Many of the people were Christians. They left behind churches, homes, and buildings, many of which remained standing for hundreds of years.

During the civil war in Syria, refugees began moving back into the Dead Cities. The civil war in Syria began in 2011. (A civil war is a war between groups within the same country. Refugees are people who flee from a dangerous place to somewhere safer.)

They set up simple homes in caves under the cities. The homes are musty and uncomfortable, but they keep the refugees safe from the fighting.
Simeon Stylites

Jesus was active in the world around Him. The Bible tells us that He “went about doing good” (Acts 10:38). He preached, healed, taught his disciples and others, went to a wedding, and visited people in their homes.

But after Jesus rose from the dead and returned to heaven, some people believed they could be closer to God if they separated themselves from others in the world.

“Stylites” lived simple, strict lives on top of a pillar or column. One of the first to do so was Simeon Stylites, who lived on top of a tall pillar in the Syrian desert for more than 30 years.

Simeon’s friends visited him and took care of his needs by climbing a ladder to the top of the pillar. Simeon preached to people who came to look at him, and he settled arguments among them.

After Simeon died, others followed his example and became stylites.

Ruins of the Church of Saint Simeon in Syria

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Religion
About 90 percent of the people in Syria are Muslims. About 6 percent are Christians.

Rules for Christians in Syria
An annual report from the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom tells what life is like for people of different faiths around the world. The report describes some of the rules that affect Christians in Syria.

• The president of the country must be a Muslim.
• A Muslim woman can’t marry a Christian man, but a Christian woman can marry a Muslim man. (Children are considered to belong to the father’s religion.)

To Think About
Which rules would make it hard for Christian missionaries to work in Syria?

After dozens of Christians were kidnapped by radical Muslims in Syria, a Syrian leader suggested specific ways to pray.

1. Pray that the Lord will encourage Christians in Syria so they can be a living testimony to others around them in the midst of war.
3. Pray that young Christians will turn to God in times of trouble and put their hope in Jesus.
4. Pray for children and women who are being taking hostage by radical Muslims.
5. Pray for peace in Syria.
More Problems for Christians
In 2011, some Syrians held public protests against the leaders of the country. Government soldiers fought to stop the protests. More people joined in the fighting, some for the government and some for the protestors. The fight turned into a war.

Christians began to face more problems than usual because of the conflict.

• One of Syria’s neighbors is Iraq. Because of conditions in Iraq, many Iraqi Christians moved to Syria in recent years. When the fighting started in Syria, enemies forced Christians to leave their homes. Iraqi Christians joined Syrian Christians as refugees in nearby countries.

• Churches were attacked and raided.

• More Christians said they were treated harshly on their jobs.

• Many Christians had settled in the city of Aleppo over the years. After the war started, they began to feel more fearful about their safety.

(Source: The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom)
Geography Facts

Cities in Syria
Damascus
Aleppo
Latakia
Hama
Damascus
Homs

Landforms
More than half of Syria is desert. Other features include beaches, plains, mountains, forests, rivers, and oases. The climate varies from place to place.

Resources
Some of Syria’s natural resources are natural gas, oil, iron ore, marble, gypsum, salt, and phosphates. War and violence have prevented Syrians from making full use of the resources.

Phosphates are used in soft drinks, detergent, toothpaste, fireworks, French fries, fertilizers, and other products.

Some of the salt is produced by the evaporation of water from Syria’s salt lakes. Syria’s largest salt lake is Sabkhat al-Jabbul.

Aleppo’s Souk

Aleppo is a large city in Syria with many very old buildings. Parts of Aleppo’s souk (market) were built before the United States became a country.

The souk has been known as the largest covered market in the world. The alleys where people walk through the market cover more than eight miles. The shops sell cloth, food, crafts, spices, and many other goods. Many of the shops have been burned, damaged, or destroyed in the civil war.
The Golan Heights
Soldiers fought battles in the Golan Heights even during Bible days. In modern times, the region was part of Syria. Israel gained control of the Golan Heights in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, also known as the Six-Day War. Since that time, the countries have held peace talks to discuss plans for the area.

Mount Hermon, the highest point in Syria, is partly in the Golan Heights.
The Levant

“Levant” comes from a French word that means “to rise.” Countries on the eastern edge of the Mediterranean Sea, including Syria, are sometimes called “the Levant.” From the viewpoint of the countries west of them, they are in the direction of the sunrise.

A radical Muslim group, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), became well known for its violence in Syria and Iraq. The group changed its name to “ISIS,” the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. Then, to emphasize its goal of creating a large Muslim nation, the group changed its name to “IS,” the Islamic State.
Some Syrian Boys’ Names
Ahmed, Elijah, Sami, Ammar, Nizar

Some Syrian Girls’ Names
Shayma, Bana, Nour, Zeinah, Rima

Traditional Clothing
Many Syrians dress in the same kinds of clothing worn in North America and Europe. They might wear traditional clothing on special occasions. Traditional clothing for Syrian women includes a thob, kaftan, and scarf. A thob is a long dress with triangle-shaped sleeves, and a kaftan is a long covering worn over the dress.

In recent times, radical Muslims in parts of Syria have demanded that women wear scarves and long robes. In addition, more women are choosing to wear scarves and robes to show that they are strict Muslims.

Men may wear pants with a long shirt and cloak, and a long headdress held in place with a cord called an agal.
Homes

Apartments
Apartment houses are common in Syrian cities.

Single Homes
Houses for one family often have a central courtyard, so their yard is in the center of the house.

Beehive Houses
In some parts of Syria, houses are shaped like beehives. The design helps the houses stay cool in the summer.

Tents
Bedouin people are traditionally nomads — people who live in tents and move from place to place as they take their animals to fresh grazing land. Some Bedouins in Syria today still make their homes in tents.

Refugee Housing
Many Syrians fled their homes during the civil war that began in 2011. Some found places to live in broken down homes that no one else wanted. Others live in homes they built of simple materials.
**Pigeons**
Pigeon collectors in Syria keep their birds in coops on the roof of their house. A coop is a cage for birds.

The collectors keep the pigeons for enjoyment as a hobby. But news reports say that some people in Syria have used the birds to carry messages in war-torn areas. When the phones and electricity were not working, they tied tiny paper notes to the pigeons’ legs. The birds delivered the messages to people in other parts of the city.

Collectors who flee Syria because of the war are sad when they have to leave their pigeons behind. Some start new collections in other countries.

**Syrian Hamsters**
Syrian hamsters are also called golden hamsters, even though they come in different colors. Travelers took them from the wild in Syria to other countries, where they became popular as pets.

**Music and Dance**
“While Muslims don’t use music in worship, music is still a huge part of the [Syrian] culture,” said a Christian in Syria. “Dancing is also an important part of the culture.”

**Some Syrian Musical Instruments**
- The rebab is a one-stringed instrument played with a bow.
- The oud is a pear-shaped stringed instrument.
- The tabla is a drum shaped like a goblet. It is played with the hands.

**Dabke Dance**
Dabke is a line dance. The dancers hold hands with those on either side of them. The dance includes specific steps, kicks, and stomps.

**To Try**
The instruments and dance described above are popular in the Middle East. Invite someone from a Middle Eastern country to visit your group or class and demonstrate the dabke or how to play a Middle Eastern instrument.
Syrian Soap Operas
Soap operas are TV or radio programs that tell stories about the daily lives of a group of characters. The stories continue from episode to episode and often involve romance.

Syrian soap operas have been popular in countries where the people speak Arabic. The programs are especially enjoyed during the month of Ramadan, when Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset. Muslims often enjoy Ramadan feasts in the evening, and many watch TV programs.

Fewer Syrian soap operas were produced after Syria’s civil war began.

Risky Travel
During the civil war, the U.S. State Department issued the following warning to U.S. citizens: “The Department of State continues to warn U.S. citizens against travel to Syria and strongly recommends that U.S. citizens remaining in Syria depart immediately. ... There is an increased risk of kidnappings, bombings, murder, and terrorism. ... No part of Syria should be considered safe from violence.”

Driving Habits
“Vehicles often do not stop for pedestrians and regularly run red lights or ‘jump’ the green light well before it changes.” — U.S. government report on driving in Syria

Parts of many cities have been destroyed in the war.

Street vendor

Film set for a Syrian TV program
Languages

Arabic
Arabic is the main language of Syria.

Different forms of Arabic are used in different places. The Muslim holy book, the Quran, is written in classical Arabic. Other forms are used in school, in the media, and among friends and family.

Arabic is read from right to left, the opposite of English.

Kurdish

Many Kurds live in Syria, Turkey, Iraq, and Iran. The region where they live is often called Kurdistan, which is not an official country. Many Kurds would like a country of their own. Other Kurds would be content to have more rights and freedoms in the countries where they now live.

Kurds speak a variety of Kurdish languages. Kirmanji Kurdish is a Kurdish language spoken by Kurds in Syria.

Saladin and the Great Mosque

Saladin was a famous Kurdish Muslim warrior in the 12th century. His tomb is on the grounds of the Great Mosque of Damascus, one of the largest and oldest mosques in the world. (A mosque is a building where Muslims worship.) The mosque was built hundreds of years ago on the site of a Christian church that honored John the Baptist.

Historians are concerned that wars and violence will damage and destroy mosques and other old buildings in Syria.
Aramaic, the Language of Jesus

Jesus spoke Aramaic when He lived on earth. Today people in a few communities around the world still speak the language. Different forms of Aramaic are spoken in different locations.

People in some Syrian communities have continued to speak Aramaic in modern times. Linguists (people who study languages) fear that Aramaic may become extinct. Syria’s civil war has driven many Aramaic-speaking residents away from their villages. They may stop speaking Aramaic if they settle in places where no one speaks their language. But even before the war, fewer and fewer people were using Aramaic as their main language.

“Jesus” in Aramaic

Syrian children
Syria Facts Puzzle

The puzzles below form a word square. In each puzzle, the words read the same vertically (up and down) as horizontally (across). Read the Syria facts on the previous pages, then use the clues below and a Bible to help you complete the puzzle. Answers are in the Answer Key.

Down
(There are no “Across” words for this puzzle.)

1. More than _____ of Syria is a desert.
2. Syrian men wear a long headdress held in place with an ______.
3. Al-Jabbal is the largest salt _____ in Syria.
4. Many Syrians _____ their country during a civil war.
5. Dabke dancers step, _____, and stomp.
6. Many Kurds live in Syria, Turkey, Iraq, and _____.
7. Pigeon collectors keep their birds in a coop. A coop is a _____ for birds.
8. When the dove came, Noah _____ that the land was starting to dry.
9. _____ people came to Syria in the seventh century. They brought their Arabic language with them.
10. A Syrian girl’s name.
11. The last word of a prayer.
12. Another Syrian girl’s name.
13. Simeon Stylites lived on top of a _____ pillar.
14. In _____, Syria is a little larger than the U.S. state of Oklahoma.
15. Pigeon owners tied tiny messages to their pigeons’ _____.
16. Matthew 20:16 says, “The _____ will be first.”
Syria Facts Puzzle
Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body.

—Hebrews 13:3
John, a Christian man in Syria, was driving down a road near his house one day. As he went around a corner, two youth crashed a motorcycle into his car on purpose to make it look like John had run into them.

The two boys fell to the ground. John jumped out of his car to see if they were okay. When John got closer to them, he saw that one of the motorcyclists had blood on his face. The injured cyclist’s brother then beat John up and left him unconscious. A Christian friend of John’s who drove by saw what happened, and he took John to the hospital.

The police came to the hospital and asked John about the “accident.” “Do you want to accuse the youth of a crime?” they asked John.

If John did not bring charges against the youth, they could say the accident was John’s fault, and he could go to jail. But John said he would not charge them. He said he wanted to have a forgiving attitude like Jesus.

John found out that some people who did not like his witness for Christ had paid the youth to cause the “accident.” He asked the police to please bring the youth to him because he wanted to talk to them.

The youth came to the hospital with some of their friends. John told them he did not blame them and that he forgave them for what they did. He said, “If you decide to blame me and press charges against me, I still will not press charges against you. I will accept jail time if that’s what happens.”

The youth were puzzled about John’s actions, and they began to ask him questions. Later some non-Christians who heard about the incident even started going to church with John to learn more about Jesus!

Praise God for their change of heart, and pray that they will decide to give their lives to Jesus.
Activity: Syria Map and Flag

Map
Syria's neighbors are Lebanon, Israel, Turkey, Iraq, and Jordan. Photocopy and color the map.
Flag
Photocopy the flag below, and color it. Hang it up as a reminder to pray for Syria. The top stripe is red and the bottom stripe is black. The middle stripe is white, and the stars are green.
The story below is a re-telling of the biblical story of Saul’s conversion on the road to Damascus. The city of Damascus still exists in Syria today.

Saul patted the pouch on his hip as his horse galloped along the stone road. He glanced back at the men riding with him to the city of Damascus.

*Hmmph!* he thought smugly. *We’ll finally get rid of those followers of Christ for good!*

Saul and his men hunted down Christians all over Jerusalem, hauling them to prison. Like a wild man, Saul burst into homes dragging Christians away. As word spread of the arrests, followers of Christ fled to Damascus.

Saul looked at the pouch that held the papers to arrest the Christ followers in Damascus. *They won’t be safe for long,* he thought. *No, they won’t be safe for long.*

Saul and his men were tired from the week-long journey. Beads of sweat slid down their faces. “It won’t be long now men!” announced Saul when the city came into view.

Just then, the horses began to whinny and snort. “Easy, now!” Saul said, patting his horse. Suddenly a blinding light shone from heaven.

“Saul,” said a voice from the light. “Why are you persecuting me?” Saul fell to the ground. He squinted his eyes as he looked up into the light.

“Who — who are you, Lord?” Saul stammered. Saul’s men were surprised and confused. It wasn’t like Saul to be at a loss for words.

“I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting.” *What?* thought Saul. He, too was confused. *Is Jesus really God?*

“Get up and go to Damascus, where you will be told what to do.” The light and the voice disappeared. Saul stood up, but he was now blind.
In Damascus, a Christian named Ananias was working when the Lord spoke to him. “Ananias, go to Judas’s house and ask for Saul. I need you to lay hands on him and restore his sight.”

“But, Lord,” replied Ananias, “Saul is coming here to arrest more of your followers.”

“You must go. I have chosen him to tell Jews, Gentiles and even kings about me. And I will show him how much trouble this will bring him.” Ananias obeyed.

Saul was a changed man. A smile replaced his scowl. His anger turned into passion. And his gruff voice that once shouted threats now proclaimed God’s love. He couldn’t wait to tell his people, the Jews, about Jesus.

“Isn’t this the man who was arresting followers of Jesus?” Jews in Damascus murmured. “Didn’t he come to arrest more of them?” whispered others. They were shocked he believed that Jesus was God’s son. They didn’t like what Saul said, so they plotted to kill him.

When Saul heard of the Jews’ plot to kill him, he knew it was time to leave. But Roman spies and the Jews were watching for him at the city gates. Under the cover of night, believers placed Saul in a basket. They lowered him through a window and down the city wall until the basket reached the ground.

Saul was safe from trouble — for now.

(Source: God’s Apostle: The Adventures of Paul, available at www.vombooks.com. The illustrations on the previous page are from the book.)
Activity: Damascus Facts

Damascus Today
“So the Lord said to him, ‘Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying’ ” (Acts 9:11).

(The verse above is from the story about Saul in the Book of Acts. The Lord was speaking to Ananias. The Judas in the story is not the one who betrayed Jesus.)

Straight Street is still a street in Damascus today. Visitors can see the street where Saul stayed after his encounter with Jesus on the way to the city.

In the Chapel of Saint Ananias in Damascus, Christians can remember the events in Saul’s life.

Damascus Rose
The Damascus rose is a flower named after the Syrian city. Oil from the flower is used in perfume and cosmetics.

Damascus Steel
Damascus steel was used to make strong knives and swords. People who made them kept their method a secret. After a while the secret was lost, and no one remembered how to make the knives and swords.

Damascus steel was said to be “superplastic,” meaning it would be easily shaped when heated. But it was very strong when it was cool.

Damask Cloth
Damask cloth, named after the city of Damascus, is used for furniture coverings, tablecloths, and sometimes clothing. The cloth is thick and is decorated in distinctive patterns. Color the drawings featuring damask cloth on page 25.
Make a “Rose”
Use the instructions below to make a “Damascus rose.”

Place three Kleenex halves flat on top of one another. Fold all the layers accordion style, making the pleats about one-inch wide. Fasten the pleated Kleenexes together by placing a large paper clip in the middle of the strip of folded layers. Cut off the ends of the folded strip, leaving about three inches of Kleenex on either side of the paper clip. Gently separate and fluff all the layers to form a delicate flower.

**STEP 1:** Fold all the layers accordion style. If you want to add some color, use markers and color the edges of the Kleenexes.

**STEP 2:** Place a large paper clip in the middle of the folded layers.

**STEP 3:** Fluff all the layers to form a flower.
Damask Cloth
The following letter came from a Christian worker in Lebanon who helps Syrian refugees who fled from Syria’s civil war.

“One morning I went out distributing food for Syrian refugees who have escaped Syria to find refuge in Lebanon. As I was walking and praying, I met a boy. The boy said that he and his family are from Homs, Syria. When I asked him if I could visit them, he was not sure if that would be okay. I gave him my phone number and some food. His father called that afternoon, thanked me for the food, and invited us to his house.

“The following day my wife and I went to the house and met his family. They had three children. They turned out to be a Christian-background family who escaped the fighting and persecution in their village. The man had been memorizing verses from the Bible for the past 10 years and was still doing this, but he did not know Jesus personally.

“From our first visit, they invited us to read the Scriptures together. Although they grew up going to church, they had never experienced salvation in Christ. As we read the Bible passages about following Jesus, they were ready to receive Christ. They all gave their lives to Jesus at the end of the meeting. Salvation had come to the entire household!

“The man told us that he has been praying for a long time that God would send him believers in Christ who could share and explain the Scriptures to them. He then said God had answered his prayers and now he is ready to open his house for study of God’s Word for his entire family. What a joy it was for us to hear this! We started visiting them every Saturday evening for a time of prayer, discussion and Bible study.”

Note: One of the family’s relatives, Darius, gave his life to Jesus in their home. A few days later while Darius was visiting his hometown in Syria, he was killed by Muslims. God comforted and strengthened his relatives and other Syrian Christians.

To Discuss
• Acts 8 tells the story of Philip’s conversation with a man who was reading the Scriptures, in Isaiah. Philip asked him, “Do you understand what you are reading?” The man answered, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” How was the man like the Syrian refugees in the story?

• Are there parts of the Bible that you don’t understand? Who can you ask to help explain them to you?

• How can you prepare to be a person who can explain Christian truths to others who ask for help?
Eating Customs
“Eating customs can vary from family to family,” said a Christian who lived in Syria. “It depends on the people group and many other factors. Some families eat on the floor with food on a mat in the middle. Others eat at a table.

“Some food is eaten with the hands, some with bread [to scoop up the food], some from plates or bowls with silverware. It depends on what you’re eating.

“The big meal of the day is in the afternoon, usually between 2:00 and 5:00. The breakfast and dinner meals are lighter. Dinner can be any time from 8:00 to the early hours of the morning. The average time is probably about 10:00.”

Common Foods in Syria
- Rice
- Hummus
- Lamb
- Khubz (flatbread)
- Yogurt
- Fresh fruit
- Olives
- Baklava
- Fresh vegetables
- Tomatoes
A cola drink
Hummus
Carrying khubz
Making khubz
A food vendor
Meat in the market
A food stall in the market
Recipes

Barazek — Syrian Cookies

1. Toast 1/3 cup of sesame seeds in a dry frying pan over medium heat, stirring until the seeds are golden brown.
2. Pour the seeds in a bowl, and stir in 2 teaspoons of honey. Set aside.
3. Mix 2 1/2 cups of flour, 3/4 cups of sugar, and 1/2 teaspoon of baking powder.
4. Add 1/2 cup of butter or margarine. Stir it into the mixture as you would if making pie crust. Add 1/3 cup of water, and stir just until dough forms. Add a little flour if it is too sticky to handle easily. (For even easier handling, chill for several hours.)
5. Use your hands to make dough balls that are larger than a marble and smaller than a ping-pong ball. Flatten the balls somewhat, and put them on a lightly greased cookie sheet, leaving some space between them. Spoon a little of the sesame seed and honey mixture onto the top of each cookie, and slightly press it into the top of the cookie.
6. Bake for 15 to 18 minutes at 350° degrees until lightly browned.

Strawberry Banana Drink

Blend the following in a blender until smooth:

Two to three ripe, peeled bananas cut into chunks
1 cup of frozen strawberries
2 cups of cold milk
1 cup of yogurt
1/4 cup of honey or sugar (optional)

Mahalabiya (Rice Pudding)

2. Heat 1 quart of milk to a low boil in a large pan.
3. Add the water and rice flour mixture. Stir constantly until it begins to thicken. Add 1/4 cup of honey or sugar, 1 teaspoon of vanilla extract, and a dash of salt. Continue to stir the mixture until it has thickened.
4. Remove from the heat and let it cool.
5. Pour or spoon the pudding into serving bowls. Top with dried fruit and nuts, and serve.
Syria had been in the news for many months because of the violence taking place there. Different groups were fighting for control of the country.

Many Christians had left their homes and moved to other countries to escape the violence. Samer and Liena, a Christian couple, had to decide whether to stay or take their children and leave the country.

A Hard Place to Live
Violence was not the only hardship for people who remained in Syria. A Syrian pastor said that because of the war, he had electricity only three hours a day, and other parts of the country were worse.

Some people stayed in Syria because they had nowhere else to go. But a church offered to help Samer, Liena, and their two children move to Europe. The church said they would provide the family with a house, take care of them, and even send their children to a private school.

Samer and Liena prayed and fasted for days until they made a decision. They decided to stay in Syria and be a light for Christ.

Singing with the Angels
One night the family huddled together in their home as bombs fell on their neighborhood. Liena tried to prepare her children for what could happen. She told them that one day, terrorists might come to the door, and they might have swords. But, she told them, even if something bad happened and they died, “We will close our eyes, and we will open them again in heaven. And we will be with Jesus, singing with the angels.”

No one came to the door that night, and the bombs stopped. The family continued to serve God in Syria.

To Think About
• If you were part of Samer and Liena’s family, how would you want Christians to pray for you?
• If you could have electricity for only three hours a day, which three hours would you choose? (Syrians don’t get to choose.) How would your life change during the hours when you had no electricity?
Islam

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Ephesians 2:8–9).

About 90 percent of the people in Syria are Muslims. Islam is the religion of Muslims.

Muslims believe that Jesus was a great man, but not the Son of God. Muslims worship Allah. They recite, “There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is his messenger (prophet).”

Muhammad is the man who started Islam many centuries ago in the region that is now Saudi Arabia. He taught that Allah lets people into heaven if they have done enough good works. But no one knows how many good works are “enough.”

Christians know that people can be saved only by the grace of God through faith in His Son, Jesus. Christians believe that humans are not righteous enough to save themselves through good works. All fall short of God’s glory. God sent Jesus to redeem the lost from sin, so that those who believe in Him may have eternal life. (See Romans 3:22–25.)

Sunnis and Shi’ites

“Jesus answered, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here’” (John 18:36).

Muslims are permitted to have more than one wife, and Muhammad had several. When he died in 632, he left behind a number of wives. But he left no living sons.

Not long after his death, Muslims began to argue about who should replace him as leader. Their disagreement led to a split in Islam. Today Islam has two main branches, the Sunnis [SOON-eez] and Shi’ites [SHEE-ites]. The majority of Muslims in Syria (and in the world) are Sunnis.

Shi’ites believe that the leadership of Islam should have passed down to someone related to Muhammad. Sunnis believe it was right that the leadership passed to leaders (called “caliphs”) who guided the Muslims after Muhammad’s death.

Muhammad’s grandson, Hussein, was killed in 680 as a result of fighting between the two groups.

Sunnis and Shi’ites agree on many beliefs. But they follow different traditions and celebrate different festivals. Shi’ites give more power to their imams. (An imam is a Muslim leader.) Shi’ites honor and admire Hussein and others who died for Islam.

Activity: Non-Christian Religions in Syria

Fighting

Muhammad’s followers fought battles against non-Muslims during Muhammad’s lifetime. After he died, Muslims spread Islam to other regions, including Syria, sometimes by force. Sunnis and Shi’ites also fought against each other.
## Comparing Shi’ite and Sunni Muslims

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Shi’ite</th>
<th>Sunni</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percentage of followers in the world</strong></td>
<td>About 15 percent of the world’s Muslims are Shi’ites.</td>
<td>About 85 percent of the world’s Muslims are Sunnis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>History (1)</strong></td>
<td>Muhammad was the founder of Islam. Shi’ites believe that the leadership of Muslims should have been passed down to someone in Muhammad’s family.</td>
<td>Sunnis believe that it was right for leadership to be passed from Muhammad down to leaders called “caliphs” (KAY-liffs).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>History (2)</strong></td>
<td>Quarrels over who should be the leader resulted in the death of Muhammad’s grandson, Hussein. Hussein is still highly honored among Shi’ites as a Muslim martyr.</td>
<td>Caliphs were chosen by elders among the Sunnis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leaders</strong></td>
<td>Imams are very important leaders among Shi’ites.</td>
<td>Sunni imams are simply the leaders of Friday prayers. (Friday is the Muslims’ holy day.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Free will</strong></td>
<td>Shi’ites believe that humans were created with free will.</td>
<td>Muslims worship Allah; they believe he created the world. Many Sunnis believe that good and evil are the will of Allah and that everything is decided by him before it happens.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Salvation</strong></td>
<td>Both Shi’ite and Sunni Muslims believe that human beings are born sinless, and they do not seek a personal Savior. They depend on their own good works to please Allah and to get them into paradise when they die.</td>
<td>Neither Shi’ites nor Sunnis believe the following: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). Also see Romans 5:12 and Ephesians 2:8–9.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Sufis**

“[Jesus said,] ‘Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light’” (Matthew 11:28–30).

Sufis are Muslim mystics. They hope to experience Allah in ways beyond what they can experience with their five senses.

Chanting is one way Sufis try to connect with Allah. Other ways include meditation, giving up all desires, and walking through fire. Different Sufi groups have different practices. Sufis who seek Allah through energetic dancing are known as whirling dervishes.

Lillias Trotter was a British missionary who worked among Sufis in the 1800s, teaching them the true path to God. She understood the Sufis’ desire to have a personal relationship with the Creator. She was sad to see how hard they tried to find the truth in wrong ways.

Miss Trotter shared the good news of Jesus with the Sufis so they could come to Him and rest from their constant work to reach Him. Missionaries who came after Miss Trotter used her example in their witness to Muslims.

**Alawites**

“‘Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. ...’” (Matthew 10:27–28).

Bashar al-Assad was the president of Syria when a civil war began in 2011. He and his father, who led Syria before him, came from an Alawite family.

Alawites broke off from Shi’ites to form their own group hundreds of years ago. In modern times they made up more than 10 percent of Syria’s population, and many held important jobs in government and business.

Alawites follow some teachings of Islam and some of other religions. But some of their beliefs are secret, unknown even to many Alawites.

Alawites are allowed to follow the practice of taqiyya [tah-KEE-uh], which means hiding or lying about one’s beliefs to avoid persecution. As a result, their secrets have remained secret from their enemies and others.

[Image of Whirling dervishes in the Middle East]
Druze

“And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many” (Hebrews 9:27-28a).

Druze gather for religious meetings on Thursdays instead of on Friday like Muslims or on Sunday like most Christians.

No one is allowed to become a Druze if they were not born into a Druze family. And followers of Druze teachings are not allowed to leave the faith. Strong families and a strong Druze community encourage members not to explore other religions.

The Druze do not permit marriages to non-Druze people. To obey the rules, sometimes they marry people they do not love.

Like the Alawites, the Druze broke away from Shia Islam many centuries ago. Also like the Alawites, the Druze may lie about their faith or hide their beliefs if they think it will keep them out of danger. The Druze also have many secrets. Only a few Druze know all the secrets.

The Druze believe in reincarnation — the belief that people who die may return to life in other bodies.

Ismailis

“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me’” (John 14:6).

Ismailism is a branch of Shia Islam. Salamia, Syria, is an important city to Ismailis, who make up about half of the population.

The leader of the Ismailis is the Aga Khan. The current Aga Khan is Prince Karim Aga Khan. He is said to be descended from Muhammad, the founder of Islam. Ismailis believe that the Aga Khan is able to explain the meaning of teachings in the Quran, the Muslim holy book.

Prince Karim Aga Khan was born in Switzerland, went to college in the United States, and was a skier in the Olympics. Later he became one of the richest people in the world. He uses some of his money to build schools and hospitals and to help poor people. He also owns racehorses, jets, and several homes.
Yazidis

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

Yazidis combine parts of other religions in their teachings. They believe God created the world. They also believe in seven angels that are important to their religion; the lead angel is the peacock angel.

Many Muslims believe that Yazidis are devil worshipers. Yazidis have been harshly persecuted by Muslims, and many have left Syria and settled in other countries.

Most Yazidis speak Kurdish.
The statements on the left below are common Muslim beliefs. Draw a line from each statement to the verse on the right that tells what the Bible says about the statement. The first one has been done for you. Answers are in the Answer Key.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Muslim Beliefs</th>
<th>What the Bible Says</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. “We don’t believe that Jesus died. Somebody else took his place on the cross,” said an American Muslim. What does the Bible say?</td>
<td>A. Though men and women may have different roles and tasks, they are equal in God’s sight. Galatians 3:28 (NIV) says, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. “Men are superior to women on account of the qualities with which [Allah] hath gifted the one above the other” (Quran 4:34). What does the Bible say?</td>
<td>B. “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Ephesians 2:8–9). People can be saved only by the grace of God through His Son, Jesus. (See John 3:16.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. “We don’t believe that Jesus was the Son of God,” a Muslim youth said. What does the Bible say?</td>
<td>C. “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19, NIV).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. “Those whose scales are light are those who lose their souls, in hell abiding” (Quran 23:103). Muslims believe that good works are weighed on a scale; enough good works will earn someone’s way to heaven. What does the Bible say?</td>
<td>D. “Christ died for our sins” (1 Corinthians 15:3).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. It’s permissible to forgive others who have wronged you, but getting revenge is also acceptable says the Quran (42:37–41). What does the Bible say?</td>
<td>E. “Do not take revenge” (Romans 12:19, NIV).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The Quran does not say Allah seeks to redeem those lost in sin or that he loves those who don’t love him first. What does the Bible say?</td>
<td>F. “[God said,] ‘You are My Son, whom I love, with You I am well pleased’” (Mark 1:11, NIV; see also Matthew 16:16–17, NIV).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Witnessing with a Wristband

During Syria’s civil war, many people left the country to live in refugee camps in nearby countries. The struggle in Syria led some to seek the truth outside of Islam.

A Syrian Christian who ministers among other Syrians shared the good news of Jesus using an interesting wristband. He shares his wristband with everyone he sees.

Using a wristband that you can write on, make a wristband like the one in the photo. Can you explain the gospel to someone with the help of the wristband?

**Note:** The down arrow represents Jesus coming to earth. The cross is a symbol of His crucifixion, and the grave shows that He died for our sins. The up arrow illustrates Jesus’ resurrection. The second down arrow shows that one day Jesus will come back.
Many Syrians fled Syria and moved to nearby countries during the civil war that started in 2011. Both Muslims and Christians found shelter in refugee camps that were set up to provide simple housing for them.

Abdallah

Abdallah is a Muslim boy who lives in a refugee camp. Read below to learn what he said about the importance of cellphones to refugees.

Things are very dangerous in Syria right now. I want to go to our village, Ankhel. When I left, the shelling had stopped. But Allah knows how it is now.

Our phone is very important to us. We use it to check up on the situation there. We usually call my aunt in Ankhel. If she tells us it has become safe, we can go back.

There is a hill we call Syria-Tel. You can access the Syrian phone network there. So people come here to connect. And we are not the only ones. A lot of people come here. Everyone is here to talk to their relatives.

“Is the electricity and water back?” [they ask]. “Is it back on in our village?”

It’s natural to worry about your cousins or your siblings. As soon as I speak to my family, I start remembering them, all our uncles, and our house.

Why is the phone important? It keeps us connected to our relatives. And the day we return to Syria, it’ll be because of the phone.

(Source: UNHCR)
Needs of the Refugees
Many refugees live in shelters that barely protect them from the weather. They often lack food, medical care, blankets, stoves, and other daily needs. Trash piles up because there is no place to take it, and there are no schools for the children.

Christians Help
Christians try to help both Muslim and Christian refugees. “Christians are the only group helping everyone,” said a Christian who works among the refugees. “Other groups help only their own people.”

Some Muslim countries send aid, but they don’t help non-Muslims, or even Muslims who are not part of their Muslim group.

Muslims notice the Christians helping others.

A Muslim Helper
A group of Christians came to an area outside of Syria where refugees were living in small shelters. They gave food, supplies and Bibles to the Muslim and Christian refugees. When they gave the refugees a Bible, they told them the story of Jesus and the good news of salvation by God’s grace through faith in His Son.

A Muslim man helped the Christians with their project. He saw them passing out Bibles, and he listened to their story about Jesus.

Sometimes the Christians would forget to add a Bible to their gift packages. The Muslim man began to remind them. He also told the story of Jesus to the refugees when he gave them a Bible!

The Muslim was still a Muslim, but he thought about what he had learned from the Christians. “He loves Jesus, but he’s not a Christian yet,” said a Christian worker.

Pray that more Muslims will experience Jesus’ love through the Christians they meet and that they will want to follow Jesus, too.
Activity: Life for Children in Syria

The Syrian School System
“Kids wear uniforms, usually blue, at public schools,” said a Christian who taught at a Syrian school before many of them closed, during the civil war. In the Syrian system, children are expected to memorize a lot of facts. When they don’t meet the teacher’s expectations, the teacher often shames them in front of their classmates.

Students take an important exam in ninth grade. After they get their scores, they go to either a school to prepare for college or a technical school to learn a trade. A final test during the last year of school determines where they will go to college.

School During the War
During the civil war, many schools were damaged or destroyed. Some people who lost their homes in the war moved into school buildings.

Some schools that have stayed open are crowded. Many teachers have left the country. Some children have dropped out to help their families.

A United Nations report said that half of Syrian children were not going to school during the war. To keep children from getting behind in their education, some radio stations broadcast lessons on the radio.

Refugee children who have left Syria with their families might not attend school at all. Some refugee camps have schools; some do not. Refugees who live outside the camps often do not go to school. Those who do are sometimes bullied because they are refugees.
Daily Life
A Christian who has lived in Syria and the United States made the following observations about life for children in Syria before the civil war.

“The entire community cared for the children. So parents could go places and let their children run free. Strangers would love, take care of, and spoil the children wherever they might go. Syrians don’t normally think, ‘Strangers are dangerous, so you must keep your children close by and well-behaved,’ like many Americans do.

“Children are greatly loved by the society as a whole. They often ran errands and did chores that adults might do in America, like running to the store to pick up something. Neighborhood stores made it unnecessary to drive.”

(The war made life more dangerous for both children and adults.)

A School Story
At a Christian school in Syria, the students memorize Psalm 91. The children use the psalm to guide prayers for their families during times of fighting and war. They fast and pray for peace in their country. Thankfully they have seen answers to their prayers.

One night a driver made a serious mistake in the city where the children go to school. He got into his car after he had been drinking alcohol and tried to drive. But he could not drive straight. His car ended up sideways, blocking the road. The driver got out of the car and walked away.

The next morning, no vehicles could drive on the street because the car blocked the way. The school children were stuck on the road in their buses as people looked for the car’s driver.

While the children waited for the road to clear, a bomb exploded farther down the street. At that time of the morning, the school buses were usually near the place where the bomb exploded. The car blocking the road might have prevented them from being injured.

Read Psalm 91. Why do you think the Syrian children use it to guide their prayers?
Activities in Syria

The puzzle below includes the hidden names of activities that Syrians enjoy watching or doing. The words can be found running up and down (vertically), from left to right (horizontally), or diagonally. Answers are in the Answer Key.

Look for the following activities:
- soccer
- basketball
- karate
- swimming
- wrestling
- boxing
- table tennis
- track and field
- hajla
- camel racing
- weightlifting
- tennis
Facts
- Hajla is a traditional game with rules similar to hopscotch.
- Syrian children also enjoy watching TV and using computers.
- Some Syrian children swim in craters created by exploded bombs and filled with dirty water.
Boutros, a Christian in Syria, understands Jesus' command to “Go and make disciples of all the nations” (Matthew 28:19). But it was not easy for him to make disciples in Syria. Most people there are Muslim, and the country was in the middle of a war.

Every day Boutros gathered a load of Bibles and walked from shop to shop, sharing the story of Christ. He was often rejected or kicked out of the shops. But others welcomed the Good News that he brought.

Boutros’s task was dangerous. Christians in Syria couldn’t be sure that they would return alive when they left their homes. In fact, Boutros’s work was so risky that his church leaders asked him to stop doing it! “We can’t afford to lose you,” they said.

Boutros did not stop.
Arrested
One day, the police stopped Boutros while he was passing out Bibles. “Get out of here!” they told him. So Boutros went to the next street and continued giving away the Scriptures. The police followed him, put a black bag over his head, and took him away. They locked him in a crowded jail cell, but Boutros began sharing the gospel with other prisoners!

The next day, the police questioned Boutros and yelled at him. “The guy sitting in front of me had no idea what I did,” Boutros said. “He was just yelling and cursing at me. Finally he asked me what I had done. I told him, ‘I didn’t do anything. I was just giving out Bibles. The Bible teaches to pray for your leaders and respect your leaders.’ ”

Boutros shared the gospel with the officer, and told him that God is love and that God loved him. Boutros’s words changed the officer’s attitude. The officer handed Boutros his personal phone number and told him to let him know if he had any more trouble with the police.

Back to Work
Boutros went from prison to his church, where he found everyone crying and praying for him. The Christians were so happy to see Boutros alive!

Boutros returned home to his wife and child. The next day, he got out of bed, packed his bag with Bibles, and continued spreading God’s Word from place to place.

To Think About
“Boutros … is not waiting for the perfect moment to share the gospel. He knows the time is always now.” — a Christian worker

- Can you think of other times and places where it would be difficult to share the gospel?

- Many people welcomed the information about Jesus that Boutros shared with them. Why might people living in the middle of a war be eager to find the truth?
Eblaite
An extinct animal is an animal that has died out, with no examples still living. An extinct volcano is one that no longer erupts. An extinct language is a language that is no longer in use.

Eblaite is an extinct language of the ancient Syrian city of Ebla. The city was important hundreds of years before Jesus was born. It was destroyed in an attack by enemies.

Archaeologists rediscovered Ebla in the 1960s. Among the treasures they dug up were thousands of cuneiform tablets. The Eblaite markings on the tablets revealed facts about life and customs in Ebla.

Cuneiform
Cuneiform, meaning “wedge-shaped,” is a system of writing. Scribes used styluses to make cuneiform symbols on clay. (Styluses are pointed writing instruments.)

To Do
Flatten a piece of clay, and shape it into a rectangle. Use the end of a craft stick to “write” on the clay. Make only straight marks, like ancient scribes used to write in cuneiform.

Cylinder Seals
Officials and royalty in western Asia used cylinder seals to put their identifying marks on clay tablets and other items. The seals were made of gems or other hard substances. A design was carved onto the seal backward. When the seal was rolled over wet clay, it created a mirror image with the design facing the right way.

To Do
Use a small wooden craft spool to make your own “cylinder seal.” Cover the sides of the spool with oven-bake clay. Draw designs or write words on the clay with a toothpick or ballpoint pen. Remember to write or draw backward so that the finished design will face the right way. (Variation: Press a ring, pendant, or earring into the clay to make a design.)

Follow the manufacturer’s instructions on the clay package to bake the seal. Then roll the seal across a flat piece of clay to make marks. Put a string through the hole in the spool so you can hang it around your neck like ancient rulers.
Syria Facts Puzzle
1. Half
2. Agal
3. Lake
4. Fled
5. Kick
6. Iran
7. Cage
8. Knew
9. Arab
10. Rima
11. Amen
12. Bana

13. Tall
14. Area
15. Legs
16. Last

What Does the Bible Say?
1. D
2. A
3. F
4. B
5. E
6. C