

The Deaf Of Jordan

The Jordanian Sign Language Community



"Amen" in Jordanian Sign, face deleted because of sensitivity

Primary Religion:

Islam

Disciples (Matt 28:19):

Perhaps 10

Churches:

1

Scripture Status (Matt 28:20):

Bible stories on DVD

Population (date):

About 20,000 deaf (2008)



The Kingdom of Jordan is a small country in the Middle East, bordered by Israel and the Palestinian areas to the West, Syria to the North, Iraq to the East and Saudi Arabia to the South and South-East. Most of the country is desert and the population is centered in urban areas in the western part of the country. There is an estimated 15,000-20,000 Deaf persons in Jordan who would rely on sign language to have access to Scriptures (which is not to say they all know Jordanian Sign Language, since many isolated Deaf people in rural areas might not have a real language at all, using only home signs.)

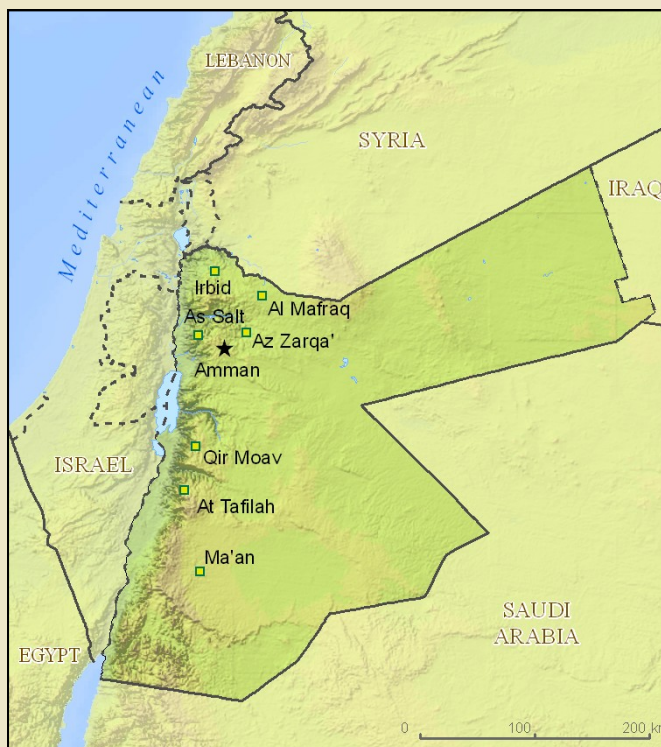
The official language of Jordan is Arabic, which refers to Modern Standard Arabic, not the language that most people speak, which is very different and is referred to as "dialect". Both Arabic and English are required subjects in schools.

In Arab culture, disabilities, including hearing loss, have traditionally been seen as shameful even though most Arabs believe that anything that occurs can be attributed to the will of God. In some verses of the Qur'an, disability is associated with sin. Because of this stigma, the existence of disability in a family used to be (and in some areas, still is) denied and felt to be a disgrace to the whole family.

A change in attitude, especially over the last 25 years, has made it possible for care and rehabilitation services to be set up. Better education for the deaf, as well as acceptance of their sign language as a real language, plays an important role in providing these services. Jordan has 13 schools for the Deaf (2006) with around 850 children enrolled. The Deaf schools, together with Deaf clubs in the major cities, form communities in which the sign language is transmitted.

Jordanian Sign Language appears to be closely related to that of Lebanon and Syria. A dissertation, an introductory grammar and several linguistic articles about Jordanian Sign Language have been published. And there are some articles that deal with lexical comparisons between various Arabic sign languages.

In Jordan, around 5% of the population is registered as being Christian. There is some receptivity among the Deaf from this group but few of them have ever had access to the gospel in a way they can understand. Obviously there is not this same receptivity among those from a Muslim background. However, all Deaf people seem more open to ideas presented in sign language (including the gospel) than most hearing Muslims would be to a written version of the gospel.



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Have They Heard The Gospel?

Call Themselves Christian	5%
Believe In Jesus As God And Only Savior	about 10
Prophet/Good Man, But Not God's Son	Most of those registered as Muslims who know who Jesus is
Have Not Heard Who Jesus Is	Most
Response To The Gospel	Little
Number Of Churches	1
Christian Schools	1
Is The Word Of God Translated?	Only some stories
Any Hindrance To Scripture Distribution?	Some Muslim opposition
Forms Of Gospel Presentation Available	There are some Bible stories in Jordanian Sign Language on DVD. However these may not yet have been released. There are also 20 booklets available using line drawings of stories from a children's Bible. The Lord's Prayer has been translated and is on video..
What Kind Of Missionaries Are Needed?	Deaf (foreign or national) Christians need to train/equip/pass on the vision for Deaf Jordanians to reach out to their own people locally as well as in areas where there is not yet Christian outreach to the Deaf. Deaf congregations need to be established, rather than interpreted ministries.

For further information on the Jordanian Deaf community, please see www.lotpublications.nl/publish/articles/002998/bookpart.pdf.

This 2008 doctoral thesis by Bernadet Hendriks is published online by the Netherlands Graduate School of Linguistics. The first chapter has a wealth of information about the Jordanian Deaf community.