

WORLD GEOGRAPHY

AND CULTURES



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Thank you to the curriculum development **team** at Master Books:

Elizabeth Gilbert, Jennifer Bauer, John Ribeiro, Kristen Pratt, Laura Welch, Melanie Chandler, and Sony Elise.

This course was shaped through your careful work, thoughtful insight, and shared commitment to excellence. We are grateful for the time, skill, and care you invested, and we pray this work will serve families and students well.

First printing: February 2026

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Master Books® is a division of the New Leaf Publishing Group, LLC.

ISBN: 978-1-68344-414-5

ISBN: 979-8-90092-016-0 (digital)

LOC: Pending

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Thank you to the many people whose encouragement, suggestions, and feedback helped make this course better, and to Lisa for saying yes to helping write it. You each have a part in the lives of the children impacted by this course, and may God be lifted up.—Jennifer



Lisa Knight is a veteran homeschool mom with almost two decades of experience. She has a passion for meaningful, life-giving education and experience in curriculum design and editing. Lisa is also a certified transformational coach and enjoys helping families discover resources

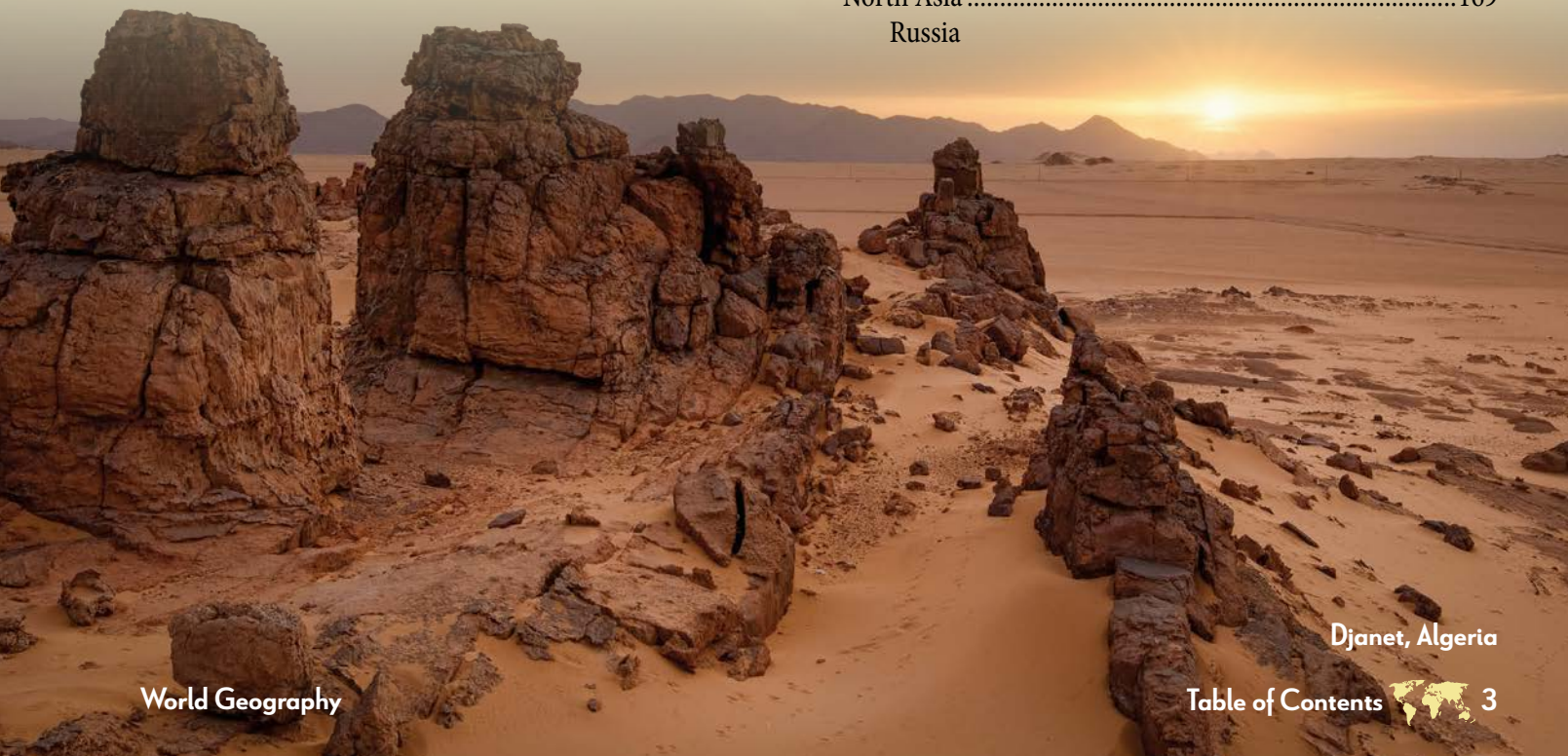
that support their unique educational goals.

She and her family reside in Northern California, where she serves on ministry teams at her local church and pours her love for faith, family, and education into all she does.

I'm deeply grateful to my co-author, Jennifer, for her passion, vision, and invitation into this work; collaborating with her has been a journey I truly cherish. I also thank my husband, Jeff, who read every page, offered thoughtful insight, and encouraged us every step of the way.—Lisa

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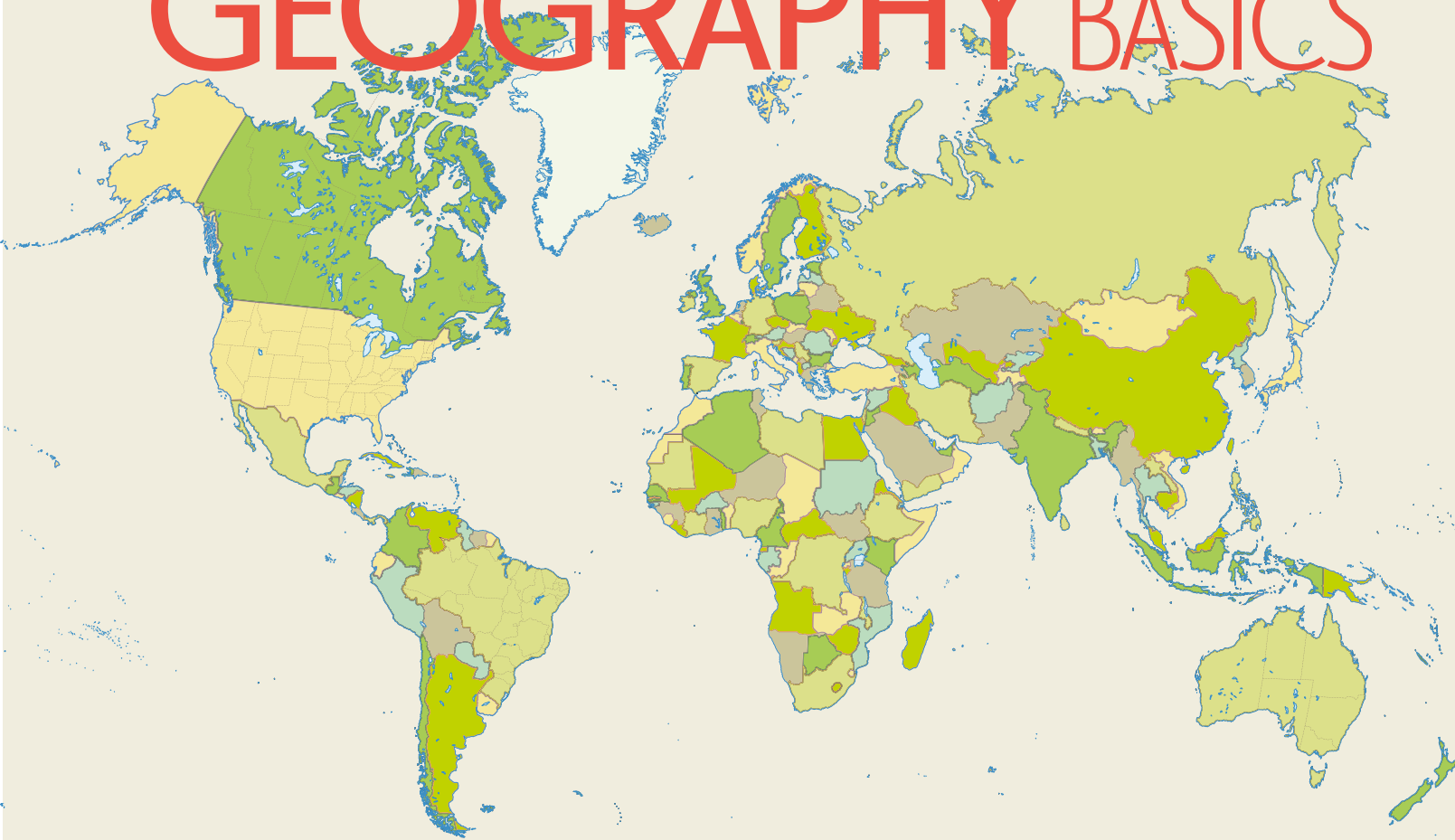


Mount Thor,
Baffin Island,
Canada



When you see this
symbol, look for
details that give a
sense of scale.

GEOGRAPHY BASICS



Have you ever wondered what it would be like to hike through the Himalayas, sail on the Nile, or walk across a desert that stretches farther than you can see? The world is full of incredible places—each with its own story, people, and purpose. Studying geography helps you see how landforms, weather, cultures, and resources shape the way people live. It also builds useful skills, like reading maps, spotting patterns, and understanding global events.

Geography is more than just memorizing capitals and mountain ranges, however. It shows how the world fits together—where food comes from, why cities grow in certain places, and how rivers connect people. It helps explain why one country is rich in oil while another depends on farming or fishing. Geography answers the “why” behind what you see on a globe, and that helps you better understand the news, your community, and even your own future.

As Christians, we study geography with a different perspective. We believe that God created the world in a perfect state—full of beauty, order, and life. When sin entered through Adam, not only did it bring death to mankind, it also affected the earth itself (Romans 8:22). The world we see today still shows God’s handiwork, but it also bears the scars of sin and judgment. The global Flood in the days of Noah reshaped the land, carved valleys, and buried fossils deep beneath the surface. What some call “millions of years” of slow change, many Christians understand as the dramatic result of God’s judgment and mercy—a reminder of both His power and His plan. This biblical worldview helps you see the world rightly. Geography is not just about dirt, rivers, and borders; it is about a creation that groans under the weight of sin but still reflects the glory of its Creator. Every mountain range, ocean trench, and people group tells part of that story.

This book cannot cover everything—no book could—but it will give you a window into many fascinating places and help develop a sense of wonder and purpose. Whether exploring volcanoes, deserts, rivers, or remote islands, you will come away with a greater appreciation of the world God made—and your place in it.

PANGEA & PLATE TECTONICS

The Bible states that God created the heavens and the earth in six days. In that perfect world, the land was joined together as one large supercontinent—a landmass now called **Pangea**. Genesis 1:9 records that God said, “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” If all the water was in one place, it makes sense that the land may have been too.

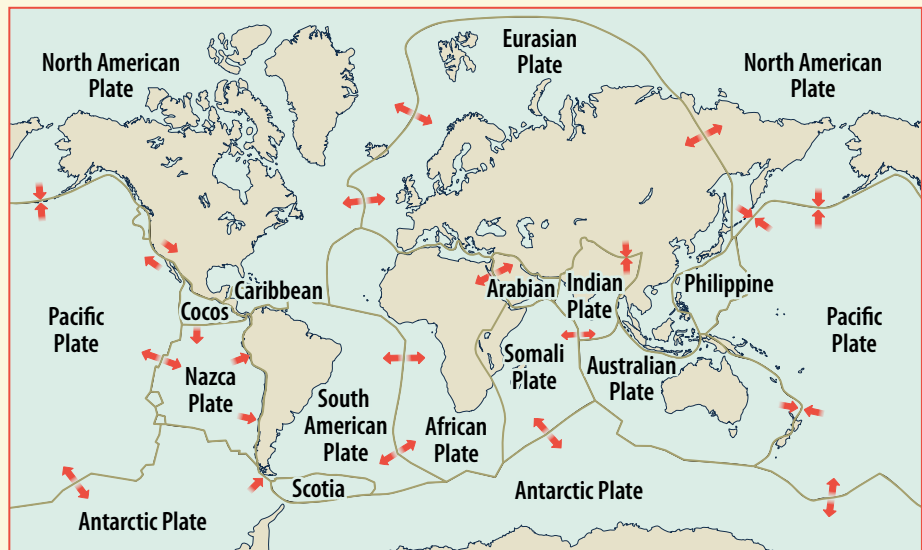
Today, the continents are scattered across the globe, separated by wide oceans, so what happened? The Bible provides a clue. Genesis 7:11 states that during Noah’s Flood, “all the fountains of the great deep burst forth.” This was no quiet rainstorm. The earth shook, water exploded from beneath, and the crust of the earth cracked and shifted violently. That catastrophic event broke apart the land, beginning the process that would later spread the continents across the surface of the globe.



What About Plate Tectonics?

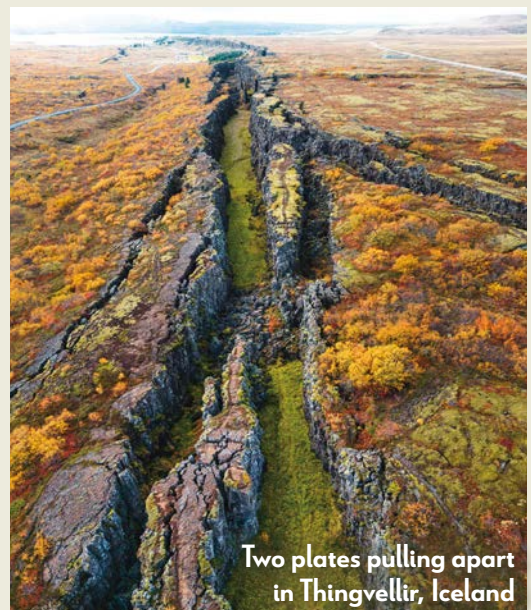
Many scientists teach that the continents drifted slowly apart over millions of years, but the Bible’s timeline does not allow for such long ages. A biblical view understands that the earth was reshaped rapidly during the global Flood described in Genesis. During this event, the crust of the earth broke into large plates that moved quickly—sliding, colliding, and sinking beneath one another as the waters rose.

These enormous movements would have formed mountain ranges, deep ocean trenches, and widespread volcanic activity. After the Flood, the plates slowed down, and today they move only a little each year. Earthquakes, volcanoes, and tsunamis often happen where these plates meet—ongoing reminders that the earth still bears the marks of the great judgment God sent long ago.



The World We See Today

Pangea and plate tectonics are not just scientific theories; they are part of the real history of God’s world. The Bible helps you understand the past correctly, showing that the brokenness seen today has a cause. The continents, mountain chains, and ocean floors all tell a story—not of millions of years, but of a perfect world, a global judgment, and a God who keeps His promises.



Two plates pulling apart in Thingvellir, Iceland

When we use the word **ANCIENT**, we do not mean millions of years ago. We mean events or cultures from the early centuries after Noah’s Flood—after which Earth’s surface was completely reshaped—usually hundreds or sometimes a few thousand years in the past.

MAPS

POLITICAL | SATELLITE
SHADED RELIEF

Maps offer different ways to understand a place. By comparing several types of maps of the same location, you can see both physical features and human-made divisions. Each kind of map highlights something unique—from borders and regions to mountains, rivers, and landscapes—helping build a clearer picture of how a place looks and how people live there. Putting these maps together gives a fuller view of the world and helps you recognize patterns you might miss on a single map.



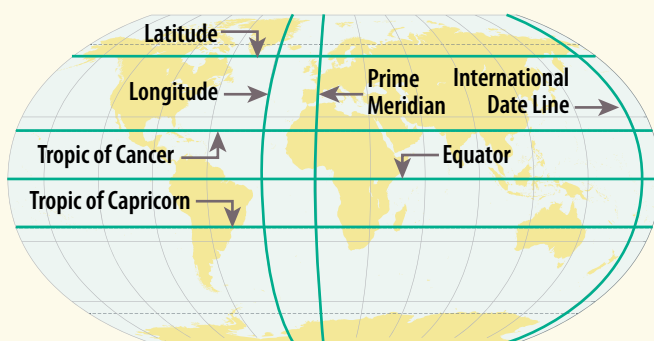
Political maps show country borders, major cities, and capitals. They highlight how land is divided and governed. Political maps are commonly used to introduce new regions and to help students identify key national boundaries.



Satellite maps display real images of the earth's surface, revealing mountains, rivers, forests, deserts, and farmland. These maps are useful for studying natural features, the effects of events like tsunamis or floods, and making real-world comparisons.



Shaded relief maps use color and shadow to show changes in elevation. Mountains, valleys, and plateaus appear with depth and shape. While these maps can be harder to label, they offer a strong visual sense of the land's structure.



Maps use several important lines to help us describe locations on Earth. **Latitude** lines run east–west and measure how far north or south a place is, while **longitude** lines run north–south and show how far east or west a location falls. The **equator** is the main latitude line that circles the middle of the earth. Farther north and south are the **Tropic of Cancer** and **Tropic of Capricorn**, which mark the warm tropical zone. The **Prime Meridian** is the central line of longitude, and on the opposite side of the world, the **International Date Line** marks where each new calendar day begins.

MAPS

MERCATOR PROJECTION MAP AUTHAGRAPH MAP

When looking at most maps, the shapes of the continents may seem familiar—but they are not always shown in their true size. Traditional maps like the **Mercator Projection map** stretch areas near the North and South Poles, making places such as Greenland and Europe look much larger than they really are. This happens because it is difficult to flatten a round earth onto a flat page without bending or stretching something. A globe is the most accurate way to compare land size, but it is not always practical for close-up viewing.

The **AuthaGraph map** was created to reduce these distortions. It divides the surface of the globe into many curved “triangle-like” sections, a bit like the pieces used to build modern stadium domes. These sections are then unfolded and rearranged into a rectangle while keeping the continents in better proportion. Because of this design, the AuthaGraph map allows Antarctica to appear in its full shape and size, instead of being stretched, squashed, or chopped off like on many other projection maps.

When comparing the two maps, notice how small Europe looks next to Africa, or how large South America truly is. Maps like this help landmasses to be viewed based on their actual size. Maps are powerful tools, and each one has a purpose. Some are used for navigation, others for showing borders, and some—like these—help with understanding the real size and shape of the world. When you begin comparing them, your view of the world can change in exciting ways.



The Mercator Projection map (top) makes northern regions like Greenland and Europe look much larger than they really are. The AuthaGraph map (above) keeps the continents in better proportion by dividing and folding the globe in a unique way.

Why Do Planes Fly in Curved Paths?

Airplanes often fly in curved paths because the earth is a sphere. What looks curved on a flat map is actually the shortest route—called a **great circle**—over the globe. Pilots follow these paths to save time and fuel, even though the line bends on a map. You can see this clearly when traveling from New York to Moscow, where the route curves northward but is still the quickest distance between the two cities.



GEOGRAPHY AND THE ECONOMY



Rice Terraces in Indonesia



Greenhouses in Almería, Spain, use the region's strong sunlight to grow fruits and vegetables year-round—even in a dry, rocky climate.

The way people live and work is often shaped by the land around them. Imagine a country with rich soil and steady rainfall—farming will likely be a major part of life there. In a dry desert region, people might raise animals that need little water or turn to mining for resources underground. Along coastlines, fishing or shipping may become the main way people earn a living. Geography sets the stage, and people find ways to use what they have.

Over time, these patterns form the backbone of a country's economy. Some nations are known for technology, oil, or tourism. Others rely on agriculture—growing rice, corn, tea, or raising livestock. These are called a country's **top industries** and **agricultural commodities**—the things they produce the most and often trade with others. What a country produces depends a lot on its location, climate, and landforms. Even in tough places, people get creative—like farming in narrow mountain terraces, using greenhouses to trap sunlight and moisture in cold or dry regions, or turning a sunny desert into a year-round vegetable farm.

To understand how a country is doing economically, there is a number called **real GDP** (Gross Domestic Product), which tells how much value a country creates in goods and services each year. You can think of it like the country's annual paycheck—the total of what everyone's work adds up to. A bigger number often means a stronger economy, but it does not always mean that everyone in the country is wealthy.

The **GDP growth rate** tells another part of the story. Is the economy moving forward—or falling behind? A positive growth rate means the economy is growing, like a train picking up speed. People may be starting businesses, getting jobs, or seeing more trade. A negative growth rate means things have slowed down—jobs might be lost, or businesses may be struggling.

By looking at what people grow, make, and trade—and how much their economy is growing or shrinking—you get a clearer picture of life in that region. Geography may set the challenges, but people's choices shape the outcome.

Macau is a small region on the southern coast of China that depends heavily on tourism and entertainment. When COVID-19 hit in 2020, Macau shut its borders—and the impact was huge. Real GDP dropped by more than 50% in a single year. Hotels, restaurants, and venues sat near empty as visitors stopped coming. For a place where most jobs and businesses rely on tourism, this was a major blow.

When travel opened back up in 2023, Macau's economy made a dramatic comeback. GDP shot up by more than 70%, one of the highest growth rates in the world that year. Tourists returned, and money started flowing again. Still, even with this huge rebound, Macau's economy has not fully returned to pre-COVID levels. The GDP percent change shows how vulnerable a region can be when it depends on just one major industry.

Macau's story is a reminder of how closely geography, travel, and the economy are connected—and how a global event like a pandemic can shake things up in powerful ways.



CULTURE & GEOGRAPHY

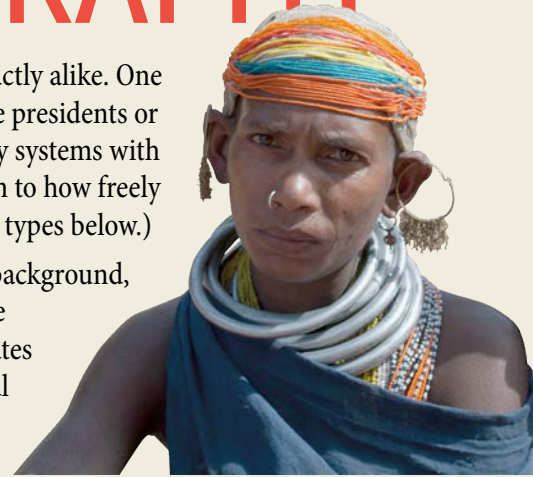
Culture shapes how people live, think, speak, and interact—and no two countries are exactly alike. One of the biggest differences between nations is how they are governed. Some countries have presidents or prime ministers who are elected by the people. Others have kings, queens, or single-party systems with tight control. These **government** structures affect daily life, from how leaders are chosen to how freely people can speak, worship, or travel. (You'll find a helpful chart on common government types below.)

Each nation is also made up of different **ethnic groups**—people who share a common background, language, or traditions. In some places, like Japan or Armenia, most people belong to one group and have kept a strong sense of identity for centuries. In others, like the United States or Singapore, many ethnicities live together and influence one another, creating a cultural “melting pot.” Geography often plays a big role in this. Mountain ranges, rivers, and seas can keep people separated—or bring them together through trade and migration. Over time, geography also shapes how people live. Nomads in the deserts of North Africa developed very different lifestyles than herders in the frozen tundra of Siberia. What people eat, how they dress, and even how they build their homes are all connected to their surroundings.

Language is another key part of culture. Some countries have just one official language, while others have dozens. There are about 7,000 known languages in the world, grouped into around 150 major language families. In places like India or Papua New Guinea, people may speak different languages at home, at school, and in business. This makes communication—and Bible translation—a challenge, but thanks to partnerships between local churches, global ministries, and translation groups like Wycliffe Bible Translators and others, the process of Bible translation is moving faster than ever. In recent years, new technology and teamwork have helped bring the Bible to more people in their heart language—the language a person understands best.

Population also impacts culture. In some areas, **birth rates** are high and families are large. In others, people are having fewer children, and the population is shrinking or aging. **Life expectancy** and **literacy rates** tell us even more. People in countries with clean water, stable food, and good healthcare usually live longer. Those with better schools and reading programs have higher literacy—and that opens doors to jobs, technology, and even understanding the Bible for themselves.

No matter how different cultures may seem, all people come from the same original family: Noah's sons, after the Flood. God scattered the people at Babel and gave them different languages, but He did not forget them. Over time, each group developed its own culture, shaped by climate, landscape, and history. Today, there are over 17,000 known ethnic and cultural groups in the world—each one loved by God and made in His image. As you explore different countries in this book, remember that every people group matters to Him—and He is still writing His story across the globe.



A member of the Bonda tribe of India



A Samburu tribal man of Kenya



A Quechua from Peru

GOVERNMENTAL SYSTEMS AND HOW THEY WORK

Communism	The government owns all property and makes all major economic and political decisions. Often led by one political party.
Democracy	People vote to choose their leaders. Laws and decisions are made by majority rule.
Dictatorship	One person has total control over the government. Citizens usually have few freedoms.
Monarchy	A king or queen rules. Power may be passed down through family. Some monarchs have full control; others share power with a parliament.
Republic	A type of democracy where people elect representatives to make decisions for them.
Theocracy	Religious leaders rule the country in the name of God or a false god.

GEOGRAPHY AND RELIGION



Alpine village church, Val di Funes Valley, Italy



Berlin Cathedral, Germany

In every part of the world—from mountain villages to crowded cities—people worship. Some pray to ancestors, others chant in temples or bow before idols made of stone or metal. Some follow many false gods, while others follow none, yet almost everyone searches for something greater than themselves. This is because God “has put eternity into man’s heart” (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Deep down, people know there is more—and they long to be connected to the One who made them.

Ever since Adam and Eve sinned and were cast out of the Garden of Eden, mankind has felt that separation from God. People have tried to fix it with religion—offering sacrifices, repeating prayers, or following rules—but these cannot save. Only Jesus Christ, the Son of God, can make us right with God. He died and rose again so that anyone who believes in Him will be saved. “[T]here is salvation in no one else” (Acts 4:12).

As you read about different countries and beliefs, you will see how people are searching for truth in many ways. Some beliefs are deeply woven into the culture. Others have been forced on people through fear or control.

In many places, Christianity is restricted, yet God’s truth is not limited by mountains or borders. It travels in backpacks, on radio signals, through internet connections, and—most of all—from person to person.

Social issues show real struggles people face—poverty, war, hunger, loneliness, or persecution. These challenges often open doors for compassion and ministry. Many Christians have stepped in to help with water, food, schools, or safe shelter. Others are sharing God’s love in quiet, steady ways—building relationships and offering hope. History shows us, when a leader follows Jesus, an entire nation can begin to change.

Throughout this course, you will see charts that show the religious makeup of each country. These numbers are not just statistics; they represent people. Every percentage is a group of souls who need to hear the good news of Jesus Christ. As you learn about their beliefs and their needs, ask God how He might use you to pray, care, and maybe even go. The world is full of people who are searching. Jesus is still calling them—one heart at a time.



A Christian believer is baptized on the Congo River, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo)

GEOGRAPHY THROUGH TIME

Geography is not just about places; it is about how those places came to be and how people live in them. Some changes happened quickly, like when the earth was reshaped as a result of the global Flood. Others, like trade routes or the spread of Christianity, happened over centuries. This timeline gives you a glimpse into how events from the Bible, powerful natural forces, and human journeys have shaped the lands, cultures, and borders we study today.

c. 4004 B.C.	God Creates the World According to the Bible, God made the heavens and the earth in six days. He created the land, water, animals, and people—all perfect and good (Genesis 1). Geography begins here, as God formed the first rivers, forests, and continents.
c. 2348 B.C.	Noah's Flood Reshapes the Earth A global Flood covered the entire earth, destroying all land life except what was saved on the Ark (Genesis 6–9). This created massive geological changes, carving valleys, forming new coastlines and mountains, and leaving behind rock layers and fossils we see today.
c. 2248 B.C.	Tower of Babel and People Groups Scatter After the Flood, people tried to stay together and build a tower to reach heaven (Genesis 11). God confused their language and scattered them across the earth. This explains the start of different languages and people groups living in different regions.
Post-Flood	Land Bridges and The Ice Age After the Flood, the world's climate changed. Large ice sheets covered parts of the northern continents, creating land bridges that people and animals used to move to new regions, such as between Asia and North America.
c. 600 B.C.	Silk Road Trade Begins Trade routes linked China to the Middle East and Europe, crossing deserts and mountains. Geography shaped where cities developed, and inventions, art, and religious and cultural ways of thinking spread along the way.
c. A.D. 30	Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ Jesus died on the Cross and rose again three days later. His followers began to spread the gospel—first around the Mediterranean region and then throughout the world.
c. 40–301	Christianity Spreads Early missionaries, like Paul, traveled trade routes across Asia, Africa, and Europe, spreading the gospel. In 301, Armenia became the first nation to officially follow Christ, shaping its history and faith for centuries.
535	Eruption of Krakatoa (Indonesia) A massive volcanic eruption darkened skies and affected climates around the world. It caused crop failures and cooling temperatures, showing how one geological event can affect the entire globe.
1400s–1600s	The Age of Exploration Redraws the Map During this period, European explorers set out across oceans to find new trade routes and lands. Men like Marco Polo, Vasco da Gama, Christopher Columbus, and Ferdinand Magellan crossed deserts, seas, and unknown lands. Their journeys led to new maps being drawn, revealing continents, coastlines, and rivers never charted before, changing how people saw the world and connected distant regions.

PRAYER POINTS

THANK God for the beauty, variety, and order of His creation—from forest to river valleys and island chains.

PRAY for curiosity and excitement as you begin to explore the world through a biblical lens.

ASK God to help you see each place not just for its features, but for the people who live there and their need for the gospel.

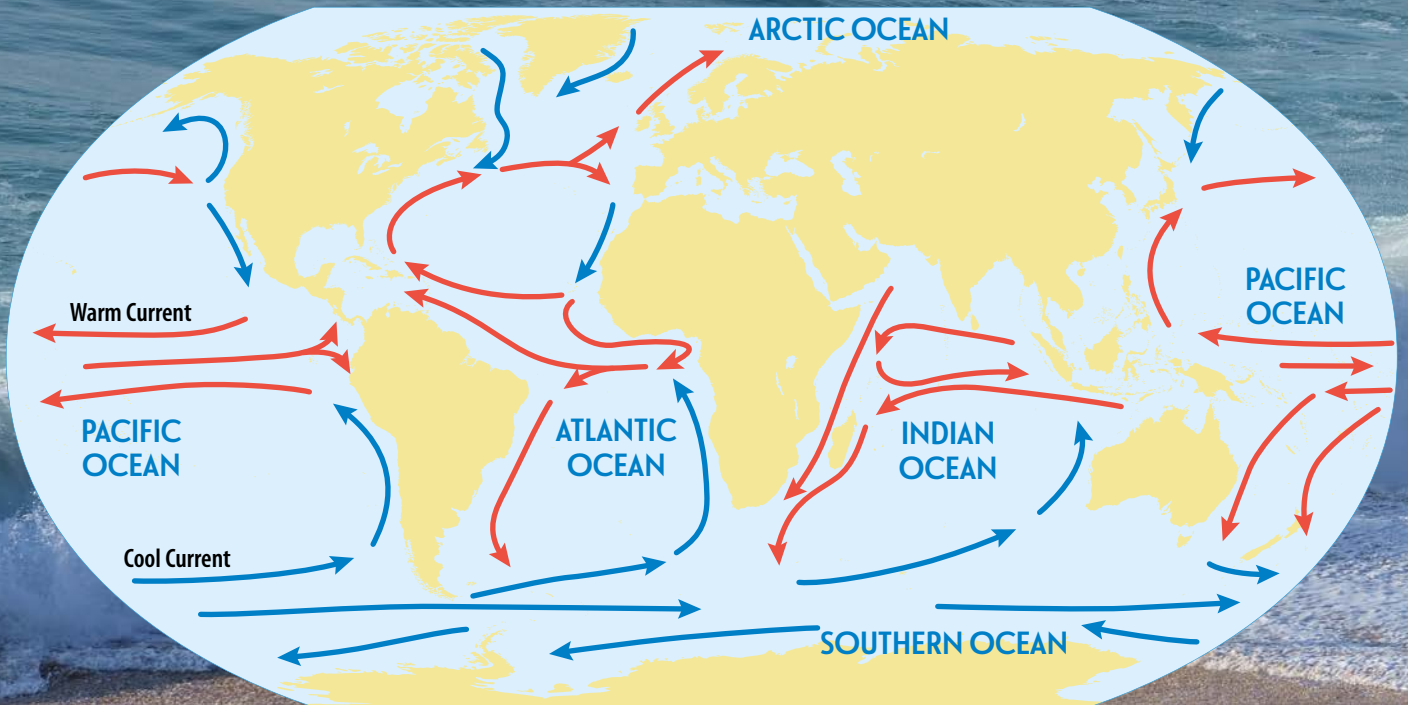
PRAY that God would prepare your heart to care about the nations and be ready to share His love, wherever He leads you.



God, thank You for creating the world with such beauty and purpose. As I begin this journey through world geography, help me see Your hand in the physical features and cultures of every land. Open my eyes to the needs of people around the world—not just their physical needs but their need to know You. Use what I learn this year to grow my heart for others and show me how I can be part of Your plan to bring the gospel to every nation.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

EARTH'S OCEANS



More than 70% of the earth's surface is covered by water, and most of that water is found in the oceans. An ocean is a huge body of saltwater that flows freely between continents and connects with other oceans. There are five main oceans: the **Pacific, Atlantic, Indian, Southern** (around Antarctica), and **Arctic**. Together, they play a big role in shaping the weather, supporting marine life, and connecting people around the world.

Each ocean has unique features. The Pacific Ocean is the largest and deepest, reaching down over 36,000 feet in the Mariana Trench. The Atlantic Ocean is known for its long, busy shipping routes that link Europe, Africa, and the Americas. The Indian Ocean stays warm all year and has been a key trade route for centuries—connecting East Africa, the Middle East, India, and Southeast Asia. The Southern Ocean surrounds Antarctica and helps control Earth's temperatures by cooling warmer water and moving cold water toward the equator. The Arctic Ocean, the smallest and coldest, is covered with ice for much of the year.

Oceans are always moving. Ocean currents act like giant rivers flowing through the sea, moving warm and cold water around the globe. These currents affect weather patterns. For example, the cold Benguela Current flows along the coast of Namibia and keeps the land dry, helping form the Namib Desert. In contrast, warm ocean currents can make coastal areas like parts of western Europe feel much milder than other places at the same latitude.

Deep under the ocean surface, the land is not flat. There are underwater mountain ranges called mid-ocean ridges, and deep cracks called trenches—some of the deepest places on Earth! You can also find hydrothermal vents, where superheated water bursts out of the seafloor. These vents create an environment with no sunlight, yet strange sea creatures like tube worms, giant clams, and heat-loving bacteria still survive there by using minerals from the vents instead of sunlight for energy.

Ocean water gets colder and heavier the deeper you go. Water pressure increases, too—so much that humans cannot dive very far without special equipment. Most divers can go about 100 feet down in a suit, but modern submarines and deep-sea robots can explore miles below the surface.

The oceans are full of mystery and power—shaping life on Earth in ways you may never have noticed but will never forget once you start exploring.



The **Atlantic Ocean** stretches between the Americas on one side and Europe and Africa on the other. It is the second-largest ocean in the world, but it plays a far-reaching role in world history and geography. For centuries, explorers crossed it in ships, opening new trade routes and connecting distant continents. Many of the world's busiest ports—like New York, London, and Rio de Janeiro—are found along its coasts.

One of the most important features of the Atlantic is the Mid-Atlantic Ridge—a long underwater mountain range that runs down the middle of the ocean. It is where new ocean floor is slowly forming as tectonic plates pull apart. This ridge also helps explain why earthquakes and volcanoes sometimes occur on the ocean floor. The Atlantic also has strong currents, like the Gulf Stream, which carries warm water from the Gulf of America up toward Europe, keeping western Europe much milder than it otherwise would be.

The Atlantic Ocean has shaped climate, trade, and culture across three continents. It connects people and ideas, but it also challenges sailors with storms like hurricanes. From sandy coastlines to rocky shores, the Atlantic's influence reaches far inland, affecting weather patterns and even where people choose to live.



Gueirua beach, Asturias, Spain

The Atlantic Ocean is home to the **Sargasso Sea**—the only sea in the world with no land borders! It is surrounded by ocean currents instead and is filled with floating golden seaweed called sargassum. This unique sea is a nursery for baby eels and sea turtles.



The **Pacific Ocean** is the largest and deepest ocean on Earth—so big that it covers more area than all the continents combined! It stretches from Asia and Australia to the Americas, and holds thousands of islands, from tiny coral atolls to large nations like Japan and the Philippines. This ocean touches more countries than any other, making it important for trade, weather, and travel.

A major feature of the Pacific is the Ring of Fire, a horseshoe-shaped zone of volcanoes and earthquake activity that surrounds the ocean basin. This is where many tectonic plates meet, creating both beauty and danger. The Mariana Trench, located in the western Pacific, is the deepest part of the ocean—nearly 36,000 feet down! That depth is so extreme that only reinforced submersibles have ever reached it.

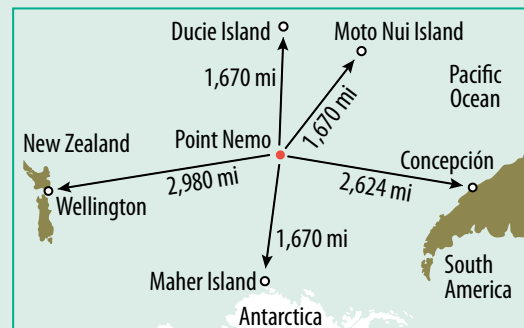
The Pacific also plays a major role in global weather. It drives powerful air and water patterns like El Niño and La Niña, which can bring droughts to some regions and floods to others. Coastal areas along the Pacific often experience tsunamis, typhoons, and tropical storms. The ocean is also a source of life and food for millions of people, from tuna fishermen to coastal farmers who depend on the rain the Pacific helps bring.



Loreto, Baja California Sur, Mexico

There is an area in the Pacific called **Point Nemo**, known as the oceanic pole of inaccessibility. It is the farthest point from any land—over 1,600 miles from the nearest shore!

Space agencies sometimes crash old satellites there because it is so remote.



AFRICA

Population: 1.4 billion; 2nd-populous continent

Four major language families with over 2,000 languages

54
COUNTRIES

11.7 MILLION
SQUARE MILES

2ND-LARGEST
CONTINENT



Natural Wonders in Africa

Atlas Mountains	Mount Kilimanjaro
Great Rift Valley	Niger River
Lake Victoria	Nile River
Lake Tanganyika	Serengeti Plain
Mount Kenya	Victoria Falls

Deserts of Africa

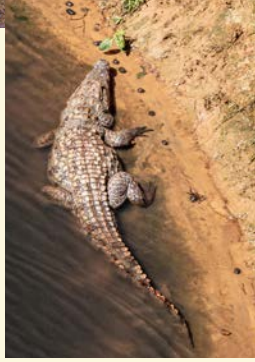
Kalahari Desert	Nubian Desert
Libyan Desert	Sahara Desert
Namib Desert	Somali Desert

TROPIC OF
CAPRICORN

~19,000 MILES OF COASTLINE



A guelta is a natural waterhole or pool found in the desert, usually fed by underground springs or seasonal rains. These hidden water sources are vital for survival in places like the Sahara. Chad's **Guelta d'Archei** is one of the most famous—tucked between cliffs



and surrounded by endless sand. Here, wild camels travel long distances to drink, often moving in herds along ancient caravan paths. Beneath the water, a small group of Nile crocodiles have adapted to life in this harsh environment, surviving far from any river—a rare and surprising sight in such a dry region. This guelta shows how life finds a way, even in the most unlikely places.



High in the rocky plateau of **Tassili n'Ajjer**, ancient artists left behind over 15,000 paintings and carvings—but not of desert life. Instead, the walls show people swimming, hunting with bows, and herding cattle. Some even show animals like giraffes and elephants. These scenes seem out of place in the dry Sahara, but they point to a time when this region was green and full of life.

The artwork, hidden among cliffs and caves, is incredibly detailed and still visible after thousands of years. It leaves behind questions: Who made it? What did their world look like? How did it all change? Tassili n'Ajjer invites you to explore not only the desert but a forgotten chapter of its past.



In northern Tanzania, **Ol Doinyo Lengai** rises from the Great Rift Valley with one of the strangest lava flows on Earth. Its name means “Mountain of God” in the language of the Maasai people, who consider it a sacred site. While their beliefs are part of a false religion, the volcano itself is a real wonder. It is the only active volcano in the world that produces natrocarbonatite lava—a rare type of lava that looks black when it flows but turns white as it cools. Unlike most lava, it is cooler and thinner, almost like oil. The white surface around the volcano can look like snow, even though the area is hot and dry. This one-of-a-kind volcano is just one of many natural surprises hidden across the African continent.



Namibia's Sossusvlei region is home to some of the tallest sand dunes in the world—steep, wind-shaped mountains of deep orange sand. Some of these dunes can actually roar. When dry sand slides down their slopes, it creates a deep humming or booming sound, like far-off thunder. This strange effect happens when millions of tiny grains rub together just right. Scientists call them “**booming dunes**,” but locals sometimes call them singing or roaring dunes. A desert that makes music is a great surprise.

NORTH AFRICA

ALGERIA | EGYPT | LIBYA | MAURITANIA
MOROCCO | TUNISIA | WESTERN SAHARA

North Africa stretches along the Mediterranean Sea and is home to vast deserts, rugged mountains, and ancient civilizations. Much of the land is dry, but rivers, oases, and coastlines have supported life for thousands of years.



Algeria (*al-JEER-ee-uh*) is the largest country in Africa and is mostly covered by the Sahara Desert. Its landscapes include sand dunes, mountains, and coastal plains.

- The Sahara covers over 80% of the country.
- The Atlas Mountains run along the northern part and receive more rain.
- Coastal areas along the Mediterranean are fertile and more populated.
- Sandstorms and dry winds are common in the desert interior.

Egypt (*EE-jipt*) is known for the Nile River, which makes life possible in an otherwise dry land. Most people live near the river or along the coast.

- The Nile River flows north and forms a wide delta before reaching the sea.
- The Sahara Desert stretches across most of Egypt.
- The Sinai Peninsula connects Egypt to Asia and includes dry mountains.
- Oases in the desert provide water and support small communities.

Libya (*LIB-ee-uh*) lies between the Mediterranean Sea and the deep Sahara Desert. It is one of the driest countries in the world.

- Most of the land is flat desert with very little rainfall.
- The coastal plain is narrow but supports farming and cities.
- The Sahara's sand dunes and rocky plateaus cover the south.
- Underground water is pumped to cities through long pipelines.



Mauritania (*mawr-ih-TAY-nee-uh*) is a mostly desert country in western North Africa. The land is dry and sandy, with a few areas that support grazing and small farms.

- ✔ The Sahara covers most of the country, with shifting dunes and rocky land.
- ✔ A small stretch of coastline lies along the Atlantic Ocean.
- ✔ The Senegal River marks part of the southern border and provides water.
- ✔ Most people live in the south, where the land is more fertile.

Morocco (*muh-RAH-koh*) has a wide range of landscapes, from beaches to mountains to desert. Its location near Europe and Africa has made it a cultural crossroads.

- ✔ The Atlas Mountains run through central Morocco and rise above 13,000 feet.
- ✔ The Rif Mountains line the northern coast near the Mediterranean Sea.
- ✔ The Sahara Desert covers the southeast part of the country.
- ✔ Coastal plains along the Atlantic are good for farming and trade.

Tunisia (*too-NEE-zhuh*) is the smallest country in North Africa and lies between the sea and the desert. It has a mix of hills, plains, and dry lands.

- ✔ Northern Tunisia has mountains and more rainfall.
- ✔ The central region has fertile plains used for growing olives and grains.
- ✔ Ras ben Sakka (Cape Angela) is the northernmost point of Africa.
- ✔ The Mediterranean coastline supports cities and fishing.

You might not think a desert in Africa could affect life halfway around the world—but the Sahara does just that. Every summer, strong winds scoop up huge clouds of dust and send them high into the sky. This dusty layer, called the Saharan Air Layer (or SAL), travels thousands of miles across the Atlantic Ocean.

Some of that dust falls into the sea, but a surprising amount keeps going. It can reach places like Brazil, Florida, Texas—and even as far away as Japan! Along the way, it does a mix of good and bad. The dust can stop hurricanes from growing, which can be a blessing. But it can also lead to heavier rain or health problems. The tiny particles can irritate people’s eyes, noses, and throats—and sometimes even cause lung infections.

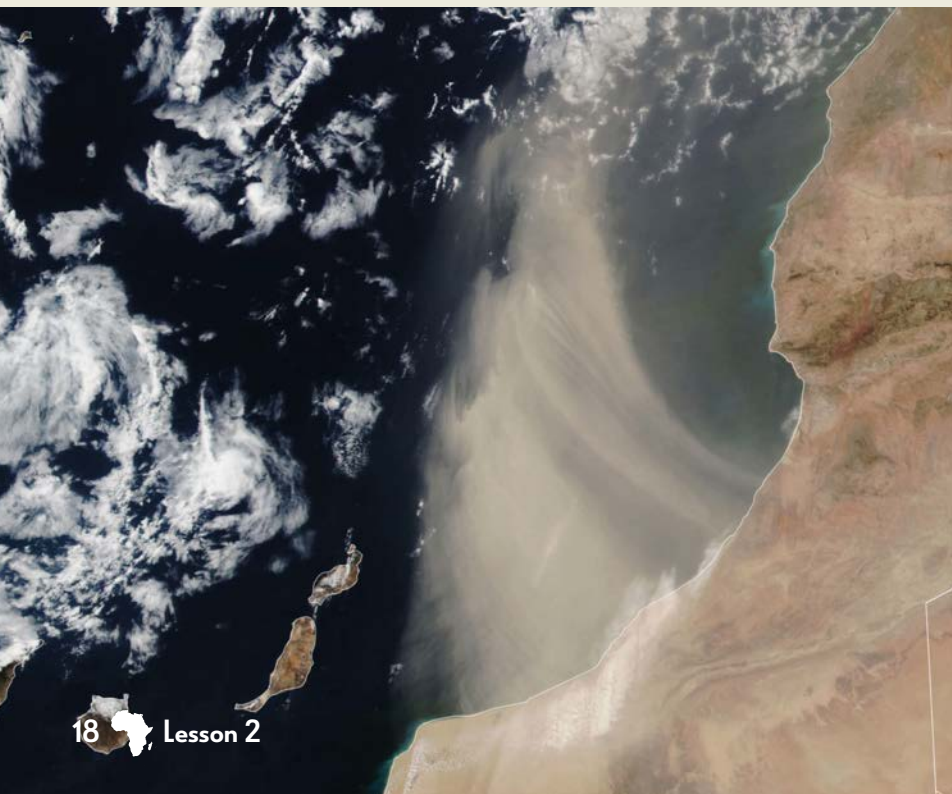
Still, there’s a bright side. That Saharan dust carries important minerals like iron and phosphorus. When it lands, it helps fertilize soil in other parts of the world. So even from thousands of miles away, the Sahara is shaping the planet.

Western Sahara (*sah-HAIR-uh*) is a disputed territory with dry desert landscapes and very little water. It lies along the Atlantic coast in northwest Africa. Both Morocco and the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic claim control of the region, leading to ongoing conflict.

- ✔ Most of the land is flat, rocky desert with sand dunes.
- ✔ Rain is rare, and temperatures can be extreme.
- ✔ There are few permanent rivers or lakes.
- ✔ The Atlantic Ocean borders the west, but most of the interior is empty and harsh.

The **Maghreb** (*MAH-greb*) is the name for the western part of the Arab world. It includes Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia, and Western Sahara—a region that’s still disputed. Egypt and Sudan belong to a different region called the Mashriq, which means “eastern Arab world.”

A long time ago, the Maghreb just meant the land between the Atlas Mountains and the coast. Today, the name covers a wider area, like you’ll see on the map below.



SAHARA

As you look across the map of North Africa, one feature stands out right away—the **Sahara Desert**. It's hard to miss. Spreading across 11 countries, this massive desert takes up nearly a third of the continent. In fact, if you laid the United States over it, the two would be about the same size!

When you imagine the Sahara, you might picture endless sand dunes—and, yes, those are definitely there—but the landscape actually changes from place to place. Some areas are covered in soft waves of sand, while others are rocky and dry, almost like the surface of the moon. It is divided into regions with names like the Libyan Desert, Grand Erg Occidental, Grand Erg Oriental, Issaouane Erg, and Erg Chigaga, each with its own look and feel.

Temperatures can soar during the day and drop below freezing at night. Rain is rare. Most parts get less than two inches a year! Even so, life finds a way. Underground water sources called aquifers help support small pockets of life, and a few lakes—some salty, one fresh—still exist. You might even come across a green oasis tucked between the dryness. For thousands of years, nomads like the Tuareg have learned how to live here, traveling with their animals in search of water. Long ago, camel caravans carried salt and gold across these same sands, linking distant kingdoms and sharing languages and ideas. The Sahara may look empty at first glance, but it has always been full of movement, challenge, and history.



Gaberoun Lake Oasis in the Awbari Sand Sea, Libya



The Sahara Desert is not just one endless sea of sand. It is full of different landforms, each shaped by wind, erosion, and rare bursts of rain. These features give clues about how deserts work and change over time.

Ergs are the classic sand seas, with dunes that can rise hundreds of feet. Some move with the wind, while others stay in place for years.

Hamadas are flat, rocky plateaus with little or no sand. Their stone surfaces are cracked and tough to cross.

Regs, or desert pavements, are areas covered in gravel or stones. The wind has blown away the finer sand, leaving rocks behind.

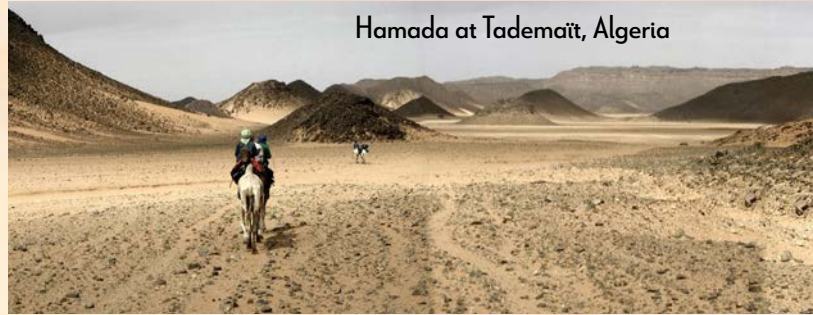
Wadis are dry riverbeds that only fill during sudden desert rains. Flash floods can carve deep paths through the land.

Chotts are shallow salt flats that may hold water after rain but usually dry out, leaving behind a crusty white layer.

The Sahara's not just sand; it's a desert full of variety.



The Erg Chebbi desert area



Hamada at Tademait, Algeria



Reg in Adrar, Mauritania

Chott el Jerid in southern Tunisia

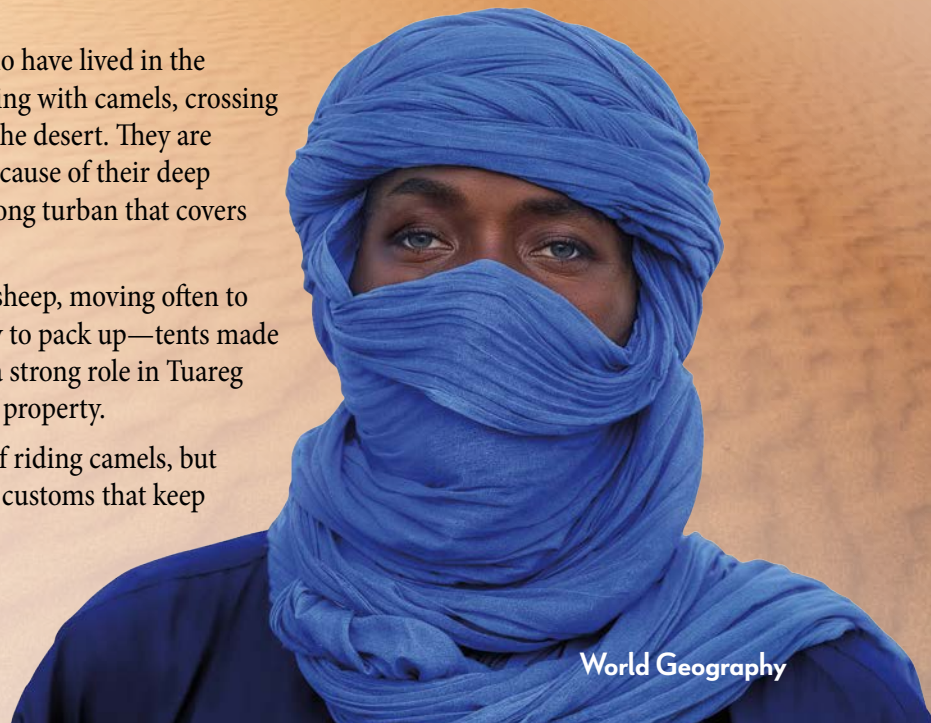


Wadi Degla in Egypt during the dry season

The **Tuareg** (*TWAH-reg*) are a nomadic people who have lived in the Sahara for centuries. You will often see them traveling with camels, crossing dunes and rocky plains to guide caravans through the desert. They are sometimes called the “blue people of the desert” because of their deep indigo clothing. Tuareg men wear a tagelmust—a long turban that covers the face to block out sand and sun.

Traditionally, the Tuareg raised camels, goats, and sheep, moving often to find water and grazing land. Their homes were easy to pack up—tents made from animal hides or woven mats. Women played a strong role in Tuareg society, often managing the household and owning property.

Today, some Tuareg live in towns or drive instead of riding camels, but many still speak their own language and follow the customs that keep their desert heritage alive.



ECONOMY NORTH AFRICA

ALGERIA | EGYPT | LIBYA
MAURITANIA | MOROCCO
TUNISIA | WESTERN SAHARA

North Africa's economy is shaped by both its land and its location. Along the Mediterranean coast, countries like Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia benefit from tourism, fishing, shipping, and trade. Ports in cities like Alexandria and Casablanca connect Africa to Europe and Asia, making the region an important hub for business and transportation.

Inland, the dry climate makes farming difficult, but people still grow wheat, olives, dates, and vegetables along the Nile River, in mountain valleys, and around oases. Rural communities often face challenges like poverty and limited resources, while cities continue to grow and modernize. Geography can make life hard, but it also pushes people to be creative with how they farm, build, and use energy.

	Top Economic Industries	Real GDP	GDP Growth Rate
Algeria	Industries: petroleum (crude oil) & natural gas (14% of GDP & 83% of exports 2019–2023), mining, light industries, pharmaceuticals, mechanical & electronic industries	\$700 billion	4%
	Agricultural commodities: wheat, barley, potatoes, dates, olives		
Egypt	Industries: petroleum & natural gas, textiles, tourism, food processing, chemicals, fertilizers	\$2 trillion	4%
	Agricultural commodities: wheat, rice, corn, cotton, citrus fruits		
Libya	Industries: petroleum (95% of exports; 60% of GDP), petrochemicals, mining, agriculture, tourism	\$122 billion	-2%
	Agricultural commodities: wheat, barley, olives, dates, vegetables		
Mauritania	Industries: mining, fishing, agriculture, petroleum, trade	\$30 billion	3%
	Agricultural commodities: sorghum, millet, wheat, dates, livestock (camels, sheep, goats)		
Morocco	Industries: automotive manufacturing, phosphate mining, textiles, agriculture, tourism	\$337 billion	3%
	Agricultural commodities: wheat, barley, olives, citrus fruits, sugar beets		
Tunisia	Industries: petroleum & mining, tourism, textiles, agriculture, electrical machinery	\$154 billion	0%
	Agricultural commodities: olives, wheat, barley, tomatoes, dates		
Western Sahara	Industries: phosphate mining, fishing, tourism, nomadic herding, public administration	\$906 million	0%
	Agricultural commodities: dates, fruits & vegetables (grown in oases), camels, sheep, goats		



Several North African countries—especially Libya, Egypt, Algeria, and Tunisia—rely on **offshore oil drilling** to support their economies. This process involves building platforms out in the Mediterranean Sea to pull oil and gas from deep under the ocean floor. It is expensive and complex, but the profits can be large, especially for countries that depend on selling energy.

Libya earns most of its income from oil, and offshore drilling adds to its supply. Egypt made a major discovery with the Zohr gas field—one of the largest in the Mediterranean—giving its economy a strong boost. Tunisia and Algeria also benefit from smaller offshore sites.

Offshore drilling fuels more than just energy. It provides jobs in engineering, shipping, construction, and refining. It brings in foreign money, pays for national needs, and ties these countries into global trade. Even with great expense, it remains a major economic force in North Africa.

See notes on page 377 regarding data charts.

GOVERNMENTAL



Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi was elected president in 2014 and re-elected in 2018 and 2023. He won each election with over 89% of the vote.

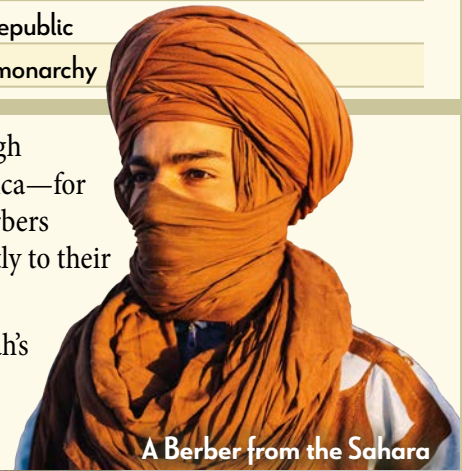
Egypt is a republic, which means the people vote to choose their president. In the past, the president could serve two four-year terms, but in 2019, a change in the law extended the term to six years and allowed the current president to stay in office longer. This change gave the leader more time to carry out plans but also reduced how often people could vote for a new president. Some citizens worry it gives too much power to one person for too long.

Algeria	Presidential republic
Egypt	Presidential republic
Libya	Provisional government since 2021
Mauritania	Presidential republic
Morocco	Parliamentary constitutional monarchy
Tunisia	Parliamentary republic
Western Sahara	Constitutional monarchy

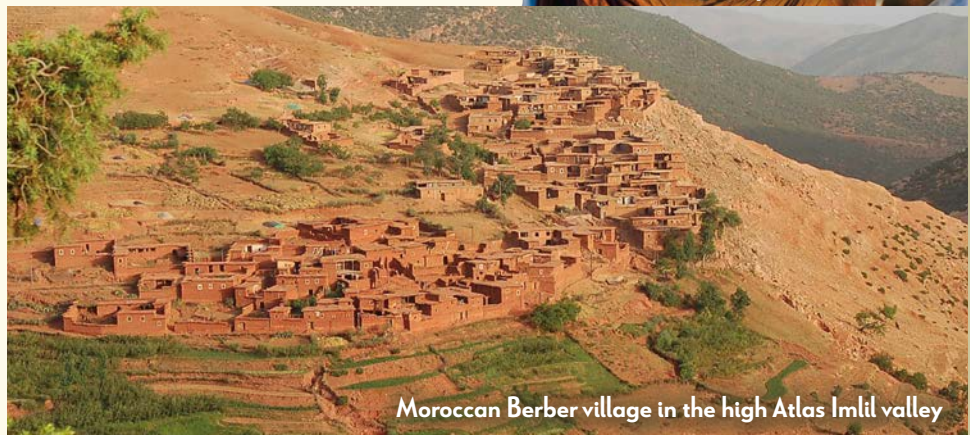
One of North Africa's oldest people groups is the **Berbers**, also called the Amazigh (*AH-mah-zeer*). They have lived in the Maghreb—the western part of North Africa—for thousands of years, long before the Roman Empire or the rise of Islam. Many Berbers continue to live in both cities and remote mountain or desert areas, holding tightly to their cultural identity.

According to tradition, Africa was settled by the descendants of Ham, one of Noah's sons. The Berbers are often connected to this family line and are known for their endurance, independence, and deep connection to the land. They have survived many invasions over the centuries but have managed to preserve their traditions and language.

Berber culture is known for its colorful woven fabrics, geometric designs, and strong oral storytelling passed down through generations. Many still speak Tamazight, a language with its own unique script and a long history of survival despite outside pressures.



A Berber from the Sahara



Moroccan Berber village in the high Atlas Imlil valley

	Ethnic Groups	Language(s)	Population	Population Growth Rate	Life Expectancy	Literacy
Algeria	Arab-Amazigh 99%	Arabic	47,020,000	2%	78 years	81%
Egypt	Egyptian 100%	Arabic	111,250,000	1%	75 years	73%
Libya	Arab-Amazigh 97%	Arabic	7,360,000	1%	78 years	91%
Mauritania	Black Moors 40%, White Moors 30%, Sub-Saharan Mauritaniens 30%	Arabic	4,330,000	2%	66 years	67%
Morocco	Arab-Amazigh 99%	Arabic	37,390,000	1%	73 years	76%
Tunisia	Arab 98%	Arabic	12,000,000	1%	77 years	83%
Western Sahara	Arab-Amazigh	Arabic, Spanish	620,000	3%	54 years	50%

NORTH AFRICA



ALGERIA

EGYPT

LIBYA

MAURITANIA

MOROCCO

TUNISIA

WESTERN SAHARA



Islam spread across North Africa in the 600s and soon became the dominant religion. Today, most people in Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia follow Sunni Islam, the largest branch of the faith. It teaches submission to a false god called Allah and denies key truths from the Bible—especially that Jesus is the Son of God who died and rose again. These Islamic beliefs stand in direct contrast to the true gospel. Before the rise of Islam, North Africa had strong Christian roots. The early Church in Alexandria was known for Bible study and teaching, and leaders like Augustine shaped Christian history from this region. Over time, however, Islam replaced Christianity in many places. Today, some Christians meet in secret, and those who leave Islam to follow Christ may face rejection, threats, violence, or even death. North Africa is part of the 10/40 window—a region between 10 and 40 degrees north latitude that stretches across Africa and Asia. It includes more than 8,700 people

groups, many of whom have little or no access to the gospel.

Be strong and of good courage, do not fear ... for the LORD your God, He is the One who goes with you.
—Deuteronomy 31:6

	Total Population	Percent Christian			Percent Muslim	Percent None
		Catholic	Orthodox	Protestant		
Algeria	47,020,000	--	--	--	99%	1%
Egypt	111,250,000	2%	5%	1%	90%	1%
Libya	7,360,000	--	--	--	97%	2%
Mauritania	4,330,000	--	--	--	100%	--
Morocco	37,390,000	--	--	--	99%	1%
Tunisia	12,000,000	--	--	--	99%	1%
Western Sahara	620,000	--	--	--	100%	--

If you are a Christian in parts of North Africa and follow Jesus openly, you face serious danger. Many countries in this region have laws that limit religious freedom, especially for those who leave Islam. Converts to Christianity may be shunned by relatives, monitored by authorities, or punished under local laws. Churches that are allowed often stay small and are closely watched by the government. In countries like Libya, Algeria, and Morocco, believers sometimes meet secretly in homes to avoid drawing attention. Still, many North African Christians remain firm in their faith. Christian groups from outside the region continue to support them through prayer, Bible distribution, and discipleship.

Note: Percentages in the religion charts may not add up to 100 percent. All numbers are rounded. Some data is not available. Religions with small percentages are not included. Unless specified, Orthodox percentages include all major Orthodox branches.



EVENTS THAT HAVE IMPACTED THE REGION

c. 2000 B.C.	Abraham Visits Egypt During a Famine Abraham journeys to Egypt during a time of drought, marking one of the earliest biblical connections to North Africa.
c. 1446 B.C.	Israelites Leave Egypt in the Exodus God delivers His people from slavery through Moses. The journey to the Promised Land begins in Egypt.
A.D. 40s–300s	Christianity Spreads Across North Africa John Mark brings the gospel to Alexandria, Egypt, starting the Coptic Church. Christianity grows in Libya and Tunisia, with leaders like Augustine shaping the early church.
600s	Islam Spreads Rapidly Through North Africa Arab armies bring Islam. Arabic becomes the main language, and most of the region becomes Muslim.
c. 1100s–1300s	Great Cities and Trade Routes Flourish Cairo, Fez, and Marrakesh become centers of learning and trade, linking Africa with Europe and Asia.
1517	Ottoman Empire Takes Control of Egypt and Surrounding Lands Turkish influence spreads across North Africa. Mosques, palaces, and trade routes grow under Ottoman rule.
1798	Napoleon Invades Egypt The French invasion opens Egypt to European ideas and begins a season of change.
1830	France Invades Algeria France takes over Algeria, then Tunisia and Morocco. Resistance movements begin, especially in mountain regions.
1911	Italy Invades Libya Italy removes the Ottomans and rules Libya. The people face harsh control and cultural pressure.
1954–1962	Algerian War for Independence After years of brutal conflict, Algeria gains freedom from France. The war inspires other independence movements.
1963	Earthquake Strikes Northeastern Algeria A powerful quake kills over 1,800 people in Skikda. Families rebuild with little outside help. Churches pray and serve.
1969	Muammar Gaddafi Takes Power in Libya Gaddafi rules for 42 years with strict control. He is removed during the Arab Spring in 2011.
1975–Present	Dispute Over Western Sahara Morocco and independence groups claim the land. The area remains unsettled, and many live in refugee camps.
1980s–Present	Desertification Expands in the South The Sahara grows into parts of Mauritania, Algeria, and Libya. Christian groups help teach soil care and tree planting.
2011	Arab Spring Brings Upheaval Across North Africa Protests in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya lead to major political changes. People call for justice and reform.
2015–Present	Persecution and Church Growth in Secret Though most of North Africa is Muslim, small house churches continue to grow. Believers worship quietly and share their faith carefully.

PRAYER POINTS

THANK God for the early roots of Christianity in North Africa and for believers who continue to follow Christ faithfully in modern times.

PRAY for boldness and wisdom for Christians worshiping in secret across Egypt, Algeria, Libya, and Morocco, where persecution is often severe.

ASK God to provide clean water, sustainable farming solutions, and relief in areas suffering from extreme drought and desertification.

PRAY that Muslims in the region would encounter the truth of Christ—through dreams, digital ministries, or personal conversations—and turn to Him in faith.



Lord, thank You for the early Christian heritage of North Africa and for believers who continue to follow You with courage. Strengthen and protect those who must worship in hidden places. Please provide water for dry lands and help restore farms and communities. Open hearts across the region to the truth of Christ through dreams, technology, and the bold witness of Your people. In Jesus' name, Amen.

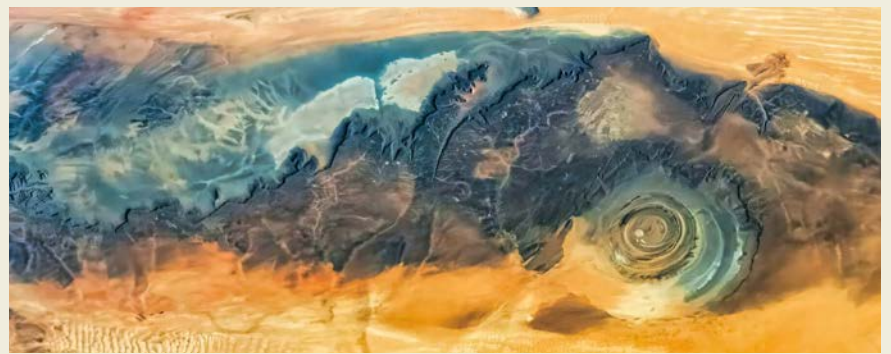
NORTH AFRICA

ALGERIA | EGYPT | LIBYA | MAURITANIA
MOROCCO | TUNISIA | WESTERN SAHARA



The Moroccan **Western Sahara Wall** is a long desert barrier that stretches about 1,700 miles from north to south. Made of sand and rock, it stands around 6 feet tall and 10 feet wide. It runs through dry, empty land and separates Western Sahara from areas controlled by the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic.

Beside the wall lies the longest minefield in the world. Morocco placed these landmines during the 1980s, during a war with the Polisario Front—a group that has fought for independence for Western Sahara. The mines were meant to protect the wall and stop attacks. Many of them are still in place today and remain extremely dangerous.



The **Richat Structure**, also known as the Eye of the Sahara, is a massive circular landform in Mauritania's Adrar region. From above, it looks like a giant bullseye made of rock, with ring-shaped layers stretching about 25 miles across. It is so large and distinct that astronauts can see it from space.

Over the years, many early artifacts have been found in and around the structure. These discoveries show that people once lived in this area and traveled through the region long ago.

The **Matmata Homes**

of southern Tunisia are one of North Africa's most surprising examples of how people adapt to their environment. In this dry desert region, Berber families have



built underground homes called troglodyte dwellings for generations. They start by digging a wide, round pit into the ground, then carve rooms into the sides. These cave-like homes stay cool in the summer and warm in the winter, making them perfect for a place with extreme temperatures.

Some of these homes are still lived in today. Their unusual design has appeared as inspiration in several older films.

The **Giza Pyramid Complex** sits just outside modern-day Cairo. It includes the Great Pyramid, also known as Khufu's Pyramid, along with the Pyramid of Khafre and the Pyramid of Menkaure. The site also holds three smaller pyramids built for queens, ancient boat pits, and the famous Great Sphinx. These structures were built during Egypt's Old Kingdom, between 2580 and 2470 B.C.

The pyramids were made from large stone blocks, each carefully cut to the same size. As the pyramids rose, builders had to find smart ways to lift and place the heavy stones. Even today, no one is fully sure how they built one of the world's greatest construction achievements.



UNESCO World Heritage Site pyramid complex

In the middle of Egypt's Western Desert, you will find two landscapes that could not look more different: one bright white and the other dark black. Together, they are known as the **White Desert** and the **Black Desert**, and they sit not far from each other like a study in opposites.

The White Desert is filled with giant rock formations made of chalk—a soft white stone formed from the remains of sea creatures buried and pressed into layers during Noah's Flood. Over time, wind and sand carved these chalk deposits into wild shapes that look like animals, mushrooms, or towers. Because chalk erodes easily, the land keeps changing, almost like it is alive.

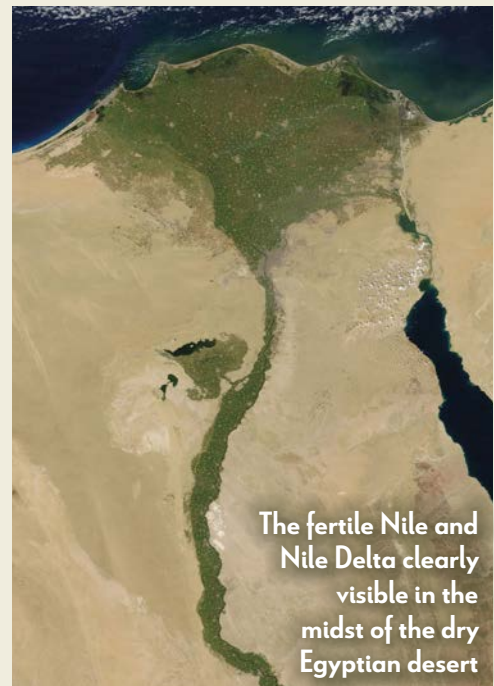
Not far away, the Black Desert has rolling hills covered in dark volcanic rock and gravel. Instead of soft white stone, it is made of hard, black basalt left behind by ancient volcanic activity. The dark color absorbs heat, and the landscape feels dry and rugged, completely opposite from the glowing white sculptures nearby. Together, these two deserts show the incredible variety God placed on Earth—even in the middle of what seems like empty sand.



The **Nile River** is the longest river in the world, stretching over 4,100 miles. It flows north from just below the equator all the way to the Mediterranean Sea. Its drainage basin—the area where a river collects water—covers about one-tenth of Africa and passes through eleven countries. The river is fed by two large lakes—Lake Victoria and Lake Albert—and three main rivers: the White Nile, the Blue Nile, and the Atbara. In most places, the Nile is 26 to 36 feet deep and can be more than a mile wide.

At the northern end is the Nile Delta, a wide, triangle-shaped area along the coast. It is about 150 miles long and 100 miles from north to south. The Nile and its delta were the heart of ancient Egyptian life. Major places like the Giza Pyramids, Aswan, and Cairo are nearby.

The Bible refers to the Nile as the river of Egypt rather than using its modern name. In Genesis 46:28–34, Joseph's family moved to the land of Goshen during a famine, settling near this great river. They lived in Egypt until Moses later led them out during the Exodus (Exodus 12:31–42). For thousands of years, the river's yearly flooding brought rich soil for farming. In the 1960s, Egypt built the Aswan Dam to control flooding and manage water. Even today, the Nile remains vital for life, agriculture, and history across northeastern Africa.



The desert on the far side of the Nile Valley as seen from the Nile near Aswan. The Nile Valley is a narrow (12 mile average) strip of fertile land along the river.

ASIA

Population: 4.7 billion; most populous continent

15 major language families with over 2,000 languages

49

COUNTRIES

172 MILLION
SQUARE MILES

LARGEST
CONTINENT



Natural Wonders in Asia

Caspian Sea	Lake Baikal
Dead Sea	Mount Ararat
Gobi Desert	Mount Fuji
Himalayas	Son Doong Cave
Sundarbans Mangrove Forest	

~39,000 MILES OF COASTLINE

Only one continent can claim both the **highest and lowest places** on Earth's land surface—and that's Asia! At one extreme, a climber stands on the icy



summit of Mount Everest, rising 29,032 feet above sea level in the Himalayan mountains. It's the tallest point on Earth and a symbol of how vast and rugged Asia's landscape can be. At the other extreme, someone floats effortlessly in the salty waters of the Dead Sea, which lies 1,410 feet below sea level between Israel and Jordan. This spot is so low and so salty that it creates a floating experience unlike anywhere else. From mountaintops to sunken shores,

Asia is full of dramatic contrasts that show just how remarkable this continent truly is.



Asia isn't just home to the tallest mountain and the lowest land—it also has the **hottest and coldest places** on Earth. The hottest temperature ever recorded in Asia was 129°F in Kuwait and Pakistan. On the other extreme, the coldest inhabited place on Earth is Oymyakon, a village in Siberia, Russia, where temperatures have dropped as low as -96°F! From fiery deserts to frozen tundras, Asia's climates are as extreme and fascinating as its geography.



Asia is home to over **4.7 billion people**, which is more than half of all the people on Earth, but they aren't spread out across the whole continent. Most live in a few crowded regions, especially in South Asia, East Asia, and parts of Southeast Asia, like Indonesia and the Philippines. These areas have huge cities like Tokyo, Delhi, Jakarta, and Manila, but the population boom began long before modern times.



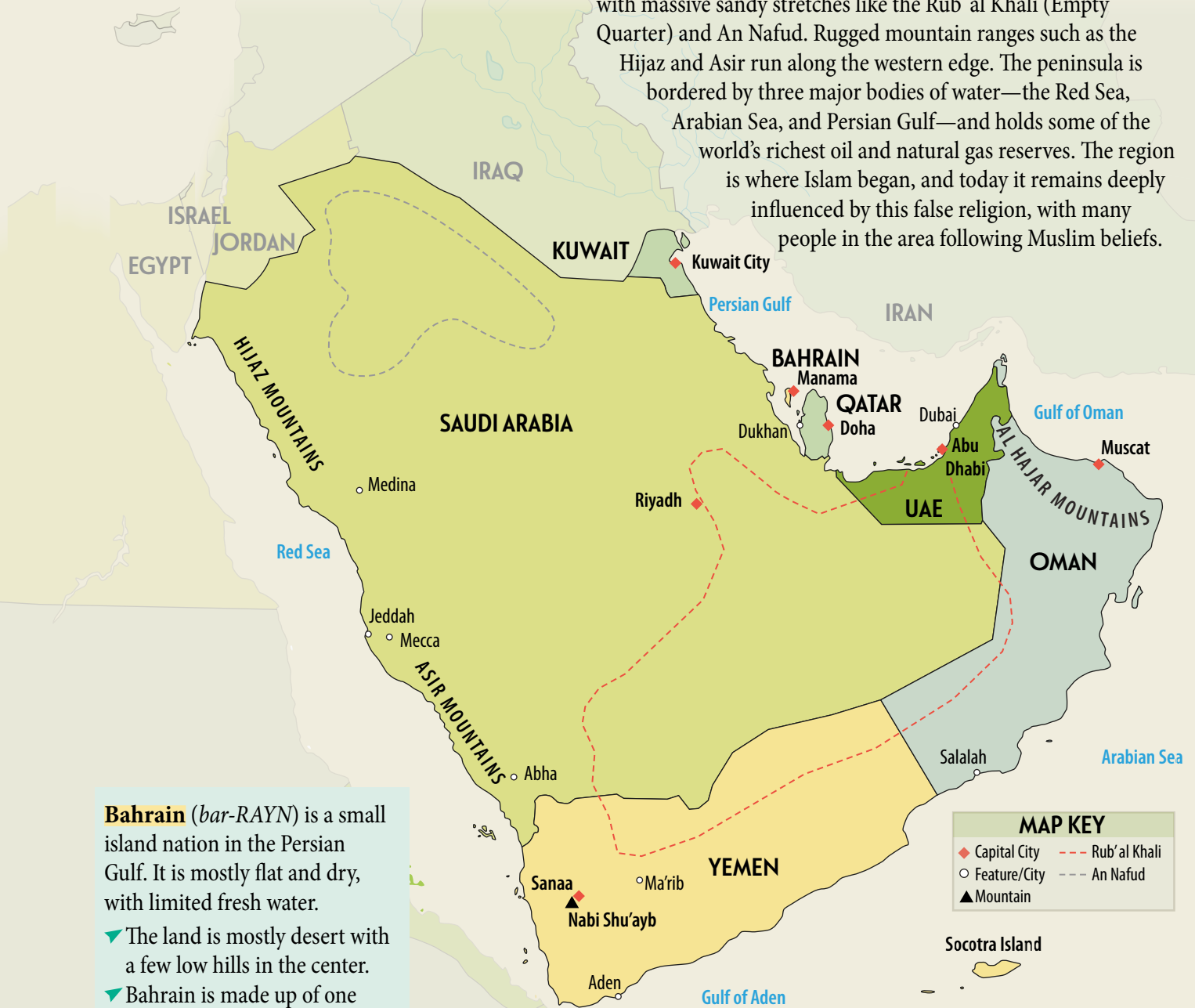
A circle about 2,500 miles wide, covering parts of India, eastern China, Indonesia, the Philippines, and surrounding countries, holds more than half of the world's population—over 4 billion people. Even though this circle includes only a small portion of Earth's land (about 10%), it contains many of the most densely populated places on the planet.

So why are so many people living here and not in places like South America, Mexico, or France? One big reason is geography. Asia has some of the world's largest river valleys and coastal plains with rich soil, perfect for growing rice, wheat, and other crops. Rivers like the Ganges, Yangtze, and Mekong gave early farmers water for their fields, good land to plant on, and easy transportation for trade. In island nations like Indonesia and the Philippines, fertile volcanic soil, warm climates, and access to the ocean supported fishing, farming, and trade. These regions could feed large populations thousands of years ago—long before modern farming. Because food was available and life could be sustained, civilizations grew earlier and faster in Asia than in many other parts of the world. Over time, more people stayed where food, water, and jobs were easier to find. Cities formed, and generations of families stayed close. Much of the world's population packed into this one part of the globe—a place where geography made life possible, and history kept people rooted.

ARABIAN PENINSULA

BAHRAIN | KUWAIT | OMAN | QATAR
SAUDI ARABIA | UNITED ARAB EMIRATES | YEMEN

The Arabian Peninsula is the largest peninsula in the world, covering more than 1.2 million square miles. It is mostly desert, with massive sandy stretches like the Rub' al Khali (Empty Quarter) and An Nafud. Rugged mountain ranges such as the Hijaz and Asir run along the western edge. The peninsula is bordered by three major bodies of water—the Red Sea, Arabian Sea, and Persian Gulf—and holds some of the world's richest oil and natural gas reserves. The region is where Islam began, and today it remains deeply influenced by this false religion, with many people in the area following Muslim beliefs.



Bahrain (*bar-RAYN*) is a small island nation in the Persian Gulf. It is mostly flat and dry, with limited fresh water.

- The land is mostly desert with a few low hills in the center.
- Bahrain is made up of one main island and several smaller ones.
- Fresh water is scarce, so desalinated seawater is used for daily needs.
- Its coastline supports fishing, trade, and tourism.

Historic houses in the middle of the desert in Oman



Kuwait (*koo-WAYT*) is a small country at the northwest corner of the Persian Gulf. Its flat, sandy desert terrain contains valuable oil reserves.

- ✔ Most of Kuwait is flat desert with little natural vegetation.
- ✔ The coast provides access to shipping and trade routes.
- ✔ Kuwait Bay is a sheltered area along the shoreline.
- ✔ Summers are extremely hot, and rain is rare.

Oman (*oh-MAHN*) stretches from the Persian Gulf to the Arabian Sea and has mountains, deserts, and coastal plains.

- ✔ The Al Hajar Mountains run through the north and reach over 9,000 feet.
- ✔ The Rub' al Khali, or Empty Quarter, is a vast desert in the west.
- ✔ Coastal areas are more humid and support farming and fishing.
- ✔ Oman's coastline is long and important for trade and travel.

Qatar (*KAH-tar*) is a small peninsula jutting into the Persian Gulf. It is dry, flat, and rich in natural gas and oil.

- ✔ Most of the land is desert, with very little rainfall.
- ✔ The coastline includes shallow bays and salt flats.
- ✔ Summer temperatures can reach over 110°F.
- ✔ Qatar is surrounded by water on three sides.

Saudi Arabia (*SAW-dee uh-RAY-bee-uh*) is the largest country on the Arabian Peninsula. It is mostly desert and holds some of the world's largest oil reserves.

- ✔ The Rub' al Khali, or Empty Quarter, is one of the world's biggest sand deserts.
- ✔ The western mountains include the Hejaz Range near the Red Sea.
- ✔ Oases provide water for farming in some desert areas.
- ✔ Saudi Arabia has coastlines on both the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf.

United Arab Emirates (UAE) (*EM-uh-rets*) is a federation of seven emirates on the southeastern coast of the Persian Gulf. The UAE has modern cities surrounded by desert.

- ✔ Much of the land is flat desert with sand dunes and gravel plains.
- ✔ The Al Hajar Mountains rise in the east, near Oman.
- ✔ Coastal areas have beaches, ports, and islands.
- ✔ The UAE has hot summers, with temperatures often over 100°F (38°C).

Yemen (*YEH-men*) lies at the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula. It has rugged mountains, desert plateaus, and a long coastline.

- ✔ The western highlands receive more rain and support farming.
- ✔ Eastern Yemen is drier, with rocky deserts and sandy plains.
- ✔ The Red Sea and Arabian Sea give Yemen long coastlines for trade.
- ✔ The land includes deep valleys and terraced hillsides used for crops.



The ruins of ancient **Ma'rib** (shown above) are in modern-day Yemen. Long ago, Ma'rib was the capital of the Kingdom of Sheba (also called Saba), one of the strongest ancient kingdoms in Arabia. It became rich and powerful by controlling trade routes that carried incense and spices between Arabia, Africa, and the Mediterranean.

The Bible (1 Kings 10:1–13; 2 Chronicles 9:1–12) tells us that the Queen of Sheba came from this region to visit King Solomon in Jerusalem. She brought valuable gifts of gold, spices, and jewels. Some traditions also connect her to Ethiopia, where the account is an important part of local history and identity.

Ma'rib was also famous for the Ma'rib Dam, a smart irrigation system that allowed crops to grow in the desert. Today, the ruins remind us of a powerful kingdom that played a role in both Arabian and biblical history.

RUB' AL KHALI

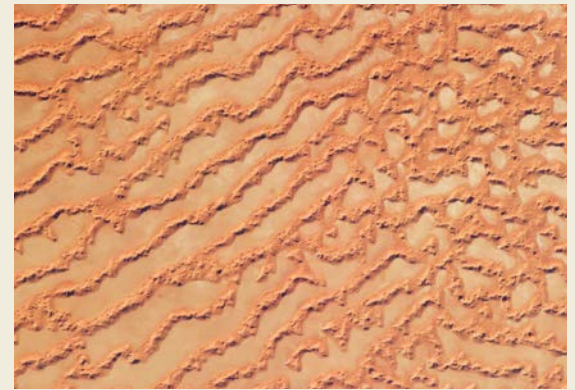
THE EMPTY QUARTER

The **Rub' al Khali**, or Empty Quarter, is the largest continuous sand desert in the world, covering over 250,000 square miles—larger than Texas and California combined. It holds nearly half the sand of the entire Sahara Desert, even though the Sahara is more than three times bigger. That is because much of the Sahara has rocky plains and gravel fields, while the Rub' al Khali is almost entirely made of deep, shifting sand. It forms massive dunes over 800 feet high, along with some gravel plains and salt flats called sabkhas.

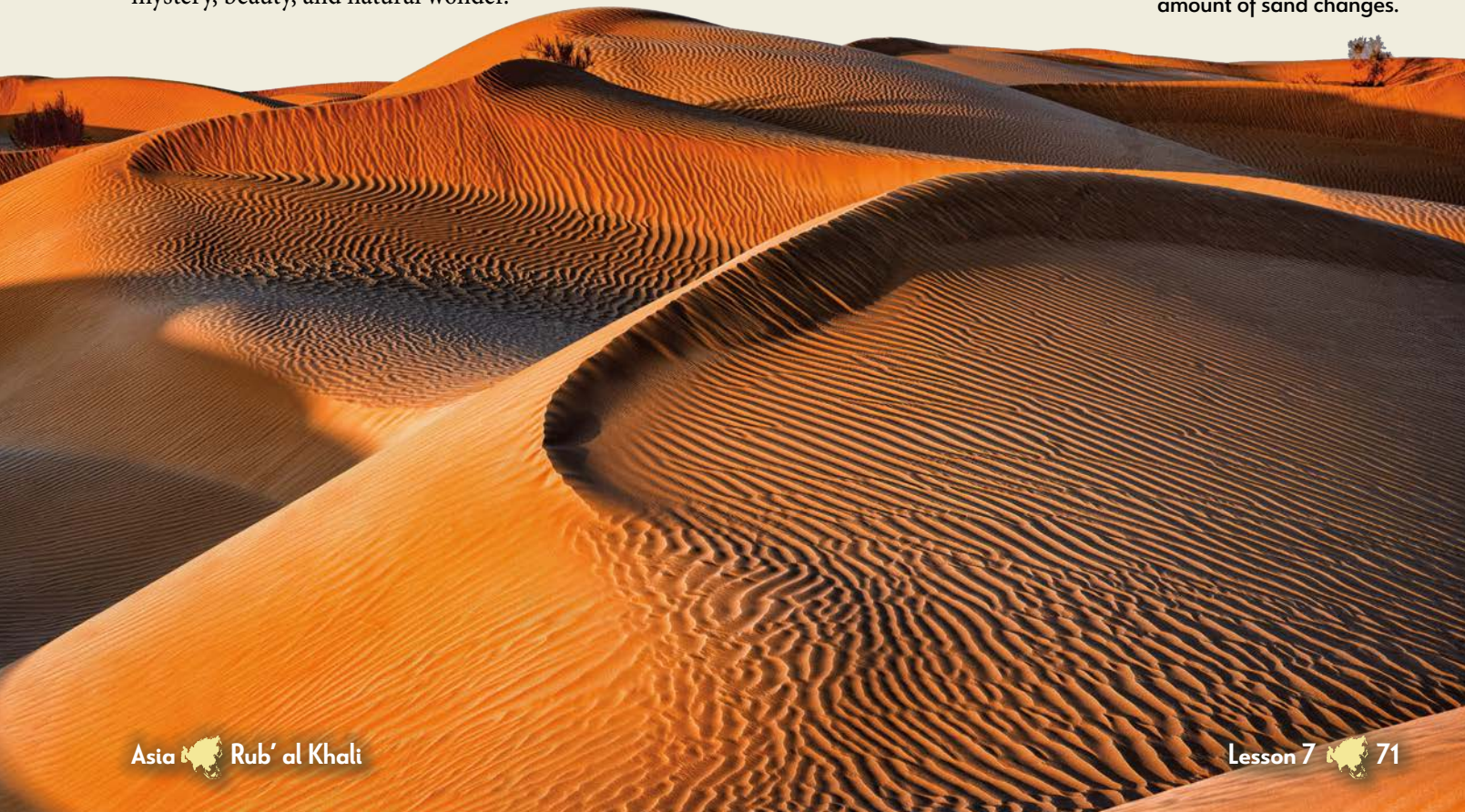
One of the hottest places on Earth, summer temperatures here can rise above 125°F, and rain is rare. Even so, underground aquifers create oases that support desert plants and animals. Some dunes move up to 100 feet each year as strong winds shift the sands. These moving dunes can bury roads, wells, and even landmarks, making it hard to travel or build in the area. The desert's sand can be more than 3,000 feet deep in places, hiding ancient riverbeds and signs of past ecosystems.

Fossils found in the Empty Quarter show that this area was once a green, fertile land. Scientists have uncovered bones from hippos, water buffalo, and long-horned cattle—evidence of lakes, rivers, and grasslands long ago.

Legends tell of a “Lost City of Ubar,” an ancient trade center believed to have vanished under the sand. Today, the Rub' al Khali is rich in oil, making it important for the economy. It remains a place of mystery, beauty, and natural wonder.



This satellite image above shows long, reddish-brown sand dunes running side by side with flat, salty areas called sabkhas. The dunes are shaped by seasonal winds—in the summer, Kharif winds from the southwest form crescent-shaped barchan dunes and star dunes that point in several directions. In the northeast and east (to the right in the image), the long dunes begin to break apart into larger star dunes. This likely happens as the wind shifts direction and the amount of sand changes.



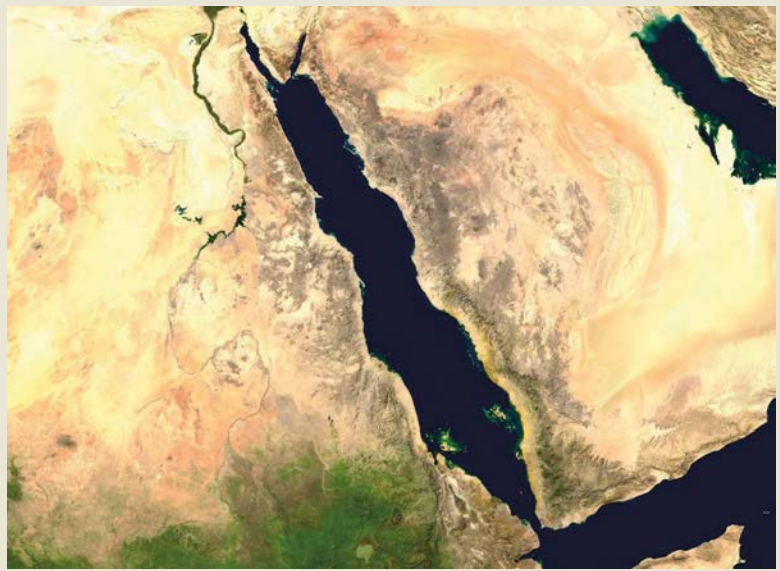
THE RED SEA

The **Red Sea** stretches about 1,200 miles between Northeast Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. It ranges in width from 35 to 220 miles and has an average depth of 1,640 feet, with its deepest point, the Suakin Trough, reaching 8,200 feet. Because of high evaporation and little fresh water flowing in, the Red Sea is very salty and makes floating easier than in most oceans. Its name may come from the occasional reddish algae blooms or the red-tinged mountains nearby.

It is a key global shipping route, linking the Mediterranean Sea to the Indian Ocean through the Suez Canal in the north and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait in the south. About 10% of the world's sea trade, including oil, travels through it. Beneath the sea, there are oil and gas reserves, especially near the Arabian side.

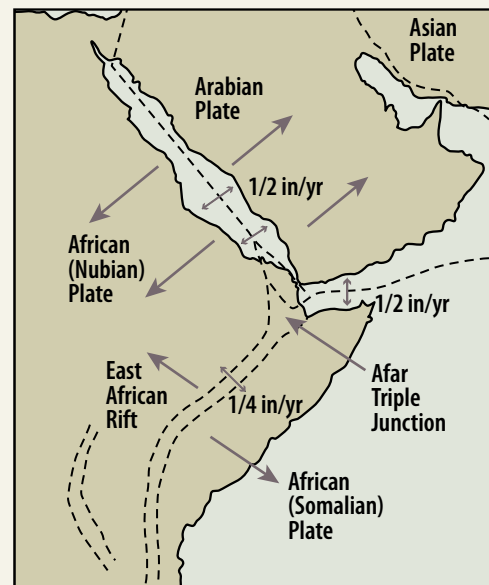
The Red Sea is also known for its coral reefs and rich sea life. Its warm, clear waters are home to over 1,200 fish species, many found nowhere else. Animals like sharks, dolphins, sea turtles, dugongs (gentle sea mammals similar to manatees), and moray eels live in its coral reefs and seagrass beds.

In the Bible, the Red Sea is where God parted the waters so Moses and the Israelites could escape from Pharaoh's army (Exodus 14:21–31).



The **Red Sea Rift** is a tectonic boundary where the African and Arabian plates are slowly moving apart. As the plates separate, magma (hot, melted rock) rises from deep inside the earth. When it cools, it forms new ocean floor—a process called seafloor spreading.

These plates move about half an inch per year. Scientists track this slow movement using satellite technology and GPS measurements. It is a reminder that the forces set in motion during the global Flood are still at work today, shaping the land beneath our feet.



Some corals found in the Red Sea

ARABIAN PENINSULA

The Arabian Peninsula holds some of the largest **oil and gas reserves** in the world. Countries like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates built much of their modern wealth on these resources. The oil industry started in the early 1900s, when geologists saw signs of oil in the desert—such as natural seeps and certain rock layers. They believed that ancient sea creatures and plants, buried under layers of sand and rock, had broken down into oil deep underground. Drilling in the 1930s confirmed it—the desert held massive amounts of oil.

Today, the region produces tens of millions of barrels of oil every day. Saudi Arabia alone pumps enough oil daily to fill more than 3,000 Olympic-size swimming pools. This oil is shipped around the world to power cars, trucks, and industries. Oil wealth has helped build modern cities, highways, and schools. While some countries are starting to invest more in tourism, finance, and clean energy, oil and gas still drive the economy across the Arabian Peninsula.

BAHRAIN

KUWAIT

OMAN

QATAR

SAUDI ARABIA

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

YEMEN



	Top Economic Industries	Real GDP	GDP Growth Rate
Bahrain	Industries: oil & gas, aluminum smelting, financial services, manufacturing, tourism	\$85 billion	2%
	Agricultural commodities: alfalfa, dates, figs, tomatoes, potatoes		
Kuwait	Industries: oil & gas, petrochemicals, cement production, shipbuilding, financial services	\$219 billion	-2%
	Agricultural commodities: vegetables, potatoes, grains, dairy products, fish		
Oman	Industries: oil & gas, natural gas processing, construction, cement production, tourism	\$186 billion	1%
	Agricultural commodities: dates, limes, bananas, vegetables, fish		
Qatar	Industries: oil & gas, petrochemicals, steel manufacturing, financial services, ship repair	\$305 billion	4%
	Agricultural commodities: vegetables, dairy products, poultry, dates, fruits		
Saudi Arabia	Industries: oil & gas, petrochemicals, tourism, construction, manufacturing	\$2 trillion	-1%
	Agricultural commodities: dates, wheat, barley, poultry, dairy products		
United Arab Emirates	Industries: oil & gas, tourism, financial services, construction, aluminum production	\$720 billion	3%
	Agricultural commodities: dates, vegetables, poultry, dairy products, fish		
Yemen	Industries: agriculture, fishing, construction, food processing, cement production	\$74 billion	1%
	Agricultural commodities: millet, sorghum, wheat, barley, vegetables		

Dates are one of the oldest crops grown on the Arabian Peninsula. They thrive in the region's hot, dry climate and have fed desert travelers and nomadic people for centuries. Today, Saudi Arabia is the second-largest producer of dates in the world, growing over 1.5 million tons each year from more than 31 million date palms. The Bible uses the palm tree as a symbol of life and blessing (Psalm 92:12).

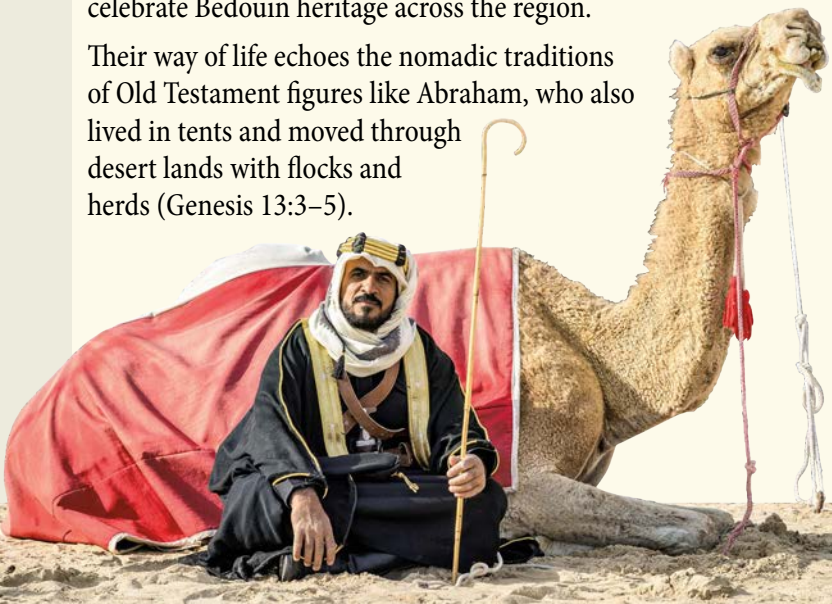
There are many varieties of dates, each with its own taste and texture. Popular kinds include Ajwa from Medina, Sukkari, and Khudri. Dates are eaten fresh or dried and are also made into syrups, pastes, and sweets. Saudi Arabia now exports dates to more than 100 countries, making them an important part of both the region's culture and economy.



The **Bedouins** (*BED-oo-ins*) are nomadic and semi-nomadic Arab tribes who have lived for centuries in the deserts of the Arabian Peninsula and North Africa. They move with their camels, sheep, and goats, always searching for water and grazing land. Bedouins live in tribes, each led by a sheikh—a respected leader who makes decisions and settles disputes. Their tents, called *bayt al-sha'ar*, are woven from goat hair and built to withstand the desert's wind, sand, and heat.

Bedouins are known for their hospitality, loyalty, and strong sense of honor. They pass down history through poetry and storytelling, and many Gulf leaders trace their roots back to Bedouin tribes. While most Bedouins now live in towns and cities, their music, clothing, and customs still reflect their deep desert roots. Today, desert festivals and camel races continue to celebrate Bedouin heritage across the region.

Their way of life echoes the nomadic traditions of Old Testament figures like Abraham, who also lived in tents and moved through desert lands with flocks and herds (Genesis 13:3–5).



Bayt al-sha'ar

GOVERNMENTAL

Bahrain	Constitutional monarchy
Kuwait	Constitutional monarchy (emirate)
Oman	Absolute monarchy
Qatar	Absolute monarchy
Saudia Arabia	Absolute monarchy
UAE	Federation of monarchies
Yemen	No unified government

A **federation of monarchies** is a government made up of several kingdoms or states, each ruled by its own monarch. These rulers lead their own regions but work together on national issues like defense, foreign policy, and shared services. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a good example. It has seven emirates, each with its own royal family. These rulers cooperate through a federal government, and one of them is chosen to serve as president. This system allows local traditions to continue while still forming one united country.

	Ethnic Groups	Language(s)	Population	Population Growth Rate	Life Expectancy	Literacy
Bahrain	Bahraini 47%, Asian 43%	Arabic (official), English, Farsi, Urdu	1,570,000	1%	80 years	98%
Kuwait	Kuwaiti 30%, other Arab 27%, Asian 40%	Arabic (official), English widely spoken	3,140,000	1%	80 years	97%
Oman	Arab, Baluchi, South Asian (Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Bangladeshi), African	Arabic (official), English, Baluchi, Swahili, Urdu, Indian dialects	3,900,000	2%	77 years	96%
Qatar	non-Qatari 88%, Qatari 12% (2015 est.)	Arabic (official), English commonly used as a second language	2,550,000	1%	80 years	94%
Saudi Arabia	Arab 90%, Afro-Asian 10%	Arabic (official)	36,540,000	2%	77 years	98%
United Arab Emirates	Emirati 12%, South Asian 59%, Egyptian 10%	Arabic (official), English	10,030,000	1%	80 years	98%
Yemen	predominantly Arab; but also Afro-Arab, South Asian, European	Arabic (official)	32,140,000	2%	68 years	70%



ARABIAN PENINSULA

BAHRAIN | KUWAIT | OMAN | QATAR | SAUDI ARABIA
 UNITED ARAB EMIRATES | YEMEN

The Arabian Peninsula is where Islam began. Muhammad founded the religion in Mecca in the 600s. Today, Islam dominates Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, and the Gulf nations. Most people are Sunni, but Shia Muslims live in Bahrain and eastern Saudi Arabia. These two groups disagree about who should have been leader after Muhammad's death, but both deny the Bible and worship the same false god, Allah.

In these countries, sharing the gospel is forbidden. Owning a Bible or attending a house church can be risky, but God is not limited by man-made rules. In recent years, some Muslims in the Arabian Peninsula—and in Africa as well—have reported having dreams or visions of a mysterious “Man in White.” In many of these stories, the Man speaks words like “Follow Me.” No one can make these things happen; they are the work of God alone. Though this region is deeply Islamic and part of the 10/40 window, Jesus is still calling His sheep—and many are beginning to hear His voice.

	Total Population	Percent Christian			Percent Muslim	Percent Hindu	Percent None
		Catholic	Orthodox	Protestant			
Bahrain	1,570,000	2%	10%	2%	74%	--	12%
Kuwait	3,140,000	6%	6%	6%	82%	--	--
Oman	3,900,000	5%	--	1%	86%	6%	2%
Qatar	2,550,000	5%	2%	2%	78%	--	13%
Saudi Arabia	36,540,000	3%	1%	1%	95%	--	--
UAE	10,030,000	2%	1%	6%	77%	7%	7%
Yemen	32,140,000	--	1%	--	99%	--	--

Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, But the night shines as the day; The darkness and the light are both alike to You. —Psalm 139:12

Millions of international workers live and work across the Arabian Peninsula. Many come from poorer countries such as the Philippines, India, Bangladesh, and Ethiopia to work in construction, housekeeping, or as drivers and maids. Most earn very little, but it is often more than their families could make at home. Many live simply and send their earnings to support several loved ones on a single income.

Life for these workers can be very hard. Some face long hours, poor housing, and unfair treatment. A few are mistreated or trapped in jobs they cannot leave, and women working as domestic helpers are especially vulnerable. While some countries are working to improve conditions, many laborers still live in loneliness and silence, with few rights or resources.

Many international workers are Christians who quietly live out their faith. Some meet in house churches or share Bible stories with coworkers. Though the gospel is restricted in this region, these believers shine the light of Christ—offering love, hope, and truth through their daily lives and quiet witness.

Note: Most Christians counted in this religion chart are international workers or expatriates, not native citizens.



EVENTS THAT HAVE IMPACTED THE REGION

c. 2000 B.C.	Traders Cross Arabia with Spices and Incense Camel caravans carry goods like frankincense and myrrh across the desert, linking Arabia to Egypt, Mesopotamia, and India.
c. 1400s B.C.	Moses Leads the Israelites Across the Red Sea God parts the Red Sea to deliver His people from Egypt. This miraculous event may have taken place near the Arabian Peninsula.
c. 1000 B.C.	The Queen of Sheba Visits King Solomon A queen from the kingdom of Saba, possibly in Arabia or Ethiopia, visits Solomon with gifts and questions about God’s wisdom.
c. A.D. 570	Birth of Muhammad in Mecca (Saudi Arabia) Muhammad, the founder of Islam, is born in Mecca. His false teachings shape the culture and governments of the region.
630s	Islam Unites the Arabian Peninsula Arab tribes are united under Islam. Mecca and Medina become holy cities, and Islamic law guides life and leadership.
700s–900s	Trade Flourishes Across Arabia Arabian ports connect the East and West. Cities expand as trade increases, and centers of learning develop in science, math, and writing.
1500s–1800s	Portuguese and Ottomans Compete for Ports European powers fight for control of Gulf trade routes. Oman becomes a regional naval power.
1744	Islamic Revival Shapes Modern Saudi Arabia A strict form of Islam spreads across central Arabia through an alliance between a (false) religious teacher and a local leader.
1839	Britain Takes Control of Parts of Oman and Yemen Britain establishes protectorates to secure trade. Later, Bahrain, Qatar, and the UAE also come under British influence.
1932–1938	Saudi Arabia Becomes a Kingdom and Discovers Oil King Abdulaziz unites Saudi Arabia. The discovery of oil brings sudden wealth and rapid growth to the entire region.
1961	Kuwait Becomes Independent Kuwait leads Gulf nations in gaining independence from Britain, followed by UAE, Qatar, and Bahrain in the next decade.
1990–1991	Gulf War Begins After Iraq Invades Kuwait A coalition pushes Iraqi forces out of Kuwait. The war highlights the region’s oil wealth, global importance, and vulnerability.
2001–Present	Christianity Grows Quietly Among Migrant Workers In cities like Dubai and Doha, many international Christian workers meet in house churches, reaching others through service and friendship.
2007	Cyclone Gonu Strikes Oman and Causes Widespread Flooding One of the strongest storms in Arabian Sea history damages roads and cities in Oman. Heavy rains bring flash floods and recovery challenges.
2015–Present	Yemen Caught in Civil War and Crisis Ongoing conflict brings suffering and need. Aid groups and believers offer help in one of the world’s hardest places.
2020	Abraham Accords Bring Peace Agreements The UAE and Bahrain normalize relations with Israel. New partnerships open in trade, security, and communication.

PRAYER POINTS

THANK God that the gospel is still reaching hearts in this deeply Islamic region—even through dreams and the quiet witness of believers.

PRAY for international workers who live far from their families. Many earn very little, yet they work hard to send money home. Ask God to protect them, encourage Christian workers in their faith, and help them be a light for Jesus.

ASK for strength and boldness for the underground church. In places where owning a Bible or attending a house church is risky, pray that believers will have courage and access to God’s Word.

PRAY for Muslim people across the Arabian Peninsula to meet the “Man in White”—Jesus—and follow Him as Lord. Ask God to break through spiritual darkness and call His children by name.

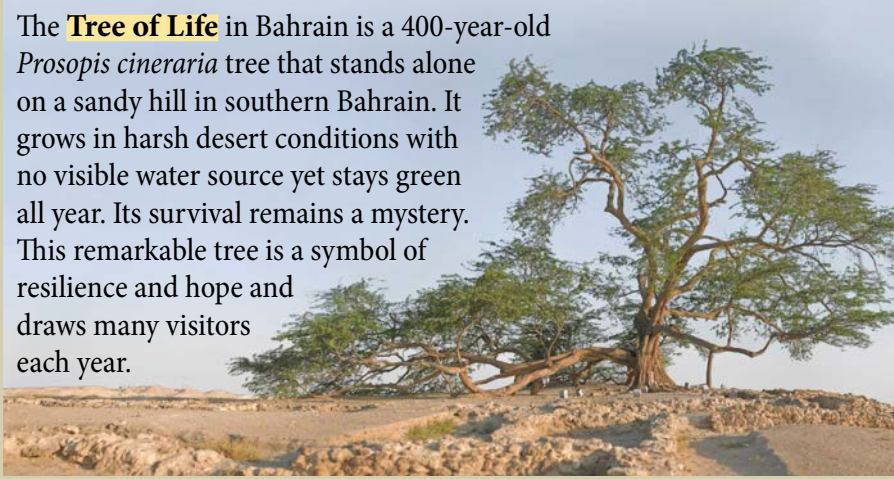


Lord, we pray for the people of the Arabian Peninsula—both locals and international workers far from home. Thank You that even where churches are banned, Your gospel is still spreading. Strengthen believers who meet in secret, and use Christian workers to share Your love. Protect those who are mistreated or lonely. Call many to Yourself through dreams, truth, and quiet witness. May the people of this land hear Your voice and follow You. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

ARABIAN PENINSULA

BAHRAIN | KUWAIT | OMAN | QATAR
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The **Tree of Life** in Bahrain is a 400-year-old *Prosopis cineraria* tree that stands alone on a sandy hill in southern Bahrain. It grows in harsh desert conditions with no visible water source yet stays green all year. Its survival remains a mystery. This remarkable tree is a symbol of resilience and hope and draws many visitors each year.



Sabkhas, or salt flats, are found across Qatar's coastline and inland deserts, especially near areas like Dukhan. These flat, salty plains form when rainwater quickly evaporates in the hot, dry climate, leaving behind layers of salt and minerals. Thick salt crusts can shine in the sun, creating a shimmering white surface. Though sabkhas may look empty, some support salt-tolerant plants, and others hold fossil evidence beneath the crust.

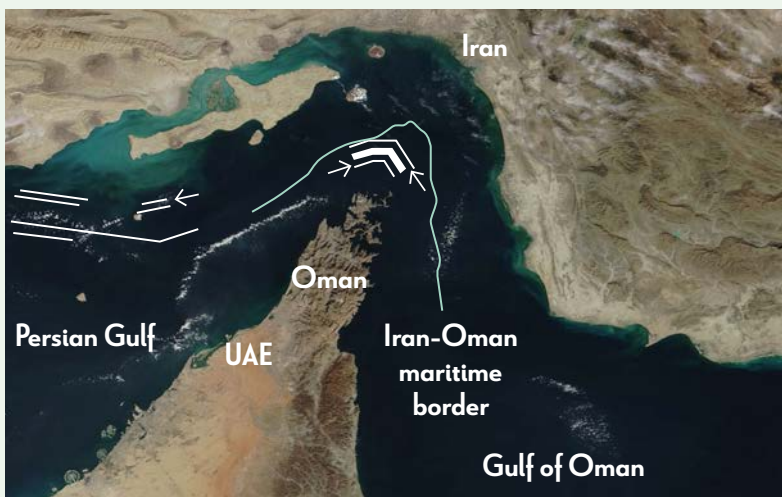
Before oil was discovered, Bahrain and Qatar were known for **pearl diving** in the Persian Gulf. Divers sailed out in



wooden boats, clipped their noses shut, and dove deep—all without modern gear. Holding their breath for over a minute, they searched for oysters and the rare natural pearls inside. These pearls were highly valued and brought traders from around the world. Though dangerous and exhausting, pearl diving was a proud tradition that shaped the region's culture and economy for centuries.



The Pearl Fishery in the Persian Gulf
Illustration for *The Graphic*, Oct. 1, 1881



The **Strait of Hormuz** is a narrow waterway connecting the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman and Arabian Sea. At its narrowest point, it is about 21 miles wide, but the main shipping lanes are just two miles wide in each direction (see arrows on the map). This strait is one of the most important oil routes in the world—about 20% of global petroleum flows through it. It borders Iran to the north, and the UAE and Oman to the south. Strong currents and deep waters can make travel difficult. While known for its strategic importance, the strait also supports coral reefs, dolphins, and sea turtles.



The **Burj Khalifa** in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, is the tallest building in the world, standing 2,717 feet tall with 163 floors. Completed in 2010, its sleek design was inspired by Islamic architecture. Inside are homes, offices, and a hotel. A popular feature is the observation deck, where visitors can see stunning views of Dubai and the surrounding desert.



The **Dragon's Blood Tree** (*Dracaena cinnabari*) grows only on Socotra, an island in the Arabian Sea between Yemen and the Horn of Africa. Its wide, umbrella-shaped top helps collect moisture in the island's dry climate. The tree's red sap, called "dragon's blood," has been used for medicine, dyes, and incense for hundreds of years. Its strange shape and vivid color make it one of the most unique and striking trees in the world.



Long before oil, Oman was known for trading **frankincense**—a fragrant resin that was once more valuable than gold. It comes from special trees that grow in the dry southern region of the country. Traders carried frankincense by camel caravans and ships across deserts and seas to Egypt, Rome, and Israel. This was the same gift the wise men brought to baby Jesus (Matthew 2:11). Today, visitors to Oman can still see ancient trading ports and frankincense trees that link the region to Bible times.

The **Palm Islands** in the United Arab Emirates are man-made islands off the coast of Dubai, built to expand the city's coastline and create space for buildings. The most famous, Palm Jumeirah, is shaped like a palm tree with 16 fronds, a trunk, and a crescent-shaped wall to protect it from waves.

The islands were formed by dredging sand from the Persian Gulf and shaping it into the design. Today, Palm Jumeirah is home to luxury hotels, resorts, and homes. These bold projects show Dubai's creativity and its big vision for using the coast in new and exciting ways.



EUROPE

44
COUNTRIES

3.9 million square miles, second-smallest continent

Three major language families with over 200 languages

750 MILLION
POPULATION

~90,000 MILES OF COASTLINE

520,000 ISLANDS, MOST SMALL AND UNINHABITED

ARCTIC CIRCLE

SMALLEST COUNTRY: VATICAN CITY

LARGEST INLAND
BODY OF WATER:
CASPIAN SEA

OLDEST
CONTINUOUSLY
INHABITED
CITY:
ATHENS, GREECE

Natural Wonders in Europe

The Alps

Białowieża Forest

Fjords of Norway

Giant's Causeway

Ice Caves

Karst Plateau
Caves

Mount Vesuvius

Northern Lights

Surtsey

Tara River Canyon

Europe is full of stories—some told through books, and others written in stone. Look closely, and you will find unusual rock shapes standing quietly in the middle of forests, valleys, and cliffs. In England, there is Idol Rock, perfectly balanced like it is defying gravity. In Norway, Trolltunga juts out like a giant stone tongue over a deep blue lake. El Tornillo in Spain twists upward like a screw, while Pravčická brána in Czechia stretches out like a natural bridge.

Long ago, people saw these shapes and made up myths to explain them—creating imaginative and fantastical stories. But as Christians, we know the truth: God is the Creator of all things, and nature does not exist by accident or magic. It was formed with purpose. Some of these dramatic landforms can be reminders of powerful forces at work during the global Flood. Others show the strength and beauty built into God’s design.

As we study Europe, look closely at the land itself. It has shaped how people traveled, built homes, formed borders, and even believed. Ask questions, notice details, and remember: Creation points us back to the Creator.



In the hills of North Yorkshire, **Idol Rock** balances surprisingly on a thin pedestal of stone. The top rock is over 15 feet wide and rests on a much narrower base. Shaped by years of wind and rain, it looks as if it could tip over, yet it has stood firm for generations. Locals have long told stories about its strange shape, but the real wonder is how such a heavy rock remains so steady. It stands as a reminder that God designed the land with order and strength, even in forms that seem fragile at first glance.



Trolltunga, or “Troll’s Tongue,” is a thin rock ledge that juts out from a high cliff in southern Norway. It hangs about 2,300 feet above a deep lake, with mountains rising in the distance. Just as glaciers carved Norway’s fjords, the same ice movement shaped cliffs and rock ledges like Trolltunga. The ledge extends far into open air, creating a striking and narrow platform above the valley below. Today, hikers climb for hours to reach it, drawn by both the beauty and the thrill.

El Tornillo (*el tor-NEE-yoh*), or “The Screw,” is a striking rock formation in southern Spain’s Torcal de Antequera. It looks like a stack of flat stones twisted into a spiral, shaped by wind, rain, and erosion acting on layers of limestone. Softer rock wore away, leaving behind this oddly balanced column that seems like it could topple over, yet it has stood firm for centuries. The formation rises about 10 feet tall—roughly the height of a basketball hoop. El Tornillo is just one of many unusual limestone formations in the Torcal de Antequera, where erosion has created towers, ridges, and narrow rock corridors. The area was once under a shallow sea, leaving thick limestone layers that were later exposed and shaped into today’s rugged landscape.



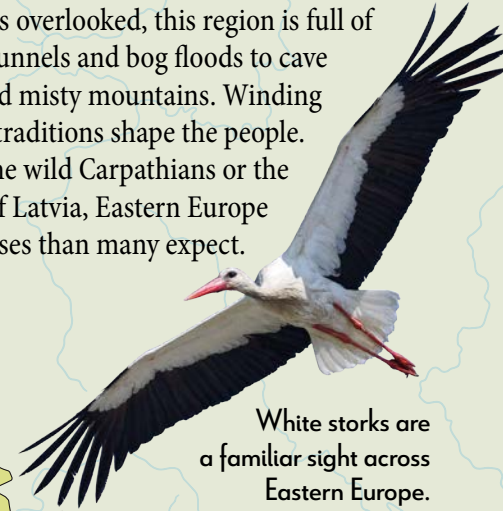
Pravčická brána (*PRAHV-cheets-kah BRAH-nah*) is the largest natural sandstone arch in Europe, rising above the forested cliffs of Bohemian Switzerland National Park in the Czech Republic. It spans over 85 feet and stands nearly 50 feet tall, shaped by centuries of wind and water carving through soft sandstone. Surrounded by gorges and wooded hills, the arch seems to grow right out of the landscape. Hikers can reach scenic viewpoints to admire its curves and the Elbe River valley below. Its size and setting show how patience and time can turn simple stone into a landmark that defines an entire region.

EASTERN EUROPE

BELARUS | ESTONIA
LATVIA | LITHUANIA
MOLDOVA | UKRAINE

Eastern Europe is a region of flat lowlands, ancient forests, rivers, lakes, and fertile plains. It stretches from the Baltic Sea in the north to the Black Sea in the south and includes both Slavic and Baltic cultures. While sometimes overlooked, this region is full of geographic variety—from tree tunnels and bog floods to cave monasteries, glacial beaches, and misty mountains. Winding rivers shape the land, and deep traditions shape the people.

Whether exploring the wild Carpathians or the quiet countryside of Latvia, Eastern Europe holds more surprises than many expect.



White storks are a familiar sight across Eastern Europe.

MAP KEY	
◆ Capital City	- - - Chernobyl Zone of Alienation
○ Feature/City	- - - Gauja National Park
▲ Mountain	

Belarus (*BEH-lah-roos*) is a mostly flat, landlocked country between Russia and Poland.

- ✔ Cold winters and short summers shape daily life and farming.
- ✔ Belarus means “White Rus” and reflects ties to Slavic heritage.
- ✔ Known for strong national folk traditions, music, and embroidery.
- ✔ Many rivers flow through the country, including the Dnieper and Pripyat.

Estonia (*ess-TOH-nee-uh*) is the northernmost of the Baltic States, with over 2,000 islands.

- ✔ Borders the Gulf of Finland and shares close ties with Nordic countries—the nations of northern Europe, like Finland and Sweden.
- ✔ Estonian is a Finno-Ugric language, related to Finnish and not Russian.
- ✔ Celebrates one of the world’s largest choral song festivals every five years.
- ✔ Saaremaa and Hiiumaa islands feature windmills, lighthouses, and quiet farms.

Estonia’s wetlands support rare plants like the delicate bog orchid.



Latvia (*LAT-vee-uh*) lies along the Baltic Sea and is known for its forests and rivers.

- ✔ Home to Gauja National Park and the sandstone Gūtmanis Cave.
- ✔ The Gauja River winds through scenic valleys and sandstone cliffs.
- ✔ Latvia has a strong folk song tradition, with hundreds of thousands of *dainas* passed down through generations.
- ✔ Traditional woven belts, called *Lielvārde* belts, use detailed patterns to tell stories about Latvian history.

Moldova (*mol-DOH-vuh*) is a small, landlocked country between Romania and Ukraine.

- ✔ Gently hilly landscape with fertile soil and vineyards.
- ✔ The Dniester River flows along the eastern border.
- ✔ Forests and pastures cover parts of the north and center.
- ✔ Famous for its winemaking and long tradition of grape growing.

Lithuania (*lith-oo-AYN-ee-uh*) is the largest and southernmost of the Baltic States.

- ✔ Rolling hills, lakes, and rivers cover much of the countryside.
- ✔ Borders the Baltic Sea with sandy shores and coastal dunes.
- ✔ Dense forests provide habitats for elk, boar, and lynx.
- ✔ Known for strong basketball traditions and international success in the sport.

Ukraine (*yoo-KRAYN*) is the second-largest country in Europe and has rich farmland.

- ✔ The Carpathian Mountains stretch across the west.
- ✔ The Dnipro River flows through the center of the country.
- ✔ Eastern and southern regions include wide plains and steppe.
- ✔ Known as the “breadbasket of Europe” for its wheat production.

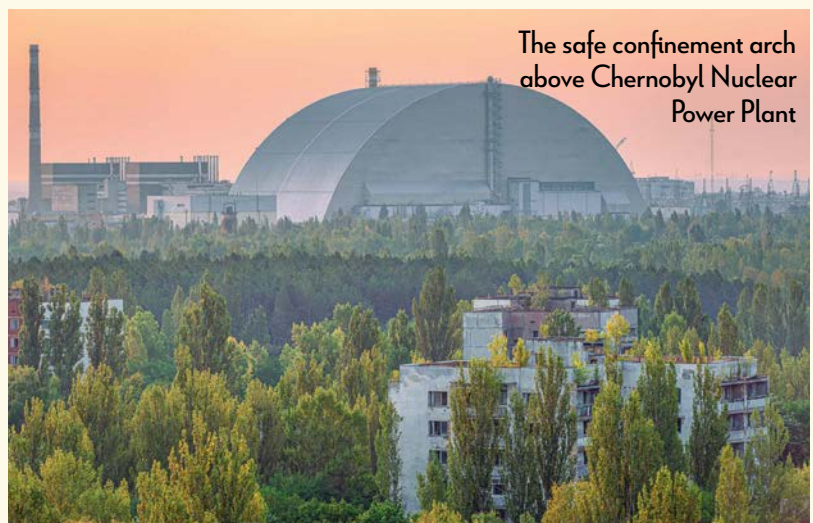
In 1986, the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant in northern Ukraine exploded during a safety test, releasing dangerous radiation into the air. The nearby town of Pripyat was evacuated, and a large area around the plant—nearly 1,000 square miles—was sealed off. This became the **Chernobyl Exclusion Zone**, one of the most restricted places on Earth.

With people gone, nature took over. Forests grew through buildings, and wild animals returned—including wolves, wild boar, lynxes, and even wild horses. When residents fled, many were forced to leave pets behind; those that survived formed stray populations still found in the zone today. Most of the area remains off-limits for living, but it is monitored by scientists, and a few elderly villagers have quietly returned to remote corners.

The Chernobyl Zone is a striking example of how human decisions can reshape land—and how nature sometimes adapts in unexpected ways. It raises difficult questions: What happens to land after a disaster? Can it recover? And how do people choose where—and how—to get energy? Though marked by tragedy, this region is a living reminder of the deep connections between geography, science, and history. As stewards of God’s creation, we are called to use wisdom and care in how we interact with the world He made.



The town of Pripyat



The safe confinement arch above Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant

PEAT BOGS



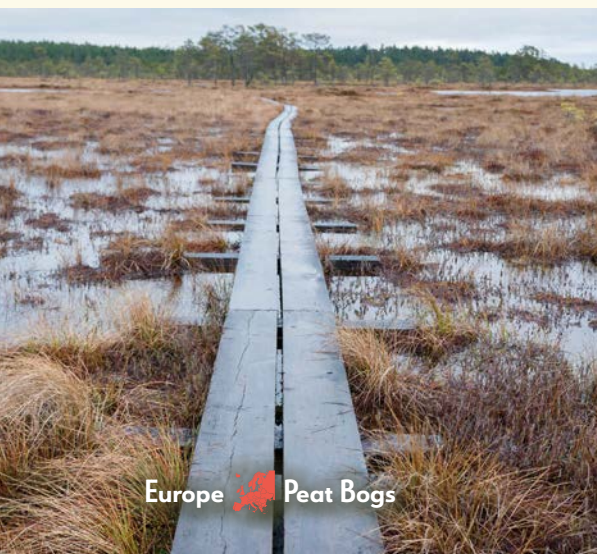
At first glance, a **peat bog** might look like just a wet, muddy field—but it's actually one of the most unusual and important landscapes in Europe. Found in places like Estonia, Latvia, Finland, and parts of the British Isles, peat bogs are wetland areas where water-logged soil and plants slowly build up over time, creating a thick, spongy surface.

What makes a bog different from a swamp or marsh is what lies under your feet. The ground is filled with peat—a dark, crumbly layer made from partially decayed plants. Because bogs are so wet and low in oxygen, dead plants don't fully break down. Instead, they pile up, forming peat. In fact, peat forms very slowly. It can take over 1,000 years to build just three feet of peat!



What's So Special About Peat?

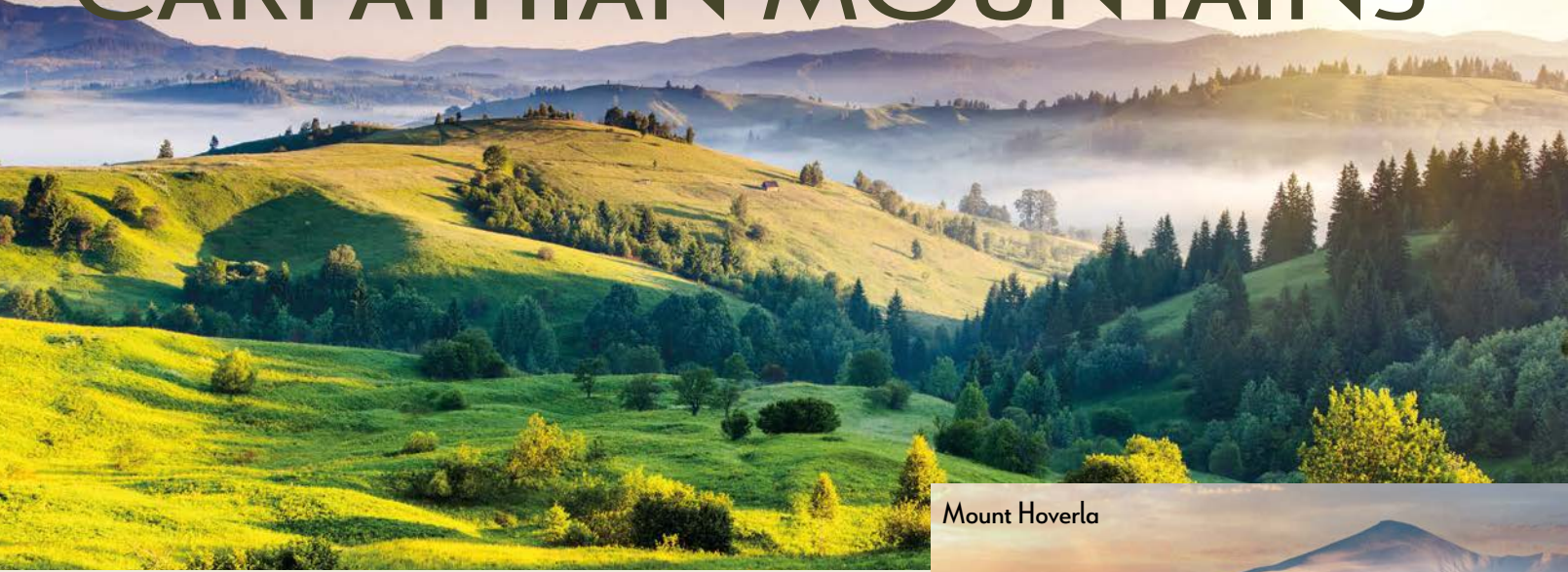
- Peat holds water like a sponge, keeping bogs wet even during dry months.
- It stores huge amounts of carbon, helping stabilize soil and plant life.
- It preserves things really well, even ancient wooden tools or “bog bodies” from thousands of years ago!
- In the past, people dried peat and used it for fuel, especially in cold, treeless areas.
- Bogs support rare plants like carnivorous sundews and cotton grasses, and provide a home for nesting birds.



Peat bogs teach us how soil, water, and plants work together to shape the land. They often form in flat, lowland areas where water gets trapped, creating layers that build up gradually. These landscapes can cover wide areas and affect local farming, climate, and travel.

Peat bogs may look quiet and squishy, but they cover millions of acres across Europe and make up a surprising share of the land in some countries. In places like Estonia and Finland, peatlands cover over one-fifth of the country, shaping where people farm, build roads, and settle. In these waterlogged areas, plants die and partially decay, slowly forming thick layers of peat beneath the surface. These layers preserve plant material and affect drainage, construction, and land use. As a result, the ground remains soft and wet, which can slow travel and limit development, leaving wide areas open and undeveloped.

CARPATHIAN MOUNTAINS



The **Carpathian Mountains** curve like a giant green arc through Eastern Europe, stretching across Ukraine, Romania, Slovakia, Poland, and into the Balkans—the mountainous region of southeastern Europe. In Ukraine, they are sometimes called the “Ukrainian Alps,” though they are not as sharp or rocky. Instead, they are covered in thick forests, quiet meadows, and rolling ridges. This part of the range feels wild and peaceful, with misty peaks, narrow valleys, and wooden villages built almost entirely from timber, where homes, churches, and barns are made from logs and planks using traditional designs passed down for centuries.

The Carpathians are part of the larger Alpine-Carpathian system and form a natural border in western Ukraine. Mount Hoverla, the country’s highest peak, rises to about 6,762 feet. From the top, hikers can see deep forests below and scattered farms across the hills. The mountains also give rise to many rivers that flow into the Danube and Dniester basins.

This region is rich in biodiversity. Brown bears, lynxes, wolves, and golden eagles live in the forests. Glacial lakes, caves, and waterfalls are hidden among the trees—shaped long ago by ice and water. In early summer, wildflowers paint the hillsides purple. In winter, snow blankets the slopes for skiing and snowshoeing.

One special feature of the Carpathians is how the mountains trap moist air, creating their own cool, wet climate. While much of Eastern Europe is flat and open, these hills are green, forested, and full of life. In places like the Hutsul region, people still farm small mountain plots, ride horses along forest paths, and build homes from local timber—traditions shaped by the land itself.

The Carpathians show how mountains influence human life in practical ways. Their forests provide wood and shelter, their steep slopes limit large cities, and their passes control where roads and trade can move. Rather than lines drawn on a map, the mountains themselves shape where people settle, how they travel, and how cultures develop. Standing between plains and highlands, the Carpathians remind us that geography is not just scenery; it is a steady force that shapes nations, communities, and daily life over time.

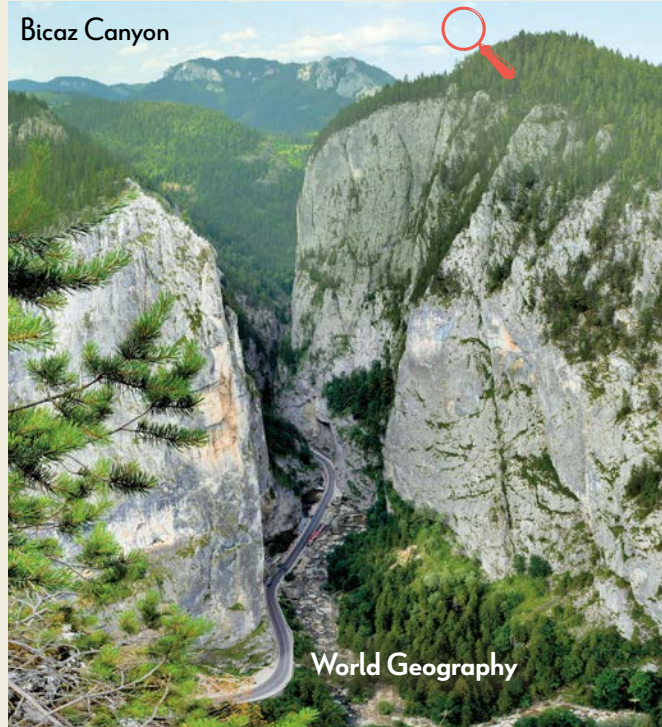
Mount Hoverla



Hutsul shepherds



Bicaz Canyon



EASTERN EUROPE

BELARUS | ESTONIA

LATVIA | LITHUANIA

MOLDOVA | UKRAINE

Latvia is one of the most forested countries in Europe—nearly half its land is covered in trees. Pine, spruce, birch, and other species grow across the landscape, making forests one of the country’s greatest natural resources. Because of this, timber is a major industry. Many Latvians work in logging, sawmills, wood processing, and furniture-making. Wood products like lumber, plywood, and paper are shipped through Latvian ports and sold across Europe.

The timber industry provides jobs and income in many rural areas, where other work can be hard to find. Workers cut trees, haul logs, run machines, and craft goods in workshops and factories. For generations, Latvia’s forests have supplied firewood, building materials, tools, and traditional wooden homes. Because trees grow naturally and abundantly, the timber industry allows people to use the land wisely and productively.

Latvia also works hard to protect its forests. For every tree that is cut down, new ones must be planted. Forest owners follow strict rules about how much wood they can harvest and when replanting is required. Some forests are mapped and managed, while others are left wild to protect nature and wildlife. Latvia’s careful forest practices show that it is possible to use the land without destroying it.



	Top Economic Industries	Real GDP	GDP Growth Rate
Belarus	Industries: machinery & equipment manufacturing, chemical production, agriculture, textile, food processing	\$76 billion	0%
	Agricultural commodities: potatoes, sugar beets, wheat, barley, rye		
Estonia	Industries: information technology (IT), electronics manufacturing, wood processing, energy production, machinery & equipment manufacturing	\$43 billion	-1%
	Agricultural commodities: wheat, barley, oilseed crop, oats, potatoes		
Latvia	Industries: logistics & transportation, timber, manufacturing, financial services, information technology (IT)	\$43 billion	0%
	Agricultural commodities: wheat, barley, rye, potatoes, dairy products		
Lithuania	Industries: information & communication technology (ICT), manufacturing, financial services, transportation & logistics, agriculture & food processing	\$85 billion	-3%
	Agricultural commodities: wheat, barley, rye, potatoes, dairy products		
Moldova	Industries: agriculture & food processing, textile & apparel manufacturing, wine production, information technology services, machinery & equipment manufacturing	\$18 billion	0%
	Agricultural commodities: grapes, wheat, corn, sunflower seeds, apples		
Ukraine	Industries: agriculture & food processing, metallurgy & steel production, chemical manufacturing, information technology services, machinery & equipment manufacturing	\$190 billion	3%
	Agricultural commodities: corn, wheat, sunflower seeds, barley, sugar beets		

Lithuania is a country full of strong traditions and national pride. Though the people may seem quiet at first, they are known for being warm, thoughtful, and deeply connected to their families, faith, and heritage. Many of their customs have been passed down for generations, giving the country a strong sense of identity.

One of the most meaningful parts of Lithuanian history is its journey to Christianity. Lithuania was the last country in Europe to officially convert, in 1387. But once it did, Catholic faith became central to daily life. Crosses and roadside chapels can be seen across the countryside, with the most famous example being the Hill of Crosses near Šiauliai—where more than 100,000 crosses have been placed as symbols of faith, hope, and remembrance.

Lithuanians also value music, dance, and cultural festivals. Folk songs are often sung in the Lithuanian language, one of the oldest still spoken today. At midsummer, people celebrate Joninės (*yoh-NEE-ness*) with bonfires and late-night gatherings that blend old traditions with community fun.

Basketball is more than just a sport in Lithuania; it is part of the national spirit. Children grow up playing it in nearly every school and neighborhood. Lithuania has won several international medals and is known as one of Europe's basketball powerhouses.

From ancient language to national pride, and from deep faith to athletic achievement, the Lithuanian people reflect a country that holds tightly to its roots while still engaging the modern world.



GOVERNMENTAL

Belarus	Authoritarian presidential republic
Estonia	Parliamentary republic
Latvia	Parliamentary republic
Lithuania	Parliamentary republic with a strong president
Moldova	Parliamentary republic (with instability)
Ukraine	Semi-presidential republic

Moldova is a **parliamentary republic**, but unlike others with stable systems, its government has faced **instability** for many years. Voters elect a parliament, which then chooses the country's leaders—but power often shifts between rival parties, and new leaders are frequently elected or replaced. Widespread corruption has made it hard for citizens to trust the system, and many question whether elections are always fair. This ongoing instability weakens the government's ability to lead with confidence or carry out lasting reforms.

	Ethnic Groups	Language(s)	Population	Population Growth Rate	Life Expectancy	Literacy
Belarus	Belarusian 84%, Russian 8%, Polish 3%	Russian (official) 71%, Belarusian (official) 26%	9,100,000	0%	75 years	100%
Estonia	Estonian 69%, Russian 24%	Estonian (official) 67%, Russian 29%	935,000	-1%	78 years	100%
Latvia	Latvian 63%, Russian 25%	Latvian (official) 56%, Russian 34%	1,860,000	-1%	76 years	100%
Lithuania	Lithuanian 85%	Lithuanian (official) 85%, Russian 7%	2,900,000	-1%	76 years	100%
Moldova	Moldovan 75%	Moldovan 57%, Romanian 24%	3,100,000	-1%	70 years	100%
Ukraine	Ukrainian 78%, Russian 17%	Ukrainian (official) 68%, Russian 30%	37,900,000	2%	71 years	100%

EASTERN EUROPE

BELARUS | ESTONIA

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MOLDOVA | UKRAINE

Orthodox Christianity has long been the dominant religion across much of Eastern Europe, especially in Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine. Its spread followed early trade routes, rivers, and political centers connected to the Byzantine world and later Slavic kingdoms. Churches and monasteries were often built on hills, near rivers, or at the heart of towns, making them visible landmarks that shaped landscape and local traditions. Even under Soviet rule, when religion was restricted, Orthodoxy remained closely tied to national identity. Today, many people still identify as Orthodox by heritage or culture, even if they do not regularly attend church.

While Orthodoxy became firmly established, Islam did not spread widely across Eastern Europe. Unlike North Africa or West Asia, the region lay outside major Islamic trade routes and early Islamic empires. Most of Ukraine, Belarus, and the Baltic states developed within Christian political and cultural spheres, which limited the growth of Muslim communities. As a result, the religious landscape remains overwhelmingly Christian, with Islam present mainly through small groups and limited modern migration.



War damage to monasteries and churches, such as in Bohorodychne, Ukraine, alters both the physical landscape and the cultural history tied to the land.

	Total Population	Percent Christian			Percent None
		Catholic	Orthodox	Protestant	
Belarus	9,100,000	12%	73%	9%	6%
Estonia	935,000	3%	16%	16%	60%
Latvia	1,860,000	23%	18%	24%	30%
Lithuania	2,900,000	80%	4%	--	15%
Moldova	3,100,000	--	90%	2%	6%
Ukraine	37,900,000	10%	65%	2%	20%

*Depart from evil and do good;
Seek peace and pursue it.*
—Psalm 34:14

Rural infrastructure damage



War affects more than people; it reshapes the land itself. In Eastern Europe, especially in places like Ukraine and Moldova, conflict has altered landscapes once used for farming, travel, and daily life. Fields may be marked by trenches, craters, or unexploded weapons, while forests are burned or cleared for military movement. Roads, bridges, and rail lines—essential geographic links—are often damaged or destroyed, cutting cities and villages off from trade and supplies.

Rivers, plains, and border regions are especially vulnerable. Eastern Europe's wide lowlands and river systems have long served as natural travel routes, but during war they can become barriers or battlegrounds. Bridges may be destroyed to slow military movements, and wetlands or forests are used for cover and defense. Over time, conflict changes how land is used, forcing farms to close, towns to relocate, and some regions to remain unsafe or uninhabited for years. These physical changes shape settlement patterns and infrastructure long after fighting ends.

EVENTS THAT HAVE IMPACTED THE REGION

A.D. 800s–1000s	Christianity Reaches Eastern Europe Missionaries such as Cyril and Methodius bring Christianity to the Slavic peoples. Orthodox and Catholic churches begin to grow across the region.
1386	Lithuania Joins Poland in a Christian Union The Grand Duke of Lithuania becomes a Christian and joins Poland. A powerful Catholic kingdom forms.
1795	Russian Empire Takes Over the Region Belarus, Ukraine, and the Baltic States fall under Russian rule. Catholic, Lutheran, and local Orthodox traditions are restricted as the Russian Orthodox Church is favored.
1917	Russian Revolution Spreads Change Following the revolution, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Ukraine briefly gain independence.
1940–1945	Soviet Control and World War II The Soviet Union takes over the region. Nazi Germany invades during WWII. Churches close, and many are killed or displaced.
1945–1991	Communist Rule Under the USSR (Soviet Union) All six countries in this region come under Soviet control. Faith is suppressed, and cultures are controlled.
1986	Chernobyl Nuclear Disaster (Ukraine/Belarus) A reactor explodes in northern Ukraine. Radiation spreads across Belarus and Ukraine. Thousands are evacuated, and the area remains restricted even today.
1991	Independence from the Soviet Union All six nations break away from the USSR. Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant churches reopen, and native languages return to public life.
2004	Baltic States Join the European Union (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) These countries grow their economies and connect more closely with Western Europe.
2005	Major Flooding in Moldova and Ukraine Heavy rains cause the Dniester and Prut Rivers to overflow. Villages and farmland are flooded.
2010	Baltic Sea Freezes Along Estonia's Coast An extremely cold winter freezes parts of the sea. People walk and skate across the ice to nearby islands—a rare and memorable event.
2014	Russia Annexes Crimea from Ukraine Russia takes control of Crimea, citing its strategic location and large Russian-speaking population. Fighting breaks out in eastern Ukraine, and the region becomes unstable.
2020	Protests in Belarus Against Government Control Citizens call for free elections. The government responds with violence, and protests continue.
2021	Severe Wildfires and Drought in Ukraine and Lithuania Record heat and dry conditions fuel widespread fires, ruin harvests, and threaten water access in Ukraine and Lithuania.
2022	Russia Invades Ukraine Russia attacks Ukraine, restarting large-scale war in Europe. Millions become refugees, and the conflict impacts global food prices, energy markets, and international security.

PRAYER POINTS

THANK God for Christians working in war zones and refugee camps, providing food, shelter, medical care, and a clear witness to Christ.

PRAY for healing in broken communities, especially among children, widows, and families who have lost homes or loved ones.

ASK God to raise up leaders, teachers, doctors, and builders to restore communities where many workers and fathers have fled or been killed.

PRAY that ethnic divisions, fear, and corruption would be replaced by peace, justice, and truth through the power of Christ.

Hill of Crosses, Lithuania



Dear God,

Thank You for those who are serving the hurting in Eastern Europe—for every believer offering food, shelter, and hope in Your name. We pray for families torn apart by war, for children carrying fear, and for hearts that feel lost or forgotten. Please raise up new leaders and helpers in the places that have been emptied by conflict. Bring peace where there is fighting, honesty where there is corruption, and healing where there is pain. Remind every person in this region that they are seen and loved by You.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

EASTERN EUROPE

BELARUS | ESTONIA

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The **Dancing Forest** is a strange and fascinating part of the Curonian Spit—a narrow strip of land that stretches between Russia’s Kaliningrad region and Lithuania along the Baltic Sea. In this forest, pine trees do not grow straight. Instead, their trunks twist into loops, spirals, and even hoops close to the ground. No one knows exactly why the trees grow this way. Some scientists think it may be linked to shifting sand, strong coastal winds, or insect damage when the trees were young. Others suggest that unusual magnetic fields or changes in the soil’s electrical properties could affect how the trees grow and orient themselves as they develop.

The Dancing Forest shows that nature can behave in unexpected ways, reminding us that the land is shaped by natural forces we do not always fully understand.



The **Vidzeme Stony Seashore** (*VID-zeh-meh*) is a rocky stretch of coastline in northeastern Latvia, where the Baltic Sea meets land shaped long ago by glaciers. Instead of soft sand, the beach is covered in large boulders left behind during the Ice Age, when massive sheets of ice scraped across the land. Colorful sandstone cliffs, sea caves, and exposed rock layers line the shore. Many of the rounded boulders have been smoothed by centuries of crashing waves, making the area a popular place for hikers, photographers, and anyone interested in Earth’s past.

This coastline shows how glaciers once moved across northern Europe and how melting ice helped shape today’s Baltic shores. The mix of boulders, cliffs, and exposed rock layers explains why much of the Baltic coast looks very different from sandy beaches elsewhere.



The **Kõpu Lighthouse** (*KOH-poo*) stands tall on Hiiumaa, one of Estonia’s western islands. Built in the early 1500s, it is one of the oldest working lighthouses in the world. What makes it especially impressive is where it was built—on top of the island’s highest hill, about 220 feet above sea level, with the lighthouse adding even more height. Even though it looks far from the shore, its high location means ships can still see the light from many miles away. In fact, its beam can reach more than 30 miles across the Baltic Sea.

Long before GPS, sailors depended on this beacon to guide them past the rocky coasts and shallow waters of the Baltic. The shoreline was known for hidden sandbars and dangerous currents, so a tall, steady lighthouse was vital for safe travel.

By placing the lighthouse on the island’s highest point, builders were able to extend its visibility far across the sea without needing a taller tower. This smart use of geography made Kõpu one of the most effective navigation aids in the Baltic for centuries. The lighthouse shows how elevation, location, and human planning work together, helping sailors travel safely through one of northern Europe’s most challenging coastal regions.



In **Soomaa National Park** (*SOH-mah*) in Estonia, spring brings more than just warmer weather; it brings a fifth season. Each year, melting snow and heavy rains cause rivers to overflow, flooding roads, fields, and even forests. The land is flat and filled with peat bogs, which are already soaked and cannot absorb the extra water. As a result, floodwaters spread out across the landscape. During this time, locals trade cars for canoes, gliding through flooded meadows and tree-lined waterways. Some still use dugout canoes carved from tree trunks, keeping old traditions alive. The fifth season is a clear example of how geography and seasons shape everyday life. In Soomaa, the rising waters are not a disaster; they are simply part of the natural rhythm God built into the land.



The **Panga Cliffs** rise sharply from the sea along the northern coast of Saaremaa (*SAR-eh-mah*), Estonia's largest island. These limestone cliffs stretch for nearly a mile and reach up to 70 feet tall—the highest sea cliffs in western Estonia. From the edge, you can see far across the Baltic Sea, with layers of ancient rock stacked beneath your feet. The limestone is rich in marine fossils. These layers likely formed underwater during the time of the global Flood, when rising waters covered the land and buried sea life in thick sediment. Over time, wind and waves carved the exposed edge into the steep cliffs we see today.

From the top of the Panga Cliffs, the exposed rock layers show how sediment was laid down, lifted above sea level, and slowly shaped by waves.



Belarus is one of the best places in Europe to see **white storks**—tall birds with long legs, red beaks, and wide wingspans. These graceful birds often perch on chimneys, rooftops, and poles, especially in rural areas. Belarus has one of the highest stork populations in Europe, and some nests—used year after year—can weigh over 1,000 pounds.

Storks prefer open meadows, wetlands, and river valleys, all common in Belarus' flat landscape. Each spring, they return from Africa, often flying more than 6,000 miles to the same nesting site. For many in Belarus, storks have become a symbol of good luck and faithful return.

Their presence is a clear example of how geography and wildlife are closely connected. The open land and quiet countryside of Belarus offer just what these remarkable birds need to thrive.



Near the town of Klevan, Ukraine, a simple train track through the woods has become one of the most photographed places in Eastern Europe. Called the **Tunnel of Love**, this three-mile stretch of railway is surrounded by trees that naturally grew into a green arch. The shape was not planned; it formed as a train regularly passed through, trimming the trees and keeping the path clear. This is a striking example of secondary growth, when nature reclaims a human-made space. The steady rhythm of the train helped shape the trees into something beautiful. Though it began as an ordinary industrial track, it became a quiet place of wonder that draws visitors from around the world.

The Tunnel of Love shows how time, rhythm, and unseen work can shape even the simplest places—a small reflection of how God brings beauty and purpose where we least expect it.