

Introduction

Cyperus has a civilisation and history stretching over 9,000 years. Considered to be the birthplace of Aphrodite (the goddess of love), the island's rich heritage can be seen in the Greek temples, Roman remains, Byzantine churches and Crusader castles scattered throughout the countryside.



History

Stretching over 90 centuries, with roots in the Classical Greek period, Cyprus' history is rich and varied, primarily shaped by occupation. The first settlers came to Cyprus during the Stone Age (7000-3900 BC). Over the centuries the island was invaded and ruled by Achaeans, Assyrians, Egyptians, Persians, Phoenicians, Hellenists, Romans and the Crusaders.

In 1571 Ottoman troops invaded the island and Turkish rule began, lasting until 1878. The Ottomans introduced Islam, expelled Catholicism and restored the Greek Orthodox religion. In 1878 under the Cyprus Convention, the Sultan ceded Cyprus to the British for defence and administration but the island remained the property of the Sultan. In 1914 the Ottomans supported Germany during the First World War, giving Britain a reason to annex the island. In 1925, under the Treaty of Lausanne, Turkey renounced all claims to the island and Cyprus was declared a Crown Colony.

In 1955 an armed struggle broke out led by the Greek Cypriot, Colonel George Grivas who demanded independence from colonial rule. The struggle lasted for five years until Britain granted the island independence in 1960.

Archbishop Makarios became the first president of the independent Republic of Cyprus. However, despite having achieved independence, inter-ethnic fighting between Greeks and Turks frequently flared up. By 1963 Turkish-Cypriot ministers withdrew from the Government in protest at

proposed changes to the Constitution and Turkey threatened to invade.

In 1974 a group of Cypriots, supported by the military junta in Greece, launched a coup against Makarios and appointed Nicos Sampson as President. Five days later, on 20 July 1974, Turkey invaded Cyprus. By 1983 the north of the island was declared the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (a status not recognised by the UN).

Today a green line, patrolled by UN troops, divides the island. The Turkish side to the north of the island, which is occupied by Turkish-Cypriots, is monitored by watch towers, barbed wire and UN troops.

Boundary restrictions were relaxed by the Turkish-Cypriots in 2003 and five crossing points have been opened since then.

Both Turkish and Cypriot hopes of joining the European Union hinged on a settlement between the two communities. UN-sponsored negotiations took place during 2002 and a peace plan was tabled. A few months later the EU invited Cyprus to become a member.

Today EU laws and benefits apply only to the Greek Cypriot community (gained on 1 May 2004) but there is hope that the island's situation will be resolved by Turkey's EU accession efforts.

Current challenges

- ▶ Cyprus is ethnically divided between the Greek Cypriots and the Turkish Cypriots. The division is clearly seen in the media with the Turkish-controlled zone in the north operating its own press and broadcasters, separate from the media in the south.
- ▶ Cyprus is a destination country for large numbers of women, who are promised legitimate employment, but trafficked from Eastern and Central Europe, the Philippines and the Dominican Republic for sexual exploitation. Cyprus is on the US watch list of countries that lack effort in combating trafficking.
- ▶ Cyprus suffers from water shortages exacerbated by seasonal disparity in rainfall and no natural

reservoir catchments. This has economic, social and environmental implications, and affects farmers who are desperate for a solution. In addition deforestation over the centuries has damaged the island's drainage system and made access to water difficult.

BMS involvement in Cyprus

BMS World Mission is a founder member of SAT-7, the television satellite station for Christians of North Africa and the Middle East, whose main headquarters is in Cyprus. BMS long-term personnel Steve and Jane Williams are currently working with SAT-7 as administrators. BMS also fully supports Naji Daoud, the SAT-7 Lebanese Business Manager at the Beirut SAT-7 office.

Background information

The land

Situated 40 miles south of Turkey and 60 miles west of Syria, Cyprus is the third largest island in Europe at around 3,572 square miles and 150 miles from west to east, and 60 miles from north to south. It is dominated by mountain masses made of volcanic and igneous rock (the Troodos Mountains and Kyrenia Range), a broad inland plain (the Mesaoria) and narrow coastland.

Geopolitically the island is divided into four main regions: the Republic of Cyprus, which occupies two-thirds of the region, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, which occupies the northern third, and two bases under British sovereignty – Akrotiri and Dhekelia.

The island has rainy winters (with snow in the mountains) and hot, dry summers.

Cyprus has a population of over 780,000 people. Around 84 per cent speak Greek and 13 per cent speak Turkish (both are official languages).

Religion

In 45 AD on his first missionary journey, the Apostle Paul along with Barnabas brought Christianity to Cyprus – the governor of the island was also converted during the trip (Acts 13). Today, the primary religion in Cyprus is Christianity with around 74 per cent of the population claiming to be Christian. The majority of Greek Cypriots (about 67 per cent) belong to the Greek Orthodox Church which traces its foundations directly to Paul and Barnabas.

Islam is the next major religion. Around 23 per cent of the population is Muslim, mostly from the Turkish Cypriot community. Religion is safeguarded in the country's constitution.

Prayer points

- ▶ Pray for the Church in Cyprus, which has a rich heritage of Christianity, to be examples of unity, love and devotion to God.
- ▶ Pray for the division between the Greek and Turkish Cypriots that has marked the island's recent history to be overcome by peace and acceptance of one another.
- ▶ Pray for the work of SAT-7 which is reaching people who would otherwise have little, if any, access to the good news of Christ.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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