

Exiled pastor returns from ministry in Gaza

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AMMAN, Jordan (ABP) — The exiled pastor of Gaza Baptist Church began teaching Aug. 16 at Jordan Evangelical Theological Seminary following a three-week visit to his homeland to preach, teach and distribute food and medicine to the poor.

"While food is available in Gaza, it is very expensive, and few can afford to buy it due to the siege and high unemployment," Hanna Massad said in an e-mail report.

The "siege" referred to Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip enacted after Hamas seized control in June 2007. Israel wants to weaken and end rocket attacks by Hamas. Critics say it punishes innocent people and has caused a humanitarian crisis.

Massad said his [Christian Mission to Gaza](#) spent about \$35,000 to help poor families in Gaza last year alone.

Denied permission to travel through Israel, Massad traveled between 14 and 18 hours each way to enter Gaza through Egypt. He said the opportunity to minister in Gaza was worth it.

Hanna Massad shared his testimony at the New Baptist Covenant Celebration in Atlanta in 2008.

He led a special one-day women's event and preached and taught three Sundays at Gaza Baptist Church. He led home Bible studies, visited families and counseled church leaders throughout the week.

"The focus of my teaching and preaching was how we already have been accepted in Christ," Massad reported. "And I reminded people who have lost their hope about the very real hope we have in Him."

Massad, who [spoke](#) at the New Baptist Covenant Celebration in Atlanta in 2008 and a [regional](#) New Baptist Covenant gathering in Oklahoma in 2009, left Gaza in 2007 after a member of his church was murdered because of his faith. Since then he has traveled between Amman and Gaza to help the Christian community in Gaza.

"As Palestinians, we have experienced and continue to experience rejection and disappointment — probably more than any other ethnic group under the sun — at checkpoints and borders, in our own homes and neighborhoods," he said. "We are not treated as human beings, created in God's image. We are treated according to the identity documents we carry in our pockets."

He said that rejection comes not only from the Israelis. "As Palestinian Christians, we are often rejected by our own people, as Christians are throughout the Middle East," he said. "It is no wonder that so many Christians have emigrated to the West. For example, 60 years ago, we had 25 million Christians in the Middle East. Today, only 12.5 million remain."

Massad urged supporters of Christian Mission to Gaza to pray "for protection of the Christians in Gaza" and for him "to be able to preach the Good News and provide desperately needed relief to our community in Gaza."

-Bob Allen is senior writer for Associated Baptist Press.