

ISRAEL

& Christians Today

INTERNATIONAL

February 2025

Sh'vat-Adar 5785



Understanding Israel and world events from a Biblical perspective

www.c4israel.org | info@c4israel.org



Israelis watch the release of three hostages from Hamas captivity at hostage square in Tel Aviv, 19 January 2025. | Photo: Yonatan Sindel/Flash90

Finally Home Again!

■ Akiva van Koningsveld

News Desk Editor | JNS

Released hostages Emily Damari, Doron Steinbrecher and Romi Gonen were reunited with their families at Sheba Tel Hashomer Medical Center in Ramat Gan on Sunday night, 19 January 2025, after 471 days in Hamas captivity in the Gaza Strip.

The three women were the first of the 33 captives expected to be freed during the first phase of the ceasefire agreement with Hamas that went into effect earlier in the day. The women were handed over to the Israel Defense Forces by representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross inside the Gaza Strip.

A Hamas propaganda clip released after the women left

the terrorist group's control showed them being forced to accept bags of 'mementoes' from their time in captivity, including a Hamas 'certificate of appreciation,' as hundreds of Gaza civilians looked on.

Following an initial medical examination at the reception point near the Gaza border and their subsequent transfer to hospital via helicopter, Tel Hashomer General Hospital Director Dr Yael Frenkel Nir told local media that the women's physical condition was good enough to allow them to focus on reuniting with family members.

The condition of the released hostages "allows us to focus on the important thing, which is reuniting with their families, and to postpone delving into medical issues for a few hours," she stated. She added, "We are

closely accompanying them and their families."

Hundreds of exhilarated Israelis were awaiting the return of the three hostages outside the hospital as the helicopters touched down.

Damari's mother Mandy, a dual Israeli-UK national, shortly after her daughter's return thanked "everyone who never stopped fighting for Emily throughout this horrendous ordeal, and who never stopped saying her name. In Israel, Britain, the United States and around the world.

"While Emily's nightmare in Gaza is over, for too many other families the impossible wait continues. Every last hostage must be released, and humanitarian aid must be provided to the hostages who are still waiting to come home."

Continued on page 3



3

Free, But at What Price?



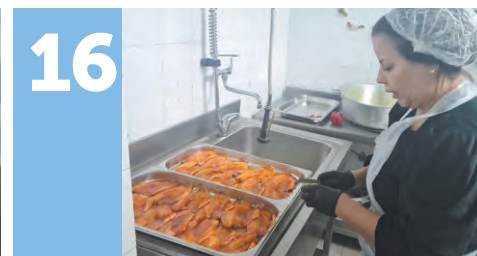
6-7

The Modern State of Syria



11

Understanding Antisemitism



16

Battling Rising Costs to Serve Those in Need



Colophon

Israel & Christians Today is the premier publication of Christians for Israel.

Mission

Our mission is to bring Biblical understanding in the Church and among the nations concerning God's purposes for Israel and to promote comfort of Israel through prayer and action.

Editorial Team

Andrew Tucker
International Editor-in-Chief
atucker@c4israel.org

Cathy Coldicutt
Managing Editor
newspaper@c4israel.org

Marloes van Westing
International Communications Manager
international@c4israel.org

Ian Worby, Bryce Turner, Rita Quartel,
Marie-Louise Weissenböck, Marijke Terlouw

Scripture references: THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

C4I Offices

Christians for Israel—International

Leon Meijer, *Chairman*
Rev Willem JJ Glashouwer, *President*
Rev Cornelis Kant, *Executive Director*
PO Box 1100 | 3860 BC Nijkerk,
The Netherlands | Tel: +31 33 422 0405
info@c4israel.org | www.c4israel.org

The English Edition of *Israel & Christians Today* is published by the following English speaking branches:

Christians for Israel—Australia

Ian Worby, *National Leader*
PO Box 1508, Springwood
Queensland, Australia 4127
Tel: +61 7 3088 6900,
info@c4israel.com.au
www.c4israel.com.au

Christians for Israel—New Zealand

Bryce Turner, *National Executive Director*
PO Box 12 006, Penrose,
Auckland, New Zealand 1642
Tel: +64 9 525 7564
info@c4israel.org.nz
www.c4israel.org.nz

Christians for Israel—Korea

Rev Paul Wonil Jung, *Director*
Suite 3, 37 Railway Parade, Eastwood
NSW, Australia 2122
Tel: +61 410 430 677
email: c4israelkorea@gmail.com
www.c4israelkorea.org

Christians for Israel—USA

David Sudlow, *Chairman*
PO Box 400, Front Royal, VA 22630, USA
usa-info@c4israel.org
www.c4israel.us

DISCLAIMER: Articles printed in *Israel & Christians Today* express the views of the individual authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Editors or that of the Board of Christians for Israel. The printing of articles or advertising in *Israel & Christians Today* does not necessarily imply either endorsement or agreement.

© Christians for Israel International.

Reproduction, or storage in a retrieval system or in any other form, is prohibited without permission. Please contact the Managing Editor should you wish to syndicate or republish any articles or materials appearing in *Israel & Christians Today*.

www.facebook.com/c4israel

Deals with Extreme Islamist Regimes Cannot Bring Peace

■ Andrew Tucker

International Editor | Christians for Israel

In his first days in office, President Trump took a number of measures to support Israel in its fight against Islamist extremism. For example, he signed an executive order calling on the US Secretary of State to designate the Houthis as a terror group, and reversed Biden's Executive Order which sanctioned Jews living in Judea and Samaria accused of "undermining peace, security and stability in the West Bank." Trump also lifted the Biden Administration's restrictions on the supply of heavy bombs to Israel.

However, it remains to be seen how far the new Administration will go in confronting Islamist extremism outside its own borders.

The Trump Administration's relations with Qatar is especially troubling. Qatar has played a central role in the negotiations for the release of the hostages. According to Trump's Special Envoy Steve Witkoff, Qatar had been 'enormously helpful' in creating the agreement, and the communication skills of its prime minister had been 'indispensable.'

The problem is that Qatar is far from neutral. On the contrary, it has a deep interest in ensuring that Hamas is not defeated. Qatar is a major sponsor of terror in the region. The Qataris have since the mid-1990s been sponsoring radicals, sheltering terrorists and inciting hatred of Jews. Qatar has been a base for the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood, which begot many terrorist organisations like Al Qaida and ISIS.

Qatar has been a major sponsor of Hamas. It's allowed Hamas leaders to live in Qatar enjoying their billions of corrupt dollars.

Qatari media celebrate the recent deal as a victory for Hamas. One article even compared the ceasefire deal to the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah signed between the Prophet



Palestinian prisoners who were released in the hostage deal arrive to the West Bank town of Beitunia, 20 January 2025 | Photo: Flash90

Muhammad and the Quraysh tribe, which serves in Islamic tradition as an archetype for a temporary agreement between Muslims and their enemies, meant to be violated once the Muslims grow stronger.

As Melanie Philips has written: "Qatar can never be a solution in the Middle East because Qatar is the problem."

President Trump's philosophy is that wars must end, and all conflicts can—and should—be resolved by making deals. This is a naïve, Western mindset that underestimates the fact that Islamist extremist individuals, organisations and states are not governed by the sort of Western logical rationality that informs the art of deal-making. Their religiously-inspired objective is, in summary, to destroy the infidel West, starting with Israel and the USA.

Trump's Special Envoy Steve Witkoff played a crucial role in pressuring Israel to make a deal with Hamas that involves massive Israeli concessions. It fails to guarantee the release of all hostages and it has opened the door for Hamas to regroup and become even more deeply established in Gaza.

It is reported that Witkoff has been tasked

by Trump with opening negotiations with Iran. This is dangerous. As Melanie Philips has explained: "The Witkoff view of the world doesn't appear to factor in that Islamists aren't motivated by self-interest. The prospect of peace and prosperity for the region means little to people who believe that they are the warriors of God himself in purging the world of Israel, the Jews and the Christians, and conquering it for Islam."

As Christians, of course, we do not promote war. But we do accept that war may be necessary in order to achieve real peace. The tragic reality is that Islamist extremism must be defeated and eradicated from Palestinian society. Only then will there ever be real peace between Israel and the Palestinians?

Nevertheless, we have an even more important task: to intercede before the throne of the Almighty. Let us pray all the more fervently that further war will not be necessary. We should pray that the Lord Himself will intervene miraculously to disperse Israel's enemies, to protect and preserve the Jewish people and that more innocent lives will not be lost.

Prayer Points

Israel

- Pray for a heavenly presence to safeguard Israel's borders, shielding the nation from external threats and hostility.
- Pray for the protection of soldiers serving in Gaza. Tragically, reports of soldiers losing their lives emerge almost daily. Pray for peace and comfort for the grieving families. Also pray for the families and friends of the soldiers who are in Gaza, and are in constant uncertainty about their fate.
- "In His hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind." *Job 12:10*. Thank God for His sovereign care, trusting that He sustains Israel and provides for His people through everything.

Israel and the Nations

- Many Jewish students faced unsafe or even threatening situations at school or the university. Pray that more fellow students will stand up for the Jewish students.

- 'O God, do not remain silent; do not turn a deaf ear, do not stand aloof, O God. See how your enemies grow, how your foes rear their heads. With cunning they conspire against your people; they plot against those you cherish. 'Come,' they say, 'let us destroy them as a nation so that Israel's name is remembered no more.'" *Psalm 83:1-4*. From these verses, pray for protection for Israel and Jews worldwide.

Christians for Israel

- Give thanks for the teams of Christians for Israel worldwide who are constantly working to stand in the gap for Israel and the Jewish people. Pray that many Christians worldwide will come to see that Israel is a great sign of hope!
- Pray for unity among Christians, including when it comes to the topic of Israel. Pray that Christians will support and pray for the people of Israel in unity.

For daily Prayer Points, go to: www.c4israel.org

Free, But at What Price?

■ Cnaan Lidor

Journalist | JNS

When three Israeli hostages returned to Israel on Sunday 19 January after 471 days in captivity in Gaza, a divided country put aside its differences for a moment to rejoice. Thousands of Israelis were celebrating at Tel Aviv's Hostage Square, where weekly gatherings have been held in solidarity with the hostages for more than a year. Yet, despite the joy over the return of several hostages, many Israelis question the wisdom of paying the price desired by Hamas for their release.

This doubt is typical of the moral dilemmas facing Israeli society. Judeo-Christian society strives to preserve human life, but must survive in a region where sacrificing individual lives for Allah is often considered a privilege and honour. At home, at work and in cafés, Israelis breathlessly watched images of the return of Romi Gonen, Doron Steinbrecher and Emily Damari, young women who were among the 251 people Hamas abducted from Israel on 7 October 2023. To date, 94 hostages are still in the hands of Hamas, and 33 of them will return in the coming weeks.

Opponents Deal

The return of the first three hostages appears to put an end to a heated debate that raged in recent days over the price Israel would have to pay to retrieve those 33 hostages: the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, including terrorists; a partial withdrawal from Gaza; and a delay of at least 42 days in Israel's war to dismantle Hamas. Opponents of the deal, who largely stopped their public protests after it was signed, argued that the release of 33 hostages in the first phase of the deal unfairly reduced the chances of releasing the remaining 61. Opponents also argued that it was likely to nullify the military successes achieved so far against Hamas. According to them, the deal guarantees the survival of Hamas, and is an incentive for terrorists to carry out new kidnappings to free more Palestinian prisoners.

End of War?

Many fear the deal marks the end of a war aimed at dismantling Hamas after 6,000 Hamas terrorists invaded Israel, killing approximately 1,200 people and



Visitors at Hostage Square in Tel Aviv right before the release of the first three Israeli hostages on 19 January 2025. | Photo: Miriam Alster/Flash90

plunging the region into war.

"My heart is burning. I cannot accept it if my son died for nothing," wrote Moshe Morano, whose son, first sergeant Itai Morano, was killed while fighting Hamas terrorists on 11 October 2023. Morano opposes the deal because "we will find out in a few days that we were deceived, as the other side regrouped and rearms to kill more soldiers. Grief is a heavy burden to bear. And now I ask myself: what was it all for?"

Paying a Price

"A pact with the devil, no matter the terms, is a disaster for which we will all pay a price in the form of compound interest; everyone knows that," wrote Rabbi Hagai Lundin, a leading author and lecturer in Israel.

He calls it "a classic example of a national lack of respite from pleasure gratification and a preference for short-term emotional relief over moral values." Blaming the government is unfair, he added, because "after Israeli society was hijacked by the perception that the lives of hostages are above everything else, including the future safety of each of us, the decision was made for all of us." Still, "nothing was in vain," Lundin wrote in an opinion piece on *Arutz 7*. "Thanks to the struggle and the enormous sacrifices made, our situation today is immeasurably better than it was a year and a half ago. Despite

the enormous damage the deal will cause, the stranglehold that existed around the state of Israel has been broken."

Government

One coalition party, Otzma Yehudit, quit the coalition government in protest against the deal, but failed to overthrow the government or stop the deal. Another party, Religious Zionism, opposed the deal but remained in the coalition. After the return of the hostages on Sunday 19 January, Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, one of the deal's most vocal opponents, tweeted, "Emily, Doron and Romi, welcome home! Our hearts go out to you, our dear sisters! The entire nation is proud of you, weeps with you, and embraces you endlessly!"

In Our DNA

On Sunday 19 January, Jerusalem Minister Meir Porush asked Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to tighten security in Jerusalem, where some of the released terrorists reside. His concern reflects the realisation that the released terrorists, whose identities are known, will kill or kidnap Israelis (again) in the future. No one understands this better than Yossi Kuperwasser, former head of the Israeli army's military intelligence. It is a "bad deal", he said. But Israel had to go for it, because "releasing so many hostages is simply in our DNA."

unwavering support and the strength they gave us during our darkest moments. We also extend our gratitude to President [Donald] Trump for his significant involvement and support."

Gonen recorded a voice message for residents of her hometown of Kfar Vradim in northern Israel, telling them,

"With God's help, we will meet soon."

"This is Romi, who returned from captivity. Thank you to all of you," she stated. "I don't yet have a clue what you have done. I've seen a tiny, tiny part, but you're the best. I appreciate you more than anything, and I am sending you hugs and kisses."

Continued from page 1

Finally Home Again!

Steinbrecher's family shared a statement expressing "gratitude to everyone who supported and accompanied us along this journey."

The statement went on to extend "a special thank you to the people of Israel for their warm embrace,

Short News

Hypocrisy of the UN



For months, the UN has been arguing that many Gazans are dying from a severe food shortage, but the problem is that the UN itself is blocking food aid. Dozens of trucks carrying food are waiting to be picked up in Gaza, but the UN argues that it is too dangerous to pick them up. Israel has repeatedly offered to provide security for the trucks, but the UN has consistently declined the assistance. | Photo: Flash90

Surprising Result

According to a survey of Israeli Arabs, half believe the war has created a sense of 'shared destiny' with their Jewish neighbours. In addition, 33.9 per cent of respondents believe that their Israeli citizenship is the most important part of their personal identity. It is likely that various events in the Middle East, such as the war with Hezbollah, have contributed to Arab citizens' appreciation of their Israeli citizenship. At the same time, this does not mean that Israeli Arabs have given up their Arab or Palestinian identity.

Peace with Israel

The chairman of the Lebanese Syriac Union Party has called for peace with Israel. He emphasised the need for the country to break free from the cycle of violence and embrace peace. Additionally, he encouraged the country to be neutral in conflicts in the region.

Life-saving Art



Israeli painter Elyasaf may have saved dozens of lives with his art on 7 October 2023. Elyasaf had painted several shelters located along roads in southern Israel before 7 October. These shelters have no address, but they became identifiable thanks to his artwork. On 7 October, those seeking refuge in the shelters were able to describe their locations to relatives and police using the murals, ultimately helping to save lives. | Photo: Flash90

As Iranian Power Recedes, Turkey and Its Sunni Allies Are Filling the Vacuum

Jonathan Spyer

Journalist

Last year was a historic year for the Middle East. It began with Israel locked in the opening stages of a war on several fronts that threatened to spill over into an all-out regional conflagration. With the commencement of open confrontation between Israel and Iran in April, this possibility appeared closer than ever.

Yet by the year's end, the picture had substantially altered. From June onwards, Israel scored a series of strategic successes against the Iran-led regional bloc, leaving it bruised and diminished. The killings of Hamas leaders Ismail Haniyeh and 7 October architect Yahya Sinwar, the decimation of Lebanese Hezbollah's senior and mid-level leadership, and the 26 October retaliation raid that destroyed Iranian air defences exposed Tehran's proxy alliance as lacking any coherent response to Israel's conventional superiority.

The history-making advance by the Syrian rebels on Damascus in late November was made possible only by this prior weakening of Iran and its proxies. The Lebanese Hezbollah that existed before mid-2024 would have advanced rapidly eastwards and almost certainly stopped Hayat Tahrir al Sham somewhere around Hama. But by November that organisation no longer existed.

The result of this sequence of events is that the strategic balance of the region has substantially shifted. So what might 2025 bring for the Middle East?

Similarly, Hamas's refusal to surrender, despite the decimation of its forces in Gaza, is testimony to the continued loyalty that movement can inspire among its most dedicated cadres, and to its continued ability to suppress any sentiments of opposition to its rule.

First, it is important to understand that the Iran-led regional alliance is down but by no means out. Tehran and its allies remain the main threat to Israel, to the West and to hopes for regional stability. Iran's clients still control Lebanon. They have the upper hand in Iraq, where the Shia militias are a powerful force within the government of Prime Minister Shia al-Sudani. The Iran-aligned Houthis still control the Yemeni capital and the greater part of its coastline. As has been acutely apparent over the last few weeks, the Houthis are not susceptible to the usual cost-benefit analyses by which deterrence between states is built. Indifferent to the fate of their own people, 80 per cent of whom are dependent on international aid, the Yemeni Shia Islamists appear determined to continue their attacks on Israel and their terrorising of shipping on the Gulf of Aden/Red Sea route.

Similarly, Hamas's refusal to surrender, despite the decimation of its forces in Gaza, is testimony to the continued loyalty that movement can inspire among its most dedicated cadres, and to its continued ability to suppress any sentiments of opposition to its rule.

Both these ongoing campaigns should be sufficient to cure any excessive optimism regarding Iran's setbacks



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. | Photo: Shutterstock

in 2024. Tehran's conventional inferiority has been laid bare. But its ability to continue to weaponise poverty and the continued unrivalled popularity and vigour of political Islam at the popular level in the Arab world remain intact.

With the inauguration of a new US president Israel is likely to seek support for an invigorated campaign against Iran, with the ultimate objective now being the

bringing down of the Iranian regime. There is in the Israeli political and security establishment a growing conviction that the Iranian regime is currently both more vulnerable than ever before, yet potentially more dangerous.

Its vulnerability comes from the blows inflicted on it in the second half of 2024. The danger is that with its proxy strategy severely set back, Iran may turn toward other elements of power projection. The ballistic missile programme and the nuclear project are the other two components. There appears to be a widespread view in Israeli leadership circles that the new incumbent in the White House will be in agreement regarding the need for a new, forward strategy against the Islamic Republic of Iran. Whether or not that is true is likely to become apparent in the course of 2025.

It is also important to bear in mind that the main effect of diminishing Iranian power in the region over the last year, in addition to a renewed respect for and awareness of Israeli capacities and power, is the advance of Turkey. HTS's victory in Syria was a result of the strategic acumen and Islamist commitment of Turkish President Recep Tayepp Erdogan. Ankara's

domiciling of the Syrian rebels in the northwest of the country made possible the HTS offensive.

In the year ahead, Turkey will seek to consolidate its control of Syria by entrenching HTS and Sunni Islamist control and crushing alternative centres of power in the country. The Turkish/HTS taking of Damascus is likely to lead to a resurgence of Sunni political Islam in the region. This may also lead to conflict with Shia elements, for example in the framework of the continued Shia domination of Lebanon and Iraq. Many former officials of the Assad regime have made their way to Lebanon. It is likely that they may seek to foment unrest among non-Sunni supporters of the former regime against the new rulers.

But any notion that the revival of the fortunes of Sunni Islamism represents a net gain for the West and its allies should be dismissed.

The advance of Turkey and its clients raises an alternative banner for political Islam in the region, one with in many ways greater capacity and sophistication than Iran.

It introduces a third focus of power, in addition to the Iran-led bloc, and the loose alliance of US-aligned states centred on Israel, the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

2025 will see competition between these three blocs, with the stance of the US, and the extent of its involvement, perhaps the key element that will determine the course of events. Buckle up—the ride is far from over.

This article was originally published in the Jewish Chronicle. Republish with permission.

Jonathan Spyer, a journalist, reports for Janes Intelligence Review, writes a column for the Jerusalem Post, and is a contributor to the Wall Street Journal and The Australian. He frequently reports from Syria and Iraq. He has a BA from the London School of Economics, an MA from the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, and a PhD from the London School of Economics. He is the author of two books: The Transforming Fire: The Rise of the Israel-Islamist Conflict (2010) and Days of the Fall: A Reporter's Journey in the Syria and Iraq Wars (2017).

The Jewish Temple Mount: *Holy Grail for the United Nations—Part 1*

Wim Kortenoeven

Former Member of Dutch Parliament
| Middle East Specialist

The Temple Mount, located in the heart of Israel's capital Jerusalem, is coveted as a holy grail by the United Nations, but only actually revered as holy by the Jewish people. Currently still occupied by Muslims, this holiest site of Judaism is a geopolitical explosive that occupies a unique and crucial place in the End Times: a 'bowl of intoxication' for the nations, where past, present and future will converge in fateful ways for them.

Built by King Solomon as part of the construction of the First Temple and doubled in area by Herod nearly a thousand years later, the Temple Mount covers approximately 145 thousand square metres (14.5 acres) and is considered the largest square of antiquity. It is located on Mount Moriah, where, according to Jewish tradition, the cornerstone of the earth, the 'Even Shiah', is located and where the first man Adam was also created. Moreover, it is the place where God sent Abraham, then living in Beersheva, to offer his son Isaac as a burnt offering. In Jewish tradition, therefore, the Temple Mount is described as 'HaMakom': The Place -- the heart of all things in the undermoon.

Tabernacle

Moriah is a summit on the central part of the north-south running Judeo-Samaritan ridge, but at 741 metres it is not the highest. The Mount of Olives and Mount Scopus, located (north) east of it, both tower about 85 metres above it, and the mountain located southwest of Moriah, which today bears the name 'Zion', nearly 25 metres.

That precisely Moriah was chosen is extraordinarily appropriate from a ritual standpoint, since idols were always practiced on the highest mountaintops and thus were inherently unclean for Jewish worship. We also see this principle in Israel's first capital Shilo, where the tabernacle containing the Ark of the Covenant stood for 369 years on an insignificant hill surrounded by high mountains.

Moriah, Salem, Jebus and Zion

The Temple Mount forms part of an intricate play of words regarding designations of the city of Jerusalem and the mountains surrounding it.

Despite its exalted position, urban development never took place on the Temple Mount. This was due to the lack of a natural water source. There was one in the adjacent Kidron Valley. This Gihon spring became the only water supply for the town of Salem ('Peace')



Muslims praying on the Temple Mount, turning their backs to where the Temple once stood. | Photo: Flash90

which was located on a lower but very defensible southern spur of the Moriah. After Salem (also called Jebus after the Jebusites living there) was conquered by King David, it was given the name 'Fortress of Zion' and 'City of David'.

David then bought the threshing floor located on Moriah from the Jebusite Arauna and built an altar to the God of Israel there. On that site, his son Solomon later built the First Temple.

Later, the name Jerusalem already mentioned in the biblical book of *Joshua (10)* came back into use for the entire city. 'Zion' afterwards became a synonym for Jerusalem and again later for the entire Land of Israel. Zionism as a Jewish return ideology obviously refers to this.

Jerusalem and Temple Mount not Really Sacred to Islam

It is dogma that Jerusalem is a holy city for Judaism, Christianity and Islam and that the same is true of the Temple Mount. This is factually correct for the first two religions, but not for Islam.

Jerusalem plays a central role in Judaism, as the eternal and indivisible religious and political capital of the Jewish people, and as the focal point of the Messianic redemption promised by God Himself. In it, the Temple Mount is the only place where the Jewish Third Temple can and will be built. The Western Wall ('Wailing Wall') is not Judaism's holiest site, but the Temple Mount diagonally above it, currently still occupied by Muslims, is.

Consequently, Jerusalem plays a central role in the Jewish liturgy and daily prayer cycle. When praying, Jews always turn toward the Temple Mount, wherever they are.

Despite expulsions and exiles, Jews in the Diaspora throughout the millennia have kept alive the memory of and

desire to return to Jerusalem, to Zion.

Jerusalem is also a holy city for Christians because they carry the Jewish books of the Bible in their tradition and because of the New Testament events that took place in Jerusalem, which have their physical manifestation in numerous bona fide Christian holy sites. However, to the extent that Jerusalem and the Temple Mount are holy to Muslims, it is a holiness derived from Jewish and Christian traditions.

Jerusalem and Islam

Jerusalem does not appear once in the Qur'an, nor did events relevant to Islam take place there. The Islamic relationship with the city was artificially linked to *Qur'anic verse 17:2*, which recounts Islam founder Muhammad's nocturnal air journey with the winged horse Boerak to the 'distant mosque' ('Al-Aksa'). But Muhammad died in the year 632, and at that time there was no mosque in Jerusalem at all.

Jerusalem was conquered by the Muslims six years after Muhammad's death. And it wasn't until 660 that a (wooden) mosque was erected in the Temple Mount on the ruins of a Byzantine church. Not until 715, by order of the Umayyad Caliph Al-Walied, ruling from Damascus, was a permanent structure erected there and named 'Al-Masjied Al-Aksa' (the distant mosque). With this, Jerusalem was incorporated post hoc into the Qur'an and the city was given a prominent but false role in the life of the Islam founder.

But when Muslims pray on the Temple Mount they do so tellingly in the direction of Mecca and with their backsides facing the spot where the Jewish Temples stood.

Part 2 of this article will be published in the April issue of *Israel & Christians Today*.

Short News

Revolutionary FireDome



Israeli startup FireDome is developing an innovative system to combat forest fires, inspired by the Iron Dome. When a forest fire erupts, the system launches projectiles that release environmentally friendly fire-retardant fluids, creating a protective barrier to halt the fire's advance. Additionally, an AI-powered system detects and extinguishes fires sparked by embers. FireDome is set to undergo testing in Israel this May. | Photo: Flash90

Sea Wave Power Plant

Israel's first wave power collector has opened in Jaffa. This innovative plant generates electricity by harnessing the motion of sea waves through large floaters. As the floaters move with the waves, they drive a hydraulic motor and generator located onshore. This groundbreaking technology has the potential to play a key role in Israel's shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources. The wave energy project has also garnered interest from countries including Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and even Iran.

Café Otef-Re'im



In Tel Aviv, a café has been established by and for survivors of 7 October 2023. The café is called Cafe Otef-Re'im. The name Otef refers to the border area with Gaza, and Re'im to the *kibbutz* that was badly hit on 7 October. The café chain is now expanding to other cities. Located in central Israel, Cafe Otef-Re'im serves as meeting place for evacuees from both northern and southern Israel, fostering a deep connection between the two communities. | Photo: Shutterstock

The Modern State of Syria

■ Johannes de Jong

Director | Sallux

Modern Syria is a patchwork. Regional and international powers have been present for centuries, at invitation or as occupying forces, in a country comprising a rich mosaic of cultures, religions and ethnicities. This situation—reflected also in other parts of the Middle East—is largely a result of the developments after WWI following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire.

In 1916, as the Ottoman Empire stood on the verge of collapse, the French and British governments agreed on the partitioning of the Middle East. The French would receive the area that roughly overlaps with current-day Syria and Lebanon. This secret Sykes-Picot agreement (named after the civil servants involved) between the French and British would leave a deep and devastating impact on the region. Especially for the Kurds and Syriac-Assyrians, this would have negative consequences up until today.

The Sykes-Picot agreement ultimately superseded the agreements made in 1916 between the British (through their High Commissioner McMahon in Egypt) and Hussein bin Ali Al-Hashimi, the Sharif and Emir of Mecca. Under the McMahon-Hussein agreement, the Arabs were to revolt against the Ottoman Empire with British support and in return the Arabs would establish their independent Arab Kingdom in the Saudi peninsula and Syria and Iraq.

The British essentially promised Syria to two different parties. On the one hand, Syria was to become a French mandate under the Sykes-Picot agreement, and on the other hand part of an independent Arab kingdom. Consequently, the Arabs and French would find themselves at loggerheads over the area.

In 1919 the Syrian National Congress convened and in March 1920 declared Syria as an independent kingdom. That Kingdom (at least on paper) comprised the areas roughly comprising today's Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Israel. Faisal I bin Al-Hussein (third son of Emir Hussein) was declared King.

While French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau (1917–1920) was inclined to allow self-rule in Syria, the new French government under Alexandre Millerand based its policy on the Sykes-Picot agreement. As a result, the San Remo Conference of the Allied Powers in April 1920 established a system of mandates as defined by the League of Nations for Palestine, Syria and Mesopotamia.

The Mandate for Syria

In July 1920, the French army took over Syria. Self-rule was replaced by direct colonial rule. The French mandate

would create a number of sub-states in Syria that were abolished later on. The one exception was Lebanon which ultimately became an independent state, separate from Syria.

French rule was continuously resisted by the peoples of Syria as became clear in the Great Syrian Revolt (1925–1927), which was supported by all Syrian ethnicities. The French violently cracked down, deploying tactics that would be repeated by the Assad regime in the Syrian civil war after 2011 (including aerial bombardment of civilian areas). However, this revolt led to the realisation in the French government that direct French rule was untenable and that an independent Syria was inevitable. Steps were taken in that direction, but it was only in 1936 that the French and Syrian governments concluded a Treaty in which the French would gradually leave Syria and Syria would become a fully independent member of the League of Nations.

However, this agreement was not immediately implemented, as the Syrian government faced a clash with three regions that demanded greater autonomy. In the coastal western Alawi region, an Alawi movement challenged the central government and so did a Druze movement in the southern Jabal al-Druze region (with As-Suwayda as the regional capital). In both cases, the areas would remain part of Syria.

Moreover, in 1936 an alliance of Kurds and Syriac-Assyrian Christians in cooperation with (a part of the) Arab Shammar tribe drove the call for more regional autonomy for Jazira in North-East Syria, fearing that Damascus would suppress their religious and cultural identity.

Another development that overtook the new government in Damascus was equally a foreshadowing of more recent developments. In 1936 Turkey claimed Hatay (Antioch) and the surrounding Sanjak of Alexandretta. France initially assured that it would not hand it over to Turkey, but ultimately betrayed the Syrian government and in 1938 allowed the Turkish army to enter the Sanjak of Alexandretta. The Turkish army brought also an influx of Turkish citizens who were allowed to vote in an election in the Sanjak which created a regional Parliament that declared independence from Syria. In 1939 this region merged with Turkey. The original Arab and Armenian population fled the area to Syria. This pattern of Turkish occupation and annexation of Syrian territories would be repeated in the Syrian civil war in areas such as Idlib, Afrin, Al-Bab and other areas in northern Syria. In many cases, the Turkish regime would invoke claims stemming from and inspired by Ottoman imperialism.

Both the Hatay crisis and the struggle of autonomist movements (Jazira, Alawi's and Jabal al-Druze) were evidence that Syria as a political reality was not firmly rooted in all parts of the Syrian state or in the region at large. These crises of the late thirties showed that the institutions of the Syrian state were too weak to maintain the unity of the state. This would prove to be fatal for the Syrian democracy after WWII.

Syrian Independence

In 1946 the French forces finally left Syria, leaving it in the hands of the Syrian government. The years between 1946 and 1961 were marked by political upheaval. Between 1946 and 1956 Syria suffered several coups that (in turn) created a powerful position for the Syrian army. The first coup was in 1949 after Syria lost an unprovoked war against Israel in 1948. This pattern of coups was coupled with increased foreign interference (USSR, Egypt). Pan-Arabism resulted in a temporary political union with Egypt between 1958 and 1961. This ended when the Ba'athists took power through a military coup, caused by the failure of Nasser to implement true power-sharing. In 1970 an intra-party coup brought Hafez-al-Assad to power as de-facto dictator in Syria.

The Assad Dictatorship

The state that the Assads presided over never truly accepted totalitarian rule. The fact that an Alawi clan wielded absolute power over all of Syria was unacceptable for many, as became clear in the uprisings and resistance against the Assad regime over the years. The clearest example was the 'Islamist uprising' that culminated in the Hama

revolt and subsequent massacre in 1982, in which the Assad regime forces killed thousands of citizens (numbers vary between 10,000 and 40,000). Ultimately the prospect of a small Alawi elite forever maintaining power over Syria was not realistic. Initially, Bashar al-Assad seemed to understand this when he took power following his father's death in 2000 and opened up some dialogue with opposition leaders, but that window closed soon after. Ultimately Syria could not escape from the Arab uprisings of 2011 against dictatorial regimes in the region, which were the beginning of the notorious Syrian civil war.

The Assad regime would have been defeated without the substantial support from Russia and Iran, which enabled the regime to cling to power in around two-thirds of Syria. This left Russia and Iran practically in de-facto control over areas nominally ruled by Assad. The Sunni Arab population may have been militarily defeated but continuing protests and flare-ups between 2020 and 2021 (especially in Daraa) indicated that only sheer force kept Assad in power.

Thus, by the end of 2024 and before the fall of Assad, there were roughly four types of territorial control in Syria: those areas under the control of the Assad regime, the areas under the control of Turkey, areas occupied by Turkey, and the AANES region in NE Syria defended by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

Johannes de Jong is the Director of Sallux, a recognised European political foundation. Since 2014, he has been working with movements advocating for ethnic and religious minorities in Iran, Iraq and Syria.

The Three Mandates in 1920



After the defeat of the Ottoman Turkish Empire in WWI, the Allied Powers (Britain, France, Italy, USA and Japan) agreed in 1920 to divide the Middle East into Mandates. These Mandates were created by the League of Nations, to enable the peoples and communities of the region to become independent.

Syria in the Bible

Smith's Bible Dictionary records: "The first occupants of Syria appear to have been of Hamitic descent— *Hittites, Jebusites, Amorites*, etc. After a while, the firstcomers, who were still largely nomadic, received a Semitic infusion, who most probably came to them from the southeast."

Syrians trace their biblical heritage back to a man named Aram, who was a descendant of Shem, Noah's son. Also known as *Arameans*, the plight of the Syrian people can be read about throughout both the Old and New Testaments. Syria is one of the oldest biblical lands that still exists today.

In the book of *Genesis*, we first hear mention of the people who would become Syrians:

"The sons of Shem: Elam, Ashur, Arphaxad, Lud and Aram. The sons of Aram: Uz, Hul, Gether and Meshek." (Genesis 10:22-23; see also 1 Chronicles 1:17)

The *Arameans* settled between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, also known as Mesopotamia. (Genesis 24:10, 25:20) This included a land called Paddan Aram (Genesis 28:5)—the homeland of Rebekah, the wife of Issac, Laban, her brother and his daughters Rachel, and Leah, the wives of Jacob.

Other key biblical figures of *Aramean* descent include Boaz, David, Solomon, Hezekiah, Josiah, and Joseph, the adoptive father of Jesus.

In the book of *Kings 1*, we are told that

Syria was at odds with Israel during the reign of King Solomon, about 2900 years ago.

Sometime after the conflict in Judges, King David of Israel led a conquest against Syria and won (*1 Chronicles 18:1-13, Psalm 60, and 2 Samuel 8:3-13*).

During Roman times, Syria included portions of Palestine and Asia Minor.

Syria plays an important role in New Testament times. For example, information about the miracles being performed by Jesus spread into Syria, as noted in the book of Matthew:

"So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick..." (Matthew 4:24, ESV)

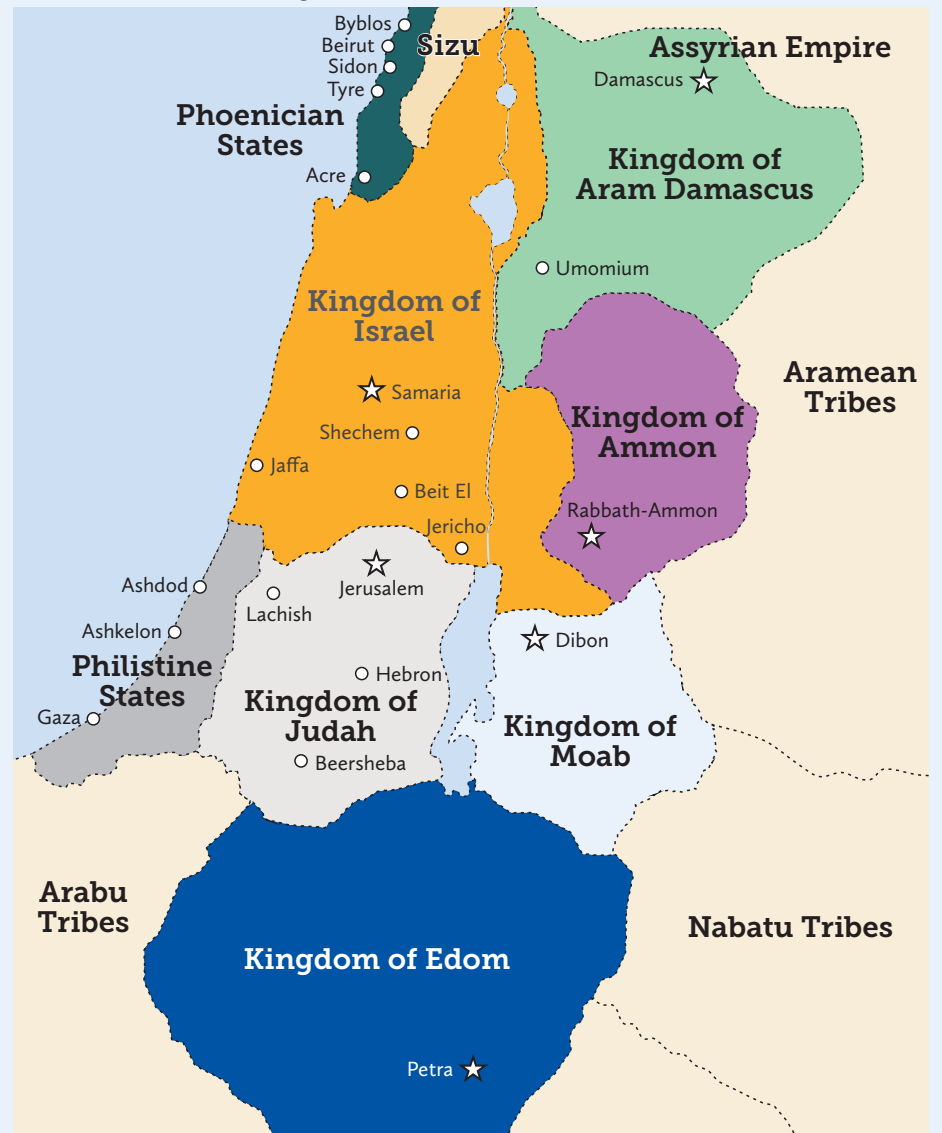
One of the most well-known stories is Saul's journey to Damascus when he met Jesus (*Acts 9*) and became Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles.

The members of the Early Church spent a lot of time in Syria. *Acts 11:19-30* records the spread of Christianity to Antioch, which became the centre of one of the first Christian churches, and the missionary journeys of Barnabas and Paul.

Biblical Cities in Syria

There are several recognisable towns and cities of Syria throughout the Bible. Many were very important to the Early Church in the New Testament, namely, Antioch and Damascus. Smith's Bible Dictionary lists the cities of Syria, in order of importance in the Bible:

Syria in the Time of Jesus



"1, Antioch; 2, Damascus; 3, Apamea; 4, Seleucia; 5, Tadmor or Palmyra; 6, Laodicea; 7, Epiphania (Hamath); 8, Samosata; 9, Hierapolis (Mabug); 10,

Chalybon; 11, Emesa; 12, Heliopolis; 13, Laodicea ad Libanum; 14, Cyrrhus; 15, Chalcis; 16, Poseideum; 17, Heraclea; 18, Gindarus; 19, Zeugma; 20, Thapsacus."

The Current Situation After the Take-over by HTS



The Current Situation in Syria

The most acute situation in Syria is the possible return of ISIS if Turkey's aggression against north-east Syria is not stopped. The return of ISIS would lead to new chaos in Syria and mean a potential resurgence of civil war. Without the SDF, there will be no more than a local force to fight ISIS in Syria.

Damascus was not taken by HTS but by the Syrian Free Army (coming from US base 'Al Tanf' on the border with Jordan) and the Southern Operations Room (amalgamation of resistance forces from Daraa and As Suweida (Druze city)).

Syrian Democratic Forces, Southern Operations Room and Syrian Free Army are arguably multi-ethnic and multi-religious and anti-extremist. SDF has played a major role in defeating ISIS.

Southern Operations Room is partially Druze and has already publicly called for good relations with Israel. Syrian Free Army was part of the fight against ISIS along with US for years.

Because of its size, the HTS has been able to establish an interim administration in Damascus that (unlike AANES) does not currently include ethnic/religious minorities.



Syrian rebels in Damascus, the Capital of Syria, 12 January 2025. | Photo: Asaad Syria/Flash90

New Executive Director for C4I International

The Board of Directors of Christians for Israel International (C4I International) is pleased to announce a change in leadership.

Effective 5 March 2025, Dr Leon Meijer will assume the role of Executive Director, succeeding Rev Cornelis Kant, who will be retiring upon reaching the age of 67.

For the past seven years, Rev Cornelis Kant has faithfully guided the ministry with great dedication, fostering meaningful connections and expanding the Christians for Israel network to new countries. We are deeply grateful for his service and pleased that he will continue to contribute to the organisation as a speaker at various events of Christians for Israel.

Reflecting on his time with the ministry, Cornelis shared: "It has been a great privilege to educate and equip Christians in many nations with a Biblical understanding of Israel's eternal place in God's plans for the world. This personal calling is one I hope to continue pursuing also after my retirement."

The Board of C4I International has invited its current Chairman, Dr Leon Meijer, to take on the role of Executive Director. Leon has served as a Board Member of Christians for Israel Netherlands since 2008 and as Chairman of Christians for Israel International since 2016.

Expressing his vision for the future, Leon Meijer stated: "Christians for Israel International is about understanding God's Word concerning Israel and participating in God's plan for the Jewish nation. This involvement includes praying, giving, and raising our voices in support of the people and the land of Israel. Together with my wife, Janine, I look forward to this new responsibility for the benefit of the apple of God's eye— Israel and the Jewish people worldwide."

We are excited about this new chapter for Christians for Israel International and trust in God's continued guidance as we work to fulfil our mission.



Dr Leon Meijer (left) with Rev Cornelis Kant (right). | Photo: C4I

Israel's War: Genocide as Colonial Erasure? *A lecture by Francesca Albanese*

■ Marie-Louise Weissenböck

Chair | Christians for Israel Austria

On Friday evening 6 December 2024, international lawyer and 'United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Territories of Palestine', Francesca Albanese, gave a public lecture entitled 'Israel's War: Genocide as Colonial Extermination?' at the University of Vienna. Over 1,000 participants—mostly students, had registered. The lecture formed the public part of the lecture series 'Palestine: Occupation, War and Development Policy' by Dr Helmut Krieger of the Institute for International Development.

No Jewish student had succeeded to be allowed into the lecture hall.

The Israeli ambassador to Vienna, David Roet and the Union of Jewish Students (JÖH) had asked the university to cancel this lecture with Albanese, who is known for her provocative antisemitic and anti-Israel statements; but it went ahead anyway. In response, the chairwoman of Christians for Israel in Austria, Marie-Louise Weissenböck, decided to sign up to gain an insight into the event and take part in the 'discussion'.

In the 45-minute lecture, Albanese used confusing analogies and compared countries where genocide had really taken

place, such as Rwanda, with Gaza (with Israel as the alleged perpetrator). She also created the impression that the colonisation of territories and countries by Europe in earlier centuries was comparable to colonialist 'acts' by Israel, which Albanese said occupied 'Palestine' and Gaza. After stating that the Holocaust had been a mistake and the fault of European countries, and yet, quoting from the words of Primo Levi (Auschwitz survivor), "one must know the past in order to prevent something like the *Shoa* from being repeated in the future", she no longer uttered the word Jews and referred to the Jewish inhabitants of Israel and 'Palestine' as 'settlers' throughout her lecture. The word 'Hamas' or 'terrorist organisation' was not used once.

According to Albanese, the war between Israel and 'the Palestinians is not a real war, but a cleansing plan carried out by Israel to wipe out the 'Palestinians'. These statements were also featured in her October 2024 report to the UN General Assembly entitled 'Genocide as Colonial Erasure'. According to her analysis of Israel's policies in the Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem and the West Bank, Albanese states that "although the scale and nature of Israel's ongoing assault on Palestinians varies from area to area, the totality of Israel's destructive acts, directed against the entire Palestinian people, with the aim of conquering the entire Palestinian land, is clearly recognisable." She further argues that "Israel's genocidal behaviour, hidden in false Israeli narratives of a war waged in

'self-defence', must be seen in a broader context, as numerous actions (totality of behaviour) collectively directed against the Palestinians as such (totality of a people) over the entire territory in which they reside (totality of land), in furtherance of Israel's political ambitions for sovereignty over the entire former Mandate of Palestine. Today, the genocide of Palestinians seems to be the means to one goal: the complete removal or extermination of Palestinians from the land that is so fundamental to their identity and illegally and openly coveted by Israel."

On the Mandate: Albanese did not say a word about the fact that the League of Nations recognised the Balfour Declaration (1917) as binding as early as 1920 i.e. the British Mandate for Palestine, and this recognition was based on the 'historical connection of the Jewish people with Palestine'. The term 'reconstituting their national home in this land' was explicitly used in this context (see San Remo 1920). The goal of the Mandate was the creation of an independent state.

In the discussion afterwards, which was not a discussion but allowed questions to be asked, Francesca Albanese avoided going into the above facts after Marie-Louise drew her attention to them. She also refused to abandon her position that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza—even after Marie-Louise read out to her what the definition of genocide is under international law and that South Africa (the plaintiff) has so far been unable to prove to the International Court of

Justice that this is indeed the case.

Albanese further refused to address the 7 October massacre in Israel; the fact that hostages were taken including small children and that over 100 hostages [ed: at that time] are still being held in Gaza by Hamas and others without medical care or International Red Cross visits. She also refused to address the fact that the words 'colonisation' and 'occupation' cannot apply to Gaza (since 2005, Gaza has been 'Judenrein') and the disputed areas in Judea and Samaria (the so-called West Bank). The question of why she had not mentioned important information, such as the division of the West Bank into A-, B-, and C-areas, she also avoided and did not allow for any discussion. Unfortunately, Marie-Louise's voice was the only critical pro-Israel voice and every one of her questions or statements resulted in resounding laughter from the entire room.

At the end of the lecture, the students were asked to leave the campus through a specific courtyard, not the usual one. There Jewish students, who had put up a *Shabbat* table for the hostages were waiting to hear how it had been. No Jewish student had succeeded to be allowed into the lecture hall.

An outpour of thankfulness has been coming to Christians for Israel in Austria ever since. It is heartwarming and encouraging. We will continue to stand in solidarity and friendship at the side of Israel and the Jewish people—in prayer and in action!



Palestinians' Statehood Is Not Guaranteed

■ Andrew Tucker

Director General | The Hague Initiative for International Cooperation (*thinc.*) | www.thinc.info

In the last few months of 2024, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted two Resolutions intended to speed up the establishment of a Palestinian state in the Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem and the so-called West Bank.

These UN resolutions, partly based on the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in July 2024, seek to compel Israel to withdraw its military and civilian presence from the 'Occupied Palestinian Territory' and to establish a Palestinian state swiftly. In its Advisory Opinion, the ICJ argued that Israel's 'presence' (ie. the existence of Israeli civilians and soldiers) in the so-called 'occupied territories' has become illegal. In the subsequent resolutions, the majority of the UNGA members call on all member states to support these demands by applying pressure on Israel through legal, diplomatic and economic measures.

Resolution ES-10/24 (September 2024) demands Israel's unconditional withdrawal from East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza within 12 months, disregarding Israel's legitimate sovereign claims and past agreements like the Oslo Accords and UNSC Resolution 242 (1967). If implemented, it could create a security vacuum in the West Bank and Gaza threatening Israel's very existence.

By its part, Resolution A/79 L/23 (November 2024) calls for a high-level international conference in June 2025, endorsing the paradigm of the two-state solution. The resolution, however, emphasises compliance with the Oslo Accords and UNSC Resolution 242. Unlike ES-10/24, it avoids imposing deadlines and unilateral demands, promoting more inclusive diplomacy.

These resolutions are highly problematic and should be rejected. They ignore (i) the massive problem of extreme Islamist terrorism—not only for Israel but for regional and global stability—and (ii) the risks associated with a hasty Israeli withdrawal from these territories and implementation of the two-state solution.

Of course, neither the ICJ Advisory Opinion nor the UNGA resolutions are legally binding on Israel or any other state. But they do have a significant political impact. And the adoption of such resolutions over time can affect the development of customary international law. (There are basically two main sources of public international law: customary law and treaty—otherwise known as 'conventional' law. Customary law consists of those rules that states develop over time through their conduct reflecting their acceptance of rules as universal and binding. UN General Assembly resolutions do not make law, but if a series of resolutions is adopted by almost all states over time,



Palestinians during a protest. | Photo: Flash90

this can be used as evidence of the development of customary law. It must be emphasised that UNGA resolutions concerning Israel are almost always adopted by a bare majority of states, and thus do not constitute evidence of the existence of customary law.)

Despite the fall of its key ally Assad in Syria, Iran remains a major security threat to Israel, continuing to fund and arm Hamas and its proxies including Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthis in Yemen. In the meantime, *jihadi* groups like ISIS and Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) have gained strength in Syria. Turkey's growing involvement, particularly its support for the Syrian National Army (SNA) and other factions targeting the Kurds, has intensified these challenges. Ankara's actions, often driven by neo-Ottoman ambitions, heighten tensions and could potentially lead to armed conflict between Israel and Turkey in the future.

Palestinian governance remains a critical security risk for Israel. The Palestinian Authority (PA) continues to struggle with corruption and inefficiency, and its weakness and inaction were significant factors leading to Hamas's attack on Israel on 7 October. Trust between the parties is now at an all-time low, complicating—if not entirely undermining—the possibility of re-engaging with the two-state formula.

In this fragile context, a very recent provisional ceasefire between Hamas and Israel in Gaza—brokered by Qatar and endorsed by US President Donald Trump—has temporarily halted hostilities and enabled the release of the first round of Israeli hostages. However, this provides only a brief respite and raises questions about its durability and the long-term prospects for stability.

To address postwar Gaza's security and governance challenges, we propose the establishment of an international peacekeeping force led by Israel and supported by Arab nations, including signatories of the Abraham Accords, Saudi Arabia, and other peace-supporting countries from regions such as Latin America and Africa. This initiative could be followed by a modern trusteeship to oversee governance, reconstruction, and development, ensuring sustained peace.

We also recommend the creation of an arbitration mechanism to provide compensation for refugees (or their descendants) who fled their homes in 1949. This would include Palestinians who left the territories of the State of Israel around that time due to actual or perceived violence, and Jews who were displaced from Arab states and the territories of Mandate Palestine seized by Jordan—aligned with UNSC Resolution 242's call for a 'just settlement of the refugee problem.'

Moreover, in our view, UN member states should:

1. Prioritise neutralising internationally sponsored terrorism and *jihadi* threats over immediate Palestinian statehood demands;
2. Leverage Resolution A/79 L/23 to encourage pragmatic diplomacy and direct negotiations between Israel and the PLO as required by the Oslo Accords and UNSC Resolution 242;
3. Ensure Palestinian governance is reformed as a condition of acknowledging Palestinian rights to establish a state; and
4. Recognise Israel's sovereignty over East Jerusalem, and its sovereignty claims and right to maintain control of the West Bank and Gaza Strip until secure borders are negotiated.

“Thank You is Far Too Small a Word!”

■ Anemone Rüger

Project Coordinator | Holocaust Survivors Ukraine

What Holocaust survivors in Ukraine would like to say to our readers.

When we travel to Ukraine with our team to visit first and second generation Holocaust survivors, we often wonder, How can we ease the indescribable suffering they experienced? The inconceivable atrocities of the Nazi era, embedded in the Stalinist persecution before and after the war, the loneliness of their old age, right up to the horrors of the current war? But just like He once asked Moses, God is asking us the simple question today: “What is in your hand?” Thanks to our loyal supporters, we always have something in our hands—a food parcel, a bouquet of flowers, a hot water bottle. And with these simple things, the Father’s love connects and brings healing to the wounded souls of the survivors. With the following brief reports, we would like to share with our praying and donating supporters some of the many miracles of the heart reflected in the survivors’ words of gratitude.

We have barely entered the room when a stream of thankful words starts flowing from Mery’s lips.

“What an honour that you’ve come to visit me! So much attention for me! How did I deserve this? God grant you good health!”

Mery lives in Kremenchug. She has seen a lot—she has been on this earth since 1928. “First the great famine in Ukraine, then the flood in Kremenchug, then the war and the flight, and then the great earthquake when we lived in Ashkhabad.”

Mery’s grandmother was very religious and observed all of the Jewish holidays. “Grandfather didn’t come with us when we left,” says Mery. “The Nazis tied him to a horse and dragged him through the village. That’s how he died. That’s what people told us when we returned.” Unimaginable childhood memories.

Mery’s Greatest Gift

“After the war, yes, there were Jews in the city who returned. They secretly went into a basement where they met to pray.”

And Mery thanks us once again: “Thank you is far too small a word for everything you do for us! Thank you for all the gifts! But my greatest gift is that you came!”

Food for Body and Soul

In Kremenchug, we work with the synagogue congregation to provide needy senior citizens with medication, hot meals and nourishment for their spirit. For *Rosh Hashanah*, we invited 30 Jewish senior citizens from our programme to the synagogue. We are hosted by the cooks who also prepare the food for the needy. We already know their skills from our previous visits.

We have bought 30 gifts and assume that at least the statistical 10% of those invited won’t come, even more so in this age group. When everyone is seated, there are 33—not 10%, but more! Everyone wants to be there if there is a chance of a reunion. When the music starts, Rabbi Salamon himself takes the microphone and makes everyone sing along with ‘Hava Nagila’.

“I Have Recovered”

Soya is keen to talk to us. “Back then when I was diagnosed with cancer, I had to sell everything I had to afford surgery,” says Soya. “At the time, I thought my life was over. But then you came along. Thanks to you, I’m alive!”

Igor, the rabbi’s assistant, also approaches us. “Do you remember me? I’m the one that Pastor Johannes and his wife Ute prayed for back then. I had just had a serious cancer operation and had little chance of survival. That was many years ago now. I have recovered!”

Words of Hope, Handwritten

Ira is so grateful for the medication, our food parcel and the gifts, but she is most touched by the handwritten card from a supporter in Germany. “Fear not”—the words of Isaiah go straight to her heart.

“I am so moved,” says Ira. “How much we need such words of hope right now, when the siren goes off every day! I’m going to put the card in a visible place so that I can read it every day!”

He is Our Healer, he is Our King

“We used to live in Făleşti,” says Mira in Belz, Moldova. “Dad worked as a shoemaker in a village. We were a big family. Then we had to flee, by horse cart, towards Soroca. When we got to the river, not everyone could come with us. I crossed over to the other side with my mom and brother, and dad stayed behind with grandma and a brother. Then we were attacked from the air. We waited another day for them, but they never came...”

Evi, one of our volunteers, puts a red heart into Mira’s hand. ‘You’re someone special’, it says.

“There was a German here last year,” says Mira. “He played the violin for me. He also asked for forgiveness for what happened here. I know God will heal our hearts. He is our healer; He is our King.”

What Still Keeps Nikolai on This Earth

Nikolai, our dear Nikolai... He is already waiting for us at the entrance to his apartment block in Ungheni on the Romanian border. He has lost so much, and our visit means so much to him. When we met him just over a year ago, he was mourning the loss of his wife and only daughter. They had both died of coronavirus within a single week.



30 Jewish seniors were invited to a joint luncheon at the synagogue. | Photo: C4I Germany

Nikolai has set up his little camping table in the living room for us again— cake, coffee and strawberry secco to celebrate the day. Yes, he was also in Munich, he explains, back then with his ensemble.

Nikolai used to be a professional musician himself—his instrument was the clarinet. Back then, before Chernobyl. After he was ordered by the authorities to work as a first responder without protective equipment, his career as a musician was over. The fact that he is Jewish and that his grandfather was murdered because of that had been kept a secret by his family for the longest time.

There have been no instruments in Nikolai’s apartment for a long time. Almost all of his friends are gone too. “Some of my students and friends have become well-known musicians in Israel. I no longer have the strength. With my ailing heart, I can barely make it to Kishinov. What still keeps me on this earth is that I have friends like you,” says Nikolai, the voice of this tall, strong man breaking.

Evi puts a red heart she has brought with her in his hand. It’s a hand warmer that says: ‘Be blessed’—so that Nikolai has something to remind him that he is precious and loved.

It All Started With Uman

Despite the bad road, we choose the southern route for our journey back to Vinnitsa. Uman is on the way—one of the first Jewish communities we ever visited and supported.

When we enter the familiar old Soviet apartment, the ladies are carrying plate after plate out of the kitchen—*blinchiki* (stuffed pancakes), gingerbread cake, fruit and cheese plates, and—not to be forgotten—something to toast with. *L’chaim!* And *Shabbat Shalom*—Lyuba just lit the candles.

Galina’s daughter shows a photo of her mother to me. “Do you remember the hand-knitted blanket you brought mom? She’s had it on her knees all winter!”

Someone Knows Our Story

After having delivered the greetings from the sponsors and supporters at home, Dmitri takes the floor. “The fact that someone in Germany knows our personal story... and has our photo with them... and prays for us... this is beyond my comprehension!” Dmitri was born in the Uman ghetto in 1942; his father and mother were left alive by the Nazis as they were considered ‘useful’ as shoemakers.

I Really Want to go There

Sofia also survived the camp with her mother, who had to carry out forced labour under the harshest conditions. “I can hardly walk now; I didn’t leave the house all summer,” Sofia explains. “But when I heard you were coming, I said to my daughter: ‘I really want to go, no matter what! Somehow I’ll drag myself there with my walking cane! You’ve added precious days to our lives today!’”

You Bring us Light and Warmth

“Whenever we hear your name, we feel warm and light in our hearts,” adds Olga. The Olga who survived the executions in a nearby *shtetl* and was pulled wounded from underneath the dead bodies by two young boys.

“You bring us so much light and warmth in these difficult times! Thank you is far too small a word to express our hearts to you!”

You are welcome to support our work with Holocaust survivors and needy Jewish post-war children with a donation at <https://www.c4israel.org/support-israel/survivors-of-the-holocaust/>

Terrorism So Close to Home

■ Sondra Oster Baras

International President of CFOIC Heartland

On a beautiful Monday morning in January, terrorists stopped their vehicle in the middle of a main road, got out of the car and started shooting in every direction. There was a bus travelling in one direction and cars going in both directions. Many were injured. Three were murdered: Rachel Cohen, Aliza Reis and Elad Vinkelstein. The road links my community, Karnei Shomron, with the next community to the east, Kedumim. The two communities are well connected to one another. The high school students from both communities study in the same school, and people from one community work in the other. Karnei Shomron is the larger community with more services so many from Kedumim come regularly to Karnei Shomron to shop, go out for dinner, or go to the pool. And we have friends across both communities.

Rachel Cohen and Aliza Reis, both women in their seventies, were both guidance counsellors from Kedumim. They were also best friends. Rachel had already retired but Aliza was finishing her last year of work. Aliza was the guidance counsellor at one of the elementary schools in Karnei Shomron and she was loved by parents, teachers and students alike, always there when needed. Rachel had once lived in Elon Moreh. But after her close friend and neighbour Rachel Gavish was murdered in her home together with her husband, father and son, the Gavish children moved to Kedumim to be with relatives. Rachel Cohen moved her family to Kedumim to be near the Gavish children and be a part of their lives. So terrorism and its tragic consequences were no stranger to Rachel.

When the news hit of a terrorist attack on the road near Kedumim, at first only the murder of the two women was announced. I heard the news and I was deeply worried. They mentioned the women as being in their 60s or 70s and that meant that any of my friends could have been the victims. We held our breath and worried for hours until the names of the victims were released.

My sister was a good friend of Aliza Reis. She was the head of school of psychology in Karnei Shomron until her recent retirement and worked closely with Aliza for decades. As soon as she heard about the attack, she phoned Aliza, knowing that she was still making her way to work in Karnei Shomron each morning. The phone rang and rang with no answer, my sister was worried.

Soon, we heard the news that there was a third victim—a young man in his thirties. I have five children in their thirties and early forties and while I knew that my children were safe, I kept wondering if this was a friend of any of theirs.

Then they announced the names and we discovered that the young man was Elad Vinkelstein who had grown up in Karnei Shomron. He had been a close childhood friend of my nephew. His brother had recently moved back to Karnei Shomron and had become friendly with my son. And his son was good friends with my grandson. That son, Naveh, was in the car when his father was shot in front of his eyes. He phoned his mother to tell her. Naveh is ten years old.

I moved to Karnei Shomron in 1987 and shortly after that, terrorists attacked a group of teenagers hiking in Samaria, murdering a 15-year-old girl. That attack signaled a change. Suddenly, we had to think twice before driving around the countryside, stopping to shop in local Arab markets, and hiking in the beautiful

hills that surround us. Even as we became more cautious, the violence escalated. At the time, all of the main roads in Judea and Samaria drove through Arab towns and villages. And nearly every day, Arab terrorists, even children, would throw rocks or Molotov cocktails at our cars. People were injured. People were killed. It was a time when each and every resident of Judea and Samaria had to consciously commit to living here, knowing that we could be risking our lives daily. But we persevered. We were not going to let the terrorists drive us off our land.

Ever since those first years of terror, terrorism has had its ups and downs. Over the years, bypass roads were built to enable us to avoid entering Arab towns and villages. Actually, one of the last villages to include a main road through its centre was the village where the recent terrorist attack took place. Just days prior to the attack, the government had announced plans to complete the final stages of the road that would bypass that village.

Since 7 October 2023, attention has focused on the main battle fronts, initially in Gaza and more recently in Lebanon and Syria as well. But no one was talking about Judea and Samaria. For months, I have called Judea and Samaria the third front that no one is talking about. The IDF has been well aware of this front, of course, and has fought bravely and effectively in a far more aggressive manner than before. There have been air strikes and street battles against terrorist groups in Shechem, Jenin and TulKarem, the three cities in Samaria with a strong Hamas and Islamic Jihad presence. Israeli intelligence has been working overtime and has successfully prevented over 1,000 terrorist attacks in 2024 alone. As a result of their diligence, there was a 40% decrease in actual terrorist attacks over the past year.

But the terrorists are still among us, funded and armed by Iran, and others. The IDF has tripled its presence along the Jordan Valley border with Jordan, to try and stop the ongoing smuggling of arms and ammunition coming through that border from Iran via Jordan to Judea and Samaria. It is an ongoing battle and one that we dare not stop.

With the spectre of the 7 October massacre always before us, we have placed added emphasis on civilian protection for communities in the event of an attack. Everyone—civilians, police and military—is on alert 24/7.

So how do we live? It is amazing what you can get used to. Ever since 1988, terrorist attacks have become a part of our lives. It isn't right. It isn't fair. But it's a fact. Over the years, we have lost friends and neighbours to terrorist attacks. One of my neighbours is in a wheelchair, paralysed from the waist down from an attack over 20 years ago. Today, he volunteers his time to visit wounded soldiers and victims of terrorist attacks, to give them hope and courage. Life goes on.

When one of our loved ones is injured or killed, we are heartbroken. We mourn them. We weep and then we find



Our children are our life and the guarantee of our future. | Photo: CFOIC

a way to move on. When someone in the community suffers such a loss, everyone rallies to help—some bereaved families are receiving home-baked goodies from neighbours even a year after the tragedy. It is our way of saying we are with you. It is also our way of remembering that it could have happened to any one of us.

One day, they will give up. They will realise that their hatred has consumed any chance for them to have a normal life. But we will never give up. And we will never lose our hold on life. They may continue to murder us but we will not let them kill our desire for life and our commitment to all that is good in this world. We will continue to have children and grandchildren—the very essence of life. And we will pray to God for protection and strength.

Sondra Oster Baras is the Founder and International President of CFOIC Heartland, representing the Jewish communities in Judea and Samaria to Christians all over the world. To support the urgent needs of the people of Judea and Samaria, during this terrible war, please use the form on the back page and select CFOIC (Christian Friends of Israeli Communities).

YouVersion

Read

Pray

Share

Discover our reading plans

SCAN ME

Jews in the North and Central Asia—Part 6

■ Joanna Moss

Following on from our series on the Jews of Middle Eastern lands we head north to the Caspian Sea, the Caucuses and the Stans. The Caspian Sea is an inland sea lying east of the Black Sea. The Caucasus region lies between the seas and the Stans refers to the five countries to the north; which were formally Soviet Central Asian republics in the Soviet Union and became independent countries in the early 1990s in the aftermath of the Soviet collapse. Why these nations are important to our study of Jewish history and culture is the role of Empires, the Silk Routes and the dispersion of Soviet Jewry called FSU Jews or Jews from the former Soviet Union.

Today most of these nations are Muslim-dominated except Georgia and Armenia and the Jewish population remaining is tiny, almost insignificant. Uzbekistan has 10,000 and 3,500 remain in Kazakhstan. But that was not always so. Sometimes the numbers belie an important role that the Jews played. One community stands out and that is the *Bukharin* community which has primarily migrated to both USA and Israel and maintained their identity and culture through intermarriage. Today 'Bukharin Jews' refers to Jews with Central Asian Jewish culture.

Map

The five Stans are vast Kazakhstan (19 million), Kyrgyzstan (7 million), Tajikistan (10 million), Turkistan (6 million) and Uzbekistan (35 million) with their estimated populations shown in parenthesis. Interestingly, Persian is spoken in Tajikistan. Afghanistan is sometimes added.

Some Bukharin Jews fled Stalin's persecution in the 1930s and went to independent Afghanistan only to die of starvation.

Made up of high passes, steppes and mountains with little arable land and low rainfall; these harsh conditions make for tough living. Even to this day, the population density remains some of the lowest in the world.

Bukharin Jews

Their presence in the region dates back to the 5th century with 1,500 years of existence marking a significant period of continuous occupation, part of the splintering of the Judeo-Persian world (*Sunni vs Sh'ite*). Famed for their regional music, performance and food, these remain key features of their culture today. *Bukharin* food shaped modern Israeli cuisine integrating meat, rice, fruit and vegetables. Linguistically they speak *Bukhori*; which is Judeo-Persian in origin integrated with Hebrew words.

Primarily urban dwellers, these Jews were centred on the cities of Samarkand, Bukhara, Tashkent and Kolang in Uzbekistan, Dushanbe in Tajikistan and Bishkek in Kyrgyzstan. These names conjure up exotic images and may be familiar to people who have read about or watched series on the Silk Route. Previously looking at the flight arrivals and departures board at Ben Gurion Airport, you would find flights to these cities and nations.

The Silk Road linked Xi'an in China with the Levant which is the land bridge between Europe, Asia and Africa of which Israel forms a part. It had several tributaries. China lies east of the Stans and so trade routes had to pass through them. In earlier articles, we saw that Jewish merchants left Aleppo and other inland centres and moved to coastal cities as the trade shifted from overland routes to sea routes. In the case of the inland parts of the Silk Routes, this move was not an option and trade continued to flow; although reduced and more for local trade. Thus the Jews remained.

Bukharin Jews were primarily Silk Route traders and merchants trading in people, goods and ideas. Often described as transmitters, their culture reflects this important function. They were also involved in colourful dyeing and weaving, so important in this region.

The first synagogue in Bukhara was built in 1620. Conditions waxed and waned as empires rose and fell. In the 18th and 19th centuries, the Jews were persecuted and many were forced to convert to Islam. As a consequence, many moved to Palestine where the community has existed for

over 150 years, much longer than the state itself and the first *Aliyah* wave.

Russian and Soviet Empires

During the Russian Empire, European Jews were forced to live in the Pale of Settlement a strip of land 242 kilometres wide extending from the Baltics to the Black Sea and only engage in particular activities. Primarily they lived in Jewish villages called *shtetls* outside the main cities. For Jews to move outside the Pale, they required a permit. By contrast, isolated *Bukharin* Jews had much greater autonomy and wealth. Once the Bolshevik Revolution happened, Russians fled to the extremes of the empire to escape persecution. The same happened under Soviet oppression. Some were simply sent to the outposts. Kazakhstan has seven million Russians, 500,000



The Stans lie sandwiched between major empires: China, Russia and Iran. | Photo: Shutterstock

Ukrainians and 170,000 Germans. This is how *Ashkenazi* Jews ended up in this part of the world. Like other areas, they maintained their separate Jewish identity and culture, mostly secular.

Jewish Exodus

As political conditions worsened, Jews were keen to leave. But it was not always easy. Some *Bukharin* Jews fled Stalin's persecution in the 1930s and went to independent Afghanistan only to die of starvation. Despite Soviet persecution and restrictions, the Jews began leaving this part of the world in the 1950s, particularly in the Stans from the 1970s and 1980s. Interestingly, the remaining Jews of Kabul, Afghanistan left shortly after the 1979 Soviet invasion. Civil war in the Stans post-1991 was the final signal to leave.

Georgian Jewry

Georgia lies on the eastern side of the Black Sea and forms part of the Caucuses bridging West Asia with Eastern Europe. Yet it is part of the Silk Route. The capital city Tbilisi lies well inland and today has a population of about 1.5 million. At the beginning of the 19th century, it became part of the Russian Empire and Soviet forces occupied Georgia in 1921. Unlike many of its neighbours, Georgia is primarily Christian with 84% following Orthodox Christianity. Antisemitism came with the Russians, but thankfully the Christians didn't persecute the Jews. Traditional Georgian Jews are not *Ashkenazi*, but rather part of the Jews who were dispersed following the Babylonian captivity. Despite being cut off for many centuries, they retained their Jewish identity. Their language is Judeo-Georgian with Hebrew words. In the 1970's there were 60,000 Jews. Today a mere 1,500 remain, mostly in Tbilisi. The Soviets also sent or exiled many

Russian Jews to Georgia. These Jews were primarily secular due to being forbidden from learning about and practising their faith and culture. Some had very little understanding at all save from their designation as Jews. This created two separate groups, but they were united under Zionism giving the impetus to leave.

The bulk of Georgian Jewry went to Israel where 65,000 live today mostly in Ashdod with about 10,000 in the USA. When they arrived in Israel they refused to be sprinkled around the country and caused such uproar politically that Golda Meir singled them out as wanting to form their own cultural ghetto, not wanting to be the integrated 'New Jew' of Israel. They won their case claiming that they had endured much under the Soviets including religious persecution and thus wanted to preserve their ancient religious culture in Israel.

Mountain Jews

These are a separate community of Jews speaking a *Judeo-Tat* language with ancient Hebrew elements. Descended from Persian Jewry, they are mainly found in Azerbaijan. One key characteristic is their integration of Muslim beliefs and foods. Interestingly, there are no Cohens or Levites among them.

Nazi Invasion

The Nazis reached the bottom of the Caucasus Mountains and began their killing spree first in 1942 killing hundreds. The *Einzagruppen* began with the *Ashkenazi* Jews as they were obviously Jewish and executed a quarter of the Mountain Jews as well. However, the Mountains Jews didn't look Jewish and practised polygamy (part of the Muslim cultural influences) and were able to persuade the Nazis that they were a separate ethnic group, thus preserving many souls.

Syria, Israel and the Middle East

■ Rev Willem Glashouwer

President | Christians for Israel International

We are living in exciting days because we see biblical prophecies being fulfilled. In my opinion, biblical prophecies are like a stone thrown into a pond, creating a rippling effect. The waves come and go until they finally hit the shores of eternity. While reading prophecies and looking at the daily news, it is important to recognise a prophetic pattern, that will one day be completely fulfilled.

Destruction of Damascus

Recently, the Syrian regime of Assad was overthrown and one immediately wonders: Is there a biblical prophecy referring to this? *Isaiah 17:1* contains a prophecy about Damascus: "Behold, Damascus will cease from being a city, and it will be a ruinous heap." In the history of the Syrian capital, this has never happened. The city has been conquered, but it has never been completely destroyed. Yet one day it will be, as *Isaiah* prophesies. Observing the events in Syria, one wonders whether they will ultimately lead to the climax of Damascus's total destruction. I am not a fortune teller, so I cannot say if the destruction of Damascus will happen now. However, what I want to convey is that, in our time, these prophetic pieces of the puzzle are increasingly coming together to form a final picture with ultimate fulfilment.

Healing of Egypt

Isaiah 19:16,17 contains another unfulfilled prophecy. This prophecy is about Egypt: It tells us that the Lord will use the land of Judah to bring fear upon Egypt. We have already witnessed some ripple effects of this prophecy and its early fulfilment, when, in 1948, after Egypt launched an attack on the newly formed state of Israel, the Israelis pursued the Egyptians through the Sinai desert. The Egyptians were terrified. However, prophecy is not solely about terrible events that will occur; it also contains many promises. *Isaiah 19:22* says that the Lord will heal Egypt and they will return to Him. This is what ultimately will happen to Egypt: God will lead them to the acknowledgement and worship of the one and only true God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In those days, there will also be a highway



Suburbs of Damascus that were completely wiped out as a result of the intense bombing during the Syrian war, 12 January 2025. | Photo: Flash90

from Egypt to Assyria (v. 23). The Assyrians will travel to Egypt and the Egyptians to Assyria, crossing through Israel. Together, they will worship the same God.

A Defeated Turkey

In addition to Syria and Egypt, the Bible also prophesies about Turkey. For example, in *Ezekiel 38*, God reveals to Ezekiel that many nations, including Iran (Persia), will prepare for a battle against Israel under the leadership of Gog. I believe that Gog refers to Turkey. Turkey aspires to re-establish Jerusalem as the capital of a new Muslim empire under its leadership. However, these nations will be defeated. *Ezekiel 38 and 39* contain great promises that Israel will not be wiped off the face of the earth. The Lord Himself will join the battle and fight for Israel.

Glorious Future

Even though these unfulfilled prophecies remind us of dark times ahead, we firmly believe that a glorious future awaits us in the end. This glorious future is only possible due to what *Isaiah* prophesies in *chapter 9:6-7*. In these well-known verses, the coming of the Messiah, the Prince of Peace is foretold. This Prince of Peace, from the line of King David, will rule, establish and uphold His kingdom with justice and righteousness.

On that day, when He returns, he will take away the blindness and deafness of the nations.

Blindness Destroyed


Isaiah 25:6-8 contains a wonderful passage that speaks directly about this issue. Sometimes one wonders: Why do the nations not see how special the land of Israel is? What a special people the Jewish people are! Why do the nations fail to understand what is happening? The United Nations passes one anti-Israel resolution after another, and whatever happens in the Middle East Israel always seems to bear the blame. However, one day, as *Isaiah 25:7* declares: "He will destroy on this mountain, the surface of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations." There is a veil covering the eyes of all nations; they simply cannot see. A blindness has overtaken them. Yet one day He, the Prince of Peace, will destroy the veil that enfolds all people. Today, Israel is ridiculed and blamed for everything, but He will also take away the disgrace of His people Israel.

In the end, glory, peace and righteousness will flow from Jerusalem to cover the whole world. There will be no end to His kingdom. Hallelujah!


Facts Speak

Since the start of the war and over the last few months, a series of blatant falsehoods have spread regarding the supposed banning of essential humanitarian items into Gaza. It's time to set the records straight.


Myths vs. Facts: Humanitarian Aid to Gaza

MYTH The Israeli regime has deliberately blocked the entry of food aid into #Gaza, which is a war crime: weaponising starvation = The Hague 


FACT Over 900,000 tons of food have entered Gaza since the start of the war. It's getting tiring to repeat this over and over but we will say it again. **There is no limit on the amount of food and aid that can enter Gaza.**

MYTH Israeli Forces have prohibited the entry of tents into Gaza. As a result, people are living in makeshift shelters made of plastic and blankets, which have all been flooded due to heavy rain. 

FACT Over 90,000 tons of shelter equipment, including over 280,000 tents, have entered Gaza. We have also been working proactively for months to coordinate entrance of more tents and other essential shelter equipment in preparation for winter.

MYTH Israel bans the importation into Gaza of anaesthetics. Hence, the scores of children who are amputated daily, following Israel's bombings, are put to the knife without anaesthesia. 

FACT There is no ban on the entrance of any kind of medication. Including anaesthesia, insulin or any medicine falsely claimed to be denied entry.

MYTH They banned baby formula from entering Gaza. Baby formula! 

FACT Again, there is no limit, on all kinds of foods and amounts. Over 500 tons of baby formula and baby food entered Gaza over the last few weeks alone.

Short News

Greek-Israeli Deal



Greece is expected to finalise an agreement with Israel to purchase 36 missile defence systems valued at €600-700 million. These systems are primarily intended to bolster Greece's defences along its northeastern border with Turkey, a region marked by longstanding tensions between the two nations. Additionally, Greece and Israel have been negotiating a separate deal involving the sale of a version of the Iron Dome system, worth approximately €2 billion. | Photo: Flash90

Unusual Activity

Scientists at Tel Aviv University recently found out that the unusual convoy of heavy vehicles Hamas drove towards the border with Israel on 7 October was detected by three seismic stations in southern Israel. This is the first time in history where ground movements caused by terrorist activity were identified through seismic noise analysis. This discovery may help provide early warnings of terrorist actions in the future.

Close Ties

A report by UN Watch highlights the close connection between Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), and UNRWA. In recent years, Philippe Lazzarini, the director of UNRWA, has conducted multiple meetings with leaders from Hamas and PIJ. For instance, in 2019, Lazzarini met with a Lebanese Hamas leader to recruit Hamas members for vacant teaching positions within UNRWA. This arrangement allowed Hamas and PIJ to gain increased access to UNRWA facilities, including schools.

Significant Increase

Antisemitic incidents at British universities surged to record levels over the past year, with 272 cases reported—five times the number recorded the previous year. These incidents encompassed both online and offline verbal abuse, desecration of Jewish property, physical attacks, and threats. For instance, a rabbi affiliated with the University of Leeds faced death threats after returning from Israel as a reservist.

“I Have Left in Israel 7,000”



White weeping broom in the Negev Desert. | Photo: Shutterstock

■ Johannes Gerloff
Theologian, Journalist, Lecturer & Author

This is part of a series of articles based on the book *Rejoice, You Nations, with His People*, by Johannes Gerloff

In *Romans II*, Paul uses the experience of Elijah to explain how God has not abandoned Israel.

Time and again, the chosen people were shown the truth of what they themselves had confessed on Mount Carmel: “*The Lord, He is the one, true and only living God*” (1 Kings 18:39). Still, Israel turned against her God, killed the prophets He had sent and destroyed the places of worship He had provided.

The pagan queen Jezebel seduced her husband Ahab and the people of Israel into the cult of Ba'al (1 Kings 16:31-33). Fearing her revenge, Elijah ran for his life. After days on the run toward the south, he finally found himself under a broom tree in the Negev desert, where he “*wished to die and said, 'It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers*” (1 Kings 19:4). Only days before this same prophet had killed several hundred pagan prophets by his own hand at the Kishon River in northern Israel.

“*Now he was at the end of his strength*” (1 Kings 18:19,22,40).

Elijah no longer wanted to live—but God wasn't finished with him yet. An angel of the Lord strengthened the burned-out prophet so that he “*went in the power of this food forty days and forty nights until the mountain of the [one, true] God, the Horev*” (1 Kings 19:8). There the Lord asked Elijah: “*Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord!*” (Verse 11). Then, finally, in “*a voice of a low whisper*”, through a noise that could hardly be heard, with a voice that seemed fragile, the prophet received the

answer from God. The prophet covered his face with his coat, stepped to the entrance of the cave and heard:

“*I have left for myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to Ba'al.*” (Romans 11:4)

God did not abandon Elijah to his depression. There were others who had not succumbed to the licentiousness of the Zeitgeist or to the claim to power of religious or ideological traditions. During Elijah's time, there were ‘7,000 men.’

‘Seven’ is the number of completion, perfection, blessing, holiness, sanctification and cleansing—but also of obligation and mercy. By referring to ‘7,000,’ God described the quality of those he had left: They would be blessed by His mercy, pure and holy. But he also indicated that they were ‘many,’ a large mass, a ‘full number’ which, however, remained hidden and could not be counted exactly. The crucial revelation is: “*I have left in Israel 7,000. All the knees that have not bowed to Ba'al, every mouth that has not kissed him*” (1 Kings 19:18).

“*So too at the present time...*” (Romans 11:5a)

Prophetically, the Apostle explains Elijah's situation and God's promise to him as a fundamental pattern for his own time. A few days before his death, Jesus had lamented: “*Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it*” (Matthew 23:37). Earlier, Messiah had warned his disciples: “*Look, I send you as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore, be wise as serpents and without false as doves. Beware, however, of men. They will deliver you to their courts. They will scourge you in their synagogues. And you will be brought before authorities and heads of state for my sake*” (Matthew 10:16-18).

Paul himself reported: “*Five times I have*

received forty stripes save one from the Jews” (2 Corinthians 11:24).

Elijah was not alone in his experience. Throughout the centuries, Jewish people who have taken the word and the dealings of their God seriously and wished to be obedient to Him shared the feeling that: “*I am the only one who believes and thinks in this way. I am the only one remaining and my people want to take my life!*” Therefore, God's promise and encouragement are not just addressed to the Old Testament prophet, but rather to all Israelites throughout the centuries—from Elijah to the present day.

“*There is a remnant, chosen by [the principle of] grace. If, however, by grace, then it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.*” (Romans 11:5b-6)

By grace, not on the basis of their personal achievements, ‘7000’ did not bow their knees before ‘Ba'al.’ “*It is the work of the one and only God, that you believe in him whom He has sent,*” Jesus explained to the Jewish people (John 6:29), and: “*No one can come to me, except the Father who has sent me draws him*” (John 6:44). “*...Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*”, Paul admonished the Church in Philippi. Yet he reminds them in the same breath: “*God is [the one] who causes in you both the wanting as well as the accomplishment of His good pleasure.*” (Philippians 2:12b-13). Neither the acceptance of an orthodox theology nor the fulfilment of certain commandments is decisive, but only God's mercy.

This is the crucial response to the prophet's depression. As the theologian Karl Barth expressed it: “*Elijah is not alone, and the whole of Israel is not cast away: because God enters the scene, exactly at this point, where all human hope comes to an end.*”

Understanding Antisemitism

■ Kameel Majdali

Director | Teach All Nations Inc.

After the indescribable horrors of the Holocaust, a large group of survivors found their ideal place of refuge: Australia. With the second-largest community of Holocaust survivors outside of Israel, Australian Jews lived their lives in relative peace and harmony. Yet even in Australia, Jewish schools, synagogues, community centres and the like routinely installed high fences, metal detectors, CCTV cameras and armed guards. All this was a precaution... just in case.

Then came 7 October 2023, and the deluge began: Antisemitism sky-rocketed in Australia. Menacing shouts of 'F**k the Jews' and 'Gas the Jews' were chanted two days later by pro-Hamas protestors on the steps of the iconic Sydney Opera House. University campuses became war zones for Jewish students. Graffiti, taunts, physical assaults, protests outside the synagogue and then, the unthinkable: The firebombing of the Adass Israel Synagogue in Ripponlea, Melbourne. Weeks later, the Victorian police and Australian Federal Police have not—at the time of this writing—found a suspect.

Please understand: this kind of activity was unheard of in Australia until the 7 October deluge. In 2023, there were 495 antisemitic incidents; by 2024, it rose to 2,061. The deluge of 7 October antisemitism reached Australia.¹

If antisemitism is increasing in Australia—and it is by 300%—you can be sure that it is growing worldwide. Our purpose is to define, explain, and look at the causes.

Definitions

As a big phenomenon, any definition will have its limitations, but we need something to work with. Antisemitism is the irrational hatred of the Jewish people, which can lead to attempts, by word or deed, to humiliate, marginalise, and physically harm them.

Anti-Zionism is on the rise, too, and many contend that it is not necessarily 'antisemitic.' Space is inadequate to address this contention, but to say how opposition to the existence of the only Jewish state in the world **has nothing to do with antisemitism** would be a challenge, to say the least.

While antisemitism can be considered a form of racism, it is also uniquely in a category of its own. Its uniqueness includes the fact that it is universal or global in scope. It is irrational because antisemites may have had little or no direct contact with Jews. This hatred exists in nations that have no Jews at all. Antisemitism can be multi-dimensional: Ethnic, religious, political and/or theological in nature.



| Photo: Shutterstock

Its uniqueness comes from its longevity: antisemitism dates back over two millennia to the fifth century BC. A bonafide card-carrying antisemite named Haman planned to destroy all Jews in the Persian Empire simply because one Jew named Mordecai refused to bow when he passed by. His nearly successful plot—yet ultimate failure—is chronicled in the Bible book called Esther.

The current problem is that Haman may be long gone, but the murderous spirit of antisemitism still lives on.

Antisemitism can be found in a variety of sources: far left, far right, *jihadi*, fascist, and communist. Even in Christendom—Catholics, Orthodox, and Protestants—demonstrated antisemitic thoughts and actions that were recorded throughout the centuries. This included the great reformer Martin Luther (though perhaps near the end of his life when he was not fully functional). It has been said historically that antisemitism was far greater in Christendom than in the Islamic world. That would radically change with the advent of Zionism, the nationalist movement to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

Causes of Antisemitism

1. **Political:** Until the rise of Zionism, it is said there was no conflict between Arabs and Jews in Ottoman Palestine. Once the Turks were gone, the Balfour Declaration was given, and the League of Nations authorised the British Mandate to prepare for the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine, the communal harmony was gone. For many, the politics of the Arab-Israeli conflict define the cause of antisemitism.

2. **Theological:** The great patriarch Abraham was promised by God (covenant) to have a 'seed' (descendant) Who would bring universal redemption and **blessing**. That seed was 'Christ' (*Galatians 3:16*), and the chain link between Him and Father Abraham was

the Jewish people. The Saviour Himself said that salvation is of the Jews (*John 4:22*). Being chosen and anointed by God is wonderful, but it is also like painting a target on one's back for the devil to attack. Also, a clever Messianic author pointed out in Hebrew that the Name of God YHWH is contained in the name Judah—which means praise, and it is from this name that the word 'Jew' is derived' YHWDH (*Yehudah*—best to see this in Hebrew lettering). His conclusion? The Jewish people thus have the imprint of God's name in their genes. And the world hates God!²

3. **Spiritual:** The human antisemite can be ignorant of these things, but the malevolent spiritual forces in the heavenly realm are not; they know what the Bible teaches. The devil and his demons are 100% antisemitic, and for understandable reasons. The great salvation that comes from the Jewish Messiah, the continued preservation and existence of the Jewish people as a testament to the faithfulness of God (*see Jeremiah 31:35-37*), and finally, the indispensable role they play in end-time prophecy (*Daniel 9:24-27*), means the devil's reign is finished, and his end is near. Since the devil cannot attack God directly, He attacks those who represent Him on earth: Jews and Christians. As history comes to the windup, persecution will increase. Yet the silver lining is that the Lord will regather His people as per *Jeremiah 16:14-16* and *23:7-8*, even if He has to use 'fishers' and 'hunters' to do it.

Now that we know what the problem is and why it exists, let us press into the presence of God, who is always the solution. He can turn the deluge into rivers of living water (*John 4:10; 7:37-39*).

¹ *The Jerusalem Post: Antisemitic incidents rose in Australia by over 300% since October 7—report by Michael Starr, December 3, 2024.*

² *Dov Chaikin, The Biblical Origins of Antisemitism, Israel Today Magazine, 1 June 2016.*

Biblical Roots

By David Nekrutman

The Writing on the Wall

A painting by Rembrandt solves the riddle of the *Book of Daniel*. In his depiction of Belshazzar's Feast, the artist shows the moment when a hand appeared and wrote on the wall a phrase only Daniel could decipher. At the height of the king's prosperity and power, while feasting from the Temple cutlery, the writing on the wall foretells Belshazzar's downfall. With his distinctive manipulation of light and shadow, Rembrandt captures the mood as banqueters stare in amazement and terror at the mysterious hand.

Artistic commentators fault Rembrandt for transcribing the *Mene, Mene, Tekel, Pharsin* (counted, counted, weighed, and divided—*Daniel 5:25*) for arranging the Hebrew letters of these Aramaic terms in columns. The orthographic nature of Hebrew is that it is written from right to left. However, the artist should be praised for his depiction of the Hebrew letters in vertical format for it elucidates one of the most troubling questions of this entire episode—of all the sages in Babylon, there were none who could read Hebrew.

Then from his presence, the hand was sent, and this writing was inscribed. And this is the writing that was inscribed: *Mene, Mene, Tekel, and Parsin* (*Daniel 5:24-25*)

With the redundancy of "this was the writing inscribed," it is possible to infer that the writing itself was in a cryptogram format. With the help of the *Ruach HaKodesh* (God's Divine Spirit) resting on Daniel, he would be able to unravel the cipher along with its meaning.

King Belshazzar knew how God judged his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar for pride, and yet, he still took silver and gold goblets from God's holy Temple and used them in the orgy that praised and exalted other pagan gods. The king dared God and He called his bluff.

The rubble of history should be the greatest indicator that pride mixed with taking God out of the equation does not bode well for any empire. The tendency of every great nation is the belief that it will always be a superpower. In the end, God judges every nation to see if our technology or powers become a Tower of Babel.

In a time of postmodernism, God has been sidelined from our society. It is time to rescue God and bring Him back to our national conversations. At this moment, we have an opportunity to demonstrate that Judeo-Christian values can be a force to repair a broken world and help the global community to understand that the God of Israel is the one who represents true peace, and justice, morality and love.

From Haman to Hamas—*Purim* in Our Time

■ Kees de Vreugd

Theologian | Christians for Israel International & Editor
| Israel & the Church

The *Book of Esther* (in Hebrew called the *Scroll of Esther*, as the liturgic reading in the synagogue is from a scroll) describes how the vicious Haman planned the annihilation of the Jewish people in Persia. This was in fact the second attempt of genocide on the Jews since Pharaoh's in Egypt (*Exodus 1:16*). Haman's plot was discovered by Mordecai who revealed it to his niece Esther. Esther had become queen of Persia after King Ahashverosh (*Xerxes*) had sent away his wife. Mordecai was an officer at the royal palace (*Esther 2:19*).

Mordecai and Esther were Jews, but because of her position, Esther had to hide her Jewishness and her relationship with Mordecai. Her name, in fact, could be heard as a pun on the Hebrew verb 'to hide'. Mordecai, on the contrary, was openly Jewish. When Haman was elevated to the highest position in the realm under the king, and all people had to kneel for him, Mordecai did not kneel. That stirred the rage of Haman. His revenge was not satisfied with punishing only Mordecai. The whole Jewish nation was to be exterminated.

Mordecai was from the tribe of Benjamin. According to Jewish tradition, *Benjaminites* do not kneel, as their father did not kneel before Esau (*Genesis 33*), since he was not yet born then. Mordecai, moreover, was from the royal family of King Saul.

Though Haman's decree could not be withdrawn, an additional royal decree allowed the Jews to defend themselves...

Haman is called the *Agagite*, which is generally understood as referring to his descent from Agag, the king of Amalek (*1 Samuel 15:8*). Amalek, a people descending from Esau, attacked the people of Israel in the back of the desert (*Exodus 17*). Therefore, Amalek became synonymous with cruelty and cowardice. Because of this, God commanded Israel to remember what Amalek did and to blot out the name of Amalek (*Deuteronomy 25:17-19*).

When King Saul defeated Amalek (*1 Samuel 15*), he left King Agag alive, in disobedience of God's explicit order. It was the prophet Samuel who actually killed Agag.

In the *Esther Scroll*, Haman the Agagite acted in the spirit of his ancestral people, plotting to eradicate Israel. In Haman and Mordecai, Saul and Agag were facing each other again. Mordecai was put in the position of restoring the failure of his ancestor Saul.

In the end, everything was turned upside down. Haman ended up impaled on the pole he had set up for Mordecai. Though Haman's decree could not be withdrawn, an additional royal decree allowed the Jews to defend themselves and destroy the armed men who might attack them and their women and children, and plunder the property of their enemies (*Esther 8:11*). Even many people of other nationalities became Jews because fear of the Jews had seized them (*Esther 8:17*).

The nation of Amalek disappeared from the scene of history. Yet, Israel is still told to remember what



Ultra orthodox Jewish kids dressed up in costumes a few days before the Jewish holiday of Purim. | Photo by Chaim Goldberg/Flash90

Amalek did to them in the desert. The nation of Amalek no longer exists, but the notion of Amalek, the concept of groundless enmity against the Jews, has passed through the times and is more vivid than ever.

On 7 October 2023, Israel was brutally attacked by surprise by Palestinian terrorists. The spirit of Amalek had returned. Since then, every Jew in the world is under threat. At the same time, a surrealistic turnaround of perpetrator and victim has taken place.

The state of Israel that is defending itself is accused of genocide, and every Jew in the world, whether he likes it or not, is associated with Israel.

As I am writing this, the first three hostages have just been released. An ordinary sense of justice would demand the unconditional release of all the hostages at once. I hope that there will be a turnaround like in Esther's days, where the 'fear of the Jews' will make the nations join Israel instead of attacking Israel.

The Bible Speaks



Psalm 20

*For the director of music. A psalm of David.
May the Lord answer you when you are in distress;
may the name of the God of Jacob protect you.*

*May he send you help from the sanctuary
and grant you support from Zion.*

*May he remember all your sacrifices
and accept your burnt offerings.*

*May he give you the desire of your heart
and make all your plans succeed.*

*May we shout for joy over your victory
and lift up our banners in the name of our God.*

May the Lord grant all your requests.

Now this I know:

*The Lord gives victory to his anointed.
He answers him from his heavenly sanctuary
with the victorious power of his right hand.
Some trust in chariots and some in horses,
but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.*

*They are brought to their knees and fall,
but we rise up and stand firm.*

Lord, give victory to the king!

Answer us when we call!

How many times throughout history have God's people prayed this beautiful psalm? Countless occasions when Israel faced days of distress. Today, as Israel's existence is once again being challenged on a global scale, we join in praying Psalm 20 with Israel.

When we examine this psalm more closely, we discover it is not merely a plea for salvation but also a confession full of confidence. This is especially evident in the second part, after the core of the psalm. In verse 6 we read: We will lift up our banners in the name of our God. Though Israel's army may be strong and resourceful, it is the Lord who gives strength His people.

And let us not forget: the psalms are the very words of God, placed upon the lips of His children. | Photo: Flash90

Gaza and its Jews, their Past and their Future

■ Yisrael Medad

Researcher, Analyst and Opinion Commentator on Political, Cultural and Media Issues | JNS

Why can Arabs live in Jaffa, Nazareth and Haifa, yet any suggestion of Jews living among Arabs is non-acceptable and non-negotiable?

During recent remarks to leaders of local Jewish community relations councils, it was reported that Karen Paikin Barall, the vice president of government relations at the Jewish Federations of North America, said: “We should all look forward to the day we can hope to buy townhouses in the West Bank and Gaza.” It seems that some of those present became distressed, even offended.

One official was quoted saying, “I thought JFNA stood for a democratic state. That’s what was troubling to me.” Most, however, came away with the impression her words were jocular, “a joke that had fallen flat.” Nevertheless, another communal official who was not present received alarmed texts from nearly a dozen people while the session was underway.

Of course, what these ‘leaders’ missed in their liberal progressivism is what would be undemocratic in that supposed situation. After all, more than two million Arabs live in Israel, representing 22% of the population. Since 2005, no Jews have resided in the Gaza Strip, making it a Palestine apartheid entity.

The history of Jews and Gaza has been consistent as it has been turbulent, and at times, terrible.

Some 3,000 years ago, Samson carried away the gates of Gaza. In 145 BCE, Yonatan the Hasmonean besieged Gaza, and even after the city surrendered, it remained hostile to the Hasmoneans; in 96 BCE, it was overrun by Alexander Jannaeus. During the revolt against Rome, it was again sacked by Jewish rebels in 66 CE. One of the pillars in the Great Mosque of Gaza, brought there from Caesarea, was an inscription in both Hebrew and Greek that read: “*Hananiah son of Jacob.*”

But instead of Jews arguing among themselves, a better discussion would focus on asking Arabs why they can live in Jaffa, Nazareth and Haifa, yet any suggestion of Jews living among Arabs is non-acceptable and non-negotiable.

In 637 CE, the Arabs conquered Gaza, killing Jews who served in the city’s defense, among them descendants of those who during the Byzantine period built a synagogue there in 508 CE. Subsequently, Jews returned and for three centuries until the Crusader conquest in 1100 CE, the Jewish community in Gaza restored itself. After the Crusaders’ defeat, centuries passed before Jews managed to re-establish their presence in the 14th century.

In 1481, it was recorded that around 70 Jewish families resided in Gaza City. The 17th century saw Rabbi Yisrael Najara producing his poetry and Natan the Prophet declaring *Shabtei Tzvi* the *Messiah*. In 1799, with the Napoleon conquest, the Jews fled again. Under the late Ottoman period, stagnation set in all around, and Jews were unwelcome in Gaza.

However, they returned in 1886, at the initiative of Zev Klonimus Wissotzky, a leader of the Hovevei Zion movement, who invested in commercial ventures in Gaza, Shchem and Lod. Throughout the centuries, Jews resettled the Land of Israel, all of it.



View of structures in the former Jewish settlement of Gush Katif in the southern Gaza Strip in 2020. | Photo: Abed Rahim Khatib/ Flashy

During World War I, Jews in Gaza again were subjected to Ottoman oppression, and many were banished. The Margolin family was the first to return at the war’s end; later, 54 Jews were registered as residing there in the 1922 British census. In the larger Gaza Sub-District, including the Western Negev, there were 830 Jews. Then came the watershed of 1929.

The 22 October 1929 edition of the *Haaretz* newspaper reports on the criminal investigation of several Arabs of the Al-Maghar village of Gaza. They were suspected of inciting their fellow villagers to throw rocks at the Jews fleeing Gaza during the previous August traveling in a convoy to escape the riots, a mission organized by the two Jewish wives of British policemen serving in Gaza.

Earlier, on 26 August 1929, Arabs from Gaza—some who were employed in the agricultural fields and orchards of Be’er Tuvia—participated in the attack on

presence of Jews resettling the Jewish national homeland is not necessarily a cause of Arab terror.

Despite Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu repeatedly expressing opposition to plans for Jews to resettle Gaza or at least become neighbours with the Gazans—terming the idea ‘not realistic’—there were two significant gatherings to promote the idea. One was during the past *Sukkot* holiday near Gaza and the other, in Jerusalem, back on 28 January 2024. Both were attended by ministers and Knesset members from coalition parties.

In a recent essay in *Mosaic*, Shany Mor argued, among other points, that what was wrong with the “settler movement”—one that was engaged in “state capture”—is that ultimately, wherever they were, they were a main cause of Arab violence, Fatah or Hamas. Justifying his thesis, he wrote:

“When a settler was murdered [at Homesh], the perverse logic of the entire settlement movement took over ... the threat to their safety remained and was, if anything, more acute, so more soldiers needed to be sent there to protect them, and roadblocks had to be set up, and so forth. The Jenin sector, once the quietest part of the West Bank, quickly became, together with nearby Nablus, not just a focal point of skirmishes among settlers, the army, and Palestinian militants, but also the epicenter of a new wave of terrorism targeting Israelis in central Israel.”

Of course, no Jews present in Gaza for 23 years is a fact that does not alter his thinking. Nor does the lack of Jews anywhere across the former Green Line in Judea and Samaria for 19 years affect it.

I’m not sure that resettling Jews in Gaza at this moment in history is doable or even advisable. And for sure, partisan protest gimmicks like trying to cross over into the Strip during the war are insane. But instead of Jews arguing among themselves, a better discussion would focus on asking Arabs why they can live in Jaffa, Nazareth and Haifa, yet any suggestion of Jews living among Arabs is non-acceptable and non-negotiable.

Liberals and human-rights activists should equally be asked if the banning of Jews from Gaza can be defined as principled apartheid. Diplomats should be pressed to explain why they are supporting a policy of an exclusive uni-ethno state—moreover, one that is autocratic, theocratic and unsustainable economically.

the *moshav*. They killed Dr Haim Yizraeli, the Mandate-employed doctor for the south of the country, while he was attending to a wounded Arab. Binyamin Tzvi Rosen, who had hidden in the synagogue, was beaten, stabbed to death and disemboweled, and then rolled up into *Torah* scrolls taken from the ark and set afire.

Gaza Arabs participated in the attacks on the *kibbutzim* of the Western Negev as well as Kfar Darom, which was founded in 1946 on land purchased by Jews in the early 1930s, today located across the street from the Deir Al-Balah Primary School.

Between 1948 and 1967, no Jewish civilians lived in Gaza, and after 2005, those who had returned to resettle the area (more than 8,000) were expelled in fulfillment of then-Israel Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s disengagement plan. The Palestinian Authority/Fatah Party took control until they were quickly and violently ousted by the Hamas terrorist organisation in June 2007, two years after the Israelis had vacated. Then came the invasion of Hamas from Gaza on 7 October 2023. Obviously, the

“God Was with Me in the Tunnels”

The Psalm that Saved Sapir Cohen in Gaza Captivity

■ Israel Today Staff

One of the most astounding stories of heroism in this war is that of Sapir Cohen. She was taken captive by Gaza terrorists on 7 October and miraculously released after 55 days. Her story started six months before that when twenty-six-year-old Sapir began to have a horrible premonition. She was fearful it meant she could soon die; and therefore, she tried to stay very safe — for example, refusing to go on a hot air balloon or sky diving with her boyfriend Sasha. She feared maybe she had a fatal disease.

Though not orthodox, Sapir already had an innate though unformed sense of faith in God. She was so apprehensive of sickness, that she felt only God could save her and decided to start praying for the first time. Sapir asked orthodox Jewish women she worked with, for a chapter of Psalms to pray for healing. They could think of none. Then one day while randomly scrolling through her Instagram feed, an advertisement popped up stating that anyone who would read *Psalm 27* daily for 30 days would be healthy and have miracles and wonders. Sapir: “Well this is exactly what I was looking for. From that day I read this chapter every day for 30 days. The last day was 7 October.”

While praying *Psalm 27* daily in September 2023, Sapir was surprised to discover she had learned the chapter by heart. She was also surprised that *Psalm 27* said nothing about sickness or health. But it said much about victory in God over fear, war and enemies, and mentioned the word ‘Hamas’ [in verse 12, translated as violence or malicious accusations]. Sapir kept asking herself: “Why am I praying this? What war am I praying to be saved from?”

On 7 October Sapir and her boyfriend Sasha were spending the *Simchat Torah* holiday at his parents’ house in Kibbutz Nir Oz near the Gaza border, when all hell broke loose. Early in the morning, they began to hear the Hamas terrorists taking over one house after another. As her premonition came to pass in the immediate danger of death, it finally clicked:

“In that moment I understood the meaning of my prayer [*Psalm 27*], and I was terrified. I was shaking. All my body was [sweating], but I said the prayer again and again. And when I said it, I felt something. Deep, deep inside of me, I felt peace. And I said, ‘How can I feel peace in this situation?’”

“And while I heard the terrorists outside, I just kept praying it over and over and

over and over again. And I say there is no way it was a coincidence. And all the time in captivity I proclaimed this chapter every day. And in every new place I would go [in captivity], I would declare the chapter.”

In unimaginable circumstances, Sapir became a uniquely hopeful daughter of Israel. In place of paralyzing fear; she received strength, faith and mission. Inconceivably, every day in captivity in Gaza, Sapir proclaimed appreciation to the Holy One of Israel:

“Thank you, God for sending me to this place, because I feel all the power you gave me. And I know how to use it to protect myself and help all the other captives.”

“Thank you God for all the angels you sent to me here in this hell.”

Sapir says the other captives could not understand how Sapir retained a positive outlook; and that one of her terrorist captors even admitted: “You are my enemy. I hate you, but when you are here, all this place is full of light.”

After 55 days and many miracles, Sapir was released from captivity and returned to Israel. Her boyfriend Sasha Trufanov is still captive in Gaza. On 13 November 2024 the Islamic *Jihad* released a new video from Gaza featuring Sasha talking, after more than a year in captivity. (His message, that the *Jihadi* captors obviously wanted him to convey, was for Israeli citizens to oppose IDF offenses in Gaza and to pressure the government into concessions and cease fire.) In the video he appears healthy and speaks clearly.

Now set free, Sapir has devoted herself to testifying in Israel and internationally, while advocating for the



Sapir Cohen (left), Lena Trufanov, mother of hostage Sasha Trufanov and freed hostage Danielle Aloni take part in a ceremony for the release of hostages. | Photo: Avshalom Sassoni/Flash90

release of Sasha and all the remaining 101 captives. Israel fears many of them are no longer alive, and the IDF adjusts certain military offenses so as not to inadvertently kill them.

Sapir told PBS: “When I came back I asked myself the same question like in Gaza, ‘Why did God send me back?’ And I decided that I have to tell my story.”

The Words from Beyond

For your edification, these are words of *Psalm 27* Sapir prayed in the land of death, in the Hamas dungeon tunnels:

The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?

When the wicked draw near to devour me, it is my enemies and my foes who will

stumble and fall.

Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then I will be confident.

One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.

For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent and set me high upon a rock...

I would have lost heart, had I not believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

Hope in the Lord; Be of good courage, And He shall strengthen your heart; Hope, I say, in the Lord!

The Lord's Prayer

By Kees de Vreugd

Your Kingdom Come

In this series, we explore how the Lord's Prayer is embedded in contemporary Jewish faith.

The kingdom of God is perhaps the central theme in the Bible. The Old Testament is full of it. The psalms sing of God as King in every tone: “*The Lord reigns, He is robed in majesty*” (*Psalm 93:1*). His kingship is not limited to Israel but extends to the whole world and all nations. This is sung out as a fact and as an expectation. God appears as King and He comes as judge of the earth. “*He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity*” (*Psalm 98*).

Jesus’ ministry began with the

proclamation of the kingdom of God. “*And Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people*” (*Matthew 4:23*). Earlier, John the Baptist had the same message: “*Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven has come near*” (*Matthew 3:2*). When “*kingdom of heaven*” is mentioned in Matthew, the other gospels mention “*kingdom of God*”. Both have the same meaning. Matthew applies a Jewish way of speaking to avoid pronouncing the Name of God.

In the ancient Jewish Kaddish prayer, after the sanctification of God’s Name, prayers are said for God’s kingdom to come: “*May He establish*

His kingdom during your lifetime and during the lifetime of all the House of Israel, soon and in our days.”

Jews utter a *berachah*, a blessing, at all kinds of everyday events; when consuming food or drink (not only with wine or bread, but also with fruit or a glass of water. Also when you see something beautiful, or when you go to the toilet, and so on). Always in the *berachah*, God is honoured as King: Blessed are You, King of eternity...

What is the kingdom of God? From the psalm texts mentioned and from Jewish prayers, it becomes clear that it is first and foremost about His kingship. He is king, which must be proclaimed and acknowledged. When that happens and the world conforms to God’s kingship, then the kingdom has come.

The Long Way Home

Yulia Berman

Director | First Home in the Homeland

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace. Numbers 6:24-26

A family from Kharkov joined the 'First Home in the Homeland' programme a few months ago and now reside in *kibbutz* Mashabei Sadeh in the middle of the Negev desert. Reflecting on our first Zoom call with them, it's striking how far they've come. Back then, their faces were marked with worry and hesitation—a reflection of the immense challenges they had faced. They were forced to leave their beloved home in Kharkov and start their whole life from scratch.

The family's life in Kharkov had been stable and fulfilling. Tatyana, the mother, worked tirelessly for 15 years to rise from a bank manager to the head of a branch. Sergey, the father, owned and operated a passenger transportation company. Their three children were thriving in school, kindergarten, and extracurricular activities. Life seemed settled and secure.

But 2022 changed everything. Tanks appeared on rural roads, and bombs fell perilously close to their home (in the photo bottom right, you see their house in Kharkov).

In the face of unimaginable danger, they made the heart-wrenching decision to flee. After relocating to central Ukraine, they moved to Hungary, enduring four days of travel filled with uncertainty. They slept in



Daria, the family's eldest daughter is in the foreground.



Sergey, Tatyana and their children with all their family in Kharkov. | Photos: First Home in the Homeland

dormitories and schools, and upon crossing the border, found refuge with a compassionate Hungarian family in Budapest where they stayed for a year.

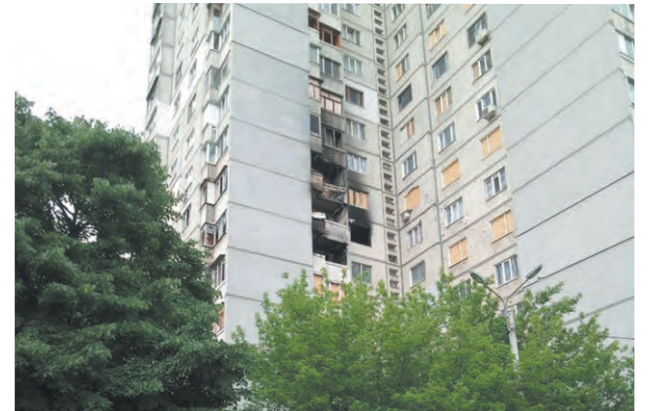
In Budapest, they met another family from their neighbourhood in Kharkov who recommended they contact an educational centre that had been set up by voluntary teachers from Ukraine. Tatyana joined them as a co-founder and as a teacher. She taught math to children who had been forced to leave their homes, while Sergei worked as a driver.

Meanwhile, their children tried to adapt to Hungarian schools but eventually continued their education online due to difficulties integrating with classmates. Though life felt paused, their shared struggles strengthened their bond. A turning point came when their eldest daughter, Daria, decided to join the NAALE programme in Israel. She passed all the necessary exams and enrolled at Mevoot Iron School in November 2023, just weeks after the devastating events of 7 October. Inspired by Daria, the rest of the family followed suit. In August, Tatyana, Sergey, and their younger children arrived in Israel and joined the 'First Home in the Homeland' programme, reuniting with Daria and beginning a new chapter in their lives in the Promised Land.

The family is now smiling and full of hope and plans for the future. They are embracing the transition step

by step, or 'leat, leat', as we say in Israel. Tatyana and Sergey are learning Hebrew in *Ulpan*, their children are integrated into local schools, and Daria visits them on weekends, making their time in their new homeland truly special. Despite the challenges of arriving during a turbulent period, they feel safe and cared for, thanks to the dedication of volunteers and coordinators.

We hope this will be a good start for them in Israel and we will support them with your help and prayers! Thanks to your loving kindness, such stories happen!



We welcome your support for families integrating into Israel through First Home in the Homeland. Will you help? Any amount helps.

Food Parcels Bless Survivors in Tulchin

Tulchin, a small town in the Vinnitsa region in Ukraine, was once a thriving *shtetl* with a vibrant Jewish community. It was a picturesque and peaceful place until the tragic events of World War II. During that dark time, not many were able to survive the atrocities of the Nazis. While many perished, a few people became living witnesses of these horrific crimes. They made a solemn promise to the Almighty to share their stories with future generations.

Today, only four Holocaust survivors remain in Tulchin. Each time we come to visit them it feels

like a precious, God-given opportunity—a privilege to spend time together, offer hugs, and bless them. We never come empty-handed; the food parcels we bring are a tangible expression of our love and care. These packages are not only vital for the physical survival of these elderly people, especially during Ukraine's ongoing war, harsh winter months, and economic hardships, but they also serve as a powerful testimony of God's unconditional and everlasting love for His chosen people. They are often the key to people's heart.

The gratitude we receive from

these survivors is deeply moving. One of them told us: "It feels as if God Himself visited me."

Another shared; "We don't need much anymore; life has passed so quickly. But knowing that someone cares about us, makes our days brighter. You nourish our bodies and fill our souls with love and hope."

In blessing these survivors, we are blessed in return. And we carry these blessings forward to everyone who supports and loves the Jewish people.

Update Food Parcel Campaign



Alina of C4I Ukraine delivers a food parcel. | Photo: C4I Ukraine

Battling Rising Costs to Serve Those in Need

Food prices in Israel have surged dramatically last year due to scarcity caused by the war situation. Hineni's soup kitchen, located in the heart of Jerusalem, also experiences the consequences of the war in several ways.

"Since 7 October 2023, everything in Israel has changed," says Benjamin Philip, director of Hineni. "Our work at the soup kitchen has become far more demanding. Across the country, including here at Hineni, staff shortages are a pressing issue, as many employees have been called to military service. Additionally, migrant workers and volunteers are staying away due to the situation."

The rising costs of food have further complicated operations. Benjamin explains, "Previously, I could pick up fruit and vegetables at a discount just before the market closed, but now there's nothing left by then. This inflation has extended beyond groceries. "The cost of nearly everything in Israel has risen sharply. This inevitably increases the number of people reliant on food aid. We at Hineni want to help, but it is a daunting task for our small

team," he notes. The challenges include a 15% increase in the rent for their facilities, as well as soaring energy costs, which make running essential appliances such as ovens, frying pans, refrigerators, and freezers very expensive.

Hineni's mission extends beyond serving meals. "We aim to make our guests feel at home," says Benjamin. "It's not just about filling plates; it's about offering a welcoming space and a listening ear."

In fact, Hineni once started as an aid organisation for victims of war and terror and remains committed to this legacy. "Over the past year, in addition to meals, we have therefore been busy offering psychological help to survivors of that terrible 7 October attack. "Just yesterday, for instance, I spoke with Arielle, the youngest survivor of the Nova music festival massacre. Drawing from my own experiences as the son of a Holocaust survivor, I can provide support to people like her, ultimately with the aim of bringing people closer to the Eternal one."



**A meal at Hineni costs
€7,50 | US\$7.50**

In 2025, Christians for Israel aims to donate 100,000 meals to the poor of Israel.

Will you help?

You can donate by completing the coupon below.

YES! I Want to Support Christians for Israel

CHRISTIANS FOR ISRAEL MINISTRY

- My donation for ministry costs, print & post
- Emergency Situation in Israel**

ALIYAH - BRING THE JEWS HOME

- One person from Ukraine - € 135 | US \$150
- One family (5 people) - € 675 | US \$750
- One bus (25 people) - € 4500 | US \$5000
- First Home in the Homeland - € 450 | US \$465
- Bnei Menashe (India) (1 person) - € 950 | US \$1000
- Aliyah Ethiopia

SOCIAL WELFARE PROJECTS

- Meals on Wheels - € 5 | US \$5 each
- Food Parcels in Ukraine - € 15 | US \$15 each
- Children at Risk - Jaffa Institute
- Hineni Soup Kitchen - € 7,50 | US \$7.50 per meal
- Holocaust Survivors Ukraine and Moldova
- Christian Friends of Israeli Communities (CFOIC)
- Arab Christians

TOTAL DONATION

DONATION

.....
\$.....

TEACHING RESOURCES

- Israel on Trial (Book) by Andrew Tucker
- 70 Questions About Israel (Book) by Chan Siew Fong
- Israel 70 Years (One-off Collector's Magazine)
- Jerusalem 50th Anniversary (One-off Collector's Magazine)
- Israel: Covenants & Kingdom (Book) by Willem JJ Glashouwer
- Why Israel? (Book) Why Jerusalem? (Book) Why End Times? (Book)
- Why Israel? (Trilogy Book Set)
- Why Israel? Study Guides (Trilogy Book Set)
- Why Israel? (DVD) Why Jerusalem? (DVD) Why End Times? (DVD)
- Why Israel? (Trilogy DVD Set)
- Why Israel? (Book, DVD & Study Guide)
- Why Jerusalem? (Book, DVD & Study Guide)
- Why End Times? (Book, DVD & Study Guide)



To order these and other resources, go to www.c4israel.org/webshop

TO MAKE AN ONLINE DONATION:

Go to our website: www.c4israel.org/support



INTERNET BANKING:

Ref: Your name & donation purpose
Account Holder: Christians for Israel International
Bank Account No: NL12 ABNA 06275.15.460
Bank: ABN-AMRO Bank, Nijkerk, The Netherlands
BIC/Swift code: A B N A N L 2 A

Please confirm by emailing international@c4israel.org

Name: _____
Address: _____
Phone: _____
Email: _____