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CHRISTIANS FOR
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INTERNATIONAL

Understanding Israel and world events from a Biblical perspective

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Medical worker prepares a Covid-19 vaccine injection, at a vaccination center in Jerusalem. | Photo: Flash90

Israel World-Leader in Covid-19 Vaccinations

Israel began vaccinations on 19 December 2020 and is delivering jabs to about 150,000 people a day, with priority given to the over-60s, health workers and people who are clinically vulnerable.

By mid-January, about 20% of the population had been vaccinated. The BBC reported that Israel has given vaccinations against Coronavirus to more than one million people, the world's highest rate, as global immunisation efforts step up. At the end of 2020, Israel had a rate of 11.5 vaccination doses per 100 people – followed by Bahrain at 3.49 and the UK at 1.47, according to a global tracking website affiliated with Oxford University.

As at mid-January, about 4000 people had died of Coronavirus in Israel. In January the country was in its third lockdown, amidst a new surge in infections, and even considering bans on incoming travel.

Israel secured supplies of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine following negotiations early on in the pandemic. According to an article in New York Times, "Israel's heavily digitised, community-based health system — all

citizens, by law, must register with one of the country's four Health Maintenance Organisations — and its centralised government have proved adept at orchestrating a national inoculation campaign, according to Israeli health experts."

"With a population of nine million, Israel's relatively small size has played a role as well", said Professor Balicer, who is also the chief innovation officer for Clalit, the largest of the country's four Health Maintenance Organisations.

An aggressive procurement effort helped set the stage. The health minister, Yuli Edelstein, said in an interview that Israel had entered into negotiations with drugmakers as an 'early bird,' and that the companies were interested in supplying Israel because of its reputation for efficiency and gathering reliable data. "We are leading the world race thanks to our early preparations," he said.

Some people fear that Israel has moved too quickly and that it has allowed the vaccine manufacturers to use it as a 'guinea pig' to try out untested vaccines.

Aviel Schneider at Israel Today, in Jerusalem, rejects these criticisms. "Everything is a risk, including the accelerated Israeli vaccination effort", he said. "But isn't Israel's very existence in the Middle East at risk daily? The people of Israel are a conditioned people who have survived one risk after another for generations. From a biblical and spiritual standpoint, with God's help, Israel has repeatedly overcome all risks. This may not have been easy and may have had its consequences, just as the year of Coronavirus will have economic consequences."

According to Schneider, the fears are unfounded. "Israel will survive the Pfizer vaccinations. And the faster everyone in the country is vaccinated, the faster the borders will be reopened. You will be able to visit Israel again. Nor can I imagine God sacrificing His chosen people as guinea pigs for Pfizer, or you. On the contrary, in this case, Israel is an example for others, a light to the nations. It is Israel that is encouraging and motivating other nations not to be afraid of a syringe."

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The Arrival of Bnei Menashe
was a Hanukkah miracle



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Colophon

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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.

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Lights Turned off in Europe

■ **Andrew Tucker**
International Editor | Christians for Israel

Just before last Christmas, during the Jewish ‘festival of lights’ Hanukkah, the European Court of Justice ruled that a Decree by the Flemish Region of Belgium that requires animals to be stunned prior to slaughter to reduce their suffering does not contravene European law.

The case concerned Belgian legislation that prohibits the slaughter of livestock unless they have first been stunned into unconsciousness. Both Muslim Halal and Jewish kosher rituals require the animal to be conscious when it is slaughtered. It is estimated that Belgium is home to about 30,000 Jews (many of whom are orthodox) and 350,000 Muslims, out of a total population of 11.5 million.

According to Dr Matthijs de Blois, one of Europe’s leading experts on religion and law, “the judgment is a serious violation of the enjoyment of the freedom of religion in Europe by religious minorities.”

Kosher slaughter is known as ‘shechita’, a procedure required by Jewish dietary laws (which are known as ‘kashrut’). It is performed by an approved person (*shochet*), who uses a very long sharp knife to sever the windpipe (trachea) and food pipe (oesophagus). In the case of cattle, the soft tissues in the neck are sliced through without the knife touching the spinal cord, in the course of which four major blood vessels are severed. No undue pressure may be applied to the knife, which must be extremely sharp. The procedure is executed with the intention of causing a rapid drop in blood pressure in the brain and loss of consciousness, to render the animal insensitive to pain and to exsanguinate in a prompt and precise action.

The Court held that European national parliaments are entitled to restrict the freedom of religion that is guaranteed under European law (Article 10 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU), where that is necessary and proportionate to reflect ‘changes in values and idea’.



Herding cattle at the Gamla Farm, in the Golan Heights, Northern Israel. | Photo: Flash90

This means Belgium was entitled to place animal welfare above the right of Muslims and Jews to follow their ancient religious customs.

De Blois: “This openness to modern ideas adopted by the Court (in imitation of the European Court of Human Rights) endangers the freedom of religion which protects rituals that have existed for thousands of years. Against the dark background of European history, which is full of examples of the suppression of Jewish religious practices, including the prohibition of ritual slaughter, this is a sad observation.”

The Court said that “a scientific consensus has emerged that prior stunning is the optimal means of reducing the animal’s suffering at the time of the killing.” But this is highly questionable. According to Dr Goldfeder, Director of the National Jewish Advocacy Center and founding editor of the Cambridge University Series on Law and Judaism, “there is no such scientific consensus. Research done by Dr Temple Grandin, perhaps the world’s leading expert on the humane treatment of animals for slaughter found that when *shechita* is done properly, the animals show little or no stress reaction to the ritual cut before losing consciousness. In her words, “It

appears that the animal is not aware that its throat has been cut.” There is no evidence that kosher slaughter is in any way ‘crueller’ than stunning.”

The Court’s reasoning can be contrasted with the United States, where it is recognised that stunning and Jewish ritual slaughter ‘are alternative methods,’ and that each ‘is supported by legislative history as a justifiable legislative determination that the stated method of slaughter is indeed humane.’

This case reflects a growing tendency of the European Court of Justice to allow European and national legislators to override the religious beliefs of Jews and Christians in Europe. In November 2019, the Court ruled in the *Psagot Wineries* case that the European Commission is entitled to require importers of products from Judea and Samaria to label these as ‘made in the West Bank’ – thus imposing a particular political interpretation of history that effectively ignores the millennia-long connection between the Jewish people and the territory known for centuries as ‘Judea and Samaria’.

All of this is further evidence of the fact that step by step, Europe is abandoning its own Judeo-Christian background, heritage and values. The lights in Europe are being turned off.

Prayer Points

By Pieter Bénard

Israel

- “The Lord is my strength and my defence; He has become my salvation.” *Psalms 118:14*. Pray that Israel expects and seeks God’s help and guidance in the combat against the Coronavirus. Israel is in the process of vaccinating the entire population. Pray that this may make a major contribution to reducing the incidence of the virus.
- In Israel, there will be elections for the third time in two years. Pray that after the elections, there will be a stable government that works well together. Many Israelis strongly long for this, after all the political wrangling of recent times.
- The winter in Israel is very cold and windy at the moment, but there is not much rain and therefore, relatively dry. Pray for rain in Israel.

Israel & the Nations

- Israel has vaccinated over two million people against the Coronavirus. Instead of applauding this in the international media, Israel is being accused of withholding vaccines from the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank. This is a bizarre accusation since Israel is not responsible at all for the healthcare in those

areas. Israel hatred surfaces time and again. Pray for protection of Israel against this hatred.

- Pray for good cooperation between Israel and other countries, like the United States that has a new government now and the Arab countries with which peace was made not long ago. Pray that these countries may be a blessing to Israel and vice versa.

Christians for Israel

- Pray for Christians for Israel’s (C4I’s) representatives in numerous countries that are affected by the Coronavirus. Give thanks that the work still can continue (online) and many people are reached.
- “For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink...” *Matthew 25:35a*. Last year Koen Carlier and his team handed out food parcels in Ukraine to poor, old Jewish men and women, often Holocaust survivors. Give thanks that many people are helped with a food parcel and pray that their poverty may be alleviated. Also, pray for a blessing on the work of Koen and his team.

For daily Prayer Points, go to our website www.c4israel.org



Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia, right, welcomed the emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, left, in Al Ula, Saudi Arabia, on Tuesday, 5 January 2021. Photo: Bandar Aljaloud/Saudi Royal Court, via EPA

The Saudi Qatar Agreement

■ Lt.Col. (Res) Dr
Mordechai Kedar

The year 2021 began with refreshing news: after three years of Qatar's diplomatic and economic boycott accompanied by a land blockade, Saudi Arabia and Qatar will be signing an agreement that will bring the dispute to an end. The agreement was reached with Jared Kushner, Avi Berkowitz, Adam Buehler, and Brian Hook with the help of the American negotiating team.

The dispute between Saudi Arabia and Qatar stemmed from several factors: Qatar's support for Iran, with which it shares the largest natural gas field in the world; its support for the Muslim Brotherhood, nemesis of the Saudis; and its support for anti-Saudi propaganda media outlet Aljazeera. These factors went hand in hand with a historical element: the refusal of the Thani family, which rules Qatar, to join the Saudi kingdom despite the fact that in Qatar, as in Saudi Arabia, the Hanbali school of religious law and its Wahhabi branch hold sway.

The quarrels between Riyadh and Qatar did not begin three years ago, but many years earlier. However, the Saudis were unable to contain Qatar's opposition until the advent of Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman, who discovered that Qatar was aiding the Houthi rebels in Yemen and decided to crack down. The ending of the dispute points to the reunification of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), an organization comprising the states of the Arabian Peninsula (excluding Yemen).

Over the past three years, messages have

been passed between the Saudi and Qatari leaderships (mainly through the governments in Kuwait and Oman) in an effort to calm the tensions between the two states—both of which were aware that the dispute was weakening them in the face of Iran's expansionism. The efforts of the Trump administration officials brought these contacts to fruition. Like the crisis that preceded it, this agreement stands under the heavy shadow of Tehran and was affected by some important developments. First, Joe Biden's imminent entry into the White House is expected to change US policy toward Iran substantially. Second, Iran has started enriching uranium to 20%, a significant step in the direction of the bomb. Third, Saudi Arabia has failed to fend off the pro-Iranian militias in Yemen and Iraq and avert the threat they pose to the kingdom and its strained economic position. And finally, during the three years of the blockade, Iran provided aid to Qatar. The Iranian media reported on the Saudi-Qatari agreement without commentary or quotes from top Iranian officials. Those officials are in no hurry to respond, even though, given Iran's deep intelligence penetration of the Gulf States as well as close ties with the Qatari leadership, they undoubtedly knew about the Saudi-Qatari contacts. Clearly, then, the agreement was reached with Iranian consent. One reason for Tehran to accept the easing of the Saudi-Qatari tensions could be fear of a US action against Iran during the last two weeks of the Trump presidency. Meanwhile, Iran seized a South Korean

tanker on dubious grounds for the sole purpose of showing the world that no actor can bend Tehran to its will. This show of force is an indication of the kind of reception Iran is preparing for Biden as it seeks to forestall—even at this stage—any intention he or his negotiating team might hold to pressure Tehran into altering the terms of the 2015 nuclear agreement.

The question of interest to Israel is whether the Saudi-Qatari thaw and possible reduced tensions between Riyadh and Tehran would allow Saudi Arabia to keep progressing toward mutual recognition with Israel without rousing too much anger among the Iranian leadership and in its proxy militias in Yemen and Iraq. It is too early to answer this question because the Iranian stance stems from several factors that cannot yet be assessed: the state of negotiations with the Biden administration on the conditions for a US return to the nuclear agreement; the future of US sanctions on Iran; Saudi activity in Yemen; Iran's economic situation and the stability of the regime, and so on.

However, the people and the leadership in Israel will need to understand that Jerusalem's new ties with states of the Arabian Peninsula, including the UAE and Bahrain, are not etched in stone but subject to changes caused by the vicissitudes in those states' relations with Iran. It must be borne in mind that the Middle East—and that includes Israel's own politics—is built on sand dunes that change their shape according to the prevailing winds.

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Israel Heading for New Elections

■ Israel & Christians
Today Staff

On 2 March 2021, Israel will have its fourth elections in only two years. The elections were forced after the volatile Netanyahu-Gantz coalition collapsed last December.

These elections may see the end of the political career of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has been in power since 2009 – the longest-serving Prime Minister in Israel's history.

The main contender to form a coalition appears to be Gideon Sa'ar, who served under Netanyahu in various posts including Minister of Interior, but who left the Likud Party in recent weeks to form a new party called New Hope. Sa'ar is building a Centre-Right platform based on a commitment to replace the current government. Several Likud members have moved with him, including former minister Ze'ev Elkin and Member of Knesset Sharren Haskell.

"I want a heterogeneous list, with people

who are fitting," he said. "I have been meeting people, mostly from outside politics, from different fields of work. I am not looking for candidates on the Left, because our party is Center-Right. Our candidates are Center and Right. I belong to the pragmatic Right."

At the time of writing, the parties on the right wing of politics were still in negotiations and discussions to determine which parties will run, who will be in them, and which potential partnerships can be forged.

Short News

Collection of Postcards



The Hebrew University in Jerusalem received a special donation: a collection of 130,000 postcards of Israel, Judea and Samaria from the end of the nineteenth century onwards. 82-year-old David Perlman collected the postcards. The postcards provide the University's scientists with the opportunity to research the images and ideas about the Holy Land.

| Photo: Flashgo

Hand-width

What exactly is the size of a 'hand-width' when this is mentioned in the Bible? This is an age-old question. But an Israeli study may shed some light on it. Three of the investigators noticed that the neck opening of the jugs remained the same for centuries. The shape of the jugs changed, but not the width of the openings: 8.9 centimetres – the width of an average male hand. Remarkably enough the size of the hand widths has not changed through the ages; it corresponds to the size of the gloves the US military orders for their military personnel.

The First Woman on the Moon

Jewish astronaut Jessica Meir wants to be the first woman on the moon. Since returning to Earth from the International Space Station in April 2020, she has been working on her travel plans. Meir was the 4th Jewish woman to travel to space and conducted the first all-female spacewalk together with fellow astronaut Christina Koch. According to Time magazine, Meir is one of the most Influential People of 2020.

Malawi Plans Embassy in Jerusalem



Malawi announced their plans to open an Embassy in Jerusalem in the summer of 2021. It would be the first African country to do so. Malawi is one of few African countries to have maintained continuous diplomatic ties with Israel since the central African country's independence in 1964.

| Photo: Africabriefing.org

Israel-US Relations - a 'Coming Storm'?

■ Caroline Glick

Columnist

Israeli journalist Caroline Glick has expressed concerns that a number of incoming Democrat President Biden's appointments may seek to resurrect policies they were responsible for under the Obama Administration that are hostile towards Israel.

Iran

Biden has restated his intention to return to the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran. Glick writes: "Media reports over the past few weeks have detailed some of Israel's plans to convince the incoming administration to reconsider its position. Among other things, the government intends to use documents from Iran's nuclear archive, that Mossad agents spirited out of Tehran in 2018, to show Biden and his advisers that the 2015 deal was based on the incorrect assumption that Iran's nuclear program was defensive and civilian... Although Israel's case is rock solid, it is unlikely to convince the Biden team to change course. Israel shared that evidence with the Obama administration, and Barack Obama and his advisers didn't care. They drove forward and demonised Israeli leaders and their American supporters as warmongers. The same people who dismissed Israel's evidence then are now leading Biden's national security team."

In particular, Glick is concerned about Biden's appointment of William Burns as CIA Director and Jake Sullivan as his National Security Advisor. "Obama appointed Burns and Sullivan to hold secret nuclear talks with Iran behind the backs of US allies Israel, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Those talks led to the deal which provided Iran with an open path to a nuclear arsenal by 2025. It permitted the regime to enrich uranium. It didn't touch Iran's ballistic missile program. It gave Iran the power to decide which nuclear sites UN inspectors could enter. And it gave Iran a direct payoff of \$150 billion including \$1.7 billion in cash."

Israel/Palestinian Negotiations

Glick: "In September 2000, the Palestinians launched a

massive terror onslaught against Israel that lasted for four years. Every day, Israelis were subjected to acts of murderous terrorism that ranged from roadside stonings, shootings and bombings to mass shootings to suicide bombings, to mortar and missile assaults. The Palestinians launched their terror war after rejecting Israel's offer of peace and statehood at the Camp David Peace Summit in July 2000. Yet in 2001, Burns was instrumental in convincing then-president Bush to become the first president to support Palestinian statehood."

Biden has appointed Obama's former UN ambassador Samantha Power to serve as administrator of USAID. Glick: "Power played a central role in conceiving and passing UN Security Council Resolution 2334 in December 2016 which referred to Israeli communities and installations beyond the 1949 armistice lines in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria as "a flagrant violation of international law." As USAID administrator, Power will be responsible for providing US financial support to the endemically corrupt and terror-supporting Palestinian Authority and to international organisations that facilitate Hamas's terror regime in Gaza."

Anti-Semitism

The Biden Administration may seek to undermine the Trump Administration's advancement of the recent International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of anti-Semitism as the basis for criminal prosecution of anti-Semites and protection of their Jewish communities. This definition includes a provision stating that denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination is a form of anti-Semitism. "The US Justice



Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu with United States Vice President Joe Biden in 2016. | Photo: Flash90

Department's Civil Rights Division is the government body responsible for fighting anti-Semitism. This week Biden appointed Kristen Clark, an African American attorney and advocated to serve as head of the division. Following her appointment, Fox News's Tucker Carlson reported Clark's troubling past promotion of both racial bigotry and Jew-hatred."

Glick concludes: "Thanks in large part to Trump's extraordinary friendship, Israel is much more powerful than it was when Obama left office, but it is still vulnerable. Whether it has the power to persuade Biden and his advisers to change course remains to be seen. But what power Israel does have will have to be used to protect itself from the coming storm in its relations with the United States."

Caroline Glick is an award-winning columnist and author of "The Israeli Solution: A One-State Plan for Peace in the Middle East." Her full article can be accessed at www.carolineglick.org

Palestinian Elections Present West with Many Challenges

■ Maurice Hirsch

Palestinian Media Watch

Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas has announced elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council will take place on 22 May 2021, followed by elections for the PA President/Chairman on 31 July 2021.

According to the PA Elections Law elections, the position of 'President' must be held every four years. Elections for the PA President/Chairman were last held in January 2005. The last general elections for the Palestinian Parliament were held in January 2006. In those elections, Hamas - an internationally designated terror organisation - won the popular vote in both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank and a majority of the parliament seats. Hamas won 74 seats out of the 132 seats. Following the electoral success, Hamas' leader, Ismail Haniyeh, formed the new PA government.

Emboldened by the electoral win, from the beginning of 2006, Hamas substantially increased its terror attacks on Israel. These attacks reached their peak on 25 June 2006, when Hamas terrorists infiltrated Israel from Gaza, killed two Israeli soldiers, and kidnapped soldier, Gilad Shalit. In response, Israel arrested most of the Hamas members of government.

Abbas seized the opportunity, deposed the remainder of the government and replaced it with a so-called 'technocrat' government, which was dominated by Fatah and would continue and increase to be so over time.

Hamas, angry with Abbas's actions, seized control of the Gaza Strip in the summer of 2007.

Since then, de facto, the lawfully elected Palestinian parliament stopped functioning. Hamas has continued its control of the Gaza Strip ever since, while Abbas and Fatah control the PA areas in the West Bank/Judea and Samaria.

A recent survey by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research indicates that in a presidential race between Fatah's Mahmoud Abbas and Hamas' Ismail Haniyeh, most Palestinians would vote for terror head Haniyeh. This is not necessarily a reflection of the widespread Palestinian support for terror, but more likely a reflection of most Palestinians' demand (66%) that Abbas resign. It is also probably the result of the belief of the majority of the Palestinian public (52%) that Abbas is the wrong candidate and that Fatah has better options.

According to the poll, the most dominant of the alternative Fatah candidates is Marwan Barghouti. Barghouti has been convicted for his involvement in the murder of 5 Israelis, and is currently serving five

consecutive life sentences plus an additional 40 years in an Israeli prison. If Barghouti were to face Hamas' Haniyeh in presidential elections, Barghouti would receive 61% of the vote as opposed to 37% voting for Haniyeh.

Whether those elections will ever take place, and whether the results of the elections will indeed affect any change, remains to be seen.

However, the interim period raises a number of fundamental questions, not only for the Palestinians, but predominantly for the new Biden Administration, the European Union, and other major supporters of the PA.

While the Palestinians consider Hamas and the PFLP to be legitimate 'Palestinian factions', both organisations are designated by the US and the EU as terror organisations.

If reason and basic morality were to prevail, the Biden Administration and the EU would make it clear that they do not accept, in any shape or form, the participation of US and EU designated terror organisations in the Palestinian elections, and that they are unwilling to facilitate - in any manner - such a decision.

This is an abbreviated version of an article by Maurice Hirsch Adv. of Palestinian Media Watch. For the full article see: <https://palwatch.org>. Republished with permission.

Israel's Colourful Society

Amit Barak

Elias Zarina is an Arabic-speaking Christian born in the Christian Quarter in the Old City of Jerusalem. Elias works in the hotel industry in the city. More than once he told me that he met with pilgrims (Catholics or Orthodox) at the hotel and Elias repeatedly proves them wrong. When they hear that he is an Israeli Christian, they react in amazement, because the impression they came with is that in the Holy Land there are only Jews, Muslims and conflict.

Those who read only the usual headlines in the media can be excused for such thinking. Those who read a little more, however, will discover a very different picture. In order to get to know how diverse Israeli society is, you really have to sit down and study or travel in Israel, on a trip that departs from the conventional tourist routes.

Israeli society comprises a rich fabric of different religions, denominations and groups living side by side. This is possible because of the strong Israeli democracy that draws its power from Judaism and Zionism.

While 74% of the population in Israel are Jews, the truth is that Jewish society is complex and diverse. Further, the other twenty six percent are minorities and others without classification (about 4.8%).

The majority group within the minorities are the Arab Muslims (about 1.6 million), among them about 395,000 Bedouin. The Arabs live mostly in Arab cities and villages and preserve their religious and cultural way of life (Jews can hardly be found in Arab localities because selling homes to Jews in Arab villages is taboo for the Arab society). Others live alongside Jews and Christians in mixed cities like Haifa, Beersheba, and Jaffa.

Arab society maintains a certain distance from the State of Israel in the national aspect, many preserving a distinctly Palestinian identity. But in the economic, employment, academic, sports, educational, and cultural fields they are fully integrated. You can find Arab Muslims in senior positions in all professions - in the courts, in hospitals, in government offices, in banking, in national sport teams. You can also find Arab MKs in the Knesset (most of whom are hostile towards the State of Israel).

In recent years, more and more Muslim Arab men and women can be found in the National Service, which is also considered by Israeli society as a parallel service to the army. At the request of the Arabs (as well as at the request of some ultra-Orthodox Jews), this service is called today the National Civil Service. The word 'Civil' was added because they are more comfortable identifying with civil society in Israel than with Israeli nationality. In any case, the state has decided that it is a step that builds trust, and a change of this sort, increasing the inclusion of Arabs into National Service, needs to be implemented step-by-step.

However, most of them are absent (except a few and brave) from the symbol most identified with Israeli-ness, and which is seen as a final entry ticket into Israeli society: service in the Israeli Defense Force (IDF).



Druze women seen walking by an Arab vendor selling begehle (bagels) in Jerusalem's Old City. | Photo: Flash90

The Bedouin - with their own cultural characteristics - live mainly in the north of Israel and in the Negev (in Israel's south). The Bedouin living in the north have much more Israeli identity than the Bedouin in the Negev. The northerners integrate into society and enlist in the IDF more easily, and this is acceptable in their community. Among the Bedouin in the south, an ideological struggle is taking place between the State of Israel and the Islamic Bedouin movement.

The second group among the minorities are the Christians. In Israel there are about 175,000 Christians, most of whom are Arabic-speaking. This group also includes Armenian Christians (about 3,000), Aramaeans and others. Most of them live in and around the Galilee and Haifa, others in central Israel (Jaffa, Ramla, Lod) and Jerusalem. Most Christians live in towns and villages with a Muslim Arab majority or in mixed cities. They are represented in all aspects of Israeli society - as individuals, judges of the Supreme Court, director of a hospital in the Galilee, in sports, members of parliament, senior executives in the high-tech industry. Even the Israeli ambassador to Azerbaijan is an Arab Israeli Christian.

In 2012, following the genocide and persecution of Christians in the Middle East, the Greek Orthodox priest from Nazareth, Father Gabriel Naddaf, called on the young members of the Christian community to volunteer for the IDF and National Service. He encouraged them to integrate into Israeli society in all aspects, and to be partners in building the State of Israel. He spoke to them as representatives of the Christian community, as a collective and not just as individuals. Many responded to his call and activities, and today enlistment in the army for national service is more acceptable among Christians than in the past. Many have become interested in their biblical and historical connection with the people of Israel. A large part of Israel's Christian population, the Aramean Christians, have rediscovered their historical roots in the land.

Another group are the Druze - about 145,000 were integrated into the State of Israel and IDF under a law in 1956 enacted with the consent of the community leaders and the Druze religious leadership. The Druze live on Mount Carmel near Haifa and in the Galilee. They speak Arabic, and while their culture is similar to the Arab culture, it is a separate and independent religion and community, with unique traditions. They also have a connection to the Jewish people through Jethro. Jethro is viewed as a Prophet in Druze belief, named in Arabic Nabi Shu'ayb. Druze men serve in the IDF, most

of them in combat units, and many senior officers can be found among the Druze. Druze women do not serve in the army but in recent years more and more have decided to volunteer for National Service.

In Israel you can find other small and special minority groups. For example there are the Circassians in Israel - about 4,000 people are Sunni Muslims from the Caucasus who came to Israel in the 19th century. They are, in fact, in the same position as the Druze, under the same law from 1956. They live in two villages in Israel, with their own language and traditions. One of the things that characterises their villages is the cleanliness of the streets. They are fully integrated and serve in the IDF.

Approximately 2600 Alawites all live in one village in the north, the border between Israel and Lebanon crossing the village.

There are only about 850 Samaritans today. Half of them live on Mount Gerizim and half in Holon near Tel Aviv. Those who live in Holon are Israelis in every way and serve in the IDF, while those who live on Mount Gerizim hold Israeli citizenship, a Jordanian passport and are also citizens of the Palestinian Authority. Samaritan-owned factories also suffer from BDS and restrictions in Europe.

The Baha'is living in Israel today are volunteers who come for a limited time to serve in the World Baha'i Center in Haifa and Acre. On average, there are about 650 volunteers from 75 different countries in Israel at any given time, with about a third of them changing every year.

There are also several hundred Vietnamese living in Israel, who were absorbed by Israel between 1977 and 1979, after they fled Vietnam after the Communist takeover in 1975.

In the Muslim quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem, you can find a small number of Gypsies; even Israelis hardly know this.

Several thousand families of the former South Lebanese Army live in Israel. They arrived in Israel as refugees from Lebanon in 2000 after Israel withdrew from Lebanon. Most are Christian Maronite and Greek-Orthodox Christians, others are Druze, and both Sunni and Shiite Muslims. Most of them - especially the second generation - have integrated into Israeli society much better than Arabs and Christians born in Israel.

With this colorful cultural diversity, there is a lot to see, hear and eat in Israel.

Amit Barak was one of the initiators of the historical movement to integrate Christians into the IDF and Israeli society. Amit is an expert in Christian-Jewish relations, Co-founder of Jerusalemite Initiative, and Innovation Ltd.

Short News

Israeli Aid Delegation Assisting Honduras



A delegation from Israel travelled to the Republic of Honduras to help the country following the devastation left behind by hurricanes. Part of their mission was to assist cities suffering from hurricane damage and providing guidance to local leadership. The delegation was formed after the government of Honduras requested help from Israel's government and consisted of Israel's Home Front Command and the Foreign Ministry delegates. Col. (res.) Golan Wach, commander of the Search and Rescue National Unit, stated: "Israel and the Home Front Command will continue to lend a hand to any country that needs our help anywhere in the world." | Photo: © Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Israeli Sign Language Academy

Israel will establish a Sign Language Academy. This decision was made to boost equality and help those with disabilities fully integrate with society. Israeli sign language shares a long history with the State of Israel. Sign language speakers developed Israeli sign languages alongside the building of the state and the ingathering of Jews from the Diaspora. Israeli sign languages connect the deaf community in Israel, regardless of their nationality or sector. It is the main mode of communication for most deaf people in Israel, including Jewish, Muslim and Christian Arabs, Druze and Bedouins.

Recycling Face Masks



Israeli clean-tech startup UBQ converts used face masks into eco-friendly material. The donning of single-use masks has skyrocketed globally since the onset of the corona pandemic. The masks can be potentially harmful to the environment when not disposed of properly, so recycling them is very important. UBQ has developed a way to transform unsorted household waste, including single-use masks, into an additive for the plastics industry that can be used in products like furniture, toys and car parts. | Photo: Flash90

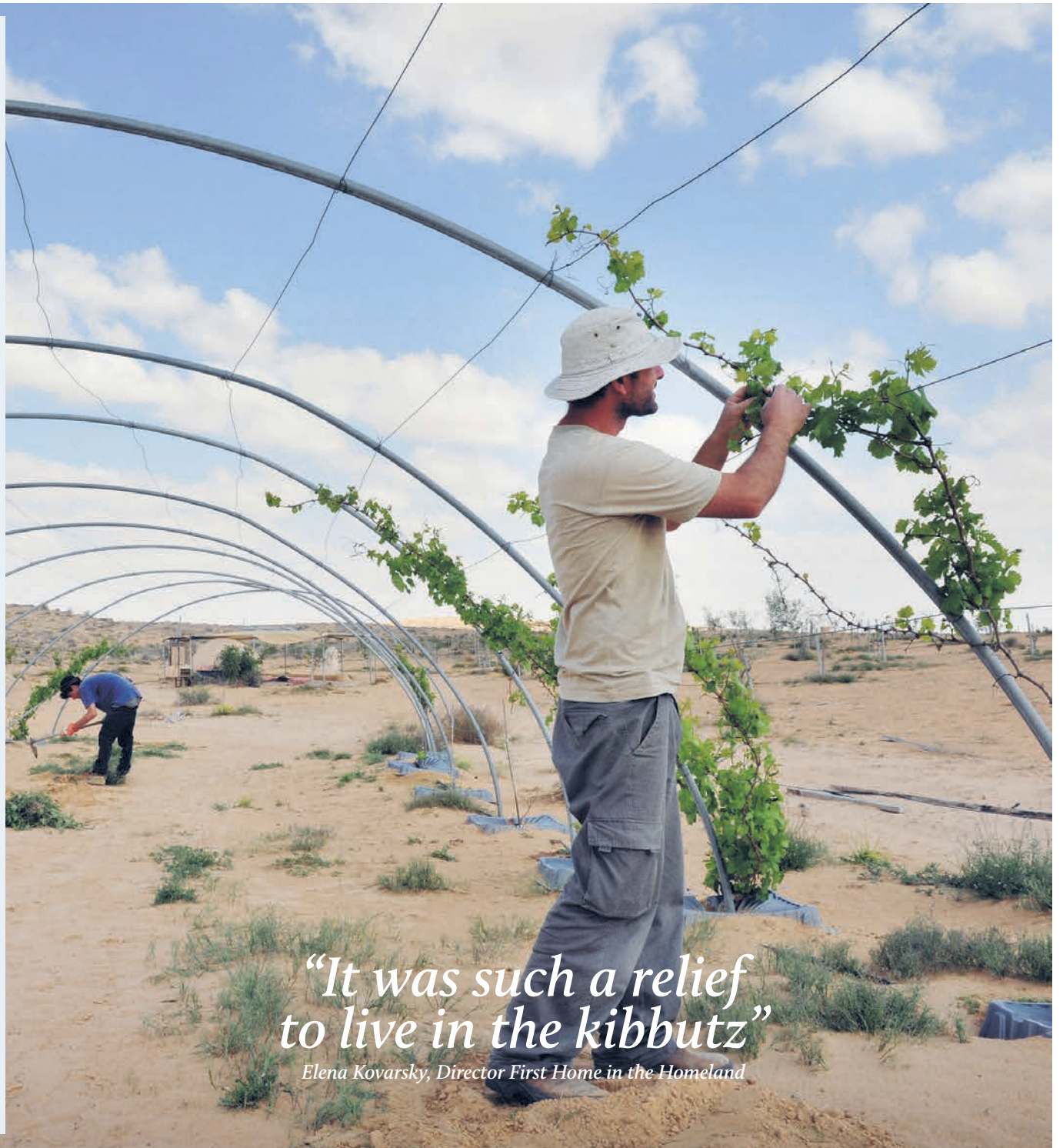
Life in a Kibbutz

■ Rita Quartel

Christians for Israel Netherlands

It was 21 January 1991 when Elena Kovarsky (born 1962), her husband and little daughter left the Soviet Union to build a new life in Israel. Their destination was Kibbutz Mashabei Sadeh in the Negev. To this very day, Elena remembers the warm welcome they received from the people at the kibbutz. It made all the difference. And it is for good reason that this welcoming spirit has become one of the pillars of the *First Home in the Homeland* programme, of which Elena has been the director since 2007.

Elena grew up in Moscow in a family with one younger brother. Although her parents and grandparents on both sides were Jewish, it wasn't really part of their daily life. Society was imbued with the communist, secular mentality, including the doctrine 'religion is the drugs of capitalism' ('religion is the opium of the people'). Elena: 'We didn't celebrate Shabbat or Pesach; I didn't even know the word 'Pesach'. My grandmother sometimes managed to get matzah to prepare a tasty meal. But if you would have asked me at age ten what the connection was between Pesach and matzah, I wouldn't have known. It was only when I was a student, that I learned more about Jewry. It was a friend, who turned out to be Jewish, who told me about Pesach, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur etc. I started going to the synagogue twice a year, not because I decided to become religious or more Jewish, but to meet some Jewish people. My parents hardly spoke about us being Jewish, but there was an unwritten rule that said if I wanted to marry someone, he had to be Jewish. The second thing we were taught was that we had to be the best. I will never be a big director but I want to be a wise director and to achieve that position, I must be the best. Being the best was very important for all Jews in the Soviet Union. I know my husband and Jewish friends experienced the same.'



Aliyah

When a friend introduced Elena to Lev, they started dating and got married in 1983. Elena studied Spanish and English and trained to be a teacher. When the Iron Curtain fell in 1989, the prospect of making Aliyah suddenly became more realistic and appealing, especially with the terrible situation in Moscow after the perestroika. Elena: "There were so many changes to our everyday life, we were afraid to stay." Our Aliyah preparations took about a year. At that time there was no Jewish Agency in Moscow or an Israeli embassy. "We knew that the Israeli consul was meeting people

wanting to make Aliyah in the Dutch embassy in Moscow. So we collected the necessary paperwork, went to the embassy and stayed for two days to get our documents. The consul gave us the Aliyah visa on the spot. He said: 'You have the right to make Aliyah, here is your visa.'"

Decision

As it would take at least another six months before any flight connection between Moscow and Tel Aviv would be available, the consul suggested buying a train ticket to one of the major railway stations in Eastern Europe, like Budapest

(Hungary) or Bucharest (Romania). So that's what they did. They opted for Budapest, and the first available date was 21 January 1991. In Budapest, they were met by Israeli people who helped them – on behalf of the Jewish Agency – to fly to Tel Aviv. For Elena and her family, it was the first time outside the (Former) Soviet Union, and it wasn't easy to leave. "It was hard and also a bit scary. We didn't know what to expect, especially taking into consideration that four days before our departure, Operation Desert Storm (part of the Gulf War) started. Our parents were terribly worried about us leaving. My mum went crazy. She was crying and begging us to postpone, but we decided to go. We didn't want to wait any longer. My husband said: 'We don't belong here anymore, we will go and I believe that everything will be fine.'"

Frightening Arrival

Unfortunately, their arrival in Israel turned out to be anything but fine. "We landed on 22 January at 10 pm and walked from the plane to the Absorption Ministry hall. We were given boxes with gas masks, and someone from the IDF was explaining in Russian how to use them. Suddenly the siren went off, and we were

told to run to the shelter at the end of the corridor, leaving everything behind. In the meantime, we had to put the masks on (my husband helped our daughter), and I noticed they were different from the ones we knew from the civil defence in Moscow. My daughter started to cry, but we didn't know what was wrong as we couldn't see her face. All of a sudden someone came our way, and without saying a word, pressed a button on her mask. I then realised that the children's masks had some kind of motor which needed to be activated to let the air in. My daughter had been without air to breathe, and as soon as I understood that I had almost killed my own child, I lost consciousness. I fell on the floor; everybody stopped running and came to help me. Soon we heard the announcement that things were back to normal and we could pick up our belongings. When we left the airport, our daughter was still crying, but we had no time to deal with her. We were pressed to leave as the IDF were afraid the airport would be bombed. In the end, the procedure at the airport only took 20 minutes. Normally it takes two to four hours.'



Kibbutz Mashabei Sadeh



Hebrew language sessions in Kibbutz Mashabei Sadeh

Kibbutz

The next stop was Kibbutz Mashabei Sadeh, south of Beersheva. It's a place they still call their home after so many years. "We had a couple of friends who made Aliyah three months before us and they went through the interview programme of *First Home in the Homeland* in Tel Aviv and the kibbutz movement. They were placed in Mashabei Sadeh and were very positive. While we were still in Moscow, we spoke with the director of the kibbutz. He happened to be fluent in Spanish, so I could communicate in Spanish and explain who we were and what our plans were. He invited us to stay and said: 'Don't worry; we'll prepare a place for you.' When we arrived at the kibbutz, the apartment we were supposed to get was given to someone else who had fled the war. We got another apartment, small but very nice. It was such a relief to live in the kibbutz because it was relatively safe and the people of the kibbutz were very welcoming, nice and supportive. I have never forgotten their generosity, it made all the difference."

Membership

It took Elena and her family about half a year to feel at home in Israel. They started learning Hebrew and were dedicated to intense studies for the next six months. To their surprise they were considered candidates for the kibbutz membership, being the only family from the Former Soviet Union to be offered that option. "Normally it takes two years to finish the candidateship and become official members (with the right to vote) of the community. You don't have to pay for

living at the kibbutz but need to work there, and your children receive free education. During those two years, we worked at different places in the kibbutz. I worked in the kitchen, the kindergarten but also in the factory as Import and Export Manager. My husband was as a technician involved in the maintenance of the machinery of the factory. And before we got accepted, he already held the position of engineer, which he used to be in Russia as well."

Argentina

In 2002 Elena faced a new challenge. The Jewish Agency offered her a job as their representative in Argentina, knowing that she was fluent in Spanish and Russian. Elena and her family of five (two more children were born in the kibbutz) decided to accept the offer and moved to South America for the next three years. "I found myself at the right place at the right time. Accepting the job was an excellent decision. It opened a lot of doors for my family regarding culture, language etc. All of my children are fluent in Spanish and know all about South America. Not everyone knows this, but a lot of people from the Former Soviet Union emigrated to Argentina in the 1990s because of the terrible economic situation. However, in 2001, there was a major crisis in Argentina and some of those who had immigrated remembered their Jewish roots and came to the Jewish Agency as they wanted to make Aliyah. Hence why the Jewish Agency needed someone who spoke Russian and Spanish to help these people."

First Home in the Homeland

Upon return to Mashabei Sadeh in 2005, Elena became the Director of Marketing for the kibbutz factory, when two years later, she was offered the position of Director of *First Home in the Homeland*, which at that time was in a terrible state. The kibbutzim no longer wanted to be involved, and the programme came to a halt. The Jewish Agency decided to restart the programme, and it was Elena's job to get all parties back on the same page. "It was far from easy. It took me a whole year to visit all the kibbutzim and tell them to accept anyone who wanted to stay. They couldn't say no to anyone, even difficult social cases (e.g. a single mum with three children without any education or elderly people etc.). We had to show people that our programme worked and we were to be trusted. If you promise something, you need to keep your word! It was hard the first year but the second year was easier, as was the third year. It took a lot of effort, but it worked."

Christians for Israel

For a number of years, Christians for Israel (C4I) has also been involved in the *First Home in the Homeland* programme. The relationship started with a friend of Elena's in Kiev who also happened to know Koen Carlier (C4I Ukraine). "This friend believed in our programme but also knew that it was about to stop soon due to a lack of sponsors. The programme used to be sponsored by the Jewish Federation in the USA, but because of a financial crisis, they had to pull out. He had some ideas about new sponsorships and suggested to meet with Koen."

"I am extremely proud to belong to this country, and I want to be here when we celebrate the 100th anniversary of the State of Israel!"



Elena Kovarsky, Director of *First Home in the Homeland*

We went to Vinnitsa to visit Koen, and he explained what Christians for Israel was doing. I told him that the work of C4I in Ukraine is critical, helping people 'to get on the plane'. But I also said, 'Do you ever think of people getting off the plane in Israel and what their start in Israel will be like?' Koen then introduced the ideas of *First Home in the Homeland* to the directors of Christians for Israel.

In 2013, when Christians for Israel had its biennial international conference in Jerusalem, all of the participants (about 70) came for a 2-hour visit to Mashabei Sadeh. Some olim (immigrants to Israel) shared their personal (Aliyah) story, and the people were impressed by what they heard and saw. After that Christians for Israel decided to start sponsoring our programme. I couldn't have asked for better partners. There is now a strong relationship between the two organisations which I really value."

Challenges

Of all olim who take part in the *First Home in the Homeland* programme, 25% stay on for another year. Some stay for two or three years. About 10% stay for life. The main reason for short-term stays is that the kibbutz is a perfect place for children to grow up. It also provides a safe haven to integrate, which is not always easy generally speaking.



Olim in Mashabei Sadeh who made Aliyah from Ukraine

"Olim from the Former Soviet Union/ Belarus/Ukraine are highly motivated to integrate, and they are not afraid to face difficulties as they come from societies where difficulties are part of daily life. But olim from South America and Europe are a different story, as they are not as ready to face the challenges." One of those challenges is finding a job (outside the kibbutz). "I know a lot of people who find an excellent job immediately after they finish the programme. But we also have highly qualified people who can't find a job."

In spite of all the challenges, Elena wants to encourage all who consider making Aliyah. "Don't wait, don't waste time, do it right now. Another year spent in your native country doesn't give you anything. Every year here in Israel helps you to advance your future."



ELENA AND HER FAMILY

Tulips from The Netherlands

■ Christians for Israel Netherlands

Every year Christians for Israel Netherlands distributes ten thousand Dutch tulip bulbs in Israel as a symbol of friendship and solidarity. The Tulip Tour whisked through Israel again in November 2020. Since no Dutch 'Tulip Teams' could travel to Israel because of corona measures, local friends did the honours, sometimes even in Dutch style!

Many tulip bulbs were given out in Jerusalem, among others to Mayor Moshe Lion. He has been mayor of Jerusalem since 2018 and is close friends with Benjamin Philip, the director of the Hineni soup kitchen in the Netherlands. The 60,000 tulip bulbs Mayor Lion gave to the city parks and green spaces.

Mayor Lion gave the bulbs to Lion while wearing traditional Dutch clothing of Volendam. Even though there are no Dutch people in Jerusalem, the city is more Dutch than that!

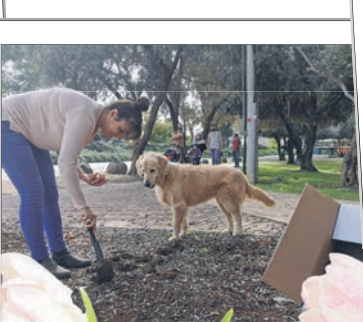
Mayor Lion said: "The tulip bulbs that you have donated to the city of Jerusalem are a symbol of friendship. We will make sure that they are planted in our blossoming friendship." As the children walked through Jerusalem's city hall, they drew a lot of attention...

Encouraging and Connecting

Two important goals of the Tulip Tour are to encourage Israel and to connect the people living there with each other and with their Dutch friends. The photo below from the kibbutz HaGoshrim is a great example, as well as the photo of a grandmother planting Dutch tulip bulbs with her granddaughter, just a few kilometres from Lebanon's troubled border. We especially want to encourage people who live in places like this, where few others visit!

A delegation from the Jewish Agency visited the absorption centre in Karmiel, where young immigrants (primarily from the former Soviet Union) are welcomed and prepared for life in Israeli society. Soon the garden will be brightened by Dutch tulips: the young people planted lots of tulip bulbs.

Another place where the tulip bulbs mean a lot and are always gladly accepted is in Israel's heartland, the Biblical areas of Judea and Samaria. The people here often feel like the whole world is against them, so a symbol of friendship is a real boost.



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Israel Prayer Calendar December 2020 & January 2021

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The Abraham Accords

■ Rev Willem JJ Glashouwer
President | Christians for Israel International

It came unexpectedly. Israel and the United Arab Emirates concluded a bi-lateral agreement under supervision of the United States of America. This is quite exceptional because Israel maintains only diplomatic ties in the Middle East with Jordan and Egypt. The deal is called ‘The Abraham Accords’ after the common ancestor Abraham of both Jews and Arabs.

However, the following should be noted.

Peace is better than war. Every right-minded man will agree with that. Except when peace talks are held as another form of warfare, during which one party tries to achieve goals, you cannot attain militarily because you are too weak. That doesn’t seem to be the case here.

Peace is better than war.

There is no reason why Isaac’s offspring (ancestor of the Jewish people) and Ishmael (ancestor of the Arabs) should not be able to interact in a friendly manner. They had the same father – Abraham – but different mothers, respectively Sarah and Hagar. One received the Covenant, the other God’s blessing. Read *Genesis 17:15-22*. The Bible calls Isaac the son of the promise, and Ishmael, the son of the flesh. These two boys buried their father Abraham together. Read *Genesis 25:9-10*.

Islam has always been the blocking factor to bring about peace with Israel. I write extensively about ‘Jerusalem and Islam’ in chapter 7 of my book *Why Jerusalem*. In my opinion there can be no question that a nation like Israel that was under Muslim domination once, would ever return under religions that were considered to be a bypassed station by Islam, like Judaism or Christianity. Or that the third holy city in Islam – Jerusalem – would be in Jewish or Christian hands. In the Middle East conflict, it is ultimately not a question whether a Palestinian State will be established on the West Bank of the river Jordan, with East Jerusalem as its capital. It involves the whole of Israel and the whole of Jerusalem. Allah will not settle for less. Yes, once the whole world will be under Allah. That is what he has promised through his prophet Mohammed.

These peace accords in no way imply that these Islamic states recognise that Israel has the right and is entitled to be an independent Jewish State.

There are only two possibilities for the devout Muslim: you either live in the house of war or live in the house of peace. The house of peace is where Allah rules. The house of war is where Allah does not rule. So, if there is any mention of ‘peace’ talks with Israel, the devout Islamist means the peace of Allah. That is what Israel is offered,



The flags of the US, United Arab Emirates, Israel and Bahrain were screened on the walls of Jerusalem’s Old City in September 2020. | Photo: Flash90

but it means that the entire territory of Israel returns in the lap of Islam. Then, there can be a second-rate existence as second-rate citizens – dhimmis – in relative freedom for Jews or Christians living there. But suppose you want to know what that relative freedom means. In that case, you should look at that in Islamic countries like Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Pakistan and other countries in south-east Asia. These former Soviet republics are all Islamic, in large areas of Africa, the Middle East, etc.

These peace accords in no way imply that these Islamic states recognise that Israel has the right and is entitled to be an independent Jewish State. They only accept the fact that this is momentarily only political reality. The same goes for the peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan.

What will happen when Donald Trump is not re-elected in the USA? It seems to be very likely that Joe Biden will be the next President of the United States of America. What will his policies in the Middle East hold? If it is more of the same as it was under Barack Obama, then Israel is in for an uncertain future.

The Bible talks of wars that will affect the Middle East. Prophecies, not yet fulfilled until the present day. For example, *Isaiah 17:1-2*, which speaks of the total destruction of Damascus, the capital city of Syria, which you can see from the Golan Heights in Israel. Or *Isaiah 19:16-17* in which Egypt will shudder with fear at the uplifted hand of the Lord, because of the terror the land of Judah will bring to Egypt. Or *Psalms 83*, with a first ring of nations around Israel with Assyria in the background – who jointly and unanimously say: “Come, let us destroy them as a nation, that the name of Israel be remembered no more.” Or *Ezekiel 38 and 39*, with a second and wider circle of nations around Israel (Syria and Egypt are no longer mentioned here!) that want to wipe Israel off the map. With Turkey and the former Soviet republics and Russia in the background? An Islamic holy war, a jihad, against Israel? And *Zechariah 12 and 14* in which finally all nations, one could say in our days: The United Nations, will try to lift that troublesome rock called Jerusalem.

In short:

- Israel does well never to let her guard down. All of a sudden, everything can change.
- However: peace is better than war.

And one day this will be the political reality, like *Isaiah 19:23-25* says: “In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria. The Assyrians will go to Egypt and the Egyptians to Assyria. The Egyptians and Assyrians will worship together. In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing on the earth. The Lord Almighty will bless them, saying, “Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance.”
May the Prince of Peace come soon!

Signs of Faith

By Kees de Vreugd

Torah Scroll

In this series, ‘Signs of Faith’, objects that express Jewish faith are explained and discussed.

Israel is set apart from the nations by the Torah. The Torah is holy and treated with the greatest possible reverence. In the synagogue service, therefore, the Torah is not simply read from a printed book. A special scroll is taken from the Torah chest. Sometimes, there is more than one reading from the Torah in the service. If possible, for each reading, a separate scroll is used. In every synagogue, therefore, several scrolls are present. After the reading, the scroll is rolled up again, clothed in a Torah cloak, and put behind a double curtain in the ‘Holy Ark’, the Torah chest.

The Torah scroll is made of parchment and handwritten by a specially trained writer, the *sofer*. Before he sets himself to writing, he immerses

himself in the *mikveh*, the ritual bath, to devote himself to this special task. Writing a Torah scroll is a particularly precise job, as no mistakes can be made. No letter may be forgotten or added.

Only the consonants are written. The vowel and cantillation marks that were added to the original consonant text are found in the printed *Chumash* (Pentateuch), but not on the scroll. The *Baal Qore*, the lecturer in the synagogue, has to be well prepared. Besides, there is a special way of writing the letters, that sometimes slightly differs from the well-known printed letters.

The parchment is made from the skin of a kosher animal. The parchment sheets are needled together with a thread made of a kosher animal’s tendons. The scroll is rolled around two wooden sticks, called *atsei chayyim* (plural of *Ets Chayyim*, Tree of Life). The ink used for writing is also of a special composition, which is the secret of the *soferim* (plural of *sofer*).

Writing a complete Torah scroll takes about a year and a half. Therefore, a Torah scroll is an expensive object. It is customary to have a scroll written on the occasion of a special event or a jubilee. The one who has given the assignment may write the last words on the scroll. The handover and inauguration is a festive happening.



Reading the Torah at the Western Wall. | Photo: Shutterstock

Jewish Festivals

Ta'anit Esther

Fast of Esther

25 February 2021

The Fast of Esther is a Jewish fast from dawn until dusk on Purim eve, commemorating the three-day fast observed by the Jewish people in the story of Purim. If the date of the Fast of Esther falls on Shabbat (Saturday), the fast is instead observed on the preceding Thursday. *Ta'anit Esther begins at dawn (first light) and ends at nightfall (full dark).*

Purim

Festival of Lots

26 February 2021

Purim (from the Hebrew word *pur*, is also called the Festival of Lots); is a Jewish holiday which commemorates the saving of the Jewish people from Haman in the ancient Persian Empire, a story recorded in the Biblical Book of Esther (Megillat Esther). *Purim begins at sundown on Thursday, 25 February and ends at nightfall on Friday, 26 February 2021.*

Shushan Purim

Purim celebrated in Jerusalem and walled cities

28 February 2021

Shushan Purim begins at sundown on Saturday, 27 February and ends at nightfall on Sunday, 28 February 2021.

Ta'anit Bechorot

Fast of the First Born

25 March 2021

Fast of the Firstborn (Hebrew: *Ta'anit B'khorot* or *Ta'anit B'khorim*); is a unique fast day in Judaism which usually falls on the day before Passover. Usually, the fast is broken at a *siyum* celebration (typically made at the conclusion of the morning services), which, according to prevailing custom, creates an atmosphere of rejoicing that overrides the requirement to continue the fast. Unlike most Jewish fast days, only firstborns are required to fast on the Fast of the Firstborn. *Ta'anit Bechorot begins at dawn on Thursday, 25 March 2021.*

Passover

Feast of the Unleavened Bread

28 March - 4 April 2021

Passover (Hebrew: *Pesach*) commemorates the story of the Exodus, in which the ancient Israelites were freed from slavery in Egypt. Passover begins on the 15th day of the month of Nisan in the Jewish calendar, which is in spring in the Northern Hemisphere, and is celebrated for seven or eight days. It is one of the most widely observed Jewish holidays. *Passover begins at sundown on Saturday, 27 March in the Diaspora and ends at nightfall on Sunday, 4 April 2021.*



Kees de Vreugd

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

‘Peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.’ (*Galatians 6:16*)

This verse is a bit of a peculiar sentence, almost at the closure of Paul’s letter to the Galatians. Who is Paul speaking about?

Most English translations connect the two parts of the sentence with the conjunction ‘and’, suggesting that the text points at two different groups: the one denoted as ‘them’, the other as the ‘Israel of God’. The word ‘them’ refers to the first part of the verse: ‘Those who will walk by this rule’. The Living Bible changes the whole sentence, apparently in an attempt to avoid mentioning Israel, and reads: ‘May God’s mercy and peace be upon all of you who live by this principle and upon those everywhere who are really God’s own.’ That translation is a clear example of how this scripture is often interpreted: the Israel of God is not the people of Israel, but instead is the church of Christ, whether you are Jew or non-Jew. While Paul has indeed said that neither circumcision is anything, nor uncircumcision, an alternative way of understanding might be preferable.

Let us have a closer look at the text. Which rule, which principle does Paul mean? He described that principle in the previous verse: In Christ, ‘neither circumcision is anything nor foreskin, but a new creation!’ He wishes peace and mercy to those who hold firm to that principal. And he wishes that also to the Israel of God.

Now we need to consider what the whole purpose of this letter is. Some found that the believers of Gentile origin had to be circumcised and to take upon themselves the rules of Judaism, such as the feasts,



Gethsemane Garden on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. | Photo: Shutterstock

dietary laws, and so on. Paul combats this requirement strongly. A non-Jew does not need to become a Jew, and a Jew remains a Jew, but there is unity in the Messiah. In Him, we are even a renewed creation. The opposition, the enmity between Jew and non-Jew has been overcome. The difference is not dissolved, but reconciled, for peace has come. And the non-Jew, too, shares in God’s mercy. If that is the case, would that not also be valid for all Israel, then? Israel is and remains God’s own property, after all.

Another possibility is to translate the Greek conjunction *kai* as ‘even’. Then, both parts of the sentence refer to the same group: those who follow this rule are the Israel of God. Those believing Jews, who recognise that Gentiles need not be circumcised in order to belong to God, are the Israel of God. This would be true for rabbinic Judaism, too, by the way. Rabbinic Judaism judges that for Gentiles to receive salvation, it suffices to live according to the so-called Noahide laws, which do not include circumcision.

This rabbinic concept was elaborated in the Talmud, but an echo of the Noahide laws is heard in *Acts 15:20*. The congregation in Jerusalem may have been familiar with an early form of this concept. So, even for rabbinic Judaism, gentiles need not become Jews to inherit eternal life.

Whatever interpretation we prefer, it is important to understand that Israel never means anything else than Israel throughout the Bible. So, we must bring strong arguments if we would want to spiritualise Israel’s meaning in *Galatians 6:16*. But both from the logic of the letter to the Galatians, and from the logic of the New Testament as a whole, it is inevitable that here, too, Israel is Israel. In *Romans 9*, there seems to be a split in Israel. However, *chapter 11* makes clear that also those who have stumbled are still the Israel of God. Would it be different in Galatians?

It is time for the church worldwide to bless the people of Israel as the Israel of God.

Book Review

By Andrew Tucker

Barak Obama, A Promised Land

Former President Barak Obama has released part one of his Memoires chronicling his terms as President of the United States. ‘A Promised Land’ is a thought-provoking account of a critical period of history. It will influence many people.

During his Presidency, Obama said many positive things about the Jewish people. But at the end of the day, when it came to action, he was deeply hostile towards the Jewish State of Israel.

Obama’s tragic misreading of the Middle East during his Presidency (recall his Cairo speech in 2009, his failure to confront Syria’s President Assad when it became clear he was guilty of massive crimes, and the Libya debacle) is reflected in his recounting of the history Israel and the Jewish people.

Former Member of Israeli Knesset Dov Lipman has written a scathing critique, saying the book “is filled with historical inaccuracies” and “a flawed

understanding of the region—which clearly impacted his policies as president—but misleads readers in a way that will forever shape their negative perspective of the Jewish state”. Lipman analyses and rebuts one-by-one the many instances in which Obama portrays Jews as outsiders in the region, pawns of white European colonialism, Israel as an aggressor, and the Palestinians (and Arabs and Muslims generally) as their victims. According to Michael W. Schwartz, this is because Obama himself was “miseducated”: “The version of events he puts forward in A Promised Land unmistakably calls to mind the accounts associated with the late Edward Said, who was on the faculty at Columbia during Obama’s years there. Indeed, it was shortly before Obama entered Columbia that Said published his The Question of Palestine, which, as Mideast scholar Martin Kramer has said, “set the

parameters within academe for what one could and couldn’t say about the Palestinians and Israel.” Said’s Palestine book appeared just a year after the appearance of his magnum opus, Orientalism, which essentially remade the world of Middle Eastern studies by positioning the Arabs as the victims of their own “ism”—both physical occupation and exploitation and then intellectual despoliation—with the plight of the Palestinians being “Exhibit A” of the existence and extent of this two-fold exploitation.”

It is a pity Obama’s miseducation will now mislead millions more people who will read what is otherwise a fascinating book.

Lipman and Schwartz’s reviews of the book can be accessed at www.jns.org. Barak Obama. A Promised Land - Penguin Random House 2020



The Spirit of Purim

■ **Rev Cornelis Kant**
Executive Director | Christians for Israel International

On February 25 and 26, Jewish people celebrate the Purim festival. A cheerful feast with good food and drinks and giving each other presents. Purim originated from the events recorded in the book of Esther. In the great Persian empire in the 6th century BC, Haman wanted to exterminate the Jewish people. But through the intervention of Queen Esther at the king's court, genocide was thwarted. Let us dwell for a moment on a few memorable moments.

Haman, a senior official in the Persian Empire, was offended that the Jew Mordecai refused to bow down to Haman. Haman was an Agagite (*Esther 3:1*). Agag had been a king of the Amalekites (*1 Samuel 15*). Later Amalek became a generic name for the archenemies of Israel. Esther's history is an example of the prevalence of anti-Semitism before and after her time.

Mordecai's refusal to bow down to Haman undoubtedly derived from his faith in the God of Israel. Haman's annoyance with the Jewish religion, therefore played a role. How many times have we seen this throughout history?

It is very striking that Haman immediately wanted to punish the entire Jewish people and carry out genocide straight away. And by royal decree. This is typical of what the Jewish people have endured through the centuries. Annoyance at Jews often leads to vengeance against the entire Jewish people immediately. How often did the entire Jewish people have to suffer because of what a few were accused of? And often by false accusations. The examples are numerous.



Jewish settlers wearing costumes take part in the annual parade marking the Jewish holiday of Purim in the town of Hebron. | Photo: Flash90

Earlier, Mordecai had already discovered a conspiracy against the king and passed it on to the king. The king owed his life to Mordecai but had forgotten to thank him for it. Isn't this symbolic of the many blessings that the Jewish people have brought to the world? Instead of thanking Israel for it, Israel is repeatedly falsely accused, and continues to receive numerous condemnations and resolutions against it.

The Jewish girl Esther was incorporated into the king's harem and later raised to the rank of queen. Mordecai pins his hopes on Esther. She must now stand up for her people. But by doing so, she is risking her life. She does it

and goes to the king uninvited. Meanwhile, Mordecai fasts with all the Jews in Susa for three days. It's beautiful how fasting and prayer are combined with courageous action.

Later the king ordered that Haman and all those who intended to exterminate the Jews had to be killed. This reminds me of Joel 3, where the Lord says that at the end of times He will judge the nations that turned against Israel and the Jewish people. Esther, therefore, symbolises the history of the Jewish people throughout the centuries on their way to the coming of the Kingdom of Peace under the leadership of the Messiah.

Orphans *Part 3*

■ **Mandy Worby**
Christians for Israel Australia

This article is the third instalment of the four-part series. The first article was published in the October 2020 issue.

Last time we began looking at the issue of orphans and how God laid out very clearly in His Word that He expected His people to be compassionate and caring toward orphans. This is very important to understand because it demonstrates very clearly how God views all men who are estranged from Him. We also saw that Jesus fulfils the criteria as the 'go-between' so to speak, to bridge the gap between orphaned human beings and our God who is, in fact, a Father to those who are fatherless. We saw Jesus as our prophet, declaring the kingdom of God. He is our King, the Son of David – the Messiah who will come to set all things right in this world at the appointed time. We saw Him as our Great High Priest and Mediator not only making the offering on our behalf, but He was the offering given on our behalf ensuring our redemption.

It's important to understand that because of sin, humanity is Fatherless, we're all orphans.

Because of Him, we would no longer be fatherless...we would finally be reconciled to our Father, in fact, Scripture says we become 'adopted'.

Romans 8:15, 'For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba Father!"'

Ephesians 1:3-6, 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus, Messiah, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Messiah, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love, He predestined us to



| Photo: Shutterstock

adoption as sons through Jesus our Messiah to Himself, according to the kind intentions of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.'

God knew that we'd rebel and sin against Him, He knew we'd become orphans, and still, He created us but in the process of that creation, He predestined us to adoption so we'd be restored to Him and we'd no longer be 'Fatherless'.

I'm talking about the sovereignty of God, and that's a very deep rabbit hole to crawl into...if you can understand the sovereignty of God, you're God! Is God sovereign? Yes, He is. Do we have the ability to choose for ourselves? Yes, we

do. Are we accountable for those choices? Yes, we are. Did God predestine and ordain all that would unfold throughout human history? Yes, He did...He's God. Is your brain stretching a bit thin? Mine is. Regardless of our ability to fully comprehend God's sovereignty, His sovereignty is true and Biblical. It's just the way it is. Slight diversion there.

When you realise that Paul wrote these passages during the rule of the ancient Roman Empire, you understand that it was common knowledge and widely understood by the general populace, what adoption meant under Roman law. We'll look closer at that next time.

A Polish Jew Who Made the Desert Bloom



| Photo: Shutterstock

Kay Wilson
Israeli Tour Guide | Author | Cartoonist

Simcha Blass, a Polish Jew who emmigrated to Israel a decade before World War II, changed the world forever.

Growing up in Warsaw, antisemitism and poverty so impacted him and his other fellow Jews that Simcha was prompted to ‘check out his future’ in the Jewish homeland, which was then under British control. Before his exploratory journey, he devoted much time to thinking about how he could contribute to his people, and what would make his Promised Land thrive.

While in Warsaw he invented an agricultural device that he believed would ensure the success of Zionism in British Mandate Palestine. Used for planting wheat, it could increase crops by a massive 300%. Wheat would release the Jews from British or Arab dependency and favours. However, like every genius, Simcha did not know how to market his own product. His invention failed to be implemented.

With Hitler’s rapid ascension to power, Simcha returned to Poland to bring his wife to the Land of Israel from the city of Bialystok. Far away from the impending and unprecedented catastrophe that was about to strike his people, they settled in the pastoral Kibbutz Deganyah

His goal was to make the desert bloom, to make every patch of land suitable for human habitation.

Bet, on the shores of Lake Kinneret. It was here that Simcha came to the conclusion that the primary problem in the Jewish homeland was not enough wheat, but rather a lack of accessible water.

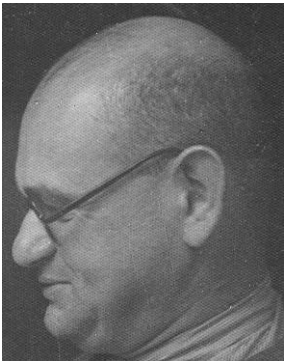
After the war, with political turmoil rife under the British, and a future Jewish state looking less and less likely, Simcha set about building the first pipeline in the Negev

Desert. His goal was to make the desert bloom, to make every patch of land suitable for human habitation. First, he got hold of the water pipes the British used during the Blitz for putting out the fires. Then he laid them in the Negev Desert, enabling water to flow in abundance. The result was eleven new communities. It was this new, against-all-odds, blooming desert that influenced the United Nations to include most of the Negev within the boundaries of the recommended Jewish state.

Years later, Simcha one day noticed a large tree flourishing among a group of barren trees all on dry land. Digging below the dry surface to find out how this could be, he discovered a leak coming from a buried mechanical coupling. The hidden water was dripping onto the roots of this one tree and not the others around.

Thus was born drip irrigation, a device that opened up a world of possibilities, and possibilities for the world.

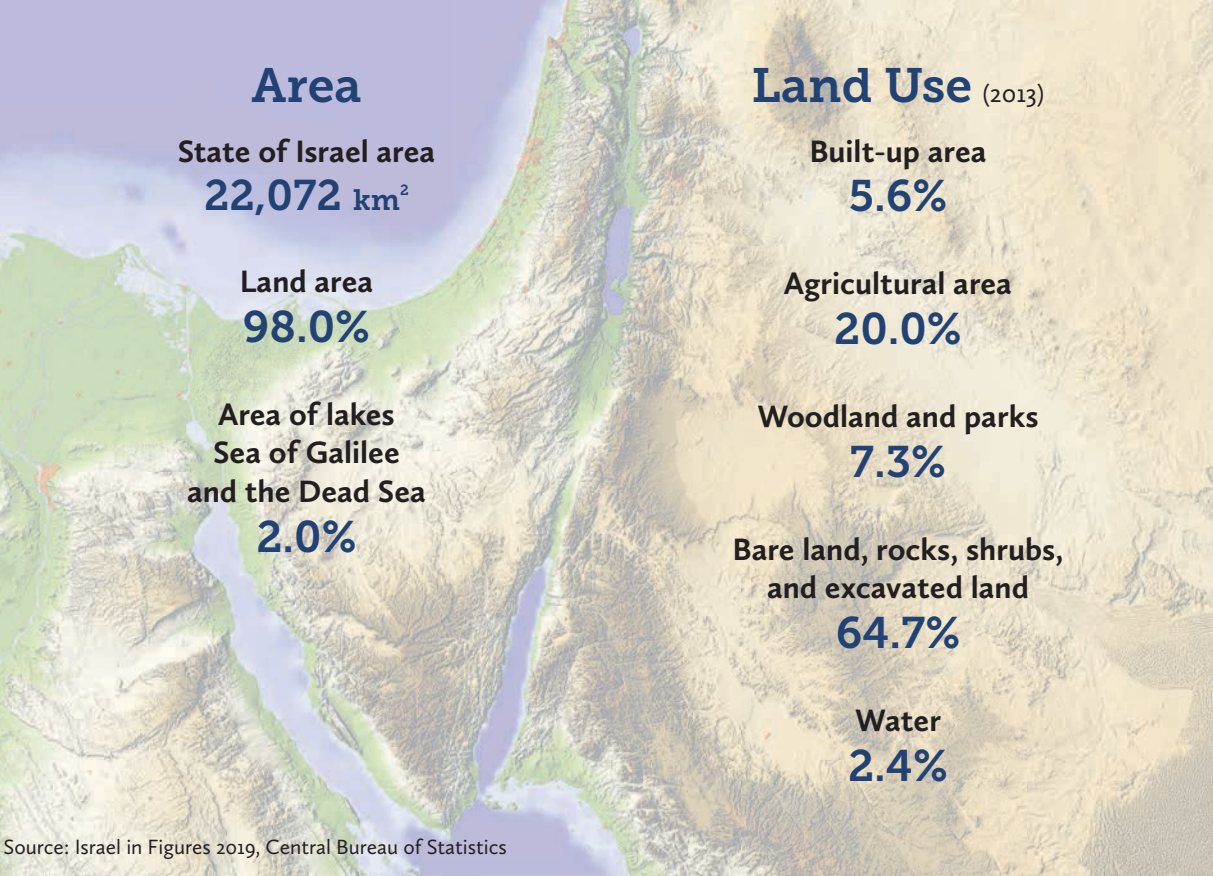
Simcha and his family moved to Kibbutz Hazerim in the Negev with the specific goal of exporting this technology all over the world. The desert would give him land to work on and experiment with. In 1966, at already 70-years old, with his son Yeshayahu and several engineers, they began to develop and perfect the online dripper, which enabled Israel’s desert to bloom, and also deserts all over the world. Kibbutz Hazerim became the successful prototype for countries all over the world, demonstrating how to maximise from the minimum. Drip irrigation was a system that would go on to transform the lives of millions of farmers in over 150 countries, enabling higher yields to be produced from any land, while saving water, fertiliser and energy. Thus it took just one man, one Zionist Polish Jew, to ensure that millions would now have enough to eat.



Simcha Blass

Facts Speak

Israel’s Geography in Figures



Poppy anemone blooming in the Negev Desert. | Photo: Shutterstock

Anniversary of the Iron Dome



The anti-missile system Iron Dome deployed in Ashkelon, Israel in 2011. The \$200 million anti-rocket system was created by Israel against rocket attacks from the Gaza strip. | Photo: ChameleonsEye/Shutterstock

■ **Bryce Turner**
Christians for Israel New Zealand

2021 brings the tenth anniversary of the famous ‘Iron Dome’, one of the most well-known of Israel’s defence super-weapons. Now fondly referred to as something of an icon of Israeli national pride, the Iron Dome system has allowed countless Israelis to sleep peacefully at night, relaxing in the knowledge that the system’s 90% success rate provides the best protection of any such defence system in the world.

Developed in response to increasing numbers of Hezbollah rocket attacks, the technology was fast-tracked during the second Lebanon war, being taken from concept to functional testing in only four years – a phenomenal achievement. In 2004, Brig. Gen. Danny Gold, the head of Maf’at at the time, started the programme that would research and design the intercept system, culminating in a demonstration of the functional system. Israel subsequently commissioned the development of Iron Dome in 2007, appointing Israeli contractor Rafael to the task. Another Israeli company mPrest Systems, was selected to handle programming the core of the Iron Dome’s management system.

Since Brig. Gen. Danny Gold posed the initial concept, the Iron Dome Air Defence System has now been deployed over 2000 times, dramatically reducing the Israeli casualties of enemy rocket attacks.

However, this peace comes at a huge cost with each defence battery reportedly costing over fifty million (USD), and each individual missile costing \$40,000-50,000 (USD). The initial order for 2-3 batteries has now been increased to 10 operational units, and it is claimed that this gives air defence coverage to the whole of Israel’s land area. The system is now well proven, and it is believed there are plans to purchase further batteries

Partnerships with the USA and other countries have seen the Iron Dome programme expanded. Currently Azerbaijan, India and Romania are

reported to have purchased Iron Dome Systems, Singapore has purchased the advanced radar control technology and is believed to now have a functional Iron Dome battery, and a partnership between Israel’s Rafael and the US Raytheon has seen extensive joint development. The US recently took delivery of its second complete Iron Dome battery.

The technology has also now expanded to the sea, with the development of the C-Dome – the naval version of the Iron Dome Air Defence System. In 2020, photos showed the Israeli Navy’s Sa’ar 5 class corvette Lahav, armed with two Iron Dome air defence system launchers for what is believed to be the first time. The Israeli Navy’s new Sa’ar 6 class, the first of which was completed and delivered at the end of 2020, are to be fitted with the latest C-Dome as part of a breathtaking arsenal of cutting edge defence, detection and surveillance systems.

The Iron Dome Air Defence System is designed to identify and destroy projectiles before they land in Israeli territory and is now one of the most effective anti-missile systems in the world. According to manufacturer Rafael’s website ‘The multi-mission system effectively counters rockets, mortars and artillery shells, as well as aircraft, helicopters and UAVs at very short ranges’. The system is comprised of three components: the design and tracking radar built by Elta, an Israeli defence company and subsidiary of Israel Aerospace Industries, and by the IDF; the battle management and weapon control system designed by the mPrest Systems software company; and the missile firing unit manufactured by Rafael Advanced Defence Systems Ltd.

The Iron Dome works by first detecting incoming projectiles –especially rockets, mortars, and artillery shells – and then calculating the trajectory and target. The advanced software then determines whether the target area is likely to be a critical zone – an area of population or other significant resource – or if it is likely to land in an unpopulated area causing

minimal damage. The system then launches interceptor missiles with pinpoint accuracy. Each interceptor then refines and controls its own flight path before detonating at a precise distance from the incoming projectile, destroying it and preventing it from killing Israelis and damaging essential resources. Given the extremely close proximity of Hezbollah, Hamas and other hostile terrorist groups who regularly launch projectiles into Israel, the Iron Dome has to perform its complex air defence function at incredible speed. Even with the interceptors travelling at 2.5 times the speed of sound, the system has only seconds to detect, calculate and launch the interceptors in order to neutralise the threat of the incoming projectile effectively.

The Iron Dome has had some very visible successes, with many rocket interceptions captured on camera and shared throughout the world by social media. Israeli society’s effect has been significant, especially in those towns and cities most often targeted by terrorist projectiles. Whilst there is still opposition to the Iron Dome programme, and some may still challenge its effectiveness, even the psychological advantage that it has brought to the regular Israeli citizen has been profound. Memories remain fresh of hundreds of thousands of Israelis evacuated during the 2006 Second Lebanon War, and over a million who were forced to spend countless hours in bomb shelters. During that conflict, over 4000 rockets were launched by Hezbollah into the northern parts of Israel, whilst a further million Israelis faced a barrage of over 8000 rockets in the south.

Iron Dome is yet another in an ever-growing list of Israeli innovations and technology, developed even whilst under rocket attacks from hostile neighbours. Many point out that the Iron Dome by itself is not a solution, not an instrument of peace in the Middle East. For the last ten years, however, Israelis have felt safer living, working, and sleeping under the Iron Dome.

Short News

A Legendary Loss for the World



Just a few days ago, the world lost an exceptional individual. Sheldon Adelson’s philanthropic impact was legendary - countless non-profit organisations benefited from his donations, such as Israel’s national Holocaust memorial Yad Vashem, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, and Friends of the Israeli Defense Forces. He has also expressed an immense effort in ending cancer and the devastating pain it causes people around the globe by creating a cancer research programme with his wife. Sheldon Adelson leaves behind an incredible legacy of philanthropy. | Photo: Getty Images

DIY Covid Test With One-Hour Results

A new revolutionary Covid-19 test has been developed by the Israeli Institute of Technology, which delivers results in less than an hour. To take this test, one simply donates a saliva sample that is introduced to a specially-developed enzyme. The mixture then gets heated and changes the color which shows the test result. This test, known as the NaorCov19, is currently used by the Technion and may soon be available to the public. It is yet another incredible innovation we have seen made in Israel to keep people safe.

2000-Year-Old Lamp Found in Jerusalem



A City of David archaeologist recently discovered an intact, complete oil lamp dating back to the Second Temple period – from the 1st or 2nd century BCE, between the Hasmonean and Roman periods. The lamp was found on the Old City of Jerusalem’s Pilgrimage Road, which goes from the Shiloah Pool to the area adjacent to the Western Wall. | Photo: City of David archives

Israel’s Population Continues to Grow

Latest population figures shows that the Jewish nation continues to grow. Overall, the population increased by 1.7% in 2020. 84% of the population growth came about through births, and 16% through immigration.

Valley of Armageddon

Kameel Majdali
Director | Teach All Nations Inc.



Just hearing the name can make you sober, even shiver: **Armageddon**. One thinks of the last end-time battle with bloodshed up to the horses' bridle. If you want to understand your Bible better and get the most from a future holy land tour, you need a good introduction to what we call 'The Valley of Armageddon.' It is a must-see site in any Biblical itinerary.

The valley has various names: *The Central Valley*, tucked in the north, sandwiched between Samaria, Carmel, and Lower Galilee. Other names include *Valley of Jezreel*, a term used only three times in Scripture (*Joshua 17:16; Judges 6:33; Hosea 1:5*). *Esdraelon* and *Valley of Armageddon* are not found in the Bible but in extra-Biblical literature. Yet these terms all refer to the same place: The Valley (Hebrew: *ha emek*).

The valley has rich alluvial soil that washes from the mountains of Galilee, Samaria, and Mount Carmel. Annual rainfall is 500mm or 20 inches, with the hills getting 700mm. Travel through the winter is muddy but during the warmer seasons, you can grow barley and wheat, as well as oranges, white beans, watermelon, melon, chickpeas, green beans, cotton, sunflowers, corn, and grazing for cattle and sheep.

Think of The Valley as an arrowhead pointed NW-SE. There are five passes in and out, with the Via Maris or Afro-Eurasian international highway (more like a dirt road), running right through it. That means trading caravans and conquering armies were familiar with this valley either travelling to Egypt or Mesopotamia.

The Valley's strategic location was even more important than its agricultural output. The tribes of Zebulon, Manasseh, and Issachar were allotted part of The Valley, but it eluded their grasp until the time of David.

The narrow neck of the arrowhead is often called the Jezreel Valley. To the south of the 'arrow neck' is Mount Gilboa.

Contained in the 'arrow's neck' are the cities of Beth Shean and Jezreel, plus the Spring of Harod. Jezreel means 'God sows.'

North of the 'arrow neck' is Mount Moreh (*Judges 7:1*), which houses three Biblical villages:

- 1. **Shunem:** Home of Abishag, David's last woman (*1 Kings 1:3, 15*) and Elisha's hospitable hostess, the unnamed Shunammite woman (*2 Kings 4:8-11*).
- 2. **En Dor:** Saul visited the witch here on the eve of his ill-fated battle (*1 Samuel 28:7-25*).
- 3. **Nain:** Where Jesus raised to life, the widow's son (*Luke 7:11-16*).

The actual arrowhead is sparsely populated but contains



Aerial panorama of the ancient city of Tel Megiddo archaeological park, site of the biblical Armageddon in Israel. | Photo: Shutterstock

the modern city of Afula, 'Capital of The Valley' with a population of 54,000. Further west is the archaeological site of Megiddo, one of Solomon's chariot cities (*1 Kings 9:15*), which guarded The Valley entrance.

It is from Megiddo that we get the name 'Armageddon' (Har Megiddo or mountain of Megiddo). Please note that Megiddo is not a 'mountain,' it is an archaeological tell (man-made hill) in the great valley. Right next to it westward is the Mount Carmel, which is actually a mountain range, rather than a single-peak.

An Eventful Place

This strategic valley has been the scene of around 200 battles throughout its long history, of which only a few are recorded in the Bible. It is one of the most bloodstained battlefields in the world. Consider some of the Biblical events, including battles, that occurred in The Valley:

- **Deborah and Barak:** Their great victory against Jabin king of Canaan and his general Sisera happened at Mount Tabor (*Judges 4*).
- **Gideon:** The menacing Midianite forces numbered 135,000 and wreaked havoc in Israel. The Spring of Harod, where Gideon's 300 mighty warriors were identified, helped Israel defeat the 'children of the East' in *Judges 7*.
- **Saul's Defeat** (*1 Samuel 31:1-6*): The disastrous campaign at Mount Gilboa between Israel and the Philistines happened in The Valley. Saul consulted with the witch at En Dor the night before. His untimely death occurred on Mount Gilboa itself, and his decapitated body was temporarily hung on the wall of nearby Beth Shean.
- **Elijah and the Prophets of Baal:** After his stunning victory on Mount Carmel, Elijah took the 450 prophets of Baal and slew them at the Brook Kishon (*1 Kings 18:40*), also in The Valley near Carmel.

- **Naboth's Vineyard** (*1 Kings 21*): Located by Ahab's winter palace in Jezreel. Naboth refused to sell his vineyard to the covetous king. Thanks to Jezebel, he signed his own death warrant. This murder and theft would be avenged in due course.
- **Death of Jehoram and Jezebel** (*2 Kings 9*): In fulfilment of Elijah's prophecy, newly anointed king Jehu slew Jehoram king of Israel at Jezreel. He also got the eunuchs to throw Jezebel out of the window, and she met a grizzly death, as prophesied.
- **Josiah Slain:** Good king Josiah of Judah confronted Pharaoh Necho and was slain at Megiddo (*2 Chronicles 35:20-24*).
- **Battle of Ain Jalut 1260 AD:** One of the most important battles in history. The Mongols were building the world's largest empire by brutal conquest. Until Ain Jalut, they had known only victory. Yet, right here in The Valley near the Spring of Harod, they met with their first defeat at the hands of Baibars, the Mamluk sultan.
- **Other battles in The Valley:** Napoleon defeated the Ottomans in 1799, and the British fought the Turks and Germans during World War I.

What about Armageddon?

This is a big topic, and we only have a short space. In summary, *Revelation 16:16* speaks of Armageddon as a 'gathering place' - not a battlefield. After 'the gathering of the troops,' the battle is probably elsewhere. Where? Afula? No, Jerusalem (*Joel 3:1-2; Zechariah 12:2-14; 14:2-4*). Once Christ intervenes, the game is up and the world's kingdom becomes the (visible) Kingdom of God (*Revelation 11:15*).

Whatever your eschatology, make sure to go Israel's north and see The Valley, which has caught the world's imagination.



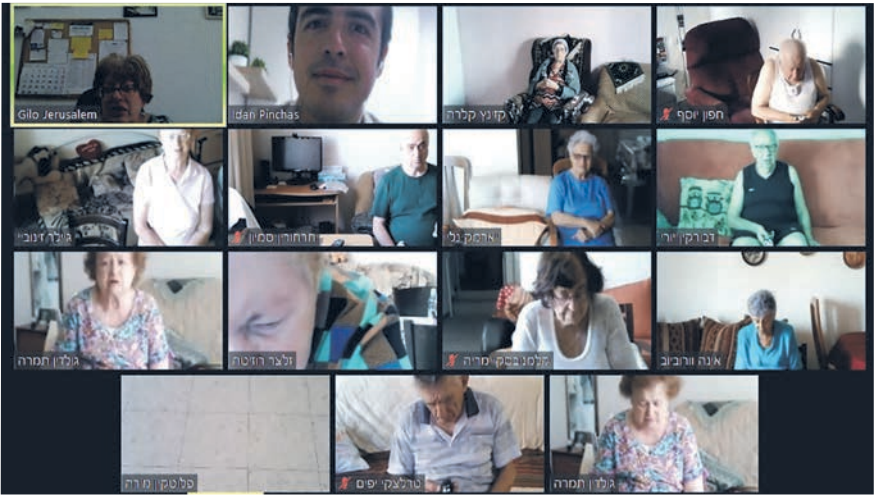
View of The Valley of Armageddon from Mount Carmel. | Photo: Shutterstock

Café Europa Under Covid

The Jerusalem Foundation

2020 was a difficult year for everyone. Across the globe, the coronavirus pandemic hit people hard and gave us new challenges to face. Here in Jerusalem, one incredible organisation brought vital support and a semblance of normality to one special group of people who were in need of help - Holocaust survivors.

The Café Europa network provides social and support opportunities for elderly Holocaust survivors in Jerusalem. Each branch serves as a meeting place where survivors enjoy a social and cultural experience, as well as being a resource centre where professionals assist survivors in accessing the rights and services to which the city's elderly are entitled. The Jerusalem Foundation is proud to have a long association with the Café Europa programme, as part of our wider support for some of the city's most vulnerable populations. In the past months, we have found ourselves at the forefront of



| Photo: The Jerusalem Foundation

Jerusalem's response to the pandemic. Together with the Municipality and other partner

organisations, we have supported tens of thousands of people in Jerusalem.

It's at times like these that the difference between an ordinary social worker and a great one becomes obvious...

On 20 March 2020, an 88-year-old Holocaust survivor in Jerusalem was

announced as the country's first casualty of coronavirus, highlighting the vulnerability of Holocaust

survivors and driving home the importance of providing a support network. Café Europa's six branches across the city cater to hundreds of Holocaust survivors, including Russian and English-speaking immigrants and survivors from the ultra-Orthodox community. With the elderly being the group at highest risk from the coronavirus, combined with the loneliness and isolation of being at home, the branches have adapted creative ways to reach members at home.

Many activities had to take place via Zoom, or in small groups in outdoor spaces. Transport had to be arranged to get elderly survivors to activities taking place in person, and extra support had to be arranged for those in need - including food packages and tablet computers for ongoing communication.

On any given day, one could find dozens of elderly Holocaust survivors engaged in an exercise class or a lecture about Jewish life - an incredible range of activities that kept people connected with one another during this difficult period. Over and above the social activities, the network provided a telephone hotline staffed by volunteers that provided assistance and advice to help the survivors deal with logistic and health emergencies.

As two elderly survivors commented: "Not only is your information helpful but you are as well. It is at times like these that the difference between an ordinary social worker and a great one becomes obvious... Thanks to you and Café Europa we are well provided for."

If you wish to support the elderly Holocaust Survivors in Jerusalem during this difficult time, you can fill out the coupon and select: Holocaust Survivors: I'm Not Alone!

Overview of our projects

Part of our mission is to comfort Israel and the Jewish people through prayer and action. If you would like to support one of our projects you can complete the coupon on page 16 or make an online donation. Thank you very much for your support!

Aliyah

Aliyah is the Hebrew word for the return of the Jewish people to Israel. We support Aliyah mainly from Ukraine (and the former Soviet Union), but also from India and France. Furthermore, we help new immigrants (in Hebrew: olim) to integrate into Israeli society.



Hineni Soup Kitchen

We help the poor of Israel, by providing them with food. We do this in partnership with the Hineni Center in Jerusalem, headed by Benjamin Philip. Your gift for the soup kitchen goes directly to the purchase of food.



Holocaust Survivors

We support impoverished Holocaust survivors in Israel and Ukraine through various projects which provide assistance to survivors of the Holocaust. Those survivors are elderly and will not be among us for long, and there is a growing demand for practical assistance.



Christian Friends of Israeli Communities (CFOIC)

You can support the Jewish communities in Judea and Samaria, the heart of Biblical Israel. The main purpose is to encourage the people in the Biblical Heartland and to show them that there are Christians throughout the world who support them and share the belief that the areas of Judea and Samaria are part of Israel's inheritance.



Food Parcel Campaign Ukraine

We distribute food parcels amongst Jewish people in Ukraine. These parcels are handed out to Holocaust survivors, needy families, and the sick. Those food parcels are a sign of friendship that demonstrates your support for our Jewish brothers and sisters and that they are not alone.



Arab Christians

Life for Christians in Bethlehem is often not easy. Christians for Israel supports the First Baptist Church of Rev Naim Khoury in Bethlehem and Jerusalem. The members of this church spread the gospel among Arabs and share their love and heart for Israel and the Jewish people.



For country-specific or further information on our projects, go to our website, www.c4israel.org

Project Update

'Non-stop' Food Parcel Delivery in Ukraine

Since we started our food parcel campaign at the end of October 2020, you could almost say that we have been packing and distributing food parcels non-stop.

The response is heartwarming, for example Sveta from Kropivnitsky, Ukraine told us: "The fact that you also think of us in this corona time gives me comfort in my difficult situation!"

To this we always answer: "It is a blessing to receive, but also a blessing to give!"

Will you help to feed Jewish elderly people in need? Donate one or more food parcels. A food parcel costs NZ \$17 | AU \$15 | US \$11 | €10. Thank you in advance on their behalf!



The Arrival of the Bnei Menashe was a Hanukkah Miracle

Michael Freund
Founder & Chairman | Shavei Israel
After a long and tiring flight throughout the night, the band of new immigrants emerged from the El Al plane and made their way slowly down the stairs, their senses heightened by the early-morning chill as well as the knowledge that their cherished dream was coming true.
As they reached the tarmac, setting foot on the land of their ancestors after centuries of exile, many knelt and passionately kissed the ground, vocally thanking the Creator for bringing them home to Zion. Surely even the hardest of hearts could not help but be moved by this powerful visual image as a scene wrought with Biblical overtones that has come to life.
On 15 December 2020, a group of 250 Bnei Menashe from northeastern India touched down at Ben-Gurion Airport on a special charter flight. The Bnei Menashe are descendants of the tribe of Manasseh, one of the Ten Lost Tribes exiled from the Land of Israel more than 2,700 years ago by the Assyrian Empire.
Despite being cut off from the rest of the Jewish people for so long, the Bnei Menashe continued to preserve the ways of their ancestors, observing Shabbat, keeping kosher and adhering to the laws of family purity. They never forgot who they were or where they came from nor

where they one day yearned to return.
So far, more than 4,000 Bnei Menashe have made Aliyah. Another 6,500 Bnei Menashe remain in India awaiting the chance to immigrate to the Jewish state. The group of 250 which made Aliyah in December was the first to arrive in two-and-a-half years, and their homecoming is rife with moving personal stories.
Among the arrivals was Miriam Singson, a widow from the Indian state of Manipur, along with her son Tzadok and daughter Rina. Miriam has two other children who made aliyah several years ago, and this week she was able to see her six Israeli-born grandchildren for the first time.
Another heartwarming reunion took place with the aliyah of Yaffa Haokip and her two young sons, Alon and Hanan. Yaffa's parents, Nehemiah and Nirit, moved to Israel 13 years ago and she hasn't seen them since, nor have they ever had the opportunity to meet their own grandchildren.
And then there is Azaria Kolny, who has lived in Israel for the past two decades and told me in advance of the aliyah that, "It is very hard to believe that I will have the chance to embrace my dear son and his family after a long gap of 20 years. I feel very happy and in shock... I can't even express what my feelings are."
This aliyah was also the fruit of efforts by a

wide range of Christian Zionists and lovers of Israel around the world. International groups such as Christians for Israel, Bridges for Peace, Ebenezer Operation Exodus, the ICEJ and Shalom Israel Asia Pacific, as well as many Christians from Scandinavia to Seoul, poured out their hearts in prayer and provided support to carry the sons of daughters of the Bnei Menashe back to Zion just as Isaiah (49:22) foretold.
It is fitting that the Bnei Menashe aliyah took place during Hanukkah when we celebrate the Hasmoneans' discovery of the miraculous flask of pure oil which somehow managed to remain untainted. In this sense, the rediscovery of the lost tribe of Bnei Menashe, which maintained its fidelity to the God of Israel despite 27 centuries in exile, is a modern-day version of the Hanukkah miracle, Jewish faith and survival against all the odds.
With God's help, we will do everything in our power to ensure that all the remaining 6,500 Bnei Menashe will be able to call Israel their home. May it happen soon.
Michael Freund is founder and chairman of Shavei Israel (www.Shavei.org) which assists lost tribes and hidden Jewish communities to return to the Jewish people.
If you wish to donate to the Bnei Menashe, please complete the coupon below.



Photo credit: Eleonora Shilova Ministry of Aliyah and Absorption

YES! I Want to Support Christians for Israel

CHRISTIANS FOR ISRAEL MINISTRY

My donation for ministry costs, print & post

SOCIAL WELFARE PROJECTS

- Food Parcel Campaign Ukraine - € 10 | US \$11 ea
- First Home in the Homeland
- First Baptish Church Bethlehem
- Hineni - Soup Kitchen
- Holocaust Survivors - "I'm not Alone"
- Christian Friends of Israeli Communities (CFOIC)

ALIYAH - BRING THE JEWS HOME

- One person - € 135 | US \$165
- One family (5 people) - € 675 | US \$825
- One busload (25 people) - € 4500 | US \$5000
- First Home in the Homeland
- Bnei Menashe (India) (1 person) - € 900 | US \$1000

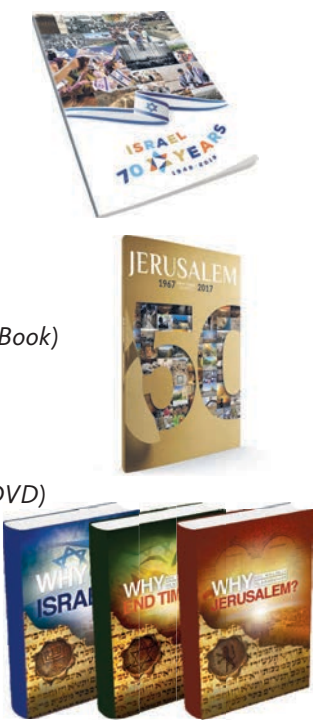
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- Israel: Covenants & Kingdom (Book) by Willem JJ Glashouwer
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