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CHRISTIANS FOR
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INTERNATIONAL

Understanding Israel and world events from a Biblical perspective

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The Garden Tomb in Jerusalem. | Photo: Shutterstock

Sharing in the Victory

■ **Rev Henk Poot**
Christians for Israel

It is a beautiful image: the opening of the Garden Tomb in Jerusalem. Even the stone is gone. Colourful flowers surround the entrance - or should we say, the exit? - of the tomb.

The longer I look at it, the blacker the gaping hole becomes. A grave belongs to the realm of death, but in this grave, there is only emptiness.

Even in death, the Lord Jesus believed that it would be

like this: the Father would not leave Him alone. If He would glorify God by loving His own to the end, He would see the light of a new tomorrow and be clothed with glory. For a life of such love, death is not the end.

In *Romans 8*, Paul calls Jesus - the Firstborn among many brothers and sisters. Jesus Himself testifies that He lives - and that He has the keys to death. Jesus has overcome, and we get to share in that victory. The dark door no longer locks.

Paul also writes about more things in this chapter. He speaks about the sighing of creation.

He mentions *Psalms 44* and talks about sheep being slaughtered. But what prevails is victory. Death does pretend to have the last word: we remember the bitter night of the Shoah, the Holocaust. Meanwhile, we live in a confusing time when foreign powers dictate world affairs.

But the tomb is empty; the tomb of Christ is empty. That is so decisive. What follows is not death but the fulfilment of all God's promises, the coming of the Kingdom and the resurrection. We are more than victors. Hold on to that.

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Hineni Experiences
God's Provision



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

Colophon

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

Mission

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

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Andrew Tucker

International Editor | Christians for Israel

The Old Testament contains many promises by God to bring home the twelve tribes of Jacob to the land promised to Abraham. More than that, He promised to make them into 'one nation' in the land:

"This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I will take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land. I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel." (Ezekiel 37:21-22)

The fact that so many Jews have returned to Israel from so many countries over the last century or so is nothing less than a miracle, the fulfilment of prophecy.

But it is one thing to return to the land; it is another to become 'one nation' in the land. The practicalities of achieving unity is not without difficulties.

On 14 May 1948, the State of Israel was created. The Declaration of Independence states that Israel is a 'Jewish State' which 'will be open for Jewish immigration and the Ingathering of the Exiles; it will foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; it will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture; ...'

The idea of a 'Jewish State' raises many controversial issues requiring clarification in practice. When is a person Jewish? How does a person become Jewish? Who decides these issues? These are not easy questions, considering the diversity of cultural, political and religious traditions in Jewish society.

Significantly, Israel has never had a Constitution. In fact, Prime Minister Ben Gurion was opposed to the idea, based on both theoretical and practical considerations.

As Neil Rogachesky has noted, it appears Ben Gurion was "worried that the task of creating a document that could cross

One Nation



Arrival of Ethiopian olim (immigrants) at Ben Gurion Airport on 11 March 2021. | Photo: Flash90

Israel's enormous ideological divisions would have occupied the attention of the entire country, possibly forcing decisions that would undermine the delicate balance necessary to sustain a diverse nation".

He also wanted to make sure that no single minority group be able to take power. "Better that they pass a bad law than that a minority takes over. For the people will not accept this! Even the rule of the majority is not so quickly accepted among us. The rule of a minority? This won't be accepted. There also isn't any moral or logical justification for it."

The closest Israel has to a Constitution is a series of 'Basic Laws' – laws that require a two-thirds majority in Knesset to be amended or abolished.

One important issue concerns the question of determining who are Jews for the purpose of achieving Israeli citizenship. The Law of Return (1950) stated that "Every Jew has the right to come to this country as an *oleh*". In 1970 this was extended to anyone who has a parent or grandparent who was a Jew. Those who settle in Israel under the Law of Return have a right to citizenship. The 1970 law also extended the Law of Return and Israeli citizenship to 'converts' but did not define exactly what conversion means and who can perform it.

On 1 March 2021, the Israeli Supreme Court handed down a controversial

judgment in which it ordered the state to recognise individuals who have undergone Reform and Conservative conversions in Israel as eligible for citizenship through the Law of Return. The decision was made following petitions to the court by converts who had been denied citizenship by Israel's Ministry of Interior, which is controlled by the Ultra-Orthodox.

The ruling reflects the tensions in Israel between the Judiciary, Parliament (Knesset) and Executive (government). It sparked strong reactions across the political spectrum in Israel and the Jewish world.

The fact that the recent elections failed to produce a clear winner (see page 3) also shows there is much division in Israeli society.

And so many challenges still face the Jewish people before the people in the land will be 'one nation'.

But we should also be thankful for how much has already been achieved in such a short time. In fact, true unity may only be possible under Messiah, whose rule will combine both spiritual and secular authority.

May we pray ever more fervently that the Lord will send the Deliverer from Zion, who will reign on the throne of His father David, in the midst of Jacob (Luke 1:32-33).

Prayer Points

By Pieter Bénard

Israel

- By now, millions of people in Israel have been vaccinated against the coronavirus. However, infection rates are not yet dropping. Pray that the country will come out on top of the coronavirus and place its trust first in God.
- "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you" (James 1:5). After the government coalition collapsed at the end of December, new elections took place on 23 March. Pray for wisdom and pray that a stable government will be formed.
- "The mountains leapt like rams, the hills like lambs. Why was it, sea, that you fled? Why, Jordan, did you turn back?" (B'tzeit Yisrael). Great miracles accompanied Israel's exodus. God is still a God of miracles today. Pray that Israel may experience this in protection from its enemies.

Israel & the Nations

- Pray for the more than 21,000 people who have made Aliyah in 2020 but find it difficult to integrate due to the coronavirus. Pray that these people will receive the

strength to work on their future in Israel. Give thanks to all the Jews who are returning to Israel.

- "Deliver me from evildoers and save me from those who are after my blood" (Psalm 59:2). It appears that President Biden is planning to return to the nuclear deal made with Iran in 2015, which Trump had just gotten out of. This is leading to concerns in Israel because people fear more instability in the Middle East if this happens. Pray for Israel's protection against danger from Iran and pray that the US government makes the right decision.

Christians for Israel

- Pray for a blessing on the work of those who are involved in the ministry of Christians for Israel worldwide. Pray that both our speakers and writers for our publications will receive inspiration again and again.
- Please give thanks for the work of Hineni, a soup kitchen in Jerusalem, and the help they give to the poor and needy. Give thanks that they were able to continue operating despite the lockdowns.

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

Israeli Elections

■ Andrew Tucker

International Editor | Christians for Israel International

The Israeli elections on 23 March - the fourth elections in two years - have yet again failed to produce a clear winner.

It appears the Israeli electorate remains divided.

There were 26 parties in the elections - grouped roughly into those who are willing to serve with current Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the others, many of whom vehemently want to get rid of him.

With around 88% of votes counted on Wednesday evening 24 March, Netanyahu and his natural 'right-wing' allies and the centre-left bloc opposing him, each lack a 61-seat majority in the 120-seat Knesset.

Netanyahu's Likud won 30 seats - making it yet again by far the largest party. Netanyahu immediately claimed a 'giant victory' and invited others to join him in forming a stable government.

The truth is, it will be very difficult for him to form a solid coalition. But Netanyahu has proven that he is a master in political survival.

Israelis vote for party lists rather than individual candidates, and seats are apportioned out based on the percentage of votes received. No single party has ever won a 61-seat majority, so larger parties must assemble governing coalitions — often with fringe parties.

In order to form a coalition, either the right-wing allies of Netanyahu or the 'pro-change' group will probably have to work with one of the Arab parties.

The most likely of these is Ra'ab, led by Mansour Abbas.

Joseph Krauss reported in Times of Israel: "Unlike other Arab leaders, Abbas has not ruled out working with the Likud or other right-wing parties if he can secure gains for the Arab community, which faces widespread discrimination, mounting poverty amid the coronavirus pandemic and a wave of violent crime."

He continued: "Arab parties have never asked to serve in an Israeli government or been invited to do so. Abbas could break with that tradition, potentially requesting a cabinet post in return for his support. More likely, he would not hold an official post, but instead support the coalition from outside the government in return for greater public investment in housing, infrastructure and law enforcement in Arab communities."

Another key player is Naftali Bennett's Yamina party that has probably achieved seven seats (much less than expected). Bennett could end up becoming the 'kingmaker' deciding whether or not Netanyahu returns as Prime Minister. He has not ruled out working with Netanyahu. Former hi-tech whizzkid Bennett is widely regarded as a possible successor in the future to Netanyahu as Prime Minister.



PM Netanyahu addresses his supporters on the night of the Israeli elections. | Photo: Flash90

Benny Gantz (Kavol Lavan), who has been locked in battle with Netanyahu since the last elections, did surprisingly well with seven seats. He vowed to work hard to unite the pro-change block.

Gideon Sa'ar, the former Likud star who left the party to form a new anti-Netanyahu party New Hope, performed less well than expected, with only six seats. Yair Lapid's Yesh Atid is, predictably, the largest of the parties opposing Netanyahu, with 17 seats.

It is reported that those parties who oppose Netanyahu are already working on legislation that will make it impossible for a Knesset member facing trial to become Prime Minister.

Short News

British Newspaper Deceived



In January 2021, the British newspaper *Observer* reported on coronavirus vaccinations. In the headline of the article, the newspaper stated, "The Palestinians are excluded from the Israeli coronavirus vaccinations because the jabs go to settlers". In the article, Israel is accused of a shortage of vaccines in the areas under administration by the Palestinian Authority. Critics rightly point out that the responsibility and authority for obtaining and distributing the vaccines in these areas rests with the Palestinian Authority and not with the State of Israel. | Photo: Flash90

Textbooks Full of Hate

The textbooks used by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) still appear to contain anti-Israel ideas and anti-Semitism. Peace with the State of Israel is rejected, and terror encouraged. This is what research shows by the organisation *Impact-se* that examines school curricula. Their recent report also states that the curricula contravene the UN's demands, namely that we respect 'others' and commit ourselves to achieve peace.

"Jews Guilty of Coronavirus"

Every year the Simon Wiesenthal Centre (SWC) produces a top ten with the worst anti-Semitic incidents worldwide. Last year's list (2020) is headed by conspiracy theories that blame the Jews for the coronavirus pandemic. "From the very beginning in February 2020, right-wing extremists on social media platforms lay the blame for the coronavirus on Jews and Asian Americans", the SWC states in its report.

Arabs in the Army



The Israeli army is rejoicing in the unexpected interest of Israeli Arabs to serve in the army. One thousand Arab inhabitants of Israel enlisted in the past year, double the number in previous years. But what really stood out was that some seven hundred people from Arab countries like Lebanon and Syria expressed interest in becoming IDF volunteers. The Israeli army thinks that this is due to changes in the region. Their applications had to be declined however due to security considerations. | Photo: Flash90

Embassies in Jerusalem

■ Andrew Tucker

International Editor | Christians for Israel International

The status of Jerusalem remains contentious. The city was part of the territory covered by the Mandate for Palestine (1922-1948), whose main purpose was the establishment of the Jewish homeland. In 1947 the UN adopted the Partition Plan in which Jerusalem would become an international city, but this plan was never adopted. Jordan occupied most of the city, following its aggression against the new State of Israel, from 1948 to 1967. Israel took control of the whole city during the Six-Day War in June 1967 and immediately united the city, creating one single Municipality of Jerusalem.

In 1980, the UN Security Council condemned Israel's reunification of the city and its designation as Israel's capital. Since then, foreign embassies to Israel have been located in the Tel Aviv area.

In fact, to this day, most countries do not even formally acknowledge that west

Jerusalem, which is within the pre-1967 lines, is part of sovereign Israel.

That is changing ever since the US moved its Israel embassy to Jerusalem in 2017. Guatemala followed suit soon after. A number of states have announced intentions to move their embassies to Jerusalem but have not put that into effect.

However, recently, two European countries moved ahead. The Czech Republic opened a full-fledged diplomatic mission in west Jerusalem on 11th March. Although the embassy officially remains in Tel Aviv, the Czech Ambassador Andrej Babiš announced that the Jerusalem office "will deal with a lot, ranging from politics and economic cooperation to the consular agenda and other topics. It will have its permanent staff and work under the leadership of our embassy in Tel Aviv." He continued: "It represents another milestone in our cooperation, and gives evidence that we see the importance of this great city," adding that it would strengthen the ties between the two countries.

A few days later, on 14 March 2021, Kosovo opened an embassy to Israel for the first time – located in Jerusalem. "A truly proud and historic moment for Kosovo-Israel relations," Kosovar Ambassador Ines Demiri tweeted.

Kosovo and Israel officially established diplomatic relations in February in a ceremony held over video conference. Kosovar Foreign Minister Meliza Haradinaj-Stublla submitted a formal request to open an embassy in Jerusalem during the ceremony.

The move came after the US negotiated an economic agreement between Serbia and Kosovo last year. Israel agreed to establish diplomatic relations with Kosovo, and both Balkan countries committed to opening embassies in Jerusalem, though Serbia already has one in Tel Aviv. Belgrade strongly opposes Israel's full recognition of Kosovo, and as such, Serbia's embassy move remains in question.

Kosovo is the first Muslim-majority country with an embassy in Jerusalem.



Kosovo opens embassy in Jerusalem, following the US and Guatemala

Why Europe Remains Hostile to Israel

■ Marilyn Stern

Communications Coordinator | Middle East Forum

Rafael Bardaji, executive director of the Friends of Israel and Spain's former national security advisor, spoke to participants in a 15 February Middle East Forum webinar about the persistent "clash of interests ... between the European Union (EU) and the Israeli government" likely to endure for the foreseeable future.

According to Bardaji, three points of friction between the EU and Israel are prominent this year. The first is the International Criminal Court (ICC) decision by its former prosecutor, Gambian lawyer Fatou Bensouda, to "accept the Palestinians as a national state ... able to ask for an investigation, prosecution and indictment of a non-state-member of the ICC," namely Israel. "The Europeans are very well attached, by heart, to the ICC despite all violations of international law regarding this decision." Bardaji suggested that the most effective way to counter the ICC's illegal action is to approach those European powers opposed to Bensouda's decision and persuade them to defund the ICC.

The second point of friction concerns Iran. Despite Tehran's violations of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the EU is eager to 'keep it afloat' and press the U.S. to lift its sanctions imposed under Trump in order to resume their own trade with Tehran. The Biden administration's clear desire to reach out to Iran for a new agreement will encourage the Europeans to 'offer even more concessions to Iran' to hasten a deal.

The third point of conflict is European eagerness to "pull the Palestinians back into the centre stage" of the Middle East peace process, despite the fact that the Palestinians' longstanding belief that "without them, nothing can be done in the region" has been proven wrong. The Abraham Accords established as a result of Trump's 'thinking out of the box,' bore results, but the Biden administration has expressed "doubts about nurturing new countries" to join the accords. That stance will cause the Europeans to stiffen their own resistance.

Bardaji discussed several factors giving rise to these and



European Union and Israel flags together. | Photo: Shutterstock

other clashes of interests between the EU and Israel. Culturally, there is a clash of values between a "pacifist continent ... [where] nobody wants to kill or die for anything," and Israel, "defined as a Jewish state for the Jewish people" committed to defending its borders and people. Europeans "reject defence as a tool of the state" and perceive Israel as a framework foreign to its embrace of a multicultural European identity. "We [Europeans] despise ourselves, and we embrace everyone else coming from every country in the world, even if they don't want to integrate, like Muslim radicals."

Furthermore, "a state that is defined by religious belief – the state of the Jewish people" is seen as an 'anachronism' given the "radical secularisation of Europe." The average European, ascribing to a 'post-modern world,' cannot comprehend a people defined by a religion other than Islam surviving in the hostile environs of the Middle East. Further contributing to Europe's hostility towards Israel is that it has evolved from its beginnings as a socialist experiment, which appealed to the left in Europe, to become the 'pro-capitalist ... start-up nation,' where the European left 'cannot see itself ... represented.'

The irony is that the Europeans, in their embrace of secular values while exhibiting hostility toward the Jewish state, see no contradiction between these sentiments and their tolerance of Muslim migrants who ascribe to "a religion that is hostile to our values and our way of life," and who are becoming more radicalised. Indeed, the 'new left' in Europe has established a 'symbiotic relationship' with Muslims that is "making [the continent] more fertile for anti-Semitism ... [and] anti-Israeli criticism."

Bardaji questioned whether the emergence of the new right in Europe is an antidote to the hostility towards Israel because, excluding what Daniel Pipes calls 'civilizational parties,' there are elements of anti-Semitism there as well. With the far left and far-right "emerging as the only two poles determining the political dynamics in the EU and the European continent," Bardaji is pessimistic about the future of EU-Israel relations.

This article was originally published by The Middle East Forum on 14 March 2021. www.meforum.org

Israel's Covid-19 Policies

■ Israel & Christians Today Staff

Israelis spent a total of 139 days under lockdown – more than any other nation in the world, according to the Oxford Coronavirus Government Response Tracker.

In the autumn of 2020, according to data from Johns Hopkins University, the Jewish state had the highest rate of new infections per capita of any country in the world.

About 6,000 Israelis have died of Covid-19, and at the pandemic's peak, one in three Israelis was out of work.

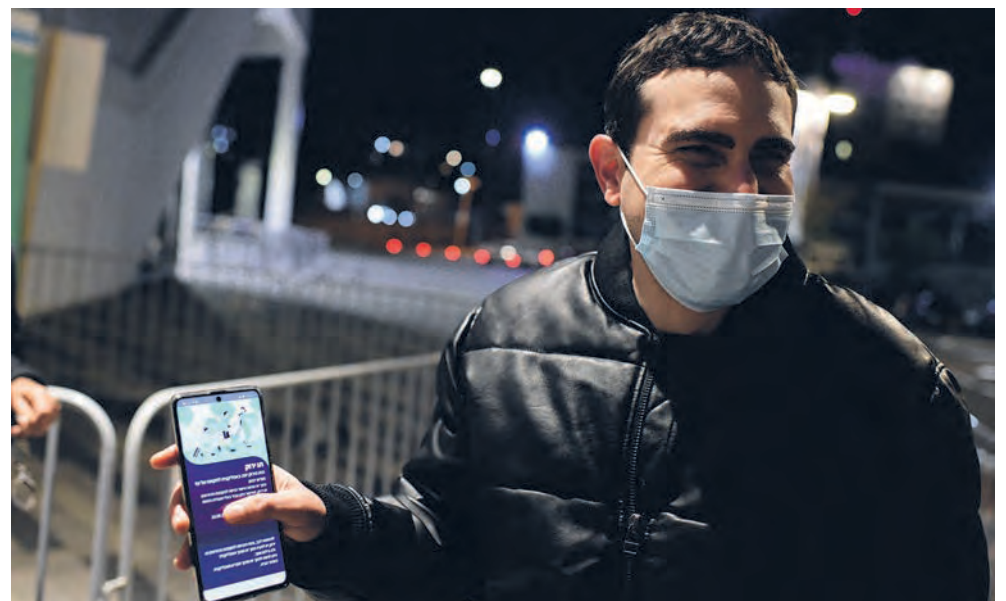
Financial Times reported: "The lockdowns hit businesses hard. Even though gross domestic product shrank only 2.4% in 2020, thanks to an unexpected leap in diamond exports, private consumption fell 10 per cent. And while high-tech companies quickly transitioned to working remotely, small businesses did not."

Israel has also led the world in vaccinations. According to The Guardian, "Israel is the first country to have vaccinated more than half its population, which it has done with the collaboration of Pfizer/BioNTech and an agreement to monitor the results. As of 9 March, about 55% of its 9 million population had been given at least one dose of the Pfizer vaccine, according to health ministry data, and 43% had received a second dose, which in Israel takes place three weeks after the first."

The Guardian report continues: "The Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine appears to give high protection against asymptomatic Covid-19, according to data from Israel – a finding that will boost hopes that mass vaccination can stop the spread of the virus. The top line of the real-world results, issued by the Israeli ministry of health and the companies but not yet peer-reviewed by scientists, is efficacy of 97% against disease and death and 94% against infection without symptoms."

By mid-March, Israel's third national lockdown was being eased. The government has launched a 'Green Passport' system that grants the vaccinated special access to concerts, gyms and other once-routine parts of life.

There is also opposition to these policies. Anshei Emet (People of Truth), a group against coronavirus vaccination, even filed a suit against the Israeli



Showing a Green Passport before attending a concert of Israeli rock singer Shalom Hanoch in Tel Aviv. | Photo: Flash90

government with the International Criminal Court (ICC) earlier this month, arguing that Israel's administration of the coronavirus vaccine and policies to encourage vaccination are considered 'crimes against humanity'.

A recent poll showed that three-quarters of Israelis were still wary of declaring the pandemic over.

ICC Investigates 'War Crimes'

■ **Andrew Tucker**

Director | [thinc.](#)

On 3 March 2021, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC), Ms Fatou Bensouda, announced she has started an official investigation into alleged 'war crimes' in 'the territory of Palestine'. This could lead to the prosecution and imprisonment of Israeli, Hamas and maybe other Palestinian leaders for 'war crimes' under the Rome Statute.

The Prosecutor's decision follows the ruling a month earlier (on 5 February 2021) by the Court's Pre-Trial Chamber (PTC) that the ICC has 'jurisdiction' over crimes committed on the territory of 'Palestine'.

The Background

The Court cannot prosecute all crimes. Unless the Security Council refers a "situation to the ICC (which it has done on only two occasions – Libya and Darfur), the Rome Statute says the Court can only investigate and prosecute crimes committed by a national of a State that is party to the Rome Statute, or that have been committed on the territory of such a State.

But Israel is not a party to the ICC's Rome Statute, and 'Palestine' is not a 'state' under general principles of international law.

The Court based its reasoning on Resolution 67/19 adopted in 2012 by 138 of the 193 UN member states recognising Palestine as a 'UN non-member Observer state'. It was on the basis of that resolution that 'Palestine' applied to apply to become a member state of the ICC in 2015.

The UN Secretary-General (who is responsible for administering accession to the Court's Statute) accepted their papers - and ipso facto 'Palestine' became an 'ICC State Party'!

It is all the more bizarre to consider it an 'atrocities' for Israel to allow Jews to live in East Jerusalem, Judea or Samaria.

The first thing the Palestinians did was ask the Prosecutor to investigate Israeli leaders for war crimes committed on the territory of 'Palestine' since 13 June 2014. (The Palestinians chose this date deliberately – it was the day after three Israeli teenagers were killed in Gaza).

The Prosecutor then spent five years investigating this 'Situation in Palestine'. Her conclusion: there are 'reasonable grounds to believe' that two kinds of 'war crimes' have been committed 'in Palestine':

- Unlawful use of force by Hamas, other Palestinian groups and the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) in the two conflicts in Gaza since 2014, as well as the 2018 'March of Return'; and
- Israeli 'settlements' policies, which she regards as infringements of the prohibition on transporting or deporting civilians into occupied territory.

'The Territory of Palestine'

Aware of how controversial the question of Palestinian statehood is, in early 2020, the Prosecutor asked the Court to confirm whether, in fact, she has the authority to investigate the alleged



The International Criminal Court in The Hague, Netherlands. | Photo: Shutterstock

crimes. The Court invited states and experts to provide it with advice; over fifty submitted lengthy and detailed reasons for and against jurisdiction. Then there was a deafening silence.

Finally, on 5 February, two of the PTC's three judges issued a short ruling. Arguing that the Court is not allowed to address the complex question whether Palestine is really a 'State' under international law, they said the bare fact that the UN recognises Palestine as a 'UN non-member Observer state' is enough for Palestine to qualify as a 'State on the territory of which the conduct in question occurred' for the purposes of article 12(2)(a) of the Rome Statute.

Moreover, they said the 'territory' of the 'State of Palestine' is the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip.

Acrobatics

The dissenting Judge (Hungarian judge Peter Kovács) issued a blistering 160-page

dissent. Clearly outraged, he accused his colleagues of 'acrobatics with provisions of the Statute', which, he said, 'cannot mask legal reality.' He said the majority's reasoning has 'no legal basis in the Rome Statute, and even less so, in public international law.'

'Atrocities'

The ICC is a court of last resort that was established to end impunity for 'unimaginable atrocities that deeply shock the conscience of humanity' – 'grave crimes' that 'threaten the peace, security and well-being of the world'. It is absurd to suggest that the crimes identified by the Prosecutor qualify as the sort of grave crimes that the Court was intended to deal with.

The IDF is responsible for protecting the State of Israel. Its actions relating to Gaza have all been in response to Hamas-instigated aggression. It is quite conceivable that mistakes may have been made. But accusing Israeli leaders of purposefully committing 'atrocities' shows a lack of understanding of the difficult environment in which Israel finds itself.

It is all the more bizarre to consider it an

'atrocities' for Israel to allow Jews to live in East Jerusalem, Judea or Samaria. These communities are not directed against the Palestinians, and they do not result in deaths or physical harm. These 'settlements' cannot be compared with the mass forced population transfers performed by Germany and Russia during and after WWII.

Criticism

The ICC State Parties that made submissions to the Court are furious that the Court rejected their non-recognition of Palestine, instead unapologetically adopting the historical, political and legal paradigm advocated by the Palestinians and the Arab League. Australia, Canada, Germany, the Czech Republic, Austria and other nations have all issued statements criticising the decision.

Australia's Foreign Minister Marise Payne: "Australia has deep concerns with the ruling ... Australia does not recognise a 'State of Palestine', noting that matters relating to territory and borders can only be resolved through direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians... The International Criminal Court should not exercise jurisdiction in this matter."

What Happens Next?

The ICC has limited resources and is under pressure to achieve successful prosecutions.

Despite an annual budget of about 150 million euro (approximately US \$178 million), eighteen judges and a staff of over 400 personnel, in its 19-years existence, the Court has managed only four convictions. The Court is plagued by inefficiencies, poor internal communication and a culture of fear and intimidation. In 2020, a review by Independent Experts proposed a whole range of reforms to the way the ICC operates, makes decisions and sets priorities.

The current Prosecutor, Ms Bensouda, will be replaced in June when her 9-year term expires by British lawyer Karim Khan. He will have the job of deciding whether, how and when to carry out this investigation into war crimes 'in Palestine'.

Short News

Sharp 'Moving' Photos



Anyone who takes a photo from time to time knows how tricky, if not impossible, it is to sharply capture moving images in a photograph. Your photo contains 'blurs'. Researchers of the University of Tel Aviv created the solution by a computer technique in the photography process. Explained simply: this technique recognises as it were the movement in the photograph and erases the blurs. | Photo: Shutterstock

Egyptair to Replace Sinai Air on Tel Aviv - Cairo Route

With other Arab airlines inaugurating flights to Israel, Egyptair is 'coming out of the closet' and replacing its subsidiary and tripling daily flights. Egyptair has requested to operate 21 weekly flights on the Tel Aviv - Cairo route. In the wake of the Abraham Accords, the anticipated presence of other Arab airlines at Ben Gurion airport, such as Emirates, Etihad Airways, Gulf Air and Royal Air Maroc, has persuaded Egyptair to submit the request. Egyptair is a government-owned airline with a fleet of 70 aircraft and belongs to the Star Alliance, the world's largest global airline alliance.

Sheba Hospital Ranks Among World's Top 10



For the 3rd consecutive year, Newsweek magazine has ranked Sheba Medical Center among the 'Top 10 Best Hospitals in the World', placing it at #10 in 2021. The magazine's annual 'World's Best Hospitals' survey once again cited Sheba's superior healthcare, as well as its medical innovation and cutting-edge research. It should be noted that Sheba faced stiffer global competition, as the annual Newsweek ranking expanded from 1,000 hospitals in 2019 to 2,000 in 2021. Despite doubling the number of participating hospitals, Sheba was still placed amongst the Top 10 in 2021. Sheba is located on a 200-acre campus near Tel Aviv and is home to 11 of Israel's national health centres, four hospitals, two institutes (Heart and Cancer), expansive research laboratories, 159 medical departments and clinics, as well as diverse educational facilities. | Photo: 5TJT

7 Misunderstandings about Israel and the Bible

■ **Rev Willem JJ Glashouwer**

President | Christians for Israel International

Israel is an awkward topic for many Christians. Does it even matter for a Christian? Why are some Christians so passionate about Israel, and why is it all so complicated? Does Israel mean anything today, or is its significance all in the past?

In this article, Rev

Willem Glashouwer refutes seven misunderstandings that often come up in conversations about Israel and shows how you can respond.

Misunderstanding 1: The church is God's new Covenant people

This is absolutely false. All of the Covenants in the Bible were made with Israel. Israel is God's Covenant people. Some eight Covenants are described in the Bible. The amazing thing is that in His mercy, God opened one of these Covenants, namely the New Covenant (which was made with Israel like the rest, by the way), and welcomed us into it. So, as Paul says, we are grafted into that Covenantal relationship of the New Covenant that God made with Israel. We do not become Jews through this, and we do not need to move to Israel either. God has called a people for His Name out from the gentile nations. Believing gentile Christians are a chosen people of God, but they never ever replaced the Jewish people. We have received a share, a place on the nourishing root of the New Covenant (according to Paul in *Romans 11*, gentile Christians have become 'engrafted').

What about people who say that the Old Covenant - the Old Testament - has now been discarded and that only the New Covenant - the New Testament - counts today? If you follow this line of reasoning, you make God a liar. It is true, as Paul says in his letter to the Hebrews, that the Old Covenant is 'obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear'. He is speaking specifically about the Mosaic Covenant - the only conditional covenant made with Israel - which was, indeed, replaced by the New (renewed) Covenant. But that does not mean that the other covenants have been terminated or replaced. All of the Covenants that He made with Israel - with one exception - are unconditional. They do not depend on Israel's behaviour. They come from the Most High, the Everlasting God. Therefore each of those Covenants is everlasting, eternal, valid for all time, and He has reinforced each of them with an oath, He has sworn by His own name. Some say, "Wait a minute, that only counted up until Jesus Christ. When the Jews said no to Jesus, God responded, 'Fine, suit yourselves, I'm done with you.'" No! Eternal is for *all time*. He has sworn an oath by His own name, and He cannot lie. So if you develop this theory, you make God a liar. If you say: God is finished with the Jews, you disregard His eternal plans and purposes with the people of Israel and with the Promised Land of Israel. But *Psalms 105: 8-11* says: "He remembers His Covenant forever, the promise He made, for a thousand generations, the Covenant He made with Abraham, the oath He swore to Isaac. He confirmed it to Jacob as a decree, to Israel as an everlasting Covenant: "To you I will give the land of Canaan as the portion you will inherit." If you declare this to be not true, you make God into a liar. A God who cannot be trusted. A God Who sometimes says this and another time that. A God who apparently changes His mind. A God who's Word



Sunset over Jerusalem in spring as seen from the Mount of Olives. | Photo: Shutterstock

one cannot really trust or rely on..

We know who in the Bible is called a liar from the beginning - the devil, who is also a murderer from the beginning, *John 8:44*. This whole theory (which is called replacement theology in the church) has caused rivers of Jewish blood to flow throughout church history in the past 2000 years. Lies lead to murders. So it is not just

The church needs to repent radically of this theology. It is a horrible line of reasoning that goes far beyond a misunderstanding. It's demonic.

false theology; it is a sin before God, which needs to be confessed as sin. The church needs to repent radically of this theology. It is a horrible line of reasoning that goes far beyond a misunderstanding. It is demonic.

Misunderstanding 2: The Jews did not accept Jesus, so the Covenant with Israel was broken

This is impossible. God made everlasting Covenants with Israel. Take a look at *Jeremiah 31*. There you can see that the creator Himself guarantees Israel's continued existence. *Verse 35* says, "Thus says the Lord, who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar— the Lord of hosts is His name: 'If this fixed order departs from before Me,' declares the Lord, 'then shall the offspring of Israel cease from being a nation before Me forever.'" As long as heaven and earth exist, as long as there is the universe, as long as the rhythm of day and night continue - Israel will continue to exist. "But", those people say, "they did so many wrong things, and they don't believe in Jesus." The text in *Jeremiah 31* continues, "Thus says the Lord: 'If the heavens above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth below can be explored, then I will cast off all the offspring of Israel for all that they have done, declares the Lord.'" So the Lord will not even cast them out for what they have done!

This was His choice. The origin of Israel was an act of creation by God. Abraham and Sarah were too old to have children, yet the biological miracle happened: Abraham was 100 and Sarah 90 when Isaac was born. God says [of Israel], "My firstborn son, whom I have created for My glory, whom I have formed and made." God joined Himself willingly to them with everlasting Covenants. He loves Israel as a father loves his son. Clearly, the Jewish people are not just a chosen people; God created them. He did this with the intention to bless the whole world - all nations - through this small nation of Israel. And He remains faithful to His plans and purposes by executing His everlasting promises and Covenants.

Misunderstanding 3: The Heavenly Jerusalem has nothing to do with the earthly city of Jerusalem

This is a gross misunderstanding. The roots of the earthly Jerusalem are in the heavenly Jerusalem. Why is Jerusalem such a special city? Because God Himself decided to make His name to live there. It was there that the Temple was built. It was there that the Glory of the Lord filled the Temple. It was there, in that same city, that Jesus was crucified, died, was buried, was raised and ascended into heaven. It was there that the Holy Spirit was poured out.

God says of the land of Israel, "It is My land, and I give it to you". And of Jerusalem, He says, "It is My city." When Solomon prays in *2 Chronicles 6* that wonderful prayer at the dedication of the Temple, he says, "The heavens cannot contain You, let alone this house in this city, with all of its gold and silver, all its beauty and grandeur. But it was Your desire. So, Lord, I have built it as You wanted it. Will You now come and live in Your house?"

Every believing Jew completely understands that the earthly Jerusalem will only properly function and become the true Jerusalem when it is bound with its spiritual roots, with the God of Jerusalem. The creator of heaven and earth. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The God of Israel. The God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? It is only then that Jerusalem will find its true place in the world. And later, as you can read at the end of the book of *Revelation*, even that Heavenly Jerusalem will come down to earth. Then the dimensional boundaries will be broken, eternity will fill time, and God will live with humankind. As it was in the beginning. Then the nations will go to Jerusalem, and from Jerusalem, peace will cover the whole earth.

Misunderstanding 4: Modern-day Israel (the State) has nothing to do with Israel in the Bible

This is another gross misunderstanding. What is modern Israel? It is a direct continuation of the Jewish people that started with Abraham 2,000 years before Christ. A nation that was created by God and received His revelation. God has spoken to them during various times, in various places and to various people: the prophets of Israel. He nurtured them and made them grow into very special people and nation, *Genesis 12:1-3*, to bless the world. He gave them the Promised Land of Israel, *Psalms 105:7-11*.

He made them possess the city of Jerusalem. He made them build the Temple as the dwelling place for His holy name. That Temple was destroyed, and the Jewish people were driven out of the land of Israel twice. The first time was between 500 and 600 before Christ. We call it the Babylonian Captivity or Exile. At that time, the Babylonians razed the city and the Temple to the ground

and carried many Jews away as captives. Later they were allowed to return.

Then came the second Temple, which was subsequently destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D. The city and Temple were razed to the ground, and the Jews were carried into exile a second time. The Roman Captivity. Yet throughout the past 2,000 years, there have always been Jews living in Israel. It was their land. So the Jewish people today are simply the descendants of the Jewish people that we read about in the Bible.

But isn't the modern state of Israel a secular state, in contrast to the Biblical state of Israel that lived closer to God, as some say? I challenge you to read the Bible more carefully, especially the books of *Kings* and *Chronicles*.

You will see just how 'closely' the people of Israel lived to God. It was a stiff-necked people, as the Bible itself says. They were constantly going after other gods and leaving God by the wayside. They sought security in political alliances with the regional powers of their day. Over and over, they heard the lashing words of the prophets and the disobedient son was disciplined by the Most High. Israel has never been a faithful people. But yes, they were deeply connected with the Most High. They knew very well who their Father was. Just as you may have stubbornly done your own thing as a child. Of course, you knew who your father was, but you always thought you knew better.

Recognising that they are still the same people in the same land is not the same as approving of everything the state of Israel does. That is not the point. When God started to gather the Jews from the four corners of the earth, from north, south, east and west (*Isaiah 43:5-8*), back to the Promised Land, and they grew in that land as a nation, at a certain point they had to make a decision. They lived there as a people, as a nation in a country: What form of government should they choose? Would it be a dictatorship, an oligarchy, a democracy or a theocracy? They chose democracy following the western model. Is that the very best form of government according to the Bible? No, that would be theocracy, in which you are led by God and obey Him. So it is clear that Israel has a long road ahead to grow into what it is meant to be in the end, namely a light for the nations under the leadership of the Messiah.

What the Bible teaches us and what Israel needs to learn as well is that you need to listen to God's perspective and rules and try to act according to that. Fundamentally this is the meaning of the Torah: To realise, not just individually but also as a nation, how to achieve a just, peaceful and secure society under His leadership and with administrators who are deeply conscious that they have to answer to Him.

Misunderstanding 5: Jews have a head start with God

No more than anyone else. Jews are just as much descendants of Adam as we all are. Sin is in our blood. Jews are exactly the same. They are not better than others. But God created them and uses them to bless others. We are all equally sinful, whether we are born

Jewish, Chinese or Dutch. This is also a good thing. Luke reports in *Acts 17:22-34* that the apostle Paul said to the people of Athens that God created the entire human race from one single person. That means that this fundamentally contradicts and goes against every form of discrimination. We can never say, "I am better than you." My race is better than yours. My village is better than yours. My country is better than yours. We all have the same lineage as human beings. We are all sinners.

He did not choose the Jews because they are better people. He chose them because He wanted to use them as an instrument in His hand. He set them apart. Chosen in this sense means: set apart, as does the word 'holy'. Israel is not a holy people in the sense of 'holier than others' or 'perfect' like some Roman Catholic saints are considered to be. To be holy means to be set apart. The same goes for Christians. Christians are not better than other people either, but God has taken hold of them, has chosen them, to be an instrument in His hand to serve Him in this world – by loving Him with all of their heart and one's neighbour as oneself. That is how it is with Israel, too—chosen to become a blessing for the world.

That puts you in a difficult position. If you are the chosen one, you suffer in this world. No one can stand a teacher's pet, who is often bullied and hated by the rest of the class because of this. Clearly, being chosen brings suffering. No other people have suffered in this world like the chosen Jewish people. Among the Jewish people, the Chosen One, Jesus, has suffered like no other person in this world.

Christians, chosen out of the gentile world, suffer too. Millions are being persecuted around the world at this very moment. The entire history of the church is one long tale of suffering. Being chosen does not mean "I am better". It is absolutely to your disadvantage. But in the end, what you receive from Him through this, discovering something of who He is, brings deep joy. Nothing in the world can compare, and when we see Him, this joy will be perfected. Then that love will become so intense, so great and mighty, that you will be completely filled. To follow Him means suffering, persecutions, plus everlasting life, according to Jesus in *Mark 10:28-30*.

Misunderstanding 6: Jesus was a Christian

This often reminds me of the story of an American Sunday school teacher. She told the children, "Children, you should all follow Jesus' example. He was a perfect Christian. He went to church every Sunday." There are several things wrong with this statement. a) He was not a Christian, but He was a Jew. b) He did not go to church but to a synagogue. c) He did not go on Sunday but on Saturday, the *Shabbat*. So Jesus was a faithful Jew. When Jesus was asked what the most important law of Israel was, He said, "Love God with everything you have and everything you are: your reason, your will and your emotions – with all your strength. And after that: love your neighbour as yourself. On these hang all the law and the prophets." Right up until the present day, every

faithful Jew will give the same answer. The name 'Christians' first showed up in Antioch, Greece, much later when the gospel started to spread among non-Jews. At that point, they started to be called followers of Christ, 'Christians'. The word 'Christ' means 'Anointed One'. It is exactly the same as the Greek word 'Chrestos', or in Hebrew, 'Messiah'. This means Anointed One as well, just in a different language. The new believers were followers of this Christ; that is why they were called Christians. The negative connotation of the name Christians to the Jews was caused by these theological developments in church history that claimed that the Jews were rejected by and hated by God. According to this new replacement-theology or supersessionism, Christians, the church, were considered to be God's new [chosen] people, having replaced Israel. Wrong! Chosen? Yes! Replacing the Jewish people? No!

Misunderstanding 7: The New Testament replaces the Old Testament

I am reminded of a former professor in Utrecht, the Netherlands, Dr van Ruler. He called the New Testament a glossary at the end of the Old Testament. This is a very different approach. But what he meant was this. The whole Bible is simply one continuous revelation from God. Old Testament and New Testament. Inseparably connected.

Yet you always sense the tension: Them (the Jews) versus us (the Christians); The New Testament that is said to have replaced the Old Testament. It started early in church history, and the more anti-Jewish thinking developed, the more the ancient church fathers started asking themselves, what use is the Old Testament to us? This way of thinking has continued throughout history.

Nowadays, you still see Christian mission organisations and churches handing out New Testaments 'because that's what it's all about.' Under the Nazi regime, the Old Testament was seen as a Jewish book one Christians shouldn't have anything to do with. So this is another strange line of reasoning that shows how deeply rooted replacement theology is and how deep our internal resentment against the Jewish people and God's relationship with them goes.



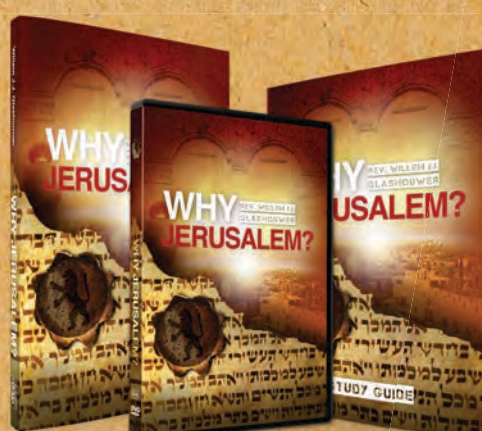
Willem JJ Glashouwer is the President of Christians for Israel International. He holds an honorary knighthood bestowed upon him by Beatrix, former Queen of the Netherlands and is Honorary President of the European Coalition for Israel. He is also an ordained minister of the Dutch Reformed Church and a former director of the Evangelical Broadcasting Company in the Netherlands. Rev. Glashouwer has played a key role in the establishment of the

Dutch Institute for Evangelical Higher Education and in addition to several books, articles and Bible studies on Israel and the Christian faith. He also published a Daily Devotional on the Book of Revelation. He is married to Marianne, and they have four children and eight grandchildren.

More from Rev Willem JJ Glashouwer is available with his Why Israel? series: Why Israel? Why Jerusalem? and Why End Times? books, DVDs and Study Guides.



Why Israel?
Book, DVD and Study Guide



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The Fig Tree and the Last Days

■ **Lance Lambert**
Bible Teacher | 1930 - 2015



How do we know we are in the last days? The Lord Jesus gave a great deal of signs. So how are we to understand these signs that the Lord Jesus gave us? He summed up this major discourse of His in one sentence: “From the fig tree, learn its parable.” In other words, there is something specific, something particular about the fig tree. The other signs are general signs, but the fig tree is the specific sign. The other signs are invalid when the fig tree is not present. But once the sign of the fig tree is present and the other signs are present, then we know we have passed into the last phase of world history. The fig tree -Israel- was to disappear from its natural habitat, and it would seem as if there had never been a fig tree there, but Jesus said that before He returns, the fig tree will be back in its original habitat –not as an antique, not as a fossil, not merely as an illustration, but as a living tree.

A hundred years ago, Jerusalem was nothing but a little village town with thirty-eight thousand inhabitants – unhygienic, flea-bitten, fly-blown, half-ruined, the capital of nothing, buried in the Judean hill country in the Syrian province of the Ottoman Empire. Why would nations come against Jerusalem? There is no oil, gas, coal, natural resources, and very little water. Why would they come against this little postage stamp of territory? But today, everybody understands. There have been six wars in the past decades, and they have all been over Jerusalem. Suddenly, something has happened that has changed the whole scene. Seemingly, from the ashes, like the phoenix, she has risen from the dead and occupied the centre of the world’s stage. Now we understand the prophet Zechariah when he said that one day the Messiah’s feet will again stand upon the Mount of Olives, and from this, we understand the fig tree is very much alive and back in its original territory. The sign is there, and at the same time, there have been two world wars that have



Fig tree. | Photo: Pxhere

the unshakable King of glory have in our lives, in our families, in our business life and church life? If He has the place that God has given Him, we shall be unshakable, as invincible as the King, as immovable as the King. Jesus said, “Upon this rock, I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

understand what the Lord’s will is.” In every generation of the church, in every generation of the people of God, going back to Abraham, there have been foolish believers, and there have been understanding believers. The understanding knows what the will of God is for their generation. They are the wise, and therefore, they put first things first. They give the Lord His place. They understand the priorities of God in their generation.

Indeed God has His heart set on these four priorities –the gospel, the bride (the church), you and Israel. He will shake everything to pieces in order to fulfil His heart’s desire –but He will fulfil it. With His desire in view, what is our responsibility in these last days?

This is an excerpt from ‘The Last Days and God’s priorities’ by Lance Lambert.
Lance Lambert (1930-2015) was a UK born, renowned Bible teacher whose clarity and humour gave many people great help and joy in the Lord. Lance, as a Jew, has an interesting history as he didn’t know this was his heritage for quite a bit of his youth. Sometime after he had been saved and had known of his Jewish heritage, the Lord called him to move to Jerusalem and to seek to show God’s heart for the Jewish people and the nation of Israel. He travelled around the world to teach and wrote numerous books.
More on: www.lancelambert.org

But if our heart is in the wrong place, then we are going to see a lot of shaking in our lives. We are going to lose a lot. We are going to be harmed. This is why this matter is so important.

Redeem the Time

The apostle Paul said, “Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.” (Ephesians 5:15-16). In other words, our family life, personal life, business life, and our fellowship life can be a redeeming of the time; but if we are unwise, like the unwise virgins, we shall lose a lot. This word is not to unsaved people; it is to the child of God; it is to the church of God. “Therefore do not be foolish, but

Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. Ephesians 5:15-17

There is one thing about little Israel: she is not dead. Everybody has heard about Israel. The whole world discusses little Israel, with only six million people, in a tiny postage stamp of territory. It is no bigger than the state of New Jersey, Tasmania, or the north island of New Zealand. It is a little smaller than the Kruger National Game Park in South Africa, the size of Wales in the United Kingdom, Portugal or Hungary in Europe. It is so small, but the whole world knows that Israel is alive. She suddenly occupied the centre of the world’s stage, exactly as Zechariah the prophet said she would. Three times, he said: “All the nations of the earth will be gathered together against Jerusalem.” What in the world would the nations come against Jerusalem for?

shaken the whole world and wars and rumours of wars ever since. Now we understand that the Lord is shaking everything according to the prophets Haggai and Zechariah and the writer of the Hebrew letter. God said He would shake the nations, and the desire of all nations shall come. The writer of the Hebrews said that everything that can be shaken, God is going to shake. **Receiving a Kingdom Unshakeable** If the lives of the children of God consist very largely of the shakable, they will be shaken. If we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, if our lives are centred in the unshakable One, we will neither be shaken nor moved. But how much of the kingdom is in our lives? What place does

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■ Jason Silverman
Author | Israel Today

Israel has managed to find itself once again entangled in the quagmire of religion and state issues. On 1 March, the Supreme Court made a dramatic decision ordering the state to recognise individuals who have undergone Reform and Conservative conversions in Israel as eligible for citizenship through the Law of Return. The decision was made following twelve petitions to the court by converts who had been denied citizenship by Israel's Ministry of Interior.

Interestingly, the state already recognises Reform and Conservative conversions abroad for the purpose of Aliyah (immigration). This decision merely extends state recognition to those who complete this kind of conversion process inside Israel.

President of the Supreme Court Esther Hayut clarified that the decision concerns 'a public-civil question and not a religious one.' Hayut added that the non-Orthodox communities in Israel are 'well established' and that they are 'central denominations in world Jewry.'

Those to the left of the political spectrum immediately praised the Supreme Court decision. Yair Lapid (Yesh Atid) hailed the court's decision on Twitter, stating that "Israel needs to treat the rights of all of Judaism's denominations equally." He added that "a sane government will put an end to the reality in which Israel of all places is the only democracy in the world that doesn't have religious freedom for Jews."

Rabbi Gilad Kariv, a Reform rabbi who is number four in the Labor party's candidate list for the Knesset, posted on his Facebook page stating that "since Israel's inception, the Knesset rejected every attempt to place a monopoly on conversion in the hands of the Chief Rabbinate."

Impact on the Election

Not everyone could be seen dancing and rejoicing after learning of the Supreme Court's controversial decision. Knesset members of the ultra-Orthodox parties were furious and lashed out against the court. Aryeh Deri (*Shas*), Ya'akov Litzman (United Torah Judaism) and Moshe Gafni (United Torah Judaism) sent a stern warning to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that unless he commits to passing the 'override clause' into legislation (which would enable cancelling the court's decision), they'll refuse to join his next coalition. This clause gives lawmakers increased power and implies that the Knesset may preclude any matter from subjection to judicial review. The clause is promoted in order to curtail an 'activist Supreme Court.'

A Persistent Mess

Matters of religion and state constitute a mess that, for almost 73 years, the Jewish State has been unable to clean up.

It's like riding on a never-ending roller coaster. Pressing



An orthodox Jewish man argues with a reform Jewish woman wearing a prayer shawl at the Western Wall. Reform judaism is the most liberal form of modern Judaism, being the only ones who allow women to wear the prayer shawl. | Photo: Flash90

questions such as who can get married in Israel, who counts as Jewish for *Aliyah*, who and how can one pray at the *Kotel* (Western Wall) and what conversions are legitimate have been raised repeatedly for decades with no definitive answers. These issues generate social struggles between competing sectors and sow deep division within Israel's Jewish population.

Unfortunately, wars on the social-Jewish battlefield are not new for Israel. It has proven seemingly impossible to strictly define the Jewishness of the Jewish State. The difficulty of settling these issues has serious implications in a number of domains.

Israel's relationship with Jewish communities abroad is severely affected by matters of religion and state. For example, in the United States—the most prominent Jewish community outside of Israel—the vast majority of Jews active in Jewish life are involved in Reform congregations. When Israel frowns upon their conversions and sometimes belittles their unique style of Jewish practice, which is egalitarian and pluralistic, this community feels rejected by the state that claims to represent them.

Israel's democratic character is also highly affected. Many native Israelis are unable to perform the basic right of marriage in Israel because of their questionable Jewish status, according to *Halacha* (Jewish law). Those who are recognised as Jewish can only have an Orthodox wedding through the Chief Rabbinate if they want their marriage to be recognised by the state. Expressions of Judaism other than Orthodox, which are accepted by the majority of the Jewish world, are outlawed in the only Jewish state.

Issues of religion and state serve as a major point of contention in Israeli politics. Concerning matters of conversions, marriage and Kosher food in public places, the ultra-Orthodox parties remain steadfast in their

intransigence. This leads to a tying of hands of parties that would otherwise support religious reforms. Ultra-Orthodox support is typically the deciding factor for reaching a majority of 61 seats to form a coalition. Therefore, politicians have traditionally been willing to compromise on issues of religion and state for the sake of gaining and preserving power.

So, What's the Solution?

Whether we like it or not, the problems of religion and state are here to stay. Neither the Orthodox nor liberal forces in Israeli society will succeed in shaping the Jewish State entirely in their own image. Like most issues, we must find a balance between both worldviews.

The Haredim and other Orthodox circles will never be able to create a state that is subservient completely to Jewish Law. This may preserve the Jewishness of Israel but trumps every inch of democracy. Likewise, the secular sector will continue to fail at trying to completely separate the Jewish from the Jewish State. This may preserve the country's democratic character but will destroy its Jewish calling, the purpose for which Israel was established.

We must find middle ground to stand upon. This means respecting sacred Jewish tradition while allowing for other streams of Judaism to be expressed in our shared public space. Traditional and progressive Judaism can be lived in public without canceling or delegitimising one another, so long as we proactively make that choice.

The issue of Judaism and state must be solved in order for Israel to truly live out its calling as a state for *all* of the Jewish people.

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Tallit

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

Everybody will know the *tallit*, the rectangular white cloth with black or blue stripes. Jews wear it as a shawl around their shoulders or on their head while praying. Therefore, it is often called a prayer shawl. What is its background?

In the Bible (*Numbers 15:37-40*), we find the commandment to make *tzitzit*, tassels, on the four corners of your garments. Those tassels remind those who wear them of God's commandments. The tassels have to contain a cord of blue (*verse 38*). According to sources, the blue dye used was obtained from a sort of purple sea snail (*murex*), a species that is extinct according to sources. Therefore, the *tzitzit* nowadays is white. The passage from *Numbers* is recited in the

morning prayers after the *Shema* (*Deuteronomy 6:4*). While reciting these words, the tassels are taken together and kissed three times.

The *tzitzit* is attached to the four corners of the upper garment with which you cover yourself (*Deuteronomy 22:12*). In antiquity, people would wear a long rectangular garment as a sort of cloak over their basic clothes. It would be a simple woollen garment for the common person or a cloak of more refined tissue for the rich and the notable. Over time, fashion changes, of course, and Jews took over their host countries' clothing habits in the exile. The upper garment disappeared as daily fashion. But it remained in religious use as a prayer shawl.

The garment is made of wool, cotton or silk, although prominent Jewish scholars rejected silk. The black or blue stripes are a reminder of the original purple of the *tzitzit*. As a matter of fact, the blue stripes on the

Israeli flag are a reference to the *tallit*.

The *tallit* is normally worn during the morning prayer by men and boys who are *bar-mitzva*. However, on *Tisha be-Av* (9th of Av, the fast-day commemorating the destruction of the temple), it is worn during the afternoon prayer, and on *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement) during the whole day. When wrapping yourself in the *tallit*, a corresponding *beracha* (blessing) is said. God is given thanks for commanding Israel to cover itself in the *tzitzit*.

Moreover, Orthodox men and boys carry a *tallit katan* (*small tallit*) under their clothes, a sort of undershirt with four corners, on which the *tzitziot* (plural form) is attached. Usually, they have the *tzitziot* over their clothes so that they are clearly visible. In that way, they always carry the reminder of God's good commandments with them.

Jewish Festivals

Yom HaShoah

Holocaust Memorial Day

8 April 2021

Yom HaShoah is Holocaust Remembrance Day, observed as Israel’s day of commemoration for the six million Jews and five million others who perished in the Holocaust. In Israel, it is a national memorial day and public holiday. It was inaugurated on 1953, by a law signed by the Prime Minister of Israel, David Ben-Gurion and the President of Israel Yitzhak Ben-Zvi.

Yom HaZikaron

Israeli Memorial Day

14 April 2021

Yom HaZikaron is Israel’s official memorial day, enacted into law in 1963. While Yom HaZikaron has been traditionally dedicated to fallen soldiers, commemoration has also been extended to civilian victims of terrorism.

Yom HaAtzma’ut

Israeli Independence Day

15 April 2021

Yom HaAtzma’ut commemorates the declaration of independence of Israel in 1948.

Pesach Sheni

Second Passover

26 April 2021

Pesach Sheni is the second Passover, one month after Passover.

Lag BaOmer

Counting of the Omer

30 April 2021

Lag BaOmer is celebrated on the 33rd day of Counting of the Omer. It is a holiday as it is the day of passing of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. Modern Jewish tradition links the holiday to the Bar Kokhba Revolt against the Roman Empire (132-135 CE). In Israel, it is celebrated as a symbol for the fighting Jewish spirit.

Yom Yerushalayim

Jerusalem Day

10 May 2021

Yom Yerushalayim is an Israeli national holiday commemorating the reunification of Jerusalem and the establishment of Israeli control over the Old City in June 1967. The Chief Rabbinate of Israel declared Jerusalem Day a minor religious holiday to thank God for victory in the Six-Day War and for answering the 2,000-year-old prayer of ‘Next Year in Jerusalem’.

Shavuot

Festival of Weeks

17-18 May 2021

Shavuot commemorates the anniversary of the day God gave the Torah to the entire Israelite nation assembled at Mount Sinai, although the association between the giving of the Torah and Shavuot is not explicit in the Biblical text. The holiday is one of the Shalosh Regalim, the three Biblical pilgrimage festivals. It marks the conclusion of the Counting of the Omer.

Not of the World



| Photo: Lightstock

Kees de Vreugd

Theologian | Christians for Israel
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“My kingdom is not of this world”

(John 18:36)

When Jesus is brought before Pilate, he asks Him the question: “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus’ answer is rather remarkable. “Are you saying this on your

You could hear it that way, and so it is sometimes explained. But is that correct? Let us have a closer look at what Jesus is saying.

The primary meaning of both the Greek and the Hebrew word for kingdom is kingship. The word can also mean the territory where the kingship is valid. Literally, the text does not say ‘of this

not of this world order. He does not receive His kingship from the Roman emperor but out of heaven. His servants, therefore, also will not fight for Him with earthly means. But He will establish His kingship on earth.

The whole world has to come under the rule of this heavenly kingship. The whole world has to become His

Jesus’ kingship is not of this world order. He does not receive His kingship from the Roman emperor but out of heaven. His servants, therefore, also will not fight for Him with earthly means. But He will establish His kingship on earth.

own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?” After all, the Jews who have brought Jesus to Pilate, in fact, have brought no accusation against Him at all. It seems that Pilate wants to deal with the Jews and their issues as little as possible. Then Jesus speaks the well-known words: “My kingdom is not of this world.”

What does He mean? Is Jesus saying that a kingdom on earth is not His intention but that it is about a heavenly kingdom?

world’ but ‘out of’. It is about the origin – where does this kingship originate? The world (Greek: *cosmos*) – can refer to the order of the world. This world (*order*) is dominated by the Roman Empire, of which Pilate is the highest representative. The emperor of that empire could grant somebody a kingship. Herod, for example, once travelled to Rome to receive there his kingship, his royal title. Jesus’ kingship is

kingdom. But the weapon with which the world shall be conquered is the gospel of the kingdom.

Pilate, in fact, was faced with a tremendous decision. He could have recognised Jesus’ kingship. For his authority was given him from above (John 19:11), i.e. by God. Then Jesus’ kingdom would have been ushered in. But Pilate preferred the earthly authority of Rome.

Book Review

By Kees de Vreugd



November 2020, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, a former chief rabbi of the UK’s Jewish community, died. His religious and moral authority reached beyond his community to a great audience in the UK and abroad. He was the author of many philosophical and religious books.

Judaism’s Life-Changing Ideas is his latest publication. It is a collection of essays on the weekly readings of the Torah (the five books of Moses) according to the lectionary of the synagogue, in which he explores the

Judaism’s Life Changing Ideas

A weekly reading of the Jewish Bible
by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

‘life-changing ideas’ of the Torah Judaism contributed to the world, such as the sanctity of life and the dignity of the human person.

Each essay is concluded by a life-changing idea extracted from the *parasha* (the Torah portion).

In his introduction, he writes: “Sometimes ideas change the world because they change us. It’s these ideas I want to explore through the weekly *parasha*.” “If we change the way we think, we can change the way we feel, which changes the way we act, which changes the person we become. Ideas change lives, and great ideas help us to courage, to happiness, and lives filled with blessing.” “The choice humankind faces in every age is between the idea of power and the power of ideas. Judaism has always believed in the power of ideas, and it remains the only non-violent way to change the world.” “The real religious mystery, according to Judaism, is not our faith in God. It is God’s faith in us. That is the real subject of the Torah. The Torah is God’s book of man.”

It is the mystery of faith, of our Christian faith, too, that God does not want to be without us, even though we want to be without God.

Maggid Books (Koren Publishers) Jerusalem, 2020. ISBN 9781592645527

Resurrection to Ascension & Pentecost

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

After His resurrection from the dead, Jesus remained with His disciples for another 40 days before being taken up in a cloud into heaven. How could Jesus have spent those days most effectively? We as humans would say: go all over the country and show yourself to as many people as possible, so that as many people as possible could witness the truth of His resurrection from the dead. A kind of publicity tour.

And yet, Jesus did not do this. He did not invest in demonstrating His resurrection but in teaching His disciples. And what did He teach them? Everything concerning the Kingdom of God: ‘appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God’ (Acts 1:3). He apparently considered it of utmost importance that His disciples would have sufficient insight into what the kingdom of God is like, i.e. the kingdom that is to come, before they could go out into the world to proclaim the gospel.

Imagine being allowed to spend 40 days on a course with Jesus. We all would have liked to experience that. The disciples listened to Jesus carefully during these days and understood Him perfectly. The

evangelist Luke tells us that, not long before His ascension, Jesus told His disciples: “All things which are written about Me in the law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled”. Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures’ (Luke 24:44-45). The disciples then asked Him this question: “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). This question has often been seen throughout the centuries as a silly one. The disciples completely misunderstood Jesus’ teaching. They failed to realise that the kingdom Jesus was talking about was not about Israel as a nation being restored as an independent kingdom with Jesus as King. And so their question seemed to be a stupid question.

But reading their question in this way overlooks what Luke said about Jesus Himself having opened their minds so that they understood the Scriptures. The question about the restoration of the kingdom for Israel was indeed a good question. And Jesus did not reject that question at all; He only made clear that God wants to keep that time for Himself. Their task now was to wait for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and to go into the world. After Pentecost, Peter spoke to a crowd of people on the Temple Square about Jesus, “whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about

which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time” (Acts 3:21). Peter was referring to the prophets when he spoke of the restoration of all things. And the prophets all wrote clearly about a future restoration of the kingdom in Israel under the leadership of the Messiah, the Prince of Peace and King of Israel.

We have celebrated the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead, and we are on the road to Pentecost. The feast of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, who enables us to know God and to believe in Him. The Holy Spirit that Jesus promised: “When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth” (John 15: 26). The Holy Spirit comes from both the Father and the Son.

The Jewish people just celebrated Passover. As a permanent reminder of their liberation from slavery in Egypt. In 50 days, they will celebrate the Feast of Weeks, Shavuot, the Jewish Pentecost. Then they will celebrate that the people, 50 days after their liberation from Egypt, received the Torah in the Sinai desert at Mount Horeb. God gave Moses the law on stone tablets when he was on Mount Horeb. I find it very touching and meaningful that John, the evangelist, calls Jesus the ‘Word of God’, the Torah. Jews and Christians celebrate two different feasts at Pentecost. And yet, they have a

lot in common. There is a deep connection between the two feasts. Jews and Christians are distinct, and at the same time, deeply connected.



A father and his son take part in a Passover prayer service at the Western Wall. | Photo: Shutterstock

Orphans *Part 4*

■ **Mandy Worby**
Christians for Israel Australia

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

Last time we looked at the human condition of our separation from our Father, and that means that our Fatherlessness is a quandary we can’t rectify. During Paul’s day, adoption was under the jurisdiction of Roman Law, and the entire Roman Empire was subject to those laws and learning about them brings a great deal of clarity. So to conclude our series on orphans, I want to share with you an excerpt from a sermon by Dr John Macarthur who taught about the laws of adoption in Ancient Rome.

“There were two steps. The first one was called *mansupoteo* from which we get the word emancipation. And *mansupoteo* was carried out as a symbolic sort of sale. If the father would agree to let his son be adopted by another man, there was this symbolic sale they went to; they had some scales and some copper and they used this symbolism to carry out sort of a transaction like I’m selling this young man to you. They did it three times. Twice the father symbolically sold the son and twice he bought him back and then the third time he didn’t buy him back and the *Potrea Protestus* was broken.

After the sale there was ceremony called *Vindacateo* and the adopting father went to the Roman magistrate and presented a

legal case for the actual legal transference of the person to be adopted into his own *Potrea Protestus*. And when all this was complete the adoption was done.

Now there were four main consequences in a Roman adoption. The adopted person lost all rights in his own (natural) family and gained all rights in his new family. He gained all the rights of a fully legitimate son in his new family.

Secondly he became full heir to his new father’s estate even if there were other sons, even if there were no sons, if other sons were afterward born into the family who were real blood relations it did not affect his right of progenerate, his right to be the primary one. He was an inalienably identified heir.

Thirdly, according to Roman law, the old life of the adopted person, this is interesting, was completely wiped out. If he had any debts they were cancelled, if he had any record of crime it was abolished. They wiped out all the records as if that person had never existed, as if they had never been born. And the adopted person was regarded as a new person entering a new life with no past.

And fourthly in the eyes of the Roman law the adopted person was literally and absolutely the son of his new father in every sense.”

Isn’t remarkable! This is a natural picture of the exact process that takes place in our relationship with God when we come to



Young boy with his adoptive parents. | Photo: Shutterstock

saving faith in Jesus, and this was the understanding that the early church had when Paul explained that we are adopted into God’s family when we put our faith and trust in Jesus.

- We are adopted into God’s family.
- We are bought with a price.
- We are legally, in every sense of the word, a son and heir of our adoptive Father.
- Our past is gone, completely wiped away and forgotten, as though our past life and existence never happened.
- We are 100% sons and daughters of our Father in heaven, with full rights and privileges that come with being a member of this family.
- We are no longer orphans. God

completes the circle that began in Eden. We went from being 100% sons and daughters of God in perfect fellowship and full rights and heirs, to being expelled, estranged and separated through sin; we became orphans and strangers in the world, living under the slavery of sin serving a harsh task-master - Satan - until Jesus our Prophet, Priest and King came and died in our place. He purchased us with His own blood so that we could be saved. Our ransom was paid, our debts cancelled and we were adopted and are restored in our relationship with our Father once again. Thank God for Jesus!

¹ ‘Marks of a Child Adopted by God’, Dr John Macarthur, Oct 26, 1997 (Romans 8:14-16)

Joshua's Altar

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

The Palestinian Authority has been accused of using stones from an ancient Jewish site to help build a road near the city of Nablus, or Shechem. The site is located on Mount Ebal, which forms the northern side of the valley in which Shechem is located. This is in Area B of Judea and Samaria, which is under PA civil authority. Guy Derech, director of 'Preserving the Eternal', an NGO dedicated to safeguarding lands for the Jewish people, said, "The altar site is one of the most important sites in our country and special importance to the heritage of the Jewish people. Crushing thousands of years of cultural assets into gravel is an extremely unacceptable act." Critics argue that the Palestinian Authority has a history of destroying Jewish archaeological sites in an effort to erase Jewish ties to the land. It is continuing a 'tradition' begun by Jordan, which destroyed Jewish sites when it controlled Judea and Samaria and part of Jerusalem between 1948 and 1967.

Discover
In 1980, Haifa University archaeologist Adam Zertal was conducting an extensive archaeological survey in the city of Nablus, the biblical Shechem, in the West Bank, when a heap of stones caught his attention. He went on to uncover a rectangular structure approximately 9m x 7m long. Because of its character and location, Zertal proclaimed five years later that it was the altar built by Joshua after the Israelites entered the Promised Land.

Joshua's Altar
Mt. Ebal is mentioned in *Deuteronomy 27*. The book of Joshua records that Joshua built an altar here (*Joshua 8:30-35*):

"At that time Joshua built an altar to the Lord, the God of Israel, on Mount Ebal, as Moses, the servant of the Lord, had commanded the Israelites – as is written in the Book of the Teaching of Moses – an altar of unhewn stone upon which no iron had been wielded. They offered on it burnt offerings to the Lord, and brought sacrifices of well-being".

The remains consist of a well-built structure abutted by two courtyards. A ramp located between the courtyards reaches the top of the structure. Zertal argued that the site bears a striking resemblance to the altar that stood in Jerusalem's Second Temple a millennium later.

However, identification of the site as Joshua's altar is still controversial. While scholars agree this seems to be a cultic site from the Iron Age (1200 - 1000 BC), there is a dispute about when the events described in the *Book of Joshua* took place. Some say it was during the Iron Age I (1200-1000 BCE). German Bible scholar Alexander Schick disagrees: "If we take *1 Kings 6:1* seriously, then the conquest of Canaan was in 1400 BC (Masoretic Text) and after the Septuagint 1360 BC - and this is late Bronze Age. So how are we to connect the altar from the Iron Age with the late Bronze Age Joshua?" Dr Shay Bar from Haifa University, who took over the



Joshua's Altar. | Photo: Commons Wikimedia

work of publishing the site's findings after Zertal's death in 2015, says that several factors support Zertal's thesis. Still, much more work is needed before he can give a definitive answer. "The Bible speaks about an altar built there, and it is the only source available, so it seems possible that this was indeed Joshua's altar, even though we cannot know for sure. We need to carry out more work to verify it."

Damage
The municipality has apologised for the damage, which it said was accidental. Jewish and Christian volunteers have since restored the destroyed wall.

This article is partly based on reports by World Israel News and Jerusalem Post.

'Green Passport' not the Beast

■ **Johannes Gerloff**
Theologian, Journalist, Lecturer & Author

Israel is being accused of compulsory vaccinations. The Jewish state is even compared with Nazi Germany, the Netanyahu government with Adolf Hitler's regime, the green passport with the yellow star, current regulations concerning the pandemic with the Nuremberg race laws and Pfizer's vaccine with the poison gas Zyklon B. Some Bible experts are certain that the Antichrist will come from Israel. "Is Israel the forerunner of evil?," confused believers ask me. Some suspect that the 'mark of the beast' of Revelation 13 is behind the vaccination campaign.

Israel is a democracy. No subject in Israel is discussed unemotionally. This includes Covid-19 vaccination. According to public radio, about thirty per cent of Israelis do not want to get vaccinated. It is quite conceivable that these discussions will lead to fights at one point or another. After all, stones are thrown at you in certain areas of the country if you dare drive a motorised vehicle on the Sabbath. And in addition, there is an election campaign. In the heat of a political battle, it happened in the past that an opponent was referred to as 'Amalek' (compare *Deuteronomy 25:19*) – which does not necessarily have to prevent coalition talks right after the election results are published. Political correctness is neither one of the natural strengths of the character of Israelis nor one of their country's innovations.

Nobody is Being Forced to get Vaccinated

A whole range of Israeli measures against the corona pandemic may be pointless and may have caused unnecessary suffering. That has to be talked about – and it is discussed within Israel's society. To be clear, however: Nobody in Israel is being forced to get vaccinated, any more than anybody is being forced to get a driver's licence. I know firsthand that some healthcare workers and senior officers in the army have not been vaccinated. The so-called 'green passport' is simply a vaccination certificate that shows who was vaccinated with which vaccine and until when this vaccination is valid. It should be clear that vaccination makes a difference in how you are treated. This applies to every vaccination. If this were not the case, a government would declare the required vaccination to be a farce by means of its own procedures. Of course, Israel discriminates between people with a driver's licence and people without a driver's licence, between people with a gun licence and people without a gun licence. Anyone who violates these discriminations will be prosecuted. I am grateful for that.

The Comparison with the Nazis

I understand that the Jews persecuted by Nazis as children, suffered terrible things, and those who had to spend the rest of their lives in the Soviet Union now have trauma and smell dictatorship everywhere.

I am able to understand that Jewish people who have been persecuted over the past three millennia feel existentially threatened. However, this does not mean that their political views are correct. Anyone who compares the situation here in Israel with Germany at the time of the Nazis either has no idea who the Nazis were or has no idea of the reality in today's Israel – or is maliciously anti-Israel. In my opinion, the same applies to those who suspect the 'mark of the beast' (*Revelation 13:16-17*) behind Netanyahu's ambitions or claim that the Antichrist must come from the Jewish people.

A Time of Testing for the Church

We are living in a time that is a test for the Church of Jesus worldwide. The decisive questions are: How do we relate to the truth? Do we allow the Word of God to determine our orientation? I am convinced that Christians should distinguish themselves in dealing with social media by living according to biblical commandments, respecting the dignity of other human beings and expressing themselves responsibly – fully aware that each of us will have to give an account of every useless and unfruitful word that we have said or passed on (*Matthew 12: 36-37*). During this time, perhaps like never before, the challenging question arises: Who is 'God' in my life? Do I exude the freedom, peace, confidence, and tranquillity that I was redeemed to? Do I really serve the Lord, who taught His disciples that it is not that which goes into him from without

that defiles a person, but that which comes from one's heart (*Mark 7:14-23*)?

Am I on the road on behalf of the Lord, who knew quite well: "You are afraid in this world ..." (*John 16:33*) But, nevertheless, He sent His beloved disciples into exactly this world because He knew: "All power has been given to me in the invisible world and in the world that appears to us to be comprehensible..." (*Matthew 28:18*)? When the risen Jesus said 'all power', nothing can happen in this world without His permission. He sent his disciples even though He foresaw the possibility that they might have to swallow something poisonous in performing His commission (*Mark 16:18*). He knew that following Messiah means 'cross' and that 'cross' somehow always smells of 'risk of death' (*Mark 8: 34-38*).

I do not have a message of hope for the economy. But I serve the Lord who has an army of ravens at his disposal to provide for those who are unwilling to bow their knees to the Baal of the Zeitgeist (compare *Romans 11:3-5*; *1 Kings 17-19*) – and I would like to invite you to join us in doing this; that we encourage each other to straighten up instead of frightening or panicking one another.

When I listen to Yeshua, the Messiah, I learn that "by this, all will know that you are my disciples when you have love for one another" (*John 13:35*). None of us is able to fulfil this desire that springs from the very heart of our Lord just by himself. We have to do this together.

30th Anniversary of Operation Solomon

■ **Bryce Turner**
Executive Director | Christians for Israel NZ

During Shavuot, 24-25 May 1991, a record-breaking operation took place, under a shroud of military secrecy, to bring 14,325 Ethiopian Jews to safety. In just 36 hours, a mixture of Israeli Air Force aircraft and El Al passenger jets operated non-stop in one of the largest airlifts in living memory. Flying over 40 sorties, with up to 27 aircraft in the air at one time, less than 24 hours separated the first take-off from the last. One El Al 747 holds the Guinness World Record for carrying at least 1088 people, including two babies who were born during the flight. Operation Solomon was overseen by the Israeli Prime Minister at the time, Yitzhak Shamir, and was kept secret by military censorship.

Due to the petite and often malnourished stature of the Ethiopians, and the ability to remove seats, considerably higher numbers of passengers were able to be accommodated within the maximum take-off weight of the aircraft. Also, few passengers had luggage - nothing but the clothes they were wearing. 24 May also happened to be a Friday, when the Jewish Shabbat begins, during which transportation is not normally used. Jewish religious law, however, permits breaking Sabbath traditions for saving lives. This meant that more vehicles were available for the mission.

It is believed that a Jewish community was already established in Ethiopia around 587BC. Although the exact origin of the Ethiopian Jews is unclear, there is widespread belief that they are descendants of King Solomon and Queen Sheba. There are many other theories as to their origins and the path that brought them to Ethiopia, but the name given to them 'Beta Israel' - 'House of Israel' - illustrates the Ethiopian Jewish community's deep connection to the Torah. Whilst there is still debate as to the Jewish heritage of the Beta Israel, the Israeli government were sufficiently convinced as to authorise the use of the IDF. The immigration of Jews from Ethiopia into Israel began in the early 1980's, following the death of some 2500 Jews in the aftermath of a violent coup. Immediately after the coup the Ethiopian government legislated to prohibit the practice of Judaism and declared the teaching of Hebrew illegal. This sparked a number of operations conducted by Israel to rescue Ethiopian Jews. Operation Solomon was the third Aliyah



IDF officer helping Ethiopian immigrants out of the Hercules jet, Air Force Base, Operation Solomon. | Photo: Wikimedia Commons, GPO

airlift mission from Ethiopia to Israel, following Operations Moses and Joshua.

In 1991, the government of Ethiopia was very close to being brought down by rebel forces after a long and bitter civil war, and North Africa was in the grips of a massive famine. Jewish organisations around the world were very concerned for the safety of the Ethiopian Jews. The Ethiopian government had made it nearly impossible for the Beta Israel to emigrate, so by 1990 the Israeli government and the IDF had already begun making covert plans to evacuate the Jews to Israel by mass airlift. The United States also became involved in the planning of Operation Solomon after American Jewish leaders made the US government aware of the danger facing the Beta Israel population. Following numerous diplomatic negotiations, final approval for the airlift was gained following a letter to the Ethiopian government from President George H.W. Bush. The Acting Ethiopian President approved the airlift. As a part of the arrangements to allow the Jews to come to Israel, the Jewish Community raised some \$35 million to present to the Ethiopian government, to cover 'airport costs' in Addis Ababa.

The American Association of Ethiopian Jews (AAEJ) contributed considerably to the speed at which Operation Solomon was mobilised. One significant

challenge facing the Beta Israel was the logistics of even getting to Addis Ababa. The AAEJ was instrumental in organising buses and trucks to help transport evacuees from Gondar; many more travelled hundreds of miles by car, horse and even by walking, facing many perils along the way. Numerous robberies, assaults and even murders took place along the route as the Ethiopian Jews desperately sought safety. By 1990, some 2000 Ethiopian Jews had even walked all the way from their village in the Gondar highlands to the capital Addis Ababa.

As the passengers disembarked, Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir and other government officials greeted them. Approaching the 30th anniversary of Operation Solomon, it is clear that the welcome received by the Beta Israel hasn't always been so warm. The vast difference between the largely illiterate culture of rural Ethiopia and high-tech, professional, urban Israel hasn't always been easy for the tens of thousands of Ethiopian Jews who ultimately made Aliyah to Israel, many only just now settling into employment and truly fitting into Israeli society. The struggle has been very real for the Beta Israel, but now more and more we can hear stories of those who have overcome the odds and now make vital contributions to Israel. Soon, Jews and friends all over the world will commemorate that bold, brazen and record-breaking mission of 30 years ago, and the countless lives that were inevitably saved.

Shira Shares her Experience of Operation Solomon

■ **Danielle Mor**
Jewish Agency. Abridged by Managing Editor

Since the day the Jewish Agency established the State of Israel in 1948, the borders of Israel have always been open for Aliyah. Can it be that the pandemic will change this? Indeed, it has. Thousands of *olim* who were all set to arrive, that sold their property, left their jobs etc, were held back. Our work revolved around finding ways to care for and assist them and to reverse this government decision.

I am overjoyed to share, that although not a complete reversal has been achieved, we have succeeded in bringing home to Israel some 1,000 *olim* from countries such as Ethiopia, France, Russia, Ukraine and Latin America.

I'd like to share with you a beautiful story. It is that of a six-year-old boy named Benjamin and a woman named Shira who arrived together on the first flight from Ethiopia.

Six-year-old Benjamin was born in Ethiopia with a heart condition that went undiagnosed until recently... he urgently needed open heart surgery. This surgery is not available in Ethiopia, but it is in Israel. As a member of the Ethiopian Jewish community, his family has long awaited Aliyah. Everything seemed to be in place - his visa and the hospital waiting to receive him in Israel -

but then found out the Ethiopian government wouldn't issue his mother a passport in time so she couldn't go with him! We knew that if we didn't get Benjamin on the flight, he could die. Without his mother, how could six-year-old Benjamin board the flight on his own? So we struggled to find a legal guardian but we did. Benjamin parted from his mother in tears and yet boarded the flight with a hopeful heart. What he didn't know was that mid-flight, the guardian changed her mind. She would not accept the role of guardian.

This is where Shira comes into the story... Shira is a dear colleague working at the Jewish Agency. Thirty years ago, she made Aliyah from Ethiopia as a six-year-old child with her own family on Operation Solomon. Over two months ago, she left Israel on what was meant to be a three-week mission to assist with Aliyah from Ethiopia. She left behind her husband and four children, sharing with them that she was on a mission to bring members of their community home to Israel.

Due to the civil war in Ethiopia and the lack of flights, this three-week mission grew longer and became over two months long. Her family was desperate for her return, so were overjoyed to learn she was coming home on a special Aliyah evacuation flight.

When the legal guardian of Benjamin changed her mind, Shira realised Benjamin would have to return to Ethiopia immediately. She remembered herself at his exact age, coming on the 'metal bird' of Operation Solomon, and immediately knew what she must do.

Shira volunteered herself to be guardian of Benjamin (pictured right) and came off the flight holding his little hand, being taken directly to spend 14 days in quarantine with him at the hospital.

Calling her family, her eight-year-old boy asked her: "Mommy, you landed? You're coming home?" Shira replied with tears: "Honey, I am in Israel, but it will take a little while longer. You see, a little boy here needs me, his heart is not as strong as yours, he needs urgent surgery, and his mother is not with him. I must be with him in her place." And indeed, Shira stayed with little Benjamin who is now preparing for life saving open heart surgery.



The Heart of the Bible

■ Kameel Majdali
Director | Teach All Nations Inc.



The Lord said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, “Look around from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. Genesis 13:14-15

But the land you are crossing the Jordan to take possession of is a land of mountains and valleys that drinks rain from heaven. It is a land the Lord your God cares for; the eyes of the Lord your God are continually on it from the beginning of the year to its end. Deuteronomy 11:11-12

So you are going on a holy land Bible tour, but time is short. If you could only visit one region and learn more about the Bible, where would it be? Well, the topic of this ‘Walk through the Land’ is the place to go.

The land of the Bible can arguably be called the navel of the world. It sits at the intersection of the great Afro-Eurasian landmass and serves as its ‘land bridge.’ Its location ensures great international attention, past and present.

One of the key differences between Judaea and Samaria is that the latter is more accessible than its southern counterpart. This meant it was more vulnerable to foreign invasion.

Yet there’s more. This land is central because the eyes of the Lord are upon it from the beginning to the end of the year (see verses above).

If this centrally located land has a ‘heart,’ especially from a geographic and Biblical perspective, it has to be the region known as ‘the Central Hill Country’ (CHC). Also known as ‘Judaea and Samaria,’ though most of the world calls it the ‘West Bank,’ a term coined since the 1948 War. For in this region lies the stage of many key Bible events, particularly in the Old Testament.

This will be the final part of our series, ‘Walk through the Land.’ We have already covered the coastal region, including the Plains of Philistia, Sharon, Acre/Asher. Also, we examined the Sea of Galilee, the region of Galilee, Mount Carmel, and the Valley of Armageddon.

We have not covered: The strategic Shephelah (lowlands) between Philistia and the Judean mountains, the great southern desert called the Negev, the Rift Valley and its subsections, and Transjordan, including Golan, Gilead, Ammon, Moab, and Edom. We may visit these sometime in the future.

On the surface, CHC looks like one and the same region, especially since the hills are nearly all made of limestone, but there are distinct variations that have affected



Herod the Great Palace in Sebastia, Samaria. | Photo: Shutterstock

Biblical history. Let’s see how the Central Hill Country (CHC) is the heart of the matter.

Samaria and the Northern Kingdom

The CHC resembles the letter ‘B’ upside down and backwards. Samaria is the larger region to the north and Judaea to the south. Samaria covers an area 80 by 40km

westward was the city of Samaria, capital of Israel, where the kings Ahab to Hoshea reigned.

South of Shechem in the region of Ephraim is Shiloh, Israel’s first capital and home of the tabernacle and ark of the covenant for 369 years.

South of Shiloh, in Benjamin’s subsection, is located Bethel, ‘House of God,’ where Jacob saw the ladder from heaven and Jeroboam placed the golden calf. Other Biblical sites are Gibeah, Geba, Gibeon, and Mizpah. This area, along with Jerusalem, was probably the busiest region for Biblical events.

Judaea: Israel’s Capital Territory

Judaea was the stage for God’s revelation and redemption. It is Israel’s capital territory and hosted the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Judaea, 40 by 32km, can be divided in half: west is the hill country, forested, green, with cool, moist Mediterranean air and rain. The east side is the wilderness; the contrast between the two couldn’t be greater. The mountains are high enough to receive occasional snow and adequate rain (500 to 700mm). Wonderful agriculture was found here, including wheat, barley, olives, grapes, pomegranates, sheep, donkeys, camels, and livestock. Key cities are Hebron, Bethlehem, and the crown jewel, Jerusalem.

The Judean wilderness and Rift Valley are to the east; the contrast in height is striking: 760 to 915m above sea level to the Dead Sea, 400m below sea level. In just 16km, as the crow flies, the descent is 1310m. The rainfall is 100mm. Judaea’s wilderness influenced the lives of David, Amos, Jeremiah, and, of course, Jesus of Nazareth.

Hopefully, this short introduction to redemption’s stage will stir your interest in visiting the heart of the Bible. You’ll never read God’s Word or the newspaper the same again!

and can be subdivided into three parts, north to south: Manasseh, Ephraim, and Benjamin.

One of the key differences between Judaea and Samaria is that the latter is more open and accessible than its southern counterpart. This meant it was more vulnerable to foreign invasion. Also, as the centre of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, Samaria’s openness made it more unstable. It had two heathen shrines at Bethel and Dan, three different capitals: Shechem, Tirzah, and the city of Samaria, and at least 6-8 dynasties. Having the capital in the city of Samaria made the Northern Kingdom fully open to the cultural, political and religious influences of the West (1 Kings 16:29-34), rendering it more cosmopolitan yet insecure.

The famous Biblical city of Shechem is located here. Mentioned 63 times exclusively in the Old Testament - Shechem really is the ‘navel’ of the Samaria. Sandwiched between Mount Ebal (940m), the ‘mountain of cursing’ on the northside, and Mount Gerizim, the ‘mountain of blessing’ (881m) on the southside, Shechem is important in Genesis, Joshua, Judges, and 1 Kings. Nearby eastward is Sychar, the location of Jacob’s Well, where Jesus first revealed Himself as Messiah to the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4. Down the road from Shechem



Panoramic view from the archaeological park of Shiloh in Samaria, Israel. | Photo: Shutterstock

Hineni Experiences God’s Provision

The current work of Hineni humanitarian restaurant in Jerusalem can be described briefly: ‘creative problem solving’ and ‘miracles’.

The management, staff, and volunteers need to adapt constantly. When regions are closed because of corona and the cooks cannot come to Jerusalem, the secretary does the cooking, and her own work is left undone.

Covid-19 Crisis

The coronavirus crisis poses significant challenges to Hineni’s continued operation and has abruptly halted the steady stream of foreign volunteers. With creativity and hard work, the three volunteers who were left managed to prepare 200-300 meals per day. A plea from city hall for help for the elderly did not fall on deaf ears. Of course, Hineni could help! Benjamin Philip, the director, had no idea where they would find the money, but his life motto is always, “The Eternal One will provide!” And...the Lord did provide, through Christians for Israel.

2100 Meals

The constantly changing restrictions also had consequences for the restaurant. One week only ten people could eat there at a time; two weeks later, the restaurant had to close, and meals could only be provided for pick-up. The needs of the community kept growing. A nursing home asked for help again: 125 meals, three times a week! Miraculously, the task of packing all these meals is completed every week! This is thanks to the faithful assistance of International Christian Embassy Jerusalem (ICEJ) staff members and local volunteers who spontaneously offered their help when Hineni was left short-handed.



Meals on Wheels by Hineni
The Meals on Wheels Programme helps primarily the elderly and Holocaust survivors who are living

are afraid to go to the store, they are eating unhealthier food. The emotional damage caused by the isolation is even worse, as many are

“The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want.” Mark 14:7a

below the poverty line. These people live independently in a ‘protected’ government building where there is no shared dining room or kitchen. Due to the coronavirus crisis, government support has fallen away, but these people do not have the money for hot meals. Because they

relying war traumas. Added to this is the fear of catching Covid-19, ending up alone in a hospital, and dying without being able to say goodbye to family. Receiving a hot meal is often the high point of the day for these isolated seniors. | Photos: Hineni



Hineni’s budget has been reduced during the Covid-19 crisis, but:

- The number of meal requests have increased;
- Employees are being paid to work longer hours due to the shortage of volunteers;
- The kitchen is forced to use more expensive frozen vegetables instead of cheaper fresh vegetables.

With your support, Hineni can provide even more meals to Jerusalem’s poorest. The cost of a hot meal is € 5. You can fulfil the Lord Jesus’ biblical commission by contributing to the important work of Hineni. Please complete the coupon on the back page.

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

'Like Doves to their Nests'

Koen Carlier
Aliyah Fieldworker | Christians for Israel Ukraine

At midnight on 25 January, Ben Gurion Airport closed indefinitely. Both for 'tourists' as well as for olim (immigrants). This was a new situation for us. Even in wartime, Jews could always emigrate to Israel. Just think of January 1991, when Iraq was firing scud missiles at Israel, the Iron Curtain had just fallen, and thousands of Soviet Jews were arriving in Israel. The first thing they were given at the airport was a gas mask....

The Green Light
All olim who were to leave after 25 January were almost literally sitting on their suitcases patiently waiting to see when they could leave. Fortunately, the trips to the Israeli consulates in Ukraine could go ahead in the meantime. The pressure on the Israeli Ministry of Aliyah and Integration became too great. As an exception, the green light was given to land six flights with Jewish immigrants from South America, Ethiopia, France, Russia and Ukraine. In total, this involved about 900 olim!

The Lord continues to bring His people Home... these six flights remind me of Isaiah 60:8: "Who are these that fly along like clouds, like doves to their nests?"

The two flights from Ukraine were scheduled for 25 February. For both flights, we brought families from all over Ukraine with all our minibuses to the airport. Emigrating from Ukraine and other countries is a special and stressful event in itself, but since March last year, due to all kinds of travel restrictions and the mandatory PCR test, there is even more stress.

In our minibus, we had families from Kamenets-Podolsky and Khmelnytsky whose flight was originally scheduled for 28 January. The flight was postponed to 7 February, then to 15 February and finally to 25 February. Having to postpone your trip to Israel three times is not a pleasant thing.

The main reason Alexei and his wife Natasha left was because their 16-year-old son is autistic and since there are almost no shelters and facilities for him in Ukraine. In Israel, there are many more opportunities for him to be part of society. We picked up the families between 3pm and 7pm, followed by a seven-hour drive to the airport! The main roads may be free of snow, but the hundreds of new potholes in the road (a recurring problem every year) can be quite nerve-wracking.

After we took the first group to the airport in Kiev, we drove to our shelter for an overnight stay, where another group of olim from Krivov Rog had just arrived. Another minibus picked up a group near Chernobyl during the night. Their departure to Israel was scheduled for 4pm the next day.

At breakfast, my colleague Nataliya explained about our work. She mentioned that, over the years, almost 7,000 Jews had spent the night in our shelter before leaving for Israel. There is room in our shelter for up to 30 people.

Problems
Everyone was grateful for a 'flawless' trip, and at the airport, we wished all the olim a good flight and a good homecoming in Israel.

What no one knew at the time was that there were problems with certain procedures and permissions to allow the flight to depart from Kiev.... After 14 hours of long and anxious waiting, the flight finally left at 5:20am on Friday morning. Another 140 Jews will start a new life in their homeland. Something their ancestors could only dream of.

The Return Continues
Despite all the challenges we have faced in recent months, caused by the coronavirus, the return of the Jewish people to the land of Israel continues. The Lord is faithful to His promises, and the exiles from the four corners of the world will continue to go home for good.



We continue our practical help in Ukraine to assist them with their Aliyah. Will you help? It costs € 135 to assist one Ukrainian Jew to make Aliyah. Please complete the coupon below. Any amount is welcome!

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

TOTAL DONATION

DONATION

TEACHING RESOURCES

- Israel on Trial (Book) by Andrew Tucker
- 70 Questions About Israel (Book) by Chan Siew Fong
- Israel 70 Years (One-off Collector's Magazine)
- Jerusalem 50th Anniversary (One-off Collector's Magazine)
- Israel: Covenants & Kingdom (Book) by Willem JJ Glashouwer
- Why Israel? (Book) Why Jerusalem? (Book) Why End Times? (Book)
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- Why Israel? (Book, DVD & Study Guide)
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To order these and other resources, go to www.c4israel.org/webshop



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