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Understanding Israel and world events from a Biblical perspective

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Members of Israel's new Knesset together with President Isaac Herzog, just before the end of 2022. | Photo: Flash90

Israel's Controversial New Government

Israel's new government was sworn in on 29 November 2022. It contains more religious party members than Israel has ever had. All five coalition partners of PM Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party are religious parties. Several Likud politicians are 'religious'.

That unity of Bible-based faith and the fact that this coalition has a majority of 64 out of 120 seats in the Knesset could make this government even more stable than recent governments. From 2009-2018, Netanyahu ruled with coalitions of parties that were ideologically

much further away from Likud. None of these coalitions turned out to be able to serve the full four-year reign.

Netanyahu's new government resulted from the Knesset elections held on 1 November last year. Before this, Netanyahu's political rivals had ruled for a year with a coalition perceived as 'anti-religious' by believers in Israel. This further exacerbated the political divisions between secular and religious Israelis.

Since Netanyahu's new coalition took shape, secular media in Israel and abroad, in particular, have sought to

portray it as 'ultra-right-wing', 'ultra-nationalist', 'undemocratic' and even 'theocratic'.

Already, there has been much controversy in Israel surrounding this government. There have been large demonstrations in Tel Aviv against the government's proposed judicial reforms. One Minister in the government has had to resign after the Supreme Court ruled that his appointment was unreasonable. Pray with us that this government will transcend divisions and that God's glory will take shape in Israel.

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



Colophon

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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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Crisis in Israel-Political or Spiritual?

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

Israel’s new government, led by Prime Minister Netanyahu, comprises a coalition of several right-wing political parties. The main members of the coalition are Likud (headed by Netanyahu), the Religious Zionism party led by Bezalel Smotrich, and the Otzma Yehudit Party of Itamar Ben-Gvir. Smotrich has become Minister of Finance and has been given responsibility for Israel’s civil authority in Area C of the West Bank. Ben Gvir has become Minister of Security. Smotrich and Ben Gvir are widely branded as ‘ultra-nationalist’ and ‘extreme right’.

One suspects they will be only too happily misused by those who are already intent on destroying Israel’s credibility and international standing

Among the key clauses in the coalition agreement between Religious Zionism and Likud are a commitment to pass a law designed to reduce judicial checks on executive and legislative power, a vaguely-formulated commitment to annexing the West Bank to Israel, legalisation of dozens of unauthorised settlements, and the provision of large funds for road building and public transport in the West Bank.

In mid-January, Minister of Justice Yariv Levin (Likud) announced reforms that will alter the existing relationship between the executive, legislature and judiciary. The planned reforms include measures that will significantly limit the power of the Israeli High Court. This reflects the view of many in Israel that the court—an unelected body of jurists—has, over recent decades, assumed too much power.

Key aspects of the proposals will:

- allow the governing coalition to ‘override’ Supreme Court rulings by a simple majority of 61 votes in the 120-member Knesset; the overriding legislation could only be struck down by a unanimous ruling of all 15 justices;
- end the Supreme Court’s ability to revoke administrative decisions by the government on the grounds of

‘reasonability’;

- require a ‘special majority’ in an expanded bench of justices to strike down laws and/or decisions deemed to contradict Israel’s quasi-constitutional Basic Laws;
- enable government ministers to install political appointees as legal advisers in their ministries; and
- give the government a greater say in the appointment of judges.

It is important to note that Israel is a Parliamentary democracy on the British model. It does not have a written constitution. It only has one house of Parliament (Knesset); there is no upper chamber. The coalition of parties that

forms the majority in the Knesset also forms the government (executive). The President has very limited powers. Thus, there are (compared with some other democracies) relatively few inherent checks and balances on the power of the Knesset and government. Many feel that the judiciary’s wide powers promote democracy by providing an essential rein on the risk of abuse of power by the executive. Others feel the court has infringed democracy by enabling a college of unelected judges, on the basis of subjective views, to strike down laws and measures passed by the elected legislature and government.

The government thus says the reforms will ‘restore’ Israel’s democracy, while its critics assert that the proposed reforms will destroy democracy in Israel, paving the way for a ‘democratic dictatorship’.

These proposals have led to a political crisis. There have been violent demonstrations. Opposition leaders have accused the government of treason. Opposition Leader Yair Lapid vowed to wage “a war over our home.” At the same time, Benny Gantz, the defence minister until two weeks ago, warned that the

judicial overhaul could lead to “civil war” and urged the public to lawfully take to the streets, declaring: “It’s time to go out en masse and demonstrate; it’s time to make the country tremble.”

These are disturbing scenes. One suspects they will be only too happily misused by those who are already intent on destroying Israel’s credibility and international standing.

This comes at a time that Israel is under increasing pressure in the international community. For example, late December, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution to seek an Advisory Opinion from the International Court of Justice about the legality of Israel’s ‘occupation’.

There is something paradoxical about Israel that perhaps many in the land do not appreciate. God is restoring His people to the land for a specific purpose: in order to live in unity, in accordance with His law, under His authority—as a witness to the nations of God’s sovereignty and love for the whole world.

Seen from a spiritual perspective, the essential question is thus not how wide the judiciary’s powers are or whether the government has too much power. No institution, person or system will ever be perfect.

The core issue is one of the heart. It is whether the people—as a whole, together—Jews and non-Jews—are genuinely seeking to live in unity, serving the God who is bringing the Jewish people home. This is the spiritual crisis facing the people of Israel.

Therefore, let us, as non-Jewish Christians outside the land of Israel, refrain from becoming embroiled in Israel’s political crisis. Instead, let us hope and pray that, in the coming days and weeks, Israel’s people and political leaders will put aside personal, and even political differences, and seek the common good of the nation, living in accordance with God’s laws.

As crisis after crisis engulfs the earth, the other nations of the world desperately need Israel to play the leadership role for which it was established and to which it is called.

Prayer Points

By C4I Prayer Team

Israel

- Pray for wisdom and insight for the new government of Israel under the leadership of Benjamin Netanyahu. Pray that they will be guided by wisdom from God and not by international criticism.
- In 2022, twice as many Jews (74,000) immigrated to Israel compared to 2021. Give thanks for this huge increase. Pray that many Jews choose to make *Aliyah* this year. Pray also for Jews from Russia and Ukraine, that it remains possible to leave for Israel.

Israel & the Nations

- Since Israel’s new government took office, there has been much criticism from the international community about its right-wing character, which resulted in a very negative press worldwide. Pray that many will stand up and choose to support Israel and pray for unity among Christians in taking a stand for Israel.
- ‘He (Nebuchadnezzar) was driven away from people and given the mind of an animal; he lived with the wild donkeys and ate grass like the ox; and his body was

drenched with the dew of heaven, until he acknowledged that the Most High God is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and sets over them anyone He wishes’ (*Daniel 5:21*). Pray that God will appoint other leaders in Iran who will abandon enmity with Israel.

Christians for Israel

- ‘All your words are true; all your righteous laws are eternal’ (*Psalms 119:160*). Give thanks that it’s possible again to organise meetings and conferences in various countries around the world. Pray that these gatherings also attract people who haven’t heard the message of God’s faithfulness to Israel before.
- The outbreak of war in Ukraine made it a very intense year for Koen Carlier and his team. Give thanks for the thousands of Jews they were able to help by offering comfort, food, shelter and transport to Moldova, from where they could leave for Israel. Pray for the safety of the team, that they may receive strength to cope with all challenges.

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

Israel Cracks Down on PA Over ‘Legal and Political War’

■ Charles Bybelezer

Authorities confiscated the VIP passes of top Palestinian officials and are withholding taxes and tariffs collected on behalf of the Palestinian Authority (PA) to hold Ramallah accountable for last month’s ‘distorted’ UN resolution on Judea and Samaria.

Israel on Sunday, 8 January 2023, revoked the VIP pass of PA Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki, in line with a Cabinet decision last week to sanction Ramallah in response to the UN’s passage, at the PA’s behest, of a resolution asking the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to weigh in on the legal status of Judea and Samaria.

Border officials stopped al-Malki as he crossed from Jordan into the PA and confiscated the travel document allowing him to expedite or altogether bypass normal security checks in Judea and Samaria.

“In the diplomatic sphere, the Security Cabinet convened last Thursday and decided on a series of measures against the PA for advancing a radical anti-Israel decision at the UN,” Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said.

“These steps include sanctions against senior Palestinian officials, the offsetting of terrorist funds and the freezing of Palestinian construction projects in Area C, which contravene the explicit commitments that the PA has taken upon itself.

“We have established a different government with a different policy, and

everyone will see this,” added Netanyahu. Ahmed al-Deek, an aide to al-Maliki, told Reuters that the Palestinian diplomat “will continue his job with or without the card.”

The official PA Wafa news agency reported that Ramallah was “considering a legal and political response to the vindictive measures,” which al-Malki claimed violate international law. He added that “work is underway to build an international public opinion against the occupying regime by exposing its crimes before the countries of the world.”

The decision to retaliate against Ramallah came a week after the UN General Assembly passed a resolution calling on the ICJ to “render urgently an advisory opinion” on Israel’s “prolonged occupation, settlement and annexation of Palestinian territory.”

In response to the PA’s ongoing ‘political and legal war’ against the Jewish state, the Security Cabinet decided to withhold taxes and tariffs collected on behalf of and transferred to the PA in an amount equal to that which Ramallah paid to terrorists and their families in 2022 under its ‘pay-for-slay’ policy. An additional sum of nearly \$40 million was deducted from the same PA pool of funds to be disbursed to Israeli victims of Palestinian terrorism.

The Knesset had previously passed legislation mandating such deductions. However, the Bennett-Lapid government repeatedly found loopholes to delay its implementation.

Netanyahu had said that the ‘disgraceful’

UN move would not obligate or restrain his government, adding: “The Jewish people is not occupying its land and is not occupying its eternal capital Jerusalem. No UN resolution can distort this historical truth.”

Meanwhile, the Israeli Defense Ministry suspended the entry permits to Green Line Israel of three other senior PA officials after they participated in a homecoming ceremony for a convicted terrorist released from prison. The three officials, including an assistant to PA chief Mahmoud Abbas, arrived in the Arab Israeli town of ‘Ara, in northern Israel, to greet Karim Younis, an Israeli jailed for murdering IDF Cpl. Avraham Bromberg on the Golan Heights in 1980.

The three men were identified as Mahmoud al-Aloul, deputy chairman of Fatah’s Central Committee, Azam al-Ahmad, and Ravhi Fatuh.

Israeli National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir announced the cancellation of a regulation implemented by the previous government that allowed any lawmaker to meet with jailed Palestinian terrorists. Ben-Gvir said that he took the step after “concluding that these visits resulted in incitement and the promotion of terrorist actions.”

The policy will now revert back to that of the past when only one legislator from each political party was permitted to meet with imprisoned terrorists, and under ‘appropriate supervision.’

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Short News

Sustainable Apparel Reduces Pollutant Emissions



The final stage in textile production, fabric finishing, is the most polluting step in textile production. In this process, the fabric is dyed and/or coated with antibacterial, odour-repellent, water-repellent, UV-blocking or other substances. German company Brückner Textile Technologies, which supplies a quarter of the world’s textile finishing machines, has collaborated with the Israeli technology company Sonovia to develop a textile finishing machine that uses sound waves to give fabrics the desired properties. This technology uses much less water and energy than conventional processes and significantly reduces pollutant emissions. It also makes garments more durable. The first jointly developed SONOfix machine was recently installed at Delta Galil Industries in Galilee to produce underwear and sportswear for brands such as Tommy Hilfiger, Calvin Klein and Adidas. Sonovia plans to supply additional machines to textile mills in Taiwan and Central America that produce apparel for brands such as Adidas, Nike, The North Face, Decathlon and Lululemon.

Pakistani Cotton Found in 7,200-year-old Israeli Village



Archaeologists excavating a 7,200-year-old village in Israel have found cotton from what is now Pakistan. The find is considered one of the earliest records of cotton in the ancient Near East. The site in the Jordan Valley already held “amazingly well-preserved organic material,” archaeologist Danny Rosenberg of the University of Haifa explained. The new finds involve microscopic cotton fibres. Until now, historians have assumed that fabrics in the region at that time were made of flax or linen. The cotton find therefore points to the importance of Tel Tsaf as a trading centre, which is also supported by other finds. In recent years, archaeologists have found pottery from Iraq or beads from Anatolia and Africa. “Tel Tsaf was a kind of hub where a lot of trade was done, and many people from all over the world met.” | Photo: Lightstock

Valley of Dry Bones

Holocaust Remembered

On 27 January—official International Holocaust Remembrance Day—the *Shoah* was commemorated in many different ways around the world.

For some people, the creation of the State of Israel in 1948—three years after the end of the Second World War—was a fulfilment of the prophet *Ezekiel’s* prophecy about the valley of dry bones. The Jewish nation rose out of the ashes of the *Shoah*. Israel lives—*Am Yisrael Chai!*

Dutch Christian artist Otto de Bruijne recently made a special painting about it. “I made more than 30 drawings: *Ezekiel* lying on his side near a model of the besieged city of Jerusalem, how he was not allowed to mourn when his wife died. I made an image of the merkava, the mysterious chariot of heaven with the angels, and large paintings about the nations attacking Israel, the new temple, the promise of a new heart, and the temple stream.

Bible reading, designing images, working them out, each time an adventure. But somehow the Holy Spirit is also involved. Don’t ask me how...

Tears

But it happened very clearly when I got to the prophecy (in *Ezekiel 37*) about the valley with the dry bones of death. Where is that valley? Is that future? Has that already happened? Naturally, out of intuition, I started with the railway tracks and the gate of the Auschwitz concentration camp. The black gaping hole... While painting, seven chimneys emerged above the building. And then... tears. Out of those chimneys came black dots, it didn’t stop. I may have touched twenty thousand of them. And I got tired of it, but in reality there were six million of them. Each dot a person, a child, an elderly person. The dots became shapes: arcs, lines, circles. Then something like ribs, legs, arms, heads. Then they became skeletons, and they grew into human shapes, and the seven braces became seven arms of the menorah. People took on colour and grew with the seven arms of the candlestick: dancing, singing, praying, working, loving.

Resurrection

This painting became the Word for me: the valley of the barren bones of death is the *Shoah*. And the menorah is the



resurrection of the millions who were killed: Israel is resurrected.

Rarely have I painted in such a way, hour after hour, from dot to man, from chimney to menorah, reflecting on the darkest night of God’s people.”

Otto de Buijne’s beautiful paintings inspired by the prophet *Ezekiel* are to be seen in the Israel Centre in Nijkerk, Netherlands.

The Israeli Canary in the West's Cultural Coal Mine

■ **Melanie Phillips**

5 January 2023. The attacks on Ben-Gvir's Temple Mount excursion defy reason.

Those scratching their heads over the way Western liberals have lost all connection with reason over issues of race, gender and Western 'colonialism' might usefully look at the reaction to Itamar Ben-Gvir's visit to Jerusalem's Temple Mount this week.

Here was a Jew walking for 15 minutes on the site that is most sacred to Judaism. He did it without fanfare or media attention, early in the morning when the compound was almost empty and didn't pray there or say anything to stir up trouble.

Yet his visit provoked uproar with claims that it was an extremist act, that it was likely to spark a new terrorist war and even—this from a Ha'aretz columnist—that Ben-Gvir was leading Israel 'on the road to hell.'

In any sane universe, this is simply unhinged. Ben-Gvir was fully entitled to be there. He did nothing out of the ordinary. Other Israeli Jews, including government ministers, regularly visit the site.

The people actually responsible for inciting violence over the Temple Mount are the Palestinian Arabs. Since the 1920s, they have been provoking fanatical religious hysteria and the murder of Israelis with the wickedly false claim that the Jews were either storming or planning to destroy the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Similar claims were made in 2022 when Palestinian Arabs turned Al-Aqsa into an ammunition store from where they hurled rocks down at Jews praying at the Western Wall and attacked Jews making their way there.

The reason is that, as the site of the Jewish Temple that was the focus of Jewish religious life in ancient Israel until it was destroyed in 70 AD, the Temple Mount stands at the very centre of the Jews' unique entitlement to Jerusalem and the land.

That's why the Palestinians have tried to destroy the archaeological evidence that has been dug up at the site over the years. They attempt to wipe the Jews out of their own history in the land—centuries before the first Arabs or Muslims invaded it—in order to support the laughably bogus claim that the Palestinian Arabs were its indigenous people.

Yet this use of the Temple Mount for incitement, violence and religious supersessionism draws no condemnation from the Western left. They do not acknowledge that this aggression, which strikes against Judaism itself, is the real cause of the Middle East conflict.

Instead, the Biden administration condemned the Ben-Gvir excursion as an "unacceptable" and "unilateral" action that "undercut the historical status quo." Not only was this untrue, but the status quo, which Israel has upheld, is itself unacceptable.

The status quo prevents Jews and Christians from praying at their own holy site; it restricts non-Muslims to entry through only one of 12 gates while Muslims can use all the gates; it forbids Jews from drinking from the water fountain in the compound because of the claim that Jews are 'unclean'.

While falsely asserting that Israel is attempting to drive Muslims out of their holy site, the Palestinian Arabs bellow that no Jew is to be allowed to set foot on the Temple Mount with what Palestinian Authority chieftain Mahmoud Abbas described as 'their filthy feet'.

This odious racial discrimination and violence draws no condemnation from the Biden administration or the Western left. Instead, it is Ben-Gvir who is accused of racism.



Itamar Ben Gvir arrives to visit the Temple Mount, at the Western Wall in Jerusalem's Old City on Tisha B'Av, 7 August 7 2022. | Photo: Flash90

The Oslo Accords state: "The Palestinian side shall ensure free access to, respect the ways of worship in and not make any changes to, the Jewish holy sites."

At both the Temple Mount and the sacred Jewish site of Joseph's Tomb in Nablus, which is under the control of the Palestinian Authority, the Palestinian Arabs have repeatedly broken this pledge.

For years, Jews visiting Joseph's Tomb have been attacked by Arab rioters and gunmen, most recently on 21 December 2022, when Jewish worshippers and the soldiers guarding them came under heavy gunfire.

Yet this draws no condemnation from the Biden administration or the Western left. Instead, there are veiled threats that the US will punish Israel for having Ben-Gvir in its government.

In the same way, successive Democratic administrations and other Western liberals have held Israel responsible for the Arab war against it on the grounds that Israel is 'illegally occupying' Palestinian land.

This is geopolitically illiterate. Only the Jews have a legal, historical and moral entitlement to this land. The Jews are its only extant indigenous people, and the Palestinian Arabs are its would-be colonial occupiers, declaring that 'not one Jew' will be allowed to live in the state of Palestine.

Yet this attempt to erase the Jews from their own country and even from their own history is ignored by the 'anti-racist' Western left, who instead accuse Ben-Gvir of promoting ethnic cleansing.

In a savage tweet this week, Sen. Ted Cruz said that the Biden administration's 'pathological obsession' with undermining Israel was endangering the national security of America and its allies.

The administration's attacks following the Ben-Gvir visit, Cruz said, will convince Palestinian officials that compromise is unnecessary because Democratic administrations "will coerce our Israeli allies into making dangerous concessions." The administration, he added, consistently seeks to undermine Israel's security and sovereignty while pouring more than \$1 billion into Palestinian areas and "bringing officials from the terrorist Palestine Liberation Organization to Washington DC."

This perverse behaviour by Western liberals, aided by Israeli leftists who fan the flames by even more hysterically promoting these lies and appeasement, hugely incentivises further Palestinian rejectionism and violence. It also actively emboldens Israel's existential foes among the world's tyrannies and kleptocracies who use United Nations resolutions and 'lawfare' to try to bring Israel down.

Just imagine if America said that these Palestinian lies and incitement have to stop, that Israel has law and history on its side and that the only aggressors in this war are the Palestinian Arabs who want to destroy the Jews' right to their country and historic identity.

The Palestinians' strategy of extermination would collapse overnight because the main reason this war never ends is the West's support for their cause.

The result is the unique and insane situation in which Israel is forced to fund people who continue to build an infrastructure of genocidal warfare that they periodically unleash against Israeli civilians, in which so-called allies prevent Israel from taking measures essential to defend its people against mass murder; and in which the same so-called allies now have the gall to tell Israel that the composition of its government doesn't meet with their approval.

Israel, however, is not the only example of a looking-glass world in which aggressor and victim, right and wrong, truth and lies have been turned on their heads.

Many are observing similar denials of reality and character assassination in the West's culture wars and are concluding that the world has simply gone mad.

Israel's new Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, may turn out to behave badly or unwisely. Ben-Gvir and the other two 'extremists' in Israel's government may promote the fanaticism or recklessness with which they are associated. If they do so, they will deserve to be criticised.

But just as happened with former US President Donald Trump, such a rational, evidence-led approach is vanishingly unlikely. To liberals, there are simply no facts or evidence that can reframe the way they view the Netanyahu government: That it has crossed over to the dark side from which there can be no return.

Antisemitism repudiates reason. Anti-Israelism repudiates reason. It's well known that the Jews are always the canary in the cultural coal mine.

Today, anti-Jewish bigotry is both symptomatic of and fueled by a far broader and deeper phenomenon. We can see this in the madness of identity politics. The West, having produced the age of reason, is now intent on destroying it.

Melanie Phillips, a British journalist, broadcaster and author, writes a weekly column for JNS. Currently, a columnist for The Times of London, her personal and political memoir Guardian Angel has been published by Bombardier, which also published her first novel, The Legacy. Go to melaniephillips.substack.com to access her work.

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Seven Phases of the Holocaust

■ Kelvin Crombie
Researcher & Author

Introduction

In March 2018, Rev David Pileggi of Christ Church, Jerusalem, asked me to undertake a research project relating to Jewish people who were involved with the Church during the period of the Holocaust. This group of Jews were officially classified as ‘non-Aryan Christians’ by the Nazis, but often saw themselves as Jewish Christians or Hebrew Christians, while to their detractors they were known as converts or *meshumaddim* (traitors).

Irrespective of their classification, there was a considerable number of such Jewish people spread throughout Europe, involved in the Church at different levels and capacities. In most instances these Jewish Christians underwent the same persecution suffered by their Jewish brethren, and many of them (possibly into the tens of thousands) were also murdered.

Discovering There Were a Number of Interconnecting Phases

The sheer volume (and darkness) of the material being read, and observed during four on-field research trips to archives and ‘the killing fields’ of Europe, overwhelmed me, forcing me to develop a system in order to digest and collate this information.

While reading a book entitled *From Gurs to Auschwitz* (the life story of a Jewish woman named Maria Krehbiel-Darmstadter, a ‘non-Aryan Christian’), I was intrigued why a Jewish person from the western part of Germany was transported, together with thousands of others, to southern France and primarily to a detention camp at the base of the Pyrenees named Gurs. Sometime later they were transported back north to the death camp at Auschwitz. It just did not make any rational sense—if indeed anything about the Holocaust makes rational sense!

It was then that I became familiar with the Nazi scheme to transport the Jewish people under German control in 1940 to the French colony of Madagascar. My interest was now piqued. After further research on the so-called Madagascar Plan, I began to see that this was actually just one phase in the Nazi attempt to make Europe *Judenfrei*—Jew free.

From that point onwards I was able to recognise that there were other phases, culminating in the Nazis ‘final solution’ to the so-called ‘Jewish problem’—which was total genocide.

Thereupon I developed a working model based upon seven phases which culminated in the decision to murder eleven million Jewish people in Europe and surrounding regions, including the Middle East. These were not seven distinct phases, as there was overlap between them. This model has greatly assisted me to better understand a very complex and complicated subject.

Seven Phases of the Holocaust

- **Phase One: Until 1933—Foundation of the Nazi worldview.** When the Nazi’s came to power on 30 January 1933 they already had an established worldview. This worldview had been conditioned and prepared by a number of streams or sources during the previous hundred or more years, and included historic anti-Semitism in the Church. A central component of this worldview was that Germany was to be made *Judenfrei*—Jew free.
- **Phase Two: 1933-1939—Intimidation, exploitation and emigration.** Once the Nazis took power they began to exploit and intimidate the Jewish people with the goal of getting them to emigrate from the German Reich. This goal only partly succeeded. That Hitler detested the Jewish people is clearly evident in a speech he made on 30 January 1939 in which he alluded to “the annihilation of the Jewish race throughout Europe.” Did he, at that stage, contemplate their physical annihilation, or was it merely their removal from Europe?



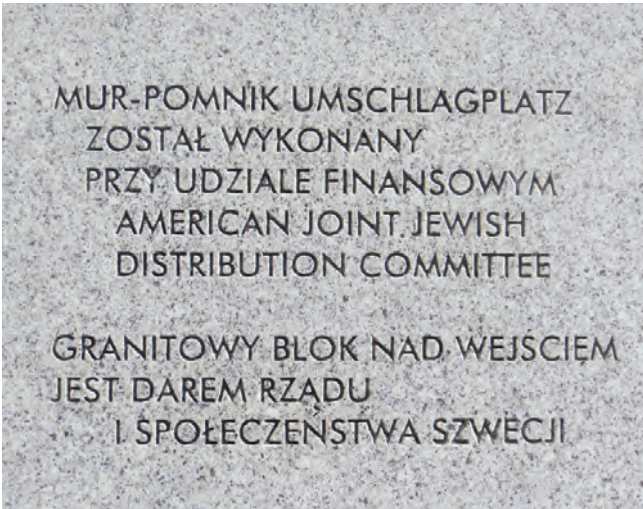
Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp. | Photo: Unsplash

- **Phase Three: 1939-1940 —The Lublin and Ghettoization Plan.** When the Germans invaded Poland they ‘inherited’ another 3 million or so Jewish people. The plan was to place them in ghettos in larger cities and ultimately to move them to a region of Poland near Lublin, which would become a large Jewish ghetto. This plan was partially implemented.
- **Phase Four: 1940-1941—The Madagascar Plan.** With the conquest of the Netherlands, Belgium and France, the Nazi regime inherited another 550,000 Jewish people. It was then decided to remove these, as well as those from Germany, to the French colonial island of Madagascar. When Adolf Eichmann drew up a plan it included the deportation of all 4 million Jewish people under German control. Britain, whose navy ruled the sea lanes, though, could not be defeated thereby rendering this plan obsolete.
- **Phase Five: 1941 (22 June)—The Eastern Plan.** As part of Hitler’s grand plan for gaining *lebensraum* (living space) the Germans invaded the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941. Indiscriminate shooting of some Jewish people was sanctioned at this point, while it was also planned that Jewish people from Europe would ultimately be transported further East into Russian Asia. Encouragement was also given for local pogroms against Jewish people.
- **Phase Six: 1941 (30 July)—Initial implementation of genocide.** Following a directive from Herman Goring on 31 July 1941, the SS and other units began indiscriminately shooting Jewish men, women and children throughout occupied areas of the Soviet Union. SS leader Himmler then ordered that other forms of mass murder be developed. From late 1941 murder by gassing, including in gas vans, began to be employed. Five specialised death camps were established for gassing, namely Chelmno, Auschwitz, Treblinka, Sobibor and Belzec—for the systematic murder of all the Jewish people in Europe.
- **Phase Seven: 1942 - 1945—Complete implementation of genocide.** This plan to murder 11 million Jewish people in Europe and surrounding regions was formalised at a conference at Wannsee House near Berlin on 20 January 1942. While mass shootings would continue in many areas, large numbers of Jews from throughout Europe were thereafter transported by train to the death camps of Chelmno, Treblinka, Sobibor, Belzec and Auschwitz. Throughout this period hundreds of thousands of Jewish people were also incarcerated in ghettos, and concentration camps and used as slave labour where many were executed, or died of starvation, sickness and beatings.

By the time Auschwitz was liberated on 27 January 1945 the gassings had ended. But many more died thereafter through death marches and deprivation in camps mostly in Germany. Thankfully the Nazis were defeated by May and were not able to fully implement their demonic plan in total. The United Nations in 2005 designated 27 January as *International Holocaust Remembrance Day*.



Hebrew Christians in CMJ Warsaw congregation, pre-1939. Most of these people were murdered. | Photo: Conrad Schick Archive, Jerusalem



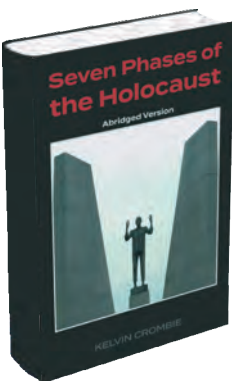
Umschlagplatz, Warsaw Ghetto

Conclusion

Three lessons being learnt through this research are: (1) There is no human way to understand the Holocaust, leaving me with the words of *Jeremiah*: “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” (*Jeremiah 17: 9*). (2) One’s faith, prestige or position in society made no difference—if you were Jewish you were earmarked for death—including in most instances, the Jewish Christians. If the totalitarian Nazi regime didn’t want you, then nothing could save you.

(3) Signs and symptoms from that terrible period are still evident today. The challenge for us today is to discern these signs, and to then seek for God’s wisdom as to how best to act against them.

© Kelvin Crombie 2023. More complete details of the *Seven Phases of the Holocaust* will be provided in a forthcoming publication of this name. Details of other publications on the subject matter can be obtained through kelvin@heritageresources.com.au, various branches of CMJ (Church’s Ministry among Jewish People) or Christians for Israel.



What preceded the founding of Israel—Part 1 Israel's Secular Legitimacy is Much Older than 75 Years

■ **Wim Kortenoeven**

Author, Journalist and Former Politician

According to the Jewish calendar, the State of Israel will celebrate its 75th anniversary on 26 April 2023. The regained Jewish independence was declared on 14 May 1948, according to the Gregorian calendar. This marked the first phase of the prophesied Jewish return to the Land of Israel after nearly two thousand years of exile. That national restoration had long before been proposed by influential European non-Jews and legitimised by non-Jewish states under international law.

Viewed properly, the celebration of the 75th anniversary of Israel is an absurdity. After all, the (restored) Jewish state is rooted in a statehood tradition going back more than three thousand years. It was King Saul who, from Hebron, united the tribes of Israel into a unitary state, with the lands of *Yehuda* (later called 'Judea' by the Romans) and *Shomron* ('Samaria') at its core. It was Saul's successor David who established Jerusalem as the capital of that Jewish federation, and it was his son Solomon who built the first temple there. During that period of Jewish boom, the most basic civilisation was far from penetrating Western Europe, and most of the Netherlands was still a marshland where the animal-skin-clad inhabitants lived in sod huts.

Christian Zionism

It was only 2,600 years after the start of David's reign, in 1585, that The Hague became the 'Dutch' seat of government. And Amsterdam, founded in 1275, did not become the capital of the Netherlands until 1808. The Jewish return had been propagated by numerous prominent European non-Jews, mostly 'Christian Zionists', since the early nineteenth century. And they naturally projected it onto the cradle of Jewish civilisation: Judea, Samaria and Jerusalem. Those voices rang out long before the Jewish 'political Zionism' of

for the "return of the Jews to their original land". It was not his intention that they should establish their own state there but settle there "at their own expense and risk" and submit to the local government. At the time, the Land of Israel was under the Egyptian-based governor Mohammed Ali, who had rebelled against the Turkish-Ottoman sultan in 1831.

Shaftesbury was primarily driven by the idea that the Jewish return to Zion would hasten the return of Christ. But he also saw it as the cheapest and most efficient way to colonise Syria. According to Shaftesbury, its benefits,

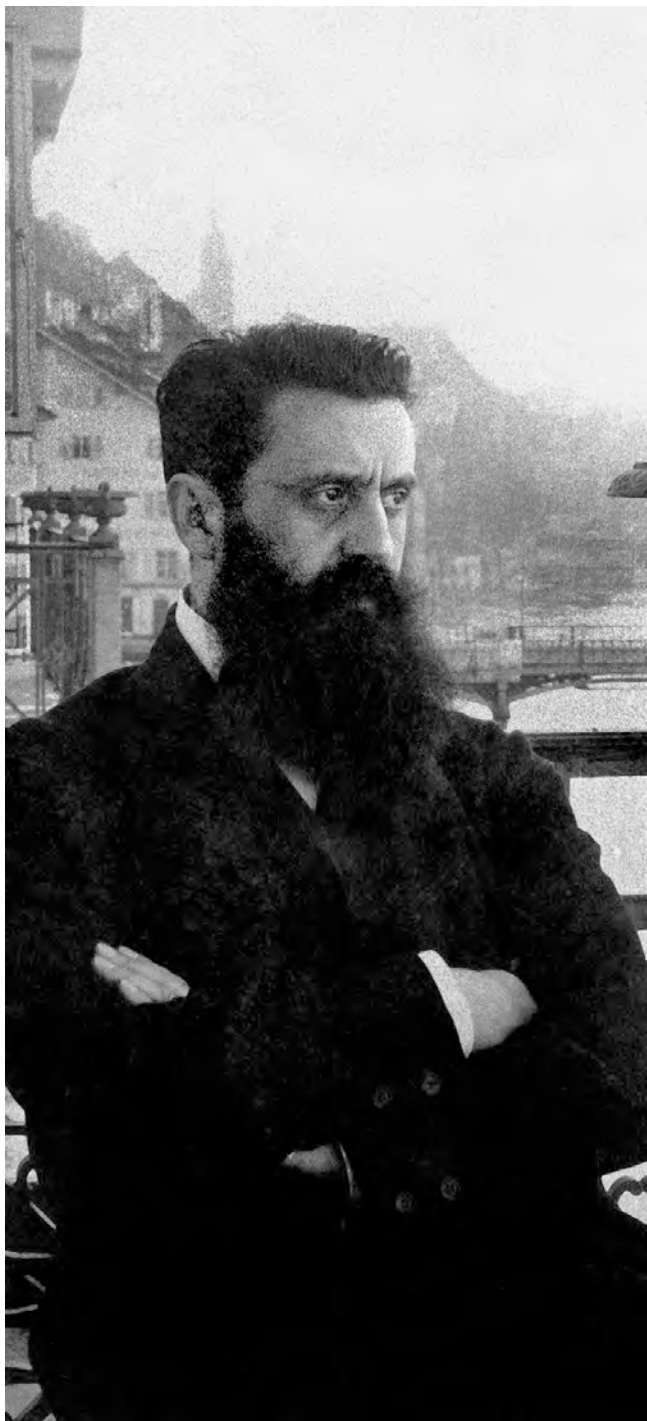
The Jewish return had been propagated by numerous prominent European non-Jews, mostly 'Christian Zionists', since the early nineteenth century.

secular Viennese journalist Theodor Herzl gained a foothold (in 1897). And in the early twentieth century, their logical premise was explicitly, formally and ethnically endorsed by the international community.

Geopolitical Considerations

One of the best-known earlier Christian Zionists was the British statesman Lord Shaftesbury (1801-1885). In 1840, he published an appeal in the daily newspaper *The Times*

including the undermining and partition of the Turkish-Ottoman Empire, would "benefit the entire civilised world". These religious and geopolitical considerations dovetailed well with those of the British political establishment. And they laid the foundation for later political British support for Zionism.



Theodor Herzl in Basel, Switzerland. | Photo: GPO



In 1799, the French General and later Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte issued a statement calling for the national restoration of the Jewish people in the Land of Israel. | Photo: History Extra

Napoleon Bonaparte

Shaftesbury is sometimes cited to ‘prove’ that European political Christian Zionism preceded Herzl’s Jewish political Zionism. This is true in itself, but even long before Shaftesbury, many other non-Jewish European intellectuals had been calling for a national restoration of Israel. In April 1799, for instance, French General Napoleon Bonaparte issued a declaration of support laced with Biblical references to “the rightful heirs of Palestine”. This was on the eve of his invasion of what was then Turkish-Ottoman-controlled Palestine. The document should have been officially declaimed in Jerusalem. But thanks to a British maritime intervention in support of the Turkish defenders, the French invasion stranded near the Mediterranean port of Akko in May 1799.

Crusades

Nevertheless, 1799 is seen as the year when Europeans, for the first time since the Crusades, returned to the Holy Land with great ambitions. In the following period, competing European powers France, Britain, Germany and Russia each established religious, economic and

The Balfour Declaration was adopted as an official policy document, and the right of Jews to settle anywhere in Palestine was confirmed under international law, i.e. in all areas between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River as well as the region across the Jordan.

political power bases in the Palestinian part of the disintegrating Ottoman Empire. The largely desolate area between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea was almost literally broken open and awakened. This also created locally essential conditions for large-scale Jewish immigration and Jewish national recovery.

French and British declarations

During World War I, Britain and France conquered large parts of the Ottoman Empire, including the territories of Palestine and Syria. This created opportunities for international political recognition of the Jewish return, even though, organisationally and numerically, it was in its infancy at the time. Well-known is the declaration of

the British cabinet published on 2 November 1917 by British Foreign Secretary Lord Balfour, which promised the Jewish people ‘a national home’ in Palestine. Less well-known is that on 4 June that year, France’s top diplomat Jules Cambon had already issued a declaration in which the French government officially declared itself in favour of “national Jewish recovery in the land from which the people of Israel were expelled so many centuries ago.”

San Remo and Mandate

As Britain captured Palestine and France captured other parts of the Turkish Empire, Balfour’s declaration became more politically relevant than Cambon’s. In April 1920, the victors of World War I held a conference in San Remo, Italy, to discuss the division and future of the conquered Turkish territories. The Balfour Declaration was adopted as an official policy document, and the right of Jews to settle anywhere in Palestine was confirmed under international law, i.e. in all areas between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River as well as the region across the Jordan. This right of settlement was

subsequently reaffirmed by the League of Nations (the forerunner of the UN) in the Mandate for Palestine assigned to Britain.

Banned for Jews

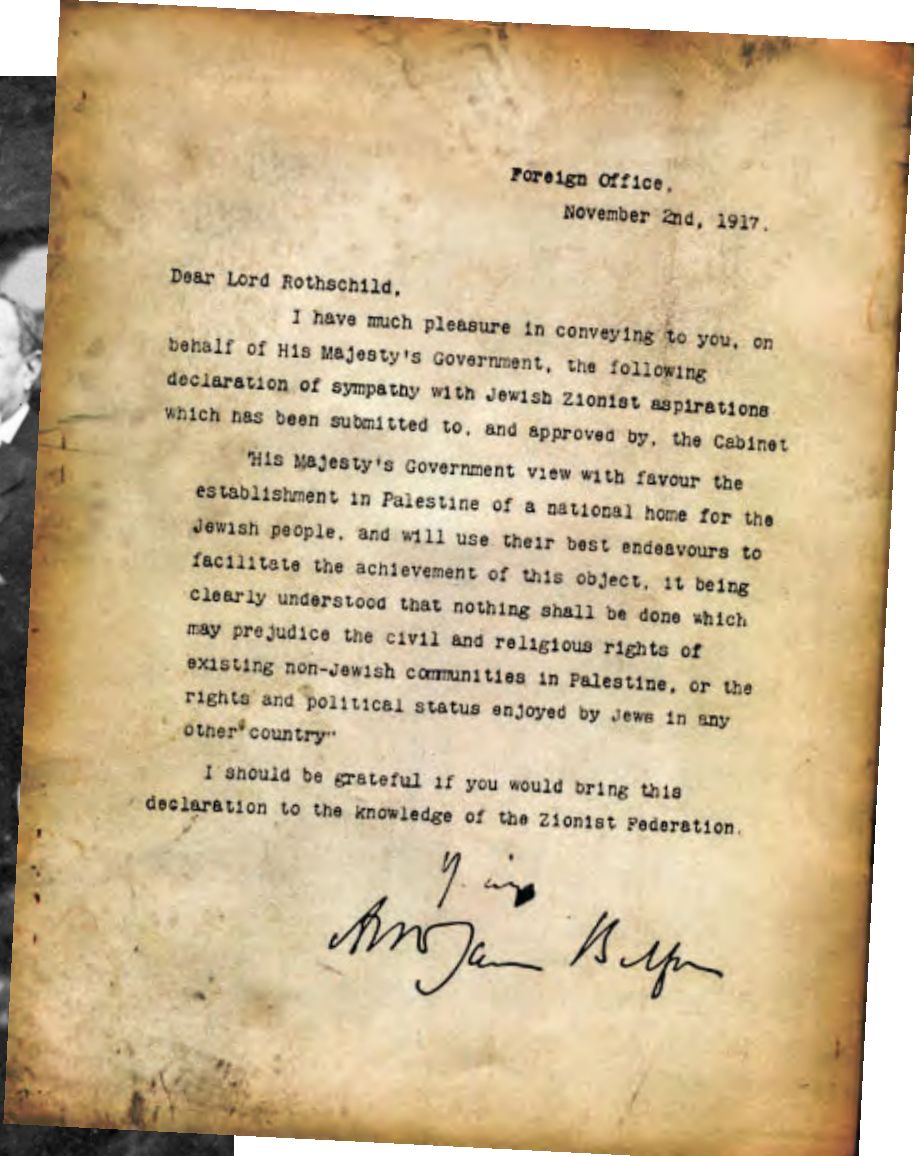
London was also instructed to facilitate Jewish emigration to the area. In 1922, however, the Jewish right of settlement for the region across the Jordan River was unilaterally revoked by London. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan was later founded there. Jewish right of settlement in the area west of the Jordan River (including Judea, Samaria and Jerusalem) was never negated by the League of Nations or, subsequently, the UN.



Lord Balfour. | Photo: GPO



Participants in the San Remo conference. | Photo: GPO



The Balfour Declaration. | Photo: GPO

How a Small Gift Makes a Huge Impression



■ **Leon Meijer**
Chairman | Christians for Israel International

With bare hands, a four-year-old girl is digging a hole in the ground. Another girl places a tulip bulb in the hole. Together they cover the bulb with soil and continue their work. The girls are wearing hearing aids. In daily life, they receive help from Smaya, a medical daycare centre in Bnei Barak, an orthodox Jewish city in Tel Aviv.

In the north of Israel, on the Lebanese border, we see twenty-year-old soldiers putting their guns aside and getting down on their knees. Holes are being dug; tulip bulbs are being planted and covered with soil. Within a week, this same ritual takes place at more than fifty locations all over the country.

150,000 Tulip Bulbs

In November, two Christians for Israel teams visited Israel and distributed over 150,000 tulip bulbs. In every place the teams visited, they sat with the people, explaining that Christians for Israel represent thousands of Christians worldwide. Christians who learned from the Bible that God loves His people and made everlasting covenants with them. These Christians like to follow the Lord in His love for His people. And what do you do when you love someone? You bring flowers.

Reminder

The flowers we bring need a little more attention and patience than regular flowers, but they also give the

opportunity to do something together. While planting the tulip bulbs, you have the most wonderful discussions. And long after the teams have left Israel—as the tulips start to grow and blossom in early spring—people are reminded (again) that all over the world, there are Christians who love the people of Israel.

Open Arms

Several years ago, Christians for Israel Netherlands took the initiative for the so-called ‘Tulip Tour’, and it has become an annual event. The tulip bulbs are being sponsored by Christians who love Israel. Their donations make it possible to order the bulbs from Dutch tulip horticulturists. The bulbs are then shipped to Israel in large containers. Upon arrival, they are packed in smaller boxes. During the Tulip Tour, each team visits as many communities, Christians for Israel projects, schools, kindergartens, army bases and absorption centres as possible. The programme is being put together with the help of Israeli contacts of Christians for Israel. And everywhere the teams come, they are welcomed with open arms.

I have visited Israel many times, but the Tulip Tour is something special. On a normal visit, you drink tea or coffee and speak with the host. During the Tulip Tour, you not only drink coffee or tea, but you also get down on your knees, plant the bulbs together and have the most wonderful conversations. Small talk with four-year-olds, encouraging talks with soldiers, comforting talks with people of old age, impressive talks with new immigrants

who sometimes had to flee their country. Often, we see tears in the eyes of the people we visit. It touches their hearts that we make an effort to visit them, that we remind them of God’s love, and that there are Christians around the world who love them.

Longing for Zion

During the recent Tulip Tour, all visits were special, but I will highlight two visits. Beit Alfa is a village close to the Gilboa mountains, where Saul and Jonathan fought the Philistines. It also houses an absorption centre for new immigrants from Ethiopia. At the centre, they start to learn Hebrew and get used to living in a modern Israeli society where houses have kitchens and toilets. We were welcomed with Ethiopian coffee and Injera, Ethiopian flatbread. Young and old walked with us to the garden, and as I got down on my knees, I looked around me and was surrounded by Ethiopian immigrants; a people who have longed for Zion for centuries. Here we were, digging in the soil of Zion, planting flowers, knowing that God intended His people to be planted back in Israel.

Coming Generation

Close to the springs of the Jordan River in northern Israel, we visited a school where children learn to dance. Full of joy and sweetness, the children walked—many barefoot—to the garden to plant the tulips. Israel’s coming generation learns that God loves them and cares for them as a flower in the garden.

| Photos: Christians for Israel International

“This is a New Revelation to Me”- Part 2

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

A pastor from Bangalore, India, recently proposed to us that he was prepared to organise conferences, on the subject of Israel, designed for pastors, in three different cities in India. “Your message about Israel is important for India, and pastors here are eager to learn about Israel”, he told us. As a result, conferences have been held in Bangalore, Pondicherry and Chennai in November. In the previous edition, I wrote about Bangalore.

In Pondicherry, a local church bought a parking garage and converted it into a church. Over 200 pastors attended the conference. Rev Willem Glashouwer explained that the Kingdom of God will come from heaven to the earth when Jesus returns. Dr Conrado Lumahan, from the Philippines, spoke about why Christians should stand with Israel. I spoke about the role of the Messiah, as revealed in the Bible, relating to the current return of the Jewish people to their homeland Israel.

In Chennai, a city with over six million inhabitants, we held our conference in a church that looked more like an industrial warehouse than a church. The pastor told us they have four church services every Sunday with over



2,000 visitors each. The church congregation is growing every year. Over 180 pastors attended our Israel conference. They were all touched by the biblical message regarding the significance of Israel and the Jewish people in our Christian faith. One of them told us with tears in his eyes: “I need to repent for never preaching about Israel in my Sunday sermons”. All pastors receive a copy of the book ‘Why Israel’, translated into their own regional Tamil or Telugu language.

India is number ten on Open Door’s ‘World Watch List’



of 50 countries where Christians are persecuted. Some pastors told us that they were personally beaten by radical Hindus in the past. But all of them are eager to go on with church planting and spreading the gospel of Jesus without regard to consequences. It was impressive to meet these pastors and to witness how the message about Israel touched them. Together with pastors from the city of Hyderabad, we are now preparing similar conferences there in 2023. Our Christian brethren in India need our prayers and support. | Photos: Christians for Israel

Believing Without Israel - Part 3

How Israel Disappeared from our Christian Faith

Rev Cornelis Kant
Executive Director | Christians for Israel International

In this new series of articles Rev Cornelis Kant explains how it happened that the role of Israel was seen as insignificant in the development of our Christian faith and in the history of Christian theology.

Destruction of the Temple & Jewish Diaspora

In the year 70 AD, the Roman army invades Jerusalem and destroys the city and the Temple. Many thousands of Jews are slaughtered in a gruesome way. Jewish boys and girls are sold as slaves, and many flee abroad. The Temple service comes to a definitive end and the Jewish dispersion, the Diaspora, begins. This news also reaches the Christians in the various congregations around the Mediterranean Sea. It touches them deeply. Many see it as a judgment of God on the Jews. It feels like a confirmation of what they have always thought: God is executing His judgment on the Jews as punishment, because they rejected and killed Jesus. The covenant with Israel would have been definitively broken. Israel has ceased to be God's people, so they thought. The Christian church is now the only and true people of God.

Replacement Theology

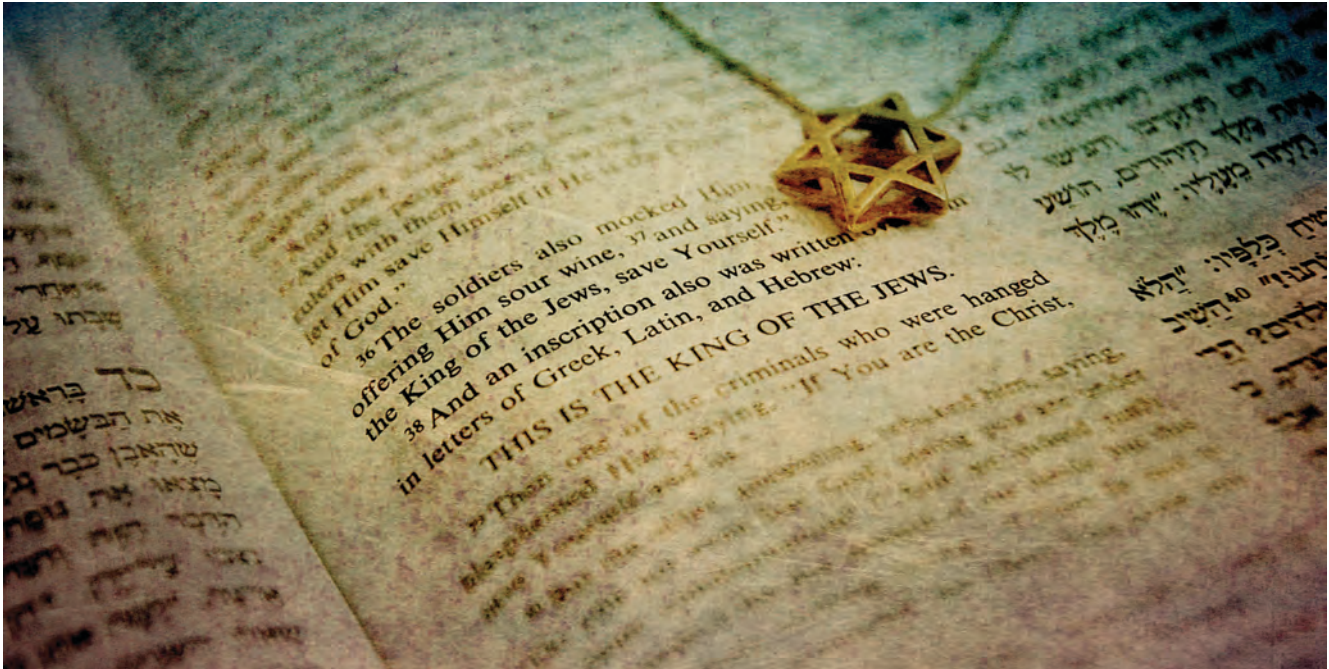
This perspective has had a profound impact on the further development of Christian theology. It has been called 'replacement theology': the Christian church has replaced Israel's position as God's people. It is astonishing

...This shows that it was God's eternal plan that Jesus Christ should die and rise for our salvation. It was therefore part of God's salvation plan for the world.

to see how, in a relatively short period of time, Christians in this first period of the church were able to set aside the multitude of Bible passages about God's eternal love and faithfulness to His people. The aversion to the Jews was apparently stronger than the biblical testimony of God's plan for the Jewish people. One might pose the question: what is left of Paul's thorough explanation in his letter to the Romans?

The Killing of Jesus

Is it true that the Jews killed Jesus and thereby brought about God's eternal judgment on themselves? No, this is not true at all, and for several reasons. The Jewish Council wanted the Romans to crucify Jesus. They were afraid that the movement around Jesus might cause an uprising against the Romans which would lead to bloodshed. High Priest Caiaphas explains this in *John*



[Photo: Lightstock]

11:49. It is, of course, unfair to attribute this to the entire Jewish population of Israel, let alone the many thousands of Jews who were already living outside Israel at that time. Besides, Jesus Himself said: "For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it

state: "crucified under Pontius Pilate". That is, if you want to speak of guilt, because in the end Jesus' death was already determined by God's plan of salvation. Even before creation, the coming of Jesus was already included in God's plan of salvation. So it is ultimately pointless to speculate in a legal sense about the question of guilt for Jesus' death. Nevertheless, this perception of the Jewish guilt of Jesus' death has deeply influenced attitudes and thinking about Jews within the Christian church, as we will see in the following articles.

down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father' (*John 10:17*).

God's Everlasting Plan

Paul even clarifies that God "chose us in Him before the foundation of the world" (*Ephesians 1: 4*). This shows that it was God's eternal plan that Jesus Christ should die and rise for our salvation. It was therefore part of God's salvation plan for the world. It is quite remarkable, then, that we would reproach the Jews for this. Besides, Pilate, who was then the Roman governor, said after having interrogated Jesus: "I find no guilt in this Man" (*Luke 23:4*). So he could have released Jesus, but had Him scourged and crucified in spite of it, and hypocritically washed his hands in water as a sign of his innocence. So you could say that Pilate, as a Gentile, was at least as guilty of Jesus' death. The old creeds of the Church also

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Signs of Faith

By Kees de Vreugd

Megillat Esther

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

Megillat Esther is Hebrew for the 'scroll of Esther'. There are five books in the Old Testament traditionally referred to as 'scrolls': *Ruth*, *Song of Songs*, *Lamentations*, *Ecclesiastes* and *Esther*. They are linked to the various feast and memorial days. But only *Esther* is traditionally read from a *kosher* scroll, which is a parchment scroll, handwritten with ink, in the classical Hebrew script, just like a *Torah* scroll. Only *Esther* is invariably referred to as the *Scroll of Esther*. This will probably have to do with the popularity of the story and of the feast.

One notable difference from a *Torah* scroll is that *Esther* scroll is rolled on one stick, while a *Torah* scroll has two. This is purely practical, as the *Talmud* describes. A *Torah* scroll, of course, is much larger.

Moreover, a piece is read from it every week. Then it is easier to roll it through on two sticks, so that it can be closed where one left off.

An *Esther* scroll, on the other hand, is actually a letter (*Esther 9:20 and 26*) and is therefore read like a letter: all at once. This happens on *Purim*, twice, on the eve and in the morning. The scroll is first completely unrolled and neatly folded on the lectern, to be read aloud.

The precept (*mitzvah*) for *Poerim* is that you must hear the *Esther* scroll read aloud, preferably in the synagogue. Moreover, you must hear the reader immediately and not through a phone, live stream or microphone. When reading aloud, therefore, it must be absolutely silent so that not a word is lost. Absolutely silent... except when the name *Haman* drops. Then as much noise as possible is made, with rattles and by stamping your feet, to drown out that name.

In practice everyone reads along, in his/her own

scroll, or in a printed Bible. There are four passages that are jointly read aloud by everyone, after which the reader repeats them again, to ensure that everyone has heard them. These are known as the four 'verses of salvation'.

Recommended Reading

Israel: A Concise History of a Nation Reborn by Daniel Gordis (2016)

By Simon Smelt

Daniel Gordis delivers with this book. An influential and well-known writer and blogger on Israel, he writes with vigour and clarity. At 585 pages, including six appendices, 38 pages of notes, ten useful maps, and lengthy ‘works cited’, this is neither a quick guide nor a plodding history. But it is concise.

Gordis describes the Jews’ return to their homeland as “one of the great dramas of human history” and “like a fairy tale.” He writes in sufficient depth to bring out the drama and tensions and deftly summarises complex events. He gives each of the main characters a brief bio and provides a feel for the street through popular songs and poetry.

Gordis remarks that he is not writing a military or economic history. So, there are no details of tank battles but economic pressures on the early state are well described. He centres his story on politics and political decision-making amidst competing factions, a divided populace, scarce resources, military threats and unreliable allies. He provides a page-turner on the struggle for independence, on Ben Gurion’s determination to build a nation and the new Jewish man from often unpromising material, and on the shifting dynamics of the multi-fold divisions in Israeli society: Arab and Jew, religious and secular, Sephardic and Ashkenazi, settler and city dweller, Sabra and immigrant.

Gordis brings out the huge ongoing challenges after independence: the overwhelming influx of refugees into a poverty-stricken and barely functioning state, the lack of shared experience, knowledge or common ground between the various peoples most of whom lacked understanding of democracy. He gives nuance to the shifting fault lines as the nation develops and grows and suffers various military, economic, political and population shocks and setbacks.

Inevitably, the book has limitations. The period prior to the emergence of Zionism receives light coverage: the impact of the Russian revolution and subsequent civil war on the lands where most Jews then lived gets half a sentence, the Holocaust a paragraph. Gordis writes from a secular perspective: here is the redemption of Israel but the Lord is not an active participant. He discusses the Arab side but as secondary. He refers casually to the ‘Palestinians’, without explaining that prior to 1967 the term was used to indicate location not ethnic identity. Jewish groups and products were referred to as ‘Palestinian’ during the Mandate period: the ‘Palestinian companies’ within the British army, the ‘Palestinian Post’ newspaper, and so forth. Arafat’s drive for a Palestinian man to match Ben Gurion’s new Jewish man is unremarked.

The novice prepared to tackle a weighty tome should be entertained and well-informed; the more knowledgeable will find surprises and fresh perspectives.

The Origin of Messiah



| Photo: Lightstock

Johannes Gerloff
Theologian, Journalist, Lecturer & Author

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

“From them comes the Messiah according to the flesh” (Romans 9:5)

The fact that Christ, according to the flesh, stems from the Israelites, and that the Israelites are both the home and the people of Messiah, is the “final and highest of Israel’s prerogatives”. Because “salvation is of the Jews,” as Jesus himself emphasises (John 4:22), “they were separated as a peculiar people, and preserved amidst all their afflictions”.

That our Lord Jesus Christ is born a Jew was not only for Martin Luther, but already for Paul, more than just a historical coincidence. Jesus Christ cannot be separated from His Jewish people and background. It was not by accident that God put in all the effort and took two thousand years to create the cultural, national and spiritual environments into which He sent His Son.

This is not just a question of an historical-cultural background through which we might better understand Biblical texts. We are not even just talking about messianic prophecies which have been tangibly fulfilled in history. Towards the end of this series about the privileges of the Jewish people, it’s all about Messiah

Himself, about His Jewishness, that is, about the very identity of Messiah Yeshua. The biological descent and the historical fact of Jesus’ coming from Judaism are by no means theologically irrelevant.

Whoever tries to strip Jesus of His Jewishness in order to create a redeemer that is ‘more relevant’ for other cultural environments, is in imminent danger of fabricating a god according to his own standards and imaginations and, thus, of falling into idolatry. Whoever consciously dismisses Israel as irrelevant or even secondary should beware lest they all of a sudden also lose Messiah Himself - and with Him the only way to the Father. For of Paul’s “kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites,” comes not least Christ Himself “according to the flesh”. And this is by no means a coincidence! “The fact of Jesus being born Jewish permanently binds all those from the nations who believe in Him to God’s history with his people”.

In all this, Paul does not say that the Jews were once Israelites, sometime in the past. Rather, they are Israelites to this very day. The title of honour ‘Israel’, including all its riches and privileges, is valid up to the present time. Marquart writes: “The Apostle writes and preaches after the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth, after the rejection of Jesus as Messiah by the Jews, after ‘the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom’. This present

tense is present tense in the face of the cross of Christ, not denying its relevance and importance”.

Similarly, Klaus Wengst observed the use of the term ‘brothers’ in verse 3 of chapter 9: “With this terminology [Paul] refers exclusively to people from the churches. If he uses it in this case for Jews who do not believe in Jesus, then this is worthy of special notice”. This professor of theology from Bochum University in Germany thinks it “probable, that Paul consciously upgrades his countrymen according to the flesh by calling them ‘brothers’. He thereby sets the Church and the Israel that does not believe in Jesus in analogy to each other”. Wengst concludes: “It is not about what once distinguished Israel but is no longer valid. Rather, it is about what distinguishes the people of God now and in the future from all other nations”.

The focal point and objective of the uniqueness and riches of Israel, however, are not human beings, but the one—

...who is God over all, forever praised!
Amen. (Romans 9:5)

Thus, Paul slides from theology into worship. In this way he directs the attention from the gifted to the giver of all spiritual gifts. Furthermore, he prepares the way for the text that follows. There, Paul emphasises the absolute sovereignty of the Creator. He is indeed and unquestionably God.



The garden tomb where Jesus was buried. | Photo: Lightstock

In the Beginning: The History of Jerusalem—Part 1



Jerusalem 1900. | Photo: Wikimedia Commons



Kameel Majdali
Director | Teach All Nations Inc.

Thus say the Lord God; This is Jerusalem: I have set it in the midst of the nations and countries that are round about her—*Ezekiel 5:5*

It is arguably the most famous city in the world—a household name even in remote places like the highlands of

Papua New Guinea or the jungles of the Amazon. It has four thousand years of history of which the first thousand was heathen, the second thousand Israelite, the next two thousand Gentile, and then after the June War of 1967, the city returned to Jewish/Israeli rule.

This six-part series will look at Jerusalem—historically and prophetically. When we understand Jerusalem, we better comprehend the will of God.

Bird's Eye View

The very first time Jerusalem is mentioned in the Bible by name is in *Joshua 10:1*. Adonizedek formed a coalition against the royal city of Gibeon, for having the audacity of making a league with Joshua and Israel. He is referred to as 'king of Jerusalem'.

Despite its lack of mention in the *Torah*, (the first five books of the Bible), Jerusalem is undoubtedly the chief city of the Bible. It's explicitly named 811 times. In addition, it has other names like:

- City of God (*Psalms 46:4; 87:3*)
- City of David (*2 Samuel 5:7; Isaiah 22:9*)
- Jebus (*Joshua 18:28; Judges 19:10*)
- City of Righteousness (*Isaiah 1:26*)
- City of Truth (*Zechariah 8:3*);
- City of the Great King (*Psalms 48:2*);
- Holy City (*Nehemiah 11:1*)
- Faithful City (*Isaiah 1:21,26*)
- Salem (*Genesis 14:18; Psalms 76:2*)
- Holy Mount (*Daniel 9:16*)
- Perfection of Beauty (*Lamentations 2:15*)
- Throne of the Lord (*Jeremiah 3:17*)
- Egypt & Sodom (*Revelation 11:8*)
- Zion (*1 Kings 8:1; Zechariah 9:13*).

When you tally up the references, it amounts to a 1000 times Jerusalem and its synonyms are found in Scripture. In contrast, the city of Babylon—the spiritual rival to Jerusalem—is cited 252 times.

The Glory of Zion

It is impossible to understand Jerusalem's significance without mentioning Zion. Are Jerusalem and Zion the same thing or are they distinct?

The name 'Zion' needs special emphasis. It is often associated with 'Zionism,' though ultimately it has a spiritual, prophetic side that is above politics. Zion has several meanings in Scripture,

depending on the context. The word is used 152 times in the Bible, along with 'Sion' nine times.

- Zion can mean the city of Jerusalem (*Psalms 87:2-3; 48:1-4*);
- Zion can mean the land of Israel (*Isaiah 51:3*);
- Zion can mean the Jewish people (*Isaiah 51:16*);
- Zion can mean Salem, which is equal to Jerusalem (*Psalms 76:1-3*).

Thus, while Zion's exact meaning is uncertain, it has become synonymous with Jerusalem, Israel, and the Jewish people. Significant as these points are, Zion goes to a whole new level when referring to Almighty God Himself.

Psalms 132 gives great insight into the significance of 'Zion.' We learn that God has chosen it (*verse 13*), desires it as His habitation (*verse 14*)—His local earthly address; He desires it as his final abode above all other places (*verse 14*); the lamp of God's anointed (David and Messiah, son of David) will be there.

In light of *Psalms 132*, and other Scriptures, Zion's greatest glory is this: It is associated with God's literal dwelling place on earth; His local earthly snail mail address. The phrase, 'The Lord Dwells in Zion' is found in the following verses: *Psalms 9:11; Psalms 135:21; Isaiah 8:18; Joel 3:21; Isaiah 33:5*.

In summary, Zion appears to be a royal city, or at least the royal section of the city, where the King of Israel will live. Zion/Jerusalem is a holy city, where the God of Israel dwells, too. Messiah is the Son of David and Son of God, the heir who will sit on David's throne and rule from the holy city.

Since God has chosen Zion for Him and His King to dwell, you can be sure that the forces of darkness will do their utmost to foil the divine plan. If it were possible, they will try to keep the King out of Zion. In *Psalms 2* and *Zechariah 12, 14*, we begin to see a picture of why the nations are so restive and concerned about Jerusalem. These passages are the beginning of understanding why Jerusalem is the burdensome stone. Either Zion will be God's capital or that of an anti-God, anti-Christ force.

The First Thousand Years (2000-1000 BC)

While the first millennium of Jerusalem was not in Israelite hands, it is mentioned by implication in the following events:

- Melchizedek, king of Salem, welcomed the patriarch Abraham after the slaughter of the kings. He was a priest of the Most High God (*Genesis 14:18-20*).
- Isaac's near-death experience occurred in the 'land of Moriah,' traditionally considered Mount Moriah, Jerusalem.
- Joshua's conquest of Canaan: Information was sparse, but we learn that Judah did not drive out the *Jebusites*, inhabitants of Jerusalem (*Joshua 15:63*) and neither did Benjamin (*Judges 1:21*);
- Alternatively, Judah destroyed Jerusalem by fire (*Judges 1:8*) but did not retain it. Then the *Jebusites* inhabited it afterwards.
- In short, neither Joshua, the judges, nor king Saul succeeded to capture and keep Jerusalem. That honour would be left for a man called David.

To be continued...

Biblical Roots

By David Nekrutman

Esther: The Holy Spirit

On the evening of 22 February, we will begin the Hebrew month of Adar—launching our annual Hebrew redemptive season. It includes the holidays of *Purim*, *Pesach* (Passover) and *Shavuot* (Pentecost). The first sacred text we read during this season is the Book of Esther. Not only was Esther written and canonised within *Tanakh* (the Hebrew Bible) by the *Ruach Hakodesh* (Holy Spirit), but the establishment of the *Purim* on the Jewish calendar was also done by the work of the *Ruach Hakodesh*.

The Book of Esther, for all intents and purposes, should not be in the Bible. It's a story that takes place outside of Israel after the giving of the *Torah* at Sinai, between the First and Second Temple periods. The book does not even contain God's name in it. If I were on the Bible Canonisation Committee Board, I wouldn't dare put Esther into the Hebrew Bible. However, the *Ruach Hakodesh* ensured that Esther was in the Hebrew Bible.

At first glance, the Book of Esther seems to be an exclusive Jewish experience and victory. It is, therefore, quite astounding that Esther remained in the Christian canon. Certain early Church fathers, and later, Martin Luther, argued for the removal of Esther from the Bible. It was just too Jewish! How does one explain Esther's canonisation in Christian Scriptures, as well as being used by a remnant of Christian brothers and sisters to "stand in the gap" for Israel (*Esther 4:14*)? The *Ruach Hakodesh*!

I humbly believe that Christians should celebrate *Purim* with the Jewish people. Although God's hand provided the military victory, it was both Jews and non-Jews who were the divine agents to win the war. Traditionally, *Esther 8:17* has been translated to invoke that a mass conversion to Judaism occurred—"... Then many of the people of the land became Jews because fear of the Jews fell upon them." My preferred translation is, "Then many of the peoples of the land anchored their destiny with the Jewish people because the remarkable God of the Jews descended upon them."

Due to the limited scope of this article, I cannot extrapolate the two Hebrew terms in *Esther 8:17*—*Pachad Ha'Yehudim* (traditional translation—'fear of the Jews') and *Mit'yi'hadim* (traditional translation—'became Jews') to understand how I arrived at my translation. Let's just say that the traditional translation reflected a late Second Temple period understanding of the verse when a more formalised conversion system was in place. However, an *Esther 8:17* live stream would show a move of God that took hold of a segment of non-Jews, and they recognised Him. This non-Jewish remnant decided to defend His people without conversion to Judaism.

I encourage my Christian brothers and sisters to study Esther this season. It is truly a *Ruach Hakodesh* holiday.

David Nekrutman is an Orthodox Jewish theologian involved in the sacred calling of Jewish-Christian relations for over two decades and currently serves as the Israel Director for The Isaiah Projects. In 2018, Mr Nekrutman received his master's in biblical literature from Oral Roberts University.

English Feast of ‘Lots’

■ Dr GH Cohen Stuart
Theologian | Certified Israeli Tour Guide

The name *Purim*, *Lots*, is taken from the book of *Esther* 3:7. Ordered by, and in the presence of Haman, the lot (*pur*) was cast to determine the best day to extinguish the Jewish People. *Purim* celebrates the failure of Haman’s plot (the final solution of the Jewish question). That single failure has never lost its horrible and shocking reality.

Steps
Purim is celebrated in steps, representing different aspects of the feast. The first step is set during the morning service on the *Sabbath* before the feast. The usual *Torah* reading is followed by a special reading from *Deuteronomy* 25:16-19. There, Israel is called not to forget to blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven after entering the promised land. What is the connection with *Esther*? The last king of Amalek, mentioned in *1 Samuel* 22, was Agag. The Agagite Haman was his descendant.

The plot of Haman was a continuation of the cowardly assault by Amalek on Israel’s rear, right after the exodus from Egypt (*Exodus* 17). The reading of *Deuteronomy* 25 reminds Israel that it is the most principal struggle in all of *Tenach* (the Hebrew designation for the Old Testament): “The Lord will have war against Amalek from generation to generation” (*Ex. 17:16*). It is not just a fight against (meanwhile extinct) Amalek, but a combat against any form of antisemitism—even until today.

When in the evening the celebration starts, the second preparation is also finished. Convinced of the seriousness of Haman’s threat (*Esther* 4:14), *Esther*—through her uncle Mordechai—called on all Jews in Shushan, the capital of the empire, to fast with her for three days. Then she

risked her own life to save her people: “If I perish, I perish” (4:16). To commemorate this, *13 Adar* (in 2023 on 6 March) is a day of fasting. According to tradition, upon entering the throne hall, she said: “My God, my God, why have You forsaken me” (*Psalms* 22).

Masks
The fast ends at sunset, when the 14th of Adar begins. Synagogues fill up with people. Many visitors are dressed up, often masked. That masquerade is a reminder that people often act different than who they really are. Haman, too, kept up the appearance of a loyal servant to King Ahasuerus, while in fact he was not just after blotting out the Jews, but in particular after royal power (hence his arrogant suggestion, *Esther* 6:6-9). Mordecai, by refusing to kneel for Haman (*Esther* 3:3) seems a rebel, but at the same time prevented a conspiracy against Ahasuerus (*Esther* 2:19-23). In the second part of the book, the masks fall.

This turns everything upside down. The day Haman had wanted to exterminate all Jews becomes a day of punishment for Jew-haters. In *Esther* 9:1, ‘contrary’ is used as a rendering of the Hebrew *wenahafoch hu*. Those words mean: it was reversed. When the masks are dropped, Haman turns out to be Jew-hater, Esther a Jewess, Mordecai her uncle, and the Jews loyal subjects of King Ahasuerus. Haman’s accusation (*Esther* 3:9) of a people ‘not fulfilling the king’s laws’ is belied.

Jews love to play with such masquerades. You poke fun at all kinds of ‘news’. In Israeli newspapers, you no longer know what real facts are. In Jewish periodicals, but also in communal magazines, ‘fake news’ articles at *Purim*. At *talmudic* high schools, rabbis are made fun of by their students. Bad traits are exposed during hilarious performances.

Both in the evening and the following morning, the entire book of *Esther* is read. As ‘the memory of Amalek’ is to be blotted out, the name of Haman, when read, is made inaudible by trampling the feet and the noise of rattles and tooters. It causes young and old to attentively read the text.

The morning service is followed by a festive meal. During the preparations, neighbours and friends bring each other gifts and deliver food packets to people with limited income, so they can celebrate the feast (*Esther* 9:19, 22). From all neighbours you can expect plates with sweets and Haman’s ears, the special *Purim* cookies. It is the only feast in Judaism where one is allowed to drink without limits, to the extent that one does not know anymore whom to bless or to curse, Haman or Mordecai.

Esther 9:15 tells that in the capital, Shushan, Jew-haters were allowed to be punished one day longer. In remembrance of this, *Purim* in Jerusalem (as a walled city) is celebrated a day later.

Victory
Pesach celebrates the Divine intervention in history. In the *Purim* story, the Jewish people act themselves. No name of God appears in the book of *Esther*, though hidden references were discovered in the text. Against the divine intervention of the exodus, *Purim* seems just a secular happening.

This least religious (?) of Israel’s feasts is one of the most beloved, not just in secular, but especially in strictly religious circles. According to rabbis, *Purim* is the only feast that will be celebrated in the coming new world (*olam haba*): the victory over antisemitism and Jew-haters.

Dr GH Cohen Stuart is a theologian and in Israel a certificated tour-guide. He lives in Jerusalem with his wife Marian.

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The Oslo Accords: A Failed Pursuit of Trust

■ Dr Sheree Trotter

Thirty years ago, on 20 January 1993, the first secret talks took place that would eventually lead to the signing of the Oslo Accords. Two Israeli academics and three Palestinian representatives of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), met at the home of a Norwegian couple to begin negotiations. The secluded spot away from the public eye afforded the opportunity for discussions and relationship building, in an attempt to cultivate trust between the Israelis and Palestinians.

After months of talks, the 'Oslo backchannel' culminated in the signing of the 'Declaration of Principles On Interim Self-Government Arrangements' on 13 September 1993. The formal signing ceremony hosted by US President Bill Clinton, at which Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat shook hands, provided the perfect photo opportunity for a world eager to resolve the long-standing Israel-Palestinian conflict.

This historical moment marked a turning point in the relationship by initiating open, direct talks between Israel and the PLO. Letters of Mutual Recognition were exchanged in which the PLO recognised the existence of the State of Israel and Israel recognised the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, while core issues such as refugees, settlements, borders, Jerusalem and mutual security, were to be resolved at some future time by direct negotiation between the two parties.

Such was the initial euphoria surrounding the signing of the Oslo Accords that in 1994 Yitzhak Rabin and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat won the Nobel Peace Prize. Rabin also signed a peace treaty with Jordan in 1994. However, in November 1995, Rabin was assassinated by a disgruntled Jewish extremist.

Leaders on both sides failed to take their people along with them and internal political opposition hindered progress. Commitments were broken and efforts to negotiate final status issues were fruitless. Violent outbreaks undermined trust. The attempt by Clinton at the 2000 Camp David talks, to broker an agreement between new Israeli PM Ehud Barak and PA chairman Yasser Arafat failed and the subsequent outbreak of the Second Intifada further dampened hopes for peace.

As Yossi Klein Halevi expressed in 'Letters to My Palestinian Neighbor',

The second intifada exhausted my capacity for outreach; I didn't think I could ever resume that journey in any form. I no longer wanted to hear your stories, your claims, your grievances. I wanted to shout at your hill: It could have been different! Partner with us, and negotiate a compromise! And look at me, acknowledge my existence! I've got a story, too.

Halevi, Yossi Klein. *Letters to My Palestinian Neighbor*, p.15, Kindle Edition.

A key factor in the initial hopeful phase of negotiations was recognition of the need to build a relationship of trust. The Norwegians worked to provide an atmosphere that would facilitate friendly relations, where stereotypes could be overcome and the other party humanised. A policy of constructive ambiguity was pursued with the view to remaining ambiguous on key issues until the relationship was strong enough to face difficult decisions.

Thirty years on, the prospects for peace appear further away than ever. The Palestinian leadership has refused land for peace offers, including the creation of a contiguous Palestinian state in 97% of the West Bank with east Jerusalem as its capital, the dismantling of isolated settlements and land swaps for the remainder. They have rather chosen to pursue a path of demonising and delegitimising Israel with a litany of fabricated accusations, from settler-colonialism to genocide to apartheid. Terrorism has been ongoing.

Indeed at a recent celebration of the 58th anniversary of the launch of Fatah, which controls the Palestinian



Yitzhak Rabin, Bill Clinton and Yasser Arafat at the White House 13 September 1993. | Photo: GPO Photos

National Authority in the West Bank and is considered more moderate than the hardline Islamist Hamas party in Gaza, the party reasserted its commitment to undertake more terrorist activity in 2023. The Fatah statement expressed commitment to the 'path of comprehensive popular resistance', and to 'striving together with the Palestinian struggle forces to escalate, organise, develop, and expand [the resistance] against all the occupation's aggressive plots, with all types of resistance remaining open to our people'.

Significantly, the 58th anniversary is counted from Fatah's first terror attack against Israel in 1965—two years prior to the Six Day War, highlighting the fact that the resistance to the Jewish state is unrelated to the territory Israel gained in the Six Day War. Palestinian rhetoric and actions point to a stubborn refusal to accept Jewish presence anywhere in the land between "the River and the Sea".

A key factor in the initial hopeful phase of negotiations was recognition of the need to build a relationship of trust.

When in 1996 Israel followed through with Oslo commitments to pull out of Jenin and Gaza in 2005, these territories became bases for terrorist activities. Rather than engaging in direct negotiations, the Palestinian leadership has sought to internationalise the conflict, the latest example being the UN's push to have Israel brought before the International Court of Justice.

Not only is there no indication that the Palestinians are interested in pursuing peace with Israel, the Palestinian Authority has made little progress in setting up the structure and machinery necessary for achieving statehood.

No legislative or presidential elections have been held in the Palestinian territories since 2005. Abbas's presidential term was supposed to end in 2009. Twelve years later in 2021, an election was planned, but Hamas was poised to sweep the parliamentary election. This was widely seen as the real reason Abbas postponed the poll, while he cited Israel's refusal to allow voting in East Jerusalem.

Meanwhile the conflict between Hamas and Fatah has continued, having begun prior to Hamas seizing Gaza in 2007.

Fatah faces a severe leadership crisis, charges of corruption and lack of public support. These factors add to general insecurity and the alarming rise in terrorist activity. Palestinian lawyers and other unions staged a series of protests in 2022. They challenged decision-

making processes, deep-rooted nepotism and corruption among senior officials.

In addition to the general corruption and incompetence of the PA, Palestinians lack basic human rights.

According to Human Rights Watch, the Palestinian leadership goes to extreme lengths in its persecution of journalists and activists. HRW documents more than 80 cases of torture and arbitrary arrests, some for nothing more than writing a critical article or Facebook post, others for belonging to the wrong student group or political movement.

Both the Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority (PA) in the West Bank and the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) in Gaza have in recent years carried out scores of arbitrary arrests for peaceful criticism of the authorities, particularly on social media, among independent journalists, on university campuses, and at demonstrations.

Further, a litmus test in the attitude of the government is what is taught to children. Sadly, Palestinian children are indoctrinated to hatred with a school curriculum that encourages violence, jihad, martyrdom, antisemitism, hate, and intolerance. This is further entrenched in Summer camps where children are encouraged to become martyrs and recruited to become child soldiers, a war crime. Palestinians are incentivised to terrorist activity with the families of 'martyrs' receiving financial rewards.

Israel for its part has shifted focus elsewhere in the Middle East, normalising relations with other Arab countries, beginning with Bahrain, the UAE, Morocco and Sudan.

Normalisation has opened new opportunities for defence and security cooperation, cultural and economic activity. Just as building trust was considered important in the Oslo process, developing relationships around common interests has been a significant factor in the success of the Abraham Accords. Seeing the others as cousins rather than foes, with a common descent from Abraham has been key in setting the stage for mutual cooperation. In addition, these Arab countries have grown weary of waiting for the Palestinians to progress towards peace and recognise that the Iranian threat is of greater mutual concern.

While a new paradigm for peace has begun in the Middle East, the Palestinian leadership has remained intransigent, still hoping to purge the region of all Jewish presence. Given that Israel is unwilling to oblige by disappearing from the pages of history, the conflict looks set to continue indefinitely.

Dr Sheree Trotter is an historian, founder of the Indigenous Coalition for Israel and co-director of the Israel Institute NZ. www.indigenouscoalition.org



Celebrating Israel’s Successes

David Zwartz

Former Honorary Consul of Israel in New Zealand

It is an extraordinary and unique achievement by the young State of Israel—now only 75 years old—that in spite of major military, economic, and political threats to its existence from the very first day of being an independent nation, it has contributed so significantly to world culture.

True, Israeli cultural development started earlier than 1948. In particular, rapid development occurred in the 1920s with the growth of the *Yishuv*, the organised Jewish community in Eretz Israel, during the time of the British Palestine Mandate.

Also true, the Jews who arrived to found and build the modern State of Israel in Eretz Israel had behind them a history of outstanding cultural richness and variety in the many countries where they were forced to live during the previous 1900-odd years of exile in the Diaspora.

The tensions and excitement of creating a nation made up of scores of different ethnicities and nationalities brought a wave of creativity in every cultural field. Dance, song, literature (in the new and still-developing language, *Ivrit*—Israeli spoken Hebrew), film and art and crafts have flourished.

Dance in Jewish and Israeli culture dates back to Biblical times, with many *Torah* and *Talmudic* references. Western-style classical dance in Israel grew out of prominent Jewish involvement in Russian ballet, through the *Batsheva* dance company (which has visited New Zealand), to a wide range of modern dance creativity.

The Israeli *horah*, based on a dance from Eastern Europe, and popular in kibbutzim, became a symbol of the early days of agricultural and socialist reconstruction. It was often danced to folk tunes such as *Hava nagila*, a modern folk song written around 1920 and widely popularised by Harry Belafonte. Israeli folk dance today reflects the cultures of Israel’s many different immigrant societies, culminating in the most recent Ethiopian *Beta Israel aliyah*. It is practised and enjoyed by dance groups around the world.

Large-scale post-1948 *Mizrahi* (Middle Eastern) Jewish immigration has also influenced pop songs, changing

their earlier *Ashkenazi* flavour to world-level Middle Eastern fusion style, featuring popular songwriters and singers such as Yemenite-born Ofra Haza and Tel Aviv-born Achinoam Nini (Noa). Ofra is in *Rolling Stone’s* top 200 singers of all time. Male pop stars include Arik Einstein, Dudu Fisher, David Broza, David D’Or (who performed at WOMAD in 2008) and Aidan Raichel.

Israeli success at the international level is shown by its four Eurovision contest victories – Izhar Cohen and Alphabeta with *A-Ba-Ni-Bi* in Paris (1978); Milk and Honey with *Hallelujah* in Jerusalem (1979); Dana International (the first transgender person to win Eurovision) with *Diva* in Birmingham (1998); and Netta Barzilai with *Toy* in Lisbon (2018).

In mainstream classical music, the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra is pre-eminent. It was founded as the Palestine Symphony Orchestra in 1936 and gained its international fame under the 50-year leadership of conductor Zubin Mehta. World-class Israeli violin soloists include Itzhak Perlman, Pinchas Zukerman, Shlomo Mintz (who gave master classes here in 2018), Gil Shaham and Miriam Fried.

With conflict continuously present in Israeli life—whether historically recent Holocaust memories or current internal and external confrontations—contemporary authors do not lack subject matter for both sensitive and strong poetry and prose. Shmuel Yosef Agnon (1888-1970) won the Nobel Literature prize in 1966 for novels reflecting the growth and transformation of the Jewish State during his lifetime. More recent outstanding writers include A B Yehoshua, David Grossman, Amos Oz (published in 45 languages), Etgar Keret (also a film maker), and historian Yuval Noah Harari, whose ‘world history’ books *Sapiens* and *Homo*



Yuli Edelstein, PM Benjamin Netanyahu, Itzhak Perlman, Stan Polovets, Natan Sharansky and Helen Mirren at the Genesis (Jewish Nobel) prize award ceremony. Jerusalem, Israel, 23 June 2016. | Photo: Shutterstock

deus have reached many readers in many languages. Israeli books and scripts have inspired successful TV series such as *Fauda*, *Tehran*, *Absentia*, *Shtisel* and *Traitor*. The widespread artistic and cultural creativity described briefly here reflects a society which, compared to *Aotearoa* New Zealand, is tumultuous but at the same time has the ‘feel’ of a large family. Israel’s sense of the bonds of *mishpoga* is like our sense of *whānau* (family). An interesting consequence of this is the strikingly large number of museums in Israel—over 230, more per capita than anywhere else in the world.

This links to Israelis’ strong sense of history. When your forbears have lived in your country for thousands of years, a school pupil can (and does) pick up an ancient coin on a weekend hike, and archeological discoveries are almost everywhere, the pride of displaying your heritage is understandable. History, art, science and special subject museums range from the world-class Israel Museum in Jerusalem, displaying Dead Sea scrolls, and the ANU Museum of the Jewish People in Tel Aviv-Yafo, showing 4,000 years of Jewish and Israeli creativity, to the local kibbutz museum. The range of topics and changing exhibitions, and the high quality of presentation, is dazzling.

David Zwartz ONZM was President of the New Zealand Jewish Council for seven years and Honorary Consul of Israel in New Zealand 2003-2008.

Music to Our Ears

Tal Hartuv

Israeli Tour Guide | Author | Cartoonist

Every country has their iconic bands, artists and musicians, and Israel is no exception. One of the first indigenous cultural trailblazers to establish the reputation of an indigenous musical and theatrical heritage, is the Banai family. More of a clan, the Banai siblings and cousins have all made their mark on Israeli culture, on the likes of music, art, literature and comedy.

Like many Jews who came from far-off lands, the beginnings of this popular and influential family is also extraordinary. At the end of the nineteenth century, the first Banais arrived from Persia (now Iran). The original doting parents came with three sons, aptly and succinctly named, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Upon arriving in the Land of Israel after a perilous journey, they were unable to find a place to live in the Old City of Jerusalem. Under the yoke of the negligent Turkish authorities, Jerusalem was filthy, overcrowded and disease was rampant. Disappointed but pragmatic, they settled down in the (now famous) Mahaneh Yehuda market, and began selling vegetables.

They were successful beyond their imagination. It wasn’t long before they began investing in projects in Jerusalem.

First, they established a school and then, a synagogue, for the impoverished Persian Jewish community.

Just a few generations later, the Banai family continue to leave a deep footprint on Israeli culture. In the middle of the Corona pandemic, they had an idea to set up a virtual musical exhibition in the Tower of David Museum to display their family’s amazing journey from Persia to the Promised Land. This was new ground. Not just because of the restrictions of lockdown but also because of history. With much attention given to the European Jewish community decimated in the Holocaust, the Banai family wanted to remind us all, that the history of the Jewish community of Shiraz, also was rich in culture and history. Persia was the place where Jewish poets, singers and actors were also in plenty.

For the exhibition, the Banai siblings banded together and used musical instruments from the Levant barely heard in Israel. In doing so they created a musical drama of pre-state Israel, the waves of aliyah up until the Jewish community in Jerusalem who lived and fought to see independence in 1948.

The family have made their mark as a native and cultural superpower. They are admired and cherished, because of

their extraordinary talent, and because it was from impoverished beginnings, that these Persian Jews flourished against all odds.

The music of the Banai’s sabra-born generation struck a chord with sabras and with those who have been here for most of their life. This is because the Banai’s did not have a Russian, Polish, Romanian or Yemenite accent. Theirs was seen as the ‘authentic’ accent, and they spoke with the ‘right’ diction. The love of a Hebrew, barren of a European or Arab accent, led one member of the Banai family, Yossi (pictured above), to record an album of Psalms. It became an instant hit.

He further went on to record every chapter in the Hebrew Bible. For months he sat in the studio, reading in ‘Israeli’ Hebrew, with perfect diction. For some, his is a local, indigenous Hebrew, a revived People-of-Israel Hebrew and one which hasn’t been heard on the streets of Jerusalem for two thousand years. Whether that be true or not, whoever we are or wherever we have come from, listening to him read the words of the prophets, is music to our ears.



First Home in the Homeland

Marie-Louise Weissenböck Christians for Israel Austria

The Jewish people are returning home from the four corners of the earth. Once in Israel, it is important to integrate into society. For many, this is not an easy process, as it includes learning to speak Hebrew, finding employment and housing, and a school for the children. The First Home in the Homeland programme aids in this integration process.

Since 1989, thousands of families have been welcomed to Israel by the First Home in the Homeland programme, which was established by The Jewish Agency for Israel. The programme is run in kibbutzim, where families live for their first six to twelve months in Israel and study the Hebrew language. They learn more about Jewish history and traditions and receive assistance with their integration into Israeli society. More than forty kibbutzim participate in this programme.

Getting Settled

Olim (immigrants) are carefully matched with one of the participating kibbutzim in the Negev and Galilee, where a coordinator is assigned to introduce the family to the new community and helps them to get settled. For the first six months, the parents study Hebrew in ulpan (classes for adults) either three or five mornings weekly, while their children attend schools on the kibbutz or nearby. The smaller ones attend the kindergarten in the kibbutz.

Thousands Participated

After completing their integration process, they are given the option of extending their stay for another half-year; most olim use that extended time to find employment in

the area, continue in advanced ulpan, or join vocational courses. Each kibbutz also provides after-school care for school-age children six days a week and on holidays. Additionally, local recreation centres offer after-school sports, music, ballet, and the like. Following their initial experience on the kibbutz, participants are given the option of remaining on the kibbutz as residents, or applying for kibbutz membership. They may also opt to pursue life and employment in other areas of Israel. Thousands of men, women and children have participated in this programme and have now made Israel their home.

Olim from Ukraine

The war in Ukraine has turned lives upside down and destroyed homes. With the help of Christians for Israel and other initiatives, thousands of Ukrainian Jews made Aliyah and many of them have joined The Jewish Agency's First Home in the Homeland programme in Israel. As the war is continuing, more families are following. Also, many Jewish families from Russia have been coming to Israel in the past few months. In many kibbutzim, Russian and Ukrainian olim live together, eat together and their children play together. They are united through the fact that they are Jews and are saddened by the war that is raging between their two countries.

Celebrating Hanukkah Together in Israel

In December 2022, the end of Hanukkah coincided with Christmas. Hanukkah commemorates a holy miracle that happened more than two thousand years ago. Annually, it reminds the Jewish people that light always wins out over darkness. In the different kibbutzim participating in the First Home in the Homeland programme, this feast was celebrated together with the new olim.



The miracle of Hanukkah in a kibbutz in the Jordan Valley. All olim celebrated together.



In kibbutz Revivim, Hanukkah candles were lit under the supervision of kibbutz 'veterans', those who have lived there for almost all their lives. "I can speak Russian", were the words an old lady began her speech with. "My father was Russian. We came here over sixty years ago, and I still live in kibbutz Revivim, which will celebrate its 80th anniversary this year. Imagine, I was born when it was established."

Emilia from Mukachevo (Ukraine) and her friend Alina from Saint Petersburg (Russia) lit candles together, and then everybody present started singing a prayer and helping themselves to Hanukkah treats, which the olim from Mashabei Sade and Revivim had prepared.



(Left): In the Museum of Yarmukian Culture located in kibbutz Shaar Hagolan. Children received instructions on how to light candles for Hanukkah. (Right): Hanukkah celebration in kibbutz Ein HaShofet, Megiddo.



The festive Hanukkah table brought together olim from Russia and Ukraine in kibbutz Ein HaShofet and kibbutzim in the Eshkol area. "The light of human hearts can do more than the light of a candle", exclaimed Valeria Zakharova, one of the coordinators of the programme, when experiencing this familiar celebration.

| Photos: The Jewish Agency for Israel

With your support, we can help many families to integrate successfully, so that they in turn can be a blessing to others. Costs to assist one person for one month in the First Home in the Homeland programme: €450 or US \$465. Please donate on page 16.

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



Just Some Old Documents



Koen Carlier

Aliyah Fieldworker | Christians for Israel Ukraine

Recently, we brought four ladies and two small children from Ukraine to Moldova, or at least that was the intention. Among them was Yana, a single mother, with her two young children and younger sister Alina, who has a mental disorder.

Normally, you can only cross the border when having an international passport. However, during wartime, you are also allowed to leave the country with a Ukrainian passport. At the border, however, it turned out that Alina's Ukrainian passport had expired. Therefore, she was not allowed to leave the country. After the gruff-looking Ukrainian border guard bluntly told Alina she had to go back, she started crying. Fortunately, one of our volunteers with a van was nearby, and he took Alina back to our shelter. My wife Ira immediately went with Alina to apply for a new passport.

Orphanage

Meanwhile, we were in Moldova and the atmosphere in the van was initially subdued, which is understandable.



Yana (left) with her two children. Behind her (wearing the black hat) stands Alina.

After all, Yana is like a mother to her younger sister and cares for her. We assured Yana that Alina was in good hands with us. And then Yana told her own story. At the age of five, she ended up in an orphanage because her father regularly beat Yana and her mother. Growing up in an orphanage is quite hard, but Yana also had to endure all kinds of antisemitic comments from other children, which she did not understand at the time. At the age of 17, she left the orphanage only to get married not much later. Unfortunately, her husband also proved aggressive and Yana and the (now born) children were regularly beaten. History seemed to repeat itself. In addition, Yana took care of Alina.

A New Life

After years without contact, Yana suddenly received a message from her father asking her to come and visit him. He was on his deathbed and gave her some old documents, saying: "With this, you can start a new life." Yana did not understand what he meant but asked no questions and left. Once home, she looked at the documents, and a birth certificate from 1911 showed not only her grandmother's name (Chava), but also her Jewish identity. Yana now understood why she was bullied so much in the orphanage.

Exit Visa

She contacted a Jewish organisation in Dnepr and was invited to come and



Alina in the snow with Natalia Kriszhanoviski, team member of Christians for Israel Ukraine.



Several times a week, Koen and his team members bring Jews to Moldova's capital Kishenov, from where they leave for Israel.

visit. The people examined the documents her father had given her, and it turned out that these papers allowed her to move to Israel to start a 'new life'. It seemed almost too good to be true. Yana wanted nothing more than to take her children and sister Alina with her as well. Miraculously, her ex-husband gave permission for the children to go. As soon as Alina receives her new passport, we will bring her to Kishenov as well. Together they can apply for the exit visa to indeed build a new life in Israel.

Shepherd

Yana trusts the Almighty that very soon, they will be able to leave the Diaspora and go to Israel for good. Yana's story touched us and shows that—despite everything—we may also see the mighty hand of the Lord in this. Like a shepherd, He calls the children of His people one by one to His land! | Photos: Christians for Israel

We continue our practical help in Ukraine to assist them with their Aliyah. Will you help? It costs €135 or US \$150 to assist one Ukrainian Jew to make Aliyah. Please complete the coupon below. Any amount is welcome!

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ALIYAH - BRING THE JEWS HOME

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

SOCIAL WELFARE PROJECTS

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

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



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