

ISRAEL

& Christians Today

INTERNATIONAL

June–July 2026

Tamuz–Av 5786

CHRISTIANS FOR
ISRAEL
INTERNATIONAL

Understanding Israel and world events from a Biblical perspective

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Israelis celebrate Jerusalem Day near City Hall, waving national flags in an atmosphere of festivity and unity. Jerusalem, Israel. | Photo: Shutterstock

Jerusalem: A Cup of Reeling

The city of Jerusalem plays a central role in God's plan of redemption of the whole creation. In essence, God promised to bring the twelve tribes of Israel home to the land, and to restore Jerusalem in the end times. The word of the Lord will go forth from Jerusalem (Zion). The nations that oppose His purposes will be judged. Those that align themselves with God's plans will prosper. In short, Jerusalem will become a 'cup of reeling' and an 'immovable rock' for the nations.

This past month two events took place that epitomise the prophetic times in which we are living. In Jerusalem, the Jewish people celebrated Jerusalem Day—a day of rejoicing at God's miraculous reunification of Jerusalem in 1967, reveling in God's glory. At around the same time, Europe was celebrating 'Europe Day'—a day of rejoicing in what man has done, reveling in its own glory.

The hatred of the nations (this hatred is notably strongest in Europe) towards the restoration of Jerusalem

is proof that the coming of *Messiah* is close at hand.

In *Zechariah 8* God says "I am very jealous for Zion; I am burning with jealousy for her. I will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the Faithful City, and the mountain of the Lord Almighty will be called the Holy Mountain."

This restoration of Jerusalem will provoke the nations to jealousy and anger. In *Zechariah 12* God says of the last days: "I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that sends all the surrounding peoples reeling. Judah will be besieged as well as Jerusalem. On that day, when all the nations of the earth are gathered against her, I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations. All who try to move it will injure themselves."

Since 1967 Jerusalem has become a 'cup of reeling'. In 1967 Jerusalem was restored to the Jewish people. Ever since, the nations have been gathering against it, trying to divide the city. They have become increasingly angry

and confused. In trying to 'move' Jerusalem—ie. take it away from the Jewish people—they are being increasingly injured by their efforts.

Antisemitism has spiked in Europe since Islamist extremists led by Hamas attacked Jerusalem on 7 October 2023 ('Operation Al-Aqsa Flood'). It is the means by which the nations are being injured. Quite simply, irrational hatred of the Jews is destroying Europe.

Commentator Fiamma Nirenstein wrote: "Antisemitism has once again become omnipresent—a stain spreading across the continent just as it did in the Europe of the 1930s, a Europe dazzling in beauty, culture and tradition before the plague of Nazism and fascism consumed it. Today's Europe, confused by a mixture of distorted human-rights ideology and Third Worldist progressivism, applies an obvious double standard... antisemitism remains the structural weakness of European thought—its recurring condemnation."

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Patience Will Be Rewarded



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Colophon

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

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

Editorial Team**Andrew Tucker**

International Editor-in-Chief
atucker@c4israel.org

Cathy Trotter (nee Coldicutt)

Managing Editor
newspaper@c4israel.org

Marloes van Westing, Bryce Turner,
Ian Worby, Rita Quartel,
Marie-Louise Weissenböck

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C4I Offices**Christians for Israel—International**

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

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

Christians for Israel—Australia

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

Christians for Israel—New Zealand

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

Christians for Israel—Korea

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

Christians for Israel—USA

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

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Shavuot: The Case for Sovereignty

■ Andrew Tucker

International Editor | Christians for Israel

This edition is being published soon after the Jewish Festival of *Shavuot*—one of the biblically ordained three pilgrimage festivals when Jews were called to celebrate in Jerusalem. *Shavuot* marked the wheat harvest in the land of Israel (*Exodus 34:22*). It recalls the revelation of the Ten Commandments to Moses and the Israelites at Mount Sinai. On *Passover*, the people of Israel were freed from their enslavement to the Egyptians; on *Shavuot*, they were given the *Torah* and became a nation committed to serving God.

How Can Freedom and Law Be Compatible?

The answer has to do with the concepts of responsibility and sovereignty. As Michael Oren recently explained, “freedom without law, without limits, and without people taking responsibility for their actions, is not freedom but anarchy. And law without decision-making, without the freedom to make choices and take responsibility for them, is totalitarianism. Ideally, freedom and the law are in constant balance, mutually reinforcing, and preserving. Maintaining that equilibrium, though, necessitates a framework. To equitably apply the law and exercise freedom, a people needs a state. That is the message of much of the *Torah* after *Exodus 20-23*. Take, for example, *Deuteronomy 16*, in which the Children of Israel are told: “*You must appoint judges and sheriffs for yourselves in all your cities that God, your God, is giving you, for each of your tribes. They must judge the people by rendering fair judgments... Justice, justice must you pursue, in order that you live and take possession of the land that God, your God, is giving you.*” ...

Freedom and responsibility are not only the products of sovereignty but also its prerequisites. For the Children of Israel,



Kibbutz members take part in traditional *Shavuot* Festival celebrations. | Photo: Flash90

gaining freedom from Egypt and accepting the Law were insufficient. To fully relish the first and effectively enforce the latter, they needed to inherit the land. They needed to cease wandering, sink indigenous roots, and begin to take responsibility. In short, they had to be Zionists.

Zionism is hated by many secular humanists in the West. Their obsession with freedom as a goal in itself causes them to be blind to the truth that, because of human frailty, we humans need God's laws in order to experience the blessing of freedom. Those who hate Zionism hate the idea that God gave His laws to the Jews. They hate God himself.

This is connected to the vexed question of sovereignty over Judea and Samaria, often called ‘the West Bank’. Since the fall of the Ottoman empire in WWI, there has been a vacuum of sovereignty. Since 1967, Israel has exercised sovereignty over the city of Jerusalem (including the Old City and its environs), but (under international

pressure) has refrained from exercising sovereignty over Judea and Samaria.

The result of a lack of sovereignty is the chaos and vicious circle of violence we witness in Judea and Samaria today.

The problem is that the world—and even many Jews—are obsessed with preventing the Jewish people from exercising sovereignty over Judea and Samaria (the so-called ‘occupied territories’). At the same time, we see Israel increasingly asserting a kind of sovereignty over Judea and Samaria.

But at the end of the day, the people in the land—Jews and non-Jews—will only experience true blessing when the Jewish people exercise true sovereignty over the land.

The festival of *Shavuot* reminds us all—both Israel and the nations—that Jerusalem will no longer be a “stone of contention” and a “cup of trembling” (*Zechariah 8 and 12*), but “a house of prayer for all nations” (*Isaiah 56*), and the source of blessing for the world.

Prayer Points

Israel

- Pray for Israel's protection against threats from Iran. As long as the hostile regime remains in power, Iran poses a major threat to Israel. There is still enriched uranium present in Iran which could be used for a nuclear bomb. Pray that this material will be neutralised.
- Pray that Hezbollah's role in Lebanon will come to an end. Pray that Israel will be successful in defending itself against attacks by Hezbollah and that a proper buffer zone between Israel and Lebanon will be established.
- “*I will rejoice in doing them good and will assuredly plant them in this land with all My heart and soul.*” (*Jeremiah 32:41*) Thank God that, even long before we were here, He promised that He would plant His people Israel in His land. Thank God that everything is in His hands.

Israel and the Nations

- Violent, hate-filled protests against Israel are spreading in many countries, with disturbing slogans and the glorification of violence. Pray for Israel's protection against this rising spirit of hatred and lies.
- “*The Lord will be king over the whole earth. On that day, there will be one Lord, and His name will be the only name*” (*Zechariah 14:9*). Pray that God's Name will be the focus of Israel, the Church, and the world.

Christians for Israel

- Give thanks to all Christians worldwide who support Israel. Pray that the group of Christians who stand with Israel will continue to grow and that the connection between Jews and Christians will become stronger.
- Pray for a blessing on the work of those who are involved in the ministry of Christians for Israel worldwide.

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

Iran's IRGC Takes Over Real Power From the Supreme Leader

■ Yoni Ben Menachem
JNS

Mojtaba Khamenei's elevation has sharply limited his authority, rendering his role largely symbolic.

Israel's intelligence agencies have assembled a comprehensive assessment of who truly controls Iran, senior security officials say. Evidently, Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei remains hidden at an undisclosed location, known only to a select few, due to fears he could be targeted by Israel.

Though seriously wounded, his mental faculties are intact, and he receives regular updates.

The killing of his father, Ali Khamenei, the previous supreme leader, occurred on 28 February, the first day of the current war, along with the deaths of other senior regime figures. This event led to a profound transformation in Iran's power structure.

Iran issues written statements in the name of Mojtaba, without images or recordings.

Defence Minister Israel Katz stated that Israel may soon target Mojtaba. On 23 April, after a security briefing, Katz said, "We await a US green light to eliminate the Khamenei dynasty and its successors."



Iranian Revolutionary Guard troops march through the streets during a public rally. | Photo: Shutterstock

dominant influence, in a system increasingly characterised by the absence of a clear, decisive authority.

Mojtaba Khamenei, the new supreme leader, remains at the top of the system. He was elevated by the Assembly of Experts, largely under pressure from IRGC commanders, led by Brigadier General Ahmad Vahidi. Senior security officials say he owes his appointment to the Revolutionary Guards and has effectively become a 'rubber stamp',

shifting from a religious-theocratic model to rule by the security establishment, led by the IRGC, possibly meaning a harsher foreign policy and tighter domestic control.

A senior official said, "At this rate, Iran could become like North Korea."

Despite US and Israeli pressure, Iran's regime shows no signs of collapse.

Instead, an internal consensus has formed: avoid full-scale war, keep

Iran's leadership has undergone a dramatic transformation since Ali Khamenei's death, with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps now emerging as the dominant force behind political and military decision-making, sidelining the supreme leader and steering the regime toward a harsher military-security model of rule.

Now, after two months of war against the United States and Israel, Iran is no longer governed by a single leader wielding undisputed authority. This marks a break from the political tradition that has prevailed since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, a shift that could lead Tehran to adopt more hardline positions as it weighs the possibility of reaching an agreement with Washington.

Since the establishment of the Islamic Republic, the political system revolved around the figure of the supreme leader, who held ultimate authority over all major decisions.

That reality has now fundamentally changed. Iran has entered a phase in which the centre of power has shifted to the Supreme National Security Council, where commanders of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps hold

providing legitimacy for their decisions. His responsibilities involve approving, not formulating, military decisions.

Real power lies with a hardline group operating through the Supreme National Security Council and the IRGC, which now shapes Iran's military and political direction.

This shift in power centres has slowed and complicated Iran's decision-making process. Leadership is fragmented, and responses to US-Iran negotiations can take days.

IRGC Commander Vahidi plays a central role in strategic decision-making, including ceasefire arrangements and negotiations. Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf is sidelined, while Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi acts mainly as a limited envoy.

Israeli intelligence assesses Iran is

leverage—especially the Strait of Hormuz—and seek to exit the crisis stronger.

In conclusion, Iran's political system is marked by a shift; while formal authority rests with the supreme leader, real power now resides with the security establishment. The IRGC is not just an executive arm but the central force directing the country, with control concentrated among the military-security elite.

Originally published by the Jerusalem Center for Security and Foreign Affairs. Republished with permission.

Yoni Ben Menachem, a veteran Arab affairs and diplomatic commentator for Israel Radio and Television, is a senior Middle East analyst for the Jerusalem Center. He served as director general and chief editor of the Israel Broadcasting Authority.

Short News

Israel Overtakes the Diaspora



A new report by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research indicates that for the first time in modern history, Israel could become the home of the majority of Jews worldwide within the next decade. The global Jewish population currently stands at around 15.8 million. Of these, roughly 49% already live in Israel. While Jewish communities in the Diaspora are shrinking or stagnating, Israel's population continues to grow steadily. The main driver is the country's high birth rate. | Photo: Flashgo

Jerusalem Has 1.063 Million Residents

Jerusalem, the capital of Israel, is the largest city in the country, and on Jerusalem Day, its number of residents is estimated at 1.063 million. This is according to the data released by Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics. At the end of 2025, 56.6% of Jerusalem's residents were Jews and others, 38.4% Arabs, and 4.9% foreigners.

Jerusalem Honours Residents

The Jerusalem Municipality honoured 12 residents with the 2026 Yakir Yerushalayim ("Worthy Citizen of Jerusalem") award — the city's highest honour — at a ceremony ahead of Jerusalem Day celebrations. Established after the reunification of Jerusalem in 1967, the award recognises residents aged 65 and over for exceptional long-term contributions to the city. Mayor Moshe Lion said the recipients reflected "the human, moral and professional mosaic of Jerusalem."

AI Responses Shift Across Borders

An Israeli study comparing identical prompts submitted from Israel, the United States, Turkey, and Spain found notable differences in ChatGPT's responses. The prompts addressed topics including Israel's actions in Gaza, international law, self-defense, occupation, and alleged war crimes. Although the core information was similar, the tone, framing, and emphasis varied by language and geographic location.

UAE, Saudi Covert Strikes on Iran

■ JNS Staff

The United Arab Emirates reportedly conducted direct military strikes against Iran in April, targeting a refinery on Lavan Island in the Persian Gulf. The attack sparked a major fire and crippled the facility's operations, according to *The Wall Street Journal*.

Iran admitted at the time that the refinery had been hit and launched missile and drone strikes against the UAE and Kuwait in retaliation, *the Journal* said.

Although the attack took place around the time of the ceasefire, the United States didn't mind as it welcomed active participation by the UAE, one source told *the Journal*.

Speculation about the UAE's direct involvement in the conflict has intensified since mid-March, when footage emerged of an unidentified fighter jet that didn't belong to the United States or Israel operating over Iran.

The Emiratis have a capable air force, including French Mirage fighters, advanced F-16 jets and Chinese Wing Loong drones, US Air Force Lieutenant General Dave Deptula who planned the



US President Donald Trump is greeted by UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan in Abu Dhabi, 15 May 2025. | Photo: Shutterstock.

air campaign for Desert Storm, told *the Journal*.

"They are very strong in terms of precision strike, air defence, airborne surveillance, refueling and logistics," said Deptula. "If you have that capable of an air force, why would you sit back

and absorb attacks from Iran without responding?"

Israel recently added to the UAE's capabilities, sending an Iron Dome system with attendant troops to help protect the country, marking the first time Israel had sent an air defence

battery to another country.

Its strong military has made the UAE the most combative of the Gulf States. It lobbied forcefully for a UN Security Council Resolution to open the Strait of Hormuz. On 5 May, the State Department announced it was proposing such a resolution.

Saudi Arabia also launched covert retaliatory attacks against Iran, *Reuters* reported recently, citing two Western officials briefed on the matter and two Iranian officials.

The attacks by the Royal Saudi Air Force are reportedly the first time that Riyadh has targeted the Islamic regime militarily on its soil and are estimated by the Western officials to have taken place in late March (the recent US-Israeli joint operation was active from 28 February to 8 April). One official said that they were "tit-for-tat strikes in retaliation for when Saudi (Arabia) was hit."

Saudi Arabia warned Iran in advance of retaliatory strikes and followed with intensive diplomacy and threats of further action, prompting both sides to reach an informal understanding to deescalate, according to the Iranian and Western officials.

Trump: Iranian Response "Totally Unacceptable"

■ JNS Staff

Tehran "has been playing games with the United States, and the rest of the world, for 47 years (delay, delay, delay)," he said.

(11 May 2026). The Iranian regime's response to the latest US proposal to end hostilities was "totally unacceptable," US President Donald Trump said.

■ Trump accuses Tehran of 'playing games' after rejecting US proposal.

"I have just read the response from Iran's so-called 'representatives.' I don't like it—totally unacceptable!" Trump wrote in a post on his *Truth Social* platform.

Iran's state-run *IRNA* news agency reported earlier that Tehran's response to Washington's plan had been submitted to Pakistani mediators.

According to the regime outlet, Iran's response sought to end "the war in the region." Tehran's proposal conditions any future understandings with Washington on reaching a ceasefire with Hezbollah in

Lebanon and lifting restrictions on Iranian oil exports, according to separate reports in Arab media.

In another post, Trump had accused the regime of "playing games with the United States," warning the mullahs they would be "laughing no longer."

"For 47 years the Iranians have been 'tapping' us along, keeping us waiting,

killing our people with their roadside bombs, destroying protests, and recently wiping out 42,000 innocent, unarmed protesters, and laughing at our now great again country," Trump wrote on his *Truth Social*.

The Islamic Republic "has been playing games with the United States, and the rest of the world, for 47 years (delay, delay, delay!)," he charged.

According to Trump, the regime "finally hit pay dirt" when Barack Obama became president in 2009 and pushed

through the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which lifted sanctions in return for limitations on Tehran's nuclear programme.

"He was not only good to them, he was great, actually going to their side, jettisoning Israel, and all other allies, and giving Iran a major and very powerful new lease on life. Hundreds of billions of dollars, and 1.7 billion dollars in green cash, flown into Tehran, was handed to them on a silver platter," he said. Trump withdrew from the deal in May 2018.

The mullahs "had never seen money like this, and never will again," the president vowed.

Trump warned that 'Operation Project Freedom' in the Strait of Hormuz could be resumed and expanded if Tehran doesn't agree to a deal to end the war.

"We'll go a different route if everything doesn't get signed up, buttoned up," Trump told reporters at the White House. "We may go back to 'Project Freedom' if things don't happen, but it'll

be 'Project Freedom Plus,' meaning 'Project Freedom' plus other things."

Trump launched 'Operation Project Freedom' on 4 May to safeguard merchant vessels in the Strait of Hormuz following a series of Iranian attacks in the vital waterway. Tehran has largely blocked the strait since the start of the war, triggering a spike in global fuel prices and putting pressure on financial markets.

The operation was suspended two days after its launch at the request of Pakistan, which is mediating talks with Tehran.

Trump's most recent threat followed an exchange of fire between US and Iranian forces in the Strait of Hormuz, fueling uncertainty over the temporary ceasefire that Washington claims remains in place.

Trump told journalists that he would "see what happens" with the negotiations, adding: "Look, they have no military, they have not a lot left."

"We'll find out soon enough," the president said.

The Reunification of Jerusalem

■ Canaan Lidor

Israeli-born Journalist

As the Jewish holidays of 1967 came to an end, Boris Shapiro decided to celebrate them in a way that had been impossible for centuries: as a citizen of a Jewish state in the Old City of Jerusalem.

Shapiro, an Israeli from present-day Azerbaijan, was 17 at the time. He wanted to celebrate Simchat Torah on Jerusalem's Temple Mount, captured by Israel from Jordan just months earlier during the Six-Day War.

The trip was exciting and historic, Shapiro recalls, but he found the experience spiritually unsatisfying. "There was euphoria and curiosity, but it was mainly about buying knickknacks from Arab sellers. I felt little reverence around me. The synagogue service was uninspiring, even compared to what I remembered from our synagogue in Baku," he says.

Religious Revival

Shapiro's impressions of Jerusalem after reunification are shared by many Israelis of his generation. They reflect the change that Israeli society has undergone since then: a shift away from its secular-socialist founding principles toward greater religious engagement and recognition.

On Jerusalem Day, which began this year on the evening of 14 May, thousands of people marched through the Old City carrying Israeli flags during the so-called Flag Dance. Jerusalem Day is celebrated annually on the 28th day of the Hebrew month of *Iyyar*, the day on which Israel took the eastern part of the city and reunited it with West Jerusalem. Both the Flag Dance—which once began as a modest nightly walk by a handful of Jews—and other new traditions are part of a broader development in which Jerusalem gradually became the center of a religious revival in Israeli society, especially since the 1990s.

Before that, the Jewish autumn festivals—*Rosh Hashanah*, *Yom Kippur*, *Sukkot* and *Simchat Torah*—only resulted in a limited increase in the number of visitors to the Western Wall, a remnant of the Jewish temple. Today, the holidays attract hundreds of thousands of visitors, not only during those periods—with up to fourteen large prayer services—but also during *Passover*, *Hanukkah* and *Shavuot*. Israel's two chief rabbis also organise mass prayers at the Western Wall on special occasions, including a 2023 prayer gathering for Israelis held hostage by Hamas.

In addition, there is the pilgrimage to the Temple Mount itself—the holiest site in Judaism. Where the place was once strictly forbidden territory for Jewish prayers and religious gatherings, the situation has changed dramatically under the current government. In 2025, more



The Flag March on Jerusalem Day. | Photo: Flash90

than 80,000 Jews visited the Temple Mount: 30% more than the year before and more than twice as many as in 2021. Jews are now allowed to pray, sing, bow and even completely prostrate themselves—an act of humility called *hishtachavah* in Hebrew. Just a few years ago, even speaking Hebrew could be grounds for removal by the *Waqf*, the Islamic religious authority that effectively exercised control over the area until 2023.

Emotion and Great Joy

For religious Jews, the reunification of Jerusalem was obviously a very different experience. Rabbi Avigdor Nebenzahl, now 91 years old, visited the Wailing Wall six days after the liberation of the Old City, during *Shavuot*—another important Jewish holiday. "Masses of people came from all over the country. We crowded at the entrance. Many cried with emotion," Nebenzahl recalls. "The joy was enormous. I went in and prayed the *Musaf* prayer [an additional prayer for holidays and special occasions]. That prayer is clear in my mind to this day."

The joy, he added, "was twofold: first because we had liberated the Temple Mount, and then because we had been saved from our enemies." He was referring to the great fear of a destructive Arab invasion in the days before Israel's pre-emptive strike that began the Six-Day War.

An estimated 200,000 Jews visited Jerusalem's Old City during *Shavuot* in 1967. Yet it took decades for the traditional *Shavuot* march through the Old City—held a few weeks after Jerusalem Day—to become an annual tradition. Today, tens of thousands fill the Old City's alleys in a procession reminiscent of that first 1967 pilgrimage. Shapiro visited the Temple Mount in 1967, shortly before Israel handed over control to the *Waqf*, in an effort to accommodate the local Arab population

and the broader Muslim world. He remembers seeing the Foundation Stone, which, according to Jewish tradition, marks the spot where Abraham bound his son Isaac—a central story in both Judaism and Christianity about obedience and faith.

Shapiro, father of one son and grandfather of three, has become more religious over the years. On every visit to Israel, he travels to the Old City of Jerusalem. "I remember visiting the Temple Mount and then descending to see the Foundation Stone. I took it in, but maybe I was too young to really understand the meaning. Perhaps Israel as a society was also too young at the time to fully realise the miracle of our return to this place."

Reunification & Reconstruction

Jerusalem, especially the eastern part of the city, has many Arab residents and is often the scene of terrorist attacks. Much of the Arab world views it as the future capital of a Palestinian state, while many countries recognise it as Israel's capital. Yet Shapiro believes that Israel will be able to essence has succeeded in reuniting the city. He points to the relatively peaceful coexistence between Jews and Arabs, despite the ongoing tensions.

"Especially since it became possible again to walk on the Temple Mount, I would say that we have Jerusalem both symbolically and practically reunited," says Shapiro. "But it has taken time for many of us to get the full meaning of it."

Rabbi Nebenzahl says that it is a source of joy and gratitude to be able to visit and visit the Old City of Jerusalem. living. "But that is precisely why it hurts all the more that the Jewish temple is still has always not been rebuilt." At the same time, he adds, "rejoice those who mourn the destruction of the temple also remember that Jerusalem is being rebuilt all around us."

Short News

Recovery in the Gaza Envelope



Most residents of the Israeli border area with Gaza who were evacuated following the 7 October massacre and the subsequent war against Hamas have now returned to their homes, representing around 92% of the original population. In addition, approximately 3,000 new residents have moved to the area. Significant investment and the development of new infrastructure have played a central role in the region's recovery and renewal. | Photo: Flash90

Not Enough Rockets

According to *Palestinian Media Watch*, the Palestinian Authority's official daily newspaper criticised Iran for not launching more rockets at Israel during the war that began on 7 October 2023, arguing that Hamas had been left to fight alone. The paper claimed that had Iran not 'abandoned' Hamas, the outcome of the war would have been different.

Rare Roman-era Archaeological Find



An 8-year-old Israeli boy discovered a rare 1,700-year-old statuette fragment dating to the Roman period while hiking with his family in the Ramon Crater in the Negev Desert. The fragment, measuring about six by six centimeters, depicts part of a human figure draped in flowing folds of fabric resembling a cloak. Archaeologists date it to approximately 1,700 years ago. Although the fragment lacks identifying marks, however archaeologists believe it may depict the Roman god Jupiter or Zeus-Dushara, a Nabatean deity associated with Zeus. The Ramon Crater lay along the ancient Spice Route linking southern Arabia and the Far East with Mediterranean ports. | Photo: Flash90



The *Bnei Menashe* Return to Zion



The India-Israel journey in pictures. | Photos: Jewish Agency for Israel

On Thursday, 23 April, a flight from India arrived at Ben Gurion Airport carrying members of the *Bnei Menashe* tribe on their long-awaited journey home to Israel. After years of historical and religious research, Israel's Chief Rabbi officially recognised the *Bnei Menashe* as Jewish in 2005, although some members of the community had already emigrated to Israel before then. Today, approximately 6,000 *Bnei Menashe* still remain in India, and the current plan is to bring them to Israel over the next five years—around 1,200 people each year.

Frank van Oordt of C4I Netherlands travelled alongside 240 members of the *Bnei Menashe* community from India to Israel. Reflecting on the journey, he shared how deeply moving their conversations were. "Both young and old spoke about one great desire: to celebrate the *Sabbath* freely, observe the biblical feasts, and live in the land of their ancestors. At the same time, there is a strong determination to contribute to Israeli society—to learn Hebrew, work, and serve their new homeland."

The journey itself was emotional and demanding. Leaving behind homes, possessions, and familiar surroundings is not easy. Yet throughout the trip, Frank witnessed remarkable determination and hope among the travellers. "Before departure, we were able to take some of the young people shopping for a few essentials—new shoes, a neat polo shirt, a power bank. Small gestures, but for them they meant so much."

Background of the *Bnei Menashe*

The *Bnei Menashe*—meaning 'Sons of Manasseh'—are believed to be descendants of the biblical tribe of Manasseh, one of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel. For

generations, they lived in the remote northeastern region of India near the borders of Myanmar and Bangladesh. Despite centuries of separation from the Jewish world, many of their customs remained remarkably rooted in biblical tradition. They observed the *Sabbath*, kept *kosher* dietary practices, and celebrated biblical festivals.



After careful investigation into their history and traditions, Israeli religious authorities formally recognised them as Jewish in 2005. Since then, their longing for Zion—the land of their forefathers—has only grown stronger.

A Warm Welcome in Israel

Frank van Oordt comments about the moment of arrival: "Upon arriving in Israel, the group received a heartfelt welcome. Tears of joy, embraces, and singing the Israeli anthem *Hatikvah*. The name of this Aliyah operation is Wings of Dawn. The words of Psalm 139 came to life: "God has preserved them to this day and is bringing them back from the land of the dawn, bringing them home."

"If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea even there Your hand will guide me, Your right hand will hold me fast." (Psalm 139:9-10)

The group was welcomed at the airport by the Minister of Absorption, and the Chairman of the Jewish Agency, Doron Almog. The mayor of Nof HaGalil, near Nazareth, also extended a warm welcome to this group of *Bnei Menashe* from India. Future groups are also expected to settle in Kiryat Gat. | Photos: Omri Dagan/Jewish Agency for Israel

Please Help!

There are still six thousand *Bnei Menashe* waiting. Your support will enable them to make this journey too. Please help them make this long journey—covering thousands of kilometres and lasting several days—to finally be home! To support the *Bnei Menashe*, please complete the donation coupon on the back page.





Origin of the Jewish population in Israel

The Jewish population in Israel has roots across the globe. Through successive waves of migration, Jews from Europe, the Middle East, North Africa, Ethiopia, the Americas and other regions came together to build a shared national home.

Top 10 countries of origin (since 1948)

1.

Former Soviet Union
2.

Morocco
3.

Iraq
4.

Romania
5.

Poland
6.

Ethiopia
7.

USA
8.

France
9.

Argentina
10.

Yemen

Timeline migration waves

1948-1960

A massive influx from Iraq, Yemen, Morocco and Egypt

1960-1980

Influx from North Africa and the Middle East

1980-present

Ethiopian Jews and smaller groups from Western countries

1990s

Around one million immigrants from the former Soviet Union

Today

The vast majority is born in Israel

1880-1948

Migration from Eastern Europe and Russia

Europe ± 45%

Ashkenazi Jews
mainly Eastern and Central Europe

Former Soviet Union

large wave of immigration in the nineties

Americas ± 3-5%

Constant inflow including the US, Argentina and Brazil

Spain & Portugal ± 15%

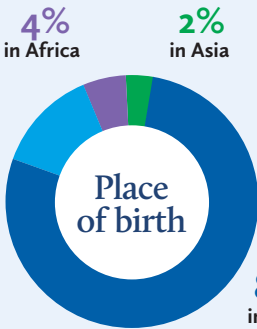
Sephardic Jews
Later spread across several countries

Ethiopia

Ethiopian Jews
Largely via rescue operations

Middle East & North Africa ± 15%

Mizrachi Jews
Including Iraq, Iran, Morocco and Yemen



Some facts: ❶ Jews in Israel come from more than a hundred countries. ❷ Almost half of all Jews worldwide live in Israel.

Figures are indicative; origin lines partially overlap.



Once in Israel people receive their residence permit.

Scapegoats in the Biblical Land

■ Leon Meijer

Executive Director | Christians for Israel
Netherlands

A week of travelling through Judea and Samaria—speaking to dozens of Israeli settlers—reveals that ‘500,000 violent settlers’ is a myth, and that the truth is both more nuanced and more troubling.

They are portrayed as fanatics, arsonists, half a million people who wake up every morning eager to terrorise their Arab neighbours. In the Western media, the word ‘settler’ has become virtually synonymous with ‘violent extremist.’ But is that picture accurate? After spending a full week travelling extensively through Judea and Samaria—the Biblical names for what the media calls the West Bank—and speaking to dozens of Israeli settlers across the region, my answer is unequivocal: no.

More than 500,000 Jews live in the West Bank alongside an estimated 3 million Palestinians. They live separately—in their own towns and villages—but share the same roads, petrol stations, and roadside markets. No other conflict zone on earth attracts comparable media attention, driven in no small part by the remarkable imbalance of United Nations resolutions directed at Israel compared to every other country combined.

The Oslo Accords and the Question of Legality

Those who declare the Jewish settlements flatly ‘illegal’ overlook a crucial fact. The Oslo Accords of 1993, signed by both Israel and the Palestinian Authority, explicitly agreed that no final decision would be made on the status of the Jewish communities in these areas. Nor did those accords prohibit the natural growth of existing settlements. Families grow, children reach adulthood and need homes—that is no different in Judea and Samaria from anywhere else in the world.

Beyond the headlines, Judea and Samaria tells a far more nuanced story.

The International Court of Justice recently ruled that Jews may not live on the West Bank at all. Yet that ruling sits in direct tension with the Oslo Accords, which are themselves part of international law. It is deeply troubling when an international court sets aside a binding treaty, signed by both parties, in favour of rules it finds more convenient. For a Christian reader familiar with Scripture, there is an added dimension: Judea and Samaria are, by their very names, the heartland of the land promised to the people of Israel—a reality that rarely receives a fair hearing in diplomatic forums.



One of many encounters in Judea and Samaria. | Photo: Dr Leon Meijer

Three Hundred Troublemakers, Half a Million Scapegoats

Let me be clear: the violence is real. That must be stated honestly. A group of roughly three hundred young men—drawn from settlements, but also from cities such as Tel Aviv—does indeed set fire to cars and occasionally to houses belonging to Arabs. They are troubled young people who, in another country, would likely find their outlet in the hooligan fringe of an infamous football club. In Israel, they channel their aggression into raiding Arab villages in Judea and Samaria. They are known as the Hilltop Youth.

What the media consistently fail to report is the response of the other 499,700 residents. In the course of my week travelling through the region and speaking to dozens of settlers—farmers, teachers, security coordinators, mothers, young professionals—I did not meet a single person who defended or excused this violence. Every one of them condemned it in the strongest possible

terms. Soraya, a resident of a settlement near Ramallah, is personally involved in programmes designed to give these young men constructive alternatives. “We are being identified with this group, while we distance ourselves from them as clearly as we possibly can,” she told me. “This does nothing but harm us.” The settlers also understand the context. Many of these young men are children of fathers who spend months at a time on reserve duty in Gaza or along other frontlines. While their mothers have a hard time taking care of their younger siblings, they are frightened, bored, and vulnerable—and

are sometimes deliberately exploited by far-right Israeli figures who encourage them to commit acts of violence. The Israeli Defence Forces and the Police are struggling to contain the problem. Dealing with this small group demands scarce military resources at a time when active combat is ongoing on multiple fronts, and these same youths are destroying the very security infrastructure the army has installed to protect the settlements from terrorist infiltration. There is a further legal obstacle that compounds the frustration: under the rule of law, security forces cannot arrest a person simply because they suspect he may cause trouble. An individual can only be apprehended once a crime has actually been committed—caught in the act, in *flagrante delicto*. You cannot detain someone for what he might do. That principle, fundamental to any just legal system, means that known agitators cannot be stopped before they strike, leaving the army and police perpetually one step behind.

Coffee with the Neighbour

The reality on the ground is far more complex than the simple narrative of oppressor and oppressed. A security coordinator at one settlement told me he regularly receives phone calls from Arab neighbours warning him when they know someone is planning to infiltrate the settlement. “I have coffee with them on a regular basis,” he said with a shrug. In several areas I visited, the day-to-day relationship between Jewish and Arab communities was, by any reasonable measure, functional and at times genuinely cordial.

But there are also places where tensions run high—and not always through the fault of the settlers. In recent years, increasing numbers of Arab shepherds have encamped around isolated Jewish

settlements, deliberately intimidating the Jewish residents. Their tactics are varied and calculated: they drive their flocks right up to the perimeter fence, photograph the layout of the settlement and its security infrastructure, and have been known to damage fences, cameras and other security systems. This is not casual trespass—it is systematic harassment, and residents described it to me as a daily source of stress and fear. These shepherds are sometimes supported by Western volunteers who arrive under the banner of solidarity but whose actions go well beyond peaceful protest. On more than one occasion, those volunteers were caught feeding dates laced with rat poison to the settlement’s cattle. Meanwhile, a striking double standard exists in construction policy: Jewish villages require explicit permission from the Israeli authorities for any new building, while in some Arab villages in Area C—where Israel holds civil and security authority—houses have been built without any permit, and in some cases funded with European taxpayers’ money. The Israeli Supreme Court has repeatedly ordered these structures demolished, but the Israeli government has so far declined to act, apparently unwilling to endure the international backlash that would follow.

Correcting a Distorted Picture

Can I claim to offer a fully objective picture after one week? No—and I do not believe anyone can, because we are always dependent on the stories people choose to tell. But I pressed beyond the first answer, refused easy summaries, and kept asking until the picture became clearer.

What I know is this: the narrative that there are 500,000 violent settlers is a falsehood. It is a caricature that reduces half a million men, women and children—farmers, teachers, security coordinators, and neighbours who drink coffee with Arabs—to the actions of a small band of neglected and manipulated young men. That caricature serves no one, and it certainly does not serve peace.

As Christians, we are called to pursue justice—and justice begins with truth. Scripture commands us not to bear false witness. Uncritically repeating a media narrative that criminalises hundreds of thousands of people without nuance or evidence is precisely that: bearing false witness. There is real violence in Judea and Samaria that must be confronted and condemned. But the people condemning it most loudly, and working hardest to stop it, are the settlers themselves.

Dr Leon Meijer travelled extensively through Judea and Samaria over one week, speaking to dozens of residents of Jewish settlements across the region.



Western and Islamic Lawfare Against Israel

■ Andrew Tucker

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

In contemporary conflicts, states routinely use legal fora to frame the adversary's conduct in legally charged terms—thus shaping global perceptions of legitimacy; influencing political decision making among allies and partners; imposing reputational and diplomatic costs; and creating a narrative 'anchor' that media and NGOs will repeat.

There is nothing wrong with this. But where the highest court in the world—the ICJ—is deliberately weaponised to attack the sovereignty of other states, a red line is crossed.

For the last five years, there has been a strange alliance between Islamist states (which have an anti-Western agenda) together with progressive lawyers in Western states like Denmark and Netherlands. They have been acting in concert to engage in litigation under the 1948 Genocide Convention in the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to undermine Western-oriented states, especially the State of Israel.

So how does it work? The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) comprises 57 states, most of them having an Islamic majority. The OIC has been instrumental in bringing two cases under the Genocide Convention to the ICJ: *The Gambia vs Myanmar*, and *South Africa vs Israel*. The revolutionary regime in Iran also played a key role in these cases.

Once these cases were launched, progressive legal advisers in key Western countries like UK, Germany, Denmark, France, Netherlands and Canada convinced their governments to 'intervene' in these cases, pushing for an expansive approach to the concept of 'genocide'. The end goal of both the Islamist states and progressive lawyers: to have Israel convicted of genocide.

The timeline: in 2019, the OIC enabled the small African country The Gambia to bring genocide proceedings against Myanmar before the ICJ over atrocities committed against the Muslim Rohingya population. The OIC formally encouraged and authorised legal action through resolutions adopted by its member states, and OIC summits and ministerial meetings endorsed the strategy of pursuing proceedings before the ICJ. Since only states can bring contentious cases before the ICJ, the OIC could not sue Myanmar itself, so it designated The Gambia—an OIC member state and party to the Genocide Convention—to institute proceedings. As the litigation was expensive, the OIC helped finance it through a special fund supported by member-state contributions and the Islamic Solidarity Fund. The OIC also coordinated diplomatic support among its 57 member states, publicly backed the proceedings, promoted accountability efforts internationally, and supported engagement with international lawyers and advocacy groups involved in

the case. After the ICJ ordered provisional measures in January 2020 requiring Myanmar to prevent genocidal acts and preserve evidence, the OIC continued publicly urging compliance and rallying international support for the Rohingya cause.

The Myanmar case shows how a small state with no direct territorial connection to the atrocities could invoke obligations owed to all parties under the Genocide Convention, with strong backing from a multilateral organisation like the OIC.

After six years, the Myanmar proceedings is now drawing to a close. All arguments and evidence have been presented, the Court is now writing its judgment.

In the meantime, in late 2023, South Africa brought a case under the Genocide Convention against Israel claiming that Israel is committing genocide of the Palestinian people. Like The Gambia, South Africa had neither the finances nor the expertise to mount such a case; it was likely funded by Iran, with support of Qatar and other Islamist states.

For the last two years, the Myanmar case has been used by the Islamist states to lay a legal foundation for South Africa to succeed in its claim that Israel has committed genocide. Strikingly, the legal teams on both cases are almost identical; comprising highly-paid progressive international lawyers with strong anti-Israel sentiments like Professor Philippe Sands.

Even more striking is the role of six Western states in these proceedings. Central to the definition of genocide in the Genocide Convention is the requirement of 'specific intent'. In its jurisprudence to date, the ICJ has insisted that genocide exists only if the intention to destroy a people is the only possible inference that can be drawn from the factual circumstances. The ICJ has held that "claims against a State involving charges of exceptional gravity must be proved by evidence that is fully conclusive," and the Court must be "fully convinced" that allegations of the crime of genocide have been committed.

France, Germany, UK, Netherlands, Canada and Denmark are now urging the court to lower the evidentiary threshold, arguing that the construction of the Convention in relation to the requirement of specific intent requires what they call a "comprehensive and holistic" approach to the available evidence. They also urge the Court to rely 100% on UN reports, many of which have an anti-Western bias—such as reports by the UN Special Rapporteur for the Palestinian Territories, Francesca Albanese.

For example, these states are trying to convince the ICJ that because the finding of genocide includes the intent to destroy "at least a substantial part of the particular group", and children form a substantial part of the groups protected by the Genocide Convention, therefore high mortality rates among children provides an



| Photo: AI

indication of the intention to destroy a group as such, at least in part. Given the significance of children to the survival of all groups, evidence of harm to children may contribute to an inference that the perpetrators intended to destroy a substantial part of the protected group.

Another argument they raise is that forced displacement may also constitute evidence of specific intent to commit genocide. This may be so even in cases where affected members of the group are not transferred to a place where they are subjected to conditions leading to their death or destruction. Acts of 'ethnic cleansing' may occur in parallel to acts prohibited by Article II of the Genocide Convention and may be significant as indicative of the presence of a specific intent (*dolus speciosus*) inspiring those acts. Furthermore, "the violent military operation triggering the forced displacement of members of a targeted group may similarly contribute to evidence of a specific intent to destroy the protected group, regardless of whether the acts triggering the forced displacement fall within one of the five categories of underlying acts of genocide."

All of this totally ignores the fact that regimes like Hamas deliberately conduct asymmetric warfare—strategies of using human shields to ensure the maximum mortality rate of their own children. The arguments of Netherlands etc not only will make it easier for progressive ICJ judges to convict Israel of genocide; it actually raises risks for all Western countries engaged in terrorism.

The risk is that the applicable standard no longer demands that the perpetrator acted with genocidal intent. The armed forces of Western states engaged in defensive operations against terror regimes or in other counter-terrorism activities will be exposed to the risk of allegations they are committing genocide. As countries like the USA, Paraguay and Fiji have argued, the scope of the crime of genocide must be approached with special restraint. Attempts to broaden the definition of genocide risk diluting the specific normative function of the Convention, blurring its boundaries with other international obligations, and eventually undermining the treaty framework.

Three Small Miracles for Adina

■ Anemone Rüger

Project Coordinator | Holocaust Survivors Ukraine

Some of the most precious encounters happen spontaneously—encounters with survivors whom we would never meet at an event due to their age. Many of our project partners are descendants of Holocaust survivors, including Yonatan, who told me about his 100-year-old grandmother in Netanya during a visit to the Jaffa Institute.

The so-called expressway to the north, which is lined with construction sites slowing down traffic even on weekends, leads through Netanya. I want to try to find a parking space, a flower shop, and Adina, Yonatan's grandmother, in the congested city center. Three small miracles for a precious and healing moment.

Adina is resting on her daybed as she is feeling weak. She is being cared for by a young woman from India who has learned Hebrew for her. Still a beautiful woman, this lady with such a special charisma has lived through a whole century of human history!



Anemone Rüger (C4I) with Adina, who turned 101 in November. Raised in the Carpathian Mountains, Adina rebuilt her life in the US after the Shoah before immigrating to Israel at the age of 81. | Photos: C4I

Then she whispers with all her strength:
"You can't imagine how happy I am that you visited me!"

"That's my dad in the photo, and my brother is to his left. And in the other photo, that's me with my mother," Adina explains. The nurse has hung the photos opposite Adina's bed so that she can always see them.

I tell Adina about my family, about the many Christians in Germany who love the Jewish people, about my work. "That's very nice," Adina says repeatedly in a soft voice; every sentence obviously takes a lot of effort. The bright flowers make her face light up.

When I read her the card with the verse from *Isaiah 62*, she quietly repeats each word: "You will be a beautiful crown in the hand of the Lord..."

Then she whispers with all her strength: "You can't imagine how happy I am that you visited me!"

Only afterwards do I learn her whole story from her grandson Yonatan.

From the Carpathians to Auschwitz

"My grandmother was born in 1924 in a small village called Svaliava near Mukachevo in the Carpathian Mountains; at that time it was Czechia, today it is Ukraine," Yonatan tells me. "She was the middle child of three. Her older brother, Hersz, is with her in the photo with their mother. Her younger brother, Shmil (Schmuel), can be seen in the photo with his father. They were wealthy and had a large house. Their father, Yitzchak, was often away on business in America, and Malka, their mother, stayed with the children."

When the war broke out, Yitzchak returned to be with his family. He was immediately deported to a labour camp, where he perished. Adina's older brother also disappeared in a labour camp.

"My grandmother was already 18 when the Germans invaded the area," Yonatan continues. "She was deported to Auschwitz with her mother and younger brother. She remembers that they had to line up in front of a certain Mengele. Then Shmil, her younger brother, was pulled out. He was maybe eight or nine. Malka started crying and ran after her son. So they both went together into the line for the gas chamber."

"My grandmother didn't understand what was happening. She was desperate to avoid being separated from her family. 'Do you see the smoke over there? That's where they're being taken,' one of the prisoners said to her. She had to work in the crematorium until liberation. Her job was to examine the bodies after they had been gassed to see if they were wearing any gold."

I can hardly breathe listening to Yonatan telling me this unbelievably tragic story so matter-of-factly on the phone. I would love to drive back to Netanya right now.

"My grandmother never talked about it. But my mother grew up with her mother screaming in her sleep every night from nightmares and crying for her family. She always needed strong sleeping pills to be able to fall asleep."

A New Start in America

After the war, Adina was taken to

Hungary with other survivors; a year later, she boarded a ship to the United States. By then, she was 22 years old and alone in the world. A Jewish couple from Minnesota adopted her, gave her a new home, and helped her train as a kindergarten teacher—a profession she pursued with great passion throughout her life. She eventually moved to New York, where a large community of Holocaust survivors had formed. She was still haunted by the question of what had become of her older brother.

"One day, she was standing in line at the checkout in a store," Yonatan recounts. "Someone tapped her on the shoulder. It was Hersz, her brother, two years her senior. He had been searching for her for a long time. He then took care of her for the rest of his life. He already owned several bars in New York and had achieved a certain level of prosperity. He visited her every *Shabbat*. And every few years, he bought her a car, even though she already had a family and was well provided for. He supported her as a big brother until the end of his life 17 years ago."

Aliyah at 81

After 30 years, Adina moved with her family to Florida, where she stayed for another 20 years. When she was already well into retirement, she decided—at the age of 81—to make *Aliyah* with her 90-year-old husband and follow their two daughters to Israel. She had already learned Hebrew in her hometown in the Carpathians.

"Grandma Adina always had guests for *Shabbat*," Yonatan recalls. "When we used to visit her in the US, she often had 10 or 15 guests at the table who had no one else."

When Yonatan receives the photos of the flowers from the nurse a few minutes after my visit, he thanks me warmly. "What you did for my Grandma is incredible!" Really? I am humbled by his words. In relation to Adina's story, what I did seems to be less than nothing. Now that he has told me the whole story, I just want to cry. And go back there again. But at the same time, I know that God takes the little we have and turns it into something divine.



Adina's father with her younger brother, Shmil. Both were murdered in the Holocaust.



Childhood photo of Adina with her mother and her older brother, Hersz.



Through Joy and Tears

■ Sondra Oster Baras

International President | CFOIC Heartland

Three days before Memorial Day and Israel Independence Day, the US announced a cease-fire with Iran. The missiles that had been raining down upon Israel since the first of March, stopped suddenly and we breathed a collective sigh of relief. Unfortunately, the Hezbollah terrorists in Lebanon had no interest in laying down their weapons and their attacks against northern Israel continue. But for most of the country, the Memorial Day ceremonies and Independence Day celebrations that had been put on hold, were suddenly back on schedule. Communities, towns and cities scrambled to rehearse, set up stages, sound systems and carnival rides. And somehow, it all came together.

No one believed the cease-fire would last long, especially since Iran seemed committed, as always, to the destruction of Israel and to the continued development of its nuclear and ballistic missile systems. But we were relieved by the break. We rejoiced in being able to sleep through the night and slowly began to gain confidence that life could resume normalcy, at least for a while.

Israel is an enigma, to people around the world, but no less to ourselves. Our young men are still serving hundreds of days each year in the reserves, fighting the worst terrorists on multiple fronts. Hundreds of homes were destroyed during the recent Iranian missile attacks, with people seeking refuge with families and in hotels. Most of the north is still living under irregular missile barrages with many still not willing to return to their homes in the northern-most communities. And yet, we rejoiced on Israel Independence Day. The children love to walk around with spray foam, spraying everyone in sight. My husband barely dodged an attack! There was music and dancing, falafel and chips. We barbecued both on Tuesday evening and on Wednesday afternoon—enjoying meat and salads and all kinds of trimmings with friends and family. Walking around the festivities, you would be hard-pressed to identify the fear and uncertainty that was so prevalent just days earlier. How can this be? How can we face an existential threat one day and laugh and celebrate the next?

Since the early days of the State, our leadership decided to place Memorial Day for our Fallen Soldiers on the day before Independence Day. There have always been those who question the proximity of such diametrically opposed days—a day of profound mourning just before a day of equally profound



The people of Shaked in northern Samaria celebrate Israel's Independence Day in a display of flags and joy. | Photo: Sondra Oster Baras

From mourning our fallen soldiers to celebrating independence, Israelis continue to hold joy in one hand while wiping tears away with the other.

celebration. But that is really what Israel is about.

Israel is a miracle. After nearly 2000 years of exile, discrimination and near destruction, we returned to our ancient Homeland and restored our nation as a political entity, a nation among nations. No longer hounded as a minority group dispersed all over the world, we were free to determine our own future, even as we drew upon our rich and shared past. But winning our independence and sustaining it has never been easy. Ever since the earliest years of modern Zionism, our Arab enemies tried to murder us, expel us and prevent us from reaching our national and religious aspirations. We had no choice but to fight to secure our freedom and very existence.

The IDF started with nothing—a few second-hand sten guns left over from World War II, four airplanes that had to be held together in the most primitive ways. The US and most of Europe declared an arms boycott against Israel, even as they anticipated the destruction of the fledgling Israel. But we defied all expectations. We drove our enemies out of most of Israel and we built a state. We built a powerful military, including the best air force and the best intelligence services in the world today. We worked hard, but none of this would have been possible without God's help. And it also would not have been possible without the ongoing sacrifice of so many of our young men and women who fought bravely and fell in battle.

We have no right to celebrate Israel's

Independence without first remembering and mourning those who made the ultimate sacrifice so that we could celebrate.

Today, that dual experience hits home like never before. We were able to celebrate Israel's Independence Day this year because we knew how hard our soldiers and fighter pilots worked to bring us to the cease-fire. And people paid a price—soldiers and civilians lost their lives, their homes and their security. But when we celebrate, we acknowledge that the price had value, it had enormous meaning.

The emotional switch that we all make each year between Memorial Day and Independence Day, was also good training for the roller-coaster we have been experiencing for the past two and a half years. From the depths of the horrific massacre of 7 October, 2023, from the mourning for our fallen soldiers—during the first year of the war, nearly every day we mourned another fallen soldier—we were able to identify moments of hope. We recognised the miracle when Iranian missiles first attacked Israel and the Iron Dome downed every one that was aimed at inhabited areas. We heard stories from our soldier sons, sons-in-law, husbands and relatives about near misses. We celebrated like never before when our hostages came home. Through all of this and from the very beginning of our restoration in our precious land, we have found ways to hold joy in one hand, while wiping the tears from our eyes

with the other. I can't explain how we do it, but I can assure you we do. It is just how we are. And Israel continues to rank amongst the happiest nations on the planet. Explain that one!

Independence Day in Israel is not only a wonderful national celebration. It is a spiritual one. Just as we stop to remember our fallen soldiers and the sacrifice they made before we can celebrate, we also remember God's mercies before we start picnicking. In synagogues and public areas all over the land, Independence Day celebrations begin with a prayer service. It is a service of rejoicing—we sing *Psalm 126* to the tune of *Hatikvah*. Like our ancient forebears, when we returned to Israel it was a dream come true—a dream so beautifully articulated by Naftali Herz Imber, the Jewish poet who wrote *Hatikvah* in 1877.

As I write this, we are waiting anxiously to learn if the US and Iran will reach an agreement. And there is great consensus in Israel that an agreement could be a very bad thing. If we were dealing with a normal country with a normal government that takes the interests of its people into account, Iran would certainly understand that nothing good can come from continued bombardment from the US and Israel. They would give up their nuclear programme, their ballistic missiles programme and invest in their people. But that is not Iran. So long as Iran is an Islamist Republic with a national suicidal/*jihadist* mentality, it will continue to come after Israel. It will lie, cheat and steal and then find a way to continue developing nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles. If the sanctions are lifted and billions of dollars flow into Iran, they will use that money to rearm, both themselves and their proxies— Hamas and Hezbollah. Nothing good can come out of an agreement with Iran. They must be defeated. Totally. There is no other option.

So for now, we do anticipate a return to hostilities, to additional missile attacks with its fear, sleepless nights and ongoing damage. But it will be worth it if we can finally defeat Iran and pave the way for a new Iran. If we stop too soon, Iran will be like a wounded lion—angry and powerful enough to do real damage.

But regardless of what happens, we will continue to hold joy in one hand, even as we dig in, fight on, and wipe our tears with the other. Because we will never lose hope and faith in the God of Israel that there will be a better time.

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

A Demonstration of God's Love and Kindness Amid the Ofakim Massacre

■ Mandy Worby

Radio Announcer, Podcaster and Israel Tour Host for Vision Christian Media

After 7 October, the world's media immediately focused on the atrocities committed by Hamas against the *Kibbutzim* in the Gaza envelope and at the site of the Nova Festival and rightly so. It was beyond comprehension that such ferocious barbarity, could be meted out by human beings against other human beings. The visceral hatred was an offence to the minds of all decent people around the world.

Of course, the focus on the *Kibbutzim* was short-lived, and the world's focus turned against Israel within a matter of days, long before Israel fired a single retaliatory bullet against the demonic Hamas enclave in Gaza, and it remains the case to this day. The nations of the world are fickle and quite frankly, deplorable for their deliberate and grotesque acceptance and justification of terrorism against Israel, while demonising and blaming the Jewish State for the war forced upon them.

What many are unaware of is that Hamas didn't only attack the *Kibbutzim* communities in the Gaza envelope and the Nova Festival attendees, they also managed to make it to the community of Ofakim in the Negev desert region, some 29km from the Gaza border. No one expected the terrorists to ever make it so far inside Israel.

Fifteen Hamas terrorists entered the city of Ofakim early on *Simchat Torah*, a very holy day in the Jewish calendar, and proceeded to murder 25 innocent civilians, and 5 security personnel, not to mention, wounding many others. The idea that Hamas could reach so far inside Israel was so unexpected, that there was precious little readiness for the attack.

The trauma on the community of Ofakim was savage and ongoing, particularly with the young people. As is the case with all Israelis, they've either lost immediate family or friends due to terrorism or war, or they know someone who has lost loved ones to terrorism or war. The Jewish community is small and very connected, and this is the case for Diaspora Jews also.

Christians for Israel Australia was approached by Karen Hayesod to invest in an Ofakim youth initiative called Youth Futures, ('Empowering Youth At-Risk and their Families'), an organisation that works very closely with children, who have been suffering severe trauma,



Ian and Mandy Worby with Rachel Edry. Photo: Christians for Israel Australia

an initiative we were very enthusiastic to support.

We assisted by providing an outdoor shade awning, valued at AUD \$25,000, which now allows the children in the centre to spend time outdoors during the very hot summer months, where the temperature sits consistently at around 35°C from June to early September.

We were privileged to visit the centre last November after the conclusion of our ANZAC Solidarity Tour to see the facility, meet the children and also see the shade awning.

The staff, all qualified counsellors and teachers, shared with us the methods used in helping the children, how they interact with their families and the progress being made. The accounts of the children were heartbreaking, but also encouraging. Children of pre-teen and early-teenage years, having experienced what no child should. Coming to terms with unspeakable violence and hatred, simply for being Jewish, seeing their community butchered and dealing with the ongoing fear and trauma that the terrorists want nothing more than to return again to kill them next.

Christians for Israel Australia is very proud and privileged to have assisted these children in their recovery, knowing that we're assisting, even in a small way, to help the next generation of young Israelis grow up to not only love their nation and their people, but to stand strong and defend it.

While we were in Ofakim, we were taken to the site where the worst of the fighting took place. The Hamas attack

on 7 October began just after 6:30am when rockets rained down over the *Kibbutzim*, Nova and the city of Ofakim, just minutes later 15 terrorists in two pickup trucks crossed into Israel and drove straight to Ofakim.

The first victim in Ofakim was murdered at 7:06am as they walked along the promenade west of the city. Shortly after that, the terrorists fired on homes in the suburb of Mishor Hagefen, and began going house to house on Bayit Vegan St killing everyone they could find. The IDF at the time were spread very thin, they were outnumbered and unprepared because again, no one expected Hamas to commit such an audacious attack, and certainly not so far from Gaza.

The terrorists continued their rampage, reaching Tamar St where they forced their way into the home of David and Rachel Edry, taking them hostage and holding them at gunpoint for almost 20 hours, and this is where I describe to you not only the bravery of the Jewish people, but their honour and grace.

While Ian and I, with our guide for the day, stood on the corner where the worst of the attack took place, looking at a massive mural and memorial to the fallen heroes on that fateful day, we learned we were standing right beside the home of David and Rachel Edry. Our guide told us how Rachel provided First Aid to one of the wounded terrorists, how she provided them breakfast, lunch and dinner, and even baked them chocolate chip cookies.

While providing them remarkable hospitality, IDF and police negotiators arrived to try and talk the terrorists

down. The lead negotiator was a police officer, David and Rachel's son. Unfortunately, the terrorists refused to surrender, and deadly force had to be used to rescue David and Rachel.

While we were standing on the corner talking, our guide looked up and said, "There's Rachel Edry!" She was walking across the road toward her home. We were introduced, and she warmly embraced us both and thanked us for coming to Israel and supporting her nation.

She recounted her story again for us, saying that when the terrorists forced their way into her home, she'd said to her husband that *Simchat Torah* was a holy day, and we welcome guests into our home on such a day, and as such, she would serve these 'guests'. And that's exactly what she did.

We learned that her husband David died just a few months after the 7 Oct. attack, the stress and trauma being too much. She opened her phone and showed us photos and the bloody carnage inside her house after she and David were rescued. In fact, they weren't able to return to their home as it needed to be completely renovated, in fact, Rachel had only moved back a few months before we had the privilege of meeting her.

One of the residents of Ofakim, Oded Omesi, commented that "Inside (the Edry home), a miracle happened. But outside the house, it was a small Holocaust."

While visiting the children at Youth Futures Ofakim, we did an exercise with them, going around in a circle to share who our heroes are and why. Most of the children mentioned family members who fought and or died in the 7 Oct. massacre, and I watched and listened as they shared their stories, overwhelmed by their bravery and strength. Then it was my turn.

I told them, "I was going to say that Joseph the patriarch is my hero because he endured so much, but still blessed the world. (Betrayed by his family, sold into slavery, falsely accused and imprisoned, but eventually became Prime Minister of Egypt and saved his family, and the known world at that time.) But it's hard to have just one hero. So my heroes are the Jewish people because you endure so much, and yet you still bless the whole world."

The quality and resilience of the Jewish people never ceases to amaze me.

From Resurrection to Restoration

■ Rev Henk Poot

Christians for Israel Netherlands

Between Easter and Ascension Day, we encounter two important questions posed by the disciples. But it is debatable whether these questions have always been properly understood.

The first question comes from the two disciples who, on the day of the resurrection, are travelling from Jerusalem to Emmaus. They are talking amongst themselves about Jesus' death and are shocked that things have ended this way for Him. They had great expectations of Him, but it all seems to have been in vain. When Jesus joins them, they do not recognise Him. The text literally states that their eyes were kept from recognising Him. When He asks them what they are discussing so earnestly, they ask Him whether the events of *Passover* have perhaps passed Him by. And they recount the crucifixion with the lament: *"But we had hoped that He was the one who would redeem Israel!"*

Through Suffering

And then, after listening to them, Jesus says: *"O foolish ones, and slow of heart, that you do not believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer in order to enter into His glory?"* We must pay attention to what Jesus does not say. He does not say that they did not understand the prophets or that they have a wrong idea of the *Messiah*. Jesus merely says that they did not believe everything the prophets had said. What those two expected was entirely justified. But it had to go through suffering. And then Jesus explains the whole Bible, the books of Moses, the Prophets and the Writings—in short, the *Tanakh*.

I would have liked to have heard his explanation. Perhaps he should read the Bible in this way so they could discover it for themselves? Perhaps the story of Joseph, who was sold into slavery but eventually exalted, and who ultimately saved the whole world from famine. Or David, who was anointed king over all Israel, but had to flee for years before his coronation. Or *Psalms* 22 with that beautiful ending: *"All the ends of the earth shall turn to God."* Or *Isaiah* 53: *"When He has offered His life as a sin offering, He shall see the light."*

The Redemption of Jerusalem

As they eat, their eyes are opened. When Jesus stretches out His hands, they see the marks of the wounds. When He breaks the bread, they recognise him. But the truth remains: He will redeem Israel!



| Photo: AI

Easter was not the end of the story, but the beginning of God's promised restoration, redemption and coming Kingdom for all nations.

What Mary and Zechariah sang, what Simeon prayed for and what Hannah testified to, has not been rendered obsolete by Jesus' death. He has risen to do just that: the redemption of Jerusalem!

Restoration of the Kingdom

The second remark takes the form of a question—the one posed by the twelve disciples about when Christ will restore the kingdom to Israel (*Acts 1:6*). This is not an inappropriate question. After all, Jesus had spent forty days teaching them about the kingdom in its fullness. It is not as though the disciples still understood nothing; to suggest that would imply that Jesus' teaching had no effect and that the apostles were unprepared for their calling. If that were the case, Jesus could hardly depart—he would need to begin again. Rather, this is their final question, and perhaps the most pressing one from their perspective. After all, Jesus had promised during the *Passover* meal that they would rule over the twelve tribes of Israel! It is only natural, then, that they now ask: when will this come to pass? When will it be brought to completion?

They are ready and equipped for their task. What remains is the power of the Holy Spirit, to truly fulfil their calling in practice, in the authority of Jesus. The proclamation of the kingdom must now go forward. What Jesus began is to be continued—first among the Jews in the diaspora, and extending to the Gentiles as well, who are invited in. And then comes the fulfilment, which includes the redemption of Israel: Jerusalem restored as a city of praise on the earth, the centre of God's Kingdom. There Jesus will take His seat on the throne of David, and there the apostles will become kings.

Easter Is the Beginning

The question is whether we, as the Church, have truly grasped this. Have we become so focused on life after death—on heaven—that we thought Easter was enough? It is not finished yet, Easter is the beginning. Easter assures the fulfilment of all that the Lord has promised. The best is yet to come, and it is destined to unfold here as well, including the restoration of the kingdom for Israel.

Poor in Spirit

In this series, we examine the Beatitudes and how they guide us in experiencing true happiness in God's Kingdom.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 5:3

"Blessed, happy, are the poor in spirit." That is how Jesus begins; and in doing so, He sets the tone, as it were. Who are they? The expression 'poor in spirit' was very familiar in the Bible and in Jesus' time, and it had a certain resonance. Certain groups in Israel who wanted to live very close to God and His commandments, such as the community at Qumran, called themselves that: the poor in spirit. They do not necessarily suffer material deprivation.

That would be the suggestion in Luke, though, who omits the phrase 'in spirit', which leads one to think of people living in poverty. But 'the poor in spirit' expresses that they long for God's presence, for God's nearness, in all things. They know that they need God's help and presence in everything. Moreover, when compared with other expressions found in the Dead Sea Scrolls (such as 'the poor of Your salvation' or 'the poor of grace'), one might even say that it is even more powerful: they may well be poor, but they do have the Holy Spirit.

We should probably consider the Beatitudes against the backdrop of *Isaiah* 61, and in particular verses 1 to 3, the words which, according to *Luke* 4, Jesus read in the synagogue at Nazareth:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has

anointed Me to preach good news to the meek..."

The word 'meek' in Hebrew is very similar to the word 'poor' (more on this in the third Beatitude). The Beatitudes are a first proclamation of the fulfilment that Jesus is about to bring to this prophecy.

The Kingdom of Heaven belongs to them. By this, Matthew means nothing other than the Kingdom of God. Luke states this quite plainly (*Luke* 6:20). But Matthew adheres to the Jewish way of speaking, in which 'Heaven' is a reference to God.

God's kingdom is therefore already present in the poor in spirit. They have accepted God's rule in their lives, and they long for the visible breakthrough of God's kingdom, on earth as it is in heaven.

Recommended Reading

The Arab Case for Israel

by Hussain Abdul-Hussain

Book review by Kees de Vreugd

The author introduces himself as a Muslim-born Arab who grew up in Lebanon and Iraq, who transformed from an ardent opponent of Zionism to a staunch supporter of the State of Israel, which he sees as an asset to its predominantly Arab neighbours and the broader Middle East.

In the opening, title chapter, he describes his upbringing as the child of an Iraqi father and Lebanese mother. Raised in a Sunni environment in Iraq and later in Shia-majority Baalbek under Hezbollah's influence, his perspective broadened after moving to Beirut and attending the American International College, where he encountered Sunnis, Shias, Christians and Druze. Friendship with a Christian classmate sparked his interest in the Bible and history, leading him to study history at the American University of Beirut. His curiosity also led him to learn Hebrew and speak with Israeli soldiers along the Lebanese-Israeli border.

The author openly admires Israel while advocating a pragmatic, non-ideological approach. Chapter titles such as *"The Myth of Ancient Palestine"* and *"Zionists Plan the Future, Palestinians Cling to an Imagined Past"* reflect his detailed analysis of Palestinian and broader Arab history, politics and psychology.

Most Arab states, he says, are failed states, autocratic and dictatorial. His basic argument is that the innovative technological lead of Israel over the surrounding Arab states is proof that the Arab world would be better off, in every sense, if the Arab worlds would normalise relations with Israel. He observes that a growing number of Arab states are putting (or wishing to put) their own interests first, by leaving aside the Palestinian cause and seek normalisation with Israel.

The Abraham Accords are a model for peaceful coexistence. He notes that there is no coincidence, that the Emirates are one of the few successful Arab states.

To the Palestinians he has a clear and simple message: they would be far better off if they would forget about a Palestinian state and accept the State of Israel instead. There is no need of another failed state. By prioritising peace over historical grievances, the region would move forward with stability, economic growth, and mutual respect.

Israel Has Been Hardened in Part

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

In this article we continue our study of **Romans 11, focusing on the 'mystery' referred to in Romans 11:25.**

"...Hardening has come upon Israel in part, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved..."
Romans 11:25

This brings the apostle Paul to the content of the mystery: There is an indissoluble connection between the salvation of the non-Jewish nations and the salvation of Israel.

Israel's hardening is neither complete nor permanent. When the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, God's redemptive purposes for Israel will ultimately be fulfilled.

First, we recall what Paul said in the first part of the chapter: Through the fall of Israel, the possibility of salvation was opened to the Gentiles (*verse 11*). The Jewish people had to reject their *Messiah* so that he could become the Saviour of the Gentiles.

But this hardening of Israel for the sake of the non-Jews does not, on the one hand, encompass the entire Jewish people—*"hardening has come upon a part of Israel"*—and, on the other hand, it is limited in time: *"Until the full number of the Gentiles has been saved."*

When the 'fullness' of the Gentiles has been saved, *"the temporary hardening of a part of Israel has fulfilled its purpose and no longer plays a role"* (Wengst, 371).

The 'fullness' or 'completeness' (*πλήρωμα/pleroma*) is that which makes something imperfect perfect, the 'filling,' the 'full measure,' the 'contents' that fill a particular vessel or space. A *πλήρωμα/pleroma* always presupposes *"a vessel into which the filling takes place according to purpose and nature or necessity"* (Philippi, 516). As long as the measure is not full, the *πλήρωμα/pleroma* is not reached.

An old, torn dress, for example, lacks the *πλήρωμα/pleroma*. The 'full number' or 'fullness' that makes the old garment complete is in this case to be translated as 'rag' or 'patch.' The *πλήρωμα/pleroma* of the *Torah*, which makes the *Torah* perfect, is love (*Romans 13:10*). And when a certain 'space of time' is 'full,' that is, when 'the time is fulfilled,' then the New Testament speaks of the 'fullness of time,' of the *πλήρωμα τοῦ χρόνου/pleroma tou chronou* (*Galatians 4:4*) or *πλήρωμα τῶν καιρῶν/pleroma ton kairon* (*Ephesians 1:10*).

The word *πλήρωμα/pleroma* also appears in the New Testament when describing

the relationship between God and Jesus and between Jesus and his Church. In Jesus dwells *"the whole fullness of the Godhead bodily."* *"From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace,"* confesses Jesus' disciple John (*John 1:16*). Therefore, Paul can also set before the church in Ephesus the goal of being filled 'with all the fullness of God'. Paul leaves open what exactly is meant by the 'fullness of the Gentiles' in *Romans 11:25*. In any case, there is a certain amount that must be filled.

Perhaps there is a certain number of Gentiles who must come to faith.

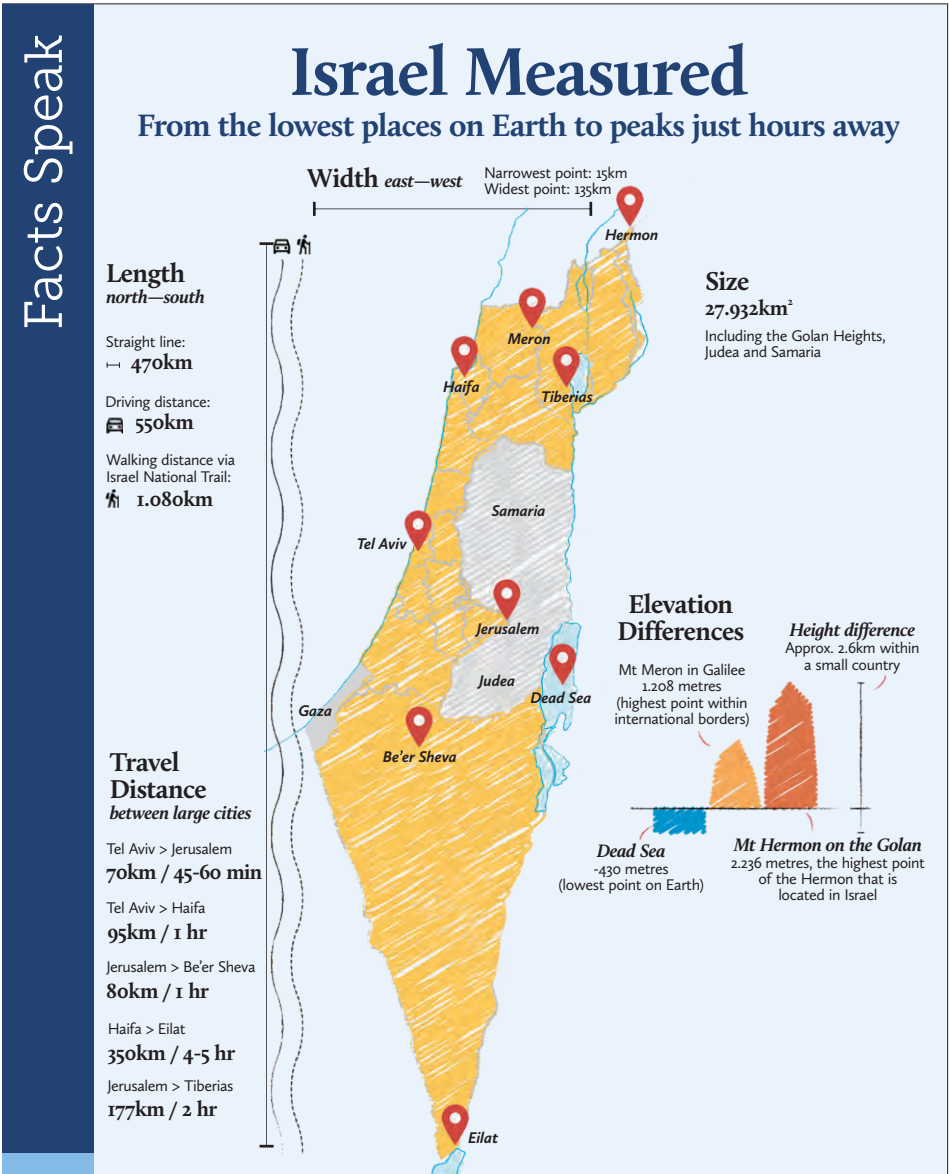
trampled on by the Gentiles *"until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled"* (*Luke 21:24*). But perhaps it is also a combination of these quantitative, qualitative and chronological possibilities.

The crucial point is that Israel's hardening is not final. When the measure appointed by God for the non-Jewish world is full, ... all Israel will be saved, ... (*Romans 11:26*)

Israel has a future! All of Israel will be saved. The 'all of Israel' is related to the 'part of Israel' in the previous verse. Therefore, it 'cannot be understood in

Perhaps the Gentile Christian church needs to reach a certain spiritual quality before Israel becomes jealous and then returns to its God. Another possibility might be, however, that it refers to a measure of time that must be 'filled up,' comparable to the case when God explains to Abraham that *"the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full"* (*Genesis 15:16*). Jesus speaks of Jerusalem being

any other way than by the totality of the people of Israel.' This refers to those people, some of whom have previously experienced hardening. Furthermore, the overall context of *Romans 9-11* uses the terms 'Israel' or 'Israelite' to refer to the Jewish people, which is why it must be ruled out that this is referring to a 'spiritual' Israel that is to be saved.



Tisha B'av—Mourning for the Destruction of the Temple

■ Kees de Vreugd

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

A year ago I wrote: “It is a day that receives great attention in Jewish tradition but is unknown in Christian tradition, the 9th (Hebrew: *tisha*) of the Hebrew month of Av. Christians do not commemorate the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem.”

9 Av is the day commemorating the destruction of both the first and second temples. This is done by fasting for a day (like *Yom Kippur* from evening to evening). In the synagogue, the book of Lamentations is read, which sings of Jerusalem destroyed by the Babylonians.

How should I, as a Christian, from a Christian viewpoint, reflect on *Tisha B'Av* and the destruction of the Temple? I first try to listen again to a Jewish voice. In his book *The Jewish Way; Living the Holidays* (1988), Rabbi Irving Greenberg reflects on the impact of the destruction of the Temple and the responses to it. The loss of the Temple caused a change in Jewish religion. The destruction of the Temple was not the end of Judaism, “it could only mean a call to serve God in a new way”, Rabbi Greenberg writes. The two answers were rabbinic Judaism and the rise of Christianity. Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai escaped Jerusalem to set up the study house in Yavne (Yamnia), where eventually the canon of the Hebrew Bible was finally decided on. The focus shifted from the sacramental service of the priests to the priestly service of the Jewish people. The daily prayers of the community and the individual, accompanied by acts of loving kindness, replaced the sacrifices in the Temple, including their atoning power. In a sense, Jewish worship was secularised (as Rabbi Greenberg puts it) and popularised. Secularised, because the focus no longer could be the presence of God in the temple, but finding God and serving Him in every aspect of daily life—a secularisation that paradoxically leads to the sanctification of life. Rabbi Greenberg calls this shift from priests to people a renewal of the covenant: now, the covenant people became fully responsible as covenant partner.

Christians—that is to say, the Christian authors whose writings have survived—could not or would not go along with that. Early in Christian tradition, the destruction of the temple was seen as evidence of God's final judgement on Israel. Yet, as Greenberg observes, the early Christians were using traditional



The Siege and Destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans Under the Command of Titus, A.D. 70.
Oil on canvas by David Roberts | Source: WikimediaCommons

Jewish categories in their response. They accepted the events of Jewish history as normative. But once they perceived the Destruction as a sign of the end of the Jewish covenant, the logic of the new situation turned them to a new road. “Rejecting some Jewish beliefs, spiritualising the old promises by transferring their focus from the land and people of Israel to personal salvation, yet preaching the basic religious love and consolation of Judaism to the world, they created Christianity.”

On the other hand, historians such as Daniel Boyarin today say that in practice, even until the fourth century, the dividing lines were not that sharp. There was much more interaction between Christians and Jews, than the religious leaders deemed desirable.

Rabbi Greenberg called the Jewish reaction the ‘paradigm of response’. That is a main characteristic of Judaism. How do we respond, as Christians?

I listen again to Jewish tradition. The temple was destroyed, it is taught in the *Talmud*, because the people were driven by baseless hatred. How is that with us? How much baseless hatred towards Judaism has there been in Christianity? How much baseless hatred exists still today, even among Christians themselves?

Jesus taught the fully Jewish, i.e. Biblical, principle of loving each other. That should also guide our relationship with Jewish people. Did He announce God's final judgement over Jerusalem? There is certainly an element of judgement in His speech: “Look, your house is left to you desolate” (Matthew 23:38), but that is not the final word. There is an ‘until’: “For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord’” (verse 39). When *Messiah* comes in glory, Israel will return and the ‘House’ (the temple) will be filled again with the Glory of the Lord.

Discover our reading plans

Biblical Roots By David Nekrutman

The Prophetic Pivot

Last month, as the sun dipped below the horizon and the somber sirens of Memorial Day gave way to the vibrant lights of Independence Day, a specific ancient melody rose from synagogues and homes across the world. It was *Psalm 107*—a prophetic song chosen by the first Chief Rabbis of Israel to serve as the spiritual anthem for the modern state.

While the echoes of those celebrations have now faded into the routine of our daily lives, the message of the Psalm remains more relevant than ever. To the casual observer, celebrating a state that still faces internal division, external threats, and spiritual shadows might seem premature. However, the wisdom of Isaiah and the structure of the Psalms teach us a different lesson: Redemption is a process, not a singular event.

The Three Layers of Promise

This process is built upon a foundation of ancient certainty. The ‘Ingathering of the Exiles’ is not a modern political invention; it is a three-layered Divine commitment. It began with the promise in the *Torah* (*Deuteronomy 30*), was amplified by the Prophets (*Isaiah 43*), and was finally set into a song of thanksgiving in *Psalm 107*.

Isaiah 43 famously demands that the North ‘yield’ and the South ‘not hold back.’ Today, we are the first generation in two millennia to see these words move from ancient parchment to the tarmac of Ben Gurion Airport. This return of millions from the four corners of the earth—a feat never achieved by any other nation—is the very ‘Banner for the Nations’ Isaiah promised.

However, the beauty of this national banner often competes with the noise of our current reality, leading many to question the validity of the miracle itself.

The Light and the Shadow

The most profound challenge of living in the wake of the 78th year is acknowledging this ‘partial redemption.’ Critics argue that without total spiritual perfection, the State lacks religious significance. However, we must remember the Song of the Sea. The Israelites sang their greatest song of praise before they received the *Torah* at Sinai and before they entered the Land.

To wait for perfection before offering thanks is not piety; it is a lack of faith. As we move forward from this 78-year milestone, our call is no longer just to witness this redemption from the sidelines, but to accelerate it through an active, daily partnership with God.

The Iran War: Who's Winning?

■ Kameel Majdali

Director | Teach All Nations Inc.

Note: By the time this article is released, active combat in Iran and the Persian Gulf may have ceased. But will that cessation conclude the war? And what will winning look like, anyway? That's what this article is about.

A famous revolutionary's army conquered a major country and took control of its governance. A few years later, he was asked by a foreigner if his party was winning the peace, as they had won the war. He allegedly replied that it was too soon to tell.

This man was an example of taking the 'long view' or playing the 'long game.' While westerners don't look past next year, month, or week, the long-view people look into the future, long after their natural life has ended.

As we examine the 2026 American-Israeli war against Iran (more specifically, the IRGC [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps]), 'winning' to one side means something different to the other. Even the definition of war is changing: it is becoming more asymmetrical, so that the little guy can win, like David against Goliath.

Warfare has moved from the battlefield to the office, from 'eye-to-eye combat' to long-distance. Today, there is armed warfare, cyber warfare, information warfare, media warfare, and propaganda warfare. It is possible to win the military battle yet lose the war. That's what the IRGC is hoping for.

The War Begins

The recent fighting commenced on 28 February 2026, but the war began when the Islamic Republic of Iran was founded on 1 February 1979. From the outset, Shia Iran condemned America as the great Satan and Israel as the little Satan. These two nations were seen as an impediment to its long game, which is the hegemony of the Middle East and the entire Muslim world—Sunnis included. The destruction of America and Israel was proclaimed and planned for.

Iran backed up its words with action, and the chosen method was terrorism. Sleeper cells and terror proxies, like Hezbollah and Hamas, were put to work. An empire of terror was assembled, called the Shia Crescent. Stretching from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean, the Shia Crescent consists of Iran-funded and aligned terror proxies, including Iraqi militia, Assad's Syria (he was deposed in December 2024), Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Gaza, and the Houthis in Yemen. These proxies were Iran's foot soldiers in its war for supremacy and defence insurance if attacked.



| Photo: Adobe Stock

America destroyed its navy and air force—now propaganda and cyber warfare are Iran's weapons.

The IRGC was the regime's secret weapon. Described as a parallel economy with soldiers (800,000), the IRGC controlled 30–40% of Iran's pre-war economy. They owned a variety of businesses and were completely loyal to the Supreme Leader. Their goal is to actively resist Israel and the United States.

After the assassination of the late Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, on 28 February 2026, it is unclear who is running the country. Neither the President of Iran, Masoud Pezeshkian, nor the new Supreme Leader, Khamenei's son Mojtaba, appear to be in charge, though they hold the two most powerful positions in the government. The consensus is that the IRGC, in whole or subdivided into a mosaic, seem to be the puppet masters.

Their weapons include ballistic missiles, which can carry a nuclear weapon. And with a range of 2,500 miles or 4,000 kilometres, an Iranian missile can reach anywhere in Europe, including London. Sophisticated drones, expert cyber warriors, propaganda and the media are now Iran's most formidable weapons, since America destroyed its navy and air force.

Who's Winning?

To answer this question, it depends on what the objectives are. For the United States and Israel, their goal is to prevent Iran from gaining nuclear weapons, strip them of their missiles and other lethal weapons and to defund their terror proxies. In other words, to stop

future danger?

One of the key reasons for the American-Israeli attack at this time is that Iran has never been weaker. Inflation is sky high, and the economy is teetering. Public support for the regime is near zero, and Iran has been mostly forsaken by its allies, Russia, China, and the proxies.

It has sustained much damage in two recent wars. Plus, Iran has a super serious water shortage. The timing for a military strike seemed ideal.

Since the 28 February attack, the IRGC has had to contend with the regular Iranian army (made up of conscripts), the mullahs, and the Iranian people. And while the future is frighteningly uncertain, Iran's regime has a few 'cards to play.' They have weapons-grade enriched uranium, enough to make eleven bombs; long-range ballistic missiles; the capacity to close the Strait of Hormuz; terrorist sleeper cells, cyber hackers, and propaganda outlets. Most of all, they have a 'long game' vision of Islamic and global hegemony. Their immediate goal, like Hamas recently, is not to have a military victory but regime survival. To remain intact would be a 'victory.' Iranians are pragmatic and patient: the US could proclaim success now, walk away, and Iran can reconstitute, rebuild, and live to fight another day.

Bible prophecy, the greatest long-game of all, speaks of the 'ultimate win' of a kingdom that triumphs in battle and war, and can never be overthrown. As *Obadiah 1:21* says, "... the kingdom shall be the Lord's."

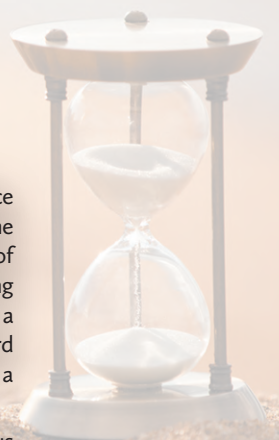
The Bible Speaks

God's Purpose Will Stand

"Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, 'My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please...' (Isaiah 46:9-10 NIV)

The Lord oversees history from beginning to end. Or vice versa: From the end He looks back and oversees the present and the beginning. The Great End Goal draws all of history toward itself like a magnet. That goal is the coming of God's Kingdom—and the coming of its King. It is a divine force that both pulls and guides everything toward its destined fulfilment, leading not only to an end, but to a new beginning.

In the Bible God has revealed who He is and given us insight into the future of humanity and the world. Through Scripture, we learn to trust that His purpose stands firm and that His plan is unfolding exactly as He intends.



Short News

A Ban on Demonstrations?

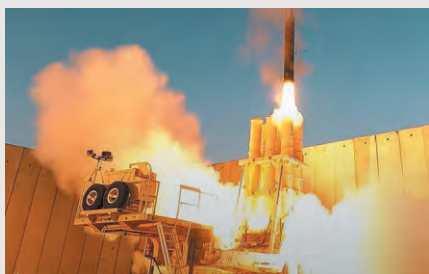


In the UK, calls have been made for a ban on anti-Israel demonstrations. The call comes from a lawyer who assesses the British government's anti-terrorism legislation and opposition leader Badenoch. The reason for this are the countless antisemitic incidents, including the stabbing of two Jewish men in the London borough of Golders Green. Badenoch: "It is time to ban these demonstrations. It is clear that they are being used as a cover to promote violence and intimidation against Jews." | Photo: Shutterstock

UNRWA and Hamas

According to USAID, the US agency responsible for overseeing foreign aid, there are four additional UNRWA staff members who may be linked to the terrorist attacks of 7 October 2023. These include three teachers and a social worker. The US Department of State is investigating how the four can be barred from working for (future) US-funded aid organisations.

Arrow Production Increased



Israel is set to significantly expand production of the Arrow missile defence system following approval by a ministerial committee, according to the Ministry of Defence. The move is aimed at strengthening Israel's protection against ballistic missile threats. Manufacturer Israel Aerospace Industries will increase both production capacity and output of the system, which was jointly developed by Israel and the United States. The Arrow system is designed to intercept long-range ballistic missiles and has been widely used in response to attacks launched from Iran and Yemen, Defence Minister Israel Katz said. | Photo: Wikimedia Commons

European Jews:
Jewish Nationalism—Part 3

■ Edda Fogarollo

Historian | President | Christians for Israel Italy

Last edition, we looked at the beginnings of Jewish immigration to what was then called Palestine, driven by rising antisemitism in 19th-century Europe. Settlements were established in remote areas, but this did not yet lay the foundations for a national state. Zionism—the longing for a state of their own—was still waiting for a leader.

In Western Europe during the 19th century, as previously mentioned, Jewish communities lived in a rather privileged way. They enjoyed equal rights in Germany, in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in Italy, in Switzerland and in Scandinavia. In 1858, the first Jew was elected to the British House of Commons and some others filled government posts in France, the Netherlands, Italian and German states. Benjamin Disraeli became Prime Minister in Great Britain. As the dream of assimilation came true in the West, the gap with the Jews of Eastern Europe grew wider as they failed to benefit from the French Revolution or Napoleonic campaigns.

It was Theodor Herzl who turned the Zionist dream into a nationalist movement that rekindled hope for a Jewish homeland.

Zionism did not reflect nationalism and the various nationalist movements, but has been unique in the history of nations: the emancipated and well-assimilated Jews of Western Europe intended to mitigate the difficult conditions of the Jewish people in Eastern Europe through large-scale immigration to Palestine, making it public and giving it political vigour. The uniqueness of Zionism is also evident for its origin: it emerged from a dispersed and variegated people who, apart from religion, had nothing in common. It was Theodor Herzl who, thanks to his personality and overwhelming energy, succeeded in turning the Zionist dream into a coherent nationalist movement that included all the different philanthropic, humanitarian, religious and political tendencies necessary to rekindle the hope of a Jewish homeland. He managed to build a bridge over Western and Eastern Judaism, gave the Zionist association precise directions and achieved responsibility and credibility from the rest of the world watching this movement.

Theodor Herzl and the Zionist Movement

Born into a wealthy family in Budapest,

Herzl (1860-1904) moved to Vienna in 1878 to study law. He was well respected by Viennese society and did not represent the typical stereotype of a Jewish businessman or investor in European stock exchanges, or the poor Jew escaping from the Russian pogroms. He was indifferent towards many of the problems that affected his people. He loved theatre and composed some works that never achieved great success. But he wasn't to know that his life was itself about to take centre-stage in the world's political theatre.

His commitment to the Zionist movement started in Paris where he worked as a correspondent for the Viennese newspaper *Neue Freie Presse*. He was sent to write an article about the case of the artillery captain of the French army, Alfred Dreyfus, of Jewish origin, who was unjustly accused of espionage and publicly degraded. From the notes that Herzl regularly wrote in his diary, it appears that it was the dramatic events in France that aroused his awareness of the antisemitism that was reaching a crescendo in Western Europe. Books had been published with



Leader of the Zionist movement Theodor Herzl.
| Photo: Public Domain

attending certain hotels. In Russia and Romania, some of us are put to death. In Austria and Germany, antisemitism has a major impact on public life. And in Algeria there are travelling antisemitic agitators."

Herzl understood that antisemitism developed from Jewish emancipation and that undoing it would mean going against the mentality of the time. However, the Jews' social mobility and economic situation only increased hatred towards them. "The consequence is inevitable: We are one people—our enemies have made us one without our consent. Let sovereignty be granted us over a portion of the globe large enough to satisfy the rightful requirements of a nation; the rest we shall manage for ourselves."

Herzl's Proposal for a Jewish State

Herzl's great plan was simple and comprehensible to everyone, 3,000 copies of his book were published and it spread all over Europe, drawing the attention of both Jews and antisemites. In the five chapters of *Der Judenstaat*, he clearly and deliberately tackled the needs of a people.

With regard to the place where the state should be founded, Herzl left the yet-to-be-formed political body 'Society of Jews' free to decide. A very attractive place—for its wide and open spaces and mild temperatures—was Argentina, where some Jews had already purchased land. On the other hand, Palestine "is our ever-memorable historic home", declared Herzl. The name Palestine was a powerful call and, as Herzl believed, if the Sultan gave the land to the Jews, they could create a defensive bastion of Europe in Asia.

the aim of uniting European people under a common hatred towards Jews and, for the first time in Europe, the German city of Dresden hosted an antisemitic conference. Herzl duly understood what was happening and set out on a mission to save a humiliated people—the Jewish people to whom he also belonged. He immediately composed his work *Der Judenstaat* ('The Jewish State') published in Vienna in 1896 in which he clearly stated his objective of developing an old idea: restoring the Jewish state. The basis of his work was founded on his faith in the strength of his people and the fact that the world needed a Jewish state, one of the reasons why it was finally established. He claimed that the Jewish question was not primarily social or religious, but national—and, as such, should be treated as part of international politics.

Studying Antisemitism

By examining antisemitism, Herzl declared: "No-one can deny the gravity of the Jews' situation. Wherever they live in perceptible numbers, they are more or less persecuted. Also in parliaments, we are attacked by politicians and even barred from

Myth: 'Israel Occupies East Jerusalem'

■ Bryce Turner

Executive Director | Christians for Israel New Zealand

Faced with a barrage of misinformation, distortions, and blatant lies, supporters of Israel are constantly challenged to defend their position. We continue addressing this issue, bringing information and resources to combat these myths. Oscar Lohuis of the Netherlands has written specifically on this topic, and we thank him for permission to use his work in this section.

Myth: 'Israel occupies East Jerusalem'

In 1000 BC, King David captured the city from the Jebusites. It was, in fact, more of a palace coup, as David did not kill the Jebusites, but instead incorporated them into his court and army. Thus, as early as three thousand years ago, Jerusalem became the capital of Israel. It remained so until 70AD, when the Romans destroyed the city. Jerusalem has never served as the capital of any sovereign nation other than Israel. Even after 70AD, for the Jews in the diaspora, Jerusalem remained their capital and the deepest longing of their hearts. The descendants of Israel have always continued to say at their celebrations: "Next year in Jerusalem", and in every synagogue around the world, they have continued to pray facing Jerusalem.

East Jerusalem Occupied by Jordan

In Jerusalem's three-thousand-year-old history as the capital of Israel, the city was divided into a western and an eastern part for nineteen years, from 1948 to 1967. This division occurred when, in 1948 the country of Jordan captured the heartland of Israel (later referred to as the West Bank) and East Jerusalem. This happened during the War of Independence, which broke out after the State of Israel was declared on 14 May 1948. East Jerusalem was subsequently occupied by Jordan. As a result, all Jews were forced to flee or were killed. Due to this occupation, Jews were no longer allowed to pray at the Western Wall (also known as the Wailing Wall), or visit the ancient tombs of their ancestors on the Mount of Olives. Until then, Jews had lived in East Jerusalem, including the Old City, and the Siloam neighbourhood (the original City of David), and had always been able to access these holy sites. From 1948, the Jordanians began destroying the entire Jewish quarter in the Old City of Jerusalem, including the centuries old Hurva Synagogue and dozens of other synagogues. Some of the remaining synagogues were repurposed as stables, chicken coops, or even toilets. Of the 50,000 Jewish tombstones on the Mount of Olives, 38,000 were removed or destroyed. The reason the current Jewish Quarter in the Old City appears so new, compared to other areas in the Old City, is that it had to be completely rebuilt after 1967, following the destruction during the Jordanian occupation.

No Occupation

The resettlement of Jews after 1967 in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City, in East Jerusalem or in the neighbourhoods like Siloam (or Silwan) cannot be regarded as a form of occupation or colonisation. In 1948, all Jews were expelled from these areas, and their homes were taken over by Arabs. When, after 1967, Jews asked those residents to leave, this was not an act of confiscation or theft, but rather a reclaiming of property that had originally belonged to them. The ability of Jews to once again pray at the Western Wall is not something new, nor the result of dispossessing others. It represents a return to a historical norm that

existed for centuries, even millennia. Photographs from the early 20th century showing Jews praying at the Western Wall testify to this longstanding tradition. What is new, however, is that the State of Israel now has sovereignty over all of Jerusalem, including the eastern part, the Old City, and even the Temple Mount. This was not the case prior to 1948, and only partially true from 1948 to 1967. So, in terms of governance, the shift has been from Ottoman (Turkish) control, to British, to Jordanian, and now to Israeli control. In this context, the change is not about replacing Palestinians or Arabs with Israelis. The region known as Israel/Palestine was not Arab, and (East) Jerusalem did not belong to the Arabs.

The Green Line is Not a Border

The 'border' between so-called East Jerusalem and West Jerusalem has never been a true (international) border. What was agreed upon in 1949 was an armistice line—the so-called Green Line—but an armistice line is not a recognised border. When Israel gained control of the entire city of Jerusalem during the Six-Day War in 1967, that armistice line effectively ceased to exist. In that conflict, Israel drove out the Jordanians from the eastern part of Jerusalem. Jordan had no legitimate claim to the West Bank or East Jerusalem, not even under international law. The fact that Jordan did not establish a Palestinian state in the West Bank during the 19 years it controlled the area is also revealing. It shows that the Arabs were not focused on establishing a Palestinian state alongside Israel, but rather on the destruction of Israel itself, a goal that has continued to define the Palestinian leadership's agenda since that time.

The People of Jerusalem

Who has the right to the city of Jerusalem? This is a question that can be viewed and answered from many different perspectives. As Christians, we believe that the Bible is the Word of God, and in it we read clearly about Israel's history in Jerusalem and God's past, present, and future plans for this city. We believe it is the 'City of the Great King', and therefore belongs to the people of this King, Israel.

But let us also consider the question from a different angle: the demographic composition of Jerusalem over the past few centuries. If we broadly categorise the population into Jews, Christians, and Muslims, the historical figures are as follows:

- Around the year 1700, Jerusalem had only about 5000 inhabitants, mostly Jews, with some Christians. Under Ottoman rule, Jerusalem remained poor and somewhat isolated.
- In 1844, before the rise of Zionism, the city had 15,510 inhabitants. Of these, 7,120 were Jews (46%), nearly half. The rest were Christians and Muslims.
- In 1847, Dr John Kitto wrote: "Although we usually regard Jerusalem as a Muslim city, not more than one-third of the population consists of Muslims."
- By 1870, Jerusalem's population had grown to 22,000, with 11,000 were Jews (50%), 6,500 Muslims and 4,500 Christians.
- In 1890, the city had 40,000 residents, including 25,000 Jews—62% of the population.
- In 1905, out of 60,000 inhabitants, 40,000 were Jews (66%).
- In 1917, the population was 60,500: 32,000 Jews (53%), 13,500 Muslims, and 15,000 Christians.
- In 1948, the city had 149,000 residents: 84,000 Jews (56%), 40,000 Muslims and 25,000 Christians.



Jews in front of the Western Wall in the 1900s, Jerusalem.
| Photo: The Library of Congress

Even when Jordan occupied East Jerusalem, Jews remained the largest demographic group in the city.

- In 1967, Jerusalem had 263,300 inhabitants, including 195,700 Jews (74%).
- By 1976, the population reached 365,000, with 260,000 Jews, (71%).
- In 2024, Jerusalem has grown to nearly one million residents, approximately 65% being Jewish.

The idea that the Jewish State of Israel is 'occupying' Jerusalem because it is primarily an Arab or Muslim city is clearly refuted by these demographic figures. No other people on earth has a longer-standing historical and cultural connection to the land of Israel and the city of Jerusalem than the Jewish people. Despite the centuries-long dispersion of most Jews around the world, Jerusalem has remained a city with a predominantly Jewish population for centuries.

The Knesset is Also Good for Arabs

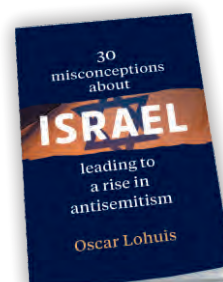
When Israel took full control of Jerusalem in 1967, it did not expel Muslims or destroy mosques. Israel has consistently demonstrated a far more humane and inclusive approach than many of the countries or Palestinian organisations that harbour hostility toward it.

It is therefore not surprising that a recent survey conducted by a Palestinian organisation(!) indicates that 93% of Arab residents of Jerusalem prefer Israeli rule over Palestinian rule. Today, many Jews and Arabs live side by side in Jerusalem in peace, a coexistence that stands in stark contrast to cities and villages in the Palestinian-controlled territories, where all Jews have been expelled.

Conclusion

Turkey, Britain and Jordan have no rightful claim to East Jerusalem. For centuries, the Jews have been the largest population group in the city. Under Israeli governance, all residents of Jerusalem enjoy greater stability and quality of life than those living in the Arab countries or the current Palestinian territories. The incorporation of East Jerusalem into Israel in 1967 should not be seen as an act of occupation.

Find Oscar Lohuis' book on Amazon:
<https://www.amazon.it/-/en/Oscar-Lohuis/dp/9082000369>





First Home in the Homeland Update

Support and Friendship will Overcome Everything



Olim from kibbutz Revivim with their first Hebrew books. | Photos: First Home in the Homeland

Over the past months, uncertainty became a constant companion for many of our participants, and bomb shelters briefly turned into the places where people gathered more often than around a festive table. Yet even in those challenging moments, something remarkable happened: our community’s spirit grew stronger, day by day.

Our programme coordinators stayed in close contact with every participant, doing everything possible to maintain a sense of routine and stability. Against all odds, we succeeded in opening every planned *Ulpan* group (intensive Hebrew language course)—including online classes for those who were unable to reach Israel due to flight cancellations. It

mattered deeply to us not to delay the process even though they could come to Israel, but to support them, encourage them, and help them begin building a meaningful connection with Israel from afar.

Dedication and Community

Those who were already in Israel showed extraordinary dedication. Some even brought their textbooks with them into the shelters when the sirens sounded. Their determination to learn, grow, and move forward became a source of inspiration for all of us.

As always, First Home in the Homeland is not only about studying. It is also about creating a home, building a community, and sharing experiences together. Also during difficult days, participants found ways to uplift one another. In Kibbutz Merhavia and Hinnanit, for example, participants organised activity stations inside the shelter—playing guitar, crafting with

children, and creating moments of joy and calm for everyone.

New Families

Among the new families were Katya and Kirill from Ukraine arrived in Afula and, thanks to Koen Carlier, joined our programme in Kibbutz Mashabei Sadeh. They received a heartfelt welcome, found temporary jobs, and began studying Hebrew online almost immediately. “We managed quite well,” Katya shared. “Our heads were spinning from the studies, but thank God, we began to succeed. We are grateful for your support. In a city it would have been much harder for us. We felt safe.”

Another Ukrainian family—Gennadiy, Yana, and their son—joined us in Hinnanit at the end of February. They, too, quickly found comfort and belonging. “Both adults and children felt safe here. Our son made new friends quickly. We had excellent coordinators and were surrounded by very good and kind people.”

Acts of Kindness

Throughout this period, we witnessed countless acts of kindness. Children created crafts together, adults exercised and studied side by side, and coordinators opened their homes for tea, conversation, and reassurance.

Today, it feels especially important to stay connected with you—our partners, supporters, and friends. Your generosity made it possible for us to continue our mission even in the most uncertain times. You helped ensure that every participant felt seen, supported, and safe.

Life goes on. Am Israel Chai!



Activity stations in the bomb shelter, Merhavia



Katya and Kirill in their First Home in Israel.

