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Understanding Israel and world events from a Biblical perspective

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People light candles in memory of the victims of the mass shooting attack in Sydney in Tel Aviv. | Photo: Erik Marmor/Flash90

Massacre at Bondi—Islamism in Action

On 14 December, two Islamic gunmen attacked a *Hanukkah* festival at Bondi Beach in Sydney, Australia. Two armed assailants opened fire during a large '*Hanukkah by the Sea*' celebration marking the first night of *Hanukkah*, killing at least 16 people and wounding 40, including two police officers, according to local authorities.

The Bondi Beach massacre is what 'globalising the intifada' looks like. It is a warning to all Western governments that fail to confront the spread of Islamist ideologies in their populations.

Not all Muslims are Islamists. In fact, Muslims are amongst the most outspoken opponents of Islamist extremism. One of the most articulate and powerful

responses to the Bondi massacre was by the Global Imams Council, which clearly stated, "when Islamist hatred is normalised, incitement excused and extremists are tolerated under cover of politics, slogans and cowardly silence, violence is inevitable. What begins as chants and threats inevitably ends in blood."

But there can be no denying the connection between Islamist extremism and the wave of verbal and physical violence against Jews since 7 October 2023.

Former Australian treasurer Josh Frydenberg said Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has 'personal responsibility' for Sunday's terror attack, blasting the premier's lack of accountability for rising antisemitism and accusing him of 'abandoning' the

Jewish community. Frydenberg, who is Jewish and served in the Liberal-led government as treasurer and deputy leader from 2018 to 2022, blamed Albanese for the 'all too predictable' massacre of Australia's Jewish community.

"We need answers, we need solutions, we need action," he asserted, taking issue with Albanese's vow to enact stricter gun control laws in the wake of the shooting, saying that "guns may have stolen the life of 15 innocent civilians, but it was radical Islamist ideology that pulled the trigger. Prime minister, you have failed us. Your government has failed us," he concluded. "If you don't want to do the job, give it to somebody who will."



Home at Last



The Origin of *Jihad*



A People Among the Nations



The Ongoing War in Ukraine



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

Colophon

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Mission

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

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Australian Jews: Hurt But Resilient

■ Andrew Tucker

International Editor | Christians for Israel

On a recent visit to Melbourne I met with several Jewish leaders. I wanted to hear how the Jewish community is coping following the recent Bondi Beach massacre. I also wanted to express the support and solidarity of Christians across the nation and around the world.

Rabbi Glasman, President of the Rabbinical Association of Australasia, welcomed me to St Kilda Hebrew Congregation. A visit to his beautiful *shule* brings to life the fact that many Jews have played an important role in the development of Australian public life over the two centuries. Photos lining the walls include such luminaries as Sir John Monash and former Governor-General Sir Zelman Cowen. Many members of the *shule* served in the Australian Defence Forces in WWI and WWII (proportionally more Jews served in the army than any other group).

Since the commencement of the protests following 7 October, there has been a series of violent attacks on Jewish leaders and synagogues. The Jewish community has repeatedly warned that unless action was taken, something even more violent would happen.

From my conversation with Rabbi Glasman and other Jewish leaders, I observed that the Australian Jewish community now feels not only physically unsafe (like most Western countries, synagogues and other Jewish places of worship in Australia have heightened security), but deeply abandoned and rejected. Many Jews feel the government did not do enough to prevent the anti-Israel and anti-Jewish rhetoric that erupted after 7 October 2023.



Andrew Tucker with Rabbi Glasman of St Kilda Hebrew Congregation, Melbourne, Australia. | Photo: C4I

Over the past two years, Prime Minister Albanese has given no indication that he understood the magnitude of the problem. His silence was apparently perceived as an implicit licence to the hatred.

Many Jews in Australia feel unsafe as a community, and abandoned by the government. An increasing number of Australian Jews are contemplating making *Aliyah* to Israel.

On the other hand, I was assured that the Jewish community has become even more unified and resilient. They were greatly encouraged by strong support from many Christian leaders.

But Bondi shows there is a deep problem in Australia. It is manifested by a growing hatred of the Jews in certain parts of society, coupled with indifference in the population generally plus an appalling lack of moral political leadership. The root cause of this problem seems to be a combination of Islamist extremism, which is a more recent phenomenon, and secular/humanist anti-Western hatred of

Israel. The latter has increasingly become mainstream in Australian society since the 1970s—to the point that even the government is deaf and blind to understand what is happening.

The history of antisemitism tells us that, unless it is vigorously addressed, verbal violence against the Jewish people in the public square inevitably results in physical violence against individual Jews. Antisemitism is not just a 'Jewish' problem—violence often starts with the Jews, but it never ends there. Antisemitism is a disease that ultimately infects and destroys our society as a whole.

After much hesitation the federal government has finally established a Royal Commission to investigate the root causes of the antisemitism that drove the Bondi massacre. It remains to be seen whether this commission will be able to adequately get the heart of the matter.

The deep wound caused by the last two years will take a long time to heal—if ever.

Prayer Points

Israel and the Nations

- There are regular reports in the media about organisations wanting to boycott Israel, such as universities that no longer want to collaborate with Israeli universities. Pray that people within these organisations will stand up for Israel and pray that wrong decisions will be reversed.
- "He has helped His servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and His descendants forever just as He promised our ancestors." (Luke 1:54-55). Pray that Christians worldwide will increasingly recognise and honour Israel's place within God's redemptive plan as revealed in the gospel. Pray that believers will remember that Jesus was born a Jew, and that His earthly ministry was rooted in bringing salvation first to the Jewish people, and through them to the nations.
- Developments in Iran are being closely watched in Israel. Pray that a government will come to power in Iran that seeks peace rather than hostility against Israel.

Israel

- Pray for Israel's recovery following the Hamas attack of 7 October and the ongoing war. Pray for healing

from physical injuries and from the deep emotional wounds. Pray for comfort and consolation for all who mourn the loss of loved ones.

- Give thanks for signs of hope emerging from Israel, including groundbreaking innovations in medicine, agriculture, and other fields that bring blessing not only to Israel but to the world. Give thanks also for hearts turning toward God—both those seeking Him for the first time and those returning to Him.
- Pray for unity among the people of Israel in this time of strain and uncertainty. Pray for healing of divisions and mutual distrust between right-wing and left-wing political leaders. Pray also for peace and understanding amid social unrest, particularly surrounding demonstrations by members of the Orthodox community against compulsory military service.

Christians for Israel

- Pray for a blessing on the activities that Christians for Israel hopes to organise in the coming period. Pray that these activities will foster meaningful encounters and mutual encouragement.

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

Home at Last



The funeral of police special forces officer Ran Gvili, 28 January 2026. | Photo: Chaim Goldberg/Flash90

The Jewish Agency Leadership

With the return home of Ran Gvili, the last hostage from the Gaza Strip, a painful and deeply moving chapter in the history of the State of Israel and the Jewish people has come to an end. This is a moment of relief and comfort, but also a moment for quiet reflection.

Home is not just a physical place. It is knowing that someone is waiting for you, fighting for you, and refusing to give up on you. Ran's return home reminds us how precious this home is...

During this time, we learned something fundamental about ourselves as a people. We learned how to miss people we had never met, and how their absence created a void in our hearts. This longing and concern are not a given. They reflect the depth of our bond, our sense of shared responsibility, and the deep love this people has for one another.

Throughout this period, in the midst of the greatest crisis the State of Israel has faced since its founding, the word home took on a clearer and more powerful meaning. Home is not just a physical place. It is knowing that someone is waiting for you, fighting for you, and refusing to give up on you. Ran's return home reminds us how precious this home is, and how deeply committed we are to it and to everyone who lives within it.

This is a moment in which an especially significant chapter has closed, and at the same time a critical point for beginning the next chapter. A chapter of rebuilding, recovery, and healing for the State of Israel and for the Jewish people

everywhere. This is a time to remember what happened, those who gave so much, and the security forces who continue, even now, day after day, to make it possible for us to live in our land. It is thanks to them that all the hostages were able to return home.

At this moment, we want to say thank you to the Jewish people across the world and to our Christian friends who prayed

prayed, you struggled, and you did not give up. From great physical distance but deep closeness of heart, a powerful connection was formed, reminding us of the strength of a people and of friends, who stand together, even in the darkest moments.

Our hearts are with the Gvili family. With his mother, who said that Ran was the first to go out and fight and the last to return home. We embrace them in this painful moment and offer our deepest condolences as this difficult chapter comes to a close.

This moment reminds us who we are. A people who cares deeply for one another, full of resilience and hope. A people who, through this love, continues to endure, to rebuild, and to believe.

Through this shared bond, the people of Israel live— *Am Yisrael Chai*



Picture of Ran Gvili at Hostages Square in Tel Aviv. | Photo: Erik Marmor/Flash90

Short News

Ancient City Wall Discovered



A section of Jerusalem's city wall, built over 2,100 years ago during the Hasmonean era, has been uncovered by archaeologists. This section of the wall is known as the 'first wall' and is impressive in size—forty metres long and five metres wide. The wall was once over ten metres high, but today only its base remains. The excavations are taking place in the *Kishle* at the Tower of David Museum in Jerusalem's Old City. | Photo: Flash90

Unrest Grows in the West Bank

The Israeli army is warning of a growing terrorist threat in the West Bank (Judea and Samaria). According to military officials, weapons are being smuggled into the area with assistance from Iran, raising concerns about the potential for a large-scale attack similar to that of 7 October 2023. At the same time, the army emphasises the need to remain vigilant against smaller-scale threats, such as terrorist cells infiltrating homes and carrying out assaults or murders of civilians.

'Homecoming' Hebrew Word of the Year



Israelis have chosen *habaita*—Hebrew for 'homecoming' or 'homeward'—as the word of the year in a public vote marking Hebrew Language Day. The word resonated strongly after the return of all living hostages and all but one of the deceased, securing 25 per cent of the vote from 10 nominated words. Thousands took part in the survey organised by the Academy of the Hebrew Language. Hebrew Language Day is observed on the 21st of the Jewish month of Tevet, marking the birthday of Eliezer Ben-Yehuda (1858–1922), the pioneer of modern spoken Hebrew. | Photo: Flash90

The Global Intifada

■ Melanie Philips

JNS

How many wake-up calls does anyone need?

The cliché that the Bondi Beach *Hanukkah* massacre was just that is singularly inappropriate. Australia and the West have had one wake-up call after another. Since the Hamas-led attacks on Israel on 7 October 2023, Australian synagogues have been firebombed; as elsewhere, anti-Israel marches have regularly chanted for the mass murder of Jews; and on campus, Jewish students and academics have been harassed and intimidated.

The significance of all this has been ignored by Western governments, which have stuck their heads ever more deeply into the sand. But now the attacks have gone into overdrive.

In Britain on *Yom Kippur*, two Jews were killed in an Islamist attack on a synagogue. Early December 2025, two Iowa National Guard soldiers and a US interpreter were killed and three were wounded by an ISIS terrorist in Syria's security forces, an assailant shouting antisemitic abuse fired about 20 rounds into a private Jewish home in Redlands, California, which was decorated for *Hanukkah*, and *yeshivah* students were assaulted on the New York City subway when returning from a *Hanukkah* event. In another attack, a Jewish man was stabbed in the Crown Heights neighbourhood of Brooklyn, New York, by an attacker who declared: "It's OK if the Holocaust were to happen again."

Two students at Brown University were murdered in an attack on the economics class of a Brown University professor, who also teaches Jewish studies courses.

A Jewish professor of nuclear physics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology was shot dead inside his home; there are unconfirmed reports of Iranian involvement.

During a *Hanukkah* celebration in Amsterdam, dozens of violent anti-Israel protesters were arrested after police had to physically surround Jewish families to protect them. Islamic terror plots have been foiled at German and Polish Christmas markets.

In other words, this is a global *intifada*. For Diaspora Jews, it's an emergency. But it's also a last warning for the West to take Islamic extremism much more seriously as a danger to everyone.

This has developed into a global crisis because of a climate of impunity. For more than two years now, the streets have been colonised by demonstrators screaming for the murder of Jews and *jihad* against the West. This has all been largely shrugged aside as 'free speech.'



Pro-Palestinian activists Washington, DC, March 2025 | Photo: Shutterstock

On the very day of the massacre on Bondi Beach, where 15 people were murdered and three times that many were wounded, demonstrators marched in the British Midlands city of Birmingham behind a banner reading "Brum [Birmingham] says one solution, *intifada* revolution."

The 7 Oct. attacks acted as a galvanic signal to the Islamists that they were now within sight of a final victory over Israel and the West. The way in which the West's political and intellectual elites bought into their defamatory and obsessional lies about Israel, turning it into a pariah state for daring to defend itself against genocide and reacting with indifference to the escalating abuse of Jews, emboldened and incentivised them to ramp up their intimidation and attacks.

Too few realise that for the Islamists, the destruction of the Jews, who they understand to be central to Western civilisation, is the necessary precondition for its destruction.

From Sayed Qutb, the early-20th-century Islamic theorist who inspired modern extremist Islam, to Osama bin Laden and the Hamas Charter, Islamic *jihadis* have said that their war is against modernity, which is a bacillus carried by the West. And behind both modernity and the West are the Jews.

It's important to acknowledge the many Muslims who have no truck at all with Islamic extremism. The hero of Bondi Beach, who tackled the 50-year-old man who perpetrated the attack along with his 24-year-old son, and disarmed him with his bare hands, is reportedly a Muslim of Syrian origin.

Nevertheless, the vast majority of global terror attacks are committed in the name of Islam. The history of Islam as a religion of war tells us that today's terrorism is not an aberration by a handful of extremists.

Following the Bondi Beach massacre, there has been a chorus of imams declaring that this attack was inimical to Islamic teaching.

But that isn't true. Islamist extremism—or the spreading of Islamic precepts by violence to the rest of the world—is founded in texts and precepts upheld by all Islamic authorities. Warlike Quranic verses, including calls to kill unbelievers and hate Jews, are seen as overriding more pacific passages.

True, many Muslims don't interpret their religion in this way. Many simply ignore its religious precepts.

Still, no Islamic authorities have repudiated these warlike texts. And there's no shortage of imams in Britain, Australia and America preaching hatred and murder against Jews and the West with no pushback from either state or Islamic authorities.

In Australia, an Islamic scholar, Wissam ('Abu Ousayd') Hadad, preached in November 2023 that the Jews were 'rats' and 'cowards' who controlled the media and the banks, and who needed war to continue in order to make money.

In Britain, imams have been documented referring to Israel as a 'rapist' who suffered only a 'scratch in his face' in the 7 Oct. attacks; praying for victory over the 'cursed' Jews and infidels, stating, "Scatter them and rip their groups apart, and destroy their houses and homes, bring them down and punish them like you do criminals;" and preaching that it was 'obligatory' for Muslim leaders to support *jihad* and praising Hamas as 'heroes.'

In the Islamic Center of Kansas, an imam reportedly proclaimed that "Gaza has begun a new page of *Jihad* and sacrifice and then prayed for the destruction of the 'criminal Zionists.'

Are all these imams contravening Islamic teaching? Hardly.

Following the atrocity in Australia, US President Donald Trump said: "All nations must stand together against the evil forces of radical Islamic terrorism, and we're doing that." Britain's Conservative Party leader, Kemi Badenoch, has spoken up with refreshing bluntness by stating that Islamic extremism is incompatible with Western democracy.

This may appear to be a statement of the blindingly obvious. But the problem is that very few other Western leaders have explicitly called out this problem for what it is. And none of them has taken the action necessary to tackle it.

Trump has made a start by deporting extremists. But Washington could do much more. And the governments of Britain, Australia and Canada have combined extreme hostility towards Israel with a refusal even to identify Islamic extremism as an acute problem, let alone take the measures necessary to deal with it.

A responsible government should root out extremist imams, prosecute or deport them, and ban the Muslim Brotherhood, its affiliates, and Iran's Revolutionary Guard. It is intolerable that these subversive or terror-promoting groups should be operating with impunity in the West.

In addition, any responsible and civilised government should be calling out the defamatory lies about Israel as the tissue of falsehoods that they are and as a weapon of war to destroy Israel through delegitimisation.

Yet the British, Australian and Canadian governments have themselves been promoting these lies, thus fanning the flames of murderous Islamist hysteria about Israel and Jews.

The Jewish world should be likewise calling out those in its own community who unwittingly lend their support to the Islamist onslaught.

The danger to Jews is not only physical. We are seeing an all-out onslaught on Israel and Judaism by anti-Israel obsessives, inside and outside the Jewish community, trying to set Judaism against Zionism.

Since Judaism constitutes the inseparable fusion of the people, the faith and the land, setting it against Zionism—the right of the Jews to self-determination—is an attempt to rip out Judaism's very soul.

If the struggle to stamp out antisemitism is to mean anything more than hollow platitudes, then it must consist of zero tolerance for Islamic extremism—and zero tolerance for the delegitimisation of the world's only Jewish state.

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No Turkish or Qatari Troops

■ JNS

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said that there would be no Turkish or Qatari troops deployed to Gaza as part of Phase Two of the Trump administration's Mideast peace plan.

Speaking at a Knesset debate on 'violence and crime in the Arab sector' within Israel, Netanyahu acknowledged the dispute between his government and the Trump administration over the post-war management of Gaza.

"... Hamas will be disarmed, and Gaza will be demilitarised."

"We have a certain argument with our friends in the United States over the composition of the executive board that will oversee the processes in Gaza," he said. "In the Gaza Strip, we stand before the second phase of the Trump plan. The second phase says a simple thing: Hamas will be disarmed, and Gaza will be demilitarised," said Netanyahu. "We are adhering to these objectives, and they will be achieved. Either the easy way or the hard way. Turkish soldiers or Qatari

soldiers will not be in the Gaza Strip."

The Israeli prime minister has openly disagreed with US President Donald Trump in recent days over appointments to committees intended to directly and indirectly govern Gaza, post-Hamas.

"The announcement regarding the composition of the Gaza executive board, which is subordinate to the Board of Peace, was not coordinated with Israel and runs contrary to its policy," the prime minister's office stated mid-January.

One of the core disputes appears to be the role that Qatar and Turkey, both of which have taken strongly anti-Israel positions and host Hamas officials in their countries, will play in governing the Palestinian enclave.

'Control Architecture' That Centralises Power

On 16 January, the Trump administration named Turkish and Qatari officials to sit on the Gaza executive board, including Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan, alongside Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and former senior adviser; former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair; and Steve Witkoff, US special envoy to the Middle East.

The only Israeli on the panel is Yakir

Gabay, a Cypriot-Israeli businessman.

The executive committee will manage the National Committee for the Administration of Gaza, a group of Palestinian technocrats who will oversee the coastal enclave, which took its first official act in signing its mission statement on 17 January.

Both the executive board and the national committee will be overseen by the Board of Peace, chaired by Trump, which has come under fire in recent days over reports that permanent seats on the board can be bought for \$1 billion and that invitees to the board include Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"Trump's 'Board of Peace', scheduled to be rolled out in Davos, is not 'peace architecture.' It's 'control architecture' that centralises power, dilutes legitimacy and makes a long-term sustainable peace harder," wrote Hady Amr, former US special representative for Palestinian affairs during the Biden administration. "Exempting big contributors from term limits makes membership look purchasable. Even if 'voluntary,' it screams transactional influence and corrodes credibility."

This article was published by JNS on 19 January 2026. Republished with permission.

Short News

Mapping Israel's Anemones



A citizen science project is updating Israel's anemone map for the first time since 2019, showing how climate, rainfall, and soil influence the colours and flowering times of the country's iconic flower. The survey explains why northern and central Israel host anemones in a variety of colors, while the Negev in the south features mostly red blooms. The study, based on hundreds of observations, charts the geographic distribution and flowering periods of different anemone colors across the country. Israel's most beloved flower grows from Mount Hermon to the desert, appearing not only in red but also in white, pink, purple, and even blue, depending on the region. | Photo: Flash90.

Isaac Agreements

Israel is strengthening its diplomatic and economic ties with countries in Latin America through the so-called Isaac Agreements. This initiative is designed to promote political, economic, and cultural cooperation between Israel and the governments of Latin America. The agreements were launched in early December by Argentine President Milei. Other countries involved in the first phase of these agreements include Uruguay, Panama, and Costa Rica. Projects in the fields of technology, security, and economic development are already taking shape within this new cooperation. Costa Rica and Israel have already signed a free trade agreement for goods, services, and investments.

Israel's No. 1 Hospital

Hadassah Medical Organisation has been named Israel's No.1 hospital for scientific output by 'Nature Index' which tracks primary research articles in health and science journals from October 2024 to September 2025, placed Hadassah at the top among Israeli hospitals and ranked it 179th worldwide. The hospital led in publications across clinical sciences, oncology and carcinogenesis, microbiology, genetics, cardiovascular medicine, and hematology, highlighting its strength in cutting-edge medical research and innovation.

Strike on Khamenei 'Equals All-Out War'

■ JNS

Iran's president has warned that a strike on Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei is the equivalent of an "all-out war" against the country, while blaming the United States and its allies for the "hardship and difficulties" facing citizens of the Islamic Republic.

His comments came a day after US President Donald Trump called for "new leadership in Iran."

The US president in recent statements has urged demonstrators to "keep protesting" and threatened military action if the regime's security forces use lethal force against them.

US Buildup, Israel on Alert

Israel's *Channel 12* reported on 18 January that Israel's defense establishment believes an American attack on Iran remains a realistic option as the United States accelerates its military buildup in the Middle East. US aerial and naval forces are expected to complete preparations within days, giving Washington the capability to carry out a large-scale strike.

The Israel Defense Forces has raised its alert level accordingly, while Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu convened a security consultation with

senior ministers and defense officials to assess possible scenarios.

Khamenei Admits "Several Thousand" Killed

Khamenei publicly acknowledged that "several thousand" people were killed in the nationwide protests that began on 28 December, while attributing the deaths and damage to "those linked to Israel and the US," as quoted by Iranian state media.

"We consider the US president criminal for the casualties, damages and slander he inflicted on the Iranian nation," Khamenei continued. Estimates of the number of protesters murdered by the regime's forces range from a few thousand to the tens of thousands, with the full picture of the casualties difficult to determine amid a government-imposed internet shutdown that began on 8 January.

State TV Hack Boosts Opposition Messages

Iranian state television broadcasts were briefly hacked on Sunday 19 January to display opposition messages and footage of protests against the regime, including speeches by exiled Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi urging security forces to "join the

nation for the freedom of Iran."

The London-based channel *Iran International* reported that the hack, seen by viewers receiving broadcasts via the Badr satellite, came amid the ongoing internet blackout.

The largest protests since 1979 have spread across Iran, with demonstrators filling the streets of Tehran, Mashhad and other cities across all 31 provinces. The nationwide unrest was triggered by soaring inflation and the collapse of the rial, which has plunged to about 1.46 million to the dollar. What began as anger over prices and a sinking currency has widened into open calls to end clerical rule, with strikes shuttering markets and businesses in commercial hubs.

The unrest comes as Iran's leadership grapples with long-running US sanctions and the UN 'snapback' that restored nuclear-related measures, alongside mounting strains on the country's water and energy systems. Israeli and US strikes on Iranian nuclear and energy facilities in June 2025 caused significant damage and have further complicated Tehran's already fragile energy landscape.

The Origin of *Jihad*

■ Bat Ye'or

Islam is a religion revealed in Arabic by an Arabian prophet, Muhammad, in seventh-century Arabia. While drawing its core ethics from the two biblical religions, it also absorbed local cultural elements shaped by the region's nomadic and semi-sedentary tribes of the *Hijaz*. These tribes formed the militant core of the early Islamic community, driving its expansion through war.

In the space of a century the Islamised Arabs, originating from the world's most arid regions, had conquered the most powerful empires and had subjugated peoples who had created prestigious civilisations.

The *jihad* (the holy war against non-Muslims) linked the mores of great warlike nomadism with the conditions of the existence of Muhammad in Yathrib (Medina) where he emigrated in 622, fleeing the persecutions of the pagan Meccans. Lacking means of subsistence, the small emigrant Muslim community lived at the expense of the new converts in Medina, the *Ansar*. As this situation could not last, the Prophet organised armed incursions to intercept the caravans which traded with Mecca. Interpreter of the will of *Allah*, Muhammad combined the political power of a military leader, the religious power and the functions of a judge: “*Whosoever obeys the Messenger, thereby obeys God*” (*Koran* 4:82).

Revelations tied to these raids legitimised Muslim claims to the lives and property of pagan enemies. Quranic verses sanctified the conduct of battle, the division of spoils, and the treatment of the defeated. Over time, relations with non-Muslims were shaped by the ambushes, battles, stratagems, and truces that constituted holy war and enabled Islam's expansion. The policy the Arab prophet adopted toward the Jews of Medina and the Jews and Christians of the oasis of the *Hijaz* determined his successors' policy towards the native Jewish and Christian



| Photo: Shutterstock

inhabitants of territories conquered subsequently. The Jews of Medina were either plundered and expelled from the town (Banu Qaynuqa, Banu Nadhir, 624-25) or massacred, except for converts to *Islam* and women and children who were reduced to slavery (Banu Qurayza, 627). Since all these decisions were justified by *Allah's* revelations inscribed in the *Koran*, they became normative and obligatory in the strategy of the *jihad*. The possessions of the Jews of Medina constituted a booty to be shared between the Muslim fighters, a fifth of every seizure being reserved for the Prophet himself. In the case of the *Banu Nadhir*, Muhammad kept all the booty, which, having been taken without a fight, reverted in its entirety to the Prophet. According to verses in the *Koran* (59:6-8), he was entrusted with managing it for the benefit of the Muslim community, the *umma*. This was the origin of the *fay*, that is to say, the religious principle, laden with consequences for the future, whereby the collective property of the *umma* was constituted by the former property confiscated from the vanquished non-Muslims.

Muslim jurists subsequently derived the status of the tributaries from the treaty concluded between Muhammad and the Jews who farmed the *Khaybar* oasis. The tributaries are the Jews and Christians (referred to as ‘Peoples of the Book,’ the Bible) and the Persian *Zoroastrians*.

In this treaty, Muhammad allowed the Jews of *Khaybar* to remain in possession of their land as Muslim *fay* in exchange for half their harvests. They retained religion and possessions, but he could revoke the arrangement at any time.

The *umma* continued to grow and increased its wealth by raids on caravans and oases populated by Jews, Christians, or pagans in Arabia, and to the furthestmost Syro-Palestinian deserts (629-32). These agglomerations, situated to the north of Ayla (Eilat), in the Wadi Rumm and around Mu'ta, were surrounded by nomadic Arab tribes. When these tribes rallied to Muhammad, the settled populations, frightened by the *razzias*, preferred to deal with the Prophet on the basis of an agreed tribute. Utilising contemporary sources, Michael the Syrian later described these events:

“[Muhammad] began to assemble a band of his own and to organise ambushes in parts of Palestine, so that by bringing something back for them [the Arabs], he persuaded them to believe in him and to join him. As he had gone down [from Medina] and gone up several times without being harmed, had pillaged and had returned laden with booty, the thing [Muhammad's preaching] was confirmed for them by the love of possessions which led them to make a regular feature of going out to pillage... Soon his troops set about invading and pillaging several lands. [...] We showed earlier how, from the beginning of the empire of the Arabs, they went out to take prisoners, to pillage, steal, ambush, invade and destroy whole regions during all of Muhammad's life.”

By the Prophet's death in 632, most *Hijaz* tribes had embraced *Islam*, idolatry had ended in Arabia, and Jews and Christians were paying tribute. Abu Bakr, the Prophet's successor, crushed the Bedouin *rida*, enforcing *Islam* and *zakat*, then extended the *jihad* beyond Arabia. *Jihad* offered non-Muslims a choice: conversion or tribute; refusal meant battle. Arab idolaters faced death or conversion, while Jews, Christians, and *Zoroastrians* could secure life, worship, and property by paying tribute and accepting conquest terms.

In 640 the second *caliph*, Umar Ibn al-Khattab, drove the Jewish and Christian tributaries out of *Hijaz* by invoking the *dhimma* (contract) of *Khaybar*: the land belonged to *Allah* and his Envoy and the contract could be broken at the discretion of the *imam*, the religious and political leader of the *umma* and the interpreter of *Allah's* will. Umar also invoked the desire expressed by the Prophet on his deathbed: “Two religions should not co-exist within the Arabian peninsula.”

This article is an excerpt from Bat Ye'or, The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam—From Jihad to Dhimmitude (Seventh-Twentieth Century), Fairleigh Dickinson University Press (1996).

Abridged by the Managing Editor.

The *Jihad*: Dogma and Strategies

■ Bat Ye'or

The doctrine of *jihad* borrowed the practices of the *razzias* (invasions—ed.) perpetrated by the nomads but softened them with Quranic injunctions. Muslim jurists established a Quranic dogma that regulated the procedures and tactics of military operations during the conquests, as well as the treatment of conquered peoples and the fiscal system applicable to the conquered lands (*tithe*, *kharaj*, *fay*).

The aim of *jihad* is to subjugate the peoples of the world to the law of *Allah*, decreed by his prophet

Muhammad. Mankind is divided into two groups, Muslims and non-Muslims. The former compose the Islamic community, the *umma*, who own the territories of the *dar al-Islam* governed by Islamic law. Non-Muslims are *harbis*, inhabitants of the *dar al-harb*, the lands of war, so called because they are destined to come under Islamic jurisdiction, either by war (*harb*), or by the conversion of their inhabitants. According to the jurist Ibn Taimiya (fourteenth century), the property of non-Muslims must revert legitimately to the sole followers of the true religion (*Islam*). Consequently, the *jihad* is the means whereby

possessions considered illegally usurped by non-Muslims are restored to Muslims. That is why every act of war in the *dar al-harb* is legal and immune from censure.

As the *jihad* is a permanent war, it excludes the idea of peace but authorises temporary truces related to the political situation (*muhadana*). These truces must not last for more than ten years at most and can be unilaterally denounced by the *imam*, after notifying the adversary.

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The Roots of Modern Islamism

■ Bat Ye'or

The current rise of Islamism hardly represents a revolutionary ideological innovation, since Islamism is embedded in a permanent historical trend—the same trend which over the centuries has nourished and sustained the *jihad*—the conquests of new lands—and the dhimmitude of its indigenous inhabitants. Contained by European military superiority and sporadically controlled from the 19th century by the regenerative forces of modernisation, Islamic radicalism crystallised under the impact of political and social tensions which drew the people toward with religious leaders who radiated charisma and an aura of sanctity.

In the Egypt of the 1930s and in pre-Khomeinist Iran, Islamism served as a valve to channel into religion the popular discontent and the rebellion of white-collar workers, any other form of political opposition being forbidden. Modern Islamism—with its multiple and contradictory causes—reflects the violent tensions and disarray in eminently religious societies shattered by the West's intrusion. Its aim is the restoration of the *Koran* and the *shari'a* as the sole authority for jurisdiction and government in Muslim countries.

However, the return to a strict orthodoxy first necessitates a purification of Islamic society from foreign legislation—that is, from all legislation borrowed from the *dar al-harb*. In fact, the return of the land to the *dhimmi* peoples and the humiliation caused by military setbacks are attributed to these pernicious influences, responsible for the divine chastisements, punishing the community of *Allah*, presently governed by heretical rulers. Therefore, Islamism expresses primarily a rejection of the transformations introduced by exchanges with the civilisations of *dar al-harb* and refuses *dhimmi* sovereignties. This attitude is justified



A typical Middle Egyptian village (1910). | Photo: Wikimedia Commons

by the perception of the *dar al-harb* through demeaning stereotypes which neutralise its attractiveness—for example, materialism, colonialism, imperialism, Zionism, Great Satan, enemy of humanity.

In Iran, the *mullahs* fomented revolution against the pro-Western *Shah* by stirring up fanaticism in order to seize power. The misery and ignorance of the people were the leaven of an uprising which was controlled and guided by the clergy. The *Pahlav* dynasty (1925-79) that had attempted to modernise Iran since the 1920s was swept away by the Islamist tide. In Egypt, President Sadat endeavoured to win over the Islamist movement in order to control it from within and suppress it. However, political overtures to the *dar al-harb*—the West and Israel—inspired by a modernist vision of a society freed from the shackles of religion made him, like the *Pahlavis* and the *Khemalist* Turks, Islam's enemy.

Islamism, however, does not only represent rejection, for it bears within itself the people's sufferings and hopes.

Thus it is proclaimed as the means to the redemption of the *umma*, corrupted by the West. The Muslim peoples, it teaches, will regain their lost supremacy in our time if they adopt the institutions which were defined in the seventh century and which secured their power then. This power was founded on *jihad*, on the annexation of land, the spoils of victories, the pillage of conquered civilisations and the exploitation of an enormous source of slaves and manpower from Africa, Asia and Europe. Thus the rejection of the West, coupled with nostalgia for power based on war and conquests, helped to make Islamism the vehicle and mainstay of *jihad*.

The political programme of the Islamist trend is well known. It advocates a return to the *shari'a* in all Muslim states. The first step would enable the political and military command to be unified and bring back the *ghazi* mentality. It would then be possible to take these subsequent, ultimate steps: world conquest and the universal supremacy of Islamic law, the destruction of non-muslim civilizations, and the application

of the *dhimma* to the populations of the *dar al-Islam*, conquered and integrated into the *dar al-Islam*.

The Islamist trend justifies its ideology by the past, when the periods of Islam's glory were actually linked to the two great waves of Arab and Turkish conquests. It was neither in Arabia, exclusively peopled by the Arabs, nor in Mecca or Medina that Islamic civilisation glowed in the full blaze of its glory. Its radiance came from the lands of *dhimmitude*, in periods when the *dhimmi*s still formed majorities subject to the conquering Muslim minorities. Under the Arabs, it reached its apogee in the Christian East and in Spain. Similarly, it was not in their central Asian homeland that these *Seljuks* and Ottomans founded a prestigious empire, but in Anatolia and in the Balkans, through the subjection of its Christian Orthodox populations. Today, except in the oil-producing countries, the Muslim peoples are among the poorest in the world. They are just as fascinated by the wealth of Europe and America as were the erstwhile nomads of Arabia and Turkestan by the flourishing, civilised cities of the pre-Arab Orient and Byzantium.

The Islamist movement makes no secret of its intention to convert the West. Its propaganda, published in booklets sold in all European Islamic centres for the last 30 years, sets out its aims and the methods to achieve them. They include proselytism, conversion, marriage with local women and, above all, immigration. Remembering that Muslims always began as a minority in the conquered territories ('liberated', in Islamic terminology) before becoming a majority. The ideologists of this movement regard Islamic settlement in Europe, the United States, and elsewhere as a chance for Islam.

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In the context of temporary truces, the *jihad* governs the conditions of treaties with the *dar al-harb* and provides for an intermediate state of non-war or of vassality. Holy war, regarded by Islamic theologians as a pillar of the faith, obliges all Muslims to contribute according to their means—physically, financially, or through their words.

Jihad has been waged militarily, notably during the Arab expansions of the seventh and eighth centuries and later by Islamised Turks in Europe. The strategy of war provides for the destabilisation at the frontiers of the *dar al-harb* by irregular forces burn villages, take

hostages, or pillage and massacre in order to drive out the inhabitants and facilitate the army's advance by gradual territorial encroachment. The methods of dividing the booty are governed by Koranic revelations, one fifth reverting to the custodian of spiritual political authority (the *imam* or *caliph*).

Jihad can also be waged by peaceful means: proselytism, propaganda, and corruption which consists of gratuities 'to win over hearts' (*ta'lif al qulub*). The *harbi*, inhabitant of the lands of war, is an enemy who cannot venture without risk into the lands of Islam where, according to the dogma, any Muslim may shed his blood and seize his goods.

However, his safety can be ensured by the *aman*, a temporary protection which any Muslim of either sex can grant.

When a victory transforms some of the *dar al-harb* into *dar al-Islam*, its former inhabitants (*harbis*) become prisoners of war. The *imam* can, according to the circumstances of the conflict, condemn them to massacre, slavery, exile, or negotiate with their representatives and grant them a treaty of protection (*dhimma*), which confers on them the status of tributaries (*dhimmi*s).

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“The Fact That You Are Here Is Enough”

■ Leon Meijer

Executive Director | Christians for Israel
Netherlands

Twenty young people from twelve different nations, unfamiliar with one another travelled across Israel for almost three weeks, and through an intensive educational programme they came to better understand the many facets of Israel and its people.

The *Voices for Israel* programme—an initiative of Christians for Israel International in collaboration with the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs—aims to invest in young people so they can stand up for Israel and the Jewish people in their own countries, grounded in factual knowledge. It was a unique experience for all participants. Lorena (26) from Austria summarised the trip as follows: “It was such an incredible experience to travel through Israel with so many young people from different nations. One of my many highlights was Hannaton in the Galilee, where we met young Israelis who were preparing for military service during a special gap year.” Sifra (24) from The Netherlands: “I felt that God took us out of our bubble for a moment and showed us His land Himself. I now feel more confident when it comes to Israel and am deeply convinced that this is the right fight.”

“People often talk about a silent majority, but the time for silence is over.”

Daniel (25) from India had the feeling that he touched holy ground: “Walking through Jerusalem, I got the feeling that I was stepping into living Scripture—where faith feels tangible and the life of Jesus comes alive in a deeply personal way.” Back home in India he is encouraging young Christian Indians to take notice of Israel in the Bible: “Reading about Israel in the Bible is an invitation to see God’s redemptive story with reverence and wisdom, it strengthens faith and Christ-centered living in everyday life.”

Han (18) from Vietnam explains that she both learned from historical biblical ancient sites and from “incredible Israelis.” She gained a deep feeling for what is happening in Israel: “These experiences were not just a chance for me to explore and discover Israel, but they really showed me God’s mercy and faithfulness to the Jewish people and also the Gentiles. His everlasting love for His people has never been lost.”

Trust

During the trip, significant attention was given to topics such as geopolitics, history and identity, culture, the economy, faith, security, and everyday

reality, alongside countless encounters with Israelis. These included *Druze*, young (Jewish) immigrants, survivors of the 7 October 2023 massacre, young people preparing for military service, and ‘ordinary’ citizens in the local corner café. What stood out was the confidence many radiated about the future, despite the difficult situation Israel was—and continues to be—in.

Mica (20) from New Zealand reflected: “One of the many things I will forever remember is how resilient and benevolent the people of Israel are in the midst of constant attacks and extreme abuse from bordering countries as well as the international community. Israelis innovate, build, preserve, protect, create, and contribute not only for their own country, but on the international level as well. This will forever astound me.”

Lynn (25) from the Netherlands shared: “In both Kibbutz Be’eri and Kibbutz Kerem Shalom, survivors of the massacre showed us around. They have consciously chosen to rebuild their homes there, near the Gaza border. ‘This is our home; we will not be driven away,’ they said.”

Not Like Their Enemies

At the Lebanese border, Frederic (33) from Germany was impressed by the

harsh reality of war: “We saw destroyed villages on the Lebanese side, while Christian villages less than a kilometre away remained untouched.” This contrast showed how Israel acts in a highly differentiated manner, targeting only structures used for attacks while sparing civilian areas. “I realised that Israel’s military strategy is often about buying time rather than achieving lasting peace, while simultaneously investing in security, innovation, and the education of its young generation—unlike its enemies, who often invest their resources in destruction rather than renewal.”

Andras (25) from Hungary shared a similar insight: “During lectures at Reichmann University and a visit to ZAKA, I was struck not only by the deep knowledge of terrorism and antisemitism, but by the systematic and fair way atrocities are confronted. Again and again, I saw that Israelis do not descend to the level of their enemies, but instead put human life and truth first.”

Comfort

Since 7 October 2023, Israel has become increasingly isolated on the world stage, something that was also reflected in



The Voices for Israel group in Jerusalem. | Photo: Bryce Turner, C41 NZ



Survivors from Kibbutz Be’eri show their burned homes. | Photo: Bryce Turner, C41 NZ

many of the encounters. Sifra: “We heard the term ‘existential loneliness’ very often. People genuinely feel abandoned by the world. At the same time, we also heard regularly that people feel supported by Christians. Someone said, ‘You have shown that you are there for us not only in good times, but also in difficult times. That is why we feel connected to you.’ I thought it was beautiful that he spoke about that connection, that they experience our support as comfort.”

Lynn: “Someone else pointed out that many people no longer want to listen to Jews themselves, because it is considered logical that a Jew would stand up for their own country, people, and right to exist. But when non-Jews stand up for Israel, people may be more open to listening. He found it comforting that we came, wanted to listen, and wanted to pass that on in our own country.”

A Voice for Israel

Back home the young people now carry the responsibility of being ‘a voice for Israel’. Sifra: “I already had a passion for Israel, but now a fire has been lit. It is very easy to voice your support for Israel from behind a screen, but we have to show people that we are—quite literally—standing beside the Jewish people.” Lynn: “People often talk about a silent majority, but the time for silence is over. It is time to take real action and use your voice to stand up for the truth, because this is a battle between light and darkness.”

Ivy (23) from the Philippines adds: “This trip has deepened my desire to know the One True God more. Stepping onto the places I had just read about in the Bible, hearing the testimonies of the Jewish people is a blessing that cannot be orchestrated by human hands alone. I truly believe this journey was His intention, and I am incredibly grateful to be part of it.”



thinc. Opposes Misuse of the ICJ

■ Andrew Tucker

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

On 12 December 2025, Norway and other states tabled a resolution for adoption by the UN General Assembly ‘endorsing’ the recent Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on Israel’s obligations on Gaza.

This resolution is yet another example of how a number of UN member states are using the UN system (including the ICJ) to push their version of the facts and political preferences and pretend that these have the force of law. It is a highly dangerous trend, that undermines the rule of law and is seriously affecting the integrity of the ICJ.

The ICJ Opinion was issued in response to a request issued by the Assembly after Israel terminated its cooperation with UNRWA, the UN’s agency for assistance to the Palestinian refugees, earlier this year. The reason for doing so was Israel’s intelligence that UNRWA has been infiltrated by Hamas. Israel provided the Court with extensive information about how UNRWA became irreparably compromised through its infiltration by terrorist organisations, systemic violations of the principle of neutrality, and persistent refusal to remedy this situation. Israel maintained that under international law it was entitled, as a sovereign state, to terminate its relationship with UN organisations in circumstances where cooperation undermines its security.

The Court issued its Opinion on 22 October 2025. It rejected Israel’s claims. The Court opined that Israel’s suspension of cooperation with UNRWA was unlawful and that Israel must permit unimpeded access for humanitarian organisations into Gaza.

However, in a strong dissenting opinion, Vice-President Judge Julia Sebutinde criticised the ruling as an abuse of the ICJ’s advisory function, arguing that it overlooked the complex realities of urban warfare as well as Israel’s security concerns, and noted the limited and unreliable evidence before the Court.

Norway’s draft Resolution was intended, in principle, to adopt the Advisory



Emmanuel Macron speaks at a UN General Assembly meeting in support of a two-state solution between Palestine and Israel at the United Nations. September 2025. | Photo: Shutterstock

Opinion. Like the Advisory Opinion, there were significant procedural and legal flaws with the Resolution. Moreover, the draft Resolution introduced new issues that were not included in the Advisory Opinion, purported to attach legal significance to the Opinion that it does not have, and ignored new developments on the ground.

We strongly advised a number of UN countries (including Pacific Island nations) to vote against this resolutions. The reasons included:

- The Opinion risks prejudicing two active contentious cases—South Africa v. Israel and Nicaragua v. Germany— which also address humanitarian issues in Gaza.
- The Court focused only on Israel’s obligations and embarked on a tangential excursion, affirming the Palestinian right to self-determination through statehood, while neglecting to scrutinise the roles and responsibilities of other actors, such as Hamas and Egypt.
- The Court relied heavily on UN-supplied evidence, while disregarding alternative sources, creating a circular and biased evidentiary process.
- The Court rejected evidence provided by Israel and other sources that UNRWA’s infiltration by Hamas and other terrorist organisations is so systematic that it compromises the agency’s neutrality. It portrayed the involvement of UNRWA employees in

the 7 October attacks as an isolated event, although UNRWA’s links to terrorism are endemic and longstanding.

- The Court also disregarded UNRWA’s role in exacerbating the conflict since its inception, including by radicalising Palestinians through its educational programmes.

But we also noted that the resolution went considerably further than the ICJ Opinion:

- The Resolution refers to the recent New York Declaration on Palestinian statehood—a non-UN document which many States neither supported nor adopted, and which was not discussed within the UN framework.
- The Resolution refers to ‘judgements’ against the State of Israel, despite the fact that no binding judgement issued by the ICJ against Israel (Advisory Opinions are neither binding nor judgements).

One of the most concerning things about the Resolution was that it contained a preamble that twists the ICJ’s position regarding sovereignty of Judea and Samaria (the West Bank), Gaza and East Jerusalem:

“Recalling that Israel is not entitled to sovereignty over or to exercise sovereign powers in any part of the Occupied Palestinian Territory on account of its occupation, ...”

This wording suggest that because Israel is an occupying power it can have no sovereignty rights in the ‘occupied territories’. That is not an accurate statement of the law, and it is not what the ICJ has said. In fact, the ICJ said in its 2004 and 2024 Advisory Opinions that it makes no determination that no such claims exist—it only opined that Israel’s status as an occupying power does not (in and of itself) confer on it any sovereign claims. That is a very different thing from saying that Israel cannot have any sovereignty claims at all.

The reason this is so concerning is that the UN member states who promoted this resolution seem to be using General Assembly resolutions to give an appearance of legal authority to their political position that the ‘occupied territories’ cannot belong to Israel.

As it turns out, resolution A/80/116 was adopted by only 139 of the total 193 UN member states. Twelve (12) states voted against, nineteen (19) abstained and twenty (20) states did not attend the meeting.

While this may seem a large majority, in fact it reflects that fifty-four states (almost one third of the total 193 UN member states) did NOT support the resolution. That is a very significant number.

This lack of universality shows a division in the UN on some of the issues contained in the resolution. In any event, such resolutions do not create customary international law.

Amongst the ‘no’ votes were: Argentina, Paraguay, Bolivia, Hungary, and United States. Among the abstainers were several European states: Albania, Bulgaria, Czechia, Serbia and Slovakia.

Remarkably, most Pacific Island states voted against or abstained: Fiji, Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga, and Tuvalu.

This small victory is an example of how *thinc.*’s legal diplomacy efforts can be effective in pushing back against the delegitimisation of Israel in the UN. Our goal now is to work with partners to expand the number of states able and willing to oppose the misuse of the ICJ as a weapon to undermine the Jewish State of Israel.

Reunion in Chernihiv

■ Anemone Rüger

Project Coordinator | Holocaust Survivors Ukraine

As the war progresses, the geography of the places we can visit with our team in Ukraine is also changing. Every day, people fall victim to Russian missiles. We constantly have to weigh up which trips are responsible and how we can make the most of the time we have. Material hardship is growing, the loneliness in rural areas is heartbreaking, and the hope we can bring with our visits is priceless.

The intense sun shines through the dense foliage of the trees on our way through northern Ukraine. Every now and then, we pass an old, colourfully painted concrete bus stop in Soviet style. A small detour onto an alternate road. Only after we have passed it do I realise that the road has been hit.

I would have loved to visit Sumy again for the first time in a long time. Only once has that been possible so far. That was before the war. Since then, the city near the Russian border has been virtually inaccessible. In the spring, when many believers were on their feet for Easter services, Russian missiles struck the city center, killing dozens of people. The Jewish community leader cried on the phone as she told me about those she knew personally.

I am so grateful for our team in Ukraine, for the loyalty and courage of each of our staff to be where they are needed—and at the same time for our joint decision-making process of what is sensible and possible. And so we decide that we must wait for better times for Sumy. But Chernihiv, located a little further west, is feasible. I haven't been there for more than three years either.

Pretty Wooden Houses—Deep Loneliness

The further north you go, the more picturesque the villages become, with their traditional wood carvings on the wood-paneled huts. We stop in Priluki, Nezhin, Koselets. In each of those places we have addresses of Holocaust survivors who are even more isolated here in the countryside—and even happier about a visit.

Stanislav hurries over to his garden gate, hobbling, and invites us into his little house. There is no one else there but us. It is quiet, too quiet here. He misses his wife, his great love. “I met her on the bus in Odessa, where I was studying,” Stanislav recalls. “She was the conductor. I accidentally sat in her seat. It turned into a lifelong love.”

This love brought him back to life. He had already lost so much. “Dad was at the front throughout the war,” Stanislav reports. “He grew up in an orphanage—his father was taken away by the Stalinists one day, his mother died early. His sister was shot by the Germans when she was heavily pregnant.”

Two Wars and a Little Comfort

His mother went into hiding with Stanislav and his little brother. “Mom had an acquaintance in the police who always informed her when there was a raid. Then we had to go into the basement and be very quiet. I remember the bombings and everything burning.”

Once, they were surprised by three German soldiers. “Children, they called out. We were very frightened,” Stanislav recalls. “Don't be afraid, one of the soldiers said. ‘I have three children too. I didn't want to go to the front, but I had to.’ And then he gave me cookies.”

Stanislav's father, Isay, actually had his birthday at the end of April. But he always saved the celebration for 9 May, Liberation Day.

Isay is Isaiah in Russian. Like the card I brought for



(Left): Holocaust survivor Stanislav now lives alone. A visit from the C4I team—with Alina and Anemone Rüger—means the world to him. (Right): Holocaust survivors in Chernihiv meet regularly for support. C4I's restaurant invitation is a joyful celebration.



Stanislav: “Fear not... I have called you by name.”

Two years ago, Stanislav's older son died. He can't get over it and struggles to hold back his tears. His other son lives in Russia—and is therefore out of reach for him because of the war.

“Don't bother with flowers for men, they don't know what to do with them anyway,” I had been advised. But Stanislav is so lonely. And he has a small garden. Two late tulips are still blooming.

I ask him if he likes flowers. “Yes, very much!” says Stanislav. I quickly get the basket of flowers from the car. And Stanislav breaks out into a big smile. That smile alone made the whole trip worthwhile.

Between Damaged Facades & Street Cafés

The last few days have been quiet in Chernihiv. But I don't sleep much tonight. Although I've set my cell phone to silent, I wake up three times to air raid sirens. You should always ask at the reception desk whether there are any military personnel staying at the hotel. That can be dangerous. There are informants in every war. But in the morning, the sky is clear again before we set off. I order another cup of coffee and pray for an extra dose of strength.

In the city center, we repeatedly pass administrative buildings that have been boarded up with chipboard and some of which have already been provisionally repaired. The district administration has been particularly badly affected. The window openings are still blackened from the fire. “That was at the beginning of the war, when our city was so badly attacked,” says our companion from the Jewish community.

I remember how Vera, the programme manager, told me on the phone at the time: “Our city is under siege! All the bridges are damaged and occupied; no one can get in or out. We go to bed at night not knowing if we will wake up in the morning.”

And I remember how Bassya, a Holocaust survivor, said to me: “Do you remember the hand-knitted shawl you brought me from Germany? I wear it around my shoulders all the time. It gives me a feeling of security.”

Apart from the damaged facades, Chernigov is as beautiful as I remember—and perhaps a bit more. Countless churches that have survived the centuries, restaurants and parks and street cafes. And many Jewish seniors whom we haven't seen in a long time.

Survived—Then and Now

Seven Holocaust survivors are already waiting for us in the restaurant where we invited them. They have dressed up and give us a big hug. I am speechless: my

dear Bassya and my dear Vera, who survived alone with her brother as a child, both around 90, have not changed at all since my last visit. They are in good shape and come to every event, the community leader tells us.

“Many of us survived the war back then because we came from mixed families,” says Bassya. In fact, most Holocaust survivors here in the north spent the war as small children with their non-Jewish relatives in a village cellar hideout, while almost all of their compatriots in the Odessa area ended up in the ghetto or concentration camps. And now they are spending their last years as they did their first—at war.

“One of us, Viktor, died at the beginning of the war,” says Bassya. “We are all in contact with each other. After an attack, I called him. Someone else answered the phone and said, ‘Viktor has passed away. His wife and daughter had thrown themselves on the floor. They survived. Viktor was standing. He was hit by the rocket.’”

Our Most Important Gift: Time

Grigory has brought his disabled son with him; he cares for him with great compassion. He also serves as a chauffeur for the ladies. He is originally from near Vinnytsia. “Back then, Mom thought nothing would happen to us. That's why we stayed. When the Germans came, they beat Mom, even though she was Ukrainian. Someone betrayed her. She then changed my name and showed my new birth certificate. That got her through for the time being. Then we built a kind of cave in the garden and hid there until the end of the war.”

The group is small enough that we can take time for each of the survivors. Including Vera, who remembers our first visit with shining eyes; and Alla, who survived with her grandparents because her grandfather was a respected teacher; and Klara, who as a pretty little girl almost disappeared at the German command post to be put up for adoption.

“You can't imagine how much your visits mean to the people here!” says Yelena, who has been running the Jewish social welfare organisation Hesed in Chernihiv since the beginning of the war. “When the war broke out, I was in Vinnytsia for a few weeks, managing things here from there. When I came back and saw our people, we just held hands and cried together. And we said to each other: If we survived this, then we still have a job to do. So let's keep going.”

Kindly join us in supporting the many Holocaust survivors and Jewish elderly in Ukraine.
Will you help? Any amount helps.

Jewish Life Beyond Israel

■ Joanna Moss

We begin a new series on the key diaspora communities—what makes them unique and what makes them tick. Since 1880s the makeup of Jewish communities around the world has changed dramatically as has the ratio of Jews in Israel versus the diaspora. In the previous series on the MENA Jews (Middle East and North Africa), we looked at ancient communities and saw what happens when the Jews were expelled from Spain and Portugal into the Ottoman Empire followed by the rise of Western empires leading to their collapse and finally community expulsion. In this series we will examine Western diaspora Jewry. Specifically: the United States of America, Canada, Britain, France, South Africa, Argentina and Australia. Looking at the history—when and why did they come, the make-up of the community, numbers over time and where they lived. We then examine the role of Jews in society, Zionism and the links with Israel. Finally, the future of the community and numbers making *Aliyah*.

The Big Picture

The Jews were always tiny in number as a people group, facing waves of persecution and pogroms that stunted growth. But when they lost six million plus (Holocaust scholars suggest it could be as many as eight million), it was a devastating blow from which they have never recovered. Not even 80 years later. When Israel was founded in May 1948 only 600,000 Jews lived in Israel, just 6% of global Jewry. Now nearly half of Jewry lives there. The numbers matter. But so does the Jewish relationship with the majority in diaspora communities since they are always a minority. What is their relationship with the host government? Are they welcome or tolerated? Do they thrive or struggle? Are doors open or closed to them? Do they occupy key positions? Culturally, do they become assimilated or hold fast to their religion, identity and values? Does Jewish life develop or is it a struggle to survive?

Australian Overview

Jews first came to Australia in 1788 as part of the first convict ships, thus marking nearly 240 years of continuous Australian Jewry. They have always been a small community, comprising at best nearly 0.05% of the population. But they have made an enormous contribution to Australia. From a small base, the numbers have grown enormously augmented by waves of new arrivals from various places, rather than sustained internal growth.

By Australia's federation in 1901, there were only about 15,000 out of a population of five million. Early Jews came to Australia primarily via Britain although many were born in Europe, particularly in Russia and Poland. Until recently, most of the community were *Ashkenazi* Jews. Historic communities were established in Sydney, Melbourne, Hobart and Launceston, then Adelaide. Much later, Perth and Brisbane were added. Canberra has always had a tiny community.

Waves

The Gold rush brought Jews to Victoria. A community sprang up in both Ballarat and Bendigo, then dispersed. Australian Jews have historically lived in big cities rather than rural areas. Another wave came in the 1920s from Europe escaping poverty and persecution. Sadly, it was only those with family connections in Australia, a profession and means who could come. But in the 1930s some 9,000 persecuted Central European Jews made it into Australia in time. Many didn't. These

were primarily German-speaking Jews who encountered antisemitism and persecution from British colonial-minded Australians who referred to them as 'reffos', a derogatory term for refugee. Once the war began they were classified as 'aliens' and subject to restrictions. Other 'aliens' from Britain and other Commonwealth countries joined them. After the war many stayed as there was nothing to go back to.

Things changed post-war. Australia was the recipient of many Holocaust survivors from DP camps in Germany, Austria and Italy, one of the largest recipients per capita. This wave of 31,000 Holocaust survivors had a profound impact upon the culture and community. Up until that point the community was small and struggling, facing emigration rather than thriving. These new arrivals were determined to rebuild their lives far away from Europe in a new country. Next came 2,000 arrivals from China who had taken refuge there, followed by 2,000 MENA Jews creating a *Sephardic* community. The next biggest wave was South African Jewry, some 14,000–15,000 of whom arrived in the 1980s and subsequently. Around 10,000 Russian Jews (FSU Jews) arrived and a further 7,000-plus came from Israel. Today the community numbers around 120,000, providing critical mass with strong institutions.

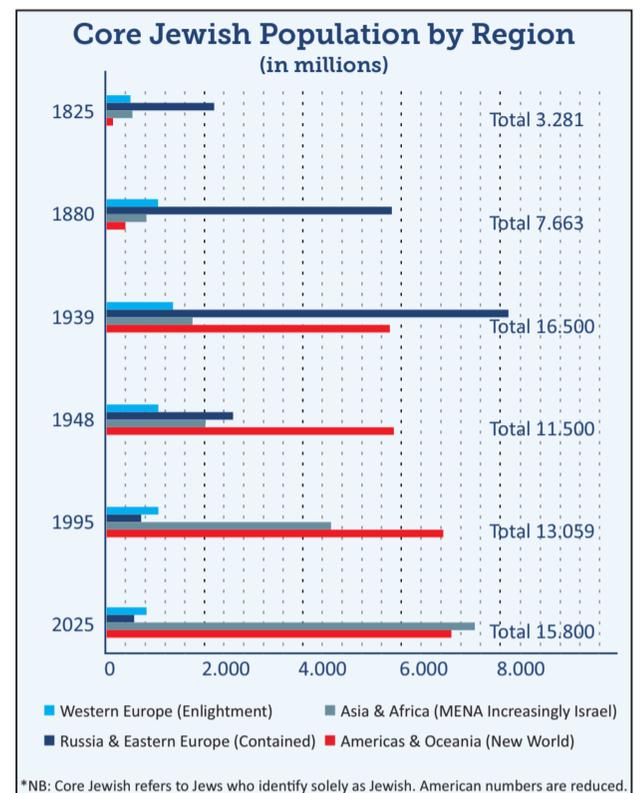
Ethos

Australia has been a place of refuge for Jews for decades. They have built a strong community around the notion of staying and thriving, by marrying within their community and being diverse religiously. Some came by choice, but most were grateful for being allowed to live in *the lucky country*. They worked hard and prospered. The refugee mentality of earlier generations emphasised the importance of Israel as a haven for Jews and drove widespread support for building up Israel both financially and ensuring strong bipartisan political support. Consequently, trade with Israel and aid is significant. The current Australian government's Israel and Jewish stance is a major problem and marks a sudden shift in the face of declining importance as a community.

Although there was some WW2 discrimination, Jews have primarily had free entry into Australian society. They have had the freedom to develop their own culture and be part of the majority participating freely in academic life, the professions, business, clubs, sport, art and culture. They have occupied significant roles in Australian society from the early 1900s, have been extraordinarily successful in business, and have given generously to Australian causes, not just within their community.

Make-up Today

Melbourne is the largest community (55,000) and Sydney (40,000). Melbourne is the more religious and Zionist community with a Polish flavour, whilst Sydney is more Hungarian culturally having more commercially-minded and liberal Jews. In the 1980s global Jewry encouraged the building up of the Melbourne community. Caulfield is the heart of Jewish Melbourne with orthodox and *Haredi* communities, but there is another established community in the South-East around St Kilda where the Jewish museum is located. Sydney has two hubs—Bondi-area and North Sydney near St Ives plus a Russian community further north. Perth's community is dominated by former South African Jews and Brisbane's community is growing like Florida, fueled by Jews escaping the cold winters of Melbourne and for lifestyle reasons. Politically Australian Jews are mostly centre voters.



Governing Bodies

Australian Jewry was modelled on British Jewry and falls under the Commonwealth structure even today. But things altered rapidly after WW2 with the new arrivals. Today the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ) is the prime voice of Australian Jewry and the Zionist Federation of Australia is also strong.

Schooling

Around 50% of Jewish children attend Jewish schools, making the school an important community hub and one that shapes Jewish life as strong and proudly Jewish. The Australian government never built enough public schools and so it subsidises schooling costs by approximately 30%. Although private, this makes Jewish schooling more affordable and necessary in many areas reflecting the different flavours of religious life. Many Jewish schools are well endowed with generous philanthropy providing scholarships and excellent facilities. They are regarded as some of the top schools in Australia with impressive academic results. Since 1980s Jewish schools had barriers and armed guards outside. Camps and Jewish youth movements are well established creating strong links with Israel.

Key Personalities

Interestingly, the first Australian-born Governor General Isaac Isaacs (1931–36) was Jewish as was Sir Zelman Cowen (1977–82). Sir John Monash was an outstanding military commander in WW1 and for whom Melbourne University is named. Josh Frydenburg was a former Treasurer, Michelle Rowland current Attorney General and Linda Dessay former Victorian Governor. Issi Leibler was an important figure in Australian and global Jewry.

Antisemitism & Aliyah

Until recently antisemitism was minor. The motivation for *Aliyah* had mainly been ideological, often attracting young people. More recently, career opportunities in Israel's booming tech environment beckoned as does cultural relevance. In 2020, 280 made *Aliyah* and there has been a steady annual rise to 530 in 2024. Since 7 October, and now after the Bondi massacre, the numbers are expected to increase markedly. In 2025 *Aliyah* fairs were first held in Sydney and Melbourne.

The Story of a Family

■ Sondra Oster Baras

International President | CFOIC
Heartland

A few months ago, my youngest son and his family, wife and four small children, moved in with us. They began an expansion of their home to accommodate their growing family, and we were overjoyed that they decided to move in with us. They live in the same town as we do, Karnei Shomron, but in a different neighbourhood. So it was very convenient for them to be able to leave home amidst all the construction but still live so close to home.

They are still with us for a few more weeks and we have loved every minute of it. While we have lots more noise in our home than usual, when it's just my husband and I, but the noise is the joyous tumult of children. What greater joy than that! My son and daughter-in-law both work full-time and the children are in school (the youngest in day care) so we do have quiet during the day. But beginning at 2:30 in the afternoon when the first children come home, the noise, and the mess, arrive. The school bags tossed casually in the front hallway, the older ones sprawled on the couch watching TV or playing guitar with friends. There is always someone tossing a basketball outside in the yard, in the net we still have up from when our kids were small. And there are always kids from the neighbourhood stopping in to pick someone up or join in for a jamming session right here. Some of you may have had similar experiences with your adult children. But there is one experience you probably have not had—the three months when my son was in the IDF Reserves. Yehuda was drafted from just after *Rosh Hashana* in late September until early in January, right after *Hanukkah*. He missed much of the holiday celebrations during this time. This was his 5th tour of duty since 7 October, with a total of 400 days in the military.

Yehuda is also a high-school teacher. He met his students for just a few weeks in September and then they had a substitute teacher for more than three months. When he went back to teach, it was like starting over again at the beginning of the year. It was a challenge for him but I am sure it was not easy for his students. And his students, as well as so many all over the country, have had ongoing upheaval since 7 October. And that is coming on the heels of the Covid crisis with its impact on children all over the world!

This time, though, I was able to witness first-hand the impact of my son's extended military service on his family.



Yehuda and Sapir with their four children, home together during his IDF weekend break. | Photo: CFOIC

We need you on our side, to serve in a very different sort of army—the army of public opinion.

Thank God we were there to lend a helping hand in a more intensive way than before when we were living in separate houses.

My daughter-in-law Sapir is truly remarkable. She is always cool and collected. And she keeps track of so many comings and goings. She takes the children to school each morning and then ferries them to various afternoon enrichment programmes that are walking distance from their home but too far to walk from my house. In between she is working at a high school about a half-hour drive from here.

Night after night, she is the one feeding the children, taking care of the baths for the little ones, putting them to bed, doing mounds of laundry (did kids always generate so much laundry?), supervising homework, and making sure everyone has a good breakfast and is dressed and ready for school each morning. My son is usually a full partner in all of the housework and childcare, so when he is absent, the burden on Sapir is enormous. And this is not just for two weeks when a husband might be away for a work trip in any country. This is for hundreds of days over a two year period. When I recently asked Sapir how she is feeling, she said “tired.”

Israel has never fought such a long-lasting war. And even though the war is supposedly over, the Reservists' experience is still heavily involved with war. There is no question, the fighting and intense military missions were far more concentrated during the first year of the war. There is far less tension and

fear today. And the country has generally returned to normal. But the families of reservists are still feeling the strain as their young and not-so-young men are constantly being called up for service.

My son spent many months in Gaza. After that, he was in Lebanon, then in Samaria. Most recently in Syria. There are voices around the world speaking of the chances for peace between Israel and her northern neighbours—Lebanon and Syria. But the fact is that Hezbollah is continuing to re-arm in Lebanon, and Syrian militias are testing the IDF's level of alertness and response. The IDF has learned its lessons from 7 October. We will no longer trust the assurances of enemy and ally alike—Israel will ensure the safety of Israel. There is no other way. So that means ongoing reserve duty for our brave young men. At least 100 days of service each year, if not more. Their wives are amazing, tough women who see their role in the family as their own sort of draft for the nation. As they soldier on looking after home and children, their husbands soldier on against our enemies.

Will this ever end? Maybe one day. We often speak of a war on multiple fronts—the threats coming from Iran, Yemen, Gaza, Syria and Lebanon, with ongoing terrorist activity threatening us from Jordan and Egypt as well. It is these threats that occupy our military. But there is another front—the front of public opinion. And that front may be the most significant of the entire war. It is no secret that antisemitism has

reared its head in an unprecedented manner, not seen since the 1930s in Europe. But today's antisemitism not only feeds on traditional antisemitism, but is fueled by social media, university professors and politicians, in the pay of or under the influence of Qatar and other Middle Eastern Islamists. The narrative that Israel has been starving Palestinians in Gaza, holding them hostage in tent cities in the midst of snow-storms (which don't exist in Gaza!), that Israel is committing genocide, are all lies, created, planted and nurtured with billions of dollars from our worst enemies.

As long as there are people around the world who support the Hamas, Hezbollah and Iran narratives, their foot-soldiers in Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen and Iran will continue to attack Israel. And our reservists will continue to serve for months at a time. We are willing to serve. We are willing to pay the price because we have no choice. Our very survival is at stake.

We need you on our side, to serve in a very different sort of army—the army of public opinion. Recent reports predict that Christian Zionism will die out because the younger generation is influenced by these virulent antisemitic narratives. We cannot let that happen. When Muslim terrorists attacked Jews in Sydney, most Australians were horrified. But a disturbing number of Australian young people were sharing their antisemitic messages on social media.

I am turning to you to help us reach the young people who can still be reached, who are still horrified by such acts of terror. These young people are your neighbours, your friends' children and grandchildren. They are the future of the free world. They need to hear the truth. They need to understand what is at stake. When these young people reject the evil of antisemitism and understand the truth, then our reservists will come home.

Share this article and pro-Israel material with everyone you know. Share accurate information about Israel by sharing the newspaper from C4I International and news from CFOIC Heartland (www.cfoic.com). It is one easy but effective way to join the effort. And with God's help, we will prevail. We have no choice!

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

Understanding Antisemitism



| Photo: Shutterstock

■ Kameel Majdali

Director | Teach All Nations Inc.

Antisemitism is the irrational hatred of the Jewish people, which can lead to attempts, by word or deed, to humiliate, marginalise, and physically harm them.

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

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

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

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

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

What is the Source of Antisemitism?

The great patriarch Abraham was promised by God (covenant) to have a 'seed' (descendant) who would bring universal redemption and blessing. That seed was 'Christ' (*Galatians 3:16*), and the chain link between Him and Father Abraham was the Jewish people. The Saviour Himself said that salvation is of the Jews (*John 4:22*). Being chosen and anointed by God is wonderful, but it is also like painting a target on one's back for the devil to attack.

Also, in Hebrew the name of God YHWH is contained in the name Judah—which means praise, and it is from

this name that the word 'Jew' is derived' YHWDH (*Yehudah*—best to see this in Hebrew lettering). The Jewish people thus have the imprint of God's name in their two genes. And the world hates God!

The human antisemite can be ignorant of these things, but the malevolent spiritual forces in the heavenly realm are not; they know what the Bible teaches. The devil and his demons are 100% antisemitic, and for understandable reasons.

The great salvation that comes from the Jewish *Messiah*, the continued preservation and existence of the Jewish people as a testament to the faithfulness of God (see *Jeremiah 31:35-37*), and finally, the indispensable role they play in end-time prophecy (*Daniel 9:24-27*), means the devil's reign is finished, and his end is near. Since the devil cannot attack God directly, he attacks those who represent Him on earth: Jews and Christians. As history comes to the windup, persecution will increase. Yet the silver lining is that the Lord will regather His people as per *Jeremiah 16:14-16* and *23:7-8*, even if He has to use 'fishers' and 'hunters' to do it.

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

Forever and Ever

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

"For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever." What is forever and ever?

God is always worthy of all praise. That is a fundamental theme throughout the Bible. In the Jewish *Kaddish* prayer (*kaddish* means sanctification), which bears many similarities to the Lord's Prayer, there is the line: "May His great Name be blessed for ever and ever." *Psalms 113:2* (KJ21) says: "Blessed be the Name of the Lord from this time forth and for evermore." A Jewish explanation adds: 'from this time forth', that is to say: in the present; and

'for evermore': in the future. And so Daniel says: "Blessed be the Name of God for ever and ever" (*Daniel 2:20*, KJ21). Paul writes: "To whom (God) be glory forever and ever" (*Galatians 1:5*). Paul was and remained a Jew. He uses the same wording in Greek as in the Aramaic *Kaddish* prayer: "forever and ever." In Greek, the word is *aion*; in Hebrew and Aramaic, it is *olam*.

The Greek word *aion* means not only vitality and lifespan, but also era or period. In the latter sense, it is the translation of the Hebrew word *olam*. In the Hebrew Bible (the OT), *olam* always means eternity. It usually refers to a long period of time. In post-biblical Hebrew, it also came to mean 'world'. According to rabbinical interpretation, the word *olam* is related to the verb 'to hide'. *Olam* actually

means 'that which is hidden'. This is even felt as if God is hiding in or behind this world. That hiddenness is the essence of everything. The 19th-century German rabbi SR Hirsch writes that not only the future and the past, but even the present are essentially hidden from us. And yet, according to Ecclesiastes, man is aware of this: "He has also set eternity in the human heart, yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end" (*Ecclesiastes 3:11*).

The praise with which the Lord's Prayer concludes actually summarises the entire prayer. It is the certainty that God's kingship, His power and His glorious presence are forever revealed, on earth as in heaven.

Recommended Reading

30 Misconceptions about Israel

Book review by Mandy Worby

Over the past two years, I've been asked to comment on countless social media clips promoting outrageous conspiracy theories about the Jewish state and the Jewish people. These claims have circulated for millennia and been repeatedly debunked. In 2026, the accusations are the same—they're just dressed in new clothes.

Did you know there are only 15.7 million Jews worldwide, out of a global population of 8.2 billion? That's just 0.19%—less than one-fifth of one percent. To make up even 1%, the Jewish population would need to reach 80 million.

Yet, despite their tiny, minuscule numbers, they are accused of controlling all the banks, economies of the world, foreign governments, media outlets, and schools and institutions of higher learning. If that were true, they would have nothing but positive news coverage, they would never be boycotted. Every government on earth would vote in their favour, universities and colleges would host 'Jewish love-ins', and the economies of the world would be thriving, not failing.

So with a great deal of enthusiasm, I recommend to you a truly important and timely book that will help educate and equip you to debunk many false accusations about Israel and the Jewish people, and the ongoing shockingly long-lasting conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.

Rev Oscar Lohuis wrote *30 Misconceptions About Israel* for the express purpose of bringing truth and light into the dark, and dangerous lies spreading around the world yet again, as the entire world seems determined to delegitimise and demonise the only Jewish state on earth.

Examples of chapter titles in *30 Misconceptions About Israel* are, *Israeli occupies the territory of another country; The State of Israel represents a form of Colonialism; We should support Jews but not the State of Israel; Jews are not allowed to live in the West Bank; Israel oppresses the Palestinians and Israel's army has no morals.*

Each chapter is succinct and to the point, explaining with incredible clarity the facts regarding the conflict and accusations leveled against Israel. There are also extensive end notes with references to the sources used.

I highly recommend *30 Misconceptions About Israel* to help you give a response and defence against the lies and libels directed against the Jewish State.

The Olive Tree Continues

■ Johannes Gerloff

Theologian, Journalist, Lecturer & Author

In this article we continue our study of *Romans 11:12-27*, in which the image of the Jewish people being regrafted back into their olive tree is central.

For the Catholic exegete Norbert Baumert, it is undisputed: "For Paul, it is clear: Israel retains its primacy in the history of salvation and its mission for the salvation of all peoples." We, who were once called 'non-people' and 'uncircumcised,' have become 'close' in the *Messiah Yeshua*. Through Him, we have received the civil rights of Israel, the *politeia tou Israel*, 'Israeli citizenship,' and have thus become natives and participants in the covenant of promise (*Ephesians 2:11-13*).

With the image of the natural branches that were broken off from the noble olive tree, the apostle shattered any false security of salvation on the Jewish side. Not all who come from Israel are automatically Israelites (*Romans 9:6*). "God can raise up children to Abraham from these stones," John the Baptist had already countered to his Jewish contemporaries, who had relied on the fact that "we have Abraham as our father" (*Matthew 3:9*).

Paul knew: "A Jew is not one who is outwardly so, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but a Jew is one who is inwardly so, and that is the circumcision of the heart, which is in the spirit and not in the letter" (*Romans 2:28*).

True solidarity requires resisting the impulse to neutralise Jewish particularity. It means naming Jewish identity, faith, and Jewish

The word 'standing' in *Romans 11:20* contrasts with 'falling.' "You stand firm through faith," Paul emphasises. "Those who stand by faith stand by divine grace, not by their own merit," emphasises Friedrich Adolph Philippi, quoting the Pietist father Johann Albrecht Bengel: "The relationship of faith with the heavenly Father is a gift from God that no one can earn through good deeds."

This applies to the Jewish people. God's promises of salvation to Israel are not a guarantee of salvation for every individual Jew who can prove his/her Jewish ancestry or demonstrate a Jewish lifestyle. This applies all the more to non-Jews. By comparing the wild branches with the natural branches, the apostle opposes any false assurance of salvation or spiritual arrogance on the part of the Gentile Christian community. "If God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either" (*verse 21*).



The Golden Gate and Christian cemetery, Mount of Olives, Jerusalem, Israel. | Photo: Shutterstock

If it was possible for the natural branches to be broken off from their natural foundation because of their unbelief, how much easier can the branches grafted in contrary to nature be broken off again? Therefore: "Do not be proud, but be afraid!" (*verse 20*).

Believers from Gentile nations should not despise the Jewish people. When they understand the situation of the chosen people from God's perspective, they begin to tremble for themselves.

A few years before Paul, Jesus had used a similar image with a comparable intention: "I am the true vine, my Father is the vinedresser! Every branch in me that does not bear fruit, he will take away."

Jesus explained to his disciples that "Every branch that bears fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit," and therefore urged them, "Remain in me, and I will remain in you!" For "whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit."

However, like Paul, the Lord also knew the other side of the coin: "If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers, and people gather them and throw them into the fire, and they must burn" (*John 15:1-8*).

True faith includes fear. A fear that is healing. A fear that relies exclusively on God and His sovereign grace and claims nothing based on one's own achievements: the fear of God.

"Absolute, unconditional promises that guarantee salvation to Gentiles or Jews, regardless of how they live," writes the Reformed US theologian William Hendriksen, "exist only in human

imagination, but not in Holy Scripture."

"Faith sustains in fear," recognised Adolf Schlatter, "because I stand by faith, I do not stand by myself, but solely by what God gives me." According to Klaus Wengst, this is about "reverence for the actions of God, in the face of which arrogance would be extremely inappropriate."

"But those who do not continue in unbelief will be grafted in. For God is able to graft them back in. For if you were cut out of an olive tree which is wild by nature, and grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree?" (*Romans 11:23*).

The Messianic Jew Joseph Shulam rightly observes that Israel stands on firmer ground than we non-Jews. While Gentile Christians stand only 'by faith,' Jewish Christians are additionally rooted in 'God's gifts and calling.'

In fact, Paul repeatedly implies a permanent difference between Jews and Gentiles, a permanent privilege of the Jewish people in comparison to all other nations, even with regard to justification.

While the "wild olive branches" were "grafted into the cultivated olive tree contrary to nature (*para physin*)," the branches of the cultivated olive tree will be "grafted into their own olive tree according to nature (*kata physin*)" (*verse 24*). That is, the justification of Israel is 'natural,' self-evident, while the salvation of the Gentiles is extraordinary, 'contrary to nature.'

So God saves the Jewish people because He has committed himself to do so. The God of Israel, on the other hand, turns to the Gentile nations without any obligation, out of pure grace, *sola gratia*.

A People Among the Nations

■ Kees de Vreugd

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

Purim celebrates the deliverance of the Jewish people from the evil Haman, who, out of personal resentment, devised a plan to destroy the entire nation. The story is told in the 'Esther Scroll' (the traditional Hebrew name for the biblical Book of Esther) and takes place in the Persian Empire, about five centuries before Christ.

It is a story that exemplifies the fate of the Jews among the nations. Time and again, the Jewish people have been threatened in their existence. From Egypt at the time of the pharaoh— which led to Israel becoming a nation— to the cowardly attack by Amalek in the desert, to the pogroms in ancient times, the Middle Ages and modern times, culminating in the Shoah and ultimately the Amalekite attack on 7 October 2023, the mere existence of the people of Israel has always provoked hostility. All kinds of motives play a role in this, motives that already appear in the Book of Esther and recur throughout history, including today.

The motive that Haman presents to the Persian king Ahasuerus for destroying the Jews is telling: *"There is a certain people dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom, who keep themselves separate. Their laws are different from those of all peoples, and they do not obey the king's laws; it is not in the king's best interest to tolerate them" (Esther 3:8). Subsequently, a law is enacted with the order to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews" (Esther 3:13).* Around the same time,



People have fun on the holiday of Purim. | Photo: Shutterstock

Daniel receives his visions (e.g. *Daniel 11*), which speak in veiled language about, among other things, the coming attack by Antiochus IV Epiphanes on Jewish life and Jewish identity; a deliberate and purposeful attempt to completely Hellenise or exterminate Israel.

In fact, it is always about Israel's identity as God's people that the world resents. Israel serves the one, invisible God, who cannot be depicted, and observes laws and rules that are completely different from what is common sense in the surrounding culture: election and Torah make Israel different.

This is evident in Mordecai, who refuses to bow down to Haman. The Jew bows down only to the one God. The attitude of that one Jew is reason enough for

Haman to exterminate the entire people.

This is another recurring motif. Even today, Jews worldwide are judged by the actions of the state of Israel. And it does not matter whether they associate themselves with it or not.

Persia, where the Jewish people were threatened with destruction at the time of Esther, is today's Iran. And even now, there is a regime in power there that is hostile to Israel. But the Iranian people feel differently about this. The Iranian writer Atti Bahadori, who lives in the Netherlands, recently visited Israel and told a Dutch newspaper (*De Telegraaf*, Thursday 8 January) that she was surprised and moved by the welcome she received: "I have never been hugged so many times." The Jews and the Iranian people are fighting the same battle, she says. It is the battle against Islamism. "For me, it is terrible to see how Europe is abandoning the Jews for a second time."

In the story of Esther, the masks come off: evil is exposed, and Esther's identity as a Jewish woman is revealed. Today, the opposite seems to be the order of the day. Israel, fighting for its existence, is portrayed on international stages and social media as the ultimate evil, while Western leaders bow to a power that threatens not only Israel and Christians worldwide, but also every other dissenting way of life. When will the scales fall from the eyes of world leaders?

When the tide turns in the story of Esther, many join the Jews (*Esther 8:17*). Israel is a blessing to the world. Despite hatred and hostility, Israel blesses the world for example with technological developments and first aid in disasters. But above all, Israel's existence reminds us of God. In doing so, it presents the community of nations with the choice of serving God or rejecting God's blessing.

Biblical Roots By David Nekrutman

The Code of the Exodus

After completing the reading of the personal family sagas of Genesis, synagogues around the world have now transitioned, at this time of year, to the national epic of the Exodus. The book of Exodus begins with the story of a people who have fallen from the heights of Egyptian nobility into the depths of state-sanctioned slavery. Yet, beneath this harrowing narrative lies a secret whispered on a deathbed from generations earlier: a 'classified phrase' intended to serve as a beacon of hope for a nation of captives.

On his deathbed, Joseph makes a startling declaration to his brothers: *"I am dying. But God will surely attend (pakod yifkod) to you, and bring you up from this land" (Genesis 50:24).*

With the brothers being extremely vulnerable, Joseph's words could have been rooted in mere diplomacy. He might have leaned on his own status to soothe their fears, saying: *"I have secured your safety through my position; I will appoint a successor to look after you, and when the politics are right, I will arrange for your return home."* Instead, Joseph bypasses human strategy entirely. He frames their stay in Egypt as a supernatural timeline governed not by the whim of Pharaohs, but by one specific word: *Pakad*.

To understand this choice, we must look back to the first 'impossible' moment of the Covenant. The root P-K-D can mean to count, assign, or deposit, but its first appearance in the Torah is foundational: *"And the Eternal attended (pakad) to Sarah as He had said..." (Genesis 21:1).* In this context, *Pakad* describes an intimate turning of God's gaze toward those He has promised to remember.

By using this same root, Joseph reminded his brothers that their national birth would mirror their ancestral birth. In both instances, redemption is birthed directly into the heart of human impossibility. Just as a womb beyond years cannot produce life, a nation of slaves cannot break the back of an empire. Joseph frames their future as a supernatural delivery— proving that the Covenant thrives exactly where human agency ends.

Fast forward to Exodus. God appears to Moses at the burning bush and hands him the 'secret password' to give to the elders: *"Say to them... 'I have surely attended (pakod, pakadeti) to you..." (Exodus 3:16).* When the Israelites heard this code, they believed and bowed their heads in awe. They recognised the echo of Joseph's promise and Sarah's miracle.

Between the *pakad* of Sarah and the *pakad* of Moses, there were centuries of struggle. Yet, the promise remained active. God's silence is not His absence; it's the space where the supernatural timeline unfolds at the perfect pace.

The Bible Speaks

"The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn His face toward you and give you peace."

Numbers 6:24-26

What the Lord says to Moses here is quite remarkable. It is nothing less than God connecting His Name with Israel: "So they will put My Name on the Israelites, and I will bless them," it says in *verse 27*.

The Lord does not remain at a distance, merely watching how the children of Israel fare. Instead, He descends in their midst. First and foremost, this means profound protection. God Himself is like a shield over His people.

This also sets Israel apart. Other nations may ask for God's blessing, and the Lord may grant it, but here the initiative comes from God Himself. This blessing is not merely requested; it is commanded to place God's blessing—and His Name—upon the people of Israel.

Prince of Persia—Queen of Persia: The Islamic Republic

■ Kameel Majdali

Director | Teach All Nations Inc.

...and now will I return to fight with the prince of Persia: and when I am gone forth, lo, the prince of Grecia shall come. Daniel 10:17 (KJV)

In Part One (August 2025), we were introduced to the unique and consequential nation known as Iran. More than a nation, Persia/Iran is a civilisation, language, and empire, providing location, leadership and an important place in Biblical history and end-time prophecy. In Part Two, we look at Iran, the Islamic Republic, with a little bit of history.

Iran Update

At the time of writing this article, there is an uprising against the clerical regime, which is getting little attention from the international media. This is because the regime has closed down the internet, so the Iranian people cannot communicate with the outside world. In other words, a complete media blackout. While uprisings are not new to Iran—the last one was in 2022. This one could go further and faster in toppling the government.

Normally, the ruling regime pushes back ruthlessly, and hundreds of protesters die. World governments watch and lament, but take no action. This time, there are unconfirmed reports of thousands killed. US President Donald Trump has threatened military action if the Mullahs don't stop killing the people.

One of the key reasons previous revolts have failed in the past is because of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). Completely independent from the regular military and the police, the IRGC is devoted to the leadership and ideals of the Iranian Islamic Revolution. Their loyalty, tenacity, and ferocity make them formidable. They hold the balance of power; whoever they side with wins. Supreme Leader Ali Khomeini is looking to them for complete support. However, there is no guarantee that some IRGC members won't defect if the revolt drags on, or more unarmed Iranians are killed.

Why are Iranians now rising in revolt? One grievance is the economic collapse with hyperinflation; grocery prices have doubled. Reasons for a bad economy include the cost of the Twelve Day War with Israel in 2025, the effect of American and EU sanctions, corruption, and economic mismanagement of the command economy, investing billions in funding military proxies such as Hezbollah, the Houthis, Hamas, and trillions of dollars of financial maleficence. Perhaps the biggest problem is that Iran is running out of water. Lack of rain and poor water management are the reasons. Tehran's reservoirs are only 15% full. There is talk of evacuating the capital before it runs out of water.

The birth of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979 was seen as a repudiation of the 2,500-year-old Persian monarchy. The Shah fled in disgrace and was not welcomed anywhere, especially in Iran. Mentioning him favourably could bring serious repercussions. Now, the exiled crown prince Reza Pahlavi, son of the last Shah, has been communicating with his homeland, and the response has been favourable. In what would have been unthinkable a few weeks ago, there have been chants of 'Long live the Shah.' The question: Will

this rebellion succeed where others failed? Are the Iranians ready to trade in a republic and return to a monarchy? Some signs to watch: the IRGC breaks ranks, the Supreme Leader Ali Khomeini flees into exile to Moscow, or the water runs out in Tehran.

The Islamic Revolution of 1979

While the history of the Persian monarchy is rich and deep, our focus is on its demise in 1979. Until then, as mentioned, Iran was a Western-leaning secular society. Along with secular Muslim Turkey, Iran had diplomatic relations and direct flights to the Jewish state.

The Shah of Iran lived a lavish lifestyle. For the 2,500th anniversary of the Iranian monarchy, he hosted the party of the millennium and no cost was spared. This all changed with the coming of the Islamic Revolution.

Growing public disenchantment with the Shah of Iran's autocratic rule opened the door for revolt. In a sense, the Iranian revolution was a Persian precursor of the 2011 Arab Spring, where long-term secular autocratic regimes were overthrown, and Islamic-based entities have been replacing them. The revolution was led by Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini, known to the world as the 'Ayatollah Khomeini' (1902-1989).

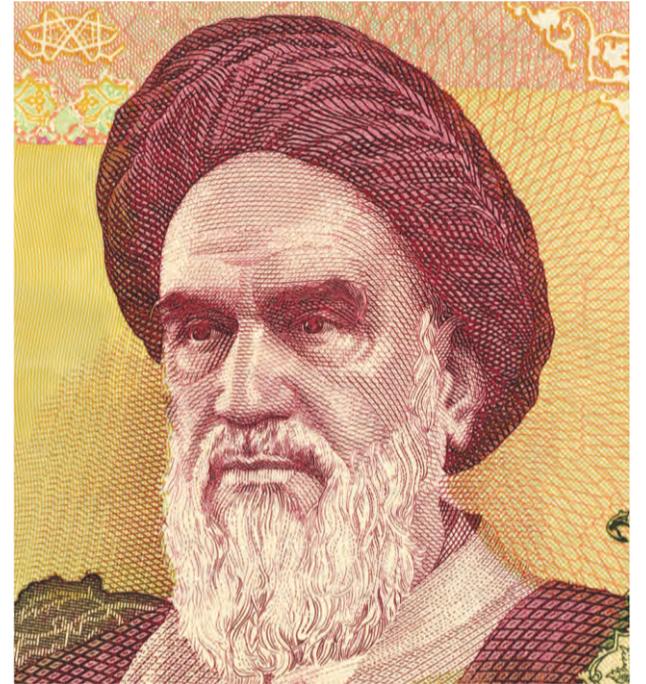
Much mystery surrounds the life of Khomeini, but sources tell us he was pious, studious, and politically active. Along with Islamic studies, he also studied Aristotle and Plato. Some say he wanted to make Iran a republic like Plato's model, though an Islamic version.

One unconfirmed source says that Khomeini, as a young cleric in the 1940s or earlier, would preach among the Iranian theological colleges that, due to the backslidden condition of the Muslims, Allah would allow the Jews to take over Palestine as punishment. No other Muslim theologian had dared say such a thing. Once the Muslims entered into 'revival' and 100% commitment to Islam, then their fortunes would change, and both Jerusalem and Palestine would revert to Muslim rule.¹

Public discontent over the monarchy was so great that the Shah and his family fled out of Iran, never to return. Shortly thereafter, Khomeini triumphantly arrived in Iran after fourteen years of exile. It was then, in February 1979, that he quickly replaced the 2,500-year-old monarchy with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The centrepiece of this 'Islamic Plato's Republic' was the doctrine of *'vilayat e faqih'* or the 'rule of the clerics.' Iran has a constitution that was approved by a referendum. In addition, the Islamic Republic holds regular elections for the parliament and the president. Yet under *'vilayat e faqih'*, enshrined in the Iranian constitution, it is the unelected clerics who have the real power, particularly the Supreme Leader, who is the apex of power. The Supreme Leader is the head of the armed forces, the head of the judiciary, appoints the Guardian Council, and holds the lofty title of 'Imam.' The 'Imam' in Shia Islam is the head of the Muslims, the true successor of Islam's prophet Muhammad, one invested with divine authority to interpret Islamic law. Khomeini became the 'Supreme Leader' of Iran on 3 December 1979, and continued to serve in that capacity until his death on 3 June 1989.

The values that undergird the Islamic Republic in



Ayatollah Khomeini. | Photo: Adobe Stock

Khomeini's day still apply today:

1. Shia Islam is the one true religion.
2. The Supreme Leader is Allah's agent of interpreting Islamic law and must not be questioned. Thus creating an unaccountable, anti-democratic, authoritarian regime.
3. Nuclear power is Iran's undeniable right.
4. America and Israel are the 'great Satan' and 'little Satan.'²

Khomeini's global notoriety grew quickly once he gained power. He was the patron of those students who occupied the US embassy and held the American hostages captive for 444 days. Khomeini ordered the execution of thousands of political prisoners. The Iran-Iraq War of 1980-1988, though started by Saddam Hussein, was prolonged by probably six years because of Khomeini's refusal to stop fighting. It is estimated that a million people died in this conflict. Just before he died, he issued a *fatwa* calling for the murder of British-Indian author Salman Rushdie, who wrote *The Satanic Verses*. Khomeini said this book was blasphemous. The fact that he cut across national and international law to impose his own law only heightened his controversial ways on the eve of his death.

Though feared and vilified, Khomeini was unquestionably one of the most influential people of the twentieth century (so was Mao Zedong, Joseph Stalin, and a few others). He succeeded in overthrowing the 2,500-year-old Persian monarchy. Khomeini became the face of 'The Islamic Revival,' 'The Islamic Revolution,' and, for many, even Islam itself. Posters of Khomeini can be found in diverse places like Lebanon and Indonesia.³ Though the top leader of the minority Shia, he gained the respect (and fear) of many Sunni Muslims. In our next article, we will look at the topics: Are the Shia on the rise?

¹ This author has tried to find additional sources to this claim, but so far, without success. Nevertheless, it is worth considering, though as of yet unsubstantiated.

² These points were taken by Elam Ministries Prayer Guide.

³ This author has personally seen these posters!

Short News

Last Witnesses,
Living Memory

In April 2026, on *Yom HaShoah*, Holocaust survivors will once again lead the *March of the Living*, walking alongside thousands of students from around the world in a powerful act of remembrance. As the 81st anniversary of the liberation of Europe from Nazi Germany approaches, the march carries heightened urgency—this may be the final opportunity for many young participants to walk with survivors. With each passing year, the number of living witnesses to the Holocaust grows smaller. Their presence transforms history into lived memory, underscoring lessons of resilience, dignity, and moral responsibility. In the shadow of 7 October and a global surge in antisemitism, the *March of the Living* stands as a defiant reminder: remembrance is not only about honouring the past, but about safeguarding the future. | Photo: Flash90

Otto Frank's
Daughter Dies at 96

Eva Schloss-Geiringer, a Holocaust survivor adopted by Anne Frank's father, Otto Frank, has died in London at 96, the Anne Frank Foundation announced. Otto Frank adopted her in 1953 after marrying her mother, Fritzi; Schloss-Geiringer had lived near the Franks in Amsterdam before the Nazi occupation. Only a month older than Anne Frank, she knew her from the same neighbourhood. Schloss-Geiringer authored books about her survival and spoke widely against antisemitism.

Rare Menorah
Pendant Unearthed

Israeli archaeologists have uncovered a rare 1,300-year-old lead pendant decorated with a *menorah* near the southwestern corner of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Found north of the City of David, the late Byzantine pendant bears identical seven-branched *menorahs* on both sides, with only one other known worldwide. Researchers believe it was worn by a Jewish pilgrim visiting Jerusalem despite a ban, offering a glimpse into Jewish devotion during that period.

European Jews: Emancipation
to Persecution—Part I

■ Edda Fogarollo

Historian | President | Christians for Israel Italy

*"France is our Israel,
Her mountains are our Zion,
Her rivers are our Jordan,
Let us drink the water of these springs;
It is the water of freedom."*

(Letter from an emancipated Jew)

Cronique de Paris, 1791

Jewish Emancipation in Western Europe

After many centuries of segregation and confinement in ghettos (ghetto-isation), French Jews entered a new era in the wake of the French Revolution of 1789: they were afforded the same rights as other citizens in a social and legal process known as emancipation, which soon spread throughout Western Europe.

Jewish emancipation occurred between the late 18th century and the first half of the 19th century. During this period, Jews in Western Europe could enjoy equal civil and political rights. They could also access universities, achieve prestigious and government positions, purchase goods of all and choose where to live since, as a letter of the time claims, France was now their Israel. The achievement of a milestone was the result of a long series of discussions during Europe's Enlightenment period. In fact, according to Enlightenment thought, emancipation of the Jews was necessary to guarantee homogeneity within a secular state, which could not be diverse and united if different groups with different legal conditions existed.

The Situation of Jews in Eastern Europe

However, while the Jews in Western Europe were living in a new historical era, the Jewish people of Eastern Europe were still subject to poverty and oppression: the antisemitism initiated by the Russian clergy triggered a mass hatred among the lower classes. The Jews had to accept heavy obligations and acts of violence, such as that of ten-year-old children being snatched from their parents to serve as soldiers.

Only during the reign of Tsar Alexander II, who launched a plan to modernise the country, did the life conditions of the Jews start to improve: military service was reduced to five years and they were also allowed a certain freedom of movement and access to some schools. All this tragically ended with the murder of the Tsar in 1881 when a new wave of intense hatred hit the Jewish communities once again.

Pogroms and Mass Violence Against Jews

Following the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in St Petersburg on 13 March 1881, for which the Jews were held responsible, the hatred of the Russian people towards them escalated into a real form of persecution, which culminated in a series of collective massacres, known as 'pogroms': hundreds of Jews were killed, women and children slaughtered and houses burnt down. The pogroms continued into the 20th century, reaching alarming proportions and giving rise to the figure of Pogromski, the professional instigator of pogroms. In fact, the numerous local massacres of Jews in Russia that took place between 1881 and 1920 were not random or spontaneous popular upheavals: they required much preparation, meticulous organisation and, above all, intensive propaganda. Sometimes this task was carried out by the police or even by private citizens, especially unscrupulous journalists, who used their journals to spread antisemitism.

The three-day long pogrom that broke out in Elisavetgrad on 15 April 1881 was uncontrollable and its violence could only be soothed by the intervention of the armed forces. Riots also took place in other cities during the same month: Kishenov,

Yalta and Znamenka. This wave of death and destruction even reached Odessa in early May. It is estimated that a further 200 cities and villages witnessed similar riots during this first year. Thousands of people were deprived of their houses and goods.



Expulsion of the Jews from Kiev (1881) | Photos: Wikimedia Commons

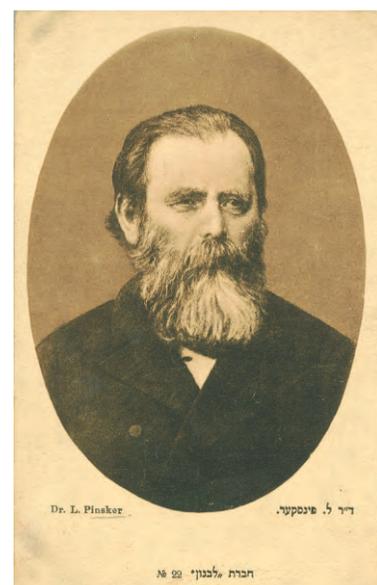
The Russian press described the pogroms as spontaneous revolts that were justified by the local people who were 'long forced to endure the Jewish presence'. The request made by the Jews to punish the instigators of these revolts was described by the press as an insult to the Russian people. The Russian government did not intervene: this lack of critique and indifference towards such violence and destruction gave grounds to suspect that the government itself had tacitly approved such manifestations.

It was the first time in twentieth-century Europe that the Jews had to face antisemitism, not just as a form of regular discomfort or a phenomenon produced by a specific incident, but as an immediate threat to their lives and a manifestation of mass persecution. This led to an unprecedented crisis in the modern history of the Jews.

Leon Pinsker and the Call for Jewish Self-Emancipation

It was in this period of persecutions that Leon Pinsker (1821-1891), a Jewish doctor and loyal subject of the Tsar, became resentful and disillusioned after realising that, despite all efforts, Russification was unachievable for the Jews. As he expressed in his pamphlet *'Auto-Emancipation'* (1882), Pinsker was aware that a wave of hatred would always hit him and his people, as it had already occurred in the past and during his time: *"Insulted, robbed, plundered and dishonoured, we do not dare to defend ourselves and, what is worse, is that all this is accepted as almost natural... One day you discover that you are considered as foreigners, and a ferocious crowd will remind you that, after all, you are only vagabonds and parasites to which the law does not offer any protection... forever exposed to a mental disorder... for which no therapy exists: antisemitism."*

The Jewish doctor understood that the only salvation for the Jews was to dwell in their own Land. Reunion in a fatherland would be the solution and would also instil common awareness of being a nation once again with a unifying language.



Leon Pinsker (1821-1891)

Spiritual Revival Versus Mistrust

■ Canaan Lidor

Journalist

While many Israelis are searching for meaning and connection after the trauma of 7 October 2023, there is also mistrust of the state and institutions, despite personal and communal reconstruction efforts.

Since his return after nearly 500 days of captivity in Gaza, Sagui Dekel-Chen has not only resumed his life; he has 'devoured' it, according to his father Jonathan. Sagui Dekel-Chen, father of three children, was kidnapped by Hamas terrorists from Kibbutz Nir Oz on 7 October 2023, and held captive in Gaza until February 2025. Since his release, he has devoted himself entirely to reviving the mobile supermarket he founded several years ago with his wife Avital. This supermarket, Columbus, supplies remote communities with food. At the same time, he is getting to know his youngest daughter, who was born while he was in captivity, reestablished contact with his two older daughters, and started several creative projects. All this is happening while he is recovering from a serious physical injury that has left one of his arms temporarily paralysed.

Sagui Dekel-Chen's community in Kibbutz Nir Oz, on the other hand, is still far from recovered, says historian Jonathan Dekel-Chen, who himself survived the 7 October massacre. Although the damaged buildings in Nir Oz are being physically rebuilt, most residents do not want to return. They plan to move about 80 kilometres to the northeast, to Kibbutz Beit Nir.

Reconstruction of Tkuma

The contrast between the family's reconstruction and their inability to participate in the reconstruction of their *kibbutz* reflects a broader divide: that between personal and spiritual reconstruction after 7 October, and the indelible scars and damage left by the massacre in the affected communities—and possibly in Israeli society as a whole. Physical reconstruction is easier to quantify. Of the 47 villages, towns, and localities in the Tkuma region near Gaza affected by the attack, only five remain uninhabited. The combined population of approximately 6,200 people is currently staying in temporary housing, awaiting return after renovations, or permanent relocation.

Remarkably, the population of the Tkuma region—a name chosen after 7 October that means 'revival'—has actually grown since the attack. According to an annual report from the Tkuma region, the number of residents grew from 62,000 to 65,000. The available budget of approximately €4.8 billion is earmarked not only for repairs, but also for the large-

scale reconstruction of an area. Hamas damaged 2,603 buildings. Of these, 525, spread across 23 locations, were completely destroyed.

Of the 1,200 people killed on 7 October, nearly 530 lived in the Tkuma region—almost 1% of the local population. The region has 288 orphans, and nearly half of the 250 people abducted by Hamas were local residents. In recent months, Hamas has returned all living hostages to Israel, as well as the bodies of all hostages who were killed in captivity. The return of the hostages has helped to heal the trauma in a society where many said healing would be impossible without them.

Need for Connection

These developments were part of a ceasefire brokered by US President Donald Trump. The Israeli army controls about half of the Gaza Strip, while preparations are being made for an international force to replace Hamas in the other half. The ceasefire also gave the Israeli economy a boost. Last month, the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) predicted growth of 3.3% in 2025, rising to 4.9% in 2026 and 4.6% in 2027.

In addition to economic growth, there is also another, more difficult to measure development: spiritual growth. According to film director and cultural researcher Sigalit Banai, this growth is clearly visible to many Israelis who follow developments within society. She said this in an interview on 11 October with *Kan*.

Banai, a secular mother, said she was surprised to learn that her 15-year-old daughter, a student at an arts high school in Tel Aviv, had been reciting *slichot* for weeks: prayers for forgiveness normally uttered only by devout Jews in the run-up to *Yom Kippur*. When Banai asked her daughter why she was doing this, she replied, "We are a generation of thirsty souls." She explained that the quote came from the young singer Ben Tzur, whose hit song extols the benefits of combining a modern lifestyle with Jewish traditions. Intrigued, Banai accompanied her daughter to a popular synagogue in Tel Aviv 'filled with teenagers,' a rare sight in religious communities and even rarer in secular Tel Aviv. "What I saw was not a return to religion as people of our age know it. It was something new, something I didn't yet recognise." Teenagers her daughter's age, Banai said, "have gone through two years of terrible war with the fears that came with it, and that creates a tremendous need for connection and closeness to God."

Drawn Closer to Judaism

One of the most prominent figures embodying this trend is Iris Haim, the mother of Yotam Haim (29). Yotam was



Former Israeli hostage Sagui Dekel-Chen and his wife at a memorial service at kibbutz Nir Oz, where 65 kibbutz members were murdered or taken captive by Hamas on 7 October. | Photo: Flash90

accidentally killed by Israeli forces in the winter of 2024, along with two other Israelis, after they escaped from Hamas captivity and were mistaken for terrorists by soldiers clearing the area. In a recent interview, Iris Haim—formerly secular—looked back on her emotional journey. Since her son's abduction, she was initially 'unrelentingly optimistic' that Yotam would return alive. "After his death, I spent the first year telling the story of my son, who died heroically during a daring escape."

After that initial period of mourning, "my life became a roller coaster, with highs from good things happening and lows from loss. Later, I began to tell myself a story about connecting with my Judaism. I was very far from it, but now I have come very close." Haim has since become an activist for initiatives that seek to reduce political polarisation in Israeli society. In 2024, she accompanied PM Netanyahu on a state visit to the United States. At the same time, other relatives of hostages accused Netanyahu of being primarily responsible for the massacre and of undermining democracy. Haim defended Netanyahu against these accusations and criticised the army leadership for failing to prevent the attack.

At the same time, she harbours no resentment toward the soldier who killed her son. That soldier visited her home during the *shiva*, the seven days of mourning after Yotam's death. "My feelings were complex, but I wasn't angry at that soldier. I get angry when I talk to the highest-ranking officer and get vague answers." She recently met the mother of the soldier who shot her son, who thanked her for telling her son not to blame him for Yotam's death.

Remaining Confident

"After Yotam's death, I lost all hope, but

then hope returned. Not to see Yotam again, but to see the people of Israel rise from this tragedy with a strengthened spirit." She told the Israeli newspaper *Maariv*: "Israelis should look at the path we took until we got our own state." She was referring to the 1947-1949 War of Independence, the deadliest war in Israel's history, with more than 6,000 deaths—about one percent of the population at the time. That war is often compared to the war that broke out on 7 October 2023, because of its unusually long duration and the combination of stunning successes and painful defeats and concessions, including the withdrawal from Samaria and East Jerusalem.

Historian Jonathan Dekel-Chen acknowledges that the Zionist project has endured and even grown despite losses greater than those of 7 October. But, he added, "on that day, there was a catastrophic failure, both militarily and politically, which left many Israelis feeling that the unwritten contract between citizens and government had been violated. As a result, someone like me, who has led a patriotic, hyper-Zionist life since my arrival in Israel in 1981, has experienced a huge breach of trust—something unusual compared to everything that preceded it, even compared to the War of Independence."

In her lectures, Iris Haim recommends "staying away from places that cause us fear, loss of clarity, and loss of trust in people and the state." She repeated a metaphor that became popular during the *Yom Kippur* War of 1973, when the Israeli Air Force suffered heavy losses. In that metaphor, each downed aircraft was like a string snapping in a giant harp, but the melody being played could not and must not be interrupted.

“The Lord Spoke to Me”

■ Rev Henk Poot

Christians for Israel Netherlands

In the lobby of a hotel in Jerusalem, I meet ‘the pastor of Bethlehem’, Reverend Naim Khoury, and his charming wife Elvira. When they arrive, they look tired. It is not only their age—both are well into their seventies—nor merely the difficult journey from Bethlehem to Jerusalem. It is difficult to be a Christian in Bethlehem, and it shows.

Once we find a place to sit, I ask Naim how long he has served as a pastor in Bethlehem. “Forty-eight years,” he replies, and immediately begins to tell me how it all started. “The Lord spoke to me! I come from an ancient lineage; our family has lived in the Bethlehem area for centuries. Almost all of them are Greek Orthodox; many of my uncles were priests. But I couldn’t believe that we are saved by Mary, whom they call the mother of God, and by the saints, and by baptism alone. God showed me that we only have life through the precious blood of Jesus.” As he speaks, all his fatigue seems to vanish.

Tell Your Own People!

I ask him how the church started in Bethlehem. Naim explains: “We started with church services in an apartment. My wife and I visited five thousand people. We knocked on doors, spoke about Jesus, listened to their concerns,

shared their grief, and prayed with them. And that is how the church started. That was the second miracle of Bethlehem.” He continues: “I wanted to read the Old Testament. I had never read it before. People believed it was a Jewish book, something from the past, and that it was not for us. I searched for six months for an Old Testament, and when I found it, I started reading it. I read about God’s prophecies and His eternal covenant with Israel. And then the Holy Spirit said, ‘Tell people’. And I did. People were shocked and walked away, and I was called a Zionist and a traitor.” A moment of silence follows, as if we too need to be reminded that Jesus is a Jew, born in Judea, in Israel, and that this truth must never be forgotten.

God Provides for Everything

“Those years were not all difficult, Naim says. “Most people in Bethlehem were Christians, even if they thought differently from us. The mayor was a Christian, and treated us favourably. I was even sent to the funeral of the mother of King Hussein of Jordan, where I spoke about the gospel. He was a man of dignity and honour. But everything changed. Hamas rose to power and took control. There is no freedom of religion in Islam. Now we have a church building, but it is surrounded by barbed wire. I have

survived attacks. Yet the Lord provides for everything, even now.”

When I bring up the war, Naim’s shoulders sink. He looks at the ground as he speaks of churches abroad that suddenly stopped their support, without explanation. He talks about growing poverty, because the border with Israel is closed and the Palestinian Authority rewards terrorists but does nothing else. “But with God’s help, we will continue, and prayer is a great power.”

Then Elvira speaks up. It is clear that her heart is especially with the children. She tells me about Iranian rockets that fell during the summer camps. “We don’t have any shelters here. The children crawled towards me. There were two hundred of us. I pointed to the sky and told them not to be afraid. If our house here is destroyed and we die, we have a home in heaven where Jesus is waiting for us. We must be ready to meet Him. And they calmed down.” Naim nods: “Many wonderful things are happening. This morning there was a Bible study with a hundred people. People are coming to faith. They see that the faith and love of Jesus truly changes lives.”

He is Very Close

I notice that the holy fire has returned in Naim’s eyes. “God’s Word is being fulfilled,” he says. “Gaza is burning, just as the prophet Zephaniah said. And



Rev Naim and Elvira Khoury in front of their church in Bethlehem. | Photo: Walid Sababa

darkness covers the earth. But I also see the beginning of *Isaiah 19*, the road between Damascus, Jerusalem, and Egypt. Jesus is very close! I have never felt this way before.”

In the church of Naim and Elvira Khoury in Bethlehem, they already see the light of the coming of Jesus, the King of the Jews and the Saviour of the world.

To support Rev Naim and Elvira Khoury in Bethlehem, please complete the donation coupon on the back page (select Arab Christians).

**Will you help?
Any amount helps.**

Comforting the Last Survivors

■ Christians for Israel

Thousands of Holocaust survivors in Israel live with the physical, emotional, and social consequences of their traumatic past. Organisation Amigour plays a vital role in their lives, offering not only affordable and safe housing, but also personal guidance, social activities, and a close-knit community. This gives the survivors the peace they deserve at this stage of their lives.

A Warm Home

Spread across 57 residential centres throughout Israel, Amigour provides a warm home to approximately 7,500 vulnerable elderly people. Among them are many Holocaust survivors who would otherwise be unable to afford their own living space. But Amigour does more than just provide a roof over their heads. Social activities, cultural programmes, and personal care turn these homes into true communities. Singing, dancing, and shared celebrations are a regular part of life. These activities keep the elderly active, while also offering a therapeutic effect.

Many of the last generation of Holocaust survivors never really had a childhood. Having fun together allows them, even briefly, to experience what they were once denied—the freedom to simply be children again.

Boris has been part of the Amigour family for 25 years. He arrived in Israel in 1991, immediately after the fall of the Soviet Union. Although he has no family in Israel, thanks to Amigour he does not feel lonely: “I am surrounded by love and companionship here,” he says. Last summer, Boris celebrated his 90th birthday. At his advanced age, he is still a shining example of vitality. With his trusty walker, Boris enjoys daily walks through the corridors and often participates in the cultural activities and classes that are offered by Amigour.

Boris is known for his gentleness, his ever-present smile, and a characteristic saying that melts every heart: “When I see you, everything is fine.”

Holocaust Survivors in Israel

Of the 250,000 Holocaust survivors



Boris (90) is surrounded by love and companionship. | Photo: Amigour

still alive today, about half live in Israel. The city with the most Holocaust survivors is Haifa, followed by Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. 25% of Holocaust survivors in Israel live in poverty. An even higher percentage depend on financial assistance to make ends meet.

“Comfort, comfort My people,” God urges us in *Isaiah 40:1*. By supporting

Amigour and other organisations dedicated to Holocaust survivors, we help turn these words into action.

Please help us bring comfort the Holocaust survivors in Israel. Complete the coupon on the back of this newspaper.

Your support means so much.

The Ongoing War in Ukraine “Our Trust and Hope are in God”

■ Renske Lankman Christians for Israel Netherlands

It has been almost four years since Russia invaded Ukraine. Although negotiations between the two countries have been ongoing, an end to the war does not yet seem to be in sight. We spoke with Koen and Ira Carlier, our C4I field workers about the impact of the war on their lives and ministry.

What impact has the war had on your lives?

Ira: “I never imagined I would live in a country at war. I often read in the Bible that there would be wars, but I always thought they would happen somewhere else. Then one morning we woke to gunfire and explosions and realised the war was here. The first few days were chaotic and frightening, yet we decided to stay in Ukraine to help the Jewish community.

For safety reasons, we had to send our children to Belgium—the hardest decision for me. I remember hugging them at the border, not knowing when I would see them again. I will never forget the fear on my eight-year-old daughter’s face as she walked away with a crowd of refugees, leaving us behind.”

Koen Carlier: “That moment is also etched in my memory. It was very emotional. As far as our work in Ukraine for Christians for Israel was concerned, we were well prepared. We had a shelter, a large generator, a kitchen, a medical center, thousands of kilos of food,

and fuel for our vans. Still, when the war broke out, I knew that our work was entering a completely different phase.”

What gives you strength and hope at this moment?

Ira: “In these difficult times, people are desperately searching for hope, trust, and peace. Some place their hope in Trump, others in Europe, NATO, or heavy weapons, forgetting that our trust and hope must be placed in God.

What motivates you to continue working for Christians for Israel despite the challenges of war?

Ira: “My main motivation is that I have a calling to serve the Almighty. We are living in extraordinary times, involved in very special work for Israel and the Jewish people, and seeing prophecy fulfilled with our own eyes.

Amidst all the uncertainty, the support we provide to people immigrating to Israel and to the Jewish community—whether it’s transportation, food parcels, or other needs—is a real lifeline. It touches lives and gives a sense of hope. I think that in these dark days, we see God’s hand and His miracles more than ever.”

In Ukraine, we support essential projects like **Bring the Jews Home** and **Food Parcels Ukraine**. Your help allows us to continue supporting Jewish communities across Ukraine.



Koen (fifth from left) with a group of Jewish immigrants leaving for Israel. | Photos: C4I Ukraine



Ira hands out food parcels for the Jewish community in Tsjernikov.

YES! I Want to Support Christians for Israel

CHRISTIANS FOR ISRAEL MINISTRY

My donation for ministry costs, print & post

Emergency Situation in Israel

ALIYAH - BRING THE JEWS HOME

One person from Ukraine - € 135 | US \$150

One family (5 people) - € 675 | US \$750

One bus (25 people) - € 4500 | US \$5000

First Home in the Homeland - € 450 | US \$465

Bnei Menashe (India) (1 person) - € 950 | US \$1000

Aliyah Ethiopia

SOCIAL WELFARE PROJECTS

Meals on Wheels - € 5 | US \$5 each

Food Parcels in Ukraine - € 15 | US \$15 each

Children at Risk - Jaffa Institute

Hineni Soup Kitchen - € 7,50 | US \$7.50 per meal

Holocaust Survivors Ukraine and Moldova

Christian Friends of Israeli Communities (CFOIC)

Arab Christians

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DONATION

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TEACHING RESOURCES

Israel on Trial (Book) by Andrew Tucker

70 Questions About Israel (Book) by Chan Siew Fong

Israel 70 Years (One-off Collector's Magazine)

Jerusalem 50th Anniversary (One-off Collector's Magazine)

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

Why Israel? (Book) Why Jerusalem? (Book) Why End Times? (Book)

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