

# ISRAEL

## & Christians Today

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CHRISTIANS FOR  
**ISRAEL**  
NEW ZEALAND

Understanding Israel and world events from a Biblical perspective

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People hold a giant Israeli national flag at the Western Wall in Jerusalem's Old City, on the eve of Jerusalem Day, 25 May 2025. | Photo: Chaim Goldberg/Flash90

## At the Centre of Attention

Each year, Israel celebrates Jerusalem Day, *Yom Yerushalayim*, on 28 Iyar in the Hebrew calendar. This year it was Monday, 26 May. This special day marks the reunification of Jerusalem in 1967.

After declaring independence in 1948, Arab armies advanced to wipe Israel off the map. In the ensuing war, Jordan captured Jerusalem, including the Old City. The synagogues were destroyed or desecrated, and the Jewish residents expelled or killed. Even the surrounding villages on the east side—nearly all of them were Jewish—were evacuated. For 19 years, Jews were barred from their holiest sites, including the Western Wall. However, Jerusalem came under Jewish

rule in 1967 during the Six-Day War. This was the first time in 2,000 years.

### Capital

It should be noted that a majority of Jews have lived in the city since 1880, and their brief absence during the Jordanian rule was an exception. The city of Jerusalem has been at the heart of the Jewish people—King David ruled there for 33 years, King Solomon for 40 years. The Lord Jesus calls it the city of the great King, following *Psalm 48*. “Great is the Lord, and most worthy of praise, in the city of our God, His holy mountain. Beautiful in its loftiness, the joy of the whole earth, like the heights of Zaphon, is Mount Zion, the city of the Great King.”

### Destination

We live in extraordinary times. Jerusalem is at the centre of the world's attention. Once dismissed as a desolate town—author Mark Twain described Jerusalem as mournful, dreary, and lifeless city—Jerusalem is now the focus of global attention. The goal of Hamas' attack, as well as that of Hezbollah, the Houthis and Iran, is the conquest of Jerusalem. In June, the United Nations will discuss the future of this city. When it comes to this future, we read in *Psalm 48*: “God makes her secure forever.” And the prophet Zechariah confirms this: “...but Jerusalem will remain intact in her place.” (*Zechariah 12:6*)

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



## Colophon

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**Mission**

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

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# Hamas to Blame for Gaza's Ruins

## ■ Andrew Tucker

International Editor | Christians for Israel

Every day, our screens are filled with images of destruction, and alarming reports of a humanitarian crisis and impending famine in the Gaza Strip. Israel is framed as the aggressor, accused daily of war crimes and genocide.

Israel has been at war now with Hamas in Gaza for over 18 months—since 7 October 2023.

But the war is about much more than Gaza or Hamas.

Hamas is a close ally of Iran—supported financially and logistically by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), as well as Qatar. They are all part of the network of Islamist *ji*had movements and groups that are spread across the Middle East and are devoted to destroying the infidels. It is a war against the West, with Israel and the USA as their main targets.

The war with Hamas started when Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip in 2006. Ever since, Hamas has been oppressing and exploiting the Palestinian population in Gaza in order to destroy Israel. Israel has defended itself and occasionally launching a military campaign against Hamas' military infrastructure.

The Gaza conflict is part of an existential war that the Jewish people have been fighting for centuries. It is not about territory, but about whether the Jewish people have the right to exist as a nation. The new phase of this war commenced with the appointment by the British of Han Amin Al Hussein as the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, who incited the Hebron pogrom in 1929 in which around 70 Jews were slaughtered in a brutal fashion not unlike the 7 October 2023 massacre.

The 7 October 2023 attack opened a new



Smoke rises after an Israeli military operation in the Gaza Strip, 19 May 2025. | Photo: Flash90

phase in this war. Israel stated clearly that it has two main war aims: removing Hamas and freeing the hostages. Both are perfectly legitimate (and necessary) war aims. So far neither of those goals has yet been fully achieved. Hamas is still active and operating in Gaza, and around 50 persons are still held hostage in the tunnels under Gaza (many of them confirmed dead).

Israel recently took the decision to launch a new offensive in Gaza named 'Gideon's Chariots'. Several months ago, it terminated supply of food into Gaza because Hamas misuses the food supplies. These actions have attracted a huge amount of condemnation and censure. For example, France, UK and Canada issued a joint statement threatening to impose sanctions if Israel continues its campaign and does not allow humanitarian aid into Gaza.

In late May, apparently in response to this international pressure, the Israeli

government agreed to allow a limited number of supplies into Gaza. That is to be welcomed.

The problem is complicated by the extremist calls by some Israeli leaders for annihilation of the people of Gaza, implying the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in Gaza. These statements are highly problematic. As Christians, we cannot support or condone them.

But we need to keep the big picture in mind. Israel is fighting an asymmetric defensive war against a terror group that is deeply embedded in the population and operates from a massive complex of hundreds of kilometres of tunnels deep under cities, houses, hospitals, schools and mosques.

The widespread destruction in Gaza is necessary to root out Hamas, and free the hostages.

It is Hamas, not Israel, that is responsible for the tragic destruction and death of its own people.

## Prayer Points

### Israel

- Pray for the release of the hostages still held in the Gaza Strip. Ask for their deliverance amid suffering, and that they may sense God's nearness and comfort even in the midst of such horrific circumstances.
- Give thanks that Israel's population has surpassed 10 million this year—a milestone reflecting great potential to continue building the nation and serving as a blessing to the world.
- "He sent out His word and healed them; He rescued them from the grave." *Psalms 107:20*. Pray for the healing of all who have been physically or mentally wounded by war, and for blessings on the efforts of organisations providing aid and relief.

### Israel and the Nations

- Pray for the protection of Israel on all fronts—north, south, near Gaza, and throughout Judea and Samaria. As threats can arise from any direction, pray for vigilance among the armed forces and for the

effectiveness of Israel's defence systems in safeguarding the nation.

- As the war continues, criticism of Israel intensifies, and with it, antisemitism is on the rise. Pray for the protection of Jewish communities around the world as they face growing hostility. Pray that they receive genuine support from Christians and sense a deepened connection and solidarity during this time.
- "For the Jews, it was a time of happiness and joy, gladness and honour." *Esther 8:16*. This happened because Haman's plan to exterminate the Jewish people was overturned, and Mordechai was given a high position in Ahasuerus' kingdom. Pray that God will also provide relief and deliverance at this time when Israel's enemies plan to exterminate the Jewish people.

### Christians for Israel

- Give thanks for those who went on solidarity missions to Israel to help and encourage the Jewish people.

For daily Prayer Points, go to: [www.c4israel.org.nz](http://www.c4israel.org.nz)



# Peacenik in the White House

■ **Melanie Philips**

Journalist | JNS

When Donald Trump won the US presidential election last year, many in Israel thought they'd dodged a bullet. The Democratic Party was viscerally hostile to Israel, while Trump was considered the greatest friend the Jewish state had ever had in the White House.

Now the Israelis are wondering whether they have escaped one nightmare to find themselves in another.

They were blindsided by the Trump administration's decision to stop attacking the *Houthis* after the Islamist group promised to end its attacks on shipping in the Red Sea while continuing to fire missiles at Israel.

The Israelis were also cut out of the hostage deal that secured the release of 21-year-old American-Israeli hostage Edan Alexander. Of course, the release of any hostage is a source of profound relief. But many were shocked that the United States dealt with Hamas directly to get its nationals out, while Hamas ditched a broader hostage deal that was on the verge of being clinched.

Moreover, if Qatar could force Hamas to release Alexander, then it could have got the other hostages released, too. That's because Qatar is Hamas. Yet the Americans have fawned over the Gulf state and praised it to the skies.

In addition, Trump has accepted a luxury Boeing 747 jumbo jet—owned by the tyrant who formerly ruled Qatar and funded Hamas—to serve as the next Air Force One; he is also building a new luxury golf resort near Qatar's capital, Doha, in partnership with a Qatari company.

It's hard to see these as anything other than inducements to persuade Trump to advance Qatar's interests. Doha has other links to the Trump administration, of which the most egregious is that its Middle East envoy, Steve Witkoff, who has gushed over Qatar in cloying terms, is in its debt. In 2023, Qatar's sovereign wealth fund bought out its faltering investment in New York's Park Lane Hotel for \$623 million.

Not only is Witkoff the beneficiary of the state with which he has been negotiating the release of the hostages, but Qatar represents the Muslim Brotherhood, the Islamist organisation that is intent upon conquering the West for Islam. It is pursuing this aim by turning not just Witkoff but America and Britain into its hopelessly compromised debtors.

*The Free Press* has reported that Qatar has spent almost \$100 billion to advance its interests in Congress, American

colleges and universities, US newsrooms, think tanks and corporations—in other words, to suborn America.

In a similar vein, Syria's president and former Al-Qaeda and ISIS terrorist, Ahmed al-Sharaa, has dangled the offer of a Trump Tower in Damascus as part of a full-on charm offensive to win over the president.

This week, Trump announced that America was lifting sanctions on Syria and met al-Sharaa, describing him as a “young, attractive, tough guy” with a “very strong” past—a stomach-turning way to describe his bloody and fanatical record.

Yet after announcing the end of sanctions against Syria, Trump remarked: “Oh, what I do for the crown prince!” This was a reference to Mohamed bin Salman, the effective ruler of Saudi Arabia, who, along with Turkey, is al-Sharaa's firm ally.

Saudi support for al-Sharaa is doubtless to prevent Iran from again using Syria as its puppet. While Iran's eclipse in Syria is welcome, its replacement by the Islamist Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as the resident strongman is hardly a cause for celebration.

And the idea that al-Sharaa has stopped being a fanatic who believes that he has a sacred duty to destroy all infidels and institute an Islamic caliphate, just because he's trimmed his beard and now wears smart suits, is implausible.

Trump's negotiations with Iran are also spooking Israel. Although he previously said that if Iran didn't dismantle its nuclear programme in a verifiable way, the United States would destroy it, he's now saying that the Iran talks are going very well and that the Iranians are being “very intelligent.”

Indeed, they are. While the clock is ticking and they're racing to build the bomb, they're dangling Trump at the end of a string to buy time to rebuild the air defences that Israel destroyed last October. If Trump isn't careful, he's going to end up in exactly the same bad place as his left-wing foes, even though they start from opposite positions.

To the post-nation universalists of the left, everyone is governed by reason and self-interest; so all conflicts are amenable to negotiation and compromise. War, say these progressives, solves nothing. What matters is avoiding people being killed.

There's no doubting that Trump's genuine commitment to Israel and the Jewish people. But it's now clear that he has an almost messianic belief that he can end all wars and bring peace to the world through his ability to make deals. He thinks that he can make even the most bloodthirsty tyrants an offer they can't refuse. He doesn't care about the justice of

a cause. He just wants to stop the killing. But just as the left, with their belief in some utopian nirvana of the brotherhood of man, have helped empower aggressors such as the Palestinian Arabs and abandoned their Israeli victims, so Trump is in danger of doing the same thing. Like his foes on the left, he doesn't seem to grasp that any negotiation with a non-negotiable agenda, such as the belief by Iran's rulers that bringing about the apocalypse will cause the arrival of the *Shia messiah* on earth, is inescapably an act of surrender. In his consequential speech in Riyadh, Trump announced a total rupture with the ‘neo-conservative’ aim of remaking the Middle East in the image of American democracy.

However, the alternative to imposing Western values on the Arab world is not choosing to ignore the attempt by elements of that Arab world to impose Islam on the West. The correct course of action is, as it always has been, to fight and defeat these threats to Western interests.

Trump's mantra “peace through strength” is fine, but strength inescapably involves the credible threat of war. His Riyadh speech suggested instead that he's using showers of money to tell those who threaten the West, as well as their putative victims, that all of them are now on their own. America won't go to war. There's a peacenik of the right in the White House raining down gold instead of missiles.

Trump says he doesn't have enemies. Where others see threats, he sees only financial opportunities. The inconvenient truth, however, is that some people are out to destroy America and the West. If Trump doesn't regard these as enemies, he will leave America and the West defenceless against attack.

It also puts him radically at odds with Israel, which views fighting and winning the war to defeat genocidal Iran as essential for its survival.

When Edan Alexander was released, the head of Qatar's state-run *Al Sharq News* gloated that America had now been peeled away from Israel by “a move that constitutes implicit recognition of Hamas” and that would “deal a blow to Netanyahu and his Zionist team.”

It's possible that Trump has a genius strategy that will cause lions to lie down with lambs. It's possible that he will soon realise that his quest to bring peace on earth is hitting a dead end and that he will accordingly turn on a dime. But it's also possible that he won't realise that he's been played for a sucker until it's all far too late.

*This article was published by JNS on 15 May 2025. Reprinted by permission.*

## Short News

### Ariel's Butterfly



The Jerusalem fritillary butterfly (*Melitaea ornata*) has been renamed in memory of the murdered five-year-old Ariel Bibas. Ariel was murdered by Hamas in Gaza in November 2023, along with his mother, Shiri, and baby brother, Kfir. Ariel, known for his striking red hair, now lends his name to the butterfly, whose vivid orange wings evoke a visual connection. The name ‘Ariel’ is also linked to Jerusalem. The renaming of the butterfly also expresses a wish: “May this butterfly be of comfort to you.” | Photo: Shutterstock

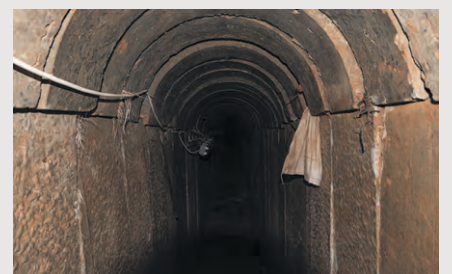
### Israel Ranks Among Happiest Nations

Despite the ongoing war, many Israelis continue to view their country as one of the happiest in the world. According to the *World Happiness Report 2025*, Israel ranks eighth globally. However, this marks the second consecutive year of decline, after placing fourth in 2023 and fifth in 2024.

### Violation of the Peace Agreement

Egypt is reportedly building up troops and military infrastructure in the Sinai Peninsula, in violation of the peace agreement between Israel and Egypt. In response, Israel approached both Egypt and the US, asking them to dismantle the military infrastructure. A senior Israeli official emphasised that Israel remains firmly committed to upholding the peace agreement with Egypt.

### Smuggling Tunnels



A significant number of smuggling tunnels running from Egypt to Gaza are still intact, Israeli security sources told N12 in early April. Concerns about arms smuggling led Israel to refuse to withdraw from the Philadelphi Corridor along the Egypt-Gaza border. According to the sources, the Israeli military has destroyed so far only a quarter of Hamas's tunnel network in Gaza. | Photo: Flash90



# Hamas is Only Part of the Problem

## ■ Wim Kortenoeven

Former Member of Dutch Parliament |  
Middle East Specialist

Of all the anti-Israel terrorist organisations, Hamas is undoubtedly the most successful not only in terms of the number of victims it has claimed among the Israeli population in recent decades, with 7 October as the lowest point, but also in political and administrative terms. In 2007, Hamas was the only terrorist organisation to establish and maintain a de facto independent 'Palestinian' state in the Gaza Strip, equipped with an enormous military force.

As a competitor to secular terrorist organisations such as the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the orthodox Islamic Hamas, founded in 1987, specialised from 1990 onwards in suicide bombings against Israeli civilian targets, including buses and restaurants. In addition, since 2003, increasingly massive rocket attacks have been carried out from the Gaza Strip against Israeli civilian targets.

Successful terrorists are promised an Islamic paradise, as are aspiring 'martyrs'. There are now countless numbers of them. Entire generations of Gazans have been systematically brainwashed by Hamas (with the help of the UN agency UNRWA) from kindergarten age with the idea that it is better to die in the holy war against the Jews than to live for Palestine.

### Undesirable Election Result

In 2005, Israel withdrew completely from the Gaza Strip. The following year, elections were held for the Palestinian National Council in the areas then administered by the Palestinian Authority (PA) in Judea and Samaria, plus the Gaza Strip. These were won by Hamas, not least because of the implicit but clear Hamas message that the Oslo Accords were passé and that the struggle against the Jewish state must be intensified until its destruction. The election results were not accepted (not even by Israel, the EU, or the US), which



Palestinians cheer at the northern Erez border crossing between Israel and Gaza on 7 October 2023, following the Hamas attack in Israel. | Photo: Flash90

led to violent confrontations between the old guard of Fatah on the one hand and Hamas on the other. Ultimately, Hamas managed to gain complete control over the Gaza Strip, while the PA/PLO remained in power in the 'Palestinian' parts of Judea and Samaria. The democratic experiment has obviously not been repeated. Certainly now, with the triumph of 7 October on its banner, Hamas would win elections by a landslide. Under Hamas rule, the Gaza Strip was transformed into a giant terror base with military assistance from Iran and financial assistance from Qatar, facilitated by its benevolent neighbour, Egypt. From there, Israeli civilian targets were attacked with increasingly heavy rockets on an ever-larger scale. This led to limited Israeli counteroffensives in 2008-2009, 2012, 2014, and 2021, and at the end of 2023 to the devastating war that is currently still ongoing.

### Muslim Brotherhood

Hamas does not stand alone, and this explains its great success. It is a spearhead of the globally active Muslim Brotherhood, which is directed from Qatar. This wealthy oil and gas state,

which undermines the international legal order, has long been Hamas's most important financial, ideological, logistical, and political pillar, alongside NATO member Turkey, Iran, and Israel's 'peace partner' Egypt. Qatar is Hamas; it openly directs and houses Hamas institutions and leaders. Qatari spokespeople and media even openly hailed the 7 October massacre as 'heroic'. At the same time, the Qataris act on behalf of Hamas as 'noble' negotiators for the release of Israeli hostages, whether they have already been murdered or not.

### World Caliphate

None of this is surprising. Central tenets of the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood, led by Qatar, are the worldwide spread of the orthodox variant of Sunni Islam by any means necessary; the destruction of the Jewish state of Israel; and the global extermination of the Jews, including those in New York, Melbourne and Amsterdam. In its charter (1988), Hamas calls itself "one of the wings of the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine" and calls on Muslims to kill all Jews.

It is naive and dangerous to characterise Hamas as a nationalist organisation

seeking to establish an independent Palestinian-Arab state alongside Israel. The concept of (nation) states is contrary to fundamental Islamic doctrines and (consequently) to the uncompromising primary goal of the Muslim Brotherhood: the establishment of a global caliphate.

### Al-Jazeera

Qatar's export of the global Muslim Brotherhood agenda is being carried out, among other things, through the financial corruption of Western universities and through the internationally operating media organisation Al-Jazeera, which has elevated the multilingual dissemination of sophisticated anti-Israel, anti-Western, and Islamic propaganda to a true art form. Al-Jazeera 'journalists' were also visibly active in the atrocities of 7 October, as well as in their aftermath. For example, Noa Argamani, a hostage freed by Israeli commandos on 6 June 2024, was held in the home of Al-Jazeera journalist Abdallah Aljamal, who tried to prevent the rescue operation by force of arms and was killed in the process.

Qatar is Hamas, a deadly enemy of the Jewish people and Western civilisation.

### King Willem-Alexander of The Netherlands

In this context, the following words of the Dutch King Willem-Alexander are not only surprising but even more seriously disturbing. They were spoken on 24 June 2024, during the state visit of the Qatari Emir Al Thani to the Netherlands: "Qatar has proven itself to be a stable pillar of the international legal order and a committed partner within multilateral institutions. [...] In the bitter conflict between Israel and Hamas, which has been accompanied by so many atrocities, you continue to tirelessly seek ways to end the violence. Qatar and the Netherlands pursue the same goal: peace in the region. [...] Your visit confirms the ever-broadening and deepening relationship between our countries. This bond is dear to us."

## Famine in Gaza?

Ongoing media coverage of a possible famine in Gaza often presents a distorted picture of a complex reality. But is famine truly imminent—and is Israel to blame?

Following repeated violations of the cease-fire by Hamas, Israel resumed its military campaign and imposed a full blockade, including on food imports.

However, in the two months before the blockade, 338,676 tons of food were brought into Gaza. According to the UN World Food Program, this is

enough to feed two million Gazans for five to six months; the UN itself estimates six to eight months. In other words, there is enough food in Gaza.

The real issue is distribution. Hamas has reportedly diverted large quantities for its own use and sells food at inflated prices to raise funds, food that should be free for the population. Yes, images of long soup kitchen lines are real. But what's often left out are equally valid images of bustling, well-stocked markets, like the one in central Gaza shown in the photo.



Palestinians shop at the market in the Nuseirat Refugee camp, in the central Gaza Strip, on 10 May 2025. | Photo: Ali Hassan/Flash90



# The Netherlands to Veto Extension of Israel-EU deal

## ■ JNS Staff

**Brussels will block European cooperation with Jerusalem until alleged rights abuses in Gaza are investigated.**

Dutch Foreign Minister Caspar Veldkamp said on 7 May 2025 that The Hague would veto any extension of the EU-Israel Action Plan, which implements the association deal between Brussels and Jerusalem.

“The situation in the Gaza Strip is rapidly deteriorating—it is dramatic, catastrophic. Israel’s blockade of humanitarian aid is in violation of the laws of war,” Veldkamp told the Dutch *Algemeen Dagblad* newspaper.

“Meanwhile, the [Israeli] War Cabinet is announcing a reoccupation of Gaza. Taken together, this is reason to draw a line in the sand,” he said.

In a missive to European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Kaja Kallas, Veldkamp accused Jerusalem of acting in violation of the 2000 EU-Israel Association Agreement, which states that relations between the Jewish state and the 27-member body are “based on respect for human rights and democratic principles.”

The Netherlands will block European cooperation with Jerusalem until alleged rights abuses are investigated, he wrote to Kallas. Renewal of the programme requires unanimous support from all EU foreign ministers.

Veldkamp, a former ambassador to Israel, said he would bring up the issue during a two-day EU meeting in Warsaw starting on 7 May 2025.

The EU-Israel Action Plan forms the basis for cooperation in areas like climate policies, policing, scientific research and global poverty relief. Brussels is Jerusalem’s largest trade partner, accounting for 28.8% of its trade in goods in 2022, according to official data published by the European Union.

In his letter to Kallas, Veldkamp said Israel’s newly proposed system of aid distribution to bypass Hamas appeared to be incompatible with the “principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence.”

Speaking with *The Guardian* following a meeting with British Foreign Minister David Lammy on 6 May 2025, Veldkamp criticised Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s prioritising of Hamas’s defeat in Gaza.

“The criticism in Israel is increasing against [the] prime minister that he does not give enough priority to the release of the hostages, and he has now stated also that he doesn’t give that ultimate priority, but he gives the priority to fighting Hamas,” The Hague’s top diplomat told paper.

Last month, Veldkamp told local media he understands “very well” why some Israeli protest groups have been rallying against the Gaza war, urging Netanyahu to prioritise a ceasefire deal over military pressure.

Also last month, Veldkamp summoned the Israeli ambassador to The Hague for a meeting to provide additional clarification regarding the Israel Defence Forces’ now-expanding ground operation in the Gaza Strip.

“At my request, the Israeli ambassador was summoned this morning to provide clarification on the worrying developments in the Gaza Strip, including the attack on the aid convoy,” stated Veldkamp, referencing a 23 March 2025 incident in which several aid workers were reportedly killed alongside six Hamas terrorists in a convoy of Palestinian ambulances.

The Israeli Embassy in the Netherlands confirmed in a statement that Ambassador Modi Ephraim held a meeting with the director of the Middle East and North Africa at the Foreign Ministry in The Hague.

Ephraim “emphasised the expectation that the Netherlands, as a friend of Israel, will support our efforts to dismantle the Hamas threat in Gaza—a terrorist organisation that uses civilians as human shields,” it said.

Geert Wilders, the leader of the Party for Freedom, the country’s largest political movement and a senior coalition partner, slammed Veldkamp’s move as “clumsy and premature” in an interview with Dutch media.

“He has no clue what happened in reality,” Wilders said of his coalition partner’s response to the March incident. “I believe it’s being probed.”

Responding to Veldkamp’s latest move against the Jewish state in a post on X recently, Wilders slammed him as a “weak minister who sides with anti-Israel protesters.”

“Did the entire Cabinet actually agree to those ridiculous anti-Israel measures by Minister Veldkamp? Were all ministers from all parties informed about this in advance, and did they agree to it? Was there a decision by the Council of Ministers?” he asked, addressing Dutch Prime Minister Dick Schoof in the social media post.

In a recent meeting, Wilders spoke with Israeli Foreign Affairs Minister Gideon Sa’ar and Defence Minister Israel Katz. The politician tweeted that he had assured the two of “the support of millions of our people” for the war against “Islamic terror, whether from Hamas, Iran or the Houthis.”

Wilders, a staunch supporter of Israel, resided in the Jewish state for two years during his youth and has reportedly visited the country more than 40 times. After he graduated from secondary school, he spent a year as a volunteer at Moshav Tomer in the Jordan Valley.

Following his win in the 2023 Dutch general election, Hamas and the Palestinian Authority condemned him for saying Palestinian Arabs should be offered the right to move to Jordan and elect its government.

*This article was published by JNS on 7 May 2025. Republished with permission.*

## Short News

### Award for Former Hostage



Former hostage Amit Soussana has been awarded the 2025 *International Woman of Courage Award* by the U.S. Department of State. She was recognised for her bravery in publicly speaking out about the sexual violence she endured during her captivity. The award ceremony was attended by First Lady Melania Trump and other dignitaries. At the ceremony, Soussana called for global action to secure the immediate release of all remaining hostages. | Photo: Flash90

### Concerns Over AI Bias

According to a study by the *Anti-Defamation League (ADL)*, AI models, such as *Openai* and *Chatgpt*, show anti-Israel and antisemitic bias. The research shows that these AI models sometimes refuse to answer questions related to Israel and the Jewish people or provide inaccurate and misleading information. In addition, *ADL* recently published a comprehensive report on *Wikipedia’s* anti-Israel bias. The organisation claims there is clear evidence of a coordinated effort on *Wikipedia* to manipulate information about the conflict.

### 2,200-year-old Pyramid Discovered



Archaeologists have uncovered a 2,200-year-old pyramid, some six metres tall, in the Judean Desert. They also discovered ancient papyrus texts and rare artefacts dating back to the Hellenistic period. The discovery was made by a specialised research team that scanned 180 kilometres of desert terrain using advanced technology. Israeli archaeologists have described the pyramid as one of the most important finds in the Judean desert. | Photo: Israel Antiquities Authority

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# Biblical Significance of the Mount of Olives

## ■ Rev Henk Poot

Christians for Israel Netherlands

When visiting Jerusalem with a group, the guide will often take you to the Mount of Olives first. The view from there is breathtaking.

You can see the entire Old City: Mount Zion and, in the distance, the domes of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the large Hurva Synagogue, the City of David and, of course, in the middle, the Temple Mount, the centre of the world, the navel of the earth, where it all began, God's bridgehead on earth.

On the mountain itself, you can see the white tombs of the Jewish cemetery, and a church: the Church of the Ascension and the Church of the Lord's Prayer, where the prayer can be read in many languages, including Frisian. What stands out is the Russian church with its golden 'onion' dome, dedicated to Mary Magdalene. As you descend the mountain, you arrive at the Church of All Nations at Gethsemane.

### The Mount of Weeping

The Mount of Olives has an enormous and profound meaning. It is the Mount of Weeping. King David climbed this mountain when he left Jerusalem for Absalom. It is said that he continued weeping with those who were loyal to him until he reached the summit, "where one bows down before God" (2 Samuel 15:32). Jesus also wept there, primarily because of the fate that would befall Jerusalem, the city of the great King (Luke 19:41). The temple, the house of God, would also be destroyed. It would not be until Jesus' return that the temple would be rebuilt. Before that, the Gentiles would not allow it.

### The Mountain of Prayer

It is not without reason that Jesus, when He was in Jerusalem and taught in the temple, spent the nights on the Mount of Olives (Luke 21:37). Not only to seek the nearness of His Father, but also to devote Himself completely to Him. On the night before His death, He wrestled here with His fear. An angel comforted Him. Here, He allowed Himself to be bound as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

After the destruction of the temple, Jews were forbidden to enter the city. When the Roman Empire adopted Christianity, that would remain the case. From the Mount of Olives, the children of Israel prayed for the consolation of Jerusalem. Once a year, on the 9th



Christian pilgrims take part in the traditional Palm Sunday procession on the Mount of Olives on 13 April 2025. | Photo: Flash90

of Av, the day of destruction (which falls in the summer), they were allowed to enter, to see and realise how Israel, as the people of God, was a thing of the past.

### The Mountain of Longing

The prophet Ezekiel witnesses how the Glory of God leaves the temple and the city and settles on the Mount of Olives (Ezekiel 11). The exile of Judah begins. But he is also allowed to prophesy about the return of the Lord to the new temple at the end of time (Ezekiel 43:4). The words of God sound powerful: "This is the place of My throne and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell among the Israelites forever." Another prophet, Zechariah, also speaks about this. He tells how God is inflamed with zeal for Jerusalem, and that His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives when Israel is threatened (Zechariah 8 and 14:4). And that is why it is not without reason that Jesus reveals to His disciples here what will happen in the future and how there will be signs in the heavens before the great day of the Kingdom arrives.

### The Mountain of the Second Coming

On the Mount of Olives, the kings of Judah were anointed with oil from the trees that grew there. Jesus is also anointed there by Mary, the sister of Lazarus, before He descends the mountain as King to enter

Jerusalem. He is hailed by countless pilgrims as the King of Israel (John 12), and He is indeed the King. In Jerusalem, He will conquer the ruler of the world through His death.

**As the night before His death came, He wrestled here with His fear, and an angel comforted Him.**

Then, after His resurrection, He will be taken up by the angels from the Mount of Olives. After forty days of teaching about the Kingdom of God, one question remains: when will He restore the Kingdom to Israel? The answer remains hidden. The gospel must go out into the world, and then the end will come. That is certain. He will later encourage John, the disciple He loved, with the words: "Do not be afraid. I am the first and the last, and the living one. I have been dead, and behold, I am alive, and I have the keys of death and of Hades."

Jesus is coming back, on the clouds of heaven, to the place where the ruler of this world is now deceiving people by saying that no Jews are allowed to go there!

## The Promised Land

### ■ Rev Willem JJ Glashouwer

President | Christians for Israel International

Let's look at 'The Promised Land' from a biblical and prophetic perspective.

First of all: Who is the legitimate owner of the land? Is it Israel? No, it is God.

He tells Israel in Leviticus 25:23: "The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is Mine and you are but aliens and My tenants." God owns the land, and it cannot be sold permanently to anyone else without His permission.

The Lord God decided to give the Promised Land to the nation of Israel. He says in Psalm 105:8-11:

"He remembers His Covenant forever, the word He commanded, for a thousand generations, the Covenant He made with Abraham, the oath He swore to Isaac. He confirmed it to Jacob as a decree, to Israel as an everlasting Covenant: 'To you I will give the land of Canaan as the portion you will inherit.'"

The land of Canaan certainly includes Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria (where important Biblical cities are located, like Hebron and Sichem).

But what about Gaza—is it part of the Promised Land? Yes, it is. Gaza is included in the land allotted to the tribe of Judah in Joshua 15. Zephaniah prophesies in chapter 2:2:4-7 that "Gaza will be abandoned and Ashkelon left in ruins", but that "[i]t will belong to the remnant of the house of Judah; there they will find pasture. In the evening they will lie down in the houses of Ashkelon. The Lord their God will care for them; He will restore their fortunes."

Although Israel left Gaza voluntarily in 2005, one-day it will again belong to Israel, to the tribe of Judah.

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## The Jewish People and Israel's Heartland

### ■ Rabbi Steven Pruzansky

Senior Research Associate | Jerusalem Center for Applied Policy

**Judea and Samaria have since ancient times constituted the biblical heartland of Israel. These small territories—5500 square kilometers in total—are the spine of the land, bounded on the east by the Jordan Valley and River and on the west by Israel's coastal plain and the Mediterranean Sea. Jerusalem in the center serves as the bridge between Judea to its south and Samaria to its north. It is not widely known but Jews have lived in this region in an unbroken chain of residence from biblical times until today.**

The major battles of the Hasmoneans—approximately 165 BCE—were fought in this area. Even after the destruction of the Second Temple in the year 70 CE and the subsequent exile of most Jews from Israel, a remnant always remained, especially in Jerusalem, Hebron in Judea and various towns in Samaria. In medieval times, major Jewish centers were established. In the late 15th century, one rabbinic luminary, Rabbi Ovadia of Bertinoro, left his hometown in Italy, ascended to Jerusalem and soon became the rabbinic leader in Hebron. Pilgrimages to the holy sites—the Tombs of the Patriarchs in Hebron, Joseph's tomb in Schechem—were common, notwithstanding that Jews routinely suffered from the predations of the Crusaders and then Muslim rulers. Muslims barred Jews from entering the Tomb of the Patriarchs in 1267; that ban remained in effect until Hebron was liberated by Israel in 1967.

From 1517-1917, Judea and Samaria were governed by the Ottoman Empire, where it was deemed a provincial backwater of little importance. Jews dwelled there as second-class non-citizens but remained faithful to the land. No Arab entity ever exercised sovereignty there or brought its barren soil to life. The land began to bloom when Jews returned in larger numbers in the 18th and 19th centuries.

This small region was promised to the Zionist Organisation as part of the Jewish homeland envisioned by the 1917 Balfour Declaration. But that promise was repudiated, mainly due to power politics and a lingering distaste among some Western politicians for the Jewish national movement. The United Nations Partition Resolution of 1947 granted Judea and Samaria to a putative Arab state, wrenching

the Jewish heartland of Israel away from the Jewish people. This, too, was never implemented due to the Arab rejection of the plan and their invasion of the nascent State of Israel on 15 May 1948.

Thus, Judea and Samaria were misnamed the 'West Bank' in 1950 after Transjordan illegally seized it during Israel's 1948 War of Independence. That country even changed its name from 'Transjordan' ('across the Jordan River') to 'Jordan' to reflect its new holdings on its western bank. When Jordan renounced its claim over this land in 1988 it nevertheless did not revert to its original name.

While Jordan controlled Judea, Samaria, and eastern Jerusalem from 1948 to 1967, it brutally expelled all Jews who had lived there since antiquity, massacring hundreds in the process. Jordan also barred Jews from visiting all Jewish holy sites including in Jerusalem from 1948 to 1967. During the years of Jordanian occupation, Jordan made no effort to create a Palestinian state nor was there even a demand for one. Calls for a Palestinian state arose only when Israel conquered Judea and Samaria after Jordan attacked Israel during the 1967 Six Day War. Indeed, the Palestine Liberation Organisation was founded in 1964, three years before Israel possessed Judea and Samaria, begging the question what was the PLO trying to 'liberate' in 1964? That the PLO was trying to eradicate Israel before there were any settlements in Judea and Samaria defines the essence of the conflict until today.

More than 500,000 Jews live today in Judea and Samaria in roughly 150 different communities. In Jerusalem, Israel's capital city, 250,000 Jews reside in areas formerly occupied by Jordan. These communities are mostly but not entirely religiously oriented. Jews are drawn to live in the heartland of Israel by its expanse, its beautiful vistas and historical resonance, the quality of life the areas afford, and to fully participate in fulfilling the biblical destiny of Israel.

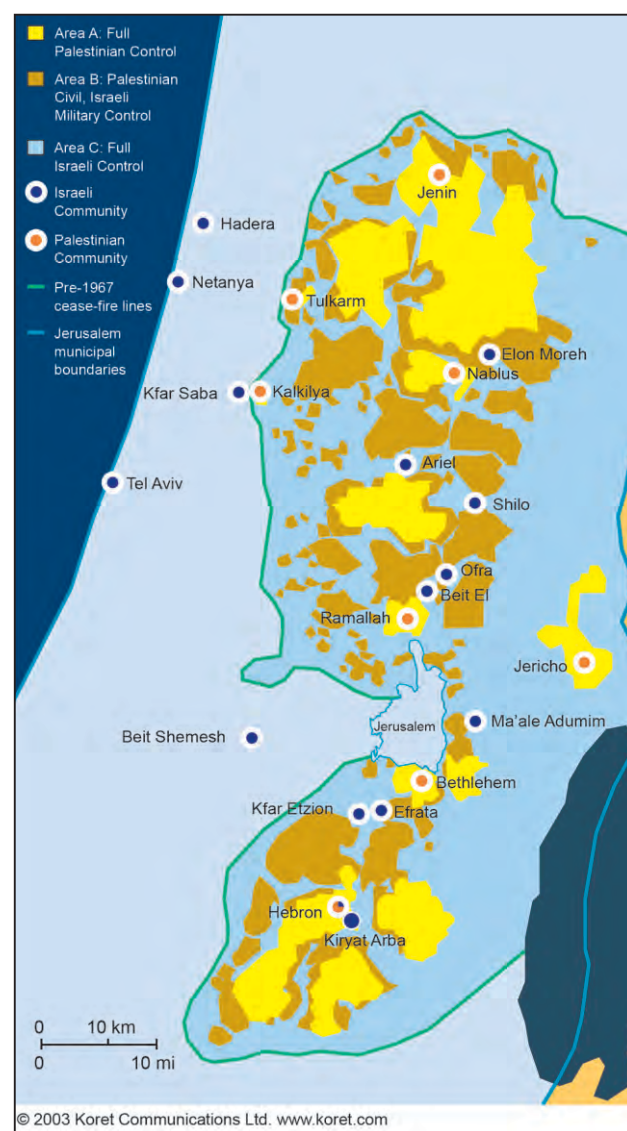
Jews have returned to live in places where our ancestors dwelled—in Hebron, in Shiloh where the Tabernacle stood for 369 years, in Bethel and Efrata, and numerous other places.

This is in fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy (31:4), "you will again plant vineyards in the mountains of Samaria, the planters shall plant and enjoy it," has literally been fulfilled.

In the historic confrontation between Menachem Begin and US President Jimmy Carter in 1977 in which

Carter demanded a halt to settlement construction, Begin retorted: "There are many towns named Hebron in the United States, and many named Bethel and Shiloh... Imagine a governor of a state declaring that all American citizens except Jews could go live in these towns. Can we be expected, as the government of Israel, to prevent a Jew from establishing his home in the original Bethel? In the original Shiloh? ... This is a great moral issue. We cannot tell Jews in their own land that they cannot settle in Shiloh."

There is nothing more natural than Jews returning to Judea—from which the word 'Jew' derives!



Map of Judea and Samaria. | Image: Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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The Promised Land of Canaan also includes the area known in the Bible as 'Bashan', the land east of the Jordan River, now located partly in Jordan and partly in Syria. This is where two and a half tribes lived: Reuben, Gad and half of the tribe of Manasseh. Look at Numbers 21:33-35 and Deuteronomy 3:12-13; 29:7-8; 34:1-4.

**God owns the land, and it cannot be sold permanently to anyone else...**

The problem is not only the West Bank of the River Jordan – that has always been even the heartland of Israel—but also part of the eastside, the Eastbank of

the River Jordan, today called the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

You could say that Syria and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan today are occupying God's land.

The same goes for part of the undivided City of Jerusalem. While Israel unified the city after the June 1967 Six Day war, the Kingdom of Jordan currently manages the Temple Mount in the heart of Jerusalem on behalf of the Muslim world. However, this is Mount Sion, of which the Lord God of Israel says in Psalm 132:13-14: "...For the Lord has chosen Zion, He has desired it for His dwelling: 'This is My resting place for ever and ever; here I will sit enthroned, for I have desired it...'".

One question remains. What about the Biblical rights of non-Jewish people living in the Promised Land of

Israel? Does the Bible speak about them as well? Yes, it does. In Ezekiel 47:21-23 the Lord says:

*"You are to distribute this land among yourselves according to the tribes of Israel. You are to allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the aliens who have settled among you and who have children. You are to consider them as native-born Israelites; along with you they are to be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel. In whatever tribe the alien settles, there you are to give him his inheritance," declares the Sovereign Lord.*

So civil rights for foreigners (non-Jews) living—maybe already for centuries—in the Promised Land of Israel? Yes! But an independent Palestinian State on the Land that God Promised to Israel? No. That is a bridge too far.



# 505 Days in the Hell of Hamas:

## *A Meeting with Tal Shoham*

### ■ Marie-Louise Weissenböck

Chair | Christians for Israel Austria

The Austrian Israeli dual citizen Tal Shoham spent 505 days in the hands of Hamas. Six weeks after his release from hostage-taking, on 3 April 2025, Tal, his wife and two children were welcomed at an emotional reception at the Jewish Community Centre in Vienna. He gave a moving account of his 505-day captivity in the tunnels of Gaza, spoke of the agonising uncertainty about the fate of his family during this time and emphasised his commitment to freeing his two 'brothers', Guy Gilboa-Dalal and Eviatar David, whom he had to leave behind.

Tal comments that on 6 October 2023, "It was a peaceful day," The day before, he had travelled with his wife Adi and their two children Naveh (8) and Yula (4) to his in-laws, who lived in *kibbutz* Be'eri, to celebrate *Sukkot* (the Feast of Tabernacles) together. After a festive meal in the *kibbutz* dining room, they sat together in the *sukkah* (leaf hut) of his wife's parents, drank wine and enjoyed "precious moments with the family". "Nothing prepared us for the hell that would open up just hours after we had sat peacefully in the *sukkah* and laughed."

Next morning, Saturday, 7 October 2023, there was one rocket alarm after the other. The family was then informed via *WhatsApp* that terrorists had infiltrated the *kibbutz*. They locked themselves in the shelter: three women, three children, two men. When the terrorists set about blowing up the door of the shelter, his son Naveh, eight years old at the time, hid behind him and asked him questions:

"Aba (Pappa), are we going to die?" "I answered truthfully because I didn't want the last thing my son would hear from me to be a lie," Tal Shoham recounted. I said, "I don't know."

Naveh had started to cry. After that, the terrorists separated them. "During the entire 505 days in captivity, I prayed that this sentence would not be the last thing my son would ever hear from me."

When the terrorists dragged him out of the house, he not only saw dozens of Hamas perpetrators, but also several corpses in the street. They had been murdered in cold blood. Tal was then held in solitary confinement in Gaza for 50 days. He did not know whether his family had been murdered or whether they were still alive. After everything he had seen, he suspected the worst. "I mourned them, each one individually, and said goodbye to them."

A miracle happened on the 50th day. On this day, one of the terrorists brought him a letter from his wife Adi, from which he learned that she and the children had also been kidnapped but would be released shortly. Adi, Naveh and Yula were released as part of the first hostage deal between Israel and Hamas at the end of November 2023.

"That was the first time I allowed myself to cry," says Shoham. But now he also knew "that I could from now on start fighting for my own life".

After 50 days in solitary confinement, he was imprisoned 20 metres underground in a tunnel together with Guy Gilboa-Dalal (24) and Eviatar David (25), who had been kidnapped together and had been friends since childhood. From then on, they shared every crumb, and even if there was only one pita or one cup of rice to eat on some days, it was divided between them down to the gram. Sadistic guards tortured them psychologically and physically the whole time, the lack of vitamins led to a complete loss of muscle strength and inflammation and "we were completely immobilised for a month and a half". The darkness was oppressive. The humidity meant that our clothes were always wet. There was a hole in the room that served as a toilet. Nothing else. The terrorists sat next door in a well-lit, air-conditioned room and always had plenty to eat, which they liked to show off.

"Not even animals would be kept the way we were treated," said Shoham. He lost 30 kilograms of body weight.

"I was rescued. I was freed and can hold my wife and children in my arms again." But his friends—Guy Gilboa-Dalal and Eviatar David—are still in the tunnels, fighting for their lives. Tal is fighting for their release and will not rest until they are free too.

### Hamas

In terms of politics, Shoham emphasised that it is important to understand who one is dealing with regarding Hamas. "Hamas is a terrorist organisation that is guided by the belief that Jews have no right to the land of Israel—a belief that has driven them to murder, rape and arson." Hamas' most dangerous weapon is not its rockets or its cruelty. "It's the fundamentalist education they use to raise the next generation of terrorists." "Weapons can be taken away, but fanatical convictions last a lifetime." This education rejects the possibility of a state or a people that is not governed by an extreme Islamic law. "There is only ever one acceptable reality: fundamentalist Islam controls the entire Middle East."



Tal Shoham on 3 April 2025, at the IKG (Jewish Community Centre) in Vienna.  
| Photo: Marie-Louise Weissenböck

In Hamas' value system, human life has no value, "neither Israeli nor Palestinian life". Under the ground in the Hamas tunnels, he also realised that the civilians in Gaza were also prisoners, "either of Hamas itself or of the fanaticism they grew up with". The best thing that could happen to the people in Gaza was therefore "liberation from the terrible rule of Hamas". The international community must reject anything that encourages terrorism. "There is no scenario in which terrorism is legitimate. There is no excuse for what happened on 7 October." Hamas has called into question the fundamental values of the international community, the values on which the United Nations had once been founded, "I am not sure that the UN is aware of this today".

Despite everything, it was important to Shoham to emphasise that there is always hope. "Hope has brought me back together with my family." And when he was sitting in the darkness in Gaza, he had no idea how many people were taking the streets for him — including in Austria, and how many people worldwide had stood up for the hostages. He wanted to say thank you. Tal expressed his biggest gratitude to the Austrian government and in particular former Federal Chancellor Karl Nehammer, former Foreign Minister and Chancellor Alexander Schallenberg and diplomat Peter Launsky-Tieffenthal for their enormous efforts, which had ultimately led to his release.

## Expression of Gratitude

On Tuesday evening, 27 May 2025, Marie-Louise Weissenböck, regional director Europe of Christians for Israel, the former head of government, Karl Nehammer and his former special envoy Peter Launsky-Tieffenthal were honoured for their "outstanding services to the State of Israel."

According to the Israeli Embassy in Vienna, this prize is intended to honour people and organisations in Austria "who have made an extraordinary contribution to improving relations between Israel and Austria through their achievements." It is also "an expression of gratitude for standing by Israel in these difficult times."

Marie-Louise Weissenböck has been "a voice of moral clarity and courage for many years" and "a leader in the fight against antisemitism, against misinformation and for a better



understanding of Israel's history, its democratic values and the challenges it faces."

Nehammer and Launsky-Tieffenthal were honoured "for their extraordinary commitment and principled leadership in the campaign to free the Israeli hostages in Gaza."

The award was presented to the honourees at a reception to mark the 77th anniversary of Israel's independence by Israel's Ambassador to Austria, David Roet.



# “...And Books Were Opened...” (*Revelation 20:12*)

## ■ Rev Willem Glashouwer

President | Christians for Israel International

During the Second World War, the Dutch Government, already in exile in the UK in 1943, drafted a number of resolutions in order to establish a Special Court of Justice (*Dutch: 'Bijzonder Gerechtshof'*) in the Netherlands after the Second World War. That was established to try defendants accused of having committed high treason and war crimes immediately following the country's liberation in May 1945. There were 14,000 such cases from which, 145 led to a sentence of death. Only 42 of those cases actually led to an execution by a firing squad. They were the last instances of capital punishment in the Netherlands.

The records of the Court, comprising the files of roughly 425,000 individuals who were suspected of collaborating with the Germans, make up the 'Centraal Archief Bijzondere Rechtspleging (CABR)', translated from Dutch as 'Central Archive for Special Jurisdiction'. These are stored at the National Archives of the Netherlands. These records are the largest archive on the Second World War in the Netherlands, and were made public on 1 January 2025.

Reading those records reminded me of the verses in the *Book of Revelation 20:12-15* and *21:8*. *Revelation 20:12*: “And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.” One day, the books will be opened. Jesus says in *Luke 8:17*: “... For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open...”.

One day, the files kept by the Most High will be opened and made public. Nobody can escape that. Earthly justice is imperfect. Many facts did not and do not come to light. Many names are missing. Many people carefully covered their tracks. So, the earthly legal rulings and verdicts are flawed and remain the work of man. Many dodged the bullet. But then, no more!

One day, justice will be done. What a consolation and a comfort for the victims. What a chilling prospect for the perpetrators. *Revelation 21:8* says: “... But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death...”.



| Photo: Shutterstock

Also, the murderers. Murderers of the past and murderers today. Then and now. Among those also were they who ‘just’ betrayed Jews (and others) for a few Dutch guilders. By doing so, they became ‘murderers’ by handing those innocent people over to a certain death. It can make your blood boil. It creates an almost uncontrollable anger and inner urge to somehow take revenge. Yet the apostle Paul says in *Romans 12:19*: “...Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: “It is Mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord...”.

One day, they have to pay the price and suffer the penalty. Neither will liars get away with it. With their blatant lies and ideologies leading to left-wing or right-wing or democratic (humanistic/Hellenistic) dictatorships that subsequently resulted in streams of blood during the course of history. After the lie comes murder. *John 8:44* says that “the devil is the father of lies”—and also that the devil is the “murderer from the beginning”. It starts with lies and ends with bloodshed. Streams of innocent Jewish blood have flowed along with other innocent victims of betrayal over many centuries continuing until the present day. The numbers of persecuted Christians worldwide increase every year but none of the perpetrators will get away with it in the end. Is there an escape? Yes, there is.

Fortunately, another book with files will be opened as well. The Lamb's Book of Life, says *Revelation 21:27*. In

it are the names of those who were looking at Him for their salvation and found it. What a consolation. True comfort.

Moses returned to the Lord because of Israel's sin. In *Exodus 32:32-33* Moses pleads: “...But now, please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book You have written.” The Lord replied to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against Me I will blot out of My book...”.

Everybody is personally responsible. In this same way, David prays over the wicked enemies of Israel in *Psalms 69:29*: “...May they be blotted out of the book of life and not be listed with the righteous...”. Chilling words. Chilling reality.

It is not too late yet. There is still time to repent and to confess our sins, turn to Him, repent and convert. To take a new path and follow a new direction. That applies to us all as well as to our Churches and congregations. And to our Governments. Yes, to all of us.

The old rhyming of *Psalms 130:2-4* says: “Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared.”

An extensive version of this article is available on our website under the title: ‘Judges and Laws in Hitler's Democracy Then – And Now’

## Our Daily Bread

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

After the three prayers of praise, three prayers of request follow. The first is: “Give us this day our daily bread”. The translation of this prayer presents a difficulty. Several English translations (such as the NASB and the NRSV) add an alternative translation in a footnote: “Our bread for tomorrow”. Another possible translation would be: “Give us today the bread we need.”

The Greek word used here (*epiousion*) occurs only here and can be understood in different ways,

depending on how you analyse the components of the word. Possible meanings are: necessary for existence; for today, daily; or for the next day.

In the desert, Israel received *manna* daily every week. On the sixth day, *manna* fell for two days. Israel's life in the desert is, in my view, an important background for understanding Jesus' teaching in Matthew's gospel. We can also place the prayer for bread every day in that context. It is about trusting that God provides every day, even for tomorrow, as Jesus goes on to say in the Sermon on the Mount: “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink. [...] Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself” (*Matthew 6: 25-34*).

The Bible itself gives an even deeper meaning to the *manna* in the desert. In *Deuteronomy 8:3*, Moses tells Israel: “God humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.”

Jesus cites this verse when He was tempted by the devil in the desert (*Mat 4:4*), emphasising: “from every word from the mouth of God”. This shows that we are talking about the Word of God, the *Torah*. *Manna*, bread, is symbolic of *Torah* in Jewish tradition. Seen this way, the supplication in the Lord's Prayer is therefore also a prayer to enable us to engage daily with God's Word.



# “Through their Fall, Salvation Comes to the Gentiles”

## ■ Johannes Gerloff

Theologian, Journalist, Lecturer & Author

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

John, the evangelist, realised how ‘unnatural’ it was that the Jewish people rejected their Messiah. John writes: “Even though He did such signs before their very eyes, they did not believe in Him” (John 12:37).

Israel should have recognised Jesus as her Messiah, if only her eyes had not been blinded and her ears had not been numbed.

eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them” (verse 39-40). The Jewish people in the time of Yeshua were not able to believe, even if they had wanted to!

John even had an explanation as to why God denied His people conversion and salvation: “These things Isaiah said, because he saw his glory and spoke of him” (John 12:41). Isaiah knew of God’s plan of salvation not only for Israel, but also for the Gentile world, through the blindness of the chosen people. The ancient prophet never lost sight of the vision that in the end, ‘my house’ will be ‘a house of prayer for all nations’.

At the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew, Yeshua is introduced to us as the son of David. The number ‘14’ is a significant factor in His lineage from Abraham and through David. Matthew employs *gematria*, a rabbinical method of interpretation which deduces meanings from the value of numbers. ‘14’ is the numerical value of the Hebrew name ‘David’. Jesus, the son of David the son of Abraham, is the “ruler, who shall shepherd my people Israel” (Matthew 2:6).

Before sending out His disciples and giving them the authority to preach, to heal and purify, to raise the dead and to drive out demons, Jesus ordered them: “Do not go among the Gentiles! Do not enter any city of the Samaritans! Rather go [exclusively] to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 10:5-6). Yeshua is Israel’s Messiah. He takes Israel’s calling to be separate from the Gentile nations very seriously, even in light of His own existence and calling as the King of Israel.

This is what the Canaanite woman who turned to Jesus in the region of Tyre and Sidon experienced when she pleaded with the only One who was able to help her in her distress: “Have mercy on me, Lord, son of David! My daughter is terribly bound by demonic powers” (Matthew 15:22). But Yeshua reacts in exactly the way any orthodox Jewish man would be required to react if approached by a Gentile woman: “He did not answer even one word”. Finally, His disciples became annoyed by the intrusive manner of the woman. They urge Him to: “Send her away! [Give her what she wants]; for she is crying out after us” (verse 23). In response, still not addressing the woman, but His disciples!—He gives a cold, factual answer: “I am sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (verse 24).

In Matthew’s report, a tension grows between Jesus and his own people because of the statement that He is the Messiah only for Israel. He sees the people and it grieves him “because they are neglected and scattered like sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew 9:36). In Matthew 13:14-15, Jesus has to explain to His disciples why he speaks to the Jewish people only in parables: “Because seeing they do not see, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand”. He quotes Isaiah 6:9-10 just as John did in his Gospel (John 12:40).

The Father in Heaven himself denies His servant the much longed for unity of Messiah and people. The shepherd of Israel has to tell his sheep: “The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a Gentile nation that will bring forth its fruits” (Matthew 21:43).

Finally, we see Yeshua shortly before His crucifixion on the Mount of Olives. He laments over Israel: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you kill the prophets, and stone those who are sent to you. How often I wanted to gather your children, as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings. But you were not willing!” (Matthew 23:37).

Matthew quotes the prophet Zechariah (13:7): “I will strike the shepherd. The sheep of the flock will be scattered” (Matthew 26:31). Only after this prophecy was clearly fulfilled was Jesus able to send His disciples into the “Galilee of the Gentiles” (Matthew 4:15).

Only after Israel had irrevocably denied its Messiah could He commission His followers to: “Go therefore and make disciples of all non-Jewish peoples!”

**The Father in Heaven himself denies His servant the much longed for unity of Messiah and people. The shepherd of Israel has to tell his sheep: “The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a Gentile nation that will bring forth its fruits” (Matthew 21:43).**

Just as the Apostle Paul in Romans 10:16, John turns to Isaiah 53 in order to explain this phenomenon: “In order to fulfil the saying of Isaiah the prophet: ‘Lord, who has trusted our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?’” (John 12:38). He goes on to say: “Therefore they could not believe [emphasis mine], because Isaiah said once more (Isaiah 6:9-10): ‘He has blinded their

For: “The Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, declares, “I will gather yet others to him besides those already gathered” (Isaiah 56:7-8, ESV). Jesus summarised this idea in John 10:16: “I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them too, and they will hear my voice. There shall be one fold and one shepherd”.

## The Bible Speaks

### Forty Days

Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

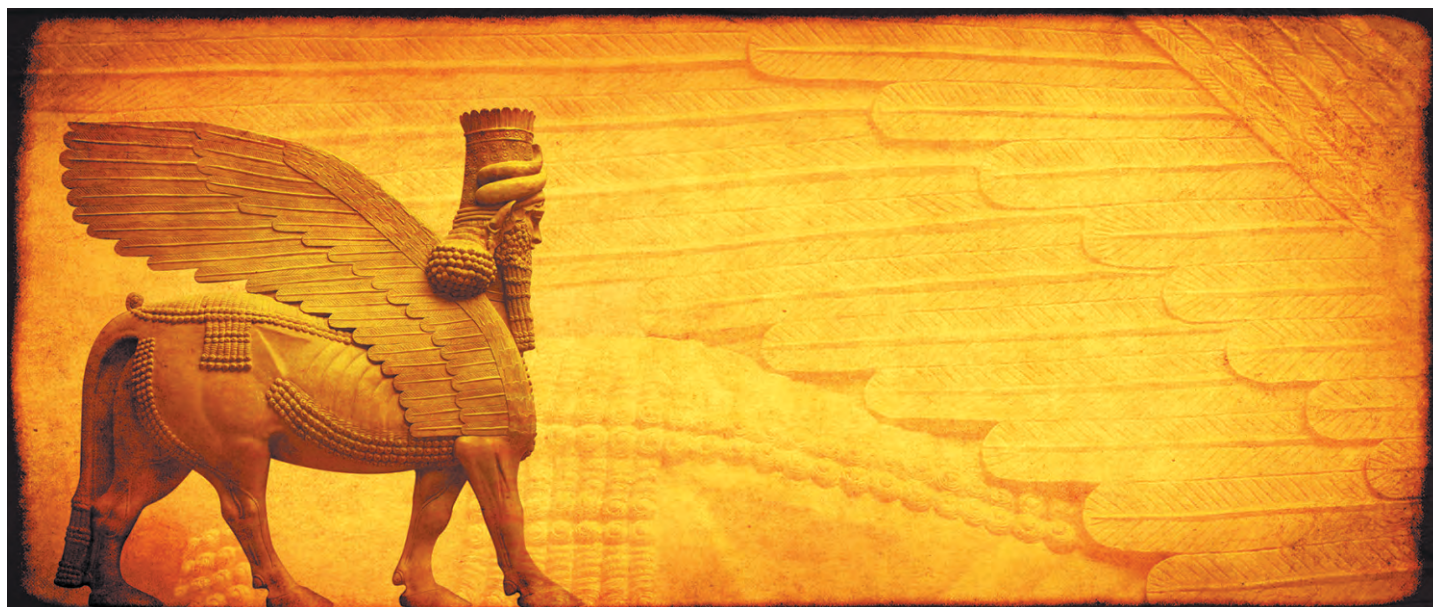
After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

Acts 1:6-9

After forty days of being instructed by the risen Christ concerning the coming Kingdom, the apostles have one final question: When will the Kingdom of God come? Their question is tied to the restoration of Israel. Therefore it is not a wrong question. By this point, after so much time with Jesus, they clearly understand what the Kingdom is all about. It is evident that Jesus spoke extensively about the redemption of Jerusalem. So they simply ask: When will it happen? And in many ways, that question is ours today. As we witness events unfolding in our time—signs that resonate with the prophetic Scriptures—we too ask with anticipation: “When, Lord?” | Photo: Flashgo



## Introduction to Iran



Ancient Iran Persia. | Photo: Adobe Stock

### ■ Kameel Majdali

Director | Teach All Nations Inc.

This is part one of a series of articles analysing the Israel-Iran relationship.

...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)

When it comes to words like 'Iran,' 'Ayatollah,' 'Khomeini,' 'Khameini,' and 'Ahmadinejad,' the name recognition is universal. It is hard to believe now, but until 1979, Iran was considered a Western-oriented, secular nation, and an ally of the United States as well as Israel. Yet, like a mighty earthquake, it all changed with the coming of the Islamic revolution on 1 February 1979. Overnight, Iran was transformed into a theocratic, fundamentalist, and puritanical Islamic Republic. The United States, despite its vast intelligence services like the CIA, was caught completely off guard.

In November 1979, 52 hostages were taken in the US embassy in Tehran and held captive for 444 days. It was a nightmare that haunted America, compounded by a failed military raid to rescue the hostages in April 1980.

Overnight, Iran turned against Israel and became a leading spokesman of the anti-Israel bloc. It broke off diplomatic relations with the Jewish state and spoke as a furious adversary: America was the 'great Satan' and Israel the 'little Satan.' Both nations will be destroyed.

Just as the name recognition is widespread, so is the ignorance about this significant country. Iran has an imperial past and likewise a prophetic future. What does it all mean for us today?

### Iran Means Influence

First, look at the world map. Iran is the largest Middle Eastern nation after Saudi Arabia. More than that, it

dominates the oil and gas-rich areas; it is the master of the Persian Gulf, where 55% of the world's oil is located. Consider the Caspian Sea and its pipelines: Iran also influences those areas where the pipelines flow: to the Black Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, the Indian Ocean, and China. Iran's influence casts a shadow on the neighbouring Arab world as well as the countries of Central Asia. Iran's 500-kilometre coastline on the Arabian Sea gives these landlocked nations international access.

Iran is not just a large territory, perched in the same location it has occupied for millennia; Iran is not just a noble race called Persian, with some *Azeri* mixed in. Iran is also a language group and a high culture that has until now dominated from Baghdad to Bangladesh. Languages as diverse as *Urdu*, *Pashtu*, *Dari*, *Tajik*, *Bengali* and *Hindi* are all under the cultural-linguistic influence of Iran. Apart from Israel and Egypt, Iran is the only other Middle Eastern nation to have ancient texts, language and culture that survived antiquity. For this reason, the influence of Iran and any changes in its government will reverberate from India to Israel.

### Imperial Iran

Iran is not an Arab country, and Iranians don't speak Arabic, though their script is the same. Iranians are Indo-European people, and they speak *Farsi*. It was only in 1935 that the nation became known as 'Iran,' the 'land of the Aryans.' Before that, its age-old name was 'Persia.' This is also the name of a mighty empire that ruled during the days of the Bible.

From all accounts, the Persian Empire (539-333 BC) was glorious and impressive. Consisting of 127 satraps (provinces or counties) which stretched from India to Ethiopia, the empire started a monarchy which lasted over 2,500 years, from the days of Cyrus the

Persian until the overthrow of the Shah of Iran in 1979. More details can be found in the Bible books Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther.

The Persian Empire, along with its size, was very tolerant, liberal, multiethnic and multicultural. Occupied people enjoyed a reasonable amount of autonomy. Unlike any other empire, the Bible records that the rulers of Medo-Persians were kind to God's people: allowing them to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple of God; returning the temple furnishings which were plundered by the Babylonians; and reissuing the building permits when there was a stoppage caused by Israel's neighbouring enemies. Jewish life flourished in Persia, the Diaspora, and in Judah itself.

The empire continued for approximately 200 years until the coming of the conqueror Alexander the Great. At a young age, he made it a goal to conquer the Persian Empire, which he did. The legacy of that empire continued for centuries until our time.

The Book of Daniel describes life in the courts of the ancient Babylonian Empire and the Persian Empire. It also has powerful imagery. These include 'the chest and arms of silver' (Daniel 2:32), 'the bear' (Daniel 7:5) and 'the ram' (Daniel 8:3, 6-7). Ultimately, it speaks of 'the prince of Persia' (10:20).

Who is he? The Bible mentions him in only two verses (Daniel 10:13,20). He appears to be a malevolent spiritual principality over ancient Persia (at least over the gods of Persia). He opposed the plan and the people of God. When God dispatched an angel to Daniel in response to his prayer and (partial) fast, the prince of Persia fought him for twenty-one days, until the archangel Michael intervened. Does this principality still exist today, and does its agenda remain the same?

## Biblical Roots

By David Nekrutman

### Jesus Rejected at Nazareth?

Most Bible translations title *Luke 4:14-30* with 'Jesus Rejected at Nazareth'. This heading is very misleading. The word 'rejected' projects negativity and limits the message of the text. Instead of focusing on rejection, Luke is highlighting a *Sabbath* message and Jesus' mission to non-Jews.

'The Sabbath Sermon' would be a better title for the first section (v.16-21) because it sets up the drama of this synagogue scene, Jesus' one-liner—"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (v.21).

Jesus is presented as a reader of the synagogue lesson from the Prophets. The congregation gives Jesus the scroll of Isaiah. He unrolls the scroll, finds *Isaiah 61:1-2* and *58:6*, slightly amends the text, rolls it back up, hands it back to the attendant and sits down. When the congregation waits in anticipation for Jesus' next move, he declares, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

Jesus could have said, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in me." Instead, by using the word 'hearing', the one-liner is directed to the congregation with a root word well known by Jews—*shema*. In biblical Hebrew, there is no term for 'obey'. It is quite strange that a book full of laws would have no expression for mandatory compliance with divine commands. Yet, it doesn't. The closest word to 'obey' is *shema*, which means to internalise, reflect and process, and make a choice. God doesn't want robotic faith. He wants a person to freely choose His divine will.

If we imagine the synagogue scene as in video format, let's freeze-frame this moment. Observe the initial reaction of the congregation. "All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips..." (v.22). This is not rejection! This is amazement. Now scroll forward to one more scene. Jesus is asking them to act upon the fusion of how he is interpreting the Isaiah texts. This is an invitation!

It is beyond the scope of this article to take a deep dive into why this Nazareth congregation ends up wanting to throw Jesus off Mount Precipice. However, Jesus invoking the Elijah and Elisha healing episodes demonstrates that Isaiah texts are not just about the physical restoration of the Jewish people but also uplifting non-Jews as well.

For Christians viewing *Luke 4:14-30*, living a *Sabbath* lifestyle should be more important in their lives. It is an opportunity to reflect on how one is actualising healing in the world.



# Shavuot—Festival of Weeks

**Kees de Vreugd**  
Theologian | Christians for Israel International & Editor  
| Israel & the Church

Seven weeks are counted starting from *Pesach* (Passover), according to the Biblical commandment (*Leviticus 23:15*). On the fiftieth day, it is *Shavuot* (Festival of Weeks; *Pentecost*). *Shavuot* means ‘weeks’, from the Hebrew root *sheva*—seven. And *Pentecost* is derived from the Greek word ‘fiftieth’. So, in the name of the Christian feast, there is still a connection with the Jewish roots.

The seven weeks’ count is traditionally called the *Omer* counting. The Hebrew word *omer* means ‘sheaf’. In Biblical times, the counting started when the first sheaf of the new harvest was brought as a firstfruit offering in the Temple. In that season, the wheat harvest would start, and on *Shavuot*, the first wheat was brought to the Temple.

In Jewish tradition, *Shavuot* also became connected with the receiving of the *Torah* on Mount Sinai. When you calculate the data in the Exodus story, you will find that Moses received the *Torah* on the day of *Shavuot*. At least since the time after the destruction of the second temple, but probably earlier, the celebration of the revelation of the *Torah* has been the most important aspect of *Shavuot*, but since the return of the Jews to the Land of Israel and the establishment of the State of Israel, the agricultural aspect has also gained strength again.

**“Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire.”**

The People of Israel, standing at the foot of Mount Sinai, had to prepare themselves for three days before God was to reveal the commandments. But immediately after, they sinned with the golden calf. It is therefore a custom in Judaism to stay awake throughout the night of *Shavuot*, studying the Word of God together, as a preparation for receiving the *Torah*. In Jerusalem, for example, every synagogue and every Jewish institute offers study sessions and lectures during this holy night. And at dawn, after a long and



Young children celebrating the Jewish holiday *Shavuot*. | Photo: Yossi Aloni/Flash90

inspiring time of study, everybody draws near the Western Wall to say the morning prayers together. I remember being woken up very early in the morning by the bustle of people passing by on their way to the *Kotel* (the Hebrew word for the Western Wall). The ecstatic joy of studying the Divine Word makes everybody sing and dance. It is easy then to imagine the ecstatic state of the apostles when they received the Holy Spirit on *Pentecost* after Jesus’ death and resurrection (*Acts 2*).

It is true that we don’t know for sure whether the giving of the *Torah* was already celebrated on *Shavuot* in the Second Temple period. However, the signs of the wind and the tongues of fire in *Acts 2* are remarkable references to the revelation on Mount Sinai. “Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire” (*Exodus 19:18*). Moreover, there is obviously a clear connection between the Holy Spirit and the Word of God.

Nicodemus (*John 3*) came at night to Jesus to talk to Him. It is often said that it was out of fear that he came

during the nighttime. In Judaism, however, nighttime is viewed as particularly fit for discussing *Torah*, based on words in *Psalms 134*: “who by nightstand in the house of the Lord” (*KJ21*). That is also what is happening on *Shavuot*. John does not tell us whether Nicodemus’ visit was on the night of *Shavuot*. In fact, *Shavuot* is not mentioned at all by name in the gospel. It is interesting, though, that Jesus speaks with Nicodemus about the renewal through the Holy Spirit and uses the wind as a metaphor. Renewal of the covenant is very much connected to *Shavuot*.

Finally, back to the bringing of the first fruits and the *Omer* counting. A Psalm that is related to this season is *Psalms 67*. In Hebrew, this Psalm counts 49 words, one for every day of the season. It sings of the earth that has yielded its increase, and the (gentile) nations praising God. Just as the risen Christ was the “firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (*1 Cor. 15:20*), on *Pentecost* the ingathering of a great harvest of believers from all nations has begun. And finally, all nations will praise God and fear Him.

## Facts Speak

### The Hostage Deal

Israel and terror organisation Hamas agreed in the first phase of negotiations to exchange Israeli hostages held by Hamas for the release of Palestinian prisoners.		
Date	Number of hostages	Palestinian prisoners
19 January	3	90
25 January	4	200
30 January	8 (3 Israelis and 5 Thai)	110
1 February	3	183
8 February	3	183
15 February	3	369
20-21 February	4 (dead)*	600
22 February	6	620
26 February	4 (dead)	596**
27 February		46
Total	38 (33 Israelis and 5 Thai)	1904 (among whom 737 with a ‘life sentence’)

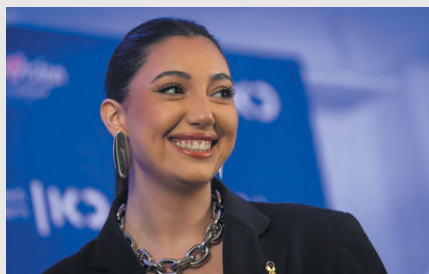
\* One of the bodies turned out not to be that of hostage Shiri Bibas. Her body was still handed over to Israel a day later.  
\*\* The body of the Gazan woman was also handed over to Hamas. Hamas had earlier handed over her body to Israel instead of that of the murdered Shiri Bibas. Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2025\\_Gaza\\_war\\_ceasefire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2025_Gaza_war_ceasefire)



Agam Berger is transferred to the IDF by the Red Cross on 30 January. | Photo: IDF Spokesperson/GPO



## Short News

Audience Defies  
Media in Eurovision  
Vote

Yuval Raphael took to the Eurovision stage amid intense media scrutiny. Coverage focused less on her performance and more on protests against Israel's participation. Headlines emphasised division, framing the event as politically fraught. Yet when the votes were cast, the public response told a different story. Despite receiving low scores from juries, Israel won the audience vote, earning the maximum points from multiple countries. Millions of viewers chose to support Raphael, a survivor of the 7 October attack, recognising her for her talent rather than politics. In the end, public sentiment overruled media narratives—and made her a star. | Photo: Flash90

Restitution of  
Property

The property of Hungarian Jews who were murdered during the Holocaust will be returned to their rightful heirs. Their property was confiscated by the Nazis and later became the property of the Hungarian state. Although the state promised restitution, it never materialised. Now, with support from Israel, this situation is set to change: stolen property will go to the descendants of the victims and partly to the Jewish community.

## Popular Museum



In 2024, the Tel Aviv Museum of Art was ranked 78th among the world's 100 most-visited museums, attracting over one million visitors—a 17% increase from 2023. The museum described the international recognition as especially meaningful in a year marked by war and a cultural boycott against Israel. The Israel Museum in Jerusalem also secured a spot in the top 100. | Photo: Flash90

A Tale of Two Cyruses  
*The Incredible Journey of Aaron the Kohathite—Part 1*

■ Christopher J Archer

Co-chair | New Zealand Israel  
Friendship Association Inc.

My name is Aaron. I am a Kohathite from the tribe of Levi<sup>i</sup>, and I have just celebrated my 80th birthday. I was born in Jerusalem during the second year of Zedekiah, King of Judah. It was the year 596 BCE (in your calendar system), and it was a time of mounting tribulation for the kingdom of Judah. Despite warnings by the prophet Jeremiah, King Jehoiakim had declared independence from Babylon and, as a result, Nebuchadnezzar had taken thousands of young nobles and many of the Temple's treasures away from Jerusalem<sup>i</sup>. One of these 19-year-old nobles was Daniel, who later rose to a position of influence in the court of Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon<sup>i</sup>. I met Daniel in Babylon, and he told me things that I will now share with you. However, I am getting ahead of myself.

As a Levite from a Kohathite family, my father's task in the Temple priesthood was to take charge of the sacred vessels<sup>iii</sup>. Our world came crashing down during the Hebrew year 3194 (586 BCE), in the 11th year of Zedekiah, the last king of Judah. His final rebellion against the Babylonians triggered the calamity that saw the great Temple of Solomon<sup>i</sup> and much of the city destroyed. My father had to accompany the treasures of the House of God to Babylon, and I still have vivid memories of the destruction and of the following three months on our thousand-kilometre journey to Babylon.

Babylon was one of the wonders of the World. Nebuchadnezzar was more than a great military campaigner. He rebuilt the city and remodelled it and constructed the beautiful, blue-tiled 'Ishtar' gate in 575 BCE. Babylon also became a centre of learning and culture. Many of the 18,000 exiles from Judah took leading roles in his administration. During the reign of king Belshazzar, I once met Daniel who was also known as Belteshazzar. That day he showed me a copy of a letter<sup>ii</sup> he had received from the Judean prophet, Jeremiah who had been prophesying in Jerusalem during reign of king Josiah, twenty years before Daniel's exile. Jeremiah had warned the people against idolatry and wickedness, but they had refused to heed him. The calamities which subsequently befell Judah, according to Jeremiah's word, were a consequence of their refusal to repent. Jeremiah wrote a letter to the exiled elders and leaders in Babylon telling them to marry, plant gardens, and work for the welfare of the city.<sup>vi</sup>



Visitors admire the intricate blue tiles of the Ishtar Gate at Pergamon Museum, Berlin. | Photo: Shutterstock

**The word he sent them from the Lord was, "Seventy years of exile had been decreed for the people" as punishment for their iniquities.**

The word he sent them from the Lord was, "Seventy years of exile had been decreed for the people" as punishment for their iniquities. At the end of this time God promised that the exiles would be returned to their ancestral land.

The situation for the Judean exiles was about to change, dramatically. This happened during the last year of the reign of king Belshazzar in 539 BCE. Daniel had been praying and seeking the Lord on behalf of the people of Judah. He had calculated that starting from the date of his 15th birthday in 609 BCE, the seventy years of exile prophesied by Jeremiah were nearly fulfilled. King Belshazzar was in the middle of debauched feasting, and blaspheming the sacred vessels taken from the Temple in Jerusalem, when suddenly the Persian army led by king Cyrus finally captured what was considered to be an impregnable city.<sup>vii</sup> Cyrus had succeeded in diverting the river Euphrates which flowed through the City of Babylon, and he was then able to lead his troops into the fortress city with little opposition.

Cyrus was an enlightened ruler who demonstrated an unprecedented tolerance for the religions in his realm. According to the bible, Cyrus issued an edict, recorded in 2 Chronicles 26: 23, "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the Lord God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at

Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is among you of all His people? May the Lord his God be with him and let him go up!"

So, in the second year of Cyrus, I joined the trek back to Judah along with 42,000 other returning exiles under the governorship of Sheshbazzar. My task, as a Kohathite, was to care for the golden vessels which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Temple in 586 BCE, and which had been released to us. We all understood that Cyrus was, "the Lord's anointed," as prophesied by Isaiah<sup>viii</sup> two centuries earlier, being the only gentile in the bible called a 'mashiach' or messiah.

After many delays, the building of the second temple was completed during the reign of Darius II, and the governorship of Zerubbabel. Two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah<sup>ix</sup> stirred up the people. Daniel had been praying and fasting towards this end since the first year of Darius.<sup>xi</sup> This finally took place in the Hebrew Year 3124 (516 BCE), exactly seventy years after the destruction of the first temple, according to the prophecy of Jeremiah.

[Disclaimer: Although Aaron is a fictional character such a person would almost certainly have lived. The details surrounding his journey are historical and cover an important period in Israel's history during the sixth century BCE.]

Footnotes: <sup>i</sup>Num. 4:4, <sup>ii</sup>2 Kings 24:12-13, <sup>iii</sup>Daniel 1:1-6, <sup>iv</sup>Numbers 3:30, <sup>v</sup>2 Kings 25:8,9, <sup>vi</sup>Daniel 9:1-2, <sup>vii</sup>Jeremiah 29, <sup>viii</sup>Daniel 5:30-31, <sup>ix</sup>Isaiah 45:1, <sup>x</sup>Circa 520 BCE, <sup>xi</sup>Daniel 9:1-3



# Colourful Weeds as a Sign of Hope

## Joanne Nihom

Journalist and Writer

“How are you?” It’s a question I hear almost daily from friends outside Israel. The answer isn’t simple. In northern Israel, where I live, things are relatively calm now. Fewer sirens. No more panic to run to the shelter. Life seems a bit like the old normal again, as it was before that black 7 October 2023. But underneath that surface, everything feels different.

The sense of unshakable security—the belief that Israel is always safe, that it always prevails—is gone for many of us. Including me. I never used to lock my door when I was home, but since that terrible day, I do. My shoes are always by the door, my phone is fully charged, and a bottle of water is always within reach—just in case. During the day, I stay at my own house, comforted by the knowledge that the shelter is only a minute away. But at night, I sleep at a friend’s place—he has a bombproof safe room. I feel calmer there at night. Even so, every unexpected sound—a slamming door, a motorbike passing by—sets my heart racing. Before 7 October 2023, I used to turn off my phone for a few hours. Just like that, for some peace and quiet. Now I wouldn’t dare. What if the alarm on my phone suddenly goes off and danger looms, and I fail to notice?

### Hope and strength

It’s reassuring to see mobile shelters popping up across shopping centres and main roads. It gives a sense of security,



Firefighters fighting one of the many forest fires caused by missile strikes from Lebanon. | Photo: Flash90

but also serves as a grim reminder of the world we now live in. The news is a constant stream of grief and violence. The stories from released hostages are almost too painful to process. I want to listen. I try. But it’s overwhelming. I have a constant urge to turn off the news, but I can’t. It is impossible to shut yourself off from the world around you. The protests to release the hostages continue as ever. Israel is coloured yellow with ribbons and flags—the colour that has become symbolic of the protest. I always thought demonstrating made little sense. But the stories of those released show that it does matter: they said that, even in captivity, they occasionally got something from those

demonstrations. It gave them hope and strength to persevere.

### Colourful weeds

The extent of human suffering after a year and a half of war is unimaginable, and then there is the damage to nature. Walking through the avocado groves again, something that wasn’t safe for much of the past year, I find joy in the greenery, in the familiar beauty of the landscape. But I also see the shadows of what has been lost. A large patch of forest in our village burned after being hit by missiles. The blackened trees still stand, mute reminders of what was lost. It will take years for nature to fully recover. And that applies to almost all the forests hit in the north. Yet there is hope—nature

never gives up and gives signs of recovery. The combination of rain, with sun, and heat, is causing the earth to be covered with colourful weeds everywhere. As if to say: “It will be all right!”

### 65,000 refugees

The north of Israel was once a place for Israelis from the whole country to spend a weekend for rest and relaxation. For a year and a half, it was quiet there. Because of the danger. However, the traffic on the roads is increasing again. But many of the 65,000 refugees on the northern border who had to leave their homes after 7 October 2023 have not yet returned. They are living scattered across the country. Many of their homes and possessions have been destroyed.

### Revival

As I write this, my mind returns to the day it all changed—7 October, 2023. A day of horror that sparked a terrible war. And still, a large number of people are being held hostage by Hamas. As complicated as the situation is, I try to be positive. I get happy when I hear the young children in our village. For months, they were hardly allowed to play outside or only near a shelter. Now I see them running through the streets again, their laughter like music to my ears. It is a sign of hope, of renewal, of recovery. Despite everything, despite the pain and devastation, life is beginning to flourish a little again. Because there is no choice. Because this country is our home. Our only one.

## Crossing Borders, Building Bridges: A Journey of Faith

### Dr Leon Meijer

Executive Director | Christians for Israel Netherlands

Sometimes, the most meaningful journeys begin with unexpected obstacles.

As we reached the border between Laos and Thailand, trouble greeted us. Our car’s registration turned out to be incomplete, and the authorities told us it couldn’t leave Laos. For a moment, it seemed like our plans might fall apart. But God had already prepared the way—through Angelo Calaunan, a Filipino Christian who has lived in Laos for over a decade. Angelo doesn’t believe in problems—only challenges. With his help, we crossed the border smoothly, leaving the car behind and catching a tuk-tuk to Nong Khai.

Our destination: the vocational center run by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, where the 11th Asia-Pacific Christians for Israel (C4I) Conference

would take place—this time especially for Christians from Laos.

What a joy it was to welcome participants not only from Laos, but also from Thailand, the Philippines, and India. With a newly translated Lao edition of *Why Israel?* in hand, Rev Willem Glashouwer began three powerful days of teaching on God’s eternal purposes with Israel. Though many of the attendees were well-versed in Scripture, it was as if familiar verses suddenly came alive with fresh clarity.

Pastor Dr Lumahan from the Philippines unpacked *Romans 9–11*, showing how God’s love for Israel still holds strong—even through a New Testament lens. Dr Leon Meijer, Christians for Israel’s new executive director, offered a sweeping overview of 2,000 years of Jewish history, leading up to the modern-day restoration of Israel. His explanation of antisemitism—how it often follows the pattern of demonisation, delegitimisation, and



double standards—resonated deeply.

The response? Overwhelming. One participant from India said, “You must come to my country. My church needs to hear this—not just for three days, but for at least a week!”

After the conference, we crossed back into Laos for our flight home. But the journey wasn’t over. A house church in Vientiane invited Dr Meijer to speak.

There, in the heart of the People’s Republic of Laos, we witnessed something truly beautiful: a gathering of believers, praying passionately for Israel and for the peace of Jerusalem.

It reminded us once again—God is moving in quiet corners of the world, crossing borders, touching hearts, and awakening His people to His promises.



# A Christian in Bethlehem



At Pastor Naim Khoury's church where he delivers a sermon. | Photo: C4I

## Marijke Terlouw Christians for Israel Netherlands

Bethlehem is known around the world as the birthplace of Jesus Christ. Once a vibrant Christian town bustling with tourists, it has faced increasing pressure in recent years. Christians are now a small minority; Bethlehem is dominated by Muslims. Those who can, leave. In search of work and a better future. After the difficult years of the COVID-19 crisis, there was a glimmer of hope that tourism might return. But following the Hamas attacks on 7 October 2023, there is no sign of this. In these uncertain times, Pastor Naim Khoury's church remains a faithful witness to Christ in Bethlehem, offering support and hope wherever possible.

Most of our church members are unemployed. Many are struggling to meet basic needs—medicine, food, medical appointments, and household expenses.

**How is the situation in Bethlehem right now?**  
“The situation is tense,” Pastor Khoury shares. “People have difficulty getting permits to go to Jerusalem and find work. This makes it difficult for many families to make ends meet; poverty is growing. Many are deeply concerned about their children’s future. They are afraid of a big war. They want peace and to build for the future, but they live in fear. There are frequent protests, strikes, and closures. But we, as a church, never close our doors. No matter what happens, the future is in His hands. As believers, we see the signs of His return, because the world is in turmoil”

**How is your faith community holding up?**  
“Our community is made up of people from Bethlehem and the surrounding area. A mixed group of people, young and old and families. We are truly a community in every sense. We make sure people can come to church; we pick them up if necessary, for their safety. There are all kinds of programmes and activities. We

are very grateful to God that we can do that. There is Sunday school, activities for young people, Bible study for adults, and, of course, Sunday worship.”

**What challenges do you face?**  
“Most of our church members are unemployed. Many are struggling to meet basic needs—medicine, food, medical appointments, and household expenses. They want to care for their families, but don’t know how anymore. But we believe this: the Lord is the answer to all questions.”

**How do you support those in need?**  
“Because many people have had no income for months, we do our best to provide food and other essentials. It all depends on what funds we receive, but we use everything we get to help others. At Christmas, we did a special food programme and helped as many people as we could. On a monthly basis, we help the elderly and sick with groceries. If they can’t come to church to pick up their food parcel, we deliver them.

Recently, one of our members shared how, after picking up his food parcel, a stranger stopped him in the street asking for help. He returned to church to ask for more, and we gave what we could.

It’s not always easy. Life here is not easy, and the situation remains difficult and tense. People from the neighbourhood also knock on the door for help. However, we realise that at this time we may be a light of Christ as a church. He cares for us. That is what we teach people. He will strengthen us and give us wisdom to care for those around us.”

**Do you have a prayer request for us?**  
“Pray that times will change and that His peace will reign. Pray that the Lord will provide all that we need. And do as we do: plan, pray and then wait for His answer.

And thank you, truly, for your support. The Lord blesses your offerings.”

You can contribute to First Baptist Church of Rev Naim Khoury in Bethlehem here.  
**Will you help? Any amount helps.**

## Our Projects Overview

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

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



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



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



**Christian Friends of Israeli Communities (CFOIC)**  
You can support the Jewish communities in Judea and Samaria, the heart of Biblical Israel. The main purpose is to encourage the people in the Biblical Heartland and to show them that there are Christians throughout the world who support them and share the belief that the areas of Judea and Samaria are part of Israel’s inheritance.



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



**Arab Christians**  
Life for Christians in Bethlehem is often not easy. Christians for Israel supports the First Baptist Church of Rev Naim Khoury in Bethlehem and Jerusalem. The members of this church spread the gospel among Arabs and share their love and heart for Israel and the Jewish people.  
For country-specific or further information on our projects, go to our website, [www.c4israel.org.nz](http://www.c4israel.org.nz)







# For Our Children

■ **Koen Carlier**  
*Aliyah Fieldworker | Christians for Israel Ukraine*

Week after week, we continue to assist families on their journey from Ukraine to Israel via Moldova, even as the war rages on and rockets and drones fly in both directions. Recently, a young couple, Vitalic and Lena, left their hometown of Tulchin with their three children.

Why are they leaving? For their children, for their future and safety. No one knows when this senseless and tragic war will end. For Vitalic and Lena, the decision to leave had been delayed long enough. Now, they are acting on what they have felt in their hearts for years.



Vitalic and his family together with our Aliyah fieldworkers, Koen and Ira Carlier. | Photos: C4I

**Feiga Stayed Home**  
On the day of their departure, friends and family gathered to say goodbye. But Feiga, Vitalic's grandmother, chose to stay home. Overcome with emotion, she found it too difficult to say farewell in person—and yet, her heart was full of joy knowing her grandson and his family were heading to the land of their forefathers!

On the way to the Moldovan border, we paused at the site where Feiga and thousands of other Jews had been gathered 84 years ago, during the harsh winter of 1941, before being forced to march to Pechora. Thousands of Jews were forced to march on foot, often in freezing temperatures, from their towns and villages to Pechora, under guard. Many died on the way due to

cold, starvation, exhaustion, or were shot by guards. Once at the camp, prisoners faced unspeakable living conditions—little or no shelter, food, or medical care. Feiga survived the horrors and shared her story with her grandson Vitalic.

**The Work Goes On**  
Our work in Ukraine is not getting any easier. Yet as long as 'it is day', we will continue. We are steadfast in our commitment to do everything within our power to help Jewish families—like Vitalic's—who long to begin a new life in Israel.

*Your prayers and support make a difference as we continue helping Jewish families return to Israel.*  
**Will you help? Any amount helps.**



On our way to the Moldovan border we stop at the place grandmother Feiga stayed on her way to Pechora.

YES! I Want to Support Christians for Israel

CHRISTIANS FOR ISRAEL  
NEW ZEALAND

CHRISTIANS FOR ISRAEL NZ MINISTRY

☐ Israel Solidarity Tour

☐ Emergency situation in Israel

☐ My donation for ministry costs, print & post

☐ thinc. (countering anti-Israel 'lawfare')

☐ Speak Up (funding for speakers)

ALIYAH - BRING THE JEWS HOME

☐ Aliyah - Ethiopia

☐ One person (Ukraine) - \$300

☐ One family (Ukraine) (5 people) - \$1250

☐ One bus (Ukraine) (25 people) - \$6250

☐ First Home in the Homeland - \$765

☐ Bnei Menashe (India) (1 person) - \$1460

SOCIAL WELFARE PROJECTS

☐ Meals on Wheels - \$10 each

☐ Food Parcels in Ukraine - \$26 each

☐ Children at Risk - Jaffa Institute

☐ Hineni Soup Kitchen - \$15 per meal

☐ Holocaust Survivors

☐ Christian Friends of Israeli Communities (CFOIC)

☐ Arab Christians (First Baptist Church in Bethlehem)

☐ For Zion's Sake

☐ Israel Alzheimer's Centre

TOTAL DONATION \$.....

Check out our website for a full list of essential resources

ESSENTIAL RESOURCES

☐ NEW! From the River to the Sea by Dr Simon Smelt

☐ SALE! Why Israel? (Book) by Willem JJ Glashouwer \$20.00

☐ SALE! Why Jerusalem? (Book) by Willem JJ Glashouwer \$20.00

☐ SALE! Why End Times? (Book) by Willem JJ Glashouwer \$20.00

☐ SALE! Why Israel? (DVD) by Willem JJ Glashouwer \$25.00

☐ SALE! Why Jerusalem? (DVD) by Willem JJ Glashouwer \$25.00

☐ SALE! Why End Times? (DVD) by Willem JJ Glashouwer \$25.00

☐ SALE! Why Israel? (Study Guide) by Willem JJ Glashouwer \$8.00

☐ SALE! Why Jerusalem? (Study Guide) by Willem JJ Glashouwer \$8.00

☐ SALE! Why End Times? (Study Guide) by Willem JJ Glashouwer \$8.00

☐ Land Without Borders. Book

☐ Two States for Two Peoples? Executive Summary Booklet

☐ Two States for Two Peoples? Book

☐ Christians for Israel NZ Israeli & Friends Cookbook

☐ The Signs of the Times by Willem JJ Glashouwer

☐ Living a Life in Victory by Willem JJ Glashouwer

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QTY

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