

INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN EMBASSY JERUSALEM // OCTOBER 2021 // USA EDITION



# WORD

FROM JERUSALEM



**‘HEAR, O ISRAEL’**  
THE SHEMA IN JEWISH FAITH



The International Christian Embassy Jerusalem was established in 1980 in recognition of the biblical significance of all of Jerusalem and its unique connection to the Jewish people. Today the ICEJ represents millions of Christians, churches, and denominations to the nation and people of Israel. We recognize in the restoration of Israel the faithfulness of God to keep His ancient covenant with the Jewish people. Our main objectives are:

- To stand with Israel in support and friendship;
- To equip and teach the worldwide church regarding God's purposes with Israel and the nations of the Middle East;
- To be an active voice of reconciliation between Jews, Christians, and Arabs, and to support the churches and congregations in the Holy Land.

From its head offices in Jerusalem, the ICEJ reaches out into more than 170 countries worldwide, with branch offices in over 90 nations.

Our vision is:

- To reach every segment of Israel's society with a Christian testimony of comfort and love, and
- To reach and actively represent to Israel the support of denominations, churches, and believers from every nation on earth.

The Christian Embassy is a non-denominational faith-based ministry supported by the voluntary contributions of our partners and friends across the globe. We invite you to join with us as we minister to Israel and the Jewish people worldwide by donating to the ongoing work and witness of the ICEJ.



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**ICEJ President** Dr. Jürgen Bühler  
**USA Director** Susan Michael

**VP International Affairs** Dr. Majmir Kallus

**VP Finance** David van der Walt

**VP Operations** Barry R. Denison

**VP International Spokesman** David Parsons

**VP AID & Aliyah** Nicole Yoder

**Managing Editor/Publications Director** Laurina Driesse

**USA Managing Editor** Julaine Stark

**Copy Editor** Karen Engle

**Staff Writer** Anastasiya Gooding

**Graphic Design/Illustrators** Ryan Tsuen, Peter Ecenroad, Nancy Schimp

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INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN EMBASSY JERUSALEM - USA

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# FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK



Dear Friends,

To stand with the people of Israel, and in anticipation of Zechariah 14:16, we recently celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles. In these uncertain times when it seems everything is shifting and changing daily, the God of Israel and His eternal promises are unwavering and constant.

One unchanging aspect of God is His Word. In my article "Hear, O Israel," I dig into the significance of the *Shema* to the Jewish faith (Deuteronomy 6:4). I hope it will bring you a deeper understanding of this prayer, how it is taught to every Jewish child as soon as they start to speak, and the deep spiritual significance of these words. As we see Israel's appreciation of the divine command to hear and listen to the voice of God regarding who He is—the one true God—may it challenge each of us in our own lives. God speaks to us through His Word and in many other ways—but do we hear and listen?

The *Out of Zion* podcast with Susan Michael is a wonderful way to dig into God's Word and see Israel from a biblical perspective. As her "Walk Thru the Bible" series continues into the New Testament, consider reading and listening along for this exciting fourth quarter (p. 16).

In "Recent Israeli Finds" (p. 8), discover new archaeological evidence recently unearthed, confirming accounts in both Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. These are sites you will definitely want to remember, so when you visit Israel on an ICEJ-USA tour, you can see them for yourself!

The latest article on our Haifa Home for Holocaust Survivors (p. 10) is a window into the beautiful, multicultural tapestry of the staff that works together at the home—including Jews, Christians, Muslims, Israelis, and foreigners. They come from all walks of life but are woven together in the common cause of serving these precious Jewish Survivors of the *Shoah*. Love certainly knows no boundaries, and this is evident at the Haifa Home.

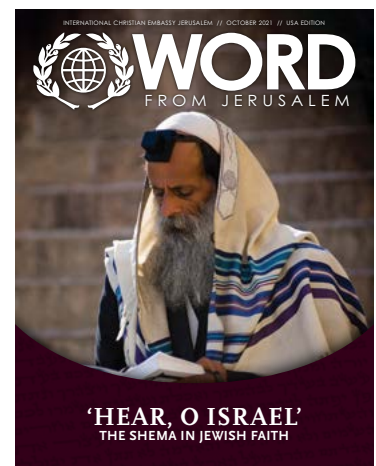
Finally, I thank you for standing with the ICEJ through these uncertain times and for helping us bless Israel today more than ever before. I pray a new and fresh touch for you this season.

May the Lord bless you richly out of Zion!

Dr. Jürgen Bühler  
President  
International Christian Embassy Jerusalem

**COVER PHOTO:** An Orthodox Jewish man at prayer (sunseeker.it).

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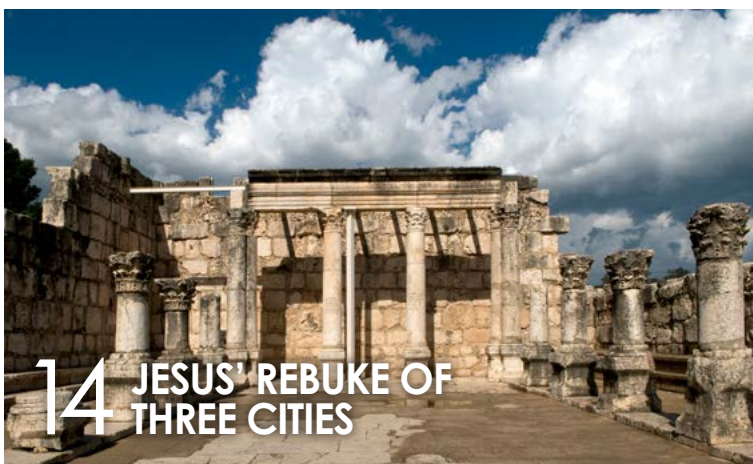
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# HEAR, O ISRAEL!

## THE SHEMA IN JEWISH FAITH

BY DR JÜRGEN BÜHLER • ICEJ PRESIDENT

*Shema Yisrael, Adonai  
Eloheinu, Adonai Echad!*  
Hear, O Israel! The Lord  
our God, the Lord is one!

This is known as the *Shema*—the most central prayer in Judaism. It is considered the main confession of Jewish faith. As such it is different to our Christian confessions, which usually are expressed in multiple series

of declarations: “We believe ...” The Jewish confession, however, is not so much a “we believe” statement but a divine command to hear, to listen to the voice of God regarding who He is—the one true God. The *Shema* has such a sanctified status: for many rabbis, the short phrase “*Shema Yisrael*” is equal to the very name of God, many times symbolized with only the Hebrew letter ש [shin].

Every Jew is supposed to pray the *Shema* at least twice a day, in accordance with the above passage from Deuteronomy 6, that you should say it “when you lie down” [in the evening] and “when you rise up” [in the morning]. This is at least according to the prominent Jewish sage Shammai, who lived around the time of Jesus.

The entire daily prayer is composed of three biblical passages. The first is from Deuteronomy 6:4, which is the commandment to love the Lord with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength.

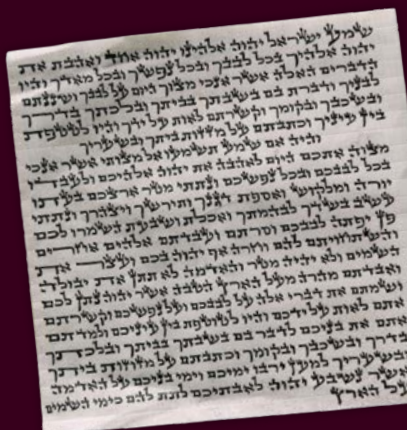
The second passage included in the traditional *Shema* prayer is taken from Deuteronomy 11:13–21, which underlines the prayer’s spiritual significance: Blessing comes with obedience, but if Israel should turn aside from *Adonai*, they would “perish from the good land” the Lord had given them.

Finally, the third passage comes from Numbers 15:15–41, where the command is given to undertake practical steps to incorporate the



**HEAR, O ISRAEL: THE LORD OUR GOD, THE LORD IS ONE! YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH. AND THESE WORDS WHICH I COMMAND YOU TODAY SHALL BE IN YOUR HEART. YOU SHALL TEACH THEM DILIGENTLY TO YOUR CHILDREN, AND SHALL TALK OF THEM WHEN YOU SIT IN YOUR HOUSE, WHEN YOU WALK BY THE WAY, WHEN YOU LIE DOWN, AND WHEN YOU RISE UP. YOU SHALL BIND THEM AS A SIGN ON YOUR HAND, AND THEY SHALL BE AS FRONTLETS BETWEEN YOUR EYES. YOU SHALL WRITE THEM ON THE DOORPOSTS OF YOUR HOUSE AND ON YOUR GATES.**

- Deuteronomy 6:4-9 -



A mezuzah and a scroll of the Shema prayer



The ancient tradition of binding phylacteries (tefillin) on the arm and forehead—all of which contain the Bible passages recited in the Shema

*Shema* into daily customs and rituals. This includes the command to place the fringes (*tsitzit*) on one's garment, the *mezuzot* at every door post, and the binding of phylacteries (*tefillin*) on the arm and forehead—all of which contain the above-mentioned Bible passages. This ancient tradition to combine

these passages in the *Shema* prayer dates back well over 2,000 years and is mentioned in the Qumran scrolls.

Jewish rabbis teach that with every recitation of the *Shema* prayer, every Jew accepts the yoke of the kingdom of God upon his shoulders.

The *Shema* is the first prayer taught to a Jewish child when they start speaking, and it is the last prayer a Jew is taught to say



A Jewish child is taught the Shema prayer from early on.

on their death bed. It also became especially noted for its dramatic usage during the Holocaust.

Former Chief Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau has repeatedly told the story of how many Jewish children were hidden in Christian orphanages during the Holocaust. When they searched for the Jewish children after the war, it often was difficult to find and separate the Jewish youths among the Christian orphans. But Rabbi Lau said it was enough just to start proclaiming "*Shema Israel*"—the Jewish children would instinctively reply with "*Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Ehad*." Many of these rescued Jewish children are still alive in Israel today.



As Jews were marched to the gas chambers at Auschwitz-Birkenau in their last moments of life, they often said the *Shema* together.

In addition, the *Shema* prayer was on the lips of the more than one million Jews who perished in the Nazi gas chambers at Auschwitz, the more than 33,000 Ukrainian Jews murdered

in the massacre at Babi Yar outside Kiev, and the scores of Jews who died at the execution wall of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp outside Berlin.

**"THE FIRST OF ALL THE  
COMMANDMENTS IS: 'HEAR,  
O ISRAEL, THE LORD OUR  
GOD, THE LORD IS ONE.  
AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE  
LORD YOUR GOD WITH  
ALL YOUR HEART, WITH ALL  
YOUR SOUL, WITH ALL YOUR  
MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR  
STRENGTH.' THIS IS THE FIRST  
COMMANDMENT."**

- Mark 12:29-30 -

#### THE MOST IMPORTANT COMMAND

The question we need to ask ourselves is: Does the *Shema* bear any significance for us as Christians and for the church? The answer comes directly from Jesus. When asked to identify the most important commandment of the Bible, Jesus replied:

*The first of all the commandments is: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." This is the first commandment. (Mark 12:29-30)*

According to Jesus, this commandment carried the highest relevance as the most prominent biblical commandment for His disciples and all who would follow Him. For Christians, it is therefore noteworthy that God defines His relationship to His people most clearly through the means of hearing "Hear, O Israel!"

God could have used several other senses to define His relationship to us. Besides hearing, we also have taste, touch, feeling, seeing, and even smelling. Jesus Himself repeatedly called His disciples to "come and see." He could have chosen even Psalm 34:9 as the defining verse of our relationship to him: "Taste and see that the Lord is good!"

The medieval cathedrals—with their spectacular stained-glass windows, gold-covered statues, paintings, and frankincense that filled the air—touched exactly these senses. But the hearing part fell woefully short, as the sermons back then were delivered in Latin, a language few understood. Even today, our emotions are well served by spectacular new church buildings and holistic experiences in our services, but we often forget that the kingdom of God should be less "show-business" and much more "hear-business."

#### THE CHALLENGE TO LISTEN

Interestingly, it was with the "hearing" part that Israel often struggled. The prophet Jeremiah repeatedly challenged Israel for not hearing what God had spoken: "*Hear this now, O foolish people . . . who have ears and hear not*" (Jeremiah 5:21); "*Indeed their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot give heed*" (Jeremiah 6:10); "*I spoke to you, rising up early and speaking, but you did not hear, and I called you, but you did not answer*" (Jeremiah 7:13). Consequently, Jeremiah saw Israel being judged by God and exiled to Babylon.

And if we are honest with ourselves, this was not just Israel's problem; so often, it also is our problem today. Even the disciples struggled with hearing and understanding the message of

Jesus (Mark 8:17ff; 16:14). And this means we all need to be watchful over how we hear. Thus, Jesus admonishes His disciples: "Therefore take heed *how you hear!*" (Luke 8:18, emphasis added).

That means in the eyes of Jesus there is hearing, and then there is *truly* hearing. You can hear and yet not really listen to God's voice. It is this perpetual struggle to hear Him that presents possibly our biggest challenge as believers.

Let's be honest! How many sermons have we heard, how many Bible studies have we attended, how often have we read the Bible, yet so little has changed in our lives. Too often, we select between what we want to hear and what we deem as not relevant for us. Already in Paul's time, Christians were drawn to teachers who "tickled their ears," who taught what the people wanted to hear rather than what they needed to hear. And even more, we often are sincerely touched by God's voice in a sermon

or daily reading, but our busy lifestyles distract us immediately and we become what the apostle James calls "forgetful hearers" (James 1:24ff).

God speaks to us in many ways. Of course, primarily it is through the Word of God—the Bible, and through the

**"THEREFORE TAKE HEED  
HOW YOU HEAR!"**

- Luke 8:18 -



**Radio telescope dishes on the site of the Westerbork concentration camp in the Netherlands**



preaching of the Word. But often He also talks to us through circumstances or daily lives. But do we hear?

I well remember a visit to Holland years ago. Our national director there, Jacob Keegstra, took me to Westerbork, one of the few concentration camps in the Netherlands. Walking through the forest to Westerbork, we passed by an array of huge radio telescopes directed to heaven. There, Jacob explained me, the faintest signals from space could be detected. I marveled on humanity. We have grown so sophisticated to be able to listen to the slightest sounds from outer space, but there in Westerbork, as in Dachau and Auschwitz, humanity failed to hear the deafening cry of God: “Where is Abel your brother?” And in our busy lives, we cannot hear Him cry to us even now: “Adam where are you?” *Shema Yisrael!*

Some did listen during Hitler’s rule in Germany, like Pastor Theodor Dipper (1906–1967), who led dozens of other pastors around Stuttgart in hiding and rescuing Jews during the Holocaust, risking their own lives. Or there was Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who preached regularly against Hitler and his deceptive and evil empire.

But God also speaks today, through Israel. The Swiss theologian Karl Barth wrote in 1967, when Jerusalem was reunited in the wake of the Six Day War: “Now we can read it in the newspapers: God keeps His promises!” But are we listening? Do we react when He speaks? And do we act upon what we hear and see? *Shema Yisrael!*

God also spoke to His people during the days of Elijah through three years of devastating drought. Life became very difficult as harvests were lost, and people starved and lacked life-sustaining water. For sure, people must have died. But when Elijah’s voice resonated from Mount Carmel: “‘How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.’ But the people answered him not a word” (1 Kings 18:21).

The question is, are we listening during this current coronavirus crisis? I am concerned when I hear people say all they want and pray for is just to return to normal, to the life they lived before COVID-19. God spoke to us at the Christian Embassy through the prophet Haggai just a few days before the coronavirus hit. Haggai foresaw a great shaking coming over the world. It is a time of divine reset when God



A Jewish boy wears the traditional fringes (tsitzit).

Thus, *Shema Yisrael* means not just hearing but also acting. Our hearing needs to result in practical changes in how we deal with our neighbors, spouses, and children and how we spend our time and money. “Hear, O Israel” means that all our being—our strength, our hearts, our minds—is directed in a loving way to God.

Remember that for Jews, *Shema Yisrael* means to accept the yoke of the kingdom of God upon oneself. It therefore places us under a higher authority: the Lord is God, the Lord is one! He is the Creator of heaven and earth. He is my and your Creator. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords and thus demands to be the ultimate authority over our lives—down to the smallest detail. But He does so as a loving Father who wants and knows what is best for every one of us.

Yet He also is the one who will judge the living and the dead and who will make us answerable even over every idle word. Therefore, to hear now and to respond accordingly is the most wise and prudent thing for all our lives. It is this call that the letter of Hebrews brings to all of us: “Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts” (Hebrews 4:7).

Let us be hearers of the word of God—and doers as well!

*Shema Yisrael!* 🕊️



An intricately carved mezuzah, which is placed at the doorpost of every Jewish home



The impressively decorated rooms unveiled in the area of the Western Wall tunnel

# RECENT ISRAELI FINDS CONTINUE TO AFFIRM BIBLICAL ACCOUNTS

BY DAVID PARSONS, ICEJ VICE PRESIDENT & SENIOR SPOKESMAN

There were rising hopes that Israel would soon open up once again for Christian tourists, but a fourth wave of the coronavirus had the new government heading back toward tightening restrictions on foreign visitors. Until the country welcomes tour groups again, the land of the Bible continues to divulge its many hidden treasures proving the accuracy of God's Word.



Unearthed ruins discovered in the ancient City of David

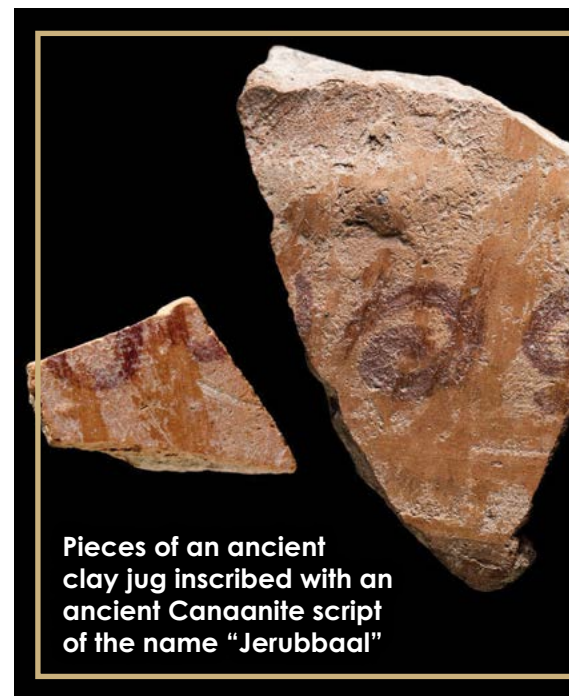
In recent months, numerous archaeological finds have verified the accounts in both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures.

For instance, excavations in the ancient City of David have just uncovered a layer of destruction dating back some 2,800 years, which does not correspond to any ancient battle or conquest of Jerusalem, leaving archaeologists to surmise it may be proof of the major earthquake that struck the city mentioned in the books of Amos and Zechariah. The unearthed ruins include shattered clay vessels, lamps, cooking utensils, bowls, and storage containers that were damaged when the walls of an ancient building collapsed. The books of Amos (1:1) and Zechariah (14:5) both refer to a great earthquake that shook Israel "in the days of Uzziah, king of Judah."

Archaeologists are finding many other fascinating artifacts in the City of David that continue to prove that the walled city indeed served as the capital of the Davidic dynasty ruling over the kingdoms of Israel and then Judah in the time frame given in the Hebrew Bible. For example, recent digs uncovered a missing eastern section of the outer city wall of Jerusalem that the Babylonians encountered when laying siege to the city in 586 BC. Other

finds in the same area relate to Second Temple times, including recently unearthed arrowheads and other weaponry from the Roman conquest in AD 70.

Meantime, a pair of large, magnificent adjoining chambers were recently unveiled in the area of the Western Wall tunnels, which are believed



Pieces of an ancient clay jug inscribed with an ancient Canaanite script of the name "Jerubbaal"

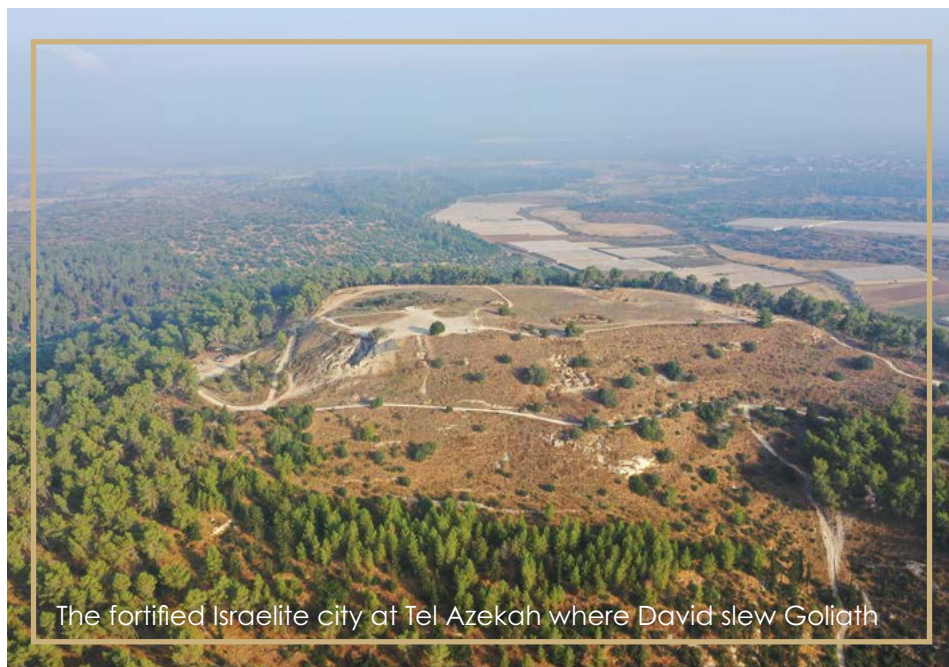
JUST IN RECENT MONTHS,  
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to have been part of an ornate public hall used by local Judean officials to welcome important visitors before they ascended to the temple courts above. The Western Wall Heritage Foundation will soon add the impressively decorated rooms and adjoining water fountains to the tour options for those visiting the *Kotel* tunnels in future.

Elsewhere, an ancient clay jug was recently found in a dig at Khirbet al-Ra'i, believed to be biblical Ziklag (e.g., 1 Samuel 30), with an interesting ink inscription of the name "Jerubbaal." This is the name given to Gideon in Judges 6:31–32 and can mean "Let Baal plead against him" or "May the lord be great." The jug inscribed in an ancient Canaanite script dates back 3,100 years to the time of the judges, when Gideon destroyed the altar of Baal at Ofra and led the Israelites in defeating the Midianites in the Jezreel valley. While it is not certain that the inscription on the pottery has a direct connection to Gideon, experts say it does reveal how the Bible preserves authentic names from this early period in Israel's history.

In recent months, the excavations at Tel Azekah (where David slew Goliath) have revealed not only pottery and walls of the fortified Israelite city but also skeletons of troops who fell in battle there. The human remains are believed



The fortified Israelite city at Tel Azekah where David slew Goliath

to date to when the Bible says that King Sennacherib destroyed Azekah at the time of the Assyrian invasion of the Kingdom of Judah more than 2,700 years ago (see 2 Kings 18–19; 2 Chronicles 32; Isaiah 36).

Several months ago, archaeologists also reported finding dozens of fragments of a biblical scroll dating to the Bar Kokhba revolt in AD 135—the first such discovery of an ancient biblical parchment in some 60 years. The scroll, written in Greek, includes portions of the 12 Minor Prophets, including the books of Zechariah and Nahum. The rare find was uncovered during a concerted national effort to locate and preserve any remaining ancient parchments from looters of antiquities operating in the Judean Desert and Dead Sea basin.

Finally, at Timna, near the southern tip of Israel, evidence has recently been discovered that indicates Israelites were indeed working the copper mines located there in the time of King Solomon, as the Bible suggests. Until now, many archaeologists and scholars had dated the copper mining activities at the site almost exclusively to an earlier Egyptian presence in the area. Among the groundbreaking new finds, archaeologists have recovered scraps of fabric dyed in royal purple from the time of kings David and Solomon. The special dye comes from a certain species of local snails used to

produce the unique purple and blue colors adopted by Israelite kings and priests that were eventually incorporated into Jewish prayer shawls and today's Israeli flag. 🌐

Archaeologists have recovered scraps of fabric dyed in royal purple from the time of kings David and Solomon.





# THE MULTICULTURAL TAPESTRY OF THE HAIFA HOME FOR HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS

BY YUDIT SETZ

A beautiful tapestry begins to emerge as one looks at the “family” of residents and staff at our Haifa Home for Holocaust Survivors. Despite all the tensions in Israel between Jews and Arabs and religious and non-religious, a culturally different group of people is woven together here with the common goal of giving Holocaust Survivors the best life they can live in their last years. Added to this multicultural fabric are foreign caregivers from Asia and Eastern Europe and the ICEJ’s Christian staff, making the Haifa Home so unique!



Here’s a look at the dedicated staff caring for the Holocaust Survivors:

## SABRINA THE CAREGIVER (1)

Sarah, age 93, is assisted by Israeli Arab caregiver Sabrina, 29, who helps her five days a week. Born in Jerusalem into a Muslim family, Sabrina moved to Haifa when she got married and soon joined our “family.”



“It was love at first sight,” Sabrina recalled about the day she first met Sarah. “In school, we learned about the Holocaust, but Sarah also shares her past with me. I like to listen, and I like to learn. I have a special relationship with Sarah. I love to help her and know what she needs even without words being spoken. We laugh a lot too!” said Sabrina. Sarah half-jokingly responded: “Sabrina is very important to me. I will not give her to anyone else!”

This lovely relationship between a religious Holocaust Survivor and a religious young Muslim woman is contagious. “I love to work here. Everyone, residents and staff, knows me and loves me, and I feel like I am part of a family,” said Sabrina.

## BOUTROS THE PAINTER (2)

Born in Nazareth to a Christian Arab family, Boutros (56) started to work at the Haifa Home some 18 months ago. He is continually fixing and painting people’s homes and helping residents with odd jobs. The residents and staff love Boutros because he does great work and is friendly. “The residents are all like my mother, who also lives in a home for the elderly. I love to help them and do work for them,” said Boutros. Holocaust Survivor Esti had to exclaim: “He is such a great guy” as she passed by while he was fixing the staircase in her building.

## JULIA THE CHEF (3)

An only child in a Jewish family, Julia (48) immigrated to Israel in 1996 from Ukraine, together with her husband and daughter. Their second daughter was born in Israel. Her parents also immigrated soon after.

Both her parents suffered during the Holocaust, and her grandmother’s entire family was murdered. Early last year, Julia became our chef and works with a team to prepare three daily meals for the residents. “It’s so much fun to serve the residents. That’s why



I come to work with joy every day. I love them and want them to feel good,” said Julia. Whenever Julia receives a request from the Survivors for a special traditional dish they like, she happily makes it for them.



**NANU THE DINING HALL SERVER (4)**

Nanu (40) was born in Gondar, Ethiopia. Her family had dreamed of seeing Jerusalem for generations. When she was a little girl of 10, her family set out on foot and walked for one month to reach the nearest big city. From there they took a bus to Addis Ababa. In 1991 she arrived in Israel with her family in Operation Solomon.



Nanu lives with her husband and two children in Haifa, and although she was never able to fulfill her dream to become a social worker, she is happy to serve our residents in the dining room. "I love to help people, especially the elderly. During the meals, I have a lot of interaction with them. Everyone is so nice, and it gives me a lot of joy to be able to help," said Nanu.

**FADI THE SOCIAL WORKER (5)**

After finishing several degrees, among them social work, and a diplomatic stint at the Israeli Embassy in Jordan, Fadi (38) decided to



concentrate on social work and the elderly, as this is his passion. Born in Hurfeiz to a Druze family, he is happy to work with our Survivors. "The Druze are a minority within a minority in Israel. I very much identify with the Israeli people, who were a minority in Europe and everywhere they lived. I am very much aware of their suffering. I love to help people who do not have a voice, and I want to be that voice in those places where it needs to be heard," expressed Fadi.

**NAOMI, WHO IS ALWAYS AVAILABLE (6)**

In 1963 Naomi immigrated from Poland to Israel with the "Youth Aliyah" program. Families were not allowed to leave Poland at the time, so her parents and youngest brother came later to Israel.

Naomi is always only a phone call away and works far beyond her normal hours. Over the past seven years, she is always willing to try to solve any problem, big or small, that residents may have. She is an indispensable member of the staff.

"For me, it's the closure of a circle. What I



couldn't do for my parents, I am able to do for the residents today, and that gives me much joy," said Naomi. Both parents suffered unspeakably in the Holocaust but never said a word to their children. It wasn't until Naomi was already married with three children that she stumbled by accident upon her mother's painful past. The only thing her mother said was: "I survived Auschwitz because they used me as their sex slave." Her father survived the Babi Yar massacre near Kiev, staying alive in the mass grave and fleeing to join the partisans. Only at the end of his life while he was sick did they discover the great wounds on his back and hear his story.

**AHMED THE MAINTENANCE MAN (7)**

Three months ago, Ahmed (49) started doing maintenance and odd jobs at the Haifa Home. After spending 27 years in and out of prison, he truly desired to make a complete change in his life. He married, moved to Haifa, and now has two daughters. The next step was to support his family, but not many people were eager to hire him with his past. "In prison, different Holocaust Survivors came to visit us and share their stories of suffering. This touched me so deeply. I felt these are the people I want to help the most," said Ahmed. When his wife heard about the Haifa Home, she visited and inquired about work for Ahmed. There was certainly enough to do, and Ahmed was given a new chance to prove himself and serve others in need.



Please support our work at the Haifa Home for Holocaust Survivors. Donate today at: [www.icejusa.org/haifa](http://www.icejusa.org/haifa)





# GIVING COMFORT TO JEWISH FAMILIES AFTER TERROR

BY MAXINE CARLILL, ICEJ HOMECARE

The sigh of relief in Israel was palpable. Lockdowns, further lockdowns, and restrictions were coming to an end. A year of challenges left behind. Yet suddenly, the sense of freedom was gone. A lockdown of a different kind was triggered by repeated barrages of Hamas rockets. For nearly two weeks, especially in southern Israel, residents spent days and nights in bomb shelters.

ICEJ Homecare regularly visits families in Beersheva and other places in southern Israel. Unable to visit during the war, phone calls had assured them that Christians around the world were praying and standing with them in this difficult time and that we would come by at the first opportunity. Finally, we could resume our visits, taking along bags with dolls, games, coloring books, and pencils for children.

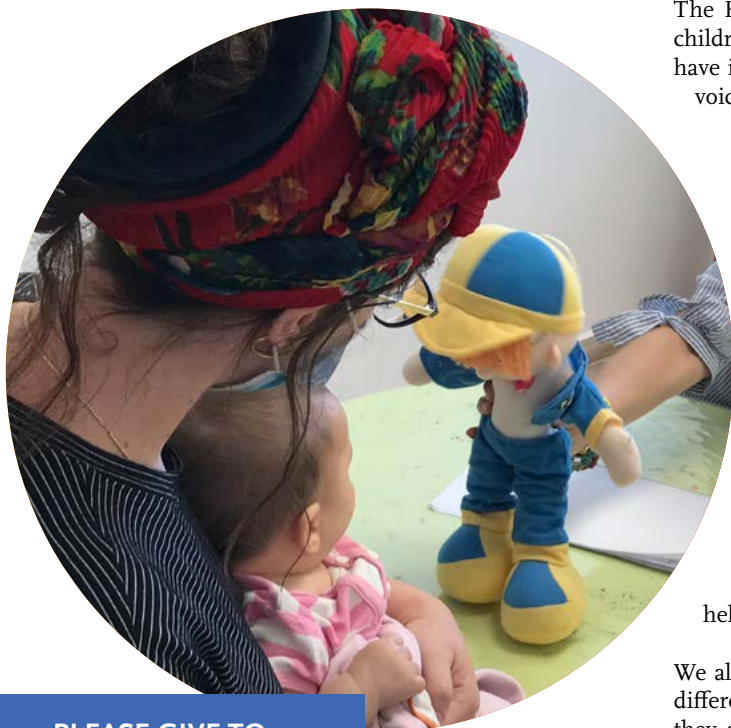
The Homecare team visited a single mother with three young children. They live in a poor area and her apartment does not have its own “saferoom.” We heard her story and the fear in her voice as she told it.

“We all slept in the living room, and when the siren went off in the middle of the night, which happened often, I took the baby of six months on one arm, my special needs daughter on the other, while the six-year-old had his shoes near the door and we ran down the three floors in a matter of seconds,” she explained. “We were trained, and it became our sport to do it as fast as possible.”

“In the saferoom, we were with neighbors, and the minute my boy and another his age arrived in the saferoom, they played as friends, not thinking of any danger,” she added.

Whenever the rockets came, another elderly lady said she relived childhood memories of suffering in the Second World War, but she was sure the God of Israel would help her.

We all respond differently in times of crisis. But we can make a difference for those who get overwhelmed by assuring them that they are not alone and that others are supporting, giving, and praying for them. 🙏



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Ruins of the ancient Great Synagogue at Capernaum (or Kfar Nahum) on the shore of the Lake of Galilee



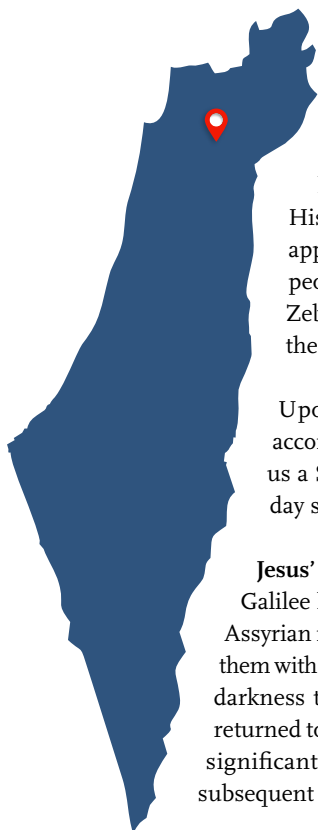
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# JESUS' REBUKE OF THREE CITIES

## What Happens When Light Is Rejected

BY DR. SUSAN MICHAEL, ICEJ USA DIRECTOR



The common application of Isaiah 9:2 is a spiritual one in which the “people who walked in darkness” are those who lived before Christ and without knowledge of His saving power. While that is a valid spiritual application, this verse is actually referring to the people of a specific geographical area: the land of Zebulun and Naphtali, known as the “Galilee of the gentiles.”

Upon them a great light would shine when, according to verse 6, “unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given.” Jesus is the light that would one day shine upon the Galilee, according to Isaiah.

### Jesus' Ministry in Galilee

Galilee had become largely gentile after 722 BC when Assyrian forces exiled most of the Israelites and replaced them with pagan and idolatrous Assyrians causing spiritual darkness to fall over the region. While many Jews had returned to the area and repopulated it over the centuries, significant idolatry remained and was encouraged by subsequent Greek and Roman invaders.

In chapter 4 of his gospel, Matthew explains that Jesus conducted the bulk of His ministry in the Galilee in fulfillment

of Isaiah 9:1-7. Just as Jesus' birth in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2) and His return from refuge in Egypt (Hosea 11:1) was a fulfillment of prophecy, so was his upbringing in Nazareth (Matthew 2:23) and subsequent ministry in the Galilee.

Jesus traveled throughout the Galilee healing all manners of sickness, opening blind eyes and deaf ears, raising the dead, and casting out demons. It was on the Sea of Galilee that He performed two of His most dramatic miracles: stilling the storm and walking on the water.

### Walking Where Jesus Walked

Tourists today can visit the archeological remains of some of the cities in which Jesus ministered. The remains of the first-century synagogues in those cities are the most exciting finds because it's fairly certain Jesus visited and even preached in them. Both Mark and Matthew say that He preached in all the synagogues of the region.

The synagogue visible today in Capernaum dates to the third century, but it is built over the remains of the first-century synagogue Jesus likely taught in. Another incredible find there is the possible home of Simon Peter. We know Jesus visited this home and on one occasion healed Peter's mother-in-law of a fever. It is even possible He lived there while in Capernaum.

Mark 1:29 tells us that Peter's home was near the entrance to the synagogue. Archaeologists have uncovered a first-century home in that



Ancient synagogue at Korazin



Ruins of the city gate, Bethsaida



Photo Credit: Chmee2 - Own work

area with several indications to its historical significance. The house had eleven coats of plaster on the walls indicating it was a special place that had been well cared for over a long period of time.

The threshold stone is broken but was never replaced, indicating someone important may have stepped on that stone. Numerous pieces of wall plaster have writing on them referring to Jesus as Lord, the Most High, the Savior, and Messiah, while three of them mention Peter himself. A fifth-century church was built over the site, indicating the locals knew it as Peter's home, which Jesus had frequented.

In nearby Magdala, a first-century synagogue has been uncovered where visitors can see the very floor Jesus may have walked on. Another exciting find in that synagogue is an altar (or stone table), the earliest known artistic depiction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. Jesus probably rested the Torah scroll upon this stone table as He taught.

### The Three Impenitent Cities

While these archaeological finds are exciting and help us to imagine the life and ministry of Jesus, they are also a stark reminder of what happens when light is rejected. Darkness remains.

Matthew refers to Capernaum, Korazin, and Bethsaida as the cities where Jesus performed most of His miracles. Yet Jesus rebuked these three impenitent cities and said that if the mighty works that had been done in them were done in the gentile cities of Tyre and Sidon or the sinful city of Sodom, they would have repented. He then declared that judgment would result, and Capernaum would be "brought down to Hades" (Matthew 11:20–24).

All three cities were destroyed by a series of earthquakes between the fourth and eighth centuries and remain in ruins to this day. What a powerful reminder of Jesus' words that "everyone to whom much is given, much will be required." Those privileged to have enjoyed the light of His presence in their midst and witnessed the miracles He performed would suffer judgment for rejecting that light.



To better understand the words of Jesus, one must read the Scriptures in their geographical, historical, and cultural context. Thankfully, the Israeli government safeguards archaeological finds and holy sites, so Christians can visit them and not just recount but experience the words and ministry of Jesus on a whole new level. 🌍





## GOD SPEAKS WITH POWER

BY DR. SUSAN MICHAEL

The book of Job is one that we usually rather avoid! God said Himself that Job was blameless—He feared God and shunned evil. Yet He let down the protective hedge around Job and allowed him to suffer tremendous loss. When Job passed the test with a humble response, the Lord allowed even more loss into his life.

God wanted to prove the stuff Job was made of! But what a test. Most of us read it and cringe—and then scour the book for someone to blame. That is exactly what Job's three friends did. They offered many explanations and pointed the finger at Job, driving him deep into despair.

Then God spoke. And everything changed in an instant.


I don't know if you have ever experienced God speaking to you—it might be in a still small voice, a word from a friend, or a Scripture verse. But when God speaks, it is not just with words to satisfy our intellect; it is with power. You may have sensed this as an overwhelming peace filling you head to foot. Or you may have found supernatural

resolve and the ability to do what you felt the Lord was directing you to do. The Holy Spirit spoke those words into your spirit, and the encounter can be life-changing.

Job encountered the presence of God, and in an instant, He had a whole new perspective. He said, "My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore, I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:6). Job realized God did not owe him anything. And in the face of the Almighty, Job was just a spec of dust. Who was he to have questioned God?

God then restored everything to Job and more so. Job's pain and suffering had positioned him to move beyond just knowing *about* God to *encountering* God. When God spoke, it was with such power and revelation that Job was a changed person.

Join me for this week's *Out of Zion* podcast on "When God Speaks." *Walk Thru the Bible* with me each week by downloading our Bible reading guide and get started reading right away! Invite your friends and family to join us! I can't wait to *Walk Thru the Bible* with you!

Dr. Susan Michael is USA Director of the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem and host of the *Out of Zion* podcast. 

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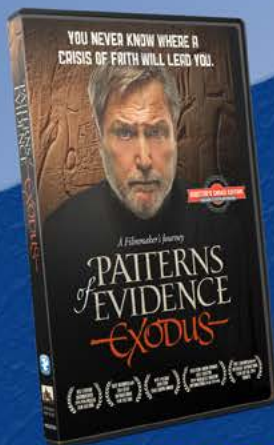


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## YOUR ISRAEL ANSWER

# Should the United States Fund Israel's Iron Dome?

By Dr. Susan Michael, ICEJ USA Director

**I**ron Dome funding recently hit headlines when progressive Democrats had it removed from an emergency bill needed to keep the US government running. The removal of \$1 billion for replenishment and development of Israel's Iron Dome was at first glance a major blow, but within hours, the US Congress passed another bill allowing for this expenditure. Nevertheless, we thought it a good opportunity to discuss how important US funding of the Iron Dome system is.

### What Is Iron Dome?

Iron Dome is the most effective battle-proven, short-range missile defense system in the world. Developed by Israel, it has intercepted more than 4,000 rockets fired by terrorists at Israeli population centers with over a 90% success rate. Were it not for this astonishing defense system, the Gaza-based terror groups would have reduced Israel to rubble in recent years and killed millions of civilians.

Three components make up the system: radar to detect the incoming rocket's launch and track its trajectory, a control center to calculate the impact point and if a populated area is threatened, and if so, an interceptor missile that fires to destroy the incoming rocket before it reaches

the predicted impact area. Each launcher, containing 20 interceptors, is operated remotely via a secure wireless connection.

### The Cost

One Iron Dome battery costs roughly \$50 million, and each interceptor missile fired costs around \$150,000. Since 2011, the United States has invested over \$1.7 billion in Israel's Iron Dome system. This investment not only saved millions of lives but billions of dollars in infrastructure damage had the incoming missiles not been destroyed.

### Moral Defense

The Iron Dome has enjoyed strong bipartisan support in the US government because it is a defensive system designed to save lives despite terrorists' best attempts to kill them. It is the first line of defense against the war crime of indiscriminate rocket fire directed at Israeli civilians. The successful missile defense system also saves Palestinian lives because the lack of Israeli casualties means Israel's leaders have less pressure to escalate their military response.

### Increasing Need for Missile Defense

While most rocket attacks thus far have been from terrorists in Gaza, Israel's most pressing future threat comes from the


north. Hezbollah's extensive arsenal includes an estimated 150,000 rockets and missiles capable of reaching every part of Israel.

Military planners estimate Hezbollah will be able to launch thousands of rockets per day in a future conflict. In the recent conflict in Gaza, Hamas fired more than a hundred rockets at once in an effort to overwhelm the Iron Dome. While the defense system handled the barrage successfully, a simultaneous barrage attack in the future from both north and south could pose a problem.

Israel also faces rocket and drone threats from Iranian-backed forces in Syria, Yemen, and Iraq.

### The US Benefit

Parts of the system are built in facilities across the United States, helping to create American jobs. The system's deployment and improvement, with US funding, also helps develop technology that can be used to defend Americans. Already the US Army has purchased two Iron Dome batteries to protect American troops positioned in troubled areas around the globe.

It is clear the US Congress should continue support to replenish and develop Israel's Iron Dome missile defense system. 

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