

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF TOWNS COUNTY

OPINIONS & COMMENTARY

Muslim Sovereignty

How Christians Fare Under Muslim Sovereignty

By Yonatan Hambourger and Tzali Reicher

Echos from Sinai
"Torah for Everyone"
Rabbi Yonatan Hambourger



Over the past 10 months, there have been many victims of the war Hamas launched on Israel on October 7, 2023.

First and foremost are the 1,200 people who were brutally murdered and the over 200 who were taken hostage during Hamas's invasion and the mass atrocities they committed. The innocent people of Gaza have also suffered immensely, living under the oppressive rule of the terrorist organization they voted into power nearly 20 years ago. These civilians are now forced to endure the consequences of the decisions made by their leaders residing in Qatar and Iran, whose actions have led to continued bloodshed and suffering. The displaced communities of Israel's North, forced to flee their homes for almost a full year due to Hezbollah's provocations and non-stop rocket attacks, and the ravaged communities of the South are also still suffering.

But another group of overlooked victims in this ongoing conflict are the Christian communities in the Palestinian territories and, more broadly, throughout the Middle East. The plight of Christians in these regions is often overshadowed by the broader narrative of the conflict, yet it is a story that needs to be told.

Bethlehem, the birthplace of Christianity and once a city with a strong Christian presence for almost two millennia, has seen its Christian population dwindle significantly since the Palestinian Authority took control in 1995 following the Oslo Accords. Christians, who once formed the majority in Bethlehem, are now a small and shrinking minority. Economic hardship, political instability, and rising antagonism have driven many Christians to leave, seeking safety and stability elsewhere, especially in Israel.

This is not an isolated case but part of a broader pattern across the Middle East and other Muslim-majority areas, where Christian communities have faced relentless persecution and displacement. Lebanon, once a beacon of liberalism with a majority Christian population, has seen its Christian communities decimated by civil war and sectarian violence, forcing many to flee the country. According to C.U.F.I., "Christians living in Lebanon consider themselves second-class citizens and live in fear of persecution." Iraq's ancient Christian population, targeted by ISIS in the 2010s, has been nearly wiped out, with towns like Qaraqosh and Bartella emptied of their inhabitants. Syria's civil war has devastated cities like Aleppo, where Christians have been caught in the deadly crossfire. Afghanistan's few remaining Christians are forced to practice their faith in secret under the oppressive rule of the Taliban, while in Somalia, Al-Shabaab's terror campaign has made the country one of the most dangerous places for Christians, where even the suspicion of apostasy can lead to death.

The situation for Christians in Gaza and the West Bank is particularly dire. In Gaza, Christians are brutally repressed, living under the thumb of Hamas, which imposes strict Islamic rule and leaves no room for religious minorities. In the West Bank, Christians are treated as second-class citizens under the Palestinian Authority, facing discrimination and marginalization in a society where their rights are mostly ignored.

In stark contrast to these harsh realities, "Israel is the safest place for Christians in the Middle East ... the only state in the Middle East where Christians and their holy sites are protected. Since the Arab Spring, there has overtly been an exodus of Christians from the Middle East due to violence, oppression, and threats of extermination ... However, the number of Christians in Israel has grown over the past few decades. Israel continues to be a safe haven for minorities in the Middle East that wish to live their lives without oppression," states C.U.F.I.

This stark contrast between Israel and its neighbors highlights the broader principle that when minorities are treated with dignity and respect, societies can thrive. Israel's treatment of its Arab citizens, including Christians, stands in sharp contrast to the repression and violence faced by Christians in many parts of the Middle East.

Why is Israel so hospitable to all people, regardless of their race or religion?

It's because the Torah's teachings on kindness and justice are simple and clear and provide a powerful moral framework that contrasts sharply with the persecution faced by Christians in many Muslim-majority countries. The Torah commands Jews to care for the stranger and the vulnerable, a principle that has guided Jewish law and tradition for millennia. Leviticus 19:34 instructs, "The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." This message of empathy and justice is a central theme in Jewish thought and provides a moral guide for how we should treat others.

Working to ease the plight of Christians in Muslim-majority countries is not just about recording their mistreatments; it is a moral responsibility for us to acknowledge and fix. We must advocate for the protection of these vulnerable communities and demand that the international community holds accountable those responsible for their suffering, instead of building imaginary oppressors and false divides. As we witness these injustices, we must remember that compassion and justice are not just ideals to strive for but commands that must be followed. In the face of persecution, let us commit to these timeless principles, ensuring that every human being, regardless of their faith, is treated with the dignity and respect they deserve.

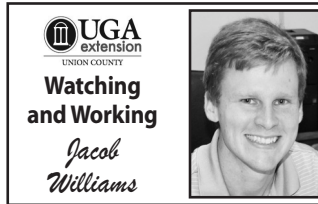
Yonatan Hambourger is a Rabbi and writer serving spiritual seekers of all persuasions on behalf of Chabad of Rural Georgia. Tzali Reicher is a Rabbi and writer serving communities throughout the regional South. You can reach them at y@tasteoftorah.org.

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Japanese Stiltgrass

Japanese stiltgrass is a very common and extremely invasive plant in our area. My personal Mount Rushmore (but in a bad way) of invasive species in our area would be wild hogs, hemlock woolly adelgid, Chinese privet, and Japanese stiltgrass. I would give them this notorious designation because of the damage that I see them causing to our natural resources. From these four I think that Japanese stiltgrass is the least well known. Let's get talk about where it came from, the damage that it causes and how to control it.



The scientific name for Japanese stiltgrass is *Microstegium vimineum*. Another common name that you might see for it is Nepalese brown-top. Originally this plant was used as packing material for shipping fragile items. In the early 1900s it escaped into the wild. Once in the wild it began to spread. It can now be found throughout the Eastern United States. It is a true grass, in the grass family, poaceae. It grows to up to three feet in height. It can grow in shaded areas and outcompete many native plants. It can grow in places that have been disturbed, or in places that are undisturbed. As an annual it reseeds itself each year. The leaves on it are alternate, with a faint silver line down the center of the leaf.

Because it grows in the shade and outcompetes native plants, it will often push out plants that are beneficial to wildlife. Japanese stiltgrass is extremely deer resistant. This means that deer will eat down native plants, leaving the Japanese stiltgrass behind to grow and spread. In Georgia it covers the second most acreage. Non-native privets are first by a large margin. But I think that where we live the spread of Japanese stiltgrass is underappreciated in the terms of the damage that it does to the ecosystem.

All hope is not lost because there are some effective ways at controlling it. If you only have a little bit of it you can pull it out by hand. It is very shallow rooted, so hand pulling is not too difficult. You can also mow it down at the end of August or early September. It puts a seed head on in late August to mid-September. So, if you pull it out or cut it down shortly before it does that you can keep it from reseeding itself. Keep in mind that Japanese stiltgrass seed can remain viable for three to five years. So, you should still expect some plants to grow the following years, until the seedbank is depleted. Pre-emergent herbicides like prodiamine or pendimethalin can be used. For those to be effective, they must be applied before the Japanese stiltgrass has germinated. Generally mid-March is when a pre-emergent would need to be applied. Post-emergent broad-spectrum herbicides can be used, but make sure you are only spraying the target plant. Always read and follow the label when using any pesticide. Controlled burns also kill Japanese Stiltgrass.

If you have questions about Japanese stiltgrass, contact your County Extension Office or email me at Jacob.Williams@uga.edu.

Letters To The Editor

Get Out the Vote

Dear Editor,

In the 2020 election, Towns County had a 74.5% turnout for the presidential election.

That is a significantly high number, but we need to do better and make it 100%. Let's be known as the county where everyone participates. What a great example that will set for the rest of Georgia! Let's all go out and exercise our God-given right and vote in 2024. It's the least we can do for our forefathers who fought so hard for these rights and many more that we are blessed with here in the USA.

Early voting is Oct. 15 through Nov. 1 (9 a.m. to 5 p.m., including both Saturdays). And of course, Election Day is Nov. 5 from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. If you are going to be out of town, apply for an absentee ballot and drop it off at the Board of Elections at 67 Lakeview Circle in Hiawassee.

Judy Aube

Possessions

Dear Editor,

From the time children become aware of possessions, "I want" becomes a part of their vocabulary. Wanting things never diminishes, but the price tag on the things we want increases dramatically as we grow older. From a bicycle to a car, a regular car to a sports car, from an apartment to a house, from the first-time home to a larger one - and it seemingly never ends.

Whatever our economic status, we always want bigger, better and more. As we age, most of us come to realize and accept the fact that, regardless of what we have accumulated, none of it will leave this earth with us. An old saying comes to mind: "You'll never see a U-Haul trailer behind a hearse."

However little or however much we possess, it is a gift from God. If we have been blessed with extra, then we should be willing to share it with someone who has less. Some may equate success in life by how many cars and homes they own, or how many storage units they have filled up with stuff. Matthew 6:21 tells us that, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Finding peace and contentment in serving the Lord will exceed anything this old world has to offer. And, there is no fee for a storage building!

Gene Vickers

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR SHOULD BE E-MAILED OR MAILED TO:

Towns County Herald, Letter to the Editor
P.O. Box 365, Hiawassee, GA 30546
Our email address: tcherald@windstream.net

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Note: All letters must be signed, and contain the first and last name and phone number for verification.

The Quality of Mercy

"How far that little candle throws his beams! So shines a good deed in a naughty world."

-The Merchant of Venice

It has been a while since we told a chicken story here, and I was beginning to worry that my editor might think our little flock had run afoul of some calamity. Mr. Tibbs and the girls are fine, but the baby chicks we bought to add vigor to the herd did not fare well.

Of course we won't tell you the name of the business that sold us the unvaccinated, diseased little unfortunates. Suffice it to say that a company which supplies tractors should probably stick to that and refrain from any side ventures which require a high level of integrity across the entire supply chain.

The poultry business has become so vulnerable to disease that a friend who rents a facility to one of the large suppliers cannot visit his own property without first undergoing a sterilization procedure and wearing a protective suit designed, not for his protection but for the safety of the birds. Diseases spread rapidly and a large investment can be destroyed in a matter of days.

A reputable supplier vaccinates the birds and ships directly to the customer. Alternatively, when your baby chicks come from a retailer which may purchase unvaccinated birds on the cheap, which then must survive the stress of shipping only to be cared for by untrained or uninterested employees, your chances of raising healthy chickens diminish significantly.

Our broody hens rejected the newcomers, which in hindsight was probably fortunate. We were then required to separate the babies from the herd and care for them ourselves. They were just beginning to bond with us when they started to die, quite horribly. First one, then the next day another in the morning and then four all at once.

Tracey was heartbroken. When she discovered the last three in their death throes, weeping she held and comforted them because she didn't want them to be alone when they passed. Just when you think you can't love a woman more...

Most of us are blessed to know someone who is possessed of the quality of mercy. Not long after our sad event I read an account by a friend who grieved for an aged pelican standing alone at the edge of the surf waiting to die. There is something beautifully human about the ability to recognize that destiny we share with all living creatures, and the desire that none of us should stand on that shore alone.

But human empathy is not evenly distributed. The narcissist, the borderline personality, and the psychopath have little or none. For others, it may be selective. The loner who despises humanity may rescue stray animals. Many reserve compassion for a particular tribe, which may be perceived as immediate family, political party, generation, race, or nationality.

In an election year, empathy and compassion contract. The political process aggravates the divisions humanity has always struggled to overcome. Every time I visit social media I witness grievous insults and derisive humor levied even by God-fearing, church-going people, and I cannot cast the first stone. One of my favorite memes depicts Jesus looking over a man's shoulder at his phone with the caption, "Jesus showing me my memes and explaining why I can't go to heaven."

Empathy, compassion, love for our fellow man is complicated and often difficult. The puppy pawing at my arm as I write this suggests that the Creator gifted us the ability to love our pets and feel compassion for so many other creatures on this planet, perhaps as a way to exercise the ability and keep it alive for a higher purpose.

Outside The Box

By: Don Perry

worldoutsidethebox.com

Towns County Community Calendar

First Monday of each month:	School Board... HS/MS Media Center	6:45 pm
Every Tuesday:	Storytime for Children... TC Library	10:30 am
First Tuesday of each month:	Hiaw. City Council... City Hall	6 pm
	YH City Council... YH City Hall	6:30 pm
Second Wednesday of each month:	Board of Elections... Elections Office	4 pm
Third Monday of each month:	Planning Commission... Temporary Courthouse	6 pm
Third Tuesday of each month:	Commissioner's Mtg... Courthouse	5:30 pm
	City of Young Harris Planning Commission...	
	Meeting Room in City Hall	5 pm
	TC Water Authority Board Meeting	6 pm

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