

ISRAEL INTERCESSORY PRAYER ITEMS

January 22-29, 2021

1. ISRAEL-USA CHANGES/UPDATES:

PM Netanyahu said Wednesday (Jan 20): "Congratulations President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris on your historic inauguration. President Biden, you and I have had a warm personal friendship going back many decades. I look forward to working with you to further strengthen the USA-Israel alliance, to continue expanding peace between Israel and the Arab world and to confront common challenges, chief among them the threat posed by Iran. I wish you the greatest success."

USA Ambassador Gilad Erdan has met with USA President Joe Biden, Erdan said on Thursday (Jan 21) after he took over the post from Ron Dermer. "I happened to coincidentally meet him on the train to Washington. We had a very long conversation about his relationship with Prime Minister Netanyahu and the State of Israel, which runs very deep. I think we can expect years of expanding cooperation to even more areas beyond the existing ones. I think there is a strong basis for optimism. In talks I have had with factors in the Democratic party and members of Congress, the mainstream of the Democratic party supports Israel very much. They understand that we are an asset to the USA and have shared values."

At his Senate confirmation hearing on Tuesday (Jan 19), Antony Blinken, President Joe Biden's nominee for secretary of state, was asked by Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Tex.), "Do you agree that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel and do you commit that the United States will keep our embassy in Jerusalem?" "Yes and yes," Blinken responded. (Note: The Palestinians reacted with outrage to Blinken's remarks.)

Secretary of State-nominee Antony Blinken testified at a confirmation hearing Tuesday before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) asked whether Blinken considered Iran the world's "largest state sponsor of terrorism." Blinken replied, "I do." Did he consider Israel a racist nation? "No." Blinken promised an enduring USA commitment to Israel's security, but said that Biden remained committed to a two-state solution with the Palestinians. He added that "realistically, it's hard to see near-term prospects for moving forward."

Secretary of State-nominee Antony Blinken pledged to consult with Israel, Gulf allies and Congress when seeking "a longer and stronger" agreement to rein in Iran's nuclear ambitions during his Senate confirmation hearing Tuesday. He said the administration would "engage on the takeoff, not just the landing" with allies and partners before taking steps to rejoin the landmark nuclear agreement. "Biden is committed to the proposition that Iran will not acquire a nuclear weapon. Iran with a nuclear weapon or the threshold capacity to build one is an Iran that would act with potentially greater impunity than it already is."

USA Ambassador to Israel David Friedman completed his tenure Wednesday (Jan 20) evening in a visit to the Western Wall at Jerusalem's Old City. He was greeted by Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz, rabbi of the Western Wall, Jerusalem Mayor Moshe Lion, and Mordechai (Suli) Eliav, Director of the Western Wall Heritage Foundation. Eliav presented Friedman with the most recent archaeological findings from the Western Wall Tunnels. Friedman came full circle, as when he began his role as ambassador, landing in Israel in May of 2017, his first act was to pray at the Western Wall. During his time visiting the holy site, Friedman recited a Psalm of thanks in front of the Western Wall stones and spoke of the importance of Israel to him, particularly Jerusalem, in addition to his accomplishment while serving as ambassador.

Place in Israel's cabinet "sons of Issachar" and by Your mercy reveal to them the true heart intents of the members of the new USA administration (1 Chr. 12:32). Lord, override all attempts to restart a "peace" deal based on two-states in Your land (Job 5:13-14). Give Israeli leaders a united stance against all USA demands which are not in Your will (Isa. 30:1-3). Remove the fear of man from Israelis and replace it with the biblical 'fear of the LORD' (Eccl. 12:13). May Israel's leaders not resist You positioning Your nation to be different from all other nations and to dwell alone (Num. 23:9). Anoint Gilad Erdan in his position as Israel's ambassador to the USA and to the UN (Psa. 81:10). Use him to open many hearts to hear Israel's genuine concerns (Psa. 49:1-3). Let him give wise counsel to Israel's leaders about the Biden Administration's plans towards Israel (Prov. 19:20).

"He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honour him." (Psalm 91:15)

2. ISRAEL GOVERNMENT/KNESSET UPDATES:

The Jerusalem Municipality's Building and Planning Committee approved plans for a new USA embassy building in Jerusalem. Jerusalem Mayor Moshe Lion called it a "historic and exciting moment," and that he thinks it will inspire other countries to move to the capital. "After two years, we're thrilled the local planning committee finally approved it," Jerusalem Deputy Mayor Fleur Hassan-Nahoum said. "We've been waiting for a very, very long time and we're happy it finally passed." The approved plans include expanding the current embassy site in Arnona, as well as the construction of a new embassy on Derech Hebron. They will need additional approval from a district council, but it's expected to pass easily.

The City of David was recognized as a "testament to America's Judeo-Christian heritage and founding principles" by the US Embassy in Jerusalem and the US Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad at a special ceremony on Monday (Jan 18). USA Ambassador to Israel David Friedman and Chairman of the Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad Paul Packer dedicated a plaque recognizing the "seminal role" the City of David plays in connecting visitors to "the origins of the values that helped shape America."

Father, we pray for March 23rd when there will be the fourth national election in two years in Israel. Keep Believers vigilant in prayer for Israel and their upcoming elected officials. Is it not time to give Israel the shepherds after Your heart You have promised (Jer. 3:14-15)? Lord, help Israelis to vote with divine wisdom from You. May the politicians run a clean campaign...about policies and not personalities (Prov. 6:16-19). Create a government that is stable and which furthers Your kingdom purposes (Luke 11:2). Create a government that will bring Israelis into a greater sense of unity and purpose (Psa. 133:1). Raise up leaders who love Israel – both the people and the land (Isa. 62:4-5; Luke 7:5). Exalt those to leadership who have a heart for the ingathering of Your people (Aliyah) (Ezek. 36:23-24). Remove all the dross from sitting in the next government (Isa. 1:25). Guard over and keep all those who are leading well now into the next government (Isa. 1:26). Protect the present government so that the new USA leaders will not be able to manipulate it (Num. 23:23).

"First of all, I exhort that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence, for this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who will have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." (1 Timothy 2:1-4)

3. ISRAEL CORONAVIRUS UPDATES:

8,174 people tested positive for Covid-19 on Wednesday, the Israel Health Ministry said Thursday (Jan 21). Also reported, 1,132 patients are in serious condition, of whom 317 are ventilated, a record high. The death toll now stands

at 4,179, including 800 patients so far this month. There are 82,401 active patients, 16,262 of them in Jerusalem. **2,364,828 (26.6%) people have received the first vaccination shot and 691,876 (7.8%) have received both doses.** (Note: Despite the tightened lockdown for the past two weeks and despite the incredible distribution of vaccines, the number of COVID-19 cases continues to remain at very high levels.)

Israel's Ministry of Health lowered the age of those eligible to receive the coronavirus vaccine to 40 on Tuesday (Jan 19). At the same time, the ministry ordered the country's four health management organizations to prepare to distribute a quarter of a million vaccines per day. The directive comes as the country faces a spike in infections, with more than 10,000 Israelis testing positive for the virus on Monday. Israel's current and third national COVID-19 lockdown began on December 27. Restrictions were tightened on January 8 as morbidity continued to rise, with the Health Ministry confirming the presence in the country of both the UK and South African variants of the coronavirus.

According to the results of a serological study conducted by Tel Aviv's Sheba Medical Center at Tel HaShomer, more than 98 percent of the people who received both doses of the COVID-19 vaccine developed antibodies that neutralize the effects/symptoms of the virus. The study, whose results were published Monday, tested subjects for antibodies a week after they received their second dose of the vaccine. Out of the 102 tests analyzed, researchers saw the level of antibodies jump by factors ranging from six to 20—even higher than the level of antibodies measured in recovered COVID-19 patients who had been seriously ill. (Note: There is no evidence that the vaccine stops or reduces the spread of the infection of the virus.)

An Israeli company has developed a test for the COVID-19 coronavirus which gives results in minutes. 'Scentech', which specializes in producing equipment that allows medical diagnostics tests that analyze breath samples, announced this new development last week. The test is still undergoing trials at Shamir Medical Center (an affiliate of Tel Aviv University's Sackler Faculty of Medicine), but so far the company says it is 98% accurate. (Note: 784 individuals participated in the trial at Assaf Harofeh Medical Center, breathing into the device for 10 seconds. The results are available within a few seconds. The breath technology can differentiate with high accuracy between positive, negative, and those with Covid-19 antibodies. It will also help identify those infected even before symptoms are present.)

Israel has been lauded for deploying what is currently the fastest Covid-19 vaccination campaign in the world. Less than a month after receiving its first shipments of the Pfizer-BioNTech jab, the country of 9 million has vaccinated around 20% of its population, and more than 72% of people over the age of 60 have already gotten their first dose of the shot. Israel's health ministry aims to have 5.2 million of its citizens vaccinated by March. The vaccinations, officials say, will help the country gradually exit its strict lockdown, and soon with the help of a new document: a Covid-19 vaccination certification, or what's being called the "green booklet."

Lord, teach us how to pray into this corona crisis (Psa. 10:17; Rom. 8:26). While increasing numbers of Israelis are being vaccinated, the numbers of newly diagnosed and seriously ill have also been increasing. Protect those who are already sick and all those who care for them (Jer. 29:11). Provide all that they need at this time – including mental and emotional support (Isa. 61:3). Bless all of Israel's medical personal and give them rest, strength and encouragement (Matt. 25:21). Thank You for the reports saying that Israel is in good position to recovery financially (Deut. 28:12). Sustain the owners of small businesses who have been deeply hurt by the lockdowns (Psa. 138:7a). Guard the hearts and minds of parents towards their children in this chaos (Deut. 4:10; 6:7; 11:19). Provide the needed support for those with mental health issues (Isa. 26:3). Be all that the widows and orphans need to make it through (Psa. 68:5). Use this chaotic time to show Israeli rabbis that they must seek You for answers (Psa. 9:10). Reveal Messiah Yeshua to all who are struggling in regard to all these issues (John 6:44-45; 14:6). Bless and guide all the Christian groups who are aiding Israel today (Isa. 60:10). Abba, we trust in Your promises in Your Word that You would care for Your people after their return from exile; so we ask You to watch over these promises for today (Ezek. 36:11; Amos 9:13-15).

“But now thus says YHWH who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel, ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned...For I am YHWH your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior’...” (Isaiah 43:1-3)

4. POST ISRAEL NORMALIZATIONS UPDATES:

The USA was closing in on agreements with Mauritania and Indonesia to be the next Muslim countries to normalize relations with Israel, but ran out of time due to the presidential change. Mauritania established full diplomatic relations with Israel in 1999, but severed ties 10 years later. The USA was also in "intermediate" talks with Oman and slightly less advanced talks with Saudi Arabia on Israel normalization. An outgoing senior USA official said that "if the USA wants to continue to motivate the Abraham Accords, three to four more countries should be the low bar for its success...There's no doubt that when the USA wants to lead toward peace and normalization, more countries will follow."

On his final full day in office, President Trump chose to honour Bahrain’s King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa for his country’s normalization of ties with Israel and its role in hosting a June 2019 economic conference to showcase his Middle East peace plan. Last week, Trump conferred the rare Legion of Merit, Degree Chief Commander on King Mohammed VI of Morocco for his role in restoring diplomatic ties with Israel. (**Note:** The Legion of Merit is a military award created to honor leaders of Allied nations during World War II. It has not been awarded to anyone since, until it was restored to service last month by Trump, who employed the award to honor the prime ministers of Australia, India and Japan.) **This week on his final full day in office, Trump bestowed the Legion of Merit, Degree Chief Commander on the King of Bahrain,** saying, “King Hamad showed extraordinary courage and leadership through his support of the Vision for Peace and his decision to establish full diplomatic relations with the State of Israel. King Hamad has challenged old assumptions about the possibility for peace in the region, and in doing so, positively reshaped the landscape of the Middle East for generations,”

Further Note: Trump was directly responsible for the development of the Abraham Accords, in which four Arab nations signed peace accords with the State of Israel in agreements brokered by President Trump and his “peace team.”

The United Arab Emirates has signed an agreement with the United States to purchase 50 F-35 jets and up to 18 armed drones on Wednesday (Jan 20). Although the UAE and the United States were working to ink a deal before President Biden took office on Wednesday, the new president has said he will re-examine the agreements. The UAE, one of Washington's closest Middle East allies, has long expressed interest in acquiring the stealthy F-35 jets made by Lockheed Martin and was promised a chance to buy them in a side deal when it agreed to normalize relations with Israel last August, which was later finalized on September 15 as part of the Abraham Accords.

Israel and the United Arab Emirates will allow visa-free travel between the countries after the UAE ratified an agreement on the matter. Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi said, “the ratification of the agreement is a central element of the full and quick implementation of the many agreements being worked on these days with the Emirates, Bahrain, and Morocco.” Ashkenazi credited the Foreign Ministry with “quickly advancing the relations with these countries.” The visa-free agreement will go into effect on February 12. The UAE was originally expected to authorize the agreement in late December or early January but deferred the final ratification.

An Egyptian public opinion poll in November 2020, commissioned by the Washington Institute, found that:

- 55% say good ties with China are important for Egypt, compared with 52% who say good ties with the USA are important.

- Only 35% call good relations with Ankara (Turkey) even "somewhat important," while just 9% rank relations with Iran as even somewhat important.
- 96% voice a negative opinion of Hezbollah, and an equal amount express a negative view of Iran's ally in Yemen, the Houthis.
- 73% voice a negative opinion of Hamas.
- Only 23% now view the Muslim Brotherhood positively.

However, only 1/4 support the recent peace agreements with Israel by the UAE and Bahrain, while 2/3 reject the agreements.

The USA International Development Finance Corporation, a government agency that invests overseas, could more than double its current \$1 billion portfolio if Indonesia develops ties with Israel. DFC Chief Executive Officer Adam Boehler said in an interview last month in Jerusalem, "We're talking to them about it. If they're ready...then we'll be happy to even support more financially than what we do."

Lord, we ask that the spirit of genuine cooperation between these nations to be guarded (Gen. 26:26-31). Show Israel where it can compromise in negotiations and when it needs to just say no (Prov. 16:1)! Protect Israel from being deceived in anyway during these ongoing negotiations/normalizations (Num. 23:23). Remind all Israelis involved that security must be their primary concern (Rom. 13:1-4). Prevent anything from being agreed upon that would set a bad precedent for any future negotiations with other Arab nations. Use the anti-UAE rage of the Palestinians to show UAE leaders – and all other Arabs – the true nature of the corrupt Palestinian leadership. May all Christians in the UAE perceive Israel's restoration to be connected with Your glory (Psa. 115:1-3).

"It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man. It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes." (Psalm 118:8-9)

5. GOLAN HEIGHTS/SYRIA/LEBANON/IRAQ/TURKEY UPDATES:

Syria

Syrian state media reported Israeli airstrikes near the western city of Hama in the predawn hours of Friday (Jan 22) morning. Speculation is that an Iranian missile facility near Masyaf, a city in the Hama region of north-western Syria was hit along with a strike on an Iranian storage facility near the airport. It appears that the attack may have been in connection to an Iranian shipment that was unloaded at that Syria airport overnight. It also appears that Syrian anti-aircraft fire missed their Israeli targets and instead hit a Syrian home in Qadmus kilometers away. An Iranian cargo ship, the "Kashan" which underwent significant upgrading for the Iranian military was expected to dock in Latakia, Syria overnight, and may indicate that Iran is planning to resume their missile smuggling via the sea.

A senior USA intelligence official claimed that this week's large scale aerial bombing campaign targeting Iran-linked military sites in eastern Syria was carried out by Israel on the basis of intelligence provided by Washington. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, was cited as saying that the strikes targeted numerous warehouses used to store Iranian weapons near the Syria-Iraq border. The source further revealed that USA Secretary of State Mike Pompeo had discussed the operation in advance with Mossad chief Yossi Cohen at a public meeting on Monday at a popular eatery in Washington, D.C. The assault, which reportedly targeted more than 15 facilities, was the fourth alleged Israeli attack in Syria over the past two-plus weeks. It comes on the backdrop of ongoing Iranian threats to avenge the January 2020 killing of Quds Force chief Qasem Soleimani in a USA drone strike in Iraq.

Iranian forces and affiliated militias in eastern Syria carried out new redeployment and repositioning after their military sites and barracks were subjected to airstrikes on January 13. A local journalist said, "The Iranian militias

transferred the bulk of their members and military equipment to residential neighbourhoods. The new deployments included transferring rockets and heavy weapons and hiding them inside the tunnels that Iranian forces had previously dug...They have also lowered flags from the roofs of the buildings where they are stationed. They removed all signs indicating their presence to avoid being targeted." **(Note:** Iranian militias in eastern Syria have replaced their flags with Syrian flags amid fears of new Israeli attacks. The IRGC transported ammunition and heavy weapons, including missiles, in trucks with Syrian license plates. It is reported that the Iranian Revolutionary Guard is deployed in 125 locations throughout Syria.)

Thirty-four fighters from Deir ez-Zour affiliated with pro-Iranian militias have left and joined the 5th Corps established by Russia in the area, reliable sources say. The number is expected to rise significantly in the coming days. Russia seeks to reduce Iran's role in Syria, launching frequent security campaigns with militias loyal to Russia.

Israel's demand to remove Iran and its militias from Syria was discussed by Syrian and Israeli officials last month at the Russian Hmeimim base in Syria's Latakia. The meeting included the Director of Syria's National Security Office Maj.-Gen. Ali Mamlouk, Security Advisor at the Syrian Palace Bassam Hassan, and Israel's former army chief of staff Lt.-Gen. Gadi Eisenkot. Alexander Tchaikov, the commander of Russian forces in Syria, was also present. The center reported that Israel demands "completely removing Iran, Hezbollah and Iran's militias."

Russian planes carried out 40 airstrikes on ISIS areas in Aleppo, Hama and Raqqah in Syria on Sunday (Jan 17). Since the start of the year, ISIS sleeper cells have upped their attacks on regime forces, killing at least 44

The 'Asharq Al Awsat Arabic' international newspaper reported Sunday (Jan 17) that Russia hosted a meeting for Syrian and Israeli officials at the Russian airbase in Hmeimim, Syria last month. Neither Damascus nor Jerusalem has confirmed the report. Asharq Al Awsat said it learned of the reported Syria-Israel meeting through the Syrian Jusoor Center for Studies, which is described as "an independent institution specializing in information management and conducting studies and research related to Syrian political and social affairs in particular and the Middle East region in general." It appears that Syria wants to return to be accepted back into Arab League and to receive financial help to repay its debts to Iran. Syria also wants Western sanctions to be lifted. Israel, on the other hand, demands that Hezbollah, Iran, and Iranian proxy militias be totally removed from Syria, that a Syrian government includes opposition parties, and that the Syrian military be restructured.

Thank You that Israel's recent attacks in Syria have been successful and effective (Psa. 144:1). Lord, we ask You to stop all potential terrorist attacks (Isa. 41:10-14). Provide all the security forces with the intelligence and information needed to stop all evil plans being formulated against Israel (Job 28:11b). Be with the IDF soldiers and aid them to not be distracted by the weather, smartphones, other young men or women, etc. Protect the IDF from Covid-19 (Num. 16:48; Psa. 91:3, 6). Remind Israel's leaders that when it comes to protecting their nation, it does not matter what the USA, or the UN, or the EU or any other group thinks. It is their responsibility alone (Rom. 13:3-4). Watch over and advance Israel's cyberwarfare capabilities (Job 22:13; 37:15; Isa. 19:1). We praise You for the "unmanned" aerial vehicles, patrol cars and boats Israel has developed. We pray that the human operators behind these "unmanned" weapons systems would be sharp, alert and have a will to act as and when needed (1 Chr. 12:8; Prov. 28:1b).

"For the nation and kingdom that will not serve you [Israel] shall perish; yes, those nations shall be utterly wasted." (Isaiah 60:12)

6. PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY UPDATES:

On January 3, 2021, Mohammed Dahlan broadcast on his Al Kuffiya network a two-part documentary program called "The Lost Story," including the revelation that PA President Mahmoud Abbas embezzled more than \$2 billion from the Palestinian Authority Investment Fund. The program revealed documents and audio recordings of senior Fatah figures allegedly confirming Dahlan's accusations. Dahlan's accusations include responsibility for the fall of Gaza to Hamas and the failure of the Fatah movement in the 2006 Palestinian parliamentary elections. Attempts by Abbas to kill Dahlan were also cited. As a result, Dahlan feared for his life and fled Judea-Samaria to Jordan and then on to the UAE.

- It is likely that Dahlan concluded that this was the best time to disclose all the information he possessed about Abbas' actions and failures in an attempt to discredit him before the new U.S. administration.
- At the same time, Dahlan wants to improve his own image among residents of the territories as the battle of succession in the Palestinian Authority leadership continues.

As coronavirus aid from the UAE made its way from Egypt into Gaza earlier this month, Hamas thanked Mohammed Dahlan, a key rival of PA President Mahmoud Abbas, for helping to secure the assistance.

The Palestinian Authority's (PA) Ministry of Foreign Affairs has threatened to "legally pursue" outgoing USA Ambassador to Israel David Friedman after the USA Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad recognized the City of David in Jerusalem's Old City as "a testament to America's Judeo-Christian heritage and founding principles." The PA's Ministry said in a statement on Tuesday (Jan 19) that "all of East Jerusalem is a Palestinian territory occupied since 1967," and "it is the eternal capital of the State of Palestine despite Friedman and his outgoing administration, which has deviated from every legal, diplomatic or ethical norm." The PA added, "Friedman's bigoted statements are a flagrant violation of international legitimacy and its resolutions, and international law and diplomatic traditions. The Ministry will consult with "legal experts and the concerned authorities to discuss the possibility of holding Friedman accountable before international and specialized courts." It is unclear on what ground the PA can sue Friedman.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas last Friday (Jan 15) announced that parliamentary and presidential elections will take place in the country for the first time in 15 years. Abbas said in a decree that the parliamentary elections will take place **on May 22**, and the presidential race will be held **on July 31** in Judea-Samaria, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem. They will be the first votes of their kind since 2006, when the militant group Hamas won in a resounding victory and set off a clash with Abbas's Fatah Party, thrusting the Palestinian Authority (PA) into a political crisis. Hamas later took control of the Gaza Strip in a bloody fight.

Egyptian and Jordanian intelligence chiefs who visited Ramallah last week and met with Abu Mazen warned the Palestinian Authority that Israel would not cooperate with a Palestinian government in which Hamas would be a partner. This was stated following the possibility of a Hamas victory in the Palestinian parliamentary and presidential elections expected in May and July. It should be noted that Fatah and Hamas are also discussing running a joint list and forming a unity government after the election, which could soon lead to Hamas' participation in the Palestinian government. Hamas is expected to run in the Palestinian Legislative Council elections. However, for the time being, Hamas has not decided whether to run for the presidency of the Palestinian Authority, assuming it happens. The delegation from Egypt and Jordan warned the head of the PA that Fatah was not prepared for the election challenge, due to internal power struggles and the apparent split of the lists, which raises the possibility of significant political achievement for Hamas, as in the 2006 elections. Abu Mazen states that he will work for the unity of all Fatah factions again before the election.

Note: The conflict between Abu Mazen and Muhammad Dahlan, a Fatah official who was expelled from the movement and whom the PA intends to prevent from running in the election on the basis of criminal accusations, is receiving the most attention in the organization, especially in light of the fact that Dahlan supports Marwan Barghouti, a senior Fatah

official which between him and Abu Mazen there is a lot of tension and who has signaled his intention to run for the presidency in July as well.

Palestinian Authority (PA) security forces arrested Akram Abu Shalbak, a Jerusalem journalist and director and editor of the 'WE ONE' website. Dressed in civilian clothes, Palestinian security personnel arrested the Arab journalist, who holds a blue Israeli identity card, while he was in the village of Aqab last Wednesday (Jan 13), and then transferred him for questioning to Ramallah. His detention was extended by 10 days on Tuesday and he was prevented from meeting his lawyer. Shalbak is a political activist, identified with PA Chairman Abbas's rival Muhammad Dahlan. This arrest follows a series of arrests of Dahlan's people, due to fears and tensions within Fatah, ahead of the possible upcoming Palestinian Authority elections. In recent months, more than 15 of Dahlan supporters, including residents of eastern Jerusalem, have been arrested.

Guard over all of Israel's spies and collaborators among the Palestinians (Josh. 6:22-23). Lord, You are Israel's Shepherd...defend this nation which You are regathering for Your name's sake (Jer. 31:10). Tie Prime Minister Netanyahu, Defense Minister Gantz and the IDF Chief of Staff Kochavi into a threefold cord in dealing with any and all Palestinian terrorism (Eccl.4:12). Provide security on the roads and settlements in Judea-Samaria (Psa. 121:4). May the population of the Israeli communities in Judea, Samaria and the Jordan Valley increase dramatically in the very near future (Ezek. 36:8-12). Do not allow the Palestinian issue to become the central issue for Middle East peace again. Prepare Israel's security forces for the chaotic time that may take place in the upcoming Palestinian elections (Psalm 70:2).

"Teach me Your way, O LORD, and lead me in a smooth path, because of my enemies. Do not deliver me to the will of my adversaries; for false witnesses have risen against me, and such as breathe out violence." (Psalm 27:11-12)

7. GAZA UPDATES:

Palestinians in Gaza fired two rockets toward the Israeli city of Ashdod before dawn on Monday (Jan 18). They landed in the sea just off the coast. In response, the Israel Defense Forces bombed multiple sites where Hamas is digging underground tunnels in southern Gaza.

Father, help Israel to turn the tables on Hamas so that they no longer control the outcome (Est. 9:1, 22). Stir up the common Palestinians in Gaza to rebel against the PA and Hamas and then set up leaders who would be willing to live in peace with Israel (Psa. 11:5; 37:17; Prov. 10:24). Continue to give Israel success in developing and using defensive weaponry (Psa. 118:27a). Protect Your people in the Negev, Lord. May the new initiatives to bless Sderot and Ashdod and Ashkelon be applied with wisdom and great effect.

"Behold, all those who were incensed against you shall be ashamed and confounded; they shall be as nothing. And those who fight with you shall perish. You shall seek them, and shall not find them; men warring against you shall be as nothing, and as ceasing." (Isaiah 41:11-12)

8. THE LIGHT SHINES INTO THE DARKNESS *(This weekly commentary documents incidents where God shines his light into the darkness and exposes pending attacks, injustices and terror incidents. It also documents situations where the goodness of God breaks through into evil circumstances)*

The Israeli population in Judea and Samaria grew by 2.6% in 2020, continuing a decade-long downward trend in the growth rate in the region. The Israeli population in Judea and Samaria at the end of 2020 was 476,000 residents in about 150 localities. This number does not include the number of Israeli residents living in the Jerusalem area (over the Green Line).

- The last decade has seen an average growth of 3.8% per year. The population growth in Judea, Samaria, and the Jordan Valley was higher than the annual growth in the entire state of Israel, which was 1.7% in 2020.
- The growth percentage in 2020, 2.6%, was lower than the 3.4% in 2019, and continues the downward trend that began in 2012, when the increase was 4.7%.
- The growth in the number of new residents also dropped, and while in 2019 it stood at 15,229 new residents, in 2020 only 12,132 residents moved to Judea and Samaria, the lowest number in years. The decrease in growth may be attributed in part to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, which brought to a significant slowdown in the housing market.
- In the last decade, the number of Israelis living in Judea and Samaria has increased by 147,829 residents, an increase of about 45% in 10 years and an average of 14,783 new residents per year.
- The largest localities in Judea and Samaria are the cities Modi'in Illit, Beitar Illit, Ma'ale Adumim and Ariel, where 206,358 residents, or 43%, live.
- The locality to which the largest number of new residents was added in 2020 is Alei Zahav, and the smallest locality in Judea and Samaria is Niran in the Jordan Valley.

Planting a tree in the Land of Israel has great meaning and creates a profound connection between the person planting the tree and the land. For some, it is a religious experience, while for others, it affirms their Zionist values. Eran Zavadi is a forester with Keren Kayemeth L'Israel-Jewish National Fund (KKL-JNF), founded in 1901, which has planted millions of trees in Israel. Zavadi, who has planted trees with tourists for the past 10 years, says the tourists seek a "people-to-people" connection. Visitors plant trees to mark special occasions such as anniversaries, birthdays and bar and bat mitzvahs, or to honor the memory of family members. Many of those who plant trees are not Jewish. With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Zavadi and his team have begun conducting live, online tree plantings via Zoom.

- People sign up at the KKL-JNF page - plantatree.kkl.org.il, choose a date and a time, and then receive a link to the tree-planting ceremony, which is conducted by Zavadi from the forest.
- Frequently, the online Zoom tree-planting can involve family members from around the world and is a significant family event.
- A special prayer of the tree-planter is recited in Hebrew and in the language that the donor speaks.
- Afterward, a certificate is sent to the person who ordered the tree and a video of the event is sent to the recipient.

In a bid to solidify Arab-Israeli efforts against Iran, outgoing President Trump ordered that responsibility for matters involving Israel in the Defense Department be moved from the USA European Command to Central Command. Israel will become the 21st nation under CENTCOM's purview, joining as it is increasingly cooperating with the Sunni-led Gulf States in an alliance against Shia-led Iran. After the announcement that Israel will be moved from the USA European Command to Central Command, Anthony Zinni, a retired Marine general and former head of the Central Command, said last Thursday (Jan 14), "We could see more Arab countries recognize Israel, so it makes sense to bring them all in under one unified American command. It will make security cooperation better." Dennis Ross, a former USA peace negotiator, said that the change was overdue. "I don't think the Biden people will have a problem with it, and I think the Israelis will welcome it as a reflection of the new realities in the region."

Lord, let Your light shine into the darkest areas of the earth. Expose all plots to harm Your people...both Jews and Christians. Thank You that there is increasing coordination between the agencies who are in charge of security and protection. We bless the security forces and police forces around the world...they have an impossible job to protect all the people all the time. Give them much wisdom and great alertness, we pray!

"YHWH discovers deep things out of darkness, and brings the shadow of death to light." (Job 12:22)

9. ANTI-SEMITISM UPDATES:

For his Zionist activities in the USSR, Natan Sharansky was sent to prison for nine years, half of which he spent in solitary confinement. He is a human rights activist, an Israeli politician, and former chair of the Jewish Agency. At one of his visits to American campuses, he says, "I gave a lecture on Jewish identity. There was an anti-Israel demonstration right outside. Demonstrators accused Israel of being an apartheid state. I tried to speak to one of the demonstrators, I told her how I was friends with Nelson Mandela, that I was even an international observer in the South African elections. I wanted to tell her about South Africa, so that we could understand together whether Israel was an apartheid state. She began screaming out loud: 'We didn't come here to talk to you, we came here to demand a boycott of Israel.' This is a narrow oppressor vs. oppressed understanding, according to which Israel is a colonialist nation, the Palestinians are always right and there is nothing further to discuss."

The USA State Department has cut ties with Islamic Relief Worldwide, an international charity that the USA accuses of spreading anti-Semitism. Until recently, IRW was an official partner of the American government and raked in hundreds of thousands of dollars. The State Department is "conducting a full review of the organization and USA government funding" due to the "anti-Semitism exhibited repeatedly by IRW's leadership," said Ellie Cohan, deputy special envoy to monitor and combat anti-Semitism. The group's senior leadership has engaged in persistent anti-Semitism, including social media posts praising Hamas leaders and calling Jews the "grandchildren of monkeys and pigs." Israel has designated IRW as a supporter of terrorism. James Richardson, director of the State Department's Office of Foreign Assistance, said, "Given what we know about IRW, the Department and USAID should act with extreme caution and avoid partnering with IRW in the future."

USA Democratic Congress member Rashida Tlaib of Michigan slammed the State of Israel on Tuesday as a "racist state" while speaking in an interview on the program, "Democracy Now!" The lawmaker told viewers that Israel is to blame for the Palestinian Authority not being able to vaccinate its citizens. Tlaib earnestly told viewers it is "really important to understand that Israel is a racist state, in that they would deny Palestinians like my grandmother access to a vaccine, that they don't believe she's an equal human being who deserves to live." Sadly, Tlaib seems to be confused between her role as an American Representative of her constituents, the people of the state of Michigan, and her role as the granddaughter of a woman living in the Palestinian Authority on a different continent, whose geopolitical location has no relation to the state she represents in Congress. She also seems to have no understanding about the nature of the legal relationship between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, which are two entirely different entities, with separate security forces and two different sets of laws and even crossing points at borders, negotiated and agreed upon in the internationally recognized Oslo Accords in 1993. Under that document Israel is not responsible for the health care of the citizens of the Palestinian Authority, who have their own system in place. (**Note:** Israel has offered to assist the PA with acquiring and distributing the corona vaccine; the PA has flatly refused all such offers.)

Father, use the worldwide coronavirus crisis to shake Your people loose from their worldwide Exile (Jer. 51:50). As well, use the rising anti-Semitism in the world to draw Your people home to the place You have prepared for them in Israel. Impact them with the truth that they can either save their lives or their comfortable – but deceptive – lifestyles (Jer. 50:4-5). Complete the ingathering of the Ethiopians and the Bene Manasseh [from India] (Isa. 43:5-7). Lord, help Israel place the new immigrants [olim] throughout Your land (Jer. 50:19; Obad. 1:19-20). Smooth the path for the olim – especially in dealing with Israel's bureaucracy (Isa. 62:10). Give them the courage to overcome all obstacles (Num. 14:6-9). Anoint the olim with the skill to learn Hebrew quickly and fluently (Zeph. 3:9). As olim arrive, by Your grace, root and ground them in the land (Isa. 27:6) Especially for olim from the West, shut their mental escape hatches which tell them that they can always return to their country of birth (Num. 11:5).

"I will return Israel to his home, and he shall feed on Carmel and Bashan [the Golan], and his soul shall be satisfied on mount Ephraim and Gilead [northern Jordan]. In those days... the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and none; and

the sins of Judah shall not be found: for I will pardon [+forgive] them whom I reserve [the remnant].” (Jeremiah 50:19-20)

10. IRAN UPDATES:

The Iranian regime has taken highly dangerous steps in recent weeks that make a military strike by Israel more likely in 2021, and thus forcing the new USA Biden administration to make Iran its top and most urgent foreign policy priority. That’s the assessment former USA Ambassador Dennis who served as a senior advisor to President Barak Obama and then-Vice President Joe Biden, and on the National Security Council as senior director for the Middle East. He also served as a special advisor to Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Since December, Iranian sources have been responsible for a growing number of cyberattacks targeting the Israeli government and private companies in Israel and abroad. The vast majority of attacks have been thwarted in their early stages and, as far as is known, no major damage has been inflicted.

The foreign ministers of Britain, France and Germany warned Saturday (Jan 16) that Iran's plans to produce uranium metal has "no credible civilian use" and "has potentially grave military implications. We strongly urge Iran to halt this activity, and return to compliance with its JCPOA commitments without further delay if it is serious about preserving the deal."

The USA last Wednesday (Jan13) blacklisted two Iranian foundations controlled by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and their subsidies, saying the institutions enabled Iran’s elite to sustain a “corrupt” system of ownership over large parts of the economy. The measure was introduced as Iran announced it has started producing uranium metal-based fuel for a research reactor – the latest breach of its nuclear deal with six major powers as the country presses for a lifting of USA sanctions. Iran has been accelerating its breaches of the deal in the past two months. Some of those steps were required by a law passed in response to the killing of its top nuclear scientist in November, which Tehran has blamed on its arch-foe Israel.

Ali Akbar Salehi, Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, said Monday (Jan 18) that Iranian scientists at nuclear installations "are producing 20 grams (of 20% enriched uranium) every hour; meaning that practically, we are producing half a kilo every day."

Iran has sent drones to Yemen, enabling the creation of a base for so-called “suicide drones” or what are known as loitering munitions. “Shahed-136” drones, which are advanced UAVs, are now based in Al-Jawf. The drones might have a range of some 2,200 kilometers – which puts them conveniently just within range of Israel. In the past, Iran has claimed long ranges for its drones. It operates drones that are basically like cruise missiles: They are given a target coordinate and fly to it without needing to communicate with their base. In this sense they operate as a German V-1 rocket more than a modern drone; they don’t really “loiter” over a target.

Iran has the largest and most diverse ballistic missile arsenal in the Middle East. It is able to produce its own missiles and has demonstrated that it can significantly expand the range of acquired missiles, as it has done with ‘Nodong’ missiles from North Korea. Iran's missiles can already hit any part of the Middle East, including Israel. However, it is significant to note that the satellite navigation units, such as Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) receivers, employed by Iran's precision-guided missiles can be rendered less-effective by jamming or spoofing GPS signals, a capability that Tehran's technologically superior adversaries possess.

Lord, as Iran's leaders are Your enemies (Psa. 83:1-5), arise and scatter them (Psa. 68:1)! Provide the IDF's 3rd Directorate, called the Iran Command, with all the intelligence it needs to formulate both strategy and tactics for this time (Prov. 16:1, 9). Solidify all plans that are in line with Your will and remove any that are not (Prov. 21:31). Whatever happens, we ask that You would determine the timing (Eccl. 3:1, 8b). Draw the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp [IRGC] into Your trap (Ex. 14:1-9). Bring to nothing all the counsel of Iran's leaders and let Your counsel prevail (Psa. 33:10-11). Create a lack of cohesion, poor communications and confusion to divide the Iranian forces internally (Psa. 129:5; Luke 12:52). Cut off from Iran all finances for military use and its alliances with terrorists (Isa. 14:22; Jer. 50:16). Prepare Israel to defend itself from all attacks – whether from Iran or its proxies (Psa. 44:4; 91:5) Give the Iranian church a burden to stand in the gap for their nation (1 Tim. 2:1-4). Lead them in prayer, especially about their leaders' continual cursing of Israel (Ezek. 22:30-31). Prevent President Biden from rushing into re-engaging with Iran and the nuclear deal (Eph. 5:15).

“You are my King, O God: command deliverances for Jacob. Through You we will push down our enemies: through Your name we will tread them under that rise up against us.” (Psalm 44:4-5)

11. UNITED NATIONS UPDATES:

Outgoing USA Secretary of State Mike Pompeo tweeted on Jan. 14: "We suspended funding to UNRWA, which is riddled with waste, fraud & concerns of support to terrorism. UNRWA is not a refugee agency; it's estimated that less than 200,000 Arabs displaced in 1948 are still alive and most others are not refugees by any rational criteria." (Note: UNRWA says it serves 5.8 million Palestinian refugees. Richard Goldberg, a senior adviser at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, noted that "most people served by UNRWA... are either citizens of other countries or live within Palestinian territories. Most were not displaced by conflict.")

The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) responded to the findings last week that documented continuing anti-Semitism in the school curriculum distributed by UNRWA. This week, UNRWA declared that their curriculum emphasizes the UN values of neutrality, human rights, tolerance, equality and non-discrimination with regard to race, gender, language and religion. Some material the Agency had previously identified as not in line with UN values was mistakenly included in printed educational materials distributed to students at home after the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. As soon as the issue was identified, the Agency conducted a thorough review of the self-learning material and took steps to address it.

Father, we thank and praise You for the USA's stand with Israel in the past and we pray for its continuation in the future with the new American administration. May they know Your reward and blessing when they choose to bless Your people and nation. We pray that the UNHRC will be filled with confusion and controversy so that the nations of the world will see the farce that has been elected to power. Abba, bless all the nations that support Israel...we pray that the Canadian government will be pro-Israel in all future resolutions. (Num. 24:9). Confront all lukewarm nations. (Rev. 3:15-16). Father, wake up Believers in the nations that they may see the curse that is brought on their country when their nation votes against Israel in the United Nations (Hab. 3:1-2). Thank You for Australia's decision to decrease their contribution to UNRWA.

“Fear not, for I am with you. I will bring your seed from the east, and gather you from the west. I will say to the north, 'Give up', and to the south, 'Keep not back. Bring My sons from afar, and My daughters from the ends of the earth; even everyone that is called by My name, for I have created him for My glory. I have formed him; yes, I have made him...This people have I formed for Myself. They shall show forth My praise.” (Isaiah 43:5-7, 21)

12. ISRAEL GOOD NEWS ITEMS:

The wintery storm that began at the beginning of this week continued on Wednesday (Jan 20) with an expected peak throughout the day, and rain, thunderstorms, and even hail in northern Israel. Mount Hermon saw snowfall already due to the storm, as did the northern Golan Heights, and other hilltops in the north and center of the country that are over 900 meters high are expected to see snowfall as well. There is still a concern over possible flooding in the rivers in the south and east Israel, and temperatures throughout the Jewish state will be far colder than usual.

A 1,500-year-old Greek inscription bearing the name “Christ, born of Mary” was unearthed in northern Israel, the Antiquities Authority announced on Wednesday (Jan 20). The archaeologists discovered the inscription engraved at the entrance of an impressive building from the Byzantine or early Islamic period, featuring mosaic pavements decorated with a geometric design. The doorway and its inscription were discovered during an excavation conducted by the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) in the village of et-Taiyiba in the Jezreel Valley prior to the construction of a new road. The full text of the inscription reads: “Christ born of Mary. This work of the most God-fearing and pious bishop [Theodo]sius and the miserable Th[omas] was built from the foundation – . Whoever enters should pray for them.” Theodisius was the founder of the church and the regional archbishop for Bet She’an, the to which et-Taiyiba belonged. It is therefore clear that the building is a church, and not a monastery: churches greeted believers at their entrance, while monasteries tended not to do this. This is the first evidence of the Byzantine church’s existence in the village of et-Taiyiba and it adds to other finds attesting to the activities of Christians who lived in the region.

Chevron Corp and other companies helping to develop Israel's natural gas fields will invest \$235 million to lay a new subsea pipeline from Israel's Mediterranean gas fields to Egypt.

Following the Czech Republic and Hungary, Slovakia is purchasing 17 MMR Radar systems manufactured by Israel Aerospace Industries subsidiary ELTA in a deal valued at \$182 million. The radar components will be manufactured in collaboration with defense industries in Slovakia. The radar detects airborne threats, calculates their threat level, and provides essential data that enables systems to neutralize multiple threats simultaneously. The MMR radar is used by Israel's Iron Dome air-defense system and has been acquired by Canada, Finland, and India.

Thank You, that You continue to bless Israel. Thank You that You have chosen to bless the world through the Jewish people. May the world see these inventions and discoveries as a fulfillment of Your promise to Abraham!

“The LORD had said unto Abram, ‘Get out of your country, from your kindred, and your father's house, unto a land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great. And you shall be a blessing...and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed’” (Genesis 12:1-3)