



SIGNS OF THE TIMES

News Articles for Episode 399

Israeli leaders express outrage and alarm over inclusion of Turkey, Qatar into Gaza Executive Board | Allisraelnews.com

#bibleprophecy, #israel, #gaza, #turkey, #united states

Jan 18, 2026

Israeli leaders slam Netanyahu after the U.S. names Turkey and Qatar to a Gaza governing body, warning it endangers Israel's security.

Following the announcement by U.S. President Donald Trump of the [Board of Peace](#) to oversee the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip, and the inclusion of Turkey and Qatar in another council just under the Board of Peace, Israeli politicians reacted strongly, with many criticizing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

According to a White House announcement, the interim body called the Gaza Executive Board will operate between the [Board of Peace](#) and the technocratic National Committee for the Administration of Gaza (NCAG), and will include Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan and Qatari diplomat Ali Al-Thawadi.

Opposition leader Yair Lapid, of the Yesh Atid party, called the Gaza board's composition a "diplomatic failure of the Netanyahu government."

"For a whole year now I've been telling the government: 'If you don't advance the Egyptian solution with the US and the world, you'll end up with Turkey and Qatar in Gaza,'" Lapid posted in Hebrew to X.

"Last night the composition of the "Peace Council" was published – Turkey is in, Qatar is in, and according to the IDF, Hamas still has 30,000 armed men in Gaza," he continued. "This is a complete diplomatic failure of the Netanyahu government after the endless heroism and sacrifice of the soldiers and commanders of the IDF."

In a video message, Lapid added, "The ideological partners of Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood will govern the Strip. Netanyahu is allowing the entrance of Turkey and Qatar into Gaza. This endangers the security of Israel. It was not for this that our fighters and heroes fought for two years."

The announcement of the Gaza Executive Board led to an unusual statement by the Prime Minister's Office against the United States, in which the PMO announced that the move had not been coordinated with Israel.

"The announcement regarding the composition of the Gaza Executive Board, which is subordinate to the Board of Peace, was not coordinated with Israel and runs contrary to its policy," the statement said.

Right wing opposition member and head of Yisrael Beytenu Avigdor Liberman also slammed the inclusion of Qatar and Turkey, calling it a “total disgrace.”

“Ran Gvili in Gaza, Hamas rules Gaza, and the Muslim Brotherhood – Turkey and Qatar – will rebuild Gaza. Total disgrace!” Liberman posted to X.

The Democrats chair Yair Golan, called the result “a leadership problem.”

“There is no coordination problem here – there is a leadership problem,” Golan wrote to social media. “The Netanyahu-Smotrich government has deliberately abandoned the political arena. The IDF provided Israel with maneuverability and achievements, and the Netanyahu government threw them in the trash and allowed Qatar and Turkey – the financiers of Hamas – to enter Gaza.”

Former Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said, “The entry into Gaza of Qatar and Turkey, which support and finance Hamas, rewards Hamas for the October 7 massacre, endangers the security of Israel's citizens, and sends a serious message to all the peoples of the region that the massacre of Jews yields political and military achievements.”

Gadi Eisenkot, former IDF Chief of Staff and head of the Yesh Atid party, accused Netanyahu of placing political considerations ahead of national security, saying, “We sat down and warned that the absence of Israeli initiative and decision-making on “the day after” in Gaza would lead to a loss of control, and today (that) reality is exploding in our faces: Netanyahu has lost the reins – other countries are the ones managing Gaza over Israel's head, with Turkey and Qatar being part of the governing body. The transition to Phase II after military achievements at heavy costs is being carried out as an international dictate imposed on Israel, out of a leadership and strategic vacuum, and politicians motivated by narrow political considerations.”

Even coalition members were highly critical of the announcement, with Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich taking the unusual step of directly criticizing Netanyahu.

“The original sin is the Prime Minister's unwillingness to take responsibility for Gaza, to establish a military government there, to encourage immigration and settlement,” Smotrich said. “This refusal gave rise to the need for strange constructions for managing civilian life in Gaza that are not Hamas and not the PA. But even under this assumption, there must be red lines: the countries that inspired Hamas cannot be the ones that replace it. Those who support it and continue to host it even now will not be granted a foothold in Gaza. Period.”

Minister of Aliyah and Absorption Ofir Sofer said, “Israel must oppose the entry of Qatar and Turkey into the administration of Gaza. This is a fundamental security interest, no less important than the insistence on control of the Philadelphi Corridor. Israel should tell its closest friend, ‘No. This is a real danger to the security of the state.’”

Minister of Diaspora and Combating Antisemitism Amichai Chikli strongly attacked Turkey in a post, saying that “Israel cannot and will not accept the presence of such a terror state on its borders.” However, Chikli did not criticize either Netanyahu or Trump directly.

Erdogan’s Turkey is Hamas.

Erdogan has transformed Turkey from a democracy into an outright dictatorship.

He dismantled the secular republic envisioned by Atatürk and replaced it with a Muslim Brotherhood–style jihadist state.

He turned Turkey from a peace-seeking nation into... pic.twitter.com/AoRXdh8PvV

— עמיחי שיקלי - Amichai Chikli (@AmichaiChikli) [January 17, 2026](#)

In an interview with Army Radio, Transportation Minister Miri Regev expressed concern over the inclusion of Turkey and Qatar, but did not blame either Trump or Netanyahu.

“There is no doubt that this worries us, Trump is a great friend of Israel but does not coordinate everything with Netanyahu – we will do everything possible to change the decision, I don’t know if we will succeed,” Regev said in the interview.

Maj. Gen. (Res.) Yaakov Amidror, former head of the National Security Council, told 103FM on Sunday morning that “Turkey is a country that truly dislikes Israel, and its leader is a Muslim Brotherhood member. That is precisely why it should not be in Gaza.”

He also criticized the U.S., saying, “The Americans have decided to ignore the needs of the State of Israel in this area and are acting against our interests. Israel must stand up for itself as much as possible. In the end, we must dismantle Hamas by force, and the Qataris and the Turks think exactly the opposite.”

'This is First Amendment activity': Democrats give church-storming mobs their stamp of approval | The Blaze.com

#bibleprophecy, #lawlessness, #anti-ice, #church, #minnesota

Jan 20, 2026

Minnesota AG Keith Ellison and Rep. Adelita Grijalva defended what Christians leaders have referred to as a desecrating invasion.

Radicals participating in a so-called "ICE Out Action" stormed a Christian church on Sunday in Saint Paul, Minnesota.

The interlopers — ex-CNN talking head Don Lemon and a motley crew of leftists hailing largely from Nekima Levy Armstrong's Racial Justice Network, Black Lives Matter Minnesota, and BLM Twin Cities — not only lashed out at a pastor over his apparent role at U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement but intimidated parishioners, drowned out sound of worship with their propaganda, and pressured the prayerful to condemn ICE.

The Justice Department has indicated that criminal charges for possible Freedom of Access to Clinics Entrances Act and [KKK Act](#) violations are imminent. Despite the clear language of the relevant statutes, some Democrats have defended the mob action, indicating that churches are viable targets for further desecration.

'When they find out that someone that's supposed to be speaking for the community in church is found out to be in ICE ... they have the right to go in there.'

When asked whether the DOJ has a case against the anti-ICE radicals who disrupted Minnesota Christians' lawful exercise of religious freedom in a place of worship, [Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison](#) (D) told CNN's Erin Burnett on Monday, "Under this DOJ, wrongdoing has nothing to do with whether they're going to focus or investigate you. So I wish in a normal time I would say no; I'd say this is First Amendment activity."

After she suggested that "the optics of going into a place of worship are not necessarily great," Burnett asked the Muslim Minnesota AG whether he was frustrated "that it happened this way."

RELATED: ['You are on notice!' Don Lemon backs anti-ICE radicals who stormed Saint Paul church — but DOJ vows reckoning](#)

Ellison avoided answering the question, suggesting he was instead frustrated by the number of ICE agents operating in his [crime-ridden jurisdiction](#) and the possibility that troops might be deployed to Minnesota.

Rep. Adelita Grijalva (Ariz.), a co-sponsor of a [resolution](#) to impeach Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem and a [recent participant](#) in an anti-ICE operation, is another Democrat who evidently figures churches are fair game for intimidation campaigns.

On a CNN appearance Monday, Grijalva [justified the mob action](#), suggesting that the supposedly ICE-affiliated pastor "now knows what it's like to have his daily life and privacy interrupted. This is a daily occurrence in our immigrant communities — being followed, being kidnapped, us out of our schools, churches, and hospitals."

The Democrat congresswoman underscored that she did not think it was a step too far for "protesters" to go into churches, noting, "I think that when they find out that someone that's supposed to be speaking for the community in church is found out to be in ICE, like a federal agent that is running ICE in their communities, they have the right to go in there."

"Churches have always been an open door," continued Grijalva. "And from my understanding in the videos that I saw, those protesters were not violent in any way."

'No cause — political or otherwise — justifies the desecration of a sacred space.'

Numerous Christian leaders and organizations evidently see things differently and have advocated for legal consequences in response to the intrusion.

Pastor Paul Chappell, president of the West Coast Baptist College, [stated](#), "We condemn the actions of Don Lemon and the group of activists who stormed Cities Church today in St. Paul, Minnesota, in clear violation of the FACE Act. Christians everywhere should demand that the Department of Justice arrest those who participated. We must protect religious liberty in this country."

"This group trespassed on private property and willfully obstructed Christian worship," [said](#) Kevin Ezell, president of the North American Mission Board. "No cause — political or otherwise — justifies the desecration of a sacred space or the intimidation and trauma inflicted on families gathered peacefully in the house of God."

Ezell added, "What occurred was not protest; it was lawless harassment."

Albert Mohler, the president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, [called](#) the mob action not only a "desecration" [but](#) an "unspeakably evil intrusion."

Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights Harmeet Dhillon [stressed](#) on Sunday that houses of worship are not public forums for the protests of radicals but spaces "protected from exactly such acts by federal criminal and civil laws."

"We don't want to pre-judge, but I think it is fair to say that I saw multiple federal criminal incidents yesterday, and there will be charges," [Dhillon told](#) Blaze Media co-founder [Glenn Beck](#). "It's only a question of when we can get a judge to sign off on arrest warrants and exactly what the charges would be."

"We will not let this happen to another church in the United States. It is un-American, unacceptable, and there is a zero-tolerance policy for it at this DOJ," added Dhillon.

America's data center growth hot spots, mapped | Axios.com

#bibleprophecy, #ai, #data centers, #united states

Jan 12, 2026

Virginia and Texas lead the way, but they're becoming a major political fight.

Driving the news: Virginia leads the country in data centers, with 663 operational and 595 more either under construction or planned.

- Texas is also up there, with 405 existing data centers and 442 planned or being built.
- That's per [a new report](#) from the American Edge Project (a pro-tech advocacy group) and the Technology Councils of North America (which represents tech and IT trade organizations).

Zoom in: Georgia and Pennsylvania are among the states due for particularly big data center booms, if all goes to plan.

- Georgia currently has 162 data centers, and is slated for 285 more (a 176% increase, if all are built).
- Pennsylvania has 98, with 184 more potentially on the way (a 188% increase).

Follow the money: "\$560 billion in AI-related venture investment has flowed into all 50 states across nearly 27,000 deals from 2019 to the first eight months of 2025," the groups say.

- Data centers will generate nearly \$27 billion in estimated tax revenue nationwide over the next decade, per the report.
- Virginia (about \$4.2 billion), Arizona (\$2.6 billion) and Delaware (\$2 billion) are on track for particularly large slices of that pie.

What they're saying: "Whether you live in a coastal tech hub, a manufacturing corridor, or a rural community, AI is now a major engine of local jobs, construction, revenue, and long-term economic growth," AEP CEO Doug Kelly argues in the report.

- "This trillion-dollar build-out is creating new opportunities for electricians, construction workers, engineers, and logistics teams while strengthening tax bases that support schools, roads, police, and other essential services."

The other side: Data center [detractors](#) say they cause environmental and energy use problems, quality of life issues for surrounding neighborhoods, and relatively

little [permanent job creation](#) given the huge investments and big [tax breaks](#) often involved.

- U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) — tapping into fears that AI could erase jobs and consolidate wealth — is [pushing for a moratorium](#) on the construction of data centers powering the AI boom.
- "Data centers are the largest development issue of our generation," Angie McCarthy, Maryland's state conservation advocate at environmental group Nature Forward, [recently told](#) Axios' Mimi Montgomery.
- There's also the [question](#) of what'll happen to all these new data centers if the AI boom turns out to be a bust.

What we're watching: Whether these forecasts hold true as the AI industry's [bubble-or-no-bubble](#) tension plays out.

US plans Gaza Board of Peace signing ceremony in Davos, as Israel's Netanyahu and other world leaders are hesitant to join

| AllIsraelNews.com

#bibleprophecy, #trump, #davos, #board of peace, #israel

Jan 20, 2026

US plans Gaza Board of Peace signing at Davos; world leaders hesitant as France declines, Israel disputes Turkey & Qatar's inclusion in the board.

The U.S. is planning a signing ceremony for President Donald Trump's Board of Peace on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, this Thursday, according to a copy of the invitation that has been circulated online, amid ongoing concerns by many of the invitees.

How many of the over 60 invited leaders are expected to participate in the ceremony is still unclear, as many of the major world powers have been hesitant to accept the invitation amid growing concerns that Trump could intend the board's authority to grow far beyond Gaza.

According to its [**foundng charter**](#), which doesn't even mention Gaza, the board would be led by President Trump as chairman, and permanent membership can be purchased for the sum of \$1 billion.

⚠️ Trump's Board of Peace charter signing ceremony: Thursday 10:30am in Davos pic.twitter.com/155SrdeyvQ

— Barak Ravid (@BarakRavid) [January 19, 2026](#)

The charter also says the board should have "the courage to depart from approaches and institutions that have too often failed," leading many to speculate it could be designed to eventually replace the UN. Earlier this month the U.S. left 31 UN agencies and bodies, arguing that they operated "contrary to U.S. national interests."

So far, only the leaders of Argentina, Hungary, Morocco, Vietnam and Kazakhstan announced they would accept Trump's invitation.

According to the *Times of Israel*, President Isaac Herzog is set to travel to Davos for the WEF, though it is unclear whether he will participate in the signing ceremony for the Board of Peace.

My best effort at understanding Trump's Board of Peace and its constituent parts.

This is the Trump Organisation that the UK, Europe and Arab countries are being asked to buy into as an alternative to the UN. Understandably, many are hesitant. <https://t.co/CnokFTgvvi> pic.twitter.com/TCm1XsjQQM

— Hugh Lovatt (@h_lovatt) [January 19, 2026](#)

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu confirmed receiving an invitation to the Board; however, he is currently mired in a dispute with the U.S. over the [**inclusion of Turkey and Qatar**](#) in the board's executive sub-committee, and hasn't officially responded yet.

Argentina's President Javier Milei said on X that "It is an honor for me to have received tonight the invitation for Argentina to join, as a founding member, the Board of Peace, an organization created by President Trump to promote lasting peace in conflict-affected regions, starting with the Gaza Strip."

According to the Jewish Insider (JI) citing Ukraine's Ambassador to Israel Yevgen Kornichuk, President Volodymyr Zelensky did not immediately receive an invitation, unlike Russian President Vladimir Putin and Belarus' President Aleksandr Lukashenko.

The next day, JI's Lahav Harkov updated that Ukraine had since received an invitation to join the Board.

Reporter: Have you invited Putin to be a member of the Board of Peace?

Trump: Yeah. He's been invited.

Reporter: Thoughts on Macron saying he will not join the Board of Peace?

Trump: [...] I'll put a 200% tariff on his wines and champagnes, and he'll join. pic.twitter.com/2KzEt3ARUP

— Daractenus (@Daractenus) [January 20, 2026](#)

Poland has signaled concern over the inclusion of Russia. According to Politico, an aide to President Karol Nawrocki said on Monday that he had also been invited and was considering his response, while noting that Putin was among leaders "seen at odds" with Nawrocki.

Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said joining the Board of Peace would require approval by the parliament, "and we will not let anyone play us" in a post on X.

Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer told reporters the UK is "talking to allies about the terms of the Board of Peace," and a German government spokesman said Germany is "thankful for this invitation," noting that the country shared "the aim of pursuing peace in the world. It is in Germany's core interest to end the conflict in Gaza for good."

Prime Minister Rama shared Trump's invitation for [#Albania AL](#) to become a founding member state and party to the 'Charter of the Board of Peace': pic.twitter.com/PNLbOEYQJy

— Rainier Jaarsma (@RJaarsma) [January 18, 2026](#)

Meanwhile, France said publicly that it wouldn't accept the invitation. French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot said on Monday that it is "incompatible with France's international commitments and in particular its membership in the United Nations, which obviously cannot be called into question under any circumstances."

Talking to reporters later that day, Trump said about France's President Emmanuel Macron, "I'll put a 200 percent tariff on his wines and champagnes. And he'll join. But he doesn't have to join."

China also confirmed receiving an invitation. "Over the past year, China-US relations have experienced ups and downs, but have maintained overall dynamic stability," foreign ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun said at a news briefing, "Cooperation between China and the US benefits both sides, while confrontation harms both."

Trump's 'Board of Peace' Would Have Global Scope but One Man in Charge | NYtimes.com

#bibleprophecy, #trump, #board of peace, #global order

Jan 21, 2026

The initiative is the latest example of the president's dismantling the post-World War II international system and building a new one, with himself at the center.

Israel, Saudi Arabia and other nations have said they would join President Trump's proposed "Board of Peace," but France, Norway and Sweden have said no. Credit...Allison Robbert for The New York Times

In the proposed charter of the "Board of Peace" that the United States sent to national capitals in recent weeks, one man has the power to veto decisions, approve the agenda, invite members, dissolve the board entirely and designate his own successor.

His name is spelled out in Article 3.2: "Donald J. Trump shall serve as inaugural chairman."

"If Trump, then peace," Prime Minister Viktor Orban of Hungary, one of President Trump's closest allies in Europe, [wrote](#) on Facebook on Sunday after Mr. Trump invited him to join the board. "We have, of course, accepted this honorable invitation."

Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Israel, Belarus, Pakistan and several more countries also said they were joining, ahead of the signing ceremony Thursday in Switzerland.

But many officials and experts in international affairs were stunned by the breadth of the initiative, the latest example of Mr. Trump taking apart the American-built, post-World War II international system and building a new one, with himself at the center.

"This is a direct assault on the United Nations," said Marc Weller, a Cambridge international law professor who specializes in peace negotiations and has worked closely with the global body. "This initiative is likely to be seen as a takeover of the world order by one individual in his own image."

The U.N. Security Council itself endorsed the creation of a Board of Peace in November in a resolution welcoming the U.S.-brokered peace plan to end Israel's war in Gaza. According to that resolution, the board is to function as a "transitional administration" through 2027 to oversee the redevelopment of Gaza.

[Anton Troianovski](#) writes about American foreign policy and national security for The Times from Washington. He was previously a foreign correspondent based in Moscow and Berlin.

South Africa declares a national disaster over flooding and severe weather | APnews.com

#bibleprophecy, #floods, #south africa, #rains, #destruction

Jan 18, 2026

South Africa has declared a national disaster over torrential rains and floods. The severe weather has killed at least 30 people in the northern part of the country.

CAPE TOWN, South Africa (AP) — [South Africa](#) declared a national disaster Sunday over [torrential rains and floods](#) that have killed at least 30 people in the country's north, damaged thousands of homes and washed away roads and bridges.

The declaration was made by the head of the National Disaster Management Center and announced by the government. It allows the national government to coordinate the response [to the disaster](#).

The worst impact is in the northern provinces of Limpopo and Mpumalanga, where the fatalities occurred. But the Ministry of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs said at least three other provinces had also been affected by the severe weather.

Parts of South Africa and neighboring Mozambique and Zimbabwe have experienced heavy rains for weeks. That resulted in severe flooding in central and southern Mozambique and northern South Africa. More than 100 people have died in the three countries since the rains began late last year.

The floods in northern South Africa caused the closure of [the Kruger National Park](#) and the evacuation of hundreds of tourists and staff members from flooded camps to other parts of the park.

The premier of Limpopo province said the weather had caused around \$240 million in damage in her province, with many houses and buildings washed away completely.

More than 100 people died [in floods last year](#) in South Africa's Eastern Cape province in the south of the country, while more than 400 died in [flooding in the eastern KwaZulu-Natal province](#) in 2022.

Rescue teams in [South Africa](#) continued with the search for four people, including 5-year-old Siyanda Baloyi believed to have been swept away when his home in Limpopo province was flooded last Thursday.

Authorities also said Sunday that a government official in South Africa's Ekurhuleni municipality, east of Johannesburg, was missing after a vehicle he was traveling in was swept away by floods in Mozambique.

Andile Mngwevu and other occupants who were in the vehicle are still missing.

Meanwhile, South Africa's famed [Kruger National Park](#) was set to reopen for visitors after a suspension forced by heavy flooding which led to the evacuation of over 300 tourists and staff.

The park, which is one the biggest game reserves in the world covering about 2,000 hectares (7.7 square miles) bordering Mozambique and Zimbabwe, suffered extensive damages as heavy downpours devastated the Mpumalanga and Limpopo provinces and killed more than 20 people.

More Protestant churches closing than opening in America as older congregations struggle: study | Christianpost.com

#bibleprophecy, #churches, #apostasy, #closures

Jan 18, 2026

More Protestant churches are being closed in America than are being planted, according to a new study.

- 4,000 churches closed in 2024, while only 3,800 were started, Lifeway Research reports.
- Older congregations are struggling, with many facing declining attendance.
- Churches shuttered in 2024 represent nearly 1.4% of the Protestant churches highlighted in the 2020 U.S. Religion Census.

More Protestant churches are being closed in America than are being planted, and older congregations appear to be bearing the brunt of the contraction, according to data from a new Lifeway Research study.

The [study published Tuesday](#) used data collected from 35 denominational groups that represent 58% of U.S. Protestant churches. The Tennessee-based research arm of Lifeway Christian Resources also cited information from the Annual Church Profile for 2023 and 2024 of the Southern Baptist Convention — America's largest Protestant denomination.

While 4,000 Protestant churches were closed in 2024, Lifeway Research estimates that only 3,800 were started in that year. The estimated 4,000 churches shuttered in 2024 represent nearly 1.4% of the 293,000 Protestant churches highlighted in the [U.S. Religion Census 2020](#).

The analysis also found that 1.4% of active Southern Baptist congregations disbanded or shuttered between 2023 and 2024, while some 0.4% left or were disaffiliated over the period.

"The immediate impact of COVID appears to have passed. Denominations have discovered those that closed during quarantine and never reopened. However, the typical church in America has fewer attendees than it did 20 years ago," Scott McConnell, executive director of Lifeway Research, said in a statement on the research. "These assemblies are often weaker than prior generations. But at the same time, new churches are flourishing and a subset of churches are growing."

While most Protestant pastors in the Lifeway study (94%) don't believe their churches will be shuttered in the next decade, about 4% disagree with that outlook, and another 2% said they aren't sure.

Pastors leading congregations with fewer than 50 people attending weekly services were the least likely to agree that their churches would endure another decade. The study also found that new congregations were more likely to be growing than older ones.

A review of SBC data showed that churches that began since 2000 grew by 12%, while membership in churches founded between 1950 and 1999 declined by 11%. Those that started between 1900 and 1949 declined by 13% while those that started before 1900 declined by 11%.

"While the American church landscape changes slowly, it is not standing still," McConnel said. "The future of Protestant churches in America lies in reaching new people with the offer of salvation through Jesus Christ. Most growth in the U.S. happens in new communities. Church planting is vital to share the gospel in these new communities as well as communities in which the population is changing or previous churches have closed."

Thom Rainer, a former president and CEO of Lifeway Christian Resources and the founding dean of the Billy Graham School of Missions and Evangelism at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, warned in January 2025 that about 15,000 churches would close last year and another 15,000 would shift from having full-time pastors to part-time pastors in America's rapidly shifting religious landscape.

"For the first time in modern church history, 15,000 of the churches will cease to exist in a period of one year. Notice that we are projecting that 15,000 churches will close and that 15,000 will move from full-time pastors to part-time pastors," Rainer wrote in op-ed published by [The Christian Post](#). "Those 30,000 churches represent about 1 out of 12 existing churches. The change is dramatic."

Last November, Boston University theology, philosophy and ethics professor [Wesley Wildman](#), who has researched the impact of secularization on religious groups, blamed the decline on America's growing secularization as fewer people have a religious affiliation and are attending church services.

"The problem is that nobody knows how to confirm these numbers. We have to go by denominational numbers, which are difficult to collect and often not up-to-date," Wildman told [BU Today](#). "The 15,000 closures might be overblown. But there is no question that many more than that have closed, and will continue closing, over a period of years."

Among the key conditions in society that drive religious decline, he contends, is a positive attitude to cultural pluralism that has enabled people to "vote with your feet" and leave religious organizations without paying any costly social or family or economic

penalty." Other conditions he cited are "existential security," "education," and "freedom."

"These four factors drive down supernaturalism, which in turn makes religious worldviews and lifeways less plausible for some people, some of whom remain spiritual," Wildman wrote.

Catholic Church condemns Christian Zionism as “damaging ideology” that threatens Church unity |

Israel365news.com

#bibleprophecy, #churches, #catholic, #zionism, #christian

Jan 19, 2026

The institution that declared Jews collectively guilty of deicide, that forced Jews into ghettos, that presided over expulsions and forced conversions, now objects to Christians who read their Bibles and conclude that God's covenant with Israel remains intact.

The Catholic Church and its allied denominations in Jerusalem just declared war on Christian Zionism. In a [statement released January 17](#), the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in the Holy Land—led by the Roman Catholic hierarchy along with Eastern Catholic, Orthodox, and other traditional church leaders—condemned Christian support for Israel as a “damaging ideology” that misleads the public and harms Christian unity. The statement represents the Catholic Church’s most direct assault yet on the millions of evangelical Christians whose biblical interpretation leads them to support the Jewish state.

The Catholic-led coalition opened with a bold assertion of ecclesiastical authority: “The Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in the Holy Land affirm before the faithful and before the world that the flock of Christ in this land is entrusted to the Apostolic Churches, which have borne their sacred ministry across centuries with steadfast devotion.”

Then came the condemnation: “Recent activities undertaken by local individuals who advance damaging ideologies, such as Christian Zionism, mislead the public, sow confusion, and harm the unity of our flock. These undertakings have found favor among certain political actors in Israel and beyond who seek to push a political agenda which may harm the Christian presence in the Holy Land and the wider Middle East.”

The statement invoked New Testament authority to attack Christian Zionists: “Holy Scripture teaches us that ‘we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another’ (Romans 12:5). To claim authority outside the communion of the Church is to wound the unity of the faithful and burden the pastoral mission entrusted to the historic churches in the very land where our Lord lived, taught, suffered, and rose from the dead.”

The Catholic-led coalition then accused Israel of interference: “The Patriarchs and Heads of Churches further note with concern that these individuals have been welcomed at official levels both locally and internationally. Such actions constitute interference in the internal life of the churches and disregard the pastoral responsibility vested in the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem.”

This unsigned statement is a confession that Christians are persecuted by Arab Islamic governments and think adopting a dhimmi Church attitude gives protection.

Our native Aramaic Christian community in Israel enjoys freedom and protection while holding true to who we are.... pic.twitter.com/ojHDNm8jKL

— Shadi khalloul (שאדי ח'לול) (@shadikhalloul) [January 18, 2026](#)

Their territorial claim was unambiguous: “The Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem reiterate that they alone represent the Churches and their flock in matters pertaining to Christian religious, communal, and pastoral life in the Holy Land.”

The historical irony is staggering. The Catholic Church, which developed and enforced replacement theology—*Supersessionism* in Latin—for nearly two millennia, now condemns Christians who reject that very theology. The institution that declared Jews collectively guilty of deicide, that forced Jews into ghettos, that presided over expulsions and forced conversions, now objects to Christians who read their Bibles and conclude that God’s covenant with Israel remains intact.

The Bible speaks directly to this issue: “And I will bless them that bless thee, and him that curseth thee will I curse; and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 12:3). The Catholic hierarchy is demanding that Israel reject those who bless her and grant exclusive recognition to institutions whose theological foundation for centuries was that the Church replaced Israel in God’s plan.

David Nekrutman, an Israeli theologian who has spent decades building bridges between Christians and Jews, responded by defending both Christian Zionism and Israeli sovereignty. Nekrutman, an Orthodox Jew who studied in Oral Roberts University’s online Graduate Theology program, emphasized that “the State of Israel is a sovereign democratic nation” with the right to “form alliances with international groups that support its security and existence” and “engage with diverse religious voices, including those outside traditional ecclesiastical hierarchies.”

Nekrutman characterized Christian Zionism as “a historic shift toward rapprochement, moving away from ‘Replacement Theology’ (Supersessionism) and toward a deep respect for the Jewish people’s ongoing covenant with God.” He argued that Christian Zionism “helps believers rediscover the Hebraic roots of the Christian faith” rather than constituting a “damaging ideology.”

The Catholic Church’s statement reveals what truly threatens them: losing control. For centuries, the Vatican and its hierarchies held monopolistic authority over Christianity

in the Holy Land through institutional structures, property claims, and political arrangements. Christian Zionism bypasses all of that, creating direct relationships between millions of Christians worldwide and the State of Israel based on biblical interpretation rather than ecclesiastical authority.

This represents an existential crisis for the Catholic institutional model. Christian Zionism is predominantly evangelical and Protestant, movements that already rejected Rome's claim to exclusive spiritual authority five centuries ago during the Reformation. Now these same Protestants are reading the Hebrew Bible, connecting with the Jewish people, and supporting Israel based on their understanding of prophecy and covenant. The Catholic hierarchy's response is to declare this biblical interpretation "damaging" and demand veto power over which Christians Israel can engage with diplomatically.

The theological reversal is complete. Replacement theology taught that when the Jews rejected Jesus, God rejected the Jews and transferred all covenant promises to the Church. The land meant nothing, the prophecies were spiritualized, and Jewish return to Israel held no theological significance. Christian Zionism rejects every element of this framework. It reads the prophecies literally, sees the return to the Land as fulfillment of biblical promises, and understands support for Israel as a religious obligation rooted in God's unchanging covenant with the Jewish people.

The Catholic statement's reference to Romans 12:5 about being "one body" weaponizes scripture to enforce institutional conformity. But as Nekrutman noted, they ignore Romans 9-11, where Paul wrestles with Israel's place in God's plan and warns gentile believers: "if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches." The Catholic Church spent centuries being arrogant toward those branches. Christian Zionism represents Christians who finally stopped.

The Sages teach that those who bless Israel receive blessings, and those who curse Israel receive curses. The Catholic hierarchy is positioning itself on the wrong side of that equation. They are condemning Christians whose biblical interpretation leads them to support the Jewish people's return to their ancestral homeland. They are demanding that a sovereign Jewish state give them exclusive authority over Christian-Israel relations. They are calling the blessing of Israel a "damaging ideology."

Israel owes the Catholic Church nothing. The Jewish state does not require permission from Rome or its allied hierarchies to form relationships with Christians who support Jewish sovereignty in the Jewish homeland. The prophecies are being fulfilled whether the Vatican approves or not. Christian Zionists will continue standing with Israel because their Bibles tell them to, regardless of what ecclesiastical authorities declare.

The Catholic condemnation of Christian Zionism exposes the institution's continuing attachment to the theological framework that justified Jewish persecution for millennia. They dress it in language about "unity" and "pastoral responsibility," but the

message is clear: Christians who bless Israel threaten church authority and must be marginalized. Israel's response should be equally clear: the days when Jewish sovereignty required Christian approval are over. The State of Israel will continue engaging with believers who bless the Jewish people, and no statement from Jerusalem's Patriarchs will change that.

Open Doors US releases 2026 World Watch List report: 'Persecution is expanding' | Christianpost.com

#bibleprophecy, #churches, #persecution, #global, #world

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Nonprofit watchdog Open Doors US released its annual World Watch List on Wednesday, which ranks the top 50 countries where Christians are being persecuted.

- Open Doors US reports that Christian persecution is expanding globally.
- The 2026 World Watch List ranks 50 countries with record-high levels of discrimination.
- 388 million Christians face high levels of persecution, an increase of over 8 million from last year.

Nonprofit persecution watchdog group Open Doors US released its annual [World Watch List](#) on Wednesday, which ranks the top 50 countries where Christian persecution and discrimination are at a record high.

"We're seeing a continuation of a multi-year trend where persecution is expanding," Ryan Brown, the CEO of Open Doors US, told The Christian Post. "That number moved from 380 million to 388 million this last year."

Christian persecution has reached an unprecedented scale worldwide, and the findings of Open Doors US show that the 388 million Christians facing high levels of persecution and discrimination for their faith — more than one in seven — marks an increase of more than 8 million [compared to last year](#).

Brown said there are multiple dynamics at play beneath the surface of such trends, but noted there is "expansion of the levels of really extreme violence that are taking place." He added that much of it is concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa, which is home to 14 countries on the watch list.

The large region of more than 720 million people, nearly half of whom are Christian and where one in eight Christians live in the world, remains a critical area of concern.

Brown said Nigeria is "at the center of a lot of the things going on," and the list notes the African country is the primary hotspot for deadly violence, accounting for the majority of faith-related killings globally. Of the 4,849 Christians killed worldwide for their faith during the reporting period, 3,490 were Nigerian, which marks an increase from 3,100 last year, according to the report.

Somalia landed as the second-most dangerous country for Christians for the fourth consecutive year, and Aweis Ali, who is the son of a Muslim cleric and converted to Christianity, recounted the violence Christians face there.

"Somali Christians are among the most extremely persecuted in the world," he said. "You could be sitting in a cafeteria, enjoying your meal, and somebody could come and attempt to decapitate you, to cut your head off."

The list also highlights Syria, which achieved its highest-ever score on the ranking system after experiencing the most significant single-year increase in Christian persecution recorded by any country since the nonprofit's ranking methodology began in 2014. The trend reflects intensified pressures on the Christian community amid ongoing conflict that has lingered for more than a decade.

The militant Islamist group Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, which took power after the Assad regime collapsed, at first engaged in dialogue and expressed a willingness that Syrians "could worship freely and different faith persuasions would have a seat at the table," Brown said.

"While we haven't necessarily seen the difficulties at the hand of the central government, we have seen, due to the weak rule of law, that there have been vacuums of power that have been created throughout the country, and extremists have stepped into those vacuums," he said, adding that there are Christians suffering elsewhere because of similar examples of extremists filling a power vacuum.

Brown contrasted what he described as "smash persecution" that results in overt violence, like in Nigeria, with the "squeeze persecution" that he says is increasingly manifesting and making life "extremely difficult for Christians around the globe."

Such squeeze persecution is especially prevalent in China, he said, where the Chinese Communist Party increasingly spies on Christians and asserts state control over religion.

"The Chinese government has really sought to close down a number of the unregistered churches — those that were not officially aligned with the Communist Party, and close those churches out," he said. "Last year, on September 25, they rolled out a list of guidelines, about 18 rules governing the online behavior of Christians and religious expression. This included things such as Christians are not allowed to broadcast any live videos with religious or Christian intent; access to Bible apps was made illegal."

"It's not as visible as the violence or churches being lit on fire, but churches are being closed," he said of such persecution. "Christians are being told that they can't engage in worship or engage in community with one another."

Governments such as the oppressive communist regime in North Korea — which rates the the top most dangerous country for Christians overall — are also getting more creative, according to the report, which noted artificial intelligence is being used to

identify "suspicious behavior patterns" that might indicate someone is a Christian believer.

Replying to a question about Vice President JD Vance's notable [speech](#) at the Munich Security Conference last February, when he rebuked European leaders for suppressing free speech and discriminating against Christians, Brown said any rising persecution against Christians in the West is not comparable to those in other parts of the world, but that ebbing religious liberty could potentially allow Western Christians to better empathize with their brothers and sisters elsewhere.

"We still have, by means of comparison, the rule of law and religious liberties that are protected," he said. "Many of us have certainly felt cultural shifts that, at times, have been aligned in opposition to our faith or misaligned with it. And so, I think many of us have experienced those types of things in recent years."

"I would never seek to equate that to the level of persecution and realities that our brothers and sisters represented on this World Watch List are experiencing," he continued. "If, on some level, it allows us to better identify with them, allows us to better empathize, then hallelujah for that. But we in the West still have freedoms, and we have recourse when those freedoms are being violated."

Brown said that the watch list is not just an informational resource, but also a prayer resource, and that persecuted Christians are asking their fellow Christians around the world to pray for them. The list offers specific prayer points for each of the 50 countries that are detailed.

"For the most part, these are prayer points that our brothers and sisters on the ground have told us," he said. "These are the things that they are praying for. So utilize that World Watch List as a resource, not just to be informed, but to know how we can not just pray for our brothers and sisters, but actually be praying with our brothers and sisters."