

The Devil's Face in Gaza

By [Gerald McDermott](#)

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Last week in Israel I saw the aftermath of diabolical barbarism. That is, what was left behind after Satan's face appeared.

I joined a group of Christian leaders, hosted by the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem, who came to support Israel in its time of war. We saw blood-spattered walls and bullet holes in baby nurseries on the Gaza envelope. We saw hundreds of burned cars stacked thirty feet high and thousands of others riddled with holes from bullets and rocket-propelled grenades. Baby seats, children's toys, and vacation gear were strewn amid the carnage.

We heard a messianic Jewish pastor tell of a soldier friend who on October 7 led five comrades in battle against fifty terrorists. On their subsequent race down a road to save civilians, they found a bullet-ridden car. In the front were the bodies of a father and mother; the decapitated bodies of three little children were in car seats in the back, and their little severed heads in the trunk.

Hamas terrorists raped young women in front of their parents before killing them all. They burned grandparents in their homes, and led other elderly people and children away in their pajamas to be tormented in Gaza tunnels. When someone in our group said the terrorists behaved like animals, a rabbi friend corrected him, "That's unfair to animals. Not even animals treat their prey with such sadistic savagery."

We heard from two mothers of hostages. Rachel Goldberg told of her twenty-three-year-old son Hersh, who had gone to the fated music festival on October 7 after his parents had prayed the Aaronic blessing on him at their family Shabbat meal the night before. Hersh's arm below the elbow was blown off by a terrorist's grenade, and he was seen being dragged into Gaza with his own improvised tourniquet on his bleeding stump.

Shuli ShemTov told us her twenty-one-year-old son Omer has asthma and celiac disease and is without help for either condition in Gaza's underground jail cells. Despite his suffering, released hostages have reported that Omer rallies his fellow hostages by improvising shabbat meals for them. He uses a tissue as a yarmulke and grape juice and salt to pray the Friday *kiddush*.

Eighteen of the remaining 126 hostages are over the age of sixty. A baby in captivity just turned one.

Militarily, Israel is winning the war in the south against Hamas. But in the global propaganda war, Islamists are convinced they are winning. Never before since 1948, they are telling one another, has Israel had to fight a war for so long without resolution. They are exhilarated by support from Russia, North Korea, and China. Hamas leaders boast that Russia has thanked them for forcing the United States to shift focus away from the war on Ukraine.

The war in Israel has brought vast change to Israeli society. The economy is suffering from the collapse of tourism and the departure of hundreds of thousands of reservists from civilian jobs to the war fronts. The deep political divide over judiciary overhaul has been set aside, at least for the moment, by agreement from left to right over the nation's need to destroy its enemies. Israel faces not only Hamas in the south but a bigger and better-trained Hezbollah in the north, armed with 150,000 missiles capable of reaching every part of Israel.

There are signs of new spiritual stirrings. A Christian soldier in the IDF told his father that while before the war only 10 percent of his fellow soldiers prayed in the morning, now it is only 10 percent who *don't* pray. One of the rabbis from Tsderot told our group how he saw his people murdered and nearly got shot himself. He told us he prays for the Messiah to come—"no matter which Messiah he is."

Even President Herzog—known to be on the more secular left—recently visited a yeshiva that had lost some of its students in this war. He was filmed singing with the attendees a Chasidic song about the coming redemption of Messiah.

The minister of tourism, a rabbi, told an Israeli Christian leader, "We hope you send missionaries to the Arabs here." The Christian was shocked: "Don't you hate missionaries?" The government minister replied, "If you teach them what you believe, we will have peace in the Middle East."

Spiritual movement is not limited to Jews. An Arab Christian leader in Bethlehem confessed to our group that he was too embarrassed to talk to his Jewish friends for at least two weeks after October 7. But then he resumed his ministry on the West Bank where he has three hundred Arabs in Bible studies. He tells them, "If you justify October 7 by seventy years of occupation, you have sold your soul to the devil."

Among those attending the Bible studies are mothers and grandmothers of terrorists. Some of those women are now praying for Jewish soldiers.

Another Arab Christian pastor in Nazareth leads his people to pray for the success of the IDF and collects money and food to contribute to Israel's defense.

These Arab leaders know that Israel is the only place in the Middle East where Christians have grown in number (more than 400 percent since 1948) and can practice their faith in security.

But while Israelis are confident they will defeat their enemies, there is still distrust. We inspected bomb shelters in the only inhabited town close to the Lebanese border. A fifty-five-year-old high school teacher who had never locked her door now does so. She told us she no longer trusts the government or the IDF. "They failed us on October 7. I trust only God now."

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