



**FROM SARAH,
OUR SABRA ON THE
GROUND IN ISRAEL**

August 2024



Dear Friend,

Greetings from the Holy Land. Here in Israel, we use the slang term *Israbloff* — a combination of Israel and *bluff* (Hebrew slang for the English word *bluff*) — to describe a situation in which you’re being sold something bogus that is “for your own good.” Such an arrangement is presented as being beneficial, but actually doesn’t deliver on its promise.

Living in Israel — a high-pressure, diverse society made up of immigrants from many countries — often results in social situations where differences are difficult to resolve. To overcome these circumstances, Israelis have many “creative” ways to defer, skirt, or circumvent problems, sometimes while leaving reason at the door. As a result, people who live here often shake their heads and say, “Only in Israel.”

One such *Israbloff* came in 1948 after the birth of the modern State of Israel. Following Israel’s declaration of Independence, several Arab countries attacked Israel, and all adults aged 18 and older were conscripted into the Israel Defense Forces (IDF).

Religious Waivers

Afterward, a group of prominent rabbis approached David Ben-Gurion, our first prime minister. The rabbis sought an agreement stating that Torah study was so important for the protection and survival of the Jewish nation that religious youths studying in yeshivahs (Torah schools) should be exempt from IDF service. Actually, yeshiva students do not study the Scriptures; rather, they study books of rabbinical interpretations and commentary on the Torah. Still, the rabbis argued that people who maintain Jewish knowledge of Scripture are as important for the country’s continued existence as are those who defend its borders.



An ultra-Orthodox man protesting IDF conscription. His sign reads, “It would be better for our children to be killed than to become secular.”

Ben-Gurion agreed to allow Israeli yeshiva students — approximately 400 at the time — to forgo the mandatory military service. The agreement allowed for a maximum of 800 waivers.

Following the 1967 Six-Day War, the subject arose again after many young men died in battle and secular Israelis wanted religious people to share the burden. Serving in the IDF, especially during a war, increases the risks of severe injury and death. And losing a loved one brings untold grief to families. While most Israeli families live with this risk, Orthodox families were unconcerned about that possibility.

(over please)

A significant change in Israeli politics came in 1977 — the right-wing Likud party (currently led by Benjamin Netanyahu) came to power when Menachem Begin became prime minister. He removed the 800-waiver limit, allowing all religious youths to be exempted from military service, and ended the timeframe on how long waivers could continue.

A Growing Burden

Begin also agreed that Israel would fund the Orthodox students' (and their families') living expenses with ever-increasing subsidies, which added an additional burden to the national budget. At that time, Orthodox youths made up 2.7% of the population that was eligible for conscription.

Since the "floodgates" opened in 1977, the Orthodox birthrate continues to be high — each family has an average of seven children. In contrast, the secular population's birthrate has remained lower — an average of three children per family. Current estimates are that Orthodox youths now make up 37% of those who are of conscription age. And in 2024, the funded religious students numbered a staggering 63,000.

Credit: Menachem Kahana / AFP



Ultra-Orthodox men and boys protest outside an IDF recruitment office in April 2024.

Increasing Discontent

Working Israelis fund this subsidy agreement through income taxes. Since yeshiva students continue their studies well into their 30s and 40s, they never enter the workforce and do not pay income taxes. For secular Israelis, this adds insult to injury.

If this was not enough, those in the IDF typically serve a mandatory three or more years, after which they enter the reserves. Reservists

must serve one month of duty annually, which means leaving jobs, businesses, and families. This reserve duty, along with the ever-increasing demand for national security and military spending that is funded by rising taxes, means that the waiver arrangement continues to generate frustration.

Because the religious political parties have held the lynchpin votes in almost every political coalition since the late 1970s, secular legislators have been unsuccessful in altering the agreement. Thus, every prime minister has extended the waivers, even though people have presented evidence that not all Orthodox youths are actually studying Torah.

Seeking to appease complaints, religious leaders agreed to allow several hundred religious youths to be drafted after some years of studying. Though the religious parties presented this solution as satisfactory to everyone, it is *Israbloff* at its finest, since the secular population does not accept that religious studies are as important or as dangerous as military service.

In 2018, the resignation of then-Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman (of the right-wing Yisrael Beytenu party) began an era of political turmoil. From 2019–2022, we experienced five elections in less than four years. One of the primary election issues was the Orthodox conscription waiver.

Controversial Coalition Agreements

After the fifth election at the end of 2022, Netanyahu formed the current government, which relies heavily on right-wing religious Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox parties. As part of the coalition agreements, Netanyahu promised to pass a law ratifying the waiver.

However, the newly formed Likud government's first order of business in the Knesset (Israeli legislature) in 2023 was a highly divisive judicial reform. This brought major, ongoing protests, with many claiming that the reforms would benefit Netanyahu in the corruption allegations that he faced. The religious parties supported judicial reform since they were promised that the conscription waiver would be the second item that the legislature would address.

Judicial reform threatened to tear apart the fabric of Israeli society. Still, the ruling coalition pushed it, even though people warned that it weakened Israel and gave our enemies an opportune time to attack. Undeterred, Netanyahu claimed that because his coalition had won the election, it was their right to make changes.

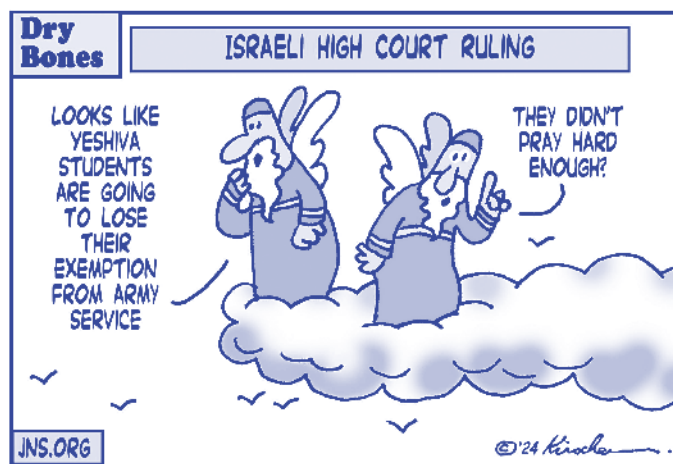
On October 7, 2023, modern Israel suffered the worst attack in its history, which was the most calamitous attack on the Jewish people since the Holocaust. Hamas brutally massacred over 1,200 civilians and soldiers. Afterward, secular Jews asked religious Jews, "Where is the protection from your Torah studying that you promised us?"

Because of the Gaza War, reservists have served for seven or more months straight. They continue to be separated from their families, careers, and university studies. Reservists who are small business owners have also suffered devastating financial damage. Still, eligible Orthodox Jews do not serve in the IDF.

In April 2024, the religious parties demanded that the governing coalition uphold the agreement and pass the waiver law. Still, many Israeli citizens and government leaders, including Minister of Defense Yoav Galant, strongly opposed the exemption. Galant noted the dire need for 7,000 more citizens to be conscripted, not only to replace many Israelis who had died in the ongoing Gaza war but also to bolster northern forces against the imminent threat of war with Lebanon. IDF leaders also sought to extend the mandatory service of the reservists.

Ending the Exemptions

On June 25, this major *Israbloff* was called in a 9-0 decision by the Supreme Court. For the first time in Israeli history, religious youths will not receive draft exemptions. The Court's judgment enraged members of the



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religious political parties. This decision marks a major turning point in a very long saga. Hopefully, Israel will avoid massive secular protests like we experienced related to judicial reform. Still, the religious parties have threatened demonstrations and even riots, claiming that Orthodox youth would “rather die than be conscripted.”

While these are turbulent times for Israel, we Believers* know that God has not forsaken our nation. We trust His plan for global redemption and acknowledge that Yeshua’s return is focused on the Middle East region, and Israel specifically.

I lift up my eyes to the mountains — where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of Heaven and Earth. He will not let your foot slip — He who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, He who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD watches over you — the LORD is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD will keep you from all harm — He will watch over your life; the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore (Psalm 121).



Im tirdefu lada-at oto — “Press on to know HIM!” (Hosea 6:3, NLT)

Many blessings from Israel,

Sarah Liberman | *סרה ליברמן*
 Sarah Liberman ENGLISH HEBREW

P.S. I write these personal letters, sharing details of our lives here, in hopes that they will guide you in praying more effectively for Israel. Thank you for your faithfulness in standing with us and supporting ZLM. ☆

* “Believers” is short for “believers in Yeshua/Jesus as Messiah.”

Zola Tours: Always Plan Ahead

Be prepared. Plan ahead. Many people live by these wise words. But how can anyone plan for a trip to Israel during a war?

Previous Israeli conflicts have stopped abruptly. While this hasn’t happened yet in the Gaza War, we believe that the hostilities could end soon. Therefore, we look forward to visiting the Holy Land again during a time of peace. Would you join us?

Contact our tour manager, Sandra, to tell her that you want to be on the “I’m ready to go when we can” list. Communicate with Sandra at 214-696-9760, travel@levitt.com or levitt.com/tours.

Spring Tour 2025 options

Deluxe — Israel	Mar. 24–Apr. 3	\$5,988
Grand Petra — Israel & Petra	Mar. 24–Apr. 6	\$7,688

Prices include tips, taxes, and airline surcharges (subject to change).

A Note from Joshua and Caleb Colson

Matthew 28:18–20 states: *“And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in Heaven and on Earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you...’”*



Yeshua imparted His authority to us upon our adoption into His Father’s Kingdom. He essentially made us His “hall monitors” on Earth. Mark 16:15–18 details how we Believers should exercise this authority by healing the sick, casting out demons, and speaking in new tongues. We can even supernaturally avoid harm from natural sources — including, but not limited to, venomous snakes and deadly poison. (But that doesn’t mean that we should test God with our own idiocy. Remember, as recorded in Matt. 4:5–7, when Satan tempted Jesus to throw Himself off the Temple in order to prove the angels would catch Him? Bad form. *We’re looking at you, Holiness Snake Handlers!*)

Satan knows the truth, and he knows Yeshua’s Word. In Matthew 12:25, Yeshua warns: *“Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand.”* Don’t let the enemy deceive you or the Jewish people into surrendering spiritual authority through division and strife. Our declaration of God’s Word and our prayers for peace can bring unity to Israel’s Knesset and the Israeli people amid conflict. God’s supernatural weapons (Eph. 6:10–18) enable us to properly combat the spiritual opponents causing strife in the spirit world.

Scripture reveals that the entire Arab world will continually come against the Jewish people, seeking to remove them from the land of Israel (Ps. 83). These Arab coalitions are already alighting. Nevertheless, the kingdom of darkness rarely unites, except when directing its hate toward Messiah and His people. The demons, fallen angels, and principalities battle against each other to gain more authority and power.

Now is the time for us to pray for a supernatural ambush of dissension and confusion against the devil’s forces, just as Gideon witnessed when the Lord turned the Midianites’ swords against each other (Judg. 7:19–22). If we Believers unite in prayer, submitting ourselves to God, we can watch the enemy flee (James 4:7–8)!

Love,

Joshua and Caleb,
The Bearded Bible Brothers

P.S. We Believers need to stand united in faith to fight on Israel’s behalf. Thank you for your financial gifts that enable us to boldly share Yeshua’s Gospel and love. ☆



Our Jewish Roots TV programs in August

David and Kirsten Hart

Considering that “Variety is the spice of life,” we’ve got a savory month for you. Our August stand-alone broadcasts relate to current events in Israel. While we continue using a Jewish perspective to teach both Testaments of the Bible, we have expanded our locations and topics to provide a broader range of Biblical insights.

The last week of August will feature a viewer-favorite program. We will quote letters from you, highlighting popular theological questions that Joshua and Caleb will answer in our studio. Thank you for sending us such worthwhile questions! Interspersed throughout the questions and responses, we’ll present clips from our upcoming series, *Josiah and the Last Reformation*.

If you have questions for Joshua and Caleb, please email staff@levitt.com or write to our ministry’s P.O. Box. Who knows — we may feature your question on our next Viewer Mail program.

We pray and anticipate that this month’s episodes will significantly enhance your spiritual growth. Thank you for your ongoing donations, which enable us to continue producing and presenting insightful Bible teaching. This ministry wouldn’t continue without your faithful support.

The Second Coming — Yeshua came as our sacrificial lamb, and one day soon, He will return with power. Join the Bearded Bible Brothers™ as they share teachings from their social media sites with the *OJR* television audience. As always, the BBB teach as Believers with a Jewish foundation.

Last Days Revival — Is our world destined for doom and gloom, or is there still hope for a global revival? Joshua and Caleb search the Scriptures for evidence of a spiritual revival in the prophetic future. As the world grows darker, we Believers faithfully hold on to hope for God’s magnificent plan to unfold.

Future for Believers — No one knows what the future holds — or do we? BBB Joshua and Caleb reflect on their social media teachings and teach us about the wonderful future that is in store for those who believe in Jesus.

Viewer Letters and Josiah Preview — Join David and Kirsten Hart in the studio as they ask the Bearded Bible Brothers questions from viewers who have written to ZLM. This program also features a sneak peek at our upcoming series *Josiah and the Last Reformation*.

Zola Levitt Ministries is ECFA approved and has Charity Navigator’s top rating of 4 stars, plus Ministry Watch’s Give With Confidence Score of 100.



Evangelical
Council for
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Jewish Heritage calendar

5784/5785 (2024–2025)

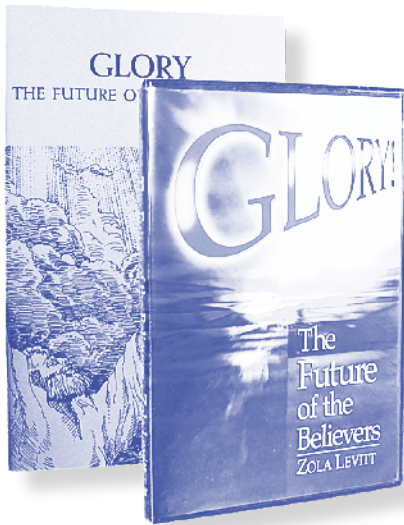
With the Seven Feasts of Israel in mind, imagine the usefulness of our delightful and inexpensive Jewish Heritage calendar. This full-color calendar begins in September 2024 and spans 13 months, through September 2025. It provides the dates of all the Biblical feasts and Sabbaths plus the names of the months, the Holy Days, and all the rest through English phonetics like those in our monthly Hebrew Lesson in the *Levitt Letter*.

Enjoy Biblical feast graphics, Hebraic regalia pictures, and new insights.



Jewish Heritage calendar

- 1 Calendar — \$12
- 2 Calendars — \$18
- 3 Calendars — \$26



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Message to the Churches The Book of Revelation brings its readers a promise of blessing. In the first two chapters, Jesus appears to John as the great Judge and addresses the churches in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, and Thyatira.

Vision of Heaven Chapters 3, 4, and 5 reveal a rare bright spot in Revelation. The message to the seven churches also includes Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. A peek behind the veil gives a glimpse of God's throne.

The Six Seals Chapters 6 and 7 turn dark as the first waves of judgment begin. The four horsemen of the Apocalypse bring pestilence, war, famine, and death. God's servants from Israel and every nation receive His seal.

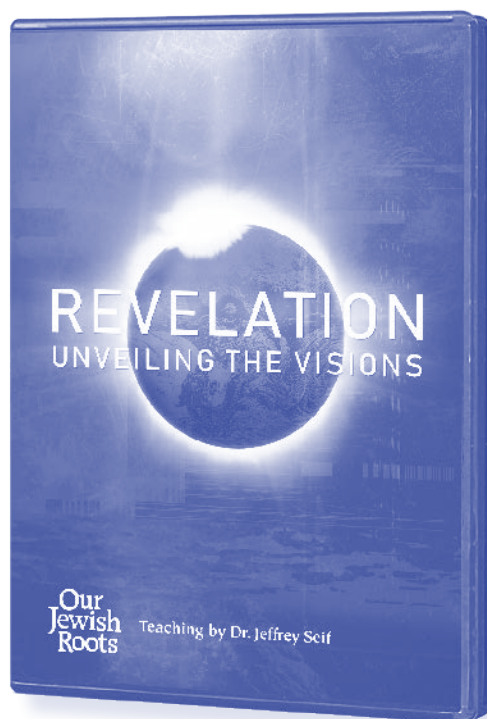
Impending Judgments Chapters 8–10 show that the Word of God is both bitter and sweet. The Seven Trumpets herald judgment for those who refuse to turn from wickedness. Believers can call on Messiah to help them persevere through difficulties.

Two Witnesses In chapters 11–13, two witnesses arrive with the sound of the seventh trumpet, bringing the Gospel during times of misery as Satan and the antiChrist exert their evil rule.

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Dear Sarah, *(please check appropriate boxes)*

I believe that God has not forsaken Israel, and trust that He continues to watch over His people both now and forever (Psalm 121).

- Here is my donation for **August** to enable people in Israel to know the security that comes through Yeshua, the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6).
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