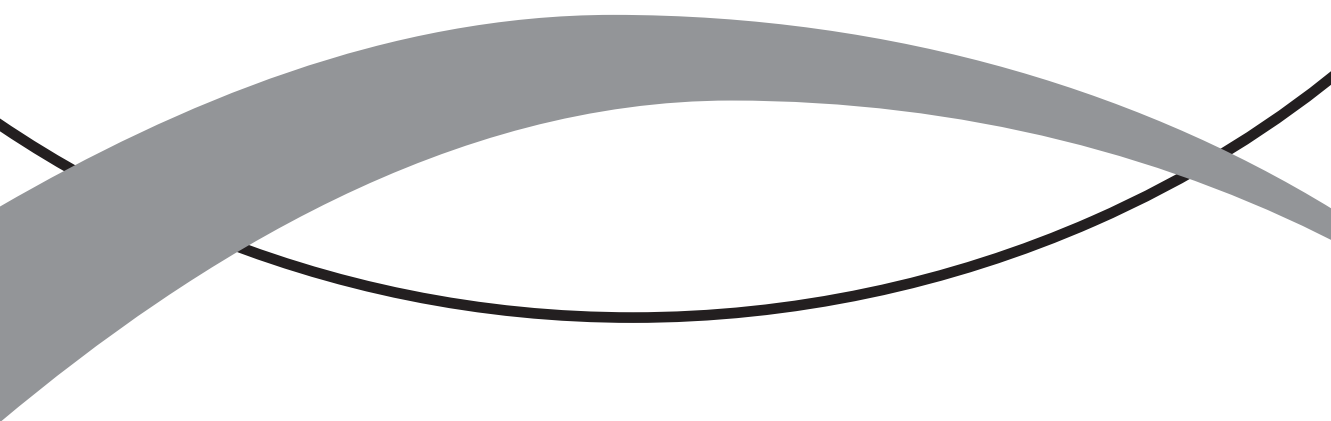


UNITING CHURCH STUDIES

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**UNITING CHURCH ENCOUNTERS
WITH THE MIDDLE EAST**

Vol. 28, No.1



Abbreviations

Documents

Hyperlinks are embedded in the full name and provide access to the full documents.

<i>AssMin</i>	Assembly Minutes
<i>BOU</i>	Basis of Union
<i>CS</i>	Covenanting Statement
<i>RP</i>	Revised Preamble
<i>UCMC</i>	The Uniting Church is a Multicultural Church
<i>UCAConst</i>	Uniting Church Constitution
<i>UCAREgs2025</i>	Uniting Church Regulations 2025
<i>UIW2</i>	Uniting in Worship 2

Institutions and Organisations

<i>UCA</i>	Uniting Church in Australia
<i>UAICC</i>	Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress
<i>WCC</i>	World Council of Churches
<i>ASC</i>	Assembly Standing Committee

This journal

This abbreviation can be used in bibliographical references to articles published in this Journal.

<i>UCS</i>	Uniting Church Studies
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A Holy Dream, A Bloody War

inise vakabua foi'akau

Abstract

This article is a personal reflection on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land on September 2023, a journey interrupted by the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war on 7 October 2023. Framed by the tension between a lifelong “holy dream” and the realities of a “bloody war,” the article explores how pilgrimage, sacred geography, and biblical imagination are reshaped when experienced within an active conflict zone. The reflection moves from reverence and spiritual encounter during the Feast of Tabernacles (*Sukkot*) to fear, uncertainty, and repatriation as violence unfolded around Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza. Writing as a native Fijian wo-man, a Candidate for the Ministry of the Word in the Uniting Church in Australia, I reflect on the ways in which inherited biblical imaginations are challenged by lived realities of those who inhabit the land today. Conversations with local people, experiences of military mobilisation and lockdown, and subsequent engagement with historical and theological scholarship reveal the Holy Land as both a sacred landscape and a contested political space marked by competing narratives, displacement, suffering, and enduring hope. The article argues that Christian pilgrimage cannot remain detached from these contemporary realities but must engage them with theological humility, historical awareness, and a commitment to justice and peace. Situated within the witness of the Uniting Church in Australia and informed by decolonial and contextual theological perspectives, this reflection invites readers to reconsider what it means to encounter God in a land where biblical memory and present human suffering coexist.



With my head bowed, I acknowledge and pay my respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, to their elders past and present, and to emerging leaders. I am a *marama iTaukei*, a native Fijian wo-man of *Yavusa Tio*,¹ of the chiefly village Nailaga in Ba along the Ba River in Fiji. My mother's tribe is *Nawaqaivanua vei ira na Gone ni Yavusa Tunu* from Vutia, in Rewa Province in central Fiji, a traditional warrior to her chief. I live and write on land I am not native to, on the country of Burramattagal people of Darug nation.

A Dream

In Aboriginal knowledge systems, dreaming² is not merely a series of dreams experienced during sleep or an exercise of imagination. Rather, it is a living reality that grounds ways of knowing, being, and belonging, connecting people with ancestors, country, law, kinship, and spirituality³.

¹ *yavusa* is the native Fijian tribal unit. *Tio* is oyster in Ba dialect. *Tio* is totem to the tribal unit of *Yavusa Tio*

² “Dadirri: Inner Deep Listening and Quiet Still Awareness,” *Ungunmerr-Baumann, Miriam-Rose* accessed 10.08.2026, <https://www.scribd.com/document/368472589/Dadirri-Inner-Deep-Listening-M-R-Ungunmerr-Baumann-Refl>

³ “Some Thoughts about the Philosophical Underpinnings of Aboriginal Worldviews,” *World Views Environment Culture Religions*, accessed 13.07.2026, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233563150_Some_Thoughts_about_the_Philosophical_Underpinnings_of_Aboriginal_Worldviews

Some native Fijians claim a spiritual and ancestral connection to the Holy Land, Israel. Within certain strands of Fijian oral tradition and Christian interpretation, it has been suggested that Fijians may be connected to the dispersed or “lost” tribes of Israel.⁴ Others associate migration narratives from Tanganyika in East-Central Africa to the South Pacific with the scattering of these tribes.⁵ While such claims hold significance within some communities and faith traditions, they are not supported by mainstream historical or archaeological scholarship. Nevertheless, these narratives have contributed to a sense of connection with Israel among some native Fijians.

There is also a historical connection reinforced through Fiji’s long-standing participation in United Nations peacekeeping missions in the Middle East. Following the establishment of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in 1978, Fiji contributed troops to the peacekeeping mission and has maintained a significant presence through successive deployments over several decades.⁶ In addition, personnel from the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) have served with the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) in Golan Heights.⁷ These peacekeeping commitments have given many Fijians direct experience of places associated with the biblical world, contributing to enduring social, religious, and cultural connections between Fiji, the Holy Land, and the wider Middle East.

Growing up in Suva – Fiji, stories of church choirs travelling on pilgrimage to the Holy Land was common. My late mother, an educator and broadcaster, and my youngest brother were among the many Fijians who travelled on pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and to visit family serving in Lebanon. In anticipation of their return, I listened attentively to my mother’s accounts of the journey. She spoke of the Holy Land with profound reverence, recalling that upon arriving in Tel Aviv she knelt to kiss the ground – a gesture reminiscent of Pope John Paul II during his pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 2000.⁸ She described an overwhelming awareness of God’s presence as the aircraft descended towards the runway, a sense of awe that she was approaching a landscape rendered sacred through the biblical narrative and centuries of faithful witness. Her stories became formative in shaping my own imagination, nurturing what emerged as my “holy dream”: a deep longing to walk the landscapes, to encounter places where biblical narratives are situated, and to participate in the enduring tradition of pilgrimage through which generations of believers have sought a tangible experience of God’s presence.

As I prepared to enter ministry formation in the Uniting Church in Australia, my desire to undertake a pilgrimage to the Holy Land deepened. Such a journey was not a requirement for formation, but a long personal aspiration. During this period, I noticed a poster at United Theological College advertising a 2023 study tour to the Holy Land. By the time I made enquiries, registrations had closed. Further enquiries led

⁴ “The Lost Tribes of Israel – and the Genesis of Christianity in Fiji: Missionary Notions of Fijian Origin from 1835 to Cession and Beyond,” *Oceania* 25 no.3 (2015): 250–270, accessed 17.06.2026, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/ocea.5106>

⁵ “The Lost Tribes of Israel – and the Genesis of Christianity in Fiji”

⁶ “Fijian troops conclude UNIFIL mission,” United Nations, accessed 13.06.2026, <https://unifil.unmissions.org/en/news/fijian-troops-conclude-unifil-mission-0>

⁷ “Fiji Peacekeepers Shine in UNDOF Mission in the Golan Heights,” Fiji Global News, 19 September, 2025, accessed 13.06.2026, <https://fijiglobalnews.com/fiji-peacekeepers-shine-in-undof-mission-in-the-golan-heights/>

⁸ “Pope Endorses Arafat’s Quest for Statehood,” Los Angeles Times, 23 March 2000, accessed 17.06.2026, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2000-mar-23-mn-11859-story.html>

me to a group of Fijian women in Sydney who were organising a pilgrimage to Israel. What had long been a holy dream was now beginning to take shape as reality.

Farewelled

My usual preparations for international travel were almost non-existent for this trip. I paid little attention to the details I would ordinarily consider before travelling – weather forecasts, political developments, current events, exchange rates, and even aspects of the itinerary. Perhaps consumed by the busyness of life, or with the excitement of finally realising a long-held dream.

Our tour group was formally commissioned and farewelled at my local church. During that gathering I had a conversation with one of the ministers, the exchange appeared unremarkable; yet, only weeks later, those words would return to me with unexpected significance.

Depart

We departed Sydney on the morning of 26 September 2023. Arriving at Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv, our first destination was the coastal city of Netanya. It was late, yet the music that drifted from the beachfront to our hotel rooms made me wander towards the shoreline for my first feel of the eastern Mediterranean. The experience was surreal. To the south lay Joppa, the ancient port made known from the story of Jonah and apostle Peter, and beyond it, Gaza. Places that had long existed in my imagination through biblical text, and contemporary news formed the landscape before me.

With the Mediterranean stretching before us, what struck me was the vibrancy of ordinary life. On an otherwise unremarkable Tuesday evening, the promenade was alive with people walking, talking, swimming, and gathering around the beachside cafés as music filled the air. There was an unmistakable sense of peace and normality that contrasted with the region's long and contested history. In those first hours, the Holy Land appeared no different from other countries I had visited – a welcoming, vibrant, and at ease – offering little indication of how profoundly the days ahead would alter both the journey and my understanding of the place.

Sukkot

As a Sydney-based Fijian pilgrimage group, one of the central events of our pilgrimage⁹ was the Feast of Tabernacles (*Sukkot*), hosted annually by the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem (ICEJ). *Sukkot* is one of the three major biblical pilgrimage festivals, commemorating Israel's dwelling in temporary shelters during the forty years of wilderness wandering following the Exodus from Egypt, while also celebrating the autumn harvest and God's continuing provision.¹⁰ Since 1980, ICEJ has welcomed thousands of Christian

⁹ "Feast of Tabernacle 2023." International Christian Embassy Jerusalem, accessed 13.06.2026, <https://www.icej.org/event/icej-feast-of-tabernacles-2023/> Organised by the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem (ICEJ), the 2023 Feast of Tabernacles attracted thousands of pilgrims from around the world, including Fiji. Our ecumenical Sydney-based Fijian pilgrimage group partnered with one of the Fiji groups.

¹⁰ See Deuteronomy 16:13–15; Leviticus 23:33–43

pilgrims from around the world to Jerusalem for its annual Feast of Tabernacles, interpreting the festival as an expression of Christian solidarity with Israel and as an anticipation of the prophetic vision of all nations gathering in Jerusalem to worship God.¹¹

During the opening days of the festival, we joined thousands of pilgrims representing nearly eighty nations in intercultural celebrations along the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Through worship, music, prayer, and fellowship, people from diverse cultures and traditions gathered in a shared expression of Christian faith. The pilgrimage then continued in Jerusalem, nightly celebrations were held at the Pais Arena with worship, biblical teaching and the symbolic 'Roll Call of Nations'. The atmosphere was uplifting and deeply spiritual.

In addition to participating in Sukkot, we visited significant historical and archaeological sites. These included Caesarea Maritima, now in ruins was the magnificent city built by Herod the Great; Rosh Hanikra, with its spectacular sea grottoes and remnants of the railway that once connected Cairo, Haifa, and Beirut during the Second World War; Tzipori, an archaeological site renowned for its intricate mosaics and layers of settlement history; and the remarkable Keshet Cave, known for its natural rock arch and breathtaking views across the Galilee. We also journeyed through a few biblical sites: Mount Tabor, traditionally associated with the Transfiguration of Jesus; Nazareth Village, which offers a reconstruction of life in first-century Galilee; Magdala, the hometown of Mary Magdalene; the Mount of Beatitudes, overlooking the Sea of Galilee where Jesus is believed to have delivered the Sermon on the Mount.

One particularly memorable experience was sailing across the Sea of Galilee in a traditional wooden boat. As we crossed the lake at dusk, the setting sun illuminated one side of the vessel while the moon rose over the opposite horizon, creating a moment of profound beauty and contemplation. The experience invited reflection on the Gospel narratives in which the Sea of Galilee serves not merely a geographical setting but as a significant theological landscape in the ministry of Jesus. Upon reaching the opposite shore, we shared a meal of locally prepared Galilean fish, recalling the enduring association of the lake with the fishing community that feature prominently in the Gospel tradition.¹²

Other significant moments included experiencing baptism in the Jordan River; at the Garden of Gethsemane at the foot of the Mount of Olives; placing written prayers from families in the ancient stones of the Western Wall; walking the Via Dolorosa deeply reflecting at the Stations of the Cross; to be in the traditional site of the Upper Room; and sharing a meal together as Sukkot celebrations drew to a close.

In many of these sites, our group paused to sing and pray. Whether overlooking the Sea of Galilee, standing beside the Jordan River, or walking the ancient streets of Jerusalem, the biblical narratives became inseparable from the physical landscape. *"All one had to do was to think of a text, and the authentic spot could be provided"*.¹³ The Holy Land was no longer simply a place encountered through scriptures and tradition, it had become a loved space where faith, history, memory and pilgrimage converged. At the time,

¹¹ See Zechariah. 14:16–19

¹² See Matthew 4:18–22 [calling of first disciples], Matthew 8:23–27, Mark 4:35–41, Luke 8:22–25 [Jesus calms the storm], John 21:1–14 [breakfast by the Sea of Galilee].

¹³ Simon Coleman and John Elsner, *Pilgrimage: Past and Present in the World Religions* (British Museum Press, 1995), 85.

it seemed this sacred landscape embodied the peace and hope it proclaimed. Only later that perception be profoundly challenged.

7.10.2023

Prior to our travel on the morning of Saturday(Sabbath) 7th October 2023, for a two-day tour to Jordan, we were advised us not to carry items that overtly identified us as Christians: including Bibles, Christian literature, or religious merchandise. Precautions as such reflected the practical realities of crossing an international border in a region shaped by complex political, religious, and security considerations. We travelled from Jerusalem towards the Allenby Bridge/King Hussein Bridge, the crossing between the West Bank and Jordan.

It seemed to be an ordinary morning. We had spent the previous days immersed in the sacred landscapes of biblical text, moving between places that for years had shaped our faith and imagination. The Jordanian staff at the hotel where we stayed in Jerusalem had shared stories of their homeland, speaking warmly of its history, culture, and hospitality. Their accounts heightened our anticipation as we looked forward to crossing the border, and to experience Jordan.

At the border we were refused entry, only to realise the scale of events unfolding in Israel and Gaza. Reports began to emerge that Hamas militants had launched an unprecedented cross-border attack from the Gaza Strip into southern Israel. Initially, the information was fragmented and difficult to comprehend. News alerts accumulated and conversations among travellers became questions of safety and uncertainty, it was increasingly evident that we were witnessing the beginning of a major regional conflict.¹⁴

The land we had come to encounter as pilgrims was suddenly fractured. Places that had existed in our imagination as sacred biblical landscapes became repeated locations in news bulletins and emergency alerts. Gaza, which only days earlier had seemed a geographical reference as we stood on the shores of the Mediterranean, had become the epicentre of a conflict unfolding before the eyes of the world.

In a matter of hours, our pilgrimage moved from celebration to vigilance, from certainty to uncertainty. The Holy Land that had inspired a lifelong dream now confronting with the realities of violence, fear and human suffering.

The pilgrimage was no longer simply about visiting sacred places. It became an encounter with the fragility of peace and a reminder that the lands revered as holy are also landscapes marked by recurring conflict, displacement, bereavement and hope.¹⁵ Emerging slowly yet clearly were the juxtapositions of faith and suffering, memory and violence, sacredness and political conflict as tension unfolded.

We returned to Jerusalem, to the same Jordanian hotel we had departed from. For the next couple of days, we remained confined to the hotel as the security situation tightened. Air raid sirens became recurring,

¹⁴ "Israel/Palestine: Devastating Civilian Toll as Parties Flout Legal Obligations," GlobalSecurity.org, 9 October, 2023, accessed 14.07.2026, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2023/10/mil-231009-hrw01.htm>.

¹⁵ Coleman and Elser, 1995, 5.

directing attention to the skies with vapour trails of intercepted missiles. Apps pinged frequent alerts of the locations of rocket impacts – sometimes within 15 to 20 kilometres of our hotel, at other times further away. What was unfolding lay far beyond our experience, comprehension, or control.

Bloody War

During the subsequent two-day lockdown, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared that Israel was “at war”.¹⁶ As an international traveller, this announcement carried practical implications, as travel insurance policies with exclusions for acts of war or armed conflict were affected. Pilgrims in other accommodation reported being directed repeatedly to bomb shelters in response to incoming rocket alerts. Our group was spared these repeated evacuations, a circumstance for which I was deeply grateful, as claustrophobia would likely be exacerbated by prolonged confinement in such shelters. Instead, our group gathered regularly in the basement where we prayed, cared for one another, and drank kava. These frequent gatherings became a source of spiritual sustenance, amid growing uncertainty.

This standstill gave space for me to follow news reports and historical analyses in a belated effort to make sense of the political and religious complexities of the region. Frustratedly, I had arrived at a selective knowing of the historical, theological, and geopolitical forces that shaped this land. I was confronted with the interrelationship between ICEJ¹⁷, strands of Christian Zionism, the history of British¹⁸ and American¹⁹ involvement in the region, the emergence and influence of groups such as Hamas²⁰ and Hezbollah²¹, and the diverse religious, political, and cultural identities within Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The complexity of these intersecting histories defied simplistic explanation.

As the conflict unfolded, I found myself grappling with growing unease, grief, and moral disquiet. The conversations I had with the minister and others before our departure gradually made sense as the realities of war became clearer. In retrospect, the conversations shared with the Jordanian hotel staff, who travelled regularly between Jordan and Jerusalem for work, and the apprehension expressed by our driver, Mohammed, who had accompanied our group throughout the preceding twelve days.

As reports from Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza continued to emerge, they revealed the devastating human consequences of the conflict: the loss of civilian lives, the taking of hostages, the displacement of communities, and the extensive humanitarian impact of the ensuing military campaign in Gaza. These accounts deepened my awareness that behind the political narratives were ordinary people whose lives had been irrevocably altered by violence and war.

¹⁶ “We are at war,” Times of Israel, 7 October, 2023, accessed 14.07.2026, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/we-are-at-war-netanyahu-says-after-hamas-launches-devastating-surprise-attack/>.

¹⁷ “Christian Zionism – The Land Promise: A Divine Covenant Unfolding,” International Christian Embassy Jerusalem accessed 14.07.2026, <https://www.icej.org/understand-israel/biblical-teachings/christian-zionism-the-land-promise-a-divine-covenant-unfolding/>

¹⁸ Mitri Raheb, *Decolonizing Palestine: The Land, the People, the Bible* (Orbis Books, 2023), 27

¹⁹ Raheb, *Decolonizing Palestine* 28.

²⁰ Beverley Milton-Edwards, and Stephen Farrell. *Hamas: The Islamic Resistance Movement*. 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity, 2024), vi.

²¹ See Clive Pearson, “David, Goliath and the Gospel” elsewhere in this Issue.

The earlier experience of profound spirituality – marked by worship, praise, and a deep sense of the sacred – now exists in tension with realities that I did not fully apprehend. Subsequent reading and reflection have drawn my attention to the separation barrier in the West Bank, the displacement of Palestinian communities, disputes over land and housing, ongoing restrictions affecting movement and access to resources²², and the broader humanitarian and human rights concerns of oppression of livelihoods in the occupied Palestinian territories for decades. The continuing devastation in the Gaza Strip and the immense suffering experienced by civilians²³ have challenged my understanding of the land I had encountered primarily through the lens of biblical faith.

Moving Further North

On the morning of Monday, 9 October 2023, we were instructed to have breakfast before travelling approximately 180 kilometres north to Tiberias. By this stage, my overriding desire was simply to leave Israel. The three-hour journey from Jerusalem took us past Ben Gurion Airport, military checkpoints, armoured vehicles, and both visible and camouflaged tanks that had become increasingly common following the mobilisation of the Israel Défense Forces. We passed service stations and roadside facilities where young soldiers, many carrying assault rifles, stationed as part of heightened national security measures. Above us, white trails lingered across the sky – later explained as the paths of rockets and interceptions associated with Israel's Iron Dome air defence system, which had been deployed extensively to intercept incoming projectiles during the conflict.²⁴

Not long after leaving Jerusalem, we received news that a repatriation flight to Fiji had been arranged for the following day, with only a limited number of seats available. My travel companion, my sister and I bought tickets, and continued north with the remainder of the group. At the north, we were approximately 60 kilometres from Israel's border with Lebanon. Having recently travelled through northern Israel, our guide had pointed out the proximity of Hezbollah positions across the border, the reports of escalating regional tensions heightened an already profound sense of uncertainty.²⁵

The Final Leg

That night in our hotel in Tiberias, I slept very little. My body trembled as I struggled with what I believed was either the onset of an infection or a physical response to the cumulative stress and uncertainty of the preceding days. Although I could not distinguish between illness and the physiological effects of acute stress, I remained prayerful, asking God for strength and sufficient health for trip back to Ben Gurion Airport.

²² "Israel and the occupied territories: After two months of aid blockage, humanitarian response in Gaza on verge of total collapse," International Committee of the Red Cross, accessed 14.05.2026, "<https://www.icrc.org/en/news-release/israel-and-occupied-territories-after-two-months-aid-blockage-humanitarian-response-verge-collapse>."

²³ "UNRWA Situation Report #194 on the Humanitarian Crisis in the Gaza Strip and the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem," United National Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East accessed 14.07.2026, <https://www.unrwa.org/resources/reports/unrwa-situation-report-194-situation-gaza-strip-and-west-bank-including-east-jerusalem>.

²⁴ "Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel – reported impact 2023," United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs, accessed 14.07.2023, <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/hostilities-gaza-strip-and-israel-reported-impact-3-december-2023-2359>.

²⁵ "The Coming Conflict with Hezbollah," The Center for Strategic and International Studies, accessed 14.07.2026, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/coming-conflict-hezbollah>.

At dawn, the hotel reception arranged a taxi for my sister and I to travel south to Ben Gurion Airport, while the remainder of our group continued the pilgrimage. The taxi ride cost approximately USD \$500 – a considerable and unexpected expense. Yet, in that moment, the financial cost seemed secondary to the overwhelming desire to leave the country at war. It marked the final stage of a pilgrimage that had begun as the fulfilment of a lifelong holy dream but had been irrevocably transformed by violence and uncertainty. This bloody war.

Reflection

The memories of 7th October remain vivid: the images of young people fleeing in terror, the wounded, the dead, and those taken hostage. Equally, the ongoing suffering of civilians in Gaza, where widespread destruction, repeated displacement, and the severe restriction of access to basic human need: food, water, healthcare, sanitation, and secure shelter have created an unprecedented humanitarian crisis.²⁶ These experiences have also compelled me to grapple with the enduring realities of Israeli control over the occupied Palestinian territories, longstanding concerns regarding violations of international humanitarian law, and the legal and ethical questions raised by the ongoing proceedings before the International Court of Justice concerning genocide.²⁷

As an Australian-Fijian traveller to Israel, my experience challenged the assumed inherited imagination. I discovered that the Holy Land cannot be understood solely through the lens of biblical geography or devotional spirituality. Rather, it is a living landscape where sacred memory coexists at different levels.²⁸ This experience has not diminished my reverence for the biblical witness; instead, it has expanded my understanding of what it means to read biblical text in dialogue with lived experiences of those who inhabit the land today.²⁹

I recognise that my experience has enabled me to perceive realities that some fellow Fijians, may not (willingly) see. Prior to the pilgrimage, I largely understood the Holy Land through biblical stories and the testimonies of returning pilgrims. Only after witnessing the outbreak of war did I begin to recognise the perspectives of Palestinian Christians, the diversity within Judaism itself, the tension of reading biblical text and contemporary Israel, the contested nature of Christian Zionism³⁰, and the profound humanitarian consequences of protracted conflict. My perspective transformed, I still do not fully understand the complexities of the Middle East and its political players, but this pilgrimage has exposed my limitations of a devotional imagination that had not previously engaged with the social, historical, and political realities of the land.

Since the outbreak of the Israel–Hamas war, the Uniting Church in Australia has consistently lamented the violence, condemned the targeting of civilians, called for the release of hostages, advocated for an immediate and sustained ceasefire, urged unhindered humanitarian access, and affirmed that any lasting

²⁶ "Occupied Palestinian Territory," United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs accessed 14.07.2026, <https://www.unocha.org/occupied-palestinian-territory>.

²⁷ "Order of 26 January 2024," International Court of Justice, accessed 14.07.2026, <https://www.icj-cij.org/node/203447>.

²⁸ Caplan, Neil. *The Israel-Palestine Conflict: Contested Histories* 3rd ed. (Wiley Blackwell, 2019), 3-19.

²⁹ Tessler, Mark. *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* 3rd ed. (Indiana University Press, 2024), 130-131.

³⁰ Raheb, *Decolonizing Palestine*, 30.

peace must be grounded in international law and the equal dignity of all people.³¹ These statements have provided an important ecclesial framework within which I continue to reflect on pilgrimage, discipleship, and God's call to justice and peace in the Holy Land.

inise vakabua foi'akau, of Fijian heritage, crossed the moana with her family and now lives, worships, and serves on the country of Burramattagal people of the Darug Nation. Attentive to her intersectionality, she is a wife, mother, candidate for the Ministry of the Word, with formative roots in the Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma. As a pilgrim, she navigates the complexities of ethnocultural identity, faith, and church, and continuing to wrestle with biblical texts through the lens of a native Fijian and diasporic woman.

³¹ "Statements, Articles and Resources on Palestine and Israel," Uniting Church in Australia Assembly, accessed 14.07.2026, <https://uniting.church/palestine-and-israel/>.



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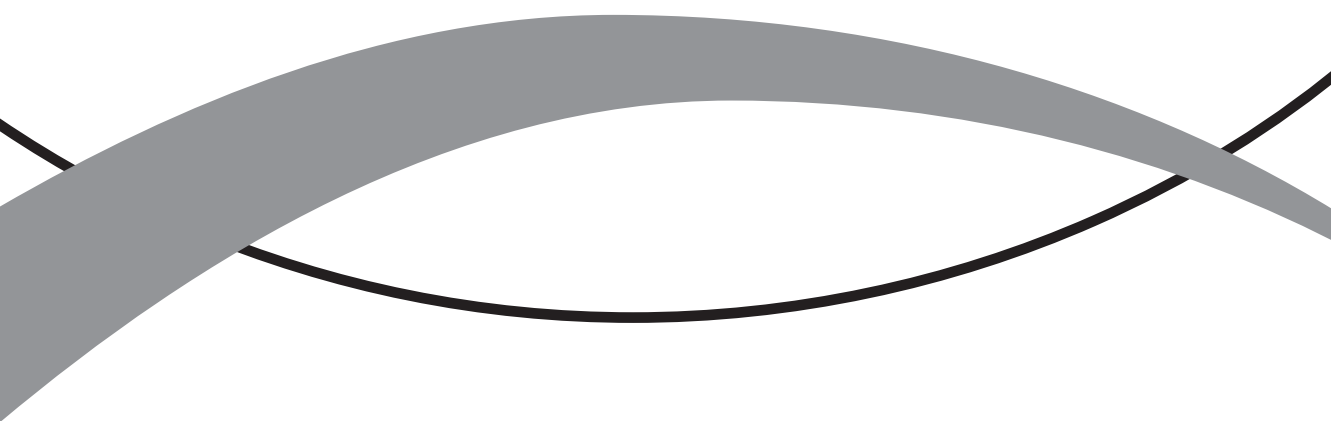
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