

THIS WEEK IN CONSCIENCE & JUSTICE

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Top News

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Israeli strikes kill more than 40 people in Gaza, say health officials, ahead of UN meeting

Israeli strikes in Gaza City and at a refugee camp killed more than 40 people, including 19 women and children, health officials said Sunday, as several European countries and leading U.S. allies moved to recognize a Palestinian state.

Health officials at Shifa Hospital, where most of the bodies were brought, said the dead included 14 people killed in a strike late Saturday which hit a residential block in the southern side of the city. Health staff said a nurse who worked at the hospital was among the dead, along with his wife and three children.

Another strike that targeted a group of people in front of a clinic in the Bureij refugee camp in central Gaza killed at least eight Palestinians, according to the Al-Awda Hospital. The dead include four children and two women, the hospital said. Another 22 people were wounded, it said.



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Smoke rises following an explosion in the Gaza Strip, as seen from southern Israel, Sunday, Sept. 21, 2025. (AP Photo/Ohad Zwigenberg)

What is Navaratri, the Hindu festival of nine nights?

Monday (Sept. 22) marks the start of Navaratri, a vibrant, nine-night Hindu festival dedicated to the Divine Feminine in all her forms. Hindus will dedicate rituals to the goddess Durga — the “Mother Goddess” who embodies the feminine energy known as Shakti — in recognition of her victorious nine-day battle against the buffalo demon, Mahishasura.

In Hindu tradition laid out in the Devi Mahatmya, a third-century sacred text, each night is dedicated to the form of Durga that appeared as the battle raged, as her powers shifted from day to day in ways that helped Durga eventually defeat the demon. Night one’s Shailputri represents Durga’s courage and focus to begin the battle, whereas night seven’s Kalaratri is considered Durga’s most dark, fearsome warrior form.

Some Hindus celebrate all nine of Durga’s manifestations, while others divide the holiday into three parts, dedicated to the triad of goddess Durga, goddess Lakshmi and goddess Saraswati — representing power, prosperity and wisdom, respectively.

In all its iterations, Navaratri is seen as a time for men and women alike to recognize the role feminine power has played in their lives — the loving and compassionate caregiver, the steadfast and devoted supporter and the powerful and fierce protector.

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Indian women wearing traditional attire pose for pictures as they practice the Garba, a traditional dance of Gujarat state, during a rehearsal ahead of Navaratri, or nine night festival, in Ahmedabad, India, Sept. 15, 2025. (AP Photo/Ajit Solanki)

For many US Jews, High Holy Days will be a mix of anxiety and determination

For Jewish congregations across the United States, the upcoming High Holy Days — always a compelling mix of celebration and repentance — will be more charged than usual this year. Rabbis say many of their congregants are worried by a surge of antisemitism, including two deadly attacks in the spring, yet are all the more determined to worship together in the coming days.

“There’s no doubt this is a very precarious moment,” said Rabbi Rick Jacobs, president of the Union for Reform Judaism. “People are feeling unsettled and vulnerable and also feeling that the High Holy Days could not matter more.”

At Sinai Temple, a Conservative synagogue in Los Angeles, Rabbi Erez Sherman said his diverse congregation seems eager to gather side by side.

“Obviously security is of utmost concern,” Sherman said. “It’s led to people saying I want to be here. I want to be in these pews. And I want to walk out with a proud Jewish identity as well.”

Similar sentiments came from Rabbi Moshe Hauer, executive vice president at the Orthodox Union.

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At Charlie Kirk's memorial, religion, politics and antagonism toward liberals combine



President Donald Trump embraces Erika Kirk at a memorial for conservative activist Charlie Kirk, Sept. 21, 2025, at State Farm Stadium in Glendale, Ariz. (AP Photo/John Locher)

Shortly before the speaking program began at State Farm Stadium in Glendale, Arizona, on Sunday (Sept. 21) to kick off the massive memorial service honoring conservative activist Charlie Kirk, a group of prominent Christian musicians onstage sang a rendition of the hymn "It Is Well With My Soul."

As the first notes of song filled the space, thousands of attendees silently began to raise four different signs. Two referenced Scripture, and others referenced Turning Point USA, the political organization Kirk founded. The placards were emblazoned with contrasting colors and assigned to different sections of the crowd, with the ultimate effect of transforming the stadium into precise stripes of red, white and blue — the colors of the American flag, two of which hung on either side of the gargantuan stage.

It was the beginning of what quickly became an unapologetic fusion of conservative Christianity — particularly evangelicalism, Kirk's chosen religious tradition — and President Donald Trump's style of conservative politics, sometimes delivered by prominent representatives of the United States government. Over the course of roughly five hours, a who's who of right-wing figures, conservative dignitaries, Trump administration officials and Trump himself regaled a sprawling crowd of tens of thousands with speeches that mixed religious appeals with personal remembrances of Kirk. In many cases, the speeches also included criticism of liberals and progressives, whom some blamed for Kirk's death even as investigators have yet to determine an explicitly political motive for the shooter.

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Why attempts to venerate Charlie Kirk are rubbing Black Christians the wrong way



If you were surprised Wednesday to hear Rep. Troy Nehls, R-Texas, claim at a congressional hearing, "If Charlie Kirk lived in biblical times, he'd have been the 13th disciple," then you haven't been paying attention. Since the Turning Point USA founder was shot dead Wednesday, Sept. 10, there's been a segment of Christians categorizing him as a Christian martyr.

For example, Kirk had only been dead a few hours when the Rev. Rich Bitterman, who pastors Cedar Ridge Baptist Church in Galena, Missouri, posted an 1,100-word sermon to X called "The Cross Still Offends."

In a piece that's been viewed almost a half-million times on X and who knows how many times elsewhere, Bitterman characterized Kirk not as a political activist, only as "a Christian apologist." He placed him not only in the company of Stephen, an early church leader stoned for his beliefs, but also in the company of Jesus himself.

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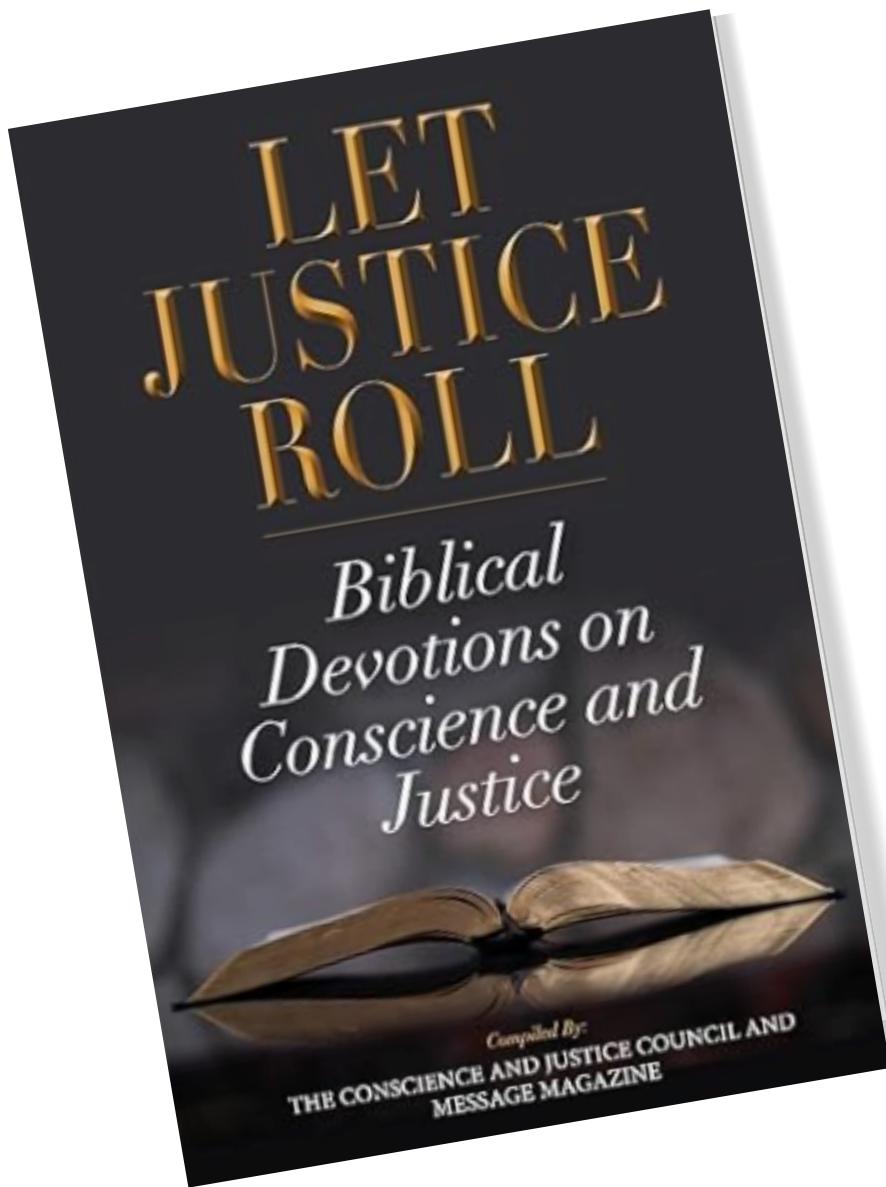
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OUR PURPOSE

This newsletter aims to highlight news articles relating to religious liberty, civil rights, and social justice. The Conscience & Justice Council desires to be attuned with society so that we may change the nation by impacting one community at a time. Articles linked above are meant to provoke thought and discussion on important topics, and do not always express options or views endorsed by the CJC.

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