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A Very Important Notice

I have lost *all* of my contact list and all of the emails awaiting reply. If you would like to be on my contact list, or if you are awaiting a reply from me, please write and provide the necessary information. If rejoining my contact list, please provide full contact details, including home address and telephone numbers. The MaozNews mailing list has not been affected; recipients of our monthly newsletter will continue to receive the letter, but all except their email information has been lost. Thank you.

An Updated Version of the Traditional Biblical Text

Prof. Menachem Cohen of the (Jewish Orthodox) Bar Ilan University and a group of colleagues recently produced what they claim is the most accurate version of the Old Testament published in 1,000 years. Cohen has been engaged in this project for the past 40 years, as the director of the Mikraot Gedolot-HaKeter project. He hopes it will become the standard version of the Scriptures, as well as introduce the ancient text into the digital age.

The History of the Traditional Text

There are numerous differences between Bible manuscripts. Most of these are insignificant: the absence of a letter or its substitution with another, similar to it, differences in diacritical marks (indicating pronunciation), a mistaken cantillation annotation (a "musical" note, according to which the Scriptures are read in a sing-song at synagogue services), and other such differences. The masora, for example, formulated by Jewish scholars more than 1,000 years ago, indicates how many times specific words appear in the entire Scriptural text in a given grammatical configuration.

The best product of this effort was the Keter Aram Tsova, also known as the Aleppo Codex. This text is considered by scholars to be the most accurate version of Bible ever produced. It was transcribed in Tiberias by Aharon Ben Asher in the 10th century, and set the standard to which all transcribers of the Scripture after him aspired.

The last person to take upon himself a similar task was a Spanish Jew named Jacob Ben Hayyim, who lived in Venice circa the early 16th century, less than 100 years after the Gutenberg Bible was first printed. Like Cohen, Ben Hayyim lived in an era of a technological revolution. Printed and bound volumes replaced handwritten scrolls. In response, Ben Hayyim wrote: "I saw that many of the masses, as well as many wise scholars among us, in our generation, do not esteem neither tradition nor the masora [the traditionally-accepted version of the Old Testament, with textual annotations, as well as statistical and linguistic information by which transcribers may secure themselves from further scribal errors]. They ask what use the text will continue to provide them; it has nearly been forgotten and lost."

Ben Hayyim therefore devoted himself to creating the most precise textual manuscript of his day, which became the progenitor of the Bible as we know it today. He also added comment by various Jewish commentators on the literal meaning, notably Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki (Rashi). This was the birth of the Mikraot Gedolot manuscript. This edition of the Torah usually includes the traditional Biblical text, notes on the Masora, Aramaic explanations of the text and rabbinical commentaries. It is the pedagogical version of the Bible that has served generations of Jewish school children and adults for study and for everyday use. It serves as the basis for the Textus Receptus, which, in turn, was the basis for the King James translation.

Many editions have been published, "all of them offsprings of Ben Hayyim," says professor Cohen. He goes on to insist that, despite Ben Hayyim's best intentions, hundreds of minor errors crept into his text. These "nonconformities," are discoverable by comparing that text with the Masora.

A Manuscript's Adventures

The legendary Keter Aram Tsova was not in Ben Hayyim's possession when, 600 years after the Aleppo Codex was written, he decided to edit and print his version. By then, the Keter Aram Tsova had been deposited by the local Jewish community in a synagogue in Aleppo, Syria, its very existence kept as a closely guarded secret.

The manuscript had been purchased by the Karaite Jewish community in medieval Jerusalem about a century after it was written. It then fell into the hands of the Crusaders, but was redeemed for a high ransom by the Jewish community in Egypt. It somehow reached the desk of Maimonides, who used it as reference for various finer points of Scripture. Eventually the document made its way to the Aleppo community, which hid it in a cave at the synagogue for hundreds of years.

Some 500 years later, in 1948, the codex was torn during pogroms against the Syrian Jewish community. Eventually, much of it was smuggled to Israel with the help of Israel's second President, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi. However, the first 200 pages, most of the Pentateuch, had disappeared. The mysterious story of the codex and the theories concerning the whereabouts of the missing pages have been recounted in journalist Matti Friedman's book, "The Aleppo Codex: A True Story of Obsession, Faith, and the Pursuit of an Ancient Bible" (Algonquin Books, 2012).

Unaware of the Keter Aram Tsova, Ben Hayyim forced to work with those versions of the Bible he had at hand. Professor Cohen describes the unavailability of the Keter Aram Tsova version of the Bible in Ben Hayyim's time as "a huge loss" because there are some 1500 differences between Ben Hayyim's version and the Keter Aram Tsova. Differences were thereby perpetuated as they found their way into subsequent editions. Scholars who, in the process, added mistakes of their own rectified a few differences. Cohen and his colleagues are seeking to redress this loss at a critical moment: at the beginning of the digital revolution.

Cohen and his team have undertaken to reconstruct the text and the Masora of the missing parts of the Codex. They referenced countless other parts of the text and various ancient manuscripts

in an effort to determine the wording of the Pentateuch. They also created a computer program that assisted in the reconstruction of Ben Asher's Masoretic notes. Their conclusions are yet to be tested by the academic world.

A Modern Version

The first volume of the Bar-Ilan "Mikraot Gedolot-HaKeter" was published 20 years ago. To date, 16 volumes have been published. Four remain to be completed. The next part of the Bar-Ilan project is the preparation of a digital edition writing a program that will enable scholars to analyze biblical portions in the smallest possible units. This program, called the Keter Application, is a philologist's dream. It enables a multi-dimensional search of the text, not only by letters or words but also by diacritical marks and cantillation notes.

Cohen's team also included a number of rabbinical commentators, and an Aramaic translation based on ancient manuscripts from Yemen. In effect, they have created the most accurate version ever of the Mikraot Gedolot. Cohen hopes that by the end of next year, the digital and printed project will be completed.

The Bar-Ilan "HaKeter" has a significant competitor. "Keter Yerushalayim" was published 11 years ago by the late Rabbi Mordecai Breuer of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. This version is also based on the Aleppo Codex, but a philological argument erupted between the Breuer and Cohen as to the proper way to place a certain accentual notation above the letters and lead to the two scholars to part ways.

Baruch's Biography

(continued)

In the last installment aspects of the pastoral ministry were described. We then told of the move into a new facility in Rehovot, and the stringent opposition of the Orthodox.

Picketing our Home

The protest against the presence of an Israeli Christian congregation in Rehovot was led by the Orthodox community in the city. The city's Chief Rabbi gave his nod to the protests. After all, he had participated in the initial break-in to the facility on Weismann Street. He and members of the Municipal Religious Council also participated in repeated demonstrations outside our home. Our home was picketed for weeks. Sometimes a small group of Orthodox stood outside our home, sometimes hundreds gathered, shouting threats and protests as we, or our children, passed by.

Our policy was never to show fear. We were convinced that any show of fear would merely encourage our protagonists. Nor were we willing to depart from our normal course of life. Bracha and I taught our children that such mild persecution was a privilege, that the Orthodox bark was worse than their bite. We insisted that we were not only within our legal rights, but that it was our God-given duty to stay course and not display any discomfort. Our children were welcome to cry at home, but in the presence of their friends and of the Orthodox, they were to display a gracious fortitude.

Avital's schoolmates took to accompanying her to and from school. On one occasion, she engaged the protestors in conversation. In this case, they did not know she was my daughter, and played into her hands, to the delight and banter of her accompanying schoolmates.

On one occasion, Bracha hired a taxi to take her home from shopping in the city. Upon receiving the address, the taxi driver commented to Bracha, "Oh, that's the building in which the dangerous missionary lives." "Dangerous missionary?" replied my wife. "He's not dangerous at all. I've been living in this building for as long as he has, and he has never done anything to persuade me that

he is dangerous. He's actually kind of nice!" They continued in conversation about the baneful influence of the Orthodox in the city. Upon alighting from the taxi, handing the driver his fee, Bracha said to him, "By the way, I'm the dangerous missionary's wife." The driver broke out into a laugh and has, ever since, honked a greeting any time he's seen her in the street.

Seeking to rail the population against us, the Orthodox painted slogans all over the city, "Baruch Maoz – child kidnapper – get out of our city!" "Down with the Mission!" "Protect our city from Baruch Maoz." They managed to photograph me and put up posters all over the city, calling on the populace to "vomit" us out. On another occasion, I left the house and got in my car to drive away. Before I had gotten very far, I heard a heavy "thump!" and the car dropped. Someone had removed the bolts on the two front wheels. Had I managed to gather speed, who knows what would have happened?! At that stage, CWI decided I should have protection. They hired a bodyguard who shadowed me for some two weeks, until I tired of the ordeal and insisted he be removed.

One day the doorbell rang. Edith, a Scottish friend then staying with us, opened the door and a young man burst in, demanding to know, "where is the missionary?" He then proceeded to throw furniture to the floor, pulling at curtains and breaking vases. I was in my office, the far part of the flat. Hearing the commotion, I hurried to the living room and confronted our uninvited guest. I warned him that, if he so much as stretched out his hand to touch another item, I would restrain him by force. He looked at me, laughed and reached out. I tackled him, pinned him to the ground with one of his arms bent behind his back. Every time he tried to resist, I applied force to his arm. "Call the police!" I instructed Bracha. The police came and took our guest to the station, where I was invited to press charges but chose not to do so. "If you so much as come within shouting distance of my house again," I told the young man, "I will deal with you differently."

Threatening letters began appearing in my mailbox, scrawled in an almost illegible hand. Later in the week I received a telephone call: "I have been hired to kill you if you do not leave the city." "Well, you've got your work cut out for you, because I am not leaving." We talked for over an hour. I had a wonderful opportunity to speak with whoever was on the other side of the line about the Gospel. Finally he said, "Y'know what? You're kinda nice. I don't understand why they wanna kill you, but if they still do, they're gonna havta find someone else to do it for them." I never reported the matter to the police, and never heard further from him, or from anyone else in that vein.

Bracha was walking Shlomit in the pram, passing by our apartment building on her way to the small local park. Two Orthodox women were walking their babies and, as they passed the building, Bracha heard one of them say, "That's where the missionary lives." "Yes," replied the other, "and it does not matter what is done to him, he and his family don't seem to care!" We had scored the very kind of victory we had aimed at achieving: the Orthodox could protest as loud and as long as they wished – we will not budge.

Since the protests had continued for quite a period, I decided it was time to take some initiative. I composed a pamphlet, addressed to the neighbors, apologizing for the ruckus they had been forced to endure and explaining that my insistence benefited them as well: if my liberties were allowed to be curtailed, theirs would likewise be threatened. Many of the neighbors responded with understanding. One of our Orthodox neighbors even brought us a plate of cookies, expressing their shame at the events taking place. The Orthodox community responded in kind, with a pamphlet accusing me of kidnapping Jewish children and shipping them to Germany. That was the climax: the neighbors united and, without my knowledge, sent a delegation to the Rehovot Chief Rabbi: if he

would not bring an immediate end to the protests, they would picket his home until he did. Within hours, all the protests stopped.

A Legal Battle

In the providence of God, we still had the lease on our previous property on Yavneh Street. When forced out of the property on Weismann Street, we made preparations to recommence worship at Yavneh. Late on Friday afternoon, when the courts were no longer accessible and no appeal could be submitted, a knock was heard on the door of our home. A grinning Orthodox messenger handed me a Court Order and left immediately. We were restrained by the court from using the Yavneh property for worship. We immediately called around to members of the congregation, informing them that we would be meeting on the Saturday at the Maoz residence.

Following legal advice, for the following five or six years we never met anywhere consecutively. We alternated between parks, woods and the homes of congregants, while we conducted a legal battle to obtain a license that would enable us to meet within the city boundaries.

The property on Yavneh Street previously served as a beauty parlor. It was situated on the ground floor of an apartment building. We had met there, without much apposition, for five years. Now we were forbidden to do so. Obviously, no building in the city licensed for religious purposes would be available to us for Christian worship. The municipal government had a large contingent of Orthodox representatives, rendering it unlikely we would receive a permit for our own facility. We could move to another city, perhaps more friendly. We believed this was a battle that needed to be fought, not only for ourselves, but also for the sake of the Christian congregations in Israel.

So, we continued to pay rent for a facility we could not use and engaged legal counsel for the ensuing struggle. When our submission for a license to use our facility for worship was rejected, as expected, we filed an appeal. When the Orthodox submitted a public remonstrant, requiring that we not be accorded license, we gathered support from neighbors living adjacent to the building we rented by way of a petition, calling for the city to uphold freedom of religious practice and expression. When the Orthodox claimed our gatherings constituted a public nuisance, we had our neighbors insist that we did not. Still, the City ruled against us. Orthodox political pressure was too strong: has the City granted us license, the Orthodox threatened, they would walk out of the municipal government, causing its collapse.

But we were unwilling to concede defeat. Israel is a democracy and Israeli law forbids discrimination. Its law assures freedom of religion. So we appealed. For the whole length of the five year period we paid rent for a facility we could not use, but to allow our lease to expire would pull the rug from under the feet of our legal battle: we sought a license for that location.

Our appeals went all the way up to the Regional Court. There our case was heard and the City instructed to issue a license at once! We had established a precedent. This was the first time in Israel that a municipal refusal to accord a local Christian community license to use a building for worship had been overruled. Since the facility on Yavneh Street could no longer cater for our needs, we terminated the lease within a week and sought a suitable location. It took us something just under a year to relocate: Christian Witness to Israel (CWI) purchased a property in the Old Industrial Area of Rishon LeTzion.

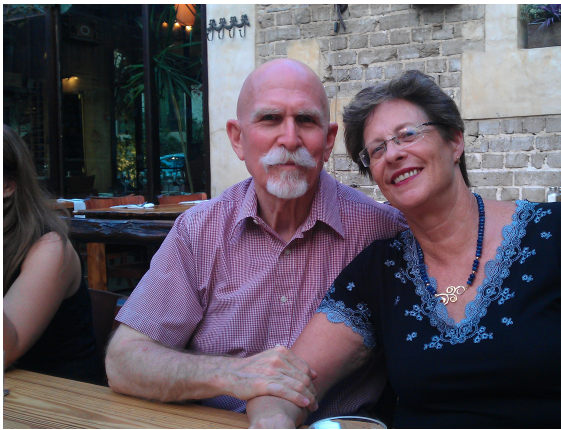
The property was premeditatedly large enough to serve Grace and Truth as a congregational home. The purchase was made contingent upon the seller obtaining an appropriate license from the municipality, and the building was generously fitted by CWI so as to best serve the church. Murdo MacLeod, who then led CWI, was committed to promoting the welfare of the churches in Israel,

particularly that of Grace and Truth Christian congregation, with whom he and the Society he led chose to work closely. Generously, obligations the CWI Board placed no financial on the church. However, Grace and Truth gradually assumed such obligations as it grew, and its ability to undertake financial obligations grew in consequence.

To be continued

Ministry and Family News

Baruch and Bracha are presently **visiting family and friends** in the US. IN the course of this visit, Baruch has been invited to teach two seminars, address two conferences (of which more anon) and preach in various churches. One of the conferences is a closed, invitation-only Symposium on issues relative to the Messianic Movement. Baruch has been asked to address the role of Torah and of (Jewish) tradition in the Messianic community. A report of this symposium and of Baruch's paper will be given in the November of MaozNews. Meanwhile, your prayers would be much appreciated.



In the course of this trip, the Maozes will meet with Avital and Tamar and their families for about a week in Dallas Texas, during which time Baruch will address a regional Missions Conference. They hope to meet with **Baruch's brothers**, who live in Dallas and with whom relations are somewhat tenuous due to Baruch's faith in Christ. We also look forward to renewing fellowship with **Ron McKinney**, a long-time friend with whom we had not been in touch since the mid-1970's.

Avital and family are back home and readying themselves for the school year.

Shlomit and Keith have moved into the house they purchased in Parma Heights, near Cleveland. Shlomit is tired, caring for two toddlers while moving house.

Yonatan celebrated his second birthday, wondering what all the fuss was about and why this day differs from any other day. After all, his father and mother love him as much on Wednesday as they do on Monday...



Tamar and Marcus are well. They are seeking the mind of the Lord regarding future church commitment following the merger of their church with another.

Rose is also well. She and a friend are house-sitting for the period that Bracha and I are away, and soon to commence studies. A truck accidentally drove into our fence, destroying a large part of it and exposing the house to break-ins. The damage is quite significant, and must be speedily repaired. Rose is handling this.

Thank you for praying for us!

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