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Israel Following Recent Elections

This issue of MaozNews was delayed to enable us to report the initial results of recent elections, held on March 17.

With 99% of the votes cast now in, the results are now as follows: Likud, led by incumbent Prime Minister Benjamin (Bibi) Netanyahu, 30 seats; Mechane Zioni (Zionist Union) led by Isaac (Bougie) Herzog, primary contestant, 24 seats; Joint (Arab) List, 14 seats; Yesh Atid, 11 seats; Kulanu 10 seats; HaBayit HaYehudi 8 seats; Shas, 7 seats; United Torah Judaism, 6 seats; Yisrael Beiteynu, 6 seats; Meretz, 4 seats = 120 seats in Israel's legislative body, the Knesset. A simple majority is needed to form a Government. Mr. Netanyahu is the most obvious candidate to be mandated by the President to form a Government and he will have no difficulty in doing so.

Mr. Netanyahu has served as Prime Minister of Israel consecutively since 1999. Under him Israel's economy prospered while the rich grew fewer and richer and the poor grew increasingly poorer. Housing has long passed out of the range of the average citizen, rising 80% in 7 years. It now takes twice as many months' salary to buy a house in Israel than it does in France, the USA or Britain. Almost 1,000,000 children in the country -- one out of every three -- languish in poverty. Israel has the 4th highest child poverty rate in the developed world. Israel also has the highest rate of uneducated, unemployed youth (30.7%), well over Turkey's 25.5%.

The cost of living in Israel relative to disposable salaries is one of the highest in the OECD. Teachers' and nurses' salaries are the lowest while the medical system is collapsing for lack of funds and medical staff. Taxes on new vehicles are 78% of the purchase price, so that a Honda Civic which sells for some \$16,000 in the US costs \$33,000 in Israel. Petrol costs about \$8 per gallon.

The average Israeli pays just over 20% income tax and just under 9% for National Insurance. In addition, all purchases are subject to an 18% VAT, all totaling a tax burden of just under 50%. An 8-ounce container of cottage cheese costs \$1.68; a pound of hummus costs \$4.54; 2 liters of orange juice — in a country that exports oranges — costs \$6.54; 2 pounds of rice cost \$1.94; and a 13-ounce container of

Israeli Osem soup nuts costs \$4.54 — more than it costs in American stores that import the soup nuts from Israel. A 6-ounce can of Israeli-made sunscreen spray costs some \$40.

Mr. "Destroy Hamas" has conducted two indecisive conflicts with that organization and must now prepare for the third round, for which Hamas is openly positioning itself. Iran is ever closer to becoming a nuclear power while international support for Israel's opposition to such a process has waned and relations with the U.S. Administration are unnecessarily strained. Mr. "No Compromise with Terrorists" released more imprisoned Hamas terrorists than any Israeli Prime Minister.

Israel ranks 24th out of 34 countries in the OECD Transparency Index and 37 in the Corruption Perceptions Index (100 being the best score possible) with senior government Ministers and functionaries under police investigation. Many hundreds of millions of Shekels were allocated to Religious parties in order to secure their political support and Israel's stricken North and South were neglected while funds were surreptitiously channeled to West Bank settlements, in some cases in the form of grants to make up for municipal taxes lost due to the fact that projected housing was not built. His next Government is expected to include a felon convicted of embezzlement and a party leader who, with senior members of his party, has been under police investigation for corruption, while the Prime Minister himself, and his wife, are under investigation for misuse of public funds.

Enormous gas deposits discovered off Israel's shores are not being utilized because Netanyahu's Government twice reneged on agreements signed with international companies and, as a result, no international company is willing to negotiate with the present Government.

Increased Government-sponsored legislation has eroded democratic freedoms in the country, with the Prime Minister's office seeking control of the Israel Broadcasting Authority which controls Israel main radio and TV channels, a free daily newspaper distributed nation-wide in support of the Government and NGOs who dare oppose Governmental policies subjected to police and tax authority investigations as well as increasingly restrictive legislation.

The prospects of attaining a peace agreement with the Palestinians are almost nil, but Netanyahu's handling of this situation has only served to exacerbate tensions and make the outburst of renewed violence all the more likely. The Palestinians are being squeezed into increasingly smaller enclaves, their livelihood restricted by illegal settler attacks, military impositions and the withholding of taxes, with no hope of any kind for the future. A wiser, more productive leader would have found a way to enlist the support of the free world and to reduce frustration among the Palestinians.

Netanyahu has gained a baneful reputation among international leaders as an inveterate liar, incapable of withstanding pressure, a Machiavellian survivor rather than a visionary leader of his people. A growing number of his own political partners have expressed their disgust at his weakness and scores of Israeli military and security leaders have spoken out against him, decrying his policies and warning against his indecisiveness as well as his constant feeding on fear rather than vision.

Under his leadership, economic disparity is expected to rise in spite of the Israeli public's expressed concern over this disparity and the social platform established by one of his most obvious political allies, Moshe Kahalon (Kulanu). Only if Kahalon is able to impose his will on the notoriously feckless Netanyahu could there be a turn-around.

However, Israel's economic woes are deemed likely to grow. Economic boycotts coupled with the need for increased spending on defense will hamper efforts to reduce poverty, bring prices down and improve the medical and educational systems. Both the West Bank settlers and the Orthodox community will be howling for a larger share in the national budget and tensions with Iran, Lebanon, Syria and Hamas are poised to create further drains on the economy. Tourism, a major industry in Israel, is expected to suffer from any flare-up of violence. The need to call up reserves, leaving their workplaces vacant and imposing the need to feed and care for them in the course of non-productive military activity will add further strain. Such developments will leave greatly reduced economic wriggle room.

All too many American Evangelical supporters of Netanyahu are motivated by the hope that he will fulfill their eschatological expectation; they have little regard for our lives and welfare here in Israel. We are mere pawns in their eschatological scheme of things. Their concern is not for us but the product of a fascination with purportedly end-time developments regardless of moral considerations. This is to divorce spirituality from holiness, the biblical message from moral standards. It is to empty the biblical message of the main part of its content, leaving an empty shell of supposed prediction. Biblical eschatology has to do with holiness, justice, righteousness and peace. Much of the radical support for Israel has all too few of these values in mind.

That is to be greatly regretted.

Baruch's Biography

Pastoral Challenges

Stephan

Immigration from Russia continued, presenting us with new pastoral opportunities and challenges. A family arrived at church, Stephan, his wife and two young adult sons. As ever, they were warmly welcomed. As was our custom, after they attended services a number of times, one of the Elders and I paid them a visit to learn more of them. Stephan was quick to inform us that he had been a Deacon in the unregistered Baptist church to which he belonged, and that Deacons, in fact, fulfilled the role of Elders in his church. He would be available to the church should we choose to call upon him to exercise his gifts.

We assured Stephan that we were always on the lookout for gifting in the congregation and that we were very open to the possibility that, at a later date, he might fill a role in the church. However, we preferred to wait so that he and the church could become better acquainted. He could not simply transfer leadership from one church to another. His gifts would need to be recognized and called upon by the congregation. Stephan thought this was a wise and acceptable expectation. His two sons would be seeking employment while learning Hebrew, while he and his

wife would initially concentrate on learning the language.

Our services always included a time of congregational prayer in which any present could lead in prayer. In the service immediately following our pastoral visit Stephan was the first to rise and lead in prayer. His prayer became a mini-sermon, exhorting the congregation to serve the Lord. Little time was left for others to lead in prayer. In the following week this was repeated. Following the service I asked to speak with Stephan and, as gently as I could, asked Stephan to please leave time for others to pray, suggested that he did not have to lead in prayer every week and requested that he pray, not preach until invited to do so. He was less than pleased. The Elders and I met every week, and I reported the conversation to the Elders.

In the following Sabbath he rose again and true to pattern, prayed at length, castigating those in the congregation whom he perceived not to be walking with the Lord as they should. Later discussing the matter with the Elders, we decided to speak with Stephan again, this time asking him not to pray more than once a month and repeating the request that he pray briefly and that he limit himself to worship and supplication, avoiding attempts to address the congregation. That was the last time we saw Stephan and his family at church.

Felix

Felix, in his mid-twenties, had met Alex, our Elder/Evangelist, heard the Gospel and began attending church. Some months later he professed conversion and sought baptism. We had never been invited to his home, knew little of his background and nothing of his present labors: was he working? Studying? He lived with his parents, who were they? Did he have siblings? There was so much apparently secretive about him that we became suspicious. The anti-Christian organization, Yad Le'Achim, had repeatedly sent people into our midst to pose as new Christians and to garner information that, the organization believed, could be used to harass congregants or against us in court.

We feared Felix was one such and certainly would not baptize someone of whom we knew so little. So we insisted on visiting Felix in his home. His father was unwell but greeted us kindly, as did his mother. Our concerns were allayed as we sat and chatted with them and interviewed Felix. Upon reporting to the Elders, it was agreed that Felix would be admitted to the short pre-baptismal course we had devised and then, as with all others, considered for baptism.

To make a long story short, Felix completed the course, was baptized, later became a Deacon in the church and married Katya one of the two we fostered in the years that followed. He and Katya, with their two daughters, now live in Montreal, Canada.

Nadya*

Nadya was another person we met. She had emigrated from Russia with her husband and baby and now lived alone with the child. Her estranged husband, a drug addict and petty thief lived nearby but hardly ever saw the two.

Nadya was chronically ill. She had found employment in a government office and was frequently visited by a man from a nearby village who brought her gifts, spend nights in her home and developed a sense of ownership over her. We

preached the Gospel to her and over time, she was increasingly attracted to Christ, brought an end to the illicit relationship and sought to put order in her life.

There was much to change. Nadya had to learn to establish standards for her child and to maintain them herself. She had to adopt new modes of dressing, new ways of spending her time, using her money. She was pretty, blond and blue-eyed, with an obvious emotional need. The manager of the office in which Nadya worked identified her weakness. He began making advances and taking liberties. Fearing the loss of her employment, she was afraid to refuse him. We assured her we would stand by her, should an occasion arise that made it necessary, and encouraged her to report the manager's behavior.

Finally she plucked up courage and reported. Immediately she was invited to the office of the Minister in charge of that department and assured that all required steps would be taken. The manager was removed from office without pension and Nadya's position at work was fortified by ministerial authority.

A short while later, Nadya collapsed, an emotional heap. Her disease, medication and the harsh realities of life all caved in on her and we had to forcibly hospitalize her. She remained under medical care for months while Rose, her 12 year-old daughter lived with Nadya's in-laws. We kept tabs on Rose and visited Nadya regularly. Happily, the psychologist who treated Nadya was willing to cooperate with us, so that she was released from care much earlier than would be the case otherwise.

The church decided to employ Nadya, who had begun learning sign language. Her duties had to do with the deaf community, some office assistance and translating materials for our Russian language magazine from Hebrew into Russian. Rose had been shattered by her mother's illness and was faltering at school. I began assisting her in her studies, making sure she went to school on time and guiding her mother in her daughter's education.

A few years later Nadya collapsed again. This time she pleaded with us not to hospitalize her: Rose had been so adversely affected by the previous period Nadya spent in hospital that there was room for concern this time would be even more unsettling. In consultation with her psychologist, we agreed. This meant that there had to be someone at Nadya's side every minute of the day and night -- quite an undertaking for a small church. But the congregation rose to the occasion and, for over two long years, Nadya was never left alone while our Dutch brethren, who funded her salary, generously continued to do so and we prayed for her restoration to health. Slowly but surely, Nadya came around.

I was not getting younger while the church grew and required increasingly more of my time and energies. Its financial abilities likewise grew. The church accepted responsibility for my salary and began paying HaGefen a yearly sum, gradually increased until almost one-half. In addition, the church undertook to pay a large portion of the costs for the upkeep of the HaGefen offices, also used by the church.

Years ago, at the College in Glasgow, I met John Ross, who later served as a missionary in Nigeria (1972-1976) and returned to Britain for family reasons. At College he was considered something of a misanthrope but he excelled in his studies and later transferred to South Wales Bible College and then went to Nigeria as a missionary. In the course of his time in the country he wrote an impressive article on

Gospel work in the country, published in the Banner of Truth magazine. In the course of one of my visits to Ireland I had the pleasure of renewing our acquaintance. John was serving a congregation of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of (Northern) Ireland, where God was blessing his ministry. John appeared to be pleasant, godly, dedicated and pastoral.

Eitan

Murdo MacLeod, then-Director of Christian Witness to Israel (CWI) was considering retirement, so I mentioned John to Murdo and was encouraged to put out feelers. The next time I was in Ireland, I did so. John was, in principle, interested and was ultimately taken on, first as Assistant to and then understudy of Murdo. Upon Murdo's retirement, he was appointed Director and later had his title changed to Chief Executive Officer.

John asked me to undertake more frequent overseas trips with a view to increasing support for CWI Israel. John had proposed that HaGefen (CWI Israel) become an independent body governed by an Israeli Board. I opposed the idea because I did not then deem the church in Israel mature enough to be responsible for such an undertaking, because I considered accountability to be extremely important and because I thought that the Church universal had a Gospel obligation toward the Jewish people and that CWI could serve as an instrument for the fulfilling of that obligation, at least for the Reformed branch of the Church. After discussion, John and I agreed that we would work together in effort to establish HaGefen on a firm financial footing that would greatly reduce the level of CWI's contribution to the annual budget, but that HaGefen would continue to be overseen by the CWI Board in Britain.

Once I began traveling overseas on a regular basis we faced a delicate problem: CWI/HaGefen was primarily engaged in translation and production of Christian literature in Israel. What could we report? -- another book published, a new issue of the Russian magazine, more chapters of the Bible translated. An extremely important ministry provided little excitement. The church easily drew attention. There were conversions, pastoral issues, opportunities for witness, instances of harassment, legal struggles. Supporting friends and churches were naturally inclined toward the more exciting undertakings and evidenced disproportionate interest in the church rather than HaGefen's valuable work.

I therefore took to emphasizing the publication ministry and the CWI Board's proven commitment to the health of the church in Israel at the expense of reporting about the church. In the Question and Answer sessions I would invariably be asked more about the church and, in my responses, repeatedly veered to the work of HaGefen, so much so that Bracha would often challenge me to refrain from such an effort. Such was the situation even at CWI Annual Meetings in Britain, normally held with Murdo MacLeod's active participation. Yet CWI was funding these tours. What should I do?

I addressed the church with my predicament and proposed that a substantial part of income incurred through these tours be contributed to HaGefen. To my delight, the church agreed. So, I continued to try and promote our literature work rather than the witness of the church while the church contributed increasing annual sums to CWI/HaGefen.

At the same time, I was convinced that the time had come for me to begin preparing a successor at the helm of HaGefen, both so as to ensure continuity and so as to enable me to devote all of my time and energies to the church. At that time we heard of the Kashtan family, recently returned from the USA. We were told the Kashtan's affirmed a Calvinistic understanding of the Gospel and that Eitan was a capable young man.

John agreed, so I contacted Eitan and suggested we meet. It turned out that the Kashtans were worshipping in a nearby church and that Eitan had an excellent job in a software company. He impressed me as a competent individual with leadership abilities and a consistently solid view of the Gospel. His Calvinism was combined with a firm Dispensational view of eschatology and what is known as a pre-Wrath rapture position over which one of his closest friends and a one-time supporter of John MacArthur broke with MacArthur. This gave rise to some concern, but Eitan assured me that he however firmly held this position it was not to be a test of fellowship or an emphasis in his labors. Ultimately, Eitan was offered the position of an under-study. To accept the offer, Eitan would have to forgo a lucrative income. He did not hesitate, and so joined the team.

Some months later he indicated his intention to commence worshipping with Grace and Truth. The church never encouraged individuals to transfer membership unless there was good reason to do so and transferals were conducted in an orderly, Christ-honoring manner. Eitan and Orit (his wife) had decided to transfer because the church with which they worshipped was decidedly non-Calvinistic although it affirmed an eschatology close to their own whereas Grace and Truth affirmed a generally agreed outline of eschatology without embracing any of the various schools of thought in this area. They transferred with the commendation of their Pastor and were accepted with affection.

A few more months passed, when the Pastor of the Kashtan's previous church contacted me. He knew we sought to maintain high standards and that we valued open communication between churches as a means of constructive fellowship and an expression of the unity of the church. He was calling to complain that Eitan and Orit were engaged with members of the congregation he served, speaking ill of him and encouraging members to leave and join other churches.

I assured him that this was a serious charge and that we would not ignore it. At the next Elders' meeting I reported it to the Elders of Grace and Truth. They agreed: if the charges were proven true, Eitan and Orit would have to be disciplined. I was commissioned to further investigate with the Pastor, report back and we would then decide on the next step.

I called the brother and asked him to narrate instances and present proof of these serious charges. He referenced specific instances and individuals with whom the Kashtans had purportedly talked but declined to provide their contact details. We then addressed the Kashtans, making it as clear as we could that we considered the charges grievous and that we were determined to investigate as best we could and take whatever measures were called for in response.

Eitan and Orit responded with humility and what appeared to be frank sincerity. They denied the charges and provided contact details of the individuals mentioned by the Pastor, inviting us to inquire of them whether the charges were true. This we did, only to learn from each of the individuals that Eitan and Orit had

not uttered a single word of criticism when asked why they had left their previous church to join Grace and Truth. I therefore contacted the Pastor, reported on our findings and inviting him to meet with us and the Kashtans in an effort to further confirm his accusations or clear their air by discovering he had been mistaken.

The Pastor was incensed! How dare we question the integrity of his word?! If he said the Kashtans had spoken ill of him, then that is what they did. After all, he is a Pastor! He would not be put on equal grounds with them, would not meet with them or with us and insisted that we put the Kashtans out of fellowship.

I reported all this to the Elders and we agreed: The Kashtans were to be cleared of the charges laid against them. The Pastor was to be informed that we would not investigate the matter further and requested that he leave off pursuing it. It was a relief -- to the Kashtans and to us -- to inform them of our decision. Needless to say, the Pastor was less than pleased and, for years, held a grudge against us over this sad event.

Ministry and Family News

Baruch's **Introduction to the Pauline Epistles** is now being reviewed by a publisher. Final editing of his **commentary on Romans** has been completed and handed over to the publisher. Baruch's **Studies in Matthew** is now on hand and work **on Obadiah** and **Nahum** is progressing well. Obadiah is written and Nahum is well on the way.

Editorial comments on **his translation of Matthew** were of high quality and extremely helpful. Baruch has now completed the second draft of Matthew. This will now be subjected to secondary scrutiny by the Linguistic Editor, some discussions held, and a third draft created and submitted to the various control groups for their review and comment.

A bi-weekly expository **series on the Pauline Epistles**, hosted by a church north of Tel-Aviv, has commenced. His **book on Colossians** is just about to be released by Crossbooks and may be ordered through Amazon, Barnes & Noble and Christian bookshops. Please remember to write a review for the Internet wholesalers – such reviews help promote the book.

After never darkening the threshold of the Messianic church in Jerusalem, **Baruch was recently invited to preach** there. Reception was warm and friendly. There are grounds for hope that he could be of some service to the church there, now undergoing important leadership changes.

Baruch has been asked to prepare **a draft Confession of Faith** for the Fellowship of Reformed Churches in Israel – a major undertaking with which he is presently involved.

Warm thanks are due to **Patmos International** for the very generous financial support they have provided since my retirement in 2007. As this support draws to a close, I would be grateful if friends and churches would consider raising the level of their own support so as to make up for the substantial decrease. Our monthly income is expected to drop by some \$3,550 as of July.

A hearty thanks goes to those of you who informed us of your **intentions for the coming year**. We are still looking forward to hearing from a number. Even if you need to inform us that you will no longer be able to support us, knowing what we can expect enables us to budget responsibly. We are still far from making up for the

loss of our major supporter, rendering your support and information concerning your support all the more valuable.

We are in the throes of packing our belongings, getting rid of some and preparing to move into **our new home**. Our eldest daughter, Avital, plans to come in April to help us with packing. We expect to commence moving by the end of that month.

Most of the windows in our **USA trip** have been booked. We still have a few in or near the following locations: Louisville KY, Kansas City KS, Dallas and San Antonio TX, Phoenix AZ. Interested churches are invited to write posthaste to languageservice4U@gmail.com

Thank you for your prayers!

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You can help by purchasing copies of Baruch's books from Barnes & Noble or from Amazon, by asking for them at your local bookstore and **by posting reviews of these books** on Barnes & Noble or Amazon websites. Positive reviews help sell the books!

COME LET US REASON TOGETHER (On the Unity of Jews and Gentiles in the church), P&R. This book presents Christ as the fullness of divine revelation and his work as sufficient for our whole salvation.

JONAH: A PROPHET ON THE RUN, Shepherd Press. A devotional commentary on the book of Jonah.

MALACHI: A PROPHET IN TIMES OF DISTRESS, Crossbooks. A devotional commentary on the book of Malachi.

Available from Amazon and from Barnes & Noble

Baruch's sermons may be heard on [Sermon Audio](#)

To remain abreast of developing circumstances in Israel, visit the [MaozWeb](#) or "follow" Baruch on [FaceBook](#), [LinkedIn](#) and on [Twitter](#) (@BaruchMaoz).

Intermittent bulletins are produced as necessary.



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