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Israel Following Recent Elections

The results of **recent elections in Israel** are a far cry from what I had hoped against hope we would see. I tremble for my country at this time and am praying earnestly for our next Government. God holds the hands of kings in his hand, moving them in any direction he chooses. That is a comfort. Richard Baukham's little booklet on the Theology of the Book of Revelation has been a tremendous encouragement and a source of real joy. Finally someone who gets at the essence of the matter: Jesus reigns, and all the machinations and exertions of Satan only serve to further His kingdom.

Prime Minister Netanyahu has not yet formed the next Government. There is little doubt that he will succeed in doing so. At present the various parties to be included in his coalition are jockeying for positions, seeking to minimize their gains. By May 6 a Government must be formed or new elections will be called. Until then, few if any are willing to concede hoped-for achievements.

Three options are available to Mr. Netanyahu: a Government with a bare parliamentary majority of 61, which would lay him open to extortion by any member of his Government or of the parliament; a Government with a majority 67, which would provide stability but involve the loss of important Cabinet seats to his party because they would be granted to other parties; a broad coalition with the leftist Mahaneh Tsioni, which would force Netanyahu to forestall construction in the West Bank and drive him to negotiate with the Palestinians.

Netanyahu's preference is for the second of the three. Such a Government would be a coalition of the Orthodox parties (who seek to roll back legislation that affected their constituency by encouraging them to work, requiring their young men enlist for national service and imposing the study of English, mathematics and history in their schools), and all of the right-wing parties. The policies expected of such a Government would be nationalistic, most likely leading to difficult international relations, which in turn could lead to political, military and economic difficulties as the international community responds to the Government's actions. What is of greater concern is that such a Government is likely to further polarize Israeli society and weaken its moral fiber while adding to the disparity between Jewish and Arab (and other non-Jewish) citizens.

Christ in a Traditional Jewish Passover?

Recently, Jews around the world celebrated Passover. The Messianic Movement makes much of traditional Jewish practices, insisting that Christ is repeatedly portrayed in them. Some adherents of the Movement visit churches with a "Christ in the Passover" presentation.

One of the features often displayed has to do with what is known in Jewish tradition as the *Afikoman* – the middle of three leaves of unleavened bread, broken and hidden until the end of the meal, when it is to be sought. Whoever finds it is to be rewarded. Like all modern unleavened bread (*matsa* in Hebrew), the leaf is pierced and stripped to ensure there is no leavening. The Messianic argument is that the *Afikoman* is a symbol of Christ, pierced for our sakes, by whose stripes we are healed, broken for our transgressions and now hidden for the Jewish people. Those who find him are amply rewarded, with salvation.

Not only does such a presentation attach inspired meaning to an uninspired tradition – as if the Holy Spirit was active in guiding the rabbis as they formulated Jewish tradition – but this is a factual distortion.

There is no consensus as to what was the *Afikoman* actually represents. Some believe the original reference was to a dessert after the Passover meal, others to Grecian post-feast debauchery. Even the students of the much esteemed Rabbi Judah the Prince, who compiled the *Mishnah* (approximately 200 CE) could not agree as to its meaning. The Talmud (500 CE) presents answers from three of his disciples to the question: "What is an *Afikoman*?"

Rabbi Abba Arika claimed that Rabbi Judah said the term *Afikoman* meant that people should not visit other families following the Passover meal. Samuel of Nehardea insisted that the *Afikoman* is a welcome food, like mutton and pigeons which the Talmud (Berahot 47a) describes elsewhere even after the main course. Johanan bar Nappaha said that the *Afikoman* consisted of nuts and dried fruit, common desserts at the time (Pesahim 119b).

To these we should add the *responsa* given by Rabbi Anani ben Sasson in the Jerusalem Talmud (approximately 400 CE) that *Afikoman* was the family singing during or after the Passover meal.

The word *Afikoman* has a number of possible origins, mostly from Greek and having to do with revelry, festivals, and merry-making. All kinds of revelry took place at the end of Greek festive meals. Sometimes the celebrants would attend other houses and continue the party. At other times they would remain at table to sing. It is possible that Rabbi Judah was saying, "Following the seder, don't go crazy, just go to bed."

Rabbis of later generations followed Samuel and Johanan's interpretation in understanding that the *Afikoman* was dessert. They also accepted Judah bar Ezekiel's injunction to end the seder eating *matza*, which injunction appears immediately following the Talmudic discussion of the *Afikoman*.

Apparently the students of Rashi in the 12th century connected the two and began calling the *matza* eaten at the end of the meal the *Afikoman* (in a *responsa* regarding an occasion when Rashi forgot to eat the *Afikoman matza*).

Apparently Maimonides (1135/8 – 1204) went on to misread a Talmudic passage (Pesachim 109a) in which Eliezer ben Hurcanus said: "They hasten [the eating of] the *matza* in order to keep the children awake." Maimonides, writing in the 12th century, took to say "they snatch *matza* from the children to keep the children awake."

The practice of hiding the *Afikoman* appeared in rabbinic literature only during and after the 12th century. For example, Jonathan ben David HaCohen wrote in that same century: "The adults steal the *matza* from the children in order to play with them." Over the centuries, the tradition changed among Ashkenazi Jews to hiding the *Afikoman*, children finding it and the head of the table then redeeming it with a gift. The first record of this is in the 17th century. Rabbi Yair Bacharach condemned the practice to no avail: the custom made its way to Jewish communities around the world.

Ministry and Family News

For once (I don't remember this ever happening before) I exceeded my plans and have completed writing the **commentaries on Obadiah and Nahum** and am now engaged in translating my commentary on **Colossians** to Hebrew. This is the only time I wrote a commentary in English and am translating it into Hebrew. Normally it is the other way around. But I needed that commentary for a series in Germany and in the US, so I reverted the process. Going through Colossians again, I am thrilled with the glories of Christ and his sufficiency, as well as with Paul's view of the church in light of that sufficiency! What an amazing Gospel we declare!

Of course, the Hebrew version differs in some details from the English -- our circumstances differ. But the principles are as relevant today as they were 2000 years ago, and to the fledgling Israeli church as they were to the church in Colossae are to the church in the West.

I do not expect to complete the translation before **departing for the US**. We are expected to move house in May and that will take up some of my time as well. I'm working among boxes of packed books and clothing, kitchenware and household goods of various kinds. Most of my books are now inaccessible and will be so until we move. We are now investing in minor alterations and additions to the house to render it more suited to our needs and more efficient to maintain.

At one stage I had to put the translation aside for three other, shorter, projects. First, I was asked by the fellowship of Reformed churches in the country (Baptist and Presbyterian) to create **a synthesis of Reformed Confessions**, with additions that will address the Charismatic and Messianic movements. This was an exercise of love and a great opportunity to learn and to sharpen my theological thinking.

Second, having received editorial comments on **my translation of Matthew** in the modern Hebrew version, I needed to go over these, learn from them, make corrections, defend renderings I deem more correct and finalize a second draft for resubmission.

Third, I was asked to prepare a 4-part mini-series of sermons on **the essence of the church and the nature of its function** in light of its essence. Since the doctrine and practice of church life are matters of great interest and concern for me, I was

delighted to accept the undertaking and will soon be preaching the series to the congregation with which Bracha and I worship.

I continue to teach **a bi-weekly course on the Pauline epistles**. Last week I taught the two letters to the Corinthians. Next week, God willing, I will be teaching Romans. This is a survey that will be produced in booklet form. I had offered it to the Israel Bible Society, but they are clogged up with publication projects and cannot now undertake another. HaChotam, run by my friend and former colleague, Eitan, is planning to publish it.

Speaking of publishers, my (English) book on **Colossians** was print-ready when the Print on Demand publisher (Crossbooks) folded. I am trying to see if I can at least get my money back while another publisher has committed to publishing the book. This is a major spanner in my spokes, as it will not be ready for our annual trip to the US. Malachi is set to be republished by them in 2016.

Passover time is near, as is **Easter**. What an opportunity to remember God's victorious grace.

To date, we are very far from making up the **shortfall**, come June, with Patmos' generous support coming to an end. We're looking at ways to manage without reducing our work in the future. Churches and individuals who may be interested in supporting our work are invited to write and make any inquiries they might wish to make.

A **hearty thanks** goes to those of you who have 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 continue your support, 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. Please do write us.

The windows in our **USA trip** have been booked with the exception of Phoenix AZ. Interested parties are invited to write to languageservice4U@gmail.com

Thank you for your prayers!

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. This book is **presently unavailable**. We plan to republish it in 2016.

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