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The Scene in Israel

In a surprise move just disclosed, Prime Minister Netanyahu and opposition Leader Isaac Herzog had agreed on a revolutionary step that, if implemented, would have **transformed the Middle East, opened a door of almost unlimited opportunity for Israel and revolutionized both Arab and Israeli society**. They had framed an agreement according to which the Opposition would join a re-formed Government and offer the Palestinians a freeze on all Israeli settlement activity in the West Bank, followed by extensive Israeli territorial compromises, an independent State, a division of Jerusalem between Israel and the **Palestinian State-to-be** and access to Israeli ports on the coasts to the Mediterranean and the Red Sea. These steps were to be preceded by Israel publicly embracing the principles of the Saudi peace plan. Negotiations were to be brokered by the Saudi King, the Egyptian President, the King of Jordan and the United States.

Before such an offer could be made, there would of necessity be a shake-up of the Israeli Government, with the more right-wing elements departing, replaced by the main opposition party, with Mr. Herzog as Minister of Foreign Affairs and his co-leader, Mrs. Tzipi Livni in charge of negotiations.

Had all this occurred, and had the Palestinians agreed to these generous offers, the ground would have been cut under the feet of most extremists (although it is clear that there would be need to deal with their determined resistance, probably for some years to come). Iran's hot air balloon would be popped, together with Hezbollah's raison d'etre. Hamas would be greatly weakened and the countries of the Middle East would be able to redirect the considerable resources, now devoted to the conflict, toward education, health, infrastructure and industry.

Such a broadly-based government could also, at long last, weaken the chokehold Orthodox religious parties have placed on the Jewish State. Such an event would enable a reformulation of our system of Government, ridding us of a system in which a multiplicity of political parties imposes the need for coalition Governments, thereby reducing governability and according disproportionate clout to small parties who hold the balance of power.

Benjamin Netanyahu, with all his faults, would have become Israel's most influential, most important Prime Minister, second only to Ben Gurion. He would have been remembered, lauded and studied in history; the Israeli economy would be freed of its' enormous military budget, as well as the costs of creating, upholding, and defending the settlements. Tens of

thousands of guards, now protecting our malls, coffee houses, supermarkets and cultural events could undertake productive employment. Israeli young men would not have to spend some 10% of the year in the military – not counting the time spent when active combat occurs.

Within a short space of time, Israel and the Middle East would not be recognizable. Our schools, hospitals, industry and commerce would be transformed, leading to a significant transformation of our society. Steps toward this direction were to an abrupt end, because Netanyahu got cold feet in light of recent opposition he faced to the removal of nine Israeli houses illegally built on Palestinian land.

Elior Azariah, an **Israeli soldier** who killed a disabled Palestinian assailant, on the ground, struggling for life, was, found guilty of **manslaughter** and sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment over and above the 12 months he had been incarcerated, awaiting trial. The sentence caused an uproar, with politicians calling for it to be commuted or the soldier pardoned, while others called for a more stringent punishment. Azariah, represented by an individual viewed by many as one of Israel's most notorious lawyers, has decided to appeal, as has the prosecution.

The police continue their investigations concerning **alleged corruption in the Prime Minister's Office**, reaching all the way to the Prime Minister himself. A growing number of Netanyahu's surrogates have been called in for questioning, and a number indicted. Some of the matters being investigated reflect directly on Israel's security, including the purchase of submarines, their maintenance contracts and the purchase of combat boats for the defense of Israel's coastline and gas rigs in the Mediterranean. **Renewed elections** are increasingly likely. Political parties are beginning to rev their engines, new parties are being formed and intra-party negotiations commenced.

The **Israeli currency**, the Shekel, is now one of the strongest in the world, creating a problem for our economy because the price of exports has increased while imports are cheaper. Even the value of expected income from the gas fields on our shoreline, denominated in foreign currency, has therefore been eroded. The twin factors of relatively low industrial productivity and the need to import raw materials create a significant challenge to Israeli industry, which increasingly focuses on technological development and the know-how, rather than on physical manufacturing.

Government policies have led to a sharp increase of Orthodox men (16%) engaged in the study of religion instead of joining the work-force, thereby **increasing poverty among the Orthodox**. At the same time that **the economy is booming** and the number of unemployed is at an all-time low, the number of citizens **slipped under the poverty line** has increased while the average standard of living has risen. The cost of food, electricity, medical services and other basics has increased while income remains largely dormant. The Euro and the US Dollar, once almost 4 Shekels to a unit, have respectively slipped to 3.64 and 3.67. The cost of housing continues to rise.

It appears like the scene in **Syria** is stabilizing, with Assad's reign established on the barrels of Russian gunships, the Iranian National Guard and Hezbollah's armed men. Israel is now concerned lest that **Iran** establishes a forward post on our northern Border with Syria. At the same time, tensions on our southern border are increasing. **Hamas in Gaza** has been flexing its muscles. Assumed cooperation with ISIS in Sinai has resulted in rockets being fired into Israel. Experts claim that the human plight in Gaza is reaching a point in which an explosion is inevitable. Hamas prefers tunneling into Israel to reconstructing houses, improving services and repairing infrastructure. Electricity is available 4-7 hours a day at most and the majority of men from the age of 21 and up are unemployed. Food is scarce. Israel has offered to assist in restoring the Strip, building a port and opening an airport in exchange for disarmament, but

Hamas will have none of it.

The **number of churches in Israel** continues to rise. I have now lost count. But many of these are small works at the very beginning of what we hope and pray are first steps toward a virile Gospel witness throughout the country. Many church members are making solid social **contributions to the needy in the country** by way of pregnancy centers, caring for substance abusers, the homeless and refugees. Our greatest need is the cultivation of God-fearing holiness.

Ministry and Family News

The Gospels of Matthew and Mark in THE TRANSLATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT are to be handed over to our various control groups. The third stage of editorial process, in which Shoshi and I discuss all but final editorial issues, will be stalled while Bracha and I visit the US, between the end of March to the middle of August, God willing. Meanwhile, Shoshi will edit and send me the other Gospels, Acts and as much as she can of Paul's letters. In the course of the trip, I intend to review her comments and edit as much as possible of my work in their light. I have already edited most of the New Testament epistles in light of her earlier comments.

Time will also be devoted to the BOOK ON CHURCH LIFE and to the second year of DAILY DEVOTIONS. The first 365 devotions have been prepared for the printer and submitted to a Christian publisher I have never used before – if we can get some of my books into the hands of other publishers, we shall be able to reach another potential readership. It is my intention to dedicate the book to the memory of Victor Smadja, who labored hard and long on the part of the church and was one of the pioneers of our faith in Israel.

OUR VISIT TO THE US is scheduled to commence on March 27th and end on August 16th. A week later **Avital** and her oldest daughter, **Noam**, expect to arrive in Israel. Noam plans to remain in Israel for 10 months and Avital is coming to help her settle in. We're excited about having them with us and Noam for almost a whole year. **Shlomit** has taken up part-time teacher's replacement to help with her children's schooling and **Tamar** has taken up work as well, to assist in her own children's schooling. Having completed her studies, **Katya** is now working as a surgical nurse in Montreal. **Rose** continues to pursue her studies and to supplement her income by working as a dental assistant.

A number of windows in the course of the tour remain open, particularly in AL, TN, OH, MI and ND. However, their number has decreased. If any of MaozNews readers can refer churches in those States to us, or can inform us of accommodation arrangements available at a reasonable price for mid-week-stays when we have no engagements, we'll be grateful.

In Christ by grace,

Baruch and Bracha Maoz

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

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

The devotional commentaries are well suited for personal devotions and group Bible studies

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

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