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Some Observations on the Israeli Church

One of the students at the Israel College of the Bible conducted a limited survey of young, professedly Christian, Israelis who do not attend church. The finding, with the proposed evaluations and suggestions that followed, are disconcerting, primarily because they reflect worrisome trends in the believing community in our country.

Three primary reasons were given for non-attendance. The first was an desire for an egalitarian context in which all are equal rather than one in which frontal exposition and application is practiced and in which spontaneity is not the primary guideline. A distaste for regularity, for order and for liturgy, was expressed

The second was, on the one hand, a (conflicting) desire for deeper, more consistent and more challengingly relevant teaching and, on the other, a desire for shorter teaching sessions.

The third was a lack of a sense of committed community. Many respondents had been offended by someone, which experience became the breaking-point after which they ceased to attend church.

Secondary issues mentioned were the large percentage of foreigners in churches and the disparity between professed values and those actually practiced.

Suggested conclusions were, to my mind, astounding. No thought was given to biblical standards which might exist and to which church conduct and worship should confirm. No thought was given to the role of obedience or to the glory of God in church life. The operative considerations had to do with how to render church life and worship more appealing to disenchanting but professedly Christian respondents. Hence, it was suggested that

1. Israeli churches, already highly non-liturgical, should introduce further spontaneity, consciously endeavoring to distance themselves from worldwide church practice. The unity of the church and the universal applicability of biblical injunctions was not even raised.

2. Frontal teaching should be briefer, with less frequent Communion services and fewer frontal exhortations and more opportunity for congregational interaction. Rather than hearing God's word, the people prefer to hear one another. The authoritative declaration of God's word was deemed less suitable to the "needs" of the people.

Israeli young Christians are hankering after reality. They are tired of superficial preaching that does not delve into God's word and therefore cannot feed, challenge or equip them for life. They are grasping at straws. I am immensely impressed with the moral, psychological and social health of these young, second generation Christians. But they are adrift and do not know it. They're spiritually malnourished and believe that the answer is in more fast-food, froth and sugar. They're dedicated, but more often than not channel their energies into non-church activities because they have given up on the church of Christ. They are convinced that the church should be made to suit their expectations rather than God's.

Some of the finest among them have enlisted in various instructional, humanitarian and evangelistic organizations in the country that are further eroding the role of the church and that are ill-equipped to provide their enlistees with the kind of well-rounded edification that the church was framed by God to provide. More could be said, but the writing is on the wall: how long will the professed church in Israel remain the true church if these trends solidify? A clear, firmly biblical voice needs to be heard – and heeded!

Israel

The wave of corruption investigations the police are conducting is staggering. The fact that highly-placed individuals being investigated is nothing less than frightening. Senior politicians, Government officials, Ministers of State, senior military personnel and others in the defense establishment, mayors, prominent businessmen, former Prime Minister's Chiefs of Staff, Newspaper editors, the Prime Minister's wife – the list goes on and on, to our shame and consternation. Major issues of national security, of the abuse of power and others, relating to the exploitation of national resources, are at stake.

A society bent on hedonism is consuming itself, while the Orthodox seek to buttress their influence and broaden the grip they have on Israel's education, labor, health and housing ministries. Reading the biblical prophets today is a frightening experience. Will we as a nation once again face the wrath of our holy God?

Brethren, pray for us

Security

Iran is strengthening its' position in Syria, Lebanon and Gaza while Hezbollah in Lebanon is emboldened by successes and by military experience gained supporting the Assad regime in Syria. Hezbollah now has a standing army, as well-equipped as that of its' host country, Lebanon.

Israel has preparing for the next round of fighting, expected to be on two fronts: in the south-west with Hamas in Gaza and with Hezbollah in the north. The prospects of Syria joining in are also being taken into account. Hezbollah has threatened to utilize its' 100,000 rockets, which have a range that covers most of Israel, as well as to capture Israeli villages in Galilee. Hamas, also preparing for the next round of fighting, will seek to utilize its attack tunnels, unless they are discovered in time by Israel, as well as to use their own rocket arsenal. Israel, on the other hand, has responded in kind by affirming that the goal of Israel's military response will be the ultimate termination of the threat posed by these two organizations, rather than its' containment.

Society

Life continues as normal in spite of the turbulent circumstances. Rumors of looming elections appear at this stage to be vacuous. None of the parties presenting in the Coalition are ready for or interested in elections and are likely to punish the Prime Minister if he abbreviates the present Government's term. Since, if elected, he is likely to need them to form his next Government, that is a risk he does not deem wise to take.

Israeli society continues to polarize, with secular Jews against the orthodox, the Orthodox against Reform and Conservative Jews, Jews against Arabs (there is a growing racist trend in Israeli society), the middle class against the rich, the poor, the invalids and disenfranchised against the government, right-wing politicians against the Supreme Court, left-wing politicians against the State Attorney-General, the Minister of Culture and Arts against "non-patriotic" elements, the Minister of Justice against the "non-Zionist" courts. Having lost its' moorings, Israel is a society in search for identity, a society in desperate need of the Gospel. But it is need of a Gospel that is firmly rooted in an informed and coherent world-view in which God is loved and feared, where his word is understood, loved and obeyed and which motivates Christians to be so occupied with God's glory, rather than with comfort or success, that we will live our lives with courageous abandon, come what may.

Ministry and Family News

I returned home after a short stop-over of one week in Britain, the primary purpose for which was a visit to our friend and elder brother in Christ, Erroll Hulse. I cannot sufficiently thank the many churches and individuals who made this trip in the US and Britain so memorable, who trusted us, welcomed us and cared for us so generously. Kindness was expressed in countless ways. Bracha and I are grateful. As indicated in MaozNews 114, Erroll passed into his reward before I was able to visit him. His memory and his solid, loving biblically-orientated contribution lives on. With many others, I thank God for all he meant to the cause of Christ.

I'm presently preaching through Galatians in two churches – the one Bracha and I attend and a church in Jerusalem. I've written 214 expository devotion on the Pentateuch and am now in chapter 12 of Deuteronomy. Once this series on the Pentateuch is completed (151 more installments to go), I will not write further such devotions. The first book, on the lesser known New Testament letters, and this second, on the books of Moses, will suffice. They

require a great deal of time and effort. I prefer to devote the rest of my time to other projects.

David (HaGefen) has asked me to assist him by translating a book on the role of women in the church and the family. David is doing an excellent job at HaGefen and I am happy to support him in any way I can. Work on church life has, therefore, been put side until I complete that project. I expect to complete it by the first week of October, or thereabouts, and then revert to the book on the church.

I await editorial comment on the rest of my translation of the New Testament before proceeding to translate that last remaining book, Revelation.

All three of our daughters came to Israel for the memorial held for Bracha's mother. It was a sad time around the grave in the company of family who have no faith and no real grounds for comfort. On the other hand, it was a sweet-sweet time of family, with the girls refreshing their bonds and reaching out one to another.

In Christ by grace,

Baruch and Bracha Maoz

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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, a devotional commentary on the book of Malachi. Founders Press.

COLOSSIANS: The All-Sufficient Savior, a devotional commentary on the book of Colossians. Founders Press.

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

Baruch's sermons may be heard on [Sermon Audio](#)
To remain abreast of developing circumstances in Israel, visit the [MaozWeb](#)
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Intermittent bulletins are produced as necessary



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