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**A Letter to The Churches in Israel – Part One, pg. 1**  
**Ministry and family News – pg. 5**

### **We've Lost Something Valuable**

A letter to the Churches in Israel

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Part One of Two

Baruch Maoz

Dear sisters and brothers,

I'll soon be 74. I've been limping after the Lord for some 54 years. I thank God for his remarkable blessings on the church of Christ in Israel. I was brought to Christ toward the end of 1963. There were 200-300 Israeli believers in the country and not a single Hebrew-speaking congregation which I could join. The tiny congregations that existed then were led by dedicated brethren from overseas and testimony to the Gospel was borne discretely, clandestinely.

I recall the days when the Israel Defense Forces refused to allow believers to undergo Officers' Course for fear that they would constitute a security risk, when Christians had their employment terminated once the fact of their faith became known, that churches could not rent premises, let alone build their own facilities. I remember the days one could easily count the number of children and youth in any one local church.

Today, by the grace of God, the situation is wholly different. Christians are intertwined in all areas of national life, excel at work and in military service and contribute, each according to his or her ability, both to society and to the State. The number of churches has grown and continues to grow each year, and many churches have their own facilities (bought or rented). A second and third generation of Christians has been born and, contrary to what is usually the case, they are devoted, energetic and speak of their faith without fear. There are Christian bodies that are active in defense of the unborn, assisting substance abusers, refugees, holocaust survivors, the homeless and the poor. Conferences are attended by scores and even hundreds of young people. A Bible College has been established and various other courses are available to help confirm, strengthen and defend the faith of many. Organizations are active in evangelism and an increasing number of Israelis serve churches in various capacities. Inter-congregational relationships have also improved.

All this and more is a welcome cause to give God thanks and to be encouraged. Still, we've lost something valuable.

We've lost something valuable and central to the Gospel. We've lost faith in the power of the Gospel to bring about the transformations in the lives of individuals and nations for which it is designed. So, we qualify and beautify it to ensure it meets the expectations of our audience in the hope that by this means we will manage to persuade them.

Paul did not hesitate to address his audience in terms that stood in direct contradiction to their expectations:

"Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.' Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles" (I Corinthians 1:17-23).

Furnished with such a perspective, the apostle did not hesitate to declare, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16). We insist that we believe as he did, but we do not act like he did. We have lost the consciousness that he had, that our message is the living, active, powerful word of God: "O land, land, land, hear the word of the Lord" (Jeremiah 22:29)! "The lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken; who can but prophesy?" (Amos 3:8)?! Instead, we present the Gospel as one option in the supermarket of opinions that lead to happiness, although the best of them all.

The fear of God is not evident in our conduct. It is not evident in the way we preach the Gospel. It is not evident in the way we conduct our services. It is not evident in the way we dress, and it is not evident in the priorities we daily exemplify. In the long run, we differ but slightly from the world around us, although we claim to be nicer.

Paul insisted, "we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth" (II Corinthians 13:8). Such a conviction drove him to speak unequivocally, sharply against those who opposed the truth:

"What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?" (I Corinthians 4:21).

"Even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8-9)!

"Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh" (Philippians 3:2)!

“I have handed over to Satan” (I Timothy 1:20).

This is what the apostle learned from the Lord Jesus himself, who did not hesitate to point to those who departed from the ways of God and to describe them as “hypocrites”, “sons of hell”, “blind guides”, “whitewashed graves that look well on the outside but whose insides are full of dead men’s bones and all kinds of defilements” (Matthew 23). In today’s terms, Jesus was “not nice”.

Among us, in our churches and at our conferences, “nice” is often substituted for holiness and most of what takes place is often a matter of entertainment, of pleasing the audience. God requires of our teachers to declare the truth, and the truth is often extremely inconvenient. So many prefer to remain within the boundaries of general agreement, of what is considered to be interesting or causes pleasure. When did you last hear a piercing sermon that awoke in you a disturbing awareness of your sin, that evoked shame and that called upon you to turn from yourself and renew your devotion to God? Are you and I not in need of such sermons?

Do our teachers encourage us to think, to delve deeply into the meaning of God’s word? Do they demonstrate how this is to be done? Or do they rather impress us with supposedly spiritual discoveries that no-one really knows how they were achieved?

What is our teachers’ main burden when they speak to us of the End Time? – Political developments? Israel? The temple? Antichrist? Satan and his angels? Why does Jesus have such a minor role in your view of the End Times, and why does God hardly count? Why is our focus not on him, his glory, the accomplishment of his will, and on Christ? Why do sermons on the End Times not fill us with pure longings, the fear of God and gratitude?

When did you last hear someone address the church as Jesus did when he challenged conventions and traditions that are generally accepted among those who claim to have faith, who viewed themselves as the climax of spirituality? We want to be accepted by our people, so we don prayer shawls and phylacteries. We forget that God called our forefathers to create a society that will differ fundamentally from what is generally accepted, and that the church of Christ is likewise called to be different:

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:1-2).

“You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation ... For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry (I Peter 2:9-12, 4:3).

Our teachers labor to please us. For that reason, they are unwilling to call us into account, correct our opinions and force us to think' to examine ourselves and learn to be ashamed, to the end that we repent and draw closer to God. Some have become court prophets who declare only what we find convenient to hear, and are unwilling to treat us as did Michaiah the son of Imlah treated the king of Israel:

"Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred men, and said to them, 'Shall I go to battle against Ramoth-gilead, or shall I refrain?' And they said, 'Go up, for the Lord will give it into the hand of the king.' But Jehoshaphat said, 'Is there not here another prophet of the Lord of whom we may inquire?' And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, 'There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of the Lord, Micaiah the son of Imlah, but I hate him, for he never prophesies good concerning me, but evil.' And Jehoshaphat said, 'Let not the king say so. Then the king of Israel summoned an officer and said, 'Bring quickly Micaiah the son of Imlah.'

"Now the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah were sitting on their thrones, arrayed in their robes, at the threshing floor at the entrance of the gate of Samaria, and all the prophets were prophesying before them. And Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah made for himself horns of iron and said, "Thus says the Lord, 'With these you shall push the Syrians until they are destroyed'." And all the prophets prophesied so and said, "Go up to Ramoth-gilead and triumph; the Lord will give it into the hand of the king."

"And the messenger who went to summon Micaiah said to him, 'Behold, the words of the prophets with one accord are favorable to the king. Let your word be like the word of one of them, and speak favorably.' But Micaiah said, 'As the Lord lives, what the Lord says to me, that I will speak.' And when he had come to the king, the king said to him, 'Micaiah, shall we go to Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall we refrain?' And he answered him, 'Go up and triumph; the Lord will give it into the hand of the king.' But the king said to him, 'How many times shall I make you swear that you speak to me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord?' And he said, 'I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd. And the Lord said, "These have no master; let each return to his home in peace".' And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, 'Did I not tell you that he would not prophesy good concerning me, but evil? ' " (1 Kings 22:6-18).

The true God – the God of our fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the father of our Lord Jesus Christ – is greater than all the convenient frameworks we have created for ourselves. He is not a tame house god whose primary interest is our happiness. He is a God who breaks through barriers, awesome and terrible, evoking wonder:

"The Lord is a jealous and avenging God; the Lord is avenging and wrathful; the Lord takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies. The Lord is slow to anger and great in power, and the Lord will by no means clear the guilty. His way is in whirlwind and storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebukes the sea and makes it dry; he dries up all the rivers; Bashan and Carmel wither; the bloom of Lebanon withers. The mountains quake before him; the hills melt; the earth heaves before him, the world and all who dwell in it. Who can stand before his indignation? Who can endure the heat of his anger? His wrath is poured out like fire, and the rocks are broken into pieces by him" (Nahum 1:2-6).

His main interest is not our happiness but his own glory: "By myself I have sworn; from my mouth has gone out in righteousness a word that shall not return: 'To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance' " (Isaiah 45:23).

## Ministry and Family News

November 11, 1963:

Long my imprisoned spirit lay,  
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;  
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray—  
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;  
My chains fell off, my heart was free,  
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.  
Amazing love! How can it be,  
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

No condemnation now I dread;  
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine;  
Alive in Him, my living Head,  
And clothed in righteousness divine,  
Bold I approach th'eternal throne,  
And claim the crown, through Christ  
my own.  
Amazing love! How can it be,  
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

'Tis mystery all: th'Immortal dies:  
Who can explore His strange design?  
In vain the firstborn seraph tries  
To sound the depths of love divine.  
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore,  
Let angel minds inquire no more.  
Amazing love! How can it be,  
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

He left His Father's throne above  
So free, so infinite His grace—  
Emptied Himself of all but love,  
And bled for Adam's helpless race:  
'Tis mercy all, immense and free,  
For O my God, it found out me!  
Amazing love! How can it be,  
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

I give God thanks.

Editing MY COMMENTARY ON ROMANS is progressing nicely and should be completed by next week. The DAILY DEVOTIONAL SERIES so far includes 321 devotions, commencing at Genesis and ending in Judges, so far over 250,000 words. Readership has vastly increased and comments are encouraging. It is my intention to complete this series by the end of November. I'm well advanced in preparations for translating Revelation, the last of the NEW TESTAMENT books.

Responses to the ESTIMATE OF CHURCH LIFE IN ISRAEL TODAY, distributed by various means among the churches here (the first of two parts is given above) have likewise been encouraging. An encouraging trend is evident toward closer and more meaningful cooperation between congregations as well as toward a more coherent theological stance. Some 15 years ago I initiated a pact among churches in central Israel, according to which signatory churches would support and oversee each other's discipline. An extensive document was drawn up, outlining the grounds and means of discipline, the steps to be taken and the form in which both mutual

oversight and support in areas of discipline would be realized by signatory churches. To my delight, this document served as a basis for discussion in a recent national inter-congregational conference.

This is yet another step in the right direction. Increased doctrinal and moral clarity on the one hand and committed fellowship on the other can only add to the health of churches in the country.

We have begun planning the 2018 VISIT TO THE US. This time we do not expect to drive further west than Texas or further north than Kansas and Illinois, commencing the trip in Pennsylvania, flying over to Seattle Washington to visit the two girls and their families there, and conducting a short excursion to Montreal Canada to visit Katya and her family. Southwards, we expect to visit southern Florida. **Churches in the interested in our visiting them** are encouraged to write to us as soon as possible.

We're also in the throes of preparing our 2018 BUDGET. If you presently support us and intend to continue to do so next year, please do write in the very near future to indicate the level of your support. This will enable us to frame a responsible budget, as well as to plan for next year's endeavors.

**Noam**, our eldest granddaughter, has just turned 18. As you might recall, she is in Israel until the end of May 2018, serving in a volunteer capacity. We're thrilled to have her nearby and with the opportunity to enjoy being active grandparents. **Keith**, Shlomit's husband, is struggling with ill health while enjoying God's blessing on his pastoral labors. **Marcus**, Tamar's husband, has left for a two-week overseas undertaking on behalf of Boeing, his employer. Tamar now has to cope with three small children, work and life all on her own.

**Katya**, who works as a nurse in the operating room of the Jewish Hospital in Montreal, has just celebrated another birthday and **Rose** is busy with her studies.

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.

**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](#)  
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Intermittent bulletins are produced as necessary



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