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A Letter to The Churches in Israel – Part Two, pg. 1
A Note on the Recent Declaration Concerning Jerusalem, pg. 4
Ministry and family News, pg. 4

We've Lost Something Valuable

A letter to the Churches in Israel Part Two

Issued September 2017, translated into English November 2017,

Dear sisters and brothers,

We have lost the sense of loving horror, of a virulent fear of God that is full of life that turns the world upside down. We are unwilling to challenge the world because we do not want the Gospel to do that to us – again and again. We want comfort, peace, stability. We want to be able to control the situation in which we find ourselves, and are unwilling to recognize the fact that the only one who has a right to such control is the Creator of the universe.

In consequence, we proclaim a Gospel that speaks of happiness, health, emotional welfare and strength: "If only you turn to Jesus, all will be well". In contrast with the prophets of Israel, we have nothing to say about national responsibility or the sins of our nation. We dare not warn our people of the wrath of God and we dare not tell them that our fate in this land will be determined to a large extent by our attitude to the weak in our society, to widows, orphans, the members of single parent families to the Palestinians and to any who are in need of our kindness.

Hosea did not hesitate to declare,

Call his name Jezreel, for in just a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel." ...

She conceived again and bore a daughter. And the Lord said to him, "Call her name No Mercy, for I will no more have mercy on the house of Israel, to forgive them at all ... I will not save them by bow or by sword or by war or by horses or by horsemen" (Hose 1:4-1).

For fear that insistence on principles of faith (theology, doctrine) is contrary to love for one's fellow man, there are those among us who prefer to love one another at the expense of God's truth. Instead of humbly insisting on the truth, they forgo it for unity, and thereby forgo the opportunity to grow in Christ, broaden their understanding and correct their views. Paul did not believe this to be the right course:

When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him,

so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?" (Galatians 2:11-14).

That is why he refused to give in to the demand to have Titus circumcised "for peace' sake" or "for the sake of unity". He explained in verse 5 of the same chapter, "we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you".

We want to be accepted. We're not willing to risk anything significant. We cannot claim as did Jeremiah, "If I say, 'I will not mention him or speak any more in his name,' there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot" (20:9). We realize that a faithful declaration of the Gospel, sounded in the ears of our people in unequivocal terms would involve many sacrifices – which we are not willing to make. We're not willing to challenge the status quo in areas dear to our people, although we fully understand that is precisely in those areas that changes be made.

So, we're more Jewish than many Jews and more Zionistic than many Zionists. In an effort to curry favor and to prove that we belong, we hitch the wagon of the Gospel to some of the most extreme nationalistic aspirations, and silence anyone who dares challenge those aspirations. "They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace. Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush" (Jeremiah 6:14-15).

God calls us to dare be an alternative society, the kingdom of God on earth. We must not house-break the Gospel. We must strive to tame God. We must not moderate the message or modify it to suit our audience. We MUST NOT! The Gospel has sharp corners that cut and hurt, and which we must declare before we describe its softer contours which embrace, caress and comfort and forgive:

There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality. For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified (Romans 2: 9-13).

True biblical prophecy does not have so much to do with predictions of the future as with warnings for fear of the wrath of God due to the spiritual and moral deviations that are common among us, yes, even in the churches of Christ. How many of our young women are virgins? How many of our young men? How many of us accord our employers a full day's work, pay values added tax although doing so raises the price we are called upon to pay? How many of us devote the Sabbath to the Lord instead of to ourselves?

Our message should be characterized by the same kind of uncompromising demands that were motivated by the prophets of Israel: Thus says the Lord, "Have you killed and also taken possession?" ... "Thus says the Lord: 'In the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick your own blood' " (I Kings 21:19). Thus says the Lord, "You shall not come down from the bed to which you have gone up, but you shall surely die" (II Kings 1:4). Thus says the Lord, "Set your house in order, for you shall die; you shall not recover"

(II Kings 20:1). The problem is that our message cannot be of that kind unless our hearts are in tune with what we say.

We and our teachers devote far too little time and effort to hearing the voice of God issuing out of his word, wounding and breaking our hearts. All too often we have studied scripture merely to confirm our own views. Many of us cannot remember when we last changed our mind on an important issue in light of what we learnt from the scriptures. That is why we do not know how to address our people with the cry, "I will kindle a fire in the wall of Rabbah and it shall devour her strongholds shouting on the day of battle, with a tempest in the day of the whirlwind; and their king shall go into exile, he and his princes together", says the Lord (Amos 1:14-15). Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown (Jonah 3:4)!

The word of God does not burn within us. It does not impose those transformations it is meant to impose. The question must be asked: Are we truly in the faith? Have we been born again? I fear that many in our congregations have never truly turned to God. They have never cried out, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8). They merely affirm a Faith in the hope of a better life.

It is embarrassing to wonder which of the two best represents us in the parable Jesus taught:

"Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 18:10-14).

For this reason, in the best scenario, we are viewed by the nation in terms of an interesting curiosity, more often than not as a strange bird, innocent of any significance to the life of the nation.

Small wonder that the number of those who claim to believe and yet avoid congregational life is increasing. Many churches are conducted like private fiefdoms that belong to those who happen to lead them. A large number of those who lead have never stood the test of congregational approval. They achieved their status because some organization overseas decided they should, because they know how to raise funds overseas, or because of some other such reason. They were not appointed by the congregation following an examination of the holiness of their lives, their humility, their love for God, their understanding of scripture and their ability to teach the scriptures faithfully.

We pay lip service to belief in the unity of the body of Christ, but usually do not labor to "preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). We are divided on linguistic, cultural and national grounds, as if the Lord Jesus has a plethora of churches: one Hebrew speaking, the other speaking Russian and a third Amharic; one for Jews and one for Gentiles, one for Israelis and one for Arabs; one for Charismatics and one for those who are not Charismatic. Rather than demonstrating goodwill, openness and affection for those who do not belong to "our" church, we often make light of them. Nor do we remember people like Seniah Rashilov, Solomon Osrovsky, Magne Solheim, John Zaidan, Warren and Linda Graham and Victor Smadja, who paved the way before us. We think history began with us, so we hasten to declare, ignorantly, that "never before" and "for

the first time”, whereas there were many such times in the past, and most of what we do others has been done by others before us.

We do not want to forgo what we describe as “the autonomy of the local church” while we actually have in mind is the autonomy we enjoy if we lead a congregation. We do not want to be subject to anyone, which is why we find it so convenient that those who appointed us are overseas. Most of what they know of how we function, they hear from us. That is why we are not subject to the churches we lead and are not really subject to anyone else. (to be continued)

A Note on the Recent Declaration Concerning Jerusalem

President Trump’s celebratory statement that affirms the US’ recognition of Jerusalem was and remains much ado about nothing. Previous US Presidents and other international figures have stated as much in less pompous terms and under less pompous circumstances. Nothing new was said; nothing useful was achieved. Statesmen from all over the world have repeatedly treated Jerusalem as Israel’s capital, there presenting their credentials to the Israel President, conferring with the Prime Minister, addressing the House of Legislature and meeting with other Ministers and Governmental officials – even the late President Sa’adat of Egypt did so.

The statement was carefully crafted. It did not delineate the contours of the city because those are subject to agreement, not yet achieved, between Israel and the Palestinians. That being so, the statement left room for West Jerusalem to serve as Israel’s capital and East Jerusalem to serve as the capital of the Palestinian State-to-be. It could have been crafted more helpfully by overtly stating that to be the case. Had it done so, much good would have been done.

The pomp which accompanied the statement was, I believe, ill-conceived, primarily in terms of timing. President Trump has indicated his desire to bring Israelis and Palestinians to the negotiating table with the hope of leading to a resolution of the conflict between the two sides. To do so, the US must serve as an honest broker, deserving the trust of both sides. Had the statement not been made, it could have been used in the process of brokering meaningful negotiations as leverage in relation both to Israel and the Palestinians. The only practical consequences to which Mr. Trump’s statement led were to arouse the ire of the Palestinians, embarrass moderate Arab States, and please Prime Minister Netanyahu and those Israeli politicians who are dragging their feet because they oppose negotiations that might lead to the creation of a Palestinian State. Pro-Israel Evangelical glee is both misplaced and ill advised.

Ministry and Family News

Bracha has been able to find part-time work and is thereby to supplement our income. The editorial process on my **commentary on Romans** has been completed. I have completed writing 365 **daily expository devotions** on Genesis to Judges, plus 27 on sections from the book of Proverbs. I have, consequently, resumed work on the **book on church life** and am **translating the last of the New Testament books**, Revelation.

Responses to my **daily postings of devotionals** has been very encouraging. Due to the amount of work involved, I intended to discontinue those upon completing two installments of 365 portions, but have decided to continue them in a different form, offering sections from books I’ve written or am writing.

It looks like the **2018 tour of the US** will be the last. As of 2019, I intend to be available to churches and conferences in response to invitations, but we will no longer embark onto the extensive annual tours we’ve conducted over the last 16 years. The number of productive years yet before me is fast waning; I must, therefore, devote more time to

writing. There still are a few openings in the 2018 itinerary. Interested churches should write as soon as possible.

To the many of our friends who celebrate Christmas and New Year, and those who celebrate Hanukah, Bracha and I wish truly blest times of celebration and much of the presence of God in the coming years.

In Christ by grace,

Baruch and Bracha Maoz

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