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*Our goal is to provide readers with an overview of realities in and with regard to Israel,
with particular reference to the Gospel.*

Readers will view those portions of MaozNews in which they have interest.

To that end, we seek to diversify.

In this issue:

Christianity Nears Extinction in the Middle East – pg. 1

Baruch's Biography Continued – pg. 2

Ministry and Family News – pg. 5

Christianity Nears Extinction in the Middle East

Protesters led by hard-line Islamists in southern Egypt refused to end a campaign of civil disobedience until the government removes a newly appointed Coptic Christian governor. The protesters, many from the ultraconservative Salafi trend of Islam, have been sitting on train tracks, took over government buildings and blocked main roads in the southern city of Qena. Their complaint: the newly appointed Christian Governor cannot be expected to implement Islamic law.

Since the February 11 ousting of President Hosni Mubarak, Islamist groups have been flexing their muscles and now vow to take a more active political role in Egypt. Their prominence has worried many, including the secular activists and youth groups that were the driving force behind the uprising.

A video posted on the YouTube website showed a speaker telling a crowd at the government office that, according to the constitution, Islamic law is to be the primary source of legislation in the country.

The civil disobedience campaign prompted Egypt's top security official, Interior Minister Mansour el-Eissawi, to visit Qena to try to defuse the situation, but he wasn't able to sway the protesters. The country's most organized political opposition group, the long-banned Muslim Brotherhood, has become more vocal about its plans, drawing on its large network of social groups and followers. The group has announced its intention to contest half of the seats in Parliament. A senior Muslim Brotherhood leader caused an uproar after being quoted in local

papers as stating that his group seeks to establish an Islamic state, imposing Islamic punishments - including amputating hands for theft. "Don't let us waste this opportunity," Saad al-Husseini, a Brotherhood leader, said, according to the daily Al-Masry Al-Youm.

According to the Egyptian Federation for Human Rights, more than 70 Christians emigrate from Egypt every week due to Islamist threats. The only Middle Eastern country in which the number of Christians has grown is Israel. The Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics reports that the Christian community has grown from 34,000 in 1949 to 163,000-strong, and is expected to reach 187,000 by 2020. In the rest of the Middle East, the drive for Islamic purity is going to banish all traces of the pre-Islamic past.

Silence in global forums, the flawed conscience of human rights groups, the self-denial of the media and the Vatican's appeasement are facilitating this Islamist campaign. According to a Report on Religious Freedom compiled by the US Department of State, the number of Christians in Turkey declined from two million to 85,000; in Lebanon they have gone from 55% to 35% of the population; in Syria, from half the population they have been reduced to 4%; in Jordan, from 18% to 2%. In Iraq, they will soon be exterminated altogether. Benjamin Sleiman, archbishop of Baghdad, is talking about "the extinction of Christianity in the Middle East."

Should the exodus of Christians from Bethlehem continue in the next two or three decades, there may be no clergy left to conduct religious services in Jesus' birthplace. In Iran, Christians have become virtually non-existent since 1979, when Khomeini ordered the closure of Christian schools.

In Gaza, the 3,000 Christian residents are subject to persecution. In Sudan, Christians in the south are forced into slavery. In Lebanon, the Maronites, the only Christians to have held political power in the modern Arab world, have been reduced to a minority because of Muslim violence and Hezbollah's rise. In Saudi Arabia, Christians have been beaten or tortured by religious police. Should the Islamists prevail, the Middle East will be wholly Islamic by 2048.

Hundreds gathered in Cairo on Friday, May 6, to protest Egypt's peace agreement with Israel. Protesters waved Palestinian flags and called for another intifada on May 15, when Palestinians mark the Nakba (The Catastrophe – Israel's founding). Participants, mostly young people, called to "return Palestine to the Palestinians" and held signs saying Jews should "return to their places of birth". Speakers at the rally said Jews who wanted to stay in "Palestine" should agree to live under Islamic rule. "Egypt's military secured the protest with armored vehicles and dozens of soldiers. Buses and cars also halted traffic at the site in identification with the protesters.

Should Egypt turn fully against Israel, the Palestinians succeed in their unilateral effort to achieve independence and Syria erupt, with Lebanon falling under Hezbollah's unchallenged sway (all likely scenarios), Israel will be in dire straits, and its' economy will inevitably suffer. Once elections take place in Turkey (scheduled for July of this year), and the Islamic Party strengthens its hold on the country (another likely scenario), the situation is expected to worsen.

With Bahrain, Yemen, Iraq and Jordan threatened, and with Saudi Arabia's stability imposed – literally – by the sword, the future does not bode well.

Baruch's Biography

(Continued)

In the previous installment, Baruch joined CWI and resumed publication of two quarterly magazines in Hebrew, one for the local church and the other for Christian youth. Within a short space of time, he found himself bearing leading CWI's work in the country. On her second birthday, Baruch and Bracha almost lost their daughter to a severe asthma attack.

Beginnings of Grace and Truth Christian Congregation

In 1974 Bracha and I were the only Christians in our city, Rishon LeTzion. We soon realized that Christians living in the area crisscrossed each other's paths as they traveled to their respective congregations. Bracha and I agreed that it was high time to begin working for the establishment of a Christian congregation in our city. In the course of a visit to the USA in 1974, I was encouraged by Pastors Al Martin and Walter Chantry to pursue those intentions.

I contacted CWI and requested their permission to devote some of my time to that purpose. The society, true to its theology and to its understanding of missions, agreed that I should do so on condition that, 1) the church envisaged would not be a CWI endeavor but the fruit of local indigenous effort, 2) That my work with CWI would not suffer as a result. I was happy with the first of these conditions and certainly willing to accept the second. Little did I know that this would mean extremely long work days and a level of effort that would impose a heavy toll on my body, my energies and my family.

I had never pastored a church before, but had been given the privilege of seeing healthy churches in action, particularly Gunnersbury Baptist Church in London. I had by then made the acquaintance of Walter Chantry of Grace Baptist Church in Carlisle, PA, had read through their Confession, Constitution and Bye-Laws, and was deeply impressed. It seemed obvious that no church could be a healthy church if did not have a solid confessional foundation – in other words, if it did not have a clearly written statement of its Faith and an orderly, biblically informed set of rules for conduct. My first step, therefore, was to try and create such for the church I hoped God would use Bracha and me to form.

I prepared a Confession of Faith based on the Westminster Shorter Catechism, with some modifications that addressed the challenges of the day and issues that facing us in Israel. A constitution was framed, based on that of Grace Baptist Church in Carlisle, PA. This was a lengthy undertaking, but I learnt a great deal in the process, particularly as I began to compare various Confessions and Constitutions.

Bracha and I agreed never to invite members of other congregations to join what we hoped would become a local congregation. We would maintain honorable and open relations with all the congregations of Christ in Israel. The church for which we labored would seek to exert a doctrinally informed expositional pulpit ministry; a frank and active evangelistic commitment; a transparent leadership that did not hesitate to exert authority but would be open to having its authority and its use scrutinized by those subject to it, an active social engagement with society and an active evangelistic ministry.

We commenced worship services in our home, inviting no other believers but encouraging our unbelieving friends to attend. None of the latter ever came but some of the former began to hear about our services and paid us a visit from time to time. I would prepare us if I was to preach before a congregation of hundreds.

Sermon Preparation

Many hours were spent in sermon preparation and, in the course of time, I developed what has become my style of preaching and of sermon preparation. I prefer to write my sermons out in full. I prefer expository preaching to any other form of pulpit ministry but recognize the need for topical sermons from time to time. When the sermons were topical, they were also generally systematic rather than a hodge-podge of unrelated subjects. I endeavor to incorporate into my sermon as much as possible of the biblical text relating to the topic or the text being expounded. I expect and seek to encourage the congregation to follow the text with an open Bible and to think with me through the presentation. At a later stage I learned from my daughter to engage in conversation with the congregation by asking non-rhetorical questions.

While preparing, the relevant text will be investigated as thoroughly as I am able to investigate it. My findings will be put down on paper, with indications of unclear matters or subjects calling for further thought. I will consult a dictionary, a map or a commentary only to clarify specific references in the text I do not understand. Once I have completed formulating my own view of the text, I will consult as many commentaries as I have on hand, comparing their views with mine, correcting myself where I discover myself to have been to be in error, broadening my view and strengthening it.

I then spend time thinking and writing about the theological lessons of the text, what the old Puritans called "The Doctrine", and then devote a good deal of time to thinking out the practical implications (The Puritan "Uses" of the text). Only then would I be ready to write out the sermon. Over the years I have honed the method and improved its execution, but this is essentially the way I prepare. It still takes me an average of 16-20 hours to prepare one sermon, on condition that I have studied the text or the topic in advance.

I had a captive congregation: Bracha and Avital. But I preached my heart out and encouraged my "congregation" to be true to God's word, cultivate a spiritual walk with God, hunger for holiness and develop a prayerful walk, social and moral sensitivities and an avid evangelistic concern.

Joined by Others

After some time I was approached by the families living in the area: the Ben Moshes in Ramleh, the Goldbergs in Rishon LeTzion and our friends, the Tel Zurs in New Tsiona: Would we agree to work together to establish a church.

Eli Ben Moshe was a North African Jew, a gentle soul, somewhat reticent, but with a huge ego hiding under his reticence. He had a warm affection for things traditionally Jewish but never celebrated any of the Feasts nor commemorated the Sabbath or kept it. I do not recall where he had been worshiping before he approached me, but I do know he was a friend of the Tel Zurs and of the Goldbergs. I had never met him before.

Arthur Goldberg was a kindly, big-hearted, boisterous man who had studied under Dr. Louis Goldberg at Moody in Chicago. In no sense a deep thinker, he had warm evangelical convictions and a heart eager to serve. Art's father was Jewish. Zella Goldberg was a fascinating mixture of Amerindian, Polish and other bloods. She and Art ran an open home, ever welcoming. Later, they were very kind to my second daughter, Shlomit.

They had four children – three boys and a girl. Art was a TWA aircraft mechanic who rose to the rank of supervisor. Being himself technically-minded, he found it difficult to appreciate his sons' preference to art. Art was convinced that he had leadership abilities, but he lacked the insight, courageous foresight and the ability to command respect, although he and Zella commanded a great deal of well-earned affection. For a good number of years they made a solid contribution to the Christian youth work conducted in the country, many of whom know them as Aunt Zella and Uncle Arthur.

Dudu was a soft-spoken and highly intelligent individual, with a lovely singing voice, obvious leadership abilities and a sharp mind. He was slim and dark skinned, with jet black hair. He was a young man bent on his studies at the Faculty of Agriculture of the Hebrew University in Rehovot, where he undertook his doctoral studies on some aspect of bee life. His wife, Etti, was a shorter woman and both were good looking. Etti's father came from Turkey and, upon immigration, was humiliated by the Ashkenazi Jews who by that time lead most of the country. His muscles and teeth were checked as if he were a mule, and then he was sent to work in the citrus groves in the area. The pain of that humiliation was passed on to his daughter and later

came into play. They owned a small home in the eastern side of Nes Tsiona and welcomed Dudu as if he were a son. They were kindly, simple folk in the best sense of the term.

Dudu was born to an Indian Jewish mother who had loved a British sailor during the World War, and was then forsaken by him. Dudu assumed that his father was Jewish because he found it hard to believe that his mother would have fallen into the arms of a gentile. She had immigrated to Israel with Dudu – I never heard if he had any other relatives. He certainly never visited them – and went through the painful struggles that were imposed on Indian Jews in addition to her being an immigrant and a single mother. Dudu remembered these vividly and they played a large part in his own emotional make-up. Bracha and I never gave a thought to the fact that we were Ashkenazi. Dudu was much aware of this.

I was unwilling to work with these men on my own. Dudu had worshiped with the Bar Davids and I was uncomfortable with their view of family control over the church and with their tendency to authoritarianism. I did not know the Ben Moshes and had few expectations from the Goldbergs in terms of a clear, biblical and realistic view of church structure and function. I had the joy of worshiping with the Brethren in Haifa and in Tel Aviv and had learnt much from them, but I had also had been given the opportunity to identify what I perceived (and perceive to this day) to be weaknesses in their concept of a church. I had been exposed to churches that commanded my highest regard and, at the same time, I knew myself to be thoroughly inexperienced with the formation and government of a church.

David Zeidan was then living in Petach Tikvah and worshiping with Solomon Ostrovsky in Tel Aviv. We were friends and I held him in high regard. I knew he was uncomfortable with those features of Brethrenism that most troubled me, although our concerns differed in nature. David was concerned with certain features of that ecclesiology; he never conceived of them as essential parts of a whole.

I had come to the conclusion that the Plymouth Brethren system of church government fell short of the biblical standards and that there was need for a church to have both Elders and Deacons, with a Presiding Elder serving as pastor. So, in response to being approached by the local believers – for the one and only time in my life – I broke with our earlier decision and asked David I to consider joining me in working with the others to form a church in our area. I have never regretted that deviation, any more that I regretted our settled policy in this regard. David taught us much.

David was born to one of the most respected Christian families in the country. His father was an Arab and his mother was a German Jewess. They married as Christians. Frida Zeidan was widowed after the birth of her four children and labored with her hands for many years as a farmer, until Dr. James Churcher, the senior British Jews' Society missionary in Israel, offered her residence at the compound. There she brought up her four fine children: Eva, who married Dr. Baruch Pokroy; John, who married Beatrice; Miriam, who never married; and David, who married Ann from Scotland. John and Baruch (Pokroy) have served for many years as the Elders of Bethesda Brethren Assembly in Haifa.

David was firm and gracious about his convictions, of an open mind and an eager heart. He later became the OM leader in Israel, a task he fulfilled with typical faithfulness until ill health and family reasons compelled his departure to England.

As far as establishing a church was concerned, none of us agreed at that stage on the most central issue: what should be the nature, structure and function of the church we wanted to found. Eli had no settled view and would go along with whatever was agreeable to the rest. He had no pretensions to leadership. Art suggested that we meet, remove our shoes, sit on the floor, strum the guitar and see how the Lord would lead. Dudu thought that we should copy what he had seen in Ramat Gan with the Bar Davids, with some modification. David was open to

reconsider the whole matter and I was hoping for a church that would look and function in some way similar to the churches I had come to know and respect in the UK and the USA.

To be continued

Ministry and Family News

A good part of this month has been spent on restoring, repeat research and rewriting materials lost because my backup failed at a time when my computer crashed. I have given some thought to the purchase of a new laptop in place of my 3-year old sturdy Thinkpad, but have decided not to follow that course. My Thinkpad can still give me quite a bit of mileage. I have, however, purchased an online backup service – many thanks to those who wrote in with suggestions. All were reviewed, and I finally decided on Carbonite. It took the system almost four whole days (!) to backup my 12,000 or so (!!) files, but now each file is backed up within minutes.

One of the files for which I've had to repeat the research and rewrite the material was a paper on hope in the books of Lamentations and Ecclesiastes. Looking back, I'm glad I was forced to go over the material again – the rewrite was much better than the original paper.

This Friday I completed translation of the Westminster Confession of Faith. I've also submitted my devotional commentary on Malachi to a publisher and awaiting the response of another publisher as to the possibility of reprinting my Judaism is Not Jewish. I keep receiving requests for the latter, as it is the only book on the topic that takes issue with the Messianic Movement. It would greatly help if you would be willing to write to Marvin Padgett to encourage Presbyterian and Reformed to republish this book (mpadgett@prpbooks.com). If you have used it and found it helpful, please make a few comments in this regard. A copy to me would be very useful.

I am now making final preparations for the US trip, following which I plan to revert to working on my commentary on Romans. Meanwhile, I await the publication in Hebrew of my Judges and the publishers review of my Hebrew commentary on Matthew. We are making excellent progress in our work on the Modern Hebrew Bible for Youth. I expect only First and Second Chronicles to await my attention before departing for the US in July, and to be able to edit those two books while on the trip.

Prices continue to climb in Israel while foreign currency loses its value. Gas (petrol for Europeans) is now at \$9.24 per gallon. Food prices also continue to rise. There is some concern that the real estate market has become a bubble doomed to burst, and all efforts on the part of fiscal authorities to rein in the trend have failed.

Tamar has given birth to **Avishai**. Mother and child are well. **Bracha** was able to be with Tamar for a month following the birth – a cause of satisfaction to all concerned. She, with **Shlomit** and **Yonatan** are presently visiting us in Israel and will soon be joined by **Keith**. It is a joy to have the house full of the happy sounds of life again.

Avital underwent a successful minor operation. She and **the rest of the family** are well, as is **Rose**, well into her second and last year in the military and contemplating her options for the future.

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