

MaozNews No. 44
Published every 4 weeks or so
July 2011

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:

Religious Extremism, pg. 1

Disturbing trends in Israeli Society, pg. 3

Baruch's Biography Continued, pg. 6

Ministry and Family News, pg. 7

Religious Extremism

When Theodore Herzl envisioned the Jewish State, he spoke of the army and religious authorities as carefully avoiding politics. The army was to "remain in its barracks and the Rabbis in their synagogues". Such were also the expectations of the founders of the State. The Jewish religious establishment of the day and most of its leading lights opposed the formation of the State; only under Messiah should the Jewish people aspire to national political expression. To date, the more stringent of Jewish Orthodoxy refuse to recognize the Jewish State, decline to use its currency, pay its' taxes, fulfill the military obligation mandated on the rest of the population, salute its' flag or remember its' dead. This branch of Judaism went so far as to send representatives to visit Iran's Ahmedinejad, just as they supported Yasser Arafat when he was waging a war of terrorism against Israel.

Well, the State was formed nevertheless, and the army has remained in its barracks, but the Rabbis are coming out of their synagogues in an increasing measure.

The Background

Until 1977, when Menachem Begin became Prime Minister, religion was allowed a significant but clearly-defined role in the life of the nation. It was part of the cultural background to which the nation harped and on which its national and cultural values were based, but not an active aspect of its ongoing ethos.

Begin's electoral success resulted in what has become a tectonic change. Religion was increasingly invoked in the political arena. The Rabbis were encouraged to play a role in the political, economic and cultural life of the nation. National policies were in the light of religious aspirations. This trend, coupled with the growing

awareness of the need to encourage employment among the Orthodox (who have traditionally lived off State pensions and overseas support while they engaged in study and prayer) have altered the tone of Israeli society.

The political success of Shas, a religious party which garners most of its support from the religiously traditional Occidental Jews, served to accelerate the process. The political talents of some of the religious Knesset and Government members, and their relative success in the political arena, added impetus to religious aspirations. The Orthodox now speak openly of the day when Jewish religious law and the Jewish religion will hold sway in Israel.

Let it be said clearly: this is not a spiritual revolution in the making. It is a determined effort to impose hardened religious restrictions on an unwilling populace. It is not a call to moral values, to love for God or to hearty obedience to God's commandments. It is an effort to subdue a largely-secular population to the authorities of the Rabbis. It is not a desire for a law-abiding society, but for the dominance of Jewish religious law (halakha).

Emboldened and encouraged by the government and by their Rabbis, a growing number of religious men are forsaking Torah study, and training for secular occupations. The number of employed religious women is increasing in leaps and bounds. More religious men are enlisting in the army, albeit under specially-designed terms. More religious men are beginning to play an active role in the formation and expression of Israeli cultural life – within the boundaries of Orthodox or semi-Orthodox freedoms. Some of the popular singers are Orthodox, or have converted to Orthodoxy. A few leading economists and industrialists are Orthodox. Increasing numbers of the more moderate are rising to prominence in the Israeli military. Secular neighborhoods are targeted and religious families encouraged to purchase homes and settle in them. Often, the purpose is openly stated: ultimate control of Israeli society and the imposition of Jewish traditional law.

Orthodox progress has given rise to tensions within Israeli society, evidences of which have emerged afresh in recent days. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) have served as a melting pot into which the various elements of Israel society have been poured, only to come out united, on common grounds and with common ideals and practices. Fighting for its life over the last 65 years, it is natural that the military has become the context in which much of leadership is tested – and which provides many of its prominent politicians (Isaac Rabin, Ehud Barak, Benjamin Netanyahu, to mention but three). Now the IDF is in the throes of a dilemma created by Orthodox pretensions.

In the course of a military ceremony on Memorial Day for the IDF fallen, soldiers have traditionally called upon the nation to remember its sons and daughters who gave their lives in defense of the country. The Chief of Staff has recently ordered that the invocation should call upon God to remember those fallen, not the nation. The Israeli army conducts conversion courses (to Judaism, of course) for the hundreds of non-Jewish conscripts in its ranks. The troops are provided with Orthodox chaplains, while Christian chaplains are not to be found. The Government offers material and social inducements in an effort to encourage conversion and the Prime Minister's office has a special department responsible for the promotion and reward of conversions.

Recently, hundreds of officers and soldiers walked out of a military event because women were among the performers. Last October, in the course of a ceremony held in a military camp in memory of assassinated Prime Minister Isaac Rabin, scores of officers and soldiers walked out of the ceremony for the same reason. More and more base and unit commanders are requesting that women not be sent to perform before the troops for fear of offending the vocal and growing minority of religious soldiers. Special military units have been formed, where the troops are shielded from all contact with women. Soldiers completing active duty have been brought to the Western wall, lectured by a Rabbi and called upon to undergo a religious ceremony following their being

spared injury and death. Prominent Rabbis have insisted that Israeli soldiers are to disobey military commands if instructed to do so by their Rabbis.

In civilian life, many supermarkets serving the Orthodox community now have men-only check-out lines. In some bus services serving Orthodox neighborhoods, women are required to enter buses through the back door and sit behind, separate from the men. In December last year, a letter by city Rabbis, including Safed's Chief Rabbi Shmuel Eliyahu, called on homeowners not to rent apartments to Arabs.

Prominent Rabbi Dov Lior was recently questioned by the police for a book he endorsed, which claims that Jewish religious lore calls for the killing of non-combatant gentiles, including babies, in the course of battle. The book Lior endorsed insists that such babies are likely to grow up and become enemies of Israel, so that their killing is justified. Lior was detained for questioning following his refusal to respond to a police summons on the grounds that, as a Rabbi, he is free from civilian and secular investigation for actions taken in his capacity as a Rabbi. His arrest and questioning caused hundreds of his disciples to riot in Jerusalem. Knesset Member Ben-Ari called for the dismissal of Israel's Security Minister, and a group of Knesset Members are promoting a bill that would grant Rabbis immunity when they act with regard to "the Torah of Israel".

Rabbi Yaacov Yosef, who also endorsed the afore-mentioned book, refused to respond to summons on the same grounds. The police were warned that, should he be detained, the response would be "stringent". Undeterred, the police detained him for questioning. Following his release, he and Rabbi Lior held a public meeting following their release, challenging the State's right to question Rabbis when the latter function in their religious capacity. Menachem Livni, who was convicted of the murder of Palestinians political leaders, formerly headed a terror organization dubbed the "Jewish underground." He said in Court that the spirit behind the group was Rabbi Lior, and that Lior was involved in planning attacks. It was he who decided whom to attack, how and when. Lior encouraged the perpetrators to blow up six Arab buses, full of passengers. Preparations were made for the attack, but Israeli security forces arrest the group shortly before it was carried out.

Leading Rabbis also testified that Lior was the source of rulings which labeled the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin a traitor. It was this "religious" ruling that motivated Yigal Amir to assassinate Rabin. Amir had travelled frequently to Hebron and conferred with Lior. Baruch Goldstein, who in 1994 massacred Arabs at prayer, also frequented Lior's instruction. Following his attack and consequent slaying, Lior declared him "holier than all the martyrs of the Holocaust". Sooner or later, Israel will have to decide what kind of society it wishes to be.

Disturbing Trends in Israeli Society

A Law against Freedom

On Monday, July 11, Israeli's Knesset passed a bill stating, "deliberately refraining from economic, cultural or academic ties with a person or organization for no reason but the person's or the organization's association with the State of Israel, with one of its institutions or with an area under its control, if such action will cause economic, cultural or academic damage," constitutes a "boycott." Anyone engaging in such a boycott, encouraging it or verbally supporting it is liable to punitive action specified by the law.

Protest, both within Israel and without has been justifiably vehement. Attempts to limit what citizens are allowed to purchase or refrain from purchasing, what they allowed to encourage others to purchase or not to purchase, is a limitation of freedom of speech. The bill draws no distinction between boycotting Israel or Israeli companies as a matter of individual conscience, and boycotts initiated by foreign states or international organizations. The bill further indiscriminately prohibits any boycott on Israel, any part of Israel, or any Israeli companies or individual, even if the boycott is held, for example, in protest of policies unrelated to the occupation.

What is more, the bill would accord individuals subject to boycott the right to private action, and authorizes courts to rule damages regardless of whether financial losses were incurred. The law, in effect, transforms individuals into private law enforcement agencies. No such freedom and no such compensation is secured by legislation anywhere in the world. For example, it would penalize a group of actors and individual singers who declined to perform in West Bank settlements on grounds of conscience.

The Knesset's apolitical Legal Advisor, Eyal Yinon, ruled the bill illegal and stated that, if passed into law, it could well compromise freedom of speech. The Government's Legal Advisor said the bill is within the bounds of legality, but only barely so. The High Court has been called upon to determine the legality of the bill. Israel has no constitution, but has passed a number of basic laws, one of which is the Law of Human Dignity and Freedom. The Court has been asked to determine whether or not the bill meets the standards established by that law.

A number of U.S. Jewish organizations have condemned the bill, notably the Anti-Defamation League, which generally refrains from criticizing Israeli government policy and actions. The ADL expressed its concern that the new law impinges on the "basic democratic rights of Israelis to freedom of speech and freedom of expression." "To legally stifle calls to action – however abhorrent and detrimental they might be – is a disservice to Israeli society," ADL National Director Abraham Foxman said in a statement. "We hope Israel's Supreme Court will quickly take up a review of this law and resolve the concerns it raises."

The bill passed the first of three readings. Emboldened by their success, Israel's right-wing politicians, lead by Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman, is preparing another bill that would require investigation of the finances of all NGO's opposing the present Israeli Government's policies. These bills represent an accelerated erosion of Israeli democracy, bridling internal opposition and enshrining tendencies some in Israel has described as "fascist". In March a law was passed, punishing public commemoration of the founding of the State of Israel in anything but positive terms. Israeli Arabs have taken to marking that event as the Palestinian catastrophe.

Weakening the Opposition

Israel's Supreme Court has long been a thorn to Israel's right because it has traditionally upheld human rights' defended the oppressed and acted as a moral guide in a society increasingly militarized and hedonistic. The Government is now preparing a bill that will limit the Supreme Court's power. A still further initiative proposes that the Knesset be able to veto candidates for the Supreme Court. The new system would "allow the committee to introduce to the Court a different state of mind and [thus] allow them to influence the legal system".

When asked to comment on the anti-boycott law, the U.S. State Department said the law was an "Israeli internal matter" but also hinted its criticism by pointing out the right to peaceful protest in democratic countries. "Freedom of expression, including freedom to peacefully organize and protest, is a basic right under democracy," a State Department official said. "It is a right that the American people hold dear and it is among the democratic values that the Israeli and American people have long shared." The European Union expressed concern over the bill and stated its intention to "enter discussions" with the Israeli Government with regard to recent legislative actions.

On Wednesday, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu defended the bill: "Don't be confused," he said. "I approved the law. If I hadn't, it would not have passed. I oppose boycotts against Israel." Kadima Chair, MK Tzipi Livni, took the podium after Netanyahu and accused him of "leading Israel into an abyss."

Thirty two law professors at university faculties and colleges all over the country have signed a petition, in which they state that the Boycott Law contradicts Israel's Basic Law and does grievous harm to the freedom of

political expression and of protest. Among the signatories are Prof. Niva Elkin-Koren, dean of the law faculty at the University of Haifa; and Prof. Moshe Cohen-Eliya, dean of the law school at the Ramat Gan Academic Center, and several former law school deans: Hanoach Dagan, Ariel Porat and Menachem Mautner (former deans of the Tel Aviv University Law School); Uriel Procaccia (former dean of the Hebrew University Law School) and Eli Salzberger (former dean at the University of Haifa).

Signatures will be sought until the end of the week, according to Prof. Alon Harel of the Hebrew University and Prof. Frances Raday of the College of Management, who initiated the petition. Everyone asked to sign was given a copy of the law. Harel said that although many PhD candidates in law had asked to be included in the petition, it was decided not to seek their signatures lest their signing be held against them when they are considered for university positions.

The law, Harel said, is a classic expression of what political theory calls the "tyranny of the majority," when political entities exploit the fact that they represent the majority to silence and at times even persecute the minority." "From a legal perspective, we're talking about restrictions on political expression, when the restrictions are not neutral with regard to worldview, but are aimed at promoting one viewpoint and subjugating another, a clear expression of the tyranny of the majority," Harel said. Leading legal minds must try to scuttle unacceptable legislative initiatives like the Boycott Law, he said.

"Under the current circumstances, when the political system is acting against the legal system and the legal principles that developed during the 1990s, the task of a lawyer in government service is to block implementation of initiatives of this type," Harel said. Raday said that the Boycott Law is particularly dangerous because it restricts freedom of expression regarding one of the deepest conflicts in Israeli politics – the future of the territories and the settlements.

"Personally I don't support boycotts of any sort," she said. "But I think that the part of the Jewish people that is concerned about the policy toward the territories should be permitted to express its opinion, even if it's by boycotting products."

Meanwhile, Knesset members whose parties are part of the coalition that forms the Government, and who did not support the bill, are being penalized by their parties.

Salute the Flag

Patriotism has been described as the last refuge of a scoundrel. As part of the national trend toward a more stringent nationalism, directives issued by the Ministry Education require nursery and kindergarten teachers, beginning this September, to open the week raising the Israeli flag and singing the national anthem. Preschool teachers will also be required to teach the children the state symbols once a week. At this time, the new directives will not be implemented in the Arab sector. "We are conducting discussions in the Preschool Department to see how we can adapt [the directives] to this sector," the Ministry Spokesperson said.

The new directives include an "output index" that will be the responsibility of the Pedagogical Authority, which relates to the number of preschool teachers dealing with the national symbols in every district. The goals of the plan are to strengthen the pupils' Jewish and Zionist values, and to improve their scholastic achievements. The plan does not refer to education toward democracy or responsible citizenship. Prof. Gabi Solomon of the University of Haifa, an Israel Prize laureate for education, responded to the directives by saying, "It looks like a competition between members of the Likud to see who can push us faster into the arms of fascism ... There's definitely room for Zionist education for [Israeli] Jews," Solomon said. "But such education must be balanced by democratic values. We are a Jewish and democratic state and without this balance even the best of intentions sound chauvinistic."

Prof. Yaron Ezrahi, a professor of political science at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, scoffed at the initiative. "They are doing injustice to the State of Israel and to Jewish identity by starting this in kindergarten," Ezrahi said. "They should start in the maternity wards. Instead of wrapping the babies in a white sheet, they should wrap them in an Israeli flag, hang Israeli flags over every bassinet, and ensure that the national anthem is played in the delivery room."

The new directives are part of a series of initiatives launched by Education Minister Gideon Sa'ar. These have included "adopting" a grave of a fallen soldier, school visits to (West Bank) Hebron and the Tomb of the Patriarchs, and expanding visits to Jerusalem, with a stress on the City of David. Sa'ar has also instructed schools to increase their cooperation with the Israel Defense Force. Officers are invited to visit schools in an effort to motivate teachers and pupils.

Baruch's Biography

In the previous installment, Baruch took initial steps toward forming a church in Rishon LeTzion. He framed a proposed Confession and a Constitution and commenced services in his home. He was then joined by four others.

Grace and Truth Established

Bracha was carrying Shlomit, who was born on May 14, 1975. Shlomit was a delightful, blond, blue-eyed, happy baby who brought much joy to our lives – and no small challenges. She had an unusual glee for life, an ability to bounce back after every difficulty and a strong personality (all of our children ooze with personality).

The Fellowship had been meeting for about two years. In the course of that time, David, Dudu, Art and I had met every two weeks for confessional discussions. The agreed basis of our discussions was a Confession of Faith and Constitution I had framed, the former largely based on the Westminster Confession of Faith and the latter on the Constitution adopted by Grace Baptist Church in Carlisle PA.

The Confession underwent some changes, in two primary directions. First, I held (and hold) to a moderate immersionist view of baptism, including the conviction that baptism should be administered only to credibly-professing believers. Second, the Confession had little to say about modern movements and their theological claims, including the Messianic Movement (which was then just raising its head). I deemed it necessary to address these issues.

The Constitution limited the holding of office to those who, among other standards, could affirm our Confession without reservation. However, church membership was open to all who professed a biblical faith in Christ, whose conduct was worthy of the Gospel and who undertook to live with us in peaceful accord under the authority of the Confession and the Constitution.

I firmly believe that the love and pastoral care of a church should not be limited to those who are able to cross our T's and dot our I's, that it should include all who call upon the name of the Lord in spirit and in truth. So long as individuals were willing to live with us under those terms, and undertake not to seek to subvert either of our Standards, I believed we should welcome them into fellowship and live together with them and our differences. My desire was to accord the Lord primary place in our church life, not a Confession, however biblical.

Two fascinating years followed. At the initial stage, we went over the Confession and marked all the areas of agreement. These were set aside. Next, we went over the areas in which we had reason to believe there was disagreement, defining our terms and explaining our positions. We discovered in the process that there were

many areas in which we assumed disagreement, only to discover the differences were merely semantic. Finally, we were able to get down to the real issues – the areas in which we clearly disagreed.

Two of our group were asked to prepare papers on the topic in question, the two chosen presumably adhering to different positions. The papers were then presented, discussion was held, and the proposed Confession's phraseology modified to express our shared understanding. To my delight and surprise, over the course of the ensuing two years, no significant changes were introduced. Gradually, ever so slowly, three of us found ourselves inching closer and closer to each other. As mentioned, Art did not share that growing consensus and therefore chose to return to the church he had left to share our efforts at churchmanship in our neglected city.

Once the Confession was agreed upon, David and I were asked we go over the Constitution and submit a draft to the three of us who remained. The result was an agreed Constitution and Confession of Faith. It was now time to present our findings to the 18 families that had gathered around us in the course of time.

We did so, recommending that a church be established in Rishon LeTzion, based on the Confession and Constitution we on which we had agreed. There was some discussion, primarily for the purpose of clarification, and in March 1976, the proposed Confession and Constitution were unanimously adopted. It was further determined that David, Dudu and I would serve as Elders, that we would formally constitute in May, and that a Pastor would be chosen at a proximate later date.

The founding of Grace and Truth Christian Congregation was something of an anomaly in Israel. This was the first time a congregation had been founded on the basis of a Confession and a Constitution. It was unusual to witness the forming of a church that chose to identify itself by an express name, rather than by the city in which it was to be found, or the name of its more prominent leader. Above all, Israel had never evidenced the forming of a *Reformed* church.

In the teeth of history, it was assumed that Reformed churches had no interest in Israel, opposed evangelistic outreach, and were socially insular, culturally inhibited and theologically doctrinaire. Grace and Truth was the opposite of this caricature. David and I were well-known for our evangelistic endeavors. I was deeply involved in the life of our society. We had, indeed, affirmed a clear doctrinal stance, but insisted upon our right and duty to love those in Christ with whom we disagreed. Consequently, we extended a loving hand of fellowship to all and any of the evangelical churches in Israel. We believed we had as much to learn from sister churches as we might have to teach them.

On a sunny day in May 1976, in response to an invitation sent out to all the evangelical churches in Israel, Grace and Truth Christian Congregation hosted some 40 church leaders from all over the country as we constituted ourselves as a church and received the blessing of our sister churches.

Three months later I was installed as Pastor. Following another four, Eli Ben-Moshe was installed as Deacon. It was a glorious time. Our congregation began to grow by leaps and bounds. We were engaged in an active evangelistic outreach and sought to reach out to our society.

Ministry and Family News

Before the Maoz' departure for an extensive tour of the US, Shoshi and Baruch completed most of the work on all the remaining books of **THE OLD TESTAMENT FOR YOUTH**, excepting Chronicles. Shoshi will be preparing Chronicles for Baruch's return. Remaining issues on the other books will be discussed by email and Skype.

Presbyterian and Reformed has decided to produce Baruch's **JUDAISM IS NOT JEWISH (A FRIENDLY CRITIQUE OF THE MESSIANIC MOVEMENT)**. Cross books has completed editing his devotional commentary on **MALACHI** and Shepherd Press is preparing his devotional commentary on **JONAH** – all these in English. Meanwhile,

Baruch has completed the courses requires for credit in the Biblical Studies program and is now alternately working on his thesis and on his commentary on Romans. His Hebrew commentary on **JUDGES** is now in print.

The **Young Adults group** at the church will be fending for itself for the next few months, while Baruch is in the US. This will be an opportunity for the young people to assume responsibility as adults and to ensure the continued function of the group on its own. We clean the church every other week, meet for an evening meal every six weeks and hold alternate work days and social evening s every six weeks. Baruch's goal is to lead them to greater involvement in the life of the church, and to increased responsibility in their own lives as Christians.

By the time you receive this letter, **Baruch and Bracha** will have arrived in the United States, where they plan to be until October 20th. Baruch is scheduled to return home then, with Bracha following on November 7th. They will be visiting family and churches. Their itinerary begins in Seattle WA, takes them through the northern States, all the way to Ohio, then south to Virginia and North Carolina, west through the southern States to southern California and back to Seattle. They will be driving all of this way, so your prayers will be much appreciated. Should you need to contact us while we're in the US, our mobile number is 216-288-1375. We are also available by email and by Whatsapp (free SMS).

Avital & Co. are well. The girls did extremely well at school and are to be joined next year in the same school by Nadav, who will be attending school for the first year. We hope to spend five days with them in Yellowstone national Park.

Shlomit & Co are also fine. They spent three short weeks with us in Israel and are now back in tow in Cleveland.

As you can see, little Jonathan has grown – this picture is already somewhat dated. It was taken in our living room in May.



Tamar @ Co, including the two children, are busy with life. Marcus is finding work rewarding. They continue to be challenged in terms of church life. Your prayers for them would be much appreciated. Yotam (left) and Avishai (right) are both well and, as you can see, happy children.



Katya and Felix have purchased a small flat, into which they expect to move in August. Katya has faced moral challenges at work (she is a surgical nurse, working on the operating theatre of a large hospital). But she has taken a courageous and worthy stand.

Rose is nearing the end of her military duty and is seeking wisdom for her future steps. She would like to study but is unsure as to the area of studies to which she wishes to devote herself. Army life is taking a toll on her spiritual life, and your prayers will once again be much appreciated.

TAX-deductable **support for our ministry** should be written to the order of **Berean Baptist church, P.O. Box 1233, Grand Blanc, Michigan 48480-3233**. Direct bank transfers may be made to **Franklin Bank, 24725 West Twelve Mile Road, Southfield, MI 48034 USA, Routing Number 241271957 Berean Baptist Special Account No. 567495976**.

Please inform **Max Sharp** at Berean Baptist Church by email of the details of the transaction (including date, transaction number and sum) at maxsharp@earthlink.net

All contributions are tax deductible. Receipts are sent at the end of the calendar year or at the donor's request. Please do not send contributions directly to us – we consider accountability extremely important.

Funds sent for the ministry will be used exclusively for that purpose.

We reserve the right to use for the ministry funds sent for personal use.