

MaozNews No. 18

Published every 4 weeks or so
June 2009

In this issue

Israeli Messianic Jewish Identity
Banned from Wedding in Israel
Sephardic Rabbi Wants Tougher Conversions
Baruch's Biography
 The Crises (Continued)
 The WEC College
Family and Ministry News

Israeli Messianic Jewish Identity

Most congregational leaders in Israel prefer to describe themselves as Messianic, even when they disavow the common trappings of a Messianic image, such as maintaining the dietary laws, observing the Jewish Sabbath and conducting an Orthodox or traditional Jewish lifestyle.

Caught between the Scylla of their faith in Christ and the Charybdis of their Jewish identity, many Jewish Christians are insecure of their identity. Their people insist that faith in Christ severs believers' tie with the Jewish people; the church insists upon their duty to adopt a new set of loyalties, sometimes and to varying degrees set over against Jewish nationality.

The Israel College of the Bible (ICB) initiated a Theological Forum, the first of a projected series, in which the chosen topic was *Jewish Christian (or, Messianic) Israeli Identity*. The topic was to be discussed from three angles: psychological-sociological, theological and pastoral (in that order). Originally, two speakers were to address the topic on each of the three angles, and the speakers chosen were to represent differing positions. The forum was to be by invitation only, with some 100 invitations projected.

The lack of willing, capable speakers and lack of interest forced the organizers to open the forum, and to have about half of the intended number of speakers, among whom Baruch was numbered. He was asked to address the topic theologically.

The Forum took place on May 24-25 in a small hotel in Netanya. Some 50 participants attended, including the organizers and the speakers. **Dr. Erez Soref**, ICB President and clinical psychology graduate of Wheaton College, presented his findings following a survey of Israeli Jewish Christians. His presentation was followed by one from **Michael Tsin**, Chosen People Ministries senior representative in Israel, who presented the case for the need and legitimacy of binding Messianic religious

legislation (Halacha), as well as for the validity of observing aspects of rabbinic Halacha. He insisted that attributing spiritual authority to rabbinic Halacha was scriptural, and that one could pick and choose which parts of Halacha are to be obeyed. He offered no criteria on which to base such choices, nor did he address the inherent contradiction of the call to partial subservience to a binding authority.

Baruch's presentation insisted on the primacy of Christ, the unity of the church, the sufficiency of the work of Christ and the authority of the word of God. He called upon Israeli Jewish Christians to be, first and foremost Christians, and to frame the other aspects of their identity – Jewish and Israeli – in accordance with the faith of Christ.


This presentation was followed by one from **Dr. Gideon Nerel**, who surveyed confessions of faith created by some of the congregations in the country. Dr. Nerel noted that many confessions defined themselves by disavowals rather than by affirmations, called for a rejection of all creeds and for a review of the essential tenets of an Israeli Messianic Jewish faith. By way of example he called for a review of a recent statement adopted by congregations in Israel, which affirmed "the full humanity of Jesus". Dr. Nerel expressed discomfort with such a statement because (as he explained on another occasion), he believes, such attributed humanity reduces the value of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross.

Seth (Chaim) Ben Chaim presented his case for a strict subservience to rabbinic Halacha. He intimated the possibility that the Jewish people were all included in a redemptive covenant by virtue of the call "his blood be on us and on our children", which Ben Chaim interpreted as a possible invocation of the blood of the covenant about to be made by Christ as he went to the cross. This invocation, he suggested, could have brought the whole of the nation into the covenant of redemption.

The final presentation was made by a good-natured Messianic Pastor, **Eitan Shishkoff**, who called for reliance on the Spirit, a messianic lifestyle, an active evangelistic outreach and for social engagement.

It is doubtful whether an academic rather than ecclesiological context is most conducive to such discussions, particularly when there is but a superficial theological underpinning to serve as guideposts. The veneration of academic liberty allows for the free expression of heresy and forbids its active engagement. What is needed is a vigorous, believing, committed pastorally and theologically equipped context in which crucial issues of the Faith are hammered out in a manner relevant to the challenges facing the church in Israel today. The general tone of the proceedings was reasonable, although the forum was obviously and almost overtly tendentious. Some of the participants resorted to negative personal innuendo. The Forum was a disconcerting but true picture of trends among Israeli Jewish Christians.

Banned from Wedding in Israel

According to New Family, an Israeli organization dedicated to advancing family rights and the rights of individuals within families in Israel,  some 45,000 Israeli citizens are unable to wed in the country because the identity of their fathers is unknown. Some 10,000 of these, the majority of whom are minors, have been formally defined by the Rabbinate as "bastards". Some 3,500 new such children are born in Israel every year, 2,800 of whom are born to single parents. For various reasons, the identity of their biological fathers of these children is unknown.

Irit Rosenblum, an advocate and the founder and chairperson of New Family says these children are blacklisted by the Rabbinate, who maintains a file of their status. Eli Ben Dahan, Director of the Rabbinical Court assured the Press that "the list of bastards is kept at the Rabbinate" and that the list is "highly confidential".

Sephardic Rabbi Demands Tougher Conversion Process

The Israeli Government is actively engaged in the promotion of conversion among its non-Jewish citizens. Dissatisfied, Sephardic Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar has called for a stricter conversion process: "There is a need to fix in a principle law the Chief Rabbinate's authority with regard to conversions... Over the last 10 years the concept of 'conversion' lost its religious meaning and became an 'immigration' term, through which non-Jews automatically seek Israeli nationality under the Law of Return, intending to join the Jewish people," Amar wrote.

Amar suggests that converts be allowed to become Israeli citizens under the Citizenship Law and that the Law of Return be limited to foreign nationals whose mothers are Jewish. Converts whose conversion will not be recognized by the Rabbinate who are allowed by the High Court to stay in Israel will be unable to wed Jewish spouses in the country because the Chief Rabbinate will not recognize their conversions.

Baruch's Biography

In our previous installment, Baruch was in the throes of a spiritual crises. Painfully aware of his unworthiness, he composed a letter to Bracha and was preparing to "slump back to Israel and bury himself in some forgotten corner of the country to hide his shame and unworthiness.

The Crises (continued)

The next morning was a cold November morning. The CLC headquarters was not centrally heated; all we had were small electric heaters. I awoke early as was my custom and walked down to the library to pray. It was pitch dark outside and not a soul in the house stirred. I turned on the heater and sat in front of it, as close as I could. I was cold in body and in soul. I opened my Bible and lighted on the little word "grace" in Paul's letter to the Romans. Prompted by I did not know what, I decided to trace that word in Paul's letter. I was stunned:

Rom. 1:7 – grace is a companion of peace.

Rom. Rom 3:3 – human unfaithfulness cannot undo God's faithfulness.

Rom. 3:23-24 – all humans are sinful but justification is free, by grace, with no reference to human effort, a fruit of the redemption that is in Christ.

Rom. 4:4-8 – grace is not a reward for right doing. God justifies sinners, as David testified when he spoke of the blessedness of those to whom, though iniquitous, God refuses to attribute iniquity.

Rom. 4:16 – God's promises are based on faith and given by grace so that their fulfilment will be sure (!).

Rom. 5:1-2, 6-10, 15, 21 – we have peace with God because our standing before him is the fruit of grace. Christ died for the morally and spiritually incompetent, for the guilty and the sinful, thereby displaying God's love. Having been reconciled when we were (unconverted) enemies of God, all the more will we be saved by the death of his Son. Grace and its consequences are greater than sin and any result it can bring. Grace reigns, resulting in eternal life.

Rom. 9:14-18 – God reigns through grace, which grace has nothing to do with a person wanting or doing. It has to do with God exclusively, and God shows mercy to whomever he wants.

Rom. 10:12 – God is full of grace toward all who call on him.

Rom. 11:5-6 – grace is the reason for election, not our doing or any potential to be found in us, otherwise it is no longer grace.

I sat in the cold library, almost hugging the heater, and wept for joy. I had come to understand: God's love is unconditional. It had nothing to do with what I was, could do or ever had done. It was solid in spite of my sin and weakness, as sure as God is sure. Life suddenly took on a new aura, had new meaning – and I had more than just a hope. Only many years later did I begin to fathom the importance of grace in a wider sense. But I had sweet, life-changing a foretaste on that November morning.

I returned to my room, destroyed the letter to Bracha, and returned to my studies with renewed vigour. As far as I was concerned, Bob was no longer an instrument of torture. He was a tool in the hands of God for my good.

I intended to return to Israel as soon as the Candidate's Course ended, and establish a CLC work in the country. The CLC leadership concluded that I was not ready for such a task and encouraged me to undertake biblical and theological training. Since CLC had close connections with WEC (Worldwide Evangelism Campaign) it was suggested that I study at the WEC College in Glasgow. I recognized that there was a need for me to study – how could I deal with Christian literature when I was so ignorant of Christian things?! I also had a sense of being unprepared. I applied and was accepted.

The WEC College

The College was founded to train candidates for WEC, but it had broadened its ministry and now sought to train all and any. WEC believed that it was not sufficient to provide merely the academics of a biblical and theological education; the College created and maintained an environment in which spiritual disciplines were inculcated, to the benefit of all who studied there.

A strict regime was applied: dress codes were firm, a list of what was permitted and forbidden was readily available, no relations between the sexes were allowed except under precise guidelines and subject to formal permission from the Principle. Everyone was to be in bed and up at certain hours. The Head Boy and the Head Girl were expected to exemplify the College Code.

We were not allowed to request seconds at table. There were six of us at each dinner table. Students sat at the sides of the table. The ends were for Staff members and senior students. The letter served out the portions to the staff member, Head Boy or Head Girl first, then the rest of us hungry youngsters, and finally themselves. Students were to be aware of the needs of those with them at table and to offer seconds or thirds, so long as any food was left, to those whose plates were empty. We developed stratagems by which to inform each other we wanted seconds. If we wanted more potatoes, we would turn to someone with plenty of potatoes on his plate and offer, "Would you like more potatoes?" He or would invariably reply, "No thank you. Would you?" to which we could innocently reply, "Why, yes. Thank you", and help ourselves to another serving. If we were in a playful mood and our plate was full, we would respond to whoever offered us seconds, "No thank you" and leave it at that. The response was often a slight kick under the table.

Pa and Ma Rowbottom, who established the College, were still there, much liked and much respected by all present. They were kind, ever intervening on the students' behalf and eager to go the extra mile for anyone. Roy and Daphne Spraggett were

veteran WEC missionaries who had worked in the villages of Viet Nam. Their home was attacked by the Viet Cong when Daphne was expecting their second child. Roy lost part of his hearing in the attack and they were both badly wounded. Their then only child was protected from the blast because, she had chosen to sleep that night between her parents. The two were rushed to hospital and nursed back to health. The child Daphne carried was born and had become the darling of the College. Roy taught practical topics like mechanics, building, well drilling, gardening and the like. Daphne taught English.

Roy was uptight. The injury seemed to have shaken him and Daphne, so that they had to deal over and over again with the trauma they had undergone. We were protective of Daphne and treated her with the utmost understanding. But we foolishly expected Roy to be unaffected. Roy responded to our lack of understanding with a nervous kindness mixed with a stern attitude that did not always know how to be just. Over the years, they both healed emotionally and were much loved and respected within the WEC family. Roy worked for many years with Patrick Johnston of Operation World.

There was another staff member whose name I cannot recall, nor his duties at College. He was a short man, with a sight paunch. I think his name was Bill. Bill had been a WEC missionary in Columbia. The Roman Catholic Church opposed Protestant missionary work in the country, and Bill had been attacked, his skull crushed with a machete. He was an older man and became an object of sympathetic affection from the students. He died during the first year I was at College.

Bill Chapman was the Principle and his wife, Myra, the administrator, often also serving as cook. Bill was as uptight as his wife was congenial. A nuclear scientist, he was employed as an intelligence officer during "the War. We never discovered his rank but were given to understand he had been an officer. Shy to an extreme, Mr. Chapman, as we all called him, was seldom seen to smile or to engage in small talk. No one liked to sit at his table for a meal. He taught us theology and was, it appeared, a closet Calvinist. Behind his stern exterior there hid a generous, kind individual with a real concern for the good of the students.

Having no source of income, I have no idea how or who paid for my tuition and provided me from time to time with sufficient pocket money to get by. The College had placed in the basement a Poor Man's Box, in which clothes no longer needed would be put to be given to the needy. Most of my clothes came from that box. One day I was given a pair of shoes. I already had a good pair but I noticed that Mr. Chapman's soles were worn thin and had holes. By some means no longer remembered, I discovered that he and I wore the same size shoes. So, early in the morning, I tiptoed up the narrow stairs to Mr. Chapman's office and left the shoes in a plastic bag with a typewritten note, so he could not identify my handwriting. That morning, as the bell rang for breakfast, I was delighted to see Mr, Chapman wearing the "new" shoes I had given him. (to be continued)

Family and Ministry News

Since late March, **Bracha** has been in the US, visiting our children. She spent a month with Marcus and Tamar, assisting with Yotam, the new baby, and then two weeks with each of the other families (Eran and Avital, Keith and Shlomit). Baruch managed the house well during that time, but pined for his partner.

Marcus received an excellent job offer in southern California, which would put him and **Tamar** with an easy day's drive from **Eran and Avital**. He accepted the job and, within a short while, moved to Irvine near Los Angeles. It was difficult to leave friends and especially church friends in the Seattle area, and now they are in the process of seeking a church to which they can attach themselves.

Eran took advantage of the fact that Bracha was with Avital to make a short business visit trip to Israel. **Noam** is learning to cope with her diabetes, **Maya** with being second fiddle to her older sister and **Nadav** speaks of himself in the feminine (Hebrew distinguishes between the genders extensively). Can you blame him, with two dominant sisters and no one else with whom to speak Hebrew?

Keith and Shlomit are extremely happy at church. Keith has found further part-time employment to help him make up for the shortfall in family income, and Shlomit is still processing her papers. Until this is completed, she is not allowed to work. There is some possibility that she will visit Israel to testify at a court case, but will only know this for certain once she knows if the process of her documentation in the US will not be disaffected. She was enabled to visit us for just over two weeks in June, which was a particular delight.

Katya, who lived with us for an extended period and left to be wed, is now with child. **Rose**, for whom we care, is now completing high school and intends to work until her military call up, in February.

Baruch has been asked to be responsible for the **Young People** in the church Bracha and he now attend. At our age, this is quite a challenge and Baruch's hope is to equip someone in the few coming years to take over this sacred task. Meanwhile, Bracha and he will have the young people over for a Sabbath meal once a month and Baruch will meet with them to study, pray and fellowship 5 times each month. Baruch has also been **asked to preach** once a month and to fill in from time to time as is necessary.

Work on a **commentary on Micah** has been laid aside for a while in order to respond to the more pressing need for a **commentary on Romans. Joel and Amos** is now in print and the publisher is reviewing **God and His World**, the next projected publication in the Foundations for Spirit Life series on the fundamentals of the Faith. Inna, our hired editorial assistant has had to delay work on the book about church life and structure – she is now a mother. Baruch is looking for further editorial and research assistance in order to increase the pace of production.

At the end of May, Baruch was privileged to preach a short series on chapters 1-11 of Romans to a reforming church in **Germany**. The series may be heard (with German translation) at <http://idisk.mac.com/frankhuck-Public?view=web> (Messages 01-03). He and Bracha plan to travel to **Scotland** where Baruch will be free for most of the

TAX-deductible **support for our ministry** should be written to the order of Berean Baptist Church and posted to **Berean Baptist church, P.O. Box 1233, Grand Blanc, Michigan 48480-3233**, earmarked "**for the Maoz Ministry (Soli Deo Gloria)**", or "**for Maoz Support**". 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 (date, transfer number, sum and designated purpose). 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

Funds sent for the ministry will be used exclusively for that purpose. As necessity arises, we .reserve the right to use for the ministry funds sent for personal use