

**MaozNews No. 90**  
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**USA Travels**

To date we have driven 12,000 miles and yet we feel none the worse for it. God has preserved our health and our strength. We've had the privilege of visiting family, friends, supporters, former congregants and brethren in the ministry for their encouragement. Our concern has been to help push back the Messianic Movement, promote an informed and biblically-motivated interest in the evangelization of the Jewish people and encourage those so engaged while reporting to those who pray for us and/or support us in our work. As readers of MaozNews will know, we have lost just above half of our annual support. Efforts to make up for the loss have so far not been crowned with success but for some 10% of the loss. We trust that the Lord will not forsake us in these, our later years.

What I would consider to be one of my more important sermons was delivered at Briarwood Presbyterian Church in Birmingham. Briarwood, its Pastor, the congregation and the Jacksons there have been long-time friends. I am thankful for their prayers and support. Visiting Briarwood has always been a spiritual experience: here is a congregation where the word of God is proclaimed with consistent faithfulness, where the people pray and where a walk with God is cultivated.

To hear the sermon, go to [On Being a Christian in Our Time](#)(podcast) or to the Dropbox link that follows (MP3): [On Being A Christian in Our Time](#). The transcription of the sermon may be found on my web page as well as on my FaceBook wall.

To list the churches and brethren we have visited and to describe the joy of being there or accord each our thanks would take up far too much space in this newsletter. Special places of note were La Grange Baptist in Louisville KY, Grace Baptist in Hartsville TN, Southern Hills Baptist in Kempner TX, The Brooks and Cornerstone and Grace Covenant. There and everywhere else visited in the course of this tour we were accorded generously considerate hospitality and my preaching was received with kindness. Visiting Katya and her family in Montreal and former congregants in various locations in the USA was bittersweet; sweet because of renewed ties of

affection and shared longing after Christ. Bitter because they are all so far away and I am no longer in the capacity I once enjoyed in relation to them. Serving either as father to my children and Pastor to the congregation is a holy privilege that I miss greatly.

Bracha travelled to the States earlier and enjoyed two weeks with Avital and Tamar in Washington State and a week or so with Shlomit in Pennsylvania. I joined her and, together, we had a few days with Shlomit and a week with Katya. We will soon be with Avital and Tamar for just under three weeks before making our way back East and then southeast, to spend a bit more than a week with Shlomit. We sorely miss our family!

We have yet another 12,000 miles to go, before returning home, God willing, on October 6<sup>th</sup> (departing from the US one day before) where Bracha will make acquaintance with our new home and my ongoing work awaits me. I have been able to invest some hours in work, particularly on the New Testament translation, but not as much as I would like.

Our house was burglarized. Rose was asked to watch over the house in our absence. She left for work in the morning. The alarm system was neutralized (which is why the security company had no indication that anything was amiss), the safe broken into and removed with all its contents: my pistol, the totality of our savings in the form of collectors' coins, to the value of some \$85,000 which we were to use to make the final payment on the home, having used our pension savings for previous payments. In addition, significant damage was done to the house.

In the goodness of God, Rose did not return home until after work, late at night, when she found the front door ajar. I dread to think what might have happened had she chanced to return while the thieves were in the house. Needless to say, she is now justifiably afraid to sleep in the house, which means that the rest of our property is unprotected. Better that than that anything should happen to her.

The police spent a good part of the morning looking for clues as to the identity of the thieves, who apparently watched our home for some days and noted when there was no one at home and for how long. So far we have not received information from the police that indicate the discovery of evidence found that could lead to the capture of the perpetrators.

Presumably, they had seen us move the safe into the house and so knew it was there. They broke in through the French doors leading to the yard, sought and found the safe and spent a good part of the day, using my tools, in an attempt to break the safe open. Failing that they uprooted the 700-pound safe from its moorings, dragged it to the front door and thence to the steps leading to the street in front of our house, where a vehicle awaited them.

We have not received official word from the insurance company but were given to understand that the fact that the alarm system was neutralized is to be the grounds

on which the company will refuse to accept responsibility for damages or loss. The coins were not insured because we could not afford the costs involved. In our former home, the safe was so well hidden that the security company did not think it worthwhile insuring it or the contents. When we moved to our smaller home, I requested our agent to "insure the house and its contents," which she took to mean an identical policy to the one we had and which excluded the safe and the valuables in it. I was so occupied with moving and all the arrangements related to the move that I forgot to check if the safe and the valuables had been included. Consequently, they were not insured and we will not be able to recover their loss. Our insurance agent — an unbeliever — offered to "doctor" the policy so as to include the safe and its contents. But, needless to say, I refused to allow such subterfuge.

The gentleman who does our maintenance and the insurance agent will be submitting their reports and their recommendations. In addition to the final payment we need to make and for which we now have no funds, we will need to invest more effort in security, including iron grates on the windows, further protection of the French doors (already protected by an aluminum shutter), and more effective measures against neutralizing the alarm system.

Such events are never welcome, but we trust in the Lord and are confident that he has some wise purpose of grace. The Heidelberg Confession puts it as follows: "I believe in the everlasting Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who made of nothing heaven and earth, who likewise upholds and governs the same by his eternal counsel and providence. This God I believe to be my God and Father for Christ's sake, and therefore so trust in him and rely on him that I do not doubt that he will provide all things necessary for both my soul and body. But also, whatever evil he sends me in this troublesome life he will turn out to my safety because he is both able to do it, being God Almighty and willing to do it, being bountiful Father." God truly rules over all and uses all to the praise of his glorious grace. It is ours to honor him by trusting, and this we seek to do.

Please note: this is **NOT** an appeal for funds. This is an appeal for prayer and an expression in our shared confidence in God. At this stage we have no idea how to make up for the loss and the added costs. We are grateful to those who chose to send us contributions in an effort to cover the costs, but a loss of such dimensions, on top of which come the expenses that have to do with repair of the damage and increased security, can only be met by an extraordinary providence. Upon returning home I intend to request a loan from the bank. While it is true that banks are reticent to provide loans to persons of my age, I have reason to hope that the equity on our home will suffice to allay concerns.

We do not wish the financial issue to be the major focus of attention. We seek the grace to glorify God in this circumstance. Please pray with us that we will do so in what we do and, no less, in how and why we do it.

### Isaiah 53

Isaiah had prophesied the punishment of Judah. As of chapter 40 he speaks of the nation's comfort. In 52:13 to the end of the chapter he states that, had Judah only trusted in the Lord and obeyed God's commandments, the nation would have enjoyed "peace flowing like a river." But God has a plan. He will raise up his servant to turn the people back to himself. He will bring the nation from afar and renew their fortunes because his love is faithful. Judah's mourning will be turned to joy. God will "bare the saving arm of his might before the eyes of the nations and the ends of the earth will see the salvation" he accomplished for Judah. This is the wonderful message of hope that the messenger will bring. Just as the servant was despised, so he will be glorified. And so we come to Chapter 53.

"<sup>2</sup>Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" Few have believed the message. Small wonder, it is so contrary to all natural expectation: a God who loves those on whom he brings judgment, who saves those whom he punishes. Such an idea boggles the mind. It does not seem reasonable. Faith in such a message can be nothing less than the fruit of an act of God. As Calvin puts it, "no man can come to God but by an extraordinary revelation of the Spirit".

This does not excuse us from the guilt involved in unbelief. We are guilty of not readily believing what God has said in his word. Our self-serving prejudice has blinded us; our pride restrains us from submitting to the truth and drives us to reject what God by his grace has done for our salvation. Our desire to retain control over our miserable lives, even when we are in the depths of filth and despair, moves us to refuse to allow God to take control and save us. "I can do it," we insist in our foolish arrogance. We need the grace of God to believe. We need his grace to release us from the shackles of sin over our mind and heart. We need his forgiveness for daring to disbelieve.

"<sup>3</sup> He grew up before him like a tender shoot and like a root out of parched ground; he has no stately form or grandeur that we should look upon him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to him." The servant of whom the prophet spoke, who will be used of the Lord to bring his people back to himself, is to come from a wholly unexpected source. As meets the eye he was to be as weak as a "tender shoot," easily broken, easily parched. His accomplishments were to be as likely as those of "a root that grows out of dry ground." There would be nothing to him visibly. He was not to be the son of an earthly king, nor the child of a renowned warrior. He will have no promising ancestry, no remarkable social standing, no financial backing.

On the contrary, "he was despised and forsaken of men, a man of pains and like one from whom men hide their face and acquainted with weakness, he was despised, and we did not esteem him." His personal history was to be one of rejection, pain and weakness -- not what one would expect from the one used of the Lord to restore Judah's fortunes. Like his background, his prowess was not to be physical, political or military. The restoration he was to achieve ought not to be thought of in such terms. It had a different nature, made clear as we proceed to view the chapter.

Rather than being above the "pains," sorrows and "weaknesses" of mankind, this servant will be thoroughly acquainted with human reality. As a result, he will be "despised." He will not be "esteemed" to be who he truly is. He will be taken to be something else. The message concerning him will not be believed by any except those "to whom the arm of the Lord is revealed."

Isaiah made reference to that arm in 52:10. Speaking of the future salvation of Judah he said, "the Lord has made bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations that all the ends of the earth may see the salvation of our God." This term, "the arm of the Lord," is borrowed from the scriptural description of a previous act of salvation, which act constituted the foundation of the nation: God brought the people out of Egypt with an outstretched arm. Hence, Isaiah had cried out, "Awake! Awake! O arm of the Lord, put on strength as in the days of old." (51:9). His reference to the arm of the Lord is the prophet's way of calling on his hearers to remember how unlikely that redemption was, and yet how glorious. It is a phrase almost wholly peculiar to Isaiah, pregnant with meaning, suggestive of an act of national redemption that equals that formative redemptive act when the people were brought out of Egypt.

That earlier salvation was more than release from bondage. It was a glorious victory for God. It marked the creation of a nation and the establishment of a covenantal relationship between God and the people. All that and more seems to be intimated by the prophet's reference to "the arm of the Lord."

How is this great accomplishment to be achieved? Well, the means are as unlikely as was the servant. "<sup>4</sup>Surely our weaknesses he bore and our pains he carried; and we esteemed him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted." The opening word, "surely," serves to give emphasis. It is a strong affirmation.

There is no room for doubt: the sufferings this servant of God bears are not his own; they are ours. But Judah was unable to see beyond appearances: "He trusted in God, let us now see if God will save him." When there was seemingly no divine intervention on behalf of the suffering servant, the conclusion at which the people of Judah arrived was as clear as it was firm: "we esteemed him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted." Judah thought the servant suffered for his own sins. As Isaiah will show, that conclusion was mistaken. God indeed smites the wicked but the weaknesses and pains this servant bore were ours, due to us for our wickedness. "<sup>5</sup>But he was pierced through for our transgressions, he was suppressed for our iniquities."

Instead of Judah bearing punishment, the servant did so. He was in Judah's stead, the nation's representative in punitive suffering. What the sacrifices in the temple were designed to do, he did. The central role they fulfilled in Judah's relationship to God he now fulfills. The servant has substituted for Judah in the bearing of Judah's guilt and of guilt's consequences. In some way, the servant of the Lord has become one with Judah.

Isaiah is telling us that the promised redemption from punishment is not at the expense of justice. Judah suffered for its sin, but now that sin has been atoned, twice-atoned, that is to say, effectively. Consequently, the servant's substitutionary sufferings are effective: "the chastening for our peace fell upon him and by his bruise we are healed." The sufferings achieved the purpose for which they were inflicted and those whose punishment for their transgressions and iniquities were borne by the servant are granted "peace" and "healing."

"Peace": God is no longer to be angry with Judah. The sacrifice offered by his servant will remove the just cause for anger and God will again relate to man with kindness and with pleasure. "Healing," not from physical disease but from the sin that originally brought disease into the world.

THAT is what Judah sought. Judah at the time that the prophet prophesied was due to be judged. These words of promise and comfort were meant to sustain the people and to encourage them to turn to God in the course of their sufferings, so as to find "peace" and "healing". That is what is promised. God will show himself to be, at the same time, both just and the justifier of sinners.

"<sup>6</sup>All of us like sheep have gone astray: each of us has turned to his own way but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on him." Contrary to Judah's view of itself, the nation is but like a foolish sheep, following after a wicked shepherd, straying into strange and evil pastures by virtue of the nation's assertion of autonomy from Jehovah and the freedom to choose its own national course. This is nothing but a reaffirmation of the original deceptive lie: you will be like God, able to determine what is good or evil. As if we had the moral infinitude, the holy wisdom and the divine right to rule over our lives and environment.

Here is the root of all sin: the desire to be free from God. We are willing to believe in a God who blesses, indeed, who is bound to bless, make us happy and save us from the unwelcome consequences of our pride. But we do not want a God who exercises authority over our lives, who demands that his will be our first priority and his glory our primary goal. Yet, somehow, "the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on him." He bore Judah's guilt.

Note: it is not the punishment of sin that is here spoken of but the guilt. This is identification in the highest degree. Just what form that identification will take we are not told. That is left to later revelation. We cannot but wonder and wait with eager anticipation for that further disclosure.

Next we have a description of the servant's demeanor as he suffered: "<sup>7</sup>He was oppressed and he was afflicted yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so he did not open his mouth." He did not complain. He did not resist. He did not call upon God to send ten thousand of his angels to defend him. He went like a sacrificial lamb to the slaughter. We know why he did so: it was to that end he was sent. That is the service he renders to God: the redemption of God's people. His weakness is merely apparent; it

is the arm of the Lord, outstretched for the salvation of his people. His death is a work of God on behalf of the people of God. He does not protest because he knows that it is his to drink the cup that God has given him to drink, down to its very dregs.

"<sup>8</sup>By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and who will describe his generation, because he was cut off out of the land of the living," On the one level, the servant was unjustly slain. It was a miscarriage of justice and there is none in Judah to narrate to truth of his life. On the other, "because of the transgression of my people he was diseased." As we have said, the servant's suffering and death were on behalf of Judah and in Judah's place. "<sup>9</sup>His grave was assigned with wicked men and with a rich man in his death yet he had done no violence nor was there any deceit in his mouth." Repetition serves to drive the point home: let there be no mistake. The servant's suffering was not the just desert of his sin. Although numbered, slain and buried with transgressors, he was not a transgressor. His identification with those whose guilt is obvious leaves no room for doubt, but it does not reflect on the moral perfection of the servant himself -- and morality in biblical terms always issues out of the fear of God.

"<sup>10</sup>Yet the Lord was pleased to crush him, putting him to grief;" Can it be? The judge of all the earth pleased with a miscarriage of justice?! Still further, whoever was humanly responsible for such a perversion, Isaiah tells us, was merely an instrument in the hands of God. In an ultimate sense, it was God himself who "crushed" the servant and "put him to grief." God used wicked, unjust men to achieve his purposes of redemption for Judah. He is Lord of every human heart, and that without affecting in the slightest degree the moral aspects of human choices, reducing the relative freedom of human choices nor undoing man's responsibility. They miscarried justice. The Lord was behind their actions, using their wickedness for his benign purposes, but the deed was theirs.

There is more to Isaiah's statement. What we have here is a statement concerning the amazing love of God, who was "pleased" to sacrifice his servant for those who would be redeemed. He found pleasure, not in the servant's terrible suffering (intimated by the terms, "crushed," hinting at premeditation and "grief") but in the achievement obtained by these means. God loving sinners? A holy God loving sinners on grounds he so amazingly establishes? Yet that is the prophet's message.

"If you will render his death a guilt offering he will see his offspring, he will prolong his days and the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in his hand. As a result of the anguish of his soul he will see and be satisfied; by his knowledge the righteous one, my servant, will justify the many because he will bear their iniquities." Now comes the call to respond to this deed of God through his servant. How is Judah to relate to this act? "If you will render his death a guilt offering." There it is: the guilt offering was central to the tabernacle and temple worship. The sacrifices offered there are now replaced by the servant's sacrifice, and Judah's trust in the atoning value of the sacrifices is now to be replaced by faith in the sacrifice offered by the servant.

He is Judah's "guilt offering." He secures atonement, the forgiveness of sin. Those who will so view that sacrifice and relate to it in that manner will become his "offspring." The good pleasure of the Lord to redeem Judah will be accomplished, the purpose for which the servant suffered anguish will be achieved and he will be "satisfied." Many will be justified "because he will bear their iniquity." Although just himself (and this is the first and only direct reference to the servant's just nature), he will bear the punishment of Judah, justifying many from among the people "because he will bear their iniquities."

And so the slain servant now lives and his days are prolonged as he enjoys the fruit of his amazing act of kindness. Again Calvin puts it so well: the Lord's servant "shall not be hindered by his death from prolonging his days, that is, from living eternally." How is this possible? Isaiah leaves us again, wondering, awaiting further revelation. The Old Testament creates anticipation and motivates to further seeking, but it does not answer all the questions it raises.

The Almighty responds to his servant's action. "Therefore", because he has done this, says the Lord concerning his servant, "<sup>12</sup>I will allot him a portion with the great and he will divide the booty with the strong;" no longer viewed as weak, he has overcome and now shares in the rewards of his victory "because he poured out himself to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he himself bore the sin of many and interceded for the transgressors." God does not tire. He repeats the message.

Repetition is necessary because the ideas presented in this passage are almost unbelievable: one bearing the guilt and punishment of the many, thereby securing their redemption, forgiveness and justification; the death of one on behalf of many, to be followed by a prolonged, victorious life; weakness that is discovered to be strength; grace that overcomes sin; a holy God who rules over human freedom without reducing it and who utilizes even evil for good.

Such is the message of grace, and such are the principles of the Gospel as enunciated in the Old Testament.

Let's summarize:

- Judah had sinned and was punished according to its desert because God is holy and sin cannot go unpunished in his world.
- God is true though every man is proven to be a liar: he is true to his covenant. His gifts and calling are irrevocable. So God took the initiative to save Judah from its sin and from that sin's consequences.
- That salvation is to be accomplished by a servant of the Lord and on the grounds of a substitutionary sacrifice.
- God's love is amazing. He loves the unworthy and he saves sinners, yet he does so in a way that does not detract from his law but fulfills it.
- Redemption, the forgiveness of sins is according to the law but not by way of the law; it is possible only after the satisfaction of the law's demands by the sacrifice of another, the just for the unjust, a perfect sacrifice made by one who is free from the guilt of sin yet assumes the guilt of many.

- Faith is necessary for redemption. Those who seek forgiveness must make his sacrifice their own by embracing and relying on it as the effective offering for sin, by whose virtue sinners are healed and peace is established between God and them.
- Such faith can only be the product of the work of God in a human heart. None but those to whom the arm of the Lord is revealed are enabled to understand the message and to put their trust in him.
- The Old Testament leaves some questions open and, to the extent that we wish to be true to the Old Testament, we cannot impose upon the text in an effort to provide the answers those questions.

### Shame and Horror; Israel – An Update

Upon receipt of the news of the murder by arson of a Palestinian child and the wounding of his family by Israeli terrorists, I published the following on my FaceBook Wall:

#### **Shame and Horror - and Yet There is a Difference**

There is no excuse for the despicable, murderous act that caused the death of a Palestinian baby and the wounding of three Palestinian citizens. The perpetrators must and will be caught, tried and punished in the severest measure the Israeli legal system can exact. Nothing, but nothing can justify such barbarism. Nothing can make up for the sense of shame that I and every Israeli feels at the thought that any from among us have committed such a crime.

And yet there is a difference.

In a meaningful sense, the vicious criminals are NOT one of us. They are the rotten fruit of an extremism we eschew. They have been castigated by our Government, pilloried by our press, disowned by our public and are being sought by the best of our criminal and intelligence investigators. When found, they will be prosecuted and punished.

Israeli children and Israeli families have been murdered by Palestinians in cold blood. Their actions have not been decried by the Palestinian Authority, press or public (except, on occasion, to say that such acts are "not in the Palestinian interest"). On the contrary, the PA has named streets after deceased terrorists and celebrated their deeds, accords their families financial remuneration and commends them as exemplary martyrs for the cause.

I am ashamed of those who have perpetrated this atrocity but proud of my people -- in both cases, for good reason. I long for the day when Palestinian official and public opinion will legitimately be able to say as much.

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COME LET US REASON TOGETHER (On the Unity of Jews and Gentiles in the church), P&R. This book presents Christ as the fullness of divine revelation and his work as sufficient for our whole salvation.

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. This book is **presently unavailable**. Crossbooks, who published this commentary, has closed its doors. We hope to republish in 2016.

Baruch's sermons may be heard on [Sermon Audio](#)

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