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Returning Home

God willing, on the day that you receive this newsletter Bracha and I will have begun our way home, where duties and challenges await us. Bracha will have been in North America, primarily in the US, since June 22nd and I since July 17th. It has been a time of deepest challenges, much pain and of God's blessing.

Bracha's health was challenged by the discovery of cancer. She underwent surgery and has now been declared cancer-free. The shock of the diagnosis, the physical and emotional challenges involved in both the diagnosis and what followed, have all been instruments in the gracious hand of God. We adore him who loves us so wisely.

Compared to when we wrote the first of our 2015 letters, our material situation has been fundamentally altered, this too under the loving hand of God in whom we put our trust. He will provide the grace to cope, and we will seek the grace to serve him best with the remaining resources on hand. We are in need of such grace to guide us as we endeavor to deal responsibly with a considerably reduced income and expenses we could not have foreseen. Wisdom, frugality and courage will be needed. We are grateful for the many who have assured us in practical ways of their support, and will be issuing a full report once all the issues are clear.

Pray with us, please, as we negotiate with our lawyer, the insurance company, the contractor and the company responsible for our home security; and await the decision of the hospital where Bracha underwent surgery. Our deepest longing is to honor God by our conduct and by the motives that guide our conduct as we enter and conclude negotiations. We seek grace to find the right tension between insisting on justice and showing mercy, between obtaining reasonable compensation and displaying a godly generosity. Our straitened circumstances should not dictate whatever course we choose to follow; a fear of God and love of his honor should be our guide. We are merely human and therefore need your prayers.

Israel Today

To a meaningful extent, the Israel we left and the Israel to which we return is not the same country. Yes, the issues have not changed, but the situation has in important ways been accentuated.

The Israeli public has lost its confidence in the Authorities' ability to lead the country: prices continue to rise in spite of the politicians' confident promises that they will not; a present wave of spontaneous knife attacks and car-ramming by Palestinian young men and women is incapable of being contained; Israel's borders are under growing threat from a murderously radical movement within Islam; cynical politicians, some notoriously corrupt, promote their interests and those of their cronies, fans and followers; our House of Legislature is inhabited by a growing number of moral nincompoops who heap shame on the nation; high-ranking police officers have been dismissed on charges of sexual harassment; a tiny number of super-rich families control the economy, forcing prices up and railroading any potential newcomers out of the market; the Government seems more listless than ever, blindly driven by religious and nationalistic forces that refuse to consider either the moral implications or the inevitable practical consequences of their policies.

Freedom of speech is being restricted; the democratic nature of our society eroded and religiously motivated legislation is adding to the ability of the Orthodox to impose their values on society and to force on others their standards of conduct.

The church is becoming increasingly Israeli and, to the same extent less biblical. Engagement with society is being promoted at the expense of a humble kind of courageous godliness. Enlistment on behalf of national causes is encouraged at the expense of the kind of other-worldliness that makes more of the Kingdom of God than of the kingdoms of this world. Spirituality is measured by apparent success rather than in Christ-likeness, and so worldly means are introduced into the life of the churches. I fear for the church. Extra-curricular activity, mostly outside the pale of congregational life and with little reference to it, is the order of the day. Prayer, fasting, meditation, serious Bible study, these are relegated to a secondary position while promising young people are encouraged to channel their abilities through non-congregational endeavors at the expense of congregational life.

These are days of tremendous opportunity if we would but dare to be godly. They are days of potential if we but dare aspire to the highest spiritual standards rather than ape the world by following the most popular psychologized fad. Oh, how the church needs the Gospel!

Reformed Baptist Network

As many will know, the Reformed community in the USA has undergone a major schism, with good men on both sides. Ostensibly, the conflict which gave rise to the schism had to do with the doctrine of God, with both sides affirming the same truths while differing in the way they choose to nuance their positions.

Christians divide too easily, Baptists all the more so. There is a fundamental flaw in our understanding of the church that makes us willing, at times it would seem almost eager, to separate from brethren in Christ. Paul engaged in strenuous conflict over very real issues, but he never contemplated unchurching his brethren or in any way separating from them. He insisted upon what he believed to be true with the recognition that the body of Christ is one, and that we belong together even when we disagree. So long as he was able to view an individual as his brother in Christ, Paul would treat him as such.

Why?

Because Paul realized that the unity of the church is a practical proclamation of the sufficiency and the primacy of Christ: what distinguishes us must not be allowed to divide us because him in whom we share has a priority over the views in which we differ and because Christ's sufficiency is a sufficiency of grace: we belong to him, to the church and to one another on the grounds of grace, not on theological, methodological or moral merit.

We deny the Gospel every time we insist on our right to love one another across denominational barriers we create in our arrogant self-righteousness rather than breaking those barriers down. We deny grace every time we deny it to others by telling them they can no longer belong to us unless they dot our i's and cross our t's. The world looks at us and can no longer say, "Behold how they love one another!" Our divisions render such a perception impossible. They create the opposite impression.

It was, therefore, a distinct pleasure to attend the first conference of the Reformed Baptist Network (temporary designation), held in Boulder Colorado on November 15-17. Although initiated by a group of men who left ARBCA under unhappy circumstances, there was no rancor, no bitterness, no back-biting at the conference; it was Gospel-focused and forward-looking. Discussion of the schism was not part of the program – officially or unofficially. The attitudes were positive, God glorifying.

Some 50 men were present, representing some 35 churches, the overwhelming majority of which had never been in previous association. We had series of thrilling missionary reports from the Far and Middle East, Oceania, Western and Eastern Europe, Latin America and the American home front. From basic evangelism to theological education, from the rain forest jungles to the asphalt jungles of cities, from regions where freedom is accorded to places too dangerous to identify, all had thrilling reports to offer.

The last day was given to discussion of the future, again with no discussion of the past, not even of the recent past. The organizers suggested no agenda and drove the discussion in no specific direction. Fundamentally, two options were suggested: some form of intra-church missionary cooperation for the Gospel, or a wider purpose of mutual intra-church edification, accountability and cooperation. Two avenues of confessional bases were considered: an affirmation of the 1689 Baptist Confession, or a wider, decidedly Reformed but not limited to the 1689.

In a follow-up meeting to be convened in February, further discussion is to be held. Meanwhile, ad hoc committees have been asked to explore the implications of the respective options and respective confessional bases. They were not commissioned to present recommendations.

At the same time, following up on the avid missionary interest evidenced at the conference and the active involvement of many churches, information is being disseminated among participating churches with regard to present missionary endeavors and opportunities.

Ministry and Family News

Having had the pleasure of being with the family for so long, driving them to and from school, watching them at sports and in the home, sharing in their lives even if to a limited extent, makes departing all the more painful. We deeply love our family and long to have more of them, to give ourselves to them more significantly. That is not to be. We depart with a sense of call and of duty to assume afresh our duties in Israel.

I have been able to devote a good number of hours to the work before me. I suspect I have somewhat overdone it, resulting in a painful case of tendonitis. I am now learning to use the mouse with my left hand, so as to allow my right hand some rest. I've also been looking at options for a more ergonomic position while at the computer for so many hours a day. I had contemplated purchasing a full-fledged apple computer with a large screen, but that is cost-prohibitive. I have, however, discovered that I can lift my 13-inch laptop to a more comfortable position and use a wireless keyboard rather than hunch over the laptop for 12-14 hours a day. I am going to try that. If any of my readers have had to deal with similar issues and found solutions, I would be glad to hear from you.

Work on Cairns' CHRISTIANITY THROUGH THE CENTURIES has been frustrating. The book is poorly edited; the author's language is often anachronistic relative to the times he describes; his focus is on externals rather than the content and logic of matters and his concept of the Gospel somewhat limp (he will talk more about faith in Christianity than in Christ). Nevertheless, I've made good progress on this project.

In the course of the coming year I hope to make significant advances in my translation of the New Testament, complete translating Cairns and write a commentary on Habakkuk as well as a work on church life and structure (Ecclesiology).

Our Children and Theirs

Eran and Avital's oldest, Noam, is fast approaching college age and is contemplating a gap year in Israel. Keith and Shlomit are experiencing God's blessing in the church. Marcus and Tamar seem to have found a stable church family while Katya and Felix have yet to find such. Katya and her family are all doing well. Rose has faced some tremendous challenges with her mother. She continues to pursue her college education, with evident blessing.

Bracha is well, no really, as I am too. We give God thanks. Our health is good, our energy levels high, our aspirations tangible and our confidence in God well founded. Your prayers as we return to Israel will be much appreciated.

As soon as our situation is clear with regard to the home, damages, the insurance company and all other related matters, we will issue a full report. In the meanwhile, we thank you all for your love and prayers.

In Christ by grace,

Baruch and Bracha Maoz

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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. **Presently unavailable.** To be republished by Founders Press in 2016.

**The devotional commentaries are well suited
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