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Ordination and Installment of Pastor at Grace and Truth

January 12 2013 was a special day. Four years ago, I bid adieu to the people I had the privilege to love, care for, lead and serve for some 33 years, my pre-designated term of service as their Pastor having come to an end. I had been preparing the church for this moment over the last 7 years. I had also sought to prepare my dear Bracha and myself. It was a sweet-sweet moment in many ways as the church and we parted.

Still, I confess I was in a state of shock and had a tremendous sense of loss. I *love* pastoring. I love the joy and holy privilege of representing the people before God in prayer, to being allowed into many of the secret, intimate moments of joy and sorrow, victory and failure of God's people. I love the duty of strenuous Bible research, sermon preparation and the pulpit ministry. I love the give-and-take involved with working with congregants, Deacons and Elders from whom one learns so much and by which ones' errors are exposed and corrected. Now all of that came to an abrupt end, as Bracha and I moved to a much smaller, very different, daughter church being served by one of my former Elders.

Grace and Truth went through turmoil. The congregation called a Pastor who turned out to be other than expected. A radical change came over the church. Many held on by the skin of their teeth. Others responded to the pride of their hearts, took advantage of the situation to do what they had been preparing to do for some time, broke away and established themselves elsewhere. I lost some of my dearest friends in the process, because I could not support their actions. I pleased with them to turn the other cheek, despise the shame and seek to glorify God by their humility, moral courage, fear of God and kindness. To no avail.

I wept as I saw the church undergo such double turmoil. I prayed but did not intervene in any way beyond my fervent prayers: I was no longer their Pastor. It was for me to trust in the Lord for and with them. After all, the church is his, and we Pastors are merely under-shepherds. Surely he is able to care for his own. What is more, the church had a competent Eldership. So, I prayed.

In the course of preparing the church for my departure, we had set up a Search Committee, a profile and a search process, all carefully approved by the church, and had begun seeking. One candidate was found and, in the course of time, called. But he believed himself duty bound to decline our call. Each of the Elders was considered, but the Committee came to the conclusion that, while some might be suited for a pastorate elsewhere, none among them were suited for Grace and Truth. One reason among others was the strong-minded Eldership alongside which I had been privileged to work. David Zadok was among those thus considered.

In some ways, he was the most likely candidate. Among the Elders, he had the best theological education, having graduated from Westminster Theological Seminary in California. He was an Israeli, married, with proven Christian track record and a family man, with experience of life

both as an officer in the Israeli military and as a senior Systems Analyst in an up-and-coming software firm. He had also replaced me at the helm of HaGefen Publishing and as Israeli Field Leader of CWI, and was steadily steering that work exactly in the same direction I had taken it for decades, with a slightly greater emphasis on the church rather than CWI' and with less financial aid going from the church to CWI. But he was deemed not to be ready for the specifics of the task at Grace and Truth.

I had the privilege of being involved in David's life and have a warm spot in my heart for him. His first few years in the country, following his conversion, were choppy. He had been given by his parents to his uncle and aunt, who raised him, and sent him to the US to study in the hope that he would not have to fulfill the mandatory duty of enlistment into the Israeli military. Once converted, and as a Christian, he knew himself to be duty-bound to fulfill his civic duty, and therefore returned home. At first he was reticent to tell his uncle and aunt that he was a Christian. His church attendance was erratic. But he always responded to my visits, gracious responded to my encouragement and soon became a central figure in our church life. It was with great sorrow I had to inform him that the Search Committee did not deem him suited to be the church's next Pastor.

David responded as a godly man should, and as some do not. He remained in the church and continued to serve faithfully. During the period the new Pastor served, David came to his own, apparently developing those very skills it was thought he had not displayed earlier, so that one of the more strong-minded of the Elders told me later that, in light of David's performance during those dark years, he would now gladly follow his lead.

Bracha and I had carefully stayed away from Grace and Truth all this time, but for a single instance a few months back, when 10 young people of the church were to be baptized. We knew most of these children. So, we slipped into the back of the hall shortly after the service began, and slipped out shortly before it ended. It was a joy to see the church alive, worshipping, hearing God's word, baptizing new believers, sharing the bread and wine of communion.

On January 12 2013, David was ordained and installed as Pastor of Grace and Truth Christian Congregation. I had the privilege of conducting the proceedings. As I ascended to the pulpit and faced the congregation, I took a deep breath. I must not give expression to my excitement. The focus must be on the awesome occasion, on the seriousness of David's and the church's undertaking before God. I fought my tears, suppressed a sense of deep joy and gratitude and, while I stumbled once or twice as I addressed the church, its officers and David, managed to get through the service.

Overcome with emotion, I fled the scene as soon as I could. Bracha - so much of a people's person, wanted to stay on, I knew. So I asked someone else to bring her home later.

What can I say? I am grateful to God. I also have a renewed sense of painful lose as I recall the smiles, tears and embraces of the people when they discovered Bracha and I were at the service, and as I look at my own heart.

Oh! There is something more: the service was the first held in Grace and Truth's new building. Finishing touches need yet to done. The congregation cannot afford a HVAC system. But we met in the lovely new building, which - it is hoped - will be dedicated and formally populated in April.

No indigenous Christian congregation in modern Israel has built its own building. This is a landmark achievement, an exciting moment in the history of the Israeli church. I am grateful to have been allowed to witness it, and to have played some small part in the process. I thank those who undertook to help the church toward this day, some of whom gave sacrificially and dedicated many hour and days in an effort to give a helping hand. May God bless you all.

Election Results

Exactly 32 parties competed for Israeli's 120 parliamentary seats (2 were denied permission. A 2% threshold of actual votes counted must be achieved in order to gain a parliamentary seat. At the

present elections, that threshold was estimated prior the elections to be around 70,000 votes, giving a total number of 3.5 million. Actual participation was XX% of potential voters, XXX in all.

The major political parties in Israel compose blocs: the Right is led by incumbent Benjamin Netanyahu, head of the Likud party, which entered a pact prior to the election with Yisrael 3, led by former Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman. Lieberman is presently contesting criminal charges which, among other matters, will determine his immediate political future. A relative newcomer to this bloc is HaBayit Hayhudi, led by a young upstart and a former Chief of Staff to Netanyahu, Naphthally Bennet. This bloc is most characterized by its nationalist platform

The Left-Center bloc is considered to be such largely because its member parties oppose Prime Minister Netanyahu's social, economic and diplomatic policies. The major parties are Labor, led by Shelly Yechimovitz; HaTnuah, led by former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Former Minister of Justice, Tsipi Livni; Yesh Atid, led by Yair Lapid, and Meretz, led by Zahava Gal-On. This bloc is best characterized by its social concern, but is not necessarily socialistic. It is also more open to meaningful negotiations with the Palestinians.

The third bloc is made up of Israel's traditional king-makers, the religious parties. The major parties in this bloc are Shas and Agudat Yisrael. Their concerns are obviously religious.

The fourth bloc is made up of the two Arab parties, Ra'am-Tal and Balad.

The Israeli system assigns the President with the task of asking one of the parties to form the next government. Since no party has ever won an outright majority, all Israeli Governments have been coalitions, according the balance-tippers (i.e., the religious bloc) disproportionate opportunity, which is often used with impunity and little consideration of the rest of the population. That being the case, it is not necessarily the party that wins the most seats in parliament that is asked to form a Government (Prime Minister Netanyahu's party was the second-largest in the election that took place 4 years ago), but the largest party in the largest bloc. The results of elections held on January 22 are:

Likud-Beiteynu (Netanyahu) -- 31 seats (down from 42)

Yesh Atid (Lapid) -- 19 seats (up from 0)

Labour (Yechimovitz) -- 15 seats (up from 13)

HaBayit HeYehudi -- 12 seats (up from 6)

HaTnuah (Livni) -- 6 seats (up from 0)

Shas (Occidental religious) -- 11 seats (no change)

Yahadut HaTorah (Orthodox) -- 7 seats (up from 6)

Meretz (Gal-On) -- 6 seats (up from 3)

Arab parties combined -- 11 seats (no change)

Kadima (Mofaz) -- 2 seats (down from 28)

The Right has 61 seats, with the Likud the largest party. President Peres has asked Benjamin Netanyahu to form the next Government. He has 28 days to do so, and may receive a single extension of another 14 days. Yesh Atid is a new, upstart party, with no clear political platform, now holding the balance of power. Forty eight of the 120 Knesset members elected to this, Israel's 19th Knesset, are newcomers. The quandary now facing Netanyahu is as follows:

Over the years, much of the Israeli public has despaired of peace with the Palestinians and has therefore veered further to the right. Netanyahu is now a moderate compared to many in his own party, let alone Yisrael Beyteynu and HaBayit Hayhudi, as well as Shas. If he forms a Government within his own bloc, with the support of the religious, he will be forced to adopt an ever-increasingly nationalist stance, alienating the world and a significant part of the Israeli populace, including the significant Arab Israeli population. The margin is so small, his government is not likely to last long.

On the other hand, if Netanyahu forms a Government with the left-Center bloc, he will be forced to adopt policies that are directly opposite his own. He will need, therefore to perform a balancing act, drawing into his Government parties from both blocs in a manner that will involve the least-meaningful compromises and the maximal Governmental stability. THAT is easier said than done! In any case the next parliament promises to be a stormy one, and the next Government's mandate to be repeatedly threatened. How long it will last is anyone's guess.

The Israel Economy

In some ways, Israel has been an Island of relative quiet and prosperity in the midst of a stormy world crises. Israel's economy grew in 2012 by 3.3% - a substantial growth in light of the world economy and the fact that the country has had to invest hundreds of billions in defense. In other ways, Israel's economy is a time, threatening soon to explode. Inflation was a mere 1.6%. By official standards, unemployment in Israel is 6.7%. This does not take into account the numberless that are not seeking employment, including those living off State pensions while they engage in (Jewish) religious studies, the military enlistees and a large percentage of employable Arab women who have long given up seeking employment. Many others are underemployed, eking out a meagre monthly income, with no savings and no visible prospects of improvement.

According to the Knesset Committee for Budgetary Supervision (<http://www.knesset.gov.il/mmm/data/pdf/m02879.pdf>), in 2011 the Price Index rose in 2011 by 18%, general food prices by 31.6%, fruit and vegetables by 37.6%, homes for purchase by 56.9%, and homes for rent by 27.3%. In the same year, the minimum wage rose by 18% and the average wage by 22.7%. Full data on 2012 is not yet in, but Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics indicates that the rise in the cost of food was 18%, of bread by 45.6%, of water by 2.8%, of city tax by 2.5% and of electricity by 8.8%. Public debt is a hefty 74% of the GDP - well over the recommended maximum of 60%. An average apartment costs 92.7 full taxable salaries.

The rich fiddle while the middle class erodes, steadily disappearing into the ranks of the needy, and the needy become desperate. The rise in the value of the Shekel relative to foreign currency has rendered exports more difficult (grew by 0.2%) and imports considerably cheaper, (grew by 34%) but imports consist more of products purchased by the well-to-do. Food makes up some 18% of an median Israeli family's expenses. Once mortgage, water, electricity, city tax, transportation and education are taken into account, little if any is left. The 2011 National Deficit is 220% larger than budgeted, with the major part of the deficit resulting from lower income from taxes - indicating a slowdown in the economy.

Maximum Income Tax in Israel is 50% for family incomes over \$200,000 (in the US 39.6%/ \$120,000). Capital Gain tax in Israel is a flat tax of 25% and of 27% for those making \$200,000 per annum (in the US 23.8% on incomes over \$400,000). National Health and National Insurance in Israel cost together 12% for salaries up to \$120,000 per annum (US 6.2%). Company Tax in Israel is 25% (US 15-35%, depending on the size of the company). Israel accords no tax credits for mortgages, travel to work, higher education, taxes paid to other countries or business expenses (US - credits limited to annual income of \$250,000).

The year 2013 will require drastic budget cuts - and the easiest place to cut is in services provided to the population. Social pressures are consequently increasing as the gaps grow. Israeli society is being divided into haves and have-nots, with those who have developing increasing attachment to the nipples of Government, local and national. Concern is in place, as are the words of the prophet:

There are those who hate the one who upholds justice in court and detest the one who tells the truth. You levy a straw tax on the poor and impose a tax on their

grain. Therefore, though you have built stone mansions, you will not live in them; though you have planted lush vineyards, you will not drink their wine, for I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins...

Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the Lord God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is. Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the Lord God Almighty will have mercy(on the remnant of Joseph. Therefore this is what the Lord, the Lord God Almighty, says: "There will be wailing in all the streets and cries of anguish in every public square. The farmers will be summoned to weep and the mourners to wail. There will be wailing in all the vineyards, for I will pass through your midst," says the Lord.

Woe to you who long for the day of the Lord! Why do you long for the day of the Lord? That day will be darkness, not light. It will be as though a man fled from a lion only to meet a bear, as though he entered his house and rested his hand on the wall, only to have a snake bite him. Will not the day of the Lord be darkness, not light— pitch-dark, without a ray of brightness?

"I hate, I despise your religious festivals; your assemblies are a stench to me...

Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream... I will send you into exile beyond Damascus," says the Lord, whose name is God Almighty (Amos 5:10-27).

Israel has no security but in God, and can have no security in God by way of religiosity or by virtue of natural descent. God demands a just, kind and gracious society, and warned Israel time and again that, if the society if establishes is not such, it has no right to claim the Abrahamic promises. *That* is the burden of prophecy. *That* is what Israel needs to hear. *That* is biblical eschatology. Away with time-guessing! Away with speculation! It is time to call Israel to repentance.

Ministry and Family News

When the **Israel College of the Bible** (ICB) was founded, I was privileged to encourage the process and to be part of the initial steps in that direction. Since then it has been my joy to teach a number of courses, including a homiletics class which has become the basis of one of my books, *How to Preach and Listen to Sermons*. From the out start, I encouraged the College to establish and maintain standards that would enable it to truly equip men for the ministry of the Word. This is a major concern of my own heart and a labor of love in which I have been engaged from the beginning of my labors, back in 1965.

Encouraged by the College upon retirement to improve my own formal education so as to continue teaching there, I undertook an MA course in Biblical Studies, completed the credits and submitted a 327 page thesis on The Use of the Old Testament (Hermeneutics). My thesis was accepted and I repaired to the College to discuss subjects I would be asked to teach. To my delight, I was asked to teach a course on Historical Theology -- a highly useful and relevant subject for Israeli students and very much within the gamut of my interests and concerns, but not of my expertise.

But I was given a mere two months to compile a bibliography, obtain the literature, research the subject and create a curriculum. Needless to say, I declined. I had given the College ample notice and requested sufficient time to prepare for any courses I would be asked to teach. I believe the Institute is worthy of support and am happy to lend mine, but it would be irresponsible for me to accept the proposed task under such a time restriction. Consequently, I am not now teaching at the College and have no idea whether I will be asked to do so in the future. I confess I find this deeply

disappointing. I had invested a good deal of time and money in undertaking the course for an MA, with the express and agreed intention of teaching at the ICB.

Meanwhile, a group of churches are preparing to launch a **biblical and theological course**, and have asked me to compose an introductory course in Systematic Theology. This is closer to my capacities, I have all of the literature I would need for research and I have written on the topic many times before. What is more, MaozNews readers will know that writing a **Systematic Theology** has been one of my planned projects. As a result, I am now investing my 12-14 hour work-day in writing exactly that. I plan to teach the course a number of times, hone the work in light of that experience - perhaps slightly enlarge what I have written -- and we will have the first Hebrew Systematic Theology. Research, prayer and writing has been an act of adoring worship, as I have repeatedly found myself amazed by the glories of God and of the Gospel.

At the same time, David Zadok has asked me, on behalf of HaGefen Publishing, if I would be willing to undertake **translation of the New Testament in the Modern Hebrew Bible for Youth** project, in the hope that I would be able to further the project with greater speed than it has taken to complete the OT. I have agreed, on condition that I devote to the project no more than a day per week, and that I find and am able to maintain **office and research assistance**. Such assistance would relieve me, on average, of a days' work each week, thus releasing time for me to undertake the translation. I am now in search of such an assistant and would appreciate your prayers. The profile is not an easy one: the individual needs to be proficient in both Hebrew and English, computer-literate, punctual, steady, thorough, creative and a self-starter who will be able to assume the tasks and work from home most of the time, with us communication by Skype, telephone and correspondence.

I expect to complete writing the Systematic Theology by March, then to complete the devotional commentary on **Micah**, and once again revert to the major project -- the **commentary on Romans**. I regret having to delay completing Romans but believe that the opportunities afforded me and described above will, in the long run, justify that delay.

Our grandchildren keep on growing! The Erez lot:

Noam (13)



Maya (10)



Nadav (6)



The Erez family lives in San Jose California. Dad (Eran) is an Electrical Engineer, working on developing hardware and hardware applications in the Flash Memory industry, with Sandisk. Their

Mom (Avital) describes herself as General Director and Co-Manager of daily life in the Erez madhouse. Their home is a busy one, with many coming and going. The Maoz girls have something of their mother's famous flair for cooking - but just something; no-one can compare with mother!

The Thompsons

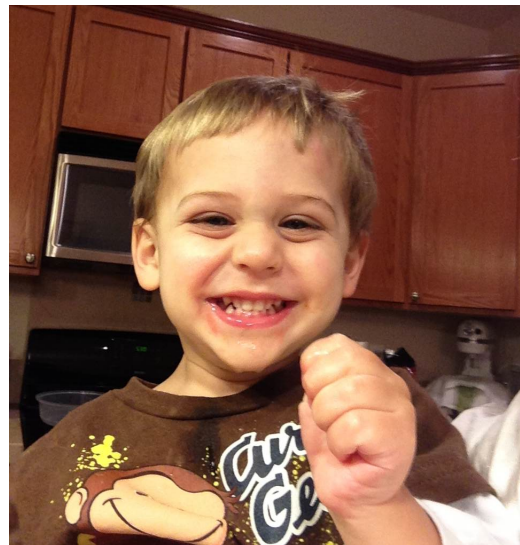
Yonatan (2+) loves his little sister (decidedly -1), **Caitlyn**.

Their father (Keith) is Co-Pastor in a Reformed Baptist church in Cleveland OH. Mommy (Shlomit) is a busy, dedicated Pastor's wife and mother. Their home is always open, and many enjoy Shlomit's cooking.

Keith was invited to preach in Sweet Home, Oregon, where he had an excellent time. The church welcomed him the the family warmly, bountifully caring for all their needs. They are now scheduled to travel to Canada, where he is scheduled to take a conference.



The Richardsons



Yotam (3)

The Richardsons live near Seattle WA. Their father (Marcus) is a Mechanical Engineer, working on cooling systems with Boeing International. Their mother is a dedicated housewife and mother. They are both active in their church. Like all our children, they love to extend hospitality, and both cook.

In January, **Avital** and **Tamar** travelled to Cleveland, to spend an extended weekend with **Shlomit**. It is great to see the sisters' relationship. Well aware of each other foibles, they are supportive of one another, often in contact by telephone and Skype, sharing joys and recipes, struggles and quandaries. Being the busy mother of a two year-old and a seven moth-old baby, with

Avishai (2)

a busy Pastor-husband, and having moved home just about a year ago, Shlomit has not had much opportunity to turn the house into a home, often finds it a struggle to go shopping, cook or even wash her hair. The cold Cleveland winter means that the children are shut in more than would be the case in a warmer climate. So, the two girls' visit was timely -- especially since husband **Keith** was away for a week on a mission trip.

Katya and **Felix** celebrated my 69th birthday with us. I spent a good part of the time playing with little **Maya**, who has become a precocious little child!

Rose spent 7 of 21 intended weeks in South Africa, working as a salesperson, selling Israel beauty and health products in malls. She soon discovered this kind of work entails practices that are not on par with Christian principles, and could not accede to such, and therefore left, paying the required fine for breach of contract.

Local Christians, Notably Pastor and Mrs. Michael Rogers, opened their hearts to her until she was able to fly home.

Her hope was to set some money aside for schooling (thus relieving our own financial burden) and for when she leaves home. That hope was dashed. She is now seeking part-time employment and is about to resume studies, preparatory to College.



Website Redesigned and Now Live!!

Our website has been **completely redesigned** and will soon have extensive new content. The address (URL) has not changed. <http://www.themaozweb.com>

Friends are invited to view and to recommend the site to others.



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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.

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