

MaozNews No. 11

The Baruch and Bracha Maoz Newsletter

POBox 75, Rishon LeTzion, 75100 Israel

bmaoz@GMX.com Tel/Fax +972 7 779 1111 6

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Israel's Greatest Need

A Plea to American Evangelicals

I just don't get it! Perhaps someone can explain it to me: **how can we act so contrary to what we believe?** How can there be such a yawning gap between what we know is true and what we do in the name of the truth we know? You don't get it either, do you? You're not sure what I mean? Well, let me explain: The Bible faces us with a question: what will it profit a nation if it gains the whole world and loses its own soul? I therefore ask, what does Israel need above and beyond anything else – a strong army? Peace with its Arab nations? A thriving economy? No. There is something far more important that Israel needs.

What is the greatest blessing God has promised Israel – the Land? The Law? The temple? No. He promised something far more wonderful, something that addresses Israel's greatest need better than anything else. He promised "I will be your God and you will be my people". "I will pour clean water on you and you shall be clean". "I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah... I will put my law in their inward parts and write it on their hearts". "I will put my Spirit within you". "They shall all know the Lord, from the least to the greatest of them". God and his transforming power are Israel's greatest need. God is all men's truest, greatest need. We were created in the image of God and made for fellowship with him, whether we are Jewish or gentile, male or female, slaves or freemen. Nothing is more fulfilling, more suited, more appropriate to man than the knowledge and worship of God. This is true of the Jew first and also of the gentile.

Israel and the Land

In the past, Israel had possession of the land. It enjoyed a thriving economy and substantial security. God fulfilled his promise to Israel and gave them, through the hand of David, all the territory from the Euphrates to the river of Egypt, from the Great Sea to the Mediterranean. But Israel defiled the land with its sensuous idolatry, its greedy, hedonistic and selfish society, and with its determined transgressions of the laws of God. To what nation had God given so much? Yet no nation had proven so ungrateful. In just response, and according to the covenant God made with Israel's forefathers, God sent them out of the land. Ten of the twelve tribes were destroyed, utterly wiped off the face of the earth. A bare remnant attached itself to Judah and thus preserved its continued existence. God had warned the people. He sent messengers who brought God's word to the nation. They said,

The word of the Lord that came to Micah of Moresheth during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah — the vision he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem: ² Hear, O peoples, all of you, listen, O earth and all who are in it, that the Sovereign Lord may witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple. ³ Look! The Lord is coming from his dwelling place; he comes down and treads the high places of the earth. ⁴ The mountains melt beneath him and the valleys split apart, like wax before the fire, like water rushing down a slope.

⁵ All this is **because of Jacob's transgression**, because of the sins of the house of Israel. What is Jacob's transgression? Is it not Samaria? What is Judah's high place? Is it not Jerusalem? ⁶ "Therefore I will make Samaria a heap of rubble, a place for planting vineyards. I will pour her stones into the

valley and lay bare her foundations. ⁷ All her idols will be broken to pieces; all her temple gifts will be burned with fire; I will destroy all her images. Since she gathered her gifts from the wages of prostitutes, as the wages of prostitutes they will again be used." ⁸ Because of this I will weep and wail; I will go about barefoot and naked. I will howl like a jackal and moan like an owl. ⁹ For her wound is incurable; it has come to Judah. It has reached the very gate of my people, even to Jerusalem itself (Micah 1:1-9, NIV).

You have behaved more wickedly than your fathers. See how each of you is following the stubbornness of his evil heart instead of obeying me. ¹³ So I will throw you out of this land into a land neither you nor your fathers have known ... for I will show you no favour (Jer. 16:12-13).

Israel had no right to security in its sins. The people lost their right to possess the land when they sinned and would not be allowed to remain in it. The covenant was clear:

If you do not obey the LORD your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today. ...

⁶⁴ Then the Lord will scatter you among all nations, from one end of the earth to the other. There you will worship other gods—gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your fathers have known. ⁶⁵ Among those nations you will find no repose, no resting place for the sole of your foot. There the Lord will give you an anxious mind, eyes weary with longing, and a despairing heart. ⁶⁶ You will live in constant suspense, filled with dread both night and day, never sure of your life. ⁶⁷ In the morning you will say, "If only it were evening!" and in the evening, "If only it were morning!"—because of the terror that will fill your hearts and the sights that your eyes will see (Deut. 28:15, 64-67).

" Hear the word of the Lord, all you people of Judah who come through these gates to worship the Lord. ³ This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place. ⁴ Do not trust in deceptive words and say, "This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord!" ⁵ If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly, ⁶ if you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm, ⁷ then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your forefathers for ever and ever. ⁸ But look, you are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless.

⁹ " Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, ¹⁰ and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, "We are safe"—safe to do all these detestable things? ¹¹ Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching! declares the Lord.

¹² " Go now to the place in Shiloh where I first made a dwelling for my Name, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of my people Israel. ¹³ While you were doing all these things, declares the LORD, I spoke to you again and again, but you did not listen; I called you, but you did not answer. ¹⁴ Therefore, what I did to Shiloh I will now do to the house that bears my Name, the temple you trust in, the place I gave to you and your fathers. ¹⁵ I will thrust you from my presence, just as I did all your brothers, the people of Ephraim' (Jer. 7:2-15).

God would not allow Israel to remain in the land so long as it remained in sin, and no purported reliance on a covenant would avail. The people of Israel had no right to view itself safe from punishment due to a covenant they consistently transgressed. God made this very clear to Israel on many occasions, as he did to the northern kingdom through Amos:

⁷ "Are not you Israelites the same to me as the Cushites?" *declares the Lord* .
"Did I not bring Israel up from Egypt, the Philistines from Caphtor and the
Arameans from Kir?" ⁸ "Surely the eyes of the Sovereign Lord are on the sinful
kingdom. I will destroy it from the face of the earth — yet I will not totally
destroy the house of Jacob," declares the LORD. ⁹ "For I will give the
command, and I will shake the house of Israel among all the nations as grain
is shaken in a sieve, and not a pebble will reach the ground. ¹⁰ All the sinners
among my people will die by the sword, all those who say, 'Disaster will not
overtake or meet us' (Amos 9: 7-10).

God required of Israel a pure, sensitive, godly society that conducted its affairs in justice, protected the weak, restricted the strong and the well-connected, and ensured that the needy had their true needs met. This was the main burden of the prophetic message. Prediction was the smallest part of what the prophets had to say, and most predictions were of an unwelcome nature because they spoke of impending judgment. Modern-day fascination with the prophetic tends to ignore the moral content of the prophecy and focus, instead, on a form of Christian fortune-telling. It is catastrophic rather than Christological, event-focused rather than focused on moral duty. It is tantalizing rather than sanctifying, and it insists on Israel's right to possess the land without reference to the nation's moral duty before God and to those of other nations. This is unbiblical. It is not truly helpful to Israel, nor does it address Israel's greatest need.

Israel's Sinfulness

God informed Isaiah that the nation's sins had created a barrier between himself and the people so that he will not hear their prayers (Isa. 59:1-2). Their religiosity was an abomination to him, their many sacrifices brought him no pleasure, their presence in the temple was a nuisance, their incense detestable, and their celebrations hateful. When they spread their hands in prayer, he would turn his face away. He would not listen even if they offered many prayers. **As far as God was concerned, the nation's leaders were like leaders of Sodom and Gomorrah** (Isa. 1:10-15)!

Israel today is barely different. A former President of Israel has been accused of rape and indecent behaviour while in office. Its Minister of Justice was found guilty of forcing himself on a young woman and removed from office. Its Minister of the Treasury was indicted for theft of public funds and forced to resign. The police have recommended that Israel's Prime Minister be indicted for fraud, embezzlement, and misuse of public funds, which recommendation brought about his resignation. Religious Ministers of State and parliament members have been jailed for bribery, fraud, and misuse of public funds.

In 1999, **18,785 legal abortions were performed in Israel** compared to 131,936 births. In 2006 there were 148,170 births and 19,830 reported abortions. This number does not include the many unreported abortions performed in Israeli hospitals and, more commonly, in clandestine, ill-equipped and unsanitary conditions. The Israeli military provides free abortions to any female soldier who requests it, for any reason. Reports from Israeli soldiers, both commissioned and non-commissioned, indicate a high incidence of terroristic activity on the part of Israeli West bank settlers against Palestinian villagers, whose olive trees are cut down, whose flocks are stolen or poisoned, whose homes and cars are vandalized and who are often forced to run a gauntlet of jeering, poking, striking Israeli settlers armed with guns and clubs. All too often, such events take place with the connivance of the Israeli military. Military roadblocks, originally established by Israel in the West Bank due to security considerations, are now being used to stifle Palestinian economic development and render life in the Palestinian regions insufferable. The World Bank released insists that Israel's closure system is a leading cause for the Palestinians' economic woes.

I am aware of the argument on the other side. We must recognize that **Israel is at war with brutal enemies** that aim at nothing less than its total, physical annihilation. Israel's misbehaviour, or the individual failures and misjudgements of some of its soldiers are not characteristic of Israel's policies or of its moral standards. The enemy often hides within the Palestinian civilian population, and is often harboured by that population, where it is permitted to establish its bases and store its weaponry. Israel's press is full of effective

protest against Israeli moral failures, whereas the Palestinian press and population often hail atrocities perpetuated in their name with glee and calls for more.

Being an Israeli, I am furious at every terrorist attack on my nation. I am fully aware of the way infiltrators cynically use ambulances, pregnant women and the goodwill of some soldiers. Being a Christian, **I denounce the horror of terrorism** and recognize that Jews do not normally engage in the kind of life-threatening acts of terror widely employed by the Palestinians. But Jewish settlers do terrorize Palestinian their neighbours without cause or justification. Their actions deserve firm condemnation and seldom receive such from Israeli authorities. Every time an injustice is perpetuated by an Israeli against Palestinians, the moral fibre of Israeli society is weakened and the justice of the Israeli cause put in question. Vengeance is the Lord's. It may not be executed by man, taking the law into his own hands.

Israeli society is hedonistic, materialistic, and promiscuous. The biblical role of men and of women is being extensively and effectively denied. Homosexuality is portrayed as a legitimate sexual option. God is far from the thoughts of the average Israeli. The gap between the rich and the poor is immoral because much of their riches are not the product of innovation or industry but of tax evasions, and of political connections.

Orthodox Judaism is void of a moral message. Nor is it able to set a moral example when its internal squabbles spill over to verbal and physical violence and so many among them are notoriously corrupt. Orthodoxy enlists en mass to protest the desecration of the Sabbath but not of the family through infidelity and divorce. It ensures that leavened foods are not sold during the seven days of Passover, while it is known for double bookkeeping and for false reporting and consequent receipt of disproportionate government aid. Judaism constitutes a major departure from biblical norms. Its views of God, of man, of sin, of holiness, and of the way to atone for sins is altogether contrary to what the Bible teaches. Jewish can-do arrogance has replaced shame, sorrow, and repentance and is viewed as a substitute for an atoning sacrifice. Holiness is especially a matter of ritualistic adherence. Sin is not viewed as an eternal offence against God but a relative error that can be ameliorated by human effort and God exists to bless Israel and to promote its national aspirations.

The Good in Israeli Society

there is no doubt: **Israel is an innovative society.** It has contributed to the world's welfare in many ways. There are more Israeli Nobel Prize winners per capita than of any other nation. Israeli technological, agricultural, and medical inventions are renown, and used the world over – including in many Arab countries. The State of Israel has accorded the Palestinians more political liberties, more economic possibilities, more educational opportunities than they had under Egyptian and Jordanian rule. Israel has also contributed more to the United Nations' Palestinian Relief Organization than all the Arab nations combined. In spite constant military threats for over 60 years, Israel has remained a bastion of democracy in the militarized, autocratic Middle East. No less remarkably, Israel ensures true religious freedom, including the freedom to evangelize in spite of the shameful history of persecution, consistently undertaken by Christian societies and nations. The Israeli judicial system is independent and famously just.

Israel in the Eyes of God

None of Israel's virtues makes up for the sins of which Israel is guilty. None can atone for the sins of a nation that has transgressed the laws of God, broken covenant with its Maker and set itself up in determined rebellion against him. Which of the prophets did Israel heed? Which of God's laws did it not break? Although the nation was punished, it has persisted in sin:

² Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth! For the LORD has spoken: "I reared children and brought them up, but **they have rebelled against me.** ³ The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner's manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand."

⁴ Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption! They have forsaken the LORD; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him. ⁵ Why should you be beaten

anymore? Why do you persist in rebellion? Your whole head is injured, your whole heart afflicted. ⁶ From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness —only wounds and welts and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with oil. ⁷ Your country is desolate, your cities burned with fire; your fields are being stripped by foreigners right before you, laid waste as when overthrown by strangers. ⁸ The Daughter of Zion is left like a shelter in a vineyard, like a hut in a field of melons, like a city under siege. ⁹ Unless the LORD Almighty had left us some survivors, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah.

¹⁰ Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom; listen to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah! ¹¹ "The multitude of your sacrifices —what are they to me?" says the LORD. "I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. ¹² When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? ¹³ Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations — I cannot bear your evil assemblies. ¹⁴ Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. ¹⁵ When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood;

¹⁶ **Wash and make yourselves clean.** Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, ¹⁷ learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.

¹⁸ "Come now, let us reason together," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. ¹⁹ If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land; ²⁰ but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword." For the mouth of the LORD has spoken (Isa. 1:2-20).

The main point of eschatology, the main burden of the prophetic message, was not to predict the future but to provoke Israel into spiritually motivated moral behaviour by warning of impending judgment. It was not so much prediction as protest and promised punishment, and any use of prophecy that ignores this is unfaithful to the prophetic message.

Israel's Predicament

Isaiah called upon the people:

¹⁶ **Wash and make yourselves clean.** Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, ¹⁷ learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.

¹⁸ "Come now, let us reason together," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. ¹⁹ If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land; ²⁰ but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword." For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

How could the people wash? How could they make themselves clean? They could not remove their evil deeds from the Lord's sight because no one can bring clean out of that which has been soiled. How could the people stop doing wrong? How they learn to do right? They could do so no more than a leopard can change its spots or an Ethiopian the colour of his skin. Sin had infected the hearts of all mankind, and the Jewish people are no exception now and were no exception then. Nothing but a transforming act of God can change them. They need a new heart, a different attitude to God's legislated demands. The narrative of Israel's history is repeatedly one of sin, judgment, mercy, restoration and renewed sin, leading to a repeat of the same cycle.

But God had promised to break that cycle and to transform Israel inwardly:

⁷ This is what the LORD says: "Sing with joy for Jacob; shout for the foremost of the nations. Make your praises heard, and say, 'O LORD, save your people, the remnant of Israel.'

⁸ See, I will bring them from the land of the north and gather them from the ends of the earth. Among them will be the blind and the lame, expectant mothers and women in labour; a great throng will return. ⁹ They will come with weeping; they will pray as I bring them back. I will lead them beside streams of water on a level path where they will not stumble, because I am Israel's father, and Ephraim is my firstborn son. ¹⁰ Hear the word of the LORD, O nations; proclaim it in distant coastlands: 'He who scattered Israel will gather them and will watch over his flock like a shepherd.' ¹¹ For the LORD will ransom Jacob and redeem them from the hand of those stronger than they. ¹² They will come and shout for joy on the heights of Zion; **they will rejoice in the bounty of the LORD** —the grain, the new wine and the oil, the young of the flocks and herds. They will be like a well-watered garden, and they will sorrow no more.

¹³ Then maidens will dance and be glad, young men and old as well. I will turn their mourning into gladness; I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow ...¹⁷ So there is hope for your future," declares the LORD ... ³¹ "The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when **I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.** ³² It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them, " declares the LORD.

³³ "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ³⁴ No longer will a man teach his neighbour, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their wickedness" (Jer. 31:7-13, 17, 31-34).

Nor will Israel then return to the cycle of sin, punishment, restoration and renewed sin. As Ezekiel put it:

I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws (36: 25-27).

"They will no longer defile themselves with their idols and vile images or with any of their offenses, for I will save them from all their sinful backsliding, and I will cleanse them. They will be my people, and I will be their God" (Ezek. 37:23).

Drawing Conclusions

A day is coming when Israel will be so unlike itself today that the very cooking pots of Jerusalem will be dedicated to the Lord. These promises are very familiar to those evangelicals who love Israel. What practical conclusions do they draw from them? Why is it that they have neglected the promises' obvious meaning and have substituted political support for a faithful Gospel ministry? How can evangelicals, in the name of the Gospel, refrain from preaching the Gospel to Israel and how can it be that they have more interest in Israel's social, political and economic advance than in the strengthening of a local, indigenous Gospel by way of Jewish Christian congregations in Israel?

Some years back, I was engaged in a struggle against a legislative effort in the Israeli house of legislature (the Knesset) to outlaw evangelism in Israel. We had the support of parliamentarians, Heads of State and prominent friends of Israel all over the world. To my amazement, **no American evangelical leader would take a public stand** against this

bill. None would openly stand with us Israeli Christians, for fear that they would lose the illusionary influence they claimed to have with Israeli politicians.

Millions, tens of millions of evangelical Dollars are sent to support Israel, often in support of Israel's most radical political platforms, while some congregations of Israeli Christians struggle to make ends meet or meet for worship in unsuitable facilities for lack of funds. Rabbi Eckstein is milking evangelicals dry for funds, many of which serve worthy causes but, I ask: is any cause more worthy than the Gospel? Evangelicals are supporting the building of West Bank settlements, hospitals, schools and even synagogues where the name of Christ is reviled. They invest large sums of money assisting Jews to immigrate to Israel. They fly Israeli flags in their churches and hobnob with Israeli politicians. Meanwhile, the church I formerly served has been struggling for 6 years to complete a building and is still unable to finish for lack of funds. A national Christian social aid fund in Israel that I chair presently has a waiting list of over 30 families seeking help in purchasing a home, and as many have given up waiting because we do not have available funds. An evangelical Bible college in Israel, the only one in the country, is struggling to make ends meet. A translation of the Bible into modern Hebrew struggled for years for lack of funds. Again, I could multiply examples.

Can you imagine what impact just 10% of that money could have on the life and witness of Israeli congregations? Can you begin to imagine the impact Israeli churches could have on their society if another 10% of these evangelical benevolent funds were channelled through them to worthy causes? Can you imagine the good it could do? But, no. American evangelicals have become politicized. They are more interested in forwarding God's presumed eschatology than his moral injunctions and their duty to members of the Household of Faith in Israel.

I'm disappointed by evangelical Christians who profess a biblical love for my people, who lay claim to faith in Jesus as the saviour of the world, and yet have such unbiblical priorities. These brethren know there is no salvation apart from faith and repentance; that, unless a man is born again from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God. They know that ancestry, human effort – even if it is sincere religious effort – or anything else within the reach of man is not enough to earn a place in heaven. Salvation is by grace through faith, not of works lest any man should boast. Yet, in spite of their faith in Jesus and their love for the Jewish people, they act as if being Jewish assures one of a passport to heaven. Many do not stretch a finger to preach the Gospel to Israel or support local Israeli churches. American Christians visit "the Holy Land" in the thousands. How many have visited Israeli Christians, encouraged them, taken a part in their labours and worshipped with them?

It is time to change, brethren. It is time to renew our commitment to the Gospel and to him who died so that we would have a Gospel. It is time to return to biblical priorities. **The Gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, Jews first and also gentiles.** May God us grace to believe it.

Important Changes

Baruch is no longer responsible for **GTNews**. **MaozNews** will continue to be written be published, carrying news of the Soli Deo Gloria ministry, of the Christian and secular Israeli scene and articles on relevant themes. Contrary to former notice and in response to general request, veteran recipients of **GTNews** need not subscribe to **MaozNews**. They will continue to receive this publication unless they request to be unsubscribed.

Baruch is in the process of transferring his electronic mail to a new address. In matters regarding the church, please write to office@GandT.org.il Baruch will continue to receive this mail and deal with it until January 2008. In personal matters relating to Baruch, his family or his ministry, please write to bmaoz@gmx.com.

We recommend that our readers update their contact lists accordingly.

The Maoz Web Page is presently being designed.
We hope to have the web site online before the end of December.