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Israel – The Church

In the past, a proposed formalizing of inter-church relationships on the grounds of a shared Confession of Faith and a constitution was rejected. The reasons for this were in the firm anti-establishmentarian attitude of many prominent individuals and an endemically mutual that rendered everyone unwilling to cede any measure of the independence for the sake of unity.

Reality has a way of forcing itself upon the minds and hearts of people. The Hebrew speaking church in Israel today is being challenged by heretical movements. As a result, the fellowship of Hebrew speaking congregations now has no choice but to consolidate in terms of convictions and to define limits to fellowship. There is room to hope that such a process will lead to increased mutual accountability in spiritual, theological and moral terms. Three issues now face the church at large: one has to do with the moral example and influence of Jaerock Lee, a Korean heretic who claims to have been infused with the blood of Jesus, and who is serving a prison sentence in Korea for eight instances of sexual assault. Mr. Lee supports almost 50 Israeli congregations, and his emissaries are welcome in those churches.

Another is the claim that Jewish people who sincerely trust in the God of Israel and look to the coming of the Messiah are, by virtue of such faith, redeemed apart from repentance toward God and faith in Jesus the Messiah.

The third is the claim that the worldwide church should submit to the leadership of self-proclaimed apostles in Jerusalem (some of whom do not even live there). Intensive discussions are being held and *ad hoc* bodies have been created to formulate proposed positions on each of these three issues.

Earlier challenges, which had to do with rabbinical authority in relation to the understanding of scripture on the one hand and over Israeli Christian life and with regard to the doctrine of the Trinity, led to the adoption of the afore-mentioned Confession of Faith. Sooner or later, a constitution will have be drawn up. One can only pray that the needs of the hour will

motivate but not limit or overly frame that constitution, as further challenges undoubtedly await the church in the future.

What the Philistines Brought to Ancient Israel

Based on an article published in Ha'Arets September 1 2015

In spite of their past proliferation, sycamore trees are not indigenous to Israel. They arrived in the land some 3,000 years ago, apparently brought by the “Sea Peoples” – the Philistines. Other plants imported include the cumin plant and the opium-producing poppy, says a recent study. In other words, the sycamore is an invasive species.

Israel has any number of invasive species, from jellyfish to the mynah bird which displaced many local species. The blue acacia, an aggressive invader that has changed the landscape, is another example. The cause of this unwanted spread of species is usually man, sometimes deliberately – the blue acacia was imported by the British in an effort stabilize the sand dunes – or inadvertently (the conventional explanation for the spread of mynahs is that they escaped from a bird park in Tel Aviv, to which they were brought as ornamental birds). The increase in transportation of goods and people across the globe has exacerbated the phenomenon. But a study conducted at the Bar-Ilan University indicates that this is not a modern phenomenon. Migration in the ancient world brought about dramatic changes in the flora and the landscape of many countries.



A Philistine altar from the late Canaanite era Leonid Padrol, courtesy of Israel Antiquities Authority

The study was conducted by doctoral student Sue Frumin, as part of her thesis under the joint supervision of Prof. Ehud Weiss, the head of the laboratory for botanical archaeology, and Prof. Aren Maeir, both from the Department of Land of Israel Studies and Archaeology at Bar-Ilan. In the study, published in *Scientific Reports*, Frumin examined findings from dozens of Iron Age archaeological sites (around the 10th century B.C.E, when the Philistines first arrived in the land), and from the preceding Bronze Age. A database of all botanical/ archaeological findings unearthed in Israel was formed and then divided by their civilizations of origin – Canaanite, Philistine and Israelite, says Weiss.

An import business in 10th century BCE

Three species were non-existent before the arrival of the Philistines – the sycamore, the cumin plant and the poppy, which first appeared in the southern coastal plain, near Ashkelon and Gaza, parallel with Philistine settlement in that area. The sycamore was well-known in ancient Egypt, where its fruit was eaten and its wood used for construction. Products manufactured from sycamore wood appear in Israel during the Bronze Age, but up to the Iron Age no sycamore seeds were found, which implies that the tree or its products were imported.

The appearance of sycamores tends to confirm one of the theories regarding the Philistines' arrival, according to which at least some arrived from the south, through Egypt. Their invasion of Egypt as part of the vast collapse of civilizations in the Levant is well-described in bas-reliefs that were found at the site of Medinet Habu in Upper Egypt. Sycamores are mentioned in the Bible, in 1 Kings, 10:27 we read that king Solomon "made cedars as plentiful as sycamore trees that are in the lowland." Prof. Maeir suggests an abundance of sycamores on the coastal plain, which was inhabited by the Philistines.



As for the poppy, it was domesticated in Greece and in more western reaches of the Mediterranean basin. The narcotic properties of the plant were probably discovered there as well. The theory that poppies were imported by the Philistines supports the notion of their ties to the broader Aegean world. "Finding poppies cannot provide us with unambiguous answers to some questions, but we now know that the Philistines did not arrive from a single island but from different locations," says Frumin.

Philistines in Mesopotamia?

The cumin plant poses more of a riddle for researchers, since the region it is known to have grown in was Mesopotamia. Cultural ties between Philistines and Mesopotamia are unknown at present. "This may mean that the Philistines had extensive cultural ties," suggests Maeir. "There is a debate over whether the Philistines that are mentioned in the Bible are the ones who lived in what are now the archaeological sites investigated," says Frumin. "Studying plants can tell us something about their origins. We see that their civilization differed from that common in those days in the Middle East– they ate differently, they grew different plants and their arrival brought about various changes in the land. Another conclusion the researchers draw from these plants is that, contrary to conventional wisdom, the Philistines were not bands of soldiers who migrated across the sea to conquer and settle. They were migrants who left their countries with their families and possessions.

"When a farmer moves from place to place he takes a sack of grains with him because therein lies his future," explains Weiss. "We're trying to see what was in that sack. Undoubtedly, it contained the classic items – wheat, barley, grape vines – but there were other plants as well. Nor did they bring only seeds that altered the diversity of plants. They also imported new agricultural practice.

The study also supports the accepted conception that the Philistines' migration was not a single event but a continuous process. "We know that this wasn't a ship or a single fleet that landed in Ashkelon or Gaza. Waves arrived from different locations," says Weiss. "People always ask how archaeology is relevant to modern humans – this is a good example of how archeology provides us with a long view of the impact of humans," adds Maeir

Israel's New Government and Old Political Morass

As noted in our previous issue: according to Israel's system of Government, the head of the party able to create a majority of 61 or more votes in the Knesset, our House of Legislature, the Knesset, is entrusted by the President with the task of forming a Government made up of other parties that belong to his party's political bloc, that is to say, a coalition. He has 28 days to do so and may seek an extension of up to 14 additional days. If he is successful, he becomes the Prime Minister. If he fails, new elections are called. In other words, election results are determined by party blocs rather than by individual parties.

Because no single party has ever been able to win a parliamentary majority since Israel's founding in 1948, all Israeli Governments have been coalitions. This leads to a great deal of horse-trading, with each potential coalition party vying for maximal gains on behalf of its supporters and the benefit of its most influential leaders. Party leaders compete with one another over the portfolios that will accord them maximal exposure, increased influence and opportunity to benefit their personal supporters, leading to corruption, nepotism and the appointment of unsuited individuals to highly demanding posts.

It also means that relatively small parties enjoy disproportionate influence on policy making and implementation because of the tendency, in an effort to reduce the horse-trading, to work for a coalition comprised of a smaller number of parties. This leads to a situation in which the withdrawal of even a small party from the coalition could lead to the collapse of the Government. Needless to say, governability is not enhanced under such circumstances. Recent elections brought the proliferation of parties to new heights, with over 40 parties runner for the 120 seats in the Knesset.

All the parties in the so-called right-wing bloc have affirmed their support of Mr. Netanyahu, whose party garnered 35 seats, thereby ensuring that President Rivlin will accord him first shot at forming a government. His most natural partners are the two Orthodox religious parties, Shas and United Torah Judaism (8 seats each), the first representing the religiously-Orthodox from the Occident and the Arabic speaking countries, the latter representing the religiously—orthodox from Europe and the Americas. The Union of Right-wing parties, which includes adherents of Rabbi Meir Kahane of notoriety and admirers of mass murderer Baruch Goldstein each won 5 seats. Kulanu, led by the Minister of Treasury, Moshe Kahalon won 4 seats and Avigdor Liberman's Yisrael Beiteinu won 5 seats. In total, the bloc won 65 seats and is set to form a government.

There are pitfalls. The Orthodox parties oppose drafting men from their sector for military service whereas Yisrael Beiteinu has insisted that it would not be part of a government without some form of compulsory national service for all. The Orthodox parties also wish to maintain their control over marriages and the conversion process, whereas there is across the board support for civil marriage and for a loosening of the conversion process. America's much trumpeted peace plan (no pun intended) is another major obstacle, as most of the potential coalition parties, as well as prominent members of Netanyahu's own party, firmly oppose any form of territorial compromise.

In addition, there is widespread support for a relaxation of the Sabbath laws, imposed by the Orthodox, increased concern over religious intervention in the national education system and the lack of even a simplified core curriculum (math and English, for example) in the separate religious education system. Finally, the Orthodox demand and have traditionally obtained significant diversions of funds to their institutions, combined with greatly relaxed oversight of those funds.

The Israeli multiparty system that obtains today was born in the course of the Zionist congresses as of 1897, and in the Assembly of Representatives of the Jewish community in British Palestine. Delegates from all over the world birthed a framework in which they could work together for the creation of a Jewish State. The system formed enabled full, free representation. At the time, this was the only way to proceed for lack of both a State, a national economy and a military to be managed.

Upon its founding, Israel incorporated the system into its political framework. Since then, no party has been able to win an absolute majority which would enable it to form a government. Instead, Israeli Governments have been coalitions in which conflicting interests, political and personal, are expected to work together effectively. Such a system has obvious weaknesses: the constant threat of governmental collapse at the hands of a party, however small, choosing to leave the coalition forces the main party to placate individuals and coalition parties at the expense of both principle and policy, and to the inevitable detriment of Israeli society; the opposition, similarly divided, is more easily manipulated by the Government and, therefore, is far less effective.

Obviously, the electoral system is in need of radical modification. The abundance of parties teetering around the current 3.25% of votes cast, some of which offer themselves to the highest bidder as coalition partners, does little to reflect the public's best interests while according disproportionate power to minority interests. Often, the only difference between one party and another is their respective leaders' inflated egos. This was accentuated in the course of the most recent elections, when parties largely abstained from publishing their platforms.

In Israel's fragmented society, a republican system in which the Prime Minister was elected directly and empowered by the voters to form a government, could not effectively function. However, improvement should be sought and, at the very least, the electoral threshold should be raised.

If the threshold was raised to 8-10%, the smallest party would be represented by at least 10 legislators. Four political blocs would probably come into being: a right-wing party (Likud plus the religious Zionists), a centrist-left-wing party (Kahol Lavan, Labor and Meretz), an Arab party (such as served in the outgoing Knesset) and an ultra-Orthodox party (whose members form a *de facto* bloc in any case and who disavow Zionism). This would render the political system more rational. But coalition governments would still be necessary, and the Ultra-Orthodox and the Arabs would enjoy a disproportionate increase in political clout because no government could be formed without one or the other.

A different option, raising the electoral threshold to 25% or more, would result in the smallest party numbering at least 30 seats in the Knesset. Israel would then probably shift to a two-party system, with the ultra-Orthodox integrated into the right-wing party and Arabs

into the centrist-left. This would allow a clear and unequivocal decision with a clear winner and loser, enabling governability.



At the most, there would be three parties. Stable coalition governments, devoid of the narrow sectarian interests that are the bane of the present Israeli political chaos, could be formed. What is more, the amazingly large number of votes given to parties that do not pass the threshold (in recent elections almost 8.5%!) would not be lost, thereby giving more faithful expression to the will of the voters.

Whatever course might be chosen, recent elections clearly indicate the urgent need to reduce uncertainty and guarantee a stable government which would provide minorities with effective representation within the context of broad political frameworks and obviating miniscule minority manipulations which are presently burdening the nation and hampering effective policy-making. The problem is that coalition governments are unlikely to cut the carpet from under their own feet. The small parties in all such coalitions repeatedly render any such changes highly unlikely. Only a unity government based on the two major parties could undertake the earth-shaking changes necessary, but the divide that exists between the two parties today transform the hope for such into a pipe-dream.

Having failed to form a Government within the first 28 day permitted by law, Mr. Netanyahu now has until May 29 to do so. If he fails, the President may appoint any Knesset Member to the task, or new elections will be called.

Ministry News

While in the US, following the improvement in Keith's health (more of which see below), I was able to give some 150 work hours to projects, primarily **linguistic annotations to the book of Isaiah**, and the **translation of Bible study notes**. This is a major project in which I will be heavily involved for the next 3-5 years, alongside my regular program of writing commentaries and theological works in Hebrew. One of the matters that we need to deal with issues out of the fact that the notes being translated are themselves based on a translation of the Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek text. Such a translation involves obscures the linguistic difficulties resident in the Masoretic Old Testament text used by the churches in Israel. Those difficulties need to be resolved by added linguistic (not doctrinal) annotations – a major but delightful undertaking.

My publisher is finding it hard to keep up with my output. He is still engaged in preparing my **Romans commentary** and my **book on church life** for the printer. I will be taking counsel with my oversight church as to how best to respond to that challenge. At the very least, I will continue to write at the same pace and will leave behind me a list of books ready for the publisher. Your prayers for wisdom and guidance would be appreciated.

Books written and awaiting publication include commentaries on in Hebrew on **Micah**, **Jonah**, **Romans**, **Galatians**, **Colossians**, and a commentary in English on **Galatians**. A book on **church life, function and structure** is also in the hands of the publisher and awaits

publication. Each of these are in various stages of preparation. A commentary in Hebrew on **Nahum** is in progress.

Family News

Following a visit to a homeopathic clinic in Atlanta (Longevity), the clear diagnosis and treatment reported in the previous MaozNews, **Keith's** health has taken a remarkable turn to the better. The details are too private to share but there have practically been no ill symptoms for over seven weeks now. Tests in the course of a return visit showed meaningful improvement. Thank you, all, for your prayers. **Keith and Shlomit** are now busy seeking employment, which they desperately need. Keith has been without gainful employment for almost 18 months. Shlomit's school has reduced the number of classes and, since she was the last to join the staff, she is the first to be asked to leave. The month and a week I was privileged to stay in Chattanooga and assist somewhat was a boon. Family is such a sweet, kind gift from God!

Our home in Israel has not yet sold. Since we had not intended to relocate, we fitted the home for our needs (and we're kinda old, you know), thereby limiting the potential buyers' market. The Lord will lead when and how he sees fit. After all, we only need one buyer. A close friend's son has planned his wedding for late July and **Rose** is to be married in early August. We will, of course, endeavor to attend both weddings. However, we are anxious to make the move as soon as possible thereafter because a delay involves higher costs, and we have budgeted as if we were to relocate around June/July.

Meanwhile, we are seeking to **ready our home in Chattanooga** and have engaged professionals for some of the work, and Keith to paint the walls and woodwork. While seeking to keep our relocation costs as low as possible, we do need to fit the house to our needs, which include reasonable space for an office, redoing the steps leading to the house (amazingly, the original steps were of three different heights), installing a kitchen, clearing the garden and the such like.

Noam is about to complete her first (highly successful) year in nursing school. **Tamar and Marcus** have decided to home-school **Avishai**. Before returning home to Bracha, the Lord opened the way for me to spend the last 12 days of April with the two girls and their families in Seattle, where we celebrated Passover together as well as the joys of family life. I returned home desperately ill with the flu, and then responded to the flu virus as I often do, but with one of the severest instances of Urticaria I have ever experienced. I was able to work most days but am still on medication.

The recent round of fighting in Gaza affected us to some extent, but the present ceasefire is obviously merely a pause. The conflict will resume, probably with more ferocity, in the near future. We will be wise to prepare our safe room, and your prayers are always welcome. Thank you for them!

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). Christ as the fullness of divine revelation and his work as sufficient for our whole salvation, Presbyterian and Reformed.

Jonah: A Prophet on the Run a devotional commentary on the book of Jonah, Shepherd Press.

Malachi: A Prophet in Times of Distress a devotional commentary on the book of Malachi. Founders Press.

Colossians: The All-Sufficient Savior a devotional commentary on the book of Colossians. Founders Press.

The commentaries are suited for personal devotions and group studies

Baruch’s sermons may be heard on **Sermon Audio**

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