

**MaozNews No. 144**  
**Published every 4 weeks or so**  
**February2020**  
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**The Scene in Israel**

On March 2nd, Israeli citizens will go to the polls for the third time in 12 months, during which period the county was governed by a caretaker government that could not present a budget, frame long-term plans or initiate most forms of legislation. The primary issue at stake is whether or not incumbent Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will gain enough seats in Israel's parliament, the Knesset, to grant him immunity by way of radical legislation and thereby secure him from prosecution for bribery, breach of truth and corruption. He has endeavored to forestall the judicial process, first by repeatedly forcing new elections, then requesting immunity literally minutes before the expiration time Israeli law permits such request to be tabled, unsuccessfully blocking the formation of the Knesset Committee, which is the only body authorized to grant the request and then withdrawing his request once it became clear that such a committee would be formed. Hours later, the Attorney General submitted the indictments. Benjamin Netanyahu must now defend himself in court.

As a fundamental strategy of his defense, Mr. Netanyahu has claimed that the Attorney General, the Public Prosecutor, the Chief of Police, the Courts and the Knesset Speaker (all of whom are his appointees in the course of the 14 years he served as Prime Minister, and most of whom are former members of his political party) are either corrupt or his left-wing political opponents. In the course of time, Israel's most respected politicians, such as former Justice Minister Dan Meridor, former Housing Minister Limor Livnat, former Government secretary Tsvi Hauser, former Defense Minister Boogie Ya'alon, former Defense Minister Ehud Barak, former Knesset Speaker Dan Tichon, much-regarded Knesset Member Benny Begin (the son of the late Prime Minister Menachem Begin), and countless others, all of whom served under Mr. Netanyahu and identify with his policies, turned against him.

In an effort to divert public attention from his indictments, Mr. Netanyahu has feverishly traversed the world, rushing from Washington DC, where the Trump Deal of the Century was unveiled, to London where he met Prime Minister Johnson, to Moscow where he arranged for a 21-year-old Israeli citizen, jailed in Russia and released, to fly back to Israel with her mother, himself and his wife, so he could make a splash in Israeli newspapers. He then rushed off to Uganda to meet secretly with Sudan's present ruler and made a point of making the meeting public. Later he flew to India, where he claimed major political achievements yet to materialize. He promised to annex the Jordan Valley, then vacillated, promised to annex all Israeli settlements in the West Bank, and again vacillated, affirmed his agreement to a Palestinian State while, in Israel, he repeatedly denied the wisdom of such

an option. He meddled in the affairs of other right-wing parties in an effort to increase his political support, was castigated for doing so and withdrew.

Still, Mr. Netanyahu enjoys the consistent support of a large segment of Israel society. It remains to be seen whether March elections will accord him the immunity government he seeks or if Israel will at long last have the stable government it needs. American Evangelical fascination with and uncritical support of Mr. Netanyahu is an embarrassment, unworthy of the Gospel. Eschatology is not a political platform, nor should it serve as a basis for such. Christian considerations should, above all, be moral. The issues at stake in the upcoming elections have nothing to do with policy; there is little difference between those espoused by Mr. Netanyahu and those of his political opponents. The differences are clearly and distinctly moral. It is never right to identify the Gospel with a political platform. The church and those who belong to it should be the voice of their nation's spiritual and moral conscience, never wedded to a politician or blindly committed to any one political party. God and his will stand above the dingy politics of humanity, calling all men – especially those in power – to account.

### **The Assyrians Kicked Everyone Out**

*Based on an article by Phillippe Bohstrom, Ha'Arets September 27, 2019*

The town of Hadid perches on a hill, covering a vast 50 hectares, making it one of the largest archaeological sites in Israel. It first arose, it seems, in the second millennium B.C.E., assuming it is the Huditi mentioned in the Karnak list of towns conquered by Egyptian Pharaoh Thutmose III. Numerous pottery sherds have been dated to the Late Bronze Age, meaning occupation of the site goes back at least 3,600 years. During the following biblical period, the settlement grew well beyond the mound. Among the structures uncovered in the excavation is a pillared four-room house, typical of the Iron Age in the Levant. And as said, the archaeologists uncovered evidence of non-Israelite influences.

Cuneiform records show land sales 2,700 years ago in Hadid, central Israel, were made to people with entirely foreign names. Two clay tablets found in Hadid recording loans and land sales in the seventh century B.C.E. indicate that most of the people living in the town, between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem today, were foreign, not Israelites, archaeologists say. In fact, the former territory of the Kingdom of Israel may have had very few Israelites left during the 7th century B.C.E., archaeological evidence suggests.

The two tablets, made of clay and inscribed in cuneiform, have been dated to the time of Assyrian rule over the Southern Levant: the eighth and seventh century B.C.E. They name several individuals, none with typical Hebrew names. Aside from the tablets showing land sales to people with strange names, a seal has been found with the emblem of the Assyrian moon god Sin. That was discovered during this season of excavations led by Eli Yannai, formerly of the Israel Antiquities Authority; Ido Koch of Tel Aviv University and Dan Warner of the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

### **The Shadow of Assyria**

Ur in the south and Harran in the north were two main centers of worship for the moon god Sin. As [Assyria](#) spread its wings over the lands of Syria and Palestine, its gods came too. "The iconography of the [moon god](#) spread across the Levant in the seventh century B.C.E.. We found it in a secured archaeological context of the seventh century B.C.E. and hence we can speculate about its connection to an agent of the Assyrian Empire," says Koch.

One tablet, found in the courtyard of the pillared house, documents a land sale in the year 698 or 697 B.C.E.. The other tablet was inside a different structure and documents a loan in

the year 665 or 664 B.C.E. This money was lent to what appears to have been a family for a three-month period by a Mesopotamian living in the area of the former Israelite kingdom. The borrower, according to the document, used his wife and sister as collateral and promised to pay punitive interest amounting to a third of the sum if he did not return the loan on time. Both documents feature Akkadian, perhaps Babylonian, and Aramaean names of several individuals. No local, Yahwistic name is mentioned. Why would the area of the former Kingdom of Israel, north of Jerusalem, become thronged by non-Israelites?

### The Netanyahu of Gezer

The empire of Tiglath-Pileser III grew in all directions. Order was maintained in the realm by means of a program of mass deportation and transplantation of conquered peoples. Scholars have interpreted the clay tablets found in Hadid as evidence of the Assyrian kings' relocation drive. In fact, archaeologists have uncovered similar evidence of forced migration in the nearby regional capital of Gezer.

Gezer was a major regional center, located only a few kilometers away from Hadid. It was probably conquered by Tiglath-Pileser III in 734 B.C.E. and after some years, it was rebuilt. A handful of Assyrian-style architectural elements and an assemblage of Assyrian-style cylinder seals, were connected to this phase in the [history of Gezer](#). There archaeologists found two other clay tablets composed in Assyrian style like those from Hadid, dealing with land sales in the mid-seventh century B.C.E.. Among the individuals mentioned, 12 bear Mesopotamian names, five probable Aramaic names, one Egyptian and one had a Yahwistic name: Netanyahu. The evidence from Hadid and Gezer provides solid evidence regarding the notorious Assyrian policy of deportation, says Koch.

It seems the Assyrians forcibly relocated hundreds of thousands of people to other places within the realm of conquered lands during their 100 years of domination over the Levant. The apparent purpose behind the harsh policy was to break the spirit of the national groups and weaken or eliminate potential rebellion. Relocating vanquished peoples seems to have been quite a norm in biblical times. Something similar happened in the territory of the Kingdom of Israel.

In 722 B.C.E., after the son of Tiglath-Pileser III, Shalmaneser V, conquered the kingdom, he continued his father's policy, expelling the locals and replacing them with foreigners. During the following centuries, through to the Persian Period (539 B.C.E.-332 B.C.E.) the people of Assyria and the vanquished Israel seem to have become entwined. For instance, several governors of Israel during the Persian period are named Sanballat, an Akkadian name (meaning Sin-Ubalit, "the moon god Sin has begotten"). Letters found in an archive in the island of Elephantine, in southern Egypt, show that one of these governors, ruling during the late fifth century B.C.E., had children with Yahwistic names: Delilah and Shelemiah. The implication is that the Israelites and Mesopotamians were mixing in this area, Koch says.

### Hasmoneans at War

Somewhat more recent ruins from the Hellenistic period discovered in the upper city of Hadid during two previous excavation seasons include what seem to be the corner of a fortification wall and a tower built during the Hasmonean period, perhaps by Simon Maccabeus in 165 B.C.E. during the war with Seleucid general, Diodotus Tryphon: "*And Simon built Adiada in Sephela, and fortified it, and set up gates and bars.*" (Second Maccabees 12:38; 13:13).

In antiquity, the city controlled the east-west road to Jerusalem and the north-south coastal road between Mesopotamia and Egypt. It is also located in one of the most fertile areas in the land, and indeed the majority of the population farmed, producing wine and olive oil. More than 25 olive presses as well as several rock-hewn wine presses have been discovered at the site. It was clearly a site of strategic significance for occupying armies. The Jewish-Roman historian Flavius Josephus writes that a Roman garrison was stationed there during the First Jewish War (Antiquities 13:5-6;2).

The town continued to exist in the Byzantine period, 330 CE – 638 C.E., a period of major growth throughout Israel in which Hadid appears to have taken part. Finds from the time include ceramic vessels, oil lamps, and a silver crucifix, jewelry, glass, coins and a mosaic pavement with Nilotic scenes dating to the 6th century. Hadid was mentioned by Eusebius, (260/265–339/340 CE). He called it Haditha and identified it as the site of Adithaim, a town in the allotment of Judah (Joshua 15:36). Among the discoveries this season was a large wine press about 6 meter in diameter, which was cut into bedrock and also appears to date to the Byzantine period.

### Ministry News

I've completed the **Bible Study notes Ezekiel**. These turned out to be a far greater challenge than expected because Ezekiel's language is obscure; his syntax is often without parallel in the Old Testament; he uses the largest number of words never repeated elsewhere in the Bible (known to scholars as *hapax legomena*), and he has extensive references to locations, customs and practices that need to be identified and explained. In the Bible Study notes, I am now working on the Minor Prophets. **Hosea** has been completed and **Joel** is now the focus of my attention. I've also completed a review of editorial comments on my translation of **the Gospel of John** and am working on **Acts**. We are making good progress. My commentary (in Hebrew) on **Galatians** is being edited, as is my book on **church life and structure**, while I work on the commentary on Zachariah, the last in my series on the Minor Prophets (Malachi was written a long time ago).

On one of the Sabbaths, after preaching to the congregation with which Bracha and I worship. One of the young men approached me: "Thank you for today's sermon. You know, something you said today clinched with what you said to me two years ago, following your first sermon on Galatians. I challenged you then because I disagreed with what you said. I believed that we are obliged to keep the Torah and at least some of our religious traditions. That was, I thought, the only way to grow in one's spiritual life. After some discussion you said to me, 'If that is what you think, you do not understand the Gospel'.

"I was offended: 'Who is he to say I don't understand the Gospel?!' But, you know, I've now heard the whole of your series on Galatians and – you were right: I didn't understand the Gospel. I didn't realize that Jesus did it all, and that I did not need to add anything to what he did for me, nor can I. Today, in your closing statement you said, 'Folk, if you understand this, you understand the Gospel', and that reminded me of your earlier statement when we had that first conversation. Thank you".

I admit: I was encouraged. We've been worshipping with these brethren for some 2 years now, during which time I've preached 24 sermons on Galatians and taught a class on preaching. Bracha and I give God thanks for indications of fruit for our shared labors. A number have testified to the effect that God allowed us to make something of a contribution to the life and health of the church. We are grateful. Above all, I am grateful to note a marked improvement in the Pastor's preaching both in terms of content and of delivery. It

was sweet to hear one of the young men say that he is praying we'll not manage to settle in the US, and that we return to Israel and to the church.

Notice has been given that we will be invited back every so often to offer courses, teaching the Bible and principles of the Faith. We would welcome such an opportunity and expect that this would open doors to teaches such courses in various locations in the country.

We are busy saying our goodbyes to friends, fellow congregants and colleagues. It is painful to tear ourselves away from our country, the church here and the people we love so dearly. I've preached in a number of churches, offering a parting sermon and seeking to call the churches to maintain faithfulness in the face of waves of doctrinal and practical aberrations now threatening the church, and to encourage increased doctrinal and moral fidelity. I long to strengthen that which is good and encourage those whose spirits are low. This coming weekend I preach my last sermon, to the church in whose fellowship I have been privileged to worship the last years. God willing, on March 4<sup>th</sup>, we make our way to the US. Bracha is a bit concerned in light of the spread of the Corona flu, but we put our trust in the Lord.

As of March 1<sup>st</sup>, my work is conducted under the oversight of Reformed Baptist Network (RBNNet), a registered 501(c) 3. It continues to be overseen by Faith Reformed Baptist Church (FRBC) in Media PA. I am grateful to FRBC, which has supported out work since the mid-1970's, and to RBNNet for their ongoing encouragement to continue my ministry of writing exegetical, devotional and theological books for the fledgling Israeli church. I am open for invitations to preach, but writing is what will take up the larger part of my time. While I am grateful for what the Lord has allowed me to write, I've plenty more writing projects ahead. As ever, your prayers are appreciated and very much needed.

We still have a considerable expected annual shortfall of our needed income. If you have supported us until now and intend to continue to do so; if you have not supported our work but intend to do so in 2020, or if you supported us but intend to bring that support to an end, please be so kind as to write us as soon as possible so that we will be able to plan accordingly. Should you have any queries, please be free to address us or Pastor Matt Forman, Faith Reformed Baptist Church, 110 Old State Road, Media PA 19064. Tel 610.566.8959, [mrforeman@gmail.com](mailto:mrforeman@gmail.com).

**As of March 1<sup>st</sup>, support for our ministry should no longer be sent to Berean Baptist Church.** All support should be sent to **Reformed Baptist Network, 860 Peachcrest Ct. NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49505 USA.** Bank details for direct transfers are **Chase Bank, Plainfield Four Mile 3539 Plainfield Ave. NE Grand Rapids, MI 49525, Account Number: 236738891.** The **routing number for domestic wire** transfers is **021000021.** The **Swiftcode for international transfers is CHASUS33.** Please indicate: For Baruch Maoz's ministry.

### Family News

Our belongings were packed and shipped to Seattle. For the next two-plus weeks we're camping out in our own home, with bare walls and floors and very little furniture. We will not be hosting, as our dining room table and chairs have been taken, as well as our pots and pans, kitchenware and serving plates. We sold what we could. What remains is to be given away. Arriving in the US, we shall be like newly-weds setting up home: purchasing tableware, bedspreads, towels and the like (what we have is not worth shipping) – we'll have lots of fun shopping! We've already bought beds. For the first few months we expect to live with one of our daughters and her family, and then rent. Meanwhile, we're learning

what it means to live in the US – a challenging wall to scale because realities differ so much from what pertains in Israel. Even the banking system is different!

All of our family are well, with no news to share except that fact **Keith** has found part-time employment! He is working for a small company in the house renovation industry, learning skills that will stand him in good stead in the future. Since Elinor (his and Shlomit's youngest) will attend pre-school next year **Shlomit** is now free to seek full-time employment, which she has commenced doing. God has provided for them during these two years in which they fought for Keith's life, and then experienced the ravages of unemployment. Keith is still seeking full time employment. They will need to vacate the house in which they presently live rent-free, and find a suitable rental.

Our daughters, their spouses and children in Seattle are excited over our oncoming move. We, too, are thrilled, although the pain of leaving Israel adds to the mix of joy and sorrow, gratitude and longing, hope and concern.

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.

Soon to be available: ***Galatians: He Did it All*** 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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