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In light of the pandemic, we will continue to produce MaozNews monthly until the pandemic subsides, and then revert to producing MaozNews on a quarterly basis. More frequent updates are available via my accounts with [FaceBook](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [Twitter](#)

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The Pandemic and Israeli Elections

Israel and the Coronavirus

Unlike most countries whose lot is happier, Israel is accustomed to national emergencies. Its antennas are therefore always up and its response teams generally quick identify threats and to respond. In addition, its national culture includes a combination of socialistic authoritarianism, innovative individualism and a Judaism-bred tendency to bend the rules. Israel was therefore one of the first countries to require all who entered the country to self-quarantine for 14 days. It was one of the first to impose social distancing, and it has enlisted the army, the national police and its Secret Services in the battle against the virus.

As a result, the country is coping with the present pandemic relatively well so far as issues of health are concerned. To date (April 17) 12, 885 are known to be infected in Israel, of which 9,558 are in light to moderate condition and 632 are hospitalized. The latter number includes 182 who are in intensive care (of whom 129 are on life support machines). Happily, 2,967 have overcome the disease and 148 passed away. In the last 24 hours, 264 new cases were confirmed and 343 patients recovered and were released from hospital. One of the lowest percentages of those infected is among elderly (which accounts for the low percentage of deaths). The highest is among the Orthodox, who have been slow to exercise social distancing, have large families and tend to live in particularly crowded areas. Israel seems to have turned a corner in its struggle against the disease.

This is not to say there are no hardships, no conflicts, at times even conflicts of interest, between the various bodies engaged in reducing the virus' impact on Israeli society. The Prime Minister has been careful to keep all other politicians well in the shade while he hogs the limelight. The Ministers of Health, of Homeland Security and of Defense have contended for more authority and more visibility. The medical and hospital staff, as in most countries, is exhausted, some have been infected and there still is a projected shortage of ventilators, and uncertainty as to how best to treat those who contract the disease.

The Minister of Health, Ya'acov Litsman, who oversaw Israel's health Ministry for the last decade, is a representative of the Orthodox Agudat Yisrael political party. Gifted with a

strong personality and a sharp mind, he has no other qualifications for the task. He has neither a managerial, a scientific or a medical education. Partly as a result, Israel's national health system has been neglected over the years. There is a dearth of hospitals, of hospital beds, of equipment and of staff.

No country should be expected to be able to cope without difficulty with a pandemic of the present proportions. However, those in the know have been decrying the deterioration of the national health system for years. For the last 25 years, only one new hospital has been built, the majority of Israel's medical doctors were forced to obtain their professional education overseas, and staff limits imposed by the Government on national hospitals have meant that medical institutions are drastically underpaid and understaffed.

Recently, Mr. Litsman and his wife were both diagnosed with Covid-19 because Mr. Litsman consistently disobeyed the orders he and his ministry issued. He participated in public prayer. Consequently, he put the Prime Minister, the Chief of Staff, the head of Israel's Intelligence Services and other prominent public servants at risk by declining to maintain social distance from them in the course of meetings convened, ironically, to discuss ways to combat the virus.

Mr. Litsman's conduct is symptomatic of many in the Orthodox community, so much so that the areas densely populated by the Orthodox are hotbeds for the pandemic, resulting in the Government imposing almost-military closures on some such areas.

Some 1,000,000 of the work force are unemployed and their number is growing. The economy is at a standstill, to some extent buoyed by income from Israel's gas fields. But the price of housing has plummeted, reducing the value of many citizen's investments while saddling them with a disproportionate debt. The middle class, largely consisting of owners of small businesses or earners of better than average pay-checks, is being eroded. The lack of tourism -- a major industry in Israel -- means that hotels, hotel staff, restaurateurs, restaurant staff, travel agents, travel guides and the broad periphery of other businesses related to the tourism industry is losing money daily.

However, Israel has been successful in flattening the curve of infections and is believed to be seeing light at the end of the tunnel. Plans are being laid for a gradual and controlled return to what is expected to be the new normal. An effort to jump-start the economy is to be made as soon as possible shortly after the Passover week (April 9-15).

Israel's Elections

While engaged in a struggle against the virus, Israel is in a political deadlock. Mr. Netanyahu, in an effort to spare himself the indignity of appearing in court, forced the country into three consecutive elections within the space of 11 months, and thrice failed to gain a majority. Master politician that he is, he managed to woo Mr. Gantz, his most significant opponent, into negotiations that can only result in the latter's political castration, regardless of whether or not he and Mr. Netanyahu succeed in forming a government. There is even reason to doubt if Mr. Netanyahu is interested in such a government. Having demeaned his opponent and thereby ridden himself of the only threat to his continued rule, there is little reason for him not to try forming a government without Mr. Gantz and celebrate his Machiavellian success, or even call for another round of elections -- no one on the scene seems to be in a position to present him with a meaningful challenge. If elections were held today, Mr. Netanyahu is likely to win by a landslide.

Mr. Gantz rode on a ticket that united a majority of voters, according him a slight parliamentary majority (61 seats to Netanyahu's 59). He vowed to reunite Israeli society, strengthen the courts, support the rule of law, defend the Supreme Court, pass legislation to limit the Prime Ministers' terms to two and forbid candidacy to anyone indicted for crimes.

He repeatedly assured his supporters that he would not serve under the leadership of Mr. Netanyahu due to his multiple indictments. A wave of optimism swept the country.

Accorded a mandate to form a Government, Mr. Gantz turned to Netanyahu, offered to serve under him for 18 months while serving as Deputy Prime Minister, rotating for 18 months and rotating again for the remaining 12 months of the potential new government's 4-year term. Mr. Gantz' supporters are aghast. His party split and public spirit is at an all-time low, with growing discontent and increased protest. The sole obstacles to the formation of a Government is now whether or not Mr. Netanyahu will be allowed to take control of the judicial system by receiving a majority in Judicial Appointments Committee and whether or not the Courts will be allowed to rule on his political future in light of his indictments. Mr. Gantz insists that it does not make sense to allow an individual under indictment to choose his own judges. Mr. Netanyahu insists the he should be given the authority to do so, and has threatened massive public protest if his political future is not secured. The outcome remains to be seen.

Israel's Political Impasse (for now)

The results of Israel's third round of elections were inconclusive. Mr. Netanyahu's party became the largest, but Mr. Gantz gained the parliamentary majority necessary for him to be mandated to form a Government. Mr. Gantz then turned his back on that majority, split from his political partners and sought to form what he described as "an emergency Government" with Mr. Netanyahu.

Negotiations between the two and their respective parties took up all of the time (28 days) allowed by law for the formation of a Government. Mr. Netanyahu insisted on control of the Committee responsible for appointing new judges. Mr. Gantz balked. He had gone back on too many campaign promises to agree to this one, he said.

Nearing the end of his mandate, Mr. Gantz asked President Rivlin for the legally allowed 14 days extension, explaining that he and Mr. Netanyahu were on the brink of agreement. Mr. Netanyahu denied that to be the case and, as a result, the President informed Mr, Gantz that he would not grant the extension unless informed by Mr. Netanyahu otherwise. Following renewed appeals from both Netanyahu and Gantz, the President accorded Mr. Gantz another two days., Not being willing to take part in the political gameplays of both contestants, when the two days were over, the President referred the matter to the Knesset.

A number of ways ahead are now possible:

1. Messrs. Netanyahu and Gantz manage to eke out an agreement;
2. The Knesset recommend someone who garnered a parliamentary majority, who will then be authorized by the President to form a Government;
3. Mr. Gantz, who is now Speaker of the House, manages to pass legislation that will, in effect, obviate Mr. Netanyahu's ability to serve in any governmental post;
4. Israel is forced to undergo yet a fourth round of elections.

Ministry News

Initially, assuming all was normal when we relocated to the US, my plan was to take a month or so off from work, so I could deal with matters arising from our relocation. Under the circumstances, once I was able to do all the paper-work possible under limitations imposed by the pandemic, I reverted to working. That took about a week. Since then, having been given a room for an office (we're living in with our eldest daughter and her family until our intended rental is available), I've been able to have 12-14 hours work-days, 6 days a week. Once we are able to move, I'll need to take a few more days off, and I have promised Bracha

that I would work 5 days a week, nor more than 10 hours a day. So, I'm trying to take advantage of the present circumstances and get as much work done as possible. Taking advantage of the circumstances created by the Corona pandemic, I ended my hiatus from work and am presently engaged in a number of projects:

1. Having finalized **my translation of the Gospel of Matthew**, I've responded to both of my editors and await the response of one to his comments on my rendering of the Greek in **Mark, Luke and John**. Meanwhile, I'm reviewing his comments on my translation of Acts. **The rest of the New Testament** has been translated and edited. It now awaits my review and my editors' final comments before being ready for the printer.

2. I'm translating and writing **Bible study notes to the Old Testament Prophets, Psalms, and the New Testament**. So far, I completed Isaiah - Obadiah + Philippians. I am now working on Jonah. I've been asked to go back and translate the Introductions to the books and some General Articles which were not within my earlier mandate, and have agreed to do so.

3. As per a request from HaGefen, I am writing **a book on How to Understand the Bible**, with a particular emphasis on the Old Testament, based on my Thesis for my MA. My goal is to write an academically respectable book that is nevertheless very accessible to an average reader. Therefore, for example, instead of footnotes I will use endnotes, I bring quotations rather than just referring to them, and I am trying to write in a somewhat conversational style (that does not come naturally to me). I'm very much open to any advice, criticism or remarks you wish to make on the attached in the light of what I've just said. Please do assist me in this way — I'm an eager learner.

4. I'm putting my last commentary on the Minor Prophets (**Zachariah**) on the back-burner for a while, in order to make progress with the above three projects, but am taking advantage of the time to read as much as I can find relevant to that project.

Meanwhile, I'm creating and expanding my list of contacts with a view to initiating a renewed effort to create **a counter-movement to the Messianic Movement**. I plan to attend a number of Messianic-orientated conferences, which, I have learned, are attended by many discomfited with the movement but aware of no other option. Then, if the Lord gives me strength and years, re-commence my efforts to promote the International Jewish Evangelical Fellowship, encouraging Jewish Christians to be part of the Christian church at large while playing a viable part in the lives of our people and reaching out to them with the Gospel.

Family News

We have been **self-quarantined** in the home of **Avital**, our eldest daughter and her family as of March 7th. **Tamar**, our youngest, and her family live 10 minutes' drive away. She and her family are also quarantined. That being the case, we are able to see one another. On April 1st (yes ... I know), we celebrated **Yotam's** 11th birthday. Yotam is Tamar's oldest, a sweet, bright child, amazingly knowledgeable, with some social disabilities due to his borderline autism. On Wednesday, April 8, we celebrated the oncoming Passover evening together. The fact that we are isolated in the company of family is a boon nor many enjoy. We are grateful.

We intend to move into a rental home owned by Avital and Eran, and to pay them the market rate for rent, but are unable to move until the quarantine is lifted and the present occupier finds other accommodation. His contract is not up until the end of June at any rate, so there is no hurry. Avital and Eran have kindly arranged for me to have an office to myself

in their relatively large home, and I am able to keep my normal working hours, commencing before the family is up and taking advantage of the evenings to enjoy their company.

Our belongings should arrive from Israel by ship toward the end of April. We will store them until the rental is available. Some of our belongings are in Chattanooga, with our second daughter. Once travel is possible, I will be renting a Penske truck, pick up our belongings and drive them to the Seattle area in which we live.

Due to the pandemic, **Noam** is home from College, as are **Maya** and **Nadav** from school. Tamar had been home-schooling **Avishai and Eliya**. Now she has Yotam to home-school as well. The Thompsons (**Keith and Shlomit**) in Chattanooga have been ordered to quarantine, as have all residents of the State. Shlomit enjoys having the children home. Keith is able to work part time, although that is expected to come to an end soon. The area underwent a serious Tornado. They and the house were spared. Only one (massive) tree fell. Keith's health is holding up – he is still in search of employment.

in Christ by grace,

Baruch and Bracha Maoz

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