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I keep vacillating between issuing MaozNews on a monthly or quarterly basis, or perhaps, as circumstances dictate (I'd be glad to hear what you think). There are good reasons for each of these options. Now that three months have passed, I'm at a loss where to begin and will probably find it equally difficult to know where to end. But let's start with Israel:

The Scene in Israel

Internal Politics

Following three rounds of elections during which the incumbent, Benjamin (Bibi) Netanyahu or any of his opponents failed to achieve a parliamentary majority that would enable them to form a Government, a faction led by Benjamin (Benny) Gantz, broke away from Blue and White, which vowed never to form a Government with Mr. Netanyahu so long as he is subject to the indictments against which he is now defending himself, and formed a Government with Gantz' nemesis, Netanyahu.

To enable such a government, legislation was passed, creating for Mr. Gantz the bizarre post of Alternative Prime Minister, which is to become Mr. Netanyahu's position once he relinquishes power to Mr. Gantz 18 in months' time. Nobody but Mr. Gantz believes such an exchange will occur, and even Mr. Gantz may now have his doubts because Mr. Netanyahu has reneged on a series of other undertakings on the basis of which the Government was formed: contrary to those undertakings, he has declined to allow the Blue and White faction and equal say in Governmental decisions; declined to support the creation of a budget for 2020-2021 (which could bring about the fall of the Government, new elections, and Mr. Netanyahu at the head of a caretaker government for the next 4-6 months); seeks to influence the appointment of the next Attorney General, State Prosecutor and Chief of

National Police, and has maneuvered to lay blame for any failures – real or apparent – on Mr. Gantz while hoarding praise for any successes – real or imaginary – for himself.

Mr. Netanyahu has bought the political support of the Orthodox parties, which hold the balance of power (we often say that elections serve to determine with whom the Orthodox will form a Government ...) by according their section of the population extensive monetary privileges at the cost of Israeli tax-payers and acceding to their every request, often contrary to the advice of his closest advisors.

The country is in uproar. Protests in most cities, on bridges and at major intersections call for Netanyahu's resignation. Prominent, highly respected members of his Likud party have spoken against him. Former senior members of the Defense establishment have called for him to resign. Still, Mr. Netanyahu clings to power in the hope that he will be able to use those powers to escape the relentless judicial process that was initiated by his own hand-picked appointees, who witnessed corrupt conduct and turned against him.

Covid-19

Israel's first response to the pandemic won accolades the world over. However, the surge which followed placed Israel at the top of the list of the countries whose infection rate per capita was distressingly high. The primary cause for this within the Jewish population is the refusal of the Orthodox community to wear masks or maintain social distancing. The Arab community, some 20% of the population, also has an unusually high infection rate due to the tendency of extended families to live together.

Israel's economy, a short while ago transforming Israeli currency into one of the strongest in the world, has been devastated. Over a million out of a population of approximately 9 million are unemployed, small businesses are collapsing, families are unable to pay their mortgage, purchase medicines or buy food. Meanwhile, the number of infections continues to rise, as do the fatalities.

Iran and Hezbollah in the North and Hamas in the South

Israel continues to pound Iranian efforts to establish a front on the Syrian border. Hezbollah acts as Iran's proxy in support of such efforts. As a result, its operatives are often affected by Israel's attacks. In a recent such attack, an operative was killed and Hezbollah has vowed revenge. Two attempts were foiled by Israeli defense forces, however tensions on the northern border remain high and Israel has warned Lebanon that it will hold that country responsible for any attacks launched – directly or indirectly – from its territory.

Hamas in Gaza, witnessing Israel's preoccupation the pandemic and with Hezbollah, has renewed attacks on Israel's villages that share a border with Gaza. Explosive and incendiary balloons have caused increased damage. Israel has responded with vigor, attacking Hamas' military assets. So far, Hamas has not been deterred. Rather, it has conditioned its termination of attacks on Israel agreeing to increased monetary support of the Hamas regime and allowing extensive infrastructure and economic improvements.

The Recent Peace Accords

As so often is the case, both good and bad are to be found in the recent accords signed between Israel on the one hand, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates on the other. Every step toward peace is welcome, of course, and to staying of Netanyahu's overt annexation plans an important boon (however – be not deceived, surreptitious appropriation of Palestinian lands occurs on a daily basis) Most likely, President Trump is right, and these

accords are the harbingers of further such developments in the near and far future. The Sunni Arab countries share with Israel a common enemy – Iran – and Israel’s prowess as well as its connections with the US offer those countries a means of defense against an aggressively ambitious Iran.

On the other hand, such accords shunt the Palestinian issue aside, to the realm of irrelevancy, enabling Israel to continue to progress toward a situation in which the Palestinians are disenfranchised of the right to political self-expression and robbed of the hope that such an expression will someday be theirs. The festering sore – Israel’s suppression of Palestinian national aspirations – is eating away at the moral fiber of Israeli society.

The Spiritual Scene

All of this is the backdrop of what really counts – spiritual realities in Israel. It is disconcerting to witness the measure of angry despair under which many labor. True, circumstances are dire, but there is more to life than health, wealth and physical security. The biblical options of repentance, of casting oneself as individuals and of the nation as a nation turning from itself to God, are not considered. Nor do I see the church raising to the occasion. Like so many in the country, local Christians are bent on survival, as are the congregations.

Most churches in Israel resorted, as did many others around the world, to virtual services by way of FaceBook, YouTube and Zoom. Recently, some have recommenced gathering under the strict conditions allowed by the Government while others have chosen to ignore those conditions. Now that the Government has imposed further strict measures, it is unlikely that the churches will be able to meet for some time.

Ruins from First Temple-period Palace Found in Southern Jerusalem

Adapted from an article by Ruth Schuster, published by Ha’Aretz, June 9, 2020



Elaborately decorated capitals bearing the symbol of the Judahite monarchy apparently from a palace erected 2,700 years ago were discovered in Jerusalem. The finds from the First

Temple Period were made in the neighborhood of Armon Hanatziv, a strategic hill located south of Jerusalem's Old City. A team headed by IAA archaeologist Yaakov Billig discovered the buried pieces of palace, with beautifully carved capitals in the style of the Kingdom of Judah, in November, during a dig ahead of the construction of a visitors' center.

The finds were revealed at a press conference, attended by Culture Minister Hili Tropper. The evidence of a palatial edifice outside the ancient walls of Jerusalem is "the discovery of a lifetime," Doron Spielman, vice president of the City of David Foundation, said. The palace was possibly destroyed during the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E., said Yuval Baruch, the head archaeologist for the Jerusalem District at the IAA. The remains were found in the area of destruction. "The quality not only of the capitals but other finds, such as the columns, is extraordinary," Baruch told Haaretz. He added that throughout the Levant, finds of this exceptional quality are associated with royal estates.

Billig explained that "The capitals hadn't just fallen during the destruction. They had been purposefully buried in the ground." The rest of the site had been leveled. In antiquity, what could be recycled and used somewhere else was taken. But in this case, the decorated architectural elements were removed from the building and squirreled away in a niche. "Was it a matter of sanctity? Perhaps someone did not want them desecrated. For now, we don't know," Billig says

"Most capitals discovered to date, even the bigger ones, were only decorated on one side, the face facing the people entering the edifice. This was carved on both sides, front and back," he said. "And then when extracting the capital from the ground – we found another one." The second one was also elaborately decorated.

A third, smaller capital was discovered a few days later, near the first two, Billig said. The small capitals had niches on top for pins: when connected, they form a decorated windowsill. How can we know where these capitals came from? "They must have belonged to a palace, or a royal estate or wealthy home built on the ridge of Armon Hanatziv – maybe a royal figure, with a view of the City of David and Temple Mount. It was situated strategically," Billig said.

The palace was likely built in the early seventh century B.C.E. in King Hezekiah's time, after Jerusalem had survived a siege by the Assyrians. "Evidently they felt confident enough to build beyond the walls, villas and royal estates," Billig noted. Sadly, the palace or estate would not last long, he said, as the building was apparently destroyed, along with much of the city and the First Temple, when the Babylonians conquered Judah.

Previous excavation had uncovered a destruction layer in Jerusalem from the period of the Babylonian conquest. It cannot be certain that the presently unveiled edifice was razed then, but it seems plausible. Then at some point, as is the norm in human history, the stones of the original edifice were removed and repurposed, except for the buried capitals.

The blocks are also unique in size. About 20 to 30 similar capitals had been found throughout Judah and the Kingdom of Israel: they were probably the lintels of doorways into palaces. These were medium-sized and probably served as decoration on top of pillars in a courtyard.

They later found miniature capitals too – extra small, which may have decorated windowsills. "This shows they used the same symbol, the same decoration for multiple

formats," Billig said. Baruch noted that the decoration on the capital is absolutely typical of the Kingdom of Judah. The same monarchic symbol, which some scholars interpret as a stylized palm tree, appears on today's five shekel coin.

The archaeologists dated the putative palace based on the style of pottery fragments they found to within the seventh century B.C.E – from King Hezekiah who survived the Assyrian siege to the reign of Josiah – just before the Babylonian destruction. "The whole strata with the rubble and the fragments of pottery can be dated with resolution roughly of several decades in the 7th century B.C.E. The pottery, jugs, cooking pots, lamps, repertoire of fractured clay vessels are all from that time period," Billig said. The First Temple dating should be backed later using other technologies.



Billig said that the capitals definitely came from the structure excavated in Armon Hanatziv, which is about two kilometers from the Temple Mount. The location has always been strategic. It received its modern name (which translates to Governor's Palace) because it once housed the seat of the British High Commissioner during the mandate period.

Ministry News

I have just completed a **Bible Studies series, taught to one of the congregations in Israel** via Zoom. In **October** I am scheduled to commence, God willing, a series on **the doctrine of God**, taught by the same means.

The Gospels of **Matthew, Mark and Luke** are now in their final form in our **translation of the New Testament into Hebrew**. We are now working on the Gospel of John. My Greek editor has been occupied with other undertakings. This has imposed a hiatus in his and my work on the Epistles and Acts – I await his response to my review of his comment on Acts, Romans, Galatians and Ephesians.

The **Bible notes project** is progressing apace. I'm working on the introduction to some of the biblical books while reviewing and honing previously-written **notes on Isaiah – Zephaniah**. It is likely that I will be able to complete my mandated part in this task well before the scheduled date.

My **commentary** (in Hebrew) on **Galatians** is in the hands of the printer. The pandemic has stuck a spanner in the wheels of the publisher working on that same commentary in English. I am told publication is soon to take place.

Work my **hermeneutics book** is also progressing. I hope to complete another chapter or two by the end of December. However, reading and rethinking, honing and corrections my perceptions and articulating them clearly must be a cautious process. So as to be as true to God's word as the Lord will enable me to be.

Family News

Avital and Maya travelled to Israel, where Maya is undergoing preparation toward enlistment in the Israel Defense Forces. Avital stayed for a month and has just returned. Bracha and I moved out to an Airbnb for two weeks, until our rental is ready for us, so Avital can quarantine without constituting a risk to our health.

Shlomit and Keith have both found employment. Keith is struggling with his SIBO, but has been able to carry a heavy workload. **All three children** are enrolled in a Christian Classical School, where Shlomit teaches.

Tamar is home-schooling Avishai and Yotam, as well as overseeing Eliya, whose schooling is via Zoom. That is quote a task, particularly in light of Yotam's special needs and the vast age difference between the children.

We have moved into our home. Considerable work needed to be done on the house: mold was found in the kitchen and the bathrooms (which entailed new tiling and new vanities), new flooring and a new kitchen were put in, the deck is about to be renewed, the shed needs a new floor, a large window had to be replaced and the whole house needed painting. We contracted a local company to do the work and have been well served by them. Most of the work has been completed – enough to allow us to move and to begin settling down under more normal circumstances. We intend to undertake maximal hospitality as soon as circumstances permit and, as ever, our home is open to you, our friends. We continue to wait on the authorities regarding Bracha's application for a Green Card. Should any of you have access to someone who could influence the process, please reach out to us.

Katya and Felix in Canada just celebrated another wedding anniversary. **Rose and El'ad** in Israel are expecting their first child.



LinkedIn



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