

# *Soli Deo Gloria*

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## **The Scene in Israel**

### **The Political Scene**

In March 2021, Israel will go through its fourth round of elections in two years. The first two previous rounds failed to result in the formation of a Government. The third took place just before the pandemic broke out. A Government was formed under pressure due to the looming disaster the pandemic threatened to become, with strange arrangements such as a Prime Minister and an Alternative Prime Minister (the latter also doubling as Minister of defense), who were scheduled to rotate after two years. The Government could only be convened if the two agreed on the agenda, posts could not be filled except the two agreed and a State Budget was to be presented within 6 months.

As expected, Netanyahu commenced breaking his side of the bargain before the ink of the agreement had dried. He sought to hamstring the judiciary, refused to pass a budget and repeatedly sidestepped the Alternative Prime Minister, Benny (Benjamin) Gantz. He took unilateral action, keeping his Minister of Defense and Minister of Foreign Affairs in the dark and blocked the appointment of important posts such as Chief of Police. Finally, Gantz' famous patience wore out.

Prominent members of Netanyahu's Likud party have defected and now belong to Gideon Sa'ar's recently-formed New Hope party. Sa'ar's policy statements largely echo those of Benjamin Netanyahu, perhaps with a bend slightly more toward an intransigent nationalism. The main issue has to do with Netanyahu's indictments for corruption, yet to be played out in court, his ethical conduct and that of his family. If the polls will prove to be right, the next Parliament (Israel's Knesset) will be made up of a majority that will not permit Netanyahu to serve again as Prime Minister.

If the Orthodox, Netanyahu's perennial supporters, will jump ship, the conclusion is foregone. Cynically, after decades of anti-Arab diatribes (Israeli Arabs number just under 2 million), Netanyahu is now courting them in a desperate effort to remain in power at the

same time as he courting extreme anti-Arab parties. At the same time, he is courting the most extreme right wing of the electorate, including Kahanists (whom the Supreme Court formerly barred from running on the grounds of their racists and anti-Arab rhetoric). Juggling the two is the kind of feat that only a consummate Machiavellian politician like Netanyahu is capable of considering, let alone implementing.

### **The Pandemic**

In a population of just over 9 million, at the time of writing, 732,040 of the population have been infected, there have been 5,414 deaths, 962 are in intensive care units, the British mutation is fast spreading among school children, with some of them desperately ill and some numbered among the dead. Hospitals have been instructed to prepare for a wave of infected children. Medical staff are exhausted, intensive care units over-worked and there is no end in sight. The Government imposed three lock-downs, but these were almost completely ignored by the 17% of the population that are Orthodox, whose frequent public events and educational institutions have become hotbeds of infection. Netanyahu, politically dependent on them, has refused to take necessary action. For instance, he refused to lock-down cities whose population is largely Orthodox and where infection is highest by far, unless the whole of the country, including areas where there are but few infections, we locked-down as well.

Frustration over the Government's handling of the pandemic has become wide-spread. In consequence, large number of the population have refused to obey Government edicts, and shops are opening contrary to the Government's instruction. Tens of thousands of small businesses have collapsed, and hundreds of thousands are unemployed.

So far, 399,214 have been vaccinated, with a 94% success rate. As a result, schools are beginning to open, as are shops and other forms of cultural life – all under severe restrictions and constant monitoring. The country is expecting an increase in infections and is bracing itself for it but the economic and social toll exacted by the closures have become unbearable.

### **The Abraham Accords**

Mutual and formal recognition between Israel on the one hand and various Muslim States on the other (The United Emirates, Bahrain and Sudan) have not had visible impact on the Middle East. The Palestinians, side-lined by the Accords, refused to negotiate so long as Donald Trump was President of the United States. It remains to be seen what will be their approach now that there is a new American Administration. US commitments, which served as an impetus for the Accords, have been temporarily frozen by President Biden, while Saudi Arabia waits off-stage to see which way the wind will blow.

However, trade relations between Israel and the two small, oil-rich Gulf states has blossomed and Iran must now tread a bit more carefully in its open antagonism toward Israel. Speaking of Iran, Israel continues to attack Iranian and Iranian proxy forces in Syria while keeping a watchful eye of Hezbollah in Lebanon. Tensions on the border with Gaza, a densely-populated strip of land controlled by Hamas, a Muslim Brotherhood organization, has eased, largely due to the pandemic.

## **Remains of Royal Garments From King David's Time**

*3,000-year-old textiles unearthed in the copper mines of Timna were dyed with purple extracted from seashells, said to have been used by biblical kings and priests* Based on an article by Ariel David, January 28, 2021

Analysis of 3,000-year-old textile fragments unearthed in 2016, in the Timna copper mines, deep in Israel's southern desert, revealed some to have been stained with a precious dye believed to have decorated the clothes of biblical kings and high. Some of the woolen fabrics were colored with "royal purple," a team of researchers from Tel Aviv University, the Israel Antiquities Authority and Bar Ilan University reported Thursday in the journal PLOS ONE (<https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0245897>). The purple dye was extracted from seashells through a complex and costly process. Its use symbolized wealth, as well as religious or political power among many cultures across the Mediterranean, from the ancient Israelites to the Greeks and Romans.

Finding such costly and relatively material hundreds of kilometers from the Mediterranean shores, where it was produced, affords insight into fashion trends in biblical days, says Prof. Erez Ben-Yosef, the Tel Aviv University archaeologist who led the team. The study also intersects the broader debate on the historicity of the Bible, particularly on the existence of the kingdoms of David and Solomon, to whose era the recovered textiles roughly belong.

### **Born to the Purple and Blue**

Archaeologists recovered more than 100 wool and linen fabrics, preserved for over three millennia by the desert climate, dating back to the 11th-10th centuries BC. Previously they had noted that the clothes of some of the ancient metal workers were of an unexpectedly high quality, tightly woven and decorated, mainly in blue and red dye produced from plant-based dyes. Now, using high pressure liquid chromatography, the researchers found three items in the collection that contained signature compounds of royal purple.



**Wool textile fragment decorated by threads dyed with Royal Purple**

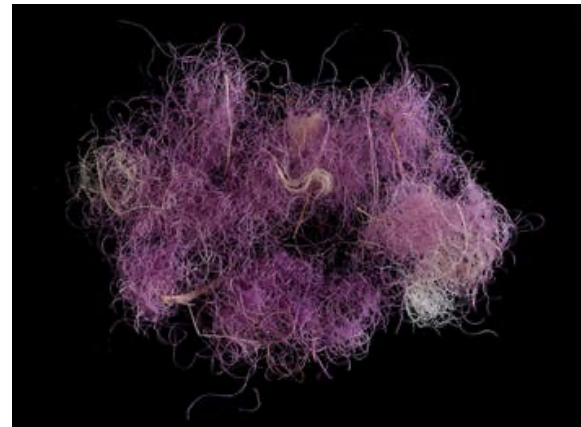
*1000 BCE, Timna Valley, Israel* Credit: Dafna Gazit, courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority

Dr. Naama Sukenik, an expert on ancient textiles and curator for organic materials with the IAA explains that this dye, also known as "true purple" – to distinguish it from cheaper but less durable plant-based imitations – was extracted from murex sea snails, a family of

mollusks commonly found in the Mediterranean Sea. Only five other textiles decorated with royal purple have been found in Israel so far, all of which date to the Roman period, some 1,000 years later than the Timna items.

Purple dye is known in the Old Testament as “argaman” and is mentioned 38 times, generally in the context of prestige and wealth. For example, the color graced the robes of Midianite kings mentioned in Judges 8:26. Purple-colored fabrics are said to have been used for the veil at the entrance to the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle (Exodus 26:31) and for several of the garments worn by the High Priest (Exodus 28:5-33). King Solomon’s palanquin was apparently upholstered in purple (Song of Songs 3:10). The biblical argaman is often mentioned alongside another symbolically important color, “tekhelet,” a blue dye which was used, among other things, for the fringes on the corners of the tallit, the Jewish prayer shawl (which is why the color graces modern Israel’s flag as well).

Like royal purple, tekhelet was also made in antiquity from murex seashells, using a specific species of these mollusks and a longer exposure of the dye to light during the production process, Sukenik explains.



**Wool fibers dyed with Royal Purple  
1000 BCE, Timna Valley, Israel**

*Credit: Dafna Gazit*

*By courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority*

Apparently, neither argaman nor tekhelet were invented in these parts. The Minoans of Crete were probably the first to invent this dyeing method during the Bronze Age. In the subsequent centuries the murex dye market was largely cornered by the Phoenicians, especially by the city state of Tyre, in today’s Lebanon. This is why royal purple is also known as “Tyrian purple” (some scholars believe that the term Phoenician derives from the Greek word “phoinix,” which means red-purple). Phoenician traders exported the dye far and wide, and nowhere was the product more successful than in Rome, where it became a status symbol for the aristocracy, adorning the togas of senators, triumphant generals and emperors. The Roman historian Pliny the Elder, who describes the dye’s production process in his *Natural History*, tells us of the “*purpurae insania*” – the frenzy for purple – that gripped the empire’s elites. The symbolic association between this color and power then translated into Christianity. To this day, Roman Catholic bishops and cardinals wear robes colored in various shades of purple and red.

While it’s fairly easy to imagine those dashing and cosmopolitan Romans falling victim to a mega fashion trend from the East, it’s a bit more difficult to understand how royal purple made its way to a distant mining operation in the desert of the southern Levant back in the 10th century B.C.E.

### **A Kingdom of Nomads**

However, the discovery makes sense in light of other recent research on the ancient miners of Timna, Sukenik says. The fabric remains were uncovered among the blackened landscape

of the so-called “Slaves’ Hill,” a copper smelting area thus labelled because its original discoverers in the 1930s imagined it as a hellish spot where enslaved people were pressed into backbreaking labor. The discovery of the textiles and of remains of high quality imported have changed that assumption. Archaeologists now suspect the smelters at Timna were if anything highly prized for their skills. Well-clothed and well-fed, they would have been anything but slaves. The presence of royal purple garments at Timna means that either the rulers of this society were present at the site or the copper smelters themselves were part of the elite, says Ben-Yosef.

Ben-Yosef says that, despite the fact that we have not found significant remains of permanent settlements in the Negev from this period, evidence of the good food and elegant clothes found at Timna are signs of cultural sophistication. Added to the massive size and the standardization of mining activities there and at similar sites (such as Feynan in nearby Jordan), there is indication the hand of a strong, centralized kingdom.



**Closeup of a fiber dyed with purple, Timna**  
Credit: Dafna Gazit  
By courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority

Apparently, by the 11th-10th century BC, the Edomites had managed to create a sophisticated political system and a highly stratified society despite continuing nomadic or semi-nomadic ways. The fact that scholars often dismiss the complexities of ancient nomadic societies because for lack of massive archaeological is a paradigm against which Ben-Yosef has been pushing for some time now. “The use of royal purple is further evidence that nomads were capable of creating a strong kingdom with an elite and vast trade ties, contrary to the traditional perception of nomadic societies as simple and isolated,” he says. “They would manifest power and wealth not by building walls and palaces but by obtaining exquisite artifacts that were mobile like they were.”

While archaeological evidence of a sedentary Edomite polity only dates back to around 8th century B.C.E., if Ben-Yosef’s theory is correct, would jive with the Bible’s assertion (Genesis 36:31) that such a kingdom existed already before the time of King David, namely, in the 11th-10th century B.C.E.

Ben-Yosef suggests that this paradigm shift should apply not only to the Edomites but also to the Israelites and the longstanding debate among scholars over the historicity of the great united monarchy of Israel and Judah under David and Solomon. Many experts argue today that there is no archaeological evidence pointing to the existence of a centralized kingdom such as is described in the Old Testament. But the architectural hallmarks of Edomite political grandeur appear only in the subsequent centuries. hence, we should at least admit the possibility that David’s kingdom did exist although still

based, like Edom, on a largely nomadic population which would inevitably leave little tangible evidence behind.

At the very least, the newly discovered luxurious textiles at Timna show that the biblical descriptions of royal purple being used by the elites of the Israelites and their neighbors in the time of King David are not an anachronism inserted by later authors projecting their own traditions back into the past, Ben-Yosef notes. Haaretz.

Given Timna's distance from the Mediterranean, the purple textiles found there are a remarkable discovery that shows the economic and political power of the locals, says Dr. Yigal Bloch, a curator at the Bible Lands Museum in Jerusalem and an expert on ancient dyes. The find does not provide direct information on what was going on at the time, however, Bloch notes, the Bible does describe a battle between King David and the Edomites, (2 Samuel 8:13-15). Although there is no archaeological proof of this event, it stands to reason that there would have been contacts between the two kingdoms. The presence at Timna of royal purple, highly prized by the Israelites, may well be a result of those relations, he speculates. "One could argue that it was King David who organized this trade," Bloch tells Haaretz.

### Ministry News

The series on **the doctrine of God**, attended by the congregation with which Bracha and I worshipped before relocating to the US. Is proceeding well. I have reason to believe it is impacting the way some of the participants view God, salvation and the grace of God in salvation. Earlier resistance has waned and more agreement has become evident. Of course, one's view of God significantly shapes one's view of anything else. May prayer is the God would be glorified in the lives of the participants, and that they will be drawn to a greater appreciation of his unwarranted kindness to them, and a deeper commitment to live for him.

An article on our response to the pandemic was kindly received by many. I am deeply troubled by the fact that so many churches has experienced tension, in some cases, schism, over this issue. For those who might want to read it, a link to the article is provided below: <https://www.dropbox.com/s/j4leop2pw9iy2w6/Priorities in Light of the Pandemic.pdf?dl=0>

The editorial process of my **translation of the New Testament into Hebrew** is proceeding well. We have finalized the text of **the four Gospels and Acts** and are now reviewing my translation of **the letter to the Romans**. Reviewers repeatedly ask me to explain rather than translate terms and phrases such as "righteousness" and "unrighteousness", "in Christ", "fruit among you", but I am translating, not commenting, and must be true to the text. While working on Romans, earlier when writing my commentary, I was struck by the very particular way Paul uses the word "all" in Romans, in almost every case as consciously intended to imply the inclusion of both Jews and gentiles. "All" is an extremely important word in this wonderful letter, all too often ignored!

In the **Bible notes project** I am now engaged in writing and translating notes on Psalms , no small task due to the difficulties involved in ancient poetic Hebrew. Your prayers would be much appreciated.

I am drawing closer to the end of my renewed studies for the book on hermeneutics and hope to revert to writing before you receive the next issue of MaozNews.

### Family News

**Maya** completed her basic training, following which she received an honors citation for excelling in the course. She has also completed training for a specific role in the Israel Defense Forces and awaits her final posting, somewhere on our northern border – a very active border responsible for the conflict with Iran in Syria and with Hezbollah in Syria and Lebanon. As ever, **Noam** is doing extremely well at college and **Nadav** at school. Nadav has found ways to relate meaningfully with friends of his age while maintaining social distance, thereby enable us two older folk to spend time with the family.

The fact that we have family nearby has been a tremendous help, particularly for Bracha. She has been able to take almost days walks with one or another of our daughters or sons in law, and we to share meals with the families on various occasions. In December I marked my 77<sup>th</sup> birthday. I am grateful for the good health I still enjoy and the ability to maintain a long workday, work in the garden, shovel snow and carry on a reasonably acceptable physical regime. I've had to forgo the latter for the last few weeks due to pain in my wrists and elbows – the consequence of too many hours at the computer. I'm giving more time to study at the moment so as to allow for healing, but some projects cannot be delayed, particularly the editorial process of my translation of the New Testament and the writing and translation of Bible study notes. Your prayers would be appreciated. On January 18 we celebrated **our 52<sup>nd</sup> wedding anniversary**. The family invited us out. We sat, bundled in heavy winter coats, enclosed in a tent and served by masked waiters. It was a good meal and an extremely happy time.

The church of which we are members, Kings Cross Church in Kirkland, just north of Seattle, is one we have known for decades. It was formerly pastored by our good friend, Bruce Ray, and is now pastored by a young man by the name of Daniel Corey. When open air services were allowed, we met in the parking lot, sitting in our cars and hearing the sermon through our car radios. Once the weather allowed, we began meeting in the church's back yard while the church building was being fitted to meet the challenges Covid-19 presented. New, effective ventilation was installed and a media system that allows to have the service, conducted in the main hall, to be followed on-screen in a large secondary room. Once allowed (in the nick of time due to the change of the weather), we began using the building. Seating is spaced out in the secondary room, where masks are required, and that is where those of us who are higher risk congregate. The rest of the congregation meet in the main hall, and some come down (masked) to visit us after the service.

As to be expected, there are hiccups from time to time (after all, we're all merely human), but the Pastor and Elders have labored hard to take conflicting views into account, accord Christ the priority that is altogether his and preserve the unity of the

body in the bond of peace. As a result, our church has grown in the course of the last year, including baptisms.

**Shlomit and Keith** are well. Keith , while providing for his family is seeking permanent placement in the service of a church. As a family, we regretfully assume this would mean that they and the children would no longer live nearby, but we are all supportive of Keith investing his gifts and sense of calling in the context of a pastoral ministry.

I have the joy and privilege to study the Bible with **Tamar's two boys, Yotam and Avishai**— Tuesdays with Avishai and Thursdays with Yotam. We are studying the book of Romans. My prayer is that an understanding of the Gospel will lead them ever closer to Christ. Yotam made a credible profession two years ago, and I had the privilege of baptizing him. Avishai makes no claim to be in Christ. Please do join me in praying for them.

Bracha and I are extremely grateful to God and to you brothers and sisters for your loving prayers and your ongoing support. Both are very much needed.

In the sweet, sweet bonds of Christ,

Baruch



**Support for our ministry** 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**. Kindly indicate: For Baruch Maoz' ministry

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