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Egypt

The Egyptian Republic is in turmoil. Hosni Mubarak's removal from office was followed by a military government, described as an interim arrangement to be replaced following the formation of a new Parliament, the adoption of a new constitution and the election of a new President. The Muslim brotherhood became the largest party in Parliament, forming a radical Muslim majority in cooperation with the more extreme Salafists. A new constitution is yet to be adopted, but the radical Muslim majority does not bode well.

Initially, the Brotherhood sought to allay concerns by declaring it would not field a candidate for the office of President. It has since reneged on that promise. The Salafists fielded a candidate, who was not allowed to run because the National Committee responsible for the running of fair and constitutional elections learned that his mother was a foreign citizen. The constitution forbids the candidacy of any, one of whose parents held or holds a non-Egyptian citizenship. Riots followed, the end of which has not yet been seen.

The economy is in shreds: Tourism, a mainstay industry, is frozen. Foreign investment is at all-time low. Companies and persons of means are exporting their financial resources to banks overseas. Reserves have been reduced from 35 billion to 9 billion Egyptian Lira, leaving the country with a mere two month's reserves.

Rising food prices are placing an unbearable burden on Egyptian households. Most food is imported: Egypt manages to grow eight million tons of grain to feed 84 million, leaving a deficit of six million tons per annum. Fifty percent of the population earns no more than \$2 a day and subsists on 160 Kilogram of grain per annum (twice the world average). Gas is subsidized to the tune of 83 billion, and the lack of foreign currency has forced a reduction of 35% in gas imports. The heavily subsidized price of gas has encouraged sectors of the Egyptian economy to sell the subsidized commodity at full price to foreign countries, increasing gas shortages in Egypt.

Civil society is collapsing, and the Muslim Brotherhood, competing both with the government and the Salafists, is seeking to replace social institutions with its own. Members of the Brotherhood patrol the streets, suppress crime and distribute necessities. The International Monetary Fund offered to loan Egypt three billion Dollars, but the Brotherhood blocked the loan because it expects resultant social unrest will further strengthen the Brotherhood's hold on society. The Arab Spring is turning into an Arab Nightmare.

Israel's New Government

Faced with an economic downturn (due to a reduction in the International Rating for Israeli banks, reduced governmental income from taxes, increased unemployment), with rising protest over his economic policies, a decision on attacking Iran, unrest in Syria, renewed tensions with Egypt, increased terrorist activity from Sinai and new contenders for his seat, Prime Minister Netanyahu called for elections 17 months before his Government's term ends. While Parliament was busy passing the Dissolution Bill, it woke up one morning

to learn that Netanyahu enlarged his largest-ever Israeli Government by adding the main opposition party to its ranks, relegating elections to their original date.



Benjamin Netanyahu Shaul Mofaz

The Government now has no effective opposition: 94 of the 120 seats in Parliament belong to parties represented in Government, effectively emasculating the legislative body. Legislation favored by the Government can easily be passed, riding roughshod over the concerns and interests of minorities. Nor is there now effective parliamentary supervision of Governmental action. Judicial supervision is also threatened: Israel has no Constitution and therefore no clearly defined limits to Governmental powers. In light of the strong-armed tactics employed by the present Government toward Supreme Court decisions not to its' liking, the lack of a potent parliamentary opposition, this is disconcerting. In response to a recent Supreme Court ruling, steps are afoot to frame a law that would relieve the Government of the need to obey.

To form this amazingly broad coalition, Netanyahu undertook to pass legislation that will impose an equal burden of military and social service, presently carried by a shrinking part of the population, by enlisting the Orthodox and Arab communities. He also undertook to alter the system of Government, which will involve a change in the electoral system.

Israel's present systems are widely viewed as impossible: the electoral system accords disproportionate power to miniscule parties who hold the government captive to the wishes and interests of minorities. The governmental system has created unstable governments – the present government is the first in many that is likely to live out the full term of its mandate. Some means needs to be devised to provide Israel with stable governments and make long-term planning and implementation possible. The Orthodox repeatedly block electoral reform because the present system allows them disproportionate

clout. However, the present Government no longer depends on the Orthodox and can easily pass the needed reforms. The question remains: will it do so? Traditionally, the Orthodox serve as a convenient means to stave off more painful compromises. That is precisely the reason why electoral and governmental reform is needed.

Shaul Mofaz, who recently won the leadership of his Kadimah party, had repeatedly declared that the present government was “a bad government”, led by “a liar; he would not join it “under any circumstances”. Mofaz formerly served as Chief of Staff, Minister of Defense, Minister of Transport and Chairman of the parliamentary Foreign Affairs and Security Committee. His relatively moderate stance will accord Netanyahu more political wriggle-room in his relations with the Palestinians, although it is not clear whether the Prime Minister is interested in such.

A major shake-up of the political scene is also expected due to the increase in clout gained by more extreme right-wingers in Netanyahu’s Likud Party, much to the Prime Minister’s chagrin. We may see a wholly new political landscape coming into existence preparatory to next elections, scheduled for November 2013.

Israel’s Population

According to Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, on the eve of its 64th Independence Day, Israel’s population passed the 7.8 million mark, with 137,000 new citizens since last year. Almost 19,500 of these were new immigrants. The Jewish population makes up 75.3% of the population (5,931,000); the Arab population 20.6% (1,623,000), and the remainder 4.1% (327,000). The majority of the Jewish population – 70% – is Israeli-born and most are second generation Israelis. Six cities (Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Haifa, Rishon-LeTzion, Ashdod and Petah Tikva) have a population that exceeds 200,000.

The average Jewish family size has increased from 2.8 children per household in 2008 to 2.97 in 2010. In the Muslim community, the average number of children per mother was 3.75 last year, a fall from the previous two years where it had reached 3.97. Nearly 28% of Israel’s population is under the age of 14. Only 10% is over 65. There are 979 men for every 1000 women. In the over-75 age group there are 673 men for every 1000 women.

Grace and Truth

After over three years, on the occasion of eight baptisms, five of which were of children into whose lives I had some input, Bracha and I attended a service in the church. It was a glorious occasion. It was also evident that the church is coming back to its own following the departure of the Pastor who had taken up the pastoral role upon my departure. The worship was warm, exuberant in the best sense of the term, and well ordered and there was a sense of unity and of hope that was encouraging to see. Work on the church facility has been resumed, with a target date of December 2012 for completion.

I am pleased, after these three years, to be free to report again on the progress of the church I loved and still love, and for which I continue to pray.

Church News

The church to which Bracha and I now belong, The Hope of Israel, has been undergoing encouraging changes, with the young adults taking a more active role in teaching the

children, caring for the church and contributing to worship. We have renovated sections of our rented facility and the young adults are about to repaint the walls. The property is beginning to look more like a place of worship.

On Israel's Independence Day, I threw our home open to the church. We held a barbeque in the yard, while the children and young adults played board games in the living room. Over 3.5 million – half of the entire population of Israel – crowded roads, parks and picnic grounds. We were glad to have a quiet, private location in which to celebrate.

Our Pastor, Tom Jameson, travelled for some weeks to the US, leaving Sasha, the sole remaining Elder, with a heavy burden he bore well, with devotion, humility and loving concern. Preaching is shared by Tom, Sasha, Misha and me by rota. Tom normally teaches the adult Sabbath School and I teach the Young Adults. Alexei serves as the sole Deacon. The church could do with new blood in leadership and more working hands. Tom has been praying that the Lord will bring some such to the church, or raise them from within.

The church has opted to have the children remain for the duration of the service, sermon included. This has worked quite well, teaching and enabling the children that they are part of a larger body, while enabling their teachers to attend to the ministry of the Word. Some discussion has been held about using a sound system for translation into Russian and English but, as you know, discussion does not necessarily lead to action.

Mid-week Bible Study and Prayer meeting are held in Russian on Wednesday and, on alternate Thursdays in Hebrew.

Baruch's Biography

(continued)

In the previous installment, Bracha lost the child she was carrying. Avital, the Maoz' oldest daughter, informed her parents at the age of 16 that she no longer wished to attend church, as she could no longer honestly affirm the Christian Faith. Bracha and I decided not to force her to attend. It was a painful decision, but true faith is never the product of human manipulation. It is the gift of God, a matter of an intimate relationship between God and an individual. We had taught Avital all we knew; it was up to her to stand before God and her own conscience, and make her decision.

The Modern Hebrew Bible Project

Meanwhile, work continued. The church was a bustling, thriving body and HaGefen continued to aspire to greater things. I had been involved for some years in a project initiated and run by the Israel chapter of the United Bible Societies (UBS). A team of us was engaged in creating historical and Old Testament annotations to the modern Hebrew New Testament. These were not expository notes, and we took great caution to ensure they did not become such. But the project had come to an end and the UBS was considering its next project.

A dear friend and supporter of the annotation project, also widely involved in the work of CWI, proposed translating the Old Testament into Modern Hebrew. Initially, I was enthusiastic about such an undertaking. But further investigation gave rise to doubts: there was settled opposition to any tampering with the Masoretic (traditional) text of the Hebrew Scriptures. Not only did Jewish Orthodoxy oppose any such idea, but the general populace would be very wary of any translation produced by a non-Jewish body. On the other hand, the Jewish Christian community would almost assuredly adopt such a translation. Within a

short space of time it would no longer be familiar with the traditional, commonly accepted text, and would thus be rendered less capable of presenting the Gospel from that text.

I therefore opposed the project. Happily, the UBS was persuaded, while the supporting friend agreed to support a somewhat-similar project in which the UBS was not interested: an illustrated, limited-vocabulary translation of the Old Testament, aimed primarily at youth and children. I began looking for suitable staff. Needless to say, I was not likely to find anyone trained and experienced in this field. Nor had I much experience. This was a major undertaking, for which much grace and accorded wisdom would be needed!

My secretary referred a relative, Shoshi. She primed her for the interview: "Now, Baruch is rather conservative, old fashioned, a stickler for certain details. Dress modestly, with cheerful colors. Come with a dress or a skirt, not trousers." Shoshi had an excellent Hebrew and evident editorial skills. She had a good command of English, sensitivity toward the fine issues of language, a love for the Bible and a lively Christian faith. HaGefen had recently been asked to undertake the translation of a Children's Bible, and I considered this to be a good opportunity to train Shoshi, so she and the project were undertaken. We devoted more than a year to that project, and learned much in the process. Shoshi did an excellent job and Mirriam, who sponsored the work, was a wonderfully helpful critic. Finally, we produced the one-volume Emmanuel Children's Bible Story book in Hebrew, the only one then available of its kind, and were ready to commence work on the translation of the Old Testament.

The first stage was a pilot project – the book of Genesis. Our intention was to test the waters both in terms of our side of the work as well as general acceptance within the believing community. We designed a book that could never replace the traditional text because its fonts, layout and illustrations all bespoke of a children's translation. However, the text was translated word for word, verse by verse, as close to the original syntax as we possible could be. The pilot was welcomed with enthusiasm, and we turned to implement the project as a whole.

An illustrator was needed. My original idea was to find a competent, naïve artist, with an eye for detail and a hand that would render illustrations to inform, not entertain, and with which children would be comfortable. I wanted illustrations that would convey a sense of historical reality. So many Bible illustrations are either aimed at an adult audience, or convey a sense of legendry or of parable. I aimed at the kind of illustrations that would express faith in the concrete realities of the scriptural narrative, distinguishing by style between narrative and parabolic language.

I interviewed a number of artists, most of whom were not Christians. I could find no naïve artist to meet our requirements, and was beginning to look around for just about anyone who could fit the bill at least to a limited extent.

One day I spoke to Diana, a congregant who told me she loved to draw. I asked her to bring me samples of what she had drawn, because I was looking for someone to assist me in producing illustrations. A few days later Diana arrived with a portfolio. I recall some of the illustrations to this very day although almost 15 years have passed. They were amazing! Diana had no experience of working with watercolor or gouache; her work was with pen and color pencil. But it was delightful to see and detailed down to the very nails in the structure she had drawn. I had found my illustrator.

Now I needed to train her to use a medium other than color pencil. Oil was impractical for our purposes (it takes too long to draw and is too sensitive to handle in large volumes) and acrylic paints accord too artificial an atmosphere. Watercolors were too forbidding and did not allow for errors and changes, so we opted for gouache.

I hired Diana at half a salary, using the other half to pay a local artist to train her for a year in the use of various media and in sketching. Diana blossomed as an artist. After a year, the gentleman who trained her was so delighted with her abilities that he offered to continue to train her for free. I declined. I was anxious for Diana to develop her own style, and her work had become too much like that of her teacher. Instead, Diana undertook a full-time job while studying at art school in the evening. We sent her to the best art school in the country, short of Bezalel in Jerusalem, and once again, she excelled.

Diana and her family had emigrated from Georgia (USSR) with her mother and an older and a younger sister, and brother. She lived apart from her mother and brother, supporting her sister, Julia, mothering her and guiding her through life. Needless to say, Diana faced challenges and hurdles many a young lady has to face in such circumstances. She proved dedicated to the Lord and made many sacrifices as she sought to be faithful to him and a wise, loving sister to Julia. She has won my undying respect and affection. I have a number of her paintings at home, and hold them in high regard. Diana has since become an established illustrator and a member of the Israel Association of Illustrators.

In the course of time, Shoshi became an accomplished translator. She is thorough, exact, enterprising and competently professional, with a knowledge of Hebrew grammar and vocabulary that have been very helpful as we proceed in the course of the translation. Shoshi faced her own hurdles with fortitude, penitence and sacrificial love. She and I are very different, but her many strengths complement my many weaknesses, and we work well together. I have seen Shoshi maintain a steady hand in her walk with the Lord and at work in the midst of many trials. It has been a pleasure and an honor to know and work with her.

I am very grateful to the Lord for the people he has brought into my life and for my many co-workers. Each of them has enriched me in many ways and taught me a great deal.

The process we devised was as follows: Shoshi creates the first draft translation, which I review. She then examines my editorial comments, incorporates those with which she is in agreement and marks the remainder for discussion. On issues of style, Shoshi's is the last word – she is the translator, not me. On issues of content, we study the matters extensively, at times spending hours on a single word. The next draft is submitted to control groups who review the level of language, the grammatical quality and faithfulness to the text. The control groups include children whose input has proven invaluable. The third draft is the product of the control groups' comment and discussion between Shoshi and me. Finally, the text is read out, with someone following in the traditional text, to ensure we have not missed a word, a phrase or a sentence.

We aim to provide approximately one illustration every 2-3 chapters, and to ensure that illustrations clarify the text. Diana provides pencil sketches (Shoshi will often assist Diana in her choices). These are reviewed by me, commented upon and approved or rejected. Initially, we submitted the sketches to a Bible archeologist for professional comment, but Diana has become so proficient in the cultures and geography of the Bible that she no longer needs such oversight, and has yet to be mistaken. Finally, a color illustration is produced.

The genealogies are largely illustrations. Thousands of different faces, figures, items of clothing and objects have been drawn to illustrate the genealogies, at times indicating the same person at different stages of his life. In all, this is a fascinating project and probably one of the most important in which I have been privileged to be involved.

To be continued

Ministry and Family News

Baruch continues to be active in the local church he and Bracha are attending. He is teaching a mid-week class on the book of Judges and preaches regularly. Most of his time is presently devoted to work on the **Romans Commentary**, while HaGefen has commenced editing his commentary on **Matthew**. A little over a day is devoted each week to work on the **Modern Hebrew Bible for Youth**, with the Old Testament part of that project now nearing its end. The first edition of Volume One on the Pentateuch has sold out. Following relatively light but important revisions, it will soon be republished.

Baruch and Bracha are preparing for their annual trip to the US. The program is presently full to the brim. Baruch will be taking some work with him, and will also be engaged via Skype and correspondence with work on the Bible for Youth.

Bracha spent two long months in the US, first assisting Shlomit following **Caitlyn's** birth, then with Tamar and Avital. She was delighted to be with the family and enjoyed the grandchildren as would any grandmother.

Eran and Avital plan to visit in June. I look forward to that, as I do not get to see children much and would love to be more involved in their lives.

The three children attend the same charter school, where each does well. **Noam** is quite a teenager (with all THAT means!). She excelled in a science project in which her engineering father was delighted to take part. **Maya** (photo) is turning out to be a sports-girl, and **Nadav** has settled well into the class once he figured out the disconcerting difference between real school and play school...



Keith and Shlomit were approved for a mortgage and are shopping for a house that will meet their needs and fit their pocket – a challenging task! They offer a frequent hospitality and hope to increase that aspect of their service in the church, so they are looking for a home that will enable them to do so without having to invest a great deal in renovation or house improvement. I have the joy of sharing in the process by looking at homes and getting excited with them over the Internet. **Keith** is busy at church while undergoing a course on counselling and seeking to be a supportive and loving husband and father.

Caitlyn is a lovely baby. **Yonatan** has turned out to be a protective big brother, who loves to fondle and kiss his little sister, and rushes to inform Mommy every time Caitlyn so much as makes a sound. He is thrilled to have his little sister sit on his lap. He enjoys waving at Ta (Bracha) and Ba (me) when he sees us on Skype.



Marcus and Tamar are faced afresh with the need to decide concerning their church affiliation, as the church to which they have belonged is uniting with another. Congregants from both bodies will determine their respective future. Marcus is doing very well at work. **Avishai** (see photo) is very different from his older brother, Yotam: he is as mischievous as Yotam is gentle, as active as Yotam is quiet. Having learned to walk, he is into everything within reach – however unsafe!

Yotam attends day school and enjoys it immensely. The interaction with a wider body of children close to his age has worked wonders.

Rose has changed temporary jobs since her release from the military in February. An *au pair* position in the US has not materialized, so she would love to find a permanent job that would help sustain her through her oncoming school years. Admittance to college in Israel is contingent upon matriculation at levels and in fields specific to the courses taken. Rose needs to improve her matriculation grade in three topics, and has registered for a course that will assist her in so doing as of September. She is developing well on a personal level, and we are praying for advances in her spiritual life.



Katya and **Felix** have moved into their newly purchased flat after having renovated it. It is good to see them settled and happy. Little **Maya** loves attending play school and is developing quite a vocabulary.

Baruch's assessment of the Messianic movement, formerly published under the title **Judaism Is Not Jewish**, is due to be published by Presbyterian and Reformed at the end of June under the title **Come Let Us Reason Together**. Copies may then be ordered from Barnes & Noble, Amazon and at your local Christian bookshop. Baruch's **Malachi: A Prophet in Times of Distress**, published by Crossbooks, is selling and is available from the same online channels. Help us promote these books by recommending them (directly or via FaceBook), gifting them to friends, and asking for them at bookshops and church bookstalls.

Reviews on the Barnes & Noble or Amazon websites are welcome; such reviews help promote the books described.

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