

MaozNews No. 62
Published every 4 weeks or so
March 2013

In this issue:

An Appeal, pg. 1
Baruch's Biography Continued, pg. 1
Israel's New Government, pg. 3
Locusts, Anyone? pg. 4
Ministry and Family News, pg. 5

An Appeal

A young man in our congregation is serving in one of the Israel military's crack units. He has just completed a vital part of his training as a non-commissioned officer and is preparing for his next assignment. Having heard of his faith, the unit commander has inquired of him whether he would be able to muster a \$5,000 contribution to the unit for the purchase of mountain boots.

If this is something any of our readers might be interested in shouldering, in whole or in part, please send your contributions to Berean Baptist Church (details below), earmarked Baruch - Mountain Boots. Once we have the full sum, I will inform MaozNews readers to desist contributing.

Baruch's Biography (continued)

In the last installment, the church was torn by a schism. Dudu left with the majority of the congregation. Baruch reassumed the Pastorate and the church regrouped and pressed forward.

Restoration: People Matter More than Things

It was a slow climb up from the abyss. Slowly, others joined us and the church began to grow. Lena Lehtonen arrived from Finland to work as a physiotherapist in a nearby hospital, later joined by Rita Fudilla, a colleague, also from Finland. David Zadok came a short while later and others began to join. By the late 1980's we were a congregation of forty, with great aspirations and a deep sense of gratitude to God.

I was anxious to have others alongside me leading the church, but the congregation was unwilling to appoint anyone for some time. The schism occurred in late 1983. In 1984 I finally persuaded the church to appoint an advisory committee to oversee my work and advise me in the decision-making process. From this committee later sprung our first Elders.

I always believed that churches should be led by a plurality of Elders, assisted by Deacons. The latter's responsibility, as I understood apostolic example, was administration and the organizational and material life of the church, under the leadership of Elders. The latter were to bear responsibility for the spiritual and moral aspects of church life, each of the Elders bearing equal responsibility and authority, led by one of their number -- the Pastor -- as the first

among equal. His leadership was spiritual and moral, by no means executive. He led by virtue of his training, experience and proven biblical wisdom.

I further believed that the authority which the Elders and the Pastor exercise should always be subject to the scrutiny of the congregation. It should not be the product of a distance created between those leading and those led. The Elders should frankly and observably share the struggles faced by each of those whom they led. They should demonstrate in their lives how, in these struggles, grace may be found, thereby teaching and encouraging the congregation by way of example.

While I respect those who preferred another course, I have always felt uncomfortable with social withdrawal, different garb, preferred seating and other such accretions of the Pastorate or of the Eldership. Precisely because I have what I think is a strong personality, I believe the congregation should be very much aware of my frail humanity, and consider it all the more important to maintain divine wisdom's division of labor and responsibility between Elders and Deacons, as well as the equal authority the Bible accords the Elders.

Lena, mentioned above, lived in the hospital staff dorms. In the first few months, we worked hard to encourage her to attend church regularly. Once convinced of her duty and of the privilege involved, she would often walk the 19 km (just under 12 miles) from the hospital to the church, until she moved to Rehovot. Lena was a devoted Christian, gentle, gracious, eager to serve the Lord. She was highly respected by the congregation and played a significant role in caring for those in need of a supportive hand and a listening heart. Typically Finnish, she was a very private person.

Aaron and Alice (Pseudonyms) joined us with the blessing of the Lutheran church in Tel Aviv, to which they had previously belonged. Aaron had undergone a serious crisis, in the course of which he lost his clean slate, his job, a large measure of self-respect and his reputation. We believed it was our duty to do all the Lord would enable us to do in an effort to rehabilitate him.

His initial contact with us was through HaGefen, where he was employed as a messenger, stock-keeper and dispatcher. On the first day of his employment, we designedly sent him to the bank with 4,000 Shekels in cash to be deposited. He was astounded at the thought that we would entrust him with such a sum. It was the beginning of the process of his rehabilitation. He and his wife were childless, after 15 years of marriage. We began looking into assisting them in an adoption process and had actually taken the first steps when Aliza informed us she was with child. Jonathan Markowitz was born in the 17th year of his parents' marriage, a true gift of God.

Gabi (A Pseudonym) grew up in a home in which there were few expressions of affection. Consequently, he was starved of and, at the same time, intimidated by any such. He became a frequent visitor at our home, a welcome guest at our table. I recall one occasion when, parting from us, he opened the door of the elevator (we lived on the 8th floor of an apartment building). I hugged him briefly, but Gideon shrank in terror, escaping my embrace into the elevator and giving me a furtive, guilty look as the door slid shut. I was saddened by this display of his fear of being loved.

Tom and Jan Jameson arrived from Iran. American born, of Roman Catholic background, they had been converted, Tom had trained with Moody Bible Institute and the couple were sent by the American Messianic Fellowship to work among the Jews in Iran, where they had two daughters, Shawdy and Mojdeh. Tom was a typical American fundamentalist: dedicated, serious, separationist, Dispensational and Arminian. He was a humble man, a hard worker and very much committed to the word of God.

Upon arrival in Israel, he chose to worship at the local charismatic church in Tel Aviv, meeting at Immanuel House. But Tom and Jan were not charismatic by conviction and soon

concluded that Immanuel House was not the place for them and their children. The only other option they considered was Grace and Truth Christian Congregation. But Grace and Truth was Calvinistic, openly so.

Tom approached me: “Baruch, Jan and I are considering worship with Grace and Truth. However, we do not want Calvinism shoved down our throats. We differ in our understanding of the Faith. Would we be welcome?” I assured Tom that no one would impose anything on him. Grace and Truth was first and foremost a Christian church. As such, it sincerely welcomed Christians of any conviction. It was a matter of personal determination that we should never preach against anything but sin, and that any Christian who wished to serve God alongside us would be made welcome. Of course, the church was committed to a Confession of Faith. Its teaching ministry would always seek to be consistent with that Confession. Congregants were expected not to agitate against the doctrinal position of the church. Those who did not affirm our Confession could become members, but not officers. The Jamesons were more than happy to join us on those terms.

My preaching tends to be systematic and expository: I prefer to preach through whole books of the Bible, chapter after chapter. From time to time I deviate and preach a topical series. Every five years it was my habit to preach through the Confession. The major part of each sermon consisted of an exposition of the text or of the topic, with some 10% devoted to application. It has always been my conviction that Christians should be encouraged to understand the Bible for themselves, to think, question and extrapolate their own practical conclusions from truths preached.

I further believe that pulpit expositions should be a means of instructing listeners on how to study and understand the Bible, and that we best serve our people when we display the truth rather than rail at error. Of course, a clear theological basis should always underlie the pulpit ministry, and that involves some exposure of error. However, preaching should be doctrinal rather than doctrinaire, positive rather than negative and welcoming rather than negating. I’ve seldom lived up to my own standards, but those are the standards I embraced and to which I have sought to accommodate my preaching.

About twelve months after Tom and Jan joined us, a short while after I had conducted a regular pastoral visit to their home, Tom called and requested that I visit them again. There was something they wished to discuss with me. I was glad to do so, although I assumed some difficulty had arisen.

I was mistaken. Tom and Jan had come to the conclusion that the Gospel indeed spoke more about the glory of God than the salvation of man, more about the grace of God than man’s faithfulness, more about the law of God than regenerate man’s moral intuitions. They had embraced the doctrinal understandings of the church. In the course of time since, Tom was elected an Elder at Grace and Truth, added to his education a Masters degree from Westminster Theological Seminary in Escondido, California, and was sent out by Grace and Truth to establish another congregation. He is now Pastor of the church where Bracha and I worship since I completed my term of service with Grace and Truth.

Israel's New Government

Recent elections delivered incumbant Prime Minster Benjamin Netanyahu a blow. Expecting to gain 5-10 seats in Israel 120 Parliament, he joined forces with recently-resigned Foreign Affairs Minister, Avigdor Lieberman, under investigation for breach of trust. Instead, their combined political forces lost 12 seats. On the other hand, Yesh Atid -- a new upstart party led by former journalist Yair Lapid -- won 19 seats, and political newcomer Naftali Bennet doubled the strength of his Yisrael Beytenu party to 12. As a result, although Netanyahu is the head of the

largest political bloc and asked by the President to form the next Government, his hand was forced.

Forty days of haggling resulted in a Government very different from the one Netanyahu aspired to form. Aiming at social and educational reform and the increased enlistment of thousands of young religious men presently exempted from military service, Lapid and Bennet refused to join a Government in which Netanyahu's "natural allies," the Orthodox parties, had a role; an inflated 30-Minister Government (plus four Deputy Ministers) was whittled down to 22 and four Deputy Ministers; the Ministries of Housing and Interior were wrested from Orthodox hands; the new Education Minister is planning to implement changes the Orthodox strenuously oppose (including a requirement that all religious schools teach a Core Curriculum of Mathematics, History, English, Introduction to Science and Basic Computer Skills); National Service will be required of all citizens, without exemption to the majority of Orthodox young men, and the System of Government is to be revamped.

The new Government signals major changes in Israeli society in all of these areas. On the other hand, Bennet represents the 350,000 Jewish settlers in the West Bank. The Housing Ministry is in the hands of his party, and is almost sure to promote an ongoing wave of new construction, to the chagrin of the Palestinians and most of the world. While Bennet has resigned himself to Justice Ministress Tsipi Livni's conduct of peace negotiations with the Palestinians, he has made it clear that he will oppose territorial concessions, effectively threatening to tie her hands.

Election results have also left many of Netanyahu's senior party members disaffected, either because there were not more ministerial posts to divvy out, or because their hopes for higher positions were disappointed. Former Minister of the Treasury is now to be head of the Ministry for Strategic Affairs – largely empty of content since the Ministry of Defense and the Prime Minister's Office deal with strategic affairs, and Moshe Ya'alon, the new Minister of Defense, is a highly competent former Chief of Staff who is unlikely to share chunks of his responsibility with a newcomer. Former Deputy Prime Minister Silvan Shalom, a major figure in Netanyahu's party, is now to be Minister of Homeland Defense.

The new Government is faced with an urgent need to cut the national budget by 15%, cope with the international economic crisis, deal with instability on Israel's borders with Egypt and Syria, suppress terrorism initiated by Hamas, handle Iran's growing nuclear threat, respond to Turkey's growing belligerency and continue to restrain Hezbollah in Lebanon while Jordan is threatening to become the next victim of the chilling Arab Spring, the West Bank is simmering and hundreds of thousands of illegal immigrants from Africa have crossed the border in search of a better future, imposing a heavy burden on Israeli society, increasing the number of unemployed and contributing to crime and social instability. Who is his right mind would want to be in Government at such a time!?

Since our Ministers of State do not know how to pray, *your* prayers are needed all the more.

Locusts, Anyone?

Israel has been combatting swarms of locusts, some consisting of hundreds of millions of the pests, brought in by the winds from Sudan. These voracious insects eat anything green, destroying crops and damaging trees and bushes, sometimes leaving effects that can be overcome only in

the course of years. They fly in, carried by the winds and alight on fields as soon as the sun sets. During the night they do not feed, and Israel hasten to spraying them with insecticides at the break of dawn.

Farmers in the south of the country have already registered serious damage to

potato and carrot crops, olive groves and grape vines.

On the other hand, some local chefs have recommended recipes for locust hamburgers, locust soup and locust salads. Somehow, there have not been many takers. Apparently, John the Baptist's fare does not quite appeal to them.

The photo on the right will give you some sense of the reality our farmers are now facing. Yes, those specs in the sky are locusts.



Ministry and Family News

The last two months have been hectic beyond description but, in the goodness of God, as fruitful as busy. As long-time readers of MaozNews will know, among my writing plans has been a Systematic Theology. Having been asked to teach an academic course, an **Introduction to Systematic Theology**, I embarked onto writing the course of the form of a book, with the intention that the material could serve a wider audience.

Needless to say, any Systematic needs to include a chapter on Ecclesiology (the doctrine of the church). To write that chapter, I embarked onto another project long in view, namely a book **on church structure and function**.

I've worked on these two projects with great intensity, long and full hours daily, with the result that both books have been completed! I confess I'm very pleased. Both have no equal in Hebrew and, while I would hope to enlarge later on the Systematics, so that it is more than an introduction, what I have produced so far is a reasonable start and I'm quite encouraged. The last two months have been very productive. My next project is a paper on the theological issues facing Jewish Christians in Israel, and then reviewing editorial comments on my **commentary on Matthew** while working on the next commentary in the Minor Prophets series, **Micah**.

The **personal assistant** with whom I was privileged to work for over a decade at HaGefen, and who has launched her own language services business, has agreed to take on some of the administrative work that has been laying heavily on me, thus freeing me for writing. It is a joy to be working with her again. She is so pleasant, so efficient, and we understand each other so well. I'm grateful to her for being willing to assist me, and to God for this privilege. Do remember her and her girls in prayer. One has completed her military service and is now studying at the Jerusalem School of Musical Art. Another is in her second year of national service. A third is in High School and the fourth in Junior High.

For all matters not requiring my personal attention, particularly with regard to our oncoming trip to the US or MaozNews, please write to her at languageservice4u@gmail.com

I have agreed in principle to undertake the **translation of the New Testament into limited vocabulary modern Hebrew** and will commence that project, devoting one workday per week (40-50 hours monthly) as soon as the terms under which the project will proceed are agreed upon and signed.

Your help in promoting **my books in English** is much appreciated. Please write reviews on Amazon or Barnes & Noble, recommend the books to group Bible studies and introduce them to those whom you believe can benefit from either a devotional commentary on Malachi, or are concerned with the Messianic Movement or with issues of inter-racial and inter-

cultural congregational life. Income from the sale of these books assist our labours – so far, sales have not been all that I had hoped for them to be.

In December 2014, **Keith and Shlomit** are planning to conduct a second tour of Israel. There are still some spaces available. Interested parties are welcome to write to Keith at rev.keiththompson@gmail.com.

Noam, my oldest granddaughter, has graduated with honors from Elementary School and is now preparing for Junion Hlgh. Her sister, **Maya**, was invited with others in her singing class to perform with the San Francisco Opera. Needless to say, she is not the only one excited about this. **Avishai and Caitlyn** celebrate their birthdays, with **Yotam's** birthday soon coming up.

Katya and Felix are expecting their second child. Their little Maya insists she wants a sister. **Rose** is working hard at school and coping very well.

In God's goodness, the rest of the family all are well. Passover is coming up, and that is a time when we miss them all the more. **Bracha** finds some compensation through Skype. I leave Skype conversations with a sense of frustration: I can't hug my family. I can't smell them. I can't rumble with them or do what parents and grandparents normally do! I confess I miss my family, very much.

We expect to **celebrate Passover** this year with a smaller number of guests than usual this year. I am to prepare the lamb as usual. We'll have Bracha's 83 year-old mother with us, Rose's mother, Katya and Felix, and a number of friends.

At the beginning of next month, God willing, **Grace and Truth Christian Congregation** will dedicate its new facility. I have been invted to attend and will gladly do so. The congregation cannot yet use the building, but hopes to be able to do so soon.



Linked 



TAX-deductible **support for our ministry** should be written to the order of **Berean Baptist church, P.O.Box 1233, Grand Blanc, Michigan 48480-3233**. Direct bank transfers may be made to **Franklin Bank, 24725 West Twelve Mile Road, Southfield, MI 48034 USA, Routing Number 241271957 Berean Baptist Special Account No. 567495976**. Please inform **Mr. Craig Cooper** of the details of the transaction (date, transaction number and sum) at coopmobile31@gmail.com

All contributions are tax deductible. Receipts are sent at the end of the calendar year or at the donor's request. Please do not send contributions directly to us – we consider accountability extremely important.

Funds sent for the ministry will be used exclusively for that purpose.

We reserve the right to use for the ministry funds sent for personal use.