

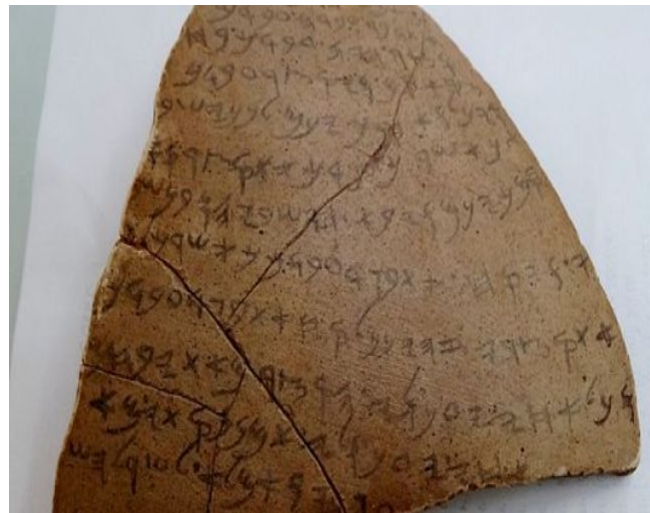
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A Message From the Ancient Past

Pottery shards, known as an ostraca, were used in ancient days to write missives. A shard 2,600 years old, inscribed with a full 14-line letter in ancient Hebrew and now displayed in the Archaeology wing of the Israel Museum, Jerusalem, is a voice from distant history. The shard was discovered in 1960, in the excavation of a 7th-century BCE Judaeen fort on the Mediterranean shore between Jaffa and Ashdod, at the port of Yavneh-Yam. The shard dates from the reign of King Josiah. Scholars are divided as to who controlled the garrison: the king in Jerusalem or the Egyptian Pharaoh, reasserting his power along the coastal plain.



2600 year old letter

The original name of the fort is unknown, but the excavators call it "*Metzad Hashavyahu*" ("Hashavyahu's Fort"), based on the personal name appearing on several ostraca unearthed there. The ostracon pictured is 20 centimeters high (about 8 inches), 7.5 cm (3 inches) wide at the top, and 16.5 cm (6.5 inches) at the bottom. The bottom right-hand corner is missing, leaving gaps in the last four lines of the missive.

The letter, apparently dictated to a trained scribe, is from a farm-worker whose supervisor alleges that he has not fulfilled his obligation – he owes either a quota of work-time on royal farmland, or a portion of his crop, to be delivered to the garrison. Possibly, the supervisor caught him slacking on the job. The farm-hand claims to have been wrongly accused, and appeals to his supervisor's senior, the governor of the fort or of the region, it is not clear, to seek the governor's intervention. The worker has the support of biblical law, which

he may be referencing: Exodus 22 says, “If you take your neighbor’s cloak in pawn, you shall restore it before the sun goes down; for it may be your neighbor’s only clothing to use as cover; in what else shall that person sleep?” Hear the worker's complaint:

... nor, listen to the word of his servant. Your servant is a reaper. Your servant was in Hasar-'Asam, and your servant reaped, and finished, and stored (the grain) during the days prior to the Sabbath. When your servant had completed the reaping, and stored (the grain) during these days, Hoshabyahu ben-Shobi arrived. He confiscated of your servant garment when I had completed the reaping. Days have passed since he took the garment of your servant. And all my brothers—who are reaping with me—can testify on my behalf...

If I am innocent of any wrong, return my garment; if not, it is the governor's right to [consider my case] and send word to him so that he restores the garment of your servant. Do not let [your servant's plea] be displeasing to him . . . (Translated by K.C. Hanson, adapted from W.F. Albright (1969), edited BM)

The fine penmanship that characterizes the message indicates that a professional wrote it. The conventional formal opening (“Let my lord...”), which echoes a biblical passage in which David pleads to be reconciled with King Saul (“...let my lord the king hear the words of his servant,” 1 Sam. 26:19) seems to indicate as much.

Some question the translation of “days prior to the Sabbath”. They read the passage as saying, “before I cease from my labors (i.e., rest)”. If “Sabbath” is the correct translation, then this letter constitutes the earliest non-biblical mention of Sabbath.

Egypt and Syria

The Muslim Brotherhood (MB), having ascended to power by democratic means (albeit, a sliver of a majority), consistently used their power to erode civil liberties and fortify the organization’s hold on society and on the political apparatus. A new constitution was rammed through and the Parliament set aside. Morsi’s actions were declared illegal by the Egyptian Court, but this did not stymie his efforts at consolidation of power.

Since Morsi was elected, Egypt suffered two financially disastrous years. Tourism collapsed, investors fled and wealthy Egyptians began to smuggle their fortunes abroad. Growth slowed, unemployment rose, prices soared and 5,000 factories shut down. Egypt's foreign exchange reserves reached a dangerously low \$13 billion. Once an oil and gas exporter, the country is enduring an energy shortage, with long power outages in the sweltering summer heat and endless lines at gas stations. Social adhesion has broken down: traveling on the roads is dangerous as bandits are liable to stop your car in the middle of the road, kidnap you and demand ransom from your family.

The economic crisis and the fall in tax revenues have left Egypt with a huge 12% budget deficit and unemployment reaching 13% according to official figures. The truth is worse by far, with actual unemployment around 25%, increased public debt, a raised risk premium and soaring interest rates. Egypt has been refused credit from international organizations, raising the specter of national bankruptcy. Such realities cannot be resolved in a short space of time, but no one has the patience to wait. Any despotic ruler such as Morsi had increasingly become, who significantly reduces food and fuel subsidies, would face opposition and a threat to his power. In Egypt this would mean 84 million people with little to eat, leading to a war of survival that could spell as failed a country as any on the African continent.

Egypt was poised to pay a heavy price for the Islamic regime that stole the revolution of 2011. The instigators of the revolution that brought the downfall of the Mubarak regime called for change. The MB, under President Morsi’s political leadership, refused. Instead, Morsi sought to extend and fortify the MB’s position in Egyptian halls of power. The people, including many who had voted the MB into Parliament, rose in protest.

President Morsi continued to obfuscate and the protest grew until civil war seemed likely, at which point the Egyptian military, led by Major General al-Sisi – himself a MB appointee – intervened to prevent a bloodbath. Morsi was removed and a temporary Government set up, most of whose members are civilians. The Brotherhood was invited to participate.

In response MB supporters went berserk. After 80 years operating underground and being hounded by the various governments, they had come to power; they were not going to concede it easily. The protest was spontaneous, disorganized and non-orchestrated while the Brotherhood was well organized, with cells in every city. They went about marking houses and businesses owned by Christians and other supposed opponents of the protest, identifying targets for firebombing. Over 60 churches have been burned and untold homes and businesses destroyed. In many cases, Muslims defended their Christian neighbors, to little effect. Since August 14, 2013, attackers have torched and looted scores of churches and Christian property across the country, leaving at least four dead in the governorates of Minya, Asyut, Fayum, Giza, Suez, Sohag, BaniSuef, and North Sinai. Human Rights Watch has verified with family members and a lawyer that at least three Coptic Christians and one Muslim were killed as a result of sectarian attacks in Dalga, Minya City, and Cairo. See this link: [Egypt: Mass Attacks on Churches](#).



The Government has undertaken to restore the ruined properties and, in an effort to restore order, arrested the MB leadership. The Brotherhood responded by declaring a Day of Rage on Friday, August 23rd, which call was met with little enthusiasm. It is possible that the organization's wider support will wane, and that the Brotherhood will again go underground. Having renounced violence in the past, it remains to be seen whether the present spate of extreme violence indicates a new direction for the organization.

At the time of writing, it appears like the Egyptian army, the only effective barrier against an Islamic restrictive government, is gaining control of the country and credibility in the eyes of the Egyptian people, surrounding Arab nations and International opinion. On the other hand, Russia is poised to reassert its influence in the Middle East.

The lack of a coherent Western response, especially from the USA, has added fuel to the fire. US policy is understood to be in support of the MB, raising the ire of the Egyptian people and increasing the likelihood of Egypt again turning to Russia. Forces calling for freedom in Iran, Tunisia, Sudan, Egypt and Syria consider themselves betrayed by the West. The American departure from Iraq in the state it was then, its seemingly-evident intention to capitulate in Afghanistan and its vacillation with regard to Syria increases the sense of betrayal as well as of weakness. Nothing will encourage radical Islam more than such signs of weakness.

Hezbollah, a Shi'ite militant and political organization in Lebanon, has become engrossed in the war in Syria, defending the Assad regime and Iran's interests in that country. In response to Hezbollah's involvement in Syria, Sunni Jihadist movements, including Al Qaida, have announced intended attacks against Hezbollah, some of which seem to have already been perpetuated. In the past, the Lebanese organization was involved in planning attacks in Egypt against the interest of the Sunni MB, particularly with regard to Israel and in support of Hamas. Intelligence authorities believe this was undertaken at the instigation of Iran, which is seeking to stir the pot of internal conflict among the Sunna.

Hamas has also begun attacking Egyptian military targets in Sinai. In response, Egypt has imposed a strict blockade in Gaza, destroying all of the tunnels used to transport goods to and from Gaza, including weapons, creating a 500 yard wide buffer zone between Sinai and Gaza by razing homes proximate to the border. When Israel took similar measures, the world was in uproar and Turkey sent a ship to try and breach the blockade. But not so much as a whimper is heard now. Just as the world protests when Israel raids a Palestinian home that harbors a terrorist, yet remains silent as 100,000 Syrians are killed by their own Government.

At the same time, the increased MB threat has created strange alliances, such as that formed between Wahabbi Saudi Arabia, the more moderate Gulf States and Israel, all of whom view both Iran and the Brotherhood as threats. Let there be no mistake, at the same time as Huntington's Clash of Civilizations between the barely still-Christianized West and the largely-Islamized East is taking place, Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims are contending for ascendancy, as are various factions within the Sunna (the Muslim Brotherhood is a radically Sunni group, as are the Wahabbi's), and the broad majority of Muslims who have been imbibed with the Western views of individual worth, of equality before the law and of inquisitive scientific research.

Periodic updates on the scene are available on my website and Facebook wall.

Go to Breaking News on the home page of www.themaoznews.com

Baruch's Biography *continued*

In the previous instalment Baruch recounted the challenges involved in absorbing so many immigrants from the former Soviet Union. Here he continues this story.

Alex and Sveta Atlas, also arrived from the USSR, were later joined by Alex's mother. Alex was an accomplished musician, well-known in his neck of the woods as the leader of a rock band. Following his conversion, Alex devoted his considerable musical talents to the service of the Lord. It was hard for him to understand that musical talent and know-how are insufficient to determine the nature and practice of worship; a thorough, biblically-grounded theology is needed, including a coherent theology of worship.

Like so many of the immigrants, Sasha was a hard-working individual, to whom no employment was denigrating. He found work in a warehouse and, in the course of time, worked his way up to a senior position. His wife, a former prima-ballerina, learned to be a dental assistant and added to the family's meagre resources. They had one son.

These and others arrived with not so much as a sheet to place on their bed (if they had a bed). Inna's mother slept for a period in the bath tub. They had no furniture, no money -- nothing. Our church was small and its financial resources limited. I scoured the country for furniture, collecting clothing, toys, tableware, toys and kitchen utensils. But it was but a drop in the bucket as the number of newcomers joining our congregation grew. Finally, in desperation, I sent out a circular letter, asking friends to help us reach out to needy Christians in Israel by providing us with funds to purchase necessities and help them establish themselves in the land.

I was astounded with the response. Within a few months, over \$250,000 poured in to the church's bank account, all designated for aid to the immigrants and others in need. It seemed to me that this was far more than we needed, so I wrote to contributors and to other friends, requesting that the flow of contributions be stopped. Still, I was faced with a dilemma: these monies had been sent by people who trusted me and who responded to my appeal because they did so. How were we to handle more funds than I deemed necessary?

A short while later, an idea came to mind, one for which I (and others) have blessed God ever since. I submitted a proposal to the church: we had more funds than we needed for their designated use, and could not of course divert them to other uses. But why should we think only of ourselves? Churches in the country had many immigrants and other needy Christians. Why not invest in assisting them establish themselves economically in one of the most pressing, most demanding of needs: home ownership.

Other small funds in Israel were assisting by way of minimal loans and grants in cases of emergency: doctors' fees, the provision of food and such like. Housing in Israel is largely for purchase. Rentals are usually available for 1-3 years, following which residents have to move and during which time they are at the mercy of often-heartless, greedy home owners. To buy a home one needs to have at least 33% of the value of a house, three guarantors must accept responsibility in case of default and you must have sufficient proven income. Where would immigrant families, for example, find \$70,000 to meet the 33% down payment?

I therefore suggested that our church establish a national social aid fund for Christians. The fund would provide loans linked to the Cost of Living index to secure the money's value and at 1% interest to cover overheads. Loans would be granted for the purchase of homes, obtaining a gainful profession or setting up a viable business, with an emphasis on the first of these purposes. Requests for loans would be considered only at the recommendation of local churches and only to those who could prove their ability to meet the financial obligations involved. I further suggested that the Fund's management be formed from representatives of various congregations in the country, and that the church transfers the money that was then in our coffers to this new Fund. In this way we could work with others toward making fellow Christians economically independent and, in consequence, forward the financial independence of local churches.

To my delight, the church approved my proposal and authorized me to form such a Fund. In this way, Keren Tkuma came into being. Members and immediate family members of the Fund's management cannot apply for loans. When applications from friends, fellow congregants and associates of the members are reviewed, management members withdraw from participation. We insisted on being audited and on publishing our audit although, initially, our cash flow was far below the level where an audit was legally required.

Over the years, this Fund has assisted more than 100 families to purchase homes at reasonable rates. A number have obtained a professional education and two viable businesses were assisted. Upon retirement from the pastorate of Grace and Truth, I deemed it time for me to make way for others in other spheres as well. I therefore resigned as Chairman of Keren Tkuma and am pleased to see the Fund continuing to serve the wider body of Christ.

Living, worshipping and serving with these brethren was no easy task -- any more than it was easy for them to live, worship and serve with us. We had undergone a meticulous doctrinal pilgrimage and were just emerging from the pains of an horrific schism. They too had cherished views and were surprised to discover that there were those who loved the Lord, whose understandings, standards and practice were so different from their own. It took a good deal of humility and dedication on their part, and of patience on ours, for us to remain together. On more than one occasion rumblings were made among them, calling for them to break away and establish a separate congregation. But God held us together.

We proposed to the newcomers: our commitment is, above all, to God's word. Where our Confession or practice could be shown to run contrary to God's word, we undertake to change. However, we expected the same kind of openness from our brethren: they must undertake to change where it could be demonstrated from God's word that Grace and Truth had followed the dictates of the Lord. We all believed that God had brought us together, and that the unity of the church was to be expressed in our shared lives together. We further believed that truth was of great importance, and that it was our shared duty to pursue truth with vigor while loving and respecting those who were likewise engaged in the pursuit of truth and who had come to different conclusions. And so a new, shared pilgrimage began.

On those essentials that unite all evangelicals we fully agreed: there were no questions in our minds on issues such as the Trinity, the sacrifice of Christ as the grounds of salvation and the necessity of faith and repentance for the implementation of the salvation Christ had purchased. We agreed that some kind of work of the Holy Spirit was an aspect of salvation, leading to devotion and obedience. We shared a hope in the resurrection of the just and the unjust, and of eternal salvation for the redeemed.

But we also differed on extremely important issues: did the sacrifice of Christ secure salvation or render it possible? Did he die in the hope of saving all, or as many who would choose to believe, or did he die to secure the salvation of some, however many? Does faith replace obedience in order to salvation? Is repentance necessary and can one receive Christ as Savior without his becoming Lord and Master? Does the effective work of the Holy Spirit precede faith and repentance, or are the latter the result of that work? Are all Christians gifted with and by the Holy Spirit and what is the essential nature of the Spirit's gifting? What is the role of the law in salvation and in Christian obedience?

Needless to say there were many other issues at stake. I refrain from enumerating them simply to avoid providing a long list, but issues such as the Sabbath, the nature of the Kingdom of God and eschatology were among these.

As Pastor, I did most of the preaching, with David assisting from time to time as I was eager to train others to take up leadership alongside or instead of me. I generally preach expository sermons, book by book, chapter by chapter, verse by verse. But in light of the circumstances, I embarked on a series based on our Confession of Faith, and later adopted the practice of preaching through the Confession every five years or so. There was ample room for discussion, sometimes quite heated discussion. We all felt deeply about the matters at hand. But the heat never transferred onto a personal plain.

Why did we not engage in the invitation system, inviting people to come forward as does the famous evangelist, Billy Graham? How dare we use humor in the pulpit (never to entertain or appear "cool")? Why did we not preach "practical" sermons, telling people how they should behave rather than laying down principles for them to apply? Why don't we sing more Russian Hymns? How dare we place a Bible -- that holy book -- on the floor, or cross our legs in church? Why do the women not cover their heads? How could we say that salvation cannot be lost when such a view leads to loose morals and less spiritual endeavor?

The questions went on and on. Nor were we always right. It was our practice to permit those who made a credible profession to the Lord's Table, even prior to baptism. We were challenged on that score and discovered ourselves to be mistaken.

Ever so slowly, we found ourselves moving closer and our Confession found acceptance. Where it was still considered questionable, at least the brethren could see that we had biblical reasons to assert and to practice as we did. Openness to criticism, a willingness to be challenged, a consistent appeal to scriptural rather than to ecclesiological authority, -- these all contributed to an atmosphere that was not only very different from Soviet custom, but welcome although somewhat threatening.

Ministry and Family News

Bracha and I are in the US, visiting family and friends. We have a very full program, with me teaching seminars, reporting on the scene in Israel and preaching. As we travel, I seek to utilize free time to work on the translation of the New Testament into Hebrew and on other projects. So far we have driven some 7,000 miles and are just under half of our tour.

An important part of the present trip is to visit small, isolated churches in distant locales, seldom visited by missionaries and whose Pastors feel the isolation. My desire is to thank those of the churches that are praying for us, and to encourage them and their Pastors by a visit. Knowing what it feels like to be alone, I am grateful for the opportunity to extend a loving hand of fellowship to others in Christ.

We have commenced planning for **the 2014 trip to the US**, in the course of which we hope to visit the east and mid-east of the USA, and Florida, as well as visit our children on the West Coast. We do not intend to drive along the northern or southern borders of the US in 2014, but will reserve that itinerary for 2015, if the Lord permits. Churches and parties interested in a 2014 visit are invited to write to Rivka at languageservice4u@gmail.com. I am also available for expository seminars and Pastors conferences. We plan to be in the USA for a much shorter period, from mid-June to mid-August, unless any of the children give birth before or after that time, in which case Bracha will be in the States for a longer period.

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Noam has commenced High School and has decided to take Mandarin as one of her language projects in addition to taking the test for Hebrew proficiency. **Maya and Nadav** have likewise begun their school year, for the first time without their big sister in the same school. Avital will be teaching cooking as part of her duties at the younger ones' charter school.

Yonatan and Caitlyn are doing very well. They enjoyed their father's working vacation in Canada. They are ever playing together and hugging each other. We were thrilled to be with them for a short while – all too short!
Bracha and I also had the joy of visiting with **Yotam and Avishai** and their parents, **Marcus and Tamar**. They have grown much since we last saw them, as the photo will show. We expect next to see the Erez family.



While in Washington, we paid a short visit to dear friends in Canada. Long-time readers of MaozNews will be acquainted with **Martin and Grace Gouldthorpe**, who took me in, cared for me and provided for me for many months when I was forced to leave the Bible College of Wales. Martin was assistant Pastor to John Caiger in London, an outstanding preacher and a capable minister to the young fringes of society. Later Martin served as a Pastor in British Columbia. Grace ran a loving, welcoming home ever brimming with young people. In BC she taught French. They are both retired. We enjoyed happy fellowship.



Martin and Grace Gouldthorpe



Katya and the new baby

Katya has given birth to her second daughter. Mother and child are well. Maya, the baby's older sister, is delighted, and all are well. It is a source of joy to witness Katya's happiness and joy in family life. God has blessed her greatly.

Rose continues to work to improve her matriculation grades. She earned two 100 grades in mathematics – a topic in which she had failed in the past – is awaiting the results of her exam in literature and is improving her grammar. To see her satisfaction and to witness her desire to study is another great encouragement.

Thank you for your prayers.

In Christ by grace,

Baruch



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

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