



Credit: Wikimedia



EPILOGUE:

ELIEZER BEN YEHUDA

A ROADMAP TO THE IMPOSSIBLE

By Shira Sorko-Ram

With this month of May, Israel's 70th year of Independence ends. In honor of this prophetic year, I have written about two of the most important people in Israel's modern history, Theodore Herzl, the Father of Modern Israel, and Eliezer Ben Yehuda, the Father of the Modern Hebrew Language. Most significantly, for the person who is spiritually sensitive, one can see the guiding hand of Providence upon Herzl, and upon Ben Yehuda's entire family. They all went through unbelievable hardship, but were used by God for His purposes. Therefore, they succeeded in their mission. I wrote two episodes on Herzl and eight episodes (including this Epilogue) on Ben Yehuda.

You will find all these episodes in the maozisrael.org archives, beginning with May 2018, or maozisrael.org/herzl-ben-yehuda.

Eliezer Ben Yehuda, Father of the Modern Hebrew Language, believed, when no one else did, that the language of the Bible could be revived to become the language of a new Jewish nation.

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Credit: Wikimedia

RIGHT:

Ben Yehuda, the man who fought tuberculosis in his body for 45 years, preferred to stand while working up to 18 hours a day on his dictionary.

Eliezer Ben Yehuda understood there would be no Jewish nation without the Hebrew language and there would be no Hebrew language without a Jewish nation.

OPPOSITE PAGE:

Ben Yehuda Home: He never saw this house, a gift from the American Jewish Community, as it was finished after his death. However, Hemda, his second wife lived in it for thirty years until her death in 1951. It is now a cultural center and hostel.

Three years after he moved to Jerusalem, Eliezer Ben Yehuda began work on a “Hebrew dictionary” by listing a few new words in his weekly four-page Hebrew newspaper. The new words came out of necessity when Eliezer and his first wife, Devora, vowed to speak only Hebrew to each other and a few close friends, all of whom barely knew any Hebrew when they immigrated to the region of Palestine in 1881.

Actually, there wasn’t a Hebrew word for “newspaper”—or “printer”—or “post office”—or “stamp”—to mail his newspaper to his few subscribers abroad or in Palestine. There wasn’t a word for “subscriber” or “mail” either.

Yet Ben Yehuda had a mission from which he never wavered—to raise “a spoken Hebrew language” from the dead. To create new words, Eliezer found himself searching the Bible, the Talmud, and all the rabbinical books. But many of the needed words didn’t exist in any of those books, either.

When his first child was born in 1882, Eliezer’s Hebrew world expanded to the need of modern words such as “diaper.” One can imagine why Jews of the late 19th century considered it utterly impossible to resurrect a dead language. It had never happened in the history of mankind. The idea was thought to be pure madness. There was not a single human being on earth who spoke Hebrew as his mother tongue. But Eliezer had a dream and a plan. He would make his firstborn “the grand experiment.”

The Grand Experiment

When the news spread that his new son Ben Zion would not be allowed to even hear any other language except Hebrew, the people of Jerusalem actually believed the boy would grow up a disabled “idiot.” Nevertheless, Eliezer and his faithful wife spoke only Hebrew in his presence. This experiment forced them to constantly come up with new words that would meet the needs of families living in the late 19th century lifestyle of the West.

All in all, it is more than doubtful that the Jews returning from the four corners of the world would have agreed on a national language for their newborn state, had the Hebrew language not been prepared for them ahead of time by Ben Yehuda. Indeed, Ben Yehuda and his Hebrew-speaking family became a living legend, an embodiment of a revival that he modeled for others to emulate.

Eliezer realized that if the Hebrew language was to take root among new Jewish immigrants who had begun to settle in and around Jaffa and central

Israel, they also needed a vocabulary to express the needs of educated Jews originating from Europe in a world where knowledge was expanding at breakneck speed. Therefore, his best tool at that time was a newspaper.

In 1884, Eliezer founded his own weekly newspaper and started printing a list of a few new Hebrew words in each issue. With Eliezer’s passion and example, little by little, the concept of a modern Hebrew language was beginning to take root among at least a few Jews in Palestine.

But there was another seemingly impossible challenge to overcome. As new immigrants began teaching Hebrew in their schools, the teachers taught according to their taste and accent, even creating their own words. Besides, how do you *pronounce* a word that didn’t exist until today?

Even before Eliezer moved to Palestine, he was aware there was an Ashkenazi accent spoken by Orthodox Jews from Europe and Russia, and a Sephardic accent of Jews from Arabic nations. (The Yemenite accent was considered the “purest” of all.) Then there were the natural accents of immigrants whose mother tongue was French, German, Yiddish or Arabic.

A Language Needs Rules

When Eliezer and Devora spoke with their few friends, they could use the

language however they wished. But if Eliezer wanted to circulate a modern tongue with the goal of making it universally spoken among Jews in the Holy Land, the words had to be precise and accurate, according to strict linguistic rules. Therefore, Ben Yehuda became a self-taught scientific lexicographer.

But how was the average reader of his newspaper, who obviously had a very small vocabulary, able to remember all the new words of each week’s newspaper?

And what about the few bold pioneers teaching Hebrew at their makeshift schools in their settlements? They were without a single Hebrew textbook. So, Eliezer began helping them compose such textbooks—not just to learn the language—but to teach math, history and everything else in Hebrew.

Eliezer became increasingly aware of the greatest need of all: *“Our crying need is for an up-to-date dictionary. Here we are trying to teach people to speak a language and there is no dictionary of that language!”* In fact, there wasn’t even a word for dictionary!

Did Anyone Speak Hebrew?

It is true that in some parts of the world there were Jews who had to conduct business with other Jews who had no common language with each other except their Hebrew prayers. They created a kind of pidgin, a semi-language that included words, sounds, body language, simplified syntax, and limited vocabulary. It, of course, was never learned as a first language. But this limited speech encouraged the young Ben Yehuda even before he went to Palestine to believe that Hebrew could again be spoken.

It is estimated that about 50% of male Jews of the 19th century could read the Torah and rabbinical books. But here was the real issue. In Arabic countries, Hebrew literacy was high, as the Jewish communities were more segregated in Islamic cultures. Their religion was the center of their lives. But, in Europe, the Age of Enlightenment had penetrated deeply into Jewish culture. Many Jewish leaders in the West believed Jews should completely assimilate into the local society and culture, giving up their



Credit: Maoz Israel

“Perhaps I am the last of Zion’s poets, and you are the last readers.”

Yehuda Leib Gordon,
Jewish Poet (1830-1892)

ethnicity and religion. They reasoned that would end all persecution of the Jews forever. In other words, the Jews would cease to exist.

The Last Of The Last

In the same decade the Russian-born Ben Yehuda immigrated to Jerusalem, the Jewish poet, Yehuda Leib Gordon (1830-1892), wrote: *“Perhaps I am the last of Zion’s poets, and you are the last readers.”* Gordon himself was a part of the Jewish Enlightenment; he saw little hope for Hebrew becoming a daily spoken language or even a language of literature.

He understood Hebrew and Zionism were one and the same. There would be no Jewish nation without the Hebrew language. There would be no Hebrew language without a Jewish nation. Ben Yehuda wrote, *“The Hebrew language can live only if we revive the nation and return it to the fatherland.”*

Alone and unique from all the visionaries of the Jewish national renaissance, Ben Yehuda saw the whole picture: the need for a people wedded to its land speaking its own language.

Jewish nationalism, to Ben Yehuda, was both the return to the historical homeland and the revival of the Hebrew language. Ben Yehuda thus launched his great undertaking of creating *The Complete Dictionary of Ancient and Modern Hebrew*.

Irreplaceable Hemda

One last thought. The dictionary would never have been created had it not been for his second wife, Hemda, who married Eliezer six months after her sister Devora died. She labored with Eliezer every day through their 30 years of marriage. By the time he died, they had completed seven volumes of his dictionary. She had raised the money for all of them.

For the next three decades, 1922 to 1951, Hemda did everything in her power to complete the dictionary, along with her son Ehud. She raised the funds for another six volumes, averaging 600 pages each.



Credit: Wikimedia

Moshe Lilienblum (1843-1910), who was considered the “dean” of Hebrew authors of his time, was also disillusioned with the future of the language. In a newspaper article, he announced, *“Hebrew’s time has passed, and it no longer has a purpose or task in Jewish life.”*

The Orthodox Jews who knew Hebrew best, and would have been the best candidates to learn spoken Hebrew, would not countenance using it as a modern language. For them it was too holy to use in everyday communication.

But Ben Yehuda recognized a hidden truth in plain sight that no other Zionist leader of his generation saw. Not one!



Credit: Maoz Israel

Tombs on the Mount of Olives are inscribed:

Eliezer Ben Yehuda (middle right)
Reviver of the Hebrew Language

Hemda Ben Yehuda (left)

With your help:
my day is long
and my labor is blessed
and my mind is strong
and my strength is steady
and my natural vigor is not diminished
(last line from Deuteronomy 34:7)

[Taken from a tribute of Eliezer to his wife]

“Hebrew’s time has passed, and it no longer has a purpose or task in Jewish life.”

Moshe Lilienblum,
“Dean” of Hebrew authors
(1843-1910)

to it, and the matter will progress, all obstacles in the way notwithstanding... In every new event, every step, even the smallest in the path of progress, it is necessary that there be one pioneer who will lead the way without leaving any possibility of turning back.”

After the state of Israel came into existence, the completion of the dictionary became a state project. The last volume was published in 1958, seven years after her death. There were 17 volumes altogether.

A Legacy Like No Other

Today there is no special memorial for Ben Yehuda, not even a modest museum. However almost every town of any size has a Ben Yehuda street! Even so, the average Israeli knows surprisingly little about the life of Ben Yehuda.

Today Ben Yehuda’s original dictionary is out of print. If you are fortunate, you may be able to find one for sale on eBay. (I just did—although two volumes are missing.) But he has a legacy like no other. Every Israeli who opens his or her mouth to speak their native tongue today is a living memorial to Eliezer Ben Yehuda.

Ben Yehuda, then, was the prophet, the theoretician and tactician, the sign and symbol of the revival of the language. He himself wrote in 1908 in his newspaper, *The Deer*:

“For everything there is needed only one wise, clever and active man, with the initiative to devote all his energies

Language and land created a physical foundation for the nation. Yet the greatest “impossibility” is still to come! It will happen when God’s Chosen People return to their God with all their hearts, souls and strength. They will not only be God’s beloved, but He will be their Beloved God. And I am sure they will worship Him and their Messiah in the beautiful Hebrew language!

To this writer, Ben Yehuda’s life is a magnificent example and inspiration to all born-again believers as to how God searches for even one person to stand in the gap to fulfill God’s vision, His desires and His purposes. Even now, God is looking for those to fulfill His plan for our generation. ■

Principle Sources: Fulfillment of Prophecy, Eliezer Ben Yehuda, by Eliezer Ben Yehuda (grandson) 2008; Tongue of the Prophets, The Life Story of Eliezer Ben Yehuda by Robert St. John 1952; <https://goo.gl/MVvmMUK>; <https://goo.gl/8r29uN>

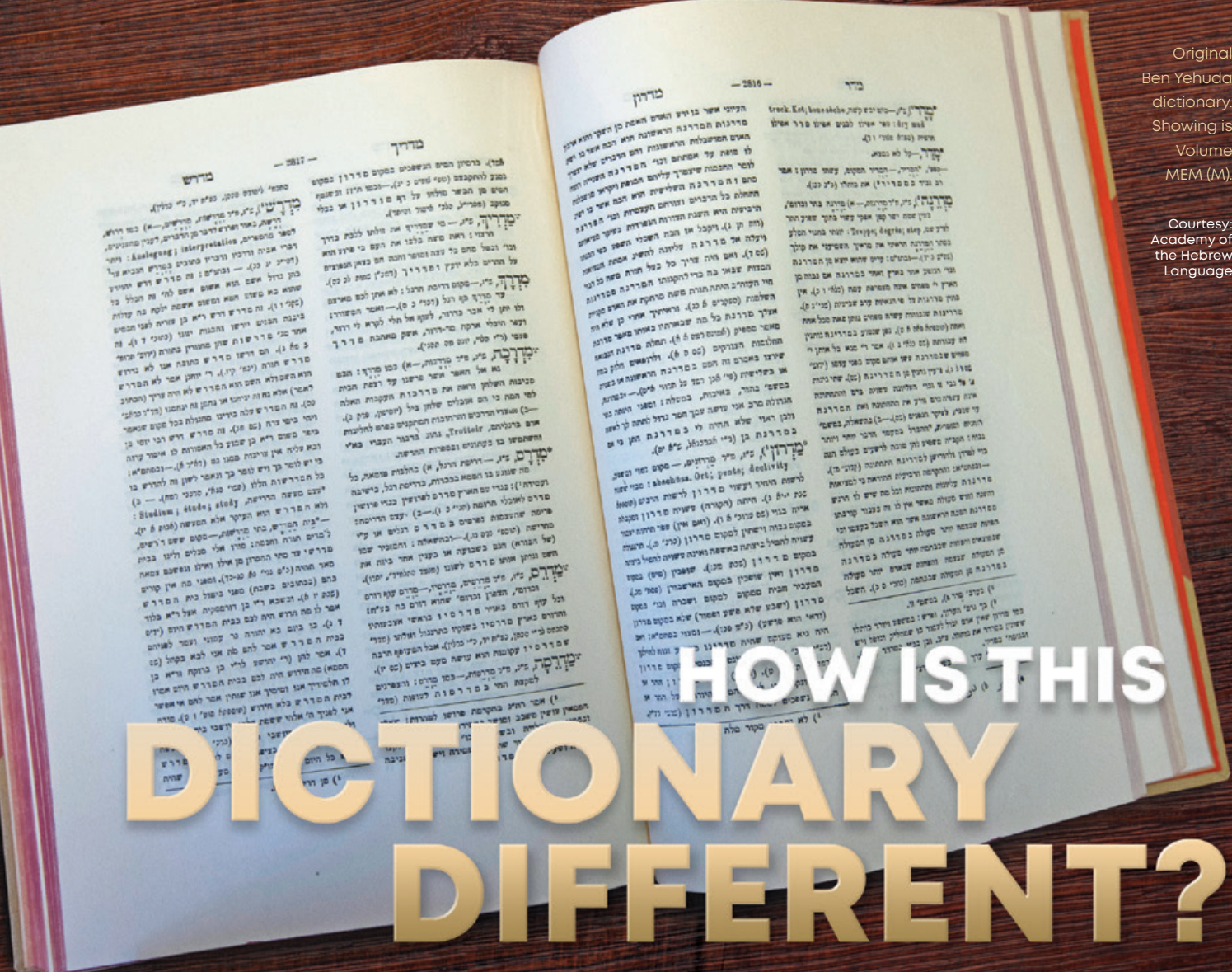


Courtesy: Academy of the Hebrew Language

Ben Yehuda’s original desk, made for him to stand while working.

ABOVE:
A set of Eliezer Ben Yehuda’s *The Complete Dictionary of Ancient and Modern Hebrew* stored in the Academy of the Hebrew Language headquarters in Jerusalem. One of the 17 volumes is missing.

RIGHT:
Hemda, second wife of Eliezer Ben Yehuda.



Original Ben Yehuda dictionary. Showing is Volume MEM (M). Courtesy: Academy of the Hebrew Language

HOW IS THIS DICTIONARY DIFFERENT?

By Shira Sorko-Ram

Ben Yehuda perused over 40,000 books in pursuit of the roots of Hebrew words.

Ben Yehuda spent most of his life searching for ancient Hebrew words that had been lost. He also sought to find the origin of words and examples of their usage, as well as their changes in meaning throughout the centuries. He scoured libraries all over Europe and the Middle East. And when he moved to the United States during World War I to escape Turkish persecution, he spent four years searching the great libraries of the United States.

When he fled Palestine in 1914, he had already accumulated about 450,000 notes concerning sources for Hebrew words. His wife, Hemda, packed them up and turned them over to the American consulate in Jerusalem for safe-keeping. Those notes

were taken from over 40,000 books he had consulted that had been written over a period of more than two thousand years.

Those who thought that his dictionary was going to be a mere list of Hebrew words with brief definitions were in for a great surprise. This was to be unlike any dictionary ever compiled. His goal was no less than an encyclopedia of the Hebrew language. He identified the origin of each word and provided its sister words in other Semitic languages. He provided synonyms and antonyms. He traced the changes in the meaning of the word through the centuries. And he provided overwhelming examples of the use of the word in sentences to help the reader see how to use the word in conversations.

A Work Of Multi-Languages

After each Hebrew word would come the translation into French, German and English. This made the work unique; a multilingual dictionary in Arabic, Assyrian, Aramaic, Greek and Latin.

Moreover, it was a thesaurus as well as a book of definitions. After each word, Ben Yehuda listed all the other words which were in any way connected. The reader was given the origin of each word, an explanation of its construction, a comparison with its sister words in other Semitic languages, the changes it had undergone down through the ages, and all its nuances, shades, forms, inflections and uses.

After each word were examples of its usage, which Ben Yehuda called “witnesses” or “proofs.” With a language as old as Hebrew there were bound to be many more shadings and colorations of meaning, and even conflicting uses of a word.

He dug out and listed 335 different ways in which it was possible to use the Hebrew word *lo*, meaning “no” or “not.” There were 210 “witnesses” for *ken* (yes).

“Witnesses” from Everywhere

Many of his “witnesses” were quotations from the Bible and other religious books, but there were often long passages from secular literature, from the works of little-known poets, or from manuscripts he had found somewhere in a distant library. These quotations were interesting reading in themselves. They gave pictures of the life of early Jews in their homes, market places, fields and ghettos.

The little marks which Ben Yehuda sprinkled through his manuscript were marks of his honesty. These symbols appeared alongside words which he himself had created. “I put them in so the reader can see immediately that these are new words, and if he does not like them he should consider them as non-existent.”

He was the first to make a regular and systematic practice of coining Hebrew words to meet the practical demands constantly being made of the language in daily speech, journalism, science and literature.

In his later years, he co-founded and established the ruling principles for the the Language Council. The Council gave way to the Academy of the Hebrew Language, which adopted Ben Yehuda’s rules and took upon itself his life’s work. The Academy, still housed at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, approves new Hebrew words to meet the ever-evolving needs of contemporary Israeli society.

Theodore Herzl, considered the Father of modern Israel, had a famous saying still quoted by Israel’s school children today: “If you will it, it is no dream.” But Ben Yehuda simply said, “It is not a dream, a period.” ■

Ben Yehuda found 335 different ways the Hebrew word *lo*, meaning “no” or “not” was used through the ages.

http://www.lamblion.com/xfiles/publications/magazines/Lamplighter_MarApr14_Hebrew.pdf, Tongue of the Prophets, The Life Story of Eliezer Ben Yehuda by Robert St. John. Photo credits page 6-7, Maoz Israel.

Example of the 500,000 notations of word sources Ben Yehuda catalogued in creating his Hebrew dictionary. Seven volumes were completed before his death. All volumes were completed from 1908 to 1959.

Courtesy: Academy of the Hebrew Language

ISRAELIS READ BOOKS!

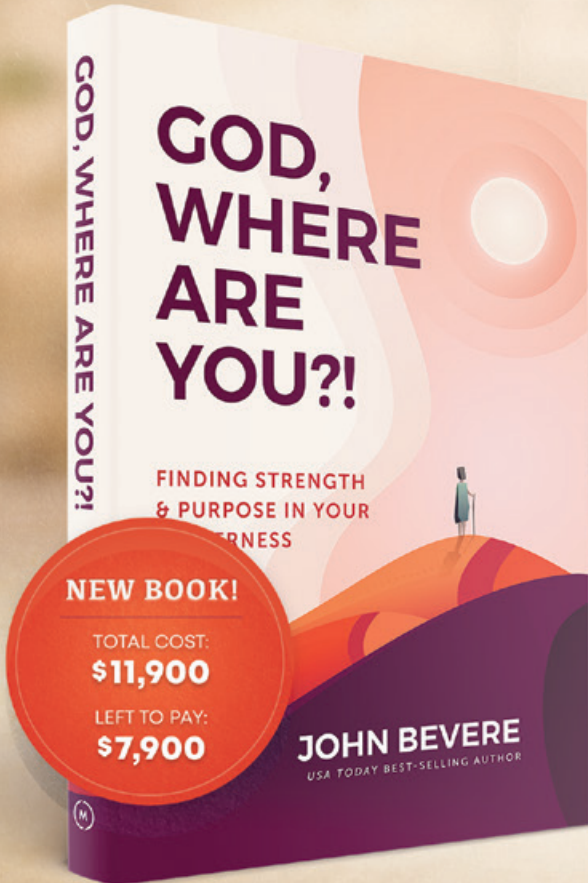
One of the most effective tools God has given us for bringing light and truth to both believers and non-believers is through **BOOKS**

These books by contemporary men and women who have proven lives of commitment and maturity, have a message for this generation. **Thankfully, Israelis still read books!**

Take a look at this selection of books we are currently in the process of translating and publishing.

We invite you to partner with us in getting the most important message in the whole world to our Israeli people. **It is their time!**

-Shira Sorko-Ram-



NEW BOOK!

TOTAL COST: **\$11,900**
LEFT TO PAY: **\$7,900**

GOD, WHERE ARE YOU?!

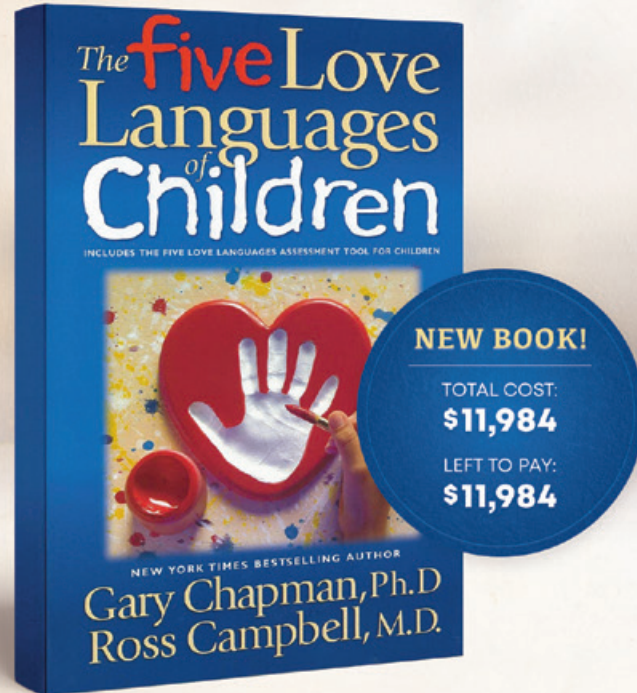
Finding Strength & Purpose in Your Wilderness

By John Bevere

John Bevere and his wife passed through sad, difficult and barren seasons in their lives. Was it punishment? Sin? Missing the mark? Was God angry with them?

This book explores the purpose of a wilderness experience with God. The children of Israel were suffering the same problems every child of God struggles with in life. They were looking for miracles, but weren't aware they needed, most of all, to pursue a deeper relationship with their God.

When I read this book, I immediately sent it to two close friends going through a severe and seemingly hopeless valley at this time. As Israeli believers read this book, they will find it points to a Biblically based path out of their desert to greater spiritual maturity.



NEW BOOK!

TOTAL COST: **\$11,984**
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THE 5 LOVE LANGUAGES OF CHILDREN

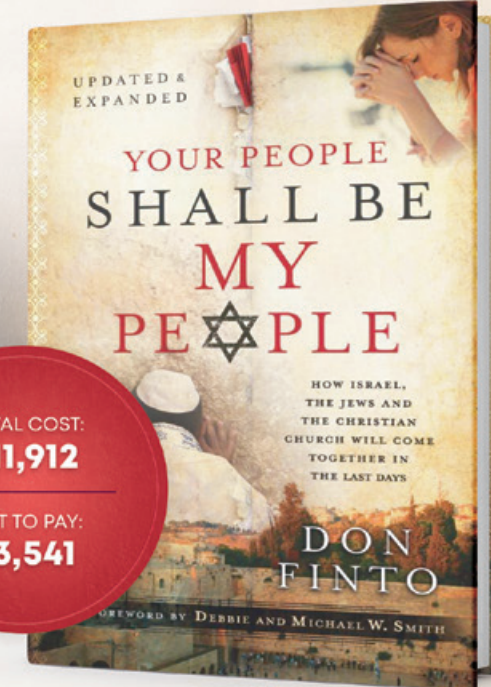
By Gary Chapman and Ross Campbell

At Maoz, our hearts are constantly searching for every good book we can possibly publish to help children and teenagers of Messianic families stay true to their faith through those critical years. The Five Love Languages series are our #1 most-requested books. Many non-believers also ask for these books.

So we are delighted to begin translation of this book and to put it into the hands of believing Israeli parents to help their young people stay in strong relationship with their family and with God.

The bottom line of these authors is how to help your child feel loved. When a child feels loved, when his or her tank is full, they will be more open and responsive to parental guidance in all areas of life.

Each child is different, but these godly authors, with a lifetime of experience in pediatrics, psychiatry and family life, provide the well-tested tools of quality time, words of affirmation, gifts, acts of service and physical touch. This book will help Israeli Messianic Jews and Christian Arabs parent their children in a way that results in a warm, close, faith-filled family. Do Israelis need this book? YES, they do!



TOTAL COST: **\$11,912**
LEFT TO PAY: **\$3,541**

YOUR PEOPLE SHALL BE MY PEOPLE

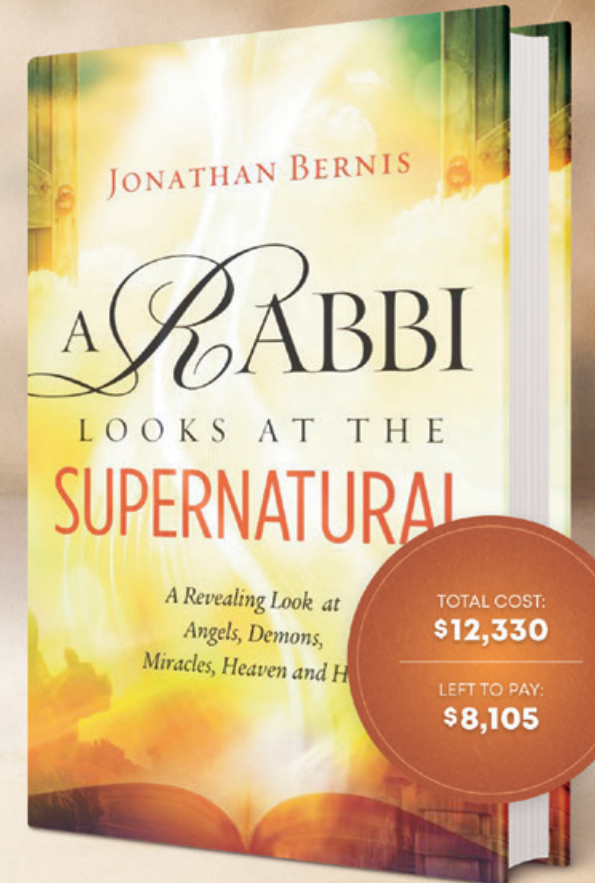
How Israel, the Jews and the Christian Church Will Come Together in the Last Days

By Don Finto

This remarkable pastor, who nurtured Michael W. Smith and Amy Grant, has a pure and powerful love for the Israeli people. He wrote this book for Christians.

So why translate it into Hebrew? The Israeli nation in the last half-century has gone through a true revelation and revolution. Fifty years ago, Israelis were convinced Christianity was their greatest enemy, and viewed all of Nazi Europe as typical Christians who were haters of Jews.

Today, the Israeli people, from top officials on down, now see Evangelical Christians as their greatest friends and supporters in the world. Finto's book will explain why. His love just shines through! It will, no doubt, cause many Israelis to hunger after the God of Israel and His Jewish Son, Yeshua!



TOTAL COST: **\$12,330**
LEFT TO PAY: **\$8,105**

A RABBI LOOKS AT THE SUPERNATURAL

A Revealing Look at Angels, Demons, Miracles, Heaven and Hell

By Jonathan Bernis

Maoz has published scores of books critically important for the discipling and growth of Israeli believers in Yeshua. But what about the person who shows interest in your witness, but knows virtually nothing about the Gospel? This book is for them!

There are very few reader-friendly books that are easy to comprehend and yet answer, in a compelling and captivating way, the most important questions of life for the non-believer.

From a Jewish point of view, Bernis examines a wide variety of spiritually-diverse subjects such as angels, ghosts, aliens, the lives of Bernie Maddox and Elvis Presley, the thoughts of Stephen Hawking and Albert Einstein, plus near-death experiences of unbelievers and believers in Yeshua.

His conclusions are not only thought-provoking but, I believe, will be convincing to many Israelis searching for Truth. I can think of several friends right now, to whom I have been witnessing, and I can't wait to give this book to them!

MAOZ BOOK PUBLISHING

A TEACHING ON IMMERSION (BAPTISM)

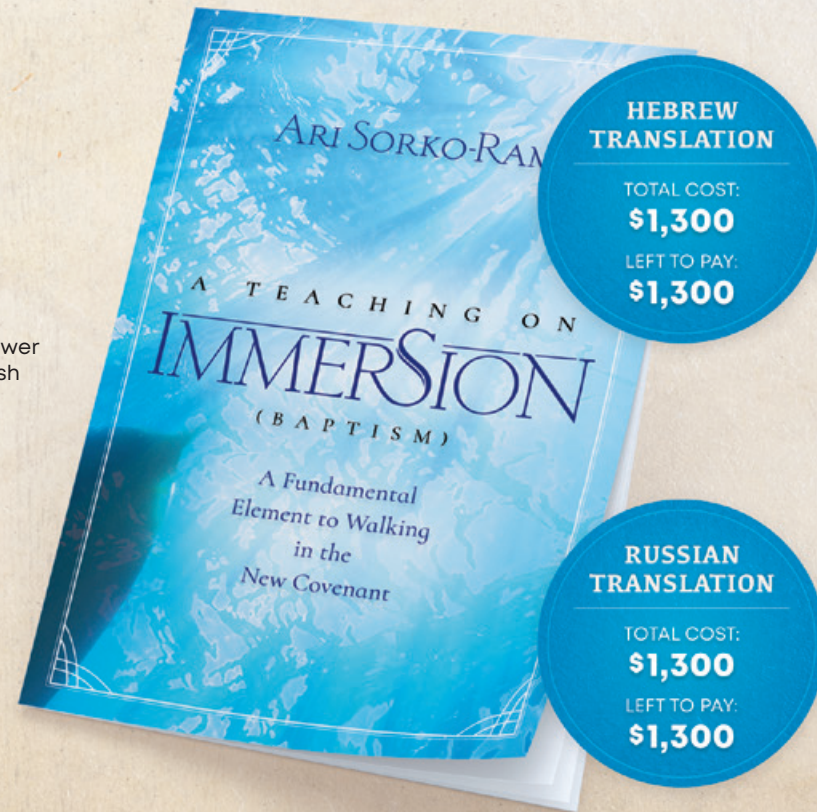
A Fundamental Element to Walking in the New Covenant

By Ari Sorko-Ram

In Jewish culture, there is great opposition to a Jewish follower of Yeshua being baptized, as it is wrongly thought the Jewish person will no longer be a Jew.

Nevertheless, water baptism is a fundamental element for every Jew or Gentile walking in the New Covenant. It is a commandment of the Messiah—not an optional choice. Therefore, it is critical for every Israeli believer to know why he or she should be baptized, and how God will use this act of obedience to strengthen their faith and increase their ability to hear His “still, small voice.”

This book takes the reader through the Old and New Testament—laying a firm foundational understanding of immersion. It is sure to give the reader—both Jew and Gentile—new insight!



HEBREW TRANSLATION

TOTAL COST:

\$1,300

LEFT TO PAY:

\$1,300

RUSSIAN TRANSLATION

TOTAL COST:

\$1,300

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\$1,300

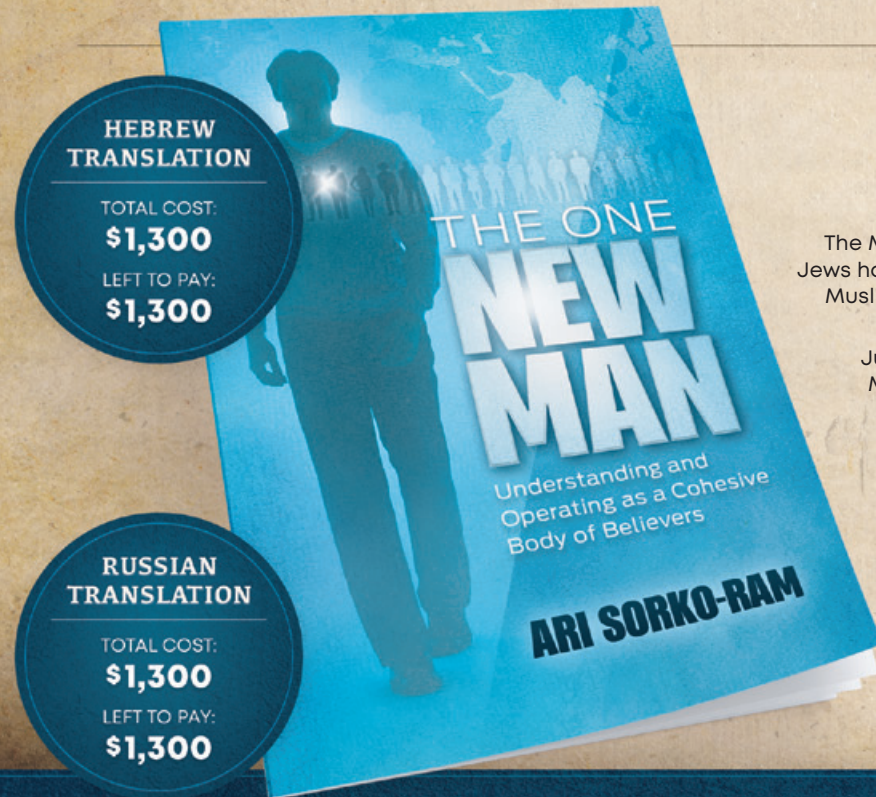
THE ONE NEW MAN

By Ari Sorko-Ram

The Middle East is like no place else! In Israel, we Messianic Jews have as our neighbors Orthodox Jews who persecute us, Muslim Arabs who despise us, and true Christian Arabs who are our co-workers in Messiah's harvest.

Just how do we relate to our fellow man as the One New Man—spiritually, nationally and internationally? Yes, the New Man is a Jew and a Gentile walking together. But how does that work in practical terms? The reader will find a surprising commentary of God's plan and purpose for the One New Man.

Because there are many Messianic congregations of Russian background here in Israel who are asking us for these basic studies that are particularly relevant to believing Jews, we are, for the first time, going to publish Ari's two books both in Hebrew and Russian.



HEBREW TRANSLATION

TOTAL COST:

\$1,300

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\$1,300

RUSSIAN TRANSLATION

TOTAL COST:

\$1,300

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\$1,300

Both of Ari's new books are also available in English. **Request your copy today!**



ISRAEL TURNS RIGHT

After a real cliff-hanger, it turned out that the election on April 9 gave Benjamin Netanyahu a comfortable majority in Israel's Knesset.

So what does this election say about Israel?



First of all, it is the most right-wing coalition in modern Israel's history. But the most dramatic element revealed just a few days before the election, was when Netanyahu announced he would not uproot a single Jew (settler) from Judea and Samaria. He also promised to begin a process of applying Israeli sovereignty to some or all of this area, originally given to Israel through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

With this solid right-wing coalition, the nation is now awaiting President Donald Trump's peace plan. The vast majority of Israelis believe there is little or no chance of the peace because the Palestinians still dream of replacing Israel with their Islamist state.

There was a time in my life when the majority of Israelis longed for peace with the Palestinians, and would have given “half the kingdom” and more to secure peace. Those were the days when the left wing Labor party had 65 seats! In this present election, Labor received six seats!

Even as late as March 2015, the Prime Minister told NBC, “I don't want a one-state solution. I want a sustainable and peaceful two-state solution, but circumstances have to change for that to happen.”

The circumstances have changed—not with the Palestinians but with the Israelis. The Prime Minister and the people of Israel have simply given up. Not only does the PM have the backing of President Trump, amazingly, he also has the backing of the youth of Israel. According to the 2018 Israeli Democracy Index, 65% of Israeli Jews aged 18-24, and 53% of those 25-34, favored Netanyahu winning reelection, while 17% and 33%, respectively preferred his more centrist rival, Benny Gantz. The left has not won an election since 1999.

Another important factor is Israel's youngest Jewish voters are increasingly Orthodox due to high birth rates in the ultra Orthodox and religious communities. Statistics show these

communities grow more quickly when they are represented in the Knesset, as their leaders can demand massive sums of money for their communities.

This phenomenon is not good for the nation, as the religious siphon off many millions of shekels for their non-working men and their large families. Money that is desperately needed for the nation's educational institutions. Many authorities are warning that Israel will lose its edge in technology unless more money is available for schools and universities. According to this election, that won't happen any time soon.

There is some talk that PM Netanyahu and General Gantz are in negotiations to form a super two-party coalition. Many Israelis believe this would be the best of all worlds. However, my guess is that chances are slim.


A strong Orthodox presence in the coalition will result in greater resistance against the Messianic Jewish community. This spiritual war will continue until the great breakthrough for revival comes. For now, God will call us to prayer and bold action.

Every generation has its role to play in history, and every administration has a purpose in God's plan. Perhaps this government, though hostile to followers of His Son, will in some way play their role in solidifying Israel's presence in her promised land, the “Mountains of Israel” in Judea and Samaria—the very place where God first promised Abraham this land forever. ■

-Shira Sorko-Ram



Shira casting her vote



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Or consult your lawyer to include a bequest in your will for Maoz Israel Ministries.