



Alona and Roma the day they arrived in Israel after traveling for a week

Stories from **UKRAINE**

By Shani Sorko-Ram Ferguson

For the first time in two years, an event is taking place on the world stage that has replaced the pandemic headlines. A world power has taken military action against another nation with the intention of conquering it—and everyone is watching to see what the rest of the world will do about it. The vast numbers of bombs, wounded and perished grows with each attack, but nothing makes numbers and cold facts come alive more than real-life stories of those living through this atrocity.

You can get some historical background to the conflict in the accompanying article of this issue. However, since several of our Maoz staff in Israel have friends and family in the affected areas, we wanted to share just a few of their first-hand stories with you.

Alona

If you've been following the work of Maoz for more than two years, you have likely enjoyed seeing some of the beautiful photos we've captured of the people Maoz has been able to serve in various projects. Those photos were taken by Yoni who immigrated to Israel from Ukraine. Yoni has since moved on to a different field of work, but he remains in close contact with members of our team.

Yoni's older sister, Alona, was the first one to make the move to Israel years before Yoni was old enough to take the steps himself. Occasionally, Alona would go back to visit friends and family in Ukraine and on one of those visits she met a young man named Roma.

Alona (continued)

Roma and Alona eventually married and began building a family in Israel. The Jewish state, however, is no easy place to raise a young family—especially as believers.

When Alona's parents heard of their struggles, they offered them the opportunity to return to Ukraine, live in their home and be surrounded with a believing community. They had an online business they could run from anywhere—and their income would go further in the Ukrainian economy. And so, in 2019, with the hope that they would be able to support their family and raise their kids in a quality believing school, they decided to move their family back to Ukraine.

Even through the difficulty of the pandemic, their business flourished. They found much strength in the believing community around them, opened a small store to sell their merchandise and had enough left over to send their kids to afterschool activities. That beautiful life came to an abrupt halt the day they woke up to what sounded like distant thunder.

“No one really believed Russia would invade, but on February 24th when at 5:00 a.m. we heard explosions in the distance, we knew exactly what it meant. Russia had invaded” Alona shared. “The kids were scared but the booms were a good distance away, so we turned on the news to try to get as many details about the situation as possible in terms of where the dangerous areas were. It took only a few hours for us to realize that we

Praying with **CLARITY**

Below are some excerpts from a Maoz Israel Weekly Prayer Letters that many of our readers told us helped them pray with clarity in this situation.

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Dearest Prayer Warrior,

No one knows how long the fighting will last, **but the recovery effort will be a topic of discussion for months and years ahead.** In the meantime, there are two fronts to this war—**those in the midst of the fighting** for whom we must pray to experience God's protection and rest in the midst of the storm, and **those of us on the outside** for whom we must pray will take action and not be apathetic.

It's being called the **greatest humanitarian crisis in Europe since WWII.** Among the harrowing tales, Israeli news has **highlighted the stories of Jews who were babies when their families carried them as they fled the Nazis.** Now in their 80's—for a second time in their lives—they are being forced to flee their homes. The unspoken difference is that today **there is a land for Jews to flee to.**

We like to say if you need help in an emergency, Israel is happy to lend a hand. If you're looking for that help to come with customer service—go ask someone else. As such Israel is catching flack for how it is handling the many refugees that are landing in Tel Aviv. Long lines, lots of red tape and young apathetic clerks greet the tired

travelers who have spent days trying to find a safe destination. Ukrainian President Zelensky encouraged Israel to open its doors wide to receive his people, “Don't worry,” he said, “Israel is one of the most expensive countries in the world. As soon as the war is over, the refugees will leave.”

The issue is that among the Jewish refugees arriving from Ukraine are many non-Jews. And this is creating quite the conundrum for Israel—one that Israel has been wrestling with for over a decade with the tens of thousands of Sudanese refugees who came and now refuse to leave. Israel understands what it feels like to be without a home and so the Jewish heart wants to help misplaced people. But, in our founding documents the stated purpose of modern Israel's existence is to provide the Jew with a homeland. Therefore, every decision must consider that in our small land, if we absorb too many non-Jewish people, Jews will once again be left without their own homeland.

- Father, You are the Ruler of the Ages. There is no weapon or army that threatens the dominance of Your Kingdom.

needed to leave—and that we would likely be gone for at least a year. It took another couple of hours for us to pack up what we could fit into a few suitcases knowing we may never see this home again.”

“All in all, we spent a week on the road with our four children crossing into Moldova and eventually Romania where we purchased tickets to Israel. By the time we arrived in Tel Aviv, Maoz’ **I Stand with Israel** already had funds ready for us to purchase food and clothing for the children and even managed to get us good mattresses from the Joseph Project to put on the floor of Yoni’s one room apartment where we’ve been staying. Now we begin the process of finding a more permanent place to live, then registering the kids into new schools and finding work. It is difficult not knowing how long we will be here—one year? Three years? Do we just stay? But for now, it’s just one day at a time.”

Upon arriving in Israel Roma tried to reach his family back in Ukraine. For three days he heard nothing from his sister, Tatyana, her husband, Misha (not their



Roma and their kids about to board a plane after a week of travel

real names), and their two kids. As it turns out, the family had been hiding in their basement with no water, electricity, or cell reception. Realizing they needed to find a way to flee their village, Misha went out to search for help. He needed someone with a vehicle who could give them a ride out of the danger zone. Night fell and Misha didn’t return. Three days later Tatyana was notified that someone who knew him had found him. She never got to see his body, but they brought his clothes for her to identify. ■

- ***The wicked draw the sword and bend the bow to bring down the poor and needy, to slay those whose ways are upright. But their swords will pierce their own hearts, and their bows will be broken.*** (Psalm 37:14-15)

And so we ask that Ukrainians would abandon wickedness and turn to Your upright ways as You break the back of their enemy. Use this time of humbling to reach both Russians and Ukrainian hearts that have been hard toward You. Let knees bow, and tongues confess, that **You are King of Kings and Lord of Lords.**

- **Many mistakes can be made when leaders are tired—or isolated.** We ask You to grant supernatural rest to world leaders making important decisions on very little sleep.
- We’ve seen the photos of Putin “social-distanced” from all his staff. But You can reach him in his inner chambers and his innermost thoughts. **Speak Your words to him** so he will hear them.
- We ask that **Church leaders outside of Ukraine will lead the way** in rescue efforts, **standing up for righteousness during this time.**

- **Forbid that other rogue nations become inspired by the lack of international intervention.**
- Despite the clear moral stance Israel has in regard to Russia’s attacking civilian targets, she has many reasons to be hesitant to take an aggressive and public stance on the matter, one of which is the **Russian military virtually sitting on our border with a significant presence in Syria.** Give Israel wisdom in how to respond privately and publicly.
- We understand that Israel is uniquely in the middle of this conflict. **Help Israeli leadership use Your wisdom** in walking the fine line of being a mediator between Russia and Ukraine and bring resolution to this situation.
- We thank You for the aid sent from Israel and many other nations, the rescue missions, and the doctors lining up to fly out at a moment’s notice. **Protect and guide their work.**
- Grant supernatural protection and Your peace of mind to the women who have fled with their children and are worried for the safety of their husbands, brothers, and fathers. **Show them You are the only safe place to hide.**

Safe and sound after escaping Ukraine—one of orphan girls Alisa cared for is now all grown and raising a family of her own



Marek

Before Alisa immigrated to Israel (and eventually joined the *Maoz Israel* team) she lived in Ukraine. Alisa's connection there with the Sunshine Children's Center for orphans and PTSD kids (whose parents had lost custody rights) began with her volunteering at their summer camps. Though she was doing well in her job as an assistant producer for commercials, she preferred the hands-on work with children in the orphanage. She worked there for almost two years as a social worker before she could no longer resist the inner pull she felt to move to Israel—the land of her ancestors.

It was a hard goodbye for her, and over the years Alisa kept in contact with the staff at the orphanage as well as the children she had cared for—some who were now legally adults and starting their own families. When the war broke out, the orphanage was one of the first places she called. "I knew firsthand that Marek doesn't waste resources." Marek (whose gifting is in helping children suffering from trauma), co-founded the orphanage over 20 years ago and now divides his time between the orphanage and fundraising for it abroad. By chance, he was out of the country when the bombings began and men of fighting age were forbidden from leaving Ukraine.

▲ Marek arrives safely in Switzerland with the orphans from the *Sunshine Children's Center*

Stories from
UKRAINE

The staff hid the kids in the orphanage basement while Marek worked out the details of how to get them out. They piled the kids in the available vehicles and left. What should've been a six-hour drive to the border of Ukraine with Poland took 24 hours because of the masses of people fleeing. In the end, however, they made it out and Marek was there on the other side of the border ready to take them to Switzerland where they would be safe. Marek then returned to the border to help the growing number of refugees—almost entirely made up of women and children. He continues to return to the border to guide refugees to safety and Maoz has already raised thousands of dollars to cover food and transportation costs to help his efforts. Now our focus turns to the staff who stayed behind at the orphanage to prepare for what is coming. As we all understand, by its nature, war always creates more orphans. ■

Valentina with her mother ▶

Circles: Some of the people
Valentina delivers food
and supplies



Valentina

“My birthday falls on February 23rd and so that night my friends threw me a party and we had so much fun. I never dreamed the next morning I would wake up to the sound of bombs. Despite the attacks, I got ready and went to work that day as I had several important appointments. However, the attacks only increased, and I realized I should find a safe place to hide.

“As it turns out, my apartment was the safest place out of all my friends’ homes and so for several days we had 10 people and a dog laid out on mattresses in my living room and hallway. Within a few days, however, we realized the war wasn’t going to stop soon and, one by one, my friends gathered their family members and fled the country.

“The day the last of my friends left I cried bitterly all day. I knew I couldn’t leave. My mother is disabled and there was no way to get her out.

When I went out to get food for my mother and son, I had to learn to drive alongside tanks to get to the grocery store. Several times we had to flee the grocery store because of aerial attacks. I felt such a heaviness for all those around me who didn’t know God and had no one to turn to with their fear and pain. I, on the other hand, could trust in the Lord to protect me, and I was thankful that in the struggle I was able to be a light to those around me.

“Now, there’s a group of us in the neighborhood who volunteer to drive around and deliver items to people who can’t go out on their own. We pool together any money we can find and divide up food and other items for the elderly and handicapped. I know that driving around is dangerous, but it is my choice to make. I may not be a soldier, but I am a fighter, and I will be part of our great victory”. ■



UKRAINE :

The War & The Church

By Shira Sorko-Ram

To understand the complexity of the current Russia-Ukraine conflict, a quick bit of history will help: In the year 1054, an event took place in Christendom that would forever impact the future of the entire world. The greatest schism in church history occurred between the Church of Rome and the Church of Constantinople. In short, the Patriarch of Constantinople and the envoys of the Pope excommunicated each other. It had been a long time coming, as church fathers wrangled over such dogmas as proper ways to fast, differences in their veneration of Mary, and whether the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father only, or also from Yeshua.

Though the Catholic Church has a brutal history of faults and failures, there were periods of revival which birthed new vibrant communities and a return to the Word of God. On the other hand, the Eastern Church consistently took many steps away from Biblical truths without the accompanying seasons of renewal and re-grounding in God's Word.

Russia fell into the Eastern Orthodox sphere. Then, what was left of Eastern Christianity eventually mingled with the local Slavic pagan culture. Award-winning author and student of Russian history Larry Alex Taunton¹ points out: "Consider the fact that Russia never experienced a Renaissance, Reformation, Enlightenment, Scientific Revolution, or Industrial Revolution. These epochs define the West as we know it and define Western thinking, but not Russia, not Ukraine."

The Russian Empire was often isolated from the West culturally, spiritually and linguistically during centuries of the influence of Oriental tyranny. As a result, Russia and Ukraine entered the 20th century with a Middle Ages despotic mentality.

Beginning in the late 15th century when the Mongols' 250-year reign of terror finally ended, a strange split-personality behavior evolved. There were a few powerful rulers and czars who saw Russia's social deficiency

and tried to liberalize the nation by giving rights to citizens, improving the state of peasants, and encouraging education and individual enterprise. However, there were also many evil tyrants who ravaged the land, starved and mass-murdered their people and devastated their cities over and over.

Taunton explains: "[Russian] rulers were always struggling between two impulses: one is westernizing, one is moving back toward dictatorship. And—for eons—they were always going back and forth between the two. Catherine the Great was a westernizer. Her son wasn't. Alexander I was a westernizer followed by Nicolas I who wasn't, followed by Alexander II who was a westernizer, followed by Alexander III who wasn't." So it went back and forth—that struggle between freedom and progress, versus hardline dictatorship and terrorizing the old Russian Slavic way. This pattern has continued to this very moment.

[1] <https://larryalextaunton.com>

It is important to note these extreme political swings continued during the Communist takeover—hellish tyranny in the form of Soviet Marxism lasting from 1917 to 1991. It ended because liberalizers Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin opened the country to capitalism, and ultimately to freedom. During this period, fifteen sovereign states emerged, independent of the former Soviet Union, including Ukraine!

Freedom! Real Freedom!

This period of freedom and liberty created an extravagant opening for Christians around the world to bring the Gospel to these nations whose citizens had been “forced atheists.”

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia welcomed Western influences of many stripes, whether they were economists, capitalists, Christians, Evangelicals—whoever they were—they were allowed in!

There was kind of a naivete that characterized the Soviets. They embraced everyone with enthusiasm. Missionaries from large organizations and small churches flooded Russia with the Gospel. Literally hundreds of thousands of Russians came to faith. Churches and Bible schools sprang up across Russia and the new independent states. Among the Jewish population, Messianic Jewish congregations were birthed in many of these countries.

Jonathan Bernis of *Jewish Voice*, and a board member of *Maoz*, crisscrossed Russia and Ukraine for 12 years, hosting Messianic Jewish concerts, preaching the Gospel and seeing thousands and thousands of Jews and Gentiles come to faith. In 1994, Ari and I had the opportunity to teach for a week in St. Petersburg at his Messianic Bible school. Just months before, this group of young Jews and non-Jews didn't know God existed! Now they came with a deep passion to learn everything we could teach them. It was a unique window of time that, thanks be to God, was not wasted by the people of God!

Schism of 1054



Many new Russian Jewish believers made aliyah to Israel and quickly doubled the number of Messianic Jews in Israel. Today some are pastors, musicians, business people and artists, all working for the Kingdom of God. Several talented members of our *Maoz* team came from Russia and Ukraine.

The Most Recent Pendulum Swing

Then Vladimir Putin became president in the year 2000. By

2012 Russia was already moving to impede foreign missionaries and three years later, their law said all religious meeting places needed to be registered. By 2020, Russian Christians were being persecuted, whether Roman Catholics or Pentecostals, while the Russian Orthodox Church's status was elevated.

Sadly, there is also a tragic element which the West must acknowledge. The West was given a rare opportunity to influence a culture. But besides those

who brought the Gospel came a flood of pornography, sexuality, and every kind of corruption and depravity, notes Taunton. Russians didn't have the historical experience or savvy to figure out what was what. They simply slammed the brakes on everything.

The Wars

Returning to the present crisis: Although Ukraine and Russia have been tied to the same historical heritage, the Ukrainian people have had a deep longing to enjoy their own country, language and culture; they have long been attracted to the self-determination and prosperity of the West. So when the last Romanov czar was suddenly ousted in 1917, Ukraine boldly declared its freedom as a sovereign state and fought against the Bolshevik Red army. They had three years of freedom, until Lenin's Marxist Bolshevik forces swallowed Ukraine back into their Russian empire.

Almost immediately, Russia's Communist leaders demanded that Ukrainian farmers collectivize their farms. Ukrainians rebelled and were horrifically punished by the Soviets with genocide and a forced famine in the 1930's. The manmade Great Famine claimed the lives of some 3.9 million people. The hardest hit area was Ukraine.

When Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, there were Ukrainians who did cooperate with the Nazis, not because they agreed with Germany's ideology, but because they thought they had a better chance of rebirthing their sovereign state under Germany than under Communist Russia. Manipulating that history, Putin's propaganda today explains he



This map, published in *The New York Times* in February 1918 shows the boundaries of the Ukrainian People's Republic, which existed from 1917-1920. Vladimir Putin denies that Ukraine was a sovereign state for those three years. Anyone in Russia claiming this historical fact can be imprisoned for up to 10 years.



Wikimedia Commons (smithsonianmag.com)

Nationalist rally in Kyiv in January 1917 when Ukraine declared itself an independent sovereign state. Contrary to President Putin's misinformation that Ukraine was never an independent state until 1991 at the collapse of the Soviet Union, this picture is one of the many proofs that Ukraine achieved its independence from 1917-1921.

must attack Ukraine to destroy their “Nazi leadership”—despite the fact that both the president and the prime minister of Ukraine are Jewish. During the 74 years of Communist Russia’s tyranny they managed to obliterate 100 million people from the earth—that bit of history Putin leaves out.

Evangelicals Elected to Ukrainian Government

Of Ukraine’s 43 million citizens, 67% of the total population still adheres to Orthodox Christianity. About 2.2% of Ukrainians are Evangelicals (mostly Baptists and Pentecostals) with about 3,000 churches.

Interestingly, the most trusted entities in Ukraine are the Church, trusted by 63%, and the military at 65%.² A year ago,

[2] Christianitytoday.com 10 May 2021

The shortage of good leaders in Ukraine was so intense, political parties started to recruit candidates from Evangelical churches!

a poll showed over two-thirds of Ukrainians distrusted state officials and politicians. President Volodimir Zelensky won because he ran on a platform to wipe out corruption.

For a small minority of 2.2%, there is an unusually large number of Evangelicals present in Ukraine’s government. The shortage of good leaders in Ukraine was so intense, political parties started to recruit candidates from Evangelical churches! In 2020, more than 500 Evangelicals were elected to all levels of government!

After the elections, Nikolay Kuleba, Zelensky’s Ombudsman

for Children, gathered all the winning Evangelical politicians and asked them to ask God: “What is your purpose for me here?”

Kuleba was the only high-level official from the former administration that Zelensky didn’t fire when he came to power. “Believers need to be in the government,” he said.

Recognizing this recent cultural shift towards the Gospel, the coordinator of Ukraine’s National Prayer Breakfast, Pavel Unguryan, said, “Ukraine has become the epicenter of a global spiritual battle... Introducing people to the teachings of Jesus will

change the country and region much faster than the activities of a party.” One can see why the Enemy would like to have Ukraine once again under communist control.

The Church at Work

This war has changed everything. At the very least it has inspired a movement to bring together Baptists, Pentecostals and other newer groups into an informal union so that practically all Ukrainian Evangelicals can now speak with one voice.

Reports of the heroic efforts of Evangelical churches in Ukraine in this war are getting widespread coverage. Church leaders are occupied full time with the refugee chaos. In most cases, pastors send the women and children westward on buses, while they and a small team remain to help more refugees make it to the borders.

One pastor, Ivan Rusyn, stated: “This war has completely redefined my understanding of mission and holistic ministry. You cannot show compassion from a distance.” He and his seven remaining colleagues coordinate relief from the offices of the Ukrainian Bible Society, where he sleeps on the floor at night.

His joy, he says, comes from seeing the smiles on the faces of Ukrainian soldiers who know that the pastors and priests are praying. He plans to stay in Kyiv as long as President Zelensky does.

Rusyn said, “For 70 years the nation was under the bondage of Soviet Communism. But the Ukrainian church used well the 30 years of freedom that we have had. Wherever the Russians are, they restrict born-again believers and institutions, attempting to shut down the robust religious

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tolerance of Ukraine. Christian leaders that remain in Kyiv and other cities are the incarnated witness of Jesus Christ.”

The Gospel has indeed been expanding across Ukraine, including to the Jewish people. In Kyiv, Boris Grysenko pastors the largest Messianic Congregation in all of Europe with over a thousand members, Jonathan Bernis says. “Conservatively I would estimate there are some 80-100 Messianic Congregations in Ukraine (while in Russia there are only estimated to be 10-20 such congregations).”

Where Does Israel Stand?

In the midst of this horrific war, Israel has found herself in a precarious position. While literally all the civilized world is horrified at the war crimes happening on their screens, our citizens are doubly so, because many Israelis have close relatives and friends caught in this carnage. Yet Israel’s Prime Minister is preoccupied with the reality that Russia has placed troops on our northern border since the war in Syria began during the Obama administration. Russia’s excuse for this is that they are protecting Syria.

Nevertheless, there has been an agreement between Israel and Russia permitting Israel to have open skies over Syria to bomb Iranian shipments of weapons on their way to Hezbollah. It is imperative that those skies remain open for Israel’s security.

So P.M. Naftali Bennett may be the only Western leader who has tried to maintain some sort of neutral position. Believe me, he has received plenty of criticism for it. Volodimir Zelensky has not been happy with Bennett. At the same time, Israel is the only country mentioned in the news when it comes to mediating between the two countries. If there is any positive movement towards mediation through Bennett, it is because Israel has solid relations with both sides.

Yet as we Israelis say, it is complicated. Around 400,000 Jews are citizens of Ukraine and are living there now. Israel is ready to bring them all “home” to the Promised Land. At least 100,000 new Jewish immigrants and their families are expected in the next few months. And as always, Israel is sending tons of humanitarian aid to this war-torn nation.

On the other hand, the Israeli government is also concerned for the well-being of 165,000 Jews who are citizens of Russia, and is ready to help them also immigrate to Israel, even though, it is reported the backlog of applications will take nine months to process!

As one commentator said, “It takes a large number of coordinated and committed people to make peace; it takes only one madman to make war.” ■



April 2022

Dear Lover of Israel,

I'm sure, along with us, that **your heart is broken** with the images we see nightly on our television screens. And, believe me, the **stories from the families of our team members have brought the reality of war up close and personal to us.**

There are **many ways to give** to bless others when a crisis of this magnitude occurs. But the **beautiful thing about our relationship with you**, is that we can provide you with an **intentional, immediate, and personal way** to help those suffering through the tragedies of this horrific war.

You've read a few of their stories. You've heard their desperation. And you also are a witness to their FAITH in God almighty!

As we pray for a swift end to this conflict we know that the repercussions of this **will not be solved in a day or two.**

That's why we ask you, this month, alongside your regular gift to Maoz, that you **include a gift for the Ukrainian families** still trying to escape and come settle here in our Land.

This is one of the things we do best—help in times of crisis. **And YOU make this possible.**

We are here for them! **And YOU are right here by our side!**

Your Boots on the Ground,

Kobi and Shani Ferguson

Kobi and Shani Ferguson



COMING THIS SUMMER

MAOZ ISRAEL MUSIC

Worship Tour



July 3-8

MJAA Conference

Messiah College
Grantham, PA

July 13

Night of Worship

The Light Church
Willis, TX

July 15-16

Maoz Israel Conference

Baruch Hashem Congregation
Dallas, TX