

SINCE 1976



Kabul, Afghanistan

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AFGHANLAND

By Shani Sorko-Ram Ferguson

The invasion was complete, the Islamic forces had been repressed and the West was enjoying its dominance in Afghanistan. A western-friendly Afghan leader was put in place, but as it turned out, he wasn't quite able to unite the various Afghan sects. And so, after years of failed efforts, the politicians decided staying in Afghanistan was too costly. After all, you couldn't stay there forever. A pullout was initiated and a treaty was signed to allow the

troops to exit Afghanistan. But before the troops could make it to safety, Islamic forces struck.

You'd be forgiven for thinking I was talking about this year's jaw dropping pullout by allied forces. This was not 2021, the year was 1842. The allied troops who died during the retreat were not U.S. troops but rather British. Sixteen thousand British troops and civilians who fled Kabul would die from the cold, starvation—and an ambush by Afghan forces who reduced the

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Rich in culture, locals enjoy an afternoon in Herat, Afghanistan

retreating band to one survivor. Many believe the survivor was allowed to live to tell the tale and warn future powers not to mess with Afghanistan.

By now—unless you’ve been enjoying the peaceful existence that life without news media can bring—you have seen the heart-wrenching footage coming out of Afghanistan. Desperate Afghans, who cooperated with western allies—or at least grew to enjoy basic human rights—chasing a plane and even clinging to the wings in an insane bid for freedom. Fearful parents passing their kids off to foreign soldiers in hopes of giving them a better life—or just sparing their life. Taliban leaders issuing statements of calm to the masses—then declaring Sharia Law.

As the world watched in horror at the sudden fall of Afghanistan, many of our partners and readers wrote us asking how this change of government will affect Israel. I tried a few times to summarize the situation but found there is so much to say about what is happening there (and some things that can’t be shared until later) I need to give the topic some solid attention.

About Afghanistan

In some ways Afghanistan is a land frozen in time. Its varied landscape could be mistaken for both the Arabian desert and the Swiss Alps. Per its location and largely insignificant international influence, it is an easily forgotten country—until someone capitalizes on its lack of importance and turns it into—say a training base for terrorists. It remains poor according to modern standards, despite sitting on an estimated trillion dollars worth of minerals such as lithium. It is also a fascinating blend of multiple tribes and cultures that both blend with each other, yet remain distinct. Though the population is made up of some 14 tribes, there is a clear Persian influence in their lineage, culture and language. In a strange twist, some anthropologists and many among the Pashtun tribe, Afghanistan’s largest ethnic group, believe they are descended from Israel’s lost tribes. Despite Islam being the dominant religion in Afghanistan, they claim to feel a connection with Jews and the Jewish state. Openly sharing this affection, of course, could get them killed.



Second, Afghanistan is not Lebanon, Syria, Jordan or Egypt meaning, it doesn't border Israel and has never engaged in or threatened a war with modern Israel. Despite the lack of hostilities, Afghanistan has never had official ties with Israel and its new government has stated emphatically in recent weeks it is interested in relations with the U.S. and all regional countries—except Israel.

Third, it is common for Islamic terrorist organizations to be at odds theologically or strategically with each other. So

it's not shocking that ISIS and the Taliban hate each other. To the international community, the Taliban is viewed as less of a threat than ISIS—not because one is less brutal than the other, but because while ISIS was hoping to unite Islamic States across the region and create an Islamic Caliphate empire that would eventually rule the world, the Taliban has, so far, preferred to impose their Shariah rule locally.

It's worth noting that despite the Taliban's clear dominance in Afghanistan, it has yet to prove itself powerful and informed enough to stop the recent bombing at the Kabul airport.

Fourth, the Taliban of today (thanks to the tutelage of the likes of Yasser Arafat and Iran's leaders) has learned a key lesson for all modern-day terrorist organizations if they want to ensure long-term viability. International powers are hesitant to get involved with new wars and, as such, will put up with a lot of nonsense, so long as you say nice things to the news cameras and keep your evil rule within your borders. And so, it comes as no surprise that world powers are doing little to a Taliban who promises to rule fairly, though the reports tell of an opposite reality.

The locals tell of massacres of minorities, door-to-door hunting of non-Muslims and kidnapping of young boys and girls to be turned into fighters or trafficked as brides to Taliban fighters.

When Israel was rebirthed in 1948, Afghanistan's Jewry was estimated to be around 5,000. They were allowed to immigrate to Israel and most left for the Holy Land. By the turn of the 21st century, Afghanistan was down to two Jews—neither of whom liked each other very much. Zablon Simantov and Yitzhak Levi regularly reported each other to the authorities—including to the Taliban—during their rule. The squabbles varied and reportedly included disputes over custodianship of the synagogue's Torah. At one point the Taliban arrested them both, but ultimately released them because they wouldn't stop arguing. The Taliban subsequently confiscated the Torah and

In a strange twist, some anthropologists and many among the Pashtun tribe, Afghanistan's largest ethnic group, believe they are descended from Israel's lost tribes.

a few years later Yitzhak died leaving Zablon the last Jew standing in Afghanistan. Though his wife and daughters moved to Israel in the 90's, Zablon preferred to stay in Afghanistan. The Taliban assured journalists who asked that minorities like Zablon would be protected. But, when death threats began streaming in, Zablon finally fled the only land he'd ever called home.

The reality is that no matter what anyone thinks, there are Muslims who are simply born into a Muslim family (and are therefore officially Muslim) but who want nothing more than to live normal lives. But, there are also strands of Islam that demand ultimate submission to the Quran and the destruction of all who refuse. In fact, the word *Islam* means—submission. But the PC police would have nothing of such talk. They insisted Islam was a peaceful religion. By the time President Bush sent troops into Afghanistan, the war had been defined. It was not a war against radical Islam, it was a war on terror.

I remember thinking when I heard what they were going to fight against, there was simply no way the U.S. and its allies could win. There is no definable way to end terror. How do you win against a concept? An emotion? A strategy? And ultimately, how can you win against an enemy you refuse to identify?

Power Vacuum

That the west—too moral to wipe out a whole society even if it was infested with terrorists and too naïve to realize not everyone dreams of being western—would fail at this war was inevitable. That they would fail so miserably was not. Only time will tell what use the Taliban will find for the weapons and military equipment the U.S. left behind. But the strangest part of this pull out from Afghanistan is not the equipment they abandoned, but the people. Though I'm not sure what is more outlandish—that the U.S. wouldn't do everything it can to bring its own citizens home—or that they have been actively blocking refugees from being absorbed into other countries.

When I watched the U.S. pull out of Afghanistan I couldn't help but juxtapose the similarities of when the British pulled out of the region of then-Palestine in 1948. British troops were exhausted by two world wars and the locals didn't want them there. As expected, within 24 hours of the power vacuum they left behind, war broke out between the Jews and the surrounding Arab countries intent on a land grab (Syria



U.S. Marines patrol as part of Operation Enduring Freedom in Kajaki, Afghanistan

Defining Victory

I was in the U.S. on September 11, 2001. I got a call early that morning from my mother-in-law. "America is under attack and Jews need to lay low," she told me. For a short while everyone was in shock enough to say what they were thinking—"Muslims from the Middle East who hate America and Israel." The U.S. immediately began to plan to "go over there and get them" and some overzealous and extremely ignorant Americans began attacking random Muslims living in the U.S. Very quickly the public conversation began to shift to explain to Americans who knew very little about Islam that being a Muslim doesn't automatically make you a terrorist.

Zablon Simintov, believed to be the last remaining Jew in Afghanistan, prays in the room he called "home" until he fled the country after the recent Taliban takeover.



Alamy Stock Photos/Oleksandr Rubeta

would grab the Golan Heights, Jordan took eastern Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and Egypt snatched up Gaza). The difference between that pullout and the current one is that the land won by the Jews would become a democracy where the population would decide their leadership and who they would worship. Not so in Afghanistan.

While a government that allows the people to vote is a great wonder of the modern world, it is the freedom to worship that makes Israel the Crown Jewel of the Middle East. For sure there are those within Israel who oppose Yeshua; however, Messianic Jews and Christians are protected by the law and free to worship their God.

No matter what they tell you, an Islamic state will never offer that privilege.

Future Afghanistan

There's a lot of chatter—both heavy and hopeful—when it comes to the spiritual future of Afghanistan. Some have approached the reported attacks on minorities in Afghanistan the same way they approach their end-times apocalyptic timeline—an unfortunate necessity to bring about God's plan. But while God can turn evil into good, we are never told to capitulate and accept evil as an inevitability. If that were the case, why not leave the Jews in concentration camps or why defend the freedom to worship in any country?

There may well be a revival in a future Afghanistan, but there is no shame in leaving a war zone that has been taken over by terrorists. In fact, unless God specifically instructs us to stay in a danger zone, it is wisdom to get away from evil people.

We know one day every knee from every tribe will bow to the God of Israel. That includes the tribes of Afghanistan. That day is not yet here. We, however, can participate in the plan which He established before the foundations of the earth. And what greater reward can we look forward to than meeting the Afghans we prayed in at the end of our journey? ●

By the turn of the 21st century, Afghanistan was down to two Jews. At one point the Taliban arrested the two but ultimately released them because they wouldn't stop arguing.

Israeli PM Yitzhak Rabin and PLO Yasser Arafat shake hands after signing the first Oslo Accord with President Bill Clinton in 1993.

HOW IT ALL BEGAN - PART 9

Never Say Never

By Shira Sorko-Ram

Israel was going through her First Intifada hell, infamous for its suicide bombings and killings. The Islamic uprising took center stage in 1987, and Israelis felt as if we were in the shadow of the Valley of Death. For years, as a nation, we would live day-to-day, in survival mode. PLO chief Yasser Arafat urged on his suicide bombers and creative killers—and you never knew where they would appear. It was a bit like the coronavirus of today. The danger was invisible—until it hit.

Just 15 years prior, the Israeli government signed the Jibril Agreement, freeing 1,150 Palestinian terrorists in exchange for three Israeli soldiers. Many of those terrorists morphed into the backbone of the leadership of this First Intifada.

For some unfathomable reason, history records that the First Intifada lasted seven years. The reality for those of us who lived through it was that terrorists attacked us with bombs and

knives and cars and tractors for some 20 years. However, during this first seven-year period, 233 Israeli civilians and 60 IDF soldiers were killed by bombs alone. And 1,400 Israeli civilians and 1,700 soldiers were wounded.

That was only the beginning. Arafat's goal was to make Israeli life intolerable. Terror could hit anywhere. Most people quit riding buses, which were particularly vulnerable. We drove our kids everywhere. Your home was the safest place you could be.

When Yitzhak Rabin was elected prime minister in 1992 at the height of the First Intifada, he began to put into place a plan to end violence and create a Palestinian state. His plan was based on making peace with Yasser Arafat. Rabin's team secretly negotiated with him and Rabin signed the infamous 1993 Oslo I Accord. The violence was

so withering that even Israelis who were strong Zionists began to think that if dividing the country would bring an end to the violence, maybe it was worthwhile.

But for the small Israeli body of believers, this was emotionally a difficult time. We who believed the Bible knew God had given this little piece of land to the Jewish people as an everlasting covenant. And now our own Prime Minister was determined to hand over "the mountains of Israel" to create an Islamic nation. He actually declared that the Bible is not Israel's Title Deed.

In the end, all was for naught. The Oslo Accords was all give and no take. It slowly evaporated and we continued to suffer these attacks until our government finally built a wall separating the Palestinian populations from Israel proper. But that would come much later.

Finding Our Place

In 1991, after our two-year stint in the U.S., we began traveling each week to a congregation in Jerusalem, continuing our plan to move to the Jerusalem area (see April 2021 *MIR The War, the Immigrants and the Training Center* for the story). But when we realized we would be remaining in Ramat HaSharon, a suburb of Tel Aviv, we began looking for a place to worship in Tel Aviv. There were several great pioneer groups in our area, and we finally chose a spirit-filled congregation in Jaffa, led by David Lazarus.

There was a strong presence and a freedom to worship. The services had translation into several languages to accommodate the many new immigrants. David was also an enthusiastic encourager of our call to evangelize and to teach. Arni and Yonit Klein had recently immigrated to Israel and had become our close associates. Together we dreamed and planned of creative ways to reach the lost of Tel Aviv.

Serving Our Messianic Pioneers

Despite our ever-present burden for the lost, we could see there were needs within the local Messianic community. We knew many of the leaders and saw their passionate efforts to build the Kingdom. We were praying for opportunities to serve the Body in Israel when a wonderful surprise from California dropped in our laps. In 1994, a visionary pastor, Tom Barkey, offered to teach at a three-day conference in Israel. He asked us to invite every pastor and



leader in Israel together with their spouses to a lovely hotel in Herziliya, just north of Tel Aviv, all expenses paid!

Some of the local leaders had never been to a hotel in their lives! Tom Barkey ministered from his heart to a hundred leaders and their wives, including a wonderful representation of leaders from the Arab Christian community. (This was the beginning of our close ties with many Arab pastors.)

From the feedback, the conference was a great success. The hunger we saw on the faces of our Israeli brothers and sisters caused us to realize that God's pioneers in Israel, and especially the Messianic leadership who were often struggling against great odds, had little opportunity to receive encouragement and spiritual nourishment.

These faithful leaders soaked it in, rested, received the Word, and had wonderful fellowship.



Ari and Shira share at the first national leadership conference (top)

Leaders from all over the country enjoy fellowship and building new relationships

They were from many different persuasions and theological perspectives, and many made new and lasting friendships at this conference.

In subsequent conferences we hosted, Pastor Jack Hayford, also from California, was the keynote speaker two years in a row. Pastor Jack sponsored half the costs, and Maoz raised the other half. After the heartbreaking loss of our own congregation while we were in the U.S. because of our son's need for special

education, we were greatly encouraged to see the unifying influence these conferences were generating.

To Russia with Love

In the autumn of 1994, we were invited to Russia where Jonathan Bernis was conducting massive Messianic outreach concerts with tens of thousands of Jews and non-Jews coming to the Lord. Hosting concerts in many Russian cities, he saw at least 250,000 respond to invitations to stand publicly and pray. From the followup cards, 50% were Jewish or had at least one Jewish grandparent. Jonathan understood that to sustain this incredible awakening, he had to create discipleship models.

His first Bible school opened in St. Petersburg with 108 students. (Many of these new Jewish believers later made *aliyah* to Israel and became leaders in the Messianic movement.)

Jonathan invited us to teach in his brand-new Bible school. We spent

a week there and poured into them everything we could. We taught them foundational truths of the Bible—from Abraham to Moses to Yeshua the Messiah! When my mother (Freda Lindsay) heard about what was happening, she called us insisting that we move to Russia for a while to help disciple the huge number of new believers because of the massive harvest taking place in that moment.

We knew we needed divine help if we were going to be doing street outreach in this dangerous environment so we fasted for three days.

The Lost City of Tel Aviv

But our passion for the lost always turned our hearts to ask the Lord, how can we reach the lost sheep of Tel Aviv? When we returned to Israel, we began planning a music and street drama presentation with our partners Arni and Yonit. We would shoot for the biggest outreach we knew how to implement—on the famous Dizengoff Square.

The first night arrived. We set up our “stage” on the sidewalk. Speakers, mixers, lights, instruments. The backdrop was hung between two trees. The steps in front of us formed a natural amphitheater leading up to a fountain. Buses and cars belched smoke and blared horns. Around this large city plaza in the heart of Tel Aviv, the little stores sold falafel, pizza on Arab bread, smoothies and shwarma—lamb on the rack. As we turned on the stage lights, a crowd began to gather.

Meanwhile, two blocks away at Avi Mizrachi’s Dugit Messianic Bookstore and Outreach Center, he and a group of volunteers—ready to witness and share—gathered from 5-7:00 p.m. to pray for the outreach that evening. At 7:00 p.m., they came to the plaza where they would pray until time to start. Intercessors had come from all over the country.

At 8:00 p.m. our band began to play and within minutes the



steps were full. Even above, along the railing, people were standing as far as possible for them to still see the “show.” Not a spot was left. In fact, people were trying to push in, but could not.

As Arni began to play his saxophone, “*Who is like thee O Lord,*” the air became electrified. Our ad hoc band played a few more songs. Pioneer leader, Eitan Shishkoff was on the drums and I was on the keyboard. With bandannas and baseball caps, we didn’t radiate “religion.” The crowd did not know we were offering this music as worship to our King, but they loved it.

For our last number, Arni, with his Bob Dylan-type voice closed out the final chorus with (translation from Hebrew):

- *They died in the wilderness,*
- *They died in the exile,*
- *We are dying in our country,*
- *We are dying in our soul.*

Immediately, the drama kicked in featuring Ayal Frieden, a Messianic leader who was also a professional dancer. He mimed the story of a “seeker” who tries

Ayal Frieden mimes the role of the “Seeker” in Tel Aviv outreach (left)

Section of the packed stairs in Dizengoff where Israelis sat riveted for the entire presentation



300 Tel Avivians came to Dugit to hear more about Yeshua.

Every chair and table (that had only been delivered hours before) was filled with hungry people who spoke of their own heartbreak and listened to the Good News about the redeeming blood of Yeshua the Messiah. Between 800-900 people sat through the 30-minute music drama and appeal and call to repentance, explaining how our Messiah brings us back to God.

Over a dozen pastors and leaders from Tel Aviv,

Netanya, Haifa and Jerusalem participated in the outreach. This was a turning point for us. Besides the outreaches we were planning ourselves, we collaborated on outreaches in concert with other members of the Body in Israel. What we all understood and became painfully evident, is that there were not enough laborers to take in this harvest.

In October 1994, six months after our initial outreach, a suicide bomber blew himself up on a bus passing where we had been on Dizengoff Street. Twenty-one Israelis and one foreigner were killed.

We knew we needed divine help if we were going to be doing street outreach in this dangerous environment. So we decided to fast three days a month, for six months starting in December 1994. We called on our Maoz readers and anyone in our country who wished to join us. Many wrote they would pray and fast with us.

everything the world has to offer before finally, on the verge of giving up entirely, he turns to God. At the end of the drama, the “seeker” held up a large mirror to the crowd of everyone from everyday shoppers to drug addicts and drunkards, to soldiers, homeless yuppies and even holocaust survivors. Ari then got up and spoke about how God brings freedom from bondage to the hopeless.

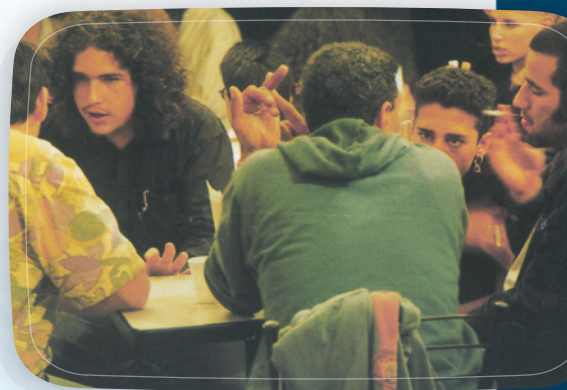
Believers from all over the country came to witness the event and be available to share the Bread of Life with the hungry. They sat among the crowd, and after the drama ended, initiated conversations with the people on the steps. The second night we invited those interested to go to Dugit Coffee House a couple of blocks away. Twenty-five Israelis arrived with Avi Mizrachi waiting to seat the people and give them materials to read. The third night there was a complete flood of people trying to get into Dugit. Over the three nights, more than

Decisions to be Made

In the month of May 1995, we, together with seven congregations, staged two performances in Jerusalem, under slightly different circumstances. That these performances were done at all was a great miracle in hostile Jerusalem. But we knew that many of our readers had been fasting and praying for both our conferences and the outreaches.

The security situation was deteriorating in the land. You never knew where the next attack would be. In one *Maoz Israel Report* of 1994 I wrote, “Israelis are becoming more desperate, more broken and more open to turning back to God. It is the Time.” Great unity had begun to blossom from the time spent together by leaders in the leadership conferences. Now it was time for fruit to come from these street outreaches.

In the summer we held another three-night music drama outreach in the heart of Tel Aviv. It was even more effective than the year before. But we were not seeing how all these interested people—some really seeking—could be



The Dugit coffee house was crowded to overflowing for hours with Israelis asking questions about the drama they had just seen

taken care of. There needed to be an Israeli congregation that was totally in the Hebrew language, geared to bringing lost Israelis to faith, and then working with them to get them solidly in the Word of God and ready to multiply themselves. But we had promised ourselves to never pastor a congregation again.

You Are Pioneers—So Pioneer!

One night Ari and I were sitting in our living room. I looked at him and said, “Ari, have you ever thought of starting another congregation?” He looked straight ahead and said, “I’ve been thinking about it.”

We spoke with Paul Liberman, a friend of several decades and board member of Maoz. Besides being a Messianic leader of a congregation in the States and later in Israel, he was a very successful businessman and strategist.

He said to us, “You guys have pioneered a number

of assignments from the Lord. For example, you pioneered helping many Messianic Jews to make aliyah, knowing that the government was very much against believing immigration.

You brought together Israeli leaders throughout the country to sit under ministers who have much experience and wisdom in hearing from God. You also worked to promote unity among our pioneer leaders, spread thinly around the country, by

helping them get to know one another.”

He continued, “Today in Israel, there are congregations in languages of Russian, English, Ethiopian, Arabic and even Spanish. But there are very few solely in the Hebrew language.

You’ve always wanted to participate in breaking through the Israeli cultural barrier that Jews who believe in Yeshua is a completely foreign western phenomenon. And I know your greatest passion has always been to reach Sabra (native-born) Israelis. So your assignment should be to raise up a Spirit-filled Hebrew speaking congregation, practicing the gifts of the Spirit and celebrating the Biblical Jewish holidays so that when new believers and seekers come to your services, they will feel completely at home with the language and the culture.”

The Elephant in the Room

When Paul said these words to us, we instantly knew he had given us a revelation. A reality check. We were used to doing a bunch of stuff at the same time. Our hearts were continually thinking about multiple ways to help build God’s kingdom in Israel. But Paul shined a laser beam on our deepest desire, to focus on the elephant in the room! We had our marching orders and our Kingdom assignment.

We spoke to pastors of the congregations in the Tel Aviv area, letting them know we



Ari and Shira hosted Jack Hayford at two of their national leaders conferences

felt we were to start a new “Hebrew language only” congregation in Ramat HaSharon, with a heart for evangelism and training new believers. They all blessed us and encouraged us to begin.

Together with our little team, Arni and Yonit, and one other Israeli believer, pharmacist Hannah, Ramat Hasharon Congregation would have its first meeting on Sept 24, 1995, the eve of the Feast of Trumpets, also known as the Israeli New Year 5756. That congregation would eventually be renamed Tiferet Yeshua (the Glory of Yeshua).

The day our congregation was born, Israeli Prime Minister Rabin and Arafat met in Egypt and signed the Oslo II Accords, solidifying for the first time on paper the Israeli intent for a future Palestinian State. The next few months would quickly prove what a mistake that signing was. ●

To be continued next month...

The day our congregation was born, Israeli Prime Minister Rabin and Arafat met in Egypt and signed the Oslo II Accords.

October 2021

Shalom from Jerusalem!

If you ever watched *Schindler's List* or the *Hiding Place* or heard the stories of Oscar Schindler and Corrie Ten Boom, and wished you could have lived in a time where you could save lives like that – well, you do.

This very month, **Maoz has the privilege to come to the aid of believers who are being affected by the turmoil in the Middle East.** And you can help us do that.

One of the things we love about our Maoz ministry family is how such a small team of about a **dozen staff members in Israel can streamline so much activity across the country.** As such, whenever we partner with another organization or ministry, we look for people who function in the same way – **simple yet impactful.**

Because of our **unique position in the Middle East,** we can connect with those on the ground in high-risk areas who are working to protect families. **You can work together with us** to help them begin their lives anew free from the terrorism of radical agendas.

We cannot give many details right now because of security concerns, but **AFTER** the fact, **we will be able to share with you exactly what your "RESCUE" gift this month helped make happen.** And we CAN say, you will be transforming lives with your gift.

We know you wish to make a difference, and **you can make one today with your special "RESCUE" gift** along with your regular gift to us. God will receive the glory. Lives will be changed. **And you will receive your reward.** It's as simple as that!

Blessings and shalom,

Kobi and Shani Ferguson

Kobi and Shani Ferguson



There are **MANY** worthy causes... You need a **TRUSTED** way to help them.

We want YOU to be confident when you give to make a change. That is why Maoz Israel has been a trusted member of the ECFA since 2002 and has been awarded GuideStar's highest Platinum Seal rating for transparency and integrity.



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