

Blow the Shofars. It's Time for the World to Wake Up

This past Sunday night marked the beginning of the biblical holy day known as the sounding of the trumpets. Originally, it marked the beginning of the first day of the seventh month on the biblical calendar, and then, over time, it developed into the Jewish new year, known as Rosh Hashanah.

But what was its original significance? What was the purpose of the day?

Other biblical holy days are quite specific in terms of their purpose and meaning. During the Passover, the Jewish people remember their deliverance from Egyptian bondage. On the Day of Atonement, the nation asks for mercy and forgiveness. But what about the sounding of the trumpets (or more precisely, the blowing of the shofars, the rams horns)? What does that signify?

This is what the Scriptures teach in the book of Leviticus: "And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to the people of Israel, saying, In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe a day of solemn rest, a memorial proclaimed with blast of trumpets, a holy convocation. You shall not do any ordinary work, and you shall present a food offering to the LORD.'" (Lev. 23:23–25)

That's it. Nothing more. Nothing as to the purpose of this sacred convocation.

Is there anything else in the Bible to tell us about the significance of this day?

Actually, there is, in the book of Numbers.

There we read: "On the first day of the seventh month you

shall have a holy convocation. You shall not do any ordinary work. It is a day for you to blow the trumpets, and you shall offer a burnt offering, for a pleasing aroma to the LORD: one bull from the herd, one ram, seven male lambs a year old without blemish; also their grain offering of fine flour mixed with oil, three tenths of an ephah for the bull, two tenths for the ram and one tenth for each of the seven lambs; with one male goat for a sin offering, to make atonement for you; besides the burnt offering of the new moon, and its grain offering, and the regular burnt offering and its grain offering, and their drink offering, according to the rule for them, for a pleasing aroma, a food offering to the LORD.” (Num. 29:1–6)

Well, we see that lots of animal sacrifices were involved in the celebration of the day, but still nothing more is told us about the day’s significance. Could it be that the meaning was somewhat self-evident?

In the ancient Israelite community, the blowing of the shofar served different purposes, some involved with warfare, some involved with the community moving from location to location (this applied to their days wandering in the wilderness). But in all cases, the shofar was an attention getter, a wake-up call, a call to action.

Here, falling just 10 days before the most sacred day of the year, the Day of Atonement, it serves as a wake-up call to the conscience of the nation.

As explained by Moses Maimonides (1135-1204) and translated vibrantly by the Jewish scholar Avraham Yaakov Finkel, “Wake up from your sleep, you sleepers! Arise from your slumber, you slumberers! Examine your deeds! Return to God! Remember your creator! Those of you who forget the truth in the futilities of the times and spend all year in vanity and emptiness, look into your soul, improve your ways and your deeds. Let each of you abandon his evil ways and his immoral thoughts.” (Laws of

Repentance, 3:4)

This is underscored by the fact that, often in the Bible, the number 10 signifies testing (see, for example, Daniel 1:12; Revelation 2:10). And so, with 10 days from the blowing of the shofar to the Day of Atonement, the Jewish people saw this (and still see this) as a time of divine testing, a time when their lives are weighed in the balances by the Lord.

For me, though, as a Jewish follower of Jesus, this time of the year extends beyond the people of Israel. In my own spirit, I hear it as a wake-up call to the whole world, starting with Israel and extending to the Church, but to all the world as well. (I do not mean in terms of a formal celebration or obligation. I'm simply sharing what I feel in my own heart at this time of the year.)

It's as if the blowing of the shofar reminds the world that one day, we will all stand before God and give account. That one day, our lives will be weighed in the balance by our Creator and Judge. That one day, the books will be opened and nothing will be hidden.

Those of us who have fled for mercy and taken refuge in the Messiah's sacrificial death can rejoice that our sins have been forgiven and we have been reconciled to God. And yet, as stewards over our lives, the New Testament teaches that we will give account as well, not in terms of our salvation but in terms of what we did with our lives (see Romans 14:12; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

As for those who mock God or think that they can commit evil acts with impunity, this sacred time of the year is for them as well. Wake up from your slumber and self-deception. The Judge is at the door.

To quote Maimonides again: "Wake up from your sleep, you sleepers! Arise from your slumber, you slumberers! Examine your deeds! Return to God! Remember your creator! Those of you

who forget the truth in the futilities of the times and spend all year in vanity and emptiness, look into your soul, improve your ways and your deeds. Let each of you abandon his evil ways and his immoral thoughts.” {eo}

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