

PP **Nehemiah: When the Shofar Blows...**

Text Nehemiah 8:1-2

Part 25, 1/26-27, 2013

On what day did God create the world, and what day did He create Adam?
 On what day did Adam sin and then receive forgiveness from God?
 On what day will the righteous dead be resurrected and given eternal life?
 On what day did Abraham tie up Isaac his son in order to sacrifice him?
 The answer to all of these, according to Jewish tradition, is *Rosh Hashanah*

We'll return to this Jewish holy day in a few moments

Let's look at our text before us: ***"And all the people gathered...on the first day of the seventh month."*** **8:1-2**

It is easy to read of this date and miss its significance, so this sermon is all about this date

PP (Chart of Jewish Calendars) The Jews used two different calendars

One is called the sacred or religious calendar and the other the civil calendar

The *sacred calendar* corresponded to their holy days, each month starting the new moon

The *civil calendar* corresponded with the agricultural seasons which started with the early rains

In **2:1**, the month is Nisan, mid-March to Mid-April, when Nehemiah gained the king's favor to go back to Jerusalem to rebuild

In chapter **6:15**, we saw that the wall was completed on the 25th day of Elul, which is approximately mid-August to mid-September on our calendar

Now in **8:2** we see that Nehemiah assembled all the people again on the first day of the seventh month Tishri, around our mid-September

Look with me at the reason why this day was significant for the Jews

PP ***"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."*** **Leviticus 23:24-25**

God commanded this to be a memorial festival, but it had no name other than *Yom T'ruah*
Yom is Hebrew for day, and *Ruah* loud noise, or the blowing of a horn

This day came to be called the **Feast of the Trumpets**

It was not so much a holiday as it was a holy day

Not as strict as the Sabbath day, but everyday work and regular duties could not be performed

All manner of daily life was to recede into the background and the thoughts of the people turned forward to the coming Day of Atonement as well as the Feast of Tabernacles

You see, the Feast of Trumpets kicked off the fall festivals of the Jews

On Tishri 10, the Day of Atonement occurred, and on Tishri 15, the Feast of Tabernacles

4 long months went by since they planted their fields, hoping and praying for good crops

Now the harvest had been finished, the storehouses full, and it was time to celebrate their faithful God

Nehemiah assembled the people on Tishri 1, the Day of the Feast of Trumpets, a festival to remember God's faithfulness to them, seen clearly in the completion of their wall

PP (Psalm 81:1-3) In later times, while the drink offering of the sacrifice was being poured out, the priests and Levites chanted Psalm 81 and in the evening sacrifice they sang Psalm 29. 6 of the 7 high holy days of the Jews took place under a bright moon, but the Feast of Trumpets. It took place when there was a new moon, where the primary night light was at its darkest, a bare sliver in the night sky.

On the 30th day of the month, watchmen were placed around Jerusalem to watch the night sky. As soon as each of them detected the moon he hurried to a house in the city to report to the president of the Sanhedrin, who confirmed the new moon, and then would stand up utter the words, "It is consecrated."

The signal fire on the Mt. of Olives would be lit, and sent through mountain top signal fires throughout the land, signaling Tishri 1, the start of the Feast of the Trumpets.

The Feast of Trumpets reminded of when Israel was in dark times, when hope had dimmed. It was a day to remember what happened to their ancestors who turned away from God, and His faithful love to bring them back.

Psalm 81 instructed them to remember their deliverance from Egypt, during those dark 400 years.

And the day centered around the blowing of the trumpets.

Israel had a few different horns and one of them was the silver trumpet.

But on this day, the main trumpet was the *shofar*, which could be made from any animal's horn except for those of oxen or calves.

They did not want to remind God of their people's worship of the golden calf at Mount Sinai.

The most common shofar was the ram's horn.

A shofar made from a ram's horn was a reminder of God's faithfulness to Abraham as He provided a sacrifice in the ram, as a substitute for Isaac.

PP The rabbis had a saying that went, "*The shofar was created for the welfare of Israel.*"

It was blown to signal the Israelites to gather for war, or warning of danger.

It was also blown at the start of the Jubilee year, when slaves were released from their debt, and it was blown when a new king came to the throne.

But its main use was as a call to worship, particularly to bow down in worship.

In fact, this happened in the Roman-occupied city as the shofar was blown in the morning temple service and thinking it was a revolt, the soldiers massacred hundreds of Jews.

PP The blast of the shofar was a reminder that their God was sovereign: "***God has gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a trumpet.***" **Psalm 47:5**

PP It was not an easy instrument to master and though it wasn't a musical instrument, the priest chosen to blow it was trained for this calling since a youth.

He would raise the horn to his lips and gather a lungful of air, and send the haunting notes through the temple mount to stir the people to repentance.

Only a shofar in perfect condition could be used and it usually was fitted with a gold mouthpiece.

It could be carved but not painted, and a curved or bent horn was preferred to show the proper attitude of sorrow one ought to have before the Lord during this 10 day period.

Three times, the shofar would sound, followed each time by blasts of a silver trumpet by two Priests, intending to echo the mournful call of the ram's horn.

The purpose of the Feast of Trumpets was to pierce the soul to repentance, moving the Israelites to look into their hearts and then upward to God for mercy.

The three blasts from the shofar each represented the three major themes of the Feast:

PP The *first blast*, a long unwavering blast, emphasized the theme that **God is the King over all**

PP The *second*, three short, broken blasts, the theme of remembering **God's covenant He made** and His faithfulness to keep it

PP And the *third*, a long, nine-part staccato blast, sounding like sobbing, reminding how the wicked cry and tremble in the fear of God on the day of judgment the theme of the shofar, and the **deliverance of God**

In between each blast, 10 verses of Scripture must be recited in accord to each theme

But it was forbidden to read scriptures of God's divine punishment, as the Feast was about the mercy of God and His willingness to forgive

PP Judaism developed the Feast of Trumpets into a 2 day festival known today as Rosh Hashanah, which literally means *Head of the year*

I want to spend the rest of this sermon helping us understand what is significant of Rosh

Hashanah and how we can understand the Jewish mind as bring the gospel to them

It is the Jewish New Year celebration

By AD 70, the temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed by Rome, and now the Feast of Trumpets became a matter of helping the Jews survive spiritually as a nation scattered

It became a 2 day festival because it was especially difficult to determine when the actual day of the new moon had arrived, and how to communicate that to the scattered Jews

Jewish tradition taught that on Rosh Hashanah, Satan appears before the Almighty to accuse Israel as the books for judgment are opened

The ancient rabbis, therefore, suggested, that the blasts of the shofar confused Satan, leading him to believe that the Messiah had arrived and his authority had ended

It became customary to sound a total of 100 shofar blasts on each of the two days of Rosh Hashanah synagogue services

PP The Rabbis began to teach that *"On the New Year, all the inhabitants of the world pass before Him like flocks of sheep"*

They taught that God opened 3 books: one for the completely righteous; one for the completely wicked; and one for the average person

When God sees the completely righteous, He immediately inscribes their names in the book of life, and for the completely wicked, He writes their names in the book of death

But the average, most of mankind, are kept in suspense for 10 days of awe, until Yom Kippur, or the Day of Atonement

These 10 days are given to them to have time to repent, so the shofar blasts on Rosh Hashanah were meant as a call for God's people to repent and avert God's judgment by asking for God's mercy

As we learn to love our Jewish friends, it is important that we understand the significance of their beliefs, which is why I took a sermon to expand on the Feast of Trumpets, or its modern holy day, Rosh Hashanah

In 2013, will be celebrated the evening of Wednesday, September 4th and conclude the evening of Friday, September 6th

Our New Year celebrations are done with excitement and joy and celebration

The Jewish New Year is a time of solemn self-evaluation first, and joy second
 There is a tremendous benefit in having a regular time of reflecting on God's sovereignty, His
 covenant promises to be faithful, and His ability to deliver us from the power of judgment
 On these two days, the Jews look back at the mistakes of the previous year, and plan the changes
 they must make for the new year

This brings in what the Jewish people call, the *10 Days of Awe*

That during these 10 days, God reviews the books of judgment on Tishri 1, and hands out his
 final judgment on Tishri 10, on *Yom Kippur*, whether they will live or die

Therefore, the Jewish New Year of Rosh Hashanah is a time of reflection intended to powerfully
 move them to repentance

PP The common greeting during the 10 days of awe is "*May you be inscribed [in the book of
 life] for a good year!*"

So important is Rosh Hashanah that preparations begin a month in advance

Special prayers of repentance are recited a week in advance, pious Jews get up early to pray
 heart-wrenching prayers, and many attend public baths for ritual cleansing

Judaism teaches that man was created with both good motives and evil motives

Each person must choose to obey God's law rather than follow his evil tendencies and reap
 judgment

Even a perfectly righteous person by one sin at the end of his life, destroys all his former deeds

PP And a rabbi will support this from **Ezekiel 33:12**, "*The righteousness of the righteous shall
 not deliver him when he transgresses...*"

Insisting that a person must sincerely repent by the Day of Atonement so that the scale of God's
 judgment can be tipped in favor of good

This is why Rosh Hashanah is so important: it is to remind the people of their righteous
 sovereign God, who will be faithful to forgive if they repent, so the blasts of the shofar
 usher in that time of sorrow and reflection

Despite the solemn tone of Rosh Hashanah, there is a joyful side to it as well

As the synagogue services end, the worshipers are to leave in a joyful mood, confident that God
 has compassionately heard their sincere prayers and the call of the shofar

Therefore they wear white for joy, eating and drinking and rejoicing in the conviction that God
 will perform miracles for them

They adopt this custom from our text in **Nehemiah 8:10**, "Then he said to them, "***Go your way.
 Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready,
 for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your
 strength.***"

The dinner table is set with the finest of dinnerware and all things bitter are avoided as such food
 is considered an omen of bitter times to come

Nothing is eaten that bears a reminder to God of their sin

PP (Pic of bread/honey) They often eat apples, symbolic of God's glorious presence, dipped in
 honey, a symbol for their wishes for a sweet new year

There is a special braided, round loaf of egg bread that is baked in the shape of a crown,
 reminding them of the kingly theme and desire for a long span of life

PP (Pic of Tashlich) They will often participate in a ‘casting off’ ceremony, where small pieces of bread are put in their pockets, to be emptied into a body of flowing water with fish in it, symbolically casting off their sins as the water carries them into the deep
Sometimes they hold small pieces of paper, that have the sins that they are letting go of

What developed from the Feast of Trumpets to the modern day Rosh Hashanah is beautiful in its imagery and so clearly points to what the Jewish people are looking for in their Messiah

The Feast of Trumpets was instituted by God as an arrow toward a future fulfillment

PP In fact, according to Marvin Rosenthal, all of the festivals of Israel “*commence at Calvary where Jesus voluntarily gave Himself for the sins of the world (Passover), and climax at the establishment of the Messianic kingdom at the Messiah’s second coming (Tabernacles).*”

PP He writes, “*These seven feasts depict the entire redemptive career of the Messiah.*”

PP This great horn will be blown when Jesus comes again for His people: “***For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God.***” 1 Thessalonians 4:16

This is why Jewish gravestones are so often decorated with a shofar

And the response for us, as well as for every Jew is this: the day to repent is today!

And repentance is a turning away from sin by forsaking it, and this is the aim of Rosh Hashanah

But biblical repentance is more, it is turning toward God by putting complete trust in Him and His redeemer, Jesus Christ, *Yeshua Messiah*

PP “***Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in Him.***” Psalm 2:12

When you do, he takes your sin and plunges them into the depths of the sea to be gone forever

The sound of His shofar will be sweet to your ear not terrifying

Your name will be forever inscribed into the lamb’s book of life!

Nehemiah assembled the people on the day of the Feast of the Trumpets, and next week we will see the incredible revival that broke out

Pray