



Minutes With Messiah

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Sound the Trumpet

The Feast of Trumpets of the Jewish calendar begins the evening of September 17 this year. Here in the United States, the name of the feast conjures up the brass section of an orchestra, perhaps, or of the straight trumpets used by English heralds even today. Christian art pictures the end of the world with Gabriel blowing the herald's trumpet, ignoring that the Christian scriptures never attribute such an action to Gabriel.

The actual "trumpet" in question, however, is the *shofar*. This is made from the horn of a clean animal other than the beef. Usually it is made of the horn of a ram or an antelope, but may be made of sheep or goat horn as well. It is particularly not to be straight, but must have at least some curve to it.

The Jewish sages further developed certain rules about the *shofar*. No alterations were to be made to the horn to improve its sound. While it may be decorated with metal designs, the interior of the horn was not to be lined with metal to make it sound better. Any holes were not to be covered so as to change the note of the horn. Further, it was not to be boiled or steamed in order to straighten or further curve it. In essence, it was to be a naturally occurring horn to give a natural note.

The directions for the Feast of Trumpets are found in Leviticus 23:24-25:

In the seventh month, in the first day of the month, shall ye have a sabbath, a memorial of blowing of *shofars*, an holy convocation. Ye shall do no servile work therein: but ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD.

No other command or explanation is given. Just blow the trumpet, make an offering, and do no constructive work. God doesn't explain his reasons, as he does for the Sabbath and Pesach (Passover). He commands, and that is it. There is one possible reason for the holiday that bears emphasizing.

One of the traditional uses of the *shofar*, indeed of the modern trumpet, is the sounding of a warning in times of danger. It can be heard at a much greater

distance than a human voice, and be distinguished even in the babble of battle.

In the blowing of the *shofar* we are reminded that we are in danger. The adversary is approaching. We are in a battle with the Evil Inclination. Temptations surround us and besiege us daily. Once a year, ten days before the Day of Atonement, the *shofar* is sounded to remind people of sin and call them to repentance. Ten days, it says. Ten days and then comes Yom Kippur. Recall that you are in danger, and repent.

Jeremiah lived in a time of religious reform. The book of the Law had been found. The Temple worship and the calendar had been restored. And yet the people did not repent of their idolatry. They would worship at the Temple, and then go home to their shrines and idols. Perhaps it was around the start of the year, the Feast of Trumpets, when God told him (Jer 6:17), "Also I set watchmen over you, saying, Hearken to the sound of the trumpet. But they said, We will not hearken." Perhaps they had just come from hearing the 100 blasts of the *shofar*, and God was telling him that it had done no good. As a priest, perhaps even Jeremiah had been the person to blow the *shofar*, and now God was telling him that, just as the people had not listened to that horn, they would not listen to the man who was God's *shofar*, Jeremiah himself.

May God never say of us that we had ignored the sounding of the *shofar*. May we hear, and repent.

To hear the actual sounds of a *shofar*, please go to my web page www.geocities.com/riversidecoc/shofar.html.

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The Scapegoat

And he shall take the two goats, and present them before the LORD at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats; one lot for the LORD, and the other lot for the scapegoat. And Aaron shall bring the goat upon which the LORD'S lot fell, and offer him for a sin offering. But the goat, on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat, shall be presented alive before the LORD, to make an atonement with him, and to let him go for a scapegoat into the wilderness. (Lev 16:7-10)

And when he hath made an end of reconciling the holy place, and the tabernacle of the congregation, and the altar, he shall bring the live goat: And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness: And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited: and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness. (Lev 16:20-22)

This is the rule for the “scapegoat” on which the sins of Israel were placed yearly. As the passage says, the goat bore the sins into the wilderness, where it

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virtually identical.

presumably died of exposure or was eaten by the wild beasts. What the passages do not say, but is told by the Jewish sages, is that a red cloth was tied to the horns of the goat. The man accompanying the goat to the wilderness was not to release it until the cloth turned white, signifying the sin offering had been accepted. It is further recorded that for about the forty years leading up to the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans the cloth remained red. The beginning of the

period in which the scapegoat's bearing of the sins was no longer accepted, as indicated by the cloth, was the time of the death of Jesus of Nazareth.

I have read the above account in a number of Messianic Jewish books. Each author used the story to illustrate that Jesus was the final, perfect sin offering. Because of the efficacy of his death the offering of a goat and the laying sins on the scapegoat were no longer necessary or useful. Whether you accept the legend or not, it is true that Jesus removed the need for a yearly sin offering and the scapegoat.

What I would like to do, though, is look at some reasons the people might have feared the cloth would not turn white. Why would the sin offering not be accepted or effective?

The High Priest

It is said that when the High Priest went into the Holy of Holies at Yom Kippur during the last couple of centuries of the Temple, a scarlet rope was tied to his foot. A priest in the Holy Place tended the other end of this rope. The rope had a purpose. If the High Priest's sins were not atoned for properly, he would die in the presence of the *shekinah*, the glory of God that filled the Holy of Holies. Since nobody else could enter that part of the Temple without also dying, the priests felt they needed a way to retrieve the body of the High Priest, if necessary. That was the purpose of the rope—to pull the body out.

Many of the High Priests under the Romans were Sadducees who had bought the position. Some may not even have known the Hebrew language and had to memorize the words they were to speak during the ceremony. There was a real fear that they were so ignorant of the requirements of their position that they would make a mistake, or even be smitten because they had not truly repented.

Compare with them the High Priest after the order of Melchizedek who offered himself as a perfect offering. “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” (Heb 4:15-16) We need not tie a rope to our High Priest, for he had no sin. The offering will not be rejected because of his sin. The cloth will not stay red on his account.

The Offering

The second fear of the people might have been that the sin offering itself was unsatisfactory. The requirements were pretty strict. They had to be without blemish, as all offerings. Traditionally, the two goats chosen for Yom Kippur had to be virtually identical. In fact, that was the original reason for the cloth on the horns. When the scapegoat was chosen by lot, the cloth was put on its horns so that it would not accidentally be mistaken for the goat of sin offering. If either goat was less than perfect, the offering would be rejected.

Since our High Priest is also our sin offering, we don't have to worry about the perfection of the sacrifice. As his sinlessness made him an acceptable High Priest, so it also made him an acceptable sacrifice.

For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation. (Heb 9: 24-28)

Jesus was such an acceptable offering for sin that it was effective for all time. The goat for Yom Kippur had to be chosen yearly. Not so our sacrifice who was once and forever offered for sin. And after that time, nobody ever needs fear that the sacrifice will not be accepted.

The Attitude

The third reason the people could realistically fear that the sin offering would be rejected was that there might be those among them who had not repented. Some might not have approached Yom Kippur with the right attitude.

The Ten Days from the Feast of Trumpets to Yom Kippur are called the Days of Awe (September 18-27 this year). They are a period of reflection and repentance. The trumpets were blown every day to remind the people to repent. And yet, there was the possibility (maybe even a probability through some of their history) that the nation as a whole had not

repented. Even the blood of the most perfect goat could not cover sins not repented of.

And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but deceitfully, saith the LORD. And the LORD said unto me, The backsliding Israel hath justified herself more than treacherous Judah. (Jer 3:10-11)

Jeremiah had to admit that the attitude of the people in offering legitimate sacrifices was not correct. Even Israel, who offered no sacrifices, was better than Judah, who did. Even though the offering was pure and according to the law, the people could still be held to be guilty. The cloth on the goat could still remain red.

Although we have a perfect High Priest who is a perfect sin offering, it is still possible for that offering to be ineffective. God is not going to reject the High

The Days of Awe are a period of reflection and repentance.

Priest or the sin offering. But we can make it ineffective in our own lives by our attitude toward sin. Jesus said those who would not repent would perish (Lk 13:3,5). The psalmist says that it is our choice. "Our God is the God of salvation; and unto GOD the Lord belong the issues from death. But God shall wound the head of his enemies, and the hairy scalp of *such an one as goeth on still in his trespasses.*" (Ps 68:20-21, emphasis mine) God is not a God of robots. He gives us the opportunity to repent. We can choose not to, to our detriment.

The High Priest laid his hands on the head of the scapegoat and confessed "all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins." Had he neglected to lay any of the iniquities or any of the transgressions in sin, those would not have gone into the wilderness with the goat. The nation would still bear that iniquity or sin.

The day of atonement for each individual is always at hand. The sin offering has been made. The scapegoat has been sent out. We are holding the cloth, watching to see if it turns color. Let us each work at our repentance, so that the cloth will change. The sacrifice is effective, but only if we let it affect us. "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death." (2 Cor 7:10)

God or Fire

“It’s a marriage made in heaven.” We sometimes hear that at weddings. Sometimes the people who say it don’t know just how right they are. Any good marriage has the involvement of heaven, because both parties include God in their marriage.

Some Hebrew scholars have pointed this out in a unique way. They look at the Hebrew words for man and woman and come up with a surprising observation. The Hebrew word for man is “aish” (אִישׁ, aleph-yod-shin). The Hebrew word for woman is similar. It is “ishah” (אִשָּׁה, aleph-shin-heh). The scholars noted that each word differs by one letter. The two different letters, יָ (yod-heh, reading right to left), spell one of the names of God, Yah, which is the ending syllable in such names as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Obadiah. From this they concluded that marriage, the union of man and woman, should include God. They further noted that when you take out the differing letters, both words become a different word, “ash” (אֵשׁ, aleph-shin). This is the Hebrew word that is translated “fire.” The conclusion, then, is that a marriage without God is a consuming fire.

Perhaps this gives us a new perspective on the wisdom of the Proverbs. In both Prov 21:9 and 25:24 the writer says, “Better to dwell in the corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman and in a wide house.” In the context of the earlier observation about marriage, and applying the proverb to either a man or a woman, we could rephrase the proverb. Better to live in a corner of the attic with God than to be burned in the rest of the house with an unbelieving mate. This then becomes a warning against even entering a marriage without ensuring that both parties first live with God.

The Israelites were allowed to marry outside of the nation. Ruth the Moabitess was married to two Israelite men (the second after she was widowed). But there were certain people they could not marry. These were “the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites,” (Deut 7:1, 3) the seven nations they were to drive out of Canaan. The reason they were not to marry from these nations was that wives from them would not give up their gods and “they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods” (Deut 7:4). God had given these people 400 years to learn of Him, and yet they had refused. They were not about to change, and so a marriage with one of their women would end up consumed by fire.

Marriage is an honorable thing, created from the beginning. Marriage is designed to last for a lifetime. Imagine a Jew spending a lifetime trying not to worship the gods of his foreign wife. Imagine a lifetime being “burned” by your mate because you can not agree to give God a place at the dining table or in the bedroom.

There is no law against marrying an unbeliever. There may even be the exception in which a godless marriage lasts through the sheer doggedness of the mates. On the other hand, some surveys say that the two things that cause the most problems in marriages, especially after there are children, are money and religion. The marriages may stay together, but there is often a burning fire separating the two. Instead, a union between a man and a woman, an “aish” and an “ishah”, that includes Yah will likely avoid the “ash” that comes from burning each other up.

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