

Israel's Significance Of The Shofar Or Ram's Horn

'On the morning of the third day, there was thunder, lightning, a thick cloud on the mountain and the sound of an exceedingly loud trumpet. All the people who were in the camp trembled. Moses led the people out of the camp to meet God and they stood at the lower part of the mountain. All of Mount Sinai smoked because God descended on it in fire and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him with His voice' (Exodus 19:16 to 19). 'God will be seen over them and His arrow will flash like lightning. The Lord will blow the trumpet and will go with whirlwinds of the south' (Zechariah 9:14).

These verses tell us the Lord Himself blows His trumpet to signify His presence in the midst of His people. In the above verses, God's trumpet is called a 'shuphr' or Shofar. The plural is shuphruth. The Hebrew word for ram's horn is 'qrn e.ibul' meaning the horn of jubilee, also called the trumpet of jubilee. Shofar means to 'burn into' like a branding iron burns into the flesh of an animal. The very loud sound of the shofar burns into the heart, drawing people to attention. The unique sound is unmistakable and has the same effect on people as an emergency siren. When the Lord blew His shofar, the people trembled. The genuine ram's horn was created by God and was used by the children of Israel. It is not man-made and has been used for thousands of years. Each individual shofar has only one pitch and one note and cannot be tuned like a modern musical instrument. The note lasts only as long as the breath of the person blowing it. The ram's horn used for a shofar is curved, symbolising a humble and contrite heart before God. In the Bible, a straight animal horn usually signifies the strength and power of a leader, or the forgiveness and redemption of God. The horns overlaid with gold or brass on the four corners of the Altars of Incense and Sacrifice in the Tabernacle, were to be daubed with blood and were placed there to reveal the forgiveness of God. These horns were 'qrni' not 'shuphruth', meaning they were straight horns, not curved horns.

We have to be careful not to confuse a man-made bugle with the God-created ram's horn. Both were used by the children of Israel and the word 'trumpet' is used for both in modern Bible translations. We need to understand the significance and symbolism of using a shofar created by God as a weapon in spiritual warfare, and a man-made bugle used for other purposes. In times past, the shofar was used by the children of Israel for various occasions. 'With bugles and sound of the shofar, make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord God' (Psalm 98:6). 'Zadok the priest took the horn of oil out of the Tent and anointed Solomon. They blew the shofar and all the people said, "Long live King Solomon"' (1 Kings 1:39).

A shofar was used as a weapon of spiritual warfare. 'Seven priests will carry seven shuphruth made of rams' horns before the ark. On the seventh day you will march around Jericho seven times and the priests will blow the shuphruth. When they make a long blast with the ram's horn and when you hear the sound of the shofar, all the people will shout with a great shout and the wall of Jericho will fall down flat ... The seven priests bearing the seven shuphruth made of rams' horns before the ark of God, continually blew the shuphruth. The armed men went before them. The rear guard came after the ark of God. The shuphruth blasted as they went' (Joshua 6:4, 5 & 13). After Joshua died and the Israelites were at war with the Midianites and the Amalekites, the Lord asked Gideon to reduce the numbers of Israelite soldiers from twenty-two thousand down to three hundred. They were up against many thousands of men, then with the very small army, the Israelites defeated their enemy using the shofar. 'The Midianites and the Amalekites and all the children of the east lay along in the valley like locusts for multitude and their camels were without number as the sand on the seashore for multitude.' The Lord said to Gideon, "The people who are with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hand ... When I (Joshua) blow the shofar, I and all who are with me, then blow the shuphruth on every side of the camp ... They blew the three hundred shuphruth and God set every (Midian) man's sword against his fellow and against all the army and the army fled' (Judges 7:2 to 22). A shofar was blown to signify the end of battle: 'Joab blew the shofar and all the people stood still, and pursued after Israel no more, neither did they fight any more' (2 Samuel 2:28). 'Joab blew the shofar and they dispersed from the city, every man to his tent. Joab returned to Jerusalem to King David' (2 Samuel 20:22).

A shofar was used to alert people to danger. 'Son of man (Ezekiel), speak to the children of Israel and tell them, "When I (God) bring the sword on a land and they set a man for their watchman, if he sees the sword come on the land and he blows the shofar to warn the people, then whoever hears the sound of the shofar and does not take warning, if the sword comes, his blood will be on his own head ... if he had taken warning, he would have delivered his soul"' (Ezekiel 33:2 to 5).

A shofar was used to call people together: During the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, the Jewish people were faced with a similar situation as they face today. The Jewish people were returning to the land of Israel after being exiled for centuries and the people had hostile enemies on every side but that did not stop them from rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple. 'When Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabians, the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem went forward and the breaches began to be

stopped, they were very angry ... I (Nehemiah) rose up and said to the nobles, to the rulers and to the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord Who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives and your houses." When our enemies heard it was known to us and God had brought their counsel to nothing, we all returned to the wall, everyone to his work. From that time forth, half of my servants worked in the work and half of them held the spears, the shields, the bows, the coats of mail and the rulers were behind all the house of Judah. They all built the wall and those who bore burdens loaded themselves. Everyone with one of his hands worked in the work and with the other held his weapon. Every builder had his sword girded by his side, and so built. He who sounded the shofar was by me. I said to the nobles, to the rulers and to the rest of the people, "The work is great and considerable and we are separated on the wall, one far from another so whenever you hear the sound of the shofar, gather together there with us. Our God will fight for us. So we worked in the work. Half of them held the spears from the rising of the morning until the stars appeared' (Nehemiah 4:7, 14 to 21).

Our marriage covenant with Jesus is eternally binding. Jesus is preparing a place for the Bride of the Lamb to live. 'In My Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will receive you to Myself so where I am, you will be there also' (John 14:2 & 3). We must prepare ourselves for this wonderful event. 'Let us rejoice and be exceedingly glad and let us give the glory to God, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready' (Revelation 19:7). When Jesus comes for the pure church, He will come for us with a blast of the shofar blown by His attendant, Archangel Michael (Matthew 24:31; 1 Thessalonians 4:16). The shofar was blown on the Feast of Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah) to signify repentance as the Jewish people prepared their hearts by fasting. 'On the first day of the seventh month, you will have a holy assembly. You will do no work. It is a day of shofar blasts for you' (Numbers 29:1). Ten days later the Day of Atonement or Yom Kippur feast was held and the people once again assembled together. Here is one thought; there were ten days between the Feast of Trumpets and the Day of Atonement, and the people of God assembled together. There were ten days between the ascension of Jesus into the clouds of heaven and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, where God's people assembled together. If we consider this in a spiritual light, we may be able to assume Jesus will return to earth to gather His people together on or near Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

The shofar is integral to the Jewish people's worship of God. From 1930 to 1948, the British government who were overseeing Israel, made it illegal in Israel for anyone to blow the shofar at the Western Wall. Praying out loud and holding a Tenach (Old Testament) were also forbidden. To do so would result in immediate arrest and imprisonment. The occupying government ruled over the Jewish people so even on their most holy days at their holiest location, they were not allowed to worship God as the Tenach instructed. Jewish men ignored the risk and blew the shofar in defiance of that foolish law. They felt prison was a small price to pay to obey the Lord God of Israel. The British mandate ended and Israel became a sovereign nation, and the shofar has been freely used ever since. Praise the Lord for that. A shofar is sounded all over Israel heralding in the Feast of Trumpets. 'Praise God! Praise God in His sanctuary! Praise Him in His heavens for His acts of power! Praise Him for His mighty acts! Praise Him for His excellent greatness! Praise Him with the sounding of the shofar! Praise Him with harp and lyre! Praise Him with tambourine and dancing! Praise Him with stringed instruments and flute! Praise Him with loud drums and cymbals! Praise Him with resounding cymbals! Let everything that has breath praise the Lord! Praise God!' (Psalm 150:1 to 6).

Amen and God bless you.

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