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MINISTRIES

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The Mo’edim: Yom Teruah

In the Bible, God gave his people special days to remember and celebrate every year. In Hebrew, these holy days, or holidays, are called mo’edim, which means “appointed times.” The purpose of these days is to remember what God has done in the past, and to anticipate the fulfillment of his promises for the future. In this teaching, we’re going to cover one of the more mysterious holidays, which in the Bible is called *Yom Teruah*. Also known as the “Day of Trumpets,” Yom Teruah is celebrated on the first day of the seventh month. We find this day described in two passages, Leviticus 23 and Numbers 29:

Leviticus 23:23-25

And the LORD [YHWH] 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 [YHWH].”

Numbers 29:1-6

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 [YHWH]: 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 [YHWH].

So, this day is a day of rest and giving offerings to God, a day of blowing trumpets, a day of holy convocation, and a day of memorial. What makes this day mysterious is that there is no explanation of what is being memorialized. Scripture clearly states the reasons for celebrating the other mo'edim—for example, Passover is a memorial of the Exodus from Egypt (Exodus 12:17, 26-27), and Sukkot is a memorial of the journey of the Israelites through the wilderness (Leviticus 23:42-43). But Scripture gives no clear reason why Yom Teruah is celebrated. In fact, the two passages we cited are the only ones that explicitly mention this holiday. So, what exactly is this day's purpose?

Why is Yom Teruah Kept?

There are many ideas about why Yom Teruah was kept, but we want to stick to the Scriptures for our answers whenever possible. As we mentioned before, the Bible doesn't directly tell us the purpose of this day, nor does it use the name 'Yom Teruah' very often. However, the word *teruah* by itself is mentioned in numerous places throughout the Scriptures. The meaning of that term can shed some light on the meaning of the day. *Teruah* literally means a shout or a loud noise. It is translated as "blow the trumpets" in Numbers 29:

Numbers 29:1

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.**

As we track this word *teruah* through the Scriptures, we find some consistent themes. Trumpets were blown when the tribes of Israel were supposed to pack up and move in the wilderness:

Numbers 10:5-6

When you blow an alarm [*teruah*], the camps that are on the east side shall set out. And when you blow an alarm [*teruah*] the second time, the camps that are on the south side shall set out. An alarm [*teruah*] is to be blown whenever they are to set out.

We also see *teruah* at the battle of Jericho. This sound indicated that it was time for the people to move in and capture the city:

Joshua 6:5

And when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, when you hear the sound of the trumpet, then all the people shall shout with a great shout [*teruah*], and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and the people shall go up, everyone straight before him.

Teruah is also connected with the fearsome "day of the LORD" in the book of Joel:

Joel 2:1-2

Blow a trumpet in Zion; sound an alarm [*teruah*] on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD [YHWH] is coming; it is near, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness!...

Joel goes on to say that, in response to this warning about the coming day of the LORD, the people should mourn, fast, weep, and return to YHWH with all their heart. The alarm, the *teruah* is sounded to wake people from their spiritual slumber and get them to move back toward God's ways.

This may explain one of the reasons for observing Yom Teruah. Soon after Yom Teruah comes Yom HaKippurim, or Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. That day was the one day of the year that the High Priest would appear before God and request atonement for the sins of all Israel. It was a day for people to humble themselves and seek God's mercy. So, the sounding of trumpets on Yom Teruah can be seen as an alarm, a warning that this Day of Atonement is just around the corner. This alarm would tell the people that they should get their lives and their hearts in order—they should “wake up and move,” so to speak. Jewish tradition agrees with the idea that Yom Teruah is a warning of coming judgment. Traditionally, the ten days from Yom Teruah to Yom HaKippurim are called “Days of Awe,” where people are encouraged to examine themselves and repent. However, there is still more to be uncovered about the term *teruah*. It is not only a sound of alarm, but also a sound of rejoicing:

Psalm 47:1-7

Clap your hands, all peoples! Shout [*haryi'u*] to God with loud songs of joy! For the LORD [YHWH], the Most High, is to be feared, a great king over all the earth. He subdued peoples under us, and nations under our feet. He chose our heritage for us, the pride of Jacob whom he loves. Selah God has gone up with a shout [*teruah*], the LORD [YHWH] with the sound of a trumpet. Sing praises to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King, sing praises! For God is the King of all the earth; sing praises with a psalm!

The word *haryi'u*, which was translated “shout” in verse 1, comes from the same root word as *teruah*, and it means to shout or make a loud noise. It is also used in the next passage, again referring to a sound of rejoicing:

Psalm 66:1-4

Shout [*haryi'u*] for joy to God, all the earth; sing the glory of his name; give to him glorious praise! Say to God, “How awesome are your deeds! So great is your power that your enemies come cringing to you. All the earth worships you and sings praises to you; they sing praises to your name.”

Why do the people celebrate with a shout, a *teruah*? Because YHWH has conquered the enemies of his people, and he is king over all the earth. But how can *teruah* be both a sound of alarm, and a sound of joy? Well, it is a sound of alarm for God's enemies, because the coming day of the LORD will be one of judgment and punishment for their sins. At the same time, it is a sound of joy for God's people, because the coming day of the LORD will be one of deliverance from their enemies, a day when God will be king over all the earth.

So, how does this all connect to the day of Yom Teruah? What event is being “memorialized” by blowing the trumpets on this day? Was there a day that God punished the wicked, saved the righteous, and became king over all the earth?

As we look through the early parts of the Bible, the event that comes closest to this description would be Noah's flood. In that event, the wicked on earth were destroyed, righteous Noah and his family were saved, and all who remained on earth were worshipers of YHWH. The flood story doesn't mention anything about "blowing trumpets," but Noah's flood is prophetically linked to Joel's "day of the LORD." Peter connects these two events together in his second epistle:

2 Peter 3:4-10

They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation." For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

Peter says that the fiery judgment of the day of the LORD will come "by the same word" as Noah's flood. The judgment of one will be like the judgment of the other. What's even more significant to Yom Teruah, though, is that this future "day of the LORD" is called a day of blowing trumpets:

Matthew 24:29-31

Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels **with a loud trumpet call**, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

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. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

So, at the coming "day of the LORD," which is similar to Noah's flood, God is going to come with the sound of a trumpet, gather his people from all over the earth (even from the dead), bring judgment upon all wickedness, and establish his eternal kingdom. This call of the trumpet will be a sound of warning and alarm to those who are wicked and need to repent from their sins, and a

sound of rejoicing and victory for those who have been forgiven and are righteous. It may be that Yom Teruah is not so much memorializing a past event as it is drawing attention to a future event: the judgment of the whole earth, and the resurrection of the just.

This may explain why so few details are given concerning this holiday: the event that it is memorializing hasn't happened yet, so all of its details are not yet known. One detail that is known is that there will be a sounding of trumpets announcing that God is coming. We know that we need to prepare for his arrival. Yom Teruah reminds us that God will be here soon.

Why is Yom Teruah Called “Rosh Hashanah”?

Yom Teruah is frequently called “Rosh Hashanah,” which means “head of the year,” or “new year.” Why is it called this, and why do we call the day “Yom Teruah” instead?

We will address the second question first. We call the day “Yom Teruah,” because that is what the Scriptures call the day.

Numbers 29:1

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 [*Yom Teruah*]...

Nowhere in Scripture is this day called “Rosh Hashanah.” We don't see any compelling reason to use a different name than the Scriptures, so we just use the name that the Scriptures give us. But why is this other name, Rosh Hashanah, more commonly used? The short answer is because it's Jewish tradition. Rabbinic Jews have used the term “Rosh Hashanah” to refer to Yom Teruah for at least 1,800 years (*m. Rosh Hashanah* 1:1-2). The Talmud claims that the first day of the seventh month was when gentile nations started counting the years of the reigns of their kings (*Rosh Hashanah* 3a:14). Presumably, this “kingly new year” would be why the day was called, “Rosh Hashanah,” the “beginning of the year.” However, again, the Scriptures do not refer to this time as the “beginning of the year;” they do not say that the year starts in the seventh month, but rather in the first month, as we would expect:

Exodus 12:2

This month [when Passover is celebrated] shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you.

Since the year starts in the first month, not the seventh month, we think that applying the term “Rosh Hashanah” to the day of Yom Teruah is incorrect. However, some go so far as to say that it is sinful. It is sometimes claimed that the term “Rosh Hashanah” originates in ancient Babylon, where they supposedly had an idolatrous new year's festival that was celebrated in the seventh month. However, there are problems with this idea. Babylon's calendar was similar if not identical to Israel's. They considered the first month to be in the spring, just like the Bible does, and that's the time of year that they celebrated their new year's festival (“Akitu Festival” <https://www.livius.org/articles/religion/akitu/>). Babylon did have a festival that was celebrated in the seventh month, and some scholars think that this festival served as a second “new year's”

festival (e.g., S. Langdon, “The Tablets of Uruk”, *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* Vol. 39, No. 4 (July 1923), p. 283; Karel Van Der Toorn, “The Babylonian New Year Festival: New Insights From the Cuneiform Texts and their Bearing on Old Testament Study”, *Congress Volume Leuven 1989*, p. 332), but this is speculation. There are some pieces of evidence that may suggest that the seventh month was considered a different kind of “new year,” but those pieces are few and far between, and what is there is subject to interpretation (Jonathan S. Tenney, “The Elevation of Marduk Revisited: Festivals and Sacrifices at Nippur during the High Kassite Period”, *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* Vol. 68 (2016), pp. 175-176). So, it is far from certain that the name “Rosh Hashanah” is Babylonian, much less that it comes from an idolatrous celebration. What is clear is that the name is not Biblical. Wherever it comes from, applying the name “Rosh Hashanah” to Yom Teruah is a product of tradition. The Scriptures never use the term.

How Can We Keep Yom Teruah Today?

The Bible gives just a handful of instructions about celebrating Yom Teruah. Let’s take a look at the verses again just so we have the full context:

Leviticus 23:23-25

And the LORD [YHWH] 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 [YHWH].”

Numbers 29:1-6

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 [YHWH]: 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 [YHWH].

In these passages, we see four things that we are commanded to do on this day:

- 1) Observe a day of solemn rest. Do not do any ordinary work.
- 2) Proclaim a memorial by sounding trumpets.
- 3) Present a food offering to YHWH.
- 4) Present a burnt offering to YHWH.

The food offering and burnt offering cannot be presented today, because offerings must be brought to the temple (Leviticus 17:3-4), and today there is no temple. So that leaves us with two commands: have a day of rest from our work, and blow trumpets. Both of those are things that

we can do. If you can't blow a trumpet yourself, then consider attending a group where they do. God's holidays are meant to be celebrated with other people, so we encourage you to find others to celebrate with.

In addition to what the Bible commands, there are some traditions that people like to observe when keeping Yom Teruah. These traditions are not necessary or commanded, but some people find them helpful. One is called *tashlich*, where they recite the end of the book of Micah and pray for God's mercy near a body of water. Micah speaks of God casting "sins into the depths of the sea" (Micah 7:19), and so the idea behind this tradition is that the water symbolically carries their sins away. Another tradition is to read the story of the binding of Isaac in Genesis 22. The idea behind this tradition is that the ram's horn that is blown on Yom Teruah reminds us of the ram that was offered instead of Isaac. Another tradition is to eat sweet foods, representing the sweetness of the coming season.

Again, none of these traditions are commanded in the Scriptures, but they are common things that are done at this time. We would suggest that Yom Teruah is a good time to reflect on the fact that God is coming to judge the world, and that he's going to reign as king. This is a time of introspection and repentance, a time to prepare for the coming judgment. Like Noah prepared for the flood waters by building an ark, we must prepare for the floods of judgment by building ourselves upon a solid rock.

Matthew 7:24-27

Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.

So Yom Teruah is a wake-up call for us to get our hearts and our lives ready. The day of the LORD is coming, and Yom Teruah reminds us that we must be prepared. We must be on the solid foundation of Messiah. We must hear and do God's word. However, Yom Teruah is also a time to rejoice, because our king is coming soon, and he's going to set everything right. We're going to be resurrected, transformed, and able to dwell with God forever. Paul wrote about this in 1 Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 15:51-57

Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ [Messiah Yeshua].

Messiah already has victory over death, in that he himself was resurrected. However, this “last trumpet” ushers in the resurrection of all who belong to him. This trumpet announces the culmination of Messiah’s work, when we will no longer have perishable bodies, but instead we will get to experience eternal life with him. This is the victory that will come after the judgment. So, we encourage you all to celebrate Yom Teruah, both as a day to prepare for judgment, and as a day to look forward to Messiah’s ultimate victory.

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching.

Remember, continue to test everything.

Shalom!

For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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WEBSITE: www.TestEverything.net & www.ExaminaloTodo.net

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