

An Open Letter to Ohev Yisrael Regarding Our Celebration of Yom T'ruah

by
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We are approaching the period of two High Holy Days – *Yom T'ruah*, followed ten days later by *Yom Kippur*.

Yom T'ruah literally means “day of blowing” and, from its biblical description, we know that *shofarim* or trumpets are what are to be blown; consequently, the day is also called *Yom Shofarim* or simply Trumpets. One would suppose that these many names for a Holy Day are sufficient, but the day has even another name – *Rosh Hashannah* – which literally means “head of the year;” consequently, the day is also known, throughout the world, as the “Jewish New Year.” *Yom T'ruah* always occurs on *1 Tishrei* on the lunar calendar (Leviticus 23:23-25; Numbers 29:1) and will, this year, fall on September 23 which also happens to be a Shabbat.

The other High Holy Day, *Yom Kippur*, literally means “day of covering,” but it is more popularly known as Day of Atonement because, according to the Scriptures given to Moses, the sins of Israel were to be covered over or atoned for on that day (Leviticus 16:17; Hebrews 9:7). *Yom Kippur* always occurs on *10 Tishrei* on the lunar calendar (Leviticus 23:26-27) and will, this year, fall on October 2.

We celebrate *Yom T'ruah* because Leviticus 23:23-25 and Numbers 29:1 command that Israel do so. That notwithstanding, Scripture does not specifically say why, and does not link *Yom T'ruah* to *Yom Kippur* other than by placing it ten days earlier; we surmise, however, through biblical context, historical writings and oral transmission, that the blowing of *shofarim* on *Yom T'ruah* is meant to initiate a ten-day period for personal examination and repentance culminating in *Yom Kippur*. According to Jewish tradition, *1 Tishrei* (Rosh HaShannah) is also the day the world was created, and the day that books of spiritual account are opened for God's judgment; since these legends are not supported by Scripture, Ohev Yisrael does not give them more than passing notice.

One thing to which Ohev Yisrael does give more than passing notice is that the mention of trumpets in the New Covenant Scriptures is unmistakably linked to Messiah's return and to resurrection of the dead (Matthew 24:30-31; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; 1 Corinthians 15:51-55). Consequently, at Ohev as well as other Messianic Jewish congregations, the traditional celebration of *Yom T'ruah* takes on the additional eschatological theme of God's triumph over Satan.

Although Scripture defines *Yom T'ruah* as only a single calendar day, the Jewish community in the diaspora (outside of Israel), some time back in history, began celebrating it for two days because it was uncertain in which geographic time zone the celebration should begin. Interestingly, because *Yom T'ruah* always falls on *Rosh Chodesh* (a new moon), the transmission of the exact time of its beginning, even in Israel, was difficult to determine; consequently, the Israel Jewish community began celebrating it for two days there as well. Ohev Yisrael follows

the custom of most American Messianic Jewish congregations, which is to celebrate *Yom T'ruah* on *I Tishrei* only, from sundown local time to the following sundown.

Since this year *Yom T'ruah* falls on a Sabbath, Ohev's services will be similar to those of most Sabbaths except for two very important differences, (1) the *shofar* will be blown in the traditional way as we have done in the past, and (2) the day will begin with a joyous recognition of our salvation in Yeshua and will then become more contemplative, as an indication that we are beginning a ten day process of self-examination and spiritual preparation to intercede, on *Yom Kippur*, for the repentance and salvation of the Jewish people (Romans 10:1) and, secondarily, for the gentile nations (Exodus 19:6; Isaiah 42:6, 60:3; Romans 1:16).

It is important, on *Yom T'ruah*, that we maintain an appropriate balance between holy introspection and fully experiencing the joy of the Lord (e.g. Nehemiah 8:9-12). It is for this very reason that we will end our morning service early and then go to a local park for a short *Tashlich* (casting away sin) service (Micah 7:18-20) that will include partaking of the bread and wine of the Lord's Table (Luke 22:19-20), and be followed by a picnic.

The ministry of the Levitical Priesthood, at the time of Moses, depended heavily on the Tabernacle and later the Temple, because the animal sacrifices that were required for that priesthood to function could only be conducted in those very special places. However, God in His grace and mercy, changed the priesthood (Hebrews 7:11-12), made Yeshua High Priest forever in the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 6:20), and made believers in Yeshua into a holy priesthood for offering up spiritual sacrifices through Him (1 Peter 2:5; Revelation 14-6).

What we will be doing on *Yom Kippur*, therefore, may be thought of as a New Covenant priestly mandate, analogous to the ministry of the *kohen gadol* (Levitical High Priest) who entered the Holy of Holies one time a year, with blood, which he offered for himself and for the assembly of Israel for sins that were committed in ignorance (Leviticus 16:17; Hebrews 9:7). We too will enter with blood, but it will be the blood of Yeshua.

Because of the season's traditional focus on *teshuvah* (repentance) and the serious ministry to which we believe we are called, the general mood of both the Friday evening and Saturday morning services will be a bit more solemn than usual (Psalm 81:3[4]; Romans 9:1-5). That notwithstanding, we will begin with music, dancing, and a joyful sound (Psalm 81:1-2[1-3]) because, while we are sobered by the knowledge that many of our people Israel do not yet know Yeshua, we also rejoice in our own salvation, recognizing that it is only in Yeshua that we are able to exercise our collective priestly responsibilities to help our people through priestly intercession.

Our *Yom T'ruah* Shabbat morning service will be somewhat more traditional than on other Sabbaths, but it will not be entirely so. It may not contain all of the liturgical elements that some of us may desire, while others of us may wish that there were fewer. Prayer is a personal thing, and it is important that we seek common ground as a congregation and, in love, be willing to compromise for the sake of our brothers. In identification with Jews worldwide, we will utilize many of the same prayers as denominational Jewish synagogues, but our services must always be different in order to reflect the joy of our salvation in Yeshua as well as other New Covenant

realities. Finally, we must remember that we ought not to be attending High Holy Day services solely for our own pleasure and edification, but to serve the needs of others through our priestly ministry.

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