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Yom Teruah and the Ten Days of Awe

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Yom Teruah, or the Day of Blowing, is the point that designates the beginning of the month of Tishri,¹ and commences with a commandment to set this day apart as the Fall appointed times begin in earnest:

“Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, ‘In the seventh month on the first of the month you shall have a rest, a reminder by blowing *of trumpets*, a holy convocation. You shall not do any laborious work, but you shall present an offering by fire to the LORD” (Leviticus 23:24-25, NASU).

As the command is articulated, you will note that this is a High Sabbath that required God’s people to present offerings by fire to Him. Further details on what those specific offerings were to be are stated in the Book of Numbers:

“Now in the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall also have a holy convocation; you shall do no laborious work. It will be to you a day for blowing trumpets. You shall offer a burnt offering as a soothing aroma to the LORD: one bull, one ram, *and* seven male lambs one year old without defect; also their grain offering, 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. *Offer* 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 continual burnt offering and its grain offering, and their drink offerings, according to their ordinance, for a soothing aroma, an offering by fire to the LORD” (Numbers 29:1-6, NASU).

¹ Or, Ethanim (1 Kings 8:2).

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Since there is no Temple in Jerusalem today to offer these sacrifices, the Jewish people have principally commemorated this holiday as *Rosh HaShanah*, or the beginning of the civil new year. The days of repentance take on some urgency as *Yom Kippur* rapidly approaches on the 10th of Tishri. The thirty days of the month of Elul that precede it, and the Ten Days of Awe, constitute forty days of repentance in total, as God's people are supposed to have been preparing their hearts for the Day of Atonement. The tradition of celebrating *Rosh HaShanah* fully developed during Second Temple times (m.*Rosh HaShanah* 1:1), as many in Judaism look to 1 Kings 8:2 to begin the civil calendar, the miraculous scene of the First Temple's dedication:

"Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the fathers' *households* of the sons of Israel, to King Solomon in Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD from the city of David, which is Zion. **All the men of Israel assembled themselves to King Solomon at the feast, in the month Ethanim, which is the seventh month.** Then all the elders of Israel came, and the priests took up the ark" (1 Kings 8:1-3, NASU).

The events that took place when Solomon dedicated the First Temple had such a profound impact, that the civil new year was connected with this magnificent epiphany of the Holy One. Today, as the Messianic community has grown, especially as many non-Jewish Believers have eagerly embraced their faith heritage in Israel's Scriptures, a combination of the *Yom Teruah* prescriptions and the Jewish New Year activities has been occurring. Since the Jewish people were specifically entrusted with the oracles of God (Romans 3:2), and have historically been the one group of people who have faithfully observed the Biblical feasts for millennia, many of their edifying traditions have been incorporated into this annual convocation, by Messianic Jewish and Messianic non-Jewish Believers alike.

Traditionally in Judaism, *Rosh HaShanah* is a brief break in the forty days of repentance. After the dispersion of the Jewish people that followed the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E., it is commemorated in the Diaspora for two days. I believe that our Heavenly Father is very pleased that today, greater numbers of His children are taking this special season seriously, and are devoting their energies to honoring the Fall feasts. We must not only praise God that He is actively preparing His people for Yeshua's return, but that His people are commemorating this day!

I am personally amazed that God is inspiring His people to remember His appointed times! For those who are seeking to please their Heavenly Father and obey His commandments, understanding the *moedim* and celebrating them is a joyful experience—and one that brings great blessings to individuals, families, fellowships, and burgeoning congregations. But beyond the experience of blowing the *shofar*, my desire would be to encourage you to

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remember that **this is a season of repentance**, as we approach the solemnity of the Day of Atonement. It is beneficial for each of us to focus on some passages of Scripture that have special meaning at this time of year.

Historically, the Jewish community has taken this time very seriously. It is believed by the Rabbis that during the Ten Days of Awe between *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur*, our Creator reviews His books and decides many things regarding the year to come. The three books that are opened are each referred to in the Holy Scriptures. They include the Book of Life, the Book of Death, and the Book of Judgment. The Book of Life is referred to by Moses in Exodus 32:32-33, and by King David in Psalm 69:28:

“But now, if You will, forgive their sin—and if not, please blot me out from Your book which You have written!” The LORD said to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book” (Exodus 32:32-33, NASU).

“May they be blotted out of the book of life and may they not be recorded with the righteous” (Psalms 69:28, NASU).

As you can imagine, many of our Jewish brethren are very concerned about the possibility of their names being removed from God’s Book of Life. God’s Book of Death is something that the Prophet Daniel refers to when describing the coming antimesiah/antichrist:

“I kept looking until thrones were set up, and the Ancient of Days took *His* seat; His vesture *was* like white snow and the hair of His head like pure wool. His throne *was* ablaze with flames, its wheels *were* a burning fire. A river of fire was flowing and coming out from before Him; thousands upon thousands were attending Him, and myriads upon myriads were standing before Him; the court sat, and the books were opened” (Daniel 7:9-10, NASU).

The Book of Death is obviously one book that you do not want your name associated with for eternity! Thankfully, Daniel also refers to God’s Book of Life, something which we should all hope will contain our names:

“Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands *guard* over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued” (Daniel 12:1, NASU).

The Prophet Malachi speaks about God’s Book of Judgment, which assists Him to separate out those who are considered righteous, and those who are not:

“Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD gave attention and heard *it*, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who esteem His name. ‘They will be

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Mine,' says the LORD of hosts, 'on the day that I prepare *My* own possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him.' So you will again distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him" (Malachi 3:16-18, NASU).

Finally, in the Book of Revelation, the Apostle John summarizes all of these books together:

"And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is *the book of life*; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one *of them* according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:12-15, NASU).

Those whose names are not written in God's Book of Life are eternally punished. **You should want your name to be engraved in His Book of Life!**

Many faithful servants of the Most High have considered these admonitions for centuries, and have rightly determined that the period from *Rosh HaShanah* to *Yom Kippur* is an excellent time to focus on getting one's sinful accounts taken care of with God and with others. One way that I have done this is to reflect on some readings from the Scriptures, which can help all of us in the responsibility we have to be reconciled with one another.

Traditionally, observant Jews read through Psalm 145 every day during this period, as a reminder that when we cry out to the Lord for salvation, He hears our pleas and saves us. For the Ten Days of Awe, I encourage you to take the time during your devotionals to read this psalm. Added to this are often complementary readings from the Book of Job. Perhaps no other book in the Bible reminds us of our humanity quite like Job, as frail mortals are compared to the power and glory of the Almighty. Hopefully, via my personal devotions, you will each have an opportunity to reflect upon your own relationship with God and your fellow human beings.²

² This series of ten reflections was written by Mark Huey as part of Virtual Sukkot 2005, and has been edited to remove any time-sensitive material.

Day One

Psalm 145

Genesis 21:1-21; 22:1-19; Exodus 20:1-2

The time between the Day of Blowing or *Yom Teruah* on the 1st of Tishri, and the Day of Atonement or *Yom Kippur* on the 10th of Tishri, is traditionally known as the Ten Days of Awe. It is during this time that many Jews focus on the final days of *teshuvah*, or “return to God, repentance” (Jastrow).¹

In an attempt to encourage people to take the time to read and meditate upon the Word of God during the Ten Days of Awe, I surveyed a few of my Messianic Jewish friends, asking them if traditional Judaism offered any specific Scripture passages to focus on during this time of repentance. Some indicated that Psalm 145 is read each day, because God will hear the cry of His petitioners and save them: “He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He will also hear their cry and will save them” (Psalm 145:19, NASU). Upon further examination, I found that the Book of Job is often read at this time of year, in order to reflect upon the trials and tribulations of a faithful servant of the Most High. Also, some specific Scriptures are designated for *Shabbat Shuvah*, which falls between *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur* (Hosea 14:2-10; Micah 7:18-20).

Finally, I heard from a Jewish friend who mentioned one of the most obvious things to meditate upon and consider during this time. After all, there are ten days of reflection—and are there not Ten Commandments? When this was pointed out, it immediately made sense to me. For the next ten days, while you can certainly read from the Book of Job, I will primarily be spending my time reflecting upon the Ten Commandments.

I also believe that it will be beneficial for each of us to take a look at Psalm 145 on a daily basis, because there is so much to consider from this psalm of David. As you read and meditate upon it, I hope you will be blessed by the insights you will receive from the Holy Spirit, as you are taught more about the mercy and grace of our Creator. If you will take the time to read this psalm, you will notice that its thoughts are broken into twenty-one verses that correspond to the Hebrew *alef-bet*. The letter *nun* is skipped in Psalm

¹ Marcus Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature* (New York: Judaica Treasury, 2004), 1703.

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145:14, because commentators often conclude that since the verb *nafal* in Hebrew has an allusion to “downfall” or “fallen,” it is best to be overlooked. However, even though man might fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23), the verse does state that the Lord will support the fallen ones and straighten the bent, broken, or bowed down.

Before we consider the First Commandment, let us take the time to read the following psalm and bask in the mercy of our loving Father:²

A Psalm of Praise, of David. I will extol You, my God, O King, And I will bless Your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless You, and I will praise Your name forever and ever. Great is the LORD, and highly to be praised, and His greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall praise Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts. On the glorious splendor of Your majesty and on Your wonderful works, I will meditate. Men shall speak of the power of Your awesome acts, and I will tell of Your greatness. They shall eagerly utter the memory of Your abundant goodness and will shout joyfully of Your righteousness. The LORD is gracious and merciful; slow to anger and great in lovingkindness. The LORD is good to all, and His mercies are over all His works. All Your works shall give thanks to You, O LORD, and Your godly ones shall bless You. They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom and talk of Your power; to make known to the sons of men Your mighty acts and the glory of the majesty of Your kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Your dominion endures throughout all generations. The LORD sustains all who fall and raises up all who are bowed down. The eyes of all look to You, and You give them their food in due time. You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing. The LORD is righteous in all His ways and kind in all His deeds. The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth. He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He will also hear their cry and will save them. The LORD keeps all who love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy. My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD, and all flesh will bless His holy name forever and ever (Psalm 145:1-21, NASU).

The First Commandment

When the Ten Commandments were given to the Ancient Israelites, their deliverance from Egyptian bondage had been completed. The awesome display of God’s power had been exercised, and Israel, under the able leadership of Moses and Aaron, is now in the third month of dwelling in the wilderness. Moses is called up to Mount Sinai to receive some instructions that will be personally initialed by the finger of God. The Almighty tells Moses to

² Note that in Days 2-10 following, I will only be referring the reader to Psalm 145, but it will not be reproduced for you to read.

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communicate the following reasons why He chose Israel to be the recipient of His Ten Words:

“Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel” (Exodus 19:5-6, NASU).

The challenges given to the people of Israel are that *if* they obey the voice of God and keep His covenant, *then* they will be His possession among the nations of the Earth—specifically being a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. This is an incredible opportunity for a group of former slaves, who through the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, had been promised much in previous generations. But now they are some four hundred years deceased, only with their memory being kept alive by a group of people who have just endured harsh conditions by Egyptian taskmasters. In spite of the challenges of possible memory loss and the effects of ill-treatment, when Moses gives these words to the elders of Israel, their response is a unanimous Amen and Amen:

“So Moses came and called the elders of the people, and set before them all these words which the LORD had commanded him. All the people answered together and said, ‘All that the LORD has spoken we will do!’ And Moses brought back the words of the people to the LORD” (Exodus 19:7-8, NASU).

When the response comes back that all of the people will do what God has spoken, they agree to do what He has asked—and they do not even hesitate to ask *why*. The Israelites were so impressed with the fact that the Lord loved them so much to deliver them from the oppression of Egypt, and that His love was so great that all He said would be to their benefit, they declare with enthusiasm that they will do all that He says to do.

After instruction is given on how to prepare themselves for receiving the commandments, the Israelites begin to hear the sound of a great *shofar* on the third day. As we are remembering the Day of Blowing and listening to the sounds of the *shofar* today, hopefully we can picture in our minds the intensity of such a *shofar* sound echoing from the thickened clouds, which were illuminated by flashes of lightning and accentuated by the roar of thunder. This sound, however, was not just one made by human lungs and lips. This sound was so deafening that the camp trembled. Read the account and imagine how fearless Moses must have been to climb to the summit:

“Now Mount Sinai *was* all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently. When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him with thunder. The LORD came

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down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up" (Exodus 19:18-20, NASU).

It is from this dramatic setting that the Ancient Israelites received the Ten Commandments. The First Commandment given to them is very succinct and to the point:

"Then God spoke all these words, saying, 'I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery'" (Exodus 20:1-2, NASU).

The Holy One of Israel is not mincing words. He simply states *anokhi ADONAI Elohekha*, or "I am the LORD your God." He declares that He is the One and Only God. There is further amplification of this theme in the Second Commandment that details a prohibition on worshipping other gods, but for the First Commandment He just absolutely states that He is God. It can be understood that this is a positive commandment, which requires all to believe that this Supreme Deity is the God they are to worship. For the people Israel, there is only **One God**.

We worship and celebrate the existence of the One True Creator God, who alone is God, every day via our faithful service to Him. Here for the sake of Israel, He personalizes the fact that He is the God of Israel. Of course, as He stated earlier to Moses, this specific word to them has some incumbent responsibilities associated with it. Listening to His voice and obeying His commandments are of importance to the people chosen to be a light to the nations, who have been commissioned with a sacred call. It is the direct responsibility of Israel to demonstrate the goodness of the Lord to the rest of the world. As a kingdom of priests, Israel is to intercede for the other peoples of the world—pointing and directing them to Him as the loving Creator.

If you believe that you are a part of the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16), who has been grafted into the olive tree (Romans 9-11), being a part of the Commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:11-12), then you have a great responsibility to believe in God's promises to His people! As part of an assembly that has been separated out to receive His Word, it is our personal and corporate responsibility to point all humanity to the One God of the Scriptures—and now the atoning work of His Son, Yeshua HaMashiach. If you are like the Moabitess Ruth who could claim that "Your people *shall be* my people, and your God, my God" (Ruth 1:16, NASU), then you have decided by your free will to choose the great I AM who alone is God of Creation.

Revel in this truth as you seek His face more fully during this season of repentance. Cry out to Him and He will hear you and save you as Psalm 145:19 declares! Likewise, consider the admonition of the Prophet Isaiah and what the Lord has done for us:

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“Remember He is your God and there is none other: Declare and set forth *your case*; indeed, let them consult together. Who has announced this from of old? Who has long since declared it? Is it not I, the LORD? And there is no other God besides Me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none except Me. Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. I have sworn by Myself, the word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness and will not turn back, that to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear *allegiance*. They will say of Me, ‘Only in the LORD are righteousness and strength.’ Men will come to Him, and all who were angry at Him will be put to shame. In the LORD all the offspring of Israel will be justified and will glory” (Isaiah 45:21-25, NASU).