Yom Teruah (Rosh HaShanah)
Yom Teruah: When the Shofar Sounds
Remembering the Promise and Awaiting the King

There are certain sounds that do more than enter the ear. They enter the soul. A mother hears the cry of her child and knows immediately that something is wrong. A soldier hears the alarm and knows it is time to rise. A shepherd hears the call of the flock and knows where to look. And Israel hears the shofar and knows: It is time to remember. It is time to awaken. It is time to return. It is time to listen for the King. That is the great mystery and majesty of Yom Teruah. The Torah does not first introduce this day to us as "Rosh Hashanah." The biblical designation is יוֹם תְּרוּעָה, Yom Teruah, the Day of Sounding, the Day of the Shout, the Day of the Alarm. Sefer VaYikra (Leviticus) calls it a מִקְרָא־קֹדֶשׁ, mikra kodesh, a holy convocation, a day on which Israel is summoned to assemble before the Holy One. The two passages I am using today are from the weekly readings of Genesis 21:1–34 and Matthew 24:29–36 and may at first seem like an unusual pairing. Genesis 21 is about the birth of Isaac, the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael, God's provision in the wilderness, and Avraham's covenant with Abimelech. Matthew 24 is about the end of the age, cosmic signs, the coming of the Son of Man, the gathering of the elect, the days of Noach, and the command to watch. But beneath both passages is one great biblical theme: God remembers His promise, God acts in His appointed time, and God's people must be awake when He moves. Genesis begins with the words: וַה' פָּקַד אֶת־שָׂרָה — *V'Adonai pakad et-Sarah*. *"And Adonai remembered Sarah."* Matthew ends with: *"Therefore, stay awake."* Between those two statements lies the theology of Yom Teruah. The God who remembers is also the God who comes.

Let us begin where the Torah begins. Sarah has waited. Avraham has waited. The promise has waited. Years have passed since the Holy One first promised Avraham that he would become the father of a multitude. The promise had seemed impossible almost from the beginning. Avraham was old. Sarah was barren. Human biology said, "No." Human experience said, "No." Human chronology said, "No." But covenant said, "Yes." And the Torah says: *"Adonai remembered Sarah as He had said."* The Hebrew word is זָכַר — zakhar, to remember. But biblical remembering is more than mental recollection. God did not suddenly wake up one morning and say, "Oh! Sarah! I almost forgot about her!" No. When Scripture says God "remembers," it often means that God brings His covenant commitment into action. God remembers Noach—and the waters begin to recede. God remembers Rachel—and she conceives. God remembers Israel in Egypt—and redemption begins. God remembers Sarah—and Isaac is born. The divine remembrance is active. It is covenantal. It is purposeful. And notice the words that follow: "as He had said." Then: "as He had spoken."

The emphasis is on the Word of God. God acts according to what He has spoken. That is enormously important for Yom Teruah. Because when we hear the shofar, we are not merely remembering an ancient ritual. We are remembering that God keeps His Word. We live in a world in which human promises are easily broken. Contracts have loopholes. Politicians make promises. People say, "I'll call you," and never do. Someone says, "I'll be there," and doesn't show. But the God of Avraham, Isaac, and Jacob says what He means, and He does what He says. Sarah's entire life becomes a testimony: The promise may be delayed, but it is not forgotten. That is a word somebody needs to hear today. Perhaps you have prayed about something for years. Perhaps you have watched circumstances become more difficult instead of easier. Perhaps you have wondered whether heaven has become silent. As we read Genesis 21 it seems to say: Do not confuse delay with abandonment. Sarah's promise was delayed. But Sarah was not forgotten. God promises and He is faithful.

This is where the Jewish sages help us understand Yom Teruah. Maimonides, the Rambam, writes in *Hilchot Teshuvah* that although the sounding of the shofar is a divine command, it carries a profound spiritual allusion. He describes the shofar as crying: *"Awake, you sleepers from your sleep! Arise, you slumberers from your slumber! Search your deeds, return in repentance, and remember your Creator."* Notice the sequence. Awake. Search. Return. Remember. That is Yom Teruah. The shofar is heaven's alarm clock. It is not merely music. It is interruption. It interrupts the normal rhythm of life and asks: What are you doing with the life God has given you? We can become spiritually asleep while physically awake. We can go to work. Pay our bills. Raise our families. Attend services. Sing the songs. Read the prayers. And still be asleep inside. The shofar says: Wake up! Wake up from resentment. Wake up from bitterness. Wake up from complacency. Wake up from secret sin. Wake up from spiritual laziness. Wake up from the illusion that tomorrow is guaranteed. Wake up from the assumption that the Messiah's coming is merely theological information rather than a reality that should transform the way we live. Let me give you a Jewish-style parable. There was once a king who sent word to a village that he would visit them. The villagers were delighted. They began preparing. One man painted his house. Another repaired the village gate. Another prepared a feast. But one elderly man simply sat beside the road every morning. A young man asked him, "Why are you sitting here?" The old man answered, "I am listening." "Listening for what?" "For the king's trumpet." The young man laughed. "We already know the king is coming." The old man smiled. "Knowing that the king is coming and listening for his arrival are not the same thing." That is the difference between belief and readiness. Many people believe Messiah is coming. But Yom Teruah asks: Are you listening?

Then Isaac is born. His name is יִצְחָק — Yitzchak, "he laughs." Sarah says: *"God has made laughter for me."* The child who seemed impossible becomes the evidence that God keeps His Word. This is one of the great paradoxes of Scripture: What looks like the end may actually be the beginning. Sarah's barrenness looked like a closed door. God turned it into a doorway. Avraham's age looked like a limitation. God turned it into a testimony. The impossible became the visible sign of the invisible promise. And this prepares us for the Messianic application. Because the Gospel itself begins with another impossibility. A virgin conceives. A Messiah is born. The eternal Word enters human history. The One who will conquer death first submits Himself to death. The resurrection comes through the tomb. The kingdom comes through apparent defeat.

Again and again Scripture teaches: God specializes in bringing life out of places where human beings see only impossibility. But Genesis 21 does not allow us to turn the story into sentimental celebration. Isaac is born, but Ishmael remains. There is conflict. Sarah sees Ishmael mocking and demands that Hagar and Ishmael be sent away. Avraham is distressed. This is a painful moment. The covenant is moving forward, but the process involves separation. God tells Avraham to listen to Sarah, while simultaneously promising that Ishmael will become a great nation. There is judgment, but there is also mercy. There is separation, but there is also provision. There is covenant election, but there is not divine indifference toward Ishmael. That balance matters. The Jewish sages noticed something remarkable in this very passage. In Rosh Hashanah 16b, Rabbi Yitzchak interprets Genesis 21:17—*"God heard the voice of the lad"*—to teach that a person is judged according to his deeds *"as he is at that moment."* The Gemara uses Ishmael as its example: although his future descendants would become associated with wickedness in the narrative's later horizons, Ishmael himself is heard and answered because of his condition at that moment. What a profound principle. God sees the individual before Him. God hears the cry. God is not careless with human suffering. And yet, God remains faithful to His covenant purposes. That gives us a mature understanding of divine judgment. Judgment and mercy are not opposites in the character of God. They meet in the holiness of God. This becomes particularly important on Yom Teruah because Jewish tradition associates the day with Din, judgment. The shofar announces the King. But when the King comes, there is judgment. The Talmud in Rosh Hashanah 16b even presents the striking image of the shofar confusing the Satan, because the repeated sounding demonstrates Israel's love for the mitzvah and interferes with accusation before the heavenly court. Whether we take the imagery literally or homiletically, the point is powerful. There is an accuser. There is a heavenly court. There is accountability. Human beings do not live in moral chaos. Our actions matter. Our words matter. Our treatment of one another matters. Our hidden lives matter. The shofar therefore confronts us with teshuvah. And *teshuvah* means more than feeling guilty. It means return. Return to God.

Return to covenant faithfulness. Return to righteousness. Return to truth. Return to mercy. Return to holiness. The shofar does not merely say, "You are guilty." It says: "You can return." That is why the sound of Yom Teruah contains both terror and hope. The sages tell many stories about kings, servants, and messengers. Let us imagine one in that spirit. A king once sent a sealed letter to a village. The letter contained a royal command. But the messenger arrived at night, when everyone was asleep. He stood outside the gate and blew the royal trumpet. Some people turned over in their beds. Others woke up. A few opened their windows. But one man immediately dressed himself and went to the gate. "Why did you respond so quickly?" the others asked. He answered: "Because I recognized the sound." The question of Yom Teruah is not merely whether we hear the shofar. It is whether we recognize the King's voice.

Now we come to Matthew 24. The disciples have asked Yeshua about the sign of His coming and the completion of the age. The historical setting matters. Jerusalem is at the center of Jewish religious life. The Temple dominates the city. The disciples are looking at the magnificent structure and thinking about its permanence. Yeshua tells them that the Temple will not stand forever. Then He describes tribulation, deception, cosmic signs, and finally the appearance of the Son of Man. He says: *"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."* This is prophetic Jewish language. Yeshua is speaking in the vocabulary of Israel's prophets. Isaiah. Joel. Ezekiel. Daniel. And then He says: *"Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven."* This is Daniel 7 language. Daniel sees one like a Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven, receiving dominion, glory, and a kingdom. The imagery is royal. The Messiah is not merely returning as a teacher. He is returning as Melech HaMashiach—the King Messiah. And then comes the line that should make every person who knows Yom Teruah sit up: *"He will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds."* A great trumpet. קול שופר גדול — Kol shofar gadol. The great sound of the trumpet. The shofar of the King. Genesis gives us the God who remembers. Matthew gives us the Messiah who comes. Yeshua then gives us one of His most powerful parables—not exactly a parable in the conventional form, but a historical comparison: The days of Noach. People were eating. Drinking. Marrying. Building. Working. Living ordinary lives. And then judgment came. Notice that Yeshua does not condemn ordinary human activity. Eating is not sinful. Marriage is not sinful. Work is not sinful. The problem was spiritual blindness. They were so absorbed in the ordinary that they failed to perceive the extraordinary. Noach heard the Word of God. Noach believed it. Noach acted upon it. Noach built the ark before there was visible evidence that the flood was coming. That is faith. Faith is not merely believing after the rain begins. Faith is building while the sky is still clear.

Imagine a city whose king is away at war. He tells the watchman: "When you see my army approaching, sound the trumpet." The watchman climbs the tower. Hours pass. Nothing. He waits. Days pass. Nothing. People begin mocking him. "Where is your king?" "Perhaps he is not coming." "Perhaps you misunderstood." "Perhaps the promise was only symbolic." But the watchman remains on the wall. Why? Because his responsibility is not to determine when the king comes. His responsibility is to be awake when the king comes. This is precisely why Yeshua says: *"Concerning that day and hour no one knows."* The command is not: "Calculate." It is: "Watch." There is a difference. This deserves emphasis. Yeshua deliberately removes the date from our hands. He says no one knows the day or hour. Therefore, the authentic Yom Teruah response is not obsession with chronology. It is readiness. Every generation has had people who believed they had discovered the secret calendar. They calculated. They predicted. They announced. And history repeatedly answered: The Son said no one knows. We should therefore be humble. We study prophecy. We teach prophecy. We rejoice in prophecy. But we do not presume to know what Messiah Himself said is unknowable. Our responsibility is simpler: Be faithful. Be holy. Be watchful. Be ready.

Now we come to the heart of our Messianic application. Why does Yom Teruah matter so profoundly for those who confess Yeshua as Messiah? Because the shofar points us toward a biblical expectation that runs from Torah through the Prophets and into the apostolic writings: God will gather His people. The prophets speak of Israel's restoration. The apostles speak of resurrection. Yeshua speaks of gathering the elect. Rav Sha'ul speaks of a trumpet and resurrection. The imagery converges. The shofar is the sound of gathering. In ancient Israel, the trumpet summoned the assembly. It called the people to attention. It announced movement. It announced battle. It announced the presence of the king. And therefore, when Matthew speaks of the Messiah sending His angels with a great trumpet, we should hear the echo of Israel's Scriptures. The King is summoning His people. The scattered are gathered. The sleeping are awakened. The dead are raised. The faithful are assembled. The King comes. This is why Yom Teruah cannot be reduced to a holiday about apples and honey. Those traditions may have their place, but beneath the sweetness is a trumpet. And beneath the trumpet is a warning. And beneath the warning is hope. There is another Messianic connection hidden in Genesis 21. Sarah waits for Isaac. Israel waits for redemption. The disciples wait for Messiah's return. The congregation waits for consummation. The biblical people of faith are always a waiting people. But biblical waiting is not passive. קָוֵה — kaveh, to wait with expectation. תִּקְוָה — tikvah, hope. Biblical hope is not wishful thinking. It is confidence rooted in God's character. Avraham did not know how God would fulfill the promise. He knew who had made the promise. That was enough. And that is the foundation of Messianic faith. We may not know every detail of the future. But we know the One who holds the future.

We may not know the day or hour. But we know the King who promised to come. We may not know how every prophetic passage will unfold. But we know that the God who remembered Sarah does not forget His covenant.

The imagery of waiting for Messiah naturally brings us toward another Jewish-shaped teaching of Yeshua: the wise and foolish virgins. Ten bridesmaids wait for the bridegroom. All have lamps. All are waiting. All appear to belong to the wedding procession. But there is a difference. Some have oil. Some do not. The bridegroom is delayed. Everyone becomes tired. Everyone sleeps. Then at midnight comes the cry: "Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!" There is the shofar principle again. A cry in the night. An announcement. An awakening. A moment when preparation can no longer be postponed. The foolish say, "Give us some of your oil." But readiness cannot be borrowed at the last minute. You cannot borrow another person's relationship with God. You cannot borrow another person's repentance. You cannot borrow another person's faith. You cannot borrow another person's obedience. There comes a moment when the King arrives. And at that moment, preparation is finished. That brings us back to the Rambam. "Awake, you sleepers." The greatest danger for the congregation is not necessarily persecution. It may be sleep. A persecuted congregation knows it needs God. A comfortable congregation can forget. A suffering people prays. A prosperous people can become self-satisfied. A threatened people watches. A comfortable people becomes distracted. Therefore Yom Teruah comes every year and says: Wake up. Not because God wants to frighten His children. But because He loves them enough to call them back. The shofar is mercy disguised as an alarm. What Does It Mean to Be Ready? What does readiness look like? It means teshuvah. If there is something between you and God, deal with it. If there is bitterness, release it. If there is sin, confess it. If there is pride, humble yourself. If there is brokenness, bring it before the Healer. If there is someone you need to forgive, begin. If there is reconciliation to pursue, pursue it. If you have grown spiritually cold, return. The shofar does not ask for a religious performance. It asks for a heart turned toward God. And Messianically, we understand that return through the grace revealed in Messiah. Yeshua does not merely announce the coming judgment. He offers redemption before the judgment. He does not merely tell us the King is coming. He invites us into the kingdom. He does not merely expose sin. He bears its consequence. He does not merely tell us to return. He opens the way home. That is the glory of the Messianic proclamation. Teshuvah is not merely turning away from sin. It is turning toward the King.

Matthew 24 does not end with speculation. It ends with responsibility. Yeshua says: "Therefore, stay awake." That is the message of Yom Teruah. Stay awake. Not frightened. Awake. Not obsessed. Awake. Not arrogant. Awake. Not argumentative.

Awake. Not distracted by the noise of the age. Awake. The world says, "There is plenty of time." The shofar says: "Wake up." The world says, "Live for yourself." The shofar says: "Remember your Creator." The world says, "You are your own king." The shofar says: "Melech!" The King. The world says, "History is random." The shofar says: "The King is coming." The world says, "The promise has been delayed." The Torah says: "Adonai remembered Sarah." And the Gospel says: "The Son of Man will come."
Imagine, for a moment, the final shofar. Not the shofar we sound in the synagogue. Not the shofar we hear during our service. The great trumpet. The trumpet that announces the culmination of the age. The trumpet that gathers the elect. The trumpet that declares that waiting is over. The trumpet that says the King has come. At that moment, no one will need to explain prophecy. No one will need to argue about charts. No one will need to debate whether Messiah is real. The King Himself will answer every question. And those who have waited will discover that waiting was not wasted. Avraham waited. Sarah waited. Israel waited. The prophets waited. The disciples waited. The early believers waited. And we wait. But biblical waiting is never empty. While we wait, we worship. While we wait, we serve. While we wait, we repent. While we wait, we proclaim. While we wait, we love. While we wait, we teach our children. While we wait, we welcome the stranger. While we wait, we care for the widow and orphan. While we wait, we pursue holiness. While we wait, we proclaim Yeshua as Melech HaMashiach. And while we wait— we listen. Because somewhere beyond the noise of this age, the trumpet of the King will sound. And when it does, the God who remembered Sarah will once again demonstrate that His Word cannot fail. The God who brought Isaac from a barren womb will bring life from death. The God who gathered His people in generations past will gather His elect. The Messiah who came in humility will come in glory. And the One who first came as the suffering servant will be revealed as the King.

So on this Yom Teruah, do not simply hear the shofar. Listen to it. Let the tekiah call you to the steadfastness of God. Let the shevarim remind you that broken hearts can be restored. Let the teruah shake loose spiritual complacency. Let the shofar awaken your *neshamah*—your soul. Remember zikkaron—God remembers. Remember teshuvah—return. Remember malchut—the King reigns. Remember emunah—faithfulness. Remember tikvah—hope. And remember this: The promise may be delayed. But it is not forgotten. The King may tarry. But He is not absent. The world may sleep. But the watchman must remain awake. The shofar may sound only briefly. But its message is eternal. Wake up. Return. Remember. Watch. For the God of Avraham, Isaac, and Jacob is faithful. And the Messiah will come. When that great trumpet sounds, may we not be found sleeping. May we be found faithful. May we be found watching. May we be found with lamps burning.

May we be found with hearts prepared. And may we lift our eyes and say: "Baruch haba b'Shem Adonai—Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord." For the God who remembered Sarah has not forgotten His people. The God who fulfilled the first promise will fulfill the last. And when the final shofar sounds, the waiting will be over. The King is coming. Am Yisrael, be ready. Fellowship of HaMashiach, be awake. Hear the shofar. Hear the call. Hear the voice of the King.

Shanah tovah u'metukah. May this be a good and sweet year—but above all, may it be a year of *teshuvah*, *emunah*, holiness, faithfulness, and readiness.
Maranatha.
Come, Lord Yeshua.