



“Blow The Ram’s Horn In Zion!” Toward A Biblical Theology Of The Shofar

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IN THE FALL OF 1988, A HISTORIC MEETING OF Seventh-day Adventist Bible scholars at (what is now named) Southern Adventist University led to the founding of the Adventist Theological Society (ATS), with Jack Blanco as the first President. The charter members of ATS chose two biblical symbols, one from the Old Testament and one from the New, to be featured in the Society’s logo: the cross and the shofar (ram’s horn). It was suggested and voted at the first meeting of ATS charter members that at the commencement of each ATS yearly convocation, the shofar be blown, along with a verbal reminder of how the call of the ram’s horn reverberates the message of the Gospel in the special setting of present truth. Although this early tradition of ATS has now been discontinued, Jack and I (the first vice president of ATS) have often reminisced about the meaningfulness of that shofar sound in the early days of ATS. I dedicate this study of the biblical theology of the shofar to my beloved colleague, Jack, with a prayer that the shofar will continue to be given a “certain sound,” a “clear call”¹ resonating the Three Angels’ Messages to the world.

¹1 Cor 14:8, NKJV and NIV. Citations in this paper will be from the New King James Version (NKJV) unless otherwise noted, except that I will regularly substitute the term *shofar* for the word “trumpet.”

The term *shofar*² appears 72 times in the Old Testament, and refers to a hollowed-out, curved animal horn (particularly the ram's horn), used as a wind-instrument.³ The Akkadian cognate term *šapparu* refers to a species of wild goat or ibex. While in its Old Testament occurrences the term *shofar* usually denotes the ram's horn, in Second Temple Judaism it also was used of the horn of the ibex or antelope.⁴ The Septuagint (LXX) translates the term *shofar* by the Greek *salpinx* (about 50 times) or *keratinē* (about 20 times).

The shofar has been referred to by musicologists as the oldest known musical instrument, but in biblical times it was rarely used together with other instruments, and is not to be confused with the straight metal trumpet (Hebrew *hăšôsrâ*).⁵ The shofar of the Bible is the

²In this article I transliterate the biblical term for ram's horn as *shofar* (and plural as *shofars* rather than *shofarim*) according to a common usage of the term in modern Judaism. In technical discussion of etymology and semantics in the footnotes I use the academic transliteration of the term *šôpār*. The Hebrew term *qeren* is the ordinary word for "[animal] horn," and appears once in construct with another Hebrew term *yôḥēl* ("ram"); this phrase *qeren yôḥēl* is used synonymously with *šôpār* in the story of the fall of Jericho (Josh 6:5). The Hebrew term *yôḥēl* (in the sense of "ram's horn") can also be used alone as a synonym for *šôpār* (Exod 19:13; cf. vs. 16). As we will discuss below, the term *yôḥēl* also lent its name to the year of "Jubilee" (Lev 25:10-13), which was inaugurated by the blowing of the ram's horn (Lev 25:9), and this term may ultimately also be connected with the name of Jubal, the biblical "father" of musical instruments (Gen 4:21).

³See H. Ringgren, "šôpār," *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (vol. 14; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 541: "The šôpār was made of a ram's horn . . . which in cultic use could neither be decorated nor altered with a metal mouthpiece." In modern Jewish tradition, "All horns may be used, except those of cows and oxen, because their horn is called *qeren* and not *shofar*" (Shmuel Yosef Agnon, *Days of Awe* [New York: Schocken Books, 1965], 68).

⁴Mish. *Rosh ha-shanah* iii. 3-5.

⁵In biblical times only *hăšôsrôt* (straight metal trumpets) and not *šôpārôt* (ram's horns) were blown "as with one voice" – i.e., in unison (2 Chron 5:13). In early rabbinic literature the term *šôpār* (*shofar*) "[ram's/ibex] horn" was confused with the *hăšôsrâ* "[metal] trumpet," apparently since after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE use of the *hăšôsrâ* was discontinued and only the shofar remained, employed primarily as the signaling instrument for the High Holy Days of the seventh month. See E. Werner, "Musical Instruments," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (1962), 3:473.

signaling instrument par excellence. Basically, its signals “were used to create two different moods. One was the mood of fanfare, rejoicing and celebration . . . and the other was the mood of awe, dread, and solemnity.”⁶

Jewish tradition recognized the profound theological significance of the shofar.⁷ In this article I suggest ten theological “reverberations” of the shofar in Scripture, and briefly point to their practical application for us today.

1. Theophany

The first appearance of the term *shofar* in Scripture takes us back to Mt. Sinai and the proclaiming of the Law to Israel, when God appeared on the mountain in dazzling, deafening theophanic display, and the shofar was blown by a heavenly being:

On the morning of the third day, there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud upon the mountain, and a very loud blast of the *shofar*, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. . . . And as the sound of the *shofar* grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him with thunder. . . . Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes,

⁶Jon Paulien, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets: Literary Allusions and the Interpretation of Revelation 8:7-12*, Andrews University Doctoral Dissertation Series, 11 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1988), 203.

⁷For a survey of the various theological usages of the shofar in rabbinic literature (in particular the Mishnah and Talmud), see especially Sol B. Finesinger, “The Shofar,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 8/9 (1931-32): 193-228. Later Jewish scholars synthesized the meanings of shofar blowing in Scripture. For example, Sa’adiah Gaon (892-942 CE) suggested ten reasons for blowing the shofar: (1) celebration of creation and God’s kingship; (2) introduction to the Ten Days of Penitence (Rosh Hashana); (3) revelation at Sinai, when the Torah given; (4) the warning of the watchman (Ezek 33); (5) the sound of battle; (6) symbol of the ram on Mt. Moriah; (7) to arouse fear; (8) evocation of the ultimate Day of Judgment; (9) the final gathering of exiles; and (10) the resurrection. In this article I also list ten components in a biblical theology of the shofar (although I develop them differently than Sa’adiah Gaon).

the sound of the *shofar*, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off (Exod 19:16, 19; 20:18; cf. Heb 12:19).

The shofar signals a theophany: God appears in His glory and majesty! While Exodus 19 and 20 do not make clear which heavenly being was blowing the shofar on Sinai, the one other theophanic passage in the Old Testament referring to the shofar, explicitly states that God Himself is the shofar blower! Zechariah 9:14 states:

Then the Lord will be seen over them,
And His arrow will go forth like lightning.
The Lord God will blow the *shofar*,
And go with whirlwinds from the south.

The ultimate theophany is described in this latter passage, when God appears to save His people! The sound of the shofar reminds us today of the theophany at Sinai, the importance of the Law for God's people, and points us forward to the final theophany at the end of time. We will return to Zechariah 9 as we look at the eschatological significance of the shofar.

2. Warfare

One of the most common usages of the biblical shofar was to summons soldiers to battle, or announce to the enemy the ensuing battle (aimed at striking terror into their hearts), or to signal when the battle was over. In Scripture we find the blast of the shofar first used for signaling warfare signaling by Joshua in the Battle of Jericho, with the word *shofar* occurring fourteen times in the battle narrative of Joshua 6!⁸ The battle signal usage in this narrative is actually also linked with theophany, since the shofar announces the presence of God symbolized by the ark. According to God's command, Joshua and his army

⁸Josh 6:4 (2x), 5, 6, 8 (2x), 9 (2x), 13 (3x), 16, and 20 (2x).

marched daily around the city while “seven priests bearing seven *shofars* of ram’s horns before the ark of the Lord went on continually and blew with the *shofars*. And the armed men went before them. But the rear guard came after the ark of the Lord, while the priests continued blowing the *shofars*” (vs. 13). On the climactic seventh day of the army’s march around Jericho, they marched seven times, and after the seventh time, “the priests blew the *shofars* . . . and it happened when the people heard the sound of the *shofar*, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat. Then the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city” (vs. 20). This narrative is not only filled with powerful incentives for trust in God in time of spiritual warfare, but also with its reference to seven trumpets provides foundational Old Testament imagery for the seven trumpets of Revelation.⁹

The shofar was used as a signal instrument in battle by other military leaders in Scripture. We are reminded of Gideon and his little band of 300, each with a shofar in hand; in this narrative of Judges 6-7 the word shofar appears six times!¹⁰ “When the three hundred blew the *shofars*, the Lord set every man’s sword against his fellow and against all the army, and the army fled” (Judg 7:22). Some military leaders used the shofar to summon the army for battle: Ehud (Judg 3:27); Gideon (Judg 6:34); Saul (1 Sam 13:3); and Nehemiah (Neh 4:18, 20). Others utilized the shofar call to disperse the army when the battle was over: Joab (2 Sam 18:16; 20:22); cf. Sheba (2 Sam 20:1).

An allusion to the usage of the shofar as signaling instrument in battle is found in God’s description of the war horse in Job 39:24-25 (NIV):

In frenzied excitement he eats up the ground;
he cannot stand still when the *shofar* sounds.
At the blast of the *shofar* he snorts, “Aha!”

⁹Paulien, 231-32.

¹⁰Judg 6:34; 7:8, 16, 18, 20, 22.

He catches the scent of battle from afar,
the shout of commanders and the battle cry.

The prophet Zephaniah also alludes to this usage of the shofar as he mentions its sounding at the time of battle cry: "A day of *shofar* and alarm against the fortified cities and against the high towers" (Zeph 1:16). Likewise, Jeremiah describes the armies of the nations being gathered against Babylon by the call of the shofar:

Set up a banner in the land,
Blow the *shofar* among the nations!
Prepare the nations against her,
Call the kingdoms together against her (Jer 51:27).

In the Church today the shofar still calls us to warfare, spiritual warfare against the spiritual forces of the enemy. The shofar may be seen as a signal of spiritual victory in the Church. When the shofar sounds in the Church, when we give the message "a certain sound," it signals a spiritual reality – victory against the powers of darkness. And it announces the imminent day when the great Cosmic Battle is over and Christ and His hosts are victors!

3. Worship

Worship at the Old Testament sanctuary was intimately connected with the blowing of the shofar. The psalmist writes:

Blow the *shofar* at the new moon,
At the full moon, on our feast day.
For it is a statute for Israel,
An ordinance of the God of Jacob (Ps 81:3-4 [Heb. vss. 4-5]).
With trumpets and the sound of the *shofar*
Make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord! (Ps 98:6).
Praise Him with the sound of the *shofar*,
Praise Him with lute and harp! (Ps 150:3).

Specific historical reference is made to the blowing of the shofar as part of the covenant renewal event in connection with King Asa's reform to

true worship: "Then they took an oath before the LORD with a loud voice, with shouting and trumpets and *shofars*" (2 Chron 15:14).

The joyful mood represented by the fervid blasts of the shofar in Old Testament worship should awaken in us today a passion for emulating on earth the vibrant praise of the heavenly sanctuary! The first angel of Revelation 14 calls for a revival of true worship of the Creator (Rev 14:7) by God's remnant people in the last days. Perhaps we should even hear the actual sound of the shofar, with its rich and melodious tones, blown once in a while in our worship services!

4. Enthronement

The shofar was blown to announce the enthronement of God as King: "God has gone up with a shout, The Lord with the sound of a *shofar*" (Ps 47:5 [Hebrew vs. 6]). Psalm 47 is recited seven times by modern synagogue congregations every year before the blowing of the *shofar* on Rosh Hashanah (Feast of Trumpets or Jewish New Year). Jewish tradition considers Rosh Hashanah as the anniversary of Creation, "on which the Holy One, be blessed, created the world and reigned over it."¹¹ God became King of this world at Rosh Hashanah!¹²

Psalm 47:5 may allude in particular to the occasion in the history of Israel when David brought to Jerusalem the ark, upon which the Lord sat enthroned as King between the cherubim (2 Sam 6:2; cf. Pss 80:1; 99:1): "So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting and with the sound of the *shofar*" (2 Sam 6:15; cf. 1 Chron 15:28).

The shofar was also sounded at the occasion of the anointing of Israel's human king, who was considered God's vicegerent, sitting upon

¹¹Sa'adiah Gaon, cited in Agnon, 71.

¹²The logic of linking Rosh Hashanah and creation is appealing, and has biblical support: Since Rosh Hashanah is Jewish New Year, coming at the "turn" of the year (Exod 34:22), it makes sense that the beginning of the year now would correspond with the beginning of the first year of earth's history, i.e., the time of creation week.

the throne of the Lord (1 Chron 29:23). Solomon was enthroned at the Gihon Spring in Jerusalem accompanied by the piercing blast of the shofar (1 Kgs 1:34, 39, 41); likewise Jehu's anointing as king by Elisha at Ramoth Gilead was signaled by the sound of shofars (2 Kgs 9:13). When Absalom usurped the throne from his father David, he likewise utilized the shofar to announce that he was proclaimed king (2 Sam 15:10).

Today the biblical shofar blast still reverberates through our land, reminding us that though evil apparently triumphs, the Father sits upon His heavenly throne with Christ His Son, whom He has inaugurated to be King of kings and Lord of lords, and He is in ultimate control (Ps 2:7-11)!

5. Repentance

The liturgical use of the shofar leads us in particular to the sanctuary worship connected with the close of the Old Testament typical religious year, to the liturgy of the High Holy Days of the seventh month, the Days of Awe. On the first day this month (called Rosh Hashanah or Jewish New Year), which came ten days prior to the Yom Kippur, there was a *těřú'á* "blowing [of the shofar]"¹³ to (implicitly) call the people of God to repentance in preparation for the Day of Atonement (Lev 23:23-25; Num 29:1). Joel explicitly refers to

¹³The word *shofar* does not appear in this text, but the "blowing" (*těřú'á*) is traditionally understood to refer here (as explicit with regard to Yom Kippur in Lev 25:9) to the blast of the shofar (Agnon, *Days of Awe*, 68). Such is still the tradition of every synagogue on Rosh Hashanah, the first day of the seventh month; one hundred blasts of the shofar are sounded by the *ba'al těqi'á* (literally, "the master of the blowing," i.e., the one who blows the *shofar*), consisting of four different types of sound: (1) *těqi'á* (a long clear blast); (2) *šěbāřim* (three short, wavering, undulating or "wailing" blasts); (3) *těřú'á* (a series of at least nine extremely short trilled or staccato blasts); and (4) the *těqi'á gěđólá* (the final, great, long clear blast). According to rabbinic tradition, the *těqi'á* blasts were for gathering or assembly, while the *šěbāřim* and *těřú'á* blasts were to announce danger or alarm. See E. Werner, "Musical Instruments," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (1962), 3:474, and Naphtali Winter, ed., *The High Holy Days*, Popular Judaica Library (Jerusalem: Keter Books, 1973), 28.

shofar blasts as constituting a call to repentance and deep affliction of soul and putting away of sin:

Blow the *shofar* in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; gather the people. Return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments. Between the porch and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep and say, “Spare your people, O Lord” (Joel 2:15, 12, 17).

Isaiah 58 places the call for repentance and reformation in a Day of Atonement setting (with many verbal allusions to this solemn day.¹⁴ The chapter begins with the message: “Cry aloud, spare not, lift up your voice like a *shofar*, declare to my people their transgression, to the house of Jacob their sin” (vs. 1).

My orthodox Jewish Hebrew teacher in Israel brought a ram’s horn to class the week before the High Holy Days of the seventh month, pointed out the curved shape of the horn, and then shared her understanding of the meaning of the shofar as a symbol of repentance. Just as the the shofar is curved or bent, so we who hear the horn during the High Holy Days should have our hearts bent down in humility and repentance before God!¹⁵ That’s exactly the meaning of the divine command to “afflict one’s soul” during the Day of Atonement (Lev 23:32): the word “afflict” in Hebrew (*‘ānā*) literally means “to bend

¹⁴There is the mention of the lifting up of the “shofar” (trumpet) in verse 1, an instrument used especially on the Day of Atonement as well as the weekly Sabbath. Verse 3 speaks of the day of “fast” and the only required fast day in Scripture is the Day of Atonement. Probably the most explicit connection with the Day of Atonement is the reference to “afflict your souls” in verse 3, which is a direct linkage with the command to “afflict your souls” on the Day of Atonement (Lev 23:27, 32). Finally, the reference to the “acceptable Day of the Lord” is an echo of similar language found in Isaiah 61:2, and scholars see this as a reference to the Jubilee, which was announced on the Day of Atonement (Lev 25:9). See my book, Richard M. Davidson, *Love Song for the Sabbath* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1988), 91, 107.

¹⁵So Agnon, 68: “The ram’s horn should be bent, that the children of Israel may bend their hearts toward their Father who is in heaven.”

low." The Jewish medieval commentator Moses Maimonides captures this theological meaning of the *shofar*. For him the sound of the *shofar* represents the following call:

Awake, you sleepers, from your sleep and you slumberers awake from your slumber. Reflect on your deeds and repent, and remember your Creator. Look to your souls and mend your ways and actions, those who forget the truth because of the empty vanities of life, who all their years go astray following vanity and folly which neither profit nor save. And let each one of you abandon his evil way and thoughts which are not good.¹⁶

The Yom Kippur setting of the shofar makes its symbolism of vital import for the present time in which we are living, the antitypical Day of Atonement. Visiting the Great Synagogue in Jerusalem on Yom Kippur some years ago taught me that I had so much yet to learn about the *experience* of the Day of Atonement. Listening to the Jewish cantor singing those prayers of repentance with choking sobs, joining my Jewish brothers and sisters in praying those powerful corporate prayers of repentance like Daniel ("We have sinned. . ."), watching brother going to brother and sister to sister to ask forgiveness and making reconciliation with hugs and many tears of joy – I long for such a deep experience of repentance in my own life and the life of our church!

How crucial it is for us to hear – and heed – the sound of the shofar calling us to repentance during these antitypical Days of Awe!

6. Judgment

The blowing of the shofar on the High Holy Days not only called Israel to repentance but also to judgment. In the Old Testament Prophets, the sounding of the shofar frequently represents a call to divine judgment. So, for example, the shofar announces divine

¹⁶Cited in Winter, ed., 33.

judgment upon Ethiopia in Isaiah's burden against that nation (Isa 18:3). The call of the shofar to judgment is usually placed in an eschatological context. In the same way Zephaniah 1:16 notes: "A great day of the Lord is near; . . . A day of *shofar* and alarm." Jeremiah likewise places the judgment call of the shofar in an eschatological setting:

Proclaim in Judah, Announce in Jerusalem,
 And say: "Blow the *shofar* in the land!"
 Shout aloud and say: "Assemble, and let us go
 Into the fortified cities!"
 Oh, my suffering, my suffering! How I writhe!
 Oh, the walls of my heart!
 My heart moans within me, I cannot be silent;
 For I hear the blare of the *shofar*,
 Alarms of war (Jer 4:5, 19 Tanak; cf. v. 21):

Again in Jeremiah:

O you children of Benjamin,
 Gather yourselves to flee from the midst of Jerusalem!
 Blow the trumpet in Tekoa
 And set up a signal-fire in Beth Haccerem;
 For disaster appears out of the north,
 And great destruction (Jer 6:1).

Today the shofar blast pierces through our Laodicean complacency and reminds us that we who live in the eschatological time of the end are indeed Laodicea (Rev 3:14-22), which means "people of the judgment"! We are the people to whom the First Angel's Message (Rev 14:6-7) has been given: "For the hour of his judgment has come!"

7. Atonement

That call to judgment is the everlasting gospel – good news for those who heed the call (Rev 14:6). It is good news about a gracious God. Joel 2:13 (in the context of the shofar blast, as seen above) reveals this gracious God: "Return to the Lord, your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love."

The shofar of the Day of Atonement judgment is a reminder of the ram provided as a substitute for Isaac on Mount Moriah (Gen 22:13). The rabbis recognized the symbol of substitutionary atonement in the connection of the judgment-day ram's horn sound and the ram on Mt. Moriah: "Blow before me with the ram's horn, that I may be mindful of the offering of Isaac, the son of Abraham, so that I will impute it to you as if you had offered yourselves for me."¹⁷ Genesis 22 (the story of the substitutionary ram offered on Mt. Moriah) is read still today in the synagogues just prior to the shofar being blown on the Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish Day of Judgment. Paul recognized this Mt. Moriah experience as a foreshadowing of the Gospel (Rom 8:32; citing Gen 22:12; Gal 3:8, 15-16; citing Gen 22:17-18).¹⁸ As Christians we rejoice to see how the shofar signals the complete atonement in the antitypical ram, the Messiah – assurance in the judgment through our Substitute Jesus Christ!¹⁹

8. Prayer

Numbers 10:9 records that the trumpets (here the straight metal trumpets [*hăšôšrôš*]) were to be blown in time of war so that *God* will remember His people and bring deliverance: "When you go to war in your land against the enemy who oppresses you, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets and you will be remembered before the

¹⁷bRH (Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Rosh Hashana*) 16a; cited in Gerhard Friedrich, "*šôšrôš, šôšrôš, šôšrôš*," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 7:83. Thus for Jews, "Despite the repentance and abstinence practiced on Yom Kippur, it was never a sad day. Its atmosphere was solemn but this was always accompanied by the confidence and joy at finding atonement;" Winter, 64.

¹⁸See discussion in Jo Ann Davidson, "Abraham, Akedah, and Atonement," in *Creation, Life, and Hope: Essays in Honor of Jacques B. Doukhan*, (ed. Jiri Moskala (Berrien Springs, MI: Old Testament Department, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, 2000), 68-71.

¹⁹See my discussion of this in "Assurance in the Judgment" (*Adventist Review*, 7 January 1988), 18-20.

Lord your God, and you will be saved from your enemies.” Jon Paulien rightly points out that, “The sounding of the trumpet became, in a sense, a symbol of covenant prayer. When the priests blew the trumpet, they were calling on God to remember His covenant with His people.”²⁰ Since, as we have seen above, the ram’s horn shofar was also blown as a call of alarm in time of war, it is probable that the blast of the shofar, like the metal trumpet, also had the significance of calling for God to remember (i.e., to act in their behalf), as well as a call to human warriors in battle.²¹

Uziel Meisels, writing from Warsaw in 1863, captures this significance of the shofar by relating a dream:

The reason for the blowing of the ram’s horn was revealed to me in a dream. It is as though two friends, or a father and son, who do not wish that what the one writes to the other should be known to others, were to have a secret language, known to no one but themselves. So it is on Rosh Hashana, the Day of Judgment; it was not the will of the Omnipotent that the Accuser should know of our pleas. Therefore He made up a language for us, that is the ram’s horn, which is only understood by Him.²²

²⁰Paulien, 207-208.

²¹This conclusion is strengthened by the fact that Numbers 10:10, the verse which immediately follows the reference to God’s remembering, speaks of blowing the trumpets (again the metal *hăšôšrôš*) over the sacrifices as a “memorial” [or “reminder” (*zikkārôn*)] before God, and this verse also probably refers to God’s remembering (i.e., acting in behalf of His people). This same term *zikkārôn* “reminder” is used to describe Rosh Hashanah (Feast of Trumpets) in Leviticus 23:24; and thus the reference to “memorial” or “reminder” of “blowing [shofar/trumpet]” in this verse is probably an allusion to God’s remembering His people – hearing their covenant prayers – on this solemn day.

²²Uziel Meisels, *Tiferet Uziel* (Warsaw, 1863), n.p., cited in Agnon, 73-74.

Paulien shows how the imagery of trumpet-blowing as a symbol of the covenant prayers of God's people seems to lie behind the heavenly sanctuary scene that forms the prelude to the seven trumpets of Revelation, in particular the reference to the "prayers of all the saints" that ascends with the incense (Rev 8:3).²³

The sound of the shofar is a call to prayer – and an assurance that our covenant-keeping God will hear our prayer and bring us deliverance!

9. Warning

In Old Testament times the shofar was sounded to warn of impending danger. To the Northern Kingdom of Israel as they face extinction at the hands of Assyria, Hosea (5:8; 8:1) gives warning that danger is near, and Amos (3:6), another eighth-century BCE prophet in Israel, gives a similar warning, emphasizing the general principle of cause and effect: "If a *shofar* is blown in the city, will not the people be afraid?" Amos also warns the people of Moab that they "shall die with tumult, with shouting and *shofar* sound" (2:2). To the Southern Kingdom of Judah, Jeremiah gives a divine message in the closing years before the close of probation and the Babylonian captivity:

Thus says the LORD:

"Stand in the ways and see,

And ask for the old paths, where the good way is,

And walk in it;

Then you will find rest for your souls."

But they said, "We will not walk in it."

Also, I set watchmen over you, saying,

"Listen to the sound of the *shofar!*"

But they said, "We will not listen" (Jer 6:16-17).

²³Paulien, 222.

Couple with this passage a message of Jeremiah's contemporary, Ezekiel, also delivered by Judah in the last days of God's investigative judgment upon the nation:

Son of man, speak to the children of your people, and say to them: "When I bring the sword upon a land, and the people of the land take a man from their territory and make him their watchman, when he sees the sword coming upon the land, if he blows the *shofar* and warns the people, then whoever hears the sound of the *shofar* and does not take warning, if the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be on his own head. He heard the sound of the *shofar*, but did not take warning; his blood shall be upon himself. But he who takes warning will save his life. But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the *shofar*, and the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at the watchman's hand." So you, son of man: I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore you shall hear a word from My mouth and warn them for Me (Ezek 33:2-7).

The sound of the shofar has special relevance for those in the Church who are seeking to preserve the "old landmarks" in the face of those who would wish them eroded in these last days.

In this time of the climactic antitypical investigative judgment (of which Ezekiel's judgment message was a type), just before the final close of probation upon the world, may God's ministers, teachers, and leaders give the shofar a "certain sound" (1 Cor 14:8) as faithful watchmen on the walls of Zion!

10. Jubilee

Ultimately, the shofar points us forward to the joyous climax of the Day of Atonement, to the exuberant commencement of the Jubilee.

Every fifty years in biblical times the Jubilee shofar was to be sounded at the conclusion of the Yom Kippur services: "Then you shall send abroad the great *shofar* on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement you shall send abroad the *shofar* throughout all your land. And you shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants" (Lev 25:9, 10).

The Old Testament prophets refer to the great blowing of the eschatological shofar at the final resurrection, the ingathering of God's people, and the setting up of His kingdom:

And you will be gathered one by one, O you children of Israel. So it shall be in that day: The great *shofar* will be blown; They will come, who are about to perish in the land of Assyria, And they who are outcasts in the land of Egypt, And shall worship the LORD in the holy mount at Jerusalem (Isa 27:12, 13 [cf. 26:19]).

Zechariah indicates that God Himself will blow the shofar on that day:

Return to the stronghold, You prisoners of hope. Even today I declare That I will restore double to you. . . . Then *the Lord God will blow the shofar*, And go with whirlwinds from the south. The LORD of hosts will defend them; . . . the LORD their God will save them in that day, As the flock of His people. For they shall be like the jewels of a crown, Lifted like a banner over His land (Zech 9:12, 14-16).

Jesus alludes to these predictions and shows how they will be fulfilled in the final gathering and deliverance of eschatological Israel: "And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet [i.e., a shofar] call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matt 24:31). Paul echoes the same theme as he describes the blowing of the "last trump:" "the trumpet [i.e., a shofar] will sound and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed" (1 Cor 15:52). "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet [i.e., a shofar] of God" (1 Thess 4:16).

Conclusion

A few years ago I had the privilege of standing in the courtyard next to the Western (“Wailing”) Wall in Jerusalem at the close of Yom Kippur. The old rabbi had raised the ram’s horn to his lips, just at the time when the Jubilee shofar was to be sounded. As he prepared to give the penetrating blast, I mentally recounted the rich theological meanings encompassed by the shofar, and was struck by the thought that in this one sacred instrument is concentrated virtually the entire scope of the biblical message. The shofar recalls the mighty acts of God: His self-revelation (theophany) as Creator and Lawgiver, King and Warrior, Savior and Judge, Life-giver and Liberator. The call of the ram’s horn also encapsulates the whole range of our human response to God’s self-revelation: worship, repentance, prayer, acceptance of the substitutionary sacrifice, spiritual warfare, the watchman’s work of warning, joyous assurance in the judgment, and eager expectation of the imminent Jubilee.

When the old rabbi blew the final piercing blast of the shofar at the close of Yom Kippur, that unforgettable sound penetrated into the deepest recesses of my imagination and can never be erased. I invite you to catch the reverberations of that shofar blast and the many shofar calls of Scripture, let their sound resonate in the chambers of your mind and experience, eliciting from you an ever-deepening response to His mighty acts!

All inhabitants of the world
And dwellers on the earth:
When the signal is hoisted on the mountains,
Look!
And when the *shofar* is blown,
Listen!²⁴

²⁴Isa 18:3, personal translation.