



# The New Shofar

*Be still, and know that I am God; supreme among the nations, supreme in the earth—Psalm 46:10*

January 30th

## *Why did so many in Israel hate Jeremiah?*

Jeremiah's major problem came about because he was a prophet of God. Not one of those court prophets who would feed the king with the message he wanted. No. Jeremiah spoke revelations from the very throne of God. His words reflected the divine will.

We could be forgiven for thinking that hearing God's will in those difficult times would be something the Hebrew people desired above all else. They were, after all, God's people, the children he had made his own. What did they have to fear?

*for it is I (God) this day who have made you a fortified city, a pillar of iron, a wall of brass against the whole land.*

*Kings, princes, priests and people* was the list of opponents God lists as the enemies of the prophet. The first three in that list would have seen Jeremiah as being a threat to their way of life. If they were to follow his directions, most of them would lose power, prestige and wealth. Why is that? Because Yahweh the God of Israel demanded absolute fidelity from his children. In contrast, the ruling elite preferred to call on God when things became dire. Time and time again they preferred political and religious compromises to achieve peace. God wanted honesty and integrity. All of this human compromise was encouraged and blessed by the false prophets—those who were nothing more than mouthpieces to the gentry.

## *Why did the Hebrew people end up in exile?*

The answer to this is as clear as it is simple: disobedience and idolatry. These are the archetypal sins, the same sins that brought down Adam and Eve in the Garden. As it was with their ancient forebears, Israel had become comfortable in the land. They had adjusted their understanding of divine expectations and made themselves indistinguishable from the pagan people around them. Yes, they continued to worship Yahweh but they added a few of the pagan gods to their own worship activities.



The main gods were Baal, Molech and Ashtoreth with the name Baal meaning Master or Lord. Both of these titles were offensive to God because they suggested there were alternatives the people could have alongside of the God of their Covenant.

One good example is the way Israel would turn to Baal when it came to matters of agriculture and farming, seasonal rain, soil fertility and animal husbandry, areas of life they presumed God had little interest. He was a warrior God, defeating the inhabitants of Canaan, a God who could lead them in the wilderness, feed them in the desert make a covenant with them. But farming? What did their God know about that. It was an area their neighbours had successful left to Baal.

## *They also asked, “Isn’t this the son of Joseph?”*

Here in the Gospel we the same kind of sin. How ironic that it is aired just as Jesus is at the very opening of his ministry. There was nothing wrong with his message. In fact, it was mind-blowing, world transforming in what it promised...*The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free...* What was the problem then for these Jews who had been waiting for their messiah for centuries?

They could not imagine their God would be working in the way Jesus was proclaiming. God would have a messiah who would be a king like David. A king who would fight off the Romans and restore Israel to the kind of political nation they wanted it to be. The problem there is clear—that was their plan, their hope and their expectation. There was no pausing to engage with God to ponder the possibility of an alternative, a the divine plan.

### *Asking the right question is important*

When praying to God for the coming of His Messiah, the Jewish people were keen on asking themselves what kind of Messiah they wanted, what kind of Messiah they thought God needed to be sending. Their challenges were clear, as were the threats to their wellbeing and national integrity. Like it can be with us so very often, we know from where the threats are coming and the areas of need and “darkness” that are challenging and endangering our peace. We then turn to God and lay out for Him the way forward, the action plan that is needed to restore our health, our equilibrium or whatever it is we feel we need.

What then is the correct question? If we believe God already knows what we need before we even ask, then why do we feel the need to spell out the details for Him...*Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him (Matthew 6:8)*. This does not mean we do not take our needs to God in prayer. We must. We should. But that does not mean we bring with those needs a game plan for God to follow.

The right question to put before God is this: What are you already doing? Illuminate my mind and my heart so that I can experience your gentle, saving and healing hands. Let your Holy Spirit well up inside of me so that I *can taste and see the good things of the Lord (Psalm 34:8)*. If the story of Israel has shown us one thing it is surely this: God can be trusted. God has never ceased in the ongoing work of creation, never abandoned us no matter how poorly we treated him, how often we ignored him and how often we pursued other means to resolve out problems (i.e. calling on the modern day Baals).

### *Don’t leave God to one side until we are in the “foxhole”*

I am not sure just how true the saying *there are no atheists in a foxhole* would prove to be, but the image is useful. If we have not been building up and acting on a close and intimate relationship with God, in Jesus Christ, then what makes us think we will turning to him in the foxholes of life? Hearing God, experiencing God does not just happen because we need to hear Him or are desperate for reassurances that He is in fact acting on our behalf. God is. That is what God does. The problem is not with God. The problem remains with us.

God is there in the foxhole alongside of us but we are much too busy looking for a God of our own making that we miss the God already there. Just like the Jews praying desperately for the Messiah and all the time he was there among them, offering them the very life the sought.

