

A Most Annoying Shofar
a story for the season of repentance
10/2011

He heard it as clearly as the thumping of his own heart after a hard run. A Voice not from this world, not easily identified, yet not easily mistaken either. It came into his ears loud and clear, overpowering the praise music that was streaming full-blast from his i-pod.

*"Sound an alarm in My holy Mountain."*¹

The prophet was familiar with those ancient words, like all Messianic teachers of his day. He also knew that the prophecy had been fulfilled on the original holy Mountain - the earthly Jerusalem with its temple. The alarm had gone out, had been ignored. The destroying army had come and gone. Twice, actually.

If the prophecy was to have another fulfillment in these last days, everyone knew the alarm would be directed at the other "Zion", unsaved Israel. That Jerusalem was anything but a "holy" mountain. And as long as she kept trying to manage without Messiah, she would remain naked, enslaved and at the mercy of enemies. Yes, many believers were even now sounding the alarm to wake her up to repent and receive salvation.

As though reading his thoughts, the Voice was heard in his ears again.

"No, this time the alarm is for My HOLY Mountain. Where My saints live." The prophet's i-pod went dead. The praise music was suddenly replaced by a tense silence.

An alarm? Among the believers? Whatever for? This was Messiah's own Body, heir to all spiritual riches, clothed with His righteousness and filled with His Spirit. And living in the restored Land of Israel, no less -- what more could anyone want? The prophet and his community were protected, fed and led by God's own hand. Nothing could invade here... unless... *Ah, of course! The long-expected war with Israel's neighbors---*

"It's not an invasion, it's not a war. It's not the 'Arab Spring' or the 'Iranian Winter'. I Myself am the reason. I'm coming to My House. Sound the alarm, I say!"

The prophet scratched the fashionable stubble on his chin. No, there was no mistaking that Voice. But how was he to understand this strange revelation, much less pass it on?

"Lord, I don't get it. A new Intifada - okay, that would need an alarm. Or an invasion from Turkey, Hizbulla missiles, Iran's nuclear program. We're already jumpy about those possibilities anyway, and your Messianic prophets are tracking it every hour. But why should your saints be alarmed that YOU are coming? You're the Master of the House, not some thief! You must be aware that we have been asking and begging You to come for years."

"Yes, I am aware. I am very aware."

There was a silence that was louder than sound. That last "aware" seemed to stretch out over the quiet like a pointing finger. The prophet was getting uneasy, for the silence was heavy and bright, mournful and stern all at the same time.

Suddenly he was somewhere else. His surroundings faded away. His mind was like a movie screen. His thoughts started filling with a procession of images and voices, as clear and as orderly as watching a you-tube clip. But they were not like any videos he had ever seen with his eyes. Scenes were unfolding one at a time, but each scene had layers one on top of

another. There were several things happening in the same place at the same time. Somehow he could see through each layer and look at each one, without getting them confused and without missing any of them.

The top layer was always familiar to him - congregations, conferences, prayer meetings, outreach trips, friends celebrating some event together. He could spot Messianic leaders he knew and respected, and in some scenes he could see himself and remembered being there. So then, they were real events.

But as he stared into these multi-layered videos, he began to doubt that. The scenes and sounds underneath were too strange to belong to real life. At least they couldn't belong to the places and people he could identify on the surface.

Here was a congregational meeting room filled with praise and worship. In front, a talented ministry team, pillars in the Body of Messiah. The skilled playing, harmonies and dance moves were generating waves of golden energy. But as the young prophet watched, the layers underneath brought dark streaks up into the gold.

The streaks expressed hidden actions and unspoken intentions. They had names. Manipulation behind closed doors. Use of flattery, guilt and bribes to drive the ministry team forward, always forward, until they were empty shells. In a layer farther down, a quick shuffle to get rid of the "dead weight". Torn people shoved into a back storeroom, the floor already wet with blood, sweat and tears from others. New talent recruited to replace those who had "moved on", so that the ministry could continue. In the deeper darkness, he could hear thoughts and decisions: *"Look good, keep moving. Leave the wrecks, they will only slow us down. Publish something diplomatic - no one will challenge it. The godly will forgive, the witnesses will forget."*

The prophet looked away, feeling dirty. He had once been in that same congregation, and yes, over the years he had forgotten. But not really... The walking wounded from those days still haunted the conferences, and he took care to stay on the opposite side of the auditorium. For the sake of unity and peace among brothers, that storeroom door must never be opened. Surely the Lord understood that.

There was one video he couldn't believe was from the Lord's House. It was like a grade-B movie. The top layer: generous help to the needy, passion for the Land, eloquence on stage in pleading for the widow and orphan. Underneath: blows and curses in the board room, hands bending the laws of God and man. Protests silenced by bribes and threats, brazenly written on ministry letterhead. A court drama running for seven years... wild accusations, no evidence. Self-incrimination, no penalty. No judges in His gates, no justice in His House. Godless authorities protecting the innocent, while godly shepherds protected the guilty. *"We saw nothing wrong. We have more urgent matters. We don't want to be next. Stop crying 'abuse', don't bring shame on the Family."*

The scenes went on. The young prophet could see his own part in far too many of them, and he cringed.

Hypocrisy. Rumors passing through the House, from wagging tongues to itching ears. Untold damage rippling outward into the Body. Time to confront the problem. The participants indignantly refuse to identify the source of the rumors, or to investigate the rumor themselves. *"That would be gossip and meddling."*

Dishonesty. Cutting corners in giving workers their benefits, scheming to evade tax authorities, inflating ministry stories to attract more supporters... trading pieces of soul

for numbers in the bank and seats of honor at conferences. Tell them what they want to hear: *yes we're missionaries, no we're not*. Weights and measures, visions and partners, all can be adjustable for financial gain.²

False Unity. Surely His commands are not meant to bring division and argument. Better to have unity by cancelling the need to obey, than to deal with strife caused by the obedience of a few. *If all the leaders agree on what God said, then that's what He said*. It's written somewhere....³

Conformity. Friends and humor, lifestyle and priorities - mirror images from city, campus and army. *A pure thought life? Unrealistic, geeky, boring. Being cool works, whereas dying to self sucks*. No one should be asked to stand alone against the whole world.

Idolatry. My public image is important to me. I sacrificed a lot to build that image. I have invested my life in that image. I protect and serve it. *The Lord Himself serves it - has He not adorned it with men's applause and earthly assets?* If you love Him, you will serve it too.

Cowardice. He's too important in Body ministry to put out of fellowship. She's too fragile to face the one she slandered to others. What the Lord commanded is not always practical. *If we confront a wolf devouring a sheep, we will get torn also*. If we don't judge sin, no one will judge our sin.

Laziness. Do just enough to stay out of trouble and avoid pain. Coast on the spiritual efforts of others, borrow oil to keep my lamp going. *If the Lord is not pleased, He can let me know*. When He cracks the whip I will exert myself, until the crisis passes and I can coast again.

Pride. They are all missing something. Too childish, too scholarly, not alive enough, not Jewish enough. If they were following with us, the Body would be stronger, purer, more gifted. *Someday they will see, and they will come begging us to take the lead*. No point in trying to reason with them until then.

Complacency. *"We the Body have need of nothing."*⁴ It's the blinded orthodox and the hate-filled ultra-orthodox who need to clean up their act. They pursue us and torment us because they are jealous of our love for one another. Or maybe they just hate God. Let us pray that they repent before His judgment overtakes them.

The last scene was of a storm. The whirlwind turned the sky black with a huge and terrifying roaring sound. In its path was the Lord's Household, a neighborhood of homes in different sizes and made of various materials. Even the mansions looked small and rickety under the gathering storm clouds. Those of His saints who weren't celebrating or sleeping saw the storm in the distance. They ran outside. They began to wail and cry to the sky - "Lord, save us! Lord, don't let Your House get flattened! Lord, turn back the enemy from our gate!"

Yet this scene also had layers. The prophet could see inside the awful funnel cloud. Someone was seated there, riding the storm as it twisted like an angry bucking horse. It was not the devil, or a godless leader, but the Lord Himself. He was grim, sad and determined as the tornado thundered toward His village. It was clear that He would not turn back, turn aside, or slow down.

"Prepare to receive Me!" He roared over the wild wind. The saints were paralyzed with confusion and terror. "Who ARE You?!" they cried.

The watching prophet was startled by a whisper close to his ear. Somehow the Lord was in the wind and by his side at the same time. To the young man He said: **"Haven't you read it many times? Judging My House must come first, before I judge the world.⁵ My House must be clean and in order before Israel is restored, so that the nation can be raised up in Spirit and in Truth.**

"My shepherds, you were given a charge: to make My House a safe and nourishing place.⁶ You brought to Me new sound systems and beautiful furniture, but you failed to bring justice to My abused ones, or discipline to their abusers. The news of this behavior has sickened the unbelievers, while you have yet to admit there is anything wrong. *'But you have become arrogant, and have not mourned instead.'*⁷

"Truly I tell you: the Restoration, which you long for and look for, will burn like a fiery oven; your worldly wealth will disappear and will take you away with it!⁸ For years I have called out to you, to turn around. And now, We are out of time."

The saints heard the whispering also -- because it came from His mouth, it was not overcome by the noise of the storm. But in hearing, they did not understand. They screamed to one another over the rising howl of the wind, "Who is this demon? It's a lie, a deception! We ARE ready for Israel's restoration! We talk and sing of nothing else!"

Finally one man stepped out to the front of the others. He shook his fist at the storm. "We are the SAINTS of the Most HIGH, damn it! We don't have to TAKE this! Bring out the intercessors, and we will kick this spiritual attack right in the butt, in Yeshua's name!!"

The young prophet had seen and heard enough. He ran, sobbing a prayer for forgiveness for himself, his family, his friends, his community. "How do we get right with You?" he moaned. "Where do we start?"

The Voice was calm. **"Sound the alarm, call for a season of soul-searching and mourning. Start with the saints you love best - to send out this call is to Love them in the deepest way possible."**

"But, Lord -- I'm no better than they are! I SAW myself there..." The young prophet hid his burning face in his hands, unable to say more.

"When you began to mourn for your own sins, you began to be cleansed. And now, BECAUSE you are no better than they are, I am sending you to warn them.

"Let all the saints hunt for hidden sin. Let them seek through their own deeds for a change, rather than tracking the sins of others!

"Let them search out their offenses against Me and against their brothers. Not the sins that cause them to cry for deliverance - those have already been covered by My blood, as I promised.⁹ Let them seek out the sins they have justified, denied and half-forgotten. Moldy things thrown into dark corners. Disgusting things swept under rugs. Shameful things buried in the yard, with no grave markers.

"These are the deeds that go in front of them, that lie in wait to tangle their feet. They don't deny that they stumble. Yet they deny the effect their own stumbling has on the rest of My Body. *'For this reason, many are weak and sickly among you.'*"¹⁰

"Please, Lord, how much time do I have?"

"A few hours at the most. My judgment has already begun. The Lord's House is beginning to shake, and some are already finding it hard to keep their balance.

"They don't know why they are being devoured, losing their anointing, being led into pits by voices they thought were Mine. They don't understand why their residence in My Land has become less secure, even when citizenship is not an issue; why they are lacking provision, even when income is not a problem; why they encounter obstacles in the road, even though I had given them a green light to go. *'Behold, I have come out as an adversary, because your way was contrary to Me.'*"¹¹

"My people have come to believe that the passing of time erases sins, or at least makes them irrelevant. Like biodegradable garbage! Just bury it deep enough, and let enough years go by... and no trace of the old offense will remain.

"But unrepented sin is the opposite. It is like toxic waste, poisoning their spiritual environment for generations to come! *'My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.'*"¹²

"You must educate them. *'The Day of the Lord is near, and it will come as destruction from the Almighty. Blow a shofar in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy Mountain.'*"¹³

The Lord paused, turned, and looked intently at His trembling prophet. **"Do you think I am a cruel Father for striking My children? You have no idea of My Mercy.**

"Spiritual death is far worse than earthly hardship, a medical condition, mutilation, or even physical death."¹⁴ To tell the truth, I would have preferred the gentler pressures of heart conviction and private humiliation before Me.¹⁵ But there is no more time left. Go now!"

The young prophet grabbed his shofar off the shelf and raced outside. He was headed for the home of his Messianic leader. He ran at the leader's door, sounded the alarm with all his strength, blowing again and again. The door flew open, revealing the startled face of his spiritual mentor. Breathlessly the young man gave him a summary of what the Lord had said.

The leader replied, "Hmmm. Okay, calm down! I can see you feel quite strongly about this. We can discuss it in the next national meeting with the other leaders. But I think you may be over-reacting. We all love the Lord as much as you do. If we were in that much trouble, wouldn't He tell us?"

He started to slowly close the door as he continued: "We're in the middle of a leadership training meeting right now... we have priorities, you understand. But don't worry, we'll talk more about this... You know what? Make an appointment with my office for next week." By then, the door was nearly closed. It shut with a gentle click, followed by a heavier clunk as a key turned in the lock.

The young prophet didn't wait around. He ran to the house of another leader who lived nearby. It was dark and deserted; neighbors said he was away on a speaking tour. It was the same with the next three places that he stopped at. It seemed they were all out of the country, raising funds or teaching at "Israel in Prophecy" conferences.

From one group to the next he ran, hopping on and off buses, blowing the alarm and telling the news he had been given. Oddly, unbelievers didn't seem to hear the noise; they walked by as though they couldn't even see him. Saints, on the other hand, came driving, strolling or jogging up to him to see what the commotion was about.

"What's all the noise? What's he saying?" asked one praise leader.

"Oh, it's another one of those self-proclaimed prophets, yelling at us to 'repent' and quoting Joel prophecies," said an evangelist, slightly amused. "Not very original. If you've heard one, you've heard them all."

"Good heavens, what a racket! He's going to give all the Messianic believers in Israel a bad name," the prayer team muttered to one another. "Just keep walking, act like you didn't see him."

A Messianic musician made a face and covered his ears. "That has got to be the most ANNOYING noise I have ever heard! Clearly he doesn't know how to blow a shofar properly – it's not an instrument of torture, for heaven's sake."

A small group of elders got out of a van and came up to the young prophet. Known for their diplomatic skills and powers of persuasion, they had been called within the first five minutes to handle the embarrassing situation.

"What seems to be the trouble, brother?" asked the eldest of the elders.

"The Lord is coming to clean His House, and we need to get ready!" began the prophet for the tenth time. "We have sin in our camp, we have abusers and liars, and we need--"

"Whoa, son. Those are strong words. You're talking about the holy Remnant! If you have a grievance against someone, we can arrange a private meeting to reconcile the two sides."

The prophet thought a minute. "No, I don't have any complaint against anyone. It's the Lord who has a complaint, and He--"

"Well, if the Lord has a matter to settle with any of His people, He would speak to them directly, wouldn't He? Why would he send someone who isn't involved?"

"I don't know. But He came to me, and showed me things... hidden things, some of them were in me, and some were--"

"Ah, so there it is. You are repenting for your own sins, and that's good. Keep it up. But beyond that, it's not right to assume others are guilty of the same thing, especially if you don't have evidence. If you didn't witness a sin with your own eyes, your information is only hearsay."

The prophet started to answer, and another elder intervened. "Yes, yes - we know you believe you heard the Lord say these things to you. Whether or not that is true is a matter for discussion. It needs to be verified by a committee of elders." He smiled. "Brothers who have been in the Lord many years longer than you."

A third elder put his arm around the young man's shoulders in a friendly way. "The Body of Messiah appreciates your efforts, really we do. But there are better ways to do this. Provocative words like 'abusers' and 'liars' will keep people from listening to you. Use terms like 'relationship issues' and 'problematic statements'. Keep things upbeat, and NEVER try to decide who is right and who is wrong. You'll see - you will get a lot farther in communicating your message."

Together, they convinced the young man to hand the ram's horn over to them. Seeing that the uproar was over, the crowd of curious spectators drifted away. Within a few minutes, the prophet was left alone, just another person on the busy sidewalk. He felt invisible as people marched past him on their way to somewhere. He sank wearily onto a nearby bench, put his head in his hands, and cried.

He didn't see that a few of those who had heard him were not moving with the crowds. They stood or sat numbly alone in different places, not looking at anyone, trembling with an inner realization that Truth had been spoken. Something in their eyes expressed a common, unspoken agreement: Time to do business with God. Tears were beginning to spill down a few faces, but no one passing by took any notice. Some hid their faces in their hands like the young man. Time passed, and still they were held motionless in the grip of the Holy Spirit, heavy with the knowledge that the Body was not only unclean but self-confident. Specific incidents replayed in their minds. *"Surely judgment is overdue."*

Neither the prophet nor his followers saw the gigantic angel walking up and down the middle of the street. Burning with an unearthly light, he was nevertheless invisible to all human eyes. He paid no attention as cars, trucks and buses rushed through the lower half of him. He was criss-crossing the street, intent on marking those who were mourning because of the message they had heard. Nothing dramatic, just a quick, light touch to the forehead, leaving a shining mark like a fingerprint from the sun. This too was invisible to all, except for the company of angelic warriors following close behind him.

A Voice rang out like a deep bell, but in tones only angelic ears could hear:

"Go through the midst of My spiritual Zion, and put a mark on the foreheads of those who groan and sigh over all the abominations being committed among My people. The rest of you: Go through My holy city after him and strike. But do not touch anyone who has the mark. Start from My Holy Places, where they offer up incense to Me."¹⁶

Responding in unison, the bright warriors drew their swords, which began to glow with white fire. Their reflections lit up the sky, where boiling clouds were gathering. It grew dark overhead.

One of the elders looked out of the van as they pulled into traffic, and remarked, "Looks like rain... a strong storm front for so early in the year. You see, brothers? The Lord has not forgotten us."

-
1. Joel 2:1
 2. Matt.5:37, Micah 6:11-13
 3. I Kings 22:13
 4. Rev.3:17
 5. I Cor.11:32, I Pet.4:17
 6. Matt.24:45, Jn.21:15-17, I Pet.5:1-5
 7. I Cor.5:2
 8. Isa. 13:9, II Pet.3:9-12, James 5:1-5
 9. I Jn.1:9
 10. I Cor.11:29-30
 11. Num.22:32
 12. Hosea 4:6
 13. Joel 1:15, 2:1-2
 14. Matt.5:30, 10:28; I Cor.5:5
 15. I Cor.11:31
 16. Ezek.9:4-6