

THIRTY-SECOND MESSAGE:
HOLY ASSEMBLY FOR THE MEMORIAL OF NOISE-MAKING
Leviticus 23:23-25

Introduction

The third MESSAGE concerning Israel's "appointments" with Jehovah dealt with the first day of their secular year, which began on the first day of the seventh month of their religious year. The beginning of a new year is an appropriate time for renewed dedication to God. This MESSAGE set aside the first day of the secular year for just that purpose. In this MESSAGE that day is called "a Memorial of Noise-Making" (see comments on Lev. 23:24 below). Like New Year days all over the world, it was to be a day of joyous and boisterous celebration. In Israel it was a day of holy joy in honor of God.

In Numbers 10:10; 28:11-15, a very similar but less elaborate celebration was commanded for the "beginning" or first day of each month. It was called the New Moon celebration, because the Hebrews began their months on the new moons. Thus, the first day of every month was a time of new dedication also, though not quite as significant as the first day of each new secular year. The New Moon celebration is not mentioned in the five MESSAGES in Leviticus 23, because a holy assembly was not required at those observances.

At least two other explanations have been suggested for the significance of the observance that is discussed in this MESSAGE. Keil thought that the seventh month of the year was a sabbath, like the seventh day of the week, and that the seventh month was sanctified as a sabbath that was to be observed on the first day of that month. No hint of that idea is found anywhere in the Scripture. If the seventh month was a sabbath, it could not have been celebrated in only one day of ceasing from work. It would have required ceasing from work during the whole month, which would have been impractical. Meyrick and others have suggested that the first day of the seventh month was celebrated because the month was especially sacred by virtue of containing the Day of Coverings and the Feast of Booths. However, a joyous and boisterous day such as the Memorial of Noise-Making could not possibly have been an appropriate preparation for a solemn day of sorrow and repentance like the Day of Coverings. The first day of the secular year must have had its own separate significance. Celebrating the beginning of a new year is a much more satisfactory explanation for the significance of celebrating the first day of the seventh month.

This MESSAGE has no sub-topics.

Critical Note

Though the first day of the seventh month of the Jewish secular calendar is today universally celebrated by Jews as their New Year, many scholars have questioned whether a secular calendar beginning in the seventh month of the religious calendar existed as early as the time of Moses. They have argued that Ezra 3:1-18 is the earliest evidence of the existence of such a calendar. However, this present passage is itself evidence of its early existence. The fact that the significance of the day is not stated in this MESSAGE shows that the significance was so well known that it did not need to be stated. It is highly logical, therefore, to conclude that the significance for the day that is universally known today was just as universally known then. It would have been most difficult for the significance of the day to have changed over the years from one universally understood idea to another. The type celebration commanded for the day fits perfectly mankind's universal pattern for the celebration of New Year days. Therefore, this passage is strong evidence for the existence of a secular calendar in Israel in the time of Moses.

CHAPTER 23

Verse 23. **And Jehovah spoke to Moses saying,**

A new MESSAGE to Moses from Jehovah is introduced by this verse. Though these verses are a separate MESSAGE, they continue the same subject of holy assemblies. Likely the five MESSAGES on that subject were all spoken to Moses on the same day.

Verse 24. **Speak to the people of Israel, saying, In the seventh month on the first [day] of the month, you must observe a sabbath, a Memorial of Noise-making, a holy assembly.**

Speak to the people of Israel, saying. This MESSAGE was for all Israel. It specified another day when Israel was to hold a holy assembly (see comments on Lev. 23:2 in MESSAGE 30 under the heading in which you must call holy assemblies).¹

In the seventh month on the first [day] of the month. The time was to be on the first day of the seventh month. God had appointed the month when Israel left Egypt as the first month of their religious year (Ex. 12:1-2), but likely long before the Israelites left Egypt their secular year had begun six months later. Israel continued to observe that year for secular affairs. Thus, their secular year began on the seventh month of their religious year. All of Israel's life belonged to God. The Passover and The Feast of Unleavened Bread would keep Israel reminded of God's love for them as their religious year began (Lev. 23:5-8), but they might easily forget to honor Him in their secular affairs. Therefore, God set aside the first day of their secular year as a time for a holy assembly to call the nation to remember their obligations to Him in their daily lives.

you must observe a sabbath, a Memorial of Noise-making, a holy assembly. The day was to be observed in three ways. (1) It was to be a sabbath, that is, a day when the Israelites would cease their occupational activities and honor God. (2) It was to be a "Memorial of Noise-Making." The word translated "memorial" was used to refer to either an occasion or an object that was a reminder of a

person or an event that it was important to remember. The day described in this MESSAGE was a memorial to remind the Israelites of their obligations to God. The word translated "Noise-Making" refers to making noise by sounding musical instruments. English translations have used great variety in translating the expression into English. Most have added thoughts that are not actually in the Hebrew. Nonetheless, all of them recognize the day as a time of boisterous rejoicing, like other New Year celebrations all over the world.¹ The boisterous celebrations were not to be done in a worldly spirit but in a spirit of reveling in the goodness of God. A sabbath and a joyous celebration should not be understood to be incompatible, as long as the celebration is about God's goodness, not about worldly possessions or entertainment. (3) It was to be a time for holding a holy assembly. The assembly was not to express sorrow and repentance, like the Day of Coverings. It was to express joy and excitement over God's bountiful blessings, but it was a day when they were to celebrate God's goodness together in a holy gathering.

Keil thought the day was to remind Jehovah of Israel, the people He had chosen. He based his opinion on Numbers 10:10, which describes the day as "a memorial at the face of your God." Keil saw the day as a time to remind God of Israel's need for Him and to call on Him for help. However, Jehovah does not need to be reminded of His people. They are never far from His mind or heart. Isaiah said,

"Can a woman forget her nursing child,
or lack compassion for the child of her womb?
Even if these forget, yet I will not forget you.
Look, I have inscribed you on the palms of My
hands;

Your wails are continually before Me."
(Is. 49:15-16 (HCSB))

¹ KJV, ASV, and RV translate the word as "blowing of trumpets," BBE as "blowing of horns," CEV "sound of horns," CJB "blasts on the shofar," NASB "blowing [of trumpets]," NRSB "trumpet blasts," and RSV "blast of trumpets." HCSB uses "jubilation" but adds the footnote: "Lit *shout*, or *blast*, traditionally trumpet *blasts*."

And Jesus said, “. . . your Father knows the things you need before you ask Him” (Matt. 6:8 HCSB). God did not need to be reminded of Israel, but Israel needed to be reminded of God. A most appropriate time for Israel to remember her obligations to God was at the beginning of each new year. It could become a time of commitment to be loyal to Him throughout the year ahead.

Verse 25. You must not do any occupational work, but you shall present a fire-offering to Jehovah.

This verse reemphasized that the day was to be observed as a sabbath (see comments on Lev. 16:29b-31 in MESSAGE 20 under the heading a sabbath of a sabbath it must be to you, and you shall afflict yourselves and on Lev. 19:3 in MESSAGE 23 under the heading A man must fear his mother and his father, and you must keep My sabbaths).

The Israelites were to take time out of their regular activities on that day to honor and praise God.

Later in Numbers 29:1-6, Jehovah specified special fire-offerings that were to be offered on the first day of the seventh month. They were to be special forms of the rededication-offering, the homage-offering, and the sin-offering. Evidently even the sin-offering was to be offered in a spirit of jubilation, because they rejoiced over being forgiven for their sins. If they observed those offerings in the spirit in which God intended, they would begin each new year with a new dedication of themselves, a new commitment to faithfully use the possessions God gave them, and a new cleansed heart from all their sins. They could begin a new year fresh and work to make it the best year of their lives.

Application

It is entirely appropriate that Christians should join in joyous noise-making at the time of New Year. The faithful Christian life is a happy life, and Christians have more reasons to rejoice than anybody else in the world. However, the Christian should celebrate in a way that is neither sinful nor dangerous. Many people think that the way to be happy is to alter one's mind with alcohol or drugs. Jesus gives happiness that does not dull the mind but enhances and elevates the mind. Others think that the way to be happy is to indulge in coarseness, ribaldry, and sexual indulgence. Those actions do not bring lasting joy. They bring shame and regret the next day, and they make a poor beginning for a new year or for a new beginning of any kind. Holy joy is the only good way to celebrate the beginning of a new year.

The happiness God gives lasts long after the feast and the fireworks have passed away. His joy lasts throughout the year and encourages us to be faithful in our lives and witness throughout the year. Christians should use the joyous celebration of New Year as a reminder of our need for God as we pass another milestone in our lives and make another new beginning.