

Shalom AZ Ministries

In Pursuit of Israel's Redemption



“There Is Still Time to Return: *Shabbat Shuvah*”

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Devotion and Discussion Questions

Key Texts (TLV): *Joel 2:1-14; 1:2-4, 14, 19* *Lev. 23:24, 27; Ex. 34:6-7; 2 Pet. 3:8-12; Is. 30:20-21*

Nobody likes an alarm clock when they are comfortably sleeping. The sound can feel intrusive—even irritating—because it interrupts something we would rather continue doing. Our first instinct may be to reach over, hit snooze, roll over, and go back to sleep. But an alarm is not our enemy. It is sounding because there is something we need to wake up for. There is somewhere we need to be. There is an appointment coming, and continuing to sleep will eventually cost us something. That picture lies near the heart of *Shabbat Shuvah*—the Shabbat of Repentance that falls during the Days of Awe, between Yom Teruah and Yom Kippur. On Yom Teruah the shofar sounds like a great, noisy reminder: Wake up. Search your heart. Prepare yourself. The appointed day is coming.

The Torah calls the first day of the seventh month *zikaron teruah*—a remembrance marked by the sounding of the *teruah* (Lev. 23:24). The *teruah* is not a soft, soothing sound. It is an alarm—a call to attention and action. And that is exactly how Joel 2 begins: “*Blow the shofar in Zion! Sound an alarm on My holy mountain! Let all living in the land tremble—for the day of ADONAI is coming—surely it is near!*” (Joel 2:1). Because God loves His people, He refuses to allow us to comfortably sleep our way toward destruction. He speaks. He warns. He sounds the alarm. Not because He desires our destruction, but because He wants our hearts. The message of Joel 2 is urgent, but it is also filled with extraordinary mercy: **Wake up. Return. There is still time.**

1. THE ALARM: GOD IS TRYING TO GET OUR ATTENTION — Joel 2:1-11

Joel begins with an unmistakable command: “*Blow the shofar in Zion! Sound an alarm on My holy mountain!*” (Joel 2:1). Chapter 1 has already described devastation throughout the land. Fields, food, fruit, grain, barns, beasts—everything has been touched. Joel called the people to cry out to ADONAI, but crying out is only the beginning. Crying because life hurts is not necessarily the same thing as returning to the LORD. Ultimately, ADONAI desires *teshuvah*—a turning, a returning. And so the alarm grows louder. Joel describes an overwhelming army moving across the land, transforming a land like the Garden Eden into a desolate wilderness. They rush on cities, climb walls, enter houses, and move with terrifying determination. Then comes the great shock of verse 11: “*ADONAI utters His voice before His army. For His camp is very vast—for mighty is it that carries out His word. For great is the day of ADONAI—very terrifying! Who can endure it?*” (Joel 2:11). The people may have thought they were sounding the alarm to get God's attention, but the reality was exactly the opposite: **God had been trying to get theirs.**

That is uncomfortable, because we would often rather think of God only as the One who rescues us from every difficult circumstance. Yet Scripture also presents Him as the Father who loves us enough to correct us, expose us, and interrupt us when we are moving toward destruction. Being part of the covenant community and having the “right lineage” was not enough for Judah. Going through the motions of religion was not enough. And it is not enough for us either. God does not wink at pride, greed, rage, selfish ambition, sexual immorality, idolatry, jealousy, hostility, or secret corruption. When His warnings are ignored, He may allow us to experience circumstances that finally shake us awake. The alarm – the warning – itself is mercy because it tells us that the final judgment has not yet arrived. He is getting our attention **now** so that we will listen while there is

still time. The question is not simply, “Is God speaking?” The question is, **have I become so accustomed to the alarm that I no longer respond?**

2. THE INVITATION: “YET EVEN NOW” GOD IS CALLING US TO RETURN — Joel 2:12–13

After the terrifying picture of the first eleven verses, Joel asks, “*Who can endure it?*” If the passage ended there, it would be a devastating message. But then come three of the most beautiful words in this chapter: “*Yet even now.*” ADONAI declares, “*Yet even now...turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, weeping and lamenting*” (Joel 2:12). **Yet even now.** Eden is about to become a wilderness. The army is already moving. Everything that once seemed secure is being shaken. The consequences are no longer theoretical. And still the LORD says, “Return to Me.” As far gone as things appear, as much damage as has already been done, and as irreversible as the situation may feel, the invitation remains. *Shuvu*—return. *Teshuvah*—repent. There is still time.

That is the heart of repentance. It is not merely feeling badly because life has fallen apart. It is not simply crying because the consequences hurt. It is returning to ADONAI Himself. Peter later writes, “*The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some consider slowness. Rather, He is being patient toward you—not wanting anyone to perish, but for **all to come to repentance***” (2 Pet. 3:9). His patience (Lit: slow-to-anger-ness) should never be mistaken for indifference toward sin; His patience is an opportunity to turn. That is why Joel continues, “*Rend your heart, not your garments, and turn to ADONAI, your God*” (Joel 2:13). God is not impressed by outward displays that leave the heart untouched. Religious motions cannot substitute for genuine surrender. He does not merely want a torn garment, a solemn face, or the appearance of repentance. **He wants us back. He wants our hearts.**

3. THE ASSURANCE: RETURN BECAUSE THIS IS WHO HE IS — Joel 2:13–14

Why should people who have ignored God again and again dare to return to Him? Joel answers by reminding them who their God is: “*For He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abundant in mercy, and relenting about the calamity due*” (Joel 2:13). These words reach all the way back to Sinai. After the children of Israel had broken trust with ADONAI through the golden calf, the question could have been asked: Can this relationship possibly be restored? Yet ADONAI revealed His character to Moses: “*ADONAI, ADONAI, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, and abundant in lovingkindness and truth*” (Ex. 34:6). Israel had been faithless, but He remained faithful to His own character. Joel is telling the people: Return to Him, not because you are worthy, but because you know who **He** is. Judgment is real, sin is serious, and God does not leave the guilty unaccountable—but His heart is gracious, compassionate, patient, and overflowing with mercy.

Then Joel says something beautifully humble: “*Who knows? He may turn and relent, and may leave a blessing behind Him—so there may be a grain offering and a drink offering for ADONAI, your God*” (Joel 2:14). “Who knows?” is not presumption; it is the language of a broken heart that recognizes, “I deserve nothing. I am completely dependent upon Your mercy. I need You, LORD.” And notice the blessing Joel hopes God might leave behind. It is not primarily wealth, comfort, restored status, or an easier life. It is grain and drink offerings—the ability once again to worship ADONAI and enjoy communion with Him. That forces us to reconsider what we call a blessing. The greatest blessing after wandering from God is not simply getting back everything sin cost us. **The greatest blessing is getting back to God Himself.** Restoration to His presence is the treasure.

CONCLUSION

On Yom Teruah the shofar is sounded again and again. It is not one blast and then silence. In that repeated sounding there is a powerful picture of the way ADONAI deals with us. Throughout our lives, He continues to speak. Sometimes His voice reassures us: all is well. Sometimes He announces

that something is changing and calls us to prepare. And sometimes the *teruah* sounds: Wake up! Danger! Pay attention! We can become afraid that we will somehow miss God's voice, but often the real problem is not that He has stopped speaking—it is that we have become accustomed to hearing Him in the background. Isaiah describes the mercy of God this way: *“Your ears will hear a word behind you saying: ‘This is the way, walk in it,’ when you turn to the right, or when you turn to the left”* (Is. 30:21). His voice is calling. The question is whether we will listen and respond.

Perhaps today the alarm is sounding in an area of your life. Maybe the Holy Spirit has been putting His finger on something you have excused, hidden, defended, or simply refused to deal with. Maybe you have cried out to God because of the pain of your circumstances, but you know that crying out is not the same thing as returning. Do not hit snooze. Do not merely promise that someday you will deal with it. **“Yet even now,”** ADONAI says, **“return to Me.”** Rend your heart. Bring the sin into His light. Lay down the pride, the bitterness, the secret compromise, the selfishness, the idolatry—whatever has taken His rightful place. Hear the alarm for what it really is: the loving intensity of a Father calling His child away from destruction and back to life. Run to Yeshua. Run to the One who is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abundant in mercy. **While it is still called today, return to Him. There is still time to return.**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In Joel 2:1–11, why does ADONAI command the alarm to be sounded, and what does the severity of the warning reveal about both His holiness and His mercy?
2. What is the significance of the words *“Yet even now”* in Joel 2:12? What do they teach us about God's willingness to receive those who genuinely return to Him?
3. Joel says, *“Rend your heart, not your garments”* (Joel 2:13). What is the difference between outward religious activity and genuine repentance of the heart?
4. Is there an area of your life where you sense God has been trying to get your attention, but you have been tempted to “hit snooze,” excuse it, or tune His voice out? What would responding to Him look like today?
5. Joel describes restored worship and communion with ADONAI as the blessing that may remain after repentance. When you think about “God blessing you,” are you primarily longing for changed circumstances—or for deeper fellowship with Him? How might that change the way you pray?

CLOSING PRAYER

ADONAI, thank You that You love us enough to speak, to warn us, and even to sound the alarm when we are wandering toward destruction. Forgive us for the times we have ignored Your voice, gone through the motions of religion, or cried out for relief without truly returning to You. Search our hearts today. Show us anything we have hidden, excused, defended, or allowed to take Your rightful place. Give us ears to hear and hearts that respond.

And LORD, we hold tightly to the truth of who You are: gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abundant in mercy. Thank You that Your invitation still says, “Yet even now, return to Me.” Through Yeshua, draw us back into close communion with You. May we not hit snooze when Your alarm sounds. May we hear Your voice, heed Your warning, and run toward You with all our hearts. Restore in us the joy of walking closely with You, and teach us to treasure Your presence as our greatest blessing.

B'Shem Yeshua, In the name of Yeshua, amen.