

“The Feast of Trumpets: Get Ready!”

Leviticus 23:23-25; Nehemiah 8; 1 Thes. 4:13-5:10

We've been studying the Feasts of Israel this year around the time they occur on the calendar. The first three spring feasts are observed very close to each other. Passover was celebrated on the 14th day of the first month commemorating the deliverance of Israel from Egypt when the angel of death passed over the homes that applied the sacrificed blood of the lamb to their doorposts. The Feast of Unleavened Bread began the next day to remember the bread of affliction that Israel ate in haste at the exodus. The day after the Sabbath that followed Unleavened Bread was the Feast of First fruits, which was when the Israelites gave to God the first sign of maturing of their crops, trusting God to provide a harvest. 50 days later Israel celebrated their 4th feast, Pentecost or Weeks which was the celebration that God did provide a great spring harvest and also signifies the beginning of summer.

As we studied these we saw that the Feasts were not just historical celebrations of God's mighty acts in the past. The Feasts reveal prophetic events on God's plan for His people. The apostle Paul tells us this in Col. 2:16-17

Do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality however is found in Christ.

When we studied the 3 spring feasts in the spring we saw how all 3 foreshadowed prophesied events concerning Jesus' sacrificial crucifixion – Passover; His death & burial – Unleavened Bread and His resurrection - First fruits. We looked at New Testament passages that validated Jesus is the Passover Lamb, Jesus is the Bread of life and Jesus is the First Fruits of the resurrection. God presented His best in Jesus guaranteeing a 'harvest'. 50 days after Jesus rose from the dead there was a great harvest of souls on the Feast of Pentecost, when the church was born.

So the first 3 feasts foreshadowed Jesus' first coming, and Pentecost foreshadowed the birth of the church. The next Jewish holidays happen in the fall and like the spring feasts all 3 happen within a short period of time. In keeping with the pattern that we saw in the spring Feasts, the last 3 feasts foreshadow future events concerning Jesus' second coming. Already we understand there's a significant gap of time from the start of the church (Pentecost) to its removal (Trumpets). And the next prophetic event on God's timetable is the rapture of the church which begins a short period of time (7 years) that will move toward the judgment and the coming Kingdom on earth when Jesus returns to rule.

Before we see how Trumpets foreshadows the rapture of the church let's see what it meant historically in Lev. 23:23-25 and Num. 29:1-6. The reason why there isn't much info on it is because it served as a sign for what followed more than the day itself. The Feast of Trumpets historically announced . .

A Season of Repentance and Restoration **(23:23-44; Neh. 8:1-12)**

God told Israel to observe the 1st day of the 7th month with “trumpet blasts”. The trumpet they blew was called the shofar, made from a ram's horn. The 7th month was set aside by God to be a holy

month. Blowing the shofar on the 1st day announced to Israel that 2 other major events are going to happen very soon. The Day of Atonement on the 10th day of the month was a solemn occasion of fasting because God was going to deal with your sins. Trumpets itself was a day of rejoicing that the summer harvest season was over but now be prepared to think seriously about your sins and God.

Even today many Jews still use the days between Trumpets and Atonement [Yom Kippur] as a time of serious reflection [called the 'Days of Awe'], doing good deeds and extended prayers because on 10th day was judgment day. Once God dealt with your sins, then you had the biggest celebration of the year planned, the Feast of Tabernacles (15th day), an 8-day celebration of God's blessing of the fall harvest.

Neh. 8 records an actual account of a Feast of Trumpets. Nehemiah, a Jew in the Persian government was cup-bearer to the Persian king Xerxes. As his food and wine taster he was also his confidant and advisor. The book of Nehemiah takes place around the years 445-430 BC, 100 years after the Israelites returned to Jerusalem and 140 years after Nebuchadnezzar had the temple destroyed. After hearing a report from his brother that Jerusalem's walls had never been rebuilt since they were destroyed in 586 BC, Nehemiah prays for forgiveness on behalf of Israel and then asks for wisdom because he wants to go back. Nehemiah then asks Xerxes if he can go home and help rebuild the city. He says yes. He returns and under great stress and threats by their enemies Nehemiah rallies the people of God to rebuild the walls of the city in 52 days. In Neh. 8:1 there is a great gathering of God's people to the city square. Why? Because the shofars have blown to announce it is the 1st day of the 7th month. Ezra the scribe reads from God's Word and notice how the people respond in v.9, *the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law.*" Feast of Trumpets marked a season of repentance and restoration. Yet Nehemiah wanted the people to focus first on the joy of what they just accomplished. The Nehemiah account also shows us another reason why Trumpets was historically celebrated. When the shofar was blown it was a call to.

Gather as God's People into His Presence **(23:24-25)**

As was illustrated in Neh. 8 the shofars called God's people to gather together in His presence and . . .

Enjoy a time of rest (vv.24-25)

Every first day of the month was actually announced with the blowing of the shofar – but only one blast. The 7th month was holy and so God said to commemorate it with trumpet blasts. Traditionally the Jews blow the shofar 100 times on Trumpets. The first 99 blasts are short blasts but the last one is very long and very loud. Something you'll want to keep in mind for when we get into the New Testament.

This was a holy day so stop your regular routine of work, and rest, spending time in God's presence. On this day special sacrifices were offered. In Num. 29:1-6 we read that they were to offer a burnt offering of 1 bull, 1 ram and 7 lambs (which were completely burnt up to God as a sign that you were giving your life completely to God), a special grain offering (which symbolized you were honoring God for meeting your needs, because everything comes from God) and one goat as a sin offering (this animal died in your place). What were they doing?

Renewing their covenant relationship with God (v.25)

The blasting of the shofar called God's people to a 'sacred assembly' where they renewed their covenant relationship with God and also – as we saw in Neh. 8 . . .

To listen to God's voice

The first time the Israelites heard the shofar blown was when the nation arrived at Mt. Sinai after the exodus. In Ex. 19:10-13 God tells Moses He is going to come down in the sight of all the people in a cloud from the top of the mountain. The people are to consecrate themselves and wash and not to touch the mountain until they hear a long blast from the ram's horn (v.13). So the next day the glory of God descends in a cloud and "a very loud trumpet blast" is heard. Then Moses led the people to meet with God, all the while the trumpet is blowing louder and louder. V.19 says, "*Then Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him.*" The people of Israel learned very early that the trumpet blast of the shofar was a sign for them to stop what they were doing, go to meet with God, and listen to Him.

We find a number of amazing parallels as we come to the New Testament. Historically Trumpets announced a season of repentance and restoration. So prophetically the Feast of Trumpets announces the . . .

Final Season for Repentance and Restoration **(1 Thes. 4-5)**

Paul teaches about Christ's return in the Thessalonian letters. Written around 50-52 AD, (appx. 20 years after Jesus died) these disciples believed Jesus was coming back any time. Yet some had died and those alive wondered what would happen to them when Jesus returned. Paul explained that they didn't need to grieve as men without hope but that those who died will be 'caught up' with those of us still alive where we will meet Jesus in the air. How will we know when this will happen? Jesus will come down from heaven and meet us in the air with a loud command, the voice of Michael the archangel and the trumpet call of God.

It will come when people least expect it, especially the unbelievers of the world (5:1-3). In 5:1-10 Paul says we don't have to be alarmed about the Day of the Lord – when God will deal with the nation of Israel's sins for the last time and judge the world – because we are sons of light. "We do not belong to the night or darkness" which describes the Day of the Lord judgment. We will have been removed from the earth before that happens. The Day of the Lord is a season of judgment that will begin when the trumpet blast calls us home and signify the world has only 7 years left to repent of their sins if they want to enjoy final restoration with God. We'll see this even more clearly when we see how the Day of Atonement foreshadows the tribulation and how tabernacles foreshadows Jesus' return to rule in the Millennium.

The Feast of Trumpets historically called God's people into His presence in the past, and prophetically. . .

Calls God's People Home into His Presence

In 1 Cor. 15, we read more about the trumpet blast and our disappearance from this world to meet the Lord in the air. Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 15:50

“I declare to you brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed – in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable and we will all be changed.”

Again Paul mentions the rapture takes place at the blowing of the trumpet. Trumpet blasts called God’s people together. A future trumpet blast will call us together – permanently. Some get confused by Paul’s saying “last trumpet” and think Paul’s referring to the 7 trumpet judgments in Revelation that will happen near the end of the tribulation. Neither Paul nor the Corinthians had any idea about Revelation since it wasn’t written until 40 years later. They were well aware that the last trumpet blast at Trumpets – the long, loud one - coincides with what he told the rapture which gathers God’s people before the Day of the Lord/tribulation.

When this trumpet blast occurs, God will call us home into presence . . .

To enjoy our eternal rest (1 Thes. 4:17)

1 Thes. 4:17 says that when we go to meet Jesus in the air, we will be with the Lord forever. This agrees with Jesus’ promise to all His disciples in John 14:1-3. I believe Jesus was talking about the rapture here. He said:

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in Me. In My Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”

Jesus is using Jewish wedding imagery here. When a man and women were engaged, it was considered a legal covenant. Shortly after the engagement begins, the groom builds an insula – an addition – on his father’s house. He spends months preparing a place for his bride. A wedding date is not established. The groom can show up any day. The bride and her bridesmaids are always to be ready even at night, and to have oil lamps and extra oil ready. When the day arrives that the groom will come for his bride, he comes to her house blowing trumpets to announce that he is coming to take his bride and to be with her forever.

Jesus comes to meet us in the air to receive our ...

Reward in our covenant relationship (1 Thes. 1:10; 5:9)

Why does Jesus remove us from the earth just prior to the worst 7 years of earth’s history? As a reward for placing our faith in Him. The 7 years of tribulation is the pouring out of God’s wrath on the unbelieving world.

Twice Paul told the Thessalonians believers in Christ will not experience the wrath of God. *“they turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead – Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.”* (1:9-10).

“For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our lord Jesus Christ” (5:9)

Our reward for trusting Jesus as our Saviour and entering into a covenant relationship with him is our removal from the world into God’s presence before these 7 years.

What about those who will be on the earth at that time? One of the other purposes of the shofar in the Old Testament was a warning of battle to come. When the last trump sounds and we

disappear that serves as a warning to the earth that judgment and the greatest war on the earth will soon happen. So before the trumpet sounds and we disappear, we need . . .

To prepare others to listen to God now (Is. 27:13; Matt. 24:29-31)

. . . especially Israel. Most Israelites have rejected Jesus as their Saviour. These prophetic fulfillments that apply to the church are to cause them to be jealous (Rom. 11:11). Our disappearance signals this final season of repentance and restoration. God is giving Israel one last chance.

The Feast of Trumpets signified a holy gathering. At the end of the tribulation when Jesus returns physically to the earth and we're riding behind Him on horses, a trumpet will sound again for the nation of Israel to gather to Him. Is. 27:13 prophecies,

"In that day the Lord will thresh from the flowing Euphrates to the Wadi of Egypt and you O Israelites will be gathered up one by one. And in that day a great trumpet will sound. Those who were perishing in Assyria and those who were exiled in Egypt will come and worship the LORD on the holy mountain in Jerusalem"

Jesus Himself said in Matt. 24:29-31

"At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a loud trumpet call and they will gather His elect from the four winds from one end of the heavens to the other."

Our disappearance at the trumpet warns the world – especially Israel – to be prepared for one more final trumpet call of God. God is gracious. He gives us lots of chances as long as we're alive. But once we've died, there are no more chances to change what we believed about Jesus Christ while we were on earth.

Trumpets historically announced a season to get ready to meet God. It also foreshadows Jesus' church going to meet with God forever while the world has a short season in which to listen to God's voice.

Many passages encourage us to live for Jesus every day as a sign that we're ready when He comes back to meet us in the air. Are we ready? If we're preparing to go on trip, we get ready by packing lots of stuff and thinking about what we'll do there. With God it's different. We won't need stuff. There's nothing to pack. The only thing we can take with us to heaven is people who we've helped believe in Jesus.

The Feast of Trumpets was a call to get ready for what was coming ahead. For the believer in Jesus Christ, the trumpet call will be a welcome sound, but for others a warning. May we be alert now to take the opportunities to tell others about Jesus so that when the shofar is blown, they too will be ready to meet Jesus.

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