



THE FEAST OF TRUMPETS

WEEK 12
11.22.15

FOCUS VERSE

Numbers 29:1

And in the seventh month, on the first day of the month, ye shall have an holy convocation; ye shall do no servile work: it is a day of blowing the trumpets unto you.

LESSON TEXT

Joel 2:1-3, 15-17

1 Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the LORD cometh, for it is nigh at hand;

2 A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains: a great people and a strong; there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations.

3 A fire devoureth before them; and behind them a flame burneth: the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; yea, and nothing shall escape them.

.....

15 Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly:

16 Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts: let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet.

17 Let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O LORD, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God?

Numbers 10:10

10 Also in the day of your gladness, and in your solemn days, and in the beginnings of your months, ye shall blow with the trumpets over your burnt offerings, and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings; that they may be to you for a memorial before your God: I am the LORD your God.



FOCUS THOUGHT

Trumpets represent the joy and excitement of celebration and worship as well as the announcement of good news.



Nothing to Be Ashamed Of

Wynnton Marsalis, whose title at the Lincoln Center in New York City is Artistic Director of Jazz, may be the world's greatest living trumpet player. A prolific artist in both classical and jazz genres, Marsalis's recordings have garnered nine Grammy awards and one musical Pulitzer Prize, the first ever for a jazz recording.

A key aspect of Marsalis's musical mission has been to promote appreciation for jazz as "America's music," especially among younger audiences. In a 2013 interview, approaching the twenty-fifth anniversary of Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra (JALCO), Marsalis reflected on the challenge of preserving jazz culture:

"It's an uphill struggle in our country because we tend to be so commercial minded. Since Sputnik, you know, we've believed that

math and science are the best way to compete with other cultures, and we've never been centered in our own culture because a lot of our culture came from slaves . . . we could never reconcile it and it's unfortunate, because the rest of the world has embraced a lot of American culture and we've never felt it was something we should teach to our kids with the type of intensity we have taught other things" (www.wyntonmarsalis.org).

In many ways, the church is on a similar mission to "preserve" and "promote" a unique Apostolic culture. We need not be ashamed of our distinctives or be deceived that the best way to compete in the religious marketplace is to simply "blend in." Instead, we need to make it a priority to pass on the truth to the next generation.

OUTLINE

I. THE FEAST OF TRUMPETS

II. TWO SILVER TRUMPETS

- A. Worship
- B. Kingship
- C. Battle

III. BLOW THE TRUMPET IN ZION

- A. The Trumpet of Alarm
- B. The Trumpet of Assembly

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

Due to the corrosive influence of Eastern transcendental meditation in Western religion, many Christian denominations have become quite shy about addressing the need for contemplative practices within spiritual formation. Though we would agree with the psalmist about the blessed state of the one who meditates in the Torah day and night (Psalm 1:2), we have very little idea, it seems, how to implement such a concept within our own lives.

Today's lesson on the biblical Feast of Trumpets and its contemporary form as Rosh Hashanah (the Jewish New Year) is designed to spark a renewed discussion of the need for celebratory reflection as part of the rhythm of our life together.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. THE FEAST OF TRUMPETS

The Feast of Trumpets as prescribed in Numbers 29:1 is probably one of the most obscure of all the festivals described in the Pentateuch. Its original meaning is somewhat mysterious, its historical development is convoluted, and the components of its observance have greatly varied. In contemporary Judaism, the Feast of Trumpets is now the celebration of Rosh Hashanah (literally, "the beginning/head of the year"), the Jewish New Year festival that occurs in early fall.

Two things are unique about this festival. First, most of us associate a New Year's Day celebration with a time of joyous festivities.

While the Jewish celebration of the New Year is certainly not as sad or despondent as Tisha B'Av, it by no means matches the frivolity of Purim. Hayyim Schauss says: "In all other festivals the spirit is one of exalted joyfulness." However, the New Year is a "profoundly serious" day "with a feeling of the heavy moral responsibility which life puts on all" (*The Jewish Festivals: History and Observance*).

The other striking element about the Feast of Trumpets is the odd "plainness" of its festivity. It is not as if the ancient Israelites only sounded the trumpets on this one day of the year. Trumpets were sounded during the daily sacrifices, the new moons (Numbers 10:10), and the year of Jubilee—and those are just the trumpet soundings relative to religious purposes. It is safe to say that, for most ancient Israelites gathered around the Tabernacle and later the Temple, rarely a day went by without the echoing blast of the trumpet. In fact, there was nothing that unusual about the Feast of Trumpets—no unique sacrificial rituals, no assigned prayers or Scripture recitations—other than the fact that the morning sacrifice was preceded by an unusually long trumpet blast (Abraham P. Bloch, *The Biblical and Historical Background of the Jewish Holy Days*).

Perhaps this ordinariness of the day contributed most to its development, for the meaning of the Feast of Trumpets is a popular topic of rabbinic discussion. Over the centuries, rabbis have assigned different layers of meaning to the day by pointing to its various connections and significations. In many ways, these discussions all related to the multiple ways the trumpet was used within Israelite society.

II. TWO SILVER TRUMPETS

In Numbers 10:1–10, on the eve of Israel's departure from Mount Sinai for the Promised Land, the Lord instructed Moses to construct two silver trumpets (these were not the well-known *shofar* or "ram's horn") to serve as signaling devices for the congregation of Israel as they marched through the wilderness toward the Promised Land. The vastness of the Israelite encampment made such a system of communication vital to existence and safety.

Although God had anointed Bezaleel and Aholiab with workmanship skills to construct the Tabernacle and all its furnishings (Exodus

31:1–11), He commanded Moses to personally make these two trumpets (Numbers 10:2). Following that directive, God described how Aaron's sons were to blow the trumpets to produce various important signals.

Two things are notable in this passage. First, the passage concluded with the Lord's explicit direction that each signal be distinct (Numbers 10:7). The utility of these instruments depended entirely on their clarity. Centuries later, in the context of a discussion of proper order within the worship service, Paul would ask a rhetorical question: "For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?" (1 Corinthians 14:8). Now, as then, it is difficult to overestimate the value of having clear direction.

Second, the signals described ranged from the mundane to the critical, from routine activity to emergency response (Numbers 10:3, 5–6). These trumpets, as instruments of divine direction for the people of God, not only sounded clearly but also sounded often—and with a variety of instructions. The chapter that gives the divine command "Ye shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy" (Leviticus 19:2) is then filled with a seeming mixed bag of divine commandments related to obedience to parents (verse 3), proper consumption of peace offerings (verses 5–6), harvesting fields/gleaning vineyards (verses 9–10), and paying fair wages promptly (verse 13). Topics switched from religious to secular, from cultic to agricultural to domestic.

The apparently "jumbled" nature of the chapter, though, subtly made a key point: Israel's obedience in all of these areas was a direct reflection of her holiness unto the Lord. God cared just as much about how the Israelites farmed their fields as He did about how they worshiped at the sacred altar. No sacred/secular, public/private distinction was made as is typical in modern Western life; in Israel, all of life—at home, at work, at church—was lived before God. Today, even though many resist such claims, in God's Word we find both clear and thorough direction. God has not disguised His intentions or desires for human life; neither has He restricted His direction to only certain issues, leaving us to fend for ourselves and guess at what would please Him in other areas. Thank God for the "certain sound" of

the truth of Scripture and the leading of the Spirit!

A. Worship

“Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all the earth: make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise. Sing unto the LORD with the harp; with the harp, and the voice of a psalm. With trumpets and sound of cornet make a joyful noise before the LORD, the King” (Psalm 98:4–6).

The sound of the trumpet was heard regularly in Israel’s worship. If Psalm 98 and other psalms can be taken as any indication, then worship in the Temple was quite the raucous affair. Granted, there most certainly were moments of contemplative silence; but just as surely there were moments when the very ground would tremble as the chosen people proclaimed the wonders of their God! This connection between the sound of the trumpet and the worship of God is so well established it is never really explained.

How did the blast of a trumpet become a symbol of worship? Was there anything unique about a trumpet blast? Was there some sort of magical power in its tone? Certainly not. It seems that the reason for the connection can be traced to the Lord’s first appearance to the just-delivered children of Israel at Mount Sinai, described in awesome detail in Exodus 19:16–19:

“And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled. And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God; and they stood at the nether part of the mount. And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly. And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice.”

It appears Moses had reached the limits of human language in his attempt to describe the Sinai theophany, which struck fear into the hearts of its witnesses. This moment was crucial to the story and identity of the nation of Israel for, in this revelation, God fulfilled His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and entered into covenant with their descendants. If the Israelites were to properly understand the gravity of the moment, they must first be impressed with the overpowering majesty of God; the goal of this magnificent display was not simply to “show off,” but to impress on all those who saw it the necessity of obedience to the forthcoming commands.

The Lord’s appearance on Mount Sinai at that crucial covenant-making moment was preceded by a sound like the “voice of the trumpet.” Thus the use of the trumpet in Israel’s worship would have served to echo that trumpet blast that shook the earth on the day of her founding! The trumpet would have signified God was present in Israel’s regular worship as He had been present that day on Sinai.

To be gathered in the Lord’s presence in the Tabernacle or Temple was to be no less an awesome experience than the day Israel gathered at the base of God’s desert mountain. Worship was designed to evoke the same reverential awe that would lead the people to renewed grateful obedience. The divine presence is never a “static” reality; rather, it is a “dynamic” reality. Divine presence is simply another way to describe divine action. God does not come to be with us and then observe silently from the sidelines. God’s presence always comes to save, deliver, set free, and heal! (See Luke 5:17.)

B. Kingship

Another major national event accompanied by the sound of trumpets was the coronation of a new king. (See I Kings 1:34; II Kings 9:13; 11:14.) Moses anticipated the institution of the kingship in Israel and gave instructions about the king’s relationship to the law of God. (See Deuteronomy 17:18–20.) While the Levites’ task was to teach the divine law, the king’s task was to make sure it was enforced. In fact, the writer of First and Second Kings primarily evaluated each Israelite and Judean king related to that individual’s faithfulness to the covenant, primarily in the orthodoxy of one’s worship.

However, the king's responsibilities extended far beyond "taking attendance" at every Temple pilgrimage festival.

Israel's covenant community life as described in the Pentateuch was aimed to incarnate the saving power of God in everyday existence. It was not enough for the people of Israel to be saved; they must also live saved. The deliverance experienced in the Exodus was never intended to be just the experience of those who stood with Moses on the banks of the Nile as the water turned to blood; rather, God's wondrous work pointed to a new way of living that God wanted to characterize His people's new way of life in the Promised Land. It was to be a life characterized by faithful worship, care for the needy, and justice between neighbors. In one of the most crucial passages in the entire Pentateuch, Moses commanded the Jordan generation:

"Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked. For the LORD your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward: He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment. Love ye therefore the stranger: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt. Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God; him shalt thou serve, and to him shalt thou cleave, and swear by his name. He is thy praise, and he is thy God, that hath done for thee these great and terrible things, which thine eyes have seen" (Deuteronomy 10:16-21).

After the establishment of the monarchy, primary responsibility for adherence to this admonition fell to the king. It was the king's divine task to make sure the "fatherless, widows, and strangers [e.g., resident aliens]"—three specific groups lacking key advocacy relationships like parents, husbands, and relatives—were treated with justice rather than being exploited. Understanding this helps to explain why stories like David's treatment of Jonathan's lame son Mephibosheth (II Samuel 9) figured so prominently in the text when it was a relatively minor episode or why David's

sin with Bathsheba (II Samuel 11) is meant to be seen as such a heinous act, especially for the divinely appointed "covenant enforcer"!

C. Battle

Another key role played by the trumpet blast was to summon the people of Israel to war. In Numbers 10, a key use of the silver trumpets was to organize the troops for battle. Shortly after their departure from Egypt, the nation of Israel faced an Amalekite attack (Exodus 17:8-14), which revealed their vulnerability and need of military preparedness. Thus the instruction in Numbers 10 represented a kind of divine "military training" meant to prepare Israel for battle.

At least a dozen times, the Bible mentioned the people being called to battle with the sound of the trumpet. The most famous of these, of course, would have been the battle of Jericho, Israel's first military encounter in their conquest of the Promised Land. That battle culminated with the people's shout and the voice of the trumpet; "and it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city" (Joshua 6:20).

If it is not already clear, these three usages of the trumpet are interwoven with one another. The king was to lead Israel into battle against her enemies and oppressors so she might live in God-granted freedom. And God's presence would go with the Israelite army (when they were in God's will) to give them miraculous aid and bring them the victory. To hear the sound of the trumpet was to be reminded of God's saving presence, called to obedience in light of His fearsome power, and commissioned to fight injustice wherever it was found.

When we understand the interconnections of divine presence, covenant faithfulness, and the promise of justice and freedom, we begin to grasp the significant encouragement provided in Paul's exhortation to the Thessalonians when he reminded them that on the great final day "the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God" (I Thessalonians 4:16). One day that final trumpet will sound, the final King will be crowned,

and we will enter into the final era of human history marked by peace and prosperity unknown since Eden! Today may we find our ears straining to catch that final blast, looking ahead in hope and anticipation of our Lord's glorious return!

III. BLOW THE TRUMPET IN ZION

A. The Trumpet of Alarm

"Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the LORD cometh, for it is nigh at hand" (Joel 2:1).

Joel used the sounding of the trumpet as the controlling image in the second movement of his prophecy. The sounding of the trumpet was a warning signal. When the Israelites heard the silver trumpets sound a specific tattoo, they immediately sprang into action because that sound indicated danger and the nearness of an enemy.

Joel called for the sounding of the battle alarm, for the Day of the Lord was imminent. In the Old Testament, the Day of the Lord was the controlling concept in the understanding of what we would call the "end times." In many important ways, the New Testament doctrine of the second coming of Jesus Christ (Revelation 19:11–15) is simply a new nomenclature applied to the Old Testament's Day of the Lord.

To understand the power of Joel's prophecy, it must be noted that for most of Israelite history, the Day of the Lord was thought of as the time when the Lord would come to punish the pagan enemies of Israel. It was to be a day of "sweet revenge" where, as the psalmist said, "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them [that is, the Gentile nations] in derision" (Psalm 2:4).

But Joel did not direct his message of imminent judgment to the heathen Gentiles. He commanded the trumpet to be sounded "in Zion" and not "in the nations." All the inhabitants of "the land" (that is, the Promised Land)—not the inhabitants of "the earth"—were called to tremble! The stunning revelation of Joel's prophecy was that the warning of God's impending wrath and judgment must

first be heard by God's own chosen people.

We rightly bemoan the reticence in many corners of Christendom to declare the righteousness and justice of God and to decry the spirit of compromise that has swept divine truth away from innumerable pulpits, leaving behind a pabulum message of what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called "cheap grace." Perhaps an even more serious danger, however, is to proclaim the biblical message of judgment on this world without applying it to ourselves. If God is just, as the Scripture so loudly proclaims, then He cannot simply overlook sin—even, and especially, our own. Peter wrote:

"For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (1 Peter 4:17–18).

B. The Trumpet of Assembly

"Let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O LORD, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God?" (Joel 2:17).

After a frightening description of the coming Day of the Lord, Joel again commanded his audience to "blow the trumpet." However, this time the tattoo was different; it was a call to a "fast" and a "solemn assembly." In light of the swift-approaching judgment of God, the only proper response was deep repentance.

The real battle to which Joel called the people was an engagement with their own waywardness, a confrontation with the hardness of their own hearts. Too often, like the Judeans of Joel's day, we assume our lives will go on forever, and therefore we presume upon the grace of our almighty God. Rarely do we take serious stock of our spiritual position. We would much rather assume that, though we may not be doing as well as some, we are certainly doing better than others and must be in God's good graces. Our

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

innate tendency is to self-justification, not correction. This reminds us of the final stanza of an anonymous poem found scrawled on the wall of a prison cell on death row: “You can fool the whole world down the pathway of years and get pats on the back as you pass; but the final reward will be heartache and tears if you’ve cheated the man in the glass” (www.itwillpass.com).

We should take warning today in the number of Jesus’ parables about the last judgment that emphasize surprising outcomes and reversals of expected fortunes. The “goats” and “foolish virgins” of Matthew 25 fully expected to be included in the celebration until the fateful final moments. How sobering it is to consider just how many sitting on church pews today may “just miss” the rapture of the church and the Lord’s return!

All hope, however, is not lost! Immediately after the call to repentance in Joel 2:17, the prophet continued: “Then will the LORD be jealous for his land, and pity his people. . . . Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice: for the LORD will do great things” (Joel 2:18, 21). True repentance brings salvation, for we serve a gracious and merciful God.

The “blast of the trumpet,” then, should fill our days with sobriety and rejoicing. Most certainly, divine judgment is coming on all those who refuse to follow after God; but just as certainly, salvation is prepared for those who turn to the Lord and away from their own sin. We can trust that our God not only will do justly but also will love us with His mercy!

It is intriguing to note the Feast of Trumpets occurs on 1 Tishri, and the Day of Atonement occurs just nine days later on 10 Tishri. They are together called the “Days of Awe” and are considered the two holiest days of the Jewish year (Hayyim Schauss, *The Jewish Festivals*). Also, both of these high holy days occurred in the fall of the year after completion of the harvest.

Taken altogether, a key lesson to learn here is both the value of reflection and the importance of its timing. We live in a fast-paced world that makes little time for self-reflection, that wants to catch us up in a whirlwind of activity so we face the conundrum of days filled with “doing things” without ever accomplishing anything of lasting value. We must be intentional in our resistance to the ever-increasing social speed and take time to reflect on the meaning and purpose of our lives.

Furthermore, it is important to embark upon such reflective exercises at the height of our success and not just in the valleys of our deepest failures. God called Israel to a season of solemnity when the granaries were full, not empty. It is so tempting when life is going well to assume life will always go well. The temptation of success is to believe the lie that it is the product of our own hard work and intelligence rather than a gift from God. But we know from Scripture that “every good gift and every perfect gift is from above” (James 1:17), so we must in grateful humility continually turn back to our Creator. ■

REFLECTIONS

- Do you remember attending a Watch Night service on New Year’s Eve? Do you remember your initial impressions? Did you grow to appreciate the experience? What is the one thing you most appreciate or miss about the Pentecostal Watch Night tradition?
- It seems to be difficult for humans to hold together the ideas that the coming of the Lord is both a message of hope and a message of warning—and that both messages are necessary for us to hear. Why do you think that is? What are some important keys you have found to living both soberly and joyfully in light of the promise of the Lord’s soon return?
- What are the three most difficult challenges you face in establishing a regular time each year for this kind of solemn reflection on your life direction? What are some specific things you can do to make space in your schedule for this necessary process?