

Rosh HaShanah 25.09.22

Intro.

We are interrupting our studies in Philippians for three weeks as we consider the 3 great Autumn Festivals, the holy celebrations which God instituted with His own people in the Old Testament.

Today, we are going to consider Rosh HaShanah, the Feast of Trumpets, the New Year Festival for the Jews, and in following weeks we will look at Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement and then Sukkot, the festival of tabernacles or booths.

You might be thinking, 'why are we looking at these festivals? What have they got to do with us? They are for Jewish people to celebrate.'

Well, firstly, God instituted them. In Leviticus 23 v 2, 4 we read:

'These are the Lord's appointed feasts, the sacred assemblies you are to proclaim at their appointed times.'

God knows that we humans need markers in the year. During the two covid years when we didn't have our usual national markers and couldn't get together in the usual ways, we realised how important they are to us.

The festivals or feasts that God instituted gave a break from work and a time to worship, celebrate and also to reflect, fast and repent.

Secondly, 2 Timothy 3 v 16 *'All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.'*

So, although we do not keep these feasts, we can learn a great deal from them, for our benefit.

Rosh Hashanah

Ros HaShanah starts this evening, 25th September through to tomorrow evening.

Rosh Hashanah, also called Yom Hazirikaron – Day of Remembrance was special because it was a day to remember God and turn back to Him. It comes at the end of a period of forgiving others and asking for forgiveness for oneself.

Secular commentators made many mentions of the late Queen's faith and her amazing example of forgiveness towards others – and not just her family. This is a rare attribute in the world. We pray, the prayer Jesus taught, 'Forgive us our trespasses *as we forgive those who trespass against us.*' How do I want God to forgive me when I sin against Him? Totally, freely, not holding that offense against me anymore. Then, that's how I must forgive others who offend me in some way.

This is an act of faith and of will. However much someone has hurt us, we need to forgive – to let them off our hook. God will sort out injustices completely fairly, in His time; it is not our job to try to wreak revenge by withholding forgiveness. Let us forgive as freely and generously as we want Him to forgive us.

On Rosh HaShanah, there were a lot of sacrifices and offerings made. The most significant being the sacrifice of a lamb as a sacrifice for sin.

This is of course an amazing foreshadowing of Jesus, the Son of God, offering up Himself as the Lamb of God, as a sacrificial substitute for our sin.

Trumpets

An alternative name for Rosh HaShana is Yom Truah, which means 'blasting the shofar'.

The shofar is the ram's horn trumpet used in the Old Testament and still around today. It is a most distinctive sound.

Numbers 29 v 1

'On the first day of the seventh month (of the Jewish calendar) hold a sacred assembly and do no regular work. It is a day for you to sound the trumpets.'

Leviticus 23 v 24 'A sacred assembly with trumpet blasts.'

However, trumpets were sounded with different calls at other times for other purposes.

Today, I want us to consider just four of the occasions when the shofars would be sounded.

1. Battle

For example, Joshua 6, Jericho was brought down when, in accordance with God's instructions, the priests blew their shofars, and the people gave a great shout. In Judges 7 v 16 -22 the story of Gideon. Following God's instructions so far, and God's assurance of victory, Gideon divided his ridiculously small army of 300 men into 3 companies. They advanced at night and each man had a clay jar with a lit torch inside and a trumpet. Once they reached the edge of the enemy army camp, they all smashed their jars, so that light blazed out, they shouted, and they blew their shofars. The enemy panicked and fled.

Well, that doesn't seem very relevant to us, does it? But we are in a battle whether we acknowledge it or want to be in it.

Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the dark spiritual powers who are implacably set against the Lord God and His church. The battle rages for our minds and our wills; will we live in obedience and submission to the Lord God, or give in to the temptations of the world, the flesh and the devil?

We are also called to the larger spiritual battle in the world for the soul of our nation. To intercede and to pray that the gospel will be proclaimed fearlessly and clearly.

2. A warning

When the prophets warned that the sin of the nation was so great that God would judge them, the shofar was sounded to call the people to repentance.

Joel 2 v 1 *'Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the trumpet on My holy hill.*

Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming. It is close at hand.'

When we hear a warning siren, we do well to take action. When we hear an emergency vehicle on the road, we try to move out of the way; when the smoke alarm went off during Chinese church a couple of weeks ago, they very wisely evacuated the building; when air-raid sirens went off in WW2, people went into the shelters.

Except for my mother – claustrophobic!

And one time, Philip, Chris and Kathryn were staying in a hotel and were the only three people to evacuate when the fire alarm went off. Other people said that they couldn't hear anyone in the corridors, so they thought it must be a false alarm!

How foolish!

There are people who ignore warnings, but we are wise when we respond appropriately.

When the nation is in rebellion against God, as ours is, we, the people of God should hear in our spirits the warning that God will not turn a blind eye for ever, and we should repent and intercede for the nation.

Rosh HaShanah was also linked with Yom Hadin, the Day of Judgment – the Day of the Lord – when God will judge the living and the dead.

We don't hear much about this, these days – it is very unfashionable, and it makes us feel uncomfortable. Some people dismiss it as belonging only to the Old Testament, but Jesus spoke of it and **all scripture is God-breathed!**

We need to take this seriously.

3. The trumpets were sounded **to praise the King and at his anointing:**

Over the past few weeks, we have heard quite a lot of ceremonial trumpeting. When the King's accession was announced, trumpets were sounded and what a stirring sound they are! We will hear more when King Charles is crowned. There is something very solemn and majestic and affecting about a trumpet fanfare.

We get quite a lot of our Coronation ceremonial from the Old Testament:

1 Kings 1 32 *'Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet are to anoint [Solomon] king over Israel. Blow the ram's horn and shout, 'Long live King Solomon!'*

Some of us remember, or have seen film of, that joyous moment in the late Queen's coronation when the shout went up in Parry's great hymn; 'Vivat, Regina! Vivat Regina Elizabetha, vivat!' 'Long live Queen Elizabeth!'

Psalms 98 v 6 *'with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn – shout for joy before the Lord, the King.'*

Lastly, The shofar was sounded to get people's attention

When Israel was camped at Mt Sinai, Moses was commanded by God to prepare the people and that they must consecrate themselves to God and wash their clothes ready for the third day. When the third day came, thunders and lightning and a thick cloud and fire on the mountain, and the mountain quaked, and there was the sound of a shofar that got louder and louder for a long time. Terrifying! Then, God spoke to Moses by an audible voice. It reminds us of Elijah's encounter with God on that same mountain.

One day, and maybe it will be soon, we will hear the last great trumpet blast. That heavenly shofar will blow again to get our attention and announce the King. We might have already left this life or we might still be alive, but all will hear the great shout - the voice of an archangel, and the blast of the trumpet of God as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords returns for His own.

Apparently, the late Queen hoped to be alive when the Lord Jesus returns so that she could lay her crown down at his feet. Well, when that last great shofar blows, she will get her opportunity.

Then those who are in Christ will get to be with Him forever. Our new Resurrection bodies. No more sickness, death and sorrow.

What thrilling words from our reading:

'And so, shall we ever be with the Lord.'

Amen, come Lord Jesus!