

Psalm 81 and the Feast of Trumpets

The Jews read Psalm 81 on the Feast of Trumpets – what they call “Rosh Hashanah,” which means “the Head of the Year.”

Some commentators have written that this psalm may have been inspired and written especially for the Feast of Trumpets.

In this article, I would like us to share a Bible study to examine what God has to say to us through Psalm 81, specifically in relation to the Feast of Trumpets.

But first, let us cast our minds back six months to the Feast of Unleavened Bread at which time we often look beyond the symbolism of the spring holy days alone – rich though it may be – all the way out through the symbolism of the subsequent holy days and the time periods that separate them – all the way out to the wonderful imagery of the Last Great Day. In this article, I would like to ask you to notice in Psalm 81 how frequently God seems to do something similar to this – only in reverse. He seems to firmly root us in the symbolism of the Feast of Trumpets – which is so obviously a pivotal day historically and prophetically – then point us forward to the symbolism of the other three fall holy days; but even more frequently backwards to the symbolism of the spring holy days.

Preface

Like many of the Psalms, this one has a preface, and here it is:

To the Chief Musician upon Gittith (KJV)

Strong’s says that this word, “Gittiyth,” comes from the word “Gittiy” which means “a Gittite” or “belonging to Gath” or “an inhabitant of Gath.” The Philistine city of Gath is probably familiar to many as the origin of Goliath.

Both words – *Gittith* and *Gath* – mean “a wine-press,” “treading grapes” or “wine-fat.”

Used in the preface of this psalm and that of Psalm 8 and Psalm 84, this word is thought to refer to a musical instrument common to the Philistine city of Gath, in a similar way, perhaps, as bagpipes are common to Scotland. Perhaps the authors of these three psalms were recommending that these particular psalms be sung to the accompaniment of the “Gittith” instrument.

We see a New Testament parallel to this word in the word “Gethsemane” (Oil Press), a noun of Aramaic origin which joins the word “Gath” with the word “shemen” which means: *oil, olive, olive oil, oiled, anointing, ointment, medicament and unguent* – all of which are symbolic of the Holy Spirit and of healing.

This word *shemen* also refers to *fat, fatness, fruitful land or valleys* – all of which might be symbolic of the many physical blessings poured out by God on His people for keeping His holy days.

I am not 100% sure what the connection might be between a wine-press/oil-press and a musical instrument. Perhaps they looked alike or perhaps they had similar workings. I wondered if there might be any connection between the *gittith* and the *guitar* because of the similarity between the first syllable of both words. According to Wikipedia, “the modern word *guitar* and its antecedents have been applied to a wide variety of cordophones since ancient times... The English word *guitar*, the German *gitarre*, and the French *guitare* were adopted from the Spanish *guitarra*, which comes from the Andalusian Arabic *qitara*, itself derived from the Latin *cithara*, which in turn came from the Ancient Greek *kithara*, and is thought to ultimately trace back to the Old Persian language. *Tar* means string in Persian.”

Continuing in the Psalm 81 preface:

A Psalm of Asaph.

Who was Asaph? What do we know about him? His name means “Convener” or “collector.” I have heard that perhaps he is the man – or one of the men – who collected all the Psalms together.

We know that Asaph was a Levite, a son of a man named Berechiah of whom we know little or nothing, and that Asaph was one of the leaders of David's choir. We know also that Psalms 50 and 73 through 83 are attributed to him. He is mentioned along with David as skilled in music, and also as a "seer" or prophet (II Chronicles 29:30).

The "sons of Asaph," (mentioned in I Chronicles 25:1-2, 26:1, II Chronicles 20:14, 29:13, 35:15, Ezra 2:41, 3:10 and Nehemiah 11:22) were perhaps his descendants, or more probably a class of poets or singers who recognized him as their master.

So now let us get into the body of the psalm itself with verse 1:

Sing aloud to God our strength; make a joyful shout to the God of Jacob.

The Psalm itself begins with great power. We are encouraged to sing out loud to our powerful God – to joyfully shout to Him.

As well as being symbolic of the return of Jesus Christ and the beginning of the new world – the World Tomorrow, the Feast of Trumpets is also commemorative of the original creation of the world. Job describes this wonderful event, using some of the same words as Asaph:

When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? (Job 38:7)

Let us briefly examine ourselves in this matter of our weekly hymn-singing. Are we embarrassed or ashamed to sing out loud to our great God? Do we virtually whisper or mumble the wonderful hymns that have been so lovingly written around the words of the psalms and other scriptures in order to help us to praise God?

In our Sabbath services throughout the year, even if we are worshipping on our own or with a tiny living-room group, perhaps we should practice singing out loud with power and strength so that, when we are together with more of our fellow-brethren at the Feast, we can raise the rafters! This concept leads nicely into verse 2 of Psalm 81:

Raise a song...

Here we are admonished to raise a song – to *raise* the volume of our voices – to lift up our voices up before God – our great God and His Son, both of whom dwell so much higher than we do. When we raise something, we lift it to a higher plane; and they *are* on a higher plane – a much higher plane than we are. Just how high are they? God answers through His prophet Isaiah:

For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:9)

Now that's high! Jesus Christ is not called the High Priest for nothing!

Speaking of the highness of our High Priest, the author of Hebrews wrote:

For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; (Hebrews 7:26)

Back to Psalm 81, and still in verse 2:

... and strike the timbrel, the pleasant harp with the psaltery.

In this verse we go from the enthusiastic singing of psalms to God to instrumental music – or perhaps instrumental accompaniment.

Here we see a small band pictured – the smallest size being a trio with three types of musical instruments: timbrel, harp and psaltery. Perhaps the temple ensembles were larger than just a little trio. Perhaps there were multiple sizes of timbrels, harps and psalteries in the same way as today's orchestras have many different sizes of string, woodwind, brass and percussion instruments.

So what were these instruments? The word “timbrel” is translated from the Hebrew “toph” and is thought to have been a kind of drum or tambourine.

The English word “harp” is translated from the Hebrew word “kinnowr” which means to “twang.” Perhaps it was similar to a lyre or a modern harp. Or perhaps it was more like a guitar. How many of you oldies remember Duane Eddy from the late sixties, who was renowned for his twanging electric guitar sound? In 1959, he had a hit album called “The Twang's the Thang.”

The psaltery is an interesting instrument. The word is translated from the Hebrew word “nebel” which can mean *bottle, flagon, pitcher, vessel, jar, or bag*...all of which can be made either from animal-skin or earthenware. Various scholars have thought the psaltery to be a harp, lute, guitar, or some other type of musical instrument. But to me, the derivation from bottles, flagons, pitchers, vessels or jars brings to mind instruments like those used in North American or British “Jug-bands” in which one the players plays a tune by blowing into the neck of a bottles or jar. Some of you oldies will remember the huge jug-band hit “In the Summertime” from the early seventies. All our yesterdays!

Another possibility for the identity of a psaltery – from the idea of the “animal-skin bag” derivation – is that this word might refer to a kind of bag-pipe – similar to those popular in Scotland, Ireland, Spain and many other countries. I remember from my early years in the church that this was at that time the common interpretation of the word “psaltery.”

It is also interesting that the Hebrew word for psaltery is “nebel.” This fits in with the name of Abigail’s first husband – Nabal – who was a fool (I Samuel 25). Today, we might refer to such a man as “a wind-bag”!

Still in Psalm 81, on to verse 3:

Blow up the trumpet in the new moon, in the time appointed *{Hebrew “keceh” which means “full moon”}*, **on our solemn feast day.**

Here is a fourth musical instrument in our “band” – the trumpet. Here at last we see the direct relationship with Psalm 81 and the Feast of Trumpets. The well-known Hebrew word used here is “shofar” which was a wind instrument made from the horn of a ram.

The commentator Faussett writes that in the Temple years, as well as the shofar, the “straight trumpet” – Hebrew *chatzotzrah* – was also blown.

Although our modern perception of the shofar of Bible times might be one of a simple, limited, one-note instrument, Strong says that this word comes from another similar word, “shafar” through, writes Strong, “the original sense of incising.” I am not totally sure of what he is getting at by this. To incise means *to cut into, to carve, to engrave, score, notch, slit open* or *to chisel*. Perhaps the shofars were ornately carved. Or perhaps holes or notches were chiseled into them so that multiple notes were possible – similar to our modern woodwind and brass instruments. A third possibility is that perhaps Strong is referring to the shofar’s piercing sound – that it cuts through the air. And its sound certainly *does* cut through the air, doesn’t it?

I think that sound could cut through hardened steel! As a military trumpet, the sound of a shofar could be heard over long distances and even through the din of battle.

The root word “shafar” means *goodly, pleasing, beautiful, fair, comely or bright*. I’m not sure that I personally would describe the shofar’s sound as any of these adjectives! But perhaps it is an acquired taste! Perhaps God’s musical appreciation is different than ours. After all, please think about the huge variety in musical tastes – especially between generations. Do you twenty-somethings like the same music as those seventy-somethings – or even us thirty-somethings! So why wouldn’t God, who has lived forever, have vastly different and more mature musical tastes than limited-lifespan human beings? Also, there is much geographical difference in musical tastes. In the west, most of us Caucasians do not appreciate Chinese or East Indian music.

Here in verse 3, the psalmist tells us to blow the trumpet at the time of the New Moon; also at the “keceh” – the full moon, on our solemn feast day. The full moon indicates the middle of each lunar month. Notable full moons which are also solemn Feast days are the First Day of Unleavened Bread and the first holy day of the Feast of Tabernacles.

The new moon or “chodesh” indicates the beginning of each lunar month.

In those days, every new moon was marked by the blowing of trumpets. Although most new moons are not holy days, it is good for us to mark them and note them – mainly in reference to how far we are away from the spring or fall holy days. Still, a few of the new moons *are* notable – specifically the one that begins Abib (also called Nisan), the first month of the sacred year and the one that begins Tishri (also called Ethanim), the seventh month of the sacred year and the first month of the administrative year. This last one is, of course, the Feast of Trumpets. This is both the new moon and the solemn feast day mentioned in Psalm 81:3. On now to verse 4:

For this is a statute for Israel, a law of the God of Jacob.

Asaph writes that “this” is a statute and a law of God for physical Israel – of which we – the peoples of modern Ephraim and Manasseh – are part; and more importantly, for the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16) – the New Testament church of God.

But what is this statute and law? Just the marking of the new moons, full moons and solemn feast days? Or is the psalmist also referring to the blowing of trumpets on these days?

The Jews take this command 100% literally.

Some time ago, I read a question on the *Ask Moses* web-site asking the Rabbis if it was OK for a Jewish person to listen to the Rosh Hashanah shofar blast over the telephone. The answer given by the rabbis was that it is a sin to use a telephone on any Sabbath day; also that the listener would not be hearing a shofar blast, but merely an electronic representation of one.

I don't know about you brethren around the world; but here on Vancouver Island, we don't have a shofar to blow. I suppose we travel to the local synagogue to hear one blown; or we could buy one of our own and get one of our members to blow it each year. Christian Book Distributors sells shofars in a variety of sizes and prices ranging from \$13 to \$209.

Alternatively, Jewish community centres sometimes put on information sessions where, for about \$15, you can buy a ram's horn and they'll teach you to make your very own shofar. So I guess we don't have much excuse!

One of our local ex-members – in a sermonette a couple of years ago – blew a few blasts on a shofar he owned. It didn't go down too well! I wasn't there at the time, but I believe he nearly emptied the meeting hall!

But do we really need to blow trumpets or shofars to fulfil this command?

It would certainly be nice to have an accomplished *modern* trumpet player come and play a nice trumpet tune at services on each Feast of Trumpets; but most of our congregations don't have one of them locally either.

I think it is *somewhat* important to play *some* trumpet music on the Feast of Trumpets each year – to fulfil this command and to remind ourselves of the significance of the trumpet on this day.

What we have traditionally done in our local congregations is to play a short, recorded clip from a pleasant piece of classical trumpet music during the taking up of the Holy Day Offering – e.g. Haydn's Trumpet Concerto or "The trumpet shall sound" aria from Handel's "Messiah." We also traditionally sing the ever popular hymn, "God speaks to us," with its inspiring "trumpet" chords played on piano at the beginning of each verse.

I trust that this is acceptable to God. If it is not, perhaps we should pray that He might reveal to us what else we should do in this regard.

Verse 5: This he ordained in Joseph for a testimony, when he went out through the land of Egypt: where I heard a language that I understood not.

This is a very interesting and seemingly pivotal verse which raises a few questions, all of which I am not sure of the answers to, especially regarding the pronouns “he” and “I.”

Asaph says that the “he” mentioned here established the blowing of trumpets “as a testimony” on the new-moons, full-moons and Feast days “in Joseph.”

Who was the “he” that established this testimony? The NKJV capitalizes the word; but was it really referring to God? Or could it perhaps have been referring to Jacob, from verse 4?

And who was the “he” who traveled throughout the land of Egypt? Was it God, Jacob, or Joseph?

Then we see the “he” suddenly change to “I” for the first time. This “I” tells us that this person heard a language that he didn’t understand.

The use of the pronoun “I” in the *following* verses fairly obviously refers to God. But what about here in verse 5? Can we believe that there is *any* human language that God is unable to understand?

Could Asaph have been applying it to himself? Perhaps he had visited Egypt and was unable to understand their language. Or was he applying it to Joseph when he first arrived in Egypt and was unable to understand their language? Or Jacob upon his later arrival during the time of the great famine?

If Asaph is referring to Joseph – is he talking about the time when Joseph was actually alive and living in Egypt?

Or is he referring prophetically to Joseph’s descendants – the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh – in Egypt in later years when they were under the lash of slavery, as the following verse (6) seems to imply?

Another question: What is a testimony? The word is translated from the Hebrew “*eduwth*,” which can also mean “witness. Strong says that it comes from the word “*ed*” which means *witness, proof or evidence of truth*.

We all know that God does not like confusion. He loves truth, logic, proof, clarity, and common sense. And this concept brings to mind what Paul says about speaking in tongues in what almost appears to be a New Testament parallel scripture of this section of Psalm 81:

**Now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine? And even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped?
(I Corinthians 14:6-7)**

Paul, like Asaph, makes a similar use of the analogy of musical instruments.

Paul says that each musical instrument has its own distinctive sound, which makes a unique impression as a solo instrument or when included in an ensemble. Different musical instruments played in different ways can give different musical messages. Many experienced classical music aficionados can listen to certain pieces of music and can know what the composer is trying to “say” to the listeners – even though no words are being spoken or sung! Some composers in Soviet Russia – notably Dmitri Shostakovich – barely escaped Stalin’s firing squads because they were “saying” the “wrong” thing – i.e. sending the wrong political message – through their music! Still in I Corinthians 14, continuing in verse 8:

For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?

Like Asaph, Paul adds the trumpet – as a special instrument – to the other instruments he had listed previously. The military trumpet *must* not give an “uncertain sound.” It must give a “certain” – instantly recognizable – sound.

In the barracks, when the military trumpet plays “Reveille,” the soldiers know that they must get up and get out of bed. When he sounds “Come to the cookhouse door boys,” they know it’s meal-time. When he plays “Last Post,” they know it’s time to switch off and go to sleep.

Also and more importantly, on the battlefield, when the “Charge” is sounded on the trumpet, they know that they are being commanded to speedily advance – and to do their best to put holes in the enemy before the enemy puts holes in them! If the trumpeter sounds “Retreat,” they know that they are being commanded to withdraw.

Still in I Corinthians 14, now verses 9 through 12:

So likewise you, except you utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? For you shall speak into the air. There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices *{or sounds}* in the world, and none of them is without signification. Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice *{sound}*, I shall be unto him that speaks a barbarian *{foreigner}*, and he that speaks shall be a barbarian *{foreigner}* unto me. Even so you, forasmuch as you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that you may excel to the edifying of the church.

What does it mean to edify the church? It means to enlighten, inform, educate, instruct, improve, or teach the brethren. Paul goes on to show in practical terms that this cannot be done in a foreign language that the members do not understand.

Let me repeat for emphasis: God does not like confusion. He likes logic, clarity, proof, common sense and truth. This is proof itself that the old Roman Catholic practice of holding church services and reading scripture in the Latin language was so obviously wrong. God wants His people to be able to understand what is being said and sung.

Back to Psalm 81 and continuing in verse 6:

I removed his shoulder from the burden: his hands were delivered from the pots.

It is obvious here in this case that the “I” is not Asaph. Who did the removing and delivering? It must refer to God. But who does the “his” refer to? Whose shoulder was removed from the burden? Whose hands were delivered from the pots? Was this the young Joseph when God freed him from the Egyptian dungeon? Or was it his Ephraimite and Manassite descendants in the Egyptian brick-yards, along with their brethren from the other Israelite tribes? The description certainly does seem to be broadening out from just Joseph – back to his father Jacob and to his descendants – but also to the New Testament “Israel of God.” Let us apply some of this to ourselves – to the Church of God.

Firstly, God wants us to listen to His Word in a language that we clearly understand. Speaking in tongues is a related subject, but is one which would take up a whole article just by itself.

Secondly, if we are willing, God will give us the understanding of things that the wise of the world are totally unable to comprehend.

Thirdly, God is removing our shoulders from the burden and our hands from the pots. He is delivering us from our slavery to sin. This refers right back in God's sacred calendar –from the beginning of the administrative new year (Tishri 1) to the beginning of the sacred new year (Abib 1); from the beginning of the fall holy day season to the beginning of the spring holy day season; to our pre-Passover self-examination; to Passover itself; and to the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Verse 7: You called in trouble, and I delivered you; I answered you in the secret place of thunder: I proved you at the waters of Meribah. Selah.

Before we get into the meat of this verse, let us consider this last word “Selah.” This word is thought to have been a kind of musical term to show a pause, accentuation or interruption. We in the church have historically interpreted it as a recommendation for us to “Think on this!” But isn't it interesting in the context of this Psalm that the Hebrew word “Selah” itself actually means “to lift up” or “to exalt”? Isn't it interesting that this is how we began our discussion today back in verses 1 and 2, where God – through Asaph – tells us to raise our voices – to lift up our voices – in songs of praise to Him?

Now into the meat of verse 7: here we see Israel pictured at three different times and in three different places.

First: when they called to God out of Egypt and He heard, responded and delivered them:

And it came to pass in process of time, that the king of Egypt died: and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto them. (Exodus 2:23-25)

Second, when He answered them in the secret place of thunder:

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 {shofar} exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled... And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice... And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses, Speak you with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die. (Exodus 19:16, 19; 20:18-19)

Third, when God proved them at the waters of Meribah. There were actually two places called Meribah – both of them places where the Israelites complained because of a lack of water. The first was in the Wilderness of Sin, near Rephidim:

And all the congregation of the children of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of Sin, after their journeys, according to the commandment of the LORD, and pitched in Rephidim: and there was no water for the people to drink. Wherefore the people did chide with Moses, and said, “Give us water that we may drink.” And Moses said unto them, “Why chide you with me? Why do you tempt the LORD?” And the people thirsted there for water; and the people murmured against Moses, and said, “Why is this that you have brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?” And Moses cried unto the LORD, saying, “What shall I do unto this people? They be almost ready to stone me.” And the LORD said unto Moses, “Go on before the people, and take with you of the elders of Israel; and your rod, wherewith thou smote the river, take in your hand, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there upon the rock in Horeb; and you shall smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink.” And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the name of the place “Massah,” and “Meribah,” because of the chiding of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the LORD, saying, Is the LORD among us, or not? (Exodus 17:1-7)

Massah or *Maccah* is the Hebrew word for "temptation." This was the place in the wilderness where the Israelites tested God. *Meribah* is the Hebrew word for "strife" or "contention."

The second Meribah was in the Wilderness of Zin near Kadesh on the southern border of the Promised Land:

Then came the children of Israel, even the whole congregation, into the desert of Zin in the first month: and the people abode in Kadesh; and Miriam died there, and was buried there. And there was no water for the congregation: and they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron. And the people chode with Moses, and spake, saying, Would God that we had died when our brethren died before the LORD! And why have ye brought up the congregation of the LORD into this wilderness, that we and our cattle should die there? And wherefore have ye made us to come up out of Egypt, to bring us in unto this evil place? It is no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates; neither is there any water to drink. And Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they fell upon their faces: and the glory of the LORD appeared unto them. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink. And Moses took the rod from before the LORD, as he commanded him. And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock? And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also. And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them. This is the water of Meribah; because the children of Israel strove with the LORD, and he was sanctified in them. (Numbers 20:1-13)

So what is God telling us by grouping these three (or four) events together in verse 7 of Psalm 81? He is reminding us that:

1. He heard the Israelites when they cried to Him in their Egyptian slavery,
2. He knew us – New Testament Israel – even before we knew Him; even before we knew enough to cry out to Him; even before we recognized the fact that we were in slavery,
3. He brought Old Testament Israel out of slavery in Egypt by means of a series of huge miracles,
4. He brought New Testament Israel out of our slavery to Satan's world by means of even greater miracles!
5. He frightened the living daylights out of the stiff-necked Old Testament Israelites in order to get them to properly fear and reverence Him,
6. He used much gentler means to get His New Testament children to fear Him. One of the main purposes of the Feast each year is to teach us to fear Him:

**And thou shalt eat before the LORD thy God, in the place which he shall choose to place his name there, the tithe of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thine oil, and the firstlings of thy herds and of thy flocks; that thou mayest learn to fear the LORD thy God always.
(Deuteronomy 14:23)**

What else is He saying to us through verse 7 of Psalm 81?

7. Even when the Old Testament Israelites had seen such huge, incredible miracles and signs, they still murmured against God,
8. Even Moses and Aaron sinned at the second Meribah in the Wilderness of Zin. They vainly tried to attribute to themselves and their own power – in the Israelites' eyes – the miracle of bringing the water out of the rock,
9. We in New Testament Israel must learn from their mistakes, and we must keep clearly in our minds the vast miracles God used to bring us out of sin,
10. We must remember His vast power and that we must continue to fear Him – always!

11. We must remember the identity of the Rock from whom the water of the Holy Spirit is poured out upon us,
12. We must never be tempted to murmur against God or to attribute any spiritual power to ourselves.

Continuing again in verse 8 of Psalm 81:

Hear, O my people, and I will testify unto you: O Israel, if you wilt hearken unto me;

“Hearken” means “Listen.” At the beginning of this psalm, God commanded us to sing and shout to Him. Now He commands New Testament Israel to “Shut up and Listen up!” and especially at the Fall Feast time! Over the three weeks from the Feast of Trumpets to the Last Great Day, God wants us to do a lot of listening. As many as thirty messages. More if we have split sermons on some days. That’s a lot of listening!

He promises here in verse 8 that if we will open our ears, He will *testify* to us. What does the English word “testify” mean? It is translated from the Hebrew word “ood” – a little word, yes; but it is filled with much rich meaning. It means that God will:

- Testify on our behalf – for our benefit,
- Have us as His witnesses,
- Hire us to bear witness for Him,
- Record our names in His Book of Life,
- Take us to Himself,
- Admonish and correct us as necessary like a father to his children,
- Exhort and encourage us each day
- Surround us with His protection,
- Restore us to top spiritual health,
- Eventually give us eternal spirit bodies,
- Relieve us from any distress,
- Give us advance warning of what is ahead of us,
- Charge us with a set of important duties.

Then in verse 9 – despite the festive nature of the fall festival season of rejoicing – He gives us some stern commands:

There shall no strange god be in you; neither shall you worship any strange god.

We know this! Don't we? Of course we do! But take care! So did ancient Israel; and look what they did as soon as Moses' back was turned. They built a golden calf and worshipped it! Yes, but we wouldn't do that. We wouldn't commit idolatry. Would we?

What was the idolatry that caused God to blow spiritual Israel apart back in the Nineties? Was it that God's people were perhaps worshipping other men rather than God Himself? That was living proof that we can be as subject to idolatry as were our ancient Israelite forebears!

Verse 10: I am the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt: open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.

He blasts this message to us! I am the LORD – the YHWH – the Eternal – your God"! These physical idols are not real gods. They have no power at all:

And there you shall serve gods, the work of men's hands, wood and stone, which neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell. (Deuteronomy 4:28)

And have cast their gods into the fire: for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone: therefore they have destroyed them. (II Kings 19:18)

They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone... But have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you, and your lords, your wives, and your concubines, have drunk wine in them; and you have praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: and the God in whose hand your breath is, and whose are all your ways, have you not glorified: (Daniel 5:4, 23)

What profits the graven image that the maker thereof has graven it; the molten image, and a teacher of lies, that the maker of his work trusts therein, to make dumb idols? Woe unto him that says to the wood, “Awake”; to the dumb stone, “Arise, it shall teach!” Behold, it is laid over with gold and silver, and there is no breath *{life}* at all in the midst of it. (Habakkuk 2:18-19)

And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk: (Revelation 9:20)

“Don’t waste your time or your efforts on them!” God commands - “I am the LORD – the YHWH – the Eternal – your God”! Then He takes us back again; back from the symbolism of the Feast of Trumpets; back to the symbolism of the Feast of Unleavened Bread; to remind us that it was *He* who had the power to bring the Israelites out of mighty Egypt and the humanly powerful hand of Pharaoh. Also to remind us that it was *He* who had the power to rescue New Testament Israel out of the powerful hand of Satan, sin and the world. *He* has the power! So why waste our time on powerless idols?

“Open your mouths!” He commands us, “and I will fill them.” What with?

Physical food? Yes, yes! We have plenty of that each Feast day, don’t we? Probably more than we really need. God has blessed us with plenty of food for most of our lives throughout the year too. How many of us have ever known real and prolonged hunger? Very few!

But God wants us to develop an even greater desire for His *spiritual* food – the very Bread of Life itself! We don’t open our *mouths* to receive spiritual food, though. We open our *ears* – and our attention!

The more we move through this study, we’re seeing that much of this Psalm 81 is about hearkening – listening! Let us get ourselves ready to do just that as we approach each of God’s spiritual Feasts. Back to Psalm 81 and verse 11:

But my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me.

The last phrase in the King James Version (KJV) of this verse doesn't make good grammatical sense to us today – **Israel would none of me.** It seems like there is a word missing. Various modern Bible versions translate this phrase in different ways; but the main idea is: “Israel would **have** none of me,” or “Israel would have nothing to do with me.”

Oh, how true this is in modern physical Israel today; perhaps more so in modern Ephraim than in any other tribe! At least in modern Manasseh, many at least pay lip service to God!

But what about in the New Testament Israel of God? Amongst God's New Testament people? In God's true church? Are any of us refusing to hearken to His voice? Are any of us saying by our actions (or lack thereof) if not with our words: “We will have nothing to do with you, God”?

This dire warning cuts through, yes, right in the middle of the rejoicing on the Feast of Trumpets and God's other holy days; and we all need to heed it!

Verse 12: So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: and they walked in their own counsels.

Yes. God has given up the people of modern physical Israel to the lusts of their own hearts. Lust, enjoyment and entertainment seem to constitute the “raison d'être” – the sole purpose in life – of the majority of the people of our modern Israelite nations. All the many seem to care about is the physical: entertainment, fancy cars, fancy houses, ongoing partying and endless vacationing. Can't really afford it? That's OK; we'll put it on the plastic! Live now, pay later! And that's the relatively decent people! I know that I don't have to remind you about the gross immorality that is taking place in our so-called Christian nations! Just take a glimpse – but not too long a glimpse – at the average evening's TV offerings. But please don't blame the TV networks for the content. They're only giving the people what they want – what they demand. An endless stream of depictions of homosexuality, adultery, fornication, violence and murder!

From the second phrase of this verse, the nations of modern physical Israel do walk totally according to their own human counsel. There is virtually no fear of God any more: not in our peoples; not in our leaders – not at any level of government: federal, state or provincial, municipal – even right down to our school boards and parent-teacher associations. All of them seem to be totally godless!

God says He has given up on physical Israel for the time being. He has given them up to these things that they desire and demand – this lust and this living according their own counsel.

But again, what about us – in *spiritual* Israel? Are *we* being caught up in it all? We can only answer this question ourselves individually. But if the answer is “Yes” or even “Maybe just a little,” we had better hope that God hasn’t given up on us – that He hasn’t given us up to lust, gross immorality and to being guided by our own human counsel.

God warns us again on the Feast of trumpets and on His other days of rejoicing: “Don’t follow the lustful ways of your unconverted, physical Israelite brothers and sisters! And don’t emulate their ways of decision-making and problem-solving! Because their methods are based upon the Babylon model. So reject that Babylon model! Come out of her, my people!”

Verse 13: Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways!

Here’s that “H” word again – “hearkened.” Here God seems to be lamenting. What a tragedy – our great God lamenting – on a Feast day when He should be rejoicing with His people.

“Oh!” He cries – how He “wishes” that His people would have hearkened – listened – to Him and walked in His ways. God seems to be very upset with His people here – and rightly so. It is very upsetting for a parent or a teacher to be instructing a child and that child ignores him or her. There is the aspect of the lack of respect for the teacher or parent; but there is also the disappointment that, because the child is not listening, he will not enjoy the benefits of what the teacher or parent is telling him. What are some of those benefits? He tells us in verse 14:

I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries.

God says that He gladly would have defeated their enemies for them. He had showed them repeatedly how He was able to do this so very easily; but they continued to be faithless; so He had to remove His protective hand away from them.

Let us citizens of spiritual Israel – God’s New Testament people – heed this warning and let us take it very seriously. Why? Because the enemies and adversaries of New Testament Israel are so very much more powerful, vicious and hateful than those of physical Old Testament Israel. *Their* enemies were mere fellow human beings. *Our* enemies are Satan and his demon foot-soldiers – powerful and tremendously fierce spirit beings who hate us and everything we stand for with a passion that is hard for us to even imagine.

We know that the Feast of Trumpets pictures a day of terrible warfare, the like of which has never been seen on this planet before. When the surviving human armies of this world will attempt to fight the returning Christ, His angels and His newly spirit-born brothers and sisters, who do you think will be the instigator of this warfare? Satan, of course – the one whose very name means “adversary” – and his demon followers:

And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared. And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of devils *{demons}*, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty....

{Skip over verse 15 just for a minute}... **And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.
(Revelation 16:12-14, 16)**

But please notice how God inspired the apostle John to insert verse 15 into this narrative as a warning to us:

Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.

Christ will return at a time that men will least expect. What does He command us to do in the mean time? To watch! To keep our spiritual garments so that we won’t be caught spiritually naked.

Just as an aside, let me ask another question: Do you know what “our spiritual garments” can symbolize? I believe that they can picture God’s New Testament tabernacle – His church. We must keep the “clothing” of the church around us – for spiritual warmth and protection. God warns us not to let it go. If we do, we’ll be spiritually naked.

Let us go back again to Psalm 81 and on to verse 15:

The haters of the LORD should have submitted themselves unto Him: but their time should have endured for ever.

The grammar of this verse is a little awkward and has been taken in different ways in different translations. But let us take the KJV as it stands. Those who hate the LORD Jesus Christ would have been wise to submit to Him at their earliest opportunity. To continue our last example from Revelation 16, we all know what the outcome of the “Battle” of Armageddon will be, don’t we? Actually, it won’t be a “battle” at all:

**And this shall be the plague wherewith the LORD will smite all the people that have fought against Jerusalem; their flesh shall consume away while they stand upon their feet, and their eyes shall consume away in their holes, and their tongue shall consume away in their mouth.
(Zechariah 14:12)**

What chance have even the most advanced of humanity’s weapons against this – against God’s arsenal? These haters of God whom Satan has deceived into thinking that they have a chance of military success will have no chance whatsoever.

The second and last phrase of Psalm 81:15, “but their time should have endured for ever,” may be taken two ways. Some Bible translations give the erroneous Protestant and Roman Catholic view that, because this is the only day of salvation, if these haters of Christ refuse to repent and submit to Him immediately, the punishment He imposes on them will be everlasting – i.e. eternal life in hell fire.

Satan and his demons would have us believe that the penalty God has in store for him is also in store for errant humans. Hence, if we apply this interpretation to Satan and his demons – and not to human beings – it may carry some weight. But I think that this version twists the scripture. I think that what God is saying through Asaph here is this:

If human haters of the LORD would repent and submit to Him, He – our supremely merciful God – will be happy to give even them an opportunity for eternal life.

Now on to the final verse of Psalm 81 – verse 16:

He should have fed them also with the finest of the wheat: and with honey out of the rock should I have satisfied you.

The psalm finishes on a very positive note – but also one of warning. If and when those who hate God (and, let's face it, we all did hate Him – or love Him less – to some extent at one time before our conversion) truly repent and submit to Him, He will feed them with the finest of the wheat.

What kind of reward is this? It doesn't sound very appealing, does it? What is "the finest of the wheat"? And is it really worth giving up a lifetime of doing our own thing for?

God is, of course, giving us another physical symbol of something spiritual. What is the main use of wheat? For making into flour – to make into nutritious bread. The very Finest of the wheat is the First of the Firstfruits which God threshed, winnowed and ground into flour, from which He "baked" the Bread of Life.

God is saying that those who will repent and submit now in this age will be given a place among the subsequent Firstfruits of His people, and He will feed them with the First of the Firstfruits – with the Bread of Life – with Jesus Christ.

Every year at the Passover service, we read about the Bread of Life in John chapter 6. And so again, God picks us up amidst the rejoicing and symbolism of the Feast of Trumpets, and points us right back to the very beginning of His Holy Day season – to the symbolism of the Passover.

It is almost like He's saying, "Look, I certainly *do* want you to rejoice over the wonderful symbolism of these Fall Feasts – over the First Resurrection, the return of Jesus Christ, the putting away of Satan, the Millennium, and the barely credible symbolism of the Last Great Day. But while you're doing so, I want you to keep a tight grip on yourselves. In your rejoicing, I don't want you to let go of what I taught you right back at the beginning – at the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread."

Let's look at the second half of the verse which concludes the psalm: "with honey out of the rock should I have satisfied you."

Although it was common in the Israelite territory of Asaph's time for honey bees to make nests in clefts in rocks, I think there is more to the wording here.

Did you notice, by the way, that in the first half of the verse, God and Asaph are talking about "them" – presumably the same "them" as He was talking about in the previous verse – verse 15 – i.e. the haters of God?

But in this second half, He's talking to "you." There seems to be an "us and them" distinction going on here. "Them" are the haters of God. "You" are those who love God – the people of God.

And again we seem to be pointed back – back from the Feast of Trumpets – back to events symbolized by the time immediately following the Feast of Unleavened Bread – the time when Israel was in the wilderness and when God miraculously drew water out of solid rock. Remember that He mentioned either one or both Meribahs back in verse 7 – the two Meribahs, where God miraculously brought life-giving water out of solid rock to give life to the physical Israelites... despite their murmuring!

But for His faithful people, He promises not just water – but honey! For us, He will bring honey out of the Rock – with a capital 'R.'

Honey has at least two symbolisms in the Bible, and probably even more. I will just mention the two that are relevant to the Feast of Trumpets – a feast day which promises both sweet and sour prophecies. Strangely, these two are somewhat opposite in their symbolism:

First, honey is symbolic of good health, riches, abundance and prosperity – to the point of absolute luxury. Good health – because honey was known for its medicinal qualities. Riches, abundance and prosperity in those days meant agricultural abundance because a land with much honey will normally have lots of pasture land and flowering plants. There are at least twenty Bible mentions of the "land flowing with milk and honey" referring, of course, to the Promised Land which, in turn, is prophetically symbolic of the World Tomorrow, the Millennium and the eternal Kingdom of God.

Second, honey is symbolic of an appropriate level of self-denial – yes, even in the midst of plenty – self-denial for the purposes of learning the consequences of rebellion against God, the importance of repentance, obedience and spiritual renewal and choosing right over wrong.

In this we have both John the Baptist and Jesus Christ Himself as our examples:

In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, and saying, “Repent you: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare you the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’” And the same John had his raiment of camel’s hair, and a leather girdle about his loins; and his meat *{food}* was locusts and wild honey. (Matthew 3:1-4)

Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign; “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel. Butter and honey shall He eat, that He may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good.” (Isaiah 7:14-15)

And as they thus spoke, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said unto them, “Peace be unto you”... And they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish, and a honeycomb. (Luke 24:36, 42)

So there we have it – Psalm 81. Over and over again in this Psalm, it seems that God is telling us: Go forth and rejoice on this Feast of Trumpets – yes, and on my other Fall Feast days too; but do not forget the instruction and warnings I gave you during the Passover and the Spring Holy Days!

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