
Christian Holidays: The Feast of Trumpets

by: Ronald L. Dart

Even if you are not Jewish, you are probably aware of two major Jewish holidays that occur in the autumn of every year. They are the Jewish New Year and Yom Kippur. What you may not be aware of is that these are also Christian holidays.

Along about the end of the first century there was a lot of persecution of the Jews in and around Rome and the Church began to differentiate themselves from the Jews in every way they could. They did not want people to think they were Jews, because the Jews were being run out of Rome and they would like to stay at home. A lot of practices that were very common in the early church disappeared in the midst of a major persecution of the Jews in Rome.

The Early Church

Why would the early church have paid any attention in the first place to what we know of the Jewish holidays? Well for one thing Christians and Jews share the same God. In its earliest years Christianity was viewed by the world, not as a separate religion, but as a sect of Judaism. The earliest Christians were all Jews, and they had no consciousness of starting a new religion. Rather they saw what they were doing as a restoration of a purer faith. Judaism in the Christian view had gone astray, and they were going to put it right.

Now there is nothing unusual about that. Nearly every new sect of religion sees itself as a restorer of lost paths and so the first Christians were Jewish and continued to observe holidays that they had observed all their lives and they taught the Gentile converts to do the same.

Christ Is In the Jewish Holidays

But it was inevitable that they should begin to see new significance in these days that transcended the Jewish historical meaning of the days. To put it simply, the early Christians saw Christ in the Jewish holidays.

And now 2000 years later you and I come along, and we wonder what was it that they saw that led them to this?

When you look at the law and the Jewish New Year, you don't really get a lot of help. The Scripture in question is Leviticus 23 and it begins in verse 23 "The Lord spoke to Moses, saying {24} Speak to the children of Israel, saying, In the seventh month, in the first day of the month, you shall have a sabbath, a memorial of blowing *of trumpets*, a holy convocation. {25} You shall do no servile work therein: but you shall offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord."

Now what is odd about this, is that there's not a word in the Bible that tells us what is memorialized in this. It is a memorial, okay. A memorial of what?

In Christian thought, a memorial can be in terms of the future and in Jewish terms it's a memorial of the past.

Don't Let Anyone Judge You

In Colossians 2:16, Paul wrote to these people and said, "Don't let anyone judge you or condemn you in matters of food and drink or observing festivals, new moons or sabbaths." These he said, "Are only a shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ." Now strangely some people use this passage to argue against the observance of the holidays but rather the contrary is true. This passage assumes that the Colossians were observing these days, listen to the wording: "Don't let anyone condemn you in matters of food and drink or observing festivals, new moons or sabbaths." It does not say not to do it, he says, "Don't let anybody condemn you for doing it."

And so, the Colossians were not supposed to let anyone judge them for observing these days.

But what's more important about this passage, it shows that Christians thought of these days as shadows of things to come. In other words, it is a memorial of future events that are out there ahead of us.

Memorial of Blowing

Now, there's a curious ambiguity, relative to the feast of trumpets, also known as the Jewish New Year. Leviticus 23 verse 24: "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a sabbath, a memorial of blowing *of trumpets*, a holy convocation.'" Now, if you're looking at this in a King James version of the Bible, the chances are the word 'trumpet' will be in italics. That means it's absent from the Hebrew text and is assumed by the translators. Now they assumed correctly, but there is still something to be considered. The Hebrew says literally that this is a day of shouting or blasting as on a trumpet. The term is used elsewhere of a trumpet blast, so the translation is appropriate enough. But the word 'shouting' here is also commonly used of the shouting of a crowd. In other words, we have a day of shouting here. Now if you trace the word through the Old Testament you will gradually see that the sense of the word is better rendered by the word 'cheering'.

A day of shouting is not a day that we go around yelling at one another, it is a day of cheering, so what was there to cheer about? The idea of being resurrected to eternal life is something that we can cheer about.

Trumpets and Shophars

In the Old Testament, the trumpet was used as a signal (Numbers 10:1:10), just as the military uses trumpets for reveille, for taps, chow call, officers call, to the colors. The trumpet was used in the Old Testament in much the same way. They would call up the elders to the tabernacle for a meeting. They would tell the people by means of the trumpet when it was time to uproot their tents and get ready to pack and to move on. They would sound the trumpets to tell them that it was time for one part of the congregation to move forward and when they should set up camp. All of these things were done by the blowing of trumpets. However, in the Scriptures, the shophar is blown as an alarm of war (Joel 2:1). Now, it's not clear how the idea of the feast of trumpets passed into Christian theology, and how the idea of the trumpet connected with it passed in Christian theology, but it plainly did and in two significant places in Paul's letters.

When we see the apostle Paul, one of these days, we can all register our complaint with him about why he didn't explain some things more clearly. And he will probably reply "Well, I thought everybody would understand that."

What Was Paul Driving At?

But nevertheless, here we are 2000 years after his letters were written trying to peer through the fog and to understand what he was driving at and where he got his ideas.

For example, when he wrote his letter to the Thessalonians, we can look back and tell from the book of Acts, those poor people had a lot of trouble up there. In fact, there is every reason to believe that some of them had been killed for the faith since Paul was there. And because of that, when he wrote his first letter back to the Thessalonians, he was trying to encourage them, relative to the people among them, who had died since he was there.

He says in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them that are asleep." By that he means that they had died. "That you sorrow not like others who have no hope. {14} For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also would sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. {15} For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain to the coming of the Lord."

Now I will just stop right there for a moment. That is interesting all by itself, because it suggests that the apostle Paul really assumed that it was possible that Jesus would come within the lifetime of himself or the people who would get this letter.

And he says this, "Now I want you to understand that we who are alive and remain to the coming of the Lord shall not prevent or precede them, which are asleep." The idea being, we are not going to see God before the people who are dead are going to see God. Don't get some idea that we are going to be there without these people.

The First Resurrection

1 Thessalonians 4:16 "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first."

Now when I look at this, I can't tell with any certainty, but it sounds very much to me that Paul is here making an allusion to the feast of shouting, the feast of trumpets, and he is connecting it to the time of the resurrection of the dead.

He says, {17} "Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so, shall we ever be with the Lord. {18} "Now comfort one another with these words." He didn't set out to explain to us about the feast of trumpets. He didn't set out to explain to us about the resurrection. He set out to encourage the Thessalonians regarding people who had died and were in the grave waiting for the return of Christ.

Now as you read this, this poses certain problems for those who may believe that one group of people are taken up to God at one time and another group of people are raised at another time. The wording seems quite clear from this passage, that the living saints who are living at the time of the return of Christ and those who have died in Christ in previous generations, all are resurrected together and go up to meet Christ in the air at the same time.

But for our purposes, we understand, that in Christianity the shout and the trumpet, somehow early on got connected with the resurrection. Then there is the definitive statement on the subject in Paul's letter to the Corinthians in the fifteenth chapter of first Corinthians which some people call the resurrection chapter and with good reason.

Paul Preached the Gospel

In writing to the Corinthians Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1: "Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached unto you, which you have received, and wherein you stand; {2} By which you are saved, if you keep in memory what I preached to you, unless you have believed in vain."

Okay, he is getting ready to tell us what the core of the gospel is that he preached to the Corinthians.

Verse 3 "For I delivered to you first of all that which I received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; {4} That he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: {5} And he was seen of Cephas, then he was seen of the twelve: {6} After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain to this present, although some of them have died. {7} After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. {8} And last of all he was seen of me, as of one born out of due time."

Now because the question of the resurrection had been brought into challenge, that is the part of the gospel that he emphasizes, but the gospel itself as he presents it is very simple. Jesus died for our sins, He was buried, He rose again the third day according to Scriptures, that is the gospel.

Witnesses of Jesus' Resurrection

But then Paul goes on to establish this fascinating litany of the people who saw Jesus Christ alive after His resurrection and he names them, and then he says "There were 500 brethren at one time, who saw Him alive after His resurrection", which basically meant that witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus at the time Paul wrote this letter were still pretty common. You might very well run into one. There might've been one at Thessalonica. Paul, of course, had been there and told them about it, but apart from that there were Jews that traveled around the country and I have little doubt, in that first century, that those people who could actually have testified to having seen Jesus Christ alive after His death and resurrection were in great demand, and probably moved around a great deal.

So, Paul establishes the first very important thing, Christ was raised from the dead. This was a unique event in all history.

No Resurrection of the Dead

1 Corinthians 15:12 "Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?"

And it seems that one of the old problems of the Christian church, I suppose of any religious organization, differences in belief, new ideas, someone charging off and down some other pathway rises up, and somebody in Corinth says "No, there is no such thing as a resurrection of the dead." What it meant or how they came to it, that we don't know.

But what we do know is how Paul responded to it. He said {13} "If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen." Well, what can you say to that? If there is no such thing as a resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen.

Verse 14: "If Christ has not risen, then our preaching is vain, and your faith is also vain, {15} But worse than that, we are found to be false witnesses of God because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He raised not up, if so be that the dead don't rise."

Have you got it? This isn't some middle-of-the-road thing where Paul was nice and had some good ideas and we can believe them on some things, but this resurrection from the dead idea is impossible. Oh no, Paul says, if there is no resurrection of the dead then you have determined that those 500 people, that all those people he's named above, and he himself are false witnesses, because they have testified of God that He raised up Jesus Christ, whom He raised not up. If so be that the dead don't rise, Christ is not raised and if Christ is not raised your faith is vain. You are still in your sins.

Now there's a remarkable bit of theology. I figure the chances are most of us as Christians would assume that the death of Christ is paying a penalty for our sins, that that took care of everything. When they nailed Him up on the cross all of our sins were nailed there and we were forgiven and it was all over and the shed blood of Jesus Christ forgave us all of our sins. Then they took Jesus down off of the cross and buried Him.

Now what Paul is telling us here is that, that's not true. Not true that you're cleared right there, because if Christ was not raised from the dead, you're still in your sins. Being relieved of your sins depended on something happening after the resurrection of Christ and that something was the presentation of Jesus Christ at the throne of the Father as our high priest with His own blood on behalf of our sins. It depends on the continual intermediary work, the intermediation of Jesus, for us to ask God to forgive us of our sins, but the point simply is, that it is not just the death of Christ, it is the resurrection of Christ that makes the difference (Romans 5:10).

So, if all of these things that Paul says are true and there is no resurrection, then they who have died or have fallen asleep in Christ are perished. They are just gone. You'll never see them again and if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. You know, I wouldn't feel like saying that today, I would say that it's good to have known Christ. It's good to have been a Christian. It's good to have lived a Christian life. It has made me a better man and it has made my life better.

I would not have said that but why did Paul say it? Well, because they lived in a period of time when it did not pay to be a Christian. People lost their jobs. People lost their families. People were segregated from people they loved. They were killed. They were thrown out of cities. The lot of a Christian in the first century was very, very hard. There were times when it was worth your life to even admit that you were a Christian. And so, Paul says "Look, if the only meaning to us for Christ is in this life, right here, right now, we are of all men most miserable because there's no reason that we should be doing this."

We should not be making sacrifices and not putting your life on the line for the name of Jesus Christ if the dead don't rise, because all you're going to get out of all of this is what you get in this life.

Nexus Between Jewish and Christian Belief

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:20 "Now is Christ risen from the dead and become the firstfruits of them that slept. {21} For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. {22} For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."

Now right here, in this little section, is the nexus between Jewish and Christian belief on this. The feast of trumpets is to choose the memorial of creation, specifically the day of the creation of man and it is also believed to be the day that Adam sinned. And so the Jewish New Year is the first day of ten days of repentance leading up to Yom Kippur, the day of atonement or reconciliation. This is a day of profound awareness of the first Adam and the first Adam's sin. In Christian thought, the ultimate reconciliation of Adam's sin takes place at the resurrection from the dead, a day of shouting and blowing of trumpets.

And so there is a Christian connection. There is a Christian meaning to the feast of trumpets. Now when you read this, and again we are at a disadvantage at 2000 years later, but it seems apparent that this Jewish belief in the fact that the Jewish new year, Rosh Hashanah, symbolizes the day of creation and the day of Adam's sin, and there's every reason to believe that that was true in the first century.

Paul being a Pharisee of the Pharisees, was well schooled in all of this. He was aware of this when he pulled Adam into this picture and Adam's sin and Adam dying and all men dying and then contrasting Christ who is the last Adam. It is very likely that he was making reference to the feast of shouting, to the feast of trumpets and a resurrection to take place on that day.

Order in the Resurrections

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:22 "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. {23} But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming." So, the resurrection takes place at the coming of Christ.

Now I want to pause momentarily to remind you of something. Christ is called the first fruits. That's a highly significant word, a highly charged word, in the New Testament.

The resurrection takes place at the coming of Christ. Then he says in 1 Corinthians 15:24 "Then comes the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. {25} For he must reign, till he has put all enemies under his feet. {26} The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death."

The final tying up of all the enemies of God, the removal of all those enemies and that last enemy to be destroyed is death. How do you destroy death? It is done with a resurrection.

Verse 27 "For he has put all things under Jesus' feet. {28} "And when all things are subdued unto him, then shall the Son Himself be subject to him that put all things under him, that God can be all in all."

Baptized for the Dead

1 Corinthians 15:29 "Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? Why are they then baptized for the dead?"

Now what on earth does Paul mean by that? Are we supposed to be baptized for the dead?

Some people think that Paul advocated baptism for the dead in this passage, but that's not implied here. Note that Paul does not use the collective word 'we', he uses the word 'they'. Now I would have expected him, if this was the practice of the Church or something that Paul was involved in, he would have put that verse this way. "Else what shall we do when we are baptized for the dead if the dead don't rise. Why are we baptized for the dead?" But he didn't say that. He said "What shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? Why are they then baptized for the dead?"

Now what's interesting about this is that Paul in the very next verse shifts to 'we' and says in verse 30: "Why then do we stand in jeopardy every hour?"

Now I don't know where the idea of baptizing people for the dead came from. I don't know who was doing it or why they were doing it. All I know is that Paul was not advocating it and if you

study baptism thoroughly through the New Testament you will find no case of one person be baptized for another person, living or dead.

A person, in order to be baptized, according to Acts 2:38 must repent. It is pretty hard for a dead man to repent.

If the Dead Don't Rise

1 Corinthians 15:31 Paul says "I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. {32} If it is after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what good is that to me, if the dead don't rise?"

If I am going to go into the arena for the word of Jesus Christ and die there, if I have to fight with the beasts, why would I do that, if there's no resurrection from the dead? He says, "Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die."

Verse 33: "Don't be deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners. {34} Awake to righteousness, and don't sin; for some people do not have the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame."

What Will You Look Like in the Resurrection?

Then he comes to some of the interesting questions about this.

1 Corinthians 15:35 "But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?"

Now Paul was not what I call your average patient guy. He responds, {36} "You fool, that which you sow is not made alive, except it dies." He is saying "Everyone should know this. You can't resurrect something from the dead unless it dies first"

Verse 37: "And what you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain; perhaps wheat or some other grain. {38} But God gives it a body as He pleases, and to each seed its own body. {39} All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of animals, another of fish, and another of birds. {40} There are also celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another."

By that Paul means, there are bodies that shine by their own light like the sun and terrestrial bodies like the moon that shines from reflected light.

Verse 41 "There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory."

Remember, all of this was given to us in answer to the question, "How are the dead raised up, and with what body do they come?" I would have to conclude, they come with glorified bodies and they are different, but it's interesting, people oftentimes want to know, will we recognize one

another in the resurrection? Will we know who one another are? The answer is, we will be different, and of course, if you know who you are, wouldn't you be capable of telling somebody else who you are? It seems to me to be obvious that we rise as who we are and we can be known.

Feast of Trumpets

1 Corinthians 15:42 "So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. {43} It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. {44} It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. {45} And so it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being."

Paul keeps going back to this in connection with the resurrection. And I think he's making the connection with the day of the first man's sin according to the Jewish custom of the time, which was, the feast of trumpets, the day of shouting, the memorial of the blowing of trumpets.

1 Corinthians 15:45 Paul says: "And so it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. {46} However, you don't start with the spiritual first, you start with the natural, and afterward the spiritual."

So, what is God doing? He started out with the physical, of Adam, man, you and I but afterward, what we're going to be is spiritual.

So once again, it is suggestive of the sin of Adam and the resurrection of the dead being opposite bookends of a long process.

The First Resurrection

Now in Verse 50 Paul says, "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption." In other words, you and I can't get there like we are.

Verse 51 "Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep." Paul thought that maybe we all would not have to die because he expected the possibility of Christ to return in his lifetime.

Paul continues: "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, {52} In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."

Did you notice that Paul said, "At the last trump.?" That suggests there might be more than one resurrection.

The late Ronald L. Dart was a Christian evangelist whose teachings still inspire thousands of people around the world. His legacy spans decades. For more information about the teachings of Ronald L. Dart, visit RLDEA.com where you will find booklets, articles, sermons, Bible studies, and books by Mr. Dart.

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever considered Mr. Dart's point that the early Christians would have been seen as a sect of Judaism not as a separate religion?
2. Do you find it interesting that Paul wrote to the Colossians to not "let anyone judge you or condemn you in matters of food and drink or observing festivals, new moons, or sabbaths" because these are "a shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ"?
3. How does modern non Holy Day keepers, explain the above statement by Paul from Colossians 2:16?
4. Do you see a connection with the Feast of Trumpets and the resurrection?
5. What are your thoughts about the Jewish idea that the Feast of Trumpets/Rosh Hashanah is the anniversary day of creation and the day of Adam's sin?
6. Why do you think they came up with this theory?
7. Have you ever studied the baptism for the dead? If you have, what have you learned?
8. Have you ever wondered if you will be able to recognize loved ones after the resurrection?
9. Isn't it interesting how much Paul has to point out that Christ rose from the dead, and that there will be eventually a resurrection for us all?
10. Have you ever studied how many resurrections there will be?