



THE JEWISH HIGH HOLY DAYS: ROSH HASHANA

Tishri, the seventh month in the Jewish calendar, contains three major holidays. Rosh HaShana, Yom Kippur, and Succos. Tishri begins sometime during the last three weeks of September or the first week of October. The first day of Tishri is the Jewish New Year or Rosh Hashana which means “head of the year.” If you read Exodus 12:2, you will discover that the Torah teaches that the month of Nisan, when Passover is celebrated, is to be the first month. How then did the first of Tishri come to be celebrated as New Year's day? Probably because the letters of the words “the first of Tishri” in Hebrew can be rearranged to form the words “in the beginning”. This was probably understood as being a hidden indication that the world was created on the first of Tishri, according to a certain method of Rabbinic interpretation, and, therefore, the year begins on this day. There is, however, a Biblical holiday on this day: the Feast of Trumpets (Lev. 23:23 and Nu. 29:1-6).

Rosh Hashana, also known as Yom ha-Din (Day of Judgement), begins the “Ten Days of Awe” (Yomin Noraim), the “Ten Days of Turning or Repentance” or “The High Holy Days” which conclude with Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. During this period, it is customary to greet one another with the phrase, “L'Shanah Tovah Tikateyvu” meaning “To a good year, may you be inscribed (in the Book of Life).” This holiday is both solemn and joyous since it is considered a day of repentance and judgement and also the birthday of the world. It is celebrated for two days. On the first day religious Jews practice a custom called “tashlich”, which involves going to a body of water and casting bread crumbs from one’s pockets into the water. This is symbolic of Micah 7:19, “And you will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.” A family meal is celebrated which includes honey cake, wine, and apples dipped in honey to symbolize hope for a sweet and happy year. On the second night, a fruit not yet eaten that season is served. Hallah (Jewish egg bread), baked in a round loaf to symbolize a crown, is another traditional food.

In the synagogue the major focuses are recognizing one's sins and turning from them. The blowing of the shofar (ram's horn trumpet) is a central feature and calls the worshipers to turn to God. It announces that a great event is about to take place, as when the walls of Jericho fell. Genesis 22, which tells of God's command to Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac, is read on the second day.

The Biblical holiday of the Feast of Trumpets is described most fully in Numbers 29:1-6. The central elements are the number 7 (7th month, 7 male lambs offered), the abstaining from regular work, the sounding of the ram's horn trumpets, various burnt offerings, and the sin offering of one male goat to make atonement for sin.

Notice that this holiday, which focuses on sin and repentance, is followed by Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) on the 10th of Tishri, and then Succos (the Feast of Booths, emphasizing God's providential care) on the 15th of the month. We must acknowledge our sin, repent, and receive God's atonement for sin before we can experience God's providential care over our lives.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR NEW COVENANT BELIEVERS:

God has provided the ultimate rest from our works, the supreme Sabbath rest, through Jesus the Messiah. He is our sin offering. We must recognize our sin, repent, and trust him in order to know our names *are* inscribed in the *Book of Life* (Phil. 4:3 and Rev. 3:5). Jesus' death demonstrated that sin must be judged (he received the judgement in our place). His resurrection shows that God has appointed Him the Judge (see John 5:21-27; 12:31; and Acts 17:31). That final Day of Judgement will come when the *trumpet sounds* and the Lord Jesus turns to judge the earth (I Thess. 4:16; I Cor. 15:52). We can now *celebrate the New Creation* that has already begun in the Messiah (2 Cor. 5:17; Romans 5:12-19; and I Cor. 15:45) and will come in fullness when he returns (Romans 9:19-22).

SUGGESTIONS FOR CHRISTIANS:

1. Wish your Jewish friend a Happy New Year. In Hebrew you say L'shanah Tovah.
2. It is appropriate to send Jewish friends a Rosh Hashana card.
- 3 Ask your Jewish friend what he is doing for Rosh Hashana and how his family celebrates the holiday. Ask about his concept of sin, judgement, and repentance.
4. Read together the biblical passages that describe the holiday.
5. Check the Internet for the date each year as it changes.

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