

God's Appointed Times – Part 2

Rosh Hashanah – Be Ministers of Reconciliation

Rosh Hashanah: The Key Is Repentance, Forgiveness And Reconciliation

Biblical References: B'midbar (Numbers) 29:1 – 6 & Vayikra (Leviticus) 23:23 – 25 – Yom Teruah (The Feast of Trumpets) In 2014, the holiday begins at sundown on September 24th.

Rabbinic Change: Since this is the first Shabbat of the Fall Holidays, it has been considered as the "spiritual" New Year. Hence the name changed to Rosh Hashanah, "the head of the year." It is also considered the anniversary of creation; the sacrifice of Yitz'chak; the release of Yosef from Pharaoh's prison; and, the birth of Samuel, the prophet.

The purpose and traditional observance of the Holy Day is summed up in one word – regathering. Since the fall holidays call us to regather to a pure faith in God, Rosh Hashanah has come to represent the day of repentance. It is the day when people of Israel take stock of their spiritual condition and make the necessary changes to insure that the upcoming New Year will be pleasing to God.

The shofar is sounded daily to alert the faithful that the time of repentance is near. The observance takes on a somber character, yet always with a hint of hope because of God's forgiveness.

The traditional challah is shaped in a circle to symbolize God's kingship and the coming of Messiah. Sweet honey cakes and apples dipped in honey are a real treat and symbolize the hope of a new sweet year.

Tradition tells of three books that are opened in the heavenly courts during the feast of Rosh Hashanah; one for the completely righteous, one for the completely wicked, and one for the average person. The completely righteous are immediately inscribed in the book of life. The completely wicked are immediately inscribed in the book of death. The average person is kept in suspension from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement). If they deserve well, they are inscribed in the book of life; if they do not deserve well, they are inscribed in the book of death. Consequently, the Ten Days of Awe are a time of solemn self-examination with time spent in seeking reconciliation and doing good works in the Jewish tradition.

Since the 15th Century, the ceremony of Tashlich is celebrated in the afternoon of Rosh Hashanah. The congregation meets at a river or stream. Special prayers of repentance are recited and a portion of Micah is read. People then take breadcrumbs and cast them into the water symbolizing that our sins are carried away by the water.

Rosh Hashanah has deep Messianic significance! The rabbis have taught that one day the shofar would sound and the Messiah would come. According to Rabbi Sha'ul, in the future all true believers in Yeshua will be gathered to meet Him in the clouds. The dead in Messiah will rise first, to be followed immediately by those believers alive at the time. ***"For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven with a rousing cry, with a call from one of the ruling angels, and with God's shofar, those who died united with the Messiah will be the first to rise; then we who are left still alive will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and thus we will always be with the Lord. So encourage each other with these words."*** (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18) That day will certainly be characterized by joy, delight and sweetness for those who are called home! As we observe Rosh Hashanah, we should anticipate the time of Yeshua's return.

The traditional greeting during Rosh Hashanah is, "L'shanah tovah tikatevu!" ***"May your name be inscribed in the book of life!"*** As Messianic Believers we can rightly say, "L'shanah tovah tikatevu b'shem Yeshua!" ***"May your name be inscribed in the book of life, in the name of Yeshua!"***

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17 – 21. Rosh Hashanah: repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation. Rabbi Sha'ul wrote to the Corinthians about these key ingredients to our annual observation of this holy appointed time. As Rosh Hashanah is the beginning of the new spiritual year, so it is that we become new creations when we are united with Yeshua as our Messiah.

The key idea in this passage is *reconciliation*. Because of our rebellion, we are the enemy of God and out of fellowship with Him. Through the work of the execution stake, Yeshua has brought God and us together again. God has been reconciled and has turned His face in love toward the lost world. The basic meaning of the word *reconcile* is "to change thoroughly." It refers to a changed relationship between God and the lost world. **"And it is all from God."** (2 Corinthians 5:18a)

God does not have to be reconciled to man, because Yeshua accomplished that on the execution stake. It is sinful man who must be reconciled to God. "Religion" is man's feeble effort to be reconciled to God, efforts that are bound to fail. The Person who reconciles us to God is Yeshua, and the place where He reconciles us is His execution stake. He not only reconciles us to Himself, but he gives us the task of reconciling other people to Him. **We** have been entrusted with the message of reconciliation.

Another key idea in this paragraph is that God does not count our sins against us. In the KJV, the term used is *imputing*. This is a word borrowed from banking; it simply means, "to put to one's account." When you deposit money in the bank, the teller puts that amount into your account. When Yeshua died on the execution stake, all of our sins were imputed to Him - put into His account. God treated Him as though He had actually committed those sins.

What was the result? All of those sins have been paid for and God no longer holds them against us, because we have trusted Yeshua as our Messiah. But even more: God has put into our account the very righteousness of Yeshua! **"God made this sinless man be a sin offering on our behalf, so that in union with him we might fully share in God's righteousness."** (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Reconciliation is based on imputation: because the demands of God's Torah have been fully met on the execution stake, God can be reconciled to sinners. Those who believe in Yeshua, as their Messiah will never have their sins imputed against them again (Psalms 32:1-2; Romans. 4:1-8). As far as their records are concerned, they share the righteousness of Yeshua!

How does this wonderful doctrine of reconciliation motivate us to serve Yeshua? We are ambassadors with a message. God has committed to us the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-19).

Since we are the ambassadors of Yeshua, this means that the world is in rebellion against God. He has sent His ambassadors into the world to declare peace, not war. "Be reconciled to God!" We represent Yeshua (John 20:21; 2 Corinthians 4:5). If sinners reject our message and us, it is Yeshua who is actually rejected. What a great privilege it is to be heaven's ambassadors to the rebellious sinners of this world!

God has not declared war on the world; at the execution stake He declared peace. But one day, He *will* declare war; and then it will be too late for those who have rejected Yeshua (2 Thessalonians 1:3-10). Satan is seeking to tear everything apart in this world, but Yeshua and His Messianic community are involved in the ministry of reconciliation, bringing things back together again, and back to God.

Ministry is not easy. If we are to succeed, we must be motivated by the fear of the Lord, the love of Yeshua, and the commission that He has given to us. It is indeed a privilege to serve Him!

During these next 10 days before Yom Kippur, I encourage you to do some self-reflection. Is there any unconfessed sin in your life? Do you need to forgive someone who has hurt you? Are there any relationships that require reconciliation? As we enter into the start of a new spiritual year, resolve to make a fresh start and be ambassadors of Yeshua HaMashiach, **"so that in union with Him, we might fully share in God's righteousness."**