

Seeing Christ in the Jewish Feasts



Class 3

Rosh HaShanah The Feast of Trumpets

- Reading: Leviticus 23:22-25
- The Feast of Trumpets is a bit paradoxical in nature: although the Bible says very little about this particular feast day, it is now among the most significant holy days in Judaism.
- At some point in history, the Feast of Trumpets became the day on which the Jewish New Year is celebrated.
- Rabbinic sources tell us that there have always been two different “years” in Judaism, the secular harvest year (analogous to today’s “business year”) beginning in the spring, and the religious year, beginning on the first day of the seventh month.
- Some historians point to the fact that Ancient Babylon observed two separate New Year celebrations, and suggest Israel brought this custom back when they returned.
- Regardless of how and when it came about, today the Feast of Trumpets is celebrated as Rosh HaShanah (literally “head of the year”), the Jewish New Year.
- While Rosh HaShanah itself is a day of celebration, blessing, and joyful anticipation, it also begins a time of earnest reflection and repentance culminating on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), the most sacred day in the Jewish calendar.
- The ten-day period that begins with Rosh HaShanah and ends with Yom Kippur is called the “High Holy Days.”

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

- Rosh HaShanah is a time of hope and prayers for a blessed year, but also a time for remembrance and acknowledging God's power.
- These three elements are bound together not only in this holiday, but throughout the Bible: expressions of hope in the Lord are accompanied by acknowledgements of his power and might; praises and petitions are mingled with remembrances of his mighty deeds and followed by promises to remember his commandments and precepts.
- Our hope is linked to remembrance: recall the ways in which he has blessed us in the past; remember his awesome might and power; and acknowledge his ability to accomplish that for which we hope.
- Remember also his precepts and commandments, keeping them in our own lives and passing them on to our children. Hope and remembrance are therefore both individual and communal: we hope for ourselves and our loved ones; we remember what God has done for us and for our people.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

- There are three spiritual lessons that we would like to get from Rosh HaShanah:

- 1. Celebrate your hope.**
- 2. Remember what God has done for you.**
- 3. Acknowledge God's Power.**

1. Celebrate your hope.

- Rosh HaShanah is a celebration of hope for the future, hope of promised blessings, even hope for an eternal reward.
- The traditions associated with the holiday are all designed to illustrate and enrich this hope.
- An examination of these traditions can enrich our understanding of the holiday itself.
- Since Rosh Hashanah is celebrated for two days, there are two sets of Scripture readings associated with the holiday: on day one the story of the birth of Isaac (Gen. 21) is read, along with the story of Hannah's prayer for a son and God's answer to that prayer (1 Sam. 1:1-2:10).
- On the second day, the story of Abraham's near sacrifice of Isaac is followed by the reading of Jeremiah 31:1-19, which recounts God's love of and promises to Israel.
- After the service, a festive meal is a central part of the Rosh HaShanah holiday.
- There are a number of traditional foods involved; most universal of these is probably apple slices dipped in honey, to signify the hope of a fruitful and sweet year ahead.

- The eating of this fruit is accompanied by a specific blessing, which is translated, *“Blessed art thou, Lord God King of the Universe, who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this season.”*
- Along with the apples and honey, the Sabbath bread (challah) served on Rosh HaShanah is made somewhat differently.
- On most Sabbaths, the challah is a simple braided loaf, but on Rosh HaShanah it is braided in a circle, with no apparent beginning or end to the braids.
- This is said to represent the circle of the seasons coming back to their beginning.

2. Remember what God has done for you.

- Rosh HaShanah is referred to in the Bible as a “Sabbath memorial of trumpet blasts” (Lev. 23:24b).
- The word for “memorial” here can be variously translated as “remembrance” or “commemoration.”
- It carries the idea of looking back as well as that of remembering to observe a sacred day.
- The true meaning of the word for “trumpet blast” is not merely “trumpet blast,” but is specific to the sounding of a shofar, the ram’s-horn trumpet used to signal military maneuvers on the battlefield.
- The significance of the shofar should not be underestimated.
- The voice of the shofar was heard by all the people when Moses encountered God on Mt. Sinai (Ex. 19:16–19).
- It was blown by Joshua’s army when the walls of Jericho fell (Josh. 6:20), and by Gideon’s army when God gave them victory over the Midianites (Judges 7:15–21).
- The shofar was blown to announce the return of the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6:15).
- And the shofar will be blown when Messiah returns (Isa. 27:13; 1 Thess. 4:13–18).

- The blowing of the shofar as a remembrance, therefore, has a multi-faceted meaning.
- It is a remembrance of what God has done, of who God is, and of what God has promised he will do.
- It is a remembrance of wars fought, victories won, and soldiers lost.
- It is a symbol of compliance with God's commandments, since the very act of blowing the shofar is itself commanded on the Day of Trumpets.
- The shofar is the instrument of sacred commemoration.
- The importance of remembering is stressed throughout the Bible, especially in the giving of the feast and fast days.
- We are to remember the words of God as well as the deeds of God, and to tell these things to our children.
- We are to remember when we rise up, when we go to sleep, when we leave our homes, and when we return.
- Paul's exhortation to "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances ..." (1 Thess. 5:16-18a) echoes this theme as well.
- Remembrance is to be an ongoing part of our lives in Christ.

3. Acknowledge God's power.

- The ten days beginning with Rosh HaShanah and culminating with Yom Kippur are called both the High Holy Days and the Days of Awe.
- The awe referred to here is not the "wow is that ever cool" kind of awe, but rather the fall-on-your-face-and-pray-for-mercy kind of awe.
- It is awe in the sense of awful or terrible, as in "the great and terrible Day of the Lord."
- This is the awe expressed by Isaiah when he said, "Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips" (Isa. 6:5), or by any number of biblical personages who fell on their faces and trembled at the sight of heavenly messengers.
- It is the awe inspired by the sure knowledge of a coming day of reckoning.

- During the High Holy Days, the Jewish tradition is to try to remember every sin committed during the past year and to repent.
- If possible, restitution should be made to anyone you may have wronged.
- Apologies should be made to those whom you may have offended.
- Money should be paid to those you may have cheated.
- It is an opportunity to “clear the slate” with God before his judgment is finalized on the Day of Atonement.
- The idea is that no sin should remain un-atoned for by the end of that day.
- As the beginning of the Days of Awe, Rosh HaShanah is a time to begin the process of remembering sins.
- This is a time of quite literally working out our salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12).
- Yet woven into this time is also a sense of great hope in the Lord: hope brought on by our remembrance of what the Lord has done, as well as the awareness that we are ourselves commemorating this day, just as God commanded us.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

- Awe without hope is terror, pure and simple.
- Hope without remembrance is wishful thinking, empty and without substance.
- Remembrance without awe is mere nostalgia.
- Yet these three strands combined weave an unbreakable cord, binding us to the sure and dependable love of the Lord and causing us to desire to follow him in all that we do - not from a sense of tradition or fear, but out of reciprocal love.
- The combination of hope, remembrance, and awe create something else entirely: mindfulness.
- The full and present awareness of God in each waking moment of our lives is a goal we all should share, elusive though it may be. Meditating on God's Word - and on its application to our lives - is one way of describing this mindfulness.
- Praying constantly is another.
- Simply being aware that God is here, with all that that implies, can help us to transcend the mundane day-to-day rituals of our lives.