

# FAQs on the Fall Holidays

## Rosh HaShanah

Why does the Jewish community call *Yom Teruah* “Rosh HaShanah”? I thought the Biblical New Year began in the Spring.

For many people in the independent Hebrew/Hebraic Roots movement, Exodus 12:2 settles the matter: “This month shall be the beginning of months for you; it is to be the first month of the year to you,” speaking of the month of Aviv (Exodus 13:4). It is thus said that the worldwide Jewish Synagogue has been in error for millennia about designating the festival commanded in Leviticus 23:23-25 and Numbers 29:1-6 as “*Rosh HaShanah*,” and remembering the first of Tishri as the Civil New Year:

“Again the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, “In the seventh month on the first of the month you shall have a rest, a reminder by blowing *of trumpets*, a holy convocation. You shall not do any laborious work, but you shall present an offering by fire to the LORD”’” (Leviticus 23:23-25, NASU).

“Now in the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall also have a holy convocation; you shall do no laborious work. It will be to you a day for blowing trumpets. You shall offer a burnt offering as a soothing aroma to the LORD: one bull, one ram, *and* seven male lambs one year old without defect; also their grain offering, fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths *of an ephah* for the bull, two-tenths for the ram, and one-tenth for each of the seven

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lambs. *Offer* one male goat for a sin offering, to make atonement for you, besides the burnt offering of the new moon and its grain offering, and the continual burnt offering and its grain offering, and their drink offerings, according to their ordinance, for a soothing aroma, an offering by fire to the LORD” (Numbers 29:1-6, NASU).

Those dismissing the Jewish custom of celebrating *Rosh HaShanah* at this time, note that there is no reference to any kind of new year in either passage. All it speaks of is a *zikron teruah* or “a memorial (of) blowing” occurring in the seventh month. They feel justified at referring to this appointed time exclusively as *Yom Teruah*, and then criticizing anyone who follows the lead of the Synagogue, notably people in Messianic Judaism.

The issue regarding *Rosh HaShanah* would not be an issue at all (along with many others) if it were not for the large numbers of non-Jewish Believers which have swelled the Messianic movement over the past several decades. Within this are some people who often misunderstand Jewish tradition, and have, at times, been thrust into various positions of influence and/or leadership with often very little preparation. Respectfully, rather than investigate a Jewish tradition in a sensitive manner, with an attempt to understand it—many just dismiss something without any adequate understanding of how it came to be. This often follows with harsh attitudes and disdain for things which are just classified as “vain traditions of men,” sometimes without any strong factual basis. Such, we believe, is the case with *Rosh HaShanah*—as little, if any attempt, has been made to carefully weigh all of the opinions. It is, unfortunately, difficult for many non-Jewish Messianics in the independent Hebrew/Hebraic Roots movement, to realize that the Jewish people have been given the scepter of leadership (Genesis 49:10), that they possess the oracles of God or various explanations on how the Torah is to be followed (Romans 3:2; 9:4), and that Yeshua Himself directed His disciples to follow the lead of the Pharisees in matters of (major) Torah application (Matthew 23:2-3). And, the Pharisaism of the Apostle Paul is often not even realized (Acts 23:6).

The argument against *Rosh HaShanah* which is commonly made, to paraphrase what is often said, is that,

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*The Rabbis were deceived by a blast from Babylon. The Civil New Year is based on Babylonian practices, and is now a misunderstanding present among Judah. We must leave such Babylonianism at the door.*<sup>1</sup>

Most would be unaware of the fact that saying *Rosh HaShanah* was picked up by the Jewish exiles in Babylon is actually quite dangerous, not knowing the school of Biblical scholarship which supports it.

Many Messianic leaders and teachers are largely not equipped with knowing anything about German Higher Criticism from the Nineteenth Century, and the considerable damage that it has caused to Biblical Studies. If they actually did know about it, then the rhetoric we can witness against *Rosh HaShanah* would not be able to pass. The critical tradition advocates that the Torah was not at all written by Moses or scribes via his direction, but instead was written entirely *after* the Babylonian exile of the Sixth Century B.C.E. The Torah is believed to be a compiled document of a series of disparate witnesses which they attribute to the J writer or Yahwist, the E writer or Elohist, P or the Priestly writer, and D or the Deuteronomist.

The sources which make up the Pentateuch in this schema can be determined by the usage of certain Divine names such as YHWH (J) or Elohim (E), cultic material which would relate to the priests of Israel (P), and then the Book of Deuteronomy (D) as a so-called "pious fraud" written during the time of the Josianic reforms (2 Kings 22-23). In this case, information from Leviticus 23:23-25 and Numbers 29:1-6 would be viewed as originating from the Priestly writer, set against information from Exodus coming from J and/or E, and then the earliest data in D which would have said nothing of a *Yom Teruah* or *Rosh HaShanah* (Deuteronomy 16:1-17). Yet if Moses is the principal compiler of the Torah, as affirmed by both Yeshua and His Disciples (Mark 12:26; Luke 24:27; John 1:45; 5:46; Romans 10:5; 2 Corinthians 3:15), then some theological synthesis needs to take place between these so-called disparate witnesses within the Torah.

How does this all relate to hastily judging the Jewish Synagogue's observance of *Rosh HaShanah* as the Civil New Year? Those who dismiss *Rosh HaShanah* as a legitimate observance are often forced to

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Batya Ruth Wootten, *Israel's Feasts and Their Fullness*, expanded edition (St. Cloud, FL: Key of David Publishing, 2008), 205.

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turn to literature which is affected by the JEDP documentary hypothesis—while often not even realizing it! Many would, for example, turn to a short quote in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* on “Rosh Ha-Shanah,” which says in “the post-Exilic period. . .the Babylonian influences had become particularly pronounced.”<sup>2</sup> There you have it, *Rosh HaShanah* was picked up in Babylon, right? Unfortunately, many such teachers would exclude the surrounding sentences from their quotation, perhaps disregarding some of the information provided as just theological gobbledygook:

“In the critical view, the Pentateuchal legislation in which the festival appears belongs to the Priestly Code (P) and, therefore, **to the post-Exilic period, when the Babylonian influences had become particularly pronounced.** The older critical views consider the whole institution to be post-Exilic, pointing out, for instance, that there is no reference to it in the lists of the feasts of Deuteronomy (16:1-17).”<sup>3</sup>

Here, the view is that the festival codified in Leviticus 23:23-25 and Numbers 29:1-6—regardless of what one calls it—is a part of P, a source for the Torah which was compiled after the Babylonian exile. The belief that *Rosh HaShanah* was, in fact, something which the Jewish exiles picked up in Babylon is actually rooted in a theological tradition which denies any Mosaic involvement with the composition of the Torah—and more than anything else also severely denies the Torah’s historicity and reliability, **treating the Torah as little more than Ancient Israel’s mythology.**

While some might (foolishly) be willing to reference critical scholarship to refute what they perceive to be the errant Jewish practice of *Rosh HaShanah*, what else do those same scholars usually conclude the Jewish exiles “picked up” in Babylon? Well, they often propose that things such as the Flood of Genesis 6-8 and the Creation accounts of Genesis 1-3 were Ancient Israel’s redactions of the Epic of Gilgamesh, the Enuma Elish, and Atrahasis—adaptations of pagan mythology into its own Scriptures! A poignant example would be the

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<sup>2</sup> Louis Jacobs, “Rosh Ha-Shanah,” in Cecil Roth and Geoffrey Wigoder, eds., *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1972), 14:307.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

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*Jewish Study Bible's* liberal comments on Genesis 6: "The flood narrative that ensues, [is] a characteristically Israelite adaptation of a well-known and widespread Mesopotamian story."<sup>4</sup>

Rather than considering the thoughts of those who believe that the early parts of the Bible—and consequently *all* of the instruction seen in Leviticus 23—are Ancient Israel's mythology, we need to consider the Jewish theological justification for what *Rosh HaShanah* actually is.

The Rabbinical argument in favor of *Rosh HaShanah* being the Civil New Year is how *Rosh HaShanah* is connected to the later holiday of *Yom Kippur*, occurring ten days later. *Yom Kippur* is the Day of Atonement, and consequently also the eschatological time of humanity's final judgment. The Civil New Year is celebrated on *Rosh HaShanah*, ten days previously, because it is believed that the judgment of humanity will likely take place during the same time of year as the creation of humanity had taken place. After the instruction of Aviv being the first of the year (Exodus 13:4), some conflicting information does—at least on the surface—appear in Exodus:

"Also *you shall observe* the Feast of the Harvest *of* the first fruits of your labors *from* what you sow in the field; also the Feast of the Ingathering at the end of the year when you gather in *the fruit of* your labors from the field" (Exodus 23:16, NASU).

"You shall celebrate the Feast of Weeks, *that is*, the first fruits of the wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the turn of the year" (Exodus 34:22, NASU).

These verses speak of the commemoration of *Sukkot* "at the end of the year" or *b'tzet ha'shanah*, and keeping *Shavuot* "at the turn of the year" or *tiqumat ha'shanah*. This represents some kind of changing of the year in the Fall (Autumn), and not in the Spring, and one in the later Spring. Do the contradictions between Exodus 13:4, and later Exodus 23:16 and 34:22, appear because one set of commandments comes from P, and another comes from J and/or E, with D saying nothing on the matter? Or, if all of these commandments came from

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<sup>4</sup> Jon D. Levenson, "Genesis," in Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 21.

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Moses, have those criticizing *Rosh HaShanah* missed something and drawn some inappropriate conclusions?

Also to be considered is Ezekiel 40:1, when the Prophet is shown his visions from God:

“In the twenty-fifth year of our exile, at the beginning of the year, on the tenth of the month, in the fourteenth year after the city was taken, on that same day the hand of the LORD was upon me and He brought me there” (Ezekiel 40:1, NASU).

All interpreters are agreed that this vision was shown ten days after “the beginning of the year” or what the text clearly indicates as *b’Rosh HaShanah*. **Either this was on the 10th of Aviv, a date with no particular significance, or this was on the 10th of Tishri, Yom Kippur (Leviticus 23:27)**. The latter is the traditional view (b.*Arachin* 12a), and Ezekiel being shown his vision on *Yom Kippur* fits much more in line with the promise of restoration from exile.

It is very true that the first of Aviv/Nisan designates some kind of new year in the Spring, but it is equally true that there are different witnesses in the Tanach which point to a new year at a later time such as in the Fall (Autumn). To act as though the Sages, Rabbis, and Jewish people have somehow been blind to all of this for millennia—and now it is time for various non-Jewish Hebrew Roots advocates to correct them—is at the very least not a very constructive attitude. It is one which is not open to learning why the Synagogue has designated the first of Tishri as *Rosh HaShanah*. In fact, the Mishnah indicates the view that there are four new years to be reckoned with as seen in the cycles of Scripture, as the tractate *Rosh HaShanah* begins by saying,

“There are four new years: (1) the first day of Nisan is the new year for kings and festivals; (2) the first day of Elul is the new year for tithing cattle. R. Eleazar and R. Simeon say, ‘It is on the first day of Tishre.’ (3) The first day of Tishre is the new year for the reckoning of years, for Sabbatical years, and for Jubilees, for planting [trees] and for vegetables; (4) for the first day of Shebat is the new year for trees, in accord with the opinion of the House of Shammai. The

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House of Hillel say, 'On the fifteenth of that month [is the new year for trees]' (m.*Rosh HaShanah* 1:1).<sup>5</sup>

It is quite surprising for today's Messianic people to see that there are no recorded statements in the Apostolic Scriptures about either Yeshua or His Apostles observing *Yom Teruah/Rosh HaShanah*. This lack of data does not mean that they did not know about it, nor that they did not keep it. But what it does mean is that Messianic students have to read between the lines regarding how Yeshua and His Disciples would likely observe this were they living among us today. The closest that we can actually get is Paul's defense before Festus in Acts 25:8, where he said, "I have committed no offense either against the Law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar" (NASU). Considering the broad categories listed here by Luke, *ton nomon tōn Ioudaiōn* or "the Law of the Jews" would be best considered as involving *both* the Written Torah and whatever significant customs went along with it, normative to Paul's Pharisaism (cf. Acts 22:3).

What this all points to is that we must consider how this sacred day was followed in the Second Temple period. In fact, what we see is that it was observed as *Rosh HaShanah*,<sup>6</sup> something which has been carried on faithfully in today's Jewish Synagogue. To find out what some of those significant customs were, which the Apostle Paul would not have committed an offense against as part of "the Law of the Jews," the Messianic community can start reading at Mishnah *Rosh HaShanah* 1:2: "at the New Year all who enter the world pass before Him like troops, since it is said, *He who fashions the hearts of them all, who considers all their works* (Ps. 33:15)."<sup>7</sup> **It is not at all inappropriate for the Messianic movement to celebrate *Rosh HaShanah* along with the worldwide Jewish community.**

In the Synagogue today, *Rosh HaShanah* is considered to be a very serious occasion calling people to *Yom Kippur*, occurring ten days later. J.H. Hertz indicates in his *Pentateuch & Haftorahs*, "unlike the New Year celebrations of many ancient and modern nations, the

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<sup>5</sup> Jacob Neusner, trans., *The Mishnah: A New Translation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 299.

<sup>6</sup> "Rosh Hashanah," in Jacob Neusner and William Scott Green, eds., *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 536.

<sup>7</sup> Neusner, *Mishnah*, 299.

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Jewish New Year is not a time of revelry, but an occasion of the deepest religious import.”<sup>8</sup> He further goes on to say how the *shofar* is blown, and what it is intended to call the people for:

“The sound of the Shofar, consisting, as handed down by Tradition, of three distinctive Shofar-notes—tekiah, shevarim, teruah—has been looked upon from time immemorial as a call to contrition and penitence, as a reminder of the Shofar-sound of Sinai; and the Day of Memorial, the beginning of the Ten Days of Repentance. . . which culminate in the Day of Atonement, as a time of self-examination and humble petition for forgiveness.”<sup>9</sup>

*Rosh HaShanah* being a call to self-examination, prayer, and repentance—is to be contrasted against the new year celebrations of the Ancient Near East, often involving great pomp and circumstance.<sup>10</sup>

The Synagogue’s commemoration of *Rosh HaShanah* in the Fall (Autumn) **by no means** parallels the kinds of contemporary celebrations which would have taken place in the ANE. *Rosh HaShanah* is to be a very contemplative time of reflection as one prepares for *Yom Kippur*. When sacrifices were offered in the Temple, they were done in accordance with specific instructions delivered by God through Moses, and not P. It is not a time when one pops open a bottle of champagne and celebrates the coming of another year.

Yet when we consider some of the ANE new year practices and compare them to many of the “*Yom Teruah*” commemorations which can occur in some of today’s independent Hebrew/Hebraic Roots fellowships—is there more commonality between the revelry and partying of Canaan, Egypt, and Mesopotamia and such assemblies, or the prayer and piety of the Synagogue? Which style of commemoration would be more likely to encourage greater holiness among God’s people? Which is a *miqra-qodesh* or “holy convocation” (Numbers 29:1, NASU)?

Based on some of the customs which have arisen in the two decades or so (2000s-present) regarding the various “*Yom Teruah*”

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<sup>8</sup> J.H. Hertz, ed., *Pentateuch & Haftorahs* (London: Soncino Press, 1960), 522.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Consult Julye Bidmead, “New Year,” in David Noel Freedman, ed., *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 963.

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commemorations seen in the independent Hebrew/Hebraic Roots movement—a return to the Jewish practice of *Rosh HaShanah* should be in order on the part of many. *Rosh HaShanah* was not just “picked up” in Babylon by the Jewish exiles, unless of course we are prepared to believe that most of the Torah, save the “pious fraud” of Deuteronomy, also came from Babylon. But what has happened more than anything else, is that the reverent day which *Rosh HaShanah* is in the Synagogue, has not always been understood. And as it has been observed in both the Synagogue and Church of today, getting a rabbi or pastor to encourage reverence for God in the people is probably the most difficult thing that such a leader has to do.

Some of the things which we will be encouraging and working for in the years ahead, so that *Yom Teruah/Rosh HaShanah* can return to being the holy time that it is in the Synagogue, include:

- Only blowing the *shofar* at the designated times on *Rosh HaShanah* (and/or *Yom Kippur*), as opposed to indiscriminately blowing it not just any time on only these two dates, but any time throughout the year. The sound of the *shofar* is a sacred sound which has lost much of its significance in the contemporary Messianic movement, becoming quite a common sound akin to “a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal” (1 Corinthians 13:1, NASU).
- Let *Rosh HaShanah* be a very sacred and sober time of being called to the Ten Days of Awe toward *Yom Kippur*, where Believers are called to personal and corporate repentance, and intercessory prayer for our Messianic faith community, Israel and the Jewish people, and the salvation of the world.

The fruits of dismissing many of the significant Jewish traditions associated with *Rosh HaShanah*, as brought on by a number of today’s “*Yom Teruah*” commemorations in the Hebrew/Hebraic Roots movement, do speak for themselves. No stability of any kind has been brought by summarily disregarding our Jewish spiritual heritage in this area, and non-Jewish Believers going along have not performed their job well of provoking our Jewish brethren to jealousy for faith in the Messiah (Romans 11:11). If anything, new and unnecessary barriers have been placed between the Messianic movement and the Jewish Synagogue which need not be there.

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And worse enough, Christians who know a few things about *Rosh HaShanah* and the important themes associated with it, have not exactly been interested as a result of what has been allowed to transpire. Hopefully, *Rosh HaShanah* can return to being a time of serious spiritual reflection, as we are called into a specific season where we can “work out [our] salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12, NASU)—focusing on the need of Yeshua for our salvation, and any deliverance or unfinished spiritual business which is required.<sup>11</sup>

## Yom Kippur, Fasting

Where is the command in Torah to fast on *Yom Kippur*?  
I thought it only said that we are to afflict our souls.

The command to commemorate *Yom Kippur* or the Day of Atonement appears several times in the Torah (Exodus 30:10; Leviticus 16:30; 23:27-28; Numbers 29:7-11), with each section of commandments giving specific details. One of those specific details—and arguably the most important—is listed in Leviticus 23:27: “it shall be a holy convocation for you, and you shall humble your souls” (NASU) What does the clause *v’innitem et-nafshoteikhem* mean, exactly? The verb *anah*, appearing the Piel stem (intensive action, active voice), is defined as “**humble oneself., mortify oneself. (by fasting)**” (*CHALOT*).<sup>12</sup> So from a lexical standpoint, “afflict your souls” (KJV) or “self-denial” (NJPS) can definitely mean that one is to fast on *Yom Kippur*.

Surveying Jewish history, it is very easy to see that fasting—abstaining from food—was most definitely the traditional interpretation and application of what it meant for a person to afflict

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<sup>11</sup> For a further summary of the traditions commonly associated with *Rosh HaShanah*, consult Ronald L. Eisenberg, *The JPS Guide to Jewish Traditions* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004), pp 184-204.

<sup>12</sup> William L. Holladay, ed., *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, the Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1988), 278.