

TO: Trinity Foundation Members

FROM: Ole Anthony

SUBJECT: **Rosh ha-Shana**

We are rapidly approaching what the Jewish world calls the “High Holy Days.” Three major feasts occur within a period of twenty-two days. This memo will concern itself with the first of these three feasts. Later memos will cover Yom Kippur and the Feast of Tabernacles.

Rosh ha-Shana, the Jewish New Year, falls each year in September or October. Jesus Christ was born on Rosh ha-Shana almost 2,000 years ago in the Jewish year 3761. It is difficult to accept, but each of the things that we celebrate at Christmas and every song we sing at that time all celebrate what happened on the Jewish New Year, Rosh ha-Shana.

We celebrate the feast in the individual seder groups on the nearest Sunday to the actual date. Other than the birth of Christ, the events said to have taken place on Rosh ha-Shana are as follows:

- 1) The earth was created.
- 2) Moses ascended Mt. Sinai for the second time to receive the tablets of the Law.
- 3) The walls of Jericho fell at the blast of the trumpet.

Women do no work on Rosh ha-Shana. Men must prepare the festive meal. This is because God rewarded the women for refusing to give their earrings to make the golden calf; instead they gave theirs for the ornaments of the Temple. The men gave theirs for the idol.

Rosh ha-Shana is said to be God’s judgment day for the world. On judgment day, “it is the custom of men who appear before a court of justice to wear black clothes, fast and be mournful because the outcome is uncertain. But we do not do so. Because we are certain of God’s mercy in Christ Jesus and because we have picked up the Cross, we wear white garments, have our beards shaven and eat, drink and rejoice in the conviction that God will perform miracles for us” (Targum R. H. 1:3; 576.)

The theme of the day is that God is truly King over all His creation and we must only rest in that certainty. During the prayers of the day, it is necessary to recite 10 biblical texts which have the theme of God as King; ten which have the theme of God as He who remembers; and ten which have reference to the shofar.

On Rosh ha-Shana it is said that God opens three books. One is the Book of Life—for those whose works have been good. One is the book of death—for those whose works are thoroughly evil, and one is the intermediate book—for those whose works are lukewarm or undecided. For the people in the intermediate book, their case will be decided on Yom Kippur, ten days later. God grants the delay in order that all may come to repentance.

At the beginning of the day, the Rabbi proclaims:

“Awake from your slumbers, ye who have fallen asleep in life, and reflect on your deeds. Remember your creator. Be not of those who miss reality in pursuit of shadows, and waste their years in seeking after vain things. Forsake your evil ways and thoughts.”

The shofar was blown all day in the Temple. The ram’s horn or shofar is the essential symbol of Rosh ha-Shana. We know that the ram’s horn was sounded to announce and celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ twelve miles away in Bethlehem. The Rabbis say the trumpet’s sound confuses Satan, and ten days later, on the Day of Atonement he is completely powerless.

The ancient Rabbis gave 10 reasons why the shofar was blown:

- 1) Trumpets are sounded at a coronation and God is hailed as King on this day.
- 2) The shofar heralds the beginning of the 10 days of awe in which all have an opportunity to repent, to turn totally from themselves.
- 3) The Torah was given on Mt. Sinai accompanied by blasts of the shofar.
- 4) The prophets compare their message to the sound of the shofar.
- 5) The armies that destroyed the temple sounded trumpet blasts.
- 6) The ram was substituted for Isaac (the shofar is made from a ram’s horn.)
- 7) “Shall the horn be blown in a city, and the people not tremble” (Amos 3:6.)
- 8) Zephaniah called the great day of the Lord (Judgment Day) as a “day of the horn and alarm” (Zeph. 1:14,16.)
- 9) Isaiah says “a great shofar will be blown” to herald the beginning of the Messianic age (Is. 27:13.)
- 10) The shofar will be sounded at the resurrection (Maimonides, Yad, Teshuvah 3:4; I Cor. 15:52; Matt. 24:31.)

“Happy is the people that know the sound of the trumpet.” (Ps. 89:16)

At the festive meal, it is customary to dip a piece of bread, over which grace has been recited, into honey as a token of the sweet year that will now begin.

For the same reason a slice of apple is also dipped in honey and before eating it the following prayer is recited:

“May it be Thy will, O Lord our God and God of our fathers, to renew unto us a good and sweet year.”

The Jews eagerly looked forward to New Year’s Day, for they universally believed that on this day God performed miracles. Any type of mourning was forbidden.

The law was read to make people sad, so that the joy of the Lord was their only strength (see Neh. 8:1-10.) At the end of the day the Rabbi proclaims the following:

“Now O Lord O God, impose thine awe upon all thy works and thy dread upon all thou has created, that all thy works may revere thee and all creation prostrate themselves before thee, that they all may form a single band to do thy will with a perfect heart.”

Then the people were dismissed to their own awe. The ten days intervening until Yom Kippur are regarded as the Days of Awe.

**ROSH HA SHANA**  
**Order of Feast**

**2:00 PM**

- 1) Reading of the Law, Exodus 20-23 (see Nehemiah 8:1-10)
- 2) Psalm 47-Read seven times, then the walls of Jericho fell at the sound of the trumpet.
- 3) Two benedictions:
  - a) “Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who sanctified us by thy word and has instructed us to hear the call of the shofar.”
  - b) “Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe who has kept us in life, has sustained us and who has privileged us to reach this time.”
- 4) Readings:

Psalm 29, 81, 98 (as Christ was being born the Priests and Levites were singing these Psalms in the Temple)  
Exodus 20-23  
Leviticus 23:23-25  
Numbers 29:1-6  
I Samuel 1:1 - 2:10  
Isaiah 7:10-25  
Isaiah 9:1-7  
Isaiah 27  
Jeremiah 31:2-22
- 5) New Testament:

Matthew 2:1-18  
Luke 2:1-10  
Galatians 4:19-31  
Ephesians 5:8-14

**4:00 PM**

Eat in Seder Groups

**5:30 PM**

Meet in the big group for singing, worship and communion