

Rosh Hashanah

Background & Practices



For millennia, our spiritual ancestors set apart times throughout the year to be reminded of theological realities and vital truths conveyed to us throughout Scripture, history, and tradition. Observing these moments is intended to reorient our imagination and remind us that we are part of a grand narrative that transcends time, culture, and even the grave.

Even when we're separated from Christian community, we are inextricably bound together by the Spirit through whom we live and move and have our being. Wherever you may find yourself in this season, we invite you to engage in these sacred times alongside your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Rosh Hashanah ("head of the year") is one of two *High Holy Days* in the biblical calendar. It is based on the Feast of Trumpets in Leviticus 23:23-25, falling on the seventh month (*Tishrei*) of the Jewish calendar, symbolizing the sabbath. The holy day is commemorated throughout the community by the blowing of trumpets as a celebration of God's faithfulness and promise to restore all things through the Messiah.

Flowing into the Ten Days of Repentance (*Aseret Yemei Teshuvah*) and culminating with the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur, the other High Holy Day), this is a period of reflection and confession of past transgressions in preparation for the new year. The Day of Atonement ritual of applying the blood of animal sacrifices throughout various places of the temple was a symbol of cleansing the defiling effects of the community's sin upon the dwelling place of God. Atonement was necessary in reminding the community of the implications of their wrongs and the resulting impact on their relationship with God. Without the opportunity for atonement, the presence of God could no longer dwell among his people (Leviticus 23:26-32; cf. 16:2-34).

This period reminds us of God's goodness in the original creation and the brokenness that pervades our present world. This is a period to pause, remembering that the present state of the world is not as God intended. Yet God is ever moving toward us to provide peace, wholeness, and rest through his abiding presence with us. We are also reminded that there is no presence without confession, repentance, and atonement for our sins.

Jewish holy days begin at sundown. This year, Rosh Hashana is celebrated from sundown on September 18 to sundown on September 20. Yom Kippur is observed from sundown on September 27 to sundown on September 28, with the Ten Days of Repentance in between.

Here are some practices you can engage in over this ten-day period.

Celebrate

Celebrate by baking or purchasing a challah loaf (*hal-lah*, kind of like “holla,” a fun play on this being the Feast of Trumpets!).

Challah is a traditional Kosher bread that is braided to represent the life cycle that continues into a new year. Some dip the bread in honey to represent the sweetness of the coming year.

Breaking challah with family and friends is a great opportunity to take turns declaring what you are thankful for about the past year, and what you are prayerful for in the year to come.

Confession

Ask some of your trusted family and friends to help you see your blind spots.

Ask questions like: *What do I do that hurts you? How could I better love you? What is it like to be with me? Do I show interest in others or talk mostly about myself?*

Allow yourself time and space in silence and solitude to process their responses. Invite the Spirit to reveal the difficult truths of their responses and guide you through confession and repentance in these relationships over the coming year.

Fasting

Traditionally, the Day of Atonement is observed through fasting as a form of sacrifice in providing additional space for remembrance and gratitude, reflection and confession, reading, prayer, and hearing from God. Read: Leviticus 16; Hebrews 6:13-10:39.

Additional Resources

www.jewsforjesus.org/jewish-resources/jewish-holidays/rosh-hashanah
www.jewsforjesus.org/jewish-resources/jewish-holidays/yom-kippur