

Days of DISTINCTION

Rosh Hashanah



The first mention of **ROSH HASHANAH** (literally Heb. "The Head of the Year") is found in the book of Leviticus in the Hebrew Testament. Rosh Hashanah is celebrated on the first day of the month of Tishrei (around September). In the Hebrew Testament, Tishrei is considered the seventh month of the calendar, not the first. Just as the seventh day of the week is considered special, so is the seventh month of the year. The most important, or High Holidays, are celebrated in Tishrei and it is considered to be a very holy month.

This New Year is celebrated in the fall because it is the time of planting. Ancient Jews were very connected to the land; therefore, planting time to them was considered the beginning of the year. The Jews offered up their prayers so that the harvest would be a good one, and that rain would fall.

ROSH HASHANAH was not as big of a holiday in the Jewish calendar as it is now. It began as a day of rest where the shofar (rams horn) was blown and a day of celebration. The day became more important in the minds of the Jews after the exiled Jews returned to Israel from Babylon following the edict of King Cyrus of Persia in 539 BCE. The prophet Ezra gathered the Jews at the Water Gate in Jerusalem on the first of Tishrei and declared the day to be one of celebration and feasting. However, after the gathering of the Jews by Ezra, they go and celebrate Sukkot (the holiday of booths celebrated on the 15th of Tishrei).

The Mishna (Jewish code of law compiled in 200 CE) mentions four distinct New Years in the Jewish calendar. The first New Year was used to measure the duration of a king's reign, the second New Year was used for the tithing of cattle, the third New Year was the civil New Year which then became the religious New Year, and the fourth New Year was for the trees. The Mishna continues its discussion of **ROSH HASHANAH** by saying that all creatures stand in judgment before God on Rosh Hashanah, and ten days later on Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) God records his judgment.

Today **ROSH HASHANAH** is a holiday dealing with judgment. **ROSH HASHANAH** is perceived as one of the most important holidays in the Jewish year. Synagogues are filled, special tunes are used, and the shofar is blown. Rosh Hashanah has become so important because it begins the ten days of repentance which culminates with the fast of Yom Kippur. It is the beginning of the Jews supplication to God to write their names in the Book of Life.

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