

A Messianic Take on Rosh Hashanah

Rosh Hashanah can be a bittersweet time. For Susan Perlman, one of the founders of Jews for Jesus, growing up in Brooklyn was an occasion, at least for the children, to anticipate getting new clothes and a new pair of shoes.

It was a time to look forward to a new year with hope that good things would come. Susan's family ate sweet things like teiglach; little balls of cookie dough held together with a mixture of honey and sugar. As you ate them, you were meant to have thoughts of a sweet year ahead.

But then life happens. Susan recounts that, "My Rosh Hashanah in 1963 came 18 days before my dad died suddenly of a heart attack. I was a child and suddenly it wasn't a sweet time at all. As we sat shiva in our apartment—the traditional Jewish mourning period of seven days—I asked our family rabbi, 'Is my daddy in heaven?'

The rabbi was a little taken aback but then said something that he had perhaps said many times before. 'Well, Susan, his memory will live on in the life you lead.' Being somewhat precocious, I shot back with, 'Rabbi, you didn't answer my question.'

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"So, he tried again: 'Susan, we can't know for sure what lies beyond the grave, but your father was a good person so we can hope.' Somehow that didn't cut it for me. At Rosh Hashanah, we also wish for others to be inscribed in God's Book of Life. But to me, it didn't matter to talk about an eternal book or ledger that is opened on Rosh Hashanah if eternity was only a

possibility.”

Bittersweet indeed. I have memories that are different than Susan’s. I remember walking to synagogue with my grandfather, who was the most observant one in our family. And I have warm recollection of how our little synagogue would throw open their back doors that led into a dirt lot.

They would pitch a tent over the dirt and the whole sanctuary would expand to accommodate the overflow crowds. People could choose to sit inside the building or inside the tent. I wasn’t much of a Bible reader as a kid but this was pretty impressive—it seemed kind of biblical to have a tent and dirt under my feet.

Rosh Hashanah: some sad memories, some warm ones. {eoa}

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Bronx-born and Brooklyn-raised Rich Robinson came to faith while a college student at Syracuse University in upstate New York. He has been on staff with Jews for Jesus since 1978, originally serving as pianist and songwriter with their “Jewish-gospel” music team, the Liberated Wailing Wall. He’s also been a missionary at several of the Jews for Jesus branches in the United States and currently calls San Francisco home. There, he conducts research and writes as the ministry’s senior researcher. Rich received his . from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and his Ph.D. in biblical studies and hermeneutics from Westminster Theological Seminary in 1993. He is author of the books Christ in the Sabbath and The Day Jesus Did Tikkun Olam: Jewish Values and the New Testament, and co-author of Christ in the Feast of Pentecost.