

The Most Redeeming Part of Rosh HaShana Is Not Rosh HaShanah

Rosh Hashanah (New Year's), biblically known as Yom Teruah (Day of Trumpets, but technically the Day of the Sounding), is the first of the Fall Holy Days. As a young child, I attended and observed this day by gathering in our synagogue with a thousand other Jewish people and spending the entire day in solemn prayer. We would begin with an evening service followed by morning service, which could hardly be called a morning service because it lasted way into the afternoon. My memories of Rosh Hashanah services as a child are filed away in my mind, along with the many other traumatic events of my youth.

You may ask why? First, the entire service was done in Hebrew and, as a child, I did not understand much Hebrew. I could recite the prayers along with everyone because, while I didn't understand Hebrew, I was proficient at reading Hebrew, which allowed me to chant/speak thousands of words that I didn't understand along with a thousand other people (most of whom also didn't understand the words we were speaking). Second, the rabbi's message was always about sorrow and repentance, which are not really two subjects high on the list of interest in the minds of children. Third, the service was extremely boring, which resulted in small children wiggling and falling asleep, both actions of which were discouraged strongly by my parents and grandparents. I still have places on my ears that are sensitive today from being pinched so often. Fourth, the services were long. If Batman could save Gotham City in a half hour, why did it take G-D all day to save His people? The fifth, and the absolute worst, thing about this service was that it was the precursor to Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), which would be even longer.

As a child, the only real redeeming part of the Rosh HaShana service was the Sounding of the Shofar – this nearly magical instrument, which was blown 100 times during the service. Every child I know wanted to learn how to make that horn sound that powerful. As a 19-year-old, who became a believer in Yeshua (Jesus) as my Messiah and began to view the Bible through the lens of the prophetic, I realized that while the other parts of Rosh HaShanah were much more meaningful as a believer than they were to me as a child, those prayers and words of repentance were vital to the lives and hearts of G-D's people. Ultimately, my conclusion about the most redeeming part of the service was accurate, although not for the reason that I held as a child.

In order to understand this statement, let me explain two additional things: The first being that after observing Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, and after reciting days of prayers of brokenness and repentance, those same Jewish people walk out of those services having no assurance that they are in right standing with G-D. They only have a hope that their names are written in the Book of Life. After days of prayer and fasting on these commanded, Appointed Times, myself and every other Jew walk away from those services not knowing our status before G-D. It was this unknown status that was the most disillusioning thing about Judaism. I believe that one of the reasons Jews walk away feeling so spiritually unsettled is because the focus of this day has changed from Yom Teruah to Rosh HaShanah; that the day has become more about a moment in time than it is about hearing a sound. Please remember that I said above the words Yom Teruah literally mean the day of the sound. The sound of a shofar is not referred to as music, but rather it is called the voice of the shofar. It wasn't until I became a believer in Yeshua that I understood the significance of these days and what was lost in translation to my people as time went on, especially after the destruction of the Temple, when I read 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 (TLV):

“For the Lord Himself shall come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the blast of God’s shofar, and the dead in Messiah shall rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left behind, will be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air—and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words.”

The reason for the Appointed Time came into focus and my unsettling fears of my name not being found in the Book of Life evaporated for all time. The purpose of this day is not simply that we would begin the Ten Days of Awe, a season of repentance and renewal of soul. The purpose of this day was so we would prepare our hearts to hear the voice of G-D. Let’s think back to the first time we read about man hearing the voice of G-D in Genesis 3:8-10 (TLV):

“And they heard the sound of Adonai Elohim going to and fro in the garden in the wind of the day. So the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of Adonai Elohim in the midst of the Tree of the garden. Then Adonai Elohim called to the man and He said to him, ‘Where are you?’ Then he said, ‘Your sound—I heard it in the garden and I was afraid. Because I am naked, I hid myself.’”

We read these verses after Adam and Eve had sinned and their eyes were open to their sins. Their response demonstrates repentance; they immediately made clothing of fig leaves to cover themselves. It is at that moment of repentance that they heard the “sound” of G-D calling to them. After their sin and their repentance, they heard G-D’s sound. The same sound we will hear one day when Yeshua returns for His bride; all those who have made themselves ready. When He comes back just as with Adam and Eve, all of those who have believed and repented will hear His voice because their names have been written in the Book of Life. That is why Paul wrote those powerful words in 1 Thessalonians 4:18 (TLV): “Therefore encourage one another with these words.”

Now I understand the most redeeming part of Rosh HaShana is not that it is a new year, but rather an opportunity for those who have been redeemed by the Lamb to rehearse for the day we will hear His sound. So, let's encourage one another with those words.{eoa}

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