

Shayla: Why is Rosh Hashanah considered the Jewish New Year?

Meforshim:

Everyone agrees that the first month of the Jewish calendar year is Nissan (Exodus 12:2) and that Tishri is the seventh. If this is the case, why then does Judaism proclaim that in the month of Tishri is the beginning of the year?

The Talmud provides the answer. According to the section called “Rosh Hashanah” there are four “new years” in Judaism. There is a new year for:

1. **kings and for festivals** which is on the first of Nissan;
2. **tithes: agriculture and animals** which is on the first of Elul;
3. **years** which is on the first of Tishri;
4. **trees** which is on the fifteenth day of Shevat.

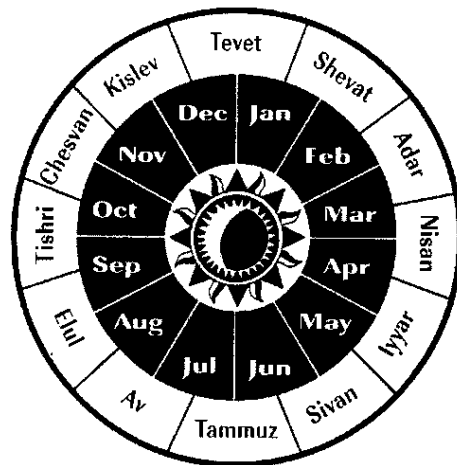
Kings. Therefore, on the first of Nissan, an additional year would be added to the amount of time that the king has ruled. In the Tanakh one is not given a year, like 2009; rather it is said, for example, “...in the first year of the reign of king...” Even if the king took the throne on the last day of the month of Adar, on the first day of Nissan he would begin another year. Hence the king could have only ruled two days and it would be said in the second year of his reign.

Festivals. The first of Nissan is also the year for establishing the festivals. Hence the first festival of the year is Passover and not Rosh Hashanah. The Old Covenant says¹ that every Jewish male twenty years and over was required to go to Jerusalem to offer a sacrifice three times a year for the Shalosh Regalim – The Three Pilgrimage Festivals (Pesach’, Shavuot, Sukkot). If a man turned twenty after the first of Nissan, he would be exempt for Shavuot and Sukkot that year even though he was literally twenty years old. He would not have to go up to Jerusalem until the following Passover.

Tithing land and animals. In regard to tithing of produce of the land and animals, the year starts on the first day of the sixth month (Elul). In Israel, most animals are born in the month of Av, the fifth month; hence, those animals born the following month were of a different year and could not be offered with those born in the month of Av.

Years. Years (sabbatical and Jubilee) are calculated from the first day in the seventh month, Tishri. This means that one could not plant in the seventh year after the month of Tishri. The Jubilee year is figured according to the years beginning each Tishri, but would not begin to be observed until the blowing of the Shofar on Yom Kippur. Hence, if this year was a Sh’mithah year (sabbatical, i.e. letting the land lie fallow) it begins in Tishri. One could harvest the crop of the things planted before Tishri in the first year of the sabbatical year.

Trees. Finally, the New Year for trees begins on the fifteenth day of the month of Shevat. You will recall the prohibition in the Torah (Leviticus 19:23-25) that one cannot eat fruit from a tree the first three years and on the fourth year the fruit must be offered to HaShem, and only on the fifth year and thereafter one may enjoy the fruit of the tree. If one plants a tree prior to the fifteenth day of Shevat it is of the previous year and receives another year on the fifteenth day of Shevat. Thus, the tradition in Israel is to plant trees on the fifteenth day of Shevat to give it a full year of growth before the second year is numbered.



¹ Exodus 23:14-17; 34:18-23; Deuteronomy 16:16

Though at first glance this discussion may seem largely academic in nature, an interesting remez can be found. Because redemption is the main message of the Scripture one can read about a debate in Meseket Rosh Hashanah in the Gemara concerning what is the month that the final redemption will take place. The argument is between the month of Nissan or Tishri. The conclusion is that as the first redemption (Exodus from Egypt) took place in Nissan so will the final.

Consider the fact that the biblical name of this holiday (Yom ha Zikkaron -the day of remembrance; or Yom Teruah – the day of sounding the shofar) refers to the sounding of the Shofar, while the rabbinical name speaks to the future, i.e. the Kingdom of God. Isn't it interesting to compare that to:

- **Matthew 24:31 HCSB** He will send out His angels with a loud trumpet, and they will gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.
- **1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 HCSB** For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the archangel's voice, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. (17) Then we who are still alive will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will always be with the Lord. (18) Therefore encourage one another with these words.
- **Revelation 10:7 HCSB** but in the days of the sound of the seventh angel, when he will blow his trumpet, then God's hidden plan will be completed, as He announced to His servants the prophets."
- **Revelation 11:15-18 HCSB** The seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven saying: The kingdom of the world has become the *kingdom* of our Lord and of His Messiah, and He will reign forever and ever! (16) The 24 elders, who were seated before God on their thrones, fell on their faces and worshiped God, (17) saying: We thank You, Lord God, the Almighty, who is and who was, because You have taken Your great power and have begun to reign. (18) The nations were angry, but Your wrath has come. The time has come for the dead to be judged, and to give the reward to Your servants the prophets, to the saints, and to those who fear Your name, both small and great, and the time has come to destroy those who destroy the earth.

Note that verse Revelation 11:18 states that the initial joy that comes with the trumpet signaling the beginning of Yahweh Melek's reign also signals the beginning of the judgment of His enemies? Isn't it interesting that the joy of Rosh Hashanah signals the beginning of the Ten Days of Awe (or Repentance), culminating in the all-day fast of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement?

Remember that Christ purposefully entered Jerusalem at the same time as the national Pesach' lamb was being led through the streets; purposefully tied Pesach' to Himself; was examined by the Sanhedrin at the same time as the national lamb was on display; died at precisely the same moment as the national lamb was killed; and that on Shavuot (aka the Festival of First Fruits) the Holy Spirit descended in a miraculous manner. Wouldn't it be interesting if the Master gathered us on the Festival of Trumpets and culminated His Great Day of Wrath on Yom Kippur, thus completely tying His agenda to God's holy days?