

## Rosh Hashanah

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Christians can be inspired by Jewish festivals.

Take, for instance, *Rosh Hashanah* which is Jewish New Year. It has an important theme of God as Creator and King (Sovereign), the One who created the world and continues to renew creation. In fact, Rosh Hashanah is celebrated as ‘the birthday of the world’.

It is a solemn festival, with an awareness of the need to renew one’s life so as to more authentically reflect the person God created. On Rosh Hashanah the blast of the *shofar* (ram’s horn) is heard, and Jews come together at the synagogue for prayers and readings.

In Jewish homes families greet the festival by lighting candles, and a blessing is said over a cup of wine (a ritual called *kiddush*). There are also customs of eating apples dipped in honey (for a ‘sweet’ year) and sharing festive bread (*hallah*) that is round-shaped (for a ‘perfect’ year).

On Rosh Hashanah Jews will walk to a place where there is running water and throw pieces of bread or coins into the water, symbolically releasing sins committed over the past year. In the words of the prophet Micah: “*You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea*” (Micah 7:19).

Rosh Hashanah is celebrated over two days (one day by Reform Jews). It is the beginning of a ten-day period in the Jewish calendar known as the “Days of Awe” (or “the High Holy Days”). During these ten days the Jewish people are very aware of standing before God, mindful of their failings and committed to living more loving and faithful lives. (Catholics have a similar period of self-examination: Lent). The ten-day period climaxes

with a special day of repentance and forgiveness called *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement.

### Why should Christians take notice of Jewish New Year?

There are a number of reasons for Christians to be aware of Rosh Hashanah:

1. Christianity has deep links with Judaism—historically, biblically, spiritually. In the words of Pope John Paul II: “*The Jewish religion is not ‘extrinsic’ to us, but in a certain manner, it is ‘intrinsic’ to our religion. We have therefore a relationship with it which we do not have with any other religion.*” [Synagogue of Rome, 1986] We can honour this relationship by being aware and supportive of the festivals celebrated by Jewish communities.
2. Rosh Hashanah themes and customs hold inspiration for our own Christian faith. They can help us to reflect on God as Creator and Sovereign, and to reform our lives in that awareness. They can also refresh our religious instincts in a joyful sense; after all, apples dipped in honey are rather delicious, and religion doesn’t have to be all hard work!
3. Most of all, it can instill awe and gratitude. Learning about Rosh Hashanah puts us in touch with the continuing presence and action of God in the Jewish people.

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# LIGHT OF TORAH



## Be inspired by Rosh Hashanah customs

**Greet.** Send your Jewish friends a *Rosh Hashanah* greeting. 'Shanah Tovah!' (a wish for a good year).

**Learn.** Invite a Jewish friend to explain more about their experience of Jewish festivals.

**Enjoy.** Savour an aspect of this beautiful world created by God, our Creator and Sovereign. Gather fresh flowers for your home. Watch the sun rise. Breathe deeply, savouring your living breath.

**Let go.** Name an attitude or habit that is not life-giving, that is dark, sinful. Pray, repent, release it. Ask God to create you anew.

**Eat.** Add a festive food to your meal table. E.g., apples dipped in honey: a wish for the sweet year to come. Round-shaped bread: symbol of a year that is whole and complete. •

## More

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To learn more of Jewish beliefs, rituals and customs associated with Jewish festivals, explore the following sites:

- My Jewish Learning <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/>
- Chabad.org [https://www.chabad.org/holidays/default\\_cdo/jewish/holidays.htm](https://www.chabad.org/holidays/default_cdo/jewish/holidays.htm)
- AISH.com <https://www.aish.com/h/>