



A SELECTION FROM THE SERVICE FOR ROSH HASHANAH

Announcing the Year

Ancient cultures and civilizations started calendars to mark the cycles of nature, the origins of their people, and the creation of the world. In the beginning, there were only solar days. Sunset was considered to be the end of the day and the beginning of the next. Although the start of the day was shifted to midnight in the Roman era, the Jewish calendar still marks the start of each day at sunset.

That calendar was originally agricultural and links the motion of the earth around the sun – marking years – with the motion of the moon around the earth – marking months. Because the lunar year falls short of the solar year by approximately eleven days, the Jewish festivals, which are tied to specific harvests, would start to “wander” around the year. In order to preserve them in their seasons, the calendar is periodically adjusted according to a complex set of rules, with the result that our New Year sometimes comes early and sometimes comes late – but never the same time each year.

At first, the Jewish calendar did not mark the years by number but described events that occurred in a particular year of a specific ruler’s reign. It was only in the tenth century that the method of counting the year from the date of creation became popular. This was based on the assumption that human history may be equated with the physical history of the earth. According to that tradition, which is based on biblical genealogies, we now begin the year 576₇.

While we may still mark the calendar in this fashion, we certainly no longer believe this literally states the age of the world since modern science has taught us that the universe is billions of years old. Nonetheless, we take pride in the longevity of our people and we are proud of our continuity for at least 3500 years. We have not just survived. We have thrived and have significantly contributed to the advance of civilization and society.

So now, as we enter the New Year 576₇, let us look back at our past with respect and appreciation. Let us make our own mark with conviction and dedication. And let us gaze ahead with hope and expectation.