



Justice and Mercy

BENJAMIN JUSTER

As we enter the season of the High Holidays—Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot—we are confronted with the sobering reality that God will one day judge the entire world. These days are called the Yamim Nora'im, the “Days of Awe,” precisely because they force us to consider the holiness and authority of the Creator who holds our very lives in His hands.

For many of us, this thought is unsettling. How do we reconcile the image of a loving, merciful Father with the reality of a righteous Judge who will separate the righteous from the wicked?

From our limited human perspective, it is difficult to comprehend a God who will ultimately condemn the unrepentant to eternal separation, anguish, and torment.

Our natural tendency is to focus on the severity of God’s punishments, perhaps imagining them as overly harsh or unfair. Yet at the same time, each of us has been created with a built-in sense of justice—a reflection of God’s own image stamped upon our soul’s. Even from childhood, we instinctively know when we have been wronged.

“That’s Not Fair!” – A Glimpse of Our Need for Justice

If you are a parent, you’ve likely experienced this firsthand. Perhaps you’ve had to mediate a dispute between two of your children over a toy. After listening to both sides, you declare, “It’s Billy’s turn to play with the toy,” or, “It takes two to argue, so both of you need to have a time-out.” Inevitably, one of the children will cross their arms, stomp their foot, and cry out, “THAT’S NOT FAIR!”

This simple moment reveals a profound truth: we all crave justice. We want fairness when we have been mistreated or overlooked. We long for wrongs to be righted and for the vulnerable to be protected. And moreover, social activists take a visible stand and work tirelessly to bring restitution for the injured or abused.

The Scriptures are full of God’s commands for His people to uphold justice. In Deuteronomy 16:20 TLV, God declares to Israel: *“Justice, justice you must pursue, so that you may live and possess the land that Adonai your God is giving you.”*

Biblical justice is not merely about punishment. It is about protecting the poor, marginalized, and mistreated. The prophets of Israel repeatedly called the nation to repentance, not only for idolatry, but also for neglecting justice and showing partiality toward the



powerful (Isaiah 1:17; Amos 5:24). God’s heart is especially tender toward the orphan, widow, and stranger (Deuteronomy 10:18-19).

The Tension Between Justice and Mercy

But here lies the challenge: how can a perfectly just God also be merciful?

Justice is objective. It demands that the guilty be punished according to the exacting standard of the Law. **Mercy, on the other hand, is subjective.** It chooses to withhold punishment, even when it is deserved.

From a purely legal perspective, this creates a dilemma. If God is perfectly just, then every sin must be accounted for. *“The soul that sins, he will die”* (Ezekiel 18:20). Yet if God is merciful, how can He forgive without compromising His justice?

The answer is found in Yeshua the Messiah. Only through His sacrificial death and resurrection can justice and mercy meet in perfect harmony. At the cross, justice was fully satisfied—our sins were paid for in full. And mercy was poured out as Yeshua bore the penalty we deserved.

Paul writes in Romans 3:25-26 TLV:

“God set forth Yeshua as an atonement, through faith in His blood, to show His righteousness in passing over sins already committed. Through God’s forbearance, He demonstrates His righteousness at the present time—that He Himself is just and also the justifier of the one who puts his trust in Yeshua.”

We are still guilty. Our good deeds, religious observances, and personal efforts cannot erase the stain of sin. Only Yeshua’s blood pays our debt and guarantees that we will receive mercy instead of judgment.





This is why the themes of the High Holidays are so significant for believers today. Rosh Hashanah reminds us that there will be a final day of reckoning when God will judge all nations. Yom Kippur points to our desperate need for atonement through Messiah's sacrifice. And Sukkot celebrates the joy of restored fellowship and dwelling with God.

Mercy for the Dependent, Not the Self-Sufficient

Mercy is rarely given to the strong or self-sufficient. It is extended to those who acknowledge their weakness and need for grace. Yeshua told the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9-14). The Pharisee boasted of his righteousness, while the tax collector simply cried out, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner!"

Yeshua declared that it was the tax collector—not the Pharisee—who went home justified before God. In the same way, we must come to the High Holidays with humility, admitting our utter dependence on God's mercy through Messiah.

As Messianic believers, we live in the tension of knowing both the seriousness of God's judgment and the extravagance of His grace. This tension should lead us to personal repentance, deeper worship, and compassionate action toward others.

Three Challenges for Application

As we reflect on these themes, here are three ways to apply this message during the High Holidays:

1. Examine Your Heart Before God (Psalm 139:23-24 TLV)

"Search me, O God, and know my heart. Examine me, and know my anxious thoughts, and see if there be any offensive way within me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

Challenge yourself to spend intentional time in self-examination and prayer. Ask the *Ruach HaKodesh* (Holy Spirit) to reveal areas of unconfessed sin, bitterness, or compromise. Write down what He shows you, then bring it before the Lord in repentance.

The High Holidays are not merely about communal traditions—they are a personal invitation to return to God with sincerity. Just as Israel prepared for Yom Kippur through ten days of introspection, we too must prepare our hearts to receive His mercy afresh.

2. Extend Mercy to Others (Matthew 5:7 TLV)

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall be shown mercy."

God's mercy toward us should overflow into our relationships with others. Is there someone you need to forgive? A relationship that needs healing? A person you've judged harshly instead of showing compassion?



Choose to demonstrate tangible acts of mercy. This could mean reconciling with a family member, serving someone in need, or simply offering grace in a situation where you were wronged. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, famous Jewish Theologian of blessed memory, reflects, "When I was young, I admired clever people. Now that I am old, I admire kind people. Forgiveness is the highest form of kindness."

3. Proclaim the Good News of Messiah's Mercy (2 Corinthians 5:20 TLV)

"We are therefore ambassadors for Messiah, as though God were making His appeal through us. We beg you on behalf of Messiah, be reconciled to God."

The High Holidays are not only a time for personal renewal but also an opportunity to share the hope of Yeshua with others.

Many in the Jewish community experience these days with a deep sense of fear and uncertainty, wondering if their names will be inscribed in the Book of Life.

We have the joy of proclaiming that Messiah has made a way for eternal life through His atoning sacrifice. Look for opportunities to share your testimony, invite someone to your congregation, or simply explain the meaning of these holy days in light of Yeshua's fulfillment.

Living in Awe of God's Perfect Justice and Mercy

As we walk through this season, let us hold fast to the truth that God is both perfectly just and profoundly merciful. His judgments are righteous, and His mercy is limitless for those who turn to Him in repentance and faith.

C.S. Lewis once wrote, *"There are only two kinds of people: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, in the end, 'Thy will be done.'"*

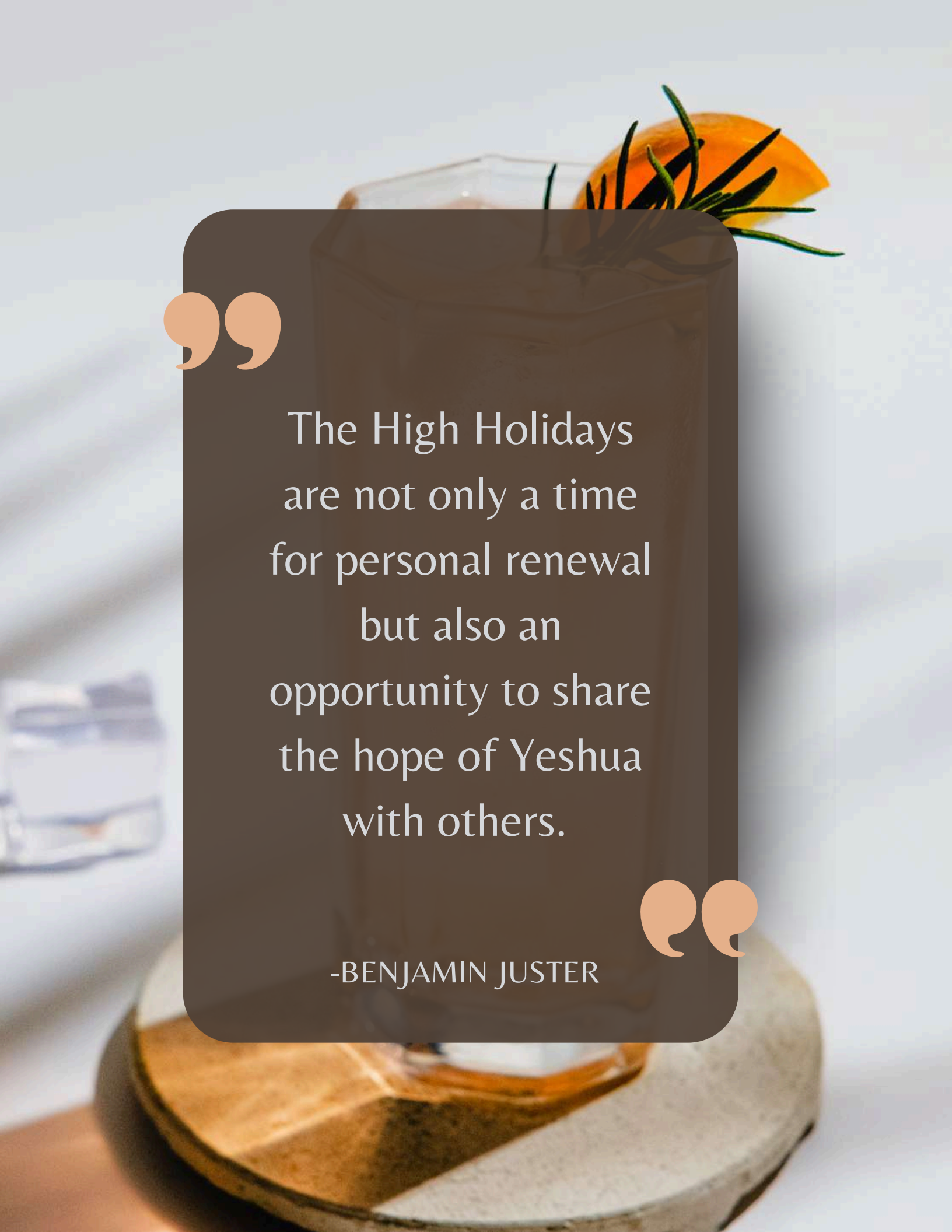


May we be among those who surrender fully to His will, trusting in the blood of Yeshua to cover our sins, and boldly extending His mercy to others. As we hear the sound of the shofar and prepare our hearts, may our response echo the ancient words of the prophet Micah:

"He has told you, humanity, what is good, and what Adonai is seeking from you: Only to practice justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God." Micah 6:8 TLV



Benjamin Juster
Editor in Chief

A glass of water with a slice of orange and a sprig of rosemary on a wooden coaster.

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