



CHOSEN PEOPLE  
MINISTRIES

# What are the Ten Days of Awe?



We are about to observe the civil Jewish New Year, Rosh Hashanah, which literally means, “head of the year.”

This festival is one of the seven great festivals of the Lord described in the Hebrew Scriptures. It is appointed by God to be celebrated on the first day of the seventh month of the Jewish calendar, *Tishrei*. All seven of these holy days are found in the Bible in Leviticus chapter 23, as well as in a number of other passages in the Pentateuch/Torah. There is also a vast amount of rabbinic material describing the festivals and how they should be observed.

The holy days are prophetic in nature, and over the course of the year, provide a roadmap to redemption; Passover, Unleavened Bread, First Fruits, Pentecost, the New Year, Day of Atonement, and Tabernacles. They are similar in that each one involves worship, offerings, a rest from labor, and usually a reminder of a great event in the history of Israel. Oftentimes, a holiday is also tied to the agricultural

season and is in some way connected to the harvest.

It is important to note the Hebrew word translated as “holiday” in Leviticus 23 is better understood as “appointments.”<sup>[1]</sup> God asks Israel to remember what He did for them in history more than one hundred fifty times in the Hebrew Scriptures. He set up these appointments, or appointed times, to help His people commune with Him and remember His good works in their history.

Each of these holy days was established by God and revealed to the children of Israel by Moses, who received the calendar as part of the Sinai revelation. I also believe that every one of these festivals (“appointed times”) was fulfilled in the person of Jesus, the Messiah, and along with many scholars, believe the first four festivals, which occur in the spring, point to His first coming. The latter three in the fall are related to His second coming.

These holidays have a variety of themes and customs, and are observed in a similar manner by most Jewish people, whether they are *Ashkenazic* (of Eastern European descent) or *Sephardic* (primarily from Spain and North Africa), New Yorkers, or Israelis. The major themes of the Jewish New Year are Kingship, Remembrance, and the Sounding of the Shofar.

Over the centuries, our rabbis and sages have compiled a book called the *Machzor*, which is used in the synagogue as the prayer book and service guide for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. (See Leviticus 23:23–25; Numbers 10:10; 29:16 for the biblical details.)

**Rosh Hashanah** is the first of three great festivals to be celebrated in the fall. The other two are **Yom Kippur** (the Day of Atonement) and **Sukkot** (the Feast of Tabernacles).

The great theme of Rosh Hashanah is repentance, and the overarching theme of the high holiday season is forgiveness. The first day of Rosh Hashanah begins a ten-day season of repentance, often called the **Ten Days of Awe** by the Jewish people. These ten days conclude with the observance of the Day of Atonement.

Most Jewish people understand that repentance is the path that leads to salvation and the forgiveness of sin, which is secured at the closing moments of Yom Kippur. Though it is difficult to explain the difference between the Jewish

and Christian understanding of salvation, the Jewish community stresses forgiveness far more than personal salvation, especially as salvation is understood by most Christians. Jewish people are not as apt to think about personal salvation or a secured future beyond the grave in the same way Christians do.

However, Jewish people think about forgiveness during this time of year and are usually eager to repent before God and reconcile with whomever they may have offended. But forgiveness is viewed as temporary—needing annual renewal—and received not only on the basis of God’s grace, but also on our repentance and willingness to be obedient to His Law, which is found in the Five Books of Moses. At least this is the traditional Jewish teaching on the subject.

The Ten Days of Awe, or the Ten Days of Repentance, are observed during the time between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Jewish tradition calls upon us to ask for forgiveness from those we may have offended during the past year and to forgive others for their offenses against us in anticipation of receiving God’s forgiveness at the conclusion of the ten-day period.

### **The Purpose for the Devotional**

We have provided ten devotions—one for each of the Ten Days of Awe. These devotional thoughts will hopefully be a blessing to you and help sensitize you to what your Jewish family and friends are observing as well. We will also present a passage or two from the Bible for you to meditate upon and allow the Lord to speak to you through His Word during this important season of the year.

The Apostle Paul suggested the importance of understanding and even experiencing the Jewish festivals in his letter to Timothy. He wrote, *“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work”* (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

### **Scripture Meditation:**

I have found the above verses to be very helpful and practical in understanding

the role of the festivals in the lives of believers in Jesus the Messiah. In using the term “Scripture,” Paul is referring to the entirety of the Old Testament. Certainly, we can infer that this is also true of the New Testament, but specifically, Paul has the Hebrew Scriptures in mind.

Every part of the Bible is useful to us in the process of growing to spiritual maturity. This would include the Jewish holidays. Paul did not suggest that we must keep these festivals in any particular way, nor did he suggest that we are under obligation to keep them! Rather, he told us that every verse in every one of the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament is helpful and may be utilized for spiritual benefit. This would be true of the festivals outlined in Leviticus 23 and that include the three fall events: The New Year, the Day of Atonement, and Tabernacles.

Therefore, learning more about these festivals is helpful for your spiritual journey. And for me, the emphasis of the first two holidays on repentance and forgiveness creates a magnificent backdrop for understanding the work of Jesus the Messiah, who died that I might live.

[1] מִיָּד, pronounced *mo-ayd*, is translated as appointed time, place, or meeting. See Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc, 2008), 417.