



AWAKE O SLEEPER

EXPLORING THE SEASON OF REPENTANCE

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There is a great joy found in the rhythm of Jewish life throughout the year. Each season has a distinct character. Later, Winter and Spring speaks of God's deliverance as we celebrate both the Feasts of Purim and Passover. The "death of cold weather," when the first springtime weekend arrives, almost always seems to coordinate with Passover and Messiah's death and resurrection. The lengthening of days and the early summer heat warms us up as we are brought to Shavu'ot where we remember the fiery spectacle of the giving of Law on Mount Sinai and outpouring of the Spirit. Fall, however, is a changing season, where the warm rays often dim dramatically. This period gives us some of the most intense days of the year, the High Holidays, where we are called to account to examine ourselves and change, and not just into our fall jackets.

Prior to these High Holidays, there are quite a few minor holidays in the Jewish calendar. One is the 17th of Tammuz. This date is a minor fast which commemorates the breaching of the walls of the first Temple before its destruction. It also kicks off a period of three weeks of “decreased joy” known as the Three Weeks where certain customs are observed that indicate mourning, such as not shaving, buying new clothes or listening to music.

Finally, this period culminates in Tisha B’Av (the 9th of Av) which denotes a full 24 hour fast. This day remembers numerous ills of Jewish history including the destruction of both Temples. A sense of sorrow sets the service with Lamentations read along with prayers of repentance. This seemingly minor period is truly the beginning of a long season of repentance and mourning that lasts through Yom Kippur. All of it is based on a core foundation of remembrance.

To remember what God has done for us is not merely a passing exercise that brings happy nostalgic thoughts, but a memory that burns deep and drives us to act. We are called to do many things when we are asked to remember. We remember the covenant of Abraham and the binding of Issac by circumcision. We remember when we dwelt in booths by building a Sukkah.

We remember the first Passover by reciting the Haggadah and cleaning out our houses of leaven. We remember our Messiah’s death by partaking in His Body and Blood. We also remember our new life and victory in Messiah Yeshua when we turn away from entangling sin. Paul writes of this in Ephesians chapter 5,

For once you were darkness, but now in union with the Lord you are light. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them—for it is disgraceful even to mention the things that are done by them in secret.





Yet everything exposed by the light is being made visible, for everything made visible is light.

*This is why it says,
“Wake up, O sleeper! Rise from the dead, and Messiah will shine on you.”
So pay close attention to how you walk—not as unwise people but as wise. Make the most of your time because the days are evil. For this reason do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. And do not get drunk on wine, for that is recklessness. Instead, be filled with the Ruach, speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music in your heart to the Lord— always giving thanks for everything to God the Father, in the name of the Lord Yeshua the Messiah. (TLV)*

Paul’s instruction here is clear – We are to Wake Up (!) and live as Messiah’s people as we remember the goodness of God and our deliverance out of darkness and into His marvelous light. We are learning how to please the Lord as well as learning His ways and exposing the things in our lives that are not of Him. All the while we are to be filled with the Spirit, praising Him and making joyous melodies in our hearts before Him.

The late summer and early fall season of repentance on the calendar is marked by remembrance of both terrible days as well as our own shortcomings before God. However, our life in Messiah Yeshua is not just a season, but a lifestyle of remembrance and repentance. As we remember more and more His goodness, and are filled up more and more by His Spirit, and seek Him more and more in our lives, repentance and acts of righteousness become second nature. The Power of the Spirit enables us to see this reality in our lives and we can truly be lights in this dark world.

As we navigate this difficult shaking throughout the world, let’s approach this High Holiday season awakened by our need and desire to turn to Him for forgiveness. Rabbi Yonah of Gerona thus wrote regarding Repentance:



“O person who has willfully sinned or erred and seeks to take refuge under the wings of the Divine Presence and to enter the paths of repentance, I will make you wise and enlighten you in the proper path to travel. On that day let him cast off all the sins he has committed and consider himself as though he were newly born on that very day, and he is with neither merit nor guilt.”

May it be so that our remembrance turns us once again to the One who created us, and caused us to be born anew to a living hope!



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