

Days of Awe

by Colby Weinhofer

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Background

When you think about the holidays in the traditional church calendar, summer and fall can seem kind of boring. The major church holidays all happen in the first half of the church year, leaving not much of note in the period between June 20 and November 20. Wouldn't it be nice if there was something to celebrate in the midst of this long season of "ordinary time"?

If you look to the holidays of the Old Testament, there is. In Exodus 23, God commands that the Israelites observe three festivals in perpetuity– the Festival of Unleavened Bread (aka Passover), the Festival of Weeks, and the Festival of Booths. The first two have been revitalized as the Christian celebrations of Easter and Pentecost, but the third has no church counterpart. Except for those who are serious scholars of the Old Testament, Christians might vaguely recognize the name "Festival of Booths", but would have no idea about the date or the contents of this celebration. A celebration of the Festival of Booths (and the surrounding holidays) not only adds an important theme to the church calendar, but the holidays happen to fall in the middle of this long period without a major Christian holiday. A happy bonus!

If you include the Festival of Trumpets and the Festival of Atonement, which happen on the two preceding weeks, you have a nice holiday season similar to Advent or Lent. In Jewish tradition, this holiday period is generally known as the "Days of Awe", which also makes a fitting name for the celebration for Christians. The Festival of Trumpets foreshadows the day when the trumpet will sound to herald Jesus' second coming. The action of the priests during the Festival of Atonement looks forward to Jesus as the ultimate high priest. And the Festival of Booths is a celebration for God's provision in our lives. Taking time to celebrate these works of God (using inspiration from the Jewish festivals) encourages us to be awestruck at what God is

doing in our lives now, as well as what he has done in the past and will do in the future through Jesus.

Instructions for the Facilitator

The Jewish celebrations typically occur late September / early October, but you can celebrate the “Days of Awe” on any three consecutive weeks in early fall that work for you, as the celebration outlined here is meant to draw inspiration from – rather than strictly adhere to – the Jewish holidays. The material has been written to be usable in either a cell group / small group gathering or as part of a family meditation time (e.g. before the weekly Day of Rest).

Below is a general Days of Awe introduction for the participants. Following that is a more detailed introduction for the participants for each of the three celebrations, along with specific instructions for the facilitator. Following the introductions and instructions is the actual liturgy for the celebration. I would recommend that before doing the liturgy you read the background notes together with the group or pass them out for people to read individually, as they will help participants understand symbols in the liturgy and have a richer experience. If you’re doing this with young children, you may need to talk through / explain the background rather than simply reading it.

In addition to this document, each celebration has a PowerPoint version of the liturgy as well as other resources to assist in celebration. Each liturgy also suggests a meditation song to accompany it. Videos of these could not be included for copyright reasons, but you can easily find various versions of each of these songs on video sharing websites or purchase an audio file from your preferred digital music store.

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Scripture quotations are from *The Holy Bible, New Living Translation* (published by Tyndale House Foundation 2015) or *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (published by Crossway Bibles 2016) as indicated in the notes.

Introduction for the Participants

“Days of Awe” is a set of three celebrations done over three consecutive weeks in early fall that draws inspiration from the Jewish holidays of the Feast of Trumpets (Yom Teruah), Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), and the Feast of Booths (Sukkot).

Celebrating the Days of Awe provides an occasion to reflect on the wonderful ways God is at work, both in the past (Atonement Celebration), present (Provision Celebration), and the future (Coming Celebration). It serves as a Christian counterpart to one of the three major Jewish festivals that the people of God were required to keep in perpetuity (Shalosh Regalim), the only one that does not already have a counterpart in church tradition. It also rounds out the liturgical calendar nicely, providing a celebration in the midst of a long period of “ordinary time”.

Coming Celebration

Introduction for the Participants

This liturgy celebrates the future return of Jesus Christ, drawing inspiration from the Jewish Feast of Trumpets (Yom Teruah). It highlights the fact that on the day Jesus returns, God will gather his people together and all will be put to right. The use of the trumpet in this liturgy connects back to the functions of the silver trumpet and ram's horn trumpet in the Old Testament – to call the Israelites together for worship or celebration and to alert the people or let them know God was on the move.

It incorporates the Year of Jubilee or the “the acceptable year of the Lord” as it is referred to in both Isaiah and Luke and the way this points toward Jesus’ return on the Day of the Lord. For those who have chosen not to follow God, this day is a foreboding thing, a day of impending judgement. But for the redeemed, looking forward to the Day of the Lord is a celebration of hope.

It also uses Jesus’ words in Luke 4 as a reminder that this celebration is not just a future hope. Though we have not experienced its ultimate effects, the Bible tells us that the Kingdom of God is already at hand. Jesus is already king, and he has given us the authority and the duty to propagate his kingdom, both in word and in deed. We do not know when the trumpet will sound and the King will return, but as his followers, we are called to prepare for his return by joining in his mission.

Instructions for the Facilitator

1. Prepare something for the trumpet. This can either be a ram's horn or a metal horn. Ram's horns can be purchased online inexpensively. If you choose to go with metal, you can purchase a bugle online inexpensively, but you can also fashion something simple, but still decent looking, using a trumpet mouthpiece, a 2 to 4-foot length of metal tube (approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ inch internal diameter), and a metal funnel with a diameter matching the tube. If none of your participants has experience doing the lip buzzing necessary to play a brass instrument, you will want to research this on the internet (do a search for "embouchure") and practice beforehand.
2. Prepare a recording of the song "Days of Elijah" by Robin Mark. Various versions with lyrics are available on video sharing websites.
3. To perform the liturgy, you can use either the liturgy sheet or the slideshow. In addition to the actual text, the printed version also contains endnotes with the specific quotation references.
4. At the points indicated in the liturgy, sound the trumpet. If you have a skilled player, you can imitate some of the shofar calls, but one long, deep note is sufficient.

Liturgy

[TRUMPET]

READER ONE Throughout the Old Testament, trumpets called together the people of Israel.

The longest and loudest blast was to call the people together for the Year of Jubilee¹ – a time to celebrate the freedom experienced through trusting in God’s provision and a time when things in the social order were made right again.

The Jubilee looked forward to the Day of the Lord, the future day when Jesus Christ will come again and everything in all creation will be made right.²

ALL We await with eager anticipation for the coming of our Savior.

[TRUMPET]

READER TWO At his first coming

“... he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross.”

¹ Leviticus 25:8-13

² Romans 8:19-25

But at his second coming, he will come

“...in the place of highest honor and with the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”³

On that day, when the last trumpet sounds, the honor will be his, but the joy will be ours. For on that day, our long-awaited salvation will be at hand⁴. On that day, we will inherit the great promise for which now we dare to hope.⁵

ALL We await with eager anticipation for the coming of our Savior.

[**TRUMPET**]

READER ONE Lord, while we long for your future return, we also celebrate your present work. May your Spirit guide and empower us as we join in your mission to

“bring Good News to the poor... to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, that the time of the LORD’s favor has come.”⁶

SONG [**DAYS OF ELIJAH**]

³ Philippians 2:7-11 (NLT)

⁴ Luke 21:27-28

⁵ Titus 2:11-14

⁶ Luke 4:18-19 (NLT)

Atonement Celebration

Introduction for the Participants

This liturgy celebrates the complete atoning work of Jesus Christ, drawing inspiration from the Jewish Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). Following that theme, it highlights Jesus' once and for all high priestly function, replacing both the offering of incense and a blood sacrifice to atone for sin.

It also incorporates a modified reenactment of part of the Jewish water-drawing ceremony (Simchat Beit HaShoeivah) and the accompanying illumination of the temple courtyard – both of which Jesus himself used to illustrate his being the ultimate answer to man's spiritual need. Although these two ceremonies were both part of the Feast of Booths (Sukkot, the inspiration for next week's celebration), they are included here due to their connection to this week's theme.

The fact that the water-drawing ceremony uses both water and wine is particularly appropriate for Christians because these liquids represent the two things that allow us to fully live as the people of God. The wine represents the blood of Jesus, which makes us right with God; and the water represents the Holy Spirit which empowers us to become God's representatives. (see Mark 14:23-24 & John 7:38-39)

Similarly, the lamps in the four corners of the room follow Jewish tradition but have a special symbolism for us as Christians: our commission, as the redeemed people of God, is to take the light of the Gospel to the four corners of the world.

Instructions for the Facilitator

1. This liturgy involves the lighting of lights and the pouring of liquids as the reader reads the accompanying part of the liturgy. Therefore you will want to have the two readers working together to do these two parts – one reading and the other performing the action.
2. For the lights, prepare four lamps or four sets of candle holders. If you have some way of using oil lamps (particularly multi-wick oil lamps), that is best, but candles are more practical for most people. If you need simplicity, you can get away with using four single candles, but this is generally not sufficient to light up a room well. Adjust the number of candles based on what will light up your room well and what is practical for you. Lamps or holders that place the light on a stand are especially symbolic (mimicking the illumination stands in the Feast of Booths).

Place your light sources at the four corners of the room. If possible, dimming the room before the start of the liturgy makes the change in lighting from these candles / lamps more dramatic. At the point indicated in the liturgy, light each of the four lamps / sets of candles as the reader reads each line.

3. For the liquids, prepare two small pitchers, one with a small amount of warm water and one with a small amount of wine⁷. Prepare a decorative bowl to pour the liquid into. Put a small pile of decorative rocks into the bottom of the bowl to symbolize the alter (one of the symbolic connections of this part of the liturgy is the drink offering). At the point indicated in the liturgy, pour the water

⁷ Gravy or cream pitchers work well for this. In Biblical times, the pitchers would have been larger, holding approximately 900 ml each. But, if doing the liturgy with a smaller group, use smaller pitchers for practical purposes.

and wine simultaneously into the bowl as the reader reads the final line.

4. Prepare a recording of the song “Before the Throne of God Above” by Charitie Lees Bancroft. Various versions with lyrics are available on video sharing websites.
5. As with the previous celebration, you can use either the liturgy sheet or the slideshow. In addition to the actual text, the printed version also contains endnotes with the specific quotation references.

Liturgy

READER ONE “Under the old covenant, the priest stands and ministers before the altar day after day, offering the same sacrifices again and again, which can never take away sins. But our High Priest offered himself to God as a single sacrifice for sins, good for all time. Then he sat down in the place of honor at God’s right hand. There he waits until his enemies are humbled and made a footstool under his feet. For by that one offering he forever made perfect those who are being made holy.”

READER TWO “And the Holy Spirit also testifies that this is so. For he says,
This is the new covenant I will make with my people on that day, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.

Then he says,

I will never again remember their sins and lawless deeds.

And when sins have been forgiven, there is no need to offer any more sacrifices.”⁸

⁸ Hebrews 10:11-18

ALL Lord, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole hearts; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.
9

READER TWO “Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sin is put out of sight! Yes, what joy for those whose record the Lord has cleared of guilt, whose lives are lived in complete honesty!”¹⁰

“... thank God! He gives us victory over sin and death through our Lord Jesus Christ.”¹¹

READER ONE “He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God.”¹²

“... [He] has now become the High Priest over all the good things that have come. He has entered that greater, more perfect Tabernacle in heaven, which was not made by human hands and is not part of this created world. With his own blood—not the blood of goats and calves—he entered the Most Holy Place once for all time and secured our redemption forever.”¹³

9 Confession of Sin - The Holy Eucharist: Rite One (Anglican Communion - Book of Common Prayer)

¹⁰ Psalm 32:1-2 (NLT)

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 15:57 (NLT)

¹² Ephesians 5:2b (NLT)

¹³ Hebrews 9:11-12 (NLT)

READER TWO Every year, the priests would have to fill and light lamps in the courtyard. But Jesus said:

[**LIGHT 1**] “I have come as a light to shine in this dark world,

[**LIGHT 2**] ... all who put their trust in me will no longer remain in the dark.”¹⁴

[**LIGHT 3**] “I am the light of the world.

[**LIGHT 4**] If you follow me, you won’t have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life.”¹⁵

READER ONE Every year, the priests would have to draw water for the offering from the pool of Siloam. Jesus said:

“Anyone who drinks this water will soon become thirsty again. But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life.”¹⁶

“Anyone who is thirsty may come to me! Anyone who believes in me may come and drink! For the Scriptures declare,

[**WATER & WINE**] ‘Rivers of living water will flow from his heart.’ ”¹⁷

¹⁴ John 12:46 (NLT)

¹⁵ John 8:12 (NLT)

¹⁶ John 4:13-14 (NLT)

¹⁷ John 7:37-38 (NLT)

SONG [**BEFORE THE THRONE OF GOD ABOVE**]

Provision Celebration

Introduction for the Participants

This liturgy celebrates God’s provision, drawing inspiration from the Jewish Festival of Booths (Sukkot). It highlights God’s faithfulness in our lives through significant acts as well as his promise to be with us even in the midst of difficult circumstances.

The opening comes directly from the Jewish prayer over the cup of blessing used on ceremonial occasions (Kiddush), specifically the one used to open the Festival of Booths (Shehecheyanu). This prayer is accompanied by the participants sharing the overflowing cup as they as they proclaim God’s overflowing blessing in their lives.

The second section draws inspiration from the various occasions in the Old Testament where God’s people placed stones to remember the mighty works God had done¹⁸. In this liturgy, each person is asked to bring a small object – which we refer to as “eben” from the Hebrew word for stone – that can serve as a symbol of some specific ways God has shown his provision for them.

The final section uses the bread eaten in Jewish ceremonial occasions (Challah) as a reminder of God’s promise to us. Although two loaves are prepared, only one loaf is eaten during our celebration. The second loaf is untouched and is another symbol of God’s abundant provision, from providing the Israelites with an extra portion of manna, to the abundant salvation we have in Christ, all the way up to the abundance we experience in our present day. The citrus peel in the bread is a nod to the citron (Etrog) used in the Feast of Booths ceremony and is used to represent the bitterness of life. The honey is also a nod to the Feast

¹⁸ Gen 28:16-19, 31:43-55, 35:9-15, Josh 4:1-9, 1 Sam 7:7-14

of Booths tradition and is used to represent God's loving presence that sustains us even through difficult situations.

Instructions for the Facilitator

1. Prepare a cup for the blessing prayer. You can purchase a Kiddush set complete with cup, saucer, fountain, and serving cups; but this can be quite expensive. To assemble this set out of household items, find a large wine glass (something decorative or ornate is a nice touch, but not a necessity), and a large decorative plate to put under the cup, and a set of small glasses for the participants. The pouring will work best if the wine glass holds enough to fill each of the participant glasses with a generous sip, plus extra to account for spillage. Place the wine glass on the plate and the serving glasses in a semicircle around the front.

The reader begins by reading the prayer of blessing and then fills the wine glass until it overflows onto the plate. Then take the wine glass and carefully pour a sip into each cup. You'll want to practice this ahead of time to get the hang of how the liquid comes out of your particular glass, but some spillage is a given. Once you have distributed the wine, the participants read the declaration together before drinking the wine.

2. For the second section, each participant needs to find or make a small item that serves as a symbol of a specific way that God has shown himself or his care for them over the past year (or just in the past). If necessary, you can adjust how many items each person presents – or whether or not everyone presents an item – based on the size of your group and the age of your participants.

In the liturgy, each person will show their item to the group and describe in a sentence how it is a symbol of God's provision saying, "This [name of item] reminds me (or 'us' if you are doing this as a family) of [way God provided].". This should not be a complete and thorough recounting of the situation (though this would be an

excellent topic for conversation at dinner following the liturgy), but just a brief mention of what the item represents. For example, “This piece of shingle reminds me of when God provided the money to fix my roof after I had just lost my job.” He / she then follows with the phrase, “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good!” to which all the participants respond, “His faithful love endures forever.”

If you are doing this liturgy as a yearly family tradition, you may want to begin a collection of items and / or collect items that represent things in the past. These can be re-presented year after year (with each family member presenting a few items) or even just placing them around the room before the celebration to remind everyone of God’s past faithfulness.

3. Prepare two loaves of challah bread according to the attached instructions. Prepare small dishes with a bit of honey for each participant. When you get to this section, the reader of this section takes a piece of the bread and then passes it to the other participants, who do the same. After taking their portion, they dip it into the honey and eat it.

In Jewish celebrations, the challah is covered with a decorative cloth while it is on the table.¹⁹ You can follow this tradition or not according to your preference.

4. Prepare a recording of the song “You Are My Stronghold” by Watermark. You can use one from a video sharing website or purchase an MP3 and prepare a slideshow to go with it.

¹⁹ In Jewish tradition, the bread always comes before the wine. Covering the bread symbolically removes it from the table so the cup can be properly blessed at the beginning of the celebration.

5. As with the previous celebration, you can use either the liturgy printout or the slideshow. In addition to the actual text, the printout also contains endnotes with the specific quotation references.

Liturgy

READER ONE Blessed are You, Yahweh, our God, sovereign of the universe. You have granted us life and sustain us.

[POUR THE CUP OF BLESSING]

ALL “What mighty praise, O God, belongs to you in Zion... You faithfully answer our prayers with awesome deeds, O God our savior...”²⁰
You overflow our cup with blessing.²¹

[SHARE THE CUP OF BLESSING]

READER ONE Like the saints of old who placed stones as memorials to your help and provision, we hold up these symbols of your goodness to us.²²

PRESENTER This (name of item) reminds me / us of (way God provided).

[PRESENT EBEN ITEM]

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good!

ALL His faithful love endures forever.²³

²⁰ Psalm 65:1a, 5a (NLT)

²¹ Psalm 23:5

²² Genesis 28 & 35, Joshua 4-5, 1 Samuel 7

²³ Psalm 118:1 (NLT)

READER
TWO

We live in a world full of struggle and striving. But you have abundantly provided everything we need.²⁴ But more importantly, you have promised that nothing can separate us from your love. Not trouble nor calamity, persecution nor hunger, destitution nor danger, even the threat of death.²⁵ We recognize that you have filled our lives with good things, but that even in the absence of these things your goodness still remains. As we eat this bread, we claim that promise.

[CHALLAH BREAD]

SONG

[YOU ARE MY STRONGHOLD]

²⁴ 2 Corinthians 9:8

²⁵ Romans 8:35

Prep Items Master List

Coming

- trumpet
- “Days of Elijah” by Robin Mark

Atonement

- small pitcher x2
- water and wine
- alter bowl
- alter rocks
- oil lamps
- “Before the Throne of God Above” by Charitie Lees Bancroft

Provision

- kiddush cup
- wine
- eben items
- challah bread & cloth covering
- honey dip
- “You Are My Stronghold” by Watermark

Lyrics

Days of Elijah

These are the days of Elijah,
Declaring the word of the Lord
And these are the days of Your servant Moses,
Righteousness being restored.

And though these are days of great trial,
Of famine and darkness and sword,
Still, we are the voice in the desert crying
"Prepare ye the way of the Lord!"

Behold He comes riding on the clouds,
Shining like the sun at the trumpet call,
Lift your voice, it's the year of jubilee,
And out of Zion's hill salvation comes.

These are the days of Ezekiel,
The dry bones becoming as flesh,
And these are the days of Your servant David,
Rebuilding a temple of praise.

These are the days of the harvest,
The fields are as white in Your world,
And we are the laborer in Your vineyard,
Declaring the word of the Lord!

Behold He comes riding on the clouds,
Shining like the sun at the trumpet call,
Lift your voice, it's the year of jubilee,
And out of Zion's hill salvation comes.

Before the Throne of God Above

Before the throne of God above
I have a strong and perfect plea

A great High Priest whose name is love
Who ever lives and pleads for me
My name is graven on His hands
My name is written on His heart
I know that while in heav'n He stands
No tongue can bid me thence depart
No tongue can bid me thence depart

When Satan tempts me to despair
And tells me of the guilt within
Upward I look and see Him there
Who made an end of all my sin
Because the sinless Savior died
My sinful soul is counted free
For God the Just is satisfied
To look on Him and pardon me
To look on Him and pardon me

Behold Him there, the risen Lamb
My perfect, spotless Righteousness
The great unchangeable I AM
The King of glory and of grace
One with Himself, I cannot die
My soul is purchased by His blood
My life is hid with Christ on high
With Christ my Savior and my God

You Are My Stronghold

Lord You are my light and my salvation
Whom shall I fear if You are near
Lord You are my peace when there is war all around me
And even here inside me I will have no fear

Oh Lord You're my protection from my enemies
You set me high upon a rock and You defend my soul
And when their ways advance against me
I am confident that they cannot make me less
For You have made me whole, oh Lord
You are my stronghold, You are my stronghold

Lord You are my strength so let my head be lifted up
That I may glory in the ways You've overcome
And Lord You are my home because You've created in me
A heart that lives the victory that You've already won

Oh Lord You're my protection from my enemies
You set me high upon a rock and You defend my soul
And when their ways advance against me
I am confident that they cannot make me less
For You have, You made me whole, oh Lord
You are my stronghold, You are my stronghold