

The Feasts of Israel

Lesson Eight - The Fast Of The Fifth Month - Tisha B'Av

The fast of the fifth month refers to the ninth day of the Jewish month of Av, which is a day of fasting and mourning for the Jewish people. It commemorates the day both the first and second temples were destroyed. It has also been a day of other catastrophes for Israel including the erection of idols in the temple during the Roman invasion, and the start of the Spanish Inquisition in 1492.

Jews mourn on Tisha b'Av as the nation feels the depth of sadness and grief that has marked this day in Jewish history.

Jeremiah wrote in Lamentations concerning Israel's mourning:

Lament. 2:18 - Their heart cried unto the Lord, O wall of the daughter of Zion, let tears run down like a river day and night: give thyself no rest; let not the apple of thine eye cease.

The Observance

The synagogue is dimly lit during the observance of Tisha B'Av and the congregation is plunged into mourning. The curtains covering the ark are removed, symbolizing that the TORAH (the Bible) is also mourning. To further symbolize mourning, Jews sit on the floor and/or low stools, and the "Scroll of Lamentations," bemoaning the sacking of Jerusalem and the fall of the first temple is chanted.

Dirges lamenting the various episodes of Jewish suffering on Tisha B'Av are also recited. Today, in modern times, it is also customary to add special dirges, or readings, in remembrance of those Jews killed in the Holocaust. But in spite of the mourning, this day is injected with a note of hope and optimism. Jewish tradition says that Messiah will be born on this day, and that in messianic times this mournful fast day will be transformed into one of great joy and celebration.

The fast usually takes place during the summer months around late July-early August. This year (2001) the celebration took place from sundown on July 29 to sundown on the 29th.

The Fast And Jesus Warning To Jerusalem

In relation to this fast of the fifth month, Jesus warned the nation at His crucifixion that days of mourning were ahead of her, especially her capital city, Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the SPIRITUAL HEART OF JUDIASM!. God summoned Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice on Mt. Moriah within her gates. A thousand years later Solomon built his temple to the Lord on the same mountain. Solomon's father, David, chose Jerusalem to be the capital for the nation of Israel

when he purchased the land on Mount Moriah where the temple would eventually stand. Jerusalem was God's CHOICE and is still GOD"s CHOICE TODAY!

Later, when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and took the Jews into captivity in Babylon, the city was still foremost in the hearts and minds of her citizens:

Psalm 137:1 - By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.

Psalm 137:5-6 - If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. [6] If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.

The Jewish people returned to Babylon to reclaim the land and rebuild their city. A new temple, though modest in comparison to the one built by Solomon, again graced Mount Moriah. It took an additional 80 years for Jerusalem's walls to be rebuilt, but God raised up Nehemiah to complete the task. Nehemiah records the adversity and opposition his people faced during these times of turmoil and triumph.

From the close of the Old Testament to the beginning of the New Testament, the Jewish people occupied the land and worshipped in their temple. But there was one notable exception. In 169 B.C., Antiochus IV Epiphanes plundered the temple, converting it into a pagan shrine to Zeus. He actively persecuted anyone who dared to resist or who sought to follow the Law of Moses. God raised up an elderly priest, Mattathias, and his son, Judas Maccabeus ("Judah the Hammer") to drive the Syrians from Jerusalem and to rededicate the temple to the Lord. This victory is recounted in the Jewish Feast Of Hanukkah.

By the time of Jesus, Herod the Great had renovated and enlarged the temple. It was once again a thing of beauty. The platform built by Herod to hold the expanded temple, is, today, the same platform on which the Al Aksa mosque and Dome of the Rock sit. This was the temple admired by the disciples. But, as Jesus predicted in the Olivet Discourse and at His Crucifixion, Jerusalem and the temple would be destroyed.

In A.D. 70 the Roman army attacked Jerusalem in response to the Jewish revolt that began four years earlier. Rome killed thousands of Jews and deported thousands more sold as slaves. A new Diaspora began that has lasted for 1900 years. But during all those years the focus for the Jewish people was and still is Jerusalem and their temple. As the Jewish Midrash so eloquently exclaimed, "the land of Israel is at the center of the world; Jerusalem is at the center of the land of Israel and the temple is at the center of Jerusalem."

Even as we move forward into the 21st Century the soul of Judaism remained bound to Jerusalem. God has placed Jerusalem in the eye of a coming storm over her gates once again. The temple will be rebuilt and once again it will be destroyed. The mournings of this great fast pale in comparison to the mourning Israel will have during the coming Tribulation period. A temporary calm may return to the Middle East but nothing will last. The sticking point for any agreement will be the status of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount - the two focal points for Israel's mourning during the fast of the fifth month.

Zechariah's Prophecy And The Fast Of The Fifth Month

Zech. 12:10-14 - And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. [11] In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon. [12] And the land shall mourn, every family apart; the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Nathan apart, and their wives apart; [13] The family of the house of Levi apart, and their wives apart; the family of Shimei apart, and their wives apart; [14] All the families that remain, every family apart, and their wives apart.

The prophet Zechariah lived at the time of the nation's return to the land following their 75-year captivity in Babylon and the destruction of the first temple. He encouraged the people to rebuild the temple, but he also looked far into Israel's future to see the days ahead of us when there will be such a mourning throughout all Israel for the rejection of her Messiah. In Chapters 9-14 the prophet had two extended prophecies (called "oracles" or "burdens") that provide a detailed account of the first and second comings of Israel's Messiah. The events of the first coming, which centered on Jerusalem, were dramatically fulfilled. Zechariah's second message (12-14) focuses on events leading up the SECOND COMING OF MESSIAH. Again, ground zero for all these events will be the TEMPLE and JERUSALEM.

Zech. 12:2-3 - Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of trembling unto all the people round about, when they shall be in the siege both against Judah and against Jerusalem. [3] And in that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people: all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it.

The last days that are ahead of us will be a time when Israel and Jerusalem dominate the world's attention, though in a negative way. Nations will try to

"move" God's people, but none will succeed. The entire Middle East conflict right now centers on nation's trying to wrest control of Jerusalem from Israel. These will be countries (i.e. the Muslim/Arab world) that Israel will have the greatest conflict, and who will suffer defeat at Israel's hands.

Zech. 12:6 - In that day will I make the governors of Judah like an hearth of fire among the wood, and like a torch of fire in a sheaf; and they shall devour all the people round about, on the right hand and on the left: and Jerusalem shall be inhabited again in her own place, even in Jerusalem.

There are storm clouds on the horizon. The distant rumbles of thunder are being heard. War is coming, not peace. The Great Tribulation is ahead. Israel will once again mourn for Her Messiah in the not too distant future. It will be very similar to her celebration of this fast day - the Fast of Tisha B'av. We need to pray for the peace of Jerusalem!