

Tisha B'Av

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Last Tuesday I asked my *chavurah* some questions, and I would like to ask you the same questions.

First Question: “Who among you are clear about the meaning and traditional practices of *Tisha B'Av*?” Please raise your hands.

Second Question: “Please raise your hand if you are clear about the meaning and traditional practices of *Tu B'shvat*.”

Third Question: “Please raise your hand if you are clear about the meaning and traditional practices of *Pesach* – Passover.”

Fourth Question: “Please raise your hand if you are clear about the meaning and traditional practices of *Yom Kippur*.”

Do you notice how few of us are familiar with *Tisha B'Av* and *Tu B'shvat* compared with *Pesach* and *Yom Kippur*? That's because, as Messianic Judaism developed, and Ohev being no exception, we rightly have given priority to days and times that were commanded in the *Torah* over those that were not. There are those non-commanded days with which we are fairly familiar, such as *Chanukah* and *Purim*, mostly because there are references to them in Scripture. *Simchat Torah* is not commanded either and we do celebrate that, but poor *Tu B'shvat* and *Tisha B'Av*! They've been pretty much ignored.

Well, starting at sundown tonight is *Tisha B'Av*, so what say, this year, we show it some kindness, and look at it more closely!

Tisha B'Av literally means “the 9th day of the month of *Av*, the 5th month of the Jewish calendar. In the Jewish world, *Tisha B'Av* is principally observed as a day for mourning the destruction of both Solomon's Temple and the Second Temple which allegedly were destroyed on the same date.

Regarding Solomon's Temple, 2 Kings 25:8-9 tells us:

“And in the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month (which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. He burned the house of the LORD and the king's house; all the houses of Jerusalem, that is, all the houses of the great, he burned with fire.”

Jeremiah 52:12-13 describes the event using a different date; it says:

“Now in the fifth month, on the tenth day of the month (which was the nineteenth year of King N'vuchadnezzar king of Babylon), Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, who served

the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. He burned the house of the LORD and the king's house; all the houses of Jerusalem, that is, all the houses of the great, he burned with fire.”

You notice that the Scriptures are the same, except that 2 Kings mentions the 7th day and Jeremiah mentions the 10th day; but neither of the Scriptures say that the “house of the Lord” was actually burned on either of those days. The traditional Jewish explanation for the timing of all of this is that Nebuzaradan arrived in Jerusalem on the 7th of Av, and set fire to the Temple on the evening of the 9th, so that the Temple burned through the 10th. That’s why the 9th of Av was chosen as the commemoration date.

In 70 C.E., the Second Temple was destroyed by a heathen army as well, but the circumstances were different. During Yeshua’s lifetime and a shortwhile thereafter, Israel was treated as a favored nation by Rome. By 66 C.E., however, the tide had turned, and Israel was looked at as an unwanted nuisance. The Roman governor of Judea, Florius, actively persecuted the Jews in his jurisdiction, even to the extent of encouraging riots that resulted in Jewish deaths. At first, the Jews attempted a peaceful solution through negotiations, but when Roman troops charged into a group of peaceful marchers, a general revolt ensued. A Roman general, Vespian, began to methodically quell the revolt in Judea by first conquering and occupying cities in the northern Galilee. Finally, in 70 CE, he marched on Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple of God, causing Jews in Jerusalem to flee in all directions; and thus began what we now call the Jewish Diaspora (or dispersion).

Two Temples destroyed by a foreign enemy, two dislocations of the Jewish people and, according to Jewish traditional history, both occurring on the 9th day of Av. There were other tragedies in Jewish history that occurred on the 9th of Av as well, but the destructions of the Temples are the major foci of *Tisha B’Av*, and it is for these two temples that the early Jewish leaders proclaimed an annual day of fasting and mourning.

Now let’s look at these destructions more closely. Isn’t it strange that Babylonia and Rome were able to burn Temples that God approved to be built? Perhaps not so strange, because there was a common cause for both, and that was the sin of Israel as a nation in rebelling against God. In the case of the First Temple and the Babylonian exile, the sin was breaching the Mosaic Covenant through disobedience to *Torah*. We know this because we have several Scriptures that describe the sin – for example, Isaiah 1:4:

“Alas, sinful nation, A people laden with iniquity, A brood of evildoers, Children who are corrupters! They have forsaken the LORD, They have provoked to anger The Holy One of Israel, They have turned away backward.”

And the prophecy of Micah 3:8-12:

“But truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the LORD, And of justice and might, To declare to Jacob his transgression And to Israel his sin. Now hear this, You heads of the house of Jacob And rulers of the house of Israel, Who abhor justice And pervert all equity, who build up Zion with bloodshed And Jerusalem with iniquity: Her heads judge for a bribe, Her priests teach for pay, And her prophets divine for money. Yet they lean on the LORD, and

say, "Is not the LORD among us? No harm can come upon us." Therefore because of you Zion shall be plowed like a field, Jerusalem shall become heaps of ruins, And the mountain of the temple Like the bare hills of the forest."

Because the Second Temple was destroyed after the last Scriptures were written, the biblical record of it is not as complete as it is for the First Temple. Nevertheless, we do have some foretelling of it, like in Matthew 24:1-2, and Mark 13:1-2, which are very similar:

Matthew 24:1-2: "Then Yeshua went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple. And Yeshua said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down."

Mark 13:1-2: "Then as He went out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, "Teacher, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!" And Yeshua answered and said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down."

In the case of the Second Temple's destruction and the Jewish dispersion that followed, the sin was probably breaching God's covenant with Israel once again – this time the New Covenant prophesied by Jeremiah. The breach consisted of most of Israel refusing to embrace it, their rejection of Yeshua, and their continuing to be disobedient to *Torah*. I say "probably," because we do not have Scripture that addresses it.

Now back to *Tisha B'Av*. "Judaism 101" on the Internet describes *Tisha B'Av* this way:

"*Tisha B'Av*, the Fast of the Ninth of *Av*, is a day of mourning to commemorate the many tragedies that have befallen the Jewish people, many of which coincidentally have occurred on the ninth of *Av*. *Tisha B'Av* primarily commemorates the destruction of the first and second Temples, both of which were destroyed on the ninth of *Av* (the first by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.E.; the second by the Romans in 70 C.E. Although this holiday is primarily meant to commemorate the destruction of the Temple, it is appropriate to consider on this day the many other tragedies of the Jewish people, many of which occurred on this day, most notably the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492."

"*Tisha B'Av* is the culmination of a three week period of increasing mourning, beginning with the fast of the 17th of *Tammuz*, which commemorates the first breach in the walls of Jerusalem, before the First Temple was destroyed.The restrictions on *Tisha B'Av* are similar to those on *Yom Kippur*: to refrain from eating and drinking (even water); washing, bathing, shaving or wearing cosmetics; wearing leather shoes; engaging in sexual relations; and studying *Torah*. Work in the ordinary sense of the word [rather than the *Shabbat* sense] is also restricted. People who are ill need not fast on this day. Many of the traditional mourning practices are observed; people refrain from smiles, laughter and idle conversation, and sit on low stools."

“In the synagogue, the book of Lamentations is read and mourning prayers are recited. The ark is draped in black.”

End of quote!

Well, it is not *Tisha B'Av* yet, but if it were, you would notice that Ohev and most of our members do not practice most of the restrictions I just read to you; some of us do comply with some of them, however. In future years, the elders may increase our participation, but for now let's just learn what we can about it so that we better understand the wider Jewish community, and can make personal decisions about how each of us will conduct our private lives on *Tisha B'Av*.

Perhaps the easiest way for me to proceed is to tell you where I am at regarding *Tisha B'Av*. First, when I say “where” I'm at,” I mean that I am trying to hear the Holy Spirit on the matter, and am open to change if the Spirit directs me; that is the proper New Covenant approach to all such things, and I urge you to adopt the approach as well.

In my current way of thinking, I perceive that some level of recognition of *Tisha B'Av* is appropriate, but not for the same reason as is typically given by Jewish orthodoxy whose focus is on the Temples' loss. I don't find it possible to mourn over the destruction of either Temple; I have never experienced Temple worship, and the most central sacrifice of the Temples – the sin sacrifice – is wholly taken care of by my having adopted Yeshua's sacrifice as my own. I used to think that God took away the Second Temple because, after Yeshua, there was no longer a need for it. I don't think that way any longer because I see now that God took away both Temples as a response to Israel's sin. Look! Here is what God said about His Temple to David:

“He [meaning Solomon] shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever” (2 Samuel 7:13).

To Solomon, He said:

“For now I have chosen and sanctified this house, that My name may be there forever; and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually.” (2 Chronicles 7:16).

Clearly, the Temple was a place where God's Name, eyes, and heart were to dwell forever. It was not intended to be temporary, so one of the Temples would still be standing were it not for the sin of Israel. Now consider this: We know that the Temple sacrifices were never sufficient to take away sin; they could only cover it over. So God always planned to send His Son to be our Savior, and the Holy Spirit to be our constant companion and source of communication with God, whether or not there was a standing and functioning Temple. It follows, then, that the Temple and the Levitical Priesthood had a role that was consistent with Messiah, and had Israel not breached its covenants with God, I have no doubt that we would now have both Yeshua and the Temple. It's challenging to ponder how that would work, but work it would, because it is still going to happen. How do I know? Because it is prophesied; in Isaiah 2:3 we read:

“Many people shall come and say, “Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.” (Isaiah 2:3).

In Ezekiel chapters 40 to 44 you can read a description of the future Temple, and in chapters 45 and 46 you can read a description of its functioning. I think that’s God’s way of bringing everything full circle. That Temple that is described in Ezekiel is probably the way either of the first two Temples would have been, had Israel not sinned.

Back to my observance *Tisha B’Av*. I can’t mourn for the Temples, but I can deeply regret the sins of my people that brought their demise. So I can relate to *Tisha B’Av* as a day for reflection and corporate repentance similar to the theme of *Yom Kippur*. I came to this conclusion earlier this week while preparing this message, and was astounded when, during the *Chalutzim chavurah* meeting, David Metzger read the footnote from the ArtScroll *Chumash* that he shared with you today as part of his *d’rash*. It is a quote from Rabbi Mendel Hirsch, and is so right on, that I will read it to you again; speaking of *Isaiah*, Hirsch says:

“The prophet does not lament because the *Beis HaMikdash* [the Temple] was destroyed; rather he laments over the underlying causes of the destruction. And this annual lesson serves to focus the national mourning of *Tisha B’Av* not to the past but to the present.”

Hirsch goes on to say:

“We must use our mourning as a way of initiating an examination of our present day feelings, thoughts, and deeds. What have we done to eliminate the attitudes and practices that thousands of years ago sent our ancestors into exile – not once, but twice?”

If, in future years, I lead Ohev to a higher level of observing *Tisha B’Av*, I am sure that Rabbi Hirsch’s commentary will be the chief rationale for it. I suspect that “mourning” is not the right response, however; rather, a theme of introspection, prayer and repentance seem more appropriate. There is, indeed a similarity to the theme of *Yom Kippur*, but that day of repentance was commanded as part of the Mosaic Covenant, and it required Temple sacrifices. The sin that is the subject of *Tisha B’Av*, however, is the sin of Israel that breached the Mosaic Covenant, and was responsible for the Temple’s destruction; so the two days are not for the same reason. And let us keep in mind Rabbi Hirsch’s admonition that we need to look to the present lest the same sin that befell our forefathers should befall us, and we repeat history.

Perhaps between now and next year, some of you will receive wisdom from God about *Tisha B’Av*, and you will share it with us. Meanwhile, tonight some of you will be visiting another synagogue where Lamentations will be chanted in a traditional way. That’s a good thing to do for several reasons, not the least of which is that the Book of Lamentations is generally not addressed in other Jewish contexts. For those of you who will be fasting, may your fast be easy, and your prayers profitable.