

Tisha B'av

The Fast of Remembrance

The 9th of Av on the Jewish calendar is set apart as a fast day known as Tisha B'av, the Fast of Remembrance. This year (2003) the 9th of Av falls on August 6-7.¹ This fast commemorates the many tragedies that have affected the Jewish nation over the years.

Origin

The Mishnah² states that God declared the 9th of Av as an eternal day of mourning because the people "wept without cause" when they heard the discouraging report of the spies who surveyed Canaan (Numbers 13-14).

History

The Jews note that the following events all occurred on or near the 9th of Av:

- The first Temple was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C.
- The second Temple was destroyed in 70 A.D.
- King Edward I signed the edict compelling the Jews to leave England in 1290
- The Jews were expelled from Spain in 1492
- August 1, 1914 marked the outbreak of WWI, which fell on the 9th of Av that year. Most historians concur that WWII was simply an extension of WWI which led to the Jewish holocaust.

Besides these events, other days of mourning were assimilated into this one day. For example, three failed Jewish uprisings against their oppressors which occurred in 66, 116, and 132 A.D. are remembered on this day.

Commemoration

The Jews begin the commemoration of Tisha B'av in the synagogue on Friday evening. They are mournful, sit on the floor and read Lamentations by candlelight. The synagogue readings for the 9th of Av also include Deuteronomy 4:25-20, Job, and other material describing the calamities that have befallen the Jewish nation. The focus is on the fate of the nation of Israel; it is a time of national reflection.³

There is a movement in the last ten of these readings from persecution to redemption; exile to return. While Tisha B'av is a time for mourning, it ends with the hope that the nation of Israel will not always be thought of with sadness; there will come a day of national liberation. For seven weeks after Tisha B'av the synagogue readings include passages of hope and comfort from Isaiah.

Application

Why should those of us who are Christians -- especially those of us who are Gentile Christians -- commemorate Tisha B'av? I believe there are at least two reasons.

1. *It increases our appreciation for the Jews and the blessings we have received through them.*

By identifying with the Jews on this national fast day we are increasing our awareness that we "were grafted in among them and became partakers with them of the rich root of the olive tree" (Rom. 11:17). We are warned:

... do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, *remember that* it is not you who supports the root, but the root *supports* you. You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; for if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He spare you. Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in; for God is able to graft them in again. Romans 11:18-23 (NASB)

Becoming familiar with the Jewish fasts and feasts will increase our sensitivity to the Jewish people and intensify our gratitude for all the blessings we have received through them -- particularly through the Jewish Messiah. While we reflect on their history, we respond in praise to Jesus Christ through Whom we become partakers of the blessings promised to them.

2. *It motivates us to intercede for the nation of Israel and her citizens.*

By familiarizing ourselves with the tragedies in the history of Israel, we will become more sensitive to the plight of her citizens and more able to minister to and pray for them. We are admonished to "pray for the peace of Jerusalem" (Psalms 122:6). Dr. Robert Gordis states that one reason American Jews should observe Tisha B'av is because, "It can focus attention upon the universal aspects of the Messianic hope." Taking time to reflect upon the tragedies that have befallen the Jewish people will increase our motivation to intercede for them and to pray that they would recognize that Jesus is their Peace (Acts 10:36; Eph. 2:14).

How should we commemorate Tisha B'av from a Christian perspective? The following ideas come to my mind. I'm sure you can add more:

- *Read from Job, Lamentations, and Deuteronomy 4:25-40 this week-end.*
- *Read selections of hope and comfort from Isaiah for several days or weeks afterwards.*
- *Read about the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70:*
http://www.preteristarchive.com/PartialPreterism/dolphin-lambert_pp_01.html (Note: I do not endorse the Preterist doctrine, but this article is written by Lambert Dolphin, a Dispensationalist.)
- *Learn more about the current situation in Israel concerning the Temple Mount:*
<http://templemount.org/>
- *Learn more about the holocaust:* <http://www.aish.com/holocaust/default.asp>
- *Read more about Tisha B'av:* <http://learn.jtsa.edu/tishabav/>
- *Intercede for the nation of Israel*
- *Phone or write your Jewish friends, neighbors and/or co-workers and tell them that you are thinking of them and praying for them on Tisha B'av.*

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1 The Jewish calendar is a solar calendar with 30 days in every month. Because of this the feasts and fasts fall on different days each year in our calendar. The Jewish days are reckoned from evening to evening. Thus the 9th of Av will begin on Friday at sunset and end on Saturday at sunset. The last meal must be eaten before nightfall on Friday.

2 The Mishna is a collection of Jewish traditions and explanations of Scriptures. It was handed down orally for many years before it was collected in a written form in the late second century.

3 The Fast of Yom Kippur is a day of personal reflection on the fate of the individual and balances this day of national reflection. These are the only two 24-hour fasts in the Jewish calendar.