



Tisha B'Av

5779

Commemoration of the Destruction of the Temples

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Community is an important part of society. When one lacks being part of a strong and vibrant community, sociologists state that this person will suffer adverse effects. When studying the book of Acts, it becomes most clear that after the giving of the Holy Spirit on the Festival of Weeks (Shavuot) or Pentecost, early believers formed a community. This was true not only in Jerusalem, but in other places throughout the world where the message of the Gospel reached.

Even though Rav Shaul (Paul) was the Apostle to the Gentiles, he would visit the synagogues and share the message of Messiah Yeshua with the Jewish community first. Because of this, most of the congregations which he established were comprised of both Jews and Gentiles. There is no doubt that this fact influenced the Gentile believers to have an understanding of the observances which were part of the Jewish community. The vast majority of these observances were derived from the Scriptures.

One of the events which had a great impact on all Jewish individuals was the Babylonian Exile. Of course this exile included the destruction of the Temple. The destruction of the Temple is observed as a special fast day and is mentioned in Zechariah 8:19 (the fast of the fifth month). There is no doubt that early believers, both Jew and Gentile, would have commemorated this day. Also, the Second Temple was destroyed in 70 AD on the same date, the ninth of Av. It is very sad to me that the vast majority of believers in congregations today throughout the world, do not remember the destruction of the two Temples on this date. In fact, there is unfortunately stark differences between the believing community today and the Jewish community when it comes to holidays and important Scriptural events.

The purpose of this brief article is to challenge the reader to remember why the first Temple was destroyed and then ask what spiritual message could this have for our walk with Messiah Yeshua. Traditionally, one is told that due to three specific sins the First Temple was destroyed: idolatry, sexual immorality and shedding innocent blood (Yoma 9b). I would like you to concentrate on one passage of Scripture from the prophet Jeremiah. G-d tells Jeremiah to go and stand in the gate of the Temple and confront those who are entering to worship the G-d of Israel and say,

“Thus said the L-rd of Hosts, the G-d of Israel, make good your ways and your deeds and I will dwell with you in this place. Do not trust in false words saying, ‘the Temple of the L-rd, the Temple of the L-rd, the Temple of the L-rd; those are.’” Jeremiah 7:3-4

The passage ends with the Hebrew word הִמָּה. This word means literally “Those are”, which serves to emphasize that the words of the false prophets are indeed false. In other words, the people were incorrect to pay attention to all the other prophets who were falsely comforting the people by assuring them that Jerusalem was safe because the Holy Temple was located there.

Today there is something similar taking place both in Judaism and Christianity. This is ignoring the clear teaching of both the Biblical prophets and the Apostles concerning the End Times. The Word of G-d makes it most clear that before our **Blessed Hope** (Rapture) occurs, and before Messiah Yeshua returns to deliver Israel from all the nations of the world and establish His Kingdom (Second Coming), **there will be a time of great persecution**. First, the persecution will be aimed at believers in Yeshua and then after the Rapture, **Jacob's Trouble** (Jeremiah 30:7) will take place when two thirds of the Jewish people will be killed (see Zechariah 13:8). The Bible is clear and teaches in a number of places that believers will suffer and even be killed for our faith. For a variety of reasons, none of these reasons dealing with the words of prophecy, the majority of Bible teachers falsely state that there are no remaining prophetic events that must take place prior to our Blessed Hope occurring. In fact, often times a promise of not suffering in the last days is offered as motivation for receiving the Gospel.

True students of the Scripture know that suffering and even martyrdom is part of the believers' history and will become prevalent in the End Times. Leaders who do not prepare the people for this time of persecution are very similar to the Priests and other leaders in the days of Jeremiah who falsely assured the people that they had nothing to fear because of the Temple. Today, within Judaism, there is an overwhelming tendency to similarly believe that Israel will not go through any future persecution and all prophecies like Jacob's Trouble have been canceled by G-d.

Recently, I encountered an article by a fellow believer, Brian Hennessy which was published in the newspaper / website **Israel Today** (israeltoday.co.il). In his article, **Will two-thirds of Israelis Perish? February 1, 2016**, Mr. Hennessy took issue with the view that Zechariah 13:8 actually teaches that two thirds of the Jewish people will die in this period of time known as Jacob's Trouble. Mr. Hennessy writes,

"The theory being, that nothing short of near annihilation will ever be able to overcome their stubborn resistance to accepting Jesus as the Messiah. Quite frankly, I believe it is dispassionate theological interpretations of Scripture like this that only reinforce Jewish resistance to the gospel. How can we loudly proclaim love for Israel one minute and in the next breath, say, 'oh well, it's a shame, but up to four million more Jews must die before all Israel is saved.' I don't buy it."

Although I applaud Mr. Hennessy for his sentiments not wanting to think about such a horrible happening as two thirds of the Jewish people being slain, I would offer that one's personal desire should not influence how a particular Scriptural passage is understood. I also take issue with his assessment of the matter. His criticism that the typical Christian interpretation of this passage being *"nothing short of near annihilation will ever be able to overcome their stubborn resistance to accepting Jesus as the Messiah"* is misplaced. Yeshua Himself quoted Zechariah 13:7 (see Matthew 26:31) in order to scold His disciples for not properly comprehending Who He was. A primary reason for this failure was their inability to understand the revelation of Scriptures. If one studies the Word of G-d properly, especially the prophets, coming to faith in Yeshua is a natural outcome. Most Christians probably are not aware of how little attention is placed in Judaism (orthodox) on the Prophets. As a Jewish believer, and one who has grown in the Jewish community and who has lived in Israel for nearly 20 years, I would never say there is *"stubborn*

resistance to accepting Jesus as the Messiah"; rather an utter lack of interest in Biblical revelation. Once again, as someone who has spent 25 years studying with seriously committed men within the orthodox world of Judaism, seldom is Scripture, outside the Torah, delved into. And when studying the Torah, the methodology and the perspective frequently draws the student away from the basic meaning of the text. I would strongly state that this time of the most intense persecution of Jewish individuals in the Last Days is to cause the Jewish people to seek G-d and to prepare them to behold Yeshua's return.

Furthermore, for Mr. Hennessy to state that this view is a dispassionate theological interpretation misses the point. One should never bring emotion to Biblical interpretation. My experience is the vast majority of Jewish individuals have never read Zechariah or have ever heard any Christian view of this passage. In addition, I do not know any true believer who should be characterized in the manner which Mr. Hennessy does when he states, "*oh well, it's a shame, but up to four million more Jews must die before all Israel is saved.*" The believers I know would never have such a callous thought. Rather, it greatly grieves us concerning what will happen to so many Jewish individuals.

Mr. Hennessy is an excellent example of what many people from within Christianity and from within Judaism do when encountering a difficult portion of Scripture. They simply reject the simple reading of the text and ignore other Scriptures that state something similar. For example, Yeshua spoke of a great time of tribulation for the Jewish people in Israel in the Last Days (See Matthew 24:16-31) and unless G-d will shorten the days, no flesh would be saved. But, for the sake of the elect (the Jewish people), G-d will indeed shorten the days (Matthew 24:21-22). Mr. Hennessy's understanding of the Zechariah passage as being fulfilled in Yeshua's days is only a partial fulfillment. When looking at the whole passage, taking into account the entire context beginning in Zechariah chapter 12, it becomes most clear that it is an End Times prophecy. Next, Mr. Hennessy contradicts himself when then writes that it is actually the European Holocaust that is the fulfillment of Zechariah 13:8. I strongly disagree that the phrase *בכל הארץ* could refer to all the world and has no connection with Israel. Did not Mr. Hennessy not say that verse 7 had to do with Yeshua and His disciples? Were they not in the Land of Israel? I can accept that Jewish people also outside of Israel will sadly suffer during the End Times, but to exclude Israel from this prophecy and focus solely on Europe, totally misses the intent of the text. When Daniel speaks about the worst time of suffering for the Jewish people, he also states that it will be in the End Times immediately before the establishment of the Kingdom (See Daniel 12:1-2).

Mr. Hennessy also states, "*I believe it (Zechariah's prophecy of two thirds of Jewish people dying in the End Times) must be understood in light of God's favor being shown on Israel today.*" Yes Israel is indeed flourishing today, but this was also prophesied by Yeshua,

"And from the fig tree learn the parable, whenever already her branch became soft and the leaves put forth you know that near is the summer." Matthew 24:32

In this passage, Yeshua does inform the reader that in the Last Days Israel will be prosperous, but this only serves as a prophetic indicator that a major change is going to take place. In fact, Israel's success will precede the time of persecution that will begin with believers being the target of hate by the world. In Matthew 24:32, Yeshua says, "...*you know that near is the summer.*" In

the Hebrew language, the word summer קיץ is most similar to the Hebrew word קץ which means “end”. Therefore, the intent of the passage is to inform the reader that just prior to the End Times beginning, Israel will become a highly prosperous nation. This section, Matthew 23:32-47, is specifically written to believers.

In conclusion, it would be wise for believers to mark Tisha B’Av in their congregations, remembering the destruction of the two Temples and the great suffering of the Jewish people. This year, the ninth of Av is August 10th; but because this is a Shabbat, the commemoration is postponed to August 11th. As one remembers the horrors that happened to the Jewish people in the past, let us also be prayerful about the worst time for Israel and the Jewish people, which will take place in the **Last Days**. Let us as believers also be prepared for the coming persecution that will happen to those who are Yeshua’s disciples today. Change is most definitely coming. Evidence of hatred for the message of the Scriptures is already prevalent in many parts of the world. Failure to teach what the Prophets and Apostles and even Yeshua stated is a great error. May you have a meaningful fast on Sunday, August 11th for Tisha B’Av and may your reading of the book of Lamentations be a source of spiritual awakening.