



Every summer Jews around the world hold a fast. In most places, and Israel certainly being no exception, with regards to temperature, it is a hot time of the year. One of the nice things about Yom Kippur is that it is during the fall when the temperature has dropped to a moderate level. Yet, in the fifth Jewish month, the month of Av, the temperature is high and not eating and drinking becomes all the more difficult for those observing this fast. This is not something God commanded us to do. (Admittedly, God's commandments are usually quite sensitive). So, why then do we do this?

The Scriptures do have something to say about this. The prophet Zechariah thus tells, "Again the word of Adonai-Tzva'ot came saying: 'Thus says Adonai-Tzva'ot, "The fast of the fourth, the fast of the fifth, the fast of the seventh and the fast of the tenth months will become joy, gladness and a cheerful moedim. Therefore, love truth and shalom!" (Zechariah 8:18-19). Ironically, the Scriptures don't tell us specifically what these fasts were for, yet it does seem to indicate that they hold deep significance for God's people.

tisha b'av

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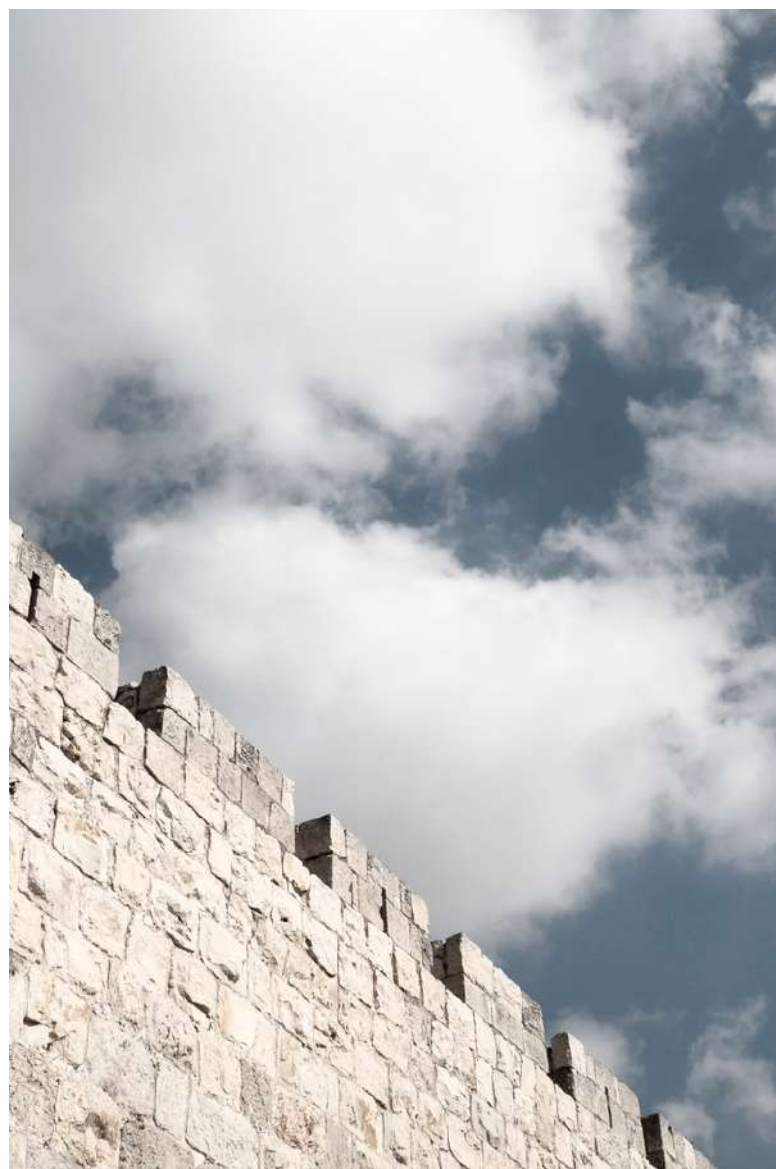
It is helpful to remember when reading this passage within Zechariah that he was addressing the Jewish community at the end of their Babylonian exile. The people were returning home from Persia, (who conquered the Babylonians) and they were rebuilding that which was destroyed, namely, the Temple and Jerusalem as a whole.

The people had taken upon themselves these days of fasting to commemorate the besiegement and ultimate destruction of Jerusalem, the Temple, and Jewish sovereignty. The fast of the tenth month therefore commemorates the beginning of the siege against Jerusalem by King Nebuchadnezzar. Half a year later, in the fourth month, he (Nebuchadnezzar) breached Jerusalem's walls. Amidst much internal fighting, the Babylonians managed to completely demolish the Temple. Most of the Jews were then exiled, though a small contingent remained in Jerusalem, and Jewish governor was installed to manage this group, yet in the seventh month he was assassinated.

The exiled community would recall each year the tragic events that fulfilled God's judgment upon the kingdom of Judah. While this is a good endeavor, one that would hopefully keep the exiles humble, God does question their sincerity at one point. (see: Zechariah 7:4-7) Even the best-intentioned practices can become mere outward actions over time, and those really mean nothing to God in the end. The key is not to do away with such practices; rather, we need to keep our hearts in the right place before the Lord.

The exiles would eventually return home and rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple. The fasts would continue to keep the severity of what happened etched within the souls of the people. Over 500 years would go by—a little bit longer than the first Temple stood—until another time of tragedy would come upon the Jewish people; this time in the form of the Roman empire.

In the year 66 C.E., the Jewish people would get fed up with this oppressive foreign ruler and would revolt. Four years later, under the command of General Titus, the Romans would sack Jerusalem and throw the Temple to the floor. (You can still see physical evidence of this to this day).



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Titus commemorated his military victory in the Arch of Titus located within Rome. The Jews continued to resist for another three years or so until a decisive squashing of all rebellion towards the empire. And you may be wondering when did Titus destroy the Temple?

That's right, it was on Tisha B'Av (the ninth of Av)!

Other terrible things had happened on this day. Ten of the twelve spies sent by Moses to check out Canaan, deliver their pessimistic and faithless report and doom the people to 40 years of desert wandering. About 60 years after the Temple was destroyed, the Jews revolted again.



They fought for 3 years under the leadership of Bar Kokhba (along with Rabbi Akiva) only to be defeated, leading to the Jewish expulsion from the land of Israel. The Romans further deride the losers and rename their homeland, Syria Palaestina. The first crusade was likewise declared on this date. Jews were expelled from England in the 13th century and from Spain in the 15th century, on Tisha B'Av. World War I began, which was terrible in and of itself, though it was also the precursor to World War II and the Holocaust. Needless to say, it is the darkest day in Jewish history!



Many within the Jewish community continue to observe this day with practices similar to Yom Kippur: complete fasting, no bathing, no leather shoes, no marital relations, and special penitential prayers are recited. People read the book of Lamentations, the book written by the prophet Jeremiah, who foretold the coming destruction of Solomon's temple. Some even visit the tomb of Rachel, the wife of our father, Jacob, as Jeremiah also envisioned her weeping for the destruction and exile of her children. (see: Jeremiah 31:14)

As you may have noticed, God does promise that this day, as well as the other three fast days, would one day be turned into joy. Well, when is that? Tradition tells us that is when the Messiah comes! Within the Messianic community one could argue to fast or celebrate. Each community will have to make that decision for themselves. One should keep in mind however of another tradition which states that on the darkest day—Tisha B'Av—the light of the world, the Messiah, would be born (Midrash Eicha Rabbah 1:51). Whether this is true or not, the desire for redemption is obvious. On a day which seems cursed, who is the one who will break this curse? On a day of such calamity, who will redeem us? On a day of defeat, who will be our victorious judge?

Whether your community fasts or not, it would behoove the Messianic community as a whole to pray and intercede for our people who have suffered much on this day. Yeshua's desire is to gather Jerusalem like a hen gathers her chicks. We ought to beseech our Father in heaven to grant Yeshua this desire. We also ought to pray that our people would see the One who is greater than the Temple. Indeed, this is a dark day, but let us let the light of the world shine in the darkness, for the darkness cannot overpower it!



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