

TISHA B'AV – FAST OF AV

Text: II Kings 24, 25; Jeremiah 8:13 – 9:24; 52; Lamentations; Zechariah 7:1-14

Historical and Thematic focus of the Feast: This is one of the most solemn of days on the Jewish calendar (during July or August); only Yom Kippur precedes it in solemnness. It is the day which the Jewish community remembers and mourns the destruction of the first and second Temples. On this day of lament according to Jewish tradition numerous other *disasters* befell the Jewish people throughout history.

They are according to tradition:

- 1) The twelve spies return with their report - Israel loses faith and is condemned to die in the wilderness.
- 2) The destruction of Solomon's Temple by the Babylonians in 587 B.C.
- 3) The destruction of the second Temple by the Romans in 70 A.D.
- 4) The Roman army plowed Jerusalem with salt in 71 A.D.
- 5) The destruction of Simeon Bar Kokhba army in 135 A.D.
- 6) England expelled all of the Jews in 1290 A.D.
- 7) Spain expelled all the Jews in 1492 A.D.
- 8) World War I is declared on the ninth of Av 1914; Russia mobilized for war and launched persecutions against the Jews in Eastern Russia.

Traditional Observance: In order to commemorate these disasters the Jewish people fasted from sunrise to sunset, a total fast, separating themselves from anything that would give pleasure. The study of God's Word was not allowed because this was known to bring joy into one's life. Although according to Jewish tradition it is customary to read from Jeremiah 8:13-9:24 and the entire book of Lamentations in the synagogue on this day. In many Sephardic synagogues the ark is draped in black or the curtain is removed all together. As the Jewish community would gather to pray on this day they would not greet each other, pray in hushed tones, and remove their shoes as symbols of their mourning.

Another ancient custom on Tisha B'Av is to walk around the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem. This has been practiced by the religious community in Jerusalem ever since the destruction by the Romans of the Second Temple on the Temple Mount, almost two thousand years ago.

Traditional foods: The day before the fast it is customary to eat hardboiled eggs and/or lentils as a sign of mourning. In some communities, it was customary to sprinkle ashes on the egg or to eat with it a piece of bread dipped in ashes, a practice based on Lamentations 3:16.¹ For those whose health would not allow fasting they could partake of foods which were bland so to minimize the enjoyment that one would have in the act of eating.

¹ Lesli Koppelman Ross. *Celebrate! The Complete Jewish Holidays Handbook*. (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc., 1994), 150.

Musing Moment: What purpose did the Temple fulfill in its day? How does Ezekiel's vision of Ezekiel 10:18, 19 help us in understanding the Temple's purpose? Explain the difference between the first and second Temples. What role, if any, does the Temple have in the future? Please explain your answers from Scripture.

Meditate upon the following passages in the light of Tisha B'Av and draw out their practical life applications for the believer.

John 2:19-22; 4:21-24; I Corinthians 3:16, 17; 6:19, 20; Revelation 11:1ff; Ezekiel 40-48.