

THE FAST OF 17 TAMMUZ, TISHA B'AV, AND THE THREE WEEKS

July 23 – August 13

During the summer months, we mourn the destruction of both Temples in Jerusalem, which took place on the ninth of Av, and the events that led to their destruction. We fast on the seventeenth day of the month of Tammuz, Shivah Assar B'Tammuz, because it was on that day that the enemy penetrated the walls of Jerusalem prior to the destruction of the Second Temple. The Talmud, however, writes that these were not the only tragedies that befell the Jewish people on this day. On the seventeenth of Tammuz four more tragedies occurred:

- the first tablets containing the Ten Commandments were broken by Moses after the sin of the Golden Calf;
- the daily sacrifice was suspended during the time of the First Temple; • the wicked Apostomos burned the Torah;
- an idol was erected in the Temple. Additional tragedies also befell the Jewish people on the ninth day of the month of Av—Tisha B'Av.
- On this day, the spies (meraglim) returned to the Jews in the desert with a negative report about the Land of Israel.
- In addition, it was on this day that the city of Betar was destroyed. Tens of thousands of Jews were killed, and the wicked Turnus Rufus plowed the site of the Temple and its surroundings.
- Tradition asserts that the expulsion of the Jews from England in 1290 and the expulsion from Spain in 1492 also took place on Tisha B'Av.

Our mourning for the destroyed Temples and for the other calamities which occurred on these days extends beyond the fasts themselves. The period between these two fasts, traditionally called the "Three Weeks," includes several practices of mourning. During these three weeks we do not get our hair cut, attend weddings or involve ourselves in large joyous gatherings. The Talmud writes that when the month of Av begins, our mood should reflect our mourning for the destruction of the Temples. During the nine days which begin on the first of Av (August 5) and continue until midday on the tenth of Av (August 14), we are additionally forbidden to

- eat meat and drink wine (except on Shabbat),
- to swim or bathe for pleasure,
- to do any laundry or dry cleaning that is not absolutely necessary.

On Tisha B'Av itself, besides fasting, we are prohibited from

- washing our bodies,
- wearing leather shoes,
- anointing ourselves and
- having marital relations.

It is forbidden, as well, to study Torah on this day excepting the sections of the prophets and the Talmud that discuss the destruction. We do not wear tefillin until mincha and the custom is to sit on low chairs as mourners do until midday. Our observance of mourning also forbids us from greeting friends on Tisha B'Av.

We mourn the Temples that were destroyed over nineteen hundred years ago, and we pray that we will be worthy to see God rebuild the Temple in our lifetime.