

Tisha B'av 5785

תשע באב תשפ"ה

The events which the ninth day of the month of Av commemorate are truly some of the saddest and worst events in the history of the Jewish people. The unfortunate matter is that these terrible events did not have to take place, for G-d raised up a prophet called Jeremiah to lead them to repentance and place them upon the proper way; however, the people refused to heed his voice and it was precisely their hardness of hearts that caused them to suffer in a most harsh manner. For one reads in Jeremiah's prophecy,

כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה עֹמְדֵי עַל-דֶּרֶכִּים וְרֹאֵי וְשֹׁאֲלֵי לִנְתַּבּוֹת עוֹלָם, אִי-זֶה דֶּרֶךְ הַטּוֹב וְלִכּוּ-בָּהּ, וּמֵצְאוּ מְרוּגָעַ, לִנְפְשְׁכֶם; וַיֹּאמְרוּ, לֹא נֵלֶךְ. יִרְמְיָהוּ ו.ט"ז

"Thus said the L-rd, stand upon highways and see, ask for the eternal paths, which way is good and go on it and find relaxation for your souls, but they said, 'no we will not walk'." Jeremiah 6:16

This verse summarises the attitude of the Children of Israel. Jeremiah noted their stubbornness and unwillingness to respond to the instructions of G-d. Within this verse, there is a most interesting expression. G-d commands His people, *"ask for the eternal paths."* In Hebrew this expression is לִנְתַּבּוֹת עוֹלָם. Although the word עוֹלָם is frequently translated *eternal* or *everlasting*, there is a direct connection with this word to the Kingdom of G-d. In other words, despite the fact that Israel had engaged in idolatry and behaved rebelliously, HaShem was willing to forgive and extend grace to His people. The Hebrew word חֶסֶד relates to G-d's grace. The Biblical concept of grace is frequently misunderstood. Although grace is certainly related to salvation, many fail to connect grace to the **will of G-d**. It is because G-d was extending grace to the Jewish people, there was now an opportunity for them to enter into the Kingdom of G-d. This is why the expression לִנְתַּבּוֹת עוֹלָם appears in this verse. It is the grace of G-d which restores His covenant people of G-d to His will. Ultimately, G-d wants those who are in a covenant with Him to experience the fullness of His promises, which can only be known in His Kingdom.

When one rejects the grace of G-d what can this person expect to experience? The answer is found in Jeremiah 6:19,

שָׁמְעִי הָאֶרֶץ--הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי מְבִיא רָעָה אֶל-הָעָם הַזֶּה, פְּרִי מַחֲשָׁבוֹתָם: כִּי עַל-דִּבְרֵי לֹא הִקְשִׁיבוּ, וְתוֹרָתִי וַיִּמָּאֲסוּ-בָּהּ. יִרְמְיָהוּ ו.יט

“Hear the earth, behold I am bringing evil to this people, the fruit of their thoughts, for concerning My words they did not hear and My Torah they loathed it.” Jeremiah 6:19

It is very important that the Bible student learn the significance of two Hebrew words. These two words are טוב ורע, good and evil. For some reason, many translators fail to render the word רע correctly in many Biblical texts. When examining this verse in numerous translations, I found the most common way it was rendered was with the word “*disaster*”. Another way it was frequently translated was with the word “*calamity*”. The primary meaning of the Hebrew word רע is something which is categorically against or in opposition to the will of G-d. Hence, it was not that G-d wanted to or intended to bring the events of Tisha B'av on the Children of Israel. He preferred to be gracious and restore Israel to His covenantal promises which the greatest was eternity in the Kingdom of G-d. It was only due to the unrepentant heart of Israel and their rebellious spirit that G-d did what He did not plan to do, that is, something which was against His will. The message which this article wants to emphasize is that all the terrible things which the Jewish people experienced during those three weeks known as בין המצרים (between the straits). The key word in this Hebrew expression is המצרים and is derived from the Hebrew word צר which means *narrow, relating to pressure or tribulation*. This term is used to describe the three weeks between the 17th day of Tammuz and the 9th day of Av. It was during this period that the people of Judah suffered greatly and the **First Temple** was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and also on this same date the **Second Temple** was destroyed by Titus of Rome.

Again, this did not have to happen if Israel would have turned away from Idolatry, and repented and began to walk in the ways and the truth of G-d. It was only because the people refused to respond to Jeremiah's call, that all of these horrible things came upon the people. This fact is clearly seen in Jeremiah 7:3,

כֹּה-אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הִטִּיבוּ דַרְכֵיכֶם וּמַעַלְלֵיכֶם וְאָשַׁכְנָה אֶתְכֶם בַּמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה

“Thus said the L-rd of Hosts, the G-d of Israel, make good your ways and your deeds and I will make you dwell in this place.” Jeremiah 7:3

When a person examines the conclusion of this verse, there is an emphasis on the phrase וְאָשַׁכְנָה אֶתְכֶם בַּמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה. The verb שכן is in the intensive form which reveals the strong desire that G-d had to cause the people to continue to dwell in this place, Jerusalem. It was truly sad that the people's hard hearts and stubbornness caused them to endure one of the most difficult periods of Israel's history. Instead of hearing and responding to the words of the true prophet of G-d, Jeremiah, the people foolishly

believed the words of false prophets who led them astray and into exile. This problem is mentioned in Jeremiah 7:4,

אל-תבטחו לכם אל-דברי השקר לאמר היכל יהוה היכל יהוה היכל יהוה המה.

“Do not trust in words of falsehood saying, ‘The sanctuary of the L-rd, the sanctuary of the L-rd, they are the L-rd’s.”

Most Bibles incorrectly translate the Hebrew word היכל as Temple, when in actuality it relates to the Sanctuary, i.e., the Holy of Holies, where G-d used to dwell. The message of the false prophets was easy to comprehend, as the prophets were trusting in the fact that it was the היכל where G-d resided; therefore, they could not imagine a world without Jerusalem being the dwelling place of their G-d. But G-d is not mocked; He will not endure the idolatrous behavior of the tribes of Israel for long and will even destroy the Kingdom of Judah and the Holy City of Jerusalem and even the place in which His spirit once resided. It is easy to see why the people trusted in false words, as it would indeed be difficult to believe that the L-rd G-d of Israel would allow the city in which His presence dwelt to be destroyed. However, the righteousness of G-d demanded that if Israel went after other gods, which G-d had warned them against, there would be a harsh response to such behavior. For Moses had written,

העידתי בכם היום את-השמים ואת-הארץ, כי-אבד תאבדון מהר, מעל הארץ, אשר אתם עברים את-הירדן שמה לרשתה: לא-תאריכון ימים עליה, כי השמד תשמדון. והפיץ יהוה אתכם, בעמים; ונשארתם, מתי מספר, בגוים, אשר ינהג יהוה אתכם שמה.

“I testify against you today O heaven and earth, that you will utterly perish quickly from the land which you are passing over the Jordan there to inherit it. You will not lengthen your days upon it, for you will be utterly destroyed. The L-rd will scatter you among and you will be left few in number, where the L-rd will lead you there.”

Deuteronomy 4:26-27

In this passage, Moses prophesies about a future exile which will happen to the Children of Israel if, G-d forbid, they fell into idolatry. The events that led up to Tisha B'Av are clearly related to what Moses had written so long before. It should serve us today as a reminder of our righteous G-d, Who Moses called,

כי יהוה אלהיך, אש אכלה הוא: אל, קנא.

“For the L-rd your G-d, He is a devouring fire, a jealous G-d.” Deuteronomy 4:24

Sobering words which are as relevant today as they were 3,500 years ago and during the days of Jeremiah, who had called the people to repentance unsuccessfully. Let us learn from the errors of our forefathers. May you have a meaningful fast on this coming Tisha B'av.