

“Tish B’Av: Grieving the Empty Sanctuary”

Texts: Deut. 30:15-20; Psalm 50; Micah 6:2-8; Isaiah 1;
Jer. 7:2-12; Ezek. 3:4-9; Ezek. 8:1-6; Ezek. 10:18; Ezek. 11:13-20; Jer. 24

Bible Study & Discussion Questions

Introduction:

Tish B’Av, the 9th day of the Hebrew month of Av, is a day steeped in sorrow and reflection for the Jewish people. It is a day marked by historical tragedies, most notably the destruction of the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem. However, the devastation associated with Tish B’Av extends beyond the physical destruction of these sacred spaces; it symbolizes the spiritual devastation that occurs when God's presence departs from His people due to their persistent disobedience. The physical destruction of the Temples serves as a metaphor for the spiritual desolation that results from estrangement from God. The true tragedy lies not in the loss of stone and mortar but in the broken relationship between God and His people. As we reflect upon the history and significance of this day, we are reminded of the importance of genuine repentance and the dangers of empty religion.

The Spiritual Devastation:

The most significant exile in human history occurred long before the destruction of the Temples. In Genesis 3:23, Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden, symbolizing humanity's initial separation from God. Despite this separation, God instituted a plan for redemption, choosing Israel to reflect Him to the world - to be a kingdom of priests and a light to the nations. Yet, Israel repeatedly chose rebellion over obedience, leading to warnings from the prophets and, ultimately, to the exile and destruction of the Temples. (Ultimately God sent Yeshua, Son of David, Messiah of Israel and the world, to perfectly reflect His character to the nations).

The physical destruction of the Temples was preceded by the departure of God's glory from these sacred spaces. In Ezekiel 10:18, we read of the glory of the Lord departing from the Temple, leaving it an empty shell. The true mourning on Tish B’Av is not for the loss of the physical structure but for the loss of God's presence.

A Call to Genuine Repentance:

The mourning associated with Tish B’Av is not intended to be an end in itself. It is a call to *teshuvah* (repentance). God desires a relationship with His people, not empty rituals. Throughout Scripture, God's prophets call Israel to turn back to Him with sincere hearts. Micah 6:6-8 and Isaiah 1:16-20 emphasize that God is not interested in sacrifices or offerings if they are not accompanied by a heart of obedience and a commitment to justice, mercy, and humility.

The destruction of the Temples serves as a powerful reminder that God values true worship—worship that is grounded in a relationship with Him and in living according to His ways. When that relationship is broken, the physical symbols of worship, like the Temple, lose their significance and are ultimately destroyed.

Hope in Exile:

But even in the midst of judgment, God does not abandon His people. His glory may have departed the Temple made of stones, but through the prophet Ezekiel, the Lord reassured the exiles in Babylon that **HE would be a Sanctuary** for them even in a foreign land (Ezekiel 11:16). This promise points to the hope of restoration—a hope that God would one day gather His people, cleanse them, and give them new hearts and a new spirit (Ezekiel 11:19-20).

Conclusion:

Tish B'Av is a solemn reminder of the consequences of disobedience and the dangers of empty religion. It calls us to examine our own lives and to return to God with sincere hearts. As we remember the tragedies of the past, we are also reminded of the hope that comes with genuine repentance—a hope rooted in God's promise to restore and renew His people.

Discussion Questions:

These questions should encourage reflection and discussion, helping us to engage deeply with the themes of mourning, repentance, and spiritual renewal presented in the message.

1. Reflecting on the Significance of Tisha B'Av:

- Tisha B'Av commemorates numerous tragedies in Jewish history, including the destruction of the First and Second Temples.
 1. Why might believers in Yeshua (Jesus) observe Tish B'Av as a day of mourning?
 2. How does this mourning connect with the hope and restoration promised through Yeshua?

2. The True Devastation of Exile:

- The message suggests that the true devastation wasn't just the physical destruction of the Temple but the loss of God's presence.
 1. How does this concept challenge our views on the significance of physical places or rituals in our spiritual lives?
 2. Can you think of ways in which we might sometimes prioritize external expressions of faith over the presence of God in our hearts?

3. Personal Exile and God's Presence:

- The message highlights the experience of Daniel, Ezekiel, and other exiles in Babylon, noting that God was still at work even in their displacement.
 1. Have you ever felt spiritually exiled or distant from God, and if so, how did (or could) you recognize God's Presence and work in your life during that time?
 2. How does the concept of God being a "sanctuary" during times of exile and hardship challenge our understanding of His presence in our lives today, especially in difficult circumstances?

4. Warning and Rebellion:

- Despite numerous warnings from prophets, the people of Israel persisted in their rebellion.
 1. What are some modern-day parallels to this situation?
 2. How can we become more sensitive to God's warnings in our own lives, and what steps can we take to respond with obedience rather than rebellion?

5. The Illusion of Empty Religion:

- The message mentions that the people of Israel were deceived into thinking their religious practices alone were sufficient, even as they lived in rebellion.
 1. In what ways might modern religious practices risk becoming "empty observance"?
 2. How can we ensure our worship remains genuine and aligned with God's desires?

6. The Role of Lamentation and Mourning:

- Lamentations, Jeremiah, and Job are traditionally read during Tisha B'Av.
 1. How does the act of mourning and lamenting play a role in spiritual growth and repentance?
 2. Can you think of a time when mourning or lamenting led you to a deeper understanding or connection with God?

7. Hope in Restoration:

- Despite the destruction and exile, God promises restoration and renewal (Ezekiel 11:19-20).
 1. How does this promise of restoration speak to you in your current life circumstances?
 2. What areas of your life do you believe God is calling you to allow Him to renew and restore?