

יְחֶזְקֵאל YEchezkel

EZEKIEL 24

SESSION 7 BEGINS HERE

The day had come. Yechezkel's prophecies of destruction had reached their terrible climax.

Ezekiel Chapter 24

Ezekiel 24:1-2 יְחֶזְקֵאל JPS 1917

- א וַיְהִי דְבַר-יְהוָה אֵלַי בַּשָּׁנָה הַתְּשִׁיעִית, בַּחֹדֶשׁ הָעֲשִׂירִי, בְּעָשׂוֹר לַחֹדֶשׁ, לֵאמֹר:
- 1 And the word of the LORD came unto me in the ninth year, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, saying:
- ב בֶּן-אָדָם, כְּתוּב- (כְּתֹב-) לְךָ אֶת-שֵׁם הַיּוֹם--אֶת-עֶצֶם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה: סֶמֶךְ מֶלֶךְ-בָּבֶל אֶל-יְרוּשָׁלַם, בְּעֶצֶם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה.
- 2 'Son of man, write thee the name of the day, even of this selfsame day; this selfsame day the king of Babylon hath invested Jerusalem.

The Infamous Dates

The dates of the happenings of the destruction of the First Temple became days of fasting. They are remembrances of terrible things. However, the Bible says they will one day become times of “joy and gladness” (Zechariah 8:19).

Zechariah 8:19 KJV Thus saith the LORD of hosts; The fast of the fourth *month*, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be to the house of Judah joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts; therefore love the truth and peace.

The fast of the 17th of Tammuz is the first of the four fast days accepted by prophetic decree. The other three are Tisha B'Av, the Fast of Gedaliah and Asara B'Tevet. Presently, these fast dates mark sad events, but Zechariah tells us the day will come when these will be days of celebration.

Shivah Asar B'Tammuz—the 17th of Tammuz

- Moses descended from Mt Sinai, saw the Israelites worshipping the Golden Calf and smashed the Tablets.

- An idol was set up in the Temple. Some believe this was done by King Menashe while some believe this was done by an enemy military leader.
- When the Babylonians were besieging Jerusalem, the Jews could no longer offer the daily sacrifices due to the lack of sheep.
- The Romans breached Jerusalem's walls in A.D. 70.
- Apostomus, a Roman military leader, burned a Torah scroll in public.

Tisha B'Av—the 9th of Av—the saddest day in the year

- This is the anniversary of the divine decree that the Jewish people had to remain in the desert for forty years until that generation died out. This was a result of their acceptance of the evil report of the ten spies. The Israelites cried all night (Numbers 13 and 14).
- The First Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.
- The Second Temple was destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70.
- In 1492, Av 9 was the day on which all Jews were forcibly expelled from Spain.
- World War I began on Av 9, leading to WWII and the Holocaust.
- In 2005, the government of Israel under Prime Minister Ariel Sharon organized pushing the Jews out of Gush Katif in the Gaza Strip. (The day originally picked by the Sharon government was 9 Av. When they discovered their mistake in choosing that day, they decided to wait until the fast was ended on the tenth.)

The four fast dates which are now mournful, shall become times of joy. Amid all the bad things happening, God was basically saying, "Here's bad, but hold on. It will turn to good."

David Baron, *Zechariah*

The fast of the ninth day of the fourth month was instituted to celebrate the taking of the city by Nebuchadnezzar in the eleventh year of Zedekiah's reign (Jer. 52:6,7). The fast of the fifth month (the blackest day of all the Jewish calendar) commemorates the destruction of both the city and the Temple (Jer. 52:12,13), and many other calamities which ... happened on this same day ... the fast of the seventh month ... was appointed for the murder of Gedaliah (2 Kings 25:25, 26; Jer. 41:1-3); the fast of the tenth commemorated the commencement of the siege of Jerusalem on the tenth day of that month in the ninth year of Zedekiah (2 Kings 25:1; Jer. 39:1; Ezek. 24:1, 2).

All these days are still observed as fasts by the Jewish nation in all parts of the earth ...

But the long night of weeping is to be followed by a morning of joy, when Jehovah shall accomplish the "good" which He has purposed and promised to Israel and Jerusalem (vers. 14, 15), and then the former troubles and calamities shall be

"forgotten" (Isa. 65:16), and the very days which commemorate them shall be turned into "joy and gladness" and *moedim tobhim*—cheerful feasts ...²⁹

The Death of the Prophet's Wife: Ezekiel Is Himself a Sign

Ezekiel 24:15-18, 20-24, 26-27 יְחִזְקִאל JPS 1917

15 Also the word of the LORD came unto me, saying:

16 'Son of man, behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke; yet neither shalt thou make lamentation nor weep, neither shall thy tears run down.

17 Sigh in silence; make no mourning for the dead, bind thy headtire upon thee, and put thy shoes upon thy feet, and cover not thine upper lip, and eat not the bread of men.'

18 So I spoke unto the people in the morning, and at even my wife died; and I did in the morning as I was commanded.

20 Then I said unto them: 'The word of the LORD came unto me, saying:

21 Speak unto the house of Israel: Thus saith the Lord GOD: Behold, I will profane My sanctuary, the pride of your power, the desire of your eyes, and the longing of your soul; and your sons and your daughters whom ye have left behind shall fall by the sword.

²⁹ David Baron, *Zechariah: A Commentary on His Visions and Prophecies* (1918; repr., Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2001), 248–249.

22 And ye shall do as I have done: ye shall not cover your upper lips, nor eat the bread of men; תאכלו.

23 and your tires shall be upon your heads, and your shoes upon your feet; ye shall not make lamentation nor weep; but ye shall pine away in your iniquities, and moan one toward another.

24 Thus shall Ezekiel be unto you a sign; according to all that he hath done shall ye do; when this cometh, then shall ye know that I am the Lord GOD. {S}

26 that in that day he that escapeth shall come unto thee, to cause thee to hear it with thine ears?

27 In that day shall thy mouth be opened together with him that is escaped, and thou shalt speak, and be no more dumb; so shalt thou be a sign unto them; and they shall know that I am the LORD.'

"he that escapeth shall come unto thee ..."

A fugitive will come with the news of Jerusalem's destruction. The prophet's mouth will be opened. He will take his place among them and receives their respect.

"so shalt thou be a sign unto them"

They will recognize that a prophet has been among them.

(In the Supplement section of the manual, see "Mother of the Pound," pages. 82–83, for a description of how this strong respect for Ezekiel endured through the centuries. See also the brief excerpt below.)

**Excerpted from Supplement Section
“Mother of the Pound”**

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My people’s long and proud history in what is now Iraq dates back some 2,500 years, to the Babylonian Exile of 586 BCE. At that time, the elite of the Jews of Israel were exiled by the god-king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylonia, who hoped to distance them from their First Temple and, ultimately, from the worship of God. The exiled Jews crossed the desert and proceeded to establish, under the spiritual leadership of the prophet Ezekiel, a thriving society in Babylonia, along the shores of the Euphrates River.

Fifty years later, Persia’s King Cyrus came to rule over Babylonia and offered the Jews a chance to return to Israel and build their Second Temple. Those who stayed along the Euphrates and those who returned to their homeland established dual, vibrant Jewish centers in Babylon and in Jerusalem. But hard times lay ahead for both groups. The Jerusalemites would lose their Temple, while the Babylonians would have to contend with a number of invaders—some beneficent and some oppressive—over several centuries.

After Moslem Arabs arrived in the seventh century to rule Iraq and establish their capital in Baghdad, most of the Babylonian Jews moved from outlying areas and settled in the city. Depending on the whim of the Islamic ruler of the time, the Jewish community either flourished or retreated into a self-protective mode. The Mongols followed and brought good fortune to the Jews at one time, misfortune at another. The Turks came next, and their effect was also mixed.

In periods when favor was shown to the Jews, a burst of progress took place; in tougher times, their advancements froze—but importantly, the culture of the Jews never deteriorated.

Pilgrimage

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Shavuot, like all Jewish holidays, begins in the evening. Since this occasion celebrates the giving of the Ten Commandments, the first evening is spent reading biblical and rabbinic passages, prayers, and remembrances of the dead. In our house, all members of the extended family gathered together, each bringing candles to light for their dead ones, and the men took turns in the readings. Women prepared coffee and meghli, an herbal tea specially brewed for this occasion that the children were allowed to drink and helped serve.

As the men continued their readings, the women exchanged family news, and were occasionally joined by one of the men taking a break from the lengthy recitations. Looking back, it seems as if the readers were conducting a celestial conversation in Hebrew and Aramaic with God and the prophets and rabbis whose writings they were reciting, while the rest of the household passed the time in down-to-earth conversation. The rituals ended considerably after midnight, leaving little time for sleep, especially for those who were planning a pilgrimage the next morning.

In Iraq during the 1930s, masses of Jewish people made the pilgrimage—not by foot but by car—to Kiffel, the burial place of our beloved prophet Ezekiel. Kiffel was a small town composed of mud houses and a few brick buildings, with narrow,

serpentine dirt alleys meandering in-between. Most of the alleys led to the small river that coursed through the town, a tributary of the Euphrates. As religious pilgrims, our focal point in Kiffel was always Ezekiel's tomb, which was situated in a little domed building, part mud and part brick, with thick walls and only a few small windows. In front of the building was a large, open square that accommodated the many cars, carts, donkeys, and other modes of transportation. This space also served as an open market in which a wide variety of vendors randomly set up shop to sell all kinds of goods, from simple bedding to cooking utensils, food products, and a myriad of other items that the arriving pilgrims might need.

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In the center of the burial building was a small, dark room containing Ezekiel's tomb. The tomb, some 8 feet long, 4 feet wide, and 6 feet high, was overlaid with several ornate covers on which Hebrew inscriptions from the Bible were embroidered. Only 6 or 8 feet separated the tomb from the walls of the room. When I visited this holy site, I was struck by the smell of wax that saturated the cool, damp air inside the building and the constantly changing patterns of light thrown off by the flickering candles.

In a custom shared by Jews and Moslems alike, all visitors to this dwelling took off their shoes before walking over the carpeted floor of the sacred room. As I entered the room, my ears caught the whispered prayers of fellow visitors. Each person would squeeze as close as possible to the tomb, kissing it and murmuring his or her prayers, petitions, and vows. The crowd moved slowly around the tomb in a counterclockwise manner. Others, most often men, stood at some distance from the tomb itself, reading psalms in hushed tones. (Something similar to our visit to Ezekiel's tomb can be experienced in Israel today at the building that shelters Rachel's tomb, on the road to Bethlehem.)³⁰

SESSION 7 ENDS HERE

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³⁰ David Kazzaz, *Mother of the Pound: Memoirs on the Life and History of the Iraqi Jews* (Brooklyn: Sepher-Hermon Press, 2001), 2, 82–83.