

The Fast of Ab and Baseless Hatred

The destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple – first by the Babylonians in 587 B.C. and later by the Romans in 70 A.D. – are marked by Jews each year at the Fast of Ab.

In years past we concentrated on observing the customs of the Jews for this day. We would turn our furniture upside down and sit and sleep on the floor, not wear shoes or even drink water - traditional signs of mourning.

But there is a hint in the scriptures about a different way of looking at this fast.

First is in **Isaiah 58**, which describes the true fast that God is looking for - a fast from self that results in brotherly love and an outpouring of kindness toward the poor and needy..

Importantly, the medieval Jewish commentator Maimonides said that all fasts would cease in the times of the Messiah:

- **Zechariah 8:19** – “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.”

For Christians, the fast can be a time of thanksgiving for the forgiveness provided by Christ’s atoning sacrifice on the cross.

The complete spiritual process that the fasts point us to includes confession, repentance, acceptance of forgiveness and joy and celebration in Christ.

Jewish tradition lists a number of events that happened on the ninth of Ab, which are listed in our memo on the Fast.

To set the stage, we can read **Jeremiah 3**. The prophet had been tasked with calling Judah to repentance, but had failed and now was forced to witness the desolation inflicted by the Babylonian army on the city of Jerusalem.

Jeremiah relays the message that Judah had seen what had happened to Israel previously because of their idolatry - destruction and exile by the Assyrians.

- **Jeremiah 3:10** - "And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly, saith the Lord."

Feigned repentance is no repentance. This is what Jesus criticized the Pharisees for. They professed piety but were unclean, ravening wolves on the inside.

Are we? That's one thing the Fast of Ab is meant to clarify. It means to lead us to repentance.

Jeremiah wrote his reflection on the destruction of Jerusalem in the book of Lamentations.

Somehow he was able to see hope in the midst of the gloom.

- **Lamentations 3:22-23** - "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness."

The rabbis pondered these scriptures and proposed an explanation of what toleration of idolatry can do to a society.

Six Reasons Jerusalem was Destroyed

1, They said the vision is for many days hence. (A lack of urgency -i.e. we don't have to deal with it now - put it on the back burner).

2. Wise men contended with fools.

3. Wise men corrected scorners. (These both were a waste of time, neglecting more important issues).

4. They said the same things befall Israel as happen to other nations. (Denying God's hand in their destiny).

5. They gave what was holy to dogs.

6. They did not endure chastisement.

These errors by the leadership led to a general spread of animosity among the people.

People harbored "baseless hatred" for one another and then a tendency to judge only by the letter of the law.

(i.e. They did not go beyond the law to find ways to compromise when they had issues between people. There was no room for mercy, only justice).

This is one reason Jesus criticized the Pharisees:

- **Matthew 23:23** - "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone."

"Baseless hatred" can only be countered by "baseless love."

This is *agape* love - undeserved love. When we recognize that God has given us baseless love, we can in turn give it to others.

Usually when we respond to someone with "baseless hatred" it's because they have marred one of our idols. They've offended us or pushed our buttons. These are all signs that we're just defending our idol!

Paul referred to "the Jerusalem which now is" - meaning the city and the Temple with its sacrifices, Law and rituals - as a contrast to the Heavenly City - "Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all." (**Galatians 4:24-26**)

Jesus said that the city of Jerusalem He taught in would be destroyed, with "not one stone left upon another." (**Matthew 24:2**) And it was indeed destroyed in 70 A.D. by the Romans.

The lesson for us here is to just let our old "Jerusalem that now is" remain destroyed, and inhabit that New Jerusalem, in which the Lamb provides the light. (**Revelation 21:23**)

Each stone torn down in the old Jerusalem represents each of us as Old Man Adam and the deception that leads to our own idolatries. In the same way, we are pictured as being built up as "living stones" in the New Jerusalem, the Temple that is the Lord's body.

- **1 Peter 2:5** - "...you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

Idolatry is forbidden in the New Jerusalem:

- **Revelation 21:27** - "And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life."

And instead of sacrifices of bulls or goats, Christ's sacrifice is sufficient. Now, Paul says to "offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, which is your spiritual service of worship."

Then we will experience that transformation of a fast into a feast - in which "joy and gladness" is the theme.