

# The Destruction of Solomon's Temple on Tisha B'Av in 586 BC

**586 BC at the end of Zedekiah's eleven-year reign**

**Two Temples** stood in succession on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem. **The First Temple** was constructed by **King Solomon**, based on detailed plans that **God** had given to **his father, King David** through the prophet Nathan. **King David** had wanted to build it **himself**, but was told that **his son** would be the one to do it (**First Kings 5:3-5**).

In the fourth year of his reign in 833 BC, **King Solomon** found **himself** at peace with his neighbors and began the construction of **the Temple**. The site chosen by **his father King David** was the top of Mount Moriah, where Abraham had once proved his readiness to offer up his dearly beloved son in obedience to **God's** command.

Tens of thousands of men were needed to perform the many tasks required for the gigantic undertaking. Men were sent to Lebanon to cut down cedar trees. Stones were hewn near the quarries, and then brought up to Moriah, there to be fitted together. In the valley of the Jordan the bronze was cast. Craftsmen were brought in from Tyre to help perfect the work. Ships set sail eastward and westward to bring the choicest materials for the adornment of **the House of God**.

It took seven years to complete **the Temple**. In the twelfth year of **his** reign, in 827 BC, **King Solomon** dedicated **the Temple** and all its contents. The ark of the Covenant was brought into **the Temple** amidst inaugural celebrations that lasted for seven days.

For the next 410 years, **the Jewish people** would bring daily offerings in this magnificent edifice, and here the nation would gather three times a year to "see and to be seen by the face of **God**." Here the divine **Presence, the Shechinah glory**, was manifest. The sages recorded ten daily miracles - such as the wind never extinguishing the fire on the altar - which attested to **God's** presence in **the Temple**. This was the archetype of the "dwelling for **God** in the physical world" that is the purpose of creation.

**Solomon's** reign was a golden era. **His** capital became the center of wisdom, riches, and splendor. Monarchs as well as ordinary people came to gaze on all the marvels to be seen there, and left wide-eyed with amazement and awe. The land of **Isra'el** developed into a great center of commerce. **The Jews** lived in peace and happiness, **every man under his vine and under his fig tree**.

At the end of **King Solomon's** life, **he** was guilty of indiscretions, unbecoming to his great stature. **God** told him **he** would be punished. After his death, the kingdom would be torn in two. And indeed, after **Solomon's** death, the ten northern tribes refused to accept his son Rehoboam as their king. In 796 BCE, the country was divided into two kingdoms: the kingdom of **Isra'el** in the north and the kingdom of **Judah** (containing **Jerusalem**) in the south.

The kings of the kingdom of **Isra'el** practiced idolatry, but so did many of the kings of the kingdom of **Judah**. **God** sent prophets repeatedly to admonish **the Jews**, but **they** refused to change **their** ways, choosing instead to deride these prophets as false messengers coming to discourage **them** with predictions of destruction.

In one awful example, in 661 BCE, the prophet **Zechariah** ben Jehoiada chastised the nation for their sins, warning them of the grave punishments that would befall **them** if **they** would not change **their** ways. Rather than accept **his** rebuke, **the nation** stoned **Zechariah** to death in **the Temple** courtyard (2 Chronicles 24:21). **The rabbis teach that this occurred on Yom Kippur, and that rather than allowing Zechariah's blood to settle into the earth, God caused it to bubble up. The people tried to cover it with earth, but it continued to seethe for the next 252 years, until the destruction of the Temple.**

As a result of the disobedient and corrupt behavior of **the Jews**, **God** did not provide either kingdom with the peace and security that the united kingdom had enjoyed under **Solomon's** reign. Their common enemy was the Assyrian empire to the north.

In 555 BCE, Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom, fell to the Assyrians, and the kingdom of **Isra'el** came to an end. Scores of thousands of the conquered people were led into captivity. They were transported to distant provinces of the Assyrian empire, and they disappeared completely. The Assyrians repopulated the land with exiles that had been uprooted from other countries, whose descendants came to be called the Samaritans or Kuttim (2 Ki 17:24). **The rabbis teach that no trace has been found of the Ten Tribes.**

The kingdom of **Judah** miraculously survived the Assyrian threat and lasted another 150 years. Their kings were not uniformly evil as the kings of **the kingdom of Isra'el** had been; they had several truly righteous monarchs - notably among them Hezekiah and Josiah - and enjoyed occasional bouts of resurgent spiritual health. But eventually, they would fall victim to **the Babylonians**.

**Jeremiah** prophesied about **the Babylonian** threat and warned **the Jews** of the terrible devastation **they** would incur if **they** did not stop worshipping idols and mistreating each other. But **his** melancholic prophecies, recorded in the book of **Jeremiah**, went largely unheeded by **the Jews**, who mocked and persecuted **him**.

Some eighteen years before the destruction of the Temple God then spoke to **Jeremiah**, saying: **Take for yourself a scroll and write upon it all the words that I have spoken to you concerning Israel and concerning Judah. . . . Perhaps the house of Judah will hear all the evil that I plan to do to them, in order that they should repent, each man of his evil way, and I will forgive their iniquity and their sin (see Df - Jehoiakim Burns Jeremiah's Scroll).**

**Jeremiah** summoned his devoted disciple, **Baruch** ben Neriah, and dictated to him a heart-rending and graphic warning of the coming doom; this prophecy eventually became known as the book of **Lamentations ("Eichah")**. In this scroll, **Jeremiah** described and mourned the devastation that **God** would wreak upon **Jerusalem** and the Holy Land: children starving; cannibalism on the part of hunger-crazed mothers, the city abandoned. **Baruch** followed **Jeremiah's** instructions. He publicly read the scroll in the Temple.

When **Jehoiakim** was informed of this event, he asked that the scroll be read to him. After hearing but a few verses, the king grabbed the scroll and callously threw it into the fireplace. **The rabbis teach that when Jeremiah was informed of the king's actions, he sat and composed another chapter that he added to the book. This book of Lamentations is read in the synagogue every year on the eve of the Ninth of Av.**

The Assyrians had long dominated the Middle East, but their power was waning. Even with the help of the Egyptians, who were getting stronger, the Assyrians were not able to fight off the Babylonians. These three empires were engaged in a power struggle, and the southern kingdom of **Judah** was caught in the middle.

In 601 BC, **Jehoiakim** tried to form an alliance with **Egypt**. The Jews thought, despite **Jeremiah's** prophecies, that this would keep them safe. But instead, the **Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar**, marched on **Judah**. He pillaged **Jerusalem** and in **the second deportation**, he took tens of thousands of **Jews** to his capital in **Babylon**; all the deportees were drawn from the upper classes, the wealthy, and craftsmen. Ordinary people were allowed to stay in **Judah**, and **Nebuchadnezzar** appointed a puppet king, **Zedekiah**, over **Judah**.

Later, **Zedekiah** was weak and foolishly courageous, and (despite **Jeremiah's** repeated admonitions not to) he tried to break free from the **Babylonians**. So **Nebuchadnezzar** marched on **Jerusalem** again. This time he would not be content with making **Judah** into a vassal state. On the tenth of Tevet, 588 BC, **Nebuchadnezzar** began the siege of **Jerusalem**.

Twenty months later, after a long siege during which hunger and epidemics ravaged the city, the city walls were breached on the ninth of Tammuz 586 BC. **King Zedekiah** tried to escape through an eighteen-mile long tunnel, but enemy soldiers who, while chasing a deer, saw **him** emerging captured **him** in the plains of Jericho. **He** was brought before **Nebuchadnezzar** in Riblah. There **Zedekiah's** sons and many other Jewish personages were slain before **his** eyes; then **his** eyes were put out, and **he** was led in chains to **Babylon**.

On the seventh day of **Av**, the chief of **Nebuchadnezzar's** army, **Nebuzaradan**, began the destruction of **Jerusalem**. The walls of **Yerushalayim** were torn down, and the royal palace and other structures in **the City** were set on fire.

The rabbis teach that when **Nebuzaradan** entered the Temple he found the blood of **Zechariah** seething. So he asked the Jews what this phenomenon meant, and they attempted to conceal the scandal, but he threatened to comb their flesh with iron combs. Therefore, they told him the truth: "There was a prophet among us who chastised us, and we killed him. For many years now his blood has not rested."

**Nebuzaradan** said, "I will appease him." He then killed the members of the **Great and Small Sanhedrins**, then he killed youths and maidens, and then schoolchildren. Altogether, he killed 940,000 people. Still the blood continued to boil, whereupon **Nebuzaradan** cried: "**Zechariah, Zechariah! I have slain the best of them; do you want all of them destroyed?**" Then, at last, the blood sank into the ground (Talmud, **Gittin 57b**).<sup>356</sup>

On the ninth day of **Av**, toward evening, after sundown, or the beginning of a new day, the **Holy Temple** was set on fire and destroyed. The fire burned for 24 hours. That is why **Jeremiah 52:12** says the tenth of **Av**.

Everything of gold and silver that still remained was carried off as loot by the **Babylonian** soldiers. All the beautiful works of art with which King Solomon had once decorated and ornamented the holy edifice were destroyed or taken away. The holy vessels of the **Temple** that could be found were brought to **Babylon**. The high priest **Seraiah** and many other high officials and priests were executed. In addition to the 940,000 people killed by **Nebuzaradan**, millions more were killed inside and outside of the city. Many thousands of the **people** that had escaped the sword were taken prisoner and led into captivity in **Babylon**, where some of their best had already preceded them. Only the poorest of the residents of **Jerusalem** were permitted to stay on to plant the vineyards and work in the fields.

Thus ended the empire of **David** and **Solomon**; thus **the magnificent City and Holy Temple** were destroyed. Thus **God** punished **His** people for deserting **Him** and **His statutes**. All this had been predicted in the Torah, and it truly came to pass with all the horror of which Moshe had warned. **Jeremiah** also promised that **the Jewish people** would return to **Jerusalem** (**Jeremiah 30:10-22, 32:15**).

For this our heart has become faint, for these things our eyes have grown dim. For **Mount Zion**, which has become desolate; foxes prowl over it. But **You, O God**, remain forever; **Your throne** endures throughout the generations. **Why do You forget us forever, forsake us so long? Restore us to You, O God, that we may be restored! Renew our days as of old** (**Lamentations 5:17-21**).

**The Second Temple** was called **Herod's Temple** and would be destroyed by the Romans 658 years later (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Mt - The Destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple on Tisha B'Av in 70 AD**).