



Asarah B'Tevet -

Remembering the Siege of Jerusalem

אם אשכחך ירושלים תשכח ימיני:

If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill! - Psalm 137:5

Asarah B'Tevet (the Tenth of Tevet) is a minor fast day (observed from sunrise to sunset) that marks the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon (in 587 BC) and the beginning of the battle that ultimately would destroy the Temple and send the Jews into the 70-year Babylonian Exile.



Nebuchadnezzar

This siege is recounted in 2 Kings 25:1-2:

“And it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month (*Tevet*), in the tenth day of the month (*Asarah B'Tevet*), that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he, and all his host, against Jerusalem, and pitched against it; and they built forts against it round about. And the city was besieged...”

The Cycle of Minor Fasts and the Fall of Jerusalem

Three years after Jerusalem was besieged, Nebuchadnezzar finally broke through the city walls (on the 17th of Tammuz) and destroyed the Temple three weeks later (on the 9th of Av). *Asarah B'Tevet* is therefore part of the cycle of fasts connected with the events surrounding the destruction of the Temple:

1. **Jerusalem Besieged** - The fast of *Asarah B'Tevet* (Tevet 10) marks the day when Nebuchadnezzar first besieged Jerusalem in 587 BC.
2. **Walls Breached** - The Fast of the 17th of Tammuz marks the date when Nebuchadnezzar broke through the walls of Jerusalem and began the 3 week campaign to destroy the Temple (marks the start of the three weeks of sorrow)
3. **Temple Destroyed** - The fast of Tish'ah B'Av (Av 9) marks the fateful day when the Temple was destroyed (marks the last day of the 3 weeks of sorrow).
4. **Exile** - The fast of Gedaliah (Tishri 3) marks the dreadful consequences of the exile and further rebellion.



Fasts Surrounding the Destruction of the Temple

Event	Fast (Tzom)
Jerusalem Besieged	10th of Tevet (Asarah B'Tevet)
Walls Breached	17th of Tammuz (Fast of Tammuz)
Temple Destroyed	9th of Av (Tisha B'Av)
Self-imposed Exile	3rd of Tishri (Tzom Gedaliah)

In Israel, *Asarah B'Tevet* also marks the day the **Kaddish** (memorial prayer) is recited for people whose date or place of death is unknown. This has resulted in a day of mourning for the many Jews who perished during the **Holocaust**.

קדיש יתום

יתגדל ויתקדש שמה רבא. (Cong. - אמן.)
 בעלמא די ברא כרעותה. וימליך מלכותה,
 בחייכון וביומיכון ובחיי דכל בית ישראל,
 ובזמן קריב. ואמרו: אמן.
 (Cong. - אמן.) יהא שמה רבא מברך לעלם
 ולעלמי עלמיא.)
 יהא שמה רבא מברך לעלם ולעלמי עלמיא.
 יתברך וישתבח ויתפאר ויתרומם ויתנשא
 ויתהדר ויתעלה ויתהלל שמה דקודשא בריך
 הוא (Cong. - בריך הוא)
 - לעלא מן כל ברכתא ושירתא תושבחתא
 ונחמתא, דאמירו בעלמא. ואמרו: אמן.
 (Cong. - אמן.)
 יהא שכמא רבא מן שמיא, וחיים עלינו ועל כל
 ישראל. ואמרו: אמן. (Cong. - אמן.)
 עושה שלום במרומיו, הוא יעשה שלום עלינו,
 ועל כל ישראל. ואמרו: אמן. (Cong. - אמן.)

The Fast of Asarah B'Tevet is viewed as such an important fast day that it is observed even if it falls on a Friday (*erev Shabbat*). Synagogue services normally include prayers of repentance (*selichot*) and the Torah portion recalls the story of the idolatry of the golden calf (Exodus 32:11 - 34:10). *Minchah* (afternoon) services include readings from Isaiah 55 and 56. Traditionally, the death of Ezra the Scribe is also remembered on Tenth of Tevet (even though he died on the 9th).



Tevet and the Septuagint

According to the Talmud, in the third century before Christ the Torah was translated into Greek during the month of Tevet. This translation of the Torah is called the “Septuagint,” a name that means “seventy” that derives from the tradition that 72 Jewish scholars were involved in the translation effort. The Septuagint is also called the LXX, the Roman Number representation for 70, the nearest round number to 72.

The 8th of Tevet is sometimes regarded as a fast day because the Septuagint is considered a work of assimilation that abandoned Jewish identity and culture for the cause of Hellenism.

Asarah B'Tevet and the Birth of Messiah

Messianic Jewish scholar Alfred Edersheim wrote that an early Aramaic source document called “The Scroll of Fasts” (i.e., Megillat Ta’anit: מְגִלַּת תַּעֲנִיָּה), which included additional commentary in medieval Hebrew (called *scholium*), may refer to the 9th of Tevet as the day of Yeshua’s birth (i.e., sometime during late December in our Gregorian calendars). Note that Jewish history regards the month of Tevet to be one of national tragedy, marking the beginning of the destruction of the Holy Temple by Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon (in 587 BC). After the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 AD, the early sages might have associated the birth of Yeshua as yet another reason for mourning the loss of the Temple on this date. (For more about the controversial date of the birth of Yeshua, see the article, “Christmas: Was Jesus really born on December 25th?” on the Hebrew4christians website.)