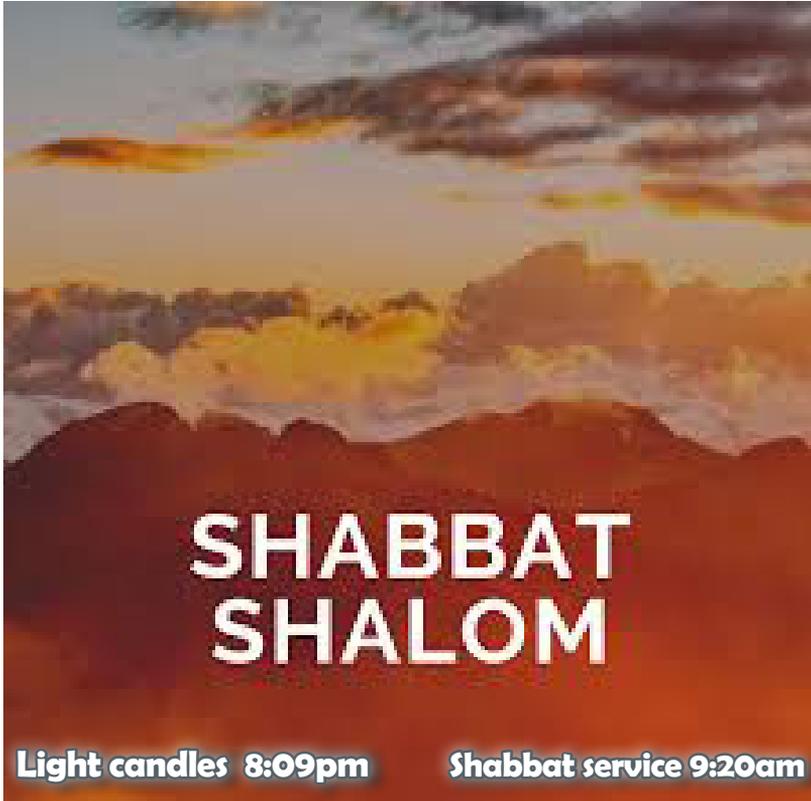




Carnegie Shul Chatter

August 6, 2020



High Holidays

As we reported in last week's Chatter, we will soon be taking reservations for seating in the Sanctuary for the High Holidays. We would love to have you join us in the Shul, but for those who are not comfortable attending in person, we will also make the services available to you on Zoom.

As always, there is no charge for High Holiday tickets or reservations. We are here for our members or any Jew who needs a place to worship on the Holidays.

A substantial portion of our income for the entire year comes from your membership dues, which are just \$100 per person, and from donations that are pledged on the High Holidays.

We hope that, even if you do not attend in person, you will still elect to make a donation on the High Holidays this year,

You are the life blood of our congregation, both spiritually and financially, and we value your continued support.

The Holy Temples

Last week we observed the solemn day of Tisha B'Av. On that date in the history of the Jewish people both the first and second Holy Temples in Jerusalem were destroyed. Most of us are familiar with the fact that the Temples were destroyed on Tisha B'Av, but many of us know little else about the Temples. This week I'd like to share an article from Chabad about the first Temple. Next week's Chatter will include an article about the second Temple.

The Destruction of the First Holy Temple

Two Temples stood in succession on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

The First Temple was constructed by King Solomon, based on detailed plans that G-d 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.



In the fourth year of his reign, 833 BCE, King Solomon found himself at peace with his neighbors and began the construction of the Temple. The site chosen by 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 G-d's command.

It was the archetype of the "dwelling for G-d in the physical world" that is the purpose of creation. 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 G-d.

It took seven years to complete the Temple. In the twelfth year of his reign, in 827 BCE, 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 G-d." Here the Divine Presence was manifest. Ten daily miracles – such as the wind never extinguishing the fire on the altar – attested to G-d's presence in the Temple. This was the archetype of the "dwelling for G-d in the physical world" that is the purpose of creation.

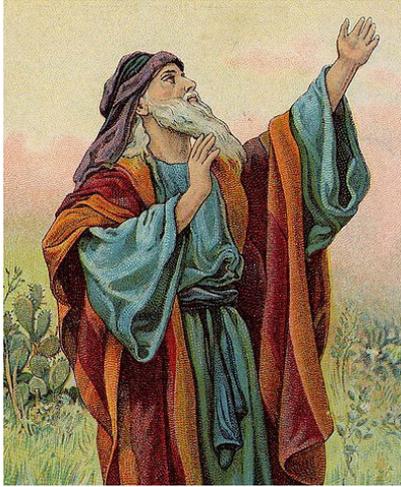
Solomon's reign was a golden era. His capital became the center of wisdom, riches, and splendor. Monarchs as well as ordinary people came to gaze on all the marvels to be seen there, and left wide-eyed with amazement and awe. The Land of Israel developed into a great center of commerce. The Jews lived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

The Beginning of the End

At the end of King Solomon's life, he was guilty of indiscretions unbefitting his great stature. G-d told him he would be punished. After his death, the kingdom would be torn in two.

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 Israel in the north and the Kingdom of Judah (containing Jerusalem) in the south.

The kings of the Kingdom of Israel practiced idolatry, but so did many of the kings of the Kingdom of Judah. G-d 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 egregious 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. Incredibly, this occurred on Yom Kippur.

Rather than allowing Zechariah's blood to settle into the earth, G-d 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 (more on this later on).

As a result of the disobedient and corrupt behavior of the Jews, G-d 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 Israel 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. 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 Israel 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.

The Book of Lamentations

Beginning in 463 BCE, Jeremiah prophesized 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, Jeremiah was imprisoned by King Jehoiakim (apparently due to his persistent prophecies foretelling the fall of Jerusalem). G-d then spoke to Jeremiah (Jeremiah ch. 36):

“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.”

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 G-d would wreak upon Jerusalem and the Holy Land: children starving; cannibalism on the part of hunger-crazed mothers, the city abandoned.

Baruch ben Neriah followed Jeremiah’s instructions. He publicly read the scroll in the Holy Temple.

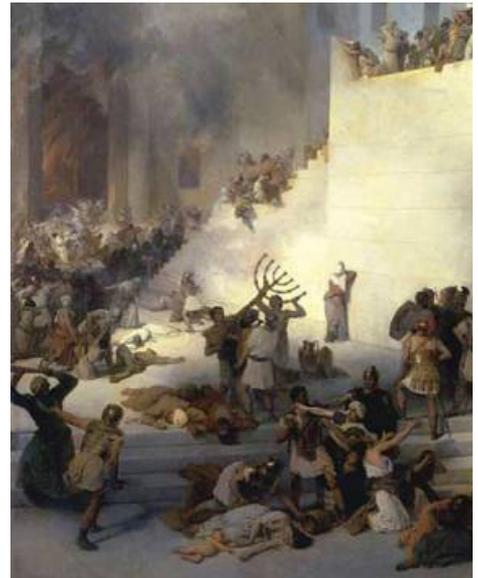
When the king was informed of this event, he asked that the scroll be read to him. After hearing but a few verses, the king grabbed the scroll and callously threw it into the fireplace.

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 Babylonians Are Coming

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

In 434 BCE, the Kingdom of Judah 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 deported 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 over Judah, Zedekiah.



But Zedekiah, though G-d fearing and righteous, was 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, 425 BCE, Nebuchadnezzar began the siege of Jerusalem.

The Destruction

Thirty months later, in the month of Tammuz, after a long siege during which hunger and epidemics ravaged the city, the city walls were breached. King Zedekiah tried to escape through an eighteen-mile long tunnel, but he was captured in the plains of Jericho by enemy soldiers who, while chasing a deer, saw him emerging. 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 the city were torn down, and the royal palace and other structures in the city were set on fire.

Our Sages say that when Nebuzaradan entered the Temple he found the blood of Zechariah seething. 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. So 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 school-children. 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?" At last the blood sank into the ground (Talmud, Gittin 57b).¹

On the ninth day of Av, toward evening, the Holy Temple was set on fire and destroyed. The fire burned for 24 hours.

Our Sages taught: When the first Holy Temple was destroyed, groups of young priests gathered with the keys to the Sanctuary in their hands. They ascended the roof and declared: "Master of the World! Since we have not merited to be trustworthy custodians, let the keys be given back to You." They then threw the keys toward Heaven. A hand emerged and received them, and the priests threw themselves into the fire (Talmud, Ta'anit 29b).

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 in the aforementioned incident, 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.

All this had been predicted in the Torah, and it came to pass with all the horror of which Moses had warned. Thus ended the empire of David and Solomon; thus the magnificent city and Holy Temple were destroyed. Thus G-d punished His people for deserting Him and His laws. All this had been predicted in the Torah, and it truly came to pass with all the horror of which Moses had warned.

Jeremiah also promised that the Jewish people would return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple. That would come to pass seventy years later.

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 G-d, remain forever; Your throne endures throughout the generations.

Why do You forget us forever, forsake us so long?

Restore us to You, O G-d, that we may be restored! Renew our days as of old.

—Lamentations 5:17-21



Recent donations to the Carnegie Shul:

Burton J. Dodick, for the yahrzeit of Brauna bas Baruch

Betty Joyce Kruman, for the yahrzeit of Joel Kruman

Lois Ash Metlika, for Mi'sheberachs for the sick