

Between the Straits (“*Bein HaMetzarim*”): Fear and Anxiety in the Month of Tammuz

The Temple Congregation Ohabai Sholom

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Lamentations 1:3

Judah has gone into exile because of misery and harsh oppression; When she settled among the nations, she found no rest; all her pursuers overtook her in the narrow places (*bein hametzarim*)

Mishna Ta’anit 4:6

Five events happened to our ancestors on the seventeenth of Tammuz and five on the ninth of Av. On the seventeenth of Tammuz: The tablets [brought down by Moses from Sinai] were shattered, the daily offering was cancelled [by the Roman authorities], the [walls] of the city [of Jerusalem] were breached, and *Apostomos* burned the Torah and placed an idol in the Temple.

“Tammuz: Mesopotamian God” (from *Encyclopaedia Britannica*)

When the cult of Tammuz spread to Assyria in the 2nd and 1st millennia BCE, the character of the god seems to have changed from that of a pastoral to that of an agricultural deity. The texts suggest that in Assyria...Tammuz was basically viewed as the power in the grain, dying when the grain was milled...The cult of Tammuz centred around two yearly festivals—one celebrating his marriage to the goddess Inanna, the other lamenting his death at the hands of demons from the netherworld...The celebrations in March-April that marked the death of the god also seem to have been dramatically performed. Many of the laments for the occasion have as a setting a procession out into the desert to the fold of the slain god. In Assyria, however, in the 7th century BCE, the ritual took place in June-July.

Ezekiel 8

3) A spirit lifted me up between heaven and earth and brought me in visions of God to Jerusalem, to the entrance of the P’nimit Gate that faces north; that was the site of the infuriating image that provokes fury

13) Next He brought me to the entrance of the north gate of the House of the Eternal, and there sat the women bewailing Tammuz. He said to me, “Have you seen, Oh mortal? You shall see even more terrible abominations than these.”

Isaiah 1

1) The prophecies of Isaiah son of Amotz, who prophesied concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. 2) Listen, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, for the Eternal has spoken: “I reared children and brought them up—and they have rebelled

against me! 3) An ox knows its owner, a donkey its master's crib; Israel does not know, My people takes no thought.

11) "What need have I of all your sacrifices?" Says the Eternal. "I am sated with burnt offerings of rams, and suet of fatlings, and blood of bulls; and I have no delight in lambs and he-goats. 12) That you come to appear before Me—Who asked that of you? Trample my courts 13) no more; Bringing oblations is futile, incense is offensive to Me. New moon and *shabbat*, proclaiming of solemnities, assemblies with iniquity, I cannot abide. 14) Your new moons and fixed season fill Me with loathing; they are become a burden to Me, I cannot endure them. 15) And when you lift up your hands, I will turn My eyes away from you; Though you pray at length, I will not listen. Your hands are stained with crime. 16) Wash yourselves clean; put your evil deeds away from My sight. Cease to do evil; 17) Learn to do good. Devote yourselves to justice; aid the wronged; uphold the rights of the orphan; defend the cause of the widow. 18) "Come, let us reach an understanding" says the Eternal. "Be your sins like crimson, they can turn snow-white; be they red as dyed wool, they can become like fleece." 19) If then, you agree and give heed, you will eat the good things of the earth; 20) But if you refuse and disobey, You will be devoured [by] the sword.—for it was the Eternal who spoke.

Jeremiah 1

4) The word of the Eternal came to me: 5) Before I created you in the womb, I selected you; Before you were born, I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet concerning the nations. 6) I replied: Oh, Eternal Lord! I don't know how to speak, for I am still a boy. 7) And the Eternal said to me: Do not say, "I am still a boy," But go wherever I send you and speak whatever I command you.

10) See, I appoint you this day over nations and kingdoms: to uproot and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant. 11) The word of the Eternal came to me: what do you see, Jeremiah? I replied: I see a branch of an almond tree (*shaked*). 12) The Eternal said to me: You have seen right, for I am watchful (*shoked*) to bring My word to pass. 13) And the word of the Eternal came to me a second time: What do you see? I replied: I see a steaming pot, tipped away from the north. 14) And the Eternal said to me: From the north shall disaster break loose upon all the inhabitants of the land! 15) For I am summoning all the peoples of the kingdoms of the north—declares the Eternal. They shall come, and shall each set up a throne before the gates of Jerusalem, against its walls roundabout, and against all the towns of Judah. 16) And I will argue my case against them for all their wickedness: they have forsaken Me and sacrificed to other gods and worshipped the works of their hands. 17) So you, gird up your loins, arise and speak to them all that I command you. Do not break down before them, lest I break you before them. 18) I make you this day a fortified city, and an iron pillar, and bronze walls against the whole land—against Judah's kings and officers, and against its priests and citizens. 19) They will attack you, but they shall not overcome you; for I am with you—declares the Eternal—to save you.