

A Time for Self-Examination and Repentance

Tammuz 17-Tisha B'Av -- “Between the Straits”

The time between Tammuz 17 and Tish B'Av is a most amazing and remarkable time, known according to Jewish Rabbis as “the time between the straits.” It has awesome, mind-boggling significance for all mankind, and especially for the saints of God, true believers and worshipers of the Messiah! Are you now “between the straits”?

William F. Dankenbring

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The middle of summer is a very interesting time of year to the Jews because during this time the three-week time period of national mourning between Tammuz 17 and the 9th of Av occurs – called “Time Between the Straits”.

Grant R. Jeffrey in July 1990, wrote a book entitled *Armageddon, Appointment with Destiny*. Even though the book is over 27 years old, it has a very good summary of the events that happened during the time of Tammuz 17 and the 9th of Av.

It is interesting that there are *four* fast days mentioned in the Old Testament. In Zechariah 8:19 “fast of—(1) the 4th month (Tammuz), (2) the 5th month (AV), (3) of the 7th month (Gedaliah), (4) of the 10th month shall be joy and gladness and cheerful feasts to the house of Judah, therefore love truth and peace”. Today these days are of mourning and seeking repentance. In the world tomorrow, these days will be turned into joy and rejoicing. Why do the Jews fast on these days now in this generation?

The 17th of Tammuz Woes

The 17th of Tammuz in Jewish history was the day when Moses broke the tablets of the law when he saw the idolatry of the golden calf, when he descended from Mount Sinai. The flagrant idolatry

and sexual excess became a day of mourning in Israel. If Moses had not interceded, God would have wiped out Israel for their profligacy.

Interestingly on this same date in 586-7 B.C., king Nebuchadnezzar of the Babylonian Empire attacked Jerusalem in the days of king Zedekiah of Judah, and the Babylonian army broke through the walls of Jerusalem and caused the daily sacrifice to cease.

Again, on this date in 70 A.D., the Roman armies under Titus and Vespasian attacked Jerusalem and the Temple Mount and forced the priests to stop the daily sacrifice.

The 9th of Av Disasters

Similarly, on the 9th day of Av, known as Tish B'Av, when the twelve spies returned from scouting out the land of Canaan, and brought back a faithless, evil report, causing the children of Israel to lose heart and faith, and to curse Moses, God punished them for their disobedience and lack of faith, and declared that generation would perish in the wilderness – they would wander for 40 years, a year for each day the spies had scouted out the land (Numbers 14:34).

This date also became a day of national mourning for the Jews. It also is a day of infamy. On this date, in 586-7 B.C., king Nebuchadnezzar burned down the Temple of God in Jerusalem. Then again, on the very same day in 70 A.D., the Temple was again destroyed by Roman Emperor Titus son of Vespasian.

In fact, over the centuries and millennia, no less than eight of the greatest disasters witnessed in the history of Israel have occurred on the same anniversary date. This remarkable fact is unprecedented in the history of nations. Tish B'Av has seen more disasters than any other single date in history. Notice!

- 1) The twelve spies return with their report on the 9th day of Av. You can read about this in Numbers 14.
- 2) The destruction of Solomon's temple by the Babylonians in 587 B.C.
- 3) The destruction of the second temple by the Romans in A.D.70
- 4) The Roman army plowed Jerusalem with salt in A.D. 71
- 5) The destruction of Simeon Bar Kochba's army in 135 A.D.
- 6) England expelled all of the Jews in 1290 A.D.
- 7) Spain expelled all of the Jews in 1492. During the reign of Queen Isabella/King Ferdinand, the Roman Catholic Inquisition came to the shores of Spain. The Jews as a whole did not accept the Roman Catholic Christ, so 800,000 Jews had to leave penniless and find another home. From this point onward the Spanish empire's fortunes began to decrease. God said, "I

will bless them that bless you, and curse those who curse you” to Israel (Gen. 12:3). The nations which cursed Israel have all likewise suffered calamities as a result.

- 8) World War I was declared on Av 9; in 1914. Russia mobilized for WWI and launched persecutions against the Jews in Eastern Russia.

Grant Jeffrey writes, “On the ninth of Av, August 1, 1914, as the Jews fasted and mourned, World War I was declared. This war involved the *greatest military struggle in history to this point as ‘nation shall rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom’* (Matthew 24:7). As Russia mobilized its army, this triggered persecution and attacks against the Jews in eastern Russia and forced many of them to emigrate to the Holy Land. These Russian and eastern European Jewish immigrants joined the native born ‘Sabras’ in building the agricultural settlements and infrastructure of the embryonic state. This immigration helped set the stage for the dramatic events of the creation of Israel in 1948.”

Improbable Odds

All these traumatic events occurred on the 9th day of Av. The odds that all eight events would occur by chance alone on the 9th of Av, rather than by God’s design, is equal to one chance in 863 zillion!

Writes Grant Jeffrey, “The phenomenon of eight major historical disasters affecting one nation over thirty-five centuries happening on the same anniversary day is totally unprecedented in human history. As a student of history for the last twenty years I can assure you that I have looked, without success, for any such pattern of historical anniversaries or ‘coincidences’ in the history of any nation other than Israel, God’s Chosen People.” He continues:

“In fact, if any of my readers are mathematically inclined, I would suggest that they check the probability that these eight historical tragedies could have occurred by chance rather than by God’s foreknowledge and sovereignty. Because there are 365 days in a year, the chance that even a second significant historical tragedy could occur by chance alone on the anniversary date of a previous tragedy on a given day, say, the ninth day of Av (August), is 1 chance in 365. The odds against a third similar event occurring on the exact same day, the ninth day of Av, is:

$$1 \text{ times } 365 \text{ times } 365 = 133,225$$

“In other words, the odds against only three of these disasters occurring by chance alone on the ninth day of Av is only:

$$1 \text{ Chance in } 133,225$$

“The odds that all eight events would occur by chance alone on the ninth day of Av, rather than by God’s design, is equal to:

$$1 \times 365 \times 365 \times 365 \times 365 \times 365 \times 365 \times 365 \times 365 =$$

one chance in 863,078,009,300,000,000

or

1 Chance in 863 Zillion

“It is important to remember that the above probability analysis only considers eight of the anniversary events, those which occurred on the ninth day of the biblical month Av. In all, there are more than forty anniversary events in Israel’s history that we are examining in this chapter. If we were to add these additional dates to our probability figures, the numbers would be so astronomically high that no rational person could conclude that these events have happened on their respective dates by chance alone.

“The consideration of these facts will lead many to believe, with this author, that the only rational explanation for this phenomenon is that God has His hand upon the Jews and Israel and that the Bible, which reveals these staggering, historically verified events, is truly the inspired Word of God” (Grant Jeffrey, *Armageddon: Appointment with Destiny*, p.80-81).

The Golden Calf Folly

In the Book of Our Heritage by Eliyahu Kitov, volume 3, “The Month of Tammuz”, we discover a lot of insight into what happened – the tragedies and disasters – on these two months including our forefathers starting with Moses at Sinai. There are lessons that we need to learn from that time and those events. Says Kitov, “Tammuz is the fourth month counting from Nisan and is referred to as such in Scripture. On the third of Tammuz, Joshua caused the sun and the moon to stop and their light remained for 36 consecutive hours so that Israel could exact retribution from her enemies (Joshua 10:12-13).” God also fought for Israel as great meteorites fell from heaven at that time.

Because of the dire tragedies that occurred Biblically between 17 Tammuz and 9 Av, this is a time to reflect on sin and punishment, iniquity and retribution – not only on ancient Israel, or the Jews, but also concerning our own PERSONAL lives.

There are days when all Israel fasts because of the catastrophes and tribulations that occurred on those dates. The purpose of these days of remembrance is to bring our attention back to the consequences of sin, to further awaken us to our own lives and our own sins, and to stir our hearts toward repentance by recalling our own misdeeds as well as those of our ancestors.

The apostle Paul wrote, concerning the “Wilderness Generation,” “But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness” (I Cor.10:5). “Now these things became our EXAMPLES, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. And do not become idolaters as were some of them . . . nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did . . . nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted . . . nor complain as some of them also complained” (verses 6-10).

Paul went on, “Now all these things happened to them as EXAMPLES, and they were written for OUR admonition, upon whom the ends of the world have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (I Cor.10:11-12).

These things were recorded for OUR learning (Rom.15:4).

By remembering these misdeeds, which we continue to repeat and which bring on similar calamities from generation to generation, we are motivated to return to the proper path of life. Leviticus 26:40 says, “They shall confess their sins and the *sins of their ancestors*.” Each person should use these days to engage in self-examination, to examine HISTORY, and to learn the lessons of the past, and to repent.

We read in Jonah 3:10 of Nineveh, “God **saw their actions (deeds)**”— they stopped going the wrong direction and humbled themselves before God and obeyed his commands (the purpose of fasting is to bring one to repent).

The Mishnah actually records five calamitous events occurring on Tammuz 17th.

- 1) Moses smashes the 1st two tablets of God’s commands when he saw the golden calf and the idolatrous actions of Israel
- 2) The offering of the daily sacrifice was suspended
- 3) The (wall of the) city was breached
- 4) Apustamus the wicked burned the Torah
- 5) An idol was placed inside the Sanctuary

Says Eliyahu Kitov, Moses told the people “after 40 days have passed, in the beginning of the sixth hour, I shall return and bring you the Torah”. According to Eliyahu Kitov, the faith which the people had in Moses and in his every word was greater than that man would normally place even in something which he sees or knows himself. They assumed the day on which Moses ascended the mountain was the first of the 40 days to be counted. Rather, the day he ascended was to be counted as a “partial” day, so he was to return on the 17th of Tammuz.

Satan Creates Doubt

So when it appeared that Moses had told them something that had failed to come true, and by their reckoning he did not return at the appointed time, they became confused. They lost their faith and suddenly were plagued with doubts and fears, losing control of their senses.

Says Kitov, “On the sixteenth of Tammuz Satan came and brought with him darkness and confusion. . . . He told them [on Tammuz 16], ‘The sixth [hour] has come [i.e., he should have already returned],’ but they paid no attention to him. ‘He is dead!’ [Satan said],’ but they paid no attention to him. He showed them the image of his [Moses’] deathbed (*Shabbos* 89a)” (vol.3, p.899). At this point, “they became like people who witness the collapse of Heaven and earth and lose control of their senses” (*ibid.*). So they said to Aaron, “make us gods to go before us” (Exo.32:1).

How was it possible for a nation who had witnessed a vision of God, who heard Him speak, could turn to idolatry so quickly? Says Kitov, “How was it possible that almost the entire nation should be ensnared by a common transgression without becoming divided into different groups with differing point of views and how did it happen that not one member of the tribe of Levi was drawn to worship the false god? . . .

“The matter may be understood as follows: In the preparation for receiving the Torah God purified their souls and they accepted the Torah as if they were a ‘single man with a single heart.’ But when they built the golden calf, God forbid that we should think that they were all united in doing so; they were in fact divided into many different groups.”

“When they approached Aaron and told him: *Make us a god*, almost all of them meant it for the sake of Heaven. They wanted to fully participate so that through their actions, a power equivalent to Moshe—who would *go before them*—would emerge.

“When the calf emerged as a result of the sorcery of those among them who had been steeped in idolatry, their differences of opinion came to the fore. The few among them who had been fervent practitioners of idolatry instantly fell back into their pagan habits. They were warned but paid no attention.

“Others, more numerous than the first group, maintained a vestige of their previous inclination to worship idols, for the desire to worship pagan cults had not been totally erased from within them. But the awesome effect of the revelation at Mount Sinai and the wonders that they had witnessed previous to that event, and temporarily sublimated that inclination. Their old inclination was now reawakened and they watched as others worshiped the idol, while they stood on the side and rejoiced.

“Still others were stunned by the awful scene they witnessed and ridiculed those who worshiped the calf as well as those who were steadfast in their faith. They saw that both factions were cursing each other and they said: ‘Both groups are *equally* wrong,’ and they denigrated both.

“And the righteous among Israel, when they saw the terrible state of their brethren, became despondent and lost hope that their brothers might repent. And even if they were to repent, they could not believe that their repentance would be accepted and that a nation of *kohanim* and a holy people could be formed from them. So they addressed their brethren and said: ‘You are not our brothers. You shall not be accounted among the congregation of God.’”

Even the Righteous

The factions were divided in their attitude toward the golden calf; nevertheless, God described their actions to Moshe as if they were all guilty of idolatry.

Why were they all guilty? “Why then were the righteous so indignant? Why did they say there was no hope for those who had worshipped the idol? It could only be *they too ascribed a measure of substance to the idol!*” (page 901). Even the righteous were wrong, and sinned, in that they did not understand that no matter how grievous and great the mistake, their brethren could be forgiven.

Moshe descended from the mountain the next day, and called to the people: Whoever is for God, come to me, the tribe of Levi alone came forward. Levi differed from the righteous of the other tribes only in that they were completely obedient to Moshe like a disciplined army awaiting command of their leader. Moses restored order by judging all who had sinned intentionally and punished them.

Kitov says, “The number of people who actually worshiped the calf was a small minority of the nation. When they left Egypt, the verse states that they numbered 600,000 (Numbers 11:21) men on foot. When the shekels which they donated to the Tabernacle were counted, three months after the episode of the golden calf, their numbers had grown to 603,350. Thus, the number of people killed during the episode of the golden calf was less than the number of men who reached the age of twenty between Nisan (when they left Egypt) and Tishrei (when the census using the *shekalim* was taken)” (page 903).

Kitov asks, “Why, then, did He, Who sees into the future and foresaw all the generations, bring it about that this generation of knowledge be culpable of these serious transgressions?”

The Way of Repentance

“The answer is that it was done to *teach the way of repentance* to the multitudes. Israel had only now become a nation. From the beginning, the Shechinah (presence of God) dwelled in their midst, the people ate bread provided by Heaven and drank water from a spring [Christ] which flowed miraculously” p.904).

A long, perilous road filled with tests of poverty and wealth, of servitude and freedom lay before them which could stretch for thousands of years before they would reach the end of time. Numerous pitfalls on the road down through the centuries could cause Israel to stumble and sin resulting in rebellion and wrong acts. God gave us this example, of His forgiving the ancient Israelites, to demonstrate His love and mercy.

No matter what we have done, or what sin we have committed, there is still forgiveness possible. God wants no one to ever say: “We have become immersed in sin and the road to repentance is therefore blocked before us and we are destined to be lost forever.” Says Kitov, “God taught them—and all subsequent generations—the path of return to Him. . . No generation could commit a more serious sin than the generation that dwelled in the desert, yet even they were returned by God and transformed into His inheritance” (p.905).

Israel was led astray by Satan who deceived them. As Kitov says, “They were not deserving of having their Evil Inclination vanquish them and it would not have been conceivable were it not an edict from the King—issued so as to provide an opening for those who seek to repent. If a sinner says: ‘I will not repent for He will not accept me’—he is told: ‘Go and learn from the episode of the calf where they denied God but were accepted by Him when they repented.’”

Indeed, God always holds out His hand to Israel, His people, pleading for them to repent – there is room for repentance and mercy. God declares, “Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD, Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isaiah 1:18).

The major lessons of the 17 of Tammuz transgression and resulting calamity, by our forefathers, is that **THERE IS STILL ROOM FOR REPENTANCE!** There is still time for our wicked, evil and iniquitous modern generation to repent and find the way open to return to God!

As James wrote, “Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. . . . Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up” (James 4:7-10).

Seeing troubles mounting around the world, and economic disaster, and growing terrorism, many are worried, anxious, and discouraged. You must stop Satan from getting a hold of your mind and convincing you to lose hope and give up. Fear God and keep His commandments. Discouragement is one of the devil’s frequent and foremost wiles. As long as we have breath we can praise and glorify God with a repentant attitude and spirit. God does not tolerate rebellion.

As long as we repent, nothing is too great for God to forgive or conquer. God works all things together for good to them that love Him, to them that are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28-39). Even our sins can work together for our good when we repent of them, because they teach us

lessons of what not to follow or do, in the future. A man that was deceived and admits he has been deceived has thereby learned something. He knows NOW what not to believe!

The Month of Av

The month of Av concludes this period of mourning and fasting which commemorates the destruction of the first and second Temples. Bar Kochba's rebellion in 135 A.D. ended in disaster and on the ninth of Av, Jerusalem was plowed under with salt like a field.

The Jews were also expelled from Spain in 1492 by Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand under the Roman Catholic Inquisition. No Jew would be allowed to set foot on Spanish soil after that. On the 9th of Av all the Spanish Jews were left defenseless and in a state of captivity and annihilation with only a pitiful remnant surviving.

“Go Up!”

The calamities and woes of the ninth of Av trace back to the generation in the wilderness, again, who lost faith and refused to go in to conquer the Promised Land, after a negative report by ten of the twelve spies sent in to spy out the land.

God told Israel to GO UP AND INHABIT the Promised Land which He gave to them, but they did not believe Him (Deut.1:21-32). God described it as abundant and flowing with milk and honey (Exo.3:17). Israel sent 12 of their mighty leaders (no ordinary men) from each of the tribes to spy out the land. But the land was only hospitable to those who are strong and great in faith. Ten of the spies brought back a very negative report.

“And they gave the children of Israel a BAD report of the land which they had spied out, saying, ‘The land through which we have gone as spies is a land that DEVOURS its inhabitants, and all the men we saw in it are men of great stature. There we saw the GIANTS [Nephilim] . . . and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so were we in their sight’” (Num.13:31-33).

They slandered the land. They denied God's words. They lost faith, even though these were the same men who stood before God at Mount Sinai, who experienced the deliverance from Egypt and the miracle at the Red Sea, and had been fed manna from heaven! The people wept when they heard the report, which *slandered* the land, and the people *slandered* God. Because the people believed the negative reports, they doubted God's promise and wept all night. Because of their disbelief and statement that they would be better off dying in the wilderness, God told Moses to tell them, “How long shall I bear with this evil congregation who complain against Me? . . .

“Say to them, ‘As I live,’ says the LORD, ‘just as you have spoken in My hearing, so will I do to you: The carcasses of you who have complained against Me shall fall in the wilderness,, all of you who were numbered, according to your entire number, from twenty years old and above’” (Num.14:27-29).

God told them that they *wept for no reason*—“your own mouth has condemned you and your generation will die in the wilderness.” This was on “Tish B’ Av” that God set upon them as a time (date) of weeping throughout all their generations. So it has been throughout history that calamities have befallen them on this specific day.

How Could It Happen?

That generation that came up to the Holy Land was filled with knowledge having seen with their own eyes the great wonders, signs and miracles performed by God in Egypt and at the Red Sea. They had perceived God and heard His voice speaking to them. Israel received daily sustenance from Divine bread from the heavens, and water from the Divine Rock. Israel had been led and protected, a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night—a generation to whom God was near. He dwelt among them and destroyed their enemies. He forgave their sins multiple times. They were a nation whose every desire had been met and fulfilled, yet they lost their faith and abandoned hope saying “God hates us!” Without faith no one will inherit the kingdom of God. We have to walk by faith, not by sight. Those who walk in faith, walk in certainty.

How a wise nation can speak so foolishly is puzzling. How could this happen? First look at human nature. Not all men merit that this nearness to God is beneficial. Not everyone achieves a sense of goodness from being constantly near to God. Some get anxious and afraid to be too close to God and do not seek to cleave to God’s nearness due to fear they will not measure up to His standard. They know that God is a holy God, just, righteous, and will not requite the wicked. Israel spent 210 years in Egypt in servitude. The last 86 of these years Israel endured brutal oppression before being redeemed. They did not enjoy presence under God’s divine wings until they departed from Egypt. When ready to leave Egypt, Israel received the command to keep Passover, and then circumcision. God required that they (a) strengthen their faith and trust in Him leading to obedience and (b) to refrain from rebelling against Him by giving them several tests. They had to trust Him DAY BY DAY looking to Him, asking for their needs.

Efes – “Only”

When Israel spied out the land they knew the Amorites were powerful. They knew the descendants of the giants were famous for their power. The spies added a single word when they returned to report to Israel which did them all in. The Hebrew word was *efes*, which means “Only,” or “But.” Israel got a case of the “Buts.” They needed to “get off their butts”!

Eliyahu Kitov declares, “One who walks with faith, walks with certainty.” But he goes on, “When the spies returned and reported to Moshe and the entire people, they spoke truthfully and supplied no new information. . . . But the spies, in their report, added a superfluous word: *Efes* – ‘only,’ and said: *Efes – the nation that inhabits the land is powerful*” – Numbers 13:28. “They were held culpable because they added the word, which brought those listening to conclude that there was no alternative but to fail in any confrontation. . . . But when the spies added the restrictive *efes* they revealed the FEAR that was in their own hearts” (Kitov, p.945).

They should have had FAITH IN GOD! All creation is the handiwork of God – the stars in the galaxies, the teeming life on planet Earth, the clouds in the sky, the dry land, mountains and prairies, the magnificent oceans, rivers and lakes – ALL was made by God, is kept functioning smoothly by God and upheld by His mighty power. Even the fragile wild flowers, the tiny hummingbird, the Monarch butterfly, all are the works of Almighty God.

He who created it all, and created mankind – how can He not also deliver His people when they are in danger?

The spies said, “*efes* (ONLY/BUT)” the nations that inhabit the land are powerful” (Numbers 13:28). The spies were blameable and culpable BECAUSE they added that word. If they had just said the truth that the nations that inhabit the land are powerful, the listeners would have said, “We are even more powerful.” If they had reported that the Amalekites dwelt there, then those listening would have said, “Well we will destroy them just as we destroyed them when we came out of Egypt.” With reports of giants living in the land, the people should have responded, “They will fall before us just like the great nations who dwelt in the land of Moab, Seir and Ammon.”

However, adding the restrictive word *efes* (but/except) the spies revealed the fear that was in their own hearts. They believed God was capable of doing miracles, and able to deliver the powerful into the hands of the weak and the few, but *they did not believe they were worthy of these miracles and that they would occur for them.*

They had to rely, not on the natural order of things, but on miracles. Natural order only appears to be a natural order. God sustains everything. There is nothing natural about what we call natural and take for granted. All creation is unnatural. What is natural is “nothingness.”

It took the creative acts and power of God to bring into existence Creation and it is all sustained by His almighty power, love, and law. In that sense, everything around us is a miracle of God. All life is surrounded with miracles.

The spies who went into the Promised Land did not reveal the full extent of their fears, they only alluded to them. CALEB then raised his voice of FAITH affirming that Israel was God’s chosen nation and that they were capable of destroying the greatest and most powerful nations despite the size.

“The Miraculous Is Natural”

Says Eliyahu Kitov, “For Israel, the miraculous is natural, for God desires them even when they sin. A father never becomes disgusted with his son nor does he hate him even when he is angry” (p.945-6).

Caleb declared, “Let us ascend and take possession of it” (Numbers 13:30). Caleb had *faith* in his heart. Israel responded by fully revealing the *fear* that tormented their souls saying, “we cannot ascend against them for they are stronger than we are.”

In truth and reality, their words were directed against God. God desires Israel even when she has sinned. A father does not hate his son even when he is angry with the son for some action or choice, but the father yearns for the son to repent. The spies knew that when bringing them out of Egypt God had used his mighty hand, the attributes of divine judgment. But by saying “but” they indicated or claimed that they were not or did not feel worthy of His miracles. A small step of faith separated the Israelites from the Egyptians, on Passover night. The same held true at the Red Sea.

But at the entrance of Canaan, Israel thought to themselves, “Do we have the right to still expect that God will continue to use His mighty hand to save us whose lives are filled with transgressions, forever? How can we expect more miracles in our behalf and maintain this kind of faith?” Rather than look at the Word of God and His promises, they looked upon their own “worth,” or lack thereof – and felt unworthy of God’s continuing miracles, and lost their faith. God did not wipe them out, but He did punish them for 40 years of wandering in the wilderness until that generation died.

Faith and the Kingdom of God

The kingdom of God is like the Promised Land (Num. 14:7-8). The Israelites were not worthy to be supreme among all nations or enter and inherit the Promised Land. They avoided the yoke of freedom by not accepting responsibility. Sin is part and parcel the lives of those who refuse to overcome.

Do we have the faith to endure to the end? Do we have the FAITH to enter the Kingdom? The Moffatt translation says, “From the days of John the Baptist until now, they are *pressing into the Realm of heaven – these eager souls are taking it by force*” (Matt.11:12).

The apostle Paul declared, “For the love of money is the root of all evil. . . . Shun that, O man of God, aim at integrity, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, modesty; *fight in the good fight of the faith, secure that life eternal to which you were called*” (I Tim.6:10-12, Moffatt).

Jesus Christ, Yeshua, declared, “The *conqueror* will obtain this, and I will be his God, and he shall be my son; but as for the craven, the faithless, the abominable, as for murderers, the immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and liars of all kinds – their lot is the lake that blazes with fire and brimstone” (Revelation 21:7-8).

Says Kitov of that generation, “Indeed, they were unworthy of ascending into the Land. Moshe had told the spies when they set out: *Be strong and take from the fruit of the Land (Bemidbar 13:20)*. One who desires to taste the fruits and sate himself from the goodness of the Land [or the KINGDOM of God] must first gird himself with strength and might. When the spies returned weak

and fearful, they were truly unworthy of being seen as inheritors of the Land and would instead die in the wilderness” (p.947).

What about you? Is your faith in God and His Word real, solid, tangible, palpable, forceful, dynamic, strong?

The Israelites, having lost faith, wept for no real reason. So for this God ordained that the ninth of Av would be a remembrance of the calamity resulting from lack of faith and forceful conviction. Says Kitov, “ ‘You wept for no reason, and I shall set [this day] for you as a time of weeping throughout the generations (*Ta’anis* 29b)” (p.948).

If we are to enter God’s Kingdom, we must also “Be strong; take hold” (Numbers 13:20). The apostle Paul explains: “To conclude. Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might; put on God’s armour, so as to be able to stand against the stratagems of the devil. for we have to struggle, not with blood and flesh but with the angelic Rulers, the angelic Authorities, the potentates of the dark present, the spirit-forces of evil in the heavenly sphere. So take God’s armour so that you may be able to make a stand upon the evil day and hold your ground by overcoming all the foe” (Eph.6:10-13, Moffatt).

The 40 Years of Divine Punishment

During the entire period of 40 years of wandering, not a single Israelite – not one – died of natural causes, nor were they weakened by old age. The only deaths that occurred in the wilderness were the result of transgressions.

Says Kitov, “Commencing from the first Tish B’Av when the decree was issued, the date was fixed as a time of mourning and eulogies throughout their stay in the wilderness, for all those who reached the age of sixty died on Tish B’Av” (p.950).

The nation was made up of a large number of elderly men and women, widows of the 600,000 men of military age who had been affected by the divine decree. Even those who did die in the wilderness as a result of the decree of God died only when they reached the age of 60. God foresaw that Israel was destined to commit that sin of the spies and knew they would die in the wilderness as a result. So he distributed the frequency of their births while they were still in Egypt.

An equal number of males were born each year. There were 603,550 men who left Egypt. About 15,000 were born every year, and every year an equal number died of 15,000. When this decree was issued forth commencing on the 9th day of Av that time was fixed as a time of mourning and eulogies throughout the stay in the Wilderness every year. For all those males who reached the age of 60 died on Tish B’Av each year. Females were not affected. Each year on the eve of Tish B’Av the proclamation was read calling on all people to go out and dig graves and lie down in them. In the morning a second proclamation was read, saying that the living should separate themselves from the dead. The living were

to arise, and they would count the people. There would be approximately 15,000 that were missing (dead).

Thus they would do each year for 40 years on every Tish B'Av. All who had not reached the age of 60 would remain alive. Those who had passed the age of 60 would die during the night and be covered in the morning. Those who were still alive would get up, and fill in the empty grave. None were to be left open during the year. The people would say, maybe God would have mercy on the remnant and rescind His decree before the coming year.

This is the Midrash account of the decree that was issued in the second year and applicable for 37 years. God had said that corresponding to the number of days that they spied out the land, 40 days, a year for a day, they would bear their sins for 40 years (Numbers 13:34). The two years that passed before the decree were counted as part of the 40 years and the men began to die only on the 3rd year of Tish B'Av.

On the last year no men died, for God remitted the final payment. This left some 45,000 men who were subject to the decree that were not affected by it. On the last year of Tish B'Av of Israel's stay in the wilderness, God remanded the penalty of 15,000 that should have died that year. The remaining 30,000, that is 14,700 died in the plague, and 250 died with Korah in the aftermath of Korah's rebellion against Moses leadership. Then another 15,000 died when Israel went out to fight the Amalekites, and Nemerites in defiance of Moses' decree not to go out because God wasn't with them (they went out to fight any way). This is all a test of faith and trust in God.

God's Warning to Us

As believers in and followers of the Messiah, Yeshua, we are today traversing a formidable wilderness – a spiritual wilderness. We are in the wilderness today, struggling, striving, and enduring until we get to the Kingdom (The Promised Land) of God.

In order to enter God's Kingdom, it is required of us that we hold fast the faith in confidence and rejoicing in joy in the hope of the kingdom always until the end comes.

The apostle Paul wrote, "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness, where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, and saw My works forty years. Therefore I was angry with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart, and they have not known My ways.' So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest'" (Heb.3:7-11).

Paul continued, "BEWARE, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another DAILY, while it is called 'Today,' lest any of you be *hardened by the deceitfulness of sin*. For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end" (Heb.3:12-14).

We need to learn to commit everything to God and place our faith in Him. Beware, lest there be an evil heart of unbelief in any of you. Doubt causes departure from the living God. Exhort, encourage one another daily lest any of you become hardened and calloused to the **deceitfulness** of sin.

The devil, a liar and the father of liars, will tell you that God will not forgive you, because your sin is too great and He doesn't really love you. Trust and have faith in God. Tell the devil, "Get you hence, Satan, be-gone! God is greater than my sin and weakness! I can conquer THROUGH CHRIST, who died for me, and who is now at the right hand of God!"

As Paul declared: "I CAN DO ALL THINGS THROUGH CHRIST WHO STRENGTHENS ME" (Phil.4:13). Or, as the Amplified Bible says, "Yet amid all these things WE ARE MORE THAN CONQUERORS through Him Who loved us" (Rom.8:37).

Paul goes on: "Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us FEAR LEST any of you seem to come short of it. For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it" (Heb.4:1-2).

Paul continues, "Let us therefore be DILIGENT to enter that rest, lest anyone FALL according to the same example of DISOBEDIENCE. For the Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb.4:11-12).

We have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our faith steadfast to the end. For 40 years God was angry with those that sinned, lost their faith, and rebelled which is as the sin of witchcraft and idolatry. Those who did not obey did not enter His rest. God told them to go in and conquer the land. They said "No, it is too hard, we can't do it." They could not enter in because of unbelief. Unbelief led to disobedience. Disobedience is sin. The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23).

What about Us, Brethren?

To receive the promise of entering God's Kingdom, we need to learn the lessons of Tammuz 17 and Tish B'Av – the "time between the straits." We must EXAMINE ourselves, and REPENT of our sins.

This is a good time to do so, leading up to the Fall Festival of Tabernacles. From this time through the month of Elul, until Yom Kippur, is a time for self-reflection, self-examination, and putting away all sin.

The apostle Paul declares,, “EXAMINE YOURSELVES as to whether you are IN THE FAITH. TEST YOURSELVES. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? – unless you are reprobates” (II Cor.13:5).

As Moffatt puts it, Paul says to us, “*Put yourselves to the proof*, not me; test yourselves, to see if you are in the faith. Do you not understand that Christ Jesus is within you? Otherwise you must be failures.”

Or as the Amplified Parallel Bible says: “Examine and test and evaluate your own selves to see whether you are holding to your faith and showing the proper fruits of it. Test and prove yourselves [not Christ]. Do you not yourselves realize and know [thoroughly by an ever-increasing experience] that Jesus Christ is in you – unless you are [counterfeits] disapproved on trial and rejected?”

What about it?

Will you enter His rest? Do you combine faith in God with obedience to His Word? Are you learning the lessons of the “times between the straits”?