

Why Fast for Events of the Past?

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Zecharia Chapter 7 זכריה פרק ז

וַיְהִי בַשָּׁנָה אַרְבַּע לְדָרְיוֹשׁ הַמֶּלֶךְ הָיָה דְבַר ה' אֶל זְכַרְיָה בְּאַרְבַּעָה לַחֹדֶשׁ הַתְּשַׁעִי בְּכֶסֶלֹוּ: וַיִּשְׁלַח בַּיַּת אֶל שַׂר אֶצֶר וְרָגַם מֶלֶךְ וְאַנְשָׁיו לַחֲלוֹת אֶת פְּנֵי ה': לֵאמֹר אֶל הַכֹּהֲנִים אֲשֶׁר לְבַיַּת ה' צְבָאוֹת וְאֶל הַנְּבִיאִים לֵאמֹר הֲאֵבַכֶּה בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַחֲמִשִּׁי הַזֶּה כְּאֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי זֶה כַּמָּה שָׁנִים: פ וַיְהִי דְבַר ה' צְבָאוֹת אֵלַי לֵאמֹר: אֲמַר אֶל כָּל עַם הָאָרֶץ וְאֶל הַכֹּהֲנִים לֵאמֹר כִּי צַמְתֶּם וְסָפוֹד בַּחֲמִישִׁי וּבִשְׁבִיעִי וְזֶה שִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה הַצּוֹם צַמְתִּנִּי אָנִי: וְכִי תֹאכְלוּ וְכִי תִשְׁתּוּ הֲלוֹא אֲתֶם הָאֹכְלִים וְאֲתֶם הַשְׂתִּים: הֲלוֹא אֶת הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר קָרָא ה' בְּיַד הַנְּבִיאִים הָרְאִשְׁנִים בְּהַיּוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם יִשְׁבֹּת וּשְׁלֹוּהָ וְעָרִיָה סָבִיבָתֶיהָ וְהַנֶּגֶב וְהַשְּׁפֵלָה יֵשֵׁב: פ וַיְהִי דְבַר ה' אֶל זְכַרְיָה לֵאמֹר: כֹּה אָמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת לֵאמֹר מִשְׁפַּט אֲמַת שְׁפֹטוּ וְחֹסֵד וְרַחֲמִים עֲשׂוּ אִישׁ אֶת אָחִיו: וְאַל־מָנָה וְיִתּוֹם גֵּר וְעַנִּי אֶל תַּעֲשִׁקוּ וְרַעַת אִישׁ אָחִיו אֶל תַּחֲשִׁבוּ בְּלִבְבְּכֶם: וְיִמְאַנּוּ לְהַקְשִׁיב וְיִתְּנוּ כְּתָף סָרְתָה וְאַזְנֵיהֶם הִכְבִּידוּ מִשְׁמוֹעַ: וְלִבָּם שָׁמוּ שְׁמִיר מִשְׁמוֹעַ אֶת הַתּוֹרָה וְאֶת הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר שָׁלַח ה' צְבָאוֹת בְּרוּחוֹ בְּיַד הַנְּבִיאִים הָרְאִשְׁנִים וַיְהִי קֶצֶף גְּדוֹל מֵאֵת ה' צְבָאוֹת: וַיְהִי כְּאֲשֶׁר קָרָא וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ כֵּן יִקְרָאוּ וְלֹא אֲשַׁמְעֵם אָמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת: וְאַסְעֲרֶם עַל כָּל הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדְעוּם וְהָאָרֶץ נִשְׁמָה אַחֲרֵיהֶם מֵעַבֵּר וּמִשָּׁב וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ אֶרֶץ חֲמָדָה לְשִׁמָּה: פ

1 And it came to pass in the fourth year of king Darius, that the word of the LORD came unto Zechariah in the fourth day of the ninth month, even in Chislew; 2 When Bethel-sarezer, and Regem-melech and his men, had sent to entreat the favour of the LORD, 3 and to speak unto the priests of the house of the LORD of hosts, and to the prophets, saying: 'Should I weep in the fifth month, separating myself, as I have done these so many years?' {P} 4 Then came the word of the LORD of hosts unto me, saying: 5 'Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying: When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and in the seventh month, even these seventy years, did ye at all fast unto Me, even to Me? 6 And when ye eat, and when ye drink, are ye not they that eat, and they that drink? 7 Should ye not hearken to the words which the LORD hath proclaimed by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity, and the cities thereof round about her, and the South and the Lowland were inhabited?' {P} 8 And the word of the LORD came unto Zechariah, saying: 9 'Thus hath the LORD of hosts spoken, saying: Execute true judgment, and show mercy and compassion every man to his brother; 10 and oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you devise evil against his brother in your heart. 11 But they refused to attend, and turned a stubborn shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they might not hear. 12 Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the LORD of hosts had sent by His spirit by the hand of the former prophets; therefore came there great wrath from the LORD of hosts. 13 And it came to pass that, as He called, and they would not hear; so they shall call, and I will not hear, said the LORD of hosts; 14 but I will scatter them with a whirlwind among all the nations whom they have not known. Thus the land was desolate after them, so that no man passed through nor returned; for they laid the pleasant land desolate.' {P}

Zecharia 8:18-19 זכריה פרק ח, יח-יט

וַיְהִי דְבַר ה' צְבָאוֹת אֵלַי לֵאמֹר: כֹּה אָמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת צוֹם הַרְבִּיעִי וְצוֹם הַחֲמִישִׁי וְצוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וְצוֹם הָעֲשִׂירִי יִהְיֶה לְבַיַּת יְהוּדָה לְשִׂשׂוֹן וּלְשִׂמְחָה וּלְמַעֲדִים טוֹבִים וְהָאֲמַת וְהַשְּׁלוֹם אָהָבוּ: פ

18 And the word of the LORD of hosts came unto me, saying: 19 'Thus saith the LORD of hosts: The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be to the house of Judah joy and gladness, and cheerful seasons; therefore love ye truth and peace.

מתני' על ששה חדשים השלוחין יוצאין: על ניסן מפני הפסח, על אב מפני התענית, על אלול מפני ראש השנה, על תשרי מפני תקנת המועדות, על כסליו מפני חטבה, ועל אדר מפני הפורים.

MISHNA In six months of the year the messengers go out^N from the court in Jerusalem to report throughout Eretz Yisrael and the Diaspora which day was established as the New Moon, the thirtieth or the thirty-first day since the previous New Moon.^M They go out in the month of Nisan, due to Passover, so that people will know on which day to celebrate it; in the month of Av, due to the fast of the Ninth of Av; in Elul, due to Rosh HaShana, which begins thirty days after the New Moon of Elul; in Tishrei, due to the need to establish the correct dates on which to celebrate the Festivals of Tishrei, i.e., Yom Kippur and Sukkot; in Kislev, due to Hanukkah;^N and in Adar, due to Purim.

ובשעה בית המקדש קיים - יוצאין אף על אייר מפני פסח קטן.

And when the Temple was standing, messengers would also go out in the month of Iyyar due to small Passover,^N i.e., second Pesah, which occurs on the fourteenth of Iyyar. This holiday allowed those who were ritually impure or on a distant journey on the fourteenth of Nisan, and therefore incapable of bringing the Paschal lamb at that time, to bring their Paschal lamb a month later.

GEMARA

אמר רב חנא בר ביזנא אמר רבי שמעון חסידא: מאי דכתיב: "כה אמר ה' צבאות צום הרביעי וצום החמישי וצום השביעי וצום העשירי יהיה לבית יהודה לששון ולשמחה?" קרי להו "צום" וקרי להו "ששון ושמחה". בזמן שיש שלום - יהיו לששון ולשמחה; אין שלום - צום!

As Rav Hana bar Bizna said^N that Rabbi Shimon Hasida said: What is the meaning of that which is written: "Thus said the Lord of hosts: The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall become times of joy and gladness, and cheerful seasons, to the house of Judah" (Zechariah 8:19). It calls them days of "fast" and it calls them "times of joy and gladness."^N How so? When there is peace in the world, they will be times of joy and gladness, on which eulogies and fasting are forbidden; but when there is no peace, they are days of fasting. In a time when there is no peace, why are messengers not sent out also for the fourth and tenth months, so that people can know when to observe the fasts?

אמר רב פפא: הכי קאמר: בזמן שיש שלום - יהיו לששון ולשמחה; יש שמד - צום; אין שמד ואין שלום, רצו - מתענין, רצו - אין מתענין.

Rav Pappa said that this is what it is saying: When there is peace in the world and the Temple is standing, these days will be times of joy and gladness; when there is persecution^N and troubles for the Jewish people, they are days of fasting; and when there is no persecution but still no peace, neither particular troubles nor consolation for Israel, the halakha is as follows: If people wish, they fast,^M and if they wish, they do not fast. Since there is no absolute obligation to fast, messengers are not sent out for these months.^M

אי הכי תשעה באב נמי! אמר רב פפא:
שאני תשעה באב, הואיל והוכפלו בו
צרות. דאמר טר: בתשעה באב חרב הבית
בראשונה ובשניה, ונלכדה ביתר, ונחרשה
העיר.

The Gemara asks: If so, the Ninth of Av should also be like the other fast days, that sometimes it is observed and sometimes not, depending upon the wishes of the community at the time. Why does the mishna state that messengers go out for the month of Av? Rav Pappa said: The Ninth of Av is different, since the calamities that occurred on that day were multiplied. As the Master said: On the Ninth of Av the Temple was destroyed, both the first one and the second one; on this day the city of Beitar was captured; and on this day the city of Jerusalem was plowed over by the enemies of the Jewish people, as a sign that it would never be rebuilt. Consequently, the fast of the Ninth of Av is obligatory, and not optional like the other fasts. Messengers are consequently sent out so that people will know when to fast.

משנה תענית Mishnah, Taanit

פרק שני

משנה א'

סדר תעניות כיצד? מוציאין את המכה לרחוקה
ש' עיר ונותנין אפר מקלה על גבי המכה ובראש
הנשיא ובראש אב בית דין, וכ' אָחַד וְאָחַד נוֹמְן
בְּרֵאשׁוֹ. הַזֶּקֶן שֶׁבָּהֶן אֹמֵר לְפָנֵיהֶן דְּבָרֵי כְבוֹשִׁין:
אֲחִינוּ, לֹא נֶאֱמַר בְּאֲנָשֵׁי נִינְוָה, וַיֵּרָא הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת
שָׁקֶם וְאֶת תַּעֲנִיתָם, אָתָּא (וינה ג. ו): „וַיֵּרָא הָאֱלֹהִים
אֶת מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם, כִּי שָׁבוּ מִדְּרָכָם הַרְעָה“; וּבִשְׂפָלָה הוּא
אֹמֵר (יואל ב. יג): „וְקָרְעוּ לְבַבְכֶם וְאַל בְּגִדֵיכֶם“.

משנה ב'

עמדו בתפלה. מורידין לפני המכה זקן ורגיל, ויש
לו בנים וביתו ריקם, כדי שיהא לבו שלם בתפלה.
ואומר לפניהם עשרים וארבע ברכות: שמונה
עשרה שבקד יום, ומוסיף עליהן עוד שש.