

Tish'a b'Av during the 2nd Temple - Were We BI-POLAR?

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This year, because Tish'a b'Av falls on Shabbat, we will be Feasting instead of Fasting. The Tish'a b'Av Fast is pushed off until Sunday. What about Tish'a b'Av during the Second Temple Period? Did the Jewish People fast during those 420 years that the Second Temple stood?

The Prophet Zecharia, who lived at the beginning of the Second Temple Period, states (ch. 8) that all of the 4 fasts, commemorating the Destruction of the Temple shall become days of joyous festivals and gladness. Was this prophecy fulfilled during the Second Temple Period?

Rabbenu Chananel states that indeed this prophecy WAS fulfilled during the Second Temple Period. The Rambam agrees that the 17th of Tammuz, Tzom Gadalia, and Asara b'Tevet were celebrated as Yamim Tovim during the Second Temple Period. However, Rambam insists that Tish'a b'Av, unlike the other 3 fasts, continued to be a day of fasting and mourning during the entire Second Temple period.

How can there be a disagreement between Rabbenu Chananel and the Rambam over the historical fact of the observance of Tish'a b'Av during the Second Temple Period?

Either people fasted or feasted on Tish'a b'Av during the time of the second Beit

HaMikdash. All one has to do is to check the historical and oral religious tradition of that time.

The Talmud in Eruvin 13 states that when great Torah scholars disagree a Heavenly Voice proclaims, "These and those are both the Words of the Living G-d." How can we apply this concept to resolve the difference of opinion between Rabbenu Chananel and the Rambam?

The answer is that Rabbenu Chananel and the Rambam were talking about two different groups of people. The Book of Ezra states that when the Second Temple was built, the old generation, who remembered the First Temple were weeping. The young generation who never saw the First Temple were rejoicing. Talk about a Split Personality!

The Talmud in Yoma states that the Second Temple was vastly inferior to the First Temple. The Second Temple lacked the revealed Divine Presence, the Holy Ark that contained the Tablets of the Ten Commandments, and there was no king of the Davidic Dynasty. Also the Urim v'Tumim the Kohen Gadol wore on his chest was 'disconnected'.

Why were these elements missing from the Second Beit HaMikdash? The answer is found in Ezra ch. 2. When Ezra called on the Jews to make Aliya from Babylon (Boro Park?) and Persia, only 42,360 responded to his call. The millions of Jews remained behind in exile. There were not even enough Kohanim and Levites to serve in the new Temple. What a Chilul Hashem! Therefore, the Second Temple was pale and inferior by comparison with the First Temple.

Thus, the old generation who remembered the splendid glory of the First Temple were weeping when they saw the inferior quality of the Second Temple. The young generation, who did not have the memory of the glory of the First Temple, rejoiced at the sight of the Second Temple.

Therefore, both the Rambam and Rabbenu Chananel are correct. Rabbenu Chananel is referring to the young generation, who rejoiced and feasted on Tish'a b'Av during the Second Temple Period. They grew up in the Babylonian Exile and never experienced the glories of the First Temple. For them, the Second Temple was the zenith of joy, so they educated their children that Tish'a b'Av is now a day of joy and celebration.

However, the Rambam is referring to the older generation who continued to fast and mourn during the Second Temple period on Tish'a b'Av, because they remembered the splendor of the First Temple, which the Second Temple lacked. They taught their children to continue to mourn and fast on Tish'a b'Av.

Thus, both the Rabbenu Chananel and the Rambam are correct because they are referring to different segments of the Jewish People during the Second Temple Period.

This was the sad and tragic situation during the Second Temple Period. The Jewish People were engaged in BI-POLAR behavior, because so few of them returned to Eretz Yisrael and refused to answer Ezra's plea to make ALIYA.

What a powerful message to Diaspora

Jewry today. Ezra's call of 2400 years ago is still reverberating in our ears. Jews, please come home! 🌸