

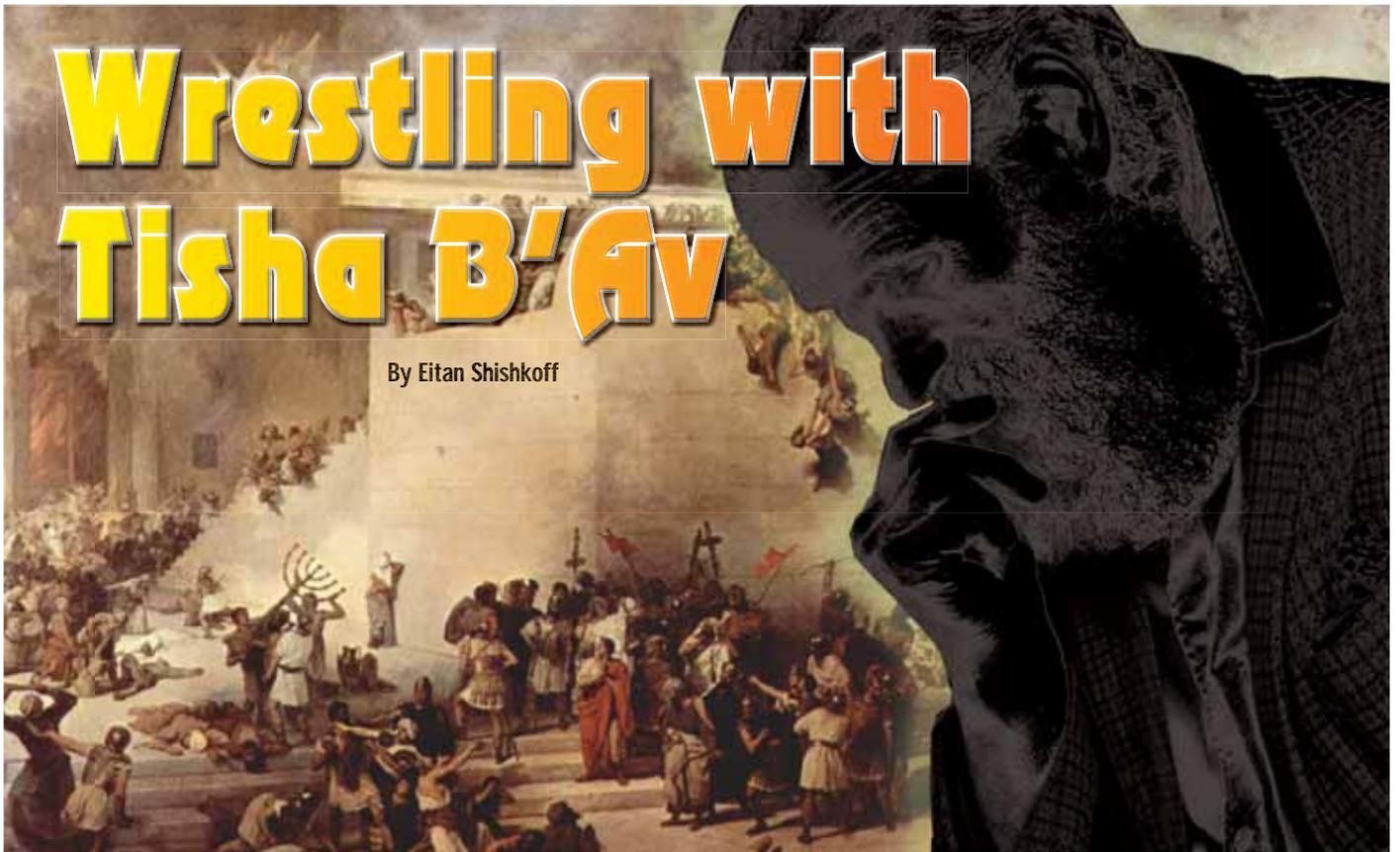


Oasis

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Wrestling with Tisha B'Av

By Eitan Shishkoff



How does God redeem tragedy? Is there a higher plan? Can terrible events and situations ever contain the seeds of a greater good? How can we respond so as to move forward with God's work in the earth? How can we guard against disillusionment? How can we encourage others who are walking through nightmares of sickness and devastation?

The annual observance of the Ninth of Av holds some answers to these questions. The ninth day of the month of Av generally falls in July or August. In 2009, it's July 30. This day, ironically, has been the date of many of Jewish history's most tragic events. Tisha B'Av has become a watchword that represents death, tragedy, expulsion, destruction. On this day there are solemn prayers, mourning and contemplation. Here are a few of the immense disasters that befell our people, all on the same calendar day:

The First Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians, on the 9th of Av in 586 BCE. It was accompanied by the slaughter of an estimated 250,000 Jews. The Second Temple was destroyed by the Romans on the 9th of Av in 70 CE; and subsequently the Jews experienced world-wide dispersion. The expulsion of the Jews from England took place on the 9th of Av in 1290, and they did not return for nearly 400 years. Ferdinand and Isabella may have knowingly chosen the 9th of Av, 1492, as the deadline for all of the Jews in Spain to leave or be executed. And while not strictly Jewish, the carnage of World War I (which began on the 9th of Av, 1914) paved the way for the upheavals that brought about the Holocaust.

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Jeremiah's Lamentations and God's Compassions

One key to unlock the redeeming message inside Tisha B'Av is the eventual outcome of these catastrophes. After the First Temple was dismantled by the Babylonians, the nation received the enduring prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, which are coming true in our lifetime, more than 2500 years later! **"So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth. It shall not return to me void, but it shall accomplish what I please."** (Isaiah 55:11)

Another key is found in the Book of Lamentations. Traditionally read on the Ninth of Av, the book is named for the anguished mourning and soul-searching provoked by the Babylonian conquest. Though his name is not mentioned, scholars agree that the prophet Jeremiah authored these five tear-soaked chapters. *Eicha*, the first word, sets the mood. It's a term of intense, poignant emphasis. How much! How unbearable! **"How lonely sits the city that was full of people. (1:1) How the Lord has covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in His anger. (2:1) How the gold has become dim...the stones of the sanctuary are scattered." (4:1)**

Jeremiah is said to have been an eyewitness to Jerusalem's destruction. Lamentations carries an overwhelming sense of loss - grieving both the end of Jerusalem's glorious Temple and the onset of forced exile. Yet in the midst of Lamentations God inserts assurance of His goodness, love and faithfulness. As if written for everyone who has walked through the valley of the shadow of death, these words are the Lord's response to the struggling, disillusioned victim of tragedy. His answer cuts off the lies that God is fickle, unavailable or uncaring.

"Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness. 'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul, 'Therefore I hope in Him.' The Lord is good to those who wait for Him." (Lamentations 3:22-25)

He Gives Beauty for Ashes

In God's vocabulary resurrection is a theme that must follow destruction and death. The Amidah, the backbone prayer of Jewish liturgy, declares repeatedly that God is He who "gives life to the dead." Ezekiel's immortal vision of the Valley of Dry Bones comes immediately to mind. And when we consider the emergence of Israel out of the ashes of the Holocaust, the prophecy's imagery is positively arresting.

The story of Israel is clearly one of death and resurrection. The message of Tisha B'Av is not that all ends in death, destruction and despair. It is rather that, instead of giving us the judgment our rebellion deserves, the God of Abraham is merciful and will not abandon us to ourselves. His compassions are new every morning!

Even while warning Jerusalem of impending doom Jeremiah preached about the return from exile and the rebirth of the land. How could he possibly agonize over imminent war, rape and famine - and believe for joyful restoration at the same time? We could use some of Jeremiah's prophetic insight and trust in God's goodness! Here's a sample, recorded from a prison cell: **"Call to me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know...Behold, I will bring...health and healing...the abundance of peace and truth. And I will cause the captives of Judah and the captives of Israel to return and will rebuild those places as at the first."** (Jeremiah 33:3,6,7)

Our Destiny is to Carry Out Jeremiah's Prophecies

I believe the Spirit of God so inhabited and energized Jeremiah that he manifested both aspects of God's character...justice and mercy. What's more, we are the direct inheritors and beneficiaries of his prophecies. As such, we have a profound destiny to carry out the rest of Jeremiah's prophecies.

The question is not; can we find the anti-Semitism reflected in Tisha B'Av? The world has plenty, and yes, it's growing. The question is: what can we do to bring beauty for ashes? I want my life to count for Israel's redemption. The heaviness of our past is all around us. The threats of the present are reported by the hour. It takes no faith, courage or love of God to sink into depression over our oppressors - past or present. But laying hold of the grace of God to witness resurrection - that's what will make a difference in the history that's about to be written.

I once tried to raise a man from the dead. Though I didn't succeed, I'm not at all sorry I attempted it. I wish with all my heart he had gotten up. But at least I battled while weeping. Challenging the weight of unbelief, the wall that separates our people from the life of God in Messiah, is like raising a dead person. It's no stroll in the park. There's a tidal wave of intimidation facing us. It's gut-wrenching, bloody, sweaty, grimy personal and corporate spiritual warfare.

Our response to Tisha B'Av has to be "No way! I'm not going to stand by passively while the devil beats up on my people, denying them entrance to the Kingdom of God, when the whole thing started here in Israel in the first place." At the same time that sense of righteous, bold indignation has to be matched by an entirely radical submission to God. **"You are not your own, you were bought with a price." (1 Corinthians 6:19,20) "As the Father has sent me, I also send you." (John 20:21)** We are bought; we are sent. We bow before our Maker/Master, yielding our all to Him because He is worthy.

There is a resurrection taking place. We have been chosen to be active participants. For that reason we can say, even on Tisha B'Av, **"You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; you have put off my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness. To the end that my glory may sing praise unto you and not be silent."** (Psalm 30:11,12) ✨

Editor: Martin Shoub

Graphic Design: David Coddington
P.O.Box 1018 Kiryat Yam 29109, Israel
Tel: +972 (4) 877-7921, Fax: +972 (4) 875-7792
E-mail: ohalei@netvision.net.il
Stateside: c/o Tikkun Ministries
P.O. Box 2997 Gaithersburg, MD 20886-2997

www.tents-of-mercy.org



Our Vision:

Tents of Mercy - to participate in today's historic exodus by assisting Israel's returning exiles.

No spectators in the Kingdom - to be a worshiping, sharing community based in homes, equipping each one for service.

Come back Yeshua - to welcome Yeshua home to Israel, by restoring the Jewish roots of New Covenant faith.



A Voice for Those Who

The killing of unborn children through abortion is a great evil in Israel today. In ancient Israel the prophets issued many stinging indictments against the rulers and the people, but none described the anguish in God's heart so much as Jeremiah's pronouncements against those who made their children "pass through the fire" to Molech and Baal. Against this sin and no other we read of God's bewilderment over the depravity of His people. Three times the Word of the Lord declares against this sin: **"which I did not command them, nor did it come into My mind that they should do this abomination" (Jeremiah 32:35, see also 7:31, 19:5).** The hardness of Israel's heart was no surprise to God (see, Deut. 31:16-21), but that they would do such wickedness evidently was.

Today we all recoil in horror at the idea of parents sacrificing their children on fiery altars, yet every day thousands and thousands of children are being killed in their mothers' wombs through abortions. In Israel today, a country of only 7,000,000 people, each year approximately 140,000 babies are born, but

40 -50,000 babies are aborted.¹ That is approximately 25% of all babies conceived!

lowed suit. Guy and Tali Cohen had known since their congregation's inception that this was a ministry God was asking them to pursue. Their focus had understandably been directed towards establishing the new congregation in Akko (see, "Harvest of Asher," *Oasis* June '08), but a personal tragedy compelled them to implement the Lord's call.

A young woman and her boyfriend discovered they were going to have a baby. Both their families were connected to Guy and Tali's family; both their families pressured the young woman to have an abortion. Wherever the young woman turned, the advice was the same, "you are too young to have a child, abort it." The young man was in favor of keeping the child, but because of the social pressure upon her the young woman went ahead with the abortion. Because of their conflict over the issue the young couple parted ways and as a result, the dejected and despondent boyfriend committed suicide.

Two lives were lost, two families were broken. Guy and Tali only heard about the situation after the tragedy occurred, but it shook them. "What might have been the outcome if we could have talked to her?" If only someone had offered this woman the facts and had presented an alternative to the delusion that abortion is an easy way out of difficult circumstances. Perhaps the joy that a baby brings would have replaced the sorrow both families now suffer. "If only" is not an effective

way to respond to events. Action to change the future is the way to react to tragedies in the past. Guy and Tali knew they needed to provide their city with an alternative to the abortion lobby.

ENTER VERED

Vered made Aliyah 13 years ago. She began her new life in the Kriyot and became part of the Tents of Mercy congregation. Almost immediately after coming to Israel, Vered heard God's voice calling her to intercede for Akko. She did not know where the city was. She had never heard of Akko before, but in the Spirit she saw an old city with walls and gates on Israel's coast. Vered researched Akko's history and discovered that from ancient times it had been an important Phoenician seaport. Allotted to the tribe of Asher, Akko and all the seacoast north of Mt. Carmel remained Phoenician territory until the Assyrian invasions and the destruction of the Northern Kingdom. Here too, children were offered in sacrifice to the Phoenician god, Baal.

Despite the wicked history of the city, Vered sensed God's intention was to show mercy to Akko, much like He did with Nineveh as recorded by the prophet Jonah. Seven years after moving to Israel, Vered at last visited the city. She now saw with her physical eyes what she had been seeing in the spirit. She met Guy and Tali and recognized two kindred souls burdened to see God's kingdom grow in this city that had known so much darkness. Four years ago Vered made Akko her permanent home and joined Katzir Asher Congregation.

Before moving to Akko Vered had been one of three ladies that pioneered the pro-life work at Tents of Mercy. It was only natural for Guy and Tali to recruit her as the new pro-life worker. So last December, Guy gave up his office and a "Lilach" pregnancy counseling office took its place. "Lilach" means "from me to you" in Hebrew. It is also the word for the Lilac flower. There are seven other Lilach counseling centers around the country - all under the auspices of Be'ad Chaim (Israel's pro-life organization). To date seven women have chosen to keep their babies after meeting with Vered.



Vered at the entrance to the "Lilach" office

Tents of Mercy opened a pro-life counseling office in 1999. Last December our daughter congregation, Katzir Asher fol-

Who Cannot Speak

By Marty Shoub

OFFERING A HELPING HAND

Vered's counseling strategy is to give women the facts about pre-natal development and the consequences of abortion for the mother. Of course the goal is to

a baby bed, changing table, stroller, and bath delivered to her house once the baby is born. We also provide monthly diapers/formula for the first year of her child's life and visit her on a regular basis."²



Vered showing off her baby supplies

see the baby saved, but Vered does not concentrate on the morality issue. Vered explained that most women she meets have many unanswered questions and appreciate the opportunity to talk about their pregnancy without feeling pressured to make a decision to abort their baby. "We offer physical support, but emotional support is really what women are seeking. They have so many questions and no one else to talk to – everyone else tells them, 'just abort the baby.'"

Should women decide to keep their baby, Be'ad Chaim can offer practical assistance through their Operation Moses program: "Operation Moses gives every mother who considered an abortion (but kept the baby) all that she needs for the first year of his or her life. This includes

and had two previous abortions. She was pregnant again. Ronit was embarrassed to say why she wanted to talk to Vered but in the course of their conversation Vered understood Ronit was contemplating having yet another abortion. After talking with Vered, Ronit decided to keep the baby. She has been enrolled in Operation Moses and is due sometime in the fall. Vered and Ronit stay in touch and she is trying to find her way back to following Yeshua. Please pray for her.

Please also pray for Vered. It is no surprise that in a city where so much innocent blood has been shed over the millennia that the spiritual forces of darkness actively oppose those involved in this work. Vered asked if folks would pray for her protection, for wisdom in counseling and that God would raise up a local team of intercessors to support the work. Vered suffers from debilitating back pain; please lift this matter up in prayer as well.

Akko is a city with a tragic history. Held under the pagan influence of the Phoenicians, it became the gateway for invaders into Israel from Alexander the Great to the European Crusaders. Babies were sacrificed here and over the years wars and invasions have stained the ground with blood. Despite all this cruelty God is raising up a congregation of believers in Akko that stand for life. That women now have a place to support them in choosing life for their unborn babies is a hopeful sign that Akko's history is about to change. ✡

ONE WOMAN'S STORY

Seemingly out of the blue, Ronit³ called Vered and asked to talk. She had been a believer some 10 years ago but had left the community of faith. She was now a single mother with a young child

Footnotes:

1. Be'ad Chaim figures for 2007
2. Excerpt from Be'ad Chaim website (www.beadchaim.com/operation-moses)
3. Not her real name

EITAN SHISHKOFF'S USA SUMMER ITINERARY

July 25th:	AM Service at Shomair Yisrael in Knoxville, TN
July 26th:	AM & PM Services at Christ Chapel in Florence, AL
July 31st & Aug. 1st:	"A Time to Honor" Promise Keepers' Conference in Boulder, CO
Aug. 1st & 2nd:	PM & AM Services at Resurrection Fellowship in Loveland, CO
Aug. 6th:	PM Service at The Remnant in La Grange, TX
Aug. 9th:	AM Service at Knollwood Church in Mobile, AL
Aug. 15th:	AM Services at Beltway Baptist Church in Abilene, TX
Aug. 22nd:	PM Service at Glory of Zion in Denton, TX
Aug. 23rd:	AM Service at Shady Grove Church in Grand Prairie, TX