

The Scriptures record awesome events, some miraculous and some catastrophic that occurred during the fourth Hebrew month of Tammuz.

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| 3 Tammuz - circa 1277 BCE | Joshua stopped the sun (10:1-15) |
| 5 Tammuz - 592 BCE | Ezekiel received the powerful Chariot vision (1:4-26) |
| 9 " - 586 BCE | The Babylonians breached the walls of Jerusalem, leading to the destruction of the First Temple. |
| 17 " - 70 CE | Walls of Jerusalem breached by the Romans, destruction of the Second Temple. |

17 Tammuz - 1312 BCE (1372 years before) The Sin of the Golden Calf. Only 40 days after the revelation of God and the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai.

In modern Israeli history two dramatic events come to mind:-

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| 6 Tammuz, 1976 | The Entebbe Rescue of hijacked Jewish and Israeli passengers held hostage in Uganda. |
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During Tammuz 2005 The evacuation of Gush Katif - a bloc of 17 Israeli communities in the Gaza area. 8,600 residents were removed from their homes. [Established on legally owned land in 1968, Gush Katif developed unique greenhouses, using advanced technology, that produced bug-free, organic vegetables and herbs. These made up 15% of the agricultural exports of the State of Israel. The combined assets in Gush Katif were estimated at \$23 billion. A great sacrifice for the sake of peace, which sadly has proved to be a mistake.]

As we see, historically - looking to the past - Tammuz has been a very dramatic and challenging month. Looking to the future, it also is significant prophetically. The book of Ezekiel begins in the fourth month of Tammuz.

In the thirtieth year, on the fifth day of the fourth month, while I was among the exiles by the K'var River, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God... I looked and saw a windy storm approaching from the north and a huge cloud with flashing fire, glowing brightly all around with the color of gleaming amber from within the fire. (1:1-5, CJB)

Ezekiel is noted for emphasizing God's process and purpose of salvation in the history of the world, and for His unfolding plan of Redemption into the future. In Ezekiel's time many of the people of Israel had again fallen into idolatry.

"Then he brought me to the door of the gate of the Lord's house which was toward the north; and, behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz." (8:14).

Who is this 'god' Tammuz that is mentioned? The meaning of the name is positive, 'faithful, true son'. He is considered to be the son of the infamous warrior Nimrod, king of Assyria-Mesopotamia, who instigated the building of the Tower of Babel, and Ishtar, a Babylonian goddess.

"Ishtar was closely associated with lions, [a scepter], and with the eight-pointed star, which was often used as one of her symbols. In the Babylonian [pantheon](#), she "was the divine personification of the planet [Venus](#)." (Wikipedia)

Tammuz was worshipped in Babylon as the god of food and vegetation. After his demise, 6 days of mourning were observed annually, beginning with the Summer Solstice. The idolatrous worship of this 'vegetation' god no doubt was connected with the growth and harvesting of good crops and the provision of food. In Israel, the growth of the 7 Species, the main crops of the Land, depend completely on favorable weather conditions - rain at the right time, etc. Sadly we see that, rather than depending in faith on the God of Israel for this provision, the women, predominantly it seems, look to Tammuz!

The question then arises: Why award a Biblical Hebrew month the name of a Babylonian god? There may be other reasons, but what comes to my mind is that it should act as a warning and a reminder of the temptations and dangers of idolatry - and, perhaps, also to remember the good and positive meaning of "faithful, true son" and that we need to be true and faithful children of the One true God and not turn to the false gods that fallen man replaces Him with. It is significant, then, that God gave Ezekiel his powerful and prophetic visions in the month of Tammuz - the month of wars and sorrow, the destruction of the Temples and of exile. In the face of pain and loss, God reveals His constant faithfulness and loving-kindness to His people with the promise of salvation and future redemption.

What about in our time; today? This year Rosh Chodesh Tammuz begins on the eve of 25 June. On 17 Tammuz (11 July) there is a fast day. *Tzom Tammuz* - the Fast of Tammuz, which is the day Moses broke the first tablets of the Torah that were written by God Himself, when he saw the people worshipping the Golden Calf. Three weeks of mourning begin, called *Bein HaMitzarim* - Between the Narrow Straits, which is a time of reflective sorrow. This ends on the 9 Av, 1 August, with the Fast of the Ninth of Av - the day when the 10 spies returned with their evil report and the generation of Israelites were condemned to wander and die in the wilderness; and also the date of the destruction of the Second Temple! The Shabbat after this fast is called *Shabbat Nachamu*, the Sabbath of Comfort. The *haftarah* is read from Isaiah (40:1-26) that speaks of "comforting" the Jewish people for their suffering. It is the first of seven haftarahs of consolation leading up to the holiday of Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish civil New Year.

Are there reasons we should we fast? We can reflect on God's purposes for mankind at Creation and yet see the brokenness of man and the distortion of the image in which we are created.

Also, while we remember past losses with sorrow and recognize the present reality of life's imperfection, we can understand the fact that we are still awaiting full redemption. God's Kingdom is now but not yet! All is not dark and gloomy for we look forward in faith, filled with joyous hope in the promises of God and in His faithfulness.

To partly quote from an article, *The Sorrow of Tammuz*, by First Fruits of Zion:

The name Tammuz serves as a reminder of our dark past as a people. We do not weep over idols, but we do weep over our sins and the present exile. Yet we do not weep as those without hope. Tammuz is also a reminder of God's wonderful grace. By the sacrifice [and life] of our Lord and Messiah Yeshua, [the way was made and all peoples have received] the hope of [salvation and the promise of] redemption. We live in the paradox of hopeful sorrow. We've been redeemed, ...yet we still wait for the [full] restoration of all things.

LEAH

How is our matriarch Leah connected with the month of Tammuz? What can we learn from her? Of all women in the Hebrew Scriptures, Leah epitomizes "hopeful sorrow." We can compare her with Miriam - Mary, the mother of Jesus, in the Gospels who had to face judgment and much suffering at the unfair and gruesome death of her son, as the prophet Simeon had said "...and a sword will pierce through your own soul" (Luke 2:35). Although not understanding the full implication of the events we are told that, in faith and hope, she "... treasured up all these things in her heart."

Leah named her first son Reuven, which means "See, a son!" She describes her reason for choosing this name: "Because God has seen my humiliation".¹ Leah was painfully aware that she was Jacob's wife through the deceptive manipulation of her father, and that Jacob's true love was her sister Rachel, now his second wife. Leah is the first to conceive and bear a son, and she sees this as a vindication from God. He had seen her distress and had honored her with Jacob's first-born.

The hope was born that maybe now Jacob would love her too. Sadly, this doesn't happen, and she names her second son Shimon, "Because God has heard (*she'mi Yah*) that I am unloved." With the birth of her third son, Levi, she hopes, "Now my husband will be attached [*yelaveh*] to me." Even now, while her sister is the wife who is wholeheartedly loved, she is merely tolerated by Jacob. Then...

She conceived again and bore a son and said, "This time I will praise [*yadah*] the LORD."

Therefore she named him Judah [*Yehudah*].

Every person has four basic emotional needs: Attention, Affection, Appreciation and Acceptance. Leah did not receive these from Jacob initially, but she does from God, as indicated by her sons'

¹ Genesis 29:32

names: "God has seen," "He has heard, (that I am unloved)," "He will become attached," "Now I will praise Him!" Emotionally, the turn around in her own attitude and life came with the birth of Judah. Now she could praise God and sing, with the Psalmist, "You have turned for me my mourning into dancing" (Psalm 30:11).

Another word from the same root as *yadah* is *todah* - to give thanks, indicating grateful praise! Prominent in the word *yada* is the word *yad* - hand. The open hand - to stretch out the hand. Leah saw the birth of a fourth son as a gift from the hand of God. In response, the physical gesture of grateful, joyful praise can be raised hands open in gratitude to Heaven.

THE SNAKE AND MESSIAH?

The next mention of *yadah* is in Jacob's blessing of his sons before his death:

"Judah, your brothers shall praise [*yadah*] you; ...The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh [Messiah] comes; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples" (Genesis 49:8-10).

Through Judah, the son born with grateful praise, the Messiah would be born, and the light and beauty of the God of Israel would shine forth in His Anointed Son - "the Light of the world".

Interestingly, a Torah portion read during Tammuz, is *Chukkat* (Numbers 19:1-22:1), where we find the dramatic incident of the invasion of poisonous snakes into the Israelite camp. It appears that this is a response to the ongoing complaints of the people to Moses regarding their boring diet of manna and the lack of water. Offering an antidote to the snakebites, God instructs Moses to make "... a fiery serpent [*nachash*] and place it on a pole, and it will be that anyone who was bitten will look at it and live". (21:8)

The dying people would need to consciously raise their eyes to look at the serpent, which would trigger a process of interpretation in their minds that should lead to repentance. They would see a representation of the cause of their pain and impending death and should realize that it was a consequence of their sin of ingratitude towards God. He had been guarding them all along and now had removed His hand of protection. They owed Him their very lives.

They had lost sight of the fact that He protected them and provided for their needs day after day, and they had become bitter and complaining. Every day of life is a gift from God's hand. Now, in His loving-kindness and mercy, He was offering them the opportunity to "see" and repent.

We can consider this wilderness account in the bigger picture of salvation in Yeshua. The numerical value of *nachash* - snake and *Mashiach* - Messiah are both 358.

Salvation from sin and healing from the wiles and poison of the Snake are provided by Messiah. How much more than seeing a copper snake on a pole, should sinners repent on seeing Messiah, the Anointed Son of God, as our representative, lifted up on a stake carrying the sin of the world with its poison that leads to death?

As Paul challenges in Romans: "...do you presume on the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?" When one looks up and "sees" and comes to repentance, one's life is spared and restored.

A final thought about Leah. The Sages of Israel make an astonishing claim:

"From the day that God created the world, there was no one who thanked God until Leah came and thanked Him." (Berachot 7b)

Of course, many people must have thanked God before she did, but there must have been something different and special about her thanks. With Judah she realized that she was being given more than her "fair share" of sons. He was an unexpected gift from God, for which her thankfulness was filled with praise, with gratitude. She offered up grateful praise.

This is how we should view every day and all we receive - as a gift from the open, generous hand of God. In Jewish tradition, every morning begins with the *Modeh Ani* prayer; thanking God for His faithfulness in gifting one with a new day and for restoring one's life in His compassion.

When we realize that every moment of life is a gift, our hearts too will constantly be filled with grateful praise!