

# Forging a New Beginning

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Some twenty-five hundred years ago, on the ninth of Tammuz, the walls of Jerusalem were breached by the Babylonians. Or, perhaps not.

Yirmiyahu placed this Babylonian invasion on the ninth of Tammuz:

*In the fourth month, on the ninth of the month, the famine strengthened in the city and there was no bread for the population. And the city was breached and the soldiers fled, and they departed the city via the gate between the walls by the king's garden, with the Chaldeans surrounding the city, and they traveled via the aravah.*

**Yirmiyahu 52:6-7**

בחדש הרביעי בתשעה לחדש ויחזק  
הרעב בעיר ולא היה לחם לעם  
הארץ: ותבקע העיר וכל אנשי  
המלחמה יברחו ויצאו מהעיר לילה  
דרך שער בין החמתיים אשר על גן  
המלך וכשדים על העיר סביב וילכו  
דרך הערבה:  
**ירמיהו נב:ו-ז**

This perplexed the sages, for a mishnah (Taanit 4:6) teaches that this invasion took place on the 17th of Tammuz. Rava offered a solution in the Babylonian Talmud.

*There is no problem; Yirmiyahu spoke regarding the first Beit haMikdash, whereas in the time of the second Beit haMikdash the city was breached on the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz. A braita corroborates this, saying, "In the first Beit haMikdash the city was breached on the 9<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz. In the second, on the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz."*

**Taanit 28b**

לא קשיא כאן בראשונה  
כאן בשניה דתניא  
בראשונה הובקעה העיר  
בתשעה בתמוז בשניה  
בשבעה עשר בו  
**תענית כח:**

The Tur and Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 549) cited Rava's view as law, explaining that we fast on the date of the second breach of Jerusalem because the destruction of the second Beit haMikdash is more severe for us.

Notwithstanding Rava's explanation and its adoption by the Tur and Shulchan Aruch, the Talmud Yerushalmi offers a different justification for the conflicting dates. Addressing both the conflict regarding the 9<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz as the date of the breach of Jerusalem, and a second conflict between Yechezkel's statement (26:1-2) that the first Beit haMikdash was destroyed on

the 1<sup>st</sup> of Av and our tradition of commemorating the destruction on the 9<sup>th</sup> of Av, Rabbi Tanchum bar Chanilai explained<sup>102</sup>:

*Rabbi Tanchum bar Chanilai said: I see a corruption of calculations here... Whether taking the view that the walls were breached on the 9<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz, or taking the view that the walls were breached on the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz, there were 21 days from the time the city was breached until the Beit haMikdash was destroyed... The one who said the walls were breached on the 9<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz took the view that the Beit haMikdash was destroyed on the 1<sup>st</sup> of Av, and the one who said that the walls were breached on the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz took the view that the Beit haMikdash was destroyed on the 9<sup>th</sup> of Av.*

**Yerushalmi Taanit 4:5**

אמר ר' תנחום בר חנילאי  
קילקול חשבונות יש כאן... בין  
כמאן דאמר בתשעה לחדש בין  
כמאן דאמר בשבעה עשר מה  
ביניהון עשרי' ואחד יום מיר'  
שהובקעה העיר ועד יום שחרב  
בית המקדש... מאן דאמר  
בתשעה לחדש באחד באב חרב  
הבית מאן דאמר בשבעה עשר  
בתשעה באב חרב הבית  
ירושלמי תענית ד:ה

According to Rabbi Tanchum bar Chanilai, the walls of Jerusalem were breached on the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz and the destruction of the Beit haMikdash actually took place on the 9<sup>th</sup> of Av, and the Jews of Bavel remembered that twenty-one days had passed between the invasion of Jerusalem and the fall of the Beit haMikdash. Therefore, when they incorrectly set the destruction of the Beit haMikdash as the 1<sup>st</sup> of Av, they dated the invasion as having occurred 21 days earlier, on the 9<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz.

All of the above leads to a simple question, though: Granted that the beleaguered population might have been confused, why did the Sages canonize inaccurate dates? Can it be that these texts, canonized as prophecy, are simply inaccurate?<sup>103</sup>

Chatam Sofer, writing on the Yerushalmi, contended that the confusion was actually the people's misunderstanding of a proactive decision by those prophets to date the churban as the 1<sup>st</sup> of Av, even though it had occurred on the 9<sup>th</sup>:

*That generation of Babylonians did not believe this [that once the Beit haMikdash was destroyed, there was hope for redemption]. They gave up hope... The Babylonian Jews heard from their prophets, 'On the first of the month, Tyre rejoiced at the fall of Jerusalem,' and they did not understand that the prophets called the 9<sup>th</sup> of Av 'the first of the month' because of the prediction, 'Now your sin is complete [and the redemption can begin].' They thought it was to be understood literally, that the Beit haMikdash had been burned on the 1<sup>st</sup> of Av. They calculated 21 days back, and figured that the city had been breached on the 9<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz.*

אנשי אותו הדור בבבל לא  
האמינו זה, ונתיאשו... אנשי  
בבל שמעו מהנביאים שלהם  
"ביום א' לחדש שמח צור  
במפלת ירושלים" והם לא  
הבינו כי ט' אב נקרא א'  
בחדש על "כי תם עונך", על  
כן חשבו כפשוטו כי ביום ר"ח  
אב נשרף בהמ"ק והשבו כ"א  
יום למפרע לבקיעת העיר  
ויהיה ביום ט' תמוז.

The destruction of the Beit haMikdash fulfilled Eichah 4:22, "[The punishment for] your sin is concluded." Once the building was demolished, we entered a new world of consolation and re-birth, and so our leaders dated the destruction as the first day of a new month, and indeed a new

<sup>102</sup> And see also Yalkut Shimoni to Melachim II, Remez 249

<sup>103</sup> Tosafot Rosh haShanah 18b זה תשעה בתמוז, averred that the prophets were, indeed, handcuffed by popular error

era. The nation took this literally, dated the fall of the Beit haMikdash as the 1<sup>st</sup> of Av, and back-dated the fall of Jerusalem as the 9<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz.

Chatam Sofer's suggestion that the Sages would have risked calendar havoc is stunning in its presumption. Judaism views the calendar as sacrosanct, the very purpose of the creation of the celestial spheres; "He created the moon for the sake of the appointed times," King David sang in Tehillim 104, building on Bereishit 1:14. We set our halachic lives by our days and months. Our first national mitzvah was the system of calculating the lunar month. And yet, Yirmiyahu and Yechezkel felt comfortable feigning re-setting the clock, in clear defiance of the physical moon and the halachically infallible justices of the beit din, for the sake of making a philosophical statement about the new era we had entered!

This bold approach should highlight for us the importance of launching new beginnings immediately after catastrophe. The sky is still filled with soot and ash, parades of chained Jews shamle out of Jerusalem, looters are stuffing elegant gold and silver into sacks – and the prophets have the hope-filled hubris to declare, "Today is the first day of the rest of your national life." This must serve as a guide and inspiration for us; if it is always darkest before the dawn, then the moment after our darkest despair is always the start of our new day.

This point is underscored by the arrangement of our own Tishah b'Av-centered mourning. Whereas normal mourning following a personal loss consists of consecutive, easing levels of grief, our mourning for the Beit haMikdash consists of intensifying levels, building up to Tishah b'Av. Then, immediately after the Tenth of Av's special commemorations end, the mourning ceases entirely and we begin building anew. As the Chatam Sofer put it, "It is the first of a new month, menachem." This is a day deserving of the title, "Day One."

May the value of our mourning up through Tishah b'Av, and our efforts at consolation in the new era born thereafter, merit the immediate rebuilding of our Beit haMikdash.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Note that the Maharsha to Taanit 28b offers a unique explanation for the calendar confusion, linking it to the difference between the lunisolar calendar observed by the Jews and a solar calendar observed by their conquerors. See, too, the explanation offered by Maharal in his Gur Aryeh to Rosh haShanah 18b.