Days of Fasting: 10 of Tebet (Part 1/3)

This coming Thursday, January 5th 2012, corresponds to the 10th. of Tebet, a fast day, which commemorates three tragedies that happened to the Jewish people.

1. The main tragedy we remember in this day is the onset of the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylonia. The siege of the city signaled the beginning of the battle that ultimately destroyed Yerushalayim and the Bet haMikdash in the year 586 BCE. Hundreds of thousands of Jews were killed or sent as captives to the Babylonian exile. The date of the Tenth of Tebet was recorded by the prophet Yechezkel, who was already in Babylonia, together with the first group of Jews exiled by Nebuchadnezzar 11 years earlier than the actual destruction of the Temple.

2. On this day we also remember the death of Ezra haSofer. Approximately in the year 516 BCE a group of Jews (roughly 40 thousand) came back to Eretz Israel with the blessing of the Persian Emperor Cyrus, led by Nechemia and Ezra the Scribe. Ezra had the responsibility to reeducate the Jews who, after more than two generations, had forgotten their language, their Tora and laws, and adopted many customs and values from the Babylonian culture. Ezra formed the Anshe Kenesset haGedola, the first "Jewish Congress" in the absence of our own King, composed of scholars and prophets. They established many rulings to maintain or retrieve Jewish values. For example, the days of Tora reading, the text of the Amida (main prayer), and many decrees against intermarriage. Ezra was considered by the Rabbis as the historic link between the written Tora and the oral Tora. Together with Nechemia, they began the building of the second bet haMiqdash. Ezra died on a 9th of Tebet. He was regarded by our Rabbis as a second to Moshe Rabbenu.

(*To be continued…*)

READ: Jewish History, Ezra and Nechemia.