The Tenth of Tebet and ezra haSofer

This coming Friday, December 13th we will observe the Tenth of Tebet, a fast day which remind us of three tragic events. The main event we remember on this day is the onset of the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuhadnezzar, the King of Babylonia. But there are two other events that we also recall on this fast day. The translation of the Tora to Greek (which occurred on the 8th of Tebet, see **this**) and the death of Ezra haSofer (9th of Tebet).

Seventy years after the destruction of the Bet haMiqdash, approximately the year 516 BCE, the Jews were allowed to come back to Erets Israel by the Persian Emperor Cyrus. Roughly forty thousand Jews were led back to Israel by Zerubabel and years later by Nehemia and Ezra the Scribe.

Ezra had the tremendous responsibility of reeducating the Jews who, after two or three generations in exile without Jewish institutions (schools or synagogues) and living, and in many cases marrying, with the local population. Most Jews had forgotten the Tora and its laws, and adopted many customs and values from the surrounding Babylonian culture. Ezra established the Anshe Keneset haGedola, the first Jewish Parliament, composed of 120 scholars and prophets. With the court that he presided, Ezra issued many new rulings to reclaim and revive Jewish values and reeducate the Jewish people. He increased the days of public reading of the Tora, composed the text of the Amida (main prayer), adapted the names of the Hebrew months and the fonts of the Tora-text, etc. Ezra also had to make very tough decisions, like excluding the Samaritans, a semi-pagan mixed population living in Israel from the times of the destruction of the Bet haMiqdash, who reclaimed to be considered as Jews. Thanks to his wisdom and courage the Jewish people was able to survive and reestablish again in Israel as the Nation of God. Ezra was also considered by the Rabbis as the historical link between the written Tora and the oral Tora, which was forgotten in the long Babylonian captivity and retrieved by Ezra the Scribe. Together with Nehemia, they also concluded the building of the second Bet haMiqdash and the protective wall around the city. Ezra died on a 9th of Tebet. He was regarded by our Rabbis as second to Moshe Rabbenu.

IMPORTANT NOTICE about the FAST DAY TOMORROW

The Tenth of Tebet is the only fast that might fall on a Friday. In NYC the fast will begin tomorrow morning, Friday Dec. 13th, at 6:16am. We will be receiving Shabbat while fasting and we will break the fast with the Kiddush, which cannot be said before 4.49pm, NYT. Minha service this Friday will probably be early than a normal Friday, because we will have Tora reading and birkat Kohanim. Follow your community's calendar and notifications.