An Idol In The Temple

The rabbis disagree on this last point: are we remembering what happened in the times of King Menashe in the 7th century, before the common era (BCE) or what happened in the time of Apostomus, a Roman general who offended the Jews in public around the year 68 of the common era?

This tragic event might have happened twice. Either way, I'm going to explain here the first interpretation.

The Kingdom of Israel was divided into two kingdoms: Israel and Yehuda. The kingdom of Israel, the lost Ten Tribes, was destroyed in the year 722 BCE. The kingdom of Yehuda is the one who survived. We Jews, Yehudim, descend from the kingdom of Yehuda.

Menashe, king of Yehuda lived from 709 BCE until 642 BCE.

There are two facts that characterized his reign.

1. He was the king who reigned for most time in Jewish history: 55 years.

2. He was probably the worst king in the history of Am Israel. Undoubtedly, the worst king of the Kingdom of Yehuda.

His father was a great Tsadiq, Hizqiyahu, and according to our tradition, his grandfather was the prophet Yesha'ayahu. Menashe converted Yehuda into a vassal state of Assyria (□□□□). And this meant that the Yehudim not only obeyed the Assyrian king but also adopted his religion. Menashe dedicated to the systematic elimination of Judaism, including all the Holy service in the Bet haMiqdash. He introduced worship to Ba'al, Asherah, and all the constellations of heaven, which was the idol-worshipping practice of Assyria. He brought to Israel the *obot* and *ide'onim,* that is, diviners, sorcerers, idolatrous wizards and all kind of superstitions. He commanded

to kill and murder thousands of Yehudim, especially those who opposed his religious reforms. Some say that Menashe murdered his own grandfather, the prophet Yesha'ayahu. Menashe made the Tora to be completely forgotten for two generations.

In Kings II, chapter 21 we see in detail what Menashe did.

Melakhim II 21: 2-6: *"Menashe did all what offended HaShem: he practiced the abominable idolatrous practices of the nations which HaShem had cast out before the Israelites. He rebuilt the pagan altars that his father Hizqiyahu had destroyed. He erected altars in honor of Baal and made an image of the goddess Asherah. He prostrated himself before all the stars of heaven and worshiped them … In both courtyards of the Temple of HaShem he built altars in honor of the stars of heaven. He sacrificed his own son in the fire, practiced magic and sorcery, and consulted necromancers and spiritualists. He continually did what offended the Lord, thus provoking His wrath."*

Lets us see now the text that tells us what happened, according to the first version, on the 17th of Tamuz.

Melakhim II 21: 7: "*[Menashe] took the image of the goddess Asherah, which he had commanded to make, and set it in the [Temple's] Sanctuary, in the place where HaShem had said to David and his son Solomon: "In this Temple in Jerusalem, the city that I have chosen from all the tribes of Israel, I have decided to dwell forever."*

When Menashe passed away he was succeeded by his son, Amon, who followed his bad ways. After two years Amon was killed, and his son, Yoshiyahu, the grandson of Menashe, was crowned king. Yoshiyahu was one of the best monarchs of Yehuda. In his days, while making repairs in the Temple of Jerusalem, the workers found a Sefer Tora that had been hidden in the times of Menashe. After reading the Tora, which had been virtually forgotten for more than 50 years, King Yoshiyahu decided to

return to HaShem with all his heart, and for the first time in two generations, the Jews returned to the observance and practice of the Tora and Mitsvot. Yoshiyahu uprooted all idolatry and restored HaShem’s service in the Bet haMiqdash.

But in some aspects, the damage that Menashe had caused, was already irreparable. Despite the efforts of King Yoshiyahu, many people had already assimilated the idolatry of the Goyim. Many rabbis believed that the destruction of the first Bet HaMiqdash (586 BCE) was due indirectly to the actions of Menashe.

On the 17th of Tamuz, when we remember the placement of an idol in the Bet haMiqdash, we should also lament and do our own Teshuba for the wrongdoings of our ancestors in the times of king Menashe.