TISHA BEAV: What happened on the 9th of Av?

This Wednesday night, July 22, we will begin the fast of Tisha Be'av, the national day of mourning of the Jewish people. Why this date? Our rabbis (Mishna, Taanit 4:6) enumerate five tragedies that took place on the 9th of Av.

1. HET HAMERAGELIM (ca. 1450 BCE): When the Jewish people were in the desert, on their way to the Promised Land, the crisis of the spies took place. Upon their return from exploring the land of Canaan, the spies convinced the people that conquering the land would be impossible. In a terrible act of ingratitude, the people reproached God for having liberated them from Egypt, and implied that He would not be able to help them conquer the Land of Israel. God decreed that everyone over the age of twenty would not enter the Promised Land, but would wander in the desert for forty years until that generation died out. The night the people cried and complained to HaShem, showing their lack of trust in Him, was the night of the 9th of Av.

2. HURBAN HABAYIT HARISHON (586 BCE): In the days of Tsidkiyahu, the last king of Yehuda, the Babylonians laid siege to Yerushalayim on the 10th of Tebet. The siege lasted two and a half years. The people had no provisions, food, or wood; thousands died of starvation and epidemics. On the 9th of Tammuz the Babylonians breached the wall and entered the city, pillaging, killing, and destroying. Still, the Bet HaMikdash kept functioning, and sacrifices were offered. On the 17th of Tammuz, for the first time since the days of the Exodus, the daily sacrifice (korban haTamid) was discontinued. On the 7th of Av, the Babylonians entered the Bet HaMikdash and profaned it. On the 9th of Av, close to sunset, they ignited the fire that burned our Bet HaMikdash through that night and the entire following day. Thousands of Jews were

slaughtered, enslaved, or exiled to Babylonia. The story of the destruction of Yerushalayim and its desolation is told in Megilat Ekha.

3. HURBAN HABAYIT HASHENI (68 CE): On the 17th of Tammuz the Romans broke through the walls protecting Yerushalayim. During the following three weeks they pillaged the city, destroyed everything in their path, and killed tens of thousands of Jews. On the 9th of Av, after desecrating the Sanctuary, Titus destroyed our second Bet HaMikdash. Hundreds of thousands of Jews were killed, sold into slavery, or exiled. Our rabbis explained that the Jews of that generation were divided and fighting among themselves (sinat hinam) – and that the Romans destroyed a Bet HaMikdash that "was already destroyed," because when the Jews are not united, HaShem's presence does not rest among them.

4. NILKEDA BETAR (135 CE): The Jews revolted again against the Roman empire, this time with the approval of great rabbis and leaders, among them Rabbi Akiba. The Bar Kokhba revolt was crushed by the emperor Hadrian. The city of Betar, the Jews' last stand against the Romans, fell on Tisha Be'av. Hundreds of thousands of Jews – according to the Gemara, even more – were slaughtered, and their bodies were left unburied.

5. NEHERASH HAHEKHAL: Around the same period, also on a 9th of Av, the Temple's holiest area and its surroundings were plowed over by the Roman general Turnus Rufus. Yerushalayim was turned into a pagan city, renamed Aelia Capitolina, and Jews were forbidden to enter it.

OTHER TRAGEDIES THAT HAPPENED ON THE 9TH OF AV

1096: The First Crusade began on the 9th of Av, destroying the Jewish communities of France and the Rhineland and killing thousands of Jews in its first months.

1290: The Jews were expelled from England on the 9th of Av (July 18, 1290).

1492: The Jews were expelled from Spain, after living there for more than six centuries. The Edict of Expulsion forced the Jews to leave the country by the end of July; Tisha Be'av fell on August 1st. Estimates of the Jewish population of Spain before the expulsion vary: some sources mention 250,000; the historian Juan de Mariana speaks of 800,000; others estimate 600,000. Roughly a third remained as "conversos"; a third were killed or died while fleeing Spain and Portugal (from which the Jews were expelled in 1497); and a third managed to escape and establish themselves in Morocco, Algiers, Tunis, Turkey – the largest colony of Spanish refugees – Greece, Egypt, Syria, and Erets Israel (Safed and Yerushalayim).

IN MODERN TIMES

Germany entered World War I on August 1–2, 1914 – the 9th of Av – setting in motion the upheaval of European Jewry whose aftermath led to the Holocaust.

On August 2, 1941 – the 9th of Av – SS commander Heinrich Himmler received the formal approval of the Nazi Party for the "Final Solution," the plan that led to the murder of a third of the world's Jewish population.

On July 23, 1942 – the 9th of Av – the mass deportation of Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto to Treblinka began.

And on the 10th of Av: the AMIA bombing of the Jewish community center in Buenos Aires killed 85 people and injured 300 (July 18, 1994). And Israel's unilateral disengagement from Gush Katif – haHitnatkut – began on the 10th of Av, August 15, 2005.