
T A M M U Z

JUNE/JULY

A Time To Mourn

Themes of Tammuz

Keeper: The name of this month, *Tammuz*, recalls an ancient myth of death and rebirth—when a descent into the depths is made as a means of fructification. To find traces of the rituals of *Tammuz*, we look in the Book of Ezekiel:

Then he brought me to the door of the gate of the Lord's house which was towards the north; and behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz.³

According to Sumerian tradition, Tammuz was a beautiful young god or god-like man who died and was then brought back to life with the aid of his sister, Innini. The myth of the dying and rising god, Tammuz, became transformed in Judaism into the destruction and rebuilding of the Holy Temple, the cyclical annihilation and rejuvenation of the Jewish people. This rhythm pervades the history of the Jews.

Several historical events occur in *Tammuz*, marking this month as a time of despair and mourning for the Jewish people. On the 17th of *Tammuz*, Noah sent a dove from the ark to scout for land, but the bird found no place to rest.⁴ On the same day, when Moses returned from the top of the mountain, he broke the Tablets of the Law after finding his people worshipping the golden calf.⁵ During the time of the First and Second Temples, the walls of Jerusalem were breached by the enemy. The 17th of *Tammuz* signifies the beginning of a three-week period of intense mourning which culminates in the Ninth of Av, *Tisha B'Av*, the date when both the First and the Second Temples were destroyed. That day has since become a minor fast day.⁶

Sign of Tammuz

Keeper: The sign of this month is *Sartan*, the Crab. The crab echoes the major theme of *Tammuz* for it scrapes away at the earth in its search for food,

remains buried for a time, and later returns above ground to continue its journey.