

Jonah for Community Presbyterian Church of Clarendon Hills

Lesson Two

What Makes Jonah Run?

And Jonah arose to flee towards Tarshish from before The Eternal and he went down to Jaffa and found a ship going to Tarshish.

Jonah 1:3

1. I was not a prophet, nor a prophet's son, but I was a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore fruit.

Amos 7:14

2. Alas, Sovereign God," I said, "I do not know how to speak; I am too young.

Jeremiah 1:6

3. Kimchi

How would he be able to flee? And when he was summoned to go on this mission for Jonah said to himself, the gentiles are close to repentance and if I go on this mission the God, Who is Praised, will turn them from their evil paths. And Israel will be accused by this action. For I, and other prophets, constantly come to them on a mission from the God, Who is Blessed, and they do not turn from their evil path. Therefore he did not accept this mission. Thus is the explanation of the sages of blessed memory in the Mechilta to Parshat Bo. Because of this it was impossible for him to accept his mission.

...And since the gentiles are close to repentance and he did not want to obligate Israel to punishment for being unwilling to repent therefore he fled.

4. Abarbanel

And here Jonah understands the truth of this matter and therefore concludes in his heart that he will not go to Nineveh so that the people of Assyria will not be saved from destruction by him. For what would be a reason for his going to Nineveh to save the children of Assyria and cut off the children of Israel? How would he be able to fear the evil that would befall his nation at the hands of the Assyrians and because of that flee from before the Eternal? That would be to say that he wished to distance himself from the Land of Israel the base for prophecy in his thought that prophecy does not extend to outside the Land of Israel. And when he would be in an impure land outside the Holy Land prophecy would not begin within him. And he would not be commanded to go to Nineveh. And he would not have to proclaim upon it the proclamation so that he would not be central to and an instrument in the saving of his enemy. And if Hashem of Blessing would want to save them He could do it Himself as He wished but not by the means of Jonah and by his hand.

5. Abarbanel

Jonah sought the honor of the son and did not seek the honor of the father.

.....*As it is written in the Midrash, Rabbi Yochanon said, Jonah did not go except to lose his life at sea. As it is written, "Sauni Vahatiluni El Hayam, Pick me up throw me into the sea."*(1:12) Jonah fled expecting that this would cost him his life.

6 .Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too.

Romans 3:29 quoted by Cyril of Alexandria in his Commentary to Jonah

7. He saw the fall of Israel, and understood that the grace of prophecy would pass to the nations. This is what leads him to withdraw from preaching and delay the execution of his mission”

Gregory of Nazianzus

Arise go to Nineveh

Jonah 1:2

8. Kimchi

The message for the Israelites

We are able to explain that it was written to be a moral lesson to Israel. Behold a foreign nation that is not a part of Israel was close to repentance and the first time that a prophet rebuked them they turned to a complete repentance from evil. And what about Israel, whom the prophets rebuke from dawn until dark, and still they do not turn from their evil?

The message for the Ninevites

And also to make known to Nineveh the great wonder which the God, Who is Blessed performed, that Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights and lived.

The message for all of humanity.

And also to teach that the God, Who is Blessed, is merciful to those who repent from any nation and grants them mercy even more so when they are many in number. The last verse of the Book of Jonah (4:11) explains that Nineveh contains 120,000 people.

9. Abraham Ibn Ezra

*For there in chapter three of the Book of Jonah we find the verse "It was a great city to God" (Jonah 3:3). Ibn Ezra uses this verse from chapter three to explain the verse here in chapter one. Both verses describe Nineveh as "Ear Gedola, a great city." The difference between the verses is that in chapter three the words "Lailohim, to God" are added. Ibn Ezra asks why does the text use the words "to God" to describe Nineveh. Could the text not simply have described Nineveh as a "great city" without including "to God"? Ibn Ezra concludes that these words are included in the text to tell us *that they*, the Ninevites, *already feared the Eternal from before* the time of Jonah. He contends that the Ninevites were not idol worshipping polytheists but rather monotheists who worshipped the Eternal.*

Ibn Ezra continues to seek a clear understanding of this line from the third chapter. *And it is written, "All the nations are as nothing before Him, they are counted by him as things of naught and vanity." (Isaiah 40:17) And there is no concern if they were many.* This verse from Isaiah teaches that God does not care about the number of non-believers for "They are counted as things of naught and vanity". Therefore the fact that God describes Nineveh here as a large city and in Chapter 4:11 God specifically says that Nineveh is, "...a great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons...." demonstrates that the inhabitants were not in the category of "All the nations", pagans. For following the Isaiah verse, if they were pagans God would not count them. The fact that God counts them as many, proves that they had a prior relationship with God.

Ibn Ezra here argues that the expression in Chapter three of Jonah, "A great city to God" does not describe the size of Nineveh but rather its importance to God. *And the explanation of the word Lailohim is that they had been fearers of the Eternal in earlier days. Only now, in the days of Jonah did they begin to do evil. If they had not originally been people of the Eternal, a prophet would not have been sent to them. And here we saw a complete repentance with nothing like it.*

And we do not find it written that they broke the altars of Baal or cut down idols. If they had been idol worshippers turning now for the first time to the worship of the One God, their complete repentance would have included the destruction of the places of idol worship. Chapter three includes a detailed description of the steps the people of Nineveh took to repent from their evil. There is no mention of destroying altars to idols. *From this we can learn that they were not idol worshippers.* They were worshippers of the same one God worshipped by the Israelites.