

DROWNING WITH JONAH

Rabba Dr Lindsey Taylor-Guthartz

Link to Sefaria for Jonah chapter 4 (Hebrew and English):
<https://www.sefaria.org/Jonah.4?lang=bi>

Session 4 - Chapter 4

Rashi (Shelomoh ben Yitshak, northern France, 1040-1105)

Avraham Ibn Ezra (Spain & elsewhere, 1089-1164)

David Kimchi (Radak, Provence, 1160-1235)

Eliezer of Beaugency (France, 12th century)

Isaac Abarvanel (Spain, Italy, 1437-1508)

Chapter 4

Rashi: v. 1: This displeased Jonah: He said, ‘Now the idol-worshippers will say that I am a false prophet.’

Ibn Ezra: v. 1: This displeased Jonah: because God had changed His mind.

Abravanel: v. 1: This displeased Jonah: Jonah became depressed and wanted to die, because ... while they had repented from their evil ways in beliefs and deeds, he saw that they continued in their idolatry, and did not repent of their sins against God.

Rashi: v. 2: Isn't this just what I said: I know that if they do *teshuvah* You will not destroy them and I will seem to them to be a liar.

‘Midrash of Extra & Missing Letters’, *Otsar hamidrashim* (1: 28) on v. 3: my death is better than my life: And in Jonah it is written, ‘I would rather die than live’. Jonah was the son of the woman of Zarfath [1Kings/Melakhim 17]. He had already died once, and knew that he would have rest.

Ibn Ezra: v. 3: And now: seeing that Israel had not repented, he feared that harm would come to them, and so he prayed, ‘Please take my life’, just as Moses said ‘Erase me [from Your book].’

Abravanel: v. 4: Do you do well to be angry?: God was rebuking Jonah for his anger by saying ‘Do you do well to be angry?’ - which is to say, is there a trait worse than this one of yours, that you are grieved that I have been good to Nineveh?

Rashi: v. 6: and save him from his discomfort [*ra'ato*]: from the heat of the sun.

ricinus plant [*kikayon*]: a plant that grows tall, with many branches, that provides shade; and this is its name.

Ibn Ezra: v. 6: and save him from discomfort: from the great heat of the sun. And some people say, since he had been in the belly of the fish for such a long time, his skin was soft and could not endure the heat of the sun.

Radak: v. 6: provided: He made it for him specially for that hour, and although it was made as shade from the sun, perhaps its wood dried out, for he was sitting there for a full 40 days. And He made it as a sign for him, to teach him about God's decree, and that God's mercies are over all His creatures.

Abravanel: v. 7: provided: However, since the good things of this world are not eternal and will soon cease to exist, the Holy One, Blessed be He, prepared a worm at dawn on the day after his joy and it attacked the ricinus plant. In other words, it severed the plant at the bottom, and when the earth's moisture ceased when it was cut the leaves that had given him shade dried up and it withered ...

Rashi: v. 7: attacked [*vetakh*]: the worm [attacked] the ricinus plant, and instead of using the masculine, *veyakh*, it uses the feminine, *vetakh*.

Rashi: v. 8: sultry [*charishit*]: Our Sages said, that when it blows, it silences all other winds before it, and it is very hot; and the Targum translates it as 'silent/quiet'.

Radak: v. 8: provided: He summoned the wind for that particular hour in order to add suffering to his suffering, like the heat of the sun, and the meaning of *charishit* is 'strong', since people become deaf [*chereshim*] when it blows ...

Abravanel: v. 9: On the one hand, Jonah did not ask for life or health, but for death. On the other, he was grieved about the plant that had gone, because he had rejoiced over it. This is why God rebuked him by pointing out the contradiction, 'Are you so deeply grieved about the plant?' - that is, if, as you say, death is better than life, why are you sorry about the plant that dried up? It would appear that life actually seemed good to you, and so you rejoiced over the plant that prolonged your life, and you were grieved at its absence, because its absence will bring about your death.

Radak: v. 10: You have mercy/cared about the plant: Even though he only cared about the plant because of his own suffering, God cared about Nineveh because of His glory, for the created things are the glory of God, as it is written, 'the earth is full of His glory' [Isaiah 6]. ...

Rashi: v. 10: which you did not work for: by ploughing, sowing, and irrigating.

which appeared overnight [*shebin lailah*, lit.: 'son of a night']: like *ben lailah*; it only grew for one night.

Radak: v. 10: which you did not work for and you did not grow: when something that a person has worked for is lost, it is more painful; and although God, may He be blessed, did not labour over the creation of his creatures, 'the Torah speaks in human terms' [*dibrah torah kilesbon benei adam*], so that those who hear the story will understand.

Rashi: v. 11: who do not yet know, etc.: children.

and many beasts: adults who are like animals, because they do not recognize who created them.

Midrash Tanhuma (on Devarim 31: 14): v. 11: beasts: But where is it shown that the righteous are called 'Adam'? Where Jonah says, 'So should I not take pity on Nineveh, that great city in which there are over a hundred and twenty thousand persons [*adam*], who do not know their right hand from their left, and many animals.' '*adam*' -- these are the righteous; 'who do not know their right hand from their left', and 'many animals', these are the wicked, in that their actions are like the actions of the animals

Eliezer of Beaugency: v. 11: shall I not have mercy: on the works of My hands and the product of My labours? And not just one, or two, but a **great city? Who do not know [the difference] between:** good and evil. And they do not sin in order to annoy Me, or deliberately, for they are not sinners, like children and **many animals** - and for them I would forgive the entire place [see Bereshit 18: 26], even if they had not repented as you told them to; but because of their repentance I have had mercy on them. And here He told him of their repentance.

Background text

1 Kings/Melakhim 1, 17: 17-24 (NSRV translation)

⁷After this the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became ill; his illness was so severe that there was no breath left in him. ¹⁸She then said to Elijah, 'What have you against me, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to cause the death of my son!' ¹⁹But he said to her, 'Give me your son.' He took him from her bosom, carried him up into the upper chamber where he was lodging, and laid him on his own bed. ²⁰He cried out to the LORD, 'O LORD my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I am staying, by killing her son?' ²¹Then he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried out to the LORD, 'O LORD my God, let this child's life come into him again.' ²²The LORD listened to the voice of Elijah; the life of the child came into him again, and he revived. ²³Elijah took the child, brought him down from the upper chamber into the house, and gave him to his mother; then Elijah said, 'See, your son is alive.' ²⁴So the woman said to Elijah, 'Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth [*emet*].'

Shemot/Exodus 34: 4-7 (NJPS translation, modified)

⁴So Moses carved two tablets of stone like the first, and early in the morning he went up on Mount Sinai, as the Lord had commanded him, and in his hand he took the two tablets of stone. ⁵And the Lord came down in a cloud and stood with him there, and called on the name of the Lord. ⁶The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, God merciful and gracious [*kel rahum vebanun*], slow to anger [*erekb apayim*], abounding in kindness and faithfulness [*rav hesed ve'emet*], ⁷extending kindness to thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; yet He does not indeed clear [*venakeh lo yenakeh*]; He visits the iniquity of ancestors on their children and on the children of their children, to the third and fourth generations.'