

Why Yonah Runs: A Close Reading of Sefer Yonah

Perek 1: The Reluctant Prophet - Why Yonah Says No

1. Sefer Yonah, Perek Alef

(1) Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying: (2) 'Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim against it; for their wickedness is come up before Me.' (3) But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD; and he went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish, from the presence of the LORD. (4) But the LORD hurled a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken. (5) And the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god; and they cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it unto them. But Jonah was gone down into the innermost parts of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep. (6) So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him: 'What meanest thou that thou sleepest? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not.' (7) And they said every one to his fellow: 'Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us.' So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah. (8) Then said they unto him: 'Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us: what is thine occupation? and whence comest thou? what is thy country? and of what people art thou?' (9) And he said unto

1. ספר יונה, פרק א

(א) וַיְהִי, דְּבַר-ה' אֶל-יוֹנָה בֶן-אֲמִתַּי, לֵאמֹר. (ב) קוּם לךְ אֶל-נִינְוָה, הָעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה--וּקְרָא עָלֶיהָ: כִּי-עָלְתָה רַעְתָּם, לִפְנֵי. (ג) וַיָּקָם יוֹנָה לְבָרוּחַ תַּרְשִׁישָׁה, מִלִּפְנֵי ה'; וַיֵּרֶד יָפוֹ וַיִּמָּצֵא אֹנִיָּה בָּאָה תַרְשִׁישָׁה, וַיֵּתֶן שָׂכָרָהּ וַיֵּרֶד בָּהּ לְבוֹא עִמָּהֶם תַרְשִׁישָׁה, מִלִּפְנֵי ה'. (ד) וְה', הֵטִיל רוּחַ-גְּדוֹלָה אֶל-הַיָּם, וַיְהִי סֵעַר-גָּדוֹל, בַּיָּם; וְהָאֹנִיָּה, חֲשֹׁבָה לְהִשָּׁבֵר. (ה) וַיִּירָאוּ הַמִּלְחָמִים, וַיִּזְעַקוּ אִישׁ אֶל-אֱלֹהָיו, וַיִּטְלוּ אֶת-הַכֵּלִים אֲשֶׁר בָּאֹנִיָּה אֶל-הַיָּם, לְהַקֵּל מֵעֲלֵיהֶם; וַיּוֹנָה, יָרַד אֶל-יִרְכַּתִּי הַסְּפִינָה, וַיִּשְׁכַּב, וַיֵּרָדֵם. (ו) וַיִּקְרַב אֵלָיו רֵב הַחִבְלִי, וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ מֶה-לָּךְ נִרְדָּם: קוּם, קְרָא אֶל-אֱלֹהֶיךָ--אֲוִלִי יִתְעַשֵּׂת הָאֱלֹקִים לָנוּ, וְלֹא נִאֲבֹד. (ז) וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל-רֵעֵהוּ, לָכוּ וְנַפִּילָה גּוֹרָלוֹת, וְנִגְדָּעָה, בְּשַׁלְמֵי הָרָעָה הַזֹּאת לָנוּ; וַיַּפְּלוּ, גּוֹרָלוֹת, וַיִּפֹּל הַגּוֹרֵל, עַל-יוֹנָה. (ח) וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו--הַגִּידָה נָא לָנוּ, בְּאִשֶּׁר לָמִי-הָרָעָה הַזֹּאת לָנוּ: מֶה-מַּלְאכְתְּךָ, וּמֵאֵין תָּבוֹא--מֶה אֶרֶצְךָ, וְאִי-מִזֶּה עִם אֹתָהּ. (ט) וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם, עֲבְרִי אֲנֹכִי; וְאֶת-ה' אֱלֹקֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם, אֲנִי יָרָא, אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה אֶת-הַיָּם, וְאֶת-הַיַּבֵּשָׁה. (י) וַיִּירָאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים יְרֵאָה גְּדוֹלָה, וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו מֶה-זֹּאת עָשִׂיתָ: כִּי-יָדְעוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים, כִּי-מִלִּפְנֵי ה' הוּא בָרוּחַ--כִּי הִגִּיד, לָהֶם. (יא) וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו מֶה-נַּעֲשֶׂה לָּךְ, וַיִּשְׁתַּק הַיָּם מֵעֲלֵינוּ: כִּי הַיָּם, הוֹלֵךְ וְסֹעַר. (יב) וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם, שְׂאוּנִי וְהִטִּילְנִי אֶל-הַיָּם, וַיִּשְׁתַּק הַיָּם, מֵעֲלֵיכֶם: כִּי, יוֹדַע אֲנִי, כִּי בְשָׁלִי, הִסְעַר הַגְּדוֹל הַזֶּה עֲלֵיכֶם. (יג) וַיַּחֲתִרוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים, לְהָשִׁיב אֶל-הַיַּבֵּשָׁה--וְלֹא יָכְלוּ: כִּי הַיָּם, הוֹלֵךְ וְסֹעַר עָלֵיהֶם. (יד) וַיִּקְרָאוּ אֶל-ה' וַיֹּאמְרוּ, אָנָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵי נָא נִאֲבֹדָה בְּנִפְשׁ הָאִישׁ הַזֶּה, וְאֶל-תֵּתֵן עָלֵינוּ, דָּם נָקִיא: כִּי-אֹתָהּ ה', בְּאִשֶּׁר חָפְצָתָ עָשִׂיתָ. (טו) וַיִּשְׁאוּ, אֶת-יוֹנָה, וַיִּטְלֻהוּ, אֶל-הַיָּם; וַיַּעֲמֵד הַיָּם, מִזְעָפוֹ. (טז) וַיִּירָאוּ

them: 'I am an Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who hath made the sea and the dry land.' **(10)** Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him: 'What is this that thou hast done?' For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them. **(11)** Then said they unto him: 'What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us?' for the sea grew more and more tempestuous. **(12)** And he said unto them: 'Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you; for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you.' **(13)** Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not; for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them. **(14)** Wherefore they cried unto the LORD, and said: 'We beseech Thee, O LORD, we beseech Thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood; for Thou, O LORD, hast done as it pleased Thee.' **(15)** So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea; and the sea ceased from its raging. **(16)** Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly; and they offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows.

הָאֲנָשִׁים יִרְאָה גְדוֹלָה, אֶת-ה'; וַיִּזְבְּחוּ-זֶבַח,
לֵיה', וַיִּדְּרוּ, נְדָרִים.

I. Why does Yonah run away?

- מלפני - before G-d's presence
- מפני - before G-d

<u>2. Melachim Alef 17:1 (I Kings 17:1)</u> (1) And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the settlers of Gilead, said unto Ahab: 'As the LORD, the God of Israel, liveth, <u>before whom I stand</u>, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.'	<u>2. מלכים א', יז:א</u> (א) ויאמר אליהו התשבי מתשבי גלעד, אל-אחאב, חי-ה' אלקי ישראל אשר עמדת לפניו, אם-יהיה השנים האלה טל ומטר--כי, אם-לפי דברי.
<u>3. Rashi on Yonah 1:3:1</u> ...Now what did Jonah see that he did not wish to go to Nineveh? He said, "The gentiles are quick to repent. Should I prophesy to them and they repent, I will be found condemning Israel, who do not heed the words of the prophets." (Mechilta, Exodus 12:1)	<u>3. רש"י על יונה א':ג:א</u> ...ומה ראה יונה שלא רצה לילך אל נינוה? אמר: העכו"ם קרובי תשובה הם, אם אומר להם ויעשו תשובה, נמצאתי מחייב את ישראל שאינם שומעים לדברי הנביאים.
<u>4. Mekhilta DeRabbi Yishmael, Parashat Bo, Petichta</u> <u>Jonah insisted upon the honor due the son but did not insist upon the honor due the Father</u>, as it is said, But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord (Jonah 1:3). What is written about him? And the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying (ibid. 3:1). He spoke with him a second time, but did not speak with him a third time.	<u>4. מכילתא דרבי ישמעאל, פרשת בא, פתיחתא</u> יונה תבע כבוד הבן ולא כבוד האב, שנאמר: "ויהי דבר ה' אל יונה שנית" (יונה ג', א) – שנית נדבר עמו, שלישית לא.
<u>5. Abarbanel on Yonah 1:1</u> ...And Yonah did not want to go, <u>because he knew Assyria would in the future do wickedness to Israel, and he</u>	<u>5. אברבנאל על יונה א:א</u> ...ושיונה לא רצה ללכת להנבא שמה לפי שהיה יודע הרעות והגליות שהיה עתיד לעשות בשבטי ישראל, ולכן כלתה נפשו

was disgusted by helping Assyria and Nineveh, and therefore he ran away.

שֶׁתְּכַלָּה אֶמֶת אֲשׁוּר וְנִינּוּה רֹאשׁ מַלְכוּתָהּ
תֵּתֵן עַד כָּלָה, וְלִזָּה בָּרַח מִמְּלֶכֶת שָׁמָּה.

6. Melachim Bet 14:23-28 (II Kings 14:23-28)

(23) In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel began to reign in Samaria, and reigned forty and one years. (24) And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD; he departed not from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, wherewith he made Israel to sin. (25) He restored the border of Israel from the entrance of Hamath unto the sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which He spoke by the hand of His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was of Gath-hepher. (26) For the LORD saw the affliction of Israel, that it was very bitter; for there was none shut up nor left at large, neither was there any helper for Israel. (27) And the LORD said not that He would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven; but He saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash. (28) Now the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, and all that he did, and his might, how he warred, and how he recovered Damascus, and Hamath, for Judah in Israel, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel.

6. מלכים ב', יד:כג-כח

(כג) בִּשְׁנַת חֲמֵשׁ-עָשָׂרָה שָׁנָה, לְאַמְצִיָּהוּ בֶן-יֹאָשׁ מֶלֶךְ יְהוּדָה--מֶלֶךְ יִרְבְּעָם בֶּן-יֹאָשׁ מֶלֶךְ-יִשְׂרָאֵל, בִּשְׁמֹרוֹן, אֲרִבְעִים וְאַחַת, שָׁנָה. (כד) וַיַּעַשׂ הָרַע, בְּעֵינֵי ה': לֹא סָר, מִכָּל-חַטּוֹת יִרְבְּעָם בֶּן-נִבְט, אֲשֶׁר הִחְטִיא, אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל. (כה) הוּא, הֵשִׁיב אֶת-גְּבוּל יִשְׂרָאֵל, מִלְּבוֹא חֲמַת, עַד-יָם הָעַרְבָּה--כַּדְּבַר ה', אֱלֹקֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר בְּיַד-עַבְדּוֹ יוֹנָה בֶן-אַמְתַּי הַנְּבִיא, אֲשֶׁר מִגַּת הַחֶפֶר. (כו) כִּי-רָאָה ה' אֶת-עֲנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, מֵרָחֵק מְאֹד; וְאָפָס עָצוֹר וְאָפָס עֲזוּב, וְאִין עֶזֶר לְיִשְׂרָאֵל. (כז) וְלֹא-דִבֶּר ה'--לְמַחֲוֹת אֶת-שֵׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל, מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם; וַיֹּשִׁיעֵם, בְּיַד יִרְבְּעָם בֶּן-יֹאָשׁ. (כח) וַיֹּתֵר דְּבָרֵי יִרְבְּעָם וְכָל-אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה, וּגְבוּרָתוֹ אֲשֶׁר-נִלְחָם, וְאֲשֶׁר הֵשִׁיב אֶת-דָּמָשֶׁק וְאֶת-חֲמַת לַיהוּדָה, בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל: הֲלֹא-הֵם כְּתוּבִים, עַל-סֵפֶר דְּבָרֵי הַיָּמִים--לְמַלְכֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.

II. Yonah and the sailors

7. Growth of the sailors	
וַיִּירָאוּ הַמִּלְחָמִים וַיִּזְעֲקוּ אִישׁ אֶל־אֱלֹהָיו In their fright, the sailors cried out, each to his own god (Yonah 1:5)	
וַיִּירָאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים יָרָאָה גְדוֹלָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו מַה־נָּעַת עָשִׂיתָ כִּי־יָדְעוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים כִּי־מִלְפָּנֶיךָ יְהוָה הוּא בֹּרַח כִּי הִגִּיד לָהֶם: The men were greatly terrified, and they asked him, “What have you done?” And when the men learned that he was fleeing from GOD’s service—for so he told them— (Yonah 1:10)	
וַיִּירָאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים יָרָאָה גְדוֹלָה אֶת־יְהוָה וַיִּזְבְּחוּ־לָזֶבֶחַ לַיהוָה וַיִּדְּרוּ נְדָרִים: The men feared GOD greatly; they offered a sacrifice to GOD and they made vows. (Yonah 1:16)	

8. Midrash Tanchuma, Vayikra 8:1	8. מדרש תנחומא, ויקרא ח:א
What did they do? They took Yonah and stood him upon the edge of the ship and said, “God of the world, Lord, do not put innocent blood upon us (Jonah 1:14), as we do not know what is the nature of this man; yet he says to us with his mouth, ‘because of me has this distress come upon you.’” They placed him [into the sea] until his knees, and the sea stopped from its fury. They [then] took him back towards them, and the sea stormed against them. They placed him [into the sea] until his navel, and the sea stopped from its fury. They [then] took him back towards them, and it stormed against them. They placed him completely [in the sea, and] the sea was immediately quiet from its fury, as it is stated (Jonah 1:15), “So they took up	מָה עָשׂוּ? נָטְלוּ אֶת יוֹנָה וַעֲמְדוּ עַל יַרְכֵיתִי הַסְפִּינָה וַאֲמְרוּ: אֱלֹהֵי עוֹלָם ה', אַל תִּתֵּן עָלֵינוּ דָם נָקִי (יוֹנָה א, יד), שְׂאִין אֲנוּ יוֹדְעִין מַה טִּיבוֹ שֶׁל זֶה הָאִישׁ, וְהוּא אוֹמֵר בְּפִי, בְּשִׁבְלֵי הַצָּרָה הַזֹּאת בָּאָה עֲלֵיכֶם. הִטִּילוּ אוֹתוֹ עַד אַרְכְּבוֹתָיו, וַעֲמַד הַיָּם מִזַּעְפוֹ. לָקְחוּ אוֹתוֹ אֶצְלוֹ, וְהַיָּם סוּעַר עֲלֵיהֶם. הִטִּילוּ אוֹתוֹ עַד טְבוֹרוֹ, וַעֲמַד הַיָּם מִזַּעְפוֹ. לָקְחוּ אוֹתוֹ אֶצְלוֹ, וְהָיָה סוּעַר עֲלֵיהֶם. הִטִּילוּ אוֹתוֹ כָּלוּ, מִדֹּם שֶׁתַּק הַיָּם מִזַּעְפוֹ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: וַיִּשְׂאוּ אֶת יוֹנָה וַיִּטְלֶהוּ אֶל הַיָּם וַיַּעֲמֵד הַיָּם מִזַּעְפוֹ (יוֹנָה א, טו).

Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea; and the sea ceased from its raging.”	
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9. Captain of the sailors	King of Nineveh
וַיִּקְרַב אֵלָיו רֹב הַחֲבִיל וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ מֶה־לָּךְ נִרְדָּם קוֹם קְרָא אֶל־אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲוִלִי יִתְעַשֶׂת הָאֱלֹהִים לָנוּ וְלֹא נֶאֱבֹד: The captain went over to him and cried out, “How can you be sleeping so soundly! Up, call upon your god! <u>Perhaps the god will be kind to us and we will not perish.</u>” (Yonah 1:6)	מִי־יָדַע יָשׁוּב וְנָחֵם הָאֱלֹהִים וְשָׁב מִחֲרוֹן אַפּוֹ וְלֹא נֶאֱבֹד: Who knows but that God may turn and relent? [God] may turn back from wrathfulness, <u>so that we do not perish.</u>” (Yonah 3:9)
Repent/turn to worship G-d	Repent
Yonah causes both to happen (directly/indirectly) against his will	

III. Further learning

Uriel Simon, JPS Bible Commentary - Jonah	- באר מרים - יום הכיפורים - ספר יונה - מפטירין בנביא, דר גבריאל כהן - 386-394 סיפורו של יונה - ד"ר יושי פרג'ון ספר יונה - רב יונתן גרוסמן
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