

DROWNING WITH JONAH

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Link to Sefaria for Jonah chapter 3 (Hebrew and English):
<https://www.sefaria.org/Jonah.3?lang=bi>

Session 3 - Chapter 3

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

Joseph Kara (northern France, c. 1065-c. 1135)

David Kimchi (Radak, Provence, 1160-1235)

Eliezer of Beaugency (France, 12th century)

Isaiah of Trani the Younger (Italy, 13th-14th centuries)

Chapter 3 (translations mine unless otherwise stated)

[Rashi v. 3: an enormously large city [lit: a large city of God]: It is called ‘great’ in the Torah [Bereshit 10: 12], and it was difficult for [God] to destroy it.]

Bereshit 10: 11-12

From that land Ashur went forth and built Nineveh, Rehovot-Ir, Kalah, and Resen between Nineveh and Kalah, that is the great city [*bi ha'ir hagedolah*].

Rashi on Bereshit 10: 12

That is, Nineveh, as it is written: ‘And Nineveh was *ir gedolah lelokim* [Jonah 3: 3]

Kimchi v. 3: an enormously large city [lit: a large city of God]: anything that [the Bible] wants to emphasize, it associates with God, by way of emphasis: like ‘the mountains of God’ [*hararei el*] [Psalm 36: 7], ‘the cedars of God’ [*arẓei el*] [Psalm 80: 11] ...

Eliezer of Beaugency v. 3: of God: and He had mercy on it, so as not to destroy it.

Rashi v. 4: overthrown/ turned over [*nehepakhet*]: destroyed [and it does not actually say ‘destroyed’ because the word ‘turned over’ has both good and bad connotations; if they would not do *teshuvah*, they would be destroyed, but if they would do *teshuvah*, then the people of Nineveh would be turned from evil to good and do *teshuvah* [cf. BT *Sanhedrin* 89b].

Ibn Ezra v. 4: overthrown/turned over [*nehepakhet*]: it was ‘turned’ from its evil deeds—and this is *derash*, and it is incorrect. But rather the matter is like ‘At one moment I may decree [that a nation or a kingdom shall be uprooted and pulled down and destroyed; but if that nation against which I made the decree turns back from its wickedness I change My mind concerning the punishment I planned to bring on it.]’ [Jeremiah 18: 7-8]

Kimhi v. 4: Forty days more and Nineveh shall be overthrown: He means: Like the overthrowing of Sodom and Gomorrah [cf. Devarim 29: 22], because their [the Ninevites'] deeds were like their deeds.

[[Devarim 29: 22

... just like the overturning [*mahepakbat*] of Sodom and Gomorrah, Adamah and Zeboiim, which the Lord overthrew [*bafakb*] in His fierce anger ...]]

Kimhi v. 5: And [the people of Nineveh] believed: They said that the people from the ship were in the city, and testified about him that they had thrown him into the sea, and about the whole incident; therefore they [the Ninevites] believed in his prophecy and made full *teshuvah*.

Rashi: v. 6: his robe: his costly clothing.

Rashi: v. 7: *vayazek* [JPS: 'he had the word cried']: he commanded and caused to be declared.

by decree [*mita'am*] of the king and his nobles: on the advice of the king and his nobles they commanded [it] to be declared.

Isaiah of Trani v. 8: They shall be covered with sackcloth, man and beast: These are the splendid horses that belong to the king and the nobles, which were [usually] covered in embroidered cloths.

Rashi: v. 8: and shall cry mightily to God: they shut up mothers and newborn babies separately, and they said, 'Master of the world, if You will not have mercy upon us, we will not have mercy upon these.' [cf. BT *Ta'anit* 16a]

Kimhi v. 8: [shall cry] mightily: with all the heart.

Kara v. 8: and from the violence that is in their hands: these are the generally-known sins, which the perpetrator knows he has done.

Rashi: v. 9: Who knows: [He who knows] that his sin is in his hand [i.e. he still has stolen goods] must return it [*yashuv*] [cf. BT *Ta'anit* 16a].

Kimhi v. 9: Who knows: Who knows, perhaps **God will turn and relent** if we turn away from our wicked deeds. Or you could interpret it: **He who knows** the ways of *teshuvah*, **let him do teshuvah** [lit. turn back], and **God will relent**. And Targum Yonatan translates it: 'Anyone who knows that he is guilty of sins, let him do *teshuvah* for them, and then there will be mercy for us from before God.'

Rashi: v. 10: And God renounced: He took heed [*nitashet*, see Jonah 1: 6] of the evil, to turn away [*lashuv*] from it.

Background texts

Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 89b (modified Sefaria translation)

A *tanna* recited before Rabbi Hisda: He who suppresses his prophecy is flogged. To which he retorted, 'Is one who eats [worm-filled] dates out of a sieve flogged?' Who then warned him?

[how would anyone know Jonah had refused prophecy, and warn him he could be flogged?] Abaye answered; His fellow prophets [will have warned him]. — Whence do they know [that Jonah received prophecy]? — Said Abaye; For it is written, Surely the Lord will do nothing without revealing his secret [to his servants the prophets] [Amos 3: 7]. But perhaps they [the Heavenly Court] repented of this? [perhaps God decided after giving Jonah prophecy that he should not deliver the message?] — Had they repented [Had God changed His mind], all prophets would have been informed. But in the case of Jonah they did repent [God did change his mind], yet Jonah himself was not informed! — [we solve this by saying that] Jonah was originally told that Nineveh would be turned [*nehapachet*], but he did not know whether it would be turned/transformed for good or for evil.

Babylonian Talmud, *Ta'anit* 16a (Soncino translation)

‘But let them be covered with sackcloth, both man and beast’ [Jonah 3: 8]: How did they act? — They separated the animals from their young and they said, ‘Master of the Universe, if You will not have mercy upon us, we will not show mercy to these!’

‘And let them cry mightily to God’ [Jonah 3: 8]: What did they say? — They said, ‘Master of the Universe, if one is submissive and the other is not, if one is righteous and the other is not, which of them should yield?’

‘Let them turn every one from his evil way and from the violence that is in their hands’ [Jonah 3: 8]: What is the meaning of ‘and the violence that is in their hands’? — Shmuel said, ‘Even if one had stolen a beam and built it into his castle, he should raze the entire castle to the ground and return the beam to its owner.’

Mishnah, *Ta'anit* 2: 1

The eldest among them then addresses them in touching terms, as follows: ‘My brothers! Behold, it is not said concerning the [repentance of the] Ninevites, that God regarded their enveloping themselves in sackcloth, and considered their fast-days, but that ‘God saw their good deeds, that they had turned from their evil way’ [Jonah 3: 10], and so says the tradition: ‘Rip your heart instead of your garments and return to God’ [Joel 11: 13].