

## The Book of Jonah

### Part 1: Jonah's Flight and Descent

#### Outline of the Book of Jonah

- G-d tells Jonah to deliver a message to Nineveh, but Jonah runs away (1:1-3).
- G-d causes a powerful storm, and Jonah is thrown into the sea (1:4-16).
- Jonah is swallowed by a big fish, and prays to G-d; eventually he is spat out (Chapter 2).
- G-d tells Jonah to go to Nineveh, and he does (3:1-3).
- The people of Nineveh repent after hearing Jonah's message (3:4-10).
- Jonah goes out of the city disappointed, and watches from afar (4:1-5).
- G-d teaches Jonah a lesson through the *Kikayon* plant (4:6-11).

#### Why is Jonah included in Tanach?

##### 1. Radak to Jonah 1:1

ויש לשאול: למה נכתבה נבואה זו בכתבי הקודש? וכולה על נינוה, שהיתה מאומות העולם, ואין בו זכר לישראל, ואין בכל הנביאים זולתה כמוהו. ונוכל לפרש כי נכתבה להיות מוסר לישראל, שהרי עם נכרי שאינם מישראל היה קרוב לתשובה ובפעם הראשונה שהוכיחם הנביא שבו בתשובה שלמה מרעתם, וישראל - מוכיחים אותם הנביאים השכם והערב ואינם שבים מרשעם... ועוד ללמד שהאל יתברך חומל על בעלי תשובה מאיזה עם שיהיו, ומוחל להם, וכל שכן כשהם רבים.

One may ask: Why was this book included among the holy texts? After all, it is all about Nineveh, which is a gentile nation, and it does not discuss Israel at all, and there is no other story in the Prophets like it? One can suggest that it was written to give *mussar* to Israel, because a gentile nation immediately repented after the first time it was rebuked, as opposed to Israel, who were rebuked many times but did not repent... And also to teach that G-d has mercy on all those who repent, Jew and gentile, and He forgives all, especially if they are many.

#### Timeline

##### 2. Melachim II 14:23-25 (chabad.org translation)

(כג) בשנת חמש עשרה שנה לאמציהו בן יואש מלך יהודה מלך ירבעם בן יואש מלך ישראל בשמרון - ארבעים ואחת שנה: (כד) ויעש הרע בעיני ה'; לא סר מפל חטאות ירבעם בן נבט אשר החטיא את ישראל: (כה) הוא השיב את גבול ישראל מלבוא חמת עד ים הערב, כדבר ה' אלקי ישראל, אשר דבר ביד עבדו יונה בן אמתי הנביא, אשר מגת החפר.

In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash the king of Judah, Jeroboam the son of Joash the king of Israel, became king in Samaria - for forty-one years. And he did what was evil in the eyes of Hashem; he did not turn away from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat that he had caused Israel to sin. He restored the boundary of Israel from the approach to Hamath until the sea of the Arabah, according to the word of Hashem, G-d of Israel, which He spoke through his servant Jonah the son of Amittai the prophet, who was from Gath-hepher.

##### 3. *The Book of Jonah*, ArtScroll, p. xxvi

The date of Jonah's mission to Nineveh is not known...At any rate, it most certainly took place during the reign of Jeroboam, from 3114-3153 (646-607 B.C.E.).

#### Why did G-d send Jonah to Nineveh?

##### 4. Jonah 1:1-2

ויהי דבר ה' אל יונה בן אמתי לאמר: קום! לך אל נינוה, העיר הגדולה, וקרא עליה, כי עלתה רעתם לפני.

And the word of Hashem came to Jonah son of Amittai saying: Arise! Go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim against it, for their evil has ascended before Me.

##### 5. *The Book of Jonah*, ArtScroll, p. 79

Nineveh was the principal city of Assyria, Israel's bitterest enemy, and is mentioned often in Scripture. It lay on the east bank of the Tigris... and as we see below (4:11), its population exceeded 120,000.

## 6. Ibn Ezra to Jonah 1:2

כי היו יראים השם הימים הקדמונים. רק עתה בימי יונה החלו לעשות רע, ולולי זה שהיו בתחילה אנשי השם לא היה שולח נביאו אליהם. והנה ראינו ששב תשובה גמורה אין כמוה ולא תמצא כתוב ששברו מזבחות בעלים, או גדעו פסילים והנה מזה נלמוד שלא היו עכו"ם. The [Ninevites] were fearers of G-d in earlier days. Only now, in the days of Jonah, did they begin to do evil. Had they not originally been upstanding people, [G-d] would not have sent a prophet to them. We see that they returned with a repentance unlike any other, and we do not find it written that they destroyed idolatrous altars or tore down statues. From this we learn that they were not idolaters.

## 7. Malbim to Jonah 1:2

ולא היה השליחות בשביל נינוה כי לא מצאנו שישלח ה' נביא מישראל להשיב את העכו"ם בתשובה, כי לא דבקה השגחת ה' לשלוח נביא רק בישראל, רק כי היתה ההשגחה על נינוה בשביל ישראל אחר שאשור הוכן להיות שבט אפו של ה' לרדות בו את ישראל שנתחייבו למקום, רצה ה' להשיבם בתשובה כדי שיהיו מוכנים למלאת גזרתו על ישראל... רצה ה' להראות שאשור יש לו זכות יותר מישראל שהם שמעו לדברי הנביא ועשו תשובה. וישראל הקשו ערפם משמוע.

[Jonah's] mission was not for the sake of Nineveh, for we do not find that G-d sends prophets from among Israel to bring idolaters to repentance, for [His] Providence is only connected powerfully enough with the Jews to send prophets. G-d's Providence over Nineveh was only for the sake of the Jews: [G-d intended Assyria to be the "rod of his anger" to punish Israel by destroying the Northern Kingdom and exiling the Ten Tribes. Had Assyria remained as wicked as it was in Jonah's time, simple justice would have not permitted that it be G-d's tool to punish Israel, which, wicked though Israel may have become, was still more righteous than the thieving, violent Assyrians. Therefore, G-d dispatched Jonah to cause Nineveh, the Assyrian capital, to repent, and thus become worthy of its mission - *ArtScroll commentary to 1:3*]. And Israel stiffened their necks from hearing.

### Jonah's escape: Where?

## 8. Jonah 1:3

וַיָּקָם יוֹנָה לְבָרֶחַ תַּרְשִׁישָׁה מִלְּפָנֵי ה', וַיֵּרֶד יָפוֹ וַיִּמְצָא אֲנִיָּה בָּאָה תַרְשִׁישׁ, וַיִּתֵּן שְׂכָרָהּ, וַיֵּרֶד בָּהּ לָבוֹא עִמָּהֶם תַּרְשִׁישָׁה מִלְּפָנֵי ה'.  
And Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from before Hashem, and he **went down** to Jaffa and found a ship going to Tarshish, paid its fare, and **went down** into it to come with them to Tarshish from before from before Hashem.

## 9. Midrash, Mechilta d'Rabbi Yishmael, Bo 1

תדע שאין השכינה נגלית בחוצה לארץ, שנאמר "ויקם יונה לברוח תרשישה מלפני ד'" (יונה א:ג). וכי מלפני ד' הוא בורח? והלא כבר נאמר "אָנֹכָה אֵלֶיךָ מִרוֹחֶךָ וְגו'?" (תהלים קלט:ז-י)... אלא אמר יונה: "אלך לי בחוצה לארץ, מקום שאין השכינה נגלית."  
You know that the *Shechinah* [Divine Presence] is not revealed outside Israel, as it is written, "And Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from before G-d." Was he truly fleeing from before G-d? It is already written, "Where can I flee from Your spirit"?! ... Rather, Jonah said, "I will leave Israel, to a place where the *Shechinah* is not revealed."

### Jonah's escape: Why?

## 10. Midrash, Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer 10

דן דין יונה לבין עצמו ואמ' "יודע אני שהגוים קריבי תשובה הן. עכשו הן עושין תשובה, וד' שולח רוגזו על ישראל. ולא עוד, אלא די שישראל קורין אותי נביא שקר; אלא אף אומות העולם!"

Jonah judged for himself, saying, "I know that the nations are close to repentance. Now they will repent, and G-d will send His anger against Israel. Further, it is enough that Israel calls me a false prophet; now the nations will, too!"

## 11. Abarbanel to Jonah 1:1

גמר בלבו שלא ללכת בנינוה, כדי שלא ינצלו אנשי אשור מהכלייה על ידו. כי איך תהיה הליכתו סבה להציל את בני אשור ולהכרית את בני ישראל?... ואם ד' יתברך ירצה להצילם בעצמו יעשה כרצונו - אבל לא באמצעות יונה ועל ידו.

He decided not to go to Nineveh, so that the people of Assyria would not be saved from destruction by his hand. How could his going cause the Assyrians to be saved, and to destroy the children of Israel?... If G-d wishes to save them Himself, let Him do as He wishes – but not via Jonah and by his hand.

Why are we told (1:3) that Jonah paid the fare (וַיִּתֵּן שְׂכָרָה)?

### 12. Radak to Jonah 1:3

שכר הראוי לו לתת לה; אמר לתת או נתנו מתחלה. ובדרש נתן שכר כל הספינה בעבור שתמהר ללכת, ולא תמתין לסוחרים ולסחורות, בעבור שהיה רוצה לברוח מהר. וסמכו מזה שאין הנבואה שורה אלא על אדם עשיר.

The price that was appropriate for him to give; he said he would pay it, or he paid up front. In *derash* it is taught that he paid the price of the entire boat, so that it would rush to travel and not wait for merchants and merchandise, for he wanted to flee quickly. They used this to support the idea that prophecy is manifest only upon a wealthy person (Nedarim 38a).

The Yom Kippur Connection

### 13. Jonah 1:4-5

(ד) וְה' הִטִּיל רוּחַ גְּדוּלָה אֶל הַיָּם, וַיְהִי סַעַר גָּדוֹל בַּיָּם, וְהָאֹנִיָּה חֹשְׁבָה לְהִשָּׁבֵר: (ה) וַיִּירָאוּ הַמַּלְחָמִים, וַיִּזְעְקוּ אִישׁ אֶל אֱלֹהָיו, וַיִּטְלוּ אֶת הַפְּלִים אֲשֶׁר בָּאֹנִיָּה אֶל הַיָּם לְהִקַּל מֵעֲלֵיהֶם. וַיֹּנֶה יָרֵד אֶל יַרְכְּתֵי הַסְּפִינָה, וַיִּשְׁכַּב, וַיִּרְדָּם.

Now Hashem cast a mighty wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, and the ship threatened to be broken up. And the sailors were frightened, and each one cried out to his god, and they cast the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had **descended** to the ship's hold, lay down, and fell fast asleep.

### 14. Prof. Alan Jotkowitz, "Reading Yona with the Rambam, the Rav, and R. Lichtenstein"

These literary allusions echo R. Soloveitchik's description of the death of the *se'ir hamishtalei'ach*, the sacrificial scapegoat:

The *mishna* in *Yoma* describes the ultimate fate of the scapegoat in the ritual: "It went **backward**, and it **rolled** and **descended** (וַיִּרְדָּ וַיִּקְרַע לְאֲחֻרָיו, וְהוּא מְתַגַּלְגֵּל וַיִּירֵד) until it was halfway down the mountain, where it became dismembered into many parts." Can there be a more accurate description of what sin itself does to a person? Even before his total descent, he is broken apart, an object victim of gravity. Sin transforms a person into someone who is acted upon or influenced... Regarding sin, an analogy is made to sleep. Sleep is an absolute passive state, in which man is a pure object. The insistent demands of the *shofar*, according to the Rambam, is the imperative to awaken oneself.

### 15. Jonah 1:7

וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל רֵעֵהוּ "לָכֹוּ וְנִפְּלֵה גוֹרְלוֹת, וְנִדְעָה בְּשִׁלְמֵי הָרָעָה הַזֹּאת לָנוּ." וַיִּפְּלוּ גוֹרְלוֹת, וַיִּפֹּל הַגּוֹרֵל עַל יוֹנָה.

And they said, each one to his fellow, "Come, let's cast lots, so that we will know because of whom this evil has befallen us." So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah.

### 16. Prof. Alan Jotkowitz, "Reading Yona with the Rambam, the Rav, and R. Lichtenstein"

The "casting of lots" is also an allusion to the lottery that occurred in the Temple on Yom Kippur to select the *se'ir ha-mishtalei'ach*. In fact, after Yona was chosen, "they picked up Yona and heaved him into the sea" – remarkably parallel to the fate of the scapegoat. Like the scapegoat, Yona was chosen to be cast off from G-d's presence, and like the vessels that were cast off the ship to lighten the load, Yona was reduced to a passive object.

### 17. Jonah 1:6

וַיִּקְרַב אֵלָיו רֵב הַחֵבֶל וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ "מַה לָּךְ נֹרְדָם? קוּם, קְרָא אֶל אֱלֹהֶיךָ! אוּלַי יִתְעַשֵּׂת הָאֱלֹהִים לָנוּ, וְלֹא נֹאכֵד."

And the captain approached him and said to him, "Why do you sleep? Get up, call out to your G-d, perhaps G-d will think about us, and we will not perish."

## 18. Prof. Alan Jotkowitz, "Reading Yona with the Rambam, the Rav, and R. Lichtenstein"

The call of the ship captain to Yona to wake up – "How can you sleep so soundly?! Arise, call to your G-d. Perhaps G-d will pay us mind and we will not perish" (ibid. 1:6) – can be seen as analogous to the sound of the *shofar* of Rosh Hashana, the purpose of which is to awaken us from our sinful stupor. As the Rambam writes:

### Fear inspires repentance

#### 19. Jonah 1:5, 10, 16

(ה) וייראו המלחים ויצעקו איש אל אלהיו ויטלו את הכלים אשר באגניה אל הים להקל מעליהם ויונה ירד אל תרפתו הספינה וישפכו וינרדם.  
And the sailors were **frightened**, and each one cried out to his god, and they cast the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them, and Jonah went down to the ship's hold, lay down, and fell fast asleep.

(י) וייראו האנשים יראת גדולה ויאמרו אליו מה זאת עשית כי ידעו האנשים כי מלפני ה' הוא ברח כי הגיד להם  
And the men were very **frightened**, and they said to him, "What is this that you have done?" For the men knew that he was fleeing from before Hashem, because he had told them

(טז) וייראו האנשים יראת גדולה את ה', ויזבחו זבח לה' וינדרו נדרים.  
And the men **feared** Hashem exceedingly, and they made sacrifices to Hashem and made vows.

#### 20. Midrash, Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer 10 (Friedlander translation)

ראו המלחים את כל האותות והנפלאות הגדולות שעשה הקב"ה עם יונה מיד עמדו והשליכו איש את אלהיו בים, שנאמר (יונה ב, ט): "משמרים הבלי שןא חסדם יעזבו", וחזרו ליפו ועלו לירושלים ומלו את בשר ערלתם, שנאמר (יונה א, טז): "וייראו האנשים יראת גדולה את ה' ויזבחו זבח לה'"; וכי זבח זבחו – והלא אין מקבלין זבח מן העכומ"ז? אלא זה הוא דם ברית שהוא כדם זבח. ונדרו ושלמו להביא איש את אשתו ואת כל אשר לו ליראת אלקי יונה; ונדרו ושלמו. ועליהם הוא אומר על הגרים גירי הצדק.

The sailors saw all the signs, the miracles, and the great wonders which the Holy One, blessed be He, did unto Jonah, and they stood and every one cast away his god, as it is said, "They that regard lying vanities forsake their own shame" (Jonah 2:8). They returned to Jaffa and went up to Jerusalem and circumcised the flesh of their foreskins, as it is said, "And the men feared Hashem exceedingly; and they offered a sacrifice unto Hashem" (Jonah 1:16). Did they offer sacrifice? Don't we not accept offerings of idolaters? Rather, this [sacrifice] refers to the blood of the covenant of circumcision, which is like the blood of a sacrifice. And they made vows every one to bring his children and all belonging to him to the G-d of Jonah; and they made vows and fulfilled them - and it is regarding converts such as these that we mention [in *Shemoneh Esrei*]: "upon the righteous converts..."

#### 21. Jonah 1:11

ויאמרו אליו "מה נעשה לך וישתק הים מעלינו?" כי הים הולך וסער.  
They said to him, "What must we do to you to make the sea calm around us?" For the sea was growing more and more stormy.

#### 22. Malbim to Jonah 1:11

ויאמרו אליו "מה נעשה לך?" שאלוהו אם רוצה לשוב בתשובה ולקבל עליו ללכת לנינוה, ואולי יהיה להם תקנה ע"י שישובו עמו ללכת אל חוף המוליך לנינוה, או ששיבוהו לא"י בחזרה, ובזה "ישתק הים מעלינו".  
They asked, "What can we do to you." They asked whether he wanted to repent and commit himself to go to Nineveh, and perhaps they could be saved if they would return with him to the shore, where he could go to Nineveh, or if they would return him to Israel, "and thus the sea would quiet itself from upon us."

### 23. Prof. Alan Jotkowitz, "Reading Yona with the Rambam, the Rav, and R. Lichtenstein"

The chapter ends with the sailors "offering a sacrifice to G-d and taking vows." They appear to exemplify the process of *teshuvah mei-yira*, repentance from fear, whose impetus is crisis but is nevertheless acceptable and even praiseworthy in the eyes of G-d...

This kind of *teshuvah* seems particularly appropriate for Rosh Hashana, the day of year where the Jewish People in a sense crown G-d as the King of the world and accept his dominion, as beautifully expressed in the *Malkhiyot* prayers of Musaf. Rosh Hashana has a universal aspect to it as well, as the kingship of G-d applies to all the nations of the world. It was this kingship that the sailors recognized and paid homage to with their prayers, sacrifices, and repentance.

### 24. Jonah 2:1-2

וַיִּמַן ה' דָּג גָּדוֹל לְבָלַע אֶת יוֹנָה, וַיְהִי יוֹנָה בְּמִעֵי הַדָּג שְׁלֹשָׁה יָמִים וּשְׁלֹשָׁה לַיְלוֹת: וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל יוֹנָה אֵל ה' אֱלֹהָיו מִמִּעֵי הַדָּג.

And Hashem appointed a big fish to swallow up Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights. Then Jonah prayed to Hashem his G-d out of the fish's belly,

### 25. Radak to Jonah 2:1

והקל ית' הזמינו לפי שעה, שבשעה שהוטל יונה בים, הזמין הדג שבלעו ולא טבע בים.

G-d prepared according to this time, that at the time when Jonah was thrust into the river, the fish swallowed him so that he would not drown in this river.

### 26. Malbim to Jonah 2:1

ה' הזמין במקום הזה דג גדול שבלעו כולו שלם ולא שבר עצמותיו.

G-d prepared in this place a big fish to swallow [Jonah] entirely whole, and did not break his bones.

### 27. Ibn Ezra to Jonah 2:1

אין כח באדם לחיות במעי הדגה כפי שעה, ואף כי זה המספר רק במעשה נס.

One does not have the strength to survive in a fish's belly for even an hour! That [he was able to survive for three days] was only possible through a miracle.

### 28. Malbim to Jonah 2:1

שהאדם צריך שאיפת רוח קר מבחוץ, אולם באשר כבר נגזר עליו מיתה ונחשב כאילו נולד שנית שם לו ה' טבע העובר, הנוצר ומתקיים ט' חדשים במעי אמו מבלי שאיפת רוח.

For a person needs oxygen from outside. Since death was already decreed on him, it was as if he was born a second time like a fetus, who is former and sustained for nine months in its mother's womb, without needing oxygen.

### 29. Rashi to Jonah 2:1

דג גדול - זכר היה, והיה עומד בריוח, ולא נתן לב להתפלל. רמז הקב"ה לדג, והקיא לתוך פיה של נקבה שהיתה מלאה עוברי, והיה שם בדוחק, ויתפלל שם שנאמר ממעי הדגה.

"A big fish [*dag*]" - It was a male, and he stood there with room, so that he did not think to pray. The Holy One, blessed he He, hinted to the fish, and it vomited him out into the mouth of a female, which was full of embryos, and it was crowded there, and he prayed there, as it is said: (verse 2) "from the belly of the fish [*dagah*]."

### 30. Jonah 2:2-3 (chabad.org tr.)

וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל יוֹנָה אֵל־ה' אֱלֹהָיו מִמִּעֵי הַדָּג: וַיֹּאמֶר קְרָאתִי מִצָּרָה לִּי אֵל־ה' וַיַּעֲנֵנִי מִבֶּטֶן שְׂאוֹל שְׁמַעְתָּ קוֹלִי.

And Jonah prayed to Hashem his G-d, from the belly of the fish. And he said: **I called** out from my distress to Hashem, and He **answered** me; from the belly of the grave I **cried** out, You **heard** my voice.

### 31. Dr. Mendel Hirsch, Commentary to Jonah 2:3, p. 288-89

Yonah recognized that the most striking proof of the rescuing proximity of G-d was the fact that he was still alive and his mind was clear in circumstances which, without G-d's direct intervention, would inevitably have brought about his death. It was proof that G-d had forgiven him for his previous folly and would preserve him for future activity. The confinement, the lack of light and air of his prison, was no longer a source of terror for him. The narrower it was, with less air and light, the more powerfully convincing was the awareness of G-d's nearness, and the great happiness in that conviction. The darker the night which enveloped him, the brighter it became in his mind's eye. Out of the narrowness of confinement, his spirit soared upward to a sublime, broad outlook on men and their doings.

### 32. Jonah 2:5

וְאָנִי אָמַרְתִּי "נִגְרַשְׁתִּי מִנֶּגֶד עֵינֶיךָ," אֲדָ אֹסִיף לְהִבִּיט אֶל הַיְכָל קֹדְשְׁךָ.

Then I thought: "I was driven from Your sight," but - I will gaze again at Your Holy Temple.

### 33. Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Repentance 7:7

כַּמָּה מַעֲלָה מַעֲלַת הַתְּשׁוּבָה! אָמַשׁ הָיָה זֶה מִבְּדֵל מֵה' אֱלֹקֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל... צוּעֵק וְנִעְנָה... וְעוֹשֶׂה מִצְוֹת וְטוֹרְפִין אוֹתָן בְּפָנָיו... וְהַיּוֹם הוּא מְדַבֵּק בְּשִׂכְיָהּ... צוּעֵק וְנִעְנָה מִיָּד...

How exalted is the level of *teshuva*! Only yesterday this sinner was separated from G-d, the Lord of Israel... He would call out [to G-d] without being answered... He would perform *mitzvot*, only to have them thrown back in his face... Today [after having repented], he clings to the Divine Presence... He calls out [to G-d] and is answered immediately.