

Haftarah Helper 5781: Yom Kippur Afternoon

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Jonah 1:1-4:11, Micha 7:18,20

The haftarah of Yom Kippur afternoon recounts the collective repentance in the capital, Nineveh, of Israel's arch-enemy, Assyria. Like this morning's haftarah chastising Jews who fast for God while doing evil, this selection about a Jewish prophet, Jonah, who flees from God's command while an entire city of Gentiles successfully repents, is an astonishing reproach to God's people. The haftarah concludes with the words of Micha¹, also said in Tashlich², imploring repentance for all, as God is forgiving.

Haftarah Breakdown

In **Chapter 1**, God commands Jonah to travel to Nineveh, and prophesy its destruction due to its evil ways. Fleeing from this task, Jonah instead heads to the port of Jaffa to sail in the opposite direction, to Tarshish. After falling asleep, Jonah is suddenly awoken by the ship's captain begging him to pray, as the ship is beset by a storm sent by God. The sailors cast lots to determine which of them is the cause of the storm, and it falls upon Jonah. He confesses his flight from prophecy, telling them to cast him into the sea to stop the storm. They disregard his request by praying and trying to row to shore but when these fail, they cast him overboard, calming the storm.

In **Chapter 2**, after being swallowed by a fish sent by God, Jonah composes the following prayer to God:

[Verse 2:3: Jonah thanks God for saving him from the depths.](#)

Jonah 2:3	יונה ב:ג
And he said: "I called out from my distress to the Lord, and He answered me. From the belly of the underworld I cried out, You heard my voice."	וַיֹּאמֶר קְרָאתִי מִצָּרָה לִי אֱלֹהֵי וַיַּעֲנֵנִי מִבֶּטֶן שְׂאוֹל שְׁוַעֲתִי שָׁמַעְתָּ קוֹלִי:

[Verses 2:4-6: Jonah, swallowed up, had given up hope.](#)

Jonah 2:6	יונה ב:ו
The waters closed in over me. The deep engulfed me. Weeds twined around my head.	אֶפְפוּנֵי מַיִם עַד־נִפְשׁ תְּהוֹם יִסְבְּבֵנִי סוּף חֲבוּשׁ לְרֹאשִׁי:

[Verse 2:7: God, however, raised Jonah from the depths...](#)

Jonah 2:7	יונה ב:ז
To the base of the mountains I descended; the earth's bars [are closed] upon me forever. But You brought up my life from the pit, O Lord, my God.	לְקַצְבֵי הַרִים יִרְדְּתִי הָאָרֶץ בְּרַחֲמֶיהָ בְּעַדִּי לְעוֹלָם וַתַּעַל מִשַּׁחַת חַיִּי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי:

¹ Per Megillah 24a, one is allowed to advance by skipping forward (but not backward) among the twelve "minor" prophets, as they constitute one "book."

² These verses are part of the Haftarah of "Shabbat Shuva" for Sephardim.

Verses 2:8: ... after receiving his prayer.

Jonah 2:8	יונה ב:ח
When my soul grew faint upon me, I remembered the Lord: my prayer came to You to Your Holy Temple.	בְּהִתְעַטֵּף עָלַי נַפְשִׁי אֶת־ה' זָכַרְתִּי וַיִּבְּאֵ אֵלַיךְ תַּפְלִתִּי אֶל־הֵיכַל קִדְשְׁךָ:

Verses 2:9-10: Others serve nothing, but Jonah will serve God in His temple.

Jonah 2:10	יונה ב:י
But I, with a voice of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to You. What I vowed I will pay. Salvation is the Lord's!	וְאֲנִי בְּקוֹל תּוֹדָה אֶזְבְּחֶךָ לֵךְ אֲשֶׁר נָדַרְתִּי אֲשַׁלְּמָה יְשׁוּעָתָה לֵה' (o)

Verses 2:11: God commands the fish to spit out Jonah.

Jonah 2:11	יונה ב:יא
And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it spewed Jonah onto the dry land.	וַיֹּאמֶר ה' לַדָּג וַיִּקָּא אֶת־יוֹנָה אֶל־הַיַּבְשָׁה:

Now on dry land, Jonah heads to Nineveh. In **chapter 3**, Upon entering the city's outskirts, he prophesies its destruction. His pronouncement travels throughout the city, eventually making it to the city's king who leads his city to repent by fasting and mourning; even the animals do so! In response to this collective repentance, God spares the city.

In **chapter 4**, Jonah despairs of God's decision, and they engage in a back-and-forth about a "kikayon"³ plant:

Verses 4:5-6: God provides Jonah with the "Kikayon."

Jonah 4:6	יונה ד:ו
Now the Lord God appointed a kikayon, and it ascended above Jonah, to be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. Jonah was overjoyed with the kikayon.	וַיִּמֶן ה־אֱלֹהִים קִיקַיִן וַיַּעַל וַיַּעַל מֵעַל לְיוֹנָה לְהַיּוֹת צֶלַעַל־רֹאשׁוֹ לְהַצִּיל לּוֹ מִכָּעָתוֹ וַיִּשְׂמַח יוֹנָה עַל־הַקִּיקַיִן שִׂמְחָה גְדוֹלָה:

Verses 4:7-9: God kills the plant, saddening Jonah.

Jonah 4:7,9	יונה ד:ז,ט
Now God appointed a worm at the rise of dawn on the morrow, which attacked the kikayon, and it withered. God said to Jonah, "Does it do you well to be so deeply grieved about the kikayon?" And he said, "I do well to be angry, even to death."	וַיִּמֶן הָאֱלֹהִים תּוֹלַעַת בַּעֲלוֹת הַשַּׁחַר לְמַחֲרָת וַיַּךְ אֶת־הַקִּיקַיִן וַיִּיבֶשׂ... וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־יוֹנָה הֵיטֵב חָרָה־לְךָ עַל־הַקִּיקַיִן וַיֹּאמֶר הֵיטֵב חָרָה־לִּי עַד־מוֹת:

³ The Kikayon's identity is debated. The two prominent positions are a type of pumpkin or a castor oil plant. The identity of the worm that ate it is also up to debate. For more, see <http://www.zomet.org.il/eng/?CategoryID=160&ArticleID=7847>.

Verses 4:10-11: God's response- Should He not care about the great city of Nineveh?

Jonah 4:11	יונה ד:י"א
Now should I not take pity on Nineveh, the great city, in which there are many more than one hundred twenty thousand people who do not know their right hand from their left, and many beasts as well?	וְאֵיךָ לֹא אֲחֹס עַל-נִינְוָה הָעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁבְּהָ הַרְבֵּה מִשְׁתִּים-עֶשְׂרֵה רְבֹ אֲדָם אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יָדַע בֵּין-יְמִינוֹ לְשִׁמְאֵלוֹ וּבְהֵמָה רַבָּה:

Micah, verses 7:18,20: God will forgive the sins of His people (as he forgave Nineveh.)

Micah 7:18	מיכה ז:י"ח
Who is a God like You, Who forgives iniquity and passes over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not maintain His anger forever, for He desires loving-kindness.	מִי-קֵל כְּמוֹךָ נֹשֵׂא עוֹן וְעֹבֵר עַל-פְּשָׁע לְשֹׂאֲרֵית נִחְלָתוֹ לֹא-הִחְזִיק לְעַד אָפוּ כִּי-חִפְץ חַסֵּד הוּא:

Other Connections

The Talmud cites Nineveh's deeds to exemplify repentance that suffices to cancel a person's "heavenly sentence."

Rosh Hashanah 16b	ראש השנה ט"ז עמוד ב
Rabbi Yitzhak said: "A person's sentence is torn up due to four actions. These are: giving charity, crying out in prayer, changing one's name, and changing one's deeds [for the better]... Improving one's deeds, as written [Jonah 3:10]: "And God saw their deeds," and as written: "And God repented of the evil, which He had said He would do to them, and He did not do it."	א"ר יצחק ד' דברים מקרעין גזר דינו של אדם אלו הן צדקה צעקה שינוי השם ושינוי מעשה... שינוי מעשה דכתיב (יונה ג, י) וירא האלהים את מעשיהם וכתיב (יונה ג, י) וינחם האלהים על הרעה אשר דבר לעשות להם ולא עשה

Rabbi Soloveitchik uses Jonah to **differentiate between fate and destiny**:

Kol Dodi Dofek, Loneliness and Separateness
Let us return to what we said above. How does destiny differ from fate? In two respects: fate means a compelled existence; destiny is existence by volition. Destiny is created by man himself, who chooses and makes his own way in life. Fate is expressed in a teleological sense, in a denuded existence, whereas destiny embodies purpose and objectives. Shared fate means an inability to rebel against fate. It is, as with the tragedy of Jonah the prophet, about the lack of alternatives to escape the God of the Jews; "And God hurled a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea so that the ship was about to break apart" (Jonah 1:4). Shared destiny means having free will to strive for a goal (a decision freely willed to be sanctified to an ideal) and a yearning and longing for the Master of the Universe. Instead of the blind fate that pursued him, Jonah, in the end, chose the exalted destiny of the God of Israel. "I am a Jew, and I fear the Lord, the God of the heaven" (Jonah 1:9).

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