



THE SIGN OF JONAH

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בס"ד

Why is the book of Jonah read on Yom Kippur? In order to answer this question one must understand an important point concerning atonement. Atonement is not offered to people who want to continue in their sin, but to those who are seeking not only forgiveness but also a desire to change. But change in what way? HaShem is seeking people who are grieved over their sins, want to be forgiven, and then serve G-d according to His will for their lives. How does the book of Jonah relate to this? Jonah, just like you and me, had a call on his life. He knew he was a prophet and willing to speak to his people, but when he heard from G-d that he needed to speak to the enemies of Israel, the Assyrians (Nineveh was the capital city of the Assyrian Empire), Jonah refused to do this.

Either Jonah had forgotten or did care about Israel's call to be a light and blessing to the Gentiles. Therefore he decided to flee from the presence of the L-rd. In other words he did not want any connection with HaShem. Did you know that when you are uninterested in doing or even knowing what plan G-d has for your life you are really saying to Him, "I don't want You to be part of my life"? It is important to note that once Jonah set out to flee from the presence of the L-rd he was on a downward journey. The Scripture says that he went down to Yafo, that he went down into the ship, and the word which was used to convey sleep in chapter 1:5 is related to the Hebrew word to go down. In fact when the captain of the ship addressed Jonah in 1:6 he called him "sleeper" which also is related to the idea of falling into a sleep.

"צ"ל שהמילה "נרדם" קשורה למילה "לרדת"

Jonah's downward spin did not end there. He was cast into the sea where he went down to Sheol (see 2:3). The book of Jonah is trying to convey to the reader that when one wants to be separated from HaShem that he is really choosing death. Sheol is the word that the Hebrew Scriptures use when referring to the place to where the dead descend. Jonah got what he wanted, separation from G-d, but no sooner did he realize this separation than he began to pray to HaShem and look to the L-rd's sanctuary. This place refers to the location where G-d dwells upon earth. Therefore Jonah, once he tasted what it was like to be separated from G-d, what did he want? He wanted to be with G-d in the intimacy of His sanctuary. This reminds me of that old saying, "be careful what you pray for, because you might get it". It was only when Jonah proclaimed that salvation—deliverance from death—is only found in G-d's grace and made a commitment to Him (see 2:10), that the reader can understand why HaShem lifted him from the pit of death (see 2:7b).

It is important that we see in this book of Jonah that he sinned and died, but through faith in G-d he was resurrected. The miraculous sign in the book of Jonah is the resurrection of Jonah. This is why when those who came to Yeshua and asked for a sign from heaven that Yeshua was indeed the Messiah, Yeshua responded that the sign they would receive would be the sign of Jonah i.e., the resurrection of Yeshua from the dead after three days and three nights just like Jonah was in belly of the fish three days and three nights.

What does this all have to do with Yom Kippur? We, like Jonah, have sinned. When we strive after our will rather than G-d's, we are saying we do not want a relationship with the Living G-d.

One of the great errors of modern Christianity is that today many are teaching that G-d desires to bless your dreams, goals, etc; rather than proclaiming that G-d's will for your life is far better than what you can come up with in your mind. It was only after Jonah's strong profession of his commitment to HaShem that He commanded the fish to vomit Jonah out upon the dry land. Jonah received a second chance. Thank G-d for second opportunities that G-d provides so we can repent and embrace HaShem's will for our life.

This is what the Day of Atonement is all about. A day set aside which we as a people are together before G-d confessing our sinfulness and seek His forgiveness not just to avoid the punishment, but so that we can do His will for our life. Repentance without a desire to embrace G-d's plan for your life and walk in obedience to His word is not at all Biblical repentance.

Jonah represents the Jewish people and for that matter all people, for all of us have to decide what we are going to do. Jonah did indeed do what G-d commanded him to do; he did proclaim destruction upon the people of Nineveh. By the way, if you think Jonah preached a message of repentance you are wrong. Read Jonah 3:4. In this verse we clearly see that Jonah proclaimed a message of G-d's wrath for Nineveh's evil deeds (see 1:2). The primary point in chapter three is that despite not being offered any hope of forgiveness, the people of Nineveh repented from their evil ways and turned to G-d. Let me ask you a question: what if the Gospel was this—G-d sent His only begotten Son into this world to prove there is One True G-d and His Torah is true and we are all guilty of violating His Law and going to be punished eternally. However it is the will of the One True G-d that people repent and do good deeds, but there is no justification and all will be damned eternally. How many of you, now being convinced there is a G-d repent and do His commandments even though there was no forgiveness and promise of entrance into His Kingdom? How many of you would say, "well, if I am going to hell any way I might as well continue to sin and do what I want."

The book of Jonah reveals that true repentance is not based on the promises of G-d, but the fact that there is One Holy and Righteous G-d Who is supreme and all people should serve Him because of Who He is and not what He offers. Can you agree with this?

Even though Jonah did what G-d commanded, his heart was still far from G-d. Jonah had only repented outwardly, but inside he was still fleeing from G-d.

The book of Jonah ends with the reader not knowing if Jonah ever understood what it was to really repent before G-d or not. You know the point is not whether Jonah understood or not, the point is do you know? Yom Kippur is a day which the word of G-d has ordained for each person to reflect upon his life and do so in light of the truth of Scripture. People always ask me, "can't I do this any day, or does it have to be only on Yom Kippur?" Of course G-d's grace and mercy is available each day, but we tend to need a reminder of this. Yom Kippur is a national day set aside to remind us of G-d's love and willingness to forgive sin. We learn that we are unable to make atonement for ourselves so G-d takes on this task Himself—ultimately through the sacrifice of Messiah.

Once again people will ask, "But Yeshua gave His sacrifice on Passover and not on Yom Kippur, so how could He be connected to this Holiday?" In order to answer this question one needs to understand the difference between atonement and redemption. Atonement is a covering up of sin. It is a removal of sin from sight, but the sin is still present. Yom Kippur did not remove the judgment of G-d from Israel, but simply kept it from coming for a year. This fact was to cause the

Jewish people to pray that HaShem would in that year send His Redeemer, the Messiah to do the work of redemption. What is redemption? Redemption is the total removal of sin, so that sin no longer exists before G-d and hence there is no need for the redeemed to experience His judgment.

Atonement always looked to its greater partner which is redemption. The connection between Yom Kippur and Yeshua is found clearly in the fourth chapter of Hebrews. This chapter reveals to us that Yeshua, our Great High Priest, passed from the heavens to earth, in order to mediate the work of redemption to those who accept Him.

Yes one can repent today and he should; however, I for one like the Biblical idea of a day set aside which reminds me of my need to confess my sin before my only Priest- Yeshua and look to Him with confidence that His grace is sufficient. The fact that I each night confess my sins and seek His forgiveness does not mean that Yom Kippur is no longer relevant and cannot be a meaningful experience.