

# JAFFA [YONAH 1:3]

*by Rabbi Dr. Meir Levin*

When Yonah descended to Jaffa to find a ship to Tarshish, he provided much grist to later commentators. This is because Jaffa was a secondary port and because it appears to have been much farther from where Yonah lived and presumably received his prophecy. The Jerusalem Talmud in Sukkah 5:1 reports that Yonah was the son of the Tsorfite woman who during the famine in the reign of Achab had given shelter to Eliahu. If so, he stemmed from the tribe of Asher, or, according to another opinion there, his father was from Zebulun while his mother was from near Sidon, from the territory of Asher. The natural port of reference for that area would be Akko, or perhaps, Tyre. The choice is especially surprising in light of the close associations of seafaring with Tarshish and the port of Tyre.

Isaiah 23, 1 (see also 10 and 14) The burden of Tyre. Howl ye, ships of Tarshish for it is laid waste... Kings I, 22 - For the king had at sea a navy of Trashish with the navy of Hiram (king of Tyre)... Ezekiel 27 ...take up lamentation for Tyre...Tarshish was thy me The Talmud offers the following solution: "Rabbi Yonah said: Yonah son of Amitai was at pilgrimage to Jerusalem and he entered the rejoicing of water drawing (simchas beit hashoeva) and the Holy Spirit rested upon him." From Jerusalem, the closest port is Jaffa. This explanation certainly throws light on Yonah's repeated reference to "your holy temple" in his prayer from the belly of the fish.

I said, I have been driven away out of Your sight, Nevertheless I shall gaze again upon Your Holy Temple ...and My prayer came before You, Into Yo However, if Yonah had come from the north, the choice of Jaffa is deeply significant for it underlines the desperation and finality of his flight. This is simply because setting forth to Tyre would take him northwest and in some measure in the direction toward Nineveh that lies to northeast. Yonah fled in the opposite direction, to the southwest precisely to head in as radically opposite direction as possible. He who runs away from G-d rarely suffices to merely move to the side; part of the psychology of escape is to go all the way, as far and in as contrary direction as possible. A true rebel does not suffice with discarding a few observances or with moving to another denomination; he jettisons all and everything and often, like Yonah, must "hit the bottom of the sea (2:7)", before coming back again.

Finally, it is certainly significant that the three cities - Jaffa, Nineveh and Tarshish define the dramatic space in which the story of Yonah unfolds. It is not for nothing that the acrostic of the first letters of their names consonantly spells Yonah. Y is for Jaffa, N is for Nineveh, and T, allowing for H to T

interchange (see Ibn Ezra to Exodus 1, 16), is, of course, for Tarshish. It is one of many allusions in this remarkably deep and profound book. IN this vein, Yonah's name in itself is in allusion to Noah's dove (yonah in Hebrew) and his mission "upon the faces of the waters". Like it, Yonah goes out twice, and only succeeds on second try.

Next week, we will, please G-d, discuss the city of Tarshish and its meaning within the overall structure of the story.

---

Text Copyright © 2004 by Rabbi Dr. Meir Levin and **Torah.org**.