

THE METZUDOT ON THE BOOK OF JONAH:
RABBI DAVID ALTSCHULER AND HIS SON RABBI HILLEL
ALTSCHULER IN CONVERSATION WITH OTHER MEDIEVAL
COMMENTATORS

SAM KLEIN

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Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion

School of Rabbinic Studies

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Advisor: Reuven Firestone, Ph.D

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I. INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This text immersion is intended to provide the first, complete English translation of the collective Metzudot (Metzudat David and Metzudat Zion) written by Rabbi David Altschuler and his son, Rabbi Hillel Altschuler.¹ In addition, this project provides a comparative analysis in relation to four medieval commentaries that preceded it: that of Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Radak (hereafter, “Kimchi”), and Abarbanel. Through this comparison, I have made an analysis of what overarching interpretation each commentator offers on the Book of Jonah, and how one might explain how they arrived at such an interpretation.

A note on navigating this document. Every verse of Jonah and every verse from the Metzudot are featured in Hebrew, derived from sefaria.org. My English translation of all commentary from the Metzudot and select comments from other commentators is also provided. When select comments from other commentators are mentioned in the document, those comments are derived from their commentary on that specific verse unless otherwise noted.

I would like to deeply thank my thesis advisor Dr. Rabbi Reuven Firestone for his immeasurably helpful guidance in translation and interpretation of the various commentaries and his generosity in giving his time to reviewing my work. I would also like to thank my father Rabbi Norman Mark Klein for carefully reviewing my work as well. I also am very grateful to the work of Rabbi Steven Bob, *Go to Nineveh: Medieval Jewish Commentaries on the Book of Jonah*, which provided a very helpful English translation and explanation of the medieval commentaries on Jonah with whom the Altschuler's were in conversation. The translations as well as any inadvertent errors or oversights in what follows are my own.

¹ Please see more on the Altschulers in section III

II. OVERVIEW AND CONCLUSIONS

The Book of Jonah is traditionally read by the Jewish community on Yom Kippur afternoon and thus, it is most known for its themes of *teshuvah* (repentance) and forgiveness, for those are the themes of Yom Kippur itself. However, I have observed a number of other themes based on my comparative analysis of the medieval commentaries on the Book of Jonah. These themes shed an alternative light on the Book of Jonah, revealing why this text has proven to be inspirational for readers throughout the ages.

Universalism

Why was this story even written and for whom was it written? Rabbi Isaac Abarbanel writes that it seems “entirely for the nations of the world.”² Thus, the story of Jonah actually has a message for everyone, Jews and non-Jews alike, even if it primarily focuses on the testing of Jonah. Kimchi makes a similar observation and asks how such a unique prophetic text could focus solely on Nineveh, the capital of a foreign nation? The Book has no mention of Israel and has no parallel in other prophetic texts, yet uses the Hebrew language and is located in the Jewish canon. He determines that the purpose of the Book of Jonah is to serve as a moral lesson for Israel by describing the drama of a foreign nation: that if a foreign nation can be close to repentance and, after the first time that a prophet rebuked them, they can turn to a complete repentance from their evil, then the people of Israel and also all peoples of the Earth can and should do the same.³

Non-Israelites play a prominent role in the Book of Jonah, namely the sailors and the people of Nineveh. Their behavior is truly exemplary. Thus, one of the messages of the book of Jonah is that even non-Israelites can be good people, capable of revering God and personal growth. Both the sailors and Ninevites originally had a reputation as people of low moral standing -- sailors for the nature of their work and the people of Nineveh for committing evil as noted in the second verse of the book. Nevertheless, both groups are saved from destruction.

Beyond the book’s universalist perspective on people, it also offers a universal perspective on God. Prophecy does not only come to Jonah while he is in the land of Israel. God’s omnipresence allows Jonah to receive prophecy on land and sea, anywhere in the world.

Nonviolence

In the ancient world, each community worshipped its own god or goddess. The sailors in the Book of Jonah are non-Israelites who demonstrate that they too can revere the God of Israel. The notion that non-Israelites might worship the same God as Israel is quite

² Abarbanel on Jonah 1:3

³ Kimchi on Jonah 1:1

novel. Not only are they willing to worship a universal God, but according to some commentators, they respect God's decrees, including ethical and ritual commandments alike. From the beginning of the story, they demonstrate a respect for human life, along the lines of Jewish recognition of the divine image in every human being and the sanctity of life. The sailors do everything they can to pursue a nonviolent resolution until the very end when they can see no other option is available and determine that casting Jonah into the sea must be God's will. The story of Jonah and the sailors then is perhaps a lesson in patience and the commitment to pursue righteousness and justice even in dire circumstances.

Furthermore, the idea of Jonah being a story of nonviolence is all the more supported by God's actions. God is also nonviolent and does not punish Nineveh. In fact, no harm comes to any creature in the book of Jonah aside from the withering of the *qiqayon* plant in Chapter 4.

Futility

As previously mentioned, God's omnipresence allows Jonah to receive prophecy on land and sea, anywhere in the world. Jonah's attempts to escape God were futile. According to the commentators, Jonah comes to recognize that his attempts to change God's will were also futile.

The attempt to escape one's fate or the "array of the heavens" (the stellar signs and stars) is also shown to be futile for non-Israelites. The lots the sailors cast fall on Jonah. According to some commentators, the sailors cast the lots several times so that there would be no doubt to his guilt and every time the lots fell on him. Furthermore, the very wording of God's prophecy to Jonah guarantees it will come to be: Nineveh will be "overturned"-- either via destruction or repentance.

There is also the theme of temporariness. Abarbanel interestingly comments, "Truly, as it is with the good things of this world, they do not last forever."⁴ Such a statement offers a new interpretation of the *qiqayon* plant episode which does not just teach Jonah a lesson about mercy, but also about the futility of preoccupying oneself with the temporary. This teaching is reminiscent of the words of Ecclesiastes 1:2: "Utter futility!—said Kohelet— Utter futility! All is futile!"

Authentic teshuvah (repentance)

Jonah must repent first before he gives Nineveh the prophecy, urging them too to seek forgiveness. He has deliberately fled from God. In his return to God, the book explores the nature of authentic repentance -- must it be voluntary or can it be imposed? For Jonah is only moved to pray when he is swallowed by the big fish. Divine coercion

⁴ Abarbanel on 4:7

seems to be a factor in his motivation. Nevertheless, he does return to God and their relationship continues.

His initial reluctance to return to God contrasts completely with the immediate repentance of the Ninevites. The commentators clearly are compelled to wrestle with this phenomenon: what was the nature of the repentance of the Ninevites? Did they need to believe in God? To convert? Or simply to correct or halt their wrongful actions? Perhaps what is at stake for the commentators is the rationale for being Jewish and taking on the yolk of the commandments. If one can still have a relationship with God, obtain forgiveness, and not be Jewish, what then is the point of Jewish identity and *mitzvot*?

Natural law and miracles (God's intervention in nature)

The Book of Jonah is full of miracles which defy the laws of nature: the big fish which swallows Jonah, Jonah's survival inside the fish, and the overnight growth of the *qiqayon* plant. God also intervenes in less miraculous ways such as with the great tempest and the worm that bites the *qiqayon* plant. The medieval commentators wrestle with the poetic language and events described in the book to determine what is to be taken literally or metaphorically and what should be reinterpreted with a rational explanation.

Reflection on destruction and the biblical God

The commentators mostly agree that Nineveh is saved so that the Assyrians will later be able to destroy the northern kingdom of Israel, serving as an instrument of God's wrath. This impending destruction is the lens through which the commentators interpret the overarching narrative of the book.

Jonah 3:9 shares a unique phrase "*mi yodeia*" with Esther 4:14. Both reflect human uncertainty regarding the future and the role of the divine when the stakes are high. Unlike the Book of Esther, God is very much present in the Book of Jonah. While there is uncertainty in the Book of Esther as to whether there is a divine plan or purpose behind the narrative, the proclamation in Jonah 3:9 reflects a different uncertainty. In the Book of Jonah, one can observe an uncertainty among the players, both Jonah and the Ninevites, as to the effectiveness of Nineveh's repentance in eliciting a divine response. Whether or not God will intervene is not in question.

The same verse from Jonah (3:9) also has a word which shares the same root -- *n.n.n*, the changing of [God's] mind -- with the story of the flood from Genesis. Before the flood narrative, God comes to *n.n.n*, change [God's] mind, and regret creating humanity.⁵ This change of mind comes after God had already acted -- God had already created humanity. But not so in the book of Jonah. The ending is the opposite of the flood

⁵ Genesis 6:6-7

narrative -- God does not regret creating humanity on account of the transgressions of the people of Nineveh. God appears more open to the notion that people can change for the better. God relents before acting, before inflicting destruction and instead, leaves the city untouched.

In the Book of Jonah, God is all-knowing. In fact, the prefix “omni” applies to God in the book of Jonah in several respects: God is omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent. The Book of Jonah therefore, may intentionally serve to offer contrast with the story of the flood as the destruction of the world is a decision made after God regrets creating humanity and therefore cannot be omniscient. The matter is further complicated in that God can still change God’s mind and be merciful in the Book of Jonah. The role of the sea draws a parallel between the two stories as well. Given the contrast, commentators such as Abarbanel open a conversation on theodicy -- why God allows for certain evil, historical events to occur (i.e. the flood) and not others (i.e. the destruction of Nineveh).⁶

⁶ Abarbanel on Jonah 4:11

III. ABOUT THE ALTSCHULERS AND THE METZUDOT

Biblical scholarship had diminished in the 16th and 17th centuries. In order to promote the study of the Bible, Rabbi David Altschuler of 17th and 18th century Prague planned an easy-to-read, literal commentary on the Prophets and Hagiographa (*Nevi'im and Ketuvim*, respectively except the Five Megillot), based on earlier commentators, mainly Rashi and Kimchi. One can see how his commentary is deeply in conversation with other commentators and his work is for the most part gleanings from the works of others. Thus, while his commentary chronologically appears after the medieval period, its methods, content, and focus reflects strong ties and influence of medieval exegesis.

The commentary, likely written over the course of the end of the 17th century and beginning of the 18th, was completed by his son Rabbi Jehiel Hillel. He divided the commentary into two parts, called respectively Metzudat Zion ("Fortress of Zion") and Metzudat David ("Fortress of David"). The former explains individual words and offers examples of where they appear in the Bible. The latter focuses on the "simple" meaning of the text at large. The commentary with its simple, clear style, attained great popularity, wide circulation, and has been reprinted frequently in various editions of the "Rabbinic Bible," known traditionally as *Miqra'ot Gdolot*.

David Altschuler's son Jehiel Hillel of Jaworow, Galicia, continued his father's work. Hillel visited Jewish communities in Germany, Holland, and Italy. In 1770 he completed and published his father's commentary on the Latter Prophets in Berlin. While in Leghorn from 1780 to 1782, he printed the entire completed commentary on the Prophets and Hagiographa together with a new edition of his own *Binyan ha-Bayit* (describing Ezekiel's vision of the future Sanctuary).

After these works, a fundamental change in Jewish biblical exegesis took place in the Haskalah period. It continued to be influenced by Christian bible commentary but also by biblical criticism as well.⁷

⁷ Kalimi, Isaac. *The Retelling of Chronicles in Jewish Tradition and Literature: A Historical Journey*. United States, Penn State University Press, 2009.

Preschel, Tovia. "Altschuler, David." *Encyclopedia Judaica: Second Edition*. (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2007), 26.

IV. CHAPTER 1

Jonah 1:1

נִיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֶל־יוֹנָה בֶן־אָמֶתַי לֵאמֹר:

Metzudat David and Metzudat Zion on Jonah 1:1 - Not applicable (hereafter, "N/A")

Jonah 1:2

קָוִים לְךָ אֶל־נִינְוָה הָעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה וְקָרָא עָלֶיהָ כִּי־עָלְתָה רָעָתָם לִפְנֵי:

Metzudat David

<p>1:2 “and proclaim judgment upon it” - It means that he [Jonah] will rebuke them and warn them. And [he will do so] by the way of prophecy. Yet it still does not explain what he will proclaim.</p>	<p>וקרא עליה. ר"ל* שיוכיחם ויזהירם וכדרך הנביא ועדיין לא פירש לו מה יקרא</p> <p>*ר"ל = רצונו לומר, רוצה לומר</p>
<p>1:2 “for their wickedness has come” - The evils that they commit rose to the heavens to stand before me [God] so as to bring charges against them (and since Nineveh is the capital of Assyria, the means of punishment [literally “staff of anger”] of God, blessed be [God]*, [God] wanted them to return to goodness so that they will be positioned to be the tool [literally “strap”] of chastisement against Israel).</p> <p>*exact meaning uncertain but a clear reference to God per Isaiah 10:5. Likely ברוך השם, or ברוך הוא, ברוך המקום</p> <p>**Perhaps a scribal error; this should be a conjunctive noun (<i>smikhut</i>) as noted in the <i>Jastrow</i> dictionary (רצועת מרדות)</p>	<p>כי עלתה רעתם. הרעות שהם עושים עלתה למרום לעמוד לפני לקטרג עליהם (ולפי שננוה הוא ראש מלכות אשור שבט אפו של המקום ב"ה* רצה להחזירם למוטב למען יעמדו להיות רצועה מרדות** על ישראל)</p>

Metzudat Zion on Jonah 1:2 -- N/A

Rabbi David Altschuler begins his commentary on Jonah by viewing the story within the larger context of the history of Israel and its relationship with God. Many other medieval commentators take the same approach. The word of God comes to Jonah, instructing

him to go to Nineveh and offer rebuke, only so that they [the Assyrians] will warrant God's forgiveness. The language of *lqarreg* invokes the image of a prosecuting lawyer as the Assyrians stand to be judged by God. Once spared from divine decimation, the Assyrian kingdom can proceed to their future role -- to be a tool [literally "strap"] of chastisement as in Isaiah 10:5, "Ha! Assyria, rod of My anger, In whose hand, as a staff, is My fury!" The Northern kingdom of Israel will become guilty of transgression against the Divine will, and Assyria will be sent by God to destroy her, and send her elites into exile. The Assyrian Empire was known to relocate elites to another conquered civilization, primarily in order to disable them from orchestrating a rebellion against the empire. "Frequently, the policy worked on a three-stage progression: seek voluntary submission of local rulers; conquer by force if voluntary submission does not happen; punish any recalcitrance or rebellion by taking over governmental control and deporting local leadership, while substituting population drawn from other locales."⁸

The commentator Isaac Abarbanel also accepts this explanation but offers an alternative and less violent understanding in his commentary. (This understanding comes more in the form of a rebuttal to an alternative explanation rather than as an explanation of its own). He quotes the sages and notes, "perhaps in the repentance of the people of Nineveh the Israelites would be ashamed of their transgressions. And they would return in repentance to The Eternal who would have mercy on them for their personal acts. [This is a] *qal v'homer*" [metaphorical argument] that should the Assyrians seek forgiveness, then all the more so, would the Israelites be convinced into doing so."⁹

In their commentary on Jonah 1:1, Kimchi and Ibn Ezra both try to place Jonah's lifetime chronologically, identifying Jonah as Jonah son of Amittai from Gath-hepher per 2 Kings 14:25. If that is the case, then Jonah prophesied during the reign of King Jeroboam who led the revolt against Rehoboam, thereby dividing the northern kingdom of Israel from the united monarchy and the kingdom of Judah in the 10th century BCE. The northern kingdom of Israel would later disappear along with its 10 tribes once the Assyrians conquered them a couple hundred years later (722 BCE).

In his comment on Jonah 1:2, Rabbi Altschuler notes the text does not explain what Jonah will proclaim in Nineveh. Rashi notes that the proclamation will come from God later, writing "my proclamation," likely referring to Jonah 3:2 "the proclamation that I will tell you (*et-haqri'a asher anokhi dover elekha*)." Kimchi, on the other hand, suggests that what Jonah learns here is to proclaim what is noted in Jonah 3:4 "Nineveh will be overturned." Rabbi Altschuler does not necessarily make either claim.

⁸ Campbell, Edward F. Jr. "A Land Divided." *The Oxford History of the Biblical World*, Edited by Michael D. Coogan. Oxford University Press: New York, NY, 1998. Page 237.

⁹ Abarbanel on Jonah 1:1; Bob, Steven. *Go to Nineveh: Medieval Jewish Commentaries on the Book of Jonah*. Eugene, Oregon, Pickwick Publications, 2013, page 68.

A *qal va'homer* is a metaphorical argument often used in rabbinic texts to draw an analogy. It is known in Latin as an argument *a fortiori*, meaning "from the stronger case."

Yet determining what Jonah knows at this point in the narrative is key to understanding why Jonah flees from God. Some commentators, including Altschuler, believe Jonah knows from the beginning that Nineveh will repent and not be destroyed because of his statement in 4:2, “Isn’t this just what I said when I was still in my own country? That is why I fled...” Rashi, for instance, believes he flees because he does not want to be called a false prophet, declaring that Nineveh will be destroyed when it will not be.¹⁰ Other commentators such as Ibn Ezra, for one, reject this understanding, explaining that it is not until 3:4 that Jonah learns Nineveh’s fate. Ibn Ezra agrees with the overall rabbinic understanding which is what Metzduat David presents: “What upset him, [Jonah, from the very beginning,] was that they, [the Ninevites,] would escape to the detriment of Israel [by repenting to save themselves] (Bob, 22). I would argue that in Altschuler’s view, it doesn’t necessarily matter if Jonah knows the Ninevites will be destroyed or not and he is not particularly concerned with his reputation as a prophet. All Jonah knows is that the Ninevites are in trouble, for God wants him to tell them to repent, and that the Ninevites (i.e. the Assyrians) are a dangerous enemy of Israel. Jonah may conjecture that perhaps if the Ninevites do not repent, God will destroy them, or at least, inflict a less severe punishment upon them, and a dangerous enemy of Israel will thus be neutralized.

Jonah 1:3

וַיִּקָּם יוֹנָה לִבְרֹחַ תַּרְשִׁישָׁה מִלִּפְנֵי יְהוָה וַיֵּרָד יָפוֹ וַיִּמְצָא אֲנִיָּה | בָּאָה תַרְשִׁישׁ יֵשׁ וַיִּתֵּן שְׂכָרָהּ וַיֵּרָד בָּהּ
לָבוֹא עִמָּהֶם תַּרְשִׁישָׁה מִלִּפְנֵי יְהוָה:

Metzudat David

<p>1:3 “to flee to Tarshish” - It [Tarshish] is outside of the land [of Israel], a place where prophecy does not rest upon the prophets. And that is the meaning of “from before the Eternal” (Jonah 1:3). And it means from that place that is before the Eternal. And that is the land of Israel. That is a place where prophecy is received. For he [Jonah] feared that prophecy might come to him again.</p> <p>And it will explain what will be proclaimed and that he will be forced to go. And because the restoration of Nineveh would be bad for Israel. Thus he did not want to be a messenger regarding the matter for</p>	<p>לברוח תרשישה. הוא חוץ לארץ מקום שאין הנבואה שורה על הנביאים וז"ש* מלפני ה' ור"ל מהמקום שהוא לפני ה' והוא א"י** שהוא מקום קבול הנבואה כי פחד פן יבוא לו הנבואה עוד פעם ויפרש מה יקרא ויוכרח ללכת ועל כי העמדת ניונה היה רעה לישראל לכן לא היה חפץ להיות שליח בדבר כי היה טוב בעיניו שיעמדו ברשעים ויאבדו ולא יהיו לשטן לישראל,</p> <p>ורז"ל*** אמרו שחשב יונה שהנה העכו"ם**** קרובי תשובה הם ויחייבו את ישראל שאינם ממהרים לשוב.</p> <p>*ז"ש = 'זהו שנאמר', 'זהו שאמר'</p>
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¹⁰ Rashi on Jonah 4:1-2

<p>he wanted [literally “it was good in his eyes”] that they will stand to be judged for their evil [acts] and be destroyed and thereby not play the adversary against Israel.</p> <p>And our rabbis of blessed memory said that Jonah thought [to himself] that indeed the idolaters were close to repentance. And thus they would convict Israel [as guilty] for they [the people of Israel] do not move speedily to repent.</p>	<p>א**י = ארץ ישראל רז**ל = רבותנו זכורנם לברכה עכנ"ם = עובדי כוכבים ומזלות</p>
<p>1:3 “He went down to Joppa” - a place [from] where the ships depart.</p>	<p>יורד יפו. מקום שפורשים שם הספינות.</p>
<p>1:3 “going to Tarshish” - [the ship] was ready to leave and head for Tarshish.</p>	<p>באה תרשיש. היתה מוכנת ללכת ולבוא לתרשיש.</p>
<p>1:3 “He paid the fare” - first he hastened to pay its [the ship’s] fare and not only that, he paid the fare for the entire [crew of the] ship so that it would rush to leave.</p>	<p>ויתן שכרה. הקדים ליתן שכרה תחילה ולא*, עוד אלא שנתן שכר כל הספינה למען תמהר ללכת.</p> <p>not in all manuscripts - ולא*</p>
<p>1:3 “to sail with the others” - with the sailors [literally “people of the ship”].</p>	<p>לבוא עמהם. עם אנשי הספינה.</p>

Metzudat Zion

<p>1:3 “Tarshisha” - To Tarshish and this is the name of the place.</p>	<p>תרשישה. לתרשיש והוא שם מקום</p>
<p>1:3 “Yafo” - The name of the city at the harbor.</p>	<p>יפו. שם העיר שעל הנמל</p>
<p>1:3 “Oniya” - a ship.</p>	<p>אניה. ספינה</p>

As Rabbi Altschuler provides the reason why Jonah flees Israel toward Tarshish in a hurry, he clearly draws from Kimchi who notes, Jonah “therefore flees outside the Land [of Israel] that is not a place of prophecy so that the God, Who is Blessed, will not [speak to him in Israel and] send him to Nineveh.” Such a connection between Israel and prophecy is deeply rooted in the concept of the chosen status of Israel among the nations and lands. Drawing from the language of the Mekhilta d’Rabbi Yishmael 12:1, Kimchi interestingly notes Jonah seeks the honor of the son and not that of the father;

that is to say, Jonah does not consider the honor of God, but only that of Israel.¹¹

As mentioned in the previous verse and here too again, in Rabbi Altschuler's eyes, Jonah is preoccupied with his knowledge of the threat posed by the Assyrians for Israel. Abarbanel writes, "this fear [of the Assyrians] was in the hearts of the wise men of Israel;" that is to say, they, including Jonah, did not require prophecy to understand the threat posed by the Assyrians as they were already aware of their military campaigns.¹² In this verse, Metzudat David goes further than just referring to Assyria as the "tool of punishment." Now it is also the *sa'an*, often translated as the "prosecuting lawyer," playing the role of "adversary" against Israel. Metzudat David also draws on Kimchi who notes that Jonah knew that the people of Nineveh were close to repentance which will ultimately mean punishment for Israel.¹³ As Metzudat David writes, "thus they would convict Israel [as guilty] for they [the people of Israel] do not move speedily to repent," he indicates the actions of other nations force Israel into an ominous position. Their good behavior leads to punishment for Israel. Demonstrated by his haste to leave, Jonah hopes the people of Nineveh would stand to be judged and thereby not become Israel's "adversary."

With this frame of urgency and haste to leave Israel in mind, Rabbi Altschuler's other comments are easily understood. Jonah boards a ship to Tarshish because that ship is ready to depart to a location outside of Israel. He then "paid the fare for the entire [crew of the] ship so that it would rush to leave." Note this last comment also draws from Kimchi, the Talmud, and midrash.¹⁴ Kimchi explains why the text says "its fare" rather than specifically the fare for a seat or a person? He suggests the use of "its fare" indicates that "he paid the entire fare so that the ship would hurry to depart, and that it would not wait for travelling merchants (men or women) because he wanted to flee quickly." Kimchi adds a fascinating takeaway: "From this one can learn that prophecy only falls on a wealthy person [who can afford the fare of an entire ship]."¹⁵ Rashi similarly concludes that the *ah* suffix of *skharah* indicates that Jonah paid for the whole boat in advance.¹⁶ Ibn Ezra disagrees with the others: what he paid was "Not all of the cost [for the entire ship,] but rather just what he had to pay for his portion."¹⁷ He understands the suffix of *vayiten skharah* as referring to Jonah's place or seat on this ship. Ibn Ezra does not explain his comment further. He generally does not hesitate to differ with Rashi by suggesting an alternative, literal interpretation,¹⁸ focusing on grammatical nuances in the text.

¹¹ Kimchi on Jonah 1:1

¹² Abarbanel on Jonah 1:1

¹³ Kimchi on Jonah 1:1

¹⁴ See for example b. Nedarim 38a

¹⁵ Kimchi on Jonah 1:3

¹⁶ Rashi on Jonah 1:3

¹⁷ Ibn Ezra on Jonah 1:3

¹⁸ Ibn Ezra and Rashi, among other commentators, would both characterize their commentary here as presenting the *p'shat* - the literal meaning. However, *p'shat* does not really mean "literal" but rather the "simple, essential meaning as I [the commentator] read it."

Jonah 1:4

וַיְהִי כִּי הֵטִיל רוּחַ-גָּדוֹלָה אֶל-הַיָּם וַיְהִי סֶעֱרָ-גָּדוֹל בַּיָּם וַהֲאֲנִיָּה חֲשָׁבָה לְהִשָּׁבֵר:

Metzudat David

<p>1:4 “[the Eternal] cast” - [the Eternal] moved and sustained the mighty wind upon the sea and a great tempest came upon the sea.</p>	<p>הטיל. הסיע והמשיך אל הים רוח גדולה והיה סער גדול בים.</p>
<p>1:4 “The ship” - It means the sailors thought that the ship would break from the strength of the deadly* headwind and the great rocking from the heightening waves, and the weight of the cargo prevented destruction [via the deadly* headwind] but [the cargo] was also the cause of the [potential] breaking apart of the ship.**</p> <p>*translation based on רודף the “pursuer”</p> <p>**ספינה vs. אניה - (in modern hebrew, a ship vs. a large ship as opposed to a <i>sirah</i> or boat)</p>	<p>והאניה. ר"ל אנשי האניה חשבו שהאניה תשבר מחוזק הרוח המוליכה ברדיפה* ונדנוד רב מהרמת הגלים וכובד משא הספינה מונע הרדיפה* והוא סיבה לשבירת הספינה**.</p>

Metzudat Zion

<p>1:4 “Heiṭil” - the matter of movement for the ‘wind moved’ (Numbers 12**) per Targum Onkelos ‘moved.’</p> <p>**actually Numbers 11:31 - error of the editors</p>	<p>הטיל. ענין הסעה כי ורוח נסע (במדבר יב) ת"א* נטל:</p> <p>*ת"א=תרגום אונקלוס</p>
<p>1:4 “Sa‘ar” - the raging waves from the storm.</p>	<p>סער. הרעשת גלים מן הסערה:</p>
<p>1:4 “Hishvah” - thought [as in not of reality].</p>	<p>חשבה. מל' מחשב:</p>

Rabbi Altschuler clearly intends to further illustrate the intensity and lengthy duration of the storm by explaining the linguistic choices of the biblical text. Ibn Ezra understands the verb *heijil* similarly to R. Alschuler as a *mashal*, a symbolic action that should be interpreted to communicate a message. God made it clear immediately that the ship would not be able to return to land, as God redirected “moved” or, as Ibn Ezra puts it, “sent” the wind in a certain direction.

Metzudat David following Kimchi understands *Hishvah* that the sailors believed the ship would break apart. In Metzudat Zion, Rabbi Altschuler clarifies that the word “*Hishvah*” refers to thought. Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Kimchi, and Abarbanel clarify in their commentary on this verse that as boats cannot think, this appears to be poetic language indicating that, to the men aboard, the boat looked as if it would break apart.

Abarbanel helps us understand the “science” or divine workings of this scene: “...When a mighty wind enters the sea to be the wind that moves [water] from its place, it powerfully attempts to break forth from under the sea according to its basic nature. And the water in its heaviness is strengthened on the wind and in this [way] it becomes a storm...And if you would say that in nature wind does not enter the sea on its own, that it was not the time that it was ready for this, but the Blessed God in God’s overseeing cast it there. And thus, the storm was made.”

Jonah 1:5

וַיִּירָאוּ הַמֶּלֶחֶם יָם וַיִּזְעֻקוּ אִישׁ אֶל־אֱלֹהֵי וַיִּטְלוּ אֶת־הַפְּלִים אֲשֶׁר בָּאֲנִיָּה אֱלֹהִים לְהַקֵּל מֵעֲלֵיהֶם
וַיּוֹנֶה יָרֵד אֶל־יַרְכָּתִי הַסְּפִינָה וַיִּשְׁכַּב וַיִּרְדָּם:

Metzudat David

<p>1:5 “In their fright, the sailors” - the sailors of the ship [on watch] were fearful and every one of them cried out in prayer to his own idol.</p>	<p>ויראו המלחים. מוליכי הספינה פחדו וכ”א * מהם צעק להתפלל אל העכו”ם שלו</p> <p style="text-align: right;">*כ”א = כל אחד</p>
<p>1:5 “And they flung” - they cast the cargo from the ship overboard to make it lighter for them so that [the ship] would be able to continue [sailing] against the deadly headwind without hindrance.</p>	<p>ויטילו. השליכו את הכלים מן הספינה אל הים להקל מעליהם המשא למען תוכל ללכת ברדיפה מבלי מונע</p>
<p>1:5 “Into the hold” - it means one of the holds just as [it is written] “he was buried in one of the towns of Gilead” (see Judges 12:7).</p>	<p>אל ירכתי. ר”ל אל אחת מהירכתיים וכן ויקבר (בערי גלעד) (שופטים י”ב:ז’</p>

Metzudat Zion

<p>1:5 “Hamalaḥim” - Such are called those who drive the ship and and similarly, ‘all the ships of the sea and their sailors’ (Ezekiel 26*).</p> <p>*actually Ezekiel 27:9</p>	<p>המלחיי. כן יקראו מוליכי הספיני וכן כל אניות הים ומלחיהם (יחזקאל כו):</p>
<p>1:5 “Vayaṭilu” - meaning casting away like ‘I will cast you out’ (Jeremiah 16:13).</p>	<p>ויטילו. ענין השלכה כמו והטלתי אתכם (ירמיה טז):</p>
<p>1:5 “Yarktei” - the area and side as in ‘the side of the altar’ (Leviticus 1:11).</p>	<p>ירכתי. עבר וצד כמו ירך המזבח (ויקרא א):</p>
<p>1:5 “Vayeradam” - It is the deep sleep and similarly, ‘He fell asleep from exhaustion’ (Judges 4:21).</p>	<p>וירדם. הוא שינה עמוקה וכן והוא נרדם ויעף (שופטי ד):</p>

In his commentary, Rabbi Altschuler largely explains the *pshat* of the text. Metzudat Zion echoes Ibn Ezra’s translation of “*Hamalaḥim*” in this verse as “those who guide the ship,” referencing the same verse from Ezekiel.

Abarbanel interestingly notes that crying out to their own God is “the first attempt [in which the sailors try to save themselves].” The second way in increasing [seriousness] was to throw the cargo into the sea. He uses the term for human beings, *bnei adam*, noting a general behavioral tendency of persons in distress.

In order to understand “*el yarktei*,” which illogically appears to refer to ‘holds’ in plural rather than one singular hold, Metzudat David draws on Ibn Ezra, Kimchi, and Abarbanel. In order to demonstrate the biblical use of a plural form when a singular meaning is intended, Kimchi and Ibn Ezra also cite Judges 12:7 as an example of such a phenomenon: “Jephthah led Israel six years. Then Jephthah the Gileadite died and he was buried in one of the towns of Gilead.” Even though this verse uses the plural “cities” to describe the burial of Jephthah, one can infer that it means he was buried in one of the cities of Gilead.

In Metzudat Zion, Rabbi Altschuler implies that Jonah goes to sleep at this time from sheer exhaustion. Abarbanel, on the other hand, reads much more into the text: “The sailors cried out each to his own god but Jonah did not cry out to God for he was ashamed and embarrassed to raise his face to God. So ‘he laid down and fell asleep’ thinking that he would die there. For sleep is one sixtieth of death (per Berakhot 57b), and so he prepared himself for it [death].” Abarbanel adds in the emotional response of shame into the narrative -- how can one ask God for help after fleeing from prophecy?

Ibn Ezra suggests a different sequence of events: “perhaps Jonah did not board the ship before this storm.” He sought to escape “seasickness and the fury of the storm” by going to sleep in the hold. As Steven Bob notes, this reading shifts Jonah from being oblivious to the severe storm to consciously hiding from it.”¹⁹

Jonah 1:6

וַיִּקְרָב אֵלָיו רֵב הַחֵבֶל וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ מֶה־לְּךָ נִרְדָּם קוֹם קְרָא אֶל־אֱלֹהֶיךָ אוֹלֵי יִתְעַשֶׂת הָאֱלֹהִים לָנוּ וְלֹא נִאָּבֵד:

Metzudat David

1:6 “How can you be sleeping so soundly!” - ‘How can you fall asleep?’ In other words, ‘do you not feel that we are in a position of danger?’	מה לך נרדם. מה לך שנרדמת כאומר וכי אינך מרגיש שאנו עומדים בסכנה.
1:6 “Call upon your god!” - pray before him.	קרא אל אלהיך. התפלל לפניו.
1:6 “Perhaps [the god] will be kind [to us]” - via prayer, perhaps God will think of us so that we will not perish.	אולי יתעשת. ע"י* התפלה אולי יחשוב האלהים לנו שלא נאבד. *ע"י = על ידי

Metzudat Zion

1:6 “Rav haḥovel” - the head officers of the ship for ‘rav’ is a head official and similarly, ‘the king’s commanders’ (Jeremiah 41:1) and the officers of the ship were called sailors [hovelim] for they pulled the ropes of the sails to direct her [the ship] against the wind and similarly, ‘They are your sailors’ (Ezekiel 27:8).	רב החובל. שר מנהיגי הספינה כי רב הוא שר וכן ורבי המלך (ירמיה מא) ומנהיגי הספינה יקראו חובלים על כי מושכים בחבלי הוילון להפנותה מול הרוח וכן המה חבליך (יחזקאל כז):
1:6 “Ulai” - its matter, as in ‘perhaps.’	אולי. עניינו כמו שמא:
1:6 “Yit’ashet” - meaning thought as in ‘his thoughts are for nought’ (Psalms	יתעשת. ענין מחשבה כמו אבדו עשתנותיו (תהלים קמו):

¹⁹ Bob, 25

146:4).	
1:6 “Lanu” - about* us. *similar to לחשוב על מישהו	לנו. עלינו:
1:6 “Vlo no’veid” - The letter vav is in place of shin and similarly, ‘you shall accept gifts for Me’ (Exodus 25:2) and it means, ‘so that you shall accept.’	ולא נאבד. הוי”ו הוא במקום שי”ן וכן ויקחו לי תרומה (שמות כ”ה:ב) ור”ל שיקחו:

Metzudat Zion follows Rashi, Abarbanel, and Kimchi in identifying “*Rav haḥovel*” as “leader of the ship” or “the head official of the crew” who are sometimes called “chovlai hayam,” those who take on the sea. Ibn Ezra agrees with a similar explanation for the word ḥovelim as Metzudat Zion -- they are called as such for they are “those who seize the mast,” as opposed to the “ropes.”

Metzudat David follows Rashi in understanding the leader’s question “*Mah l’cha nirdam*” as “How can you be sleeping? Now is no time to sleep!” Abarbanel adds, “Do you not see that this is a bad time and the great danger in which we stand? How can you not feel it? And if you say that you do not know what to do, [act] like the sailors. ‘Get up and call to your God,’ for you know how to do that!” Abarbanel adds a more human exasperated element to the reaction by the leader of the ship seeing Jonah’s seemingly lackadaisical response to the storm.

Metzudat Zion follows Rashi and Ibn Ezra in understanding “*Yitashait*” as “language referring to ‘thought.’” This is likely the more literal Hebrew translation as opposed to the JPS translation “to be kind.” Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and Kimchi all provide the same example from Psalms 146:4, which features the word “*eshtonotav*” with the same root as “*yitashait*” (in which JPS translates as “his plans”). Ibn Ezra offers one other interpretation. Noting the appearance of the same root (*ayin-shin-tav*) in the word “*eshte’i asar*” in Numbers 7:72, Ibn Ezra observes the appearance of two ‘accountings’ within one number, general and specific. Its as if the captain says, “And so too, will God pay attention to you, specifically, and therefore also to us, generally.”²⁰ Kimchi and Abarbanel on the other hand explain it to mean “[perhaps God will be] ‘willing’ to save us.”

Regarding “*V’lo noveid*,” Metzudat Zion uses the biblical example from Exodus in which a verse comes after the verb *daber*. Thus, the letter vav cannot mean ‘and’ but rather, “so that” or “as a result of which” as in “so that we will not perish.” (Jonah 1:6)

²⁰ Exact understanding of Ibn Ezra’s comment is unclear

Jonah 1:7

וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל־רֵעֵהוּ לְכוּ וְנַפִּילָה גִּזְרֹת וְנִדְעָה בְּשַׁלְמֵי הָרָעָה הַזֹּאת לָנוּ וַיַּפְּלוּ גִּזְרֹת וַיַּפֹּל הַגִּזְרֹל עַל־יוֹנָה:

Metzudat David

1:7 “[The men] said [to one another]” - the sailors.	ויאמרו. אנשי הספינה.
1:7 “Lots” - they [the sailors] thought [to themselves]* to cast many lots for they did not want to rely on one lot lest by chance it fell on one [wrong individual man]. But should it [the lot] fall several times on one individual it would seem that it was not chance. *biblical ר.מ.א. =think to oneself	גורלות. אמרו* להפיל גורלות הרבה כי לא רצו לסמוך על גורל אחד כי פן במקרה נפל על זה אבל כשיפול פעמים מרובות על אחד יהיה נראה שאין זה מקרה
1:7 “On whose account” - because of whom does this dangerous evil come upon us.	בשלמי. בעבור מי בא עלינו רעת הסכנה הזאת.
1:7 “The lot” - it means every single lot.	הגורל. ר"ל כל גורל וגורל.

Metzudat Zion

1:7 “L’khu” - meaning hurrying.	לכו. ענין זרזו:
1:7 “Bshelmi” - on whose account.	בשלמי. בעבור מי:

The casting of lots identifying the singular culpability of Jonah is the primary focus of commentary on this verse. The Bible records the practice of casting lots was a means of arriving at decisions on a variety of problems. In the Bible, the purpose of the practice was either for (a) the selection of one or more members from a group or (b) the division of goods among members of a group. Because of the latter, “lot” came to denote that which is decided by the casting of a lot, e.g., a parcel of land, an assigned function, or, more generally, one’s destiny.²¹

²¹ Lichtenstein, Murray. “Lots.” *Encyclopedia Judaica: Second Edition*. (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2007), 217-8.

Although the Bible offers few details on the practice, external evidence shows that wood and stone were commonly utilized. The casting of lots involved throwing the items to the ground and interpreting the results on the basis of a preconceived understanding. The verbs regularly employed with “lot” in both Akkadian and Hebrew denote “to throw” or “to cast down.” As each lot was previously marked to identify its owner, the ultimate determination was based on whose lot fell to the ground first. Proverbs 16:33 notes that the divine will is reflected in the falling of the lots: “Lots are cast into the lap, but the decision depends on the Eternal.”²²

Compared with other commentators, Rabbi Altschuler in *Metzudat David* pays much more attention to the practice of casting lots and explaining its logic. Only if every single lot cast should fall on one person (Jonah) can the crew be sure that it is on his account that the great storm has come upon them. In this explanation, Rabbi Altschuler depicts the crew as much more careful and logical in using such a practice governed by chance for purposes of determining judgment and potentially capital punishment. Abarbanel in his commentary notes a storm in the sea is a “natural and regular occurrence...and perhaps not because of human transgression.” Indeed, Abarbanel appears incredulous as to the alleged connection between the storm and the sailors’ questions that follow. Abarbanel also questions “how do the lots provide a true verdict in this matter?” The lot could fall on an innocent among them.²³ This makes the course of action to confirm Jonah’s guilt via lots as both suspect and also worthy of careful deliberation. Abarbanel adds, “they did not cast lots only once for perhaps [it might] happen [to fall randomly or incorrectly.] Rather they cast lots many times and they changed the type of lots but always each time the lot fell on Jonah. And when they saw twice [that despite] the changes, [for all the attempts the result was the same,] they believed that it was correct [to conclude that the] result was from God and not by chance.”²⁴

Besides the random nature of casting lots, Abarbanel gives an alternative demonstration of why the sailors were not in haste to throw Jonah into the sea even after their outcry was not effective: they first made sure it was not a natural storm. But when “they saw other ships coming and going in peace and quiet” (per *Pirkei D'Rebbi Eliezer*²⁵ 10:3) they knew it had to do with one of them.²⁶

Metzudat Zion disagrees with Rashi on the meaning of “*Bshelmi*.” Rashi understands it as “*bma’asav shel mi*” meaning “In the acts of who among us” whereas Rabbi Altschuler understands it as “*ba’avor mi*” meaning “on whose account” or “because of who.” Ibn Ezra affirms the latter by comparing the word to a similar use of the word *shel* in 2 Samuel 6:7 “*al hashal*.” What appears here to be a minor disagreement over semantics is perhaps an emphasis on Jonah’s identity as opposed to his actions.

²² Lichtenstein, 217-8

²³ Abarbanel on Jonah 1:1

²⁴ Abarbanel on Jonah 1:7

²⁵ This midrashic text is frequently cited by various commentators.

²⁶ Abarbanel on Jonah 1:7

Jonah 1:8

וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו הַגִּידָה נָא לָנוּ בְּאִשֶּׁר לְמִי־הָרָעָה הַזֹּאת לָנוּ מִה־מְלֹאכְתְּךָ וּמֵאֵינְ תָּבוֹא מֶה אֶרֶץ
וְאֵי־מָה עִם אֶתָּה:

Metzudat David

<p>1:8 “Tell us” - since all the lots fell on you, ‘tell us’ now ‘on whose account’ - it [‘on whose account’] means what was the transgression [you committed] and against whom did you wrong on account of which this evil danger came upon us.</p> <p>It’s as if they said, ‘if this was a matter of robbery*, it is possible to return what was stolen*.</p> <p>And if the evil was brought by a matter of cursing and the like, it is possible to appease him with a monetary payment.</p> <p>*exploitation/ violent oppression</p>	<p>הגידה נא לנו. הואיל וכל הגורלות נפלו עליך 'הגידה' עתה 'לנו באשר למי' ר"ל במה היה החטא ולמי חטאת שבסבתו בא לנו רעת הסכנה הזאת</p> <p>וכאלו יאמרו אם היה בדבר העושק א"כ אפשר להחזיר העושק</p> <p>ואם הרעות למי בדבר הגדוף וכיוצא אפשר לפייסו בממון.</p> <p>*א"כ = אם כן; אם כן</p>
<p>1:8 “What is your business?” - It means perhaps you [Jonah] are responsible for fraud and swindling so many people that you do not know who they could possibly be so as to return to them their due.</p>	<p>מה מלאכתך. ר"ל אולי יש בידך מלאכת רמיה והונית אנשים מרובים עד שלא תדע מי ומי המה להחזיר להם העושק.</p>
<p>1:8 “Where have you come from?” - It means perhaps you [Jonah] committed robbery* where you came from and perhaps that is a great distance [from here] and there is no way of going there to return what was stolen.</p> <p>*as noted in above definition of ‘osheq, “exploitation” or “violent oppression”</p>	<p>ומאין תבוא. ר"ל שמא עשקת במקום שבאת משם ואולי רב הדרך ואין לבוא שמה להחזיר העושק.</p>
<p>1:8 “What is your country?” - It means</p>	<p>מה ארצך. ר"ל שמא עשית דבר היפך מנהג</p>

perhaps you [Jonah] did an act contrary to the custom of your land and it's as if you sinned against everyone. And who can appease everyone?	ארצך וכאלו חטאת לכולם ומי יכול לפייס את כולם.
<p>1:8 “And of what people are you?” - [usually] the letter mem* utilized here [appear] in the opposite [order], as if it said, ‘from what people are you?’</p> <p>It means ‘who is your god’, as if they were saying ‘perhaps you did something that was not according to your god’s law.’ And therefore, there is no way to appease him by monetary payment.</p> <p>*or “letters” in general</p>	<p>ואי מזה עם אתה. מ"ם השמוש כמו הפוך כאלו אמר ומאי זה עם אתה</p> <p>ר"ל מי הוא אלהיך וכאלו יאמרו פן עשית דבר שלא כדת אלהיך ואין א"כ מקום לפייסו בממון.</p>

Metzudat Zion

1:8 “Na” - now.	נא. עתה:
1:8 “Ume’ayin” - from which place.	ומאין. מאיזה מקום:

Mezudat David like Rashi understands the sequence of questions in the sailor's inquiry of Jonah as focused first on determining the individual whom Jonah allegedly has wronged and then the nature of his transgression. Perhaps this commentary aims to present the sailors in a more favorable light; their first reaction is not to immediately determine Jonah's guilt and throw him overboard but to see if he can actually make amends for his transgression and thereby be saved. Thus Metzduat David comments, “if this was a matter of robbery, it is possible to return what was stolen. And if the evil was brought by a matter of cursing and the like, it is possible to appease him with a monetary payment.” In general, Rabbi Alschuler's interpretations of these questions are narrower than his fellow commentators; he focuses on the possibility of exploitation and violent robbery but also on the possibility of making amends to achieve a nonviolent resolution. Alternatively, perhaps this sequence of questions is meant to set up for the revelation that it is God whom Jonah has sinned against, and not another human being (see 1:9).

“What is your business?” - Altschuler agrees with Kimchi's interpretation that the sailors may be referring to fraud in their question. However, he expands further saying “perhaps you [Jonah] are responsible for fraud and swindling so many people that you do not know who they could possibly be so as to return to them their due.” Ibn Ezra, on

the other hand, sees this as a natural question: “it is the custom of most people to live by their work. The trade of the person teaches [us] about his situation and why he enters a certain place.”

“Where have you come from?” Again, Altschuler agrees with Kimchi’s interpretation that the sailors may be referring to an evil act done in Jonah’s place of origin. Ibn Ezra justifies the question “for there are certain places where most of the people are good” and one can assume that the opposite is true as well. Abarbanel offers an alternative interpretation of the questions -- “it means to say ‘Do you come from evil parents that the Holy One of Blessings visits their transgression upon you?’” Such a question invites discussion of theodicy and Judaism’s stance on inherited transgression.

Again, Alschuler’s interpretations of these questions also explore the possibility of making amends: “perhaps that is a great distance [from here] and there is no way of going there to return what was stolen.” In Metzudat David, the sailors are seeking a nonviolent resolution.

“What is your country?” - While Kimchi interprets this question as a general allegation against the entire people of Jonah’s country of origin, Altschuler holds fast to the interpretation that it is singularly Jonah who has erred and continues to explore avenues of making amends “it’s as if you sinned against everyone. And who can appease everyone?” Abarbanel understands the question as “Did you transgress against the land, for example, by disregarding the sabbatical and jubilee [years]?” or “Is your sin against your people?” The sabbatical and jubilee years are both economically onerous biblical commandments which apply to the Land of Israel.

“And of what people are you?” - Metzudat David draws on Kimchi in the reading of “*v’ai-mizeh*” as “*may’ai-zeh*.” Yet, he interprets this verse in a radically different way than Rashi and Kimchi who understand it to literally inquire from what people does Jonah come? Altschuler instead notes, “It means ‘who is your god’, as if they were saying ‘perhaps you did something that was not according to your god’s law.’” In a world where each people has their own god this logic can be followed (see verse 1:5 “the sailors cried out, each to his own god”). “Your god’s law” may refer to cultural norms in addition to religious law. Altschuler then goes on “And therefore, there is no way to appease him by monetary payment.” The sailors continue to be committed to exploring every avenue to redeem Jonah nonviolently.

Metzudat Zion’s translation of “*na*” as “now” instead of “please” is unique. Perhaps it is because the use of “please” appears overly polite in this context of perilous danger.

Jonah 1:9

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם עֲבָרִי אֲנֹכִי וְאֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם אֲנִי יָרָא אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה אֶת־הַיָּבֵשָׁה:

Metzudat David

<p>1:9 “I am a Hebrew” - As one who says, ‘you should not be asking those questions, for I did not wrong a human being.’</p> <p>And so with regard to the question that you asked last, ‘And of what people are you?’, to this I replied ‘I am a Hebrew’</p> <p>And [here is] an additional explanation: he said, ‘and it is the Eternal my God of Heaven which I revere’, it is as if he were saying in this [with these words] ‘it was him [God] I wronged.’</p>	<p>עברי אנכי. כאומר אין לכם לשאול כל השאלות הללו כי לא חטאתי לבן אדם</p> <p>ולכן על השאלה ששאלתם באחרונה ואי מזה עם אתה ע"ז* השיב עברי אנכי</p> <p>ולתוספת ביאור אמר ואת ה' אלהי השמים אני ירא וכאלו יגיד בזה שאליו חטא.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">*ע"ז = על זאת</p>
<p>1:9 “who made both sea and land.” - It means just as he made the land, so he made the sea.</p> <p>And in every case [he is referring to the] hand of God. It is as if he says, ‘Indeed via the sea too, the hand of the Eternal found me.’</p> <p>It is as if he [God] is forcing me to go to prophecy against Nineveh and upon this statement alluding to [the Divine] Most High,* I fled for nought, thinking that the word of the Eternal will not come to me here; yet, indeed, it [the Divine word] came just so.</p> <p>*meaning uncertain</p>	<p>אשר עשה את הים ואת היבשה. ר"ל כמו שעשה את היבשה כן עשה את הים</p> <p>ובכל מקום משלה ידו וכאלו יאמר הנה גם בים מצאה אותי יד ה'</p> <p>וכאלו יכריחני ללכת לנבאות על נינוה וזהו האמירה לגבוה* ועל חנם ברחתי בחושבי שפה לא יבוא אלי דבר ה' והנה כאלו באה.</p>

Metzudat Zion

<p>1:9 “Ivri” - Such are called the ‘children of Israel’ and similarly, ‘from the children of the Hebrews’ (Exodus 1*) so their origin was hewn** from the other side of the river.</p>	<p>עברי. כן יקראו בני ישראל וכן מילדי העברים (שם א) על כי מקור מחצבם** מעבר הנהר</p>
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*actually Exodus 2:6 **meaning uncertain	
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After a series of interrogating questions in 1:8, Jonah in 1:9 offers one answer: “I am a Hebrew,” he replied. ‘I worship the Eternal, the God of Heaven, who made both sea and land.’” Metzudat David understands Jonah’s offering of only one limited response as communicating “You should not be asking those questions, for I did not wrong [another] human being...‘it was him [God] I wronged.’” As noted before, Altschuler seems to imply that this sequence of questions is meant to set up for the revelation that it is God whom Jonah has sinned against, and not another human being. Additionally, Metzudat David understands Jonah’s phrase “God of Heaven who made both sea and land” as a recognition that his effort to escape God by leaving the Land of Israel was futile. Abarbanel agrees this declaration clarifies that Jonah’s transgression is against God alone and that this storm is “because of divine providence and it is not because of the alignment of the heavens.”

In this verse Jonah notably identifies himself as a Hebrew, an oddity; for after the Exodus from Egypt, the people no longer identify themselves as Hebrew but as Israelites. Ibn Ezra explains his understanding of the term “*ivri*” as referring to Eber, a descendant of Shem and an ancestor of Abraham. Kimchi uses this explanation in his commentary on Genesis 14:13 (where the term first appears) and it can also be found in Genesis Rabbah 42:8.

Metzudat Zion understands the name “Hebrew” as inherently related to the root *ayin-vet-resh*, one of its definitions being “to pass [over].” This linguistic understanding of the origins of the term suggests it was applied to the people of Israel in that they crossed over the river Jordan. As Metzudat Zion explains, as they crossed the river they were “hewn” (like stones in a river) to become who they are. The term first appears in Genesis 14:13 and Rashi’s commentary on that verse provides the same understanding as Metzudat Zion on Jonah 1:9, that the Hebrew name may be derived from the act of crossing the river²⁷, drawing from one explanation given in Genesis Rabbah 42:8.

Abarbanel offers a much darker interpretation of “I am a Hebrew.” He connects the root of *ivri* (Hebrew) to *averah* (transgression) and reads Jonah’s statement as a play on the word, revealing that Jonah “transgressed the divine commandments.” Abarbanel clarifies that “the land of the Hebrews was known to them [the sailors] as a good land. And [even though] the people that dwell there bear some transgression, the Hebrews come and go on the sea without [experiencing] trouble [like this severe storm].” It is notably problematic for a prophet to be a prominent transgressor of the commandments himself, rather than an extraordinarily righteous individual who is allowed to make minor mistakes.

²⁷ Which river this is referring to is unclear, perhaps the Jordan or Euphrates.

Jonah 1:10

וַיִּירָאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים יִרְאַה גְדוֹלָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו מַה־זֹּאת עָשִׂיתָ כִּי־יָדָעוּ הָאֲנָשׁ יָם כִּי־מִלְפָּנֵי יְהוָה הוּא בָרַח כִּי הִגִּיד לָהֶם:

Metzudat David

<p>1:10 “[The men] were greatly terrified, etc.” - Upon them hearing that he [Jonah] wronged the Eternal and that there was no way to appease [God] by monetary payment, they thus became really afraid.</p>	<p>וייראו וגו'. בשמעם שחטא לה' ואין א"כ מקום לפייס בממון לכן פחדו מאד.</p>
<p>1:10 “What have you done?” - They [the sailors] did not say it as a question [inquisitively] but rather in surprise.</p> <p>As one who says, 'How could you do this, rebel [against] the word of the Eternal and flee from this place of prophecy?'</p> <p>[Similar to God's] example [from Scripture] “how could you deceive me” (Gen. 31:26). Namely, the essential point is [to express] astonishment.</p>	<p>מה זאת עשית. לא אמרו כשואלים אלא כמתמיהים</p> <p>כאומר איך עשית דבר כזה למרוד פי ה' ולברוח ממקום הנבואה</p> <p>ודוגמתו מה עשית ותגנוב את לבבי (בראשית ל"א:כ"ו) שהוא ענין תימה*.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">*תימה</p>
<p>1:10 “And when the men learned” - It was known to them that “he was fleeing from the Eternal,” from the place of prophecy.</p>	<p>כי ידעו האנשים. היה נודע להם שהוא בורח מלפני ה' ממקום הנבואה.</p>
<p>1:10 “For so he told them” - It means through the words that he said they understood the truth of the matter, as if he told them in full [everything without hiding anything].</p>	<p>כי הגיד להם. ר"ל ע"פ* הדברים שאמר הבינו אמיתת הענין כאלו הגיד להם בפה מלא.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">*ע"פ=על פי</p>

Metzudat Zion on Jonah 1:10 -- N/A

“[The men] were greatly terrified, etc.” - As Metzudat David understands this statement, only after exhausting all possible avenues of appeasing the god behind the storm did the sailors become truly afraid.

“What have you done?” - Metzudat David like Abarbanel explores an alternative translation of “*mah*” as “how” rather than “what.” Both translations make contextual sense here but the former better conveys the astonishment and intensity of the scene. Both commentators quote the same passage from Genesis: “What did you mean by keeping me in the dark?” (Gen. 31:26). Rashi, on the other hand, translates “*mah*” as “why” reading the verse as “why have you done this, to flee from such a ruler [as the powerful God of Israel]?”

“For so he told them” - Metzudat David follows Kimchi, noting this phrase indicates a larger conversation than what is recorded in the text. Metzudat David emphasizes that he explained the matter to the sailors in full, emphasizing his honesty. Abarbanel notes the phrase refers to the previous verse (1:9) in which Jonah reveals his identity as a Hebrew and his god, the Eternal. Ibn Ezra agrees and explains that the sailors' fear is a consequence of Jonah having already “revealed to them his secret.” The commentaries seem to emphasize that the story can only be resolved once the truth comes forth.

Jonah 1:11

וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו מַה־נַּעֲשֶׂה לָךְ וַיִּשְׁתַּק הָיִם מֵעַלֵּינוּ כִּי הָיִם הוֹלֵךְ וְסוֹעֵר:

Metzudat David

<p>1:11 “What must we do to you” - What must we do with you so that the sea will quiet down around us and that it [the sea] will not rage further through the rising of the waves.</p>	<p>מה נעשה לך. מה נעשה עמך שישתוק הים מעלינו ולא יוסיף להרעיש עוד בהרמת הגלים.</p>
<p>1:11 “For” etc. - It means that indeed the waves of the sea raged increasingly and thus there was no time to delay and settle the matter.</p> <p>That's the reason [they said,] ‘tell us, what must we do with you?’ And so he stood up.</p>	<p>כי וגו'. ר"ל הנה הים מרעיש בגליו בכל פעם יותר ולכן אין פנאי להתעכב ולהתיישב בדבר לזה אמור אתה מה נעשה עמך וכן יקום.</p>

Metzudat Zion

<p>1:11 “Vso'eir” - deafening via the heightening waves from the storm.</p>	<p>וסוער. מרעיש בהרמת הגלים מן הסערה:</p>
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“What must we do to you” - According to Metzudat David, the sailors realize there is

no nonviolent option and that action must be taken against Jonah. Abarbanel's comment is similar, but notes the sailors are still suggesting that they can help fulfill Jonah's mission rather than take action against him. Abarbanel too expresses what lengths the sailors have gone to avoid violence: "And here the sailors with all the lots they cast time after time and the testimony of Jonah's guilt [from the casting of lots], like a hundred witnesses, still they did not throw him into the sea." Ibn Ezra's literal understanding suggests the sailors are asking Jonah to advise them on what to do, presumably as one who understands the Eternal's ways.

"For" etc. -- Through a description of raging waves, Metzudat David recognizes the scene is set to present not only a deadly danger to the sailors but an imminent one, demanding quick, decisive, and effective action. As Metzudat Zion notes, the storm itself was deafeningly loud, making a nuanced conversation impossible. However, the sailors are not yet ready to jump to judgment in the form of capital punishment, on a stranger no less. In their desperation they ask "tell us, what must we do with you?"

In addition the sailors know that in order to survive they must appease God and seek divine intervention. Kimchi imagines them saying "For [without God's intervention] we have no hope that the sea will become quiet because the storm is increasing in ferocity." The sailors want to know what they can do to convince God to quiet the sea in "place of its strong waves." Kimchi then refers to Psalm 107 which describes God's power in the "wonders of the deep" and a storm with huge waves. The sailors caught in that storm cry out to God (Psalm 107:28) who responds to their prayer. As it says, "[God] made the storm calm, so that its waves were still. They [the sailors] rejoiced for they [the waves] were quiet" (Psalm 107:29-30).

Jonah 1:12

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֵיהֶם שְׂאוּנִי וְהִטִּילְנִי אֶל־הַיָּם וַיִּשְׁתַּק הַיָּם מֵעֲלֵיכֶם כִּי יוֹדַעַ אֲנִי כִּי בִשְׁלִי הִסְעָר הַגָּדוֹל הַזֶּה עֲלֵיכֶם:

Metzudat David

<p>1:12 "Heave me" - Take me and throw me into the sea and certainly "the sea will calm down for you" for I know that it was because of me that this great storm came upon you.</p>	<p>שאוני. קחו אותי והשליכו אותי אל הים ובודאי ישתוק הים מעליכם כי ידעתי שבעבורי בא הסער הגדול הזה עליכם.</p>
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Metzudat Zion

<p>1:12 "Sa'uni" - meaning seizing.</p>	<p>שאוני. ענין לקיחה:</p>
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1:12 “ Vahaṭiluni ” - meaning casting off.	והטילוני. ענין השלכה:
1:12 “ Vsheli ” - on my account.	בשלי. בעבורי:

As previously explained by Altschuler, the sailors have pursued every avenue of nonviolent recourse. Yet, they are still hesitant to act and instead ask Jonah what they should do. The command must come then from Jonah to cast him overboard. The act is voluntarily not coercive.

Metzudat Zion follows Kimchi’s understanding of “*Vsheli*” as “on my account” which Kimchi explains as “that is to say, because of my transgression.”

Ibn Ezra sees Jonah clearly desiring and requesting his own death. He seeks to avoid “drawing the Ninevites back to the Eternal” and bringing dishonor upon Israel. He “does not say this to them [the sailors]” so that they would not send him to Nineveh as a solution to quiet the raging of the storm. In this way, Ibn Ezra sees the sailors more keen on pursuing a nonviolent option, even in a hypothetical scenario.

Abarbanel interestingly notes that it is “here Jonah ceases his repentance and chooses to stifle (lit. strangle) his soul and die.” However, he also notes, “his intention was for the sake of heaven” - that he did not flee out of selfish fear but out of concern for the future of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Jonah is therefore made into a heroic figure even in his disobedience to God.

On Jonah’s disobedience, Ibn Ezra interestingly wrote in his comment on the first verse, “One can wonder how there arose in the heart of a wise man, who knew God and God’s deeds, the thought to flee from before God. For he was in God’s hand. [Jonah was already a prophet, a servant of God.] And all is filled with God’s glory. [Jonah understands that God’s power and presence are not limited to the Land of Israel but rather includes all creation].”²⁸ This understanding makes Jonah’s decision to flee baffling. Ibn Ezra explores various reasons for this. Among them is a comparison of Jonah with Moses: “we saw that [even] Moses did not want to go on his mission from God to bring his people out [of Egypt]. Nevertheless, Jonah was sent to bring repentance to Nineveh [and also did not want to go].”²⁹ Ibn Ezra explains Jonah’s action citing Midrash: “he sought to project the honor of the son.” The idea here is Jonah does not only wish to spare Israel’s Northern Kingdom from the future conquest of the Assyrians, but also to preserve their honor. For if the Ninevites are willing to repent and the Israelites are not, God would grow angry with the Israelites and punish them, or the “reputation of Israel among the nations would be diminished” as Bob explains. “Therefore Jonah disobeyed the father, God, to protect the son, Israel.”³⁰

²⁸ Ibn Ezra on Jonah 1:1; Bob, 18

²⁹ Ibn Ezra on Jonah 1:1

³⁰ Bob, 19

Jonah 1:13

וַיַּחְתְּרוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים לְהָשִׁיב אֶל־הַיַּבֶּשָׁה וְלֹא יָכְלוּ כִּי הָיָם הוֹלֵךְ וְסֹעֵר עֲלֵיהֶם:

Metzudat David

<p>1:13 “Nevertheless, [the men] rowed hard” - They were making a great effort with the oars to return the ship to land, thinking that there they would place Jonah on the land and they would go on their way.</p>	<p>ויחתרו. היו משתדלים עם המשוטות להשיב הספינה אל היבשה בחשבם ששם יטלו את יונה אל היבשה והם ילכו לדרכם.</p>
<p>1:13 “[the sea] was growing more and more stormy about them” - it means the raging waves about them pushed the ship away from the land that was right in front of them [back] into the sea.</p>	<p>הולך וסוער עליהם. ר"ל הרעשת הגלים היה עליהם מן היבשה למול פניהם להרחיק את הספינה אל תוך הים.</p>

Metzudat Zion

<p>1:13 “Vayaht’ru” - meaning digging and similarly, ‘If they dig [down] to Sheol’ (Amos 9:2) it means they rowed by the oars within the sea and it seemed like they were digging into the sea.</p>	<p>ויחתרו. ענין חפירה וכן אם יחתרו בשאול (עמוס ט:ב') ור"ל השיטו במשוטו בתוך הים ונדמה כאלו חופרים בים:</p>
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“Nevertheless, [the men] rowed hard” - There is no end to the sailors pursuit of a nonviolent resolution to the storm. As Metzudat David explains, “They were making a great effort with the oars to return the ship to land, thinking that there they would place Jonah on the land and they would go on their way.” But to no avail, for “[the sea] was growing more and more stormy about them,” meaning the raging waves about them pushed the ship away from the land that was right in front of them [back] into the sea.” Abarbanel also notes, “the Eternal had cast a mighty wind on the sea’ (Jonah 1:4) [originating] from the dry land, [thus] the sailors were not able to return the ship to dry land to break apart there. For the wind was coming from there, and pushed it toward the sea.”³¹ Ibn Ezra explains “they had already rowed” as referring to an already completed and failed effort. Presumably, only when that effort failed did the sailors consider the more extreme measure of sending Jonah into the sea once he proposed it.

Metzudat Zion follows Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and Kimchi’s understanding of “Vayaht’ru” - meaning digging - that they rowed by their oars like shovels as if they were digging into

³¹ Abarbanel on 1:4

the sea. This understanding shows the desperation and effort of the sailors to pursue a nonviolent course of action. Abarbanel does not think the sailors row hard for Jonah's sake but rather for their own. "They tried to divert the ship to the land so that it would break apart there in a way that the people could escape."³²

Abarbanel also explains why the Eternal cast a mighty wind so that the sailors could not reach dry land: "the Holy One did not choose this [path for Jonah] for [God] wanted Jonah, [albeit] unwillingly, to repent and to request to go on the way which the Holy One had sent him."³³ Free will is a crucial element in the rabbinic understanding of repentance.³⁴

Jonah 1:14

וַיִּקְרְאוּ אֶל־יְהוָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלֵינוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֲלֵנוּ נִאֲבָדָה בְּנִפְשׁ הָאִישׁ הַזֶּה וְאֵל־תִּתֵּן עָלֵינוּ דָּם נָקִיא כִּי־אַתָּה יְהוָה כָּאֲשֶׁר חָפְצָתָ עֲשִׂיתָ:

Metzudat David

<p>1:14 "Do not let us perish" - let us not be destroyed by this transgression, that we [should not be held guilty of] acting to take this man's life by casting him into the sea.</p>	<p>אל נא נאבדה. לא נהיו עתה נאבדים בעון שנשלח יד בנפש האיש הזה להשליכו אל הים.</p>
<p>1:14 "Do not hold us" etc. - It means do not condemn us as if we spilled innocent blood.</p>	<p>ואל תתן וגו'. ר"ל אל תחשב לנו כאילו שפכנו דם נקי.</p>
<p>1:14 "For You, O Eternal" - It means "Is not everything in your hands? You have always acted as you desired."</p> <p>If it was your wish to kill him not by our hand, certainly there is nothing that would keep you alone from causing him to die? Rather, certainly, the decree is to kill him by our hand.</p>	<p>כי אתה ה'. ר"ל הלא הכל בידך ומעולם עשית כאשר חפצת</p> <p>ואם היה חפצך להמיתו שלא על ידינו הלא אין מעצור בידך להמית אותו לבד אלא ודאי הגזירה היא להמיתו על ידינו.</p>

³² Abarbanel on 1:4

³³ Abarbanel on Jonah 1:13

³⁴ See for example Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhoh Teshuva* 6:2

Metzudat Zion

1:14 “Anah” - meaning request like ‘O Eternal, deliver us!’ (Psalms 118:25).	אנה. ענין בקשה כמו אנא ה' הושיעה נא (תהילים קי"ח:כ"ה):
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This verse is the penultimate step before the culmination of the chapter when Jonah is heaved overboard. After so much effort to spare Jonah, the sailors must now declare their deadly intention along with their innocence.

Altschuler's commentary is very much in line with Abarbanel -- “for his wayward soul will die in this...or in some other manner. For there is no stopping the hand of the Eternal from striking God's enemy and the myriads who curse the Eternal. And why should we be destroyed because of him?...And do not say that You have no other way to cause him to die [except] for destroying the ship he is on. For You are The Eternal, for you do as you desire...And many openings [exist] to fulfill the Divine will [of destroying Jonah] without destroying us.”

Ibn Ezra notes the use of “as you desired” shows that “it was clear to them, [the sailors,] that on his [Jonah's] account the sea was storming.” Now, they declare, they are only responding to God's divine will.

Jonah 1:15

וַיִּשְׁאוּ אֶת־יִדְּנָה וַיִּטְלֶהוּ אֶל־הַיָּם וַיַּעֲמֵד הַיָּם מִזְעָפוֹ:

Metzudat David

1:15 “[The sea] stopped [raging]” - [The sea] quieted down and ceased its angry, raging waves.	ויעמוד. שתק ונח מקצף הרעשת גליו.
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Metzudat Zion

1:15 “Vaya’amod” - meaning silence like ‘Till they stopped [speaking] and no longer replied’ (Job 32:16).	ויעמוד. ענין שתיקה כמו עמדו לא ענו עוד (איוב לב):
1:15 “Miza’po” - meaning anger as in ‘I bear the anger of God’ (Micah 7:9) and regarding the raging waves they said that it looked like the sea was angered and enraged.	מזעפו. ענין קצף כמו זעף ה' אשא (מיכה ז) ועל הרעשת הגלים יאמר שנראה אז כאלו הים כועס ומתקצף:

Just as Metzudat Zion, Ibn Ezra affirms the use of “*Miza’po*” as metaphorical. As Bob explains, as the metaphor of the “raging sea” is so common in English, we might not even consider it a metaphor. Not so in Hebrew. “The word only occurs in the Bible thirteen times. This is the only place that it is used to describe the sea. Everywhere else it is used to describe a person or God.”³⁵ Metzudat Zion is playing on the word “*Qetzel*” which while meaning “angry” could mean “bubbly” or “foamy” in regard to the sea.

Abarbanel notes in Pirke D'Rebbe Eliezer (Ch. 10) that yet another unsuccessful attempt is made by the sailors to save Jonah's life: “They took him (and cast him into the sea) up to his knee-joints, and the sea-storm abated. They took him up again to themselves and the sea became agitated again against them...” It continues on with more experiments until they finally lowered him entirely into the sea. I would note this midrashic commentary understands the biblical text's use of the verb “*vay'iluhu*” as “to lower” rather than “to heave.” Notably, the sailors don't make Jonah walk the plank.³⁶

Jonah 1:16

וַיִּירָאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים יִרְאָה גְדוֹלָה אֶת־יְהוָה וַיִּזְבְּחוּ־זֶבַח לַיהוָה וַיִּדְּרוּ נְדָרִים:

Metzudat David

1:16 “[The men] feared” etc. - in their witnessing Divine Providence and [God's] power.	וִירָאוּ וּגו'. בראותם השגחת המקום ויכלתו.
1:16 “they offered a sacrifice” - it means they took upon themselves [the obligation] to sacrifice to the Eternal in [God's] Temple.	וַיִּזְבְּחוּ. ר"ל קבלו על עצמם לזבוח לה' בבה"מ*. *בה"מ=בית המקדש
1:16 “and they made vows” - to distribute charity to the poor.	וַיִּדְּרוּ נְדָרִים. לחלק צדקה לעניים.

Metzudat Zion on Jonah 1:16 - N/A

Jonah 1:16 details the experience of the sailors. They came to revere God. The text implies the sailors could be referred to as God-fearers or *yir'ei adonai*, a biblical term most notably found in the prayers of *Hallel* quoting Psalm 118 (see Psalm 118:4) alongside references to Israel and the House of Aaron. Such a designation speaks to the universal message of the book of Jonah. Non-Israelites can come to revere the God

³⁵ Bob, 29

³⁶ Pirkei de Rabbi Eliezer, Chapter 10 trans. Rabbi Gerald Friedlander, London, 1916
https://www.sefaria.org/Pirkei_DeRabbi_Eliezer.10.6?lang=en&with=all&lang2=en

of Israel. So much so that according to Metzudat David, they will even take upon the obligation to go to the land of Israel in order to sacrifice at the Temple. In this interpretation, Altschuler follows Kimchi and the Targum.

Altschuler and Kimchi differ from Rashi on the extent to which the sailors are willing to let this divine experience change their lives. Rashi interprets “and they made vows” as they swore to convert (also as understood in Pirke D'Rebbe Eliezer). Abarbanel explains that the sailors first underwent *brit milah* (circumcision for conversion) while at sea before they could offer sacrifices to the Eternal. However, Leviticus 17:8-9 suggests that neither conversion nor circumcision were required to offer sacrifices, at least at the Tent of Meeting in the wilderness if not at the Temple in Jerusalem. Ibn Ezra reads it much more literally [as a sacrificial offering] but simply clarifies the timing “they offered [a sacrificial offering] after they left [the ship].”

Abarbanel understands the phrase “they made vows” as referring to a vow to bring their entire families to the God of Jonah. Kimchi understands this phrase as indicating a vow separate from that of offering a sacrifice at the Temple, such as the giving of tzedakah to the poor. It is not clear how Kimchi and Altschuler make the connection to tzedakah. Perhaps it is a mitzvah that can be easily taken on by non-Israelites.

V. CHAPTER 2

Jonah 2:1

וַיִּמְן יְהוָה דָּג גָּדוֹל לִבְלָעַ אֶת־יוֹנָה וַיְהִי יוֹנָה בְּמִצְעֵי הַדָּג שְׁלֹשָׁה יָמִים וּשְׁלֹשָׁה לַיְלֹת:

Metzudat David

<p>2:1 “[The Eternal] provided” - [The Eternal] summoned the fish to swallow him [Jonah] immediately so that he would not drown in the waters of the sea.</p>	<p>וימן. הזמין את הדג לבלוע אותו מיד שלא יטבע במי הים.</p>
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Metzudat Zion

<p>2:1 “Vayman” - meaning assignment as in ‘the king assigned them [daily rations]’ (Daniel 1:5).</p>	<p>וימן. ענין הזמנה כמו וימן להם המלך (דניאל א':ה').</p>
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The Metzudot draw on Kimchi to understand “*vayman*.” Metzudat Zion, like Kimchi, also quotes the book of Daniel, although he selects an earlier verse with the same conjugation of “*vayman*” (Daniel 1:5), as opposed to “*minah*” (Daniel 1:10). While Metzudat David notes, as Kimchi does, that the fish was summoned to swallow Jonah, he also offers a rationale for this: “[The Eternal] summoned the fish to swallow him [Jonah] immediately so that he would not drown in the waters of the sea.”

While Metzudat David uses the word “*miyad*, immediately,” Kimchi, on the other hand, understands that God preassigned the fish to this specific time. He does not see this fish as a normal, natural fish in the sea but a miracle in and of itself, summoned as far back as the sixth day of creation, specifically “*bein hashmashot*” - the last moment before the sunset which initiated the first Shabbat.³⁷

What is at stake for the commentators is God’s ability to transcend nature to perform miracles. By tracing the origins of miracles back to creation, the sages defend the very existence of miracles and also of their absence. For the very creation of our world, even without individual miracles, is inherently miraculous. Furthermore, assigning miracles to creation perhaps helps justify God’s lack of intervention at other crucial times, especially since biblical times. Thus, praying for a miracle, at least certain types, is futile, as noted elsewhere by the rabbis.³⁸

Abarbanel also explores God’s ability to transcend nature. He compares the ability of

³⁷ Mishnat Avot 5:6; Pirkei D’Rabbi Eliezer 10:7, Genesis Rabbah 5:5

³⁸ See for example Mishnah Berakhot 9:3

Jonah to survive in a fish's belly to a fetus' ability to survive in its mother's womb: "And our eyes see that a fetus resides in its mother's belly for nine months without eating, drinking, take care of its needs [relieving itself], or breathing cold wind [fresh air] from outside. And what would prevent the Eternal from doing so for Jonah for those days?" Abarbanel also references the book of Daniel in which God "transcends nature" and allows three individuals to survive in a "burning fiery furnace" (Dan. 3:23). Ibn Ezra also notes the ability of Jonah to survive in a fish for 3 days let alone in an hour is miraculous.

Jonah 2:2

וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל יוֹנָה אֱלֹהֵי הָהָרָה מִמֶּעֵי הַדָּגָה:

Metzudat David

<p>2:2 "From the belly of the fish" - Our sages of blessed memory said, first a male fish swallowed him [Jonah] and he [Jonah] remained there in the open space [its belly] and he did not turn his mind to pray.</p> <p>God beckoned the [male] fish and it vomited him [Jonah] into the mouth of the [female] fish and there he remained in distress before the fish eggs. And so he prayed in distress.</p>	<p>ממעי הדגה. ארז"ל* בתחילה בלעו דג זכר ועמד שם בריוח ולא נתן דעתו להתפלל</p> <p>ורמז המקום להדג והקיא אל פי הדגה ושם עמד בדוחק מפני העוברים והתפלל מתוך הדחק:</p> <p>*ארז"ל=אמרו רבותינו זכרונם לברכה</p>
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Metzudat Zion on Jonah 2:2 -- N/A

Metzudat David draws directly on Rashi's comment on Jonah 2:1 here. While in the male fish, Jonah has ample room and is not moved to pray. But once vomited into the female fish full of fish eggs, Jonah has much less room. Rashi notes, he "was in distress and he prayed there, as it says [in verse 2], 'from the belly of the female fish.'" Kimchi also offers a fascinating alternative translation to "*mim'ei*" - that rather than refer to a place like the belly of the fish (as it does in Targum Yonaton), it means "from the midst of difficulty [Jonah] prayed." Thus in the following verse of Jonah (2:3), the "belly of *She'ol* I cried out" could be a similar, metaphorical reference.

While the Hebrew is different, this parallels the sentiment of Psalm 118:5, drawing parallels between narrowness and distress as well as widening and relief. The commentary by Metzudat David notes the opposite sequence of the Psalm: Jonah started in an open place and God moves him to a narrow one in order to stimulate his prayer. Claustrophobia can clearly move one to prayer.

While Kimchi notes Rashi's commentary as well, he views it as only one interpretation. Kimchi also notes Ex 7:21 in which *dagah* must refer to all fish in the first plague, not simply female fish, thus indicating that *dag* and *dagah* are interchangeable. Ibn Ezra also dismisses the gendered interpretations of the two words for fish completely: "There is no need for this. For *dag* and *dagah* are nouns [without distinction as to] gender, like *tzedeq* and *tzedeqah*," which are also interchangeable. Biblical scholars may refute this point, noting the unique conjugation of *tzedeq* as opposed to *tzedaqah* denote different, albeit related concepts.

Jonah 2:3

נִי־אָמַר קָרָאתִי מִצָּרָה לִי אֱלֹהֵי הַנָּה וַיַּעֲנֵנִי מִבֶּטֶן שָׂאוֹל שָׁמַעְתָּ קוֹלִי:

Metzudat David

<p>2:3 "I called" - Indeed, I [Jonah] called to the Eternal because of the distress that was upon me.</p> <p>And I know that he [God] will always answer me for as long as I exist.</p>	<p>קראתי. הנה קראתי אל ה' מפני הצרה אשר עלי וידעתי כי יענני הואיל ואני קיים כל הימים הללו.</p>
<p>2:3 "From the belly of She'ol" - It is [referring to] the female fish* which to him [Jonah] was like the depths of She'ol.</p> <p>*hereafter, this translation will not refer to the fish as "female", though the noun is feminine.</p>	<p>מבטן שאול. היא הדגה שהיא לו כעומק השאול.</p>
<p>2:3 "You hear my voice" - I was promised that you would hear my voice.</p>	<p>שמעת קולי. מובטח אני אשר שמעת קולי.</p>

Metzudat Zion

<p>2:3 "Mibeten She'ol" - it means from the depths of the grave.</p>	<p>מבטן שאול. ר"ל מעומק הקבר:</p>
<p>2:3 "Shiva'ti" - meaning crying out as in 'Listen to the sound of my cry' (Psalms 9*).</p> <p>*actually Psalms 5:3</p>	<p>שועתי. ענין צעקה כמו הקשיבה לקול שועי (תהלים ט):</p>

Metzudat David in his commentary on “*kar’ati*” may be drawing from Kimchi, noting Jonah’s confidence that God will answer him. Kimchi explains where this confidence may come from: “because Jonah withstood being in God’s creature, he knew that he would leave the belly of the fish in peace.” His very existence is miraculous therefore, why shouldn’t he believe that he will be released from the fish safely. This clarifies why “*vaya’aneini*” is in the past tense - it is stated with confidence what will happen. Ibn Ezra in his commentary provides a number of biblical examples in which past tense verbs describe events that have not yet taken place.³⁹ He gives a fascinating explanation: “For an event which has been decreed [by God] to happen, can be spoken of in the past tense.”⁴⁰ Abarbanel notes that Ibn Ezra’s comment specifically implies that “all words of prophecy are expressed in this way [in the past tense yet describing what will be in the future].” But he reads Ibn Ezra incorrectly if he applies this to *all* words of prophecy. Abarbanel explains prophecy in the past tense in a different way: “in these visions, these words were proclaimed by the Holy One. They were told as if they had [already] happened in reality because they were already proclaimed in God’s high wisdom.” It is worth noting that biblical scholars generally notice that the Bible does not think in terms of past, present, and future but rather as action that is completed or not. Furthermore, the “vav consecutive” or “*vav hahipukh*” is a recognized linguistic tool to invert the tense or status of an action in the Bible.

However, while Abarbanel cites the other commentators he does not agree with them. The use of the past tense here, in his eyes, does not refer to the future but rather to the traumatic difficulties of Jonah’s youth. Abarbanel recounts a passage (I Kings 17) in which Elijah brings back to life an unnamed boy. According to rabbinic sources, this boy is Jonah.⁴¹ Jonah 2:3 is therefore intentionally expressed in the past tense to refer to this earlier miracle.

Metzudat David draws directly from Rashi in referring to Sheol, the mysterious biblical underworld, as a metaphor for the experience of being in the belly of the fish.⁴² Ibn Ezra explains Sheol as “a deep place which is the opposite of the heavens which are on high.”

Jonah 2:4

וַתִּשְׁלֹכֵנִי מִצֹּלָה בְּלִבִּי יָמִים וָנָהָר יִסְבְּבֵנִי כָּל־מְשַׁבְּרֵי יָם וּגְלִיךְ עָלַי עֲבָרוּ:

³⁹ Ibn Ezra references the following examples: Gen. 48:22, Gen. 49:15, Num. 24:17, Deut. 32:15, Deut. 33:28, Ps. 3:1, and Ps. 3:5

⁴⁰ Ibn Ezra on Jonah 2:2

⁴¹ Bob, 90; citing Midrash Shocher Tov 26:7 and Pirkei D’ Rabbi Eliezer Ch. 33

⁴² See my comments on previous verse

Metzudat David

2:4 “You cast me” - Indeed you sent me into the depths by the power of the sea.	ותשליכני. הנה השלכת אותי במצולה בחוזק הים.
2:4 “The floods engulfed me” - For that was the place where the waters of the river and the waters of the sea joined.	ונהר יסובבני. כי שם היה המקום שמתחברים מי הנהר ומי הים.
2:4 “Swept over me” - For when they [the breakers and the waves] passed over the fish they also passed over him [Jonah] as he was inside her belly.	עלי עברו. כי כשעברו על הדגה עברו גם עליו בהיותו במעיה.

Metzudat Zion

2:4 “Mtzulah” - such is called the depths of the water and similarly, ‘You sent [their pursuers] into the depths’ (Nehemiah 9:11).	מצולה. כן יקרא עומק המים וכן השלכת במצולות (נחמיה ט):
2:4 “Bilvav” - it means with force and it is metaphorical language [i.e. that doesn’t usually apply here] for [in a literal sense] the heart is the source of strength for a living thing.	בלבב. ר"ל בחוזק והוא לי' מושאל על כי הלב הוא החזוק מבע"ח*: *בע"ח=בעלי חיים
2:4 “Mishbarekha” - such are called the waves of the sea because it seems like they [the breakers] are breaking the sea and [the waves] are returning and being broken [again] and similarly, ‘the breakers are thrown akilter’ (Job 41:17). And the parallel word used as a synonym* ‘and your waves’ is similar to, ‘the dust of the earth’ (Daniel 12:2). *synonymic parallel	משבריק. כן יקראו גלי הים ע"ש** שנראה כשוכרים את הים וחוזרים ונשברים וכן משבר"י יתחטאו (איוב מ"א:י"ז) וכפל המלה בשמות נרדפים ואמר וגליך וכן אדמת עפר (דניאל יב): **ע"ש = על שם ש

The majority of the commentary on this verse aims to explain its poetic, metaphorical language. Metzudat Zion explains “*bilvav*” as a metaphorical adverb for “with strength.” He responds to the abstract notion that the sea has a “heart,” instead emphasizing the

literal sense of the word, as the heart is the core source of strength of a living thing. Abarbanel interprets it more literally as referring to Jonah's being in the belly of the fish in the sea.

Metzudat David, Kimchi, and Abarbanel all draw their understanding of "*vnahar ysovveini*" as the place where the sea and river mixed from Ibn Ezra. Ibn Ezra, in turn, cites Yafet ben Ali who understood the plural word *yamim* "seas" in this verse as referring to this convergence of the "Sea of Reeds and the Sea of Yafo." This is likely referring to the Mediterranean (i.e. the Sea of Yafo) meets the marshland in northeastern Egypt (ie. the Sea of Reeds) which is where the Israelites crossed, according to some modern scholars.

In Metzudat Zion's explanation of "*Mishbarekha*" he agrees with Rashi that breakers are called as such because "they break and divide the sea" and also with Kimchi, for in terms of timing, "the moment [the waves] billow [angrily] they are called *mishbarei*, breakers." Hebrew uses two different words to capture waves -- one that captures the voluminous nature of waves (גל) and one that captures the breaking nature of waves (משבר), very similar to how English has two different words for "waves" and "breakers."

Jonah 2:5

וְאֲנִי אָמַרְתִּי נִגְרַשְׁתִּי מִנֶּגֶד עֵינֶיךָ אַךְ אוֹסִיף לְהִבִּיט אֶל־הַיָּם כָּל־יְשָׁךְ:

Metzudat David

<p>2:5 "I thought" - When they [the sailors] cast me into the sea, I thought 'Indeed, I was driven away from your sight' -- he means 'you concealed your gaze [lit. eyes] from me.'</p>	<p>ואני אמרתי. כשהשליכו אותי הימה חשבתי הנה נגרשתי מנגד עיניך ר"ל העלמת עין ממני.</p>
<p>2:5 "Would I [ever gaze] again" - But now, since you sustained me all these days, I am assured [that I will] leave from this [place] and again gaze upon Your holy Temple, to go there, voicing my thanksgiving.*</p> <p>*uses language from Jonah 2:10, there "בְּקוֹל תוֹדָה"</p>	<p>אך אוסיף. אך עתה הואיל וקיימתני כל הימים הללו מובטח אני לצאת מזה ואוסיף עוד להביט אל היכל קדשך לבא שמה בקול תודה*.</p>

Metzudat Zion

2:5 “Nigrashti” - expulsion.	נגרשתי. מל' גרושין:
2:5 “L'habit” - to see.* *although “to gaze” may be better definition	להביט. לראות:

Jonah continues his dramatic dialogue with God in this verse, describing his inner thoughts, progressing towards *teshuvah* or a return to God through repentance.

Kimchi drawing on Rashi adds to his dialogue, “I thought I was dead from the moment they threw me overboard.” When Metzudat David writes “concealed your gaze” he may very well mean that Jonah thought God “abandoned” or “ignored” him, using language of the rabbis to describe God hiding God’s face (*hester panim*) and ignoring the plight of the Israelites after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem.

Kimchi provides a link between God’s sight and the Temple. The Temple is “a place of prophecy and the place where You [God] will watch over me [Jonah].” It stands in direct contrast to Jonah’s circumstances: once Jonah left Israel he “thought that You [God] hid Your face and eyes from me. But now that You have performed this great miracle for me [Jonah] and I continue to be alive here in the belly of the fish, I know that I will again be able to gaze upon your holy palace in the Temple.” Metzudat David and Kimchi follow Rashi in this conclusion. Abarbanel appears to agree with Kimchi, that the reference to the Temple signals that prophecy will return to Jonah.

As elsewhere in his commentary on chapter 2, Ibn Ezra understands the reference to the Temple as being the heavens as opposed to the physical Temple in Jerusalem.

Jonah 2:6

אֶפְפוּנִי מִיָּם עַד־נִפְּשׁ תִּהְיוּם יִסְבְּבֵנִי סוּף חֲבוּשׁ לְרֹאשִׁי:

Metzudat David

2:6 “[The waters] closed in over me” - The waters surrounded me until I nearly died [lit. my soul nearly exited (my body)].	אֶפְפוּנִי מִיָּם. הַמִּים סָבְבוּ אוֹתִי עַד קִרְבִּי לְהוֹצֵאת הַנֶּפֶשׁ.
2:6 “The deep engulfed me” - the phrase is repeated in the writing [i.e. the	תִּהְיוּם יִסְבְּבֵנִי. כָּפַל הַדָּבָר בַּמִּשָּׁנָה.*

verse features biblical parallelism].	*במ"ש=במה שכתוב
2:6 "Weeds twined around my head" - When the fish swam with him in the sea, the weeds twined around the head of the fish, as if they twined around his [Jonah's] head since he was in her belly.	סוף חבוש לראשי. כי כשהדגה שטה עמו בים נקשר הסוף בראש הדגה וכאלו נקשר בראשו הואיל והיה במעיה.

Metzudat Zion

2:6 "Afafuni" - meaning surrounding around and rotation as in 'misfortunes envelop me' (Psalms 40:13).	אפפוני. ענין הקפה וסבוב כמו אפפו עלי רעות (תהילים מ"ג):
2:6 "Thom" - the depths of the sea.	תהום. עומק הים:
2:6 "Suf" - a kind of grass that grows in the sea and similarly, 'Reed and rush shall decay' (Isaiah 19:6).	סוף. מין דשא הגדל במים וכן קנה וסוף קמלו (ישעיהו י"ט:ד):
2:6 "Havush" - meaning tying and similarly, 'and you did not bandage the injured' (Ezekiel 34:4).	חבוש. ענין קשירה כמו ולנשברת לא חבשתם (יחזקאל ל"ד:ד):

This biblical verse, as well as the following verse, poetically describes the depth to which Jonah sank, both physically and perhaps spiritually as well, using imagery such as weeds or reeds growing on the ocean floor. In a beautiful comment Rashi expands imaginatively on Jonah 2:6 following the Targum. He understands the term *suf*, "reeds" as referring to the Sea of Reeds: "The Holy One of Blessing showed him the Sea of Reeds and how the Israelites crossed it." Kimchi clarifies this interpretation, that "some say that the Sea of Reeds enters into the Sea of Yaffo on this path. And Targum Yonaton renders it, 'The Sea of Reeds hangs over from [above] my head.'" Abarbanel also includes this connection in his commentary.

Metzudat David may draw on Kimchi and Abarbanel's similar understanding of the scene with the reeds. Kimchi notes that there are reeds that grow on the banks of the Nile and the shores of the sea...and there is [a different] variety "which grow on the floor of the sea at the base of the mountains...It is thin and long and it wraps around the heads of fish."

Rashi goes on to explain how Jonah could see from inside the belly of the fish, drawing from Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer 10: "The two eyes of the fish were like two windows and he looked out and saw all that was in the sea."

Kimchi quotes Psalm 69:2 to help us understand “*ad-nefesh*” as in “for the waters have reached my *nefesh*,” indicating a life-threatening image surrounded by water. This expression may make more sense knowing that in its most original form, *nefesh* meant “neck” or “throat” and only later came to refer to the “soul.”⁴³ Ibn Ezra’s understanding of *ad nefesh* as “until my *nefesh* was about to die” supports this interpretation.

Jonah 2:7

לְקַצְבֵי הָרִים לְרִדְתִּי הָאָרֶץ בְּרִיחִיהָ בְּעַדִּי לְעוֹלָם וַתַּעַל מִשְׁחַת חַיִּי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי:

Metzudat David

2:7 “to the base of the mountains” - to the end of the mountains emerging out of the sea, that is, the bottom of the sea.	לקצבי הרים. לאחרית ההרים התקועים בים והוא קרקעית הים.
2:7 “I sank” - while in the belly of the fish.	ירדתי. בהיותי במעי הדגה:
2:7 “the bars of the earth” - it means I thought that the earth, her foundational pillars, were erected before me forever, such that I could not return to You, as if [the earth] closed herself off via the foundational pillars.	הארץ בריחיה. רצה לומר חשבתי שהארץ הבריח* בריחיה כנגדי עד עולם כי לא אשוב אלי** כאילו סגרה את עצמה בבריחים: *הבריח=הבריחו **אלי=אליך
2:7 “Yet You brought up” - but since you sustained me all these days, I hope that you will bring my life up from the grave pit, that is, the belly of the fish.	ותעל. אבל הואיל וקיימתני כל הימים הללו אקוה שתעל חיי משחת הקבר הוא בטן הדגה:

Metzudat Zion

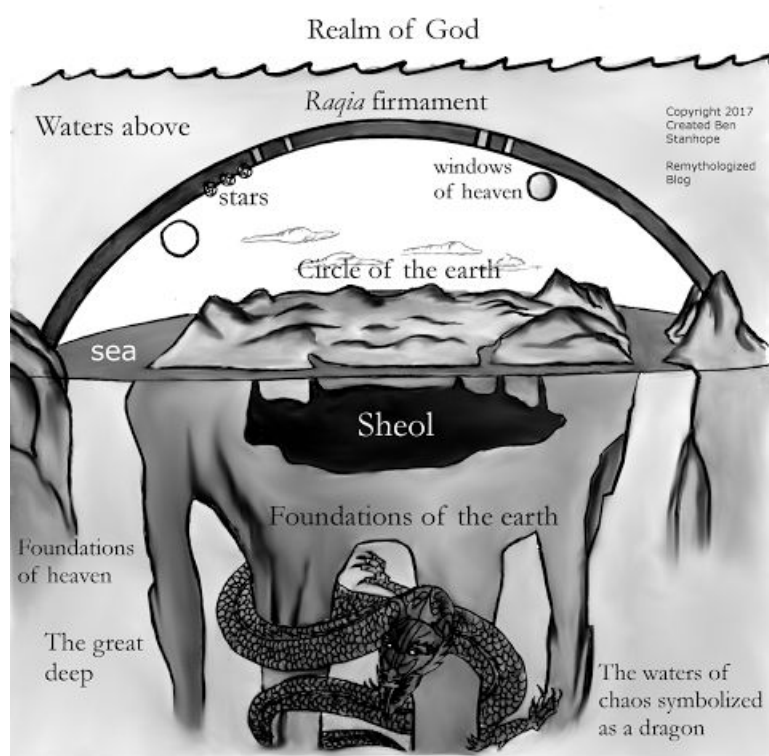
2:7 “Lkitzve” - meaning the absolute end [as in] ‘and he cut off a stick’ (II Kings 6:6) for the end of the cut [the very tip of the piece] is in the place that you cut.	לקצבי. ענין אחרית וסוף והוא מל' ויקצב עץ (מ"ב ו) כי אחרית דבר החתוך הוא במקום שנחתך:
2:7 “Briheha” - bar like the rod that is placed along the width of the gate to	בריחיה. מל' בריח והוא כעין מטה המושם לרוחב השער לסגרו:

⁴³ Pallis, Christopher A. “Death.” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Jul 26, 1999. Accessed December 20, 2020. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/nefesh-Judaism>

close it.	
2:7 “Va’adi” - in front of me and similarly, ‘shut the door in front of you’ (Ibid. 4:4).	בעדי. כנגדי וכן וסגרת הדלת בעדך (שם ד):
2:7 “Mishaḥat” - meaning a pit and a ditch as in ‘He was caught in their pit’ (Ezekiel 19:4).	משחת. ענין בור וחפירה כמו בשחתם נתפש (יחזקאל יט):

This Biblical verse references ancient cosmology in order to illustrate Jonah's feeling of being forcibly removed, barred off, and then saved. The ancient understanding was that the earth was flat, held up by mountainous bars emerging out of the deep waters which lie below the earth. The following image created by Ben Stanhope may be a helpful rendering of ancient israelite cosmology.

ANCIENT ISRAELITE COSMOLOGY



THE FIRMAMENT Gen 1:7-8; Job 37:18; Ex 24:10; Ezk 1:22-26	WATERS ABOVE Gen 1:7-8; Ps 148:4-6	REALM OF GOD Ps 104:2-3; 29:10; Job 22:12-14	WINDOWS OF HEAVEN Gen 7:11; 8:2; Is 24:18
CIRCLE OF EARTH Isa 40:22; Job 26:10; Prov 8:27	FOUNDATIONS OF EARTH Job 9:6; Ps 75:3; 102:25	FOUNDATIONS OF HEAVEN Job 26:11; 2 Sam 22:8	THE CHAOS DRAGON Ps 74:13-15; Job 7:12; 9:13; 26:12-13

*Rendering of Ancient Israelite Cosmology*⁴⁴

⁴⁴ <http://benstanhope.blogspot.com/2017/02/old-testament-cosmology.html>

Metzudat David draws on Rashi and Kimchi, noting that this verse refers to the base of the mountains, fixed in the depth of the sea (sort of an inverted summit or mountain peak). Ibn Ezra clarifies the word *lkitzvei* as indicating the mountains are “cut off” at this point.

These inverted mountains are referred to in the verse also as “*briahim*, bars or foundational pillars” for the earth, emerging out of the waters below. Metzudat David also draws on Rashi in the association of the root ב.ר.א. with ג.ר.ו, noting that the bars *closed* in on Jonah. Metzudat Zion finds the same biblical example as Rashi in II Kings 4:4 where both roots can be found. Ibn Ezra also supports this understanding of “closed.” Kimchi describes Jonah thinking that the bars would prevent him from going up to dry land ever again. Abarbanel also sees the function of the bars as to close and seal Jonah in. However, rather than interpret this phrase as bars preventing Jonah from returning to dry land, he sees these bars as preventing Jonah from fleeing from before God.

Metzudat David disagrees with Rashi in understanding the tense of the word “*vta'al*.”⁴⁵ While Altschuler sees this word as referring to the future hope of being brought up from the belly of the fish, Rashi notes that this word is presented in the past tense, and thus reads it as Jonah recognizing that God has already lifted him up from *Gehenom*, a place of purgatory, as opposed to *Sheol*, the biblical underworld which is interchangeably referred to as “*shahat*, pit” in the Bible. Abarbanel also reads “*vta'al*” in the past tense. He understands that Jonah is in the midst of a life-threatening situation, and when Jonah states “you brought up my life” he recalls the miracle of Elijah bringing him back to life, as referenced earlier.⁴⁶

Jonah 2:8

בְּהִתְעַטֵּף עָלַי נַפְשִׁי אֶת־יְהוָה זָכַרְתִּי וַתָּבוֹא אֵלַיךְ תַּפְלֵתִי אֶל־הֵיכַל קֹדֶשְׁךָ:

Metzudat David

<p>2:8 “As [my soul] grows faint” - As my soul grows faint and hurt, I call the Eternal to mind, to pray before God. And indeed my prayer comes to You to Your holy Temple. It [Jonah’s prayer] is the Shema.</p>	<p>בהתעטף. כשהיה נפשי שעלי מעוטף ומעונה זכרתי את ה' להתפלל לפניו והנה בא אליך תפילתי אל היכל קדשך הוא השמי* *השמ"י=השמע ישראל</p>
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⁴⁵ For more on verb tenses, see commentary on Jonah 2:3

⁴⁶ See commentary on Jonah 2:3

Metzudat Zion

<p>2:8 "Bhit'atef" - bending over to cloak oneself and dressing, for when someone is in distress, he is afflicted and bent over as if he was enveloped [in his cloak, from] end to end and similarly, "they who are bent over in hunger" (Lamentations 2:19).</p>	<p>בהתעטף. מלי עטיפה ולבישה כי כשהאדם הוא בצרה הוא מעונה וכפוף כאלו מעוטף קצתו בקצתו וכן העטופים ברעב (איכה ב):</p>
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Metzudat David draws on Rashi here who translates "*bhit'atef*" as "growing faint" while Metzudat Zion recognizes that the root פ.ט.ע. has two meanings, either referring to wrapping oneself or growing faint (perhaps from exhaustion).⁴⁷ The second meaning, "growing faint," may be derived from the first "wrapping oneself." Rashi also quotes Lamentations but from a separate verse than what Metzudat Zion selects in order to find this root: "the infant and baby *bei'atef*, fainted" (Lamentations 2:11). Ibn Ezra supports this definition with the biblical example of Psalm 102:1 "as he was *ya'atof*, faint."

Kimchi goes further to clarify that "this is the language that speaks about most of the suffering that shortens the *nefesh* [i.e. the life] of a person and thus their *nefesh* [i.e. soul] is wrapped up in it." Ibn Ezra also connects the definition of soul to life by linking the use of "*hayai*" in verse 7 to "*nafshi*" in verse 8.

Kimchi also believes the "Palace of Your holiness" in this verse refers not to the Temple in Jerusalem but to the heavens or the sky, thus it could serve as a metaphorical image of survival that Jonah holds onto in hopes of emerging from the belly of the fish. Ibn Ezra and Abarbanel have a similar conclusion.⁴⁸ But what is not so clear is why they resist the idea that this phrase refers to the Temple in Jerusalem.

Metzudat David identifies the "prayer" referenced in 2:8 as the Shema. This is a fitting choice given Jonah's expectation that he will die shortly and the Shema concludes one's final confession.

Jonah 2:9

מְשַׁמְרִים הַבְּלִי-שׁוֹא חֲסֶדֶם יַעֲזֹבוּ:

⁴⁷ Klein, Ernest. *An Etymological Dictionary of the Hebrew Language*. Macmillan Publishing: New York, NY, 1987.

⁴⁸ Ibn Ezra on Jonah 2:2; Abarbanel on Jonah 2:8

Metzudat David

<p>2:9 "They who cling to empty folly" - They are the people of the ship -- 'those who cling [to empty folly].' 'Empty folly' is idolatry. I know that they 'forsake their own welfare' and that they will not fulfill what they vow in a time of distress.</p>	<p>משמרים הבלי שוא. הם אנשי הספינה המשמרים הבלי שוא הוא העבודת כוכבים ידעתי שהם יעזבו חסדם ולא יקיימו מה שנדרו בעת צרה:</p>
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Metzudat Zion

<p>2:9 "Havle" - a word for futility, a matter that has no substance.</p>	<p>הבלי. מל' הבל ודבר שאין בו ממש:</p>
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Metzudat David draws on Rashi and Kimchi, interpreting "*Havley-shav*", empty folly" as idolatry. The Hebrew word "*hevel*" most notably appears in the Book of Ecclesiastes and is most aptly translated as "vapor" indicating a sense of temporariness and futility. Many of the commentators polemically apply this futility to the concept of non-Israelites remaining committed to repentance.

Metzudat David also follows other commentators in first assuming this verse refers to the sailors, and also observing Jonah's skepticism of them. Like Kimchi, Metzudat David has Jonah believe that the sailors will surely abandon God, not fulfill their vows, and return to idolatry. Kimchi draws on Ibn Ezra on the use of "*m'shamrim*" as referring to "guarding" as in the sailors would continue "holding" onto their idolatrous ways. Ibn Ezra would even argue that the appearance of this verb in the *pi'el* conjugation suggests that it is a "transitive verb which stresses that the men of the ship were calling out and encouraging one another [in their acts of idolatry]." But Kimchi dismisses this notion. Instead he offers a counter-narrative drawn from Pirkei d'Rebbe Eliezer which has the sailors abandoning idolatry for good after witnessing the miracles done to Jonah in the fish, and then even circumcising themselves in Jerusalem, taking vows, and becoming converts.⁴⁹

Abarbanel disagrees entirely. In his commentary, he understands that this verse refers to the people of Nineveh, not to the sailors. They will not remain committed to their repentance and will return to their evil ways. Abarbanel sees this thought as providing Jonah comfort in his regret for fleeing from God. Likely this is because, even if Jonah does fulfill God's direction to go to Nineveh, the people will not necessarily be able to remain committed to their repentance, and thereby will not be redeemed nor later become a tool for Israel's destruction.

⁴⁹ Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer 10.10

Jonah 2:10

וְאֲנִי בִקּוֹל תּוֹדָה אֶזְבַּחַהּ לְךָ אֲשֶׁר נָדַרְתִּי אֶשְׁלֹמָה יִשְׁוּעָתָה לִי הוּא: (ס)

Metzudat David

<p>2:10 “But I” - But I ‘will sacrifice to You’ sacrifices ‘voicing my thanksgiving’ and [offer prayers of] thanksgiving for the miracle.</p> <p>And ‘what I have vowed I will perform’ for the sake of God’s deliverance.</p>	<p>ואני. אבל אני אזבחה לך זבחים בקול תודה והודאה על הנס</p> <p>ואשר נדרתי אשלמה בעבור הישועה של ה':</p>
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Metzudat Zion on Jonah 2:10 -- N/A

Jonah 2:10 is the penultimate verse before the fish spews him out. In this verse, Jonah declares his intention once he leaves the fish.

In their commentary on 2:9, Rashi and Kimchi see Jonah’s statement in 2:10 as polemically drawing contrast to the sailors’ idolatry: “[the sailors] have turned away but I, [Jonah], am not like that. Rather with a voice of thanksgiving, I will bring offerings to you. That is according to Targum Jonathan.”⁵⁰

Metzduat David does not explain Jonah’s vow in this verse (2:10) but simply refers to it after mentioning the act of sacrificing in general without going into specifics. Rashi identifies the sacrifices: “My [Jonah’s] vow [is to offer] *shalamim* and thanksgiving [sacrifices]. I will fulfill [them] for the sake of the salvation that is God’s.”

Dr. Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, in her commentary on the first *parashah* of Leviticus in *The Torah: A Women’s Commentary*, notes that the *shlamim*, the “sacrifice of well-being” is often linked to public feast days or celebrations. While the burnt offering is an offering to God only, the *shlamim* then offered was only partially burnt and the largest part of this sacrifice was distributed among the priests and the offerers. She continues: “This means that when Israelites brought sacrifices, some offerings were solely for God, as it were, and some to be eaten by community members...This practice turns the eating of meat into a sacred act (17:1-7) and reflects the concern for taking life for human consumption; the sacrifice has nothing to do with atonement. As Jacob Milgrom observes, this ritual allowed the Israelites to acknowledge the miracles of their lives and express gratitude for them.”⁵¹ The “*todah*” or “thanks” designates the first type of *shlamim*, well-being sacrifice, taken with a grain portion that accompanies the eating of

⁵⁰ Rashi on Jonah 2:9

⁵¹ Eskenazi, Dr. Tamara Cohn. *Torah: A Women’s Commentary*. URJ Press and Women of Reform Judaism: New York, NY, 2008. Page 576.

the meat sacrifice per Leviticus 7:11-15. The other types are votive and freewill offerings.⁵²

Abarbanel understands this verse as a promise of what Jonah will do in Nineveh: “I will go to Nineveh ‘with a voice of gratitude’ and I will do the proclaiming as You command.” Abarbanel, speaking for Jonah, quotes I Samuel 15:22 “Surely adhering to God’s command is superior to sacrifice.” Here we see a similar sentiment to other prophetic texts, calling for ethical action over sacrifice.⁵³

According to Steven Bob, Kimchi explains two types of thanksgiving: public, as in “I will thank you...from the midst of the congregation,” and private, for “[God] has saved me through a great wonder God has performed for me.” Ibn Ezra on the other hand, simply understands that the vow refers to what Jonah swore “in the belly of the fish,” perhaps as in all that Jonah had expressed in prayer.⁵⁴ Ibn Ezra understands this second clause as “‘Salvation from the Eternal’ is what he [Jonah] was hoping for,” not what had already taken place.⁵⁵

Abarbanel adds to Jonah’s dialogue: “And do not think that after I get out of here that I will flee a second time as [when] I went down [to Yaffo] to flee towards Tarshish...for ‘what I have vowed I will fulfill.’” Jonah holds onto his faith that God will not let Israel be destroyed at the hands of the Assyrians for “salvation is the Eternal’s.” Following in the footsteps of the patriarch Abraham, Jonah puts *emunah*, whole-hearted trust in God.

Jonah 2:11

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה לְדָג נִקְא אֶת־יֹנָה אֶל־הַיָּבֵשָׁה: (פ)

Metzudat David

2:11 “[The Eternal] commanded” - it means [the Eternal] aroused its heart [alerted the fish] to spew him [Jonah] out.	ויאמר. ר"ל העיר לבו להקיא.
2:11 “[to] the fish” - perhaps after the [Jonah's] prayer, the [female] fish returned to spew him [Jonah] into the mouth of the [male] fish to stand in the [wide, open] space.	לדג. יתכן שאחר התפלה חזרה הדגה להקיא אל פי הדג לעמוד בריוח:
2:11 “and it spewed” - it means that [the	ויקא. ר"ל כמו שהעיר לבו כן עשה והקיא אל

⁵² Eskenazi, 599.

⁵³ See for example Isaiah 58:5

⁵⁴ Ibn Ezra on Jonah 2:10

⁵⁵ Ibn Ezra on Jonah 2:2

Eternal] aroused its heart [i.e. alerted the fish] and so it did spew him [Jonah] out 'upon dry land.'	היבשה:
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Metzudat Zion

2:11 “ Vayake ” - meaning ejecting via the mouth like ‘Lest you eat to such excess you throw it up’ (Proverbs 25:16).	ויקא. ענין הוצאה דרך הפה כמו פן תשבענו והקאתו (משלי כ"ה:ט"ז):
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Perhaps, as before, we see the medieval commentators wrestling with God’s ability to transcend nature, describing the communication between God and the fish in different ways.⁵⁶ Metzudat David’s understanding of *vayomer* as “arousing its [the fish’s] heart” or “alerting the fish” parallel’s Kimchi’s interpretation as “aroused the will [presumably, of the fish] to spew him [Jonah] onto dry land” as well as Ibn Ezra’s interpretation, “This is a metaphor. God compelled him [the fish] to fulfill the Divine will.”

As stated before, Abarbanel reacts to this series of events differently: “The Holy One saw Jonah’s repentance and that he regretted his transgression and departed from [the path of] transgression, and that he swore an oath that he would not return to foolishly fleeing, then God spoke to the fish. This means to say that God aroused the spirit [of the fish] so that the fish would move towards the shore and spew out Jonah onto dry land.”

Finally, in his commentary on male and female fish, Metzudat David refers to the sequential order of events (passing from the female to male fish) before Jonah ends up being spewed onto dry land. This explains why the fish in the verse is labeled in the masculine, *dag*, when Jonah was previously presumably in the female fish, *dagah*, during his prayer.

⁵⁶ See commentary on Jonah 2:1

VI. CHAPTER 3

Jonah 3:1

וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֶל־יוֹנָה שֵׁנִית לְאָמְרוֹ:

Metzudat David

3:1 “A second time” - in relation to the mission to Nineveh.	שנית. בדבר השליחות אל נינוה:
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Metzudat Zion on Jonah 3:1 - N/A

Ibn Ezra specifically notes that this is the second time God speaks to Jonah, as the biblical verse indicates. Abarbanel notes that this second prophecy begins in this verse and continues until the end of the book (Bob, 92).

Abarbanel notes, “Since Jonah sought the honor of the son [Israel] and not the honor of the father [God] his punishment was that prophecy came to him a second time but not a third time.”⁵⁷ Abarbanel defends his argument, “And since we do not find other prophecies of his after this long time except for these two prophecies that he prophesied on Nineveh, we know that prophecy from him ceased for this reason.” He states that it is clear that this punishment is entirely Jonah’s fault: “and it was appropriate that this [punishment] was carried out. For he [Jonah] fled from prophecy so it was removed from him. His punishment was measure for measure. For prophecy fled from him...For [the Holy One] is not stingy [in transmitting prophecy] but the recipient [Jonah] prevented the good [prophecy] on his own accord.”

Kimchi notes this verse does not necessarily indicate God never talks to Jonah again. He references a disagreement in the Talmud (b. Yevamot 98a) in which the sages connect the Jonah of this book to the Jonah of II Kings 14:25 as previously mentioned. The sages say either Jonah prophesied twice only concerning Nineveh and indeed II Kings represents a third time or alternatively, Jonah only received prophecy twice and this II Kings reference is part of Jonah’s prophecies concerning Nineveh, for both involved a reversal of the people from evil to good. The latter explanation presumes Jonah killed two birds with one stone, if you will, with one message for two peoples.⁵⁸

Jonah 3:2

קוּם לְךָ אֶל־נִינְוָה הָעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה וְקִרָא אֵלֶיהָ אֶת־הַקְּרִיָּאָה אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי דֹכֵר אֵלֶיךָ:

⁵⁷ For more on the son and father metaphor for God and Israel, see commentary on Jonah 1:3

⁵⁸ See Kimchi on Jonah 1:1

Metzudat David

<p>3:2 “what I tell you” - and this is what [God] proclaimed and said, ‘40 days more and Nineveh shall be overturned.’</p> <p>This has no need to be interpreted for it will be self-explanatory.</p>	<p>אשר אנכי דובר אליך. והוא מה שקרא ואמר עוד ארבעים יום ונינוה נהפכת</p> <p>ולא הוצרך לפרש כי מאיליו יובן.</p>
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Metzudat Zion on Jonah 3:2 - N/A

Kimchi notes that God in this verse not only tells Jonah again what will happen, but now adds what Jonah is to proclaim.

Jonah 3:3

נִיָּקָם יוֹנָה הַיֵּלֶךְ אֶל־נִינְוָה כְּדִבְרֵי יְהוָה וַיָּנִיחַ הָהִיתָה עִיר־גְּדוֹלָה לְאֱלֹהִים מֵהֶלֶךְ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים:

Metzudat David

<p>3:3 “Walk across” - proportional to a walk of three days.</p>	<p>מהלך. כשיעור הליכת שלשה ימים:</p>
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Metzudat Zion

<p>3:3 “Le’lohim” - the method/mode of the bible when it wants to enhance a term with [an additional word] at the end, connecting it to the word ‘el’ similarly, ‘mighty cedar trees’ (Psalms 80:11).</p>	<p>לאֱלֹהִים. דרך המקרא כשרוצה להגדיל דבר בתכלית סומכו למלת אל וכן ארזי אל (תהלים פ):</p>
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Metzudat David understands the verse to indicate Nineveh takes three days to walk across. Ibn Ezra understands the reference to a three days walk referring to not the diameter of Nineveh but the circumference of the city “around the district.” This understanding makes the size of the city much smaller and justifies the following verse (3:4) that Jonah could walk across the city from one side to the other in a day. Alternatively, Ibn Ezra explains verse 3:4 as “it was a one day walk” to get to Nineveh to give his proclamation.⁵⁹ Abarbanel rejects Ibn Ezra’s interpretation, noting that “this teaches that he did not cross the entire way [for he had stopped after one day of walking]...Therefore we can see that from [city] gate to [city] gate it is three days.”

⁵⁹ See more in commentary on 3:4.

One can think of the word “*le’lohim*” appearing as suffix to “city” as an exclamatory remark such as “my God, it’s big.” In Metzudat Zion, Altschuler follows Kimchi and understands “*le’lohim*” as a term of enhancement such as “mighty.” Both Kimchi and Abarbanel provide other examples with similar use of the word. Abarbanel sees it as referring to the size of the city, and notes that is why the “Holy One of Praise spared the her [the city]...not to [explain that] the people of Nineveh were righteous.” In this he rejects Ibn Ezra’s interpretation.⁶⁰ Ibn Ezra reads this word as describing the city’s importance to God and the reverence of the Ninevites for God. He notes “*le’lohim*” means “That they, [the Ninevites already] revered the God from before [the time of Jonah].” He continues “they had revered God in earlier days. Only now, in the days of Jonah did they begin to do evil. If they had not originally been people of God, God’s prophet would not have been sent to them.”⁶¹ His point is well taken for if Nineveh was not a city devoted to God, why would God pay close attention to one pagan civilization of many? Abarbanel rejects this saying, “It was the land of Assyria. And the nation which dwelled upon it was evil and they transgressed against the Eternal greatly.”⁶²

Jonah 3:4

וַיֵּחַל יוֹנָה לָבוֹא בְעִיר מֶהֱלַךְ יוֹם אֶחָד וַיִּקְרָא וַיֹּאמֶר עוֹד אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וְנִינְוָה נִהְפָּכֶת:

Metzudat David

<p>3:4 “[Jonah] started out” - When he started to go into the city, [the distance of] a day’s walk, he proclaimed and said, ‘Indeed, [you have] 40 days time and afterwards, Nineveh will be overturned.’</p> <p>It means just like the absolute destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.</p>	<p>ויחל. כשהתחיל לבוא בעיר מהלך יום קרא ואמר הנה יש עוד זמן ארבעים יום ואח”ז* תהיה נינוה נהפכת</p> <p>ר”ל כמהפכת סדום ועמורה מיש לאין.</p> <p>*אח”ז=אחרי זה</p>
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Metzudat Zion

<p>3:4 “Vayaḥel” - beginning.</p>	<p>ויחל. מלי התחלה:</p>
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The Metzudot understand “*vayaḥel*” as “starting out.” Ibn Ezra writes, “this word is similar to the expression ‘In a moment I will speak’” (Jer. 18:7), where a prophet is in a similar situation to Jonah, preparing to speak but not having begun just yet.

The Metzudot follow Kimchi who clarified that the city was in fact “a three days’ walk

⁶⁰ Abarbanel on Jonah 1:3 referring to Ibn Ezra’s comment on Jonah 1:2

⁶¹ Ibn Ezra on Jonah 1:2; see more of Ibn Ezra’s interpretation of “*le’lohim*” in the commentary here on 3:5

⁶² Abarbanel on Jonah 3:3

from end to end but Jonah began by entering the city the distance of [only] one day's walk. He was proclaiming as he walked."

Abarbanel notes, the midrash "Bereishit Rabbah says that Nineveh was a forty day's walk. Perhaps it describes the open area in the outskirts of the city." And thus the verse can be understood as "it would be forty days until he [Jonah] made the announcement publicly in all the land of the city and its outskirts. And only then would the overturning [take place]." Abarbanel also notes, "immediately its people [of Nineveh] awoke to repentance."

Rashi offers helpful commentary on the word "*nehpakhet*, overturned" - a play on words. There are two options: Nineveh may be overturned as in "destroyed" or be overturned as in "turn towards repentance."

Abarbanel interestingly investigates the fact that the prophecy in this verse does not come to be despite the notion that "The word of our God stands forever" (Isaiah 40:8). He explains that the prophecy was conditional upon the repentance of the people as in Jeremiah.⁶³ As Jeremiah prophesies, "At one moment I [God] 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."⁶⁴

Still, Abarbanel notes, "this proclamation was decided without any conditions." The play on the word "*nehpakhet*" then makes sense, for the proclamation will come to be either way: either Nineveh will be destroyed or its people will turn to repentance. For Abarbanel, both meanings are simultaneously implied in the text. The conditions are implied and do not need to be explicitly stated. He also cites Lamentations 1:20, "my heart has turned over [*nehpakh*] within me."⁶⁵

Abarbanel then comments on the dynamic between God's will and fate. For no matter how one reads "*nehpakhet*," the proclamation will come to fruition. Abarbanel writes, "this decree was not like the [decree of God] ordering of the heavenly array. For the Holy One of Praise does not rob [the heavenly] array." Abarbanel draws a powerful comparison of Israel to other nations in his commentary. While God draws close to aid Israel "as a result of its repentance, its prayer, and its crying out...for the rest of the nations there will be judgment." Per *Parashat Va'ethanan*,⁶⁶ "every nation has in general a star and a stellar sign in the heavens. And this is not the case for Israel. For God's people are a possession of the Eternal." Abarbanel draws on the rabbinic idea captured in the idiom, "*ein mazal lyisra'el*"⁶⁷ that while the fate of other nations is determined by the hour of their birth and stellar constellations, Israel's fate is determined by its

⁶³ Abarbanel on Jonah 3:1

⁶⁴ Jeremiah 18:7-8

⁶⁵ Abarbanel on Jonah 3:4

⁶⁶ See Deut. 4:19 for example

⁶⁷ See for example b. Shabbat 156b

adherence to prayer and mitzvot, relying entirely on God. And so, “for the rest of the nations, the influence of the array [of heaven] is not cancelled by their repentance.” Abarbanel thus understands that Nineveh deserved destruction, and yet God “protected the people of Assyria to be his ‘rod of anger’ and ‘staff of fury’ against Israel.”

Like Abarbanel, Kimchi notes that this [proclamation] is “similar” to the case of Sodom and Gomorrah “for the deeds of Nineveh were like those of Sodom and Gomorrah.” One may also note that the same root of “*nehpakhet*” is used for Sodom and Gomorrah.⁶⁸ It is also worth noting that when Metzudat David refers to the impending absolute destruction of Nineveh along the lines of Sodom and Gomorrah, he used the term “*yeish mei’ayin*” which also refers to the theology that God created the world “*yeish mei’ayin*, out of nothing, ex nihilo.”

Abarbanel offers an alternative way of understanding “*yom*” in this verse - not as “day” but “year” - and furthermore, while “*od*” can be understood as “another 40,” ד.ו.ל. also has the gematria of 80. Add the 80 to the original 40 days and you arrive at 120. He notes it is as if it said, ‘In 120 years, Nineveh will be overturned.’ And that was when Nebuchanezer came and destroyed Nineveh.”⁶⁹ He explains that God intentionally states the prophecy in this coded language “so that the people of the city would not understand, and also Jonah does not dive [in deep enough to understand] the intended purpose of the prophecy.” Abarbanel thus answers his own question as to how this prophecy could not come true if “The word of our God stands forever” (Isaiah 40:8). It does come true.

Jonah 3:5

וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲנָשֵׁי נִינְוָה בְּאֵלֵהֶם וַיִּקְרְאוּ צוֹם וַיִּלְבְּשׁוּ שָׂקִים מִגְדּוֹלָם וְעַד־קִטְנָם:

Metzudat David

3:5 “God” - it means the proclamation made in the name of God.	באלהים. ר"ל בדבר האמור בשם האלהים:
3:5 “They proclaimed a fast” - they officially announced a fast-day.	ויקראו צום. הכריזו יום צום:

Metzudat Zion on Jonah 3:5 - N/A

Metzudat David clearly seeks to dispel any notion that the people of Nineveh gave up their gods for the Eternal. Rather they just followed the proclamation made in the name of God.

⁶⁸ “*Vayahafokh*” in Gen. 19:25

⁶⁹ For the full chronological defense of this claim, see Abarbanel's commentary on 3:4

Kimchi offers an interesting answer as to why the Ninevites respond so dramatically and quickly to Jonah's words: "For the men of the ship were in the city and they gave testimony concerning him." Ibn Ezra makes this same claim and notes, "therefore they believed [him]." Ibn Ezra, like Metzudat Zion, understands "*le'lohim*" in Jonah 3:3 as the people of Nineveh believed "in the word of God."⁷⁰

Abarbanel interprets belief as destiny: "they were destined [to their fate] by God's words and God's proclamation." He continues, "it does not say that they believed in Jonah...but they believed in God...They are awoken by the words of Jonah to perform their repentance."

With regard to the proclamation of the fast, there is some disagreement among the commentators as to whether or not the order of verses 3:5 and 3:6 reflects the sequence of events as they took place. Kimchi argues that "before the warning of the king, they made repentance of their own. They humbled themselves and put on sackcloth." It appears that Metzudat David agrees with Kimchi for he notes, "*they* officially announced a fast" -- the people, not the king. Ibn Ezra on the other hand, argues that these events took place in the opposite order. Ibn Ezra notes that the word reached the king "before the people put on sackcloth" and thus the events of verse 3:6 occur before that of 3:5, i.e. the people put on sackcloth and fasted in response to the king's decree.⁷¹ Such a disagreement in interpretation may reflect the commentators' wariness of how quick and willing a foreign nation would be to begin repentance.

Jonah 3:6

וַיַּגַע הַדְּבָרִי אֶל־מֶלֶךְ נִינְוָה וַיִּקָּם מִכִּסְאוֹ וַיַּעֲבֹר אֶדְרֵתוֹ מֵעַלְיוֹ וַיִּכֶּסּ שָׂק וַיֵּשֶׁב עַל־הָאָפֶר:

Metzudat David

<p>3:6 "When the word arrived" - as soon as the news reached the ears of the king, he rose from his throne to sit on the earth and he took off [his] royal garment.</p>	<p>ויגע הדבר. השמועה הגיעה לאזני המלך וקם מכסאו לשבת על הארץ והעביר מעליו לבוש מלכות:</p>
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Metzudat Zion

<p>3:6 "Adarto" - per Targum Jonathan, a precious garment similarly 'a fine Shinar mantle' (Joshua 7:21); majestic.</p>	<p>אדרתו. ת"י* לבוש יקריה וכן אדרוז שנער (יהושע ז') ז** והוא מלי אדיר:</p> <p>*ת"י = תרגום יונתן</p>
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⁷⁰ Ibn Ezra on Jonah 3:3

⁷¹ Ibn Ezra on Jonah 3:6

	**"אֲדָרַת שְׁנֵעַר" (יהושע ז: כא)
3:6 "Saq" - a thick cloth.	שק. יריעה עבה:

Abarbanel makes an interesting observation of the king: he acts "as if Nineveh was already overturned", as Bob notes, "more like a mourner than a penitent."⁷²

Jonah 3:7

וַיִּזְעַק וַיֹּאמֶר בְּנִינְיָה מִטַּעַם הַמֶּלֶךְ וּגְדָלְיוֹ לֵאמֹר הָאֲדָם וְהַבְּהֵמָה הִבְקֵר וְהִצִּיֹּאן אֶל־יִטְעֲמוּ מֵאוֹמָה אֶל־יִרְעוּ וּמִים אֶל־יִשְׁתּוּ:

Metzudat David

3:7 "And he [the king] had [it] cried out" - he commanded it be proclaimed in a loud voice by the authority of the king and the authority of the nobles of the kingdom 'it has been decreed, that, 'human and beast...', etc. (Jonah 3:7) and for the sake of [instilling] remorse they commanded to restrict meat so as to subdue the willfulness of the people.	ויזעק. צוה להכריז בקול זעקה לאמר מעצת המלך ומעצת גדולי המלכות נגזר לאמר האדם והבהמה וגו' ובעבור עגמת נפש ציוו למנוע מאכל מבהמות למען יכנע לב האנשים:
3:7 "they shall not graze" - referring to the beasts.	אל ירעו. מוסב על הבהמה:

Metzudat Zion

3:7 "Vayaz'eq" - proclaimed in a loud voice.	ויזעק. הכריז בקול זעקה:
3:7 "Miṭa'am" - meaning counsel stated with the reasoning* [of the king] similarly, 'And takes away the reasoning* of elders.' (Job 12:20). *Precise meaning uncertain	מטעם. ענין עצה הנאמרה בטעם וכן וטעם זקנים יקח (איוב י"ב: כ):
3:7 "Yiṭ'amu" - tasting, though it means eating a reduced amount.	יטעמו. מל' טעימה וענינו אכילה מועטת:

⁷² Bob, 101

3:7 “M’umah” - nothing.	מאומה. שום דבר:
3:7 “Yir’u” - grazing.	ירעו. מלי מרעה:

Metzudat David like Rashi understood “*vayaz’eq*” to indicate a public command and proclamation by counsel of the king and his nobles. Perhaps Kimchi expands more on the issue Metzudat David refers to as the “willfulness of the people.” Despite the fact that the people were already warned, the announcement still applied to the contrition of the animals and the thieves, perhaps because they would not have been motivated to repent on their own accord. Abarbanel explains, “the command applies to the animals even though they do not possess discernment because the eyes of every human being are on them.” He implies that people can learn from the animal’s suffering and goes on to explain that God will provide the animals food in time.

Metzudat Zion clearly draws from Kimchi in understanding “*mita’am*” as counsel with reasoning, but Kimchi also adds that the announcement was mutually agreed upon by both the king and his nobles together. He notes Targum Yonaton renders it “ruling of the king.” Both Kimchi and Ibn Ezra note a nuanced translation of *mita’am* -- not simply “advice” or “counsel” but also “knowledge” and “wisdom.” Kimchi and Ibn Ezra both cite a similar use of the root ט.ע.ם in the phrase “*bshanoto et ta’mo*” which appears in the Tanakh to mean “he concealed his good sense” or similarly, “he feigned madness.”⁷³ Relatively, Metzudat Zion’s translation is much narrower.

Jonah 3:8

וַיִּתְפָּטוּ שָׂקִים הָאָדָם וְהַבְּהֵמָה וַיִּקְרְאוּ אֶל־אֱלֹהִים בְּחִזְקָה וַיֵּשׁׁ בֶּן־אִישׁ מִדְּרָכּוֹ הָרָעָה וּמִן־הַחֲמָס
אֲשֶׁר בְּכַפִּיָּהֶם:

Metzudat David

3:8 “They shall be covered” - this too from the announcement that [the king] commanded that everyone cover with sackcloths to show great humility and so that the people will call to God with all their heart and every one will turn back ‘from his evil ways and from the wickedness of which they did by their hands.’	וַיִּתְכַסּוּ. גם זה מן הכרוז שצוה שכולם יתכסו בשקים להראות הכנעה מרובה ושהאנשים יקראו אל אלהים בכל לב וכל אחד ישוב מדרכו הרעה ומן החמס אשר עשו בכפיהם.
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⁷³ See for example Psalms 34:1 and similarly, I Samuel 21:14

Metzudat Zion

3:8 “ Bḥozqah ” - it means with all of one’s heart.	בחזקה. ר”ל בכל לב:
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Metzudat Zion follows Kimchi noting that the announcement called on the people to cry out to God “with all their heart.” Rashi’s understanding of “*bḥozkah*” is much darker - not as an adverb but as a method: “They [the men of Nineveh] took hostage the mothers, separately, and the children, separately. They said before God, “Master of the Universe, “if you do not show us mercy, we will not show mercy to these [hostages].” In Rashi’s day as well as ours, separating families is obviously cruel and immoral.⁷⁴ Kimchi notes that they committed all types of transgression and yet the act of violence encapsulates them all, perhaps a referral back to the transgressions of violence committed by the generation of Noah.⁷⁵

Ibn Ezra interestingly does not assume like the others that the subject of “*vayiqr’u*” is not the people but a single “person -- one who is the son of knowledge or one who knows they did wrong.” Bob explains Ibn Ezra’s interpretation as any Ninevite individual who is rational or has moral judgment would have cried out to God.⁷⁶

Jonah 3:9

מִי־יִדְעַ יָשׁוּב וְנָחָם הָאֱלֹהִים וְשָׁב מִחֲרוֹן אַפּוֹ וְלֹא נֶאֱבַד:

Metzudat David

3:9 “ Who knows ” - this too is from the announcement that said, ‘who is he who knows the ways of repentance and will return to God and thereby God will have compassion so the he will turn from his divine wrath and we will not be destroyed from the world.	מי יודע. גם זה מן הכרוז שאמר מי היודע דרכי התשובה ישוב לה' ואז ינחם האלהים וישוב מחרון אפו ולא נהיו נאבדים מן העולם.
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Metzudat Zion

3:9 “ Vniham ” - meaning changing one’s mind (lit. turning over a thought) and	ונחם. ענין הפוך מחשבה וחרטה:
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⁷⁴ See also b. Ta’anit 16a and the commentary here on 3:10 for a similar explanation of hostages but with animals not humans

⁷⁵ See for example Gen. 6:11 in which “*hamas*, violence” is noted

⁷⁶ Bob, 36

regret.	
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Kimchi offers two explanations for the words “*mi yodeia*”: the first that it could refer to speculation on God’s response, and the second that a specific Ninevite(s) will lead the effort of atonement for the rest. It appears that Metzudat David and Rashi follow the latter explanation. Rashi comments that repentance is in the hand of those who know (are aware of) their transgressions. Kimchi also cites Targum Yonatan, noting this verse questions whether there is even evidence of repentance among the Ninevites.

Abarbanel offers a slightly different pair of explanations. Either the phrase “means to say who knows [which specific] act of exploitation and robbery was done by the hand [of which specific Ninevite] that he [or she] will repent of it. Or [it could mean] who knows [which of] the paths of repentance [one should follow] to repent before the Eternal.” He adds, “it is from this [the people developed] reverence[of God] and the people of Nineveh understood the Divine decree according to its use of the word ‘overturn’...[as in, should you] perform a spiritual ‘overturning,’ [then] the Eternal will ‘overturn’ God’s decree and the physical overturning of the city will not be carried out.”

Regarding the word “*vniham*”, Kimchi notes the *patakh* vowel under the *khet* letter indicates that this verb appears in the past tense of the *nifal* conjugation and yet refers to the future due to the “vav consecutive” or “*vav hahipukh*”. This rendering of the verb recognizes that the fate of Nineveh is still pending. If a *qamatz* vowel appeared under the *chet* letter it would indicate the present tense in the *nifal* conjugation.

Jonah 3:10

וַיֵּרָא הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת־מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם כִּי־שָׁבוּ מִדֶּרֶכָם הִרְעָה וַיִּנָּחֵם הָאֱלֹהִים יָם עַל־הִרְעָה אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר לַעֲשׂוֹת־לָהֶם וְלֹא עָשָׂה:

Metzudat David

3:10 “how they were turning back” - for so they did per the command of the king even though it was not mentioned [in the text, that they did repent].	כי שבו. כי כן עשו כדבר המלך ועם כי לא נזכר.
3:10 “God renounced” - [God] changed his mind [renouncing] the decree.	וינחם. נתחרט על הגזרה.

Metzudat Zion on Jonah 3:10 - N/A

The Metzudot⁷⁷ follow Rashi's understanding of the root נ.ח.נ as changing one's mind and turning from it. Metzudat David used the term "*nitharet*" with a root meaning "etching" and "scratching oneself." This may give an image of regret so intense that one feels like scratching oneself in remorse. Rashi uses the root נ.ח.נ to define it, the same uncommon word featured in Jonah 1:6. Thus נ.ח.נ may also carry with it the concept of "being kind" and "thinking of another" after changing one's mind.

Kimchi offers many biblical examples in which repentance elicits God's forgiveness. Yet Ibn Ezra recognizes that this behavior -- changing one's mind -- does not seem very godly, at least for an omniscient god. And so he comments, "Torah speaks in human language" so that we may come away with some understanding.

Ibn Ezra also specifically notes that what God sees in this verse was that the Ninevites now "believed in God." Abarbanel contests "they did not return in repentance from their faith [in other gods]" rather "they returned in repentance from their evil ways" only "concerning practical mitzvot between them and their associates" "for was not the decree [of destruction] concerning the violence of their hands [and not concerning their idolatry]." Abarbanel reacts to the lack of any indication that the king or the people of Nineveh had rejected idol worship and turned towards God.

Abarbanel references Ta'anit 16a which notes, "It is not said concerning Nineveh that 'God saw their sackcloth and their fasting [and forgave them].' Rather it says, 'And God saw their [good] deeds for they turned in repentance from their evil ways.'" Yet the Gemara also offers a more sinister understanding of how the Ninevites obtained forgiveness: "What did they [the Ninevites] do? They confined the [female] animals and [their] young separately. And they said before God, 'Master of the universe if you do not have mercy on us, we will not have mercy on these [animals and their young].'"⁷⁸ It is God's compassion for the innocent hostages that caused God to renounce the punishment.

⁷⁷ Metzudat David on 3:10 and Metzudat Zion on 3:9

⁷⁸ Abarbanel on Jonah 4:11 references b. Ta'anit 16a; also see Rashi on Jonah 3:8 for a similar explanation of hostages but with humans not animals

VII. CHAPTER 4

Jonah 4:1

וַיֵּרַע אֶל־יְיֹנָה רָעָה גְדוֹלָה נִיחָר לּוֹ:

Metzudat David

<p>4:1 “[This] displeased [Jonah]” - For via prophecy he was told that God changed his mind.</p> <p>and evil was in his [Jonah’s] eyes and [anger] stirred up inside him as is the way of one who is troubled.*</p> <p>*exact meaning uncertain; see commentary</p>	<p>וירע. כי בנבואה נאמר לו שניחם ה' והיה רע בעיניו וחרה על עצמו כדרך המיצר*.</p>
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Metzudat Zion

<p>4:1 “Vayeira” - indicating troubling.</p>	<p>וירע. מלי רעה:</p>
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Kimchi seeks to understand this verb *vayera*’ with its root *ע.ר.ע* by referencing other biblical examples Gen. 38:10 and Deut. 28:54 to show that its meaning is not about evil but displeasure. Altschuler likens Jonah’s displeasure to the Hebrew word *meitzar*, which evokes a sense of narrowness and the feeling of having few options like that of the slaves in Egypt (Egypt in Hebrew in “*mitzrayim*,” related to “*metizar*”).

Abarbanel rightly questions how Jonah can still be aggrieved even after the experience of the belly of the fish and acceptance of his divine mission.⁷⁹ Rashi sees this displeasure as idolaters misjudging Jonah as a false prophet. Therefore, to Rashi, Jonah is most concerned with his reputation. Rashi’s interpretation stands in contrast to that of other commentators who attribute Jonah’s displeasure to his knowledge of the terrible fate of Israel. As revealed in later comments, Altschuler sees Jonah as aggrieved by the knowledge that Assyria will be used as a tool of chastisement. Kimchi agrees with this, noting his grief was for Israel which “did not turn from its path of evil” and thus would not escape punishment.

Abarbanel has a similar interpretation but takes it further: the “evil mentioned here is the

⁷⁹ Abarbanel on 3:1

“sickness that accompanies the grief of his heart. He collapses, becomes ill, [feels] a great evil, and requests death [from God].” Jonah, as Abarbanel sees him, recognizes that even though the people of Nineveh have only repented in their relationship to each other, they have continued to worship idols. “And despite this the Eternal renounced the evil that existed in God’s thoughts.” Abarbanel questions how can God renounce the punishment when “idol worship is a more serious [transgression] than [what the people had done] between them?” He continues, in agreement with the other commentators, “There is no other [explanation] except that...they will be the ‘rod of anger’ and ‘staff of fury’ (Is. 10:5) to take revenge on Israel through them [the Assyrians].” Abarbanel explains that this is why Jonah was so greatly aggrieved -- Israel would be punished for the same transgression of idolatry for which the Ninevites are spared.

Kimchi presents a challenge “How did Jonah know [God will relent], for the 40th day had not yet come?” To understand this comment, one must note that Jonah 3:10 gives no indication that Jonah is aware of God’s renouncement of the punishment. So what is causing Jonah’s grief in 4:1? Kimchi explains, “The God of Blessing told him in the spirit of prophecy that God would relent from what God had decreed concerning them because they had repented from their evil ways.” In other words, God had shared his preemptive decision with Jonah (prophetically though unmentioned in the text) even though the 40 days given to Nineveh were not up yet. Abarbanel is of this opinion and fills in the gap: “immediately after the proclamation that the prophet made, the people of Nineveh were roused to repent,” i.e. they did not wait for the forty days to elapse, “and the Eternal informed the prophet that he had renounced the evil [intended punishment].”⁸⁰ Ibn Ezra on the other hand, understands 4:5 as describing what happened before the forty days and implies that the verse does not chronologically follow 4:1 but precedes it.

⁸¹

Jonah 4:2

וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל אֶל־יְהוָה וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי יְהוָה הֲלוֹא־זֶה דִּבַּרְתִּי עַד־הַיּוֹתַי עַל־אֲדָמָתִי עַל־כֵּן קִדַּמְתִּי לַבִּרְחַת
תַּרְשִׁישָׁה כִּי יֵדְעֵתִי כִּי אַתָּה אֱלֹהֵי־חַיִּים וְרַחֲמוֹם אֶרֶךְ אֲפַיִם וְרַב־חֶסֶד וְנֶחָם עַל־הָרָעָה:

Metzudat David

4:2 “He prayed” - the prayer was what is written in the Scripture after it [this verse] ‘please take my life’ (Jonah 4:3).	ויתפלל. התפלה היה מה שאמר במקרא שלאחריו קח נא את נפשי.
4:2 “Isn’t this just what I said” - this consolation [abnegation of punishment]	הלא זה דברי. התנחומין הזה היה עם מחשבותי בעוד שהייתי על אדמתי עד לא ירדתי אל הים

⁸⁰ Abarbanel on 4:5

⁸¹ See Ibn Ezra on 4:5 for more

<p>was in my thoughts while I was still in my own country [lit. on my earth] before I went down to the sea.</p> <p>And for this reason I preceded to flee to Tarshish before prophecy came to me for the second time.</p>	<p>ובעבור זה הקדמתי לברוח תרשישה טרם בא לי הנבואה פעם שנית.</p>
<p>4:2 “For I know” - I have always known that ‘you are a compassionate God, etc.’ (Jonah 4:2), and receive those who return and change your mind from inflicting punishment.</p> <p>It was difficult for me [to accept] the prophecy for it seemed good to me that they not repent and they be destroyed for their wrongdoings so that they will not be the tool [literally “strap”] of chastisement against Israel).</p> <p>And the opinion of our sages of blessed memory is indeed, you will increase your anger upon Israel in their seeing the power of repentance, and they, nevertheless, do not get the message, and this is what I was concerned about from the beginning and that is why it was difficult for me [to accept] the prophecy.</p>	<p>כי ידעתי. מאז ידעתי שאתה אל חנון וכו' ומקבל השבים ומתנחם על הרעה</p> <p>ולזה היה קשה עלי הנבואה הזאת כי היה טוב בעיני שלא ישובו ויאבדו בעונם ולא יהיו רצועה מרדות על ישראל</p> <p>ולפ"ד* רז"ל יאמר הנה בזה תוסיף כעסך על ישראל בראותם כח התשובה, ואינם לוקחים מוסר וע"ז** חשבתי מתחלה ולכן היה קשה עלי הנבואה.</p> <p>*לפ"ד=לפי דעתי **ע"ז = על זאת</p>

Metzudat Zion

4:2 “Ad” - ‘still’ as in ‘This one was still speaking’ (Job 1:18).	עד. בעוד וכן עד זה מדבר (שם א):
4:2 “Qidamti” - anticipating and hurrying.	קדמתי. מלי הקדמה וזרוז:

Metzudat David is clearly concerned with how this verse indicates Jonah prays and yet the content of the verse does not resemble a prayer other than the words “*anah adonai, please Eternal.*” He, like Kimchi and Abarbanel, understands the following verse 4:3 as the prayer referred to in this verse 4:2, for 4:3 includes the petition “*Qah-na’ et-nafshi, please take my life*”. Kimchi believes that the prayer begins with the words “*anah, adonai*” from this verse. He also notes that while “*anah*” ends with the letter *heh* instead of an *aleph* as seen in other biblical examples. Presumably he implies that the word still

retains the meaning “please” despite the letter change.

To Ibn Ezra, this prayer (this verse) serves as an explanation, perhaps for Jonah’s grief. As in 4:1, in Rashi’s eyes, Jonah is concerned with his reputation now as a liar and false prophet. Jonah knew that “if they should return [to You] in repentance You will not destroy [them] and I will become a liar in their eyes.”

Altschuler follows Kimchi’s understanding of the verse in many other respects. First they both understand “*halo’-zeh dvar*” not literally as what Jonah “said” but as what he “thought” or what he “said in his heart” for the text does not have Jonah say his fears aloud. Metzudat Zion mirror’s Kimchi’s understanding of “*ad*” as “still,” reading the verse as “when I was still on my land.” Metzudat David mirror’s Kimchi’s understanding of why Jonah said he hastened to flee, “before prophecy came to me for the second time,” as prophecy is limited to the land of Israel, by leaving it quickly he might evade prophecy again.

The commentators differ in their grammatical understanding of “*vniham*.” Kimchi notes the *qamatz* vowel under the *het* letter indicates a verb conjugated in the present tense of the *nifal* conjugation. While the *pi’el* conjugation would indicate “comforting,” *nifal* indicates “to be comforted” or “to change one’s mind.” Ibn Ezra understands this not as a verb but as an adjective for the same grammatical reasons, which does seem logical given its place among other adjectives describing God in this verse (“compassionate and gracious, etc.”).

Abarbanel understands the entirety of this verse in relation to his interpretation of the last verse (4:1): Jonah is troubled by God’s compassion to the Ninevites and plans to use them as a tool of punishment against Israel for whom God will not show compassion. Therefore, “*al’adamati*, on my land” refers to the justice to be inflicted on Israel and “*hanun vrahum*..., compassionate and gracious, etc” refers to God’s compassion on the people of Nineveh.

Jonah 4:3

וַעֲתָהּ יְהוָה קָח־נָא אֶת־נַפְשִׁי מִמֶּנִּי כִּי טוֹב מוֹתִי מֵחֲיִי: (ס)

Metzudat David

<p>4:3 “And now, God” - because of all this, I request from you that you take my life from me, for dying is preferable to living to see the perishing of the children of my people, who deserve what is coming to them [they themselves are the reason].</p>	<p>ועתה ה'. הואיל וכן הוא אבקש ממך שתקח את נפשי ממני כי טוב מותי מחיי לראות באבדן בני עמי אשר ע"י* באה הסבה.</p> <p>ע"י*=על ידם</p>
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Metzudat Zion on Jonah 4:3 - N/A

Kimchi, Ibn Ezra, and Abarbanel like Metzudat David, connect Jonah's predicament to his fear of Israel's impending punishment for lack of repentance: "'Please take my life' (Jonah 4:3) so I will not see the evil of Israel." Kimchi finds two powerful parallels to this in the words of Moses in response to the golden calf and Israel's complaints about manna: "wipe me out of your book" (Ex. 32:32) and "kill me rather" (Num. 11:15), respectively. Ibn Ezra offers another parallel to the prophet Elisha in his anointing of Ḥazail. Elisha cries before anointing Ḥazail whom he knows will bring harm to the Israelite people (II Kings 8:11-12).

Abarbanel's commentary is incredulous: "Is there a crazy person in the world who says something like this [verse]?" As Abarbanel notes, "Since from the belly of the fish he prayed to the Holy One of Blessing to raise him [lit. his life] up from the grave...And how can he now pray that God will bring death upon him?" Abarbanel compares Jonah to Abraham: "And this is not what Abraham our father did when he prayed on behalf of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah [for them] to realize [their transgression] and not to commit them to death."⁸²

Abarbanel adds, Jonah is ready to die "since I [Jonah] have already performed my mission, now my illness sickens me." Jonah's "illness" is grief from the knowledge of God's intention to destroy Israel, not simply the knowledge of God's willingness to forgive the people of Nineveh.⁸³

Jonah 4:4

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה הֲהֵיטֵב תִּרְדָּה לָךְ:

Metzudat David

<p>4:4 "Are you so deeply enraged;" - via the interrogative <i>heh</i>, it is as if [God] is saying 'indeed I will show you via a wondrous miracle beyond the law [of nature] that you are [easily] enraged and short-tempered, for this is apparent in the [episode] of the <i>qiqayon</i> plant in which the scripture will [shortly] show this to him.</p>	<p>ההיטב חרה לך. בה"א התימה וכאומר הנה אראך במופת שאין מהדין שיחרה לך וקצר בדבר המובן כי בדבר הקיקיון הנאמר בענין הראה לו זאת.</p>
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⁸² Abarbanel on 3:1

⁸³ Abarbanel on 4:3

Metzudat Zion

<p>4:4 “Haheiteiv” - indicating emphasis similarly, ‘they smashed’ (II Kings 11:18).</p> <p>*‘They smashed’ as in not simply ‘they broke’ but with emphasis</p>	<p>ההיטב. ענין חוזק וכן שברו היטב (מ"ב י"א):</p>
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Metzudat David clearly follows Kimchi, interpreting that God somehow hints to Jonah that God will show Jonah a sign that defies the law of nature that will respond to his grief.

Metzudat Zion mirrors Kimchi’s note that the word “*Haheiteiv*” intensifies the matter described. Furthermore, he notes Targum Yonaton renders it like “*halahada*, very.” Ibn Ezra references Deut. 9:21 in which “*heiteiv*” means complete and finished according to his interpretation. But Kimchi also notes other interpretations, for example that of Ibn Ezra, who cites Yafet [ben Ali], a prominent Karaite commentator, who connects the word to “good” as in “Does it displease you that I’m good to whom I want to be good to?” He (it’s unclear if its Yafet or Ibn Ezra) adds, “this is a futile [reaction]!”

Abarbanel, similar to Ibn Ezra and Yafet ben Ali, sees this verse as God’s rebuke to Jonah: “It means there is an evil aspect to your character that it deeply displeases you that I am good to Nineveh.” Abarbanel interestingly notes, “If [this verse] was [intended to be an actual and not a rhetorical] question, it would be appropriate for him [Jonah] to respond to it...Rather, it [should be understood as] rebuke.”⁸⁴ He adds separately, “We do not find that Jonah responds [with even] a word to God [in response]. And this is strange.”⁸⁵ Abarbanel continues, “It is also possible to say that Jonah did not want to respond to this statement even if it was a question. Because he certainly knew that everything is revealed before the throne of glory. And the Holy One of Praise knew the truth of his intention that he was not displeased by the good done [by God] to Nineveh, but rather about the future destruction of Israel to come from it [the renouncement of the punishment on Nineveh].”⁸⁶ That is to say, Jonah knows that God is omniscient and therefore, to respond would be futile.

Jonah 4:5

וַיֵּצֵא יוֹנָה מִדֶּהָעִיר וַיֵּשֶׁב מִקְדָּם לָעִיר וַיַּעַשׂ לוֹ שֵׁם סֹכָה וַיֵּשֶׁב תַּחְתֶּיהָ בְּצֶל עֵד אֲשֶׁר יִרְאֶה
מִהֲיִהְיֶה בָּעִיר:

⁸⁴ Abarbanel on 4:4

⁸⁵ Abarbanel on 3:1

⁸⁶ Abarbanel on 4:4

Metzudat David

<p>4:5 “until he should see, etc.” - For he [Jonah] thought ‘perhaps they will not rise up [to the challenge of] their repentance and the decree [to destroy them] will be reinstated.’</p>	<p>עַד אֲשֶׁר יֵרָאֶה וְגו'. כִּי חָשַׁב אוֹלֵי לֹא יַעֲמִדוּ בְּתִשּׁוּבָתָם וּתְחַזְזֹר הַגְּזִירָה לְמִקּוֹמָהּ.</p>
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Metzudat Zion on Jonah 4:5 -- N/A

Metzudat David's mirrors Kimchi's explaining why Jonah waits in a place near the city. Abarbanel offers an alternative explanation. While the people of Nineveh may have repented, Jonah still held onto the hope that a punishment could be brought to all of them for the idolatry they continued to commit. Jonah may have recalled the example of the Golden Calf from Exodus, in which God sends a plague upon the people even after renouncing the punishment to destroy the Israelite people (Ex. 32:14).⁸⁷ Perhaps God might still punish the people of Nineveh similarly, even if not via absolute destruction.

Ibn Ezra asserts that this verse goes chronologically backwards in order to recall the words of Jonah before the completion of the forty days. He offers two verses in Genesis (28:11 and 48:13) which similarly recall events which had already taken place, recorded literally earlier in the chapter. Ibn Ezra's interpretation, as Abarbanel understands it, asserts that chronologically the incident of the *qiqayon* plant (Jonah 4:5-4:11) occurred first, followed by the dialogue of the chapter (Jonah 4:1-4), evidenced by the repetition of the question “*haheiteiv hara lekha*, Are you deeply grieved” (Jonah 4:4 and 4:9). Abarbanel however disagrees with Ibn Ezra saying, while “it is permitted [to interpret texts in this manner] it should not be done in this case.”

Jonah 4:6

וַיֵּמֶן יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים קִיקְיֹון וַיַּעַל אֶל מַעַל לִיּוֹנָה הַלְהִיּוֹת צֶלַע עַל־רֹאשׁוֹ לְהַצִּיל לוֹ מִרְעָתוֹ וַיִּשְׁמַח יוֹנָה עַל־הַקִּיקְיֹון שֶׁמָּתָה גְדוּלָּהּ:

Metzudat David

<p>4:6 “[God] provided” - he [God] caused a <i>qiqayon</i> plant to flower and it grew up and it went up over Jonah to be a shade for him to save him from the uncomfortable rays of the sun.</p>	<p>וַיֵּמֶן. הַצְמִיחַ עֵשֶׂב קִיקְיֹון וּגְדָלָהּ לְמַעַלָּה וְעָלָה מִמַּעַל לִיּוֹנָה לְהִיּוֹת לוֹ לְצֶלַע לְהַצִּילוֹ מִזְרִיחַת הַחֲמָה הָרָעָה לוֹ</p> <p>כִּי צֶלַע הַסּוּכָה הוּא דָּבָר שֶׁאֵינוֹ מִתְמִיד כִּי הוֹלֵךְ וּמִתִּיבֵשׁ מִחוּם הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ</p>
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⁸⁷ Ex. 32:14 uses the same term for the renouncement of punishment by God, “*vayinahem*”

For the shade of the sukkah is something that will not endure for it will dry up from the heat of the sun. But not so with the <i>qiqayon</i> plant that sucks up the moisture of the earth [and will not dry out and lose its shade like a sukkah would].	ולא כן הקיקיון היונק רטיבות הארץ.
4:6 “Jonah was gladdened, etc.” - for he had enduring shade.	וישמח וגו'. על כי היה לו לצל מתמיד.

Metzudat Zion

4:6 “Vayman” - meaning summoning.	וימן. ענין הזמנה:
4:6 “Qiqayon” - a name of a plant which [is known for] great size and that [takes] many days [to grow].	קיקיון. שם עשב שעליו גדולים ורוב ים*: *May be a manuscript error - not 'רוב ים' but should be 'רוב ימים'

Metzudat David follows Rashi in understanding the simple utility of the *qiqayon* to protect Jonah from the heat of the sun. Metzudat Zion, as Rashi, understands “vayman” to be a word of summoning. Ibn Ezra notes that when the text says God summoned the plant “to save him [Jonah] from his evil,” it refers to the heat of the sun and that “there are those who say that because he stood in the belly of the fish for a long time the skin of his flesh was tender and he could not withstand the heat,” explaining Jonah’s particularly sensitivity.

While Metzudat Zion defines “*qiqayon*” as “the name of a plant which [is known for] great size and that [takes] many days [to grow],” emphasizing the miraculous nature of its divine summoning, Rashi defines it as “a plant that grows high with many branches [and leaves] which produces much shade, thus its name.” As Steven Bob observed, perhaps in this last phrase, Rashi connects the name of the *qiqayon* plant to the Hebrew word “*qanah*,” used in Ezekiel 40:5 for branch or rod. Kimchi adds that the *qiqayon* plant also has a lengthy canopy (branches) and is tall. Kimchi also notes his father’s, R. Joseph Kimchi’s, explanation that it grows between patches of shallow water, that it is grown at the entrances of stores to provide shade, and finally that oil is made from its kernels. He provides a reference to the *qiqayon* oil in the Mishnah Shabbat 2:1.⁸⁸ Ibn Ezra notes that to the sages of Spain, it is like a gourd or a *qara* but ultimately there is no need to know exactly what it is, itself a noteworthy statement from

⁸⁸ See also b. Shabbat 21a and Kimchi’s commentary on 4:6 for more

a well-known commentator.

Metzudat David's commentary clearly builds off Kimchi's understanding of the scene. Kimchi notes that Jonah had built himself a sukkah but that perhaps the branches of the sukkah had dried out. That is why God caused a *qiqayon* plant to flower. For Jonah dwelled there until the completion of the 40 days. Kimchi continues with a complementary rationale evident in the book: "God made this sign for him [Jonah] to teach him about the Divine decree. For God has mercy on all God's creatures."

Abarbanel offers a more expansive explanation building off Kimchi: "the sun was passing over [and shining] through the roof of the sukkah and [its rays] were reaching his head. And as the branches of the roof of the sukkah dried he would no longer have shade in it [the sukkah]. Indeed, when the *qiqayon* plant came, its growth was great and it stretched over the sukkah so that it made much shade, doubling and redoubling [its protection from the sun]." The sukkah was created to save Jonah from his evil; his evil being that he was ill with fever and evil from his quest to die. "And when the sun would come with all its strength, he might die as he had requested of the Holy One of Blessing...And Jonah rejoiced in it [the *qiqayon*] as is the way of those with fever, deriving great joy and happiness from cold objects." The *qiqayon* therefore not only teaches Jonah a lesson but seems to calm him.

Jonah 4:7

וַיֵּן הָאֱלֹהִים תּוֹלַעַת בְּעֵלּוֹת הַשָּׁחַר לְמַחֲרַת וַתֵּךְ אֶת־הַקִּיקְיֹן וַיִּיבֶשׁ:

Metzudat David

4:7 "At dawn" - at the time of dawn following the day that he was happy.	בעלות השחר. בעת שעלה השחר למחרת יום שמחתו.
4:7 "And it struck" - the worm cut and stopped the <i>qiqayon</i> plant from its role of absorption, and no more moisture of the earth came to it, and thus it withered from the heat of the sun.	ותך. התולעת חתכה ופסקה את הקיקיון ממקום יניקתו ולא בא לו עוד רטיבות הארץ ולכן נתייבש מחום השמש:

Metzudat Zion

4:7 "Hashaḥar" - it is the shining light on the edge of the sunrise before the sun comes out [and shines] upon the earth.	השחר. הוא האור הנוצץ בפאת המזרח טרם צאת השמש על הארץ:
4:7 "Vatakh" - it means [the worm] cut	ותך. ר"ל חתכה ופסקה:

and stopped.	
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Kimchi interprets “*ba’alot hashar*” as “*bbayit*, literally at home.” Steven Bob explains Kimchi’s comment as follows: “In its house [that the sun rose to its place in the heavens for that day according to the movement of heavenly bodies].” Such an interpretation refers to medieval cosmology. Every celestial body had its place in the heavens, instituting harmony in creation and in the movement of the stars and planets. My understanding of this interpretation is that Kimchi is drawing a contrast between the natural law governed by the array of the heavens in which the sun rises and sets and God intervening in nature with the *qiqayon* plant and the worm. The Metzudot make a more straightforward interpretation and note this phrase “*ba’alot hashar*” emphasizes that the *qiqayon* withered first thing in the morning, dramatically increasing Jonah’s suffering in experiencing the heat of the sun throughout the day.

Rashi explains the gendered nature of the language here: “instead of saying the masculine [form] *vayakh*, he struck, it says it in the feminine form *vatakh*, she struck.” Kimchi explains that the worm appears in the feminine “*to/a’at*” and adds that when it says “*vatakh*” he explains that the worm attacked the lower part of the plant, thus preventing it from receiving moisture from the earth and causing it to wither. Metzudat David and Abarbanel share a similar explanation to Kimchi for how the worm caused the *qiqayon* plant to wither. But Abarbanel interestingly comments, “Truly, as it is with the good things of this world, they do not last forever.” Such a statement offers a new interpretation of the *qiqayon* episode -- not just teaching Jonah a lesson about mercy but also about futility, reminiscent of the words of Ecclesiastes.⁸⁹

Jonah 4:8

וַיְהִי ׀ כְּזָרְחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ׃ מָשׁׁ וַיֵּמֶן אֱלֹהִים רוּחַ קָדִים׃ חָרִישִׁית וַתֵּךְ הַשָּׁמַיִשׁ עַל־רֹאשׁ יוֹנָה וַיִּתְּעַלָּף וַיִּשְׁאָל
אֶת־נַפְשׁוֹ לָמוּת׃ וַיֹּאמֶר טוֹב מוֹתִי מִחַיִּי׃

Metzudat David

<p>4:8 “East wind” - it is the strongest of the winds, and the hottest.</p> <p>And nothing could withstand her [the wind; and Jonah experienced this] for he [Jonah] was situated in the eastern side of the city.</p>	<p>רוח קדים. היא העזה שברוחות וחמה ביותר</p> <p>ולא היה דבר עומד בפניה כי הוא ישב במזרח העיר.</p>
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⁸⁹ See Ecclesiastes 7:14 for example

4:8 “Harsh” - it means [God] sounded a great crash of noise so loud that it was deafening.	חרישית. ר"ל משמיע שאון רב עד שהיה מחריש את האזנים.
4:8 “The sun beat down” - it means the sun sent its rays [lit. sparks] on Jonah's head.	ותך השמש. ר"ל השמש השליך ניצוציו על ראש יונה.
4:8 “He became faint” - by the intense heat of the wind and the heat of the sun.	ויתעלף. בעבור חמימת הרוח וחום השמש:
4:8 “He begged for death” * - he pleaded that his life-force be separated from him so that he would die.	וישאל את נפשו. שאל ובקש את נפשו להפרד ממנו למען ימות.
4:8 “Saying” - [Jonah] said to himself ‘I would rather die than live,’ and this is because he became very sick from the overpowering heat of the wind and the rays [lit. sparks] of the sun, and he endured much suffering.	ויאמר. אמר אל נפשו טוב מותי מחיי וזהו על כי נחלה מאד מתוקף חמימות הרוח וניצוצי השמש וסבל יסורים הרבה.

Metzudat Zion

4:8 “Ḥarishit” - indicating deafening silence.	חרישית. מלי חרש:
4:8 “Vatakh” - it means [the sun] shined and sent its rays.	ותך. ר"ל זרחה והשליך ניצוציו:
4:8 “Vayit‘alaf” - meaning weakness and the lack of feeling as in “your sons swoon” (Isaiah 51:20).	ויתעלף. ענין חלשות והעדר ההרגשה כמו בניך עולפו (ישעיה נא):

Kimchi notes the reappearance of the verb “*vayman*”⁹⁰ meaning that God summoned the wind “at that hour to compound his suffering from the heat of the sun.” He adds, “an eastern wind is itself hot so that the impact of the sun is [really the combined impact] of the sun and the wind [together].” The eastern wind in the Middle East (known as “*sharav*” in modern hebrew) is notorious for the heat which it carries from the desert. The ancient city of Nineveh, situated on the Tigris in Upper Mesopotamia, had little rain and relied on its proximity to the river for a cool temperature.

In defining “*ḥarishit*” as “harsh” as if “[God] sounded a great crash of noise so loud that it

⁹⁰ “*Vayman*” appears in verses 2:1 and 4:6-8

was deafening,” the Metzudot and Kimchi both draw on Ibn Ezra quoting Rabbi Merinos (Rabbi Yonah ibn Janach) who said, “it was so strong that hearing its roar deafened the ears.” Rashi and Abarbanel also tie the meaning to a deafening noise. Rashi explains that when this wind “blows it silences all other winds.” Rashi draws from the Targum which translates this word “*harishit*” as “quieting.”

Kimchi understands “*vayit’alaf*” as Metzudat David does, indicating a deadly faintness. Kimchi writes, “His soul (*nefesh*) wailed and he became quite alarmed to the extent that he could no longer stand on his own because of the excessive heat. His spirit was close to departing.” Jonah was close to death. Ibn Ezra notes the two definitions of this root, “growing faint” and “wrapping oneself,” by citing Amos 8:13 and Gen. 38:14 respectively, then ambiguously translates this word using both definitions: “he [Jonah] grew faint in his clothes” or alternatively, “he [Jonah] wrapped himself in his clothes.”⁹¹ Abarbanel reads “*vayit’alaf*” as bringing Jonah to the point of collapsing in which vital air enters the heart and leaves the limbs [of the afflicted] like those of the dead. “Jonah saw that he had been brought to the gates of death” and he again wished for death. Metzudat David explains this idiom “begged for a death” using a semitism, a linguistic feature unique to semitic languages, in which two verbs are used to emphasize a single concept: Jonah “asked and requested,” i.e. “Jonah pleaded.” Furthermore, Metzudat David’s explanation that Jonah “pleaded that his life-force be separated from him” may reflect Altschuler’s medieval use of Aristotelian philosophy in which the soul can be separated from the body.

Jonah 4:9

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־יוֹנָה הַהֵיטֵב חָרָה־לָּךְ עַל־הַקִּיקָיוֹן וַיֹּאמֶר הֵיטֵב חָרָה־לִּי עַד־מָוֶת:

Metzudat David

<p>4:9 “‘Are you that deeply [grieved]?’” / “Are you properly/that [angered]” - via the interrogative <i>Heh</i> [the letter], [God] asked him if he was very much angered by the destruction of the <i>qiqayon</i> plant.</p>	<p>ההיטב. בה"א השאלה ששאל לו אם מאד חרה לו על אבדן הקיקיון.</p>
<p>4:9 “‘that I want to die’” - ‘until I chose death over this;’ or it means ‘this angers me to death and I will never find comfort.’</p>	<p>עד מות. עד שאבחר המיתה בעבור זה או ר"ל עד המיתה יחרה לי ולא אנחם כל ימי עולם.</p>

Metzudat Zion on Jonah 4:9 - N/A

⁹¹ See commentary on 2:8 for a similar definition of "*bhit'alef*." The three-letter roots *ה.ט.ע.* and *ה.ל.ע.* may be related according to the theory that hebrew roots originally started with two letters and then evolved into three (Horowitz, Edward. *How the Hebrew Language Grew*. United States, Ktav, 1993).

Ibn Ezra interestingly explains why God continues to speak with Jonah despite what may be perceived as his insolence. He writes, “The Eternal uses a parable [of the *qiqayon* plant] to [teach] God’s prophet because he was aggrieved [over what God had done], for God renounced [the punishment on Nineveh]”

Abarbanel also exposes potential contradictions in the text. If Jonah truly preferred death over life, why did he grieve over the withering of the *qiqayon* plant, which represented life and was good and even lengthened his life? Abarbanel imagines Jonah replying, “Truly, I am displeased over the *qiqayon* plant. Not on the issue of [its] death but rather in terms of the punishment and pain I will suffer until I die. And thus death is good but the pain from the sun before death is what displeases me.”

Metzudat David provides an alternative understanding of “*ad mavet*,” that “I will never find comfort.” Here he uses the same verb as when God renounces the punishment on the Ninevites, “ג.נ.מ.” Jonah is so bitter over the *qiqayon* plant that he stubbornly claims he will never be able to emulate God’s mercy and empathy in this way.

Jonah 4:10

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶתָּה חֹסֵת עַל־הַקִּיקָיִן אֲשֶׁר לֹא־עָמַלְתָּ בּוֹ וְלֹא גִדַּלְתָּו שָׁבוֹן־לַיְלָה הָיָה וּבֹר־לַיְלָה אָבָד:

Metzudat David

<p>4:10 “You cared” - Indeed you were upset and were aggrieved over the destruction of the <i>qiqayon</i> plant that you did not labor for through ploughing and sowing and you did not grow it, water it, nor fertilize it.</p> <p>For typically people are upset and feel aggrieved over the destruction of things that they work for and do not get upset and feel aggrieved over things they do not work for.</p>	<p>אתה חסת. הנה אתה חסת ונצטער על אבידת הקיקיון אשר אתה לא עמלת בו בחרישה ובזריעה ולא גדלת אותו להשקותו ולזבלו</p> <p>כי הדרך שאדם חס ומצטער על אבידת דבר שעמל בו ולא כן יחוס ויצטער על אבידת דבר שלא עמל בו.</p>
<p>4:10 “Which appeared overnight” - it means and furthermore, in one night [the plant] grew and blossomed and the very next night afterwards it was destroyed, for at dawn the worm struck it down before sunrise.</p> <p>In other words one should not be upset</p>	<p>שבן לילה היה. ר"ל ועוד שבלילה אחד גדל וצמח ומיד בלילה שאחריה נאבד כי בעלות השחר הכהו התולעת עד לא זרחה השמש</p> <p>וכאומר הלא אין לחוס על דבר הנעשה מהר ולא עמד זמן רב.</p>

over a matter that happened quickly and did not last long.	
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Metzudat Zion

4:10 “Hasta” - caring and compassion.	חסת. מל' חס וחמלה:
4:10 “Amalta” - labor and toil.	עמלת. מל' עמל ויגיעה:
4:10 “Gidalto” - meaning causing growth.	גדלתו. ענין הצמחה:
4:10 “Shebin” - ‘bin’ with a <i>hirik</i> vowel is just like ‘ben’ with a <i>segol</i> vowel [meaning son,] and similarly, “son of Nun” (Joshua 1:1); but [here] it means ‘in the span of one night,’ and similarly, “a lamb in the span of its [first] year” (Leviticus 12:6).	שבן. בן בחיר"ק כמו בן בסגול"ל וכן בן נון (יהושע א) ור"ל בזמן לילה וכן כבש בן שנתו (ויקרא יב):
4:10 “Avad” - perish.	אבד. נאבד:

God has the final word in the Book of Jonah (4:10-11). Abarbanel decides to challenge God's statement here and has a suggestion for what Jonah could have said in response: “There is a great rebuttal to this *qal vaḥomer* [metaphorical argument] that Jonah should [point out to] respond to God, ‘What is this *qiqayon* plant about which I became upset? It saved me from death. Therefore, I am grieved at its absence, not for its sake but for my sake. And You say it is like Nineveh [but Nineveh] did not save You from death, nor give You any benefit. It is not appropriate for You to be upset over it.” He adds further, “There is no [valid] claim in this parable [of comparing Nineveh to the plant], because Nineveh did not [come to life] in a night nor perish [in a night].”⁹²

The Metzudot clearly agree with Rashi, Kimchi, and Ibn Ezra's understanding that “*bin*” normally means “son,” but here refers to the span of one night. Metzudat David also has a unique view of this verse as teaching one when to get emotionally invested and grieve: “One should not get invested in matter that happened quickly and did not last long.” Again, this is comparable to the message of Ecclesiastes and the futility of preoccupying oneself with the temporary.

The Metzudot clearly draw on Rashi's understanding of “*lo' amalta bo*” as referring to labor, specifically “plowing, sowing, and watering.” Kimchi clarifies that “even though the God of Blessing did not labor in the forming of [God's] creations, the Torah speaks in the language of humanity to bring understanding to the listeners.” Abarbanel adds to God's rebuke that in addition to the fact that Jonah did not work for nor grew the

⁹² Abarbanel on 3:1

qiqayon, “it also wasn’t anything about which [he had] thought,” since it only came to be and perished overnight.

Kimchi offers an interesting reason why God saved Nineveh: “The God of Blessing cared about Nineveh because of God’s glory. For [God’s] creations are God’s glory.” All peoples are God’s glory. Ibn Ezra has a similar take, that “the text speaks in this manner so that the listeners will understand” and will know that God will labour on behalf of all God’s creations. Kimchi and Ibn Ezra contribute to the universalist message of the Book of Jonah.

Jonah 4:11

וְאֵנִי לֹא אֲחוּס עַל־נִינְוָה הָעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁכְּבָהּ הָרַבָּה מִשְׁתִּים־עֶשְׂרֵה רַבּוֹ אֲדָם אֲשֶׁר
לֹא־יָדַע בֵּין־יְמִינוֹ לְשִׁמְאֻלוֹ וּבְהֶמָּה רַבָּה:

Metzudat David

<p>4:11 “And should I not care” - it means ‘is Nineveh not the work of my hand’ and ‘how can I not care for such a great city?’</p>	<p>ואני לא אחוס. ר”ל הלא נינוה היא מעשה ידי ואיך אני לא אחוס על עיר גדולה כזאת:</p>
<p>4:11 “Many, etc.” - it means more than 12 [ten-thousands i.e. more than 120,000], etc.</p>	<p>הרבה וגו’. ר”ל יותר משתים עשרה וגומר:</p>
<p>4:11 “Who do not know” - that every one of them does not know how to distinguish between their right from their left.</p> <p>And they are the minors, one should not consider them [as responsible for] transgression, such that no penalty [should be enforced] on them except for the transgressions of their fathers.</p> <p>But, as soon as the fathers repented, indeed no penalty [should be enforced] on them.</p> <p>And so too, for the many beasts that are in the city, indeed no penalty [should be enforced] on them.</p>	<p>אשר לא ידע. אשר כל אחד מהם אינו יודע להבחין בין ימינו לשמאלו</p> <p>והם הקטנים שאין לחשוב להם עון ואין בהם עונש אלא בעבור האבות,</p> <p>וכיון שהאבות שבו הנה הם בלא עונש</p> <p>וכן בהמה רבה שיש בעיר שאין להם עונש</p> <p>ועל כל אלה ראוי לחוס ולחמול:</p>

Therefore, all these deserve mercy and compassion.	
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Metzudat Zion

Jonah 4:11

4:11 “Ribo” - 10,000.	רבו. הוא עשרת אלפים:
4:11 “Rabah” - numerous.	רבה. מרובה:

In his commentary on this final verse, Abarbanel expands God’s comparison of the *qiqayon* plant to Nineveh. Both are “the work of My hand of which to be proud.” Yet Nineveh is not like the *qiqayon* plant for Nineveh is filled with people. God draws an analogy: just as Jonah received shade from the *qiqayon*, so too did God receive glory from Nineveh’s great name.⁹³

In anticipation of Jonah’s rebuttal that the Ninevites do not worship God but idols and do not repent from it, Abarbanel imagines God responding “they are like animals who do not speak. For they do not have Torah and are not commanded by it. But God apportioned the host of heaven [i.e. angels] to all the nations. And because of this it is not appropriate that they should be punished.”⁹⁴ Abarbanel contributes to the universalist message of the Book of Jonah.

The Metzudot follow Kimchi and Abarbanel in understanding “ribo” as ten thousand. Kimchi also clarifies that “*adam*” refers to both men and women, presumably as “human beings.” Ibn Ezra interestingly does not see this number as referring to Nineveh’s entire population but only those who had not transgressed [presumably the minors] and the beasts. Thus Ibn Ezra implies that their inclusion is what makes this a powerful story. He concludes by observing that the people and livestock of Nineveh avoided complete destruction as in the destruction of Sodom. Thereby, Nineveh’s salvation sets an example for the world. Metzudat David and Kimchi simply state that these 120,000 people are minors as opposed to “like minors.”

Like Rashi and Kimchi, Metzudat David understands those “*asher lo yada*” as referring to minors, and that these minors are entitled to exemption from liability for transgression, except for the transgressions of their parents. He omits Kimchi’s statement: “All these [minors and beasts] deserve mercy and compassion, and even more so because of their great number. However Rashi, in a fascinating interpretation, understands “*b’heimah*,” not as literally beasts, but referring to “adults whose knowledge is like that of beasts who do not recognize who created them.” Rashi understands the

⁹³ Abarbanel on 4:11

⁹⁴ Abarbanel on 4:11

entire clause “who do not know their right from their left and many beasts as well” as referring to the count of 120,000. To Rashi, this count includes both minors and adults, whose knowledge is like that of beasts.

Abarbanel rejects the understanding of “*asher lo yada*” as referring to “minors” for “in this condemned city the infants were judged for the transgressions of their parents for they are [like] limbs of the human and their portion [theirs is the same fate of their adult parents].” Rather Abarbanel understands this phrase to refer to “the entire population of Nineveh. For...the people are without [the teachings of] Torah.” Israel unlike the other nations cannot be excused for idol worship for Israel was given the commandment of “you shall have no other gods besides me” (Ex. 20:3) at Mt. Sinai. Behind Abarbanel's argument is his use of the biblical concept of “*ir hanidāḥat*,” which refers to an absolutely condemned city in Israel whose inhabitants engage in idolatry (Deut. 13:13-19). He adds later, “They [the Ninevites] are not deserving destruction because of their religious beliefs, since they were not commanded concerning them.” He continues still, “indeed, idol worship was not Israel’s only transgression. For they also [committed] illicit sex, spilling blood, perverting justice, false measure of volume, false measure of weight, and all the other categories of transgression which the prophets recalled. And therefore they [Israel] were not forgiven.”⁹⁵

Abarbanel views “the [Divine] claim to save Nineveh was strong,” supported by the “*qal vaḥomeir* [metaphorical argument]...of the *qiqayon* plant” which Abarbanel describes as “straight and sound and there is no refutation against it.”⁹⁶ Here Abarbanel opines that the argument God makes to Jonah in 4:10-11 is obvious, essentially “just as you wished I would spare this *qiqayon* plant, *qal vaḥomeir* (all the more so) how can I not spare Nineveh?”

Yet here again, Abarbanel questions God’s words “why does God not remind him [Jonah] of this strong argument?” The strong argument being “How can I [God] not care for these people who return in repentance to me with all their hearts and all their souls, and in justice, gratitude, having forsaken [their evil, how can I not] grant them mercy? Rather, why does God remind Jonah of the “weak argument from the youth [minors] and many animals?” Abarbanel understands “people who do not know their right from their left and many beasts” as referring to young people and animals.⁹⁷

Abarbanel explains why this second argument is weak. He continues that if God does rely on this weaker claim, the greater number of [innocent] children and beasts, why did God not use this claim to save the generation of the flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, and the land of Israel and Jerusalem and not allow their destruction? He challenges “Did the Eternal, [in the first century,] pass over the evil of its people because of the infants of its sages who did not transgress or because of their beasts?” If so why would this claim [be

⁹⁵ Abarbanel on 4:11

⁹⁶ Abarbanel on 4:11

⁹⁷ Abarbanel on 3:1

used] in the matter of Nineveh?"⁹⁸ In asserting the weakness of God's argument, Abarbanel opens a conversation on theodicy -- why God allows for certain evil, destructive events to occur.

Abarbanel recalls the comparison of father and son "Jonah enjoyed the *qiqayon* plant like a son enjoys his father who loves him as his shield [protector] and brings him joy. The God of Blessing loved Nineveh as God's work and deed. Thus if the God of Blessing is like a father to Nineveh, and Jonah is to the *qiqayon* plant a sort of son, and it is known that the mercy of the father for the son is much greater than the mercy of the son for the father. And this is a strong claim and *qal vaḥomeir* [metaphorical argument]." ⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Abarbanel on 3:1

⁹⁹ Abarbanel on 4:11; Abarbanel on 4:11 also has a very creative explanation for the verses of Micah 7:18-20 attached to the reading of Jonah in order to provide a *neḥemtah* on Yom Kippur afternoon. He interprets Micah, phrase by phrase, to note that while God punished Israel, God's wrath will be replaced with loving kindness.

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