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Jonah Flees From the LORD
1: 3

DIG: Why Tarshish? Why do you think he disobeyed the LORD and ran away? How will God, who is concerned about the great nations of the earth, react to the rebellion of one individual? What will happen to the one who tries to escape one's calling by running away from ADONAI? How does that compare to how other prophets responded (see **First Kings 17:1-6; Jeremiah 1:4-10**)**? Do you think Jonah was aware of the problems his decision would cause other people? What was he thinking when he left? What does scene one as a whole say about God?**

REFLECT: Have you ever felt justified in choosing not to obey HaShem? Where can you escape Him (see **Psalm 139:7-12**)**? Where do you go that's in the opposite direction from where God wants you to go? Are you an inside runner? What keeps you from doing something you believe the LORD is calling you to do? On the other hand, how do you feel when you know you have responded to ADONAI's call?**

Jonah's experience may be helpful to you
if you're having a hard time and question if you're in God's will.

The structure of this verse makes its own contribution to the message, and the key to the structure is the repetition of the words **Tarshish** (three times), **from *the presence* of the LORD** (twice), and **went down** (twice). The name **Tarshish** is especially relevant at the beginning, middle, and end of the verse. The chiastic structure forms an **ABC-CBA** pattern and is appropriate to convey the deliberate purpose with which **Jonah** reacts.

A to run away to Tarshish from *the presence* of the LORD

B went down to the city of Joppa

C found a ship that was going to the city of Tarshish

C and paid for the trip

B went down into the ship

A to go to Tarshish, intending to run away from *the presence* the LORD[25]



Commentary on scene one: But Jonah got up to run away to Tarshish (1:3a). If you drew a straight line away from **Nineveh**, that's the direction **Jonah** was headed. The delightful cat and mouse game now begins, so we should pause on the word **But**. Throughout the book **(1:3, 1:4, 1:17, 4:1, 4:7)**, there is a constant dialogue between **Yonah** and **God**, often with action and counteraction, like a chess game. This is the first **But** and the first counteraction because **Jonah** doesn't have the power to directly countermand **the Grandmaster**. **Yonah** did indeed **get up (1:2a)** as commanded; however, **he got up to run away to Tarshish. Tarshish** is generally recognized to be the Greek city of Tartessos, a Phoenician colony in Southern Spain. It was at the far end of the Mediterranean Sea, and as far away that **he** could get."[26] Once **he** began running **his** descent would take **him** down a slippery slope culminating with **his** drowning to death at the bottom of **the sea** in **chapter two**.

. . . from *the presence* of the LORD . . . This means that **Jonah** was heading in the exact opposite direction from **Nineveh**. **He** was trying to flee **from *the presence* of ADONAI**. As a prophet of **God**, **Jonah** clearly knew that **YHVH** is omnipresent, and there was no way of escaping from **His** omnipresence. But ***the presence*** spoken of here is not the omnipresence of **God**; rather, **Yonah** was fleeing from **the Shechinah glory**, which is the visible, localized ***presence* of the LORD**, residing within the Most Holy Place in the Temple in Jerusalem. **The Shechinah glory** was in the Land and **Jonah** was trying to flee out of the northern

Kingdom to **Tarshish** and away from this ***presence* of God**.[27]

. . . from *the presence* of the LORD . . . Here is the first irony, repeated later in this verse. **Yonah** cannot possibly **run away from ADONAI**, as **David** reminds us: **Where can I go from Your Spirit? Where can I flee from Your *presence*? If I go up to the heavens, You are there; if I make my bed in the depths, You are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there Your right hand will hold me (Psalm 139:7-10). The reluctant prophet** mistakenly thought that a little bit of geographical separation could put some distance between **himself** and **the Grandmaster.** There are echoes, too, of Adam and Eve naively hiding **from *the presence* of the LORD (Genesis 3:8 CJB).** It didn't work for them **in the Garden** and it wouldn't work for **Yonah** on **the ship**. All we know at present about **Jonah's** motivation is to get away **from *the presence* of the LORD. He** skillfully keeps that question unanswered until **4:2**, holding us in suspense and arousing our active participation in solving the mystery.[28]

. . . and went down to the city of Joppa where **he** could find docking facilities for the long-distance "**Tarshish ships**," which were the equivalent of our long-distance ocean liners of today, traveling as **they** did to the western Mediterranean. It has been estimated that **their** journey via many ports of call could have taken as long as a year, so when **Jonah paid for the trip he** was likely to have parted with a considerable sum of money. **The reluctant prophet** had to have **his** own way and pit **himself** against **the Almighty**, whatever the cost.

. . . Joppa is Jaffa, a large port where **Jonah** can be sure of two things – anonymity and the chance to get on a ship bound for somewhere, *anywhere* other than **Nineveh**. **He** sulked around the docks, having already descended into a totally alien culture, moving among people **he** had never met and never wanted to meet. The place was brimming with pagan sailors, all Gentiles. In a strange way, however, **Yonah** welcomed all the people, the sights and smells because they provided a distraction for **him. He** was getting away from it all.

The small nation of Phoenicia, a small strip of coastal land in what is now Lebanon, had become a great and prosperous nation because of the maritime commerce they developed. Also, it is often said that they invented alphabetic writing, which soon replaced pictographic, cuneiform, and hieroglyphic writing. They were descendants of Ham and had two great cities, Tyre and Sidon, which anchored their sea trade.

Despite their very small homeland, the Phoenicians were indisputably the leading mariners of the ancient world. There is much evidence that they not only sailed on the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea, but eventually all over the Mediterranean world and down the coast of Africa, even navigating around the tip of Africa and reaching the ports of India. Thus they had trading centers all over the known world. **Tarshish** was undoubtedly one of these.[29]

. . . where he found a ship that was going to the city of Tarshish about 2,500 miles west of **Joppa (1:3b).** So **Jonah** found **his ship** that **he** thought was going to take **him** somewhere over the rainbow. When **he** got on board, however, **he** instantly created a new and uneasy fellowship . . . a single believer on **a ship** of pagans.[30]

While you might not have gone to such extremes to run from **God** externally, we've all **run** at one time or another in ways less noticeable. It's far more simple and discreet to **run away** internally, isn't it? We head **to Tarshish** in our hearts so we can pretend we're obeying **God**.

We run mentally when we detach our thought life by building up callousness displayed by the attitude we show in others. We can even run spiritually, merely going through the motions while having no fellowship with **Him**. We can even run from **ADONAI's** directives even while we are engrossed in them.

We can be living life and yet be on the run from **the LORD**, rebelliously pulling away from **His** will all the while. We can pack our internal bags just as quickly as Yonah packed his and be on our way headed in the opposite direction of **God's** will. But we must be careful. What's on the inside will eventually show up on the outside.[31]

Jonah paid for the trip, literally *paid her price***.** Although the Hebrew word for **ship** is feminine, one would expect the text to say *paid his price,* which is what the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the TaNaKh) has. **Jewish commentators say, the phrase: *paid her price* refers to the cost of the whole ship, for, according to medieval rabbinic interpretations, Jonah was rich. Consequently, the Jewish exegetical tradition has it that Yonah hired the entire ship and its crew in his haste to escape God.** So **the rebel prophet** must have sold **his** home and left everything behind. It was as if **he** said, "Forget the cabin fare, I'll take the whole **ship**, so long as we can leave right now!"[32]

Reflection on what scene one as a whole says about ADONAI: And went down into the ship, planning to go to Tarshish, intending to run away from *the presence* the LORD (1:3c). Jonah continues **his** descent. **He** has been told to **get up** and go east. **But Yonah** has gone **down** and gone west. From **God's** perspective, **He goes down to Joppa**, **down into the ship**, **down into the sea (2:3)**, **down into the great whale (1:17)**, **down to the roots of the mountains (2:6)**, before being vomited **up (2:10).** Psychologically and spiritually **he** had gone **down** in a far more significant way, as we shall see in **chapter 2**.[33]

Jonah's experience may be helpful to you if you're having a hard time and question if you're in **God's** will. I can't tell you one way or another. But I can say this, the fact that you're having a difficult time is *not* proof that you're out of **God's** will. More accurately, it may be proof that you're *in* **God's** will. If you're having it too easy and things are breaking just right for you in every direction, and if that alone is what you're using to determine if you're in **God's** will, then, like **Yonah**, you could be in for a surprise.

Let's look carefully at **the wayward prophet's** situation. Here is **a man** who hears **God's** calling but takes off in the opposite direction. There is no doubt **he's** out of **the LORD's** will. **He** goes **down to Joppa** and when **he** gets there **he** has no problems. **He** finds **a ship**. **He** buys a ticket. **He** gets on board **the ship** and **he** goes to sleep. Smooth sailing.

How many believers think that just because they're going through a rough time means they're out of **God's** will? Conversely, when their lives seem as if its smooth sailing they believe they're in the will of **God**. Have you ever wondered why there are so many problems trying to get to shul on Shabbat, or church on Sunday? Read *the Screwtape Letters* by C. S. Lewis. It may be that the devil and his minions are working overtime because you're drawing too close to **the Lord**. Believe you me, when you're up over your eyebrows in sin, the devil leaves you alone. Just because you are having trouble doesn't mean you are out of **His** will.

Everything seemed so easy for **Jonah**. But down through the centuries **God's** men and women have not found the going so easy. Adoniram Judson and his wife Ann didn't find the going so easy when they left for India in 1812. Shortly after they arrived they were ordered by the government to return to America, so the Judsons moved their missionary work to Burma, located between India and China. They settled in Rangoon, the principal seaport of Burma and began learning the language. They quickly realized that it would be very difficult to preach **God's** Word

in a language lacking the words for **God**, heaven, and eternity, but nevertheless they proceeded to translate the Scriptures into the Burmese language. They began with the book of **Yonah**, which was especially attractive to the Burmese mind.

Ann soon adopted the Burmese dress with its light tunic of bright-colored gauze and a skirt of bright silk, slit at the ankle. A dedicated missionary, Ann formed a society of native women who met together on Sundays to pray and read the Scriptures and conducted classes for women. Her greatest contribution to the cause of women and missions was her inspirational writing. She wrote enthralling stories of life on the mission field and the struggles she faced, predominantly when her husband was confined to Burmese prison for nearly two years. She also wrote tragic descriptions of child marriages, female infanticide, and the trials of the Burmese women who had virtually no rights except what rights their husbands allowed them. Ann felt that even worse than the ill treatment of women was their ignorance. Burmese women were not taught and they spent their days in idleness. She worked to remedy this situation and enlisted the help of women back home.

As with many missionaries, Ann suffered from poor health on the mission field. She served for thirteen years in Burma before she died at the age of 37 on October 24, 1826. She was buried at Amherst under a tree while her Burmese converts wept over her grave. In the decades after her death numerous biographies and biographical sketches were written about Ann and she became a role model for all young women of faith.

But **Jonah** was having no such problems. **He** was on **his ship** and as it slipped away, I imagine that **he** stood on the deck, smiling as the shoreline faded into the distance. **He** probably thought to **himself**: What a wonderful trip this is going to be. But we'll find that **the closet prophet** wasn't going to have it quite that easy.[34]

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, We praise and love **You** always-even in the midst of hard trials. What is so very tough and unfair now can be used by **Your** hand on the potter's wheel of our life, to mold us to be purer for **You**. **These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may result in praise, glory and honor when Yeshua Messiah is revealed. These trials are so that the true metal of your faith (far more valuable than gold, which perishes though refined by fire) may come to light in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Messiah Yeshua (First Peter 1:7).** Soon all our trials and problems will be over. **For I consider the sufferings of this present time not***

worthy to be compared with the coming glory to be revealed to us (Romans 8:18)*. All who love* ***You*** *will live with* ***You*** *in heaven* ***(John 14:1-3; Revelation 21:4)*** *in eternal peace and joy forever! We look forward to praising* ***Your*** *great name forever! In* ***Yeshua's*** *holy name and power of* ***His*** *resurrection. Amen*