

Messianic Rabbi: Are We Too Much Like Jonah?

Every year, followers of Judaism prepare for the approaching fall holy days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Our thoughts turn towards repentance and forgiveness.

As part of my personal process of searching my heart before G-D in preparation for these special appointed times, I spend time reading and studying Bible passages and narratives which have themes that call G-D's people to repentance.

One of my studies this year has been the book of Jonah. I began to read these words, which are very familiar to me since I have read them since I was a small child. However, as I read them this time, for some reason, they changed from being words about a man who lived a long time ago to words that are extremely relevant to the followers of Messiah today. These are the words:

“Now the word of Adonai came to Jonah, son of Amittai, saying: ‘Rise, go to the great city Nineveh and call out to her, for their evil has risen before me.’ But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish, from the presence of Adonai. He went down to Jaffa and found a ship going to Tarshish, paid the fee and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish—away from the presence of Adonai” (Jon. 1:1-3)

As I read these verses, three things jumped out at me. First, Jonah was called by G-D to go to Nineveh, a Gentile city outside the boundaries of Israel. Second, the reason Jonah was called was because Nineveh had become evil. Third, twice in these verses we read the words “away from the presence of G-D.” These words hit me like a sledgehammer and brought conviction to my heart.

Just as in the first point above, as we look around our world

today, it would be hard not to see the similarity between the evil of Nineveh and the growing evil of our world. We live in a world in which a growing number of people call evil good and good evil. And just as Jonah was called to go to Nineveh, we have a similar calling to our world, as we read in Matthew 28:19:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, immersing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Ruach ha-Kodesh, teaching them to observe all I have commanded you. And remember! I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:19-20).

Just as in the second point above, we who are part of the body of Messiah, also known as the Commonwealth of Israel, have been called to reach out to those who are outside of that Commonwealth: evil people, sinners and unbelievers.

And just as in the third point, too many of us respond like Jonah by rejecting the call to preach the Good News. The result is exactly the same when we refuse to go to those to which we were called; we end up moving away from the presence of G-D.

Wow, just think about that for a moment. If we are not obeying the commandment to go into all the world and preach the Good News, we are moving away from the presence of G-D. So, if we want to know why we don't seem to have the fire of G-D in our midst and if we are not seeing miracles, signs and wonders in our services and homes, we need to consider that we may have joined Jonah in running away from our calling. Remember, we can be running away from our calling even if we are sitting, standing, praying and worshiping in our house of worship.

And the result of running away from our calling will always result in our running away from the presence of G-D.

As we read Jonah chapter four, we find out that the reason Jonah didn't want to go to Nineveh was because he knew that if

he preached the message of repentance to them, they would repent and that G-D would forgive them. Unfortunately, this is the same reason that too many of us don't want to fulfill G-D's calling in our lives—even if we don't want to admit it to ourselves.

We look at those in our world the same way Jonah looked at the people of Nineveh. Those people are evil and they deserve G-D's judgment and if we preach the Good News to them, they will repent and G-D will forgive them.

Now, I know that most of us would say, "That isn't what I believe," or, "That isn't what's in my heart," but the truth is that if deep down we didn't think like Jonah, then we wouldn't be running away like Jonah. If we want to dwell within the presence of G-D, we need to repent from being like Jonah and begin to preach the Good News to our Nineveh.

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