

ON JONAH'S TWO MISSIONS \*

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*Jonah* I:2 reads:

קום לך אל-נינוה העיר הגדולה וקרא עליה כי-עלחה רעתם לפני.

In III:2, however, it is stated:

קום לך אל-נינוה העיר הגדולה וקרא אליה את-הקריאה אשר אנכי  
 דבר אליך

Nearly all exegetes have noted that the Hebrew text, in all manuscripts, consistently distinguishes between the על in I:2 and אל in III:2. Most scholars, however, opt to follow the LXX which carries little perceptible distinctions, in the meaning and consequences, between the sentences in which קרא על/אל are to be found. The common contention is that אל and על are basically interchangeable, especially in "late" Hebrew (see, lastly, Brenner, 1979:400). A few scholars, however, do offer differing translations but, as far as I can judge, do not draw any conclusions from the different renderings. Thus, Keil, 1888:283, objects strenuously to the oft-at tested harmonization in meaning, but concludes only that in chapter I, Jonah is to warn of the need to do penance whereas in chapter III, he is to carry a more detailed program to the Ninevites. Magonet, 1976:25-6, suggests that a change in Jonah's prophetic status may be at stake: in the first mission, Jonah is given a free hand to preach (a rather surprising condition given the nature of the prophetic task, I should think), whereas in his second attempt, he is to carry a specific message. Other notions, yet similar in their range of suggestions, are offered by Levine, 1976:56, who relies on the Targum. In der Smitten, 1972:94 bases himself on a faulty understanding of God's objection in I:2 when he offers

\* I would like to acknowledge N. Sarna's helpful critique of this note.

"und schreie zu ihr hin." This position has been rightly criticized by Wolff, 1977:73. Most often those who object to harmonized renderings in I:2 and III:2 write in a vein that is decidedly equivocal. Note how Landes has recently put it (1982: \*158):

"The fact that in 3:2 the author of *Jonah* employs קרא אל in a verse that is consciously molded after 1:2 possibly suggests that no difference in meanings was intended between the two phrases, and קרא על is, ..., simply a stylistic variant of קרא אל... On the other hand, the possibility should perhaps not be ruled out that the author intended a somewhat stronger expression with על in 1:2 than with אל in 3:2, because of the different content that follows each of these constructions. Thus, in 1:2, קרא על may have the sense of 'denounce' which קרא אל in 3:2 clearly does not have."

However, while the interchange between אל and על may indeed be available to biblical Hebrew, it needs to be shown that, firstly, such a promiscuity is available to *Jonah*. Here I can note that the verb טול which is elsewhere construed with על when conveying the sense of "casting (out) upon something," in *Jonah* it is consistently used with אל with meanings which are not only subtly shaded, but able to carry, in one instance, at I:5, a hint of polemic against those who regard the Sea as a power in its own right. It also needs to be shown that, secondly, this interchange between אל and על is independent of the verb which the proposition is guiding. Such an enterprise is beyond the purview of this note, but it is within its interest to assess its validity when the verb קרא is at stake. For convenience's sake, such an inquiry will divide the material into two categories:

A. קרא על + pronominal suffix (without accusative complement).

1. 1 *Kings* XIII:2 (A prophet comes and) ויקרא על המזבח "He 'condemned' the altar (at Bethel) on God's order as follows:..."

Note the consequences as given in v. 3: "This altar shall be broken up and the ashes upon it spilt" (Cf. also I *Kings* XIII:4,32.).

2. *Deut.* XV:9 (A rejected kinsman in need will be so dis

tressed) וקרא עליך אל-יהוה "so that he condemns you before God." Note the consequence: "and you will incur guilt" (similarly *Deut.* XXIV:15.). See, further, *Exod.* XXII:22-3 where God's response to a similar appeal is registered: "I will put you to the sword, etc..."

This usage of קרא + pron. suffix + אל + Divine name, does have a parallel in an Aramaic text from Elephantine, one which moreover does seem to register a substitution על/אל. In Cowley 7 (see, conveniently, Porten 1974: 124-5; *ibid.*, 1968:314-7; 156), a man protests his own innocence regarding a charge of burglary and invokes the god: אנה מלכיה אנה הרמביחאל, "I, Milkiyahu, do inform you(??) before Herembethel" (Porten: "I Malchiyah shall call for you to Herembethel..."). This particular flexibility in the use of preposition can certainly be attributed to Aramaic constructions; it may also be that the construction is to be parsed according to example A:2, discussed above, in which קרא אל + pronominal suffix + *verbum dicendi* invokes the introduction of an appeal.

B. קרא על with the meaning modified by nouns.

1. מגור : *Jer.* XLIX:29. וקראו עליהם מגור מסביב "and they shall subject them (*Kedar* and *Hasor*) to an all-encompassing terror" (cf. also *Lam.* II:22).
2. מועד : *Lam.* I:15: קרא עלי מועד "(God) has called a convocation/set a time against me, in which to crush my elite."
3. חרב : *Jer.* XXV:29. קרא על-כל-ישבי הארץ "For I have set the sword against the earth's population" (note the play on the same construction, but in a different stem of the verb, in the same verse). Cf., also, *Ezek.* XXXVIII:21.
4. רעב : *Ps.* CV:16. ויקרא רעב על-הארץ "He imposes famine on the land, (destroying every staff of life)."
5. צום : *II Chr.* XX:3. (Jehosaphat feared the Arameans) ויקרא-צום על-כל-יהודה "and he imposed a fast upon the whole of Judah."

Lest it be thought that in the second category it is merely the noun in the accusative complement which is imposing a meaning on the phrase at stake, it should be noted that a

few of these nouns (מגור, צום) can, on rare occasions, be attached directly to the verb קרא, but *none* ever does so when the idiom קרא אל is involved. What these examples, therefore, show is that קרא על can best be translated through the basic notion of "to impose an (unpleasant) fate upon something," albeit in a variety of nuances. In none of the citations offered above, moreover, could an approximate meaning obtain were one to substitute a קרא אל for קרא על.

The verb קרא, in its most basic of meanings, conveys the notion of "to voice a sound." But careful attention has to be paid to the way it is used in *Jonah*, for it regulates different substantives even as it uses different prepositions. We have the following attestations:

1. קרא על a. (I:2) וקרא עליה (... קום לך)
2. קרא אל b. (I:6) קרא אל-אלהיך
- c. (III:2) וקרא אליה את-הקריאה (... קום לך)
- d. (II:3) קראתי (מצרה לי) אל-יהוה
- e. (I:14) ויקראו אל-יהוה (ויאמרו)
- f. (III:8) ויקראו אל-אלהים (בחזקה)

A surface analysis allows one to note that the examples with קרא in the imperative are addressed to *Jonah*, with a more immediate need to attend to the act when it comes from the רב החבל (2b) than when it comes from God (1a, c; with לך inserted between the imperatives). קרא is in the perfect when the subject is also *Jonah* (2d), in the imperfect when its subject is the sailors (2c) and the jussive when it is the Ninevites (2f). קרא אל is well known, of course, as a construction which expresses "praying, appealing" to a superior. In most cases, the appeal is directed to deities, in particular to God. In *Jonah* the examples in which such an appeal is made include one in which *Jonah* is urged to pray to his god by the רב החבל (2b), one in which *Jonah* in fact does so, but when in the fish's belly (2d--I will not enter here on the integrity of the psalm within the prose sections), and finally, one in which the sailors and the Ninevites appeal to God (2e, f). Thus all of these particular usage of קרא אל are addressed to the Hebrew God. But these citations do not include the passages which initiated our study, and for this to be clarified, we need to inspect the compliment or the object which follows our idioms.

In III:2, a cognate accusative depends on קרא אל: קריאה. The word is a *hapax* (latest discussion in Landes, 1982: 152\*-153\*), and its precise import can only be guessed at: from the context, from the clause that succeeds, as well as from

Jonah's speech to the Ninevites given a few verses later. The context allows us to think that God has a precise message, this time around, and this is made plausible by the following clause: אשר אנכי דבר אליך "which I am about to tell you," where the *qal* participle of דבר indicates that information is *about* to be communicated (on this cf. *TWAT*, II, 103-4 - best parallel example in *Ex.* VI: 29; *Jer.* XXVIII:7; XXXVIII:20; *Dan.* X:11). Jonah's response to God's request is to go toward Nineveh and to proclaim עונד (ויקרא ויאמר) (III:4). Much ambiguity is met in this sentence, not so much because of the construction (which has a nice parallel in *Hag.* II:6), but because the *Niphal* of הפך (*BOB*, *q. v.*) can be understood as either partaking of a passive sense (hence: "In forty more days, Nineveh will be overturned") or suggesting a reflexive meaning (hence: "In forty more days, Nineveh will change [inwardly]"). No doubt Jonah was sure that the first sense was at stake. Whatever interpretation is favoured, both by past as well as present audiences, it is nevertheless clear that the idiom קרא אל (better perhaps the verb קרא with the אל here used merely to introduce the indirect object) controls the delivery of *some* message which Jonah is to convey to the Ninevites. This is not the case within I:2 where קרא על is abruptly stopped by use of an *'atnāh*, leaving the following clause only to express God's reason for arriving at such a decision (and hardly one which Jonah was expected to communicate): כי עלתה רעתם לפני.

It is not always possible to distinguish on purely syntactical grounds between the various functions of כי whether it acts as an asseverative particle or as a subordinating conjunction. I have a slight preference for understanding it, in this context, as an emphatic. Avoiding now a decision on whether to treat the ׀-suffixed to רעה metonymically, or (a more cavalier approach) enclitically, I would translate: "Indeed, its/their wickedness has reached me." But an equally acceptable rendering would be "Because its/their wickedness has reached me." Totally *unacceptable*, however, would be a rendering where in כי is made to introduce a direct speech (i.e. "... that its/their wickedness has reached me."), for, as was shown long ago by Zorell, 1933, and was recently concluded by Schoors, 1981:258-9 "the כי *recitativum*, as a specific syntactical category, should be deleted from grammars and dictionaries."

By virtue of this philological analysis, the Jonah of I:2, as contrasted from the one of III:2, can be regarded neither as a "forth" nor a "fore" teller, charged with a mission to warn or to elicit repentance. Rather, he was sent merely

to announce an impending disaster. In a way, the role that he fills in *Jonah* I cannot be differentiated from those of the angels sent to Sodom. The LXX, it is interesting to note, must have had this connection in mind since its account of the clause following וקרא עליה is obviously influenced by *Gen.* XVIII:20. But the Jonah of Chapter I is not to save anyone from among the wicked Ninevites; rather, he is to arrive at the scene, declare Nineveh's doom, and hope to escape scott free from the cataclysm, if not from the Ninevites' anger. We have Josephus's testimony that this reading of *Jonah* I:2 was available to Hellenistic Jewry, for he paraphrases our passage in *Ant.* IX, X, 208 as follows: "Having received an order to proceed to the kingdom of Ninus and to proclaim, upon his arrival to the city, that it would lose its hegemony [over Asia; cf. 214], (Jonah) got scared and instead of going there, he escaped God's presence into Jaffa..." Josephus's impression is shared by *Tobit* XIV:3-4, for there the protagonist's son escapes from Nineveh because Jonah (other mss. read Nahum) had announced its destruction. This understanding could hardly have arisen from reading the account in Chapter III and IV since that particular portion of the narrative deliberated upon God's mercy towards the Ninevites. Jerome, it seems, also shared that perspective, as Duval, 1973: 84 n. 75, points out.

With the above annotations in mind, I can now offer the following renderings for the passages in question:

I:1-3 (And) when God's word to Jonah, Amittay's son, was: "Set out for Nineveh, that big city, and declare doom upon it; indeed, its wickedness has reached me," Jonah, instead, decided to escape toward Tarshish...

III:1-3 When, once more, God's word to Jonah was: "Set out for Nineveh, that big city, and deliver to it the proclamation I am about to tell you," Jonah did set out for Nineveh in accordance with God's order...

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*Résumé établi par la Rédaction*

L'Auteur constate qu'on n'a pas encore trouvé une explication satisfaisante de la différente construction du verbe קרא dans Jon. 1,2 (+ על) et 3,2 (+ אל). Il ne s'agit pas d'une construction équivalente et une analyse des différents textes bibliques dans lesquels se trouve la construction קרא על permet d'autre part d'isoler la notion fondamentale exprimée dans cet idiotisme: "imposer à quelque chose une desti-

née (négative)", tandis que *קרא אל* indique: "adresser une prière (un appel)" à quelqu'un qui est supérieur (tout particulièrement à Dieu).

Dans Jon. 3,2 l'expression *קרא אל* (disons mieux, le verbe *קרא* suivi par *אל*, introduisant le complément indirect) accompagne simplement la consigne à Jonas d'un message pour les habitants de Ninive. Jon. 3,1-3 doit par conséquent être traduit comme suit: "Lorsque de nouveau la parole de Dieu (adressée) à Jonas fut: Pars pour Ninive, cette ville grande, et annonce lui le proclame que je vais te communiquer, Jonas partit pour Ninive, selon l'ordre de Dieu".

Par contre, à la lumière de l'examen précédant, compte tenu de l'absence sûre du *כי* recitativum dans la grammaire hébraïque, Jon. 1,1-3 doit être traduit comme suit: "(Et) lorsque la parole de Dieu fut (adressée) à Jonas, fils d'Amittay, (en ces termes): Pars pour Ninive, cette ville grande, et annonce lui la ruine; en vérité sa dépravation est arrivée jusqu'à moi, Jonas au contraire décida de s'échapper vers Tarshish".