

Jonah 4 - Jonah's Anger & God's Kindness

II. Jonah reluctantly obeys his divine commission to preach to Nineveh (Jonah 3:1—4:11)

(2) Pouting prophet (4:1-11)

(A) Jonah's unhappiness with God regarding the extension of mercy to Nineveh

(4:1-4)

(B) God rebukes Jonah's misplaced priorities (4:5-11)

(a) Jonah sulks under the plant (4:5-6)

(b) Jonah wishes for death after the plant dies (4:7-8)

(c) Jonah asserts a right to anger (4:9)

(d) Jonah hears the merciful proclamation of God (4:10-11)

Jonah 4

(2) Pouting prophet (4:1-11)

(A) Jonah's unhappiness with God regarding the extension of mercy to Nineveh

(4:1-4)

1 But it greatly **displeased** Jonah, and he became angry.

1 But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry.

1 Greatly displeased, Jonah flew into a rage.

1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry.

— "...displeased" - literally, "it was evil to Jonah with great evil"

— Until now, "evil" (*ra'ah*) described the Ninevites, but now it describes Jonah

— Jonah became "evil" in God's eyes, and in need of punishment just as the Ninevites had been, but God showed Jonah the same compassion that He had shown the Ninevites

— Jonah evidently had hoped that the Ninevites would not respond to his call for repentance, and that God's judgment on them would follow

— His major beef with the Ninevites was that Jonah had read the other minor prophets and knew that Assyria (Nineveh was the capital city) would one day invade the northern kingdom and exile them to a far off land

2 Then he prayed to the LORD and said, "Please LORD, was this not what I said when I was still in my own country? Therefore in anticipation of *this* I fled to Tarshish, since I knew that You are a **gracious** and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in **mercy**, and One who **relents** of disaster.

2 He prayed to the LORD and said, "Please LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity.

2 So he prayed to the LORD, "LORD, isn't this what I said while I was still in my home country? That's why I fled previously to Tarshish, because I knew you're a compassionate God, slow to anger, overflowing with gracious love, and reluctant to send trouble.

2 And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.

- "...gracious" - *hen*, expresses God's attitude toward those who have no claim on Him because they are outside of any covenant relationship with Him

- "...mercy" - *hesed*, refers to God's loyal love to those who are in covenant relationship with Him

- "...relents" - some argue that an unchangeable God would never change His mind once He has announced His intentions, but both Jonah 4:2 and Joel 2:13 list God's capacity to 'change his mind' as one of His fundamental attributes, one that derives from His compassion and demonstrates His love.

Jonah was criticizing God for good qualities that he recognized in God! Jonah was essentially angry at God because He was so good. Jonah wished God were not so good!

3 So now, LORD, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life."

3 Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life."

3 Therefore, LORD, please kill me, because it's better for me to die than to live!"

3 Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.

- Jonah felt so angry that he asked God to take his life (Cf. 1:12; 4:8-9)

— Elijah had previously made the same request (1 Kings 19:4), but we must be careful not to read Elijah's reasons into Jonah's request. Both prophets obviously became extremely discouraged. Both evidently felt that what God had done through their ministries was different from what they wanted to see happen. Elijah had wanted to see a complete national revival, but Jonah had wanted to see complete national destruction.

— The sinfulness of people discouraged Elijah, whereas the goodness of God depressed Jonah. God had to teach both prophets to view things from His perspective.

4 But the LORD said, "Do you have a good reason to be angry?"

4 The LORD said, "Do you have good reason to be angry?"
4 The LORD replied, "Does being angry make you right?"
4 Then said the LORD, Doest thou well to be angry?
- The Lord's question implies that Jonah may not be viewing the situation correctly...
— Jonah had condemned God for not being angry (v2), but now God challenged Jonah for being angry
— Jonah was feeling the frustration of not understanding God's actions in the light of His character, which many others have felt (Job, Jeremiah, Habakkuk, etc.)

(B) God rebukes Jonah's misplaced priorities (4:5-11)

(a) Jonah sulks under the plant (4:5-6)

5 Then Jonah left the city and sat down east of it. There he made a shelter for himself and sat under it in the shade, until he could see what would happen in the city.

5 Then Jonah went out from the city and sat east of it. There he made a shelter for himself and sat under it in the shade until he could see what would happen in the city.

5 Then Jonah left the city and sat down on the eastern side. There he made a shelter for himself and sat down under its shade to see what would happen to the city.

5 So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city.

- The Lord proceeded to teach Jonah His ways and to confront him with his attitude problem...

— No reason is given for why Jonah stayed in Nineveh, but the shelter he built proved to be a classroom for the prophet similar to what the town dump had been for Job

6 So the LORD God designated a plant, and it grew up over Jonah to be a shade over his head, to relieve him of his discomfort. And Jonah was **overjoyed** about the plant.

6 So the LORD God appointed a plant and it grew up over Jonah to be a shade over his head to deliver him from his discomfort. And Jonah was extremely happy about the plant.

6 The LORD God prepared a vine plant, and it grew over Jonah to shade his head and provide relief from his misery. Jonah was happy—indeed, he was ecstatic—about the vine plant.

6 And the LORD God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd.

- God continued to demonstrate compassion for Jonah by providing him with a shading plant that relieved him from the blistering sun

- "...overjoyed" - this is the only time that we read that Jonah was happy about something, and it was because he was physically comfortable

— His anger grew out of his personal discomfort resulting from God's mercy on the Ninevites

(b) Jonah wishes for death after the plant dies (4:7-8)

7 But God designated a worm when dawn came the next day, and it attacked the plant and it withered.

7 But God appointed a worm when dawn came the next day and it attacked the plant and it withered.

7 But at dawn the next day, God provided a worm that attacked the vine plant so that it withered away.

7 But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered.

8 And when the sun came up God designated a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on Jonah's head so that he became faint, and he begged with *all* his soul to die, saying, "Death is better to me than life!"

8 When the sun came up God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on Jonah's head so that he became faint and begged with *all* his soul to die, saying, "Death is better to me than life."

8 When the sun rose, God prepared a harsh east wind. The sun beat down on Jonah's head, he became faint, and he begged to die. "It is better for me to die than to live!" he said.

8 And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live.

- Earlier, Jonah had wished to die because, as God's servant, he was not happy with God's will. Now he longed for death because he was unhappy with his circumstances.

— Divine discipline had brought him to the place where even the loss of a plant affected him so deeply that he longed to die

(c) Jonah asserts a right to anger (4:9)

9 But God said to Jonah, "Do you have a good reason to be angry about the plant?" And he said, "I have good reason to be angry, even to the point of death!"

9 Then God said to Jonah, "Do you have good reason to be angry about the plant?" And he said, "I have good reason to be angry, even to death."

9 Then God asked Jonah, "Is your anger about the vine plant justified?" And he answered, "Absolutely! I'm so angry I could die!"

9 And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death.

- Jonah's reply was a strong superlative; he felt that strong anger was proper

— Evidently Jonah believed that God was not even treating him with the compassion that He normally showed all people, much less His chosen servants

(d) Jonah hears the merciful proclamation of God (4:10-11)

10 Then the LORD said, "You had compassion on the plant, for which you did not work and *which* you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight.

10 Then the LORD said, "You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work and *which* you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight.

10 But the LORD asked, "You cared about a vine plant that you neither worked on nor cultivated? A vine plant that grew up overnight and died overnight?

10 Then said the LORD, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night:

- The great missionary lesson of the book: are the souls of men not worth as much as a gourd?

- Jonah had become completely indifferent to the fate of the Ninevites. He knew His God well (4:2), but his appreciation for God's love for Israel had evidently so pervaded his life that it crowded out any compassion for these people who lacked knowledge of, and relationship with, *Yahweh*.

— To reveal Jonah's lack of compassion to himself, God dealt with him as any ordinary person. He exposed him to the pleasures and discomforts that everyone faces, and He made him see that his theology made him no more compassionate than anyone else. It should have.

— Knowledge of the sovereign, compassionate God whom He feared should have made Jonah more submissive to God's will, more compassionate toward other people, and more respectful of God.

11 Should I not also have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than **120,000 people**, who do not know ***the difference between their right hand and their left, as well as*** many animals?"

11 Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know *the difference between their right and left hand, as well as* many animals?"

11 So why shouldn't I be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 human beings who do not know their right hand from their left, as well as a lot of livestock?

11 And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?

- God had invested much work in Nineveh and had been responsible for its growth. This is why it was legitimate at the most elementary level for God to feel compassion for its people. Jonah's compassion extended only to a plant, not to people.

- The gourd that Jonah had pity on was not his, he didn't do anything to make it grow

— God doesn't ask us to love the lost before we go to them. He says, I love the lost, and I want you to go to them.

- "...120,000 people" - a huge population that God cited as the special objects of His compassion, who didn't know how to escape their troubles

- "...*the difference* between their right hand and their left" - moral ignorance; they had no advantage of special revelation concerning the moral will of God

The book closes without giving us Jonah's response, but that is not the point of the book. Its point is the answer to the LORD's question in v11 that every reader must give. Yes, God should have compassion on the hopeless Ninevites, and we should have compassion on people like them too (Cf. Luke 15:25-32; Matt 20:1-16). Only two books in the Bible end with questions, and they both have to do with Nineveh. Jonah ends with a question about God's pity for Nineveh, and Nahum ends with a question about God's punishment of Nineveh.