



The scene of Jonah sitting and watching Nineveh (4:5) has an interesting parallel in Scripture. In Genesis 19:27-28 Abraham “returns to the place where he had stood before the Lord.” There he sees “dense smoke rising from the land” marking the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. By all indications, this is the outcome Jonah hopes to see for Nineveh. Of course this is where the parallel ends and the contrasts begin.

We don't know all of the specifics, but it is clear that both Jonah and Abraham experienced loss in their relationships with these cities. As a member of a subjugated nation terrorized by the Assyrians, Jonah has no love whatsoever for Nineveh. They have conquered nation after nation, dislocating entire populations and controlling their empire with an iron fist. Abraham's experiences are more personal. In Genesis 13 Abraham's nephew Lot chooses the more prosperous land of the Jordan plain and Sodom, leaving Abraham with the less productive hill country. Shortly thereafter (Gen. 14), Abraham goes to war to rescue Lot after he gets caught up in the conflict of the region. Lot, Sodom, and Gomorrah create a lot of problems for Abraham.

Despite the emotional and material costs, Abraham still loves Lot and desires his well-being. In Genesis 18:16-33 he has a famous dialogue with God in which he asks God to spare Sodom for the sake of Lot and his family. When the Lord includes Abraham in his plans, Abraham calls upon God's justice to spare the righteous among the wicked. He recognizes God as “the ruler [or judge] of all the earth” (Gen. 18:25) and submits his repeated requests with humility. He even describes himself as “nothing but dust and ashes” (18:27). Abraham recognizes his own place before God, and his request is repeatedly granted because God himself says that Abraham desires “to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just” (18:19). So even as Abraham later looks out over the devastation, God “remembers Abraham and brings Lot out of the catastrophe” (19:29).

Jonah, on the other hand, is bound by bitterness toward Nineveh. He knows God's values, that he is “gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love” (Jonah 4:2), but he desires only destruction for Nineveh. So when God calls Jonah a second time, he conforms to the expectation but rejects God's values and retains his own bitterness and anger. He fails to acknowledge God's authority and submits in a purely nominal sense. The unfortunate thing is that Jonah's resentment adds even more costs to the losses he has already suffered. Where he could be made whole both emotionally and materially by embracing God's values and remaining in Nineveh with the repentant people, he chooses isolation and bitterness.

### Discussion Questions

In what ways would you describe yourself as more like Abraham or Jonah in how you view others and God's compassion for them?

In Revelation 20:15 the Apostle John sees those whose names are not written in the book of life thrown into the lake of fire much like Abraham witnesses the destruction of Sodom. How does that image make you feel about your family members, friends, and neighbors who don't know Jesus?

What are potential costs of embracing God's values like Abraham or avoiding them like Jonah? What concrete choices can we make to adopt God's desires like Abraham?