

**Jonah – The Pouting Prophet
Jonah and the Compassion of God
Jonah 4**

Scripture quotations are taken from the following translations:

ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

**Scripture quotations taken from the New American Standard Bible® (NASB),
Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973,
1975, 1977, 1995, 2020 by The Lockman Foundation
Used by permission. www.Lockman.org**

Scripture quoted by permission. Quotations designated (NET) are from the NET Bible® copyright ©1996, 2019 by Biblical Studies Press, L.L.C. <http://netbible.com> All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (NLT) are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

The Good News Translation Bible (GNB) text used in this product is being used by permission. Copyright © American Bible Society, 1966, 1971, 1976, 1992

Scripture taken from the Holy Bible: International Standard Version® Release 2.0. (ISV) Copyright © 1996–2011 by the ISV Foundation. Used by permission of Davidson Press, LLC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED INTERNATIONALLY

Scripture quotations contained herein are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible (NRSV), Copyright © 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., and are used by permission. All rights reserved

**Scripture taken from the New King James Version (NKJV).
Copyright 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.**

The God of second chances has given Jonah the opportunity to rethink his position on not going to Nineveh; and there was a change of mind about his rebellion on that point. But if you are looking for a complete and total repentance of Jonah, once we finish chapter 4, you will still be looking. It just isn't there.

Jonah does not climb fully on board with what it is God is doing in Nineveh. His view - Why go to Gentiles at all? We saw that graphically shown to us since it was the King of Nineveh who wound up saying what it is the Prophet of God would normally say.

Jonah 3:9

“Who knows, God may turn and relent, and turn from His burning anger so that we will not perish.”
(NASB 2020)

The King and the people responded to the message they heard and repented. They knew nothing about YAHWEH, but they took His message seriously. Jesus even used them as an example for the religious leaders of His time who failed to respond; yet they knew what the scriptures said.

How do we respond when we hear a word from God that speaks directly to us?

Sometimes we become so used to hearing Yahweh's word that we become complacent in how we respond. We have much to learn from the Ninevites. How much more should we act on Yahweh's word than the pagan nation who knew only that a god was mad at them? (Hoyt 2018, 495)

I remember going to a prayer meeting where we were praying for the lost, and a brother prayed for the people of North Korea as well as their leader. My first reaction was not very spiritual.

I thought, "how dare he pray for these Godless communists." Then the Holy Spirit started talking to me and by the time we were done, I too was praying for North Korea. He had reminded me of Mark 16:15.

We learn something else here in Jonah about evangelism and about ourselves too. The Great Commission from Jesus was all encompassing.

Mark 16:15

"He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to **every creature**." (NET 2nd ed.)

Are there any exceptions? None. All means all.

The Ninevites' response also forces us to face our preconceived notions about who will and who will not respond to Yahweh. The Ninevites were the last people you would think would respond to a message from Yahweh—but they did. Who do you think will never respond to Yahweh? We must not allow ourselves to put anyone in such a category. (Hoyt 2018, 495)

From Jesus.

Luke 6:27–28

"But I say to you who are listening: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you." (NET 2nd ed.)

We tend to think that those who oppose us would never come to Christ. We are shocked when they do.

Think about Ananias who was approached by the Lord to do something for a well-known popular opponent who was all about killing believers. But this opponent has just been confronted by the living God and he repented.

Acts 9:10–18

"Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias," and he replied, "**Here I am, Lord.**" Then the Lord told him, "Get up and go to the street called 'Straight,' and at Judas' house look for a man from Tarsus named Saul. For he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and place his hands on him so that he may see again." But Ananias replied, "Lord, I have heard from many people about this man, how much harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem, and here he has authority from the chief priests to imprison all who call on your name!" But the Lord said to him, "Go, because this man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before Gentiles and kings and the people of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." So Ananias departed and entered the house, placed his hands on Saul and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came here, has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized," (NET 2nd ed.)

Ananias is just like us. God asks us to follow Him, we do and then He says to do this thing for Him. It is the next step by the way in our faithful walk with Him, but we feel like we need to remind the Lord why this might be a problem.

Lord, but I haven't been to school, or Lord, where am I going to get the funds for that, or Lord, you do know how old I am right?

He is gracious, he told Ananias that He was in this so off he went. He tells us the same as well. When He calls, we respond in obedience and move out in faith. Where God guides, God provides.

Let me introduce you to George Mueller. He was led of the Lord to start an orphanage in Bristol England.

“He never asked people for money nor canvassed believers for donations. Mueller trusted that God would provide him with what he needed, and God did (see Matthew 6:25–33). One of the most well-known stories of Mueller’s faith involves the time when he trusted God to provide the orphans with breakfast one morning. Nothing was available for the children to eat, but Mueller and the children prayed. Soon after, a nearby baker brought bread to the orphans, stating how God had laid a burden upon his heart to bring fresh bread. A little time after, the milkman arrived, asking if the orphans could use fresh milk, since his truck had broken down. God had provided the orphans with breakfast.” (Got Questions Ministires 2014-2021)

We have no idea what He wants to do, so we follow.

The king in Nineveh repented. In the scriptures, as believers, we are told to be subject to those in authority over us. The King is one of those and he is leading by example. For us, we must pray for them as well.

Romans 13:1

“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except by God’s appointment, and the authorities that exist have been instituted by God.” (NET 2nd ed.)

Titus 3:1–2

“Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work. They must not slander anyone, but be peaceable, gentle, showing complete courtesy to all people.” (NET 2nd ed.)

When Paul wrote this, Nero was emperor. We are to pray for and obey those in leadership as long as they do not conflict with God.

Acts 5:29

“But Peter and the apostles replied, “We must obey God rather than people.” (NET 2nd ed.)

We saw this play out in Realtime recently as some states decided that churches did not need to remain open during the pandemic. Some churches followed the lead of the government remembering what it says in Romans 13, but there were some of us though that recalled Acts 5:29 and Hebrews 10:23 – 24.

Hebrews 10:23–25

“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, **not neglecting to meet together**, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” (ESV)

Many in the church have forgotten that we should be praying for those who oppose us. That includes praying for those in government who seem, at times, to be leading the opposition. We need to be praying for our governor, the president, the administration. Most of them need Christ.

Their actions open themselves up for judgment, which still does happen today. For example, there is a reason why the west coast is experiencing drought and now the recent storms they have seen. We need to pray for the salvation of governmental leaders, because their actions are a cause for others to sin.

Mark 9:42

“Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea.” (ESV)

Newsman William Koenig has been tracking a side of this as it pertains to Israel. In his book *Eye to Eye*, he relates observations of catastrophes coupled with governmental policy towards Israel.

Based on his analysis of President George W. Bush's administration, "A very large majority of President George W. Bush's political problems and the many record-setting catastrophes and political disruptions that he has experienced during his time in office have a direct connection to his involvement with the Israeli-Palestinian peace process." (Koenig 2006, Kindle Location 110)

Pray for our nation and those who lead it. Who knows, they may repent, just like the King of Nineveh did. But this idea of repentance was a problem for Jonah.

For Jonah, it was the leadership of Nineveh that caused his angst which is described for us here in chapter 4.

Jonah 3:10–4:1

"When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their evil way, then God relented of the disaster which He had declared He would bring on them. So He did not do it. But it greatly displeased Jonah, and he became angry." (NASB 2020)

Jonah had his own view of how God should deal with the surrounding nations. It did not exactly align with God's. We see with the command to go to Nineveh that God cares about the gentiles. He wants to see them repent. It was supposed to be the responsibility of the Hebrews to attract them to YAHWEH, but that has been, except for a few good Kings, an abysmal failure.

The Ninevites were responsible for their actions, and God took the responsibility to judge them when they sinned. It is also clear from the response of the Ninevites that they were aware of what constituted wickedness. While God did not hold them responsible for Israel's Law, they were being judged on the basis of the light they did possess (see Rom. 2:12–16). (Richards 1987, 473)

And there is also Romans 1:18–20 we need to deal with as well.

Romans 1:18–20

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse," (NKJV)

Where did we come up with the fiction that God no longer judges nations?

God, as the creator of everything, has the right to do so, but that does not mean He will always exercise that right. God will indeed judge nations and the planet for that matter, but just as with Nineveh, His grace is still evident.

2 Peter 3:8–9

"But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." (NKJV)

Just like God provided grace to Nineveh, He does so to the nations today. "We must be particularly careful to avoid making ourselves God's inspired mouthpiece if we are not. Simply put, God never errs, but we do. The theological cause behind the event and God's intent of how to use that event in world history are part of His hidden will, not His prescriptive, revealed will. When we try to read the meaning behind events, we are trying to read God's hand behind providence, and we must be very careful in doing

so unless we have specific biblical warrant. When an event like a lethal pandemic occurs, it can be understood in at least two ways, either as God's specific judgment or as more generally the suffering that happens in a fallen world." (Fullilove 2023)

We may not truly know until we are with Him which it is.

Then there is the elephant in the room, Jonah. Why did he really run when first told to go?

Jonah is ministering in the northern kingdom, Israel. He is well aware of their predilection for sin and the fertility gods.

He is also Jewish and has a world view that connects with being a Hebrew. Because of that, he had a specific view of gentiles that was not in step with YAHWEH's view.

Jews were God's chosen people; the nations are not. "It pleased him to know that God's patience with the wickedness of Nineveh was at an end; he wanted nothing to do with restoring her to God's favor." (Thompson 1969, 666)

It is clear, not only from Jonah, but from all the prophets, that God holds the nations morally accountable, just like the Jewish nation. He clearly cares about the nations, but unlike the Jews, there is no covenant with specific terms that would apply.

The people of Nineveh saw, clearly in the signs of the earthquake, the eclipse and the plagues, that the one in control of it all was less than pleased with them. So, when Jonah walked through town, they got it and repented at once. The embarrassing thing, this was not something that took place in Israel or Judah, but in the Gentile city of Nineveh.

Yes, the Old Testament is, at one level all about YAHWEH's relationship with His chosen people, yet we also see here that the gentile nations were also being dealt with. Never assume that pagans have no light.

This is one of the items that we see here in Jonah, but chapter 4 is all about the relationship that God has with Jonah. He loves Jonah and even though Jonah is pouting about what God has done, there are lessons he needs to learn and in turn, that we need to learn as well.

The big point, once God has used us, He still loves us. We are not disposable.

After the prophet's work was done, God continued to deal with Jonah as an individual. And God's concern was focused not on Jonah's behavior, but on his values and attitudes—his inner character. (Richards 1987, 474)

Jesus would later outline the lesson that Jonah is about to learn when He answered a question with a question regarding what is necessary to inherit eternal life.

Luke 10:25–29

"Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live." But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" (NRSV)

Jesus followed that up with the story of the good Samaritan. Jonah is about to be taught a lesson too.

Jonah 4:1–4

“But it greatly displeased Jonah, and he became angry. 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. So now, LORD, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life.” But the LORD said, “Do you have a good reason to be angry?”” (NASB 2020)

Finally. Honesty. Brutal but incredibly revealing about this man that God chose to use.

Would you choose this guy? Not just the first time but would you even give him a second chance? Why does God even do this?

Because we are all just like Jonah at one level or another. Now we get to the main point of this entire story.

Jonah refused to go, turned and ran and was willing to let it all burn. He was willing to die and to take the sailors with him. God’s mercy took care of the sailors, who repented and became followers of YAHWEH, meanwhile God dealt with Jonah.

Jonah finally prays, but after 3 days and nights.

His prayer, as we discovered, was still filled with a bit of self-righteousness but he did agree to go. Did he repent of everything, not exactly. He held back a bit from that.

Now we learn the reason. He is a Hebrew patriot; he does not have any love for the Assyrians or anyone in their capital city. What he feared would happen, has indeed happened.

God has poured His grace and mercy on those who did not look for it or deserve it. Nineveh repented. Jonah though is mad about the whole thing. He is mad at God because he believes his view is better than God’s.

Appointing himself theological adviser to the Almighty, Jonah pronounces himself completely out of sympathy with divine policy. As Ahithophel, Absalom’s counsellor, reacted to his master’s mistaken strategy by suicide (2 Sam. 17:23), so Jonah feels that he can no longer represent the deity, and prays for death. “Over my dead body” is his vehement reaction to God’s grace. Himself forgiven, he cannot accept that non-Israelites should be forgiven too. (Allen 1976, 229)

Have any of us ever thought that we had all the facts and maybe God didn’t? So, we advise God. It starts with “but Lord.”

Looking back at Ananias, the first words out of his mouth when given a clear word from God to go and see Saul was ““But Lord,” exclaimed Ananias, “I’ve heard many people talk about the terrible things this man has done to the believers in Jerusalem! And he is authorized by the leading priests to arrest everyone who calls upon your name.”” (Acts 9:13–14, NLT)

The moment we have a clear word from the Lord, whether we receive it from the scriptures, through prayer, a word of wisdom from someone else or even a prophecy; our response should not be “but Lord.”

But Lord, I need this job. If I don’t accept it, then I can’t pay the bills.

And then your wife tells you the same thing the Lord just told you.

When we say, “but God,” it implies we know all the facts and maybe God has missed out on one or two of them. He hasn’t. He is omniscient. He knows everything. We don’t know. I sure didn’t.

We must just follow, and then watch as He miraculously provides the entire time.

Our answer should be just like Isaiah's, "Here I am." I am in. Let's do this. Our loving Lord explains to Ananias, and he gets onboard. Because of Ananias faithfulness, we have the ministry of Paul including a big chunk of the New Testament.

Acts 9:15–19

"But the Lord said, "Go, for Saul is my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel. And I will show him how much he must suffer for my name's sake." **So Ananias went and found Saul.** He laid his hands on him and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road, has sent me so that you might regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Instantly something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized. Afterward he ate some food and regained his strength. Saul stayed with the believers in Damascus for a few days." (NLT)

Jonah has just accused God of acting like God. He didn't have to go through the city for 3 days, it took only one and the greatest revival in history, up to that point, has now taken place.

It is clear and obvious to all looking on that repentance is happening. Instead of rejoicing with the people of Nineveh, Jonah is mad.

Literally, he has gone to a hill nearby and is pouting about all of this. How angry is he about this?

Furious.

A more idiomatic translation shows the powerful connotations of the combination of these verbs: "Jonah considered it a great evil and his anger burned within him." The Hebrew does not imply that Jonah was merely displeased; Jonah judged God's mercy as a "great evil." (Nogalski 2011, 445)

In that emotional space, he prays and references Exodus 34: 6–7.

Exodus 34:6–7

"The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." (ESV)

Jonah though provides his own interpretation of Exodus 34 when he uses "One who relents of disaster" at the end of verse 2. These are the same words as used in Jonah 3:10. His prayer here shows his true heart toward Nineveh.

Merciless, he is displeased to see God spare a people he resents as bloodthirsty, intolerable enemies who can damage his people. He is, for the moment, more a patriot than a prophet. His prayer exposes his ungracious spirit (4:2, 3). Now he reveals what offended him and turned his head in God's first commission to preach to Ninevites. He ran from God's will because he knew God's graciousness could result in people being spared in a nation that could wreak destruction on Israel. (Rosscup 2008, 1358)

In other words, Jonah is more faithful to his own people than he is to the God of the universe. This is a strong bias and is a warning to us that as we do life and live for the Lord, we must be consistently on the watch for bias as well. Just like my initial strong reaction to praying for the North Koreans, we all have things etched onto our hard drives that the Holy Spirit is working to delete. He will point them out to us and sometimes that can be a bit embarrassing.

Peter found that out when he finally went to see the centurion and realized that gentiles could be saved too.

Acts 10:44–48

“While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, “Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.” (ESV)

Who knows what the Holy Spirit wants to do? Who am I to be in the way of that because of my disobedience. I have learned that I would rather be on the side of “yes Lord” and then wait and see what He wants to do. Pastor Chuck called that “an adventure in faith.”

Look at what God did in Nineveh. But Jonah is praying and asking the Lord to kill him. He would rather die than see the Assyrians be YAHWEH followers and spared by the Lord.

By the way, Jonah never did discuss God’s grace with the Lord before, even though he says he did.

God follows up this prayer by trying to engage Jonah in conversation.

I find this to be a interesting scenario. Here sits the pouting prophet overlooking Nineveh, angry. The Lord appears to him as a result of his prayer and asks a question of Jonah, “Do you have a good reason to be angry?”

Rather than engage with the Lord, Jonah does the one thing he has proven to be good at, remain silent and walk away.

He was worthy of god’s mercy, but not the people of Nineveh.

Yahweh’s question here and the following object lesson focus on how Jonah responds when Yahweh does not act as Jonah thinks he should. (Hoyt 2018, 506)

Jonah 4:5

“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.” (NASB 2020)

No response to the question from the Lord, he spins away and heads off to the east and finds a good place to sit and wait for the destruction of Nineveh. It will be a long wait, but he is no different than many of us are. We want something from the Lord so bad that we sit and wait. Even in the face of no or not now. Forget occupying and serving, I am going to sit and pout.

What does this look like today, it looks like disconnecting from the world and withdrawing into our Christian ghettos. That way we no longer have to engage with the culture. We have decided to bury our talent instead (Matthew 25:24 – 30).

That we see happen all too often. None of what I am about to say is evil or wrong by itself, but what is the motivation?

We homeschool our children in order to ensure they have a Biblical worldview. But we also only let them play with children who having believing parents. So how are we reaching the neighbors?

We boycott whoever the target de jour is and feel that we have helped to move the Kingdom of God forward. We do nothing to talk to our neighbors about the Lord, but they sure do know that we are the ones who still have a flag still flying from a recent presidential candidate. We are patriotic. We fly our nations flag high.

When did following Jesus become a political statement rather than a statement about relationship with the King of Kings? When did we allow love of country to become our idol? Jonah is right in the middle of this conversation.

Once again, we live in this world, but we are not of this world. Our spirit is different. Our mentality is different. Our greatest goals are different. Our methods are different. Even our ultimate allegiance is different since for us there is something higher than the national flag or the team motto or the company slogan. Jesus and Jesus alone is our Lord, and we do not bow the knee of ultimate submission to anyone but Him. (Brown 2022, 32)

Philippians 3:20

“We, however, are citizens of heaven, and we eagerly wait for our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, to come from heaven.” (GNB)

We are to have the mind of Christ which means reaching out to those who are lost, even if we do not agree with them politically. In other words, pray for the people of North Korea, Ken.

Jonah was a representative of YAHWEH, and he was to reflect His mind to those he engaged with. He instead, was more into the idolatry of Hebrew patriotism.

Little did Jonah realize that the Lord’s agenda had a new focus. Having persuaded Nineveh to turn from its evil ways, the Lord now turned his attention to the angry, pouting prophet with the death wish on his lips. He decided to give Jonah an object lesson in order to deliver the prophet from his faulty way of thinking. (Chisholm Jr. 2002, 415)

School is still in session.

So, sitting on this hill east of Nineveh is Jonah...pouting. Watching and waiting for fire to fall from heaven onto Nineveh. But it won’t. They repented. Instead of rejoicing with them, he is grumping at them. So begins the lesson.

Jonah 4:6

“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.” (NASB 2020)

A lesson is to be taught that will help Jonah realize that God is God over everything. The God of the sea and fish is also God over the land.

Just as we have no idea what kind of fish, we also have no idea what kind of plant. It is one that grew rapidly and had large enough and plentiful enough leaves on it to provide shade from the sun near Nineveh.

We read the plant was to help him be relieved of his discomfort. In the Hebrew though, this word does not mean shade from the sun. The word used is רָאָתַּ (rāat) “evil (behavior) — morally objectionable behavior...calamity (event) — an event resulting in great loss and misfortune...evil (harm) — that which causes harm or destruction or misfortune...evil (quality) — the quality of being morally wrong in principle or practice...misery — a state of ill-being due to affliction or misfortune.” (Brannan 2020)

The plant is not there to protect him from the sun, but “from his displeasure or vexation, the evil from which he suffered according to v. 3.” (Keil and Delitzsch 1996, 280) School is in session.

Jonah did not want God to show any mercy to Nineveh, yet he continues to be the recipient of God’s mercy. He was rescued from drowning by a big fish. Now he is going to be comforted by a big plant. Jonah has received mercy from God time and time again, yet he sees the world as very black and white place. The Hebrew people are good, everyone else isn’t. He is entitled to mercy, they aren’t.

Actually, Jonah has been the recipient of grace and mercy. Totally underserved, just like Nineveh.

God is specifically addressing the false perceptions of Jonah.

He has gone off to the east to watch, he thinks, the ultimate destruction of Nineveh with fire from heaven. He sets up shop after once again walking away from God, and God has a plant grow to, he thinks, shade him. But that is not the purpose of the plant. It is meant to deal with his misperceptions of God. He is morally wrong and has and continues to be involved in objectionable behavior, all implied by the word choice.

But Jonah believes this is God approving of him and his choice.

Jonah 4:6–8

“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. But God designated a worm when dawn came the next day, and it attacked the plant and it withered. 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!”” (NASB 2020)

There is something else going on in chapter 4 as well.

YAHWEH is the covenant name for the Hebrew people for God. In chapter 3, when God dealt with the people of Nineveh, the name in Hebrew which showed up was Elohim. The covenant name was not used as the people of Nineveh were not part of that agreement. God is the creator and He is God, but the relationship implied by the name YAHWEH does not exist for the people of Nineveh.

In chapter 4, we see at the outset Jonah’s anger and his prayer to YAHWEH. He relies on the relationship aspect and the covenant name of God. YAHWEH was who he turned from and headed east to pout.

But here in verse 6, the term is Lord God. YAHWEH Elohim. “This is one of the rare appearances of the compound name “LORD God” in Scripture (cf. Gen. 2; 3; et al.). Its use here may help make a transition. God dealt with Jonah as He deals with all humanity in what follows.” (Constable 2003, Jon 4:6)

God has used His creation to teach Jonah about His sovereignty. God provided a storm, a very obedient fish who vomited upon command, a plant, and now a worm and an east wind.

God is using large things and small things. Jonah goes to sleep happy about the plant God has provided.

The word shift regarding the name of God reflects that just as Nineveh is receiving mercy from Elohim, so is Jonah. It has nothing to do with the covenant relationship at all. It has to do with the fact that just like Nineveh did not deserve mercy, Jonah didn’t either. But both will get mercy from God.

Now the worm will indeed turn and provide YAHWEH the opportunity to once again deal with the internal misery Jonah is dealing with.

Jonah wanted God to destroy Nineveh and not show mercy. God showed Jonah mercy and provided a plant to help shade him and provide a small respite of relief. But Jonah wanted judgement on Nineveh. So God will reflect what that looks like to Jonah, He appoints a worm to take out the plant.

In the early light of the morning, the worm goes to work and before the sun is high in the sky, the plant is dead. The intent is to cause Jonah distress, to let him experience a lack of mercy and compassion, exactly what he wants to have happen to Nineveh.

As soon as the sun is up, then comes the east wind, a wind which I have had the privilege to experience in the Middle East. Once the sun is up, you feel like you have placed your face into an oven. Your eyes

ache from the lack of moisture, the wind makes your skin dry, and crack and the sun makes it burn. The air temperature in the summer would be in excess of 120 degrees Fahrenheit. You feel like you are cooking. It does not take long for dehydration to set in, especially if you have no protection from the sun.

The spiritual condition of Jonah is now matched by his physical condition. He is miserable, inside, and out.

For the third time in this book, Jonah seeks death. First by being thrown overboard, then because of his selfishness, now because he is miserable. Once again, he is in a place where he is teachable. Why does he want to die, he finds that much more attractive than repenting. But God is God and Jonah isn't.

Lesson time.

By the way, he could have down the hill back into Nineveh for water and shade. But no, he simply can't bring himself to do so.

Jonah 4:9–11

"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!" 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. 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?" (NASB 2020)

God shows up asking a question, one similar to the first time around. The first time, Jonah walked away.

Now the question is similar, "why are you angry about the plant?" The first time God was hitting Jonah between the eyes about why Jonah would question the character of God and His mercy. God knows Jonah and He knows that now, Jonah will talk.

Jonah defends his anger over the plant and his desire to die. As we read his answer, we see again, that this has been all about the Lord working on Jonah to address Jonah's own problem.

This interaction is very similar to how the prophet Nathan uses the parable of the poor man's sheep to get David to realize his own sin (2 Sam 12:1–14). Jonah has not yet realized that the question is really about himself and not the plant. By affirming his anger over the plant, he has taken the first step; the next step is to make the connection between the plant and Nineveh. (Hoyt 2018, 511-512)

We have seen, from the very beginning of this book, that God has been pursuing Jonah. Jonah has run from God, outwardly returned, but now we see and know the truth. YAHWEH has now exposed Jonah for the phony he is.

Jonah 4:10

"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." (NASB 2020)

Compassion may not be the exact thought here, "bummed out" might be a better phrase. "You are bummed out because the plant is gone."

The loss of this plant has impacted Jonah, he took it as a sign he was okay with God and God was protecting him. But now here is God talking to him, something he has judiciously avoided for months because he knows he needs to repent but still doesn't want to. Just like any prodigal. Jonah doesn't really care about the plant; he cares for what the loss of the plant means to him and his need to deal with his sin.

The vine was a free gift. When God removed it, he simply and unmistakably underlined that fact. But Jonah acted as if God owed him the vine. And that is the proof that he did not receive it in the first place as a gift of God's grace—freely given by the Giver and wholly unmerited in the recipient. The vine, therefore, preached grace to ungracious Jonah. Jonah had been pleased with his vine. But he loved the comfort afforded by the vine, rather than the grace that raised it up to shade him from the sun. It was his vine and because he felt that way he also felt wronged by God when it was taken away. (Keddie 1986, 121-122)

Jonah 4:11

“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?” (NASB 2020)

The plant is not the issue. The issue is not the nameless and faceless citizens of Nineveh or Assyria, but we see very clearly the love of God towards His creation as He points out these are unbelievers who are struggling to get it right, they are people, children, animals. These are faces and names that God knows are lost without turning from their sin, which they have now done.

They do not know how to follow YAHWEH. Responsible for their sin, absolutely, but now they have repented. What now? They are like us suddenly confronting a city of brand-new believers in Jesus Christ. Now what?

Yahweh is not asking for an answer from Jonah but is rhetorically pointing out, almost sarcastically, that he will show compassion. Just as the flawed Jonah showed compassion to a plant he was not invested in, Yahweh will show compassion on Nineveh, which he is invested in. (Hoyt 2018, 515)

YAHWEH has now shown Jonah what forgiveness and compassion look like. God is God and He will indeed show mercy on who He will. God is sovereign and Jonah isn't.

So, does Jonah respond? He does just as he has done throughout this book, silence. This has frustrated those who read this book for centuries. Did he repent? Did he get it? Does he now understand the mercy of God? Is he no longer self-absorbed?

The silence is intentional. It is there to throw us into this book. We all identify at one level or another with Jonah.

By not answering this question, the author allows us to insert ourselves into the story at the end. Did we learn? Are we going to follow the examples of the sailors and the Ninevites by turning to God? Will we see the importance of the other people in our lives? Or will we remain self-absorbed like Jonah? (Bob 2016, 227)

Will we see the massive number of gentiles who turn to the Lord all in need of discipling? Jonah could have stepped up and taught them all about YAHWEH. We do not know if he did.

But since Jesus referred to this book as a picture of his death and resurrection, we also see it is a picture of what His death and resurrection will do for the nations. They are all now in the view of the Lord to be ones who will have the opportunity to repent of their sin. To respond to the simple message of the cross and what Jesus did for all of us there. God loves the lost and wants to see them repent.

Do we see the world through the eyes of Jesus or through the eyes of Jonah. What makes us angry? Do we make excuses to justify our anger and allow that to take our eye off what our number one mission is, to make disciples.

God intentionally challenged the motives of Jonah, and he was found wanting. He looked like he had repented back in the fish, but his heart never truly let go of the self-will that was there, and God intentionally and specifically address that. I do not want a Jonah experience to learn that lesson myself.

He wants our heart and our minds, all of us actually. As believers, we must maintain that line of communication and keep ourselves in the position of learning how to think and live the way Jesus would.

1 John 1:9

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous, so that He will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (NASB 2020)

Works Cited

- Allen, Leslie C. 1976. *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
- Bob, Rabbi Steven. 2016. *Jonah and the Meaning of Our Lives: A Verse-by-Verse Contemporary Commentary*. Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society.
- Brannan, Rick, ed. 2020. *Lexham Research Lexicon of the Hebrew Bible, Lexham Research Lexicons*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.
- Brown, Michael L. 2022. *The Political Seduction of the Church: How Millions of American Christians Have Confused Politics with the Gospel*. Kindle Edition. Washington, DC: Vide Press LLC.
- Chisholm Jr., Robert B. 2002. *Handbook on the Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Minor Prophets*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.
- Constable, Thomas L. 2003. "Notes on Jonah." In *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*, by Thomas L. Constable. Galaxie Software.
- Fullilove, Bill. 2023. "Does God Judge Nation-States Today?" *The Washington Institute for Faith, Vocation and Culture*. McLean Presbyterian Church. Accessed January 18, 2023. <https://washingtoninst.org/does-god-judge-nation-states-today/>.
- Got Questions Ministries. 2014-2021. *Got Questions? Bible Questions Answered*. Vol. 2. Bellingham, WA: Faithlife.
- Hoyt, JoAnna M. 2018. *Amos, Jonah, & Micah, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary*. Edited by H. Wayne House and William D. Barrick. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.
- Keddie, Gordon J. 1986. *Preacher on the Run: The Meaning of Jonah, Welwyn Commentary Series*. Darlington: Evangelical Press.
- Keil, Carl Friedrich, and Franz Delitzsch. 1996. *Jonah*. Vol. 10, in *Commentary on the Old Testament*, by Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, translated by James Martin. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.
- Koenig, R. William. 2006. *Eye to Eye: Facing the Consequences of Dividing Israel*. Kindle Edition. McLean, VA: About Him Publishing.
- Nogalski, James D. 2011. *The Book of the Twelve: Hosea-Malachi, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary*. Edited by Leslie Andres and Samuel E. Balentine. Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Incorporated.
- Richards, Lawrence O. 1987. *The Teacher's Commentary*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.
- Rosscup, James E. 2008. *An Exposition on Prayer in the Bible: Igniting the Fuel to Flame Our Communication with God*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.
- Thompson, W. Ralph. 1969. *The Book of Jonah*. Vol. 3, in *The Wesleyan Bible Commentary*, by Kenneth E. Jones, Bert H. Hall, Claude A. Ries, W. Ralph Thompson and J. Kenneth Grider. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.