

Jonah Chapter 4

Jonah 4:1 "But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry."

“Displeased ... exceedingly ... very angry”: Jonah still maintains a false Jewish nationalism and hatred of all non-Jews, especially Assyrians.

Jonah, because of his rejection of Gentiles and distaste for their participation in salvation, was displeased at God’s demonstration of mercy towards the Ninevites. Thereby displaying the real reason for his original flight to Tarshish.

Jonah had judged these people not worthy to be saved. He is now angry that God has forgiven them. Perhaps he was angry, because the warning he had given them had not been carried out. I believe he just harbored great hate toward these people, and did not want God to save them. His anger was toward God, and that is very dangerous.

He had thought that the Hebrews were the only ones worthy to be saved. If God saves the Gentiles, he thinks that will make the Hebrews less special to God.

Jonah 4:2 "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."

From the very beginning, Jonah had clearly understood the gracious character of God (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9). He had received pardon, but didn’t want Nineveh to know God’s mercy (a similar attitude in Luke 15:25).

He was actually questioning the good judgment of God. He did not want Nineveh to repent, and be forgiven. His hate was overwhelming. All of the prophets knew that God threatened, many times, to cause the people to repent. Jonah did not want Nineveh saved.

Jonah 4:3 "Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for [it is] better for me to die than to live."

“It is better for me to die than to live”: Perhaps Jonah was expressing the reality of breaking his vow (2:9), to God a second time (Num. 30:2; Eccl. 5:1-6).

Experts in human behavior have noted a link between hatred for others and pity for oneself. Jonah wanted to die because the Ninevites had repented. The core of Jonah’s concern is revealed in his words: “It is better for me”. Jonah could not have God’s heart for others because he was consumed with himself.

Jonah 4:4 "Then said the LORD, Doest thou well to be angry?"

"Doest thou well to be angry?" Is anger good for thee? No, anger is good for no man. But an angry preacher, minister, bishop, or prophet, is an abominable man. He who, in denouncing the word of God against sinners, joins his own passions with the Divine threatenings, is a cruel and bad man, and should not be an overseer in God's house.

A surly bishop, a peevish, passionate preacher, will bring neither glory to God, nor good to man. Dr. Taylor renders the clause, "Art thou very much grieved?" A man may be very much grieved that a sinner is lost; but who but he who is of a fiendish nature will be grieved because God's mercy triumphs over judgment?

God is disappointed at Jonah's anger. God makes Jonah examine himself rather than condemn him.

Jonah 4:5 "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."

"So Jonah went out of the city": Had not the inhabitants of it repented, he had done right to go out of it, and shake the dust of his feet against it. Or, in such a case, had he gone out of it, as Lot out of Sodom, when it was going to be overthrown.

But Jonah went out in a sullen fit, because it was to be spared. Though some render the words, "now Jonah had gone out of the city"; that is, before all this passed, recorded in the preceding verses. And so Aben Ezra observes, that the Scripture returns here to make mention of the affairs of Jonah, and what happened before the accomplishment of the forty days.

"And sat on the east side of the city": Where he might have very probably a good sight of it; and which lay opposite of the road to his own country. That, if the inhabitants should pursue him, they would miss of him; which some suppose he might be in fear of, should their city be destroyed.

"And there made him a booth": Of the boughs of trees, which he erected, not to continue in, but for a short time, expecting in a few days the issue of his prediction.

"And sat under it in the shadow": To shelter him from the heat of the sun.

"Till he might see what would become of the city": Or, "what would be done in" it, or "with" it. If this was after he knew that the Lord had repented of the evil he threatened, and was disposed to show mercy to the city. And which, as Kimchi thinks, was revealed to him by the spirit of prophecy. Then he sat here, expecting the repentance of the Ninevites would be a short lived one.

Like the goodness of Ephraim and Judah, as the morning cloud, and early dew that passes away. And that then God would change his dispensations towards them again, as he had done; or however he might expect.

That though the city was not totally overthrown, yet that there would be something done. Some lesser judgment fall upon them, as a token of the divine displeasure. And which might save his credit as a prophet.

Jonah is like a pouting little boy. He will just sit outside the city in a booth, until God destroys the city. He had made up his mind that God would go ahead and destroy Nineveh, to please him. He sits there, possibly, until the forty days expire. He still wants the city destroyed.

Jonah 4:6 "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."

“A gourd”: This seems to be a fast growing plant which in hot climates grows rapidly to give shade with its large leaves.

Jonah becomes even more proud, when God makes a gourd come up out of the ground to shade him. He will really feel his importance to God now. His grief is not a physical thing, but a trouble in his mind.

Jonah 4:7 "But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered."

"But God prepared a worm": By being eaten through the root, the plant, losing its nourishment, would soon wither; and this was the case in the present instance.

The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away. This is undoubtedly the funniest thing in this. Just when Jonah is so proud of God doing special things for him, God causes the worm to eat the gourd. Now Jonah does not have any shade. God is trying to teach Jonah that God can bless whoever He wishes, whenever He wishes.

Jonah 4:8 "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."

“A vehement east wind”: A hot, scorching wind, normally called “sirocco,” blowing off the Arabian desert. The shelter Jonah made for himself (verse 5), would not exclude this agent of God’s sovereignty.

With all the other shortcomings Jonah had, he also felt sorry for himself. God is trying to show Jonah how unforgiving he is. God is showing him, that he should have mercy on the people of Nineveh, if he plans for God to have mercy upon him.

Jonah 4:9 "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."

"I do well to be angry, even unto death": Many persons suppose that the gifts of prophecy and working miracles are the highest that can be conferred on man. But they are widely mistaken, for the gifts change not the heart. Jonah had the gift of prophecy, but had not received that grace which destroys the old man and creates the soul anew in Christ Jesus.

This is the love of which Paul speaks, which if a man has not, though he had the gift of prophecy, and could miraculously remove mountains. Yet in the sight of God, and for any good himself might reap from it, it would be as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal.

Jonah was a prophet, and yet had all his old bad tempers about him, in a shameful predominance. Balaam was of the same kind. So we find that God gave the gift of prophecy even to graceless men. But many of the prophets were sanctified in their nature before their call to the prophetic office, and were the most excellent of men.

Of course, Jonah has no right to be angry. He is like a spoiled child. He is so angry, that it nearly kills him.

Jonah 4:10 "Then said the LORD, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not labored, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night:"

God's love for the people of Nineveh, whom He had created, is far different from Jonah's indifference to their damnation and greater than Jonah's warped concern for a wild plant for which he had done nothing.

God is shaming Jonah, that he had pity on a gourd, and yet, did not have pity on the people of Nineveh. Plants of life have a very short life span. They are not made in the image of God, like people are.

Jonah 4:11 "And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and [also] much cattle?"

"Sixscore thousand persons": The message of Jonah rings out loud and clear: God cares for the heathen! God will spare no extreme to get His message to them, even when the messenger is deliberately disobedient. God will marshal His animate and inanimate creation to bring correction to His messenger and fulfill His purpose for the world.

God was ready to spare Sodom for 10 righteous; how much more a city which includes 120,000 small children, identified as those who cannot discern the right hand from the left (Gen. 18:22-23). With that many 3 or 4 year old children, it is reasonable to expect a total population in excess of 600,000.

God's question referring to those "that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand" has been interpreted as concerning children who had not yet reached the age of moral accountability, or those who were spiritually ignorant.

If the latter is adopted, the 600,000 either refers to the population of Nineveh at large, or as was often customary in the ancient Near East, refers to the number of adult males eligible to fight. In any case, the 600,000 is doubtless merely a representative guide to the number of people in greater Nineveh.

God has driven the point home. The people of Nineveh were human beings. There were over 600,000 people there who would have been lost, had God not had mercy upon them.

God is making Jonah the judge of whether He should have saved these people, or not. God is not controlled by things of the flesh, as Jonah was. God is forgiving and loving. He saves, because of His grace, and not because of our worthiness. Salvation is a free gift. God is telling Jonah, that these people had never been taught about God, and they did not know they were doing wrong.

When God showed them of their error, they repented and changed their lifestyle. To be forgiven, we must forgive. We do not hear the outcome of this. I sincerely hope that Jonah agreed with God and forgave them. God is fair. He gives us all ample time to repent and be saved.

Jonah Chapter 4 Questions

1. What did Jonah feel about Nineveh being saved?
2. Jonah had judged these people _____ to be saved.
3. Who was his anger toward?
4. Who did he think were the only ones worthy to be saved?
5. Why does he not want the Gentiles saved?
6. What was he actually questioning?
7. What did all the prophets know about God's threats?
8. What request does Jonah make in verse 3?
9. Describe Jonah.
10. What question did God ask him in verse 4?
11. What did Jonah do, because he wanted to see the city destroyed?
12. What is Jonah like?
13. The Lord God prepared a _____.
14. What was it for?

15. What effect did this have on Jonah?
16. What did God do to the gourd?
17. What lesson is God trying to teach Jonah?
18. What caused Jonah to faint?
19. What question does God ask Jonah about the gourd?
20. How angry is Jonah?
21. Why is God shaming Jonah?
22. The 120,000 people of Nineveh could not discern between what?
23. God saves, because of His _____, and not because of our _____.
24. How is God fair in His judgments?