

## Jonah's Anger And The LORD's Compassion

(4:1-11)

**Intro:** This fourth and final chapter of the Book of Jonah is a record of God's interaction with His rebellious prophet. The chapter opens with the sixth episode in 4:1-4, which parallels the third episode in 1:17–2:10. Both episodes record Jonah's prayers. In his previous prayer Jonah was thankful for God's compassion in delivering him from death. In this prayer, Jonah is exceedingly angry over God's compassionate deliverance of the Ninevites. The seventh and final episode in 4:5-11 has no parallel and serves as the climax of the story. The LORD appoints a plant, a worm, and a scorching east wind to teach Jonah a lesson on compassion (4:5-11). The book ends with a powerful contrast between the way of God, gracious and forgiving, and the way of Jonah, angry and unforgiving (vv. 10-11).

### **Sixth Episode: Jonah's Angry Prayer (4:1-4)**

Look at Jonah's angry reaction to the LORD's deliverance of the Ninevites in 4:1

#### A. Jonah prayed to the LORD (4:1-2a)

1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry. 2 And he prayed to the LORD.

Jonah was furious at God for sparing the Ninevites from destruction. In the previous episode, the fifth (3b-10), the pagan Ninevites repented of their evil ways and God relented concerning the calamity/destruction, which He had declared He would bring upon them (3:10). God's gracious reaction to the Ninevites' repentance caused Jonah to be exceedingly angry.

There is actually an *ironic twist* woven into the fabric of this story that we miss in our English translations. The book opens with God sending His prophet to pronounce judgment against the Ninevites, characterized as wicked (*ra'ah*); and here at the conclusion of the book, the prophet Jonah is the one who is acting wickedly (*ra'ah*) because of his refusal to forgive the Assyrians. God sent Jonah to denounce Nineveh's **wickedness** (*ra'ah*). His message of impending doom caused the Ninevites to turn from their **wickedness** (*ra'ah*) (3:10), but resulted in Jonah's becoming **exceedingly angry** [*ra'ah*] at God (4:1). The wicked (*ra'ah*) pagans are in harmony with God, but Jonah is not, and he is now characterized by anger (*ra'ah*).

## B. Jonah's prayer (vv. 2b-3)

The author informs us for the first time, in verse 2b, why Jonah attempted to run away from God's commission/call to go to Nineveh.

**v. 2**—Jonah, 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 Thou art a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity.”

Jonah knew the LORD would spare Nineveh if the people repented. This is the reason he tried to flee to Tarshish in chapter 1. He knew, according to **Exodus 34:6-7**, that God's character was one of grace and compassion—“*The LORD, the LORD, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness, a God who relents from sending calamity in the form of judgment.*”

Jonah knew that God was a God of grace and mercy because of His repeated forgiveness of Jonah's disobedient ancestors, and of the prophet himself. **He knew that if people repent God will relent, forgo judgment.** These words in Exodus 34:6-7 were spoken shortly after the awful sin of the people of Israel with the golden calf in Exodus 32.

Jonah's worst fear had been realized, *the people of Nineveh believed in God*, they repented from the greatest to the least of them (3:5). Even the king of Nineveh repented and issued a royal proclamation calling on all the people to turn from their wicked and violent ways (3:7-8).

Jonah's disregard for human life and bitter hatred of the Assyrians is shocking. However, as we noted in our introduction to the book, the Assyrians were one of the cruelest and most feared nations on earth. In their quest for world dominance, Assyria had carried-out unspeakable atrocities throughout the Mediterranean states, including Israel. An Assyrian monument from the time portrays Israel's king Jehu bowing down before the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III (855-824 B.C.).

The thought of God extending mercy to these wicked and barbaric people was more than Jonah could take. Rather than live with the realization that his message of coming judgment had resulted in the deliverance of Nineveh from destruction, Jonah asks God to take his life, v. 3

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

Jonah viewed death as better than seeing Nineveh saved. Perhaps he knew that these very people, the Assyrians, would ultimately be used by God to discipline His rebellious and sinful people Israel forty years later in 722 B.C.

C. The LORD’s response (v. 4)

v. 4—And the LORD said, “Do you have good reason to be angry?”

Jonah refuses to answer God, and storms out of the city.

**Seventh Episode: Jonah’s Lesson About Compassion (4:5-11)**

As noted in the introduction, this seventh and final episode (vv. 5-11) has no parallel, and serves to present the climax of the story. The LORD appoints a plant, a worm, and a scorching East wind to teach Jonah a lesson on compassion (4:5-11).

A. Jonah’s angry response: *He sits and sulks under a shelter he made* (v. 5)

v. 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.”

Rather than respond to God’s prompting, Jonah hurried out of the city to the east of it. He built a shelter to protect himself from the blistering Assyrian sun and sat under the shade of. He sat and stewed over God’s gracious deliverance of the people of Nineveh. He may have been hoping that God would still destroy these wicked people.

B. The LORD gives Jonah a lesson on compassion (vv. 6-9)

1. God’s appoints a plant to shade Jonah (v. 6)

The LORD attempts to turn Jonah from his wicked (*ra’ah*) disposition. We read in v. 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 (*ra’ah*). And Jonah was extremely happy about the plant.”

What a demonstration of grace. God appointed a vine, probably the castor oil plant, whose large leaves provided His sulking prophet with instant relief from the scorching sun.

2. God appoints a worm to eat the plant (v. 7)

Jonah's misplaced happiness over the shade provided by the plant was short lived. For we read in **verse 7** "On dawn of the next day **God appointed** a worm, and it attacked the plant and it withered."

3. God appoints a scorching east wind (v. 8a)

To make matters worse, we read in **verse 8a**, "God appointed a scorching east wind" known as a *sirocco*, that, in combination with the blazing Assyrian sun, beat down on Jonah's head making him faint.

God again appointed or called on nature to teach His sulking prophet a valuable lesson about His compassion. Don't miss the irony here. Whereas God exercises His sovereign control over the elements of nature, He patiently applies pressure to get Jonah to confess his wicked (*ra'ah*) attitude in refusing to forgive the Assyrians as God graciously forgave them.

4. Jonah's anger over the plant (vv. 8b-9)

The combination of the blazing Assyrian sun on his head, and the scorching east wind off the desert caused Jonah to faint. This led him to repeat his earlier request to die, 8b

**v. 8b**—Jonah begged with *all* his soul to die, saying, "Death is better to me than life."

Jonah's refusal to repent, results in God's asking him the same basic question He had posed to him in verse 4, but in a slightly different form, v. 9

**v. 9**—God said to Jonah, "Do you have good reason to be angry (*ra'ah*) about the plant?" Jonah answered, "I have good reason to be angry (*ra'ah*), even unto death."

C. God's concluding word: His compassion for the people of Nineveh (vv. 10-11)

**vv. 10-11**—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. **11** “And 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?”

The book ends with a powerful contrast between Jonah's anger over the death of a plant and God's delight in Nineveh's turning to Him for life. Jonah mourned the loss of an inanimate plant he had neither planted or caused to grow. He had no right to make any claims regarding the plant. It had been a gift of God's grace. The LORD was trying to drive home a lesson on His sovereignty and grace. His question to Jonah was, “Who are you [Jonah] to question Me?” This is the same lesson Job learned.

God's question captures the very intention of the book. The issue is one of *mercy and grace*. Just as God graciously provided Jonah with shade from a vine he did not deserve, so too the Ninevites deliverance was based upon a gracious repentance they did not deserve or fully understand. *God's wish for His creation is salvation, not destruction*. He patiently and graciously works to bring even the most unworthy people in the world to salvation.

The message is driven home in **verse 11** as the LORD describes Nineveh as having “more than 120,000 persons who cannot tell their right hand from their left hand.” Most commentators are of the opinion that this number refers to the children and infants in the city of Nineveh. This would put the total number of adults in Nineveh at well over 800,000, possibly a million.

Conclusion:

The lesson that God attempted to teach Jonah is this—if the plant, for which he did not labor, brought so much joy to Jonah, how much more does a repentant sinner (or in this case hundreds of thousands) bring joy to God, seeing as how the sinner is the object of God's compassion, grace, and love?

Applications:

1. Are plants, that is stuff, more important to you than people?

2. Have you forgiven others who have hurt you or wronged you?
3. Do you share the salvation available through faith in Christ with others?
4. Have you accepted God's forgiveness through the gracious gift of His Son Jesus Christ?

**Closing Song: Come to Jesus**