

God Gets the Last Word

Jonah 4:1-11
February 18, 2024

Jonah is irritated when God decides not to wipe out Nineveh after they repent. He's annoyed with God's kindness, and he's more upset about a shady plant than the people of Nineveh being spared. The book finishes with Jonah trying to wrap his head around God's big-picture view on mercy and compassion.

Jonah 4:1-11¹

¹ But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. ² And he prayed to the LORD and said, "O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. ³ Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." ⁴ And the LORD said, "Do you do well to be angry?" ⁵ Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city. ⁶ Now the LORD God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. ⁷ But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. ⁸ When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, "It is better for me to die than to live." ⁹ But God said to Jonah, "Do you do well to be angry for the plant?" And he said, "Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die." ¹⁰ And the LORD said, "You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. ¹¹ And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?"

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Opening Questions

- Pray for insight and understanding into the text (Psalm 119:18)
- Take the time to highlight key phrases from the text. Look for repeated wording, contrasts, similarities and things that are emphasized.
- Highlight key words or actions in which you see the characters engaged.
- In one clear sentence summarize the passage and write your sentence below.

Bible Study

1. Have you ever found yourself upset or even angry about something trivial? How did you react? Was it right for you to be angry? Why or why not?
2. Read Jonah 3:10-4:2. What was it that “displeased Jonah exceedingly”?
3. In verse 2 Jonah explains why he disobeyed the Lord in the first place. Why didn’t he want to go to Nineveh? Does this surprise you?
4. Compare Jonah’s prayer after God showed him mercy by rescuing him from drowning (2:1-9) with his prayer after God showed the Ninevites mercy by relenting of his wrath (4:2-3). What is different about Jonah’s attitude and response?
5. Read Ephesians 2:1-4. In his anger toward God’s decision to show mercy to the Ninevites, what was Jonah forgetting about himself?
6. Notice that Jonah does not respond to the Lord’s question in verse 4. Why might this be?
7. Compare Jonah’s attitude in verse 1 and verse 6. What do these verses reveal about Jonah’s heart?
8. What phrase is repeated in verses 6-8? Compare this with 1:4, 1:17, and 2:10. What major theme is presented here and woven throughout the book of Jonah?
9. God’s continues to demonstrate grace to Jonah by appointing a plant to provide him with shade in the heat of the day. Why would God later appoint a worm to attack the plant? In what way might the worm still be an extension of God’s grace?

10. What does it mean that the Ninevites did not know their right hand from their left?

Diving Deeper

1. Think of last time you were angry about something. Reflect carefully on these questions:
 - a. Why were you angry?

 - b. Was it right for you to be angry?

 - c. In your anger, were you primarily focused on your own needs and desires or the good of others?

2. Read Ephesians 4:26.
 - a. Is anger always sinful?

 - b. How would you differentiate between righteous and unrighteous (sinful) anger?

 - c. Read Nehemiah 5:6 Mark 3:1-5, Matthew 21:12-13. How does the anger in these passages contrast that of Jonah?

3. Read verse 9. Is there anything in your life that you feel you could not live without? If so, in what ways might this reveal idolatry in your life?

4. Whereas Jonah viewed the Ninevites as depraved enemies of God deserving only His wrath, God saw them as his created beings who were ignorant and lost (verse 11).
 - a. How do you view the unbelievers in your family, your workplace, and your community?

 - b. Read John 8:34, 2 Corinthians 4:4, and Ephesians 2:1-4. How will you pray for the unbelievers in your life in light of these verses?