

Jonah Chapter 4

Introduction

By the end of chapter three, the citizens of Nineveh had heard the Word of the Savior God, had been brought to rely on His mercy and were turning away from their evil and violence. Undoubtedly they were overjoyed to know the peace that surpasses all understanding. Undoubtedly the LORD of life was delighted to have these souls called out of darkness into His marvelous light. Apparently more days remained on the forty day countdown clock. So where, physically, psychologically, and spiritually is the prophet Jonah at this time?

Jonah 4:1 - But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry.

Literally: "It was evil to Jonah, a great evil, and he became hot."

What is so evil to Jonah?

Jonah 4:2 - He prayed to the LORD, "O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.

What's your reaction to the following phrases?

....He prayed to the LORD

.....this is why I was so quick to flee

....I knew...you are gracious

....I knewyou are slow to anger (long in the nostrils)

Jonah 4:3 - Now, O LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."

Can you think of any other Bible characters who express this kind of 'death wish'?

Why would Jonah issue this ultimatum to the Lord? (it's them or me)

One commentator wrote, "Unless corrected again, Jonah was in danger of dying spiritually. That, his gracious and compassionate God would not allow."

Jonah 4:4 - But the LORD replied, "Have you any right to be angry?"

"This could have gone in a different direction" - Why might someone write that next to this verse?

Jonah 4:5 - Jonah went out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city.

What does this verse tell you about Jonah?

Jonah 4:6 - Then the LORD God provided a vine and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the vine.

What does this verse tell you about the LORD?

What does this verse tell you about Jonah?

What application are you able to make to your own life?

Jonah 4:7-8 - But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the vine so that it withered. 8 When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to die than to live."

"LORD God provided" – notice the name change from the LORD to the LORD God, emphasizing God's almighty power over life and death.

"worm..chewed" – a military term is used here for the word, "chewed." Literally, the worm 'attacked' the vine.

"sun blazed" – again, same military term (the sun "attacked" Jonah's head)

How is Jonah's 'death wish' here different from the one he had a couple of verses back?

What lesson is God teaching Jonah?

Jonah 4:9-11 - But God said to Jonah, "Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?" "I do," he said. "I am angry enough to die." But the LORD said, "You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?"

What is the LORD trying to teach Jonah through this object lesson?

Jonah 4:11 - But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left

"more than 120,000 who cannot tell their right hand from their left"

☞ Some interpret this as a standard expression for a multitude or an immeasurably large quantity.

☞ Some (including Luther) interpret this as referring to the whole population, who were spiritual infants and didn't know their right from their left.

☞ Many interpret this as referring to the youths who had not reached the age of discretion (cf. Deuteronomy 1:39). Thus the total population of Nineveh could have been about 500,000+.

The abrupt ending does not offer up Jonah's answer to the question but it leaves no doubt as to how the LORD wanted Jonah (and us) to answer it. *"It is a question meant to disturb the complacent people of complacent churches who would claim God's unlimited mercy to themselves but would limit it to others."*

Application

1. Can you list any situations in which you might use the Lord's words, "Do you have any right to be angry?" to help control your sinful anger?
2. When we are inclined toward feelings of despair and hopelessness, we are looking in the wrong direction and at the wrong person. Explain.
3. Jonah's response to the Lord's loving rebuke of his sin was silence. Why?
4. What is your reaction to the ending of Jonah? Does it have a happy ending?