
Jonah

The Anger of Jonah

Jonah 4

Anger is a serious problem in the lives of those who are struggling with the difficulties of living in a fallen world. We get angry because something or someone interferes with life going the way we think it should. We can get angry with the sin and suffering we see in this lives of others. And certainly this is appropriate. I really get burned when I see someone being judgmental of a person when they have absolutely no idea of the pain and suffering in their target's life. I also have real problems dealing with the abuser when seeing the results of abuse in the lives of children.

We also get angry because life doesn't treat us the way we believe it should. And sometimes this anger changes to depression. "Why me, Lord?" is a question we frequently ask. Consequently, we find ourselves getting angry with God and depressed at our situation. "Why did you let it happen, God?" Or, since we know God can solve our problems, we get angry and/or depressed because He chooses not to, or at least not our way. Sometimes we respond like a little child, throwing a tantrum because we didn't get our way. We run away and hide, pouting because we don't understand what's going on. But, when was the last time you got angry because God did something right? Well that certainly seems to be Jonah's problem. He was mad because God was merciful. He was depressed because 120,000 people weren't killed.

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I Introduction: Jonah had carried out his mission. Granted, he did so under duress. God had called him to bring the message of judgment to Nineveh. Jonah knew if the people repented, God would withhold judgment. But he wanted the people to be judged. And sure enough, the people repented so God withheld judgment. Jonah experienced the greatest evangelistic success ever. Was he overjoyed? No, he was devastated and angry with God.

Chapter 4 shows how God met Jonah's needs. It demonstrates how Jonah let the loss of his plant become the trigger for an outpouring of all his frustration. He didn't understand that his present circumstances reflected God's will for him. God was concerned with His own goals and Jonah's growth. To Jonah, however, the destruction of a plant became "the straw that broke the camel's back."

The message of this last chapter of Jonah is God's perspective for Jonah. This same lesson is one believers are still dealing with — God's perspective for Christians. Believers need to be willing to accept their circumstances as the environment in which Christian maturity is developed. If God loves us and cares for us, then as we are obedient to Him we are were we need to be.

II God’s Perspective for Jonah: Verse 1: Jonah’s attitude toward his “great work” was not exactly positive. Chapter 4 finds him pouting over the mercy of God. This reaction is not what you’d expect, considering Jonah had been given the opportunity to be used in the greatest evangelistic crusade in history.

Jonah did more than pout; He was bent out of shape. He was extremely angry, and his anger was with the Lord. We find frequently in Scripture that people become angry at the good work of God, when it isn’t done in an acceptable manner. Remember Naaman, he wanted God to heal him. “But Naaman went away angry and said,

“I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than any of the waters of Israel? Couldn’t I wash in them and be cleansed?” So he turned and went off in a rage” (2 Kings 5:11-12).

Naaman didn’t like God’s methods. — Jonah knew God. He knew God was merciful. That was the problem for Jonah. He had run from the face of God because of his concern that the Ninevites would repent and be saved. He didn’t want to be part of that event. Now, all that he feared had come to pass. The people had repented and God had decided not to judge them. The bottom line was: Jonah wanted them to be judged.

Verse 2: Once again Jonah prays. Last time, from inside the fish, he praised the Lord. This time he prays in anger. Jonah actually accused God of being gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, and abundant in lovingkindness. Can you imagine anything more strange than berating God for such wonderful qualities? The New Testament instructs believers to emulate these qualities, but at the moment, Jonah saw them as negative. And note, God didn’t punish him for his anger. But God did intend to show Jonah the problem with his attitude.

Verse 3: Jonah’s frustration and anger had reached the point where his only desire was death, a death at the hands of God. This was a sincere desire. He would rather die than see the destruction of the Hebrew people instead of that of the Ninevites. In Chapter 2, Jonah praised God for snatching him from the jaws of death.

“In my distress I called to the Lord, and he answered me. From the depths of the grave I called for help, and you listened to my cry” (Jonah 2: 1-2).

Now, in contrast, Jonah wants to die. God didn’t even respond to this request. He simply asked, “Why are you angry?” Again — Jonah was angry at the righteous work of God. He was angry at grace and mercy because he believed it was going to the wrong people.

Note the context in which this anger was expressed. Jonah was praying to the Lord. His confidence in the Lord was such that he had no fear of expressing his true feelings. Believers must accept that it is better to express anger to the Lord than to deny it, for He knows of it anyway. If you really are committed to the kind of relationship with the Lord that you should have, then you must be totally honest with Him. Don’t fall into the same trap as Jonah, acting as if you can withhold something from Him.

“ O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord” (Psalm 139:1-4).

The other point that should be noted here is that we do not have to be fearful of going to God with our anger. He is suffered even as we have and so is able to empathize with our pain.

“ For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted” (Hebrew 2:17-18).

Naturally, God had no intention of granting Jonah’s request. Jonah was angry and depressed. Depression frequently arises from believing life comes from having a specific goal fulfilled and knowing it wouldn’t be. In this situation Jonah believed life, for himself, for Israel came from having the Ninevites destroyed. He also knew this wouldn’t happen. He was depressed. *Can you think of any situation is which you have believed life came from circumstantial changes that you knew wouldn’t happen? Did this lead to depression?*

Depression can also come after spiritual victory because of the physical and emotional cost of that victory. Elijah defeated the prophets of Baal. And then ...

“ Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day's journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. “I have had enough, Lord,” he said. “Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors ” ” (1 Kings 19:4).

So Jonah wasn’t unique as a servant of God who at a moment in time desired death.

Verse 4: Jonah said, “I just wish God would let me die.” Instead, God planed to give him the opportunity to understand the importance of love and mercy. God responded by asking the question, “Do you have a good reason to be angry?” The very nature of Jonah’s anger was to question the judgment of God. Jonah was saying God had made a mistake. Jonah identified God’s strengths as weaknesses because they caused God to act contrary to Jonah’s desires.

Verse 5: So, in a huff, Jonah goes out to the edge of town on a hill and settles down to see if God will do anything. He made himself a booth. Clearly he was there for the duration. Apparently, Jonah still hoped maybe the repentance of the city was false, or maybe God would come to His senses and still destroy the city. Jonah would not give up his desire for destruction. He certainly couldn’t answer God’s question. Had he been truly honest, he would have had to admit that he shouldn’t be angry with God. Jonah was saying that his own wisdom was greater than God’s.

Verse 6: Nevertheless, God prepared a lesson in mercy for Jonah. The third supernatural intervention in the life of Jonah occurs here. God prepared a plant to shade Jonah, to give him comfort. Jonah, sitting there waiting for something to happen, appreciated the gift. It gave him joy. God demonstrated love and care for Jonah, but Jonah took this care for granted. Ap-

parently Jonah was a man of extremes. He was extremely displeased with God, and now he was extremely pleased with the plant. In his commentary on Jonah, Charles Feinberg notes that this is the only time Jonah is happy. The source of this happiness was personal comfort, a totally selfish attitude.

Verse 7: So, Jonah was sitting comfortably up on the hill waiting, and hoping that God might still destroy the city. He did not want to recognize the repentance of the people, except as a hindrance to their destruction. Jonah didn't desire God's mercy for the Ninevites. So, God supernaturally intervened for the fourth time. God chose a worm to destroy Jonah's plant.

Verse 8: The fifth case of supernatural intervention was a scorching east wind, called up by God. As Jonah sat, waiting and hoping for the destruction of Nineveh, he started to bake, his sheltering plant having died. Again he pleads for death. Absolutely nothing was going right. It seems he was in a deep depression.

Verse 9: God had a question for Jonah. Did Jonah have a right to be angry about the death of the plant? Jonah's response was, "yes." His anger at the situation was warranted, or so he believed. As a result he even thought he had the right to want to die. This was genuine anger. Although a great deal of his stress was a result of his own emotional choices, his pain was real. He had reached the point of burnout.

This is a problem for many believers today. They have reached a point in their lives where the pressure is so severe they feel they can't handle it anymore. As a result they would rather give up than try. *Haven't you ever felt like you would just like the Lord to take you? You didn't want to kill yourself, but did wish the Lord would allow you to die.* Clearly, Jonah's situation isn't unique.

So, Jonah has become attached to the plant. It was his only friend. The death of the gourd became the focus for all Jonah's frustration with his situation. *What was or is your plant?*

Verses 10-11: God's basic message to Jonah was: "Can't you see how unreasonable you are being? You are so wrought up that you want to die over a plant which you had no hand in creating. You have demonstrated compassion for a simple plant. Can't you understand how I can have compassion on 120,000 people who are my creations?"

These people had been without light, and then God provided it. They repented and turned to Him. Jonah came from a people who did know God and so should have been judged by different standards than the Ninevites.

God told Jonah he needed to accept these people as they were. Again, God said they were as animals not knowing their right hand from their left. But they did repent. They did turn to God. This much they did understand. God asked Jonah, "How can you be unfeeling toward these people when you can fall into so intense a depression over the death of a simple plant?"

So ends the book. There is no comment from Jonah, no response. What could he say? But the very record of all this is a testimony to the truth of God's charge against Jonah. What a wonderful picture of the love and mercy of God. He desired salvation for all, Jew and Gentile.

And this is still true today. You should pray that you can look at people through God's eyes, desiring their salvation—no matter what their state.

III God's perspective for Believers: It is amazing how often Christians can lose sight of what the real issues are. God sees the world as it is. You must trust in Him if you are to live in a way that is consistent with the reality of your claimed faith. Two lessons can be learned from Jonah. The first is God loves all people. It is He who chooses believers' contacts. You must seek the power of the Holy Spirit to express God's love for all individuals.

God calls for Christians to love all, desiring their salvation. This should be the case regardless of how they respond. God calls the believer to love even their enemies. Remember the attacks that were made against Christ and His response?

“And as Jesus passed on ..., He saw a man, called Matthew, sitting in the tax office; and He said to him, ‘Follow Me!’ And he rose, and followed Him. And it happened that as He was reclining at table in the house, behold many tax-gatherers and sinners came and joined Jesus and His disciples at the table. And when the Pharisees saw this they said to His disciples, ‘Why does your Teacher eat with the tax-gatherers and sinners?’ But when He heard this, He said, ‘It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are ill. But go and learn what this means, ‘I desire compassion, and not sacrifice;’ for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Matthew 9:9-13).

Living this way means Christians shouldn't be concerned with pleasing men, but with pleasing the Lord.

“For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men?” (Galatians 1:10).

The second lesson found in Chapter 4 deals with the question of God's perspective versus the believer's. It is clear from God's comments to Jonah that somewhere Jonah had lost touch with reality. This is shown by his devastation over the death of a plant, and lack of concern over the potential destruction of the Ninevites.

Sometimes we can get so caught up in our own daily concerns that we lose all perspective on the crucial issues. Matthew 14 gives an account of how the Apostle Peter walked on water. As long as he kept his eyes on Jesus, he was able to walk on water. But when he focused on the waves, he began to sink. Sometimes we are so concerned with the waves, or circumstances, that we lose all sight of the Savior. Sometimes we aren't even seeing waves, but swells which only appear to be waves.

Believers can get so overwhelmed by life that they get knocked over by a ripple. For example, children can be extremely difficult. Some jobs make one feel the need for permanent retirement. However, reality is being loved by the Lord, and allowing Him to decide what is necessary for growth.

The lesson of Jonah for the unbeliever is that God loves all people and desires to provide them with the gift of salvation and eternal life. This can be received as Paul notes:

“For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures ...” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

If you accept this gift, then you can look forward to an eternity of joy in the presence of God.

The message of Jonah for the believer is that God knows what circumstances are necessary for spiritual growth. If you truly trust the Lord, then you must be willing to say, “Although I may not like my situation, I trust the Lord to provide what I need to gain maturity.”

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).

May your life demonstrate the love of God towards others as well as your trust in Him in your difficult circumstances. All believers can walk on water. Just keep your eyes on the Savior. He wants to be there for you, loving and comforting you as you grow in Him.

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

The book of Jonah is read on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, when the Jew looks to the mercy of God. Sadly most don't realize that G-d has manifested His mercy in the work of His Son, Y'shua Hamashiach. And at the conclusion of the reading of Jonah the following passage which tells of the mercy of the Lord is added. The passage is from Micah 7:18-20.

“Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea. You will be true to Jacob, and show mercy to Abraham, as you pledged on oath to our fathers in days long ago” (Micah 7:18-20).

Let us always give the message of a merciful God to those who will otherwise face His judgment. As we read this in the writings of Paul:

“But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying” (Titus 3:4-8).

Let us offer this “trustworthy saying” to others. But let us not forget God's mercy towards us. Matthew Henry puts it this way.

*“ Do we wonder at the forbearance of God towards his perverse servant? Let us study our own hearts and ways; let us not forget our own ingratitude and obstinacy; and let us be astonished at God’s patience towards us.”*¹

So let us never forget God’s patience and mercy.

*I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever,
I will sing, I will sing.
I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever,
I will sing of the mercies of the Lord.*

*With my mouth will I make know
Thy faithfulness, Thy faithfulness;
With my mouth will I make know
Thy faithfulness to all generations.*²

¹ Henry, Matthew, Matthew Henry’s Commentary (condensed), public domain.

² Text–Psalm 89:1, The Celebration Hymnal, “*I Will Sing of the Mercies*,” Word/Integrity, USA, 1997, #161.

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I Introduction

II God's Perspective for Jonah: Verse 1: *(2 Kings 5:11-12).*

Verse 2:

Verse 3:
(Jonah 2:1-2; Psalm 139:1-4; Hebrew 2:17-18; 1 Kings 19:4)

Verse 4:

Verse 5:

Verse 6:

Verse 7:

Verse 8:

Verse 9:

Verses 10-11:

III God's perspective for Believers:

(Matthew 9:9-13; Galatians 1:10; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; Romans 8:28; Matthew 11:28-30; Micah 7:18-20; Titus 3:4-8)

Personal Application: This might be a good week to do a word study on God's patience. The result of this study should be praise and worship of God.

Prayer for the Week: Lord, we can never think You enough for Your patience and mercy in our lives. Amen.