

# Jonah Learns the Heart of God

Jonah 4:5-11

## Introduction

God gives Jonah an object lesson on true compassion.

## The Aim

To learn the heart of God and reflect deeply on our own “final chapter”.

## The Text: Jonah 4:5-11

<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. <sup>8</sup> 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." <sup>9</sup> 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."

<sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> 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?"

## Outline:

- I. Introduction
  - a. Review
    - i. How to appreciate narrative (from Ryken *How to Read the Bible as Literature*).
      1. Personal Involvement
      2. Significance of Repetition
      3. The Ending: “Most important of all is the way in which a story ends...look upon the conclusion of a story as an implied comment on (evaluation of) the characters and events that the story has presented.” (p. 65)
  - b. Focus
    - i. “[The book] forces us to contemplate our personal destiny. It remains unfinished in order that we may provide our own conclusion...For you are Jonah; I am Jonah.” (Sinclair Ferguson quoted in *Prodigal Prophet*, 134)
    - ii. Jonah learns the heart of God.
      1. God Appoints a Lesson
      2. God Affirms his Love
- II. Body
  - a. God Appoints a Lesson (4:5-9)
    - i. “Appoints/provides/prepares” teaches us about God’s Providence.
      1. Occurrences of “appoint”: 1:17; 4:6, 7, 8
      2. Meaning of “appoint”
        - a. “Underscores God’s sovereign control over creation.” (ESV Study Bible)

- b. "Here, with YHWH as the subject, **the verb stresses God's sovereign rule over events for the accomplishment of his purpose** (as in Jon\_4:6-8, where the verb recurs in each verse). (Joyce Baldwin)
    - c. "The term is **part of the vocabulary describing Yahweh's royal dominion**... Expressed playfully and ironically, Yahweh corrects a recalcitrant prophet's religious and nationalistic chauvinism using circumstantial object lessons...**None of these contexts suggest an impersonal concept of fate or a predetermined historical plan; rather, these texts reveal a dynamic, personal divine rule played out in the contingencies of human moral life.**" (NIDOTTE, s.v. "mnh", 974)
  - 3. "God's works of providence are his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures and all their actions." (Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q. 11)
  - 4. **Do we REALLY believe God is THIS personal?**
    - a. "The doctrine of God's providence assures us that his personal relationship to us is important. He knows each of us and each one matters to him." (Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 376)
    - b. Consider the "secret" and "sustaining" Father of Matthew 6.
- ii. God's Providence was working to "vomit" things out of Jonah.
  - 1. The plant was a "qiqayon", which rendered literally means "vomiting, he vomited Jonah"
    - a. Jonah is the only book in OT where this word occurs.
    - b. Scholars speculate that it's a castor oil, ricinus, or gourd plant.
    - c. A play-on-words might be evident:
      - i. Hebrew "qui" means "to vomit" (see 2:10)
      - ii. Hebrew "yon" is short form of "yonah" (Jonah)
      - iii. "qui" "qua" "yon" = "vomiting, he vomited Jonah"
  - 2. God "saved" Jonah through a fish, which "vomited" Jonah's gratitude. God "delivered/rescued" Jonah through a plant, which "vomited" Jonah's bad attitude.
  - 3. Providence governs trials to reveal our sin and refine our faith.
    - a. 1 Peter 1:3-7
    - b. Apply "various trials"
- b. God Affirms his Love (4:10-11)
  - i. God "weeps" for his creatures.
    - 1. "It refers to the feeling which goes out toward one who is in trouble." (TWOT)
    - 2. The verb "pity/concern" (Hebrew "chus") is derived from a common Semitic root which has a basic meaning "to pour out; to flow" which is used in reference to emotion and tears in particular. (NET Bible) Consider first OT occurrence, Gen. 45:20. One typically weeps when moving away from one's home.
    - 3. "The verb often occurs with "eye" as its subject: the eye (over)flows, is compassionate... "the reference is always to a positive attitude towards the object, with the intention of performing a 'helping act.' It is more reasonable to assume that the original meaning was to "overflow"="weep," when used of the eye." (NIDOTTE, s.v. chus, 51)
    - 4. The phrase "your eye shall not pity" means "don't weep".
    - 5. God does weep. See Jesus Luke 19:41-44; John 11:35
  - ii. We don't love what God loves.
    - 1. Jonah became attached to the "plant":
      - a. Note the emphatic pronoun "you" in verse 9
      - b. Small—the suffix "-on" in "qiqayon" is a diminutive, i.e. "small plant"
      - c. Inanimate

- d. Temporal—sprang up overnight, died overnight
  - e. Easy and Self-serving—“you did not tend it or make it grow”
  - f. A-moral
2. God is attached to his creatures:
- a. Note the emphatic pronoun “I” in verse 10
  - b. Many—120,000 people AND many animals
  - c. Humans—spiritual beings made in the image of God
  - d. Eternal—Ecc. 3:11
  - e. Requires self-sacrifice
  - f. Erring and needing saved (consider the joy of repentance, Luke 15)
3. Believer’s hearts can attach to ungodly things.
- a. Peter: Matt. 16:23
  - b. 1 John 2:15-16

III. Conclusion

- a. God’s lesson to Jonah is a lesson to us.
  - i. “Because the book of Jonah ends this way, the text invites us to write our own final paragraphs and chapters. That is, God calls us to apply this text to our own lives, in our own time and place...So, what is *our* relationship to God’s Word, world, and grace?” (Keller, 135)
  - ii. Have we learned the heart of God?
  - iii. What is your next chapter?
    - 1. Do we care for the things God cares about?
    - 2. How can we show more concern for the “Ninevites” around us?
    - 3. Where is God grieving in our world, and how can we respond?