

Jonah 4:1-11

Jonah 4:1-11 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry. (2) So he prayed to the LORD, and said, "Ah, LORD, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm. (3) Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live!" (4) Then the LORD said, "Is it right for you to be angry?" (5) So Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city. There he made himself a shelter and sat under it in the shade, till he might see what would become of the city. (6) And the LORD God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery. So Jonah was very grateful for the plant. (7) But as morning dawned the next day God prepared a worm, and it so damaged the plant that it withered. (8) And it happened, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah's head, so that he grew faint. Then he wished death for himself, and said, "It is better for me to die than to live." (9) Then God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" And he said, "It is right for me to be angry, even to death!" (10) But the LORD said, "You have had pity on the plant for which you have not laboured, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night. (11) And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left; and much livestock?"

Questions On The Text

How did Jonah respond to Nineveh's repentance and God's mercy?

Verse 1-3: Jonah was very angry. The phrase "it displeased Jonah exceedingly" is literally, in Hebrew, "It became evil / wrong to Jonah as a great evil / wrong," and is about the strongest possible way of expressing his displeasure. Now it is clearly revealed what his motive was in fleeing to Tarshish. He foresaw that God is "gracious and merciful," words used in Scripture only to describe God (but used here almost as an accusation), and realised that if the Ninevites repented, God would forgive them and not bring about the disaster He had planned. Jonah doesn't like a God who forgives the enemies of Israel, so he prays for death. Sad considering the fact that he had been so mercifully dealt with by God.

How did Yahweh respond to Jonah's anger?

Verse 4: God asks one simple question, questioning Jonah's right to be angry.

How did Jonah deal with God's question?

Verse 5: Jonah is either too angry or too convicted to reply. He simply storms out of the city, to the east side, makes a shelter for himself, sits under it, and waits to see what will happen. No doubt, he was still hoping for the destruction of Nineveh.

What made Jonah happy?

Verse 6: Apparently the prophet's makeshift shelter was not as effective as he might have wished and he was quite miserable. So Yahweh caused a plant to grow up over his head and provide shade for him. Jonah was very grateful (literally, rejoiced with great joy). The shade plant had grown so quickly that it must have been obvious to him that it was God's merciful provision.

What happened to the plant?

Verses 7-8: God's reason for causing the plant to grow was not merely to provide shelter for Jonah, but to give him an object lesson. So the plant which God had supernaturally caused to grow was then attacked by a worm

that He sent for the purpose of causing the plant to wither. The result of the plant's withering is that the sun now beat on (literally, attacked) Jonah's head so fiercely that he grew faint and wished for death.

How did God respond to Jonah's death wish?

Verses 9-11: God challenged the prophet's right to be angry over the plant. The contrast between God's position and Jonah's is extraordinary. Jonah's pity for the plant is totally self-serving and is really self-pity, whereas God has at heart the welfare of an entire city of over 120,000 people as well as its animals.

Further Questions For Discussion:

Have you experienced times when you have been angry at God's mercy towards others?

Is it hypocritical to expect God's mercy while at the same time hoping for it to be withheld from others?

How does God deal with those who persist in judging others? (See Matthew 7:1-5; 5:7 and James 2:13)

How can you guard against being judgmental towards others?

How does God want us to respond when evil people repent and receive God's mercy?