

# JONAH

## *Extending Our Reach*

Lesson 4:

Jonah knew as well as anyone that Jehovah was a God of second chances. If he could run away from Him and be brought back again, he could count on God to be *“gracious and merciful, slow to anger, [and] abundant in lovingkindness”* (Jonah 4:2) to everyone who *“turned from [his] evil way”* (4:10).

But he was not happy about it. While Jonah thought it right for him to be delivered from calamity, he did not believe that the Ninevites deserved God’s pity nor His compassion.

But *“God [would] not allow Jonah to remain undisturbed in his foolish, wrongful attitudes and behavior patterns”<sup>i</sup>*, ruled by his own interests, security, and prejudices. He had sent a storm and a fish to change Jonah’s heart for the lost, perhaps now it was time for Jonah to hear His heart.

Exodus 34:19 says, *“I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.”*

*Read Jonah 4:1-5.*

1. How did Jonah respond to God’s decision to relent from destroying the Ninevites? (v.1) Why did he react this way?
2. What fueled his mentality? Review Luke 18:9-14 and 15:28.
3. Return to Jonah. Have you ever surrendered an issue and/or sin to God only to pick it back up again? What caused you to take hold of it again?
4. Per Jonah 2:8 does it appear that he ever had a complete change of heart toward the Assyrians?

5. In what ways does Jonah resemble the servant in Matthew 18:21-35?
  
6. Return to the book of Jonah. What did Jonah understand about God's character? (v.2)
  
7. Jonah angrily questioned God's actions because they differed from what he wanted and expected. What does this reveal about an individual's thoughts toward God?
  
8. In what ways did Jonah demonstrate self-pity?
  
9. Why might Jonah have been ready to give-up on life? (v.3) How can strong feelings of displeasure evolve into a desire to give-up on life?
  
10. After God questioned his right to be angry, Jonah positioned himself outside the city to see what would become of it. (v.5) Why might he have done this?

Do you think that Jonah believed he could prove to God that His judgment about the Ninevites was wrong? Could Jonah judge the genuineness of their contrition? Could he have convinced himself that eventually his desire would be granted?

11. With his shelter in place, Jonah was willing to wait as long as it took to see destruction come upon the Ninevites. From his perspective God's actions were unjust—the Ninevites did not pay for their

sin, nor for the pain and hardship inflicted upon his people. They were *“released and forgiven the debt”* (Matthew 18:27).

Read the following description and underline the phrases that describe Jonah’s attitude toward the Assyrians.

“Unforgiveness is an unwillingness ‘to let go from one’s power, possession, to let go free, let escape.’ It is an attempt to protect ourselves, and those we love, from future attacks or encroachments. It is an effort to obtain satisfaction for a wrong by punishing the wrongdoer. It is an opportunity to exercise our perceived role as judge by condemning and sentencing. It is the choice to maintain our ‘right’ to be angry and demand payment for the wrongs inflicted upon us. Ultimately, unforgiveness is the choice to hold on to that which has caused us the most pain.”<sup>ii</sup>

What couldn’t he forgive them for? (Refer to Lesson 1 if necessary.)<sup>iii</sup>

### *Read Jonah 4:6-11.*

12. In what manner did God seek to reach and correct Jonah’s heart?<sup>iv</sup>

13. How did Jonah feel about the plant? (vv.6, 10)

14. What did the plant reveal about Jonah’s chief concern? (vv.7-8) How were his affections distorted?

15. Twice, God asked Jonah whether he was right to be angry. (vv.4, 9) The NASB says, *“Do you have good reason to be angry?”* The Message states it this way: *“What right do you have to get angry?”* The AMP version says, *“Do you do well to be angry?”* Answer these questions for Jonah.

16. How did God dispute Jonah’s perceived “right”? (vv.10-11)

“God wanted Jonah to see that he had no right to be angry over Nineveh or the vine because Jonah did not give life to or sustain either of them. Nor was he sovereign over them. He had no control over the plant’s growth or withering. The vine was quite temporal (it sprang up overnight and died overnight) and was of relatively little value. Yet Jonah grieved over it. Whereas Jonah had no part in making the plant grow, God had created the Ninevites. **Jonah’s affections were distorted; he cared more for a vine than for human lives. He cared more for his personal comfort than for the spiritual destiny of thousands of people**”<sup>v</sup> (emphasis mine).

17. Per verse 11, how did God feel when He looked upon the Ninevites? Also, consider Matthew 9:36, Luke 19:41-44, 13:34, and 23:34.

One commentator renders verse 11 of Jonah 4 this way: “Your concern was dictated by self-interest, not by genuine love. You never had the devotion of a gardener. If you feel as bad as you do, what would you expect a gardener to feel like, who tended a plant and watched it grow only to see it wither and die? This is how I feel about Nineveh, only much more so. All those people, all those animals—I made them; I have cherished them all these years. Nineveh has cost Me no end of effort, and it means the world to Me. Your pain is nothing compared to Mine when I contemplate their destruction” (“Jonah and the Worm,” *His*. October 1983, p.12).<sup>vi</sup>

18. Warren Wiersbe said, “[Jonah] brought a whole city to the Lord and yet he did not love the people he was preaching to.”<sup>vii</sup> According to 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, why can’t our “preaching” be void of pity, compassion, and love?

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<sup>i</sup> Keller, Timothy. (2018). *The Prodigal Prophet: Jonah and the Mystery of God’s Mercy*. (pg. 126). New York, NY: Victor Publishing.)

<sup>ii</sup> West, Julie. (2009). *Woman: The Glory of Man, Shining in the Midst of Your Marriage*. Consumed, Part 2, Imprisoned by the Past. [www.coffeetalk.org](http://www.coffeetalk.org)

<sup>iii</sup> “When Christian believers care more for their own interests and security than for the good and salvation of other races and ethnicities, they are sinning like Jonah. If they value the economic and military flourishing of their country over the good of the human race and the furtherance of God’s work in the world, they are sinning like Jonah. Their identity is more rooted in their race and nationality than in being saved sinners and children of God. Jonah’s rightful love for his country and people had become inordinate, too great, rivaling God. Rightful racial pride can become racism. Rightful national pride and patriotism can become imperialism.” (Keller, Timothy. (2018). *The Prodigal Prophet: Jonah and the Mystery of God’s Mercy*. (pg. 104). New York, NY: Victor Publishing.)

<sup>iv</sup> In Jonah 4:9-11, consider how God’s method of correcting Jonah is similar to His method to correct David. See 2 Samuel 12:1-7.

<sup>v</sup> Hannah, J. D. (1985). *Jonah*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pg. 1472). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>vi</sup> Hannah, J. D. (pg. 1472).

<sup>vii</sup> Wiersbe, Warren. (2002). *The Bible Exposition Commentary: Old Testament: The Prophets*. (pg. 386). Colorado Springs, CO: Cook Communications.