

Some Possible Answers for Week 7 of the Jonah Study

Week 7: Jonah's anger and the Lord's persistence.

Day 1- Overview - Read Jonah 4:1-11

1. If God only wanted to save the lost souls of Nineveh, the book would have ended with Chapter 3.

What else do you think God is interested in?

- Jonah is not a happy camper and displays his attitude in 4:1, *"But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry."*
- This translation of Jonah's words lessens the significance of the literal translation.
- The literal translation is "But it was evil to Jonah with great evil."
- In other words, the term "evil" (*raah*), which has been repeatedly applied to the Ninevites, now characterizes the prophet!
- By objecting to the character and actions of God, Jonah has effectively put himself out of fellowship with God as the *evil* and ignorant heathen.
- Paul speaks of similar perspectives in Romans 2:1, *"You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things."*
- Here is the beauty and wonder of our Lord, He shows Jonah the same compassion that He has just shown Nineveh!
- God wasn't finished with Jonah!

2. Who would you say is the key person in this chapter – God or Jonah? Explain.

- A simple idea is to count how many times the name God/Lord is used and how many times the name Jonah is used. God/Lord = 11 times; Jonah = 5.
- God heard Jonah's prayer; God questioned Jonah's anger; God provided (3x) (6-8); God questions Jonah a 2nd time (9); Lord explains why Jonah should be concerned about saving the 120,000 Ninevites (10);
- It seems the primary message for us today is to see the Lord and His character (*gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in love, relents* (2)).
- Pastor David gave a good illustration a few weeks ago. To enable us to better understand Jonah and his anger, we should put ourselves in a similar position.
- David said "Suppose God told you to go to Afghanistan, to an al-Qaeda training camp, and proclaim a message He would give you."
- What do you think your feelings and emotions might be and how they might line up with what Jonah must have been going through to go to Nineveh?
- This chapter seems to be about God, but let's not ignore Jonah, nor look down on him because of his honesty with God.
- We should be so honest in our prayers!

3. What do you think Jonah was missing because of his anger?

- One thing Jonah misses is the happiness he should have had that he was instrumental in the saving of 120,000 lives.
- He missed the joy of seeing God's grace and mercy in action. Instead he resented it!
- He missed that truth that God's grace and mercy may be extended to all people who repent and turn to Him alone.
- He missed being reconciled to the will of God. Instead he continues to oppose God.
- He missed the fact that he did not know God as well as he thought.

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4. List some repeated phrases/thoughts in this chapter (don't have to be word for word)?

- "Now O Lord take away my life" and "It would be better for me to die"
- The Lord provided (3x): vine, worm, scorching east wind
- "Have you any right..." and "Do you have a right..."

5. What do you learn from your list about the person speaking?

- Answers will vary.

Day 2 – God questions Jonah's anger. Read 3:10-4:4

1. Jonah was a prophet. His credibility was based on his prophecies coming true. What did Jonah prophesy in 3:4? What did God do in 3:10? What was Jonah missing in this picture?

- "...Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned (destroyed)" – 3:4
- "When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, He had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction He had threatened." – 3:10
- He seems to be of the opinion that God's grace, compassion, and mercy were reserved for his (Jews) people only and Jonah was not aligned with God's purposes through His prophesy.

2. Do you think Jonah was concerned that people would question his future prophecies as a result of this prophesy? What do you think is at the root of such a concern?

- Rabbinic literature contains the idea, which is still very popular, that on the basis of Deuteronomy 18:21-22 he would be regarded as a false prophet.
- True enough, once the first wave of terror had passed and destruction did not come, many in Nineveh must have asked themselves whether Jonah had really been a messenger of the gods.
- That was an unavoidable result of divine mercy.
- But the attitude of the Ninevites and also incidents such as those recorded of David in 2 Samuel 12:14-23, of Ahab in 1 Kings 21:27-29, and of Hezekiah in 2 Kings 20:1-6, show that it was recognized universally that a pronouncement of divine punishment might be averted by suitable penitence.
- Jonah knew this could happen and we see that as he tried to justify his disobedience to God by his statement in 4:2.

3. What do you learn about Jonah's understanding of God?

- Answers will vary.

4. God appoints the prophets and He gives them the words to say. So whose responsibility is the result of the prophesy – the prophet's or God's? Explain.

- It could be argued that neither the prophets nor God's but the people to whom the prophesy is given.
- We have the big picture of God, in His sovereignty, controlling history so one could argue that He is responsible.
- It's obvious from Jonah's experience that the prophet has little to do with the result.
- Even though Jonah hated the Ninevites, God saved them in spite of Jonah's bad attitude.
- This entire book is about God and not Jonah.
- God is the active ingredient and it seems Jonah is only the catalyst to bring the message so the people can realize their need for repentance and thus God can save them.
- Our role in serving the Lord is often that of being the catalyst.

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5. Using verse 4:4, does Jonah have any right to be angry? Do you have any right to be angry at God for saving someone that you detest? Whose business is it to save lost souls?

- God likes to ask questions because they are effective in helping His people and us see the state of our hearts.
- God asked Adam and Eve questions (Gen. 3:9, 11, 13); He questioned Cain after he murdered his brother (Gen. 4:9-10); God asked Isaiah "Whom shall I send?" (Isa. 6:8); Jesus asked Judas "Are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?" (Luke 22:48).
- Quite simply, God's first question to Jonah is to challenge Jonah to judge whether he or the God of the universe is right.
- James Boice (The Minor Prophets, vol. 1, Baker Books, ISBN 0-8010-1232-5, pg. 307) says, "It is as though God had said, "We are looking at the identical situation in two different ways, Jonah. I am pleased with it. You are angry. Which of us has the proper perspective?" Whenever God asks that type of question, we must recognize that, whatever our thoughts or feelings may be, it is always God who is correct and not we."
- So does Jonah have a right to be angry – it seems God doesn't think so.
- Answers will vary.

Day 3 – God graciously provides Jonah shade. Read 4:5-6

1. Why do you think Jonah stayed to watch what happened to the city?

- From what we have seen already of Jonah and his attitude towards the Ninevites, it seems reasonable that Jonah may have been hoping against hope that God might change His mind again and destroy Nineveh.
- Answers will vary.

2. God has already dealt with the Ninevites. What do you think He is dealing with now?

- In the rest of this section, the divine name Elohim ("God"), which has been used consistently for God's dealings with Nineveh, is now used for his dealings with Jonah.
- The use of "LORD God" (Yahweh Elohim) in this verse forms a link between the two usages, even as it does in Genesis 2:4b-3:24, linking the God of creation in Genesis 1 and the God of revelation in Genesis 4.
- God's focus has now shifted from the people of Nineveh to his prophet Jonah and his seemingly hostile/angry attitude towards what the Lord has done.

3. Verse 6 says that Jonah was very happy. What could be going on in Jonah's mind? Do you think Jonah's view of the Ninevites has changed?

- Answers will vary.

4. What do you think God is doing by providing the vine over Jonah?

- God has demonstrated outstanding patience with Jonah and continues to commune with him.
- He is leading Jonah, by practical example, to see his shortcomings.
- Jonah wasn't happy about 120,000 people repenting and being saved but he was about a little fast-growing vine that provided some shade for him.
- God was preparing Jonah to see how self-centered and petty he was being.

5. What do you learn about God from these verses? What has the Lord provided for you recently?

- Answers will vary.

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Day 4 – God questions Jonah’s anger again. – Read 4:7-9

1. What three things does “God provide” in verses 4:6-8? What do you learn about God from this?
 - 1) God provided a vine; 2) God provided a worm; 3) God provided a scorching east wind.
 - Answers will vary.
2. God provides Jonah shade one day and takes it away the next. What message is God sending to Jonah?
 - God seems to be expressing to Jonah His sovereignty and power over all things and situations.
 - God sent a “*great fish*” and now He grows a large vine followed by a little worm that destroys the vine, and a scorching east wind.
 - The fish, vine, worm, and scorching east wind are all miracles from God.
 - God seems to be working on Jonah to realize that his will is not in line with God’s will or purpose.
3. How does Jonah respond to God’s persistence? How do you respond to God’s persistence?
 - Jonah was speaking on the basis of common humanity when he says he wants to die.
 - Jonah is refusing to see all that God has done for him and through him.
 - Instead he is self-centered, angry, and he is ready to give up.
 - In such a state, Jonah’s life is all about Jonah!
 - He is blind to God’s provision, protection, grace, love, mercy, etc..
4. Again God questions Jonah as to his “rights.” What is Jonah missing and how do you see God’s grace in this?
 - God’s first question was “Have you any right to be angry?”
 - It was a question as to who was right God or Jonah.
 - This time God asked, “Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?”
 - Notice the spiraling effect in all this.
 - God exposes Jonah’s pettiness, for in his anger he had spiraled from the grandeur of being angry at God – one who is at least a worthy opponent – to being angry as such a petty thing as a vine and worm.
 - We often experience the same spiraling effect.
 - We become angry at a big thing, but quickly our anger spreads to petty things.
 - For instance, we begin by being angry with God about some big circumstance.
 - Next we express our anger at other big circumstances, and then we spiral down to minor circumstances.
 - Finally, one morning, our shoelace breaks and we find ourselves ranting and raving, angry at the world, or worse!
 - This negative spiraling effect of self-centeredness and pride is what God was trying to show Jonah.
5. What do you think is the root cause of Jonah’s anger? Have you ever been like Jonah? Explain.
 - A couple of key causes would be pride and self-centeredness.
 - Jonah has refused to look at things from God’s perspective even though God has been very gracious and patient with him.
 - Answers will vary.

Day 5 – God demonstrates Jonah’s poverty towards the lost souls of Nineveh. – Read 4:10-11

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1. God by His grace blessed Jonah with the vine to protect him from the heat. But God knew Jonah's heart, so He took the vine away. What do you think was the condition of Jonah's heart towards the Ninevites?

- Answers will vary.

2. What do you learn about God by His statement, "It sprang up overnight and died overnight?" What do you think He wanted Jonah to learn (see Job 5:2)?

- Answers will vary.
- Job 5:2, "*Resentment kills a fool, and envy slays the simple.*"

3. What do you think was Jonah's major concern through these last few verses?

- Answers will vary.

4. What would you say was God's major concern through these verses? What do you learn about God from that?

- Answers will vary.