

After one of the most amazing experiences of any human on this planet, ever, Jonah finally responded obediently to Yahweh's request that he go to Nineveh and preach the need for their repentance. After surviving a terrible storm, being plunged into the depths of the sea, three days and three nights in the belly of a great fish, and a sojourn in Sheol, Jonah essentially probably did not want to risk what



else Yahweh might have in store for continued disobedience. Reluctantly he made the journey to Nineveh, did his preaching of Yahweh's message, and then probably watched in horror as every Ninevite, including the king, repented in sackcloth and ashes. Just as Jonah feared, God "relented" of His destruction of Nineveh after He saw that their works revealed changed hearts. Jonah is not very happy at this point. We discussed that Jonah did indeed respond obediently, but he is still struggling with the wrong attitude. That attitude is now clearly seen in this chapter 4.

Jonah 4:1-3

New King James Version	Qodesh Cepheriym
<i>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!"</i>	But it displeased Yonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. ² And he prayed unto YAH'HAVAH, and said, I pray you, O YAH'HAVAH, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshiysh: for I knew that you are a gracious El, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repent you of the evil. ³ Therefore now, O YAH'HAVAH, take, I beseech you, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.

- As soon as Jonah saw that the Ninevites had repented, he became angry. And in our human understanding, we can probably relate to his anger. The Assyrians were the most brutal of enemies, were becoming more aggressive toward Israel, and Jonah knew of God's mercy and His tendency to forgive. And, Jonah certainly did not want to see Assyria destroy his

homeland, or worse yet, replace Israel in the covenant relationship with Yahweh. Jonah was prophesying during a most wicked time in Israel's history. He knew of the disobedience of his own people, he knew the prophecies of Hosea (who predicted God would use the Assyrians to bring destruction upon Israel if they did not repent), and now he witnesses the wholesale repentance of a hated enemy. Yes, we can understand how Jonah felt. But Jonah's feelings, and ours, are not like God's. God still must teach Jonah a lesson, not just about disobedience (he already learned that one!), but now about having God's own heart about the lost.

- It does seem like a pretty sensational, and perhaps unbelievable event – the entire “great” city of Nineveh repenting and fasting before God. The odds of this happening are staggeringly low. Yet, it did. There is nothing impossible to God. God prepared a lot of things in this event (the storm, the fish, the plant) and now He has also prepared the hearts of the Assyrians to get right before Him, so He can grant them life.
- We do not know exactly why God did this, and exactly why he chose the Assyrians for this dramatic illustration, and not one of the numerous other enemies of Israel. Perhaps Assyria represented the largest threat. Perhaps they were the most brutal of all enemies. Perhaps they were the ones that no one thought could be saved. And, perhaps the Assyrians of yesterday represent the “enemies” of today. Maybe all of these reasons prompted God to do this. More than likely, however, it was to impress upon Jonah the need to share God's heart about all those people (Gentiles) who are lost without His good news of salvation. Jonah didn't care at all about their salvation. He wanted them destroyed, and now he is mad because God relented and chose not to destroy them – at least not at this time. Although Jonah was finally obedient to do as God directed him, his attitude is not right with God. This message is just as important today. Do we really care, with God's heart, about the lost around us? Do we really care about our enemies?
- It is interesting to notice that Jonah's “prayers” are generally honest and open conversations with Yahweh. We often think of prayers as requests. Prayer is talking to God, sharing our hearts, our thanks, our worship, our needs. Here Jonah shares his frustration. He reminds God that what has happened in Nineveh is precisely what he feared, and in fact, he said so even while he was still in Israel! Essentially Jonah is telling God, “See, I told you this would happen! I know you, and I knew it would happen, that's why I ran away.” The only thing Jonah asks for here is for God to strike him dead! This is one gutsy prophet. It should be comforting to us to know we can talk to God like this.
- As Jonah reminds God of His own mercy and lovingkindness, and propensity to forgive, the words that Jonah uses to “accuse” God and justify his own disobedience should be a huge comfort to us, and all people. This is such a beautiful statement: ***“for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm.”*** Jonah means these words to excuse his sinful attitude. We should use them to strengthen us and give us courage every day.
- We might presume that Jonah's plea for God to take his life is a selfish one, and it is for many reasons. However, having seen that God relented with the Assyrians, knowing Hosea's prophecies, and the disobedience of his own people, Jonah probably pictured what might be coming soon his neighborhood. Assyria might rise up and destroy his people and scatter them to the four corners of the earth – essentially to all the other Gentile nations. There would be bloodshed, tragedy, and complete destruction of his people and did not want to be alive to witness all this. We can understand that.

- And, since God is true to His word, He did spare at least this generation of Assyrians, and in Jonah's lifetime what he feared did not happen. However, Israel continued in her disobedience, and ultimately God indeed fulfilled His prophecy through Hosea (see Hosea chapters 8 and 9) and later through Isaiah (also a prophet to the northern kingdom of Israel, but just before Israel's demise). In 722 BC, God used the Assyrians to destroy and scatter the northern kingdom among the Gentile nations. He also judged the Assyrians of later generations, since their repentance did not last long. At the beginning of the sixth century before the Messiah came, God used the Babylonians to destroy the Assyrians.

Jonah 4:4

New King James Version	Qodesh Cepheriym
<i>Then the Lord said, "Is it right for you to be angry?"</i>	Then said YAH'HAVAH, Do you well to be angry?

- Yahweh is in teaching mode here. He does not "yell" or blast Jonah, but rebukes him lovingly. He asks Jonah if he has a right to think this way, to be angry about the current situation. A large part of the point of this event is for us to understand that we also do not "think right" about the lost. Do we care enough about the lost condition of those around us....even our enemies? Notice at this point that Jonah does not respond, at least not verbally. So he essentially "goes off in a huff." Jonah's attitude is still not right.
- By God's question, Jonah (and we) should know that the answer to this question is "NO!" We do not have the right to be angry at God for what He chooses to do. That's not to say that we WON'T be angry. It is comforting to know that God shows infinite patience here with Jonah, just as He does with us. God is not offended or angered by our honest thoughts and emotions. They may not be the RIGHT ones, and we may have to endure some discipline and teaching by God Himself (the role of the Holy Spirit in us today), but at least He is patient, and "long-suffering" toward all of us. Jonah's experience, every single aspect of it, is a comfort and encouragement to us. We all deal with Jonah's problems.

Jonah 4:5

New King James Version	Qodesh Cepheriym
<i>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.</i>	⁵ So Yonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city.

- We are not told in this record whether or not Jonah responded verbally to God's question. But he did respond, by stomping out of the city and finding a nice place where he could watch to see what God would do. Even though the Ninevites repented, and Jonah knew that God "relented" from the destruction of the evil Assyrians, Jonah is perhaps holding on to a long-shot hope that somehow, someday, the Assyrians would mess it up and God would bring judgment. Jonah is going to wait, hoping to see the city obliterated! Can you just picture Jonah crossing his arms in a sour attitude and plopping himself down in the hope he will see fire and brimstone!

- The fact that Jonah constructed a shelter of sort indicates he was prepared to wait and watch no matter how long it took. God had originally had Jonah preach their judgment as a period of 40 days to repent...or else. Maybe Jonah planned to wait the remainder of those 40 days to see the fireworks he desired.
- The word used here for “shelter” is Sukkah, the same that is used in the Feast of Sukkot (or Succot), which is the Feast of Tabernacles. A Sukkah was a temporary shelter, tabernacle or a place to stay on a temporary basis. It is more than a mere shelter, but not considered permanent. Jonah planned to stay awhile here.
- If Jonah’s skin did bleach out in the belly of the great fish, then it is probably that he was **VERY sensitive to the sun’s rays at this point**. Even the slightest exposure to sun would be painful. He needed that shelter, and the plant!
- **The sun is hot and relentless in this area.** If Jonah was going to sit and wait, perhaps for several days, he would need protection from the sun. His temporary shelter was for this purpose, and he sat in its shade to wait. He was probably just far enough away from the main city to get a good view, but not be caught up in whatever disaster or conflagration God might be planning! Jonah hangs on to his hope of their destruction, and protects his own person in the process. The Assyrians DESERVE judgment, and that’s what he’s hoping to see.



Jonah 4:6

New King James Version	Qodesh Cepheriym
<i>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.</i>	And YAH’HAVAHA ELOHIYM prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Yonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Yonah was exceeding glad of the gourd.

- Even though Jonah built a shelter that provided some shade, the **desert there is very hot and intense**. He needed a little more protection from the heat. Remember God is still in teaching mode. Jonah’s attitude must change, so God again “prepares” something to enhance Jonah’s “learning experience.”
- Notice how many things God has **prepared or brought about in this historical event**: the storm, the great fish, the Assyrian hearts, a plant for shelter, a worm, an east wind.
- This should be a clue for us as to how God works in us and through us. **He is doing all the real “work.”**



A castor bean plant

- He will often “prepare” things that happen or are available to move our “education” along. He also **prepares all of history to fulfill His perfect plan**. We must never forget this. He is the hero of this story. He is the grand “preparer” of all things.
- We should also remember that **when God “prepares” something, it is not restricted to our understanding of things we know in our natural world**. This fish was most likely nothing we have ever seen before or since. While many people speculate that this plant might be the castor bean plant which grows very fast and has very broad leaves, it is just as likely that it is a plant we have never seen before. The actual word used is *qiyqayon (kikayon)*, which is a plant no one really knows for sure. Some say this word is similar to the Egyptian word for the castor plant. We should not be so consumed by trying to determine WHAT fish, or WHAT plant in this story, but rather be looking for the greater messages and life lessons presented here.

Jonah 4:7-8

New King James Version	Qodesh Cepheriym
<i>⁷But as morning dawned the next day God prepared a worm, and it so damaged the plant that it withered. ⁸And 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.”</i>	<i>⁷But ELOHIYM prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered. ⁸And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that ELOHIYM prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Yonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live.</i>

- Now here is something else God prepared. A worm. But **not just any worm**. This is a miracle worm, one that had special power to destroy a large plant overnight. There is another reason this is no ordinary worm. God’s Word is so amazing...
- The word used here (Hebrew *towla*) is the word for something known as the “scarlet worm,” or a crimson grub. This worm produces a scarlet or crimson colored fluid that was used to dye garments. The same word is used in Isaiah 1:18 where our sins are described as being like crimson: ***“Come now, and let us reason together,” Says the LORD, “Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool.”*** But wait...there’s more! This word is also used in Psalm 22 as prophetic of our Messiah. Psalm 22 is the incredible prophecy about the crucifixion of Yeshua and is filled with startlingly accurate predictions of His death. Verse 6 begins ***“But I am a worm...”*** The same Hebrew word is used here, the worm that is known for its crimson dye. The interesting thing about this worm is that the blood-red fluid only comes after the female dies in giving birth.
- In many ways Jonah is a type for the Messiah. Here, the entire event regarding the shelter from the heat of the sun, and the plant that added to Jonah’s comfort, then God sending a crimson worm to eat the plant is remarkable. Humankind always tries to “save” or “shelter” itself. **The shelter represents man’s works**. The plant represents God’s grace to cover over our sins, but not by a plant, only the blood of His Son, which is here represented by a worm! These are the kinds of things we cannot discern without diligent study of the scriptures, not just a read-through once in a while. There are so many gems to be discovered, if we would only dig a little!

- The east wind is well-known in this region as **the hottest, driest and most miserable**. The Tigris River is to the west of the city of Nineveh, so there is no chance that any moisture could cool this relentlessly hot wind. Jonah is suffering here! God brought the wind, so He is truly testing Jonah. Jonah is miserable spiritually, emotionally, and now physically. He is at his breaking point and wants to die. Jonah is probably wondering why God is “doing this” to him. Haven’t we all wondered that in our own lives? But God is wiser, more loving, kind and compassionate than we understand. Even in times of trial and hardship, God is good. Jonah probably knows that, but his emotions are raw and he is being honest with God. We might criticize Jonah’s harshness with God, but God is infinitely patient, and really, isn’t it **nice to know HOW patient He is?** We are glad He is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow!

Jonah 4:9

New King James Version	Qodesh Cepheriym
<i>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!”</i>	And ELOHIYM said to Yonah, Do you well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death.

- Again God questions whether Jonah has a right to feel angry, now about this plant. Again, He is showing incredible patience with Jonah. And, again, Jonah’s attitude is still not right! He is miserable, and probably blaming God for all his troubles. God did indeed bring about this situation, but for Jonah’s good, whether he knows it or not at this point! How like Jonah we are today. God is working for our good, whether we know it or not. Whether it “feels” like it or not. All Jonah was feeling was the burning sun on his tender bleached out skin and now an east wind to make him more miserable. He KNEW he shouldn’t have come to Nineveh! This is all God’s fault! So in this moment, Jonah believes he is justified in his anger about losing the shade of the plant that God provided for him.

Jonah 4:10-11

New King James Version	Qodesh Cepheriym
<i>¹⁰ But the Lord said, “You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, 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?”</i>	Then said YAH’HAVAHA, You have had pity on the gourd, for the which you have not labored, neither made it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: ¹¹ And should I not spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?

- Again, in amazing patience, God responds to Jonah’s temper tantrum with a lesson. Jonah’s anger over losing the plant **was all about his own comfort**. He cared more about the plant than he did about what he hoped was the impending doom of the Ninevites.

- God tells him that he cared more about something he didn't create, that was given to him, than he did about an entire city of people. He asks Jonah another question – one that **should have shamed Jonah**. The book ends abruptly here. We don't know if Jonah learned this lesson or not.
- God makes an interesting statement about the city of Nineveh. **He says there are 120,000 people in this city who “don't know their right hand from their left hand.”** It is interesting that so many of our colloquialisms come from scripture. This obviously indicates that these people don't know what they need to know. Some commentators speculate that this must indicate children. If so, there are many, many more people in this great city who are all doomed unless they repent and God spares them. But this statement does not necessarily mean children in a literal sense. They are GOD's children, regardless of age, and they are ignorant. They are doomed because they don't know HIM. They are ignorant of God, and God needed them to know Him. He accomplished that through a very unhappy, reluctant prophet. And now Yahweh's question to Jonah wraps up this chapter, and Jonah's lesson.
- Maybe God was **appealing to Jonah's sense of mercy and justice for small children who would have innocently been doomed** if God did not relent of the evil He would have brought upon them unless they repented. God is revealing that there is always a possibility of even the worst of sinners (we have ALL sinned and fallen short of glory of God!) being converted and forgiven – and if not, even their children deserve a chance at life. Maybe Jonah couldn't find it in his heart to care about the adult Assyrians, but maybe he could care about their children. We don't hear Jonah's response, so we don't know what he was thinking here.
- It is also interesting to note that **God mentions the animals**. The word used for livestock, or cattle in some translations, refers to any livestock whether cattle, sheep, goats, or whatever. Inside most ancient cities were large areas dedicated to pasture livestock, which were used for food and clothing by the citizens. Perhaps God mentions both animals and children as innocent bystanders who would be killed or harmed by any catastrophe God would bring in His judgment on that city, as a way to help Jonah understand that he lacked compassion and mercy for at least the “innocent” of any people.
- **COMMENTARY: “It is really not surprising that God cares about his animal creation. After all, He did create them, and we have to believe He has a purpose for everything he has created. The great monologue of God in the book of Job (chapters 38-41) is very largely about His providential care of His animal creatures, and there are numerous other biblical passages to the same effect. The Lord Jesus Christ taught that not even a sparrow shall ‘fall on the ground without your Father.’ (Matthew 10:29)”** (Henry M. Morris, *“The Remarkable Journey of Jonah”*)
- We believe that it was Jonah who wrote this book, and not someone else. Only Jonah would have known what he prayed inside the belly of the fish, and from Sheol. And for some reason, **Jonah chose to end this retelling of an amazing event in his life right at this point**. God's question could not really be answered unless it was from Jonah's repentant heart. Perhaps it took Jonah a little time to get to that place. We don't know how long Jonah stayed in his shelter, but probably not long after the plant died and east wind came up. Maybe his exchange with Yahweh convinced him that God had indeed relented, and would not destroy the Ninevites. Not only did the Assyrians need to repent and get right before God, but so did Jonah. We can hope that he did, and returned to Israel to prophesy to his people for His gracious God.

- In addition to the remarkable typology and prophecy of the coming Messiah in this book, we also have **ample lessons for application in our own lives**. Perhaps the biggest for us is to have God's heart for the lost, regardless of who they are. All of them don't know "their right hand from their left" because they don't know Yahweh, or His Son. And just like the Ninevites, they are headed to eternal damnation without that knowledge and their repentance. We need to look upon these people as God does – **with a longing and desire that none of them perish**.
- This book is a reminder to Jonah's people, the northern kingdom of Israel, that **repentance and turning from wickedness is necessary for life and blessing, whether for themselves, or for the gentile peoples surrounding them**. God is not partial and does not play favorites. The Hebrew people had "hoarded" God and did not meet the challenge God set before them to bring the light of life to others. Do we do the same?
- Sadly, it did not end well for the northern kingdom of Israel, OR the Ninevites. God conquered the northern kingdom by the Assyrians in 722 BC. Israel was scattered among the nations, never to return to being a kingdom. The Assyrians were conquered by the Babylonians about 150 years after Jonah preached to Nineveh. Although the northern kingdom of Israel was scattered, God's Word is full of promises to return them not only to the land (State of Israel reborn in 1948), but to Himself. These promises are being fulfilled today in our lifetime.