

# Jonah: The Grumpiest Missionary

## Week 9: Jonah 3:5-4:4

Last week, we covered the second chance that Jonah was given and the message he proclaimed to the people of Nineveh. Today, we see how the Ninevites (and God) respond. We will take the next group of verses together since it's all really one scene, asking questions at the end.

### Verse 5

וַיֵּאֱמִינוּ אַנְשֵׁי נִינְוָה בְּאֱלֹהִים וַיִּקְרְאוּ צוּם וַיִּלְבְּשׁוּ שָׂקִים מִגְדוּלָם וְעַד־קִטְנָם:

*Then the men of Nineveh believed God. And they proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least.*

### Verse 6

וַיִּגַע הַדָּבָר אֶל־מֶלֶךְ נִינְוָה וַיִּקָּם מִכִּסְאוֹ וַיַּעֲבֵר אֶת־רִגְלוֹ מֵעַלָּיו וַיִּכֶס שֵׁק וַיִּשָּׁב עַל־הָאָפֶר:

*When the word reached to the king of Nineveh, he stood up from his throne, put off his royal robe from himself, covered himself in sackcloth, and sat down in the dust (or “sat in ashes”).*

### Verse 7

וַיִּזְעַק וַיֹּאמֶר בְּנִינְוָה מִטֶּעַם הַמַּלְאָךְ וַיִּגְדְּלוּ לֵאמֹר הָאֲדָם וְהַבְּהֵמָה הַבְּקָר וְהַצֹּאן אֶל־יִטְעַמוּ מֵאוֹמָה אֶל־יִרְעוּ וּמִים אֶל־יִשְׁתּוּ:

*Then he called out and said in Nineveh (he made a proclamation): “From the judgment of the King and his great ones (his officials), it is said, ‘Man and beast, herd and flock shall not taste anything; do not let them feed, and do not let them drink water.’*

### Verse 8

וַיִּתְכַסּוּ שָׂקִים הָאֲדָם וְהַבְּהֵמָה וַיִּקְרְאוּ אֶל־אֱלֹהִים בְּחִזְקָה וַיִּשָּׁבוּ אִישׁ מִדַּרְכּוֹ הָרָעָה וּמִן־הַחַמָּס אֲשֶׁר בְּכַפְיָהֶם:

*But let them be covered in sackcloth—man and beast. And let them call out with strength (call out urgently) to God. And let them turn from their evil ways and from the violence which is in their hands.*

### Verse 9

מִי־יֹדֵעַ יָשׁוּב וְנָחַם הָאֱלֹהִים וַיָּשָׁב מִחֲרוֹן אַפּוֹ וְלֹא נָאֻד:

*Who knows? God may turn and relent. He may turn from the burning of his nose (Hebraism for being angry) so that we will not perish.”*

1. Some might question if the Ninevites actually had true saving faith or not—they could have simply believed the fact that God was going to destroy their city. What do you think? What clues can you draw from in these verses?

- a. Look to **Matthew 12:41**. Does this add any insight?

2. The greatest to the least in Nineveh fasted, put on sackcloth (and perhaps ashes), and turned from their evil ways—all of which are accompanying signs of repentant hearts throughout the Bible. Do the “greatest” and the “least” in our society equally repent and believe? To put it another way, is the gospel “more attractive” to life’s important or unimportant, the wealthy or the poor? What scriptural backing can you give to your answer?
  
3. This is one of those places where we can talk about the will and plan of God: is it so firmly fixed that nothing can change God’s mind? Or does God adjust his plan and actions based on people’s responses and prayers? Consider both **1 Samuel 15:29** and **Jeremiah 18:1-11**.
  
4. Can we assume that Jonah preached in an energetic and interesting way? To what extent is the success of preaching based on the preacher’s personality, organization, style, flair, etc.?

Verse 10

וַיֵּרָא הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת-מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם כִּי-שָׁבוּ מִדֶּרֶךְ הָרָעָה וַיִּנָּחֵם הָאֱלֹהִים עַל-הָרָעָה אֲשֶׁר-דִּבֶּר לַעֲשׂוֹת-לָהֶם וְלֹא עָשָׂה:

*When God saw their actions—that they turned from their evil ways—God relented from the misery which he said he would do to them and he did not do it.*

5. The word “relented” is often translated as “had compassion.” How would you explain compassion to a grade-schooler or someone who is new to the idea of God’s compassion?
  - a. Can you think of other places in the Bible that God or others were said to have compassion?
  
6. Some will say that other religions like Hinduism or Islam are preferable because they lead people to inner peace or a stronger discipline of living. While that may be what some people think, they are missing the key component to eternal hope, joy, and peace. Think about how any world religion might respond to the people of Nineveh—how would that response be different than God’s response in this verse?

Chapter 4, verse 1

וַיֵּרַע אֶל־יְהוָה רָעָה גְדוֹלָה וַיִּחַר לוֹ:

*But this was a great, evil misery to Jonah (Jonah was very displeased), and it was hot for him (he was angry).*

Verse 2

וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל אֶל־יְהוָה וַיֹּאמֶר אָנֹכִי יְהוָה הֲלוֹא־אָנֹכִי דִבַּרְתִּי עַד־הַיּוֹתֵי עַל־אֲדָמָתִי עַל־כֵּן קָנַמְתִּי לְבָרֶחַ  
תַּרְשִׁישָׁה כִּי יָדַעְתִּי כִּי אַתָּה אֱלֹהֵי־חַנּוּן וְרַחוּם אַרְךָ אַפַּיִם וְרַב־חֶסֶד וְנִתְחַסַּד עַל־הָרָעָה:

*So he prayed to the Lord, saying, “O Lord, isn’t this what I said while I was upon my territory (or soil)? On account of this reason I went earlier to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, long of nose (Hebraism for ‘slow to anger’) and great in love, and one who relents from calamity.*

Verse 3

וְעַתָּה יְהוָה קַח־נָא אֶת־נַפְשִׁי מִמֶּנִּי כִּי טוֹב מוֹתִי מִחַיִּי:

*Now, Lord, take my life from me, for my death is good from my life (Hebrew’s way of saying, ‘it is better for me to die than to live.’).*

Verse 4

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה הֲהֵיטִיב תָּרָה לָךְ:

*But the Lord said, “Is it right that an anger is to you?”*

7. Jonah seemed to be doing so well—he did what God had told him to do and reaped the benefits of being a minister of the Word. And yet, after likely waiting for the forty days to expire, he does not respond the way we think he would. What was at the root of Jonah’s anger?
8. Jonah finally tells us why he fled (God knew all along but, until now, we had to speculate). When might Christians today become angry with God over the same things Jonah was angry about—that God is gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, and rich in love?
9. I think we ought to be careful of accusing Jonah of such a terrible thing here that no one else could ever be capable of. Yes, he uses extreme language in the heat of the moment—he was so angry, he didn’t want to live anymore—but what might cause even what we would call strong Christians to say something similar today?
10. There is a right way for a Christian to express their desire to die. What factors must be kept in mind as that desire is expressed?

11. Think through the words of the Lord's Prayer. Which petitions would have been good for Jonah to have on his heart?
12. Jonah was displeased that God blessed other people through his ministry. Think about your reaction when someone you are or have been at odds with either a) has something good happen to them or b) has something bad happen. Which is usually the default response?
- a. What might we feel when someone "who doesn't deserve it" receives a blessing?
  - b. What might we feel when someone "who had it coming" receives bad news?
  - c. Read **Romans 12:9-21**. This question has a simple answer, but it bears asking: who is the only person to perfectly abide by all of these New Testament commands of God?
    - i. When we are struggling to carry out these types of things, whether within our home, in this congregation, or in our daily interactions with strangers, what is the first thing we can do to grow in our desire to do good to others, deserving or otherwise?

**Closing Prayer 740** *O God, My Faithful God sts. 2-4*

**Grant me the strength to do with ready heart and willing  
whatever you command, my calling here fulfilling,  
that I do what I should while trusting you to bless  
the outcome for my good, for you must give success.**

**Keep me from saying things that later need recalling;  
grant that no idle words may from my lips be falling,  
but when within my place I must and ought to speak,  
then fill my words with grace lest I offend the weak.**

**Lord, let me win my foes with kindly words and actions,  
and let me find good friends for counsel and correction.  
Help me, as you have taught, to love both great and small  
and by your Spirit's might to live in peace with all. Amen.**