

Jonah 4:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry.

Analysis

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. Nineveh's repentance triggers Jonah's rage rather than joy. The Hebrew vayyera el-Yonah ra'ah gedolah vayyichar lo (וַיָּרַא אֶל-יְהוָה כַּעֲדָלָה וַיָּחַר לוֹ) literally reads "and it was evil to Jonah, a great evil, and it burned to him." The phrase "displeased... exceedingly" (ra'ah gedolah) uses the same intensive construction describing Nineveh's wickedness in 1:2—God saw Nineveh's "great evil," now Jonah considers God's mercy "great evil."

"He was very angry" (vayyichar lo) uses charah (חָרָה), meaning to burn with anger. The same verb describes God's "fierce anger" (charon aph) in 3:9 that the king hoped would turn away. Jonah burns with the very anger he wanted God to unleash on Nineveh. This role reversal is shocking—the prophet rages while God shows mercy; the servant demands vengeance while the Master extends grace.

Jonah's anger exposes his heart's true condition throughout the book. He didn't flee because he doubted God's power or message but because he knew God would relent if Nineveh repented (4:2). He preferred their destruction to their salvation. His prejudice, nationalism, and vindictiveness exceed his compassion for 120,000 souls (4:11). This reveals that outward obedience (chapter 3) doesn't automatically indicate inward transformation. Jonah preached, Nineveh repented, God relented—yet the prophet's heart remained hard.

This passage confronts every reader: Do we rejoice when enemies repent, or do we secretly wish for their judgment? Do we want God's mercy universally applied, or selectively distributed to people we approve? Jonah's anger unmasks the human

tendency to want grace for ourselves while demanding justice for others—the opposite of God's character, who is "slow to anger" toward all who turn to Him (Exodus 34:6, Joel 2:13).

Historical Context

Jonah's anger must be understood in historical context. Nineveh was Assyria's capital—the brutal empire that would conquer Israel in 722 BC with horrific cruelty. For an Israelite prophet around 760 BC, saving Assyria meant preserving Israel's future destroyer. From a human perspective, Jonah's anger makes sense—why rescue those who will slaughter your people? Yet this perspective reveals failure to trust God's sovereignty. God could spare Nineveh now and still judge them later (which happened—Nahum prophesied Nineveh's destruction, fulfilled 612 BC). Jonah wrongly assumed that God's current mercy guaranteed permanent exemption from future judgment. He also failed to grasp that God's purposes transcend national interests—salvation belongs to the Lord (2:9), and He extends mercy to whoever repents, regardless of ethnicity.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. When have you felt angry or disappointed that God showed mercy to someone you thought deserved judgment?
2. How does Jonah's displeasure at Nineveh's salvation expose sinful attitudes in your own heart toward certain people or groups?
3. What does Jonah's anger teach about the danger of outward obedience (chapter 3) without inward heart change?

Interlinear Text

לֹא יִרְאֶה גְּדוֹלָה יָמִינָה אֶל כֶּבֶשׂ יְמִינָה יְמִינָה
H7489 H413 Jonah H7451 H1419 H2734 H0

Additional Cross-References

Luke 15:28 (Parallel theme): And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him.

Jonah 4:9 (Parallel theme): And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death.

Matthew 20:15 (Parallel theme): Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?

Jonah 4:4 (Parallel theme): Then said the LORD, Doest thou well to be angry?

From KJV Study • kjvstudy.org