

Jonah 4:10

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then said the LORD, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night:

Analysis

Then said the LORD, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night—God's climactic argument. The Hebrew attah chasta al-haqiqayon asher lo-amalta bo velo giddaltho shebin-lailah hayah ubin-lailah abad (אתה חסת על-הקיקין אשר לא-עמלת בון ולא גמלתו שבע-לילה בינה ובין-לילה אבד) contrasts Jonah's concern for plant versus God's concern for people. The verb "had pity" (chasah, חסַה) means to spare, have compassion—Jonah felt something for the plant, if only self-interested grief over lost comfort.

God's logic is devastating: "You had compassion on something you didn't make, didn't tend, that lasted one day. Should I not have compassion on 120,000 people I created and sustain?" The phrase "came up in a night, and perished in a night" (bin-lailah hayah ubin-lailah abad) emphasizes the plant's transience—literally "son of a night...son of a night," Hebrew idiom for ephemeral existence. This follows Job 8:9: "We are but of yesterday, and know nothing, because our days upon earth are a shadow."

The parallel is unmistakable: If Jonah grieves over insignificant vegetation lasting hours, how much more should God grieve over eternal souls? Jesus teaches this principle: "Ye are of more value than many sparrows" (Matthew 10:31). God cares for sparrows (Matthew 10:29) and clothes grass (Matthew 6:30), yet infinitely more for image-bearers. The logic moves from lesser to greater—if God provides

for plants, will He not care for people? Romans 11:33-36 concludes: "of him, and through him, and to him, are all things."

Historical Context

This verse sets up the book's devastating finale (4:11). God's argument reflects ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature's use of qal va-chomer (light and heavy) reasoning—arguing from lesser to greater. If X is true in smaller case, how much more in greater case? Rabbi Hillel later systematized this as first hermeneutical rule. Jesus used it constantly (Matthew 6:30, 7:11, 10:31). The plant's overnight growth and death weren't unique—many Middle Eastern plants grow rapidly in favorable conditions. God uses natural example to teach supernatural truth about His values.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. How does God's comparison between Jonah's concern for the plant and His concern for Nineveh expose our disordered loves and priorities?
2. What does this verse teach about the infinite value God places on human souls made in His image?
3. How should God's patient reasoning with stubborn Jonah shape how we engage with those who oppose His purposes?

Interlinear Text

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|--------------------------------------|----------|----------|------------------------|--------|
| אָשָׁר | בָּקַר | קָרְבָּן | עַל | אֲשֶׁר |
| Then said | the LORD | H859 | Thou hast had pity | H5921 |
| H559 | H3068 | | H2347 | |
| עַמְלָת | לֹא | בְּ | נָדַלְתָּ | לֹא |
| for the which thou hast not laboured | H0 | H3808 | neither madest it grow | H1431 |
| H5998 | | | | |
| אָבֶד | לִילָה | בְּ | אָבֶד | בְּ |
| in a night | H3915 | H1961 | in a night | H3915 |
| H1121 | | | H1121 | |
| וּכְנָה | לְ | אֶלְהָה | וּכְנָה | לְ |
| and perished | H6 | | | |
| | | | | |

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