

Jonah 4:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.

Analysis

Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live. After witnessing Nineveh's repentance and God's mercy, Jonah responds not with joy but death wish. The Hebrew *ve-attah YHWH qach-na nafshi mimmeni ki tov moti mechayai* (וְעַתָּה יְהוָה קָח־נָא נַפְשִׁי מִמֶּנִּי כִּי טוֹב מוֹתִי מֵחַיָּי) reveals profound spiritual disorder. The phrase "it is better for me to die" (*tov moti mechayai*) echoes 1 Kings 19:4 where Elijah, also running from God's purposes, requests death. But Elijah fled persecution; Jonah flees success—Nineveh repented!

"Take my life" (*qach nafshi*) requests divine execution rather than continued witnessing God's mercy toward enemies. The particle *na* (נָא) adds urgency—"please, I beg you." This exposes Jonah's core sin: not mere ethnocentrism but theological objection to grace itself. He understands God's character (4:2) and hates it. Jonah wanted Nineveh destroyed to validate his prophecy and eliminate Israel's future destroyer. God's compassion thwarts both desires.

This verse diagnoses the human heart's capacity for religious self-righteousness that prefers judgment over mercy. Like the elder brother in Luke 15:25-32 who resents the father's grace toward the prodigal, Jonah cannot celebrate redemption of sinners. This mindset pervades religious communities—Pharisees opposed Jesus for receiving sinners (Luke 15:1-2). We naturally desire judgment for others, mercy for ourselves. Jonah's brutally honest anger exposes what we prefer to hide.

Historical Context

This prayer occurs after Nineveh's repentance (chapter 3). Historically, Jonah's anger makes political sense—Assyria would later destroy Israel's northern kingdom (722 BC). Assyrian inscriptions detail horrific cruelty: impalement, flaying, mass deportations. From Jonah's perspective, God just spared the nation that would annihilate his people. His death wish reflects not just prejudice but genuine horror that God would show mercy to such brutal enemies. Yet God's purposes transcend national interests—His covenant with Abraham promised blessing to "all families of the earth" (Genesis 12:3), fulfilled in Christ's gospel to all nations.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. What does Jonah's death wish after successful evangelism reveal about the danger of preferring vindication over compassion?
2. How do we sometimes resent God's mercy toward those we deem unworthy, and what does this expose about our hearts?
3. In what ways does Jonah's anger mirror the elder brother's resentment in Luke 15, and how does the gospel address this?

Interlinear Text

וְעַתָּה הִ	יְהוָה הִ	קַח	נָ אֵ	אֶת	נַפְשִׁי י	מִמֶּנִּי
H6258	Therefore now O LORD	take	H4994	H853	I beseech thee my life	H4480
	H3068	H3947			H5315	
כִּי	טוֹב	מוֹתִי	מֵחַיִּי			
H3588	from me for it is better	for me to die	than to live			
	H2896	H4194	H2416			

Additional Cross-References

1 Kings 19:4 (References Lord): But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.

Ecclesiastes 7:1 (Parallel theme): A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth.

Numbers 11:15 (Parallel theme): And if thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee, out of hand, if I have found favour in thy sight; and let me not see my wretchedness.

Jonah 4:8 (Parallel theme): And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live.

Numbers 20:3 (References Lord): And the people chode with Moses, and spake, saying, Would God that we had died when our brethren died before the LORD!

1 Corinthians 9:15 (Parallel theme): But I have used none of these things: neither have I written these things, that it should be so done unto me: for it were better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void.