

Jonah 4:7

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered.

Analysis

But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered. The second "prepared" thing—vayeman ha-Elohim tola'at ba'alot hashachar mimochorat vattak et-haqiqayon vayyibash (תָּמִן) (תְּולִעת בְּאַלְמָנָה מִמְּכוֹרָת וְתַּקְרִיב אֶת-פְּקִיעִין יַבְשֵׁשׁ). A tiny worm (tola'at, תְּולִעת) destroys what brought Jonah joy. The verb "smote" (nakah, נִקְהָה) means to strike, attack, kill—military terminology for small creature annihilating large plant. "It withered" (yabesh, יַבְשֵׁשׁ) describes drying up, the opposite of living growth.

The timing is precise: "when the morning rose the next day" (ba'alot hashachar mimochorat)—God orchestrates the lesson carefully. One day of joy, then sudden loss. This temporal precision emphasizes God's sovereign control—nothing is random. The worm, like the fish (1:17), storm (1:4), and wind (4:8), obeys divine command. All creation serves God's pedagogical purposes. Isaiah 45:7 declares: "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil [calamity]: I the LORD do all these things."

The worm teaches that what God gives, He can remove. Job learned this: "The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21). Jonah's joy depended on circumstantial comfort rather than covenantal relationship with God. When circumstances changed, his joy evaporated. This exposes the fragility of happiness rooted in gifts rather than the Giver. God systematically deconstructs Jonah's false foundations to rebuild on truth.

Historical Context

Worms or insects commonly attacked plants in ancient Near East—agricultural reality familiar to original audience. The "worm" might be caterpillar, grub, or similar pest. Isaiah 14:11 and Job 25:6 use tola'at metaphorically for human frailty and mortality. The worm's attack at dawn emphasized suddenness—what seemed secure at night was destroyed by morning. This natural phenomenon becomes supernatural instruction: God governs both great and small, using tiny creatures to accomplish His purposes (Joel 1:4, 2:25—locusts as divine judgment; Exodus 16:20—worms in hoarded manna).

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. How does God's use of a tiny worm to destroy Jonah's comfort demonstrate His sovereignty over all creation, great and small?
2. What does the sudden loss of the plant teach about the instability of circumstantial joy versus covenantal relationship with God?
3. In what ways does God sometimes remove blessings to expose our misplaced affections and redirect us to Himself?

Interlinear Text

לִמְחַבֵּת	בְּשַׁחַר	תַּוְלֵעַת	בָּאָלָהִים	וְתַזְמַחַת	עַתָּה	וְתַזְמַחַת	יְמִים
prepared	But God	a worm	rose	when the morning			the next day
H4487	H430	H8438	H5927	H7837			H4283
וְתַזְמַחַת	אַתְּ	בְּקִידְעֹתִים	וְתַזְמַחַת				
and it smote	H853	the gourd	that it withered				
H5221		H7021	H3001				

Additional Cross-References

Joel 1:12 (Parallel theme): The vine is dried up, and the fig tree languisheth; the pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple tree, even all the trees of the field, are withered: because joy is withered away from the sons of men.

Psalms 102:10 (Parallel theme): Because of thine indignation and thy wrath: for thou hast lifted me up, and cast me down.

Job 1:21 (Parallel theme): And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.

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