

Jonah 4:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

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. God repeats His question from 4:4, now specifying the object—ha-hetev charah lekha al-haqiqayon (הַיּוֹת בְּכָה לְבָ) (עַל-פְּקִיעִין): "Is it good, your burning anger, concerning the plant?" Jonah's response is shocking: hetev charah-li ad-mavet (חַיּוֹת בְּכָה-לִי עַד-מַתֵּת)—"It is good, my anger, unto death." He doubles down, insisting his rage is righteous. The phrase "even unto death" (ad-mavet) claims he's justified being angry enough to die.

This brazen response reveals spiritual blindness at its worst. Jonah sincerely believes his anger is righteous—he's convinced his perspective is correct and God's is wrong. This self-righteousness is more dangerous than obvious sin because it can't be corrected by mere information (Jonah knows God's character—4:2). Only supernatural grace can break through such hardness. Jesus faced this with Pharisees who "trusted in themselves that they were righteous" (Luke 18:9). They couldn't see their sin because they defined righteousness by their standards, not God's.

Jonah's "unto death" echoes Peter's "I will lay down my life for thee" (John 13:37) before denying Christ—passionate self-assurance betraying profound self-ignorance. Yet God doesn't strike Jonah dead or abandon him but continues teaching (4:10-11), demonstrating patience that leads to repentance (Romans 2:4). The book ends without recording Jonah's response, leaving readers to examine their own hearts: Do we justify our anger while God calls us to compassion?

Historical Context

Jonah's defiant response would have scandalized Jewish readers familiar with prophetic literature. Prophets typically submitted to correction (Nathan confronting David—2 Samuel 12; Isaiah's purification—Isaiah 6). Jonah's stubbornness surpasses even Israel's frequent rebellion. This literary shock forces readers to recognize similar tendencies in themselves. The book was likely written post-exile (539 BC onward) when Israel needed to understand God's purposes for Gentile nations and critique their own ethnocentrism. Jonah represents Israel at its worst—knowing God's truth but resisting its implications.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does Jonah's insistence that his anger is righteous demonstrate the danger of self-righteousness that cannot recognize its own sin?
2. What does God's continued patience with defiant Jonah teach about His commitment to pursue and transform hardened hearts?
3. In what ways might we justify our anger, prejudices, or resentments as righteous when God calls us to mercy and compassion?

Interlinear Text

וְאָמַר	אֱלֹהִים	אֶל	יְהֹוָה	בַּיְמָה	בַּיְמָה	לְבָבֶךָ
And he said	And God	H413	to Jonah	Doest thou well	to be angry	H0
H559	H430		H3124	H3190	H2734	H5921
וְאָמַר	אֱלֹהִים	אֶל	יְהֹוָה	בַּיְמָה	בַּיְמָה	לְבָבֶךָ
for the gourd	And he said	Doest thou well	to be angry			
H7021	H559	H3190	H2734			H5704

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