

# Jonah's Anger and God's Compassion

Jonah is furious that God showed mercy to Nineveh. Through the lesson of a plant, God teaches Jonah about His boundless compassion for all people.

Jonah 4:1-11

CHARACTERS: Jonah, God

THEMES: God's compassion, Prejudice, God's heart for all nations, Anger, God's patience with His servants

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JONAH WAS GREATLY displeased and became angry. This was exactly what he had feared—that God would relent and show mercy to Israel's enemies.

He prayed to the Lord, 'Isn't this what I said when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.'

Jonah quoted orthodox theology—words that should bring comfort—but he spoke them as a complaint. He knew God's character, and that's precisely why he ran. He didn't want these pagans to receive mercy.

'Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.'

The Lord replied, 'Is it right for you to be angry?'

Jonah went out and sat east of the city, making himself a shelter to see what would happen. Perhaps he still hoped God would destroy Nineveh.

The Lord provided a leafy plant that grew up over Jonah to give shade and ease his discomfort. Jonah was very happy about the plant. But at dawn the next day, God provided a worm that chewed the plant so that it

withered. When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind. The sun blazed on Jonah's head until he grew faint and wanted to die.

'It would be better for me to die than to live,' he said.

God asked, 'Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?'

'It is,' Jonah said. 'And I'm so angry I wish I were dead.'

Then the Lord said, 'You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?'

The book ends with God's question hanging in the air. Jonah had compassion for a plant but not for thousands of souls. He mourned shade but rejoiced at the thought of mass destruction. His nationalism had eclipsed his theology. He served a God whose mercy extended to all nations, yet he wanted that mercy restricted to his own people.

God's final words reveal His heart: compassion for the multitudes who live in spiritual darkness, concern even for the animals. The same God who saved eight people and animals in Noah's ark had compassion on 120,000 people and many animals in Nineveh. His mercy knows no ethnic boundaries. His love extends to all who turn to Him, foreshadowing the day when His gospel would go to the ends of the earth.