

God's Response to Jonah

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – God responds to Jonah through several object lessons about mercy and grace
2. aim – To cause us to be merciful and kind to others as we understand God's mercy towards us
3. passage – Jonah 4:5-11

b. outline

1. Jonah Sits in the Shade (Jonah 4:5-6)
2. Jonah Seethes in the Heat (Jonah 4:7-8)
3. God Responds to Jonah's Hard-Heartedness (Jonah 4:9-11)

c. opening

1. the **location** of the pericope
 - a. **previously:** the *repeated* outline of **1:1-2:10** and **3:1-4:4**
 1. Jonah is commissioned, Jonah with the sailors, Jonah's grateful prayer vs. ...
 2. Jonah is recommissioned, Jonah with the Ninevites, Jonah's angry prayer
 - b. **now:** the **fulfillment (purpose)** of the book – the response by God to Jonah, *both* to his angry prayer *and* to his overall attitude (**i.e.** which progressed from the beginning of the story)
 1. **i.e.** like **Job**, God now comes to speak, to set the record straight, to make sure that the individual in question (Job, Jonah) is properly "put in his place" such that **we** might learn
 - c. **the final pericope of the book is designed as an extensive object lesson**
 1. God is going to "probe" the attitude of Jonah in order to **cast light upon his own nature**
 2. **i.e.** God is going to demonstrate *who he is* in contrast to the attitude of Jonah (and of all humanity in the face of trouble, pain, grief, selfishness, sin, etc.)

I. Jonah Sits in the Shade (Jonah 4:5-6)

Content

a. Jonah sits outside of the city (v. 5)

1. Jonah seats himself to the "east of the city" = his journey through the city probably began on the W (towards home), and now (having travelled through it all), he "comes out" on the E
2. Jonah makes "a booth" for himself = a makeshift shelter that would protect him from the sun and wind
 - a. **note: v. 8** strongly suggests this is mid-summer, when the ambient temperatures would be at their greatest in the region, and when the prevailing winds would come from the E (**i.e.** behind him)
 - b so ... Jonah builds a "lean-to" structure, probably out of stone and wood that he collected from around the area – and *probably* up on a hill so that he could observe *the whole city/region*
3. Jonah sits under his make-shift "tent" in anticipation of "what would become of the city"
 - a. **question:** **why** does Jonah go to observe what will happen?
 1. did he *distrust* the word of the Lord, *hoping* that God would "change his mind" (again!)?
 2. or ... was he *so obstinate* in his *hatred* of the Ninevites that he thought he could "force" God to act against the city (**i.e.** if I sit here long enough, God will relent of his relenting)
 3. or ... was Jonah *afraid* that God was going to *send him home* with the same message for Israel? (**i.e.** to bring back *to his own people* God's message of destruction for *their* evil)
 - a. **IOW:** Jonah sitting, *refusing* to go home (**i.e.** as he had originally refused to come *here*)
 4. **again:** notice the **irrationality** – Jonah simply *cannot* think straight nor act rightly

b. Jonah enjoys the comfort of shade (v. 6)

1. the Lord "appointed" a plant to grow up over Jonah to provide *additional* shading to him
 - a. "appointed" (*mnh*; *y^eman*) = to number; to count; lit. to make a decision about a matter by virtue of completion and authority over (KJV: "prepared"; NIV: "provided")
 1. **i.e.** like the fish in **1:17**: the Lord counted out a *specific fish* to swallow up Jonah – the fish was *determined* and *used* by God as a **primary means** of accomplishing his *providential intentions*
 - b. "a plant" (*qiqayon*; "gourd" KJV; "bush" NRSV; "leafy plant" NIV) = a plant capable of providing shade to Jonah; a plant with large leaves or a bush of such size as to provide ample shade
 1. **note:** the word is *only* used here in **Jonah 4** – thus, its *exact nature* cannot be determined

- a. because it grows *miraculously* (4:10), its connection to *indigenous* fauna is unknown (*i.e.* did God grow up a *local* plant, or is it of a species *utterly foreign* to this locale?)
- b. but ... the exact identification of the plant is *superfluous to the story* – God grows a plant up over Jonah *on purpose*, and then *uses the plant as an object lesson* (see below)
- 2. **note:** the plant *clearly* represents God’s sovereignty over his Created Order to accomplish his will in and through and around Jonah – *i.e.* the plant was not an *accident* (like the fish)
 - a. **Calvin:** God uses the “normal” means of a plant growing (**ITC:** miraculously fast) to accomplish his providential will – taking something *ordinary* and “expanding” its *normal* operations – not an “unknown device”, but a *miraculous* effect on something *ordinary*
 - b. **although God will (most often) simply allow ordinary things to produce the outcome of his will, he may (at times) intervene in the course of our lives by using the ordinary “beyond” its normal function to accomplish his will**
 - 1. **e.g.** medicine (immediate), healing time (shortened), speaking (to create faith), etc.
- c. “to save him from his discomfort” = *explicitly sent by God* as an act of mercy
 - 1. specifically ... a plant *purposed* by God to show *mercy* to Jonah = instead of *just* his booth, God *adds* a plant to shade him (it has a *divine purpose* ... and Jonah *misses it completely*)
- 2. Jonah was “*exceedingly glad because of the plant*”
 - a. “*exceedingly*” (see also 4:1) = greatly pleased; relished; took great comfort in
 - 1. **note:** the word *repeated* here shows the *intensity* of Jonah’s *pleasure* (contra his *anger* at God relenting) – but not *necessarily* his thankfulness *in knowing it was from God*
 - 2. **IMO:** Jonah knows the plant is from God – its appearance as shade *specifically* where he is sitting (in his booth!), and its *speed, undoubtedly* makes him aware of its *divine intentions*
- 3. **Jonah enjoys the comfort of the shade** – he *probably* believes that the appearance of the plant *coincides* with what (he hopes!) God is about to do in Nineveh
 - a. *i.e.* the plant is (for him!) “evidence” that God is going to “comfort” him *more* (so he thinks!) ...

II. Jonah Seethes in the Heat (Jonah 4:7-8)

Content

a. God appoints suffering over Jonah (vv. 7-8a)

- 1. the Lord “*appointed*” two (2) specific things *at this point*
 - a. **item #1:** “*a worm*” (*toleah*) = a creeping creature that consumes organic matter (**x8 OT**); **also:** scarlet (as in the color of the curtains in the Tabernacle) or yarn (as used in the curtains)
 - 1. **in context:** a gnawing creature, eating the base of the plant, killing it (no more shade)
 - 2. **again:** given the *speed* at which this occurs (“*dawn ... the next day*”), it is *quite apparent* that God *supernaturally* used an *ordinary* worm to do *in a day* what would have taken some time
 - c. **item #2:** “*scorching east wind*” = a *dry, desert-like* wind (sandstorm?) blowing heavy from the E
 - 1. **note:** the fact that the “*sun beat down*” on Jonah (now) suggests that the “lean-to” Jonah had constructed could not withstand the wind, thus exposing Jonah to the hot sun
- d. *i.e.* the Lord appoints the elements around Jonah to serve as *means of suffering*
 - 1. **obvious:** God is *purposefully* making Jonah uncomfortable **as an object lesson** – he is *expecting* Jonah to *respond* to this suffering (*i.e.* and *the response* is the *reason* for the suffering)
 - 2. **remember:** God purposed for **Job** to suffer in order to make a point: not to teach him *how to suffer well*, but how to understand the *sovereignty of God* over his nature as a *righteous man*
 - a. **ITC:** suffering intended to demonstrate *the nature of God as merciful*, in order for Jonah to understand the concept of *divine mercy as it applies to Israel* (see below)
 - b. **suffering, from God’s point of view, is never wasted – for the believer, it is an opportunity to consider the nature and ways of God, and to give glory to him**
- 2. **Jonah seethes in the heat** – he *assumes* this suffering is (**again!**) an **unfair thing for God to do**
 - a. *i.e.* as in being made to announce *pardon* for the enemies of Israel ...

b. Jonah begs God to die (v. 8b)

- 1. **again:** the response of Jonah is the same as before (4:3) – he claims “*it is better to die than to live*”
- 2. **again:** notice the **irrationality** – Jonah simply *cannot* think straight
 - a. in his *anger* (or his *seething heat*), Jonah *assumes* that death is better than life – he’s (apparently) *incapable* of seeing the “finality” of death – *i.e.* *to die* is better than *no hope at all*
- 3. **Jonah begs God to die** – he *asserts* that his situation is hopeless – he is so **utterly myopic**, his only recourse is to *ignore* all God *can do* (*i.e.* he has **learned nothing** from what God did in Nineveh)

III. God Responds to Jonah's Hard-Heartedness (Jonah 4:9-11)

Content

a. God questions Jonah's attitude (v. 9)

1. the question God asks is *almost* the same as 4:4 – **ITC**: God adds “for the plant”
 - a. **i.e.** are you angry *over the fact that the plant has died*?
 - b. or, more specifically (**as before**): is it *right* for you to be angry over the fact that the plant has died? are you *finished* complaining about the plant? why are you so upset over a *plant*?
 - c. Jonah *assents* to the question: “*I do well to be angry, angry enough to die*”
2. God's question belies an **assumption**: **why** are you angry over a plant?
 - a. the answer may seem obvious (**i.e.** I miss the shade it provided) – but ... given what God will say next (**see v. 10**), the question is being asked *to probe Jonah's attitude*
 - b. **i.e.** aren't there *bigger issues* to concern yourself with???
 1. **IOW**: Jonah's *temper tantrum* over his circumstances (“I want to die”) is *childish* in the face of the **much larger issues in the world of which he ought to be concerned** ...
 2. **irony**: the story is often taught to *children*, but it is *Jonah* who acts as a child

b. God's simple point for Jonah (vv. 10-11)

1. **now**: the point of the book becomes apparent ... the Lord *contrasts* the attitude of Jonah towards the plant vs. the attitude of God towards Nineveh
 - a. “*pity*” (*hws*) = show mercy; have compassion towards; hold a focus on sparing or delivering (particularly from punishment); lit. be troubled by, so that you act kindly
 - b. **to Jonah**: “*you pity the plant*” = you are troubled by the fact the plant died; you desired it (selfishly) to live so that *you* might prosper from it (you did *nothing* to “*make it grow*”)
 1. **i.e.** you are so *narcissistically and myopically focused on your own comfort* that you failed to see *why* I gave you the plant (**e.g.** as an act of mercy, to show you what mercy looks like)
 - c. **from God**: “*should not I pity Nineveh*” = I am troubled by the fact that the city is filled with *people*; you desired it (selfishly) to be destroyed so that Israel might “prosper” from it
 1. **i.e.** you are so *narcissistically and myopically focused on your own desires* that you failed to consider the *human reality* of the city (**e.g.** as a population of *image bearers*)
 2. **note**: there is some debate over the phrase “*who do not know their right hand from their left*”
 - a. some assert it is phrase related to people “knowing good from evil” (**i.e.** the reprobate not knowing one from the other) – this would make the 120,000 the population of the city
 - b. Calvin asserted it simply means **children** – literally, those not able to distinguish one hand from another *logically or intellectually* – this would make the population *much higher*
 - c. **IMO**: the latter is simpler, given that God *also* points out the city is filled with *cattle* (**i.e.** look at the most *vulnerable* here, those who aren't really “to blame” for the city's evil)
 - d. **the mercy of God extended over Nineveh is an extension of his nature as a God of mercy**
 1. **i.e.** the *natural response* of those who have been shown mercy should be to extend mercy towards others (**Matthew 5:7**; “*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy*”)
 2. or ... Israel has been shown mercy *in spite of its disobedience* because I am a God of mercy – you (Jonah!) should have seen that in this object lesson, because you *obviously* failed to see it *when you were at home*
 3. **question**: why does this book end so abruptly? **answer**: because its *audience* (Samaria) should have read the story, come to the end, and *applied the above answer to itself*
 - a. Jonah's *failure* should have acted **as a prophetic word**: Samaria has failed to see what God has been *teaching*, yet has been shown mercy (like Nineveh) *in spite of its evil* – they repented at the mercy of God, *so should you!!*
 - b. **for us: do not despise the mercy of the Lord** (as so often seen in our failure to heed the lessons God brings us in suffering) – let God's mercy remind you of the *correct response* to suffering, and to the extension of mercy to others – for as much (**Romans 2:4**)
“*Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?*”