

The Book of Jonah
Class Notes
Session 9

Jonah 3.10 This is a key verse in Jonah. YHWH is compassionate and forgiving...Just as Jonah was afraid of!

Just as God had saved Jonah...He now saves...spares...Nineveh!

The Ninevites turned from their evil... חָשַׁב (*šāḥ*)... “To return” ... This is repentance! God’s judgement (Law) leads to mercy (Gospel)...Mercy leads to repentance!

“God’s mercies are always unmerited; His grace is never earned. Repentance is never a work to be rewarded. But this is not to say that God does not act in response to such repentance. Nineveh’s repentance delayed God’s destruction of the city for about 150 years. The people evidently fell into sin again, so that later the city was destroyed, in 612 B.C.”¹

God’s mercy, love, and desire for forgiveness and reconciliation are the themes that lead into the next chapter in Jonah’s journey!

“When Nineveh repented, God relented.” The very thought of God “changing his mind” causes difficulty for some believers. In perfect consistency with his justice, righteousness, and mercy, he spared Nineveh. There is absolutely no contradiction here. God’s character and his promises do not change...God does change his plan of action according to his purposes. In Exod 32:12 Moses prayed that Israel might not be destroyed despite their sinful behavior in making and worshiping the golden calf. He asked God, “Turn from your fierce anger, relent and do not punish your people” (cf. Amos 7:3, 6; Jer 18:7–11; 26:2–3). Again and again the Old Testament relays the truth that God is responsive to his creation.”²

Jonah 4.1-4 This chapter now returns to the relationship between Jonah and the LORD.

Jonah cannot understand why God would be merciful...Even though he knew God was merciful!

Literally...the phrase is...“it became evil to Jonah as a great evil.” As God turns *from* His anger...Jonah is turning *to* his anger!

חָרַחַר (*hā·rā(h)*)... Lit., “To become hot.”

Jonah’s anger is mentioned several times (vv 4, 9) and contrasts with God, who is “slow to anger” (v 2).

“Jonah’s out-of-control anger over Nineveh’s repentance and God’s forgiveness is best understood in reference to Nineveh’s historical evil. Jonah’s anger is a reflection of Yahweh’s anger (3:9) over Nineveh’s wickedness. But Jonah’s anger also stands in contrast to Yahweh’s, for he does not believe that their evil should be forgiven. He cannot accept Micah 7:18b: ‘You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy.’”³

(v.2): Jonah now turns his anger to God.

¹ Walvoord & R. B. Zuck, Eds. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*.

² B.K. Smith and F.S. Page. *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah* (Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995).

³ J. Bruckner. *Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah* (Zondervan Publishing House, 2004).

Jonah's description of God's character... God is gracious ... רַחֻם (*hannûm*)... "Gracious" ... God's *unmerited favor*.

Compassionate... רַחֻם (*rahûm*)... "The primary meaning of this word is "to be soft like a womb." It is illustrated in the soft compassion of a mother for her child in the womb."⁴

Slow to anger... אַרְיֵךְ (*'ārēk*)... "Patient" "Long-suffering."

Loyal love... חֶסֶד (*hē·śēd*)... "Kindness" "Goodness" (Covenant love)

Hosea 2.19

Relenting... נָחַם (*nā·hām*)... "A state of relief."

"Yahweh is 'a God who *relents* from sending calamity'... It is one of the two kinds of God's compassion in this verse. "Compassionate God" (*rahûm*) is a gentle womb-like compassion of God for his good creation; *naham* is an agonizing compassion of God in relation to a sinful humanity... for agonizing over sending calamity, even to a wicked people such as the Ninevites."⁵

This was Israel's understanding of God... toward them!

Psalms 86.15... Joel 2.13

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The issue... Jonah does not like God's plan for Nineveh! A "play" on words... Bad behavior should lead to a bad end, and Jonah takes it very badly that it does not.

Jonah's *angry* suggestion? He would rather die than see Nineveh saved.

(v.4): God's response is a question... "Have you any right to be angry?"

"Do you do well" reflects the idea of a result... God asks if Jonah's anger will result in any good?

"God was not rebuking Jonah; God was not even asking him what right he, a man, had to criticize God. Rather he was suggesting to him that he might not be correct in his estimate of the position. Scripture has many examples—Job and Jeremiah being the most obvious—of men in agony who, as they tried to understand the ways of God, used language others might consider blasphemous (cf. Jer 15:15–18; 20:7–18). God shows his compassion with all such, Jonah not excepted."⁶

Going Forward: "Jonah and God converse with each other for the first time. Jonah revealed why he did not want to preach to Nineveh in the first place. Assyria was Israel's national enemy, so Jonah hoped they would perish. The central conflict was between God's mercy and Jonah's unwillingness to extend to Nineveh the grace of God that had already saved his own life."⁷

⁴ Bruckner. *Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Daniel and the Minor Prophets* (Zondervan Publishing House).

⁷ *The Lutheran Study Bible* (Concordia Publishing House, 2009).