

THE BOOK OF JONAH

By Dean Robinson

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Lesson 1

THE POSTPONING PROPHET

Lesson: Jonah 1:1-17

Jonah is the fifth book of what is traditionally referred to as the Minor Prophets. The book is a record about a man of God who was chosen as God's instrument in proclaiming God's message to the Assyrians, particularly to the idolatrous pagans of Nineveh. This book is also a revelation of the amazing grace of God as He deals in mercy and patience with His servant who at first refused to carry out his divinely appointed task. Jonah is a unique book in the sense that it not only is a biography of a passionate prophet, but it also gives a prophetic preview of Christ's burial and resurrection (Matthew 12:39-40) and a remarkable prophecy of the entire history of the people of Israel.

In chapter 1 we are shown a classic illustration of the folly of trying to run from God and His calling upon one's life. Whatever God's perfect will for our life is, we must submit to it and obey it without question, doubt, or hesitation.

I. GOD'S DIRECTIVE – Verses 1-2

A. A Servant Is Selected – Verse 1

- a. God had a task to be done and chose from among His servants, Jonah, the son of Amittai.
- b. Jonah was a tried and proven prophet of the Lord who served during the rule and reign of a wicked king named Jeroboam (II) whereby he predicted that this king would reclaim some territory for Israel which had been lost under previous administrations – 2 Kings 14:23-25

B. The Specifics Are Stated – Verse 2

- a. God's word to Jonah was a clear and unmistakable command to go to heathen Nineveh and preach against it because of its grievous wickedness. Should note that God chooses to reveal His will always through His Word – Psalms 37:23; 119:104-105. If we want to know our divine obligations and responsibilities, we must first know the Word of God.
- b. Even though God's divine command was clear-cut and definite, it would not be easy because Nineveh was the ancient capital of the Assyrian Empire which was known to be a cesspool of debauchery and immorality, wholly given over to idolatry, witchcraft, and barbaric cruelty. God referred to Nineveh as "that great city" and "exceeding great city" (3:3); it was great in its wickedness (Nahum 3:1-4). Nineveh was located on the Tigris River about 75 miles south of the border of our present day Turkey and about 200 miles north of Baghdad in Iraq.
- c. The specifics of Jonah's duty are found in the words: arise, go, and cry against. That is, wake up, get up, and speak up against the sins of the people – Isaiah 58:1. The reason for God's divine directive was not just because of the wickedness of Nineveh but mainly because of the infinite holiness of God. Such a holy God cannot and will not tolerate such evil and iniquity.

II. JONAH'S DISOBEDIENCE – Verse 3

A. His Planned Destination.

- a. Jonah, in a daring and blatant way, disobeyed the divine commission given to him by fleeing to Tarshish. Jonah ran in the opposite direction than he was suppose to because Nineveh was east of where he lived and Tarshish was west. Jonah in his disobedience wanted to put as much distance as possible between himself and God and going to Tarshish emphasized this separation.
- b. Twice we're told that Jonah's intentions were to flee from God's presence. While he could never escape the omnipresence of God, he could flee and depart from the place of God's perfect will and blessing for his life. Fleeing the presence of the Lord is possible when one forsakes the place of worship, prayer, and service unto God – Genesis 4:16; Jeremiah 23:39. Disobedience and rebellion will always produce a decline in our interest in spiritual things and a dislike for the presence of God.

B. His Perilous Direction.

- a. Jonah's determination to run from God can be attributed to two things:
 - i. His spiritual deterioration — The quickness and rapid pace with which Jonah disobeyed God revealed that his spiritual health was already on a downward spiral. One does not backslide accidentally or overnight; disobedience and rebellion against God does not occur unless there has been some groundwork laid for it: neglect of Bible study, prayer, church attendance, etc.

- ii. His spiritual discrimination — In 4:2 Jonah explains why he fled: he was afraid the Ninevites might repent at his preaching and be spared God’s judgment, thereby sealing the doom and downfall of his own people. Israel (ten northern tribes) had been repeatedly warned by God through His faithful prophets (ex.: Hosea 9:3) that they would be taken captive by the Assyrians for their persistent rebellion against God. Jonah rejected the notion of God showing His mercy and grace to a heathen people and Israel’s mortal enemies.
- b. As soon as Jonah disobeyed God, his life began to plummet downward on a slippery slope: he went down to Joppa, he went down into the ship, he went down into the sea, and he went down into the belly of the fish. The path of disobedience is always down.
- c. Jonah “paid the fare thereof” but little did he realize there would be a higher price to pay for his disobedience and rebellion against God – Proverbs 13:15; 14:12

III. THE STORM’S DISRUPTION – Verses 4-17

A. Agitation of the Sea – Verse 4

- a. As a result of Jonah’s disobedience, God sent a great wind and mighty tempest on the sea. This was no small storm because verse 13 says the sea was “tempestuous” and verse 15 says it was “raging.” Jonah may have fled but God did not relinquish His sovereignty over nature or His creatures. He who created the elements is able to direct and control them: Psalm 107:23-25; 135:7; Matthew 5:45; Mark 4:39
- b. The storm was so powerful that the ship was in danger of literally being torn apart. God was grieved over Jonah’s sin; no one is immune from storms brought on by disobedience to God’s commands — Isaiah 57:20-21. Many lives have been made a shipwreck because of their rebellion and running from God.

B. Alarm by the Sailors – Verses 5-10

- a. Recognizing this was no ordinary storm and realizing their imminent danger, these sailors did two things: they prayed to their false gods and in their panic began to overthrow the cargo of the ship – Verse 5a. These seamen were no doubt experienced, skilled sailors that had been through many storms in their lifetime but this storm was so fierce and ferocious that they knew there was no chance to survive in the turbulent waves and stay afloat in the raging sea if the boat sank.
- b. While the sailors were feverishly praying and working to save their lives, Jonah was below the deck fast asleep, for which he was sternly rebuked by the captain of the ship who requested that Jonah begin praying to his God for help – Verse 5b-6. It is pathetically sad that a prophet of God was called upon by a pagan to pray. Sin is like a numbing narcotic, anesthetic drug that soothes people asleep to where they are unaware of their backslidden, rebellious condition.

- c. With life and death in the balances, the sailors concluded someone on board was responsible for the storm and after casting lots, Jonah was found out to be the guilty individual – Verse 7
- d. After an intense interrogation by the sailors, Jonah finally confessed his sin of trying to run from the one true God who was the Sovereign Creator and Ruler of all the universe – Verse 8-10. At this point Jonah was made to realize that it was utterly impossible to hide and run from God. Jonah declared he feared the Lord: Ecclesiastes 12:13; Hebrews 10:31; 12:28

C. Advice from the Guilty Prophet – Verses 11-16

- a. Upon asking the question what should be done to him by the sailors who were now even more terrified (verse 10a), Jonah humbly responded by advising them to throw him overboard into the sea – Verses 11-12. Here we see evidence of Jonah’s true repentance wherein he was willing to accept the just penalty for his sin. He who had at first tried to run from God’s divine duty was now willing to give his life, if necessary, in order to save the sailors and do God’s will.
- b. Ignoring Jonah’s advice, the sailors vainly attempted to bring the ship to land but as the storm grew worse; they decided to heed the prophet’s suggestion, acknowledging Jehovah to be the true God – Verses 13-16. As soon as Jonah hit the water, the raging of the storm ceased. These once pagan sailors were made to respect and submit to the power and authority of Almighty God. They realized that the lot and the word of the prophet, as well as the storm were indications of the sovereign will of God in the matter. God had done as it pleased Him.

D. Appointment of a Gigantic Fish – Verse 17

- a. The Lord prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah as soon as he plunged beneath the sea. The word “prepared” means: to appoint, order, assign. God arranged it that the fish should be there when Jonah was cast into the sea.
- b. Jonah’s preservation in the belly of the fish for 3 days and nights can only be explained as a supernatural miracle. The skeptic’s problem with Jonah and the whale is not a lack of explanation but a lack of faith. We are not required to explain Bible miracles; we are only required to believe them by faith.

God had a job to be done. Jonah was still to be the messenger. The Lord graciously intervened and His prophet was miraculously spared. This chapter clearly reveals not only the patience and longsuffering of God towards His disobedient servant but also the futility of running from God. God, in His love, will chasten every one of His rebellious children and when He does, the Bible declares it will be “grievous” (Hebrews 12:11). Such was the case with the life of Jonah.

Lesson 2

THE PRAYING PROPHET

Jonah 2:1-10

In chapter 1 we saw God's patience as He graciously dealt with His disobedient servant who vainly attempted to flee from God's presence. Now in chapter 2 we see a penitent servant fleeing to God's presence in humble prayer. After spending three days and nights in the fish's belly, Jonah was made to realize that the best and safest place for him to be in was in the center of God's perfect will. Submitting to the chastening of the Lord, Jonah confesses his only hope of deliverance is of the Lord. Jonah's life was living proof of the slogan: "Man's extremity is God's opportunity." From this chapter we can learn that anywhere at any time God's people can pray about anything.

I. PASSIONATE SUPPLICATION – Verses 1-2

A. Place of Jonah's Praying – Verse 1

- a. Jonah poured out his heart to God in prayer while in a fish's belly, which certainly should teach us something about when and where we can pray. We can pray even though the outward circumstances may be unfavorable and we must not excuse ourselves from prayer just because we do not have what we think is a suitable place to pray. It isn't the place where we pray that matters as much as it is the prayer which we pray.
- b. While no doubt this was one of the strangest prayer meetings ever held, we can learn from this that it is God's will for His people to pray always (Luke 18:1) and everywhere (1 Timothy 2:8).
- c. Should note Jonah prayed to the Lord "his God" — In spite of the fact that he had disobeyed and rebelled against the Lord, he knew that God had not abandoned him. Jehovah was still his God who could be called upon at anytime, anywhere in prayer.

B. Purpose of Jonah's Praying – Verse 2

- a. Jonah lifted up his voice and cried out unto the Lord because of his affliction. Jonah recognized that he was being afflicted by God for his own sin of disobedience and rebellion: Psalm 119:67. It's important to acknowledge and accept the chastening hand of God upon our life because of our sin; the worst thing a person can do is become bitter against God. Jonah did not despise God's chastening but humbly submitted to it: Proverbs 3:11.

- b. In chastisement for our sin God sometimes allows His people to experience the deep waters of trouble and afflictions in order that they may cry out unto Him in earnest and fervent prayer — Psalms 18:4-6; 69:1-2; 120:1; 130:1-2. Notice that God was ready and willing to hear and answer Jonah’s cry for help out of the belly of “hell” (sheol) — also translated grave or pit; Old Testament designation for the abode of the dead; place of departed spirits. Sometimes people have to hit rock bottom before they will ever look up — Psalms 28:1-2; 30:2-3; 86:13.

II. DIVINE INTERVENTION – Verses 3-6

A. Presence of God Revealed – Verses 3-4

- a. Believing God to be the source of his chastisement, Jonah attributes the hand of God in the storm and he being cast into the sea – Verse 3. Jonah admits it was God (“thou hadst”), through the hands of the sailors, that had thrown him overboard into the sea; he says it was God’s billows and waves that had swept over him. Jonah knew all of this did not happen by accident or chance but was the result of a supreme and sovereign God who was in charge of all things and all events.
- b. Sensing his desperate need for restoring fellowship with his God, he expresses a desire for God’s favor and blessing to once again be upon his life – Verse 4. Looking toward the temple in reverent prayer was to look to God in faith, seeking His forgiveness and favor. The temple was where God’s divine presence was manifested. It was the place where sin was pardoned and the repentant sinner restored to God’s favor and blessing, based upon the blood of the sacrifices sprinkled upon the mercy seat – Psalm 86:5

B. Preservation by God Realized – Verse 5-6

- a. In detailed fashion Jonah graphically describes the horror of his experience, after being thrown overboard and sinking into the depths of the sea – Verses 5-6a
- b. After expressing the helplessness of his situation, Jonah acknowledges his sure hope of deliverance through God’s infinite power and mercy – Verse 6b. Jonah knew that if God had not intervened on his behalf, he would still be lying at the bottom of the ocean. “corruption” — pit, destruction, grave – Psalm 40:1-2. God’s preservation of Jonah from his watery grave goes to prove that there is no depth from which God cannot lift us, no sorrow of which He cannot comfort us, no sin of which He cannot pardon and forgive.

III. STERN PROCLAMATION – Verses 7-10

A. Remembrance of God Pronounced – Verses 7-8

- a. What seemed to be the turning point through all of Jonah's troubling circumstances was when he called to mind the God whom he had disobeyed and forsaken and then turned to Him in prayer – Verse 7. Jonah's remembrance of God kept him from total despair and led him to victorious praying – Psalms 42:6; 143:4. There is grave danger in forgetting the Lord's blessings and commandments – Deuteronomy 8:11; Psalms 103:2; 105:5; Proverbs 3:1; Isaiah 46:9
- b. In reference to himself and as a warning to all others, Jonah declares there is great deceit into thinking you can forsake God and get by with it – Verse 8. To follow after lying vanities this world has to offer will lead to a disastrous end; to forsake the only source of mercy is akin to committing spiritual suicide. The will of God is ever the way of safety, peace, and comfort; to neglect and disobey His will is to set yourself on a collision course for trouble and problems.

B. Gratitude to God Promised – Verse 9

- a. Grateful for God's goodness and mercy bestowed upon his life, Jonah promises the sacrifice of thanksgiving and the performance of his vows. The goodness and mercy of God are always incentives enough for praise and prayer, sacrifice and service: Psalms 50:14-15; 54:6-7; 107:21-22.
- b. Jonah's ultimate conclusion to this whole ordeal was: salvation is of the Lord. "salvation" — deliverance – Psalms 3:8; 68:20. Jonah came to know as never before that deliverance, whether of the soul or the body, can come only from the Lord Himself. A person trying to run from God, his only hope of salvation is of the Lord; a person facing great trials and difficulties, his only hope of salvation is of the Lord; a person that is spiritually dead and lost in his sins, his only hope of salvation is of the Lord.

C. Deliverance from God Provided – Verse 10

- a. Now that Jonah had been brought to the place of repentance and submission, God spoke to the fish and it vomited out Jonah on the dry land. The mighty Creator of all life and the sovereign God of all the universe controls and orders the movements of every living creature, from the tiniest molecule to the mightiest mammal. Jonah's deliverance proved Psalm 72:12 to be true.
- b. Should be pointed out that while Jonah was disobedient and rebellious, this great fish was obedient and submissive to the commands of God. May it be our prayer to be willing to obey and yield to the will and Word of God in order that we might faithfully and acceptably serve the Lord and bring glory to His name.

In chapter 2 Jonah came to the stark realization of how foolish it was to be apart from the presence of the Lord. Out of sincere contrition and remorse, Jonah cries out to God with a prayer of thanksgiving and praise, acknowledging the mighty and miraculous workings of God upon his life. His prayer was heard in the highest heavens even though it was prayed from the lowest depths. Jonah's prayer and faith should encourage us to never let go of God no matter what our situation may be. We may be so far down that we have to look up to see bottom but if Jonah could be delivered, then so can we if we will confess and turn from our sin and return to the path of complete obedience and dependence upon God. Jonah's prayer gives warning to others to keep close to God. Jonah's experience should encourage us to trust in God as the God of our salvation.

"But the salvation of the righteous is of the LORD: he is their strength in the time of trouble."
(Psalm 37:39)

Notes

Lesson 3

THE PREACHING PROPHET

Jonah 3:1-10

In chapter 1 we learned the lesson of God's patience with Jonah running away from God in disobedience to go and preach to the Ninevites. In chapter 2 we learned the lesson of God's pardon with Jonah running to God in prayer as he sincerely repents of his rebellion against God's command. In chapter 3 we learn of God's power with Jonah running with God as he promptly obeys by proclaiming God's message to the people of Nineveh. While in chapter 2 God demonstrated His sovereign power in rescuing Jonah, in chapter 3 God now displays His sovereign grace, in not only giving Jonah another opportunity to obey, but also in sparing the Ninevites judgment because of their repentance.

I. THE COMMISSIONED MISSIONARY – Verses 1-4

A. Repetition of the Command – Verses 1-2

- a. Now that Jonah is safely back on land, repentant of his sin and restored to God's favor, the Lord repeats His command to go and preach to Nineveh. The fact that Jonah was re-commissioned a "second time" (verse 1) is a demonstration of God's marvelous grace, forgiveness, and full restoration. Jonah did not deserve a second opportunity but thankfully we serve a God that is full of tender mercy – Lamentations 3:22-23. Our God is the God of a "second chance" as illustrated in the lives of such men as Abraham, Moses, David, Peter, John Mark, etc. Serving God is a privilege, not a right.
- b. As God mercifully re-commissions His messenger, Jonah is specifically told where to preach and what to preach – Verse 2. Anyone sent by God to preach is under this edict. The message to be preached is God's, not man's. It was not left up to Jonah to determine what, when, and where to preach. A true man of God will always preach what God says to preach. The preacher's primary task is not to build a following but to faithfully deliver God's message.

B. Response to the Command – Verses 3-4

- a. Jonah's response to his renewed commission was prompt and precise, which gave evidence of his true repentance and determined dedication in serving the Lord – Verse 3. True repentance replaces the rebellious attitude towards God's commands with an attitude of humble submission to God. The first time God gave His orders, Jonah rose up to flee but this time he rose up to preach. There was no delay, no procrastination, no waiting for a more convenient time. Jonah immediately obeyed.

- b. The standard by which we measure the validity of Jonah’s immediate response of obedience is: “according to the word of the LORD.” (verse 3) The true test of one’s dedication and devotion to God is determined by how closely and persistently one adheres to the Word of God.
- c. The fact that Nineveh was “exceeding great” was in reference to its large land area. “Three day’s journey” meant it was about 60 miles in circumference. This city had walls surrounding it that were 100 ft. high and wide enough for 3 chariots to ride side by side.
- d. Not only was Jonah’s response prompt and precise, but his preaching was plain and pointed as he declared the soon-coming judgment of God upon Nineveh – Verse 4. Jonah’s message of judgment warned Nineveh that it would be “overthrown” — same strong word used for the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Note: the number 40 was often used in Scripture as a number of testing (ex: the flood: Genesis 7:17; Moses in the mount: Exodus 24:18; Israel wandering in the wilderness: Numbers 14:33; temptation of Christ: Matthew 4:2).

II. THE CONFESSING MULTITUDE – Verses 5-9

A. Demonstration of Repentance – Verses 5-6

- a. As soon as the people of Nineveh heard Jonah’s bold and uncompromising message of warning and devastating judgment, the entire city, everyone without exception, turned to God in faith and gave evidence of genuine repentance of their sins – Verse 5. Fasting and sackcloth were outward signs of inward grief and mourning over one’s sins; Nineveh was made to realize the awfulness and shame of their sin and demonstrated it by their fasting and putting on of sackcloth. True repentance does not treat sin lightly; it acknowledges the wickedness of it and is filled with sorrow for having done it — 2 Corinthians 7:10.
- b. In his repentance and faith the king reacted exactly as the people did as he changed the location where he sat (from the throne to ashes) and the clothes which he wore (royal robe to sackcloth) – Verse 6. The people and the king so understood the warning that without any delay, they immediately and accordingly complied with the implication of Jonah’s message: repent or perish (Luke 13:3,5).

B. Decree of Repentance – Verses 7-9

- a. After the king of Nineveh took action regarding his own personal repentance, he and his nobles issued a proclamation throughout the city for all citizens, along with their animals, to fast and be covered with sackcloth – Verse 7-8a. The animals were included so that everything around the people would help keep their attention on repentance. Without food or water, the animals would be bellowing and bawling all day long which would continuously remind the people of the mourning of repentance and of the spiritual work at hand.

- b. The king's decree also called for the people to fervently pray unto God and to wholeheartedly turn from and forsake all of their evil ways of barbarianism, brutality, oppression, and vicious cruelties – Verse 8b. Evidence of a genuine work of repentance and faith will be a complete change of one's conduct and behavior. Matthew 3:8; 2 Corinthians 5:17
- c. The king issued his decree of repentance in the hope that God would mercifully turn from His fierce and justified anger and spare them from divine judgment and destruction – Verse 9. The king's hope for God's mercy rested upon the experiences of Jonah. Luke 11:30 says Jonah was "a sign unto the Ninevites." Jonah was a living example of mercy received through repentance. The Ninevites could see in Jonah that God punishes sin but also spares the sinner on repentance. Jonah was not only a sign of the judgment of God upon sin but was also a sign of the mercy and grace of God who delivers the guilty from divine judgment when they cry out to God in repentance and faith for salvation.

III. THE COMPASSIONATE MASTER – Verse 10

A. Recognition by God – Verse 10a

- a. God saw the works of the Ninevites, how that they truly turned from their wickedness and sin. This is not teaching salvation by works but their fasting and forsaking of sin showed a real change within their hearts, giving proof of true repentance and faith toward God.
- b. Faith without works is "dead" (James 2:17,26). Ephesians 2:10
- c. God sees and knows all things (John 16:30; 21:17; 1 John 3:20) and all men, including their deeds and actions, the thoughts and intents of their hearts (1 Kings 8:39; Psalms 139:1-4, 23-24; Jeremiah 17:9-10; Ezekiel 11:5). Everything we say, think, or do is known to God — Proverbs 5:21.

B. Repentance of God – Verse 10b

- a. God changed His method of action against the Ninevites because of their sincere repentance and faith. The threatened doom in this instance was conditioned upon repentance; when that condition was met and fulfilled, God had no need to execute the warning.
- b. When God institutes a change in His dealings with men, His course of conduct is referred to in the Scriptures as repentance. God seems to change His mind because He changes His method. God's perfect and eternal character of immutability remains the same but His dealings with sinful men change as they change from ungodliness to godliness, from disobedience to obedience.
- c. We know that the repentance of Nineveh was legitimate and for real in Jonah's day, as stated by our Lord in Matthew 12:41.

What happened in Jonah 3 was undoubtedly one of the greatest evangelistic campaigns to ever be recorded in the Bible. It shows what the Lord can do with a frail human instrument, after being given a second opportunity that is willing to preach God's message. After repentance and forgiveness, Jonah was given another chance to faithfully declare God's Word without fear or favor of man. Thank the Lord we serve a God of a "second chance."

This chapter also clearly reveals how that through "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21), one can escape the wrath and judgment of a holy and righteous God. Without repentance and faith, the lost sinner is doomed for eternity.

Notes

Lesson 4

THE POUTING PROPHET

Jonah 4:1-11

Chapter 3 concluded with the scene of Nineveh experiencing genuine revival sent from God as the people repented of their sin and believed on the true and living God. The abundant mercy of God had been gloriously displayed as the entire city was spared the righteous judgment of God. Instead of rejoicing at what had just transpired, we see Jonah in chapter 4 upset and angry over the tender loving-kindness of God. In this chapter Jonah was made to realize that God in His love and compassion for others was not only gracious and infinite, but also reasonable and just, according to His own sovereign purpose and will.

I. JONAH'S DISPLEASURE – Verses 1-3

A. His Angry Outrage – Verse 1

- a. Jonah was extremely unhappy over the results in Nineveh. While the city was no doubt rejoicing over God's divine demonstration of His unfailing mercy, Jonah was upset and frustrated.
- b. Jonah's outrage over what had happened is emphasized by describing him being "exceedingly" displeased and "very" angry. He should have fallen on his knees in gratitude and praise to God for Nineveh's preservation. The Bible teaches there is joy in heaven over "one sinner that repenteth" (Luke 15:7).

B. His Bitter Outcry – Verses 2-3

- a. Jonah delivers a weak excuse for his disobedience by explaining that he knew God to be a God of unlimited grace, mercy, patience, and kindness and he was afraid the Ninevites would be spared and forgiven – Verse 2; Exodus 34:6-7; Joel 2:13. Jonah was more upset over God's abundant mercy than his own flagrant disobedience. What Jonah completely overlooked was the fact that he himself was a product of the mercy of God. If it had not been for these divine qualities of God, Jonah would still be in the belly of the fish.
- b. Out of total frustration and displeasure, Jonah foolishly cries out to God to take his life away – Verse 3. Death seemed more preferable to Jonah than to submit to the perfect plan and purpose of God. He had already concluded that Nineveh did not deserve God's pardon. While he had received pardoning mercy from the Lord when he repented, he was not willing for Nineveh to have the same because they were Israel's enemies. Jonah was not complaining that God was a God of mercy and grace; rather he was displeased where God chose to display that mercy and grace.

II. GOD'S DENUNCIATION – Verses 4-11

A. Divine Preparations Made For Jonah – Verses 4-8

- a. In order to get Jonah to see his own sinful behavior of sulking and resentment, God pointedly asked him if there were any reasonable grounds or justification for his anger – Verse 4. The question God asked Jonah implied that his anger was totally uncalled for and dishonoring to God.
- b. Jonah's response to God's question was to go outside the city walls on the eastside and build for himself a small temporary place of shelter in order that he may watch and wait to see what the ultimate fate of the city would be – Verse 5. This booth served to provide Jonah shade from the burning rays of the hot sun. In spite of the fact that Nineveh had been spared divine judgment, Jonah still foolishly thought that maybe some form of punishment would fall upon the city. Jonah hoped that the justice of God would exceed or surpass His mercy and waited to see whether there might be a change in the plan and purpose of God concerning Nineveh.
- c. With Jonah comfortably entrenched under his place of shelter, God caused a plant to grow at a miraculous pace over Jonah's booth and head, providing further shade and relief from the heat of the sun – Verse 6. The principle reason for the prepared gourd was not just for Jonah's enjoyment but to reveal and correct the evil attitude of his heart. His response and reaction to the gourd ("was exceeding glad") demonstrated that he was more concerned with the comforts of the flesh than with the spiritual problems of his heart.
- d. The next day God divinely prepared a devouring worm and a dry, blistering, hot wind to destroy and demolish Jonah's place of shade and rest, causing him to even despair of life – Verses 7-8. These divine appointments or preparations made by God (1:17; 4:6,7,8) were God's way of showing to Jonah that a loving and longsuffering God could shield or slay His servant just as easily as He could destroy or spare a city, according to His sovereign will and purpose.

B. Divine Pity Shown By God – Verses 9-11

- a. God asks Jonah if he had a justified reason to be angry because of the gourd to which Jonah stubbornly and arrogantly replies by declaring with emphasis that he had every right to be angry, even to the point of death – Verse 9. The question by God was to once again expose and denounce Jonah's proud and callous heart.
- b. As a stern rebuke of Jonah's own self-centered attitude, the Lord compares and contrasts Jonah's pathetic sympathy for the gourd and God's boundless love and compassion for the Ninevites – Verse 10-11. God in His tender love was willing to spare the entire city of Nineveh, including 120,000 precious souls of innocent children. Jonah's care and concern was out of balance; his spiritual eyesight was blurred to the point he had a sense of pity for the gourd destroyed by worms but was greatly perturbed at God for manifesting His mercy and grace towards a city full of people in desperate need of God's forgiveness and salvation.

CONCLUSION: A key lesson on this entire book was to reveal the heart of a servant of God whose heart was not touched with the love of God for the souls of mankind. He was willing to challenge and dispute with the goodness, mercy, and love of God and try to escape from fulfilling God's will for his life in telling those without God of His marvelous grace and power to save unto the uttermost.

Like our Saviour, Jesus Christ, we must be moved with compassion towards others who are lost in their sins (Matthew 9:36). We must be willing to move out of our comfort zone and go into the highways and hedges to preach the gospel of Christ to every creature. If we become all wrapped up in the "gourds" of life, if we are more concerned about our own material and physical well-being than about spiritual matters and souls of men, God will send His whales, worms, and winds to wake and shake us up out of our lethargy, indifference, and apathy. We need to renew our commitment to carry out our tremendous responsibility of telling others, by our lives and lips, of Jesus Christ and His saving, life-changing gospel. Being a living testimony and witness for our Lord is our God-given duty that should be carefully and consistently obeyed "for the love of Christ constraineth us" (2 Corinthians 5:14).

Notes

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