
ANGER, REVENGE, JUSTICE AND COMPASSION

BIBLE STUDY - Jonah - Jonah 1:1-3, 2:1-10, 3:1-10 & 4:1-10

Jonah 1:1-3

1 The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai: 2 “Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.”

3 But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord.

Jonah 2:1-10

1 From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord his God. 2 He said:

“In my distress I called to the Lord,
and he answered me.

From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help,
and you listened to my cry.

3 You hurled me into the depths,
into the very heart of the seas,
and the currents swirled about me;
all your waves and breakers
swept over me.

4 I said, ‘I have been banished
from your sight;
yet I will look again
toward your holy temple.’

5 The engulfing waters threatened me,
the deep surrounded me;
seaweed was wrapped around my head.

6 To the roots of the mountains I sank down;
the earth beneath barred me in forever.

But you, Lord my God,
brought my life up from the pit.

7 “When my life was ebbing away,
I remembered you, Lord,

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and my prayer rose to you,
to your holy temple.

8 “Those who cling to worthless idols
turn away from God’s love for them.

9 But I, with shouts of grateful praise,
will sacrifice to you.

What I have vowed I will make good.
I will say, ‘Salvation comes from the Lord.’”

10 And the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

Jonah 3: 1-10

1 Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: 2 “Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.”

3 Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it. 4 Jonah began by going a day’s journey into the city, proclaiming, “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.” 5 The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

6 When Jonah’s warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. 7 This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh:

“By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. 8 But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. 9 Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.”

10 When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

Jonah 4:1-10

1 But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. 2 He prayed to the Lord, “Isn’t this what I said, Lord, 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. 3 Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.”

4 But the Lord replied, “Is it right for you to be angry?”

5 Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. 6 Then the Lord God provided a leafy plant[a] and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant. 7 But

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at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. 8 When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to die than to live."

9 But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?"

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

10 But 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. 11 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?"

Getting Started

This is a long passage for one bible study, but it is good to be reminded of the scope of this familiar story. Our focus in this study is on justice and compassion.

The book of Jonah does not say exactly when these events took place. There are some clues that suggest it was at a time when Nineveh was a large, flourishing city of the Assyrians. We know that Nineveh was a place that was considered to be evil and a threat to God's people.

In Jonah 1:1-3 the stage is set. What happens? Why doesn't God just destroy Nineveh? Wouldn't this be just?

When you watch the news, are there stories where you wish God would just act to bring swift retribution to people who have done terrible things? Why do we feel that way?

Looking deeper

Chapter 2 of Jonah starts with Jonah praying for mercy. How does Jonah describe God?

Think again about Chapter 1:1-3. Is Jonah being hypocritical when he asks for mercy in Chapter 2?

Read Chapter 3:1-10. Remember Nineveh was big, strong and wicked. Forty days is a long time between the warning and impending doom. Why does God give the people of Nineveh so long to repent?

How does the King of Nineveh respond to Jonah's message? How is the repentance of Nineveh shown in their words, actions and thinking?

What is God's response? Why?

Read Chapter 4:1-10. Why is Jonah so angry? What do you find out about why he fled in Chapter 1?

How does what God does next with the plant and worm illustrate His compassion?

Where to from here?

What does Jonah teach us about God's view of justice and compassion?

How should that affect how we live as God's people in the world?

In what ways do you as an individual, or your church as a whole, seek justice and show compassion? How can we do this better?