

Jonah Chapter Four Study Guide¹

"Do you do well to be angry?" Jonah 4:4

"Do you do well to be angry for the plant?" Jonah 4:9

"And should not I pity Nineveh?" Jonah 4:11

The LORD asks three questions that shape the chapter and the book. The first question remains unanswered and it speaks for itself. The second question should have remained unanswered, but Jonah interjected a self-disclosure/betrayal for an answer. The third question remained unanswered and it speaks for itself and in so doing serves both as a rebuke and exhortation - first to Jonah, second to Israel, and third... perhaps you?

Structure

Operating Outline of Jonah 4

4:1 Jonah Was Angry About Nineveh's Response and Outcome

4:2-4 Jonah Expresses His Anger To The LORD and Divulges His Prior Motivations

4:2 Jonah Anticipated All That Happened Because He Knew the Character of God – Motivation for His Fleeing

4:3 Jonah Disavows the Value of His Life

4:4 The LORD Gently Rebukes Jonah By Means of a Question

"And The LORD said, 'Do you do well to be angry?'"

This is where the entirety context of the book's narrative comes into focus (Jonah, not Nineveh).

4:5-8 The LORD Drives the Point Home to Jonah by Means of a Supernatural Real Life Illustrative Example: A Shade Plant

4:5 Jonah Went Out of Nineveh to Observe Their Outcome

4:6-8 The LORD Appointed a Plant, a Worm, and a Scorching Wind to Open Jonah's Eyes

4:6 The LORD Provided Jonah a Plant to Save Him from Discomfort

4:7 The LORD Provided Jonah's Plant a Worm to Attack and Wither It

4:8 The LORD Provided Jonah a Scorching Wind and Overbearing Sun to Wear Jonah Down

4:8 Jonah Disavows the Value of His Life

4:9-11 The Climax of the Narrative and Intent of the Book:

A Direct Treatment of the Conflict Between the Character and Conduct of God and Jonah's Heart

4:9 The LORD, Again, Gently Rebukes Jonah By Means of a Question

4:9 Jonah Fails in His Answer, Again, Disavowing the Value of His Life

4:10 The LORD Begins Using The Illustrative Example of the Plant To Expose Jonah's Heart Problem – His Heart Stands in Striking Contrast with The LORD's Heart.

4:11 The LORD Brings the Intent and Message of the Book to Unambiguous Light: His Expressed Character and Heart Is:

"...a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster."

John R. Kohlenberger III²

a1. Jonah explains his disobedience and his anger over Yahweh's saving Nineveh, 1-3

b1. Yahweh challenges Jonah's anger over His saving Nineveh, 4

c. God demonstrates salvation and destruction to Jonah, 5-8

b2. God challenges Jonah's anger over His destroying the plant, 9

a2. Yahweh explains His saving of Nineveh, 10-11

Jonah 4:1-2, Good Theology Poorly Applied.

Jonah 4:1-2 serves as a small unit that is explicitly bound together by, "that is why," which serves as an explanatory statement for the whole of Jonah's character and actions:

4:1 Jonah is exceedingly displeased by The LORD's relenting (3:10 and 4:10).

4:1 Jonah's displeasure matured to anger.

¹ Prepared by David Crowe for Pray's Mill Baptist Church Adult Sunday School

ALL Scripture Quotations are from the ESV Bible unless the Scripture reference is in a quote from another author – their original translation was kept.

² Everyman's Bible Commentary: Jonah and Nahum, John R. Kohlenberger III. Moody Press, 1984 (Hereafter: Kohlenberger), Pg.67

- 4:2 Jonah's disclosure that this was the anticipated outcome from the start.
- 4:2 Jonah's explicit articulation of his rationale of action: "that is why."
- 4:2 Jonah's explanation of action out of rationale: "because I knew"... the character of God (concluding with "relenting from disaster")

Further, what the reader observes here was Jonah's displeasure and anger rooted in his original concerns that were themselves rooted in the character of God and that at this time were now coming to fruition. It is clear that Jonah saw this coming before and in response he fled, then when he had no hope of fleeing he capitulates in obedience and finishes in anger.

Sidebar: Forty Days and Nineveh Will Be Destroyed

While timing is not everything, it is instructive from the vantage point of context, and while I am not wholly persuaded that the full forty days had yet passed, it is a valid conclusion worthy of attention. Both C.F. Keil and John Calvin conclude that the forty days of anticipated waiting had passed and Jonah was present to observe that the great city of Nineveh was not overthrown, but had experienced the compassionate mercy of God.

Keil argues that the declared forty days had passed as Jonah would likely not have been rebuked if it were still within the prescribed time of judgment and that he would not necessarily have been definitive in his anger about the matter. He then goes on to qualify that there is nothing in the narrative's timing that requires one to conclude that the narrative advanced with an immediacy of one day to the next, but affords the allowance of span of time that could include the full forty days.³ A support to this conclusion would be the continuity of the narrative flow from Jonah's being vomited on dry land, recommissioned, and arriving at Nineveh, which was likely still an extensive journey from the location of his being deposited on dry land. All the while the narrative provides no qualification regarding these spans of time, but advances its primary elements. Further, regarding this immediate context and its timing, Keil went on to argue that Jonah likely anticipated that the judgment was not a matter wholly resolved after the lapse of the forty days, but that it was only possibly delayed – therefore he goes to watch and wait for what may be next.⁴

John Calvin frames his conclusion, that the forty days had passed, in his larger supposition that Jonah erroneously believed that the judgment of Nineveh was a necessary means to preserve the message and thereby reputation of God. Calvin states, "Since then Jonah had respect to God's command, he could not immediately extricate himself from his doubts. This then was the cause why he sat waiting: it was, because he thought that though God's vengeance was suspended, his preaching would not yet be in vain, but that the ruin of the city was at hand. This therefore was the reason why he still waited after the prefixed time, as though the event was still doubtful."⁵

4:1 Jonah Was Angry About Nineveh's Response and Outcome

Nineveh believed and repented, The LORD chose to relent of his judgment toward the great city, and Jonah concludes this account in which he was a principal character in God's service and in the people's salvation, but as one who was extremely angry. This was not a casual protest or pouting over an undesired outcome; this was disgust.

Jonah testified of judgment, the people believed, the people humbled themselves, the people repented... and God chose to respond in extending mercy and staying their judgment. This was the exact outcome any prophet, pastor, or leader would want for his people and therein appears to be the problem for Jonah. This was not Israel, but Nineveh.

Jonah clearly welcomed his own merciful deliverance as he testified, "...I, with the voice of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you...."⁶

Therefore it is clear that Jonah's problem with Nineveh repenting and being spared was fundamentally a problem not with Nineveh, but with God. Jonah was not angry with Nineveh believing God's message delivered through him or even their

³ C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch; Keil & Delitzsch: Commentary on the Old Testament, Volume 10 – Minor Prophets. Hendrickson Publishers, 2001. (Hereafter: Keil & Delitzsch), Pg. 279

⁴ Keil & Delitzsch, Pg. 279

⁵ John Calvin; Calvin's Commentaries, Volume 14 – Twelve Minor Prophets, Third Volume: Jonah, Micah, Nahum. Baker Books, 2003, Pg. 133

⁶ Jonah 2:9

beautiful response to it. There would be no great anger if Nineveh had responded in this exact way and yet suffered their anticipated overthrow in forty days (which they understood to still be a great likelihood too – see Jonah 3:9). Rather, Jonah was furious with the exercising of the consistent, albeit mysterious, character of God in his choosing to express merciful compassion to this people.

This now begins to plainly draw out what the book of Jonah has been building toward – a definitive contrast between the heart of Jonah and the heart of God. This is first observed with the opening contrasting conjunction “but,” which immediately draws out that while God has turned from his anger (3:9-10), Jonah has turned toward his own anger (4:1). As John Kohlenberger states, "...as soon as God had abandoned His fierce anger, Jonah found it."⁷

The response of Nineveh was an outcome that did not displease God. The LORD relented, not because he was acting under compulsion or duty, but as a willful expression of his character. Therefore, what is striking is that The LORD was fiercely angry with Nineveh's sin and was prepared to overthrow/destroy them in his anger, but Jonah was exceedingly displeased and angry with Nineveh's repentance and The LORD's mercy toward them. These two sources/reasons for great anger demonstrate mirror opposite hearts and reactions: The LORD angry at sin and Jonah angry at salvation, and there is no sufficient qualification that can make sense of this contrast beyond Jonah being in a grave error. Here is a man who finds himself in direct conflict with the character and conduct of God, and he stands in this place angry and, as will be made plain, prepared to justify himself in this matter.

Jonah's anger is almost a whole separate subject as anger is not inherently sinful, but is definitively sinful when misapplied (wrong/deficient motivation and/or wrong object/timing) - in this it fails to achieve the righteous application of God's anger. The LORD is angry over sin - when his glory is assaulted, when his holiness is discarded, when his justice is offended. Jonah was displeased and angry over the merciful exercising of compassion toward a people under the imminent judgment of God... himself from a people who have had an unparalleled light of revelation and care by The LORD and more directly one who had experienced the merciful exercise of compassion when at the precipice of death and being able to declare, "Salvation belongs to The LORD!" Jonah was effectively saying that he wished salvation might belong to The LORD, but he will apply it at my good pleasure and discretion. That is a vile offense to God, as was his anger, yet... even in this we see compassion toward the man Jonah.

Sidebar: That Judah Would Have Repented.

Note the contrast of the response of Judah to the prophet Jeremiah (who preached to them after Israel's own great demise and being taken in judgment):

"Again the Lord said to me, "A conspiracy exists among the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. They have turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers, who refused to hear my words. They have gone after other gods to serve them. The house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken my covenant that I made with their fathers. Therefore, thus says the Lord, Behold, I am bringing disaster upon them that they cannot escape. Though they cry to me, I will not listen to them. Then the cities of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem will go and cry to the gods to whom they make offerings, but they cannot save them in the time of their trouble. For your gods have become as many as your cities, O Judah, and as many as the streets of Jerusalem are the altars you have set up to shame, altars to make offerings to Baal. 'Therefore do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer on their behalf, for I will not listen when they call to me in the time of their trouble. What right has my beloved in my house, when she has done many vile deeds? Can even sacrificial flesh avert your doom? Can you then exult? The Lord once called you 'a green olive tree, beautiful with good fruit.' But with the roar of a great tempest he will set fire to it, and its branches will be consumed. The Lord of hosts, who planted you, has decreed disaster against you, because of the evil that the house of Israel and the house of Judah have done, provoking me to anger by making offerings to Baal.'" Jeremiah 11:9-17

Judah refused and refused and refused to hear God's message to them and The LORD finally decides to refuse to listen to them. Note though that this refusal is also in the context of a people who, upon not being heard by The LORD, begin petitioning their idols again. It was this vile rebelliousness, this wicked idolatry, and this absolute disregard for calls to

⁷ Kohlenberger, Pg. 65

repentance that provoked The LORD to anger. Further drawing out that Jonah's heart was so strikingly shameful in his own moment of anger – furious over salvation and not sin.

Sidebar: Jonah and Abraham (1)

A striking contrast between Jonah and Abraham is plain when examining Genesis 18/19. Abraham was requesting The LORD not to be angry over his persistent petitioning/bartering for Sodom on behalf of even the fewest of righteous persons that might be found there in hopes that the city might be mercifully spared. By contrast Jonah witnesses effectively a citywide conversion with clear faith and repentance. He witnesses The LORD responding to this wide scale conversion and brokenness by mercifully sparing the city... and it is he who is angry! Abraham, selfless compassion demonstrated in humble pleading. Jonah, selfish consumption demonstrated in humiliating fury.

4:2-4 Jonah Expresses His Anger To The LORD and Divulges His Prior Motivations

Jonah 4:2, Responding to the Spoken Glory of God

Jonah again prayed to The LORD, but it was effectively to complain... Jonah took so long to even cry out to The LORD through the exceptional affairs at sea and it was not until he was thrown into the sea itself (2:2) and when in the great fish (2:9) that he is stated to have prayed. So, outside of Jonah's personal deliverance, when thrust into the most severe of circumstances, this was the first record of Jonah praying, and it was in such a shocking manner that many commentators are troubled with even calling this engagement prayer.

However, it is especially insightful that in this time Jonah appears to be referencing a prayer/conversation that he had with The LORD when he was in his own country and presumably being commissioned. This recollection of his previous prayer provides a backdrop to his radical conduct for the first portion of the book and the general historical context of the narrative as a whole. Jonah outright explains why he was fleeing at his initial commissioning - he anticipated a staying of God's wrath in response to Nineveh's repentance and he intended to either: disrupt this plan, stop it altogether, or force another man be the tool for this work. Here he also expresses the urgency with which he fled: "made haste to flee." So, in a prayer that appears to be seasoned in obstinacy we are afforded direct insight too: Jonah's stated opposition and subsequent action. Jonah had effectively predicted this outcome or that it was highly likely and apparently addressed this concern with The LORD on some level too. Obviously, he was not relieved of his charge and the matter advanced according to The LORD's good pleasure.

The first statement (that he understand the command of God and the outworking principles) then gives way to his statement of explanation of action: Therefore, in view of the command and the outworking principles, I acted accordingly. Jonah goes on to unambiguously explain and rationalize his initial rebellious sin in the form of fleeing and his residual rebellious sin in the form of anger. Jonah states that he fled because he knew the character of God. He was unambiguously stating that he made a premeditated rebellion rooted in an accurate understanding of truth and its impact on his situation.

The character elements of God that Jonah articulated:⁸

Gracious: "He longs for and favors others."

Compassionate: "Tender in his affection."

Slow to Anger: "Does not delight in punishing the wicked."

Abounding in Love: "Loyal love, or faithfulness to a covenant."

Jonah understood that these character elements of God exceeded the bounds of being restricted to his covenant relationship with Israel. He understood that these elements afforded a unique relationship with Israel, but they were not restricted in their application to the covenant relationship. By contrast, it was these elements that were to be declared and

⁸ The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Jonah: John D. Hannah, David C. Cook Publisher, 1985 (Hereafter: Hannah), Pg. 1470

enjoyed by the nations with Israel serving as the witness bearers of them - thereby magnifying The LORD's glory among the nations to whom Israel was in covenant, with The LORD, to serve as a blessing to the nations as expressed in Genesis 12:3.⁹

It is imperative to understand that this relationship of benefiting and declaring was not unique with the church, but what was an unforeseen providence is that the church's faithfulness in execution of its charge in declaring the excellences of God to others stirs the hearts of the covenant people to a proper jealousy and repentance (Romans 11).

But this is a larger view of the plan of God and attention needs to first be given to how these characteristics manifest themselves toward Nineveh:

A messenger bearing the news of God's holy justice was sent to them (1:2,3:2).

The message of God's holy justice was declared to them (3:4).

Their hearts were illuminated with truth and responded in belief and humble repentance (3:5-9).

The LORD relented of his judgment (3:10).

The character elements of God that Jonah identified here were rooted in his self-declared glory. Moses requested to see The LORD's glory, but he could not. However, he was afforded the privilege of seeing its passing glimpse and hearing it declared. It was those high character elements that expressed God's glory that were present time and again when examining the ways and works of God, and they were exactly both what Jonah had in mind when originally commissioned and what he saw on display at Nineveh.

"Moses said, 'Please show me your glory.' And he said, 'I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The Lord.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But,' he said, 'you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.' And the Lord said, 'Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen.'" Exodus 33:18-23

"The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, 'The Lord, the Lord, a God **merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin**, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.'" Exodus 34:5-7

Those Exodus passages composed the context and core elements, but they are expressed throughout the Old Testament Scriptures and would have been very familiar to Jonah.

Expressions of God's character:

In 2 Chronicles 30, King Hezekiah is calling Judah and Israel to walk in obedience and again fulfill the keeping of the Passover, which had been neglected for so terribly long. In this context he addresses the restorative kindness of God who is gracious and merciful. "For the Lord your God is gracious and merciful and will not turn away his face from you, if you return to him." 2 Chronicles 30:9

In Nehemiah 9 we observe corporate confession, brokenness, and testimony to The LORD's enduring faithfulness. In this time we observe the consistency of The LORD's character amidst the vulgarity of sin - he is postured to restore and extend mercy. First is a recalling of the Exodus generation rebelling, but receiving great mercy, "They refused to obey and were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them, but they stiffened their neck and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt. But you are a God **ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love**, and **did not forsake them**." Nehemiah 9:17 Then as the historical narrative advances and continues to review God's dealings with his people, it is recognized that time and again they were so terribly rebellious and wicked, yet The LORD kept them. "Nevertheless, in your **great mercies** you did not make an end of them or forsake them, for you are **a gracious and merciful God**." Nehemiah 9:31

⁹ "I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." Genesis 12:3

In Psalm 86 David is extolling the character of God while also petitioning for his help, he knew to whom he pleaded. "But you, O Lord, are a God **merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.**" Psalm 86:15

In Psalm 103 David provides a Psalm of Thanksgiving to The LORD and includes a clear reference to the magnificent moment in Exodus 34 and its larger surrounding contexts. "He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel. The Lord is **merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.**" Psalm 103:7-8

In Psalm 116 the Psalmist gives thanks to the God who delivers and in such references elements of these well established character qualities. "**Gracious** is the Lord, and righteous; our God is **merciful.**" Psalm 116:5

In Psalm 145 David provides another Psalm of Thanksgiving of Praise to God in which he extols the character and works of God. "The Lord is **gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.**" Psalm 145:8

In Joel 2 where there is a context of great judgment from God there is also a most magnificent call to repentance rooted in these exact character elements of God. "Yet even now," declares the Lord, 'return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments.' Return to the Lord your God, for he is **gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love**; and **he relents over disaster**. Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the Lord your God? " Joel 2:12-14

These are clearly expressions of some of The LORD's chief attributes as they relate to his engagement with man, and they provoke praise, thanksgiving, and great hope.

Next there is a dramatic shift as we observe that Jonah's statement of explanation of action gives way to his statement of present disposition of heart where he effectively states, "Therefore, in view of the consistent execution of your character, I would solicit that you take my life - you afford me the privilege of death."

Jonah conceded that he had no desire to live in God's world where God does as he pleases to the benefit of a people that Jonah would not desire to see such kindnesses (obviously welcoming them for himself as demonstrated throughout chapter two).

Jonah had no problem affirming that "Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love." (2:8) But he would sooner see such a people perish in their hopelessness than know the joy and hope of steadfast love.

Jonah had no problem affirming that "Salvation belongs to The LORD!" (3:9) But he would sooner choose death than hear another people proclaim this truth.

Jonah would seem to have had no problem affirming that he was a selfish worshiper and thereby a failed worshiper. But... he did not see this yet. He was so consumed with his disgust and shortsighted failed application at what was an otherwise accurate theology, that he could not yet see what The LORD would ever so gently expose to him in such a way that he could not help but to see it. This very patience by The LORD epitomized what Jonah could not yet have grasped, namely a gracious God who is merciful, who is slow to anger and who is abounding in steadfast love.

What unfolded was both harsh and yet one of most gentle lessons a man received from the hand of God. A lesson for Jonah, a lesson for the nation of Israel, and now a lesson also for the Church.

Sidebar: Jonah and The Will of God

So many wrestle with the "will of God" when they only need to look to the clear commands of the Scriptures and principles that address what is not overtly commanded. Jonah had both: he had clear commands and he understood the principles involved (based on his accurate understanding of the character of God). His problem was not discerning the will of God, but submitting to it.

The contemporary problem in this area is twofold: persons not knowing the revealed commands and principles of God (without excuse) and when understanding them choosing to not plainly submit to them.

Jonah 4:3, Jonah's Terrible Disposition

Therefore... in view of the consistency of God's character and its producing an outcome that Jonah despises... he requested that he die.

Jonah appears to be saying that if The LORD is pleased to extend mercy toward Nineveh then he has no desire for the grace of life himself. Jonah is petitioning God to let him die as this would be better than the life he is now experiencing. Jonah is demonstrating himself to almost be an antithesis to Job in this regard. Job, who suffered so terrifyingly and without the insight that the narrator provides his later readers, despaired of life with good reason, but Jonah acts as though similarly inflicted because a city will no longer experience the just wrath of God because they have experienced the magnificent gift of restoration.

Jonah was effectively communicating that God's justice simply was not good or satisfying enough for him.

But in what way possible could Jonah have meant that it better for him to die than to live? This was not the equivalent to Paul longing to be with Christ (Philippians 1:19-26); this was Jonah throwing the most terrifying of pity parties. However, when praying in 2:6,7 Jonah was giving thanks for the deliverance and sparing of his life/soul and here he was aggressively seeking their forfeiture thereby fostering a dramatic, impulsive exposure of his heart.

These matters provoke troubling questions regarding Jonah:

Was this what he was possibly aiming for when he had himself thrown overboard?

Had he so quickly forgotten his rejoicing in having his life spared... by this same God?

Jonah, who so desperately longed for and appreciated life when sinking into the furthest depths of the sea, is now with like passion of request seeking death. A disingenuous request that spoke so very poorly of his heart and its great need. But in The LORD's most gentle kindness these matters get exposed to the end that they might be forsaken.

Jonah 4:4, The LORD's Gentle Engagement

This is both a magnificent and striking question in a dialogue that The LORD was pleased or at least willing to have with Jonah.

While I have referred to Jonah in 4:3 as almost an antithesis to Job, here for reasons unknown, The LORD appears to have responded to Jonah in an extraordinarily gentle way. Almost like speaking very gently to a petulant child rather than a firm rebuke to a man who is acting dishonorably.

Now, why is The LORD engaging in this conversation with Jonah?

It appears to make it clear that the book's narrative/account had less to do with The LORD's dealing with Nineveh and more his dealing with Jonah... really the whole of chapter four appears to demonstrate this.

Note now that all (save one) of the overt/direct acts of God recorded in the book are toward Jonah - it is not necessarily that they are advancing the effort to declare to Nineveh and potentially provoke their repentance... it genuinely appears to be very focused on Jonah:

1:4 "The LORD hurled a great wind..."

1:14 "...you, O LORD, have done as it pleased you."

1:17 "The LORD appointed a great fish..."

2:6 "...you brought up my life from the pit..."

2:10 "The LORD spoke to the fish..."

3:10 "God relented of the disaster..." - This is the one exception and it directly impacts Jonah

4:6 "The LORD appointed a plant..."

4:7 "God appointed a worm..."

4:8 "God appointed a scorching east wind..."

So, why a book so focused on Jonah and his failing to properly appreciate the character and works of The LORD as applied to another people? Because The LORD's heart for other peoples/nations is plain. What needed exposure was the believer's heart's propensity to not be in alignment in this matter so as to provoke a proper repentance and future joy.

At risk of redundancy I will again ask, why is The LORD asking Jonah: "Do you do well to be angry?" (4:4). It is a rhetorical question to demonstrate to Jonah that he has no grounds to be angry.

Further, it is striking that Jonah had fundamentally expressed that he was at the culmination of anger (happier to be dead) on account of the merciful character of God... and The LORD directly called him out on this.

The LORD directly responded to Jonah's terrible fit of anger... and he responds with a question that is intentionally left to linger - satisfied in its own content (both an inquiring and rhetorical question).

No, Jonah does not do well to be angry.

This is both a question and rebuke.

This begins the process of the harsh, yet compassionate restorative lesson to Jonah regarding a proper appreciation, not just affirmation, of the character of God. We will soon observe appointment, after appointment, after appointment by God for the peeling back of Jonah's character, and then we will conclude by being pressed to examine our own character in view of the plainly revealed character of God.

4:5-8 The LORD Drives the Point Home to Jonah by Means of a Supernatural Real Life Illustrative Example: A Shade Plant

Jonah 4:5, An angry observer awaiting for....

As addressed above, the length of time that has passed - from the time of Jonah's initial proclamation with its forty day prophecy, to this moment - is not known. However, it is clear that he observed, or was made aware of, Nineveh's radical response and that The LORD had chosen to relent of his declared judgment, as this was the reason for Jonah's great anger as expressed in his prayer.

It is also not clear from the plain reading of the text or the larger historical context why Jonah chose to temporarily settle east of the city. It is likely that this was more of a pragmatic function than anything with elements such as location of city gates and his route while declaring God's message being deciding factors. It is also likely that this location provided Jonah a desired vantage point to observe the city, but little other advantage as he had to make a temporary shelter for himself and the elements were clearly unabated by the layout and provisions of this location.

However, an element of the narrative that is clear is the reason for Jonah establishing his temporary shelter outside of the city. He desired to see what would come of the city that had experienced the relenting of God's declared judgment against them. Jonah was clearly not pleased, but rather was as angry as he had the capacity to feel and express that The LORD had chosen to relent of his judgment. Therefore, while his general motive for staying is plain enough: to observe, the more precise reasons are unclear. Perhaps Jonah anticipated that there was still room for a lesser judgment not unlike what occurred under King David when he offended The LORD with the census in 2 Samuel 24 and Israel suffered the loss of 70,000 men before the Lord showed mercy. Perhaps Jonah entertained the idea that The LORD might yet stretch his hand against Nineveh in some way or that their repentance would be short lived and reinvigorate The LORD's anger. Whatever his reasons, it is plain from the immediately preceding and following context that Jonah was not watching in worshipful gratitude, but with a bitter spite and a measure of hope for Nineveh's doom.

Jonah's angry patience in action:

Went out (of the city) - No care for the Ninevites

Sat (east of the city) - No care for the Ninevites

Made (a shade booth) - Care for Jonah

Sat (under shade booth) - Care for Jonah

Until... he should see the outcome (of the city) - Caring for Jonah while not caring for Ninevites

Sidebar: Jonah and Abraham (2)

The first contrast between Jonah and Abraham was Jonah's anger at the mercy extended toward Nineveh and Abraham's persistent petitioning for mercy to be extended toward Sodom. The other contrast between these two men and these respective contexts is the demeanor with which they watched the two cities' outcomes. In Genesis 19:27-28, Abraham observed the smoke-filled horizon from the judgment of God on Sodom and Gomorrah (no commentary is provided, but it is a safe conclusion to believe his heart was heavy, particularly for his nephew Lot who was rescued on account of Abraham). By contrast, Jonah appears to have been waiting for the chance of judgment in some measure even if not the absolute destruction that was originally proclaimed against them. Abraham watches out of concern and heartache... Jonah watches out of anger and spite. The gaze of these two men upon these two cities spoke clearly regarding the burden of their hearts and the likeness of that burden to The LORD's own heart. "Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord God, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?" Ezekiel 18:23

Jonah 4:6-8, The Appointments of God

Jonah appears to have been morbidly waiting and watching the city in angry spite when The LORD chose to directly engage him, not in conversation, but in experience first, and this was expressed through three final supernatural "appointments" – where the Lord of the natural supernaturally interacted - not to reshape the creation's order, but men's hearts.

These acts of intervention are plainly seen throughout the book where they individually serve in their respective moments and cumulatively press toward the greater objective of God's design for them in the life of Jonah and the testimony it would bear in the Scriptures. Now, while there are four overt supernatural "appointments" referenced in the book and three of them are clustered tightly together, in the final chapter there are altogether no less than seven supernatural engagements that interrupt the normal affairs of men to providentially engage Jonah (and secondarily others as well).

- 1:4 The LORD hurled a great wind over his sea – disrupting Jonah's plans to flee.
- 1:15 The LORD quieted the raging sea – Jonah's attention was secured and the matter was handled.
- 1:17 The LORD *appointed* a great fish – provided as a supernatural deliverance of Jonah, disrupting his imminent demise.
- 2:10 The LORD spoke to the great fish – directing it to eject Jonah from its body, completing its temporal deliverance.
- 4:6 The LORD *appointed* a plant – again providing a deliverance, now from the sun, establishing a context of gratitude and comfort.
- 4:7 The LORD *appointed* a worm – providing a context by which Jonah's heart would be most plainly exposed.
- 4:8 The LORD *appointed* a scorching wind – a secondary partner in the process of exposing of Jonah's heart.

Sidebar: Calvin on Supernatural Interventions

When speaking to these unique engagements by God, Calvin made some especially helpful statements regarding the means, nature, and reason of these divine interruptions.

"...we generally find that God so works, as that he exceeds the course of nature, and from nature he does not wholly depart."¹⁰

"We see here also, that what seemed to happen by chance was yet directed by the hidden providence of God. Should any one say, that what is here narrated does not commonly happen, but what once happened; to this I answer, -- that though God then designed to exhibit a wonderful example, worthy of being remembered, it is yet ever true that the gnawings even of worms are directed by the counsel of God, so that neither a herb nor a tree withers independently of his purpose."¹¹

¹⁰ Calvin, Pg.137

¹¹ Calvin, Pg.137

Jonah 4:6, A gentle supernatural appointment.

The narrative now comes to the second of the four "appointments" by God for Jonah and the second of the two "appointments of deliverance" – designed to rescue/save.

A great fish rescues Jonah from the depths of the sea (1:17).

A plant provides Jonah salvation from the sunshine (4:6).

The two appointments that immediately follow were "appointments of trial" – designed to expose.

A worm consumes the plant that had previously saved Jonah from the sunshine (4:7).

An east wind wears Jonah down while he was already being exposed to the intensity of the sun (4:8).

Following the heightened dialogue that has just transpired through the medium of prayer, the narrative continues to intentionally build in intensity even as it appears to have subsided with a gentle provision here. This begins with the articulation of a seemingly superfluous supernatural event. The event is evaluated as such because this was not a unique need of Jonah, he would have survived without the plant's generous covering and there is no indication that he was staying in this context out of necessity. Rather, this was a deliverance not from grave need or peril, but from discomfort, and as will be observed it will be to a truer salvation or deliverance for Jonah, not from physical distress but a heart that was distant from communion with God's own. In the immediate, the temporal deliverance was accompanied by Jonah's only overt expression of joy in the book as he is said to have been "exceedingly glad" or "extremely happy." Certainly, Jonah praised God for this deliverance in chapter two, but here there appears to be a unique personal enthusiasm about life which was a striking contrast from his most recent disgust with the outcome of his service and with the reaction that will soon follow.

It appears that the sun had a significant impact on Jonah as he was stated to have made a booth/shelter for himself while he observed the city, and then he found particular satisfaction in the unexpected presence of the plant that serviced him only with "salvific" shade; "salvific" yes, but only in that it provided relief from the rays of the sun. The book is intentionally drawing this out... Jonah's salvation which he rejoices in was a salvation from the sunshine that he was enduring while observing the city that he was angry had enjoyed the salvation of their lives from The LORD's imminent judgment.

This joy that Jonah found in the salvation from his discomfort was quite clear and though it was not explicitly addressed it is likely that he would have appreciated the supernatural quality to the shade plant's rapid growth for his personal benefit. Though he curiously does not appear to give attention to the uniqueness of this act or of any that preceded or followed for that matter. What is made plain for the readers is that in a strikingly polarizing fashion, Jonah has gone from anger to the point of wishing himself dead over the merciful character of God to being exceedingly glad/extremely happy over a plant that provided temporal comfort. It draws out the clear contrasts that have been working itself out in the narrative to present:

God magnified through his merciful and kind character: Jonah is furious.

The sparing of a great city because of their faith and repentance: Jonah is furious.

The springing up of a plant to provide some needed shade/relief in an elective context: Jonah is thrilled.

Now in the larger sweep of the book's conclusion we see that this appointed provision is really setting Jonah up for the full impact of the delivery of God's message to him. It is almost a peek at God's transitioning Jonah into an instructive check-mate in which he must examine his heart in view of God's character. This appears to be the singular reason for this unique act. This temporal/superficial salvation was a major contributing element to Jonah's greater salvation from the deficient conduct and actions of his heart.

The text provides a definitive timeframe for the coming of this plant - overnight (4:10) - and its very service in God's working in Jonah proved to be both a gentle means of grace and an intense revelation of his heart. The intentionality of its service is made plain with the "so that" element that is present in the immediate verse that follows and in its first use in Jonah 1:4 where a great wind was hurled so *that* the ship threatened to break up. It is a phrase that provides clear purpose of action or association and in these instances it is bridging the actions of God with their intended outcomes. Now, in this immediate text you see such a gentle "*so that*" element: a plant was made to provide shade so *that* Jonah

would be delivered from his discomfort. Next, however, we will observe that the subsequent "so *that*" elements will continue to round out the narrative and serve their greater purposes, but it is nevertheless striking just how gentle of an act this was here, particularly when observing the more intense range demonstrated in the book.

Jonah 4:7, A greater need than comfort.

A fascinating contrast begins the next day... "But God appointed a worm...." A worm was appointed to assault the plant and cause it to wither. It appears that before the plant could serve any further good the very next day it was destroyed. This appointment was early and before the sun had risen to its full strength in terms of its effect upon those exposed to it. Therefore, the reason for this appointment was the destruction of the original provision.

This provides a fascinating insight into the plain working of God. He could have just appointed the plant to die or disappear, but he was pleased to use a "natural" means to carry out his desired outcome. In this we observe a tiny element of God's detailed plan unfolding - the appointment of a worm on a mission to eat Jonah's happy shade plant. So, it can plainly be concluded that *God assaulted Jonah's superficial joy to address Jonah's misplaced anger.*

In contrast to the appointment of the plant that provided salvation from discomfort, The LORD appointed a worm to destroy the plant. The LORD quickly provided and quickly withdrew Jonah's salvation from discomfort. Therefore, this was not some incident that undermined God's provisional care for Jonah, but a sovereign act of God for Jonah's greater good - a good that superseded his need for comfort.

4:8, The final appointment, check-mate.

God's fourth and final "appointment" of the book: a scorching east wind that exasperated Jonah. It appears that almost immediately after the worm finished off Jonah's happy shade plant that The LORD chose to compound the problem that the plant initially had resolved. Whereas the plant had provided Jonah a comforting shade, it was now gone and a scorching wind was added to the discomfort of a beating down sun.

This final appointment appears to be not unlike the first appointment recorded in the book when The LORD also sent wind the prophet's way. In 1:4, it was a great wind that was designed to compel action, ultimately leading to Jonah being cast overboard which he later credits to The LORD, "...you cast me into the deep...." (2:3) and here it is a scorching wind designed to compel action too. Again, not unlike the first wind, this wind first exposes the offender and then forces him to come to terms with his offense. Here he has not rebelliously fled, but has rebelliously allowed anger to consume him. Note also that on the first occasion death was a reality that Jonah intimately came within the proximity of fully experiencing and was delivered from, and yet here he craves to experience it without the hope of deliverance.

In addition to the physical affliction from the unrelenting sun, Jonah also suffered from the scorching east wind that God appointed. Like the great fish, the plant, and the worm, the wind could have been either the unique application/amplification of the natural or an element wholly unique to this one moment. Because there is the possibility of the natural being supernaturally applied it is reasonable to consider like examples of such winds and the hardship they produce. One such possible wind was one referred to as the "sirocco" which was a hot wind that was accompanied by rising temperatures and lessened humidity and the presence of fine particles of dust.¹² It is likely that Jonah's shelter, which was insufficient to shade the sun, could not have done much to relieve such an experience as the wind would have made it an oven like context for him (bright and overwhelming sun rays accompanied by blowing dry hot air). This combination physically diminished Jonah's natural stamina - making him faint and soliciting death.

The New American Standard Bible states that Jonah, "...begged with all his soul to die...." This appointment was functionally as crushing as The LORD's first disciplinary act toward Jonah when the great wind so violently stirred up the sea that the boat was on the verge of complete destruction. This time it was his person being undone and he would seek

¹² The New American Commentary: Volume 19b. Frank S. Page, Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1995, (Hereafter: Page), Pg. 284

death even though he had already experienced and greatly rejoiced in salvation and he had already executed his work in Nineveh and he could not change that. So, why seek death now?

Jonah was in a sense being provoked, but not to the end that it should have produced this radical of a response. He was being provoked to see his grave error and in the process he was compounding it further.

This incident does not appear to have been an imminently fatal assault on Jonah like what Hagar and Ishmael experienced when they were subject to the elements.¹³ Rather, this was great distress, and it functionally broke him. Jonah was angry, he was watching to see what would happen, he was physically distressed, he was relieved, and now he was very physically distressed... he had a complex situation, but it was primarily his own doing.

It appears, though not directly stated, that Jonah was again praying to The LORD and expressing that death suited him better than life at this time. This was the climax of Jonah's struggle... he is not just saying death would be better, but pleading for it... The LORD has effectively made his last move and will now put Jonah in check-mate, peeling back that he has a failed appreciation and respect for the glory of God in the expression of his mercy beyond the people of Israel and maybe even himself.

This would have likely been a painful read for Israel... watching one of her prophets effectively undone and in the process exposing themselves too. Though the apple of God's eye, Israel did not have the exclusive rights to the mercy of God - they were to be a kingdom of priests, a holy nation, and not simply a kingdom with priests, and therein lies a magnificent difference. Exodus 19:5-6 makes their charge so clear, "Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel." Exodus 19:5-6 It was not only to be the magnification of the glory of God in Israel, but through her to others. They were not only blessed, but were to be a blessing too.

"Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." Genesis 12:1-3

Having reached this climatic breaking point, The LORD will come in and address the heart of the matter.

4:9-11 The Climax of the Narrative and Intent of the Book of Jonah

The entire context of the book's narrative was set up in 4:1 (Jonah was angry about what happened), the narrative came into focus in 4:4 (The LORD asking Jonah if his anger is fitting - no recorded responses), and finally the narrative comes to its climax of clarity and content in 4:9-11 (Jonah is defiant and The LORD demonstrates the heart of the whole matter and it is that Jonah fails to see, understand, and appreciate God's character and heart).

With this in view, Jonah 4:9-11 work as a final and singular unit with three parts, which are synonymous with the breakdown of the section's respective verses.

- | | |
|------------|--|
| Jonah 4:9 | The LORD directly confronts Jonah's angry fit about the plant - using this as a catalyst to attack the real problem. |
| Jonah 4:10 | The LORD addresses the folly of Jonah's most recent angry fit - further developing his argument by laying the foundation for a revealing comparison. |
| Jonah 4:11 | The LORD delivers the fitting and climatic conclusion with a question that will remain unanswered on paper, but whose answer is perfectly clear by the time you have walked through the whole of the book. |

"Do you?" (4:4), "Do you?" (4:9), yields to "Should not I?" (4:11)

¹³ See Genesis 21

Jonah 4:9, An Answer that Exposes the Heart.

This final section begins with another contrasting conjunction and one to firmly and properly address Jonah's deficient disposition. Jonah, "better off dead" (4:8) "But God said..." (4:9)

Whereas in 4:4 there is no recorded answer to The LORD's question, Jonah answers here and it would have suited him better to not have as it betrays the terrible, senseless, and unjustified anger of his heart. The proper responses would have been to either answer "no" or simply to remain silent.

What is underway at this time is that The LORD is drawing on Jonah's simple absurdity to direct attention to his greater absurdity. Jonah's blindingly angry over the plant – pointing to the problem of being blindingly angry over God's mercy. Curiously, Jonah was not angry with the sun or scorching wind, but at the loss of his deliverance from them. This will eventually direct one's attention to the matter of his being angry not with Nineveh or their sin, but with their deliverance.

Why is Jonah so angry... because of the loss of his physical/temporal salvation (by a plant) and the gain of Nineveh's actual salvation (by the mercy of God).

The LORD again engaged Jonah in response to his foolish and wickedly impulsive statements... and again gently rebuked him. This further draws out that this incident is intended to be directly associated with the prior one at the beginning of the chapter. Here there was a recorded answer too, elevating this incident as Jonah affirms that he was indeed right to be angry, even angry enough to seek the termination of the unique gift of God to his creatures' life. Though the NET Bible argues that this is not expressing a homicidal thought, but that he is expressing that he is as angry as he has the capacity to be – intentionally strong language for strong feelings.¹⁴ Jonah's anger had disconnected him from any reasonable thinking and any respectable engagement with God. Yet The LORD gently instructs him - unpacking the lesson that he personally crafted for him in this dramatic incident. The response that The LORD demonstrated toward Nineveh was gracious, merciful, a slowness to anger, and abundance of steadfast love. This is exactly what Jonah is experiencing even while he resists it both for others and in this moment even for himself.

Jonah 4:10, The LORD Rebukes His Prophet.

The LORD picks up where Jonah has taken his own case and unpacks it for him - making it plain that Jonah was shamefully wrong. The LORD draws out to plain view that Jonah had pity/compassion for a plant (setting up the final principle that directed the whole of the book).

A plant that: he did not labor over.

A plant that: he did not make grow.

A plant that: came into being in a night.

A plant that: perished in a night.

Jonah had great compassion that fueled an unbridled passion for an incidental, fleeting piece of vegetation that he can take absolutely no credit for personally.... Shame on Jonah. He did not plant this plant, he did not cultivate it, he did not see that it remain healthy and strong, and yet this most strikingly temporal pieces of vegetation's perishing drove Jonah to a great compassion that fueled great anger because it perished. In direct contrast to this were the people of Nineveh, who were on the precipice of perishing (3:9), and when they had been snatched back to safety by the mercy of God, he was gravely angry (4:1-3).

The LORD now overtly rebuked Jonah who had acted so shamefully and in doing so demonstrated the absolute deficiency of his heart before God. Here the heart of the matter was laid plain as it was a matter of compassion and perishing.

¹⁴ NET Bible, Jonah 4:9, Note 32

Jonah 4:11, Set Aside Restlessness and Rejoice in the Beauty of Divine Compassion.

The book of Jonah was primarily centered on Jonah and his discontent with the merciful character of God, and this was put on dramatic display for the benefit of Israel - demanding that they grapple with the mercy of God as expressed toward other nations, even hostile nations.

Through the final elements of the narrative, Jonah was shown to have cared so deeply for something of effectively no consequence in general and no genuine connection to him. This in turn was made to be a catalyst to show him so plainly that the people of Nineveh (however much they were hated) were of great consequence and ideal candidates for receiving mercy (not inherently deserving of it, but fit to be considered when it was being offered).

The LORD was not communicating that he was, is, or ever will be compelled to have compassion, but as compassion is a clearly articulated element of his character, this great city was not beyond the interest of his applying it. Therein lies the tension: The holy God of Israel choosing to have compassion on Nineveh. An act that was:

Wholly consistent with the character of God.

Wholly in opposition with the desires of Jonah.

Nineveh, The Great City

The size of Nineveh, the great city, has been a consistent refrain and effectively preparing the reader for this moment where it is a direct point of engagement with Jonah. Because of this it provokes a conversation regarding how to evaluate various contexts where there are great/denser populations and an abundance of ignorance. But, regardless of how a more philosophical missiology may work itself out, for the sake of this account the consistent emphasis on Nineveh being a great city is of particular consequence. It was of great physical size, three days journey in breadth (3:3) and it had a great population, over 120,000 persons (4:11).

However, it is interesting that numbers are brought up here in a context of mercy... almost an opposite treatment of Abraham's ambitious bartering with God in Genesis 18 where he was petitioning that Sodom be spared if there were but ten righteous persons in the city, and The LORD concluded the discussion with a willingness to spare the city for but ten righteous persons, which clearly were not present. Here the matter was not what the lowest threshold of righteous persons might be, but the abundance of ignorant persons in need of mercy. Being of two unique natures and two unique contexts we are left to remember that these matters are at the discretion of the glorious goodness of God and must be left there.

An Abundance of Ignorant People

Along with Nineveh's great size a significant element drawn on here was that it was a large city full of ignorant people. This made for a clear contrast to Israel who had struggled with rebelliousness and sin from their national inception when they saw the mighty arm of God, experienced his miraculous care, protection, and leading, and who were given covenants and the law directly from his hand. They were in no way ignorant, either in natural or spiritual matters, and yet when they saw their sin they gladly embraced it. Nineveh, on the other hand, having their guilt placed clearly before them, were broken in repentance - a radical demonstration of their genuine belief. Perhaps ignorant in natural and/or spiritual matters, but coming to a clear understanding of their culpability before God and pleading that they might find mercy as they forsook their offenses was a very wise and proper response by Nineveh.

Various authors and commentators have worked through what this peculiar statement meant and the general consensus was that the persons spoken of were ignorant on some level: cognitively and/or spiritually. The second discussion immediately associated with this was one of intended age demographic – was this a reference exclusively to children or the people in general.

Not knowing right hand from left was stated to be, "an idiom for being morally and spiritually unaware."¹⁵

¹⁵ English Standard Version Study Bible. Crossway Bibles, 2008. (Hereafter: ESV SB) Pg.1691

Building off of the understanding of this being a matter of ignorance, John MacArthur states that the 120,000 persons who know not their right from left hand was a way of speaking about very young children – thereby implying that there were hundreds of thousands of people in the city and the more naturally innocent among them number this greatly.¹⁶ Effectively stating that there are over half a million people in the greater Nineveh community and so precious many of them are children who have no awareness in these matters.

A bit of a different conclusion built off of the same basic premise is that this was a reference to adults who were as undiscerning as little children – thereby also having a deficient capacity to think through spiritual and moral matters.¹⁷ However, this does not appear reasonable in view of the response of the people of Nineveh where there was a clear understanding of the matter – a rather theologically accurate conclusion, a proper response, and a honorable hope.

Regarding the second element of the statement about animals, The ESV Study Bible concludes that this was a matter of expressing compassion for the animals – effectively asking if you won't have compassion for these people, what of all these animals (drawing off of his alleged sensitivity for the plant).¹⁸ Frank Page also sees the final statement about cattle as directly contrasting Jonah's peculiar care for the vine – noting that cattle are even higher up the priority chart, and there is an abundance of them present... so if you care so much for the plant then take notice of the abundance of cattle.¹⁹

The Tension of Judgment and Mercy

There appears to be a palpable tension between compassion and its absence amidst righteous judgments, but this is primarily on account of one's vantage point being limited to the understanding and affairs of man. The sovereign Lord who perfectly executes justice and graciously extends compassion experiences no such tension with these matters. Therefore, it would be wise for that which is created to assume the proper position of humility and trust of the one who has both created and who sovereignly works his will among creation.

With this in view, it is proper to remember there are many times that compassion finds no place in the exercising of justice – so when it is interjected it should be a point of great joy, wonder, and praise to God.

A punitive judgment of guilty nations:

"And you shall consume all the peoples that the Lord your God will give over to you. **Your eye shall not pity them**, neither shall you serve their gods, for that would be a snare to you." Deuteronomy 7:16

A disciplining/restoring judgment of Israel:

"Then you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord: Behold, I will fill with drunkenness all the inhabitants of this land: the kings who sit on David's throne, the priests, the prophets, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And I will dash them one against another, fathers and sons together, declares the Lord. **I will not pity or spare or have compassion**, that I should not destroy them.'" Jeremiah 13:13-14

"Therefore, as I live, declares the Lord God, surely, because you have defiled my sanctuary with all your detestable things and with all your abominations, therefore I will withdraw. **My eye will not spare, and I will have no pity.**" Ezekiel 5:11

"Now the end is upon you, and I will send my anger upon you; I will judge you according to your ways, and I will punish you for all your abominations. And **my eye will not spare you, nor will I have pity**, but I will punish you for your ways, while your abominations are in your midst. Then you will know that I am the Lord." Ezekiel 7:3-4

"Therefore I will act in wrath. **My eye will not spare, nor will I have pity.** And though they cry in my ears with a loud voice, I will not hear them." Ezekiel 8:18

"I am the Lord. I have spoken; it shall come to pass; I will do it. I will not go back; **I will not spare; I will not relent**; according to your ways and your deeds you will be judged, declares the Lord God." Ezekiel 24:14

¹⁶ The MacArthur Study Bible, NKJV. Word Bibles, 1997, (Hereafter: MacArthur), Pg.1297

¹⁷ Hannah, Pg. 1472

¹⁸ ESV SB, Pg. 1691

¹⁹ Page, Pg. 287

So, why was Nineveh spared? Because they believed and repented? Yes... but not to be so simply understood. Yes, because The LORD was pleased to have mercy and *therefore* effectually worked in the hearts of these most unlikely of persons that they would believe and repent. Then in God's kindness he was pleased to relent. So, examine the compassion in the aforementioned context that it is not inherently present amidst judgment, but when it is present it always beckons worshipful praise to God... never anger at its most kind interruption to the normative and just pattern of life.

Now, at the risk of oversimplifying the nature of the History of Redemption and outworking of the ways of God among his people, I will attempt to help provoke a balance amidst the perceived tension of justice and compassion. There is a difficult dance to understand mercy amidst discipline and judgment. When one will be applied and not the other is not always immediately apparent, but is always at the discretion of The LORD who is Lord of all nations and peoples. Further, this tension helps us better appreciate the surprising introduction of mercy which, while consistent with the character of God, is never deserved. This is true in the affairs of nations and the hearts of men. An interesting working out of this tension was the missionary movement that erupted after World War II. During combat, United States soldiers had a duty and charge to administer justice to the degree necessary to repel and stop all threats. However, when the war concluded there was a most fascinating surge of activity... many former soldiers and others enrolled in Bible Colleges and like institutions to be trained as missionaries and returned to foreign lands that had been fields of combat, thereby making them fields of gospel mission. The time and place of justice and mercy is not always left to our discretion, but the place of both is clear, and for one to properly reflect the heart of God they must love both justice and mercy – seeking great care and wisdom while leaving their application in the hands of providence.

Conclusion

Jonah walks through some terrible moments and the book is painfully honest through this entire process, and it leaves on such a peculiar note of tension. But there is a clear trace of great gentleness applied toward Jonah throughout and I am persuaded that it was with great humility and a heart that has been delivered from restless anger that penned this most beautiful and challenging book. A restored Jonah would beckon you to watch, listen, hear, and mimic not his heart in these moments, but in its own restoration in the resolving of the book's unsettled tension.