

Fact Sheet for **“Where’s Your Focus?”**
Jonah 4

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4:1 ¶ But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry.

Jonah was very angry (literally “hot”) with God’s goodness to the Ninevites.

2 And he prayed to the LORD and said, "O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.

Jonah had wanted God to deliver him from his immediate problem (2:1-2). However he did not want the people of Nineveh to be delivered from the overthrow of their city. Jonah had received God’s mercy but he had no mercy himself for the people of Nineveh. Jonah knew that God’s judgment on Nineveh could be avoided if the people of Nineveh sought His forgiveness. This was because Jonah had a clear grasp of God’s character, as reflected in his near quotation of Exodus 34:6. Jonah would have known this passage, as well as the writings of others who had gone before him (see Psalm 103:8; Joel 2:12-13).

3 Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live."

Earlier Jonah had prayed to live (2:1-2). But Jonah was not concerned about the people of Nineveh. God was.

4 And the LORD said, "Do you do well to be angry?"

God was hesitant to be angry with Jonah, even though Jonah was angry with God. So God asked his sulking prophet this question. Just the way God’s question is phrased implied the answer. Jonah had no right to be angry. The tone of God’s question was much like the one He had asked Adam (Genesis 3:11). But did God’s question to Jonah cause him to think and stop sulking? No! *We should never angrily question what God does, even when it differs from what we want.*

5 Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city.

Jonah made a crude shelter where there was a clear view of the city. He still was hoping that God would destroy it. He still was sulking. He didn’t even think that he himself had also deserved death for his own disobedience but was graciously delivered by God.

In chapter 1 God had hurled a great wind on the sea. He had caused the lot to fall on Jonah. When Jonah was thrown overboard He calmed the sea. And God appointed the great fish to swallow Jonah. In chapter 2 the LORD preserved Jonah for three days and nights in the belly of the fish. Then He spoke to the fish and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land. In chapter 3 God relented from the disaster He had said He would bring on Nineveh. Now in chapter 4 God had three more appointments to give Jonah a visual lesson. Here is the first.

6 ¶ Now the LORD God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant.

That whole plant grew overnight (4:10)! Wow! Jonah was not just pleased with the plant, he was exceedingly glad. It brought shade and physical comfort to Jonah. Jonah was not aware that this was only step 1 in God's object lesson for him. Here is God's 2nd appointment.

7 But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered.

God, in His great sovereignty and omnipotence, appointed a small worm. The plant that grew up the previous day withered. Jonah was still not been aware that this was part of God's object lesson for him. Now God turns up the heat on Jonah with His 3rd appointment.

8 When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, "It is better for me to die than to live."

This was the 2nd time that Jonah asked to die. The first was in 4:3. And Jonah still was not aware of God's object lesson for him. But now God makes it clear.

9 But God said to Jonah, "Do you do well to be angry for the plant?" And he said, "Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die."

Over a plant??? God set up His lesson by addressing Jonah's anger. Jonah was angry both with God for sparing Nineveh, and over the fact that he now had no shade. For an earlier prophet, Elijah, God set up a different object lesson (1 Kings 19:9-12). Now this object lesson for Jonah has been set and Jonah is about to hear from God.

10 And the LORD said, "You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night."

Jonah was sad for the plant, for the fact that it had withered. He was angry at his discomfort in the scorching east wind, and with the sun beating down overhead.

11 And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?"

It is the same Hebrew word that is translated "pity" in verses 10 and 11. God's pity spared Nineveh. Jonah was concerned about his own comfort and his own values, not about God's.

Jonah was out of step with God. Jonah's focus was not God's focus. Here's an interesting question for us. What is the focus of the Bible? The physical center of our Bible is the book of Psalms, but this is not the spiritual center of the Scriptures. It is not creation, the flood, Abraham, Moses and the Law, or David. It is something that pleased God to have four different biblical authors record.... the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In fact, a full one third of the four Gospels is devoted to the events from Palm Sunday on. The OT looks forward to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The NT looks back to it. Even our most important holiday of the year is not Christmas. It is Easter! In Charles Dickens' 'A Christmas Carol' Ebenezer Scrooge said, "I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year." We should honor the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in our hearts all the year. This will be seen in our lives, our words, and our witness.

I want to finish this morning with a word from God for us. God gave Jonah a charge and he fought against it. God has likewise given us a charge. Stop and read Matthew 28:18-20.