

JONAH: GOD'S REMINDER OF ISRAEL'S OUTREACH DUTY

V: A Lesson In God's Great Compassionate Mercy

(Jonah 4:1-11)

I. Introduction

- A. Since the Abrahamic Covenant provided that God would bless the Gentiles through Abraham's seed (Genesis 12:1-3), Israel was responsible to proclaim God's truth to the Gentiles. (Bible Know. Com., O. T., p. 1462)
- B. The book of Jonah was addressed to Israel to remind her of her duty to proclaim God's truths to the nations, and Jonah 4:1-11 provides us a great lesson in God's compassionate mercy. We view the passage for our insight and application (as follows):

II. A Lesson In God's Great Compassionate Mercy, Jonah 4:1-11.

- A. Following his great evangelistic success at Nineveh, God's prophet Jonah was very angry, Jonah 4:1.
- B. Jonah expressed the reason for his anger in a prayer to God that is recorded in Jonah 4:2-3 (as follows):
 1. Jonah complained that the outcome of his ministry with the repentance of Nineveh was what had initially concerned him when God had first called him to minister in Nineveh, Jonah 4:2a.
 2. He knew that God was gracious and merciful, slow to anger and full of great kindness, tending to relent of the calamity He initially intended to level against the wicked, Jonah 4:2b.
 3. Accordingly, frustrated that Nineveh might be delivered so that her people might end up afflicting his own people of Israel, Jonah asked the Lord to take his life, that it would be better for him if he died and no longer lived! (Jonah 4:3)
- C. God replied to Jonah's prayer by asking him if he had any good cause or right to be angry, Jonah 4:4.
- D. Jonah did not reply to the Lord's question, but he went outside of Nineveh, sat down at a place east of the city, making himself a shelter from the hot sun and he waited to see what would happen to Nineveh, Jonah 4:5. He was still hoping that God might destroy the city because it was the great enemy of his country Israel.
- E. In response, God gave Jonah an object lesson to teach him that Jonah had no right to be angry because God was full of great compassionate mercy toward the people of Nineveh, Jonah 4:6-11:
 1. First, the Lord provided a vine, making it grow up over Jonah to give him shade for his head and to ease his discomfort, so Jonah was very happy about the vine, Jonah 4:6 NIV.
 2. However, at dawn the next day as the hot sun was rising, God provided a worm that chewed the vine so that it withered, and when the hot sun arose, the Lord sent a scorching east wind that, with the hot sun blazing down on Jonah, made him feel faint, Jonah 4:7-8a NIV. Jonah wanted to die, so he repeated his closing line in his prayer to God, saying that it would be better for him to die than to live, Jonah 4:8b NIV.
 3. God responded to this line as He had to Jonah's similar closing line in his prayer, asking if Jonah had a right to be angry, but this time to be angry about the vine, Jonah 4:9a NIV.
 4. Jonah replied that he indeed had that right, that he was angry enough to die, Jonah 4:9b NIV.
 5. The Lord answered that Jonah had been concerned about the vine though he had not tended it or made it to grow, that it had sprung up overnight and had died overnight, Jonah 4:10 NIV.
 6. However, God explained that Nineveh had more than 120,000 little children who could not discern their right hand from their left, meaning there was around 600,000 people total in the city. (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, ftn. to Jonah 4:10-11) God implied that He had a right to be concerned about them, and that Jonah should be concerned about Nineveh as well, especially its children! (Jonah 4:11a)
 7. In a touch of irony, God added that there was much livestock in the city, suggesting that if Jonah did not care about the people of Nineveh, or even its little children, he should at least be concerned about all the cattle that would needlessly die were the city to be overthrown! (Jonah 4:11b NIV; Ibid.)

Lesson: When Jonah became very angry at the repentance of Nineveh at his preaching and of the God's great compassionate mercy that would withhold His initial plan to punish Nineveh, the enemy of Jonah's people in Israel, God used an object lesson to teach Jonah that God had IMPARTIAL and great, compassionate mercy on ALL people, be they Hebrews or even Israel's Gentile foes, not to mention all of His creatures, including cattle!

Application: (1) In ministering for God, may we realize that God's grace is NOT LIMITED to any one group of people, but that He has an infinite compassionate mercy for all people and even for animal life that He has created, that we thus LEARN to BROADEN our concerns to disciple the WORLD! (2) May we also realize that God does not owe us anything, even a vine to shade us from the sun, that we then serve Him in humility.