

Jonah, the Furious Prophet

Jonah Chapter Four

The Jonah 4 commentary offers my translation of Jonah 4:1-11 with Hebrew keywords and phrases in bold letters.

Jonah 4:1

But this was evil to Jonah, a GREAT EVIL! He BURNED WITH ANGER.

- The conjunction **but** shows contrast with the previous chapter.
- In Hebrew, authors use the verb plus its cognate noun for emphasis. For example, he **dreamed** a **dream** emphasizes the act of dreaming.
- The verb **was evil**, its cognate noun **EVIL**, and the adjective **GREAT** all emphasize that Jonah thinks God's merciful act to Nineveh is exceedingly **EVIL**.
- The structure of Jonah 4:1 replicates Nehemiah 2:10. "It **was evil** to them, a **GREAT EVIL**."
- In Nehemiah 2:10 Sanballat and Tobiah are upset that Nehemiah intercedes for the Israelite's welfare. Here Jonah the Israelite has **ANGER** about pleading the case of the Ninevites.

Jonah 4:2

He prayed to the LORD and said, "O LORD, was not this MY word when I was in MY country? Therefore, I fled previously to Tarshish, for I knew You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in kindness, one who REPENTS concerning EVIL (disaster)."

- Jonah 4:2 compares to Jonah 2:1 where he **prayed** to the **LORD**.
- Even though Jonah the prophet dialogued with God about His message of judgment (Jonah 1:1), he doesn't record much of the conversation.
- Here Jonah basically tells God, "Back in **My country**, this was **MY word**. I told You so!"
- He fled to Tarshish, so that the Ninevites would remain under God's judgment. He knew that God **REPENTS** concerning **EVIL (disaster)**.
- In Joel 2:13, Joel describes God as a **gracious and compassionate God slow to anger and abundant in kindness** whenever he pleads with Israel to **REPENT**.
- Jonah uses this prophet's words to question the goodness of God's mercy upon Nineveh. He calls God's compassionate act **EVIL** in the previous verse (Jonah 4:1).

Jonah 4:3

Now O' LORD, please take MY life from ME for death is better to ME than life.

- Full of selfishness and self **PITY**, Jonah's emotions race everywhere. He remained happy until he found out that the Ninevites **REPENTED**.
- Perhaps, Jonah had suicidal tendencies in Chapter One. He **WENT DOWN** into the **guts** of the ship and fell into a **deep sleep** while the sea raged (Jonah 1:5).
- He probably wanted the ship to sink to bring about his death rather than having to preach to the Ninevites.
- He asked the Pagan Sailors to **HURL** him overboard into the deadly waters. They knew that the **sea** could take his life (**innocent blood**, Jonah 1:14-15).
- The Ninevites had actually **REPENTED**. Now Jonah explicitly states that he **wants to die**. In fact, he probably spoke these same words inside the **city** as he watched them **REPENT** earlier.

Jonah 4:4

The LORD said, "Is your **ANGER** good?"

- Jonah doesn't like to answer questions. He refuses to answer the Ship Captain's question (Jonah 1:6), and only partially answers the Pagan Sailors' questions (Jonah 1:8).
- The prophet **BURNS WITH ANGER**, because Nineveh didn't literally burn. He doesn't answer the **LORD** with words but just responds by walking out of the **city ANGRY**.

Jonah 4:5

Then Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of it. He made a shelter there and sat under it in the shade until he could see what would come of the city.

- This verse begins and ends with **city**.
- Jonah **sits** under a shelter in the shade, while the King **sits** in an ash heap **REPENTING** of his sins down in the **city** (Jonah 3:6).
- Jonah seems to be restless. He **sits** down, gets up to make a shelter, and **sits** down again.
- With a bad attitude, the prophet probably thinks, "Fine, we got them to **REPENT**! Let's wait and see what they ultimately do!"
- Jonah might think that the Pagan Citizens will quickly **RETURN** to their **EVIL** ways. He waits and watches.

Jonah 4:6

Now the LORD APPOINTED a plant and caused it to rise above Jonah to provide

shade over his head to rescue him from his EVIL (discomfort). Jonah was very happy about the plant.

- This verse begins and ends with **plant**.
- The **LORD APPOINTED** this **plant** to show Jonah mercy; whereas, previously He had **APPOINTED** the **GREAT fish** to judge Jonah (Jonah 1:17).
- The Hebrew verb **caused it to rise** is significant. The Ninevites' **EVIL rises** in Jonah 1:2, Yahweh **rises (brings up)** Jonah from the pit in Jonah 2:6, and now a **plant rises** above him.
- The **plant** has two purposes to provide shade and to rescue Jonah from discomfort. The word **discomfort** literally translates as **EVIL**.
- Is the **LORD** rescuing Jonah from physical **discomfort** or emotional **EVIL**? He might be trying to calm the prophet's emotional **EVIL** by providing the physical comfort of shade.
- Jonah reacted with happiness when God blessed him with undeserved mercy, but he didn't like God's mercy toward the Ninevites.

Jonah 4:7

But God APPOINTED a worm when dawn rose up the next day. It SMOTE the plant, so that it dried up.

- The conjunction **but** shows contrast. While the **APPOINTED plant** demonstrated undeserved mercy, here God **APPOINTED** the worm for judgment.
- The Hebrew verb **rise up** has appeared elsewhere in the book (Jonah 4:6).
- The worm **SMOTE** the **plant** before sunrise. The heat of the day would bear down upon Jonah. Instead of destroying Nineveh, God **SMOTE** the prophet's only source of happiness, the **plant**.
- Consult multiple translations to decide which type of **plant** translators consider.

Jonah 4:8

When the sun came up, God APPOINTED a scorching east wind. The sun SMOTE Jonah's head. He was faint and asked with his soul to die. He said, "It is better for me to die than live."

- In Jonah 1:4, the **LORD HURLED** a **GREAT** wind. Here God **APPOINTS** an east wind for judgment also.
- In the previous verse, the worm **SMOTE** the **plant**, Now the scorching wind **SMOTE** Jonah's head.
- The sun and wind sap the strength from the prophet to the point of fainting.
- He has already asked God to **take his life** (Jonah 4:3). Now he prays again that God will bring about his death.

- Elijah prays a similar prayer to God when running from Jezebel: take away my life (1 Kings 19:4).

Jonah 4:9

But God said to Jonah, "Is it good for you TO BURN WITH ANGER about the plant?" Then he replied, "It is good for me TO BURN WITH ANGER, even unto death!"

- God has already asked Jonah this exact question (Jonah 4:4).
- If Jonah answers "no," to the question, he must also admit that his **ANGER** about Nineveh is not **good** either.
- If he answers "yes," he exposes his position as one of pure self-interest. Jonah does answer an affirmative YES!
- The prophet makes it clear that his **ANGER** will not relent even if he dies. "It is **good** for me **TO BURN WITH ANGER, even unto death!**"
- His attitude contrasts with God's attitude in Jonah 3:9-10. The King hopes that Yahweh will relent of His **ANGER**. God does relent, but Jonah refuses to do the same concerning Nineveh.

Jonah 4:10

But the LORD said, "You had PITY on the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, for it came up in a night. It also PERISHED in a night."

- Jonah didn't till the ground to nourish the **plant**. He had nothing invested in its growth, yet he had **PITY** on it. He felt sorry that the **plant** died.
- The **LORD** made Nineveh **GREAT** and has worked on their hearts to prepare them for His message.
- The prophet Jonah is full of self-**PITY**. What business is it of Jonah if the **LORD** wants to exercise **PITY** on His creatures?
- How can Jonah **PITY** the **plant** and the **LORD** not **PITY** these people?
- The keyword **PERISHED** appeared earlier. The Ship Captain, the Pagan Sailors, & the Ninevite King, none of them wanted to **PERISH** (Jonah 1:6, 14; 3:9).
- **In a night** emphasizes how quickly the **plant PERISHED**.

Jonah 4:11

Should I not PITY Nineveh, the GREAT city where there are more than 120,000 people who do not know [the difference] between their right hand and their left and many animals.

- Here the narrator emphasizes that the term **GREAT** describes Nineveh's populous size.
- The clause who don't **know their right hand from their left** may point to the following: innocent children, or 2) adults ignorant of sin.

- The Ninevites didn't know they stood in the **LORD's** judgment. This doesn't excuse them from their sins.
- "Perhaps, God will not let us **PERISH**," spoken by the Ship Captain, the Pagan Sailors, and the Ninevite King all suggest ignorance.
- Why end with the mention of **animals**? 1) Contrast: One **plant** verses many people & **animals**; 2) Link to Chapter Three: Both people and **animals** participated in repentance, both receive **PITY**; 3) Comparison: These humans are morally ignorant like the **animals**.

The Story of Jonah leaves Jonah's fate a mystery to the reader.

Summary of Jonah 4

The prophet Jonah **BURNED WITH ANGER** over the **LORD's** mercy upon Nineveh. In fact, Jonah called God's act of **PITY** a **GREAT EVIL** (Jonah 4:1). Jonah is so **ANGRY** that he wants the **LORD** to **take his life** (Jonah 4:2, 3, 8-9). The **LORD** asked him if his **ANGER** was **good**, but the prophet doesn't answer (Jonah 4:4). He simply walked out of the **city ANGRY**, built a shelter **sat** in the shade, and watched what would happen to the **city** (Jonah 4:5). The **LORD APPOINTED** a **plant** to **rise** above Jonah for shade, but He also **APPOINTED** a worm to **SMITE** the **plant** and a hot dry wind to blow on the prophet. Then the sun **SMOTE** Jonah on the head (Jonah 4:6-8). He grumbled to God about **wanting to die**. Then the **LORD** questioned Jonah about whether or not his **ANGER** over what had happened to the **plant** was justified (Jonah 4:9). God reminded Jonah that he didn't have any investment in the **plant**, yet he had **PITY** on it (Jonah 4:10). The **LORD**, however, made Nineveh **GREAT** and had worked on their hearts to receive His message (Jonah 4:11). In the end, Jonah remained **ANGRY**.