

Jonah, the Furious Prophet (Jonah 4:1-11)

Intro: The prophet Jonah travels an interesting road up to this point. His story climaxes here in Chapter Four. He runs from God in Jonah 1, tries to manipulate God in Jonah 2, partially obeys God in Jonah 3, and finally exhibits intense rage at God in Jonah 4. This final chapter clearly demonstrates how far even a prophet of God may sink if he continues in rebellion against Him. *As Christians we should not call God's plan evil unless we want to experience two forms of emotional chaos: 1) We will fill up with intense anger at God, and 2) We will sulk in self pity for our life situation.*

Let's consider the first form of emotional chaos arising when we call God's plan evil:

I. We fill up with intense anger directed at God (Jonah 4:1-4).

1. Outside of God's plan, we invite the stronghold of anger into our life.

a. The prophet Jonah emphasizes how he thinks God's act of compassion on Nineveh epitomizes evil. "But this was evil to Jonah, a great evil. He burned with anger" (Jonah 4:1). The verb *was evil*, its cognate noun *evil*, and the adjective *great* all emphasize the intensity of Jonah's anger.

b. Jonah 4:1 nearly quotes the biblical text of Nehemiah 2:10, "It was evil to them, a great evil." Ironically, Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite are upset that the prophet Nehemiah pleads for the welfare of Israel; here Jonah the Israelite expresses anger towards the actual repentance of Nineveh.

c. The prophet Jonah then basically tells the LORD, "Back in MY country, this was MY word. I told you so" (Jonah 4:2)! Jonah fills with anger when he meditates on Joel 2:13. Joel describes God as compassionate toward sinful Israel. Jonah knows the LORD has a measure of compassion for Nineveh just as He does for Israel. Jonah thinks God's attitude typifies evil.

d. Anger will overwhelm us whenever we turn our backs on God's plan. We should carefully guard our mouths in heated moments. If we become so angry at God's purposes that we question His character, we will walk right into a chaotic world of rage. God doesn't want us to go there, and many times He tries everything He can to reorder our lives. Unlike Jonah, we need to listen to God's voice.

2. Outside of God's plan, our anger might intensify into suicidal tendencies.

a. Jonah's has a history of suicidal tendencies. In Jonah 1 the prophet sleeps deeply inside the ship during a great storm. He probably wanted the ship to sink rather than have to preach to Nineveh. Then he asks the Sailors to throw him into the raging sea. In his rebellion, Jonah welcomes death. His anger climaxes in Jonah 4 where he finally vocalizes that he wants to die (Jonah 4:3, 8-9).

b. Repeatedly the prophet tells God that His actions are evil. Now God turns the question back on Jonah, "Is your anger good?" The prophet doesn't like to answer questions. He refuses to answer the Captain's question (Jonah 1:6), and only partially answers the Sailors' questions (Jonah 1:8). He doesn't reply at all to God's question. He simply walks away with his anger escalating into self-pity.

c. God understands all the dynamics of the created order. Sometimes what God allows in our lives leads us to question Him. God will not strike us down if we question Him in our struggles, but He will not tolerate slander against His character. Nor will God bend if we try to manipulate Him by suicidal threats which could ultimately hurt God. If we hold on to anger, we aren't far from wallowing in self-pity.

Let's consider the second form of emotional chaos arising when we call God's plan evil:

II. We sulk in self-pity for our life situation (Jonah 4:5-11).

1. Outside of God's plan, we invite the stronghold of self-pity into our life (Jonah 4:5).

a. Jonah makes a shelter east of Nineveh and watches to find out what would happen to the foreigners. He sits there under a shelter in the shade sulking at God (Jonah 4:5). Meanwhile, the Pagan King sits in an ash heap repenting of his sins down in Nineveh (Jonah 3:6). The King proactively does what the LORD demands of him, but Jonah doesn't and his anger increases each minute.

b. The prophet wanders around restlessly in Jonah 4:5. He sits down, gets up to make a shelter, and sits down again. With a bad attitude Jonah probably mumbles, "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.

c. Our self-pity only leads to a world of restlessness. As a result, we will walk in loneliness, in a world that revolves around our wants and needs. When God

doesn't meet our demands, we sit around thinking about what we want. We wander around restlessly failing in all our attempts to exercise our agenda. Unless we step out of self-pity, we will continue to walk in circles.

2. God pleads with us change our minds about our attitude towards His plan (Jonah 4:6-11).

a. God teaches the prophet Jonah about His mercy with an object lesson. Out of mercy, God appoints a plant to provide Jonah with shade (Jonah 4:6). The plant rescues Jonah from his evil (discomfort). The next day God appoints a worm to smite the plant (Jonah 4:7). Then He appoints a dry wind to blow on the prophet. Then Jonah entertains suicidal thoughts once more (Jonah 4:8).

b. God questions Jonah a second time (Jonah 4:9). "Is it good for you to burn with anger about the plant?" If Jonah answers "no," he must admit that his anger toward Nineveh isn't good. If he answers "yes," he exposes his position that he only wants to hoard God's mercy for himself. The prophet makes it clear that his anger will not relent even if he dies.

c. God educates Jonah about His work (Jonah 4:10-11). Jonah did nothing for the plant, yet he expresses pity for its death. The LORD, however, made Nineveh great and has worked upon their hearts to prepare them for the message. God doesn't want an entire populous of over 120,000 to perish in their sins.

In conclusion, *we should not call God's plan evil unless we want to experience two forms of emotional chaos: 1) We will fill up with intense anger at God, and 2) We will sulk in self pity for our life situation.* God will not strike us down if we question Him in our circumstances. Jesus asked God why He had forsaken Him on the cross. We take ourselves into a restless world of anger and self-pity, however, if we don't reorder ourselves with God's plan. We may not survive long in this world without God's blessing. He doesn't want us to perish in our rebellion. Instead His heart beats for us, and His eyes shed tears for us in our ignorance of the bigger picture. We should bend our knee in submission to God for His plan will bless us.