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Jonah's Anger at the LORD's Mercy

4: 1-3

Jonah's anger at the LORD's mercy DIG: Why is Jonah angry now? How did Yonah's selfish anger compare with God's righteous anger? How was this a reflection of the northern kingdom of Isra'el? How did Yonah rationalize his out-of-control anger over Nineveh's repentance and ADONAI'S forgiveness? What was Jonah's greatest fear? Compare Jonah's five-point description of God to Moshe's description of Him in Exodus 34:6-7. What attribute is missing? Do you think this omission may have been purposeful on Yonah's part? Why or why not? How did Jonah know about the LORD's mercy based on his experience with the northern kingdom of Isra'el? What is the difference between God relenting and repenting? Why the pause at this point? What does scene six as a whole say about God?

REFLECT: Have you ever tried to make an unspoken "deal" with God in exchange for your obedience? How did that work out? Did it affect your relationship with Him? Have you ever been displeased when you saw YHVH extend grace and mercy to someone you thought didn't deserve it? When was the last time you obeyed ADONAI but your emotions lagged behind? What compelled you to obey the Lord despite the way you felt about it? Can you think of an attribute of God that you only appreciate in certain situations? What does our anger at the LORD reveal about our desire to control Him?

God is merciful, compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.

Short description of scene six: One of the issues driving the story of **Yonah** from the beginning has been: What will happen to **the city of Nineveh**, whose **wickedness** is so great that it has come to the attention of **ADONAI**? That issue has now been resolved. **The Ninevites** heard the message of **the prophet**, **they** changed, and the announced destruction of **the city** has been called off. But another issue remained. What will happen to a **reluctant prophet** who disobeyed **Ha'Shem**? **Jonah** discovered that it is impossible to run away from **the Almighty**. **His** preaching in **Nineveh**, it would seem, has been tremendously successful. One would think **he** would be overjoyed. But as the scene opens **Jonah** is **absolutely furious**.

Commentary on scene six: But Jonah . . . The cat and mouse game continues, so we should pause on the word **But**. Throughout the book, there is a constant dialogue between **Yonah** and the **Grandmaster**, often with action and counteraction, like a chess game. **But Jonah was absolutely furious and burned with anger because the Ninevites had been saved (4:1)**. Most evangelists would have been delighted. Imagine preaching for **forty days** and ending up with about 600,000 people repenting and radically changing their behavior. But **Yonah** was not just upset, **he was absolutely furious** (Hebrew: *ra'ah*). Once again **Jonah** is playing upon a few of **his** favorite words. The previous chapter spoke of **the people of Nineveh** turning from **their evil** (Hebrew: *ra'ah*) ways **(3:8)**. **God** saw that **they** had turned from **their evil** (*ra'ah*) ways **(3:10a)** and therefore relents about bringing **evil** (*ra'ah*) **upon them (3:10b)**. **YHVH** has turned from **His** fury, while **Jonah** is **absolutely furious**. **God** has turned from "the heat [Hebrew root: *hrh*] of **His** anger **(3:9)** while **Yonah** is burning up (root: *hrh*) with it. Several times this chapter speaks of **Yonah's** burning **anger**. **He** was **angry** at the **grace** and **compassion** of **God (4:4)**, and because **the plant** that provided **shade** had **withered (4:9)**.⁸⁸ **His** response turned out to be anything but what we would expect from a man sent by **God** to deliver a divine message.

Jonah's out-of-control **anger** over **Nineveh's** repentance and **God's** forgiveness can best be understood in reference to **Nineveh's** well-documented **evil** (to see link click [Aj](#) - **The Word of the LORD came to Jonah: Go to Nineveh and Preach Against It**). Yes, **the LORD** hates **wickedness**, but **the Jewish prophet's anger** contrasts with **YHVH's** because **he** does not believe that **their evil** should be forgiven. In this, **he** symbolized the nation of **Isra'el**. **Yonah's** self-interests were a reminder to **Isra'el** of her lack of concern for the ways and mercies of **God** for anyone but herself.⁸⁹ **He** cannot accept **Micah's** pronouncement: **God does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in grace (Micah 7:18b CJB)**.

From the preaching of **Amos**, **Jonah** already knew that Assyria had been chosen by **Ha'Shem** to destroy the northern kingdom of **Isra'el**. If **Nineveh** was spared destruction, that would signal the certain doom of **his** homeland. **Yonah** didn't want to be the instrument that **God** would use to bring **Nineveh** to repentance, and therefore, spared. Not only that, but **he** probably believed that if he aided in the northern Kingdom's demise that **he** could also be an instrument in the southern kingdom of Judah's destruction.⁹⁰ Oy vey!



Jonah explains **his** anger. **O LORD, isn't this what I said when I was still in my country (4:2a)? It may not have been spoken, but maybe only thought.** In the Hebrew text, the emphasis is on the words **my country**. Regrettably, **Jonah** is often pictured as an anti-Gentile bigot, but this was not the problem. If **he** were a bigot, **he** would not have wanted to go to **Tarshish** either, since it was also **a** Gentile **city**. The problem was not that **he** was anti-Gentile, but rather, that **he** was pro-**Isra'el**, a nationalist. This is seen from **his** statement, **my country**.

This verse carries the fullness of **the disgruntled prophet's** relationship with **HaShem** combined with the basis of **his** dispute with **Him**. **Yonah's** prayer begins with the same formula that **the sailors** used in **1:14: Please ADONAI, Please! That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish (4:2b)**. The key to understand this verse is found in the Hebrew behind the words: **I was so quick** (*qiddamti*). The verb form *qadam* means *I anticipated* or *I was out in front* of the action. **Jonah** just *knew* how things were going to turn out. This proves **Yonah** was not faithless. In fact **he** suspected that **the Ninevites** *would* repent and that **ADONAI** *would* relent, but **the prophet** wanted strict justice and didn't want to have anything to do with any other kind. Even more than that, however, **he** didn't approve of **the LORD's** intent or action.

This familiar **five-point description** of the true **God** places **the son of Amittai** in a long line of important witnesses in the TaNaKh. The first use of this revelation of **Ha'Shamayim's** self-description was to **Moshe** after **he** forgave **the Israelites** for worshiping the golden calf (**Exodus 34:6-7a**). The prophet **Joel** warned of coming judgment but reminded the Jews that it was not too late to repent for the sake of **God's** reputation (**Joel 2:13**). **David** expressed the joy of **YHVH's** forgiveness of **his** sin (**Psalms 103:11-13**). **Ezra** reminded **the Israelites** of **the LORD's** long history of faithfulness to them as they rededicated the rebuilt wall in Tziyon after returning from the Babylon captivity (**Nehemiah 9:17b**). The psalmist also knew that although the arrogant were attacking **him** for **his** failings, **God** would still receive **him** (**Psalms 86:15**). But **Jonah**

recites **God's** reputation as the reason for **his** anger.

Jonah lamented: **I knew that You are a merciful and compassionate God, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and a God who relents from sending calamity (Jonah 4:2c, also see Joel 2:13). Jonah** was very clear about **God's** unique qualities. When **the runaway prophet** went to **Nineveh** he knew that **ADONAI** would very likely extend **His** mercy to **them** if **they** repented. While **Yonah** appreciated the character of **God** when expressed to **him** and **Isra'el**, **he** did not understand why they should be shared with **the evil Ninevites**.

*While we may be shocked at **Yonah's** response, we can often harbor the same feelings. When the ex who betrayed us, the friend who deceived us, or the offender who committed a crime against us receives **God's** forgiveness and even **His** favor, we can quickly fall into a pit of **anger** and frustration because we secretly longed for their demise.*⁹¹

Merciful: The adjective **merciful** or **gracious** (*hunnun*) occurs thirteen times in the TaNaKh and is used only in reference to **God**. Rabbi Sha'ul quoted **Exodus 33:19** when he wrote: **What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! For he says to Moshe, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion (Romans 9:13-15). Jonah** knew much about **God's** mercy, based on **his** experience with the northern kingdom of **Isra'el**. **He** had been a prophet in **Isra'el** during the long reign of King Jeroboam II, who **did what was evil in the LORD's sight (Second Kings 14:24)**. Despite that, **God** used Jeroboam to save **Isra'el** from her enemies and to recover some of the territories taken away from her earlier by Syria. In fact, **Yonah** had prophesied about this (**Second Kings 14:25**). Could it be, **Yonah** may have wondered, whether if **God** was still sparing apostate **Isra'el** and even prospering them under such a wicked king as Jeroboam II, **He** was not thinking of promoting the terrible Assyrian nation in like manner as **He** had done for **Isra'el** - especially now that they seemed repentant of their ways (**3:10**)? It is interesting that **Joel** prophesying in the southern kingdom of **Judah** probably many years later, seems to quote from **Jonah** when **he** speaks of **God's** relenting of the evil **He** had threatened: **Don't tear your clothing in your grief, but tear your hearts instead."** Return to the LORD your God, for he is merciful and compassionate, slow to get angry and filled with steadfast love. He is eager to relent and not punish (Joel 2:13 NLT).⁹²

Compassionate: The Hebrew word for **compassionate** (*raham*), is related to *reham*, the word for *womb*, and thus has something of the sense of *motherly love*. This adjective also occurs thirteen times in the TaNaKh, always in reference to **ADONAI**. **Merciful and**

compassionate are paired in **Jonah 4:2; Exodus 34:6-7; Numbers 14:18; Nehemiah 9:17 and 31; Psalm 86:15, 103:8, 111:4, 145:8; Second Chron 30:9; Joel 2:13).**

Slow to anger: The literal Hebrew for **slow to anger** has the sense *long of anger*. Being **slow to anger** is one of the virtues described in **Proverbs**; it is the opposite of having a hasty temper (**Proverbs 14:29**) or a hot temper (**Proverbs 15:18**) and is better than might (**Proverbs 16:32**) or pride (**Ecclesiastes 7:8**). This particular characteristic appears in many other places in the Bible (**Exodus 34:6; Nehemiah 9:17; Psalm 14:8**). **Yonah** had a heart problem and didn't want **YHVH** to be patient any longer.

Filled with steadfast love: In addition to the above, the expression **filled in steadfast love** occurs in prayers, such as **Nehemiah 13:22** and **Psalms 5:7, 69:13, 106:7 and 45**. **Steadfast love** translates the Hebrew word *hesed*. We may bring the sense of this word into focus by looking at its usage in a non-theological context. **David** and **Jonathan** made a covenant with each other, sealing their friendship (**First Samuel 18:1-3**). Later, **Jonathan** asked **David** to remember **him** and **his** family, no matter what the future might bring, saying: **If I am still alive, show me the steadfast love (*hesed*) of the LORD, that I may not die; and do not cut off your steadfast love (*hesed*) from my house forever, when the LORD cuts off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth (First Samuel 20:14-15).** This is **love** with a strong element of loyalty.

God gave **Hosea** a marriage comparison to illustrate this kind of **steadfast love** when **He** said: **Isra'el, I will make you my wife forever. I will be honest and faithful to you. I will show you my love and compassion (Hosea 2:19).** **He** tells **Hosea** to marry a prostitute and to be faithful to her as an example of **God's** faithfulness to a faithless people. **The LORD said to me, "Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes of Baal worship (Hosea 3:1).**

A God who relents in sending calamity: This is one of two kinds of compassion in this verse. The **compassion** of **God** (*raham*) is a gentle womb-like compassion of **Ha'Shamayim** (the One in the heavens) for **His** good creation; **the God who relents** (*naham*) is an agonizing compassion of **ADONAI** in relation to a sinful humanity. This concept of **God relenting** was discussed in more detail in **3:10**. But **Jonah's** thirty-nine-word speech (in Hebrew) here in **4:2** is balanced by a thirty-nine-word speech (in Hebrew) by **YHVH** in **4:10-11**.⁹³

God spared **the people of Nineveh** although **He** had already decreed that **they** would be destroyed because of **their** evil ways. This teaches us that no matter what we have done,

*the grace and mercy of **ADONAI** awaits us if we only repent wholeheartedly.*

Yonah had just about enough of **God's mercy and compassion, slowness to anger, steadfast love and relenting** toward **the wicked**. How differently **he** would order events if **he** were in **God's** place! **He** wanted **the Grandmaster** to destroy those **wicked** and cruel **Assyrians**. Now that **they** had repented, it seemed as though **ADONAI** might spare **them** all. **They** might even fare better than **his** own apostate and corrupt nation of **Isra'el** and **he** couldn't stand the thought! In fact, **he** became so **angry** that **he** would rather **die** than see anything like that happen. **He** didn't fear **death** anymore because **he** already **died** once and had been resurrected. **He** had already been at **Abraham's side** (see **The Life of Christ Hx - The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus**) and would rather be in Sh'ol with **him** than live in a world dominated by the hated Assyrians.

Therefore, the prayer: **Now, ADONAI, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live (Jonah 4:3, also see Numbers 11:15 and First Kings 19:4)** is a measure of the depth of **his** displeasure. Out of tune with **God**, **the reluctant prophet** was distraught. Out of all mankind **he** was the most miserable. Yet, it is ironic that the cause of **his** discontent was the goodness of **God**, which **he** himself had experienced so dramatically when **ADONAI** had resurrected **him**.⁹⁴ But **he** still had doubts. Would anyone in **Isra'el** understand what **he** had done? **Dying** was better than living . . . if **the enemy** lived.

At this point, **Jonah's** Masoretic scroll (one of the oldest and most reliable Hebrew copies of the TaNaKh) and the Dead Sea scroll both insert a *setumah*, or a grammatical indicator that punctuates the text with a pause when the story is read.⁹⁵

Reflection on what scene six as a whole says about ADONAI: **God** does not respond to **Yonah** by declaring that **the wicked** will meet strict justice. More accurately, **God** affirms **His** reputation by assuring **His chosen prophet** of **His** care for **the wicked**, even for **their** animals. **Jonah's** complaint helps us to consider the full burden of believing and serving such a **God**. It means the world will be a place where the potential for great **evil** will remain. Exactly because our free will to reject or accept **Him**, **the LORD** hopes for the salvation of **the wicked**. Our faith is complex and even challenged **Jonah**, and it continues to challenge believers today to place their trust in a **God** who loves those whom we find despicable.⁹⁶

*Dear Holy and Just Heavenly **Father**, How wonderful that **You** perfectly balance both mercy and justice. To the repentant sinner who comes humbly and lovingly to **You** - **You** offer forgiveness (**First John 1:9**); but to the hardened selfish person who may have done many good deeds - but whose heart loves himself and is very proud of all his deeds - to him **You***

sentence to the same thing he had on earth. **He** chose not to be near **You** on earth, will be far from **Your** love after his body dies but his soul will live on alienated from **Your** love forever (**Matthew 7:21-23**)!

You differentiate between people - not by the amount of their good deeds- but by the love in their heart. **You** look for the person who humbly loves **You** (**Matthew 22:37-39**). **The Father loves the Son and has given everything into His hand. He who trusts in the Son has eternal life. He who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him (John 3:35-36).**

You are fair and just when those who love **You** receive **Your** righteousness (**Second Corinthians 5:21**) and go to heaven. Those who do not love **You**, these **You** send to hell. They may know about **You**, but loving **You** is the key to enter heaven. **These shall go off to everlasting punishment, but the righteous into everlasting life (Matthew 25:46).** **You** want all to enter heaven, but each person makes that decision for himself. It is not based on money, nor on race, nor on looks, nor on any other thing. Entrance to heaven is based on loving and believing in **Yeshua God (Romans 10:8-9)**. **You** are worthy of all our love! In **Yeshua's** holy name and power of **His** resurrection. Amen