

# Jonah 4:4-11

- Should I not be concerned about that great city? -

**Author: Evert Jan Hempenius**

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## Introduction

- ❖ The book of Jonah ends with a rhetorical question. Jonah does not answer. This open ending to the book leaves this question open to the listeners, then and now: "Should I not be concerned about that great city?"
  - Walton shows convincingly (see below) that this final passage contains an important lesson: Jonah and the vine is **parallel to the events at Nineveh**. This is based on two observations:<sup>1</sup>
    - 1. The use of the Hebrew word "evil";
    - 2. The subtle change of the LORD God (4:6) – God (4:7-9) – LORD (4:10-11). Compare this with LORD (3:3) – God (3:5-10) – LORD (4:1).
  - The final passage shows also the destructive power of unreasonable anger:
  - 1. Jonah is angry because of the compassion of God towards Nineveh;
  - 2. Jonah is angry because of the withered vine;
  - 3. Jonah is angry to death.
  - In the final question, the LORD himself draws the parallel:
    - Jonah has been concerned about the vine.
    - The LORD should be concerned about the great city.

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<sup>1</sup> Walton, J. H. (2008, p. 487). *Jonah*. In T. Longman III & D. E. Garland (Eds.).

- ❖ Some commentators condemn the behaviour of Jonah. He is stubborn, reluctant, and selfish or nationalist. He knows that God is a compassionate and merciful God but he does grant God's compassion to the Ninevites. Remarkably, the LORD does not condemn Jonah: "You wicked servant" (Mt 18:32, 33).
  - Murphy probably does more justice to the significance of Jonah: In Jonah 4, Jonah the prophet expects and demands pure justice. Rather than depicting a simplistic resolution to the tension between the poles of justice and mercy, the narrative highlights the tension between what Jonah expected to happen and what actually came to pass.<sup>2</sup> **He does not understand God.**
- ❖ The book of Jonah is different from the other minor prophets because it tells a story about the prophet narrated by somebody else. He preached to the people of Assyria only these words: "Forty days from now Nineveh will be overthrown" (Jon 3:4). The book narrates his actions and words in connection with an assignment that he found difficult to accept from the Lord: to preach to an enemy nation (Nineveh, the capital of Assyria) with the possibility that they would respond in such a way as to be shown mercy by God, an outcome that Jonah was determined to resist.<sup>3</sup>
  - The reader gets the message of the book mainly by evaluating what happened to Jonah and what he, and the other characters, did in response rather than by analyzing what God told Jonah to say.<sup>4</sup>
- ❖ The main thought is found in Jonah 2:9: "Salvation comes from the LORD." But this was a lesson for Jonah to apprehend. It permeates his personal experience, combined with "Should I not be concerned about that great city?" (Jon 4:11).
  - Jonah knew this before as is clear in a second prayer to the LORD (Jon 4:2): He prayed to the LORD, "O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity."
- ❖ The context, form and structure, theological, technical and hermeneutical notes given in this sermon outline overlap with other sermon outlines taken from the Book of Jonah. This makes it possible to use this sermon outline as a "stand-alone". You can also fit this outline into a series of sermons. There are four available.

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<sup>2</sup> Murphy, K. J. (2012). *Jonah*. In C. A. Newsom, J. E. Lapsley, & S. H. Ringe (Eds.).

<sup>3</sup> Stuart, D. (2012, p. 455). *Jonah, Book of*. In M. J. Boda & G. J. McConville (Eds.).

<sup>4</sup> Stuart, D. (2012, p. 456). *Jonah, Book of*. In M. J. Boda & G. J. McConville (Eds.).

## Form and structure

- ❖ The Book of Jonah can be divided into two parts: the first and the second commission to preach against Nineveh. See below.
  - Each part has different scenes set at different locations.
    - Scene 2 has subdivisions marked by the nature of the sea: a. a violent storm; b. getting rougher and tougher; c. growing even wilder; d. becoming calm again.
    - Scene 3 has a subdivision marked by the result of the preaching of Jonah: a. the preaching; b. the effect on the people of Nineveh and consequently the compassion of God; c. Jonah displeased.
  - It is interesting to note that the two discourses together feature an ABB'A'-structure:
    - A. The mercy of God (4:2);
      - B. The angriness of Jonah (4:3);
      - B'. The angriness of Jonah (4:9);
    - A'. The mercy of God (4:10-11).
    - Between both discourses, the growth and the withering of the vine are told.
  - The prayer of Jonah has several features resembling the Psalms.
- ❖ The book ends with a question, the reader needs to answer.

PART I. First commission to preach against Nineveh (Jon 1-2)	
On the run (Jon 1:1-3)	
Scene 1 (verse 1:1-3) LORD – Jonah	<p>The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai:</p> <p>“Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.”</p> <p>But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD.</p>
At Sea (Jon 1:4-17) – the violent storm	
Scene 2a (verse 1:4-10) LORD sailors – gods	<p>Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up.</p> <p>All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they</p>

Jonah – LORD	<p>threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship. But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep. The captain went to him and said,</p> <p>“How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us, and we will not perish.”</p> <p>Then the sailors said to each other,</p> <p>“Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity.”</p> <p>They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. So they asked him,</p> <p>“Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?”</p> <p>He answered,</p> <p>“I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land.”</p> <p>This terrified them and they asked,</p> <p>“What have you done?” (They knew he was running away from the LORD, because he had already told them so.)</p>
Scene 2b (verses 1:11-12) Sailors – Jonah	<p>The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him,</p> <p>“What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?”</p> <p>He replied,</p> <p>“Pick me up and throw me into the sea, and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you.”</p>
Scene 2c (verses 1:13-14) Sailors – LORD	<p>Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. Then they cried to the LORD,</p> <p>“O LORD, please do not let us die for taking this man’s life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, O LORD, have done as you pleased.”</p>
Scene 2d (verses 1:15-16) Sailors – LORD	<p>Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. At this the men greatly feared the LORD, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows to him.</p>
<b>Inside the fish (Jon 2) – the prayer</b>	
Scene 3 (verses 1:17-2:1) LORD (his God) – Jonah	<p>But the LORD provided a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights.</p> <p>From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the LORD his God. He said:</p>
<b><i>The prayer</i></b> (verses 2:2-9)	<p>“In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me.</p> <p>From the depths of the grave I called for help, and you listened to my cry.</p>

You hurled me into the deep,  
     into the very heart of the seas,  
 and the currents swirled about me;  
     all your waves and breakers swept over me.

I said, 'I have been banished from your sight;  
     yet I will look again toward your holy temple.'

The engulfing waters threatened me,  
     the deep surrounded me;  
     seaweed was wrapped around my head.  
 To the roots of the mountains I sank down;  
     the earth beneath barred me in forever.

But you brought my life up from the pit,  
     O LORD my God.  
 "When my life was ebbing away,  
     I remembered you, LORD,  
 and my prayer rose to you,  
     to your holy temple.

"Those who cling to worthless idols  
     forfeit the grace that could be theirs.  
 But I, with a song of thanksgiving,  
     will sacrifice to you.  
 What I have vowed I will make good.  
     Salvation comes from the LORD."

(verse 2:10)

And the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

## PART II. Second commission to preach against Nineveh (Jon 3:4)

### At Nineveh (Jon 3:1-4:4)

Scene 3a (verses 3:1-4) LORD – Jonah	Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."  Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh.  Now Nineveh was a very important city—a visit required three days.  On the first day, Jonah started into the city. He proclaimed: "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned."
Scene 3b (verses 3:5-10) God – Ninevites	The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

	<p>When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. Then he issued a proclamation in Nineveh:</p> <p>“By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let any man or beast, herd or flock, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.”</p> <p>When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.</p>
<p><b>Scene 3c</b> (verses 4:1-4) LORD – Jonah</p> <p><b>The first discourse:</b> <b>prayer and answer question</b></p>	<p>But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. He prayed to the LORD,</p> <p>“O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. Now, O LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.”</p> <p>But the LORD replied,</p> <p>“Have you any right to be angry?”</p>
<b>East of Nineveh (Jon 4:5-11) – the conclusion</b>	
<p><b>Scene 4</b> (verses 4:5-11)</p> <p><b>The second discourse: Jonah's outcry and answer by question</b></p>	<p>Jonah went out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city.</p> <p>Then the LORD God provided a vine and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the vine.</p> <p>But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the vine so that it withered. When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint.</p> <p>He wanted to die, and said, “It would be better for me to die than to live.”</p> <p>But God said to Jonah, “Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?”</p> <p>He said, “I do. I am angry enough to die.”</p> <p>But the LORD said, “You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty</p>

thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?"

## Technical, hermeneutical and historical notes

### Author

- ❖ The author of this book is not known. He is very skilled in story-telling.

### Date of writing and setting

- ❖ The date of writing is not known.
- ❖ The date of the historical setting is also not exactly known. The book refers to known cities and the king of Nineveh but it doesn't mention his name. The opening verses do not refer to any reign of the kings of Israel and Judah, like some other prophetic books:
  - "The vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah son of Amoz saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah" (Isa 1:1).
- ❖ The only reference we have is 2 Kings 14:25. Based on the reign of King Jeroboam II of Israel (793–753 BC or 786–746 BC). Jonah's ministry as a prophet could have occurred in the first half of the eighth century B.C. plus ten years (740 B.C.). This is a mere indication.
  - Nahum, who also prophesied against Nineveh, must be dated several decades later when Assyria had waged war against Israel and Judah.

### Jonah

- ❖ His name means "Dove."
- ❖ Little is known about the prophet himself. He is mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25:
  - "He was the one who restored the boundaries of Israel from Lebo Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah, in accordance with the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, spoken through his servant Jonah son of Amitai, the prophet from Gath Hepher."
    - "He" is Jeroboam II, King of Israel.
  - This word of the LORD might answer the question of why Jonah didn't want to go to Nineveh.
    - A weak or even destroyed Nineveh was no threat to the restored boundaries of Israel, whereas a strong Nineveh and Assyria could become a threatening power to these boundaries. This indeed has happened (734–722 BC).

### LORD (Yahweh)

- ❖ “The divine names vary (‘Yahweh,’ ‘Elohim,’ ‘ha-Elohim,’ ‘Yahweh-Elohim’), for the most part according to who is addressing the deity (generally, the pagans use ‘Elohim,’ and Jonah uses ‘Yahweh,’ as might be expected).<sup>5</sup> See also Psalm 95:3-5.
- ❖ He is the God of heaven: “He answered, “I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, **the God of heaven**, who made the sea and the land” (Jon 1:9). This designation is especially used in pagan contexts:
  - Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon (Dan 2:18, a.o.);
  - Cyrus king of Persia (2 Chron 36:23; Ezra 1:2, a.o.);
  - Darius king of Persia (Ezra 6:8);
  - Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:12; Nehemiah 1:4, a.o.).
    - Interesting are also Revelation 11:13 and 16:10, 11:
    - “At that very hour there was a severe earthquake and a tenth of the city collapsed. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and **the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.**”
    - “The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. **Men gnawed their tongues in agony and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done.**”
- ❖ The LORD is described as governing his creation (the sea; a storm (heaven); dry land; a fish; the sun; a scorching east wind, a vine, a worm). “He **provided** a great fish” (Jon 1:17; see also 4:6, 7, 8). Jonah knew that the LORD had sent this storm, and he was thankful to God for his salvation by the fish but seems to have forgotten all this when he was angry about the withered vine.
  - He is not only the LORD of the natural world but also the nations, and the sailors were instruments in his hands.
- ❖ Three statements of Jonah are important:
  - “I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land” (Jon 1:9).
  - “But I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. Salvation comes from the LORD” (Jon 2:9).
  - “O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity” (Jon 4:2).

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<sup>5</sup> Stuart, D. (2012, p. 459). *Jonah, Book of*. In M. J. Boda & G. J. McConville (Eds.).

- They reveal also the contradictions found in the belief system of the believer.
- ❖ Person notes: “Jonah, the helmsman, and the king of Nineveh all suggest (at least implicitly) that the Lord is compassionate.”<sup>6</sup>

The captain/helmsman:	Call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us, <b>and we will not perish</b> ” (1:6).
Jonah:	Salvation comes from the LORD” (2:9).
The King	“God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that <b>we will not perish</b> ” (3:9).
Jonah	“You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity” (4:2).

- The LORD is also depicted as a God who gives a second chance, to Jonah, and the Ninevites.

### Geography

- ❖ The Book of Jonah mentions several geographical names.
  - Home (Jon 4:2) This is probably Gath Hepher (2 Kgs 14:25), a fortified town in Israel, the Northern Kingdom. Jerome, in his commentary on the book of Jonah, locates Gath-Hepher two miles from Sepphoris, on the road to Tiberias. This fortified city was occupied until the Assyrian conquest. In the Persian period, the site was again inhabited.<sup>7</sup>
  - Joppa (Jon 1:2). A town on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. It was an important harbour. Timbers from Lebanon were shipped to Joppa, where they were unloaded and carried overland to Jerusalem (2 Chr 2:16; Ezra 3:7; see also Acts 9:36).<sup>8</sup>
  - Tarshish (Jon 1:2). The location of this port is not clear. A tentative conclusion, based on the story, might point to the south of Spain (Tartessos). There existed trading contacts between the Phoenicians (Tyre, Lebanon; Ez 27:12) and the people of Tartessos. Instead of going to the east (Nineveh), Jonah wanted to travel to the West as far as possible. But, “because of the ambiguity regarding the identification of Tarshish, we are not able to say with confidence where Jonah was heading when he

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<sup>6</sup> Person, R. F., Jr. (1996, p.60).

<sup>7</sup> Greenberg, R. (1992, Vol. 2, pp. 909–910). *Gath-Hepher (Place)*. In D. N. Freedman (Ed.).

<sup>8</sup> Kaplan, J., & Kaplan, H. R. (1992, Vol. 3, p. 946). *Joppa (Place)*. In D. N. Freedman (Ed.).

set sail from Joppa. All we can be sure of is that he was going west, and that he thought he would be leaving his God behind.”<sup>9</sup>

- These ships could carry a sail and sailed close to the coastline.
- They set sail during the spring and the summer season (April-September). During the autumn and winter season the weather could become rough and travelling at sea was impossible.
- Nineveh was one of the major cities of the Assyrians located on the east bank of the river Tigris, opposite modern Mosul, and very populous by the standards of those days. It became the capital of Assyria by the decision of King Sennacherib (704–681 B.C.).

### Historicity

- ❖ For a discussion pros and cons of the historicity of the Book, see D. Stuart.<sup>10</sup>

## Exposition

### PART II. The conclusion (Jon 4:4-11)

- ❖ This conclusion must be read against the background of everything that preceded it.

#### Verse 4 (Scene 3c The Lord questions Jonah about his anger)

- ❖ “**And the LORD said, ‘Do you do well to be angry?’**” (ESV) “**Have you any right to be angry?**” (NIV).

- Johan is held responsible for his actions, and emotions. If they are justifiable, then they are justified. But, if not....
- Price and Nida suggest the following translations: “*What right do you have to be angry?* may be expressed as ‘how can you justify being angry?’ or ‘what excuse do you have for being angry?’”<sup>11</sup> Other translations: “Basic English: ‘Have you any right to be angry?’ while the reasonableness, rather than the rightfulness, of Jonah’s anger is questioned in Chinese Union Version ‘**Is it reasonable for you to be as angry as this?**’”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Baker, D. W. (1992, Vol. 6, p. 333). *Tarshish (Place)*. In D. N. Freedman (Ed.).

<sup>10</sup> Stuart, D. (2012, p. 460). *Jonah, Book of*. In M. J. Boda & G. J. McConville (Eds.).

<sup>11</sup> Price, B. F., & Nida, E. A. (1978, p. 106).

<sup>12</sup> Price, B. F., & Nida, E. A. (1978, p. 106).

- “**do well**” = “**עֲשֵׂה**”: hif. 3. to do something well<sup>13</sup> to be angry.
  - The difference in meaning between both translations is:
    - “Do you have any good reason (right) to be angry?” (see NIV).
    - “What good do you want to achieve by being angry?” (see ESV).
  - The Chinese version (see above) combines both meanings by using the word **reasonable**.
  - The LORD doesn't address Jonah's prayer but his motivation, and his reasons.
  - Stuart comments: “Note that Yahweh ignored Jonah's request to die. It was a stupid request, voiced out of frustration and pettiness, and Yahweh did not honor it with a response.”<sup>14</sup>
  - “**do well**,” there is no justification for his anger at God's compassion.
    - Isaiah 55:8-9: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,’ declares the LORD. ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.’”
- It is a rhetorical question. A rhetorical question does not await an answer but is intended to make the other think about, and in the case of Jonah to change his thoughts and feelings. Stop being angry. But Jonah continues being angry and his anger will even increase.
  - Jonah remains silent. He doesn't answer this question. Why not? Compare Genesis 4:6, where Cain doesn't answer God.
  - Is it because he hasn't got any good reason, except for disappointment, resentment or frustration, like Cain? (NIV)
  - Is it because he knows that his anger does not serve any good? (ESV) He cannot change the plan of God, his mercy and compassion.
- Jonah remains silent. Unjustified anger is unreasonable.

#### Verse 5- 9 (Scene 4 the lesson)

- ❖ “**east**” Nineveh was on the east bank of the river. Probably, Jonah had chosen a safe site with a good view of the city.

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<sup>13</sup> Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M. E. J., & Stamm, J. J. (1994–2000, p. 408).

<sup>14</sup> Stuart, D. (1987, p. 503).

- ❖ “**There he made himself a shelter.**” The climate in this area is hot, and according to the story, there were no trees or shrubs to sit under as a protection against the sun. The shelter was provisionally made of branches. These were dry, any leaves would wither immediately.
- ❖ “**and waited to see what would happen to the city**” But, as the previous chapter made clear, he already knew in advance what would happen to the city: nothing!
  - Jonah 4:2: “He prayed to the LORD, “O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. **I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.**”
  - Jonah 3:4, 5: “**On the first day**, Jonah started into the city. He proclaimed: “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned.” **The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast**, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.
    - Jonah, seeing the Ninevites' reaction, could have drawn his conclusion: “After this response of the Ninevites to my proclamation, God will cease from sending disaster. There is use in proclaiming this message for another two more days.”
- ❖ “**the LORD God provided a vine**”
  - “**the LORD GOD provided**” a fish (Jon 1:17), a vine, a worm, and a scorching wind. The LORD God as creator (Jon 1:9) controls the creation.
  - “**vine**” We do not know exactly what kind of plant is meant. Suggested are 'castor oil plant' (Chinese Union Version, in the margin of RSV and NEB);
  - 'gourd' (KJV, RV, NEB: 'climbing gourd', NAB: 'a gourd plant');
  - 'ivy plant' (Knox, following the Vulgate);
  - 'vine' (Basic English, LB, NIV).
  - There are two things we know: the plant was growing fast and leaves that gave shelter against the scorching sun. This shelter was better than the one Jonah had provided for himself. Green leaves evaporate water and provide some cooling of the air.
- ❖ “**to ease his discomfort**”

- “**discomfort**” = “**נַּעֲמָה**”: The word occurs eight times in this book, and is translated differently. “The basic meaning is probably ‘that which is harmful’”<sup>15</sup>
- Jonah 1:2: wickedness;
- Jonah 1:7; 4:2: calamity;
- Jonah 1:8: trouble;
- Jonah 3:10: destruction;
- Jonah 4:1: (*great*) *displeasure*;
- Jonah 4:6: discomfort.
  - The cognate adjective “**נַּעֲמָה**” is found in Jonah 3:8, 10: “evil”. But “the distinction cannot always be drawn with the same degree of certainty, for the adjective may mean evil one, wicked one (or thing), and moreover the substantive may be used adjectivally.”<sup>16</sup>
  - The Dutch “Naardense Bijbel” translates Jonah 3:10: “When God sees their works, that they have turned from their **evil** (NIV: evil) way, God repents of the **evil** (NIV: destruction) that he said he would do to them, and he has not done it.
  - Jonah 4:6: “And the LORD God sent a palm tree,
  - and it came up over Jonah,
  - to be a shade over his head,
  - and to deliver him from his **evil** mind.
  - And Jonah rejoiced over the palm tree,
  - with great joy.”<sup>17</sup> xx
- Walton makes two observations:
- 1. “The word translated ‘destruction’ in 3:10 is precisely the same noun that in 4:6 is translated ‘discomfort.’ (See above.) It is by this similarity that we can make the correspondence, which in turn clarifies the importance of the object lesson: Jonah =

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<sup>15</sup> Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M. E. J., & Stamm, J. J. (1994–2000, p. 1262).

<sup>16</sup> Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M. E. J., & Stamm, J. J. (1994–2000, p. 1250).

<sup>17</sup> Zoeken in De Naardense bijbel. Naardense Bijbel. (n.d.-a). [https://www.naardensebijbel.nl/?search-class=DB\\_CustomSearch\\_Widget-db\\_customsearch\\_widget&widget\\_number=preset-default&-0=vers&cs-booknr-1=19&cs-bijbelhoofdstuk-2=3&cs-versnummer-3=10-10&cs-bijbelvers\\_v2-4=&search=Zoeken](https://www.naardensebijbel.nl/?search-class=DB_CustomSearch_Widget-db_customsearch_widget&widget_number=preset-default&-0=vers&cs-booknr-1=19&cs-bijbelhoofdstuk-2=3&cs-versnummer-3=10-10&cs-bijbelvers_v2-4=&search=Zoeken)

Nineveh. To extend the comparison, the people of Nineveh have attempted to protect themselves from their 'calamity' by their humble response, while Jonah has attempted to protect himself from his 'discomfort' by constructing his hut. Both attempts are inadequate and require an act of compassion by God to accomplish the objective."

- 2. "A subtle switch takes place in this section. Consistently throughout the book, Jonah spoke to, and was spoken to, by Yahweh, while the Ninevites referred only to *God*. This is what we would expect, for the Ninevites were threatened by 'deity,' whereas Jonah is in specific relation to his God, Yahweh. In 4:6, at the beginning of the object lesson, the text states that "the LORD God provided a vine" and then proceeds, through 4:9, to use only the word *God*, though God is dealing with Jonah—a second indication that the object lesson is intended somehow to parallel the events at Nineveh."<sup>18</sup>
- ❖ "Jonah was very happy about the vine." It provided some shade. His feelings of anger are eased and even replaced by happiness.
- ❖ "God provided a worm, which chewed the vine so that it withered." This is before dawn, during the night.
- ❖ "When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind"

Climate data for Mosul (1991-2020)													[hide]
Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Year
Record high °C (°F)	21.2 (70.2)	26.9 (80.4)	31.8 (89.2)	36.5 (97.7)	43.2 (109.8)	47.4 (117.3)	49.4 (120.9)	49.3 (120.7)	46.5 (115.7)	42.2 (108.0)	32.5 (90.5)	28.4 (83.1)	49.4 (120.9)
Mean daily maximum °C (°F)	13.1 (55.6)	15.4 (59.7)	20.0 (68.0)	25.9 (78.6)	33.2 (91.8)	39.8 (103.6)	43.4 (110.1)	43.3 (109.9)	38.5 (101.3)	31.9 (89.4)	21.6 (70.9)	15.1 (59.2)	28.4 (83.2)

Climate data of Mosul (Iraq), located at the ancient site of Nineveh.<sup>19</sup>

- ❖ "A hot dry wind and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint."
  - Price and Nida comment: "Presumably, although on the point of fainting, Jonah needed to be conscious enough to address God in the last part of the verse. The verb could perhaps here refer to sunstroke."<sup>20</sup> See also Amos 8:13.
    - The condition of Jonah was seriously in danger. He probably didn't have any energy left to look for shelter and a source of water to

<sup>18</sup> Walton, J. H. (2008, p. 487). *Jonah*. In T. Longman III & D. E. Garland (Eds.).

<sup>19</sup> Wikimedia Foundation. (2024, October 14). Mosul. Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mosul#Geography>

<sup>20</sup> Price, B. F., & Nida, E. A. (1978, p. 111)).

refresh himself. Now the life of Jonah was not threatened by water and drowning (Jon 1:16) but by the heat of the sun and dehydration.

❖ “**He wanted to die, and said, ‘It would be better for me to die than to live.’”**

- His death wish has to do with his condition and his deep disappointment about the fate of Nineveh. The city was not destroyed because the people had turned away from their evil deeds and had shown remorse.
- Compare Elijah: "While he himself went a day's journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. '**I have had enough, LORD**,' he said. 'Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors' (1 Kgs 19:4).

❖ “**But God said to Jonah, ‘Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?’”**

- The question of verse 4 is extended and specified.

❖ “**‘I do,’ he said. ‘I am angry enough to die.’”**

- Price and Nida comment: “The words **angry enough to die** can be taken with a double meaning. One is the surface meaning, that his anger is sufficient to justify his request for death. the other meaning takes the words ‘even unto death; (KJV) as an expression denoting the superlative (compare NEB, ‘mortally angry,’ and Knox, ‘deadly angry’).”<sup>21</sup>
- The meaning “**extremely angry**” is preferred.
  - Price and Nida continue: “The use of hyperbole by Jonah on this occasion is the more absurd when one takes into account the reasons for Jonah’s anger on both occasions: in verse 1, because he was humiliated by the sparing of Nineveh, and in verse 9, because he was inconvenienced by the withering of a plant.”<sup>22</sup>
  - At the same time, it is also recognizably human. If someone is angry about a serious event, any other minor incident can greatly increase the anger. Life has no meaning for Jonah anymore.

❖ It is revealing to compare both discourses, Jonah 4:1-4 and Jonah 4:8-9:

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<sup>21</sup> Price, B. F., & Nida, E. A. (1978, p. 112).

<sup>22</sup> Price, B. F., & Nida, E. A. (1978, p. 112).

	<b>First discourse (Jon 4:1-4)</b>	<b>Second discourse (Jon 4:8, 9)</b>
Prayer	But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. He <b>prayed to the LORD</b> ,	(Jonah) grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, <i>(He begged for death, saying<sup>23</sup>; and begged with all his soul to die, saying<sup>24</sup>)</i>
Reason (1)	"O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.	
Request Reason (2)	Now, O LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live." But the LORD replied, "Have you any right to be angry?"	"It would be better for me to die than to live."
Reply		But God said to Jonah, "Do you have a right to be angry <b>about the vine?</b> "
Answer		"I do," he said. "I am angry enough to die."

- Remark: The Tanakh and NASB95 translations contain more emotion than the NIV.
- The following can be noted:
  - 1. In the first discourse, there is an object: "Jonah prayed to the LORD", whereas the object is missing in the second discourse.
  - 2. Jonah gave a reason for his anger in the first discourse. This reason is missing in the second. Only because God asks about the vine, do we get to know his reason. Jonah confirms that this is his reason when he replies: "I do." He is so angry that he doesn't explain why he is so angry about the vine.

#### Verse 10- 11 (Scene 4 the conclusion and final question)

- ❖ **"But the LORD said,**
- ❖ **'You have been concerned about this vine,**
- ❖ **though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight.**

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<sup>23</sup> Tanakh

<sup>24</sup> NASB95

- ❖ **But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well.**
- ❖ **Should I not be concerned about that great city?"**
  - "concerned" = "גַּםְתָּה":
  - 1. to **be troubled** about c) of people
  - 2. to **look compassionately** (on)<sup>25</sup>
  - **pity, look upon with compassion**<sup>26</sup>
  - "**you did not**": the reader knows that God is active in the storm, the sea and its waves, the great fish (Jon 1); the reader knows, what Price and Nida write:
    - "The author emphasizes also the contrast between Jonah's relation to the plant and God's relation to the people of Nineveh. Jonah *didn't do anything for it and didn't make it grow*, whereas by implication the people of Nineveh were created by God."<sup>27</sup>
    - The people of Nineveh did return from their evil ways and showed remorse. Jonah did nothing, but be angry.
  - As Creator, the LORD God is also the Judge of this world and the nations. Look at:
    - Jonah 1:2: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me."
    - Jonah 3:4: "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned."
    - Jonah 3:5-9: "The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. (...) Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish."
    - And as Creator, he is the only one who can show compassion and mercy.

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<sup>25</sup> Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M. E. J., & Stamm, J. J. (1994–2000, p. 298).

<sup>26</sup> Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977, p. 299).

<sup>27</sup> Price, B. F., & Nida, E. A. (1978, p. 114).

- Stuart writes: "Yahweh offered this choice out of pure grace, to a people who had known no other course than sin, and who could be rescued from their present difficulties only by divine fiat."<sup>28</sup>
- "people who cannot tell their right hand from their left" are children meant or people in general who cannot be held responsible for their evil ways? In that case, this is a saying. If children were meant, the narrator could have told so:
  - Compare Isaiah 7:15, 16: "He will eat curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right. But before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste."
  - "Cattle" was also covered with sackcloth and wasn't allowed to taste anything (Jon 4:7).
  - The withered vine (the anger of Jonah) and the one hundred thousand people and the cattle (the compassion of the LORD) are incomparable.
    - It also underscores the unreasonableness of Jonah's anger.
- ❖ The Book ends with an unanswered question. We don't know what happened to Jonah. Did he come to his senses? Did his anger stop?
- ❖ The question is also asked to the reader, then and now. What would your answer be?
- ❖ Can you believe and accept and submit "that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity?"

## Application

### Before

- ❖ Tell the story vividly as is indicated above. Be aware that the listeners already know the story and its outcome. It is important to summarize previous chapters.
  - This story is not told as a children's story or a story people can tell each other sitting by the fireplace. The story is questioning the reader all the time.

### Main challenge

- ❖ Stuart concludes: "'What right do you have to be angry?' constitutes the challenge of chapter 4 for the hearer/reader."<sup>29</sup> Can you believe, accept, and surrender to the mercies of

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<sup>28</sup> Stuart, D. (1987, p. 508).

<sup>29</sup> Stuart, D. (1987, p. 508).s

God: "that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity."

### Praise God

- ❖ Praise the LORD for his power and his strength as the LORD, the God of heaven, creator of the sea and the (dry) land.
  - "Many people in the world today ignore God and assume that he also ignores them. Many believe that God set the world into motion and allows it to continue along unnoticed. This text portrays God as one who notices, as a God who is active, and as a God who takes sin seriously,"<sup>30</sup> and not only of his people but also of other peoples (Nineveh) and also the cattle.
- ❖ Emphasize 4:10, 11 and praise the LORD for his mercy and patience.
  - 1 Timothy 2:4-5: "who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."
- ❖ Does God change his plans?
  - Smith and Page remark: "The very thought of God 'changing his mind' causes difficulty for some believers. In perfect consistency with his justice, righteousness, and mercy, he spared Nineveh. There is absolutely no contradiction here. **God's character and his promises do not change**, as James 1:17 says (cf. Num 23:19). But many other verses show that God does change his plan of action according to his purposes."<sup>31</sup>
- ❖ Praise God for his patience, also with this world, the Ninevites, and Jonah. Praise God for his wisdom, teaching us.

### Jonah

- ❖ Sometimes a commentary depicts Jonah as a rebellious unwilling prophet: "Jonah has standing in the tradition mainly because of his ongoing resistance to God's call. He opposed God. The story-teller shows that Jonah's response leads to chaos, storm, death, compromise, hypocrisy, self-regard and logical but irresolvable anger. Only the continuing presence of the Lord could restore to Jonah the peace and joy he had lost by running away from God."<sup>32</sup> But we must remember that Jonah is just as human as we are.

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<sup>30</sup> Smith, B. K., & Page, F. S. (1995, p. 226).

<sup>31</sup> Smith, B. K., & Page, F. S. (1995, p. 269).

<sup>32</sup> Nixon, R. A. (2003, p. 70, 71).

- Stuart writes: Jonah's "reply to God could not be more appropriate to the point God will make. Jonah insisted in the strongest terms possible that the gourd was important to him. It was significant in his eyes! He loved it! It delighted him! Now that it is dead, he is furious. He feels enough anger at the loss of that plant to prefer death to life."<sup>33</sup>
- Stuart remarks: The "question about the right to be angry is central to the whole book, and crucial to the narrator's point in telling the story as he has. **What right do we have to demand that God should favour us and not others?** By reducing the question to the particular issue of the gourd, God focused the question in a way that would cause Jonah to condemn himself by his own words. Jonah did just that."<sup>34</sup>
  - Anger can be unjustified and unreasonable.

### The world

- ❖ The final question is an open question. It is awaiting an answer from us today.
  - Are you concerned about the fate of this world, your country and neighbourhood, your family and friends?
- ❖ Remember:
- ❖ After his resurrection, Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.'"
- "When he saw the crowds, **he had compassion on them**, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Mt 9:36).

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<sup>33</sup> Stuart, D. (1987, p. 506).

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