

JONAH

Gospel of the Second Chance

JONAH CHAPTER 3

Does God give up on people? You and I tend to give up on individuals who keep flubbing up or who seem very rebellious. We may respond with something like, *“That’s it! I’ve had it. Never again will I trust so-and-so.”* Or, *“He/she lets me down every time.”* We may feel we have been understanding long enough, that its time to cut our losses and walk away from an individual who constantly defies authority or who flaunts convention. But does God do that? From our study of Jonah today I think we’ll find that God operates far differently from you and me, that He treats rebels in a way most of us wouldn’t even think of.

As we saw last week, Jonah chose self-will instead of God’s will. He rebelled. Considering that God says in 1 Samuel 15:23 that *“rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft”* one wonders whether Jonah’s rebellion puts him in a similar category as the Ninevites.

Let’s just summarize the events of the book that we covered last week.

God told Jonah to go to Nineveh in Assyria (Mosul in present-day Iraq) to preach to the people and warn them of impending judgment. So instead of being obedient to God's request, Jonah - hopped a boat heading in the opposite direction of Nineveh. Going to the seaport of Joppa, he took a ship for **Tarshish**, in Spain. This was as far from Nineveh as the prophet could travel!¹ He settled himself down in the bottom of the boat and promptly went to sleep. Soon after the ship set sail, a severe storm stirred up the sea into mountainous waves, and the sailors in terror threw the cargo overboard and frantically prayed to their gods. By the casting of lots Jonah is was identified as the culprit who had offended his God. The storm ceased only after Jonah, at his own suggestion, was thrown into the sea. Slipping down, Jonah's body was entangled in the fronds of giant, 50-foot-long seaweeds. The prophet was sure that death was God's judgment on his disobedience. Then, suddenly, Jonah found himself swallowed by a giant fish. He lost consciousness—later waking to realize he still lived and that the fish had been prepared by God to save his life.² **Now truly penitent, he prays earnestly for salvation**, whereupon God delivers him unhurt upon the shore.

¹ Richards, L., & Richards, L. O. 1987. The teacher's commentary. Includes index. Victor Books: Wheaton, Ill.

Now we'll pick up the story, reading from Jonah, chapters 3 and 4, NRSV:

*1 The word of the Lord came to Jonah **a second time**, saying,*

2 “Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.”

3 So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days' walk across.

4 Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, “Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!”

*5 And **the people of Nineveh believed God**; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.*

6 When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.

7 Then he had a proclamation made in Nineveh: “By the decree of the king and his nobles: No human being or animal, no herd or flock, shall taste anything. They shall not feed, nor shall they

² Richards, L., & Richards, L. O. 1987. The teacher's commentary. Includes index. Victor Books: Wheaton, Ill.

drink water.

8 Human beings and animals shall be covered with sackcloth, and they shall cry mightily to God. All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands.

*9 Who knows? **God may relent and change his mind;** he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish.”*

10 When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

*1 But **this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry.***

2 He prayed to the Lord and said, “O Lord! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing.

3 And now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.”

*4 And the Lord said, “**Is it right for you to be angry?**”*

5 Then Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city, and **made a booth for himself** there. He sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city.

6 The Lord **God appointed a bush**, and made it come up over Jonah, to give shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort; so Jonah was very happy about the bush.

7 But when dawn came up the next day, **God appointed a worm that attacked the bush**, so that it withered.

8 When the sun rose, **God prepared a sultry east wind**, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint and **asked that he might die**. He said, “It is better for me to die than to live.”

9 But God said to Jonah, “**Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?**” And he said, “Yes, angry enough to die.”

10 Then the Lord said, “You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night.

11 And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty

thousand persons (men)³ who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?”

Now, let's go back through the story in closer detail.

Jonah 3:1,2:

*1 The word of the Lord came to Jonah **a second time**, saying,
2 “Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.”*

Now that Jonah had surrendered to God, he was ready for service. Isn't it great to know that God does not give up on us easily? Though Jonah rebelled and completely blew it the first time God called him to this task, God still gave him that second chance, a second opportunity to obey what the Lord had told him. That's the kind of God we have.

No matter what you've done, or how you feel you have disobeyed Him, if you are willing to repent, to turn things around and start being obedient, God will also give you another opportunity to live for Him.

³ Parentheses added.

The second command God gave to Jonah was almost identical with the first one (Jonah 1:2). The content of what Jonah was to preach would be given to him later. Right now, God was concerned with giving him the first direction. God frequently does not give us all the information immediately. He will first call you, then lead you step by step, giving you opportunity to trust Him to show you what to do next when you get to that point.

Jonah 3:3,4:

3 So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days' walk across.

4 Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

This time Jonah's response was immediate. Following the caravan trail to the area of the upper Tigris River, he arrived at the city of **Nineveh**, having been directed there by the Lord

The statement in verse 4, “*a day’s walk*,” does not mean that Jonah completed a day’s journey before he started to preach. It means that he started to preach at the beginning of his visit to Nineveh. A day’s journey in open country was about twenty miles, but in an inhabited area the course of such a journey was not likely to lie in a straight line but to weave back and forth through the markets and small streets. Jonah’s message was brief, simple, and straightforward: “*Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!*” And at first glance it seemed to be unconditional. It was a cry of doom and calamity.

Jonah 3:5,6:

5 And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.

6 When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.

The people of Nineveh took Jonah’s words as a message from God and became greatly concerned about their danger. A man of Jonah’s appearance and desolate cry probably attracted the multitudes and

stirred them deeply. The people were immediately moved by the Spirit of God. When word got to the king, he also had an immediate reaction. He humbled himself and demonstrated his repentance by putting on rough, coarse burlap clothing, basically a gunnysack, and sitting in ashes. **They announced a fast because** in times of danger it was considered proper to refuse food and give full time to earnestly and humbly praying to any god they considered to be in charge until the danger was past.

Jonah 3:7-9:

7 Then he had a proclamation made in Nineveh: “By the decree of the king and his nobles: No human being or animal, no herd or flock, shall taste anything. They shall not feed, nor shall they drink water.

8 Human beings and animals shall be covered with sackcloth, and they shall cry mightily to God. All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands.

*9 Who knows? **God may relent and change his mind;** he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish.”*

The king issued a proclamation. **Sackcloth** was regarded as a symbol of **humility** and **utter dependence** on God. It was a coarse ugly cloth not fit for normal wear. By joining in the fast the King of Nineveh had made it official. Having put on sackcloth, along with the others, he too began to plead for mercy. **Sitting in ashes** (Job 2:8; Jeremiah 6:26; Micah 1:10) is a graphic way of expressing **humility** and **helplessness** before God when one is in great sorrow. Sitting in ashes was also a way of showing sorrow over sin.

William L. Banks has this comment about the fasting of the animals in Nineveh:

“It was the belief of the Ninevites that extending the external signs of repentance and sorrow in this manner would demonstrate to God their intense determination to cease their iniquity.

“The king’s order to put sackcloth on the animals is mentioned in verse 8, and showed how intense was the king’s desire for total repentance. . . . Everyone was ordered to turn from, or forsake, his evil way.”

By putting sackcloth on the animals as well as on themselves the Ninevites therefore symbolized the unity of the people in humbling themselves before God. The people of Assyria were noted for their cruelty to other people, especially prisoners of war. The Ninevites became conscious that their treatment of other people was about to bring disaster upon them.

The king of Nineveh said when he made his proclamation, “*God may **relent** and **change** his mind*” (verse 9). These two verbs indicate that these pagans believed the Lord’s greatest desire was not to destroy people but to save them. The word **relent** points rather to a decision on God’s part to change his method of dealing with his creatures. God did not change His mind regarding the fact that He judges sin. God did not change His mind regarding the fact that He delights to show mercy to the repentant sinner. He would far rather show mercy than mete out judgment (Joel 2:13; Micah 7:18; Isaiah 55:7; Ezekiel 18:23). God gave the Ninevites a warning, out of His compassion, so that they might avert the coming judgment.

Thoroughgoing repentance of sin by people is pleasing to God, and in

response He graciously pours out His love.

Perhaps before going on, let's make sure we're all together on the meaning of the term "*repentance*." The concept of repentance is important in both Old and New Testaments.

We can sum up the basic meaning of repentance as "*a change of heart and life*." The basic meaning is one of a change of life direction. A person who repents turns from his/her old ways to wholeheartedly commit himself to doing the will of God.

Jonah 3:10:

10 Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the DISASTER that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.

God's threat of punishment can be set aside when real repentance is in evidence. The Lord's promises of salvation take precedence over his warnings about judgment. God's love is eternal, but his expressions of wrath serve to warn people of the consequences of not obeying Him.

JONAH CHAPTER 4

Jonah had obeyed the Lord by going to Nineveh and preaching God's message, but his heart attitude had not been changed to love. He so hated the Ninevites for their cruelty that he looked forward to their destruction. Now the forty days had gone by, and Nineveh was still standing unharmed.

Jonah 4:1-3:

*1 But **this** was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became **angry.***

2 He prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing.

3 And now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live."

Jonah was not ignorant of the character of his God. He had fled to Tarshish,

not because he was afraid of the Ninevites, but because **he did not want them to be saved**. He knew that every threat of God could be conditional, no matter how stated.

God was **gracious**, meaning that He always had the welfare of people in mind, and **at all times desired to lift them from their sin**. God promises to help those who show genuine sorrow for sin and who trust in His kindness.

God is **also slow to anger**. It is not God's first wish to punish those who ignore Him. He endures much of mankind's disobedience. But when it becomes evident, in any given situation, that people are too proud and headstrong to be guided by God's Word, He begins to teach them the "*hard way*," by expressing His displeasure toward sin.

Jonah knows the extent of God's love is beyond measure. So God's kindness is not exhausted by the disobedience of the other party, but reaches out to draw them back to an intimate personal relationship.

God's kindness is so great that He is glad to put aside judgment so that one

who is truly sorry for their sin may be forgiven and reconciled to Him.

But Jonah did not have the love of God in his heart, and he felt angry by the conversion of those he disliked. The prophet was so downcast that he wished for death.

Jonah 4:4-7:

*4 And the Lord said, “**Is it right for you to be angry?**”*

*5 Then Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city, and **made a booth for himself** there. He sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city.*

*6 The Lord **God appointed a bush**, and made it come up over Jonah, to give shade over his head, to save him from his **DISCOMFORT**; so Jonah was very happy about the bush.*

*7 But when dawn came up the next day, **God appointed a worm that attacked the bush**, so that it withered.*

God asks Jonah, “*How can you be angry? How can you behave in such an*

ungodly way?” Here we see Jonah, who is to be an ambassador for God in a foreign land, demonstrating behavior that is no better than the Ninevites he was sent to warn. And God directs a question to Jonah to encourage him to search his own soul.

Though Jonah was aware that a wave of repentance in Nineveh would move God to save the people, **he stubbornly determined to wait for their destruction which he had predicted.** He seemed to think that the repentance of the Ninevites would be quite short lived and that as soon as they returned to sin, the promised punishment would come. Jonah apparently decided he was going to sit and wait for that to happen. Going to higher ground outside the city, he set up a booth of branches to shade himself from the sun. Such booths are still used in the open country in the Middle East. A man can be comfortable in their shade even when the sun is blazing hot. It is apparent, however, that Jonah wasn't all that skilled in booth building and also needed God's help to provide him adequate shade from the sun. The bush (plant), *palma cristi*, a castor oil plant is quite common in the Middle East. Now he was very happy for the shade that would protect him while he awaited the destruction of Nineveh.

God was somewhat displeased with Jonah's refusal to heed His gentle verbal rebuke, so God provides a more concrete object lesson. The very next day God had a worm destroy the plant and with it, the blessing of its shade.

Jonah 4:8:

*8 When the sun rose, **God prepared a sultry east wind**, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint and **asked that he might die**. He said, "It is better for me to die than to live."*

This action of the Lord robbed Jonah of his last earthly comfort, the cool shade. The east wind is famous for its searing hot temperature, from which not even the shade of a booth can protect a man. When Jonah could not endure the heat, he cried out the second time for God to release him from his pain and begged God to let him die. The first time he wished for death because of his inner despair; this time he cried to God because of his physical pain.

Jonah 4:9-11:

*9 But God said to Jonah, "**Is it right for you to be angry about***

the bush?” And he said, “Yes, angry enough to die.”

10 Then the Lord said, “You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night.

11 And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?”

Obviously, the series of divine actions directed toward Jonah had a purpose. God was striving to point out to Jonah that his disregard for the welfare of others and his selfish concern for his own physical welfare were both in direct contrast to God’s teaching. Once again, in verse 9, God questions Jonah about the appropriateness of his anger, and Jonah stubbornly persists he is justified. So, in verses 10 and 11 the Lord leaves Jonah with a final question to ponder, *“Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?”*

We see that Jonah’s attitude hadn’t changed since God first asked him if he had a right to be angry back in verse 4. Jonah was throwing what we might liken to a tantrum. He also reminds you of a little boy who sits and pouts

because he can't have his own way. God then tries to point out to Jonah that Jonah had nothing to do with the plant's growth or destruction. God also points out that the Ninevites were human beings, men, women, and children, who were objects of God's special creation, and therefore objects of his love.

Jonah's concern for the plant was selfish; he was sorry for its destruction because it served his personal comfort. And Jonah was definitely concerned with his own comfort. But God's concern for humankind is **unselfish**, for God seeks only to give comfort by delivering them from sin.

No person has the right to question or resent **the gift of God's love in saving anyone** from the destruction of sin. The Ninevites needed God because they had no one else to show them the truth. God had simply asked Jonah to be the umbilical cord between Him and the Ninevites and to give the Ninevites the same thing that God had given to Jonah and the Jews.

How is your behavior in regard to this great commission that Jesus has given to all believers in Matthew 28:19,20?

19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing

*them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
20 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you."*

Now that we've covered the entire book and learned some valuable lessons, let's see where the Lord leads us if we dig a little further. Some theologians have looked at the book of Jonah and concluded that God was sending a message to Israel that He wanted them to tell the rest of the world about God. That would certainly be a beneficial meaning to draw from the story of Jonah because **God had chosen** the people of Israel for that very purpose. Instead they had come to believe that because God made His promises to them, that made them His special people and everyone else was inferior to them. Consequently they tried to keep this special relationship to themselves and exclude everyone else. That was selfish and certainly not what God intended for them to do. That is not what God wants us to do either. So anyone reading this book who is made to feel that they need to carry the message to unbelievers is certainly being led by the Holy Spirit to do so.

Others have suggested that the book is telling the people of Israel that they

should have compassion on those who don't yet know the one true God; that they should love and forgive even their worst enemies. That too would be a worthwhile lesson to draw from the book of Jonah. Such behavior is certainly what God desires from all believers.

However, we would suggest there might be even a deeper meaning here. It seems very likely that God is showing His people Israel that Nineveh and the unbelievers there are entitled to equal treatment from God and that He is the God of all people who has the right to be merciful to all those to whom He chooses to give mercy.

Our reasoning focuses on two observations:

- 1) The first is the use of the compound divine name "*the Lord God*" (*Yahweh Elohim*) in Jonah 4:6. Until this point in the book, whenever Jonah was speaking of God he used the title, "*The Lord*" (*Yahweh*). However, when the book is speaking regarding the Ninevites, God was indicated by the title, "*God*" (*Elohim*). "*Yahweh*" was the personal name of the God of Israel

and “*Elohim*” was a general name used for any god. So now we see the two terms brought together in Jonah 4:6:

Since this combination of the titles of God, “*Yahweh Elohim*,” is used only in this one place in the entire book should get our attention. Why use the compound name, *Yahweh Elohim*, at this point? Most likely because it indicates some kind of change. From this point on in the book we see that only the term “*Elohim*” is used, even when Jonah is involved. This suggests that God is now treating both Jonah and Nineveh with equal consideration.

2) The second observation concerns the wording of the prophecy. The word translated “**DISASTER**” by the NRSV in 3:10 is the same word translated “**DISCOMFORT**” in 4:6. This suggests to us that both Nineveh and Jonah were faced with a calamity from which they both needed relief.

Let me read those verses again:

Jonah 3:10:

10 Then God saw their works, that they (the Ninevites)⁴ turned from their evil way; and God relented from the DISASTER that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.

Jonah 4:6:

The Lord God appointed a bush, and made it come up over Jonah, to give shade over his head, to save him from his DISCOMFORT; so Jonah was very happy about the bush.

This suggests to us that in the object lesson in verses 6-8 of chapter four, Jonah is in the same condition as Nineveh and therefore is being treated in the same manner as Nineveh.

Both Jonah and Nineveh faced an impending disaster. **Jonah, the climate; Nineveh, destruction.** Both sought to avert the calamity by taking whatever action they could. Jonah built a hut and Nineveh repented. Neither action was sufficient, however, to bring relief without the divine intervention of God.

God gave Jonah a bush to help Jonah. God relented and postponed judgment on Nineveh, helping them because they had taken a **first step** in turning from their evil ways. **SO GOD PUT JONAH IN A SITUATION THAT WAS SIMILAR TO NINEVEH'S.** Then we see a difference in the two situations. Nineveh does not experience anything similar to what Jonah does when the worm destroys the *bush* (*plant* in some translations) that was providing him shade. We see that Jonah was not spared from his calamity. God removed His grace from Jonah in the form of the bush. Jonah then received the very same treatment that he had wanted God to give to Nineveh. Jonah wanted to remove God's compassion toward Nineveh, so God showed Jonah firsthand what it would be like for Nineveh if God did so, and how the people would then feel.

We believe this lesson is brought home in the two discussions concerning Jonah's anger in 4:3,4 and 8,9. In both cases Jonah's anger was focused on questioning God's grace. In Jonah 4:3,4, Jonah was angry because God showed Nineveh grace that Jonah didn't feel they deserved. He felt they didn't deserve any more chances. In Jonah 4:8,9, Jonah was not only angry

⁴ Parentheses added.

about Nineveh but now he was also angry that God took His protection away from him. However, as God pointed out to Jonah, Jonah had done nothing whatsoever to earn God's protection. God had simply given it to Jonah as a gift.

Perhaps you can begin to see where God is going with this lesson. It soon becomes evident that the overall message here is that God has the right to bestow acts of grace on anyone he wants to.

Although Nineveh's attempted act of self-preservation was insufficient by God's standards to justify eternal salvation, God honored their small first step in the right direction by postponing His judgment upon them. You see **NO ONE CAN ATTAIN SALVATION BY GOOD WORKS**. Salvation can only be attained when it is given to you as a free gift of God's grace. God could have given them salvation at that time if their repentance had been sincere, but somehow in His sovereign way God knew the sincerity of their repentance was questionable. But God did honor their intentions even though they would not last. **All salvation is determined by God's grace alone.**

Romans 9:15,18:

*15 For he (God)⁵ says to Moses, “I will have **mercy** on whom I have mercy, and I will have **compassion** on whom I have compassion.”*

*18 So then he has **mercy** on whomever he chooses.*

The hut that Jonah built was obviously inadequate for his protection and he needed the bush provided by God to give him the shade he needed. When the bush was gone, the hut did not provide adequate shade for his protection. Nineveh’s repentance could be seen in a similar manner. Without God’s protection and grace Jonah was in trouble. Without God’s protection and grace the Ninevites were in trouble.

In their zeal to promote evangelism, some interpreters have suggested the repentance of the Ninevites as a grand and glorious conversion to faith and belief in God, Yahweh. However, a careful examination of the text provides no such evidence. There is no doubt the Ninevites repented at the time, but that is not necessarily the same thing as conversion. There is no evidence here that the Ninevites accepted the faith of the Jews in only one God.

⁵ Parentheses added.

Some of the basic religious teachings of this book are: (a) God feels concern for the heathen (a people or nation that does not acknowledge the God of the Bible⁶) and asks His servants to warn them about eventual judgment.

(b) In the face of a difficult task, the majority of people are most inclined to evade responsibility. (c) God is powerful and can, at will, use the forces of nature for His own purposes, such as Tsunami's, earthquakes, and floods. (d)

Though God will punish disobedience, above all else He still desires to show mercy and kindness. (e) What appear to be the least promising mission fields are often the most productive..

The book of Jonah presents a contrast between Jonah's self-centered hatred of his enemies and God's compassion for them. It is clearly intended to teach readers of the book that they are not to have the same kind of attitude as Jonah.

The message of Jonah to the Ninevites was a simple statement of judgment.

There is no reason to believe that there was any additional instruction or warning given, although that is not impossible.

⁶ Merriam-Webster, I. 1996, c1993. Merriam-Webster's collegiate dictionary. Includes

Although the people of Nineveh believed God, that could mean nothing more than believing the message that Jonah delivered from God would come true. Furthermore, Jonah 3:10 makes it clear that God (*Yahweh*) relented on the basis of their deeds rather than on the basis of their faith.

The significance of all this is that it helps us to see that the response of the Ninevites is not in any way the key to understanding the message or purpose of the book. In fact their repentance was a rather typical Assyrian response, counting on ritual to appease an angry god. The book of Jonah is not using Jonah to represent Israel, urging that Israel evangelize, forgive, and be compassionate to other nations, although those would all be good things to do.

Rather it is identifying Jonah, Israel, and Nineveh as being equal in importance and concern in God's sight. God reserves the right to be compassionate toward anyone He wishes to be compassionate, and of course He delights in performing acts of compassion.

Psalm 145:9:

9 The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made.

In fact, the message that God is a God of compassion who delights in showing mercy is one of the major messages of this book. God delights in responding to small steps in the right direction with gracious acts of compassion. Certainly if God responded that way to Nineveh, the epitome of unbelieving wickedness, He would respond compassionately to his chosen people, Israel. Could some Ninevites have turned to God in genuine repentance and received eternal salvation? That is entirely possible. But figuring that out is not the purpose God had in giving us this book.

In the book of Jonah, both Jonah and the Ninevites are secondary characters. The narrative intends most of all to teach us about God and His compassion. In the first part of the book (chapters 1 and 2) God demonstrates His compassion for both the sailors and Jonah as they are both delivered. **Jonah's prayer in Jonah 2:2-9 sets the scene for discussing the compassionate grace of God.**

In chapter 4 Jonah cared about the bush and his own welfare more than he did about the people in Nineveh and God responded: *“Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people (men only; women and children would bring the total to about 500,000) who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?”* (Jonah 4:11).

God’s compassion extends to all. People are truly important to Him.⁷ If Jonah cared about a bush, not wanting to see it die, should not God care about a whole city of people, not wanting to see them die (verse 11)? God wants us to care about people as well. Even if they are our enemies, that should not mean that we think that they do not deserve compassion from God.⁸

It is significant that this incident occurred when it did, just prior to the time that the prophets began declaring a new message to Israel. That message stated that God was angry with the Israelites for their disobedience and

⁷ Richards, L., & Richards, L. O. 1987. The teacher's commentary. Includes index. Victor Books: Wheaton, Ill.

⁸ Carson, D. A. 1994. New Bible commentary : 21st century edition. Rev. ed. of: The new Bible commentary. 3rd ed. / edited by D. Guthrie, J.A. Motyer. 1970. (4th ed.) .

rebellion, and that **God is going to punish them with destruction and exile**. It is evident that in the message of these prophets, Israel was being treated as Nineveh was in the book of Jonah. God's punishment was just around the corner. What did God expect from them? That is the message and the purpose of the book of Jonah.

We hope you now understand the nature of God's compassion just a little bit better. We also hope that other aspects of the book of Jonah have moved you to ask yourself some questions. Are you willingly carrying the message to those who need it so desperately? Or are you running the other way, or hiding out in your church, or remaining silent, or even perhaps pursuing your own comforts at the expense of others? In light of the lesson in the book of Jonah these questions are worth some serious reflection.