

Angry at God
Jonah 4
July 10th, 2022

Anger is a _____-personed, active _____ of negative moral judgment against a perceived _____. (Robert Jones)

1. Anger at God's _____ (4:1-4)
2. Anger at lost _____ (4:5-9)
3. God's point: "Should I not have _____?" (4:10-11)
4. Jonah, the _____ (Luke 15:11-32)

Questions for Discussion/Reflection on Jonah 4

1. What are some common reasons that people get angry at God? Is anger with God ever appropriate? If anger is defined as a "whole-personed, active response of negative moral judgment against perceived evil," can God ever truly do what is wrong? (see Gen. 18:25; Rev. 16:7)
2. What words or phrases are repeated throughout Jonah 4? How do those shape the content and point of the chapter?
3. Read Exodus 34:6-7 and examine the context around it and compare it to Jonah 4. What is happening in Exodus when God gives His self-revelation to Moses? How is this self-revelation repeated throughout the following passages: Psalm 86:15; 2 Chronicles 30:9; Joel 2:13?
4. Jonah appears to have a pocket in his heart that doesn't fully understand God's grace. In addition to the statements offered in the sermon ("I can't forgive myself...I hate that person and hope they get what's coming to them...I'm worthless and nobody loves me."), can you think of other ways we reveal pockets in our own hearts that don't fully understand grace?
5. Four times in the book of Jonah, God "appoints" something (1:17; 4:6, 7, 8). What does this demonstration of God's appointing teach us about Him? How is this relevant to the message of the book of Jonah?
6. What do you think is the point of the object lesson about the plant that God causes to grow and then die?
7. Why does God include "much cattle" in His appeal to Jonah in 4:11? How is this a further indictment against Jonah?

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Big idea: Anger at God's compassion to sinners is hypocritical and selfish

Intro –

We've seen the fleeing prophet, the rescued prophet, the obedient prophet, and now we see the complaining prophet.

Both Jonah and the Lord are complex in this book.

Jonah does things that are contrary to what we assume a prophet would do.

God does things that are contrary to what Jonah thinks He should do, and maybe contrary to what we assume He would or should do.

The result is that Jonah becomes angry at God.

What is anger?

Robert Jones: Anger is a **whole**-personed, active **response** of negative moral judgment against a perceived **evil**.

Active response: something we do, not something we have. Bible pictures people who do anger, not have anger.

Whole-personed: involves our entire being and engages our whole person.

Anger conveys emotion, but it always involves beliefs and motives, perceptions and desires.

Anger is complex.

Response against something – doesn't arise in a vacuum or appear spontaneously.

It reacts against some provocation but that must not be viewed as causation (i.e. He made me angry)

Anger is never without a reason, but seldom with a good one. B. Franklin.

Neg. moral judgment: Anger protests, "What you did was wrong!" "That action is unjust" This must stop!

Negative not because always sinful, but because it opposes the perceived evil.

Anger judges things – it weighs something and finds it wrong, lacking, or displeasing and then moves into action – "stupid law!" – Randy Patten

Perceived evil: our perceptions may be accurate or inaccurate.

Then our responses to our perceptions may be godly or ungodly.

Either way, our anger arises from our value system.

Anger at God can never be right because God is never wrong.

What we see in Jonah though is that God patiently teaches Jonah.

1. Anger at God's **compassion** (4:1-4)
 - a. It greatly displeased Jonah that God relented concerning the calamity He said He would bring (3:10)
 - i. "displeased" has the idea of bad, distressing. It's actually the same word translated as "wicked" and "calamity" in our English translations of 3:10.
 - ii. Jonah became angry at this. It should be shocking for us to read.
 - b. This is why he didn't want to go to Nineveh.
 - i. He recounts God's self-revealed character.

- ii. **Exodus 34:6-7** Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; ⁷ who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations."
 - 1. The most quoted OT passage by other OT authors
 - 2. But Jonah doesn't quote the whole statement – he leaves off v 7 that God will not leave the guilty unpunished
 - 3. Keller – he reads the bible selectively, ignoring the latter part of v 7... he creates a simplistic view of God who simply loves everyone without judgment on evil.
 - 4. He is mad at a version of God that doesn't actually exist. Or at least he isn't taking a full account of God's character.
 - 5. I think far too many people are mad at a god that doesn't exist.
 - a. A god who turns a blind eye to suffering.
 - b. A god who ignores injustice.
- c. His anger is so bad and his despair is so deep, he just wants his life to end.
 - i. What does his despair reveal about his ruling desires?
 - 1. National security for his homeland – Assyria was a militarily aggressive terrorist state
 - 2. Justice to triumph over mercy (at least for the Assyrians, he was a recipient of mercy for himself)
 - ii. Desire (I want) -> Demand (I must) -> Expectation (You will) -> Disappointment (You didn't) -> Despair (I can't go on)
 - iii. Even though he had received mercy in chapter 2 and declared, "salvation is from the Lord," He still felt, to some degree, that mercy had to be deserved, and they didn't deserve it. (adapted from Keller)
- d. Evidence of the up and down spiritual journey that Jonah was on to understand God's mercy. It wasn't a V shape but a jagged line.
 - i. He thought, and we might have concluded, that he finally realized that salvation is from the Lord and totally by grace. But here he shows pockets in his heart that are being exposed where he doesn't like that grace.
 - ii. Keller's example of I-79 from Pittsburg to Lake Erie delayed for years because it had to go through a swamp for several miles. They kept putting down pilings to reach bedrock so the bridge wouldn't sink and each time they thought they got deep enough, they would give way and they would have to drill deeper.
 - iii. Jonah's heart was like that. Every time it seemed he had taken God and his grace to the very bottom, it turned out that he needed to go deeper.
 - iv. When you notice pockets of your heart that are still rebelling at God's grace – let them be exposed to the light.
 - 1. "I can't forgive myself" – you haven't really wronged yourself, but that feeling is real and is more likely from not fully embracing that God has forgiven you or just sadness about the consequences.
 - 2. "I hate that person – I hope they get what's coming to them" – there is a place for righteous anger, even imprecatory psalms, but a bitter hatred that desires harm to come to an enemy is a warning light for your heart.

3. "I'm worthless. God could never love me and no one else could either." – what are you basing your worth on?
- e. We see the Lord's gentle counseling of Jonah – it's an evidence of God's mercy in itself – not just mercy to the Ninevites but mercy to Jonah in his anger and frustration.
 - i. Do you have good reason to be angry?
 1. Sometimes there are good reasons to be angry! The question is whether this is one of those times for Jonah.
 - ii. Jonah doesn't answer this time, although the question will soon be repeated.
 - iii. But the Lord continues to pursue Jonah, this time with an object lesson.
2. Anger at lost comfort (4:5-9)
 - a. Jonah moved to the outskirts of the city to watch what would happen, probably still hoping judgment would come.
 - i. The region is dry, hot, arid; on the bank of the Tigris river, so it is irrigated and prosperous in the city.
 - ii. Averages 110 degrees in the summer, little shade
 - iii. Shelter would have come from stones most likely, the only building material available there.
 - b. Just as He had appointed a fish in 1:17 to swallow Jonah, so now He appoints a plant to grow up over him.
 - i. There's speculation on the type of plant, just like there was speculation on the type of sea creature that swallowed Jonah. Whatever the plant, this is unnatural and miraculous growth as it pops up in a day.
 - ii. He was "extremely happy" – a combination of terms that emphasizes his great happiness over the plant.
 1. He was happy because of the shade and Ellison argues he was happy because of the beauty that a fresh, green plant in the arid Tigris plain would have provided.
 - c. Then God appointed a worm to attack it and a wind to dry it up.
 - i. Scorching east wind was normally called a sirocco – known throughout the middle east and into the Mediterranean, the wind comes from the east, from the desert, bringing a dry, exceptionally hot air, it raises temps at night even, 16-22 degree F above average, every scrap of moisture taken from the air, skin feels dry, people are more irritable than usual, supposedly some places will even take that into an account during sentencing if the crime occurred during a sirocco.
 1. You might consider that defense on a windy day here in Pocatello. "Sorry I snapped at you, honey, it was the wind."
 - ii. Once again the repeated refrain that he wanted to die.
 1. He is miserable and despairing yet again.
 2. The Jewish artist, Jacob Steinhardt, who grew up in Poland and emigrated to Israel in 1933 to escape the Nazis, captured this well with this powerful woodcut
 3. SEE PIC
 - d. God repeats His question as well – do you have good reason to be angry about the plant?
 - i. The answer is no – no good reason.
 1. He didn't cultivate the plant.

2. He couldn't take credit for it's rapid growth.
3. Why should he be angry to the point of despair about its demise?
 - ii. Every parent might know the frustration of trying to reason with the heart of a child and asking a question like, "Did you have a good reason to hit your brother?" with an implied answer of "no," only to be met with "yes, I did!"
- e. Stuart – God now has him where he wants him. Of his own free will Jonah has declared a plant to be eminently worthy to live, a thing of great concern to himself. He has expressed outrage that the plant has been annihilated. It is horribly wrong that the gourd has been struck down!
 - i. So how can it be right that Nineveh should be struck down? If it was not right for the plant how can it be right for Nineveh?
3. God's point: "Should I not have compassion?" (4:10-11)
 - a. You had compassion on the plant – the word means "to be sorry for."
 - i. But you didn't work for it, make it grow, and it's life was brief.
 - b. Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, full of people, many of whom are too young to know the different between right and left, let alone right and wrong? There are even many animals there – do you care about their suffering if I were to judge the city, Jonah?
 - i. "What's more important, plants or people?"
 - ii. "I made the plants and the people, should I not care about them?"
 - c. How does Jonah answer?
 - i. Does he repent of his lack of compassion? Does he argue back? Does he go on as a missionary prophet to the rest of Assyria?
 - ii. We don't know. The story ends.
 - iii. Why? Because the target is not merely Jonah but us.
 1. It's as if the arrow shot past Jonah and hit us.
4. Jonah, the older brother (Luke 15:11-32)

Jonah	The Parable of the Prodigal Son
Fled from God	Fled from the father
Difficult circumstances (storm, fish)	Difficult circumstances (poverty)
Cried for help, returned to land	Returned to the father, cried for help
Restored as a prophet	Restored as a son
Embittered at God for his mercy	Older son embittered at the father for his mercy
Abrupt ending	Abrupt ending

- a. Both emphasize two seemingly opposite but very real dangers for people
 - i. Unrepentant sin (Nineveh, the younger son) that keeps us from God.
 - ii. Self-righteousness (Jonah, older brother) that keeps us from God's heart.
- b. We can be a Nineveh/younger brother or a Jonah/older brother
 - i. We can be pursuing sin, oblivious to the harm it does us and others, uncaring about what God thinks.

- ii. We can be focused on our obedience that we look down on the Ninevehs and younger brothers and even get angry at God for showing mercy.



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Exodus 34:6-7 ⁷ who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations."

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2. Anger at lost comfort (4:5-9)

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3. God's point: "Should I not have compassion?" (4:10-11)

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JONAH

Fled from God

Difficult
circumstances
(storm, fish)

10

PRODIGAL SON

Fled from the father

Difficult
circumstances
(poverty)

JONAH

Cried for help,
returned to land

Restored as a
prophet

PRODIGAL SON

Returned to the
father, cried for help

Restored as a son

11

JONAH

Embittered at
God for His
mercy

Abrupt ending

12

PRODIGAL SON

Older son
embittered at the
father for his mercy

Abrupt ending