
JONAH 4: 1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry.

Jonah, dreading to be thought a false prophet, repines at God's mercy in sparing the Ninevites, whose destruction he seems to have expected, from his retiring to a place without the city about the close of the forty days. But how does he glorify that mercy which he intends to blame! And what an amiable posture does he give of the compassion of God! Jon 4:1-5. This attribute of the Deity is still farther illustrated by his tenderness and condescension to the prophet himself, who, with all his prophetic gifts, had much of human infirmity, Jon 4:6-11.

Verse 1

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly - This hasty, and indeed inconsiderate prophet, was vexed because his prediction was not fulfilled. He had more respect to his high sense of his own honor than he had to the goodness and mercy of God. He appeared to care little whether six hundred and twenty thousand persons were destroyed or not, so he might not pass for a deceiver, or one that denounced a falsity.

And he was very angry - Because the prediction was not literally fulfilled; for he totally lost sight of the condition.

JONAH 4: 2 He prayed to the LORD, and said, "Please, LORD, wasn't this what I said when I was still in my own country? Therefore I hurried to flee to Tarshish, for I knew that you are a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness, and you relent of doing harm.

Verse 2

I know that thou art a gracious God - See the note on Exo 34:6.

JONAH 4: 3 Therefore now, LORD, take, I beg you, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live."

Verse 3

Take, I beseech thee, my life from me - *קַח נַפְשִׁי* kach na eth naphshi, "Take, I beseech thee, even my Soul." Do not let me survive this disgrace. Thou hast spared this city. I thought thou wouldst do so, because thou art merciful and gracious, and it was on this account that I refused to go at first, as I knew that thou mightest change thy purpose, though thou hadst commanded me to make an absolute denunciation of judgment. God has left this example on record to show that an inconsiderate man is not fit to be employed in his work; and he chose this one example that it might serve as an endless warning to his Church to employ no man in the work of the ministry that is not scripturally acquainted with God's justice and mercy.

JONAH 4: 4 The LORD said, "Is it right for you to be angry?"

Verse 4

Doest thou well to be angry? - לך הרהיטב haheitib harah lac, "Is anger good for thee?" No, anger is good for no man; but an angry preacher, minister, bishop, or prophet, is an abominable man. He who, in denouncing the word of God against sinners, joins his own passions with the Divine threatenings, is a cruel and bad man, and should not be an overseer in God's house. A surly bishop, a peevish, passionate preacher, will bring neither glory to God, nor good to man. Dr. Taylor renders the clause, "Art thou very much grieved?" A man may be very much grieved that a sinner is lost; but who but he who is of a fiendish nature will be grieved because God's mercy triumphs over judgment?

JONAH 4: 5 Then Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made himself a booth, and sat under it in the shade, until he might see what would become of the city.

Verse 5

So Jonah went out of the city - I believe this refers to what had already passed; and I therefore agree with Bp. Newcome, who translates, "Now Jonah Had gone out of the city, and Had sat," etc.; for there are many instances where verbs in the preterite form have this force, the I vau here turning the future into the preterite. And the passage is here to be understood thus: When he had delivered his message he left the city, and went and made himself a tent, or got under some shelter on the east side of the city, and there he was determined to remain till he should see what would become of the city. But when the forty days had expired, and he saw no evidence of the Divine wrath, he became angry, and expostulated with God as above. The fifth verse should be read in a parenthesis, or be considered as beginning the chapter.

JONAH 4: 6 The LORD God prepared a vine, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to deliver him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the vine.

Verse 6

And the Lord God prepared a gourd - I believe this should be rendered in the preterpluperfect tense. The Lord Had prepared this plant, קיקיון kikayon. It had in the course of God's providence been planted and grown up in that place, though perhaps not yet in full leaf; and Jonah made that his tent. And its thick branches and large leaves made it an ample shelter for him, and because it was such, he rejoiced greatly on the account. But what was the kikayon? The best judges say the ricinus or palma Christi, from which we get what is vulgarly called castor oil, is meant. It is a tree as large as the olive, has leaves which are like those of the vine, and is also quick of growth. This in all probability was the plant in question, which had been already planted, though it had not attained its proper growth, and was not then in full leaf. Celsus, in his Hierobot., says it grows to the height of an olive tree; the trunk and branches are hollow like a kex, and the leaves sometimes as broad as the

rim of a hat. It must be of a soft or spongy substance, for it is said to grow surprisingly fast. See Taylor under the root 1670, קִיָּק. But it is evident there was something supernatural in the growth of this plant, for it is stated to have come up in a night; though the Chaldee understands the passage thus: "It was here last night, and it withered this night." In one night it might have blown and expanded its leaves considerably, though the plant had existed before, but not in full bloom till the time that Jonah required it for a shelter.

JONAH 4: 7 But God prepared a worm at dawn the next day, and it chewed on the vine, so that it withered.

Verse 7

But God prepared a worm - By being eaten through the root, the plant, losing its nourishment, would soon wither; and this was the case in the present instance.

JONAH 4: 8 When the sun arose, God prepared a sultry east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah's head, so that he fainted, and requested for himself that he might die, and said, "It is better for me to die than to live."

Verse 8

A vehement east wind - Which was of itself of a parching, withering nature; and the sun, in addition, made it intolerable. These winds are both scorching and suffocating in the East, for deserts of burning sand lay to the east or south-east; and the easterly winds often brought such a multitude of minute particles of sand on their wings, as to add greatly to the mischief. I believe these, and the sands they carry, are the cause of the ophthalmia which prevails so much both in Egypt and India.

JONAH 4: 9 God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the vine?" He said, "I am right to be angry, even to death."

Verse 9

I do well to be angry, even unto death - Many persons suppose that the gifts of prophecy and working miracles are the highest that can be conferred on man; but they are widely mistaken, for the gifts change not the heart. Jonah had the gift of prophecy, but had not received that grace which destroys the old man and creates the soul anew in Christ Jesus. This is the love of which St. Paul speaks, which if a man have not, though he had the gift of prophecy, and could miraculously remove mountains, yet in the sight of God, and for any good himself might reap from it, it would be as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. Jonah was a prophet, and yet had all his old bad tempers about him, in a shameful predominancy. Balaam was of the same kind. So we find that God gave the gift of prophecy even to graceless men. But many of the prophets were sanctified in their nature before their call to the prophetic office, and were the most excellent of men.

JONAH 4: 10 The LORD said, "You have been concerned for the vine, for which you have not laboured, neither made it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night."

Verse 10

Which came up in a night - St. Jerome, speaking of this plant, the kikayon, assigns to it an extraordinary rapidity of growth. It delights in a sandy soil, and in a few days what was a plant grows into a large shrub. But he does not appear to have meant the ricinus; this however is the most likely. The expressions coming up in a night and perishing in a night are only metaphorical to express speedy growth and speedy decay; and so, as we have seen, the Chaldee interprets it, די בליליא הדי הוה ובליליא אחרנא אבד "which existed this night but in the next night perished;" and this I am satisfied is the true import of the Hebrew phrase.

JONAH 4: 11 Shouldn't I be concerned for Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred twenty thousand persons who can't discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much livestock?"

Verse 11

And should not I spare Nineveh - In Jon 4:10 it is said, thou hast had pity on the gourd, אתה חסת attah Chasta; and here the Lord uses the same word, ואני לא אחוס veani lo Achus, "And shall not I have pity upon Nineveh?" How much is the city better than the shrub? But besides this there are in it one hundred and twenty thousand persons! And shall I destroy them, rather than thy shade should be withered or thy word apparently fail? And besides, these persons are young, and have not offended, (for they knew not the difference between their right hand and their left), and should not I feel more pity for those innocents than thou dost for the fine flowering plant which is withered in a night, being itself exceedingly short-lived? Add to all this, they have now turned from those sins which induced me to denounce judgment against them. And should I destroy them who are now fasting and afflicting their souls; and, covered with sackcloth, are lying in the dust before me, bewailing their offenses and supplicating for mercy? Learn, then, from this, that it is the incorrigibly wicked on whom my judgments must fall and against whom they are threatened. And know, that to that man will I look who is of a broken and contrite spirit, and who trembles at my word. Even the dumb beasts are objects of my compassion; I will spare them for the sake of their penitent owners; and remember with the rest, That the Lord careth for oxen.

The great number of cattle to which reference is here made were for the support of the inhabitants; and probably at this time the Ninevites gathered in their cattle from the champaign pasture, expecting that some foe coming to besiege them might seize upon them for their forage, while they within might suffer the lack of all things.

No doubt that ancient Nineveh was like ancient Babylon, of which Quintus Curtius says the buildings were not close to the walls, there being the space of an acre left between them; and in several parts there were within the walls portions of cultivated land, that, if besieged, they might have provisions to sustain the inhabitants.

And I suppose this to be true of all large ancient cities. They were rather cantons or districts than cities such as now are, only all the different inhabitants had joined together to wall in the districts for the sake of mutual defense.

This last expostulation of God, it is to be hoped, produced its proper effect on the mind of this irritable prophet; and that he was fully convinced that in this, as in all other cases, God had done all things well.

From this short prophecy many useful lessons may be derived. The Ninevites were on the verge of destruction, but on their repentance were respited. They did not, however, continue under the influence of good resolutions. They relapsed, and about one hundred and fifty years afterwards, the Prophet Nahum was sent to predict the miraculous discomfiture of the Assyrian king under Sennacherib, an event which took place about 710 b.c., and also the total destruction of Nineveh by Cyaxares and his allies which happened about 606 b.c. Several of the ancients, by allegorizing this book, have made Jonah declare the divinity, humanity, death, and resurrection of Christ. These points may be found in the Gospel history, their true repository; but fancy can find them any where it pleases to seek them; but he who seeks not for them will never find them here. Jonah was a type of the resurrection of Christ; nothing farther seems revealed in this prophet relative to the mysteries of Christianity.

In conclusion: while I have done the best I could to illustrate the very difficult prophet through whose work the reader has just passed, I do not pretend to say I have removed every difficulty. I am satisfied only of one thing, that I have conscientiously endeavored to do it, and believe that I have generally succeeded; but am still fearful that several are left behind, which, though they may be accounted for from the briefness of the narrative of a great transaction, in which so many surprising particulars are included, yet, for general apprehension, might appear to have required a more distinct and circumstantial statement. I have only to add, that as several of the facts are evidently miraculous, and by the prophet stated as such, others may be probably of the same kind. On this ground all difficulty is removed; for God can do what he pleases. As his power is unlimited, it can meet with no impossibilities. He who gave the commission to Jonah to go and preach to the Ninevites, and prepared the great fish to swallow the disobedient prophet, could maintain his life for three days and three nights in the belly of this marine monster; and cause it to eject him at the termination of the appointed time, on any sea-coast he might choose; and afterwards the Divine power could carry the deeply contrite and now faithful prophet over the intervening distance between that and Nineveh, be that distance greater or less. Whatever, therefore, cannot be accounted for on mere natural principles in this book, may be referred to this supernatural agency; and this, on the ostensible principle of the prophecy itself, is at once a mode of interpretation as easy as it is rational. God gave the commission; he raised the storm, he prepared the fish which swallowed the prophet; he caused it to cast him forth on the dry land; he gave him a fresh commission, carried him to the place of his destination, and miraculously produced the sheltering gourd, that came to perfection in a night and withered in a night. This God therefore performed the other facts for which we cannot naturally account, as he did those already specified. This concession, for the admission of which both common sense and reason plead, at once solves all the real or seeming difficulties to be found in the Book of the Prophet Jonah.

