International Bible Lessons Commentary
Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series
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Jonah 4:1-11
English Standard Version
May 28, 2017

The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, May 28, 2017**, is from **Jonah 4:1-11**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the *International Bible Lessons Commentary* website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the *International Bible Lesson Forum*.

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

Jonah believed that the Ninevites deserved punishment for their sins, the extreme punishment of destruction; the destruction of their city and military power that threatened Israel. He became angry because it appeared that when God forgave them that they would not suffer any punishment at all. He judged God; he said God was wrong not to destroy the city, and he became angry at God for what he considered injustice. He prayed and hoped that God would at least punish the people in some way, so he thought he would watch the city and hope for the worst punishment possible.

(Jonah 4:2) And he prayed to the LORD and said, "O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.

Jonah blamed his anger on God and even blamed God for his rebellion against God that led to his fleeing to Tarshish. He wanted the enemies of Israel destroyed for their sins and their threat to his nation. Of course, the Kingdom of Israel would not be punished or destroyed if they listened to God's prophets and repented as the Ninevites did. He described God accurately, but he wanted no part in God relenting from sending calamity on Nineveh. Jonah totally ignored the fact that because of God's values, God saved him despite his rebellion against God and all the sailors despite their idolatry from calamity

and death on the Mediterranean Sea. Surely selfish Jonah was happy when God relented and did not cast him off forever in the sea, but that happiness soon changed to anger at God and the desire to die.

(Jonah 4:3) Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live."

Jonah became so angry that he became totally unreasonable. He attacked God for being gracious and compassionate, patient and abounding in love, and he wanted to totally and finally sever his relationship with God by wanting God to end his life. Of course, dying would not separate him from God, because even in death he could not flee from God. He would rather die than watch God show compassion and save his enemies. By the grace of God, God did not answer his prayer, but continued His redeeming discipline of Jonah.

(Jonah 4:4) And the LORD said, "Do you do well to be angry?"

God asks this question of all of us when we become angry. Jonah thought it was right for him to be angry with God, because he knew that God would not destroy his enemies if the Ninevites repented after he warned them of coming destruction. He did not want them warned; he did not want them to repent; he did not want God to forgive them. Furthermore, he was angry because he could not do anything to prevent God from saving them and giving them another opportunity to live – even though God gave him many opportunities to repent and return to obedience despite his attitude.

(Jonah 4:5) Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city.

In his anger and after his answer to God, Jonah hoped that God would reconsider and at least bring some type of punishment on Nineveh. We are not told, but we can imagine Jonah sitting in the shade of his shelter and angrily and urgently praying to God to punish and not forgive the Ninevites – even thinking of different ways God could punish them effectively.

(Jonah 4:6) Now the LORD God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant.

After receiving an unsatisfactory answer or no answer at all from Jonah, because God is gracious and compassionate, once again God disciplined Jonah and began by showing

him great undeserved kindness. God caused a plant to grow to shade and comfort Jonah as he watched to see what God would do. Jonah became happy about the plant, but God's grace did not lead him to repent for his angry accusations against God and his hateful attitude toward the people of Nineveh. Jonah should have thanked God for His grace in giving him the shade, but he still refused to be on speaking terms with God.

(Jonah 4:7) But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered.

If Jonah had repented and had begun to see and accept God's gracious concern for him and the Ninevites, God would not have needed to take another step of redeeming discipline. Overnight, God caused a worm to kill the plant so that it withered and could no longer bless Jonah.

(Jonah 4:8) When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, "It is better for me to die than to live."

In spite of the fact that God had shown Jonah redeeming grace, Jonah still refused to admit that God was right and he was wrong in his hateful attitude toward others. Therefore, God provided a scorching hot wind and blazing sun to discipline Jonah with increasing punishment and suffering. Rather than repent and turn from his evil thoughts, Jonah wanted to die and be done with God completely – such was Jonah's bondage to his sin and such was Jonah's irrational prayer when he spoke to God once again.

(Jonah 4:9) But God said to Jonah, "Do you do well to be angry for the plant?" And he said, "Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die."

To help Jonah understand what he needed to do, God spoke to Jonah again rather than do to him what Jonah wanted God to do to the Ninevites as well as to himself: kill them. God asked Jonah a question about right and wrong so Jonah would use his reason to arrive at the correct answer. God asked a reasonable question and Jonah gave an unreasonable answer. Jonah continued to selfishly focus on himself and the plant that made him happy. He had no concern for anyone but himself and whatever made him happy. Therefore, he told God that if God would not make him happy and do what he wanted that he wanted to die – be eternally separated from God. Such was the extent of Jonah's foolish thinking!

(Jonah 4:10) And the LORD said, "You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and

perished in a night.

Jonah had nothing to do with the plant but enjoy God's free gift to him of comfort, shade, and the happiness it brought him. God had given it to him and God had taken it away, and Jonah refused to say as Job did, "Blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). His only concern for the plant was the benefit he derived from it: when the benefit was taken away, he became angry with God. Jonah was self-centered, not God-centered.

(Jonah 4:11) And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?"

God loved His creation. God said His creation was good (see Genesis 1). Even after Adam and Eve fell into sin God continued to love His creation, and He began the process of redeeming discipline – leading to His sending His only Son, Jesus Christ, into the world that the world might be saved (John 3:16). God is not self-centered, God is God-centered; therefore, God is gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in love: God is love. Jonah spoke with God; Jonah knew about God's character and obeying God, but Jonah did not truly know God. The Apostle John wrote: "Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. … And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them" (1 John 4:8 & 16). Unlike Jonah, God loved and expressed His concern for the Ninevites, Jonah's distant neighbors, and by sending Jonah to help them God planned to help all of them, including Jonah. Whether Jonah wanted to go or not, God would make sure that he went. All the Ninevites repented, and the people cared enough for their animals to have them fast too, perhaps in order to save them. The Ninevites were morally superior to Jonah in their repentance, and God chose to show His concern for all the people and animals alike. God also had compassion because the Ninevites did not know the law of God as Jonah certainly did. They did not know right from wrong, their right hand from their left hand, because morally speaking they were like little uneducated children. They did know enough to listen to Jonah's preaching, to believe God, to pray, and to hope that God would have compassion, relent, and save them from destruction. The Book of Jonah tells us what God did with the Ninevites to save them, but the book does not tell us how God continued to discipline Jonah until he repented. God will fulfill all His plans and purposes, and God is gracious, compassionate, patient, and abounding in love.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. When God chose to forgive the Ninevites for their sins, how did Jonah respond?

2. What kind of God is God according to Jonah?

3. Jonah was so angry that it made him unreasonable; therefore, what did Jonah tell God he wanted Him to do?

4. What did God do to Jonah after he complained to God and became angry?

5. Why was Jonah concerned about the plant? What concerned God?

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