

NT615 Biblical Exegesis  
Spring 2023  
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Final Exegesis

## **Introduction**

I will be presenting the exegesis of Jonah 4:1-10 through a sermon. My audience would be the English congregation at my church. My church is mainly Chinese and we are not culturally diverse. The English congregation consists mainly of the second generation of the families who attend the Chinese congregation, it is a younger group who does not necessarily have a solid biblical foundation. Our church is going through a stage right now where people feel stuck spiritually and are looking for a breakthrough.

The reason I chose this passage is because it carries a powerful message from God. Commentaries that I have researched may challenge the historicity of the book of Jonah, because of the unusual plot that seems almost fictional and makes one wonder if this a true event that actually happened. Regardless of the debate on the historicity of this book, God has a wonderful message for the Jews and us today and this is the message I want to preach in this sermon - God shows mercy even for those who are evil in his eyes, we all need Jesus in our lives, that include those who are kind to us, those we feel like have nothing to do with us, and those who have hurt us, we all need Jesus. God also sees us in our situations, he will guide us patiently and kindly for us to align with his heart and live in his truth, like how he guided Jonah.

## Sermon Manuscript

Today we are going to look at Jonah 4:1-10. Most of us are familiar with the character Jonah and his story in this book of the Bible. So who was Jonah? Jonah Chapter 1 verse 1 tells us that he is the son of Amittai. Then 2 Kings shed a bit more light about who Jonah was. In chapter 14 of 2 Kings, it says that Jonah was a prophet from Gath-hepher during the time of Israel King Jeroboam II, which set Jonah to be in the eighth century.<sup>1</sup>

The author of this book was not specifically known. Scholars have suggested that it might have been likely written by an author other than Jonah. This might be a reasonable suggestion since Jonah was not portrayed in the most positive way in this book, he was disobedient, angry, and bitter. In addition, some scholars even suggested that this book might have been written after the eighth century because the targeted audience intended for this book were believed to be Jews who were under oppression of other nations. Other than the Jews of the northern and southern nations, Jews in the exilic as well as the post-exilic period also faced oppression from other nations. Therefore, the book of Jonah could possibly be written by an author other than Jonah in a period later than Jonah's time.<sup>2</sup>

The passage that we are about to look at, chapter 4, sits at the end of the book, which contains the main message of the book. In the previous chapters, God asked Jonah to go to Nineveh and deliver the message of repentance because the wickedness of the Ninevites had

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<sup>1</sup>Gale A. Yee, Hugh R. Page, Matthew J. M. Coomber. The Prophets: Fortress Commentary on the Bible Study Edition. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. 2014. 861

<sup>2</sup>R. B. Salters. Jonah and Lamentations. Series: Old Testament Guides. Sheffield, England : Sheffield Academic Press. 1994. eBook.

Daniel C. Timmer. New Studies in Biblical Theology: A Gracious and Compassionate God : Mission, Salvation and Spirituality in the Book of Jonah. [Place of publication not identified] : IVP Academic. 2016. eBook.

reached before God. But Jonah was such a character, his rebellious side showed, he escaped and went the opposite direction to Tarshish. Have you wondered why Jonah acted so rebelliously? You might understand more why he acted the way he did when I tell you a bit more background about Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a capital city in Assyria, Assyria was a powerful country and its kings were known to subdue its weaker neighboring countries using violence, as we can see in 2 Kings chapter 17, Assyria later destroyed the Northern kingdom. Jonah Chapter 3 also describes the Ninevites to be evil and violent. So Jonah along with his fellow Jews were the victims of Assyria's oppression. And God asked Jonah to preach a message of repentance to his oppressors, what a daunting task for Jonah. And at the very end of chapter three, right before today's passage, God relented and did not bring destruction on the Ninevites because they repented when they heard the message Jonah delivered. Could you imagine the emotions Jonah was going through? What would you feel if you were Jonah? Now let's dive in to chapter four and look more closely at what this passage talks about.

Chapter 4 verse 1 to 4, "But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. 2 He prayed to the Lord, "Isn't this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing 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. 3 Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live." 4 But the Lord replied, "Is it right for you to be angry?" Now as you can see, Jonah was very angry, he knew God's character very well, he was a Jewish prophet used by God. But knowing God's character was not enough to ease his anger, he was so upset that he'd rather die. But God asked Jonah a rhetorical question that he did not expect to get an answer. God wanted Jonah to reflect "Is it right for you to be angry?"

And what was Jonah's reaction, did he then regret and repent? No, Jonah did not. What did he do? Verses 5 to 11, "5 Jonah had gone 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. 6 Then the Lord God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant. 7 But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. 8 When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to die than to live. 9 But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" "It is," he said. "And I'm so angry I wish I were dead." 10 But the Lord said, "You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. 11 And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?"

Here in verse 5, Jonah already made himself a shelter with shade but God still provided Jonah a plant as a shade. What is the purpose of the plant? So we know that it certainly did not only serve the purpose of a shade, God actually wanted to use the plant to teach Jonah a lesson. Jonah got angry and wanted to die a second time here in verse 8, do you see the parallel between this second time where Jonah got angry after the plant died and in verse 3, where the first time he got angry after the Ninevites repented and God relented and did not destroy the city? God wanted to show Jonah that the plant to Jonah was like the Ninevites to God. Jonah knew that God is slow to anger and abounding in love, God wants to reveal that he is the God Jonah knew through his mercy for the Ninevites. Firstly, God is sovereign to show mercy to all and pity even the wicked and sinful in the capital of a big, powerful nation, the 120,000 people who cannot tell

their right hand from their left. The number 120,000 did not necessarily represent the exact number of Ninevites, but it was believed to represent the big size of the city and the many people who lived in it. In the Old Testament, the number 12 was used frequently to refer to the 12 tribes, so when an Israelite author stated that more than twelve myriads of people lived in Nineveh, he put the size of Nineveh in perspective, Nineveh was a much larger city than anything the Israelites can imagine.<sup>3</sup> People cannot tell their right hand from their left describes the Ninevites' wickedness and sinfulness. The explanations of the size of the city and their sins are consistent with what we saw in the prior chapters of this book and in 2 Kings and also other books of prophet like Jeremiah and Nahum.

Second, God reveals that he is patient to guide us to know his truth. God knew why Jonah felt angry to preach to the Israelites' oppressors, when Jonah did not want to obey, God did not give up on Jonah was patient to guide Jonah to know his truth. In chapter one of this book, Jonah ran away from God, he literally ran the opposite direction, instead of going east to Nineveh, he went west to Tarshish. But God did not give up on Jonah, God prepared miracles to pursue after Jonah. First, God prepared a storm and a big fish to swallow Jonah and spit him out after three whole days. Then God asked Jonah to go to Nineveh again. Jonah obeyed and preached the message. But Jonah was never entirely obedient, he was angry to a point that he wanted to die, but God still did not give up on Jonah, God prepared another miracle to make a plant grow and die to reveal to Jonah who God himself was. God also patiently talked to Jonah in order to lead Jonah to understand the truth about who God truly was.

The author of this book wanted to use the same message that God had for Jonah to encourage and teach the Israelites who shared the same sentiment with Jonah. The Israelites

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<sup>3</sup>Thomas M. Bolin. Copenhagen International Seminar, 3, 236: Freedom Beyond Forgiveness : The Book of Jonah Re-examined. Sheffield, England : Sheffield Academic Press. 1997. eBook.

were oppressed by kings of other nations, and later they were also under oppression when they were in diaspora, living under foreign rule. They might be angry and bitter just like Jonah or had other negative feelings and emotions when they learned that God also loved their oppressors. But this is the heart of God, he determines to love all and save all. But he is also patient and kind to his children who are under oppression, he does not forget their suffering and pain.

How does this message of God speak to us today? When we see evil people prosper or justice not being served, how does that make us feel? We might be like Jonah, just want run away from God and be mad. The Bible reveals to us who God is, but sometimes we fail to connect the truth with the situations we face. We get so hung up on our situations and emotions that we fail to acknowledge who God is, that he is sovereign and he is also love. We forgot that we all need Jesus, including those we think are not worthy! However, God does not condemn us, rather, he is patient and kind, he sees us in our anger and brokenness, he understands what we are going through, he patiently leads us to his truth, just like how he led Jonah to know his truth. Let us look to God in the situations that we face, knowing that he sees us in our brokenness, and he will lovingly guide us to know and live in his truth.

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