

DAILY BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS

by

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Twenty-Sixth Week - First Day

JONAH'S ANGER

"But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry. . . . Then Yahweh said, 'Is it right for you to be angry?' So Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city. There he made himself a shelter and sat under it in the shade, till he might see what would become of the city. And Yahweh God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery. So Jonah was very grateful for the plant. But as morning dawned the next day God prepared a worm, and it so damaged the plant that it withered" (Jonah 4:1, 4-7).

Jonah's preaching, so instrumental in saving a great city from destruction together with many men, women, and children, must have been highly gratifying to him. But was it? No, "it displeased him exceedingly." And having so much honor laid upon him in being God's instrument of mercy surely must have been a matter of great joy and gratitude. But was it? No, "he was angry."

"LORD, what is man that You take knowledge of him? Or the son of man that You are mindful of him?" (Ps. 144:3).

We cannot think well of Jonah. We cannot see in him those signs of grace that we expect to see adorning the commissioned servants of God. Yet we know the Lord does not choose unfit instruments for his work, though He does often work by instruments which seem to man most unfit. It must be remembered that we do not know all of Jonah's characteristics, but only some that were aroused under rare and extraordinary influences. Yet it must be confessed there is such a pervading consistency in all the traits that appear in his history to suggest that we see in them his real and natural character--one no doubt solidly good and open to conviction but habitually irascible and morose, apt to view things in their worst and most gloomy aspects.

The present state of Jonah's mind is a fearful sight. There is no reason to doubt--rather it is all but avowed!--that he would much rather have this great city and its people perish than that they should repent and be spared. There are two grounds likely for this state of feeling. First, Jonah's Jewish hatred of the Assyrians for their idolatry and oppression of his country. Second, his fear that he should seem a false prophet if his denunciations were not accomplished. Indeed, he himself declares that he knew the Lord was very merciful and would probably

forgive the Ninevites if they repented. This was what lay at the root of his original reluctance to undertake the commission forced upon him. He declares that he would far rather yield up his own life than see his character as a prophet thus compromised. So morbid had his state of feeling become that he would not bring himself to believe that the city could be spared after he had pronounced its doom in the Lord's name. He therefore posted himself on an advantageous station nearby for observation, but far enough away for safety. He resolved to stay there till the forty days had elapsed within which he had declared the city should be destroyed. Now the Lord, being merciful, purposed to give him a salutary lesson, most fit to impress his willful but not yet hardened mind.

Jonah had made a booth and now rested under its shade.

He sat in his booth for a while enjoying as much comfort as a sullen and discontented man--who was dissatisfied with the divine dispensations and scarcely satisfied with himself--could be supposed to enjoy. But his comfort diminished as the foliage with which he had constructed this green booth began to wither. In such a climate where the fierce heat would speedily extract the moisture and shrivel the leaves, it would soon become insufficient to afford him protection against the rays of the sun, and thus his external circumstances would become as uncomfortable as was his state of mind.¹

The Lord then prepared a plant to come up over Jonah "that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery." Jonah was exceedingly glad for this relief. Bug God prepared a worm that killed the plant so that it withered in a night. Then, when the sun arose the next day, the Lord prepared a vehement east wind, and the sun beat fiercely upon the prophet's head until he fainted and wished that he were dead.

It was now the time for the Lord to speak: "*Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?*" (v. 9). The vehement and shockingly unbecoming answer was, "*It is right for me to be angry, even to death!*" Then in amazing condescension to the weakness of his servant, the Lord said: "*You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night. And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left--and much livestock?*" (v. 11).

Thus ends the book of Jonah. We are not told how this remonstrance worked upon him, but we may hope that he profited by it. We know, of a certainty, that we may. Jonah trusted and rejoiced in the plant, but he forgot the God who sent it. The gift was therefore taken away. And where was Jonah then? Precisely where the sons of men are now when their refuges of lies are swept away from around them. It was only for a single day that Jonah enjoyed the gourd, but that was enough to unveil the condition of his heart. By nature we have all some plant under which we sit; we all have something which we put in the place of God. His gifts

1 Rev. James Peddie, *Practical Exposition of the Book of Jonah*, Edinburgh, 1842.

are preferred to himself.

But is it not a blessing when these gourds [plants] wither? Is it not mercy in God to sweep them utterly away even though the heart should be half broken by the loss? There is one reposing, for example, on his goods laid up for many days, and regarding them just as Jonah did the goodly foliage of the sheltering plant. Is it not a mercy, in the high reckoning of eternity at least, to have these gifts of God withdrawn in order that God himself may be our trust? Another is reposing under the shadow of some protecting friend. To him and not to God the eye of hope or the heart of expectation turns. Now is it not a mercy, according to the standard of the sanctuary at least, that that earthly friend should be withdrawn in order that we may learn to lean upon the Lord alone? A third may be seeking all the heaven which he knows in something that perishes in the using. Is it not well that the delusion should be swept away in order that God may be sought and an eternal heavenly rest provided?²

2 Rev. W. K. Tweedie, *Man by Nature and Grace; or, Lessons from the Book of Jonah*. Edinburgh, 1850.