

Wings

*"Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles."
Isaiah 40:31*



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The Anger of Jonah

Jonah's whale gets all the attention, but there is a much more important lesson in this little book that we would do well to study—especially if we have a problem with our temper.

"But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry. . . . 'Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live!' Then the Lord said, 'Is it right for you to be angry?'" (Jonah 4:1, 3, 4).



Jonah is remembered in history for a fish story like no other, but that is unfortunate, because the real purpose behind this little book is to teach us a lesson about God's compassion for the lost, and our struggle to appreciate it. However, in this article I'd like to narrow the focus to the role of *anger* in Jonah's life, as detailed in chapter four.

The people of Nineveh (capital of Assyria) were godless pagans who had a reputation for butchery in battle. They had no part in the Abrahamic or Mosaic covenants, and their destruction would have been cheered by Israel, especially a patriotic prophet like Jonah. So God's call to preach repentance to these people was especially galling. When Jonah's message had its intended effect and the Ninevites turned back to God (3:10), the prophet was furious. He had feared that

very outcome (4:2), and to be used as God's tool to accomplish it was an insult. "It is better for me to die than to live!" is the cry of a man who has been humiliated beyond what he could bear.

God's reply to Jonah ("Is it right for you to be angry?") was a gentle nudge to the prophet's conscience. Could he not see the greater issue at stake here? Did he really not care whether these people were saved or lost?

Jonah did not respond to God's question, but his state of mind was revealed soon enough. God caused a small plant to grow and give Jonah shade from the hot Middle Eastern sun. It was a gift for which Jonah was grateful (v. 6). But the next day, God sent a hot wind that withered the plant and scorched Jonah. Jonah was furious at his string of bad luck. Once again he cried out, "It is better for me to die than to live!" (v. 8). And once again, God challenged him to examine his motives: "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" Jonah defended his anger: "It is right for me to be angry, even to death!" (v. 9). His life was a miserable mess.

Jonah wanted God to destroy a city and spare a plant. Instead, God spared the city and destroyed the plant. In both cases, Jonah was so blinded by rage that he wanted to die. His anger grew out of a heart *that was consumed by his own selfish interests*. He cared only about himself and no one else.

Out-of-control anger, and the conflict and destruction that follow from it, are the trademarks of people who are too self-centered to see the bigger issues that are in play in the world around them. When I am consumed with my own desires and ambitions, I will be blind to the needs of others and the opportunities to serve them. When selfish pride rules my life, I will never be able to see my hardships and disappointments for what they really are—God's loving discipline, designed to humble me and help me grow. Instead, I simply blow up and make a fool of myself.

Jonah was an angry, bitter prophet who thought too much of himself and too little of God. His example should cause each of us to reflect on our own anger issues.

— David King