

THE BOOK OF JONAH

Lesson 7, Chapters 3 and 4 END

In Jonah chapter 3 verses 7 and 8 we learn that the King of Nineveh (certainly meaning the King of all Assyria) took to heart God's oracle of warning through Jonah. He not only made a couple of strong decrees for his subjects to follow, but also led the way by stepping down off his throne, sitting in the dirt, and donning sackcloth. This is a nearly unthinkable act that surely startled the citizens of Nineveh because the level of humility and subjection that their king showed to Jonah's God was almost unprecedented. It was not that he was giving up the royal throne; it's that he's acknowledging the supremacy of God over him. But, who, exactly, did he think this god was?

In verse 8 we hear the king's decree that all his people are to don sackcloth, as are their livestock, and (most importantly) to turn (to **SUV**) from their evil... immediately! We'll usually find this Hebrew word **SUV** translated in our Bibles as "repent". In the Christian sense, to repent means a change of mind from evil to good and involves an element of sorrow over our former mindset. In the Hebrew sense, it means to change one's **behavior** from evil to good. In the Christian sense, to repent is 90% emotion and conscience, and 10% action. In the Hebrew sense, it is 90% action, and 10% emotion and conscience. The Hebrew sense is the biblical sense of it...whether Old or New Testament... and it is the way it is supposed to be for all God worshippers. The point is this: the Ninevites did not suddenly have this sincere trust and belief and knowledge of Yehoveh, God of Israel. Rather, they simply believed that Jonah's god had the power and authority to harm them, but also to define good and evil. What is interesting is that in verse 8, when it says "let them (Nineveh) call on God earnestly", the Hebrew word being translated as God is **elohim**. Even though for centuries Bible translators have assumed (wrongly, I believe) that **elohim** means the unique God of Israel in some cases and false-gods in other cases, and so we are taught to think that way, using the word **elohim** actually indicates something different. Here in this verse, The Narrator carefully chooses **elohim** for a reason that the ancient Israelites...the intended audience of the Book of Jonah...would have immediately understood. It is a broad term meant to indicate a highly ranked divine being belonging to a special category called **elohim**. Thus, the people of Nineveh didn't actually know this god as Yehoveh, God of the Hebrew or Yehoveh,

God of the Torah, but rather that he is a divine being that Jonah worships. I'll say it another way: a better translation that would get the proper meaning across is... "let them call on **this elohim**". That is, this particular **elohim** whose message his prophet, Jonah, had delivered to them. It brings with it the sort of thought that Paul was explaining as he gathered a small crowd in Athens, when the Athenians said to him that one of their many statues was to honor the "unknown god". Paul then went on to explain to them in simplistic terms who this god (this **elohim**) was whom they did not know, but yet were honoring.

The bottom line is this: the Ninevites did not convert. They didn't even really know much about Jonah's **elohim**... probably not even His name. It was the divine power of those words that Jonah was told to say precisely as Yehoveh gave them to him, which had the profound effect over the people to make them want to change. It so affected them that further persuasion from Jonah wasn't needed to get them to believe sufficiently to DO what Yehoveh wanted them to do: turn from their evil behavior to good behavior. Whatever actual heart or mind change could come over a period of time, if at all. But the behavior change had to occur within a period of 40 days, or Nineveh would become a disaster zone.

I'm speaking now to so-called Seekers and to those of you who are very new to belief in Christ. It is good that you have prayed the sinner's prayer, confessed your sins, and have chosen to accept the free gift of salvation that only God can give to you. But...what God is immediately looking for from you is a change of your behavior from evil to good. You can change your behavior nearly overnight; but changing your mind and gaining a true understanding of God and your new relationship with Him takes time...a lot more time than 40 days. Your new belief is like your reaction to the Starter's gun in a race. But, after the first step you take, it is all the other steps that come afterward that will define your race and what the outcome will be. To simply react, take that first step, and then NOT to change behavior is like immediately stopping your race after that first step out of the starting blocks. And, I'm here to tell you that despite what the Church may tell you, or that you might tell yourself, that is NOT repentance in any sense that God accepts as legitimate repentance. Rather, the reaction of Nineveh is more what God demands of us than merely a prayer and a passive good intention.

Let's re-read the final few verses of Jonah chapter 3.

RE-READ JONAH CHAPTER 3: 7 – end

Verse 9 continues the words of the king of Nineveh. They echo nearly exactly what we read in Joel.

CJB Joel 2:13-14 ***¹³ Tear your heart, not your garments; and turn to ADONAI your God. For he is merciful and compassionate, slow to anger, rich in grace, and willing to change his mind about disaster. ¹⁴ Who knows? He may turn, change his mind and leave a blessing behind him, [enough for] grain offerings and drink offerings to present to ADONAI your God.***

The issue is the lack of certainty. The king of Nineveh is not certain what he and his citizens' sincere sign of repentance might do to appease this god. Maybe it will do nothing; maybe it will soften the coming blow; maybe this god will relent and not do anything to them at all. Jonah, too, isn't certain. He fears that God is going to accept their repentance and show mercy; but he is equally aware of Yehoveh's keen sense of justice...of crime and punishment... as set down in the Law of Moses (something to which Jonah is fully dedicated). So, just as in Joel it is wait-and-see for Israel. it's going to be the same for these gentiles in Nineveh. Only God knows the answer to the question of mercy or justice.

This issue of justice versus mercy is a challenge that especially those of us who trust in the grace offered through Messiah Yeshua face because His Father has been inadequately portrayed since the establishment of Constantine's new gentiles-only religion that has become the foundation and model of the Church as we know it today. We tend to have bought into a doctrine that says that upon our trust in Christ, God offers us iron-clad guarantees and promises regardless of our thoughts and behaviors, when in fact the Scriptures seem to say that God's reaction to those thoughts and behaviors are generally contingent upon our responses to His laws and commandments. Even more, God seems to make decisions and choices that include other factors of which He is privy, but which we might not be aware. While His response to us compared to ours to Him are not necessarily in equal proportion, nonetheless there is a definite connection... a certain cause and effect. I've often said that our lives as Believers can be

described as one of a co-operative venture with Yehoveh and His Son, Yeshua. We have our part and God has His, but our part is always subservient to His.

In no sense in this co-operative venture is God giving-up some of His sovereignty over humankind. He CHOOSES to have this sort of relationship with us. He created us with a free-will that is the necessary prerequisite for this kind of relationship, as without free-will we would be little more than unwilling slaves or robots capable only of pre-programmed responses (not unlike in the animal kingdom whereby pre-programmed instinct is the driving force of their consciousness). Yet, whatever His response to us God always has the same goal in mind for mankind:

CJB 2 Peter 3:9 *The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some people think of slowness; on the contrary, he is patient with you; for it is not his purpose that anyone should be destroyed, but that everyone should turn from his sins.*

And, as we read in Timothy:

CJB 1 Timothy 2:4 *He wants all humanity to be delivered and come to full knowledge of the truth.*

In Jonah, what we learn about who God *really* is, is that His justice, love, and mercy extend to all humans...not just a select few or just a select group. Jonah, however, does not want this to be so; in fact, he is so adamant about it that he is ready to die if he actually has to accept what is apparently this new revelation for him about his God (we'll talk about this more when we get to chapter 4). He wants Yehoveh's love and mercy to be directed exclusively to his fellow Hebrews; but he's more than happy if God uses His other attribute of strict justice on gentiles. Despite God being the universal God for all, there still remains the fact (an irony, really) that there **is** a select group (Israel) that God has specifically chosen and set-apart to bring the knowledge of Him and of His justice, morality, love and mercy to the world, and also from this group will eventually come the Savior to rescue mankind from our equally universal, humanly insolvable predicament.

In verse 10, Jonah's worst nightmare comes to pass:

CJB Jonah 3:10 *When God saw by their deeds that they had turned from their evil way, he relented and did not bring on them the punishment he had threatened.*

To be a broken record, please pay close attention to the first 6 words of this verse: "**when God saw...**" saw what? He saw "**by their deeds**" that they had turned...**su**v... repented... then in consequence He relented. I've attempted to persuade you all that I can about what repentance truly is, and that you can believe in Jesus of Nazareth all you claim to. But, if that belief is not reflected by your deeds... in your changed behavior... God refuses to accept it as repentance and so your belief is worthless. Among most Christians what I just said is heresy. In God's Word what I just said is foundational truth. Let's move on to chapter 4.

READ JONAH CHAPTER 4 all

The first thing I want to say about this chapter is that the point in the Book of Jonah in which chapter 3 ends and is separated from the beginning of chapter 4 was a terrible choice by someone 1000 years ago or so. It completely separates the thought of God relenting from raining disaster down upon Nineveh due to their changed behavior, and the thought of Jonah being highly displeased about God relenting. It all ought to be not only in the same chapter, but probably just one long verse. That is: ***When God saw by their deeds that they had turned from their evil way, he relented and did not bring on them the punishment he had threatened. But this was very displeasing to Yonah, and he became angry.***

Chapter 4 is essentially the story of Jonah's second rebellion. It revolves around God's often perplexing (perhaps frustrating?) paradox of being a God of strict justice mixed with magnanimous displays of compassion and mercy to the guilty. Thus, Judeo-Christianity has had a propensity over the centuries to attempt to downplay or even eliminate one of these paradoxical attributes in order to provide clarity or perhaps simply to validate an agenda. For instance, perhaps the most common way this divine paradox is handled is by claiming that God's strict justice is reflected in the mindset of the Old Testament God, Yehoveh, while mercy and compassion are not. But, that dynamic (also called Dispensation)

ended upon the dawn of the New Testament era. Now God's compassion and mercy is reflected by the God of the New Testament, Jesus, and strict justice has been abandoned. The paradox of God is probably best highlighted and summed-up with these two Scriptures:

CJB Numbers 23:19 *"God is not a human who lies or a mortal who changes his mind. When he says something, he will do it; when he makes a promise, he will fulfill it.*

And yet...on the other hand:

CJB Exodus 33:19 *... moreover, I show favor to whomever I will, and I display mercy to whomever I will.*

Interestingly, Paul quotes this same passage in the Book of Romans.

CJB Romans 9:13-18 *¹³ This accords with where it is written, "Ya'akov I loved, but Esav I hated." ¹⁴ So are we to say, "It is unjust for God to do this"? Heaven forbid! ¹⁵ For to Moshe he says, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will pity whom I pity." ¹⁶ Thus it doesn't depend on human desires or efforts, but on God, who has mercy. ¹⁷ For the Tanakh says to Pharaoh, "It is for this very reason that I raised you up, so that in connection with you I might demonstrate my power, so that my name might be known throughout the world." ¹⁸ So then, he has mercy on whom he wants, and he hardens whom he wants.*

Paul, too, wrestled with the paradox of God. His only solution is that God isn't a man, so He doesn't think like a man, and also isn't confined to limited understanding and thus a limited set of possible responses as is a man. So, Yehoveh may (on whatever terms He chooses) grant mercy or demand severe retribution as He deems the situation and His plans require. Paul concludes:

CJB Romans 9:19-20 *¹⁹ But you will say to me, "Then why does he still find fault with us? After all, who resists his will?" ²⁰ Who are you, a mere human being, to talk back to God? Will what is formed say to him who formed it, "Why did you make me this way?"*

In the end, God is NOT a human...nor is He a super-human... He is an entirely different kind of superior being. He doesn't answer to us... we answer to Him. Who are we to judge the Judge? And, yet, as we read in the final chapter of Jonah, that is precisely what God's own prophet, Jonah, was doing. Part of what makes Jonah so difficult to interpret and fathom in a number of ways is this divine paradox we see so clearly if we'll allow our minds to open to it instead of filtering it out due to previous Church teachings and doctrines. Our difficulty arises, then, mainly because of our misguided mindset; we have learned things from our religious leaders about God that are supposed to fit in the nice, neat boxes we have been created for Him...but don't. Instead, when we let the Bible speak for itself, we find a very complex and infinitely superior divine being that reserves the right to act in ways that He doesn't necessarily give to His created creatures...ways that we have no human ability to deal with no matter how much our intelligence and knowledge may increase over the centuries and into the future. God always judges perfectly. We do not and never will. He is able to do so; we are not. Here is something God showed me in the preparation for teaching this book that I'd like to share with you.

Unless God (in an actual, real, tangible form) is the judge presiding over every trial, over every moral decision we must make about right and wrong, good and evil...since He is all-knowing in complete perfection that He can determine guilt and innocence without error and with perfect confidence... then the only alternative is to put judgment of humans on earth in the hands of human judges. This is the position that Moses immediately found himself in and it befuddled and overwhelmed him such that his father-in-law Jethro had to give him some wisdom on how to go about it. In our Universe, on Earth, we must have human judges to decide each case and to determine not only guilt and innocence, but also when it is proper to dispense strict proportional punishment or instead to exercise mercy. Yet, before any determination can be made, we first have to a law code to go by. Who or what is to be the source of that law code? Shall it be various humans in leadership who create it, and so we shall make our determinations according to many different law codes, society by society, nation by nation? Humanity has determined: yes, we can and should. God says otherwise.

Since God cannot (or at least He has decided He will not) be the judge present at every trial and moral decision, then the Lord gave us a Universal law code...a code of morality...that is perfect and perpetual. It is universal in its application. It transcends time and culture. The Law of Moses was given that we have a means of humans dispensing divine justice based on God's principles of morality and (necessarily) also on what is sin and what ought to be done about it those principles are violated. It is an objective, not a subjective, Law code. It does not play favorites; it has no regard for social status or race or wealth. And yet, despite its perfection and universality because of its divine source, and because imperfect humans are left to administer it, mistakes will be made.

Sadly, though, the Church that ought to be its greatest defender and advocate has actively encouraged Church as well as secular governments to discard this divine Law code in favor of one based on manmade doctrines and on humanity's opinions of justice and mercy. What was objective and perpetual, has become subjective and evolving. Thus, the world operates on countless different law codes and, as is clear, God's definitions of good and evil, of morality, have been kicked to the curb and we are living-out the chaotic and ruinous results.

In the end, God will grab hold of the reigns of justice and remove them from human hands. The Father's agent...Yeshua, His Son... has been appointed as the sole judge and every human who has ever lived will be judged by Him. What standard will each individual be judged upon? The one each prefers? The one each particular society on earth goes by (at the time they were alive)? Of course not. It will be according to the only divinely-given code of Law and mercy ever established on earth: the Law of Moses. Will Yeshua judge us the same as we judge ourselves or as society judges us or as a human judge in a court of law judges us? No. He will judge us as only God can. He sees through our claims and into our souls. He looks past our deeds into the motives for those deeds. He will determine our circumstances in ways that human systems cannot. He will mete out **eternal** justice that humans cannot possibly do and so reserves the responsibility solely to Himself... as it should be. This is yet another lesson Jonah is (angrily and stubbornly) learning. Let us pay close attention that we may learn it as well and cease attempting to remake God...and His moral law code... in our image.

Jonah's response in verse 2 seems comical; almost as if The Narrator was writing satire. That is certainly not the case. Jonah is criticizing God for His decision to show mercy to Nineveh. In fact, Jonah says that he knows Yehoveh so well that even before he left Joppa for Tarshish that he just knew that should Nineveh show repentance after hearing God's warning to them, that God would most likely show them mercy and grace. If ever we had doubt about the motive for Jonah fleeing his homeland for Tarshish, it is here put to rest as it could not be more explicitly and simply stated.

To help us navigate through this final chapter, let's talk about timing. In the final verse of chapter 3 when we get the news that God is relenting and is not going to destroy Nineveh, this is something that is not actually known to Jonah or to the Ninevites until the 40 days have passed. It is simply a retrospective comment that The Narrator has provided for the benefit of the reader of the book. So, what follows is what went on during that 40-day period, as all waited in suspense to see what happens. Even though Jonah knew in his heart-of-hearts that Nineveh was going to receive God's mercy and not His wrath, he held out hope all that time that he might be wrong. He wanted to be wrong. He wanted to watch the city of Nineveh obliterated as was Sodom and Gomorrah. Thus, his prayer is not one of praise and contrition before God, but rather one of scorn and disappointment in God. As hard as it can be for us to grasp, Jonah was convinced in his own mind that God was wrong about this. Therefore, the conclusion of his prayer (in verse 3) is that Jonah wants to die. He wants to commit passive suicide. Jonah was so convinced that his own rebellion was right, and that his own sense of justice, morality, and mercy was right....and because Jonah was such a single-minded and principled man... he again chooses his own death over agreeing with God.

Essentially what has happened is that Jonah has re-defined God in his own mind, and when God showed him who He *really* is, Jonah rejected it. Jonah wanted the God of his own personal imaginings, not the One that exists. The God of Jonah's image was a God of strict judgment upon the nations, but also a God that filtered everything through grace and mercy but only for Israel. He was Israel's God and so His love and mercy were supposed to be reserved only for Israel. Since Assyria was Israel's constant enemy, then of course God would dispense His harshest judgment upon them. Instead, it turns out that God also shows that same mercy

and grace to gentiles...even to Israel's enemies. Jonah preferred his way of thinking about justice and mercy to the point that he'd rather have his life ended than having to adjust his understanding of Yehoveh. Oh, what a caution we have run head-long into. When we, in despair or arrogance, seriously ask God "why?", we are deep down questioning God's judgment, or perhaps to a lesser degree the quality of His innate attributes. If we knew and accepted God as He is, we would NEVER think to do such a thing. The problem is that (likely unawares) we have made God in our own image, and now He has disrupted that image, and we are not happy about it. Perhaps we're confused and flummoxed about it. Whatever occurred, God was NOT supposed to react in whatever way He has. This, too, was Jonah's dilemma. I know of a person who confided in me that early in her adult life, when a series of tragedies in her family caused her incredible mental pain and long-term suffering, she determined to stop talking with God. She was angry with Him. She felt that she deserved better. God was wrong not to reward what she saw as her faithfulness to Him; it was a bargain gone bad. All her determined faithfulness seemed to go for nought. In her mind, God had reneged on a promise. It was many years later before she realized the folly of such thinking that happened because she had made God in her image; and imagined a quid pro quo relationship with Him that meant that if she did certain things, God guaranteed her certain protections in return. She finally repented and devoted herself to relearning who God *really* is and accepting it. At this point in our story, Jonah is yet to reach that conclusion.

Obviously ignoring Jonah's request to die, God instead asks Jonah a question: "what right do you have to be angry?". Jonah **is** angry, but his anger is completely without good cause and God calls him on it. God doesn't doubt the seriousness of Jonah's rage, rather He questions Jonah's justification for it. At this point I want you to be alert to something that is running in the background in the Jonah story for now, but becomes apparent in the next several verses. God is not angry with Jonah. Rather, God actually sees Jonah's great emotional distress and wants to soothe it the way a father wants to soothe a child's vexation and upset over something they don't understand. The child doesn't need to be disciplined; he needs love and compassion and perhaps some gentle explanation. God didn't punish Jonah for a rebellion that is unprecedented among God's prophets, when our every human emotion and instinct says he ought to be. Instead, just as God showed Nineveh patience and mercy, so He did

for Jonah. Jonah's distress was very real, even though the underlying reason for it was not justified and it was his own fault.

In verse 5, Jonah leaves the city. To the east side of the city, he finds a suitable spot and there builds himself a shelter. The Hebrew word used for this shelter is **succah**...a word that is familiar to those who celebrate God's biblical feasts. It is a temporary hut or booth. Why did he go there and do this? The verse plainly states: "**...to see what would happen to the city**". So, this is taking place during that 40-day period God warned about, and the people of Nineveh and Jonah wait in suspense to see what is going to happen to them. It isn't hard to understand the Ninevites' daily anxieties as they waited for their fate to unfold. But for Jonah? He was already convinced that God was not going to harm those people; yet, his stubborn rebelliousness meant that he held out some small measure of hope for Nineveh's destruction and he wanted to see it for himself.

Just as earlier Jonah had fled to the far west in order to not go east to Nineveh, so now he had entered Nineveh from the west, began preaching there, and later has emerged on the east. The **succah** he built was probably made from piling up stones. Wood...timber for construction... was scarce in that area and so very expensive as it had to be imported. A usable and effective roof (whose purpose would have been shelter from the sun and not from rain) would have required a few wooden poles or beams. So, whatever he first used for roof material was inadequate to keep from roasting in the intense sun and heat of the area. God, merciful and compassionate, decides to help incorrigible Jonah by providing some shelter from the sun for him.

In verse 6, the first words are: "**Adonai, God, prepared a castor-bean plant....**" Or, more usually, "**The Lord, God, prepared a plant (or gourd)...**" What we have here is a very unique Hebrew word combination in Jonah concerning God. In the original Hebrew the words are "**Yehoveh, elohim**". Knowing what we now know about Yehoveh being God's formal name, and **elohim** more meaning "divine being" as opposed to meaning "God" or "gods", here this word combination is intended to impart the information that it is Yehoveh that is the particular **elohim** who miraculously prepared this plant for Jonah. After all, as rebellious as Jonah has been and remains, it is hard for an 8th century B.C. reader to imagine that the same God that Jonah is rebelling against is also providing Jonah shade so that he

can sit more comfortably, pouting as it were, waiting to see what happens next. Jonah was, of course, delighted with this plant that grew suddenly, overnight, and provided him relief from his discomfort.

Disastrously, however, the next day a worm attacked the plant and destroyed it; so, it withered and died, and along with it went Jonah's prized shade. Only one full day of shade and relief had been provided for Jonah, but it was enough time for him to greatly appreciate it and expect it. Despite many attempts of Bible translators to identify the exact type of plant or the exact type of worm, it is a useless endeavor. There is simply not enough information to do that.

We are next told that an east wind began to blow. No doubt this direction of the wind has to do with the side of the city Jonah is encamped. If he was on the west side, he would have been somewhat sheltered from the wind by the great, high city walls. But since he is outside the eastern walls, he is bearing the brunt of it: a hot, dry east wind combined with the hot sun beating down on him made him even more miserable. Why didn't he go, then, back inside the city that was right there in front of him? Because, he still believed it was possible that Yehoveh was going to destroy Nineveh as He did with Sodom and didn't want to risk being inside of it should it happen. So, his suffering only increases due to his continuing folly.

Jonah becomes so miserable that he utters to no one in particular that he'd rather die than continue to live. Literally the Hebrew says that "he willed himself to die". Of course; clearly God wasn't going to do the work of killing him, so Jonah was willing himself to stop breathing. It didn't work. God now speaks to Jonah not to chastise him but rather to teach. Already God has asked Jonah what right he thought he had to be angry with God simply because He showed Nineveh mercy. Now He again asks Jonah about his anger, only this time it was over the death of his source of shade: the plant. Jonah not only self-righteously replies that yes, he is angry about the dead plant, but that he is so angry he wants to die. Jonah keeps making his anger and bitterness so fierce that he can't bear it any longer.

Verses 10 and 11 are the crux of the lesson Yehoveh is graciously trying to teach Jonah. He says:

CJB Jonah 4:10-11 ¹⁰ *ADONAI said, "You're concerned over the castor-bean plant, which cost you no effort; you didn't make it grow; it came up in a night and perished in a night. ¹¹ So shouldn't I be concerned about the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than 120,000 people who don't know their right hand from their left- not to mention all the animals?"*

What is God actually saying here, because what is revealed is yet another attribute of God that further explains who He *really* is? God is asking Jonah: how can it be right that I **should** strike down the 120,000 human lives of Nineveh, but it is **not** right that I should strike down a simple plant? The reality for we readers and followers of God is that we are left to complete this comparison between the people of Nineveh and the plant for ourselves. We should, by now, (as of course should Jonah) get it. It is as we read in Jeremiah:

CJB Jeremiah 45:3-5 ³ *'Woe to me now! ADONAI has compounded my pain with sorrow, I am weary from groaning, and I can find no relief!'* ⁴ *'Tell him that ADONAI says: 'I will tear down what I built up, I will uproot what I planted...'* ⁵ *'Are you seeking great things for yourself? Don't! ...''*

Nineveh is the work of God's hands. He has the right to tear it down or to keep it intact, and to use it for whatever He purposes. But, another important factor is this: Nineveh is a great important city. It is perhaps the most ancient of cities still in existence in Jonah's day. And, although it was impossible for anyone in Jonah's day to know at the time, God has plans to use Assyria (just a few years into the future) to discipline the Kingdom of Ephraim/Israel for Him. Nineveh (Assyria) needed to survive because they would be God's instrument to exile the 10 tribes of the Northern Kingdom for their rebellion against Him. Further, unlike a single plant, Nineveh is home to more than 100,000 living souls...humans AND animals...all which God has created. It is important to Him. It is far more important than a plant. And yet, for Jonah, that plant that has no soul is more important than all those with living souls in Nineveh.

God created all life; but all life was not created equal. There are basically 3 spheres...maybe it is 3 categories...of life: plants, animals, and humans. Humans sit alone at the top of the hierarchy; animals next, and plants a distant third. God

cares the most about human life. He cares for his living animal creatures, but not nearly in the same way he cares for humans. Plants are only there for the use and enjoyment of humans and animals. Therefore, God's divine attribute of compassion and mercy (something which Jonah is in full rebellion against) has two faces to it. One face is that He forgives sins of those humans who trespass against His moral code, and the other face shows compassion to humans and animals simply because they are all living creatures with the breath of life in them.

Perhaps the most profound part of this lesson to Jonah is this: God's love for His creatures...great and small... in no way diminishes His divinely ordained justice. In point of fact, mercy and compassion are essential, indispensable elements of God's justice system. What seems as paradox to humans, is perfection to God.

It is most interesting that our book ends with no response from Jonah. Whether it is so or not, I'd like to think that Jonah has finally recognized that God is right. And, that the only proper response *is* humble silence. Although the route to the conclusion is different, Jonah agrees with Job.

CJB Job 42:1-6 *Then [at last,] Iyov gave ADONAI this answer: ² "I know that you can do everything, that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. ³ "[You asked,] 'Who is this, hiding counsel, without having knowledge?' Yes, I spoke, without understanding, of wonders far beyond me, which I didn't know. ⁴ "Please listen, and I will speak. [You said,] 'I will ask questions; and you, give me answers'- ⁵ I had heard about you with my ears, but now my eye sees you; ⁶ therefore I detest [myself] and repent in dust and ashes."*

This concludes our study of the Book of Jonah.