

# God Teaches Jonah

Read Jonah 4

Jonah was angry with God. He had risked his life to proclaim God's judgment, only to see God relent and not execute His threat. Jonah felt betrayed.

So he went outside the city, built a make-shift shelter for shade, and sat down to watch what God would do with Nineveh. But the shade of the shelter wasn't enough, and Jonah baked in the sun. So the same Creator God who had appointed a fish to teach Jonah now appointed a plant. The plant (variously called a vine, a bush, or a tree-like castor oil plant) grew quickly enough to provide shade for Jonah.

But just when Jonah had grown to appreciate the plant, at dawn the very next day God appointed a worm to attack and kill the plant. When the sun came up, He also appointed a scorching wind to begin to blow on Jonah. He was again so angry with God he wanted to die. Jonah had loved the plant, and now it was gone.

God was using a plant to help Jonah understand His compassion. He had let Jonah experience love for this simple plant, which Jonah had not created or nurtured, and which grew and died in a single day. So why did it seem strange to Jonah that God would do all He could to save 120,000 persons, not to mention their animals?

As with Jonah, God's patience and delays often don't make sense to us. Why doesn't He get on with it and destroy this violent, evil, threatening world? We don't feel the depths of His love for people we consider unworthy, unlovable, and beyond repentance.

*The Lord is not slow about His promise...but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9, NASB)*

Jonah's plant or vine is somewhat different than the ones we'll meet in the rest of our studies here, but it is the same in this sense: it is an expression of God's love and patient compassion for us human beings. Like Jonah, we get so attached to our shallow, short-term comforts that we fail to grasp the depth of His love for persons we view as unlovely and unworthy, persons we tend to fear, despise, or avoid. We slap labels on people and dismiss them. God loves each one as an individual.

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