

## Angry at God?

Jonah 4:1-11 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

*But it greatly displeased Jonah, and he became angry. <sup>2</sup> Then he prayed to the Lord and said, "Please Lord, was this not what I said when I was still in my own country? Therefore, in anticipation of this I fled to Tarshish, since I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in mercy, and One who relents of disaster. <sup>3</sup> So now, Lord, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life." <sup>4</sup> But the Lord said, "Do you have a good reason to be angry?"*

*<sup>5</sup> Then Jonah left the city and sat down east of it. There he made a shelter for himself and sat under it in the shade, until he could see what would happen in the city. <sup>6</sup> So the Lord God designated a plant, and it grew up over Jonah to be a shade over his head, to relieve him of his discomfort. And Jonah was overjoyed about the plant. <sup>7</sup> But God designated a worm when dawn came the next day, and it attacked the plant, and it withered. <sup>8</sup> And when the sun came up God designated a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on Jonah's head so that he became faint, and he begged with all his soul to die, saying, "Death is better to me than life!"*

*<sup>9</sup> But God said to Jonah, "Do you have a good reason to be angry about the plant?" And he said, "I have good reason to be angry, even to the point of death!" <sup>10</sup> Then the Lord said, "You had compassion on the plant, for which you did not work and which you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight. <sup>11</sup> Should I not also have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 people, who do not know the difference between their right hand and their left, as well as many animals?"*

**Summary of the book of Jonah:** God commanded Jonah to go to Nineveh and preach against the city, yet he ran away from God, then, he was swallowed by a great fish (chapter 1). Inside the fish's belly, he prayed to God (chapter 2). Nineveh repented after Jonah delivered God's message (chapter 3). Finally, Jonah's displeasure on God's mercy was rebuked (chapter 4).

## Introduction

Among the many sermons I have preached, the topic that has received the most response from the congregation is anger—anger with God and people. So, today and next Sunday, I will revisit this subject. Although I cannot cover all aspects of anger in two sermons, I will highlight what the Bible says about our anger toward God and each other. The topic of God's anger (divine anger) will be addressed later—two weeks from today.

Today's sermon focuses on the topic of anger towards God.

People can experience anger towards God at times. For instance, a study conducted by Julie Exline, a psychologist at Case Western Reserve University, revealed several findings about anger at God:

- Atheists and agnostics reported more anger towards God during their lifetimes compared to believers.
- Anger is observed among individuals who are grieving the death of loved ones.
- More religious individuals are less likely to feel angry at God and more likely to view his intentions as well-meaning.
- Younger individuals tend to feel angrier at God than older individuals, for reasons such as rejection from preferred colleges and sports injuries. One possible explanation is that previous generations were taught not to question God, whereas younger people today may not hesitate to do so.
- Longstanding negative emotions can lead to both mental and physical health issues.
  - Source: <http://pagingdrgupta.blogs.cnn.com/2011/01/10/anger-at-god-common-even-among-atheists/>

## Content

**Definition:** let me begin with the definition of 'anger' so that we may stay on the same page.

*Anger: the strong feeling that you have when something has happened that you think is bad and unfair* (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary). In today's story, Jonah's anger fits this category--He felt God treated him unfairly by sparing the Ninevites from judgment. Jonah was also mad at God because his favorite plant died overnight.

**Anger at God:** Anger at God would be, then, the anger directed at God due to His actions or no-actions. For instance, people may become frustrated when they expect immediate justice from God but do not see it happen right away. Another instance, when God's actions differ from their expectations and hopes, they may also feel anger towards Him. This concept can be illustrated with various cases from the Bible. I am going to present to you three cases. Let's begin with Cain.

### Case Study in the Bible:

**Cain:** was the first son of Adam and Eve. He was the older brother of Abel in Adam's family. In the course of time, both of them brought their offerings to God. God accepted Abel's offering but rejected Cain's. Cain got angry at God and lashed out his anger against

Abel. He ended up killing his own brother when they were alone in the field (Genesis 4). Cain reasoned: “God is **unfair** because He rejected my offering while He accepted my brother’s.” He expressed his anger in a wrong and destructive way. Note here: anger at God arises in our heart when we refuse to accept God’s sovereignty.

**Job’s wife:** Job, a righteous man, lost everything in one day: all his possessions (the oxen and donkeys were taken by the bandits, his servants were killed by them, a fire fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them, and all of his ten children perished when a great wind struck the house, and the roof fell on them). All in one day! Consequently, a severe skin disease broke out on him, possibly shingles. Watching all these things happen to her family, Job’s wife got frustrated and reacted angrily toward God urging Job to “curse God and die” (Job 2:9). Please note here: her reaction was based on her belief that ‘we’ve been good to God; therefore, He should be good to us. This kind of things should never happen to us. My faithfulness to God should guarantee blessings and protection from God, and **I have the right to curse Him when bad things happen to me.**’ This is actually the devil’s theology, as illustrated in Job 1:8-11, where the Lord spoke to Satan about Job.

<sup>8</sup> *The Lord said to Satan, “Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil.”* <sup>9</sup> *Then Satan answered the Lord, “Does Job fear God for nothing?”* <sup>10</sup> *Have You not made a fence around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land.* <sup>11</sup> *But reach out with Your hand now and **touch all that he has; he will certainly curse You to Your face**”* (Job 1: 8-11).

Some believers live on their bad theology with such wrong expectations of God (that is, *grant me, God, only good things please; and occasional bad things I can handle. However, when I have more than I handle, it is Your fault, and I quit*).

**Jonah:** wasn’t far from Job’s wife when it comes down to bad theology. His understanding of God’s mercy was fundamentally flawed: *it is ‘ok’ for me to receive God’s unfailing mercies, but not ‘ok’ for my enemies to receive the same mercies because they don’t deserve them.* He failed to see that God’s mercy is for all, both Israelites and Gentiles. He struggled with the concept that God’s mercies apply to all regardless of their status as friends or foes. When his understanding of God’s mercy clashed with God’s own practice, he got displeased and angry with God.

Now for the rest of my sermon, I am going to talk about healthy and biblical ways to handle anger with God.

### **How to Handle Anger with God? (A-B-C)**

**Avoid Bad Theology.** How? By being grounded in God's Word for the right understanding of God. Do not rely on your own imaginations or misunderstanding. Nor in feelings, books, human wisdom, even traditions. Any theology not backed by the Bible can result in wrong expectations of God and unhealthy response to God's attributes/actions. E.g., Health-wealth theology (God blesses me with health and wealth if I am faithful to Him-- in most cases, it is true. However, this doesn't exempt us from adversities). Another example: Why 'me' vs. Why 'not me?' in times of trouble. Most of us question God 'Why me?' when bad things happen to us. What about asking God 'Why not me?'--a young mother was going blind, and her husband was mad at God because of what was happening to his wife, the woman said to him, 'Why not me?'

Here's the truth and the reality: God never promises His children a trouble-free life; life is not always rosy and healthy. We all go through ups and downs. Joys and heartaches. Through it all, though, God promises that He will be with us. *"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, Nor will the flame burn you"* (Isaiah 43:2). King David said, *"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me;"* (Psalm 23:4)

When you go through hard times, be careful not to define/dictate to God what is fair and not. He knows what's happening to you. He knows what He is doing. He does according to His will. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, "what have you done?" (Daniel 4:35). Avoid bad theology. Be Grounded in God's Word.

**Be Humble before God.** God is kind and slow to anger. His heart is big enough to allow us to speak out our anger toward Him. However, when you do it, do it with humility not with arrogance. God is gracious enough to allow us to lash out our anger at Him occasionally, but do we even have a right to be angry with God? Remember who God is (the Creator) and who you are (the Creature). You are talking to God the Almighty. Furthermore, always ask yourself if you have good reason to be angry with God in the first place. E.g., Some years ago, the Lord let my brother live after his motorcycle accident. I praised God for answering my prayers. For the next 20 years, however, his life wasn't easy. Frustrated with his disability, he couldn't hold a steady job. He turned to drinking and eventually got divorced by his wife. From then on, he was living with my mother and caused her great pain. Consequently, for my mother's sake, I silently wished him dead. In fact, I would complain to God in my prayers for making him survive his coma twenty years ago; later, though, I felt like God telling me in my prayer, "My child, I cannot please you. Which one do you want for your brother? Alive or dead? Make up your mind!" I realized my

contradiction and felt ashamed so that I repented. Be humble before God when you are angry with Him.

**Choose to Trust in God not Your Feelings.** Acknowledge your limited understanding (that is, you might be wrong and don't know the future or the eventual outcome of what you are mad at God right now). God's Word commands: "*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding*" (Proverbs 3:5). Trust God in His good will (Romans 8:28—God makes all things beautiful in His time). Don't jump into a quick conclusion. It takes time to realize what's best for us. E.g., Joseph the son of Jacob could have been mad at God for his entire life: because he had a traumatic experience. By his own brothers, he was sold into slavery and suffered for 13 years. Yet, God made him overcome his trauma years later by seeing the hands of Providence in his suffering on behalf of his family—a positive way of handling anger with God. Trust in God not your feelings.

## Conclusion

Anger is a choice. Let us make the right choice every day. Learn from biblical characters to handle your anger with God: **Avoid bad theology. Be humble before God in your anger. Choose to trust in God over your feelings.** And you will do well. Amen.