



*“An Englishwoman, a Frenchman, and a Russian are each given a single wish by one of those genies whose almost relentless habit is to pop out of bottles.*

*“The Englishwoman says that a friend of hers has a charming cottage in the Cotswolds and that she would like a similar cottage with the addition of two extra bedrooms and a second bath and a brook running in front of it.*

*“The Frenchman says that his best friend has a beautiful blonde mistress, and he would like such a mistress himself, but a redhead instead of a blonde, and with longer legs and a bit more in the way of culture and chic.*

*“The Russian, when asked what he would like, tells of a neighbor who has a cow that gives a vast quantity of the richest milk, which yields the heaviest cream and the purest butter. ‘I vant dat cow...’ the Russian tells the genie, ‘...dead.’”<sup>a</sup>*

*Dead? Dead! The Russians have a word, “zavast,” which roughly translated means envy of the meanest most black-hearted kind.*

*In The Cancer of Envy, Pastor Alan Strange preached, “Envy is so prevalent that the Germans even have a special word related to it. Schadenfreude means ‘taking pleasure in another’s problems.’”<sup>b</sup> Indeed, we rightly call envy “The Green-eyed Monster.” We will sadly learn today that Jonah was much more than merely melancholy—he was monstrous.*

## **1. THE POUTING PROPHET: INFURIATED AT HIS ENEMIES’ SALVATION**

Jonah 1, 2, and 3 showed us a Prodigal, then Praying, then Preaching Prophet. In Chapter 4, we must learn from a Pouting Prophet, one whom finally preached to a latter-day Sodom.

**Jonah 4:1** *“But it greatly displeased Jonah, and he became angry.”*

The “it” that irked Jonah the Semite was the revival of the Ninevites swarming *en masse* within the mammoth walls of the hated Assyrian capital. Jonah dropped out of our view at the first signs of repentance in Chapter 3. He now reappears, center stage, delivering a two-verse, fuming monologue that uses *my* and *I* nine times. What we saw in Jonah 3:10 would be a supreme joy to any preacher—the repentance and salvation of his entire audience—but it peevd our Pouting Prophet. What a shocking second rebellion? What a racist, ultra-nationalist, prejudiced, religious monster. He would have rather *died* than see his racial, political enemies come to salvation by faith in God’s lavish mercy and great grace.

The Hebrew text here is Hi-Def and full color. It literally says, “*It was an evil to Jonah, a great evil,<sup>c</sup> and it burned him*” (see artwork). The words great and evil are used many times in this book’s 48 verses but only here, in Jonah’s sour, small, puckered heart, do the two words appear together. Great evil was inside of Jonah’s heart.

➤ The Nuremberg theologian Gerhard von Rad was known for his scholarship and resistance to Hitler’s Nazi fiends. He felt Jonah’s regrets about Nineveh’s stupendous salvation opened a vast window into his mind. Von Rad called him, in German, *Religionspsychologisches Monstrum*, asking:

## **“WHAT RELIGIOUS MONSTER IS THIS?”<sup>d</sup>**

The great Moses pled, in Exodus 32:32, that God forgive the sins of the drunken party hounds, the half-naked, golden-calf-worshiping Israelites.

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He pled that the Lord either forgive them or else blot out his own name from God's book. What a contrast to the flush-faced, pious, Pouting Prophet, physiologically burning up, hating his enemies as they turned to the Lord for salvation.

## **2. THE POUTING PROPHET: PRAYED TO COMPLAIN TO JEHOVAH**

Jonah prayed last inside a fish in a cold sea. Now this hothead blurted out a prayer of complaint that God's word in Jonah 1:2 was not as good as Jonah's word or what Jonah said then. Listen in:

**Jonah 4:2**      *“Jonah prayed to the LORD and said, ‘Please LORD, was not this my word while I was still in my own country? Therefore, in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity.’”*

Bible and history students aware of the insane violence of the Ninevites assume Jonah went AWOL from his preaching tour of duty for fear of getting impaled or publicly skinned alive. The inspired text gives us his racist reason: he predicted his enemies' forgiveness based on the legendary grace and lavish compassion of God.

➤ The pagan king humbly asked, *“Who knows?”* The narrator now spills the beans, *“Jonah knew!”* He knew all along and flung it at God's face in this defiant, pungent prayer meeting. He quoted to God part of the orthodox creed known to Hebrew sages as His “thirteen attributes,” found in Exodus 34:6-7 (the lengthy Scripture in Week 17's intro). God *knew* His attributes because God *Himself* quoted those attributes to Moses as a Self-testimonial after the golden calf debacle.

When Jonah said, “Please, Lord...,” he was not being polite. His previously stuffed anger had now flared like a struck match, flaming white hot.

A good translation of the angry prayer of this volcano head would be, *“Oh puh-leeeeease! You have GOT to be kidding me! Are you serious!?”* Jonah's blood boiled and his forehead heated, so mad he could not see straight. God told Moses, 500 years earlier, that He was going to kill the Israelites at Mount Sinai. Moses begged for His mercy. God conditionally threatened a 40-day destruction of the Ninevites. Inside the forgiven city, stupefied and shocked at their humble repentance, Jonah blurted his deadly prayer—religiously monstrous.

## **3. THE POUTING PROPHET: PRAYED FOR PASSIVE SUICIDE**

The pagan Gentiles in this book loved life, wanted to live, and had good prayers. They are literary foils, a backdrop, against which we see the man after whom the book was named. He had wanted to die in Jonah 1:12, was prayerless until nearly dead (2:7), and now in the last half of this prayer meeting, we see him passively suicidal.

**Jonah 4:3**      *“Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life.”*

Elijah was another prophet whose stormy zeal was mightily used by God. Facing death threats from wicked Queen Jezebel, he fled in despair and solicited the LORD in a blustery request to take his life over his seeming failure as a prophet.

➤ Both preachers were zealous for the glory of God and had chutzpah enough to address Him honestly and directly. Sadly, both prophets appealed to the only One Who had the right to take life, to take their lives. Suicide was not an option for the godly Jew.<sup>e</sup> But might God help? Who knows? Sadly, Elijah sunk into a nameless depression over his failures for Jehovah. Jonah was perturbed over his unparalleled success, bringing God's mercy to revive the pagan hordes.

**ELIJAH HAD WISHED FOR HIS  
OWN DEATH FOR FAILING,  
JONAH FOR SUCCEEDING.**



➤ What a grisly attitude, Jonah! Yet, let us not be caught flatfooted, falling into a new but common heresy among evangelicals that stretches one of God's attributes so far, it neglects the others.

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**THE MODERN EVANGELICAL  
HERESY IS “GOD IS LOVE—  
PERIOD!”**

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God is love but He is also thrice-holy. God is abundant in lovingkindness but also will by no means leave the guilty unpunished. God does not have only one attribute—love. God, the Jewish scholars taught, based on Exodus 34, has at least thirteen. Do not forget to remember the deep and multi-faceted character of our infinite God. God is God and we are not. Jonah had forgotten, blinded by his angst, becoming nearly suicidal.

Oh, the dangers of depression which come when one turns unrighteous anger inward to poison one's own soul. Beware, senator, of the green-eyed and monstrous *zavast*—that black-hearted, mean envy over the success of political enemies.

**4. THE POUTING PROPHET:  
GETS ANSWERED AND REBUKED BY GOD**

Jonah was stomping mad as Heaven breathed a sigh of relief and rejoiced over more than “one sinner who repents.”<sup>f</sup> His piqued prayer is met with near silence. God patiently rebuked his tantrum with an eight-word rhetorical question.

**Jonah 4:4**      *“The LORD said, ‘Do you have good reason to be angry?’”*

God rebuffed Jonah with only three compound Hebrew words: *“Do-you-well the-anger to-you?”* The Lord wanted Jonah to self-confess. Confession is good for the soul. Jonah was blind to his own sinful rage. Our persuasive narrator, a master storyteller, has been pulling us into his trap, systematically exposing the small-minded man's monstrous attitude, word-by-word. Now, God

asked, “Do you have good reason?” to a bitter, resentful Jonah. Good question. Emotions are not the be-all and end-all. Having overwhelming feelings about a thing does not make it right.

➤ Good feelings come from good thinking, and good thinking comes from thinking rightly about God.<sup>g</sup> Conversely, bad feelings come from bad thinking, and bad thinking comes from thinking wrongly about God. Jonah had one thing quite wrong. He thought God's only attributes were holiness and justice, He *“by no means leaves the guilty unpunished.”* Jonah was wrong. Jonah felt badly. Jonah felt so badly that he wanted to die.

Thank God, He did not answer Jonah's request for divinely assisted suicide. God's answer was a big fat NO. Country crooner Garth Brooks sang:

Sometimes I thank God for unanswered prayers.  
Remember when you're talkin' to the Man upstairs...  
That just because He doesn't answer doesn't mean  
He don't care...

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**“...SOME OF GOD'S  
GREATEST GIFTS ARE  
UNANSWERED PRAYERS.”<sup>h</sup>**

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**5. THE POUTING PROPHET:  
IGNORED GOD'S WORD TO SULK IN HATE**

God answered Jonah's carnal prayers with three words of rebuke *and* by refusing to do as Jonah had asked. Jonah's passively suicidal thoughts next turned into passive-aggressive silence. Listen in on how Holy Writ records Jonah's reply.

**Jonah 4:5**      *“Then Jonah went out from the city and sat 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.”*

Jonah answered with deafening silence. Am I the only one in the room who hates the silent treatment? I was raised to speak when spoken to.



In the Capitol, and all relationships, a sign of disrespect and immaturity is “going silent”.

➤ Jonah blew off God’s word again. He blew it off in Chapter 1, fleeing westward to Joppa’s port. We learned in this chapter that he fled from his hometown because “his word” (mentally predicting Nineveh’s salvation), was something that mattered more than God’s word to go preach against it. Now, silently leaving the guilt-accepting and thus forgiven city, Jonah blew off God’s word—a direct question—again.

Last week, senators shared their opinion that the things that can keep senators away from listening to God’s word are pride and even a god complex of self-importance. A third reason senators blow off God’s word is sheer busyness. Six years ago, one senator told me:

**“YOU KNOW, PERRY, WE SENATORS OFTEN WORK OURSELVES AWAY FROM THE FAITH.”**

Asking him what he meant, he said, “*We get fooled into thinking that doing the work God sent us here to do is more important than protecting our time to be about knowing and listening to the God Who put us here.*”

➤ Jonah left the penitent city and went precisely east. Directionally, he came from the west (Israel) and proceeded through the city in an easterly direction. Elevationally, mountains banished the city’s eastern growth. Thereupon, he stared like a buzzardly vulture down into that walled metro. He still hoped God would judge them. He was in sight and had a perfect seat for a Sodom-and-Gomorrah-like fireworks show. Geographically, the Tigris and Khosr Rivers bound Nineveh on the north and west. Habitually, Jonah went east because he was wont to go in the opposite direction of God’s will. After a successful revival, God’s will would have been for him to go west, home to Israel—rejoicing. Jonah went east—angry.

➤ Jonah’s soul was calloused and his skin was tenderized from fishy gastric juices. He built a *sukkah* (= סֻכָּה meaning *interwoven*), which was a temporary, stationary shelter of leafy branches to protect his skin from the press of a brutal Middle Eastern sun. The Jewish holy feast of *Sukkoth* is The Feast of Booths. Next week, we will study why his hobbling haphazard shade hut is a vital element to the Jonah story. Until then, know that during *Sukkoth*, Jews sat camped out in crude, rickety, immobile shacks for a week to reflect on God’s mercy in delivering them from Egypt, meditate on Scripture, and extend hospitality to strangers (as the Jews too were once strangers). Ironically, God’s own Biblical prophet created a *sukkah* to shelter his lonesome self, meditating on a death wish for nameless bustling foreigners.

## WHAT RELIGIOUS MONSTER WAS THIS?

## HATING THOSE WHO HURT US

Dear Senator:

We learn very little from this prophet’s words but a great deal from his life. May you not be blinded by anger, mesmerized by bad thinking—thinking wrongly about God. May you leave ultimate justice up to God Whose multifaceted character is beyond our comprehension. May you let go of any hot hate for all of those who have hurt you.

In Jesus’ name,

Rev. Perry M. Gauthier V.D.M. (cell/text: 402-770-6270)

<sup>a</sup> Joseph Epstein, *The Seven Deadly Sins: Envy* (The New York Public Library: Oxford University Press, © 2006), page 22.

<sup>b</sup> Listened to 5/22/2005 on [Sermonaudio.com](http://Sermonaudio.com). Sermon I.D. #5220515836.

<sup>c</sup> “Cognate accusatives” as per earlier in this study: the sailors *feared fears, sacrificed sacrifices*, and *vowed vows*. Jonah had to *preach a preaching*.

<sup>d</sup> Gerhard Von Rad, *Der Prophet Jonah* (1950), W. B. Erdmans Publ., p. 229.

<sup>e</sup> Atop Masada’s infamous rocky mountain fortress in April, our Jewish tour guide commented that suicide was a grave sin in Judaism but every rule has its exception, referring to the 960 Sicarii rebels taking their own lives in AD 74.

<sup>f</sup> *Luke 15:7*— “[Jesus said,] ‘I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous who need no repentance.’”

<sup>g</sup> Adapted from Dr. Earl Radmacher, former president of Western Seminary.

<sup>h</sup> <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/garthbrooks/unansweredprayers.html>

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