

# [ARM Prison Outreach International](#)

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## **The Miserable Messenger — A Tale of Gourds and Hordes: Jonah 4**

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**Editor's Note:** This "MM" is an email sermon, the 5th of 2011 --113th overall-- in a series we are sending as an encouragement to preachers and Christian workers around the world. This message is one that went out in our first year of publishing MM. It is my prayer that these will encourage you and honor God. Use it as a devotional, edit it, share it, use it or components of it! May God bless your labors! -- Rod Farthing, Development Director

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### **ARM QUICK FACT:**

SEVEN baptistries were donated in the first two months of 2011!

Since 1973, ARM has donated over **1,459** baptistries to prisons!  
In addition, hundreds have been shipped to military bases and mission fields!

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## **The Miserable Messenger — A Tale of Gourds and Hordes: Jonah 4**

Our little town in the Ozarks has had a number of eccentric individuals, some of which have become famous – at least in our county! Fellows like Tarzan Golden and Doc Dent even have names that betray their colorful personality. Tarzan Golden was once on the witness stand – he was always getting into trouble, it seems. When the judge asked him if insanity had ever bothered his family, he simply replied, "No, your honor, we've always rather enjoyed it." Doc Dent was famous for his "jokes of the day" and his constantly active sense of humor. One day a local minister who was known to be somewhat pompous -- even over-bearing sometimes-- entered the little café where Doc was drinking coffee and entertaining the locals with his stories. The preacher walked over to Doc's table and asked, "Would anyone buy a poor preacher a cup of coffee?" Without hesitation Doc replied, "I sure will. I've heard you preach and YOU ARE A POOR PREACHER!"

I'll admit I'm a poor preacher but with God's help, I never want to be a Miserable Messenger. Who is the Miserable Messenger and why would we want to talk about such a fellow? Those questions deserve answers; those answers will lead us into an important study for every Christian. The Miserable Messenger is Jonah. Jonah 3:10—4:11 says:

*10 When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.*

*4:1 But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry.*

*2 He prayed to the LORD, "O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.*

*3 Now, O LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."*

*4 But the LORD replied, "Have you any right to be angry?"*

*5 Jonah went out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see*

*what would happen to the city.*

**6 Then the LORD God provided a vine and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the vine.**

**7 But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the vine so that it withered.**

**8 When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to die than to live."**

**9 But God said to Jonah, "Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?" "I do," he said. "I am angry enough to die."**

**10 But the LORD said, "You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight."**

**11 But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?" (NIV)**

Wow, he is not a happy camper! Now why would we want to talk about Jonah's lack of joy? We should talk about Jonah because too many of us who are Christians today suffer from that same lack of joy for some of the same reasons. Let's look at the roots of Jonah's unhappiness and take stock of our lives. It starts in chapter 1.

### **I. Jonah Knew but he didn't Do! 1:1-3**

**Jonah 1:1 The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: 2 "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me." 3 But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. (NIV)**

Jonah's anger can be traced back to his unwillingness to follow the Lord's commands. In fact, Jonah's story can be summarized with this simple outline: 1- Running From God; 2- Running Back to God; 3- Running With God; and 4- Running Ahead of God!

Jonah ran from God when he fled on the boat to Tarshish. He ran back to God in chapter 2 when, from the belly of the great fish, he agreed to obey. Then he ran with God in chapter 3 as he preached to Nineveh as God had instructed from the beginning. Now we find him in chapter 4 running AHEAD of God. He is eager for the destruction of this great city and its citizens. "Let the fire fall," is Jonah's plea. Jonah 4:5 says: **"Jonah went out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city." (NIV)**

Jonah lost his joy when he was a runaway prophet. What contentment can one find in the belly of the great fish? Moreover, even after finally going to Nineveh as God commanded, he could not be happy while he was the reluctant evangelist. Now Jonah in chapter 4 surely will not find joy in looking forward to his congregation burning under God's fire and brimstone!

Isn't it our refusal to cooperate with God that makes us miserable? Isn't it our fight against obedience to Jesus that steals our joy? In other words, crime doesn't pay and neither does disobedience bring peace or joy!

EG: In Louisiana a few years ago a man walked into a Circle-K, put a \$20 bill on the counter and asked for change. When the clerk opened the cash drawer, the man pulled a gun and asked for all the cash in the register, which the clerk promptly provided. The man took the cash from the clerk and fled, leaving the \$20 bill on the counter. The total amount cash he got from the drawer? Fifteen dollars. Was the thief happy? I think not. The point is: violating what we know is God's will DOES NOT BRING JOY! Jesus said it clearly when he said: "Blessed, or happy, are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled!" Cooperation with the Creator is the road to true happiness! Jonah knew but didn't do, and became a miserable messenger!

Is God calling you to an action you have refused to follow? Could that be the source of your lack of joy? Are you traveling away from Nineveh rather than toward it? Your journey to Tarshish will not be a pleasant trip. Even a Carnival cruise ship is an unhappy experience if you are sailing away from God's call!

### **II. Jonah had the Talk but not the Walk! 4:1-3**

**Jonah 4:1 But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. 2 He prayed to the LORD, "O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. 3 Now, O LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live." (NIV)**

Jonah could tell you all about the Word of the Lord. He could do so accurately and with eloquence. Look at verse 2. What a great sermon about the nature of our Creator! His sermon to the Ninevites was very successful as a communication. Look at what happened when he preached:

**Jonah 3:4 On the first day, Jonah started into the city. He proclaimed: "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned." 5 The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. 6 When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. (NIV)**

Jonah had the talk, but not the walk! He knew about God but had a long way to go until he really KNEW GOD! He knew God's Word but didn't walk in God's ways.

Like the Pharisees and too many of us, he knew the message but not the messenger, he knew the written word but hadn't submitted to the Living Word: Jesus said to the Pharisees in John 5:39 ***"You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me; 40 and you are unwilling to come to Me, that you may have life. (NAS)*** They knew the scriptures, but not the One who wrote the Scriptures! The Pharisees had the talk, but not the walk. Jonah had the talk, but not the walk! You can know the Book and still be miserable if you really don't know the Author!

There was once a Shakespearean actor who was known for his recitations from the classics. He would always end his performance with a dramatic reading of Psalm 23. Each night, without exception, as the actor began his recitation-"The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want"... the crowd would listen attentively. Then, at the conclusion of the Psalm, they would rise in thunderous applause in appreciation of the actor's incredible ability to bring the verse to life. But one night, just before the actor was to offer his customary recital of Psalm 23, a young man from the audience spoke up. "Sir, do you mind if, tonight, I recite Psalm 23?" The actor was quite taken back by this unusual request, but he allowed the young man to come forward and stand front and center on the stage to recite the Psalm, knowing that the ability of this unskilled youth would be no match for his own talent. With a soft voice, the young man began to recite the words of the Psalm. When he was finished, there was no applause. There was no standing ovation as on other nights. All that could be heard was the sound of weeping. The audience had been so moved by the young man's recitation that every eye was full of tears. Amazed by what he had heard, the actor said to the youth, "I don't understand. I have been performing Psalm 23 for years. I have a lifetime of experience and training, but I have never been able to move an audience as you have tonight. Tell me, what is your secret?"

The young man quietly replied, "Well sir, you know the Psalm...I know the Shepherd."

DO YOU KNOW THE SHEPHERD? MEMORIZE THE PSALM, YES, BUT DON'T FORGET TO SUBMIT TO THE SHEPHERD! Christians find true joy in knowing the Savior and becoming like Him. To know His Word and fail to know HIM only brings frustration and misery. Jonah demonstrates that! Study the Word? YES! That's how we come to know Jesus, but don't stop with the loving His Word, LEARN TO LOVE JESUS!

### **III. Jonah loved the Dying Gourd more than the Dying Horde! 4:3-11**

Jonah cared more for his own comfort than he did for the thousands of souls in Ninevah. And he was miserable. John the Apostle said in 3 Jn 1:4 ***"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth." (NIV)*** Jonah's spiritual children, the Ninevites, were walking in truth and repentance, yet he was ***"angry enough to die."*** V. 9

We Americans are showered – even spoiled – with creature comforts! Remember the last time you misplaced your TV or VCR remote and the whole family panicked? Well, at least Dad did! Yet, with all the amenities of the 'the good life' we remain unfulfilled, often bored, and anything but contented!

Who are the joyous? Are they not the self-sacrificing servants of Christ who care less for their own creature comforts than they do for the multitudes of lost souls. Jesus was talking about this when he said in Matt 5:9-12: ***"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. 10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the***

*kingdom of heaven. 11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (NIV)*

When Joe Garman was in Florida some years back for a seminar in Brookesville's Hernando Women's Prison, he went to visit Carol Herget, veteran missionary to Haiti. Carol and her husband, Jim, spent their entire married life on the mission field. Jim died and was buried in Haiti. Carol returned to America at age 82 and received the Atlanta Christian College Distinguished Service Award. Now she lies on her bed of suffering from the effects of cancer. This lady who had labored for Christ and taught over 6000 children told Joe this: "So many people have thanked me for sacrificing my life on the mission field. I have not sacrificed anything. It is not a sacrifice when you spend your life serving your Lord whom you love with all your heart. I chose to embark on the journey of life with Christ as my guide. That is no sacrifice." Do you hear the joy in that testimony? She loves her Lord, she loves those for whom He died and rose again, and she is full of hope and joy. No miserable messenger here. Rather, we see a blessed and joyful servant.

Do you want joy, real joy, wonderful joy? Let Jesus come into your Heart! Do his will, walk the walk, and love the ones for whom He died. You'll find joy when you say "Yes" to Jesus.

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**"Remain faithful unto death .." Rev. 2:10B**

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In 2010, 71 ABA Bible courses were mailed from ARM every day!**