

Jonah 4:1-11 (ESV)

Jonah's Anger and the Lord's Compassion

¹ But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. ² And he prayed to the LORD and said, “O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. ³ Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.” ⁴ And the LORD said, “Do you do well to be angry?”

⁵ Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city. ⁶ Now the LORD God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. ⁷ But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. ⁸ When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, “It is better for me to die than to live.” ⁹ But God said to Jonah, “Do you do well to be angry for the plant?” And he said, “Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die.” ¹⁰ And the LORD said, “You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. ¹¹ And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?”

Jonah 4:1-11 (HCSB)

Jonah's Anger

¹ But Jonah was greatly displeased and became furious. ² He prayed to the LORD: "Please, LORD, isn't this what I said while I was still in my own country? That's why I fled toward Tarshish in the first place. I knew that You are a merciful and compassionate God, slow to become angry, rich in faithful love, and One who relents from [sending] disaster. ³ And now, LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live."

⁴ The LORD asked, "Is it right for you to be angry?"

⁵ Jonah left the city and sat down east of it. He made himself a shelter there and sat in its shade to see what would happen to the city. ⁶ Then the LORD God appointed a plant, and it grew up to provide shade over Jonah's head to ease his discomfort. Jonah was greatly pleased with the plant. ⁷ When dawn came the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, and it withered.

⁸ As the sun was rising, God appointed a scorching east wind. The sun beat down so much on Jonah's head that he almost fainted, and he wanted to die. He said, "It's better for me to die than to live."

⁹ Then God asked Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" "[Yes,] he replied. "It is right. I'm angry enough to die!"

¹⁰ So the LORD said, "You cared about the plant, which you did not labor over and did not grow. It appeared in a night and perished in a night. ¹¹ Should I not care about the great city of Nineveh, which has more than 120,000 people who cannot distinguish between their right and their left, as well as many animals?"

4:1-4 *Jonah's Angry Prayer.* The sixth episode parallels the third ([1:17-2:10](#)) and focuses on Jonah's self-centeredness and hypocrisy. Both episodes have the same structure: (1) Jonah "prayed to the LORD" ([1:17-2:1a](#); [4:1-2a](#)); (2) Jonah's prayer ([2:1b-9](#); [4:2b-3](#)); and (3) "the LORD spoke/said" ([2:10](#); [4:4](#)).

4:1 **it displeased Jonah exceedingly** (cf. the ESV footnote, "it was exceedingly evil to Jonah"). In the previous episode (see [3:10](#)) the pagans got rid of their "evil" and God got rid of the "disaster" he had threatened (both Hb. *ra'ah*). The pagans are in harmony with God, but Jonah is not, as he alone is now characterized by "displeasure" (or "evil"; Hb. *ra'ah*).

4:2 This is Jonah's second prayer; the repetition of **prayed to the LORD** (see [2:1](#)) invites the reader to compare the two. **gracious God... relenting from disaster.** These same words occur in [Joel 2:13](#) as the basis for hope (see [Ex. 34:6-7](#); [Neh. 9:17](#); [Ps. 145:8](#)). Ironically, this standard confession of the compassionate character of God is the root of Jonah's anger. **Steadfast love**, when extended to Jonah, filled him with thanksgiving ([Jonah 2:8](#)), but when extended to the Ninevites, filled him with anger.

4:3 **My life** translates Hebrew *napshi* ("my soul"), and **to live** translates Hebrew *khayyay* ("my life"). These two expressions occur in Jonah's first prayer, where he is grateful that his "life" was brought up from the pit ([2:6](#)) and his fainting "life/soul" was revived ([2:7](#)). Ironically, when God extends the same mercy to the Ninevites, Jonah wishes his "life" and "soul" to be taken.

4:5-11 *Jonah's Lesson about Compassion.* The seventh and final episode has no parallel and thus stands out as the climax of the story.

4:5 **Jonah went out... till he should see.** Apparently, Jonah hopes that God still will not relent but will destroy the city after all. **sat under it in the shade.** Jonah is hot—both emotionally (i.e., angry) and physically.

4:6 **the LORD God appointed.** This is the second use of the verb "appoint" (see [1:17](#)). The kind of **plant** appointed is not known; the term (Hb. *qiqayon*) occurs nowhere else in the Bible, but a castor oil plant or a gourd plant, both of which have large leaves, are the most common suggestions. **Discomfort** (or "evil," Hb. *ra'ah*; see ESV footnote and note on [1:2](#)), refers both to Jonah's outer "discomfort" and to his inner "evil." **Jonah was exceedingly glad.** The grammar of this phrase is identical to that at the beginning of [4:1](#) ("It displeased Jonah exceedingly") and underscores the contrast between Jonah's anger at the salvation of the Ninevites and his joy at his own salvation.

4:7-8 **God appointed a worm... God appointed a scorching east wind.** These are the third and fourth uses of the verb "appoint" (see note on [v. 6](#)). The "east wind" is a drying wind from the desert.

4:9 **angry for the plant.** As God had questioned the justice of Jonah's anger over the salvation of the Ninevites ([v. 4](#)), he now questions the justice of Jonah's anger over the destruction of the plant.

1. Lane T. Dennis, ed., *ESV Study Bible, The: English Standard Version*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Bibles, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Jonah 4".

4:10-11 perished. Finally Jonah expresses concern over something perishing (see note on [3:9](#)), but ironically it is a plant, not the **120,000** people **who do not know their right hand from their left**, an idiom for being morally and spiritually unaware, that probably refers to the entire population. Jonah's compassion for the plant explains the rather odd expression that translates the final words in the Hebrew text, **and also much cattle**. The ironic question raised by these words is: If Jonah will not allow God to have compassion on Nineveh for the sake of the 120,000 people whom God created and cares for, will Jonah not allow God to have compassion on Nineveh for the sake of the animals, since after all, Jonah was willing to have compassion on a plant? The question is left unanswered so that the readers of the book may answer it for themselves.

Holman Christian Standard Bible - Study Bible²
Jonah 4:1-11

4:1-2 The unexpected and overwhelming success of Jonah's preaching resulted in Nineveh's escape from calamity. However, this brought emotional calamity to the angry and self-pitying prophet, who wished he were dead. Jonah had initially fled from preaching to Nineveh because he feared that God, being excessively merciful and compassionate (see [Ex 34:6-7](#)), would find some lame excuse to forgive these pagan, warlike Gentiles. Now his fears had come true.

ra'ah

<i>Hebrew Pronunciation</i>	[rah AH]
<i>HCSB Translation</i>	evil, disaster, trouble
<i>Uses in Jonah</i>	9
<i>Uses in the OT</i>	354
<i>Focus passage</i>	Jonah 4:1-2,6

Feminine *ra'ah*, related to *ra'a'* (*be evil*), signifies *evil* ([Jer 2:13](#)), *disaster* ([Dt 31:29](#)), or *trouble* ([Neh 2:17](#)). Masculine *ra'*, either as noun or adjective (299x), has similar meanings. Feminine forms of adjectival *ra'* match *ra'ah*, so it is hard to differentiate them. *Ra'ah* more often means *disaster*; *ra'* more frequently concerns physical maladies. These words involve negatives, with the sense clarified by context.

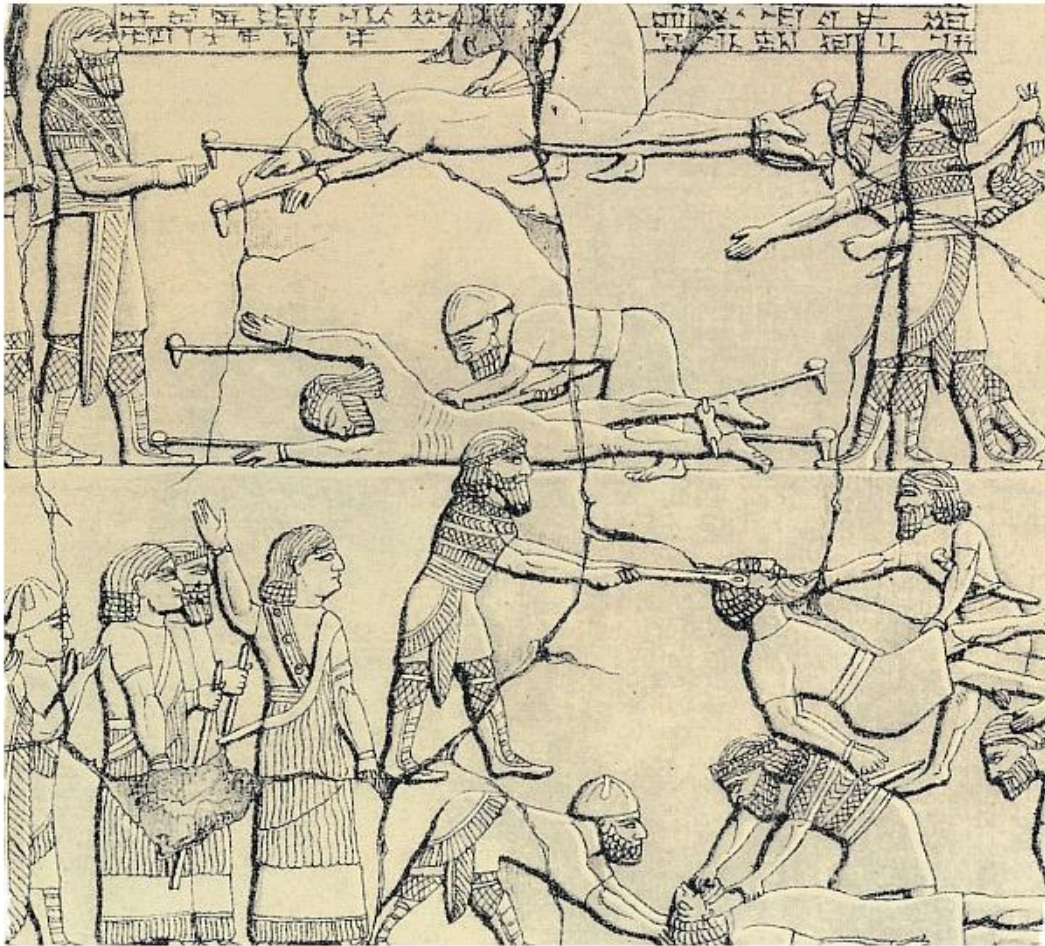
4:3-4 Take my life echoes the words of the prophet Elijah ([1Ki 19:4](#)), who despaired over the failure of his mission, just as Jonah despaired over the success of his.

4:5-8 Another factor behind Jonah's death wish was the blisteringly hot weather and the dry east wind, making him extremely uncomfortable as he sat watching to see what God would do to Nineveh. He was also upset over the withering of a plant (Hb *qiqayon*; perhaps a castor-oil plant or a climbing gourd) that had sprung up to give him temporary relief from the sun.

4:9-11 God used Jonah's emotional reaction to the death of the plant as an object lesson to rebuke him for being more concerned about a plant than the destruction of 120,000 people who could not distinguish between their right and their left. This probably does not mean there were 120,000 small children in

2. Jeremy Royal Howard, ed., *HCSB Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Jonah 4".

Nineveh, but rather that the people themselves were immature and uninformed morally and spiritually. God took their immaturity into consideration in His judgment. As well as many animals was a final rebuke. If Jonah could not feel compassion for Gentile people, he should at least feel sorry for the hungry livestock that were bellowing their misery (see [3:7-8](#)). The book ends without telling us whether Jonah responded positively to the Lord's closing reprimand.



A relief from the palace of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh shows Assyrian soldiers subjecting captives to a series of tortures. In spite of the ruthlessness of the Assyrians, God sent His servant Jonah to offer them mercy ([4:11](#)).

NLT Life Application Study Bible³

Jonah 4:1-11

4:1 Why did Jonah become angry when God spared Nineveh? The Jews did not want to share God's message with Gentile nations in Jonah's day, just as they resisted that role in Paul's day ([1 Thessalonians 2:14-16](#)). They had forgotten their original purpose as a nation—to be a blessing to the rest of the world by sharing God's message with other nations ([Genesis 22:18](#)). Jonah thought that God should not freely give his salvation to a wicked pagan nation. Yet this is exactly what God does for all who come to him today in faith.

3. *Life Application Study Bible*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1988), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Chapter 4".

4:1, 2 Jonah revealed the reason for his reluctance to go to Nineveh (**1:3**). He didn't want the Ninevites forgiven; he wanted them destroyed. Jonah did not understand that the God of Israel was also the God of the whole world. Are you surprised when some unlikely person turns to God? Is it possible that your view is as narrow as Jonah's? We must not forget that, in reality, *we* do not deserve to be forgiven by God.

4:3 Jonah had run from the job of delivering God's message of destruction to Nineveh (**1:2, 3**); then he wanted to die because the destruction wouldn't happen. How quickly Jonah had forgotten God's mercy for him when he was inside the fish (**2:9, 10**). Jonah was happy when God saved him, but he was angry when Nineveh was saved. Jonah was learning a valuable lesson about God's mercy and forgiveness. God's forgiveness was not only for Jonah or for Israel alone; it extends to all who repent and believe.

4:3 Jonah may have been more concerned about his own reputation than God's. He knew that if the people repented, none of his warnings to Nineveh would come true. This would embarrass him, although it would give glory to God. Are you more interested in getting glory for God or for yourself?

4:5-11 God ministered tenderly to Jonah just as he had done to Nineveh and to Israel—and just as he does to us. God could have destroyed Jonah for his defiant anger, but instead he gently taught him a lesson. If we will obey God, he will lead us. His harsh judgment is reserved for those who persist in rebellion.

4:9 Jonah was angry at the withering of the plant, but not over what could have happened to Nineveh. Most of us have cried at the death of a pet or when an object with sentimental value is broken, but have we cried over the fact that a friend does not know God? How easy it is to be more sensitive to our own interests than to the spiritual needs of people around us.

4:10, 11 Sometimes people wish that judgment and destruction would come upon sinful people whose wickedness seems to demand immediate punishment. But God is more merciful than we can imagine. God feels compassion for the sinners we want judged, and he devises plans to bring them to himself. What is your attitude toward those who are especially wicked? Do you want them destroyed? Or do you wish that they could experience God's mercy and forgiveness?

4:11 God spared the sailors when they pleaded for mercy. God saved Jonah when he prayed from inside the fish. God saved the people of Nineveh when they responded to Jonah's preaching. God answers the prayers of those who call upon him. God will always work his will, and he desires that all come to him, trust in him, and be saved. We can be saved if we heed God's warnings to us through his Word. If we respond in obedience, God will be gracious, and we will receive his mercy, not his punishment.

Study and Discussion Questions

***Questions for Ch 3 & 4*



Jonah Fulfills His Mission - [Jonah 3:1-4:11](#)

Topics: [Anger](#), [Attitude](#), [Believe](#), [Compassion](#), [Consequences](#), [Fasting](#), [Forgiveness](#), [God](#), [Instructions](#), [Judging Others](#), [Love](#), [Obedience](#), [People](#), [Prayer](#), [Protection](#), [Questions](#), [Repentance](#), [Resentment](#)

Open It

1. If you were offered a trip to the city of your choice anywhere in the world, what city would you choose? Why?
2. *When things don't go your way, how do you tend to respond?
3. What most easily moves you to compassion?

Explore It

4. What did God command Jonah to do? ([3:1-2](#))
5. How did Jonah respond to God's instructions? ([3:3](#))
6. What did Jonah tell the Ninevites? ([3:4](#))
7. How did the people respond to Jonah's message? ([3:5](#))
8. What did the king do? ([3:6](#))
9. What did the king decree? ([3:7-9](#))
10. What action did God take? ([3:10](#))
11. *How did Jonah respond to God's goodness to the Ninevites? ([4:1](#))
12. *What was the attitude of Jonah's prayer? ([4:2-3](#))
13. What did God say to Jonah? ([4:4](#))
14. What did the distraught prophet do? ([4:5](#))
15. How did God deal with Jonah? ([4:6-11](#))
16. *What did God want Jonah to understand? ([4:9-11](#))

Get It

17. When have you experienced a surprising, undeserved measure of God's mercy in your life?
18. Why do you think that fasting might be a useful part of repentance?
19. In your view, which culture, nation, or special interest group is undeserving of God's mercy?
20. *God was very gracious to Jonah, a pouting, reactive type. How does God deal with your prickly side?
21. How does the story of Jonah affect your view of cross-cultural ministry?
22. *Jonah wanted Nineveh, Israel's enemy, destroyed. When have you wanted revenge rather than restoration in a relationship?
23. What hard lesson have you had to learn from God?

Apply It

24. *What is one way you can extend God's love and mercy toward others, particularly those who don't deserve it?
25. How can you express thanks to the Lord this week for all the love and mercy He has given to you and others?