

A Rebellious People Receive Mercy

Summary and Goal

The covenant that God made with Abraham had the nations in mind, not just Israel (Gen. 12:3). The story of the prophet Jonah reveals the heartbeat of God for rebellious people, both those within the nation of Israel, who had received His law and promises, and also those who had not heard of Him and were engaged in idolatry and great evil. God pursues the hearts of people from all tribes, tongues, and nations, and He delights to use His people—His sinful, rebellious, yet redeemed people—to do it. In His perfect will, God uses former rebels to pursue present rebels.

Session Outline

1. God pursues a rebellious people and prophet (Jonah 1:1-4,17).
2. God extends mercy to a rebellious people and prophet (Jonah 2:10–3:5,10).
3. God reveals His patient love for a rebellious people and prophet (Jonah 4:1,8-11).

Background Passage: Jonah

Session in a Sentence

God's love and mercy extend to all people and are expressed through His sending of messengers to proclaim forgiveness and life through Him.

Christ Connection

Jonah was a prophet who rejected God's call, ran from his enemies, and eventually obeyed grudgingly. Jesus followed God's call, loved His enemies, and obeyed joyfully (Heb. 12:2). While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Missional Application

Because we were enemies who received God's grace and mercy, we break down walls and put to death our prejudices as we share the news that forgiveness is available through repentance and faith in Christ.

Group Time

GROUP MEMBER CONTENT

Group content found in the Daily Discipleship Guide is included in this shaded area throughout the session.

Introduction

EXPLAIN: Use the paragraphs in the DDG (p. 48), and the leader content below, to raise the subject of miracles and their plausibility, emphasizing the greatest miracle of God's mercy on sinners.

Perhaps you have heard the story about a man being swallowed up by a big fish and living to tell the tale. Immediately this conjures up thoughts of fables and campfire stories. So, what are we to make of this story? Is the Book of Jonah just a fairy tale with a good moral, or is it more? Can we really believe in extraordinary stories like this?

- Do we really believe that God sent a storm upon a boat and that the sailors were so desperate they tossed a man into the sea to stop it?
- Is it truly plausible that a giant fish came by at just the right time and swallowed this man up but somehow didn't bite him or kill him with stomach acid? And three days later spat him out on a beach?

Well, do we believe in miracles? Because the most miraculous part of Jonah's story isn't the fact that a large fish swallowed him and he somehow lived. The part that should overwhelm us with awe, wonder, and shock is where a great and holy God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, has mercy on sinners. Jonah, the sailors, and the Ninevites—these were people God pursued, and God is intent on working in the hearts of rebels just like them and turning them into worshipers.

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.



Why should God's mercy on sinners qualify as a miracle? (the natural order of things would mean sinners deserve God's judgment of death and hell; only God can justify His decision to show mercy to those who are unworthy of it; it should result in praise and worship for God's honor)

SUMMARIZE: The covenant that God made with Abraham had the nations in mind, not just Israel (Gen. 12:3). The story of the prophet Jonah reveals the heartbeat of God for rebellious people, both those within the nation of Israel, who had received His law and promises, and also those who had not heard of Him and were engaged in idolatry and great evil. God pursues the hearts of people from all tribes, tongues, and nations, and He delights to use His people—His sinful, rebellious, yet redeemed people—to do it. In His perfect will, God uses former rebels to pursue present rebels.

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Point 1: God pursues a rebellious people and prophet (Jonah 1:1-4,17).

READ Jonah 1:1-4,17 (DDG p. 49).

¹ Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, ² “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.” ³ But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD.

⁴ But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up.

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¹⁷ And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

EXPLAIN: Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 49) to help compare and contrast *the Ninevites* and *Jonah*, showing that Jonah’s unwillingness to obey God’s command revealed himself to be a sinner like the Ninevites.

When the word of God came to Jonah to preach a message to Nineveh, he ran. This command of God came to his ears and his heart’s response was rebellion. What this revealed about Jonah was that he, like every Ninevite, was a sinner. His status as an Israelite, his calling as a prophet, his previous acts of obedience—none of these things made it easy for him to obey this command. He would rather leave his home and sail for the ends of the earth than obey God in this.

- *The Ninevites:* Nineveh was a prominent city in Assyria. This nation never had the Mosaic law, the prophets, or any covenants from God given to them, so their disobedience, in some sense, was in ignorance (they were not wholly ignorant since God has made Himself known to His creation; see Rom. 1:18-25). Yet God was aware of their evil and set to judge them for it. They were sinners in need of a Savior.
- *Jonah:* As an Israelite, Jonah knew the God who had created the heavens and the earth. He knew about God’s holiness and His promises to His people. But nothing of what he knew—his precious theology that he carried in his mind—was enough to give him a heart that would trust and obey this command of God. Jonah too was a sinner and in need of a Savior.
- Just as the Ninevites’ past ignorance of God’s laws didn’t exempt them from God’s present standard of righteousness, all of Jonah’s past obedience didn’t exempt him from God’s command for present obedience. When it comes to rebelling against God, both Jonah and the Ninevites were guilty, and accordingly, both needed the pursuit of God’s grace.

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.



What are some reasons God's commands may cause us to run and hide from His presence? (they challenge our pride; they call us out of our comfort zone; they may require us to show love to our enemies; we don't trust God; they prohibit what we desire; they highlight our sinfulness)

EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 49) to identify the cause of Jonah's fear, which was not God's judgment but rather His mercy to the Ninevites. Then *apply* Jonah's desire to run and its consequences to the ways we might justify our disobedience and God's loving pursuit and discipline of His wayward children.

Jonah had faithfully served God as a prophet in Israel (2 Kings 14:25). But suddenly, God's message came and Jonah's immediate response was to run from God's presence, and not for the reason we might think. Jonah feared going to Nineveh, but it wasn't for his own life or the possibility that no one would repent in response to his preaching. His fear was tied to believing that God could actually spare such evil people (Jonah 4:1-2).

- Nineveh was known for its vicious and violent ways against any who would oppose them, and they had already oppressed the Israelites in war and in tribute payments.¹ To obey God's will in this situation would not only have been dangerous to Jonah's well-being but to his reputation as a prophet of Israel as well. What would the Israelites say if Jonah went to extend grace to these enemies?

Application: Every Christian, whether having recently come to the faith or faithfully walked with Jesus for decades, will likely encounter something sooner or later in God's Word that will cause him or her to run rather than obey. We may be able to point to many of God's commands that we are wholeheartedly willing to obey and perhaps have for many years, but God's ways are not our ways and His thoughts are higher than our thoughts (Isa. 55:8-9), and eventually, we too will come face to face with a command of God that we will find objectionable or scary. Like Jonah, we don't disobey God without reason; we will likely have lots of excuses and justifications for why we can't obey. But disobedience with "a good reason" is still disobedience.

Because God's love for you is like God's love for Jonah, He will not leave you in your disobedience. When it comes to disobedience and our running away from God's presence, the biggest thing we ought to fear is not a great storm but a calm and peaceful sea. As long as there is a storm raging to bring us back to obedience and back to God's presence, there is hope in the midst of our rebellion. The discipline of Jonah continued until he confessed his sin and committed to obey the difficult command of God (Jonah 2:1-9).

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.



What must be true about God to pursue those who rebel against Him for reconciliation and obedience? (He is love; He is gracious and kind; He is willing to forgive; He hates sin; He desires to use sinners to accomplish His will; He is patient; He desires peace between Himself and humanity; He has a plan to atone for the sins of sinners and to satisfy His wrath and judgment against sin)

Point 2: God extends mercy to a rebellious people and prophet (Jonah 2:10–3:5,10).

READ Jonah 2:10–3:5,10 (DDG p. 50).

^{2:10} And the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.

^{3:1} Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, ² “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.” ³ So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days’ journey in breadth. ⁴ Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s journey. And he called out, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” ⁵ And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.

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¹⁰ When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.


EXPLAIN: Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 50) to emphasize that God showed mercy to Jonah in releasing him from the fish and also in calling him to obey a second time. Then *apply* these truths to your group.

God’s forgiveness and mercy do not diminish His call to obedience. When God once again spoke to Jonah, after responding in mercy to his prayer, His command was the same: Get up, go to Nineveh, and preach. In God’s mercy, He doesn’t lower the standard for our obedience. He doesn’t lower the bar, thinking, “Oh, maybe what I’m asking is too much.” God’s mercy won’t allow His children to miss out on the joy of fully obeying His Word.

- Jonah’s disobedience and rebellion against God did not disqualify him from ministry. In fact, repenting and experiencing forgiveness and mercy from God had further equipped him *for* this ministry. God and His command had not changed, but Jonah, however, had to change. He had to acknowledge and confess his sin, turn away from his rebellion, and obey God’s command.
- Our God is a God of second chances. One of the greatest truths demonstrated throughout the Bible is that God hates sin, yes, but He also loves to forgive. He delights to show mercy to people in need of it.

Application: We will all experience times when we run for Tarshish instead of choosing to obey. We may look at our past sins and failures and wonder how God could use sinners like us. But our righteousness was never our qualification to join God in His ministry. The forgiveness and mercy offered through the work of Christ is what ultimately qualifies us for ministry. When God commands something of you, He knows the redeemed sinner whom He has called. He will not change or alter His requirements to accommodate you in your disobedience. Instead, in His mercy, He’ll offer a second chance, a third chance, a fourth, and however many times it takes. He will relentlessly extend the mercy of another chance, and by the work of His Spirit, He will change *you* so that you will trust and obey Him.

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

 Why might obedience to God often feel like an option or a chore rather than a joy? (we struggle to trust the God who calls and commands us; our sinful nature still competes with our new spiritual nature; we idolize ourselves in our hearts; we have unconfessed sin; one is unsaved)

EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 50) to explain two critical components of Jonah's message to Nineveh: **1) judgment was coming** and **2) there was time to repent**.

The sermon delivered by Jonah was short, only five words in Hebrew. Yet at this simple message, this entire city of Nineveh repented. Even the king stepped down from his throne, removed his robe, and repented (3:6-9). While the words were few, two critical components were clear: **1) judgment was coming** and **2) there was time to repent**. God hates sin and seeks to destroy it, and at the same time, He loves sinners and seeks to reconcile them to Himself. He is slow to anger and quick to forgive; He is merciful.

- **1) Judgment Was Coming:** God had seen the depth of Nineveh's wickedness and He would no longer bear it. Judgment would come. The justice of God demands that sin be punished.
 - **2) There Was Time to Repent:** Jonah proclaimed a forty-day period before judgment would come. This seemed to imply to the Ninevites that there might be time to repent, and they were correct. Though the city deserved immediate destruction, God revealed that He's not only just but also merciful and forgiving.
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FILL IN THE BLANKS: Provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 50).

God Is Merciful: Mercy refers to God's **compassion** and is often expressed in God withholding something, such as punishment for sin. Both mercy and grace are **undeserved**.

Essential Doctrine "God Is Merciful": Mercy refers to God's **compassion** and is often expressed in God withholding something, such as punishment for sin (Eph. 2:4-5; Titus 3:5). Both mercy and grace are **undeserved**, meaning humanity can do nothing to earn God's mercy and grace. If one could, then it would no longer be the free gift of mercy or grace.

SAY: We too have been told that judgment is coming to this world. Yet God is patiently providing these days that people might hear the gospel, repent, and trust in Jesus to rescue them (2 Pet. 3:8-11). God, through Jonah, was ultimately pointing to this gospel reality. Jonah's sermon proclaimed the justice and the mercy of God. Jesus on the cross fulfilled God's justice and mercy for sinners. "Something greater than Jonah is here" (Matt. 12:41).

Point 3: God reveals His patient love for a rebellious people and prophet (Jonah 4:1,8-11).

SAY: Jonah was not a one-dimensional fictional character who teaches us one lesson. He was altogether real, and through his story, God is showing us the extent to which our hardness of heart will go and, greater still, the extent to which He will go in His patience and love for His children.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read Jonah 4:1,8-11 (DDG p. 51).

¹ But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry.

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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?”

EXPLAIN: Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 51) to show that God patiently pursues the areas of His people’s hearts where they do not match up with His own. Fill in the backstory about the plant.

When God saw Nineveh’s repentance, He relented from His anger; when Jonah saw this same result, he was greatly displeased and furious. We were created for God’s glory, and our hearts were designed to align with His heart. When our hearts are out of sync with His, when we don’t love what God loves and hate what He hates, we often become angry, bitter, or depressed. But rather than becoming greatly displeased and furious at Jonah’s response, God instead continued His patient work of pursuing Jonah’s heart.

Voices from the Church

“God’s too big for us to control. You can’t pick and choose which of God’s attributes you want to see displayed and when and where you want to experience them.”²

—Priscilla Shirer

- God appointed a plant to grow to shield Jonah from the heat of the sun, and then the next day, God appointed a worm to eat the plant so that it died, leaving Jonah exposed to the sun (4:5-7). In all this careful work, God was exposing the misalignment of Jonah’s priorities with His own. God wanted Jonah to see the sinful condition of his heart—complaining about a plant he didn’t labor for—so he could have the opportunity to repent of his unloving heart for a people whom God had created.

Commentary: God was not just using Jonah to accomplish this task for Him—He was after Jonah’s heart. We may be tempted to believe that God is just out to use us and that’s what His commands are all about. But if He were just using Jonah, why waste more time on a disgruntled worker when the work had been done? The command to preach to Nineveh not only demonstrated God’s heart for Nineveh but also that God knew in His wisdom that it was the perfect command to address Jonah’s heart. So when Jonah was done with the Ninevites, God was just getting started on Jonah.

PACK ITEM 6: GOD CARES: Use this poster and the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 51) to recap all the ways God sovereignly worked to pursue the heart of Jonah.

The astonishing thing throughout the Book of Jonah is that *all of creation, except Jonah, was fully submitting to God’s word*. All of creation was available to God as He loved, disciplined, and pursued the heart of Jonah. This is no less true today. God uses all necessary means to bring people to the foot of the cross and align our hearts with His heart. He continues to work sovereignly and lovingly as He carries out His perfect plan of sanctifying and glorifying a people for Himself.

- God sovereignly wielded various pieces of creation in His work on Jonah’s heart. When he fled for Tarshish, God hurled a storm upon the sea that tossed the ship so that it could no longer sail. When lots were cast to determine who was guilty, the decision belonged to the Lord, and Jonah’s disobedience was exposed. Sinking in the ocean, God appointed a fish to swim over to Jonah and swallow him. He wasn’t chewed or digested but remained alive for three days and nights until God commanded the fish to vomit him on a beach. In Jonah’s anger, God raised up a plant to provide him shade, and within a day, He appointed a worm to kill the plant.
 - Every element of this world is available to God and at His disposal as He works out His will in the lives of His people—whether storms and winds or traffic jams and airport delays or sicknesses and tragedies. But chiefly, God works through His people empowered by His Spirit with the message of His Word about His Son to convert sinners and conform saints to the image of Jesus, the better Jonah.
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INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.



How should Christians view the opportunities they have to share the gospel with unbelievers and encourage believers in the faith?
(as divinely appointed encounters; as opportunities to obey with joy; as opportunities to grow in the faith and in love; as a means of God to make us more like Christ)

My Mission

EXPLAIN: The story of Jonah ends abruptly with God posing a question, yet no answer is recorded. But that seems to be the whole point of the ending. It forces us to contemplate our own personal response. It carries no conclusion because it beckons us to write the ending: *We are Jonah*. In this true story, we see that we are the rebellious people God has called in this world to obey His commands. We are the people in need of God's great grace to once again turn our hearts to His gospel and have our hearts aligned with His. We are the ones who have been called to show mercy as it has been extended to us. We are the people of God who have been charged to cross the borders of our lands and enter into foreign territories, cultures, and languages with the message that God will judge the world and yet there is time now to repent and believe in Christ.

READ the following missional application statement in the DDG (p. 52), and encourage group members to choose at least one of the options below as a way to respond to the truth of God's Word.

Because we were enemies who received God's grace and mercy, we break down walls and put to death our prejudices as we share the news that forgiveness is available through repentance and faith in Christ.

- **How will you respond to God's work in your life to align your heart and priorities with God's?**
- **In what ways can your group reflect God's mercy for sinners in your community?**
- **To whom will you go in mercy, joy, and obedience to share the good news of Jesus, the better Jonah?**



Voices from Church History

"Let us sow in tears, so that we may reap in joy ... Let us amend our wickedness, lest we be consumed with it."³

—Gregory of Nazianzus
(c. 329-390)

CLOSE IN PRAYER: Father, You are a merciful and gracious God. For this reason, we should confidently proclaim the message of how sinners can find mercy through Your Son, Jesus. Forgive us when our stubborn hearts impede us from taking the gospel to all people. Thank You for breaking down the barriers that enabled the gospel to come to us. Amen.

INSTRUCT: As your group departs, encourage group members to read and respond to the **Daily Study** devotions in their DDG (pp. 53-55), which build and expand upon the group study. Also advocate for small groups or families to use **Encourage One Another** (p. 56) for mutual accountability and fellowship grounded upon the foundation of God's Word.

PACK ITEM 7: THE BETTER JONAH: Pass out copies of this handout to group members to help them see the ways Jonah points to Jesus as the better Jonah as they read the **Daily Study** Scriptures this week.

Daily Discipleship

Throughout the week following the session, use the ideas below to remind and encourage your group members to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. The **Daily Study** devotions in the DDG (pp. 53-55) will help group members get into God's Word and study it for themselves. **Encourage One Another** (p. 56) will help group members and families fellowship with one another with purpose.

Daily Study

Brief daily devotions in the DDG (pp. 53-55) will help group members take initiative in their own discipleship.

- Make sure all group members have access to a Bible to read. Have some Bibles available to give to guests who may need one, or offer to get one and arrange a time to meet to give it and show how to navigate it for the devotions.
- Share the following idea from the devotion for **Day 4** as a part of point 3 in the session: **We aren't disobedient because of uncertainty. Instead, we disobey because our hearts do not love God completely; we don't love the things that He loves.**



Consider leading by example and reading the daily devotions yourself with your own DDG. Based on your study, use brief messages throughout the week (group text, email, social media) to encourage your group to keep up with their daily time in God's Word and to live it out. Here are a couple of examples you can use:

- **Day 1:** "Jonah took the opportunity to turn his back on God and His word, but God was not going to turn His back on Jonah."
- **Day 5:** "God used Jonah to spare one city, but Jesus came to save people from every tongue, tribe, and nation."



Visit www.GospelProject.com/Blog for additional content and resources you can use to help group members gain more insight into their daily studies. Send group members a link or a portion of a blog post or other content that you believe will be helpful and encouraging for their time in God's Word.

Encourage One Another

This brief plan for fellowship and accountability in the group member's DDG (p. 56) will help groups of 2-4 people to meet sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and they are responding. It could also be used for family discipleship with students and children who are using *The Gospel Project* in their groups.

- **Encourage group members to challenge one another to consider their prejudices when it comes to those with whom they desire to share the gospel.**
- See yourself as a member of the group who also needs encouragement in the faith, and participate in such a group this week.

Additional Commentary

Point 1: God pursues a rebellious people and prophet (Jonah 1:1-4,17).

“As a prophet, Jonah had the great privilege and responsibility of receiving *the word of the LORD* (1:1), that is, a message from God communicating what he wants done. God commanded Jonah to go and preach in Nineveh, against Nineveh (1:2a). This great city hundreds of miles north-east of Israel was the capital of the rich and powerful nation of Assyria . . . The reason Jonah was to *preach against* the Assyrian kingdom was that God had observed *its wickedness* (1:2b). We are not told what exactly the Ninevites were doing, but in the OT the term ‘wickedness’ refers to a wide range of sins including immorality, witchcraft, corruption, injustice and violation of human rights. We can get some idea of what was going on by reading the prophet Nahum’s description of Nineveh (Nah. 1:9,11; 3:1-7). The Assyrians did not worship the God of Israel, yet he still judged their behavior. As the creator and righteous judge, he cannot ignore atrocities and the suffering of innocent victims. All oppressors should be reminded of this. But God does not enjoy punishing people, and so he seeks to give people like the Ninevites an opportunity to repent.”⁴

“Jonah’s disobedience has consequences for others. The sailors suffer, the cargo owners suffer, even the inanimate ship suffers (she is personified as ‘reckoning herself to be broken into pieces,’ **Jonah 1:4**, author’s translation). Yet lest we despair, we should note that through Jonah’s flight the sailors are brought to true fear of Yahweh. There is nothing God cannot redeem. And in Jonah 1:16 we get our first intimation that outsiders might be insiders, that pagan sailors may worship more genuinely than Jonah. And even for Jonah, author of their misfortune, there is hope . . . The self-absorbed subject becomes an object. But behind the sailors and the fish is an even bigger subject who is at last free to act directly. It may not yet be apparent, but a turning point has been reached.”⁵

Point 2: God extends mercy to a rebellious people and prophet (Jonah 2:10–3:5,10).

“When we turn from our sins, God is always ready to start again with us. Thus 3:2 repeats 1:2: *Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it*. The message remained the same to underline God’s unchanging character and the transformation in Jonah. But whereas in 1:3 Jonah refused to obey, this time, having experienced the omniscience and mercy of God, he *obeyed the word of the Lord* and set out for Nineveh (3:3a). Nineveh is said to have been a very large city (3:3b). Jonah’s message to the Ninevites was not simply that punishment was coming because of their sinfulness, but also that a forty-day period of grace would give them time to repent (3:4). The result was immediate. Led by the king, all the people decided to turn from their sin and ask God’s forgiveness. They demonstrated the sincerity of their faith by ceasing all normal activities and fasting and praying to God. They dressed in sackcloth, as if they were mourners (3:5-8).”⁶

“The word ‘wicked’ occurs twice in Jonah 3:10, the first is translated ‘evil’ and second, ‘disaster.’ God saw the actions of the people of Nineveh. While the ritual acts of fasting, wearing sackcloth, and praying constituted external actions, the people’s turning from their ‘evil’ ways indicated true repentance. In response, God decided not to send the ‘disaster’ He had planned to send. Jonah 3:10 clearly shows the close relationship between the various translations of ‘wicked.’ As humans we believe and hope that evil, immoral, unjust behavior leads to or should lead to disastrous consequences. Even last-minute repentance on the part of the people of Nineveh should not have excused their previous decades of evil. Punishment should have come, repentance or not. God works, however, beyond human understanding and limitations.”⁷

“**evil ... disaster.** Both terms translate Hebrew *ra’ah*. The use of the same word underscores the close connection between human action and divine response. God did not carry out the threatened disaster because the Ninevites repented of their evil. From a temporal perspective, God responds to human action; from an eternal perspective, God chooses the means (human repenting) as well as the end (divine relenting). The repentance of Gentiles contrasts with the repeated lack of repentance on the part of Israel.”⁸

Point 3: God reveals His patient love for a rebellious people and prophet (Jonah 4:1,8-11).

“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 **gracious and compassionate** (see Ex. 34:6-7), would find some lame excuse to forgive these pagan, warlike Gentiles. Now his fears had come true . . . 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 **a hundred and twenty thousand people** who could not **distinguish between their right and their left**. This probably does not mean there were a hundred and twenty thousand small children in 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.”⁹

References

1. Daniel C. Browning Jr., “Assyria,” in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, gen. eds. Chad Brand, Charles Draper, Archie England (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2009) [Wordsearch].
2. Priscilla Shirer, *Jonah: Navigating a Life Interrupted* (Nashville, TN: LifeWay Press, 2010), 132.
3. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration*, 16.14, quoted in *The Twelve Prophets*, ed. Alberto Ferreiro, vol. XIV in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament* (IVP, 2001) [Wordsearch].
4. Jesudason Baskar Jeyaraj, “Jonah,” in *South Asia Bible Commentary*, gen. ed. Brian Wintle (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 1157.
5. Elizabeth A. Harper, “Jonah,” in *The IVP Women’s Bible Commentary*, eds. Catherine Clark Kroeger, Mary J. Evans, and Elizabeth Kroeger Elliott (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2011) [Wordsearch].
6. Cossi Augustin Ahoga, “Jonah,” in *Africa Bible Commentary*, gen. ed. Tokunboh Adeyemo (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 1073.
7. Robert C. Dunston, “‘Wicked’ in the Book of Jonah,” *Biblical Illustrator* (Winter 2012-13): 20.
8. Mark D. Futato, “Jonah,” in *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 1690, n. 3:10.
9. Joe Sprinkle, “Jonah,” in *CSB Study Bible* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2017), 1404-1405, n. 4:1-2; n. 4:9-11.