

JONAH

THE RELUCTANT PROPHET

STUDY SEVEN

The Grumbings of an Angry Prophet

Jonah 3:10–4:5

Our desire is that the Lord would open our eyes to see what is written, what was meant to those to whom it was written, and what it means to us who live centuries later.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

You know when you're in the presence of a mature person—one who stands strong like a deep-rooted tree during a hurricane. In fact, often, it's the winds of inconvenience or storms of disappointment that reveal a person's maturity . . . or lack thereof.

When little Jimmy or Susie throws a temper tantrum, we understand; they're children. But how pitiful it is to see adult James or grown-up Susan whine and stamp their feet when they don't get their way. Sadly, it's that very reaction we see in Jonah. Adult Jonah became pouting Jonah when life didn't go as he wanted it to go. Simply put: he was a man disappointed with God, and he let God know it! Jonah bellyached like a four-year-old when he saw the Ninevites repent and avoid destruction.

But no matter how much we grumble or pout, we all must endure disappointments, even trials. It's the Bible's *promise*. Yet, God does not leave us in the chains of ruin. The God of free redemption promises to strengthen us and teach us wisdom during tough times—whether our disappointments result from our own selfishness or from the pains of this world.

Until the day of restoration when Jesus returns, we do well to heed what God says about how to respond to life's disappointments. So, in this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we examine the fourth chapter of Jonah to glean divine wisdom and encouragement for responding to life's trials, not as a spoiled child but as a child of the living God.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Take a moment to internalize Pastor Chuck's prayer below.

Father, thank You for bringing me to the end of myself. I acknowledge the fact that I am by nature a sinful and selfish person. I want what I want when I want it. And when it doesn't come, I lash out and fight back. I know peace and relief are available, but they're only found at the cross where light replaces darkness, and life replaces death, and peace replaces chaos, and hope replaces desperation. Thank You for all of those benefits which we find in Christ. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Now write your own prayer expressing your need for the Spirit's aid as you study God's Word.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In his letter, James touched on two common themes tied to grumbling. Let's take a look at these before we dive into the story of Jonah. Enduring tough times and not getting what we want can make us grumble. Take a few minutes to read and reflect on [James 1:1–18](#) and [4:1–12](#). Jot down below what you observe along with some key takeaways on what to do when we feel like grumbling.



Observation: The Anger of Jonah

Begin by reading [Jonah 3:10–4:5](#), then write down anything you think worth noting.

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Jonah 3:10–4:5

Why did Jonah get upset (Jonah 4:1–2)?

What qualities about God did Jonah express, and why did he do so (4:2)?

What did Jonah request in his prayer (4:3)?

How did God respond to Jonah's request (4:4)?

How does the scene close (4:5)?

God lets the complaint continue. He doesn't slap the man across his face. God doesn't do that. He's patient and gracious, even with an angry, pouting adult prophet named Jonah who acts more like a spoiled child.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Interpretation: The Patience of God

Don't forget to consult your resources during interpretation. A Bible dictionary and commentary can be great places to start only after you have thoroughly read the text and asked the questions. We recommend grabbing a copy of *The Swindoll Study Bible* at insight.org if you don't have it already.

You can also access excellent tools at NETBible.org:

1. The New English Translation Bible, produced by the faculty at Dallas Theological Seminary with more than fifty-eight thousand explanatory footnotes
2. The complete set of updated *Constable's Notes* on the Bible, written by Thomas L. Constable, former senior emeritus professor of Bible Exposition at Dallas Theological Seminary

As we have seen, the author of Jonah used wordplay and irony to convey his meaning. We will look at two usages of irony now.

Irony One: Destruction/Anger

Seven times in Jonah, the author used the Hebrew word *raah* to connote “destruction,” “disaster,” “upset,” or “anger.” It occurs three times in this study's passage.

*When God saw what they had done and how they had put a stop to their evil ways, he changed his mind and did not carry out the **destruction** [raah] he had threatened. This change of plans **greatly upset** [raah] Jonah, and he became very angry. So he complained to the LORD about it: “Didn't I say before I left home that you would do this, LORD? That is why I ran away to Tarshish! I knew that you are a merciful and compassionate God, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. You are eager to turn back from **destroying** [raah] people.” (Jonah 3:10–4:2, emphasis added)*

What did the author emphasize by saying that Nineveh's avoidance of calamitous destruction (*raah*) became for Jonah a kind of emotional destruction (*raah*)?

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Irony Two: Death

Jonah's prayer in chapter two praised God for saving his life. Jonah's prayer in chapter four requested that God give him death because he was angry at God for saving the lives of the Ninevites. Jonah's words are poetic:

*"And, now, O LORD,
Take my breath from me,
For greater is my death than my life."* (Jonah 4:3, author's translation)

Why is it significant, ironically speaking, that Jonah prayed for death?

The Divine Response and Jonah's Refusal

Imagine hearing an audible response from the voice of the Almighty immediately after you pray. That's what Jonah got. What theological significance did God's question convey to Jonah in Jonah 4:4, and how is this theological significance relevant in our day?

And what does Jonah say? Like a spoiled child, he zips it. Jonah has nothing to say. He gives God the silent treatment. Really, Jonah? You're being asked a question by the living God who gives you breath in your lungs, a heartbeat, a brain wave, and the ability to walk and talk. A little respect please. In Jonah's refusal to answer, he decides to build a place to sulk. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Suffering for Being a Christian

Jonah did not get what he wanted, so he shook his fist and wagged his head against the great I Am. Even though we know it isn't true, Christians often assume this life should go well for us because we follow Jesus. Trials surprise us. But they shouldn't. We all must face them.

Jesus even tells us we may endure trials and disappointments *because we are Christians*.

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The New Testament has much to say about the trials and disappointments of Christians, so we should take notice of these teachings because we never know when we might suffer for our faith. For this reason, we will review [1 Peter 4:12–19](#).

According to Peter, how should we interpret suffering as a Christian?

How should we respond to God if we suffer as a Christian?

How should we respond to the situation or to persecutors if they hurt or revile us for being Christians?



Application: Considering a Better Alternative

Grumbling makes life worse for everyone—the grumblers as well as those who hear the grumbling. Let's consider four of Pastor Chuck's takeaways in light of our study of Jonah 3:10–4:5.

1. Start each day remembering, *"I'm not in charge."*
2. Live each day remembering, *"I'm really blessed."*
3. End each day remembering, *"I did not get what I deserved."*
4. Before you drop off to sleep, pray, *"I leave it all in Your hands."*

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Take a moment to reflect on your life, and jot down an area or two that most tempts you to grumble.

Taking it a step further, write down what aspect of those areas you are thankful for. How can Pastor Chuck's takeaways help you in those areas?

In the belly of the fish, Jonah prayed to live. At Nineveh, Jonah prayed to die. God granted Jonah's first request but not his second—such is the nature of our wise and compassionate Father. He accepts us in whatever stage of maturity we may be, and He always does what's best to help us grow.



A FINAL PRAYER

Our first response to God after we close our study of a passage should always be prayer—be it praise or petition, confession or contemplation. Use these last minutes of your study to write down that prayer.

For the 2025 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Aaron Massey, senior vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 2018, 2019, 2025 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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