Jonah 4:9-11

Jonah 4:9-Jonah Responds To God’s Question By Saying He Is Justified For Being Angry About The Plant, Even To Death

By way of review, Jonah 3:10 records that when God saw that the Ninevites repented from their wicked behavior, He relented concerning the judgment He threatened them with.

Jonah 3:10, “When God observed their actions, namely that they turned from their evil way of living, then God graciously relented concerning the judgment, which He had threatened to carry out against them. Indeed, He never carried it out.” (My translation)

Jonah 3:10 teaches that God only relented from executing the judgment He threatened against Nineveh when the Ninevites turned from their evil way of living and obeyed the inherent law within them. There is no mention of the fast, the putting on of sackcloth or crying out earnestly to God for mercy and forgiveness as the basis for God relenting. God relented when the Ninevites repented since God wants obedience. Not only as this obedience relates to Him but also with others. He is more concerned about their behavior with each other and their fellow human beings from other nations than with their sacrifices, which He in fact did not call for.

The Ninevites stopped committing evil and obeyed God because they had faith in the message from God that Jonah proclaimed to them. Faith produces obedience. The Ninevites changed their conduct as a result of their faith in Jonah’s message. Their faith in the Word of the Lord produced obedience in them. So God’s actions in Nineveh were consistent with what He taught Israel through the prophet Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 18:7, “There are times, Jeremiah, when I threaten to uproot, tear down, and destroy a nation or kingdom. 8 But if that nation I threatened stops doing wrong, I will cancel the destruction I intended to do to it. 9 And there are times when I promise to build up and establish a nation or kingdom. 10 But if that nation does what displeases me and does not obey me, then I will cancel the good I promised to do to it.” (NET)

Some contend that the Ninevites did not exercise saving faith. However, the Scriptures make clear that they were saved through their faith, which was manifested by their repentant conduct. That the Ninevites faith in God was a “saving” faith or a faith that delivered them from eternal condemnation is indicated by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself in Matthew 12:41.

Matthew 12:38, “Then some of the experts in the law along with some Pharisees answered him, ‘Teacher, we want to see a sign from you.” 39 But he
answered them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. 40 For just as Jonah was in the belly of the huge fish for three days and three nights, so the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights. 41 The people of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented when Jonah preached to them – and now, something greater than Jonah is here!’” (NET Bible)

As we can see from the Lord’s comments, the people of Nineveh will in fact stand up at the judgment and condemn those Jews who rejected Him during His First Advent since they repented when Jonah preached to them. They repented in the sense that they trusted in the message that the Lord conveyed to them through the prophet Jonah.

Further indicating that the Ninevites exercised saving faith in the Son of God, Yahweh is that the Lord would not have relented and withheld judgment if the Ninevites had not acted in faith.

The sixth scene in the book of Jonah appears in 4:1-5. The first scene appeared in 1:1-3, the second in 1:4-16, the third in 1:17-2:10, the fourth in Jonah 3:1-3a, the fifth in 3:3b-10, the sixth in 4:1-5 and the seventh and final scene in 4:6-11.

Chapter four contains the sixth and seventh scenes in the book of Jonah. The first scene appeared in Jonah 1:1-3, the second in 1:4-16, the third in 1:17-2:10, the fourth in Jonah 3:1-3a, the fifth in 3:3b-10, the sixth in 4:1-4 and the seventh and final scene in 4:5-11.

This chapter thus contains two divisions. The first appears in verses 1-4, which records Jonah’s angry reaction to the Lord sparing the Ninevites. The second appears in verses 5-11.

In Jonah 4:1, we saw that Jonah thought it was an unjust decision by God, in fact, a great injustice, which made him furious that the Lord did not destroy Nineveh because the Ninevites believed in Him and repented from their evil way of living.

**Jonah 4:1, “However, it was unjust in the opinion of Jonah, a great injustice so that it was infuriating to him.” (My translation)**

This verse presents the contrast between Jonah’s angry reaction with what should have been his reaction, namely, joy and thanksgiving. The Lord’s decision to spare the lives of the Ninevites infuriated Jonah. This rage against the Lord was due to Jonah’s self-righteousness. He like Israel was no better than the Assyrians since there is none righteous according to God’s perfect holiness standards. Jonah was treated in grace and mercy by the Lord after Jonah rebelled against His command to go to Nineveh.

Like the Ninevites, Jonah was worthy of death in the eyes of a holy God since both were disobedient. In fact, Jonah more so since he like the rest of Israel were...
given great privileges by God and greater revelation (See Romans 9:1-5). They were given the Law in writing. The Gentiles did not have it in writing. Thus, Jonah stood more condemned than the Ninevites since he like the rest of Israel received greater revelation from God than the Ninevites and the rest of the Gentile world. The Gentiles had creation and the inherent law within them. However, not only had these things but also they were given the temple worship, their forefathers were the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They were the recipients of the covenant promises made to these men since they were their racial descendants. The Lord promised that the Messiah would be a Jew.

Therefore, Jonah, like the rest of Israel was under greater condemnation because they received greater revelation concerning God and His ways than the Ninevites who were Gentiles. The prophet thanked the Lord for exercising grace towards him. However, he is infuriated when God exercises that same grace towards those he considers to be more evil than him.

Jonah repented with respect to his attitude towards God and in particular obeying Him as demonstrated in 3:1-4. However, he still hasn’t repented with respect to his attitude towards the Ninevites because he is self-righteous as demonstrated by his anger in 4:1-4.

Jonah 4:2 reveals for the first time Jonah’s motivation for disobeying the Lord’s command to go to Nineveh and announce judgment against its inhabitants. This verse records Jonah praying to God. In this prayer the prophet reveals the reason for his being infuriated that God relented from destroying the Ninevites. He also reveals why he refused to obey His command initially to go to Nineveh and instead went to Tarshish. Jonah says that he refused to go to Nineveh initially because he knew that God was gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in mercy and relents concerning threatened judgment.

Jonah 4:2, “Consequently, he prayed to the Lord. Specifically, he prayed, ‘Oh Lord, this is exactly what I thought would happen when I was living in my own country. For this reason, I previously fled to Tarshish because You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to exercise righteous indignation as well as transcendent in unconditional love. Also, one who graciously relents concerning judgment.’” (My translation)

In this verse, Jonah’s motivation for disobeying the Lord’s command to go to Nineveh and announce judgment against its inhabitants is finally revealed.

Up to this point in the narrative, the narrator has withheld revealing Jonah’s motivation for disobeying the Lord’s command to go to Nineveh and announce judgment against its inhabitants for rhetorical effect. He keeps the reader in suspense and to ultimately shock the reader. Jonah did not want to go to Nineveh in order to prevent God from exercising His character towards the Ninevites, which
the prophet knew would result in sparing the lives of the Ninevites, whom he hated.

The statement “**Consequently, he prayed to the Lord**” is a result clause that presents an action taken by Jonah that was the result of his considering it unjust of the Lord to not destroy Nineveh. This statement indicates that Jonah’s prayer in which he voices his complaint to the Lord for sparing the lives of the Ninevites was the direct consequence of considering the Lord’s decision to relent as unjust. This result clause is followed by an epexegetical clause that identifies the specific content of Jonah’s prayer.

“**Oh Lord, this is exactly what I thought would happen when I was living in my own country**” indicates that prior to receiving orders from the Lord to go to Nineveh and announce judgment against its inhabitants, Jonah had the conviction that the Lord would spare the lives of the Ninevites when they believed in Him and repented of their evil way of living.

“**For this reason, I previously fled to Tarshish**” tells the reader that Jonah fled to Tarshish to prevent the Lord from sparing the lives of the Ninevites because he knew that the Lord was gracious and merciful, slow to exercise His righteous indignation and transcendent in unconditional love as well as one who graciously relents concerning judgment.

The causal clause “**because You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to exercise righteous indignation as well as transcendent in unconditional love. Also, one who graciously relents concerning judgment**” presents the reason why Jonah fled to Tarshish previously and expresses Jonah’s conviction regarding the character of God.

“**Gracious**” speaks of God’s grace policy and describes God as imparting unmerited blessings to sinners based upon the merits of the object of the sinner’s faith. Grace is all that God is free to do in imparting unmerited blessings to those who trust in Jesus Christ as Savior based upon the merits of Christ and His death on the Cross. It is God treating us in a manner that we don’t deserve and excludes any human works in order to acquire eternal salvation or blessing from God. Grace means that God saved us and blessed us despite ourselves and not according to anything that we do but rather saved us and blessed us because of the merits of Christ and His work on the Cross. It excludes any human merit in salvation and blessing (Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5) and gives the Creator all the credit and the creature none.

“**Merciful**” describes God as compassionate towards sinners and pardons them by withholding judgment when they believe in Son Jesus Christ.

“**Slow to exercise righteous indignation**” describes as giving the sinner every chance to avoid facing His righteous indignation and speaks of the fact that He delays in exercising it so that the sinner can turn to Him in faith. God’s righteous
indignation is His attitude toward any thought, word, or action of His moral rational creatures, whether mankind and angels, that is opposed to His holiness and manifests itself in actions that judge and punish the guilty. God’s righteous indignation is the legitimate anger towards evil and sin since both are contrary to His holiness or perfect character and nature. In fact, God’s righteous indignation expresses His holiness.

“Transcendent in unconditional love” describes God as loyal or faithful to His covenants with men and characterizes how God acts towards His covenant people Israel and that this love goes beyond ordinary limits of human love. It describes God’s unconditional love as transcending the standards of human love so that God’s love is incomparable.

“Also, one who graciously relents concerning judgment” describes God as one who graciously does not act upon His decision to judge or condemn whether an individual, a group of individuals, or a nation in order that they might turn to Him in faith.

In Jonah 4:3, the prophet complains to the Lord in prayer that he’d rather die than live and see Him spare the lives of the Ninevites. Then, in verse 4, the Lord’s responds with a rhetorical question that condemns Jonah for his bad attitude towards the Ninevites.

Jonah 4:3, “Therefore, now I beg You please Oh Lord, take my life from me because my death would be better than my living.” (My translation)

This verse marks the end of Jonah’s prayer to the Lord, which took the form of a complaint regarding the Lord’s character. In Jonah 2, we saw the prophet praying that the Lord would deliver him from drowning to death but now in Jonah 4:2-3, we see him begging that the Lord would take his life because it was too much for Jonah to bear that the Lord would spare the lives of the Ninevites rather than destroy them. The Lord answered his prayer in chapter 2 but not here in chapter 4 since it was not the Lord’s will to kill Jonah. Rather, the Lord wanted to teach Jonah something about His grace policy towards the human race and His love for them. Jonah’s prayer reveals that the prophet does not have the same perspective as God with regards to the human race and specifically in relation to the Gentiles.

Like Jonah’s angry reaction to the Lord sparing the Ninevites, the prophet’s prayer is an example of Israelite national pride and self-righteousness. Jonah hates the idea of God sparing the lives of the Ninevites and treating them in grace because he is comparing the righteousness of himself and Israel to the lack of righteousness on the part of the Ninevites.

Jonah is comparing himself to the Ninevites and concludes that he and his Jewish countrymen are superior to the Ninevites. However, he fails to see that God concludes that both groups have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23) and that there is none righteous, not even one (Romans 3:10). Jonah
is not judging himself and Israel according to God’s perfect holy standards but rather he is comparing himself to the Ninevites.

In chapter 4, the Lord is teaching Jonah that He has compassion for all men including the wicked Assyrians and not just Israel. Compassion is a feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for another who is stricken by suffering or misfortune, accompanied by a strong desire to alleviate the pain or remove its cause.

The Lord expressed a feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for the Ninevites who were stricken by the curse of sin and who were enslaved to Satan and his cosmic system. Thus the Lord attempted to remove the curse of sin in the lives of the Ninevites by sending Jonah to preach the Gospel which according to Romans 1:16 is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes in Jesus Christ as Savior.

Jonah’s attitude is indicative of the nation of Israel at that time. The nation of Israel failed in evangelizing the world. They were to be the instruments that God employed to present the Gospel to the unbelieving Gentiles. They failed.

Jonah failed to see because of self-righteous arrogance that the Ninevites were just as much qualified to be recipients of salvation as Jonah and the rest of the nation of Israel. Like the Pharisees in our Lord’s Day, Jonah lacked the Lord’s view of the world.

Jonah 4:3 presents the first of two requests by Jonah of the Lord to end his life. The second is found in 4:8. In the former, he explicitly requests that the Lord would take his life but in the second he does not explicitly do so but it is implied.

Jonah 4:4 completes the sixth scene in the narrative and records the Lord responding to Jonah’s anger with a rhetorical question.

**Jonah 4:4, “However, the Lord replied, ‘Is it justified for you to be infuriated?’” (My translation)**

This verse is an adversative clause that contains a rhetorical question that demands a negative response from Jonah. The implication of this question stands in stark contrast to Jonah’s anger towards God’s decision to spare the Ninevites. In verses 2 and 3, the prophet expresses his anger and frustration with the Lord’s decision to spare the Ninevites because they exercised faith in Him and repented from their evil way of living. Now, in verse 4, the Lord responds by posing to him a rhetorical question, which implies that He was justified to render such a decision since it was consistent with His character and nature, which Jonah himself acknowledges in verse 2! Thus, the prophet condemns himself. So the question implies that Jonah was not justified in being angry with His decision. Therefore, the contrast is between God’s perspective and Jonah’s perspective with regards to the Ninevites.

The rhetorical question implies that the Lord was right to extend grace to the Ninevites and spare their lives when they turned to Him in faith and consequently
repented from their evil way of living since this decision was consistent with His character and nature and grace policy towards the entire human race. Thus, the question in a gentle manner, rebukes the prophet’s bad attitude towards the Lord’s decision to spare the lives of the Ninevites when they believed in Him and repented from their evil way of living.

The Lord’s question is designed to get Jonah to come around to His point of view regarding the Ninevites. He doesn’t condemn Jonah but through this question is actually inviting Jonah to condemn himself and admit he is wrong about his negative attitude towards His decision to spare the Ninevites.

Notice that the Lord does not even reply to Jonah’s request to die since this was utterly ridiculous and was simply the prophet expressing his frustration with the Lord’s decision to extend grace and forgiveness to the Ninevites.

So the Lord’s rhetorical question that he poses to Jonah in verse 4 makes clear to Jonah that he is not justified in his anger with respect to His decision to spare the Ninevites since this was decision was consistent with His character and nature, which Jonah acknowledges in verse 2, which in itself condemns Jonah. Jonah is inconsistent with regards to his understanding of the character and nature of God with respect to the entire human race and specifically the Ninevites. The fact that Jonah never replies as well his conduct later on in the scene indicates that the prophet is still infuriated and thus implacable.

The Lord is being patient and tolerant with Jonah as well as magnanimous with him, which are all expressions of His great love.

Jonah 4:5 begins the seventh and final scene and records Jonah departing Nineveh and then sitting down east of it. The verse then proceeds to record the prophet making a shelter for himself and then sitting down under it in order to see if the Lord would destroy the city or not.

**Jonah 4:5, “Then, Jonah departed from the city. Next, he set up camp on the east, facing toward this city. Specifically, he built a temporary shelter for himself there. Then, he sat down under it in its shade in order to see what would happen to this city.” (My translation)**

Jonah 4:5 records no oral response by Jonah to the Lord’s rhetorical question that appears in verse 4. However, the actions taken by the prophet demonstrate that he has rejected the Lord’s decision to spare the Ninevites. His actions recorded in this verse demonstrate that he does not agree with the Lord’s rhetorical question that makes clear that Jonah is not justified in his anger toward God’s decision.

Jonah’s conduct here in 4:5 is consistent with the way he has handled himself in his relationship to the Lord. In 1:3, Jonah does not verbally respond to the Lord’s command but does so through his actions by taking a ship Tarshish and not going to Nineveh. The prophet expresses his anger to the Lord by his actions rather than with words. This is what we call a “passive-aggressive” response. Therefore,
Jonah’s silence and the actions he takes in response to the Lord’s rhetorical question express his anger with respect to God’s decision to spare the Ninevites.

His conduct here in 4:5 makes clear to God and the reader that Jonah believes that this anger is justified and that he feels that God made the wrong decision. The silent treatment that he gives by refusing to respond to His rhetorical question expresses the depth of his rage against the decision to spare Nineveh.

Undoubtedly, because of his great hatred of the Ninevites, Jonah waited to see if God would destroy Nineveh in the hopes that their repentance from their evil way of living would be short lived. Thus, the prophet waited out the forty days.

Now some scholars debate the position of 4:5 in the book. Some question as to why Jonah would leave the city and set up camp east of the city to see what would happen to it when Jonah 3 makes clear that the city believed in God and then repented from their evil way of living? In fact, the deliverance of the Ninevites is what infuriated Jonah in the first place. Some question the position of this verse because Jonah 4:6-11 does not make mention as to what happened to Nineveh. In fact, 4:11 refers to what happened in Nineveh in chapter 3. It is not the place of any subsequent activity following 3:10. Furthermore, why would the Lord provide the prophet with a qiqayon plant when he had already built a shelter for himself? There is no further mention of the shelter even after the Lord destroyed the plant.

To solve these problems, some scholars contend that the verbs in 4:5 have a pluperfect sense meaning that Jonah “had” departed from Nineveh and he “had” built a shelter for himself. They say that the verse refers back to the time before Nineveh believed in God and repented or in other words, after the message that Jonah proclaimed as recorded in 3:4. Still others says that 4:5 originally belonged after 3:4. However, this has no manuscript support nor is there any explanation to support this transposition.

Jonah 4:5 belongs where it does since it makes sense in this position since it emphasizes Jonah’s stubborn rejection of God’s grace policy towards the Ninevites. This is why he waits to see if God will destroy the city. The prophet’s actions are an expression of his stubborn rejection of God’s grace policy towards the Ninevites and the Gentiles as a whole. He rejects God’s grace policy towards the Ninevites because of his nationalistic pride and self righteousness.

The Ninevites were not saved based upon their own merits but on the merits of the object of their faith, namely the Lord! This faith produced their repentant behavior. Jonah failed to see this because he sought to establish his own righteousness as demonstrated by the fact that he compares himself to the Ninevites and believes he is more righteous than they are. However, both Jonah and the Ninevites do not measure up to God’s perfect, holy standards. He acknowledges God’s grace policy in 4:2 but this is in relation to Israel and himself. He does not apply this to the Ninevites and the Gentiles as a whole. Therefore,
Jonah 4:5 records Jonah’s rejection of God’s grace policy towards the Ninevites. His actions serve as a silent protest to this policy.

So the Lord provided the prophet with a qiqayon plant when he had already built a shelter for himself because He wanted to teach Jonah about His grace. The plant was a gift from God. God’s grace provides the sinner with divine righteousness when the sinner exercises faith in God’s message. The plant was a picture of divine righteousness that is received as a gift by grace through faith. Jonah’s shelter is a picture of human self-righteousness that is based upon human works or a meritorious system of actions designed to gain the approbation of God.

The seventh and final scene in the book of Jonah begins with Jonah 4:6, which records the Lord providing a plant for Jonah that gives him shade and consequently makes him extremely delighted.

**Jonah 4:6, “Next, the Lord God provided a little qîqâywîn plant. Indeed, it grew up over Jonah for his benefit in order to function as shade for his head so as to deliver him, for his benefit from his evil. Consequently, Jonah was extremely delighted because of this little plant.” (My translation)**

In this verse, we have the Lord responding to Jonah’s anger with grace and love. The Lord does not speak to Jonah but rather responds to the prophet’s silent angry protest with silent gracious, compassionate and loving action.

The Lord uses the plant as a visual aid to teach Jonah about grace. Undoubtedly, Jonah recognized that God was being merciful to him and giving him a gift that he did not deserve. He enjoyed God being gracious to him but not others and specifically, not his enemies. Jonah is excited about the great miracle of the plant but not about the greater miracle, namely that of the Ninevites getting saved by believing in the Lord and repenting from their infamous evil way of living.

This verse records Jonah being happy for the first time. His extreme delight because of the shade the plant provided him stands in stark contrast to his being infuriated by the Lord’s decision to relent and spare the Ninevites. This should have caused him extreme joy since human beings are of more value than a plant. He is very happy when the Lord delivered him from drowning even though he was insubordinate yet he is infuriated when the Lord spares the Ninevites. This demonstrates to the reader just how self-centered Jonah is which is an indication that he is living according to the desires of his sin nature and is deceived by Satan’s cosmic system.

Jonah 4:6 also teaches that the Lord not only was attempting to deliver Jonah from the scorching Middle Eastern sun but more importantly, He was attempting to deliver the prophet from his evil attitude towards His grace policy with regards to the Ninevites. This is indicated by the dialogue that follows in verses 7-11 where the Lord is teaching Jonah about His grace policy.
So the Lord provided this plant for Jonah for two reasons. The first is that the prophet’s make-shift shelter, which he built from brush or leaves was flimsy at best and thus he needed something better. Secondly and more importantly, the Lord wanted to use this plant as an object lesson to teach Jonah about His grace policy. The Lord will ultimately use this plant to teach Jonah about His grace policy towards not only himself and the Jews but also towards the Ninevites who were Gentiles. He wants the prophet to see the Ninevites and all men from His perspective (John 3:16; 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9).

So the Lord provided the prophet with a qiqayon plant when he had already built a shelter for himself because He wanted to teach Jonah about His grace. The plant was a gift from God. God’s grace provides the sinner with divine righteousness when the sinner exercises faith in God’s message. The plant was a picture of divine righteousness that is received as a gift by grace through faith. Jonah’s shelter is a picture of human self-righteousness that is based upon human works or a meritorious system of actions designed to gain the approbation of God.

Jonah 4:7 records God sending a worm to attack the plant so that it dried up.

Jonah 4:7, “However, God commissioned a worm when the dawn arose on the next day. Indeed, it attacked this plant so that it withered.” (My translation)

This verse contains another irony in that this plant, which caused Jonah to be extremely delighted was destroyed by God whereas the Ninevites who the prophet hated and caused him misery, were not destroyed.

By killing this plant, the Lord was attempting to deliver Jonah from his evil attitude towards His grace policy with regards to the Ninevites. This is indicated by the dialogue in verses 7-11 where the Lord is teaching Jonah about His grace policy.

The Lord provided this plant for Jonah for two reasons. The first is that the prophet’s make-shift shelter, which he built from brush or leaves was flimsy at best and thus he needed something better. Secondly and more importantly, the Lord wanted to use this plant as an object lesson to teach Jonah about His grace policy. The Lord will ultimately use this plant to teach Jonah about His grace policy towards not only himself and the Jews but also towards the Ninevites who were Gentiles. He wants the prophet to see the Ninevites and all men from His perspective (John 3:16; 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9).

In verse 7, by killing this plant with the worm, God is treating Jonah the way the prophet wished that God had treated the Ninevites. Again, Jonah loves when God treats him in grace but not the Ninevites. Jonah was undeserving like the Ninevites, yet he thinks that God was wrong to extend grace to them. This is due again to his self-righteousness in that he is comparing himself to the Ninevites and concluding that he is better than them, however, if he compared himself and the
Ninevites to God’s perfect holy standards, he would have to conclude that he is no better than the Ninevites. Consequently, if he acknowledged this fact, he would have no problem with God treating the Ninevites in grace since he too was undeserving of being delivered from death and had been the beneficiary of God’s grace.

Then, in Jonah 4:8, we read that God sent an east wind when the sun began to shine to come upon Jonah. The verse goes on to record that the sun beat down on Jonah’s head so that he grew faint from the heat, despaired of life and sought to die rather than live.

Jonah 4:8, “Now, it took place, when the sun arose, God sent a hot east wind. Then, the sun beat down against Jonah’s head so that he became faint. Then, his soul desired to die. Specifically, he said, ‘my death would be better than my living.’” (My translation)

This verse is transitional moving to another episode in this seventh and final scene. God is disciplining Jonah when He sends a hot east wind to destroy his make shift shelter, leaving him to suffer the elements. When the wind died down, then the prophet had to suffer the sun beating down against his head since he no longer had any shade to hide from the sun. Consequently, Jonah became faint because of sun stroke and dehydration. His circumstances were so intolerable that he desired that he could die.

Jonah is not responding to the divine discipline properly at all. He is not repented of his evil attitude towards the Ninevites. Instead, gets involved in self-pity. The prophet’s response to the discipline echoes his complaint to God in verse 3 where he asked God to take his life because God did not destroy the Ninevites since they believed in God and as a result repented of their evil way of living.

He knows that he is being disciplined again and he knows that this time it is not because he disobeyed the Lord but rather that he has such an evil attitude towards the Ninevites. Therefore, it appears that he wants to die here in verse 8 because he would rather die than repent of his hatred toward the Ninevites! Talk about stubborn and self-righteous. He has a double standard or rather he thinks God should have two sets of standards…one for the Israel and Jonah and another for the Gentiles and specifically, the Ninevites. The former is the beneficiary of God’s grace, mercy and compassion and the latter is to be judged.

Jonah 4:8 reveals Jonah’s deep-seated hatred of the Ninevites. He does not want God to be impartial but partial to him and Israel. This verse expresses his total frustration with God’s grace policy toward the Ninevites and the Gentiles. Again, this frustration is due to his self-righteousness in that he thinks that the Israelites are superior to the Ninevites. However, he is comparing the two races to each other rather than comparing the two in relation to God and His perfect holy standards, which neither live up to!
Next, we will note Jonah 4:9 and in this verse God poses a rhetorical question to Jonah that is nearly identical to the one He posed to the prophet that is recorded in verse 4. In verse 4, Jonah never responds verbally but through his actions he demonstrates his disagreement with God’s decision to spare the lives of the Ninevites. However, in verse 9, the prophet disagrees verbally with God contending that he is justified in being infuriated with God’s decision to kill the plant with a worm.

Jonah 3:10, “When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it. 4:1 But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry. 2 He prayed to the Lord and said, ‘Please Lord, was not this what I said 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. 3 Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life.’ 4 The Lord said, ‘Do you have good reason to be angry?’ 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. 6 So the Lord God appointed a plant and it grew up over Jonah to be a shade over his head to deliver him from his discomfort. And Jonah was extremely happy about the plant. 7 But God appointed a worm when dawn came the next day and it attacked the plant and it withered. 8 When the sun came up God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on Jonah’s head so that he became faint and begged with all his soul to die, saying, ‘Death is better to me than life.’ 9 Then God said to Jonah, ‘Do you have good reason to be angry about the plant?’ And he said, ‘I have good reason to be angry, even to death.’” (NASU)

“Then God said to Jonah” is composed of the conjunction wa (תָּא) (wa), “then,” which is prefixed to the third person masculine singular qal active imperfect form of the verb אָמָר (אמיר) (aw-mar), “said” and the articular masculine plural form of the noun לְהִימ (ליהימ) (el-o-heem), “God” and the preposition אל (אל) (al), “to,” whose object is the masculine singular form of the proper noun יונתן (יונתן) (yo-naw), “Jonah.”

The conjunction wa functions as a marker of a sequence of closely related events. It introduces the next event that took place immediately after Jonah expressed to himself his desire to die because of the sun beating down against his head. Thus, it indicates that after Jonah expressed his desire to die, God posed a rhetorical question to the prophet that implied that Jonah was not justified for being angry about the plant. Therefore, we will translate the word “then.”
The noun "lō-hîm emphasizes the transcendent character of God and in particular His attributes of omnipotence, sovereignty and love. The word emphasizes with the reader that the death of the plant was according to the Lord’s sovereign control over His creation and His omnipotence over creation as well as His love for Jonah. By killing the plant with the worm, He is teaching Jonah that he is wrong about being angry over His decision to spare the Ninevites. He is teaching the prophet about His grace policy and that Jonah is not justified for being angry about the plant.

The noun "lō-hîm also pertains to the fact that the Lord is Jonah’s deliverer in the sense that by killing the plant with the worm and asking this question, He is teaching the prophet about His grace policy towards the Ninevites and is attempting to deliver Jonah from his evil, self-righteous attitude towards the Ninevites. The Lord wanted to deliver Jonah from his uncompassionate attitude toward these people.

The verb 'ā·mār means “to pose a question” since God is doing just that with Jonah by posing a rhetorical question to the prophet. The qal stem of the verb is fientive expressing an action performed by God. The active voice means that God, as the subject, performs the action of asking Jonah a rhetorical question. The imperfect tense is used of a past action from the perspective of the writer. It is used with the conjunction wa to form a sequential clause. We will translate the verb 'ā·mār “asked.”

The proper noun yownah is the object of the preposition al, which marks the prophet Jonah as the recipient of this rhetorical question from God. It indicates that this rhetorical question from God is being directed toward the prophet Jonah. We will translate this prepositional phrase “to Jonah.”

Corrected translation thus far of Jonah 4:9: “Then, God posed a question to Jonah…”

Jonah 4:9, “Then God said to Jonah, ‘Do you have good reason to be angry about the plant?’ And he said, ‘I have good reason to be angry, even to death.’” (NASU)

“Do you have good reason to be angry?” is composed of the interrogative particle hā (ḥa), “do,” which is prefixed to the hiphil active infinitive absolute form of the verb yā·tāb (ḇāḇ) (ya-tobe), “good reason” and the third person masculine singular qal active perfect form of the verb ḥā·rā(h) (ḥāḇ) (khaw-raw), “to be angry” and the preposition l (lamed), “have” whose object is the second person masculine singular form of the pronomial suffix ʾāt·tā(h) (ṭēḇ) (aw-thaw), “you.”

This same exact wording appears in Jonah 4:4. As was the case in this verse, the interrogative particle hā, “do” in verse 9 is prefixed to the hiphil active infinitive
absolute form of the verb יָתָבוּ, “good reason” to form a rhetorical question that demands a negative answer.

The verb יָתָבוּ means “to be justified” since the Lord is questioning as to whether or not Jonah’s anger toward the death of the plant is justified. The hiphil stem of the verb is an intransitive hiphil describing Jonah remaining in a state of considering himself to be justified in being angry with the Lord’s decision to kill the plant. The active voice is stative indicating that Jonah is in a state of being angry. The infinitive absolute form of the verb functions as a finite verb and its subject is the following verbal clause לַל אָלָא, “you are infuriated.” Therefore, we will translate the expression בְּלַל אָלָא, “is it justified.”

The verb הָרוּ(h) means “to be infuriated” and is used of Jonah’s great anger or rage with respect to God’s decision to kill the plant, which gave him shade. The qal stem of this verb הָרָ(h) is stative and so is the active voice indicating that Jonah existed in the mental attitude state of being infuriated with God’s decision to kill the plant. The perfect tense of the verb expresses Jonah’s mental attitude state of being infuriated with the Lord’s decision to kill the plant. We will translate the verb “it was infuriating.”

The second person masculine singular form of the pronomial suffix ’אָ-תָ(h) refers of course to Jonah and means “you” and is the object of the preposition לְ (lamed), which is a marker of content as a means of specifying a particular referent, which in our context is Jonah. Therefore, we will translate this prepositional phrase “for you.”

“About the plant” is composed of the preposition ’אַל (al), “about” and the articular masculine singular form of the noun קַיָּ-וֹנָן (kay-vohn) (kee-kaw-yone), “a plant”

Once again, the noun קַיָּ-וֹנָן refers to the castor oil plant or ricinus communis, which is indicated by its articular construction that is anaphoric meaning that the article signifies that this word was used in the previous clause and has the same referent in the present clause. The word is the object of the preposition ’אַל, which functions as a marker of cause indicating that the plant was the cause of Jonah happiness. We will translate this prepositional phrase “because of this little קַיָּ-וֹנָן plant.”

Corrected translation thus far of Jonah 4:9: “Then, God posed a question to Jonah, ‘Is it justified for you to be infuriated because of this little קַיָּ-וֹנָן plant?’”

This question that God poses to Jonah begins with the same wording as the question that He posed to Jonah in verse 4. God speaks to Jonah because He is attempting to teach Jonah about His grace policy towards the entire human race that flows from His attribute of love. God is attempting to point out to Jonah that
the prophet’s position is totally inconsistent and that His decision to spare the Ninevites was totally consistent with His character and nature and grace policy.

Stuart writes, “This question about the right to be angry is central to the whole book, and crucial to the narrator’s point in telling the story as he has. What right do we have to demand that God should favor us and not others? By reducing the question to the particular issue of the gourd, God focused the question in a way that would cause Jonah to condemn himself by his own words. Jonah did just that.” (Stuart, D. (2002). Vol. 31: Word Biblical Commentary: Hosea-Jonah; page 506)

In Jonah 4:1, we saw that Jonah was infuriated because God spared the Ninevites. However, here in Jonah 4:9, the prophet is infuriated because God employed a worm to kill the little qîqāywōn plant that provided him relief and protection from the blazing Middle Eastern sun. So he is infuriated because the Ninevites were not destroyed and when the plant died. Jonah’s position is totally ridiculous since he places a greater value on an inanimate object than human beings who are created in the image of God.

Jonah 4:9, “Then God said to Jonah, ‘Do you have good reason to be angry about the plant?’ And he said, ‘I have good reason to be angry, even to death.”’ (NASU)

“And he said” is composed of the conjunction wa (׃) (wa), “and,” which is prefixed to the third person masculine singular qal active imperfect form of the verb ā·mār (׃) (aw-mar), “said.”

Together, they form an adversative clause in the form of a declarative statement, which stands in stark contrast to God’s rhetorical question that implies that Jonah was not justified for being angry that He killed the plant with a worm.

In Jonah 4:8, the prophet expresses his anger and frustration with the Lord’s decision to kill the plant with a worm. In Jonah 4:9, God responds by posing to him a rhetorical question, which implies that Jonah was not justified for being angry about the plant. Thus, he condemns himself. So the question also implies that Jonah was not justified in being angry with His decision. Therefore, the contrast is between God’s perspective and Jonah’s perspective with regards to the plant. This is directly to the decision to spare the Ninevites since God used the death of the plant to teach Jonah about His grace policy towards the human race, which flows from His attribute of love. The plant was more important to Jonah than the Ninevites, which stands in direct contrast with God’s attitude towards the plant and the Ninevites. Consequently, we will translate the conjunction wa “however.”

The verb ā·mār means “to reply” since Jonah is doing just that by replying to God’s rhetorical question. The qal stem of the verb is fientive expressing an action performed by Jonah. The active voice means that Jonah, as the subject, performs the action of replying to God. The imperfect tense is used of a past action from the
perspective of the writer. It is used with the conjunction wa to form an adversative clause. We will translate the verb 'ā·mār “he replied.”

“I have good reason to be angry” is composed of the hiphil active infinitive absolute form of the verb yā́·tāḥ (ḇā́) (ya-tobe), “good reason” and the third person masculine singular qal active perfect form of the verb hā́·rā(h) (ḇā́nā́) (khawraw), “to be angry” and the preposition lε (γ) (lamed), “have” whose object is the first person singular pronomial suffix ḫnî (ḇṓn) (an-ee), “I.”

The first person singular pronomial suffix ḫnî, “I” is a marker of affirmation referring of course to Jonah and means “yes…me.” It is the object of the preposition lε (γ) (lamed), which is a marker of content as a means of specifying a particular referent, which in our context is Jonah. Therefore, we will translate this prepositional phrase “yes…for me.”

The verb yā́·tāḥ means “to be justified” since Jonah is telling God that his anger with respect to the plant dying is right. The hiphil stem of the verb is an intransitive hiphil describing Jonah remaining in a state of considering himself to be justified in being angry with the Lord’s decision to kill the plant with a worm. The active voice is stative indicating that Jonah is in a state of being angry. The infinitive absolute form of the verb functions as a finite verb and its subject is the following verbal clause lε ḫnî (ḇṓn), “for me to be infuriated.” Therefore, we will translate the expression yā́·tāḥ, “is justified.”

The verb hā́·rā(h) means “to be infuriated” and is used of Jonah’s great anger or rage with respect to God’s decision to kill the plant with a worm. The qal stem of this verb hā́·rā(h) is stative and so is the active voice indicating that Jonah existed in the mental attitude state of being infuriated with God’s decision to kill the plant with a worm. The perfect tense of the verb expresses Jonah’s mental attitude state of being infuriated with the Lord’s decision to kill the plant with a worm. We will translate the verb “to be infuriated.”

“Even to death” is composed of the preposition ‘ād (ḇā́) (ode), “even to” and masculine singular form of the noun mā́·wēt (ḇā́) (maw-veth), “death.”

The NET Bible has the following excellent comment with regards to this prepositional phrase, they write, “The phrase ḫnî ḫmavet (‘ad-mavet, ‘unto death’) is an idiomatic expression meaning ‘to the extreme’ or simply ‘extremely [angry]’ (HALOT 563 s.v. ḫmavet 1.c). The noun ḫmavet (‘death’) is often used as an absolute superlative with a negative sense, similar to the English expression ‘bored to death’ (IBHS 267–69 §14.5). For example, ‘his soul was vexed to death’ (Ḥmavet, lamut) means that he could no longer endure it (Judg 16:16), and ‘love is as strong as death’ (Ḥmavet, kammavet) means love is irresistible or exceedingly strong (Song 8:6). Here the expression ‘I am angry unto death’ (Ḥmavet) means that Jonah could not be more angry. Unfortunately, this idiomatic expression has gone undetected by virtually every other major English version to date (KJV, NKJV, RSV, NRSV,
ASV, NASB, NIV, NJB, JPS, NJPS). The only English version that comes close to representing the idiom correctly is BBE: ‘I have a right to be truly angry.’”

Therefore, we will render this prepositional phrase idiomatically, “I couldn’t be more so.”

Jonah’s reply to God’s question is right to the point. He emphasized with God that the plant was extremely important to him since it gave him relief and protection from the oppressive Middle Eastern sun. However, by giving such a response, God has set up the prophet since Jonah has made clear that through his own words that a plant is more important than human beings since he was upset that God spared the Ninevites yet very upset that God killed the plant. He values a plant more than human beings, which is inconsistent with the Word of God, which declares that human beings are created in the image of God and not plants. So with his own words, Jonah condemns himself since his attitude with regards to the Ninevites and the plant is inconsistent with the Word of God.

So Jonah turns God’s question into an affirmation and even adds a prepositional phrase to emphasize that he could not be more justified for being angry about the death of the plant. Even though, the prophet was no doubt suffering from sun stroke and dehydration, his answer is consistent with his attitude throughout the book and in particular his anger in Jonah 4:2-3.

Completed corrected translation of Jonah 4:9: “Then, God posed a question to Jonah, ‘Is it justified for you to be infuriated because of this little qîqâywôn plant?’ However, he replied, ‘yes, for me to be infuriated is justified, I couldn’t be more so!’”

To summarize, Jonah 4:9 presents the next event that took place immediately after Jonah expressed to himself his desire to die because of the sun beating down against his head. It begins with a rhetorical question that begins with the same wording as the question that the Lord posed to Jonah in verse 4. God is attempting to point out to Jonah that the prophet’s position is totally inconsistent and that His decision to spare the Ninevites was totally consistent with His character and nature and grace policy. This question is central to the narrative and critical in understanding the account. It is setting up Jonah to condemn himself and implies that Jonah has no justification in disagreeing with God’s decision or His grace policy towards the Ninevites. It implies that the prophet has no right to demand that God treat him well and the Ninevites badly.

Jonah is infuriated because the Ninevites were not destroyed and when the plant died. His position is totally ridiculous since he places a greater value on an inanimate object than human beings who are created in the image of God.

Jonah’s reply to God’s question whereas in verse 4 he does not but rather responds with a silent protest. His reply to God make clear that the plant was extremely important to him since it gave him relief and protection from the
oppressive Middle Eastern sun. However, by giving such a response, Jonah has made clear through his own words that a plant is more important than human beings. He values a plant more than human beings, which is inconsistent with the Word of God, which declares that human beings are created in the image of God and not plants. His answer condemns him since it is inconsistent with the Word of God, which declares that human beings were created in the image of God.

Interestingly, Jonah’s last word in the narrative, is the Hebrew term for “death.” Also, once again, we have the Lord being patient and tolerant with Jonah as well as magnanimous with him, which are all expressions of His great love.

God’s love is “tolerant” meaning that the Lord puts up with or endures with Jonah whose opinion differs from His own (Eph. 4:2). His love is also “impersonal” meaning that God can love from His own divine nature sinners who are obnoxious and unattractive to Him, which Jonah is at this point in the narrative.

God’s love with respect to Jonah up to this point in the narrative is “unconditional” meaning that no matter what sin Jonah commits or how unfaithful he is or how rebellious, God never ever disowns him (Rm. 8:35, 39).

God’s love is “compassionate” meaning that God intensely desires and will act to alleviate the pain and suffering of another or remove its cause (1 John 3:16-17). He is attempting to alleviate Jonah’s own self induced misery that is the result of his unjustifiable attitude towards His decision to spare the Ninevites.

God’s love is “magnanimous” towards Jonah meaning that the Lord is being generous in forgiving Jonah insulting Him by being angry with respect to His decision to spare the Ninevites and kill the plant. The Lord is not vindictive toward Jonah for being angry about His decision to extend grace to the Ninevites and kill the plant with a worm. The Lord is not involved in petty resentfulness in contrast to Jonah who is! The Lord is generous, tolerant, patient, moderate, courageous, and noble when dealing with angry Jonah.

The Lord is patient with Jonah in the sense that He will endure Jonah’s attempt to provoke Him and annoy Him without complaint and will not exercise His righteous indignation towards the prophet.
Jonah 4:10-11-The Lord Rebukes Jonah For Showing More Concern For The Plant Than The Ninevites

We will complete our study of chapter four of the book of Jonah and therefore the seventh and final scene of the narrative as well as the book itself by noting Jonah 4:10-11. But first by way of review, we noted that the first scene appeared in 1:1-3, the second in 1:4-16, the third in 1:17-2:10, the fourth in Jonah 3:1-3a, the fifth in 3:3b-10, the sixth in 4:1-5 and the seventh and final scene in 4:6-11.

Chapter four contains the sixth and seventh scenes in the book of Jonah. The first scene appeared in Jonah 1:1-3, the second in 1:4-16, the third in 1:17-2:10, the fourth in Jonah 3:1-3a, the fifth in 3:3b-10, the sixth in 4:1-4 and the seventh and final scene in 4:5-11. This chapter thus contains two divisions. The first appears in verses 1-4, which records Jonah’s angry reaction to the Lord sparing the Ninevites. The second appears in verses 5-11.

In Jonah 4:1, we saw that Jonah thought it was an unjust decision by God, in fact, a great injustice, which made him furious that the Lord did not destroy Nineveh because the Ninevites believed in Him and repented from their evil way of living.

Jonah 4:1, “However, it was unjust in the opinion of Jonah, a great injustice so that it was infuriating to him.” (My translation)

This verse presents the contrast between Jonah’s angry reaction with what should have been his reaction, namely, joy and thanksgiving. The Lord’s decision to spare the lives of the Ninevites infuriated Jonah. This rage against the Lord was due to Jonah’s self-righteousness. He like Israel was no better than the Assyrians since there is none righteous according to God’s perfect holiness standards. Jonah was treated in grace and mercy by the Lord after Jonah rebelled against His command to go to Nineveh.

Like the Ninevites, Jonah was worthy of death in the eyes of a holy God since both were disobedient. In fact, Jonah more so since he like the rest of Israel were given great privileges by God and greater revelation (See Romans 9:1-5). They were given the Law in writing. The Gentiles did not have it in writing. Thus, Jonah stood more condemned than the Ninevites since he like the rest of Israel received greater revelation from God than the Ninevites and the rest of the Gentile world. The Gentiles had creation and the inherent law within them. However, not only had these things but also they were given the temple worship, their forefathers were the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They were the recipients of the covenant promises made to these men since they were their racial descendants. The Lord promised that the Messiah would be a Jew.

Therefore, Jonah, like the rest of Israel was under greater condemnation because they received greater revelation concerning God and His ways than the
Ninevites who were Gentiles. The prophet thanked the Lord for exercising grace towards him. However, he is infuriated when God exercises that same grace towards those he considers to be more evil than him.

Jonah repented with respect to his attitude towards God and in particular obeying Him as demonstrated in 3:1-4. However, he still hasn’t repented with respect to his attitude towards the Ninevites because he is self-righteous as demonstrated by his anger in 4:1-4.

Jonah 4:2 reveals for the first time Jonah’s motivation for disobeying the Lord’s command to go to Nineveh and announce judgment against its inhabitants. This verse records Jonah praying to God. In this prayer the prophet reveals the reason for his being infuriated that God relented from destroying the Ninevites. He also reveals why he refused to obey His command initially to go to Nineveh and instead went to Tarshish. Jonah says that he refused to go to Nineveh initially because he knew that God was gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in mercy and relents concerning threatened judgment.

"Consequently, he prayed to the Lord. Specifically, he prayed, ‘Oh Lord, this is exactly what I thought would happen when I was living in my own country. For this reason, I previously fled to Tarshish because You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to exercise righteous indignation as well as transcendent in unconditional love. Also, one who graciously relents concerning judgment.’” (My translation)

In this verse, Jonah’s motivation for disobeying the Lord’s command to go to Nineveh and announce judgment against its inhabitants is finally revealed.

Up to this point in the narrative, the narrator has withheld revealing Jonah’s motivation for disobeying the Lord’s command to go to Nineveh and announce judgment against its inhabitants for rhetorical effect. He keeps the reader in suspense and to ultimately shock the reader. Jonah did not want to go to Nineveh in order to prevent God from exercising His character towards the Ninevites, which the prophet knew would result in sparing the lives of the Ninevites, whom he hated.

The statement “Consequently, he prayed to the Lord” is a result clause that presents an action taken by Jonah that was the result of his considering it unjust of the Lord to not destroy Nineveh. This statement indicates that Jonah’s prayer in which he voices his complaint to the Lord for sparing the lives of the Ninevites was the direct consequence of considering the Lord’s decision to relent as unjust. This result clause is followed by an epexegetical clause that identifies the specific content of Jonah’s prayer.

“Oh Lord, this is exactly what I thought would happen when I was living in my own country” indicates that prior to receiving orders from the Lord to go to Nineveh and announce judgment against its inhabitants, Jonah had the conviction
that the Lord would spare the lives of the Ninevites when they believed in Him and repented of their evil way of living.

“For this reason, I previously fled to Tarshish” tells the reader that Jonah fled to Tarshish to prevent the Lord from sparing the lives of the Ninevites because he knew that the Lord was gracious and merciful, slow to exercise His righteous indignation and transcendent in unconditional love as well as one who graciously relents concerning judgment.

The causal clause “because You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to exercise righteous indignation as well as transcendent in unconditional love. Also, one who graciously relents concerning judgment” presents the reason why Jonah fled to Tarshish previously and expresses Jonah’s conviction regarding the character of God.

“Gracious” speaks of God’s grace policy and describes God as imparting unmerited blessings to sinners based upon the merits of the object of the sinner’s faith. Grace is all that God is free to do in imparting unmerited blessings to those who trust in Jesus Christ as Savior based upon the merits of Christ and His death on the Cross. It is God treating us in a manner that we don’t deserve and excludes any human works in order to acquire eternal salvation or blessing from God. Grace means that God saved us and blessed us despite ourselves and not according to anything that we do but rather saved us and blessed us because of the merits of Christ and His work on the Cross. It excludes any human merit in salvation and blessing (Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5) and gives the Creator all the credit and the creature none.

“Merciful” describes God as compassionate towards sinners and pardons them by withholding judgment when they believe in Son Jesus Christ.

“Slow to exercise righteous indignation” describes as giving the sinner every chance to avoid facing His righteous indignation and speaks of the fact that He delays in exercising it so that the sinner can turn to Him in faith. God’s righteous indignation is His attitude toward any thought, word, or action of His moral rational creatures, whether mankind and angels, that is opposed to His holiness and manifests itself in actions that judge and punish the guilty. God’s righteous indignation is the legitimate anger towards evil and sin since both are contrary to His holiness or perfect character and nature. In fact, God’s righteous indignation expresses His holiness.

“Transcendent in unconditional love” describes God as loyal or faithful to His covenants with men and characterizes how God acts towards His covenant people Israel and that this love goes beyond ordinary limits of human love. It describes God’s unconditional love as transcending the standards of human love so that God’s love is incomparable.
“Also, one who graciously relents concerning judgment” describes God as one who graciously does not act upon His decision to judge or condemn whether an individual, a group of individuals, or a nation in order that they might turn to Him in faith.

In Jonah 4:3, the prophet complains to the Lord in prayer that he’d rather die than live and see Him spare the lives of the Ninevites. Then, in verse 4, the Lord’s responds with a rhetorical question that condemns Jonah for his bad attitude towards the Ninevites.

**Jonah 4:3, “Therefore, now I beg You please Oh Lord, take my life from me because my death would be better than my living.” (My translation)**

This verse marks the end of Jonah’s prayer to the Lord, which took the form of a complaint regarding the Lord’s character. In Jonah 2, we saw the prophet praying that the Lord would deliver him from drowning to death but now in Jonah 4:2-3, we see him begging that the Lord would take his life because it was too much for Jonah to bear that the Lord would spare the lives of the Ninevites rather than destroy them. The Lord answered his prayer in chapter 2 but not here in chapter 4 since it was not the Lord’s will to kill Jonah. Rather, the Lord wanted to teach Jonah something about His grace policy towards the human race and His love for them. Jonah’s prayer reveals that the prophet does not have the same perspective as God with regards to the human race and specifically in relation to the Gentiles.

Like Jonah’s angry reaction to the Lord sparing the Ninevites, the prophet’s prayer is an example of Israelite national pride and self-righteousness. Jonah hates the idea of God sparing the lives of the Ninevites and treating them in grace because he is comparing the righteousness of himself and Israel to the lack of righteousness on the part of the Ninevites.

Jonah is comparing himself to the Ninevites and concludes that he and his Jewish countrymen are superior to the Ninevites. However, he fails to see that God concludes that both groups have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23) and that there is none righteous, not even one (Romans 3:10). Jonah is not judging himself and Israel according to God’s perfect holy standards but rather he is comparing himself to the Ninevites.

In chapter 4, the Lord is teaching Jonah that He has compassion for all men including the wicked Assyrians and not just Israel. Compassion is a feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for another who is stricken by suffering or misfortune, accompanied by a strong desire to alleviate the pain or remove its cause.

The Lord expressed a feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for the Ninevites who were stricken by the curse of sin and who were enslaved to Satan and his cosmic system. Thus the Lord attempted to remove the curse of sin in the lives of the Ninevites by sending Jonah to preach the Gospel which according to Romans
1:16 is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes in Jesus Christ as Savior.

Jonah’s attitude is indicative of the nation of Israel at that time. The nation of Israel failed in evangelizing the world. They were to be the instruments that God employed to present the Gospel to the unbelieving Gentiles. They failed.

Jonah failed to see because of self-righteous arrogance that the Ninevites were just as much qualified to be recipients of salvation as Jonah and the rest of the nation of Israel. Like the Pharisees in our Lord’s Day, Jonah lacked the Lord’s view of the world.

Jonah 4:3 presents the first of two requests by Jonah of the Lord to end his life. The second is found in 4:8. In the former, he explicitly requests that the Lord would take his life but in the second he does not explicitly do so but it is implied.

Jonah 4:4 completes the sixth scene in the narrative and records the Lord responding to Jonah’s anger with a rhetorical question.

Jonah 4:4, “However, the Lord replied, ‘Is it justified for you to be infuriated?’” (My translation)

This verse is an adversative clause that contains a rhetorical question that demands a negative response from Jonah. The implication of this question stands in stark contrast to Jonah’s anger towards God’s decision to spare the Ninevites. In verses 2 and 3, the prophet expresses his anger and frustration with the Lord’s decision to spare the Ninevites because they exercised faith in Him and repented from their evil way of living. Now, in verse 4, the Lord responds by posing to him a rhetorical question, which implies that He was justified to render such a decision since it was consistent with His character and nature, which Jonah himself acknowledges in verse 2! Thus, the prophet condemns himself. So the question implies that Jonah was not justified in being angry with His decision. Therefore, the contrast is between God’s perspective and Jonah’s perspective with regards to the Ninevites.

The rhetorical question implies that the Lord was right to extend grace to the Ninevites and spare their lives when they turned to Him in faith and consequently repented from their evil way of living since this decision was consistent with His character and nature and grace policy towards the entire human race. Thus, the question in a gentle manner, rebukes the prophet’s bad attitude towards the Lord’s decision to spare the lives of the Ninevites when they believed in Him and repented from their evil way of living.

The Lord’s question is designed to get Jonah to come around to His point of view regarding the Ninevites. He doesn’t condemn Jonah but through this question is actually inviting Jonah to condemn himself and admit he is wrong about his negative attitude towards His decision to spare the Ninevites.
Notice that the Lord does not even reply to Jonah’s request to die since this was utterly ridiculous and was simply the prophet expressing his frustration with the Lord’s decision to extend grace and forgiveness to the Ninevites.

So the Lord’s rhetorical question that he poses to Jonah in verse 4 makes clear to Jonah that he is not justified in his anger with respect to His decision to spare the Ninevites since this was decision was consistent with His character and nature, which Jonah acknowledges in verse 2, which in itself condemns Jonah. Jonah is inconsistent with regards to his understanding of the character and nature of God with respect to the entire human race and specifically the Ninevites. The fact that Jonah never replies as well his conduct later on in the scene indicates that the prophet is still infuriated and thus implacable.

The Lord is being patient and tolerant with Jonah as well as magnanimous with him, which are all expressions of His great love.

Jonah 4:5 begins the seventh and final scene and records Jonah departing Nineveh and then sitting down east of it. The verse then proceeds to record the prophet making a shelter for himself and then sitting down under it in order to see if the Lord would destroy the city or not.

**Jonah 4:5, “Then, Jonah departed from the city. Next, he set up camp on the east, facing toward this city. Specifically, he built a temporary shelter for himself there. Then, he sat down under it in its shade in order to see what would happen to this city.” (My translation)**

Jonah 4:5 records no oral response by Jonah to the Lord’s rhetorical question that appears in verse 4. However, the actions taken by the prophet demonstrate that he has rejected the Lord’s decision to spare the Ninevites. His actions recorded in this verse demonstrate that he does not agree with the Lord’s rhetorical question that makes clear that Jonah is not justified in his anger toward God’s decision.

Jonah’s conduct here in 4:5 is consistent with the way he has handled himself in his relationship to the Lord. In 1:3, Jonah does not verbally respond to the Lord’s command but does so through his actions by taking a ship Tarshish and not going to Nineveh. The prophet expresses his anger to the Lord by his actions rather than with words. This is what we call a “passive-aggressive” response. Therefore, Jonah’s silence and the actions he takes in response to the Lord’s rhetorical question express his anger with respect to God’s decision to spare the Ninevites.

His conduct here in 4:5 makes clear to God and the reader that Jonah believes that this anger is justified and that he feels that God made the wrong decision. The silent treatment that he gives by refusing to respond to His rhetorical question expresses the depth of his rage against the decision to spare Nineveh.

Undoubtedly, because of his great hatred of the Ninevites, Jonah waited to see if God would destroy Nineveh in the hopes that their repentance from their evil way of living would be short lived. Thus, the prophet waited out the forty days.
Now some scholars debate the position of 4:5 in the book. Some question as to why Jonah would leave the city and set up camp east of the city to see what would happen to it when Jonah 3 makes clear that the city believed in God and then repented from their evil way of living? In fact, the deliverance of the Ninevites is what infuriated Jonah in the first place. Some question the position of this verse because Jonah 4:6-11 does not make mention as to what happened to Nineveh. In fact, 4:11 refers to what happened in Nineveh in chapter 3. It is not the place of any subsequent activity following 3:10. Furthermore, why would the Lord provide the prophet with a qiqayon plant when he had already built a shelter for himself? There is no further mention of the shelter even after the Lord destroyed the plant.

To solve these problems, some scholars contend that the verbs in 4:5 have a pluperfect sense meaning that Jonah “had” departed from Nineveh and he “had” built a shelter for himself. They say that the verse refers back to the time before Nineveh believed in God and repented or in other words, after the message that Jonah proclaimed as recorded in 3:4. Still others says that 4:5 originally belonged after 3:4. However, this has no manuscript support nor is there any explanation to support this transposition.

Jonah 4:5 belongs where it does since it makes sense in this position since it emphasizes Jonah’s stubborn rejection of God’s grace policy towards the Ninevites. This is why he waits to see if God will destroy the city. The prophet’s actions are an expression of his stubborn rejection of God’s grace policy towards the Ninevites and the Gentiles as a whole. He rejects God’s grace policy towards the Ninevites because of his nationalistic pride and self-righteousness.

The Ninevites were not saved based upon their own merits but on the merits of the object of their faith, namely the Lord! This faith produced their repentant behavior. Jonah failed to see this because he sought to establish his own righteousness as demonstrated by the fact that he compares himself to the Ninevites and believes he is more righteous than they are. However, both Jonah and the Ninevites do not measure up to God’s perfect, holy standards. He acknowledges God’s grace policy in 4:2 but this is in relation to Israel and himself. He does not apply this to the Ninevites and the Gentiles as a whole. Therefore, Jonah 4:5 records Jonah’s rejection of God’s grace policy towards the Ninevites. His actions serve as a silent protest to this policy.

So the Lord provided the prophet with a qiqayon plant when he had already built a shelter for himself because He wanted to teach Jonah about His grace. The plant was a gift from God. God’s grace provides the sinner with divine righteousness when the sinner exercises faith in God’s message. The plant was a picture of divine righteousness that is received as a gift by grace through faith. Jonah’s shelter is a picture of human self-righteousness that is based upon human works or a meritorious system of actions designed to gain the approbation of God.
The seventh and final scene in the book of Jonah begins with Jonah 4:6, which records the Lord providing a plant for Jonah that gives him shade and consequently makes him extremely delighted.

**Jonah 4:6, “Next, the Lord God provided a little qîqāywōn plant. Indeed, it grew up over Jonah for his benefit in order to function as shade for his head so as to deliver him, for his benefit from his evil. Consequently, Jonah was extremely delighted because of this little plant.” (My translation)**

In this verse, we have the Lord responding to Jonah’s anger with grace and love. The Lord does not speak to Jonah but rather responds to the prophet’s silent angry protest with silent gracious, compassionate and loving action.

The Lord uses the plant as a visual aid to teach Jonah about grace. Undoubtedly, Jonah recognized that God was being merciful to him and giving him a gift that he did not deserve. He enjoyed God being gracious to him but not others and specifically, not his enemies. Jonah is excited about the great miracle of the plant but not about the greater miracle, namely that of the Ninevites getting saved by believing in the Lord and repenting from their infamous evil way of living.

This verse records Jonah being happy for the first time. His extreme delight because of the shade the plant provided him stands in stark contrast to his being infuriated by the Lord’s decision to relent and spare the Ninevites. This should have caused him extreme joy since human beings are of more value than a plant. He is very happy when the Lord delivered him from drowning even though he was insubordinate yet he is infuriated when the Lord spares the Ninevites. This demonstrates to the reader just how self-centered Jonah is which is an indication that he is living according to the desires of his sin nature and is deceived by Satan’s cosmic system.

Jonah 4:6 also teaches that the Lord not only was attempting to deliver Jonah from the scorching Middle Eastern sun but more importantly, He was attempting to deliver the prophet from his evil attitude towards His grace policy with regards to the Ninevites. This is indicated by the dialogue that follows in verses 7-11 where the Lord is teaching Jonah about His grace policy.

So the Lord provided this plant for Jonah for two reasons. The first is that the prophet’s make shift shelter, which he built from brush or leaves was flimsy at best and thus he needed something better. Secondly and more importantly, the Lord wanted to use this plant as an object lesson to teach Jonah about His grace policy. The Lord will ultimately use this plant to teach Jonah about His grace policy towards not only himself and the Jews but also towards the Ninevites who were Gentiles. He wants the prophet to see the Ninevites and all men from His perspective (John 3:16; 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9).
So the Lord provided the prophet with a qiqayon plant when he had already built a shelter for himself because He wanted to teach Jonah about His grace. The plant was a gift from God. God’s grace provides the sinner with divine righteousness when the sinner exercises faith in God’s message. The plant was a picture of divine righteousness that is received as a gift by grace through faith.

Jonah’s shelter is a picture of human self-righteousness that is based upon human works or a meritorious system of actions designed to gain the approbation of God.

Jonah 4:7 records God sending a worm to attack the plant so that it dried up.

   *Jonah 4:7, “However, God commissioned a worm when the dawn arose on the next day. Indeed, it attacked this plant so that it withered.”* (My translation)

This verse contains another irony in that this plant, which caused Jonah to be extremely delighted was destroyed by God whereas the Ninevites who the prophet hated and caused him misery, were not destroyed.

By killing this plant, the Lord was attempting to deliver Jonah from his evil attitude towards His grace policy with regards to the Ninevites. This is indicated by the dialogue in verses 7-11 where the Lord is teaching Jonah about His grace policy.

The Lord provided this plant for Jonah for two reasons. The first is that the prophet’s make shift shelter, which he built from brush or leaves was flimsy at best and thus he needed something better. Secondly and more importantly, the Lord wanted to use this plant as an object lesson to teach Jonah about His grace policy.

The Lord will ultimately use this plant to teach Jonah about His grace policy towards not only himself and the Jews but also towards the Ninevites who were Gentiles. He wants the prophet to see the Ninevites and all men from His perspective (John 3:16; 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9).

In verse 7, by killing this plant with the worm, God is treating Jonah the way the prophet wished that God had treated the Ninevites. Again, Jonah loves when God treats him in grace but not the Ninevites. Jonah was undeserving like the Ninevites, yet he thinks that God was wrong to extend grace to them. This is due again to his self-righteousness in that he is comparing himself to the Ninevites and concluding that he is better than them, however, if he compared himself and the Ninevites to God’s perfect holy standards, he would have to conclude that he is no better than the Ninevites. Consequently, if he acknowledged this fact, he would have no problem with God treating the Ninevites in grace since he too was undeserving of being delivered from death and had been the beneficiary of God’s grace.

Then, in Jonah 4:8, we read that God sent an east wind when the sun began to shine to come upon Jonah. The verse goes on to record that the sun beat down on
Jonah’s head so that he grew faint from the heat, despained of life and sought to die rather than live.

Jonah 4:8, “Now, it took place, when the sun arose, God sent a hot east wind. Then, the sun beat down against Jonah’s head so that he became faint. Then, his soul desired to die. Specifically, he said, ‘my death would be better than my living.’” (My translation)

This verse is transitional moving to another episode in this seventh and final scene. God is disciplining Jonah when He sends a hot east wind to destroy his make shift shelter, leaving him to suffer the elements. When the wind died down, then the prophet had to suffer the sun beating down against his head since he no longer had any shade to hide from the sun. Consequently, Jonah became faint because of sun stroke and dehydration. His circumstances were so intolerable that he desired that he could die.

Jonah is not responding to the divine discipline properly at all. He is not repented of his evil attitude towards the Ninevites. Instead, gets involved in self-pity. The prophet’s response to the discipline echoes his complaint to God in verse 3 where he asked God to take his life because God did not destroy the Ninevites since they believed in God and as a result repented of their evil way of living.

He knows that he is being disciplined again and he knows that this time it is not because he disobeyed the Lord but rather that he has such an evil attitude towards the Ninevites. Therefore, it appears that he wants to die here in verse 8 because he would rather die than repent of his hatred toward the Ninevites! Talk about stubborn and self-righteous. He has a double standard or rather he thinks God should have two sets of standards…one for the Israel and Jonah and another for the Gentiles and specifically, the Ninevites. The former is the beneficiary of God’s grace, mercy and compassion and the latter is to be judged.

Jonah 4:8 reveals Jonah’s deep-seated hatred of the Ninevites. He does not want God to be impartial but partial to him and Israel. This verse expresses his total frustration with God’s grace policy toward the Ninevites and the Gentiles. Again, this frustration is due to his self-righteousness in that he thinks that the Israelites are superior to the Ninevites. However, he is comparing the two races to each other rather than comparing the two in relation to God and His perfect holy standards, which neither live up to!

Jonah 4:9 presents the next event that took place immediately after Jonah expressed to himself his desire to die because of the sun beating down against his head. It begins with a rhetorical question that begins with the same wording as the question that the Lord posed to Jonah in verse 4.

Jonah 4:9, “Then, God posed a question to Jonah, ‘Is it justified for you to be infuriated because of this little qiqaywôn plant?’ However, he replied, ‘yes, for me to be infuriated is justified, I couldn’t be more so!’” (My translation)
God is attempting to point out to Jonah that the prophet’s position is totally inconsistent and that His decision to spare the Ninevites was totally consistent with His character and nature and grace policy. This question is central to the narrative and critical in understanding the account. It is setting up Jonah to condemn himself and implies that Jonah has no justification in disagreeing with God’s decision or His grace policy towards the Ninevites. It implies that the prophet has no right to demand that God treat him well and the Ninevites badly.

Jonah is infuriated because the Ninevites were not destroyed and when the plant died. His position is totally ridiculous since he places a greater value on an inanimate object than human beings who are created in the image of God.

Jonah’s replies to God’s question whereas in verse 4 he does not but rather responds with a silent protest. His reply to God make clear that the plant was extremely important to him since it gave him relief and protection from the oppressive Middle Eastern sun. However, by giving such a response, Jonah has made clear through his own words that a plant is more important than human beings. He values a plant more than human beings, which is inconsistent with the Word of God, which declares that human beings are created in the image of God and not plants. His answer condemns him since it is inconsistent with the Word of God.

In Jonah 4:10-11, the Lord rebukes Jonah for showing more concern about the plant than the Ninevites.

Jonah 3:10, “When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it. 4:1 But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry. 2 He prayed to the Lord and said, ‘Please Lord, was not this what I said 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. 3 Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life.’ 4 The Lord said, ‘Do you have good reason to be angry?’ 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. 6 So the Lord God appointed a plant and it grew up over Jonah to be a shade over his head to deliver him from his discomfort. And Jonah was extremely happy about the plant. 7 But God appointed a worm when dawn came the next day and it attacked the plant and it withered. 8 When the sun came up God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on Jonah’s head so that he became faint and begged with all his soul to die, saying, ‘Death is better to me than life.’ 9 Then God said to Jonah, ‘Do you have good reason to
be angry about the plant?’ And he said, ‘I have good reason to be angry, even to death.’ 10 Then the Lord said, ‘You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work and which you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight. 11 Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?’” (NASU)

Let’s look at verse 10.

Jonah 4:10, “Then the Lord said, ‘You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work and which you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight.’” (NASU)

“Then the Lord said” is composed of the conjunction wa (ו) (wa), “then,” which is prefixed to the third person masculine singular qal active imperfect form of the verb ʼā·mâr ((Label) (aw-mar), “said,” which is followed by the masculine singular form of the proper noun Yahweh (יְהוָה) (yeh-ho-vaw), “the Lord.”

The conjunction wa and the imperfect form of the verb ʼā·mâr form an adversative clause that stands in direct contrast with Jonah’s reply to God’s question that appears in verse 9.

Jonah 4:9, “Then, God posed a question to Jonah, ‘Is it justified for you to be infuriated because of this little qîqāywîn plant?’ However, he replied, ‘yes, for me to be infuriated is justified, I couldn’t be more so!’” (My translation)

In Jonah 4:9, God poses a rhetorical question to Jonah that implies that the prophet was not justified for being infuriated by His decision to kill the plant with a worm. Jonah is infuriated because the Ninevites were not destroyed and when the plant died. His position is totally ridiculous since he places a greater value on an inanimate object than human beings who are created in the image of God. He values a plant more than human beings, which is inconsistent with the Word of God, which declares that human beings were created in the image of God and not plants. His answer condemns him since it is inconsistent with the Word of God, which declares that human beings were created in the image of God.

Now, in Jonah 4:10, the Lord says to Jonah in response to the prophet’s reply at the end of verse 9 that he was upset about this little plant, for which he did not work nor did anything to make it grow and then grew up overnight and died the next day. Then, in Jonah 4:11, the Lord poses another rhetorical question which justifies His decision to be more concerned about Nineveh where there are more than one hundred twenty thousand people in it who do not know right from wrong as well as many animals. So in Jonah 4:10-11, God is rebuking Jonah and telling him that he is not justified in being angry about His decision to kill the plant with a worm and more importantly for His decision to spare the lives of the Ninevites when they repented. Therefore, the contrast is between Jonah’s justification for
being angry over God’s decision to kill the plant and spare the Ninevites and God’s response in verses 10-11 in which the Lord declares that the prophet is not justified for being angry about the plant and His decision to spare the Ninevites since the latter is created in the image of God and the former is not. Consequently, we will translate the conjunction wa “but.”

The verb ʻā·mār means “to reply” since the Lord is doing just that with Jonah by replying to the prophet’s response in verse 9 that he was justified for being angry with God’s decision to kill the plant with a worm. The qal stem of the verb is fientive expressing an action performed by the Lord. The active voice means that the Lord, as the subject, performs the action of replying to Jonah with a rhetorical question. The imperfect tense is used of a past action from the perspective of the writer. It is used with the conjunction wa to form an adversative clause. We will translate the verb ʻā·mār “replied.”

“The Lord” is the masculine singular form of the proper noun Yahweh (יְהֹוָה) (yeh-ho-vaw), which is the covenant-keeping personal name of God emphasizing that Jonah possessed a covenant relationship with God. It also speaks of the “immanency” of God meaning that He involves Himself in and concerns Himself with and intervenes in the affairs of men. Thus, it indicates that God is intervening in Jonah’s life by responding to his complaint with regards to His decision to kill the plant with a worm and spare the Ninevites since the latter is much more important than the former since the latter are created in the image of God.

Corrected translation thus far of Jonah 4:10: “But the Lord replied…”

Jonah 4:10, “Then the Lord said, ‘You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work and which you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight.’” (NASU)

“You had compassion” is composed of the second person masculine singular form of the pronoun ʻat-tā(h) (aw-thaw), “you” and the second person masculine singular qal active perfect form of the verb ḥūs (זָה) (khoos), “had compassion” and the preposition ʻāl (אל) (al), “on” and the articular masculine singular form of the noun qī·qāy-wōn (קִיהוֹדונ) (kee-kaw-yone), “the plant”

The pronoun ʻat-tā(h) refers of course to Jonah and is appended to the verb ḥūs, “had compassion” for emphasis and should be rendered “yourself.” The emphasis upon Jonah in verse 10 sets up the emphasis on Yahweh in verse 11 who will describe Himself as the subject of the same verb.

The verb ḥūs means “to show concern for, to be concerned about” something or someone, which in our context is the plant. God is affirming that Jonah “had concern for” the plant. The qal stem of the verb and the active voice are stative expressing a mental attitude of Jonah toward the plant. The imperfect tense speaks
of this action of Jonah as taking place in past time from the perspective of the writer.

Once again, the noun qî·qāy-wōn refers to the castor oil plant or *ricinus communis*, which is indicated by its articular construction that is anaphoric meaning that the article signifies that this word was used in verse 9 and has the same referent in verse 10. The word is the object of the preposition ‘āl, which functions as a marker of persons benefited by an event indicating that plant was the beneficiary of Jonah’s compassion. Therefore, we will translate this prepositional phrase “for this little qîqāywōn plant.”

Corrected translation thus far of Jonah 4:10: “But the Lord replied, ‘You yourself had concern for this little qîqāywōn plant…””

Jonah 4:10, “Then the Lord said, ‘You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work and which you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight.’” (NASU)

“For which you did not work” is composed of the relative particle ʾāšēr (אָשֶׁר) (ash-er), “which” and the negative particle lō(’) (לֹא) (low), “not” and the second person masculine singular qal active perfect form of the verb ʾā-māl (אָמַל) (aw-mal), “you did work” and the preposition bē (בֶּ) (beth), “for” and the third person masculine singular pronomial suffix –hû (הוּ) (who).

The relative particle ʾāšēr means “which” and introduces a relative clause and refers to the little qîqāywōn plant overturning.

The verb ʾā-māl means “to work” in the sense of putting forth considerable effort and energy to a task (Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament). The negative particle lō(’) is a marker of emphatic negation. Therefore, these two words indicate that Jonah by no means put forth considerable effort and energy in cultivating or tending the plant.

The qal stem of the verb is fientive expressing an action that Jonah by no means performed. The active voice indicates that Jonah as the subject by no means worked in cultivating the plant so that it would grow. The perfect tense of the verb is a recent perfective representing a situation that occurred in the recent past. We will translate the negative particle lō(’), “by no means” and the verb ʾā-māl, “you have worked.”

The third person masculine singular pronomial suffix –hû refers to the plant and is the object of the preposition bē which functions as a marker of specification indicating that Jonah by no means worked “for” the plant. We will translate this prepositional phrase “for it.”

Corrected translation thus far of Jonah 4:10: “But the Lord replied, ‘You yourself had concern for this little qîqāywōn plant, which you have by no means worked for it…””
Jonah 4:10, “Then the Lord said, ‘You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work and which you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight.’” (NASU)

“And which you did not cause to grow” is composed of the conjunction wa (ו) (wa), “and,” which is followed by the negative particle lō(’) (ל) (low), “not” and the second person masculine singular piel active perfect form of the verb gā·dāl (גד) (gaw-dal), “you did cause to grow” and the third person masculine singular pronomial suffix –hû (יהו) (who).

The conjunction wa is adjunctive meaning that it is introducing an additional action that Jonah by no means performed with regards to the plant. Therefore we will translate the word “and in addition.”

The verb gā·dāl means “to grow” in the sense of causing another physical object to grow bigger. Here it is used with Jonah as its subject and the plant as its object. Again, the negative particle lō(’) is a marker of emphatic negation. Therefore, these two words indicate that Jonah by no means caused the plant to grow bigger.

The piel stem is causative indicating that Jonah by no means caused the plant to grow bigger. The active voice indicates that Jonah as the subject by no means caused the plant to grow in height. The perfect tense of the verb is a recent perfective representing a situation that occurred in the recent past. We will translate the negative particle lō(’), “by no means” and the verb gā·dāl, “you caused to grow.”

The third person masculine singular pronomial suffix –hû means “it” and refers to the plant.

Corrected translation thus far of Jonah 4:10: “But the Lord replied, ‘You yourself had concern for this little qīqāywōn plant, which you have by no means worked for it and in addition by no means caused it to grow.’”

Jonah 4:10, “Then the Lord said, ‘You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work and which you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight.’” (NASU)

“Which came up overnight and perished overnight” is composed of the relative particle šā- (ש) (shel), “which” and the masculine singular construct form of the noun bēn (בן) (ben) and the masculine singular form of the noun lāy·lā(h) (ليل) (lah-yel-aw), “overnight” and the third person masculine singular qal active perfect form of the verb hā·yā(h) (יָהַ) (haw-yaw), “came up” and the conjunction wa (ו) (wa), “and,” which is followed by the masculine singular construct form of the noun bēn (בן) (ben) and the masculine singular form of the noun lāy·lā(h) (ليل) (lah-yel-aw), “overnight” and the third person masculine singular qal active perfect form of the verb ṭā·ḥād (תָּחַד) (aw-bad), “perished.”
The relative particle šā- introduces a relative clause and refers to the plant. The noun bēn refers to the growth of the plant. It is used with the noun lāy·lā(h), which means “night” referring to a period of time from the setting to the rising of the sun with emphasis upon the lack of light. Together, these two words literally mean “offspring of a night” in the sense that the plant became mature in a time period of overnight.

The verb hā·yā(h) means “to exist” and refers of course to the lifespan or existence of the plant. The qal stem of this verb is stative and so is the active voice indicating that the plant came into existence overnight. The perfect tense of the verb is stative also expressing the plant’s state of being in existence.

The conjunction wa is adjunctive introducing a statement that presents an “additional” fact about the plant. Once again, the noun bēn refers to the growth of the plant. It is used again with the noun lāy·lā(h), which means “night” referring to a period of time from the setting to the rising of the sun with emphasis upon the lack of light. Together, these two words literally mean “offspring of a night” in the sense that the plant became mature in a time period of overnight.

The verb ʿā·ḥād means “to die” and of course refers in context to the death of the plant. The qal stem, the active voice and the perfect tense are all stative indicating that the plant existed in a state of being dead overnight.

Completed corrected translation of Jonah 4:10: “But the Lord replied, ‘You yourself had concern for this little qīqāywōn plant, which you have by no means worked for it and in addition by no means caused it to grow, which offspring came into existence overnight and in addition which offspring died overnight.’”

In this verse, the Lord is attempting to teach Jonah that he is totally unjustified in his anger concerning His decision to kill the plant with a worm and more importantly spare the lives of the Ninevites. The Lord rebukes Jonah for his unjustified anger about the death of the plant by telling Jonah that he by no means worked for it and by no means did he cause it to grow. The plant came into existence in one night and died the very next night. Yet, Jonah was angry though he had absolutely nothing to do with the life and death of the plant.

The prophet wanted to die over a plant whose entire lifespan was one day. He had no right or claims upon the plant. It was God’s creation and He had every right to end its existence since He is the sovereign Creator.

The plant was a gift of God’s grace, which Jonah therefore, did not merit or deserve. The Lord wants Jonah to understand that he has no business questioning or complaining about His decision to destroy the plant since Jonah has no merit with Him, nor did he create the plant.
Jonah 4:11, “Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?” (NASU)

Not translated is the emphatic, disjunctive use of the conjunction wa (י) (wa), which introduces a rhetorical question that presents an emphatic comparison between Jonah’s concern for the plant with God’s compassionate attitude toward the Ninevites who were superior to the plant since they were created in the image of God. That the conjunction is emphatic is indicated by the redundant pronoun being used with the verb הָעָשׁ (hush) (khoos), “had compassion,” which appeared in verse 10 with Jonah as its subject and with a redundant pronoun. This use of the redundant pronoun in verse 10 placed emphasis on Jonah but in verse 11, the emphasis is upon the Lord. What Jonah was concerned about was emphasized in verse 10, whereas in verse 11 what is important to the Lord is emphasized. In verse 10, Jonah was concerned an insignificant plant whereas the Lord is concerned about creatures who were created in His image. Therefore, we will translate the conjunction wa, “Indeed.”

Jonah 4:11 contains a rhetorical question even though the statement does not begin with an interrogative pronoun. Commenting on this, Lessing writes, “The questions in Jonah 4:2, 4, 9 were posed using the interrogative he (יה). However, a Hebrew question need not begin with an interrogative pronoun or adverb, especially if it expects a simple answer of yes (as here) or no (Waltke-O’Connor, § 40.3b). Without an interrogative, the context or the arrangement or emphasis of the words may indicate a question. See GKC, § 150 a; Joüon, § 161 a. Like the Hebrew, all the ancient versions render 4:11 as a question without using an interrogative: the LXX by ἐγώ δέ οὐ φέσομαι, the Vulgate by Et ego non parcam, and the Syriac by οὐ φείσομαι. The fact that Yahweh twice asked Jonah a question in the preceding context (‘Is it right … ?’ 4:4, 9) makes it more likely that this too is a question by Yahweh to Jonah.” (Concordia Commentary: Jonah; page 386)

This question in verse 11 is an a fortiori argument from lesser to greater. The lesser is Jonah’s concern about the little plant whereas the greater is the Lord’s concern for the people of Nineveh.

“Should I not have compassion on Nineveh?” is composed of the first person singular independent personal pronoun יְנִי (ne), “I” and the negative particle לֹא (lō) (low), “not” and the first person singular qal active imperfect form of the verb הָעָשׁ (hush) (khoos), “should have compassion” and the preposition ‘אל (al) (al), “on” and the feminine singular form of the proper noun נִיְנִו’בֵּה (nee-nev-ay), “Nineveh.”

The independent personal pronoun יְנִי, “I” refers of course to the Lord and is appended to the verb הָעָשׁ, “had compassion” for emphasis and should be rendered
“myself” emphasizing the Lord’s concern for the Ninevites who were created in His image in contrast to Jonah’s concern for an insignificant plant.

The verb הָעִם means “to show concern for, to be concerned about” something or someone, which in our context is the Lord’s concern for the Ninevites. The negative particle לֹא is a marker of emphatic negation. Therefore, these two words are affirming the Lord’s concern for the Ninevites.

The qal stem of the verb is stative and the active voice is as well expressing an attitude of the Lord toward the Ninevites. The imperfect tense speaks of this action of Jonah as taking place in past time from the perspective of the writer. It is used with the conjunction וַא to form an emphatic clause that contains a rhetorical question.

Therefore, we will translate these two words “should without a doubt not have concern.”

The proper noun נִינֵה (nîneh), “Nineveh” contains the figure of metonymy meaning that the name of the city is put for its inhabitants. The word is the object of the preposition אֵל, which is a marker of advantage indicating that the Ninevites benefited from the Lord’s concern for them. He demonstrated this concern by sending Jonah to them with the message that they would be overturned at the end of forty days. Therefore, we will translate this prepositional phrase “for Nineveh.”

“The great city” is composed of the articular feminine singular form of the noun יָר (yr), “the city” and the articular feminine singular form of the adjective גדָה (gadol), “great.”

This same exact phrase appeared in 1:2 and 3:2. Here in 4:11, the noun יָר refers not only to Nineveh proper but also the whole district administered by Nineveh, which in the days of the prophet would include Sinjar-Calah-Dur-Sharrukin (See Genesis 10:11-12). It refers to the entire metropolitan area composed of Nineveh and these other cities. This phrase is to be understood in a semi-technical sense, meaning “Greater Nineveh.” The adjective גדָה refers to the enormous population of the city since this is what the Lord was concerned about. The articular construction of the noun יָר indicates that this city is well-known to the reader and the articular construction of the adjective emphasizes that this city was superior to others in Jonah’s day due to its population and influence. We will translate the expression יִנְהָר הֶלֹא יָרָה גָּדוֹל “that enormous city.”

Corrected translation thus far of Jonah 4:11: “Indeed, should I myself without a doubt not have concern for Nineveh, that enormous city?”

Jonah 4:11, “Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?” (NASU)

“In which there are more than 120,000 persons” is composed of the relative particle יָשֵׁר (asher) (ash-er), “which” and the particle of affirmation יֵשׁ (šē)
“there are” and the preposition $b^c$ ($ב$) (“in”), “the third person feminine singular form of the pronomial suffix $hî$’ ($היה$) (“which” and the hiphil active infinitive absolute form of the verb $rā·bā(h)$ ($ראב$) (“abundance” and the preposition $min$ ($مين$), “than” and the dual number $šēnā·yim$ ($שנאיים$) (“two” and the number $‘ēś·rē(h)$ ($אשרא$) (“ten” and the number $rib·bō(’)$ ($ריבבו$) and the masculine singular form of the noun ‘$ā·ḏām$ ($אדם$) (“persons.”

The relative particle $d’šēr$ means “which” and thus introduces a relative clause referring to Nineveh. The particle of affirmation $yēš$ expresses the existence of something. Here it is used to show the existence of people in Nineveh. It is a marker which affirms the existence of 120,000 persons in the city of Nineveh and its surrounding districts. The preposition $b^c$ is a marker of location indicating that the Nineveh is the place or locale in which there exists 120,000 persons. Its object is the third person feminine singular form of the pronomial suffix $hî$ ($היה$), which refers to Nineveh and should be rendered “her” since it is in the feminine gender.

The verb $rā·bā(h)$ denotes an “abundance” and is used as an adjective meaning “more.” It is an infinitive absolute functioning as the subject of a verbless clause. The hiphil stem of the verb describes the subject, Nineveh of being in a state of having more than 120,000 people living in it. The active voice indicates that the city of Nineveh is the place or locale in which there exists 120,000 persons. It is accompanied by the preposition $min$, which is a comparative marker indicating that Nineveh’s population was in excess of 120,000 people.

The dual number $šēnā·yim$ means “two” and the number $‘ēś·rē(h)$ means “ten” and the number $rib·bō(’)$ means “10,000,” thus the expression $ששנאיים$ literally means “two [and] ten thousand or ten myriad” or in other words twelve myriads or 120,000.

The noun ‘$ā·ḏām$ means “people” and is used as a collective speaking of the human beings that resided in the Greater Nineveh metropolitan area. The expression to follow indicates that these were children who were before the age of accountability.

We will translate this relative clause “which there exists in her more than 120,000 persons.”

Corrected translation thus far of Jonah 4:11: “Indeed, should I myself without a doubt not have concern for Nineveh, that enormous city which there exists in her more than 120,000 persons?”

Jonah 4:11, “Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?” (NASU)
“Who do not know the difference between their right and left hand” is composed of the relative particle ḏĕr (šěr) (ash-er), “who” and the negative particle lō(’) (šō) (low), “not” and the third person masculine singular qal active perfect form of the verb yă-ḏă’ (yaw-dah), “do know” and the preposition bā-yin (bā) (bane), “between” and the feminine singular construct form of the noun yă-mîn (yaw-meen), “right” and the third person masculine singular pronomial suffix –hû (who), “their” and the preposition lê (lamed), “and” and masculine singular construct form of the noun šim·‘ēl (sem-ole), “left hand” and the third person masculine singular pronomial suffix –hû (who), “their.”

The relative particle ḏĕr means “who” introducing a relative clause and refers to the more than 120,000 persons mentioned in the previous clause.

The verb yă-ḏă’ means “to distinguish between” two different options. The negative particle lō(’) is a marker of emphatic negation indicating that it is emphatically negating the idea conveyed by the verb. Therefore, these two words are used of the 120,000 persons who are described in this relative clause as having no ability whatsoever to distinguish between right from wrong.

The qal stem of this verb is stative and so is the active voice indicating that the 120,000 human beings exist in the state of being unable to distinguish between right from wrong. The perfect tense of the verb is stative also expressing this as well.

The noun yă-mîn, “right” is used in a figurative sense for what is morally right. Now, with respect to the Ninevites who did not have the Mosaic Law given to them in writing like the Jews, it refers to what is in accordance with the inherent moral law that resides in the soul of every human being according to Romans 2:14-15. On the other hand, the noun šim·‘ēl, “left” is also used in a figurative sense for what is morally wrong. In respect to the Ninevites, it refers to what is not in accordance with the inherent moral law that resides in the soul of every human being according to Romans 2:14-15. In both instances, the third person masculine singular pronomial suffix –hû, “their” refers to children before the age of accountability.

The preposition bā-yin, “between” is a marker of distinction between what is morally right or in accordance with the inherent law of God in mankind and what is not. The preposition lê is used instead of repeating bā-yin and should be rendered “from.”

We will translate this relative clause “who can by no means distinguish between their right from their left.”

This relative clause refers to the fact that Nineveh had 120,000 children who could not distinguish between what is right from what is wrong. It does not refer to the fact that the Ninevites had absolutely no knowledge whatsoever as to how to
extricate themselves from the sin nature and Satan, both enslave the entire human race since the verb יָ֣דָּעַ means “to distinguish between” two different options, which are identified by the expression ובֵין יָֽדְיוֹ וּבֵין לֵבָּהָי “between their right and left hand.” The right/hand left option does not correspond to the interpretation that the Ninevites did not know how to be delivered from sin and Satan since there is only one way to be delivered from these, faith alone in Christ alone.

This relative clause “who can by no means distinguish between their right from their left” by no means indicates that the Ninevites were morally innocent or not accountable for their actions since the Ninevites themselves acknowledge their guilt in Jonah 3:5 and 8. It also does not express the fact that the Ninevites were ignorant of God since creation manifests the fact that there is a God. Also, the inherent law that is basically the Ten Commandments resides in the soul of every human being without exception according to Romans 2:14-15. This inherent law leaves provides the human race with a basic knowledge of God’s law. The Ninevites were not ignorant of God and His law. The fact that they expressed their guilt before God and had nothing in writing from God like the Jews demonstrates that they were by no means ignorant of God’s law.

The interpretation that this relative clause “who can by no means distinguish between their right from their left” refers to children who can not distinguish between what is right from wrong would indicate that the population of the greater Nineveh area would have been 600,000. Such a number of children would suggest a population in the greater Nineveh area of 600,000. Archaeology does not substantiate this number if Nineveh refers only to the city proper. However, if one holds this view, as this writer that Nineveh refers to the city proper and its surrounding districts, then this population estimate is possible.

Some have argued that the word for “persons” (אדם) rules out the specification of children, which indicate that the number 120,000 probably stands for the entire population. However, the relative clause “who can by no means distinguish between their right from their left” would indicate that the entire population could not distinguish between right from wrong. This cannot be the case since the Ninevites themselves acknowledge their guilt in Jonah 3:5 and 8. Also, the inherent law that is basically the Ten Commandments resides in the soul of every human being without exception according to Romans 2:14-15, which indicates the Ninevites were morally accountable.

Corrected translation thus far of Jonah 4:11: “Indeed, should I myself without a doubt not have concern for Nineveh, that enormous city which there exists in her more than 120,000 persons who can by no means distinguish between their right from their life?”
Jonah 4:11, “Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?” (NASU)

“As well as many animals” is composed of the adjunctive use of the conjunction wa (א) (wa), “as well as” and the feminine singular form of the noun bēhē·mā(h) (בְּהֵם) (be-hay-maw), “animals” and the feminine singular form of the adjective rāb (רָב) (rab), “many.”

The conjunction wa is adjunctive indicating that “in addition to” children in Nineveh, the Lord had concern for domestic animals. The noun bēhē·mā(h) refers to all types of “domestic animals.” The adjective rāb means “many” indicating that the Lord had concern for a relatively large quantity of domestic animals that were located in the greater Nineveh area. We will translate this adjunctive clause “as well as many domestic animals.”

The Lord mentions His concern for the domestic animals to emphasize that they also are more important than the plant that Jonah was so concerned about. The mention of domestic animals further emphasizes the stupidity and irrationality of Jonah’s position.

Completed corrected translation of Jonah 4:11: “Indeed, should I myself without a doubt not have concern for Nineveh, that enormous city which there exists in her more than 120,000 persons who can by no means distinguish between their right from their life as well as many domestic animals?”

The Lord had the first word in the book of Jonah and He has the last. Since the Lord poses a rhetorical question to Jonah, we would expect that the final word would belong to Jonah. However, this is not the case. There is no response whatsoever from Jonah. The reason for the silence has been questioned by many expositors of the book.

There are several reasons for the silence. First of all, Jonah didn’t respond because he finally understood what God was telling him. He got the point. Some have rejected this idea claiming that Jonah was not the author of this book that bears his name.

Traditionally, the authorship of the book of Jonah has been ascribed to the prophet himself. However, some modern scholars have rejected this for several reasons. First of all, they claim that the book itself does not claim that Jonah is the author but this can be rejected since the introductory formula in Jonah 1:1 is parallel to that used in Hosea, Joel, Micah and Zephaniah and closing that is used in other prophetic books of whose authorship there is little or no debate.

Another reason put forth by modern scholars in rejection of Jonah as the author of the book that bears his name is that the book refers to the prophet in the third person. However, again the introductory formula demonstrates this to be common practice that is found in the works attributed to Moses, Xenophon and Julius.
Caesar. In the Torah, Moses always refers to himself in the third person and Xenophon in his *Anabasis* and Julius Caesar in his *Gallic Wars* does so as well.

Some modern scholars reject Jonah as the author of the book that bears his name contending that it is later than the eighth century and thus it cannot be by Jonah ben Amittai. So to accept Jonah as the author would necessitate a date in the eighth century. However, 2 Kings 14:25 relates Jonah to the reign of Jeroboam II, thus making the events in the book of Jonah as taking place during Jeroboam’s reign (793-753 B.C.), thus refuting the idea that the book of Jonah was composed later than the eighth century. This would make the date of the book of Jonah somewhere in the mid-eighth century B.C. perhaps around 760 B.C.

Therefore, Jonah wrote this book at the end of his career as he looked back on the decisive turning point of his ministry, which would account for his use of the past tense הָיָה (hāyāh) in referring to Nineveh (3:3) for over a period of decades it might be expected that conditions would have changed in that city since the time of Jonah’s visit (Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, page 342).

Another reason why Jonah does not respond to the Lord’s rhetorical question is that this question presents the message of the book. Also, another reason for Jonah’s silence is that it confronts the reader as to their response. It makes the reader reflect upon his attitude as to whether or not he holds the Lord’s viewpoint toward the human race or Jonah’s. The silence to the Lord’s question invites a response by the reader.

Interestingly, the two Minor Prophets that deal the most with Nineveh, namely Jonah and Nahum each end with a question (See Nahum 3:19).

In Jonah 4:10-11, the Lord makes His point with Jonah that He is sovereign, His policy with all the nations and not just Israel, is grace.