

Jonah Chapter 4 “Learning”

This final chapter in the book of Jonah contains basic teaching for the people of God down through the ages. 2 Peter 3, verse 9 is appropriate – *The Lord is . . . not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.*” Read Jonah, chapter 4.

1) Verses 1 – 3 - Jonah’s complaint:-

I can understand the very human reasoning of Jonah. He knew that the Lord forgave repentant sinners and he did not want the enemies of Israel to be pardoned and set free to attack again, which did in fact happen. The heart attitude of Jonah was one of anger and not of love.

Verse 2 contains a quote from Exodus 34, verses 6 – 7. The word “love” (“steadfast love” in my Bible version “loving kindness” in others) translates the Hebrew word “hesed”. This word includes the idea of “loyalty to a covenant promise”. The expression of love is not exhausted when the covenant is broken by the other party but reaches out after the sinner to bring them back into an intimate personal relationship. (The Book of Hosea is all about this aspect of the covenant love of the Lord God for His people).

2) Verses 4 – 7 – The Plant and the Worm:-

Jonah went to the high ground to the east of the city proper and made a temporary shelter to shade himself from the sun. And waited! He wanted to see what the Lord would do.

The words “*The Lord appointed . . .*” - “*The Lord provided . . .*” occur four times in the Book of Jonah, five times if we include the “*great wind*” in chapter 1, verse 4. The great fish in chapter 1, verse 17; the provision of a plant here in chapter 4, verse 6; the worm in verse 7 and the scorching east wind in verse 8 are all special provisions of the Lord. He was using His control of nature to teach a lesson to Jonah. The hand of the Lord was on Jonah’s ministry from the beginning and guiding, keeping and protecting him through everything. Poor Jonah! He was so happy with the shade provided by the miraculous growth of the plant – but not concerned for the many lives there were in Nineveh.

3) Verse 8 – The Wind and the Sun:-

This final act of the Lord robbed Jonah of his last earthly comfort – the cool shade! The hot east wind and the sun were unbearable, even with the shade of the temporary booth and Jonah wished that he were dead! The first time Jonah wished to die (verse 3) was because of his inner despair. This time it is because of his physical distress.

4) Verses 9 – 11 – The Lesson:-

The series of divine actions in the life of Jonah obviously had a purpose. God was striving to point up how absurd was Jonah’s lack of spiritual concern for human welfare by contrasting it with his own concern for his physical welfare. The Lord God repeats his question “*Do you do well to be angry . . . ?*”. Maybe we can assume that the answer in verse 4 would have been the same! “*I do well to be angry, angry enough to die.*” The pity and concern shown by Jonah for the plant was selfish. The concern of the Lord God for man is unselfish. No-one has the right to question or resent the outpouring of God’s love in saving men and women from the destruction caused by sin.

The responsibility of the People of God to proclaim His love and forgiveness is emphasised again and again in the Bible. The promise of the Lord God that “*all peoples on earth will be blessed through you*” was given to Abram (Abraham) when he was called to leave his country and people. See Genesis 12, verses 1 – 3. The responsibility of being the representative “priesthood” of the Lord God among the peoples of the world is plainly stated:- Read Exodus 19, verses 5 – 6. At the time of Jonah this task, given by the Lord God to His chosen people was being ignored. The lesson for Jonah, for the People of God in his day and for us is clear! The task given to the “People of God” down the ages is still the same as ever. Read again 1 Peter 2, verses 9 – 10.

“For God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life”. (John 3, verse 16).

Next week we will begin our preparation for Christmas by looking at a 4 week series of studies for Advent.