

## Jonah-A Study In Serving God

### Chapter 4

In our last session we saw how Jonah had repented and finally did what God had sent him to do, preach against Nineveh. As he walked and preached throughout the city the people repented and God fulfilled His sovereign purpose for this vast city. Now, as we look at the last chapter in this narrative we will have questions answered for us that have arisen in the past three chapters.

#### Verses 1-4

Jonah is not happy with the outcome of his message against Nineveh. The Hebrew language used here is very vivid and translates literally as "it was evil to Jonah as a great wrong." But why was Jonah so angry with God? It may be because his prophecy that in "forty days, Nineveh shall be overthrown!" & '()\*', did not occur, because according to +eut. -( . . , 'when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him.' He may have felt that his mission was being ridiculed by God because of the trouble that it had brought upon him. It may also be because of a word spoken by God through the prophet Joel which Jonah cites against God when he says, *Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster.* & Joel .(, '\*. Some Jewish interpreters say that the reason Jonah is so upset is because God relents from punishing a people who are not Israelites. Whatever his reasons Jonah uses very strong language to tell God just how upset he is. The extent of Jonah's distress is clearly seen in 5s.), when he asks God to kill him. God's question to Jonah in 5s.), is both gentle and rhetorical. In fact, one Jewish interpreter translates it this way, / he 678+ replied, "Are you that deeply grieved%#/"

#### Verses 5-9

The narrative has set the scene for us. Jonah has reluctantly come to the city of his nation's enemy and reluctantly preached a message from God for their repentance. The city heard his message and repented, much to Jonah's disgust. So, having his worst fear confirmed by God relenting and forgiving the Ninevites Jonah heads off to find a vantage point where he can see the whole city and waits to see what God will do, probably still hoping for divine judgment to fall on the city. Having made a shade for himself & looth\* Jonah waits. In 5s.9, the same language is used that connects the great fish to this plant. God has 'appointed' this plant to spring up and provide cover for the prophet. Scholars have tried and failed to identify this plant correctly. I believe it must be put into the same class as the great fish, something that God has uniquely provided for His own divine purpose. This is the only way to explain such a miraculous event. Again in 5s.9, we see God's grace, the disgruntled prophet waits refusing to believe that God would relent of His judgment. He waits in the hope that God will destroy the enemies of Israel. While he is waiting God creates a huge plant to provide shade for His weary prophet. However, the next day when the sun rises God 'appoints' a worm to attack the plant, killing it :&see note below\*. Now, with no shade for protection the bitter prophet sits struggling to understand God's actions. The next day God 'appoints' a "scorching east wind", this is a Sirocco wind which is a hot humid wind, originating in the Sahara desert as a dry dusty wind but becoming moist as it passes over the Mediterranean. This scorching hot southerly wind, can create a windstorm that lifts up clouds of dust or sand. So, left with no shade, the sun beating down on him and feeling the effects of the hot Sirocco wind, Jonah again feels the desperation of his situation and again asks for death. But again God asks the rhetorical question, "do you do well to be angry?" or "are you so deeply grieved about the plant%# I can almost feel the tension in Jonah's reply when he says, "Yes, I do well to be angry." Apart from the obvious lesson Jonah had to learn, we can learn a lot from this dialogue between God and His prophet. We learn that it is good to talk things through with God and to take advantage of the liberty we have in approaching our God with boldness & He! .)(,9\*. Our faith grows as we ask things of God and seek understanding.

The aspect of the ministry of the Holy Spirit within us is to help us to grow in maturity and understanding of the character of God, and our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ (John 1:9). When we question we learn, when we learn we grow, when we grow we mature, when we mature we can then teach, when we teach we make sure the perpetual truths of God feed the church in a continuing cycle that promotes the understanding of God's character generation after generation.

#### *Verses 10-11*

Now we get to the object lesson God is teaching Jonah. The prophet is sitting, frustrated that God has taken away his shade and left him exposed to the elements and now God teaches him the lesson he should have already known. Jonah has compassion for the plant which God provided yet his compassion for the Ninevites is all but non-existent. He cares more for the plant than he does for the whole of the city of Nineveh. In contrast however, God's compassion is so extensive that it goes beyond the people to the animals. This is the character of God that Jonah should have realised. God's compassion goes beyond our understanding and reaches far into His creation. It should remind us of the compassion Jesus had for Jerusalem in Matt. 23:37, when He says, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!"

God's character can sometimes leave us wondering about His actions and that is good because if we understood everything about God, we would be God! We must remember that God is holy and that means that He is totally other than us. He is different yet He chooses to adopt us as His own and take us into His family through the person and work of Jesus. God says of Himself in Isaiah 55:9, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." So when we come to the point in our lives where we are at a loss to understand what is happening and ask that eternal question, Why? Then we get on our knees and seek God in prayer and lean on His Word. We must be aware though that there are things we don't need to know and will never get answers for. It is in these times that we learn to trust Him, we learn to walk in faith knowing that God has a purpose and a reason for what He is doing, this is when we learn to be the children of God knowing that when we cry out, Father, He will respond, and it is in these times when we must ask ourselves, do I do well to be angry?

\*Usually in the Bible, the Hebrew word for a worm is "rimmah", which means a maggot, but the Hebrew word used here for worm, is *tola'ath*, which means "crimson worm" or "scarlet worm".

The crimson worm (*Coccus ilicis*) is a worm that looks more like a grub than a worm. When it is time for the female or mother crimson worm to have babies (which she does only once in her life\*), she finds the trunk of a tree, a wooden fencepost or a stick. She then attaches her body to that wood and makes a hard crimson shell. She is so strongly and permanently stuck to the wood that the shell can never be removed without tearing her body completely apart and killing her. The crimson worm then lays her eggs under her body and the protective shell. When the larvae hatch, they stay under the shell. Not only does the mother's body give protection for her babies, but it also provides them with food, the babies feed on the living body of the mother! After just a few days, when the young worms grow to the point that they are able to take care of themselves, the mother dies. As the mother crimson worm dies, she produces a crimson or scarlet red dye which not only stains the wood she is attached to, but also her young children. They are coloured scarlet red for the rest of their lives.