

A Community to Redeem

Key Verse: *“He prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.”*
—Jonah 4:2

Selected Scripture:
Jonah 3:10; 4:11

AS WE ENDED OUR PREVIOUS lesson, we saw the repented people of Nineveh turning away from evil, and doing as God had asked them to do through the words delivered by Jonah. God then changed the way that he would deal with them, not in the sense that he would ‘repent,’ for God never repents of his ways, but he decided to change his conduct. This is in harmony with what we know of the character of the Heavenly Father, for he has no need to repent, since he knows the end from the beginning. “As for God, his way is perfect: the word of the LORD is tried: he is a buckler to all those that trust in him.”—Ps. 18:30

The events that were taking place regarding God’s dealings with the people of Nineveh caused a great deal of displeasure to Jonah. “It displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry.” (Jon. 4:1) He was so distraught because God spared the people that he even prayed to God to take his life. He

was apparently more interested in himself and his own reputation than in the people of Nineveh and their welfare. We should be ever thankful that we have such a loving Father who is full of compassion when compared to that of his imperfect human servants.

“So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city.” (vs. 5) Since the sun was hot that day, the LORD caused a gourd to grow up to provide a shadow for Jonah “over his head, to deliver him from his grief.” (vs. 6) This made Jonah glad, however his joy was short-lived because the LORD soon caused the plant to wither and die. His reaction to these events caused him to say, “It is better for me to die than to live.” (vs. 8) He had compassion for this gourd, but failed to be concerned at all with the people to whom he had come to proclaim destruction. The Lord taught Jonah a valuable lesson respecting his sympathy for a gourd—an inanimate thing—and his lack of sympathy for others. Many people align themselves to so-called good causes; they have compassion for the flowers, for the birds, for the lower animals, or for the environment. It would appear that this lack of true love, sympathy, and concern for fellow man is an attitude that has existed since man’s fall.

God does not intend to punish the world of mankind for all eternity. According to his gracious plan, he purposes to help the world in general to have an opportunity to attain to human perfection of body, mind, and heart. It is pictured in the sending of his only begotten Son to die, to take away the sins of the world. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.”—John 3:17 ■