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# Jonah



SEVENTH-DAY  
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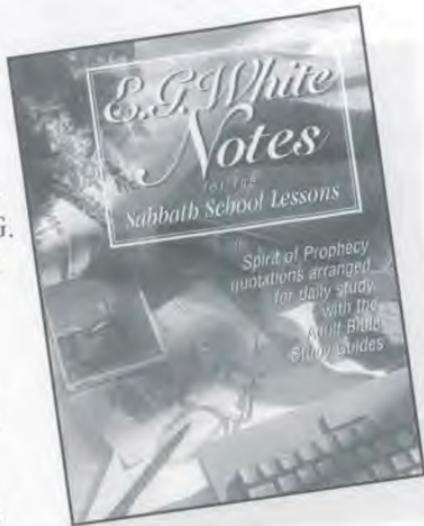
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## Divine Surprises

A farmer every morning went out to feed his chicken. Each morning, when it saw the farmer approach, the bird got ready for breakfast. This scenario happened over and over until, one morning, the farmer arrived and, instead of feeding the fowl, wrung its neck.

The point is this: The past is no guarantor of the future. Though things that have happened before, even regularly, can and often do happen again, they don't, automatically, have to. The unexpected does arise and often when least expected (which is part of what makes it unexpected).

This concept was hard for many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europeans to grasp. The tremendous advances in science, particularly through the seminal work of Isaac Newton, led many to believe that all of nature works through cold, uncaring, and unvarying laws. Once these laws were understood, it was conceivable (if enough other information were given) that a person could know everything that would happen in the future because everything—from what the king would want for dessert on New Year's Eve to the number of hailstones in the next hailstorm over Paris—could be predicted with unerring accuracy.

By the early twentieth century, however, scientists like Niels Bohr, Max Planck, and Erwin Schrödinger—with their discoveries in quantum physics—brought these deterministic assumptions into great question. According to quantum theory, reality at its most fundamental level reveals itself in a transitory, elusive, even statistical, manner, so that we can know only the probability of events, nothing more. Gone, now, was the clockwork universe of the previous few centuries. Einstein, responding incredulously to quantum uncertainty, once said, "I shall never believe that God plays dice with the world."

No, God doesn't. But He can be full of surprises, and some of His most unexpected ones appear in the topic for this quarter—the book of Jonah, which on the surface seems filled with the uncertainty and surprise of the quantum realm, though, in fact, it is based on a certitude more solid and constant than the physics of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe.

First, there's Jonah, a prophet who refuses to accept his call—hardly the usual biblical paradigm, to be sure. Though a Daniel he isn't, a prophet he, nevertheless, is: "He restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain, according to the word of the Lord God of Israel, which he spake by the hand of *his servant Jonah, the son of Amitai, the prophet, which was of Gathhepher*" (2 Kings 14:25, emphasis supplied). This is the same Jonah, son of Amitai (hard as it, at times, might be to believe), whom we'll be following for the next few months.

Next, this prophet flees from the Lord in a boat (A prophet fleeing the Lord?), only to have the Lord send a storm that threatens to sink

the vessel. Amid the storm, it's the pagans, not the Hebrew, who pray for deliverance (another surprise), and Jonah is thrown overboard, only to get swallowed alive by a big fish that holds him in its stomach for three days before spewing him out, alive, on the land.

Jonah, finally, after all this prodding, delivers the message of warning to the Ninevites, who en masse repent from their evil ways, sparing themselves divine condemnation (a rather surprising turn of events, as well). But the greatest surprise comes next, because Jonah becomes saddened, even angry, over their repentance. *A prophet angry over those who repent and turn away from sin?* (As said before, this book is full of surprises.)

Yet, the most important point of Jonah isn't found in the surprises that spill out of its 48 verses but in the one thing that's constant all the way through those verses, and that is, God's incredible grace toward wayward, erring people, even wayward, erring prophets like Jonah. If the Lord would continue to work with someone who squandered privileges and ignored light, then there's hope for us, we who surely have done as badly as this weak-willed, spiritual pipsqueak of a prophet who should have known better than to do what he did, even though he did it just the same. Of course, grace is the most gracious when bestowed upon those who know better but do wrong anyway (Who among us can't relate?).

The focus of Jonah, then, really isn't on the "great fish" that swallowed Jonah alive but on "the great God" who prepared that fish. The great God who never manifested His greatness more than when He was the most "helpless"; that is, when in the person of His Son He was nailed to the cross, His life crushed out for the sins of those who don't know better and even, maybe especially, of those who do. In one sense, it hardly matters which, because we're all spiritual charity cases, taking where we don't give, receiving what we don't deserve, and getting what we don't earn . . . like Jonah.

Many thanks to this quarter's able author, Dr. JoAnn Davidson, assistant professor of theology, in the Department of Theology and Christian Philosophy, at the Andrews University Seminary. Her love for the book of Jonah, and especially for the God revealed in that book, is apparent all through this Bible Study Guide.

Challenging, baffling, even occasionally disturbing, the book of Jonah, with all its surprises—maybe even through those surprises—reveals one truth that never changes: God's love, for even the most unlovable, which, at times, is all of us.

# Got Questions?

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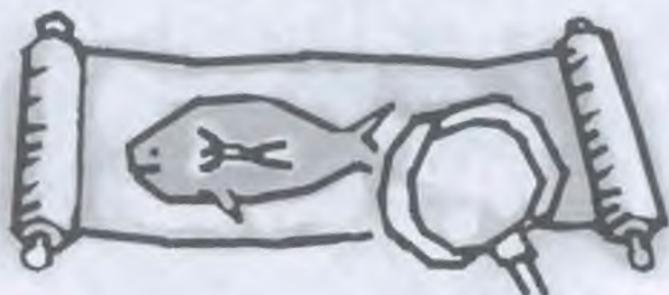
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**MISSION**

The Thirteenth Sabbath Offering on December 27  
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# Biblical Prophets, Modern Critics



## Sabbath Afternoon

**S**OME GUY GETS SWALLOWED by a big fish, spends three days and nights in its belly, and then is cast alive on the shore! We're supposed to believe this?

Of course we are. After all, the story of Jonah is included in the Bible, and if the Bible is the Word of God, then Jonah is part of that Word too. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). This includes the book of Jonah and the account of the reluctant prophet who becomes fish bait.

Some scholars seek to dismiss Jonah, and the book bearing his name, as a myth, a parable, a nice story that expresses a theological point, nothing more. They couldn't be more wrong. The book of Jonah was placed in the canon, and—as we'll see this quarter—with good reasons too. This week we'll take a look at some facts about Jonah that, purely from a scholarly perspective, show he was a historical figure who did an important work for the Lord.

**THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:** How is the book of Jonah introduced? Why were Jonah's experiences central to the book? Why do some scholars dismiss the authenticity of Jonah? How has the modern worldview impacted our Christian faith? Should the supernatural occurrences included with a prophet's life surprise us?

**MEMORY TEXT:** "‘Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets’" (Amos 3:7, NKJV).

\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 4.

**PROPHETIC AUTOBIOGRAPHIES.**

The Bible is composed, basically, of prophets and their messages. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel are “major” prophets; Jonah is one of twelve “minor” ones.

“Major” or “minor,” the prophets all exhibit some similar features. Like other prophetic books, Jonah includes both a prophet and his message. However, most prophetic books are composed chiefly of the sacred messages from God delivered by the prophets. Though varying from book to book, generally just a slight amount of biographical material is included. In most cases, the focus is on the message, not the messenger. In contrast, most of the book of Jonah deals with him, personally, while the message itself consists of less than ten words. Yet, as we’ll see, the story of Jonah, and his exploits, is, in many ways, *the message itself*.

**Read Jonah 3:4. What is the essence of Jonah’s message to Nineveh?**

Though not a lot of words, they’re packed with what’s essentially the message found all through the Bible, and that is consistent with other prophets, as well—prophets whose lives and ministries are not questioned for their historicity.

**Skim through some of the “minor” prophets: Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Obadiah. What information do you learn about the prophets themselves?**

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It’s clear from reading these other prophets that only a tiny bit of information is given about them or their exploits. We learn their names, where they are from, who their fathers are, but not much else. In contrast, though we don’t know much about Jonah’s background, his experiences themselves play a central role. This is the exception with the minor prophets, rather than the rule.

**As the lesson stated, little emphasis is usually placed on the life of the prophet as opposed to the message the prophet bears. Why do you think that is so, and what point should that make for those of us who often tend to focus too much on people themselves as opposed to the Lord? See Pss. 118:9; 146:3.**

**"AND THE WORD OF THE LORD . . ."**

The book of Jonah begins, in the Hebrew, with a phrase that is often translated "And it came to pass." This same phrase appears in these texts: Joshua 1:1; Judges 1:1; Ruth 1:1; 2 Samuel 1:1; Esther 1:1; and Ezekiel 1:1.

Different translations of this Hebrew expression may not always reveal the use of this specific phrase (such as the King James Version, with Jonah, which simply uses the word *now*), but the identical phrase is used throughout the Old Testament to begin historical narratives. The phrase itself indicates both a continuity with what has already happened and the factual nature of the account that follows. In other words, nothing about that particular Hebrew phrase indicates, in any way, that the author means to express anything other than factual history.

**What other specific phrase does the book of Jonah open with?  
Jon. 1:1.**

It's not the only time that phrase is used in a prophet's ministry. "*The word of the Lord* came to him [Elijah], saying 'Arise, go to Zarephath'" (1 Kings 17:8, 9, NKJV, emphasis supplied). "Then *the word of the Lord* came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 'Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel'" (1 Kings 21:17, 18, NKJV, emphasis supplied). "*The word of the Lord* came to Jonah the son of Amitai, saying, 'Arise, go to Nineveh'" (Jon. 1:1, 2, NKJV, emphasis supplied).

Notice how this introductory phrase or "formula" is identical in the calling of other prophets: Jeremiah 1:4; 2:1; Ezekiel 1:3; Joel 1:1; Micah 1:1; Zephaniah 1:1; Haggai 1:1; and Zechariah 1:1.

This phrase alerts the reader to the biblical record of God calling a prophet in the Old Testament. In fact, to receive the "word of the Lord" was a mark of a true prophet. It also authenticates that the spoken message does not originate with the prophet but comes from God Himself. In Jonah's case, the text states that it is "*the word of the Lord*" that comes to Jonah. This is a holy introduction. It should remind us each time we encounter it in Scripture that we need to bow before the God of heaven, with a prayer for the Holy Spirit to bless us, as we study such sacred words. It should also fill us with awe that the God of heaven still communicates with sinful humans.

**Describe what you understand the phrase "and the word of the Lord came" to mean. How do you understand that in relation to John 1:1-10? Can "the word of the Lord" come to only prophets? In what ways can we receive "the word of the Lord"?**

**MORE HISTORICAL POINTERS.**

Skim over the following texts. What is happening here that parallels the story of Jonah? Who is the Lord warning here?

Isa. 13:1 \_\_\_\_\_

Jer. 25:20-27 \_\_\_\_\_

Ezek. 21:28-32 \_\_\_\_\_

In these cases, and others, the Lord is specifically trying to reach Gentile nations with warnings about what their sin and iniquity will bring. The book of Jonah, which is also focused on a non-Israelite nation, is, in this sense, no different from some of the other messages in the Bible that do the same thing. Thus, whatever else it is, the book of Jonah has a crucial message about God's grace, extending beyond the borders of ancient Israel and Judah. This is, contrary to the arguments of some critics, more evidence for its authenticity.

Look at the following texts: Matthew 12:39-41 and Luke 11:29-32. Who is speaking, what is being said, and what do these words tell us about the historicity of Jonah?

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Look at how the Lord not only speaks of the reality of Jonah and of his experience in the "whale's belly" (the Hebrew reads, "big fish") but how closely He ties His own mission to the experience of Jonah. Certainly, as far as Jesus is concerned, there is no question regarding the historicity of Jonah.

There are many who profess to be Christians yet who dismiss some stories in the Bible, such as Jonah, as nonhistorical. What are the implications of that kind of thinking? For example, as we just saw, Jesus clearly believes in the story of Jonah. Those who don't believe that story must, then, dismiss the words of Jesus. And if we can't trust what Jesus says here, why trust Him in another place? And if we can't trust the words of Jesus, then what in the Bible can we trust? What other dangers can you see from this notion of picking and choosing which parts of the Bible we accept or reject as historical?

**THE MIRACLES IN JONAH.**

**M**odern critics tend to dismiss the historicity of the book of Jonah, especially because of the miraculous happenings found there.

**Do a quick read through the story of Jonah and write down the supernatural things that happened there.**

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It is important to notice that the miraculous events in the book of Jonah are referred to always very briefly and in a low-key manner. They are not the great focus of the story. The “great fish” is mentioned in only three verses. The supernatural events are referred to as though one should not be surprised at all with God’s power in the natural world.

**A man swallowed alive by a big fish only to be spat out alive three days later however miraculous, isn’t the only miraculous story in the Bible. Look up these texts and the stories surrounding them. What miracles do they depict?**

**Gen. 21:2** \_\_\_\_\_

**Exod. 13:21, 22** \_\_\_\_\_

**Dan. 5:5, 24-29** \_\_\_\_\_

**Matt. 1:20** \_\_\_\_\_

**Mark 6:44** \_\_\_\_\_

**How can these accounts be explained other than by the supernatural intervention of God? Thus, how foolhardy to dismiss any part of the Bible because of supernatural acts that go beyond what our basic logic, reason, and science tell us. If anything, these stories should show us just how limited our science, our logic, and our reason can be when it comes to the things of God.**

**THE MIRACLES IN JONAH (CONTINUED).**

**A**mong ancient Jewish writers, the authenticity of Jonah was not questioned. Even Josephus, the Jewish historian who lived around the time of Jesus, viewed Jonah as historical and incorporated the story into his history of the Jewish people. The historicity of Jonah is further established by the fact that it's flanked by two unquestioned prophetic books. Also, it has always been included in the minor prophets. The fact that many generations of earlier biblical scholars were convinced that the author of Jonah was not writing fiction is impressive.

**It has been only relatively recently that the historical accuracy of the book has been questioned. Why do you think that is so? What is it about the modern era and the success of science that would cause people to question the story of Jonah?**

Years ago, Thomas Jefferson decided to edit the Gospels. In them he expunged from the texts anything he believed went contrary to reason, common sense, and rational thought. The result was the Jefferson Bible, a version of the Gospels in which the virgin birth, the miraculous healings, the raising of the dead, Christ's claims to divinity, the Resurrection, and Christ's ascension to heaven were—among other things—edited out. According to Jefferson, these things could not be true. Why? Because, in his thinking, they went against common sense and reason.

**What does the story of the Jefferson Bible tell us about the limits of logic and reason in attempting to understand the ways of God? How does the answer help us respond to modern attacks on the authenticity of the story of Jonah?**

How do these following texts help us understand that Jefferson's problems were the same problems many modern critics of the Bible have, as well? Job 11:7; 1 Cor. 1:21; 2:14; 3:19; Heb. 10:38. Most important, how can the points brought out in these texts help protect us from the kind of skepticism so common today?

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**FURTHER STUDY:**

**R**ead 2 Kings 14:23-25. This reference provides the information that Jonah ministered God's Word to King Jeroboam II of Israel (782/781-753 B.C.). During the reigns of his immediate predecessors, the Aramean states headed by Damascus had made savage attacks on Israel, inflicting terrible suffering on the population (2 Kings 13:3-5; Amos 1:3). Jehoash (798-782/781 B.C.) succeeded in recovering the cities of Israel (2 Kings 13:25), and Jonah predicted that Jeroboam would restore Israel's borders to their Davidic limits.

The prediction was fulfilled (2 Kings 14:25-27). Israel prospered once more but not for long. Both Hosea and Amos severely rebuked the northern kingdom as early as Jeroboam's reign (Hos. 1:1; Amos 1:1). But whereas Amos was a southerner from Tekoa, not far from Bethlehem, Jonah was a northerner. It would not be surprising to learn his family suffered during the Syrian incursions into Israel. This might explain some of his intense antagonism toward Nineveh of Assyria, an even more menacing country at the time than Syria.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. Think about what would happen to Christianity if, indeed, Jefferson's Bible provided the most accurate historical account of the Gospels. What then would we be left with? What hope would we have? What are the implications of the thinking that would limit the Bible—any part of the Bible—to the confines of modern science and reason? Why have so many people who have gone down this road ultimately abandoned their faith entirely?
2. Look again at these texts: Job 11:7; 1 Cor. 1:21; 2:14; 3:19; and Heb. 10:38. Are they saying that worldly wisdom or reason or science is bad or that they cannot of themselves lead us to the things we really need to know? See John 17:3.

**SUMMARY:** God had a good reason for putting Jonah in the Bible. And with the book, He shows us that He is more than willing to do the unexpected in order to fulfill His purposes for us.



## The Tenacious Sister

John Ash III

When Lin,\* a 39-year-old Chinese woman from Inner Mongolia, became a Christian three years ago, she began inviting people to her home to study the Bible and worship. Within a short time, many of her neighbors had joined her worship group.

The Chinese officials and religious authorities began watching Lin's activities. As attendance at her weekly meetings climbed to nearly 100 people, the authorities ordered her to disband the group. She refused, so the police began intimidating those who attended the meetings. "If you keep going to these meetings, we'll throw you in jail!" they warned. The threats worked, and the attendance at the house-church meetings dropped to about 40. But additional intimidation had little influence on the remaining believers.

The authorities decided to jail Lin. But publicly arresting her was not so easy. So they persuaded her to come to the police station to fill out some paperwork. Once she was at the police station, she was arrested and jailed without filing charges or going through the proper channels.

The authorities made it difficult for her husband to visit her, and she was not allowed to have a Bible or any other religious material. But her husband wrote Bible texts on a blanket and sent it to her. The officer who delivered the blanket to her had no idea what it contained.

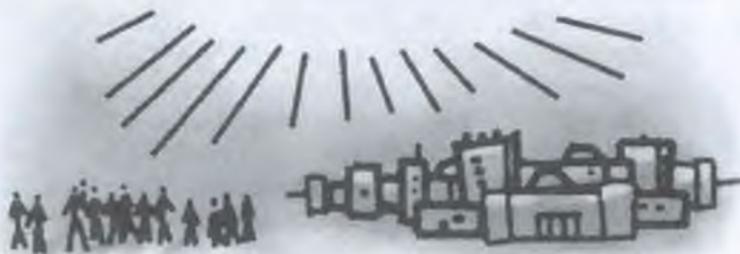
While in jail, Lin made friends with other prisoners. As the months passed and their relationships deepened, she began sharing her faith. Soon a large number of the prisoners accepted Jesus as their personal Savior and changed their disruptive behavior.

The authorities had planned to keep Lin in prison for a year, but six months after her arrest she was released. She asked the officer in charge why she was being released halfway through her sentence, and he admitted that if she had stayed in the jail any longer, all the prisoners would be converted to Christianity.

Soon after her release the group of believers was meeting in her home again, and on any given Sabbath at least 50 people attend. The government officials have not changed their stance toward house churches and small groups, but they have learned by experience that jailing Lin will not stop her, for even in prison she will share her love for God with others.

\* Not her real name. John Ash III is executive secretary of the Chinese Union Mission, headquartered in Hong Kong.

# People and Places



## Sabbath Afternoon

ONE OF THE GREAT TRUTHS of the Christian faith isn't just the teaching that God exists but that He is a personal God, a God who is intimately involved with His creation. What Christianity doesn't teach is that we have been created and then left on our own to do the best we can with what we have been given. On the contrary, the clear, explicit testimony of Scripture, from Eden onward, is that our God and our Creator is also our Provider and Sustainer. God knows about each of us and about our personal situations. He cares about us, as well. This great truth has been best revealed in the life and ministry of Jesus, in which the Lord became one of us in order to bond with us, now and for eternity. This week, we'll see how the first verses of Jonah give another example of God's knowledge of individuals and the places where they live. In a subtle way, these verses tell us something of God's love for humanity.

**THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:** How does God reveal His concern for people? How does the Bible show us God's intimate knowledge of us? How did Jesus reveal the fact that God knows so much about us? How does the book of Jonah instruct us about this aspect of God's amazing grace? Why did God send Jonah to Nineveh? Which of Nineveh's sins spurred Jonah's prophetic call?

**MEMORY TEXT:** "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5).

\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 11.

## THE PERSONAL TOUCH.

"Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the son of Amitai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me" (Jon. 1:1, 2).

**T**hink about the implications of the words. God, the Creator of the universe, the One who sustains the cosmos, is now in communication with a single human being, a mere speck on a planet that itself is a mere speck in an entire galaxy that is a mere speck itself, as well.

The universe, at least what we know about it now, extends more than 20 billion light-years across. This means that, traveling at the speed of light (186,000 miles, or 300,000 kilometers, per second), it would take 20 *billion* years to go from one end to the other. The God who created this immense cosmos, who stands above and beyond it, and who upholds it by His power, nevertheless, now contacts a single person, giving him a message to deliver to other human beings.

Perhaps, you think that you aren't important or that nobody cares about you. But here in the book of Jonah (and all through Scripture, actually), we see a picture of God that is amazing, for it reveals a God who not only knows about us but cares about us, as well, a God who has stretched across the vast expanse of the cosmos to touch each of our lives.

**Read Psalm 104. How does this passage illustrate God's providence and power in the world and in our lives? What comfort can one derive from this psalm? What is the essential message of the psalm?**

This psalm is an extended picture of God's personal involvement in His creation. Notice how its verses follow the basic order of the Genesis Creation account (see Genesis 1 and 2); notice, however, in the psalm how, the verbs connected with God's power shift to the present tense (vss. 6-10). Thus, God is seen here in His ever-continuing roles as both Sustainer and Provider of His creation. According to the consistent testimony of Scripture, God did not create this world and then depart to a distant realm, leaving it to operate solely by the natural laws He established. Rather, Scripture portrays a God who remains vitally involved, not only in nature but also in the lives of His creatures.

**Read Psalm 104:35. What is the author saying here? In other words, after talking about God's creative and sustaining power, he introduces another facet of God's activity. What is that, and what comfort can we draw from it? Or does it scare us?**

**THE HAIR ON OUR HEADS (Matt. 10:30).**

The book of Jonah helps show us that God, though invisible to us, is intimate with His creation. Moreover, His knowledge of us, His human creatures, is personal and inclusive. God knows details about us that we wouldn't even consider important to know about other people.

How does Matthew 10:30 illustrate God's personal involvement in our lives? What is Jesus saying with those words? Does the thought of God knowing so much about you make you comfortable or fearful? What reasons do you have for whatever answer you give?

In this context, that of God's knowledge regarding each of us, look at Psalm 139:1-18. After reading and praying over it, answer the following questions: What are the parallel thoughts between these texts and the texts we saw in Psalm 104? What differences are there? Together, what are both telling us about God? According to these texts, when did God's knowledge of us begin? What does that mean? What are the specific things about us the psalmist says the Lord knows? How should the realization that God knows these things impact how we live? What do you think the phrase "O Lord, thou hast searched me" means? What moral implication can you find in that text?

It's one thing for God to know all about us—about where we go, what we say, think, and do. That, in and of itself, might not be necessarily good news. In fact, it quite easily could be bad news; that is, if this all-knowing God had malevolent designs on us. In this case, though, the psalmist is so clear. In the midst of all these verses about God's omniscience, His total power over us, the psalmist writes: "How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand" (Ps. 139:17, 18).

Thus, the crucial thing to remember as we study about God's power and knowledge, as presented in Jonah, is that this God is a God of love and that He has our best interests at heart. How important that we never lose sight of this crucial point.

Dwell upon some of the specific manifestations of God's love that you have experienced in your own life. Write them down, pray over them, and (if comfortable) share them with others.

**"HEY, YOU!"**

All through the Bible, we are given examples of God's intimate knowledge of people, whether heathen or faithful. Time and again we see that God knows things about individuals that, perhaps, they don't even know about themselves.

**Read 1 Samuel 16:1-3. What is happening here, and what does it teach us about God's knowledge of what's inside us?**

In Luke 19:1-10, Jesus is traveling through Jericho and is surrounded by a crowd. Yet, He pauses at a sycamore tree and notices a man sitting in the branches. Jesus doesn't just say "Hey, you, up there in the tree." Instead, He called to the man by name: "Zacchaeus, I want to go to your house today" (see Luke 19:5). In other words, Jesus knew the man by name.

Ellen White, in *The Desire of Ages*, reveals that Zacchaeus, however abhorrent his life on the outside, was open to the influence of the Holy Spirit, which had already been working on him. Jesus, of course, knew all this about him beforehand and used this opportunity to minister to Zacchaeus in a big way. See Luke 19:9.

**Read John 4:4-19. How do you see the same principle revealed there? What intimate, secret knowledge does Jesus know about the woman of Samaria, and how does He use it for her eternal good?**

God's involvement in human lives is not limited to merely His covenant people. In Isaiah 44:28 and 45:1, even a non-Israelite ruler is divinely predicted by name.

Involvement with humanity is a notable attribute of God in Scripture. It gives us a crucial insight into the attitude God has toward human beings. When God summons people, He doesn't just say "Hey, you." Rather, He comes to them with intimate knowledge of who they are, what's inside them, and what their circumstances happen to be. In the case of Jonah, God knows him as an individual, not just some obscure face in the sea of humanity.

If you look at many of the texts for today, you can see that not only does God have intimate knowledge about each of us but He uses that knowledge for our benefit. God meets us where we are. If someone, then, were to ask you the question, "How can I surrender to Him so that He can take me from where I am to where He wants me to be?" how would you answer?

**PEOPLE AND PLACES.**

**G**od knows not only people but places, as well. This makes sense, because the people whom God loves, and whom He died for, live in places; and often, their particular situations are directly linked to the places in which they live. Thus, God knows cities by name but, more important, He knows what's happening in them. His concern, of course, isn't for the inanimate buildings or the streets or the rocks but for those who have made their homes and lives among them.

**What do the following texts indicate about God's familiarity with this world? Gen. 11:1-9; 18:20; Luke 19:41-44.**

Let's look at Luke 19:41-44. We can see that God loves Jerusalem, even though Jerusalem rejects Him. He expresses that love with His tears as He stands over the city and weeps, for He knows of its terrible future at the hands of Rome.

**However prominent Jerusalem and the Hebrew nation are in the Old Testament times, after the death of Jesus, the geographical center of God's plan for humankind's salvation shifts away from one specific geographical locality. Why is that so? See Matt. 21:43; 24:14; Gal. 3:28.**

Cities, towns, and other places all over the ancient world become prominent in the New Testament biblical narrative. The letters to the seven churches that open the book of Revelation are linked to seven different cities (Rev. 1:4–3:22). All Paul's great missionary journeys are linked to different cities (Acts 17:1-4; 16-34; 18:1-11). Many of Paul's letters, which make up so much of the New Testament, are directly tied to prominent cities and territories (Gal. 1:1, 2; Eph. 1:1, 2; Phil. 1:1). Thus, we should not be surprised with the mention of a city in Jonah's prophetic call. The book of Jonah opens with God's appointment of a person named Jonah, who is given the divine command to go to a specific place, Nineveh, an ancient and populous city on the fertile banks of the Tigris. This is a city founded by Nimrod, who went forth from the land of Shinar about the time of Babel's dispersion.

**No question, God knew all about each of those places mentioned in the Bible. Was He involved in what happened in and to them? If so, how did He express His involvement? How can you see God's involvement in the locality where you live?**

**NINEVEH—THAT GREAT CITY.**

What is the first scriptural mention of Nineveh? Gen. 10:11.

**A**rcheologists have excavated the outline of the walls of ancient Nineveh. The chief palace in existence when Jonah was sent to Nineveh (eighth century B.C.) was probably that of Ashurnasirpal, a king whose name means "the god Assur is guardian of the heir." The buildings alone occupied six acres.

Ancient documents from the first century B.C. describe Nineveh as a quadrangle, measuring a 150 x 90 stadia, with a total perimeter of 480 stadia, or about 60 miles. This agrees favorably with the record of Nineveh in the book of Jonah as a "city of three days' journey" (Jon. 3:3).

In view of Jonah's experience, it is interesting to note that the Hebrew "Nineweh" is a translation of the Assyrian "Ninua." This, in turn, is a rendering of the earlier Sumerian "Nina." Nina was a name of the goddess Ishtar, represented with a sign depicting a fish inside a womb or some sort of enclosure.

Nineveh was 500 miles to the northeast of Israel (near the city of Mosul in today's Iraq). To obey God's commission, Jonah would have had to make a tremendous journey across the desert on foot or in a camel train. This meant traveling to the capital city of what would become one of Israel's most menacing enemies, Assyria.

**Read Jonah 1:2. Why does God send Jonah to Nineveh?**

Nineveh was a citadel of heathen glory and violence. In the time of its greatest prosperity, it was also a city of crime and wickedness. Jonah is not the only prophet who warned Nineveh. More than a hundred years after Jonah, Nahum was commissioned by God to confront the citizens of Nineveh with divine judgment. And he provides graphic details of the violent wickedness found there, probably not much different from what was happening in Jonah's day.

Skim through the book of Nahum to get an idea of the wickedness of the city of Nineveh. Here is Nineveh, a heathen city steeped in wickedness. And yet the Lord sends to those people a Hebrew prophet, a Jew, to call them to repentance? What message should this send to us, as a church today, regarding the importance of spreading our message everywhere? How can you parallel what's happening here with the three angels' messages of Revelation 14?

## FURTHER STUDY:

**W**hile Peter was in Joppa, he was called by God to take the gospel to a Roman centurion named Cornelius. Cornelius was a Gentile by birth, training, and education. Ellen White describes this meeting between the apostle Peter and Cornelius: "The angel appeared to Cornelius while he was at prayer. As the centurion heard himself addressed by name, he was afraid, yet he knew that the messenger had come from God, and he said, 'What is it, Lord?' The angel answered, 'Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: he lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the seaside.'

"The explicitness of these directions, in which was named even the occupation of the man with whom Peter was staying, shows that Heaven is acquainted with the history and business of men in every station of life. God is familiar with the experience and work of the humble laborer, as well as with that of the king upon his throne."

—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 133, 134.

"As regards this earth, Scripture declares the work of creation to have been completed. 'The works were finished from the foundation of the world.' Hebrews 4:3. But the power of God is still exercised in upholding the objects of His creation. It is not because the mechanism once set in motion continues to act by its own inherent energy that the pulse beats, and breath follows breath. Every breath, every pulsation of the heart, is an evidence of the care of Him in whom we live and move and have our being. From the smallest insect to man, every living creature is daily dependent upon His providence."

—Ellen G. White, *Education*, pp. 130, 131.

## DISCUSSION QUESTION:

The modern philosophical movement of "Atheistic Existentialism" says that there is no God and no ultimate purpose to life. There is NOTHING outside ourselves. We are alone in the universe. Those who believe this worldview are called "Atheistic existentialists." They insist human life is meaningless, pointless, and absurd. How does what we've read this week show not only how wrong that view is but why the biblical worldview offers us something so much more hopeful?

**SUMMARY:** The first few verses of the book of Jonah exemplify a truth found all through the Bible: There is a God who not only knows each of us personally but is interested in our affairs. The story of Jonah is, simply, one example of God's work in our lives.



## "Before They Call, I Will Answer"

J. H. Zachary

When Galina Veretennikova was 18 years old an Adventist pastor lived next door. Several times she watched as the secret police came to the pastor's home. She saw home meetings broken up. *Why would the police do this to these lovely people?* she wondered.

Galina graduated with a degree in electronics and became attractive to the communist officials. Little by little she gained their confidence until she became a member of the communist governing body for the entire province in which she lived in the former Soviet Union.

She enjoyed the position. Everyone knew her. She also had a good job and good income. Everything seemed to be going her way.

During all this time Galina's Adventist neighbor befriended her and her family. Pastor Bolebrukh shared his joy in the Lord with Galina. In her heart she knew that he was telling the truth, but pressures from the popular church officials in town kept her from acting upon her understanding of truth. She did not want to become associated with a "cult."

When Galina's daughter turned 18, she suddenly disappeared. Galina asked the local police to search for her, but the girl was not found. Galina asked the secret police to help her find her daughter, but they turned up no clues. Next Galina turned to her church. Frequently, she went to pray for her daughter. But still no one turned up any sign of her daughter.

One day her neighbor invited Galina to attend a Bible seminar that was being conducted in the local palace of culture. At first she refused. She still thought that this group was a cult. But finally she agreed to go with her neighbor. One of the lessons dealt with prayer.

Galina asked the group to pray for her daughter, who by then had been missing for two years. Galina found comfort in the earnest prayers that her new friends offered for her daughter's safe return. Two hours after Galina returned home from the meeting, she heard a knock at her door. She unbolted the door and found her daughter standing there.

Galina learned that her daughter had been taken by force to another country. She managed to escape and return home, even without money or passport. Galina realized that God had begun to answer her prayer even before the Bible study group prayed.

Galina joined the "cult" she had avoided for so long. Later her daughter also joined the church. They sponsor a small Bible study group in their home. Six people are preparing for baptism.

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# Jonah and Judgment



## Sabbath Afternoon

**A**S THE FIRST VERSES OF JONAH reveal, this book is set against the background of judgment, God's judgment. Of course, that's nothing particularly unique or novel, not for the Bible, which is filled with different examples, warnings, and promises of God's judgment in the Old Testament and in the New.

God, we know, is a God of love; nothing proves that better than Jesus on the cross, the greatest example of God's judgment. We can trust that God's judgment will be fair and righteous. We don't have to worry about jury tampering; we don't have to worry about judges being bribed; we don't have to worry about being given an unfair trial. This week we'll continue to look at the concept of judgment in Jonah, for it reveals that God is concerned about the evil that has brought so much pain, suffering, and havoc to this world.

**THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:** Why is God concerned about the wickedness of Nineveh? Or of any place? What examples can we find in the Bible regarding God's divine judgment? What evidence exists that the Ten Commandments were known before Sinai? How can God judge people who never have been given a clear presentation of Bible truth?

**MEMORY TEXT:** "Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts 10:34, 35).

\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 18.

## NINEVEH UNDER JUDGMENT.

Look again at Jonah 1:2, particularly the phrase that reads, in the Hebrew, “ ‘for their wickedness has come up before me’ ” (NKJV). Of course, God is in heaven, the Ninevites were on earth, so their deeds didn’t literally rise to heaven (see also Gen. 4:10). What do you think the phrase, therefore, means? More important, what does it tell us about God’s concern about our moral actions? See also Judg. 21:25; Eccles. 12:13; Matt. 12:36; 25:45; Heb. 5:14. How do these texts help answer the above question?

The Bible is very clear that God has created a moral world. In other words, despite the claims of many to the contrary, right and wrong, good and evil, do exist as moral absolutes placed upon humanity by God. We are all moral creatures, and we all have moral responsibilities, whatever our station or position in life. Though God ultimately will be the final judge of us and our actions, Jonah 1:2 proves that even the heathen, such as the Ninevites, must answer for their deeds before God.

And, apparently, they will have plenty to answer for too. The Assyrians were known for their extraordinary cruelty and violence. Numerous ancient Assyrian tablets and inscriptions have been found and translated from Nineveh. The following translation of a document from the reign of Ashurnasirpal II, 884–859 B.C., is one reminder: “ I built a pillar over against his city and I flayed all the chiefs who had revolted, and covered the pillar with their skin. Some I walled up within the pillar, some I impaled upon the pillar on stakes, and others I bound to stakes round about the pillar. . . . And cut the limbs of the officers, of the royal officers who had rebelled. . . .

“ ‘Many captives from among them I burned with fire, and many I took as living captives. From some I cut off their noses, their ears, and their fingers; of many I put out the eyes. I made one pillar of the living and another of heads, and I bound their heads to tree trunks round the city. Their young men and maidens I burned in the fire.

“ ‘Twenty men I captured alive and I immured them in the wall of his palace.’ ”—D. D. Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylon*, Ancient Records Series 1, in Geoffrey T. Bull, *The City and the Sign: An Interpretation of the Book of Jonah* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1970), pp. 109, 110.

How does Romans 2:13–16 help shed light on some of the issues raised today? Using these verses, write a small paragraph summarizing the basic point of today’s study.

**DIVINE JUDGMENT—A SERIOUS MATTER.**

In spite of those who seek to soothe human consciences with an almost exclusive focus on God's love, we observe here, in the first few verses of Jonah (and all through Scripture), that God is concerned about human wickedness. Interestingly enough, this concern isn't something that's in *opposition* to His love but, instead, stems directly as a result of that love.

When studying the Bible, one must take careful notice of the choice of words and their repetitions. Biblical writers do not use modern techniques of emphasis, such as underlining or italics. Instead, they carefully select their vocabulary in light of what they intend to communicate. Within the four chapters of the book of Jonah, the word *evil* or *wickedness* is used ten times, two times referring to the Ninevites (Jon. 1:2; 3:8). There's a reason for this emphasis. The Lord wants us to know how bad a place this city is.

**What are some of the other occasions in Scripture when God's indictments against human wickedness have been issued?**

Gen. 6:5 \_\_\_\_\_

Gen. 18:25 \_\_\_\_\_

Ezek. 7:10, 11 \_\_\_\_\_

Hab. 1:1-3 \_\_\_\_\_

Rev. 16:1-7 \_\_\_\_\_

God condemns wickedness. God also has pronounced judgment on countries beyond Israel. Ultimately, as the book of Revelation instructs us, the whole earth will fall under God's judgment. Much of Isaiah is filled with warnings to many nations at that time. (See Isaiah 13; 14:24-28; vss. 29-32.) Jeremiah, too, is filled with one warning after another to the pagan nations around Israel that they will be judged for their evil.

**Though the Bible is clear that God brings judgments against nations, why do we have to be careful in how we—as mortal sinners, whose understanding of issues is very limited—determine what is or isn't God's judgment? Just because a nation faces calamity doesn't automatically mean that God is somehow punishing it. Ultimately, all we can do, in every situation, is call people to repentance, confession of sin, faith, and obedience.**

**GOD'S STANDARD OF MORALITY.**

**B**ecause of the overpowering pronouncement of the Ten Commandments from Mount Sinai, many people have decided that the Decalogue was initially given by God to the Israelites and that the moral law it reveals didn't exist until that time. However, a careful reading of Genesis and the early chapters of Exodus reveal a prior knowledge of these commandments and universal human accountability to them.

**What are the indications that, long before the time of the prophets, even before the pronouncement of the Decalogue on Sinai to the Israelites, people were held accountable to the same moral standard as those in the Covenant Line?**

Gen. 12:10-20 \_\_\_\_\_

Gen. 20:1-14 \_\_\_\_\_

Gen. 39:1-9 \_\_\_\_\_

With evidence for its antiquity within the text itself, the book of Job is recognized as the oldest book in the Old Testament. However, Job himself is not of the Covenant Line, and he lived before the Sinai Decalogue was proclaimed to the Israelites.

**Which commandments (or at least the basic principles found in those commandments) are seen in the following texts found in Job? See also Exodus 20.**

Job 31:5, 6 \_\_\_\_\_

Job 31:9-12 \_\_\_\_\_

Job 31:16-23 \_\_\_\_\_

Job 31:26-28 \_\_\_\_\_

Job 31:38-40 \_\_\_\_\_

How would you explain to someone the necessity of the existence of the law before Sinai? If, as John (1 John 3:4) wrote, "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law," why did the law have to predate Sinai?

**MORAL KNOWLEDGE OF GOD.**

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse" (Rom. 1:18-20).

Read over these verses and, using whatever reference material you can find, summarize what they are saying, particularly in the context of what we have been studying this week:

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Whatever else these texts are saying, they are clear that God isn't going to judge the evil and unrighteousness of humanity in an unfair or arbitrary manner. God is a God of love; Christ's death encompassed all humanity, every person who has or ever will live (John 3:16; Rom. 5:18; Heb. 2:9). God's desire, from the beginning, was that all humanity would be saved, including the heathen. According to these texts, enough about God has been made known so that these people will be "without excuse."

**What do you think the phrase "without excuse" means? What does that thought tell us about God's fairness and justice in bringing judgment upon all unrighteousness?**

The crucial thing we need to remember is that the same God who brings this judgment is the same God who died on the cross for the sinners whom He, of necessity, must judge. Only as we keep the Cross, and what it represents, before us can we truly begin to understand God's righteous judgment upon evil.

"But even this final revelation of God's wrath in the destruction of the wicked is not an act of arbitrary power. 'God is the fountain of life; and when one chooses the service of sin, he separates from God, and thus cuts himself off from life' (DA 764). God gives men existence for a time so that they may develop their characters. When this has been accomplished, they receive the results of their own choice."

—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, on Romans 1:18, vol. 6, pp. 477, 478.

**NO RESPECTER OF PERSONS (Acts 10:34, 35).**

**S**cripture reveals that both the prophet Jonah and the nation of Israel had proven unfaithful to their destined role of being a light to the nations. Both had forgotten how God always has expressed His concern for all humanity, not just those whom He specifically called out to be His people. Indeed, it was precisely because the Lord wanted to reach other people, the heathen, that He called out Israel to be a special treasure unto Himself.

**How does even the ancient Abrahamic covenant pointedly include people beyond the Covenant Line? Read Genesis 22:18. How were all nations to be blessed by what God did through Abraham? See Gal. 3:26-29.**

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Divine love, transcending Israel's borders, surely is not an unknown idea to Jonah. But it is easy to choke the channels that God has ordained to flood the world with His grace. No person is immune to this possibility. During New Testament times, on a sunlit rooftop, Simon Peter struggled with the same issues as did the Old Testament Jonah. And in the same town of Joppa!

**How does God instruct Peter regarding His compassion for all people? Acts 10:9-16, 34, 35; 11:4-10.**

Repetition in biblical narrative writing is a significant pointer of emphasis. Modern writers now use italics or underlining to give emphasis to an important point. But biblical writers use repetition. In this case, Peter is told *three times* that what God has declared clean he must not call common.

Peter's own explanation of this vision makes it clear he realizes that his vision is not instructing him about proper eating habits but about God's compassion for all nationalities of people. Even so, people do reject the God of heaven's grace.

**Imagine, if as Adventists, we thought salvation belonged only to us. Even worse, imagine if we didn't want to give it to those who were "unclean"! It's hard to think of a greater way to be unfaithful to our calling. And yet, in what ways, however subtly, do we face the danger of having that same attitude?**

**FURTHER STUDY:**

**H**owever much God wants those who hear the messages of warning and judgment to repent, He does not force the will. "The exercise of force is contrary to the principles of God's government; He desires only the service of love; and love cannot be commanded; it cannot be won by force or authority. Only by love is love awakened. To know God is to love Him; His character must be manifested in contrast to the character of Satan. This work only one Being in all the universe could do. Only He who knew the height and depth of the love of God could make it known. Upon the world's dark night the Sun of Righteousness must rise, 'with healing in His wings.' Mal. 4:2."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 22.

**DISCUSSION QUESTION:**

One argument for the existence of God is known as the "Moral Argument," and it goes like this: Suppose, hypothetically, some world ruler arose who decided that, for the benefit of all humanity, all red-haired people had to be exterminated. Suppose, too, that through a very elaborate and sophisticated propaganda machine, he convinced everyone that, indeed, killing every red-haired person was the only moral and right thing to do. Now, if everyone in the world were convinced that it were morally justifiable to kill all red-haired people, would that act be wrong? Most people, from our perspective now, would believe it to be wrong, regardless of how many people believe it to be right. But why? If moral values arise only from within individuals, instead of coming from some outside, transcendent source, such as God, why would it be wrong? How could it be wrong? And yet we know that it is, even should everyone at that time think it were not. For many people, the answer to this dilemma is easy: Those moral values do come from an outside Source, one that goes beyond humans, and it's called God. Discuss the strong and weak points of this argument.

**SUMMARY:** God is a God of love, but He's also a God of justice, and just as His mercy extends to all nations, so does His divine judgment.



## A Voice for God

Luis Amilcar Cano Navarro

Ever since his childhood, music has been a part of Luis Cano's life. But music did not always draw him closer to God. He grew up attending church and singing in the choir, but as a teenager he became disenchanted and left the church.

People praised his musical ability, and Luis dreamed of becoming famous. When church members told him that his voice was a gift from God and should be used only for God's glory, he began to resent God.

Luis drifted away from church. He wanted to live his own life, a life in which God did not play a large part.

After college he began studying voice with a well-known voice teacher, Doña Isabel, and the two developed a friendship. When he married, Doña Isabel invited Luis and his wife, Vicky, to join a small group that met near their home. Luis did not want to go, but Vicky yearned for a closer walk with God. Finally Luis accepted Doña Isabel's invitation to attend the small group meeting.

Luis was impressed with the speaker's understanding of the Bible. Luis and Vicky continued attending the small group meeting. Luis liked the group Bible study, but Vicky was concerned that he might want to change religions. But when the leader invited those present to surrender their lives to Christ, both Vicky and Luis stood.

Luis realized that he had never really understood God before. Every day he fell more deeply in love with God. God began filling every aspect of the Cano's lives. Soon they were baptized.

When they learned about tithing, Luis was not convinced that they could survive on less than their full income. They prayed to know

God's will, and soon Luis received a raise, which convinced him that God was leading them to trust Him.

Luis began singing in church again, but this time it was different. "No matter what happens, I will continue to sing praises to God," he said. "I want to sing for God's glory, not my own, to exalt Christ, not myself."

**Luis Amilcar Cano Navarro** is an electrical engineer in the national electricity company of Honduras.



# The “Dove” Flees



## *Sabbath Afternoon*

**THUS FAR, THE BOOK OF JONAH** has portrayed a familiar pattern in the Old Testament: a prophet receiving a divine call. “Arise, go to Euphrates” (Jer. 13:4, 5), God told Jeremiah. “Arise, get thee to Zarephath” (1 Kings 17:9, 10), God told Elijah. As expected, both prophets did what they were told.

The reader is led to expect from Jonah a similar response to God’s call, “Arise, go to Nineveh.” However, the book of Jonah defies conventional ideas about God’s prophets and how they act. How dare Jonah upset the usual paradigm! Far from obeying God, he flees in the opposite direction. Hardly the best start for a prophet of God.

Why be surprised? Prophets are people, too, touched with our fears, insecurities, and doubts. Surely, we don’t expect perfection from the Lord’s prophets. Based on what example? Noah? David? John the Baptist? Peter? Hardly. Maybe we don’t expect perfection, but we certainly didn’t expect a prophet to flee from a direct command of God! This week we’ll look a little more at what happened.

**THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:** How do we appraise the prophet’s disobedience? What is God’s response to Jonah’s attitude? What does this teach us about God? How does God’s grace respond to Jonah’s disobedience?

**MEMORY TEXT:** “Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months” (James 5:17).

\*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 25.

**"HERE AM I, DON'T SEND ME!"**

**"But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. So he went down to Joppa, found a ship which was going to Tarshish, paid the fare and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord" (Jon. 1:3, NASB).**

**J**onah's name means "dove," and we find him next in an unusual "flight pattern."

**How is Jonah's response to his divine summons unusual? Jon. 1:3.**

Thus far, the book of Jonah has opened with a recognizable situation seen in Scripture of a prophet receiving a divine call. What happens next, however, is not the usual. The shocking surprise involves the detailed description of what Jonah did to escape his task. Though hardly the usual paradigm, this isn't the only time we see the example of someone not exactly thrilled about his or her divine calling.

**Who else initially was not willing to accept God's call, and why? Exod. 4:1, 10, 13.**

When Moses was enlisted by God to return to Egypt for the purpose of leading the Israelites away from slavery, he drew back in amazement and terror at the command. He even offered several reasons why he thought he should refuse the task. But, ultimately, he accepted the task. Ellen White eloquently describes this situation: "The divine command given to Moses found him self-distrustful, slow of speech, and timid. He was overwhelmed with a sense of his incapacity to be a mouthpiece for God to Israel. But having once accepted the work, he entered upon it with his whole heart, putting all his trust in the Lord. The greatness of his mission called into exercise the best powers of his mind. God blessed his ready obedience, and he became eloquent, hopeful, self-possessed, and well fitted for the greatest work ever given to man."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 255.

**What possible reasons could Jonah have had for not wanting to do what the Lord asked? Could those have even been "valid" reasons? Also, is it possible that, perhaps, the very traits that caused Jonah to want to flee from this task could be the very traits that, if rightly channeled, would have made him qualified for that task? If so, how so? What does this say to me about my own gifts and what the Lord asks me to do with them?**

## THE "DOVE" FLEES.

**G**od gives Jonah a command, and Jonah, rather than obeying the Lord's command, attempts to flee. It is hard to imagine a more determined antagonism than is indicated here in this one verse (Jon. 1:3). Every verb in the verse reveals what Jonah is doing in order to get away from the Lord and from what the Lord asks him to do.

Look at the verbs in Jonah 1:3. Jonah **rose up** to flee. (The verb for "arose" here comes from the same root word that was part of his divine commission, when the Lord told him to "Arise, go to Nineveh.") He **went down** to Joppa, he **found** a ship, he **paid** the fare, and **went down** into the boat. All this flurry of activity for the express purpose of evading God's command. The writer of the narrative subtly suggests the determination of Jonah to flee.

In Jonah 1:3, what phrase is given at the beginning of the verse and then repeated at the end of the same verse? What do you think that means?

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This single verse says two times that Jonah flees "from the presence of the Lord." A single indication would have been enough. However, the duplication of this phrase in just one verse compels the reader to consider the irony of anyone, let alone a prophet, thinking to flee from the presence of the Lord!

Of all people—as someone who knows the Lord, who worships the God of Israel, who knows that the Lord was the Creator of the heaven and the earth and the sea (see Jon. 1:9), Jonah should have known the futility of his actions. It's not as though he were following some local, pagan deity whose "power" ended at the border.

On the contrary, by his own confession, he knows the power of the God he professes to serve—and, though knowing all these things, he flees anyway!

What could he have possibly been thinking?

Of course, it's easy for us to look at Jonah and shake our heads in disapproval. *How could he have done something so stupid?* However, in what subtle ways do we attempt do to the same thing? Maybe we don't flee, at least physically, from "the presence of the Lord" (for that's impossible), but how do we openly or inadvertently "separate" ourselves from the Lord?

## GOING DOWN.

**T**hree times the text found in Jonah 1:3 says that Jonah is going to Tarshish. That's three times in one verse. Notice this characteristic repetition in Hebrew narrative writing. The writer is not sloppy, nor is he stuttering. Rather, we are being alerted to an important issue the writer wants us to ponder. In this case, the thrice-mentioned city of Tarshish is important because Tarshish, in fact, is in the opposite direction of where the Lord wanted Jonah to go. Nineveh is east, Tarshish is west. Jonah's rebellion couldn't be made more explicit.

**What other examples can we find in the Bible of God giving someone (not necessarily a prophet) explicit instructions and he or she doing the opposite?**

Gen. 2:16, 17 \_\_\_\_\_ Gen. 3:6

1 Sam. 15:3 \_\_\_\_\_ 1 Sam. 15:21-23

Exod. 20:4-6 \_\_\_\_\_ Ezek. 8:10

**What other verb is used two times in Jonah 1:3?**

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Two times in this verse we are told that Jonah "went down," along with one additional use in verse 5. Jonah "went down" to Joppa; Jonah "went down" into the ship; Jonah had "gone down" into the lowest parts of the ship. Three times in close succession the reader is told that Jonah "went down." The writer carefully structures the narrative to focus on Jonah's downward journey away from his divine commission. Indeed, before it's all over, Jonah goes down much farther than even he imagines at this point, for he will go all the way to the "bottom" before the Lord is through with him.

The use of that specific verb isn't by chance. In this context, it has negative connotations. In fact, in modern Hebrew, the same verb "go down" can carry with it a negative meaning, while the opposite, "go up," carries a positive one.

**Are you going down or up? The answer is easy. Are you doing what God commands you to do, or are you disobeying, as Jonah did? Your answer determines your direction.**

**GOD'S PATIENT GRACE.**

**W**hen Jonah flees from the presence of the Lord, that *might* have finished everything. When Jonah pays the fare to Tarshish, that *could* have been the end of his call. When we disobey, when we try to escape what God has convicted us about, when God says one thing and we do another, that *could* be the end of us too. God is not obligated at all to keep on dealing with us, especially when we mess up, even in a big way. However, out of a love that's too big for us to understand, He keeps working with us, despite our repeated and colossal blunders. And for this, God's patient grace, we all should be immensely grateful. After all, imagine if all it took were one big mistake on our part for the Lord to cast us off. Who, even the most saintly among us, could ever hope for salvation if that were the case? Grace is nothing if not the chance—indeed, many chances—to start over.

**What examples from the Bible show God still working with those who have sadly and grossly failed in what the Lord had asked of them? What lesson can we learn from these stories about God's grace with those whose faith and trust fail them, even at crucial times?**

**Genesis 3** \_\_\_\_\_

**Genesis 16** \_\_\_\_\_

**2 Samuel 11** \_\_\_\_\_

**Matt. 26:74, 75** \_\_\_\_\_

God calls Jonah, but Jonah rejects that call. It's that simple. But what happens next? Does the Lord simply leave Jonah to his rebellion? Does He simply cast him off, because he has made this tremendous blunder? Not at all. Though Jonah, overtly and blatantly, chooses to run away, the Lord pursues him. In other words, despite Jonah's rejection of the Lord, God doesn't reject him, at least not yet. Here is this man, given a divine call by the Lord, and though this man rejects that call, God's Spirit still strives with him, anyway.

**What does this fact say to us, personally, in our own walk with the Lord? However much hope it should give us, we should also be careful about being presumptuous. How can we know the difference between having hope despite our failures and being presumptuous about them?**

**THE GOD OF NATURE.**

**What is God's response to Jonah's disobedience? Jon. 1:4, 17; 2:10.**

**B**oth the Old and the New Testament are remarkable for their unfaltering and continual ascription of the control of nature to God. At times, He uses nature as a means of instruction in righteousness and discipline. In contrast to some contemporary thinking, which views the universe as a closed and finite system, allowing no place for the action of God, the Bible's consistent confession is that the functioning of all nature is under God's control.

**Read Job 38. In the context of today's lesson, what's the crucial point made in this chapter?**

God has established laws in nature. But they do not administer themselves. The Lawgiver administers them. He has arranged a series of causes and effects. But according to Scripture, He supports, maintains, controls, and moves them at His own pleasure.

**What is the first action God takes in response to Jonah's cruise? Jon. 1:4.**

The storm is not attributed merely to the elements of nature but to the God of nature, to Him who is over all and above all things. But this is no mere display of power. It is for Jonah's sake that a tempest is unleashed. Verse 4 teaches us that this storm is there because of Jonah and *for* Jonah. The elements of nature and many innocent sailors are engaged in the adventure of Jonah, with him and because of him. The storm is sent to pursue a petulant prophet and, in the process, involves many others on board the ship.

**These "innocent" sailors were suffering because of someone else's sin. In what ways do we see this principle operating all the time? What does it tell us about the horrible nature of sin?**

The book of Jonah reveals the seriousness of a God-given vocation. God regards His choice of messenger as so important that He brings nature into play in order to nudge Jonah to fulfill his task. As God wrestled with Jacob, so now He begins to wrestle with Jonah, employing the elements of nature to get his attention.

**FURTHER STUDY:**

**W**hat picture do the different Bible writers give concerning God's sovereignty over His creation?

Amos 4:13;

Job 9:5; Amos 1:2; Mic. 1:3, 4;

Judg. 5:5; Pss. 18:7; 68:8; 114:4-6; Isa. 64:3; Ezek. 3:12; Hab. 3:6, 10;

Exod. 23:25, 26; Lev. 25:18, 19; Deuteronomy 28; 30:8-14;

2 Chron. 31:9, 10; Isa. 58:9-11; Amos 4:6-8; Hag. 1:9-11; 2:17.

Ellen White's graphic description of the plagues in Egypt is instructive: "Ruin and desolation marked the path of the destroying angel. The land of Goshen alone was spared. It was demonstrated to the Egyptians that the earth is under the control of the living God, that the elements obey His voice, and that the only safety is in obedience to Him."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 269.

The book of Revelation instructs us that the whole world will be so involved in a similar situation before the second coming of Christ. Ellen White draws this lesson in her chapter on Jonah in *Prophets and Kings*, p. 277:

"The time is at hand when there will be sorrow in the world that no human balm can heal. The spirit of God is being withdrawn. Disasters by sea and by land follow one another in quick succession. How frequently we hear of earthquakes and tornadoes, of destruction by fire and flood, with great loss of life and property! *Apparently these calamities are capricious outbreaks of disorganized, unregulated forces of nature, wholly beyond the control of man; but in them all, God's purpose may be read. They are among the agencies by which He seeks to arouse men and women to a sense of their danger.*"—Emphasis supplied.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. Do you think there could have come a point when God would have finally stopped pursuing Jonah? If so, when might that point have been? Compare the situation of Judas to that of Jonah. What was the crucial difference between the two?
2. How should the humanity of Jonah help us understand the humanity of all God's prophets, including Ellen White?

**SUMMARY:** God sought to use Jonah despite the prophet's faults.



## A Young Man's Journey

Ylli Peco

I am a new believer living in Tirana, Albania. When I was about 14 years of age, I often saw my grandma going to church. Sometimes I went with her, and eventually I signed up to attend some religious classes that were being held in the church. But to be frank, I could not understand most of what they taught there.

During my second year of high school a friend invited my group of friends—there were five of us—to his church. We had never heard of this church, but we decided to go. I thought the services were weird because they were so different from my grandmother's church. But I really liked the Sabbath School class with so many people taking part in the discussion, teaching and learning together about the Bible lesson.

For awhile I attended this church occasionally, then started going every week. When I went, I felt a peace in my heart that I could not understand. I got to know everybody, and I felt as if I were part of a large Christian family.

Some church members encouraged me to take my stand for Christ and be baptized, but I was not ready yet. I did not know a lot about God's Word, and I was not sure about some things. Besides, I had problems at home.

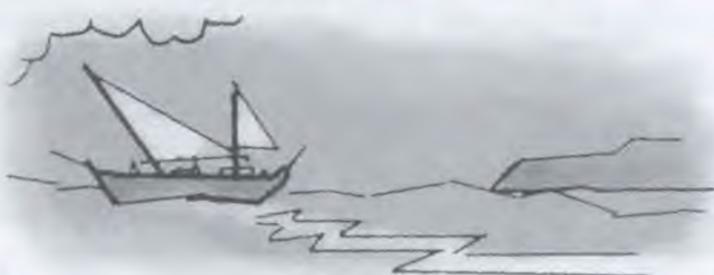
From the beginning my family opposed my going to this church. They insisted that the only true church was the Orthodox church, and they tried every way they knew to help me find my way back to the family's religion. I knew they wanted what was best for me, but I was convinced that I had found what was best. Sometimes we argued, and they tried to convince me that I was wrong. And sometimes I tried to convince them that they were wrong. Some Sabbaths were peaceful; others were full of arguing. After some time, however, they gave up trying to change my mind.

My knowledge of God was increasing, and I felt the Holy Spirit very close to me. It was as though I were talking to Him, and I felt He was guiding me. I wish everybody could experience the same thing in his life.

When I knew I had gained sufficient knowledge about God and His Word, I was ready to be baptized. The day of baptism was really wonderful, so filled with the joy of the Holy Spirit that I wanted to share the good news with everybody.

**Ylli Peco is a young man who is studying law at a university in Tirana, Albania.**

# A Hebrew Prophet and Heathen Mariners



## Sabbath Afternoon

IN SOME WAYS, THE STORY line that unfolds this week (basically, Jon. 1:4-13) is a small example of what happened to ancient Israel. God originally designed that, had the nation been obedient, the heathen would have come from all around to learn about the God who had done so much for His chosen people. Unfortunately, that wasn't how things turned out. Because of Israel's disobedience, instead of those pagans coming to the Hebrews, the Hebrews went to the pagans, often in chains. That is, they witnessed for the Lord, as He said they would, but they did so amid great calamity and distress.

This week we'll see, on a minor scale, a similar paradigm. It's in the midst of great trial and calamity that Jonah, surrounded by "pagans," is put into a situation in which he has to witness for the Lord, even if it's upon a ship sinking amid a terrible storm.

Yet, even despite Jonah and his faults, the message gets through.

**THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:** What is it about tragedy that often helps us put things in perspective? What powerful irony appears in this part of the book of Jonah? Why does Jonah identify his God as the Creator of the earth and the sea? How was God able to use Jonah as a witness, despite the prophet's stubbornness?

**MEMORY TEXT:** "Your faithfulness endures to all generations; You established the earth, and it abides. They continue this day according to Your ordinances, for all are Your servants" (Psalm 119:90, 91, NKJV).

\*Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 1.

**STORM AT SEA.**

In Jonah 1:4, 5, the narrative continues. The Lord sends a mighty storm, the ship is in danger of sinking, the pagan sailors are praying to their respective gods, and Jonah had “gone down into the hold of the ship” (vs. 5, NRSV), where the captain found him sleeping. The captain was, obviously, quite vexed to find someone snoozing in such an emergency.

Notice, too, what happens among these pagan sailors. The text says they started casting their “wares” overboard. These were things that, in normal circumstances, would be of great value to them. This even could have been the cargo. Now, however, in such an emergency, they are willing to cast it all into the sea! What’s the spiritual lesson here? (See also Eccles. 2:11; Matt. 16:26; 1 John 2:15-17.) How many of us have ever found ourselves in a situation in which, suddenly, many of the things we deemed so important become less so? How can the Lord use such situations to teach us about what’s truly of value?

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**Read what the captain says to Jonah. Why was he so upset? What did he want from the sleeping prophet? Was this an appeal made by faith or simply by desperation? Jon. 1:6.**

Note the striking similarity of the captain’s summons to Jonah—“Arise!” (Jon. 1:6), and Jonah’s original summons from God in verse 2—“Arise.” Moreover, the captain begs Jonah to “cry” unto God, using the same verb that God had when He called Jonah to “cry” against Nineveh (Jon. 1:2). Now, however, the summons to arise and to cry comes from a pagan sailor who doesn’t even worship the God of heaven.

Jonah, a prophet of the true God, is asked by a pagan to pray. The irony of this situation shouldn’t be missed.

**What spiritual significance can you find in the irony of this pagan asking a Hebrew prophet to pray? Do we as Christians ever find those not of our faith, or those of even no “faith,” who are more “spiritual” or “moral” or even more faithful to what they believe than we ourselves are to what we know? What can we learn from these situations?**

**PAGAN MARINERS CONTINUE THEIR INITIATIVE.**

**T**he sailors continue to struggle against the alarming storm while Jonah remains detached. The mariners are convicted that the violence of this storm is evidence the gods were angry.

In reality, of course, the storm was brought, not out of anger but out of love. We know that, because we know the ending of the story and what was happening behind the scenes, something the sailors didn't know. What does this tell us about how careful we need to be about drawing the wrong conclusions regarding whatever terrible problems we might be facing at the moment? (See also Proverbs 3; Rom. 8:28; 1 Pet. 4:12.)

The mariners assume that a storm of this magnitude is closely bound up with someone's guilt. The outcome of finding the culprit would put matters right. Though not often used today, casting lots was generally regarded in ancient times in Israel and by other nations as a method of resolving conflicts. (See Num. 33:54; 1 Sam. 14:41, 42; Esther 3:7; Prov. 16:33.) In the book of Jonah, God allows the casting of lots to implicate Jonah as the cause of the storm (Jon. 1:7).

Though we have clear-cut Bible examples of someone's evil bringing calamity (Joshua 7), what danger exists in assuming that calamity must result from someone's specific transgression? (See Job 1; 2.)

After the lot falls on Jonah, the sailors pepper him with numerous questions, obviously attempting to find out why the lot fell his way and why he was the cause of the storm (Jon. 1:7, 8).

Up to this point in the narrative, Jonah has not been heard talking. Now, in response to all the many pressing questions put to him, he answers selectively. In fact, he ignores the question about his occupation, about where he came from, and about his country. The only question he answers is regarding what ethic background he has. He tells them that he is a "Hebrew." Then he answers a question they don't even ask, which is who his God is.

**The phrase to "fear God" is a common Hebrew expression that implies the idea of worshiping and serving the Lord. What's so ironic about Jonah's answer in this specific situation?**

**WITNESS AT SEA.**

Immediately after identifying himself as a Hebrew, Jonah then offers some information the sailors hadn't specifically requested: "I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land" (Jon. 1:9, NKJV).

**What other prophet uses the title "the God of heaven"? Dan. 2:19.**

Daniel blesses the "God of heaven" when God reveals Nebuchadnezzar's dream and spares the lives of the Babylonian wise men. This phrase, "the God of heaven," appears numerous times in the Old Testament in reference to the Lord.

Perhaps, though, what's most interesting is that not only does Jonah name Him "Yahweh, the God of heaven"; he immediately describes him as the Creator, the One who made the sea and the dry land, an unmistakable reference to the Genesis Creation account.

**What are these texts (Exod. 2:11; Pss. 100:3; 146:5, 6; Mal. 2:10; Acts 4:24; Col. 1:16, 17; Rev. 4:11; 14:7) saying that is so important to our faith as Seventh-day Adventists?**

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Jonah knows that the power and authority of his God come from the simple, yet crucial, fact that the Lord is the Creator, the Source of all that is, the foundation of truth, the One who has made reality. Our whole faith is based on the notion that we are worshiping the God who created all things. It's a fact that He, alone, is the Creator, and that makes Him, alone, the only true God. If He's not the Creator, then why worship Him, for He would be, just as we are, merely a product of something even greater than He is?

Thus, Jonah isn't wasting time here on any long theological excursions on the essential nature of his God. Instead, He gets right to the heart of the issue, telling them what they need to know.

**God commands that every week (no exceptions) we devote one-seventh of our lives as a reminder that He is our Creator. What does this tell us about how important the doctrine of Creation is?**

**"WHY HAST THOU DONE THIS?"**

The irony here is outrageous. Jonah did not want to testify to the pagans in Nineveh. But now, in his mad flight from that assignment, he is forced to testify to the pagans on this ship.

**What did Jonah say to the men (Jon. 1:9, 10) that made them so fearful?**

Jonah's proclamation causes the sailors to be "exceedingly afraid." They were already "afraid" of the storm (1:5) to begin with; now, they are "exceedingly afraid" (vs. 10). They react even more fearfully to Jonah's confession about God than they had to the perilous storm. And no wonder: It's one thing to worship the powerful God; it's another to flee openly from Him. No doubt, not knowing much about this God, the pagans must have assumed that He brought the storm in order to destroy Jonah for his disobedience. And, because they had the unfortunate luck of being with him, they were going to be destroyed, as well.

There is a signal contrast between these pagan seamen and Jonah. While Jonah, the prophet of God, dares to act contrary to the God he fears, the mere mention of the mighty God of heaven causes great fear in the sailors' hearts. The violence of the storm is all the testimony they need to the power of the God whom they believe Jonah has angered.

This conviction didn't happen because Jonah consciously testified for God. No, he was forced to make his confession because of the storm. But through this unplanned disclosure, the mariners' hearts were stirred. They expressed horror at Jonah's flight from the God of heaven and earth. Thus, even in disobedience, Jonah was used by the Lord as a witness.

Indeed, what impressed the sailors about the terrible storm took place *despite* Jonah. They certainly saw nothing particularly virtuous in him. God, however, was able to work around Jonah's disobedience. It's kind of ironic, too, that it was through his testimony that they learned something about the true God.

**The sailors, after learning about Jonah's flight, said to him, "Why hast thou done this?" What do we say when, after being caught in sin, we are asked, "Why hast thou done this?" Do we, as born-again Christians—who have been promised so much power from above (Rom. 6:1-12; 1 Cor. 10:13)—ever have a valid excuse to sin?**

**THE EMERGENCY WORSENS.**

What phrase is repeated in Jonah 1:10 for the third time in this chapter?

This phrase “from the presence of the Lord” has appeared in this first chapter almost like a refrain. We already have seen it twice in verse 3. The author of the book of Jonah—as are all writers of biblical narrative—is deliberate in his choice of words. Repetition in Hebrew narrative is a technique employed to emphasize something important. In this case, our attention is deliberately focused on Jonah’s obstinate attitude.

Why do you think that phrase is used again? What point is the author trying to make? What irony is found in its use? Can anyone ever really flee from the presence of an all-knowing God (Prov. 5:21)? In what ways can we attempt to flee from the presence of the Lord?

The sailors grow more desperate as the storm worsens. Now they realize something must be done, or everyone will perish.

Notice how the sailors continue to take the initiative. They acknowledged the God Jonah worshiped. Now they ask him what action they should take. The sailors admit their acute fear, and they beg of Jonah the remedy: *What can we do that God should not be angered? You tell us, and we will obey. In other words, you got us into this mess, now you tell us what to do to get out of it.*

Look at Jonah’s response (1:12). How would you characterize it? Was Jonah, admitting his guilt, ready to sacrifice himself for the good of others? Was he playing the role of the pious martyr? Or was he still continuing in disobedience? What does the fact that there’s no record of Jonah repenting or confessing to the Lord tell us about his attitude, at least to this point?

At this point in the story, we see, perhaps, a bit of softening in Jonah. He admits that he was fleeing from the Lord, admits that he is the cause of their present suffering, and is willing to be cast into the sea in order to spare them sure destruction. Whatever his ultimate motives, Jonah is showing some signs of character development, however extreme the circumstances needed to bring it out.

**FURTHER STUDY:**

**C**ontrast Jonah's response with the apostle Paul's experience of a terrible storm on board a ship in the same body of water: Acts 27:21-25.

Consider how Paul takes command of the situation and declares that God will save all those on board. Courageously he exhorts them not to despair. "Last night there was standing beside me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, and He said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You are destined to appear before Caesar, and for this reason God grants you the safety of all who are sailing with you.' So take courage, friends; I trust in God that things will turn out just as I was told'" (Acts 27:23-25, Jerusalem). Imagine had Jonah displayed a similar faith in the same God.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. What might have happened had Jonah repented of his defection right there and called for God to save him, the crew, and the ship?
2. Read Jonah 1:13. What is the text saying? What's implied in there about the character of these "pagans"? Was there something already there that made them open to the moving of God's Spirit upon them?
3. Jonah was acting not out of disbelief but out of . . . what? He clearly believed in the existence of the Lord. Otherwise, why would he have fled after receiving the "word of the Lord"? Why flee from "the presence" of a God you don't believe in to begin with? When confronted by the sailors, he instantly confessed his belief in the Lord. And He knew of the power of his God, for Jonah admitted that it was because of his fleeing from the Lord that this terrible storm had come. What, then, was his problem? Why would anyone openly disobey a God whom they were so sure existed? In what ways do Christians do the same thing? It's one thing to disobey the commands of a God whom you don't believe even exists; it's another thing to disobey openly the commands of a God whom you do believe in. Discuss.

**SUMMARY:** God used Jonah, despite himself. How much better the outcome would have been had Jonah cooperated right from the start.



## A Soul Winning LE

J. H. Zachary

Josue Mpwatsibenikanka was raised in an idol-worshiping family in southern Rwanda. When he heard the call of Christ and followed Him, his family persecuted him.

During the Rwandan civil war soldiers accused him of collaborating with the “enemy.” They were about to execute him when a soldier standing on a hill nearby called out, “We have more traitors over here.” When the soldiers ran toward the hill, Josue escaped. In gratitude to God he promised that for the rest of his life he would work for God. Although he had been a farmer, he became a literature evangelist.

Josue and a friend were concerned that there were no Sabbathkeepers in a village near their own. Josue visited every home in the village and gave interested people a small gift book. Later he returned and sold many copies of *The Great Controversy*.

In Rwandan churches music is an important part of the worship experience, and every church has at least one choir. Members often spend several hours on Sabbath afternoons enjoying the music of their choirs. So Josue and his friend began inviting choirs from nearby Adventist churches to sing for their targeted village. Crowds came out to listen.

As interest grew, the two men began teaching the Bible in connection with the choral programs. They spent many days visiting the homes of people who had come to hear the choirs. As they opened the scriptures and prayed with these families, attendance at the concerts and Bible studies grew.

Each evening they would close their Bible study with a call to accept Jesus and follow Him in a new life. This community had lost many during the civil war that ravaged Rwanda. The survivors were seeking comfort and spiritual support. Bible studies on the return of Jesus and the glorious resurrection encouraged people to respond to the call to come to Jesus.

Soon Josue and his friend began Sabbath services with about 40 persons. However, after he had canvassed every home in the village and the nearby area, his work took him to another community. He asked one of the elders from a nearby congregation to lead the new group.

Josue continues to work in this region praying for more persons whom he can lead to Jesus.

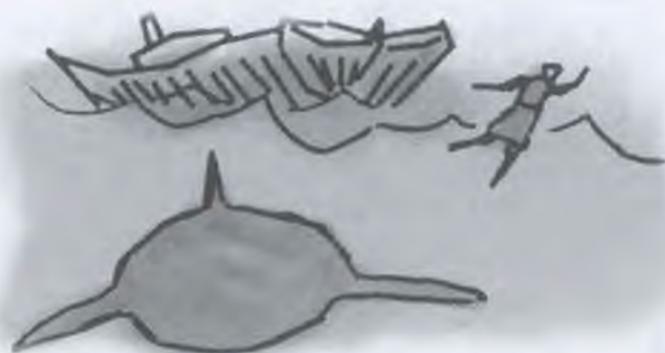
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# Salvation Is of the Lord!



## *Sabbath Afternoon*

THE DRAMA HAS CONTINUED TO mount in the first chapter of the book of Jonah. A prophet, presuming to shirk his divine mission, has found himself facing death in a storm. Yet amid all this turmoil, it is the heathen sailors, not the prophet Jonah, who pray to the Lord (see Jon. 1:14).

What irony: Non-Israelites, face to face with a disobedient prophet of God, pray that they will not acquire guilt through his death. It's not a scene dramatized that often in the Bible—pagans praying to the Lord while one of the Lord's servants keeps silent. The pagans were doing what Jonah should have been doing. Moreover, these sailors pray to Jonah's God with the special covenant name given to Israel, having accepted Jonah's testimony, as expressed in verse 9. They might be acting under duress, but sometimes that's what it takes to get someone's attention. Let's follow the narrative to see what happens next.

**THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:** What did the sailors do after the storm ended? What finally caused Jonah to pray? What did Jonah pray for? What does the story teach about the futility of profession without corresponding works? What does it teach about God's grace for those whose works don't equal their profession?

**MEMORY TEXT:** “‘But I will sacrifice to Thee with the voice of thanksgiving. That which I have vowed I will pay. Salvation is from the Lord’” (Jonah 2:9, NASB).

\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 8.

**THE FEAR OF THE LORD.**

**L**ast week, we left off with Jonah telling the sailors to hurl him overboard and save themselves. Finally, the sailors, desperate, did just that. Only then “the sea ceased from her raging” (Jon. 1:15). Again, we find the God who created the sea unambiguously in control of it.

**What was the reaction of the sailors after the storm ceased?  
Jon. 1:15, 16.**

Notice, the sailors didn’t attribute the change in weather to some coincidence of unguided nature. They didn’t view it as pure chance or luck. Instead, they “feared the Lord exceedingly” (see vs. 16). Earlier they had feared the storm, but now they feared the God of the storm, even more so than the storm itself. Seasoned mariners who earlier had worshiped a collection of false gods came to worship Yahweh and make vows to Him. The sailors come into contact with the living God. They make offerings to God, vows to the true God, the One who not only created the sea but controls it (Jon. 1:16).

**God gave them a miraculous deliverance, and as a result, they rendered Him homage. In what ways does this mirror the basic plan of salvation, particularly as seen through the life and ministry of Jesus? See, for example, John 9.**

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Are we not saved, delivered from death by Jesus, and then, as a result of that deliverance, worship and obey Him? Of course. That’s what happened with these sailors. Homage, worship, and obedience can never save; these things come only as a result of being saved, of having obtained the miraculous deliverance that is ours by faith alone. See also Galatians 2:20.

**Perhaps the most striking contrast in chapter 1 is also the most spiritually instructive. In verse 9, Jonah the Hebrew prophet professes to “fear the Lord” but doesn’t act as though he does; in contrast, the pagans, too, “feared the Lord” and then certainly acted as if they did, even though their knowledge of the Lord was much more limited than that of Jonah, a Hebrew prophet. What warnings should we take from this contrast?**

**IN THE BELLY OF THE BEAST (Jon. 1:17).**

**F**or all the sailors know, Jonah has drowned, a victim of the waves and storm. However, at this very moment, we are again confronted with God's complete control over nature. We already have seen God causing the great wind of a storm (vs. 4), controlling the casting of the lot (vs. 7), and then suddenly causing the storm to cease (vs. 15). What comes next?

**How is God's sovereign power displayed now? Jon. 1:17.**

A man being swallowed alive and living for three full days in the belly of a fish is a remarkable event in any era, not just in our sophisticated twenty-first century. Even back then, it was incredible. And yet, the Bible makes no attempt to explain or justify how something like this could happen. It's just assumed to be true, because it's assumed the Lord can do it.

The book says the Lord "had prepared" a great fish to swallow up Jonah. It could also have been translated "had appointed." The verb comes from a Hebrew root word that can mean, among other things, "to appoint" or "to prepare," "to count" or "to reckon." The use of the verb here stresses God's sovereign rule over His creation for the accomplishment of His purpose. In fact, the narrator will couple this same verb with God's directives three more times in the book of Jonah to underscore the Lord's omnipotence. See Jonah 4:6, 7, 8.

**What other verb is used to describe what the fish does to Jonah?**

The verb "to swallow" appears in various forms in the Old Testament (see Pss. 21:9; 35:25; Jer. 51:34) and often in the context of Israel's captivity. It's a word sometimes used to describe God's judgment upon His people. Thus, how well it fits this story here. After all, so many of God's judgments upon His people were nothing more than the means employed to turn them away from evil. The judgments had redemptive intentions. The Lord must have had that in mind for Jonah, as well; otherwise, the fish, instead of swallowing him whole, would have chewed him up.

**Dwell on some of the miracles in the Bible. What do they tell us about God's power, and what kind of hope do they offer us now, if any?**

**JONAH'S UNDERSEA LAMENT.**

How long does Jonah survive in His new method of transportation in the Mediterranean? Jon. 1:17. Where else in the Old Testament do we find this same time phrase used? 1 Sam. 30:12; 2 Kings 20:5, 8; Hos. 6:2. Note how this expression of time is also used in the New Testament. Matt. 12:39, 40 (see also Luke 11:30).

**J**esus relates Jonah's miraculous deliverance from death as a sign of His own passion, death, and resurrection. The prophet Hosea, speaking within a general time frame when Jonah's experience would still have been talked about, takes the timing of Jonah's experience and places it within a context that talks about resurrection (Hos. 6:2). Thus, when Christ compares His death and resurrection experience to that of Jonah, He is linking it with an understanding already found in the Old Testament.

Back in the Mediterranean, meanwhile, Jonah hardly could have known what suddenly caused the dramatic change from drowning in a wet, choking darkness to an even greater darkness. It would have taken some time to realize that the all-enveloping blackness was not that of Sheol (Jon. 2:2), the Hebrew word for the "grave." And when Jonah grasped that he was actually preserved alive, he regarded this as a pledge of his deliverance.

**What does he finally do? Jon. 2:1.**

Jonah's prayer puts into words the anguish he felt as he was drowning, the reactions he felt on the brink of death, along with his experience and reflections within the "great fish." He borrows many phrases from the book of Psalms as he prays. Using phrases from the book of Psalms in praying is not an unlikely thing to do. Even today, Christians often take at least parts of their prayers from the different psalms in the Old Testament Psalter. The psalms also are used often today in worship, as prayers of invocation and benediction.

**I**t has been said there's no such thing as an atheist in a foxhole (maybe also in the belly of a great fish). The sad thing is that Jonah was no atheist to begin with. He not only knew the Lord, he knew the Lord's power and had even been given a special calling. Why is it that so often we wait for calamity before availing ourselves of the divine power that's always there for us? Perhaps, if Jonah had been in an attitude of prayer all along, he would have been spared all these trials.

**THE EARTH AND HER BARS.**

Read Jonah 2:2-9, Jonah's prayer in the belly of the fish. Summarize the essence of that prayer. What was Jonah saying?

**C**ompare the beginning of Jonah's prayer to Psalm 18:6 and 120:1. Some commentators even refer to Jonah's prayer as a psalm, a psalm of thanksgiving to the Lord for deliverance from a terrible situation.

What's fascinating, too, is that here he is, swallowed alive by a fish—and yet he's praising God for his deliverance and salvation? Apparently, once he realized what had happened, Jonah must have seen the hand of the Lord and knew God was going to save him, despite himself. Thus, even though Jonah rebelled against the Lord, even though he attempted to flee from known duty, the Lord wasn't through with him yet. He was still going to give this reluctant prophet another chance.

Read Jonah 2:4, where Jonah says, "I am cast out of thy sight." Compare that to 1:3 and 4, when Jonah attempts to flee from the "presence of the Lord." What's the irony there? How does Jonah's prayer, which begins in distress, conclude? Jon. 2:9.

Many have seen this closing declaration of God's mercy as the very center of the book of Jonah, the central point the writer wishes to emphasize. Jonah is constrained to admit God's saving mercy. However, the heathen mariners already have done this! In promising to sacrifice and in making vows, the Hebrew prophet, Jonah, declares his intention to do what the pagan sailors had already done. Again, the irony of this situation shouldn't be overlooked.

Chapters 1 and 2 in the book of Jonah both end with the theme of sacrifice and vows, drawing for the reader a parallel between the prophet's experience and that of the pagan seamen. Both faced an extreme crisis—peril from the sea storm. Both cried to Yahweh, acknowledging His sovereignty. Both were physically saved. Both offered worship. Jonah comes at last to the same point the Gentile mariners had already reached, even though it took a bit more divine prodding to get him there.

What we see here in Jonah is an example of God's grace, mercy, and favor to those who don't deserve it. How have you seen this grace manifested for you, either by God or by other people? In what ways have you manifested grace to others?

**PRAYING IN ONE'S EXTREMITY.**

**J**onah ends his prayer by exclaiming, "Salvation is of the Lord." The Hebrew word for "salvation" means not only immediate physical salvation but also eternal salvation, as in ultimate redemption (the word for "salvation" comes from the same root letters that make up the name *Jesus*. Of course, Jonah's problem hasn't been his belief in the Lord. All through chapter 1 it was clear that Jonah had been doing what he was doing despite his belief in God. So, again, for him to make so wonderful a proclamation about the Lord and His power means nothing in and of itself. Jonah is one of the best examples of what is meant by "faith without works" (see James 2:18-20). Even then, the Lord was still willing to try to turn him around.

**What other examples can we find in the Bible of faith without works? Who comes to mind? Judas? Saul? The 12 spies? In what different ways is this workless faith manifested?**

In his entire prayer, Jonah never confesses his rebelliousness. There is no indication that Jonah is truly penitent. Of course, the fact that it is not mentioned there doesn't mean that at some point, in the belly of the fish, he didn't confess his sin. Nevertheless, the omission here shouldn't be overlooked. And even if he didn't confess and even if he wasn't truly penitent, it just goes to show that despite these things, the Lord was still willing to try to work with him.

**Compare Jonah's prayer to David's in Psalm 51. What are the similarities? The differences?**

The prayer of Jonah should encourage us that we can pray in the midst of failure, even when our distress has been caused by our own disobedience. This is a critical lesson to learn, because that is when it seems the most difficult to pray. That is when we feel we have no right to call on God. Or even if we wanted to pray, we feel we surely don't deserve God's help. More than likely, we don't. But then again, what's grace if it's not getting something we don't deserve?

**"When Satan comes to tell you that you are a great sinner, look up to your Redeemer and talk of His merits. That which will help you is to look to His light. Acknowledge your sin, but tell the enemy that 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners' and that you may be saved by His matchless love. 1 Timothy 1:15."**—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, pp. 35, 36.

**FURTHER STUDY:** Read Ellen G. White, "Bible Biographies," in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, pp. 9–15; "The Privilege of Prayer," in *Steps to Christ*, pp. 93–104.

**B**ut, having confessed your sins, believe that the Word of God cannot fail, but that He is faithful that hath promised. It is just as much your duty to believe that God will fulfil His word, and forgive your sins, as it is your duty to confess your sins. You must exercise faith in God as in one who will do exactly as He has promised in His Word, and pardon all your transgressions."—Ellen G. White, *This Day With God*, p. 89.

"Are you one that makes mistakes? Go to Jesus, and ask Him to forgive you, and then believe that He does. 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness' (1 John 1:9). Ask the Lord to pardon your errors. Then rejoice in Him."—Ellen G. White, *The Upward Look*, p. 132.

"It will not help you in the least to keep mourning over your defects. Say, 'Lord, I cast my helpless soul on Thee, and Thee alone. I will not worry, because Thou hast said, "Ask, and ye shall receive." ' Believe that you do receive. Believe that your Saviour is full of compassion, full of tender pity and love. Let not little mishaps trouble you. Small mistakes may be ordered by the Lord to save you from making larger mistakes."—Ellen G. White, *The Upward Look*, p. 132.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What would you say to someone who dismisses, out of hand, the Jonah story because he or she can't believe a human could survive inside a fish for three days? What might be the only answer you could give this person?
2. Twice in Jonah's undersea psalm he makes mention of the temple (Jon. 2:4, 7). What is it about the temple and what it stands for that would make this Hebrew refer to it? Think of the context of his words.

**SUMMARY:** Swallowed alive by a big fish, Jonah is being forced to learn the hard way what he should have known a long time earlier: that faith without works is dead.



## Wanderer Comes Home

Charlotte Ishkanian

Linda Delower's life was typical of many Aborigines. She grew up on a sheep station in northern Australia. The family moved from one station to another as work demanded.

As a teen Linda started drinking and smoking with her friends; after she married, she drank with her husband. The couple worked for a time at an Adventist mission, and the couple put away their destructive habits. Then Linda's husband was offered a job some distance from the mission. The promised job did not work out, and Linda's husband started drinking again. The couple began fighting. Life became so bad that Linda finally left her husband.

She wandered from place to place. She lost her faith, her self-esteem. She was searching for something, but she did not know what. She still believed in God, but she had lost her hold on Him. She was angry about what had happened to her. For more than 10 years she was adrift in a sea of uncertainty.

Then she met another man, Michael, and they married. Linda felt a strong pull to return to God. She began praying, and God gave her the victory over alcohol and tobacco.

An Adventist who lived in the same town as Linda had a small worship room on his land. She began attending worship with other Aboriginal Christians and was rebaptized.

One day Linda heard about an Adventist-operated Bible school for Aborigines. She decided to attend the school to learn more about the Bible. When she told her husband of her decision, he was sad that she wanted to go, but he gave his blessing. She attends school two weeks every two months and studies on her own between intense sessions.

Linda loves the Bible school and the truths that God is teaching her there, even though such intense study is difficult for her. She is learning how to share her faith with others, principles of health, and lifestyle changes along with Bible study.

During the months Linda is at home, she visits her neighbors and patients in the hospital, sharing with them her love for the Lord.

Today Linda is a leader in her little congregation in northern Australia. She preaches when a preacher is needed and leads out in Bible study time. Some of her relatives are studying the Bible with the pastor and plan to become Adventists.

**Linda Delower lives in Derby, Western Australia. Charlotte Ishkanian is editor of *Mission*.**

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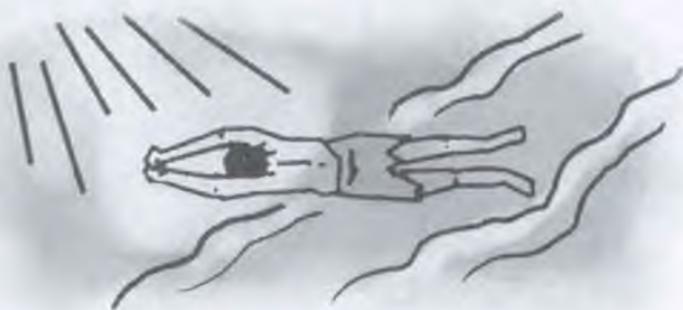
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# Second Chances



## Sabbath Afternoon

IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE THAT so much has happened so far in Jonah (and we've covered only two chapters and even did so somewhat sparingly). Of the many points brought out, perhaps one of the most important is this: The same God who was working in Jonah is the same God who is working in our lives today. Our trials, adventures, and experiences might not be as dramatic, our call might not be as intense, but God's concern and love for Jonah is no different from His concern and love for us. If only we had the faith to believe that! Look what the Lord did for Jonah, all in order to bring the reluctant prophet to where He wanted him to be. Will He not do as much for us, if that's what it takes (let's hope, though, that it doesn't take that much)?

What we see here, in Jonah, is a unique expression of what we see all through the Scriptures—God's amazing grace working upon hearts open to receive it, even if it takes a bit of prodding along the way.

**THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:** How did Jonah get out of the fish? Why did God give him a second chance? How do we see God's grace expressed in this story?

**MEMORY TEXT:** "O Lord, Thou hast searched me and known me! Thou knowest when I sit down and when I rise up; thou discernest my thoughts from afar. Thou searchest out my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways" (Psalm 139:1, 2, RSV).

\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 15.

**THE “WORD” REAPPEARS.**

“And the Lord spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land” (Jon. 2:10).

**M**any translations of the above text miss a certain nuance in the language. Translated in a moral literal fashion, the verse reads, “And the Lord said to the fish, and it vomited out Jonah.” The phrase “and the Lord [or God] said” is exceedingly common throughout the Bible.

All through the Genesis Creation account, for example, there is the phrase “and God said.” “*And God said, Let there be light. . . .*” “*And God said, Let there be a firmament. . . .*” “*And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass. . . .*” and so forth (see Genesis 1). In Jonah, we have the same verbal form used in a manner that, again, shows the Lord’s power over His creation. Indeed, if He could speak the world and nature into existence, there’s no question He can control it, too, as we’ve seen all through the first few chapters of Jonah.

**Read Jonah 3:1. What do we see in this text, that reflects what we’ve seen in Jonah 1:1?**

Here, too, we see God’s actions manifested through His “word.” Look up these verses and see how the “word” of the Lord appears in the Bible: Psalms 33:6; 107:19, 20; Isaiah 55:10, 11. These texts show how God carries out His will on the earth. It is through His “word” that He gets things done on the earth.

There is an ancient Jewish translation of the Bible into Aramaic called the Targums, which was highly influential in the synagogues. Look at how closely it relates the “word of the Lord” with the Lord Himself: The Bible says, “God created man” (Gen. 1:27); the Targums translates it, “And the Word of the Lord created man.” The Bible says, “And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth” (Gen. 6:6, 7); the Targums translates it, “And it repented the Lord that through His Word He made man on the earth.” The Bible says that Abraham “believed in the Lord” (Gen. 15:6); according to the Targums, Abraham “believed in the Word of the Lord.” There are many other examples, as well.

Concepts like “the word of God” are hard for us to understand completely. The important point is that God is at work in this world. He still manifests His power here, and the greatest manifestation of that was through Jesus, the Word. What comfort do we get from the fact that we are not alone, not abandoned, not left to our own devices in this harsh, sinful planet?

## SECOND CHANCES.

**J**onah is back where he started from. In the Hebrew, the first words of chapter 3 are almost an exact repetition of the opening words in chapter 1. Jonah is given a second chance, despite his initial disobedience. He deliberately and stubbornly rebelled against God. The marvel is that his actions are not enough to make God turn His back on him. It should cause great wonder in our thinking that, despite his rebellion, God still calls Jonah another time. The God of the Bible is the God of *second chances*. He doesn't just dismiss Jonah in his petulant disobedience. However, this aspect of God's grace is not rare or unusual.

**Whom else has God offered a second chance to? Gen. 22:1-10.**

"God had called Abraham to be the father of the faithful, and his life was to stand as an example of faith to succeeding generations. But his faith had not been perfect. He had shown distrust of God in concealing the fact that Sarah was his wife, and again in his marriage with Hagar. That he might reach the highest standard, God subjected him to another test."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 147.

**Who else got another chance? Gen. 28:10-22.**

"Threatened with death by the wrath of Esau, Jacob went out from his father's home a fugitive. . . .

"The evening of the second day found him far away from his father's tents. He felt that he was an outcast, and he knew that all this trouble had been brought upon him by his own wrong course. The darkness of despair pressed upon his soul, and he hardly dared to pray. But he was so utterly lonely that he felt the need of protection from God as he had never felt it before. With weeping and deep humiliation he confessed his sin, and entreated for some evidence that he was not utterly forsaken. . . .

"But God did not forsake Jacob. His mercy was still extended to His erring, distrustful servant. The Lord compassionately revealed just what Jacob needed—a Saviour."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 183. And thus God gave Jacob the vision of the heavenly ladder filled with angels.

**How many times in your own life has the Lord given you "second chances"? How is confession and repentance an expression of the second chances we've been given, again and again?**

**THE GIFT OF GOD.**

No question, this picture of God, as presented here in the Old Testament, reveals a great deal about His divine character. Our God is a forgiving God, a pardoning God, a God of love and mercy. The whole plan of salvation rests upon the idea of forgiveness, of us having done something terrible, deserving of death, and yet God, through Christ, offering us life.

Look up these texts. What are they all basically saying about us, about our nature, about our characters, and about our deeds? Isa. 53:6; 64:6; Jer. 17:9; Rom. 3:23; 5:12?

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As we look around in the world, who can deny the truthfulness of these Bible texts? In fact, we don't have to look around; looking inside ourselves is more than enough.

Yet, what we see with Jonah, with God giving him another chance, is a small object lesson of what God has done for the whole human race because of Jesus on the cross. Through Him, we have all been given a second chance at life; we have all been given the opportunity to receive for ourselves the glorious redemption that Christ offers the world.

Read carefully and prayerfully Ephesians 2:1-10. How do these verses encapsulate the essence of what was written above? As you read, notice how the words *sins, dead, trespasses, disobedience, lust, flesh, and wrath* are used to describe us, our actions, and our character. In contrast, what words are used in those verses to describe the Lord, His actions, and His character?

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Take a look at your own life. In what ways can you see yourself mirrored in those verses written by Paul? Trace in your own mind where you once were and where the Lord has now taken you. Compare yourself with Jonah, at least as we see him so far. What parallels can you see?

## SECOND CHANCES AGAIN.

**N**otice the title of this week's lesson. It's not called "Second Chance" but "Second Chances." And with good reason. Though the book of Jonah presents him as being given a second chance, in reality, who of us doesn't need more than a second chance? If all we had was *a* second chance, as opposed to *many* second chances, who would be saved?

**R**ead 1 John 1:8–2:1. How do these verses exemplify the idea that we, even as followers of Christ, need more than one "second chance"? To whom are these words addressed? Believers or nonbelievers? What point does John make about the actions of those to whom he is writing? Focus carefully on verse 8 (the Greek verb *have* appears in the present tense).

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Can any of us seriously claim that once we accepted Christ and were given a chance to start over, we never had to go back to the Cross and ask for forgiveness again? This doesn't mean that each time we sin we are lost; it means only that we need to be forgiven more than once.

Indeed, if we are honest with ourselves, we have to admit God has been even more gracious and forgiving with us than the two times we have seen in Jonah's life. And when we aren't so focused on the sins of others and the work God needs to do in their lives, we become more sensitive to just how many times God has given grace to us.

"Jesus knows the circumstances of every soul. You may say, I am sinful, very sinful. You may be; but the worse you are, the more you need Jesus. He turns no weeping, contrite one away. He does not tell to any all that He might reveal, but He bids every trembling soul take courage. Freely will He pardon all who come to Him for forgiveness and restoration."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 568.

When we are honest enough with ourselves to recall how God has brought us up out of the pits we have dug for ourselves, we can better appreciate God's grace to His recalcitrant prophet Jonah.

**G**o back to 1 John, the verses we looked at today. Then read 1 John 2:3-6. How do you understand the relationship, the balance, between these two blocks of text, one stressing the reality of sin in our lives, the other stressing the need for obedience to the law?

**ANOTHER TRY.**

The “word of the Lord” came to Jonah again. What did He say to him? Jon. 3:2.

**T**he divine directive, “Up! Go to the great city of Nineveh,” is identical with the first one God gave Jonah before his amazing adventure in the Mediterranean Sea. Nineveh is still the metropolis God wants him to reach. He will not be frustrated by the impudence of His prophet.

**What is Jonah's response this time? Jon. 3:3.**

As in chapter 1, Jonah went. But this time, instead of trying to “flee . . . from the presence of the Lord,” he obeys “according to the word of the Lord.” Notice how the text describes what happened to Jonah next (Jon. 3:3, 4). Jonah is told to go, and the next thing we know, he’s there. No mention is made of the long journey Jonah would have had to make. This is in direct contrast to his initial travels in the first two chapters. Instead, our attention is now taken immediately to the city of Nineveh. There was a reason for the description of Jonah’s first journey: It exposed the nature of Jonah’s rebellion against God. But now that Jonah obeys, the journey is not important to detail.

**How is Nineveh described? Jon. 3:3.**

As in Jonah 1:2, Nineveh is again described as a great city. (The literal meaning of the phrase is: “a great city to God.”) And indeed, it was large and important by the standards of the time. We can also be sure that Nineveh is “great” to God in light of all the trouble He takes to get Jonah there! The size of Nineveh is suggested by the final phrase in verse 3: “three days’ journey.” The words in the original language read more literally as “a walk of three days.” Such a designation in ancient records can suggest a day’s journey in from the suburbs, one day for business, and one day for the return. This interpretation fits well with verse 4.

God commissions a Hebrew prophet to go to the capital city of Assyria, taking a message of judgment. At a time when Israelites were no doubt praying that the Assyrians might be destroyed, God is extending a hand of mercy to them. What’s the message for us? (See Matt. 5:44; Luke 6:27, 35.)

**FURTHER STUDY:** Ellen G. White, "Our Duty to the World," in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, pp. 273–280; "Our Work," vol. 8, pp. 9–12; "The Commission," pp. 14–18.

**W**ake up, wake up, my brethren and sisters, and enter the fields in America that have never been worked. After you have given something for foreign fields, do not think your duty done. There is a work to be done in foreign fields, but there is a work to be done in America that is just as important. In the cities of America there are people of almost every language. These need the light that God has given to His church."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 36.

"While plans are being carried out to warn the inhabitants of various nations in distant lands, much must be done in behalf of the foreigners who have come to the shores of our own land. The souls in China are no more precious than the souls within the shadow of our doors. God's people are to labor faithfully in distant lands, as His providence may open the way; and they are also to fulfil their duty toward the foreigners of various nationalities in the cities and villages and country districts close by."—Ellen G. White, *Christian Service*, p. 199.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Look up other texts in the Bible in which the phrase the "word of the Lord" is found. Examples are Genesis 15:1, Numbers 36:5, Psalm 33:4, Isaiah 1:10, and 2:3. In many cases, you can replace that phrase with the name "Jesus," and it makes perfect theological sense. What important truth does this teach us?
2. The Bible teaches that we can be given many chances, even after we blow it. However, we must remember that God is not mocked; those who presume upon the grace of God are in danger of facing the wrath of God. At what point can we step beyond the bounds of forgiveness? Obviously, we can, because there will be professed Christians who are lost (Matt. 7:22). When this happens, is it because God has changed His mind about us, or does it happen because we've become so hard in our sin that we no longer turn back to God for forgiveness? Discuss your understanding of this process; be prepared to talk about it in class.

**SUMMARY:** Jonah is given a much-needed second chance. Who, among us, can't relate?



## I'll Kill That Teacher!

Peter Sinagpulo

An epidemic of German measles struck the isolated Manobo village in the mountains of southern Philippines. Already two babies had died, and many more children were sick. These people are not vaccinated against childhood diseases, because their villages are too isolated, too dangerous and too difficult to hike to. The nearest hospital was a day's hike down the mountain, and my student-missionary partner and I had no medicines to help the sick ones.

We went from one hut to another, praying and offering what help we could. In one hut we found a baby lying on a mat, gasping for breath. The family had gathered to watch, weep, and wait for death.

We had no medicines, but we offered to pray. We wet a small towel and bathed the baby, then we asked God to heal the child. The father stared silently at us, his face crowded with worry and puzzlement. "How can a wet towel heal our baby?" he asked, agitated.

We explained that it could help bring down the baby's fever. We prepared to leave, sure that God would answer our prayer. We shook hands with the family members, but the father refused and stared at us coldly.

"What is wrong, sir?" I asked. But he said nothing. We felt sure that if the child died, the father would blame us.

We had barely reached our cottage when somebody ran toward us. "Sir! Sir! The father is very angry. He knows that the wet towel is not medicine, and he has threatened to kill you both!"

We entered our cottage and knelt to pray once more. "Lord, our Great Physician, there is nothing else we can do to save the baby. Please spare her life as well as ours. Amen." We claimed promises of God's protection, then we prepared for bed.

Through the spaces between the boards of our hut, we saw something move. Figures silhouetted in the moonlight walked toward our hut. It was the family of the sick baby. They walked past our cottage toward a relative's hut, but the father kept staring at our cottage. All was quiet again, and we fell asleep.

The next morning someone knocked at our door. It was the baby's father. This time his face wore a smile, and in his hand he carried some sweet potatoes. "Thank you, teacher," he said. "My baby is well now!"

We pray that the father and others in this village will learn to love and trust the Great Healer whom we worship.

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# Jonah, the Amazing Evangelist



## Sabbath Afternoon

**J**ONAH ARRIVES IN THE Assyrian capital city of Nineveh. He proclaims the announcement that God has given him. What happens in the city is remarkable. We find a picture of true repentance from people whom we would not expect to be repentant. In fact, their repentance far exceeds anything seen so far in the prophet Jonah.

What accounted for this remarkable turnaround? The text really doesn't say. When we consider that conversion is personal and often rare, the fact that a whole city of pagans undergoes such an experience is amazing. No doubt here, as in many Bible narratives, a lot of details are missing; thus, we can go only with what we have, which is enough to give us another view of God's love toward sinners.

**THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:** What was the essence of Jonah's message? What didn't Jonah's message say? How long were the people given before judgment would fall? How did the people respond? How did the king respond? In what ways does their action reveal the link between faith and works?

What lessons can we, as a church, learn about faith, repentance, and obedience from the experience of the Ninevites?

**MEMORY TEXT:** " 'So shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it' " (Isaiah 55:11, NASB).

\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 22.

**PREACHING IN THE CAPITAL CITY OF ASSYRIA.**

"And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (Jon. 3:4).

**I**t would be fascinating to have Jonah's sermon outlines or sermon notes; that is, to know what Jonah preached that had such a powerful impact upon this pagan nation.

All we know is what we have been told here in the text, and notice, according to the text, what his sermon notes probably didn't contain. He wasn't preaching monotheism (that there is only one God) or about God's infinite love or about the hope and promise of eternity. Nor was Jonah commissioned to seek ecumenical unity. Instead, Jonah had one specific message for the Ninevites. Turn from your evil ways or face divine judgment.

**What did Jonah specifically warn them about? Jon. 3:4.**

Judgment is a key theme in the Bible; it's as pervasive in Scripture as is the theme of salvation, which makes sense, because both concepts are related. For the wicked, judgment leads to death and destruction; for the righteous, judgment promises vindication, justice, and salvation. Either way, in the end, no one—neither the righteous nor the wicked—escape judgment.

**The concept of judgment appears in various ways in Scripture. Look up these texts. Taken together, what do they tell us about judgment? Gen. 15:14; Pss. 1:5; 19:9; Eccles. 3:17; 12:14; Dan. 7:22; Luke 21:36; John 12:47; Acts 17:31; 1 John 4:17; Rev. 20:12.**

Theologians say that God's last word isn't judgment but salvation. Look at John 12:47: Here is the essence behind all God's judgments, which is His desire to save. He judged Egypt only after its continued rebellion; He judged the world with the Flood only after people refused to hearken to His words; and even now, with Nineveh, He uses the warning of judgment in order to save them. In other words, He threatens them with destruction as a means of preserving them.

**Though we don't have the details of what Jonah presented to the Ninevites, why did it appear to be a gloom-and-doom message? Unless you obey, you will be destroyed. How do we reconcile that idea with the notion of God wanting us to serve Him only out of love, not fear?**

**YET FORTY DAYS.**

How long does God give the Ninevites before the city will be overturned? In what other instances is that same number used? Gen. 7:17; Exod. 24:18; Num. 14:33, 34; Matt. 4:2; Mark 1:13; Luke 4:2; Acts 1:3. Are there any parallels to the uses of that number in these texts and what happens here in the book of Jonah? If so, what are they?

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Whatever Jonah said, in detail, to these people, there's no question: It worked. The phrase in Jonah 3:5 "from the greatest of them even to the least of them" (literally, "from their greatest to their least") is a common way to express totality in Hebrew. The entire city of wicked Gentiles accepts what Jonah says about judgment as the truth.

As we saw with the pagan mariners of chapter 1, here again non-Israelites turn to the God of heaven. The notoriously wicked pagan citizenry of Nineveh accept Jonah's judgment message with all seriousness. They believe he is proclaiming the words of God.

**When Jonah presents the dire warning to the city of Nineveh, what is the astonishing result? Jon. 3:5.**

Notice, the Ninevites didn't just believe Jonah; they *believed God* (Jon. 3:5). In this case, worshipers of other gods are not necessarily unaware of or resistant to the one supreme Deity and Judge, and when confronted with His word, they respond.

In this case, the Ninevites accept that the threatened judgment is deserved. This reminds us of the biblical perspective that there is in each person, whether a pagan or a believer, a conscience that can be touched by the power of God.

Look again at Jonah 3:5. The people "believed God." The Hebrew word there for "believed" comes from the same Hebrew word found in Genesis 15:6, regarding Abraham and his *faith*. Though the book of Jonah isn't talking about any kind of deep Pauline conception of justification by faith, it still, nevertheless, stressed their belief. Do you think this "belief," as expressed here in Jonah, is the same thing as faith, as commonly understood in Christianity? (See also Heb. 11:6.) Give reasons for your answer.

**A PAGAN CONVERSION EXPERIENCE (See Jon. 3:5-8).**

The Ninevites admit the divine judgment is deserved. And they display their conviction through outward signs of repentance: fasting and wearing sackcloth. This self-humiliation is a means of expressing submission to God. When we think of all the work often needed to bring one soul to genuine repentance, it's amazing here to see a whole city (pagans, no less) doing it, as well.

**Who else besides the general population heard the call to judgment? Jon. 3:6.**

The kings of these ancient Near Eastern nations weren't known for their humility or attitude of repentance, especially before a "foreign" God. However, something powerful happened to this one here.

The title "king of Nineveh" would more generally be described as the "king of Assyria." But Assyria is never mentioned in the book. Thus, the writer underscores how the book of Jonah is concerned specifically with Nineveh. This also accords with the accepted practice of permitting the name of a chief city to stand for a country in written documents. In the city of Nineveh, we find the king including himself in the earnest supplication of God.

**What does the king do in response to Jonah's message?**

Notice the movement of the unnamed king. He goes from sitting on a throne and wearing his royal robe to being covered in sackcloth and sitting in ashes. From a throne to ashes, from a royal robe to sackcloth. If this doesn't sound like true repentance, what does?

This heathen ruler does not use modern techniques of denying culpability. He has been wrong, and he is honest enough to admit it. Far from considering himself in a category apart from the morality of the citizenry of Nineveh, the king sets an example to his people by acknowledging his own need to repent. He does not doubt that God is right to be angry with Nineveh. And thus, this pagan king repents before the King of kings.

**However dramatic the king's example, what happened to him that needs to happen to all those who would become true followers of the Lord? Why, in a sense, does what happened to the king need to happen to us every day? (See Luke 18:13; 1 Cor. 15:31; Col. 2:6.)**

**THE KING CALLS NINEVEH TO REPENTANCE.**

**What is the remarkable pronouncement the king then issues? Jon. 3:7-9.**

**A** fast is one thing; to not drink is another. And when one usually thinks of a fast, one doesn't usually think of it applying to animals, as well. However, for whatever reasons, even the beasts aren't to eat or to drink. Whether the Lord required that or not is questionable. What isn't questionable is that the Ninevites take Jonah's words very seriously. Also, mention of flocks and herds suggests that the heralds journey beyond the city walls to the rural areas generally surrounding major walled cities then.

**What else does the king urge the people to do? Jon. 3:8.**

The king urges the Ninevites to "call insistently/mightily to God" in earnest prayer. Both humans and animals are to be clothed in sackcloth, the garb of penitence. Sackcloth expresses witness for grief of sin that makes a person vile. Wearing it gives evidence of the bankrupt state that sin brings. Its coarseness reminds the wearer of the vulgarity of transgression. It prompts remembrance as to how a sinner appears in the presence of a holy God. The ashes speak of the fire that consumes and what the ultimate end of sin will be.

**What further action does the king urge upon the people of Nineveh? Jon. 3:8.**

Note the striking picture of a pagan king urging pagan people to call upon God earnestly (the pagan sailors had done this already). The king also singles out a particular vice prevalent in Nineveh. Of all the spectrum of evils that could have been cited, the king singles out violence. God had not been mistaken in His call to judgment. Violence was a characteristic of the Assyrians. It still is graphically visible in carefully carved granite panels archaeologists have found, that portray Assyrian violence in military conquests. The king himself readily acknowledges the violent nature of Nineveh's culture.

**Why is the call to change their actions so important here? The people believed God (faith), and they covered themselves in sackcloth and fasted (repentance). But what would their repentance have meant if they didn't change their ways, as well?**

**A PICTURE OF TRUE REPENTANCE.**

What urgent motivation does the king now add to his proclamation? Jon. 3:9.

The king realizes that forgiveness for their sin was dependent upon the mercy of the great God of heaven and earth. The king is as perceptive as is the sea captain during the terrifying storm in chapter 1, when he implores Jonah to pray: “Arise, call on your God; perhaps your God will consider us, so that we may not perish” (Jon. 1:6, NKJV, emphasis supplied). Notice how this parallels what the king himself is thinking (Jon. 3:9). In both cases, neither the king nor the sea captain are sure what is going to happen; in both cases, they rely totally on the mercy of a God more powerful than they. And in both cases, only by God’s grace do they have any chance at all.

What was it about their actions that causes God to “repent” (actually, the Hebrew word often, and unfortunately, translated “repent” carries with it the idea of “feeling compassion”)? In other words, of all the things the previous texts say the Ninevites did (believed, fasted, put on sackcloth, had their animals fast), what does the text specify that the Lord “saw,” which causes Him not to do what He said He would do? What point should that make for us? (See also James 2:2-26.)

How is the depth of their repentance later recalled? Matt. 12:41.

Their repentance is later mentioned by Jesus. Jonah’s own people, the Israelites, despite their special covenant relationship with God, don’t have this same kind of corporate experience. Ultimately, they fail to repent and, therefore, experience judgment.

We are thus reminded once again that God deals with all humanity on the same basis, without partiality. Ultimately, both Nineveh and Jerusalem are destroyed. God deals evenly with the human race.

It is remarkable and sadly ironic how much more trouble God has had with Jonah, one of His own people, than with the worst of the heathen world! How amazing the willingness of the Ninevites to turn away from and forsake their evil ways. What specific lesson should we, as Seventh-day Adventists, learn from this point? Is not there some Jonah in us, as well?

**FURTHER STUDY:** Ellen G. White, "The Measure of Forgiveness," in *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 243–251; "Who Is My Neighbour?" pp. 376–389.

Nineveh, wicked though it had become, was not wholly given over to evil. He who 'beholdeth all the sons of men' (Psalm 33:13) . . . perceived in that city many who were reaching out after something better and higher. . . . God revealed Himself to them in an unmistakable manner, to lead them, if possible, to repentance." —Ellen G. White, *Conflict and Courage*, p. 230.

"And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent." In the ages of darkness that had preceded the advent of Christ, the divine Ruler had passed lightly over the idolatry of the heathen; but now, through His Son, He had sent men the light of truth; and He expected from all repentance unto salvation, not only from the poor and humble, but from the proud philosopher and the princes of the earth. 'Because He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead.' As Paul spoke of the resurrection from the dead, 'some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter.' "—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 239.

"The pardon granted by this king represents a divine forgiveness of all sin. Christ is represented by the king, who, moved with compassion, forgave the debt of his servant. Man was under the condemnation of the broken law. He could not save himself, and for this reason Christ came to this world."—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 244.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Someone once said, "How can we tell when a sin has been pardoned? By the fact that we no longer commit that sin." Nice thought, but do you agree? Support your answer.
2. Look again at Jonah 3:10. It says that God decided not to do what He said He would do. What does that mean, and what implications could it have for us, both as individuals or as a church body? How does this quote help us understand this principle? "It should be remembered that the promises and the threatenings of God are alike conditional."—Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 695.

**SUMMARY:** The Ninevites bring forth fruits worthy of repentance. What a lesson for those quick to judge the spiritual state of others.



## Transformed Lives

J. H. Zachary

Willie and Charlotte Walkus are native Americans living on Vancouver Island in British Columbia, Canada. They had let alcoholism rob them of a meaningful life, dignity, and happiness. "For 20 years I lived only for the next drink," Willie said. "I slept wherever I could find shelter, often on the city streets."

Charlotte remained at home with their children, but she, too, struggled with alcohol. "I often verbally and physically abused my children when I was drunk," she admits.

In sober moments Willie remembered his godly grandfather, who prayed every day. "I knew that there was a God somewhere, but I did not know where to find him," Willie said.

Willie had a Christian aunt who fasted and prayed for him. One day while the aunt was praying, Willie reached for a bottle of alcohol and held it to his lips, "but I could not swallow," he said. Then a strange sensation moved through his body, and he became paralyzed; he could not even speak. Someone called an ambulance, and Willie was rushed to the hospital. He thought he would die there.

Lying in the hospital, Willie prayed, "God, if you are there, please help me. I will serve you the rest of my life." God saved Willie's life. But Willie returned to the streets and soon was drinking again.

Willie realized that in his own strength he could never keep his promise to God. One day he prayed a different prayer, "Lord, I am yours, please help me." About the same time Charlotte also turned her life over to God.

The couple began attending the Adventist church and started on the long journey of spiritual growth. "Our lives have been totally changed," she says. "God has freed me from evil habits, made me a better mother and a good example to my children." The transformed Walkus family is a powerful example to others of what Jesus can do in their own lives.

"My family has felt the precious love of God," Willie said. "I want everyone to know that no matter who you are or how far you have fallen into sin, God will hear your cry and come to help."

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# Conversing With God



## Sabbath Afternoon

**J**ONAH HAS COMPLETED A MOST successful preaching mission. The citizens of the capital city of Nineveh, from the least to the greatest, accepted his judgment message and turned in repentance to the God of heaven. Jonah can now travel home, full of joy and thanksgiving for the mighty power of God to change even violently wicked pagan hearts. This is what one might expect. But the book of Jonah has still more surprises.

All through the book of Jonah God has far more trouble with His prophet than with the most profligate of the heathen world. The wicked Ninevites in chapter 3 respond in repentance to the call of judgment from God. Jonah obeys God only after being subjected to the most extreme divine measures. Even the pagan king humbly submits to God's sovereign authority, recognizing that God is not obligated to spare the city. Jonah presumes upon God's mercy.

**THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:** How did Jonah respond to the amazing repentance of the Ninevites? What was it about Jonah that made his attitude even more repugnant? What was this prophet's problem? By his attitude, whom was Jonah emulating? What does this story reveal to us about God's grace and about the limits of humans to understand that grace fully?

**MEMORY TEXT:** "For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone," says the Lord God. 'Turn, then, and live'" (Ezekiel 18:32, NRSV).

\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 29.

**UNEXPECTED RESPONSE.**

**O**ne of the most unexpected verses in Scripture is Jonah 4:1. In the Hebrew, the text reads: “And it was evil to Jonah, a great evil, and he was furious at it.” Furious at what? What was this “great evil”? It was that the Ninevites had turned from their sin and violence, and, therefore, the judgment that was to fall on them didn’t.

Imagine an evangelist holding a series in a city known for wickedness and then getting depressed when the whole city turns out and accepts the message!

What’s going on here? Why would Jonah feel this way?

Perhaps he felt that these wicked Assyrians had done so much evil that they deserved punishment and that the grace God extended to them violated the basic forms of justice. Maybe feeling purely nationalistic, he wanted God’s judgment to fall upon these heathen. Maybe he felt that because the judgment hadn’t fallen, he would be viewed as a false prophet. Whatever the reason, here’s the situation: A prophet of God is angry that the Lord has shown mercy to repentant people. It’s hard to imagine a worse sin.

**However bad Jonah’s reaction, what happened to him personally that made his reaction even worse? See Jon. 1:17–2:10.**

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Perhaps one of the greatest lessons we can learn from Jonah’s reaction is that it reveals, in a unique way, the grace of God—not as it was expressed toward the Ninevites (though it was) but how it was expressed toward Jonah. The Lord knew Jonah’s heart, knew how Jonah would react, and yet chose him anyway and was still willing to work with him, despite his bad attitude. All through the Bible, we see this principle at work.

**Look up these texts. Make a list of the character flaws they reveal. Gen. 9:20, 21; Gen. 16:1-4; Num. 20:11, 12; 2 Sam. 11:4; Matt. 11:3; Acts 15:35-41; and Gal. 2:11-14. What do they tell us about God’s willingness to work with us, and even to use us, despite our faults, as he did with Jonah?**

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**JONAH'S SIN (Jon. 4:2).**

The first time we see Jonah praying is in the belly of the fish, when he's asking for deliverance from destruction; the next time we see him praying is here, in chapter 4, where he's angry because God delivered others from destruction. Talk about hypocrisy!

Basically, Jonah was saying that the reason he didn't want to go to Nineveh was that he knew God was merciful. Thus, he's confessing, clearly, that he didn't want God to spare these people. If that's not amazing enough, the Lord, knowing his attitude, used him anyway. Surely, God's grace is greater than human wisdom allows for.

Look at the content of what Jonah says is the character of God (Jon. 4:2). What are the attributes listed there? (See also Exod. 34:6, 7; Num. 14:18; Ps. 86:15; Joel 2:13.) What is the great irony here of this confession? (Who, in many ways, was the greatest recipient of God's grace, mercy, and kindness, Jonah or the Ninevites?) On the lines below, write out each characteristic Jonah mentions and then a sentence in your own words describing what you think each one of those characteristics means.

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For Christians, the concept of God's mercy, grace, and patience isn't just theological doctrines. They should be part of the *experience* of what it means to be a Christian, of what it means to walk with the Lord. After all, if we have a relationship with God, if we love God, we should have experienced, for ourselves, what His mercy, grace, patience, and so forth are like.

**How have you experienced these aspects of God's character in your own life? What kind of personal testimony could you give to the reality of these attributes of God?**

## THE MYSTERY OF GOD'S GRACE.

What we see with Jonah is a small example of how limited humanity is in its understanding of God's grace, which—in its greatest expression—was revealed at the Cross. How can we, as humans, understand the love of a God who would do this for beings who are such a tiny—at least in a physical sense—part of His creation? We can't—at least not fully; that's why we have to (1) experience this love and grace ourselves and (2) take it on faith.

In the context of Jesus, of His death providing a sufficient atonement for the world as being something that modern men living in the scientific age could no longer take seriously, Richard Tarnas wrote: "The sheer improbability of the whole nexus of events was becoming painfully obvious—that an infinite eternal God would have suddenly become a particular human being in a specific historical time and place only to be ignominiously executed. That a single brief life taking place two millennia earlier in an obscure primitive nation, on a planet now known to be a relatively insignificant piece of matter revolving about one star among billions in an inconceivably vast and impersonal universe—that such an undistinguished event should have any overwhelming cosmic or eternal meaning could no longer be a compelling belief for reasonable men. It was starkly implausible that the universe as a whole would have any pressing interest in this minute part of immensity—if it had any 'interests' at all."—*The Passion of the Western Mind* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993), p. 305.

In contrast, Ellen White wrote: "It will be profitable to contemplate the divine condescension, the sacrifice, the self-denial, the humiliation, the resistance the Son of God encountered in doing His work for fallen men. . . . Angels marvel, as with intense interest they watch the Son of God descending step by step the path of humiliation. It is the mystery of godliness. It is the glory of God to conceal Himself and His ways, not by keeping men in ignorance of heavenly light and knowledge, but by surpassing the utmost capacity of men to know. Humanity can comprehend in part, but that is all that man can bear. The love of Christ passes knowledge. The mystery of redemption will continue to be the mystery, the unexhausted science and everlasting song of eternity. Well may humanity exclaim, Who can know God? We may, as did Elijah, wrap our mantles about us, and listen to hear the still, small voice of God."—*The Bible Echo*, April 30, 1894.

Using these verses (1 Cor. 2:7; 3:19; Eph. 3:9; Phil. 4:7; Col. 2:2; 1 John 4:10) and any others you find relevant, as well as what Ellen White wrote above, pen a paragraph answering Tarnas's challenge to the Christian faith.

**GOD TOO IS MERCIFUL?**

**A**pparently, not only a modern like Richard Tarnas has trouble understanding God's grace; poor Jonah did, too, which is why he didn't want to preach to Nineveh. He didn't want them to get something they didn't deserve. But that's always what grace is about: getting what we don't deserve.

One of the Lord's early expressions of profound grace was proclaimed to Israel following their great apostasy worshiping the golden calf in the wilderness (see Exod. 34:6). At that point, they might rightfully have been forsaken by God. As a result, this revelation of God's mercy, and grace, was especially precious to Israel.

**Read over Exodus 32. In what ways was Israel's guilt worse than that of the Ninevites? Contrast the attitude of Moses to that of Jonah. What could have caused such a profound difference?**

However grateful Jonah was for God's mercy toward him, he was upset that these marvelous, gracious attributes of Israel's God were to be shared with a wicked people like the Ninevites. He is now highly critical of these divine qualities of grace and lovingkindness. He thinks that God should reserve His salvation for the righteous and that judgment should be the destiny of the wicked.

**Who else manifests this same spirit as Jonah? (see Zech. 3:1-7; Rev. 12:10). How does this show how bad Jonah's attitude was?**

Jonah sees the deferment of judgment on Nineveh as a mistake. He disapproves strongly of wasting the Lord's compassion on these people. His reasoning reveals how he presumes to govern God's world better than God Himself! Ultimately, Jonah's underlying reason for running away from God's commission has less to do with Nineveh's vile sinners than with the character of God.

However, the wicked Ninevites are really no different from Jonah. The Ninevites and Jonah are all rebellious sinners deserving only punishment. Yet, God graciously decides to show them mercy. Jonah is willing to accept this mercy for himself but not for Nineveh.

**Geraldo's unbelieving brother had been murdered by a man who, subsequently, went to prison, where he was later converted. Geraldo, however, struggles with what he believes is a great injustice: salvation for a murderer and death for his brother. How would you answer his questions about God's justness?**

**GOD'S PATIENCE WITH JONAH.**

How does God appeal to Jonah after the prophet, so upset over God's mercy, asks to die? Jon. 4:4.

**J**onah's gracious and merciful God quietly asks Jonah a searching question. With only three words in Hebrew, God urges Jonah to reconsider.

**Compare and contrast what the Lord says to Jonah in verse 4 with what He said to Cain (Gen. 4:6). What are the parallels in the issues addressed in both incidents?**

God's response to Jonah is surprisingly mild. He yearns for Jonah to come to see the childishness of his behavior. Helping this stubborn person become a more mature believer seems to be one of His main goals. In light of this amazing conversation with Jonah in chapter 4, this goal seems equally as important to Him as was the salvation of Nineveh. God challenges Jonah to think about his reaction and to analyze his thinking. God is gently suggesting to Jonah that he might not be correct in his estimate of the situation. Jonah is not the only person in Scripture who has been troubled by the ways of God.

**Think of others in Scripture who experience deep agony as they wrestle with God's ways. Job 7:17-21; Jer. 15:15-18. What is the essence of their complaints, and how do those complaints differ from Jonah's? Read also Luke 9:52-56. Compare what happened there with what happened with Jonah here in chapter 4.**

No other nation, corporately, ever wrestled with God with the same depth or intensity as Israel did. All through the Old Testament, a rich tapestry of such encounters displays rage, despair, and anguish. The Psalter is a prime collection of such struggles.

Though Christians today generally prefer the praise psalms, many of the 150 psalms are filled with pain and protest. And recall that these were sung by the Israelites even in worship. The intensity of the relationship with God in the Old Testament seems irreverent to some now. But, perhaps, it is more a matter of our own immaturity in our relationship with God. God does not chide hurting believers. In fact, He always shows amazing respect with all such expressions, Jonah included. God apparently values honesty in our relationship with Him. We do not have to deny reality when praying reverently to God.

**FURTHER STUDY:**

**T**here are mysteries in the plan of redemption . . . that are to the heavenly angels subjects of continual amazement. The apostle Peter, speaking of the revelations given to the prophets of ‘the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow,’ says that these are things which ‘the angels desire to look into.’”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 702.

Ellen White eloquently works through the issues of God’s justice and mercy as worked out in the history of Israel.

Regarding Jeremiah’s ministry: “The unwillingness of the Lord to chastise is here vividly shown. He stays His judgments that He may plead with the impenitent. He who exercises ‘loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth’ yearns over His erring children; in every way possible He seeks to teach them the way of life everlasting. Jeremiah 9:24. He had brought the Israelites out of bondage that they might serve Him, the only true and living God. Though they had wandered long in idolatry and had slighted His warnings, yet He now declares His willingness to defer chastisement and grant yet another opportunity for repentance.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 413.

“Once more he yielded to his inclination to question and doubt, and once more he was overwhelmed with discouragement. ‘Losing sight of the interests of others, and feeling as if he [Jonah] would rather die than live to see the city spared, in his dissatisfaction he exclaimed, ‘Now, O Lord, take, I beseech Thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.’”—Page 271.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. Study the parable in Matthew 18:23-35. How do you understand this in contrast with what’s happening so far in Jonah?
2. Read Psalm 10. What is going on there, and how can it be explained in the context of what happened with what we have studied so far in Jonah?
3. French writer and Christian Blaise Pascal once wrote that “the heart has its reasons that reason knows nothing of.” What do you think he meant by that? Do you agree? And how does a thought like that fit in with the Christian faith?

**SUMMARY:** Jonah has a lot of lessons to learn about the love and the mercy of the God he professes to serve.



## A Difficult Life

Charlotte Ishkanian

Florentine's life has never been easy. As a child she was shifted from one relative to another to live and work. By age 13 she worked as a servant. She married young and had five children, before her husband left her. She supports the family by washing clothes.

When her youngest child was admitted to the hospital, Florentine met a woman, who invited her to church. Florentine believed in God, but she was not interested in the woman's invitation, because she did not know which church was God's true church. The woman urged her to ask God to show her the church she should attend.

Florentine began to pray, "God, I know You want me to attend church. Please show me the church where You want me to worship You, so I and my children can be saved."

The next day an Adventist woman visited her home and invited her to attend evangelistic meetings. Florentine felt this woman's visit was an answer to her prayer. She took her children to the meetings. She wrote down the Bible references that the pastor quoted, but she had no Bible to look them up. So she borrowed a Bible. Soon she realized that this was the church that taught all of God's commandments.

Florentine asked for prayer to quit smoking and to find work that allowed her to keep the Sabbath. The unskilled work she did required that she work every day in order to feed her family. If she did not work, they did not eat.

Following the prayers on her behalf, Florentine was able to quit smoking. The evangelist asked her to work in his garden to earn a little money. Soon she began washing the family's clothes too.

Some weeks later Florentine and two of her five children were baptized. Then one of her sons left home to stay with his father. But his father sent him back to her. Florentine believes that God sent the boy back in answer to her prayers, so that he would remain in the influence of a Christian home.

Florentine still does not have her own Bible. But her faith is strong that one day soon God will provide one for her.

**Florentine Ravaonasolo (left) lives in Antananarivo, Madagascar. Charlotte Ishkanian is editor of *Mission*.**



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# A Wind, a Worm, and a Plant



## *Sabbath Afternoon*

**H**ARD AS IT IS FOR US to understand (we who believe that our purpose as a people is to bring the good news of salvation to the “heathen”), the disgruntled prophet Jonah has expressed deep dissatisfaction with God’s mercy to the wicked Ninevites. He is sorry they listened to his warnings and repented. God then asks him to reconsider his sullen attitude as Jonah sits under a booth he has built for shade. Jonah and God continue their dialogue. Though some of the most profound theological concepts of the Old Testament are recorded in this final chapter of the book, what we see more than anything is a manifestation of God’s grace toward sinners. This week, keep in mind who Jonah is, the privileges he has been given, what the Lord has done for him . . . *and yet still this attitude?*

This should give us hope for ourselves, if nothing else.

**THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:** What was the symbolism of the booth Jonah had built for himself? What is the irony there? Why did God grow the plant for Jonah and then take that plant away? Was Jonah facing a judgment of his own? What was the Lord teaching Jonah? How do we see here a powerful manifestation of God’s grace in the life of this prophet? In what ways can we be in danger, like Jonah, of taking God’s grace toward us for granted?

**MEMORY TEXT:** “Good and upright is the Lord; therefore He instructs sinners in the way. He leads the humble in justice, and He teaches the humble His way” (Psalm 25:8, 9, NASB).

\*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 6.

**JONAH'S BOOTH.**

"Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths: that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God" (Lev. 23:42, 43).

**G**od now prepares an "object lesson" for Jonah (Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 272). Like the "great fish" in the Mediterranean, a plant, a worm, and a strong wind become God's instruments. And, like the "great fish," they obey. This adds more emphasis to the recurring theme of the Lord's control over what He Himself has created.

In Jonah 4:5, Jonah goes outside the city and makes for himself "a booth." Look up these texts, in which the same word appears (though in the plural): Leviticus 23:39, 44 and Nehemiah 8:14-16. What is the significance in the use of that word, in Jonah, based on what it means in these other texts?

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The booths were to remind the children of Israel of their miraculous deliverance from Egypt and of God's care for them after that deliverance. Apparently for Jonah, deliverance was desirable for the Hebrews but not for the pagans. Perhaps Jonah, whose only concern now was his personal comfort, missed the irony of his act.

*The Hebrew word for "booths" sukkot, the plural of sukkah (the word that appears in Jonah), is also the name for the Jewish festival of Sukkot, or the Feast of Tabernacles. During it, even today, traditional Jews live in a hut, a sukkah, as a reminder of the temporary dwellings in which their ancestors lived after their deliverance from Egypt.*

Read the last part of Jonah 4:5. What was Jonah waiting for? Did he still, perhaps, harbor some hope that the city would nevertheless be destroyed? What does this tell us about his character; more important, what does it tell us about the character of the God who endures so patiently with him? With us?

**GOD'S APPOINTMENTS.**

What verb reappears, in the opening of Jonah 4:6, that we have seen before?

**V**erse 6 opens with the phrase—"The Lord God prepared." This is the second of four occurrences of this verb in the book of Jonah (see lesson 6); the last time it had been used was when the Lord had "prepared" the fish to swallow Jonah. Each time it is used (Jon. 1:17; 4:6-8), God is the subject of the verb, the One who is doing the preparing, or appointing. Its use highlights, again, God's sovereign rule over all nature in the accomplishment of His purpose.

It's clear (from what happens next) that God still has not given up on Jonah, even though the prophet was so discouraged over the Lord's grace toward the heathen that Jonah wanted to die.

While Jonah sits in a booth he had built to await Nineveh's outcome, God causes a plant to grow and bring extra shade (apparently the booth wasn't enough) "to deliver him from his grief." And, obviously, it worked.

Just as with the "great fish," the writer doesn't identify the species; nor does the author spend any time on the miracle that caused it to grow so quickly. It's just assumed that the Lord can do these things.

**Read Jonah 4:6-8. Summarize in your own words what happens.**

Here's Jonah, depressed over the deliverance of Nineveh from destruction but now joyous because of a plant that gives him some shade. What are we to make of this guy?

In the course of events, God "appoints" the plant, then the worm to destroy the plant, and then the vehement wind. Instead of Nineveh, Jonah himself seems to be facing some sort of divine punishment; he's getting only a small taste of what he, apparently, wanted in a big way to happen to these Gentile pagans. The grace that brought the plant, which made him exceedingly happy, is now taken away, and he's miserable.

**Jonah is afflicted with one of the most common maladies that impacts the human race: selfishness, one of the deadliest sins. Look up these texts: Luke 9:23; Romans 6:4-7; 1 Corinthians 9:19; and Philippians 2:1-7. What do they tell us and promise us that can help us overcome the sin that made Jonah such a moral and spiritual wretch?**

### JONAH'S RETURNING WRATH.

**J**onah has demanded of God that He destroy. God does just that. He destroys but not what Jonah wanted Him to. God sends a worm, and Jonah's shade plant withers, perhaps blown away (along with his booth) by the wind the Lord brought next. Jonah has some hard things to learn; he needs hard lessons to learn them.

Jonah again wants to die; this time, though, he doesn't directly ask God to kill him (maybe he figures that such a request is futile). Nevertheless, his morbid desire to die, stated for the second time, suggests a deep spiritual malaise. These are Jonah's last words in the narrative (Jon. 4:8, 9). He continues, as he has from the beginning, opposing God. But Jonah does not have the last word. God again asks a question.

#### What does the Lord say to Jonah? Jon. 4:9.

Divine questions keep mild pressure on Jonah to expose his attitude. This is the second time God asks Jonah to analyze his anger, using now the issue of the wilted plant.

Notice that, in verse 4, God asks Jonah whether it is right to be angry over the act of deliverance of Nineveh. Now, in verse 9, He's asking Jonah whether it's right to be angry over the destruction of the plant. Perhaps the Lord was showing Jonah the contrast between a whole city and a plant, wanting Jonah to see just how his own perspectives were so imbalanced and his priorities so off: angry that the Lord didn't destroy a city, angry that the Lord did destroy a plant. Jonah has some problems, to be sure.

#### How does Jonah respond to the Lord's question? Vs. 9.

Imagine this scene. Here is this mortal, this sinner deserving of death—openly defiant of the Lord, the Creator, even after seeing all these miracles, one after another, and even himself being delivered by one of the most amazing miracles in sacred history. And, yet, the Lord still is working with him! There's no question, what we see here in Jonah is a small example of what the Lord has been doing with His people all through history: showing them more grace, more mercy, and more patience than they ever have deserved.

From our perspective, Jonah's anger seems ludicrous. Look up these texts. What are they saying that can help us put our trials into proper perspective? Isa. 55:8, 9; Luke 11:9-13; Rom. 8:32; 1 Cor. 13:11, 12.

**PITY FOR WHAT?**

"Then said the Lord, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night" (Jon. 4:10).

**L**ook at how the Lord answered Jonah in the above verse. God uses the verb "pity" as He describes Jonah's sympathy for the plant (in vs. 10); He used the same word for Himself, in verse 11, regarding His attitude toward Nineveh, inviting a comparison between the two. Jonah has pity on a plant; the Lord has pity on the inhabitants of Nineveh. Could the contrast between a holy God and fallen humanity be any greater?

It is remarkable that God uses the same word, *pity*, for both His and Jonah's attitudes, seeking to help Jonah realize what he is doing. Jonah is grieving over the plant only because he misses its shade.

**Note the choice of the verb *perish* in verse 10, which brings to mind the earlier occurrences of the word in the narrative. How was it used earlier?**

**Jon. 1:6** \_\_\_\_\_

**Jon. 1:14** \_\_\_\_\_

**Jon. 3:9** \_\_\_\_\_

Jesus uses the Greek equivalent in John 3:16, where the "perishing" of the whole world is at stake. By the narrator's careful writing, Jonah's concern for the shade plant is trivialized when compared with all that would be at stake if God's judgment against Nineveh were fulfilled. And, in a real sense, the issues faced by the sailors and the inhabitants of Nineveh, and even Jonah himself (most people thrown overboard in a storm die), are, of course, those faced by everyone: life or death. In fact, the issue goes even beyond life or death in this immediate existence, where life is only a vapor (James 4:14) and death only a temporary sleep (1 Cor. 15:51); rather, the real issue comes down to eternal life (John 3:15) or to eternal destruction (vs. 16).

We need to remember that every person we see is facing either eternal life or eternal damnation (John 5:29). What ways can we avoid being like Jonah; that is, getting so caught up in our concerns that we forget what really matters and what our purpose as Seventh-day Adventists is?

**A QUESTION OF GRACE.**

**L**et's look again at what the Lord had said to Jonah in Jonah 4:10. Jonah just gets done saying, basically, *Yes, I have the right to be angry, even unto death, because You took away my plant.* But the way God responds shows Jonah the true situation: that he really didn't have any claim to that plant or any right to that plant or any authority over that plant. He didn't work for it, earn it, or even grow it. The plant, when it gave him shade, was purely the supernatural act of God in behalf of Jonah.

**Something we can't earn, can't labor for, can't create ourselves, yet is totally a gift of God in our behalf? Sounds like what? See Job 4:17-21; Rom. 3:28; 4:13-16; Eph. 2:5-10.**

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Again, how much different is Jonah from the rest of humanity? How often do we take the gifts of God for granted? God shows us mercy and grace, and we almost can get used to them, as though they were our due. We forget that not only are they gifts of grace (How can grace be anything other than a gift?) but what it cost for us to have that grace granted to us. All of us, every moment of our lives, are recipients of God's grace, probably in more ways than we realize. And, perhaps, that's the problem: Like Jonah, we don't realize it.

Look at 2 Timothy 1:8-10. Notice what it says about what had been given us in Christ "before the world began." If something were given to us before the world began, it was given to us before we asked for it or even before we could earn it. That's why it has to be grace.

**Summarize 2 Timothy 1:8-10, paralleling it with what we can here in God's dealing with Jonah. What are those verses saying? List the things that, according to those verses, God has done for us solely by His grace. Why does Paul specify that it's not of works?**

A young family ate out every Sunday night. One Sunday, for whatever reason, they decided not to go. One of their children, age six, upon hearing the news, exclaimed, "Well, I expected to go out to eat!" In what ways are we in danger of doing the same thing with God's grace: Because it has been given so freely to us, and in abundance, we assume that we have it coming or that it's owed us?

**FURTHER STUDY:** Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, pp. 329–335; *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 390–404.

Nineveh finally was reduced to ruins in 612 B.C. But the generation that heard Jonah preach experienced a wonderful deliverance, and the God of the Hebrews “was exalted and honored throughout the heathen world, and His law was revered.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 271. And the book of Jonah records one of the grandest events in the history of redemption!

“The Son of God gave all—life and love and suffering—for our redemption. And can it be that we, the unworthy objects of so great love, will withhold our hearts from Him? Every moment of our lives we have been partakers of the blessings of His grace, and for this very reason we cannot fully realize the depths of ignorance and misery from which we have been saved.”—Ellen G. White, *God's Amazing Grace*, p. 185.

“It was God’s purpose that His grace should be revealed among the Gentiles as well as among the Israelites. This had been plainly outlined in Old Testament prophecies. The apostle uses some of these prophecies in his argument. ‘Hath not the potter power over the clay,’ he inquires, ‘of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor? What if God, willing to show His wrath, and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had afore prepared unto glory, even us, whom He hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?’ ”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 376.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What other prophet wanted to die over discouragement? (1 Kings 19). Are there any parallels between Jonah’s situation and that of Elijah’s? If so, what? What are the differences?
2. Ellen White, in one of the above quotes, said that every moment of our lives we have been partakers of God’s grace. Even while we were unconverted or unbelievers or in open rebellion? How do you understand what that statement means? In what ways are even the unconverted partakers of this grace?

**SUMMARY:** God loves us, despite our hypocrisy.



## The Lost Cause

Sonia Santos

"That boy of yours is a lost cause," the teacher told Lorene. She hung her head as she listened to a list of Fernando's latest misdeeds. The story was all too familiar to her. The family lived in a poor neighborhood with a lot of crime in southern Brazil. Lorene prayed constantly for her son and was sure God had a plan for his life.

Fernando seemed to find trouble. When he was 8 years old he grabbed onto the back of a moving truck. The driver did not see the boy, and as he sped around a corner, Fernando fell off. Someone found the boy lying beside the road and they took him to the hospital.

Fernando lay unconscious in intensive care for three days. The doctor told his mother that there was little chance for the boy to recover. But Fernando's mother was not willing to give up on him. She begged the doctor to give the boy more time to come out of the coma, and reluctantly the doctor agreed to give her one more day.

Lorene went into the bathroom and begged God to save her son. The next day the doctor was surprised to find that Fernando was beginning to respond to touch. His reflexes were improving, and soon he awakened from the coma. Soon after his recovery, Fernando returned home. But his life was not easy, and he needed constant medical care.

Fernando caused problems in school, and often his mother was called to the school to deal with him. His teachers sometimes said he was a lost cause, but his mother refused to give up on him. Often she reminded the boy of the miracles God had done in his life.

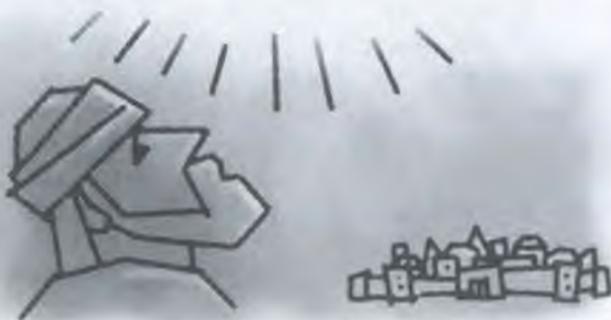
When Fernando was 13 years old a neighbor invited him to attend Pathfinders. He loved it and began attending regularly. As he attended, his behavior began to change. He attended an evangelistic series and asked his mother to allow him to be baptized. But his mother thought he was too young. Besides, the family attended another church.

The night before the scheduled baptism, Lorene dreamed that Jesus was coming. She saw other people going to heaven, but she and Fernando remained on earth. When she awoke she realized that she must allow her son to be baptized.

Today Fernando is a faithful young member of the local church in southern Brazil. He no longer causes problems in school. Those who thought he was a lost cause now are convinced that God has changed him. His parents, who thought he was too young to decide for Christ, now attend church and are preparing for baptism as well.

**Sonia Santos is director of Women's and Children's Ministries in the Rio Grande do Sul mission in southern Brazil.**

# The Last Word



## Sabbath Afternoon

THE FOUR-CHAPTER NARRATIVE OF the book of Jonah now closes. God has the last word, even though that last word is a question. The question is presented, however, not as God wanting to learn from Jonah but as God wanting to teach him.

Because the book doesn't tell us whether Jonah ever understands the point or not, it must not be that important for us to know. Instead, what's important is, Do we get the point? Sure, we know about God's love, mercy, and compassion; and we are glad to have these things for ourselves. But are we willing to allow God to work in us so we can have love, mercy, and compassion for others? Are we willing to make the self-sacrifices needed in order for us to teach modern-day Ninevites the truth that judgment is coming and that one day they will have to answer for their sins?

**THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:** What does God say to Jonah about the Ninevites? How does the Lord express their moral ignorance? Why does the Lord talk about the animals in the city? What lesson is the Lord trying to teach Jonah? How does Jonah respond? In what ways is Jonah a model of ancient Israel? Or even the modern church? Why does the Lord end the book of Jonah with a question that remains unanswered?

**MEMORY TEXT:** "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent" (Acts 17:30).

\*Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 13.

**ONE LOST SOUL.**

"And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?" (Jon. 4:11).

**H**ow can the Lord impress upon this poor man's mind which things are important and which things aren't? Jonah lived in a world, much like ours, where human life often seems cheap. Yet, the Lord died for all humanity, because He loves all humanity. In fact, we are told that He would have died for just one soul. "In the parable the shepherd goes out to search for one sheep—the very least that can be numbered. So if there had been but one lost soul, Christ would have died for that one."—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 187.

In the context of the last verse in the book of Jonah (and of Jonah's attitude), read Matthew 18:11-14. What kind of contrast does it create between God's attitude toward people and Jonah's (whose attitude might differ from ours only in degree)? What kind of rebuke do these words of Jesus have for us and for our coldness and for our lack of zeal for souls?

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The thought of Christ dying for this whole planet, as small as it is in contrast to the size of the universe, is amazing enough. But for one person? Who can grasp that kind of love? Though we don't know in the end how many ultimately will be saved (Isa. 66:23; Rev. 21:24), it certainly will be more than one. And yet, even if only one, Christ would have died anyway! No wonder the secular mind has a hard time grasping the gospel. Even those of faith can barely wrap their minds around such a powerful concept.

Think about who God is, who we are, and how small and wretched we are in contrast; and yet, look what God did for us, anyway. Dwell on what that thought tells us about God's love. Write a paragraph expressing what this truth means to you and the hope it gives. What does this concept say to us about the assurance of salvation? Ask this question too: How, in the face of such love, are souls ultimately lost?

**LIVING IN IGNORANCE.**

"And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent" (Acts 17:30).

Notice the expression in Jonah 4:11 the Lord uses to describe the Ninevites. Obviously, it's a metaphor. What is the Lord saying with that description? What other point does He wish to convey to this Hebrew prophet (notice the emphasis on the adjective Hebrew)?

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The Lord talks to Jonah, a Hebrew, someone who comes from the nation whom the Lord called out to be a special people, those who were given great light and understanding of not only who God is but of His eternal, moral principles (see Exod. 19:5; Exodus 20; Deut. 4:7; 12:8; Pss. 19:7-11; 37:31; Jer. 31:33). So much of Hebrew history is defined by their understanding of the law and the moral precepts found in the law. In this way, the Hebrew nation stood far in advance of all the pagan societies around them.

In contrast, God describes the Ninevites as not being able to discern between their right hand and their left. Obviously, these people didn't have the same kind of moral direction the Lord had given to Israel. A similar phrase appears in the Bible (Deut. 17:20; 28:14; Josh. 1:7), referring to the moral issue of not deviating from the divine law and from revelation. Thus here, in the book of Jonah, we are instructed that the Ninevites lacked the knowledge of the law of Yahweh. The use of the phrase "right hand and left hand" is also found in Babylonian texts as a synonym for "truth and justice" or "law and order." Thus, God instructs Jonah that in the case of Nineveh He defers judgment for the sake of the morally ignorant, for those who don't understand.

Maybe the Ninevites didn't have the same knowledge of God's law as did the Hebrews; nevertheless, the actions of the people and the king, as expressed in Jonah 3:10, show that they had some moral conscience and some understanding of good and evil. Look again at what the Lord says to Jonah in the last verse about the Ninevites. What does that tell us regarding God's fairness in dealing with those who don't have a deeper revelation of moral truth? Are they, therefore, not accountable to God for their actions? Or, will they be accountable to God in a different way?

**ANIMALS TOO? (READ JOB 39).**

**A**ll through chapter 4 God has kept gentle pressure on Jonah to reconsider his evaluation of God's treatment of the Ninevites. And in a book of surprises, one of the most surprising is the final question to Jonah.

**What is the last phrase of the final verse in the concluding chapter in the book of Jonah? Jon. 4:11.**

The rather cryptic ending of Jonah concludes with God showing His compassion not only on the pagan Ninevites but, apparently, on their cattle, as well (the Hebrew word there can mean not just cattle but "animals" in general). Though the recorded ending is quite abrupt (one would love to know how the conversation ultimately concluded), and the precise meaning isn't absolutely clear, it seems as though the Lord tells Jonah it wasn't only the people He had wanted to have pity on but their animals, as well.

This really shouldn't be that surprising, should it?

Throughout the four chapters in the book of Jonah, the "Lord God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land" (Jon. 1:9, NASB) is seen in His sovereignty over all His creation. This is also regularly expressed by many of the Bible writers, in both Testaments. And we are often reminded in Scripture how all the created world is part of God's concern. Even the heavens are included in this divine perspective.

**Read Job 39. Notice the focus the Lord has on the creatures He refers to. What does that tell us about God's interest and care about animals, as well? Also, no matter how greatly different the situations, what parallels can you find between what the Lord says here to Job and what He says to Jonah?**

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Jewish tradition teaches that God takes note of those who are kind to animals, because animals can't return the favor, as humans can.

**One of our greatest dangers is going to extremes. We can take a good thing so far that it becomes a bad thing. How can Christians strike the right balance in their attitude toward animals (or nature, in general) so that, on one hand, they don't treat animals cruelly nor, on the other, become fanatical in devotion toward them?**

**QUESTIONS, QUESTIONS, QUESTIONS . . .**

**T**he book of Jonah comes to a sudden halt with a probing question that is left unanswered. We are never told whether or not Jonah finally admits to his self-centered enjoyment of God's favor while begrudging it to the Ninevites. Nor whether he was ever able to grasp that God's generous love for all people far surpassed his own idea of fairness. We are left wondering whether Jonah ever would appreciate God's forgiveness of those who don't deserve that forgiveness.

It is very unusual for a book in the Bible to end with a question, a most surprising question at that; yet, there is really no reason why a book cannot end that way. In fact, this ending is not an example of unfinished thinking and careless writing. On the contrary, by ending this way, the book sharply contrasts Jonah's attitude to God's.

**Though it's not common for a book of the Bible to end with a question, it is common for the Lord Himself to ask questions. Do two things with these questions God asked: First, ask yourself, Why did He ask them? Second, write down what you think the answers are (and give reasons for your answers):**

**Exod. 4:11** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Job 40:1, 2** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Jon. 4:11** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Mark 8:36** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Luke 6:9** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Take your answers to these questions and summarize in a short paragraph what they teach us about the character, mercy, and power of our God.**

**THE OX KNOWS.**

"The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider" (Isa. 1:3).

Read the first three verses of Isaiah 1. What parallel can you see there with the story of Jonah and his attitude toward the Lord?

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**A**s we've seen all through the book of Jonah, nature is under the Lord's control. This teaching, of course, is nothing new (see Matt. 21:18, 19; 17:24-27; Mark 4:35-41). If human beings were only just as obedient. The difference, however, is that God didn't make nature morally culpable, as He made humanity. God forces nature; He doesn't force humanity. In order for us to be moral beings, we have to be free beings. Sadly, we often abuse that freedom.

Survey, again, the book of Jonah. What and who obeyed the Lord, and who didn't? What irony can you see in the answer?

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Nature obeyed, the pagans obeyed; only Jonah, the Hebrew, didn't, or at least to the degree that, no doubt, the Lord wanted him to. In a sense, Jonah typified the nation of Israel during various times in its history. What it could have done in peace and prosperity (1 Kings 8:60; Isa. 27:6; 56:6; Zech. 8:23), it was forced to do under terrible circumstances—that of captivity, slavery, and exile. The same with Jonah. The storm, the fish, and the three days and nights all could have been avoided had he obeyed when first asked. What's sad, too, is that although we don't know, ultimately, what happens to Jonah, the book ends with him seemingly still not being where the Lord wanted him to be. In other words, he still doesn't get it. Historically, it seems that much of ancient Israel didn't, either.

Keeping this day's lesson in mind, what do you think Ellen White meant when she wrote: "The work which the church has failed to do in a time of peace and prosperity, she will have to do in a terrible crisis, under most discouraging, forbidding, circumstances"? —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 463.

**FURTHER STUDY:**

**A**s individuals and as a nation God proposed to furnish the people of Israel ‘with every facility for becoming the greatest nation on the earth’ (COL 288; see Deut. 4:6-8; 7:6, 14; 28:1; Jer. 33:9; Mal. 3:12; PP 273, 314; Ed 40; DA 577). He purposed to make them an honor to His name and a blessing to the nations about them (Ed 40; COL 286).

“As the nations of antiquity should behold Israel’s unprecedented progress, their attention and interest would be aroused. ‘Even the heathen would recognize the superiority of those who served and worshiped the living God’ (COL 289). Desiring the same blessings for themselves, they would make inquiry as to how they too might acquire these obvious material advantages. Israel would reply, ‘Accept our God as your God, love and serve Him as we do, and He will do the same for you.’ ‘The blessings thus assured Israel’ were, ‘on the same conditions and in the same degree, assured to every nation and to every individual under the broad heavens’ (PK 500, 501; see Acts 10:34, 35; 15:7-9; Rom. 10:12, 13; etc.). All nations of earth were to share in the blessings so generously bestowed upon Israel (PK 370).”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol 4, p. 28.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. C. S. Lewis wrote: “There are only two kinds of people in the end, those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, in the end, ‘*Thy will be done.*’ All that are in Hell, choose it. Without that self-choice, there could be no hell.”—*The Great Divorce* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), p. 72. However deficient C. S. Lewis’s understanding of the nature (and timing) of hell, dwell on this quote. Do you agree with him or not? Give reasons for your answer.
2. Read Luke 4:24-28. How does what Jesus is saying here parallel somewhat the situation displayed in the book of Jonah? What warnings should we, as Adventists, take from what Christ said to those in the synagogue?

**SUMMARY:** The book of Jonah ends with a theme seen all through the Bible: the love and greatness of God contrasted with the pettiness and sinfulness of humanity.



## Witness In a Drug Rehabilitation Center

J. H. Zachary

The Dominican Republic government operates a drug rehabilitation center in Azua City. The director, cured of an addiction to crack cocaine in 1993, is convinced that spiritual therapy must be part of the help offered to the youthful patients in the rehabilitation center. He invited Pastor Daniel Sanchez to come to the center and conduct Bible studies and hear presentations by medical and other specialists for the 35 in-patients.

The government has found that of 30,000 persons this facility has treated for addictions, only 30 have relapsed.

During a visit to the Azua center in August 2001, I met 36-year-old Rafael Rosario, who was introduced to drugs by his own mother, who gave them to him to sell. He began taking cocaine, and before long he was addicted. His life became focused on getting his next fix. But his wife and children left him, and his life fell apart.

It took 10 years for Rafael to realize that he was trapped by the chains of drugs. At this low point in his life he learned about the Azua center. Rafael asked to be admitted to the program. His heart was touched by the religious services and the kind pastor who listened to his troubles. Rafael remembered the many occasions when he had spurned his brother's invitation to attend the church. But in the Wednesday spiritual therapy meetings, Rafael began to understand what his brother had been trying to tell him.

For years Rafael had rejected his brother's religion. Now he realized he needed spiritual help. Rafael recently testified to the other patients, "I am happy, for I have accepted Christ as my Savior."

Rafael's family visits him, and his children are delighted to see the changes in their father. When he completes his treatment program he plans to find honest work and support his family, as a Christian father should.

"The Lord has given me to a new life," Rafael says. "I thank God for the ministry of Pastor Sanchez, which helped me find this new life in Jesus."

**Rafael Rosario (left). J. H. Zachary is coordinator of international evangelism for The Quiet Hour.**



# The Sign of the Prophet Jonah



## Sabbath Afternoon

**AT THIS POINT IN OUR STUDY**, the narrative, the story of Jonah and his exploits, has ended. It was quite a story, with some amazing exploits, to be sure. However, while the narrative portion of the Jonah story is now over, the message of the story, and the reasons it was included in the biblical canon, still aren't.

Jesus Himself, during His earthly ministry, is recorded three times talking about Jonah, all in the same context: that of Jonah in the belly of the fish. Obviously, for Jesus, the story of Jonah, particularly the parts He specifically mentions, is pertinent and, obviously, because His words regarding Jonah are recorded in two of the Gospels, Matthew and Luke, there must be something there for us, as well.

This week we'll take a closer look at what Jesus said about Jonah, the reluctant prophet, and the reasons He used Jonah to relay an important message, not only to those listening to Him speak but for us, as well.

**THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:** What is asked of Jesus that causes Him to refer to Jonah, and who asks it? Why does Jesus speak such a sharp rebuke to them over what they ask? Why will there always be room for doubt? How does Jonah's experience prefigure Christ's death, burial, and resurrection?

**MEMORY TEXT:** "For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:40).

\*Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 20.

**"THIS ADULTEROUS GENERATION."**

"For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12:40).

**A**s shown in the first week's lesson, Jesus believes in the truth of the Jonah story, particularly the most "unbelievable" part; that is, Jonah's undersea excursion in the belly of the big fish. In fact, Jesus refers to Jonah, not just in Matthew 12 but in Matthew 16:4; meanwhile, Luke (11:29-32), as well, records Jesus referring to Jonah. All these references are in the same context too.

Read Matthew 12:38-45; Matt. 16:1-4; and Luke 11:29-36, the three times Christ mentions Jonah. What is the background of His response? What do all three accounts have in common? Why does He refer to this "wicked" or "adulterous" generation? What's the point of the reference to the Queen of Sheba? And to the Ninevites?

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In many ways, particularly given the context, we see here a repeat of what happened with Jonah. All through the book it was the pagans, the non-Hebrews, who were responding to the signs, the warnings, as well as the expressions of God's grace, while Jonah, the only Hebrew in the book, seems hardened to them all.

Jesus is dealing with a similar situation here: Those who, like Jonah, should know better, don't. By referring to Jonah, Jesus points to a story that, if heeded in faith and submission, would provide them with a clear object lesson.

This should teach us that to be given great light and the great privileges that come with that light are no guarantee of salvation. To know "truth"—that is, a series of propositions and statements about God or the nature of God—in and of itself, means nothing. The pages of the Bible are crammed full of people who are given truth but don't bear the fruit of that truth in their own lives.

**Read carefully Matthew 12:43-45, keeping the context in mind. What point does the Lord make here? What message should there be here for us, as Seventh-day Adventists?**

**SEEKING A SIGN.**

What question prompted Jesus' strong response regarding Jonah? Why would Jesus have reacted as He did? See Matt. 12:38; 16:1.

**S**kim through the first 16 chapters of Matthew, events that preceded these questions, and what do you see? Lepers healed (Matt. 8:2-4); a centurion's daughter healed (vss. 5-13); a paralyzed man healed (Matt. 9:1-8); the blind receiving sight (vss. 27-31), and so forth. And yet, some of these people still wanted a sign?

**How do all these signs explain why Jesus reacted to their request as strongly as He did? See also Luke 16:31.**

Ultimately, those who don't want to believe in God, or in Jesus, will always find reasons for the unbelief. In fact, it's hard to think of anything God could do to get someone to believe if that person really doesn't want to believe.

Imagine if, suddenly, the words *JESUS CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD, DIED FOR THE SINS OF THE WORLD!* were written every day across the sky in every land, in every language, by a means that eluded rational, scientific explanation. However miraculous, however great a sign these words would be, belief that *JESUS CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD, DIED FOR THE SINS OF THE WORLD!* would still require faith. Even such a powerful sign would not be absolute proof, and those who still don't want to believe would not be persuaded, even with something like this heralded across the sky.

After all, Christ's atoning death on the cross was a historical event that happened in the past. It's gone. The only way we could ever know about it is to be told about it, and, because we weren't there and didn't see it happen, we can take what we've been told only on faith. How else? Faith, because it's belief in what's not "proven," always comes with the potential for doubt, and all the signs, miracles, and wonders in the world will never erase all doubt. Thus, those who want to cling to doubt will always have something to cling to, no matter the signs.

**What are the things that have caused you to believe in the Lord Jesus? Would you like something else to happen that could, you think, strengthen your faith? If so, what is it? Now, imagine that what you ask for is given to you.**

**Do you imagine, then, that all your questions and all your doubt will completely vanish? Certainly not. The question is, What do you do with that doubt?**

**"A GREATER THAN JONAS IS HERE."**

**W**hen we read what Jesus says to the people in Matthew 12:41, 42 (see also Luke 11:31, 32), in both accounts Jesus utters an interesting and important phrase: "Behold, a greater than Jonas is here"; "behold, a greater than Solomon is here." The context of these utterances shows Jesus comparing the attitude of these people to that of the Ninevites and the Queen of Sheba.

**Read 1 Kings 10:1-13, about the Queen of Sheba visiting Solomon. What was her reaction, and why? What was it about Solomon that made her act as she did? What does this teach us about what Israel, had it been faithful, could have accomplished for the Lord? See also Deut. 4:5-8; 8:17, 18; 28:11-13.**

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Notice also in Christ's words the other comparison He's making; that is, not just the comparison between "this generation" and the pagans but between Himself and both Solomon and Jonah. He's saying, essentially, that the Ninevites repented at the words of Jonah, who is hardly the greatest example of fidelity, faith, and zeal; and yet, here He is, the Son of God Himself, doing all that He has done, *and you still refuse to repent?* And here's the Queen of Sheba, a pagan ruler, who, of her own choosing, came to hear Solomon, a mere sinful mortal; and yet, here He is, the Son of God, *who came to you, and you still wouldn't listen?*

**In what ways is Jesus greater than either Solomon or Jonah? See John 1:1-4; 8:58; Col. 1:16.**

Of all the truths we ever can know, the most profound and wonderful is that God Himself stepped into the garb of humanity in the Person of Jesus Christ. No matter how big and scary the world, God through Christ has reached down and linked Himself to sinful, dying mortals in a way that should give us incredible hope and comfort, for our God has been among us, as one of us, and thus He knows us better than we can know ourselves. Even more so, He loves us too.

**How does the deity of Christ give you comfort personally? Why do you think the deity of Christ is so important? What would it mean if Jesus were a created being like us, as opposed to being the Creator Himself?**

**STRONG WORDS.**

**T**hough we're used to the gentle Jesus, the kind, loving, forgiving Jesus, the Jesus presented in these episodes comes across a bit differently, at least on the surface. Matthew 16:1, by elaborating on the motives behind those who ask the question, helps us understand why Jesus speaks as He does.

Of course, this wasn't the first time Christ spoke strong words of rebuke and censure during His earthly ministry.

**Read Matthew 23. Who is Jesus rebuking, and why? What parallels exist between His rebuke there and what we've seen in the texts regarding Jonah for this week?**

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Notice, too, in His discourse in Matthew 23 that He more than once calls the leaders "blind." Thus, how fruitless it would be to give them the sign they asked for in Matthew 12, because the blind can't see. No matter what Jesus does—healing lepers, raising the dead, casting out demons—these scribes and Pharisees refuse to see, and that's because they don't want to. And Jesus, by pointing out their sins and corruption (in Matthew 23), shows why they don't want to: If they had, if they would have accepted Him by virtue of the signs and wonders He performs, then they would have had to reform radically their lives and practices, something that many of them, apparently, didn't want to do.

For many people today, the same principle applies: They reject truth, not so much on an intellectual basis, not so much because their mind rejects it, but because their flesh does.

**Though Jesus refuses to give them, in this situation, the kind of sign they want, He, nevertheless, amid the rebuke, gives them a "sign" anyway. Look, again, at Matthew 12:39, 40. Jesus uses the Jonah story, a past event, to talk about something that would happen soon. What is that event? How does the Jonah story prefigure this event? How, even here, is Jesus saying something to these people, that, if they listened, could have opened their eyes to Him and who He was?**

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**"IN THE HEART OF THE EARTH."**

Even amid His strong rebuke of their spiritual blindness, Jesus still seeks to win their allegiance, for though He is God, He will not force anyone to follow Him. Then, as now, service to the Lord must be given freely; otherwise, it's slavery, and God doesn't want slaves. (If He had wanted slaves, He wouldn't have made us free moral agents.) Thus, Jesus uses the story of Jonah to describe what would happen to Him; that is, His death, burial, and resurrection; the idea being that, after it happened, they—remembering what He said—would have more reason to believe in who He was.

In Jonah 2:2, Jonah says that "out of the belly of hell cried I." The word for "hell" there comes from the Hebrew *sheol*, which means "the grave" or the "underworld." In Hebrew, it's often synonymous with death. Jonah, in the belly of the fish, saw himself as "dead," only to be resurrected; that is, saved from his fate, and only by the power of God.

**What does each verse say that helps explain why Jesus would use the Jonah story as a "sign" of His own experience?**

Matt. 26:61; 27:62-64; Mark 14:58 \_\_\_\_\_

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Matt. 28:6; Mark 16:6; John 21:14 \_\_\_\_\_

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Acts 2:15; Rom. 4:24, 25; 1 Cor. 15:3-5; 2 Cor. 4:14; Eph. 1:20 \_\_\_\_\_

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However poor a symbol of Jesus that Jonah was, the Lord uses the story of Jonah, his descent to "sheol" and then his ascent back to "life," as a symbol of what would happen to Him, when—having died under the crushing weight of the world's sins—He would descend to "sheol," only to be brought back to life by the same God who brought Jonah back from "sheol," as well. And just as Jonah's "resurrection," in a small way, would lead to mercy given to the heathen, Christ's resurrection would, as well, only, of course, on a much greater scale. Jonah was a poor man's example of what would happen to Christ.

**Christ's resurrection from the dead leads to the promise of ours, as well (see 1 Thess. 4:14). Why is the promise so important to us as Christians? What would our faith mean without it?**

**FURTHER STUDY:**

The important point is that the Ninevites ‘repented’ in spite of the fact that Jonah worked no miracles for them. They accepted his message on his own authority, because it carried conviction to their hearts (see Jonah 3:5-10). The same should have been true in the case of the scribes and Pharisees, for the message Christ bore certainly carried with it convincing evidence of His authority (see on Mark 1:22, 27). But in addition to the words He spoke He wrought many wonderful works, and these constituted an additional testimony that His words were true (see John 5:36). Yet in spite of all this evidence the scribes and Pharisees still obdurately refused to believe the evidence afforded them.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary* on Matthew 12:41, vol. 5, p. 398.

Jesus said that He would spend “three days and three nights” in the heart of the earth; yet, He was buried late Friday and rose Sunday morning, which isn’t three full days and nights; that is, a complete 72-hour cycle. Obviously, then, the phrase “three days and three nights” doesn’t automatically mean exactly 72 hours. Instead, it’s simply an idiomatic expression meaning just three days, such as (in this case) Friday, Sabbath, and Sunday (see Luke 23:46–24:3, 13, 21). It doesn’t have to mean a complete 24-hour Friday, a complete 24-hour Sabbath, and a complete 24-hour Sunday. In other places, Jesus said that “in three days” He would raise His body temple (John 2:19-21) or that He would be “raised again the third day” (Matthew 16:21). These references mean the same thing as the “three days and three nights”; that is, Jesus would be crucified and raised from the dead over a three-day period, even if only one of those days, the Sabbath, encompassed a complete 24-hour day. He was crucified late Friday, spent Sabbath in the tomb, and rose Sunday.

**DISCUSSION QUESTION:**

George Washington was the first president of the United States, right? Yet, who alive today ever met him? Who ever saw him in his office? Alexander the Great was a powerful leader of the ancient Greek Empire. But how do we know? Has anyone in your class ever met him or seen him in his role as leader? In other words, all these things, like the life of Jesus, require some amount of faith, do they not? Discuss.

**SUMMARY:** Jesus used the Jonah story to give a stern warning. Who will heed it?



## One Person's Influence

John Ash III

When Chan, a young bride, moved with her husband to his hometown some 200 miles southeast of Hangzhou, China, she was baffled that she could not find any Adventists living there. She continued her search until she found a small group of Sabbathkeepers who met in the home of one of their members. But the congregation was not Adventist. As she visited the little group of believers she discovered their interesting origin.

During World War II the United States offered the assistance of military specialists to help the struggling Chinese army. Apparently a Seventh-day Adventist military chaplain was assigned to the region where this little group of believers lived. The chaplain did more than just meet the needs of the military personnel; he shared his faith with the local people, and eventually he led seven of them to Christ. Shortly after he baptized the new believers, the chaplain and his unit left the area.

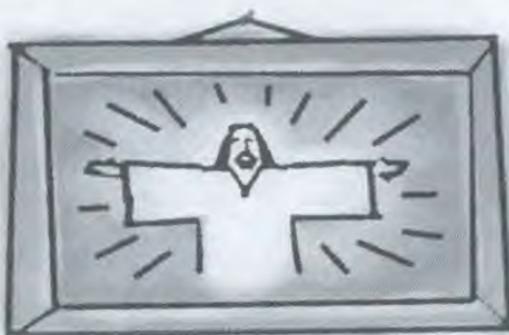
The little group of believers managed to build a tiny chapel, but it burned down shortly after completion. Through the stormy decades of Communism, atheism, and the stifling pressures of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, the little group of believers managed to continue worshiping, perhaps because they were isolated from large population centers. But over the years, without the presence of a minister, the little group lost nearly all of the Adventist beliefs, but it managed to cling to the Sabbath and their belief that Jesus is coming soon. They thought they were the only Sabbathkeeping Christians in the world.

Chan rejoiced to tell the little congregation that they were a part of a worldwide group of believers. She helped them contact another congregation of Adventists in a city two hours away. Today this larger congregation has begun to nurture the faithful little group, and today they have grown to more than 100 believers. They were excited to relearn biblical truths that they had lost over the weary decades. The larger church helped the little group buy and remodel a house for a chapel.

The chaplain who led those first seven Chinese believers to Christ may never know this side of heaven what a powerful influence his simple act of faith has made on the people with whom he shared his faith.

**John Ash III** is executive secretary of the Chinese Union Mission, headquartered in Hong Kong.

# A Picture of God



## *Sabbath Afternoon*

**T**HIS WEEK BEGINS THE END of our study on Jonah. Hard to believe the book itself is only 48 verses. But brevity shouldn't be mistaken for shallowness. On the contrary, some of the most profound concepts in Scripture can be expressed quite succinctly ("God is love," for instance). The book of Jonah might be short, but its message touches themes we'll spend eternity trying to fathom.

Of those themes, however, the most amazing is God's grace. We really can't appreciate it fully, because we really can't see just how fallen we are. The very thing we use to understand the world and our place in it is our minds—and our minds, more than anything else, have been tainted by sin. It's like asking someone in the midst of a drunken stupor to explain the evil of alcohol use. Nevertheless, God has revealed enough to us so we can learn to love Him and to express that love in faith and obedience, which is all He asks.

**THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:** What does the book of Jonah teach about God's forgiveness? About His power over the world? How does it reveal God's desire to have a personal relationship with us? What role does morality play in Jonah or in the Bible, as a whole?

**MEMORY TEXT:** “ ‘Comfort, O comfort My people’ says your God. ‘Speak kindly to Jerusalem; and call out to her, that her warfare has ended, that her iniquity has been removed, that she has received of the Lord’s hand double for all her sins’ ” (Isaiah 40:1, 2, NASB).

\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 27.

**GOD'S FORGIVENESS.**

The book of Jonah has something in common with all the biblical books: None of them ever tries to prove the existence of God. Not one of them ever expresses any doubt that God exists. Nor do they merely speak of Him out of their imaginations. Instead, without hesitancy, they fill the pages of Scripture with detailed pictures of God in action within human history. The book of Jonah is part of this vast panorama.

And one picture, drawn very clearly from this book, is seen all through the Bible (however uniquely presented in Jonah): our God's willingness to forgive. God is always surprising human beings in His capacity and inclination to forgive. Jonah, as with so many people, has a hard time grasping this profound aspect of God's character. It must be a difficult thing for sinful human beings to appreciate God's radical grace. In the New Testament, the four Gospels frequently recount that God is far more generous with His forgiveness than most of us think.

**How do the following words of Jesus illustrate this aspect of God's character; that is, His willingness to forgive?**

**Matt. 7:11** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Matt. 20:1-16** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Luke 15:11-32** \_\_\_\_\_

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The book of Jonah presents a profound picture of God's forgiveness. Perhaps this is the reason it is read by Jewish people at *Minchah*, the afternoon service of the Day of Atonement, near the holiest hour when *Yom Kippur* is nearing its peak. In the final hours, when judgment is about to close, the book of Jonah is opened, with its powerful emphasis on God's mercy.

**Do you harbor anger? Does it seethe within you (and maybe with good reason too)? How can dwelling on Jesus and His attitude of forgiveness help? Also, how can concentrating on what God has forgiven you for help you to learn to forgive others?**

**GOD'S OMNIPOTENCE.**

In the book of Jonah, we are dramatically reminded that the extent of God's sovereignty is far more vast than merely a narrow focus on only believers. Even the pagan mariners of chapter 1 recognize the power of the "great storm" involves more than just natural causes, and it draws their attention to the great God of heaven and earth.

Without exception, all the Bible writers allow no serious point of comparison between the true God and any false gods. The decisive and powerful actions of Yahweh are seen throughout Scripture in stark contrast to all other gods, which are no gods at all.

**Review, again, the attributes of God's power over nature that are portrayed in the book of Jonah. Then read Isaiah 40. In what ways do we see the Lord do some things in the book of Jonah that are expressed about Him in Isaiah 40?**

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Notice especially verses 26 and 28 in Isaiah 40, because they both make references to the Lord's creative power. It is because He is the Creator and the Sustainer that He has such control over the world. Hard as it might be for us to see at times, particularly in times of pain, turmoil, and suffering, we, nevertheless, have the assurance that our God is ultimately in control. We also have the promise that, in the end, He will make all things right, if not now and not in this life then in the life to come—the one life, that really matters, because it's eternal, while our existence here is only a vapor.

There's so much we just don't, and can't, understand. That's how it always has been. But what the Lord teaches us through His Word and also in the story of Jonah is that however much we don't understand, we can know enough about God, about His character, about His power, and, most important, about His love that we can trust Him enough to love Him and stay faithful to our divine calling, which will allow Him to work in us so others can learn about Him and His love, as well. Only to the degree that we love and trust Him can He do this through us.

**Wherever you live, as far as possible, step outside, read Isaiah 40 out loud, and look at the marvels of creation. What do you see, and what does it tell you about the power of God?**

**GOD'S MORALITY.**

**H**owever different the book of Jonah is from other books of the Bible, its message is consistent with them. And like the others, Jonah is very clear that God is a moral God, that the Lord has a standard of morality that applies to all the world. However differently the Lord might judge people, depending upon how much light they've had, the world will, nevertheless, be judged by God's standard of righteousness.

**Look up these texts. What is the essential message in them? How do these texts relate to the story of Jonah? Pss. 9:8; 96:10, 13; 98:9; Acts 17:31; Rom. 3:6.**

In all of Scripture, religion and morality are related in the closest possible way. The Bible knows nothing of morality apart from religion (the idea that you can have morality apart from religion is a modern one). In Scripture, we find God consistently evaluating human history on a moral basis, no matter which person and no matter which people group. This makes perfect sense, because just as He created all human beings, He has placed them all under His moral order, as well.

**Note how God speaks of Egypt and of the Amorites in Genesis 15:13-16. What is implied in these words regarding not only the moral state of these pagan nations but their own personal responsibility for their moral actions?**

In the book of Jonah, we observe further that even the wicked Ninevites, when falling under the judgment of God, were convicted of the correctness of God's sentence. Even more, a relationship with God in the book of Jonah, as in all Scripture, is expressed in a moral life. "Walking uprightly" before the Lord is a common expression in Scripture for moral living. The importance of doing righteousness is constantly stressed throughout the entire canon.

**As Seventh-day Adventists, we've often heard the statement made to us by other Christians, "Well, the law was done away with at the Cross," meaning, of course, that we no longer need to keep the Sabbath commandment. In light of today's study, in particular (not to mention the Bible, as a whole), why is that statement so erroneous? What would it mean if the law were done away with?**

**GOD IS A PERSONAL BEING.**

**G**od is pictured involved in personal relationships in the book of Jonah. He is not just an abstract idea or some vague impersonal power. Neither is He a distant Being, barely involved with the people on this earth. Nor is He a cosmic dictator who seeks uncomprehending, speechless submission on the part of His subjects. All through Scripture, we find Him pleading and reasoning with human beings. One whole chapter in the book of Jonah is a conversation between God and Jonah. In many ways, the whole life of Jesus was a manifestation of God coming down and talking face-to-face with us.

**Look up each of the following texts, in which God is speaking to people. What, if anything, do they have in common?**

**Gen. 4:1-7** \_\_\_\_\_

**Exod. 3:1-8** \_\_\_\_\_

**Job 38-41** \_\_\_\_\_

**Jonah 4** \_\_\_\_\_

**Acts 9:3-8** \_\_\_\_\_

Notice, in every one of these examples, God is seeking either to warn, to inform, to teach, or to reveal Himself and His love to sinful human beings. What these accounts show us is that God deals with us as we are, beings with free wills who need to be wooed away from evil choices or, in the cases of Cain and Jonah, of wrong attitudes, which can be an evil choice, just as well. In all these examples, we see a Lord who is working only for the benefit of humanity, the same Lord who is working in our behalf today, as well. Again, what's amazing is to think of the size of the universe, at least the known universe (there's so much out there we don't even know about), and then to realize that the God who created all this wants to enter into a personal relationship with us! It is a thought that defies the imagination.

**If someone were to ask you, How can I have a personal relationship with the Lord? how would you answer? What are a few of the crucial steps we must take in order to have that relationship?**

**JESUS IS A PICTURE OF GOD.**

The God of the Old Testament, who sought a personal relationship with human beings, is the same God of the New Testament. This is clearly seen through the life and ministry of Jesus.

A preacher once described it like this: Imagine you are watching a group of ants cross a street. Knowing that they are going to be squished by the first vehicle that comes down the road, you stand above them and shout, "Hey, ants, get out of the road!" More than likely, it wouldn't work. So, instead, you become an ant, get down on their level, and, speaking their language, lead them from the path of destruction. A bit fanciful, yes, but it does make the point: Jesus became one of us in order to best communicate with us and, of course, in order to redeem us from the path of destruction.

**What are some of the conversations of Jesus recorded in the Gospels? What do they all have in common? In other words, what was Jesus seeking to do in each of these conversations?**

**Matt. 19:16-22** \_\_\_\_\_

**Mark 7:24-37** \_\_\_\_\_

**John 3:1-21** \_\_\_\_\_

**John 4:1-27** \_\_\_\_\_

Christ gives human beings time and room to listen thoughtfully and answer honestly. He allows people to dispute His Word or simply not to listen. He never communicates in a way that forces anyone to assent. That's simply not God's way. He wants us to obey Him because we love Him, and love cannot be forced.

In the book of Jonah, the Old Testament reaches one of its loftiest points of revealing God in His relationship to creation and history and His tender concern for all His creatures.

With God's final question to Jonah—Should I not pity Nineveh, and what about the animals?—we find one of the most amazing biblical glimpses of the Personhood of God and His entanglement in our human situation. What Jonah tells us is what all the Bible tells us: We are not alone. Our God cares, however difficult it might seem to appear to us on the surface. But that's part of the problem. We see only on the surface. The Bible has been given to help us see, in a sense, the formula behind the ferment.

**FURTHER STUDY:**

Divine love has been stirred to its unfathomable depths for the sake of men, and angels marvel to behold in the recipients of so great love a mere surface gratitude. Angels marvel at man's shallow appreciation of the love of God. Heaven stands indignant at the neglect shown to the souls of men. Would we know how Christ regards it? How would a father and mother feel, did they know that their child, lost in the cold and the snow, had been passed by, and left to perish, by those who might have saved it? Would they not be terribly grieved, wildly indignant? Would they not denounce those murderers with wrath hot as their tears, intense as their love? The sufferings of every man are the sufferings of God's child, and those who reach out no helping hand to their perishing fellow beings provoke His righteous anger. This is the wrath of the Lamb."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 825.

"The Lord is in active communication with every part of His vast dominions. He is represented as bending toward the earth and its inhabitants. He is listening to every word that is uttered. He hears every groan; He listens to every prayer; He observes the movements of every one."—Ellen G. White, *My Life Today*, p. 292.

"In Christ is the tenderness of the shepherd, the affection of the parent, and the matchless grace of the compassionate Saviour. His blessings He presents in the most alluring terms. He is not content merely to announce these blessings; He presents them in the most attractive way, to excite a desire to possess them. So His servants are to present the riches of the glory of the unspeakable Gift."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 826.

**DISCUSSION QUESTION:**

Philosopher Bertrand Russell had been thrown in jail for antiwar activities. One of his jailers, wanting to start a conversation, asked Mr. Russell what his religious beliefs were. "I'm an agnostic," Russell replied. The jailer, looking puzzled (as if not quite sure what an agnostic was), finally answered with a big smile, "Oh, well, it really doesn't matter. We all worship the same God anyway." From what you have learned this quarter, what's wrong with that answer, and why should we as Seventh-day Adventists, of all people, know why that answer is wrong?

**SUMMARY:** Let us praise God that He's more kind, loving, and forgiving than we as human beings are.



## Prayer, the Chief Evangelistic Tool

J. H. Zachary

Valli faced a huge problem. For years her husband had been falling ever deeper into alcoholism. Often she suffered great pain from his drunken blows. Valli and her children often tried to escape his drunken wrath. When an evangelistic meeting was advertised in her village she decided to attend.

This was a difficult decision because the political party that administered her village was determined that everyone should support the national religion. Her attendance brought extra burdens to her personal life. Those who attended were forbidden to draw water from the village well. Valli had to walk more than a mile (two kilometers) to fetch water. However, as she began to experience a new outlook on life, the long hike for water became bearable.

As Valli surrendered her life to Jesus, her life took on new directions. Old ways of thinking and acting disappeared. The Holy Spirit was performing a spiritual miracle in her life. Her drunkard husband began to see these changes in his wife and was impressed by the power of the God that Valli so often referred to.

Out of the depths of discouragement Valli's husband accompanied his wife to the evangelistic service. His life began to change. When the couple's six adult children saw what was happening to their parents, they, too, began to attend. The entire family has been baptized.

Villagers were deeply impressed by the power of Jesus to change lives. The prejudice against Christians began to wane.

Then a 6-year-old boy fell ill. The family could not afford medical care, so they turned to the visiting teachers for help. The team gathered around the child in earnest prayer, and he was healed. The boy's miraculous recovery changed the attitude of the people in the village. Attendance at the meetings grew, and as the meetings progressed, a baptismal class was organized.

Today there is a new church with 70 believers in this village.

**Valli (left).** J. H. Zachary is coordinator of international evangelism for *The Quiet Hour*.



## Bible Study Guide for First Quarter, 2004

The Gospel of John often has been called "the beloved Gospel." This quarter's *Adult Bible Study Guide*, "John: The Beloved Gospel" written by Jon Paulien, explores the life of Jesus as seen through the eyes of one closest to Him during his ministry on earth.

### Lesson 1: The Unique Purpose of John's Gospel

#### THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:

*Sunday:* How the Gospels Were Written (Luke 1:1-4).

*Monday:* Selecting With a Purpose (John 20:30, 31).

*Tuesday:* The Occasion of the Gospel (John 21).

*Wednesday:* Second Generation (John 1:40-42).

*Thursday:* The Word Is as Good as His Touch (Luke 4:40).

**MEMORY TEXT:** John 20:29, NIV.

**SABBATH GEM:** The Gospel of John tells us that the absence of physical contact with Jesus is no disadvantage to those seeking a relationship with Him today. Jesus' word is as powerful as His touch.

### Lesson 2: Jesus Is the Best

#### THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:

*Sunday:* The Word as Eternal God (John 1:1, 2).

*Monday:* Creator and Sustainer (John 1:3-5).

*Tuesday:* Rejection and Reception (John 1:4-13).

*Wednesday:* The Humanity of Jesus (John 1:1, 2, 14).

*Thursday:* The Greatest Revelation (John 1:14-18).

**MEMORY TEXT:** John 1:14, NIV.

**SABBATH GEM:** At the beginning of his Gospel, John describes Jesus as the Word who was God from eternity yet who becomes flesh. Thus, He alone is worthy of our worship.

#### Lessons for the Visually Impaired

The regular Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide is available free each month in braille and on audiocassette to sight-impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, old age, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097.

# Jonah

## The Inside Story

**W**hen the prophet Jonah was saved from the sea, he rejoiced in a God of second chances. But when God spared repentant Nineveh, Jonah accused Him of being unfair.

In the biblical mosaic of God, Jonah provides a major piece of the puzzle. Jo Ann Davidson, assistant professor of theology at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, guides us through this carefully crafted book. Analyzing the text as literature, she exposes hidden literary patterns that provide clues to the meaning of the text.

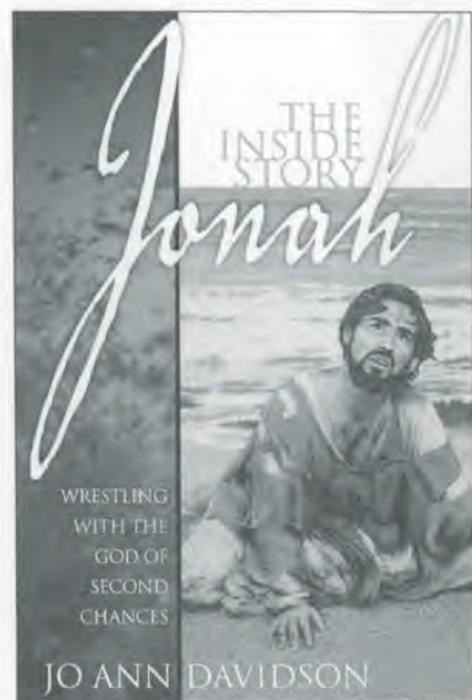
Davidson shows how Jonah is full of contemporary themes that teach us about our own human nature, and about a God who, if He loves disobedient prophets and even wicked cities, must surely care for us.

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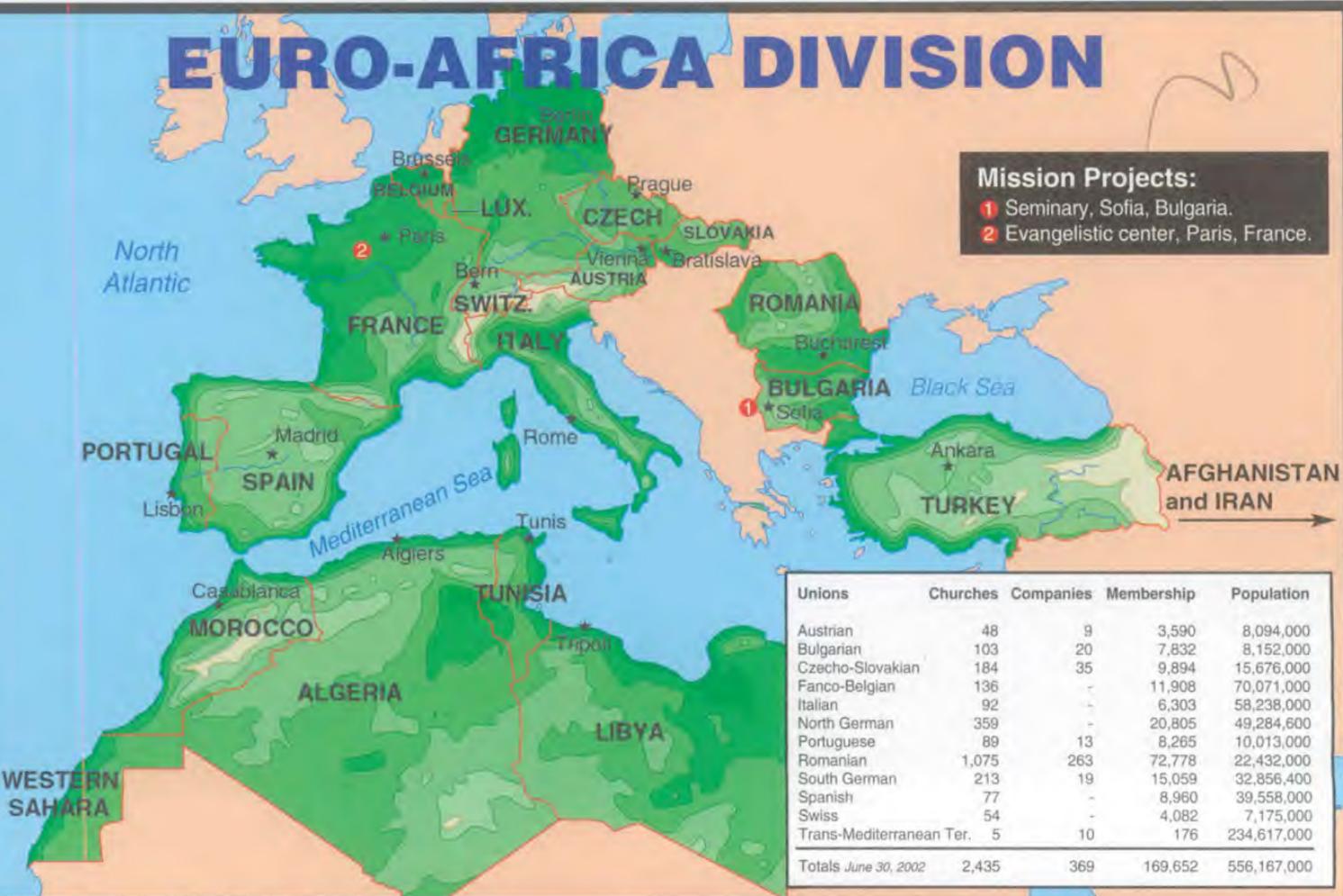


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