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Editorial Office: 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904
Email:goldsteinc@gc.adventist.org

Principal Contributor
JoAnn Davidson

Editorial Production Manager
Soraya Homayouni Parish

Editor
Clifford Goldstein

Art and Design
Lars Justinen

Associate Editor
Lyndelle Brower Chiomenti

Pacific Press® Coordinator
Paul A. Hey

1. **Key Text, Lesson Aim, and Outline:** Tanja Saldaña, freelance writer, Woodbine, Maryland, USA.
2. **The Commentary:** Gerald Wheeler, assistant vice president for Editorial Services, Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland, USA.
3. **The Inductive Bible-Study Method:** Marklynn Bazy, freelance writer, College Place, Washington, USA.
4. **The Focus-on-Witnessing Approach:** Tresa Beard, freelance writer, Springboro, Ohio, USA.
5. **The Life-Application Approach:** Fylvia Kline, freelance writer, Burtonsville, Maryland, USA.

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How to Use This Teachers Edition

The teachers comments demonstrate different methods of teaching the Standard Bible Study Guide. Five parts make up the teachers comments:

1. Key Text, Lesson Aim, and Outline: The key text is taken from the standard edition guide. The lesson aim is designed to (a) help class participants *understand* and *know* about the lesson material, (b) evoke an appropriate *feeling* about the lesson material that complements the lesson content and helps to internalize it, and (c) help class participants *apply* the lesson material to their daily lives. The lesson outline may not always follow exactly the material that appears in the standard guide. It may reflect additional perspectives as it attempts to stimulate class discussion.

2. The Commentary follows the traditional teaching methods of Sabbath School. It explains Bible passages and provides appropriate information leading to spiritual applications.

3. The Inductive Bible-Study Method emphasizes careful, methodical discovery of the meaning in a text. The teacher encourages and supports the learner's investigation and discovery, using distinctive approaches: (a) Study a text thoroughly and systematically before drawing a conclusion. (b) Look for textual meaning carefully and thoroughly; understand the passage in context; avoid misquoting the author. We must not develop opinions without biblical proof. (c) Share insights through group discussion as students examine a Bible passage together. (d) Apply the text to life today. (e) Allow the Holy Spirit to minister to class members during Bible study.

4. The Focus-on-Witnessing Approach should be used in conjunction with other methods of Bible study to demonstrate how particular passages of Scripture can be used to encourage people to commit their lives to Christ and to nurture spiritual life once it has been awakened.

5. The Life-Application Approach demonstrates how issues that grow out of Bible study can be shared in a small-group setting. This section uses an approach suitable for discussion in a small group in which interpersonal sharing and dialogue are key elements.

Use a combination of teaching methods. Within one class period it is often possible to draw from all five methods demonstrated in the teachers comments. Some teachers will prefer to focus on one method of teaching, drawing heavily on the material in the teachers comments.

For a listing of the individuals appointed by the General Conference to write the teachers comments for the current Bible Study Guide, please refer to page 1.

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 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 such as 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, although on the surface, seems filled with the uncertainty and surprise of the quantum realm, is, in fact, 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 Amittai, the prophet*, which was of Gath-hepher" (2 Kings 14:25, emphasis supplied). This is the same Jonah, son of Amittai (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.)

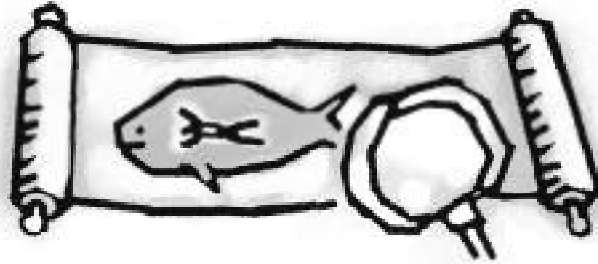
Yet, the most important point of Jonah isn't found in the surprises that spill out of its 48 verses but in the one thing that's constant all the way through those verses, and that is, God's incredible grace toward wayward, erring people, even wayward, erring prophets such as Jonah. If the Lord would continue to work with someone who squandered privileges and ignored light, then there's hope for us. We 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.

Biblical Prophets, Modern Critics



Sabbath Afternoon

SOME 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?

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.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Texts: Read the book of Jonah in its entirety.

Teachers Aims:

1. To explore how Jonah's experiences are central to his message.
2. To affirm the genuineness of the miracles in Jonah.

Lesson Outline:

I. Jonah: Profile of a Reluctant Prophet.

- A. Jonah, son of Amittai, is a northerner, a native of Gath-hepher in Zebulun of Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II. (See 2 Kings 14:25.)
- B. Jonah's family may have suffered during the Syrian invasion into northern Israel, which may explain much of his antagonism toward Nineveh of Assyria and his reluctance to warn the city. (See Jon. 1:1, 2.)

II. The Authenticity of the Book of Jonah.

- A. Jonah opens with a phrase translated "And it came to pass," anchoring his account to the past and establishing it as fact.
- B. "*The word of the Lord* came to Jonah" (vs. 1, NKJV, emphasis supplied) also opens the book, validating Jonah's prophetic call.
- C. In the tradition of other prophetic books, Jonah contains both warnings and a message of grace to a Gentile nation.
- D. Jesus affirms the historicity of the book of Jonah (Matt. 12:39-41; Luke 11:29, 30, 32).

III. The Uniqueness of Jonah's Account.

- A. Jonah's account differs from other prophetic books, which include scant biographical material.
- B. The action of Jonah's story contains the message.

IV. The Miracles of the Book of Jonah: Fact or Fiction?

- A. Modern critics dismiss the miracles of Jonah.
- B. The story of a fish swallowing a man and then spitting him out alive, however, is one of many miracles of the Bible (see Exod. 13:21, 22; Matt. 1:18).
- C. God's power transcends human logic.

Summary: Jonah "was to *cry* against [Nineveh]. Not reforming it by private effort . . . but by an open attack. . . . Many people cannot *cry*; they have not force of soul. . . . Is it so with us?"—Joseph S. Excell, *Practical Truths From Jonah* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 1982), pp. 5, 6, author's emphasis.

“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 Amittai, 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 only to prophets? In what ways can we receive “the word of the Lord”?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Commentary.

I. Arguing About Fish Tales.

The book of Jonah has bothered many readers who try to figure out how a human being could survive in the stomach of a sea creature, how an entire pagan city could be converted, or what type of plant could grow big enough in just a few hours to shade a man. Those who accept the book as historical spend great effort searching for accounts of sailors who have been cut out alive from the stomachs of whales or speculate about what type of gourd could grow so fast.

There is nothing wrong with this—as long as we do not become so obsessed with proving the historicity of Jonah that we never listen to its message. Even more important than defending the Bible is learning and putting into practice what it teaches.

II. The Messages of Jonah.

The vital messages of Jonah include the following:

A. *It is impossible to escape God's presence.* Most of the ancient world thought each god ruled a geographical area. While Jonah acknowledged that the sovereignty of God extended over the whole earth, perhaps he thought that if he fled in the opposite direction of Nineveh, God might *overlook* him and draft another more *willing* prophet to warn the city instead. However, he soon discovered the truth of Psalm 139:

“Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
If I take the wings of the morning
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me fast” (Ps. 139:7-10, NRSV).

B. *It is impossible to escape God's tasks.* God called Jonah to preach to the Ninevites. Fleeing across the sea and being swallowed by the great fish did not remove that divine mission.

C. *It is impossible to escape God's love.* God's love accompanied Jonah into the depths of the sea and as he reluctantly preached to a despised people.

D. *It is impossible to understand the depth and breadth of God's love.* Many are willing to accept that the Lord loves people like themselves. But people as terrible as those of Nineveh?

The book of Jonah illustrates what God meant when He declared to Moses that He was “ ‘a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love . . . for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin’ ” (Exod. 34:6, 7, NRSV). Even

Tuesday

September 30

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?

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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

though he did not like that fact, Jonah recognized that God was exactly that kind of deity (Jon. 4:2).

The prophet became angry when the Lord accepted Nineveh's repentance. Yet, even then the Lord continued to love *him*.

E. *Except for the sin against the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:31), it is impossible to do anything for which we cannot receive God's forgiveness, if we are willing to ask for it.* God forgave the people of an empire that was more cruel than many dictatorships of modern times. God, however, accepted their repentance. Furthermore, He forgave a prophet who did not want Him to do so.

III. An Object Lesson of Global Mission.

It took many years for Seventh-day Adventists to sense the full implications of the gospel commission (Matt. 28:19). The pioneers assumed that witnessing to North America was sufficient. But then we started to reach out to Christians in other lands. Next we began to evangelize non-Christians until we had a presence in most countries of the world. Now we seek to penetrate every people group.

However, do we yet fully grasp the full extent of our calling? Many

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

Texts for Discovery: Matthew 12:39-41, John 1:1-10, 1 Corinthians 2:14.

1. The experiences of Jonah play an essential role in the message of the book of Jonah. List and discuss other biblical characters whose experiences show their message rather than tell it.
2. Have someone in your class read John 1:1 from two different versions. Have this person insert Jesus' name each time it says "word." Reflect on how this enhances your understanding of the passage.
3. There are some dynamic preachers in the Seventh-day Adventist Church whom people flock to hear. Do we desire to hear what they say because of who they are or because of their message? What makes one preacher any better than the others if they all preach the same message? (See Pss. 118:9, 146:3.) How might presentation become more important than the message? How much responsibility does the messenger have to present the gospel in a powerful way?
4. Read Matthew 12:39-41. What parallels exist between Jonah and Christ? Why do you think the Ninevites listened to Jonah and instantly believed, while many people who heard Jesus refused to believe?
5. We may not be able to fathom the mystery of God, but we can believe by faith. Using 1 Corinthians 2:14, how would you explain faith to someone who believes in only part of the Bible or who discounts what he or she cannot understand?

Wednesday

October 1

THE MIRACLES IN JONAH.

Modern 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.

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.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

assume that only a few will be saved. True, the Bible cautions us that not all will accept God's salvation. Through His parable of the soils (Luke 8:4-15), Christ explains that people will respond to the gospel in different ways. But unlike some doctrines that teach that God predestines some to be saved and others lost, Scripture declares that anyone may receive salvation if he or she is willing. See, for example, John 3:16. Thus, if every human being is a potential recipient of salvation, the number of those who accept it may be far greater than we imagine. If we believe only a few will be saved, it will limit our witness. In the book of Jonah, however, an entire *wicked* city responded, much to Jonah's disappointment (Jon. 4:1, 2). Let us not be modern Jonahs.

IV. The Prophet of the Second Chance.

Jonah is the only prophetic book that is primarily about its prophet. The other prophetic books consist mostly of God's words to His people as given through His human agents. However, aside from the narrative account, the book of Jonah contains only a brief warning from God (Jon. 3:4), a prayer the reluctant prophet makes (Jonah 2), and some divine comments on Jonah's poor attitude (Jon. 4:9-11).

Another unusual feature is that God gives Jonah his divine assignment twice. Even though Jonah fails the first time, God does not give

WITNESSING

Six-year-old Danielle often becomes a messenger at her house. "Go tell your mother to come here," her father requests. Danielle skips off to tell her mom, and just as she expects, her mother replies, "Go tell your father to come here." Danielle does not seem to mind playing along until someone gives in.

A prophet is God's messenger. However, delivering a message may not be so much fun for a prophet. This was the case with Jonah. Like many of us, Jonah took his eyes off the message, "the word of the Lord" (Jon. 1:1).

There are many today who question the authenticity of the book of Jonah, but there is a message in this story for all of us. God's Word shall not return to Him void (Isa. 55:11). When God speaks,

something will happen. We choose whether to obey or not, and we are held accountable for our choices.

When we cease to focus on the message, we neglect our responsibility to do the Lord's will. In most cases, the messenger is a sinful human being, but she or he is, nevertheless, a vessel the Lord uses to tell others what He wants them to know.

In our witnessing, we should speak of the importance of obeying God's Word. We freely make choices in life, yet we cannot escape the consequences of those choices. It is God who decides whether or not things will turn out the way we plan. "A man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps" (Prov. 16:9, NKJV).

THE MIRACLES IN JONAH (CONTINUED).

Among 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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

up on him—just as He does not give up on Nineveh or anyone else. The Lord holds forth His offer of salvation to us our whole lives.

Equally important is the fact that God continually summons His people to their task of witnessing. Just as He repeatedly called Israel despite their continued failure, so He repeatedly longs for us to be His hands, feet, and voices in this world. If we have ignored or fled God's calling, Jonah's experience teaches us that God is willing to give us second chances.

LIFE-APPLICATION APPROACH

Icebreaker: Six bees and six flies are placed inside a bottle. The bottle is turned on its side, its base facing sunlight streaming in through a window. At the other end, the mouth of the bottle remains open. The bees, however, persist in finding their way to freedom through the sealed base of the bottle. The light shining through the base convinces them no other way out exists. They press against the bottom, closing themselves off to all other possibilities of freedom, until they die of hunger or exhaustion. The flies, on the other hand, escape the bottle within two minutes. They buzz around until they find the open mouth that takes them to freedom.

Thought Questions:

1. Consider the bees and the flies in the bottle. While the flies find freedom in their simple exploration of the bottle, the bees remain prisoners of their own insistence. How does this compare to the way some of us flounder through the Bible, weighted down by our own insistence to believe what we want

over what God is telling us? Using this illustration, what guidelines can you set for personal and for group Bible study?

2. Jonah's personal experience is far from a fairy tale—it is a nightmare! The lesson asks why Jonah's personal experience is central to the book. Think of at least two ways in which his experience parallels the corporate church. How does Jonah's story, his personal rebellion against God, draw the reader to the bigger picture of God's involvement in the lives of human beings? In a church's life? In the world?

Application Question:

Share experiences with the class in which your stubbornness not to do God's bidding was no match for God's power and persistence. Imagine how He must feel when we do things our way, instead of according to His will; then answer this question: Why is God unwilling to give up on the human race?

FURTHER STUDY:

Read 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.

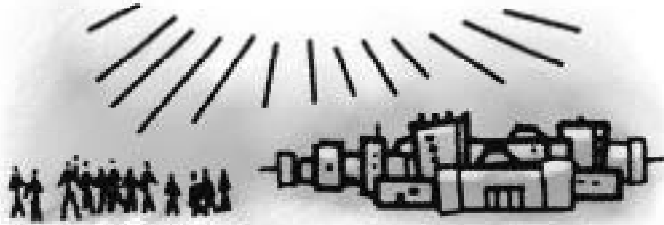
The prediction was fulfilled (2 Kings 14:25-27). Israel prospered once more but not for long. Both Hosea and Amos severely rebuked the northern kingdom as early as Jeroboam's reign (Hos. 1:1; Amos 1:1). But whereas Amos was a southerner from Tekoa, not far from Bethlehem, Jonah was a northerner. It would 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.

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.

Sunday

October 5

THE PERSONAL TOUCH.

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

Think 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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Text: Psalm 139:1-18.

Teachers Aims:

1. To affirm the belief that God not only exists but is a personal God, deeply involved with His creation.
2. To show that the first verses of Jonah hint at God's intimate knowledge of us.
3. To define how the book of Jonah reveals God's compassion for humanity.

Lesson Outline:

I. "Before I Formed Thee in the Belly . . ." (Jer. 1:5).

- A. God intimately knows us before we are born.
- B. God knows the lives and the location of the people whom He wants to save.
- C. God is a God of love, with our best interests at heart.

II. God: The Personal Touch (Jon. 1:1, 2).

- A. Jesus calls Zaccheus by name down from a sycamore tree, implying He knows us before we know Him.
- B. Likewise, in the case of Jonah's call to preach, God reveals His personal knowledge of the prophet.
- C. Through His intimate knowledge of us, God is able to minister directly to our needs.

III. God's Grace Is Far Reaching.

- A. God woos hearts in hostile territory.
- B. Nahum calls Nineveh a "bloody city" (Nah. 3:1), but God desires to save its people.
- C. God does not turn from us; we turn from Him. He ever reaches out to draw us back to Him.

Summary: The book of Jonah reveals the intensity of God's love and interest in us. He knows things about us that we may not know about ourselves. However, even the worst about us does not deter Him from yearning to save us.

Commentary.

I. "Jonah Son of Amittai, the Prophet" (2 Kings 14:25, NRSV).

Jonah first appears in 2 Kings 14:25, which indicates that Jonah gave Jeroboam theological counsel in both political and military areas. "Since Jonah's counsel proved correct and effective, one may

Monday

October 6

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.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

assume that Jonah son of Amittai enjoyed a good reputation in his homeland. The identification of Jonah as ‘the prophet’ or as ‘his [the Lord’s] servant’ presented him in a positive light. He is the last in the sequence of prophets in the Northern Kingdom (Ahijah, 1 Kings 11:29-39; 14:1-18; Jehu, 1 Kings 16:7-12; Elijah and Elisha, 1 Kings 17-2 Kings 13; the prophets mentioned in 1 Kings 20:13-22 and 28; Micaiah, 1 Kings 22).”—James Limburg, *Jonah: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), p. 38.

Jonah had grown up in Israel, which had a greater struggle with idolatry than the southern kingdom of Judah. Therefore, one would think he would be sympathetic with God’s concern for a pagan nation such as Assyria. After all, God had been long-suffering with Israel. But Jonah would not reflect his God’s loving nature. Actually, he feared God’s divine compassion. When the Lord told the prophet that He wanted him to go to Nineveh, Jonah had a suspicion of what might happen.

Nineveh was a wicked city, but that did not mean God would destroy it. The prophet had seen how God had repeatedly given the northern kingdom yet another chance. Jonah must have reasoned to himself that it was one thing to deliver pronouncements of a deity who never changed its mind but quite another to be the messenger of a God who could “repent” of His actions (or “change His mind”; see Gen. 6:6; Exod. 32:12; Jer. 18:8, 10; 26:3, 13; 42:10). As we shall see, Jonah could not accept God’s willingness to accept the repentance of the wicked Ninevites.

II. Assyria in the Eighth Century B.C.

Two kings, Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 B.C.) and Shalmaneser III (859/858–824/823 B.C.), had led Assyria to political and military greatness. Some historians consider this period as one of the golden ages of Mesopotamia. During the ninth century, Assyria had posed a great threat to Israel. One of Israel’s kings, Ahab, had joined an alliance of 12 small nations determined to stop Shalmaneser III’s westward advance. In 853 B.C., Ahab supplied a major part of the foot soldiers and chariots that fought the Assyrian armies at the Battle of Qarqar on the Orontes River about one hundred fifty miles north of Damascus. Jehu then deposed Ahab as king and began to pay tribute to the Assyrians. Shalmaneser III portrays, on the famous Black Obelisk, Jehu—or his representative—bowing in submission before him. (The Obelisk is one of the few depictions of Bible people that still survives.)

But political empires can fall even more quickly than they rise. Even during the lifetime of Shalmaneser III, the Assyrian kingdom began to collapse. Provincial governors gained increasing power until the imperial administrators found themselves unable to control local officials.

Ashur-da’in-apal, one of Shalmaneser’s sons, started a major revolt in Assyria in 826 B.C. while his father was alive. Another son put down the rebellion seven years later. The military leader of one Assyrian

Tuesday

October 7

“HEY, YOU!”

All through the Bible, we are given examples of God’s intimate knowledge of people, whether heathen or believers. 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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

king claimed victories over a neighboring nation without even mentioning the name of his ruler, something that normally never would happen. Succeeding kings were weak. Continuing strife plunged the empire into a period of stagnation that lasted until Tiglath-pileser III.

During the period of decline, small nations such as Israel, Judah, and a series of Syrian states emerged or gained new power. Inside Assyria, the various provincial rulers governed almost independently. Perhaps this is why Jonah 3:6 speaks of the king of Nineveh instead of the king of Assyria. He may have been a local ruler with perhaps more power than the actual ruler of the empire. The king of Nineveh could also issue a decree without getting imperial approval (see Jon. 3:7). Such social instability may have weakened the national religion and created a climate in which people would be willing to accept a message from a foreign God such as Jonah's.

With Assyria in decline, one can understand why Jonah would want Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire, to be destroyed. If God should spare the city, the empire might regain its strength and once again threaten Israel. Ironically, that is exactly what would happen.

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

Texts for Discovery: Psalm 104:35, Matthew 10:30, John 4:5-19.

1. Read Psalm 104:35, 1 Timothy 5:24, and Hebrews 10:27. Discuss with your class the fear factor involved with the judgment. How can you help people overcome this fear so it is not the force that drives them to church or, alternately, away from it?
2. Matthew 10:30 illustrates God's personal involvement in our lives. How else could you illustrate what it is like to have God personally involved in your life?
3. Read John 4:5-19. Jesus knew the heart of the Samaritan woman. He knew her past, her present, and her future. He knew her desire for a better life. He knew her desire for worship. How would you explain to a nonbeliever Jesus' response to the Samaritan woman regarding worship?
4. In Jonah 1:2, God tells the prophet to go to Nineveh, because it was a city full of wickedness and violence. Is your city or town any different? What might God be asking you to do for the people where you live?
5. Jesus told His disciples to go into the entire world. He did not tell them to bring everyone to Jerusalem. Read Matthew 24:14. How can you share the message with the world from your home? Where does the world begin in relation to your home?

Wednesday

October 8

PEOPLE AND PLACES.

God 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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

III. Nineveh, “That Great City” (Jon. 1:2).

The ruins of Nineveh lie across the Tigris River from the modern city of Mosul, Iraq, 250 miles north of Baghdad. People began to live at the site thousands of years before the time of Christ. Its abundant agricultural land and location at the junction of two major trade routes encouraged its growth. Hammurabi, king of Babylon, in about 1750 B.C., mentions the city in the prologue to his famous law code. The Medes and Babylonians destroyed Nineveh in 612 B.C., and although people continued to live there through Hellenistic and Parthian times, it was never completely rebuilt. Today, people from Mosul are beginning to settle in what was once Nineveh.

The site has two large mounds—Kuyunjik and Nebi Yunus—along the western wall and separated by the bed of the Khosr River. Nebi Yunus, “the prophet Jonah,” has a mosque commemorating the traditional site of where Jonah was believed to be buried. The presence of this mosque has prevented any archaeological excavation on the Nebi Yunis mound.

WITNESSING

We often identify people by associating them with someone, something, or someplace. We find this method of identification in the Bible. There is James, the son of Zebedee (Matt. 4:21); blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46); and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-28).

We also know people by their reputations. There are seven men of “good reputation” chosen to serve the people of God (Acts 6:3, NKJV). However, knowing something about a person is not the same as really knowing him or her *personally*. When you know someone on a personal level, you know more than just certain facts about him or her. You know who he or she is on the inside—his or her strengths and weaknesses, the good and the bad. Those who know us this well are the individuals

we trust the most. Our heavenly Father knows each one of us even better than this. He knows us so well that He has numbered the hairs on our heads (Matt. 10:30). We do not even know that much about ourselves. Not only does the Father know us intimately, He also assures us that we are of great value to Him (Matt. 10:31).

Many who are just learning about the Lord see Him as a distant God who is not concerned about the everyday cares of life. As we witness to these individuals, we can show them how the Bible speaks of a God who is *not* a distant arbitrator but a personal loving Father who knows everything there is to know about us, yet He still loves us and wants to save us.

He is a God we *can* trust.

NINEVEH—THAT GREAT CITY.

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

Archaeologists 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 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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

LIFE-APPLICATION APPROACH

Icebreaker: “Father, I want to know Thee, but my coward heart fears to give up its toys. I cannot part with them without inward bleeding, and I do not try to hide from Thee the terror of the parting. I come trembling, but I do come. Please root from my heart all those things which I have cherished so long and which have become a very part of my living self, so that Thou mayest enter . . . [and] dwell there without a rival. Then shalt Thou make the place of Thy feet glorious. Then shall my heart have no need of the sun to shine in it, for Thyself wilt be the light of it, and there shall be no night there. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.” —A. W. Tozer, “The Pursuit of God,” in *The Blessedness of Possessing Nothing*, chapter 2: epilog.

Thought Questions:

1. Tozer’s prayer exposes his innermost fears. It reflects our own fear of letting go of cherished idols and of forging an intimate relationship with God. What steps does this prayer inspire you to take to eliminate fear of intimacy with the Divine?
2. A healthy relationship involves give and take. However, in our relationship with God, we take more than we give and often abuse what we take. Why would God continue to yearn for an

intimate relationship with a fallen people?

3. When God communicates with us, He bridges the gap between Divinity and humanity. When He reaches out to us, He honors us by the attention. Why, then, do you think Jonah fails to respond positively to God’s instructions? What elements in Jonah’s life do you suppose steer him aboard the wrong ship? What is the role of the Holy Spirit in building the bridge between God and humanity?

Application Questions:

1. Compare Tozer’s prayer with various psalms, noting the similarities. Now write your own prayer in two parts: (a) list your fears and apprehensions that stand in the way of taking a leap of faith into an intimate relationship with God; (b) express your desire to have a more intimate relationship with God despite your fears. Share your prayer with your class.
2. The lesson refers to Jesus’ intimate knowledge of Zaccheus’s faults. Recollect your darkest secret. How does it make you feel to know you cannot keep any secrets from God? What is it about this knowledge that makes you feel vulnerable? How does awareness of God’s omniscience strengthen your walk spiritually?

FURTHER STUDY:

While 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.

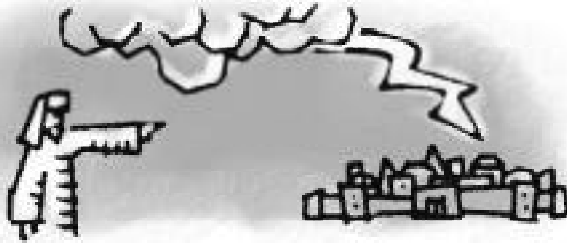
“As regards this earth, Scripture declares the work of creation to have been completed. ‘The works were finished from the foundation of the world.’ Hebrews 4:3. But the power of God is still exercised in upholding the objects of His creation. It is not because the mechanism once set in motion continues 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.

Jonah and Judgment



Sabbath Afternoon

AS 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.

Sunday

October 12

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.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Text: Jonah 1:2.

Teachers Aims:

1. To define how God’s warning to Nineveh relates to us.
2. To recognize the hope and love in God’s judgments.
3. To explore the link between the Ten Commandments at Sinai and God’s warning against Nineveh.

Lesson Outline:

I. Nineveh: “Sin-City” of the Ancient World.

- A. Nineveh, “the bloody city . . . full of lies and robbery” (Nah. 3:1), served as the capital city of Assyria, a country known for its fierce army and corruption.
- B. Nahum compared the Ninevites to “a cruel, ravenous lion” (Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 265; see also Nah. 2:11-13). Yet, the city of Nineveh was not wholly given over to evil.
- C. God calls Jonah to warn the Ninevites to repent or perish.

II. The Nature of God’s Judgments.

- A. God’s judgments against humanity’s wickedness come not from a desire to destroy humanity but from His love for the lost and His desire to save us.
- B. God’s warning against Nineveh serves also as an invitation to all fallen humanity to turn to Him and to embrace salvation.
- C. God gives humankind existence for a time so that they may develop their characters (see Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 764).

III. The Principles of the Ten Commandments.

- A. The law existed before Sinai and requires universal accountability from all humanity.
- B. It was Nineveh’s violation of the law that required God to send Jonah to warn them to repent.
- C. God shall judge no sinner—from a backslider to an unbeliever—in an unfair or arbitrary manner.

Summary: Nineveh served as an example to Israel that none was too wicked or too lost to be saved. It also served to warn Israel not to follow in Nineveh’s bloody footsteps or to take God’s mercy for granted.

Monday

October 13

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.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Commentary.

I. Universal Judgment.

Most Christians are familiar with the passages on universal judgment in the New Testament. These texts declare that God judges more than just those who claim to be His followers. But many readers of the Bible assume that in the Old Testament God focused exclusively on His chosen people. The story of Nineveh, however, shows that He also dealt with the wickedness of other nations during this time.

The first such incident is His decision to destroy the earth with a Flood because of humanity's evil (Gen. 6:11-13). During the time of Abraham, He announces judgment on the non-Israelite cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18:16-19:29).

Throughout the rest of the Old Testament, we see Him condemn the depravity of other nations. In Ezekiel (Ezekiel 25-32), for example, He pronounces judgment on Ammon, Philistia, Tyre, Sidon, and Egypt. The book of Amos contains a series of oracles against the practices of certain nations (Amos 1:2-2:3). While these nations have abused Israel and Judah, the Lord also concerns Himself with ethical issues they have raised. He condemns several nations for deporting people and selling them into slavery. He particularly charges them with indulging in violence—a crime of which Nineveh is also guilty (Jon. 3:8).

II. Evil Nineveh.

We first read in Genesis 10:11, 12 about the ancient city of Nineveh, founded by Asshur after the Flood. Centuries later, as Assyria started its military push westward and threatened Israel and Judah, the prophets began to speak of Nineveh more frequently. Although most of the references come from the later period of the Assyrian Empire, the words of the prophets reflect conditions throughout Nineveh's history.

Zephaniah declares that someday, because of the city's pride, God "will make Nineveh a desolation" (Zeph. 2:13; see also vss. 14, 15).

The entire book of Nahum is an oracle against Nineveh (Nah. 1:1). The prophet declares that the city has plotted against God (vss. 9, 11), is worthless (vs. 14), and rages on the international scene like a ruthless lion (Nah. 2:11, 12; also see 3:1, 4, 19).

III. Doom Is Conditional.

The Lord's statement that Nineveh's " 'wickedness has come up before me' " (Jon. 1:2, NRSV) implies judgment and destruction. However, it does not mean that judgment and destruction automatically must happen. God tells Jonah that he must cry out against the city. This echoes Genesis 18:20, 21, in which an outcry rises against Sodom. Abraham immediately recognizes God's intention to wipe out the city and begins negotiating with Him to save it (vss. 22-32).

The English word *repent* means a change, or transformation, of

Tuesday

October 14

GOD'S STANDARD OF MORALITY.

Because 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 reveals 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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

behavior from worse to better. The Hebrew verb *niham*, while often translated “repent,” involves a decision to act differently, or to act otherwise, than before and does not necessarily mean that the first decision or action was in any way inferior to the second one. The word *relent* might therefore be a better translation of *niham*.

A fundamental principle of God’s dealings with fallen humanity appears in Ezekiel 18:21-23: “If the wicked turn away from all their sins that they have committed and keep all my statutes and do what is lawful and right, they shall surely live; they shall not die. None of the transgressions that they have committed shall be remembered against them; for the righteousness that they have done they shall live. Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, says the Lord God, and not rather that they should turn from their ways and live?” (NRSV; also see Jer. 18:7, 8; 26:2, 3).

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

Texts for Discovery: Jeremiah 31:33, Matthew 12:36, Acts 10:9-16.

1. Matthew 12:36 says we will have to give an account of every careless word we say. Ask your class members what this means to them. What does this say about God? How does this make them feel right now? Is there anything about their words they think they might need to change?
2. If God knows our every thought and action, and if the law can be written on our hearts (Jer. 31:33), then why do we find it so hard to obey? Why do we studiously teach obedience to our children but then relax the rules for ourselves?
3. Read through Acts 10:9-16. Then do the following:
 - A. Ask each of your class members to write down on a piece of paper his or her first impression of the meaning of this passage.
 - B. In Acts 10, Peter questions God’s command to eat unclean foods by saying, “‘I have never eaten anything impure’ ” (vs. 14, NIV). God rebukes Peter, telling him, “ ‘Do not call anything impure that God has made clean’ ” (vs. 15). God was not talking about unclean meat but about people of different nationalities. How often do we treat certain people as unclean and in what ways? Yet, God loves us all so much. What can we do to change our “unclean” perspective?
4. Three times God told Peter not to call common what God had made clean. Three times he denied Christ. Three times Jesus told Peter to feed His sheep. What is significant about the number three in Peter’s life?

Wednesday

October 15

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:

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.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

One would think that of all people, a prophet especially would recognize prophecy's conditional nature. Jonah had seen this principle at work throughout the history of God's people. After Israel made the golden calf, the Lord threatened to destroy them and offered to make a new people from Moses' descendants (Exod. 32:7-10). While it must have been a tempting offer—especially after the constant grief they had caused him—Moses “implored the Lord his God, and said, ‘O Lord, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, “It was with evil intent that he brought them out to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth”? Turn from your fierce wrath; change [repent, KJV] your mind and do not bring disaster on your people’ ” (vss. 11, 12, NRSV). In response, “the Lord changed his mind [repented, KJV] about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people” (vs. 14, NRSV). While the author of the book of Jonah waits until chapter 4 to express the prophet's belief that God forgives and changes His mind, the story of Jonah teaches that God is free to respond perfectly to whatever human beings do.

WITNESSING

“For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (Eccles. 12:14). Why? Because “we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against . . . spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph. 6:12). There is a spiritual warfare going on, and we must choose whom we will serve. We cannot be neutral.

Ann found her three-year-old son hiding in the food pantry after being told not to go into the kitchen. The boy had decided he wanted to taste the pudding that rested on one of the high shelves. Since the pudding had not yet been prepared, he settled for the chocolate powder still in the box. He climbed up the shelves and seized his forbidden treasure. When his mother found him sitting on the pantry floor, he was covered in dusty pudding pow-

der, holding the empty box in his hand. Startled by his mother's unexpected appearance, he cried, “I didn't do it!”

A day is coming when every hidden thing will be revealed. “For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing” (Eccles. 12:14). We will not be able to claim “I didn't do it!” All are guilty, “for all have sinned” (Rom. 3:23). Our only escape is the redeeming power of God through the blood of Jesus (Rom. 3:21-26).

God has commissioned us to preach the gospel to the world, so that all will have the opportunity to be saved. However, we cannot be effective witnesses while hiding secret sins in our hearts, those things we are not willing to give up. One day, everything will be brought to light. On that day, let us not be found *holding the box*.

Thursday

October 16

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

Scripture 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.

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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

LIFE-APPLICATION APPROACH

Icebreaker: J. Willard Marriott was once asked how his company managed to grow an average of twenty percent every year for ten years. He said the secret lay in his use of Phantom Shoppers—inspectors, posing as customers, who rate the service received. If the service is good, the phantom shopper hands the server a ten-dollar bill clipped to the back of an ID card that discloses the phantom shopper’s true identity. If the service is bad, no ten-dollar bill is attached to the back; instead, the card says “OOPS.” The server is then sent for retraining. Every employee gets three chances.

Thought Questions:

1. The Marriott Corporation generously gives its employees three chances to straighten out their acts. Our God, on the other hand, gives us “seventy times seven” (Matt. 18:22)—and more! How does God’s forgivingness help us understand His love for us? If God gives us so many chances, does His role as *Judge* contradict His many measures of forgiveness? Explain.
2. As human beings, we limit how much and how long we bear with the wickedness of those around us. However, the lesson reminds us that the wickedness of people concerns God. Does this mean that God stops caring

at a certain point? Does a time come when God has had enough of us? Explain your answer in light of Bible texts where God says things such as: “ ‘ “I will spew you out of my mouth” ’ ” (Rev. 3:16, RSV).

Application Questions:

1. God is all-knowing, all-seeing. Why don’t these characteristics of God help us live true to Him? Does the fact that God forgives us over and over again cause us to be lax in obedience to God’s law? Would your behavior and attitude be positively altered if God periodically sent a “Phantom Shopper” into your life to evaluate your Christian service? Or what if He gave you only three chances to gain eternity?
2. Compare and contrast Jonah’s attitude toward the people of Nineveh with Moses’ toward Israel after they made the golden calf. Jonah wanted the wrath of God to pour down on the Ninevites, while Moses’ response to a disobedient people was to plead to God—“Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin—; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written” (Exod. 32:32). In what ways can Moses’ attitude be our guide in the treatment of those who “persecute” (Matt. 5:11) us?

FURTHER STUDY:

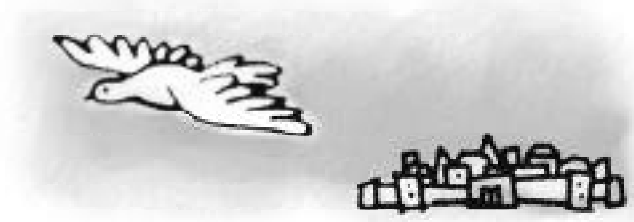
However much God wants those who hear the messages of warning and judgment to repent, He does not force the will. “The exercise of force is contrary to the principles of God’s government; He desires only the service of love; and love cannot be commanded; it cannot be won by force or authority. Only by 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 or she 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.

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.

Sunday

October 19

“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).

Jonah’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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Text: Jonah 1:3.

Teachers Aims:

1. To explore the causes behind Jonah's disobedience.
2. To emphasize God's patient grace in His response to Jonah's rebellion.

Lesson Outline:

I. Reluctant Prophets.

- A. Moses makes excuses to avoid the divine draft:
1. Timidity (Exod. 4:1).
 2. Fear of public speaking (vs. 10).
 3. Self-distrust (vs. 13).
- B. God commands Jonah to go to Nineveh, but the prophet flees in the opposite direction.

II. Jonah's Mad Flight.

- A. Of all people, Jonah should have known the futility of his flight from God.
- B. Jonah descends into a progressively deeper spiritual darkness:
1. Jonah heads "down" to Joppa to journey to Tarshish (Jon. 1:3).
 2. Jonah boards, or goes "down" onto, a ship (vs. 3).
 3. Jonah burrows "down" into the deepest part of the hull of the ship (vs. 5).
- C. Despite Jonah's downward spiral, God does not leave him to drown in spiritual darkness.

III. Nature: God's *Special Effects* (Jon. 1:4, 17).

- A. God pursues His prophet with a ship-sinking storm.
- B. God unleashes the tempest (vs. 4) for *Jonah's* benefit.
- C. The storm sent to pursue God's petulant prophet involves the fate of innocent sailors, as well.

Summary: Sin has a steep price tag. Jonah pays for his ship fare with money but almost ends up paying with his life. The ticket for Tarshish promises a one-way fare to freedom that ends in a crushing storm. Herein lies the snare of sin: It promises escape but shipwrecks lives. Only trust in God can navigate us safely through the storms of sin that thrash us.

Monday

October 20

THE “DOVE” FLEES.

God 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?

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 to do 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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Commentary.

I. The Power of Oral Presentation.

The book of Jonah is meant to be *heard*. When we read it silently, we do not sense all the power it had when people heard it recited in Bible times. Printed words lack the inflection and cadence that a trained, oral storyteller can bring to a passage. The printed word also lacks the effect of repetition. “The *repetition* of words in written material quickly becomes monotonous, but in oral discourse the speaker can play upon the repeated word or words, varying pitch, volume, and tempo for dramatic effect. In general, repetition serves to emphasize. . . . The [Hebrew] root *gdl*, ‘big, great,’ occurs fourteen times in the Jonah book. . . . big city (1:2), big wind, big storm (1:4), big fear (1:10), big storm (1:12), big fear (1:16), big fish (1:17), big city (3:2), big city (3:3), from the biggest (3:5), king and his ‘big ones’ (3:7), big anger (4:1), big gladness (4:6), big city (4:11). . . .

“A special variation of repetition is the *extension* or *diminution* of phrases. Again, such repetitions are most effective when the story is heard rather than read silently. In Jonah 1, the increasing intensity of the storm is described by the increasing length of each description (1:4, 11, 13). Another series of ‘growing phrases’ describes the increasing fear of the sailors (1:5, 10, 16). The winding down of the storm is effectively described in 1:16 with three clauses that become progressively shorter.”—James Limburg, *Jonah: A Commentary*, p. 27, author’s emphasis.

Your Sabbath School class might like to select someone who is a good reader to recite the Bible texts listed for each week’s study in Sabbath’s section of the Standard Edition of the Bible Study Guide. As this person reads the texts aloud before the class, he or she should keep in mind the above thoughts regarding oral presentations. As the class members listen, they can observe patterns and emphases they might not have noticed otherwise.

II. The Fleeing Prophet.

Prophets occasionally ran away from those who threatened them after they delivered their messages. See 1 Kings 19:2, 3 and Jeremiah 26:20-23. Jonah, however, was the only prophet to flee *before* delivering his message.

Furthermore, Scripture often presents people fleeing from something. Usually such individuals seek to make a break from a past relationship so they can start a new life. (See Gen. 16:6-8, 31:20-22, Exod. 2:15, and Judg. 11:3.)

Jonah reserves passage to Tarshish. Scholars have suggested Tarshish might have been in southern Spain or that it was the city of Carthage, on the coast of north Africa. Those who favor Spain identify it with Tartessos, a Phoenician colony at the mouth of the Guadalquivir River,

Tuesday

October 21

GOING DOWN.

Three 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?

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.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

on the Atlantic coast. A cuneiform inscription of the Assyrian King Esarhaddon (680–669 B.C.) declares that “all kings who live in the midst of the [Mediterranean] sea, from Cyprus and Javan as far as Tarshish, submit to my feet.” Several biblical passages use Tarshish as a symbol of distant places (Ps. 72:10, Isa. 66:19).

III. A Storm From God.

Scripture often portrays God as controlling the sea. (See Exodus 14, 15; Matt. 8:23-27; see also Luke 8:22-25.) Jonah 1:4 describes God as hurling “a great wind” (KJV) across the surface of the sea, producing a “great storm” (NASB). The biblical writer emphasizes the fact that the storm came from God by placing the subject (“the Lord”) at the beginning of the sentence instead of in the usual Hebrew order of verb before subject.

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

Texts for Discovery: Exodus 4:1-7, Judges 6:11-24, Jonah 1:4, Matthew 14:22-33.

1. Jonah did not want to do what God commanded. Who else did not want to do God’s bidding? Judg. 6:11-24. List and discuss the similarities and differences between Jonah and Gideon. What do their stories teach us about God?
2. God gave Moses several signs of His power. See Exodus 4:1-7. He also gave Gideon and Jonah numerous signs. What is it about people that they must see *signs* from God in order to have faith? Discuss whether or not it is wrong to ask God for *signs* in order to shore up our faith. When might it be appropriate versus inappropriate to ask for a sign?
3. In the case of Jonah, Moses, and Gideon, God did powerful things through nature. What does this tell you about God? Where else in Scripture has God shown His control over nature? Why do you think these displays of power are recorded? What can they teach us today?
4. God often used storms to get the attention of His prophets and disciples. (See Jon. 1:4 and Matt. 14:22-33.) Why do you think God uses nature to capture our attention? Why does God sometimes need to resort to such drastic measures? Discuss ways in which the quiet, peaceful side of nature teaches us about God.
5. Read Psalm 46:10. The LHH (The League for the Hard of Hearing) Noise Center reports that “noise negatively affects learning and behavior.”—(article, “Listen to the Raindrops” [cited 14 May 2002], from <http://www.lhh.org/noise/raindrops.htm>). How, then, can silence and solitude help us to know God better?

Wednesday

October 22

GOD'S PATIENT GRACE.

When 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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

The typical ship of Jonah's time was a small vessel constructed of fir planks held together with mortise and tenons. Such a ship had a deck of pine boards over a shallow hold, a cedar mast, and a single linen sail. When the wind did not blow or the crew wanted greater speed, they would propel the craft through the water with long oars made of oak. Ships hugged the coastline, since they had no compasses or other navigational instruments to guide them. The storm that lashed Jonah's vessel must have driven it far away from land.

Ancient ships had no lifeboats or rafts. Even worse, few, if any, sailors knew how to swim, because the ancients believed that water was an unnatural environment for humans. One could be tempted to interpret the story as the tantrum of an angry deity who swiftly punishes when we do not do what He wants. However, God had sent the storm to grab the prophet's attention. Because He hoped Jonah would reconsider His call to preach the gospel to Nineveh, the storm had a redemptive purpose. Had God not pursued Johah it would have confirmed the prophet in his self-destructive attitude.

"Is [the book of Jonah] meant as a parable for Israel as a whole, for any one of us in particular? Are all readers supposed to take away material for meditation on the steadfastness with which God calls them? The storms in our lives tend to be less dramatic than the one that makes Jonah famous, but it is profitable for us to interpret them as ways in which God is refusing to give up on us."—Denise Lardner Carmody and John Tully Carmody, *Corn and Ivy: Spiritual Reading in Ruth and Jonah* (Valley Forge, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 1995), p. 94.

WITNESSING

A young man stated after an adulterous relationship, "I didn't mean for it to go that far." How many people feel the same way? And not just about adultery but about other sins they have committed? We always think we have things under control.

Jonah must have thought he had everything under control. However, he overlooked the fact that things really had been in God's hands all along. Like Jonah, when things swing out of control for us and we have gone too far in sin, we are never too far from God's reach. If we cry out to Him, He will reach

out His loving hand to save us.

In our witnessing, we will meet people who believe they have gone too far, fallen too deep in sin. We must assure them God has not given up on them. His outstretched hand is waiting to save them. Ellen White writes, "Nothing is too great for Him to bear, for He holds up worlds, He rules over all the affairs of the universe. Nothing that in any way concerns our peace is too small for Him to notice. There is no chapter in our experience too dark for Him to read."—"The Privilege of Prayer," in *Steps to Christ*, pp. 100, 101.

Thursday

October 23

THE GOD OF NATURE.

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

Both 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 study, 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.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

LIFE-APPLICATION APPROACH

Icebreaker: Adam Clarke pointed out that some rabbis are of the opinion that Jonah was the widow of Sarepta’s son, restored to life by Elijah.

Regardless of Jonah’s background, one thing is certain: God knows Jonah very well, and Jonah knows God. Thus, when God gives Jonah a simple and specific command, “Arise . . . go preach” (Jon. 3:2), no room for misunderstanding presents itself. Jonah knows exactly what the Lord expects of him. Yet, he disobeys, and his disobedience afflicts him with trouble.

Thought Questions:

1. If Jonah really knows God, what is the cause of his disobedience? Surely it is not a lack of faith in God’s word. A. W. Tozer says that the essence of sin is rebellion against divine authority.

Could rebellion have caused Jonah’s disobedience? How could Jonah’s perception of the Ninevites cause him to rebel against God’s command? How does the command to “love your enemies” (Matt. 5:44) play against the acts of injustice that fall upon you at the hands of the enemy?

2. Because of his disobedience, Jonah is ensnared in a storm, cast into the sea, and swallowed by a great fish, where he lives in its belly for three

days. This does *not* sound like a vacation on a balmy island resort! Why do you think God doles out such a disgusting, yet creative, consequence? Study Jonah’s big-fish experience and trace God’s grace as it parallels the consequences of His headstrong prophet’s disobedience.

3. The storm hits with such ferocity that the sailors—men accustomed to the rage of the waters—are deathly afraid. Perhaps this is the most dreadful storm they have encountered. Their fears and reactions give us a glimpse into how one person’s disobedience affects many. Consider the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and list historical instances of times when mistakes of one individual affected many in the church.

Application Question:

Obviously, it is easier to obey the person with whom you have a close and personal relationship than one with whom you do not. However, what should be the motivating factor of our obedience in relationships that are, by nature, usually more formal or distant, such as with our government, schools, teachers, our employer, and so forth? What safety measures can you take to keep from being *rebellious* in attitude and in action toward them?

FURTHER STUDY:

What 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:

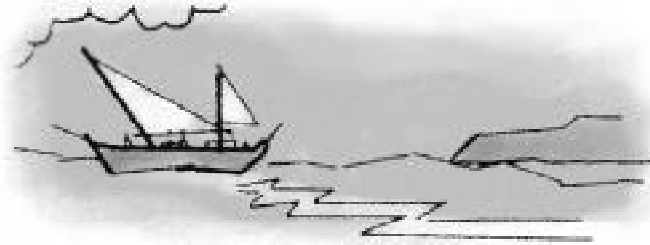
"The time is at hand when there will be sorrow in the world that no human balm can heal. The spirit of God is being withdrawn. Disasters by sea and by land follow one another in quick succession. How frequently we hear of earthquakes and tornadoes, of destruction by fire and flood, with great loss of 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 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.

Sunday

October 26

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?

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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Text: Jonah 1:9.

Teachers Aims:

1. To explore how calamity prioritizes what is important.
2. To reaffirm belief in God as Creator.

Lesson Outline:

I. Jonah: Asleep in the Storm.

- A. The crew tosses its prize cargo into the sea in order to save the ship from sinking.
- B. The captain is vexed to find Jonah asleep.
- C. He begs Jonah to pray for deliverance.
- D. God sends the storm, not in anger but in love.
- E. Pagan mariners believe a storm of this magnitude is tied to a person's guilt. Thus, finding the culprit would set matters right.
- F. God allows the casting of lots to implicate Jonah as the cause of the storm (Jon. 1:7).
- G. The sailors ask Jonah of what he is guilty.

II. The Sermon in the Storm.

- A. Jonah names God as the Sovereign Creator over land and sea (Jon 1:9).
- B. Ironically, in his attempt to avoid warning the Ninevites, Jonah finds himself doing the very thing he originally ran from: witnessing.
- C. The crew fears God more than the storm (vs. 10).
- D. They fear that in God's attempt to punish Jonah, they will die with him.
- E. The violence of the storm convinces them of God's wrath and stirs their hearts to action.

III. Castaway.

- A. The storm worsens.
- B. The sailors plead with Jonah to tell them how to avert God's anger.
- C. Jonah tells the sailors to hurl him into the sea.

Summary: Ancient beliefs held that the authority of a deity was localized to a particular region or area, such as a mountain or a river. Outside its domain, the deity held no power. Thus, when Jonah books passage to Tarshish and later *tells* the crew he is fleeing from God, it comes as no surprise that the captain does not refuse him passage. How could Jonah's land God exert power over the sea? God, however, proclaims Himself as Lord of land and sea in the storm that shakes the ship.

Monday

October 27

PAGAN MARINERS CONTINUE THEIR INITIATIVE.

The 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 ethnic 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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Commentary.

I. Storm of Terror.

God often employs the elements of nature to accomplish His purposes (Exodus 20, Judg. 5:21). In the book of Jonah, God uses a terrible storm to pursue a fleeing prophet.

As the storm rages, the sailors cry out to their gods. Ships, then as now, often had international crews. Each nation represented on this ship had its own gods, and even those sailors who belonged to the same nation may have worshiped various local deities. Furthermore, the ancients believed that the same god might manifest himself in different forms at different places. That is why the Bible will mention Baal of such and such a place. The various Baals were usually storm gods. But none of the sailors' gods seemed able or willing to help. The author does not criticize or condemn the sailors' prayers. They were sincere individuals, operating honestly within the religious frameworks they knew.

In an attempt to save themselves and to appease the gods, the sailors hurl the ship's cargo overboard. Ancient ships transported gold and silver, copper ingots shaped like ox hides, lumber from the forests of Lebanon (especially precious to Egypt, which had almost no source of wood), and huge clay jars of grain, wine, and olive oil. Valuable as the cargo of Jonah's ship might have been, life was even more precious.

II. The Sleeping Prophet.

The crew members fight for their lives, but the passenger who boarded in Joppa sleeps in the hold of the ship (Jon. 1:5). The Old Testament uses the vocabulary here for the anesthetized sleep of Adam before God removed the rib to create Eve (Gen. 2:21), for the sleep of the slothful (Prov. 10:5, 19:15), or of visionary experiences (Job 4:13, 14; Dan. 8:18). Apparently Jonah was not in an ordinary sleep, though the text does not say whether God had sent it.

The ship's captain, finding Jonah asleep, demands to know how the prophet possibly could sleep through all the commotion (Jon. 1:6). Earlier the Lord had told Jonah to get up and cry out (vs. 2). Now the pagan ship captain uses the same vocabulary. Both he, and later the king of Nineveh (Jon. 3:9), suggest that Jonah's God might hear and save them. Their tentative phrasing teaches us that no one can control the God of Israel.

III. Casting Lots.

The sailors recognize that the storm is a divine punishment on someone aboard their ship. They decide to cast lots to find out who it is. Casting lots as a means to discerning divine will appears frequently, both in Scripture and elsewhere in the ancient world. Here it possibly involved putting stones into the lap of one's garment or into a con-

Tuesday

October 28

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?

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 worshipping 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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

tainer and then shaking whatever held the stones until one of them tumbled out. (The Greek phraseology used to describe the casting of lots to select a replacement for Judas [Acts 1:26] is the same as the ancient Greek translation of Jonah 1:7.)

When the lot fell on Jonah (vs. 7), the sailors bombarded him with some questions: Why has the calamity struck them? What is his occupation? Where did he come from? and What people did he belong to?

When he tells them that he, a Hebrew who worships the Creator-God, has fled his God, they become even more afraid and demand to know why he did so (vs. 10). What are they to make of a man who openly announces that he is a servant of a God from whom he ran away in order to avoid doing His will?

Because Jonah admits that he worships the Creator-God (“ ‘who

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

Texts for Discovery: John 18:15-18, 25-27, 21:15-25; 1 John 2:15-17

1. Read 1 John 2:15-17. Where does one draw the line between having too many possessions and enough to meet our physical, spiritual, and aesthetic needs?
2. Jonah ran away from God, the same God whom He professed to the sailors. What other people in the Bible ran away from God? Name some Bible characters who did not. What made the difference in the lives of those who did not run away from the Lord?
3. Peter, who professed that he would lay down his life for Christ and seemed to do so when he defended Him with his sword, turned right around and denied Christ three times (Luke 22:54-62, John 18:15-18, 25-27). Discuss the similarities and differences between Peter's denying Christ and Jonah's running away from Christ. Jesus forgave Peter and reinstated him to the
4. What was it about Jonah that caused the captain and the sailors to single him out? Why would the captain ask Jonah to “ ‘call on your God’ ”? (Jon. 1:6, NKJV). Was there something about Jonah that screamed “Hebrew prophet”? Should there be something about us that screams “Adventist Christians”? If so, what?
5. Do you think Jonah was still running away from God when he asked the sailors to throw him overboard? Or was he acknowledging God and thinking that he deserved such a fate? Do you think that if Jonah had asked the sailors to return to port, the storm would have stopped? Would the storm have stopped if Jonah had asked to be put off the ship at the next port? What would Jonah not have learned if the great fish had not swallowed him?

Wednesday

October 29

“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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

made the sea and the dry land' ” [NRSV], a figure of speech representing all creation), they had no more doubt that it is his presence causing the storm. But what should they do about it? Jonah assures them that when they hurl him into the sea, the storm will cease (vs. 12). In asking the sailors to treat him as excess baggage, we realize that Jonah truly would die rather than do God’s will.

IV. Godly Pagans.

Unlike Jonah, who, as we shall see later, is still willing to allow a populous city to perish, the sailors are humane. They want Jonah to live (vs. 13).

Besides sails, the other power for ancient ships was rowing. Now the pagan sailors try to get their vessel back to land with their oars. The Hebrew literally says that they “dig” their oars into the water. They do not want to sacrifice Jonah, even to save themselves. Desperately they struggle against the waves, but the storm worsens, and they beg Jonah’s God to save them. As they “cried out to the Lord” (vs. 14, NRSV), we again hear an echo of God’s call to Jonah. Further, they acknowledge that the God of Israel has done as *He* pleases (vs. 14).

But what about Jonah? He does not pray even to save himself. The only alternative he offers the sailors is his life for theirs. This is not self-sacrifice but selfishness. He is determined to escape his mission

WITNESSING

In Jonah 1:3, we read how Jonah fled from what God wanted him to do. However, just as he had settled in the bottom of the ship, God took control. He sent “a great wind . . . and . . . a mighty tempest” (vs. 4). Fearing for their lives, the other men on board began to pray to their false gods of wood and stone—gods who could not see, hear, or speak; gods they had created by their own hands or imaginings. Later, Jonah confessed “I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land’ ” (vs. 1:9, NKJV). No wonder the men on the ship were exceedingly afraid. Jonah professed to worship the God who created the sea—the same sea possessed by a raging storm on which their little ship was helplessly tossed to and fro.

It was God who commanded the scorching fire of Nebuchadnezzar’s furnace not to consume Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. It was God who caused the fountains of the heavens to burst forth and flood the earth in the days of Noah. It was God who ordained the hawk to fly and the eagle to soar up at His command (Job 39:26, 27).

Many people trust in earthly things: money, possessions, false religion, etc. But like the fire, the water, and every living creature, we must bear witness that because the God of heaven is greater than all these, we are to worship Him. Like Jonah, we also are to proclaim our faith in the living God who “made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is” (Exod. 20:11).

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.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

to Nineveh. While the sailors do not wish to die, neither do they want the prophet's blood on their hands (vs. 14). Finally, they fear that they have no other choice. As they hurl him into the sea, it grows calm (vs. 15). God's need for the storm ends, so it ceases to rage. The sailors accept the storm as a display of His power, while Jonah takes advantage of it as a way out of his duty.

LIFE-APPLICATION APPROACH

Icebreaker: The royal portrait looks like a parody. William Scrots, the court painter, appears to have done a great injustice to Edward VI—the skull balloons out in the back, the forehead bulges forward, the nose curves like a beak, and the chin under-shoots the face. This, however, is no ordinary piece of art. It is anamorphosis art, which can be appreciated only by squinting at the picture through a peephole in the side of the frame. From this *narrow* view, one may see the real, true-to-life, handsomely proportioned face of Edward VI.

Thought Questions:

1. Sometimes a narrow perspective is needed; at other times it is advantageous to see the bigger picture. Think of examples that illustrate this. Describe Jonah's perspective of God's plan for Nineveh. What obstructions blocked Jonah from viewing it according to God's vantage point? What is the ideal, mature response to a change in plans? What are the characteristics of sin that keep us from responding positively to change?
2. Israel was designed to attract surrounding nations to the

true God. However, history records that this is not what happened; Israel assimilated with, more than it strived to be set apart from, its neighbors. Like Israel, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is made up of a called-out people, a group selected to be peculiar. Why, then, are we often embarrassed by our peculiarities? What are the advantages and disadvantages of being different? What role do our differences play in the bigger picture?

Application Question:

In 1910, the boll weevil wiped out the cotton crop in the southern United States, forcing farmers to diversify by planting peanuts and other crops they never thought of growing before. The change brought prosperity to the region. Growers in Enterprise, Alabama, were so grateful to the destructive beetle for ending their one-crop dependency they eventually erected a monument to it in the town square in 1919. Time has a way of putting things into the right perspective. Share some of your *big-fish* and *boll-weevil* experiences that, over time, turned out to be blessings.

FURTHER STUDY:

Contrast 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.

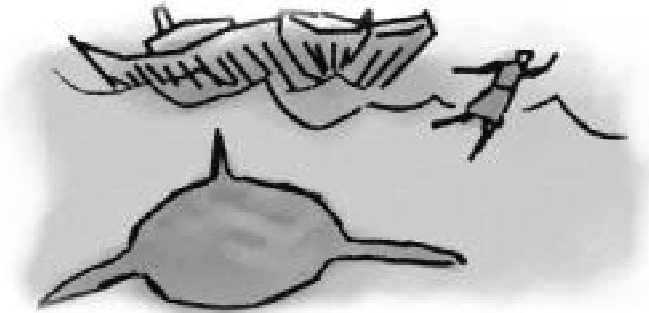
Consider how Paul takes command of the situation and declares that God will save all those on board. Courageously he exhorts them not to despair. "Last night there was standing beside me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, and He said, "Do not be afraid, Paul. You are destined to appear 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.

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.

Sunday

November 2

THE FEAR OF THE LORD.

Last 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.

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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Text: Jonah 1:16.

Teachers Aims:

1. To examine the impact of the storm upon the faith of the sailors.
2. To emphasize that Jonah's prophetic calling would be futile without personal conviction.

Lesson Outline:

I. Conviction Through Adversity.

- A. Tough pagan sailors become believers in God.
- B. God uses Jonah, despite himself, to reach those who normally would scorn belief in His power.
- C. Limited knowledge of God does not keep the sailors from acting on their fledgling faith.
- D. In a heroic but futile attempt to save Jonah, the sailors first row toward land before giving up in defeat and throwing him overboard.

II. "Out of the Belly of Hell Cried I" (Jon. 2:2).

- A. Jonah uses rich images, such as chains of seaweed imprisoning his body as the sea swallows him, to evoke a spiritual drowning.
- B. God prepares an *ark* of safety in the belly of a fish to shelter Jonah much in the same way he sheltered Noah in a wooden ark during the Flood.
- C. God's vessel of captivity provides the opportunity for Jonah's redemption.

III. Salvation in the Gut of a Fish.

- A. Jonah acknowledges God as his Savior.
- B. Jonah accepts his prophetic commission.
- C. God accepts Jonah's commitment to serve Him.

Summary: Through nature God teaches Jonah true faith. However, Jonah's choices make each lesson tougher than the last. A bullheaded and reckless obstinance to follow his own path leads him to the bottom of the sea.

Commentary.

I. Fear God and Worship Him.

The storm ceases, and the sailors "feared" God (Jon. 1:16). The Old Testament portrays such fear as an attitude of awe and reverence that leads to worship. Such fear also includes gratitude and thankfulness.

Monday

November 3

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

For 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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

The sailors offer a sacrifice to God, perhaps a grain or libation offering, since they cannot have a large fire on board ship. They also make vows to Him. The book of Jonah does not mention any formal act of conversion on their part, because they are already pious, devout men. They may have worshiped other gods, but unlike Jonah, they ultimately seek to do the Lord's will. The sailors have a strong, ethical sense—they cared for the rebellious prophet and hesitated to cast him overboard even to save themselves. As we shall continue to see, the pagans in the book of Jonah are more godly than the Lord's own prophet. In spite of Jonah's terrible witness, they accept his God.

II. In the Great Fish.

The Lord now “provides,” “appoints,” “assigns,” or “prepares” a large fish to catch Jonah as he plunges into the sea (vs. 17). The verb *manah*, used here and translated by the preceding English words, also appears in Jonah 4:6-8. In these verses, God sends a plant, a worm, and a hot dry wind to do His bidding. The Hebrew word translated “fish” refers to any sea creature, so it is pointless to speculate what it was. The text implies that it may have been some creature God created just for the occasion. It had some special characteristic(s) that regular fish do not have, as did the plant that suddenly could grow large enough in an extremely brief time to provide shade (Jon. 4:6).

Scripture mentions the creature in only a few places such as Jonah 1:17, 2:1, and 2:10, and perhaps we should spend only a little time on it, as well. We should avoid becoming so involved in measuring the gullet sizes of various marine animals that we never learn the messages God inspired the book to teach us.

III. Jonah's Undersea Prayer.

During the storm, Jonah did not bother to pray. Now, though, he does pray—in the belly of the fish. His prayer is patterned after a psalm of individual thanksgiving (Psalms 18, 30, 32, 34, 40:1-10, 66:13-20, 92, 116, 118, 138). Comparing Jonah 2:2-9 with Psalm 30 shows the pattern Jonah follows.

Jonah 2:2. The prophet calls out to God twice, perhaps first when he splashes into the water. Does the cold water shock some sense into him? Jonah prays the second time when he is in “‘the belly of Sheol’ ” (NRSV)—the place of the dead. Desmond Alexander suggests that Jonah is afraid he will be abandoned in Sheol and thus forever separated from God. (See T. Desmond Alexander, “Jonah: An Introduction and Commentary,” in David W. Baker, Desmond Alexander, and Bruce K. Waltke, *Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah: An Introduction and Commentary* [Leicester, Eng.: InterVarsity Press, 1988], pp. 113, 114). The prophet who fled from God's presence now fears he will actually be cut off from God.

Jonah 2:3. While the sailors may have been the ones to physically toss the prophet into the sea, Jonah recognizes God's hand in it.

Tuesday

November 4

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).

Jesus 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.

It 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.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

The will of humans may, for a time, frustrate His plans, but God is ultimately in control of everything.

Jonah 2:4. As the waves surge over him, the prophet who ran away from God experiences ever more strongly his alienation from the Lord. Earlier, he could not get far enough away. Now the thought of being separated from God terrifies him. The temple is the physical symbol of God's presence. The Hebrew word at the beginning of the second clause has been translated "how," "yet," or "surely." Jonah either wonders whether he ever will see the temple again, or he is sure that he will.

Jonah 2:5. Up to this point, Jonah has used traditional language from the psalms. Now the words of his prayer/psalm are uniquely his.

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

Texts for Discovery: Joshua 24:14, Galatians 2:19-21, Revelation 14:7.

1. Read Galatians 2:19-21. Then have class members reread it silently, putting their name in place of the word *I*. Finally, ask them to discuss what such a reading did for them personally.
2. God did not give up on Jonah. Think about God's relationship with Israel in the Old Testament. How many times did He deliver His covenant people? Once? Twice? Five times? Sixty? Why do you think God never gave up on them? Why does He not give up on us? How does this reassure you?
3. We do not know how long Jonah was in the belly of the great fish before he prayed. Did he pray immediately? Or did it take him a while to acknowledge that God had given him a second chance? How long does it take for us to seek God when we find ourselves in trouble? If it takes us awhile, what does this say about the nature of our devotional life and the nature of our relationship with Christ?
4. Read Joshua 24:14 and Revelation 14:7. What are the similarities and differences between these verses? Based on these texts, how can we define what it means to "fear God"? When people usually think of fear, they think of being anxious, terrified, or uneasy. Why would Satan want us to feel this way about God?
5. Jonah attempted to flee from the sight of God; yet, we know God sees all things. Still, we often do the same thing as Jonah. What other parallels exist between Jonah and modern Christians, perhaps even yourself? What can we do so we do not become like Jonah? What can we do to change if we already *are* like him?

Wednesday

November 5

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?

Compare 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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Jonah 2:6. Plunging to the roots of the mountains that extend to the floor of the sea, Jonah feels himself descending to the metaphorical world of the dead, depicted in the imagery of an ancient near-eastern city with a gate secured by bolts and bars of iron. Once inside the city of Sheol, Jonah would find himself imprisoned there forever.

Throughout the book, the author has portrayed Jonah in a continuous downward descent. The prophet goes *down* to Joppa and *down* into a ship. He slumbers *down* in the ship's hold and gets thrown *down* into the sea. Now, however, he changes direction. The Lord brings him up from the pit, or Sheol. Old Testament poetry uses these terms in parallel, meaning they indicate the same thing (see Ps. 16:10 for an example of similar parallel construction). To be rescued from death means being saved from the pit (Job 33:28). The pit is the grave.

We see why Jonah stops going down in the next verse.

Jonah 2:7. As Jonah is about to pass out for lack of oxygen, his thoughts turn to God as his prayer ascends to God's presence in the temple.

Jonah 2:8. This verse is difficult to translate. It probably suggests the idea that those who worship idols will discover during times of

WITNESSING

Imagine being swallowed alive by a giant fish. You might think Jonah was terrified, not knowing whether he would die inside this great creature or miraculously live. For Jonah, however, being in the fish's belly meant salvation. The fact that he was still alive was comforting to him, for it told him the Lord had answered his prayer.

Jonah was much more afraid when he was sinking in the depths of the cold, dark sea. What he feared most was not losing his life but his soul. In chapter 2 he states, "The waters compassed me about, even to the soul" (vs. 5). "When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord" (vs. 7). And "thou [hast] brought up my life from corruption (vs. 6).

People often turn to the Lord on their deathbeds. In many cases,

the Lord may use impending death or the fear of dying to direct an individual's thoughts toward Him. However, we should be more afraid of losing our souls instead of our lives. As we witness, we can share the following text with unbelievers: "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28). Yet, we can find comfort in knowing that Jesus "is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25). Although God is able to destroy our very souls, He loves us so much that He desires to save us and give us everlasting life.

Thursday

November 6

PRAYING IN ONE'S EXTREMITY.

Jonah 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.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

trouble that idols have no real power. When the idol worshipers recognize that fact, they will abandon their false gods. Implied is the concept that those who worship the true God will always find Him trustworthy. The NRSV translates the passage as “ ‘those who worship vain idols forsake their true loyalty.’ ” The word rendered “loyalty” is *chesed*, the term for covenant love and often used for God’s enduring love and mercy toward humanity (Pss. 100:5; 106:1; 118:1, 2; 136). The idolaters unknowingly forsake the One who is their true God.

Jonah 2:9. Having seen how God can rescue him from death, Jonah promises to sacrifice and make vows. He has finally reached the spiritual maturity we saw in the sailors (Jon. 1:16). No longer abandoning the Lord, he will seek the God of *chesed* love. But he does not yet understand that love. It is just an intellectual concept, one that he does not fully agree with when God shows it to the people of Nineveh. And although he has just contrasted himself with idol worshipers, he does not recognize that he has forsaken God in the past just as much as they have.

Jonah has stopped running away. Yet, he has more maturing to do, as we shall see in the rest of the book. He is thankful when God saves him. But he becomes angry when God wants to save others.

LIFE-APPLICATION APPROACH

Icebreaker: Daniel Webster—America’s outstanding statesman, lawyer, orator, and leader—was asked, at a banquet held in his honor, what the greatest thought was that ever entered his mind. Without hesitation, Webster replied, “The greatest thought that ever entered my mind was the thought of my responsibility to God.” As he spoke, he wept, excused himself from the banquet, and regained control of his emotions. When he returned, he talked for thirty minutes about a person’s responsibility to God.

Thought Question:

Daniel Webster could not sepa-

rate his personal life or his professional life from his Creator. Every breathing moment of life involved God. What tangible differences can a conscious knowledge of God’s presence make in your life?

Application Question:

Throughout the Bible we see how God uses all kinds of people, situations, and objects to function as pieces of the beautiful story of salvation. How do your specific talents fit into God’s plan of salvation? List three ways you can use your special gifts to share the story of the Cross with others.

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.

But, 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.

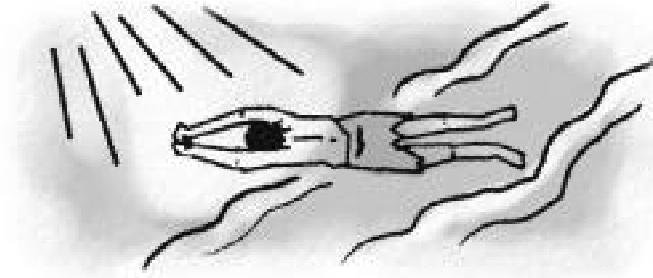
“It will not help you in the least to keep mourning over your defects. Say, ‘Lord, I cast my helpless soul on Thee, and Thee alone. I will not worry, because Thou hast said, “Ask, and ye shall receive.”’ Believe that you do receive. Believe that your Saviour is full of compassion, full of tender pity 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.

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.

Sunday

November 9

THE “WORD” REAPPEARS.

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

Many 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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Text: Jonah 2:10.

Teachers Aims:

1. To explore why God gave Jonah a second chance.
2. To define how God's grace is expressed in Jonah's divine rescue from his deep-sea captivity.

Lesson Outline:

I. God's Power Over Creation.

- A. By the power of His word, the Lord frees Jonah from his underwater captivity.
- B. The fish vomits Jonah onto dry land.
- C. God's actions toward us are revealed through the power of His Word made flesh; that is, through His Son, Jesus.

II. One of Jonah's Many Gifts From God: Second Chances.

- A. God's restoration of Jonah is an object lesson for the whole human race.
- B. The whole plan of salvation rests on the idea of forgiveness.
- C. In parallel to Jonah, we are no more deserving of second chances than he was.

III. God's Grace: A Lifeline to the Sinner Sinking in Sin.

- A. God rescues us time and again, not only from sin but from our own sinful nature.
- B. Not even a rebellious prophet can stop God from offering a second chance to Nineveh.
- C. God offers the same second chances to us.

Summary: Only through adversity does Jonah, a professed believer, come to accept God's command. How often, in the spirit of Jonah, have we not turned our own backs on God's call to action only to be thrust into adversity where, finally, we call upon God to rescue us? However, through God's grace we also are given second chances to accept His calling.

Commentary.

I. The Power of a Word.

Modern Western readers do not sense the full significance of the statement "the Lord spoke to the fish, and it spewed Jonah out upon the dry land" (Jon. 2:10). Political speeches, sales spiels, and the

Monday

November 10

SECOND CHANCES.

Jonah 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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

often nonsensical lyrics of today's music have devalued the significance of words.

In the ancient world, however, a word contained the essence of what it stood for. The ancient Egyptians considered words so powerful that they put them on the walls of tombs and temples to protect people from danger and to make sure they would survive in the afterlife. As long as someone's name was written somewhere, that person would continue to exist. When a visitor to a tomb read out loud the offering inscription, it made the food listed there come into existence for the deceased.

The Egyptians also were careful never to write down any bad events, because they believed that such an act could cause the event to happen again. Thus, they would not have recorded the Exodus and its plagues.

It is this ancient sense of the awesome power of words that helps us understand what the Bible has in mind when it has God speaking the world into existence (Genesis 1, 2) or sending "the word of the Lord" (Jon. 1:1) to a prophet. God exhibits His divine power when He speaks worlds into existence or foretells the fate of Nineveh. Unlike the false gods, His words make things happen. When God spoke to the fish, it had no choice but to do what He commanded. The fish, under divine control, vomits Jonah on land.

II. The God of Many Chances.

Jonah is the only prophet in the Bible whom God calls twice (Jon. 1:1, 3:1). (When Scripture says that "the word of the Lord came . . . a second time" [NRSV] to a prophet, it means that this person received an additional message, not a new calling.) If we had been a part of Jonah's mission committee, we might have fired him immediately and found a replacement. God, however, did not. He not only wanted to save Nineveh, He desired to use Jonah. Jonah represents the repeated opportunities God gave the Israelites, and he reminds us of the opportunities God continues to offer us when we fail. The Lord, in His great patience, is willing to start all over again with us.

The Lord could have confronted Jonah with the obvious conclusion: "So you thought you could run away from Me. Well, you can't!" Or He could have lectured him on his disobedience and foolishness. However, instead of anger, God just asks the prophet to resume the mission.

III. Proclaiming the Good News.

The Hebrew word translated "proclaim/proclamation" is *kerygma* in the Septuagint. It is the word the New Testament uses for apostolic preaching (Rom. 16:25, 1 Cor. 1:21, 15:14, Titus 1:3). The *kerygma* of the New Testament was the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, whom God had sent to save the lost. Jonah had undergone only a symbolic death, burial, and resurrection, but he could point the people of Nineveh to the God who truly offered salvation.

Tuesday

November 11

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?

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?

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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

In Jonah 1:2, God had instructed the prophet to “ ‘cry out *against*’ ” (NRSV, emphasis supplied), or *over* the city. Now the Lord directs him to “ ‘proclaim *to* it the message that I tell you’ ” (Jon. 3:2, NRSV, emphasis supplied). The shift directs the reader’s attention to the possibility that Nineveh’s fate is not sealed, that the city can do something about its doom.

IV. Jonah Accepts His Mission.

Although Jonah is still a reluctant prophet, he does not run away the second time (see Jon. 3:3). His journey would be about five hundred and fifty miles. Because of the great danger of traveling by one’s self, he most likely joined a caravan. Caravans generally traveled twenty to twenty-five miles a day, so the trip would take about a

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

Texts for Discovery: Isaiah 55:10, 11; 1 John 1:9; 1 John 2:3-6.

1. God gave Jonah a second chance. To whom else did God give a second chance, and why?
2. Read Isaiah 55:10, 11. What comfort does this text give you? God’s Word never returns empty-handed. What does that mean to you as you share His message with others? What about the “word” you give to others? Is it empty-handed? Discuss ways we can share God’s Word in meaningful ways. Be creative.
3. When Jonah confessed, God gave him a second chance. Read 1 John 1:9. Can you store up your confessions and do them all at once, or must you confess every time you sin? If God knows your sins, why must you confess them at all?
4. Read Ephesians 2:1-10 and the following quote: “Before creation it was planned that those saved by grace should have good works as a witness to the fact.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1008: “Before ordained.” Finally, have class members silently compare the text with their own spiritual journey in the past year.
5. Read 1 John 2:3-6. Discuss how Jesus walked on this earth. How might we follow His example? What help do we need in order to walk as He did?

Wednesday

November 12

SECOND CHANCES AGAIN.

Notice 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?

Read 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 non-believers? 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).

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.

Go 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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

month. As he traveled, did he think about how he would present his message? Or did the anger that would erupt later fester in his thoughts? Whatever went through his mind, God did not destroy or even punish him for what must have been a bad attitude. God always waits and woos and allows us to respond only as we are ready to do so. The book of Jonah offers much insight on how to respond to the resistance and hostility of others. An important aspect of the great controversy is God's desire that we respond to His calls with nothing less than our free will.

We also must keep in mind that God accepted Jonah even though he was going to Nineveh for the wrong reason—hoping against hope that God would actually destroy the wicked city.

WITNESSING

If I could do it all over again, I would do things differently. Isn't that a familiar concept?

If you had a second chance at something, what would you do differently? Everyday we are given a second chance, another opportunity to live for the Lord, another day to be a witness. "It is [because] of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed. . . . They are new every morning . . ." (Lam. 3:22, 23).

You often may find yourself in difficult situations involving other people or just one other person. In these moments of difficulty, embrace the opportunity to let others see Christ in you. Like Queen Esther, it may be that the Lord

has brought you to the place where you are appointed "for such a time as this" (Esther 4:14).

The Lord has a purpose for our lives. And when we let Him, He fulfills that purpose. Ultimately, His plan is to save us and to lead others to Himself through us. He does not want anyone to be lost. When the Lord wants to use us in His service, let us be willing to serve Him.

Ephesians 4:25-32 tells us how we should relate to others. These principles apply not only to how we are to treat fellow believers but how we should treat non-believers, as well. It is by our conduct and our conversation that we are able to win souls to Christ.

Thursday

November 13

ANOTHER TRY.

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

The 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.)

TEACHERS COMMENTS

LIFE-APPLICATION APPROACH

Icebreaker: As Copernicus, the great astronomer, was dying, a copy of his great book, *The Revolution of the Heavenly Bodies*, was placed in his hands. But it was not his brilliant work that occupied his last thoughts. Instead, he directed that the following epitaph be placed on his grave at Frauenburg: “O Lord, the faith thou didst give to St. Paul, I cannot ask; the mercy thou didst show to St. Peter, I dare not ask; but, Lord, the grace thou didst show unto the dying robber, that, Lord, show to me.” There is no one who cannot come to God under those terms.—Adapted from James S. Hewett, *Illustrations Unlimited* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1988), p. 346.

Thought Questions:

1. Compare the book of Jonah with other Old Testament prophetic books. Jonah is unique because, unlike the others, it focuses more on the prophet’s experience than on his message. It is a book about a man on the run—running away from a God of grace. It is a book about the *changing moment* in every person’s life when a choice is made that forever changes one’s life. Why is it important to understand that this is a story about Jonah, about one man’s choice?
2. Read Psalms 39:5, 89:48, Ecclesiastes 8:8, and James

4:14. What are the characteristics of a human being that cause him or her to search for God only when in dire need? Why does self-sufficiency blind us to our need for God? (See Rev. 3:15-18.)

Application Questions:

1. Notice that when Jonah decides to run away, a ship (with room for Jonah) conveniently waits for him. That’s how Satan operates. He is a master travel agent who stands waiting to assist your flight away from God. Share instances when everything seemed to fall in place, facilitating the wrong decisions in life. How can such assistance from Satan sometimes be misconstrued as *signs from God*?
2. Share experiences when you were given a second chance you did not deserve. What kinds of feelings are cultivated through second chances? What should be your response to others when you experience grace? How different is God’s exhibition of grace from ours? How is it possible to bridge this difference? What are the advantages of striving to emulate God’s grace? Are there any disadvantages? Explain.

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.

Wake 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?

Jonah, the Amazing Evangelist



Sabbath Afternoon

JONAH 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.

Sunday

November 16

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).

It 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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Text: Jonah 3:4.

Teachers Aims:

1. To explore the essence of Jonah's message to Nineveh.
2. To examine the Ninevites' response to the message Jonah delivered.
3. To define the lessons that we as a church can learn from the Ninevites.

Lesson Outline:

I. God's Message to Nineveh.

- A. Jonah cries out against Nineveh as soon as he sets foot inside the city.
- B. Jonah—his body in all likelihood visibly altered by his ordeal in the belly of the fish—perhaps appears to the Ninevites as the very wrath of God made flesh.

II. Sackcloth and Ashes.

- A. From the greatest to the least, the Ninevites are impressed by the truth of Jonah's message of doom.
- B. Once again, as on the ship, unbelievers take action to heed God's warning.
- C. The strength of the message and the conviction that it instills in Nineveh are best demonstrated by the king of Nineveh, who leads his city in repentance.

III. Nineveh's Repentance and Seeking of Mercy.

- A. The king of Nineveh is so moved by Jonah's preaching that he personally calls for a reform of the entire nation of Assyria.
- B. Like the sailors on the ship to Tarshish, the king recognizes that forgiveness comes only from God's mercy.
- C. In an ironic twist, God's own people do not repent of their transgressions and later reap the bitter harvest at the hands of their enemies.

Summary: The Ninevites know very little of God, and, yet, they yield swiftly to His commands. Ironically, Israel, rich in a knowledge of the Lord, in their arrogance choose to ignore God's reproofs and later are carried away into captivity. This is a warning to all God's people to spurn neither His mercy nor His invitation to come to Him in repentance.

Commentary.

I. A Great City Before God.

Jonah 3:3 says that Nineveh was a three-day's walk across. Skep-

Monday

November 17

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?

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.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

tics have argued that the city was not big enough to require three days to cross or even follow its surrounding walls. Others have suggested that Jonah started to preach only after he had gone a day's journey into the city or that he walked through it one day, preached for a day, and left the third day. But such quibbling misses the point. The author means that it is a large and important city—especially in God's eyes. The author also could have had in mind more than the city itself. Nineveh also included a large administrative district attached to it, just as we consider the suburbs around a major city to be part of the city itself.

God wants to save the people of Nineveh from destroying themselves and others. Jonah's mission was to warn them of that destruction. The most important point—indicated by the literal Hebrew—is that the city is “great to/for God.”

II. A Brief Evangelistic Series.

The book of Jonah does not go into detail about what the prophet preached. It says only that he declared “ ‘Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown’ ” (Jon. 3:4, NRSV). While Scripture uses the verb *hapak* (“overturn,” “overthrow”) for the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (see Gen. 19:25, Lam. 4:6, Amos 4:11), it also can mean “to turn around,” “to transform” (see 1 Kings 22:34, Jer. 13:23). Perhaps God inspired Jonah to employ a deliberately unclear word. If Nineveh did not “turn around,” it would have to be “turned over, overturned.”

The brief message might imply that Jonah did not put a lot of planning into it or that its power lay not in Jonah's eloquence but in God's power. Whatever the reason, Jonah's heart was not in it. Although he had at last traveled to Nineveh, he was still a most reluctant prophet, hoping that God really would destroy the brutal city. We must remember that in the ancient world prophets were not missionaries. Jonah went to deliver nothing less than a warning. He did not call for repentance or for the people to reject false gods.

III. An Instant Response.

The text strongly suggests that Jonah did not preach beyond the first day. But the Ninevites responded immediately. “It would not have mattered that Jonah was an outsider representing another country or another deity. The polytheistic beliefs of the ancient world allowed for hundreds of gods, any of whom might be capable of impacting their lives for good or ill. Foreign delegations would at times have included prophetic personnel so that the favor or disfavor of the major deities involved could be expressed concerning any negotiations. . . . The fact that [Jonah] was a foreigner would have served as evidence of the truth of his message, for why would someone have traveled all this distance unless impelled by deity?”—John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP*

Tuesday

November 18

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.)

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000), pp. 779, 780.

The Holy Spirit filled Jonah's few words with a power he probably did not intend, and the people believed the message from the God of Israel. The Hebrew idiom "believe in" expresses the concept of trusting or having confidence in a person (see Gen. 15:6, 1 Sam. 27:12). The Ninevites trusted God's word better than did His own people.

Even though to Nineveh the Lord is a foreign deity, the people acknowledge their sin when, through Jonah, God confronts them with it. The king of Nineveh asks his people to "turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands" (Jon. 3:8, NRSV). They "turn" instead of being "overturned." The Assyrian Empire was known for its violence. Violence in such passages as Genesis 6:11 and Habakkuk 1:3 refers not just to random acts but a whole philosophy of behavior. Assyria had based its policy on premeditated and systematic cruelty and force. Nineveh and its people now vowed to turn away from such a lifestyle. To demonstrate their intention, they prayed and

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

Texts for Discovery: Jeremiah 29:13; Jonah 3:4, 6-8.

1. Just as the number three is used repeatedly in the Bible, so is the number 40. (See Gen. 7:17; Num. 14:33, 34; Matt. 4:2; and Mark 1:13.) Based on these verses, why do you think God gave the Ninevites 40 days to repent in Jonah 3:4?
2. From reading Jonah, it appears that the entire population of Nineveh repented. Yet, these were people who had no prior concept of God as a saving God and as a God who wants to know us personally. How would you use Jeremiah 29:13 to explain to a non-Christian how the Ninevites repented?
3. Jonah 3:6-8 tells us that the king led his people in repentance. What was the significance of his laying aside his royal robes for sackcloth? How did this act of humility affect his people?
4. Nineveh was the largest city in the northern kingdom. Yet, every person repented. How is this possible, and what does it tell you about God?
5. Both the ship's captain and the king of Nineveh called on God to have compassion and to save their people. From the lesson this week, we learned that everyone has a conscience that may be touched by the power of God. Why do you think that people who do not have a personal relationship with God often call on Him in times of trouble but then return to their former indifference to Him after He has answered their prayers?

Wednesday

November 19

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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

fasted. Interestingly, when the king urges the people to “ ‘turn from their evil ways’ ” (NRSV), he is employing the language used by the Hebrew prophets (see Jer. 15:7; 18:11; 23:22; 25:5; 26:3; 35:15; 36:3, 7; Ezek. 3:19; 13:22; 18:23; 20:44; 33:9, 11; Zech. 1:4).

IV. Who Knows?

The phrase “ ‘Who knows?’ ” (Jon. 3:9, NRSV) also appears in the story of the child born from the illicit relationship of David with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 12:22) and the locust plague in Joel (Joel 2:13, 14). In all three cases, the words are spoken in conjunction with *fast*. (David fasts as an individual and Israel and Nineveh as whole communities.)

God accepts the repentance of the Ninevites and changes His mind about the calamity He said He would bring upon them (Jon. 3:10). The Hebrew verb behind the phrase “change mind” is the *niphal* conjugation of *niham*, meaning “to be sorry, to rue, to repent, to change one’s mind.” The *niphal* form appears a number of times in the Old Testament. Of those, the following—Exodus 13:17, Job 42:6, Jeremiah 31:19—have human subjects. The rest involve God. They fall into three categories:

1. *God repents of past actions*: Genesis 6:6, 7; 1 Samuel 15:11, 35;

WITNESSING

Earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes, and floods are just a few of the natural disasters that have caused both the death of millions and a tremendous amount of property damage. Meteorologists use radar to observe and forecast the weather. Storm watches and warnings have helped to save many lives. However, a warning is good only if people heed it. Many have died needlessly because they did not. In Noah’s day, only eight people out of the whole earth’s population heeded God’s warning about the Flood. Lot and his two daughters were the only three survivors when God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah by fire.

Although many disasters have occurred as a result of God’s judgment, He is not a God of destruc-

tion. “ ‘ “As I live,” ’ says the Lord God, ‘ “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live” ’ ” (Ezek. 33:11, NRSV).

The people of Nineveh heeded God’s warning and repented, so He was able to save them. When Abraham pleaded with the Lord to save Sodom and Gomorrah, God promised to save the two cities, even if there were only ten righteous people (Gen. 18:32). No wonder the Lord was so willing to spare the entire city of Nineveh when it repented.

When witnessing to people, we can show them from the Word of God that they are of great value to the Lord (Luke 12:24) and that He will save to the uttermost those who come to Him (Heb. 7:25).

Thursday

November 20

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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Jeremiah 20:16; 42:10; Zechariah 8:14.

2. *God speaks of future actions He may change:* Exodus 32:12, 14; 2 Samuel 24:16; 1 Chronicles 21:15; Jeremiah 18:8, 10; 26:3, 13, 19; Amos 7:3, 6.

3. *Twice the verb appears in a statement describing God*, once by God Himself (Joel 2:13) and the other by Jonah (Jon. 4:2).

In the great controversy, God's actions can depend upon humanity's response.

LIFE-APPLICATION APPROACH

Icebreaker: Bob Hope once said, "Today my heart beat 103,369 times, my blood traveled 168 million miles, I breathed 23,400 times, I inhaled 438 cubic feet of air, I ate 3 pounds of food, drank 2.9 pounds of liquid, I perspired 1.43 pints, I gave off 85.3 degrees of heat, I generated 450 tons of energy, I spoke 4,800 words, I moved 750 major muscles, my nails grew .01714 inches, and I exercised 7 million brain cells. Gee, but I'm tired!" In spite of flaws generated by sin, human beings continue to remain the most amazing creation of all.

Thought Questions:

1. Our high level of intelligence and our immense capacity to reason, when unconsecrated to God, are often Satan's greatest tools. Sometimes, like Jonah, we seek to question God's plans. What must be our response when God calls us to do that which seems nonsensical, odd, or a waste of time?
2. Our power of reasoning makes it easy to justify our actions and to judge the actions of oth-

ers. However, judgment is God's prerogative, not ours. How do we curb the tendency to be as judgmental as Jonah was? How can we demonstrate to others the heart of a God who loves the willfully arrogant and the ignorant just as much as He loves us?

Application Questions:

1. How do human intelligence and technology impede evangelism nowadays? How can we incorporate technology in the advancement of evangelism? Together with the class, think of innovative ways to witness and evangelize using technology.
2. The title of this week's lesson is "Jonah, the Amazing Evangelist." List the characteristics that make Jonah "amazing." How can we emulate these characteristics, both individually and corporately as a church? What is the role of the Holy Spirit in helping us develop these characteristics? How can we help one another become "amazing evangelists"?

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.

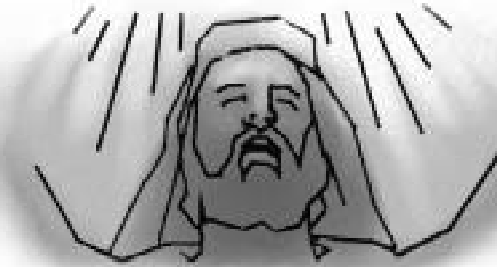
“The pardon granted by this king represents a divine forgiveness of all sin. Christ is represented by the king, who, moved with compassion, forgave the debt of his servant. Man was under the condemnation of the broken law. He could not save himself, and for this reason Christ came to this world.” —Ellen 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.

Conversing With God



Sabbath Afternoon

JONAH 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.

One 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 in one called to be a prophet.

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

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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Text: Jonah 4:1-4.

Teachers Aims:

1. To examine the cause of Jonah's response to the repentance of Nineveh.
2. To define what this story reveals about God's grace.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Unlikeliest Prophet's Un-Prophetlike Response.

- A. Nineveh's repentance and God's mercy anger Jonah.
- B. Jonah may be worried that he will be viewed as a false prophet and a failure because God did not destroy the city.
- C. Jonah's anger is an accusation that "God was so merciful that He was not just."—Exell, p. 200.
- D. He asks God to end his life (Jon. 4:3).

II. God's Mercy, Grace, and Patience.

- A. The Lord knew Jonah's heart and how he would react yet called him to service despite his character flaws.
- B. Jonah's story teaches that God can use us, as well, despite our flaws.
- C. God's mercy, grace, and patience are more than theological doctrines but are part of the experience of what it means to be a Christian.

III. The Great Mystery of the Grace of God.

- A. Nineveh responded to God's grace after just one warning and fully embraced repentance.
- B. God graciously responds to Jonah's wish to die with a yearning for him to see the error of his thinking.
- C. Jonah has more in common with the Ninevites than he cared to admit: Both he and they are rebellious sinners who deserve punishment but who receive mercy and grace instead.

Summary: Jonah throws a temper tantrum after God spares Nineveh. In an over-dramatic gesture, he asks God to take his life. He is too blinded by his own bruised ego and his imaginary failures to see the success of his mission: the saving of sin-enslaved souls.

Commentary.

I. The Angry Prophet.

In Jonah 3, the people of Nineveh turned from their evil (*ra'ah*) ways (vs. 8). When God saw this, He changed His mind about bringing

Monday

November 24

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.

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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

evil (*ra'ah*) upon them (vs. 10). But as for Jonah, he was absolutely furious, literally “displeased with great displeasure” (*ra'ah*) (Jon. 4:1). The Lord has abandoned the *heat* (root, *hrh*) of His anger (Jon. 3:9) while the prophet’s anger consumes (root, *hrh*) him (Jon. 4:1). Jonah considers the city’s amazing repentance a great evil.

II. “ ‘This, O Lord, Is What I Feared When I Was in My Own Country’ ” (Jon. 4:1, 2, NEB).

From the very beginning, Jonah was convinced the Ninevites might repent and that God would forgive them. Jonah knew that God was loving, merciful, gracious, and forgiving. The Old Testament uses the adjective “compassionate” or “gracious” (*hannun*) several times and applies it only to God.

Read Exodus 22:26, 27. Clothing, being handmade, was extremely expensive in the ancient world. Often the only clothes people had were what they wore every day. They would suffer from the cold in their unheated dwellings without a cloak to wrap around them. If one person kept the garment of another as security for a loan, the person whose clothing was taken as a pledge had every right to cry for the Lord’s help. And He would respond because of His compassionate nature.

The adjective *merciful* appears a number of times in the Old Testament. The Hebrew word for “merciful,” *raham* is related to *rehem* (womb) and has a connotation of motherly love. The Hebrew for “slow to anger” indicates the opposite of a quick temper (Prov. 14:29), or a hot temper (Prov. 15:18), and is better than might (Prov. 16:32) or pride (Eccles. 7:8). “Steadfast love” translates the Hebrew *chesed*, which means love with a strong element of loyalty. Hosea preached God’s *chesed* love and willingness to forgive (Hos. 11:1-11, 14:1-4) but not Jonah. He was of sterner stuff.

The prophet desired a Deity that fit his personal theology rather than making his theology fit his God. Furthermore, Jonah had his own concept of what a prophet should be like. A prophet’s message must not fail to come to pass. After all, Deuteronomy 18:22 said that if a prophet foretold something and it did not come to pass, it was a false prophecy and, by implication, spoken by a false prophet. If God did not destroy Nineveh, he feared his professional reputation would be ruined.

Jonah, as though he were waving his fist at God, offers the bizarre prayer, “ ‘O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live’ ” (Jon. 4:3, NRSV). The prophet who has been the recipient of God’s love, grace, and forgiveness now refuses to allow the Lord to extend it to others. There are those who would rather be lost than share heaven with those whom they despise. They may reject others for being of another race, culture, political perspective, etc. Jonah resented God’s love for the Ninevites because of their long history of cruelty. Jonah had plenty of reasons why God should destroy them. But God rejected those reasons. Nineveh’s repentance

Tuesday

November 25

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.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

made them meaningless. What about the petty objections we sometimes raise against others?

III. “Is It Right for You to Be Angry?” (Jon. 4:4, NRSV).

Jonah accuses the Lord of being too slow to anger. Thankfully, God was exactly that, or the prophet himself might have felt divine wrath. The Lord brings Jonah face-to-face with his own anger through “a simple question: ‘Is it good for you to be angry?’ This question turns the focus away from the Ninevites and what they deserve to Jonah and his response. The question ‘is it good’ can be interpreted on many levels. Is it [the anger] theologically sound? Morally correct? Emotionally healthy? Yahweh, by continuing to interact with the stubborn prophet, demonstrates the depth of his attachment to Jonah. Jonah, however, does not answer the question; he is not yet ready to acknowledge it in all its ramifications. Instead, he leaves the city. Is he once more running away?”—James L. Mays, gen. ed., “Jonah,” in *The HarperCollins Bible Commentary*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2000), p. 659.

However, God again deals compassionately with Jonah. He does

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

Texts for Discovery: John 3:16, Romans 3:21-26, 2 Corinthians 12:8-10.

1. Humans are full of faults, and the Bible is full of how many humans chose to do the wrong thing. However, the Bible also is full of how God continued to offer these people His grace. Why do you think He does so? John 3:16, Rom. 3:21-26.
2. The book of Jonah is full of God’s grace. Jonah received it numerous times. David and Peter also received it more than once. Why is God ever ready to dispense His grace?
3. Ellen White writes that “humanity can comprehend in part, but that is all that man can bear.” —*The Bible Echo*, April 30, 1894. What does our being able to comprehend only a little tell us about God and His love? What does it tell us about humankind?
4. This week’s lesson tells us that grace is about getting what we do not deserve. Neither the Ninevites nor the Israelites deserved the grace God gave them. Why did God not just give both groups up to their sin and folly?
5. Read 2 Corinthians 12:8-10. What do you think Paul is saying in these verses about grace? Is grace weak or strong? What does he mean when he says that only in his weakness does God’s power rest on him?

GOD TOO IS MERCIFUL?

Apparently, 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 worshipping 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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

not debate with him or back him into a corner, forcing him against his will to admit the foolishness of his behavior. Instead, He asks a simple question and lets the prophet consider its implications when he is ready to do so. The prophet may have stalked off just to see if he could sit God out. But the question remains—lurking in his mind, nibbling away at his prejudices and objections. God seems as determined to make Jonah mature as He is to save Nineveh.

IV. How Shall We Answer?

Not only is God's question directed at Jonah, it also is intended for us. When God works in ways that may be different from those we would select, what right do we have to disapprove? Suppose God employs methods that make us uncomfortable or that may draw people to Him who embarrass us? What if He accepts worship styles that trouble us? The list of things that can make us angry enough to want to die is as endless as the number of controversies that trouble God's people. People have fled the church because of all kinds of issues that have upset them. But does He not have the freedom to do as He sees best? Is it good for us to be angry?

WITNESSING

In the book of Esther, we read of how the queen went before King Ahasuerus unannounced, knowing full well that anyone who went into the king's court without being invited could be put to death. However, when the king saw Queen Esther "standing in the court" (Esther 5:2), he was pleased and held out his golden scepter to welcome her.

Jonah was angry when God graciously spared the Ninevites after they repented. He told the Lord just how he felt, and the same merciful God *allowed* him to do so. God is a God of reason. He has gone beyond what we deserve by explaining His law and presenting it in a way we can understand. He does this so we will choose to serve Him freely.

We know this is true by the

life of Christ. Throughout His ministry on earth, He presented the principles of God's law in parables. He told practical stories of ordinary people and events to convey God's love and the importance of keeping His law. More than anything, we know He is a God of reason by the simple fact that He has allowed the great controversy between Christ and Satan to continue. He wants the whole universe to see that He is a merciful and a just God, a God of love. So when someone questions whether or not God will understand his or her mistakes and will forgive, we, as God's witnesses, can tell this person "Yes!" God understands, and He beckons each of us to "come boldly unto the throne of grace . . . [to] obtain mercy" (Heb. 4:16).

Thursday

November 27

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.

Jonah'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's included. God apparently values honesty in our relationship with Him. We do not have to deny reality when praying reverently to God.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

LIFE-APPLICATION APPROACH

Icebreaker: William Barclay said that it is interesting to him how Jesus looks at humanity. Jesus not only sees what a person is; He also sees what a person can become. He sees not only the actualities in a person; He also sees the possibilities. Jesus sees us not only as we are but as we can be, and He says “Give your life to Me, and I will make you what you have it in you to be.”

Thought Questions:

1. Do a character study of the twelve disciples handpicked by Jesus. What kind of people would you have picked had you been the CEO? What do the disciples say about outward appearances? About talent? About attitude? From the disciples, what lessons can we learn about team spirit? About acceptance? About tolerance? About potentials?
2. It has been said that there will be three things that will surprise us when we get to heaven: one, to find many there whom we did not expect to find there; another, to find some not there whom we had expected; a third, and perhaps the greatest wonder, will be to find ourselves there. With this statement in mind, how does grace help us accept people as they are? Grace is an acquired skill, developed

over time with the help of the Holy Spirit and mentors. How may we nurture an attitude of grace in little children?

3. In a grace-filled life, the human and the Divine will be so intermingled that it would be impossible to separate the two. Do you agree or disagree? Explain.

Application Questions:

1. Michelangelo chipped away at a huge block of stone. When asked what he was doing, he replied, “I am releasing the angel imprisoned in this marble.” Outward appearances can be deceiving. Share with the class an incident when you were mistreated because of a misunderstanding. Think of the people in your neighborhood who are considered odd, or strange, and those who visit your church uninvited. How can we better reflect Jesus to them? Why is it important to remember not to judge a person based on his or her outward appearance?
2. Read John 14:12-14. Why do we hesitate to take Jesus’ words to heart? Why are we afraid to claim the promise that we can do the “works” that Jesus did (KJV)? What human flaws keep us from claiming the promise in John 14:12-14?

FURTHER STUDY:

There 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.

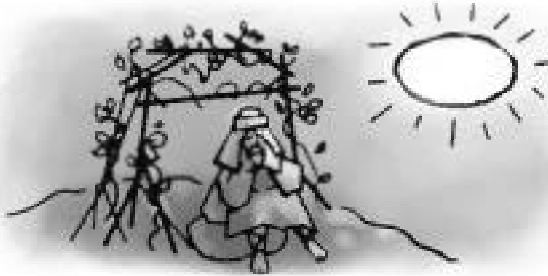
“Once more he yielded to his inclination to question and doubt, and once more he was overwhelmed with discouragement. Losing sight of the interests of others, and feeling as if he [Jonah] would rather die than live to see the city spared, in his dissatisfaction he exclaimed, ‘Now, O Lord, take, I beseech 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 Wind, a Worm, and a Plant



Sabbath Afternoon

HARD 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).

God 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?

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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Text: Jonah 4:6.

Teachers Aims:

1. To discern the symbolic meaning of the booth Jonah built.
2. To recognize the dangers of taking God's grace for granted.

Lesson Outline:

I. Jonah's New Nature Lesson.

- A. Jonah sits beneath a booth he built outside the walls of a repentant Nineveh.
- B. Booths served to remind Israel of the temporary dwellings they lived in when God miraculously delivered them from Egypt.
- C. Jonah sulks, because the Ninevites had the gall to humbly repent and receive God's mercy.
- D. God asks Jonah to reconsider his sullen attitude.
- E. God causes a plant to grow up over the booth to provide Jonah with soothing shade.
- F. A worm is appointed to destroy the plant, and harsh wind scours the land. In a small way, Jonah finds himself receiving a small taste of what he wished upon the Ninevites.
- G. The plant was God's grace in action for Jonah. Both its life and death were due solely to the grace of God—just as our lives are.

II. The Parable of the Plant.

- A. God contrasts Jonah's anger over Nineveh to his pity over the death of the shade plant.
- B. Next, the Lord contrasts His gracious pity for Nineveh to Jonah's selfish pity for the plant.
- C. Jonah is an example to God's people of the many chances that the Lord is willing to give each one of us.

Summary: God used Nineveh as an example to other nations that He was a just and gracious God. Jonah exemplifies that God's grace and mercy exist for all, embracing even the most determined doubters and self-righteous among us.

Commentary.

I. Jonah's Booth.

The fact that Jonah 4:5 employs the same term for *booth* as that used for the structures made for the Festival of Booths suggests they were similar. The booths put up during the yearly religious festival

Monday

December 1

GOD'S APPOINTMENTS.

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

Verse 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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

consisted of branches from olive, myrtle, palm, and other leafy trees. The prophet found an open space east of the city and constructed a flimsy structure with leafy branches for a roof. As the leaves dried up, more and more sunlight poured down upon Jonah, making him increasingly uncomfortable.

So, God “appointed” a plant that miraculously grew over the booth to provide a more protective roof. The Bible calls the plant a *qiqayon*, a word appearing only here. A number of scholars have suggested that the plant is a member of the gourd family. But as with the case of the giant fish, it most likely was a special creation just for the occasion. To try to find some special plant that can spread that fast and thus prove the truthfulness of the book of Jonah distracts us from the point of the story. God produces the plant to save Jonah from his “discomfort,” or, literally, “to deliver him from his evil/calamity.” The Hebrew word here for “deliver” is very similar to the word for “to shade.”

II. The Word and the Wind.

As Jonah sits in the shade of the plant, he experiences an object lesson of God’s grace and rejoices in it. Although he had wanted to withhold such grace from the people of Nineveh, he appreciates it for himself. Then God destroys the plant that protected the man who wanted the city and its people destroyed. Suddenly Jonah does not like the idea of destruction—at least not when it touches him.

Next, God sends a “sultry east wind” (Jon. 4:8, NRSV). A worm “attacked” the plant, its leaves withered away, and the sun “beat down” on Jonah’s head (vss. 7, 8, NRSV). Heatstroke can be a serious danger in the Middle East. But that is not why Jonah is suddenly so angry when he again explodes, “ ‘It is better for me to die than to live’ ” (vs. 8, NRSV).

God repeats His question of Jonah 4:4 but focuses it on the prophet’s reaction to the death of the plant (vs. 9). God’s question about whether Jonah has any right to be angry about the plant’s destruction is “a clever question—either answer impales Jonah. If the response is negative (as it should have been), recognizing that he is not in a position to make claims regarding God’s gift to him, then he would be admitting that he cannot make judgments concerning what God does with God’s own creatures. But if it is affirmative (as it was), then he tacitly recognizes God’s right to do what God wills regarding Nineveh, for God’s claims regarding Nineveh are much greater than Jonah’s regarding the plant.” —James L. Mays, gen. ed., “Jonah,” in *Harper’s Bible Commentary* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988), p. 729.

God is leading Jonah (and thus all His people) to see that He longs to save everyone and that humanity must not restrict divine grace. The people of God must learn to love as God loves.

III. Teaching by Experience.

God points out that Jonah “pitied,” or “cared for,” a lowly plant. In

JONAH'S RETURNING WRATH.

Jonah 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.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

one way, it contrasts Jonah's selfishness with God's infinite love. The prophet mourns the loss of the plant, because its death increases his personal discomfort. On the other hand, God is using the experience to help Jonah understand how much God "pitied," or "cared for," the Ninevites. God sometimes allows things to happen to us so we can begin to feel, in some small measure, both the pain and love He feels. Whether we will learn love or bitterness from such experiences is up to us.

IV. God's Freedom to Save.

Because even God's people are tainted with sin and its inherent selfishness, it is hard for any of us to understand God's infinite desire

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

Texts for Discovery: Romans 8:32, Philippians 2:1-8, 2 Timothy 1:8-10.

1. Jonah was pleased with the vine that provided even more shade (Jon. 4:6). Apparently, the booth was not enough for him. Why was Jonah so much more concerned with his own fate than with the fate of the Ninevites?
2. Read Philippians 2:1-8. Have your class members rewrite these verses in their own words. How do we understand what it means to humble one's self?
3. Romans 8:32 says God graciously gives all things. He graciously gave Jonah the vine for shade. But does God also "graciously" (NIV) take things away from us, just as He took the vine away from Jonah? If so, why?
4. Read 2 Timothy 1:8-10. Grace has been given to us before the beginning and was revealed through Christ Jesus. We constantly receive God's grace, but do we actually recognize it when we receive it? What are the many forms God's grace can take?

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).

Look 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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

to save. We are willing to let Him redeem people as long as they fit into certain acceptable categories that often reflect our requirements rather than God's. But those who try to define whom God may save do not realize that this act of judging reveals that they themselves are not safe to be saved.

Jonah angrily charges God with acting in an uncaring way toward the plant and, by implication, toward Jonah himself. But the prophet is really the uncaring one. God confronts Jonah not to punish him but to save him—and through him, countless others. The Lord wants each one of us to see our own “Jonah” nature so we will recognize our own need of His character.

WITNESSING

After boxer Mike Tyson bit off a portion of fellow contender Evander Holifield's ear, someone asked Holifield, “Do you think Tyson should be allowed to fight?” His response was that everyone deserves a second chance. According to Holifield, even though Tyson made a mistake and should pay the consequences, he still should be allowed to work.

We are called upon to treat others the way God treats us. When God looks at us, He sees our needs, not our faults. Many of us harbor grudges and treat people as though they do not deserve to be forgiven, either by us or by God. We may not *deserve* to be forgiven, but we *need* forgiveness. More than that, however, we need to forgive. We cannot be saved unless we do.

This week's lesson asks us to remember that every person we see is faced with making a decision regarding eternal life. If we have no room in our hearts for compassion and mercy, we cannot be effective witnesses. Let us not make the mistake of losing our souls because we are unforgiving, while those we do not forgive may be saved. “Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12, NKJV).

“God does not deal with us as finite men deal with one another. His thoughts are thoughts of mercy, love, and tenderest compassion.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 53.

We influence others by our words, actions, and attitudes. We can draw others to Christ with a kind, forgiving spirit—a spirit of love.

A QUESTION OF GRACE.

Let'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.

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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

LIFE-APPLICATION APPROACH

Icebreaker: William Lee said that it is not the arithmetic of our prayers, how many they are; nor the rhetoric of our prayers, how eloquent they are; nor the geometry of our prayers, how long they be; nor the music of our prayers, how sweet our voice may be; nor the logic of our prayers, how argumentative they may be; nor the method of our prayers, how orderly they may be—which God cares for. Fervency of spirit is that which availeth much.

Share an example of when the right attitude is equally important, if not more important, than words.

Thought Questions:

1. Jonah knew all about God's saving grace, in theory; however, when it came to practice, his righteous indignation locked horns with theory. In fury, Jonah carried out a one-man protest against God's saving grace toward the Ninevites. How can we keep our opinions and judgments from interfering with the gospel message of salvation?
2. The title of this week's lesson is almost comical: "A Wind, a Worm, and a Plant." God creatively uses unexpected object lessons to teach us His will. Glean through the Bible, making a list of some of the object lessons you can find. Why do you think God uses object les-

sons as a method of revealing His will to us?

3. Discouragement can fuel inappropriate actions—actions that you may be sorry about later. What other emotions spark words and actions that are not Christlike? What can you do to cope with human emotions that are detrimental to both you and to those around you? How did Jonah cope with his emotions? What should he have done differently?

Application Questions:

1. One of Jonah's major weaknesses was that he was blind to his own spiritual condition. It is easy to become blind to our own spiritual condition, as well. So, how can we guard against such blindness?
2. Ellen White comments (see Friday's section of the Standard Edition) that every moment of life everyone is the beneficiary of God's grace, whether or not he or she is converted. How should this truth affect the way we treat new church members? Why is discipling the new member so important in the context of spiritual growth and of God's grace? What role do you see yourself playing in the spiritual development of new members joining your home church?

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.

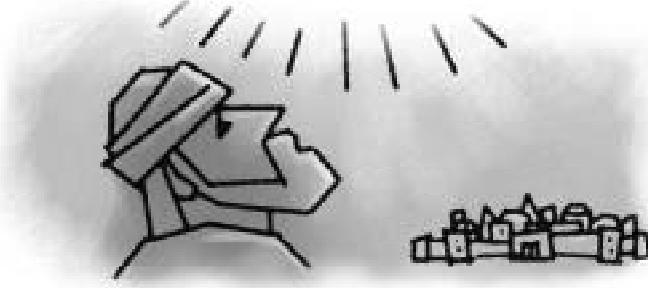
“It was God’s purpose that His grace should be revealed among the Gentiles as well as among the Israelites. This had been plainly outlined in Old Testament prophecies. The apostle uses some of these prophecies in his argument. ‘Hath not the potter power over the clay,’ he inquires, ‘of the same lump 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 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.

Sunday

December 7

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).

How 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?

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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Text: Jonah 4:11.

Teachers Aims:

1. To discuss the significance of God's mercy toward the Ninevites.
2. To examine what the Lord has to say about the moral accountability of those who are ignorant of Him.

Lesson Outline:

I. Just One.

- A. Just as Jonah wrestled with God's mercy for Nineveh, we, too, find it difficult to understand why God would sacrifice His Son for just one soul.
- B. The Ninevites' lack of instruction in the ways of God made them spiritually equal in understanding to children.
- C. They embraced the light given them, and for this God could not justify their destruction.

II. Obedience: Nature Versus Humanity.

- A. All the created world is under God's power and care, including animals.
- B. Nature is without morality, while humanity is of a moral nature, endowed with free will and a soul.
- C. Nature is compelled to obey God; humanity is offered a choice.

Summary: The book of Jonah ends with God's mercy, love, and grace contrasted to the tarnished character of humanity. The difference between our fallen selves and our holy God should not overwhelm us but should fill us with gratitude that, despite this gap, God loves us and saves us anyway.

Commentary.

I. A Book of Questions.

Commentator James Limburg suggests "the Jonah story is . . . addressed to each individual Israelite or to each individual who is a part of the people of God. . . . Some eleven questions are directed to Jonah/the hearer in the course of the story, thus placing the listener in the role of Jonah in the story and leaving the listener with the Lord's final question still ringing in his or her ears."—*Jonah: A Commentary*, p. 25.

Elsewhere Limburg comments, "As the story winds down, the questions addressed to Jonah more and more become questions ad-

Monday

December 8

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)?

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?**

TEACHERS COMMENTS

dressed to those listening to the story. Jonah, it becomes clear, is me! Thus the story asks its hearers: Do you recognize yourself in the figure of Jonah? Do you detect in yourself symptoms of the Jonah syndrome?"—*Hosea-Micah* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), p. 156.

God's final question in the book is especially relevant to God's people in earth's final days. We are His last-day *prophets* too.

II. "Who Do Not Know Their Right Hand From Their Left" (Jon. 4:11, NRSV).

Jonah feels sorrow over the death of a solitary plant. He did not bring the plant into existence or even care for and nurture it, but he still feels grief when it perishes. Yet, he has no compassion for the people of Nineveh. God leads him to face the shocking inconsistency in his thinking. He wants Jonah to experience the love and tender care He feels for the people of the city and, in the process, lead him to do everything possible to save them.

The verb translated "care" literally means "to have tears in one's eyes." God weeps over the city of Nineveh just as Jesus will later sob, heartbroken, over the city of Jerusalem (Luke 19:41-44).

"Jesus once said that God cared about the sparrows of Jerusalem (Matt. 10:29). The Book of Jonah tells of that amazing grace by speaking of the Lord's concern for the cows of Nineveh."—James Limburg, *Hosea-Micah*, p. 157.

III. Who Is Nineveh?

In Isaiah 19:25, God made a startling proclamation. After prophesying punishment against Egypt, He concludes, " 'Blessed be Egypt *my people*, and Assyria *the work of my hands*, and Israel *my heritage*' " (NRSV, emphasis supplied). Israel suffered much from Egypt and Assyria, yet God declares them His people.

Often we assume that all God's people in the Old Testament descended from Abraham. A careful reading of Scripture shows otherwise. Abraham had a thousand people with him, including his servants and other retainers. Even though not all were biologically related, they were his people. Joseph married the Egyptian woman Asenath, daughter of Potiphera, priest of On (Gen. 41:45). She bore Joseph two sons (vss. 50-52), who founded the tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim. Judah married a Canaanite woman, as apparently did his son Er. His wife Tamar became an ancestor of David, as did the Moabite woman Ruth.

The mixed multitude, though it caused many problems after Israel left Egypt, became a part of Israel. When God renewed the covenant with Israel in Deuteronomy 29 and 30, Scripture describes the aliens in the camp as being included in the covenant (Deut. 29:10-12).

After the Exile, the book of Ezra lists those who originally came from the Gibeonite cities as just another part of Israel (Ezra 2:25). Most of these people would have descended from the Gibeonites, who

Tuesday

December 9

ANIMALS TOO? (READ JOB 39).

All 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?

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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

had originally tricked Israel into an alliance with them. (Also see Ezra 2:43-59.)

God wanted His people to so impress others with His love that all humanity would desire to become part of Israel.

Jonah's fear that God would repent of His plans to destroy the Assyrian city had come true and had left him furious, humiliated, and depressed to the point of suicide. When God's anger cooled, Jonah's heated up. Why, he demanded, did the Lord insist on saving the enemies of His people? Sadly, many in the church behave like Jonah. One racial, ethnic, or national group has looked down upon another as not worthy of salvation—or even as not fully human. But to God, all nations and peoples are “ ‘my people’ ” (Isa. 19:25, NRSV).

“The people of Nineveh are the ‘people of the world,’ the ‘outsiders.’ We recall the exemplary behavior of the outsiders in this story. In times of crisis, the sailors pray and act, and the Ninevites repent and clean up the violence in their city. These favorable pictures of the people of the world suggest two things for the people of God. First,

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

Texts for Discovery: Exodus 4:11, Jonah 4:11.

1. The story of Jonah illustrates that God is not willing for even one person to be lost. What other stories in the Bible illustrate this fact? What modern illustrations could portray God's compassion for just one sinner?
2. Read Exodus 4:11. God created every aspect of us, including our abilities and gifts. Why, then, did He not create us with greater compassion for other humans? Or did He? Why do we not take every opportunity to witness for God, when He is willing to teach us what to say?
3. Jonah 4:11 teaches us that God's compassion is so great He was even concerned about the animals living in Nineveh. How should this inform our treatment of His creation?
4. Jonah runs away from God and inadvertently preaches a sermon to the sailors. A fish swallows him. He repents and preaches to the Ninevites. Then they repent. Jonah, however, is angry enough to die. What kind of personal relationship do you think Jonah had with God?
5. The Ninevites readily obeyed God. At best, Jonah reluctantly did so. How could he have experienced all that he did and still have problems obeying God? Are there any parallels in your life today and in the corporate church? How can we change so we will be more like the Ninevites in heeding God's call?

QUESTIONS, QUESTIONS, QUESTIONS . . .

The 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 _____

Job 40:1, 2 _____

Jon. 4:11 _____

Mark 8:36 _____

Luke 6:9 _____

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.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

God's people could be instructed by the people of the world. Jesus once commended the resourcefulness of the 'people of this world,' concluding that his own followers could learn from them (Luke 16:1-13). Second, the report of this people's eagerness to hear a word from God is a reminder of the missionary calling of the church. Israel had been called to be a 'light to the nations' (Isa. 49:6). Jesus spoke of the task of the disciples in the same language (Matt. 5:14). The picture of Jesus lamenting over Jerusalem is a reminder of God's love for the people of that city and that tradition (Matt. 23:37-39). The story of Jonah shows us a picture of God with tears of compassion in his eyes for the people of the other great cities of the world."—James Limburg, *Hosea-Micah*, p. 156.

IV. Unanswered Questions.

The book of Jonah ends with a question each of us must respond to. Should not God be concerned about His creation wherever and whoever it is? And how should those who claim to be His people put that concern into concrete action? God awaits your answer today.

WITNESSING

"May I ask you a question?" is a question many of us have asked at one time or another. Asking a question is a good way to get someone's attention. Most people enjoy feeling as though they may know the answer. Even if they do not know it, they may still attempt to give an intelligent response.

The lesson for this week refers to some of the questions God asked various individuals in the Bible. "Who hath made man's mouth?" (Exod. 4:11). "Who shut up the sea with doors . . . ?" (Job 38:8). "Who provideth for the raven his food?" (Job 38:41). These questions point to only One, the Creator of all things.

Jesus asked questions to stimulate thought and lead His

hearers to the truth. When discussing the Word of God with others, we also should ask thought-provoking questions that point to the truth. We also should teach others to search the Scriptures for themselves to find answers. They will believe more readily and accept God's Word when they do this.

Satan has called into question God's character. Is God just? God answered that question at the Cross. In the end, those who have overcome will sing its conclusion. "Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy" (Rev. 15:3, 4).

Thursday

December 11

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?

As 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?

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.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

LIFE-APPLICATION APPROACH

Icebreaker: Alfred Hitchcock, the famous director of suspense shows and movies, once told the following parable about the unknown: There lived a king who was granted two wishes. His first wish was to see the future. He was granted his wish, but when he saw all that lay ahead—the beauty and the pain—he immediately asked for his second wish: that the future be hidden. “I thank Heaven,” exclaimed Hitchcock, “that tomorrow does not belong to any man. It belongs to God.”

Thought Questions:

1. Most everyone has a fear of the unknown. A tiny little peek into the future would, in some ways, make a big difference in the way we make decisions today. What would be the advantages and disadvantages of knowing the future? How does the ability to know the future, based on prophecy, affect our freedom to make choices?
2. Here are two Jewish proverbs: “If God doesn’t approve, a fly doesn’t move.” “What God does not choose to give, you cannot take.” Jonah was reared in the wisdom of a culture that gave rise to such proverbs and knew better than to argue with God. Why, then, does he question God’s plan? Why does he find it hard to allow God to be in control?

Application Questions:

1. How often have you heard a toddler cry in frustration: “It’s not fair!” No matter how hard the parent tries to explain the situation, the child continues to insist “It’s not fair!” Childish minds think this way, because they cannot see a situation from a mature perspective; they cannot see the repercussions of their actions. It is often the same with God and us. What are the elements of sin that keep us from seeing things from a divine perspective? Does this mean we have to go through life feeling that life is unfair? Explain.
2. We do not know whether Jonah ever saw the bigger picture in which he was a crucial figure or whether he saw a glimpse of Nineveh from God’s perspective. Why do you think the story ends with a question from God and not an analytical statement? Why do you think it was important for God to have the last word, literally, in the story? What about your life? Do you have a hard time keeping quiet when God wants to give you His last word of advice or of warning?

FURTHER STUDY:

As 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).

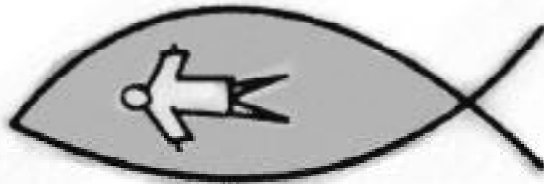
“As the nations of antiquity should behold Israel’s unprecedented progress, their attention and interest would be aroused. ‘Even the heathen would recognize the superiority of those who served and worshiped the living God’ (COL 289). Desiring the same blessings for themselves, they would make inquiry 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.

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).

As 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?

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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Text: Matthew 12:40.

Teachers Aims:

1. To explore the significance of Jesus' references to Jonah.
2. To illustrate how Jonah's experience prefigures Christ's death, burial, and resurrection.

Lesson Outline:

I. Comparisons Between Jonah and Jesus.

- A. Jonah was three days and three nights in the fish just as it was prophesied of Jesus that "the Son of man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12:40).
- B. The nonbelievers of Jesus' day responded to Him just as the nonbelievers of Nineveh responded to Jonah—with undeniable acceptance.
- C. In the same spirit of discontent as Jonah, believers of Christ's day were not prepared to accept God as He truly was.
- D. We must guard against making this same mistake.
- E. Just as Jonah's *resurrection* from the belly of the fish eventually led to mercy for the Ninevites, so Christ's resurrection offered mercy to all.

II. The Profound Truth of Christ's Life on Earth.

- A. The most profound and wonderful truth is that God stepped into the garb of humanity in the Person of Jesus Christ and died to save us.
- B. The rejection of Christ by His own people illustrates how great light and the privileges that come with that light are no guarantee of salvation.
- C. Many people today reject truth, not so much because their mind denies it but because their flesh does.

Summary: Despite our frailty and rebelliousness, God still strives to uphold us. He encourages us to freely accept His offer of salvation, urging us to cling to Him.

Commentary.

I. The Controversial Sign.

A group of Pharisees and religious leaders demanded a miraculous sign from Jesus to authenticate His mission (Matt. 12:38). But He replies that the only demonstration they will receive will be "the sign

Monday

December 15

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.

Skim 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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

of the prophet Jonah' ” (vs. 39, NRSV). Also see Matthew 16:1-4 and Luke 11:29-32.

Jesus does not explain what He meant by His reference to the sign of Jonah, and commentators have struggled ever since to make sense of it. The two most frequently offered explanations involve either Jonah's preaching to the Ninevites or his deliverance from the great fish.

Those who advocate that the sign alludes to the prophet's preaching point to Luke 11:32, in which Jesus declares that “ ‘the people of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the proclamation of Jonah' ” (NRSV). Thus the sign is Jesus' call for repentance, just as Jonah urged the people to repent. But people frequently preached repentance, so it hardly would have been something unique and striking. Furthermore, in Matthew 12:40 and Luke 11:30, Jesus clearly indicates that the sign was something in the future.

The second major interpretation—that of Jonah's deliverance from the great fish—is the most likely meaning of the allusion. Jesus says in Luke 11:30 that “ ‘just as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so the Son of Man will be to this generation' ” (NRSV). And in Matthew 12:40, He says, “ ‘For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so for three days and three nights the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth' ” (NRSV). Not only do the phrases about being in the belly of the sea monster for three days and nights and being in the heart of the earth three days and three nights parallel each other, in Greek the words *belly* (*koilia*) and *heart* (*kardia*) echo each other.

II. “A Wicked and Adulterous Generation” (Matt. 16:4, KJV).

Three times the Gospels refer to the sign of Jonah. In each case, Jesus describes those who demand some kind of a sign from Him to legitimize His ministry to a “ ‘wicked and adulterous generation.’ ” His reply suggests the only sign they will receive is one involving judgment. Nineveh escaped judgment for a time, but eventually it brought judgment upon the northern kingdom of Israel. Jonah's mission led to the deliverance of Gentiles and the destruction of Israel. Could Jesus' mission result in the same? (See Luke 19:42-44, Rom. 11:11-15.)

III. Do Three Days Equal 72 Hours?

Certain religious groups stress that the three days Jesus spent in the tomb had to be a literal 72 hours. They even rearrange the events of crucifixion week to get that exact time period. Other commentators point out that Jesus was using a type of thinking called *inclusive reckoning*. Even today, when some event covers a full day and parts of other days, we refer to those additional partial days as regular days in our description of the time span involved. For example, if we leave town for twelve hours on Friday, all of Saturday, and eight hours on

Tuesday

December 16

“A GREATER THAN JONAS IS HERE.”

When 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.

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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Sunday, we do not say we were gone for one half day, one full day, and one third of a day. We consider we were away three days.

Also, those who demand that the parallel between Jonah and Jesus be exactly 72 hours do not push the literalism between the two incidents to the point that they require Jonah to have been dead like Jesus. Scripture does not even say that Jonah was in the belly of the fish for 72 hours. The two experiences are similar, not identical.

Finally, miraculous or unusual events in Scripture often use the number three. See Genesis 42:17 and 1 Kings 17:21. Perhaps this is a way of indicating a significant period of time.

IV. Learning From Pagans.

The allusion to Jonah is one of two illustrations Jesus employs to show how people should respond when God sends someone with a call for repentance. The Pharisees and scribes were well educated. But even they could learn something—and from pagans at that. The people of Nineveh, although belonging to a tyrannical empire that worshiped blood-thirsty gods—could still respond when confronted with the God of Israel. Perhaps, Jesus suggested, Israel’s leaders could profit from Nineveh’s example. Just as Nineveh heeded Jonah’s preaching, so the Pharisees and scribes should respond to Jesus’ teaching.

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

Text for Discovery: Matthew 12:38-41.

1. Despite the fact that God did miraculous things for Jonah, the prophet was slow to repent. Yet, the Ninevites repented without having seen one miraculous sign. Jesus did miraculous things when He was on earth. Why do you think that those who saw what Jesus did still did not believe?
2. Read Matthew 12:38-41. Just as Jonah did not want to believe that God could forgive the Ninevites, the Pharisees refused to believe that Jesus was
- the Son of God. Jesus gave them an answer to their desire for a sign. Why could they not make the connection?
3. The lesson stated that Jonah was a poor man’s example of what would happen to Christ. What other examples like this one, foreshadowing Christ’s death and resurrection, are in the Bible?
4. Reread Matthew 12:38-41. Why do you think Jesus referred to Jonah during this discussion with the religious leaders of His day? How appropriate are His words for us?

STRONG WORDS.

Though 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?

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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

In Matthew 12:42, Christ uses a second example—the queen of Sheba. She had traveled a long distance to hear Solomon’s wisdom. The Pharisees and scribes called Jesus “Teacher” (vs. 38, NRSV). But were they willing to respond in the same way as this ancient queen? After all, Jesus’ wisdom was infinitely greater than that of Solomon’s.

V. Something Greater Than Jonah Is Here.

Jesus repeatedly stressed that His role and Person were greater than that of Jonah’s. We must let nothing distract us from the fact that He is the purpose, meaning, and goal of all Christianity. On a practical level, we must not quibble about how long Jesus was in the tomb. We must accept and proclaim that He was *in* the tomb and that His death, burial, and resurrection gave Him authority for all salvation. And it demands our praise.

Jonah points to Christ. St. John’s Church in Gouda, the Netherlands, has a stained-glass window of Jonah striding from the mouth of a large fish. The background depicts him being tossed overboard from the ship. As the prophet walks toward the viewer, he points toward a banner he is carrying. Its slogan declares in Latin, “Behold, something greater than Jonah is here.”

WITNESSING

Jonah did not obey the Lord, while those on the ship who did not know God worshiped Him. Jonah was unforgiving and filled with anger, while the Ninevites responded to God’s word and were subdued by His love.

Are we like Jonah, professing to be servants of the Lord, while in our hearts we are unloving, unforgiving, and disobedient?

“Sincerity of purpose, real kindness of heart, is the motive that Heaven values.”—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 81. “Half-and-half service places the human agent on the side

of the enemy as a successful ally of the hosts of darkness.”—Page 94. We can only hope that in the end Jonah had a change of heart. Now is the time for us to be sure that our hearts are right with God so we can be ready to meet Him when He comes.

The Lord has outlined the events that will lead to His second coming, just as there were signs that pointed to His birth, earthly ministry, and death. We can be true servants and faithful witnesses by telling others of these signs and pointing to Jesus, the Way of salvation.

“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 _____

Matt. 28:6; Mark 16:6; John 21:14 _____

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

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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

LIFE-APPLICATION APPROACH

Icebreaker: Harry Rimmers's book, *The Harmony of Science and Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1936), relates the experience of an English sailor who fell overboard his ship and was swallowed by a fish. A couple days later, the sailor's shipmates found the fish, floating on the water. They took it ashore and opened it. To their amazement, they found their shipmate alive inside the fish. The sailor had survived the smelly ordeal, but his skin had turned a chalky white and remained so for the rest of his life. Many more incidents such as this have been recorded and, in all cases, the person turned chalky white!

Thought Questions:

1. Imagine the reaction of the citizens of Nineveh to such a bleached-skinned man, who smelled like fish and ranted about the end of time. Jonah probably drew large crowds. He even may have remained chalky white for the rest of his life, a reminder of his experience and of a time when a great city was almost destroyed. What other effects do you think this strange event had on Nineveh and the surrounding cities? How do you suppose Jonah lived out the rest of his life?
2. Jesus refers to the story of Jonah

and to other stories and prophets of the Old Testament. (See Matt. 4:4, 7, 10; 5:27; 10:35, 36; 11:10-14; Mark 14:27; Luke 4:18, 19; 4:25-27; 20:41-44; John 5:45-47; 8:56-58.) Considering how small the book of Jonah is and that its message is specific to a city and not to the entire world, why do you think Jesus points to Jonah as a sermon illustration? What are the elements of Jonah's story that keep it alive from one generation to another?

Application Questions:

1. Jonah was a stranger to Nineveh with a hard-to-believe message. Compare Jonah with the Seventh-day Adventist Church. What are some things said of us by the media and by other denominations? What kinds of benefits are gained in becoming more mainstream? What are the dangers of becoming like any other Protestant denomination?
2. The story of Jonah was told and retold, from generation to generation, for a divine purpose. List the lessons you have learned so far from Jonah. How are these lessons applicable in today's world? How are they relevant in your own personal witness of Jesus' saving grace?

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.

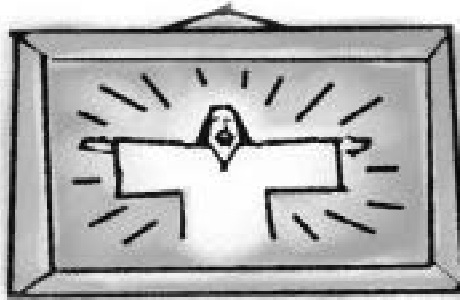
Jesus said that He would spend “three days and three nights” in the heart of the earth; yet, He was buried late Friday and rose Sunday morning, which isn’t three full days and nights; that is, a complete 72-hour cycle. Obviously, then, the phrase “three days and three nights” doesn’t automatically mean 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?

A Picture of God



Sabbath Afternoon

THIS 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. 7:7-11 _____

Matt. 20:1-16 _____

Luke 15:11-32 _____

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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Text: Isaiah 40.

Teachers Aims:

1. To review the lessons from the book of Jonah about God's forgiveness.
2. To underscore God's desire to have a personal relationship with us.

Lesson Outline:

I. Mercy and Forgiveness: Portraits of God in Scripture.

- A. The Bible does not try to prove that God exists but provides examples of a God of mercy and of grace in action.
- B. Scripture presents God as the decisive and all-powerful Creator and Sustainer of the world.
- C. The book of Jonah provides us with examples of God's forgiveness, which only He can grant to us.

II. Our Greatest Advocate.

- A. Throughout the Bible, examples of God's involvement in personal relationships dispel the notion of a distant deity.
- B. Jesus is the manifestation of God, relating to us on a face-to-face basis.
- C. He continues His never-ceasing battle to woo us away from sin.

Summary: Christ came not as a dictator or monarch but as One with whom humanity could identify. His patience, love, and understanding cross gulfs that even the greatest of bridges can never hope to span. Through His life and ultimate sacrifice we are gifted with the opportunity for salvation.

Commentary.

I. The God of Jonah.

The book of Jonah may seem to be just a simple story. But we have discovered this quarter that it is actually a theologically complex book. It teaches that:

1. God created, controls, and cares for the natural world. During the storm in Jonah 1:9, the prophet stated that God made the sea and the dry land, terms that the Bible uses to represent all creation. Read Psalm 95:3-6.

Creation is under God's control, as we see when He sent a powerful wind to whip up the sea (Jon. 1:4) and appointed a great fish (vs. 17) to swallow Jonah. The Lord spoke to the fish, and it obeyed,

Monday

December 22

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?

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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

vomiting the prophet out on dry land (Jon. 2:10). Later, He brought into being a special plant and worm (Jon. 4:6, 7) and concluded the story with another wind (vs. 8). The Lord showed His concern for all the animals of Nineveh (vs. 11). The only being in the entire book who refused to accept God's protective rulership was Jonah himself.

2. *God stands ready to rescue those who ask for His help.* Jonah acknowledged God's deliverance during his prayer in Jonah 2:2-9. The pagan sailors pleaded for God to spare them (Jon. 1:14), and the people of Nineveh both spoke and acted out a prayer by their fasting and wearing of sackcloth (Jon. 3:7-9). God delivered both the prophet and the Ninevites from certain destruction.

3. *God cares about all the earth's inhabitants.* Jonah repeated God's statement made to Moses that He is " 'a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing' " (Jon. 4:2; compare Exod. 34:6). God did show mercy and grace to the prophet, rescuing him from death in the sea. But He also saved the storm-tossed sailors and the repentant people of Nineveh. God sent the prophet to warn Nineveh, because He loved its people just as He loved Israel. Unfortunately, the only Israelite in the story did not reflect that universal love.

The crew of the sailing vessel displayed faith (Jon. 1:6) and wanted to do the morally right thing (vss. 12-14). After the display of God's power over the storm, they even worshiped and made vows to Him (vs. 16). The people of Nineveh quickly accepted the prophet's preaching about their corrupt condition and genuinely repented (Jonah 3). While Jonah recognized God's love for other nations (Jon. 4:2), he was angry about it.

4. *God may change His mind about His intention to punish.* Besides his hostility to the Assyrians, this may have been the thing that aggravated Jonah the most. His professional pride was at stake. Whatever a prophet predicted was expected to come to pass. This is one reason we find people in the Old Testament trying to kill the prophets.

If a prophet could be slain before he could deliver his prophecy, the prophecy would not be fulfilled. God told Jonah to announce Nineveh's doom then changed His mind about destroying the city. The prophet's self-image took a blow, especially since Deuteronomy 18:22 declares that a prophecy that did not come to pass was a false one. Jonah would rather have tens of thousands perish than be regarded as a false prophet. Would we allow others to perish just to preserve our own religious ideas? Have our theologies—vital as they are—assumed even more importance than our concern for others?

God, however, is free to act as He wills—even if it means doing something different from what He previously announced. Read Jeremiah 18:1-10.

God's freedom to do things His way can be frustrating from a human perspective, as we see in Matthew 20:1-16, in which the laborers in the vineyard resented the laborers hired last, receiving the

Tuesday

December 23

GOD'S MORALITY.

However 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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

same wages as those first hired. The book of Jonah explores the relationship between God's justice and His compassion and reminds us that it is His right to balance them as He sees fit. God cannot be forced into any human theology or philosophy.

5. *The Lord of the Bible is the only true God.* While the story recognizes the existence of the religious beliefs and practices of the sailors (Jon. 1:5-7), it stresses God's goal of leading them to worship Him (vs. 16). While the prophet acknowledges the folly of idol worship (Jon. 2:8), the rest of the book does not directly criticize any of the non-Israelites in the story. It accepts them where they are and seeks to lead them to a greater understanding. This is a model for the church's dealing with others. There is only one true God, but He seeks others in love, not condemnation and criticism. He works to convert sincere worship into true worship.

6. *The Lord longs for thanksgiving, praise, and worship from those He delivers.* The sailors worshiped God after He calmed the sea (Jon. 1:16). The king of Nineveh said " 'Who knows? God may relent and

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

Texts for Discovery: The book of Jonah, Isaiah 40:28-31, Matthew 7:7-11.

1. Too often people ask whether God really exists. Just as often, people believe God exists but do not believe He exists in their lives. How does the story of Jonah show that God not only exists but that He can exist in your life?
2. Read Matthew 7:7-11. If God gives only great gifts, then how can we explain to someone the bad things that happen to people? Consider Jonah's life in your answer.
3. Forgiveness is not an easy concept to understand, even for some Seventh-day Adventists. Youth and young adults especially feel they have been abused by the "institutionalization" of Adventism. Using the Old Testament, find five stories of forgiveness that are relevant to young people today.
4. From the book of Jonah, we have learned the depth of God's power over creation. What does Isaiah 40:28-31 tell you about God? About yourself? How can you use these verses as a testimony to others?
5. Throughout our study this quarter, we learned that God is a personal God. Not only was He involved personally with Jonah; He also seeks to be involved with us on a daily basis. Find and discuss three texts showing that God wants to be involved in your life.

GOD IS A PERSONAL BEING.

God 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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish' ” (Jon. 3:9). Implicit in the king’s statement was the beginnings of praise. Even Jonah praised God after his rescue from the fish (Jon. 2:9).

II. God Can Be Witnessed but Never Fully Understood.

Instead of trying to define or explain God, the Bible prefers to tell stories showing Him in action. Rather than abstractly outlining the relationship between justice and mercy, the book of Jonah recounts God’s gracious dealings both with a rebellious prophet and a pagan nation. A story of God’s love is infinitely more powerful than all our theologies and sermons about it.

The story of Jonah raises more questions than it answers. We must consider how we would react if we were in the situation of someone in the story. But those questions the story forces us to confront make us think about the implications of God’s love in our life—and thinking through something so vital is the only way we can really learn about it.

WITNESSING

An image closely resembles something else. *To image* is to reflect or to symbolize. The Hebrew word for image is *tselem*, which means a resemblance or representative figure. “God created man in his own image” (Gen. 1:27) or *to resemble Himself*. The Greek word for image, *eikon*, means “a likeness.” “[You] have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image [*likeness*] of him that created him” (Col. 3:10).

To say that we were created in the image of God means that God made us to be like Him in thought (Phil. 2:5), in words (Eph. 4:15), in action (1 Cor. 10:31), and in character (Deut. 8:6).

When we have no other gods before Him, we are walking in His ways. When we honor our fathers and mothers, we are walking in His ways. When we do not covet, we are walking in His ways. When we walk in *His* ways, we behave or conduct ourselves in the way Christ, our Example, would conduct Himself. By doing this, we *image*, or reflect, God’s character.

In the book of Jonah, we see a picture of God, of His character. God is forgiving. God is omnipotent. God knows and loves each one of us personally and has called us to be His representatives on earth, to be His witnesses.

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.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

LIFE-APPLICATION APPROACH

Icebreaker: A. W. Tozer once reflected that all God's acts are consistent with all His attributes. No attribute contradicts any other, but all harmonize and blend into one another in the infinite abyss of the Godhead. All that God does agrees with all that God is, and being and doing are one in Him. The familiar picture of God as often torn between His justice and His mercy is altogether false to the facts. To think of God as inclining first toward one and then toward another of His attributes is to imagine a God who is unsure of Himself, frustrated, and emotionally unstable, which, of course, is to say that the one of whom we are thinking is not the true God at all but a weak, mental reflection of Him badly out of focus.

Thought Question:

What kind of portrait does the Bible paint of God? What does it say about the relationship between God and humanity? Have the class find word pictures, or descriptive phrases, in the psalms that paint a picture of the God we worship.

Application Questions:

1. One of the characteristics of God that appeals to humans is

consistency, or reliability. The fact that God can be depended on at all times and in all circumstances is deeply assuring to our faith and trust. Imagine life without consistency. Consider the consistency created by the things in life that often are taken for granted: watches, office hours, traffic rules, and so forth. What kind of life would inconsistency create? Now make a list of reasons why you are glad you worship a God who is consistent.

2. On their way home from church, a little girl turned to her mother and said, "Mommy, the preacher's sermon confused me." The mother asked, "Why is that?" The little girl replied, "Well, he said that God is bigger than we are. Is that true?" The mother replied, "Yes, that's true." "And he also said that God lives in us? Is that true, Mommy?" Again the mother replied, "Yes." "Well," said the little girl, "if God is bigger than we are, and He lives in us, wouldn't He show through?" What characteristic of God would you like to show through your life? What can you do to ensure that it is an accurate representation of God?

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.