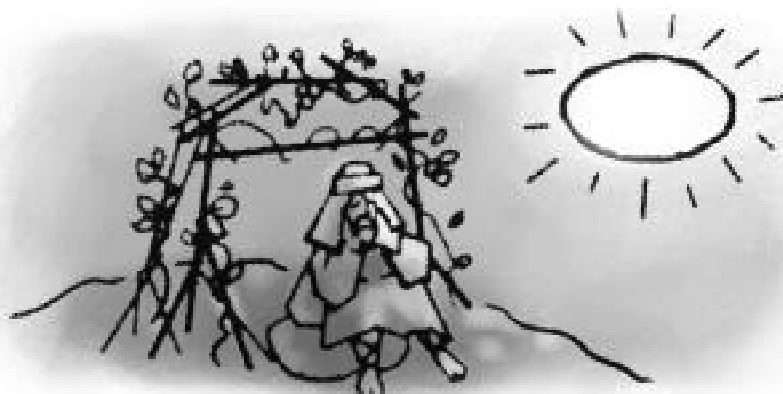


# A Wind, a Worm, and a Plant



SAB  
PM

**JONAH HAS SHOWN DEEP UNHAPPINESS<sup>1</sup> WITH GOD'S MERCY** to the wicked people of Nineveh. He is sorry they repented.<sup>2</sup> God then asks Jonah to think again about his stubborn attitude<sup>3</sup> as he sits under a booth (shelter) he has built for shade. Jonah and God continue their conversation. Some of the deepest ideas in the Old Testament are written in this last chapter of the book of Jonah. But what we see here is another example of God's grace toward His children who make mistakes. As you study this week, keep in mind who Jonah is. Remember the privileges (benefits) he has been given as a prophet and what God has done for him. And he *still* has a bad attitude!

This should give us hope for ourselves.

**THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:** What was the symbolism of the booth Jonah built for himself? What is the irony<sup>4</sup> about this booth? Why did God grow the plant for Jonah, then take the plant away? Was Jonah facing a judgment of his own? What was God teaching Jonah? How is this a powerful example of God's grace? The same as Jonah, in what ways can we be in danger of using God's grace wrongly?

**MEMORY VERSE:** "Because the Lord is righteous [holy] and good, he teaches sinners the path they should follow. He leads the humble [people] in the right way and teaches them his will" (Psalm 25:8, 9, TEV).

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

<sup>1</sup>unhappiness—not happy.

<sup>2</sup>repented—to have said that you are sorry for your sins and that you want to stop sinning.

<sup>3</sup>attitude—how a person thinks or feels about something or someone.

<sup>4</sup>irony—the opposite of what should usually happen.

**SUN JONAH'S BOOTH (SHELTER).**

**“All the people of Israel shall live in shelters for seven days, so that your descendants [future children] may know that the Lord made the people of Israel live in simple shelters when he led them out of Egypt. He is the Lord your God” (Leviticus 23:42, 43, TEV).**

God now prepares another lesson for Jonah. Like the “great fish,” a plant, a worm, and a strong wind now become God’s tools. And the same as the “great fish,” the plant, worm, and wind obey. This lesson also repeats the theme of God’s control over what He has created.

**In Jonah 4:5, Jonah goes outside Nineveh and makes “a booth.” Read Leviticus 23:39, 44 and Nehemiah 8:14-16 from a King James Bible. What is the important message in Jonah by using the word *booth*, based on what the word meant in these other verses?**

The booths reminded the Israelites of their miraculous rescue from Egypt. The booths reminded them of God’s care after that rescue. But for Jonah, freedom seemed all right for the Hebrews but not for the Ninevites.<sup>5</sup> Jonah was

concerned only with his personal comfort. He missed the irony of being concerned for his comfort and not for the comfort of other people.



**A booth like Jonah built.**

The Hebrew word for “booths” is *sukkot*. *Sukkot* is the plural of *sukkah* (the word that appears in Jonah). It is also the name for the Jewish festival of *Sukkot*, or the Feast of Tabernacles. During the feast, traditional<sup>6</sup> Jews live in a hut, a *sukkah*, as a reminder of the temporary<sup>7</sup> homes in which their ancestors<sup>8</sup> lived after their rescue from Egypt.

**Read the last part of Jonah 4:5. What was Jonah waiting for? Did he still hold some hope that the city would be destroyed? What does this tell us about his character? What does this tell us about the character of the God who is always so patient with him?**

<sup>5</sup>Ninevites—the people of the city of Nineveh, Assyria.

<sup>6</sup>traditional—Jews who are traditional worship God the way the Jews in the Bible worshiped God. Traditions are the customs of a group of people or the ways a group of people live and worship.

<sup>7</sup>temporary—lasting for only a short time.

<sup>8</sup>ancestors—relatives who lived before you.

**MON GOD'S APPOINTMENTS.**

**What verb<sup>9</sup> do we find in the opening of Jonah 4:6 that we have seen before?**

Jonah 4:6 opens with the wording, “the Lord God prepared.” This is the second of four times this wording appears in the book of Jonah (read lesson 6). The last time this wording appeared was when God “prepared” the fish to swallow Jonah. Each time this wording is used (Jonah 1:17; Jonah 4:6-8), God is the One doing the preparing or appointing. This wording shows God’s ruling power over all nature in doing His purpose.

It is clear that God still has not given up on Jonah. He has refused to give up even when Jonah was so discouraged over God’s grace toward the Ninevites, that he wanted to die.

Jonah is sitting in a booth he had built to wait for something to happen to Nineveh. But God causes a plant to grow and bring extra shade, “so that he [Jonah] would be more comfortable” (TEV).

Just the same as with the “great fish,” the writer does not name the type of plant. The author also does not spend any time trying to explain how the plant grew so quickly. The author just accepted that God can do these things.

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

Jonah is depressed that Nineveh is not destroyed. But he is happy because of a plant that gives him some shade!

God “appoints [prepares]” the plant. Then He prepares a worm to destroy the plant. Next, He prepares a strong wind. Instead of Nineveh, Jonah himself seems to be facing some type of punishment. Jonah is getting a small taste of what he wanted the people of Nineveh to have in a big way. God’s grace brought the plant. The plant made Jonah happy. But God took the plant away, making Jonah very unhappy.<sup>10</sup>

**Jonah is suffering from one of the most common problems we have. This problem is selfishness. Selfishness is one of the most dangerous sins. Read Luke 9:23; Romans 6:4-7; 1 Corinthians 9:19; and Philippians 2:1-7. How can these verses help us overcome selfishness? Selfishness is the same sin that made Jonah such a moral and spiritual wretch.<sup>11</sup>**



**Jesus was not selfish. He gave up all of heaven to save us.**

<sup>9</sup>verb—a word that shows action.

<sup>10</sup>unhappy—not happy.

<sup>11</sup>wretch—a very bad person.

**TUE JONAH'S RETURNING ANGER.**

Jonah has demanded of God that He destroy. So God does destroy. But He does not destroy what Jonah wanted Him to destroy! God sends a worm to destroy Jonah's shade plant! Jonah has some hard lessons to learn.

Jonah again wants to die. But this time Jonah does not directly ask God to kill him. (Maybe he thinks it is of no use to ask God.) Jonah's desire to die shows that he had a serious spiritual problem. These are Jonah's last words in the story (Jonah 4:8, 9). As he has done from the beginning, Jonah continues to oppose God. But Jonah does not have the last word. God again asks a question.

**What does God say to Jonah? Jonah 4:9.**

God's questions pressure Jonah to see his attitude. This is the second time God asks Jonah to think about his anger. God now points to the dying plant.

Notice that in Jonah 4:4, God asks Jonah if it was right to be angry over the act of saving Nineveh. Now, in Jonah 4:9, God asks Jonah if it is right to be angry about the plant being destroyed. Perhaps God was showing Jonah the difference between a whole city and one plant. God wanted Jonah to see just how his own attitude and thinking were so wrong. Jonah was angry that God did not destroy a city. But Jonah was angry that God destroyed a plant!

**How does Jonah answer God's question? Jonah 4:9.**

Jonah is a sinner. Sinners deserve to die, because they rebel against God, their Creator. Jonah sees miracle after miracle. Even he himself is saved by one of the most wonderful miracles in Bible history. But God still has to work with him! What we see in Jonah is a small example of what God has been doing with His people all through history. God has shown them more grace, more mercy, and more patience than they have ever deserved.

**Jonah's anger seems so foolish to us. He seems very blind to his own spiritual condition. But many of us have often felt the same way. We are angry that certain things happened a certain way, so we blame what happened on God. No doubt, Jonah thought he was right in being angry, just as we think we are right. What do the following verses say to help us have the right understanding of our problems and suffering? Isaiah 55:8, 9; Luke 11:9-13; Romans 8:31, 32; 1 Corinthians 13:11, 12.**



**If your son asks for a fish, would you give him a snake?**

**WED PITY FOR WHAT?**

**“The Lord said to him [Jonah], ‘This plant grew up in one night and disappeared the next [night]; you didn’t [did not] do anything for it [the plant] and you didn’t make it grow—yet you feel sorry for it’ ” (Jonah 4:10, TEV).**

Look at how God answered Jonah in Jonah 4:10. God uses the verb “pity” (KJV) as He describes Jonah’s sympathy for the plant. God used the same word in Jonah 10:11, to describe His attitude toward Nineveh. Jonah has pity on a plant. But God has pity on the people of Nineveh. The difference between a holy God and fallen people could not be greater.

It is interesting to see that God used the verb “pity” for both His attitude and Jonah’s attitude to help Jonah understand what Jonah was doing. Jonah was unhappy over the plant only because he missed the plant’s shade.

**Notice the choice of the verb “perish [die]” in Jonah 4:10. This reminds us of the earlier examples of the verb “perish” in the story of Jonah. How was the verb “perish” used earlier?**

Jonah 1:6 \_\_\_\_\_

Jonah 1:14 \_\_\_\_\_

Jonah 3:9 \_\_\_\_\_

Jesus uses the same word in Greek in John 3:16, where He talks about the “perishing [dying]” of the whole world. By the author’s careful writing, Jonah’s worry about the plant seems so small when contrasted<sup>12</sup> with what would happen if God decided to destroy Nineveh. The question faced by the sailors, the people of Nineveh, and Jonah himself is the same question everyone faces. This is a question of life or death. In fact, the question goes even beyond life or death on earth, where life is only a vapor (James 4:14) and death is only a temporary sleep (1 Corinthians 15:51). The real question comes down to eternal<sup>13</sup> life (John 3:15) or to eternal destruction (John 3:16).



Life “is like a puff of smoke, which appears for a moment and then disappears” (James 4:14, TEV).

**We need to remember that every person faces either eternal life or eternal destruction (John 5:29). How can we avoid being the same as Jonah? For example, how can we**

<sup>12</sup>contrasted—to have shown how things are different.

<sup>13</sup>eternal—forever; without beginning or end; lasting forever.

**not be so worried about present problems that we forget what is really important and what our purpose as Seventh-day Adventists is?**

#### **THU** A QUESTION OF GRACE.

Let us look again at what God said to Jonah in Jonah 4:10. Jonah has just finished saying, Yes, I have the right to be angry, even unto death, because You (God) took away my plant. But God's answer shows Jonah the true situation. Jonah did not really have any claim to that plant. He had no authority (power) over it. He did not work for the plant, earn it, or even grow it. The plant, which gave Jonah shade, was there through God's power for Jonah's sake.

**Something that we cannot earn, cannot work for, cannot create by ourselves, and is totally a gift of God is called grace. Read Job 4:17-21; Ephesians 2:5-10; Romans 3:28; Romans 4:13-16.**

How much different is Jonah from the rest of us? How often do we take God's gifts without thanking Him? God shows us grace, and we can almost get used to His grace as if we deserve it. We forget that God's grace is a gift. We forget what it cost God for us to have His grace. All of us, every minute of our lives, are receivers of God's grace in more ways than we know. Per-

haps that is the problem: The same as Jonah, we do not know how important God's grace is to our very existence.

Notice what 2 Timothy 1:8-10 says about what has been given to us in Jesus "before the world began." Something was given to us before the world began. This means that it was given to us before we asked for it. That is why it had to be grace.

**Summarize 2 Timothy 1:8-10 in your own words. Compare<sup>14</sup> 2 Timothy 1:8-10 with how God worked with Jonah. List the things that God has done for us by His grace alone. Why does Paul say these things are not because of anything we have done?**

**A young family ate out every Sunday night. One Sunday, they decided not to eat out. One of their children, age six, said, "Well, I expected to go out to eat!" In what ways are we in danger of doing the same thing with God's grace?**

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

Nineveh finally was destroyed in 612 B.C. But the Ninevites who heard Jonah preach experienced a wonderful salvation. The God of the Hebrews "was honored throughout the heathen<sup>15</sup> world.

<sup>14</sup>compare—show how things are the same.

<sup>15</sup>heathen—people who do not believe in God.

His law was respected.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 271. So the book of Jonah shows one of the grandest events<sup>16</sup> in the history of salvation!

“The Son of God gave all—life and love and suffering—for us to be saved. And can it be that we, the unworthy<sup>17</sup> people of so great love, will hold back our hearts from Him? Every minute of our lives we have been partners of the blessings of His grace. For this very reason, we cannot fully know how much God has saved us from trouble and suffering.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 185.

“It was God’s purpose that His grace should be shown to the Gentiles<sup>18</sup> and the Israelites. This had been clearly outlined in Old Testament prophecies. Paul uses some of these prophecies in his argument. He asks, ‘Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use? What if God, choosing to show his wrath [anger] and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects [people] of his wrath—pre-

pared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy,<sup>19</sup> when he prepared in advance for glory—even us, when he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?’ (Romans 9:21-24, NIV)”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*,<sup>20</sup> p. 376.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What other prophet wanted to die because he was discouraged (1 Kings 19). Are there any comparisons<sup>21</sup> between Jonah’s situation and this prophet’s situation? If so, what? What are the differences?
2. In the above quote, White said that we receive God’s grace every minute of our lives. How do you understand what that statement means? How do people who do not believe in God receive His grace?

**SUMMARY:** God loves us, even though we are sometimes hypocrites.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>16</sup>events—things that happen.

<sup>17</sup>unworthy—not worthy.

<sup>18</sup>Gentiles—people who are not Jews.

<sup>19</sup>mercy—kindness we do not deserve.

<sup>20</sup>apostles—the disciples of Jesus whom He chose to preach the gospel after He returned to heaven.

<sup>21</sup>comparisons—things that are the same.

<sup>22</sup>hypocrites—people who say they believe in God, but do not act like they believe in God.