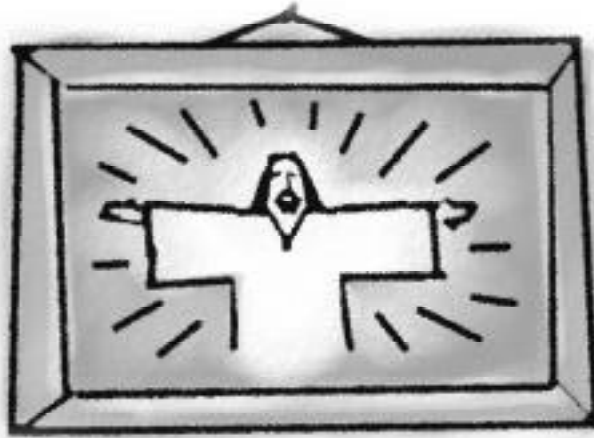


A Picture of God

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THIS WEEK IS THE END OF OUR STUDY ON JONAH. It is hard to believe the book of Jonah has only 48 verses. But the message of the book touches topics we will spend forever trying to understand.

Of those themes, the most interesting is the theme of God's grace. We really cannot fully understand God's grace. This is because we really cannot see just how sinful we are. Our minds help us understand the world. But sin has stained our minds.

Thankfully, God has shown enough of His grace to us so we can learn to love Him and to show our love in faith and obedience. This is all He asks.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: What does the book of Jonah teach about God's forgiveness? What does the book of Jonah teach about His power over the world? How does the book show God's desire to have a personal relationship with us? What part does morality¹ have in the book of Jonah?

MEMORY VERSE: " 'Comfort my people,' says our God. 'Comfort them! Encourage the people of Jerusalem. Tell them they have suffered long enough and their sins are now forgiven. I [God] have punished them in full for all their sins' " (Isaiah 40:1, 2, TEV).

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

¹morality—the practice of doing what is good and right according to what the Bible teaches.

SUN GOD'S FORGIVENESS.

The book of Jonah has something that is the same as all the books in the Bible. None of the books ever tries to prove that God is real. Not one of them ever shows any doubt that God is real. The authors do not just speak of Him out of their imaginations. Instead, they fill the pages of the Bible with clear pictures of God in action within human history. The book of Jonah is part of this whole Bible history.

One picture is drawn very clearly from the book of Jonah. This picture is of God's willingness to forgive. God always surprises humans with how much He loves and forgives them. The same as many of us, Jonah had a hard time understanding God's love and forgiveness. It is not easy for sinful humans to understand God's grace. In the New Testament, the four Gospels² often say that God forgives people more than most of us think.

How do the following words of Jesus show God's willingness to forgive?

Matthew 7:7-11 _____

Matthew 20:1-16 _____

Luke 15:11-32 _____



The son's father shows us how much God wants to forgive us.

The book of Jonah gives a deep picture of God's forgiveness. Perhaps this is why Jewish people read Jonah at *Minchah*. *Minchah* is the afternoon service of the Day of Atonement.³ In the final hours, when judgment is about to close, the book of Jonah is opened, so the people can learn about God's mercy⁴ to Jonah and Nineveh.

**Are you angry about something?
Does your anger "boil" within you?
You probably have a good reason to**

²the four Gospels—the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are called the Gospels.

³the Day of Atonement—a yearly Jewish event when the earthly sanctuary was cleansed; Day of Atonement services symbolized cleansing from sin and a renewed relationship with God.

⁴mercy—kindness we do not deserve.

be angry. But can thinking about Jesus and His forgiveness help? How can thinking about what God has forgiven you help you learn to forgive other people?

MON GOD'S POWER.

The book of Jonah reminds us how much power God has in controlling the universe. His power is much greater than we think it is. Even the pagan⁵ sailors of Jonah 1 recognized God's power in the "great storm." The storm's power drew their attention to the great God of heaven and earth.

The powerful actions of God are shown throughout the Bible to be far greater than the power of all the other "gods" the people thought were real.

Review God's power over nature as it is shown in the book of Jonah. Then read Isaiah 40. What things do we see God doing in the book of Jonah that are discussed in Isaiah 40?



"Can anyone . . . weigh the mountains and hills on scales?"

⁵pagan—not believing in God.

⁶moral—having to do with knowing the difference between right and wrong.

⁷standard of righteousness—God's law. God's law is based on love (Matthew 22:34-40).

Isaiah 40:26, 28 points to God's creative power. He is the Creator and the Supporter of life. It may be hard for us to see this in times of pain, trouble, and suffering. But we have the promise that our God is always in control. We also have the promise that in the end He will make all things right.

There is so much we just do not understand. That is how it always has been. But what God teaches us through the Bible and especially in the story of Jonah, is that we can know enough about God's character, power, and love that we can trust Him enough to stay faithful to Him. This will let God work in us so other people can learn about Him.

Read Isaiah 40 carefully and think about the wonders of creation. What does creation tell you about God's power?

TUE GOD'S MORALITY.

The book of Jonah is different from other Bible books. But the message of Jonah is the same as the message of the other Bible books. The same as the other books, Jonah is clear that God is a moral⁶ God. He has a standard of righteousness⁷ for all the world. He might judge people differently, depending upon how much knowledge they have had. But the world will be judged by God's standard of morality.

What is the important message in each of the following verses? How do these verses relate to the story of Jonah? Psalm 9:8; Psalm 96:10, 13; Psalm 98:8, 9; Acts 17:31; Romans 3:6.

In all of the Bible, religion and morality are tied together. In the Bible, we find God always judging human history according to His standard of righteousness. *All* people or groups of people are under His standard.

Note how God speaks of Egypt and the Amorites in Genesis 15:13-16. What is suggested in these verses about the moral condition of these pagan nations and their responsibility for what they do?

In the book of Jonah, we see that even the wicked people of Nineveh believed God's punishment was fair. The book of Jonah and the whole Bible teach that a relationship with God is shown in a moral life.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we have often heard the statement made to us by other Christians that the law was finished at the Cross. This means that we do not need to keep the Sabbath commandment. Based on today's lesson, why is that statement wrong?

WED GOD IS PERSONAL.

God is involved in personal relationships in the book of Jonah. He is not a far-off power who is disinterested⁸ in people. He is not a dictator⁹ who forces people to obey Him without question. All through the Bible, we find Him begging and reasoning with people. One whole chapter in the book of Jonah is a conversation between God and Jonah. Jesus' whole life was God coming down and talking face-to-face with us.

Look up each of the following verses showing God speaking to people. What do all the verses have that are almost the same?

Genesis 4:1-7 _____

Exodus 3:1-8 _____

Job 38-41 _____

Acts 9:3-8 _____

In every one of these verses, God is trying to warn, to tell, to teach, or to

⁸disinterested—not interested.

⁹dictator—a person or ruler who demands that you do what he or she tells you to do.

show Himself and His love to sinful humans. What these verses show us is that God deals with us as people with free wills who need to be led away from evil choices. As in the cases of Cain and Jonah, God tries to steer us from wrong attitudes,¹⁰ which can become evil choices. In all these verses we see a God who is working only for the good of people. The same God is working for our good too. What is surprising is to think of the size of the universe. There is so much about the universe we do not even know. The God who created the universe wants to enter into a personal relationship with us! We cannot even imagine such a great God.

If someone were to ask you how he could have a personal relationship with God, how would you answer? What are a few of the important steps that person should take in order to have that relationship?

THU JESUS IS A PICTURE OF GOD.

The God of the Old Testament, who tried to have a personal relationship with human beings, is the same God of the New Testament. We can see this clearly through the life and ministry (work) of Jesus.

A preacher once described it like this: Imagine you are watching a group of ants cross a street. You know that they

are going to be smashed by the first car that comes down the road. You try to stand above them and shout, "Hey, ants, get out of the road!" Would it work? No! So you become an ant and get down on their level. Then you can speak their language and lead them away from the speeding car. This is a silly description. But it does make the point that Jesus became one of us in order to communicate with us. He also came to save us from being destroyed forever.

What are some of Jesus' conversations in the Gospels? How are these conversations the same?

Matthew 19:16-22 _____

Mark 7:24-37 _____

John 3:1-21 _____

John 4:1-27 _____

Jesus gave people time to listen thoughtfully and answer honestly. He let people disagree¹¹ with Him. He did not get upset if they did not listen. Jesus

¹⁰attitudes—how a person thinks or feels about something or someone.

¹¹disagree—not agree.



never communicated in a way that forced anyone to agree. That is simply not God's way. He wants us to obey Him because we love Him. Jesus knows that love cannot be forced.

In the book of Jonah, the Old Testament reaches one of its highest points of showing God in His relationship to creation and history. The book of Jonah also shows His loving concern for animals.

God's last question to Jonah is: "Should I [God] not pity Nineveh? Should I not care about the animals?" This is one of the most surprising examples of God as a God who cares for what He has created. What Jonah tells us is what all the Bible tells us: We are not alone. Our God cares. God

has given us the Bible to help us see how much He cares even when we face great pain and sorrow.

FRI **ADDITIONAL STUDY:** "God's love for our good has no limits. Angels are surprised to see that the people who receive God's love do not show enough appreciation for it. God is disappointed to see how people neglect the souls of other people. Would we know how Jesus feels about it? How would a father and mother feel if they knew that their child, lost in the cold and the snow, had been left to die by people who might have saved the child? Would the parents not be very angry? Would they not criticize those murderers with anger as hot as their tears and as strong as their love? The sufferings of every person are the sufferings of God's child. People who do not help another dying person make God very angry."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 825.

"God is in active communication with every part of His creation. He is pictured as bending toward the earth and its people. He is listening to every word that is said. He hears every cry. He listens to every prayer. He watches carefully the movements of everyone."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *My Life Today*, p. 292.

"Jesus has the mercy of the shepherd, the love of the parent, and the unlimited¹² grace of the loving Savior. Jesus encourages His people with

¹²unlimited—having no limit.



**God hears us when we cry.
He listens to our prayers.**

blessings. He is not satisfied with just announcing these blessings. He offers these blessings in the most attractive way, so we will want to have them. In the same way, we are to tell

other people about the blessings God wants to give them.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 826.

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

Philosopher Bertrand Russell had been thrown in jail for antiwar¹³ activities. One of his jailers wanted to talk with Russell. So he asked Russell what his religious beliefs were. “I am an agnostic,”¹⁴ Russell answered. The jailer was not quite sure what an agnostic was. He finally answered with a big smile, “Oh, well, it really does not matter. We all worship the same God anyway.” From what you have learned this quarter, what is wrong with the jailer’s answer?

SUMMARY: Let us praise God that He is more kind, loving, and forgiving than we are.

¹³antiwar—being against war.

¹⁴agnostic—a person who does not believe in God.