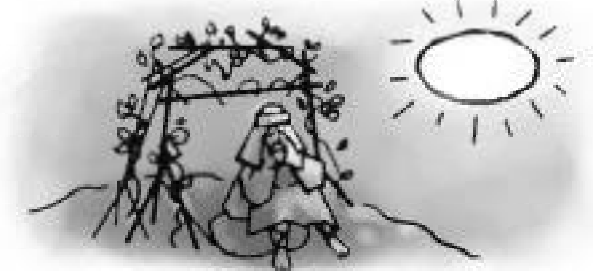


# A Wind, a Worm, and a Plant



## *Sabbath Afternoon*

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

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

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

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

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

**JONAH'S BOOTH.**

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

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

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

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

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

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

**GOD'S APPOINTMENTS.**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**JONAH'S RETURNING WRATH.**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**PITY FOR WHAT?**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**A QUESTION OF GRACE.**

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.**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

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

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



## The Lost Cause

Sonia Santos

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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