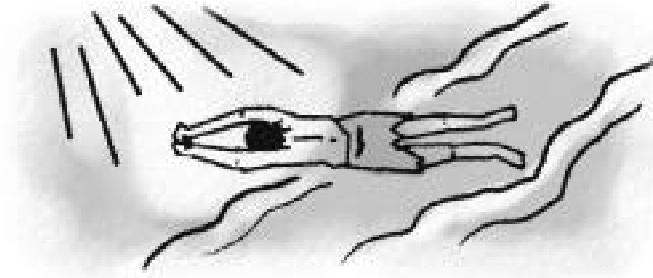


Second Chances



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

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?