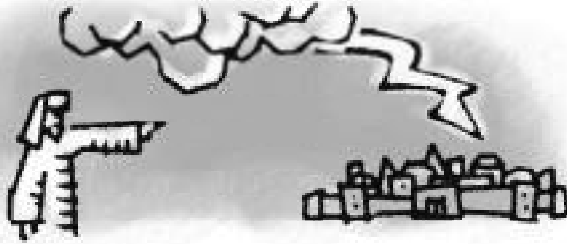


Jonah and Judgment



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.

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.

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.

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?

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.

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?

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.



A Voice for God **Luis Amilcar Cano Navarro**

Ever since his childhood, music has been a part of Luis Cano's life. But music did not always draw him closer to God. He grew up attending church and singing in the choir, but as a teenager he became disenchanted and left the church.

People praised his musical ability, and Luis dreamed of becoming famous. When church members told him that his voice was a gift from God and should be used only for God's glory, he began to resent God.

Luis drifted away from church. He wanted to live his own life, a life in which God did not play a large part.

After college he began studying voice with a well-known voice teacher, Doña Isabel, and the two developed a friendship. When he married, Doña Isabel invited Luis and his wife, Vicky, to join a small group that met near their home. Luis did not want to go, but Vicky yearned for a closer walk with God. Finally Luis accepted Doña Isabel's invitation to attend the small group meeting.

Luis was impressed with the speaker's understanding of the Bible. Luis and Vicky continued attending the small group meeting. Luis liked the group Bible study, but Vicky was concerned that he might want to change religions. But when the leader invited those present to surrender their lives to Christ, both Vicky and Luis stood.

Luis realized that he had never really understood God before. Every day he fell more deeply in love with God. God began filling every aspect of the Cano's lives. Soon they were baptized.

When they learned about tithing, Luis was not convinced that they could survive on less than their full income. They prayed to know God's will, and soon Luis received a raise, which convinced him that God was leading them to trust Him.



Luis began singing in church again, but this time it was different. "No matter what happens, I will continue to sing praises to God," he said. "I want to sing for God's glory, not my own, to exalt Christ, not myself."

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