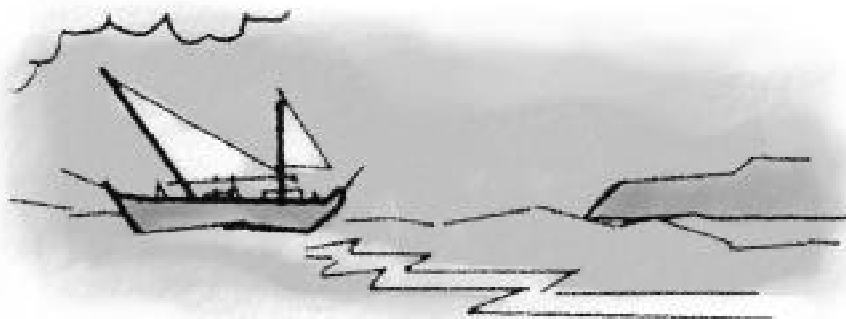


A Hebrew Prophet and Heathen¹ Sailors



**SAB
PM**

THIS WEEK'S LESSON IS an example of what happened to ancient² Israel. God planned that heathen people would come to Israel to learn about the God who had done so much for Israel. But because of Israel's disobedience,³ heathen people did not come to Israel to learn about God. Instead, heathen people led the Israelites to heathen lands as captives and slaves. Then as slaves and captives, they witnessed⁴ to heathen people.

This week we will see how in the middle of great trouble and suffering, Jonah witnessed for God to heathen sailors upon a sinking ship.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: How does tragedy (a sad happening) often help bring us back to God? What powerful irony⁵ appears in this part of the book of Jonah? Why does Jonah say that his God is the Creator of the earth and the sea? How was God able to use Jonah as a witness,⁶ even though he was stubborn?

MEMORY VERSE: "Your [God's] faithfulness endures [lasts] through all the ages [history]; you [God] have set the earth in place, and it remains [stays]. All things remain to this day because of your command, because they are all your servants" (Psalm 119:90, 91, TEV).

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 1.

¹heathen—not believing in God.

²ancient—very old.

³disobedience—not obeying.

⁴witnessed—told other people about God through words and loving deeds.

⁵irony—the opposite of what should usually happen.

⁶witness—a person who tells other people about God through words and loving deeds.

SUN STORM AT SEA.

In Jonah 1:4, 5, God sends a powerful storm. The ship is in danger of sinking. The heathen sailors are praying to their own gods. And Jonah has “gone down into the hold [cargo area] of the ship” (Jonah 1:5, NRSV). The ship captain finds him sleeping. He is quite upset to find someone sleeping in such an emergency.



Notice what happens among the sailors. Jonah 1:5 says they start throwing their “wares” (KJV) out of the ship. “Wares” were things that would be of great value to them. This could even have been the cargo.⁷ But, in this emergency, they are willing to throw everything into the sea! What is the spiritual lesson here? Matthew 16:26; Ecclesiastes 2:11; 1 John 2:15-17. How many of us have ever found ourselves in a situation where many

things we thought were important became unimportant?⁸



Will a person gain anything if he wins the whole world but loses his life?
Of course not?

Read what the captain says to Jonah. Jonah 1:6. Why was the captain so upset? What did he want from the sleeping prophet? Did he say what he did because he was a man of faith or because he was afraid?

Compare⁹ the captain’s call to Jonah (Jonah 1:6) with God’s call to Jonah (Jonah 1:2). The captain begs Jonah to “cry” (KJV) unto God. The captain uses the same verb¹⁰ that God used when He called Jonah to “cry” (KJV) against Nineveh (Jonah 1:2).

But the call to arise and to cry comes from a heathen sailor who does not worship the God of heaven. How ironic¹¹ for a

⁷cargo—things carried by a ship or plane that businesses want to send some place far away.

⁸unimportant—not important.

⁹compare—show how things are the same.

¹⁰verb—a word that shows action.

¹¹ironic—the opposite of what should usually happen. Usually, a prophet of God would ask a heathen person to pray.

heathen person to ask a prophet of God to pray.

What lesson can you find in the heathen sailor asking a prophet of God to pray? Do we ever find that people who do not believe can be more “spiritual” or “moral”¹² than we are? What can we learn from these situations?



HEATHEN SAILORS CONTINUE THEIR INITIATIVE.¹³

The sailors continue to struggle against the storm while Jonah remains unemotional.¹⁴ The sailors believe this terrible storm shows that their gods are angry.

We know God sent the storm because He loved Jonah and the people in Nineveh who needed His salvation. But Jonah and the sailors did not know God had sent the storm because of His love. What can we learn from this when terrible things happen to us? (Also read Proverbs 3:5; Romans 8:28; 1 Peter 4:12, 13.)

The sailors believe that the storm is tied to someone’s guilt and that finding the guilty person would make things right. So they cast lots¹⁵ to see who the guilty person was. During Bible times, Israel and other nations used the cast-

ing of lots as a way of solving problems (Numbers 33:54; 1 Samuel 14:41, 42; Esther 3:7; Proverbs 16:33). In the book of Jonah, God lets the casting of lots point to Jonah as the cause of the storm (Jonah 1:7).

We have a clear Bible example of someone’s evil bringing trouble (Joshua 7). But what is the danger of believing that trouble is always a result of someone’s wrongdoing? (Read Job 1; 2.)

After the lot falls on Jonah, the sailors ask him many questions. They probably are trying to find out why the lot fell on him and why he is the cause of the storm (Jonah 1:7, 8).

Up to this point in the story, Jonah has not been talking. Now he carefully answers many of the sailors’ questions. But Jonah does not answer the questions about his work, about where he came from, and about his country. The only question he answers is about what group of people he comes from. He tells them he is a Hebrew. Then he answers a question they do not even ask—who his God is. Read Jonah 1:9, 10.

The wording to “fear God” (KJV) is a common Hebrew wording that suggests the idea of worshiping and serving God. Jonah is running away from God. But he cannot help telling other people about him! When have you found yourself tell-

¹²moral—having to do with knowing the difference between right and wrong.

¹³initiative—taking the first step.

¹⁴unemotional—not feeling any emotion.

¹⁵lots—two or more of the same things used for learning God’s will by the selection of one of the things. Such things as stones were used to cast lots.

ing other people about God while you were doing something God did not want you to be doing?

TUE WITNESS AT SEA.

After telling the sailors he was a Hebrew, Jonah offers some information that the sailors did not ask for: “I fear [worship] the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land” (Jonah 1:9, NKJV).

What other prophet used the title “the God of heaven”? Daniel 2:19.

Daniel blesses the “God of heaven” when God shows him Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and saves the lives of the Babylonian wise men. The wording, “the God of heaven,” appears many times in the Old Testament when talking about God.



What is most interesting is that Jonah calls Him “Yahweh, the God of heaven.” But he also describes Him as the Creator, who made the sea and the dry land. This points to the Genesis Creation story.

What do the following verses say that is so important to our faith as Seventh-day Adventists? Exodus 20:11; Psalm 100:3; Psalm 146:5, 6; Malachi 2:10; Acts 4:24; Colossians 1:16, 17; Revelation 4:11; Revelation 14:7.

Jonah knows that the power and authority¹⁶ of his God come from the fact that He is the Creator. He is the Author of everything, the Foundation (basis) of truth. Our whole faith is based on the idea that we are worshiping the God who created all things. It is a fact that He is the Creator. Being the Creator makes Him the only true God. If He is not the Creator, then why worship Him?

Jonah is not wasting time on long religious discussions about the nature of God. He gets right to the heart of the problem. He tells the sailors what they need to know.

God commands that every week we keep the Sabbath as a reminder that He is our Creator (Exodus 20:8-11). What does this command tell us about how important the doctrine¹⁷ of Creation is?

¹⁶authority—the right to be in charge.

¹⁷doctrine—church belief.



We keep the Sabbath to remind us that God is our Creator.

WED “WHY HAVE YOU [JONAH] DONE THIS?” (NKJV)

The irony is clear. Jonah did not want to tell the people in Nineveh about God. But now, in his hurried escape from God’s call, he is forced to tell the sailors about God!

What did Jonah say to the sailors that made them so afraid? Jonah 1:9, 10.

The sailors were already “afraid” of the storm (Jonah 1:5). But now, they were “exceedingly [very] afraid” (Jonah 1:10, KJV). They act even more fearfully to Jonah’s words about God than they acted to the terrible storm. It is one thing to worship the powerful God.

But it is another thing to run from Him. The sailors must have guessed that God started the storm to destroy Jonah for his disobedience. And because they had the bad luck to be with him, they were going to be destroyed too.

There is a big difference between these sailors and Jonah. Jonah, the prophet of God, dares to act against God’s will. But when he mentions God’s powerful name, it causes great fear in the sailors’ hearts. The terrible storm is all they need to convince them of God’s power. And they believe Jonah has made Him angry.

The sailors did not just believe because Jonah tried to talk about God. No. Jonah was forced to talk about God because of the storm. But this unplanned¹⁸ testimony¹⁹ touched the sailors’ hearts. They were horrified at Jonah’s escape from the God of heaven and earth. Even when Jonah disobeyed,²⁰ God used him as a witness.

What impressed the sailors about the terrible storm? It happened not because of Jonah. The sailors certainly saw nothing special about him. Instead, God was able to work around Jonah’s disobedience. Jonah’s testimony helped the sailors learn something about the true God.

After learning about Jonah’s escape, the sailors asked him, “Why have you done this?” Suppose we are caught in sin. What do we say if

¹⁸unplanned—not planned.

¹⁹testimony—a statement about your belief in God.

²⁰disobeyed—did not obey.

someone then asks us, “Why have you done this?” As born-again Christians, do we ever have a good excuse to sin? (Read Romans 6:1-12; 1 Corinthians 10:13.)

THU THE EMERGENCY WORSENS.

What words are repeated in Jonah 1:10 for the third time in chapter 1?

These words, “from the presence of the Lord” (KJV), appear in this first chapter like a refrain.²¹ We have already seen them twice in verse 3. The author of the book of Jonah is very careful in choosing his words. Repetition (repeated verse) in Hebrew storytelling is a tool used to focus on something important. On purpose, the author focuses our attention on Jonah’s stubbornness.

Why do you think the words “from the presence of the Lord” are used again? What point is the author trying to make? Can anyone ever really flee (run) from the presence of an all-knowing God (Proverbs 5:21)? In what ways can we try to flee from the presence of the Lord?

The sailors grow more afraid as the storm gets worse. Now they realize

something must be done or everyone will die.

Notice how the sailors continue to act first. They accepted the God Jonah worshiped. Now they ask Jonah what they should do. The sailors admit that they are very afraid. They beg Jonah to give them the answer to their problem: What can we do so God will not be *so angry*? Tell us, and we will obey. You got us into this mess. Now you tell us how to get out of it.

Look at Jonah’s answer in Jonah 1:12. Was Jonah admitting his guilt? Was he ready to sacrifice himself for the good of the sailors? Was he playing the part of the brave hero? Or was he still continuing to disobey²² God?

There is no record of Jonah repenting²³ or confessing²⁴ to God. What does this tell us about his attitude?²⁵

At this point in the story, we see that perhaps Jonah is softening. Jonah admits he was running from God. He admits he is the cause of the sailors’ suffering. He tells them he is willing to be thrown into the sea to save them from being destroyed. Whatever his reasons are, Jonah is showing some signs of character growth.

²¹refrain—the part of a song that is repeated at the end of each verse.

²²disobey—not obey.

²³repenting—being sorry for your sins and turning away from your sins.

²⁴confessing—admitting to God that you have sinned.

²⁵attitude—how a person thinks or feels about something or someone.

FRI **ADDITIONAL STUDY:** Explain the difference between what Jonah did in a terrible storm and what Paul did in a terrible storm on board a ship in the same body of water: Acts 27:13-25.

Imagine if Jonah had shown the same kind of faith Paul showed.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What might have happened if Jonah had repented of his effort to escape and called for God to save him, the sailors, and the ship?
2. What does Jonah 1:13 suggest about the character of the sailors? Was there something already there that made them open to the moving of God's Holy Spirit upon them? If so, what?

3. When the sailors asked him questions, Jonah quickly said he believed in God. And Jonah knew about God's power. He admitted that this terrible storm had come because he tried to flee from God. So why did Jonah try to run away from God? In what ways do Christians try to run away from God? It is one thing not to obey God's commands when you do not believe He is real. But it is another thing not to obey God's commands when you say you believe in Him. Discuss.

SUMMARY: God used Jonah, no matter how Jonah tried to escape. How much better things would have been if Jonah had obeyed God right from the start.