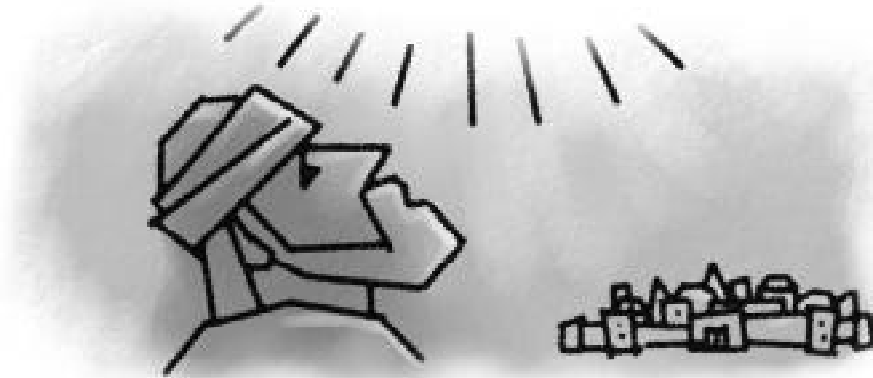


# The Last Word



**THE FOUR-CHAPTER STORY OF** Jonah now closes. God has the last word. But that last word is a question. The question is not designed to help God learn something from Jonah. Instead, He asks the question to teach Jonah.

The story does not tell us whether Jonah ever understood the question. We must ask ourselves if we understand the question? We know about God's love and mercy.<sup>1</sup> We are glad to have His love and mercy for ourselves. The question is: Are we willing to let God work in us so we can show God's love and mercy to other people? Are we willing to sacrifice to teach people that one day they will have to answer for their sins?

**THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:** What does God say to Jonah about the people of Nineveh? How does God show their lack of knowledge of spiritual things? Why does God talk about the animals in Nineveh? What lesson was God trying to teach Jonah? How does Jonah understand this lesson? How is Jonah a model (example) of ancient<sup>2</sup> Israel and the modern church? Why did God end the book of Jonah with a question that remains unanswered?<sup>3</sup>

**MEMORY VERSE:** "God has overlooked [forgotten] the times when people did not know him, but now he commands all of them [the people] everywhere to turn away from their evil ways" (Acts 17:30, TEV).

\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 13.

<sup>1</sup>mercy—kindness we do not deserve.

<sup>2</sup>ancient—very old.

<sup>3</sup>unanswered—not answered.

**SUN ONE LOST SOUL.**

“ ‘But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I [God] not be concerned about that great city?’ ” (Jonah 4:11, NIV).

How can the Lord teach poor Jonah what things are important and what things are not important? Jonah lived in a world much like our world, where human life was cheap. But the Lord died for all people, because He loves them. “In the parable (story) the shepherd goes out to look for one sheep. One is the very least number that can be counted. So if there had been just one lost soul, Jesus would have died for that one” (Luke 15:1-6).—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Christ’s (Jesus’) Object Lessons*, p. 187.



Jesus would have died for just one person.

**Read Jonah 4:11 and Matthew 18:11-14. What kind of difference do**

**we see between God’s attitude<sup>4</sup> toward people and Jonah’s attitude toward people? What kind of warning does Matthew 18:11-14 have for our cold attitude toward people?**

It is difficult to think about Jesus dying for this whole planet. But Jesus dying for just one person? Who can really understand that kind of love? We do not know in the end how many people will be saved (Revelation 21:24; Isaiah 66:23). Surely more than one person will be saved. But even if only one person were saved, Jesus would have died anyway! No wonder the worldly mind has a hard time understanding the gospel. Even people of faith have a hard time understanding such powerful love.

**Think about who God is and about how small and sinful we are. Then think about what God did for us. What does Jesus dying for us tell us about God’s love? Write a paragraph showing what Jesus’ death means to you. What does Jesus’ death say to us about the hope of salvation? Also ask: When a person knows of Jesus’ love, how can that person still be lost?**

**MON LIVING IN IGNORANCE.<sup>5</sup>**

**Notice the words in Jonah 4:11 that God used to describe the people of Nineveh. What is the Lord saying with these words? What other point**

<sup>4</sup>attitude—how a person thinks or feels about something or someone.

<sup>5</sup>ignorance—lack of knowledge.

## is He trying to get across to Jonah, who was a Hebrew?

God had called the Hebrews to be a special people. God gave the Hebrews an understanding of who God is and of His eternal<sup>6</sup> principles<sup>7</sup> (Exodus 19:5; Exodus 20; Deuteronomy 4:7; Deuteronomy 12:8; Psalm 19:7-11; Psalm 37:31; Jeremiah 31:33). Throughout Hebrew history, Hebrew people followed their understanding of the law and the moral<sup>8</sup> principles found in the law. In this way, the Hebrew nation stood far ahead of all the nations around them.



**Love is the greatest principle of God's law.  
Read Matthew 22:37-40.**

But God describes the people of Nineveh as not being able to see the difference between their right hand and their left hand. These people did not have the same kind of teachings about right and wrong that the Lord had given Israel. Almost the same wording appears in Deuteronomy 28:14; Deuteronomy 17:20; and Joshua 1:7. These words give encouragement and warning to the people about not forgetting God's law. In the book of Jonah, God tells us that the people of Nineveh lacked knowledge of God's law. The use of the wording "right hand and left hand" is also found in Babylonian books. In these books, "right hand" and "left hand" mean "truth and justice" or "law and order." God teaches Jonah that in the case of Nineveh, He delays punishment for people who do not know or understand what is right or wrong.

**Maybe the Ninevites<sup>9</sup> did not have the same knowledge of God's law as the Hebrews did. But the actions of the Ninevites and their king in Jonah 3:10 show that they had a conscience<sup>10</sup> and some understanding of good and evil. Look again at what God said to Jonah in Jonah 4:11 about the people of Nineveh. What do God's words tell us about His fairness in dealing with people**

<sup>6</sup>eternal—forever; without beginning or end; lasting forever.

<sup>7</sup>principles—laws upon which other laws are based. The principles of the Ten Commandments are our love for God and our love for other people (Matthew 22:37-40).

<sup>8</sup>moral—having to do with knowing what is right or wrong.

<sup>9</sup>Ninevites—the people of the city of Nineveh, Assyria.

<sup>10</sup>conscience—a knowledge or sense of right and wrong with an urge to do right.

who do not have more understanding of truth?

## **TUE** ANIMALS TOO?

All through Jonah 4, God has kept a gentle pressure on Jonah to change his mind about God's treatment of the people of Nineveh. The book of Jonah is full of surprises. One of the biggest surprises is God's last question to Jonah.

**What is the last group of words in Jonah 4:11?**

The rather short ending of Jonah shows God's love for both the people of Nineveh and their cattle. (The Hebrew word in Jonah 4:11 can mean not just cattle but "animals.") The end of the book of Jonah is quite sudden. And the exact meaning of Jonah 4:11 is not very clear. But it seems that God was telling Jonah that He had pity on both the people and the animals.

That God should pity both people and animals should not surprise us. The four chapters in the book of Jonah tell us that the "Lord God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land" (Jonah 1:9, NASB) is in full control over all His creation. Many other Bible writers also show that God is in control of His creation. The Bible often reminds us how all the created world

is under God's care. His care even includes the heavens.



**How much do you care for the animals God has created?**

**What does Job 39 tell us about God's interest and care about animals? What comparisons<sup>11</sup> can you find between what the Lord is saying here to Job and what He was saying to Jonah?**

Jewish history teaches that God is especially interested in people who are kind to animals, because animals depend on people for many things.

**How can Christians keep the right balance in loving animals (or nature)?**

<sup>11</sup>comparisons—things that are the same.

**WED QUESTIONS, QUESTIONS, QUESTIONS . . .**

The book of Jonah comes to a sudden stop with a deep question that is not answered. The Bible never tells us whether or not Jonah admitted to being selfish about God's favor while not wanting the people of Nineveh to receive God's favor. Neither does the Bible tell us if Jonah understands fully that God's great love for all people was far greater than Jonah's idea of fairness. We are left wondering if Jonah would ever be happy about God's forgiveness of people who do not deserve that forgiveness.

It is not usual for a Bible book to end with a surprising question. But there is really no reason why a Bible book cannot end that way. Ending with a question is not an example of thinking that is not finished or writing that is careless. By ending with a question, the book of Jonah shows a sharp difference between Jonah's attitude<sup>12</sup> and God's attitude.

**It is not common for a book of the Bible to end with a question. But it is common for God Himself to ask questions. In the following verses, what questions does God ask? Why did He ask these questions? What do you think the answers are? Give reasons for your answers.**

Exodus 4:11 \_\_\_\_\_

Job 40:1, 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Jonah 4:11 \_\_\_\_\_

Mark 8:36 \_\_\_\_\_

Luke 6:9 \_\_\_\_\_

**What do your answers to these questions teach us about God's character, mercy, and power?**

**THU THE OX KNOWS.**

**How is Isaiah 1:1-3 the same as the story of Jonah and his attitude toward God?**

The book of Jonah shows that nature is under God's control. This teaching, of course, is nothing new. Read Matthew 21:18, 19; Matthew 17:24-27; and Mark 4:35-41.

<sup>12</sup>attitude—how a person thinks or feels about something or someone.



Nature is under God's control.

If only humans would obey God as the animals do. The difference is that God did not make nature responsible for knowing what is right and wrong and for doing what is right and wrong. God forces nature. He does not force humans. In order for us to be responsible for right and wrong, we have to be free in making choices. Sadly, we often abuse that freedom.

**What and who obeyed the Lord, and who in the book of Jonah did not obey? What irony<sup>13</sup> can you see in your answer?**

Nature obeyed. The pagans<sup>14</sup> obeyed. Only Jonah, the Hebrew, did not obey. Jonah symbolized the nation of Israel during different times in its history. What Israel could have done in times of peace (1 Kings 8:60; Isaiah 27:6; Isaiah 56:6; Zechariah 8:23), God forced it to do under terrible situations such as war and slavery. It was the same with Jonah. The storm and the fish would not have happened if Jonah had obeyed God when God first asked him to obey. We do not know what finally happened to Jonah. But the book ends with him not being where God wanted him to be. This is very sad! Jonah still did not understand God's will. Historically, it seems that much of ancient Israel did not understand God's will, either.

**What do you think Ellen G. White meant when she wrote: "The church has failed to do the work in a time of peace and wealth. So the church will have to do the work in a terrible crisis, under most discouraging and difficult situations"?—Adapted from *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 463.**

**FRI** **ADDITIONAL STUDY:** "As persons and as a nation, God planned to give the people of Israel 'every facility (tool) for becoming the greatest nation on the earth' " (*Christ's (Jesus) Object Lessons*, p. 288; Deuteronomy 4:6-

<sup>13</sup>irony—the opposite of what should usually happen.

<sup>14</sup>pagans—people who do not believe in God.

8; Deuteronomy 7:6, 14; Deuteronomy 28:1; Jeremiah 33:9; Malachi 3:12; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 314; *Education*, p. 40; *The Desire of Ages*, p. 577). God planned to make Israel an honor to His name and a blessing to the nations about them (*Education*, p. 40; *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 286).

“The neighboring nations in Old Testament times were to notice Israel's fast rise to wealth under God's care. Then they would become more interested in what made Israel great and successful. ‘Even the heathen<sup>15</sup> would recognize the superiority (greatness) of the people who served and worshiped the living God’ (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 289). They would want the same blessings for themselves. Then they would ask questions as to how they, too, might gain comfort and wealth. Israel would answer, ‘Accept our God as your God, love and serve Him as we do, and He will do the same for you.’ ‘The blessings thus assured [promised] Israel’ were, ‘on the same conditions<sup>16</sup> and in the same degree, assured to every nation and to every individual [person] under the broad heavens’ (*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 500, 501; Acts 10:34, 35; Acts 15:7-9; Romans 10:12, 13; et cetera). All nations of earth were to share in the blessings so generously bestowed upon (given to) Israel (*Proph-*

*ets and Kings*, p. 370).”—Adapted from *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 28.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. C. S. Lewis wrote: “There are only two kinds of people in the end: people who say to God, ‘Your (God's) will be done,’ and people to whom God says, in the end, ‘Your (the people's) will be done.’ All people that are in hell, choose the second kind of will. Without that self-choice, there could be no hell.”—*The Great Divorce* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), p. 72. C. S. Lewis is wrong in his understanding of hell. But do you agree with him or not about his ideas on God's will and people's will? Give reasons for your answer.
2. How does Luke 4:24-28 compare<sup>17</sup> with the situation shown in the book of Jonah? What warnings should we take from what Jesus said in Luke 4:24-28?

**SUMMARY:** The book of Jonah ends with a theme shown all through the Bible. This theme is that the love and greatness of God are different from the selfishness and sinfulness of humanity.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup>heathen—people who do not believe in God.

<sup>16</sup>conditions—what we must do to receive God's blessings.

<sup>17</sup>compare—show how things are the same.

<sup>18</sup>humanity—all the people of the world.