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How to Use This Teachers Edition

The teachers comments demonstrate different methods of teaching the Standard Bible Study Guide. Five parts make up the teachers comments:

1. Key Text, Lesson Aim, and Outline: The key text is taken from the standard edition guide. The lesson aim is designed to (a) help class participants *understand* and *know* about the lesson material, (b) evoke an appropriate *feeling* about the lesson material that complements the lesson content and helps to internalize it, and (c) help class participants *apply* the lesson material to their daily lives. The lesson outline may not always follow exactly the material that appears in the standard guide. It may reflect additional perspectives as it attempts to stimulate class discussion.

2. The Commentary follows the traditional teaching methods of Sabbath School. It explains Bible passages and provides appropriate information leading to spiritual applications.

3. The Inductive Bible-Study Method emphasizes careful, methodical discovery of the meaning in a text. The teacher encourages and supports the learner's investigation and discovery, using distinctive approaches: (a) Study a text thoroughly and systematically before drawing a conclusion. (b) Look for textual meaning carefully and thoroughly; understand the passage in context; avoid misquoting the author. We must not develop opinions without biblical proof. (c) Share insights through group discussion as students examine a Bible passage together. (d) Apply the text to life today. (e) Allow the Holy Spirit to minister to class members during Bible study.

4. The Focus-on-Witnessing Approach should be used in conjunction with other methods of Bible study to demonstrate how particular passages of Scripture can be used to encourage people to commit their lives to Christ and to nurture spiritual life once it has been awakened.

5. The Life-Application Approach demonstrates how issues that grow out of Bible study can be shared in a small-group setting. This section uses an approach suitable for discussion in a small group in which interpersonal sharing and dialogue are key elements.

Use a combination of teaching methods. Within one class period it is often possible to draw from all five methods demonstrated in the teachers comments. Some teachers will prefer to focus on one method of teaching, drawing heavily on the material in the teachers comments.

For a listing of the individuals appointed by the General Conference to write the teachers comments for the current Bible Study Guide, please refer to page 1.

Divine Surprises

A farmer every morning went out to feed his chicken. Each morning, when it saw the farmer approach, the bird got ready for breakfast. This scenario happened over and over until, one morning, the farmer arrived and, instead of feeding the fowl, wrung its neck.

The point is this: The past is no guarantor of the future. Though things that have happened before, even regularly, can and often do happen again, they don't, automatically, have to. The unexpected does arise and often when least expected (which is part of what makes it unexpected).

This concept was hard for many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europeans to grasp. The tremendous advances in science, particularly through the seminal work of Isaac Newton, led many to believe that all nature works through cold, uncaring, and unvarying laws. Once these laws were understood, it was conceivable (if enough other information were given) that a person could know everything that would happen in the future, because everything—from what the king would want for dessert on New Year's Eve to the number of hailstones in the next hailstorm over Paris—could be predicted with unerring accuracy.

By the early twentieth century, however, scientists such as Niels Bohr, Max Planck, and Erwin Schrödinger—with their discoveries in quantum physics—brought these deterministic assumptions into great question. According to quantum theory, reality at its most fundamental level reveals itself in a transitory, elusive, even statistical manner, so that we can know only the probability of events, nothing more. Gone, now, was the clockwork universe of the previous few centuries. Einstein, responding incredulously to quantum uncertainty, once said, "I shall never believe that God plays dice with the world."

No, God doesn't. But He can be full of surprises, and some of His most unexpected ones appear in the topic for this quarter—the book of Jonah, which, although on the surface, seems filled with the uncertainty and surprise of the quantum realm, is, in fact, based on a certitude more solid and constant than the physics of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe.

First, there's Jonah, a prophet who refuses to accept his call—hardly the usual biblical paradigm, to be sure. Though a Daniel he isn't, a prophet he, nevertheless, is: "He restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain, according to the word of the Lord God of Israel, which he spake by the hand of *his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet*, which was of Gath-hepher" (2 Kings 14:25, emphasis supplied). This is the same Jonah, son of Amittai (hard as it, at times, might be to believe), whom we'll be following for the next few months.

Next, this prophet flees from the Lord in a boat (A prophet fleeing the Lord?), only to have the Lord send a storm that threatens to sink

the vessel. Amid the storm, it's the pagans, not the Hebrew, who pray for deliverance (another surprise), and Jonah is thrown overboard, only to get swallowed alive by a big fish that holds him in its stomach for three days before spewing him out, alive, on the land.

Jonah, finally, after all this prodding, delivers the message of warning to the Ninevites, who en masse repent from their evil ways, sparing themselves divine condemnation (a rather surprising turn of events, as well). But the greatest surprise comes next, because Jonah becomes saddened, even angry, over their repentance. *A prophet angry over those who repent and turn away from sin?* (As said before, this book is full of surprises.)

Yet, the most important point of Jonah isn't found in the surprises that spill out of its 48 verses but in the one thing that's constant all the way through those verses, and that is, God's incredible grace toward wayward, erring people, even wayward, erring prophets such as Jonah. If the Lord would continue to work with someone who squandered privileges and ignored light, then there's hope for us. We surely have done as badly as this weak-willed, spiritual pipsqueak of a prophet who should have known better than to do what he did, even though he did it just the same. Of course, grace is the most gracious when bestowed upon those who know better but do wrong anyway (Who among us can't relate?).

The focus of Jonah, then, really isn't on the "great fish" that swallowed Jonah alive but on "the great God" who prepared that fish. The great God who never manifested His greatness more than when He was the most "helpless"; that is, when in the person of His Son He was nailed to the cross, His life crushed out for the sins of those who don't know better and even, maybe especially, of those who do. In one sense, it hardly matters which, because we're all spiritual charity cases, taking where we don't give, receiving what we don't deserve, and getting what we don't earn . . . like Jonah.

Many thanks to this quarter's able author, Dr. JoAnn Davidson, assistant professor of theology, in the Department of Theology and Christian Philosophy, at the Andrews University Seminary. Her love for the book of Jonah, and especially for the God revealed in that book, is apparent all through this Bible Study Guide.

Challenging, baffling, even occasionally disturbing, the book of Jonah, with all its surprises—maybe even through those surprises—reveals one truth that never changes: God's love for even the most unlovable, which, at times, is all of us.