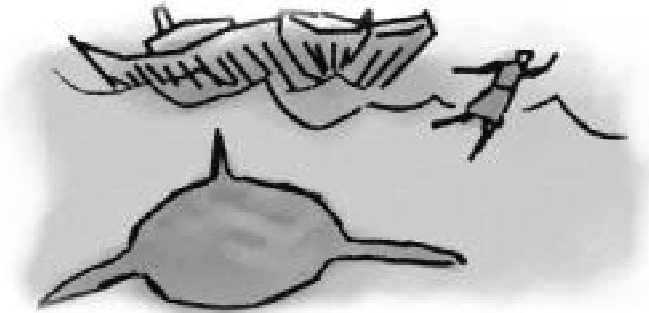


## Salvation Is of the Lord!



### *Sabbath Afternoon*

**T**HE DRAMA HAS CONTINUED TO mount in the first chapter of the book of Jonah. A prophet, presuming to shirk his divine mission, has found himself facing death in a storm. Yet amid all this turmoil, it is the heathen sailors, not the prophet Jonah, who pray to the Lord (see Jon. 1:14).

What irony: Non-Israelites, face to face with a disobedient prophet of God, pray that they will not acquire guilt through his death. It's not a scene dramatized that often in the Bible—pagans praying to the Lord while one of the Lord's servants keeps silent. The pagans were doing what Jonah should have been doing. Moreover, these sailors pray to Jonah's God with the special covenant name given to Israel, having accepted Jonah's testimony, as expressed in verse 9. They might be acting under duress, but sometimes that's what it takes to get someone's attention. Let's follow the narrative to see what happens next.

**THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:** What did the sailors do after the storm ended? What finally caused Jonah to pray? What did Jonah pray for? What does the story teach about the futility of profession without corresponding works? What does it teach about God's grace for those whose works don't equal their profession?

**MEMORY TEXT:** “ ‘But I will sacrifice to Thee with the voice of thanksgiving. That which I have vowed I will pay. Salvation is from the Lord’ ” (Jonah 2:9, NASB).

\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 8.

*Sunday*

*November 2*

**THE FEAR OF THE LORD.**

**L**ast week, we left off with Jonah telling the sailors to hurl him overboard and save themselves. Finally, the sailors, desperate, did just that. Only then “the sea ceased from her raging” (Jon. 1:15). Again, we find the God who created the sea unambiguously in control of it.

**What was the reaction of the sailors after the storm ceased?  
Jon. 1:15, 16.**

Notice, the sailors didn’t attribute the change in weather to some coincidence of unguided nature. They didn’t view it as pure chance or luck. Instead, they “feared the Lord exceedingly” (see vs. 16). Earlier they had feared the storm, but now they feared the God of the storm, even more so than the storm itself. Seasoned mariners who earlier had worshiped a collection of false gods came to worship Yahweh and make vows to Him. The sailors come into contact with the living God. They make offerings to God, vows to the true God, the One who not only created the sea but controls it (Jon. 1:16).

**God gave them a miraculous deliverance, and as a result, they rendered Him homage. In what ways does this mirror the basic plan of salvation, particularly as seen through the life and ministry of Jesus? See, for example, John 9.**

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Are we not saved, delivered from death by Jesus, and then, as a result of that deliverance, worship and obey Him? Of course. That’s what happened with these sailors. Homage, worship, and obedience can never save; these things come only as a result of being saved, of having obtained the miraculous deliverance that is ours by faith alone. See also Galatians 2:20.

**Perhaps the most striking contrast in chapter 1 is also the most spiritually instructive. In verse 9, Jonah the Hebrew prophet professes to “fear the Lord” but doesn’t act as though he does; in contrast, the pagans, too, “feared the Lord” and then certainly acted as if they did, even though their knowledge of the Lord was much more limited than that of Jonah, a Hebrew prophet. What warnings should we take from this contrast?**

## TEACHERS COMMENTS

**Key Text: Jonah 1:16.**

**Teachers Aims:**

1. To examine the impact of the storm upon the faith of the sailors.
2. To emphasize that Jonah's prophetic calling would be futile without personal conviction.

**Lesson Outline:**

**I. Conviction Through Adversity.**

- A. Tough pagan sailors become believers in God.
- B. God uses Jonah, despite himself, to reach those who normally would scorn belief in His power.
- C. Limited knowledge of God does not keep the sailors from acting on their fledgling faith.
- D. In a heroic but futile attempt to save Jonah, the sailors first row toward land before giving up in defeat and throwing him overboard.

**II. "Out of the Belly of Hell Cried I" (Jon. 2:2).**

- A. Jonah uses rich images, such as chains of seaweed imprisoning his body as the sea swallows him, to evoke a spiritual drowning.
- B. God prepares an *ark* of safety in the belly of a fish to shelter Jonah much in the same way he sheltered Noah in a wooden ark during the Flood.
- C. God's vessel of captivity provides the opportunity for Jonah's redemption.

**III. Salvation in the Gut of a Fish.**

- A. Jonah acknowledges God as his Savior.
- B. Jonah accepts his prophetic commission.
- C. God accepts Jonah's commitment to serve Him.

**Summary:** Through nature God teaches Jonah true faith. However, Jonah's choices make each lesson tougher than the last. A bullheaded and reckless obstinance to follow his own path leads him to the bottom of the sea.

**Commentary.**

**I. Fear God and Worship Him.**

The storm ceases, and the sailors "feared" God (Jon. 1:16). The Old Testament portrays such fear as an attitude of awe and reverence that leads to worship. Such fear also includes gratitude and thankfulness.

*Monday*

*November 3*

**IN THE BELLY OF THE BEAST (Jon. 1:17).**

**F**or all the sailors know, Jonah has drowned, a victim of the waves and storm. However, at this very moment, we are again confronted with God's complete control over nature. We already have seen God causing the great wind of a storm (vs. 4), controlling the casting of the lot (vs. 7), and then suddenly causing the storm to cease (vs. 15). What comes next?

**How is God's sovereign power displayed now? Jon. 1:17.**

A man being swallowed alive and living for three full days in the belly of a fish is a remarkable event in any era, not just in our sophisticated twenty-first century. Even back then, it was incredible. And yet, the Bible makes no attempt to explain or justify how something like this could happen. It's just assumed to be true, because it's assumed the Lord can do it.

The book says the Lord "had prepared" a great fish to swallow up Jonah. It could also have been translated "had appointed." The verb comes from a Hebrew root word that can mean, among other things, "to appoint" or "to prepare," "to count" or "to reckon." The use of the verb here stresses God's sovereign rule over His creation for the accomplishment of His purpose. In fact, the narrator will couple this same verb with God's directives three more times in the book of Jonah to underscore the Lord's omnipotence. See Jonah 4:6, 7, 8.

**What other verb is used to describe what the fish does to Jonah?**

The verb "to swallow" appears in various forms in the Old Testament (see Pss. 21:9; 35:25; Jer. 51:34) and often in the context of Israel's captivity. It's a word sometimes used to describe God's judgment upon His people. Thus, how well it fits this story here. After all, so many of God's judgments upon His people were nothing more than the means employed to turn them away from evil. The judgments had redemptive intentions. The Lord must have had that in mind for Jonah, as well; otherwise, the fish, instead of swallowing him whole, would have chewed him up.

**Dwell on some of the miracles in the Bible. What do they tell us about God's power, and what kind of hope do they offer us now, if any?**

## TEACHERS COMMENTS

The sailors offer a sacrifice to God, perhaps a grain or libation offering, since they cannot have a large fire on board ship. They also make vows to Him. The book of Jonah does not mention any formal act of conversion on their part, because they are already pious, devout men. They may have worshiped other gods, but unlike Jonah, they ultimately seek to do the Lord's will. The sailors have a strong, ethical sense—they cared for the rebellious prophet and hesitated to cast him overboard even to save themselves. As we shall continue to see, the pagans in the book of Jonah are more godly than the Lord's own prophet. In spite of Jonah's terrible witness, they accept his God.

### II. In the Great Fish.

The Lord now “provides,” “appoints,” “assigns,” or “prepares” a large fish to catch Jonah as he plunges into the sea (vs. 17). The verb *manah*, used here and translated by the preceding English words, also appears in Jonah 4:6-8. In these verses, God sends a plant, a worm, and a hot dry wind to do His bidding. The Hebrew word translated “fish” refers to any sea creature, so it is pointless to speculate what it was. The text implies that it may have been some creature God created just for the occasion. It had some special characteristic(s) that regular fish do not have, as did the plant that suddenly could grow large enough in an extremely brief time to provide shade (Jon. 4:6).

Scripture mentions the creature in only a few places such as Jonah 1:17, 2:1, and 2:10, and perhaps we should spend only a little time on it, as well. We should avoid becoming so involved in measuring the gullet sizes of various marine animals that we never learn the messages God inspired the book to teach us.

### III. Jonah's Undersea Prayer.

During the storm, Jonah did not bother to pray. Now, though, he does pray—in the belly of the fish. His prayer is patterned after a psalm of individual thanksgiving (Psalms 18, 30, 32, 34, 40:1-10, 66:13-20, 92, 116, 118, 138). Comparing Jonah 2:2-9 with Psalm 30 shows the pattern Jonah follows.

*Jonah 2:2.* The prophet calls out to God twice, perhaps first when he splashes into the water. Does the cold water shock some sense into him? Jonah prays the second time when he is in “‘the belly of Sheol’” (NRSV)—the place of the dead. Desmond Alexander suggests that Jonah is afraid he will be abandoned in Sheol and thus forever separated from God. (See T. Desmond Alexander, “Jonah: An Introduction and Commentary,” in David W. Baker, Desmond Alexander, and Bruce K. Waltke, *Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah: An Introduction and Commentary* [Leicester, Eng.: InterVarsity Press, 1988], pp. 113, 114). The prophet who fled from God's presence now fears he will actually be cut off from God.

*Jonah 2:3.* While the sailors may have been the ones to physically toss the prophet into the sea, Jonah recognizes God's hand in it.

*Tuesday*

*November 4*

**JONAH'S UNDERSEA LAMENT.**

**How long does Jonah survive in His new method of transportation in the Mediterranean? Jon. 1:17. Where else in the Old Testament do we find this same time phrase used? 1 Sam. 30:12; 2 Kings 20:5, 8; Hos. 6:2. Note how this expression of time is also used in the New Testament. Matt. 12:39, 40 (see also Luke 11:30).**

Jesus relates Jonah's miraculous deliverance from death as a sign of His own passion, death, and resurrection. The prophet Hosea, speaking within a general time frame when Jonah's experience would still have been talked about, takes the timing of Jonah's experience and places it within a context that talks about resurrection (Hos. 6:2). Thus, when Christ compares His death and resurrection experience to that of Jonah, He is linking it with an understanding already found in the Old Testament.

Back in the Mediterranean, meanwhile, Jonah hardly could have known what suddenly caused the dramatic change from drowning in a wet, choking darkness to an even greater darkness. It would have taken some time to realize that the all-enveloping blackness was not that of Sheol (Jon. 2:2), the Hebrew word for the "grave." And when Jonah grasped that he was actually preserved alive, he regarded this as a pledge of his deliverance.

**What does he finally do? Jon. 2:1.**

Jonah's prayer puts into words the anguish he felt as he was drowning, the reactions he felt on the brink of death, along with his experience and reflections within the "great fish." He borrows many phrases from the book of Psalms as he prays. Using phrases from the book of Psalms in praying is not an unlikely thing to do. Even today, Christians often take at least parts of their prayers from the different psalms in the Old Testament Psalter. The psalms also are used often today in worship, as prayers of invocation and benediction.

**It has been said there's no such thing as an atheist in a foxhole (maybe also in the belly of a great fish). The sad thing is that Jonah was no atheist to begin with. He not only knew the Lord, he knew the Lord's power and had even been given a special calling. Why is it that so often we wait for calamity before availing ourselves of the divine power that's always there for us? Perhaps, if Jonah had been in an attitude of prayer all along, he would have been spared all these trials.**

## TEACHERS COMMENTS

The will of humans may, for a time, frustrate His plans, but God is ultimately in control of everything.

*Jonah 2:4.* As the waves surge over him, the prophet who ran away from God experiences ever more strongly his alienation from the Lord. Earlier, he could not get far enough away. Now the thought of being separated from God terrifies him. The temple is the physical symbol of God's presence. The Hebrew word at the beginning of the second clause has been translated "how," "yet," or "surely." Jonah either wonders whether he ever will see the temple again, or he is sure that he will.

*Jonah 2:5.* Up to this point, Jonah has used traditional language from the psalms. Now the words of his prayer/psalm are uniquely his.

## INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

**Texts for Discovery: Joshua 24:14, Galatians 2:19-21, Revelation 14:7.**

1. Read Galatians 2:19-21. Then have class members reread it silently, putting their name in place of the word *I*. Finally, ask them to discuss what such a reading did for them personally.
2. God did not give up on Jonah. Think about God's relationship with Israel in the Old Testament. How many times did He deliver His covenant people? Once? Twice? Five times? Sixty? Why do you think God never gave up on them? Why does He not give up on us? How does this reassure you?
3. We do not know how long Jonah was in the belly of the great fish before he prayed. Did he pray immediately? Or did it take him a while to acknowledge that God had given him a second chance? How long does it take for us to seek God when we find ourselves in trouble? If it takes us awhile, what does this say about the nature of our devotional life and the nature of our relationship with Christ?
4. Read Joshua 24:14 and Revelation 14:7. What are the similarities and differences between these verses? Based on these texts, how can we define what it means to "fear God"? When people usually think of fear, they think of being anxious, terrified, or uneasy. Why would Satan want us to feel this way about God?
5. Jonah attempted to flee from the sight of God; yet, we know God sees all things. Still, we often do the same thing as Jonah. What other parallels exist between Jonah and modern Christians, perhaps even yourself? What can we do so we do not become like Jonah? What can we do to change if we already *are* like him?

**Wednesday**

**November 5**

**THE EARTH AND HER BARS.**

**Read Jonah 2:2-9, Jonah's prayer in the belly of the fish. Summarize the essence of that prayer. What was Jonah saying?**

**C**ompare the beginning of Jonah's prayer to Psalm 18:6 and 120:1. Some commentators even refer to Jonah's prayer as a psalm, a psalm of thanksgiving to the Lord for deliverance from a terrible situation.

What's fascinating, too, is that here he is, swallowed alive by a fish—and yet he's praising God for his deliverance and salvation? Apparently, once he realized what had happened, Jonah must have seen the hand of the Lord and knew God was going to save him, despite himself. Thus, even though Jonah rebelled against the Lord, even though he attempted to flee from known duty, the Lord wasn't through with him yet. He was still going to give this reluctant prophet another chance.

**Read Jonah 2:4, where Jonah says, "I am cast out of thy sight." Compare that to 1:3 and 4, when Jonah attempts to flee from the "presence of the Lord." What's the irony there? How does Jonah's prayer, which begins in distress, conclude? Jon. 2:9.**

Many have seen this closing declaration of God's mercy as the very center of the book of Jonah, the central point the writer wishes to emphasize. Jonah is constrained to admit God's saving mercy. However, the heathen mariners already have done this! In promising to sacrifice and in making vows, the Hebrew prophet, Jonah, declares his intention to do what the pagan sailors had already done. Again, the irony of this situation shouldn't be overlooked.

Chapters 1 and 2 in the book of Jonah both end with the theme of sacrifice and vows, drawing for the reader a parallel between the prophet's experience and that of the pagan seamen. Both faced an extreme crisis—peril from the sea storm. Both cried to Yahweh, acknowledging His sovereignty. Both were physically saved. Both offered worship. Jonah comes at last to the same point the Gentile mariners had already reached, even though it took a bit more divine prodding to get him there.

**What we see here in Jonah is an example of God's grace, mercy, and favor to those who don't deserve it. How have you seen this grace manifested for you, either by God or by other people? In what ways have you manifested grace to others?**



## TEACHERS COMMENTS

*Jonah 2:6.* Plunging to the roots of the mountains that extend to the floor of the sea, Jonah feels himself descending to the metaphorical world of the dead, depicted in the imagery of an ancient near-eastern city with a gate secured by bolts and bars of iron. Once inside the city of Sheol, Jonah would find himself imprisoned there forever.

Throughout the book, the author has portrayed Jonah in a continuous downward descent. The prophet goes *down* to Joppa and *down* into a ship. He slumbers *down* in the ship's hold and gets thrown *down* into the sea. Now, however, he changes direction. The Lord brings him up from the pit, or Sheol. Old Testament poetry uses these terms in parallel, meaning they indicate the same thing (see Ps. 16:10 for an example of similar parallel construction). To be rescued from death means being saved from the pit (Job 33:28). The pit is the grave.

We see why Jonah stops going down in the next verse.

*Jonah 2:7.* As Jonah is about to pass out for lack of oxygen, his thoughts turn to God as his prayer ascends to God's presence in the temple.

*Jonah 2:8.* This verse is difficult to translate. It probably suggests the idea that those who worship idols will discover during times of

## WITNESSING

Imagine being swallowed alive by a giant fish. You might think Jonah was terrified, not knowing whether he would die inside this great creature or miraculously live. For Jonah, however, being in the fish's belly meant salvation. The fact that he was still alive was comforting to him, for it told him the Lord had answered his prayer.

Jonah was much more afraid when he was sinking in the depths of the cold, dark sea. What he feared most was not losing his life but his soul. In chapter 2 he states, "The waters compassed me about, even to the soul" (vs. 5). "When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord" (vs. 7). And "thou [hast] brought up my life from corruption (vs. 6).

People often turn to the Lord on their deathbeds. In many cases,

the Lord may use impending death or the fear of dying to direct an individual's thoughts toward Him. However, we should be more afraid of losing our souls instead of our lives. As we witness, we can share the following text with unbelievers: "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28). Yet, we can find comfort in knowing that Jesus "is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25). Although God is able to destroy our very souls, He loves us so much that He desires to save us and give us everlasting life.

**Thursday**

**November 6**

**PRAYING IN ONE'S EXTREMITY.**

**J**onah ends his prayer by exclaiming, “Salvation is of the Lord.” The Hebrew word for “salvation” means not only immediate physical salvation but also eternal salvation, as in ultimate redemption (the word for “salvation” comes from the same root letters that make up the name *Jesus*. Of course, Jonah’s problem hasn’t been his belief in the Lord. All through chapter 1 it was clear that Jonah had been doing what he was doing despite his belief in God. So, again, for him to make so wonderful a proclamation about the Lord and His power means nothing in and of itself. Jonah is one of the best examples of what is meant by “faith without works” (see James 2:18-20). Even then, the Lord was still willing to try to turn him around.

**What other examples can we find in the Bible of faith without works? Who comes to mind? Judas? Saul? The 12 spies? In what different ways is this workless faith manifested?**

In his entire prayer, Jonah never confesses his rebelliousness. There is no indication that Jonah is truly penitent. Of course, the fact that it is not mentioned there doesn’t mean that at some point, in the belly of the fish, he didn’t confess his sin. Nevertheless, the omission here shouldn’t be overlooked. And even if he didn’t confess and even if he wasn’t truly penitent, it just goes to show that despite these things, the Lord was still willing to try to work with him.

**Compare Jonah’s prayer to David’s in Psalm 51. What are the similarities? The differences?**

The prayer of Jonah should encourage us that we can pray in the midst of failure, even when our distress has been caused by our own disobedience. This is a critical lesson to learn, because that is when it seems the most difficult to pray. That is when we feel we have no right to call on God. Or even if we wanted to pray, we feel we surely don’t deserve God’s help. More than likely, we don’t. But then again, what’s grace if it’s not getting something we don’t deserve?

**“When Satan comes to tell you that you are a great sinner, look up to your Redeemer and talk of His merits. That which will help you is to look to His light. Acknowledge your sin, but tell the enemy that ‘Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners’ and that you may be saved by His matchless love. 1 Timothy 1:15.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, pp. 35, 36.**

## TEACHERS COMMENTS

trouble that idols have no real power. When the idol worshipers recognize that fact, they will abandon their false gods. Implied is the concept that those who worship the true God will always find Him trustworthy. The NRSV translates the passage as “ ‘those who worship vain idols forsake their true loyalty.’ ” The word rendered “loyalty” is *chesed*, the term for covenant love and often used for God’s enduring love and mercy toward humanity (Pss. 100:5; 106:1; 118:1, 2; 136). The idolaters unknowingly forsake the One who is their true God.

*Jonah 2:9.* Having seen how God can rescue him from death, Jonah promises to sacrifice and make vows. He has finally reached the spiritual maturity we saw in the sailors (Jon. 1:16). No longer abandoning the Lord, he will seek the God of *chesed* love. But he does not yet understand that love. It is just an intellectual concept, one that he does not fully agree with when God shows it to the people of Nineveh. And although he has just contrasted himself with idol worshipers, he does not recognize that he has forsaken God in the past just as much as they have.

Jonah has stopped running away. Yet, he has more maturing to do, as we shall see in the rest of the book. He is thankful when God saves him. But he becomes angry when God wants to save others.

## LIFE-APPLICATION APPROACH

**Icebreaker:** Daniel Webster—America’s outstanding statesman, lawyer, orator, and leader—was asked, at a banquet held in his honor, what the greatest thought was that ever entered his mind. Without hesitation, Webster replied, “The greatest thought that ever entered my mind was the thought of my responsibility to God.” As he spoke, he wept, excused himself from the banquet, and regained control of his emotions. When he returned, he talked for thirty minutes about a person’s responsibility to God.

### Thought Question:

Daniel Webster could not sepa-

rate his personal life or his professional life from his Creator. Every breathing moment of life involved God. What tangible differences can a conscious knowledge of God’s presence make in your life?

### Application Question:

Throughout the Bible we see how God uses all kinds of people, situations, and objects to function as pieces of the beautiful story of salvation. How do your specific talents fit into God’s plan of salvation? List three ways you can use your special gifts to share the story of the Cross with others.

**FURTHER STUDY:** Read Ellen G. White, “Bible Biographies,” in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, pp. 9–15; “The Privilege of Prayer,” in *Steps to Christ*, pp. 93–104.

**B**ut, having confessed your sins, believe that the Word of God cannot fail, but that He is faithful that hath promised. It is just as much your duty to believe that God will fulfil His word, and forgive your sins, as it is your duty to confess your sins. You must exercise faith in God as in one who will do exactly as He has promised in His Word, and pardon all your transgressions.”—Ellen G. White, *This Day With God*, p. 89.

“Are you one that makes mistakes? Go to Jesus, and ask Him to forgive you, and then believe that He does. ‘If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness’ (1 John 1:9). Ask the Lord to pardon your errors. Then rejoice in Him.”—Ellen G. White, *The Upward Look*, p. 132.

“It will not help you in the least to keep mourning over your defects. Say, ‘Lord, I cast my helpless soul on Thee, and Thee alone. I will not worry, because Thou hast said, “Ask, and ye shall receive.”’ Believe that you do receive. Believe that your Saviour is full of compassion, full of tender pity and love. Let not little mishaps trouble you. Small mistakes may be ordered by the Lord to save you from making larger mistakes.”—Ellen G. White, *The Upward Look*, p. 132.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

- 1. What would you say to someone who dismisses, out of hand, the Jonah story because he or she can’t believe a human could survive inside a fish for three days? What might be the only answer you could give this person?**
- 2. Twice in Jonah’s undersea psalm he makes mention of the temple (Jon. 2:4, 7). What is it about the temple and what it stands for that would make this Hebrew refer to it? Think of the context of his words.**

**SUMMARY:** Swallowed alive by a big fish, Jonah is being forced to learn the hard way what he should have known a long time earlier: that faith without works is dead.