CORNERSTONECONNECTIONS
MAY042024

Scripture Story: Jonah.
Commentary: *Prophets and Kings* (or *Royalty in Ruins*), chapter 22.

pardoned



Photo by Alden Ho

keytext

"I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity."

(Jonah 4:2, NIV)

flashlight

"Yet Nineveh, wicked though it had become, was not wholly given over to evil. He who 'beholdeth all the sons of men' (Psalm 33:13) and 'seeth every precious thing' (Job 28:10) perceived in that city many who were reaching out after something better and higher, and who, if granted opportunity to learn of the living God, would put away their evil deeds and worship Him. And so in His wisdom God revealed Himself to them in an unmistakable manner, to lead them, if possible, to repentance" (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 265).

what do you think?

What words, thoughts, or impressions come to your mind when you hear the following words?

Immigrants _____
Goths _____
Skaters _____
Emo kids _____
Jocks _____
Snobs _____
Goodie-goodies _____
Posers _____
Teacher's pets _____

did you know?

If you've seen Mosul, Iraq, in the news, you've seen the modern-day site of ancient Nineveh—what's left of it, anyway. Old Testament prophecies foretelling its complete and utter destruction came true in 611 B.C. But for centuries Israelites trembled in their sandals at the very mention of Nineveh and the Assyrian empire—including one self-righteous, deep-sea diver who may be the most successful evangelist in history.

Established where the Khosr and Tigris rivers meet, Nineveh sat in the middle of East and West, with the Mediterranean Sea in one direction and the Indian Ocean in the other. Trade traveled freely in both directions, bringing goods, knowledge, and prosperity to Nineveh. Yet Nineveh is an example of an ancient city that was completely demolished. Attacked by the Medes, Babylonians, and Elamites, its buildings and walls were smashed to pieces and its people slaughtered or sent into exile. The Medes and Babylonians divided up the land of the once-powerful empire.

INTO THE STORY

"The word of the LORD came to Jonah . . . : 'Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it. . . .'

"But Jonah ran away . . . and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD.

"Then the LORD sent a great wind. . . .

"Then the sailors said to each other, 'Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity.' . . . The lot fell on Jonah. So they asked him, 'Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us?'. . .

"He answered, 'I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD.' . . .

". . . So they asked him, 'What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?'

" 'Pick me up and throw me into the sea,' he replied, 'and it will become calm.'

". . . Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. At this the men greatly feared the LORD. . . .

". . . From inside the fish Jonah prayed. . . .

" 'In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me. From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help, and you listened to my cry. . . . What I have vowed I will make good. I will say, "Salvation comes from the LORD." '

"And the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land. . . .

"Jonah . . . went to Nineveh . . . , proclaiming, 'Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.' The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. . . .

". . . [God] relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened. . . .

"Jonah . . . waited to see what would happen to the city. . . . God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort. . . . But . . . a worm . . . chewed the plant so that it withered. . . . [Jonah] grew faint. He wanted to die. . . .

"But the LORD said, 'You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight.

And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?"

(Jonah 1–4, NIV)

OUT OF THE STORY

What did the attitudes of Jonah's crew mates say about how God can work even in the lives of those who don't acknowledge Him?

_____
_____
_____

When Jonah asked to be thrown overboard, he was asking to die. His fear of God had led him to think he had nowhere to turn but a watery grave. What does God's dramatic rescue of Jonah tell you about His love for people even when they feel like no good solutions exist?

_____
_____
_____

In contrast to most of the prophets who urged Israelites to repent, Jonah was incredibly successful! Why was he so bitter about his success?

_____
_____
_____

What do you think Jonah had heard or read about God to know that He was so compassionate and forgiving? What experiences have you had or seen of God giving people another chance?

_____
_____
_____

How did God turn Jonah's unfaithfulness in fleeing to Tarshish into a witnessing opportunity?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

punch lines

"How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboyim? My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused. I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor will I devastate Ephraim again. For I am God, and not a man—the Holy One among you. I will not come against their cities" **(Hosea 11:8, 9, NIV).**

"The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here" **(Matthew 12:41, NIV).**

further insight

"You should not encourage a feeling of sympathy and pity for yourself."
—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 367

"Men may think to hide their evil deeds from human eyes, but they cannot deceive God. . . .

"Truth is of God; deception in all its myriad forms is of Satan, and whoever in any way departs from the straight line of truth is betraying himself into the power of the wicked one."—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 252

"When sin has deadened the moral perceptions, the wrongdoer does not discern the defects of his character nor realize the enormity of the evil he has committed; and unless he yields to the convicting power of the Holy Spirit he remains in partial blindness to his sin."—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 40

Sabbath

Read Jonah 4:11.

This week's *What Do You Think?* looks at some of the lines we draw between people in today's world. How might God's words shape how you look at people you might avoid or even look down on as sinful, violent, or evil?

Look at your own attitudes toward people who are different from you. What does the book of Jonah have to say about prejudice? How should we relate to those we don't have much in common with?

Sunday

Read Colossians 3:12-14; Romans 12:15, 16.

Empathy. The ability to see the world through someone else's perspective—even to view someone else through God's perspective. To understand the challenges and frustrations others face—and how they mirror one's own.

Read this week's inductive questions. Why was Jonah so afraid of going to Nineveh? Why was he so angry when his mission "failed"? What made him such a "Grinch"? After calling for the Ninevites to repent, what do you think he needed to repent of?

Monday

Read Jonah 4:2.

Insurance companies call destructive natural events "acts of God." Yet Jonah recognized how much more God would rather forgive than destroy—and resented how much that fact impacted his reputation. Jonah would have rather watched more than a hundred thousand people die than have preached a prophecy that didn't come true—especially when it involved people he felt no love for whatsoever.

Read this week's *Key Text*. How do you find it comforting? Do you sometimes wish God would just smash your enemies once and for all?

Tuesday

Read 1 Samuel 16:7.

When we look at people it's all too easy to see their mistakes, their selfishness, their hypocrisies, their sinful lifestyles. But God looks deeper, and knows when they're really just stumbling in the dark for something better—something only He can provide. He asks us as Christians to be willing to be Jesus for them—patient, accepting, understanding, uncritical.

Read this week's *Flashlight*. What do you think it would take for the average unbeliever to "see the light," repent, and follow Jesus? What's missing from the Christian witness that causes more people not to do so?

Wednesday

Read Hosea 11:8, 9; Matthew 12:41.

How does God feel about bringing judgment on His children? Is the old line "This hurts me more than it hurts you" really true in God's case? How should we view such Bible texts in light of Jesus' death on a cross?

Jesus condemned the people in His day for not repenting and accepting His message when Someone much greater than Jonah had come to them (and for far longer than just a few days). Why did so many reject Jesus when they already worshipped God? What blinded them to the message of love and compassion Jesus brought? What should those people have learned from the story of Jonah?

Thursday

Read Jonah 3:8, 9; 4:2.

Jonah's message of "Repent or face the consequences" was a simple one for a simple people. Is it the message we should share today? Why was it so effective to his audience? In what ways was Jesus' message different?

Compare Jonah 3:8, 9 to Jonah 4:2. Who understood God better—Jonah, or the Ninevites, who had barely heard of Him?

Friday

Read Matthew 5:43, 44; Galatians 5:14.

How was God able to bless Jonah's ministry when he was so unwilling to do it? Can the Holy Spirit use us even when our hearts aren't in it?

Twice in this story Jonah faced thoughts of suicide. Jesus taught people to "love your neighbor as yourself"—even your enemies. Jonah didn't love his enemies—or himself. How are the two loves related? How can we keep these loves in harmony and avoid loving ourselves too much or too little?

this week's reading*

Prophets and Kings (or *Royalty in Ruins*), chapter 22.

**Royalty in Ruins* is a special adaptation of *Prophets and Kings*, created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press®. Get more information about it at http://www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#.URlhF1rBO9s. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.