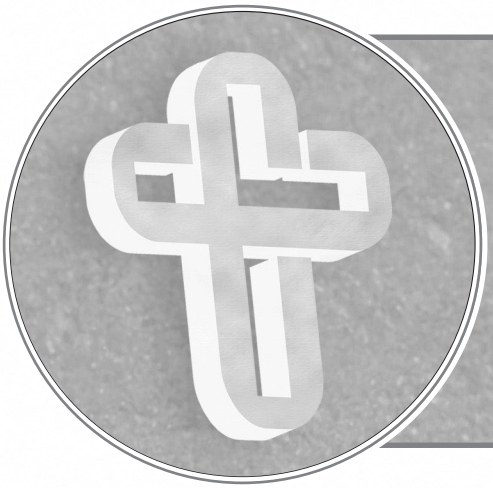


CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS
MAY 04 2024

pardoned

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

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

Jonah's story has everything—terror on the high seas, attempted suicide, supernatural rescue, prophecies of doom and destruction, a shocking display of true love—everything, that is, but a tidy ending. There's Jonah, farther from home than he ever expected, having traveled by ship, fish, and foot, sitting outside Nineveh feeling sorry for himself, letting out the world's most selfish wail.

And like no other Bible book perhaps save Job (another tale of someone who learns that if you debate God, don't expect to win), we're left with countless unanswered questions. How did Jonah's half-hearted, hellfire-and-damnation street preaching manage to touch the hearts of so many people? Whatever happened to those Ninevites anyway—especially considering that the Babylonians reduced their city to rubble only a few generations later? Why would God send someone so prejudiced to preach to people he so despised? Just how much (and for how long) did the Ninevites change their ways and how much did they ever understand God? Did Jonah ever eat fish again?

We're left with one answer: It's a God thing. A God Jonah knew all too well, "a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity" (Jonah 4:2, NIV). God saves whom He chooses, and if He had His way, that'd be everybody. No sin is too wretched to be forgiven, no sinner so far gone that they can't be saved. Jonah had to learn the same lesson as the prophet Samuel, Peter, and most of the rest of us: "People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7, NIV).

Jonah may be a shrimpy book compared to some in the Bible, but it's packed with some jumbo themes. As you explore Jonah's themes with your students, think about such issues as:

God's love and care for the most sinful people—and the most stubborn.

Just what it takes for God to save us.

The importance of seeing others as God sees them.

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Understand the core elements of trusting God to do the seemingly impossible. *(Know)*
- Sense God's willingness to save the most wicked people—and the most ungrateful. *(Feel)*
- Choose to seize faith moments as opportunities to grow instead of calamities to avoid. *(Respond)*

III. EXPLORE

The Father, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, No. 3

"God the eternal Father is the Creator, Source, Sustainer, and Sovereign of all creation. He is just

and holy, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. . . . (Gen. 1:1; Deut. 4:35; Ps. 110:1, 4; John 3:16; 14:9; 1 Cor. 15:28; 1 Tim. 1:17; 1 John 4:8; Rev. 4:11.)"

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? *section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.*

Adventists have traditionally reached people by sharing "the truth"—about the Sabbath, about what happens when we die, about the mark of the beast. While all those truths are found in the Bible, Jonah is one of the Bible stories (such as the thief on the cross or the angels rescuing Lot) about God saving people who had barely heard of many of the beliefs we take for granted.

As you reflect on this with your students, turn to Matthew 24:4-13, where Jesus warns His followers to beware of false prophets and deception. What balance is there between the importance of simply introducing people to Jesus and ensuring that they know enough to avoid being deceived?

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

Anna got straight A's, sang in the school choir, and prided herself on being involved in church. Anna's sister Heather loved playing sports and hanging out with friends, but did the least she could get away with in school. Her parents sometimes talked with Heather about her goals for the future, but Heather assured them she'd figure that out later.

Anna knew her parents didn't have a favorite, but she was pretty sure that they were just a little more proud of her. She was the one who stayed home to help paint the porch while Heather went to the amusement park. She was the one who cooked and delivered lunch and dinner when Aunt Margaret broke her leg.

The Saturday night before the annual family road trip, Anna stayed up working on a college application—while Heather stayed out far past her pretrip curfew. When Anna headed to bed she found her mom still waiting up.

When her mom woke her up at 5:00 to start packing the car, Anna blurted out, "Are you going to ground Heather?" Somehow being grounded in the middle of family vacation sounded like a particularly fitting punishment. But her mom just said, "Heather and I have talked and have made some decisions—and frankly, Anna, it's none of your business."

Anna grumbled to herself as she put on her slippers. Why did their parents have to let Heather get away with *everything?*

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

Self-righteousness. Why are others' faults so easy to see when our own are invisible to us? It's hard seeing the world through someone else's eyes when we're blind to our own faults.

"How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye" (Matthew 7:3-5, NIV).

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story *section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.*

1. *Underline* parts of the story that are new to you. What's the most surprising part of this story?
2. *Highlight* the parts of the story where people speak with God or try to send God a message.
3. What themes come out of the book of Jonah?
4. How is Jonah different from other Bible stories?
5. How do you think the Israelites reacted when they first heard about Jonah's visit to Nineveh?
6. What verse(s) do you think sum up the theme of Jonah?

Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today's story:

Matthew 5:43-48; Proverbs 25:21, 22 (compare to Romans 12:19-21); Matthew 12:41; Luke 10:25-37; Luke 23:39-43; compare Jonah 4:11 with Mark 6:34; 1 John 2:29.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

I say "Jonah," you say "whale." And while any good Bible student can tell you that the text says only "big fish," few realize that Jonah pops up one other place in the Old Testament. Second Kings 14:25 reveals that he prophesied during the wretched 41-year reign of Jereboam II of Israel, around 800-760 B.C.

Nineveh, located near present-day Mosul, Iraq, was a city of great temples and palaces that sat along the river trade routes between east and west. It served as the capital of the ancient Assyrian empire, and much architectural expansion had occurred in the decades before its most famous visitor showed up to prophesy its destruction. Jonah describes it as a "great city of three days' journey" (Jonah 3:3, KJV), which scholars believe refers to how long it would take to walk around it.

Archaeological records indicate a revival of worship of the god Marduk in Nineveh around the time of Jonah, but neither the Bible nor archaeology suggests the Ninevites all became "Seventh-day Assyrians." In the story Jonah doesn't ask the Ninevites to give up their own gods, and the text doesn't say they accepted Yahweh as their only god. He just asks them to repent of their sins, and however little they may have understood of the Israelite religion, God accepted their repentance and faith in Him as genuine.

The king of Nineveh was convicted that chief among his people's sins was "violence," and his

Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

Write It Out

Have your students write a short newspaper story or the introduction to the *Ninevite Nightly News* reporting on the sudden appearance of a mysterious Israelite prophet. Have them include quotes from Ninevites about how they feel about Jonah and the impact he's making, and why they may or may not believe that he's brought a divine message.

This exercise, though a bit of anachronistic fun, will help your students see the story of Jonah from a more personal perspective. Remind them that, as Jesus pointed out, the Ninevites believed despite the lack of any miraculous signs. What does it take to reach people with the gospel today? Is the message itself enough, or do we need "gimmicks"?

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Key Text**
  Invite the students to share the key text with the class if they have committed it to memory
- **Flashlight**
  Read the Flashlight *statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week's story found in the book* Prophets and Kings. *Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from* Out of the Story.
- **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week's story. Have them share the verse that speaks most directly to them and allow them to explain why they chose it.
- **Further Insight**
  Ask them how the quotes in Further Insight *convey the point of the story in this lesson.*

understanding of salvation is as keen as anyone's in the Bible: "Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish" (Jonah 3:8, 9, NIV).

Jesus referenced Jonah in His pleadings to the Israelites to repent of their self-righteousness. When they demanded a sign, He told them that the only one they'd get would be "the sign of Jonah": "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:40, NIV). Jesus reminded them that the Ninevites had seen far less evidence to believe than they had, yet "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" (Luke 11:32, NIV).

But as much as we may like to kick self-pitying Jonah around, his belly-bound prayer is one of the most beautiful in the Bible, and reminds us that though our faith falters, God is always listening.

III. CLOSING

Activity

[*Use* Tips for Top-Notch Teaching.]

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

Jonah challenges our preconceptions of God's judgment, our prejudices about non-Christians, and what's in our own hearts. It reminds us that there's no room in heaven for self-righteousness, for only by God's grace can any of us—"saint" or sinner, preacher or plumber, Christian or Muslim—be saved. We'll make it to heaven because God loved us and when God came knocking, we opened the door and let Him in.

Jonah also reminds us that it's often those "closest" to God—those who've grown up learning their memory verses and attending good Christian schools—who have the most to learn about God. While the Ninevites saw their need for God, God's own prophet kept running the other direction. Jonah thought he had an edge because he kept God's law while the Ninevites knew only evil, but he'd forgotten the foundation: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself' " (Luke 10:27, NIV).



Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *Prophets and Kings* (or *Royalty in Ruins*), chapter 22.

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STUDENT LESSON

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

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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.