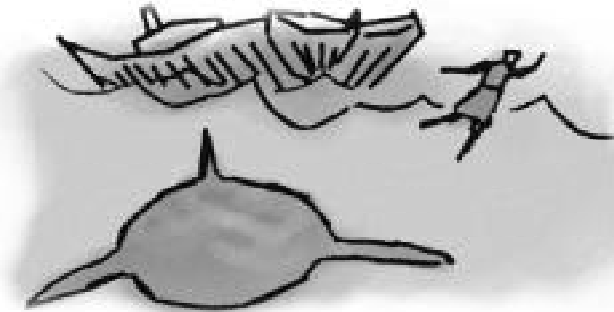


Salvation Is of the Lord!



Sabbath Afternoon

THE 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.

THE FEAR OF THE LORD.

Last 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.

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?

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

For 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?

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.

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?

Compare 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?

PRAYING IN ONE'S EXTREMITY.

Jonah 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.

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.

But, 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.



Wanderer Comes Home Charlotte Ishkanian

Linda Delower's life was typical of many Aborigines. She grew up on a sheep station in northern Australia. The family moved from one station to another as work demanded.

As a teen Linda started drinking and smoking with her friends; after she married, she drank with her husband. The couple worked for a time at an Adventist mission, and the couple put away their destructive habits. Then Linda's husband was offered a job some distance from the mission. The promised job did not work out, and Linda's husband started drinking again. The couple began fighting. Life became so bad that Linda finally left her husband.

She wandered from place to place. She lost her faith, her self-esteem. She was searching for something, but she did not know what. She still believed in God, but she had lost her hold on Him. She was angry about what had happened to her. For more than 10 years she was adrift in a sea of uncertainty.

Then she met another man, Michael, and they married. Linda felt a strong pull to return to God. She began praying, and God gave her the victory over alcohol and tobacco.

An Adventist who lived in the same town as Linda had a small worship room on his land. She began attending worship with other Aboriginal Christians and was rebaptized.

One day Linda heard about an Adventist-operated Bible school for Aborigines. She decided to attend the school to learn more about the Bible. When she told her husband of her decision, he was sad that she wanted to go, but he gave his blessing. She attends school two weeks every two months and studies on her own between intense sessions.

Linda loves the Bible school and the truths that God is teaching her there, even though such intense study is difficult for her. She is learning how to share her faith with others, principles of health, and lifestyle changes along with Bible study.

During the months Linda is at home, she visits her neighbors and patients in the hospital, sharing with them her love for the Lord.

Today Linda is a leader in her little congregation in northern Australia. She preaches when a preacher is needed and leads out in Bible study time. Some of her relatives are studying the Bible with the pastor and plan to become Adventists.

Linda Delower lives in Derby, Western Australia. Charlotte Ishkanian is editor of *Mission*.

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