

## 6. Salvation is of the Lord!

**Texts:** Jonah 1:17-2:9; Psalm 69:1-17; Psalm 62:1-8; Luke 19:9.

### Quotes:

- It must be held as a matter of faith that outside the Apostolic Roman Church, no one can be saved; that this is the only ark of salvation; that he who shall not have entered therein will perish in the flood. Pope Pius IX
- Jehovah is using only one organization today to accomplish his will. To receive everlasting life in the earthly Paradise we must identify that organization and serve God as part of it. Jehovah's Witnesses publication.
- Jesus Christ of Nazareth... Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. Acts 4:12 KJV.

### Introductory questions

How did Jonah know that to be in the fish's belly was better than drowning—might he not still die? How long was it before he came to his senses? Did he know God would hear him when he prayed from the fish—and what does that say about his ideas of God? Is this Jonah's "undersea lament" or a stirring hymn of victory? And why doesn't Jonah say sorry?

### Discussion ideas

The "psalm" prayer of Jonah does not contain any specific reference to repentance. Nowhere does he plead for forgiveness for his sins. Does this mean God saves us even if we do not confess? Nor does Jonah in his prayer say he will from now on do as he is told. There are no vows of trying to live a better life, nor does Jonah promise obedience.

So what *does* Jonah say? Interestingly, Jonah is concerned only to praise God for saving his life. It seems that Jonah, who was apparently upset enough to want to die (see also 4:9!), now realized that his life had meaning and purpose because God had performed such a miracle to save him from drowning. He admits his distress, his cries for help, and the wonderful way in which God responded. His greatest regret that he specifies is that he thought he had been banished from God's sight. That he was rescued meant that God had not given up on him, and that was the reason for his praise and thanksgiving.

Redeemed from death to live, reborn and resurrected, Jonah praises the God "who brought me back from the depths alive." (2:6 TEV). The delight is in a relationship restored in the most miraculous way—God saying and acting out his desire to want Jonah back, despite all his failings. This is the theme of Jonah's glorious thoughts, and reflects our own experience—that however deep we have fallen, God still wants us back.

There is no anxious reflecting on unpardoned sins, or on judgmental justice, or on making amends. Jonah has clear proof of God's saving love for him individually, and that is enough. He makes no promises to God, except to praise and make sacrifice. For it is enough to know that God cares for him, and that he is welcomed back with loving arms, just as the prodigal son was welcomed back by his patient and ever-loving Father. That's why Jonah cries out "Salvation is from the Lord," because that is what salvation is all about.

Salvation means rescue and healing. It means restoration of the intimate God-human relationship. Most of all it means we are welcomed back by God, to be reunited with the One from whom we ran away, to be at-one and joyous in his saving presence.

May we all recognize in Jonah's God our own God who wants us back, and who will do anything to bring us back to stand in his presence, dripping wet from sin's wide ocean, accepted by the One who loves us more than we can ever know.

### Ellen White Comments

At last Jonah had learned that "salvation belongeth unto the Lord." Psalm 3:8. With penitence and a recognition of the saving grace of God, came deliverance. Jonah was released from the perils of the mighty deep and was cast upon the dry land. {PK 269.1}

At last Jonah had learned that "Salvation belongeth unto the Lord." Ps. 3:8. "Truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel." Jer. 3:23. Men have sold themselves to the enemy of all righteousness. They cannot redeem themselves. Only by accepting Christ as a personal Saviour can human beings be delivered from the power of the enemy. {RH, December 4, 1913 par. 15}

Man's pride would lead him to seek for salvation in some other way than that devised by God. He is unwilling to be accounted as nothing, unwilling to recognize Christ as the only one who can save to the uttermost. But of Christ it is written, "There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." "In all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted." The one word written above the life that Christ lived in this world in behalf of the fallen race, is "Salvation." {RH, December 4, 1913 par. 16}

The very essence of the gospel is restoration... {DA 824.5}

### Extra material The meaning of salvation

Salvation is not some adjustment of our legal status, or wrath appeasement, but a process of making us truly at one with God. Simply to remove the guilt is not what salvation is all about. Salvation means transformation of our nature and healing from sin. It surely is no coincidence that salvation and healing are equated by Jesus when he says (identically) to the woman who anointed his feet, "Your faith has saved (*sesoken*) you; go in peace"; and to the Syrophenician woman, "Your faith has healed (*sesoken*) you; go in peace". (Luke 7:50; 8:48 NIV).

At the beginning of Luke's account it is noted that "No one could heal her." (Luke 8:43). Here the root word *therapeuo* is used--from which we get "therapeutic". She'd been to the doctors, but without getting any therapeutic benefit. The idea here is of being medically treated.

Then after the miracle she is discovered and so "In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed." (Luke 8:47). Now the root word for healing becomes *iaomai*. Meaning: to be cured of an illness, to be delivered from ills. So she is specifically referred to as having received a cure for her particular health problem.

But then Jesus says to her: "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace." (Luke 8:48 NIV). Here at the climax of the story the word for healing is *sesoken*, from the verb *sozo*. Not merely medically treated. Not just healed from a particular illness. No: this woman experiences the transforming power of God that brings salvation-healing.

## 7. Second Chances

**Texts:** Jonah 2:10-3:3; Genesis 28:10-22.

### Quotes

- The so-called godly man may be more likely to do serious wrong than a man who deeply questions himself. The ‘godly man’ often zealously follows religious precepts that, in the end, justify an unjust injury to others, while the questioning man, addressing his own conscience, may have the better chance to consider all the circumstances and come to the just decision. Gerry Spence
- The idea that God will pardon a rebel who has not given up his rebellion is contrary both to Scripture and to common sense. A. W. Tozer

### Introductory questions

What is the point of second chances? How many chances do we get? On what does God base his decisions? Had Jonah really “repented,” or was he simply being forced to do what he didn’t want? Had his perspective on God changed? What had his experience with the fish done to Jonah? What does this mean to you and me? How does God look in all of this?

### Discussion ideas

God’s second call to Jonah is identical to the first. Is this to emphasize that God will have his way, despite what we want? Do we *have* to follow the role God has given us without question? In the lesson, (Thursday, p.86 Teachers) it suggests “He [God] will not be frustrated by the impudence of His prophet.” Is that the way we should see the situation?

The aspect of second chance also applies to the people of Nineveh. Despite the depths of their depravity, God is still looking to save them too. While the nation of Israel was surely praying for the destruction of these people, their enemies, God does not see them that way. Instead of exhibiting a hateful xenophobic attitude as his chosen people had, God wants to give the evil Ninevites another chance to catch a glimpse of his saving character.

Jonah is now recorded as obeying the Lord. On what is the obedience based? Is it the threat of punishment, the promise of reward, what? Is it simply because he has seen the power of God and is now too frightened to disobey, or is there more to it than that? The desire to carry out God’s will in taking the message to Nineveh is now accepted by Jonah, but in the light of his subsequent attitude, can it really be said that he was a willing servant, and a true representative of the God who wants to save, and not to destroy?

What exactly was the “word of the Lord” that came to Jonah? In the description of his preaching, all we know is the “forty days before destruction” message. Was this all Jonah said? Or was there also some description and discussion of the nature and character of God behind this threat? Otherwise what point would there have been to give such a message—the Ninevites would only have exchanged one hostile god for another.

We often receive second chances—in fact every new day is another chance to come to know God better and more truly represent him to the world around us. The challenge is not to be more like Jonah—for he is very much the “anti-hero” in the story—but to be more like the God who wants to save and heal all of his misguided and rebellious children, whether from Israel or from Nineveh, whether from Church or from the capital cities of paganism.

## Ellen White Comments

Once more the servant of God was commissioned to warn Nineveh. “The word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.” This time he did not stop to question or doubt, but obeyed unhesitatingly. He “arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord.” Jonah 3:1-3. {PK 269.2}

As He hung upon the cross, angels gathered about the divine Sufferer. As they looked upon their loved Commander, and heard His cry, they asked with intense emotion, “Will not the Lord Jehovah save Him? Shall not that soul-piercing cry of God’s only begotten Son prevail?” We ask, What if it had? What if the world had been left to perish with its accumulation of guilt, while the Commander of all heaven again took up His kingly crown and royal robe, leaving an ungrateful, unappreciative people to perish in their sins?

Not long before this, He said, “Now is My soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour” [John 12:27]. What melting, heart-stirring words. “Father, glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son also may glorify Thee.” The Father responded to this request. “Then came a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again” [verse 28].

As the angels beheld the overmastering anguish of the Son of God, the words were spoken, “The Lord hath sworn, and He will not repent.” Father and Son have clasped their hands, and are mutually pledged to fulfill the terms of the everlasting covenant, to give fallen man another chance. {12MR 407-8}

## Extra Material True obedience

True obedience is an expression of the most elemental Christian motivation. Laws are observed as they comply with the Law of Liberty, which is based on a relationship with and an understanding of God Himself. In its simplest form, it can be summed up in “If you love me, keep my commandments.” Love is the motivational factor for “law-keeping,” which is more than legal observance, but an acceptance and agreement of right for right’s sake. The observer of the law does not understand the law as compulsion, but as an expression of what he or she acknowledges as the only way to operate. Doing right because it is internally agreed is a far cry from obedience based on obligation, compulsion and fear.

“The man who attempts to keep the commandments of God from a sense of obligation merely—because he is required to do so—will never enter into the joy of obedience. He does not obey... The essence of all righteousness is loyalty to our Redeemer. This will lead us to do right because it is right—because right doing is pleasing to God.” Ellen White, Christ’s Object Lessons, 97.

For “whoever obeys God’s commands lives in union with God and God lives in union with him,” (1 John 3:24 TEV). Why? Because “what he commands is that we believe in his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as Christ commanded us.” (1 John 3:23 TEV).

Love cannot be commanded anyway! God’s “Law of obedience” is a law that cannot be commanded; it is a truth that is accepted and endorsed. This command to love brings law full circle back to the graciousness of God. For all the laws have this at their heart, every act of obedience is a demonstration of this principle of love in action. And “our love should not be just words and talk; it must be true love, which shows itself in action.” (1 John 3:18 TEV).

So while Jonah understood the importance of following through on God’s command, reasoning and motivation may have been very flawed. A lesson for all of us...

## 8. Jonah, the Amazing Evangelist

**Texts:** Jonah 3:4-10.

### Quotes

- Evangelism is truth demanding a verdict. Lionel Fletcher
- Evangelism's highest and ultimate end is not the welfare of men, not even their eternal bliss, but the glorification of God. R. B. Kuiper.
- The evangel is not denunciatory of sin. It is not pronounciatory of judgment. It is annunciatory of salvation. G. Campbell Morgan.

### Introductory questions

Was Jonah *really* an amazing evangelist? What did he preach? Is it not another ironic aspect of Jonah that the heathen king tells his heathen people to repent and follow the true God?—and they do! What is this telling us? What is the basis for repentance here? What kind of picture of God did they receive? Once Nineveh repents, how does God “repent”?

### Discussion ideas

If Jonah truly was an amazing evangelist, then why do we not see Nineveh as a long-term nation under God? Or are we playing by the rules that just look at the numbers converted, and not at those who made a commitment that lasted a lifetime? How do we judge results anyway?

The response to the message of imminent destruction is that “the Ninevites believed God.” On what was such “repentance” based? How did they believe, and in what? The concern of the king of Nineveh was for survival—his, and his people. Notice his words—that God might turn from his fierce anger.

As is so often the case in the Old Testament narrative, God has to shout and threaten to get any response. This then leaves him vulnerable to the charges Satan has laid against him—charges that include the accusation that he is a cruel and angry tyrant who demands his own way. In working for the people of Nineveh, God chose a dramatic method, a wake-up call, but once again the results do not seem to be very long lasting. Just like Israel at the foot of Mt. Sinai, they obeyed as long as they were afraid. Once the fear was gone, so was the repentance.

The lesson (Sunday, p.90 Teachers) speculates on what Jonah's message actually was—or more specifically, what it wasn't. “He wasn't preaching... about God's infinite love or about hope and the promise of eternity. Nor was Jonah commissioned to seek ecumenical unity.” Those are assumptions for which we have no proof. We do not know more than what the text says.

The message is one of rapidly approaching doom. But is that what God really wants to communicate? For while he may threaten and shout, what is God really trying to achieve? Isn't it the same as always—that sin-sick rebels might turn to him, might choose him and his salvation. “For why will you die?” he calls out, when I can heal and save you? Here, as everywhere, God is desperately pleading for his lost children to return. He uses every method—even hellfire preachers such as perhaps Jonah was—to bring anyone who will to the point of listening and considering. The message is not the bombastic raging of some divine maniac but the urgent calls of a loving Father. The message is not “Unless you obey, you will be destroyed,” but come to me and find true salvation. For though they fearfully obeyed, in the end Nineveh *was* destroyed.

Finally, what of the question of “God's repentance”? While God may not repent as we do, he certainly appears to be changing his mind. What does this tell us of God?

## Ellen White Comments

Once more the servant of God was commissioned to warn Nineveh. . . . As Jonah entered the city, he began at once to “cry against” it the message, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.” From street to street he went, sounding the note of warning.

The message was not in vain. The cry that rang through the streets of the godless city was passed from lip to lip until all the inhabitants had heard the startling announcement. The Spirit of God pressed the message home to every heart and caused multitudes to tremble because of their sins and to repent in deep humiliation. . . . Their doom was averted, the God of Israel was exalted and honored throughout the heathen world, and His law was revered. Not until many years later was Nineveh to fall a prey to the surrounding nations through forgetfulness of God and through boastful pride. . . .

The lesson is for God’s messengers today, when the cities of the nations are as verily in need of a knowledge of the attributes and purposes of the true God as were the Ninevites of old. . . . The only city that will endure is the city whose builder and maker is God. . . . The Lord Jesus is calling upon men to strive with sanctified ambition to secure the immortal inheritance. {CC 230}

## Extra material Fearing God?

I checked out a psychologist’s dictionary. I found two hundred and thirteen specific fears—or phobias, as they prefer to call them. Two hundred and thirteen different “fear-producers” that cover almost everything you can think of. In fact as soon as they find somebody terrified of a new object or situation, they just invent a word for it and add it to the list!

There are the common ones like fear of open spaces (agoraphobia), of spiders (arachneophobia), and of confinement (claustrophobia). Some very strange ones too: like the fear of standing up or the fear of names! Then there’s the fear of gravity, (I’d be more worried if there was no gravity!), the fear of writing (I wonder if authors suffer from this?), and the fear of work—which probably affects most of us!

And some unfortunates suffer from panophobia—the fear of everything. But for all the peculiarities, the oddness that makes some of us smile, such fears are very, very real. It certainly is no laughing matter. And if you yourself have some life-crippling dread, you know how desperate you are to find an answer.

But one particular phobia on this ever-increasing list is very relevant: theophobia. The fear of God. Scared of God, terrified of him. Maybe He is out to scare us! Some views of God indicate just that. In the words of Oscar Wilde the central theme is “The terror of God, which is the secret of religion.” The terror of God: a phrase which neatly summarizes the idea that the reason for and the importance of religion is this overwhelming and petrifying fear of God—of what he is, and of what he might do. All too often—at different times, and in different places—it seems Wilde was right. The essence of religious observance is fear.

God is a divine scarecrow, we are the birds!

For the moment it’s enough to think of all the cruelty and terror used in God’s name. At the heart of all these techniques—whether they are called “evangelism,” “reconversion” and “encouragement in the faith”—is the same blunderbuss idea. This view says that violence and force are certainly acceptable to God, for they are only means to bring about something “good”. Just like God, you can use terrifying threats and actual killing if it suits your purpose.

Scaring people to God. Is this the way? Does God approve? Is God a terrorist?

## 9. Conversing with God

**Texts:** Jonah 4:1-4; Ezekiel 18:32.

### Quotes:

- Man thinks, God laughs. Jewish proverb
- Your mandate for spiritual advancement must firstly, contain no logical thought, and secondly, use lots of silly words. Gareth Harvey
- How great is God—beyond our understanding!... Should he be told that I want to speak? Would any man ask to be swallowed up? *Elihu's speech in Job (36:26; 37:20 NIV)*
- Prayer is not monologue, but dialogue; God's voice in response to mine is its most essential part. Listening to God's voice is the secret of the assurance that he will listen to mine. Andrew Murray

### Introductory questions

Was Jonah right to argue with God? Was his argument a valid one? Had Jonah run away because he “feared” God’s merciful attitude, or were there more compelling reasons? How does Jonah come across in his petulant protestations? What fundamental attitudes are revealed here? What does this dialogue say about Jonah’s relationship with God?

### Discussion ideas

Wednesday’s lesson is entitled “God Too is Merciful?” Maybe it should have been “God is Too Merciful”! Here we have an Israelite prophet who is angry with God for being too kind and compassionate. Jonah is complaining about grace. Another set of ironies to consider—instead of celebrating the goodness and mercy of God, his spokesman is mad that God is not acting in a vengeful and destructive way. Rather, Jonah is more concerned about what these enemies think of him than about the God he is representing. Whose reputation is more important? In Jonah’s eyes, it is his!

In 4:1 Jonah calls God’s lack of destructive action “a great evil.” Another irony in Jonah—the prophet identifies God as acting in an evil way—by not destroying! His protest is not a carefully considered presentation to God; rather it is another childish example of Jonah stamping his foot and pouting because he is not getting his way. Notice he’s mad enough to want to die—he claims death is preferable to the dishonour of being seen as a false prophet.

Once again it is not the actions of Jonah that look good here, but the condescension of God in dealing with such a defective representative. Just like Jonah’s first action to run away, God is patient and allows Jonah the privilege of argument and fist-shaking! We again see God not responding in an offended and negative way, but being open to question. God allows Jonah to speak out, and then asks Jonah if he has any right to think the way he does.

Notice how Jonah describes God. Is it a correct description? So how much does Jonah know/ not know God? The very fact that Jonah writes down his words and actions is perhaps the redeeming feature of Jonah—that he later saw the foolishness of his ways and wanted to set out for others the whole background of the story. In any case, though Jonah looks like a childish, petulant, self-referenced prophet, God looks incredibly good.

Think of others who have also argued with God—Abraham and Moses, for example. Notice though that both of these were primarily concerned with God’s character, not their own! Abraham wanted to be sure of God’s mercy, and Moses of God’s reputation in the eyes of others.

## Ellen White Comments

When Jonah learned of God's purpose to spare the city that, notwithstanding its wickedness, had been led to repent in sackcloth and ashes, he should have been the first to rejoice because of God's amazing grace; but instead he allowed his mind to dwell upon the possibility of his being regarded as a false prophet. Jealous of his reputation, he lost sight of the infinitely greater value of the souls in that wretched city. The compassion shown by God toward the repentant Ninevites "displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry." "Was not this my saying," he inquired of the Lord, "when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that Thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest Thee of the evil." Jonah 4:1, 2.

Once more he yielded to his inclination to question and doubt, and once more he was overwhelmed with discouragement. Losing sight of the interests of others, and feeling as if he would rather die than live to see the city spared, in his dissatisfaction he exclaimed, "Now, O Lord, take, I beseech Thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live."

"Doest thou well to be angry?" the Lord inquired. {PK 271-2}

But Jonah revealed that he did not value the souls in that wretched city. He valued his reputation, lest they should say that he was a false prophet. {SW 79-80}

## Extra material Talking to God

The science journal *Nature* published in 1997 a survey of religious belief among scientists in the US. The survey revealed that nearly 40 per cent of the 1000 scientists surveyed said they believed in a personal God—"a God in intellectual and affective communication with humankind, i.e. a God to whom one may pray in expectation of receiving an answer."

Perhaps the idea of communicating with a supreme Being is not so foreign to modern society as we might think. That God is very interested in relating to each of us individually is surely also a great endorsement of every one of us—unique, like everyone else!

Jonah's experience also reveals that God is happy for all kinds of dialogue—even when we are mad and upset with God. He does not reject us in our anger, even when we accuse him of committing evil, as Jonah did. Even when we are so concerned with ourselves and our own reputations, God is still happy to talk the situation through. Like Isaiah, God calls on us to reason together with him, to try to understand God's nature and actions. He did not tell Jonah to obey or else! Instead, he let Jonah rant and vent, and listened before responding in a way that speaks more of God as a loving parent than anything else.

"I'd rather be dead!" is a strange prayer for a prophet of God to pray. But once again the irony of the book of Jonah reveals truth in great clarity—that God is not upset or offended by such talk, and like a parent dealing with a child in a temper tantrum speaks words of reason and sense until Jonah's foolishness is revealed. Instead of looking to self, we all need to look again to the wisdom and trustworthiness of God.

"For what is prayer in the last analysis?" asks Al Martin. "It is a conscious spreading out of my helplessness before God." We do not see all the options. We do not have all the power. We do not have all the understanding. Consequently, and though we may rage like Jonah at times, the wisest course is to truly leave all in God's trustworthy hands—questioning still, perhaps, yet convinced of his ultimate ability to achieve what really needs to happen for the best.