

## Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes

### Third Quarter 2015: *Missionaries*

#### Lesson 4 “The Jonah Saga”

#### Read for this week’s study

Jonah 1–4; 2 Kings 14:25; Isaiah 56:7; Isaiah 44:8; Matthew 12:40; Revelation 14:6–12.

#### Memory Text

“ ‘I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right’ ” (Acts 10:34, 35, NIV).

#### Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. The Flawed Prophet
- III. An Early Missionary
- IV. In the Belly of the Big Fish
- V. The Nineveh Generation
- VI. Jonah’s Lament
- VII. Further Study

#### Questions and Notes for Consideration

##### Moderator: Daniel Duda

1. “This quarter we will look at mission first and foremost as God’s means for communicating the gospel to those who don’t know it. Mission is a core part of God’s sovereign activity in the process of redeeming humanity. Thus, we will study how God’s eternal purpose has been accomplished in the lives of individuals in the Bible whom He has used to be missionaries to the lost.” (Introduction to the whole Quarter) So what is it that we are supposed to learn from the life of Jonah?
2. “Jonah is the only Old Testament prophet whom we know of who was directly called to be a missionary in another country. The truth that the Creator of all races did not intend to limit salvation only to His chosen people is stated repeatedly in the Old Testament, especially in Isaiah and the Psalms, even though popular Israelite theology at the time of Jonah did not accept that the Gentiles were also in God’s plan to partake in salvation.” (Sabbath afternoon)
3. How is it possible that in the 250 years since David (when most Psalms were written) people completely lost the perspective that through the seed of Abraham “all families of the earth would be blessed”? (Genesis 12:1-3) Is it possible that we have lost some “bigger” perspectives too? Which one/ones? How important is the “bigger” picture? Why?

4. “Under the Spirit’s inspiration, the Bible’s authors present the valiant along with the petty in the lives of people to illustrate the truth that, no matter how weak and unpleasant these characters may be, God is able to work through them if they are willing.” (Sunday’s lesson) How is this an encouragement for us? How do we go about becoming “willing”? What does it tell us about God that He is eager to work even with deeply flawed people?
5. “Jonah made detailed preparations to go west by sea even though God had directed him to go east by land. Jonah, the unwilling prophet, fled in the opposite direction.” (Monday’s lesson) What is God’s lesson in sending Jonah to Nineveh? How is God calling me and you out of our comfort zones? What about us, as a corporate body? Where is the “Tarshish” we run away from when God calls?
6. If Jonah had come to the sailors in an attitude of pride, as a successful prophet, and said, “Men of Tarshish, I want you to know, my God is bigger than your god, my God is better than your god. He’s the supreme being,” they would have dismissed him, assuming his message was mostly about ethnic tribal superiority. But Jonah is running away. He doesn’t even want them to know that he knows God—He doesn’t talk about God until he has to. He is a failure; he has made a terrible mess of things. But that may be one of the reasons they actually believe Jonah. After being a prophet all these years, this will be the greatest mass Gentile conversion he has ever seen—and it is Jonah’s failure that God uses to bring these people to faith. This book is clearly not about human plans. It is a story of God!
7. The next amazing development of the story is that the sailors don’t want to sacrifice Jonah. Instead, the text says: “The men did their best to row back to land. But they could not for the sea grew even wilder than before.” (1:13) Their lives are at stake, but they don’t want to sacrifice the life of this Hebrew stranger. These Tarshish sailors on the ship have more compassion for the Hebrew prophet than the Hebrew prophet had for the people of Nineveh! Perhaps the writer is cautioning us that there is no room for pride, superiority, exclusivity among the people of God. Who knows for sure who the “good guys” and the “bad guys” are—who is on God’s side, and who is not?
8. Fresh from the belly of a whale, Jonah walks around Nineveh saying, “Forty more days, and Nineveh will be overthrown.” (3:4) That’s kind of a vague message, isn’t it? Nothing seems to be mentioned about God or God’s character, or sin, or injustice, or repentance, or forgiveness, or mercy. Jonah doesn’t seem to be putting much effort into his preaching. But the strangest thing happens. People listen. They respond. People’s hearts get broken, and their eyes fill with tears because the Spirit of God has come on them and they are convicted of sin. There is national repentance from the king down to the poorest citizen. It’s not because Jonah gave an eloquent sermon. The Spirit of God was falling on people’s minds and hearts. What is the lesson for us, if we are trying to bring about revival and reformation in our time?
9. Nineveh is sin city. The people are degraded and vile. When we begin the book, it looks like God’s big problem is, “What am I going to do about Nineveh?” Reading on,

we see God's biggest problem is, "What am I going to do about Jonah? What can be done about a man of God with a smug, superior and resentful heart?"

10. Ann Lamott says, "You can tell you have made God in your image when it turns out He hates all the same people you do." When Jesus came everyone knew who the big sinners were—the prostitutes, the tax collectors, the people you would obviously associate with a place like Nineveh. But the people Jesus had the hardest time with considered themselves the spiritually mature. They had superior, judgmental, unloving hearts.
11. God asks Jonah a question. This is the climax of the story. "Jonah, you're concerned about your little shade. You're concerned about Israel, and you want to have Nineveh decimated. If it is right for you to be concerned about *some* people, isn't it right for me to be concerned about *all* people?"
12. We want to hear Jonah's answer. We never find out. The story just ends with Jonah sitting there. (The memory text we are provided is not from Jonah, but from the apostle Peter, some 800 years later!) Why would a Bible writer end the story of Jonah so abruptly? It's not because he couldn't think up a good ending to the story. Perhaps it's because the point of the story is not that Jonah had a decision to make. The point of the story is that you and I have decisions to make. It's our story.

### Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

Sometimes God's graciousness has even been an embarrassment to some of his people! When the prophet Jonah was asked by the Lord to take a warning to the city of Nineveh, he first ran away. Later he reluctantly delivered his message: "In forty days Nineveh will be destroyed!" Then he sat down on a hillside nearby to watch the city come to its end.

But the people of Nineveh repented, and the city was not destroyed. Jonah angrily complained to God, "That's why I ran away. I knew you were too kind to go through with that prediction. You have made me look like a false prophet, and I'm so humiliated I could die" (see Jonah 3:4; 4:1–11).

God reasoned with frustrated Jonah: "Have you no pity for these people? Aren't you glad that they have chosen to repent?" But Jonah was more concerned about his prophetic reputation.

Paul was proud of the Good News about our gracious, forgiving God. Jonah was ashamed! {Maxwell, Graham. *Can God Be Trusted?*, 140-141. Redlands, California: Pine Knoll Publications, 2002} <http://speakingwellofgod.org/written-materials/can-god-be-trusted-chapters/chapter-13>

Now Jonah knew the truth about God and he was not proud of it. Do you remember when God told him to go to Nineveh and announce "forty days and the city will be destroyed. . ." and so he ran away? And God put considerable pressure on that evangelist. He was certainly no

missionary volunteer. And under duress he dragged his unwilling steps up to Nineveh. But he was a practiced evangelist and professional about it because he apparently did a pretty fine job and even the king repented. And the king ordered that all the rest should, so the whole city repented, they did things in a big way those days.

And Jonah went out and sat on a hillside nearby to see if Nineveh would be destroyed after all. And the forty days passed and it was not destroyed. And [Jonah] turned to God and said, "That's why I ran away. I knew you were too kind to go through with that warning and that threat." And God said, "But aren't you pleased the people have chosen to repent?" But Jonah was more concerned about his own reputation and he said, "You realize, God, you have destroyed my living. I'm a professional prophet. Now who's going to believe me anymore when I say something's going to happen in so and so many days? God, you have destroyed my reputation." Jonah was far more concerned about *his* reputation than God's. And forbid that we should do the same. The good news is about God and God looked good when He forgave the inhabitants of Nineveh. And He appealed to Jonah and said, "Do you do well to be angry?" And Jonah said, "Yes, angry enough to die!" Look at that evangelist there, ashamed of God's willingness to forgive. And God appealed one last time and said, "There are 120,000 people in that city, also much cattle." I love the way it ends, don't you even care about them? Jonah didn't care at all. All he cared about was his reputation.

We Adventists have announced the nearness of the end for 140 years, are you embarrassed? And are we ashamed of God or proud of Him for waiting? The longer God waits the worse we look but the better He looks. And the good news is about Him. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *Understanding the Mission of the Church*, #7, recorded September, 1983, Camp AuSable, Michigan} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/7MMUTMOTC>*

He had as clear a picture as anybody, and it embarrassed him; it confused him. So this is a good opportunity to discuss this, isn't it, how to relate the two. How do we go to the world with a serious message about what's going to happen, and still tell them that God is infinitely gracious? Any way we can phrase that so it won't confuse people? {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *The Picture of God in All 66 – Obadiah, Jonah, & Micah*, recorded 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

\*Audio links to the West Covina series recorded in 1984:

<http://pkp.cc/45MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/46MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

### Further Study with Ellen White

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. {PK 265.3}

It was taught by the Jews that before God’s love is extended to the sinner, he must first repent. In their view, repentance is a work by which men earn the favor of Heaven. And it was this thought that led the Pharisees to exclaim in astonishment and anger. “This man receiveth sinners.” According to their ideas He should permit none to approach Him but those who had repented. But in the parable of the lost sheep, Christ teaches that salvation does not come through our seeking after God but through God’s seeking after us. “There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way.” Romans 3:11, 12. We do not repent in order that God may love us, but He reveals to us His love in order that we may repent. {COL 189.1}

The rabbis had a saying that there is rejoicing in heaven when one who has sinned against God is destroyed; but Jesus taught that to God the work of destruction is a strange work. That in which all heaven delights is the restoration of God’s own image in the souls whom He has made. {COL 190.1}

One part of the ministry of heavenly angels is to visit our world and oversee the work of the Lord which is in the hands of His stewards. In every time of necessity they minister to those who as co-workers with God are striving to carry forward His work in the earth. . . . The angelic hosts rejoice whenever any part of God’s work prospers. {HP 102.2}

Angels are interested in the spiritual welfare of all who are seeking to restore the moral image of God in man, and the human family are to connect with the heavenly family in binding up the wounds and bruises that sin has made. Angelic agencies, though invisible, are cooperating with visible human agencies, forming a relief association with men. The very angels who, when Satan was seeking the supremacy, fought the battle in the heavenly courts and triumphed on the side of God, the very angels who shouted for joy over the creation of our world and over the creation of our first parents to inhabit the earth, the angels who witnessed the fall of man and his expulsion from his Eden home—these very heavenly messengers are most intensely interested to work in union with the fallen, redeemed race for the salvation of human beings perishing in their sins. {HP 102.3}

Human agencies are the hands of heavenly instrumentalities, for heavenly angels employ human hands in practical ministry. . . . By uniting with these powers that are omnipotent, we

are benefited by their higher education and experience. Thus, as we become partakers of the divine nature and separate selfishness from our lives, special talents for helping one another are granted us. . . . {HP 102.4}

No distinction on account of nationality, race, or caste, is recognized by God. He is the Maker of all mankind. All men are of one family by creation, and all are one through redemption. Christ came to demolish every wall of partition, to throw open every compartment of the temple courts, that every soul may have free access to God. His love is so broad, so deep, so full, that it penetrates everywhere. It lifts out of Satan's influence those who have been deluded by his deceptions, and places them within reach of the throne of God, the throne encircled by the rainbow of promise. In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free. {PK 369.3}

Heaven's plan of salvation is broad enough to embrace the whole world. God longs to breathe into prostrate humanity the breath of life. And He will not permit any soul to be disappointed who is sincere in his longing for something higher and nobler than anything the world can offer. Constantly He is sending His angels to those who, while surrounded by circumstances the most discouraging, pray in faith for some power higher than themselves to take possession of them and bring deliverance and peace. In various ways God will reveal Himself to them and will place them in touch with providences that will establish their confidence in the One who has given Himself a ransom for all, "that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments." Psalm 78:7. {PK 377.1}

**Recommended Reading:**

*Prophets and Kings* Chapter 22 – "Nineveh, That Great City" <https://egwwritings.org/>