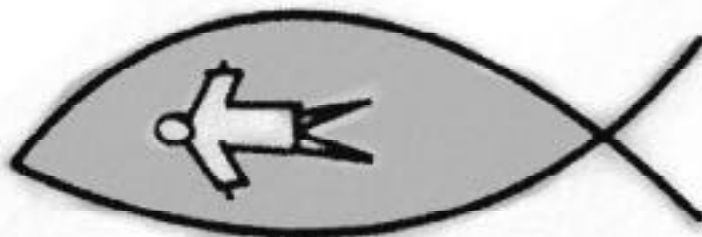


# The Sign of the Prophet Jonah

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**AT THIS POINT IN OUR STUDY**, the story of Jonah and his adventures has ended. But the message of Jonah's story and the reasons why his story is in the Bible are not finished.

During His work on earth, Jesus spoke three times about Jonah being in the belly of the fish. Jesus' words about Jonah are in two of the Gospels,<sup>1</sup> Matthew and Luke. For this reason, there must be an important lesson about Jonah for us.

This week, we will take a closer look at what Jesus said about Jonah and why He used Jonah's example to teach an important message to His hearers and to us.

**THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:** What happened that led Jesus to speak about Jonah? Why did Jesus speak such a sharp warning? Why will there always be room for doubt? How did Jonah's experience symbolize Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection?<sup>2</sup>

**MEMORY VERSE:** "For as Jonas [Jonah] was three days and three nights in the whale's [fish's] belly [stomach]; so shall the Son of man [Jesus] be three days and three nights in the heart [middle] of the earth" (Matthew 12:40).

\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 20.

<sup>1</sup>the Gospels—the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are called the Gospels.

<sup>2</sup>resurrection—coming back to life after dying.

**SUN “THIS ADULTEROUS GENERATION.”<sup>3</sup>**

Jesus Himself believed that the story of Jonah is true. This includes the part of the story that is the most difficult to believe—Jonah’s trip in the belly of the big fish. Jesus speaks of Jonah in Matthew 12 and in Matthew 16:4. Luke 11:29-32 also tells us that Jesus spoke about Jonah.

**Read Matthew 12:38-45; Matthew 16:1-4; and Luke 11:29-36. What is the background of Jesus’ answer? How are all three sets of verses the same? Why does Jesus speak to this “wicked,” “adulterous” generation? Why does He mention the Queen of Sheba and the people of Nineveh?**

All through the book of Jonah, it was the pagans<sup>4</sup> who accepted the signs, the warnings, and God’s mercy.<sup>5</sup> But Jonah, the only Hebrew in the book, seemed hardened to God.

Jesus is dealing with almost the same situation. The same as Jonah, these people should have known Jesus. But they did not. Jesus pointed to Jonah’s example. He explained that if the people of His time had listened to God and obeyed Him, they would have understood what God wanted them to learn.

This should teach us that as Christians we may have great knowledge about God.

<sup>3</sup>“this adulterous generation”—these sinful people.

<sup>4</sup>pagans—people who do not believe in God.

<sup>5</sup>mercy—kindness we do not deserve.

<sup>6</sup>events—things that happen.

<sup>7</sup>centurion—a Roman soldier in charge of 100 other soldiers.

But this knowledge is no guarantee of salvation. To just know the “truth” about God means nothing. The pages of the Bible are filled with people who have been given truth but who did not show the fruit of that truth in their own lives.

**Read Matthew 12:43-45 again. What point was Jesus making? What message should there be here for us, as Seventh-day Adventists?**

**MON LOOKING FOR A SIGN.**

**What question caused Jesus’ answer about Jonah? Why would Jesus have answered as He did? Matthew 12:38; Matthew 16:1; Luke 16:31.**

Through Matthew 1–16, we read of events<sup>6</sup> that happened before these questions. Jesus healed lepers (Matthew 8:2-4). He healed a centurion’s<sup>7</sup> daughter (Matthew 8:5-13). He also healed a paralyzed man (Matthew 9:1-8). Jesus helped blind people to see (Matthew 9:27-31), et cetera. But some of these people still wanted a sign!

People who do not want to believe in God or in Jesus will always find reasons or excuses not to believe. It is hard to think of anything God could do to get someone to believe if that person really does not want to believe.

For example what if the words JESUS, THE SON OF GOD, DIED FOR THE SINS OF THE WORLD! were written every day across the sky in every land and in every language? This writing is a miracle that could not be explained. But believing that JESUS, THE SON OF GOD, DIED FOR THE SINS OF THE WORLD! would still require faith. Even such a powerful sign as the writing would not be proof enough for people who still do not want to believe.

After all, Jesus' death on the cross for our sins happened in the past. The only way we could ever know about it is for someone to tell us about it. We were not there. We did not see it happen. But we can accept what people have told us by faith. Faith is believing in what is not "proven." For this reason, faith always comes with the possibility for doubt. All the signs, miracles, and wonders in the world will never remove all doubt. People who want to doubt will always have something to doubt. It does not matter what signs they have.

**What are the things that have caused you to believe in Jesus? Would you like a sign to make your faith stronger? If so, what would that sign be? Now imagine that the sign you ask for does happen. Do you think then that all your questions and all your doubt will go away? Certainly not. The question is, What do we do with our doubt?**

## **TUE "A GREATER [PERSON] THAN JONAS [JONAH] IS HERE."**

Read Matthew 12:41, 42 and Luke 11:31, 32. In both stories, Jesus says, "Behold, a greater than Jonas is here"; "behold, a greater than Solomon is here." This shows that Jesus is comparing<sup>8</sup> the attitude<sup>9</sup> of the people of His time to the attitude of the people of Nineveh and the Queen of Sheba.

**Read 1 Kings 10:1-13. What was the Queen of Sheba's opinion? What was it about Solomon that gave her this opinion? What could the people of Israel have done for the Lord if they had stayed faithful? Deuteronomy 4:5-8; Deuteronomy 8:17, 18; Deuteronomy 28:11-13.**

Jesus is also comparing Himself to Solomon and Jonah. He is saying that the people of Nineveh had repented<sup>10</sup> because of Jonah's words. Here is Jesus the Son of God, doing all that He has done, and you (the people of His time) still do not listen?

**How is Jesus greater than Solomon or Jonah? John 1:1-4; John 8:58; Colossians 1:16.**

Of all the truths we can ever know, the deepest and most wonderful truth

<sup>8</sup>comparing—showing how things are the same.

<sup>9</sup>attitude—how a person thinks or feels about something or someone.

<sup>10</sup>repented—to have said that you are sorry for your sins and that you want to stop sinning.

is that God Himself became a human in the person of Jesus. This world is big and scary. But God through Jesus has reached down and joined Himself with sinful and dying humans. This should give us great hope and comfort, because our God has been among us as one of us. He knows us better than we can know ourselves. Best of all, He loves us!



The greatest truth is that God became one of us.

**How does Jesus as God give you comfort? Why do you think that Jesus as God is so important? What would it mean if Jesus were just a created person, instead of being the Creator Himself?**

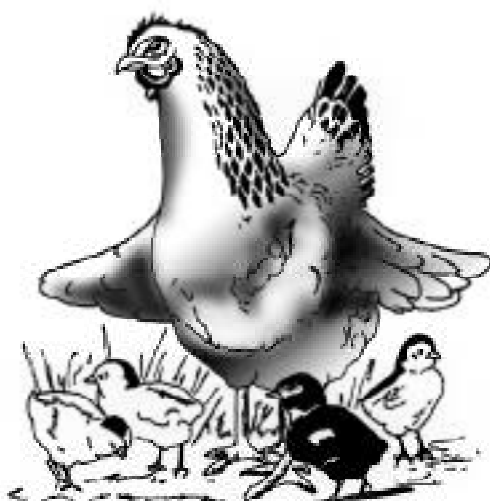
### **WED** STRONG WORDS.

We are used to the kind, loving, and forgiving Jesus. But the Jesus shown in Matthew 12:37-45 and Luke 11:29-32 seems to be different. Matthew 16:1 explains why the people

asked Jesus the question. This helps us understand why Jesus spoke as He did.

This was not the first time Jesus scolded people during His time on earth.

**Read Matthew 23. Who was Jesus rebuking (scolding) and why? What is the same about His words in Matthew 23 and the words He spoke in Matthew 12:38-41?**



Jesus spoke strong words to the religious leaders, because He loved them like a hen loves her chicks.

In Matthew 23, Jesus often called the religious leaders “blind.” So it would not help to give them the sign they asked for in Matthew 12, because blind people cannot see. Jesus healed lepers. He raised dead people. He threw out devils. No matter what He did, the religious leaders could not see, because they did not want to see. Jesus pointed out their sins in Matthew 23. He showed them why they did not want to see. If they had accepted Him through the signs and

miracles, then they would have had to change their lives and practices. Many of them did not really want to change.

The same principle<sup>11</sup> is true for many people today. They refuse to accept truth, because they do not want to change.

**Jesus refused to give the people the kind of sign they wanted. But He gave them a “sign” anyway. Look again at Matthew 12:39, 40. Jesus used the Jonah story, a past event, to talk about something that would happen soon. What was it that would happen soon? How did the Jonah story prophesy what would happen? How was Jesus saying something to these people that could have opened their eyes to who He was if they had listened?**

#### **THU** “IN THE HEART [MIDDLE] OF THE EARTH.”

Jesus rebuked (scolded) the people for their spiritual blindness. But He still tried to win their loyalty. Jesus was God, but He would not force anyone to follow Him. Then, as now, people serve Jesus because they want to, not because He forces them to. If people are forced to serve Him, it is slavery. And if He had wanted us to be slaves, He would not have given us freedom of choice. So Jesus used the story of

Jonah to describe His death, burial, and resurrection. The people would remember how He compared<sup>12</sup> Himself to Jonah. Then they would believe in who He was.

In Jonah 2:2, Jonah says that “out of the belly of hell cried I.” “Hell” comes from the Hebrew word *sheol*. *Sheol* means “the grave” or “the underworld.” In Hebrew, *sheol* often means the same as death. In the belly (stomach) of the fish, Jonah saw himself as “dead.” But he was resurrected<sup>13</sup> later. God’s power saved him from “death.”

**Look up the groups of verses below. What does each group say that helps explain why Jesus would use the Jonah story as a “sign” of His own experience?**



**Jesus used the story of Jonah to teach the people about His resurrection.**

<sup>11</sup>principle—a law upon which other laws are based. The principles of the Ten Commandments are our love for God and our love for other people (Matthew 22:37-40).

<sup>12</sup>compared—to have shown how things are the same.

<sup>13</sup>resurrected—raised from the grave.

Matthew 26:61; Matthew 27:62-64;  
Mark 14:58 \_\_\_\_\_

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Matthew 28:6; Mark 16:6; Jonah 21:14

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Acts 2:15; Romans 4:24, 25; 1 Corin-  
thians 15:3-5 \_\_\_\_\_

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2 Corinthians 4:14; Ephesians 1:20

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Jesus used the story of Jonah's fall to *sheol* and then his coming back to "life" as a symbol of what would happen to Him. Jesus wanted to show that He would die under the great weight of the world's sins. He also would go down to *sheol* and come back to life by the same God who brought Jonah back from *sheol*. Jonah's "resurrection" would lead to mercy for nonbelievers.<sup>14</sup> Jesus' resurrection would also give mercy to nonbelievers.

<sup>14</sup>nonbelievers—people who do not believe.



**Jesus' resurrection leads to the promise of our resurrection (1 Thessalonians 4:14). Why is the promise of our resurrection so important?**

**FRI ADDITIONAL STUDY:** "The important point is that the people of Nineveh 'repented,' even though Jonah did not work miracles for them. They accepted his message because the message carried conviction to their hearts (Jonah 3:5-10). The

same should have been true with the people in Jesus' time, because Jesus' message certainly carried with it strong conviction. . . . But in addition to the words Jesus spoke, He did many wonderful works (miracles). These works gave additional support that Jesus' words were true (John 5:36). The people had Jesus' words and works. But they still refused to believe in Him."—Adapted from *The SDA Bible Commentary* on Matthew 12:41, vol. 5, p. 398.

Jesus said He would spend "three days and three nights" in the heart (middle) of the earth. But He was buried late Friday and rose Sunday morning, which is not three full days and nights. This is not a complete 72-hour cycle. But clearly, the wording "three days and three nights" does not automatically mean exactly 72 hours. Instead, it means a simple count of three days, such as Friday, Sabbath, and Sunday. (Read Luke 23:46–24:3, 13, 21.) It does not have to mean a complete 24-hour Friday, a complete 24-

hour Sabbath, and a complete 24-hour Sunday. In other places, Jesus said that "in three days" He would raise His body temple (John 2:19-21) or that He would be "raised again the third day" (Matthew 16:21). These mean the same thing as the "three days and three nights." This means Jesus would be crucified and raised from the grave over a three-day period.

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTION:**

George Washington was the first president of the United States. But who alive today has ever met him? Alexander the Great was a powerful leader of the ancient Greek Empire. But has any of your friends ever met him? Explain how believing in the lives of George Washington and Alexander the Great require some faith. Now apply this to having faith in Jesus.

**SUMMARY:** Jesus used the Jonah story to give a serious warning. Will you listen to this warning?