

# *Salvation Belongs to the LORD*

## A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF JONAH



Fresco of the Prophet Jonah by Theophanes Strelitzas  
St. Nicholas Anapafsas Monastery, Meteora, Greece  
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*Salvation Belongs to the LORD*  
**A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF JONAH**

By Mark A. Myers

All the earth with joy is sounding:  
Christ has risen from the dead!  
He, the greater Jonah, bounding  
From the grave, His three-day bed,  
Wins the prize:  
Death's demise—  
Songs of triumph fill the skies.

*Lutheran Service Book 462:1*

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## A FEW INSTRUCTIONS BEFORE WE BEGIN

- This guide is intended to provide structure to our study of Jonah and help navigate us through the text. If possible, please read the relevant Scripture passages and study guide questions prior to each session. I'm not particularly interested in answering every single question in this guide—that's not the goal of this Bible study. Hopefully though, the questions and the discussion they generate will assist us as we read the book of Jonah and attempt to interpret and understand it.
- I'll be using the English Standard Version (ESV) for this study. Those of you who been part of my Sunday morning Bible study groups in the past know that I used the New International Version (NIV) in those previous studies. With the publication of Concordia Publishing House's *The Lutheran Study Bible*, I've put away my NIV and made the switch to the ESV. *The Lutheran Study Bible* was one of my main resources for this study guide and I will refer to it frequently as we work our way through the book of Jonah. The ESV has some shortcomings—all translations do—but overall it's much superior to the NIV. Many of you may not yet own an ESV Bible. Please don't feel obliged to buy one just for the purpose of this study. Bring whatever English translation you happen to have and we'll do just fine. If you're interested in purchasing an excellent study Bible that uses the ESV translation, I highly recommend *The Lutheran Study Bible*.
- Bible study is challenging. Pastors often talk about having to "wrestle with the text" when they prepare sermons. You will no doubt sometimes feel as if you're wrestling with the text of Jonah during the next several weeks. Good! That's the way it's supposed to be. Therefore, ask questions. Hopefully, I'll be able to answer at least some of them, but I'm sure that I won't be able to answer all of them. With the help of our pastor and the resources I used to prepare this study guide, I'm confident we'll manage if we get stuck on something. And keep me honest. Challenge me if you think I'm wrong. I'll be leading this study, but I'm also going to be learning along with you. I don't know everything and I make a lot of mistakes.
- This study guide is available at [www.stpaulskingsville.org/jonah.htm](http://www.stpaulskingsville.org/jonah.htm). Feel free to download additional copies if needed.
- Finally, don't forget that this is a *Lutheran* study. As such, we will follow a distinctly Christocentric approach to our reading of the book of Jonah. Jesus taught His disciples that all of Scripture points to Him (see John 5:39 and Luke 24:27). Remember then to always look for Christ, His saving work, and His holy Sacraments in the text. Jesus is in the book of Jonah, so let's dig into the text and find Him! May the Holy Spirit bless and guide us as we endeavor to do this.

Mark A. Myers  
January 17, 2010

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LESSON 1: A WHALE OF A TALE  
*Jonah 1-4*

**Introduction to the Book of Jonah**

1. The book of Jonah seems to be embedded in our collective consciousness as Christians. We all remember learning it in Sunday school. We recognize Jonah's themes and images in *Moby Dick*, *Pinocchio*, *Finding Nemo*, and other tales. We know the story very well. But how much of what we think we know about Jonah is based on the text of the book itself? Let's begin this study by reading the brief book of Jonah from beginning to end without pause. Then consider the following questions.
  - a. What parts of the story did you already know?
  - b. Were there parts or details of the story that you had forgotten, remembered differently, or did not know at all before? Explain.
  - c. What in the story left you perplexed or troubled?
  
2. Children love the story of Jonah. It's easy to find Bibles, story books, DVDs, toys, blankets, pajamas, and other products that adapt images or themes of the story of Jonah for youngsters.
  - a. Which parts of the book of Jonah do you think children appreciate the most?
  - b. Which parts of Jonah might confuse or frighten children?
  - c. Is Jonah a children's story? Explain your answer.



LESSON 2: THE COURT OF JEROBOAM  
*2 Kings 14:23-29*

***Jeroboam II, King of Israel***

5. The story of Jonah begins in the book of 2 Kings. Read 2 Kings 14:23-29 to learn about Jeroboam son of Joash, king of the northern kingdom of Israel from around 786 to 746 BC. Jonah was active in the prophetic ministry during this time.
  - a. What was Jonah's hometown? Locate it on the map in Appendix D. What other well-known prophet was from this region?
  - b. What did Jonah prophesy about King Jeroboam?
  - c. What do Jeroboam's accomplishments described in verses 25 and 28 tell us about him as a secular leader of his nation?
  - d. How does the author of 2 Kings assess Jeroboam as a religious leader?
  - e. What does the contrast between Jeroboam's secular achievements and his spiritual failures teach us Christians living in the 21st century A.D.?
6. Jeroboam son of Joash is usually referred to as Jeroboam II in order to distinguish him from an earlier king of the same name, Jeroboam son of Nebat. Jeroboam I ruled Israel 150 years or so before Jeroboam II.
  - a. Read 1 Kings 12:26-30. What religious changes did Jeroboam I bring about in Israel and why?

- b. Why is it that Jeroboam II “did not depart from all the sins” of his namesake? What warning should we Christians take from this?
  
- c. Give an example of how the theological leaders of church bodies of our time have instituted doctrinal changes contrary to the Word of God. Why do you think these church leaders made these changes? Are we at St. Paul’s tempted to do similar things? Explain your answer.

***Jonah and Other Northern Prophets During the Reign of Jeroboam II***

- 7. 2 Kings 14:25 suggests that Jonah was a “court prophet” to Jeroboam II.
  - a. What is a court prophet? Can you name other court prophets from the Bible?
  
  - b. Why did Jonah serve in the court of a ruler as wicked as Jeroboam?
  
  - c. What kind of pressures would a court prophet to the king of Israel be subject to? How might a pastor experience similar pressures in his parish ministry?
  
- 8. Hosea and Amos were Jonah’s contemporaries who also prophesied in the northern kingdom of Israel during the reign of King Jeroboam II (see Hosea 1:1 and Amos 1:1). These men, however, were not court prophets. They might more accurately be described as “free prophets.”
  - a. What is the difference between a court prophet and a free prophet? Name a few other free prophets from the Bible.

- b. Read the following excerpts from the prophetic preaching of Hosea and Amos and discuss what they reveal about the religious and moral conditions in the northern kingdom under Jeroboam II.
    - i. Hosea 1:2.
  
    - ii. Hosea 4:1-2.
  
    - iii. Amos 2:6-8.
  
    - iv. Amos 6:4-6.
  
  - c. Apply the above passages to the 21st century church in our country.
    - i. What parallels do you see between Israel during the Jeroboam's rule and the Christian church of today?
  
    - ii. To what extent do you think the church's spiritual and moral decline is related to our increase in wealth and material success?
9. Read Amos 7:10-15.
- a. How did Israel's high priest react to Amos' message?
  
  - b. What light does this passage shed on the relationship between free prophets and Israel's politico-religious establishment?

- c. How did Jesus get along with the establishment of His time?
  
  - d. Should American Christians be in partnership with or in opposition to our nation's establishment? Explain your answer.
10. Jeroboam's reign in Israel was marked by substantial positives and tragic negatives. On the positive side, God blessed the kingdom with military success, expanded borders, political stability, and economic prosperity. On the negative side, the people worshipped idols, lived self-indulgent lives, and exploited the disenfranchised members of society. Jonah, Hosea, and Amos were all active in the prophetic ministry during this period. Jonah was an "insider" in Jeroboam's cabinet. Hosea and Amos were both "outsiders" and opposed to the establishment. Despite these differences, each of these men preached God's Word of truth to the people of Israel. They foretold the work of the Messiah, the One whom God would send to save them from sin and eternal death. Read the following texts and explain how they were fulfilled by Christ.
- a. 2 Kings 14:26-27.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b. Hosea 6:1-2.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - c. Amos 9:13-15.

LESSON 3: DIVINE CALL TO THE GREAT CITY  
*Jonah 1:1-3a*

***The LORD Calls Jonah***

11. Read Jonah 1:1-2 and answer the questions below.
  - a. What is meant by the phrase “the Word of the LORD” in verse 1?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b. How did the Word of the LORD come to Jonah?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - c. How does the Word come to us? How is the way the Word comes to us different from the way it came to Jonah? How is it the same?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - d. Read Hebrews 1:1-2 and John 1:1-3 and 14. What do these New Testament passages teach us about God’s Word? Based on these texts, what can we say about the Word that came to Jonah?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
12. Where did the LORD command Jonah to go? What was he supposed to do when he arrived there? Why?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
13. Compare the call of Jonah to the calls of some other prophets.
  - a. Read Exodus 4:13. What did Moses say to the LORD in response to His call?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b. Read Isaiah 6:5. What did Isaiah say in response to His call?

- c. Read Jeremiah 1:6. What did Jeremiah say in response to His call?
  
- d. Read Jonah 1:3a. What did Jonah say to the LORD in response to His call?
  
- e. What did Moses, Isaiah, and Jeremiah do after the LORD called them? What did Jonah do when the LORD called him?
  
- 14. Our pastor here at St. Paul's was called by this congregation to serve as our minister of Word and Sacrament. We also know from Scripture that the Holy Spirit is the One who calls ministers and sends them to specific fields of service. We Lutherans acknowledge this truth by our use of the phrase "the divine call."
  - a. Think about the call of a Christian pastor today and the call of an Old Testament prophet like Jonah or a New Testament apostle like Peter. In what way are these calls different? In what way are they the same?
  
  - b. What gives the call of a prophet, apostle, or pastor its authority?
  
  - c. Why is the authority of the divine call a source of comfort for us?

***The City of Nineveh***

- 15. The site of Nineveh is near the modern Iraqi city of Mosul on the eastern bank of the Tigris about 220 miles north of Bagdad and about 500 miles northeast of the kingdom of Israel (see Appendix A). In Jonah's time, Nineveh was one of the chief cities of the powerful Assyrian Empire. In later decades it became the Assyrian capital. Read Genesis 10:8-11 for the account of Nineveh's origin.
  - a. When was Nineveh founded?

- b. Who was the city's founder? How does the text depict this man?
- c. The Hebrew word *gadol* ("great") occurs several times in the book of Jonah (see Appendix C). This word is used to describe the city of Nineveh in both Genesis 10:11-12 and Jonah 1:2. In what ways was Nineveh great?
16. The Assyrian Empire is mentioned many times in the Old Testament, almost always with a palpable sense of dread and hatred. In his commentary on Jonah, Dr. Reed Lessing gives examples of Assyrian cruelty from archeological evidence. Read these excerpts from monuments that describe the exploits of Ashurnasirpal II, king of Assyria from 883-859 BC (about 100 years before Jonah's time): *"In the midst of the mighty mountain I slaughtered them; with their blood I dyed the mountain red like wool... I carried off their spoil and their possessions. The heads of their warriors I cut off, and I formed them into a pillar over against the city; their young men and maidens I burned in the fire... I flayed all the chief men who had revolted... some I walled up... some I impaled... and others I bound to stakes..."*
- a. Compare the war rhetoric quoted above to Nahum 3:1-3, a description of Nineveh. Why did Israel hate and fear the Assyrians? What are some 20th and 21st century equivalents to the Assyrian Empire?
- b. In Jonah 1:2, Nineveh is described as "evil." The Hebrew word used here is *ra'ah*. As we'll see in the course of this study, *ra'ah* is important recurring word in the book of Jonah (see Appendix B). Why is *ra'ah* an appropriate description of the Ninevites?
- c. How might the terrifying reputation of the Assyrians have influenced the way Jonah responded to the LORD's call to go to Nineveh?
- d. Read 2 Kings 17:1-8. The events described here took place around 722 BC, seventy years or so after Jonah's mission to Nineveh. What did the king of

Assyria do to Israel? What insight do these verses give us into Jonah's rejection of God's call to go to Nineveh?

17. Read 1 Kings 17:8-10a, a brief extract from the cycle of stories centered on the prophetic ministry of Elijah.
  - a. Where did God call Elijah to serve? According to 1 Kings 16:31, who was born in this region?
  - b. What do the places Elijah and Jonah were called to have in common?
  - c. How would the kings and people of Israel have reacted to the idea of Elijah and Jonah going to these locations to minister?
  - d. Read Mark 7:24-30. How does this passage show Christ following in the footsteps of Elijah and Jonah? What did the religious authorities of Jesus' time think of His ministry?
  - e. What do we learn about our heavenly Father that He would send Elijah, Jonah, and Christ to these particular places to minister? Why does this comfort us? Why does it also infuriate us?
18. Who are the "Assyrians" and "Ninevites" we hate and fear? What is the only solution to this hatred and fear we have in our hearts?

## LESSON 4: PASSAGE TO TARSHISH

*Jonah 1:3*

### ***Jonah Purchases a Ship to Tarshish***

19. The stories of Elijah and Jonah track with one another in several interesting ways. We started to examine this in the previous lesson (see Question 17). Let's consider another parallel between these two men of God.
  - a. Read 1 Kings 17:9a. Write down the three verbs that occur in this passage.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b. Read Jonah 1:2. Write down the three verbs that occur in this passage.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - c. Read 1 Kings 17:10a and compare it to Jonah 1:3.
    - i. How did Elijah respond to God's call?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
    - ii. How did Jonah respond to God's call?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - d. What can we conclude about Jonah based of this correspondence between Elijah and him?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
20. Jack Sasson, an Old Testament scholar and author of an important commentary on the book of Jonah, notes that the idea expressed by the Hebrew in Jonah 1:3 is that the prophet purchased the ship and its crew for himself, not that he paid a fare for space on the ship. According to Dr. Sasson's research, it was not until Roman time several centuries later that the concept of a fare came into practice.
  - a. How was Jonah able to charter a vessel and its crew for his personal use?

- b. What does this information add to our picture of Jonah as a court prophet to King Jeroboam II?
21. Re-read Jonah 1:3 and consider the following questions about Jonah's intended destination.
- a. If you have *The Lutheran Study Bible*, refer to the notes for verse 3. What is the location of Tarshish? Is Tarshish "on the way" to Nineveh?
  
  - b. Read 1 Kings 22:48, Ezekiel 27:25-27, and Psalm 48:7. What do these texts say about ships bound for Tarshish? Based on these verses, what should the reader of Jonah conclude about the prophet's plan?
  
  - c. In addition to escaping from the presence of the LORD (we will study the notion of the LORD's presence in detail in the next lesson), why else might Jonah have selected Tarshish as his destination?
22. Read Isaiah 27:1, Jeremiah 5:22, and Daniel 7:2-3.
- a. What do these passages tell us about how the people of ancient Israel viewed the sea?
  
  - b. What can we say about Jonah from the fact that he was willing to risk sailing across the Mediterranean Sea in order to reach Tarshish?
23. Read Jonah 1:3 again. Pay close attention to where Jonah is going in the middle and last parts of the verse.
- a. According to the text, what direction did Jonah go to get to Joppa?

- b. How does this direction compare to the first verb in Jonah 1:2?
  
- c. This is not evident in the ESV translation of verse 3, but the Hebrew expression for “to board” a ship is “to go down into” it (other English versions like the King James Version (KJV), New King James Version (NKJV), and New American Standard Bible (NASB) provide more literal translations of this passage). How does this compare to the direction Jonah was going earlier in verse 3?
  
- d. As we work through chapters 1 and 2, we will observe Jonah continuing his movement in this same direction (see Jonah 1:5, 1:15, 2:3, and 2:7).
  - i. What does the direction Jonah is travelling as the story progresses tell us about him and his spiritual state?
  
  - ii. Why do we Christians often find ourselves moving in the same direction as Jonah?
  
  - iii. What should we do when this happens?

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## LESSON 5: CAST ME NOT AWAY FROM THY PRESENCE

*Jonah 1:3*

### ***The Presence of the LORD***

24. Even the most casual reader of Jonah 1:3 will likely notice that this verse is very repetitive. The author of Jonah has employed this repetition in order to construct a *chiasm* (a textual symmetry) that teaches an interesting and important lesson. Examine the chiastic structure of this verse and answer the questions that follow.

A But Jonah rose to flee to *Tarshish* from *the presence of the LORD*.  
B He went down to Joppa  
C and found a ship  
D going to *Tarshish*.  
C' So he paid the fare  
B' and went on board (literally "and went down into it")  
A' to go with them to *Tarshish*, away from *the presence of the LORD*.

- a. How do A and A' balance each other?
- b. How do B and B' balance each other?
- c. How do C and C' balance each other?
- d. What is the central idea of this chiasm?
- e. How does the chiasm show graphically that Jonah cannot escape the presence of the LORD?
- f. Read Psalm 139:7-10. What does this text say about fleeing from the presence of the LORD?

25. Before we continue our study of Jonah, we need to do some research into the very important biblical concept of the presence of the LORD. Read the definition of "presence" (*panim* in Hebrew) on page 843 of *The Lutheran Study Bible*. Then carefully consider the following questions.
- a. Read 1 Kings 8:27. Explain what is meant by God's *omnipresence*.
  - b. Read Jonah 1:9. How does this verse show that the prophet knew he could never escape from God's omnipresence?
  - c. Read Exodus 33:8-11a and 14. Explain what is meant by God's *sacramental presence*.
  - d. How are God's omnipresence and sacramental presence different?
  - e. Where did the people of Old Testament Israel go to find the LORD's sacramental presence?
  - f. Why did Jonah attempt to escape the LORD's sacramental presence?
  - g. Was it necessary for Jonah to go to Tarshish in order to escape from the LORD's sacramental presence? Explain your answer.
  - h. Read Genesis 4:13-16.
    - i. What did Cain experience when he fled from the LORD's presence?

- ii. Once Cain departed from the LORD's presence, into whose presence did he come?
  
- iii. Assuming Jonah knew the story of Cain, why do you think he persisted in running away from the presence of the LORD?
  
- iv. Even though Cain had departed from the LORD's presence, God put a mark on him to protect him (see Genesis 4:15). What does this teach us about God?
  
- i. Read Psalm 51:10-12 (which you may recognize as the Offertory from the Divine Service).
  - i. What do David's words tell us about the LORD's presence?
  
  - ii. How does David's plea make Jonah's desire to get away from the LORD's presence all the more shocking?
  
- j. Sometimes we Christians follow the example of Jonah (and Cain) and run from the presence of the LORD. At other times, we act like David and pray to be restored to His presence. Why are we like this?
  
- k. Read 1 Kings 17:1.
  - i. What did it mean for Elijah to "stand before" the LORD?

- ii. Now think about the part of the Divine Service when the pastor forgives the sins of the congregation. What does it mean when the pastor says "...in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ..."?
  
- iii. Based on these examples, what else might Jonah have been doing when he fled from the presence of the LORD?

l. Read Mark 15:33-34.

- i. Connect what happened to Christ when He suffered on the cross and the concept of the presence of the LORD.
  
- ii. How do we benefit from Christ's separation from the presence of God the Father experienced during His crucifixion?

m. Read Matthew 1:22-23.

- i. What does *Immanuel* mean?
  
- ii. What does this passage tell us about God's presence?
  
- iii. Where do we Christians go to encounter God's sacramental presence?

LESSON 6: SLEEPING THROUGH THE STORM  
*Jonah 1:4-10*

***The LORD Sends a Storm***

26. Read Jonah 1:4-6.
- a. What did God do as a result of Jonah's disobedience? Why?
  - b. How did the crew react to God's action? In what way was their reaction correct and appropriate? In what way was it wrong?
  - c. How did the captain react to God's action? In what way was his reaction correct and appropriate? In what way was it wrong?
  - d. How did Jonah react to God's action? Discuss the irony of Jonah's reaction.
27. Consider Jonah's slumber below decks.
- a. What does sleep often symbolize in the Bible?
  - b. Why do you think Jonah fell asleep?
  - c. Read Matthew 26:36-46.
    - i. Why did Peter, James, and John fall asleep?

- ii. In what way would it be true to say that they slept during a storm?
  - d. Read Mark 13:32-37.
    - i. Why did Jesus admonish his disciples to keep awake?
    - ii. How do we Christians keep awake for the Last Day?
  - e. Read 1 Corinthians 15:51-52. What does Paul say will happen to those who “fall asleep” in Christ?
- 28. Focus on the captain’s words recorded in verse 6.
  - a. What did the captain tell Jonah to do? Why are his words ironic?
  - b. Compare the verbs the captain used to stir up Jonah to those God used in verse 2 to call Jonah. What do you think might have gone through the prophet’s mind when he heard the captain speak these words?
  - c. What did the captain hope might happen? Why did he have this hope?
  - d. How did Jonah respond to the captain’s words?

29. What direction did Jonah go in verse 3? What direction did Jonah go in verse 5? What is the significance of Jonah's continued progress in this direction?

***Jonah Speaks For the First Time***

30. Read Jonah 1:7-10 and answer the following.
- a. Describe some other biblical narratives that involve the use of lots.
  
  - b. Why did the mariners cast lots?
  
  - c. What does the mariners' decision to cast lots tell us about them? What does it tell us about Jonah?
  
  - d. Why did the lot fall to Jonah?
  
  - e. The Hebrew in this passage says literally that the mariners "threw down" lots and that they "fell" to Jonah. What do these words tell us about Jonah?
  
  - f. Would it be appropriate for a Christian congregation to use lots to make a decision? Explain your answer.
31. In his commentary on Jonah, Prof. Reed Lessing states that the point at which the central figure of a Hebrew narrative first speaks deserves special attention because his or her opening words usually give important insight into that

- a. What did Jonah say about himself in answer the sailors' questions?
  - b. Why did he refer to himself as a Hebrew rather than an Israelite?
  - c. What did Jonah confess about his religious faith in this verse?
  - d. What does Jonah's confession reveal about him?
  - e. What did Jonah leave out of his confession?
  - f. What does what Jonah did not confess reveal about him?
32. Jonah 1:10 indicates that the crew was "exceedingly afraid" when they heard Jonah's words. Why were they so afraid?
33. If, as verse 10 indicates, the crew already knew Jonah was running away from the presence of the LORD, why did they need to cast lots?

34. Is the question the sailors ask in verse 10 rhetorical? If so, why did they ask it? How did Jonah answer their question?
35. Let's wrap up our examination of the text so far by observing that Jonah's refusal to obey the LORD's had serious implications on the lives of the sailors.
- a. In Jonah 1:1, we are told that Jonah's father was named Amittai. This name means "truth" or "faithfulness" in Hebrew and is related to the word *amen*. How has Jonah failed to live up to his description as the son of faithfulness?
  - b. Do you suppose Jonah thought about how his unfaithfulness would bring trouble to the sailors who were on the ship with him?
  - c. What is the danger when we Christians behave like Jonah?
  - d. Why do we sometimes act like Jonah?

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LESSON 7: MAN OF GOD OVERBOARD  
*Jonah 1:11-16*

***Jonah is Hurlled into the Sea***

36. Read Jonah 1:11-12 and consider these questions.
- a. What was the condition of the storm at this point in the narrative?
  - b. Why did the crew ask Jonah to tell them what to do?
  - c. What did Jonah tell them to do?
  - d. How did Jonah know his solution would calm the storm?
  - e. Why do you think Jonah wanted the crew to “pick [him] up and hurl [him] into the sea” rather than just jumping overboard himself?
37. Compare what the mariners said to Jonah in the first part of verse 8 to what Jonah said to them at the end of verse 12.
- a. Based on their words at the beginning of verse 8, what precisely did the mariners want to know?
  - b. What did Jonah confess at the end of verse 12?

- c. What important word did the mariners use in verse 8 that Jonah did not use in verse 12? What, if anything, does this difference signify?
38. This is what Prof. Reed Lessing writes about Jonah 1:12: “A certain ambivalence hovers over this verse. Why does Jonah ask to be thrown overboard? Is his primary motivation to perish? Or is it to save the lives of the sailors?”
- a. Let’s think about the “assisted suicide” interpretation.
    - i. Based on what we’ve read so far in the text, what can we conclude about Jonah’s concern for the lives of others?
    - ii. Read ahead to Jonah 4:3 and 8b. What do these verses tell us about the value Jonah had for his own life?
    - iii. Why do you think Jonah might have been suicidal?
  - b. Now let’s examine the “self sacrifice” interpretation.
    - i. How do Jonah’s words at the end of verse 12 support the idea that the prophet intended to save the ship by his death?
    - ii. What did the sailors do in verse 5b? In what way could their action be understood as a sacrifice?
    - iii. What word did Jonah use in verse 12 that the sailors also used in verse 5b? How does this parallelism suggest that Jonah had become a substitutionary sacrifice?

- c. Which of the two interpretations of Jonah's command to be thrown overboard is the better one? Explain your answer.
39. Read Jonah 1:13-16.
- a. Why didn't the mariners immediately throw Jonah overboard? What does this reveal about them?
  - b. What was their intent in trying to reach land? Why were they unsuccessful?
  - c. What did the mariners do in verse 14? What do the words of the text bring to mind?
  - d. What happened when the mariners hurled Jonah into the sea? Why did this happen?
  - e. What did the mariners do in response to the sudden end of the storm?
40. Discuss how the sacrifice of Jonah to save the lives of the idol-worshipping mariners points forward to the death of Christ on the cross for sinners.
41. Compare verses 4, 11, and 13. What had been happening to the storm during the course of the narrative? What spiritual truth does this illustrate?

***The Sailors Call Out to the LORD***

42. Re-read verse 14 and address the following questions.
- a. What did the sailors do in this verse that Jonah had not done? Why is this ironic?
  - b. Why is it significant that the text says the sailors called out to the LORD?
  - c. What was the sailors' first petition? What does this show about their understanding of the Fifth Commandment?
  - d. What was the sailors' second petition? What did they mean by this petition?
  - e. What were the sailors saying in the conclusion to their prayer?
43. Let's delve into the much-debated question of whether or not the pagan crew came to saving faith in the LORD. The answer to this question is tied to a proper understanding of the biblical concept of *yir'ah*, the Hebrew word translated in the ESV as "fear."
- a. Read and compare Jonah 1:5, 10, and 16.
    - i. How did the sailors' fear change in these verses?
    - ii. Is there a difference between the word "fear" in Jonah's confession in verse 9 and the way the same word is used in verse 16?

- b. Read Psalms 34:9 and 130:4. In addition, refer to the article in *The Lutheran Study Bible* called “The Fear of the LORD” on page 1001. What do the two passages from the book of Psalms teach us about the fear of the LORD?
  
  - c. Read Psalm 115:3-8 and compare this text to the sailors’ words at the end of verse 14. What were the sailors confessing about the LORD?
  
  - d. Read Exodus 14:30-31. What is the context of this passage? How does it connect the two concepts of fear and faith?
  
  - e. Read Psalm 116:12-14, 17-19. How did the psalmist demonstrate his faith and trust in the LORD? Compare this to what the sailors did at the end of Jonah 1:16?
  
  - f. If you have *The Lutheran Study Bible*, read the quotation from Luther in the notes to Jonah 1:16. What did Luther conclude about the faith of the sailors? What did Luther identify as the cause of their conversion?
44. Read Mark 4:35-41. This episode from the ministry of Jesus has a number of parallels to the storm narrative in the book of Jonah.
- a. Describe the central figures, people, and setting in the two narratives.
  
  - b. What do the central figures of each story do during much of the action?
  
  - c. How is the danger that confronts the people in these two stories resolved?

- d. What are the reactions of the people at the end of each narrative?
  
  - e. Gath-hepher (Jonah's hometown) and Nazareth (Jesus' hometown) were only a few miles from each other (see Question 5a and the map in Appendix E). What would this fact have suggested to those who witnessed our Lord's miraculous stilling of the storm?
45. The name Jonah means "dove" in Hebrew. We usually understand the dove as a symbol of peace or as a manifestation of the Holy Spirit (see Matthew 3:16). To the ancient Israelites however, the dove was a foolish, erratic, and disloyal bird (see Hosea 7:11). Jonah, like a flighty and unfaithful dove, attempted to "fly away" from the LORD. Ironically, even in his disobedience he became the means of the pagan crew's conversion to faith in the true God. What does this teach us about God? Why is this a source of comfort to us?

LESSON 8: A PSALM FROM THE BELLY OF THE FISH — PART 1  
*Jonah 1:17-2:6*

***A Great Fish Swallows Jonah***

46. Read Jonah 1:17.
- What does the word “appointed” (*manah* in Hebrew) tell us about God?
  - What did God appoint the fish to do?
  - What does the word “swallow” suggest about Jonah’s situation?
47. How long did Jonah reside in the belly of the great fish? Why was he there for this specific length of time? To what New Testament reality does this point?
48. Read Jonah 2:1 and compare it to Jonah 1:5. Where was the prophet in each of these verses? What does this tell us about him?

***Jonah Calls to the LORD***

49. Old Testament scholars have identified dozens of connections between Jonah 2 and the book of Psalms. Let’s briefly examine a few of these connections.
- Read the prophet’s entire prayer recorded in Jonah 2:2-9. Then read the following excerpts from the book of Psalms. Identify which part of Jonah’s prayer is paralleled in the passage from Psalms. Discuss the similarities you find.
    - Psalm 18:6.

ii. Psalm 69:1-2.

iii. Psalm 30:3.

iv. Psalm 116:17-18.

- b. What does the fact that Jonah modeled his prayer so closely on the book of Psalms tell us about him and his faith?
- c. Why is an intimate familiarity with verses from Scripture, the liturgy, and the hymnal a comfort and blessing to Christians?
50. Re-read Jonah 2:2. Which came first: Jonah's prayer or God's deliverance? Explain your answer and show how the text supports your conclusion.
51. Jonah 2:2 uses the phrase "belly of Sheol." Sometimes *Sheol* refers to the place where all people go after death (see Genesis 37:35 and Job 7:9). In other passages *Sheol* is the destination of unbelievers (see Numbers 16:30, 33 and Psalm 9:17). In still other parts of the Old Testament, true believers in the LORD experience *Sheol* when they suffer calamity (such as Jacob in Genesis 44:29 and King Hezekiah in Isaiah 38:10). Read "The Meaning of *Sheol*" on the top of page 792 in *The Lutheran Study Bible* for more information on this topic.
- a. What is the connection between *Sheol* and the concept of the presence of the LORD that we studied in detail in Lesson 5?

- b. Which understanding of *Sheol* best describes what Jonah experienced as he was drowning? Defend your answer.
  - c. Should we interpret the belly of the great fish to be *Sheol*? Explain.
52. Jonah 1:15 clearly shows that it was the crew that threw Jonah overboard. In Jonah 2:3 however, the prophet says God “cast [him] into the deep.”
- a. Was Jonah telling the truth or was he blaming the LORD for his predicament?
  - b. To what extent is God responsible for the troubles we experience in our lives?
53. Genesis 1:2, like Jonah 2:3, uses the Hebrew word *tehom*. The ESV translates this word as “the deep.”
- a. What is the context of the word *tehom* in Genesis 1:2?
  - b. What is its context in Jonah 2:3?
  - c. What does the use of the word *tehom* in Jonah 2:3 tell us about the effect of sin on Jonah and on us?
54. Re-read Jonah 2:4a.
- a. What did the prophet experience in this passage?

- b. When did Christ experience this?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - c. When do we Christians experience this?
55. Verses 4b and 7b contain references to the temple of the LORD.
- a. Recall that in chapter 1 Jonah had determined to escape from the presence of the LORD. Why then in chapter 2 did he pray toward the temple in Jerusalem, the location of the LORD's sacramental presence?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b. In what way can it be said that Christians also pray toward the temple?
56. Review your answers to Questions 23, 29, and 30e. Jonah's downward movement that began in chapter 1 continues and reaches its conclusion in chapter 2. Jonah 2:5-6 depicts the prophet at the lowest point in his descent.
- a. What is the "land whose bars closed upon [him] forever?"
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b. How did the prophet escape this terrible place?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - c. Read Matthew 16:18. What does our Lord Jesus promise us about this place?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - d. Recall the words from the Apostles' Creed, "He descended into hell." Some Christians teach that Christ descended into hell to suffer. We Lutherans, however, do not teach this. What is our doctrine of Christ's descent into hell?

## LESSON 9: A PSALM FROM THE BELLY OF THE FISH — PART 2

*Jonah 2:7-10*

### ***Jonah Praises God for His Salvation***

57. Jonah 2:7 is the halfway point in the book in terms of verses. Dr. Reed Lessing points out in his commentary on Jonah that this passage is also the place where Jonah and the LORD appear to be the closest.
- a. What was happening to the prophet at the beginning of this verse?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b. Some commentators argue that this verse depicts a “fox-hole” religion, that is, an example of someone calling on God only when he believes he is facing sure and imminent death. Do you agree or disagree with this interpretation of the verse? Explain your answer.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - c. Read Isaiah 44:21-22. Based on this passage, what did Jonah mean by his words “I remembered the LORD” in Jonah 2:7?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - d. How does Jonah 2:7 illustrate the doctrine of salvation by grace alone?
58. Take another look at Jonah 2:8.
- a. Who might be the idol worshippers Jonah referred to in this verse?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b. In what way had Jonah acted exactly like these idol worshippers?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - c. What idols do we Christians sometimes worship? Why do we do this?

59. Re-read verse 2:9.
- a. What two things did Jonah say he was going to do?
  - b. In what way can we say that Jonah “followed in the footsteps” of the sailors from chapter 1? Why is this ironic?
  - c. What things did Jonah neglect to say in his psalm? Is it significant that Jonah left these things out? Explain your answer.
  - d. What did Jonah mean by his final words in verse 9?
  - e. Read Matthew 1:21. If possible, read the article “New Testament Names for God” on page 2098 of *The Lutheran Study Bible* as well. What does the name “Jesus” mean? What does the meaning of our Lord’s personal name add to our understanding of Jonah’s closing words in his psalm?
60. Re-read Jonah’s psalm in its entirety (verses 2-9 of chapter 2). In addition, review your answers from Lesson 8. Consider the following questions.
- a. What words or phrases point forward to Christ’s suffering and death?
  - b. What words or phrases point forward to Christ’s resurrection?
  - c. In what way does the prophet’s psalm describe the working of Law and Gospel in our lives?

- d. In what way does the psalm give us a picture of Holy Baptism?
  
- e. How is the psalm an illustration of St. Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 12:9?

***The Fish Returns Jonah to Land***

61. Read Jonah 2:10 and answer the following.
- a. In Question 46c of the previous lesson, we discussed how the word "swallowed" might indicate something about Jonah and his predicament. Now consider the word "vomited" in Jonah 2:10.
    - i. What does this word tell us about the prophet?
  
    - ii. Why did the fish vomit Jonah out and not simply spit him out or allow him to crawl or walk out?
  
  - b. Where did the fish return Jonah?
  
  - c. What was the prophet's condition after being brought back to land?
  
  - d. Why is it important that Jonah is back on land at the end of chapter 2?
62. Read Genesis 1:9 and compare it to Jonah 2:10. These verses use the phrase "the dry land," the ESV's rendering of the Hebrew word *yabbashah*.

- a. What is the context of the word *yabbashah* in Genesis 1:9?
  
  - b. What is its context in Jonah 2:10?
  
  - c. If *tehom* or “the deep” gave us an indication of the consequences of sin (see Question 53), what does *yabbashah* or “the dry land” tell us about redemption? In what way does 2 Corinthians 5:17 reinforce this idea?
63. Although the great fish is mentioned only very briefly, it’s probably the most familiar and famous part of the book of Jonah.
- a. Why do you think God “appointed” a gigantic fish to save Jonah?
  
  - b. What does the account of the fish teach us about God and creation?
  
  - c. What does it teach us about the means of grace?
  
  - d. What does it teach us about Christians and their lives under the cross?

## LESSON 10: SECOND CHANCE

*Jonah 3:1-4*

### ***The LORD Calls Jonah a Second Time***

64. Read Jonah 3:1-2 and answer the questions below.
- a. When and where did the LORD's second call to Jonah take place?
  - b. After Jonah's disobedience and attempted flight to Tarshish, God could have called a different prophet to do His will in Nineveh. Why didn't He? What application does this have on the work of pastors and other called church workers?
  - c. What does God say at the end of verse 2 about the message Jonah is to deliver in Nineveh? What admonition should pastors take from this?
  - d. The LORD could have included words of disapproval or warning in His second call to Jonah since the prophet disobeyed in chapter 1. Why do you think the LORD did not do this?
  - e. Read Luke 22:54-62 and John 21:15-17.
    - i. According to the Luke 22 passage, how did Peter sin the night Christ was arrested?
    - ii. How was Christ's restoration of Peter into his apostolic office recorded in John 21:15-17 similar to the LORD's reinstatement of Jonah into his prophetic office implied in Jonah 3:1-2?

iii. What comfort do these examples of Peter and Jonah give us Christians?

65. Re-read Jonah 1:2 and compare that text to Jonah 3:2.
- a. What is the same in these two passages?
  
  - b. What is different?
  
  - c. What, if anything, is significant about the difference between the two passages?
66. Read Jonah 3:3. Verse 3:3a shows us that the prophet obeyed God's second call and went to Nineveh.
- a. What are some possible reasons why Jonah obeyed the LORD's second call?
  
  - b. Jonah's water ordeal in chapter 2 may be viewed as a "type" of baptism (see Question 60d in Lesson 9). Based on the biblical understanding of Holy Baptism, how do we explain Jonah's positive response to the LORD's second call to go to Nineveh?
67. Read the first ESV footnote to Jonah 3:3. This footnote gives the literal translation of the Hebrew in verse 3.
- a. What does this verse tell us about the size of the city of Nineveh?

- b. What does the information in the ESV footnote lead us to conclude about God's attitude toward the inhabitants of Nineveh?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- c. Based on what we know about the Assyrian Empire, why do you think God was so concerned about the cruel and sinful people who lived in Nineveh?

***Jonah Preaches in Nineveh***

- 68. Read Jonah 3:4. Jonah's message to the Ninevites as recorded in verse 4 is very short—only five words in the original Hebrew! Do you think this was the prophet's actual "sermon" or are these words meant to serve as a summary of his message? Explain your answer.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 69. In the ESV translation, Jonah's message reads as follows: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"
  - a. Which part of this proclamation is Law?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b. Which part of this proclamation is Gospel?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - c. What happens when only the Law is preached?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - d. What happens when only the Gospel is preached?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - e. What features of Jonah's sermon should present-day preachers emulate?

- f. What features of Jonah's sermon should present-day preachers not emulate?
70. Read 2 Peter 3:9.
- a. In what way is it proper to refer to the LORD as the God of second chances?
  - b. In what sense is it improper?
  - c. Why did God give Jonah a second chance to go to Nineveh?
  - d. Why does God give us second chances?

LESSON 11: REPENTANCE THAT LEADS TO SALVATION WITHOUT REGRET  
*Jonah 3:5-9*

**The Hebrew Word Haphak**

71. Read the article “Number Symbolism” on page 217 of *The Lutheran Study Bible*.
- Besides Jonah 3:4, where in the Bible is the number forty prominent?
  - What is the significance of the number forty?
72. Jonah says in verse 4 Nineveh will be “overthrown.” This is the ESV translation of a form of the Hebrew word *haphak*. Words that derive from *haphak* frequently mean destruction. In some contexts though, *haphak* indicates a radical transformation from one extreme to another. Let’s examine this further.
- Read Genesis 19:24-25. What does *haphak* (“overthrew” in the ESV) indicate in this passage? To what decisive event is this word linked?
  - Now read Hosea 11:8. Here the ESV translates *haphak* as “recoils.” The NIV translates this part of Hosea 11:8 as follows: “My heart is changed within me” (*haphak* = changed). What does *haphak* refer to in this instance? How does it point to something other than destruction?
  - How did the Ninevites understand the word *haphak* in Jonah’s message?
  - How do you think Jonah intended the word *haphak* to be understood?

- e. Based on the range of meaning possible, what might the LORD have intended by the word *haphak* in Jonah's message?
  
- f. Explain how the word *haphak* shows the way God works in our lives as Christians through the application of Law and Gospel.

### ***The Ninevites Repent***

73. The Augsburg Confession (the first of the Lutheran confessional documents written during the Reformation era) says the following about the biblical understanding of repentance: *Repentance consists of two parts. One part is contrition, that is, terror striking the conscience through the knowledge of sin. That other part is faith, which is born of the Gospel... and believes that for Christ's sake, sins are forgiven... Then good works are bound to follow, which are the fruit of repentance...* (Article XII). Now read Jonah 3:5-9 and answer the questions below.
- a. What from Jonah 3:5-9 shows the Ninevites' contrition?
  
  - b. What from Jonah 3:5-9 shows the Ninevites' faith?
  
  - c. What from Jonah 3:5-9 shows the Ninevites' good works.
  
  - d. Go back to the storm narrative in Jonah 1. How was the pattern of the sailors' repentance similar to that of the Ninevites?
  
  - e. When we Christians repent of our sins, do we follow the same pattern as the Ninevites and sailors? Explain your answer.

74. Consider what you know about ancient Israel prior to and during the time of Jonah's ministry. In this context, how is the Ninevites' repentance surprising and ironic?
75. Think about fasting and the use of sackcloth and ashes as signs of repentance.
- a. Who in Nineveh fasted?
  - b. Who in Nineveh put on sackcloth?
  - c. Who used ashes and why?
  - d. List other biblical narratives that involve fasting, sackcloth, and ashes.
  - e. Explain the "repentance" of the livestock described in verses 7 and 8.
  - f. What else did the Ninevite king command the people to do as signs of the city's repentance?
76. According to verse 9, of what two kinds of sin did the king and people of Nineveh repent? What might we conclude from the fact that the account of the flood in Genesis records these same kinds of sin as the reason the LORD decided to destroy the earth (see Genesis 6:5 and 13)?

77. Re-read verse 9 and review your answer to Question 28c from Lesson 6. What did the king hope would happen? Why did he have this hope?
78. Read 2 Corinthians 7:10-11.
- a. What is the difference between “worldly” grief and “godly” grief? Give examples from the Bible of someone who had worldly grief and someone who had godly grief.
  - b. What did Paul mean by his phrase “salvation without regret?”
  - c. What is the apostle describing in verse 11?
  - d. How did the Ninevites demonstrate a “godly grief” that led to their “salvation without regret?”
  - e. How can we be sure that our repentance is a godly one that leads to salvation without regret and not a worldly one that produces death?
79. Did the Ninevites earn their salvation by their repentance? Explain your answer.
80. Why did the Ninevites repent? Why do we repent?

LESSON 12: THE GOD WHO RELENTS  
*Jonah 3:10*

**The LORD Relents**

81. Read Jonah 3:10.
- a. What did the Ninevites do and why?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b. What did God do and why?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - c. The Hebrew word *ra'ah* occurs twice in this verse. In the first occurrence, the ESV translates it as "evil"; in the second, the ESV translates it as "disaster" (also see Appendix B).
    - i. What is the connection between the Ninevites' *ra'ah* (evil) and God's *ra'ah* (disaster)?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
    - ii. In what sense is it incorrect to understand God's *ra'ah* as "evil?"
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
    - iii. In what sense is it correct to understand God's *ra'ah* as "evil?"
82. The Hebrew root verb that the ESV often translates as "to relent" is *nacham*. This important biblical word can also mean "to pity," "to feel grief," or "to have compassion." Forms of *nacham* are often used in Old Testament texts that depict God threatening punishment but later relenting. Look at the definitions of "comfort" and "relent" on pages 1079-1080 of *The Lutheran Study Bible* for more information.
- a. Read Exodus 32:7-14.
    - i. What had Israel done to anger the LORD?

- ii. What did He intend to do because of Israel's sin?
  
- iii. What did Moses do in response to the LORD's anger?
  
- iv. What arguments did Moses use in his response to God?
  
- v. According to Exodus 32:14, why did the LORD relent of the disaster (*ra'ah*) he intended?
  
- vi. What does this passage teach us about Christ and His work?

b. Read Jeremiah 18:1-10.

- i. What did Jeremiah observe at the potter's house?
  
- ii. What connection did God make between the potter and Himself?
  
- iii. What do verses 7 and 8 say about repentance and God's relenting of His intended disaster?
  
- iv. What do verses 9 and 10 say about the refusal to repent and God's relenting of His intended good?

v. What does this passage teach us about Christ and His work?

c. Read Joel 2:12-14.

i. What from the narrative of the Ninevites' repentance in Jonah 3 are echoed in this text from Joel?

ii. We saw at the beginning of this question that *nacham* means both "relent" and "to pity." In other words, *nacham* often implies an action (relent) motivated by an emotion (pity). How does this text from Joel show us that it is characteristic of God to relent because of the pity He feels for those who turn to Him in repentance?

iii. According to Joel 2:14, what does God often do when He relents of disaster?

iv. What does this passage teach us about Christ and His work?

d. Read Numbers 23:19.

i. What do we learn about God's nature from this verse?

ii. Does this verse contradict what the previous examples from Exodus, Jeremiah, and Joel teach about the God who relents? Explain your answer.

83. If God had destroyed Nineveh after all, would that decision have been a just one? Explain your answer.
84. In 612 BC, approximately 175 years after events of the book of Jonah, and a little over a century after the Assyrians destroyed the kingdom of Israel, Nineveh was razed to the ground by the armies of the Babylonian king, Nabopolassar. The book of Nahum makes it clear that the destruction of Nineveh was God's judgment for Assyrian Empire's brutality, wickedness, and idolatry.
- a. What happened to Nineveh between the time of Jonah's preaching and the city's destruction?
  - b. What does this teach us about repentance?
  - c. What warning should we take from Nineveh's fate? What comfort?
85. The conclusion to the prophet's psalm of thanksgiving in Jonah 2 is "Salvation belongs to the LORD!"
- a. Based on these words, explain why God relented of the disaster He had planned to bring on the people of Nineveh.
  - b. What does this teach us about how we sinners are saved from the just wrath of a Holy God who demands from us perfect obedience?

LESSON 13: THE SIGN OF JONAH  
*Matthew 12:38-41; Luke 11:29-32*

***The Sign of Jonah in Matthew's Gospel***

86. Go back to Jonah's psalm in Jonah 2 and find passages that correspond to the following:
- a. Christ's suffering.
  - b. His death.
  - c. His resurrection.
  - d. In what way is Jonah a type of Christ?
  - e. Read Romans 6:3-4. How are the same sequence of events experienced by Jonah and Jesus also experienced by all who are baptized into Christ?
87. Read Matthew 12:38-41. The Greek word *semeion* occurs four times in this passage. It is often translated as "sign" in English. The word *semeion* occurs many times in the New Testament, especially the Gospels, where it usually signifies something miraculous that confirms a divine origin.
- a. Who demanded the *semeion* from Jesus?
  - b. The ones who demanded to see a sign had just seen Jesus heal a demon-possessed man (see Matthew 12:22). After witnessing this extraordinary thing, why did they now need to see a *semeion*?

- c. Why did Jesus refuse to give a sign to his opponents?
  
- d. What did Jesus offer his opponents in place of a *semeion*?
  
- e. Is it a sin for Christians to seek signs of God's love?
  
- f. What signs has Christ given to His church that assures it of God the Father's undeserved favor?
  
  
- 88. It is often asserted that the sign of Jonah refers primarily to Christ's resurrection from the dead. This should not be the preferred understanding, however. Let's examine why this is the case. Answer the following questions.
  - a. Who was present at our Lord's crucifixion?
  
  - b. Who was present at His resurrection?
  
  - c. Read 1 Corinthians 15:5-8. To whom did the risen Christ appear? To whom did He not appear?
  
  - d. Based on these answers, why is the sign of Jonah not to be interpreted primarily as Christ's resurrection?

- e. What is the meaning of the sign of Jonah as recorded in Matthew's Gospel?

***The Sign of Jonah in Luke's Gospel***

89. Read Luke 11:29-32.
- a. According to this passage from Luke 11, the *semeion* of Jonah is Jonah himself. In what way was Jonah the man a miraculous sign to the Ninevites?
  
  - b. Why did Jesus make no reference to the great fish or the three days and nights (Jonah 1:17) in Luke's record?
  
  - c. What did Jesus mean by calling the people who wanted to see a miraculous sign "an evil generation?"
  
  - d. What did Jesus say would happen to the evil generation?
  
  - e. According to Jesus, what would the Ninevites do on the Last Day?
  
  - f. As wicked and violent as they were, our Lord did not number the Ninevites among the evil generation of the Pharisees. Why is this so?
  
  - g. How did the Ninevites come to saving faith? How does anyone come to saving faith?



LESSON 14: ABOUNDING IN STEADFAST LOVE  
*Jonah 4:1-5*

***Jonah's Anger***

92. Read Jonah 4:1-4 and answer the following.
- What infuriated Jonah so much?
  - According to verse 2, how did Jonah communicate his anger to God? Is it a good thing to express anger to God in this way? Explain your answer.
  - Verse 2 is the first (and only) time in the book of Jonah that the prophet's refusal to obey God's original call to go to Nineveh is explained. What reason did Jonah give? Does this reason make sense to you?
  - What did the prophet ask the LORD to do in verse 3? Why?
  - How did the LORD answer Jonah? Why did He answer in this way?
93. Compare Jonah 4:2 to Jonah 3:9. What did Jonah know that the king of Nineveh did not know? Who knew the LORD better?
94. In Jonah's complaint recorded in verse 2, he describes the LORD using the series of adjectives given below. Define each one. Feel free to consult some of the definitions on pages 842-843 of *The Lutheran Study Bible* for assistance.
- Gracious.

- b. Merciful.
  - c. Slow to anger.
  - d. Abounding in steadfast love.
95. Read Luke 15:25-32.
- a. Why was the older son angry?
  - b. How did he express his anger?
  - c. What did the father tell the older son?
  - d. What are the similarities between this passage and Jonah 4:1-4?
96. Read Matthew 20:1-16.
- a. Which laborers were angry and why?
  - b. How did the owner of the vineyard respond to their anger?

- c. What are the similarities between this passage and Jonah 4:1-4?
  - d. Why is Matthew 20:16 a good summary of one of the themes of the book of Jonah?
97. Read Luke 15:10.
- a. What happens in heaven when a sinner repents?
  - b. How should Jonah have reacted when the Ninevites repented?
  - c. How should we react when a brother or sister in Christ repents? Do we always?

***Jonah Leaves the City***

98. Read Jonah 4:5.
- a. What did Jonah do in this verse?
  - b. What are some possible reasons why he did this?
  - c. Compare Genesis 4:16 to Jonah 4:5. What direction did both Cain and Jonah go? Why is it significant that Jonah went in this direction?

99. Read Jonah 3:5 and compare it to Jonah 4:5.
- Who is the “sitter” in Jonah 3:5? Where is he sitting? Describe his attitude.
  - Who is the “sitter” in Jonah 4:5? Where is he sitting? Describe his attitude.
  - Read Luke 18:9-14. How does the message of this parable illustrate the difference between the “sitters” of Jonah 3:5 and 4:5?
100. Let’s conclude this lesson by going back once more to Jonah 4:1. Most English translations of the Bible fail to capture the essence of the Hebrew here (although the ESV footnote serves as a corrective). What verse 1 literally says is this: “But it was evil to Jonah, great evil.” As we have seen in several previous lessons, forms of the Hebrew words *ra’ah* (evil) and *gadol* (great) occur frequently in the book of Jonah (see Appendices B and C). However, the only time in the book that the two root words *ra’ah* and *gadol* occur together is in Jonah 4:1.
- What does the expression “great evil” in this verse teach us about Jonah?
  - What does it teach us about ourselves?
  - According to the book of Jonah, what sin is the “great evil?”
  - What is the only answer to the “great evils” that we commit and are committed against us?



- b. In his commentary on Jonah, Reed Lessing writes this about God's appointment of the worm: "God does to Jonah what Jonah wishes God had done to Nineveh." What do you think Dr. Lessing means by this observation?
  
- c. What is the connection between the worm and Jonah's "evil" (*ra'ah*)? What does this connection teach us about the refusal to repent of sin and trust in Christ for forgiveness?
  
- d. Consider the scorching east wind.
  - i. What is the connection between this scorching wind and the "great wind" of Jonah 1:4?
  
  - ii. Compare the forms of the verb "to faint" in Jonah 2:7a and Jonah 4:8. What does this teach us about the effect of sin in our lives?
  
  - iii. What do you think the wind did to the shelter Jonah had built in verse 5? What does this teach us?
  
- e. Why does God allow trials, sickness, pain, tragedy, and setbacks to come into our lives?
  
- 103. Look closely at Jonah 4:8b. The ESV translation of this passage is a somewhat unsatisfactory. Many commentaries on Jonah point out that the sense of this passage is closer to this: "[Jonah] wanted to die, and said to himself, 'It would be better for me to die than to live.'"
  - a. To whom is Jonah speaking in the passage?

- b. In what important sense is Jonah 4:8b different from 4:3?
  
  - c. How is the way Jonah behaved in verse 8b true to life to the way we behave when we turn inward and become self-absorbed?
104. Consider the concept of “appointments” in the book of Jonah. As stated in Question 101c, the Hebrew word *manah* (“appointed”) is repeated four times in Jonah. The relevant passages are tabulated in Appendix D. Look over the information in Appendix D and answer the following questions.
- a. Explain why the fish and the *qiqayon* are to be understood as Gospel appointments.
  
  - b. Explain why the worm and the wind are to be understood as Law appointments.
  
  - c. What do these four appointments have in common? What does this teach us about the means of grace?

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LESSON 16: QUESTION MARK  
*Jonah 4:9-11*

***The LORD Questions Jonah***

105. Read Jonah 4:9. In this text, God repeats the question He asked the prophet previously in verse 4: “Do you do well to be angry?” However, there’s a subtle but important difference between the two questions.
- a. What did God ask in Jonah 4:4? How did Jonah answer?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b. What did God ask in Jonah 4:9? How did Jonah answer?
106. Let’s continue the line of inquiry we started in the last question by revisiting the possibility that Jonah had a death wish (review your answers to Question 38 in Lesson 7).
- a. What had Jonah been willing to die for in Jonah 1:12? Why was he willing to die in that situation?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b. Why did Jonah pray to die in Jonah 4:3?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - c. Why did Jonah long for death in Jonah 4:9? Do you think he was speaking seriously? Explain your answer.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - d. What did Jonah pray for in Jonah 2:2? How is this different from what he said he wanted in Jonah 4:9?

- e. Earlier in this Bible study, we noted some interesting similarities and contrasts between Elijah and Jonah (see Questions 17 and 19). Let's look at couple more. Read 1 Kings 19:1-8 and answer the following.
    - i. Why did Elijah want to die? How was Elijah's death wish different from Jonah's?
    - ii. What other things in this passage do you see that remind you of the book of Jonah?
  
  - f. Is it sinful for a Christian to want to die? Explain your answer.
107. Read Jonah 4:10-11.
- a. The Hebrew word *chus* ("pity") occurs twice in this passage. What is pity?
  - b. Why did Jonah pity the *qiqayon*?
  - c. What is the difference between the Lord's pity for the Ninevites and Jonah's pity for the *qiqayon*?
  - d. Based on this passage, explain why God spared the Ninevites.
  - e. What does this passage teach us about justification by grace?

108. Re-read Jonah 1:6, 1:14, and 3:9. Compare these passages to Jonah 4:10.
- a. What do the first three passages have in common with each other?
  - b. What word does Jonah 4:10 share in common with these three passages?
  - c. What is the difference between Jonah 4:10 and the other three passages? Why is this difference so ironic?
  - d. Read John 3:16. What does this verse teach us about God's attitude in this matter?
109. Who were the 120,000 Ninevites "who do not know their right hand from their left?" What does it tell us about Jonah that he pitied the *qiqayon* but not these 120,000?
110. What do you make of the fact that each of three times God speaks of Nineveh in the book of Jonah, He calls it the "great "city (Jonah 1:2, 3:2, and 4:11)?
111. You may have noticed that the book of Jonah mentions animals several times.
- a. List a few these instances.
  - b. In what other biblical narratives are animals important?



APPENDIX A  
*Jonah's Travels*



(Source: [www.augsburgfortress.org](http://www.augsburgfortress.org))

APPENDIX B  
*The Hebrew Word Ra'ah in the Book of Jonah*

Verse	ESV Text
1:2	“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their <i>evil</i> has come up before me.”
1:7	And they said to one another, “Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this <i>evil</i> has come upon us.”
1:8a	Then they said to him, “Tell us on whose account this <i>evil</i> has come upon us...”
3:8b	“Let everyone turn from his <i>evil</i> way and from the violence that is in his hands.”
3:10 (twice)	When God saw what they did, how they turned from their <i>evil</i> way, God relented of the <i>disaster</i> that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.
4:1	But it <i>displeased</i> Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. (ESV footnote adds: Hebrew—it was exceedingly <i>evil</i> to Jonah.)
4:2b	“...I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from <i>disaster</i> .”
4:6	Now the LORD God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his <i>discomfort</i> . (ESV footnote adds: or his <i>evil</i> .)

(Source: *ESV Study Bible*)

APPENDIX C  
*The Hebrew Word Gadol in the Book of Jonah*

Verse	ESV Text
1:2a	“Arise, go to Nineveh, that <i>great</i> city, and call out against it...”
1:4 (twice)	But the LORD hurled a <i>great</i> wind upon the sea, and there was a <i>mighty</i> tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up.
1:10a	Then the men were <i>exceedingly</i> afraid and said to him, “What is this that you have done!”
1:12b	“...I know it is because of me that this <i>great</i> tempest has come upon you.”
1:16	Then the men feared the LORD <i>exceedingly</i> , and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.
1:17a	And the LORD appointed a <i>great</i> fish to swallow up Jonah.
3:2	“Arise, go to Nineveh, that <i>great</i> city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.”
3:3b	Now Nineveh was an exceedingly <i>great</i> city, three days’ journey in breadth. (ESV footnote adds: Hebrew—a <i>great</i> city to God.)
3:5	And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the <i>greatest</i> of them to the least of them.
3:7b	“...By the decree of the king and his <i>nobles</i> : Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything...” (Note: <i>nobles</i> is the ESV translation of the Hebrew <i>great ones</i> .)
4:1	But it displeased Jonah <i>exceedingly</i> , and he was angry. (ESV footnote adds: Hebrew—it was exceedingly evil to Jonah.)
4:6b	...So Jonah was <i>exceedingly</i> glad because of the plant.
4:11a	“And should not I pity Nineveh, that <i>great</i> city...?”

(Source: *Jonah* by R. Reed Lessing)

APPENDIX D  
*The Hebrew Word Manah in the Book of Jonah*

Verse	ESV Text
1:17a	And <u>the LORD</u> <i>appointed</i> <u>a great fish</u> to swallow up Jonah.
4:6	Now <u>the LORD God</u> <i>appointed</i> <u>a plant</u> and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort.
4:7	But when dawn came up the next day, <u>God</u> <i>appointed</i> <u>a worm</u> that attacked the plant, so that it withered.
4:8a	When the sun rose, <u>God</u> <i>appointed</i> <u>a scorching east wind</u> , and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint.

(Source: *Jonah* by R. Reed Lessing)

