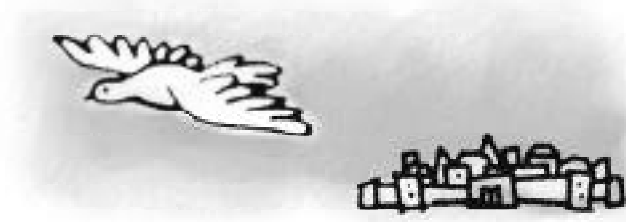


The “Dove” Flees



Sabbath Afternoon

THUS FAR, THE BOOK OF JONAH has portrayed a familiar pattern in the Old Testament: a prophet receiving a divine call. “Arise, go to Euphrates” (Jer. 13:4, 5), God told Jeremiah. “Arise, get thee to Zarephath” (1 Kings 17:9, 10), God told Elijah. As expected, both prophets did what they were told.

The reader is led to expect from Jonah a similar response to God’s call, “Arise, go to Nineveh.” However, the book of Jonah defies conventional ideas about God’s prophets and how they act. How dare Jonah upset the usual paradigm! Far from obeying God, he flees in the opposite direction. Hardly the best start for a prophet of God.

Why be surprised? Prophets are people, too, touched with our fears, insecurities, and doubts. Surely, we don’t expect perfection from the Lord’s prophets. Based on what example? Noah? David? John the Baptist? Peter? Hardly. Maybe we don’t expect perfection, but we certainly didn’t expect a prophet to flee from a direct command of God! This week we’ll look a little more at what happened.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: How do we appraise the prophet’s disobedience? What is God’s response to Jonah’s attitude? What does this teach us about God? How does God’s grace respond to Jonah’s disobedience?

MEMORY TEXT: “Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months” (James 5:17).

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 25.

Sunday

October 19

“HERE AM I, DON’T SEND ME!”

“But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. So he went down to Joppa, found a ship which was going to Tarshish, paid the fare and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord” (Jon. 1:3, NASB).

Jonah’s name means “dove,” and we find him next in an unusual “flight pattern.”

How is Jonah’s response to his divine summons unusual? Jon. 1:3.

Thus far, the book of Jonah has opened with a recognizable situation seen in Scripture of a prophet receiving a divine call. What happens next, however, is not the usual. The shocking surprise involves the detailed description of what Jonah did to escape his task. Though hardly the usual paradigm, this isn’t the only time we see the example of someone not exactly thrilled about his or her divine calling.

Who else initially was not willing to accept God’s call, and why? Exod. 4:1, 10, 13.

When Moses was enlisted by God to return to Egypt for the purpose of leading the Israelites away from slavery, he drew back in amazement and terror at the command. He even offered several reasons why he thought he should refuse the task. But, ultimately, he accepted the task. Ellen White eloquently describes this situation: “The divine command given to Moses found him self-distrustful, slow of speech, and timid. He was overwhelmed with a sense of his incapacity to be a mouthpiece for God to Israel. But having once accepted the work, he entered upon it with his whole heart, putting all his trust in the Lord. The greatness of his mission called into exercise the best powers of his mind. God blessed his ready obedience, and he became eloquent, hopeful, self-possessed, and well fitted for the greatest work ever given to man.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 255.

What possible reasons could Jonah have had for not wanting to do what the Lord asked? Could those have even been “valid” reasons? Also, is it possible that, perhaps, the very traits that caused Jonah to want to flee from this task could be the very traits that, if rightly channeled, would have made him qualified for that task? If so, how so? What does this say to me about my own gifts and what the Lord asks me to do with them?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Text: Jonah 1:3.

Teachers Aims:

1. To explore the causes behind Jonah's disobedience.
2. To emphasize God's patient grace in His response to Jonah's rebellion.

Lesson Outline:

I. Reluctant Prophets.

- A. Moses makes excuses to avoid the divine draft:
1. Timidity (Exod. 4:1).
 2. Fear of public speaking (vs. 10).
 3. Self-distrust (vs. 13).
- B. God commands Jonah to go to Nineveh, but the prophet flees in the opposite direction.

II. Jonah's Mad Flight.

- A. Of all people, Jonah should have known the futility of his flight from God.
- B. Jonah descends into a progressively deeper spiritual darkness:
1. Jonah heads "down" to Joppa to journey to Tarshish (Jon. 1:3).
 2. Jonah boards, or goes "down" onto, a ship (vs. 3).
 3. Jonah burrows "down" into the deepest part of the hull of the ship (vs. 5).
- C. Despite Jonah's downward spiral, God does not leave him to drown in spiritual darkness.

III. Nature: God's *Special Effects* (Jon. 1:4, 17).

- A. God pursues His prophet with a ship-sinking storm.
- B. God unleashes the tempest (vs. 4) for *Jonah's* benefit.
- C. The storm sent to pursue God's petulant prophet involves the fate of innocent sailors, as well.

Summary: Sin has a steep price tag. Jonah pays for his ship fare with money but almost ends up paying with his life. The ticket for Tarshish promises a one-way fare to freedom that ends in a crushing storm. Herein lies the snare of sin: It promises escape but shipwrecks lives. Only trust in God can navigate us safely through the storms of sin that thrash us.

Monday

October 20

THE “DOVE” FLEES.

God gives Jonah a command, and Jonah, rather than obeying the Lord’s command, attempts to flee. It is hard to imagine a more determined antagonism than is indicated here in this one verse (Jon. 1:3). Every verb in the verse reveals what Jonah is doing in order to get away from the Lord and from what the Lord asks him to do.

Look at the verbs in Jonah 1:3. Jonah **rose up** to flee. (The verb for “arose” here comes from the same root word that was part of his divine commission, when the Lord told him to “**Arise**, go to Nineveh.”) He **went down** to Joppa, he **found** a ship, he **paid** the fare, and **went down** into the boat. All this flurry of activity for the express purpose of evading God’s command. The writer of the narrative subtly suggests the determination of Jonah to flee.

In Jonah 1:3, what phrase is given at the beginning of the verse and then repeated at the end of the same verse? What do you think that means?

This single verse says two times that Jonah flees “from the presence of the Lord.” A single indication would have been enough. However, the duplication of this phrase in just one verse compels the reader to consider the irony of anyone, let alone a prophet, thinking to flee from the presence of the Lord!

Of all people—as someone who knows the Lord, who worships the God of Israel, who knows that the Lord was the Creator of the heaven and the earth and the sea (see Jon. 1:9), Jonah should have known the futility of his actions. It’s not as though he were following some local, pagan deity whose “power” ended at the border.

On the contrary, by his own confession, he knows the power of the God he professes to serve—and, though knowing all these things, he flees anyway!

What could he have possibly been thinking?

Of course, it’s easy for us to look at Jonah and shake our heads in disapproval. *How could he have done something so stupid?* However, in what subtle ways do we attempt to do the same thing? Maybe we don’t flee, at least physically, from “the presence of the Lord” (for that’s impossible), but how do we openly or inadvertently “separate” ourselves from the Lord?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Commentary.

I. The Power of Oral Presentation.

The book of Jonah is meant to be *heard*. When we read it silently, we do not sense all the power it had when people heard it recited in Bible times. Printed words lack the inflection and cadence that a trained, oral storyteller can bring to a passage. The printed word also lacks the effect of repetition. “The *repetition* of words in written material quickly becomes monotonous, but in oral discourse the speaker can play upon the repeated word or words, varying pitch, volume, and tempo for dramatic effect. In general, repetition serves to emphasize. . . . The [Hebrew] root *gdl*, ‘big, great,’ occurs fourteen times in the Jonah book. . . . big city (1:2), big wind, big storm (1:4), big fear (1:10), big storm (1:12), big fear (1:16), big fish (1:17), big city (3:2), big city (3:3), from the biggest (3:5), king and his ‘big ones’ (3:7), big anger (4:1), big gladness (4:6), big city (4:11). . . .

“A special variation of repetition is the *extension* or *diminution* of phrases. Again, such repetitions are most effective when the story is heard rather than read silently. In Jonah 1, the increasing intensity of the storm is described by the increasing length of each description (1:4, 11, 13). Another series of ‘growing phrases’ describes the increasing fear of the sailors (1:5, 10, 16). The winding down of the storm is effectively described in 1:16 with three clauses that become progressively shorter.”—James Limburg, *Jonah: A Commentary*, p. 27, author’s emphasis.

Your Sabbath School class might like to select someone who is a good reader to recite the Bible texts listed for each week’s study in Sabbath’s section of the Standard Edition of the Bible Study Guide. As this person reads the texts aloud before the class, he or she should keep in mind the above thoughts regarding oral presentations. As the class members listen, they can observe patterns and emphases they might not have noticed otherwise.

II. The Fleeing Prophet.

Prophets occasionally ran away from those who threatened them after they delivered their messages. See 1 Kings 19:2, 3 and Jeremiah 26:20-23. Jonah, however, was the only prophet to flee *before* delivering his message.

Furthermore, Scripture often presents people fleeing from something. Usually such individuals seek to make a break from a past relationship so they can start a new life. (See Gen. 16:6-8, 31:20-22, Exod. 2:15, and Judg. 11:3.)

Jonah reserves passage to Tarshish. Scholars have suggested Tarshish might have been in southern Spain or that it was the city of Carthage, on the coast of north Africa. Those who favor Spain identify it with Tartessos, a Phoenician colony at the mouth of the Guadalquivir River,

Tuesday

October 21

GOING DOWN.

Three times the text found in Jonah 1:3 says that Jonah is going to Tarshish. That's three times in one verse. Notice this characteristic repetition in Hebrew narrative writing. The writer is not sloppy, nor is he stuttering. Rather, we are being alerted to an important issue the writer wants us to ponder. In this case, the thrice-mentioned city of Tarshish is important because Tarshish, in fact, is in the opposite direction of where the Lord wanted Jonah to go. Nineveh is east, Tarshish is west. Jonah's rebellion couldn't be made more explicit.

What other examples can we find in the Bible of God giving someone (not necessarily a prophet) explicit instructions and he or she doing the opposite?

Gen. 2:16, 17 _____ Gen. 3:6

1 Sam. 15:3 _____ 1 Sam. 15:21-23

Exod. 20:4-6 _____ Ezek. 8:10

What other verb is used two times in Jonah 1:3?

Two times in this verse we are told that Jonah "went down," along with one additional use in verse 5. Jonah "went down" to Joppa; Jonah "went down" into the ship; Jonah had "gone down" into the lowest parts of the ship. Three times in close succession the reader is told that Jonah "went down." The writer carefully structures the narrative to focus on Jonah's downward journey away from his divine commission. Indeed, before it's all over, Jonah goes down much farther than even he imagines at this point, for he will go all the way to the "bottom" before the Lord is through with him.

The use of that specific verb isn't by chance. In this context, it has negative connotations. In fact, in modern Hebrew, the same verb "go down" can carry with it a negative meaning, while the opposite, "go up," carries a positive one.

Are you going down or up? The answer is easy. Are you doing what God commands you to do, or are you disobeying, as Jonah did? Your answer determines your direction.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

on the Atlantic coast. A cuneiform inscription of the Assyrian King Esarhaddon (680–669 B.C.) declares that “all kings who live in the midst of the [Mediterranean] sea, from Cyprus and Javan as far as Tarshish, submit to my feet.” Several biblical passages use Tarshish as a symbol of distant places (Ps. 72:10, Isa. 66:19).

III. A Storm From God.

Scripture often portrays God as controlling the sea. (See Exodus 14, 15; Matt. 8:23-27; see also Luke 8:22-25.) Jonah 1:4 describes God as hurling “a great wind” (KJV) across the surface of the sea, producing a “great storm” (NASB). The biblical writer emphasizes the fact that the storm came from God by placing the subject (“the Lord”) at the beginning of the sentence instead of in the usual Hebrew order of verb before subject.

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

Texts for Discovery: Exodus 4:1-7, Judges 6:11-24, Jonah 1:4, Matthew 14:22-33.

1. Jonah did not want to do what God commanded. Who else did not want to do God’s bidding? Judg. 6:11-24. List and discuss the similarities and differences between Jonah and Gideon. What do their stories teach us about God?
2. God gave Moses several signs of His power. See Exodus 4:1-7. He also gave Gideon and Jonah numerous signs. What is it about people that they must see *signs* from God in order to have faith? Discuss whether or not it is wrong to ask God for *signs* in order to shore up our faith. When might it be appropriate versus inappropriate to ask for a sign?
3. In the case of Jonah, Moses, and Gideon, God did powerful things through nature. What does this tell you about God? Where else in Scripture has God shown His control over nature? Why do you think these displays of power are recorded? What can they teach us today?
4. God often used storms to get the attention of His prophets and disciples. (See Jon. 1:4 and Matt. 14:22-33.) Why do you think God uses nature to capture our attention? Why does God sometimes need to resort to such drastic measures? Discuss ways in which the quiet, peaceful side of nature teaches us about God.
5. Read Psalm 46:10. The LHH (The League for the Hard of Hearing) Noise Center reports that “noise negatively affects learning and behavior.”—(article, “Listen to the Raindrops” [cited 14 May 2002], from <<http://www.lhh.org/noise/raindrops.htm>>). How, then, can silence and solitude help us to know God better?

GOD'S PATIENT GRACE.

When Jonah flees from the presence of the Lord, that *might* have finished everything. When Jonah pays the fare to Tarshish, that *could* have been the end of his call. When we disobey, when we try to escape what God has convicted us about, when God says one thing and we do another, that *could* be the end of us too. God is not obligated at all to keep on dealing with us, especially when we mess up, even in a big way. However, out of a love that's too big for us to understand, He keeps working with us, despite our repeated and colossal blunders. And for this, God's patient grace, we all should be immensely grateful. After all, imagine if all it took were one big mistake on our part for the Lord to cast us off. Who, even the most saintly among us, could ever hope for salvation if that were the case? Grace is nothing if not the chance—indeed, many chances—to start over.

What examples from the Bible show God still working with those who have sadly and grossly failed in what the Lord had asked of them? What lesson can we learn from these stories about God's grace with those whose faith and trust fail them, even at crucial times?

Genesis 3 _____

Genesis 16 _____

2 Samuel 11 _____

Matt. 26:74, 75 _____

God calls Jonah, but Jonah rejects that call. It's that simple. But what happens next? Does the Lord simply leave Jonah to his rebellion? Does He simply cast him off, because he has made this tremendous blunder? Not at all. Though Jonah, overtly and blatantly, chooses to run away, the Lord pursues him. In other words, despite Jonah's rejection of the Lord, God doesn't reject him, at least not yet. Here is this man, given a divine call by the Lord, and though this man rejects that call, God's Spirit still strives with him, anyway.

What does this fact say to us, personally, in our own walk with the Lord? However much hope it should give us, we should also be careful about being presumptuous. How can we know the difference between having hope despite our failures and being presumptuous about them?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

The typical ship of Jonah's time was a small vessel constructed of fir planks held together with mortise and tenons. Such a ship had a deck of pine boards over a shallow hold, a cedar mast, and a single linen sail. When the wind did not blow or the crew wanted greater speed, they would propel the craft through the water with long oars made of oak. Ships hugged the coastline, since they had no compasses or other navigational instruments to guide them. The storm that lashed Jonah's vessel must have driven it far away from land.

Ancient ships had no lifeboats or rafts. Even worse, few, if any, sailors knew how to swim, because the ancients believed that water was an unnatural environment for humans. One could be tempted to interpret the story as the tantrum of an angry deity who swiftly punishes when we do not do what He wants. However, God had sent the storm to grab the prophet's attention. Because He hoped Jonah would reconsider His call to preach the gospel to Nineveh, the storm had a redemptive purpose. Had God not pursued Johah it would have confirmed the prophet in his self-destructive attitude.

"Is [the book of Jonah] meant as a parable for Israel as a whole, for any one of us in particular? Are all readers supposed to take away material for meditation on the steadfastness with which God calls them? The storms in our lives tend to be less dramatic than the one that makes Jonah famous, but it is profitable for us to interpret them as ways in which God is refusing to give up on us."—Denise Lardner Carmody and John Tully Carmody, *Corn and Ivy: Spiritual Reading in Ruth and Jonah* (Valley Forge, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 1995), p. 94.

WITNESSING

A young man stated after an adulterous relationship, "I didn't mean for it to go that far." How many people feel the same way? And not just about adultery but about other sins they have committed? We always think we have things under control.

Jonah must have thought he had everything under control. However, he overlooked the fact that things really had been in God's hands all along. Like Jonah, when things swing out of control for us and we have gone too far in sin, we are never too far from God's reach. If we cry out to Him, He will reach

out His loving hand to save us.

In our witnessing, we will meet people who believe they have gone too far, fallen too deep in sin. We must assure them God has not given up on them. His outstretched hand is waiting to save them. Ellen White writes, "Nothing is too great for Him to bear, for He holds up worlds, He rules over all the affairs of the universe. Nothing that in any way concerns our peace is too small for Him to notice. There is no chapter in our experience too dark for Him to read."—"The Privilege of Prayer," in *Steps to Christ*, pp. 100, 101.

Thursday

October 23

THE GOD OF NATURE.

What is God’s response to Jonah’s disobedience? Jon. 1:4, 17; 2:10.

Both the Old and the New Testament are remarkable for their unfaltering and continual ascription of the control of nature to God. At times, He uses nature as a means of instruction in righteousness and discipline. In contrast to some contemporary thinking, which views the universe as a closed and finite system, allowing no place for the action of God, the Bible’s consistent confession is that the functioning of all nature is under God’s control.

Read Job 38. In the context of today’s study, what’s the crucial point made in this chapter?

God has established laws in nature. But they do not administer themselves. The Lawgiver administers them. He has arranged a series of causes and effects. But according to Scripture, He supports, maintains, controls, and moves them at His own pleasure.

What is the first action God takes in response to Jonah’s cruise? Jon. 1:4.

The storm is not attributed merely to the elements of nature but to the God of nature, to Him who is over all and above all things. But this is no mere display of power. It is for Jonah’s sake that a tempest is unleashed. Verse 4 teaches us that this storm is there because of Jonah and *for* Jonah. The elements of nature and many innocent sailors are engaged in the adventure of Jonah, with him and because of him. The storm is sent to pursue a petulant prophet and, in the process, involves many others on board the ship.

These “innocent” sailors were suffering because of someone else’s sin. In what ways do we see this principle operating all the time? What does it tell us about the horrible nature of sin?

The book of Jonah reveals the seriousness of a God-given vocation. God regards His choice of messenger as so important that He brings nature into play in order to nudge Jonah to fulfill his task. As God wrestled with Jacob, so now He begins to wrestle with Jonah, employing the elements of nature to get his attention.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

LIFE-APPLICATION APPROACH

Icebreaker: Adam Clarke pointed out that some rabbis are of the opinion that Jonah was the widow of Sarepta’s son, restored to life by Elijah.

Regardless of Jonah’s background, one thing is certain: God knows Jonah very well, and Jonah knows God. Thus, when God gives Jonah a simple and specific command, “Arise . . . go preach” (Jon. 3:2), no room for misunderstanding presents itself. Jonah knows exactly what the Lord expects of him. Yet, he disobeys, and his disobedience afflicts him with trouble.

Thought Questions:

1. If Jonah really knows God, what is the cause of his disobedience? Surely it is not a lack of faith in God’s word. A. W. Tozer says that the essence of sin is rebellion against divine authority.

Could rebellion have caused Jonah’s disobedience? How could Jonah’s perception of the Ninevites cause him to rebel against God’s command? How does the command to “love your enemies” (Matt. 5:44) play against the acts of injustice that fall upon you at the hands of the enemy?

2. Because of his disobedience, Jonah is ensnared in a storm, cast into the sea, and swallowed by a great fish, where he lives in its belly for three

days. This does *not* sound like a vacation on a balmy island resort! Why do you think God doles out such a disgusting, yet creative, consequence? Study Jonah’s big-fish experience and trace God’s grace as it parallels the consequences of His headstrong prophet’s disobedience.

3. The storm hits with such ferocity that the sailors—men accustomed to the rage of the waters—are deathly afraid. Perhaps this is the most dreadful storm they have encountered. Their fears and reactions give us a glimpse into how one person’s disobedience affects many. Consider the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and list historical instances of times when mistakes of one individual affected many in the church.

Application Question:

Obviously, it is easier to obey the person with whom you have a close and personal relationship than one with whom you do not. However, what should be the motivating factor of our obedience in relationships that are, by nature, usually more formal or distant, such as with our government, schools, teachers, our employer, and so forth? What safety measures can you take to keep from being *rebellious* in attitude and in action toward them?

FURTHER STUDY:

What picture do the different Bible writers give concerning God's sovereignty over His creation?

Amos 4:13;

Job 9:5; Amos 1:2; Mic. 1:3, 4;

Judg. 5:5; Pss. 18:7; 68:8; 114:4-6; Isa. 64:3; Ezek. 3:12; Hab. 3:6, 10;

Exod. 23:25, 26; Lev. 25:18, 19; Deuteronomy 28; 30:8-14;

2 Chron. 31:9, 10; Isa. 58:9-11; Amos 4:6-8; Hag. 1:9-11; 2:17.

Ellen White's graphic description of the plagues in Egypt is instructive: "Ruin and desolation marked the path of the destroying angel. The land of Goshen alone was spared. It was demonstrated to the Egyptians that the earth is under the control of the living God, that the elements obey His voice, and that the only safety is in obedience to Him."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 269.

The book of Revelation instructs us that the whole world will be so involved in a similar situation before the second coming of Christ. Ellen White draws this lesson in her chapter on Jonah in *Prophets and Kings*, p. 277:

"The time is at hand when there will be sorrow in the world that no human balm can heal. The spirit of God is being withdrawn. Disasters by sea and by land follow one another in quick succession. How frequently we hear of earthquakes and tornadoes, of destruction by fire and flood, with great loss of life and property! *Apparently these calamities are capricious outbreaks of disorganized, unregulated forces of nature, wholly beyond the control of man; but in them all, God's purpose may be read. They are among the agencies by which He seeks to arouse men and women to a sense of their danger.*"—Emphasis supplied.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1. Do you think there could have come a point when God would have finally stopped pursuing Jonah? If so, when might that point have been? Compare the situation of Judas to that of Jonah. What was the crucial difference between the two?**
- 2. How should the humanity of Jonah help us understand the humanity of all God's prophets, including Ellen White?**

SUMMARY: God sought to use Jonah despite the prophet's faults.