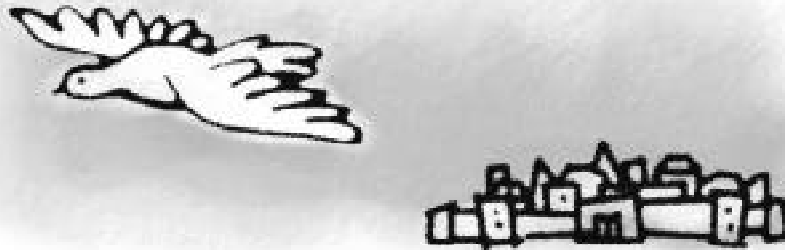


The “Dove” Flees¹



**SAB
PM**

THE STORY IN the book of Jonah pictures a common situation in the Old Testament: a prophet receiving God’s call. “Arise, go to Euphrates,” God told Jeremiah (Jeremiah 13:4, 5). “Arise, get thee [you] to Zarephath,” God told Elijah (1 Kings 17:9, 10). Both Jeremiah and Elijah obeyed. So we expect Jonah to obey God when He tells him to go to Nineveh. But Jonah did not obey God. The book of Jonah challenges our usual ideas about how God’s prophets act. Not only did Jonah *not* obey God, he ran in the opposite direction of Nineveh.

We must remember that prophets are people too. They are touched by all the same fears and doubts that touch us. We should not expect perfection from God’s prophets. But we certainly did not expect to see Jonah trying to run from God. This week, we will look a little more at how Jonah answered God’s call.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: What should we think about Jonah’s disobedience?² What is God’s answer to Jonah’s behavior? What does God’s answer teach us about God? How do we see God’s mercy³ toward Jonah’s disobedience?

MEMORY VERSE: “Elijah was the same kind of person as we are. He prayed earnestly [hard] that there would be no rain, and no rain fell on the land for three and a half years” (James 5:17, TEV).

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

¹flees—flies away.

²disobedience—not obeying.

³mercy—kindness we do not deserve.

SUN “HERE I AM. DO NOT SEND ME!”

“Jonah, however, set out in the opposite direction in order to get away from the Lord. He went to Joppa, where he found a ship about to go to Spain. He paid his fare⁴ and went aboard with the crew⁵ to sail to Spain, where he would be away from the Lord” (Jonah 1:3, TEV).



Jonah went in the opposite direction God wanted him to go.

Jonah’s name means “dove.” And we find him trying to “fly” from God.

What is unusual⁶ about Jonah’s answer to God’s call?

The book of Jonah opens with a prophet receiving God’s call. This is

not unusual. What happens next *is* unusual: the shocking surprise of what Jonah did to escape God’s call. This is not the only time we see someone not being happy about receiving God’s call.

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

“God called Moses to return to Egypt to lead the Israelites out of slavery. Moses did not want to accept God’s call. Moses gave several reasons why he thought he should refuse the call. But finally he accepted the call. God’s command to Moses found him self-distrustful,⁷ slow of speech, and shy. Moses felt strongly that he could not work as God’s spokesperson to Israel. But after he accepted God’s call, he entered upon his work with his whole heart and put all his trust in God. Moses’ important work forced him to make use of the best powers of his mind. God blessed Moses’ obedience, and he became a powerful speaker and a self-confident leader, qualified for the greatest work ever given to a person.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 255.

What reasons could Jonah have had for not wanting to do what God asked? Could those reasons have even been “good” reasons? Jonah

⁴fare—the price of a ticket.

⁵crew—men who worked on the boat.

⁶unusual—not usual.

⁷self-distrustful—not trusting himself.

had character traits⁸ that made him want to flee from God's work. Could the same traits have helped him do that work successfully? If so, how? What does this say to you about your gifts and what God asks you to do with them?

MON THE "DOVE" FLEES.

God gave Jonah a command. Instead of obeying that command, Jonah tried to flee. It is hard to imagine anyone being as stubborn as Jonah was in Jonah 1:3. Every verb⁹ in Jonah 1:3 shows what he did to get away from God.

Look at the verbs in Jonah 1:3. Jonah **rose up** (KJV) to flee. The verb for "arose" in this verse comes from the same word that was part of Jonah's command from God. For example, the Lord told him to "**Arise**, go to Nineveh" (KJV). Jonah **went down** (KJV) to Joppa. He **found** (KJV) a ship. He **paid** (KJV) the fare, and **went down** (KJV) into the boat. All these actions show Jonah's effort to avoid God's command. This is how the writer of the story tries to suggest Jonah's determination to flee.

What words are given at the beginning of Jonah 1:3, then repeated at the end of the verse? Why do you think the author repeats these words?

Jonah 1:3 says two times that Jonah wanted to be away from God. Saying that Jonah wanted to be away from God once would have been enough. But the writer repeats the words to help us see how foolish it is for anyone to think of running away from God!

Jonah worshiped the God of Israel. He knew that God was the Creator (Jonah 1:9). So he should have known the foolishness of running away. Jonah said that he knew the power of God. So why did he run away?

It is easy for us to look at Jonah and shake our heads. How could he have done something so stupid? But in what hidden ways do we try to run from God?

TUE GOING DOWN.

Jonah 1:3 says three times that Jonah was going down to Tarshish (Joppa). The author mentions this three times to make the point that Tarshish is in the opposite direction of where God wants Jonah to go. Nineveh is east. Tarshish is west.

What other examples can we find of people doing the opposite of what God tells them to do?

Genesis 2:15, 17; Genesis 3:6 _____

⁸traits—qualities of character such as being honest or stubborn.

⁹verb—a word that shows action.

1 Samuel 15:1-3; 1 Samuel 15:21-23 _

Exodus 20:1, 4-6; Ezekiel 8:10 _____



The Israelites worshiped idols even though God told them not to.

Jonah 1:3 tells us twice that Jonah “went down” (KJV). Jonah 1:5 also tells us that Jonah “went down” (KJV). Jonah “went down” to Joppa. Jonah “went down” into the ship. Jonah had “gone down” into the lowest parts of the ship. So the writer carefully builds the story to focus on Jonah’s downward journey away from God’s will. Before it is over, Jonah goes down much farther than he imagines he will. This is because he

will go all the way to the “bottom” before God is finished with him.

The author uses the verb “went down” on purpose. In this story “went down” has negative meaning. In modern Hebrew, the verb “go down” has a negative meaning, while the verb “go up” has a positive meaning.

Are you going down or up? Are you doing what God commands you to do (going up)? Or are you disobeying,¹⁰ (going down) as Jonah did?



Are you going up or down?

WED GOD’S PATIENT GRACE.

Jonah fleeing from God might have finished everything. When Jonah paid the fare to Tarshish, that could have been the end of his call. Suppose we have disobeyed.¹¹ Suppose we have

¹⁰disobeying—not obeying.

¹¹disobeyed—did not obey.

tried to escape what God has asked us to do. Suppose God has said one thing and we have done another thing. That could have been the end of us too. God is not responsible to keep on working with us when we do not obey Him. But God loves us so much that He keeps working with us even when we make mistakes again and again.

We all should be very thankful for God's patient mercy. Imagine if God would forget about us if we made one big mistake. Then who of us could ever hope for salvation? God's mercy means that He gives us chances to start over.

What examples show us how God works with people who do not do what He tells them to do?

Genesis 3 _____

Genesis 16 _____

2 Samuel 11; 12 _____

Matthew 26:69-75; Matthew 21:1, 15-19

¹²universe—all the matter, light, and energy that scientists have discovered.

What can we learn from these stories about God's grace toward people who did not obey God?

God called Jonah. But Jonah refused to accept that call. What happened next? Did God leave Jonah? Did He just cast him off because he made a big mistake?

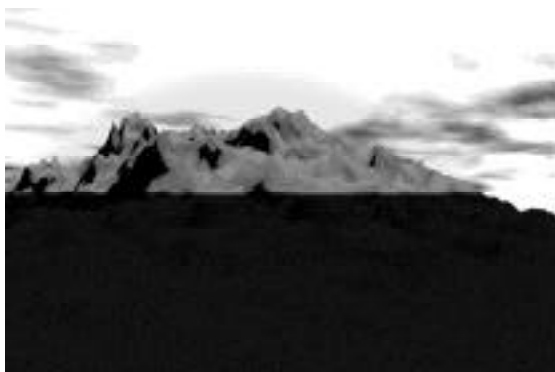
No! Jonah chose to run away. But God followed him! Jonah refused to accept God's call. But God did not reject him.

What does God not rejecting Jonah say to each one of us in our own walk with God? How can we know the difference between having hope when we fail, and taking advantage of God's mercy?

THU THE GOD OF NATURE.

What was God's answer to Jonah's disobedience? Jonah 1:4, 17; Jonah 2:10.

Both the Old Testament and the New Testament describe how God controls nature. At times, He uses nature as a way of teaching righteousness (holiness) and giving discipline. Modern thinking says the universe¹² is a closed and limited system that does not permit God to control nature. But the Bible teaches that all nature is under God's control.



God controls all nature. He makes the sun to rise.

What does Job 38 say about God’s control over nature?

God has established laws in nature. But these laws do not do the work by themselves. God controls the laws. God created the laws to work the way they do. But He supports and controls them at His own pleasure.

What was the first thing God did when Jonah decided to take a boat trip? Jonah 1:4.

The storm is not the result of a natural event,¹³ but of the God of nature who is over all things and above all things. But this was not just God showing His power. It was for Jonah’s sake that God created the storm. Jonah 1:4 teaches us that this storm happened because of Jonah and *for* Jonah. This storm and many sailors were involved in Jonah’s adventure. God sent the storm to chase

a rebellious prophet. But the chase also involved the sailors.

These sailors were suffering because of Jonah’s sin. In what ways do we see other people suffering because of someone else’s sin? What does someone else suffering because of another person’s sins tell us about the nature of sin?

We see in the book of Jonah how serious God’s work is. God thinks that His choice of messenger was very important. He takes the person He chooses so seriously that He uses nature to encourage Jonah to do his work. God wrestled with Jacob at the brook Jabbok (Genesis 32:22-30). In the same way, God begins to wrestle with Jonah, by using nature to get his attention.

It is easy for us to quote the Bible about God’s control of nature. But what happens when nature causes storms that kill people and destroy homes? How does the great controversy (war) between Jesus and Satan help us understand this difficult question?

FRI **ADDITIONAL STUDY:** What picture do the different Bible writers give about God’s control over His creation? Amos 4:13; Job 9:5; Amos 1:2; Micah 1:3, 4; Judges 5:5; Psalm 18:7; Psalm 68:7, 8; Psalm 114:4-6; Isaiah 64:3; Habbakuk 3:6, 10; Exodus 23:25, 26;

¹³event—something that happens.

Leviticus 25:18, 19; Deuteronomy 28; Deuteronomy 30:8-14; 2 Chronicles 31:9, 10; Isaiah 58:9-11; Amos 4:6-8; Haggai 1:9-11; Haggai 2:17.

Ellen White's clear description of the plagues in Egypt teaches us something about God's control of nature: "The destroying angel left a path of ruin and destruction. The land of Goshen alone was protected. God showed the Egyptians that the earth is under His control. The weather, the wind, the waters, obey His voice. The only safety is in obedience to Him."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 269.

The book of Revelation teaches us that the whole world will be involved in plagues before Jesus' second coming. Ellen White also teaches us that something like the plagues will happen before Jesus returns. "The time is close when there will be sorrow in the world that no human can help. The spirit of God is being withdrawn. Terrible events by sea and by land happen more often. We often hear of earthquakes and tornadoes, of destruction by fire and flood, with great loss of life and property!

Clearly *these events* are outbreaks of the uncontrolled¹⁴ forces of nature. We can do nothing about them. *But in them all, God has a purpose.* They are among His tools to wake up men and women to a sense of their danger."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 277, italics given.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Do you think there could have come a time when God would have finally stopped chasing Jonah? If so, when might that time have been? Think about Judas and Jonah. What is the big difference between these two men?
2. How should Jonah being human help us understand that all prophets are human, including Ellen White? Why is it important to remember that all prophets are human? Why is it important to remember that we are all human?

SUMMARY: Jonah tried to run away from God. But God followed him. This shows how much God cared for Jonah and how much He cares for all of us.

¹⁴uncontrolled—not controlled; out of control.