

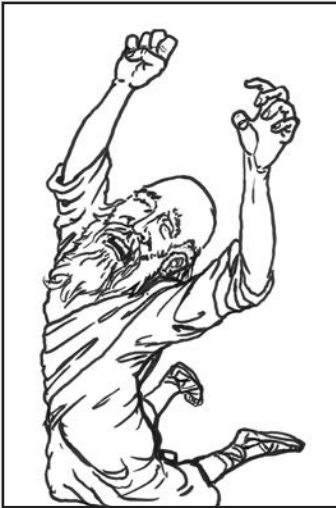
The Runaway Messenger



SABBATH—SEPTEMBER 11

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Jonah 1; Jonah 2:1-9; Jonah 3:1-10; Jonah 4:1-11; Jude 1:21; Jeremiah 25:5.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘If you can get upset over a plant, surely [of course] I can feel sorry for a big city like [the same as] Nineveh. There are many people and animals in that city. There are more than 120,000 people there who did not know they were doing wrong’ ” (Jonah 4:11, ERV).



“ ‘So now, LORD, just kill me. It is better for me to die than live.’ ”

JONAH is one of the most interesting stories in the Bible. God chooses Jonah to do special work. But Jonah runs away from God. God helps Jonah change his mind and obey Him. The work of Jonah is a big success. But what happens next? Jonah gets mad at God for saving the Ninevites!

Jonah is an example of someone who is not at rest. He has no peace when he cries, “ ‘So now, LORD, just kill me. It is better for me to die than to live’ ” (Jonah 4:3, ERV).

Jesus Himself talks about the story of Jonah: “ ‘On the judgment day [the day when God judges everyone on earth], you people who live now will also be compared with the people from Nineveh, and they will be witnesses who show how guilty you are. Why do I say this? Because when Jonah preached to those people, they changed their lives. And you are listening to someone greater [more excellent; better; more powerful] than Jonah, but you refuse to change!’ ” (Matthew 12:41, ERV). Jesus is greater than Jonah. If Jesus is not, He cannot be our Savior.

This week, we look at the story of Jonah. What can we learn about rest from this runaway messenger?

RUNNING AWAY (Jonah 1)

Jonah is a big success as a messenger. He warns the people of Nineveh to turn from their sins. They obey. But Jonah is not a willing messenger. At least not at first. When God tells Jonah to go to Nineveh, Jonah gets upset. Jonah shows he does not trust God. That is why Jonah has no rest or peace. He does not do what Jesus tells us to do when we have troubles: “Accept my teaching. Learn from me. I am gentle [kind] and humble [not proud] in spirit. And you will be able to get some rest. Yes, the teaching that I ask you to accept is easy. The load I give you to carry is light [does not weigh much]” (Matthew 11:29, 30, ERV). Jonah decides to find his own “rest.” How? He runs away, far away, from where God wants him to go.

Where does Jonah hope to find rest away from God? Does this plan work for Jonah? For the answers, read Jonah 1.

Jonah goes in a different direction. This direction is as different as can be from where God wants him to go. When other messengers from God were worried about what God asked them to do, they talked their worries over with God. (Read Exodus 4:13 for an example.) Jonah does not stop to pray about the problem. He runs.

This is not the first time God sends Jonah to give people a special message. 2 Kings 14:25 shows that Jonah does what the Lord asks him to do at another time. But not now. Why?

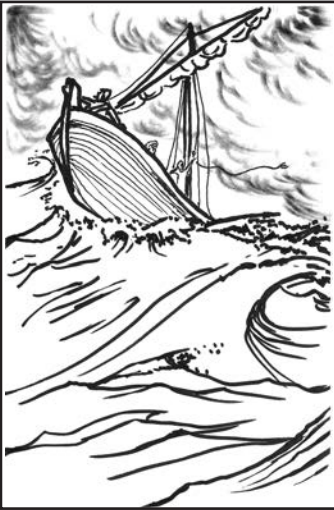
History shows us the answer. Assyrians controlled the Near East during the time Jonah worked in Israel. About 75 years earlier, King Sennacherib of Assyria attacked Judah. Assyria already beat Israel and Samaria 20 years earlier. Then King Hezekiah joined a group against Assyria.

Now Assyria wants revenge. The Bible (2 Kings 18 and Isaiah 36), history records, and picture carvings from the palace walls in Nineveh show us an awful story about the city of Lachish. Lachish was an important city in the kingdom of King Hezekiah. When Sennacherib beat Lachish, he killed hundreds of thousands of people by stabbing them with sticks. People who supported King Hezekiah had their skin pulled off their bodies while they were alive. Sennacherib made slaves of the rest of the people who lived.

Now God sends Jonah to warn the Assyrians in Nineveh about their awful end. Is it any wonder Jonah does not want to go?



Jonah runs away, far away, from where God wants him to go.

RESTING FOR THREE DAYS (Jonah 2:1–9)

**God sends a storm to
“wake” Jonah up.**

When we run away from God, we run into trouble. Jonah gets on a ship to get away from God. Then Jonah falls asleep. But his “rest” is very short. God sends a storm to “wake” Jonah up. Jonah tells the sailors to throw him into the sea. But God sends a big fish to save Jonah.

Jonah is forced to rest in the belly of the fish for three days. During this time, Jonah sees how much he needs God. Sometimes God must bring us to a place in life where we have nothing left to depend on but God. Then we see that Jesus is the One we really need.

Read the prayer of Jonah in the belly of the fish (read Jonah 2:1–9). What does he pray about?

For sure, Jonah is in deep trouble and danger. That is why he prays. His prayer is about the temple. He says, “‘But I continued looking to your holy Temple for help’ ” (Jonah 2:4, ERV). Why does Jonah say this?

The temple is the most important part of his prayer. The temple should be the most important part of our prayers, too. God can be found mostly in one place in the Old Testament: in the Holy Tent of Worship (read Exodus 15:17; Exodus 25:8). The Holy Tent is the center for communication and prayer with God.

But Jonah is not talking about the Old Testament Holy Tent. He also is not talking about the temple that King Solomon built. Jonah is talking about the temple in heaven. His hopes come from the temple in heaven. Why? Because the Savior and His mercy for sinners are there.

Jonah finally sees this important Bible truth. Jonah now understands grace. Grace is the gift from God of mercy, forgiveness, and power over sin. When the big fish spits Jonah out, Jonah understands about the love of God for him, a runaway messenger. Jonah learns that the only safe plan for someone is to obey God.

Now Jonah decides to go to Nineveh and do what God asks. For sure, Jonah needs a lot of faith on this trip. He goes to a city that is very, very evil. No doubt, the citizens of Nineveh will not like this stranger coming to their city to tell them just how bad they really are.

How does being in the belly of the big fish help Jonah look at his problems in a new way? What can this teach us?

A JOB WELL DONE (Jonah 3:1–10)

Just how big is Nineveh? Compare Nineveh to any city in Israel. Then you will see that Nineveh is a big city. The Bible says, “It was a very large city. A person had to walk for three days to travel through it” (Jonah 3:3, ERV).

Jonah preaches in Nineveh in Jonah 3:1–10. How do the people of this evil city answer? What can we learn from this story about sharing Bible truth with other people?

The Bible tells us: “Jonah went to the center of the city and began speaking to the people. He said, ‘After 40 days, Nineveh will be destroyed!’ ” (Jonah 3:4, ERV). His message is powerful. Jonah does not waste any words. Soon, Jonah sees that the people accept his message. They all believe his warning.

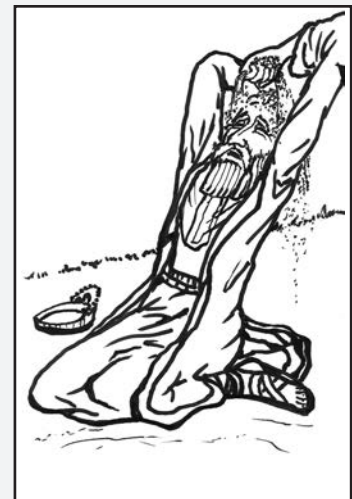
Soon the king of the city makes an announcement. Kings in the Near East made announcements in Bible times to show that they and their people had changed hearts. The king orders everyone to stop eating any food or drinking any water for a short time. The animals join them, too. The people show they are very sorry for their sins. The king steps down from his throne. He sits in the dirt. This act is an important word picture. When the king sits in the dirt, he shows his heart is empty of all pride.

Read Jonah 3:6–9. Compare these verses with Jeremiah 25:5; Ezekiel 14:6; and Revelation 2:5. What parts of the speech of the king show that he understands what being sorry for sin is all about?

The speech of the king shows that he fully understands Bible truth about being sorry for sin and turning away from it. While Jonah preaches, the Holy Spirit is hard at work in the hearts of the Ninevites.

The Ninevites do not know all the stories about the tender love of God and how He led Israel in the past. But the Ninevites answer God in a way that shows that they accept His message and trust Him in everything. They show that they depend on the mercy of God to save them and not in their good behavior. The people depend on God and His favor.

Why is turning from sin so important to our Christian experience? What does it mean to really turn from sin?



When the king sits in the dirt, he shows his heart is empty of all pride.

THE ANGRY SERVANT WHO CANNOT REST
(Jonah 4:1–11)

Read Jonah 4:1–11. As these verses show us, Jonah is far from perfect. What problem does Jonah have? What can we learn from his mistakes?

Jonah 4 starts with Jonah being angry at God because God made his work a big success! Jonah told the people of Nineveh that God will destroy their city after 40 days. But the people turn from their sins. God accepts their change of heart. He shows them mercy. Now Jonah is afraid that he will look the same as a fool and a liar.

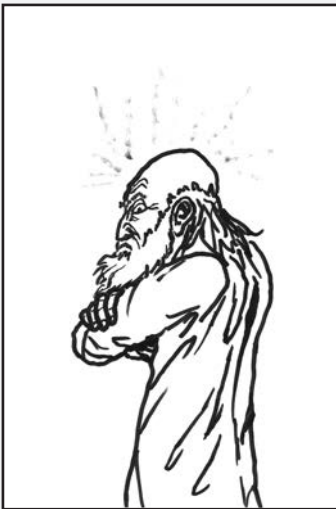
This story shows us that even loyal followers of God and His special messengers have some growing to do.

“Jonah learns that God will not destroy the city. Yes, the people are evil, but they accept the warning. They wear funeral clothes and put ashes on their heads to show God they are sorry for their sins. Jonah should be the first person to show joy because of the mercy of God. But Jonah does not. He worries that people will think he is a false messenger. Jonah cares more about his honor than about saving people. He fails to see the value of all the people saved in that awful city.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, page 271, adapted.

God is patient with Jonah. God continues to want to work with Jonah during the whole story. When Jonah runs away, God sends the storm and the fish to bring His runaway messenger back. Now, when Jonah is angry, God tries to help Jonah see that his feelings are wrong. God says, “‘Do you think it is right for you to be angry?’” (Jonah 4:4, ERV).

Read Luke 9:51–56. How does the story in these verses show us the same thing that happens in the book of Jonah?

“‘God loved the world so very, very much that he gave his only Son. Because he did that, everyone who believes in him will not lose his life, but will live for ever’” (John 3:16, WE). The God who says this to Nicodemus is the same God who says to Jonah: “‘If you can get upset over a plant, surely [of course] I can feel sorry for a big city like [the same as] Nineveh. There are many people and animals in that city. There are more than 120,000 people there who did not know they were doing wrong’” (Jonah 4:11, ERV). In the end, we should feel grateful that God is the Judge of hearts and minds, not us.



When Jonah is angry, God tries to help Jonah see his feelings are wrong.

“SAFE IN GOD’S LOVE” (Jude 1:21, ERV)

Nineveh is a city filled with danger. But in the story of Jonah, the Ninevites are not the real problem. Jonah is. Earlier in the story when Jonah runs away, God goes after Jonah. What causes God to do that? Love. God loves Jonah. God does not give up on the ones He loves. God knows Jonah needs the trip to Nineveh as much as the Ninevites need to hear Jonah. Now, let us look at the book of Jude to help us better understand this wonderful love that God has for us.

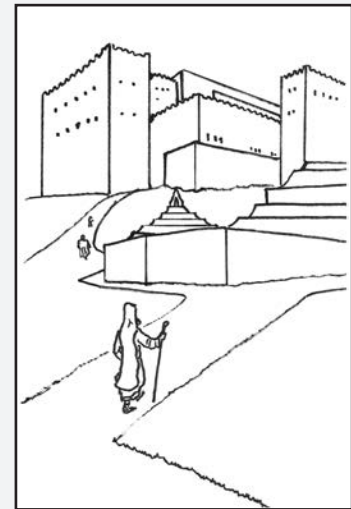
Read the book of Jude. How can you “keep yourselves safe in God’s love” (Jude 1:21, ERV)? What does that mean?

Jude tells everyone to “keep yourselves safe in God’s love” (Jude 1:21, ERV). One way we keep ourselves safe in the love of God is to help other people and show them how much we care about them. In the next verses, Jude tells us, “Help those [people] who have doubts. Rescue [save] those [people] who are living in danger of hell’s fire. There are others [persons] you should treat [be kind to] with mercy” (Jude 1:22, 23, ERV).

Read Jude 1:20–23. What are these verses in Jude saying? How do these verses help us understand better the story of Jonah? What do these verses also teach us?

God orders Jonah to go to Nineveh because Jonah needs to see the ugly feelings hidden inside his heart. We can guess that Jonah does not like the Ninevites very much. But Jonah has no idea how much he really hates them or what he will do to avoid them. Jonah is not ready to have a Ninevite as his next-door neighbor in heaven. Jonah does not know how to love as God loves. God also sends Jonah to Nineveh because God loves the Ninevites. God wants the Ninevites to be saved and to join His kingdom. God sends Jonah to Nineveh because He loves Jonah, too. God wants Jonah to grow and to become changed by the love of God. God wants Jonah to find rest that comes from obeying God and helping other people to rest in Him, too.

How much time do you spend working with God to save people? How does this work help us find real rest in Jesus?



God sends Jonah to Nineveh because God loves the Ninevites.



“God uses some hard times and strange miracles to help Jonah learn again to trust in Him and His power to save.”

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “God trusts Jonah with a very important job. God also can give Jonah wonderful success in this work. God wants to bless Jonah very much. But Jonah does not obey God at first. So, Jonah has many painful experiences. When Jonah is feeling low, the Lord does not leave him. God uses some hard times and strange miracles to help Jonah learn again to trust in Him and His power to save. This saving power has no limits.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, page 266, adapted.

“We can reach thousands of people in the easiest way. One example of people we can reach in a simple way is people who are very smart. Many people respect these experts for their gifts and wisdom. These same wise people are often refreshed by the simple words from someone who loves God deeply.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, page 232, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① How can a special messenger from God be upset when the people he warns accept the message he gives them? What do you think about the feelings of Jonah? How does the story about Jonah show us that God is very patient with His people, even when they behave in the wrong way?
- ② The story about Jonah suggests to us that God is not only interested in saving runaways and sinners. God also is interested in changing the lives of His followers. How can we get a “new heart” and a “new spirit,” even if we already know the Lord and Bible truth for this time? How is knowing Bible truth different from being changed by the truth?
- ③ Read the book of Jude again. What is the message of this book? Why is this message important to us as a church today?
- ④ How does the experience of working with Jesus to save other people help us grow spiritually?
- ⑤ Maybe Jonah thought he had many good reasons not to go to Nineveh. But God showed him how wrong he really was. What feeling do we have about other people that shows the same wrong feeling that Jonah had?

NO MORE HATE

Jimmy was only seven years old when he got lost in the jungle. He thought he was going to die. If he lived, Jimmy decided to join the fight against the leaders of his country. He blamed them for his bad experience.

When Jimmy ran away to hide in the jungle, he lost his father for two years. Then Jimmy went to Thailand. There, Jimmy found his dad in a camp for people who escaped from wars and suffering in their home countries. Jimmy told his father he wanted to be a soldier. But his father did not agree with this plan. His father told Jimmy to become a pastor.

Jimmy had a hard time giving up his anger and hate. But Jimmy saw the peace and joy that his father had when they went to the Seventh-day Adventist church inside the camp. Jimmy read about the war between Jesus and Satan in the Bible. Jimmy soon knew that his dad was right. So, Jimmy decided to forgive.

Later, Jimmy became a pastor. Then he came to the United States. Soon, Jimmy met many families that he knew from the camps in Thailand. These families wanted to go to church. But they did not know enough English to understand the preachers. So, many of these people felt hopeless. Jimmy wanted to visit them and encourage them to have faith. Jimmy also wanted to help them start small worship groups in their own language.

At the time, there were over 2,000 Adventists from Thailand in North America. After much prayer, Jimmy started three churches for these Thai Adventists. Jimmy also worked full-time to support his family. So, he did not have enough time or money to travel to all the Thai Adventists to help them.

“But God knew my heart and my needs,” Jimmy said. Jimmy worked as a pastor and was an expert for the Seventh-day Adventist church in North America. He gave the church advice about how best to help Adventists who escaped to America from war in their countries. Jimmy said, “God was leading the whole time. He already had a plan.”

A 13th Sabbath Offering in 2011 gave Jimmy money to help the foreign Adventists who came to America. Jimmy helped these Adventists start churches where they now worship in their own languages. 55 churches opened all over North America in the last ten years. All this work was possible because our church members gave and because Jimmy allowed God to replace his hate with love.

This quarter, your 13th Sabbath Offering will again help our church share the Good News with other Adventists who came to America to escape war and suffering. Thank you for giving.

INSIDE
Story
by TERRI SAELEE



When Jimmy ran away to hide in the jungle, he got separated from his father for two years.

