

The Story of Jonah

Or...the story of a man with messed up priorities

Title slide

The background setting

- α Assyria was Israel's great enemy; Israel was conquered by them in 722 B.C.E.
- α Ninevah was an important city of Assyria, and was a rising world power. It was located about 500 miles to the northeast of Israel
- α Some of the things that Ninevah was guilty of included:
 - α Plots against God
 - α Exploitation of the helpless
 - α Cruelty in war
 - α Idolatry
 - α Prostitution
 - α Witchcraft
- α God told Jonah to go to Ninevah and warn the people of judgment and tell them they could receive mercy and forgiveness if they repented

All the other prophetic books primarily contain speeches of the prophets
Jonah only has one verse of prophecy (3:4)

Jonah preceded Amos and ministered under Jeroboam II, a powerful king of Israel (793-753 B.C.E.)

Assyria was aggressive and destructive; when it conquered nations, it would split families apart and sent to different regions of the empire

Ten tribes of Israel were defeated by Assyria in 722 B.C.E., split apart and never heard from again

Ninevah was to become Assyria's capitol about 50 years after Jonah

Jonah doesn't say much about Nineveh's wickedness, but it is found in Nahum 1-3

Jonah, Chapter 1

- α God told Jonah to go to Ninevah and preach because of it's wickedness...What did Jonah do?? Run away and go to sea!!
- α What did God do?? Send a storm!!
- α The sailors became frightened, called on their gods and threw their cargo into the sea to lighten the load. Jonah was sleeping...
- α Jonah was awakened by the captain, and then they cast lots to see which one of them was responsible for making their god mad and causing the storm...guess what? The lot fell on Jonah! He could run, but he could not hide!!

Not only did Jonah run away from God, he ran away in the opposite direction to Tarshish; this is possibly Tartessus, a western seaport in Spain, on the outer edge of the known world at that time

Jonah ran from God, and God sent a storm. Does this mean that when we disobey God our lives become more difficult?

Jonah was sleeping while the storm was raging. Apparently his conscience wasn't bothering him, but we should not use guilt as a measure if we are doing the right thing.

We must compare our actions with what God wants us to do and his standards for living.

The sailors cast lots to find the guilty person, but God must have intervened to let Jonah know he couldn't run away.

Jonah, Chapter 1

- α The sailors then asked Jonah who he was, where he is from and what business he was in. When he told them, they became even more frightened since he was running from the Lord!
- α They tried to row back to shore, but the sea grew worse. Then they asked Jonah what they should do and **he told them** to throw him into the sea!
- α The sailors prayed to the Lord to spare them for taking Jonah's life and threw him overboard.
- α The sea calmed down! The sailors made a sacrifice to the Lord and made promises to serve him.
- α The Lord sent a big fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was inside the fish for three days and three nights.

Jonah knew that he had disobeyed and the storm was his fault, but he didn't say anything until the sailors cast lots and it fell on him.

Then Jonah willing to give his life for the sailors, even though he refused to do the same thing for the people of Ninevah. Why do you suppose this was? Was his hatred for the people of Assyria clouding his judgment and his priorities?

When the storm quieted down, the sailors began to worship God and did what others would not do; pray to God and vow to serve him.

What is the significance of being in the fish for three days and three nights?

Many people disregard Jonah being in the fish as impossible. Is it impossible or one of God's miracles?

Jonah, Chapter 2

- α This chapter is the prayer of Jonah while he was in the big fish
- α Was this a prayer of thanksgiving that he had not drowned?
- α Was Jonah trying to make a bargain with God?
- α Jonah was happy he was saved (v. 9) and made promises to God
- α God showed mercy and commanded the fish to cast Jonah onto dry land

The song “In the Belly of a Whale” by the Newsboys would be fun to play here

Jonah, Chapter 3

- α God told Jonah to go to Ninevah a second time and this time he obeyed
- α He was to preach about the impending doom that was going to happen to one of the most powerful cities in the world – not a very desirable assignment!
- α Jonah went to Ninevah and preached, and the people repented.
- α God had mercy and did not destroy them.

How many times does God have to tell us to do things before we listen?

Do we allow social pressures or fear of people stop us from preaching God's message?

Since the purpose of God's judgment is correction and not revenge, Jonah must have been a powerful messenger!

Jonah, Chapter 4

- α Was Jonah happy they repented? No, instead he was angry at God for showing his compassion to the people of Ninevah
- α God once again was merciful to Jonah and provided him shade...for which Jonah was very happy
- α But when the shade was taken away, Jonah became angry again, “angry enough to die”...
- α “You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight...people who cannot tell their right hand from their left...should I not be concerned about” them?

Jonah didn't understand that “his” God was also the God of the whole world. Was Jonah mad because now what he said would happen wouldn't happen, or was he mad because he hated the people of Ninevah so much? He was more concerned for himself than the people of Ninevah.

- α How are we like Jonah? Do we run away when he calls?
- α Do we care more for ourselves than spreading the word of God?
- α Do our actions and choices in our life display God's love and mercy or do we, like Jonah, want God to punish others?

Questions for thought and discussion