

JONAH AND THE BIG FISH

(Jonah 1:1 – 3:10)

Purpose: To teach that God is ready to forgive all who call upon Him in sincere repentance.

In Biblical times Nineveh was the capital of a nation called Assyria, and the city of Nineveh was great in many ways. It was large in size and in population.

And through the many years Nineveh had existed, the sins of her people had become very great indeed.

The king of Nineveh was a powerful man of war. His armies were conquering first one country and then another. All the time they were coming closer and closer to the borderland of Israel.

The people who lived in Israel were getting pretty uneasy about all of this. There had never been any friendly feelings between the Israelites and the Assyrians because there were great differences in the way they lived.

The people of Israel worshipped God, and their faith was the very center of all they thought and believed in.

The people of Nineveh were heathens. They worshipped images made out of stone.

Living in the land of Israel was a man by the name of Jonah.

Jonah was a prophet of God or, in other words, he delivered messages from God to the people.

One day Jonah became quite concerned about something God had told him. God had told Jonah to take a message to the people of Nineveh.

Jonah was to go and tell the people that because of their terrible sins their city was to be destroyed.

But Jonah didn't want to go. Nineveh was far away, and the Assyrians weren't very friendly. Why should they be warned? Why didn't God just go ahead and destroy the city?

So instead of doing what God told him to do Jonah boarded a boat that was sailing in the opposite direction of the city of Nineveh.

Jonah thought to himself, *"I'll get so far away from Israel that God will forget about me."*

"This way I won't have to hear any more about going to preach to those heathen people."

And after a while Jonah felt so sure that it was all over with he simply quit thinking about it. He went down inside the ship...

...and soon he was fast asleep, never realizing that God was planning to teach him a lesson – a lesson he would never forget.

While the prophet lay sleeping below the deck, God caused a storm to come up, the likes of which the sailors had never seen.

They fell to their knees and cried out for their lives to be spared.

But the wind blew all the harder.

The captain knew that no boat could last through a storm like this one, so he awakened Jonah and told him to call on his God to save him.

But Jonah's position was awkward, to say the least. How could Jonah call on God when he was trying to run away from Him?

In desperation, the men on the ship drew lots to see who could be responsible for all of this, and it just so happened that...

...Jonah was found to be the guilty one. And the sailors demanded to know who he was, and what he had done to bring all of this upon them.

Jonah could hide it no longer. He told them what he had done, and he begged them to throw him overboard before they were all killed. And because there was nothing else left to do...

...the sailors did just that. And right away...

...the storm was over. And the waves began to go down. As Jonah struggled to keep from sinking...

...a great fish appeared and actually swallowed this man who had tried to run away from God.

... *"and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights."* Jonah had plenty of time to think about what he had done and he prayed to God for forgiveness. (Jonah 1:17)

"And the Lord spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land." (Jonah 2:10)

"And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time, saying, 'Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.'" (Jonah 3:1,2)

"So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord."

And the Assyrians were greatly surprised when Jonah walked boldly into their city and cried out, *"Within 40 days Nineveh will be destroyed."*

On and on he went, all through the great city, telling the people of the coming destruction. *"Within 40 days Nineveh will be destroyed."*

And everywhere he went, the people listened. They believed Jonah and God used the words of the prophet to bring conviction to the hearts of the people.

And when the King heard about it, he too was aware of the sin in his life.

And the King was sorry for his sinful ways and he took off his royal garments...

...and dressed in sackcloth, and sat in ashes, and pleaded for mercy in the sight of God.

And all over the city, the people were following the example set by their king. They begged God to forgive them. And because God *is* a God of mercy He forgave them for their sins.

“The Lord is good. His mercy is everlasting.” In spite of the wickedness of man, in spite of man’s sinful heart, God is never willing for man to die in his sins. (Psalm 100:5)

“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” (1 John 1:9)

“But if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)