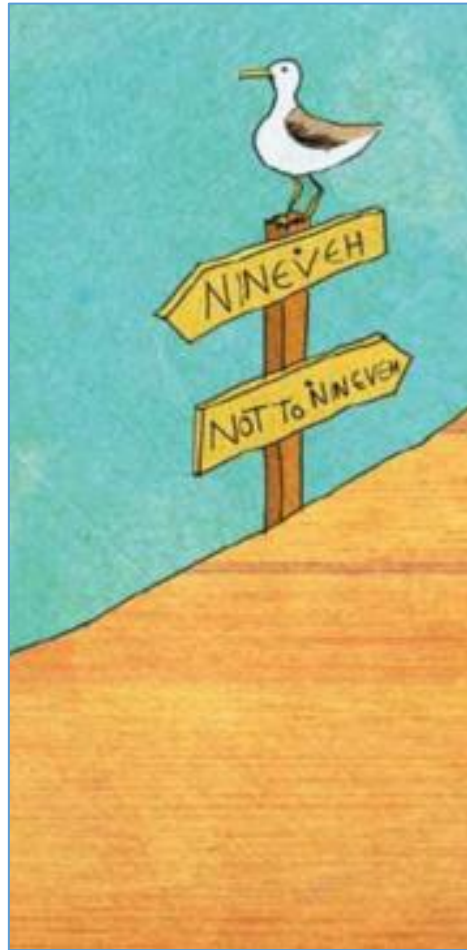


# JONAH: God or Not God



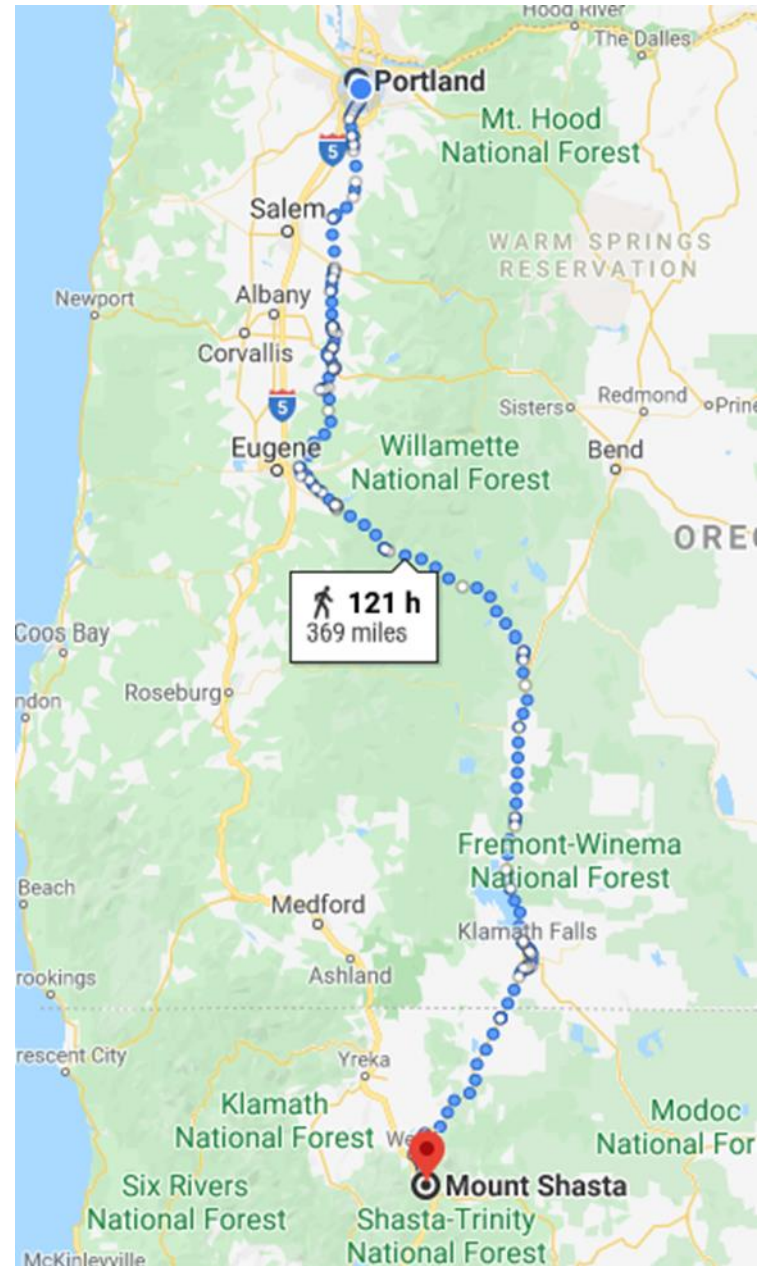
**Big picture:** God dealing with Nineveh, capital city of Assyria, world power. Brutal, violent enemy to Israel.

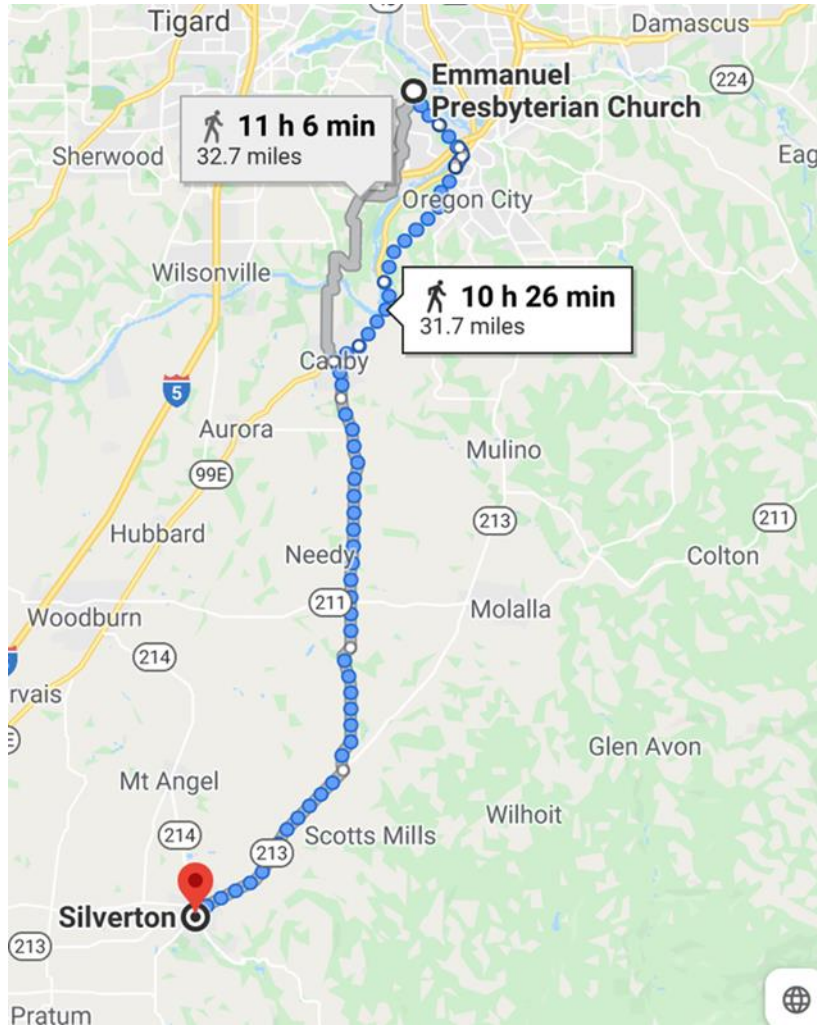
God intervenes to save them, and thereby save their enemies, most particularly Israel, 1 generation later.

God asked one man to go and introduce them to God.

Jonah has taken a long and winding road to Nineveh, where Mosul, Iraq now stands. After a failed cruise in the opposite direction, Jonah washed ashore at a point 375 miles away, at best. Long hike! Portland to Mt Shasta.

Every single day of that journey, Jonah chose again to go to Nineveh. Fearful, distracted, but faithful.





When Jonah concludes his hike through the wilderness, we are given a panoramic shot of the great city of Nineveh.

**Jonah 3:3 Nineveh was a big city, very big—it took three days to walk across it.**

How far could you walk in 3 days?

Me: About a mile

Asked some hikers: 10- 15 miles/day.

REI employee: 25 if you're a mountain goat/rock star.

10 miles a day = West Linn to Silverton

**Jonah 3.4 Jonah entered the city, went one day's walk and preached, "In forty days Nineveh will be smashed." (Message)**

(NRSV: And he cried out, 'Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!')

Drama King! This is a pretty dramatic message that takes some serious chops to pull off.



**Jonah 3:5-9** The people of Nineveh listened, and trusted God. They proclaimed a citywide fast and dressed in burlap to show their repentance. Everyone did it—rich and poor, famous and obscure, leaders and followers.

When the message reached the king of Nineveh, he got up off his throne, threw down his royal robes, dressed in burlap, and sat down in the dirt.

Then he issued a public proclamation throughout Nineveh, authorized by him and his leaders:

"Not one drop of water, not one bite of food for man, woman, or animal, including your herds and flocks! Dress them all, both people and animals, in burlap, and send up a cry for help to God.





Everyone must turn around, turn back from an evil life and the violent ways that stain their hands.

Who knows? Maybe God will turn around and change his mind about us, quit being angry with us and let us live!"



Picture this speech gone viral. The whole TriMet area -- along with our dogs, cats, chickens, llamas, whatever -- repentant, grieving.

All in response to a relatively mild nudge!  
Jonah is just one nerdy little prophet. He's  
not an invading army or a natural disaster.  
Just one guy, maybe a guide, maybe a pack  
camel.

Walks through town for a day, sets up his  
sound equipment, and delivers a  
straightforward message. 'Forty days more,  
and Nineveh shall be overthrown!'

Surprised that they listen! Capital city of the most powerful nation in the world! But they do. Very quickly Jonah's message becomes a trending topic, then a movement.

The king repents personally, then calls for a public demonstration of sincerity. A flash mob gathers around Jonah, all dressed in sackcloth. They even cover the animals just to make sure. Pretty soon, the whole city has fallen to their knees.

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We can quibble about how genuine their individual repentance was. We can even make fun of the drama of it all. Did some cynics mock the burlap covered chickens? Probably so. Did others hide indoors so they wdn't have to participate? Sure. Some left town, others were clueless and just went along to get along.

But the majority of the Ninevites looked full in the face of their brokenness and repented.

**Jonah 3:10** “God saw what they had done, that they had turned away from their evil lives. He did change his mind about them. What he said he would do to them he didn't do.”



This is one of the most endearing pictures of God in the Bible.



We often think that we are the ones who must compel an angry, distant God to notice us, when, in fact, God is waiting for us to make just the smallest step in his direction.

It doesn't even have to be the "right" step! The Ninevites didn't have it all finessed. They didn't know how to throw a proper Yom Kippur. No one taught them the Jewish prayers or showed them how to make sacrifices.

The animals in sackcloth image is hilarious - they're just guessing at what might please God here. And -- it does! Ridiculous as a flock of repenting goats might look, God is delighted. **They have chosen God, and that is enough.**



This brings the whole of the story full circle.

**Jonah got to choose:** Nineveh or Not Nineveh. God or not God. Eventually, he chose God, learning that the cost of disobedience is always higher than the cost of obedience.

**Then the Ninevites get to choose.** God or not God. Life or death. Is much the same thing. Been living with the high cost of not God: “evil life and violent ways”.

What a relief to hear there was another way! Finally, someone is going to clean up the neighborhood!

“God,” they say. “We choose God.”

God chooses first. God chooses Jonah.  
God chooses Nineveh.

Then they get to choose. God or Not God.

Jonah chooses. Nineveh chooses.

**For God so chooses every person that we in  
turn get to choose God.**