



JONAH, NINEVEH, & THE BIG FISH

JONAH 1-4

GOAL

▶ To help children understand the importance of obeying God.

CHARACTERS

▶ **Jonah:** This prophet ran away from God, was swallowed by a big fish, and traveled to Nineveh where he reluctantly preached to the people about repentance.

Sailors: They threw Jonah overboard.

Ninevites: Pagans who repented before God and turned to Him

MEMORY VERSE

▶ **Jonah 2:9:** Salvation belongs to the Lord.

OVERVIEW

▶ **Read the book of Jonah:** God called Jonah to preach to the foreign city of Nineveh, Israel's enemy and the scourge of the ancient world. Jonah flatly refused and ran the opposite direction. God sent a storm that threatened to sink the ship on which Jonah was sailing. When the sailors discovered that it was Jonah's fault that they were in peril, they asked him what they could do. Jonah told them to throw him overboard. As soon as they threw Jonah off of the boat, the sea became calm. A huge fish swallowed Jonah, and for three days and three nights, Jonah sat in the belly of the great fish. Jonah prayed, and God made the fish spit Jonah out onto dry land. Jonah eventually went to Nineveh to preach, where the people received his message, and the people there repented of their sin and turned to God.



SUGGESTIONS

▶ **Jonah was essentially a missionary, going to a distant land to tell them about his God. God is passionate that His salvation be proclaimed to the ends of the earth. He even uses unwilling messengers like Jonah. While Jonah's story teaches us the importance of humility and obedience, it also teaches us about God's grace.**

1. Humility: As an Israelite, Jonah thought of himself as superior to the people of Nineveh. They worshiped false gods and were an enemy to the people of Israel. Jonah thought that it was beneath him to go to such a place and preach to such unworthy people.

2. Obedience: God made Jonah a prophet and gave him all of his gifts and talents that made him successful at his job. So when God gave Jonah a mission, he should have gone. Only when he found himself sitting in the belly of a fish for three days and three nights did Jonah see the error of his ways. Jonah didn't particularly care for the mission God sent him on, but he saw that not going was disobedient.

3. Grace: Jonah had a hard time seeing the purpose of God's command for him to go to Nineveh. Then when he finally got there, he warned the people that God would bring disaster upon them for their evil ways. The people heard this message and took it to heart. They truly repented, and God spared them from punishment. Instead of being relieved and overjoyed, Jonah became angry with the Lord. He didn't understand why God wouldn't punish these people for the evil they had done. What Jonah failed to see was that, just as the Ninevites, Jonah deserved punishment for disobedience. God's grace through faith saves us all.

PRE-LESSON ACTIVITY

▶ **Jonah Hide-and-Seek**

Appoint one student to act as Jonah, and ask him or her to hide. When other children find Jonah, they must hide in the same place until everyone has found Jonah. Remind children that it is impossible to hide from God.



MEMORY
VERSE
MEANING

▶ **Jonah 2:9:** Salvation is a gift from our gracious and merciful God that is given to those who believe in and love Him. We cannot earn salvation.

POST-LESSON
ACTIVITY

▶ **In the Belly of a Fish | Supplies:** Printouts of a coloring page featuring a figure who can serve as Jonah, paper, crayons, markers, and glue sticks.

Give each student a piece of paper and a coloring page of Jonah. Instruct the students to draw a whale on the blank page and to color the picture of Jonah. Next, have the students cut a flap in the belly of their whale drawing. Have the students glue their picture of Jonah to the back of the whale drawing. When the flap is lifted, Jonah can be seen in the belly of the whale.

TAKE
HOME

▶ Jonah is more than a message of obedience, although that is central. It is also a way for us to understand that God desires to spread the fame of His name to all people. In spreading His name, we can tell people about His saving grace.

1. God wants everyone to hear about Him and have a chance to choose Him and the salvation He offers. It is not for us to decide who is worthy of this message and grace.
2. God has a plan. It may not sound like a good idea, but His thoughts are not our thoughts. He knows the full background of situations and the future our actions will bring. When He asks us to do something in His name, we should obey.
3. God is constant. The things we think people should be punished for are sometimes the same things for which we seek God's grace and mercy.



QUESTION & ANSWER

SLIDE 1



Q1a: Where did God tell Jonah to go preach?

A1: God told him to go to Nineveh.

Q1b: Would you rather visit Disneyland or a prison?

TN: It seems pretty likely that everyone would rather visit Disneyland than a prison. God asked Jonah to go to a place filled with evil people. He was afraid for his life. The important thing for us to remember is that if God calls us to go to a potentially scary place, He will protect us and help us to be successful.

SLIDE 2



Q2a: Where did Jonah go?

A2: He went to the port city of Joppa.

Q2b: Have you ever worked on a group project and someone didn't do their part?

TN: When this happens, we have to do our own part of the project as well as the work the other person was supposed to do. This is a really irritating situation! When we are given a responsibility, others are depending on us to follow through. God gave Jonah talents and abilities, and when He gave Jonah a task to do, He expected it to be done.



QUESTION & ANSWER

SLIDE 3



Q3a: Jonah bought a ticket on a ship going to what city?

A3: The ship was going to Tarshish.

Q3b: Is there anywhere in your house where you could hide and never be found?

TN: Probably not. It might take a while for someone to find us, but if we were known to be hiding in the house, they could look in every room, around all of the furniture, and behind every door. At some point, we would be found. God is with us always. Trying to hide from God is like playing hide-and-go-seek in a single room without furniture and the seeker doesn't have to cover his or her eyes. There's nowhere to go.

SLIDE 4



Q4a: What did the sailors do to help lighten the ship's load during the storm?

A4: The sailors started throwing cargo off of the ship.

Q4b: How hard would it be to swim wearing a life jacket filled with sand?

TN: That would be pretty hard! Life jackets are filled with a material that is meant to float, but sand is heavy and would cause us to sink. The sailors were desperate. The storm was causing the boat to take on water, which was causing them to sink. The only thing they could think to do was to throw cargo overboard.



QUESTION & ANSWER

SLIDE 5



Q5a: What was Jonah doing while the storm was raging?

A5: Jonah was sleeping below the deck of the ship.

Q5b: When are some good times to pray?

TN: Well, pretty much any time is a good time to pray, but we often think to pray when we are facing danger or trouble. God hears all of our prayers, and He will always help us.

SLIDE 6



Q6a: What did Jonah say had caused the storm?

A6: God sent the storm because of Jonah's disobedience.

Q6b: What might happen if you don't study for a test?

TN: We could get lucky and pass, but more than likely, we would fail. That's a pretty obvious consequence for not doing something we know we should. Jonah had hoped that God would find someone else to go to Nineveh, but when he saw the terrible storm, he knew that God sent it because of his disobedience.



QUESTION & ANSWER

SLIDE 7



Q7a: What did the sailors do to find out who was to blame for the storm?

A7: They cast lots.

Q7b: Do you think you could flip a coin 10 times and get heads every time?

TN: Statistically speaking, that's not very probable. Not a whole lot is known about casting lots. Flipping a coin might be the closest way to describing this activity that is mentioned several times in the Bible. So like heads and tails, traits of the lots were assigned to each person on the boat. Every time the lots were cast, they pointed toward Jonah.

SLIDE 8



Q8a: What happened after the sailors threw Jonah overboard?

A8: The storm stopped and the sea was peaceful.

Q8b: What happens when you throw a big rock into a pond?

TN: The rock causes a splash, and then the water ripples out from the spot where the rock hit the water. It might take quite a while for the water to become completely calm again. So when the sailors threw Jonah off of their boat and the storm stopped and the water became instantly calm, they recognized the power of Jonah's God. Once they witnessed that kind of power, they knew Jonah's God was the only true God.



QUESTION & ANSWER

SLIDE 9



Q9a: What swallowed Jonah?

A9: A big fish swallowed him.

Q9b: The chain on your bike is broken. Which do you choose as a way to get to school: a hot-air balloon or a horseback ride?

TN: While both options are effective methods of transportation, they are a bit unconventional. God has the power to cause a storm and then stop it, so he must have the power to make it so that a ship heading toward Nineveh would have been in the area to pick up Jonah after he was thrown overboard. Instead, God causes a huge fish to swallow Jonah and take him back to where he needed to be. While effective and a way to save Jonah from drowning, this has to be the strangest mode of transportation ever.

SLIDE 10



Q10a: How long was Jonah in the belly of the fish?

A10: Jonah was in the fish's belly for three days.

Q10b: Do you enjoy camping?

TN: Camping and being out in nature without the comforts of home is one of those activities that people either love or hate. In a way, Jonah was camping out in the belly of a fish. There were no comforts of home and nothing to distract him from his thoughts and feelings. He sat there thinking about what he had done, which led him to pray. Camping may not be something everyone enjoys, it is a good idea to find a quiet place where we can spend some quiet time reflecting on our actions and praying without distraction.



QUESTION & ANSWER

SLIDE 11



Q11a: Once on the beach, what did Jonah know he had to do?

A11: He knew he had to obey God and go to Nineveh.

Q11b: Would seeing someone's reaction to drinking hot sauce be enough for you to know that it's not good, or would you have to experience it for yourself?

TN: Seeing someone's reaction is usually enough for us to understand how things work, taste, or feel. Observing the outcome of certain actions rather than being the one experiencing the outcome is the difference between learning things the easy way versus the hard way. No doubt, Jonah had seen people disobey God and the consequences for it, but he disobeyed anyway. Once on the beach, he realized what he needed to do. No matter how much he didn't want to go, Jonah knew he had to go to Nineveh.

SLIDE 12



Q12a: What was the message Jonah brought to the Ninevites?

A12: He gave them God's message: Repent or die.

Q12b: Have you ever helped someone even though your heart wasn't really in it?

TN: It's safe to say that most of us have done this at some point. Even though Jonah didn't particularly care for the Ninevites or their salvation, he went to give them God's message. So even if we don't particularly want to feed the homeless with a church group or help someone move into a new house, when we leave, some homeless people were fed and a person is relieved of some heavy lifting. When we help, we bless. When we help and have a good attitude, we are blessed, too.



QUESTION & ANSWER

SLIDE 13



Q13a: What did God do after the Ninevites repented and asked for mercy?

A13: God forgave the Ninevites.

Q13b: You see someone spit out a bite of a cookie. The person then offers you one of these cookies. Do you try it?

TN: People don't usually spit out tasty treats, so we'd probably say no thank you. This person clearly didn't like it, so his or her recommendation isn't very sincere. This is much like Jonah coming to Nineveh with a serious attitude problem. Even though it was probably pretty obvious that this person didn't much care about them, the Lord's message and love shone through. The people of Nineveh took God's message to heart and did everything they could to change their ways, hoping for mercy.

SLIDE 14



Q14a: Where did Jonah go after he saw that God wasn't going to punish Nineveh?

A14: Jonah left the city and sat on a hill that overlooked Nineveh.

Q14b: Would you be angry if you went on a game show and won a lot of money?

TN: Anger probably isn't how most people would react to winning a game show. Anger isn't a natural response to success, but that is how Jonah felt after the message he delivered for God caused the Ninevites to repent. He wanted God to punish the people for their wickedness. He completely missed the point. This was a real reason to celebrate!



QUESTION & ANSWER

SLIDE 15



Q15a: What destroyed the plant that had shaded Jonah.

A15: A worm destroyed the plant.

Q15b: Your sibling eats a bunch of junk food before dinner and is forgiven. You do the same thing and get grounded. Is that fair?

TN: Let the students answer. The people of Nineveh were disobedient, and Jonah thought they should be punished for their wickedness. Jonah had just experienced God's mercy and grace for being disobedient. While Jonah's disobedience may not have been quite as extensively wicked as that of the Ninevites, it was still disobedience. Jonah was thankful for God's mercy when it was bestowed upon him, but he was angry with God for being merciful to the Ninevites. God is constant. He doesn't change or bend the rules. No matter what, when we repent and ask for forgiveness, we are met with God's mercy.

SLIDE 16



Q16a: What did God want to teach Jonah?

A16: God wanted to teach Jonah that when we repent, God forgives us.

Q16b: Would you want to be on a soccer team with someone who didn't like soccer or care whether or not the team wins?

TN: No, we generally want to be on teams with people who want to be there and who will work just as hard as we do to win. God knew Jonah's attitude toward the people of Nineveh, so why did He choose him for this mission? As much as this mission was to show the people of Nineveh that they were acting wickedly, it also had a lesson to teach Jonah about his attitude and about God's love and mercy.



**MEMORY
VERSE**

▷ **Jonah 2:9:** "Salvation belongs to the Lord!"

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BIG IDEA

▷ God is merciful to save those who love and obey Him.

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**CLOSING
PRAYER**

▷ Dear God, thank You for teaching Jonah a lesson. Thank You that we can learn the lesson of obedience, too. Help us all to obey You. We ask these things in Jesus' name, Amen.



LESSON TRANSCRIPT

SLIDE 1



One day, God told Jonah, a prophet and messenger of God, to go on a special journey to the great city of Nineveh. God wanted Jonah to go tell the people to stop sinning and obey God. This big task made Jonah afraid. The people of Nineveh were the scariest people in the entire world.

SLIDE 2



Jonah was so afraid that he made a foolish decision. Instead of obeying God, he ran away to the port city of Joppa, which was in the opposite direction of Nineveh. Jonah hoped that God would forget and ask someone else to go.

SLIDE 3



When Jonah arrived at the port city of Joppa, he found a ship that was going to sail to the city of Tarshish. Jonah thought this was a great idea, so he paid for his ticket, boarded the ship, and settled in for the long ride. Hopefully, he would be rid of God's mission, rid of Nineveh, and God would use someone else to bring His message.

SLIDE 4



How foolish Jonah was to think he could run away from God. While on the ship, a big storm broke loose. Everyone on board thought they were going to die. In an effort to lighten the load, the passengers started throwing cargo overboard, but nothing helped.



LESSON TRANSCRIPT

SLIDE 5



The ship was tossed in the ocean, and the waves were getting bigger and bigger. All the sailors started praying to their gods. Finally, the captain came to Jonah and found him fast asleep below the deck of the ship. Maybe Jonah had a God that knew how to quiet the storm. Maybe Jonah could pray to his God and ask for help.

SLIDE 6



Angrily, the captain shook Jonah awake. "What's going on, you lazy sleeper?! Don't you care that the ship is about to sink? Hurry and get up here! Ask your god to make this storm stop!" Jonah was in no praying mood; he knew that because of his disobedience, God had sent the storm.

SLIDE 7



Up on the deck, the sailors decided to cast lots to see who was to blame for this storm. In the end, the lots all fell to Jonah. Jonah then told the sailors that he was running away from God. This made them even more afraid. "Just throw me into the sea!" Jonah told them. "If you do, the sea will become calm." The sailors did not want to throw him overboard. They tried to save the ship, but nothing worked.



LESSON TRANSCRIPT

SLIDE 8



In the end, they did throw Jonah overboard. As soon as Jonah fell into the sea, the storm stopped, and everything was peaceful. The sailors knew that Jonah's God was the true God, and they started worshipping Him.



SLIDE 9



As Jonah sank deeper into the dark water, a big fish appeared and swallowed him. Jonah was so afraid and thought he was going to die; but God had other plans. This was not the end of Jonah.

SLIDE 10



Jonah found himself in the dark, squishy, stinky belly of this big fish. He thought he would suffocate in here. Jonah had time to think, pray, and get things right with God. He prayed, and he knew that God would save him. For three days and three nights, Jonah stayed in fish's belly.

SLIDE 11



After three days, the fish was done with Jonah. The fish spat Jonah out onto the beach, and then swam away. There he was, stinky, alone, and washed up on a faraway beach. But Jonah knew this time that he had to obey God. He had to go to Nineveh and tell them God's message.



LESSON TRANSCRIPT

SLIDE 12



This time he went, but not with a good attitude. He was really grumpy and still a little scared. Even so, he told the people of Nineveh about God's message. "Repent!" he said. "Repent, or you'll all die!" Jonah was hoping that they would not repent, and that they would all die. He still did not like these Ninevites.

SLIDE 13



To Jonah's surprise, the people of Nineveh listened to God's message and became very sad over their wicked sin. For days, they cried and prayed, asking God to have mercy on them. God listened to their prayers and forgave them.

SLIDE 14



When Jonah saw that God was not going to punish the Ninevites, he became angry and he complained to God. "You send me all this way and then you don't even punish these wicked people." Jonah left the city and went out and sat on a hill that overlooked Nineveh. Jonah still hoped to see God destroy it. As he waited, God caused a plant to grow, and it gave Jonah a bit of shade.

SLIDE 15



The next day, God caused a worm to destroy the plant shading Jonah. Without the plant, Jonah was unprotected from the sun, which made him even more mad and grumpy. Jonah lost his temper and said to God, "It is better for me to die than to live!" Then God spoke to Jonah and said, "Is it right for you to be angry for the plant? You mourn for a plant that you did nothing to make grow because it provided you with a bit of comfort. Should I not pity an entire city of people who don't know right from wrong?"



LESSON TRANSCRIPT

SLIDE 16



Then Jonah knew the lesson God wanted him to learn. He fell on his knees and started worshiping God. As he did this, he realized that God was a God of mercy and love. God wanted to teach Jonah that when people stopped sinning and obeyed Him, He would forgive, protect, and bless them.