

Jonah—No Ordinary Fish Tale!

Lessons for Children on God's Mercy & Salvation



Overview

Ch. 1 – Jonah Disobeys God – God sends a Storm

Life Application: God may send storms into our lives to bring us back to him. *The salvation of the righteous comes from the LORD; he is their stronghold in time of trouble. PS 37:39 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. RO 8:28*

Ch. 2 - Jonah Repents in the Fish – God delivers him

Life Application: God provided protection for Jonah while “in the fish.” When we’re “in Christ” we too are protected from God’s judgment. God forgives those you are repentant *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. RO 8:1-2. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 1 JN 1:9*

Ch. 3 – Jonah Obeys God – Preaches to the Ninevites

Life Application: *God does not show favoritism, but accepts men “people” from every nation who fear him and do what is right. AC 10:34-35. It is God’s Word, through the Holy Spirit, that changes hearts and minds. ...faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ. RO 10:17 Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. MK 16:15*

Ch. 4 – Jonah is angry with God – God disciplines him

Life Application: God’s ways are not our ways. God disciplines those he loves. *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” IS 55:8 Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons....God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. HE 12:7-11*

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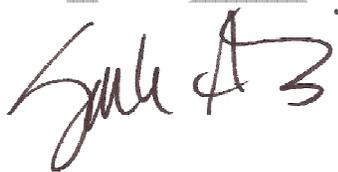
Teacher Introduction

I was inspired to study and write about Jonah when one of my students said, "I want to learn more about Jonah; not so much that he was in a fish, but what was it that he said that made the people of Nineveh want to repent?" (This was from a fourth grader!) What I discovered is that many theologians haven't arrived at a consensus on this! However, I think I have answered my student's question for myself, and I hope this series will answer it for you and the children you teach as well!

In a word association game, the likely response for Jonah would be "whale or "fish." It *is* miraculous that Jonah was swallowed by a great fish and lived to tell about it. However, the story of Jonah is really not a fish tale, but is about a reluctant prophet and our merciful God who doesn't give up on his children or his plan for their lives. Jonah acknowledged God as the God of heaven and earth, but was unwilling to submit to his authority. Is this not the same sin as Adam and Eve? Is it not the same sin that we are guilty of committing? The book of Jonah is only four chapters long, yet in it, there is much to learn about our lives and relationship to God. Jonah is full of spiritual truths for today, yet it only takes a few minutes to read the entire book.

Each lesson is accompanied with enrichment activities, crafts, games, memory work, life applications, and song-time suggestions, (see song titles in the Table of Contents). If you use both the craft and game for each session, it will take four*, two-hour sessions to complete this series. However, if you split each lesson into two sessions (recommended), whereby you present the lesson, memory verse, craft and songs in the first session and the game with lesson review, memory recitation, and songs in the next session, it will take eight*, one-hour sessions to complete the series. In addition, many of the lessons have more than one activity, craft, or game, which means you can extend the series by many more sessions. At the back of the book, you will find the patterns and templates to accompany the craft and game ideas.

God bless you in your ministry to children!



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Chapter 1: Jonah Runs Away From God

Song Time

Choose from one of our Song Time Suggestions listed in the Teacher's Introduction or songs of your own choosing.

Focus: God Knows Us

Is there something you're afraid to do? Have you ever been asked to do something that you really didn't want to do? Did you do it or run the other way? (You might share a personal story and receive answers.)

This semester we are going to learn about the prophet, Jonah. A prophet says what God tells him to say. God wanted Jonah to tell the people of Nineveh to repent. God wanted them to turn from their sins and obey him, or God would destroy them. But Jonah didn't want to go. In today's lesson, we'll find out what happened.

(Read chapter one of Jonah from a child-friendly Bible. The story of Jonah, particularly chapter one, is dramatic and illustrative—read it with passion. Alternatively, bring the story to life by using one or more of the following techniques.)



Enrichment Ideas

1) Draw it: As you read, children draw the story on banner paper. (Another option is to download pictures of Jonah from the internet and show them as you read. E.g. Jonah in the storm, in the fish, preaching in Nineveh, and sitting under the vine.)

2) Live the Story: A Dangerous Storm

Set up chairs in rows to become the ship's benches. Place cargo (buckets and boxes or make-believe items) in the "ship." You'll need a large fan, spray bottle of saltwater and two metal lids. Alternately or in addition to, download an MP3 file of an ocean thunderstorm from our affiliate bookstore @ SundaySchoolNetwork.com.

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As you read the following script, children act out the scenes according to the italicized instruction. Choose one child to be Jonah, one the captain and the rest are the sailors. Have an assistant teacher help with the lighting and sound effects.

“The Lord told Jonah to go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against their wickedness.

Start walking, Jonah.

But Jonah didn't want to go to Ninevah—he hated those people; they were enemies of Israel. So he ran away from the LORD and headed for the city of Joppa.

Run to Joppa!

When he got to Joppa, he found a ship ready to sail to Tarshish.

Jonah climbed in the boat. By now he was very tired, so he went down below deck and fell asleep.

Get in the boat, Jonah, and go to sleep.

Then the LORD sent a great wind over the sea.

(Assistant turns on the fan, points it at the kids.)

The waves began to swell higher and higher, tossing them back and forth, and back and forth...

Rock back and forth, and up and down.

...and a violent storm blew in so that it felt like the ship was going to break apart!

(Assistant turns on “Storm” sound effects and sprays saltwater into the fan.)

The wind tossed the boat back and forth and up and down; it grew more and

The rest of this script is available with book purchase.

3) Skit: An Unwilling Prophet

Copy the following skit for your actors. Have them highlight their parts, and then read it one time before they act it out. You might provide costumes or wide strips of cloth, towels or smocks to drape over shoulders and heads and tie off with cloth belts. Videotaping the skit is a fun way to involve your students; watching it the following week is a great way to review your lesson.

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Cast: Narrator, Jonah, Port Operator, Captain, Sailors

Narrator: The Lord told Jonah to go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against their wickedness.

Jonah: (toward heaven) You want me to go to Nineveh and tell them to stop sinning? Why would you want me to do that? They're not our kind of people! They are evil and worship false gods. I can't stand those people; they're enemies of Israel!

Narrator: So Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed in the opposite direction. He went to the city of Joppa, where he found a ship ready to sail to Tarshish.

Jonah: (to Port Operator) I need a one-way ticket to Tarshish, please.

Port Operator: Here you go. Hope you have a smooooth trip!

Jonah: Good, now I can get away from God. I think I'll take a nap down below.

Narrator: Then the LORD sent a great wind over the sea, and a violent storm blew in so that it felt like the ship was going to break apart.

Sailor 1: We're going to drown!

Captain: Grab the buckets! Hurry, get the water out of the boat!

Sailor 2: Everyone, pray to your gods! We need their help!

Sailor 3: Quick, toss out those heavy boxes, they're weighing us down!

Captain: Jonah, wake up! How can you sleep? Why aren't you calling on your god? Maybe he'll help us!

Sailor 1: Let's cast lots to find out who's to blame for this disaster.

Sailor 2: (Throws down dice—real or fake)

Sailor 3: It landed on you, Jonah! You're the one to blame!

Captain: Where do you come from? Who are your people?

Jonah: I am a Hebrew, an Israelite who worships the LORD, the God of heaven—he made the sea and the land.

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Discussion

- 1) Why do you suppose God wanted Jonah to preach to the people of Nineveh? (He is merciful and wanted to give them a chance to repent—to turn from their sins and follow him.)
- 2) What was Jonah's sin? (Disobedience)
- 3) Why didn't Jonah want to obey God? (The Ninevites were enemies of the Israelite people. He wanted God to punish them.)
- 4) What lessons can we learn from this story? (God is always watching us. He knows us and doesn't give up on us. God loves and offers his mercy to all people. We are to show kindness even to our enemies. Thousands of years later, Jesus taught that we are to love our enemies and pray for them. Mt. 5:44.)
- 5) When you think about the Captain, sailors, and Jonah, which ones acted more like God's children and why? (The Captain and sailors were reluctant to throw Jonah in the sea, yet Jonah, a child of God, didn't care about the people of Nineveh. God's children should be known for their loving actions. Jesus said that people would know we are his followers by our love-actions. Jn. 13:35, Gal. 5:14-23)
- 6) How are God's children today like prophets? (We are to tell others about God and his Word, which means we also must know what God's Word says.)
- 7) What does it mean to worship? (To show devotion, loyalty, and love to God.)
- 8) Is it possible for God's children to worship anything or anyone other than God? How? (If we put anything or anyone ahead of our friendship with God, by devoting more of our time and talent to that thing or person, rather than to God, that is idolatry.)

Memory Verse

"Blessed is the man who always fears the LORD, but he who hardens his heart falls into trouble." Proverbs 28:14

Discuss the verse and explain it: Blessed or happy is the person who fears (who reveres or respects) the Lord, but those who harden their heart (who refuse to submit to God's authority) will be in big trouble.

Pray (Read Psalm 139:7-12, 23-24, a beautiful Psalm that declares God's omnipresence)

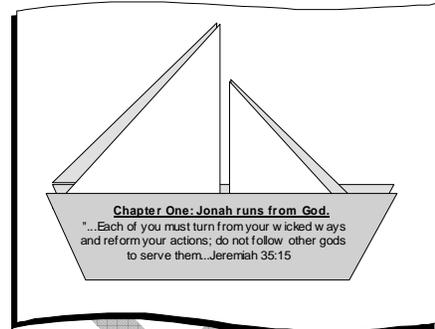
Life Application: God may send storms in our lives to bring us back to him. *The salvation of the righteous comes from the LORD; he is their stronghold in time of trouble. PS 37:39 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. RO 8:28*

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Craft: Origami Sailboat

See directions in the patterns section at the back of the book. **Available with book purchase.**



Yummy Treat: Banana "Boat"

Available with book purchase.



Lesson Review

For use when dividing the lesson into two sessions.

Song Time

Use another one of the story telling techniques from Chapter One or if you recorded last session's skit, watch it now and then review the questions.

Game: Rock the Boat

Available with book purchase.

Review and Score Memory Verse

(As children memorize their verses, score their progress by marking the matching lesson number with a sticker or check mark on their *Memory Verse Tracker Name Tags*.)

Available with book purchase.

Pray