

Jonah, Prophet to Nineveh

BIBLE PASSAGE: Jonah 1–4

MAIN POINT: God showed mercy to the Ninevites.

KEY PASSAGE: Joel 2:13

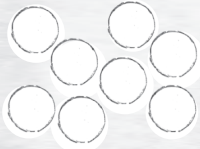
BIG PICTURE QUESTION: What is God like? God is merciful and loving.

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SMALL GROUP OPENING

(15–20 MINUTES)

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LARGE GROUP BIBLE STUDY

(10–15 MINUTES)

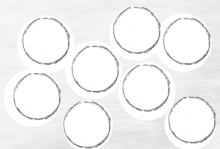
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SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES

(20–25 MINUTES)

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Leader BIBLE STUDY

The Book of Jonah is not primarily about Jonah and a big fish. While those elements are important, Jonah's account centers around the compassion of God, not only for the people of Israel, but for people throughout the earth—even Israel's worst enemies!

God spoke to Jonah: “Get up! Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because their wickedness has confronted Me” (Jonah 1:2). God is the judge of all the earth (Gen. 18:25) and He is sovereign over all the nations. Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, and the rulers of Nineveh were notoriously evil and cruel. No wonder Jonah ran the other way!

No one can flee from God's presence. (Ps. 139:9-10)
Through a storm and some time in the belly of a fish, God got Jonah's attention. Jonah went to Nineveh. For three days, Jonah walked around the city. His message to the Ninevites was brief: "In 40 days Nineveh will be demolished!"

The people of Nineveh immediately repented, and God withheld His judgment. He passed over their sins and did not demolish the city. How did Jonah react? "Jonah was greatly displeased and became furious" (Jonah 4:1).

God rebuked Jonah and prompted him to examine his heart. He left Jonah—and the reader—with a question to consider: "Should I not care about the great city of Nineveh?" (Jonah 4:11).

Jesus is greater than Jonah. (Matt. 12:41) Jesus came calling all sinners, Jews and Gentiles, to repentance. He didn't only bring a message, He truly loved us. He submitted to God's will with joy and laid down His own life for our sins. God shows His mercy in the gospel, forgiving those who trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior. God sends us out, like Jonah, to share the good news of salvation.



Additional resources for each session are available at gospelproject.com. For free training and session-by-session help, visit www.ministrygrid.com/web/thegospelproject.

The BIBLE STORY

Jonah, Prophet to Nineveh

Jonah 1–4

Jonah was a prophet. One day, **God told Jonah, “Go to Nineveh. The people have been doing very bad things. Tell them to stop.”**

Jonah was afraid! The people in Nineveh did not love God, and they were very mean! So **Jonah** ran the other way. He **got on a boat to go far away.**

God sent a storm, and the sailors on the boat were scared! They cried and asked their false gods for help. The sailors cast lots, like flipping coins or tossing dice, to figure out who to blame for all this trouble. The lot fell on Jonah. **The sailors asked Jonah, “Who are you? What are you doing here? Where did you come from?”**

Jonah said, “I am one of God’s people. I worship the one true God who made everything.”

The sailors shouted, “Tell us what to do!”

Jonah said, “Throw me into the sea!” So the sailors picked up Jonah and **threw him over the side of the boat.**

God sent a big fish to swallow Jonah. Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights. Jonah prayed to God. He thanked God for sending the fish to save him. **Then the fish vomited Jonah onto dry land.**

God said, “Jonah, go to Nineveh. Tell the people My message.” This time, **Jonah went to Nineveh.** He walked around the city and shouted, **“In 40 days, God will destroy Nineveh!”**

The people in Nineveh stopped doing bad things. They showed God that they were sorry, **so God decided not to destroy Nineveh.**

“I knew You would do this!” Jonah said to God. **“You are a gracious God. You do not give people what they deserve. You are slow to get angry, and You love people. I am so mad!”**

“Is it right for you to be mad?” God asked Jonah.

Jonah left Nineveh and made a shelter outside the city. God taught Jonah a lesson.

God made a plant to shade Jonah from the sun. Jonah was happy. Then God sent a worm. The worm ate the plant, and the plant died. Then God sent wind. Jonah was so hot, he almost fainted. He was not happy.

God asked, “Are you mad that the plant died?”

“Yes,” said Jonah.

God said, “You cared about the plant, but you did not take care of it or make it grow. **The city of Nineveh has many people. They need help. I made them, and I care about them.** Aren’t people more important than a plant?”

Christ Connection: God told Jonah to go to his enemies and tell them to stop sinning. Jonah did not want to go. Later, God sent His own Son, Jesus, to tell His enemies to stop sinning. Unlike Jonah, Jesus wanted to obey God. He died on the cross to save us from sin.



**WANT TO
DISCOVER
GOD’S WORD?
GET
MORE!**

Invite preschoolers to check out this week’s devotionals to discover that Jonah thought he could run away from God’s plan. We cannot hide from God (Heb. 4:12), who showed mercy to Jonah and the Ninevites. Order in bulk, subscribe quarterly, or purchase individually. For more information, check out www.lifeway.com/devotionals.

Small Group OPENING

SESSION TITLE: Jonah, Prophet to Nineveh

BIBLE PASSAGE: Jonah 1–4

MAIN POINT: God showed mercy to the Ninevites.

KEY PASSAGE: Joel 2:13

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: What is God like? God is merciful and loving.

Welcome time

- “The Love of God” song
- offering basket
- Allergy Alert download
- favorite toys

Play the unit theme song in the background as you greet preschoolers and follow your church’s security procedures. Set an offering basket near the door to collect at an appropriate time. Post an allergy alert, if necessary. Set out a few favorite toys, such as puzzles and blocks.

Activity page

- “Fishy, Fishy” activity page, 1 per child
- pencils or crayons

Lead preschoolers to color the biggest fish in the sea green. Color the smallest fish purple. Color the striped fish orange. Color the polka dotted fish red. Color all the other fish any color they want.

SAY • How many fish are there in the sea? In today’s Bible story, God sent a fish to swallow His prophet Jonah. Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights. While Jonah was inside the fish, he prayed. Let’s find out what happened.

Play out riding in a boat

Set up a “boat” by arranging chairs, one for each child, in short rows. Invite the children to sit in the chairs and play out what it would be like to be in a boat during the



following conditions:

- peaceful waters (sit still)
- rough seas (flail limbs about)
- choppy waves (sit up tall and slump down repeatedly)
- pouring rains (cover heads, hide under chairs)
- thunder and lightning (cover ears)
- chilly winds (shiver, teeth chatter, rub arms)

SAY • Have you ever been in a boat? What was the weather like? In today's Bible story, God sent a storm while His prophet Jonah was in a boat. God wanted to get Jonah's attention, and He did.

Play an opposite game

Explain to preschoolers that you will call out an action. Rather than completing an action, preschoolers must do its opposite. Model the opposite action for younger preschoolers. Examples of actions: open/close (with fists or mouths), up/down (with arms or whole bodies), high/low (with arms or bodies), right/left (point or run in the proper direction) near/far (walk toward you or walk away from you), and moving/still.

SAY • Today's Bible story is about God's prophet Jonah. God told Jonah to go to Nineveh to talk to the people there, but Jonah did the opposite. Let's find out what happened.

Transition to Bible study

To gain the attention of all the preschoolers to move them to Bible study, show the countdown video, flip off the lights, or clap a simple rhythm for the children to copy. Invite preschoolers to make fish faces as they move to Bible study.



• countdown video
(optional)

Large Group LEADER

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Introduce the Bible story

- toy fish

Option: Bring a live fish for preschoolers to observe.

Show the toy fish and invite preschoolers to share what they know about the prophet Jonah.

SAY • What most people remember about Jonah is that he was swallowed by a big fish, but that isn't the most important part of the story. What I want us to remember today is that God does not give people what they deserve. God shows mercy.

Watch or tell the Bible story

- bookmark
- Bible
- "Jonah, Prophet to Nineveh" video
- Bible Story Picture Poster

Place a bookmark at Jonah in your Bible. Invite a preschooler to open it. Reverently display the open Bible.

SAY • The Bible has interesting stories, but that isn't what makes it the most special book of all. The Bible is God's Word. No other book has God's true words.

Show the Bible story video "Jonah, Prophet to Nineveh" or tell the Bible story in your own words using the script provided. Use the bolded version for younger preschoolers.

Talk about the Bible story

- Main Point Poster
- Giant Timeline or Big Story Circle

SAY • **God showed mercy to the Ninevites.** The people of Nineveh did not deserve God's mercy, but God

created the Ninevites, and He cared about them.

God decided not to destroy them when they showed they were sorry for their sin.

Point to the Bible story picture on the giant timeline or big story circle as you ask the following review questions:

1. What did Jonah do instead of going to Nineveh? (*got on a boat to go far away*)
2. What happened when Jonah was on the boat? (*God sent a storm.*)
3. What happened to Jonah after the sailors threw him overboard? (*God sent a big fish to swallow him.*)
4. Did God destroy Nineveh? (*No, God showed mercy to the Ninevites.*)
5. How did Jonah feel about God deciding not to destroy Nineveh? (*mad*)

Learn the big picture question

SAY • Our big picture question is, *What is God like? God is merciful and loving.* The Ninevites deserved to be punished for their sin, but God showed them mercy and love. We deserve to be punished for our sin, but God showed us mercy and love by sending Jesus. Jesus died and came back to life to save us from sin.

• Big Picture Question Poster

Practice the key passage

Open your Bible to Joel 2:13. Read the key passage aloud several times. Sing together the key passage song, “Return.”

SAY • Our key passage reminds us that when we sin, God is ready to show us grace and compassion. He wants us to turn away from our sin and turn to Him.

• Key Passage Poster
• “Return” song

Transition to small groups

Small Group ACTIVITIES

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• “Jonah, Go!” printable

Sing a song about Jonah

Sing the song “Jonah, Go!” to the tune of “The Farmer in the Dell.” Find the lyrics on the “Jonah, Go!” printable

SAY • God told Jonah to go tell his enemies to stop sinning. Jonah did not want to go. After being swallowed by a fish, Jonah obeyed God. The Ninevites showed God they were sorry, and **God showed mercy to the Ninevites.** Later, God sent His own Son, Jesus, to tell His enemies to stop sinning. Jesus obeyed God. He died on the cross to save us from sin.

Make a collage of people

- construction paper
- magazines
- blunt-tipped scissors
- glue stick

Give a sheet of construction paper to each preschooler. Set out magazines and encourage preschoolers to tear or cut out pictures of people and glue them to their paper. Cut out the pictures before the session for younger preschoolers.

As preschoolers work, point out various ethnicities and any developmental differences depicted. Remind preschoolers that God created every person uniquely for His glory. Write the big picture question on each preschooler’s collage.

SAY • God is so creative! He made people in so many

different ways, and He cares about them all. Jonah did not love the people of Nineveh, but God did. **God showed mercy to the Ninevites.** God wants all people to turn from their sin and trust in Jesus. We can love all people and tell them how God sent Jesus to be their Savior.

Build a city with blocks

Lead preschoolers to use blocks to build a city. Invite them to identify the different buildings such as a school, stores, restaurants, homes, office buildings, and so forth. As preschoolers build, encourage them to imagine the people who would live in their city.

SAY • God told Jonah to go to the city of Nineveh and tell them to stop sinning. Jonah did not want to go. The Ninevites were his enemies. **God showed mercy to the Ninevites.** Later, God sent His own Son, Jesus, to tell His enemies to stop sinning. Unlike Jonah, Jesus wanted to obey God. He died on the cross to save us from sin.



• blocks

Look at books about different cultures

Gather an assortment of picture books that depict people of different cultures. Consider locating picture books that show people with developmental differences. As preschoolers browse through the books, point out the differences between your preschoolers and the people in the books in an affirming manner.

SAY • God reminded Jonah that He made the people in the city of Nineveh. Even though the Ninevites were Jonah's enemies, God cared about them. **God showed mercy to the Ninevites.** God made all

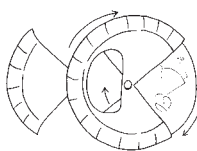
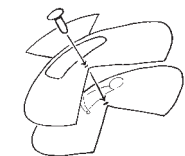
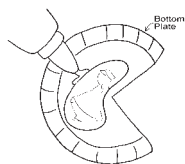
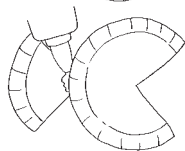
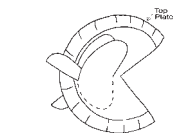
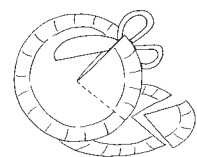
• books depicting people of different cultures and abilities

- “Jonah” printable,
1 per child
- brass fasteners,
1 per child
- hole punch
- paper plates, 2 per child
- blunt-tipped scissors
- tape
- glue
- markers

people. All people are valuable to God, no matter how they look or what they do. One day, people who look different and act different will all do the same thing together—worship Jesus.

Make a paper plate fish

Provide two paper plates and a Jonah cutout for each child. Make a paper plate fish according to the following instructions.



1. Cut a wedge out of each paper plate, approximately one fourth of the plate, to create a fish mouth.
2. On the first plate, cut out an oval-shaped hole beside the fish mouth
3. Tape or glue one wedge to the edge of the plate near the oval-shaped hole to make the fish's tail.
4. On the second plate, glue the Jonah cutout opposite the fish mouth.
5. Place the paper plate with the tail on top of the paper plate with Jonah and secure the plates together with a brass fastener. Demonstrate how to spin the bottom paper plate to make the fish swallow Jonah and then spit him out.
6. Invite preschoolers to decorate their fish.

SAY • God told Jonah to go to his enemies and tell them to stop sinning. Jonah did not want to go. When he finally obeyed God, the Ninevites stopped doing bad things. **God showed mercy to the Ninevites.** Later, God sent His own Son, Jesus, to tell His enemies to stop sinning. Unlike Jonah, Jesus wanted to obey God. He died on the cross and came back to life to save us from sin.

Snack

Play the countdown video to signal the end of activities. Guide preschoolers to clean their areas. Take a restroom break and wash hands. Gather preschoolers for snack time. Thank God for the snack.

Serve fish-shaped crackers for snack. Remind preschoolers that while Jonah being swallowed by a big fish may be the most memorable part of the story, what we learn about God from this story is most important. **God showed mercy to the Ninevites. God is merciful and loving.** God wants to forgive us when we sin, and He will when we turn from our sin and trust in His Son, Jesus.

- countdown video (optional)
- Allergy Alert download
- snack food
- paper cups and napkins

Transition

When a child finishes her snack, guide her to throw away any trash. She may select a book or puzzle to examine, play quietly with play dough or a favorite toy, or color the Bible story coloring page.

Offer the journal page and invite preschoolers to draw a picture of someone they find hard to love. Remind preschoolers that Jonah did not love the Ninevites. Because God cares about all people, we can care about all people. God will help us love other people when we ask Him. Pray for the children.

SAY • God, You are merciful and loving. You are quick to forgive people when they turn from their sin and follow Jesus. Help us to love all people and tell them the good news about Jesus. Amen.

If parents are picking up their children at this time, tell them something that their child enjoyed doing or did well during the session. Distribute the preschool big picture cards for families.

- books
- puzzles
- play dough
- Journal Page printable, 1 per child
- Bible Story Coloring Page
- crayons
- Big Picture Cards for Families: Babies, Toddlers, and Preschool