

## Jonah, Prophet to Nineveh

**BIBLE PASSAGE:** Jonah 1–4

**MAIN POINT:** God showed mercy to the Ninevites.

**KEY PASSAGE:** Joel 2:13

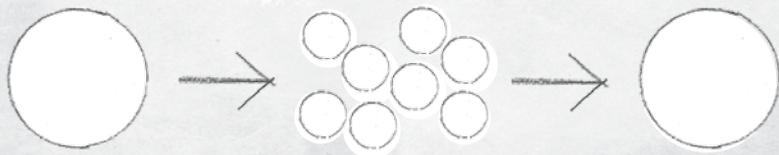
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**BIG PICTURE QUESTION:** What is God like? God is merciful and loving.

**LARGE GROUP  
WORSHIP**  
(15–20 MINUTES)  
**PAGE 82**

**SMALL GROUP  
ACTIVITIES**  
(25–30 MINUTES)  
**PAGE 84**

**LARGE GROUP  
CLOSING**  
(10+ MINUTES)  
**PAGE 86**



## 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](http://www.gospelproject.com). For free training and session-by-session help, visit <http://www.ministrygrid.com/web/tbegospelproject>.

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# 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.*

# Large Group WORSHIP

**SESSION TITLE:** Jonah, Prophet to Nineveh

**BIBLE PASSAGE:** Jonah 1–4

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

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## Welcome and worship with song

- “The Love of God” song
- “I’m Happy ‘Cause God Loves Me” song

Welcome preschoolers to worship by playing “The Love of God.” Greet preschoolers with a smile. When all the preschoolers have arrived, sing an action song such as “I’m Happy ‘Cause God Loves Me” to engage them and help them feel welcomed.

## Watch or tell the Bible story

- Bible
- container of water
- plastic boat
- “Jonah, Prophet to Nineveh” video (optional)
- Bible Story Picture Poster
- Main Point Poster
- Giant Timeline or Big Story Circle

Bring in a clear container of water and a plastic boat. Set the container on a table and place the boat inside.

**SAY** • In our story today, Jonah was out on a boat in the ocean. Now, we know the ocean is very big and that it holds all the sea creatures God has made. As you listen to the story, pay careful attention to see how God used one of His sea creatures to save Jonah’s life.

Open your Bible to Jonah. Tell the Bible story in your own words, using the script provided, or show the video. Read the bolded version of the script for young preschoolers.

## Practice the key passage and a Bible skill

- Bible
- arrow cutout
- Key Passage Poster
- “Return” song

Place an arrow cutout at Joel 2:13. Invite a few volunteers to come up one at a time and open your Bible to the key passage.

**SAY** • Our key passage reminds us that God is merciful and

loving. The Ninevites did not deserve mercy. Jonah disobeyed God and did not deserve mercy either! But God offered the people of Nineveh forgiveness, and they turned back to God.

Sing the key passage song “Return” together.

Option: Every time you say “return” or “turn,” demonstrate with the arrow.

## Learn the big picture question and answer

**SAY** • *What is God like? God is merciful and loving.* God showed mercy and love to the Ninevites when He did not destroy their city. God also showed mercy and love to Jonah when He sent the fish to save Jonah and gave him another chance to obey God.

• Big Picture Question Poster

## Respond through song and prayer

**SAY** • **God showed mercy to the Ninevites.** God told Jonah to go to the Ninevites 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.

Sing “The Love of God” and “God Helps People” as preschoolers move with the music. Prepare for prayer by singing “Deeper Still.” You may also collect an offering.

**SAY** • Dear God, thank You for being merciful and loving. Thank You for saving Jonah and for forgiving the Ninevites. Show us how to love other people in the way You loved Jonah and the Ninevites. Amen.

- “The Love of God” song
- “God Helps People” song
- “Deeper Still” song
- offering basket

## Transition to small groups

- countdown video (optional)

# Small Group ACTIVITIES

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## Play a touching game

Invite preschoolers to stand up. Give directions, such as “Touch something blue,” “Touch a favorite toy,” or “Touch something that is square.” Praise the children for following directions. Continue playing as time allows.

**SAY** • In our Bible story, Jonah did not follow God’s directions to go to Nineveh. God didn’t give up on Jonah or the Ninevites. God saved Jonah by sending a big fish, and **God showed mercy to the Ninevites** by not destroying their city!

## Decorate an ocean scene

Provide a paper plate for each child. Guide children to use a blue marker or crayon to draw a line, dividing the plate in half. Invite children to color the bottom half blue to make an ocean scene with sticker fish or creatures.

**SAY** • Jonah thought he could run away from God. Was Jonah right? No! Did God let Jonah drown in the sea? No! God sent the fish to save Jonah so he could go to the Ninevites and deliver God’s message. God showed mercy to Jonah, and **God showed mercy to the Ninevites!**

- paper plates, 1 per child
- crayons and markers
- ocean-themed stickers

## Water bottle fun

Place small plastic fish inside water bottles. You may add blue food color if you wish. Seal the water bottles with duct tape. Invite preschoolers to shake the water bottles, twirl them, and tip them over to watch the fish “swim” inside.

**SAY** • God told Jonah to deliver His message to the Ninevites, but Jonah did not obey and ended up in the belly of a fish! When Jonah obeyed God and went to Nineveh, **God showed mercy to the Ninevites.**

- water bottles with labels removed
- small plastic fish
- duct tape
- blue food color (optional)

## Examine books about fish

Provide picture books about fish for preschoolers to examine. You may also use a tablet or smart phone to show children different types of fish.

**SAY** • We don’t know what kind of fish God sent to swallow Jonah, but we know it was a big one! God sent the big fish to swallow Jonah to show him mercy. When Jonah went to Nineveh, **God showed mercy to the Ninevites** too! *God is merciful and loving!*

- books about fish
- tablet or smart phone (optional)

Tip: If you use an electronic device, be mindful of ads that may be inappropriate for the classroom.

## Review the Bible story

Print the sequencing pictures and mix them up. Invite the preschoolers to put the pictures in the correct order and to tell you what is happening in each picture. You may also invite preschoolers to glue the pictures in order on construction paper to take home with them.

**SAY** • **God showed mercy to the Ninevites. What is God like? God is merciful and loving!**

- “Story Sequencing” printable
- construction paper (optional)
- glue (optional)

## Transition to large group closing

- countdown video (optional)

# Large Group CLOSING

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## Review

Point to the giant timeline or big story circle as you review today's Bible story. Ask the following review questions:

1. What was Jonah's job? (*prophet*)
2. What did God tell Jonah to do? (*Go to Nineveh and tell the people that God was going to punish them for their wrong choices.*)
3. How long was Jonah in the belly of the fish? (*three days and three nights*)
4. What did the people in Nineveh do when they heard Jonah's message? (*They repented and told God they were sorry for their wrong choices.*)
5. What did God do when the Ninevites repented? (**God showed mercy to the Ninevites.**)
6. ***What is God like? God is merciful and loving.***

**SAY** • Like the Ninevites, all of us have made wrong choices and disobeyed God. We are all sinners. God sent Jesus to take the punishment for our sin so we can be forgiven when we trust Jesus. ***What is God like? God is merciful and loving.***

Sing the key passage song or unit theme song.

## Pray

Invite preschoolers to tell you any prayer requests they have.

**SAY** • Dear God, thank You for showing mercy to Jonah and the Ninevites. Thank You for showing us mercy by sending Your Son, Jesus, to die on the cross and come back to life to rescue us from sin. Help us to tell others about Your love that never gives up. Amen.

## Missions story

If your preschool ministry is planning a missions activity, discuss the activity, the reasons for it, and your group's progress. If you are not participating in a missions activity, talk about an unreached people group. Remind children that some people have never had the opportunity to hear the good news about Jesus. You may also show "The Flock Life" missions video.

**SAY** • Have you ever moved to a new home? Could you imagine moving to a whole new country? That is what the Flock family did. They were missionaries in the Dominican Republic, but all eight of them moved to Bolivia to tell the people there about Jesus. Let's pray for them that they would make lots of new friends and have lots of chances to tell people the good news about Jesus.

- "The Flock Life" missions video
- "Missions Prayer Cards" printable

## Fish toss

Gather fish-shaped soft bath toys or roll up pairs of socks halfway so the ends of the socks can serve as "fins." Make a masking tape line. Line up children at the line to toss the "fish" into buckets a few feet away. Play as time allows.

**SAY** • When Jonah realized God had saved him by sending a fish to swallow him, he prayed and then he obeyed.

***What is God like? God is merciful and loving.***

- buckets
- rolled up socks or soft fish-shaped bath toys
- masking tape