



JONAH AND THE BIG FISH

Jonah 1-4

Memory Verse

The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.

Psalm 103:8

OR

In my distress I called to the Lord, and he answered me. Jonah 2:1

Context/Background

Jonah the prophet lived in a city in Galilee, quite close to Nazareth during the reign of King Jeroboam II (793-753 B.C.). Jeroboam II was northern Israel's most powerful king. During his reign, the borders of the nation were expanded to their greatest extent since the time of David and Solomon.

Assyria, five hundred miles to the east, was a constant threat. The prophets Hosea and Amos, contemporaries of Jonah, had declared that God would use Assyria to punish the Israelites for their continuous rebellion (cf. Hos. 11:5; Amos 5:27). Any patriotic Israelite would have longed for Assyria's destruction! This helps explain why Jonah reacted so strongly when God told him to preach repentance to the people of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria.

Summary

Jonah was a prophet. God wanted him to go to the city of Ninevah, which was the capital of Israel's enemy, and tell them to stop doing evil things and turn to God. Jonah was afraid to go to such a wicked place, and instead of going to Ninevah, he got on a boat going in the opposite direction. God made a big storm come up. The sailors were really scared and prayed to their gods to save them. Jonah told them the storm was his fault, because he was not doing what God wanted. The sailors threw him overboard and the storm stopped. Then a big fish swallowed Jonah whole. Jonah was stuck in the belly of the fish for three days. He prayed to God and asked God to forgive him for not doing as he was told. He thanked God for sending the fish to save him from drowning. Jonah went to Nineveh and told the people that they had 40 days to repent and follow God or they would be destroyed. The king heard him and believed in God's word. He told all the people to stop doing bad things and to show how sorry they were. God spared Nineveh because they listened to him and obeyed. Jonah was unhappy because he thought God should have destroyed his enemies. God showed Jonah that God is in control and that he is compassionate and merciful when people are sorry for their sins.

Relevance/Application

Themes: Justice, forgiveness, service, purpose

Younger students:

- We cannot run from God.
- God hears us when we pray.
- God gives us second chances.

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- God wants all people to repent and be saved

Older students:

- God never gives up on those who belong to him. In his love, he will come to you and will go to the greatest lengths to rescue you. That's what he did for Jonah. That's what Jesus did later on the cross.
- God can control all of his creation to make his plans work. God commanded the weather, the big fish and the vine and the worm in Jonah's story.
- God cares for all people. Even though the Assyrians were the enemy of the Jews, God sent his prophet to them to tell them to turn to him.
- God is in control. His ways are not our ways, and sometimes he might want us to do things we don't want to or don't understand (Isaiah 55:9).
- People can change when they encounter the Word of God.
- Even when we're stubborn and proud, God doesn't give up on us.

Christian Studies Framework

CHRISTIAN BELIEFS Key Idea 3 A Christian worldview is shaped by the biblical teaching of sin and grace

CHRISTIAN LIVING

Key Idea 1 Christians believe that God creates people to live in relationship with him and with each other

Key Idea 2 Christians are called to love and serve all people

Key Idea 3 Christians have a responsibility in and for the world

Catechism Connections

In the seventh petition of the Lord's Prayer, we say: Deliver us from evil. God promises to rescue us from bad things. God rescued Jonah from a storm and a fish and God delivered Nineveh from their bad ways by sending Jonah.

Discussion/Wondering Questions:

Early Years

- What did God want Jonah to do?
- Why didn't Jonah obey God?
- What two things happened when Jonah was thrown overboard?
- What did Jonah do when he was inside the fish?
- Did the people of Nineveh listen to Jonah?

Primary

- Where did God send Jonah?
- Has God ever asked you to do something that you just didn't want to do?

Secondary

- Why do you think God wanted Jonah to go to the people of Nineveh?
 - Think about Jonah's choices throughout this story. For each one, what was his motivation? Does God wait until we are perfect to use us for good?
 - How are you like Jonah?
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Images or objects to spark discussion



Giotto: *Jonah Swallowed up by the Whale* (Public Domain)



Jonah the Prophet by Sargis Babayan, Creative Commons 3.0

Telling the Story

Bibles: The Beginner's Bible
The Big Rescue Bible
The NIV Bible
The Jesus Storybook Bible - God's Messenger Jonah and the Big Fish

Creative Storytelling:

This is a great story to act out. The Skit Guys have a great pay-to-download script <https://skitguys.com/scripts/bible-stories-for-kids-jonah-cant-be-lost>
You can find a free script for acting out this story with figures and narration (for younger students) here:
https://www.saintgregorys.org/uploads/2/4/2/6/24265184/jonah_revised_.pdf

Tracts and Other Resources

Lutheran Tract Mission
[Jonah & the Big Fish cartoon story book](#)
[Jonah & the Big Fish Activity Book](#)

GROW Ministries
[Woven Together – April - Jonah 1-4 God gives Jonah a second chance](#)

[Growing Faith at Home – Year B Epiphany 3](#)



Audio Stories/Podcasts

[Bible.is](#) - Audio recordings of the Bible in many different languages and several English translations. Searchable by book and chapter. Excellent resource for NESB learners.

Kids Corner – Bible Stories [The Story of Jonah](#)

Videos: Early Years / Junior Primary

[The Story of Jonah and the Whale | Bible Stories for Kids - Minno - Bible Stories for Kids](#)

Middle – Upper Primary

[Jonah and the Fish - Saddleback Kids](#)
[God's Story: Jonah - Crossroads Kids' Club](#)

Secondary/Staff

[Book of Jonah Summary: A Complete Animated Overview - BibleProject](#)
[Jonah 1 | Jonah is Not About a Fish | Bible Study - Spoken Gospel](#)

Invocation

In my distress I called to the Lord,
and he answered me.
From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help,
and you listened to my cry.
In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

Prayers

Prayer

Thank you God for loving us, even when we're bad.
Thank you for hearing us, when we tell you we are sad.
Thank you for forgiving us. Thank you, we're so glad. Amen.

OR

Dear Jesus, thank you that you are compassionate and gracious, and you want to show your love to everyone. Thank you that Jesus died for our sins. We confess that we have done wrong things; please forgive us. Please help us love you with all our hearts, all our souls and all our minds. Please also help us love everyone around us. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

OR

Lord God, from whom all holy desires, all good purposes, and all right works proceed: give to your servants that peace which the world cannot give. Defend us from the fear of our enemies, and set our hearts to obey your commandments, so that we may live on earth in rest and quietness. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Saviour, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

OR

Lord, thank you for being so generous
and merciful to us.
Help us to remember what Christ has done for us,
and to give ourselves in love and service
as a response to his love.

Amen.

Mealtime Prayer

Bless O Lord, this food to our use,
And us to your loving service;
And make us ever mindful of the needs of others,
For Jesus' sake. Amen.

Blessing

Go in peace. Serve the Lord with a merciful and generous spirit.
Thanks be to God.

(Name), know that God hears your prayers.

Music

[Jonah - Christian Songs for kids - Little Big Heroes](#)

[Jonah: A VeggieTales Movie \(11/11\) Movie CLIP - Jonah Was a Prophet \(2002\) - Movieclips](#)

[Go Go Jonah! - Chris Jaensch](#)

[Jonah's Prayer - Emu Youth](#)

[In the belly of the Whale - Newsboys](#)

Take my life, and let it be (Lutheran Hymnal 377) OR [Take My Life and Let It Be - Reawaken Hymns](#)

Activities

Early Years:

- Play a game of Hide and Seek. Then tell the story to the children, and notice that Jonah couldn't hide/run away from God.
- Act out the story using a tub of water for the sea, a "city", a big fish and some little figures to represent Jonah and the other characters.

Primary:

- Make a Jonah in the Big Fish puppet
<https://biblegamescentral.com/sunday-school-lessons/jonah-and-the-big-fish/>
- Play a game of Opposites. When the leader says something like Stand up! everyone has to do the opposite - sit down. Players who do the wrong action are out. The last person remaining is the winner and becomes the next leader. Make a connection to Jonah, who did the opposite of what God wanted.

Upper Primary/Secondary:

- Work in groups to create comic strips illustrating different parts of the story
<https://biblegamescentral.com/sunday-school-lessons/jonah-and-the-big-fish/>
 - Make a collaborative art piece inspired by this story. For example, a collage/paper mosaic of a big fish with Jonah praying inside and the words of the memory verse. Students could write individual prayers for forgiveness on the strips making up the ocean around the fish. Or create images inspired by Jonah's prayer in Jonah 2.
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