

JONAH AND NINEVEH

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE: JONAH



God's grace extends beyond Israel's borders.

The STORY

Pray with children to start class.

Teaching Points for Class Discussion:

Jonah tried to run away from the Lord – God commanded Jonah, a prophet in the northern kingdom of Israel, to go to Nineveh and prophesy against them because they were a sinful people. Jonah tried to run away from the Lord. His intentions were not immediately revealed, but we learn of them later in chapter four. Jonah knew that God was “merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster”(Jonah 4:2). Jonah prophesied God’s mercy toward wicked Israel during king Jeroboam II’s reign (2Kings 14:24-27). Jonah, full of self-righteous anger toward Nineveh (Jonah 4:1), wanted the Lord to carry out judgment – not mercy – on the people of Nineveh. After all, Nineveh was a great city in Assyria, the very nation that would eventually defeat and take captive the nation of Israel.

God pursued Jonah – Jonah fled to Tarshish to escape his assignment. But God was bigger than Jonah realized. God sent a great wind to the ship and the storm threatened the entire crew. The crew cast lots to see who was to blame and the lot fell to Jonah. Jonah recognized that he was the reason for the storm and instructed the crew to throw him into the sea. God appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah and he remained in the fish’s belly for three days and three nights. Jonah repented and God made the fish spit Jonah up on the shore.

God’s mercy was revealed to Nineveh – The Lord spoke to Jonah again and, this time, Jonah obeyed and delivered God’s word to Nineveh. The people of Nineveh repented at Jonah’s preaching. When God saw their repentance He stopped the judgment He planned for Nineveh. Jonah grew angry because of God’s mercy toward Nineveh. In an amazing look into the mind and heart of God, God told Jonah why He had mercy on the people of Nineveh. God had pity on Nineveh because there were 120,000 people who did not know him.

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Where Is Jesus?

Please use the following comments connecting today's lesson to the Gospel to help inform your understanding and serve you by aiding your preparation for class. Remember, we want to do more than present disconnected Bible stories and lessons to our young children. We want them to understand how each story in the Bible plays a part in God's greater plan of redemption.

Jonah preaching to Nineveh to repent is directly compared to Jesus preaching repentance.

The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here. (Luke 11:32)

In addition, Jesus tells us that the three days Jonah spent in the belly of a fish was a picture foretelling the time Jesus' crucified body was in the grave before the resurrection.

He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." (Matthew 12:39-40)

God had a plan to rescue Jonah from his sin of disobedience. God's plan for Jonah involved three days swallowed up in a fish. Jonah found his salvation in God. In the end Jonah was released and went on to preach repentance to Nineveh.

God has a plan to rescue us from our sin through Jesus. Jesus died on the cross for our sins and spent three days in the grave swallowed up by death. But death could not hold Him and on the third day He rose again. Now the message of repentance and faith in Christ is proclaimed all over the world. The question for us is, will we trust in Him?



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ON THE ROAD TO EMMAUS

Read the following Bible passage from the Old Testament. Use the following questions to help the children understand how this passage points to Christ in the New Testament.

Bible Passage: Proverbs 30:4

Connecting the passage to Christ:

This passage refers to God as creator and mentions that He has a son. Jesus is God's only son.

Questions for reflection:

- What part of this passage is referring to Jesus? (Jesus is God's one and only son. Therefore, any passage that refers to God's son refers to Jesus.)
- Where in the Bible do we find that Jesus is the Son of God? (We first find out that Jesus is the Son of God at His baptism when God calls from heaven and says, "This is my Son, whom I love, with Him I am well pleased, see Matthew 3:17.)

SWORD BIBLE MEMORY

BE A DOER OF THE WORD

Take time during the class to review the SWORD Bible Memory verses with the class. Provide the opportunity for each child to recite the verses to an adult worker.



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ACTIVITIES & OBJECT LESSONS

Use the following activities for practical application and discovery of this lesson. For the younger children, review the preschool questions and use them to help the children relate to the passage. For older children, ask them why they think this passage is in the Bible for us today. How is it supposed to affect our lives?

YOU CANNOT RUN AWAY FROM GOD

Supplies

a \$20 dollar bill

The object of this exercise is to show the children just how impossible it is to run away from God.

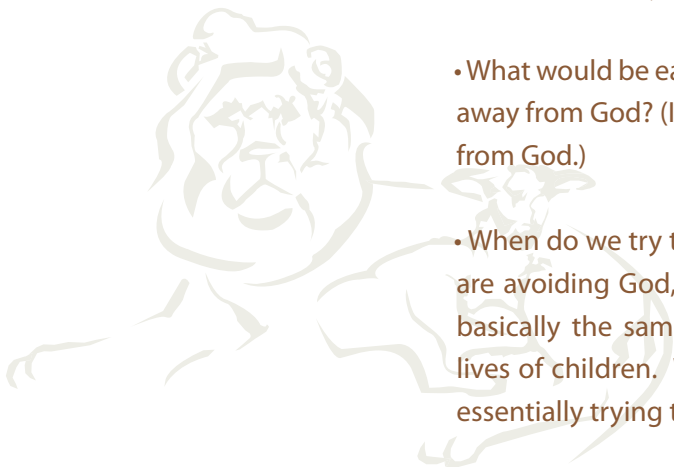
Ask for a volunteer (pick a child the same sex as you as you may need to grab or hold the child for this game).

Explain to your volunteer that you will give them twenty dollars if they can run away from you and touch the back wall of the classroom before you catch them.

Tell the volunteer to stand right in front of you and tell them to run away as soon as you say the word, "Go". As soon as you give the signal, wrap your arms around the child and hold them. Remember, it is supposed to be impossible for the child to get passed you in order to represent the ease with which God caught Jonah. After three such attempts, ask for another volunteer. Sooner or later the class should begin to object, saying that it is impossible to run away. When that happens, you can end the game to talk about the lesson.

Then ask the class the following questions:

- What was Jonah's response to God's command to bring a word to Nineveh? (Jonah tried to run away from God by sailing to Tarshish.)
- What would be easier, win the twenty dollars by running away from me or running away from God? (It would be easier to run away from the teacher than to run away from God.)
- When do we try to hide or run away from God? (Often children do not think they are avoiding God, but they do avoid being accountable to their parents. That is basically the same thing because parents are God's delegated authority in the lives of children. When we pretend we do not hear when parents call us, we are essentially trying to avoid them.)



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IT REALLY DID HAPPEN

Supplies

- photos and/or picture books of a large whale or shark
- a hand-drawn figure of a man to show scale

The book of Jonah is often mythologized and many may act or say it never happened. You can help the children understand just how plausible it is for a fish or whale to have swallowed Jonah by making a scale model of a person based on the average size of the species of whale (such as a sperm whale, blue whale, or a whale shark). When the children see how comparably small a man is, they will be able to visualize that Jonah was actually swallowed by a fish.

Then ask the class the following questions:

- What does it mean that the Lord “appointed” a great fish to swallow up Jonah? (The same word is used in verses 4:6 and 4:7. When it says the Lord “appointed”, it means that God designated, determined, or commanded the actions of the fish. God controls all things. What an amazing demonstration of the sovereignty of God.)
- In what other ways did the Lord demonstrate His control over nature? (God sent the storm to the ship and then calmed the sea. God also controlled the plant and the worm in chapter four. Another example of God’s control over all things is the lot of the sailors that went to Jonah.)



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MY SIN TOO

Supplies

two 6-inch red capital "S"
for each child in the class,
tape

The object of this exercise is to help the children identify with Nineveh in this story.

Prior to class, tape half of the letters on the front classroom wall.

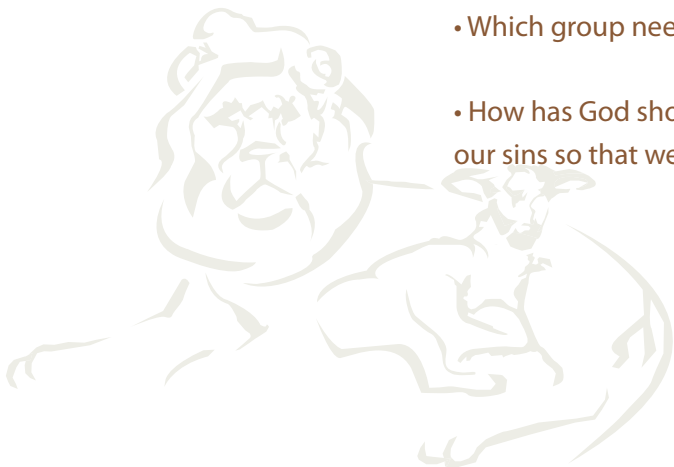
Read through the most significant parts of the story. You can actually read the entire book of Jonah to your class or, prior to class, choose parts to read and parts to paraphrase in order to save time.

Explain to the children that the letters on the wall represent Nineveh's sin. Then ask them how many of them have sinned. Of course, they will all respond and say they have sinned.

Pass out letters to the children and ask them to write down one of their sins. If you have children who are not able to write, simply have them write their first names over the letter, "S". Collect the letters from the children and then tape them on the wall. These letters should be in a separate group but next to the group representing the sins of Nineveh.

Then ask the class the following questions:

- Can you see any difference between our sins and the sins of Nineveh? (No, there is no difference.)
- Does God call us to repent and follow His Word just like Jonah told Nineveh? (Yes, God's Word calls us to repent of our sins and follow God, just like Jonah told the people of Nineveh.)
- Which group needs God's mercy more? (We both need God's mercy equally.)
- How has God shown us His mercy? (God sent His son Jesus to die on the cross for our sins so that we might be forgiven.)



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PRAYER

Pick several children to pray based on the day's scripture passages.

IN CLASS PROJECT

The first and second grade children can use the preschool coloring sheet and questions. Have the older children draw a picture of Hezekiah praying.



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FOR OLDER GRADES

Use the following activity for practical application and discovery of this lesson:

Materials: one coffee stirring stick for each child, one coffee stirring stick cut $\frac{1}{2}$ inch shorter than all the others (to be used when demonstrating the casting of a lot)

Reenact the storm on the ship by asking each person to take a straw. The one with the shortest straw is designated to be the cause of the trouble (Jonah). Have the children sit down and then have each of the children take turns reading a paragraph each of the story.

After each chapter and/or section, review with the class and ask where they see God at work behind the scenes (examples: controlling over the lot, the waves, the fish, etc.).

Draw the children out as to how they see God at work in their own lives. Ask them if anyone would like to share a testimony of how God pursued them or how God spoke to them.

Review the following scriptures and talk about how they help us to understand the scope of God's control over all things.

- Psalm 147:4
- Proverbs 16:9
- Colossians 1:16-17
- Roman's 8:28



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A LITTLE BIT MORE

Lots – Casting of lots was a method of determining the will of God in both the Old and New Testaments. Proverbs 16:33 says that the lot is “cast into the lap, but its every decision comes from the Lord”.

The bottom line is that God controls everything. Aaron cast lots to choose the goat for the scapegoat, see Leviticus 16:7-10 and the sailors on Jonah’s ship cast lots to determine who is responsible for the storm. In the New Testament, the soldiers cast lots for Jesus’ clothing and the disciples cast lots to determine who would replace Judas, see Acts 1:26.

Although the disciples used lots in this way, there is no indication it was a common practice in the church after that time and nor are we instructed to determine our behavior by casting lots.

