

## Lesson 97

# God Sends Jonah

God used Jonah to show grace to the wicked people of Nineveh.

# Studying God's Word

Don't forget! Review the Optional Supplements and determine where you can use them.

## Introduction

Have Goldfish crackers, bowls, spoons, and a timer ready for the game.

To start today, I need some volunteers for a game that involves Goldfish crackers! Choose several volunteers or give each student a chance to compete if you have a small class. Place a large pile of crackers in one bowl and an empty bowl next to it. Give each volunteer a spoon. The goal of this game is to move as many crackers from this bowl to the empty bowl using only a spoon held between your teeth to scoop them out. You have only one minute! When your time is up, we'll count how many you got into the empty bowl and award a point for each one. Ready? Let's get started! Have volunteers race one at a time to see how many crackers they can scoop using the spoon in their teeth. No hands allowed! Keep time and give a 10-second countdown as the minute runs out. Encourage students to cheer on the volunteers. Keep track of scores and acknowledge the winner who scooped the most crackers into the empty bowl. You may choose to reward volunteers or the whole class with extra crackers or Swedish Fish as a snack.

You may be wondering why we played this game with fish crackers. Today, we'll see how God used a great fish to stop a disobedient prophet. We have learned about several prophets already.

Refer to the Exodus to Malachi Timeline. We learned about Samuel, the prophet who anointed both Saul and David to be king. We read about Nathan, the prophet who confronted David when he sinned. More recently, we saw how Elijah had to confront wicked King Ahab.

Slide #3

Slide #4

Slide #5

Slide #6

Refer to Lesson 92 Theme Poster. What miracle did God do for the prophet Elijah on Mount Carmel? He sent fire from heaven to burn up the sacrifice and show his power to the Israelites.

Whom did God choose to be his prophet after Elijah? Elisha.

Refer to Lessons 94–95 Theme Posters. What were some of the miracles Elisha performed to show God's power? Allow answers. The widow's oil filled all the vessels she borrowed, the boy was raised from the dead, Naaman was healed of leprosy, and the Syrian army was blinded.

Refer to Lesson 96 Theme Poster. What prophet did we learn about in this lesson? Amos.

Amos was a shepherd called by God to deliver a message of coming judgment to the people of Israel. The people had ignored warnings God

had already sent, and they continued to sin. God said he would send an enemy, an adversary, to defeat Israel.

## Jonah Disobeys

It was often hard to be a prophet, delivering messages from God that people refused to obey. In today's lesson, we'll learn about a prophet God sent to an enemy nation.

You've probably heard about this prophet before. His name is Jonah! Jonah was a prophet in Israel, the northern nation, but he usually is remembered for the part he played in the true account about God, a pagan nation, and a great big fish.

Slide #7

Slide #8

Jonah 1:1–3

Refer to the Books of the Bible Poster. Turn to the book of Jonah in your Bibles. It is one of the minor prophets—Amos, Obadiah, then Jonah. Find chapter 1. Who will read verses 1–3 for us? Assign readers. What did God ask Jonah to do? Go to Nineveh and call out against it. How did God describe the city of Nineveh? Great city, evil.

The city of Nineveh was a wicked city but very big and powerful. The people there were called Assyrians since they were in the nation of Assyria. They did not worship the true God but worshipped many false gods. They were cruel and godless. In fact, the Jewish people, like Jonah, did not like the people in Nineveh at all.

Jonah's assignment from God was to go tell some wicked people he didn't like that they needed to stop sinning. Does that sound like a very fun job? No!

So, we shouldn't be surprised at Jonah's response. What was it? Look in Jonah 1:3. He fled to Tarshish away from the Lord.

Slide #9

Jonah went to the town of Joppa to get on a ship going the opposite direction from where God wanted him to go! Write Joppa on the board then draw a big arrow northeast (up and to the right) and write Nineveh. Nineveh was north of Israel, but Jonah's ship was headed to Tarshish, which was west across the Mediterranean Sea. Draw a big arrow west (to the left) from Joppa and write Tarshish.

God called Jonah on a mission, and Jonah disobeyed by trying to get away. Would Jonah really be able to flee from the Lord? God is omnipotent—all-powerful. And he is omnipresent—everywhere. He can't be fooled!

## Jonah Skit

Have the Jonah Skit printed and props ready.

Some of you may already know what God did next. We're going to see this acted out as a skit. I need some volunteers. Follow the instructions in the Jonah Skit to choose volunteers for the parts and to set up the scene. Then follow the script. Continue with the lesson when finished with the skit.

This is an amazing account of God's sovereignty, mercy, and power! Keep your Bibles open to Jonah chapters 1–2 so you can look up verses as we review what we saw in the skit.

What happened when Jonah tried to sail to Tarshish? What did God send? Look in Jonah 1:4. God sent a great wind and a mighty tempest on the sea.

Slide #10

What is a tempest? Allow answers. A violent storm.

Tempest: a violent storm

This storm was especially violent, threatening to break up the ship. Even the seasoned sailors were afraid and realized that this storm was caused by a god. It wasn't like the typical Mediterranean storms they were used to.

What did the sailors do to try to lighten the ship? Look in Jonah 1:5. They threw the cargo overboard.

Cargo refers to the goods the ship was carrying to the next stop. These goods were important in order for the crew to make money. Because they would be paid for delivering the cargo to Tarshish, throwing it overboard showed how desperate these men were. They didn't care about saving the cargo during this storm. They just wanted to survive!

What was Jonah doing all this time? He was fast asleep.

The Bible tells us that the captain of the ship went to get Jonah. The captain found out from Jonah what was causing the storm. What was it? Jonah 1:10. Jonah had fled from the presence of the Lord.

The captain and sailors realized that this storm was all Jonah's fault! He had tried to run from the Lord. Jonah told them to throw him overboard so that the storm would stop. They didn't want to throw a man overboard and be responsible for his death, so they tried to row the ship to dry land. But the storm was too rough. They finally realized they would have to do what Jonah said and throw him into the raging sea.

Slide #11

Slide #12

Show the Lesson Theme Poster. Here's Jonah being thrown overboard. He probably thought this was it—he was going to die. But when he hit the water, the storm stopped!

What did God have waiting in the water? What do you see in the poster? Giant fish!

Jonah 1:17

You probably know what happened next. Someone read Jonah 1:17. What happened to Jonah? A great fish swallowed Jonah. How long was Jonah in the fish's belly? Three days and nights.

Jonah deserved to be punished for his disobedience. God had called him to do something important for him, but instead of obeying, Jonah tried to run! But God had a plan to use Jonah, and his plan would not be stopped. God is omnipotent—all-powerful—and he used that power over creation to give Jonah a second chance. By controlling the weather, the seas, and the creatures in the sea, God would not allow Jonah to run from him. We can't outrun God if he wants to use us as part of his plan. And Jonah wasn't able to outrun him either.

What did Jonah do from the fish's belly? Jonah 2:1. Prayed to the Lord his God.

That's right. Jonah chapter 2 records Jonah's prayer. And what did the Lord do after hearing Jonah's prayer? Look in verse 10. The Lord spoke to the fish and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

Pass out the Class Notes.

That was quite an experience Jonah had—swallowed by a giant fish and then vomited onto dry land!

Slide #13

Slide #14

Slide #15

Let's start our Class Notes. You will circle the bold word or phrase to complete each statement. Who will read #1 and give us the answer?

Choose a reader. Nineveh. Have students complete #1.

And #2? Who will read that? Choose a reader. Ship. Complete #2.

What did God send to stop Jonah's attempt to flee, to answer #3? Choose a reader. Storm. Complete #3.

Now #4, who will read that? Choose a reader. Threw Jonah overboard. Complete #4.

Who will read #5 about what swallowed Jonah? Choose a reader. Great fish. Complete #5.

And #6? Where did the fish spit Jonah up? Choose a reader. On dry land. Complete #6.

## Jonah Obeys

Jonah was alive and back on dry ground. God gave him a second chance to obey, and this time Jonah did! He journeyed to Nineveh.

Slide #16

Slide #17

Jonah 3:3–5

Who will read Jonah 3:3–5? Assign a reader.

What message did God have Jonah deliver to the people in Nineveh? He said something about 40 days. Jonah 3:4. In 40 days, the city will be overthrown.

Yes. God was warning the Ninevites to repent and turn from their sin before it was too late! In 40 days, the city would be overthrown. God had plans to destroy the entire city unless they changed their ways, and Jonah preached this message to all the people in the city. How did the people respond? Did they listen? The people believed God, called for a fast, and put on sackcloth.

This is amazing how the people of such a wicked city believed Jonah's message. They feared God's judgment and showed their repentance by calling for a fast, which is not eating food, and putting on sackcloth, which is an uncomfortable, itchy fabric people wore to show sorrow. Even the king of Nineveh believed Jonah's message. He commanded the people to call out to God and to turn from their evil and violence.

### Slide #18

Jonah 3:10

Who will read Jonah 3:10? Assign a reader.

What did God do when he saw the change in the people of Nineveh? He did not destroy Nineveh because they had turned from their sin.

God showed mercy and grace to Jonah and to the people of Nineveh. Who will read the definitions of merciful and gracious from the Attributes of God Poster? Assign readers.

Jonah offered a humble prayer to God from the belly of the fish and asked for forgiveness. He begged God for mercy. God did show grace and mercy to Jonah by giving him a second chance to obey. He caused the fish to vomit Jonah out on dry land. And Jonah finally went to Nineveh to preach, just as God had asked him to do. Then the people of Nineveh heard Jonah's message. They repented of their sins and turned to God. God demonstrated his grace to Jonah AND to Nineveh. God spared Jonah and did not destroy the people of Nineveh.

You would think that Jonah would be thrilled to see the people repent and turn to God as a result of his preaching. After all, God showed mercy to him, so he shouldn't be surprised that God would show mercy to the people of Nineveh also.

### Slide #19

### Slide #20

Jonah 4:1-3

Let's see how Jonah felt when God spared Nineveh. Who will read Jonah 4:1-3? Assign a reader.

Many people skip this final chapter in Jonah, and they miss an important lesson. How did Jonah feel in verse 1? Displeased and angry.

Why did Jonah say he didn't want to go to Nineveh in the first place? Why did he flee to Tarshish? Allow discussion. He knew God is gracious and merciful and would relent from punishing Nineveh if they repented.

Jonah tells us why he tried to flee from God in the first place. He knew the character of God and didn't want God to be merciful to an enemy people.

He only wanted God's mercy to be shown to him and the people of Israel. He was so upset he wanted God to take his life! Is that the right attitude for a follower of God to have? Should we get angry because people we don't like are shown mercy? Allow discussion.

### Slide #21

Jonah 4:11

God had to show Jonah that he loved all people. Listen to what God said to Jonah in the final verse of the book. Read Jonah 4:11.

God asked Jonah why he shouldn't pity, or show mercy, to Nineveh. What do you think it means when God said there were 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left? What people don't know their right and left hands yet? Allow answers. Young children.

People who don't know their right from their left could be referring to young children, three or four years old and under. It also could mean that the adults in Nineveh didn't know anything about God, so they were like young children in their knowledge of God and his laws.

God reminded Jonah that there were people, over 100,000, in Nineveh who would have been destroyed. Because the people repented and God showed mercy, all the children and adults and even the animals (cattle) were spared. God was rebuking, or correcting, Jonah for his lack of mercy and love toward the people of Nineveh.

Do you think we may be like Jonah today? Are there some people we are afraid to share the gospel with? Are there some people we think are too evil to ever repent and turn to Jesus? Allow discussion or share a personal example of individuals or people groups we may be reluctant to talk to.

Slide #22

Slide #23

Slide #24

Let's answer the remaining questions in the Class Notes. Who will read #7 and give us the answer? Choose a reader. Preach. Complete #7.

What did God warn he would send on the people in 40 days? That's #8.

Choose a reader. Disaster. Complete #8.

Who will read #9 about the people's response? Choose a reader. Believed. Complete #9.

What attribute did God show in #10? Choose a reader. Mercy. Complete #10.

Who will read #11 about Jonah's reaction to God's mercy toward a people Jonah considered an enemy? Choose a reader. Angry. Complete #11.

And the last one, #12? Choose a reader. All people. Complete #12.

## **Application**

Slide #25

Refer to the Lesson Theme Poster. Jonah rejected God's call and tried to flee. After some correction from God through a terrible storm and a large fish, Jonah

went to Nineveh and preached. The people repented, and God did not destroy the city.

Some people don't believe the account we read in Jonah and say that it is not true. They ask how a fish could swallow a man and the man live three days in the fish. They think that's impossible. But there are three main points we should remember when we talk to these people. First, we cannot question the truth of God's Word. God does not lie. Second, God is the omnipotent Creator, and nothing is too hard for him. God either kept Jonah alive or brought him back to life in the fish's belly.

Slide #26

Slide #27

Matthew 12:38–41

Third, Jesus believed the account of Jonah was true! Turn to Matthew 12:38–41 and listen to what Jesus said to the religious leaders of his day. Read Matthew 12:38–41.

What did Jesus say about Jonah? He was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish.

Jesus believed that the whole account of Jonah—the storm, the fish, and Nineveh's repentance—was true. The scribes and the Pharisees were asking Jesus for a sign, or a miracle. Jesus used the account of Jonah being in the fish for three days and nights to tell the people that he would be in the heart of the earth, or dead, for three days and nights.

What did Jesus mean by that? Allow discussion.

Jesus was prophesying about his death and resurrection! He would be killed on the cross and placed in a tomb but rise again three days later. This miraculous sign would show all people that he was the Son of God, our Savior. The people of Nineveh repented when they heard Jonah's preaching, but many people who heard Jesus speak and saw his miracles refused to believe. Many would refuse to believe even after Jesus rose from the dead!

Jonah isn't just some cute story about a man and a fish. He was a real man who learned some hard lessons about obedience, grace, and mercy. The miracles God performed to get Jonah to preach to Nineveh show his love for all people. When Jesus came, he used the account of Jonah to prophesy about his death and resurrection. Jesus showed grace and mercy to us just as God showed grace and mercy to Jonah and to the people of Nineveh. This good news is for all people!

## Lesson Review

We encourage you to play a lesson review game.



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