UNIT 14 | SESSION 2

JONAH, PROPHET TO NINEVEH

JONAH



KEY PASSAGE: Deuteronomy 13:4

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: *Why do Christians continue to sin? Christians continue to sin because we still have a sin nature, but when Jesus returns, He will make us sinless like Him.*

CHRIST CONNECTION: Jonah spent three days in a fish so that the people of Nineveh could hear God's message, turn from sin, and be saved. Jesus was in the tomb for three days so that we could hear and trust the gospel, turn from sin, and be saved.

STORY POINT: God sent Jonah to Nineveh to tell the people to turn from their sinful ways.



PRIOR TO TEACHING THE SESSION

LEADER Bible Study

Jonah was a prophet sent by God to confront the people of Nineveh regarding their sinful ways. Jonah, however, did not immediately obey God's command. In fact, Jonah traveled in the opposite direction and boarded a boat to Tarshish. Have you ever been given clear directions from God, but ignored them out of fear or selfishness?

Because of Jonah's disobedience, the Lord sent a powerful storm on the sea, and the men on the boat feared for their lives. Knowing the storm was due to his disobedience, Jonah asked his shipmates to throw him overboard. As they threw him into the sea, the storm ceased.

In His mercy, the Lord sent a great fish to swallow up Jonah, and for three days and nights, Jonah lay entombed in the belly of the fish. Then, upon the Lord's command, the fish spit Jonah onto dry land. God again said to Jonah, "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach the message that I tell you." This time, Jonah obeyed.

Jonah walked about the great city proclaiming, "In forty days Nineveh will be demolished!" The people of Nineveh believed God's message. In sackcloth and with fasting, the people repented and earnestly called out to God. Because of their repentance, God did not destroy Nineveh.

As we read further, we learn how Jonah grew angry over God's mercy displayed toward Nineveh. The same storm-tossed man who had received mercy from the Lord would rather experience death than see his enemies live. Ironically, disobedient Jonah prayed for God's grace in his own life, but desired for others to perish in their sin.

While Jonah did not care for the people of Nineveh, God did. The people believed Jonah's message from God and were saved. Like the Ninevites, we cannot save ourselves. But God can. When we are confronted with our sin, we have a choice to ignore it or do as the Ninevites did and repent. God sent Jesus so we could repent of sin, trust in Him, and be saved.

This week, point boys and girls to the gift of Jesus. Thank God for Jesus' death and resurrection and share how we too can believe, turn from our sin, and be saved. While we all are born far from God, Jesus bridges the gap. Just like God the Father, Jesus is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love (Jonah 4:2).



PREPARE

THE WEEK PRIOR

Prepare your heart to teach; plan the session



WELCOME

10–15 MINUTES

Greet kids and open the session



LEARN

25–30 MINUTES

Teach kids the story of the gospel



LOVE

15–20 MINUTES

Lead kids to love the God of the gospel



LIVE

15–20 MINUTES

Lead kids to live out the mission of the gospel

© 2025 Lifeway



WELCOME Kids

Greet each kid as he or she arrives. Use this time to collect the offering, fill out attendance sheets, build relationships, and help new kids connect to your group.

> **SAY** "Have you ever had to do something you didn't want to do? What was it? Did you end up doing it, or did you keep avoiding it?"

1 SESSION STARTER (10 minutes)

☐ OPTION 1: SWALLOWED UP

Before the session, consider decorating the open end of a box as a fish's mouth. Form kids into two teams. Line up each team, about 4–5 feet away, on either side of the box. Provide the first kid on each team with a ball. When you say "go," challenge kids to toss the ball into the "fish's mouth." If the kid makes it in, award his or her team a point. Continue playing until every kid has had a turn. The team with the most points wins. Play again, leading kids to stand a little further away from the box.

> **SAY** "Today, we will learn how **GOD SENT JONAH TO NINEVEH TO TELL THE PEOPLE TO TURN FROM THEIR SINFUL WAYS.** However, Jonah chose to disobey. As a consequence, we'll see how God sent a powerful storm to stop Jonah from fleeing. We'll learn how the storm threatened Jonah's life, but God was merciful to save him by sending a great fish to swallow him."

☐ OPTION 2: THE NATIONS



Before the session, write the names of 5–10 countries on one side of individual index cards. On the other side, write a couple of facts about the people of that country. For example, for *Thailand*, you may write how *the official language of the people is Thai* and how *many people in the country are Buddhist*. Display a world map or a globe. Invite volunteers to draw an index card. Then invite kids to read the information on the card and find the country on the map. Continue until every card has been drawn.

> **SAY** "In the Old Testament, one of the nations of the world was called Assyria, and its capital city was Nineveh. The people of Nineveh did not worship God. In fact, they were considered enemies of God and His people. Today, we will learn how God is holy and will punish those who do not trust in Him and continue in sin. However, we'll also see how God is merciful and calls all people to repent. Out of His love and mercy, God called Jonah to preach against Nineveh, warning them to turn from their evil ways."

Transition from **WELCOME** to **LEARN**



© 2025 Lifeway



THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

1 ACTIVITY PAGE (5 minutes)

Invite kids to complete "Before and After" activity page.

> **SAY** "*Today, we will see how a prophet named Jonah didn't want to do something God called him to do.*"

2 REVIEW THE BIBLE STORY

> **SAY** "**GOD SENT JONAH TO NINEVEH TO TELL THE PEOPLE TO TURN FROM THEIR SINFUL WAYS**, *but Jonah ran away instead. God's plans cannot be stopped. How did God intervene in Jonah's disobedience? Look at Jonah 1:14-17.* **[Ask a volunteer to read Jonah 1:14-17.]** *God sent a storm which made the sea rage. As such, Jonah was tossed into the sea rather than be allowed to flee to Tarshish. Yet, in God's mercy, He saved Jonah by sending a great fish to swallow him.*
>
> *While Jonah was in the belly of the fish, he prayed to God. What did Jonah say about God's saving grace? Look at Jonah 2:7-9.* **[Ask a volunteer to read Jonah 2:7-9.]** *Jonah said that God heard his prayer and saved him from death. Salvation belongs to the Lord. Jonah spent three days in the belly of the fish, but God did not leave Jonah. God saved Jonah's life and reminded Jonah of His faithful love.*
>
> *Jonah finally obeyed God's command and went to Nineveh. Jonah warned the people of God's judgment on sin. The Ninevites, believing Jonah's words and hoping God would be merciful, chose to repent of their sin. God saw they turned from their evil ways, and He showed mercy. Why did Jonah become angry? Look at Jonah 4:2.* **[Ask a volunteer to read Jonah 4:2.]** *Jonah knew God was gracious, compassionate, and slow to anger. The Ninevites were Israel's enemy, and Jonah wanted God to punish them. God tried to help Jonah understand His grace and compassion through the plant, which at first provided shade and then died. Jonah was concerned for the plant, even though he didn't plant it. But Jonah didn't care for the people in Nineveh whom God made in His image. God cared for them, and in love, showed them mercy when they repented.*"

3 GOSPEL DISCUSSION

> **SAY** "*Jonah spent three days in a fish so that the people of Nineveh could hear God's message, turn from sin, and be saved. Jesus was in the tomb for three days so that we could hear and trust the gospel, turn from sin, and be saved. Have you repented of your sin?*"

(Tip: Use Scripture and the Gospel Plan Poster to explain how to become a Christian. Create an environment where kids are welcome to ask questions about what it means to follow Jesus.)

4 QUESTIONS FROM KIDS (3 minutes)

Show the "Unit 14, Session 2" Questions from Kids video. Prompt kids to discuss:

1. How do you repent?
2. Why do Christians continue to repent of sin?

© 2025 Lifeway

5 **KEY PASSAGE ACTIVITY** **(5 minutes)**

Show the Key Passage Poster. Lead kids in reading aloud Deuteronomy 13:4 together.

> **SAY** *"God is the one true God and worshiping Him is what is best for us. The commands in our key passage are not burdens but are ways we show that we love God and have experienced His love in our lives."*

Invite kids to create motions for each of the action verbs in the key passage such as follow, fear, keep his commands, listen, etc. Then invite kids to say the key passage while performing the motions they created.

Lead kids to sing "Faithful to Him (Deuteronomy 13:4)." You may also choose to sing a worship song of your choice.

6 **PRAY** **(2 minutes)**

Invite kids to pray before transitioning to Love.

> **SAY** *"Dear God, thank You for loving us. We know we are sinners, so thank You for sending Jesus to save us. Please help us turn away from sin and help us follow You. Help us obey Your commands. Amen."*

© 2025 Lifeway

LOVE God by Applying the Story

1 REVIEW & BIBLE SKILLS (5 minutes)

Distribute Bibles and display the Old Testament Mediterranean Map. Guide kids to open their Bibles to Jonah 2. Remind kids that Jonah boarded a boat to travel from Joppa (F9) to Tarshish. Then after being spit out by the fish, Jonah went to Nineveh (E11). Tell kids that the book of Jonah is in the Minor Prophets division.

Consider comparing the Old Testament Mediterranean Map to a modern-day map to help kids understand where this story took place. (Tip: Using a world map, locate the areas in and around modern-day Mosul, Iraq [E11].) Choose a volunteer to read aloud Jonah 2:6-9 or ask the kids to follow along as you read the verses aloud.

> **SAY** "*Even after disobeying God, Jonah experienced God's mercy. Inside the belly of a fish, Jonah experienced God's saving grace. God saved Jonah so he could go and preach to Nineveh.*
>
> *Yet unlike Jonah, who was disobedient, Jesus willingly obeyed God by laying down His life. Then He was placed in the tomb. Jesus compared Jonah's experience in the belly of the fish to the three days He would spend in the tomb. Jesus is greater than Jonah, because His perfect obedience to follow God's plan to die for people's sin provides us with the only way to be forgiven of sin.*"

2 GROUP DISCUSSION (10 minutes)

Ask the following questions. Lead the group to discuss.

> **SAY** "*God showed mercy to the sailors, Jonah, and Nineveh. How is God merciful to us?*"

Tell kids that when God shows mercy, He is not giving a punishment we deserve. Remind kids that we all deserve death because of our sin. Through Jesus, God shows mercy to sinners who deserve punishment for sin. (Option: Choose a volunteer to read Eph. 2:4-5.)

> **SAY** "*How can we show mercy to others?*"

Share how God desires for His people to demonstrate mercy to others because they have received His mercy through Jesus. Jonah was angry that his enemies received mercy, but the Bible tells us that God desires that we show mercy even to our enemies. Tell kids that we can show mercy by being quick to forgive, keep no record of wrongs, and show kindness even when others wrong us. (Option: Choose a volunteer to read Luke 6:35-36.)

> **SAY** "*How did you see God's patience in today's story?*"

Discuss how God was patient with Jonah when he ran away and when he was angry. God was patient with Nineveh, delaying His judgment by giving them 40 days to repent of their sins. Share how God is patient, but we shouldn't take His patience for granted. God provides us with opportunities to turn from sin and trust in Jesus. We don't need to delay seeking His forgiveness. (Option: Choose a volunteer to read Rom. 2:3-5.)

Transition from **LOVE** to **LIVE**

© 2025 Lifeway

LIVE the Mission

1 ACTIVITY CHOICE (10 minutes)

☐ OPTION 1: JONAH POP CUP

Before the session, cut the bottom out of a plastic cup. Then poke a hole near the lip of the cup. Create a cup for each kid. Provide kids with a cup. Guide kids to thread the yarn through the hole near the lip of the cup. Then guide kids to tie a knot in the yarn, so the yarn stays in place. Direct kids to crumple up a small piece of paper into a ball. Lead kids to wrap the yarn around the ball several times, and then tie the yarn securely to the ball.

Next, cut off the top of the balloon. Stretch the balloon over the bottom of the cup. Invite kids to decorate the cup as a fish and draw a stick figure on the ball to represent Jonah. Once assembled, kids can maneuver the cup, trying to get "Jonah" inside the cup. Then kids can pop "Jonah" out by pulling back on the balloon.

> **SAY** *"Jonah was swallowed by a great fish because of God's mercy. While in the belly of the fish, Jonah prayed to God and remembered how God alone provides salvation."*

☐ OPTION 2: TURN AROUND

LOW PREP

Review today's Bible story by playing a true or false game. If the statement is true, kids will step forward. If the statement is false, kids will remain in place. Consider using the following statements or create your own:

- Jonah tried to run away to Bethel. *(false, Nineveh)*
- The storm stopped when Jonah was thrown into the sea. *(true)*
- Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days. *(true)*
- Jonah said God would destroy Nineveh in 60 days. *(false, 40 days)*
- God showed mercy to the people of Nineveh. *(true)*
- God sent a cloud to give Jonah shade. *(false, plant)*

> **SAY** *"***GOD SENT JONAH TO NINEVEH TO TELL THE PEOPLE TO TURN FROM THEIR SINFUL WAYS.** *When we repent of sin and trust in Jesus, we are saved."*

2 JOURNAL AND PRAYER (5 minutes)

Distribute journal pages and pencils. Guide kids to think about and answer the questions listed on the page. As kids journal, invite them to share their ideas.

- What does this story teach me about God or the gospel?
- What does the story teach me about myself?
- Are there any commands in this story to obey? How are they for God's glory and my good?
- Are there promises in this story to remember? How do they help me trust and love God?
- How does this story help me to live on mission better?

Review the gospel and encourage kids to speak with you or another teacher if they have questions. Then pray, thanking God for His mercy and salvation. As time allows, lead kids to complete "Greater than Jonah" on the activity page.

© 2025 Lifeway