JONAH, PROPHET TO NINEVEH

Jonah



God told Jonah to preach to the great city of Nineveh, because their sin against God was great. Jonah immediately got up to try to flee from the Lord's presence. He did not want to go to Nineveh, so he boarded a boat to Tarshish.

The Lord sent a great storm on the sea. Jonah knew the storm was because of him and that if his shipmates would throw him overboard, the sea would calm down and they would live. The sailors picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the waves stilled, and the wind stopped.

The Lord sent a large fish to swallow Jonah. Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. Jonah prayed and thanked God for sending the fish to save him. Then the Lord commanded the fish to spit Jonah up on dry land. God said again to Jonah, "Get up! Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach the message that I tell you." This time, Jonah obeyed.

When Jonah got to Nineveh, he walked around the city and shouted, "In forty days, Nineveh will be destroyed!" The people of Nineveh believed what God said through Jonah. They fasted and dressed in sackcloth, from the rich to the poor. Even the king fasted and put on sackcloth, saying, "Each of us must turn from our evil ways. Who knows? Maybe God will turn from his anger, and we will not die." God saw the actions of the Ninevites and did not destroy them.

This made Jonah very angry. He prayed to God and said, "God, this is why I ran away from Nineveh! I knew that you are gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love."

Jonah traveled outside the city and sat down to see if God would change his mind and destroy the city after all. God caused a large plant to grow up to give him shade. Then God caused the plant to die, so that the sun beat down on Jonah's head. Jonah was angry.

God said, "You cared about the plant, which you did not plant or grow. Can't I care about a city full of people who don't know right from wrong?"

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.

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WELCOME

1 WELCOME TIME

Greet each preteen 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.

- **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?**

2 SESSION STARTER

☐ 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.*"

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THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

1 TELL THE BIBLE STORY

The Bible tells us what is true about God and about ourselves. All of the stories in the Bible fit together to tell us the big story of how God rescues sinners through His Son, Jesus.

Today, we heard about the prophet Jonah and how God sent him to Nineveh. Through our Bible story, we learned that **GOD SENT JONAH TO NINEVEH TO TELL THE PEOPLE TO TURN FROM THEIR SINFUL WAYS**. Whether this is your first time or your tenth time hearing this story, there is always something new to learn in God's Word.

Read from Jonah.

- **What does this story teach us about God?**

  God is merciful, gracious, forgiving, and kind. God saved Jonah from drowning in the sea by providing a fish to swallow him. God relented of His judgment on the Ninevites when they repented. God tried to help Jonah understand His grace and compassion through the plant, which at first provided shade and then died. Unlike Jonah, God cared about the people in Nineveh and showed compassion and mercy to them.

- **Why did Jonah become angry that God didn't punish the people of Nineveh?**

  Jonah knew God was gracious, compassionate, and slow to anger. **The Ninevites were Israel's enemy, and Jonah wanted God to punish them.** We all deserve punishment for our sin, but God shows His grace, mercy, and compassion toward us through His Son, Jesus. Like the Ninevites, God will rescue us from punishment when we trust in Jesus.

AFTER GOING THROUNG THE STORY QUESTIONS ABOVE, HAVE THE STUDENTS DO PART 1 of their learner guides individually.

2 GOSPEL DISCUSSION

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?

3 PRAY

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.

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THE GOD OF THE GOSPEL

Once Finished with section one. Move on to these questions and have the children follow along in their guides as you discuss them as a class.

1 THINK ABOUT THE STORY

- **How do you repent?**
- **Why do Christians continue to repent of sin?**

2 GROUP DISCUSSION

Distribute Bibles. Guide preteens to open their Bibles to Jonah 2. Choose a volunteer to read aloud Jonah 2:6-9. Remind preteens that God saved Jonah to warn the Ninevites of God's coming judgment on their sin. God sent Jesus to preach repentance because the kingdom of God had come. Yet unlike Jonah, who was disobedient, Jesus willingly obeyed God by laying down His life. 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.

Then lead the group to discuss the following questions.

1. **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.)

2. **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 we show mercy 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.)

3. **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 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.)

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.

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THE MISSION OF THE GOSPEL

1 KEY PASSAGE ACTIVITY

Instruct kids to open their Bibles to Deuteronomy 13:4. Lead them in reading the key passage aloud together. Remind kids that God is the one true God and worshiping Him is what is best for us. Discuss how the commands in the 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.

2 PRAY

Invite volunteers to share prayer requests. Then pray, thanking God for His mercy and salvation.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

TURN AROUND

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)*

Remind kids that **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.

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