


the
Jesus 
Storybook
Bible
Curriculum

God's messenger

Jonah and the big fish, from Jonah 1–4; Hebrews 1:1–2

☉ Please see the curriculum Introduction .pdf for more guidance on praying with your group and on Scripture memory.

☉ The total allotted time per lesson is 45 minutes. This is the minimum amount of time it would take to complete the whole lesson. The time can easily be extended to increase the lesson to as much as 1.5 hours. If you have more than the allocated 45 minutes, please use the extra time to extend the time for activities, to learn the memory verse, and to pray.

☉ The “Notes for Teachers on the Text” section is intended as explanation of the Bible text and advance preparation for you only; it is not expressed in terms or language the children could understand.

The Jesus Storybook Bible Curriculum
By Sally Lloyd-Jones and Sam Shammas

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Recap of the Previous Story

3 min. 

- ☉ Welcome the children and ask them to sit in a circle.
- ☉ Briefly recap the main point of the previous story: “Last time we met Daniel and we learned that Daniel loved and obeyed God whatever the cost. God rescued Daniel from the lions. We also memorized a verse about rescue.”

☉ Ask them to recite together the verse they learned at home about the story. “Jonah 2:9 — ‘Salvation comes from the LORD.’” Remind them that “salvation” is just a longer word for saving or being rescued.

☉ To lead into the theme of today’s story, say: “We are going to meet Jonah, who prayed the words we just recited. At the start of our story Jonah was not like Daniel. Jonah did not obey God whatever the cost. And the result was a storm. Raise your hand if you have ever been in, or seen, a storm? Thank you, hands down.”

Activity Introducing the Story

10 min. 

Aim: To expend energy and introduce the feeling of being in a storm.

Materials: None.

1. Say: “Imagine this room is a ship and you are in a storm at sea. The waves are pouring over you; the ship is rocking from side to side; you can’t see anything; the wind is blowing; you are scared. How would you move around? Who would like to go to the center of the circle and show us how to move in a storm?”
2. Choose a child or two to demonstrate, and comment appropriately.
3. Say: “We are going to play a game. This room is a ship and it is in a storm. You can move anywhere you like, pretending to be in the storm, but when I call out, ‘Man overboard!’ everyone has to stop moving and freeze. Anyone who moves is out and comes to sit near me.”

4. Play the game, allowing the children who are out and sitting near you to call out “Man overboard!” with you. You may also like to send them back to the ship after a few rounds so they are not sitting out for too long.

5. Call out other instructions and descriptions; e.g., “The wind is getting worse!” “The ship is tipping to the right!” “Hit the deck!” etc.

6. Toward the end of the allocated time, ask everyone to sit back down in a circle and say: “In our story today we have a ship, a storm, and a man overboard. Ready for today’s story?”

Join the children in the circle and announce the title of the story. Read aloud pages 160–169 from *The Jesus Storybook Bible* or listen to CD2 track 6.

Notes for Teachers on the Text

In the book of Jonah, God calls a Jewish prophet to go and preach in Nineveh, to the Assyrians. There was great racial animosity between the Jews and the Assyrians. They were mortal enemies. In effect, God is saying to Jonah, “I want you to go and preach to your mortal enemies. I want you to call them back to me” (see Jonah 1:1–2).

Two things happened as a result. For one, Jonah tried to run away, God sent a storm, and Jonah was eaten by a big fish and regurgitated—the only regurgitated prophet we have! The second thing was that Jonah then actually went to Nineveh and preached to the people he hated; unfortunately for him, they repented. He was then furious because he wanted to see God “destroy” them. The book ends with him still furious.

A few things to note:

☉ Jonah could not see how preaching to Nineveh would help him or his nation. But if God is King, then we must obey even if we don’t understand why. The evaluation question to ask is: “Am I willing to obey whatever God says about this area of my life, no matter how I feel about it?”

☉ The essence of the gospel is stated by Jonah in chapter 2, verse 9—“Salvation comes from the LORD.” The whole world needs to be saved from the penalty, power, and presence of sin. Through the person and work of Jesus Christ, God accomplishes this salvation for us—it is “from the

LORD.” We cannot accomplish it ourselves. We can only accept it by faith.

☉ Jonah is the only Old Testament prophet sent to a pagan city to call it to repentance. At the end of the book of Jonah, God asks the prophet a rhetorical question in reference to Nineveh, which at that time would have been one of the largest and most powerful cities in the world and one of the most hostile to God: “Should I not be concerned about that great city?” (Jonah 4:11 NIV 1984). The expected answer, much to Jonah’s chagrin, was “of course.” God cares about people, their suffering and pain, their heartaches and trials, the oppression they experience, the injustice they bear. He wants his creatures to experience joy, love, and peace. The logic goes like this: God loves people, the human creatures he has brought into being. Cities are where a lot of people live. Therefore, God cares about cities. And if God cares about cities and the people who live there, so should we.

The New Testament tells us that Jesus came to earth the first time not to bring judgment, but to bear it. Had he come to put down all evil and sin, there would have been no hope for anyone. Therefore, he calms the storm the way Jonah did: by being cast into the sea of sin in order to save others from the storm of judgment (Jonah 1:4–17). Jesus is the true Jonah (see Matthew 12:40), who was consumed by the storm and sea of God’s wrath, so that we could have peace and calm and be saved.

Understanding the Story

15 min. 

Aim: To understand that God loves people and so should we.

Materials: A microphone (this can be made out of paper, though if you can get a real microphone children enjoy using it); crayons; copies of the handout (the last page of this document).

1. At the end of the story, say: "Jonah had quite an adventure. We are going to retell this story from Jonah's point of view. So everyone pretend to be Jonah and pass the microphone around the circle. When you have the microphone, tell just one short part of what happened to Jonah and then pass the microphone to the next person. I'll start."
2. Hold the microphone and say: "Hello, my name is Jonah, and one day God told me that he had a job for me. He told me that he wanted me to ..." Do not finish the sentence, but hand the microphone to a child in the circle and ask them to continue.
3. Prompt as needed to make sure the entire story is told; e.g., "Yes, that did happen, but something happened before that ..." etc. If a child is struggling, whisper a hint or ask one of the questions below to help. (If the children are really struggling, you may simply want to use the questions below, asking them to pass the microphone to the next child when they have answered their question as Jonah.)
4. As the microphone passes around, ask suitable questions to help the children think about and remember the story, e.g.:

- ☉ Why did God want you to go to Nineveh?
- ☉ Did God love the people of Nineveh?
- ☉ Why didn't you want to go to Nineveh?
- ☉ Did you love the people of Nineveh?
- ☉ What did you do instead of going to Nineveh?
- ☉ What happened on the boat?
- ☉ What did the sailors try to do about the storm?
- ☉ What did you know had to be done about the storm?
- ☉ How did you feel when you were thrown into the sea?
- ☉ Who sent the big fish to swallow you?
- ☉ Describe what it felt like in the stomach of the fish. What did it smell like?
- ☉ What did you pray while you were inside the big fish?
- ☉ How many days were you inside the fish?
- ☉ What happened after three days?
- ☉ What did you do then?
- ☉ What message did you give to the people in Nineveh?
- ☉ Did the people in Nineveh listen to you?

5. At end of the story, take the microphone and say: "I, Jonah, finally went to Nineveh and told the people God's message. I told them that even though they had sinned and run far away from God, God still loved them; and that if they stopped running away from God, he would forgive them. They listened and stopped running. The End!"

6. Give each child a copy of the handout and a crayon. Say: "On your paper you can see a sign pointing 'To Nineveh' and a sign pointing 'Not to Nineveh.' There are also two sentences. The first is about how God feels about Nineveh and the second is about how Jonah feels about Nineveh. The same word is missing in both sentences. Fill in the missing word. What is it? Say it together. Yes, it is love."

7. Say: "Jonah did not love the people in Nineveh. Was he right? Raise your hand if you think Jonah should have loved the people in Nineveh. Thank you, hands down."

For larger groups: You may want to divide the group into smaller circles, each with a teacher and a microphone. Each teacher can then help their circle retell the story.

Drawing the Story to a Close

1 min. 

Say: “How many days did Jonah spend inside the fish? Correct, three. How does that connect to Jesus? Yes, just as Jonah was in the belly of a huge fish three days, so Jesus was in the tomb for three days before he rose from the dead.”

Say: “But unlike Jonah, who did not love the people of Nineveh and did not want God to forgive them, Jesus loves people and wants to forgive them.”

Jesus in the Story

2 min. 

Ask: “What did we discover about Jesus from today’s story?”

Get a few children to share their answers aloud, commenting appropriately; then ask everyone to write an answer in the space on their handout.

Praying about the Story

5 min. 

Pray aloud, thanking God that even though we sin and run away from him, he still loves us with a ‘Never Stopping, Never Giving Up, Unbreaking, Always and Forever Love.’ Pray that you and the children would love and forgive other people.

Ask the children to think if there is someone whom they sometimes find it difficult to love and then ask them to pray for God to help them love that person.

A Verse from the Story to Learn at Home

2 min. 

☉ Introduce the verse: “Remember the verse we recited at the start? It was a verse that Jonah prayed when he was inside the big fish.”

☉ Announce the verse: “So, the verse to practice at home is Jonah 2:9 – ‘Salvation comes from the LORD.’”

☉ Read the verse out loud together as a group.

☉ Remind the children to give the handout to their parents and to memorize the verse for next time.



God said:

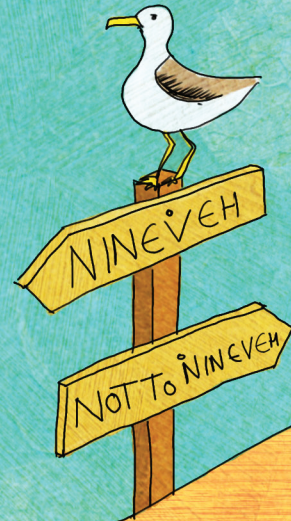
"The people have run away from me,

but I still _____ them."

Jonah said:

"Those are bad people doing bad things,

I do not _____ them."



☺ Jesus in the Story



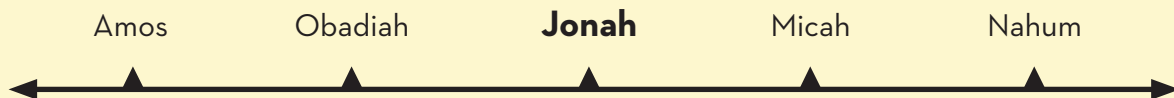
What did you discover about Jesus from this story?



Jesus

☺ A Verse from the Story to Learn at Home

Salvation comes from the LORD. (Jonah 2:9)



Notes for parents: From the story we learned that God loved the people of Nineveh. Even though we sin and run away from God, he still loves us and wants to forgive us.

Please help your child to memorize the verse and the Scripture reference for next time. Please review with them the place of the book of Jonah, using the diagram above.

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