



# 10

## God Sends Jonah

### Key Theme

- God uses imperfect people to accomplish His perfect plans.

### Key Passages

- Jonah 1–3; Matthew 12:38–41

### Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Describe Jonah's response to God calling him to Nineveh.
- Describe how God showed His grace to Jonah and Nineveh.



## Lesson Overview



### Come On In

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Students will place paper strips at Jonah 1 and Matthew 12. Students will practice the memory verse by unscrambling the words on the activity sheet and then reciting the verse to each other or to the class.



### Activity 1: God Sends Jonah Class Notes

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Students will fill out the God Sends Jonah Class Notes as you study the lesson.



### Studying God's Word

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God called Jonah to deliver an important message to Nineveh. Instead, Jonah headed the other direction. After being swallowed by a giant fish, Jonah repented and headed to Nineveh. Nineveh repented after hearing God's message. Jonah and Nineveh received God's grace, and God's will was accomplished.



### Activity 2: Breaking News from Nineveh

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Students will act out a skit of an on-the-spot reporter interviewing the people of Nineveh after hearing Jonah's message.

# Lesson Preparation

## WHAT YOU WILL DO



### COME ON IN

- Cut paper into strips for each student to mark today's study passages in Jonah 1 and Matthew 12.
- Print the Memory Verse Review Sheet from the Resource DVD-ROM for each student.



### GOD SENDS JONAH CLASS NOTES

- Print one God Sends Jonah Class Notes from the Resource DVD-ROM for each student. Keep the answer key for your use.



### STUDYING GOD'S WORD

- Study the Prepare to Share section.
- Go Before the Throne.
- Print one Reader's Theater Script from the Resource DVD-ROM for each student.
- Print one Jonah's Journey Map from the Resource DVD-ROM.



### BREAKING NEWS FROM NINEVEH

- Print four Nineveh Scripts from the Resource DVD-ROM.

## WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- Memory Verse Poster
- Paper strips
- Memory Verse Review Sheet for each student

- God Sends Jonah Class Notes for each student
- God Sends Jonah Class Notes Answer Key
- Pencils

- Student Take Home Sheets
- Reader's Theater Script for each student
- Jonah's Journey Map
- Poster putty or tape

- Nineveh Scripts
- Microphone prop



## Memory Verse

**1 Chronicles 29:11** Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, the power and the glory, the victory and the majesty; for all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours; Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and You are exalted as head over all.

► **Pace your lesson!** Use the clocks to mark the time you want to finish each section. This will help you stay on track and finish on time. You may need to shorten or drop sections as necessary.





# Prepare to Share

## SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages listed above with this background.

We serve an amazing God! He continually reveals Himself to us. Time and time again, His Word proclaims His attributes including His patience, mercy, grace, forgiveness, and goodness (Exodus 34:6–7). As we study one of God’s prophets today, we do well to be grateful each day for the grace God has shown in our lives.

Jonah was a prophet of God who was called to prophesy to the 10 tribes of Israel. However, his acclaim doesn’t come from his association with Israel, but rather from his encounter with God, a great fish, and the Ninevites. The capital of Assyria, Nineveh was believed to have been one of the largest cities in the world at the time. The people there were known for godlessness, idolatry, and cruelty. The Jews despised these pagan Gentiles—and Jonah was no exception.

That seems to be why Jonah ran the other direction when God called him to warn the Ninevites of their wickedness and of God’s impending punishment. He despised the Ninevites and did not want God to forgive them (Jonah 4:2). Jonah’s escape route led him to a ship bound for Tarshish (Jonah 1:3). But could Jonah really outrun God? Of course not. God’s purpose will never be subverted.

In fact, Jonah’s rebellion and flight led to a revelation of God’s complete sovereignty and omnipotence over every circumstance and over all of His creation. In pursuit of Jonah, the Lord sent a great wind on the sea. A great storm arose, and the ship headed for Tarshish was about to be broken up (Jonah 1:4). Not only that, but the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah when he was thrown overboard (Jonah 1:17). Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. This is a God that CANNOT be outrun or outwitted! Finally, Jonah prayed to the Lord in humble submission to God’s sovereignty, in sincere repentance, and with an earnest request for God’s mercy and grace. The Lord heard his prayer and spoke to the fish, which vomited the prophet of God out onto the ground (Jonah 2).

God faithfully answered Jonah’s prayer for mercy. God saved him from drowning, preserved him in the fish, and then offered him another opportunity to go to the Ninevites and preach the message of judgment. This time, Jonah obeyed!

Jonah cried out, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” (Jonah 3:4). God again demonstrated His abundant grace and mercy—this time to the sinful, rebellious, and despicable Ninevites. The people of Nineveh—from the greatest to the least—believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth as a sign of their repentance. God saw that they turned from their evil ways, and He relented and did not bring the destruction He had planned (Jonah 3:10).

To review, Jonah had received a clear message from God and knew that he should obey, but instead he chose to sin by disregarding God’s command to go to Nineveh. His sin did not stop God or His purposes. Nor can we thwart God’s plans for us. He will always accomplish what He intends, and He WILL carry out the work He has begun in us to completion until the day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:6).

What marvelous lessons for us in this small book. We, too, have sinned against God and continue to do so, but He has been gracious in giving us the message of the gospel. He has shown mercy to us in offering His Son on the Cross for the payment of our sins. He has listened to our cries of repentance and held back the punishment that He would be perfectly justified to give us.

We can use the account of Jonah to examine our own hearts in another area. Jonah was hostile toward sharing the gospel with the pagan Gentiles of Nineveh and was displeased that God would indeed save them (Jonah 4:1–2). Similarly, there may be times we feel that certain people don’t deserve to hear the message of the gospel—the message of repentance and faith. Perhaps we believe them to be pathetic, evil sinners—seemingly without hope. We need to guard against any type of self-righteousness in our own salvation and remember that our sins were the reason Jesus suffered and died. He willingly bore our sins, dying on our behalf. Let’s take time to consider the Apostle Paul’s words to Timothy: “And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth” (2 Timothy 2:24–25).

What an awesome truth to meditate on. Throughout the ages, God has used His people to deliver the message of repentance and forgiveness in Christ, and He is still doing so today. Maybe you will be the Jonah for someone in your class today who will hear the message of the hope of Christ and trust in that truth.

## **APOLOGETICS/HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Jonah was a prophet from the region of Galilee, the city of Gath Hopher near Nazareth (2 Kings 14:25). We know that his father was a man named Amittai, but nothing else about the family is recorded in Scripture. Although some scholars claim Jonah was not a real person, Jesus Himself referred to Jonah. On at least two occasions (Matthew 12:39–41, 16:4), Jesus used Jonah as an example of a call to repentance and as a sign of His death, burial, and Resurrection. Jesus told the scribes and Pharisees that “as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” Undoubtedly, Jesus regarded Jonah as an historical figure, and He regarded Jonah’s experiences in the fish and his preaching to Nineveh as real events.

The Assyrians were descendants of Shem’s son Asshur who settled in the North and occupied various places throughout the centuries. Around 1100 BC, Assyria rose to power in Mesopotamia and later declined. During this period of decline, around 800 BC, God sent Jonah to Nineveh. The city was known for its immorality and cruelty, and it is truly a miracle of God’s grace that the people turned from their wickedness—but the repentance didn’t continue in future generations. Later prophecies would be delivered against the Ninevites from Nahum, and God would judge them for their wickedness.

Under the leadership of Tiglath-Pileser III (2 Kings 16:7), Assyria began to influence Israel. Eventually, the Assyrians would conquer the Northern tribes and take them into captivity. After the fall of Samaria in 721 BC, the Israelites lost control of that region for many centuries. The Assyrian kings began to carry the Jews away from their land and brought new leaders from their own culture to Israel. This advanced the practice of the Jews intermarrying with the Assyrians and other foreigners. Because of this intermarrying, they were considered traitors by those who had remained in Judah, causing tension between the Samaritans and the Jews, which continued well past the time of Christ.

For more information on this topic, see the Online Resource Page.



### **BEFORE THE THRONE**

Gracious Lord, how many times have I gone the other direction when you’ve called me to do your will? Too many! Forgive me, Lord. Help me to grow in my faith and trust you more. Help me to be obedient the first time. I am awed by your grace and mercy to Jonah in his disobedience. The same grace and mercy falls on me in my disobedience. I am humbled more and more as I come face to face with your greatness. May my students be humbled and awed by you this week, too. Bless them and reveal your truth to them through your Word.



## COME ON IN

As students arrive . . .

- They will mark their Bibles at Jonah 1 and Matthew 12 with strips of paper.
- They will say the memory verse after they unscramble the words on the Memory Verse Review Sheet.

*This time at the beginning of class should be used to review the memory verse. We have provided an activity sheet on the Resource DVD-ROM for you to use. Students should unscramble the letters of the missing words and then recite the verse to you or another student. Each week the verse will get harder to unscramble. You may have other ideas and ways to encourage your students to memorize the verse.*



After all the students arrive, pray with them before beginning the lesson.



## REVIEW

Using the Lesson Theme Posters provided with each lesson, quickly review the previous lesson(s) with your students. Take 5 to 10 minutes to reinforce the important truths the students have heard so far in your class.

Ask the children questions about the previous lessons as you display the Lesson Theme Posters. Reflect briefly on the passages you read, bringing the objectives and themes back into focus. This will refresh the truths in your students' minds and maintain continuity as you teach through the lessons.



## God Sends Jonah Class Notes

### MATERIALS

- God Sends Jonah Class Notes for each student
- God Sends Jonah Class Notes Answer Key
- Pencils

### INSTRUCTIONS

*Print the class notes for each student. Pass them out at the beginning of class. Have students fill in the blanks as you study the lesson.*

We will be completing these class notes as we study the Bible passages. Try not to work ahead. You will fill in the blanks as we come to them.

### CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

As we complete our class notes today, we will learn what happened to Jonah when he tried to run from God, and what happened when he finally obeyed God's command.



# Studying God's Word

➤ Use the History of Israel Poster included with your teacher kit to show your class where the biblical accounts you study chronologically fit into this timeline.

➤ While you discuss this idea, refer to the Roles of the Prophets Poster.

➤ The students will read today's verses from the Jonah Reader's Theater Script on the Resource DVD-ROM.

## READ THE WORD

As we study the Old Testament, we hear about men called to be prophets. God used prophets to tell the people what He wanted them to know. Remember, they didn't have the complete Bible then. So God spoke through prophets to teach the people His truth and help them to know Him better. God also sent warnings to the people through His prophets. And He used prophets to tell the people about things that were going to happen in the future. We have talked about a couple of God's prophets. Remember Samuel? He anointed David as king and served as the last judge of Israel. Then we met Nathan. He was the prophet of God who helped King David during his reign.

*Pass out the Reader's Theater Scripts to the students. Today we are going to talk about someone I think you may have heard of. But you may not have known he was a prophet of God. His name is Jonah! Jonah was a prophet to Israel, the northern nation. But he isn't always remembered for that. He usually gets remembered for the part he played in the true account about God, a pagan nation, and a great big fish. Sound familiar? Let's read Part 1 of our Reader's Theater Script. Assign students to read for the different characters. You might want to read for the part of Narrator.*

## Jonah 1:1-3

## EXAMINE THE WORD

Although this account may be familiar to you already, you should pay close attention. You may hear something new! Let's answer some questions about what we just read!

### Observe the Text

- ? Who are the characters here? *Jonah 1:1. Jonah and the Lord.*
- ? Good. In verse one, what did the Lord do? *Jonah 1:1. He spoke to Jonah.*
- ? What did He ask Jonah to do? *Jonah 1:2. Go to Nineveh and cry out against it.*
- ? What do you think that means? *Allow discussion.*

The city of Nineveh was a wicked city. The people there 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. *Hold up the Joppa, Tarshish, Nineveh Map. Point to where Jonah was in Joppa and where God wanted him to go (Nineveh).*

So Jonah's assignment from God was to go tell some wicked people he didn't really like that they needed to stop their sinning. Does it sound like a very fun trip? *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. He got on a ship and took off! Point out on the map which direction Jonah fled.*

? How will you complete #1 and #2 on your class notes? *Have students fill in #1 and #2 on their class notes—1. Nineveh. 2. Ship, other.*

➤ After filling in each point on the class notes, have the students re-read the statement together or call on individual students to read it.

## Discover the Truth

God called Jonah on a mission and Jonah got on a ship that was headed in the opposite direction! Would Jonah really be able to flee from the Lord? Of course not. God is omnipotent—all-powerful. And He is omnipresent—everywhere. He can't be fooled! Let's keep reading and see how God responded to Jonah trying to run away from Him!



## READ THE WORD

Some of you may already know what God did next. Let's read Part 2 of the Reader's Theater Script. This is **Jonah 1:4–17**. *Read through Part 2 of Reader's Theater Script.*

Jonah 1:4–17

## EXAMINE THE WORD

This is so exciting! Who says the Bible is boring? Help me answer these questions about what we just read. Look in your Bibles or on your scripts for the answers.

### Observe the Text

? What happened first when Jonah got on the ship? *Jonah 1:4. God sent a great wind, the sea got rough, the ship was in danger.* **Complete #3 on your class notes.** *Have students fill in #3 on their class notes—wind, sea, danger.*

? Then what happened? *Jonah 1:5. The sailors were afraid; they threw the cargo overboard.* **Complete #4 on your class notes.** *Have students fill in #4 on their class notes—afraid, cargo.*

? What was Jonah doing all this time? *Jonah 1:5. He had gone down below and was fast asleep.* **Complete #5 on your class notes.** *Have students fill in #5 on their class notes—sleeping.*

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

That's right. Jonah's shipmates realized that this storm was all Jonah's fault! He had tried to run from the Lord.

? How will you complete #6 on your class notes? *Have students complete #6 on the class notes—run.*

Jonah told them to throw him overboard and the storm would stop! And although they didn't want to do it, they finally realized they had to.

- ? What did the men do to Jonah? *Jonah 1:15. They threw Jonah into the sea. How will you complete #7 on your class notes? Have students complete #7 on their class notes—threw, sea.*
- ? What happened once Jonah got off the ship? *Jonah 1:15. The storm stopped. Complete #8 on your class notes. Have students complete #8 on their class notes—storm.*
- ? You probably know what happened next. Someone read Jonah 1:17 again. What happened to Jonah? *The great fish swallowed Jonah. Complete #9 on your class notes. Have students fill in #9 on their class notes—fish.*

### Discover the Truth

Jonah deserved to be punished. God called Jonah to do something important for Him. But instead of obeying, Jonah tried to run! But God would not allow that. God's plans will not be stopped. And God had a plan to use Jonah, so instead of punishing Jonah, God would give him a second chance. To do that, God demonstrated His power. He is omnipotent—all-powerful—over the weather, the seas, and the creatures in the sea. 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.



### READ THE WORD

Jonah 2:1, 2:10

So we have a very powerful God and a prophet who has been swallowed by a big fish! What happened next? Let's read Part 3 of the Reader's Theater Script. It's just two verses! *Assign more readers.*

### EXAMINE THE WORD

That was quite an experience Jonah had! Swallowed by a giant fish and then vomited onto dry land. What can we learn from that?

### Observe the Text

- ? What did Jonah do from the fish's belly? *Jonah 2:1. Prayed to the Lord his God. Complete #10 on your class notes. Prayed.*
- ? That's right. And what did the Lord do after hearing Jonah's prayer? *Jonah 2:10. The Lord spoke to the fish and it vomited Jonah onto dry land. Have students fill in #11 on their class notes—vomit, land.*

Jonah 3:1-5, 3:10

So Jonah was back on dry ground. God showed Jonah grace. He had a second chance to obey. And this time Jonah did. Let's read Part 4 of our Reader's Theater Script. *Assign readers to read Jonah 3:1-5, 3:10 on the script.*

- ? Now, where was Jonah headed? *Jonah 3:2. Nineveh. Refer to the Joppa, Tarshish, Nineveh Map.*

That's right! He had learned to go where God called him. He was going to obey God this time. Complete #12 on your class notes. *Obeyed.*

? What message did God have Jonah deliver to the people in Nineveh?

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. Jonah preached God's message to all the people in the city.

? How will you complete #13 on your class notes? Fill that in now. *Turn.*

? How did the people respond? Did they listen? Someone re-read Jonah 3:5 and 3:10. It's the very end of Part 4 on your script. *Assign a reader. The people did listen. They responded, believed God, and turned from their evil way.*

? And what did God do? *Jonah 1:10. He did not destroy Nineveh because they had turned from their sin. Complete #14 on your class notes. Did not.*

### Discover the Truth

After being swallowed by a fish, 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. He gave 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. The people heard Jonah's cry and repented of their sins. They turned to God. God demonstrated His grace to Jonah AND to Nineveh. God spared Jonah and did not destroy the people of Nineveh.

*Review how this attribute applies to Jonah and Nineveh.*



MERCIFUL  
GRACIOUS

*(Refer to Attributes Poster)*



## Breaking News from Nineveh

### MATERIALS

- Four Nineveh Scripts from the Resource DVD-ROM
- Optional microphone prop: pencil, ruler, or hair brush

### INSTRUCTIONS

*Assign three students to play the characters. Encourage the person who plays the Reporter to act like a real on-the-street reporter, holding the microphone when he talks for his guests as he interviews them.*

We're going to hear a fun skit about what it might have been like to live in Nineveh

before and after the time Jonah delivered God's message to the people. *Have the characters act out the skit.*

### CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

When the people of Nineveh heard Jonah deliver the message from God about judgment, they believed it was true. They repented and called out to God for mercy. God is merciful and gracious. He forgave the people just like He forgave Jonah.





# Applying God's Word

## WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

God called Jonah, but Jonah did not want to obey. He ran the other way! He rejected God's call and fled to Tarshish. But we can't outrun God. After some correction from God through a large fish, Jonah did obey. He went and preached to the people of Nineveh. He told them to turn from their sins. And the people listened and turned to God, so God did not destroy the city.

God showed His grace and mercy to Jonah by listening to him from the belly of the fish and allowing him a second chance to obey. God showed His grace and mercy to Nineveh by warning them through Jonah, forgiving them when they repented, and saving the city.

## GOD'S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

Is this a true account? Did this really happen? Many people don't believe it. How could a fish swallow a man and the man live three days in the fish? How could the hearts of an entire evil, pagan city be turned back to God? These are good questions. If you ever get asked questions like these, I want you to remember a few things. First, we cannot question the truth of God's Word. Every word of God is true. God does not lie.

But sometimes God gives us another answer, like He does with the account of Jonah. Turn to Matthew 12:38-41. We are going to see that someone else believed this account of Jonah. This is someone we can trust to tell us the truth! *Read Matthew 12:38-41.*

Matthew 12:38-41

► Pass out the Student Take Home Sheets and remind the students to practice the memory verse this week.

- ? Who is the person talking about Jonah here? *Jesus!*
- ? What did Jesus say about Jonah? *Matthew 12:40. He was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish.*

Jesus spoke about Jonah. Jesus believed that the whole account of Jonah, the storm, the fish, and the city of Nineveh, were true. If Jesus believed it, I think we can, too!



### MEMORY VERSE

**1 Chronicles 29:11** Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, the power and the glory, the victory and the majesty; for all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours; Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and You are exalted as head over all.



### GROUP PRAYER TIME

- Praise God who gives us His grace even when we don't deserve it.
- Thank God that we can never run where He can't find us.
- Ask God to use us to proclaim the truth of His Word to others.