



# 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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Write on the board, “Do you really believe a fish swallowed a man?”

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.



### 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.

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|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Print one Reader’s Theater Script from the Resource DVD-ROM for each student. | <input type="checkbox"/> Print one Class Notes Answer Key from the Resource DVD-ROM |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Print one Jonah’s Journey Map from the Resource DVD-ROM.                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Student Guides   |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> Pencils  |



### Activity: Making Accommodations

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Students will examine how Jesus affirmed the truth of Jonah being swallowed by a fish.

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Student Guides | <input type="checkbox"/> Pencils |
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# Prepare to Share

## SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the lesson key passages along 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—seem-

ingly 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.

## HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS 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.

► **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.





## 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.*



## Review

In our last lesson, we talked about the major split that happened after Solomon's death.



**Can anyone remember what the division resulted in?** *Solomon's son Rehoboam ruled over the Southern Kingdom of Judah, and Jeroboam was made king over the Northern Kingdom of Israel.*

For the remainder of the lessons this year, we will be talking about Israel and Judah in this context. For the most part, the Scriptures will call the northern area Israel

and the southern area Judah, but there are a few exceptions that we will come across.

Our lesson today is going to step outside of Israel for a moment to focus on a neighboring nation. The nation of Assyria was to the northeast of Israel, and its capital was Nineveh. Nineveh was a Gentile nation, but salvation from sin was not only for the Jews, as we will see.



➤ Write on the board, "Do you really believe a fish swallowed a man?"



## Studying God's Word

### 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 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.

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

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.

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

Jonah 1:1-3

## EXAMINE THE WORD

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

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.*
- ? 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 Jonah's Journey Map. Point to where Jonah was in Joppa and where God wanted him to go (Nineveh).*

So God told Jonah to preach to some wicked people he hated that they needed to repent from sinning. 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.*

### 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.



► 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.

## 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. Assign students to read through Part 2 of Reader's Theater Script.

## EXAMINE THE WORD

### 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.*
- ? **Jonah's shipmates realized that this storm was all Jonah's fault, because 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. 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.*
- ? **What happened to Jonah in verse 17?** *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

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. *Assign more readers.*

Jonah 2:1, 2:10

## 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.*
- ? 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—vomited, land.*

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.*

Jonah 3:1–5, 3:10

- ? NOW, where was Jonah headed? *Jonah 3:2. Nineveh. Refer to the Jonah's Journey Map.*  
Jonah 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? *Jonah 3:4. In 40 days the city will be overthrown.*  
God was warning the Ninevites to repent and turn from their sin before it was too late, because in 40 days the city would be destroyed 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 the cry and repented of their sins. They turned to God. God demonstrated His grace to Nineveh, too, when He did not destroy the city! *Review how this attribute applies to Jonah and Nineveh.*

GRACIOUS





# Making Accommodations

## MATERIALS

- Student Guides
- Pencils

## INSTRUCTIONS

Do you really believe that Jonah was swallowed by a fish, stayed there for three days and nights, and was then spit up on the beach to head off to Nineveh? If you do, people will call you a fool. They are going to tell you that you accept what intelligent people know to be a myth. Those claims will even be leveled against you by scholars and teachers who claim to be Christians.

So how would you answer these claims? Is the account of Jonah and the great fish a reasonable thing to believe? Can it be set aside as a myth without harming the gospel?

In your Student Guide, you will find an activity called Making Accommodations. There are a series of questions for you to answer about the account of Jonah. Try to answer the questions with simple answers. We will talk about the answers in a few minutes. *Engage students and help them with any answers they cannot find.*

## CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

How many have heard of this idea of Jesus accommodating the misunderstandings of the people of His day? *Allow answers.*

1. Can God lie or deceive people (Hebrews 6:18; Titus 1:2)? *No.*
2. Is Jesus God? *Yes.*
3. Can Jesus lie? *No.*
4. Did Jesus present Jonah as a real person (Matthew 12:38–41, 16:1–4)? *Yes.*

5. Did Jesus say that Jonah was in a fish for three days and nights? *Yes.*

6. Did Jesus say that Jonah preached to Nineveh? *Yes.*

7. Some people would claim that Jesus knew that the account of Jonah was not real history, but He used Jonah as an example anyway. He was just accommodating to the people's understanding without correcting their misunderstanding. If this were the case, would Jesus be deceiving the people into believing Jonah was a real person who was really swallowed by a fish? *Yes.*

8. If Jesus misled his listeners, can He be the Savior of all mankind? *If Jesus sinned by telling a lie or deceiving people, then He cannot be the perfect, sinless sacrifice who paid for sin on the Cross. God the Father would only accept a sacrifice that was sinless.*

If we believe that the account of Jonah is just a myth, then we must believe that Jesus was willing to deceive people because, as God in the flesh, He knew the truth about Jonah. Jesus also affirmed that Moses wrote Genesis, but many scholars “know” that is not true, in which case Jesus would have been misleading the people.

If we allow the skeptics' claims to be set in authority over the clear truths of the Bible, we call Jesus a liar. And if we call Jesus a liar, we undermine the gospel by accounting sin to the sinless Lamb.

It all comes down to the authority we place our trust in—will it be God's Word or the work of so-called scholars who turn Jesus into a liar?





# Applying God's Word

## WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

We have no reason to doubt the miracles recorded in the book of Jonah. God's Word is true. The biggest of all of those miracles was the salvation of this truly pagan, wicked nation. Despite Jonah's initial rebellion, God used him to preach a message of coming judgment that was heeded by the repentant people. In this, God was pleased to demonstrate His mercy and grace to sinful people.

If we have Jonah's attitude and are not willing to proclaim the message of repentance and faith to some group or person we don't think is worthy of salvation, we need a significant attitude adjustment. Jonah received God's grace in being spared from the destruction he deserved for his rebellion.

## GOD'S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

- ? In what ways do you identify with Jonah in this section of Scripture? *Discuss various answers.*
- ? When the gospel is proclaimed, it must be proclaimed through imperfect people. How can recognizing your limitations actually help you in proclaiming the gospel to those around you? *Recognizing our limitations should drive us to our knees in prayer, begging God for wisdom and a desire to share the gospel with others. We need to guard our hearts against thinking that certain people are not worthy of receiving the good news of the gospel, or are too far gone for God to reach.*
- ? Jonah knew that God was merciful and gracious (4:1–2), but his correct understanding didn't automatically lead him to right actions. How can we help one another to obey God's commands and trust in His character? *Sin leads us to do things we know we shouldn't. As we interact within the Body of Christ, we can encourage one another and stir up one another to love and good deeds that are in line with God's character.*
- ? Let's do a little heart checkup. If you really stopped and examined your heart, who do you believe is unworthy of receiving grace and mercy from the gracious and merciful God who saved you from your sin? *Most people harbor some resistance to sharing the gospel with a certain type of person or group of people. This may stem from past experience and bitterness. Whether it is a certain ethnic group or a certain class of criminals, or people with a certain sin pattern (i.e., homosexuality, witchcraft) or religion, we need to see our own sin as just as wicked in the eyes of a perfectly holy God and repent of any ungodly attitudes.*
- ? If you have received God's mercy and grace in Christ, who do you need to intentionally share that truth with? Who have you been hesitant to go to with the hope of the gospel? *Discuss various answers, encouraging the students to share the wonderful news of the forgiveness of sins.*





## MEMORY VERSE

**1 Chronicles 29:10–11** Therefore David blessed the Lord before all the assembly; and David said: “Blessed are You, Lord God of Israel, our Father, forever and ever. 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

Be sure to pray with your class before you dismiss them.

- Thank God for His mercy and grace in offering salvation through Christ.
- Praise God for using imperfect people for His glory.
- Ask God for hearts that long to bring the gospel to everyone we can.