

Jonah and the Big Fish

Sunday School Lesson for 3rd to 5th Grade, 45–60 minutes

Main point: God gives second chances, so when God speaks, we obey the first time and don't run away.

Bible passage: Jonah 1:1–3:10. Read it before class.

Memory verse: "But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD." *Jonah 2:9 (KJV)*

You need: a Bible for each child (or one for every two children), paper and a pencil for each child, a whiteboard or large paper, a marker, and one take-home sheet for each child.

Before class: write the memory verse on the board.

1. Opening game: Do the Opposite (5–10 minutes)

Everyone stands. Give quick directions ("Step forward!", "Turn left!", "Hands up!", "Sit down!"), but kids must do the exact **opposite**. Anyone who does what you said sits out for one round. Then play one round where they do exactly what you say. Ask: *Which one felt strange? Why is it easy to go the wrong way when you aren't paying attention?* Say: "Today we will meet a prophet who did the exact opposite of what God told him."

2. Bible story: Jonah Runs, God Rescues (15 minutes)

Kids open their Bibles to Jonah 1. When you reach a **Look up** line, a child finds the verse and reads it out loud. Tell the rest in your own words.

God's call. Look up Jonah 1:2. God told Jonah, the son of Amittai, to go to Nineveh, that great city, and **cry against it**, which means to warn the people about their sin. Their wickedness had come up before God (1:1–2). **Look up Jonah 1:3.** Jonah ran "from the presence of the LORD." He went down to Joppa, found a ship going to Tarshish, paid the **fare** (the price of the trip) and went down into it.

The storm. The LORD sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty **tempest** (a terrible storm), so the ship was about to break (1:4). The **mariners** (sailors) were afraid. Every man cried to his own god, and they threw the **wares** (the cargo) into the sea to make the ship lighter. Jonah was down inside the ship, fast asleep (1:5). The **shipmaster** (captain) woke him and told him to call on his God (1:6). The sailors cast lots, a way of choosing, and the lot fell on Jonah (1:7). **Look up Jonah 1:9.** Jonah said, "I am an Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land." The men were even more afraid, because Jonah had told them he was running from the LORD (1:10).

Into the sea. Jonah told them to throw him into the sea, because he knew the storm had come because of him (1:12). The men rowed hard to get back to land, but they could not (1:13). They prayed to the LORD, and then they threw Jonah into the sea. **Look up Jonah 1:15.** The sea "ceased from her raging." The men feared the LORD very much, offered a sacrifice to Him and made **vows**, promises to God (1:16).



The great fish. Look up Jonah 1:17. The LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. **Look up Jonah 2:1.** Jonah prayed to the LORD his God out of the fish's belly. He said God heard him (2:2). He told how the water closed over him and the seaweed wrapped around his head (2:5). When his soul **fainted** (he felt weak and ready to give up), he remembered the LORD (2:7). **Look up Jonah 2:9.** That is our memory verse! Then the LORD spoke to the fish, and it put Jonah out on dry land (2:10).

The second chance. Look up Jonah 3:1. The word of the LORD came to Jonah "the second time." God told him again to go to Nineveh and preach what God told him (3:2). This time Jonah got up and went, "according to the word of the LORD." Nineveh was so big it took three days to walk across it (3:3). **Look up Jonah 3:4.** Jonah cried, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." **Overthrown** means destroyed.

Nineveh turns to God. Look up Jonah 3:5. The people of Nineveh believed God. They **proclaimed a fast** (everyone stopped eating for a time) and put on **sackcloth**, rough, scratchy cloth people wore to show sorrow, from the greatest to the least. The king got up from his throne, laid his robe aside, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes (3:6). He ordered everyone to cry mightily to God and turn from their evil way and from violence (3:7–8). **Look up Jonah 3:10.** God saw that they turned from their evil way, and He did not bring the destruction He had warned them about.

3. Questions to ask (10 minutes)

Thinking questions (no single right answer; let kids talk)

1. Jonah tried to run "from the presence of the LORD" (1:3). Can anyone really get away from God?
2. Jonah was asleep while the sailors were praying (1:5–6). What does that show about what running from God does to us?
3. Jonah prayed from inside a fish, maybe the worst place he had ever been (2:1). Where can you pray?
4. God spoke to Jonah "the second time" (3:1). Why do you think God gave Jonah another chance?
5. The people of Nineveh showed they were sorry by what they did, not only by what they said (3:5–8, 3:10). What does it look like to really turn away from something wrong?

Recall questions

1. Where was Jonah's ship going? (*Tarshish, Jonah 1:3*)
2. How long was Jonah inside the fish? (*Three days and three nights, 1:17*)
3. What did the king of Nineveh do? (*He got up from his throne, put on sackcloth and sat in ashes, 3:6*)

4. Memory verse: Erase a Word (5 minutes)

Explain the old words: **sacrifice** means give to God, **thanksgiving** means saying thank You, **vowed** means promised, and **salvation** means being saved and rescued. Read the verse on the board together. Erase two words and read it again. Keep erasing two words at a time until the board is empty and the class can say it alone. Then kids say it to a partner.



5. What this means for us (5 minutes)

Say: "God gave Jonah a second chance, and the people of Nineveh turned from their evil way. God loves you. The Bible says: 'For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23, KJV). That means all of us have done wrong, and none of us is as good as God. Jesus is God manifest in the flesh, which means God came to earth as a man (1 Timothy 3:16). Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). How do we obey the gospel? 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.' (Acts 2:38, KJV) To **repent** means to turn away from sin, like Nineveh did; our old self dies (Romans 6:6). We are **buried with Jesus in baptism**, all the way under the water, in Jesus' name. **Remission** means our sins are washed away, and we come up to live a new life (Romans 6:4; Acts 22:16). And God fills us with the **Holy Ghost**, and we speak with other tongues as the Spirit gives the words (Acts 2:4). The Bible calls this being born again (John 3:5)."

Pray with the kids, and encourage them to talk with their parents and pastor about being baptized in Jesus' name and filled with the Holy Ghost. Never pressure a child.

This week: when God's Word or a parent asks you to do something, do it the first time, without running the other way.

6. Activity: Bible Look-Up Race (10–15 minutes)

Kids work in pairs with one Bible. Read a reference and a question. The first pair to find the verse and read the answer out loud wins the point.

1. Jonah 1:1: Who was Jonah's father? (*Amittai*)
2. Jonah 1:3: In what town did Jonah find a ship? (*Joppa*)
3. Jonah 1:6: Who woke Jonah up? (*The shipmaster, the captain of the ship*)
4. Jonah 1:9: What did Jonah say he was? (*An Hebrew, who feared the LORD*)
5. Jonah 1:16: What did the sailors do after the sea was calm? (*They feared the LORD, offered a sacrifice and made vows*)
6. Jonah 2:10: Where did the fish put Jonah? (*Upon the dry land*)
7. Jonah 3:4: How many days did Jonah say until Nineveh would be overthrown? (*Forty days*)
8. Jonah 3:5: What did the people of Nineveh put on? (*Sackcloth*)

7. Prayer

"Dear God, thank You for giving second chances. Thank You that You hear us when we pray, wherever we are. Help us obey You the first time and not run away from what You ask. Thank You for loving us and coming to save us in Jesus. In Jesus' name, amen."

If a child asks "Could a man really live inside a fish?": answer simply and honestly. The Bible says the LORD prepared the great fish (Jonah 1:17), so it was a miracle, something only God can do. Jesus Himself talked about Jonah being inside the sea creature three days and three nights (Matthew 12:40).

