

Jonah and the Big Fish

Sunday School Lesson for Kindergarten to 2nd Grade, 45 minutes

Main point: God gives second chances, so when God speaks, we obey.

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, two signs that say "Nineveh" and "Tarshish," tape, a paper fish or a beanbag, crayons, and one take-home sheet for each child. If you have one: a blue sheet for the sea.

Before class: tape the "Nineveh" sign on one wall and the "Tarshish" sign on the opposite wall. Put a bookmark in your Bible at Jonah 3:1.

1. Opening game: Nineveh or Tarshish? (5–10 minutes)

Call out "Nineveh!" or "Tarshish!" and kids hurry to that wall. Call "Storm!" and everyone crouches down and holds on tight. Call "Calm!" and they stand very still. Then ask: *Was it hard to go exactly where you were told?* Say: "Today we will meet a man God told to go one way, and he ran the opposite way!"

2. Bible story: Jonah Runs, God Rescues (10 minutes)

Hold up your Bible open to Jonah 1, so the kids can see the story comes from God's Word. Tell it in your own words:

God spoke to a man named **Jonah**, the son of Amittai. God said, "Go to **Nineveh**, that great city, and cry against it." That means "Tell the people that I see the wrong things they are doing" (Jonah 1:1–2). But Jonah ran away. He went down to the town of Joppa, paid for a ride on a ship and sailed toward Tarshish, the opposite way (1:3).

Then the LORD sent a great wind, and a mighty storm hit the sea. The ship was about to break apart (1:4)! The sailors were very afraid. Each man cried out to his own god, and they threw the things on the ship into the sea to make it lighter. And where was Jonah? Fast asleep down inside the ship (1:5). The captain woke him up: "Get up and call on your God!" (1:6).

The sailors cast lots to find out who caused the storm. Casting lots was a way of choosing, a little like drawing straws, and the lot fell on Jonah (1:7). Jonah told them, "I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." He had told them he was running away from the LORD (1:9–10). "Throw me into the sea," Jonah said, "and it will be calm" (1:12). The sailors rowed hard to get back to land, but they could not (1:13). So they prayed to the LORD and threw Jonah into the sea, and **the sea stopped raging** (1:14–15).



The story continues: But God was not finished with Jonah. The LORD had prepared a **great fish** to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights (1:17). From inside the fish, Jonah prayed to the LORD (2:1). He remembered the LORD (2:7) and said, "Salvation is of the LORD" (2:9). That means only God can save us. Then the LORD spoke to the fish, and it spit Jonah out onto dry land (2:10).

Read Jonah 3:1 from your Bible: "And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying," Say: "God gave Jonah a **second chance**." This time Jonah got up and went to Nineveh, just as the LORD said. Nineveh was so big it took three days to walk through it (3:2–3). Jonah preached, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." That means "In forty days, this city will be destroyed" (3:4).

And the people of Nineveh believed God! Everyone, from the greatest to the least, stopped eating for a while and wore rough clothes called sackcloth to show they were sorry (3:5). Even the king got up from his throne, took off his royal robe, put on sackcloth and sat in ashes (3:6). He told everyone to cry out to God and turn away from their evil ways (3:8). When God saw them turn from their evil, He did not destroy the city (3:10).

3. Questions to ask (5 minutes)

1. Where did God tell Jonah to go? (*Nineveh, Jonah 1:2*)
2. What did God send when Jonah ran away? (*A great wind and a mighty storm, 1:4*)
3. What swallowed Jonah? (*A great fish the LORD prepared, 1:17*)
4. What did Jonah do inside the fish? (*He prayed to the LORD, 2:1*)
5. What did the people of Nineveh do when Jonah preached? (*They believed God and turned from their evil, 3:5, 3:10*)

4. Memory verse: Fish Toss (5 minutes)

Break the verse into four parts: *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.* Explain the old words: **sacrifice** means give to God, **thanksgiving** means saying thank You, **vowed** means promised, and **salvation** means being saved and rescued. Say the verse together two times. Then toss the paper fish to a child, who says the first part and tosses the fish to someone else, who says the next part. Keep going around until everyone has had a turn.

5. What this means for us (5 minutes)

Say: "God gave Jonah a second chance, and God gave the people of Nineveh a chance to turn from their sin. God loves you very much. But everyone has done wrong things. The Bible calls that sin: 'For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23, KJV). That means none of us is as good as God. Jesus is God who came to earth as a man (1 Timothy 3:16). Jesus died for our sins, He was buried, and He rose again (1 Corinthians 15:3–4)! The Bible tells us how to obey the gospel, the good news about Jesus: '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 we are sorry for our sin and we turn away from it, like the people of Nineveh turned from their evil. We are **baptized**, buried all the way under the water, in Jesus' name, so our sins are washed away (Romans 6:4; Acts 22:16). **Remission** means God takes our sins away. And God fills us with the **Holy Ghost**, His own Spirit, and we speak in other tongues, words God gives us, just like the believers did in the Bible (Acts 2:4)."

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 a grown-up or God's Word tells you to do something, don't run the other way. Obey right away.

6. Activity (10–15 minutes)

Choose one: the **Jonah word search** (vbshq.com/puzzles/jonah-word-search), the Jonah coloring page or craft (vbshq.com/bible-stories/jonah), or **Storm on the Sea**: kids sit in a line as the ship. Call "Wind!" (sway), "Waves!" (rock hard), "Throw out the cargo!" (toss pretend boxes), "Row!" (row hard) and "Calm!" (sit very still). Anyone who moves on "Calm!" becomes the next caller.

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. 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).