# Jonah and the Big Fish *Bible lesson*

Jonah 1–3 · 30-minute core or 60-minute full lesson



BIG IDEA

**God gives me a second chance.**

MEMORY VERSE · JONAH 2:9 BSB

**“Salvation is from the LORD!”**

## LESSON AT A GLANCE

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 0–6 | **Welcome** · Opposite day | |
| 6–10 | **Hook** · Do-overs | |
| 10–20 | **The Story** · The Story | ● |
| 20–30 | **Talk** · Talk | ● |
| 30–35 | **Memory Verse** · Memory Verse | ● |
| 35–40 | **Sing** · Sing | |
| 40–50 | **Activity** · Jonah review | |
| 50–55 | **Respond** · Second-chance journal | |
| 55–60 | **Pray & Send Home** · Pray & Send Home | ● |

● Core step. Teach just these for the 30-minute version.

# Leader prep

## Bible background

God told Jonah to go to Nineveh, the great city of Israel's cruel enemy Assyria, and warn them about their wickedness (Jonah 1:1–2). Jonah ran the opposite way and got on a ship to Tarshish, trying to get away from God (1:3).

God sent a great storm. The sailors threw cargo overboard and prayed to their gods. Jonah admitted he was running from the LORD and told them to throw him into the sea; when they did, the sea grew calm (1:4–16). The LORD appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and he was inside it three days and three nights (1:17).

Inside the fish, Jonah prayed and thanked God: "Salvation is from the LORD!" (2:9). The fish spat him onto dry land, and God spoke to Jonah a second time (3:1). This time Jonah went. The people of Nineveh believed God, turned from their evil, and God had mercy on them (3:5–10). Chapter 4 shows Jonah was angry about that mercy, which is worth knowing as a leader: God's kindness is bigger than Jonah's.

## Where is Jesus in this story?

Jesus said Jonah was a sign pointing to Him: as Jonah was three days in the fish, Jesus would be three days in the grave, and then rise (Matthew 12:40). Jonah got a second chance; Jesus is how God gives all of us a new start, by dying for our sins and rising again.

## Supplies

- A blue blanket or sheet for the 'sea'
- A large cardboard box or table covered with a blanket (the fish)
- A small fan or a spray bottle (optional, for the storm)
- Printed story cards, verse poster, coloring pages and parent pages
  **Prep: Print from the Classroom resources section.**
- A screen for the story video (optional)

## Questions kids might ask

**"Can a person really live inside a fish?"**

The Bible says God appointed the fish and kept Jonah alive. It was a miracle: God can do what we can't.

**"Why did Jonah run away?"**

Nineveh was a cruel enemy city, and Jonah didn't want God to forgive them (Jonah 4:2). Jonah wanted to choose who gets God's kindness.

**"Will God give me a second chance if I disobey?"**

Yes. When we tell God we're sorry and turn back to Him, He forgives us because of Jesus (1 John 1:9).

### If a child shares something serious

When kids share what scares or worries them, some may mention something serious, like someone hurting them or a big fear at home. Listen, thank them for telling you, and don't promise to keep it secret. Tell your ministry leader the same day and follow your church's child-safety policy.

# Teach it

SAY read aloud DO leader action KIDS SAY call and response

## 1 Welcome 6 min

Full lesson

**Opposite day**

DO Play 'Jonah says': kids do the opposite of what you say ("Jonah says sit down" means stand up). Then switch to normal and see who keeps up.

SAY Doing the opposite was fun in a game. In today's story, someone did the opposite of what God said, and it didn't go well.

## 2 Hook 4 min

Full lesson

**Do-overs**

SAY If you could have a do-over on anything, what would it be?

SAY Today we'll meet a man who ran away from God, and find out what God did next.

## 3 The Story 10 min

Core

DO Play the Jonah and the Big Fish video (3 min), or read it aloud with the story cards.

SAY Listen for what Jonah prayed inside the fish.

DO After the video, have kids open their Bibles to Jonah 2:1–10 and 3:1–2. Ask a confident reader to read it aloud.

SAY Jonah 3:1 says the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time. God didn't give up on Jonah, and He doesn't give up on us.

KIDS SAY **Salvation is from the LORD!**

## 4 Talk 10 min

Core

**Why did Jonah run away from God?**
Listen for: He didn't want to go to Nineveh, an enemy city, and he didn't want God to forgive them.

**Was the fish a punishment or a rescue?**
Listen for: A rescue! Jonah would have drowned. God saved him.

**What happened when Jonah finally went to Nineveh?**
Listen for: The people believed God and turned from their evil, and God had mercy on them.

**When do you need a second chance?**
Listen for: Answers vary. God forgives us when we tell Him we're sorry.

OLDER KIDS Read Matthew 12:40. How is Jonah a picture of Jesus? Then read Jonah 4:2. What did Jonah know about God?

## 5 Memory Verse 5 min

Core

DO Write the verse on a whiteboard or hold up the poster. Teach the motions.

> **"Salvation is from the LORD!"**
> Jonah 2:9 · BSB

MOTIONS

- **Salvation** Hands reach up like someone being pulled out of the water.
- **is from** Point up to heaven.
- **the LORD!** Arms up high, big smile!

PRACTICE IT THREE WAYS

1. Say it with motions.
2. Disappearing words: erase or cover one word at a time until kids say it from memory.
3. Say it fast, then slow, then in a whisper.

## 6 Sing 5 min

Full lesson

> The Little Lantern song for this story is coming soon. For now, sing a favorite worship song about God's second chances.

## 7 Activity 10 min

Full lesson

Jonah review

DO Two teams. Correct answers let one player ‘escape’ the fish (the blanket table). Most escapes wins.

**What city did God send Jonah to?**
Listen for: Nineveh.

**Where did Jonah try to go instead?**
Listen for: Tarshish, on a ship.

**How long was Jonah inside the fish?**
Listen for: Three days and three nights.

**What did Jonah pray inside the fish?**
Listen for: “Salvation is from the LORD!”

**What did the people of Nineveh do?**
Listen for: They believed God and turned from their evil ways.

> Prefer a quieter room? Hand out the mini-book or a coloring page instead.

## 8 Respond 5 min

Full lesson

Second-chance journal

DO Kids write: “One time I needed a second chance was ____. God forgives me, so I can ____.”

OLDER KIDS Who do you need to give a second chance to? Write their name and pray for them.

## 9 Pray & Send Home 5 min

Core

DO Pair kids up. Each one shares something they want to do better this week, and their partner prays for them.

SAY Close: God, thank you for being patient with us and giving second chances. Help us listen to you and obey. Amen.

DO Hand out parent pages.