

**VBS
2024**

JONAH



Day 1: Jonah 1
Pre-k/Kindergarten

Jonah 1

The Objective is the key concept for this week's lesson. It should be the main focus of the study.

These are the key verses that you will find helpful in teaching your study this week. The "Main passage" is the basis of the study, where the other verses support the objective of the lesson.

Each day, the students will learn a memory verse. Students who learn all 5 memory verses this week will receive a prize.

An introductory activity or question that will settle the class, draw their attention to the study and prepare their hearts for God's Word.

Objective This lesson will introduce the story of Jonah and theme of God's mercy.

Key Verses

Jonah 1—Main Teaching Passage

Jonah 4:2

Lamentations 3:22-23

Memory Verse - Psalm 103:8

"The LORD is merciful and gracious,
Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy."

Hook

Have the students share about a time when they made a mistake and were given a second chance, or when they did something wrong and their parent, guardian, or teacher chose not to punish them. Share some examples from your own life.

When a person does something wrong and is not given the consequences for their actions, that's called mercy. Our God is a God of mercy, and this week we are going to learn about His mercy.

What does the Bible say? This is where we will read a passage or series of passages that teach on the subject of the day.

BOOK

The book of Jonah begins with God telling His prophet Jonah to go to the city of Nineveh and preach against it. Nineveh was where Israel's enemies lived, so when Jonah heard this command, he tried to run away from God. He got on a ship to Tarshish, which was far away from Nineveh. Jonah then slept inside the ship, thinking he had escaped. But he would soon learn that you can't run from God.

The Lord set a great storm upon the ship, and the sailors prayed to their false gods, but that didn't help them. One of the sailors ran to get Jonah and told him to pray to his God for help. They believed that this storm had come because one of them had disobeyed their god, and through casting lots the Lord showed them that it was Jonah's fault. He told them that he had run away from God, the Creator of all, and that the only thing they could do to survive would be to throw him into the sea.

At first, when the sailors heard this, they tried to sail their way out of the storm in an attempt to save Jonah's life. But as the storm grew worse, they were left with no other choice but to throw Jonah into the water, begging for God's forgiveness as they did it. As soon as Jonah was off the boat, the storm stopped, and the sailors worshipped the Lord. Jonah, meanwhile, was swallowed by a great fish, where he would remain for the next three days and three nights.

LOOK

For VBS this year, we are studying the book of Jonah. While many of the kids probably know that Jonah was a prophet who was swallowed by a big fish, this book is about so much more than that. It's the story of God's incredible mercy toward mankind.

As we saw in the hook, mercy is when someone does not receive the punishment they deserve for their bad actions. All of us have sinned, which means thinking, saying, or doing something that displeases God. But rather than punish us, God's desire is to show us mercy and forgive our sins when we turn to Him. As this week's memory verse shows us, our God is a merciful God!

The Ninevites were in big need of God's mercy. They were some of the most wicked people who had ever lived. They had done all kinds of terrible things. They hated the Israelites, and the Israelites hated them, so you can understand why Jonah didn't want to go. Maybe he was scared of what bad things the Ninevites might do to him. In Jonah 4:2, he would admit that he didn't want the people to hear about God, turn from their sins, and be saved. That's why Jonah tried to run as far away from Nineveh as possible.

The interpretation/exegesis of the passage. What does this passage mean? How does this passage apply to my life?

LOOK (Continued)

Yet even though Jonah had no love for the Ninevites, the Lord did. Yes, He knew that they were wicked, but they were also His creation, just like Jonah and the Israelites. God loved the people of Nineveh, and He wanted to show them mercy. He sent Jonah to warn them about their sins, so that they could turn from their wicked ways and repent, and God would forgive them.

What Jonah didn't understand is that he needed God's mercy just as much as the people of Nineveh. He had sin, just like them. In fact, this week we'll see how time and time again Jonah failed to obey God or would obey God with the wrong attitude. But just as God did with the people of Nineveh, He showed Jonah mercy. It might not have felt like God was being merciful when Jonah was in the middle of a storm, but this was God's way of warning the prophet that what he was doing was wrong and calling him to turn back to God. He also showed Jonah mercy by having a fish swallow him in the sea, saving his life. God even led the unbelieving sailors to show Jonah mercy as they tried to row out of trouble rather than throw him into the sea.

Just like Jonah and the people of Nineveh, we all need God's mercy. All of us sin, but when we fail, God's desire is not to punish us. He wants to forgive us and cleanse us from our sin. And even when we continue to make mistakes, God continues to show mercy. His mercy never runs out. It's new every morning (Lamentations 3:22-23). Let's all praise and thank our wonderful, merciful God, and show His mercy to others.

What is my response to this passage of Scripture? How should my life change according to what this passage teaches me? What are the practical things I can do throughout the week to make this true in my life?

TOOK

As a class, memorize Psalm 103:8.

Review the lesson by asking the class what God told Jonah to do. What did Jonah do instead? What happened to him because he ran away?

Pray: Thank the Lord for showing us mercy in our sin and failure. Ask Him to help us show mercy to those around us.

Family Question: What does "mercy" mean?

FURTHER STUDY

Commentary on Jonah 1 by David Guzik

JONAH RUNS FROM GOD

A. Jonah's attempted escape.

1. ([Jonah 1:1-2](#)) God's call to Jonah.

Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me."

a. **The word of the LORD came to Jonah:** God spoke to Jonah in His own unique and powerful way and He told Jonah to do two things. First, *go to Nineveh*; second, **cry out against it** — that is, to rebuke them for their sin and call them to repentance.

b. **Go to Nineveh:** The city of **Nineveh** was the capital of the Assyrian Empire and was a large and prominent city in its day. It was not a city of Israel at all; God called Jonah to go to a pagan, Gentile city and call *them* to repentance.

i. Ancient historians say that Nineveh was the largest city in the world at that time. It was the large, important capital of a dominating empire — surely an intimidating place to go.

c. **For their wickedness has come up before Me:** God wanted Jonah to go because He saw their **wickedness**. None of man's wickedness is hidden before God. He sees it all, and it may come to a point where it demands the specific warning and judgment of God.

2. ([Jonah 1:3](#)) Jonah's attempt to flee from God's call.

But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.

a. **But Jonah arose to flee:** Jonah was a reluctant prophet. He didn't want to do what God told him to do. Several reasons for this have been suggested.

i. It may have been because he was given a *difficult job to do*. [Nahum 3:1-4](#) gives us a good idea of how wicked the people of Nineveh were. Jonah had every reason to expect that at the very best, he would be mocked and treated as a fool. He might be attacked and killed if he did what the LORD told him to do.

ii. It was also because Jonah didn't *want* the Assyrians in Nineveh to escape God's judgment. Imagine a Jewish man in New York during World War II hearing God say, "I'm going to bring terrible judgment on Germany. I want you to go to Berlin and tell Nazi Germany to repent." Instead of doing it, the man heads for San Francisco and then hops on a boat for Hong Kong.

iii. We may speculate on why Jonah did not want to do what God told him to do, but it is even better to think about why we don't do what God tells *us* to do. God told Jonah to *go* and preach; every Christian has the same command in [Matthew 28:19-20](#). With Jonah's example before us, we have *even less reason than Jonah* for our disobedience.

b. **To flee to Tarshish:** The distant city of **Tarshish** was thought to be towards the end of the earth, and is always associated with ships in the Bible. Jonah wanted to go as far as he could to escape God's presence, but this was a futile attempt.

i. Nineveh was to the east of Israel and **Tarshish** was about as far as you could go west, on the coast of what is today Spain, past the straits of Gibraltar. In heading for **Tarshish**, Jonah intended to get as far away from Nineveh and the calling of God to go there as he possibly could.

c. **Found a ship going to Tarshish:** We don't doubt that Jonah *felt* like going **to Tarshish**. There was in impulse within him driving him there, but it was a dangerous impulse. We may take Jonah as an example of the danger of doing things solely under impulse or feelings.

i. "Now, I very commonly meet with persons who say, 'I felt that I must do so and so. It came upon me that I must do so and so.' I am afraid of these impulses - very greatly afraid of them. People may do right under their power, but they will spoil what they do by doing it out of mere impulse, and not because the action was right in itself." (Spurgeon)

- An impulse may be very brave, yet wrong (Jonah was very brave in embarking on such a long sea-journey).
- An impulse may appear to be self-denying, yet wrong (it cost Jonah much in money and comfort to go on this long sea-journey).
- An impulse may lay claim to freedom, yet be wrong (wasn't Jonah free to go to Tarshish?).
- An impulse may lead someone to do something that they would condemn in others (what would Jonah say to another prophet disobeying God?).
- An impulse can make us do to God or others what we would never want to be done to our self.

ii. Many people take their inner impulses and say, "The LORD told me this or that." This is dangerous even when it doesn't seem so immediately. "What have you to do with the devices and desires of your own hearts? Are these to be a law to you? I pray you, be not among the foolish ones who will be carried about with every wind of fancy and perversity. 'To the law and to the testimony,' should be your cry, and you may not appeal to inward movements and impulses" (Spurgeon).

d. **So he paid the fare:** It seemed *easy* enough. Perhaps even Jonah felt that the LORD provided the money for **the fare!** This shows the danger of being guided by *circumstances*.

i. "Providence or no providence, the Word of the Lord is to be our guide, and we must not depart from it under pretext of necessity or circumstances. *It is very easy to make up a providence when you want to do so.* If you sit down and try to find in the ways of God to you an excuse for the wrong which you mean to commit, the crafty devil and your deceitful heart together will soon conjure up a plea for providence." (Spurgeon)

ii. Nevertheless, when you run away from the LORD, you never get to where you are going and you always pay your own fare. When you go the LORD's way, you not only get to where you are going, but He provides the fare.

e. **From the presence of the LORD:** Jonah should have read [Psalm 139:7-10](#): *Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me.* You can't escape the presence of God.

i. "All the while the ship sailed smoothly over the sea, Jonah forgot his God. You could not have distinguished him from the veriest heathen on board. He was just as bad as they were." (Spurgeon)

B. God prevents Jonah's escape.

1. [\(Jonah 1:4\)](#) God sends a storm.

But the LORD sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up.

a. **The LORD sent out a great wind:** It was the LORD who stirred up the storm. We often think of Jesus calm-

ing the waters, and He can do that. But God can also stir up the storm.

b. **So that the ship was about to be broken up:** The ship and the sailors were in a dangerous place. This was all due to Jonah being on the ship. There was nothing wrong with the sailors being on the ship, but Jonah had no business there — though on other circumstances it might have been fine for him to go to Tarshish.

i. Jonah might have wondered: “I can go to Tarshish if I want to. I paid the fare. I’m not a stowaway.” Yet, “Apologies for disobedience are mere refuges of lies. If you do a wrong thing in the rightest way in which it can be done, it does not make it right. If you go contrary to the Lord’s will, even though you do it in the most decent, and, perhaps, in the most devout manner, it is, nevertheless, sinful, and it will bring you under condemnation” (Spurgeon).

2. ([Jonah 1:5-6](#)) The sailors of the ship seek their superstitious gods.

Then the mariners were afraid; and every man cried out to his god, and threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten the load. But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship, had lain down, and was fast asleep. So the captain came to him, and said to him, “What do you mean, sleeper? Arise, call on your God; perhaps your God will consider us, so that we may not perish.”

a. **Every man cried out to his god:** When in trouble, man does his best to fix the problem. In this case, they threw the cargo overboard. When that isn’t enough, man also instinctively turns to **his god**. If we don’t know the true God — the God of the Bible — *before* we are in trouble, we may sincerely turn to a false and imaginary god, one of our own making.

i. Many people assume that they can put off doing their business with God until they choose a “better” time to do it. Nevertheless, it is presumptuous to think that in the moment of crisis we will be able to call upon the true God if we have not dealt with Him before.

b. **Was fast asleep:** While the storm raged, Jonah slept. Perhaps because the storm *outside* seemed insignificant to him in comparison to the storm *inside*, the storm that came from his resistance against God.

i. What a curious and tragic scene! All the sailors were religious men, devout in their prayers to their gods. Yet their gods were really *nothing*, and could do *nothing*. There was one man on board who had a relationship with the true God, who knew His Word, and who worshipped Him — *yet he was asleep!*

ii. “Jonah was asleep amid all that confusion and noise; and, O Christian man, for you to be indifferent to all that is going on in such a world as this, for you to be negligent of God’s work in such a time as this is just as strange. The devil alone is making noise enough to wake all the Jonahs if they only want to awake... All around us there is tumult and storm, yet some professing Christians are able, like Jonah, to go to sleep in the sides of the ship.” (Spurgeon)

iii. The nature of Jonah’s sleep is also instructive, and too much like the sleep of the careless Christian:

- Jonah slept in a place where he hoped no one would see him or disturb him. “Sleeping Christians” like to “hide out” among the church.
- Jonah slept in a place where he could not help with the work that needed to be done. “Sleeping Christians” stay away from the work of the Lord.
- Jonah slept while there was a prayer meeting up on the deck. “Sleeping Christians” don’t like prayer meetings!
- Jonah slept and had no idea of the problems around him. “Sleeping Christians” don’t know what is really going on.
- Jonah slept when he was in great danger. “Sleeping Christians” are in danger, but don’t know it.
- Jonah slept while the heathen needed him. “Sleeping Christians” snooze on while the world needs their message and testimony.

iv. Some sleeping Christians protest that they are not asleep at all.

- “We talk about Jesus” — but you can *talk* in your sleep.
- “We have a walk for Jesus” — but you can *walk* in your sleep.
- “We have passion for Jesus — I just wept in worship the other day” - but you can *cry* in your sleep.
- “We have joy and rejoice in Jesus” — but you can *laugh* in your sleep.
- “We think about Jesus all the time” — but you can *think* while you are asleep; we call it *dreaming*.

v. Charles Spurgeon described how the believer might know that he is *not* asleep. “What do you mean by a man’s being really awake? I mean two or three things. I mean, first, his having a thorough consciousness of the reality of spiritual things. When I speak of a wakeful man, I mean one who does not take the soul to be a fancy, nor heaven to be a fiction, nor hell to be a tale, but who acts among the sons of men as though these were the only substances, and all other things the shadows. I want men of stern resolution, for no Christian is awake unless he steadfastly determines to serve his God, come fair, come foul.”

c. **What do you mean, sleeper? Arise, call on your God:** The captain knew that his crew cried to their gods, but it did nothing. Perhaps Jonah’s God could do something in the crisis.

i. It must have seemed ironic to Jonah that the sailors demanded that he call on his God. His only reason for being on that ship was to *escape* his God.

3. ([Jonah 1:7-8](#)) The sailors discover that Jonah is the source of the trouble.

And they said to one another, “Come, let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this trouble has come upon us.” So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. Then they said to him, “Please tell us! For whose cause is this trouble upon us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?”

a. **That we may know for whose cause this trouble has come upon us:** It is hard to know what motivated the sailors to think that the storm was sent because one of them had wronged their God. Perhaps it was because of some spiritual insight, and they sensed a *spiritual* power in the storm. Or, perhaps it was just an accidentally correct superstition.

b. **The lot fell on Jonah:** Once the lot fell on Jonah, the sailors wanted to know as much as they could from Jonah, so they could solve the problem and save their lives.

c. **What is your occupation:** [2 Kings 14:25](#) says that Jonah was a recognized prophet. When he was asked, “**What is your occupation?**” and he answered, “prophet” then the sailors must have been even more terrified.

4. ([Jonah 1:9-10](#)) Jonah tells them about who he is and what he has done.

So he said to them, “I am a Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.” Then the men were exceedingly afraid, and said to him, “Why have you done this?” For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them.

a. **The God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land:** Jonah knew the truth about God, even though his claim to **fear the LORD** was only partly true because he was running from the LORD.

i. Even a believer who is in a state of rebellion can give glory to God if he will only tell the truth about God. Although, it is tragic that Jonah’s *life* contradicted his knowledge of God.

ii. However, at the moment when Jonah said, “**I fear the LORD,**” he may have already repented of running away, turning back to God because of the present circumstances.

c. **Why have you done this?** Even an unbeliever who knows *some* truth about God can rightly rebuke a Christian who is resisting God. “**Why have you done this?**” is the most logical question in the world, even for an

unbeliever to ask a believer.

5. ([Jonah 1:11-16](#)) Jonah, at his own request, asks to be thrown into the sea, and the sailors reluctantly agree.

Then they said to him, “What shall we do to you that the sea may be calm for us?” — for the sea was growing more tempestuous. And he said to them, “Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will become calm for you. For I know that this great tempest *is* because of me.” Nevertheless the men rowed hard to return to land, but they could not, for the sea continued to grow more tempestuous against them. Therefore they cried out to the LORD and said, “We pray, O LORD, please do not let us perish for this man’s life, and do not charge us with innocent blood; for You, O LORD, have done as it pleased You.” So they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice to the LORD and took vows.

a. **What shall we do to you that the sea may be calm for us?** The more the sailors hear, the worse the situation gets - **the sea was growing *more* tempestuous.**

b. **Pick me up and throw me into the sea:** Jonah was willing to sacrifice his life to save everyone else on the ship. We may consider what his motive might have been.

- Perhaps it was compassion for the sailors.
- Perhaps it was a desire to be forced into complete dependence upon God alone. After all, There is no safer place than casting yourself totally upon God.
- Perhaps it was a feeling that *anything* was better than his continual resistance against and running from God.
- Perhaps because he had already truly repented. If this is the case, it illustrates that repentance is not only a matter of heart and mind, but also a matter of *action*.

i. In all this, Jonah is a wonderful picture of the Messiah that would come after him, Jesus Christ. Jesus threw Himself into the fury of God’s storm to rescue those far from God. However, here are many differences between Jonah and Jesus, and one of the greatest was that Jonah was disobedient and guilty, and Jesus was completely obedient and innocent.

c. **Nevertheless the men rowed hard to return to land:** The sailors did not want to throw Jonah into the sea, because they believed his God was for real and they feared the consequences of throwing a prophet, even a disobedient prophet into the sea. Still, when all hope seemed to be lost they took precautions (“**We pray, O LORD, please do not let us perish for this man’s life, and do not charge us with innocent blood**”) and threw Jonah into the sea.

d. **The sea ceased from its raging:** The immediate end of the storm proved that Jonah’s God was for real, and that Jonah’s resistance to that God was the real problem. In a logical response the sailors **feared the LORD exceedingly**, sacrificed to God and made promises to serve Him.

i. The sailors moved from fearing the storm to fearing the LORD, just the disciples in the boat did when Jesus calmed the storm ([Mark 4:35-41](#)).

ii. “Brethren, I wish I had meet words with which I could fitly describe the peace which comes to a human heart when we learn to see Jesus cast into the sea of divine wrath on our account. Conscience accuses no longer. Judgment now decides for the sinner instead of against him. Memory can look back upon past sins, with sorrow for the sin it is true, but yet with no dread of any penalty to come. It is a blessed thing for a man to know that he cannot be punished, that heaven and earth may shake, but he cannot be punished for his sin.” (Spurgeon)

e. **And took vows:** Notice that the vows of the sailors came *after* they were delivered. Based on this, many commentators believe that the sailors came to a true faith in God.

i. Spurgeon preached a sermon with four wonderful points based on the actions of the crew in this chapter.

- Sinners, when they are tossed upon the sea of conviction, make desperate efforts to save themselves.
- The fleshly efforts of awakened sinners must inevitably fail.
- The soul's sorrow will continue to increase as long as it relies on its own efforts.
- The way of safety for sinners is to be found in the sacrifice of another on their behalf.