

Journey to Nineveh: Preschool Teaching for Day 1

Helpful aids:

- Map of the area (Nineveh, Joppa, Tarshish)

Welcome to the first day of our Journey to Nineveh.

We are going to learn about a prophet named Jonah, how God called him to deliver a warning to the people of Nineveh, how he disobeyed God and ran away, and how God worked in Jonah's life to show that He is all-powerful and in full control.

Let's read the first 16 verses of the first chapter of the Book of Jonah and discuss what happens:

Jonah 1:1-16 (NIV)

1 The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: 2 "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me."

What do you think it means when it calls Nineveh a "great city"? (Large, powerful, influential, wealthy)

Why was God sending Jonah to Nineveh? (To warn them that God was aware of their evil)

God says "its wickedness has come up before me."

Their sin was in direct disobedience to God and His holiness.

3 But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD.

Why do you think Jonah chose to disobey God's orders? (maybe fear of the people in Nineveh, maybe hatred for the people in Nineveh) (we will get a hint at his reason later in the book!)

Look at this map. Here is where God told Jonah to go (Nineveh) and here is where Jonah decided to go (Joppa to take a ship to Tarshish). What do you notice about the direction Jonah headed? (the completely opposite direction from where God told him to go)

Have you ever deliberately disobeyed one of God's commands, or maybe a command from your parents? (yes, we have all done this!)

What does verse 3 say Jonah was trying to do? (run away from the Lord)

Is it possible to get away from God? (NO! God is everywhere!)

4 Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up.

What did God do to get Jonah's attention? (He sent a huge storm, so bad that the ship was in danger of being destroyed)

5 All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship. But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep. 6 The captain went to him and said, "How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us so that we will not perish."

How did the sailors on the ship respond to the storm? (they were terrified; they prayed to their gods; they threw cargo overboard to lighten the ship)

These sailors were probably seasoned, experienced sailors, so this storm must have been a whopper to scare them so badly!

What was Jonah doing? (he was asleep inside the ship)

Did Jonah seem very concerned that he was disobeying God? (No)

What are some ways in which we respond when we know we have disobeyed God? (we may ignore it, we may blame someone else, we may pretend nothing is wrong, or we may admit we were wrong and ask God to forgive us)

Notice that, when we sin, we are not the only ones who get hurt because of our sin. Not only was Jonah in danger, but so were all the people on the ship with him. Our sin does more than hurt us, it hurts those around us!

7 Then the sailors said to each other, "Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity." They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah.

Do you know what it means to cast lots? (it is like throwing dice to determine the truth about something – God allowed the lot to show that Jonah was to blame for the storm)

8 So they asked him, “Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What kind of work do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?”

Even though the lot pointed to Jonah being the cause for the storm, the sailors wanted to be sure they got the full story. They were being very fair with Jonah. So they asked him, “who is responsible for making all this trouble for us?” They needed to hear it from Jonah himself.

The sailors also wanted to know more about Jonah. They asked:

- *What kind of work do you do?*
- *Where are you from? What is your country? From what people are you?*

9 He answered, “I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.”

What was Jonah’s response to all these questions from the sailors? (I am a Hebrew, I worship the LORD, the God of Heaven)

10 This terrified them and they asked, “What have you done?” (They knew he was running away from the LORD, because he had already told them so.)

Why did this scare the sailors? (Because Jonah had already admitted that he was running from God, and now they were seeing how powerful Jonah’s God really was and how foolish it was for Jonah to disobey! - “What have you done!” – “How could you!”)

They could actually see God’s response to Jonah’s disobedience. They may have been thinking, “If Jonah’s God responds this fiercely against one disobedience by a man who serves Him, what could He do to those of us who do not worship or obey Him at all?”

Notice that Jonah’s confession would have been painful – he was admitting that he serves and worships the one true God, yet he had also admitted that he was running from God.

11 The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, "What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?" 12 "Pick me up and throw me into the sea," he replied, "and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you."

The sailors now understood that the storm was Jonah's fault, but did they lash out at him? (No, they asked him what should be done)

What did Jonah tell the sailors to do to him? (throw him into the sea)

Why didn't Jonah just jump into the sea on his own to save everyone else? (maybe he was too scared, maybe God wanted the sailors to be part of Jonah's punishment)

13 Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. 14 Then they cried out to the LORD, "Please, LORD, do not let us die for taking this man's life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, LORD, have done as you pleased."

Did the sailors throw Jonah into the sea at first? (No, they tried to row back to land)

Why do you think they were reluctant to kill Jonah in order to save themselves? (Seeing his humility and confession, maybe they had pity on him)

Who was stopping them from being able to get back to land? (God!)

When they realized they could not save themselves or the ship, what did they do? (they prayed to Jonah's God asking not to be blamed for what was about to happen to Jonah, and they recognized that God was the one who was in control of the situation)

So even in Jonah's rebellion against God, he helped these sailors better understand the one true God!

15 Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. 16 At this the men greatly feared the LORD, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows to him.

What happened when they threw Jonah into the sea? (the storm stopped)

How did the sailors respond? (they had great fear and respect for God and they offered sacrifices to Him)

So even though Jonah was not being a good representative of a believer in God, these sailors still got a glimpse of the true God and worshiped him the best they knew how!

How do you think their lives may have changed after this encounter with the true God? (maybe they tried to learn more about Jonah's God, maybe they stopped worshiping false gods)

Here are a few things we can learn from Jonah's disobedience to God:

- We can never get away from God. He is all-powerful and His presence is everywhere.
- God is in complete control of everything, including nature. Remember when Jesus was in a boat with His disciples and a terrible storm came up. They were terrified and thought they were going to die, but all Jesus had to do was speak to the wind and the waves and they immediately calmed down. Our God is all-powerful and in complete control!
- When we disobey, we will get caught. It is only a matter of time. Galatians 6:7 (NIV) says, "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows." We should not run from God when we disobey, but instead we should admit that we were wrong, ask God to forgive us, try our best not to disobey again, and ask God to help us obey Him.
- We represent the true God, the creator of heaven and earth. We should take that responsibility seriously and be good examples to other people so they will want to know our God too.

Gospel Presentation (optional for Day 1)

The story of Jonah reminds us that everyone fails to obey God completely.

Jonah was no different. Even though he believed in the one true God, he still did not obey Him perfectly. And neither do we.

The Bible teaches that we are all born with a heart problem. That problem is called Sin.

But I have great news to share with you today.

Even though we don't always obey God like we should, God loves us and He is willing to forgive us.

God can forgive us because of what His Son, Jesus, did for us on the cross.

How many of you know the story of Adam and Eve?

A long time ago, God created the first humans named Adam and Eve. God gave Adam and Eve one rule to follow. But Adam and Eve broke that rule. Ever since then, every person has broken God's rules.

For instance, God tells us to obey our parents. How many of you have ever disobeyed your parents?

We have all disobeyed our parents at some time. We have all broken God's rules.

(Romans 3:23 "For all have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God.")

Well what happens when you disobey your parents and break their rules?

You get a punishment. Some of you may get a time out or lose a toy.

The punishment for breaking God's rules is that we are not allowed to be with God in heaven. Our sin separates us from God forever!

The Bible says, "For the wages of sin is death." Romans 6:23 (NIV)

When your parents go to work, they earn money for what they do. That's their wages.

What we earn (our wages) when we sin is death.

But the Bible doesn't stop there with this bad news. The rest of that verse says, "but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord". Romans 6:23 (NIV)

The good news is that Jesus, God's Son, died for us. He took away the punishment for everyone who believes in Him.

The Bible says, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8 NIV)

Jesus, God's only Son, came down to earth from heaven. He lived a perfect life. He never once broke God's rules. He loved you so much that he gave his life to save yours. Jesus let people kill him on the cross. Three days later, God raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus is alive today. Those who believe in Jesus and trust in Him will be saved from the punishment of their sins.

Salvation is a gift of God. You can't earn it.

Ephesians 2:8 (ESV) says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God".

But not only does God forgive us for all of our sins. He also makes us His very own children.

John 1:12 (ESV) says, “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God”.

When you believe in Jesus, God becomes your heavenly Father. You can then have a relationship with him. And one day you will live forever with Jesus in heaven.

Let’s pray.

[pray and thank God for his gift of salvation]

Journey to Nineveh Preschool: Teaching for Day 2

Helpful aids:

- A room where you can turn out the lights
- Crashing wave audio
- Large sea shells to pass around to kids
- Stink bait
- Slime
- Wipes for cleaning slime

Welcome back to Journey to Nineveh.

So yesterday, we learned that Jonah disobeyed God and was thrown into the great sea.

Today, we will find out what happens.

In Jonah 1:17 (NIV) it says, "Now the LORD provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights."

So, Jonah was swallowed by a big fish and he was stuck in the fish's belly for three entire days.

Can you imagine what that would have been like for Jonah?

Well, today, we are going to find out.

Inside the belly of a fish it would have been dark. So, we are going to turn out the lights.

Now Imagine noises at the bottom of the ocean. What do you think it sounds like at the bottom of the sea? Perhaps Jonah could hear the waves crashing above. Perhaps, he heard a continuous shush sound from being under water. Let the kids hear the ocean by putting a seashell to their ear.

[Turn on crashing waves sound]

It would have been stinky. How many of you have ever smelled rotten fish or fish bait? All around Jonah was stinky sea animals and weeds. The smell alone probably made Jonah feel sick. So, we are going to let you each smell rotten fish.

[pass around containers with stink bait]

Imagine what Jonah touched: slimy contents of a fish's belly. We have some fish slime here. Whoever wants to can touch some icky fish slime!

[pass around containers of slime]

Imagine how Jonah felt. He had disobeyed God and made a big mistake. He probably felt scared, alone, hopeless and trapped. He was trapped inside a fish. He probably thought he was going to die.

[turn on lights and offer wipes for those who touched slime]

So how did you feel pretending to be in a fish's belly?

What would you do if you were stuck in a fish?

Would you get mad? Ok. Everyone make a mad face.

Would you get sad? Ok. Everyone now make a sad face.

Would you get scared? Ok. Everyone make a scared face.

What do you think Jonah did?

Let's find out and read from Jonah chapter 2. Jonah 2:1 (NIV) "From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the LORD his God."

Jonah made the best decision. Jonah prayed!

We can pray to God too!

How many of you pray to God?

God listens to our prayers and comforts us.

Psalms 145:18 (NIV) says, "The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth."

So, can anyone tell me what happens to Jonah? Did he stay inside the big fish forever?

God rescued Jonah. After 3 days, the big fish spit Jonah onto dry land. God saved Jonah.

And I have great news to share with you today.

God is still saving people today.

Can anyone tell me how God saves people today?

God saves people through His Son, Jesus.

How many of you know the story of Adam and Eve?

A long time ago, God created the first humans named Adam and Eve. God gave Adam and Eve one rule to follow. But Adam and Eve broke the rule. Ever since, every person has broken God's rules.

For instance, God tells us to obey our parents. How many of you have ever disobeyed your parents?

We have all disobeyed our parents at some time.

How many of you have ever lied?

We have all lied.

(Romans 3:23 "For all have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God.")

Unfortunately, the punishment for breaking God's rules is that we are not allowed to be with God in heaven. We actually deserve to be sent to a place of punishment called Hell forever.

However, the good news is that Jesus, God's Son, died for us. He took away the punishment for everyone who believes in Him.

The Bible says, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8 NIV)

Jesus, God's only Son, came down to earth from heaven. He lived a perfect life. He never once sinned. Jesus then let people kill Him on the cross. Three days later, God raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus has been alive ever since. Those who believe in Jesus and accept His gift of salvation will be saved from the punishment of their sins.

Acts 16:31 (NIV) says, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved..."

So just as God saved Jonah from drowning in the sea, God can save us from the penalty of our sins. All we need to do is accept His gift by believing and trust in Him.

Let's pray.

[pray and thank God for his gift of salvation]

Journey to Nineveh: Preschool Teaching for Day 3

Welcome to the final day of our Journey to Nineveh.

Yesterday we learned what happened to Jonah while he was in the belly of the giant fish, how he prayed to God, and how God rescued him.

Today we will see what happened after Jonah was thrown up on the shore by the giant fish.

First, let's read chapter three from the Book of Jonah:

Jonah 3 (NIV)

1 Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: 2 "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."

Since Jonah disobeyed God the first time, God could have considered Jonah untrustworthy and refused to use him again, but He was giving him a second chance to do the right thing!

3 Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it.

How does this verse describe the size of Nineveh? (it would take three days to go through it)

We don't really know how big Nineveh was, but it was a big city with lots of people.

4 Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown." 5 The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

Notice that Jonah wastes no time in obeying God's command. He begins proclaiming God's warning as soon as he enters Nineveh.

After just one day of Jonah warning the city of Nineveh of God's anger at their sin, what happened? (they repented)

What did the people do that showed they were sorry for their sins? (they fasted (went without eating), they put on sackcloth)

What do you think of when you hear the term “sackcloth”? (sounds like a rough, uncomfortable material, like burlap!)

How many Ninevites repented? (all of them, from the greatest to the least)

Do we always respond to God the way the Ninevites did? Are we sorry for our sins and turn from the quickly, like they did?

6 When Jonah’s warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. **7** This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh: “By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. **8** But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence.”

How did the king of Nineveh respond when he heard about Jonah’s message? (he repented too, took off his royal robes, put on sackcloth and sat down in the dust; he also declared a fast for everyone, people and animals, and he required everyone to call on God for mercy and to turn from their evil ways)

9 “Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.”

Did the king know for sure God would forgive them? (No, Jonah had not said anything about God forgiving them. But the Ninevites must have had a general understanding of God’s mercy and grace, and His willingness to respond when we are sorry for our sins)

10 *When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.*

What does God’s response to the Ninevites say about Him? (He is loving, merciful, forgiving)

Psalm 51:17 (ESV) says, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”

Now, let's continue with the last chapter of the book of Jonah to see how he reacts to God being merciful to the Ninevites.

Jonah 4 (NIV)

1 But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. 2 He prayed to the LORD, "Isn't this what I said, LORD, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. 3 Now, LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."

What do you think about Jonah's reaction? (he is very unloving, very selfish, very hard-hearted; he knows the mercy and love of God but does not want it to be given to people he considers to be his enemies)

How different is this prayer from the prayer he offered while in the belly of the great fish? (in the fish, he was sorry and he submitted to God; here he is arrogant and angry with God)

Would you feel comfortable talking to God the way Jonah did? (No!)

How serious was Jonah about his anger and disgust? (he just wanted to die)

Imagine a town or city where the people are known to be very bad. How would you feel if you went to a place like that, told them about Jesus, and they all repented and turned to God for forgiveness? (we would be excited and thrilled)

Why do you think Jonah was so angry that the Ninevites had repented and God was not going to destroy them? (maybe he considered them to be enemies and wanted them to be destroyed; maybe it made his own people, the Israelites, look bad in comparison, because they constantly disobeyed God and would not repent; maybe he was afraid he would look bad because his prediction of their destruction was now not going to come true, making him look like a false prophet (i.e. his pride!))

4 But the LORD replied, "Is it right for you to be angry?"

Keep in mind, what could God have done to Jonah for his attitude and reaction? (he could have granted his wish and taken his life!)

But God deals gently but firmly with Jonah to try to get him to see how wrong he is to react the way he did.

5 Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city.

Why do you think Jonah went outside the city and watched? (maybe he was hoping God would still destroy the city and he wanted to see it)

Sounds like he is sitting there pouting, doesn't it? Instead of being thankful that God had spared an entire city from destruction, he is angry and complaining about it!

He could have gained a huge number of new friends, but instead, he shows his hatred toward them.

6 Then the LORD God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant.

What did God do to make Jonah more comfortable in the hot sun? (He made a leafy plant grow up to give him shade)

7 But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. 8 When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to die than to live."

What did God do to the plant? (He let a worm chew it and kill it)

So not only was Jonah back in the hot sun, but what else did God send? (a scorching east wind)

How did Jonah respond? (he wanted to die again; he seems a little dramatic, don't you think?)

Have you ever been outside when it is scorching hot? It can be miserable. But have you ever said, "I wish I would just go ahead and die"? (probably not!)

9 But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" "It is," he said. "And I'm so angry I wish I were dead."

Again, God gently reprimands Jonah for his anger and attitude. But does Jonah admit his sin? (No!)

Have you ever felt as angry as Jonah seems to be? How did that make you feel?

10 But the LORD said, “You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. 11 And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?”

Did God owe Jonah any explanation for His actions toward Nineveh? (No, He is God!)

God compares Jonah’s concern for the plant to His own concern for the people of Nineveh. Which is more important, the plant or the people? (the people!)

What do you think God meant by “120,000 people who cannot tell their right hand from their left”? (possibly small children; maybe people who were so far from God they could not tell right from wrong)

Compare Jonah’s concern for the gourd to God’s concern for the people of Nineveh:

- There was only one gourd plant, but there were thousands of people in Nineveh
- Jonah had nothing to do with the gourd growing or dying, yet God had everything to do with the Ninevites – they were human beings created in His image
- The gourd grew quickly and passed quickly, so it wasn't worth much; Nineveh was an ancient city full of valuable human beings whose souls would live forever, either with or without God

Matthew 16:26 (ESV) says, “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?”

So, in God’s eyes, our soul is priceless!

We can see the huge difference here between God’s love for mankind and the lack of love Jonah had.

Here are a few things we can learn from Jonah’s reluctant obedience to God and God’s response to the Ninevites:

- God is a forgiving God. When Jonah repented of his disobedience, God forgave him and offered him a second chance to obey. When Nineveh repented, God cancelled the destruction He had warned them about.

- We have no right to be angry, prideful or complaining when God does good to others, even though we don't think they deserve it. Always remember, God has done so much for us that we don't deserve!
- God is very patient. He was patient with Nineveh. He could have destroyed them a long time before he sent Jonah, but He gave them another chance and sent them a warning. He was also patient with Jonah and his selfish, angry, complaining reactions.
- We are to show God's love to everyone, even to people we may not like. God loves us and has shown us grace and mercy, so we have no right to NOT show love and mercy to others as well. Our response to God's mercy and grace in our lives should be to want to share the Good News of Jesus with others. We can ask God to give us a desire to share the Gospel with those who don't yet know Him. Do you know someone who does not believe in Jesus? You can tell them about Jesus and what He has done for us!

Gospel Presentation (Optional for Day 3)

The story of Jonah, and especially the repentance of the Ninevites, reminds us that everyone has disobeyed God and deserves to be punished by Him.

But God loves us and is willing to forgive us for our sins, just like He did for the Ninevites.

The Bible teaches that we are all born with a sinful nature, we all do things that are wrong.

But I have great news to share with you today.

Even though we don't always obey God like we should, God loves us and He is willing to forgive us.

God can forgive us because of what His Son, Jesus, did for us on the cross.

How many of you know the story of Adam and Eve?

A long time ago, God created the first humans named Adam and Eve. God gave Adam and Eve one rule to follow. But Adam and Eve broke that rule. Ever since then, every person has broken God's rules.

For instance, God tells us to obey our parents. How many of you have ever disobeyed your parents?

We have all disobeyed our parents at some time. We have all broken God's rules.

So the Ninevites were no different. They were evil people who had rebelled against God Himself.

(Romans 3:23 “For all have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God.”)

Well what happens when you disobey your parents and break their rules?

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The punishment for breaking God’s rules is that we are not allowed to be with God in heaven. Our sin separates us from God forever!

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The Bible says, “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8 NIV)

Jesus, God’s only Son, came down to earth from heaven. He lived a perfect life. He never once broke God’s rules. He loved you so much that he gave his life to save yours. Jesus let people kill him on the cross. Three days later, God raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus is alive today. Those who believe in Jesus and trust in Him will be saved from the punishment of their sins.

Salvation is a gift of God. You can’t earn.

Ephesians 2:8 (ESV) says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God”.

But not only does God forgive us for all of our sins. He also makes us His very own children.

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When you believe in Jesus, God becomes your heavenly Father. You can then have a relationship with him. And one day you will live forever with Jesus in heaven.

Let’s pray.

[pray and thank God for his gift of salvation]