



LESSON 31

God shows mercy to Jonah and Nineveh

JONAH 1:1-4:11



Salvation belongs to the LORD.



“Salvation belongs to the LORD” (Jonah 2:9b).

Supporting Truths

1. The LORD is gracious and compassionate.
2. The LORD’s grace extends to all people.
3. God is powerful over all nature.
4. The LORD saves those who repent and depend on Him.
5. The LORD saves despite man’s rebellion.

Objectives

1. Define grace and compassion.
2. Explain why Jonah did not want the Ninevites to be saved.
3. List 4 times God controlled nature in the book of Jonah.
4. Describe the repentance and trust of the sailors and the Ninevites.
5. Describe how God used Jonah to bring salvation to Gentile sailors and Ninevites.



Lesson Summary

God told Jonah to go preach in Nineveh, but Jonah did not want Gentiles to be saved. He fled from God, but God used Jonah to save the Gentile sailors. Then God saved Jonah's life and sent him to Nineveh as planned. Even though Jonah wanted Nineveh to be destroyed, God used Jonah's half-hearted obedience to save the Gentile Ninevites. When Jonah became angry, God taught him a lesson: God is right to show compassion, because salvation belongs to Him.

Spotlight on the Gospel

Jonah foreshadowed Jesus. God sent Jonah to preach salvation for all, even Gentiles; Jesus died and rose again to provide salvation for all, even Gentiles. Jonah reveals that salvation depends on the mercy of God; Jesus proved God's mercy by dying to provide the way to be saved. Jonah shows that salvation comes by repentance and faith; Jesus now grants salvation to all who repent and trust in Him.

LAST WEEK



God punishes Judah
2 Kings 21:1-18;
24:1–25:30

THIS WEEK



God shows mercy to
Jonah and Nineveh
Jonah 1:1–4:11

NEXT WEEK



God uses Esther to
protect His people
Esther 1:1–10:3

Lesson Commentary

Salvation belongs to the LORD.

When we hear the name “Jonah,” we instinctively add, “and the whale.” But it would be better, when we hear “Jonah,” to add, “and God’s compassion.” Jonah is the only prophet who was sent to a foreign land to preach to foreign people, so this book is about God’s compassion for all people, Jew and Gentile. God’s love is not limited to any one people group. Because of His compassion, the LORD rescues anyone He chooses to save, whether wicked foreigners or angry prophets. This is the truth Jonah spoke about, even though he resisted it by his actions: “Salvation belongs to the LORD” (Jonah 2:9).

The LORD called Jonah to preach to Gentiles (1:1–17)

The LORD called Jonah to go to Nineveh to preach against its sin (1:1–2). Nineveh was an important Assyrian city, and the Assyrians were known for taking pleasure in gruesome violence. Not only that, but Assyria was often Israel’s enemy. So Jonah did not want to preach to Nineveh. He had a comfortable life in Israel, during a time of great peace and prosperity, until called to go to Nineveh (2 Kgs 14:25). So true to his name, which means “dove,” Jonah fluttered off in the opposite direction at the first sign of trouble (Jonah 1:3; Hos 7:11).



THINK ABOUT IT

Jonah was running from his ever present help in time of need (Ps 46:1).

Although the location of Tarshish is uncertain—perhaps Paul’s hometown, the mining town of Tarsus in Cilicia—Jonah’s intent is clear: he was fleeing from

the LORD’s presence. This was foolish, because the LORD is *omnipresent*. He is *present everywhere* (Ps 139:7–10). But it was also sad, because the LORD’s presence is the special possession of God’s people (Matt 18:20). God’s loving presence is the Christian’s greatest desire and strongest hope (Exod 3:12; Josh 1:9; Ps 27:4–5), and all true believers long to remain in Yahweh’s presence (Ps 51:11–12).

But the LORD was still present and powerful to save. As the *sovereign ruler* over nature (Ps 29:10), He hurled a violent storm at the ship (Jonah 1:4). And as the sovereign ruler over chance, He controlled the lot to identify Jonah as the cause of the trouble (1:7; Prov 16:33). Jonah was oblivious to God’s intervention (Jonah 1:5), he did not notice the contradiction between his profession and his actions (1:9), and he preferred death over repentance (1:12). But God still saved. Jonah had fled from preaching to the *Gentiles, non-Jews*, but now he had unintentionally been used by God to convert Gentile sailors (1:16)! Jonah had run from the LORD’s command, but now by the LORD’s command a fish saved Jonah’s life. Truly, salvation belongs to the LORD.

The LORD saved Jonah, and Jonah gave thanks (2:1–10)

As rebellious Jonah sank deeper into the water, he had a change of heart. He acknowledged God’s sovereignty (2:1–3) and submitted to it (2:4–9). Jonah, on the verge of death, cried out to the LORD from the depths of the sea (2:1–6a). Despite Jonah’s disobedience, the LORD was still gracious. The LORD heard his cry and sent a large fish to rescue him (1:17). At this point, Jonah was very thankful that salvation belongs to the LORD, at least when he was the one being saved (2:9).

The LORD called Jonah to preach to Gentiles again (3:1–10)

After the fish spit Jonah out on shore, the LORD again commanded Jonah to go to Nineveh. But this time, the LORD called Nineveh a great city, literally, “a great city to God,” indicating not only the city’s enormous population, but hinting at God’s compassion for the multitudes living there (cf. 4:11). This time Jonah obeyed the LORD and went to Nineveh (3:1–3). But even though Jonah obeyed, his heart did not fully belong to God (cf. 4:1–3). He preached only once, and his message was brief and incomplete (3:3–4).

But Jonah’s message, while brief, accomplished God’s purpose. That’s because salvation belongs to the LORD. The Ninevites, from great to small, people

STUDY THE BIBLE LESSON

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to animals, fasted and wore sackcloth as a sign of true repentance. Imagine the noise created by a city full of hungry children and livestock! The Ninevites repented, turning from their evil ways and entrusting themselves completely to God (3:8–9). In response, God saved, for

He abundantly pardons all who repent (Isa 55:6–7). Just as God saved the Gentile sailors, so now He saved the Gentile Ninevites. Jonah hoped for destruction, but salvation belongs to the LORD.



THINK ABOUT IT

When the wicked turn from their sin, God turns from His intended judgment (Jonah 3:10; Jer 18:8–10; 36:3).

The LORD confronted Jonah's selfish anger (4:1–11)

But Jonah was angry with God's salvation (Jonah 4:1, 4). Why? Because Jonah did not want the Ninevites to experience God's grace, mercy, patience, and love (4:2). He was happy to experience God's *mercy* himself when he was drowning, but he did not believe the Ninevites were worthy of God's *undeserved kindness*. Jonah wanted to decide who was and who wasn't worthy of grace. He said salvation belongs to the LORD (2:9), but he acted as if it belonged to himself.

So the LORD gave Jonah an object lesson (4:5–7). If Jonah cared so much about a plant that he was angry enough to die over it (4:8–9), why shouldn't the LORD care about a very large city (4:10–11), especially one containing 120,000 children (4:11)? Jonah's disregard even for the animals (cf. Ps 36:6) showed the reality of his heart: he only cared about himself and his own people. But God's compassion is extended to all.

Instead of telling us Jonah's response, the book gives God the last word and leaves us with a question. Was God right to have *compassion, pity for those who do not deserve it*? We might say that the LORD was right and Jonah was wrong, but are there times when our actions resemble Jonah's? Are we too comfortable where we are to go when God says go (Matt 28:19–20)?

Do we pray for the salvation of our enemies, or do we yearn for their destruction? Do we think that we somehow deserve the LORD's salvation more than others, or do we realize that we are all saved by grace (Matt 20:15; Luke 18:9–14; Eph 2:1–9)?

THINK ABOUT IT

The LORD's love for Gentiles was always part of God's plan (Gen 12:3).



Despite Jonah's rebellion and anger, in some important ways he prefigured Christ. When the unrepentant Jewish Pharisees asked for a sign to confirm Christ's message, Jesus gave them the sign of Jonah (Matt 12:39; 16:4; Luke 11:29). Jesus predicted that He, like Jonah in the fish, would be in the ground three days and nights (Matt 12:40). Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection confirmed His message of salvation. But while Jonah only half-heartedly believed that salvation belongs to Yahweh, Jesus was Himself the salvation provided by the LORD (1 Cor 1:30). Jesus also declared to the unrepentant Jews that the Ninevites would rise up at the judgment and condemn them, for salvation belongs not to the self-righteous but to those who respond to God's message and seek His compassion (Matt 12:41).

The lesson the LORD was teaching Jonah is our great and only hope: salvation belongs to the LORD. When we see our sin and repeated failure, we must remember that God "is my rock and my salvation, my fortress...on God rests my salvation and my glory" (Ps 62:6–7). When we realize the judgment we deserve, we remember this and have hope: "The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness" (Lam 3:22–23). God is overflowing with compassion (Ps 119:156) and powerful to save (Zeph 3:17). Salvation does not depend on or belong to us (Matt 19:26). Rather, in repentance and rest we are saved (Isa 30:15), for salvation belongs to the LORD (Ps 3:8).

Lesson Outline

Salvation belongs to the LORD.



AGES 3–5 LESSON OUTLINE

1. God saved the sailors (1:1–17).
2. God saved Jonah (2:1–10).
3. God saved Nineveh (3:1–10).
4. God saves because God has compassion (4:1–11).



AGES 6–11 LESSON OUTLINE

1. The LORD called Jonah to preach to Gentiles (1:1–17).
 - Jonah ran from the LORD's call (1:1–3).
 - The LORD used Jonah to save Gentile sailors (1:4–17).
2. The LORD saved Jonah, and Jonah gave thanks (2:1–10).
 - Jonah's problem: He was about to die (2:1–6a).
 - The LORD's salvation: Jonah rejoiced that salvation belongs to the LORD (2:6b–10).
3. The LORD called Jonah to preach to Gentiles again (3:1–10).
 - Jonah obeyed the LORD's call (3:1–3).
 - The LORD used Jonah to save Gentile Ninevites (3:3b–10).
4. The LORD confronted Jonah's selfish anger (4:1–11).
 - Jonah's problem: He was angry at God for His mercy to Nineveh (4:1–3).
 - The LORD's salvation: The LORD proclaimed that salvation belongs to the LORD (4:4–11).





Lesson Questions

Use these questions to teach or to review this week's lesson.



Ages 3–5 Lesson Questions

- 1. Where did God tell Jonah to go?**
Nineveh.
- 2. How did God save Jonah from drowning?**
God sent a fish to swallow Jonah.
- 3. What did the Ninevites do when they heard Jonah's message?**
They repented.
- 4. Why was Jonah angry when God saved the Ninevites?**
Jonah didn't think the Ninevites deserved God's mercy.



Ages 6–11 Lesson Questions

- 1. Why didn't Jonah want to go to Nineveh?**
The Ninevites were Gentiles and enemies of Israel. Jonah did not want them to be saved.
- 2. Is it possible to run away from God?**
No, because God is everywhere.
- 3. How did God use Jonah to save the Gentile sailors?**
God sent a storm, guided the lots, and used Jonah's confession to reveal Himself to the sailors.
- 4. Why did God save the Ninevites?**
God saved them because He always planned to save Gentiles, and because He is full of compassion.
- 5. What did the Ninevites do in order to be saved?**
They repented and trusted. They did not think they could earn salvation. Instead, they turned to God and hoped He would save them.
- 6. Was Jonah right to be angry?**
No. Since he was happy for God to show mercy to him, he should have been happy for God to show mercy to Nineveh too. Since he cared for a plant, he should have cared for thousands of people and animals.
- 7. Why was God right to spare the Ninevites?**
Salvation belongs to God, so He can save whomever He wants. He has always planned to save Gentiles, and He promises to save those who repent and trust in Him.
- 8. Why did Jesus give the Pharisees the sign of Jonah?**
The Jewish Pharisees refused to believe and thought they were better than Gentiles. But Jesus said the sign of Jonah would confirm that they were wrong and needed to repent and believe like the Gentile Ninevites.

Lesson Activities

Choose from the following ideas to introduce, illustrate, and apply this week's lesson.

AGES 3–5



INTRODUCE

GRACE

Read the story *Corduroy* by Don Freeman. Point out that there was nothing special about Corduroy, the stuffed bear. In fact, he was not new, he was missing a button, and he could not fix himself. But the little girl named Lisa chose Corduroy simply because she had set her love on him. When she made him her own, she also fixed him up. That's what God's grace is like: He sets His love on us, takes us as His own, and makes us holy.

FREE TO CHOOSE

Why did God warn only Nineveh and send a prophet only to them and not to other cities? That was God's free choice. You could bring to class a bag of assorted candy and let each child choose one piece. Once every child has a piece, ask a few children why they chose the piece they did, and not some other piece. Explain that God has the same freedom to choose; He can do whatever pleases Him. God not only has the right to do whatever He chooses, but He also has the power to do it. This is God's sovereignty—His freedom to choose whatever He will and the power to carry it out.



ILLUSTRATE

DRESS LIKE JOSEPH

Have a child come and “hide” in front of the class by putting his hands in front of his face. Point out that we can all still see him. That's like Jonah trying to flee from God.

GOING FISHING

Materials: table, fishing pole, fishing line or string, clothespin, lips (1:1–2), ship (1:3), waves (1:4–6), dice, life preserver or LifeSavers candy (1:10–16), large fish (1:17), praying hands (2:1–10), cityscape (3:1–6), empty paper plate (3:7–10), plant leaf (4:1–6), gummy worm (4:7–10), the word MERCY (4:11) (Note: Most of these items can be made or purchased inexpensively.)

Directions: Have an assistant hide behind a table. Throughout the lesson, call on various children to come “fish” behind the table. The assistant should use the clothespin to hook the items onto the line in the order given above. You can use each item as a visual aid for teaching the passage it corresponds to (listed above). So, the first child will “catch” a pair of lips, and you can explain that the Word of God came to Jonah in Jonah 1:1–2.



APPLY

JONAH AND THE BIG FISH

See *Year 2 Craft Book, Book 2*.

Materials: Craft sheet, tape, scissors, and crayons.

Directions: Pre-cut pictures from craft sheet. Have the children color the pictures. Tape the front and inside of the fish together by placing tape along the top edge of the fish's fins. Glue Jonah to the inside of the fish. The students can lift up the front of the fish to reveal Jonah praying.

Jonah and the Big Fish
See *Year 2 Craft Book, Book 2*



TEACH THE BIBLE LESSON

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AGES 6–8



INTRODUCE

BUT I DON'T FEEL LIKE IT

Ask the children to name some things that they do not like doing. Why do they dislike these things? Have they ever tried to get out of doing them? In today's lesson, we will learn about a prophet who was told to do something he did not want to do. We will also find out why he did not want to do it and how he tried to get out of it.

LIVING WITH THE ENEMY

Shortly after her husband's death, Elisabeth Elliot left her home and went with her daughter Valerie (a toddler) to live with the Auca Indians, the same tribe in Ecuador who killed her husband and four other missionaries less than two years earlier. By her own testimony, she not only lived with them, but loved them. How could she love the people who killed her husband? She knew that this group of people hadn't heard the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ and felt compelled to share God's Word with them. In our lesson today, Jonah goes to his enemies to share God's message, but as we'll see, he is reluctant to do so.



ILLUSTRATE

COMPASSION THAT OVERFLOWS

Bring in a large pitcher, drinking glass, and 9 x 13 inch glass baking pan. Place the drinking glass in the pan and begin slowly filling the glass with water from the pitcher. Ask the children to tell you when the glass is full. When the glass is full, continue pouring water into it so that it spills over into the pan. Use this to illustrate God's compassion towards sinners: it overflows!

MERCY ACROSTIC

Write the word MERCY on the board vertically, in large bold letters. Tell the class that as they study the book of Jonah, they need to be looking for ways in which God showed mercy to people. After each part of the lesson, fill in the acrostic with the following phrases. The last statement reviews the application of the lesson.

Made the storm cease
Engulfed Jonah with a fish
Relented from punishing
Nineveh
Caused a plant to grow over
Jonah
You should be merciful like God



APPLY

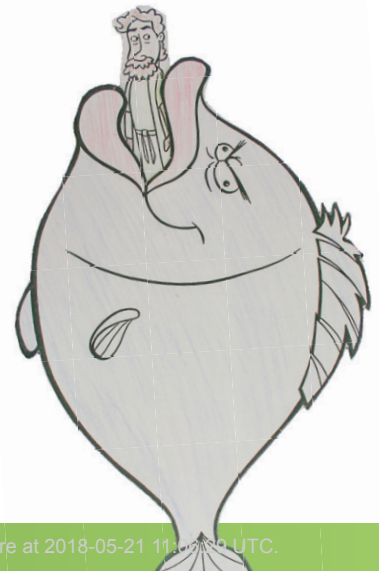
TITLE OF CRAFT

See *Year 2 Craft Book, Book 2*.

Materials: Craft sheet, craft sticks or party horn, tape, and crayons.

Directions: Have students color Jonah and the fish. Then give each student a craft stick (or party horn) and instruct him to tape his picture of Jonah to the end. Tape a large strip of paper to the back of the fish that forms a pocket that the craft stick can slide into. Students can slide the craft stick forward to simulate Jonah being spit out of the fish's mouth.

Jonah Is Spit Onto Dry Land
See *Year 2 Craft Book, Book 2*



AGES 9–11



INTRODUCE

FREE TO GIVE

Read the parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard (Matt 20:1–16) to introduce the central truth of today's lesson: God extends grace to whomever He wishes.

APPOINTED TO SAVE

Ask the children why Jonah was swallowed by a large fish. Was Jonah being punished by God? Did the fish just happen to be in the area and was hungry? Explain that God appointed the fish to save Jonah (Jon 1:17). It was God's means of rescuing sinful Jonah from certain death. In our lesson today, God appoints Jonah to be His messenger of salvation to the sinful Ninevites.



ILLUSTRATE

WHILE WE WERE ENEMIES

When reading the story of Jonah, it's hard to picture ourselves as the wicked Ninevites, enemies of Israel, but more significantly, enemies of God. Yet this is exactly how the Bible describes our relationship to God before salvation (Rom 5:10). Yet it was at this time, when we were enemies of God, that God sent His Son to pay the penalty our sins deserved. What an amazing God!

HAS THE POTTER NO RIGHT OVER THE CLAY?

Bring in a potter's wheel, clay, or piece of pottery. Describe how a potter shapes the clay into a vessel of his choosing. Then read Romans 9:21–24. Just as it is incomprehensible for a piece of pottery to question the potter concerning its purpose, so also is it illogical for men to question why God chooses some sinners for salvation.



APPLY

DEVELOPING A HEART OF COMPASSION

Children, like adults, tend to be self-consumed. They often don't think of others before themselves. To highlight what it means to have a heart of compassion and desire to put others first, create a service opportunity for your class. For instance: Take the class to a soup kitchen or mercy ministry. Or the children could bring in supplies and boxes to create care packages for missionaries or college students. The children could write notes to the recipients and include them in the boxes. Talk with the children about what it means to have a heart of compassion.