

Jonah and the Big Fish

Overview

Materials You'll Need

- craft sticks
- construction paper
- glue
- scissors
- markers or crayons
- Jonah pattern
- blue and white tissue paper
- small resealable plastic bags
- twist ties
- black permanent marker



Scriptures

Jonah 1-3

Bible Truth Objective(s)

We cannot hide anything from God

Behavioral Objective(s)

To identify things children may hide from God; to discuss ways to obey God

Memory Verse

"All that the Lord has said we will do." (Ex 24:7)



Bible Knowledge

Jonah

Jonah is a Hebrew name, meaning "dove." Jonah was a prophet during the reign of Jeroboam II of Israel, in the eighth century BC. He came from Gath Hopher, a Zebulunite town, located in the vicinity of Nazareth. He predicted the territorial expansion achieved by Jeroboam at the expense of Syria (2 Kgs 14:25)

It is believed that the events of the book took place sometime between 780 and 750 BC. During this time, Nineveh was one of the great city-states of Assyria, and Israel's most bitter enemy. It was also widely known that the people of Nineveh worshiped many gods and were cruel to victims of warfare.

The first chapter relates that Jonah was told to go to Nineveh and protest against its wickedness. However, Jonah believed that God's mercy was reserved only for His people and he refused to go. Instead he took a ship in the opposite direction. Even though he was a prophet of God, it is interesting to note that he thought he could hide from

Him. Jonah bought a ticket to Tarshish. The location of this city is uncertain, but many think it could be on the southeast coast of Spain. At the time, this would have been the most distant place known to the Israelites. After Jonah got on the ship, a storm arose, and even the experienced sailors became afraid. They cast lots to find out the will of the gods. When the lot fell on Jonah, the sailors questioned him and eventually threw Jonah overboard. A great fish swallowed the prophet.

Chapter two gives the text of Jonah's prayer, or rather a psalm of thanksgiving, from inside the fish's belly. After Jonah repented, the fish vomited Jonah onto the shore.

Chapter three shows Jonah going to Nineveh after all. His preaching of doom led the citizens to repent of their evil ways.

In chapter four, we find Jonah angry at their repentance and subsequent escape from destruction. This was the very reason he had not wanted to come to preach in the first place. He didn't think they deserved to be spared. Then through the growth and death of the plant, God taught Jonah that he must have compassion for all men. If Jonah could take pity on a plant, then he could understand why God would have pity on human beings.



Understanding Your Students

The Book of Jonah has some difficult lessons for young children to understand. For example, they may not understand the significance of Jonah's entrusted mission or the repentance of the Nineveh people. However, they can still learn a very important lesson from Jonah's actions. God told Jonah to do something, but he went against God and tried to hide. As a result, Jonah had to suffer severe consequences. He was singled out as the guilty party on the ship and subsequently thrown into the waters. Then he had to spend three days and three nights in the belly of a large fish. It was during this time that he repented. He realized that he had to follow God's orders. He could not run

away from God.

Sometimes young children try to hide things from their parents or their teachers because they don't want to get into trouble. They may have drawn on the wall or sofa. They may have broken something. They may have pushed a friend on the playground. To avoid the consequences, they don't speak up or, even worse, blame someone else or lie about it. But they should learn that, like Jonah, they can never really hide from anything. Eventually someone finds out and they will still need to face the consequences. Also remind the students that even if no one ever found out, God always knows what happened. We cannot hide anything from Him. Jonah tried to run away and hide in a ship but God knew what he was doing. Teach the students to be honest. In the end, they will feel good about owning up to what they did.



Vocabulary

Prophet

a messenger of God; he tells people what God wants them to hear

Calm

peaceful and quiet

Obey

to follow the rules



Before You Teach

When Jonah was called to preach to Nineveh, he balked at the idea and chose to flee in the opposite direction. We all know it was wrong of Jonah to disobey God's orders, but let's think for a minute why Jonah reacted the way he did.

Nineveh, though a great city at the time, was well known for its sins. Jonah, being a prophet of God, didn't understand why God would want to save such sinners. Jonah didn't think the people deserved to be saved. In fact, he wanted them to be destroyed. God's salvation was for His people, the Israelites. Jonah probably justified his actions based on these assumptions.

We may view Jonah's actions as a bit extreme. But sometimes, we do the same thing. We may judge a person based on our beliefs, or we may hold a grudge because someone hurt us in the past. Although we may not do anything about it, we

become angry or we may even wish for something terrible to happen to that person. We find it very difficult to let go.

God teaches us to be filled with compassion. Even though the people of Nineveh did not deserve to be saved according to the standards of Jonah, God showed mercy because God is a God of grace. If God saved people based on their merits, then not very many in the world would go to heaven. Really, none of us deserve to receive God's salvation; yet God gives it to us freely. Who are we, then, to judge others?

To stop the cycle of hurt and blame, we must first be ready to face our problem. Admitting that we have issues with anger is often the hardest step to take. Then we must learn to forgive. True forgiveness is not just lip-service. Just saying "I'm sorry," will not take away the ill-feelings within us. We need to pray to God to open our hearts so that we may be filled with His goodness. When we are filled with God's Spirit, then it will lead us onto the path of salvation.



Bible Story

In the last lesson, we learned about a brave woman. Her name was Esther and she was a Jew living in a land called Persia. Esther did not have parents while she was growing up because they had died. Her cousin Mordecai raised her, and he taught her about God. One day, the king of Persia picked her to be the queen. She did not tell him that she was a Jew because Mordecai told her to keep it a secret.

After Esther became the queen, a high official called Haman wanted everyone to bow down to him. He thought he was a very important man. Everyone did bow down, except for Mordecai. Haman got so angry that he came up with a plan to kill all the Jews. Mordecai told Esther to help her people. In the beginning she was afraid. Then she prayed to God for three days and got the courage to talk to the king. The king was angry at Haman and had him killed. Esther had saved her people.

Today, we are going to learn about a person who was God's special worker. He was a prophet and his name was Jonah.

Jonah Does Not Want to go to Nineveh

Do you remember what a prophet did? A prophet was a messenger of God. He told people what God wanted them to hear. One time, God had a special job for Jonah. He told Jonah to go to a town called Nineveh. God wanted Jonah to tell the people of Nineveh to stop being bad and to start obeying God.

When Jonah heard what God wanted him to do, he was not happy. He didn't like the people in Nineveh. Everyone knew they were bad. Why should he go and tell them to change? He thought to himself, "No, I won't go!" And he didn't. Instead, he got on a ship and sailed in the other direction, away from Nineveh. He was trying to run away from what God wanted him to do.

A Great Storm

Do you think Jonah can run away from God? Of course not. God is almighty. He knows everything. He knows what we are thinking and doing. We cannot hide from Him. God knew that Jonah was on a ship going away from Nineveh. So after the ship sailed off, God made a big storm on the sea. The wind started to

blow. The rain fell. The ship rocked and tossed in the big waves. Everyone on the boat was afraid, except for Jonah. He was sleeping.

The others woke Jonah up and asked him if he knew why there was such a terrible storm. Right away, Jonah knew that God was not happy with him. That was why there was a storm.

"I am Jonah, and I fear the God of heaven," answered Jonah.

Jonah told the people that it was God who made this big storm. He told them that he was trying to run away from God.

"Tell us how we can make the sea calm again," the people said.

They wanted the storm to stop so that there wouldn't be any more big waves. Jonah did not want the rest of the people on the ship to be hurt because of him. So he told the sailors to throw him into the sea. The people didn't want to do that. They knew if they threw Jonah into the sea, then he would definitely die. So they tried very hard to row the ship back to shore. But the wind and the waves were too strong. Then they decided to listen to Jonah and throw him into the water.

After they threw Jonah into the water, an amazing thing happened. The storm stopped and the sea was calm again. The people on the ship knew that there really was a God. But what about Jonah? Remember God knows everything that we are doing. God knew that Jonah was in the water. He did not want him to die. So God sent a big fish to come and swallow Jonah whole. It was probably scary to be swallowed by a giant fish but God did this to save Jonah. Now, he would be safe inside the belly of the fish. He would not drown in the raging water.

Jonah stayed inside the big fish for three days and three nights. He was not hurt, but he was afraid. He knew that all these things were happening to him because he did not listen to God in the first place. So he prayed to God. He told God he would obey and go to Nineveh. Then God made the big fish swim near dry land and spit Jonah out. Jonah was glad to be on land again. He was safe on the shore.

Jonah Obeys God

Once again, God told Jonah to go to Nineveh. This time Jonah was ready to go. He did not think

about running away. He learned that he could never hide from God. So Jonah went straight to Nineveh. He told everyone there to obey God. If they didn't they would be destroyed.

"In forty days, Nineveh will be destroyed," Jonah said as he walked around the city.

Jonah was telling the people if they didn't change their bad habits, then God would destroy the city in forty days.

When the people in Nineveh heard Jonah's words, they were sorry for the wrong things they had done. They asked God to forgive them. Even the king prayed to God and asked Him to forgive them. God

heard their prayers and forgave them. He decided not to destroy the city. The people were saved.

In today's lesson, Jonah thought he could run away from God. He didn't want to do what God asked him to so he got on a ship that sailed far away. But he learned that he could not hide. God knew where he was, and what he was doing and thinking. In the end, Jonah learned that it was best to obey God. Today, we need to obey God too. We need to follow His commands and do the things He wants us to, even if they are hard. We cannot run away. Let's always remember to pray to God so that He can help us obey His words.



Check For Understanding

1. **Where did God ask Jonah to go?** (He asked him to go to Nineveh.)
2. **Why did God want Jonah to go there?** (The people there didn't obey God. God wanted to give them a chance to change.)
3. **Did Jonah obey God?** (No, he ran away.)
4. **What happened to the ship that Jonah was on?** (It was rocked and tossed in a storm.)
5. **What did Jonah tell the people on the boat to do?** (He told them to throw him into the sea.)
6. **What happened when Jonah was in the**

sea? (He was swallowed by a big fish.)

7. **What did Jonah do inside the fish?** (He prayed and asked God to forgive him.)
8. **How long was he in the fish for?** (Three days and nights.)
9. **After the big fish spat Jonah out, did he run away again or did he go to Nineveh?** (He obeyed God and went to Nineveh.)
10. **Do you think obeying God is the best thing to do?** (Yes.)
11. **Sometimes it is hard to obey, because we want to do something else, like watch television instead of do homework. But God wants us to obey Him at all times. We will be blessed if we obey God. How can we obey God?** (Allow students to answer.)



Life Application Story

Homework or Video Game Magazine?

Juan was sitting at the kitchen table. He was getting ready to do his homework. He stared at the pages. He had two math sheets and one spelling list.

"It shouldn't take me too long," thought Juan. He picked up his pencil and began to do his math problems.

As he was working, his mom, Mrs. Lopez came into the kitchen and put a stack of mail on the table. Juan turned his head for a moment and saw that his new game magazine had arrived. He had been waiting for it to come for weeks. Now it was finally here. He put down his pencil and grabbed the magazine from the pile of mail.

"Wow, it talks about the game I really like, Mom," Juan said excitedly.

"Hold on, Juan. I thought you were supposed to be doing your homework. You can look at the magazine after you are finished," Mrs. Lopez said.

"Okay, Mom. I know I am supposed to finish my work before I can have free time," Juan said as he put the magazine down.

"Thanks for remembering the rule. I am going to plant two of these flowers out in the back. I will be back in a few minutes. You need to keep working," Mrs. Lopez said.

"Okay," replied Juan.

Juan worked on ten math problems. They were easy addition questions. Then he started to think about the game magazine.

"It won't hurt to take a short break," Juan thought.

He put his pencil down and opened the magazine. He was reading about his favorite game when he heard a sound coming from the backyard. He quickly closed the magazine and pretended to be working on his math. As he wrote a number down, his mom came inside the house.

"How's the math going?" she asked.

"It's going well," Juan replied. His heart was beating kind of fast. He was glad his mom didn't catch him reading. He had promised her that he would save it for after his homework. As he tried to concentrate on his second math sheet, he heard his mom go out one more time.

"I am going to water the plants, okay?" Mrs. Lopez said loudly as she turned on the water hose.

"Yeah, sure," Juan replied.

He got through the second page in less than two minutes.

"Boy, it sure helps to concentrate," Juan thought to himself.

As he took out his spelling list, he realized he didn't have the lined paper to write the words on. He looked around the pile of papers on the table to see if it had slipped out of his homework binder. As he went through the stack, his fingers touched the game magazine. Then, as if out of his own control, he opened it and began to flip through the pages again. This time, he was so glued to the page

that he was looking at, he didn't even know his mom had come back inside.

"You finished all of your work?" Mrs. Lopez asked.

Juan closed the magazine quickly. His heart was beating fast again. He felt kind of hot.

"Umms, no. Not exactly. I was looking for my lined paper to write my spelling words," Juan explained.

"But I see that you are reading, not looking for paper."

"I don't know what happened, Mom. I didn't really want to open it again, but it's like I had to," Juan said.

"Well, you know the rules. Homework first, and play time after," Mrs. Lopez explained. "I know it is hard to choose sometimes between something you really want to do and the things you have to finish. I am sure reading your magazine is more fun to you than doing homework, but there are rules you need to follow. It's like obeying God's commands. Sometimes, it is hard but we need to follow them because they are good for us."

"I know," Juan said. "I am going to put this magazine on the counter away from here so I can concentrate."

"That's a good plan," Mrs. Lopez said. "And here is a piece of paper for your spelling."

"Thanks, Mom."

Questions to Think About

1. **What did Juan want to do instead of his homework?** (He wanted to read his new game magazine.)
2. **What do you have a hard time doing, even though you know you need to do it?** (Allow students to share. Some suggestions: homework, practicing piano, cleaning up the room, etc.)



Activity 1

Jonah and the Big Fish

Color in the picture. Then cut out the squares. Put

the puzzle together and glue the pieces onto a piece of construction paper.



Activity 2

Can We Hide From God?

Materials:

1. construction paper
2. craft sticks
3. glue
4. markers or crayons
5. scissors

Directions:

1. Help each student draw two circles. They should be large enough to glue to the craft stick without flopping over.
2. On one of the circles, help the students write the word "yes". On the other, write the word "no."
3. The students can decorate the remaining space.
4. Help them glue the circles to the craft stick so that when they hold up the stick, one side will have the word "yes" and the other will have the word "no."
5. Ask the students the following questions. After they hear the questions, they need to hold up their sign and answer "yes" or "no." Be sure to take time to discuss the significance of each question.

"Can we draw on the wall and tell others we did not do it?"

"Can we break a toy and just put the toy away without telling anyone?"

"When we do something wrong, can we just run to our room and hide?"

"Does God know everything we do?"

"Does God want us to obey?"

"Does God want us to be honest?"



Activity 3

Jonah Obey's

Materials:

1. Jonah pattern
2. blue and white tissue paper
3. small resealable plastic sandwich bags
4. twist ties
5. scissors

6. black permanent marker

Directions:

1. Provide each student with a copy of the Jonah pattern. The students can color it in, and then cut out the pattern.
2. Cut the tissue paper into small squares.
3. Have students place a small handful of tissue paper squares into the plastic resealable bag. Also place Jonah into the bag. Then seal the bag.
4. Lay the bag on the table and flatten it out. Position the bag so that it forms a diamond shape.
5. At one corner away from the sealed end, place a twist tie around the bag so that it forms a tail. Spread out the tail.
6. Using the black permanent marker, draw an eye near the sealed edge of the bag to create a fish.
7. As the students are working on their activity, talk about how Jonah disobeyed God. In today's lesson, we learned that Jonah tried to run away from God. But in the end, he realized that he could not. When he disobeyed God, God let a big fish swallow Jonah. While he was in the fish, Jonah thought about what he did and understood that he had disobeyed God. Let this activity remind the students that Jonah prayed to God for forgiveness and learned to obey.



Activity 12:1

Jonah and the Big Fish

Color in the picture. Then cut out the squares. Put the puzzle together and glue the pieces onto a piece of construction paper.



