

SABBATH SCHOOL

Preteen Sabbath Instruction Program — Teacher's Outline

Level 3 • Unit 4 • Week 4

NINEVEH REPENTS

OBJECTIVE:

The book of Jonah teaches the students about sin, repentance and forgiveness and that God's mercy and grace, the message of salvation, is for all of mankind, not just for the Israelites.

ATTENTION GETTER:

- Do: Procure or make a simple map of the eastern Mediterranean and Assyria. Using the map, show Jonah's Journey to the class; point out the cities as mentioned.
- Ask: If you were going on a journey from the city of Joppa to the city of Nineveh, what would be the shortest and fastest route to travel? [Have one student come to the front of the class and draw the route on the map with a pencil or marker.]
- Say: Yes, that would be the best way to go. Today we are going to hear the story of a man named Jonah. God asked Jonah to go from Joppa to Nineveh, but he decided to take the long way around. He started at Joppa [point], but went by way of the sea [use marker to make a dotted line from Joppa to Sinope to Nineveh, as cities are mentioned] all the way up to Sinope and back down to Nineveh.
- Say: Now, if you were like Jonah and decided to take the long way across the sea, how would you travel? [In a boat or ship.] Yes, that would be the safest way. But let's read the story of Jonah and see how he traveled from Joppa to Nineveh and why he was going there in the first place.

BIBLE LESSON:

- Say: Jonah was a prophet of God who lived at the time of Jeroboam II, king over the northern ten tribes of Israel.

To the east of the land of Canaan where the Israelites lived was the nation of Assyria. Assyria was one of Israel's great enemies and the people there were known to be very evil and cruel. God was so displeased with them He decided to destroy their capital city of Nineveh. But because of God's love and mercy for mankind, He would not do this without first warning the inhabitants so all innocent people would have a chance to escape.

God called upon Jonah, His prophet at this time, to take this warning message to Nineveh. Let's turn in our Bibles to the book of Jonah and read what God said to Jonah and how Jonah responded. [Have one student read Jonah 1:2-3.]

Instead of obeying God's command, Jonah decided to run from God. He didn't take the straight path to Nineveh as we saw on the map. He boarded a ship and headed out to sea in the other direction.

Ask: Can we run from God? Of course we can't—He knows everything about us and where we are at all times. Jonah was going to be reminded of God's power again.

Say: As soon as they set sail, Jonah went down to the lowest part of the ship and fell asleep. But God knew where he was and sent a strong storm with howling winds and giant waves to overtake the ship. The captain and crew were so afraid they searched out everyone aboard ship and asked each person to pray to their own god to ask for protection. They even threw all of the cargo over the sides to lighten the load, to keep the ship from sinking from the crashing waves. When the captain found Jonah asleep, he couldn't believe it. In verse 6 we read what he said to Jonah. [Have one student read verse 6.]

Then the superstitious sailors decided to cast lots to see who was bringing about this curse on their ship. Surely, they believed, one of the gods was angry with someone and was trying to kill them all. Casting of lots was a ceremony used in ancient times to decide important matters. It was similar to how we might draw straws or flip a coin today. But it was not considered just a matter of chance, because the decision was always considered to be from God. And, of course, this time God caused the lot to fall upon Jonah. Jonah knew why the lot fell on him. God was trying to get his attention.

Jonah told the men he was running from God and the only way to calm the stormy sea was to throw him over into the water. But the men didn't want to be charged with Jonah's death, so they tried rowing harder, trying to get to shore to put him off the ship. But the wind and the storm grew even worse and they finally picked Jonah up and threw him overboard. Immediately the winds ceased and the sea became calm!

Jonah didn't know what was going to happen to him next. There he was floating in the middle of the sea. How was he going to get to land and to safety? Suddenly, out of the deep blue sea, came Jonah's transportation to land. It wasn't another ship or a raft, but a great fish that God had prepared to swallow Jonah. Three days and three nights Jonah was in the belly of this great fish, praying and giving praise to God. It traveled all the way up through the

Aegean Sea [point it out on the map] and in chapter 2:10 of the book of Jonah it says: "So the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land."

Ask: Can you imagine being in the belly of a fish? What do you think that would be like? [Allow some discussion—scary, smelly, lonely, wet.]

Say: This time when God spoke to Jonah and told him to go to Nineveh and preach a warning message, Jonah did not hesitate. When he entered the city he told the people that in forty days God would destroy Nineveh if they did not repent.

Ask: How did the people respond?

Say: Let's read it in chapter 3:5. [Ask one student to read.] Yes, they believed God and changed their wicked ways. Verse 6 tells us that even the king repented and proclaimed a fast throughout the land, to show God they really meant it. God showed His great mercy and forgiveness even on this gentile nation. He did not destroy them.

Say: In this story we learn that God will forgive all those who turn from their sin. God's message of mercy and forgiveness is not for the Israelites only. From the beginning God's plan has been to offer salvation to everyone. Paul tells us this when he writes to Timothy in 1 Timothy 2:3-4 [teacher read].

Say: Well, I guess this must have made Jonah happy. His mission was completed. He made it to Nineveh, warned the people, and they repented and worshiped the one true God. All was fine. Or was it?

Read: Jonah 4:1. [Ask one student read.]

Ask: Why was Jonah angry? Shouldn't we want people to be saved from destruction and learn to live God's way?

Say: Yes, we should, but sometimes our human nature gets in the way and we don't think straight. Jonah still had a lesson in forgiveness and repentance to learn himself. Jonah hated the Assyrians because of all the cruel things they had done to Israel. What he really wanted was vengeance on them, not mercy. Now Jonah had to learn to forgive the Assyrians.

Jonah talked to God, continuing to justify his own feelings. He was so angry that he thought it was better for him to die than to live. How quickly Jonah had forgotten God's mercy on him when he was in the fish. Jonah was happy when God saved him, but angry when Nineveh was saved.

God continued to work with Jonah to help him understand. Jonah went outside the city and built himself a shelter and waited to see what would happen. To protect himself from the hot rays of the sun, God caused a special plant to grow up tall and provide shade for Jonah. Jonah was very thankful for the plant.

The next morning, God caused a worm to eat the roots of the plant and it withered and died. Then the sun arose and a hot east wind began to blow and the sun beat down on Jonah's head. He became faint and again wished that he would die. He felt sorry that the plant had only lived a short time. This is when God spoke to him again.

Let me read what God said to him in Jonah 4:10-11 [teacher read]. God showed Jonah that just as he had felt sorry for the plant and had not wanted it to die so quickly, God had pity on the people of Nineveh and wanted to extend His mercy to them because they repented.

God's message of salvation was now strong in Jonah's mind. He had sinned by disobeying God and by being angry and unforgiving. But he repented of his disobedience and learned how important it was to forgive, just as God had forgiven him. No matter what we do wrong, if we repent, which means to change and do right, and ask God for forgiveness, He will show us His mercy just as He did to Jonah and Nineveh.

LESSON APPLICATION:

Supplies: Copy of "Jonah's Beach" for each student
Pencils
Crayons
Seashell stickers

First have students complete the sentence on the picture by placing the letters in their correct numerical order. Then they may draw a beach scene, finishing up by adding the seashell stickers.

Music:

Sing to the tune of "A Bicycle Built for Two."

Jonah, Jonah God gave you His command.
Go tell the people, and go as fast as you can.
Let Nineveh know of their sins,
That God will forgive and forget them.
But Jonah was swallowed,
By a great fish that followed.
God's mercy and grace finally saved him.

MEMORY VERSE:

1 Timothy 2:3-4 "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

family activity

THE POINT:

The story of Jonah teaches about sin, repentance and forgiveness and that God's mercy and grace, the message of salvation, is for all of mankind, not just for the Israelites. God honored the repentance of the Ninevites and spared their city at that time. Then He worked with Jonah to teach him a lesson in forgiveness, too.

FAMILY TOGETHER TIME:

Have your child tell you the story of Jonah. Discuss with them Jonah's reaction when Nineveh repented and how important it is to forgive the things others do wrong when they repent and change. We must learn to forgive others as God forgives us. Ask your child what they think it was like being inside the great fish for three days and three nights.

ASK ME...

Where did God tell Jonah to go and preach? (Nineveh.)

What was the first thing God did to get Jonah's attention for running the wrong way? (He sent a storm and high winds.)

Why did Jonah say the storm was his fault? (He tried to run away from God.)

After the great fish swallowed him, what did Jonah do inside the fish? (He prayed.)

How long was Jonah inside the great fish? (Three days and three nights.)

Why did Jonah not want God to forgive the people of Nineveh? (Because of all the cruel things the Ninevites had done to Israel in the past.)

What lesson did Jonah learn? (Forgiveness.)

MEMORY VERSE:

1 Timothy 2:3-4 "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

Jonah's Beach

While in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights, Jonah prayed to the Lord and asked for forgiveness. He promised to go to Nineveh and preach to the people. According to Jonah 2:10, the Lord heard Jonah's prayers and the fish...

(Complete the sentence by placing the following letters in their correct numerical order.)

e i d o n t r o h n o a o v l j d y t a d m n
6 4 23 9 22 15 18 2 12 10 16 21 13 1 20 8 7 19 5 11 17 3 14
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23