

=BOOKS OF THE BIBLE=

Lesson 32

Jonah

Objects to have:

The new Bible book sign: JONAH

Go Where God Says

A little doll made from chenille wire (pipe cleaner); a little wad of Kleenex will make a head, a little piece of straight cloth tied in the middle will make a garment

A little boat made from a small bar of soap with a sail on a toothpick

Make a big fish from a sock to cover your hand.

Your Bible.

Introducing the lesson:

(Review the names of the books of the Bible learned thus far.) Today's book is named for a preacher-man, a man by the name of Jonah. (Have the children repeat the name Jonah with you.)

(Teacher, with the objects put yourself into your storytelling. Be Jonah; picture his surroundings, think his thoughts, etc.)

Telling the Bible story:

(Hold up the doll.) We'll call this funny little doll Jonah. Jonah was a man that we read about in the Bible, in our Bible book for today, named Jonah. Jonah was a preacher. Jonah was at his home one day, and God talked to him. "Jonah, I want you to take a long journey. I want you to go to a city named Nineveh. I have seen how wicked the people and the king are in Nineveh. When you get to Nineveh, you tell everybody there that God knows how bad they are. Tell them that God has sent you to warn them that in 40 days He is going to let an army come and destroy their great city. Now go, Jonah," God said. "Go to Nineveh and tell the people there that I sent you to tell them this."

So, Jonah got ready to go. He started out on his trip. (Make him bounce as if he's walking away from in front of you, off to the left.) But wait a minute. Jonah was going the wrong way; Nineveh is that way. (Point to the right. Hold the doll still.) Jonah was thinking to himself, "I don't want to go to Nineveh. Nineveh is a great big city. Nineveh has a great big army. I know how bad the people there are; God does not have to tell me that." Jonah was thinking, "The army has gone out from Nineveh and has gone into other countries killing people and destroying everything as they marched along. People in other countries are scared to death of them. I'm afraid," thought Jonah. "I'm afraid that if I go to Nineveh, somebody there will kill me. If God has decided to destroy Nineveh, I hope that He does. I'll be glad to see that city burned down."

Jonah was planning. Jonah said to himself, "I'm going to take a long trip to some other place where God can't see me. I'll get away from God, and He can't reach me in this other place."

Jonah forgot something! He forgot that God can see everything in the whole wide world. Jonah could not run away from God, but he tried, and he got into bad trouble.

Here goes Jonah in the opposite direction from which God had sent him. (Move him farther to the left.) Jonah is going toward the sea. Jonah is going to Joppa, a city on the sea. The sooner that he could get far, far away from the place where God wanted him to go, the better Jonah would like it.

Maybe Jonah rode a horse and galloped away from his home as fast as he could go. Maybe Jonah rode a donkey. Anyway, he hurried away! As he hurried away, he probably kept looking back over his shoulder to see whether anybody was coming up behind him. God could send somebody after him. Ah, no, nobody was coming!

“Hurry, hurry,” Jonah was thinking to himself. “Ah, here is the city of Joppa. Now to get down to the seashore where the big boats are being loaded. There they are! There are the big sailing ships.” (Pick up your sailing vessel in your other hand.) “There are a lot of people down there. Some men are putting great big bundles on ships. Other men are working on the ships to be sure that they are in good shape for taking long trips out on the dangerous sea waters. I wonder which ship is going to Tarshish?”

“Hey sailor, which one of these ships is going to Tarshish? Oh, this one? Thank you very much.” (Make your little doll walk to the ship.) “Sailor, I want to buy a ticket so that I can ride this ship to Tarshish. Here’s my money. Thank you. May I go on board now? All right.” (Hold the doll on board the ship.)

“Phew!” Jonah must have thought. “Here I am safe on board ship on my way to Tarshish and nobody has stopped me yet. I’ll get away from God. He’s not going to insist that I go to Nineveh.”

Jonah got comfortable on board the huge sailing ship. Pretty soon he noticed that men were hoisting the sails, somebody was pulling up the anchor, and they were sailing slowly out of the harbor of Joppa into the sea, heading toward Tarshish.

“Here I go! No more thoughts about having to go to Nineveh now! I didn’t know that I was so tired. Guess I’ll go into the cabin and lie down and take a nap. Ho, hum.” (Move Jonah out of sight.)

While Jonah was down in the cabin in the bottom of the big sailing ship, the ship sailed on. It was sailing in the direction of Tarshish. All of a sudden the water was not quietly rippling against the ship; the winds were not gently blowing. The wind started to blow very strong. The water turned into huge waves that were hitting against the sides of the ship. (Move your ship as if it’s in a storm.) The ship was blown about first this way and then that. The captain of the ship was shouting orders as to what to do with the sails. The captain and his crew had been in storms before, and they knew just exactly what to do to keep the ship going in the right direction and to keep the ship from being blown onto rocks and from sinking. The sailors worked hard under the captain’s orders. But, the wind was blowing harder and harder! “Captain, what are we going to do?” one of the sailors yelled over the noise of the wind. “The wind is blowing the waves so high that the water is coming into the ship. Now the boards in the ship sound as if they are going to break. What shall we do? This is the worst storm that we have ever seen.”

The captain ordered some of the men to go down into the ship and to carry up the big packages that some people were sending to another country. “We’ll have to throw them into the water. It is a shame to throw away these important and expensive packages; but unless we do, the ship is going to sink, and then we’ll all be killed.”

The sailors ran down into the ship; they carried up as much as they could possibly carry at one time, and they threw those packages overboard into the sea. Then they went down for more packages and carried them up, too. While they were doing this, it was all they could do to keep from falling down because the wind was blowing them around so much. Their hair was blowing; their clothes seemed about to blow right off their bodies. Still the ship tossed and turned. Throwing the packages out into the water did not seem to do any good at all. If the wind would not stop blowing so hard, they would all be lost in the sea.

The captain called to all his men, “Every man pray to his god.” The sailors prayed to make-believe gods who could not hear them or see them or answer their prayers. The captain thought of Jonah. “Where is that man who came on at Joppa and is getting off at Tarshish? He should be praying, too.”

One of the men knew that Jonah was asleep down in the ship. The captain went to wake him up. “Wake up, Jonah. Wake up and pray. We are in the most fierce storm that any one of us has ever seen. We’ll all drown if the wind doesn’t stop blowing so hard. We’re all praying. You pray, too, to your God.”

(Hold Jonah straight up.) Then the sailors decided that maybe Jonah was the reason that they were in such a terrible storm. Maybe he had done something wrong and was being punished for it. One of them went to Jonah and said, “Who are you? Where do you come from?”

Jonah said, “I am Jonah. I am a preacher. I trust God; He made Heaven and earth. I know that I’m the reason for the terrible storm. I tried to run away from God because I did not want to go where He told me to go. You should throw me overboard, and the storm will stop.”

The captain and his men could not think of throwing Jonah overboard. If they did that, he would be sure to be drowned in the sea. The men tried to row the boat out of this place in the sea to get away from the storm. The harder they rowed, however, the greater the danger seemed to be. It was decided that they should listen to Jonah. They decided, also, that his God was the true, living God. They prayed and said, “Lord, we don’t want to throw this man out of the ship, but he has told us that we must do this or the wind will continue to blow hard and then we’ll all be killed. Don’t blame us for his death.” And then they lifted Jonah up and threw him out of the boat. (“Throw” him down, but don’t let him leave your hand.)

As soon as Jonah hit the water, the wind got calm. It got quiet, and the storm was all over. The ship sailed on. (Turn your back to your class; put down your ship and put the whale on your hand. Have Jonah in the other hand; keep the whale behind your back.)

Jonah landed—splash—in the water. The deep, deep water covered him completely. He paddled his hands and kicked his feet. But he went down, down until the water completely covered him and the sea weeds were wrapped around him. Just then something great big came swimming up to Jonah. It was a huge sea monster, a huge fish that God had prepared especially for Jonah. Was it especially for Jonah to climb on and swim to shore on? Was it especially for Jonah to eat when he got to land? No. God prepared this huge fish, which later on in the Bible is called a whale, especially to swallow up Jonah. Gulp! There was Jonah inside that big fish, swallowed up. (“Swallow” up Jonah with your whale.)

It did not kill Jonah for the fish to swallow him. Inside that big fish, in the wet, slimy darkness, Jonah started to do some serious thinking, “God must be able to see everywhere. I should have known that I could not run from Him. He really wants me to go to Nineveh. He has kept me alive, and I am thankful for that. I will go to Nineveh if God will help me.” Jonah told God how thankful he was to be alive.

After three days and three nights the fish swam up to land (make him “swim”), and he spit Jonah out on the land. (Let Jonah fall out into your other hand. Put the whale on the table.)

God talked to Jonah, “Jonah, get up. Go to Nineveh.” Jonah got up, and this time he went in the right direction. It should have taken three days to get to Nineveh, but Jonah got there in one day. He was not going to take his time about obeying God anymore; he had learned his lesson about disobeying God!

As soon as Jonah got to the city limits, he started to call out to anyone that he could see, “...Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.” (Jonah 3:4) As he passed houses, he called out for the people inside to hear, “In forty days Nineveh shall be overthrown.” (If you say the word “overthrown” slowly enough, the children will understand it and catch on to its meaning.) As Jonah walked through the city for one whole day, he called God’s message out to the people.

The people who lived in Nineveh listened. They stopped to think about how wicked they had been. The king heard about Jonah’s message; he thought about his own wickedness and the wickedness of the whole city of Nineveh. The king sent out an order, “Don’t let anybody eat any food for a while. Don’t let anybody drink any water. Tell everybody to put on some ugly clothes. Everybody should spend the time praying. Everybody should ask God to forgive him of his sins. Maybe God will not destroy our city if we are truly sorry for our sins.”

All the people changed clothes into ugly clothes, ate nothing and drank nothing. All they thought about was being sorry for their sins. They prayed, telling God about their sins, and asking for forgiveness. God heard their prayers. He forgave them their sins. He did not destroy the city of Nineveh. (Teachers, it was more than 200 years later that Nineveh was destroyed.)

The people of Nineveh were certainly glad that a preacher had come to their city and had preached the message that God had commanded him to preach. Anybody who does not know that Jesus loves him and that Jesus wants him to confess his sins needs to listen to this message, too. They will be glad if someone tells them!

LEARN OUR BIBLE VERSE: Jonah 3:10, “And God saw...that they turned from their evil way....”