



JONAH JESUS AND JONAH

MATTHEW 12:38–42

GOAL

- ▶ To teach children that we must listen to Jesus, the greatest prophet of all, even if we don't have any physical or scientific proof to show anyone that He is the Truth. Faith in Christ is all we need!
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WORDS TO KNOW

- ▶ **Authority:** the power or right to give orders and expect obedience.
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MEMORY VERSES

- ▶ **Matthew 12:40:** "For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

John 11:25: Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live."



OVERVIEW



Read Matthew 12:38–42: While Jesus was teaching one day, a group of Pharisees and teachers of religious law asked Jesus for a sign that would prove His authority. Jesus rejected their request and said that only an evil, unfaithful generation would ask for a sign. He said that the only sign He would offer was the sign of the prophet Jonah. He said that, like Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for three days and three nights, He would be in the heart of the Earth for same amount of time. Jesus continued saying that the people of Nineveh would stand against this evil generation on judgment day and condemn it because they had repented of their sinful ways after Jonah brought them a message of warning from the Lord. Even though these religious leaders had someone far greater than Jonah standing before them, they still refused to repent. Jesus also said that the queen of Sheba would also stand against this evil generation on judgment day and condemn it because she had traveled a long way to hear the wisdom of King Solomon. The religious leaders had someone far wiser than Solomon right in front of them, and yet, they still refused to listen to Him.

SUGGESTIONS



- **The cross is the climax of God's story:** Everything Jonah did was leading up to what Jesus would do on the cross. The same is true for all prophets who came before Him. All the Scriptures that the religious leaders used to teach people pointed to Jesus, but they refused to see.
- **The cross proved it all:** Though He stood before them, had performed miracles, and spoke of things no one could know or understand, the religious leaders of the time wanted more proof. Jesus gave them a glimpse of what was to come – the greatest miracle and act of grace – His sacrifice on the cross.
- **The cross is our hope:** The Pharisees and religious teachers had spent years of their lives studying Scripture, which told them that God was going to send them a savior. They studied all the signs that would help them identify the messiah that they had hoped for, but when He stood in front of them, none of them recognized Him or believed what He said.



PRE-LESSON ACTIVITY

Ages 5-7 | I Went to Market | Have the class sit in a circle. Choose a student to start the game and ask him or her to say, "I went to market and bought a ____." The student should add an item that can be purchased at a market. The next student in the circle repeats the phrase and the item that the first student said adding an item of his or her own. Each following student must remember and repeat all the items the previous students have said in the correct order. Those who can't remember the items or the correct order is out. Play until one student remains.

The Old Testament listed so many prophecies about Jesus's life that the religious leaders shouldn't have needed to ask for proof.

Ages 5-10 | How's Yours? Choose one student to be the guesser and have him or her leave the room. The rest of the class has to come up with something that they all have, such as a refrigerator, a book, or a lamp. Once the item has been chosen, the guesser can come in and ask the other students, "How's yours?" The students must give a truthful answer that doesn't give it away but isn't too vague. The guesser can ask each student only one question. If the guesser guesses the correct object, the person who gave him or her the last clue is now the guesser. Repeat until everyone has had a chance to be the guesser or until the class needs to move on.

The Scriptures provided clues about Jesus's life that pointed to Him. The religious leaders just didn't get it!

Ages 8-10 | Secret Dancer | *Supplies: something to play music*

Have the class stand in a circle. Choose one student to be the detective and then send him or her out of the room. Choose one student to be the secret dancer. The secret dancer will pick a dance move that everyone will have to copy. When everyone is dancing, call the detective back into the room. The detective gets three chances to guess the the person who chose the dance move everyone is doing. Repeat until everyone has had a chance to be the detective or until the class needs to move on.

The religious leaders had way more information to go on to see that Jesus was the promised Messiah than the detective had to figure out who the secret dancer was!



MEMORY VERSE MEANING



Matthew 12:40: After Jesus was crucified, His lifeless body was laid in a tomb for three days and three nights – the same amount of time Jonah spent in the belly of the fish.

John 11:25: After three days and three nights, Jesus rose from the dead. Those who believe in Jesus and His sacrifice will have eternal life in Heaven.

POST-LESSON ACTIVITY



Ages 5-7 Sausage | Have the class sit in a circle. Choose one student to be “It,” and have him or her stand in the middle. Each student sitting in the circle can ask an appropriate question of the person in the middle. The person in the middle can only give one answer: Sausage. For example, “What color is your shirt?” “Sausage.” “What do you use to brush your hair?” “Sausage.” The first person to ask a question that makes the person in the middle laugh becomes “It.” Continue until everyone has had a chance in the middle or until the class needs to move on.

There’s one answer to all of life’s problems: Jesus! He will help us through everything!

Ages 5-10 Jammed in with Jesus | This game is played the opposite of hide and seek. One student is chosen to hide, and all others cover their eyes. When a student finds the hiding student, he or she must hide in the same space. Continue until everyone has found the hiding student.

Once we find Jesus, we should stick with Him!



Ages 8-10 | **Scripture Sleuths** | **Supplies:** paper, printer or pen, enough Bibles for all students

On the left-hand side of the paper, write or print out this list of messianic prophecies: Isaiah 7:14, Micah 5:2, Isaiah 35:5-6, Isaiah 53:3, Zechariah 9:9, Isaiah 24:7-8. On the right side of the paper, write the following verses in which Jesus fulfilled these prophecies: Matthew 21:8-10, Matthew 11:2-6, Luke 1:35, 1 Corinthians 15:54, Matthew 2:4-6, Luke 4:28-29.

Divide the class into pairs. Give each team a sheet with the verses on it and two Bibles. On "Go!", students should look up each of the prophecies in the Bible. Then they should look up the verses of how Jesus fulfilled these prophecies. The first team to correctly draw lines between the associated verses wins.

Remind the students that the religious leaders had knowledge of all the prophetic verses, they just chose not to see that they had come true in Jesus. They already had all the proof they needed!

TAKE
HOME



- **The cross is the climax of God's story:** The Bible, though made of many books, is a single story of God. At the center of this story is Jesus, and at the center of Jesus's story is the cross. All Old Testament stories look forward to the cross, and all New Testament letters reflect back on it.
- **The cross proved it all:** The love of God, the power of God, the truth of Jesus, and every promise of God was bound up in this single incredible event. There is no greater sign that Jesus could have given.
- **The cross is our hope:** There are always times we hope that God will reveal Himself to us or demonstrate His love in our daily lives and circumstances. However, there is nothing more God could do for us than what He's already done. Because of this, our response to the cross must be to trust in the finished work of Jesus.



QUESTION & ANSWER

SLIDE 1



Q1a: What story did Jesus use to explain something that would happen in His life?

A1: Jesus used the story of Jonah to explain something that would happen in His life.



Q1b: Is there a character in the Bible that you really like?

TN: Jesus is the easy, first answer that comes to mind, but there are lots of wonderful characters in the Bible. King David had some amazing adventures and did great things for God. The prophet Daniel's story is one of a strong, unbreakable faith in the Lord. All of the good qualities we love about our favorite characters in the Bible all point to Jesus – our example of how we should live our own lives.

SLIDE 2



Q2a: What did the Pharisees and teachers of religious law ask Jesus to do?

A2: The Pharisees and teachers of religious law asked Jesus to show them a miraculous sign.

Q2b: Is there oxygen in the room where you're sitting right now?

TN: Obviously, the answer is yes, but how do we know for sure? We can't see molecules of oxygen, so what proof do we have that it's really there? Well, we know it's there because we are breathing and we're still alive! Jesus had provided the Pharisees and religious teachers with all kinds of proof of His power and authority through all of the miraculous works He had done. But they still didn't believe, and they wanted more.



QUESTION & ANSWER

SLIDE 3



Q3a: What was the only sign Jesus said he would give them?

A3: Jesus said the only sign He would give them was of the prophet Jonah.

Q3b: How would you prove to someone that you truly love Jesus?

TN: There a number of ways that Christians show their faith in Jesus, such as baptism and taking communion, but actual faith and love for Christ is something we feel in our hearts and every part of our lives. If someone doubts our belief, there is no real way of giving proof of what we feel in our hearts, and that's OK. Jesus knows our hearts and minds, and He knows how much we love Him, and that's all that really matters. When the Pharisees asked Jesus for a sign, He knew that they were asking Him to prove that He really was who He said He was. He knew that if the miracles He had performed already hadn't made them believers, nothing He did would sway them.

SLIDE 4



Q4a: How long did Jesus say He would be in the heart of the Earth?

A4: Jesus said He would be in the heart of the Earth for three days and three nights.



Q4b: Do you know what a coincidence is?

TN: A coincidence is when something happens at the same time or in the same way that is not planned or expected. Jonah's experience in the belly of a fish happened thousands of years before Jesus was born. The connection between the time Jonah was in the fish and the time Jesus was in the grave was not a coincidence. God had planned these two events before the creation of everything.



QUESTION & ANSWER

SLIDE 5



Q5a: What did Jesus say the people of Nineveh would do on judgment day?

A5: Jesus said the people of Nineveh would stand against and condemn the generation on judgment day.

Q5b: How can we stand for what we believe in?

TN: Let the students answer. However we choose to stand for what we believe in, it is important to do it out of love and not anger. We have the truth on our side, and our goal should be to help people see the truth, which will change their actions. This is how we change the world for the better - with the love of Christ.

SLIDE 6



Q6a: Whose wisdom did Jesus say the queen of Sheba came to hear?

A6: Jesus said the queen of Sheba came to hear the wisdom of Solomon.

Q6b: Who is the smartest person you know?

TN: Let the students answer. That person may know a lot, but there is no one who knows more than Jesus. The religious leaders, who studied the Scriptures for truth and knowledge stood in front of the source of all truth and wisdom, and they wouldn't believe. What a missed opportunity for them to gain understanding of life and grow their relationship with God!



QUESTION & ANSWER

SLIDE 7



Q7a: What stopped the Pharisees and religious teachers from seeing their need to repent?

A7: Trying to prove they were right stopped the Pharisees and religious teachers from seeing their need to repent.

Q7b: Have you ever seen someone struggle to do something that is easy for you to do?

TN: Before we jump in to help this person, it is kind of confusing to see someone not able to do something that comes easily for us. How can this person not just know how to do it? Sometimes, these situations can become frustrating. For some things, it might just be that we are gifted; for other things, it might just be that the person isn't able – but that's why God made us so good at certain things so that we can help those who aren't able. Jesus, God in human form, stood in front of these religious leaders, and they didn't believe. Can you even imagine?! To us, it seems so simple, but they were stubbornly stuck in their ways and refused to believe. Jesus rejected their request for a sign, but He had already given them chances to believe, and He didn't hide from them what came next. They had many chances to see what was right in front of them, but they rejected them and Jesus.



QUESTION & ANSWER

MEMORY VERSES

▶ **Matthew 12:40:** "For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

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BIG IDEA

▶ We must listen to Jesus, the greatest prophet of all!

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CLOSING PRAYER

▶ Dear Heavenly Father, thank You so much for the proof of Your love shown in the cross. Please help us to keep our faith in Your Son and His sacrifice strong. We ask these things in Jesus's name, Amen.



LESSON TRANSCRIPT

SLIDE 1



Thousands of years after the incredible events surrounding Jonah and Nineveh, God sent His Son into the world. Jesus, who often referred to the great stories of the Old Testament to share their deeper meaning, used the story of Jonah as a way of explaining something amazing that would happen in His own life.

SLIDE 2



One day, Jesus was teaching when some Pharisees and teachers of religious law responded to Jesus's lesson by making a simple request: "Teacher, we want you to show us a miraculous sign to prove your authority." They thought that for someone who said He was the Son of God, such a thing would be an easy task.

SLIDE 3



Jesus, who had shown His authority and power over and over again by performing miracles meant to help people not just give evidence to doubters, rejected their request saying, "Only an evil, unfaithful generation would demand a miraculous sign. The only sign I will give you is the sign of the prophet Jonah."

SLIDE 4



To make sure that everyone understood what He meant, He reminded them of part of Jonah's epic story, saying: "For as Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights."





LESSON TRANSCRIPT

SLIDE 5



"The people of Nineveh will stand up against this generation on judgment day and condemn it, for they repented of their sins at the preaching of Jonah. Now someone greater than Jonah is here, but you refuse to repent," Jesus said.

SLIDE 6



Jesus went on to preach, "The queen of Sheba will also stand up against this generation on judgment day and condemn it, for she came from a distant land to hear the wisdom of Solomon. You stand before someone now who is far wiser than Solomon, but still, you refuse to listen."

SLIDE 7



Jesus's message to the Pharisees and teachers of religious law was clear: They were too stubborn in their mission to find fault in Jesus to see the many faults in their own lives. Trying to prove that they were right stopped them from acknowledging their need to repent and find purpose and a new and everlasting life in their Savior.