



GOD'S CREATURES TELL THE STORY

Jonah and the Big Fish

Teacher's Packet

FREE ♦ PHOTOCOPY FREELY FOR YOUR CLASS

Five lesson plans, discussion questions for two age bands, a reproducible Bible Detective worksheet with a full answer key, a ten-question quiz, background notes for the teacher, and projects built around the shortest sermon in Scripture. Built for readers ages 11–17 from the full narrative of *Jonah and the Big Fish*.

WHAT'S INSIDE

1. Cover
2. How to Use This Packet — three tracks
3. Five Lesson Plans
4. Discussion Questions — ages 11–13 and 14–17
5. Bible Detective — reproducible worksheet
6. Family and At-Home Devotions
7. Activities and Projects
8. For the Teacher — background notes
9. Reproducible Quiz
10. Answer Keys, Scoring, and Where to Go Next

How to Use This Packet

Three tracks, one book. Pick the one that matches your setting and ignore the other two. Everything here may be photocopied for your own class or family.

Track One — Family Devotions (two weeks)

- Twelve chapters. One a night runs about two weeks with weekends off.
- Close each reading with one question from page 4, chosen for the age at your table.
- Assign each family member a reporter to follow — Penny, Professor Hoot, or Dominic — and have them report what their reporter noticed that the others missed.
- Use the devotion starters and prayer on page 6 for the two Sunday evenings.

Track Two — Sunday School (four weeks)

- **Week 1 — The Running.** Chapters 1–3. A call, a ticket in the opposite direction, and a storm that finds him anyway.
- **Week 2 — The Deep.** Chapters 4–6. Overboard, swallowed, and a prayer from inside the fish that quotes the Psalms.
- **Week 3 — The City.** Chapters 7–9. Eight words, and the most successful sermon in the Bible — preached by a man who did not want it to work.
- **Week 4 — The Plant.** Chapters 10–12. A prophet furious about mercy, and a book that ends with a question rather than an answer.

Track Three — Homeschool (across subjects)

- **History.** Assyria and Nineveh — who they were to Israel, and why Jonah’s reluctance was not simple cowardice. See page 8.
- **Science.** Mediterranean storms, marine giants, fast-growing plants, and ancient navigation. The book’s science appendix is largely sound; two figures need trimming.
- **Geography.** Joppa, Tarshish, Nineveh. Note the directions before anything else.
- **Literature.** Jonah is a short book that ends on an unanswered question. Study why.
- **Writing.** Rewrite chapter 4 with the ending Jonah wanted. See page 7.

A NOTE ON THE AGE BANDS

This packet is banded 11–13 and 14–17. The book’s own appendices still use younger bands from an earlier edition; where the two differ, follow the packet.

Before the First Session

- Read page 8 first. Students taught that Jonah was afraid will miss the book entirely — he says outright why he ran, and it is not fear.
- Photocopy pages 5 and 9 — one per student. Everything else is for you.
- Have a map handy. Tarshish and Nineveh are in opposite directions and that is the plot.

Five Lesson Plans

Each lesson names a key verse, the chapters to read, one main point, and one activity that can be done in the room. The lessons require the book; the verses are ones the narrative itself puts on the page.

1. The Ticket Going the Other Way

READ Chapters 1–2 · **KEY VERSE** *Jonah 1:3*

Main point: Nineveh lay northeast. Jonah bought passage to Tarshish, which was as far west as the known world went. He did not delay or negotiate; he bought a ticket. The verse says three times that he went away from the presence of the Lord, which he surely knew was impossible.

Activity: Put Joppa, Nineveh, and Tarshish on a map and draw both routes from Joppa. Ask what it costs to go that far in the wrong direction on purpose.

2. The Sailors Pray First

READ Chapters 3–4 · **KEY VERSE** *Jonah 1:14*

Main point: The pagan crew prays, lightens the ship, and tries to row back to land rather than throw a man overboard. The prophet is asleep below deck. Every non-Israelite in this chapter behaves better than the man who knows God's name.

Activity: List everything the sailors do and everything Jonah does, side by side, in the order the chapter gives them. Let the list make the argument.

3. A Prayer From Inside

READ Chapters 5–6 · **KEY VERSE** *Jonah 2:9*

Main point: Jonah's prayer in the fish is stitched almost entirely out of lines from the Psalms — he prays with borrowed words when he has none of his own. It ends with “salvation belongs to the Lord,” a sentence he will spend chapter four resenting.

Activity: Read Jonah 2 aloud, then read Psalm 120:1 and Psalm 42:7. Ask why memorized words might matter most exactly when a person cannot think.

4. Eight Words

READ Chapters 7–9 · **KEY VERSE** *Jonah 3:4*

Main point: The sermon is one sentence long, contains no offer of mercy, and names no God. It is delivered by a man who wants it to fail. The entire city repents from the king down to the livestock. The result has nothing to do with the preacher's eloquence or his heart.

Activity: Have the class write the shortest warning they can that would actually make someone change. Then compare theirs with Jonah's and ask why his worked.

5. Angry About Mercy

READ Chapters 10–12 · **KEY VERSE** *Jonah 4:2*

Main point: Jonah finally says why he ran, and it is not fear. He knew God was gracious and slow to anger, and he did not want that spent on Nineveh. God answers with a plant, a worm, and a question — and then the book simply stops, with the question unanswered.

Activity: Read Jonah 4:11 and then stop. Do not resolve it. Ask the class who they think the question was actually written for.

Discussion Questions

Choose three or four per session. This book is not mainly about a fish, and the second band is written on that assumption.

AGES 11–13

1. Jonah did not argue with God or ask questions. He bought a ticket. Why is running quietly sometimes easier than saying no out loud?
2. The sailors prayed, worked, and tried to save Jonah before throwing him overboard. What does that tell you about them?
3. Jonah was asleep in the bottom of the ship during a storm that terrified professional sailors. What do you think that says about how he was feeling?
4. Jonah's whole sermon was one short sentence with no good news in it. Why do you think the city listened anyway?
5. Even the animals of Nineveh were dressed in sackcloth. Does that strike you as funny, serious, or both?
6. God gave Jonah a plant for shade and then took it away with a worm. What was God trying to show him?
7. The book ends with a question and no answer. Why might a writer choose to stop there?
8. Jonah prayed a long, beautiful prayer inside the fish and then got angry the moment God did what the prayer said He does. Have you ever meant something and then unmeant it?
9. God cared about the animals in Nineveh too. Why do you think that made it into the last sentence of the book?

AGES 14–17

1. Jonah 4:2 gives his actual reason for running: he knew God would forgive them. Is that a bad reason? What is he really objecting to?
2. Nineveh was the capital of an empire that had brutalized Israel for generations. Does knowing that make Jonah more sympathetic, or does it sharpen the point?
3. Chapter one contrasts a sleeping prophet with a praying crew. What is the writer arguing by arranging the scene that way?
4. Jonah's prayer in chapter two is assembled almost entirely from the Psalms. What does it mean to pray in someone else's words, and is that less sincere?
5. The most effective sermon in Scripture is eight words preached by a man hoping it fails. What does that suggest about where results actually come from?
6. God asks Jonah twice whether he has any right to be angry, and Jonah never answers. Why would the book leave its main character silent at the end?
7. Jesus points to Jonah as a sign about His own death and resurrection. What in the story is He pointing at, and what is He leaving aside?
8. God's closing argument mentions 120,000 people who cannot tell right hand from left — and also the cattle. Why include the animals?

Bible Detective

“Let’s search for clues in our story.” — Penny the Squirrel. Answer from the book, then verify against the verse.
Answer key on page 10.

NAME _____ DATE _____ SCORE _____ / 9

1. Where was Jonah told to go, and where did he buy a ticket to instead? (*Jonah 1:2–3*)

2. What was Jonah doing while the sailors fought the storm? (*Jonah 1:5*)

3. How long was Jonah inside the fish? (*Jonah 1:17*)

4. Write out Jonah’s entire sermon to Nineveh. It is one sentence. (*Jonah 3:4*)

5. Who in Nineveh put on sackcloth — and who else did, by the king’s order? (*Jonah 3:6–8*)

6. What grew to shade Jonah, and what destroyed it? (*Jonah 4:6–7*)

7. **Challenge.** In Jonah 4:2, Jonah finally gives his real reason for running away. What was it? (*Jonah 4:2*)

8. **Challenge.** How many people does God say live in Nineveh, and what does He say they cannot tell apart? (*Jonah 4:11*)

9. **Super Sleuth.** Three different groups pray in this book — the sailors, Jonah, and the Ninevites. Name one way each prayer is different from the other two. (*Jonah 1:14; 2:1–9; 3:8*)

Family and At-Home

Five devotion starters, a prayer, and one application to carry into the week. None of these require a craft table or more than fifteen minutes.

DEVOTION STARTERS

One — The quiet no. Jonah never argued. He just went the other way. Ask what each person has been quietly not doing without ever admitting it out loud. Read Jonah 1:1–3.

Two — Outsiders who behave better. The pagan sailors come out of chapter one looking far better than the prophet. Ask whether our family has ever been shown up by someone we assumed knew less. Read Jonah 1:13–16.

Three — Borrowed words. Jonah prayed the Psalms because he had nothing of his own left. Ask what our family would pray if no one could think of anything. Then pray Psalm 23 together and find out. Read Jonah 2:1–9.

Four — The real reason. Jonah admits in chapter four that he ran because he knew God would forgive them. Ask, carefully, whether there is anyone we would rather God not forgive. Read Jonah 4:1–3.

Five — The unanswered question. God asks Jonah a question and the book ends without his answer. Read Jonah 4:9–11 aloud and then sit in the silence for a moment before anyone speaks.

MEMORY VERSES

- *Jonah 2:9* — salvation belongs to the Lord.
- *Jonah 3:10* — God saw what they did and relented.
- *Jonah 4:2* — gracious, compassionate, slow to anger.
- *Matthew 12:40* — what Jesus said the sign of Jonah meant.

A FAMILY PRAYER

Father, You are gracious and slow to anger, and sometimes that is the hardest thing about You. Forgive us for the people we would rather You dealt with harshly. Give us the honesty to say no to Your face instead of quietly walking the other way. Teach us to pray when we have no words left. And where we are angry about mercy, change us before You have to send a worm. In Jesus' name, amen.

APPLICATION FOR THE WEEK

Jonah's complaint was about a specific city he thought did not deserve mercy. Each person in the family should think of one person or group they find hard to want good things for — and pray for them by name, once a day, for a week. No one has to say the name out loud. At the end of the week, talk about whether anything shifted.

One more thing worth trying: read Jonah aloud from start to finish in a single sitting. It takes about eight minutes. Most families have never heard the whole book at once, and it lands very differently than four chapters spread over a month.

Activities and Projects

Ordinary household supplies only — two bowls, some bean seeds, a map, a clear night. Nothing here needs a craft store.

AGES 11–13

Land, Water, Weather. *Supplies: two containers, soil, water, a sunny window.* Fill one with soil and one with water, set both in the sun for an hour, and measure the temperature of each. Water heats and cools more slowly than land, and that difference is what builds fast, violent storms over the Mediterranean.

Overnight Growth. *Supplies: bean seeds, a jar, a damp paper towel.* Start the seeds and check them every morning for a week. Nothing in nature really grows in a night — which is exactly why Jonah’s plant was worth mentioning.

Find Polaris. *Supplies: a clear night.* Locate the North Star and watch it hold still while everything else turns. That single fixed point is how Jonah’s sailors knew which way was north, and therefore how far the wrong way they were sailing.

Eight Words. *Supplies: paper.* Write out Jonah’s sermon, count the words, then write a warning of your own that is shorter. Read them all out. Talk about which ones you would actually listen to, and why length has so little to do with it.

The Sackcloth Question. *Supplies: Jonah 3:6–9.* Read what the king ordered, including the part about the animals. Draw the scene as a news photograph would show it. Then decide together whether the picture is funny, serious, or both, and defend it.

AGES 14–17

Two Directions. *Supplies: a map app.* Measure Joppa to Nineveh and Joppa to Tarshish, in miles and in likely travel time. Then write three sentences on what the ratio tells you about Jonah’s state of mind.

Source the Prayer. *Supplies: Jonah 2 and a concordance or search tool.* Nearly every line of Jonah’s prayer echoes a psalm. Find as many sources as you can and mark them in the margin. Then argue, in writing, whether that makes the prayer more sincere or less.

Rewrite the Ending. *Supplies: paper.* Write chapter four the way Jonah wanted it: fire on the city, the prophet vindicated. Eight hundred words. Then write one paragraph on what the book would have lost.

Trim the Facts. *Supplies: the book’s science appendix.* Two claims in it are stated more confidently than the evidence allows — one about a whale’s heart and one about free-diving depth. Look both up, decide what is actually true, and rewrite each as one honest sentence.

The Sign of Jonah. *Supplies: Matthew 12:38–41 and Luke 11:29–32.* Jesus refers to Jonah twice and points at two different things — three days in the deep, and a city that repented at far less evidence than His audience had. Write five hundred words on which of the two is the sharper rebuke.

Who Was Assyria? *Supplies: page 8 and a library.* Research what Assyria did to the region in the eighth century BC. Then reread Jonah 4:2 and write five hundred words on whether Jonah’s anger is understandable, defensible, or neither.

For the Teacher

Background you will want before a sharp fourteen-year-old asks. The first box is the one that changes how the whole book reads.

JONAH WAS NOT AFRAID

He says so himself in 4:2: he ran because he knew God was gracious, compassionate, and slow to anger, and he did not want that aimed at Nineveh. Teaching this book as a story about a coward who learned courage misses it entirely. It is a story about a man who was right about God's character and furious about it.

WHO NINEVEH WAS

Capital of the Assyrian empire — the most feared military power of the age, known for deliberately publicized brutality toward conquered peoples, and a standing threat to Israel. Jonah is being sent to warn the enemy. Students who know this stop finding him inexplicable and start finding him uncomfortably familiar.

THE GEOGRAPHY IS THE PLOT

Nineveh lay northeast of Israel, up the Tigris. Tarshish is generally placed at the far western end of the Mediterranean, in the region of Spain — the edge of the known world. Jonah did not merely avoid the assignment; he bought passage to the farthest reachable point in the opposite direction.

A FISH, NOT A WHALE

The Hebrew says a great fish; Matthew 12:40 uses a Greek word for a large sea creature. Neither text names a species, and the book is right not to. Worth telling students plainly: the Bible does not say whale, and the point of the passage is not marine biology.

TWO SCIENCE CLAIMS TO SOFTEN

The book's science appendix says a blue whale's heart is the size of a small car. It is enormous — a few hundred pounds, closer to a golf cart — but the car comparison is a popular exaggeration. It also gives about 700 feet as the free-diving record; the no-limits record is over 800. Everything else in that appendix holds up, including the bamboo growth rate and the sperm whale figures.

THE SHORTEST SERMON IN SCRIPTURE

In Hebrew it runs to five words; in English, about eight. No mention of God, no offer of mercy, no call to repent — just a deadline. The city repents anyway, from the throne down. The book is quietly making a point about who actually produces results.

THE ENDING, AND WHY IT STOPS THERE

God asks whether He should not have concern for a city of 120,000 who cannot tell their right hand from their left — plus the cattle. Jonah never answers. The book closes on the question. That is deliberate: the question is aimed past Jonah at the reader, and a class that leaves it hanging has understood the book better than one that resolves it.

Professor Hoot's Quiz

Ten questions. Circle one answer for each. Scoring guide and answer key on page 10.

NAME _____ DATE _____ SCORE _____ / 10

1. What was Jonah's job?
a) Fisherman b) King c) Prophet
2. Where did Jonah buy passage to?
a) Egypt b) Tarshish c) Jerusalem
3. What did the sailors do first when the storm hit?
a) Threw Jonah overboard b) Prayed to their own gods c) Turned the ship around
4. What happened to the sea after Jonah went in?
a) It grew worse b) It became calm c) Nothing changed
5. How long was Jonah in the fish?
a) Three days and three nights b) Forty days c) One night
6. How far into Nineveh had Jonah gone when he preached?
a) One day's journey b) Three days' journey c) Forty days' journey
7. How did the king of Nineveh respond?
a) He laughed b) He jailed Jonah c) He put on sackcloth and ashes
8. What did God use to teach Jonah about mercy?
a) Another storm b) A plant and a worm c) An angel
9. Why did Jonah say he ran away in the first place?
a) He was afraid of the Assyrians b) He knew God would forgive them c) He did not believe God
10. How does the book end?
a) Jonah repents b) With a question God asks Jonah c) Nineveh is destroyed

Bonus. Write out Jonah's sermon exactly. Then say in one sentence why you think it worked.

Answer Keys and Where to Go Next

QUIZ ANSWER KEY — PAGE 9

1	c — prophet	6	a — one day's journey
2	b — Tarshish	7	c — sackcloth and ashes
3	b — prayed to their own gods	8	b — a plant and a worm
4	b — it became calm	9	b — he knew God would forgive
5	a — three days and nights	10	b — with a question

Bonus. “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.” Credit any answer noticing that the sermon contains no mercy, no God, and no eloquence — and worked anyway.

BIBLE DETECTIVE ANSWER KEY — PAGE 5

1. Told to go to Nineveh; bought passage at Joppa for Tarshish, the opposite direction (1:2–3).
2. Asleep below deck (1:5).
3. Three days and three nights (1:17).
4. “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown” (3:4).
5. The people, then the king, who ordered that the animals be covered too (3:6–8).
6. A plant God provided for shade; a worm God sent at dawn (4:6–7).
7. He knew God was gracious, compassionate, slow to anger and would relent (4:2).
8. More than 120,000, who cannot tell their right hand from their left (4:11).
9. Answers vary. The sailors pray in fear for their own lives; Jonah prays in borrowed psalm language; the Ninevites pray with fasting and changed conduct (1:14; 2:1–9; 3:8).

SCORING GUIDE

9–10 correct — Senior Correspondent. Reading at the level of detail Penny would sign off on.

7–8 correct — Field Reporter. Solid. Send them back for the two they missed and let them find the verse themselves.

5–6 correct — Cub Reporter. The fish landed; chapter four did not. Re-read the last three chapters.

Under 5 — Back to the Newsroom. Not a failing grade. Read the book together rather than assigning it.

WHERE TO GO NEXT — MORE FREE DOWNLOADS

- **The Six Sacred Rules of Divine Reporting** — one-page classroom poster.
- **Meet the Divine News Team** — one page, four character cards.
- Teacher's Packets for the other titles in the series.
- **52 Questions: A Year of Family Bible Conversations** — one a week, from across the series. Coming soon.

All free at dondbrownbooks.com ♦ Photocopy freely for your class.