

INTERVARSITY BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

Jonah 1:1-16 NIV, Jonah Runs Away (60 minutes)

WELCOME (7 minutes)

Icebreaker: What is one thing in your life you are currently avoiding (whether for good reasons or not)?

We are studying the Bible together because we want to grow in our love for Jesus through Scripture and because we want to grow in our witness to Jesus through Scripture.

Let's pray and ask God to help us as we study today's passage together...

GROUP NORMS (3 minutes)

Each time we meet, let's be careful to work well together as a group. We are coming from many different backgrounds, so the purpose of these group norms is to help everyone feel welcome so they can fully participate:

1. Use "I" statements (speak for yourself, not for everyone)
2. Avoid judgmental statements (no shame or blame)
3. Allow space for everyone to share if they choose
4. Practice active listening and give advice only if invited to do so
5. What we share here stays here (confidentiality)

As your leader, I will help us remember our group norms. Also, as members of this group, feel free to speak up if you notice we are straying from these norms.

INTRODUCE the Scripture Text (3 minutes)

Get ready for some *DRAMA*. Jonah lived a deeply interesting life, and this story shows it. Jonah is one of 12 minor prophets whose sayings are recording in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament), and the book of Jonah is unique because it includes interesting events surrounding his mission as a prophet. The word from God through the book of Jonah is not just about what Jonah says but about *how God responds to Jonah's actions*.

Jonah was written anonymously in the 5th or 4th century BC, and yes, it's intended as a "true story." Some of the unbelievable moments (like surviving in a fish for 3 days) could be explained by the popular contemporary tradition of hyperbole, and furthermore, the original audience was familiar with what had recently happened to Elijah, being carried into heaven by chariots and a whirlwind of fire (2 Kings 2:1-12). However, more importantly, we must remember that our Euro-Western cultural expectations of a "true story" are different from the expectations of the original author and audience. When we see signs that the author intended this book to be read as historical narrative – the fish described simply, historical introduction, historical congruency, and a literary parallel to 1 Kings 17-19 – we accept what the author has

given and study accordingly. Simply put, the original audience would not have been worried about whether Jonah “really” was swallowed by a fish, so neither should we.

During the time that Jonah was sent by God to Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire, the people of Israel had been back and forth in their faithfulness to God. They knew they were not supposed to interact with foreigners because their faith was so weak that they would end up adopting the gods of foreign nations, but in trying to live this out, they had developed a hatred for foreigners. What God really wanted was to bless Israel so they could be a blessing to the nations (Genesis 12:1-3).

Two definitions to help us understand this passage:

- Casting Lots – This was a common practice, similar to rolling dice, that was used to make a fair decision or determine God’s will (or the will of the gods).
- Sea – Even though God was seen still to control the sea, the sea symbolized the continual threat posed by the forces of chaos and evil against God and creation.

SEE the Scripture Text (10 minutes)

Let’s read the passage and talk about what we see.

- Who are the characters? How are they connected?
- What is happening? When? Where?
- Which words are being repeated?
- Is the author comparing or contrasting anything?
- Would you like to point out anything else you notice?

Jonah 1:1-16 NIV –

The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai: 2 “Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.”

3 But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord.

4 Then the Lord sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. 5 All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship.

But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep. 6 The captain went to him and said, “How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us so that we will not perish.”

7 Then the sailors said to each other, "Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity." They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. 8 So they asked him, "Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What kind of work do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?"

9 He answered, "I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land."

10 This terrified them and they asked, "What have you done?" (They knew he was running away from the Lord, because he had already told them so.)

11 The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, "What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?"

12 "Pick me up and throw me into the sea," he replied, "and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you."

13 Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. 14 Then they cried out to the Lord, "Please, Lord, do not let us die for taking this man's life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, Lord, have done as you pleased." 15 Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. 16 At this the men greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him.

DISCOVER the Scripture Text (25 minutes)

Let's discuss a few questions that will help us discover and understand the text.

1. Imagine what it might have been like to be the sailors and Jonah during this storm. What sensations and emotions do you think they were experiencing?
2. Why is Jonah running away from God?
3. Why do you think God responds to Jonah with a storm?
4. Compare the way Jonah views God to the way the sailors view God. What is similar and different?
5. If we could communicate the core message of this text in just one sentence, what would it be? What do we sense God is communicating through this passage?

RESPOND to the Scripture Text (10 minutes)

Jonah heard from God but refused to obey. He was so against going to Ninevah, his hated enemies, that he ran the other direction and boarded a ship. Then a storm arose that threatened the lives of everyone on the boat, and the sailors figured out that Jonah must be the problem. They talked it out, and Jonah admitted that he was at fault and should be thrown overboard. The sailors did their best to avoid killing Jonah, but they eventually tossed him over. And it worked. The sea was calm, but the sailors were very afraid that God would punish them for leaving Jonah.

God does not give up people, even when they rebel.

Let's discern together how we can respond to what God is saying. We will answer one option from below, whichever seems most relevant to our group's discussion of the text.

- A. In what area of your life are you fleeing from God? How is God interrupting and responding to you?
- B. How have you seen your faithlessness toward God affect people around you, or how have you been affected by the faithlessness of others?
- C. What is the most unexpected thing God has done to get your attention? How can you personally cultivate a heart that is ready to respond to God?
- D. Do you have a sense of God wanting you to tell people about him, and how have you been responding?

CLOSE (2 minutes)

Let's pray and thank God for our time in Scripture together...

Tips for leading the group discussion (and more tips are available at [howto.bible](https://www.howto.bible)):

- *Participate but keep your comments short to make space for others.*
- *Silence is okay. Encourage further discussion by saying "What else?" instead of commenting on every response.*



this material and more can be found at tiny.cc/biblestudyguides
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