

# Warning Signs

Jonah



6 INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDIES FOR  
SMALL GROUPS & INDIVIDUALS

# Warning Signs

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**Jonah**

*by Andrew Reid*



**MATTHIAS MEDIA**

Warning Signs  
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# *How to make the most of these studies*

## **1. What is an Interactive Bible Study?**

These ‘interactive’ Bible studies are a bit like a guided tour of a famous city. The studies will take you through Jonah, pointing out things along the way, filling in background details, and suggesting avenues for further exploration. But there is also time for you to do some sight-seeing of your own—to wander off, have a good look for yourself, and form your own conclusions.

In other words, we have designed these studies to fall half-way between a sermon and a set of unadorned Bible study questions. We want to provide stimulation and input and point you in the right direction, while leaving you to do a lot of the exploration and discovery yourself.

We hope that these studies will stimulate lots of ‘interaction’—interaction with the Bible, with the things we’ve written, with your own current thoughts and attitudes, with other people as you discuss them, and with God as you talk to him about it all.

## **2. The format**

Each study contains sections of text to introduce, summarize, suggest and provoke. We’ve left plenty of room in the margins for you to jot comments and questions as you read. Interspersed throughout the text are two types of ‘interaction’, each with their own symbol:



### **For starters**

Questions to break the ice and get you thinking.



### **Investigate**

Questions to help you investigate key parts of the Bible.



### **Think it through**

Questions to help you think through the implications of your discoveries and write down your own thoughts and reactions.

When you come to one of these symbols, you'll know that it's time to do some work of your own.

## **3. Suggestions for Individual Study**

- Before you begin, pray that God would open your eyes to what he is saying in his Word and give you the spiritual strength to do something about it. You may be spurred to pray again at the end of the study.
- Work through the study, following the directions as you go. Write in the spaces provided.
- Resist the temptation to skip over the *Think it through* sections. It is important to think about the sections of text (rather than just accepting them as true) and to ponder the implications for your life. Writing these things down is a very valuable way to get your thoughts working.
- Take what opportunities you can to talk to others about what you've learnt.

## 4. Suggestions for Group Study

- Much of the above applies to group study as well. The studies are suitable for structured Bible study or cell groups, as well as for more informal pairs and threesomes. Get together with a friend/s and work through them at your own pace; use them as the basis for regular Bible study with your spouse. You don't need the formal structure of a 'group' to gain maximum benefit.
- It is *vital* that group members work through the study themselves *before* the group meets. The group discussion can take place comfortably in an hour (depending on how side-tracked you get!), but only if all the members have done the work and are familiar with the material.
- Spend most of the group time discussing the 'interactive' sections—*Investigate* and *Think it through*. Reading all the text together will take too long and should be unnecessary if the group members have done their preparation. You may wish to underline and read aloud particular paragraphs or sections of text that you think are important.
- The role of the group leader is to direct the course of the discussion and to try to draw the threads together at the end. This will mean a little extra preparation—underlining important sections of text to emphasize, working out which questions are worth concentrating on, and being sure of the main thrust of the study. Leaders will also probably want to work out approximately how long they'd like to spend on each part.
- We haven't included an 'answer guide' to the questions in the studies. This is a deliberate move. We want to give you a guided tour, not a lecture. There is more than enough in the text we have written and the questions we have asked to point you in what we think is the right direction. The rest is up to you.

# 1

## Jonah 1

# *The rebellious prophet*

### **For starters**

What do you already know about the book of Jonah?



The modern city of Tel Aviv lies on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean, some thirty miles from Jerusalem. Within this modern city are the ruins of a famous ancient city—the seaport of Joppa. In biblical history, Joppa was renowned as the port where Solomon landed his great cedars from Lebanon (2 Chr 2:16) and for its connection with two very famous reluctant missionaries to the Gentiles. In Acts 9-11, we are told that it was in Joppa that Peter was prepared by God through a vision to change his attitude to Gentile uncleanness. This preparation opened him to the otherwise incomprehensible possibility that he should go to the household of the Gentile Cornelius to preach the gospel. Cornelius became the first Gentile convert to Christianity.

In the book of Jonah, Joppa is the location from which the prophet Jonah made his bid to escape from the command and presence of God in a ship bound for Tarshish (Jonah 1:1-3).

The book of Jonah does not say when the events recorded actually happened. One clue can be found in the fact that the book is

set at a time when the city of Nineveh was large and significant on the world stage. Another comes from the only other reference we have in the Bible to a prophet by the name of 'Jonah, son of Amittai'—in 2 Kings 14:25—who prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam II (approximately 782-753 BC). This general time frame does coincide with a time in which Nineveh was probably flourishing as the capital city of the then leading world power, the Assyrians. Some of the famous references to Assyria and Nineveh in the Bible apart from the book of Jonah include Isaiah 7:17-25, Isaiah 36-38, 2 Kings 17, and the prophecies of Nahum and Zephaniah.

The prophecies of Nahum and Zephaniah indicate that the city of Nineveh was not viewed positively by the nation of Israel. It represented everything that was big, bad, arrogant and an intolerable affront to God. It was a great and evil city at the head of a godless nation that severely threatened the people of God. It is this city that Jonah is told to go and preach against in Jonah 1.



### **Investigate**

Read the following Old Testament passages: Jonah 1:1-3; Exodus 3:1-4:17; Isaiah 6 and Jeremiah 1:1-10. (These passages record God calling some key prophets to their ministry.)

1. Compare the way Jonah interacts with God in Jonah 1:1-3 with the way Moses, Isaiah, and Jeremiah interact with God in the other passages. How is it the same? How is it different?

2. Look up the following verses and see what you can discover from them about Tarshish. Why do you think Jonah may have chosen Tarshish as the place to which he would flee?

• 2 Chronicles 9:21

• Isaiah 66:19

## **Jonah and the mariners**

In this section of the study we will explore the rest of chapter 1 from the perspective of Jonah and the mariners. Before getting underway we need to note some important facts about each of the parties involved.

First, Jonah is a Jew. He is therefore clearly one of God's people. Like many Jews he probably viewed the sea with some trepidation. Apart from a few people who were sailors or fishermen, most Jews appear to have been landlubbers, who viewed the sea as a place of dark sea monsters, where chaotic forces were at work and where waves heaved and rolled (cf. Ps 107:23-32). Nevertheless, Jonah obviously considered travelling westward on the dark and dangerous sea with Gentile mariners to a land where God was unknown and not honoured a much better option than God's proposed alternative—travelling toward Nineveh in the presence of God and bearing the word of God.

Second, the mariners are apparently experienced sailors. However, they are not Jews and therefore outsiders. They know nothing of Jonah's God, and they do not know that Jonah is fleeing him. When Jonah arrives at their boat, they apparently regard him as simply another normal passenger.

Third, God is the Creator of the heavens, the sea, and the dry land (Jonah 1:9, Ps 104-105). There is no place on earth where his influence is not felt or his control not exercised. As he who walks "in the recesses of the deep" (Job 38:16), he can use the wind and the waves for his purposes, which is what he does here in his pursuit of Jonah and his obedience.

It is also important to understand the idea of "the fear of the LORD" in the Old Testament. It is a somewhat technical term that means to tremble before God as God, that is, to respect and revere him. Such fear was not just an attitude but resulted in action. Hence, people who 'feared God' expressed their fear by listening to his word, obeying him and serving him.



### **Investigate**

Read Jonah 1:4-17.

1. Note down the different attitudes of the Mariners and Jonah to:

The storm

*Mariners*

*Jonah*

The gods/God

*Mariners*

*Jonah*

2. Find all references to ‘fear’ or being afraid in the passage (the same Hebrew word lies behind each reference). Who claims to fear God and who expresses that fear appropriately?

In his closing words to the Jews in Acts 7:51ff, Stephen says that his listeners are just like their forefathers in that they are “stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, and always resisting the Holy Spirit”. The sense is that they had the outward signs of being God’s people but their hearts were far from being sensitive to God and his word.

One of the great tragedies of this first chapter of Jonah is that

the outsiders—the mariners—come out looking so much better than Jonah, who had access to God in his word. However, instead of embracing God and his word with fear, joy and enthusiasm, Jonah is found running when God speaks, sleeping when God acts in the storm, and sulking when God acts in mercy according to his character (Jonah 4).

We see similar things happen in the New Testament in the Gospels and Acts. For example, Mark records for us in his Gospel that the Jews are resistant, the disciples somewhat uncomprehending, and the outsiders the most responsive. Paul's missionary journeys are full of the record of his frustration with speaking the gospel to Jews who largely respond with jealousy and persecution.



### Think it through

1. Choose one of these situations that you have experienced yourself or seen others experience:

- A time when a person first caught a glimpse of God's holiness and their own sinfulness.
- An occasion when God's word about Jesus came to someone with full conviction (e.g. through reading the Bible or hearing it preached).
- A time of reading God's word when it became clear that he wanted you to change your life or actions in some way in response to his word.

*Note: If you are working through this study with a group of people, you might like to share some of these events with others.*

2. What are the different ways you have responded to God's commands? Is/was your response more like that of Jonah or that of the mariners?

3. How do you respond to God when in the company of outsiders? Is there anything to be ashamed of before God and them?

4. There is a deep tragedy in Jonah 1. However, the tragedy is far greater for those of us who have heard God's living word in Jesus and rejected it or regarded it with complacency. Can we be too quick to condemn Jonah? Spend some time praying about your own attitude to God and his word, that of your congregation, and that of the wider Christian community where you live.