

Bill Boekestein's masterful little work on Jonah is everything that an introductory Bible Study guide should be: exegetically faithful, doctrinally sound, practically helpful, experientially warm, and colorfully written.

Dr. Joel R Beeke, President, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids

William Boekestein's Stubborn Prophet, Faithful God is a delightfully written text of value for any committed Christian. The book is not only well written but also carefully researched. For him, rightly so, Jonah is fact not fiction. He uncovers Jonah's heart and makes many connections between that heart which beat so many centuries ago and our own. Boekestein also takes his readers deeply into the text and uncovers important theological as well as practical truths. The author draws our eyes beyond Jonah and points us to Christ. A highly recommended work.

Dr. Richard C. Gamble, Professor of Systematic Theology, Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary

This book is a powerful reminder that we need to stay focused on serving the Lord and not ourselves in the work to which he calls us ... I was tremendously blessed myself from the study ... it was inspiring and, in fact, life changing to me.

Dr. Robert S. Rapp, Emeritus church planter and pastor

William Boekestein exhibits sensitivity both to the text as God authored it and to the Christian as one needing to be shepherded. The book brims with helpful application as well as explanation of the text. ... Compelling!

Paul T. Murphy, Church planter and missions speaker

Drawn from the biblical text, theologically and experientially rich, and relevant for our daily lives, this study on Jonah should be read, meditated upon, and put into practice. May it receive the reading it deserves!

Daniel Timmer, Professor of Biblical Studies for the Doctoral Program at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary (Grand Rapids) and Professeur d'Ancien Testament at the Faculté de Théologie Évangélique (Montreal).

Stubborn Prophet

Faithful God



William Boekestein



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To Pastor John T. “Jack” Jeffery:

selfless friend,
devoted churchman,
good soldier of Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 2:2).





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Introduction

Jonathan Edwards, in his preface to the *Life and Diary of David Brainerd*, described two kinds of missionaries. “There are,” he wrote, “two ways of representing and recommending true religion and virtue to the world—the one by doctrine and precept; the other, by instance and example.” The latter clearly describes David Brainerd. Edwards considered it a fault that Brainerd was “excessive in his labors; not taking due care to proportion his fatigues to his strength.”¹ In other words, David Brainerd cared for the lost *too much*, if that were possible, failing to properly steward his limited strength. Yet Brainerd’s love for the lost was so fervent that, as he explained, “To see poor pagans desirous of hearing the gospel of Christ, animated me to discourse to them, although I was now very weakly and my spirits much exhausted.” Four days later he “cheerfully complied” with the request for another sermon. Again, two days hence, “they constrained me to tarry yet longer with them; although my constitution was exceedingly worn out.”²

Brainerd loved God. He loved the gospel. He loved the Indians and colonists to whom he was called to labor. Soon after his conversion he recorded these thoughts: “My soul dearly loved all mankind, and longed exceedingly that they should enjoy what I enjoyed.” He found himself willing, “if God should so order it, to suffer banishment from my native land, among the heathen, that I might do something for their salvation, in distresses and deaths of any kind.”³ Brainerd was one of those rare Christian witnesses who love “not their lives even unto death” (Rev. 12:11). With a few exceptions David Brainerd is a stellar example of how to be effective in “representing and recommending true religion and virtue to the world.”

Jonah is not.

Jonah’s hard-heartedness is cringeworthy. He was like Brainerd in that “he was the instrument of a most remarkable awakening.”⁴ However, unlike the revival among Brainerd’s eighteenth-century Native American peers, the Ninevite revival happened nearly in spite of its missionary.

So how can we learn missional Christianity from a stubborn prophet? Why should those who genuinely care about the lost, and want to be used more for their salvation, care about the life and ministry of Jonah? Because Jonah isn’t the main character in the story. God is.

The book of Jonah helps us become more faithful witnesses of Jesus by driving home the basic truth that God saves sinners. David Brainerd was a devoted missionary because he understood God’s centrality in

salvation. On April 8, 1742 Brainerd wrote, “Had raised hopes today respecting the heathen. Oh, that God would bring in great numbers of them to Jesus Christ! I cannot but hope I shall see that glorious day!”⁵ Those most persuaded by the central message of the book of Jonah—that salvation is truly of the Lord (Jon. 2:9)—should be those most committed to the Great Commission of our missionary God (Matt. 28:18–20). As J.I. Packer wrote, “The sovereignty of God in grace gives us our only hope of success in evangelism.”⁶

Jonah’s deplorable faults as a missionary don’t detract from the power of his book to energize Christian outreach. Clearly the opposite is true. Jonah acts as a foil to make God shine. That literary term apparently comes from the old practice of backing precious stones with tin to highlight their beauty. The main character shines more brilliantly when deliberately contrasted with the more lackluster foil. As we bring our Jonah-like weaknesses to the cross, God’s deep and wide love for the lost will transform us, with the Spirit’s blessing, into more faithful missionaries.

The first part of this book lays the groundwork for studying the text by offering four key insights into how we should understand Jonah (chapter one), and by defending and applying the historicity of the book (chapter two). Part two (chapters three–ten) explores the text of Jonah, aiming to heed John Stott’s counsel that a Bible teacher must live between two worlds, building a bridge between the world of the text and the world of today. Part three explores three surprising but important ethical questions

posed by the book of Jonah: how can I know God's will? (chapter eleven), how should I understand fasting? (chapter twelve), and why should I care about animals? (chapter thirteen). Each chapter is accompanied by study questions intended to aid understanding and recall of the book's themes, as well as encourage application of Scripture's timeless truths.

As I wrote a decade ago in a much shorter study on this book, Jonah is a calloused Christian. Yet we can relate to him far more than we would like to admit. We can't always relate to David Brainerd's missionary heart. The first time I read Brainerd's diary I felt distinctly *discouraged*. I only made it from June 19 to August 10. While we need examples of heroic missionaries, we also need divine rescue stories like Jonah that first conquer and stabilize our wandering hearts and then equip us to go to Nineveh on behalf of our faithful God.