

THE CORNERSTONE OF OUR FAITH

JESUS CHRIST
THE CHIEF CORNERSTONE
EPHESIANS 2:20

A.D.

The Ridiculous Runaway
William Jones

Published by 21st Century Christian

table of contents

About the Author	4
How to Use This Study	5
Introduction	6
1 The Prodigal Prophet: <i>Jonah on the Run</i>	7
2 The Praying Prophet: <i>Jonah in the Fish</i>	13
3 The Preaching Prophet: <i>Jonah on the Job</i>	19
4 The Pouting Prophet: <i>Jonah Under a Cloud</i>	23
5 Lessons Learned By Leaving the Lord	29
6 Disobedience That Leads to Disaster	35
7 You Can Run, But You Can't Hide	41
8 Sleeping In Dangerous Times	47
9 Meeting the God of a Second Chance	53
10 A Prophet Distinguished For God	59
11 A Prophet Disciplined By God	65
12 A Prophet Disobedient to God	69
13 The Ugly Attitude of An Uncooperative Servant	75

about the author

William Jones has served as the minister for the Boulevard church of Christ in Memphis, Tennessee for the past eighteen years. Before that, he served the Reynolds Street church of Christ in Rochester, New York.

Brother Jones has been a frequent contributing writer in the *Character Under Construction* series as well as heading up his own publishing company, *A Word From the Word Ministries*. He serves as the Vice Chairman of the National Teachers Workshop and has also been a long-time board member of Agape Child and Family Services.

He received his education from Southwestern Christian College, David Lipscomb University, and The Masters Seminary and School of Theology. He and his wife of twenty-seven years have three children.

how to use this study

Each lesson in this *The Cornerstone of Our Faith* study has four major parts.

Every lesson begins with an introductory section called **The Foundation**. In this section, the author will give background material to help prepare your mind and heart for God's Word.

The second part of each lesson is called **The Cornerstone**. This section is always the heart of every lesson. The Bible is explored in detail to help us understand the text. Those who are accustomed to hearing African-American preaching can hear this section "preach." God's Word is powerfully presented so that all can understand.

The next section of each study is critical for the Word to fulfill its intended purpose. It is called **The Inscription**. Just as people take note of inscriptions on cornerstones or monuments, each lesson is written so as to drive home a point worth remembering and a principle worth following. It offers the encouragement to change attitudes or behaviors to align better with God's Word. To *know* the Bible is one thing; to *do* it is another.

Every lesson ends with a series of thought-provoking **Discussion Questions** that help you explore God's Word on a personal and a congregational level. These questions provide opportunities for group discussion and participation. Teachers can tell by the responses whether their students have really come to grips with the lesson.

introduction

If you know *anything* about the Bible, you know of the story of the prophet Jonah. His story is so big, so outlandish, that every child thrills to hear it. As adults, we remember and debate how these things could really happen. But there is more to this little book and more to the man Jonah than just an incredible fish story.

Everything is in the Bible for a reason. I believe that the book of Jonah is there to show us just how easy it is to be self-ish, uncaring, prejudiced, and disobedient. If God's prophet can struggle with these issues (and more), rest assured that we are all vulnerable. Jonah's struggle to obey also reveals God's determination to see that everyone gets an opportunity to hear His message. God *always* cares, even when we don't.

The Prodigal Prophet: *Jonah on the Run*

FOUNDATION

The book of Jonah is one of the most popular books in the Bible. It is also one of the most controversial. Scholars and skeptics have attacked its validity. Many struggle with the notion of a fish swallowing a man. If man can build a submarine that can hold a man safely underwater, God surely can create a fish to do the same thing.

Jonah is not a book about a fish, it is a book about a person much like you and me. It is a book that chronicles Jonah's call, disobedience, and ultimate return. People have looked so long at the great *fish* that they have failed to see in the book the great *God*.

The book of Jonah is a whale of a story and not a story of a whale. When we study this book, it is important that we see the size of our God and not just debate the size of the great fish.

There are three ways to approach the interpretation of the book. Some treat the book as an allegory. In this approach, each major character is seen as a symbol for some historical event. Some see Jonah as an allegory of the Assyrian captivity. Jonah is seen as Israel, Nineveh is seen as pagan idolatry, and so forth.

Others see the book as a parable. They see it as a story told to communicate a spiritual truth, but it is not to be regarded as being historical.

This author sees this book as being historical. There are several reasons for doing so. You will notice that the book of Jonah is found listed among the historical books of the Old Testament. Additionally, the Bible sees Jonah as being a historical figure (2 Kings 14:25). “He restored the territory of Israel from the entrance of Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the Lord God of Israel, which He had spoken through His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet who was from Gath Hepher.” Finally, I believe that Jonah is a historical book because Jesus did. Jesus related Jonah to His own resurrection experience (Matthew 12:39-41).



“Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, ‘Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me.’

But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord” (Jonah 1:1-4).

The book of Jonah is an interesting, intriguing, and informative story. It is more than just a “fish story.” It is more than just an ancient story told by mariners and sea-faring men. It is a story of mercy and mission, disobedience and chastisement, rebellion and restoration. There are only three verses that deal with the fish. The other forty-five verses tell us the real message of Jonah’s story.

In the first chapter we find Jonah on the run from God. This chapter reminds us of the call and claim of God on all of our lives. We will examine this chapter by looking through three lenses.

The Revelation Examined

The Scripture reveals to us that Jonah received no ordinary word. It is not a word from man or even from angels. This was the word from God himself, but Jonah treated a word from God as if it came from someone else.

It is important to remember that God does not give suggestions. God does not give recommendations. You never read where God said, “If it’s not too much trouble...” or “If it’s not too much of a bother...” You don’t read about the Ten Recommendations or the Ten Suggestions; you read about the Ten Commandments. Jonah knew that what he received was nothing less than the word of God.

Dynamic Word “And the word of the Lord...” (Jonah 1:1)

This word Jonah received came from Jehovah—the revealer of new truth. The source and authority of this word is Jehovah God! It was not a word from man. This is no ordinary word, it is a word from God—it’s *dynamic*.

In Paul’s letter to the Romans, he referred to the gospel as God’s “power” to save. The Greek word translated “power” is *dunamis*. This is the word that gives us our English words dynamite and dynamic. God’s Word has power. God’s Word is dynamic. That was true even of the word God spoke to Jonah. This word proved to be a test for Jonah. He made the mistake of thinking it was multiple choice.

Definite Word “Arise, go to Nineveh...” (Jonah 1:2)

Not only is this a dynamic word, but it is a definite word. Though brief and without explanation, it is a word that is clear-cut to the core. Jonah is left with no doubt as to where he is to go. With haste and urgency the word is given—“Arise!” With military precision the word is uttered—“Go!”

What was given to Jonah as an obligation was treated like an option. What was given to Jonah as a charge was treated by Jonah as a choice. What was given to Jonah as a demand was treated like a decision.

The word went to a definite person, Jonah. The person was to go to a definite place, Nineveh. The person was to follow a definite process, “cry out against.” The right person had to go, he had to go to the right place, and he had to follow the right procedure.

The Rebellion Exhibited

“But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord (Jonah 1:3a).

Everything in the book of Jonah obeys God except Jonah. The storm obeyed, the fish obeyed, everything obeyed God—except Jonah. It is sad that the one person who claimed a relationship with God is the only one in the book rebelling against God.

We see the two saddest words in the whole book of Jonah—“but Jonah.” He showed utter rebellion by not doing what God had clearly told him to do. Far too often in the lives of the people of God there is a “but Jonah” placed at the end of the call of God on our lives. We know we are to be consistent in worship, “but Jonah.” We are aware that we ought to be faithful stewards of our resources, “but Jonah.” We are clear that God demands that we love even our enemies, “but Jonah.”

The Regression Experienced

“He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord” (Jonah 1:3a).

Every time you rebel against God your direction is down and never up. Jonah intentionally went in the wrong direction. Nineveh was 550 miles east of Israel. Tarshish was 2500 miles west of Israel. Jonah’s destination was more than 3000 miles away from God’s destination.

Disobedience will always take you down. You can’t fall up; you can only fall down. You can always find the means to head

in the wrong direction. The Bible says that Jonah “found a ship.” Do you know why Jonah was able to find a ship to take him in the opposite direction from where he was commanded to go? He found a ship because he was looking for one!



Whenever you want to run from your responsibilities to God, you can always find a ship. If you don't want to go to worship, you can find a ship. If you don't feel like visiting the sick or helping the needy, you can find a ship. If you don't want to go and witness, you can always find a ship.

Jonah went down to the ship, he went down into the ship and eventually went down into the sea. Whenever you run from God, your direction will be down and never up!

Questions for Discussion

1. How did Jonah receive the word he received from God?
2. Discuss ways that you have seen the Word of God treated as an option.
3. What consequence did Jonah's rebellion bring?
4. What are some consequences that accompany our rebellion?
5. Discuss how disobedience can bring a person down.
6. Satan always has a ship ready to set sail for our disobedience. Read 1 Corinthians 10:13 and discuss God's remedy.