

STUDY GUIDE



CHURCH NAME

RESCUED

RESCUED FROM MORE THAN CIRCUMSTANCES

JONAH 2:1-10

04/30/2017

MAIN POINT

If you have trusted God for salvation, He has done more than simply make salvation possible; He has actually rescued you.

INTRODUCE

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Jonah 1 describes how God called Jonah to go to Nineveh. Instead of obeying, Jonah fled on a ship going the opposite direction. But God is relentless in His purposes, and He pursued Jonah. The Lord sent a storm and prepared a great fish to swallow the rebellious prophet.

Which do you think is the greatest miracle—that God could make a fish big enough to swallow Jonah, that God loved the pagan Ninevites, or that God would put up with Jonah?

How have you seen God's power or patience in your life recently?

Jonah certainly needed rescuing. But it was from more than just the belly of the fish. God is the one who brought the fish! Jonah needed to be rescued from running and displeasing God. Jonah needed to be rescued from God Himself. Luckily, Jonah cried out when all hope was lost. His life seemed over. Much like God's way with Jonah, it is often the case for us. He brings us to that despairing moment when we throw our hands up in the air and say, "My life is over!"—That moment is precisely when God really gets to work. All through the Bible we see the truth that life comes not by avoiding death but *through* death; strength comes not despite weakness but *in* weakness; comfort comes not by eliminating all affliction but *through* affliction.

Jonah points us to the supreme instance of this truth in Jesus Himself, who "was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God" (2 Cor. 13:4). This lesson of gaining life by dying to self (Matt. 16:25) is what Jonah began to learn here in Chapter 2 as he sat, miserable, in the belly of the fish. Jonah prays, "Salvation belongs to the Lord!" Just as the fish vomits him out on the beach. God's dramatic intervention in the life of Jonah is full of hope—not only for those who seek God, but especially for those who, like Jonah, have determined to shut God out. God was not relying on Jonah to save Jonah. The message remains the same for each of us today: If you have trusted God for salvation, He has done more than simply make salvation possible; he has *actually RESCUED* you.

READ AND REFLECT

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

During Jonah's period of rebellion (chap. 1), God was someone Jonah talked about but not to. Now that changed. For the first time in the book, Jonah prayed. Earlier, Jonah had slept while the pagan sailors prayed. When the captain urged him to call on his god (1:6), Jonah appeared to have ignored the plea. After all, one cannot run from

God and to God at the same time. But at last, Jonah turned to God. His prayer was one of gratitude and recommitment. Jonah stopped running from God and ran to God.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JONAH 2:1-2.

Does it surprise you that Jonah prayed in this moment? Why or why not?

Will God answer a prayer that is not prayed in complete faith? Why or why not?

In verse 2, Jonah mentions being in “the depths of the grave” or “Sheol.” In Hebrew thought the term Sheol referred to a place of the dead. What kinds of experiences today could be described as being in “the belly of Sheol?”

How should believers respond in such experiences?

In desperation, Jonah turned to God. Can you imagine what it was like for Jonah inside the belly of the fish? Yet the story doesn't focus on that. Instead, it focuses on Jonah's relationship with God. The prophet is no longer fleeing from God's presence, he is seeking God's presence. As a result, God listened to Jonah's prayer. However desperate a person's situation, God listens to prayer and can bring deliverance. God wants us to pray in desperate situations (James 5:13). He hears our prayers from any location and out of any kind of distress. When we find ourselves in the depths of despair, the question is not, “Is God still here?” but “What will I do now that I am in this crisis?” Jonah's cry out to God resulted in his deliverance and the chance to live out God's purpose for his life.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JONAH 2:3-7.

What stands out to you from these verses of Jonah's prayer?

According to 2:3, who threw Jonah into the sea? According to Jonah 1:15, who threw Jonah into the sea? How do you explain the apparent discrepancy?

Jonah was expressing not only the desperation of his situation but also his gratitude to God for the Lord's preservation and protection. Jonah was able to see that despite his circumstances, God was still in control. In verse 3, Jonah testified to God's sovereignty. He recognized God's hand in his being thrown into the sea and he also saw the waves that swept over him as belonging to God, tools in His hand.

Jonah was in a seemingly hopeless situation, “but God” delivered him. Have you had a “but God” experience in your life?

How has God's past faithfulness (v. 7) impacted your life today?

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JONAH 2:8-10.

Verse 8 refers to the folly of trusting in idols instead of trusting God. Name idols that people turn to today. What is the ultimate problem with idols?

Believers are called to make spiritual sacrifices. Read the following verses and identify the sacrifices believers are to make to God: Acts 10:4; Psalm 51:17; Romans 12:1; Hebrews 13:15-16.

Reflecting on the grace of God that forgave his sinful rebellion and rescued him from the depths of the sea motivated Jonah to confess his loyalty to God and commit himself anew to serve God. God's grace calls for our sacrificial service.

Read verse 9 again. How did Jonah end his prayer?

How have you seen God's salvation in the story of Jonah? In your own life?

In a sense, the whole book of Jonah is about salvation. Chapter 1 described how the sailors experienced a kind of physical and perhaps spiritual deliverance. In chapter 2 Jonah was rescued. Chapter 3 will show how the Ninevites repented and turned to God. Chapter 4 shows Jonah's resentment over God's mercy toward the Ninevites. "Salvation is from the Lord" (v. 9) was not just a statement of theological belief for Jonah; it was a confession based on personal experience. We can know God and experience His saving grace only through a personal relationship with Jesus who died on the cross to save us from our sins.

APPLY

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Jonah is an example of what needs to happen when we have been disobedient, rebellious, and self-focused. We need to stop running from God and run back to Him. It's not too late to stop, turn around, embrace God's purpose for your life, and run with Him.

What do you think God wants to happen in our lives as a result of this study? What's the first step toward making that happen?

When have you felt you were drowning in your circumstances?

How could faith that God is good, has a purpose for your life, and is always in control change your view of such situations?

PRAY

Thank God for His grace and commitment to living out His purpose for your life.

COMMENTARY

JONAH 2:1-10

2:1. The significance of this verse is found in Jonah's willingness to pray. Although exhorted to pray earlier by the pagan captain (1:6), there is no indication Jonah did so. That this prophet finally prayed marks a turning point in the book. That Jonah prayed not only to the Lord, as the sailors did in 1:14, but to "the Lord his God" is significant. This was an affirmation that Jonah's trust and faith were still in Jehovah God. This was the God from whom Jonah had tried to escape; this was the God who had pursued Jonah relentlessly. Now Jonah addressed Him as his God. This was an affirmation that Jonah recognized God's ownership of his life. He was running no more from God's presence.

2:2. The prayer begins in verse 2 with a simple statement of the fact that God had already heard Jonah's prayer. Jonah's earlier stated belief in God's dominion over all the earth (1:9) was personalized as he recognized that

God heard his prayer even in the midst of this distressing situation. Jonah pictured the danger he was facing by describing it as “the belly of Sheol.” The term “Sheol” was used in the Old Testament in various ways. In Hebrew thought the term referred to a place of the dead. It was spoken of as located under the earth (Amos 9:2). With this imagery Jonah described his experience of being at death’s door. The fish’s stomach is metaphorically like a tomb. Jonah thought he was as good as dead. But God was present in Sheol (“you heard my voice”) to hear Jonah’s prayer. God is everywhere we go (Ps 139:8). In the midst of impending death, God heard Jonah’s prayer from the belly of the fish.

2:3. Here is a vivid description of the distress in which Jonah found himself. Note that Jonah indicated that it was the Lord who had cast him into the sea and not the sailors on the ship. Their action in throwing Jonah overboard in chapter 1 was simply God’s hand dealing with Jonah. Perhaps the most important aspect of verse 3 is Jonah’s testimony to God’s sovereignty. Jonah recognized that the sailors had been agents of God’s judgment. He not only recognized God’s hand in his being thrown into the sea, but he also saw the “waves and breakers” that swept over him as belonging to God, tools in His hand.

2:4. This verse contains Jonah’s response to his situation. He thought that perhaps he was cast out of God’s sight or out of God’s protection and care. Perhaps he had gone too far in his disobedience and was cut off from God’s presence. And yet Jonah declared confidently that he anticipated looking again at God’s holy temple, which was symbolic of once again being in God’s presence. Such was Jonah’s trust and faith in God. The powerful message of this prayer is that as deep as the sea that engulfed Jonah, God’s mercy ran even deeper (Eph. 3:17-19; Rom. 8:38-39).

2:5-6. These verses open with a further description of the perils of death that surrounded Jonah. They paint a picture of Jonah descending to the bottom of the ocean. Using figurative speech, Jonah pictured the waves bolting the doors behind him so that there was no possible return to dry land. The idea is that there was absolutely no possibility of Jonah’s deliverance from this watery tomb. Again Jonah declared that the Lord was his God. His faith and confidence were in God, who would rescue him even from this bottomless grave in the depths of the sea.

2:7. The word “fainting” pictures Jonah’s soul being plunged into the darkness of death. From this darkness Jonah “remembered the Lord.” The verb “remember” refers here to the mental act of focusing attention on something. By itself, especially in contrast to “forget,” it often means “to act on the basis of knowledge” (see Ps. 74:22-23). Memory of God and what He had done in the past gave rise to hope. Jonah was reminded of God’s past faithfulness to him. It was this memory that gave Jonah hope of being rescued in the present situation. The same is true with us. God’s past faithfulness to us is a vivid reminder of God’s care and concern for us in the present, regardless of the situations in which we find ourselves.

2:8-9. These two verses contain words of praise and thanksgiving because Jonah was confident that God would help and save him. God’s miraculous deliverance would show that He exists, unlike pagan idols. The word “but” at the beginning of verse 9 forms a sharp contrast between trusting in idols and trusting in God. In this verse, Jonah made the decision to be obedient to God’s will. Verse 9 closes with a resounding affirmation: “Salvation is from the Lord!” This was not just a theological statement of belief. It was a personal confession. God had saved him.

2:10. In this verse the narrative of 1:17 is resumed. God spoke to the fish, as clearly as He had spoken to Jonah. God still was in control of Jonah’s situation. When Jonah was spiritually ready to do God’s will, the Creator commanded His creature to put the prophet back on dry land.