



“Salvation belongs to the LORD!” God’s dramatic intervention in the life of Jonah is full of hope—not only for those who seek God, but also for those who, like Jonah, have determined to shut him out. Many people believe God opens the door of salvation and then stands back, leaving it up to us to decide if we want to come in. But if God made salvation possible and then stepped back, refusing to interfere with our choice, then the entire life of believers would be about us—our believing, our serving, our following, and our choices to live a good life. In the case of Jonah, imprisoned in the whale’s belly, God was claiming someone who was quite incapable of performing any redeeming work to compensate for his sin. 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 saved you.

Consider what lies behind our faith. Even before the creation of the world, we were “on God’s horizon.” God set his love on us and formed his plans for us even before we were born (Ps. 139:16; Eph. 1:4–5). When Jesus came into the world, he came to save real people with real names and faces. If we are in Christ, we are among them. The sins he carried to the cross were our sins. The hell he endured was our hell. God did all this for us before we were born, but it didn’t end there. He brought salvation to us, opening our eyes to see our sin, and drawing our hearts to find hope in the Savior.

Each Christian has a unique story of how this took place. The times, the places, and the people involved vary, but behind each story, however simple, is the same amazing miracle of God’s grace (Eph. 2:8–9). Once you see that God has come after you and has laid hold of you, it will open up a new sense of worship and wonder, a new awareness of his love, and a new confidence in what God can do for others.⁷

ICEBREAKER

What’s the scariest moment you’ve ever experienced by, on, or in a body of water? What made it scary?

⁷ ESV Gospel Transformation Study Bible: Christ in All of Scripture, Grace for All of Life: English Standard Version. Crossway, 2019.

READ IT

Read Jonah 2:1-9

GET IT

1. From what specific location did Jonah pray to the Lord?
2. Who does Jonah state cast him into the deep?
3. What did Jonah say he was driven away from?
4. What did Jonah remember when his life was fainting away, and what action did he take as a result?
5. What belongs to the Lord, according to Jonah?

LIVE IT

Jonah's Prayer is Like a Psalm of Thanksgiving

The story now turns to Jonah's prayer, which is filled with biblical language, especially that of the Psalms. In fact, his prayer is most similar to a number of psalms usually considered "psalms of thanksgiving" (Psalms 18 [=2 Samuel 22]; 30; 32; 34; 66; 92; 116; 118; 138; cf. 1 Sam. 2:1-10; Isa. 38:9-20), which are characterized by thankfulness to the Lord for his protection and deliverance (cf. Jonah 2:2, 6b, 9). Such psalms usually recount the psalmist's cry for help (cf. vv. 2b, 7) and the trouble from which the Lord has delivered the psalmist (cf. vv. 2b-6a); sometimes they highlight the contrast between the righteous and the wicked (cf. vv. 8-9). For a man who was rescued from certain death because of the Lord's help, this was the perfect type of prayer to pray—and he prays it while still in the fish's belly! His trial is not yet over, but he has seen the Lord begin to work and has faith that the Lord will deliver him completely.⁸

6. Who is the person you know who seems to have the most gratitude? How can you tell they are thankful?

⁸ Sklar, Jay. *ESV Expository Commentary: Daniel-Malachi*. Crossway. 2018.

7. What place should prayers of thanksgiving have in the life of a believer? Write down another Bible verse that supports your answer.
8. What's the biggest distress (v. 2) you've experienced this last year? How did you experience gratitude for anything during that challenge?
9. How is God calling you to a greater pattern of gratitude, even in the midst of suffering or despair? What is one thing you can thank God for every day this week?

Jonah's Prayer Teaches Us How to Respond to a Second Chance from God

Jonah then does what sometimes happens in prayers of thanksgiving: he describes his own hope and faith in the Lord and contrasts himself with those who put their faith and hope in other things (vv. 8–9; cf. Pss. 32:10; 34:15–22; 92:5–15). Such a contrast emphasizes that the Lord does indeed help those who look to him in obedient faith, and he encourages those in the midst of trial to stay true to the Lord instead of looking elsewhere for salvation. In this context, those who do not hope in the Lord “pay regard to vain idols” (Jonah 2:8a). The words “vain idols” could be translated more woodenly as “worthless things of fleeting vapors,” emphasizing that placing hope in such things is utterly useless; it is like trying to get out of a hole by grabbing onto the wind. Only the Lord can save.⁹

10. Thinking of a time you received a second chance in a relationship, at work, or on another team, what did you learn from that experience?

11. What do you see in Jonah's prayer that a Christian today should imitate in our response to a second chance from God?

12. Jonah mentions God's holy temple twice. What does each verse show us about what's happening in Jonah's heart?

⁹ Ibid.

- 13. What are three “vain idols” you can think of that our world offers us for comfort in our times of distress? Write one reason for each item that they fail to truly save you.**

Jonah’s Prayer Points to Salvation through Jesus Alone

My Christian brother or sister, as you read about Jonah, consider the great deliverance God has worked in your life. Perhaps God saved you in the last few months or years, and in the process he delivered you from difficulties and trials, sinful addictions and degrading passions. Your experience has been like walking from the dark, stormy night into the broad, cloudless sunshine of morning. Or perhaps you came to Christ as a child, years ago. Either way, all of us as Christians share in Christ’s deliverance from God’s just punishment of our sins—a punishment far worse than anything a raging ocean can deal out. So praise God for the way he saved you! When you sing spiritual songs and hymns about the great salvation that God has wrought in your life, sing with your whole heart! Realize that you were heading in the wrong direction, just like Jonah. Realize that you were as helpless as a man among raging waves. Yet God saved you! Give praise to God for this because there is no greater news that you can hear.¹⁰

- 14. How does remembering that you were “as helpless as a man among raging waves” fuel a spirit of gratitude and praise?**

¹⁰ Dever, Mark. *The Message of the Old Testament: Promises Made*. Crossway. 2006.

15. What parallels are there between Jonah's story and the story of Jesus? What contrasts are there? (Hint: See Luke 11:30, Matthew 12:40-44, and Philippians 2:8)

16. Now that you've studied Jonah's prayer, how would you encourage a friend who is experiencing a season of deep "distress"?