

NO ESCAPE

JONAH 1:1-2:10

(Prepared by Gene Thompson)

1. Who is familiar with the name “Joe Louis?”

Joe Louis was the heavyweight boxing champion from 1937-1949. He has the longest reign of any boxer in history. On June 20, 1946, *The New York Times* quoted him as saying, “He can run, but he can’t hide.” He was referencing about where his opponent thought he might outmaneuver Joe Louis by staying away from him in the ring. His strategy didn’t work, and he was “found” and knocked out.

2. How far or where would you run to get away from God? (You can run and you can try to hide but you can’t escape God.)
3. For what reasons might a person try to hide from God? (They feel conviction for their lifestyle; they don’t want to do what God is asking of them; they are afraid or feel unqualified for the task God is calling them to do. Etc.)

Today we begin a short study of Jonah. He clearly wanted to hide from God and avoid doing what God was asking him to do. We will discover how successful his plan was as we examine the first two chapters.

Jonah, the prophet of God, was a farmer from Gath Hopher in Zebulun, just north of the New Testament town of Nazareth.

(Give a short narrative of Jonah 1:1-14.)

God told Jonah to go to Nineveh and preach to them a message of repentance, but Jonah fled in the opposite direction, by ship, to Tarshish, a very wealthy, affluent city. It was most likely in modern day Spain. God sent a storm and the ship was about to sink when the sailors cast lots to see whose god or God was causing this storm. The lot fell on Jonah and he told them to throw him overboard to stop the storm. He described himself as a Hebrew who worshiped Yahweh. The sailors asked God not to punish them and threw him into the sea and the sea immediately grew calm, but Jonah was swallowed by a great fish God had prepared.

4. Why didn’t Jonah want to go to Nineveh and preach? (Nineveh was a wicked city and a hated enemy of Israel. Jonah didn’t want them to repent.)
5. How much do you have to hate someone that you would rather die than share Christ with them?

GOD CALMS! Read Jonah 1:14-17

1. How would you describe the sailors’ attitude in verse 14? (They only agreed to do what Jonah said as a last resort and prayed Yahweh would not punish them. It seemed that they were coming to believe in Jonah’s God.)
2. Is it possible for a fish (whale) to swallow a man? (Is it possible for the Red Sea to part and become dry land? Is it possible for the sun to move backwards? YES! If God does it.)

The following is told to be true: “James Bartley (1870-1909) is the center of a story according to which he was swallowed by a Sperm Whale. He was found still living in the stomach of the whale, which was dead from harpooning.”—Google research.

3. What factors might determine how a person responds to God’s discipline? (The depth of your commitment to God and level of committed obedience. These sailors stood in contrast to Jonah’s rebellion. They demonstrated a true fear of the Lord while the prophet of the Lord who claimed to fear the Lord failed to show any fear of the Lord.)

Sometimes the discipline of God is both grace-filled and difficult.

The fear of the Lord: a deep-seated reverence and awe for God that causes us to want to honor Him at all costs and to avoid His loving discipline. It involves wonder, submission, obedience, worship, consideration, admiration, and love inspired by His eternal attributes and authority.

4. What most often keeps you from doing something you believe God wants you to do? (I don't want to take the time it requires.)

Doing the right thing is perhaps the eternal challenge because we are flawed human beings who are selfish and think we know better than God how to run our lives.

5. What makes us think we can get away with not following God's directions?

It is a sad situation when unbelievers behave godlier than believers!

Jonah prayed to God while inside the fish. He cried out, expecting God to hear him. Jonah expressed his dire circumstances, realizing that his only hope was to turn to God.

GOD HEARS! Read Jonah 2:1-4

Jonah's willingness to pray even when under the disciplinary hand of God reveals his faith. Though the text doesn't indicate at what point in his three-day journey he began to pray, one might imagine that it was immediately after he realized he was not going to die in the water.

1. Why do we tend to turn to God so quickly when facing a challenge or threat? (We realize the solution to our problem is far beyond our ability to solve.)

Jonah did what we should all do when we find ourselves in a difficult situation—he prayed to God.

Though the captain of the ship had asked him to pray, this is the first record of Jonah praying. Like Jonah, we sometimes are more motivated to pray as our circumstances grow more difficult.

God used Jonah's time in the great fish to bring him to his senses and renew his commitment as a prophet of the Lord.

2. How do trials tend to bring focus to a person's prayers? (God knows how to get our attention. When we have trials, we tend to pray more specifically and express a deeper faith.)

3. How did Jonah feel in verse 4? (There may be a hint of repentance in this verse but he didn't come right out with it.)

Jonah continued to share how dire his circumstances were, offering praise to God for His salvation. He pointed to the uselessness of idols and committed to fulfill his vow to God.

GOD SAVES! Read Jonah 2:5-10

1. How would you say Jonah described his plight? (He thought he was going to die at first, and then realized he might not die.)

2. Where do you see a turning point in Jonah's prayer?

3. How are faith and repentance expressed by Jonah? (In his most desperate moment, Jonah remembered the only One who could save his life. He turned back to the God from whom he had previously chosen to flee. Jonah was not trusting idols.)

God intervened in a merciful and miraculous way for Jonah. The prophet gave God credit for raising his life "from the Pit".

4. What does the delivering of Jonah reveal to us about God? (God wasn't through with Jonah; He was just giving him a little discipline. God was in control the entire time. Jonah was ready to receive God's grace in the face of his own disobedience.)

God's deliverance was miraculous then and is no less miraculous today. His God, the God of the Hebrews, was the only God who had the power to save, so Jonah's prayer turned from petition to thanksgiving and praise.

5. What do you think was the first thing Jonah did when he was vomited out on dry ground? (I don't know but I imagine he washed off in the edge of the water! :-)

Jonah's prayer contains an irony that focuses the entire book. Jonah was ready to receive God's grace in the face of his own disobedience. But he later would be unhappy that God was willing to extend that same grace to the people of Nineveh who were willing to turn from their sin and seek after the Lord.

(About a century later Nahum preached to Nineveh and they refused to repent and God brought judgment on them.)

CHALLENGE!

“Nineveh is the place God calls you where you do not want to go. Nineveh is trouble. Nineveh is danger. Nineveh is fear. What do you do when God says to you, “Go to Nineveh; go to the place you do not want to go”? Because God will say that to you.”—John Ortberg.

What actions can we take to encourage each other to share the gospel with all people? That may be someone’s “Nineveh!”

Thank You, Lord, for Your great compassion and mercy even in our disobedience. Lead us to be more eager to share the lessons we’ve learned with each other.