

# The Need To Escape And Be Rescued

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Besides the fact that God commands us to observe the Feast of Tabernacles, we look forward to escaping from the world as much as possible. Many of you want to escape the pressures of your jobs. Others of you want to escape the loneliness you feel from the isolation that obeying God many times causes.

When we come to the Feast we are not only escaping but, more importantly, we are being rescued from Satan, the world, and our own human nature. This is not because we have physically escaped anything but because God is rescuing us spiritually. Our escape and rescue is a process of separation. It is the process of building a wall of holiness for our defense and separation.

With well over a hundred references to escaping and a similar number of references to "fleeing," the Bible portrays a world in which people live in an awareness of the need to escape from a range of dangerous situations, both physical and spiritual.

The theme of escape and rescue are closely related and sometimes overlap, but while rescue is deliverance with the aid of an outside agent, escape simply refers to the effort and release experienced by the person or nation who escapes. For example, there is the release from the penalty and bondage of sin, which results from a great deal of effort.

Noah and his family staged the first physical escape in the Bible when they circumvented the death-bringing power of the Flood, which was a type of release from God's judgment on sin. As those of you getting baptized will experience this afternoon, you will receive that release from sin.

Sometimes the people who escape are guilt-haunted people who are forced to flee the consequences of their own unwise choices. An example of that is Lot, who escaped natural cataclysm when the angels led him from Sodom after he had made a worldly-minded choice to move there. Jacob escaped from his brother, Esau, after cheating him of his birthright, thereby bringing a death threat on himself. Moses was in a similar situation when he had to escape from Egypt after killing a taskmaster. Jonah escaped death at sea when God sent a huge fish to rescue him after his rebellious behavior. Sometimes the escape we need as human beings is from something we have brought upon ourselves!

More often, though, people who escape do so in acts of heroism—for example, the two spies escaping from Jericho after being hidden by Rahab, and David escaping from the paranoid Saul. It was often either the clever or the strong who escaped. Samson was in the 'strong' category when he carried off the gates of Gaza by night. On other occasions it is the lone survivor from disaster who escaped to bring the message of calamity as in Job 1.

Individual escapes seem small and isolated compared with the great physical escape of the Old Testament—the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt.

Here is a story with all the suspense and danger of escape stories at their best. You cannot find a novel with a better plot or better escape story. There is a build-up of tension and hostility and nighttime preparations for the escape (accompanied by awe-inspiring religious ceremony). There is the waiting for the word that will commence the escape, a quick getaway when the Egyptians discover the death-bringing plague, and a miraculous rescue as the nation makes its decisive break with Egypt on the far side of the sea. The Red Sea became the physical wall of separation from Egypt, the representation of sin.

The New Testament stories of escape are just as dramatic, and they typically involved the escape of either Christ or His followers from their persecutors. For example, Joseph and Mary escaped Herod's plot to kill Jesus, and later Jesus escaped from His enemies, as they stood ready to stone Him.

**John 10:39-40** Therefore they sought again to seize Him, but He escaped out of their hand. And He went away again beyond the Jordan to the place where John was baptizing at first, and there He stayed.

We find that anyone making an escape in the Bible, whether it is something they have brought upon themselves or because of some other persecution, there is always effort that has to be made on the part of the escapee. That is, the person who is fleeing.

You remember that Peter escaped from prison, and Paul escaped from a conspiracy to kill him. So it is not uncommon for God's people to have to make escapes.

The individual escape stories of the Bible point toward the great spiritual escape—i.e., redemption from sin. Because this escape is so great, the New Testament instructs us how to "escape" from the "snare of the devil."

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**II Timothy 2:24-26** And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.

We see here a massive need for escape from the one individual who is trying to keep us from being rescued.

We also learn about the impossibility of escaping if we neglect such a great salvation. Since Christ is so far exalted above the prophets, and even the angels, we should give the more intense attention to all that He has spoken—whether directly from Jesus, or through His apostles.

**Hebrews 2:1-4** Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?

There is no other way of salvation, and the neglect of this will be followed by certain destruction. This is true of spiritual and physical salvation. Neglect of salvation manifests itself in several ways: indifference, apathy, disobedience, and hostility; and this neglect equates to not escaping the terrible condemnation of God.

Those who heard God's Old Covenant message and refused to obey Him could not escape, they experienced the great shaking of the earth, and they were cut off from the kingdom of Israel. But, those who hear God's New Covenant message and refuse to obey Him will not escape, and they will not only experience the great shaking of the earth but the great shaking of heaven also, and they will be cut off from the kingdom of God.

**Hebrews 12:25-29** See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven, whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I

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shake not only the earth, but also heaven." Now this, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.

Reverence and godly fear are two very key elements of any spiritual escaping.

The world cannot escape it—but the saints are rescued by Him. The saints ultimately escape to the unshakable Kingdom of God!

II Peter talks about how to escape from the corruption that is in the world. The world is full of wickedness. It is the design of God's plan for the redemption of mankind that will deliver us from that corruption, and to make us holy. The means by which we will be made like God, is that God will rescue us from the temptation to lust—the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes.

**II Peter 1:2-4** Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

Peter also talks about those who have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

**II Peter 2:18-22** For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped [barely escaped] from those who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage. For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it

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has happened to them according to the true proverb: "A dog returns to his own vomit," and, "a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire."

In the phrase "they allure through the lusts of the flesh," the same word "allure" is used here, that in II Peter 2:14 and James 1:14 is rendered "enticing" and enticed." It occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. It means that they make use of deceitful ploys to allure, ensnare, or beguile others.

The "means" that are used are "the lusts of the flesh." That is, the false teachers promised unlimited indulgence to the human appetites. They taught the kind of doctrines that made their followers feel free to give themselves unrestrained liberty to wrong human tendencies. This has been a very common method in the world to induce people to embrace false doctrines. It is an encouragement to have a lack of self-control.

But they were allured again to the sins that they had previously indulged in for so long. Those who are addicted to habits of vice sometimes seem to become interested in religion, and temporarily abandon many of their sinful practices. But they are again allured by the seductive influences of sin, and relapse into their former habits.

You may remember a sermon I gave a year or so ago on Internet pornography, how it addicts people and they cannot let go. I have no doubt that some of you may have that problem. I advise you to get rid of your computer. Get off the Internet if you have that problem. It is a sin and it will cause a horrible degeneration to your mind.

Here in II Peter 2 the seduction was by professing religious teachers. This has been an affliction on the church for its entire existence. Members who had been addicted to a lack of self-control, who had been almost reformed to God's way of life, but who were led back again by the influence of false religious teachers. The greatest way to see that is in the greater church of God today. There are those people who are very Protestant in their approach to God's truth. You see them scattered throughout the various church of God groups.

This does not happen directly and openly. But, when their reformation is begun, its success and its completion depend on total abstinence from all the world has to offer that has the effect of spiritually intoxicating a person.

From the standpoint of doing our part to escape Satan, sin, and the world, it is necessary to overcome sin with abstinence; and nothing more may be necessary to lead them, those barely hanging on, into their former practices than indulgence.

**II Peter 2:20** For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: "A dog returns to his own vomit," and, "a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire."

God has a wonderful way of putting that.

This does not necessarily mean that they had been true Christians, and had grieved the Holy Spirit. People may outwardly reform, and escape from the open corruptions that prevail around them, or that they had previously practiced, and still not have the Holy Spirit. The prime example of that is when Worldwide [Church of God] started having its problems and fell apart, the majority of the people just stopped attending anywhere. They went back into the world.

While the Bible paints many pictures of routine actions in a daily setting, it also captures people in moments of crisis, as the theme of flight confirms. Well over 200 references to people fleeing from something express a sense of the vulnerability of people and of the dangers that frequently overwhelmed them.

Not surprisingly, approximately half of the references to flight occur in the battle stories of the Old Testament historical books. In fact, the theme of flight and chase is widespread to battle itself, inasmuch as the whole point of joining battle is to dislodge an opponent from the territory it is occupying. That holds true both physically and spiritually.

The stories of flight also portray characters fleeing for their lives from powerful figures who want to destroy them. Jacob fled for his life from Esau and later from Laban, David fled from a paranoid Saul and later from his usurping son Absalom, and Elijah fled from Jezebel after she declared war on the prophets of God.

The fledgling nation of Israel fled to Egypt, and centuries later Jesus' family fled to Egypt to escape Herod's plans for genocide. Moses fled for his life after slaying an Egyptian taskmaster. In a humiliating and futile venture, Jonah attempted to flee from the presence of God, a feat that Psalm 139 declares to be an ironic impossibility.

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**Psalms 139:7-12** Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me. If I say, "Surely the darkness shall fall on me," even the night shall be light about me; indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, but the night shines as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to You.

Verse 7 asks the question, "where can I flee from Your presence?" In the Hebrew, it is literally, "from Your face." That is, where He will not be, and will not see me. I cannot find a place—a spot in the universe, where there is not a God, and the same God.

This is a fearful thought to those that hate Him. Much as they may wish or desire it, they can never find a place where there is not a holy God! But it is immensely comforting to those who love Him—that we will never be where we cannot find a God—our God. That is, nowhere, at home or abroad, on land or on the ocean, on earth or above the stars, we will ever reach a world where we will not be in the presence of that God—that gracious Father—who can defend, comfort, guide, and sustain us.

The chase and flight theme portrays the nature and character of relationships individuals have with the Lord God, with each other, and to sin, righteousness, and judgment. The presence of the flight theme in the Bible often structures the story, moving the action from conflict toward resolution.

Let us look at three elements of the pattern of conflict toward resolution. The story of Jacob and Laban is a prime example of this pattern. The first element includes a situation of conflict (between individuals or God) beginning the action. The inflaming situation could be jealousy, barrenness, or a change of attitude.

**Genesis 31:2-3** And Jacob saw the countenance of Laban, and indeed it was not favorable toward him as before. Then the Lord said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your family, and I will be with you."

Second, a departure or a chase results. The intensity of an interpersonal conflict will put one to flight, driving an individual away, or it may result in a chase.

**Genesis 31:22-23** And Laban was told on the third day that Jacob had fled.

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Then he took his brethren with him and pursued him for seven days' journey, and he overtook him in the mountains of Gilead.

We see there it is often a departure or a chase.

Third, a divine or a human intervention occurs—many times in the form of a rescue. The purpose of the intervention varies and its location in the storyline is fluid. It appears after the chase begins to protect the pursued, and it emerges before the chase begins to encourage the pursuer in the pursuit. Ultimately, the intervention serves God's intention to rescue or to discipline.

**Genesis 31:24** But God had come to Laban the Syrian in a dream by night, and said to him, "Be careful that you speak to Jacob neither good nor bad."

Finally, the outcome is detailed. A conflict, a chase, and an intervention create a tension in need of resolution. In some accounts the outcome includes an escape, the capture of the hunted individual or a reunion between people in conflict.

**Genesis 31:25-29** So Laban overtook Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the mountains, and Laban with his brethren pitched in the mountains of Gilead. And Laban said to Jacob: "What have you done, that you have stolen away unknown to me, and carried away my daughters like captives taken with the sword? Why did you flee away secretly, and steal away from me, and not tell me; for I might have sent you away with joy and songs, with timbrel and harp? And you did not allow me to kiss my sons and my daughters. Now you have done foolishly in so doing. It is in my power to do you harm, but the God of your father spoke to me last night, saying, 'Be careful that you speak to Jacob neither good nor bad.'"

**Genesis 31:38-44** "These twenty years I have been with you; your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried their young, and I have not eaten the rams of your flock. That which was torn by beasts I did not bring to you; I bore the loss of it. You required it from my hand, whether stolen by day or stolen by night. There I was! In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night, and my sleep departed from my eyes. Thus I have been in your house twenty years; I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times. Unless the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the fear of Isaac, had



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been with me, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God has seen my affliction and the labor of my hands, and rebuked you last night." And Laban answered and said to Jacob, "These daughters are my daughters, and these children are my children, and this flock is my flock; all that you see is mine. But what can I do this day to these my daughters or to their children whom they have borne? Now therefore, come, let us make a covenant, you and I, and let it be a witness between you and me."

**Genesis 31:55** And early in the morning Laban arose, and kissed his sons and daughters and blessed them. Then Laban departed and returned to his place.

We see there God's rescue. Look how long it took for Him to rescue Jacob—twenty years, ten wage changes. There is a definite indication that we must be patient.

As seen in the story of Jacob and Laban, relationships between biblical characters often degenerate into a conflict resulting in a flight or a chase. We see this degeneration in the relationships between: Sarah and Hagar, Esau and Jacob, Joseph and Potiphar's wife, Joseph and his brothers, Moses and Pharaoh, Abimelech and Jephthah, Saul and David, and Absalom and David. Many escapes go from conflict into rescue. Sadly, this theme of flight reveals the heartache of dysfunctional relationships.

The New Testament exhorts God's people to flee unrighteousness and to pursue righteousness and all that is associated with it. The importance of the nature of this flight and chase pattern reveals our character and motives. Under such stressful times as escaping and fleeing physical or spiritual danger, we see areas of our own lives that are strong and weak. God sees our strengths and weaknesses as well. He uses such times as trial and testing, as well as character-strengthening. He builds us up in many different ways rather than in just one of them. He caused those worthy in His church to escape.

Regarding prophecy and revelation, people are portrayed as fleeing to the mountains (for example) to escape the judgment of God. On a positive side, the besieged woman of Revelation 12 flees from the dragon into the wilderness and is spared.

In Revelation 12:1-6, Christ escapes Satan's plot by ascending into heaven, and the church similarly escapes the designs of Satan and the world by fleeing into the wilderness. Not by human impulse, but by the fore-determined counsel of God—the woman representing the church, fled into the wilderness.

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**Revelation 12:1-6** Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth. And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born. She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne. Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God [That is, He rescued her.], that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

The church will have to make an effort to flee, but it is God who rescues her. He will not just "rapture" His Church off instantly. There is physical effort required by the church, just as there was for Noah and his family when they prepared to escape the Flood. Just as there was for Moses and the Israelites when they fled from Egypt, and Joseph, Mary, and Jesus when they fled to Egypt to escape Herod's edict of death to children.

There is a natural process of escape. With God's help we make the mental effort by overcoming and submitting to God's will. This requires a teachable attitude. Anyone who is not teachable will assuredly not escape. God evaluates our mental effort and hopefully counts us worthy to escape. The next step is the physical effort to go when we are stirred to action. That stir to action will only come about if we have prepared ahead of time to be made worthy.

God's process of rescue parallels our process of escape. It is intertwined!

God's rescue of Israel sets the tone for the various psalms that recount the mighty acts of God. Psalm 107 offers a series of four vignettes of rescue: from wandering in the wastelands, from imprisonment, from affliction brought on by rebellion, and from the terrors of the sea. In each case the subjects "cried out to the Lord" in their distress, and He rescued them from their plight. You remember well that we are to pray that we are made worthy to escape the things that will be coming. If you are not asking that you be worthy, you will not be worthy. It is a command from God that we do.

Psalm 91 speaks of various terrors—deadly pestilence and plague, the terror of night, the flying arrow by day, and the fearsome lion and cobra—that might befall us. But it firmly assures that those who love God will be rescued.

**Psalm 91:14-16** "Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has known My name. He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him, and show him My salvation."

The process of this rescue is justification, then sanctification, and then salvation.

It is important to realize that God does not simply rescue on demand. In Numbers 14:39-45, when Israel brashly went up against the Amalekites and Canaanites, after recanting on their initial response to the spy report, they were soundly defeated.

God does not rescue a disobedient people. He instead delivers them into the hands of their enemies. This is the first of Israel's great lessons in "no rescue." Those who presume on God will have their expectations reversed. As Amos later put it, those disobedient people who long for the Day of the Lord (i.e., the day of God's victory) will receive darkness.

The prophets also use a "no rescue" theme. For Isaiah it depicts the plight of Israel short of God's action, because of their obstinate disobedience.

**Isaiah 42:21-22** The Lord is well pleased for His righteousness' sake; He will exalt the law and make it honorable. But this is a people robbed and plundered; all of them are snared in holes, and they are hidden in prison houses; they are for prey, and no one delivers; for plunder, and no one says, "Restore!"

Hosea and Micah both hammer out a message of judgment on the anvil of the "no escape" theme. Hosea depicts God as a lion to Ephraim and Judah, tearing them to pieces and carrying them off with no one to rescue them. Micah sees the nations treating the remnant of Jacob like a lion among the flock, mauling and mangling as it goes "and no one can rescue".

On the other hand, the stories of the rescue of righteous Israelites in a foreign nation demonstrate God's power to rescue His faithful ones who obey and trust the God of Israel.

God's rescue of Israel is also a matter of God's timing. His power to do so is beyond

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question—He is the God of Israel's exodus. In Isaiah 50:2, Isaiah quotes God's sarcastic question, "Is My hand shortened at all that it cannot redeem? Or have I no power to deliver?"

Several biblical terms are used interchangeably for God's gracious act of removing us from harm—rescue, save, and deliver to name a few.

**Psalms 144:7-11** Stretch out Your hand from above; rescue me and deliver me out of great waters, from the hand of foreigners, whose mouth speaks vain words, and whose right hand is a right hand of falsehood. I will sing a new song to You, O God; on a harp of ten strings I will sing praises to You, the One who gives salvation to kings, who delivers David His servant from the deadly sword. Rescue me and deliver me from the hand of foreigners, whose mouth speaks lying words, and whose right hand is a right hand of falsehood—

That rescue from the "hand of foreigners," spiritually speaking, is from Satan.

The Bible is filled with stories and images of rescue. It is an anthology of rescue stories, spoken and written by people who had themselves participated in a grand rescue and who want us to be recipients of rescue also. God uses people to record things in the Bible. And most of the time, they are well experienced with their writing.

In fact the Bible, stretching from the expulsion from the Garden of Eden to the establishment of the headquarters of the Kingdom of God in the New Jerusalem, can be viewed as a rescue story. The Bible tells a story of humankind gone astray, taking the entire creation with it, and of God setting out to rescue His creation from its wayward and destructive course.

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and their descendants, Israel, became the special people of God's rescue operation. But Israel, too, went astray much like the world at large, and a final hero emerged from Israel—Jesus, who brought this dramatic rescue operation to its climax and will bring it to its conclusion.

Much of the New Testament is a clarification of the significance of the crucifixion and resurrection in this grand rescue, and how a rescued people can live as those who will one day inherit and inhabit a rescued creation.

But the Bible also contains numerous and smaller episodes of rescue, some of which

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foreshadow the grand rescue of the crucifixion and resurrection.

Rescue is in many ways synonymous with deliverance, though the image of rescue frequently carries a sense of immediate or impending danger, of a hazardous predicament and of bold and decisive action. It speaks of courage, strength, skill, and risk.

Rescue easily brings to mind more concrete scenes than deliverance or salvation. For example, most Americans will never forget the television image of the New York City firemen risking their lives. They ran carrying people out of the twin towers of the World Trade Center buildings—as debris and large sections of the buildings fell down around them and on them in many cases. This image of rescue is forever impressed upon our minds.

Rescues many times involve hapless victims who are in over their heads and cannot help themselves. They face awful consequences, often death. Physical rescuers take risks. They plunge into the danger.

Rescues provide the substance of great stories. Physical rescues move in a U-shaped pattern from the plane of everyday life to the depths of experience (such as danger or suffering) far from the ideal, and then back to life on its former plane, but with a renewed sense of the preciousness of life. This is a lesson we learn from the life and sacrifice of Jesus Christ—that escape and rescue are His and the preciousness of life.

Maybe the pinnacle of rescue illustrations in the Bible is the condensed story of Christ in Philippians 2.

**Philippians 2:5-11** Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

This U-shaped pattern is ironically traced in the story of Christ the rescuer. Because

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Jesus the rescuer must plunge to the depths of the human predicament in order to bring the human victims to new life. Christ descends from the height of being in the form of God and equal with God to taking on human likeness and servitude—even to the point of suffering the terrible death on the cross—and then is "highly exalted" to universal lordship.

Adam and Eve had descended from a position of privilege (seeking to be "like God") to a position of servitude and bondage to death. Christ the rescuer will eventually bring the children of Adam and Eve to an exalted position. In this sketch of a bold rescue, the rescuer (Christ) descends from an even greater height than Adam and goes to the lowest depth in order to rescue those who would otherwise be hopelessly lost.

The first great rescue story of the Bible is God's rescue of Noah, his family, and the animals from the great Flood. In this story the world has become hopelessly mired in sin, and God chose one man and his family as a sort of new Adam, whom He rescued from a great judgment and brought safely to the other side.

In the New Testament this rescue is understood as a foreshadowing of the final rescue of God's people from a universal and final judgment.

**I Peter 3:18-22** For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. There is also an anti-type which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.

So we see here that baptism is also part of God's overall rescue. Baptism has a resemblance to the water by which Noah was saved. There was a use of water in the Flood that corresponded, in some respects, to the water that is used in baptism. Peter does not say that it corresponded in all respects (for example: in respect to quantity, or to the manner of the application, or to the effectiveness of the water). But there is a sense in which water performs an important part in our salvation.

Baptism, to be effective, must be in connection with true repentance, and true faith in

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Christ. It must involve putting away sin, and involve the renewing influences of the Holy Spirit. It is an act of unreserved dedication to God.

Sadly, the descendants of the rescued Noah degenerated into godless rebellion, and the judgment at Babel fractured humanity into many nations. In this, God temporarily rescued humanity from its own imminent destruction. God used the different languages as a wall of separation.

In the New Testament the greatest image of rescue is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus was arrested, tried, crucified, dead, and sealed in a tomb. He was like Israel, with "no one to rescue" Him, immediately. But God raised Him from the dead, exalted Him, and enthroned Him at His right hand with His enemies under His feet.

The Old Testament stories of divine rescue—particularly the exodus and return from exile—provide a key for understanding this great rescue. Ezekiel's vision of a valley of dry bones coming to life in Ezekiel 37:1-14 is a prominent instance of the metaphor of death and resurrection applied to Israel's exile and restoration.

In His own death and resurrection, Jesus summarized the story of Israel's exile and full restoration. The return from exile that Israel has never fully experienced is brought to light. The rescue of Jesus from the clutches of death is the first fruits of the hope of the redemption of God's people, the church. His rescue embraces all who follow Him—both Jews and Gentiles—and in His rescue the entire created order finds its hope of rescue from death and decay.

**Romans 8:18-25** For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.

Sometimes when we are being rescued, we have to have a great deal of patience and endurance. That comes in a spiritual way by overcoming sin, Satan, and the world. Sometimes our trials are so great that nothing but the prospect of future deliverance encourages and upholds us; and the prospect is sufficient to enable us to bear them with patience.

Paul used the illustration of rescue as he speaks of the work of Jesus Christ as a new exodus. In Galatians 1:4, he speaks of Christ giving Himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age. In Colossians 1:13, it is God the Father who "has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves."

Biblical phrases like "present evil age" and "dominion of darkness" bring to mind an oppressive regime in which we are held captive, in dire need of rescue.

**Romans 7:21-25** I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

This cry of mental anguish seems to be Paul's taking on the voice of the saints. But like the psalmists who speak of God's rescue as both a national and personal reality, Paul stated in II Timothy 4:18 that he lived with the assurance that God would rescue him: "the Lord will deliver [rescue] me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom." We see beyond a shadow of a doubt *who* does the rescuing.

God knows how to deliver those who make an effort to overcome sin and reverence Him.

**II Peter 2:4-9** For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly; and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by



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seeing and hearing their lawless deeds) the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment.

We receive in God's Word promise after promise after promise that God will rescue, but there are conditions of obedience and reverence. God's delivery of the righteous shows that He is able to rescue His people when tempted, and understands the best way to do it. He sees a solution to our problems when we cannot—though it is often a solution we would not have thought of on our own.

He can send an angel to take us by the hand. Psalm 34:7 "The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them." He can interpose and destroy the power of the tempter; He can motivate friends; He can deliver us completely and forever from temptation, by our removal from physical life.

Behind much of the biblical imagery about the battles with physical and spiritual enemies, lies the assurance that Christ will rescue us from Satan, the world, human nature, evil, and death.

David confessed that it was the Lord who rescued him from his powerful enemy, from his foes, who were too strong for him. God rescued and delivered him to a place of freedom because He delighted in David. That is what we want God to do with us. We want Him to delight in us.

**II Samuel 22:1** Then David spoke to the Lord the words of this song, on the day when the Lord had delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul.

**II Samuel 22:17-25** "He sent from above, He took me, He drew me out of many waters. He delivered me from my strong enemy, from those who hated me; for they were too strong for me. They confronted me in the day of my calamity, but the Lord was my support. He also brought me out into a broad place; He delivered me because He delighted in me. The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands He has recompensed me. For I have kept the ways of the Lord, and have not wickedly departed from my God. For all His judgments were before me; and as for His statutes, I did not depart from them. I was also blameless before Him, and I kept myself from my iniquity. Therefore the Lord has recompensed me according to my righteousness, according to my cleanness

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[holiness] in His eyes."

God is the one who did it for David. He will do it for us. God is the one who rescues. God has the same delight in us as we live righteously—reverencing and obeying Him. He desires to rescue us from our physical and spiritual enemies. God is so intricately involved and interested in our well being that He has every hair of our heads counted.

God the Father and Jesus Christ know how and when to rescue us completely and in the most effective way. Our salvation—rescue—is assured! We should have no doubt. He has commanded it to happen. He has promised that it will happen. We have a wonderful Creator God who wants to rescue us. We have to do our part. We have to work at it. We have to overcome sin. And we have to reverence and fear God in the proper way.