

**In the Fish's Belly**  
A Family Talk on Jonah 2  
By the Rev. Kenneth J. Alden

1. Have you ever felt cast out by the Lord? By your parents or teachers?
  - a. If you did, it is probably because you felt you had done something wrong, as Jonah had done.
  
1. Jonah had been fleeing from the presence of the Lord when a storm threatened to destroy the ship in which he was.
  - A. When it became clear that Jonah was to blame for the storm, he told the sailors to throw him into the sea, and when they did, the sea ceased from its raging.
  
2. Our talk this morning will be about the times we feel discouraged, how the Lord helps us, and how we help the Lord help us.
  - A. Imagine how Jonah felt. He knew he had done wrong and brought people all sorts of trouble.
    1. When he was thrown into the sea, as he himself said he should be, and the sea ceased from its raging, there was proof! It was all his fault!
    2. He must have felt that he deserved to drown, right there in the sea.
    3. He must have felt that the Lord was casting him out to drown.
  
3. So, there was Jonah, left to drown in the sea. But the Lord prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah.
  - A. Once swallowed, he was in the fish's belly for three days and nights.
  - B. Imagine how dark and cold it must have been.
    1. Frightening. Was this part of his punishment or part of his salvation? Very confusing.
    2. The prayer which we read is full of feeling.
      - a. He cried out to Jehovah—he cried from the belly of Sheol!
        - 1) Desperate! Hell!
        - 2) But Jehovah answered him. He heard him.

A. Relief!

b The prayer is full of feelings going back and forth between despair and hope, and even blame and thanks. More confusion.

1) Although he was the one who said he should be thrown into the sea, he said that Jehovah had cast him into the seas.

A. So it appears to those in temptations.

2) Although he said that Jehovah had cast him into the seas, yet he acknowledges that the Lord has answered him and has brought his life up from the pit.

c Imagine how he felt when he said that he was cast into the heart of the seas, the floods surrounded him, the billows and waves passed over him.

d Imagine the feeling of the deep closing around him, weeds wrapped around his head, going down to the cutting off of the mountains, having the bars of the earth close behind him forever.

C If you feel cut off and rejected, what do you do? What is best to do?

1. Jonah kept acknowledging that the Lord had answered him and heard him.

2. He kept remembering Jehovah and turning again toward the Lord's holy temple.

3. He turned his memory of Jehovah when feeling cast off to a memory to return to Jehovah!

a It shows that he was willing to acknowledge his own fault in not doing the Lord's will.

4 Times of temptation are not only discouraging, they are confusing.

A While Jonah is praying from the fish's belly he talks about being cast into the deep and having weeds wrapped around him and going down to the bottoms of the mountains.

1. Did this all happen while he was in the fish's belly? Or are these things

that happened when he was first cast into the sea, before the fish swallowed Jonah.

- a Could it be that Jonah's feelings of being answered by the Lord included feeling thankful that the fish had swallowed him and that he was still alive within the fish?
- b We don't know for sure, but the Heavenly Doctrine says that Jonah's being in the great fish for three days and nights means the hells where most direful falsities encompassed him and grievous temptations. (Cf. JAE 622:9)
  - 1) They also say that the belly of the great fish means the lower parts of the earth. (Cf. AC 247, AE 538:11)
  - 2) The lower parts of the earth, in the Word, mean places in the world of spirits which are not in hell but are surrounded by the hells.
    - A. In these places, well-disposed people who need to rid themselves of falsities and strengthen spiritual principles are kept safe by the Lord until the time when a judgment can take place and people can be safely separated from the hells. (Cf. AR 845, AC 6854:2, 6928, 7090)
    - B. This is consistent with the Lord's preparing a great fish to swallow Jonah.
      - 1 It is consistent with the fact that Jonah was safer in the fish than in the sea, and the fact that he was, nevertheless, still in distress while in the fish, for those in the Lower Earth are on the one hand called "the unhappy" and said to be miserable and waiting for deliverance (cf. AC 699, 1107), and on the other hand are said to be removed from those who would harm them and that they live cheerful together. (Cf. AR 325, 845:2)
      - 2 Also with the fish vomiting Jonah onto dry land, perhaps representing the fact that evil spirits reject good people from their midst when the difference between their chosen nature becomes clear at the last judgment. (Cp. AR 325, 884:2)

- 5 In our second lesson it was made clear that Jonah in this chapter represented the Lord between the time when He was crucified and the time when He rose.
- A The Lord said that “As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” (Matthew 12:40)
  - B Jonah’s time in the belly of the fish represented the Lord’s time in the tomb after His crucifixion—a time which was not literally three days and nights by our standards, but acceptably so by the counting methods in Biblical times.
  - C But more than representing the Lord’s time in the tomb, Jonah’s being in the belly of the fish represented the Lord’s most grievous temptations which would have taken place prior to His giving up His spirit on the cross. (Cp. PP, AE 538:11, AC 756, 6726, 1691:5)
    - 1. During those temptations, the Lord’s love was under attack—a love which yearned to save the kind of people who were kept in the lower earth.
    - 2. The Lord was among those people, enduring the fury of the hells against those people, and conquering them by His own power, so that He could save them.
      - a As Jonah felt the cold and dark of the heart of the seas, the Lord felt immersed in the hells, with evils and falsities coming out of hell and overwhelming. (Cf. AE 538:11, AC 6726, 9050:10)
      - b As Jonah sensed the waves and clouds passing over him, the Lord felt evils and falsities doing so. (Cf. AE 538:11)
      - c As Jonah felt he was at the cuttings off of the mountains, the Lord felt he was in the hells where the most damned are and from which evils come. (Cf. AE 538:11, AC 4728:5)
      - d As Jonah felt the weeds wrapping around his head, the Lord felt bound by false knowledge. (Cf. AE 538:11, AC 6726)
      - e As Jonah felt as though the bars of the earth were upon him, the Lord felt bound by evils. (Cf. AE 538:11)
      - f But as Jonah felt remembered by Jehovah and brought out of the pit, so the Lord conquered the hells and came up by His own power. (Cf. AE 538:11)



1. We must thank the Lord for the help He has given already to keep us safe enough even to have a love that can feel discouragement.
  - a And just as the Jonah's prayer culminated in his promise to sacrifice to the Lord and pay what he had vowed, because salvation is of the Lord, so may we come to will that the Lord should provide, and not we ourselves. (Cf. AC 3880:9)

Readings: *Jonah* 1:17-2:10; *Matthew* 12:38-50; AC 247, 6854:2

***Arcana Coelestia* 247.** ...In earliest times 'the belly' meant things closest to the earth, 'the breast' those that were above the earth, and 'the head' those that were the highest....In Jonah also the belly of the great fish into which he was cast means the lower parts of the earth, as is clear from his own prophecy  
Out of the belly of hell I cried, and You did hear my voice. *Jonah* 2:2.  
Here 'hell' stands for the lower earth.

**6854.** [2] ...Those who are termed spiritual are people for whom only the understanding part of their mind, not the will part, can be regenerated. In the understanding part of their mind the Lord therefore implants a new will, a will which conforms to the teachings that compose the faith of their Church. These people, that is to say, spiritual ones such as these, were saved solely by the Lord's Coming into the world. The reason why is that the Divine passing through heaven, which was the Divine Human before the Lord's Coming, could not reach them; for to be sure the teachings of their Church were for the most part not truths, and consequently the good in their will was not good either.... Since those people could be saved solely by the Lord's Coming, they could not be raised into heaven before then. They were therefore kept in the meantime on the lower earth, in places there which in the Word are called 'pits'. This lower earth was besieged on every side by the hells where there were falsities, by which they were molested greatly during that time. In spite of this however the Lord protected them. But after the Lord came into the world and made the Human within Himself Divine, He set free those who were in the pits there and raised them to heaven. From these He also formed the spiritual heaven which is the second heaven. This is what is meant by the Lord's descent into the lower parts\* and by His deliverance of those who had been bound.

**Through The Week**

Recall the Stories

- ◆ Jonah prayed out of the belly of the fish, and Jehovah heard him.
- ◆ He went to the bottom of the mountains, and when his soul fainted, he remembered Jehovah and his prayer came to Him.
- ◆ When Jehovah spoke to the fish, it vomited Jonah on dry ground.
- ◆ As Jonah was in the belly of the sea monster three days and three nights, so the Son of Man would be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights.

Reflect on the Message

- ◆ Although Jonah had fled from Jehovah, he remembered Him and prayed to Him in his despair.
- ◆ Although Jonah was trapped within a fish, he was being saved from drowning, just as those in “the lower earth” were surrounded by the hells and kept safe from them.
- ◆ Jonah’s trials represent the Lord’s most grievous temptations, which He endured to save those in “the lower earth.”
- ◆ As Jonah looked again to the temple of Jehovah’s holiness, so the Lord looked to the glorification of His Human for our salvation.

Take Action

- ◆ Use your sense of hopelessness to remember the Lord.
- ◆ What is the Lord doing for your protection and salvation, in spite of your sense that your spiritual life is over?
- ◆ Look again to the temple of the Lord’s holiness—His Divine Humanity, in which He conquered all the hells that could ever torment you and bring you down.
- ◆ When you feel hopeless about the state of the church, country, friends or family, remember that the hells attacked the Lord with the same feelings, and turn to Him for help.