

## **An Unfair Fight? Dominating Evil Spirits and Gentle Angels**

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Then God spoke to Noah, saying, “Go out of the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons' wives with you.” (Genesis 8:15-16)

In the teachings for the New Church the story of Noah and the flood is presented as a parable. It is a parable about the spiritual battles a person faces on the pathway to a heavenly life. These battles are the battles of spiritual temptation. These temptations only come to a person who is starting to care about what is genuinely good and genuinely true. Our minds exist in a spiritual environment open to both the forces of hell and those of the Lord and the angels. Whenever we have received something that is good and true from the Lord and are trying to live according to the dictates of our conscience, the forces of hell will at some point attack these good and true things. The angels with us will defend them. The result is a powerful spiritual battle that weighs down our minds and feels like a terrible threat to the beginnings of heavenly qualities in our lives.

Some people might think that we would be better off if the Lord protected us from these attacks on our thoughts and motivations. In reality they are an important part of our spiritual development. Consider the following teaching for the New Church.

Hardly anyone can see what the battles of spiritual crisis accomplish. They are the means for dissolving and shaking off evil and falsity. They are also the means by which we develop a horror for evil and falsity, and gain not only conscience but strength of conscience; and this is the way we are reborn. For that reason, people who are regenerating are thrust into combat and undergo terrible trials — if not during their physical lives, then in the other life, assuming they can regenerate. In consequence, the Lord's church is called the church militant. (*Arcana Caelestia* 1692:1)

The whole story of Noah describes these spiritual battles as stated in the following quotation.

The Flood, the ark, and therefore descriptions concerning the Flood and the ark, mean regeneration, and also the temptations that precede. This is something learned people of today are aware of, for they too compare regeneration and temptations to the waters of a flood. (*Arcana Caelestia* 606)

In common usage the word temptation refers to an attraction. So, someone might say “When the bank robber saw the armored truck broken down by the side of the road he had an overwhelming temptation to steal the money it contained.” This is not how teachings of the New Church describe temptations. If the only thing that kept that thief from an act of robbery was either a lack of opportunity or fear that he would be caught and punished, he would not be experiencing a spiritual temptation but only a natural attraction to something he sees as desirable.

A spiritual temptation takes place when something a person recognizes to be true or good is attacked. For example it might take place with a woman who has recognized that she tends to dominate and direct other people and has resolved to change this quality in herself with the Lord's help. If one of her close friends seems to be heading toward a poor life decision that

woman's resolve could come under attack. What this attack would be is described in the following quotation.

The situation is that while a person is being reformed, which takes place by means of conflicts and temptations, the evil spirits associated with him at that time . . . activate a person's reasonings, draw out all his falsities and try to persuade him that the falsities are truths. Indeed they even convert truths into falsities. In times of temptation a person ought to fight against them, though it is the Lord who in fact fights by means of the angels who are allied to that person. (*Arcana Caelestia* 653)

For the woman who believes she should be less domineering the evil spirits might inspire the thought that it was her duty to keep her friend from making a bad decision. They might inspire the thought that she was an unkind and unloving friend if she didn't do everything possible to stop her. They might inspire the thought "You used to be strong in your convictions. Why have you become so mushy?" All of these thoughts would be a painful attack on her resolve to be less dominating and directing. Fortunately, she would not be alone in her battle against these false ideas.

The angels through whom the Lord leads and also protects a person are near his head. Their function is to impart charity and faith, to notice the direction in which the person's delights turn, and to modify and bend those delights towards what is good, so far as they can do so in the person's freedom. The angels are forbidden to act in any violent manner and thereby crush a person's evil desires and false assumptions; they must act gently. Their function is also to control evil spirits who come from hell, which is done in countless ways . . . [For example,] when evil spirits infuse evils and falsities the angels instill truths and goods, which - even if they are not accepted - serve to temper what the former infuse. Spirits from hell are constantly on the attack, and angels provide protection; and this is a proper state of order. (*Arcana Caelestia* 5992:1)

How do the elements of the Noah story represent this state of temptation and even more important how do they help us see the preparations and qualities the Lord uses within our lives to help us get through? Firstly, the Lord wants us to know that each of us reach adult life with hereditary inclinations to be destructively self-centered and to place too much priority on the many pleasures of this world. Left unattended these inclinations will inevitably lead us to see our experience and make decisions that are harmful to us and the people around us. Unless we get the Lord's help in fighting the influence of these inclinations our ability to be useful and happy will be limited.

The Lord told Noah to build a huge wooden ark in preparation for the cataclysmic flood that was coming. This ark is a picture of the mind the Lord is working with us to prepare for the spiritual battles of life. The preparation includes times from early childhood that we have been touched by the influence of angels. It also includes the true things we have learned and the good and holy things we have freely received. All the animals, creeping things and birds that were to be brought into the ark are all the good and useful ideas and motivations that the Lord would preserve during the time of spiritual attack. When everything was finally ready the Lord told Noah to enter the ark with his family and all the living creatures. Shortly thereafter the flood began. It not only rained for forty days and nights, also "all the fountains of the great deep were broken up." But the flood lasted much longer than these days of rain. As described in Genesis, from the time the

Lord spoke to Noah and he entered the ark more than a year passed before Noah and all with him could leave the ark and the Lord again spoke to him. That is a very long time.

Since the flood represents a time of spiritual temptation in our lives and in the story Noah heard nothing from the Lord for such a long time someone might think that we face our spiritual battles alone, but this is quite incorrect.

It is the Lord alone who does the fighting in people facing their own spiritual battles, and who conquers. By our own power, we cannot accomplish anything at all against evil, hellish spirits, because they band together with the hells in such a way that if one hell were overcome the next would rush in to fill the void. This would continue forever. They are like the ocean beating on the individual stones in a jetty. If it managed to open a chink or a tiny crack in the jetty, it would never stop until it had broken down and overflowed the entire structure, leaving not a trace. That is how it would be if the Lord did not bear our battles by Himself. (*Arcana Caelestia* 1692:2)

There is a teaching about this conflict that might seem like it is an unfair fight. The onslaught of the evil spirits is a powerful attempt to control us. In contrast the angels have a much gentler presence and operation which is described in the teaching for the New Church with these words.

Evil spirits invest themselves in particular with a person's false notions and evil desires, and that when they do they control him in a despotic way. For one who gets inside a person's evil desires and false notions makes him subject to himself and turns him into his slave. But an influx coming through angels adjusts itself to the person's affections, which they guide gently, turning those affections towards what is good without breaking them. The actual influx of them is silent, barely perceptible, for it is an influx into the person's interiors, always operating through his freedom. (*Arcana Caelestia* 6205)

What this means is that if we speak or act from our first inclination in a confrontation or situation that has offended us the turbulent flood of that first response is not likely to be from the angels with us. The quality that makes us better human beings is our ability to recognize the destructive qualities of some of our initial responses and not accept them as who we want to be. If we pause even for a moment or two the gentler influence of the angels can turn our minds to a far wiser and more useful response to the situation before us. This description of temptation and resisting it would be unfamiliar to most people. We are taught that “few at the present day undergo any spiritual temptations” (*Arcana Caelestia* 8965) because many people don't understand or really care about what the Lord wants us to know and live by.

The battles of spiritual temptation are the means the Lord can use to lead us to reject evil motivations and false ideas and confirm ourselves in a desire to be led by what is true and good. If we are trying to follow our journey to a heavenly home these spiritual battles will be inevitable. As hard and as humbling as they are we are never alone as we face them. The Lord and His angels are ever present with us gently guiding and strengthening us. If we seek the Lord's help then following the turmoil of the flood of evil and falsity, a time of peace will follow. The Lord will lead us to a newly refreshed world like the one Noah was able to enter when he left the ark with his family and all the animals with him. AMEN.

Lessons: Genesis 7:1-12, 8:13-22, *Arcana Caelestia* 905

### **Genesis 7:1-12**

<sup>1</sup> Then the LORD said to Noah, "Come into the ark, you and all your household, because I have seen *that you are* righteous before Me in this generation. <sup>2</sup> You shall take with you seven each of every clean animal, a male and his female; two each of animals that *are* unclean, a male and his female; <sup>3</sup> also seven each of birds of the air, male and female, to keep the species alive on the face of all the earth. <sup>4</sup> For after seven more days I will cause it to rain on the earth forty days and forty nights, and I will destroy from the face of the earth all living things that I have made." <sup>5</sup> And Noah did according to all that the LORD commanded him . . . <sup>7</sup> So Noah, with his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives, went into the ark because of the waters of the flood. <sup>8</sup> Of clean animals, of animals that *are* unclean, of birds, and of everything that creeps on the earth, <sup>9</sup> two by two they went into the ark to Noah, male and female, as God had commanded Noah. <sup>10</sup> And it came to pass after seven days that the waters of the flood were on the earth. <sup>11</sup> In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened. <sup>12</sup> And the rain was on the earth forty days and forty nights.

### **Genesis 8:13-22**

<sup>13</sup> And it came to pass in the six hundred and first year, in the first *month*, the first *day* of the month, that the waters were dried up from the earth; and Noah removed the covering of the ark and looked, and indeed the surface of the ground was dry. <sup>14</sup> And in the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dried. <sup>15</sup> Then God spoke to Noah, saying, <sup>16</sup> "Go out of the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons' wives with you. <sup>17</sup> Bring out with you every living thing of all flesh that *is* with you: birds and cattle and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, so that they may abound on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth." <sup>18</sup> So Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him. <sup>19</sup> Every animal, every creeping thing, every bird, *and* whatever creeps on the earth, according to their families, went out of the ark. <sup>20</sup> Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. <sup>21</sup> And the LORD smelled a soothing aroma. Then the LORD said in His heart, "I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the imagination of man's heart *is* evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done. <sup>22</sup> "While the earth remains, Seedtime and harvest, Cold and heat, Winter and summer, And day and night Shall not cease."

### *Arcana Caelestia* 905

"Going out of the ark" means freedom. This is clear from what has been stated already and from the point reached in the train of thought. Noah's time in the ark surrounded by the flood-waters meant that he was in bondage, that is, he was tossed about by evils and falsities, or what amounts to the same, by evil spirits responsible for the conflict that accompanies temptation. From this it follows that "going out of the ark" means freedom. The Lord's presence entails freedom; one follows the other. The more the Lord is present the more free a person becomes, that is, insofar as love of good and truth is in him he acts in freedom. Such is the Lord's influx by way of angels. On the other hand, the influx of hell by way of evil spirits brings with it a force and impulsion to dominate. Their whole intention is to subjugate a person to the point of making him nothing and themselves everything. When they are everything a person is one of them. Yet he is scarcely one of them but in their eyes a veritable nobody. Consequently when the Lord is freeing a person from their yoke and dominion, conflict arises. But once he has been set free, that is, been regenerated, he is led by the Lord through angels so gently that no yoke or dominion exists at all, for he is being led by what is joyful and pleasing, he is being loved, and he is being shown respect. This is what the Lord teaches in Matthew,

My yoke is easy, and My burden is light. Matt. 11:30.

It is quite the reverse with evil spirits. With them, as has been stated, a person is reckoned as nothing, and if they could they would be tormenting him from one moment to the next.