



Daily Verse and Comment

Matthew 12:40

(40) For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

New International Version

Some try to say that the phrase "[in the heart of the earth](#)" in [Matthew 12:40](#) does not mean buried in a grave or tomb. Those who support this theory say that *heart* implies "middle of" or "midst of," and *earth* should really be translated as "country" or "world." Thus, the argument runs, [Jesus](#) is actually saying that He would be three days and nights in Jerusalem, since it was the center of the nations according to [Ezekiel 5:5](#): "This is Jerusalem; I have set her in the midst of the nations and the countries all around her." Supporters do not say how Jesus' being in Jerusalem for this amount of time can act as a sign of His Messiahship.

However, this argument holds no water. First, the Greek is literally translated here, as it is from a Hebrew idiom found in [Jonah 2:2-3](#), the place to which Jesus referred in giving His sign. In that place, "heart of the sea" parallels "into the deep," which Jonah in the previous verse calls "the belly of Sheol," which is the pit where the dead are laid or the grave. So, *heart of the earth* means "underground," just as *heart of the seas* means "underwater." "In the heart of the earth," then, was a Hebrew metaphor signifying being dead and buried.

Second, the similar sign Jesus gave in [John 2:19](#), "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up," is explained plainly in verse 21: "But He was speaking of the temple of His body." Though they use different metaphors, the two signs are the same: Being in the heart of the earth is the result of having the temple of His body destroyed. Ergo, Jesus was not talking of His travel plans in Jerusalem but of His death, burial, and resurrection.

Indeed, the Scripture cannot be broken ([John 10:35](#)), as much as men try to cram their traditional beliefs into it. Would that they read the Bible for what it says rather than what they want it to say!

— Richard T. Ritenbaugh

To learn more, see:
[In the Heart of the Earth](#)

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