

Revealed Out of Heaven



Bird's Eye View of Lesson

Divine revelation is truth that the Lord reveals out of heaven to help us to lead useful and happy lives in this world and to eternity in heaven. Over time the Lord has provided different revelations to give people the truths they needed for their different states of mind and levels of understanding. In the New Church, people look to three revelations as the Word of God: the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Heavenly Doctrine. This latter revelation helps us understand the Old and New Testaments and also gives us new teachings about the Lord, the spiritual world, and how to serve the neighbor in our lives. The form of revelation and how we understand it may change, but it can be comforting to know that Divine truth is unchanging and can provide us with a firm foundation in life.

Readings from the Word

As you read this lesson, reflect on why the Lord provided a new revelation long after His coming into the world.

Where Can I Find Truth?

People who are seeking answers to questions about spiritual ideas might read books, visit churches, talk to others, or explore the Internet, but we are told that

Read the Word and believe in the Lord and you will see the truths that are to be part of your faith and your life (*True Christian Religion* 621).

Other avenues can be helpful but the Word is the best source for spiritual truth. The Lord God Jesus Christ encourages us to seek the truths of revelation, telling us to

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7).

If we want to learn what is true for some useful spiritual purpose, the Lord will give us what we need to accomplish this goal—by means of the Word.

The History of Revelation

From the beginning, the Lord has revealed Himself to people, providing truth that is accommodated to those receiving it. The Lord's Divine truth is unchanging and absolute, but the ability of people to receive, understand, and apply the truth does change. You can see an example of this in your own life when you think about how differently you may have understood something as a child than you do now.



Revealed Out of Heaven—Readings from the Word

There have been five key revelations—all accommodated to the people who would receive them. Most people are unaware of the first revelations. One was given thousands of years ago to people who had such purity of mind and heart that the Lord could provide them with essential truths through dreams, visions, and conversations with angels. When these people began to love themselves more than God, He gave a new kind of revelation. It consisted of symbolic stories with a deep spiritual meaning. Some of these stories are at the beginning of the Old Testament, such as the stories of Creation, Adam and Eve, Noah and the flood, and the Tower of Babel.

The next revelation was rest of the Old Testament, telling us about the history of the Children of Israel, Divine laws, the Lord's covenant with us, and much more. When the Lord came into the world, He gave many new teachings and inspired men to write the New Testament—the revelation telling about His life on earth and His teachings. Both the Old and New Testaments were written with special symbolism that holds deeper, interior truths about the Lord and how we should live our lives. These books are like a mine containing unseen precious metals and gems underground. The next and last revelation is the Heavenly Doctrine which gives people the tools needed for uncovering these hidden, spiritual truths.

Revealing the Heavenly Doctrine

While He was on earth, the Lord told His disciples that He would reveal more truths, saying “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now” (John 16:12). When the time was right for these deeper truths to be put in human words, the Lord appeared to Emanuel Swedenborg and called him to serve as a revelator. He was a well educated Swedish man with a keen interest in science, philosophy, and religion. He was 56 years old when the Lord appeared to him and called him to think more about spiritual things. Swedenborg changed the direction of his life, studying the Word with great care. At this time the Lord opened Swedenborg's spiritual eyes and let him see into heaven, hell, and the world of spirits. Experiencing life in the spiritual world helped him understand the new truths that were being given to him. The Lord also enlightened him as he read the Word, disclosing the inner, spiritual meaning of what Swedenborg was reading in the Old and New Testaments.

From the time of his spiritual calling until his death in 1772, Swedenborg focused his energies on receiving revelation from the Lord, carefully writing it down and having it published so that others could read it. Altogether, Swedenborg published 18 theological works—some in multiple volumes. Other books were published after his death. We sometimes call this revelation the “Heavenly Doctrine” because it was revealed out of heaven (*Heavenly Doctrine* 7) and because this term is used in some of the titles of the published works.

The spiritual sense of the Word has been disclosed by the Lord through me. Not a single iota in this sense can be opened except by the Lord alone. This surpasses all the revelations that have been made since the creation of the world (see *Invitation to the New Church* 44).



The Role of the Heavenly Doctrine

The Lord was referring to the revelation of the Heavenly Doctrine when He said that He would make “all things new” (Revelation 21:5). This revelation helps us understand the previously hidden spiritual meaning of the stories of the Old and New Testaments. As we read and understand, we can be like miners digging beneath the surface of the earth and finding gold, silver, and precious gems. The Heavenly Doctrine helps us gain insight into the spiritual meaning by revealing the symbolic meaning or correspondence of the words written there. This new revelation also provides a clear doctrinal framework or context to help us understand what we read. New teachings about the Lord and how He cares for us, the life after death, what a true marriage looks like, and many others are “like a lamp in the dark” (*Sacred Scripture* 54).

Since the Heavenly Doctrine has revealed so many new truths, we might wonder how people managed before the Lord gave this revelation. The Lord provided that the true meaning of key parts of the Old and New Testaments would shine through the literal sense. An analogy is that the Old and New Testaments are like a man with clothing covering all but his hands and face. These uncovered parts are like statements in the Word where the spiritual truths shine through the literal sense, helping us understand what is essential for our salvation. The parts which are clothed are those which are harder to understand without the Heavenly Doctrine to guide us.

Truth in Our Lives

One of the things that the Lord showed Swedenborg when his spiritual eyes were opened was a crystal temple in the spiritual world. Above the doorway were the Latin words “Nunc Licet” and inside was an open Word, shining with a brilliant light. The Latin inscription means “now it is permitted” and Swedenborg understood that this new revelation would make it possible for people to investigate the mysteries of faith (see *True Christian Religion* 508:5).

With the revelation of the Heavenly Doctrine, the Lord invites us to explore what had been hidden before. The “face and hands” passages of the Old and New Testaments continue to provide people with a firm foundation on which they can build their lives, and the Heavenly Doctrine can help us to look more deeply into the truths the Lord wants to give us. If we regard the Lord as our God and read His Word with a humble spirit and try to be led by His Divine truths, we will have a firm foundation on which to stand throughout our lives.

OPTIONAL READING

In order that the Lord might be continuously present with me He has unfolded to me the spiritual sense of His Word. For His presence in the Word is by means of the spiritual sense and in no other way (see *True Christian Religion* 780).



Focus Points

All Things New

In the book of Revelation, the Lord tells us: “Behold, I will make all things new” (Revelation 21:5). This prophecy refers to the teachings He would reveal through Swedenborg when people were ready for the spiritual light the Heavenly Doctrine would offer. It also refers to the Lord’s Church in heaven and on earth which will be established in people’s hearts, minds and lives by these truths.

Look at the questions below and put a check mark by the teaching that is newly revealed in the Heavenly Doctrine. The other statements express ideas which people developed when they tried to understand the Word without the help of the Heavenly Doctrine. (Note: The answers are not provided in the lesson. If you are unsure of an answer, put a question mark by the one that you think is the best answer.)

1. Who is God? How should we understand the Trinity?
 - a. The Lord God Jesus Christ is the one God of heaven and earth. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three aspects of God.
 - b. There are three persons in one God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is Jesus, the Son of God the Father, who saves us if we believe in Him.
2. Why did Jesus come into the world?
 - a. The Lord came into the world to fight the hells and make His Human Divine.
 - b. He came into the world to take on our sins and redeem us by dying on the cross.
3. What do we need to do to be worthy of life in heaven?
 - a. If we say that we believe in Jesus and acknowledge Him as our Savior, we will be saved and live with Jesus in heaven.
 - b. We need to do what the Lord teaches in His Word and turn away from evil loves and actions that tempt us. When we do this, we are gradually made into angels by the Lord.
 - c. People are predestined to live in heaven or hell. What we do here on earth has no impact on where we will live after we die.
4. What kind of life do people have after death?
 - a. People who die continue to live but we don’t know what kind of life it will be.
 - b. People continue to live as people after death, with spiritual bodies. They choose their spiritual home (in heaven or hell) based on what they love most.
5. How should we understand the book of Revelation?
 - a. It is a prophecy of the Lord’s Second Coming and the founding of the New Church. The New Church is meant by the New Jerusalem.
 - b. It tells about the apocalyptic end of the world.
6. How can we know what is meant by the stories of the Old and New Testaments?
 - a. We need to rely on Biblical scholars and other authorities for the correct meaning.
 - b. Every part of the Old and New Testaments has an inner, spiritual meaning about the Lord and how we should live our lives to become better people. The Heavenly Doctrine helps us see this inner meaning.

Variation for Groups: If you would like to use this as a group activity, mark your answers individually and then discuss the answers together.

Answer Key: 1.a 2.a 3.b 4.b 5.a 6.b

Activity 1

Swedenborg, Servant of the Lord



How did Emanuel Swedenborg serve the Lord and people in this world? Look at the chronology of the life of Swedenborg below. Then consider one or more of these questions.

1. How do you think Swedenborg's experience as a scientist prepared him serve the Lord?
2. Why do you think Swedenborg published nearly all of the Writings anonymously?
3. What if Swedenborg had not agreed to serve the Lord in this way? Do you think the Lord would have found another way to give us the Heavenly Doctrine?
4. The Heavenly Doctrine talks about serving our neighbor and tells us there are different levels of the neighbor that we can serve. How many of these levels of neighbor did Swedenborg serve in one way or another: the Lord, heaven, the church, the human race, his country, his community, his friends/family, and himself?

Brief Chronology of the Life of Emanuel Swedenborg

- 1688 Born January 29 in Sweden. His father, Jesper Swedberg, was a professor of theology at Uppsala University and was later made Bishop of Skara.
- 1709 Swedenborg graduated from Uppsala University.
- 1710-1715 Went to England, Holland, France and Germany to study science; returned to Sweden.
- 1716 Appointed to an unpaid position at a government bureau that oversaw Sweden's mining industry. This bureau was called the "Royal College of Mines."
- 1718 Worked with Swedish inventor Christopher Polhem.
- 1719 Jesper Swedberg's children were ennobled and their name changed to Swedenborg.
- 1721 Publication of first book, *Chemistry*.
- 1722 Publication of a document on Swedish coinage.
- 1723-1724 Recognized as an Assessor of the Royal College of Mines and awarded a salary.
- 1734 Publication of three-volume *Philosophical and Mineralogical Works* which received much praise.
- 1734-1745 Publication of several books exploring where the soul might be found in the human body.
- 1745 Was called by the Lord to become a revelator and started studying the Bible.
- 1747 Resigned from the Royal College of Mines.
- 1749 Publication of the first volume of *Arcana Coelestia*—the first book of the Heavenly Doctrine.
- 1749-1770 Wrote and published many books of the Heavenly Doctrine, including *Heaven and Hell*, *Divine Providence*, *Divine Love and Wisdom*, and *Conjugal Love*.
- 1760 He wrote an essay on national currency policy to be presented to the House of Nobles.
- 1770 Published first volume of *The True Christian Religion*. The second was published 1771.
- 1771 Had a stroke in London in December. Died in London on March 25th, 1772.

Variation for Groups: Discuss the questions after learning more about Swedenborg's life.

For more information on Emanuel Swedenborg, see these Online Biographies

Brief Biography <http://www.newchurch.org/about/swedenborg/biography.html>

Swedenborg: A Biography <http://www.newchurchhistory.org/articles/jkwh1988.php>

Read *The Revelator and Swedenborg's Public Mission* by Jane K. Williams-Hogan.



Genuine Truths in the Word

Portions of the Old and New Testaments provide clear teachings about how we should treat others and the way to heaven. They are like the face and hands of a person, uncovered by clothing.

The doctrine of genuine truth can be drawn in full from the sense of the letter of the Word, because in this sense the Word is like a person clothed whose face and hands are bare. All things that concern person's life, and consequently his salvation, are bare; but the rest are clothed (see *Sacred Scripture* 55).

For Reflection

Consider the following “face and hands” teachings in the Old and New Testaments. Which of these teachings would you find most helpful in showing how you should express your love to the Lord? Which would help you understand how you should treat your neighbor?

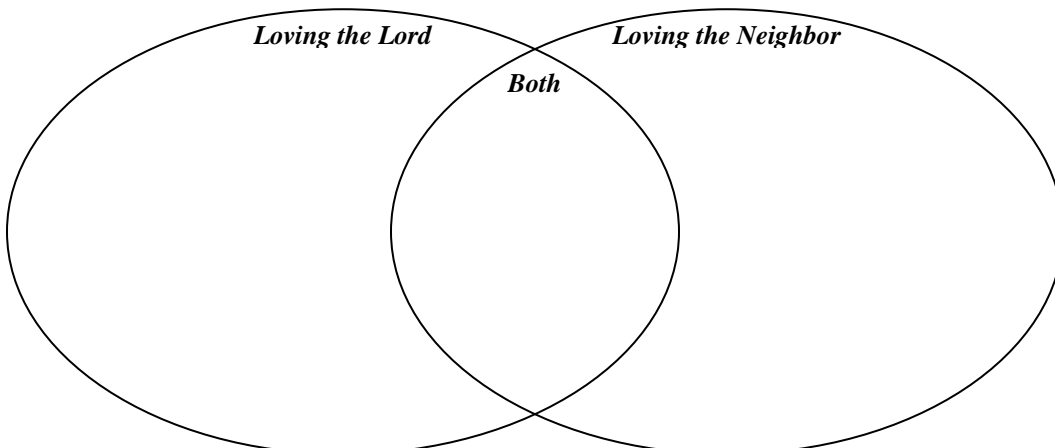
1. “What does the Lord require of you, but to love mercy, do justly, and walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8)
2. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37-39).
3. “Just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise” (Luke 6:31).

Do you think the “face and hands” teachings in the Old and New Testaments would answer all of your questions about life? Would you want to know more?

Use a Venn Diagram to Categorize “Face and Hands” Teachings

Brainstorm 4 additional teachings that you consider “face and hands” passages because they give clear teachings about the Lord or how we should treat other people. Write a few words from each passage (or a reference) in the Venn diagram to show whether it tells how to love the Lord, the neighbor, or both. Tip: Use www.biblegateway.com to help you search for a passage by entering some of the words you remember.

(Variation for Groups: Work in pairs to find additional “Face and Hands” passages, then come together to make a Venn diagram.)



Activity 3

Good Books for the Church



If someone challenged us to name all of the books of the Old and New Testaments, we might find it difficult. And if we were to look in the Bible, we would find many books that are accepted by some faiths and not others. Each faith has its own canon—a list of the books that the scholars of that faith have decided are reliably Holy Scripture. There are significant differences among the canon of Judaism; the canons of the Catholic, Protestant, and Greek Orthodox churches; and the canon of the New Church (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Books_of_the_Bible).

The canon of the New Church is given by the Lord in the Heavenly Doctrine. It tells us that the books of the Word are those which have a continuous, internal sense or spiritual meaning.

Books which do not have it are not the Word (see *Arcana Coelestia* 10325).

There are *portions* of other books, like Job, that have an inner meaning but the book is not part of Word unless the inner meaning is continuous *and* focuses solely on the Lord and His kingdom (see *Arcana Coelestia* 3540e and *White Horse* 16).

The Canon of the New Church

The Old Testament			The New Testament		
Genesis	Judges	Isaiah	Joel	Habakkuk	Matthew
Exodus	1 Samuel	Jeremiah	Amos	Zephaniah	Mark
Deuteronomy	2 Samuel	Lamentations	Obadiah	Haggai,	Luke
Numbers	1 Kings	Ezekiel	Jonah	Zechariah	John
Leviticus	2 Kings	Daniel	Micah	Malachi	Revelation
Joshua	Psalms	Hosea	Nahum		(as given in <i>Arcana Coelestia</i> 10325)

For Reflection

- 1) How might this information influence our attitude toward additional books in the Bible? Should we study or ignore the books that are not part of the canon for the New Church?
- 2) The Heavenly Doctrine sometimes uses quotations from non-canonical books to illustrate spiritual truths. Here are two of the passages it cites.

Ask the beasts, and they will teach you; and the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you.... Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this, in whose hand is the life of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind? (Job 12: 7,8,9)

Love is patient and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself...is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails (1 Corinthians 13:4-8).

Does this influence our perspective on the usefulness of the non-canonical parts of the Bible?

- 3) Speaking of the non-canonical books in the New Testament, Swedenborg told a friend that even though writings of the Apostles and Paul are not written in the style of the Word—with spiritual symbolism—they are “good books for the Church, maintaining the doctrine of charity and its faith as strongly as did the Lord Himself in the Gospels and in the Revelation” (Letter to Gabriel Beyer, April 15th 1766). Does this change your thinking in any way?

Taking It Home



Here are some reflections that may help you bring this lesson into your life.

Opening the Word for Us

- ◆ What does the symbol of the Open Word mean to you? [\[insert open Word symbol here\]](#)
Do you think it is a good symbol for the New Church?
- ◆ The magnificent crystal temple that Swedenborg saw with the words “Nunc Licet” above the doorway pictures a church in which a person can ask questions and find the answers in the Word. The revelation of the Heavenly Doctrine helps people explore spiritual truths that were hidden before. How is this vision an invitation to all people?
- ◆ Where do we find a door, doorway, or gate mentioned elsewhere in the Word?

Swedenborg’s Rules of Life

Here are four “rules” or goals for life that are attributed to Emanuel Swedenborg. Try putting them into your own words, then choose one to focus on actively. Reflect on why you chose this one and think about how you are going to apply it. (Optional: Write about this in your journal.)

- Diligently to read and meditate on the Word of God.
- To be content under the dispensations of God’s providence.
- To observe propriety of behavior and keep the conscience clean.
- To obey what is ordered, to attend faithfully to one’s office and other duties and in addition to make one’s self useful to society in general.

From the Word

Display these quotations where you will see them each day....

“I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me” (Revelation 3:20).

In the New Church it is permitted to enter with the understanding and explore all her secrets in the Word (*True Christian Religion* 508:5).

A person who approaches the Lord, acknowledges Him, and believes in Him, opens the door to the Lord that he may enter in (see *Apocalypse Explained* 208:3).

“Behold, I make all things new”

Excerpts from a sermon by the Rev. Walter E. Orthwein

“And He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new” (Revelation 21:5).

During his exile on the isle of Patmos, the Apostle John received strange and wonderful visions of things to come. He saw cataclysmic upheavals and then a new reign of peace—a new golden age—symbolized by a beautiful city descending from God out of heaven: the New Jerusalem, adorned as a bride for her husband.

This prophetic book, the Book of Revelation or Apocalypse, has never been understood in the Christian Church for no prophecy is every really understood until its fulfillment. We can see this in regard to the Lord’s first coming. He was unrecognized because the ancient prophecies concerning the Messiah had been misunderstood as meaning an *earthly* king, who would deliver the nation Israel from her enemies. But in truth the Lord came as a *spiritual* king, who would conquer the hells and redeem all humanity from spiritual slavery.

It is our belief that the prophecies contained in the Book of Revelation have been and are being fulfilled today, and that they refer, not to the end of the world, but to the end of the first Christian era, and the establishment of a new Christian age on earth—a new church.

Jerusalem, where the temple—the center of worship and instruction in the Scriptures—was, stands for the Lord’s church on earth. And the New Jerusalem, symbolically portrayed in John’s vision, stands for a new church—not a new church *organization*, primarily, but a new *dispensation of Divine truth* from heaven. When this is received, it creates a new state of spiritual love and wisdom within the hearts and minds of people on earth. This is where the church essentially exists—within people who know and love the Lord.

He that sat upon the throne and said, “Behold, I make all things new” is no other than our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. His throne is heaven, where He is acknowledged as king, and more than king, the source of life itself. And from His kingdom of heaven the Lord is continually re-creating or making new the life of religion in each person who believes in Him as the only God of heaven and earth. This is what the Lord makes new—all things of religion.

In order to come into the kingdom of heaven, the Lord said, “you must be born again,” that is, made entirely new—seeing God where you never saw Him before, aware of His presence in new ways, looking upon spiritual things with the freshness and wonder of a child, rediscovering the spiritual dimension of life—this is the newness the Lord makes. And how does the Lord bring a person into this state of life? How does He bring into existence a new church, in which He appears with new clarity and power to save? He

does it by means of a new revelation of Divine truth, coming down from heaven to make all things new, to raise up a new, more perfect Christianity.

The Lord has always revealed Himself to people, as far as He possibly could, according to their state of understanding. He spoke through the prophets of the Old Testament. Then He was born on earth Himself as the Word made flesh, or Divine truth in human form. After His resurrection, He appeared to His disciples and later to John on the isle of Patmos, foretelling wondrous things to come.

But revelation did not end there. The Word (Bible) looks forward to, and specifically refers to, future revelation. For instance, when He was on earth the Lord told His disciples, “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth...” (John 16:12-13).

We believe that this promise of a new revelation has been fulfilled in the teachings given through Emanuel Swedenborg, who, like the prophets of old, served as a human instrument whereby the Lord could reveal new truths for all people. The solemn testimony of this well-known and respected scientist, philosopher, and statesman, was that the Lord appeared to him, opened his spiritual eyes, and revealed to him all the teachings contained in the theological writings which he then published; and furthermore, that not one word of those teachings came from himself or any other merely human source, but from the Lord alone.

These Writings, or Heavenly Doctrines, do not supplant or replace the Word (Bible), any more than the New Testament supplanted the Old; rather, they infill the Sacred Scriptures by disclosing the hidden meaning contained within them. This internal sense, or spiritual sense, is like the soul or spirit within the letter of the Word. Without it, our understanding of the Scriptures is as limited as that of Nicodemus, who, when the Lord said to him, “you must be born again,” asked: How can I, a grown man, return to my mother’s womb? (see John 3). He look the Lord’s words at their literal face value and so missed the whole meaning, which was spiritual.

The words from the New Testament—“without a parable He [Jesus] did not speak to them” (Mark 4:34)—actually apply to the whole of the Scriptures. The creation story, the story of the flood, the histories of the patriarchs, the wars and laws of Israel, the actions of the prophets—all of these have a spiritual meaning, hidden within the literal sense. There is a continuous spiritual meaning running throughout the whole of the Lord’s Word, and it is because of this spiritual sense that the Word is holy.

The revelation of the internal sense of the Word is what makes all things of religion new. It gives a new vision of the Lord Jesus Christ as the one God of heaven and earth. This new vision is what is meant by the second coming of the Lord. It is not a second physical coming, or a coming in person, but is a spiritual coming. The Lord said that He would come again as the Spirit of truth, or as new truth about spiritual things, new truth about

Himself—the essence or soul of all truth. This is what the revelation of the spiritual sense of the Word discloses.

No one is asked to accept any of this on faith. It is a cardinal principle of the new revelation that religious truths must be freely accepted, not supported by emotional persuasion, external human authority, or “blind faith.” What people do not see for themselves to be true and freely choose to follow is not really their own. Investigate the Heavenly Doctrines for yourself, and see if they do not provide deep and satisfying answers to the important questions of life, in full agreement with the Scriptures and also with what common perception tells you must be reasonable and true. You will find—contrary to what is widely believed—that spiritual things can be understood. They can be and should be. The Lord wants us to understand His purposes in our creation and thus be able to freely cooperate with them.

The books which we call “the Writings” or the Heavenly Doctrine of the New Jerusalem, have new ideas about the nature of God; about the government of the Lord’s Divine Providence; about life after death; about true charity or love of the neighbor. There is a new, spiritual and heavenly concept of marriage, which shows marriage to be eternal. And you will find many other things, all new and all contributing to a renewal of spiritual life and Christianity in the world.