

THE LADDER THAT JOINS US TO HEAVEN

Rev. Norbert H. Rogers

Behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it (Genesis 28:12).

Most of you know the story of Jacob's dream, in which he saw a ladder stretching up to heaven, with angels going up and down it, and how from above the ladder the Lord spoke to him. If you think about it, you can see that this ladder joined together the Lord, the angels and Jacob. Now, in the same way, the Word joins together the Lord, and the angels, and people. This is one of the very important uses of the Word. For without this connection and joining together there would be no way for us to receive any life from the Lord, nor anything of intelligence and wisdom. Nor would we be able to feel anything of the happy and blessed sphere of the heavens, nor could we be of any use to the angels.

The Word makes known the holy truths which tell us about the Lord and His great power, wisdom, and love. They also tell us about heaven and about what we are to believe and do in order to go to heaven when we die. The Lord speaks these holy truths to us from above the heavens, so that each of them passes through the heavens in order before reaching us—before we hear it.

There are many different heavens, which are arranged one beneath another like rungs on a ladder. The heaven where the best and wisest angels are is above all the other heavens. The heaven where the next best and wisest angels are is just below the highest heaven. Below that there is another heaven where still less wise angels are. Below all these heavens is the world of spirits. And below that, at the bottom of the ladder, is the earth where we live.

Truth is like light which helps you to see things—for truth helps you to see with the eyes of your mind, to understand things. And the light of heaven is nothing but truths from the Lord, truths which go forth from Him like rays of light from a sun. The truths which go forth from the Lord and are the light of heaven, are the same truths as those in the Word.

When they first go forth from the Lord, truths are too bright even for the angels, and so they must be covered over to protect the eyes of the angels from their radiance which is the glory of the Lord. It is the same as the light of the natural sun. If we look directly into the sun, we are blinded by its light, and our eyes may be seriously harmed. For this reason the Lord has placed the sun at a great distance from the earth, and has filled the air with fine particles of moisture and dust to cover over and soften the bright light of the sun.

So it is with the light of His truth. The Lord covers each truth over to soften and accommodate it for the use of angels and people. When a truth from the Lord comes to the highest heaven, things from that heaven cover it so that the angels can use it. When it goes on down to the next heaven, things from that heaven are added to accommodate it to the use of the angels there. And so on

down through all the heavens, the world of spirits, and the earth. Something is taken from each to cover over the truth.

So it is that each truth of the Word is like some precious jewel, which is first wrapped in soft wool. Then it is wrapped in fine silk, then in strong cloth, and then in paper. Finally, it is put in a sturdy box which is wrapped in strong brown paper, and securely tied with string.

When we hold that package, it looks as if we had an ordinary parcel, yet inside it, wrapped in many coverings, is that precious jewel. Also, when we hold the parcel, we are holding not only the box and brown paper but also all the coverings within it, and even the jewel itself. Even if we don't know about the jewel inside, it is still there, and we have it with us when we hold that parcel.

This is also true with every knowledge which we learn from the natural sense of the Word, which is the outermost covering of truth. Inside that knowledge there are other coverings or senses of the truth, one within the other. And inmost, within all the coverings or senses, is the Divine Truth itself. Though we may not see these coverings or senses, and may not even know that they exist, they are still in every knowledge we learn from the Word.

But the good spirits and angels know about these coverings or senses. And when we read the stories of the Word and understand the natural sense of them, the spirits and angels perceive the senses within. And because they find wisdom and delight from the things they perceive in the interior senses, they draw near to people who read the Word. And because, inmost, the very truth of the Lord is in each thing of the Word, whenever we read the Word, we are joined together with the Lord and with the angels of all the heavens.

In the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church we are taught that unless there was a connection between the heavens and the earth, between angels and people, no one could have even natural life, much less spiritual life, wisdom and happiness. This is one reason why the Lord gave His Word. And this is the meaning of Jacob's dream. From it we learn that there can be such a ladder in every person—a ladder by which the Lord joins us to Himself.