

JOHN'S VISION

Revelation 1

With all the older classes the historical connection with the Gospels should be made. In A.D. 70, some forty years after the resurrections and ascension of the Lord, Jerusalem and the temple were finally destroyed by the Romans under Titus, and the Christians were dispersed and driven into Asia Minor and beyond. So the early churches developed in Asia Minor. Be sure the children make the distinction between John the Baptist and the Apostle John. Also call their attention to the other name for the book of Revelation—the Apocalypse, the Greek word meaning unveiling or revelation—as they will hear it used frequently.

Doctrinal Points

*The risen and glorified Lord is the one God of heaven and earth.
The vision in chapter 1 gives us a complete picture of the Lord to hold in our minds when we pray to Him.
The book of Revelation is the “charter” of the New Church.*

Notes for Parents

The book of Revelation has always been a challenge to the Christian Church. Even people who scoff at everything supernatural cannot quite deny its power. For it does not read like something anyone would or could “make up.”

It is recognized as prophecy, and many attempts have been made to connect one or another war or disaster or other great historical event with some one of its striking pictures. In the first verse of the book John tells us that it speaks of the things “which must shortly come to pass,” and in verse 19 of the first chapter he is told: “Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter.”

John was “in the spirit.” His spiritual eyes were opened to see the hearts and minds of the people of the Christian Church as they

would appear in the searching light of divine love and wisdom. What he saw was like a great moving picture portraying in marvelous symbols the process of judgment.

And first he saw the Lord, the same master he had followed in the world and had seen transfigured once long before. But now the glory is so great that John falls at His feet as dead. And now the Lord can tell him plainly, “I am the first and the last.” Jesus Christ risen and glorified is God Almighty. There is no other God.

We see many paintings of Christ, but we know that they are all merely the artists’ ideas of what He may have looked like. No likeness painted when He was on earth or by one who saw Him then has come down to us. Why? Because we are not intended to dwell on the thought of Him as one who walked the roads of Palestine centuries ago. We are to think of our living, present Lord. The Lord’s last words to His disciples in the Gospel of Matthew were: “Lo, I am with you always, even to the close of the age.”

And we can see Him with our minds. People sometimes ask, “How ought I to think of God when I pray to Him?” The Lord Himself gives us the answer in this first chapter of Revelation. We may think at first that it is a strange picture which is given us, but it is just what we should expect: one “like unto the Son of man,” one whom we can imagine walking among us doing and saying the things we find in the Gospels, and yet glorified, surrounded by light, with stars in His hand and a sharp, two-edged sword of absolute divine truth coming from His mouth. The sword destroys what is evil and false, but it defends and protects all that is pure and good.

Primary

Speak of John, the apostle whom the Lord loved best, and tell the children how, when John was a very old man and had been driven away from his church and sent to a lonely island, the Lord Jesus whom he loved appeared to him one Sunday in a beautiful vision. The children should distinguish between the two Johns and be told the relation in time of the book of Revelation to the Gospel story which we have been studying. Make the connection between

John's vision of the Lord and the story of the transfiguration. Have them notice how everything in this vision is a form of brightness and tell them that light is a picture of the Lord's truth which shows us the way in our lives. Read them verses 12 through 16 and suggest that this forms a beautiful thought about the Lord to keep in their minds when they pray.

Not long ago we had a story about how the Lord took His three closest disciples up on a high mountain and let them see a wonderful vision. Do you remember about it? One of those three disciples was John—not John the Baptist, but the John through whom the Lord wrote the Gospel of John.

Do you remember how the Lord looked to the three disciples at the transfiguration?

What three disciples saw Him transfigured?

Many years later the same John had a similar vision.

John was probably the youngest of the twelve apostles, and he lived on for a great many years after the Lord's death and resurrection. He was faithful to the Lord and went about telling people the good news about Him. Many people believed what he told them and were baptized, and Christian churches were started in several places. When John was an old man, he had charge of seven of these churches in Asia Minor, which was north of the Holy Land.

The rulers at the time of our story, like the scribes and Pharisees, were trying to destroy the Christian faith.

John was now an old man, and had been banished by his enemies to the island of Patmos.

On what day of the week did John have the vision recorded in the book of Revelation?

John was "in the spirit."

This means that his spiritual eyes and ears were opened.

What did he hear first?

Then whom did he see?

Can you describe how the Lord looked?

What did John see around the Lord?

What did the Lord have in His right hand?

What did He say about Himself?

What did He tell John the stars and the lampstands meant?

For whom did He give John messages?

He also told John to write down all he saw and heard.

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What he wrote this time is the last book of our Bible, which is called *Revelation*. This means a revealing of hidden things. It is often also called the Apocalypse, which is the Greek word meaning the same thing.

Junior

Tell this class more about how the apostles, after the Lord left them, obeyed His command and went out into the world to found the Christian Church. Tell them something about the persecution of the early Christians and how much John needed the encouragement of this vision. Remind them of the correspondence of light, and tell them that every detail of the vision has a beautiful correspondence which they will study when they are a little older. Impress upon them also that this vision is for us, too, and that we should think of the Lord in this way.

What three disciples had seen the Lord transfigured?

Many years later John had another wonderful vision of the Lord. It was nearly sixty years after the Lord's crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. John was the only one of the twelve apostles still living, and he was a very old man. Jerusalem and the temple had been destroyed by the Romans some years before and the Christians had been scattered through Asia Minor and even farther away. The first Christian churches had been organized in Asia Minor. John was the leader of the church at Ephesus, and probably had supervision over the other churches in that area.

But now the Christians were being persecuted, and John had been banished to the little island of Patmos out in the Aegean Sea twenty-four miles west of the coast of Asia Minor. One Bible dictionary tells us that the island is divided into two parts and says: "On the hill to the south, crowning a commanding height is the celebrated monastery which bears the name of 'John the Divine.' Halfway up the ascent is the cave or grotto where tradition says that St. John received the Revelation."

On what day of the week was the vision given to John?

John was "in the spirit." That is, his spiritual eyes and ears were

opened to see and hear things in the spiritual world. He was prepared for the vision by hearing a great voice “as of a trumpet,” which seemed to come from behind him so that he had to turn toward the voice. We have to turn toward the Lord with our minds before He can instruct us.

What was the first thing the voice said to John?

Alpha and omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. We often see these letters on chancel furniture in churches. They look like this:

A Ω

The vision showed John immediately that the person he had known as Jesus Christ was really God Himself. Swedenborg tells us that no one can enter the heavens who does not recognize Jesus Christ as the only God of heaven and earth, but that good people who have not learned this before they die can be instructed in the other world. It is much better for us, of course, to know it now, because so we can base our lives on the real truth about God.

What was John told to do with the vision?

What did he see around the Lord?

How was the Lord dressed?

What was His voice like?

What did He hold in His right hand?

What went out of His mouth?

What did the seven lampstands picture?

What did the seven stars picture?

Every true church is like a lampstand upholding the truth which gives light to the world. You remember the word *angel* means “messenger.” John was given messages for the seven churches in Asia Minor. He had already been the Lord’s messenger in bringing to the people there the good news—or Gospel—of the Lord’s coming as their savior. Each one of us can be a messenger of the Lord, if we try to learn all we can from Him and live as He wants us to live. If we are His messengers here, we shall be angels when we go into the other world.

Intermediate

The general correspondence of the vision, particularly as to the recurrence of light in all its details, should be stressed. The young people should be urged to read this chapter often and to learn to think about the Lord as He is pictured in it. Call their attention to the fact that, although John recognized Him as the same person who had been his master and his friend in the world, he now saw Him as a glorious being, the alpha and omega, God reigning in heaven.

The apostle John was called “the beloved disciple.” To him was given to write not only the Gospel of John but also three letters and the book of Revelation. He outlived all the others. Forty days after the resurrection the disciples saw the Lord ascend into heaven. This is told in Luke 24:50-53. After the ascension the apostles went out, as the Lord had commanded them, to preach the Gospel to all the world. Their dispersion was hastened by the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple at the hands of the Romans in A.D. 70. Asia Minor then became their principal field of activity, and there groups of Christians were formed into churches. John seems to have been leader of the church at Ephesus, and in his old age, as the only survivor of the twelve, was doubtless looked upon as the head of the Christian Church. In one of the persecutions of the Christians he was banished to the island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea, where he had the vision recorded in the book of Revelation. This book is also called the *Apocalypse*, the Greek word for “revelation.”

The Old Testament is composed of the Law and the Prophets. So is the New Testament, the Gospels constituting the Law and the book of Revelation the Prophets. The other books of the New Testament, like the books of the Old which were included as Sacred Writings, are not part of the Word (not having an inner sense), but are valuable and interesting as history.

John was “in the spirit.” His spiritual sight was opened to see “the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter.” The vision was like a mighty symbolic moving picture enacted before his eyes. Swedenborg tells us that the substance of the spiritual world is not inert like material substance, but is immediately

responsive to spiritual forces, so that everything there takes on at once an outward form corresponding to the affections and thoughts of the angels or spirits or devils.

John's vision began with an appearance of the Lord to him. He recognized the master he had known in the world; yet the accompaniments were those of deity, and John fell at His feet as dead. And the words spoken left no doubt that this was the creator *Himself* as well as the master whom John had known. In the New Church we accept this as our vision of the Lord. We do not look beyond Jesus to some more powerful and more terrible God. The Lord says to us, as to John, "Fear not; I am the first and the last."

John's vision gives us a picture to hold in our minds when we think about the Lord and when we pray to Him. The predominant feature of the picture is brightness—the golden lampstands, the stars, the eyes as a flame of fire, the feet like fine brass, and the countenance "as the sun shineth in his strength." We get the impression of a human form, but so bright that we can scarcely bear to look at it and cannot do more than glimpse its details. The correspondence throughout is to divine truth, except that the golden girdle or belt pictures divine love which binds all together, and the golden lampstands the love of divine truth which makes people of our age into a church. The two-edged sword is a picture of divine truth defending good and destroying evil.

The succeeding visions in the book of Revelation are concerned first with the condition of the church in the world and in men's minds and hearts—conditions which beset it and which eventually destroyed it in the final judgment. Their second concern is the way in which the Lord would build up a new church. The book of Revelation has been called the "charter of the New Church." But we must remember that everything that is said in the Word about the church in general has an application to our own individual lives also, and that each of us has within himself the evils which are pictured, and must fight them and try to grow into a true church.

Basic Correspondences

- golden candlesticks or lampstands = divine truth loved
a two-edged sword = truth defending good and
destroying evil
a golden girdle or belt = the divine love
-

Senior

The special lesson for the Seniors is the importance of the book of Revelation for the New Church, and of this opening vision of the Lord for our concept of Him. Use the details of the vision, in their spiritual sense, to clarify this concept and to stimulate thought about the Lord.

The book of Revelation has been called “the charter of the New Church.” It is the strictly prophetic part of the New Testament and treats in all its details of the final dispensation of the Lord’s truth which accomplishes the Last Judgment and establishes the Lord’s true church, symbolized by the holy city New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven.

The book of Revelation could not be understood in the light given to the first Christian Church era. All sorts of strange and conflicting interpretations of it were given. Only the opening of the Word in the Second Coming of the Lord has made it intelligible. In the light of the doctrine of correspondence it becomes a marvelous study.

It begins with John’s vision of the Lord, and the picture given in our lesson for today is as near as we can come to a true picture of the Lord which we may hold before our minds when we worship. He is, as John saw Him to be, in the human form, the Christ of the Gospels, and yet so resplendent in glory that there can be no lingering thought of Him as a mere historic name, a finite man like ourselves. We see Him as God, the alpha and omega, the I AM.

The foundation of every church is its doctrine of the Lord. All its other doctrines grow out of this and the quality of life depends upon it. In the New Church *the Lord* means to us Jesus Christ always. Swedenborg tells us that “throughout all heaven no other

than the Lord alone is acknowledged as the God of heaven" (HH 2). The Old Testament prophesied that Jehovah Himself would come into the world, and the Lord, when He was in the world, said: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." Now He declared it to John in the words, "I am the first and the last." While the Lord was in the world it was necessary, in order that He might meet and overcome temptations, for Him much of the time to feel Himself to be a man like other men, and thus to look to the Divine as above Him, as His Father rather than as His own indwelling soul, for had He always felt Himself to be God, temptation could not have touched Him. The language of the trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—was necessitated by this fact. It has confused the men of the church, although even the letter of the Gospel should have shown them that the separation was only an apparent and temporary one, and that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are but three aspects of one and the same person. Every New Churchman should think this problem through for himself and be sure he understands it, for only in this way can he present his belief to others clearly.

Jesus Christ is God in the flesh, Jehovah come into the world to show us how this life of ours should and can be lived, and to disclose Himself to us as our friend and companion as well as our Father and our God. It is as if a king, finding himself misrepresented by his ministers and misjudged by his people, should put on the clothes of a workman and live for a time incognito among his subjects so that they might really come to know and understand him. This is not by any means all the purpose and work of the incarnation, but it is perhaps its simplest aspect. We can really know God only if we know Him as Jesus Christ. John's vision assures us that His return to the Father meant simply returning to His own eternal glory by putting off the finite clothing which had been necessary to His work on earth. In the vision John saw Him reigning in the heavens, but recognized Him as the master and friend whom he had known on earth.

The correspondence of the details of the vision as recorded in

the Word shows us the various aspects of divine love and wisdom. We can go far, with the help of the writings, in studying each detail. Yet we need frequently to imagine for ourselves the vision as a whole, to think of ourselves as falling at the Lord's feet with John, and hearing the Lord's voice "as the sound of many waters" saying to us: "Fear not; I am the first and the last." We need to realize that we are of His church, with a golden lampstand to uphold which draws its light from one of the stars in His right hand. His messages to the seven churches are spoken to us. The sealed book of which we read in the fifth chapter is the very Word which He has given us, and the judgment which, in the rest of the book of Revelation, follows the opening of the seals goes on in us as we accept or reject its inner truths. It is for us to say whether we shall be cast into the lake of fire or lifted up to enter the gates of the Holy City.

This vision is not just something which one man saw centuries ago. It is something eternally real and present, to be seen by our spiritual eyes today so that we may examine ourselves in its light and take our stand on the side of the angels in the affairs of our everyday life. The great voice "as of a trumpet" is calling us to turn and listen.

Adult

The outline of the general content of the book of Revelation will be helpful to the Adults. It is hard to see the outline for oneself amid the multiplicity of details. The opening vision should be discussed as teaching the primary doctrine on which the New Church is founded.

Under divine providence the apostle John was permitted to live out a long life, and in his old age the wonderful vision recorded in the book of Revelation was given through him to the world. It was given on the island of Patmos, to which John had been exiled—possibly during the persecution of the Christians under Emperor Domitian in A.D. 95, John being about ninety years old at that time. We are told plainly in the first chapter that it is a vision seen

in the spiritual world—"I was in the spirit on the Lord's day"—and that it is a vision of the state of the church and of what was to come in the future. Swedenborg says (AE 5) that it treats of the state of the church "in the last times" just before the Last Judgment rather than of the history of the church from its beginning.

Although theologians and others throughout the history of the Christian Church have attempted to interpret and to explain and to apply these visions, the law of correspondence revealed through Swedenborg is the only key to a consistent interpretation. Reverent readers of the Word have always felt their power, and young children love to hear them read, but no one before the Second Coming was able to make any intelligent use of them. We should clearly recognize and be thankful for the fact that "now it is permitted to enter intellectually into the mysteries of faith." We may think of these visions of John, as of those of the Old Testament prophets, as dramas, vast symbolic living pictures enacted in the spiritual world for the instruction and enlightenment of angels and men. The particular prophet is a chosen witness by means of whom the essential features of the drama may be recorded and transmitted to men on earth and preserved in the ultimates of earthly language. The literal details of these visions are powerful and striking, and when we attempt to visualize them for ourselves, they deeply affect the mind. But their ultimate value is in their symbolic meaning. And the Lord in these latter days has made it possible for us to know surely that meaning.

The book of Revelation is a picture of the spiritual forces which were at work even from the beginning of the Christian Church, of the conflict between good and evil, truth and falsity, angels and devils, of the Lord's permission of the evil until its consequences should be plainly seen—as the tares in the parable were allowed to grow along with the wheat until the harvest—and of the final triumph of good and truth and the descent of the holy city New Jerusalem upon the earth. After the opening vision we have the messages to the seven churches in Asia Minor, of which John was doubtless the recognized head. Under the names of these churches

all types of acceptance and rejection of the Lord's truth are described, the specific rewards of each type of acceptance shown, and the specific dangers of each type of rejection. Then under the symbols of the throne, the sealed book, and the Lamb, we are shown how the Lord's providence directs the spiritual course of the world through the Word, at first closed and then gradually opened. Then we see how the opening of the Word searches the hearts and minds of men, revealing deeper and deeper evils, how the forces of falsity and evil—under the representation of the dragon and the beast—war against the Lord and the angels for the possession of men's souls, how they are permitted to appear to triumph, but how the good, who in the Lord's strength fight against and overcome their temptations, are preserved, and the New Church, which is born in the midst of the conflict, is saved, and the Lord's kingdom finally prevails throughout the earth.

The book of Revelation has been called “the charter of the New Church” because it prophesies its establishment. Coming to it, as we do, at the close of our study of the whole course of the Word, we should be able to recognize it as the crown of the Word, the culmination of human history, the final act in the great drama of man's spiritual development both as a race and as an individual. Very little can be done with it in the time allotted to it in our course. We can study it for ourselves with the help of Swedenborg's *Apocalypse Revealed* and *Apocalypse Explained* and draw more and more illumination and inspiration from it.

This first chapter gives us the wonderful picture of the Lord Jesus Christ reigning. John recognizes Him as the “Son of man,” the master he knew in the world, and the Lord declares Himself to be “he that liveth and was dead,” but also says plainly, “I am the first and the last.” Thus the book opens with the identification of the Lord Jesus Christ as the eternal God of heaven and earth.

Many before John had had visions of the Lord beginning, we recall, with Moses and the seventy elders (Exodus 24:9-10). All these visions are characterized by the appearance of brightness or fire and usually by the specific mention of the human form of the

Lord (Ezekiel 1:26-28). The fire and the brightness are symbols of divine love and wisdom. The Lord has always made it clear that we are to think of Him as a divine man. Swedenborg says He is actually the only man, that He is “Very Man” [*ipse homo*]. But it was not until after the Lord’s life on earth that, because He had ultimated His divine human, a vision could be granted whose details could be recorded more specifically. This is the picture of the Lord which He wishes us to hold in our minds. We should study and think about this picture instead of any of the imaginary and strictly finite representations which the artists of various periods have conceived. People often say, “How shall I think of the Lord? What picture of Him shall I have in my mind when I pray to Him?” John’s vision is the Lord’s answer to this question. If we have any less definite picture, He will not seem to us a real person; if we have any more ordinary picture we shall have no feeling of His glory and power.

The very fact that there are some details in the picture which we find it difficult to imagine and which would be impossible to put on canvas helps to lift our thought of the Lord above His finite humanity to the glorified divine humanity. To understand the meaning of the vision each of us must study it for himself, recalling correspondences already familiar: garments symbolize truth, gold love, the head the directing intelligence which extends to the hairs, its outmost applications; white signifies purity, the eyes understanding, fire love, the feet the outward conduct, brass or bronze natural good, the voice like the sound of many waters “the Divine truth in ultimates” or divine truth as it comes to us, the stars knowledges of spiritual things, the two-edged sword divine truth attacking evil and falsity and defending goodness, the countenance the expression of the interior character, the sun divine love and wisdom, the lampstands the church on earth, whose office it is to receive and transmit divine truth to mankind. Swedenborg in both the *Apocalypse Explained* and the *Apocalypse Revealed* gives pages to the interpretation of these few verses. Yet the vision itself may be read in a minute and memorized in a short time, and one will then have in his mind a true concept of the Lord, given by the

Lord Himself, which will direct and enlighten all His thought about the Lord and fill his everyday life with meaning and purpose.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Apocalypse Explained (Introduction to chapter 1): “Many have expounded this prophetic book called the Apocalypse, but none of them understood the internal or spiritual sense of the Word. They have therefore applied the particular things in the book to the successive states of the church, which they have learned from histories; many things, moreover, they have applied to civil affairs. For this reason these expositions are for the most part conjectures, which can never appear in such light that they can be affirmed as truths. As soon, therefore, as they are read, they are put aside as speculations. The expositions of the Apocalypse now extant are of this character, because, as has been said, their authors had no knowledge of the internal or spiritual sense of the Word.”

Apocalypse Revealed (preliminary Contents of chapter 1): “Ver. 12. ‘And I turned to see the voice which was speaking with me,’ signifies the inversion of the state of those who are in the good of life as to the perception of truth in the Word, when they turn themselves to the Lord. ‘And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands,’ signifies the New Church which will be in enlightenment from the Lord out of the Word. Ver. 13. ‘And in the midst of the seven lampstands One like unto the Son of Man,’ signifies the Lord as to the Word, from whom is that church. ‘Clothed with a garment down to the foot,’ signifies the proceeding Divine, which is the Divine truth. ‘And girded at the paps with a golden girdle,’ signifies the Divine love of the Divine wisdom in firsts and in ultimates. ‘And His eyes as a flame of fire,’ signifies the Divine love. Ver. 15. ‘And his feet like unto fine brass, as if glowing in a furnace,’ signifies the Divine good natural. ‘And his voice as the voice of many waters,’ signifies the Divine truth natural. Ver. 16. ‘And having in His right hand seven stars,’ signifies all the knowledges of good and truth in the Word from Him. ‘And out of His mouth sharp two-edged sword going forth,’ signifies the dispersion of falsities by the Lord through the Word and through doctrine therefrom. ‘And his face was as the sun shining in power,’ signifies the Divine love and the Divine wisdom, which are Himself, and proceed from Him.”

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

J. Of what two Johns do we read in the Gospels? *John the Baptist, apostle John*

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- J. Through which one was the Gospel of John written? *the apostle*
- J. What happened to Jerusalem after the Lord's death? *it was destroyed*
- J. Where were the first Christian churches started? *Asia Minor*
- J. What other books in the Bible were written through John? *three letters, Revelation*
- J. Where was John when the Revelation was given him? *Isle of Patmos*
- P. What did John hear first? *great voice like a trumpet*
- P. What did he first see when he turned? *seven gold lampstands*
- P. Who stood in the midst of the seven golden lampstands? *the risen Lord*
- P. How did the Lord appear? *dressed in long robe, . . .*
- P. What did He have in His right hand? *seven stars*
- J. What did the Lord say about Himself? *I am alpha and omega*
- J. What did He say the seven lampstands and the seven stars were? *churches/angels*
- J. What did He tell John to do? *write down the vision*
- I. Why are there so many mentions of light in this vision? *to show power of divine truth*
- I. What does the golden girdle or belt represent? *divine love binding all together*
- S. What does this vision teach us? *how we should "picture," i.e., think of, the Lord*