

THE SEALED BOOK

Revelation 5

As the vision in this chapter goes right on from that of our last lesson, simple questions on the review are the best possible introduction.

Doctrinal Points

The New Church is founded upon the opened Word.

The Lord opened the seals of the book by revealing to Swedenborg the inner meanings of the Word.

Notes for Parents

The book seen in vision in the Lord's hand is the book we have been studying all year, the Word of God, and if the Lord had not fulfilled this vision, we could not have had the teaching we have had this year. There would be no new understanding of the Word in the world, and no New Church.

For the New Church is founded on the opened Word. Six hundred years before the time of John's vision the Lord had said to the prophet Daniel: "But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased." And when the Lord was in the world, He said to His disciples: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." Many centuries had to pass after John's time before men's knowledge had increased to the point where the Lord could finally open the sealed book and show us the things which are hidden within it. But He did do this nearly two hundred years ago.

In John's prophetic vision the seven seals were opened one after another, and strange and dreadful things happened with the opening of each seal. You know how it is with a truth from the Word, such a truth, for example, as "Thou shalt not steal." You learned

it when you were a little child and at first it was just words. But you were taught that you must not take toys or candy or money that belongs to someone else, and that you have to make yourself remember and obey. Then someday you realized that saying bad things about someone else is stealing, too—stealing his reputation—and you have had to learn to control your temptation to idle gossip. Then you were perhaps tempted to take credit for some good work which someone else had actually done, and it came home to you that that is stealing, too. Finally it may have been pointed out to you that since the Lord alone is good and wise and everything comes to us from Him, taking credit to ourselves for any goodness or knowledge we may seem to have is really stealing from the Lord. And that gives us the hardest struggle of all. So one by one the seals which closed those four words—“Thou shalt not steal”—have been opened, and with each opening came a deeper temptation and a more severe conflict. But the rewards of victory, as we shall see, are greater each time.

Primary

Even the young children should be able to picture the throne with the Lord sitting upon it, the elders, and the living creatures. Be sure they know that the one on the throne was the Lord, that the book was the Word, and that the Lord really has opened the Word for us now so that we can understand its true meaning. Verse 14 offers a good opportunity to be sure that the children know what we mean when we say “Amen.”

Do you remember how John saw the Lord sitting on a beautiful throne in heaven, with twenty-four elders and four cherubim bowing down before Him? Our chapter for today goes right on from there.

What do you suppose the Lord had in His hand? Let us read our chapter for today. [Read Revelation 5.] The scroll or book was the Word of God. You know that there are some things in the Bible which everyone can understand—like the ten commandments, for example. But there are a great many things in it which no one can

really understand without the Lord's help. There are of course a great many things which grown people can understand although little children like you cannot. But even grown people always have more that they need to learn from the Lord, because He is the only one who knows everything.

Do you remember what a parable is?

If we could not understand the inside meaning of a parable, we might say it was sealed.

The whole Word is really a parable because it has an inner meaning.

Its inner meaning was sealed for hundreds and hundreds of years.

But John's vision showed him that someday the Lord would open the seals.

And many years after the time of John the Lord did open the Word.

He showed the inner meaning to a man named Emanuel Swedenborg.

And He told Swedenborg to write what he learned in books and publish them.

Swedenborg obeyed; so now we may all learn about this inner meaning.

In our chapter the Lord is also called the Lamb.

He is a Lion because He is strong and powerful.

He is a Lamb because He is gentle and innocent.

In verse 14 what did the creatures say?

Amen means "So be it."

When we say "Amen" at the end of a prayer, it means that we will do all we can to help the Lord make the prayer come true.

The Lord does not explain things to us until we are ready to understand and to try to live according to what He tells us. Let us read what the Lord said to the prophet Daniel long, long before the time of John. [Read Daniel 12:4.] The book was sealed because people did not want to obey its teachings. You have learned already in your lessons this year that the whole of the Word of God is a parable, a story with another meaning inside of it.

The time finally came when there were people in the world who were ready and willing to understand this inside meaning. Then the Lord could open the sealed book. This is what the Lord was showing John in his vision. As you grow older, if you are good children and really want to learn from the Lord, He will help you to learn more and more of what the Bible really means.



Junior

The details of the vision should be impressed on this class with as much explanation as they are able to understand. Have them look up Daniel 12:4 and tell them why the book was sealed. Then tell them how this vision of the opening of the book was fulfilled in the Second Coming and what a privilege we have today in being able to study the inner meaning of the Word.

You remember that a throne is a picture of judgment. John was to be shown a symbol picture of the way in which people on earth would receive or reject the Lord, and of how they would be judged and what their eternal life would be. For the Lord tells all of us about Himself and about how we should live, and the way in which we use this knowledge determines our lives, not only in this world but in the other world forever.

When a case is brought into court in this world, the first thing that must be done is to try to find out the facts. But our lives are made up not only of the things we do which everyone can see, but also of our hidden thoughts and feelings. These are not easy to find out. Sometimes we don't even know them ourselves. But the Lord does, and in the other world they all come into view.

So in John's vision the beginning of the judgment was the opening of the book of life. The scroll or book which John saw in the Lord's hand was the Word. In the Bible as we have it the Lord's thoughts and feelings are clothed in thoughts and words which we can understand—which even evil people can understand. There are things in the letter of the Word which appeal to the good and things which strike home to the evil. Each one sees in it what meets his own needs.

We can get some idea of how the Word is written if we remember that sometimes we cannot say to someone—a child, for instance—just what we mean, and yet our real meaning is within what we say, and an older person hearing us will understand the real meaning. In the same way, the Word is a book with an outside and an inside meaning, and the inside cannot be opened except to people who can understand it. And since the inside meaning of the Word is full of love and truth from the Lord, the things which make

people unable to understand it are selfishness and worldliness. So as people became more and more evil, the Word had to be sealed. Read Daniel 12:4. But when the Lord came into the world, a new upward trend among men began, and this in time made it possible for the Word to be opened again. Then the Lord made His Second Coming, and the New Church is founded on the opened Word.

In our chapter for today John is shown in vision how the Word is to be opened.

Why did John weep?

What did the angel tell him?

It is the Lord who is called the Lion of the tribe of Judah, and He is called a lion because of His power. He also appears to John as a “Lamb as it had been slain” to picture that the Lord was perfect innocence although He was put to death by men, as we recently learned.

What was peculiar about the Lamb?

This means that the Lord is all-powerful and all-seeing.

What did the creatures and elders have?

What are the golden vials full of odors said to be?

What was the new song they sang?

We repeat these same words and also the ones later in the chapter in some of our responsive services in church. When we take our service from the letter of the Word, we may know that we are using words which have an inner meaning and which have been given us by the Lord Himself.

In verse 14, what do the creatures say? *Amen* means “So be it.” Whenever we say “Amen” at the end of a prayer or sing it at the end of a hymn, we should remember that we are giving our solemn consent to the words we have just been saying.

Intermediate

Explain the correspondence of the details of the vision, stressing the fact that only the Lord could open the Word. Relate this to the New Church belief in regard to Swedenborg’s function as the instrument of the Second Coming.

Our chapter for today continues the vision which begins in chapter 4. We remember that a throne is a symbol of judgment; so we recognize that what John was to see was a judgment which would take place on the people of the Christian Church. You can see that it is quite fitting that this vision should come directly after the messages of rebuke and warning which John had been given for his seven churches in Asia Minor. In the New Church we accept Swedenborg's statement that the great judgment here prophesied, which is called the Last Judgment, actually took place in Swedenborg's day. He says that all the men and women from the first Christian Church who passed from this world from the time of the Lord's ascension to the time of this judgment had been allowed to live in "imaginary heavens" until the "fullness of time" when the judgment could take place. The fullness of time was the time when men had reached such a stage of development that the inner meaning of the Word could safely be opened to them.

The judgment was brought about, just as our chapter for today pictures it, by the Lord's opening the sealed scroll or book. The book is the Word. It is written "within and on the backside." That is, it has an obvious surface meaning and an inner meaning. The inner meaning was sealed, except for the glimpses which the Lord gave His disciples when He was in the world, and occasional verses in which it is allowed to come to the surface. Such a verse is verse 8 of our chapter for today, in which we are told plainly what the "vials full of odors" picture. The twelfth chapter of Daniel tells about the sealing of the book and the reason for it.

In John's vision the sealed book is in the right hand of the Lord as He sits on the throne of judgment. Sooner or later our lives must be judged as to whether or not we have lived according to the teachings of the Word. Read also chapter 20, verses 11 and 12. The more deeply we can see into the Word, the more clearly our real motives and thoughts come to view. So our chapter is followed by others telling of things that happen as the seals are opened, one after another, until finally all who are at heart opposed to the unselfish love which is the inmost of the Word have turned from

its light and found their places in the hells, and all who are in harmony with it have been prepared to enter the gates of the holy city.

The Lord on the throne is the Lord as He is in Himself above our power of comprehension. The lion of the tribe of Judah is the Lord in the power of His love, reaching down to teach us the way of life. The lamb “as it had been slain” is the Lord as He came into the world and died for us, leaving us free to choose the believe in Him or not.

The Lord alone could open the seals. Swedenborg tells us again and again that what he was allowed to write down of the inner meaning of the Word did not come from his own mind, but was revealed through him by the Lord, and that this opening of the Word to his understanding and through him to ours was actually the promised Second Coming of the Lord. At the same time that the book was unsealed in this world, it could be unsealed in the spiritual world; so the Last Judgment took place there. From that time on, everyone who has passed from this world into the spiritual world has been free to make his choice there, which is his judgment, because the necessary truth is open and available, but he makes it according to the kind of life he has learned to love while he was in this world.

In addition to the “golden vials full of odors, which are the prayers of saints”—we may think too of the golden altar of incense in the holy place—we should know that harps picture “confession of the Lord from spiritual truths.” Earlier in this course we spoke of different kinds of musical instruments mentioned in the Word, and you will perhaps remember that stringed instruments symbolize our expressions of truth and wind instruments expressions of love.

We should notice also the passages in verses 12 and 13 which we use in some of our responsive services.

Basic Correspondences

a lamb = innocence
golden vials full of odors = the prayers of saints or worship
from spiritual good

a harp = confession of the Lord
from spiritual truth

Senior

The opened Word as the basis of the New Church is the important lesson for the young people. They need to see this clearly and to gain a sense of the privilege and responsibility of being New Churchmen.

A throne is always a symbol of judgment, and this vision and the chapters following it picture the judgment which was to be made on the first Christian Church, the judgment which Swedenborg says actually took place in his day at the time of the Second Coming. For the Second Coming was the opening of the seals, and with it the opening of the inner life of motive and thought necessary to the establishment of a truly Christian Church.

Without a knowledge of the spiritual sense of the Word one might think that in this chapter the one who sat on the throne and the lion of the tribe of Judah and the lamb were three different persons. But they are three aspects of the divine being. The one who sat on the throne—of whom we are given no definite description—is God as He is in Himself, the Infinite beyond our comprehension. The lion of the tribe of Judah is the Lord as to the power of His divine love. The lamb is the divine humanity, in which God manifested Himself to us, and continues to manifest Himself. The words “as it had been slain” refer not only to the crucifixion, but to the way in which the Christian Church finally destroyed all true understanding of the divine humanity by the separation of God into three different persons and the doctrine of the vicarious atonement—the doctrine that Christ died to satisfy the wrath of an angry God and pay the penalty for our sins in our place. The lamb had seven horns and seven eyes to picture the omnipotence and the omniscience of the Lord in His divine humanity.

The explanation of the “golden vials full of odors” in verse 8 as “the prayers of saints” is one of the places where the inner meaning of the letter is clearly stated in the letter itself. It is a good

passage to remember, and we should think of it in connection with the golden altar of incense in the holy place of the tabernacle and with all the laws for the offering of incense. In verse 11 Swedenborg says that *myriad* (translated “ten thousand”) stands for truths and *thousand* for goods because “a myriad is the greater number, and a thousand a less, and truths are manifold, but goods are simple.” So the multitude of angels picture the hosts of heaven—all those who worship the Lord from the good of love or from the truth of faith.

This whole chapter should impress upon us the fact that the Lord alone could have opened the Word; hence, that what we are told in the writings of Swedenborg is from the Lord, and is merely transmitted by Swedenborg as a human agent, “servant of the Lord Jesus Christ,” as he calls himself. Our church is a small organization from a worldly standpoint, and sometimes when you go out into the world—especially if you live away from your own church—you may begin to wonder if it really has the truth, and if other churches are not just as good. When such doubts come into your mind, remember this chapter of Revelation and remember that only the New Church acknowledges the opening of the Word and has access to its inner meaning in any consistent way. This knowledge is available to everyone in the writings of Swedenborg, but accepting it means accepting the fact that Swedenborg was the human instrument of the Second Coming of the Lord, and very few people will even consider such a possibility. What Swedenborg calls “the pride of self-intelligence” is very strong in the world. Once one has really seen for himself, however, how wonderful the inner meaning of the Word is and how it helps us to understand the meaning of life and ourselves and our relation to the Lord, and how it helps us to see what is right and to do it, there is no room left for doubt.

Later we shall carry on our thought from this chapter into our study of the last part of the twentieth chapter which brings the judgment home to each of us individually. Actually we are judging ourselves from day to day as we choose either to live for self, closing

our minds to the truth when it comes to us, or as we seek to learn more and more of the truth and examine ourselves more and more deeply in the effort to write the Word of the Lord “on our hearts,” so that when we come into the other world and are given to see ourselves clearly “inside out,” we shall find that our books tally with the book of life.

Adult

The reason for the sealing of the Word and for the time chosen by the Lord for its opening should be discussed, and also the reason why it is often so difficult and even impossible to interest others in the truths which mean so much to us.

At the beginning of the explanation of this chapter in the *Apocalypse Revealed* Swedenborg says that its general meaning is “that the Lord in the Divine Human will execute judgment from the Word and according to it, because He Himself is the Word; and that this is acknowledged by all in the three heavens.”

The Word itself contains many references to a “book of life.” There are also statements as to the actual writing of the Word in its letter, such as Deuteronomy 31:9 and Jeremiah 36:1-4. Nor is our chapter for today the only place where we are told that the Word has been a sealed book. Isaiah 29:9-12 is a clear picture of the inability of men to understand the Word by means of their own unenlightened reason. And Daniel (12:4) is told to “shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end.” That the prophets themselves did not understand the meaning of the words which were given them to write appears from the same chapter of Daniel (12:8-9): “And I heard, but I understood not: then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things? And he said, go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end.” It is evidence from these verses in the letter that the Word was purposely sealed by the Lord, and that it could not be opened except by the Lord, and not until men had reached a particular stage of development. From the very letter of Scripture,

therefore, we should see that there is something written within the Word which can never be read without some divinely revealed key. Our chapter for today gives us this truth in unmistakable terms.

The New Church is the church of the opened Word. It believes that the inspired portions of the Scriptures are divine truth spoken by the Lord but necessarily—in order to reach men—clothed with corresponding forms of angelic and earthly thought and expression, just as light, coming to earth from the sun, is modified by the atmosphere and broken up and reflected in various ways by the natural forms which receive and transmit it. The letter of the Word is the outmost expression of divine truth. Being given through the minds of men in both good and evil states, it shows the truth as it appears both to the good and to the evil. Thus often the real truth takes on a directly opposite expression. That is why, for example, the Lord is sometimes spoken of as being angry, jealous, and vengeful, and as punishing and destroying. We can easily understand this if we will think how arbitrary and hard our parents' loving admonitions seemed to us as children, when we were bent on disobeying. Or we may hear critics of the Word find fault with the commandments because they are in the negative form; but we may answer that to be told not to steal, for instance, is no hardship except to one who wants to steal. Truth inevitably seems hard to those whose desires are evil, and the only way in which the Lord can reach them is by showing the consequences of their evils, just as genuine love of parents for their children must express itself in checking their evils as well as in encouraging their good deeds. The letter of the Word is written for all sorts and conditions of men in all times, and there is enough genuine truth in the surface meaning to show any sincere person the way to salvation.

And the letter of the Word is absolutely necessary. As Swedenborg says in the *Doctrine of the Sacred Scripture*, n. 30, the sense of the letter of the Word “is the basis, the containant, and the support of the spiritual sense and of its celestial sense.” Without the letter of the Word divine truth would be dissipated just as the contents of a pitcher is spilled and wasted if the pitcher is broken.

The book was “sealed.” But it was promised that it should be opened at “the time of the end” and it was said, “many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.” (Daniel 12:4). The New Church believes that “the time of the end” when the book should be opened came in the middle of the eighteenth century, when people had mentally “run to and fro” and had increased in worldly knowledge to the point where good people with a sincere desire to know the Lord could no longer believe all the letter of the Word to be literal fact. At that time, through the prepared mind of Emanuel Swedenborg, the Lord Himself opened the Scriptures, by revealing once more the knowledge of correspondences. This involved not only verse-by-verse explanations of portions of the Word, but the revelation of detailed realities of the spiritual world and its relation to this world, and also doctrines which, drawn from the letter of the Word itself, enable us to read it with enlightenment and to understand the Lord and His purposes and our relation to Him. This was the promised Second Coming of the Lord, a coming not in the flesh, but in His Word—in the “clouds of heaven”—opening its inner meaning and so fulfilling His promise to His disciples: “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.” (John 16:12)

Our chapter tells us that “no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book,” and Swedenborg claims no credit to himself: he says that the spiritual sense was revealed to him by the Lord alone as he read the Word (TCR 779-780). In SS 25-26 he tells us that no one can see the spiritual sense “except from the Lord alone, nor unless from Him he is in genuine truths,” and he also tells us that “for a long time the spiritual sense will not be recognized, and that this is entirely owing to those who are in falsities of doctrine, especially concerning the Lord, and who therefore do not admit truths,” and that the conflicts described in the book of Revelation picture the opposition in the world to the spiritual sense. All those who have received with delight the teachings of the New Church with regard to the Word and have endeavored to share this delight with relatives and

friends attached to the doctrines of other churches have had personal experience of this opposition. Both Ezekiel (2:9-10; 3:1-3) and John (Revelation 10:8-10) in vision were told to eat a little book, and both found it sweet as honey in the mouth. But as the angel told John and he proved by experience, “It shall make thy belly bitter.” Our first taste of the opened Word is full of delight and promise, but if we “eat it up,” if we sincerely try to live it out, we must be prepared to take the bitter with the sweet. This is the challenge to our sincerity and courage. And most people shrink from anything which promises to make drastic changes in their ways of thought and life.

Our chapter presents a beautiful picture of the power of the Lord through the Word and of the worship of the Lord in the heavens. The “Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David” pictures the Lord as to the power of His love. “A Lamb as it had been slain” is “the Lord as to His Human, not acknowledged in the church to be Divine” (AR 269). The seven horns picture His omnipotence and the seven eyes His omniscience. The harps in the hands of the beasts and elders represent “confession of the Lord’s Divine Human from spiritual goods” (AR 277). The new song “signifies the acknowledgment and glorification of the Lord, that He alone is Judge, Redeemer, and Saviour, thus the God of heaven and earth” (AR 279). “And the four beasts said, Amen” signifies “Divine confirmation from the Word” (AR 292). We recall that the beasts or cherubim picture the Lord’s protection of inner truth by the letter of the Word and the twenty-four elders all who are in the Lord’s church in the heavens and on earth.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Apocalypse Revealed, n. 276: “Having every one of them harps, signifies confession of the Lord’s Divine Human from spiritual truths. It is known that confessions of Jehovah were made in the temple at Jerusalem by singing, and at the same time by instruments of music which corresponded; the instruments were principally trumpets and timbrels, and psalteries and harps; the trumpets and timbrels corresponded to celestial goods and truths, and the psalteries

and harps to spiritual goods and truths; the correspondences were with their sounds.”

Apocalypse Revealed, n. 277: “*And golden vials full of incense*, signifies confession of the Lord’s Divine Human from spiritual good. The reason why ‘incense’ signifies worship from spiritual goods, but in this instance confession from such goods, is because the principal worship in the Jewish and Israelitish Church consisted in sacrifices and incense; wherefore there were two altars, one for sacrifices and the other for incense; the latter altar was within the tabernacle, and was called the golden altar, but the former was without the tabernacle, and was called the altar of burnt offering; the reason was, because there are two kinds of goods, from which all worship exists, celestial good and spiritual good: celestial good is the good of love to the Lord, and spiritual good is the good of love towards the neighbor. Worship by sacrifices was worship from celestial good, and worship by incense was worship from spiritual good. . . . Likewise in Matthew 2:11, ‘The wise men from the east opened their treasures, and offered to the Lord recently born, gold, frankincense, and myrrh.’ The reason why they offered these three was, because ‘gold’ signified celestial good, ‘frankincense’ spiritual good, and ‘myrrh’ natural good, and from these three goods all worship is made.”

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. What did John see when a door was opened in heaven? *a throne*
P. Who sat on the throne? *the Lord*
J. How many elders were there? *twenty-four*
P. How many creatures were there? *four*
J. What faces did they have? *lion, calf, man, eagle*
J. What is another name for these creatures? *cherubim*
J. What did they say when they worshiped the Lord? *Holy, holy, holy*
P. In our lesson for today what did the Lord have in His right hand?
scroll or book
P. Why did John weep? *no one worthy to open seals*
P. Who could open the book? *Lion of Judah*
J. Can you describe the Lamb that John saw? *as though slain, seven horns, seven eyes*
J. What did the elders and the beasts have in their hands? *lamps, incense*
J. How many angels were singing? *myriads*
J. What can you tell about the new song they sang? *“Worthy is the Lamb . . .”*
P. What did the four creatures say after the song? *Amen*

THE SEALED BOOK

- P. What does *Amen* mean? *So be it*
- I. What is John's vision in the rest of this book about? *judgment of all*
- S. What does the New Church believe about the opening of the book?
that the Lord has opened the book, making inner meaning available