

THE WOMAN AND THE DRAGON

Revelation 12

The powerful picture presented in this chapter contains very important lessons for our young people as well as for adults. To the younger children it may be given as one of the visions of John, the meaning of which they will study when they are older. They should be impressed with the details of the figure of the woman and of that of the dragon and led to look forward to the time when they can understand their meaning. The identity of the dragon with the serpent in the Garden of Eden should be stressed.

Doctrinal Points

The great red dragon of materialism is always present, testing our sincerity by trying to get us to ignore divine truth.

If we study our doctrines and remain true to them in our daily life, the dragon cannot harm us.

Even the New Church is not free from the temptation to live by the doctrine of "faith alone."

Notes for Parents

After the Last Supper the Lord charged His disciples to remain true to the teaching He had given them, as they went out to found the Christian Church. The apostles did remain true, but the churches they founded did not. We learn in Revelation 3 and 4 that even before the end of the first century A.D. both false teachings and evils of life had crept into the groups of Christians.

The visions recorded in the book of Revelation were given to the apostle John when he was a very old man. The whole book is a prophetic vision of what would happen in the first Christian Church—of how it would gradually become perverted, as all the churches before it had been, through the selfishness and worldliness of its members, and of how it would finally be judged and

brought to its end and a new church raised up to take its place.

The vision which is the subject of our lesson for today tells of the beginning of this new church in heaven and the opposition it would meet on earth. In many places in the Scriptures the church is pictured as a woman—the bride, the Lamb’s wife—whose husband is the Lord. So the woman in our chapter stands for the New Church. And all through the Scriptures love of self and especially love of the things of the world is pictured as a serpent, beginning with the story of the Garden of Eden, in which the serpent by his wily argument persuaded Eve to disobey the Lord. In our chapter we learn that the great red dragon is that same “old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world.”

The prophecy of this chapter was fulfilled some two hundred years ago, when the Lord in His Second Coming opened the seals of the Word and established the New Church on earth. If we think it strange that so few in the world realize this, we should remember that there are still millions who do not believe that the Lord made His First Coming nearly two thousand years ago. Knowledge of the Lord is never forced upon us. We have to open our minds to it by our own choice, and the old serpent, who over the ages has grown into the great red dragon, is always with us testing our sincerity by attempting with his subtle arguments to destroy the truth. But all those disciples of the Lord who try to “abide” in Him and keep His commandments are protected by the Lord and the angels and, like the woman, are given wings of spiritual understanding to lift them out of the dragon’s reach.

Primary

Remind the children that the book of Revelation is the last book in the Bible and have them learn its name. Connect it with the Gospel of John. Then read the lesson as one of John’s visions. If there is time, the teacher may also give the children further information about the dragon, based on verse 9, and tell them how much there is in this story for them to understand when they are older.

John was called “the beloved disciple” because he always seemed

to be close to the Lord. John lived to be a very old man, at first in Jerusalem and later in Asia Minor, where he became head of the seven Christian churches which had been established there. When he was about ninety years old, the Roman rulers exiled him to the island of Patmos. There the Lord gave him a wonderful vision, which is recorded for us in the book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible.

First John saw the Lord—the same Jesus whom he had followed in the world—in a new and glorious form, and the Lord gave him messages for the seven churches in Asia Minor. Then he was taken up in the spirit into heaven and shown how the Lord and His angels control and put down evil when it threatens to become too strong for us to resist.

The visions John saw were like great moving pictures acted out in heaven to teach us about good and evil and to help us choose what is good and hate what is evil.

In our lesson for today what did John first see?

What was the woman standing on?

What was on her head?

What appeared to threaten her?

What can you tell about the dragon?

Where did the woman flee?

What happened to her child

Who fought against the dragon?

What were given to the woman to help her?

How did the dragon try to catch her?

How did the earth help her?

We are told that the great red dragon is the same old serpent which led Adam and Eve to disobey the Lord in the beginning of history. Whenever you are tempted to do wrong, you may know that this old serpent is whispering to you. Then just say, “Get thee behind me, Satan,” and don’t do the wrong thing. If you try hard to do this, the Lord and the angels will help you to do right.



Junior

This lesson may be used to give the Juniors an idea of the fact that the Second Coming took place about two hundred years ago and was made known in this world by means of the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg. If you present the woman and the dragon as a picture of what is going on in the world now, you will help the children to be proud of their church and to feel a responsibility for resisting the dragon.

John is thought to have been the youngest of the twelve apostles and he outlived all the others. In his old age he was head of the seven Christian churches which had been established in Asia Minor, and during one of the persecutions of the Christians by the Romans he was exiled to the island of Patmos off the coast of Asia Minor. It was there that the Lord gave him the wonderful series of visions which are recorded in the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation. This book is sometimes also called the *Apocalypse*, which is the Greek word for *revelation*.

We should read its first chapter regularly, for it tells of John's vision of the Lord and how the Lord commanded him to write down all that he was to see. The chapters which follow include the messages John was told to give to the seven churches in Asia Minor, the visions of the throne, the sealed book, and the four horsemen, and the opening of the seventh seal. Perhaps you remember that when the seventh seal was opened, seven angels appeared, each having a trumpet, and as each one sounded his trumpet, certain terrible destructions followed. The opening of the seals means the opening of the inner meaning of the Word and the sounding of each trumpet stands for the proclaiming of deeper truth as it was revealed, truth which showed up the evils which people were hiding in their hearts.

Our lesson for today is one of the visions which followed the opening of the last seal.

What did John see first?

What was under the woman's feet?

What was on her head?

What appeared next?

How many heads did the dragon have? How many horns?

What did his tail do?

What was the dragon waiting to do?

How was the woman's child saved?

Where did the woman go?

Who fought against the dragon?

What was the result?

What were given to the woman to help her?

How did the dragon try to destroy her?

How did the earth help her?

The book of Revelation is a prophecy of the history of the first Christian Church and of how it would depart from the Lord, just as former churches had done, until it had to be brought to an end and a new church raised up on earth. In our lesson for today the woman is a picture of the New Church which was to be established by the Lord at His Second Coming, and the woman's child is the pure truth of that church. You will study and understand this better as you grow older. But you can understand now what the dragon is. Read verse 9 and then go back to the beginning of the Bible and read Genesis 3:1-5. You know what it is to be tempted. There is something you want to do which you know is wrong. Your conscience tells you it is wrong. But another little voice from somewhere deep down inside you says: "Oh, that isn't really wrong; everybody does it; your parents are just old-fashioned. Go ahead and do it and see how much fun it will be." That little voice is the voice of the old serpent of selfishness, and if we listen to him and keep doing as he tells us, in time he grows into a great red dragon which seems too powerful for us to fight.

You are fortunate to be brought up in this New Church which John saw in vision and which began to be established on earth about two hundred years ago, when the Lord made His Second Coming. The truths which the Lord has revealed in His Word are available to us now. But our selfishness—"that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan"—tries hard to destroy these truths as fast as they enter our minds. The false arguments which rise in the mind are the "flood" which pours out of the mouth of the dragon. "And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which

the dragon cast out of his mouth.” If we love the truths of our church and try hard to put them into practice in our lives, our minds will easily see how false the selfish reasonings are and will reject them.



Intermediate

The book of Revelation has been called the “charter of the New Church.” This lesson offers an opportunity to show our young people how this is true and to strengthen them for the opposition their beliefs will meet in the world, at the same time inspiring them by the picture of the origin of the New Church and the divine protection over it.

The book of Revelation is the record of a series of wonderful visions given by the Lord to the apostle John when, in his old age, he had been exiled by the Roman rulers to the island of Patmos, off the coast of Asia Minor. Throughout the history of the Christian Church people have felt the power of this vision. It is obvious from the letter (Revelation 1:19) that it has a very important meaning for the church and that it is a prophecy, and many have tried to puzzle out its meaning and to identify particular historical events—especially wars and conquests—with details of the prophecy. But only the opening of the internal sense of the Word by the Lord in His Second Coming has really enabled men to understand it.

The whole book is a prophecy of the history of the first Christian Church. This church was founded on the belief that Jesus Christ was the Messiah, the heavenly Father revealing Himself to men (Isaiah 9:6; John 4:25-26, 14:9). So the book of Revelation begins with a beautiful vision of the Lord. Then follow the messages which John is to give to the seven churches which had been established in Asia Minor, and these messages show that already—before A.D. 100—men were developing different ideas of the Lord and His teaching and were beginning to depart from true discipleship. Then John was taken up in the spirit into heaven and shown a great vision of the judgment which would be executed on the first Christian Church when these false ideas and evil practices had completely perverted it. In this vision the Word is shown first as a book sealed

with seven seals and then, as the Lord opens one seal after another, deeper and deeper evils in men are revealed and judged. All these scenes are prophecies of the Last Judgment, to which many in some of the Christian churches around us are still looking forward, but which Swedenborg tells us took place in the year 1757.

Our lesson for today tells of the beginning of the New Church. Swedenborg tells us that on June 19, 1770, the twelve apostles who had been with the Lord in the world were sent out throughout the spiritual world to preach the doctrines revealed by the Lord in His Second Coming (TCR 791). By this the New Church was established first in the spiritual world, and this is why we call June 19 “New Church day.” The New Church had to be established in the spiritual world before it could begin to descend to the earth.

The woman clothed with the sun portrays this New Church in the spiritual world and the moon under her feet symbolizes the faith of the New Church which would light the darkness of the minds of men on earth. The stars in her crown stand for all the beautiful truths which the New Church brings us. So, you see, near the end of the Word we come back to truth which the people of the Most Ancient Church had had by direct inspiration—the sun, moon, and stars which appeared on the fourth day of creation. The child which the woman was to bring forth represents the doctrine of the New Church.

Then appears the great red dragon. In verse 9 he is called “that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world.” Again we go back to the beginning. Do you remember the argument of the serpent in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:1-5) which induced Adam and Eve to disobey the Lord and eat of the forbidden fruit and so lose their paradise? The serpent represented the love of the satisfactions to be obtained from this world and the love of reasoning from these material “appearances.” He said to Eve in effect: “Don’t believe what the Lord has told you; He is just trying to keep you from doing your own thinking.” That was the beginning of all the falsity and evil in the world, and this old serpent grew with the growth of human selfishness, and his

arguments gained in power as man's knowledge of the natural world grew, until we have the great red dragon with his seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns. Every time you try to present the doctrines of the New Church to those who do not really want them this great dragon rises up to fight you.

The dragon was cast out of heaven and the child was kept safe in heaven, and the woman was given wings—which picture spiritual understanding—to lift her up out of the dragon's reach, and the earth—the “good ground” of an honest and faithful heart—can dispose of the flood of falsity which pours out of the dragon's mouth. If you study your doctrines and remain true to them in your life, the dragon cannot hurt you, and your life will help to build the Lord's New Church on earth.

Basic Correspondences

the woman = the New Church

her child = its doctrine

the dragon = the love of the world

wings = spiritual understanding

a flood = false reasonings

Senior

The same suggestion applies to the Seniors which is made for the Intermediates. A few further points in the correspondence of the chapter are added in the Senior notes.

In the earlier chapters of Revelation the decline of the first Christian Church—by separating itself from the Lord, the true vine—is pictured, and this is followed by visions of a last judgment executed by the Lord's opening of the seals which had sealed the Word. John's vision was prophetic of what actually took place in the spiritual world at the time of the Second Coming of the Lord. Swedenborg tells us that the permanent Christian heavens could not be formed until the deeper truths of the Word were revealed and that all who in the world had professed to be Christians and so believed themselves to be “saved” were allowed to live in “imagin-

ary heavens” until they should see their true states in the light of genuine truth. Then in the Last Judgment the good and the evil were separated, the evil found their way into the hells and the good were taken to their permanent homes in heaven. Swedenborg speaks of this Last Judgment as having taken place in 1757, and he also says that on June 19, 1770, the twelve apostles who had been with the Lord in the world were sent out through the spiritual world to proclaim the doctrines which established the New Church. Then the New Church could begin to appear on earth.

The woman clothed with the sun in our chapter for today is the symbol of the New Church. The sun corresponds to the glory of love to the Lord, in which the New Church appears in heaven. The moon under her feet pictures the intelligence and faith which would be in the people of the New Church on earth. The stars in her crown symbolize knowledges of divine good and truth possessed by this church. We know that often in the Word the church is called a bride and wife, her husband being the Lord.

The child which the woman brought forth stands for the doctrine of the New Church, and the great red dragon which threatened it symbolizes the resistance to the new doctrine from the worldly and selfish reasonings which had developed in the former church, on account of which it had come to its end. This is the same “old serpent” which was responsible for the origin of evil in the world (Genesis 3:1-5) and which caused the decline and fall of each succeeding church—the desire to be guided by self instead of by the Lord and to reason from natural instead of from spiritual considerations.

As New Churchmen you will meet this “dragon” again and again throughout your life in this world. He has grown with the growth of selfishness in man and has become more formidable with the increase of man’s knowledge of the physical world and consequent pride in his own abilities. Swedenborg interprets the dragon as meaning specifically the doctrine of “faith alone” of the Reformed Church, which we call Protestant. The essence of this doctrine is that profession of belief in the Lord and reliance upon atonement

for men's sins which His death on the cross accomplished will get a person into heaven regardless of what his life in the world has been. Although we know, of course, that many Protestants do not live according to this doctrine, it is still a part of their intellectual belief and serves as a refuge and excuse for those who care more for worldly than for spiritual values. It is also actually the basis of the idea we meet so often that the Lord is so loving and so all-powerful that He will certainly manage to get everyone into heaven someday. In fact we meet the dragon in many modern forms of thought. Since the time of Eden he has acquired seven heads and ten horns. The heads represent every variety of reasoning and the horns represent power. The crown on his heads are the statements from the Word which he twists to support his arguments.

But our chapter shows us plainly, too, how the Lord will help us if we really abide in Him. When the child was born, he was "caught up unto God, and to his throne." The doctrine of the New Church, being taught both in the letter and in the internal sense of the Word, is established in heaven. "Michael and his angels" fought against the dragon and cast him down to the earth. The quotation at the end of this lesson will tell you more of this. The angels are helping us when we resist the dragon. Then two wings of a great eagle were given to the woman and she was given a place in the wilderness where she would be nourished "for a time, and times, and half a time." The wings of an eagle represent the power and protection which come from intellectual sight and thought about spiritual things. The teachings of our church give us this higher understanding which lifts us above worldly things and enables us to see life in its true plan and proportions. And the nourishment of the woman for a time, and times, and half a time pictures the fact that the Lord is protecting and caring for His New Church on earth through its early stages when—so far as its members are concerned—it is small and weak and seems in danger of being destroyed. This is an encouraging thought for us all.

Finally, the earth opened her mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth to destroy the woman.

The flood, like the flood which destroyed the people of the Most Ancient Church, is the great body of falsity developed by selfishness and worldliness. The earth is another symbol of the church, but the church as it has been established in the life of every individual who accepts true doctrine and loves it. To such a person the falsity of the arguments of the dragon is immediately evident and the arguments are dissipated by the known truth in the mind.

Adult

The whole question of our attitude toward the ecumenical movement is involved in this lesson. We need to see the difference between cooperation with others on the natural level and trying to pattern our own church activities and attitudes on those prevailing in other churches whose fundamental concept of religion is quite different from ours.

Our lessons from the book of Revelation thus far have shown us the picture of the early states of the first Christian Church, the various ways in which its members began to depart from their first faith and life, and the prophetic vision of the condition of that church at the time when the opening of the seven seals would bring upon it the final judgment. We know from the writings that this judgment took place in the spiritual world in the year 1757. After this judgment the permanent Christian heavens were established, the good being brought into those heavens and the evil consigned to the hells. On June 19, 1770, the twelve apostles were sent forth throughout the spiritual world to proclaim the true Christian doctrine, and the New Church was begun in heaven, from which it was to descend to earth (TCR 791).

Our chapter for today is a prophetic vision of the preparation for this descent and of the opposition which would face the New Church on earth. Swedenborg's interpretation of these visions brings us face-to-face with the necessity for serious thought and important decisions concerning the nature and mission of our church, and its relation to other churches. The Rev. William Worcester's characterization of the book of Revelation as the "charter of the New Church" is not an idle epigram. Some time

ago a Jewish rabbi who had been reading the writings of Swedenborg told a group of New Church ministers that when he first read what Swedenborg said about Jews, he threw the book aside, but later he took it up again and when he found that Swedenborg said even worse things about Protestants and Roman Catholics, he felt better about it. As New Churchmen we cannot ignore these statements of Swedenborg or doubt their validity.

The writings tell us that the woman clothed with the sun symbolizes “the Lord’s New Church in the heavens, which is the New Heaven.” She is clothed with the sun because “the church is in love to the Lord, for it acknowledges Him and does His commandments.” The moon is seen under her feet “because the church on earth, which is not yet conjoined with the church in the heavens, is meant” and the moon signifies “intelligence in the natural man, and faith.” Her crown of twelve stars signifies the New Church’s “wisdom and intelligence from knowledges of Divine good and Divine truth from the Word.” Throughout the Word a woman is often used as a symbol of the church—the bride and wife whose husband is the Lord. Read Isaiah 54:5, John 3:29, and Revelation 21:2, 9-10.

The child which the woman was to bear represents the doctrine of the New Church, and we should note that it was the child rather than the woman which the dragon really wanted to destroy. This is important for our later thought, for it means that the strength of the New Church will be in its doctrine. The child was saved by being caught up to God, and His throne. This, we are told, signifies that the doctrine is protected by the Lord and guarded by the angels of heaven.

Swedenborg identifies the great red dragon specifically as “those in the Church of the Reformed who make God three, and the Lord two, and separate charity from faith, and who make faith saving, but not charity together with it.” The Church of the Reformed is the church afterward called Protestant. To make the Lord two is to “separate the Lord’s Human from His Divine.” Read here AR 537 ff. The dragon is red because red in this case signifies “falsity

from the evils of lusts.” His seven heads signify “insanity from the truths of the Word falsified and profaned.” His ten horns signify “much power,” and the seven crowns “all the truths of the Word falsified and profaned.” We profane the Word when we quote it in support of arguments which permit or excuse selfishness and worldliness in us or in others. That the dragon’s tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and cast them to the earth signifies “that by falsifications of the truths of the Word they have alienated all spiritual knowledges of good and truth from the church, and, by application to falsities, have entirely destroyed them.”

AR 548 tells us that by Michael is not meant any archangel but the ministry in heaven performed by “those who confirm from the Word, that the Lord is the God of heaven and earth, and that God the Father and He are one, as the soul and body are one; also that men ought to live according to the commandments of the Decalogue, and that then men have charity and faith.” Michael and his angels cast the dragon down out of heaven. So far as we are in truly heavenly states the falsities of the “faith alone” doctrine on which Protestantism was founded—the flood which pours out of the dragon’s mouth—have no power over us, for the earth, which represents “the church as to doctrine,” makes them “fall to nothing.”

But the woman is still “in the wilderness.” In AR 547 Swedenborg says: “It is of the Lord’s Divine providence, that the church should at first be among a few, and that it should successively increase among many, because the falsities of the former church must first be removed; for before this, truths cannot be received, since truths which are received and implanted before falsities are removed, do not remain, and they are also dissipated by the dragonists.”

This is where our lesson most closely touches our contemporary situation, and where honest thinking is most important. We are told sometimes that no Protestant Church any longer believes or preaches the doctrine of faith alone. This is simply not true. We know, of course, that there are many in Protestant churches who

do not confirm this doctrine in their lives although they may still hold it intellectually and even rely upon it for comfort when they are thinking about their own evils and those of their friends and loved ones. But the whole “modern” attitude toward religion is an outgrowth of the faith alone doctrine: the idea that one church is as good as another, that we cannot really know anything about God or the life after death and so if there is a God and a life after death, that our eternal happiness will be taken care of; that it is God’s responsibility, not ours, etc.

The fact that emphasis today is often placed on charity rather than on faith does not contradict this, for the “charity” meant is identified with what Swedenborg calls “benefactions,” which may have no charity in them whatever, and “faith” is still identified with mere lip acknowledgment that Christ died to pay the penalty for our sins, which is essentially the doctrine of faith alone.

The New Church will grow on earth only as its members recognize and resist the temptation to identify charity with external works and the temptation to succumb to a weak acceptance of popular trends of thought. We face the dragon every day. Swedenborg tells us that good receives all its quality from truth and that truth cannot live with falsity.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Apocalypse Revealed, n. 548: “By ‘war’ is signified spiritual war, which is of falsity against truth, and truth against falsity, for no other war can take place in heaven, where this is said to have existed . . . By ‘Michael’ is not meant any archangel; neither by ‘Gabriel, and Raphael,’ but ministries in heaven are meant; the ministry signified by ‘Michael’ is performed by those who confirm from the Word, that the Lord is the God of heaven and earth, and that God the Father and He are one, as the soul and body are one; also that men ought to live according to the commandments of the Decalogue, and that then men have charity and faith.”

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

J. Who was John? *the beloved apostle*

- J. What island was he exiled to in his old age? *Patmos*
- P. What did the Lord do for him there? *gave him visions*
- J. What was the first vision given him? *the glorified Lord*
- J. What does the whole book of Revelation prophesy? *the Second Coming*
- J. How were the evils which grew up in the first Christian Church disclosed? *opening of seals*
- P. In our chapter for today what does John first see? *woman clothed with the sun*
- J. Can you describe this part of the vision? *moon under feet, crown of twelve stars . . .*
- P. What next appeared to threaten the woman and her child? *dragon*
- P. What can you tell about the dragon? *seven heads, ten horns, seven crowns*
- P. How was the child saved? *caught up to heaven*
- J. Who fought against the dragon? *Michael and his angels*
- J. How was the woman saved? *eagle wings, fled to wilderness*
- I. What do the woman and her child represent? *New Church and truth of that church*
- S. What does the dragon represent? *doctrine of "faith alone"*