



# Swedenborg: Revelator 1747-1772

## Lesson Overview

### 1. Watch a Video

Watch *Emanuel Swedenborg | Revelator* at [bit.ly/SwedenborgRevelator](https://bit.ly/SwedenborgRevelator) (11min 40sec).

### 2. Discuss

Choose questions for discussion.

#### Kant and Swedenborg

The German philosopher Immanuel Kant's reaction to Swedenborg's visionary powers is of interest. Although Kant never met Swedenborg, he wrote to him and also sent personal messages through mutual friends. Kant, a rationalist, discounted stories of mystical experiences but the persistent and authoritative reports on Swedenborg's powers gave him repeated pause. At times he wrote favorably; at times quite the reverse. However, Kant took a continuing interest in Swedenborg. Even his most critical survey, *Dream of a Spirit-Seer* (1766) in which Kant attempted to denigrate Swedenborg, reveals doubts regarding the basis for his own ridicule. In short, Kant must be numbered among those intellects of Swedenborg's day who experienced difficulty explaining satisfactorily the theological phase of Swedenborg's distinguished career.

See [swedenborgstudy.com](http://swedenborgstudy.com).

## FaithBuilder 3 | Lesson 17 | Emanuel Swedenborg

### Revelation and the Revelator

Long ago the Lord spoke to leaders and prophets, and through them gave us life-saving truths.

1. How might changes in the 1700+ years after the Lord's birth on earth have led to the need for a new method of revelation—personal introduction into the life after death?
2. Emanuel Swedenborg lived in an age of scientific discovery that challenged the religious world. What impact might this have had on the kind of preparation needed for him to become a revelator?

### Watch a Video

Watch *Emanuel Swedenborg | Revelator* (see link on left).

### Discuss

Choose questions for discussion.

1. What was unique about Swedenborg's experiences when compared with the experiences of other revelators, for example Moses or Daniel?
2. What important part did Emanuel's visions and dreams play in his introduction into spiritual experiences, and his ultimate consent to serve the Lord as a revelator?
3. Could Emanuel have become a revelator in the eighteenth-century if the Lord had simply dictated what he was to write?
4. To what extent did Swedenborg, the revelator, shape the new revelation? (If at all.)
5. Religions are often started by charismatic leaders. Abraham was the founder of the Jewish nation. Jesus founded the Christian church. The New Church has often down-played Swedenborg's role in the founding of the New Church. Why is this?
6. Some describe the Writings themselves as "charismatic." How does viewing the Writings themselves as charismatic, and not Emanuel Swedenborg the revelator, change our view of Swedenborg, the man?
7. Put yourself in Emanuel's shoes. As a top scientist, would you give up everything to answer a call from the Lord?

**Three Incidents**

In July 1759 Swedenborg and his works were connected by a remarkable incident. While dining in Gothenburg (300 miles from Stockholm) Swedenborg became disturbed, withdrew from his friends and returned saying that a fire had broken out by his home in Stockholm. He said the fire was spreading and feared his manuscripts would be destroyed. At 8:00 p.m. he said, "Thank God! The fire is extinguished the third door from my house!" A friend told the provincial governor, who requested Swedenborg give a full account. When a messenger arrived from the Stockholm the next day his account of the fire agreed with Swedenborg's, making him a public figure. Soon afterwards his authorship of *Heaven and Hell* and *Heavenly Secrets* became known.

In 1760 Emanuel helped Mme. de Marteville, widow of the Dutch ambassador. A silversmith had billed her for a silver service her deceased husband had purchased. She thought her husband had paid the bill, but could not find a receipt. Swedenborg reported seeing her husband in the spiritual world. He shared where the receipt was hidden.

In 1761, Count Ulric Scheffer invited Swedenborg to visit Queen Louisa Ulrika since she was interested in Swedenborg. The Queen asked if he would communicate with her late brother Augustus William who had died two years before. Swedenborg agreed to do so and in a private audience told her a secret that only her brother could have known. The incident became widely known and discussed in Swedish social circles.

See [swedenborgstudy.com](http://swedenborgstudy.com).

8. Why might Swedenborg have published the Writings anonymously to begin with?
9. Why would Emanuel claim authorship of the first books of the Writings years after writing them? What difference would claiming or not claiming authorship have on the works themselves in future? Would they have become forgotten if he had not claimed authorship? Is the association of the Writings with Swedenborg, the man, important?
10. Why did Emanuel stop being a scientist and become a full time revelator?
11. If Emanuel was not to use his spiritual gift lightly, why did the Lord allow him to see the fire in Stockholm from so far away? What purpose did this experience, and its sharing with others, serve?
12. If Emanuel was your friend, how might you have reacted on hearing about his spiritual experiences? How would you respond if one of your friends told you they were having experiences like his today?
13. Some have suggested that Swedenborg was not sane on account of his spiritual experiences. How would you respond to a statement like this?
14. Describe changes in Swedenborg's personality later in his life.
15. If you could talk to Swedenborg, what would you ask him?
16. Compare what did Swedenborg did in his free time with what you do.

**Emanuel Swedenborg | 1688-1772**

Swedenborg went as far as he could go in explaining the questions of human existence through the faith into which he was born. His search left him dissatisfied. In 1744 and 1745 he had dreams and visions which moved him profoundly. He told nobody about his experiences, but recorded them in personal journals. He renewed his study of the Bible and began writing new books. In April 1745 while dining alone at an inn, in London, a spirit spoke to him. Later that night the vision returned and asked him to serve as the means by which God would reveal himself. After this he spent most of his time writing theological works. In 1747 started publishing *Heavenly Secrets*, a 12 vol. explanation of Genesis and Exodus. The subtitle called it "the Sacred Scripture of the Word of the Lord disclosed" along with "wonderful things which have been seen in the World of Spirits and in the Heaven of Angels." He wrote eight volumes explaining the book of Revelation; and single volumes such as *Divine Providence*, and *Divine Love and Wisdom*. He described experiences in the other world in *Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell*, and in 1768 published *Delights of Wisdom Pertaining to Conjugal Love*, a book on marriage.

Emanuel published many of these books anonymously. Few among his close friends knew the nature of his theological studies. Since his books had a small circulation he paid for them out of his own funds and gave copies away to clergymen, universities, and libraries. To begin with he lived a normal though secluded life. Unmarried, he was much alone with his books, often in a small summerhouse he built at the back of his garden in Stockholm. As his works became known in learned circles he interacted with more people. He dedicated his life to the Lord's commission, laboring as the instrument for a new revelation. This work depended on him living simultaneously in the spiritual and natural worlds year after year.

During Swedenborg's final years many wrote accounts of their impressions of him. They were perplexed by his conversations with spirits, but found him to be relaxed, gentle and humorous. He invited John Wesley to visit him, but when Wesley replied he would come after a six month journey Emanuel said it would be too late: he would enter the world of spirits on the 29th of March, 1772, the day he died. Swedenborg made no effort to establish a religious sect or form a church.